

The Rejected Werewolf Princess by Didiadeyemi Chapter 51-55

Chapter 51

I didn't see Ryker again after that. It has been two days and I had started to wonder when next I would come across him. I tried my best to hide my curiosity about him but my family knew me way too much and Christine ended up telling me that he was staying in the palace guest house.

It felt weird knowing that he was close by and all it would take would just be a few minutes journey and I would see him. I finally understand what people mean when they say out of sight is out of mind because I never worried about Ryker this much until I was faced with the prospect that he was merely a few feet away from me.

There has also been the issue of the dress and I have been exceptionally worried and disturbed about it. For the life of me, I cannot think of anything to wear and although the designers have been showing me different sketches, nothing seems to stand out so much. The entire prospect is frustrating and I know I have to give them an answer by tomorrow.

The only good thing in my life so far is Audrey. She somehow manages to help me forget about whatever is plaguing me and keeps me in the moment. Currently, she is lying against my lap while I read her a story. I looked down only to see that she had drifted off to sleep and I smiled softly.

There was a knock on my room door and Christine poked her head in. she gestured for me to step out and I had to quietly lift Audrey from me. She is a heavy sleeper but sometimes, especially if she falls asleep on you; one wrong move can wake her and she is going to be cranky as hell.

Once I managed to lay her gently against the pillows, I slowly exited the room and closed the door behind me quietly while I faced Christine. She was wearing a simple blue dress that matched the bright sky and she pulled me down the hallway before she started to speak.

"The Queen sent me to ask if you are done with the preparations,"

I raised a brow, "Why can't she ask herself?"

“Something along the lines of not wanting to feel like she was pressuring you and not wanting it to turn into an argument. with you,” she shrugged and I rolled my eyes, “So, have you?”

I shook my head, “I’m still stuck on the dress, I don’t know what to do, I don’t what color to use. I don’t know what design to use and I am just confused.”

A look crossed her face as if she wanted to say something but she quickly hid it and her expression went back to neutral.

“You have to get back to the designers soon,” she said simply, “They need to start working on your dress and it seems the Alphas are arriving early because another one crossed our borders today.”

“I didn’t know about that.”,

“It just happened a few minutes ago,” she shrugged, “I think people are just excited to see the long lost princess.”

“The lost princess who doesn’t even have a dress.” That same look crossed her face but she still didn’t say anything so I turned to look at her, “Say whatever is on your mind.”

“It’s nothing,” she said but I could tell that she was lying.

I crossed

my

arms over my chest and stared at her. We are around the same height so there was no looking up or down, she just avoided my eyes. Her entire body language read defensive and I wondered what she was so desperately trying to hide. She tried to side step me to avoid my gaze but I refused to let her and I forced her to look at me.

“What is it?” I asked and she hesitated before speaking.

“Let me choose your dress.” I was so shocked by her words that I stood immobile for a few seconds. She must have taken it as ano because she rolled her eyes, “This is why I didn’t ask.”

“didn’t say anything.”

“You didn’t have to, I could tell that it was already a no.

She started to walk away but I stopped her, “Actually, it was going to be a yes.”

She paused mid step and turned to me with a face full of disbelief. I could tell that she was playing my words over and over in her head to make sure that she hadn’t misheard by accident.

“You said yes,” she repeated and I hummed, “Are you sure?”

“I don’t know what to wear and unless I plan to go in a sack then you are my best option. I trust that you something amazing.”

will come up

with

“I have millions of ideas,” her excitement was palpable and I felt a small smile grow on my lips as her eyes lit up like a kid in a candy store, “I can show you my designs and you can choose whichever one you think is-,”

“Surprise me,” I said instead and her eyes widened.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I want to see it on that day.”

She nodded and squealed so loudly I feared someone would rush in and think we were under attack. She pulled me into a hug that was so tight I feared my ribs would crack and when she pulled away, she all but slipped down the stairs to do goddess knows what..

I smiled to myself as I watched her and made my way down the stairs to the garden. I have finished with everything I have to do today and I might as well enjoy some time surrounded by the flowers and fresh air.

I passed by a lot of guards and servants who were trying to make everything presentable for the Alphas who were set to arrive. I brushed past all of them and as soon as I stepped out of the palace doors, I could feel one of the guards following

I didn't have to look back to know it was Kevin. He is the guard my mother personally assigned to follow me once I am out of the safety of the palace. He might look calm and approachable but he is deadly and as swift as a viper. He can have a grown man begging for his life within minutes.

I tried being friendly with him when he was first assigned to me but I quickly learned that Kevin enjoys working in solitude and silence, I knew that I was most likely being a bother to him so I stopped trying. It doesn't mean that we aren't civil though, I still occasionally ask about his little sister but it mostly ends there.

I got to the garden, it isn't heavily protected because most people know not to come here. The garden was built by my father before he was mated to my mother. He was the prince and he used to come here to get away from the stress of royal life. After his mating, he gave it to my mother as a gift and it has been unofficially known as the royals garden since then.

It is a small expanse of land with beautiful flowers growing all around. There is a massive fountain that can fit at least five people in it and three different benches. I knelt in front of the fountain and stretched out my hand to call the water to me.

This is my favorite place to practice my powers mainly because of the fountain but also because there is usually no one to bother me. I bent the flow of the water so it formed an arch and I smiled to myself as I remembered how hard it was to do it when I first started. I had to learn that water isn't meant to be controlled and I had to see it as an extension of myself and not a completely different entity.

I stayed there for a while, just playing around with the water and making shapes with it when I heard Christine's voice in my head.

"Where are you?" she asked, "Audrey woke up and is searching for you."

"Bring her to the garden," I instructed and I rose to my feet.

I was turning around when I felt a presence in the woods. I barely had time to tell Kevin about it when I saw a figure emerge. At first I had to blink twice to make sure that I was seeing the right person but the longer I stared, the clearer he became.

His dirty blond hair was slicked back giving him an almost regal look. He was also older but he was completely clean shaven. His blue eyes sparkled with mischief and he was wearing a tightly pressed suit.

Kevin was quick to arrive in front of me with his sword out and under the intruder's chin. He just smiled and raised his hand to show that he had no weapons and he was no harm.

"State your name and your business," Kevin snarled, "You shouldn't be here."

"She knows me, don't you Camilla?" I ignored him, "My name is Tyson Woods and I am the Alpha of the Two Moons pack."

Tyson still had that air of faux superiority and the way he was staring at me was like he knew that I didn't belong. I hadn't expected him to be here, I thought his father would be here but I didn't even think too much about it.

"When did your father die?" I asked and he shrugged.

"A few years,"

I could see that Kevin was looking between me and Tyson almost as if he was unsure of what to do. If I am being honest, I don't know what to do either.

"I came to see you Camilla,"

Tyson took a step forward but Kevin pressed the tip of his blade into Tyson's neck. "Take one more step and I will not hesitate to take your head off. You will also address the princess by her appropriate title."

If Tyson was upset, he didn't let it show. Instead, he nodded as well as he could with a sword to his throat. Both men were not staring at me and I turned to Kevin.

"Let him go,"

Kevin was shocked but he did as I asked. Tyson was relieved and he started to make his way over to me but I held out one hand to stop him. I think it was more shock than my actual order that made him freeze in his tracks as he stared at me.

"You need to leave," I said simply and his eyes widened.

“Camilla, I came for you.”

“I don’t care why you came,” I said simply.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Christine approach but she quickly hid behind a pillar before anyone could see her and Audrey. I will forever be grateful to her for her ability to think quickly on her feet because the last thing I need is for Tyson to see my daughter.

“Go to your hotel Tyson,” I turned on my heels, “You can see me when the others do. I am not interested in whatever you have to say.”

I started to leave but I heard his voice, “I left Lisa. Right after you left, I knew you were the one for me and I left her.”

I stopped in my tracks and I looked at him over my shoulder, “I don’t care. Leave and don’t come back to this garden. because I will not hesitate to allow Kevin hurt you.”

Chapter 52

As soon as I was within the safety of the pack walls, I allowed my façade fall and I leaned against the wall to catch my breath. I thought dealing with Ryker would be the hardest part of this ceremony but I did not account for Tyson.

I have done well all these years to keep him at the back of my mind. It’s not like I am still hung up over what he did to me. I found my own way to get over and through it but seeing him is like dumping me back in ice cold water with no way to swim.

I had half a mind to call off the entire thing but I knew I couldn’t. I wouldn’t even allow myself do that simply because of two men. That would be setting the kingdom back by thousands of years. Just because I have a duty though doesn’t mean that I want to do it.

“Hey, are you okay?” Christine asked as she walked over to me.

Audrey was walking right next to her and I nodded as I slid down to kneel on the floor and opened my arms out for my daughter. She walked right in and I buried my face in her hair so I could get her perfect scent to calm me down. She allowed me hold her tightly and all she did was wrap her tiny little hands around me.

“That man was mean mommy,” she whispered, “Is he going to come back?”

“Yeah he will,” I admitted and I saw her smile fall, “He has to be at that ceremony that your grandmother organized. You won’t have to see or talk to him though. You are going to sit right next to Christine and grandma.”

That seemed to lift her spirits because she squealed and clapped her hands together in barely contained glee. Her happiness was infectious and I found myself smiling alongside her as I finally stood to my feet and kept my hand entwined with hers. She liked the fact that I was holding her hand because she leaned her head against me as we walked back into the castle.

my

Although we had just eaten less than two hours ago, the interaction I just had brought a hollowing feeling in stomach and I just wanted to snack on something. I realized my tendency to stress eat when I was pregnant and Christine gave me a healthy alternative.

-I would snack-on fruits or healthy snacks basically. It didn’t give the same high that greasy junk food gave but it was enough to allow me realize that I was actually full and didn’t want to eat. I noticed that Audrey had also started picking up the habit and I’m just grateful that it is healthy food and not junk.

As if the maids knew why I was there, they didn’t even ask what I wanted to eat, they just brought a bowl of fruits and put in front of Audrey and I. They tried to give Christine one and she politely refused them but settled for stealing from my bowl.

“Was that Tyson?” she whispered after a few minutes of silence and I nodded, “I pictured him different.

“Different how?” I asked and she shrugged.

“Ugly, disgusting, body odor, I thought his bad attitude would bleed into his appearance,” she said and I had to hold back my laughter, “Ryker is hotter though.”

I rolled my eyes, “I don’t care about who is hotter. I want both of them gone as soon as possible.”

“Today was a close call,” she said with a jerk in Audrey’s direction. “I wasn’t even paying attention, it wasn’t until she mentioned the yelling that I looked and saw what was going on. They’re going to find out about her sooner or later.”

“I choose later, hopefully twenty years later.”

Christine frowned, “If you never give her the chance to know her father, she might hate you forever.”

I knew she was right and as I glanced at Audrey who was sitting absentmindedly and shoving fruits in her mouth, I realized that one day, she wouldn’t be a child anymore. She will grow up and start asking about her dad. One day I might have to face the reality that my daughter will want to know her father regardless of whatever went on between us.

I knew what I had to do but I couldn’t bring it to myself to do it. I would have to meet Ryker and I would have to be cordial with him for her sake. It might have been four years but every single time I think about what I saw him doing, it feels like a hot iron going through my chest.

“I’m not ready,” I managed out to Christine, “I’m not ready to have that conversation with him.”

She sighed, “That’s fine but fate has a cruel sense of humor. It might come when you least expect it.”

“Ryker won’t see her until the coronation. I will be ready by then.”

She smiled ruefully as if she didn’t believe me, “If you say so.”

She looked like she wanted to say more but at that exact moment, the door to the dining room opened and my mother walked in. She had two guards flanking her as she made her way further into the room.

She paused in front of Audrey and pressed a soft kiss to her hair. Audrey practically fluttered under the praise and she smiled wide. I saw a smile tug at my mother’s lips but she quickly smothered it and turned to face me.

“I hear you’ve had an interesting morning,” she drawled with amusement. “How did he get into the palace grounds?”

“I think you should ask your guards that, it is their responsibility to watch us after all.” I quipped and a sick sense of pride rose beneath her eyes at my response.

“Touché,’ she cleared her throat, “We have a meeting with the Alpha’s, get ready.”

She turned to leave but I was so stunned that a sound came out of my throat. It sounded like a mix between a squeak and a squeal, I thought it sounded like a dying rat but it was enough to get mother’s attention as she stopped and turned to me with raised brows.

“What meeting?” I asked and she rolled her eyes as if she was bored.

“It was a last minute arrangement on my part, I will admit. But the Alphas don’t seem to know personal boundaries so I pushed up our meeting with them until today.”

“All of them aren’t even here yet.” I scrambled for any reason to not have the meeting and she knew it because she shook her head.

“The coronation is in two weeks, if they aren’t here yet then they can wait to see you on the day. Over half of them are here, even if you have only met two.”

Without another word, she was out of the dining room and I was left sitting there with my mouth opened. I turned to Christine who offered me a comforting smile and I was suddenly aware of how sick of a sense of humor fate had.

I slowly stood to my feet and I allowed my legs guide themselves to my room where the dress designers were already waiting with one of my dresses. I moved on autopilot as I took a long bath and allowed the maids work on my skin.

I didn’t even realize what was happening as my hair was styled in a sort of causal look and I was ushered into the dress. I zoned out completely until someone tapped my shoulders and I realized that they were done and waiting for my stamp of approval or disapproval.

I moved over to the standing mirror and took myself in. My hair was tied up in an elegant half up and half down do, I had very minimal makeup on to appear

more casual than business oriented and the dress, it was somehow better than the last time I saw it. I'm sure they had it altered to perfectly frame my body.

The silver of the dress sparkled under the right light and the train looked longer than I remembered but I knew my mother would be in something more dazzling so I was sure to get only a few curious stares. My shoulders were bare and I couldn't help but glance back at my hair. In two weeks, I wouldn't be able to attend any meeting without having to wear a crown.

I smiled at the designers and I saw them all let out a collective sigh of relief. I allowed them lead me downstairs and when I got to the front of the meeting hall, my mother was waiting. She ran her eyes over me and I saw approval dancing beneath her lids.

She was in a dress of blood red but it was encrusted with rubies. It was a ball gown and the train put mine to shame. It was clearly over the top but I don't think she cared. Her lips were painted the color of blood and on her head sat a ruby encrusted crown.

I stared at her for a minute and finally, she snapped her fingers and one of the guards came running over holding a clear silver box.

Inside was a small crown made of diamonds and before I could say anything, she placed it on my head. It felt different and I blinked twice before I realized what had happened.

"I thought I'm not allowed to wear crowns until after the coronation."

"You're not allowed to wear the crown for the heir," she corrected. "There is no way I will have you in the midst of all that testosterone without a crown. Now, are you ready?"

I nodded and the door was pushed open.

The first thing I noticed was how the talking ceased. There were at least twenty people in there but somehow, I was drawn to him. I could feel his eyes on me from my left but I was determined not to look or even glance in his direction. I kept my chin high as I walked with my mother towards the head of the table.

She sat down and I sat at her right. I couldn't help but imagine what a contrast we are, blood red and silver. It will make for some amazing stories and rumors.

"I am glad you could all meet us on such short notice, mother began, "Normally, this wouldn't hold until the day before the coronation but certain happenings have made it that the meeting had to be pushed up. Please, take your seats."

They all scrambled to take their seats and I was grateful when it was a random stranger and not Ryker who sat beside me but my gladness quickly faded when Ryker sat opposite me. There was need and love in his eyes and I had to look away to stop him from consuming me but unfortunately, my eyes landed on Tyson.

I felt mother nudge me slightly and I cleared my throat and placed a stoic expression on my face.

"This is my daughter, Camilla," she introduced and all I did was dip my head in a respectful nod, "It has come to my attention that a few of you have wandered into the castle on certain occasions. What for? I don't know. This will serve as my only warning to you, the castle is out of bounds to anyone who is not a member of the royal family or wasn't summoned by a higher ranking royal."

She paused for dramatic effect and stared down all of them, "Anyone found within these castle walls at any given time will be sent home immediately. Your pack will be shunned by the royals and you will have nothing to do with us. That might sound like an empty threat until you realize that we allocate land and resources to every pack."

The room went as silent as a graveyard as everyone realized that she wasn't bluffing. Mother would really do that and I felt my heart warm as I realized that she was doing it for me. I wanted nothing more than to pull her into a hug but I knew this was neither the right place nor time so I settled for gently nudging her knee with mine.

She opened her mouth to speak when the door to the room opened. A part of me already knew what was happening before it happened but I still hoped that I was wrong.

Audrey walked in through the doors and when she saw the many eyes, her thumb instantly flew to her mouth and she looked like she was about to cry. I glanced at my mother who also had a panicked look on her face.

The Alphas had started muttering amongst themselves and that was when Audrey's eyes landed on me. Within a second, she was sprinting across the room and burying her head in my skirts.

Chapter 53

I could feel the air stretching as everyone stared at me and Audrey. It felt like time had stopped briefly as every eye bored into me and my daughter. I could feel their stares even though I wasn't looking at them and they began to whisper. The whispers felt louder than they should have, they grated on my ears and it was like I could hear every single word they said.

I glanced at my mother who tried to reach down and take Audrey from me but Audrey refused to let go of my skirts. I leaned down and picked her up then placed her right in my lap so she was sitting with her legs on either side of my thighs and her head was buried into my chest.

"I'm sorry for the interruption," I made sure my voice was as clear as day as I spoke, "The rules never apply to our children, and even if they did, children always seem to run with their own set of rules."

"Is she yours?" one of the Alpha's asked.

I turned to him, I haven't seen him before. He was a lot older than me, I would say mid forties with a bald head and brown eyes. He is a bit on the pudgy side with beady eyes and a button nose. I could see him eyeing Audrey with curiosity and interest kind of like the others were doing.

"Yes she is," I admitted and I heard rather than saw Ryker inhale sharply.

The action unwillingly brought my eyes to his and I saw that he was no longer looking at me, he was staring at Audrey with a million emotions in his eyes. I saw him fist his fingers on the table and I knew he wanted nothing more than to reach out and just touch her.

"You didn't tell me that we had a daughter," I would have understood if those words came from Ryker but I followed the sound down the table to where Tyson was now on his feet. "I deserved to meet her."

He started making his way towards me and I turned to the guards who instantly blocked his way to me but he wasn't interested in going down quietly. I glanced at Ryker who was now looking at me with confusion.

"She's not yours Tyson," I said simply. "Not in blood and not in any other way."

"You don't know that, it might have been one time but one time is all it takes."

"It wasn't one time," I spat as I placed my hands over Audrey's ears so she wouldn't hear me, "It was rape and no, I wasn't pregnant for you so you can sit the f**k down or you can get out."

Tyson was stunned, I don't think I curse that much and I don't think he has ever seen me curse. Even Ryker and my mother looked taken aback at my choice of words but I didn't seem to care anymore.

I stood to my feet and balanced Audrey on my hip as I spoke, "This meeting is officially over."

As if possessed, all the Alphas rose and darted out the front doors except Tyson and Ryker. Tyson was still being restrained by guards but Ryker was standing in front of his seat and his eyes kept darting between me and Audrey.

"Is she mine?" his voice was as soft as a feather and I could tell that he was hoping for one answer but bracing himself for another.

I guess Christine was right when she said it would happen sooner or later, I was expecting it to be a lot later.

I nodded, "Yes, she is."

"That's bullsh it," Tyson yelled out, "That little girl is mine, I am her father."

"Shut up!" my mother's voice boomed through the halls leaving everyone staring at her in shock.

She stood to her feet and leveled a harsh look at both men before walking over to me and stroking Audrey's hair softly. Audrey still had her head buried into my shoulder and I hated the fact that she had to be present for this conversation but I know she will refuse to go with anyone else and I have to be here.

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” mother spat at Tyson, “Making such a stupid scene in front of not only the other Alphas but in front of a child.”

“I just want a claim to my-,”

“I don’t give a shit what you want,” she spat, “If Camilla says you aren’t the father then you aren’t. There is no way to know for sure unless by the words of Camilla but if you are so sure that she is yours, then bring proof of the last time you were with Camilla by tomorrow or this evening and you will have your answer.”

Tyson opened his mouth to complain but when he was leveled a look, he decided against it and stormed out of the room. I watched him carefully wondering if he was going to do anything crazy but he didn’t. He exited the room and soon it was just Ryker, my mother and I.

“I will leave you two alone,” mother said and with a soft squeeze of my shoulder, she walked out.

The door shut behind her and something about it felt so final. The air was thick with tension and charging. It felt like a live wire had been let loose and ignited between us. I haven’t been alone with Ryker in four years and if anything, our bond has become stronger.

I can feel the pull to him like I can feel Audrey in my arms. It was strong and charged and I wanted nothing more than to run to him and just let him hold me but I couldn’t and I knew that so I put on my best expressionless mask and turned to him.

His eyes were filled with so many questions and he slowly left his seat and walked around the table until he was standing right in front of me. He lifted his hand and at first I thought he wanted to touch Audrey but then his hand came dangerously close to my cheek and I took a step back.

“Why did you leave?” I expected this question to come up but I didn’t expect it now. “I looked for you for days. I thought the rogues had you, I didn’t know where you went. It was like one minute you were there and the next, you weren’t.”

“Don’t act so innocent,” I couldn’t take the bitterness out of my tone, “you know exactly why I left.”

“I don’t, I thought about it for days wondering if I did something,” there was so much sincerity in his eyes and if I hadn’t seen what happened with my own eyes then I might have been tempted to believe him.

“it doesn’t matter anyway,” I said dismissively, “You’re here for her not me.”

His eyes went back to Audrey instantly and his hand moved forward to run through her curls. On impact, she pushed further into me and Ryker immediately pulled his hand away.

“Hi Audrey,” he whispered and as if she recognized his voice, she turned to him, “It’s Ryker, do you remember me?”

Audrey turned to me as if asking for permission to talk to him and I nodded. She still didn’t let go of me but she nodded in response to his question and I saw his face break out into a smile.

She looked around the room and when she saw how empty it was, she started to wiggle and I put her on the floor. She rushed over to Ryker and wrapped her arms around his legs. There was an unreadable expression on his face that I would only describe as pure happiness and joy. He bent down until he was at her level and he ran his hands through her hair softly.

“Audrey,” I began and she turned to me, “Do you remember how you asked me about your dad a while ago? It was when Steven had a baby and you asked if he would be called mummy too.”

She nodded eagerly, “You said Steven is a daddy because he’s a boy and you’re a mummy because you’re a girl.”

“Well, Ryker is your daddy,” for a split second there was no reaction on her face and she angled her head to the side as if she was gauging the news and turning it over in her head.

Ryker was literally holding his breath as he waited for her to react and then in a split second she threw her arms around him again. She made a sound that sounded like a scream and a squeal and started to jump around on her tiny legs.

“I have a daddy,” she squealed and it seemed like she was more excited about the prospect of having a dad than who it was.

She lifted up her arms for him to pick her up and he looked at me first as if asking for permission and I nodded. He wasted no time in lifting her and balancing her one hip. Looking at them side by side, anyone would know that they are related.

She looks exactly like him. She has his eyes and his nose, she has thick and long lashes just like he does. The only thing she actually has of me are my hair and my lips, that's it. I felt my heart clench as I watched Audrey speak so animatedly and with barely concealed excitement.

Ryker was paying rapt attention to everything that she was saying and he kept nodding along as if he wanted to hear more. It felt like such a private moment and I couldn't help but feel like I was actually interfering or trespassing.

A part of me realized that I should have done this a long time ago. I should have told him about his daughter but that would have meant going to him or having to explain to him why I left. I wasn't ready then and I still don't think I am ready now but I am in a better place of mind now than when I was before.

"Mummy," Audrey's voice snapped me out of my thoughts and I turned to her. "Are you and daddy mates like Steven and Carla?"

I was unsure of how to answer the question so I stayed quiet. Suddenly, it was like the tension was back and I could feel Ryker's eyes on me as he waited for me to answer our daughter. He could have answered her and we both knew that but he was giving me the chance to say whatever it was I wanted to say and I knew that no matter my answer, he would respect it.

"Yes, we are," she looked so excited so I added, "But it is complicated and we aren't together right now."

Her smile fell, "why not?"

I let out a deep sigh, "Why don't we talk about this later? We have to get you back upstairs and your dad has to leave."

"I don't want him to leave," she pouted and she clung to him tighter.

14

He whispered something in her ear and she frowned but nodded and reluctantly allowed him to put her down then walked towards the door where

Steven was waiting. I nodded to him and he took her out of the room, preferably to her room.

T

It was just me and Ryker and he reached out to me but I took a step back so I was out of his reach.

“You can see her within the palace walls, but only when I am aware,” I told him, “She usually wakes up by 7 or 8 and has breakfast before 9. You can see her anytime from 9:30 or 10 depending on how soon I can get her ready.”

“Camilla,” he reached for me again but I leveled a hard look at him.

“I have to go and you have to get back to your room.”

“I don’t know what I did, but I am sorry.” His voice cracked on the last word but I couldn’t allow him break my defenses again so I turned on my heels.

I waited until I got to the door before I spoke, “Sorry doesn’t fix things.”

Chapter 54

I was dreading the morning because I knew that my life had already taken a turn and it is almost impossible for things to go back to the way they were. I should have listened to Christine when she advised me but I was so concerned with trying to keep my life the way it was that I unknowingly set the chain of events for the exact things that I did not want to happen.

Before I was able to put Audrey to bed at night, it took almost twice the usual time it would. She was so excited about her father and kept asking whether or not her father could put her to bed. I had to reluctantly let her know that he wasn’t allowed on the palace grounds after dark as he wasn’t a member of our family and she was so saddened by the words. It hurt me to see her like that and honestly, I didn’t know what to do.

This morning she did the same thing. She asked if her dad could get her dressed for the day and I hated being the one to tell her no, I hated being the one who had to deflate her hope and make her sad. I hated it and I didn’t know what else to do or say about the entire situation without looking like the bad guy.

I managed to calm her down with the prospect of seeing Ryker again after breakfast and that was the only thing that spurred her to actually get out of bed and get dressed. She put on one of her nicest dresses and demanded that I put a little bow in her hair. As we walked through the castle walls, she had a permanent skip in her step. She looked more excited than I had seen her in the past few days and I didn't even think that was possible.

My mother arrived in the dining room shortly after we did and from the look she leveled towards me, I knew she wanted to speak to me. At first, I tried to focus on my food and ignore her but I slowly lost my appetite and I ended up standing slowly to my feet. I saw all eyes fall on me but I ignored them and walked right out of the dining room.

I waited by the door because I knew she would be out soon as well and my thoughts were correct because within five minutes, the door to the dining room opened and mother walked right out. She sighted me leaning against the wall and she walked right over to me and leaned against the wall in silence.

"Before you start berating me, I know I messed up," I began, "I didn't expect Audrey to walk in like that and I should have told Ryker about her before."

"You should-have," she agreed, "But now Tyson is telling everyone that Audrey is his. There's no point sitting on the things you could have done better. Our main focus should be the things you have to do now, so what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," I admitted even though I hated how foolish it made me sound. "There is no way for me to prove that Audrey belongs to Ryker except timing. But the problem is that I wasn't with Ryker for more than three months. I don't even know when I got pregnant, I just know I had Audrey in March and I left him in August."

"I have an idea but you might not like it,"

"At this point any idea is a good idea.",

"Announce Audrey as yours and Ryker's daughter." I turned to her sharply, "I know you want her out of the spotlight and everything but that is the only way you can discredit Tyson. Anything he says will make him look stupid and desperate. It will be rumors and nothing else."

"Doing that would mean that Ryker has claim to her."

“You’re stuck between two evils Camilla. You can either give Ryker claim to his child or you have to deal with both men around your daughter with equal claim. I don’t know about you but it seems like a very easy choice for me. Besides, Audrey loves him already from what I’ve heard.”

I knew my mother was right, it was an easy choice but it didn’t mean it was one I wanted to make. But that’s the thing about life, we are stuck between bad choices and the hard ones. It would be so much easier to just stay silent but Audrey would be the one to suffer for it. It would be a constant tug of war between both parties trying to win her affection and I just want her to have a life as close to normal as it gets.

“Make the announcement,” I told my mother, “Do whatever you need to do. Just increase the guards on Audrey, I don’t want any kind of accidents during this ceremony. I need to make sure that my daughter is safe.”

“She will be,” my mother assured me. “I can promise you that Audrey will be the most protected person in this palace. No

one except you and Ryker will be able to come within ten feet of her without me knowing. You have

“Thank you.”

my

word on that.”

She gave me a soft smile that might as well have been an ‘I love you’ in her world. I let out a heavy sigh and pushed off my position on the wall. I was going to make my way back into the dining when mother’s voice stopped me and I turned to her.

“Make sure you tell Ryker about it, let him know exactly what he has gotten himself into.”

“This has nothing to do with him. He is her father, not my mate.”

“He’s still your mate until you reject him and as long as he is her father, he will have access to the palace. Tell him, the last thing we need is for another person to take us by surprise.”

“Yes mother.”

“One more thing,” she said, “I asked him to come to the palace with the people who accompanied him. From what I hear, there are just about three of them. We need to swear them all to secrecy and you will be the one to meet with them.”

I wanted to protest, to refuse and demand that someone else do it but before I could, she walked down the hallway as if she hadn't just dropped the biggest bomb on me.

Ryker arrived at the palace at exactly 9:45. I had asked that I be informed the moment he shows up and coincidentally, Audrey was with me when I was told and she ditched the book we were coloring in and all but ran out of the room.

I caught up to her and reprimanded her for running in the halls but it was half hearted because she looked so excited that I couldn't even fault her for running. Ryker was waiting for us in the private living room and as soon as I opened the door, Audrey ran into his arms.

Ryker wasn't the only person there, Riley was too. There was also a guard who I didn't recognize or maybe I did but I didn't know his name. I had to fight to keep my expression neutral as Riley's gaze went from Audrey to me and back instantly. I didn't want her to see how much I had missed her and most of all I didn't want to see the disappointment and annoyance in her gaze as she took in the scene in front of her.

Audrey was so oblivious to the tension brewing in the room and for once I wished I was as blissfully ignorant as she was. I wished I could go back to being a child and not have to worry about anything except for where I would play next or when I would sleep.

“Please sit,” I said to them and I didn't wait to see if they would respond before I took my seat on the only armchair there.

Riley and Ryker took the couch to my left while the guard was excused and stepped out of the room. As soon as the door clicked shut, it just felt so final and I knew that there was officially no going back again.

“Audrey will be announced as our daughter,” I said as a way of greeting. “I'm only telling you this because as her father, you have a right to know. She will not be put out there but she will be officially recognized as a member of the

royal family which means she will be under constant surveillance and as her father, you will probably get a lot of unwanted attention,”

“That’s it,” Riley cut in. You ran away like some criminal and we don’t see you for four years and the first thing you’re telling us is what you plan to do with our family. Don’t we even get a say?”

“You get to say ‘yes I understand,” I turned to look at her and I could see her eyes swimming with frustration. “Keep in mind. that I don’t have to tell you anything. I am simply doing it out of respect and because of my daughter.”

“Don’t you think we had a right to know her? You stole three years of her life away from us. I don’t even know her name.”

“If you want to talk about my daughter then don’t do it when she’s in the room.” I warned and she at least had the decency to turn pink.

I know that Ryker already placed his hands over her ears so she wouldn’t hear what was being said but the last thing I wanted was for my daughter to accidentally hear something she shouldn’t.

“It’s fine, Riley,” Ryker whispered to her and I saw her spine straighten even though I knew she didn’t agree.

“Why did you leave?” she asked me. “Things were going so well and then you just left like we were nothing. Was it because you were pregnant?”

“I didn’t know I was pregnant before I left.”

“Would it have changed anything?”

I paused before I answered because this is something I had asked myself for months after finding out I was pregnant. Would I have stayed if I knew? Maybe, I was always so eager to please people. But knowing who I am right now, I probably wouldn’t

stay.

“Maybe,” I admitted. The least I could do was offer them that little piece of truth. “it doesn’t matter now. What has happened has happened, what we need to do now is move forward with what we have.”

I turned to look at Audrey who was blissfully unaware in Ryker's arms. She was playing with the collar of his shirt and staring at him as if he was the most fascinating person on the planet.

"Her name is Audrey Valentina Caine. She was born on March 13th and she really likes butterflies."

"That's my mother's name," Ryker's voice was a soft whisper.

"I know,"

I locked eyes with him and there was something there. I don't know if it is the remnants of our bond or something deeper but it threatened to swallow me whole and I had to turn away.

"Thank you," he whispered and I had to turn back to him.

"What for?"

"For her," he smiled softly, "and for giving her my last name."

Chapter 55

The news about Audrey went live two days ago and it spurred all the Alphas to arrive earlier than usual. The coronation is set for a week from now and the palace has been in a complete frenzy. I knew Ryker would never be one to complain so I asked my mother to look into it and it turns out that he had been getting a lot of questions and disturbance from a lot of other Alphas.

It wasn't anything violent or malicious but the constant overbearing nature and the snide comments. My mother had Ryker and his entourage moved into the palace. I knew it was the right and best option but it didn't mean I agreed with it. At least when he was living in another building it was easier to avoid him. The palace might be big but every day, we bump into each other at least three times.

Ryker has refused to let the subject of my running away drop and whenever we are together, he makes sure to ask me about it and try to get me to speak. I have told him over and over again that we should leave the past in the past but I don't think Ryker has ever been good at following instructions because he has done the exact opposite.

If I didn't know any better, I would say he was trying to win me over but I guess that isn't possible right now because I have a million things to worry about starting with my daughter and ending with Tyson.

When the news about Audrey dropped, Tyson was furious. He stormed into the palace yelling at the top of his lungs. The guards detained him at the door but my mother and I were called down to speak to him. He told me that I had robbed him of the chance to be with his daughter and when I broke down the timeline of Audrey's birth and explained that there was no way he could be the father, he lost it..

He screamed at me and blamed it on Ryker, he spoke about how Ryker had brainwashed me and how Ryker was the cause of all his problems and honestly, it felt so normal. I was wondering how long it would take for him to break character and refuse to take responsibility for his actions and it didn't take as long as I thought.

After he was forcibly taken away from the palace, he tried to return yesterday but he wasn't even allowed to reach the gate. I was on the balcony overlooking the front gate and he was screaming my name. I don't know if he could see me or not but I know that he stood there for almost ten minutes begging me to come out and talk to him.

Audrey was right beside me and she asked who he was. I had to lie to her that he was an old friend who I drifted apart from. I didn't know how to explain the concept of mates to her three year old mind but thankfully I didn't have to worry much about it because Ryker arrived and it was like every problem she has vanished into thin air.

I wouldn't admit it but I was actually glad that Ryker was around because he helped with Audrey a lot more than I thought he would. It was annoying at first but I soon realized that it worked to my advantage because while he kept her company, I was able to get work done and finalize the planning for the coronation.

Ryker attended to her during breakfast and he helped her into bed every night. She simply refused to fall asleep if Ryker and I weren't both by her side to read her a bedtime story. That used to be my job but I think Audrey is just scared that her father will disappear and she is trying to make the best out of what she has now.

I don't know how to explain to her that the Ryker I know won't leave her. If anything, he is probably already planning a way that involves them staying together but what he won't say out loud is that the only way that will happen is if we are mated and I don't see that happening.

Tonight, I was running late because I had a last minute meeting with my mother to discuss the security for Audrey. Her eyes and ears had told her that everyone was suddenly so interested in seeing her and they were predicting at least one crazed event during the coronation. That was exactly what I wanted to avoid and I couldn't help but feel like it was my fault that Audrey was suddenly going to have her life uprooted.

When I got to her room, she was lying in her bed tucked under her blankets while whispering animatedly to Ryker. As soon as she sighted me, she sat up and stretched out her arms so I could give her a hug. I wasted no time in taking her in my arms. and inhaling her soft scent.

"I'm sorry I'm late," I mumbled into her hair. "I was in a meeting with your grandma that ran so late."

"It's okay," she whispered back. "Daddy read my bedtime story, I was just waiting for you."

I pulled back and stared at the innocent look in her eyes and I couldn't help but wish it would stay that was forever. "Thank you for waiting up for me."

She smiled widely and burrowed back under the covers. I dragged the blanket up to her chin and placed a soft kiss on her forehead. She giggled softly and a smile tugged at my lips.

"Goodnight," I told her and I felt Ryker's presence next to me.

He leaned down to kiss her forehead and he was so close to me that I could smell him, I could feel him. I didn't even realize I had held my breath until he pulled away.

"Goodnight princess," he whispered to her and I saw her beam at the nickname.

Ryker and I walked out of the room and I made sure to turn off the main light and leave her night light on. Audrey will never sleep in a completely dark room

but at the same time she can't fall asleep if all the lights are on. Her night light is a soft orange color and it gives the room a soft dewy glow that she loves.

I shut the door behind me and turned only to see Ryker standing so close to me. I looked up at him in an attempt to hide how uncomfortable I was.

"Thank you for helping out with the story.

"I didn't help out. She's my child, it's my job to do that." I started to side step him but his hand shot out and grabbed my arm. "Five minutes, I just want to talk for five minutes, please."

"We can't Ryker," I whispered. "I just want to go to bed."

"I deserve five minutes of your time."

"No, you don't," I cut him off. "I don't have to talk to you or be around you. My only obligation is to co parent with you in a civil manner so it does not affect our daughter but other than that, I owe you nothing."

He was stunned by my words but I didn't even wait for a response from him. I side stepped him and walked over to my door which was directly adjacent to Audrey's. I was about to shut the door behind me when Ryker's foot shot out and held it open. He pushed the door open and I rolled my eyes as I sat at my vanity and began to take off my jewelry and hair pins.

"You might not want to talk," he began, "But you can listen to me," he waited to see if I would retort but when I was silent, he continued. "I don't know what it was that I did but it must have been terrible for you to leave and I am sorry. I want to make things right Camilla, I miss you."

Hearing those words from him almost undid me because whether I wanted to admit it or not, I missed him too. I shook my head trying and failing to push those feelings away from my chest but they wouldn't leave.

Finally, I stood to my feet and walked over to him. I saw the anticipation as I stood in front of him and crossed my hands over my chest.

"You should leave," I said but I couldn't look him in the eye.

"Look at me and say it."

I stared deep in his eyes and I had forgotten how magnetic they were and how they and the tendency to just pull you in and never let you go. I opened my mouth to speak but the words couldn't come out. I don't know what happened next, I don't know who made the first move or who initiated it but the next thing I knew, our lips were fused together.

I had forgotten how euphoric it felt to kiss Ryker. His hands wound around my waist and pulled me impossibly closer while I balanced my hands on his shoulders. One of his hands tangled in my curls and he tugged it hard but it gave a delicious feeling and I let out a small gasp.

"I want to feel you," his tone was pleading. "Please let me feel you."

He sounded like he would go mad if I stopped him, like he was dying and this was his last meal and his life would be over if I didn't grant it. My body felt alive for the first time in years and all I could do was nod.

"I want your words,"

"Yes," it came out more like a breathy moan than a statement but Ryker wasted no time in complying.

His skilled fingers worked the ropes at the back of my dress and corset and within a second they were in a pool on the floor. We were a frenzy of hands and a flurry of bodies. I can't tell you how I got the rest of my clothes off or how he got naked. I can't even tell you how we got into bed.

I just knew that it had been too long and I just wanted him. I knew I was making a mistake and I knew I would regret it tomorrow but I couldn't bring myself to worry about tomorrow. For once, I wanted to be selfish and I wanted to indulge in a man. I haven't been with a man since Audrey was born. Mainly because I didn't want her to grow attached to him and have him leave but this is Ryker, he is going to be around for as long as he wants whether I like it or not.

I felt my back hit the mattress and Ryker settled between my thighs. I could feel the searing heat from his throbbing member against my clit and I hissed in pleasure. He rocked his hips slowly so his head will glide against my slit and I could feel myself coat him in my wetness.

"No teasing," I begged, "I just want to feel you inside me."

“Are you sure?” he asked and I nodded but he grabbed my chin. “I need you to be absolutely certain.”

“Yes I’m sure,” there was hidden frustration in my tone because he had stilled against me and I just wanted him to slide in.

As soon as he heard the verbal confirmation, he entered me in one sharp thrust. It was deliciously full and I felt like I was going delirious. Ryker claimed me in more ways than one and although this started as a onetime thing on my part, I knew that I had just opened a can that I would probably never be able to seal back.