

## The Rejected Werewolf Princess by Didiadeyemi Chapter 61-65

### Chapter 61

I didn't know where the sound was coming from, and it took Ryker wrapping his arms around me and pulling me into his chest for me to realize that it came from me. I was the one who was screaming but how did I not know? I couldn't process any of my thoughts. There was only one sentence repeating over and over again in my head and that was, 'I need to find Audrey'.

Guards rushed into the room at my screams and I couldn't even form the words to tell them what they needed to do. It was Ryker who instructed them to search the castle for Audrey and also showed them the open window. I could barely process the conversation around me, I just kept wondering how someone managed to sneak into the room and take my daughter right under our noses.

I ran my fingers through my hair in frustration as I paced the room. Normally my first thought would have been Tyson considering that tantrum he threw earlier but he was with us at the exact moment she went missing and unless he can be in two places at once then there is no way that he took her.

While Ryker spoke to the guards, I found myself detangling from his hold and walking into the bathroom. I could feel his eyes on me but I didn't bother giving him an explanation. I searched the bathroom and then the closet. Ryker must have realized what I was doing because he quickly dismissed the guards and walked over to me. He waited until the door clicked shut behind us before he spoke.

"Talk to me," he breathed softly. "I want you to use your words and tell me what's going on."

"What is going on is that my daughter is missing," I tried to drag my hand out of his grip but he refused to let me. "Ryker, I need to look for her. She could just be playing a rude game of hide and seek."

"Our daughter, Camilla," he corrected before sighing. "She isn't here and you know it. But don't worry, we will find her. Whoever took her cannot have gone far."

"We don't even know when she was taken!" I couldn't stop the yell before it came out of my mouth. "We were in this castle doing heavens knows what and our daughter was taken from right underneath our noses. I knew it was a bad idea for us to get back together. We should have never-,"

"Camilla, don't do that, please. We had nothing to do with her being taken. I know you're upset but this isn't going to make it any better."

"We should have been here."

"Maybe, but we can't start thinking about the ifs or you are going to make

yourself sick," he said and I sniffled quietly. "We are going to find her, I promise you that. We will find her and we will bring her back home and this will all be like a bad dream."

I wanted to believe him because it was a better alternative than thinking my daughter could be dead or sold or tortured. I nodded and he pulled me into his chest as the first tear slipped free.

While he was holding me, I heard the door behind us open. I turned in Ryker's arms to see my mother and Christine walking towards us. If either of them was surprised that I was with Ryker in front of them, they didn't show it. Instead, they had worry etched on their faces.

"I heard what happened," mother said first. "I have sent the guards to scour the surrounding areas of the castle. If Audrey left a scent or she is still here then they will find her. Do you remember what exactly she was wearing?"

I nodded, "She was in her white pajama set with butterflies on it. I think her hair was in a ponytail because she said it was getting into her eyes." I hated the way my voice cracked. "She wasn't wearing shoes because she was on the bed but I don't know if they took the time out to put shoes on her."

"It's okay," I heard Ryker mutter in my ear softly as he stroked my back and I think that was the exact moment that mother actually noticed our position. Her eyes narrowed slightly and then she had a look of amusement before raising one brow at me in a silent question. I didn't even have the mental energy to rise to her banter so I just shrugged. She gave me a look that told me she would be

asking about it later and then her expression went back to stoic and sympathetic.

"Camilla, are you in any position to go with one of the search parties?" mother asked and I nodded immediately. "If Audrey can hear us then she is more than likely to respond to you calling her."

"Of course," I pulled away from Ryker and wiped at my tears. "Just tell me where I need to be."

"There are four search parties so we can split up. You go with one, Ryker goes with the other and same for me and Christine. Audrey knows all of us and if she is in a position to answer, she will most likely respond to our call." My eyes widened when I realized that she was offering to leave the safety of the palace to help me find Audrey. "You would do that for us."

"She's my granddaughter Camilla. I want her back home just as much as you do." She gave me a soft smile and I held back a sob. "The search parties will leave in five minutes. That should give you enough time to get everything you need. I recommend you put on something more comfortable like breeches and hold a coat because we might be out late."

Mother left soon after and I wasted no time in rushing to my room to get

changed. I changed into my favorite pair of riding gear. It is all leather pants with a button up shirt and boots. It isn't usual riding gear as most women were dresses but I couldn't bring myself to care and was actually grateful that mother gave me this alternative when I came to the palace.

It took me less than five minutes to get changes and once I was out, I could see that everyone else was dressed too. Mother led us to the front of the palace where the search parties were waiting and in that moment, I realized why she was Queen. She was formidable as she instructed everyone on what to do and I couldn't help but watch with awe.

Just as we were about to leave, I saw Riley walk up to us. She had a careful and also suspicious look on her face as she watched each of us carefully.

"What's going on?" she asked but no one gave her a response and then she turned to Ryker. "Where are you going?"

"We're going to find Audrey," he said and her eyes widened. She opened her mouth to speak but he cut her off. "I'll explain it all when I get back, I promise." He kissed her forehead and she nodded then he turned back to his search party and they disappeared into the woods. I caught Riley staring at me with an unreadable expression in her eyes and when she caught my eye, she nodded subtly and walked away.

I don't know how long we searched for Audrey but my voice became hoarse. I yelled out for her at every opportunity and even when the sky grew dark, we took out flash lights and continued to search. We searched every cave, every stream and every road we could find. We overturned every leaf and rock but Audrey simply wouldn't appear. From the moment the sky went dark, I knew we wouldn't be finding her. I only hoped that the others would have better luck.

It wasn't until the moon was high in the sky that we decided we were going to return to the castle. Spirits were low and no one spoke a single word as we made our way back. I could tell that they were either as worried as I was or they just didn't want to risk upsetting me.

By the time we got to the palace, Christine's search party was already there. I looked at her with high hopes and she shook her head softly. I couldn't help the little sob that broke free from me but I managed to clamp down on the tears so they wouldn't fall. I couldn't risk crying in front of the guards especially a few days to coronation

Shit!

The coronation, I don't know what is going to happen but I do know that I have no intentions of holding it if Audrey isn't here. I made a mental note to talk to mother about it once I had calmed down. I knew she would agree because she wouldn't be that cruel as to force me to stand in front of thousands of people for a ceremony while my daughter was goddess knows where.

The other two search parties returned and neither of them had found anything. I wanted to scream, I wanted to cry. I wanted to scream at the goddess and ask why she allowed my child be taken but no words could come out of my lips. Instead, I nodded quietly as they all told me the bad news and I thanked the guards for searching then I walked inside.

I could tell that Ryker wanted to follow me and he had questions but I ignored him and I walked up the stairs into my room.

I locked the door behind me so no one would bother me and I made my way into the bathroom. I sat in the tub for at least thirty minutes before I even made a move to wash myself. My movements were almost mechanical, I couldn't bring myself to come to terms with what was happening.

By the time I got out, I changed into my light pink nightgown because Audrey loved it the most and I made my way to the bed. I was shocked however to get there and see a piece of paper lying there. I picked it up and read what was on it and with each word, my mouth fell open wider and my eyes felt like they were going to bulge out of their sockets.

I didn't care that I was in a night gown, I rushed out of my room and ran down the hallways until I got to my mother's office. She wasn't there and I knew the only other place she could be was her room so I took off. I knocked on her door louder and harder than I normally would have but I didn't care.

When she opened the door, she took in my features. "Why are you walking around the palace with bare feet?"

I looked down and realized that I was in fact bare footed but I didn't care. I pushed past her into her room and she watched me carefully before locking the door behind her.

"What is it?" she asked and I handed her the note.

She stared at it carefully for a second before she took it from me. I saw her expression morph from confusion to shock and back to neutral. She didn't need to read it out loud because even though I had read it only once, I could recite the entire letter word for word.

I have your daughter and she is safe for now.

You have something I want and I have something you want.

I think we can come to a mutual understanding.

Meet me at the abandoned warehouse in the district. I'll take you to my hideout from there.

I'll tell

you

what it is that you owe me and this can end without any casualties.

Do not respond and I will take something else.

Attached to the bottom of the note was a lock of Audrey's hair.

## Chapter 62

Mother told me to call his bluff and refused to let me leave. I would have done it with or without her permission but then she ordered guards to trail me all day to ensure I didn't go without her knowledge. She also increased security in and around the palace to also ensure that whoever this person was, they would not be able to take anyone else from the palace.

Something about it still didn't sit right with me and I still felt worried. My nerves were frayed and I was on edge because a part of me felt that no matter the measures we put in place, something terrible was still going to happen. I couldn't tell anyone how I truly felt about it because I didn't want to be the bearer of bad news or the one who brings down everyone's morale.

The city had been alerted to Audrey's disappearance. I don't know how it got out but I assume it was from one of the guards. Everyone was on edge waiting for a response or an announcement from the palace about it but they weren't going to get it. I was in no mood or state of mind to address the general public and neither was my mother. When the council asked our opinion, we both agreed that it would be best if we just stayed silent and allowed things to play out.

The council members then brought up the issue of the coronation and that led to the conversation that we were having now. They were listing off the millions of reasons why it cannot be postponed. They started by saying that it had never happened before and I was tempted to inform them that no monarch had their child go missing days before coronation. I was growing bored and irritated the longer I listened to them drone on about the importance of keeping the coronation. It wasn't until one of them mentioned that it would be an insult to have the Alpha's come all this way and leave/without the ceremony that I snapped.

"Do you realize that my three year old daughter is missing?" I spat with so much venom that I saw him flinch. "My child is goddess knows where and your biggest problem is whether or not the ego of an Alpha can take it?".

"Your highness, that isn't-" he began but I cut him off.

"I am going to make one thing very clear to all of you and I would advice that you do well to listen," I paused to make sure I had all their attention. "This coronation is not holding until I have my child in my arms. I don't give a sh it how long it takes and I don't care how anyone feels about it. The monarchy will not end if I suddenly decide to put my daughter over it."

"Your highness," another one muttered softly. "It is your duty as the future Queen to have the coronation. This won't be the first time a child has gone missing. You were missing for eighteen years and we found you. If your daughter isn't found after the coronation then we will invite a witch from the coven we are aligned to and she ca-)

“Shut up,” I said and he bristled. “Maybe if you had allowed my mother look for me when she wanted I wouldn’t have been missing for eighteen years. But all that is in the past, I have said it once and I will say it again; nothing in this palace will hold until my daughter is safe. Is that clear?”

“Yes, your highness,” they all mumbled even though I knew they clearly didn’t agree.

I saw my mother looking at me with eyes full of pride and for the first time since Audrey went missing, felt an emotion that wasn’t anger or sadness. I gave her a small smile and stood to my feet. I wasn’t going to spend another minute in the council room just to make myself available for the elders to annoy.

I walked out of the council room and was shocked to see Ryker running towards me looking like a man possessed. My first thought was that he had found Audrey and I felt hope rise in me like a phoenix but when he came closer, I was able to see the expression on his face for the first time and my smile fell slightly.

“What’s wrong?” I asked once I was close enough to him and he opened his mouth to speak but then closed it and ran his fingers through his hair. “Ryker, talk to me.”

“Riley is gone.”

There was a ringing in my ear as my brain refused to process his words. I stared at him like a fish out of water and as soon as the words finally settled in my foggy brain, I moved. My legs moved of their own accord and led me towards the room that Riley was occupying. I muttered prayers under my breath hoping that it was all a misunderstanding because if it isn’t then it is my fault.

I got to the room and the door was slightly ajar. I pushed it open and there was no doubt that a struggle had taken place there. The dresser was turned over and the bed was unmade, a lot of things were strewn on the floor and I even sighted a smearing of blood on one patch of the wall. My hands flew to my mouth as tears pricked the back of my eyelids.

“I am so sorry,” were the only words that came out of my mouth over and over again.

There were so many things that I wanted to ask like when he last saw her and how it was possible considering the number of guards mother had placed in and around the castle. But all I could think was that if I had just gone with them like they had asked then Riley would have never been targeted. I just kept repeating the apology over again until I heard footsteps walk into the room and I saw mother.



I shot her an accusing look and she sent me one that clearly told me to stay silent. She walked into the room and took it in with furrowed brows. I wanted to know what was going on in her head but she didn't voice the thoughts and instead, her expression shut down to neutral.

"You should have let me go," I told her and she finally turned to me. "I knew I should have gone. They are going to hurt them both."

"What are you talking about?" Ryker asked but I ignored him and faced my mother who just sighed deeply.

"Going would have changed nothing, Camilla," she said in her usual all-knowing tone and I wanted to scream. "You are going to sit in this palace while we find the others. We have already lost two and we are not going to lose a third."

"What are you talking about?"

I told Ryker about everything that happened last night and I expected him to be angry with me and tell me that it was my fault but instead, he ran his hands through his hair in frustration and started pacing the room.

"I'm so sorry," I began and he turned to me with an incredulous look.

"Why are you apologizing?" he asked. "Your mother is right, going would not have been the option, you would have been killed. I'm not saying that taking Riley was a good option either but we have to figure something out."

"I have a plan," mother said suddenly and I turned to her. "I can't tell you what it is but I will say that I need you to sit still for that plan to work."

I started to protest but Ryker spoke first, "You have our word."

After that moment, Ryker didn't leave my side once. My mother disappeared to goddess knows where and I started to get really irritated with the number of people trailing me. Christine brought some food for me but I couldn't be bothered to eat anything. I just wanted my daughter and Riley back safely.

The longer the seconds ticked, the more agitated I got and by the time evening fell and I hadn't seen mother, I decided to go looking for her. The guards trailed behind me quietly while Ryker walked by my side without saying a word although I could feel the weight of his eyes on me. I ignored it however as I checked mother's study only to see that she wasn't there. I started to grow suspicious but I checked her room next and when I didn't see her, I knew what had happened.

"I need to go to my room, I announced then I turned to Ryker. "Would you like to come with me?"

He nodded and I grabbed his arm and led him up the stairs. I allowed him walk in first and then I locked the door behind us. and started looking for that secret exit I found a while back. When I found it behind the fireplace, I muttered a small thanks to the goddess and I pulled it open. Ryker was staring at me confused.

“Mother went to get them, don’t you realize?” I told him and his eyes widened. “I don’t know about you but I am not going to let her get hurt because of me.”

“Camilla,” he began but I cut him off.

“I can either do this with you or without you. I am simply telling you now because I don’t want you to worry. I will do it whether you agree with me or not.”

He stared at me like I was crazy but at the last minute he muttered some words under his breath and walked through the tunnels.

The tunnels led straight to the outside of the palace and I made sure to check that the coast was clear before stepping out. I knew it would only be a matter of time before they realized that I was gone and they would send people to find me. I counted on them finding the letter and finding us but until then, I made sure to shut off my mind link so I couldn’t be reached or tracked.

Ryker followed closely beside me as I snuck into the stables and stole two horses. It technically wasn’t stealing since they belonged to the monarchy and I was part of that so I just chose to think of it as borrowing. Ryker rode quietly behind me as I made my way towards the abandoned warehouse hoping that mother hadn’t gone too far.

When we got there, I knew it was empty. There were no signs of life and I was about to scream in frustration. We had lost our only lead and my mother in the span of one day. I wanted to pull out my hair when Ryker called my name. I turned to him and he pointed at something in the sand- horse and footprints. He gestured for me to be silent and we quietly followed the tracks until we saw a cabin in the distance. We decided to ditch the horses so we wouldn’t be seen or heard and go on foot. My heart was beating fast in my chest but I hoped and prayed that they would be there.

“Do you think they’re in there?” I asked Ryker and he shrugged.

“We won’t know until we check.”

We got to the cabin and up close I realized it wasn’t as small as I thought. It was a little bungalow that had been worn out by the elements. We found an opened window and decided that it would be better for us to use that window instead of the front or back door. Ryker was adamant that he go in first and once he was safely in, he helped me get in.

We quietly moved around the cabin taking in the state. There were plates and empty wine/skins so we knew someone had been here recently. I heard murmuring and I moved in that direction even though Ryker tried to stop me. I got to a massive room and I saw my mother, Riley and Audrey tied up in different chairs. Ryker and I wasted no time in rushing over to them to untie them. I had just managed to take the duct tape off Audrey’s mouth when she spoke with voice weak from exhaustion.

“Mummy behind you,”



I barely had time to look before I heard the door click shut behind me and a voice. "Now that the gang is complete, the party can begin."

### Chapter 63

I turned around quickly and saw Tyson standing there with a cruel smile playing on his lips. My first instinct was to stand in front of my daughter and protect her from his gaze. He seemed to notice my actions because he laughed cruelly.

"I've already had her for a day," he laughed. "I could have seen things you didn't even want me to see. I have to admit though, your daughter is beautiful. It is a shame she isn't ours. If she was, she would have been spared all of this."

"If you lay one finger on my child," Ryker growled and Tyson turned his angry and hate filled eyes to him.

"Oh, I forgot you were here. Ryker Caine, the knight in shining armor. I expected that you would be the one to come here. I thought you would try to save your child in a heroic act of bravery. It would have given me sick pleasure to gut you like a fish, but I got the mother instead. Not a terrible bargain, but I'll live."

"Tyson," I called and he turned to me. "You're outnumbered here, so I'm going to tell you how this will go. I am going to release my daughter and we are all going to walk out of here alive or you will be gutted like a fish."

He stared at me for a long second and his eyes took in the people in the room. He seemed to realize that he actually was outnumbered seeing as both Ryker and I were free and he was the common enemy. His beady eyes took in the room and then to my shock, he started laughing.

I was taken aback by his laugh and I cast a wary glance at Ryker who was also looking at me with the same shocked expression. Tyson laughed with such reckless abandon and clutched his ribs as if he was going to keel over from the force of the laughter.

"It's funny that you think I will let you go that easily," he said as he wiped a stray tear from his face. "The thing is Camilla, that I have doused this entire house with gasoline. If you make one wrong move, then I will set this place ablaze with all of you in it. I'm not against dying but do you really want the monarchy to end with you?"

I realized that he had a point and it was at that moment that the scent of gasoline filtered into my nose. I cast a wary glance at Ryker and I knew that I couldn't risk calling his bluff so I raised my hands in surrender and took an unwilling step away -from my daughter. I moved closer to my mother and away from the door.

Tyson smiled widely while Ryker looked at me confused and once I was close

enough to my mother, I slowly put my hands down.

"You're right," I said to him making sure to keep his eyes on my face as I slowly took out a pocket knife from my back. "I'm the one you want, right? Let my daughter go safely and I will stay here with you."

"No," Ryker said almost immediately and Tyson's eyes flashed over to him.

I used the moment of distraction to slip the pocket knife into my mother's hands. Her eyes went to mine and I gave her a discreet nod. She let out a sigh of relief and I saw her start to work on her bonds. I knew it would only be a moment of time before she would be able to get herself free and maybe her powers would be of good use to us. As far as I checked, there is no water source around here and mine would be a waste.

"Camilla," Tyson called out and I looked up. "I'll let your daughter go, but in exchange for your mate. Give me the right to kill him and I'll let your child live."

"What are you saying Tyson?" I asked unable to process the choice that he had just given me,

"I am giving you a chance to save one of them. Give Ryker to me and you can walk out of here with your daughter. You understand why I cannot let the others go but it shouldn't matter to you, they are simply collateral damage. We will raise Audrey together like our own and in a matter of years she will forget about Ryker."

I opened my mouth to speak but no words would come out. I glanced at Ryker who had an impassive expression on his face- he was giving me a chance to make the decision without his input. Tyson noticed the expression and it seemed to infuriate him because he brought out a lighter from his pocket.

"Make your choice now, Camilla," he warned. "Or I swear, I will set this entire place ablaze and we will all die."

"Tyson, please," I pleaded and he flicked the lighter on as if reminding me that I had limited time to make a choice. "I choose Audrey."

The words left my lips before I could stop them and I could feel the silence that fell over the room. I shot Ryker an apology with my eyes but he gave me a look that allowed me know that he understood why I had to make that decision.

Tyson's lips curled up into a smirk and as he moved towards Ryker, there was a flash of movement from my left. Mother had cut through her bonds and she looked more angry than I had ever seen her in my life. Her eyes narrowed at Tyson and he looked from me to her, before awareness settled on his features.

"You tricked me," he growled. "You f\*\*king bi tch."

He came for me and I braced myself to side step his move but then he stopped and fell to the floor. I noticed that pocket knife I had given mother protruding from the back of his neck and when I glanced over at her, her hand

was outstretched as if she had thrown it. I stared at her with wide eyes and she rolled her eyes.

"You're welcome," she said and I rushed to pull her into a hug. "Let's get out of here as soon as possible."

I pulled away from her and rushed to Audrey. She had small tears rushing down her face and as soon as I freed her hands, she wrapped them around my neck as fiercely as she could, I picked her up and allowed her cling to me like a koala bear.

"You chose me," she babbled in the midst of her tears and all I could do was hold her close and kiss her temple.

I saw that Ryker had freed his sister but when he pulled her to her feet, she stumbled. Mother rushed over to help her and I heard Riley mutter her thanks under her breath.

"Go to your daughter," mother told Ryker and he glanced at her briefly before rushing over to Audrey.

was so fixated on having Ryker and Audrey safe and next to me that I didn't notice what was going wrong until I heard mother gasp. I turned to her only to see her crumple to the floor and Riley holding her still beating heart in her hands.

I let out a blood curling scream and shielded Audrey from seeing the bloody scene in front of me. Riley just rolled her eyes and dumped the bloody heart on the floor as if it were an inconvenience.

"Shut up," she spat as she wiped her bloody hands on the bottom of her pants. "Your voice is so f\*\*king annoying."

"Riley," Ryker began slowly. "What are you doing? Why are you doing this, we came to save you."

She rolled her eyes and reached into her pocket to take out a small vial. She emptied the contents in her mouth and I don't know how to explain what happened. All I know is that one second, Riley was standing in front of me and the next; she started to morph until Lauren was standing in front of me with an evil sneer.

I stumbled back slightly and she held out her hand. "Surprise, you must be shocked to see me."

"Where is Riley?" Ryker asked and I saw her frown in slight annoyance.

"Tied up in a cabin in the woods back at the pack," she said almost dismissively. "She isn't dead, don't worry, I have someone. there who makes sure she is fed and clothed and taken care of."

I still couldn't wrap my head around what had happened and was staring at her with my eyes wide. Audrey tried to move in my arms but kept my hand on the back of her head to prevent her from looking at the scene in front of her. Lauren must. have noticed the movement because she narrowed her eyes at

Audrey in my arms.

"I thought I got rid of you four years ago," she began. "Do you know how hard it was to get someone who was willing to morph into Ryker? Do you even know how hard it was to get a witch to sell me the potion or how hard it was to get a lock of Ryker's hair?"

"It was you," I almost face palmed at how stupid I was. It wasn't Ryker who I saw having sex with her, it was someone else who had morphed into him.

"Even the conversation with Lucy, it wasn't her, was it?"

She shook her head.

"You were stupid for believing that Ryker of all people would cheat. Even after you left I tried to make him mine but he was still hung up over you," she spat the words as if it were a curse word. "I thought all he needed was a few years to get over you then I heard that you were at the palace- you a meager omega was now a princess. I knew I had to go so I kidnapped Riley and I morphed into her. Imagine my shock when I see that you have a child."

She moved closer and I took a step back and leveled her with a look that would make meager men cringe.

"Stay away from my daughter." I warned and she smirked

"I don't want your child, I want Ryker," she said before turning to him. "She chose your child over you. She chose a baby over a life with you. I would never do that and you know it. Come with me, choose me. You know how she has been treating you lately. You told me yourself that she was using you for sex."

I turned to Ryker shocked and to my surprise, he wasn't looking at me. Before I could say anything he removed his hands from Audrey and I. I tried to reach out to him but he brushed me off and made his way over to Lucy. She squealed and buried her head in his chest.

He used that opportunity to turn to me and I saw him mouth, 'the lighter.

I knew what he wanted to do and I wasn't sure if I could. I shook my head and he gave me a weak smile before turning to Lauren and kissing her. I felt a searing pain go through my chest and I almost stumbled back. It felt like my heart was being ripped in two and I knew I had limited time.

I rushed over to Tyson's fallen body and I took the lighter from his pocket.

Lucy must have heard my movements because she turned to me then back to Ryker and a knowing look crossed her features.

"You tricked me," she spat and before she could say anything else, I lit the lighter and threw it on the floor.

I was not expecting the magnitude of the flames that filled the room. My skin prickled with heat and I heard Audrey moan over my shoulder. I unlocked the door and rushed out of the room, making my way to the front door which was locked. I cursed under my breath and decided to check the way Ryker and I

came in and to my luck it was open.

-I could hear Lauren screaming in frustration and I couldn't see Ryker but my man focus was getting out with Audrey. I

dropped her out through the window first and then I crawled through.

"Where's daddy?" she asked as she stared up at the burning house but I didn't know how to answer her.

"He's coming," I lied.

I rushed to the front of the house looking for a way to break open the door but the knob burnt to touch and I couldn't find anything to break it. Awareness dawned on me as I realized what I had just done- I had killed my own mate.

Audrey was standing in the clearing- away from the fire and I could feel her eyes on me as I fell to my knees in front of the house with sobbing wracking through my chest. I watched the house burn as guilt settled deep in my chest when I heard an amused voice behind me.

"It's funny how you thought I would die that easily."

## Chapter 64

I was sitting half dressed in the dressing room while I waited for the stylists to bring in my dress. I chose not to see it until today, hoping for the element of surprise and mainly because I thought that not seeing it would make it easier for me to forget the fact that my coronation day was going to arrive whether I liked it or not.

The stylists rushed in with a large dress and my eyes widened when I took in the color. It looked like it was made from melted gold and the longer I stared at it, the more my mouth fell open. Christine walked in behind the stylists with a shy smile on her face and my mouth fell open as I stared from her to the dress.

"What do you think?" she asked almost unsure and I immediately stood to my feet.

"I think I want to put it on right now."

She clapped her hands in glee and I saw her let out a sigh of relief. The stylists walked up to me and helped me into the dress. The first thing I noticed about it was how big it was and the train was massively long. For a split second, I was terrified that I would trip in it and fall flat on my face.

The dress was strapless and form fitted. The material curved around my body like it was second skin and I marveled at the softness of the fabric. Attached at the waist was a huge overflowing skirt and train. Under the right light, the dress almost looked like a peach and gold fusion. The best part about it was how light it was. I was amazed by that fact because I would have expected it to weigh so much.

Christine smiled up at me as I stared at myself in the mirror and I couldn't stop

a small smile from mirroring hers. We were both thinking the same thing- mother would have loved it had she seen it.

When I burnt the house down, I wasn't thinking about mother's body and it wasn't until after the fire had been put out that I learnt she had been burned beyond recognition. I knew there was no way we could bury her in the palace and I also knew she would have rather clawed her own eye out than be buried next to my father. Instead, I chose to have her cremated and I poured out her ashes in the air. I felt like that was more genuine to who she was as a person. I looked just like her today. I chose the same curly bun with some strands framing my face, that she chose on her mating ceremony. She married the prince so she didn't have a coronation, instead, she had a mating/wedding ceremony. I hoped that people would notice the tribute and understand where it came from.

"Where is Audrey?" I asked Christine.

"She is waiting in the hall like everyone else. She is protected Camilla, you don't have to worry about that."

"I will always worry."

It was so hard to let Audrey out of my sight after what happened and today, it took a lot of persuasion from Christine to even consider it. I made sure she had at least six different guards on her at all times. She didn't understand why, she just thought they were there to play with her. She still doesn't understand the impact of what happened in that cabin and I plan to keep it that way.

"It is time," she reminded me and I cleared my throat.

"Let us go then,"

She led me to the doors of the great hall where the coronation ceremony was to hold. She went in first and I waited until I heard the beat of music start and the doors flew open. I did what mother had told me all those weeks back and I kept my chin high and my eyes fixated on the throne settled on the dais where I was going to be seated at the end of the day.

I faintly heard the announcer mention my name and who I was. I ignored the curious gazes and the envious ones and I made my way over to the front. When I got there, I risked a glance to the left where I knew my family would be. Audrey was smiling widely with her butterfly crown on her hair. I could see people casting glances at her and I tried to remind myself that she was protected and no one would be able to hurt her.

The empty seat next to her caused an ache in my heart. It would have belonged to my mother and normally, an empty seat wouldn't be kept for a deceased family member but I was adamant that it be done that way because I wanted to honor her in every way possible.



I finally looked away from my family as I got to the dais. I gave a curt nod to the priest before resting on my knees. I loved the way the dress pooled out around me giving it a sort of ethereal look and as the priest walked over to me, I knew it would be the last time I bowed to anyone in my life.

I didn't pay attention to most of the words he was saying because I already knew them. He was telling the crowd who I was and what my duties to the kingdom were. Finally, I saw it- the crown. It was brought on a velvet cushion and I looked up at the priest.

"Do  
said.

you take this role with the responsibility that it brings?" he asked and I made sure my voice was clear and concise when I

"I do."

He took the crown and slowly placed it on my head. It was a simple golden crown with crystals embedded in it. I didn't want anything extravagant but it seems the palace life will always be extravagant. Not only was it beautiful, but it was heavy and when the priest held out his hand to help me to my feet, I graciously took it.

I kept my head held high as I was led over to the throne and when I sat down, I let out a sigh of relief. As soon as I sat, the entire hall stood to their feet and began to applaud. My eyes found my daughter who looked like she was clapping her absolute hardest and a small smile cracked through my façade.

I looked to the people on the other side and found Ryker's family. We managed to get Riley safely but she was so badly hurt and dehydrated.

Apparently, the person Lucy put in charge of taking care of her couldn't have been bothered to do so. She looked weak and tired but she still managed to come.

Ryker was standing next to her and he tipped his head to me in a form of bow.

When he came out of that house, I was so relieved. I thought for sure that I had lost him. He had a few burns but they only took a few days to heal and I knew for sure that I didn't want to spend another moment of my life without him. Right there in front of the burning building, we agreed to be a family again..

-Everyone who wanted to stand against us perished in that fire and we had agreed to keep it behind us and move forward together.

It probably wasn't the most romantic declaration of love but it was something and it came at the right time because Audrey was more than happy. I tipped my head back in his direction and I saw the corner of his lips quirk up.

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SEVEN MONTHS LATER

“Where the hell is he?” I couldn’t keep the irritation out of my voice as Christine fussed over me. I swatted her hands away as she reached out to touch my forehead.

“He is on his way,” she repeated the same phrase she had said for the past three hours and I wanted to stab her. “He had to finish up with the elders, you know how they are.”

I did know how they were but I didn’t care considering the fact that I was about to push out his baby. I was the queen and if I wanted him here then I didn’t give a flying f\*\*k who wanted him, he had to be here.

I heard the door open and I saw Ryker rush in. The first two buttons of his shirt were undone and his hair was a mess as if he had ran his hands through it a million times before. He rushed over to my side and pressed a kiss to my clammy forehead.

“I am so sorry,” he breathed against my hair. “I’m here now, everything will be fine.”

After my coronation, we went to the elders to figure out how to handle things seeing as Ryker was an Alpha. He had to give up control of his pack to Damien- who was now the Alpha. We also played around with some laws so that his pack was officially an extension of the palace. Our mating ceremony was held less than a month after the coronation and he became Prince Consort. It wasn’t a huge ceremony, just something small and intimate but the entire world knew.

Shortly after our mating ceremony, Christine and Damien met and found out they were mates. I don’t know what was going to happen between them especially considering that Damien wanted to mate with Riley. Christine has been tight lipped about the entire thing and refuses to comment on it.

The midwife walked back into the room and took a look between my legs. “I think you’re ready.”

Almost forty five minutes later and my daughter was placed in my arms. I had forgotten how tiny a baby could be but as I stared down at her, I felt my heart clench almost painfully. She had Ryker’s dark hair and when her eyes fluttered open, they were the same hazel eyes as mine.

“She is so beautiful,” Ryker breathed above me and as I watched the tears that gathered in his eyes, I felt a pang for the years of Audrey’s life that he missed.

“Do you want to hold her?” I asked and he nodded.

He lifted her carefully, almost like he was scared she would break and cradled her in his arms. He cooed at her softly and I watched as he was completely enamored by his child. The door opened and I saw Audrey appear almost

carefully as if she was scared of interrupting. I gestured for her to come closer and she sprinted across the room.

She climbed up on the bed and sat next to me. Ryker crouched down a little so she could look at her little sister and I saw her nose crinkle in confusion.

“She looked like a potato,” she said and my mouth fell open so she added.

“She looks like a cute potato.”

“You looked like a potato too when you were born,” I told her and her mouth fell open as if I had said something offensive. “When she grows a little, she won’t look like that anymore.”

She stared at her sister with eyes full of awe and fascination and I knew I never had to worry about her being a good sister because judging by the look in her eyes, she would protect her sister with everything in her.

“What’s her name?” Audrey asked and I looked up at Ryker with a short nod..

“Her name is Aurora Leanor Caine.”

## Chapter 65

Having a newborn has not been easy to navigate but Ryker was by my side at all times and he made it easier for me. He helped out at nights and didn’t mind watching Aurora when I had to attend meetings. I had hoped that being a new mum would reduce my workload by a significant amount but I thought wrong. I was busier than usual especially with Aurora’s naming.

Everyone knew her name but according to custom, a ceremony was supposed to be held. The last thing I wanted to do was go in front of the entire palace and showcase my newborn but I found that I had very little say in the matter. Ryker didn’t like it either so I knew I wasn’t overreacting.

“You’re the Queen,” Christine mused as she helped me get dressed for the day. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.”

“I think we both know that’s a lie. I did everything possible to get out of this and you know it.”

She sighed deeply and placed a comforting hand on my shoulder. “It’ll be over before you even realize and then you can go on that long needed trip that Ryker has been planning.”

“Are you going to tell me where he is taking me?” I asked and she pretended to zip her mouth shut.

Ryker noticed how stressed I was and declared that after the naming, we were going on a trip as a family. The elders were against it but I learned that Ryker did as he wished because he canceled all my meetings and the trip was staying despite everyone’s protests.

A loud gurgle snapped me out of my thoughts and I rushed over to Aurora. Unlike Audrey, she was a frolicky baby and it was very easy for her to go from gurgling to full blown tears within the span of a second. I picked her up and

she peered up at me with wide eyes that looked too intelligent for her age. As I gazed at her, I couldn't help but feel like something bad was going to happen.

"Is it too late to get out of this?" I asked aloud and Christine turned to me.

"Are you having second thoughts?" she asked and I shrugged. "Camilla, what's wrong?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "I just don't feel right-about this."

"You'll be fine. You have the best guards in the kingdom guarding you."

Somehow, her words did little to calm me down but there was nothing I could do about it at the moment.

I was led towards the doors of the same hall I did my coronation. Ryker was standing there waiting for me and he gave me a soft smile as he saw me. He took Aurora from my hands and she made small gurgling noises. He was a girl dad through and through and the girls adored him. Audrey was clinging to his pants and trying to get his attention as he held Aurora.

He was the epitome of ease and I tried to convince myself that I was overreacting. If Ryker didn't think anything was wrong then I was probably overreacting. His eyes found mine and he instantly knew something was wrong. He opened his mouth to ask but he was interrupted by one of the elders who walked up to us and started talking about the order of the ceremony.

I zoned him out because I already knew what was to happen. We were to go in, the priest would bless the child and dedicate them to the moon goddess and the ceremony would end with the child's name. I had the same ceremony with Audrey although it was a more private ceremony because I was still in hiding at the time. As I watched Ryker listen with rapt attention, I realized the information was more for his benefit.

Once the ceremony started, I zoned everything out and went through the motions on autopilot. Even when I delivered Audrey, I didn't want to be around people but somehow, it was worse now. I got easily irritated and I didn't know why. Ryker stayed close to me as if sensing my unease and I leaned on his calm emotions because mine were haywire.

I held my breath when Aurora was blessed because although it was rare, there were two cases in history where the goddess refused to bless the child. In the first instance, the first child died before reaching the age of five and in the second, the child murdered their entire family. A candle was lit and a prayer was offered. If the candle stayed lit then the child was blessed and if it went out, then the blessing was denied.

The priest was about to light the candle when the door to the hall opened. Standing there was a guard I had seen around but there was something off about him. His eyes were wide and he wasn't moving. All of a sudden, a knife

protruded from his neck and he fell to the ground. My first instinct was to grab Audrey and shield her from the violence but it was too late, she had seen it.

Standing behind the dead guard was a man I had never seen before. He had dark brown hair almost the same shade as mine but his eyes were a deep black, it was almost like he didn't have irises. He crossed the threshold of the room and made a show of wiping his bloody knife on his pants.

"Sorry to intrude but it looks like my invitation got lost in the mail," he smiled widely as he made his way forward. The guards were quick to point their spears at him but he merely glanced at it and turned to face me. "I think you're in my spot."

"Excuse me?"

He straightened up and took a piece of paper from his pocket. He held out the paper and I began forward to pick it but Ryker grabbed my arm in a firm grip. He shook his head and I remembered that I wasn't just Camilla, I was the queen and I couldn't make stupid decisions. One of the guards took it from him and brought it over to me. I hesitantly took it and unfolded the picture. I had seen enough of my father's handwriting to recognize it on sight. He kept a lot of journals but it wasn't the handwriting that caught my attention, it was the small photograph.

It was of my father and a young boy. The boy couldn't have been more than three years old in the picture and it was dated the year I was born. I glanced up at the man in front of me and allowed the picture flutter to the ground.

"What is that? It's just a picture, it doesn't mean anything."

He smirked. "I think we both know what that means. My name is Frederick the second, I was named after the late king. I am his son and rightful heir."

"Anyone can come out and make a claim," I glanced at his picture on the floor.

"That means nothing to me or anyone else here."

"I don't think you want your father's infidelities aired out in public, Camilla," he spoke my name like a threat and Ryker growled and stepped in front of me. "I only came here out of respect for the title. You have one week to vacate my throne before I make it my business. I will not hesitate to take my crown back from you, Camilla/

People were beginning to whisper and I knew I needed to do something to discredit him and fast. There were too many similarities between him and my father and it was clear to the naked eye. Regardless of that, I was not giving up the throne to a nobody, much less someone who killed a guard in cold blood.

"Even if you are the king's son, you are a bastard and I would rather die than

have a bastard sit on my throne.”

His jaw clenched and the next thing I knew, there was a knife being hurled my way. Ryker pulled me out of the way just in time and the knife embedded itself in the wall behind me. Frederick stood there with a snarl on his face.

“One week, Camilla.”

The guards rushed to grab him but he was quick. He turned on his heels and disappeared. There was silence in the hall as people fought to grasp what had happened. I was breathing heavily and I had so many things running through my mind but the predominant one was that the priest didn't light the candle.

“Finish the ceremony,” I instructed him. I could see him shaking like a leaf but he did as I asked.

Ryker looked at me like I was crazy but I wanted the ceremony over. I let out a sigh of relief when the flame burned brighter and I didn't wait for the announcement of Aurora's name before I grabbed Audrey and left the hall. I didn't stop moving until I was safely behind the doors of my room.

Ryker and Christine were close behind and as soon as the door shut, Ryker handed Aurora to Christine and rushed over to my side.

“Are you okay?” he asked and I nodded. “What happens now?”

“Now, we have one week to prepare before that bastard does something crazy.”