

The Rejected Werewolf Princess by Didiadeyemi Chapter 71-75

Chapter 71

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

By the time we had uncovered all there was to know about Frederick's mother, I couldn't help but feel bad for him. We were yet to find out where she lived when she was with him but it was clear that they lived alone and he never had the chance to relate with any family. I wondered if he even went to school but there was no way to find out if he did. My heart ached for the little boy he once was and I wished we had met on better terms.

"What are you thinking about?" Ryker asked a few hours later after we were done tucking the kids in and I shrugged. "Is this about Frederick?" I stayed quiet but he already knew the answer. "The spies are searching for him using the things they found in the tunnels. He couldn't have gone far."

"You know as well as I do that anything left in those tunnels was inconsequential to him. He had half an hour's head start and he knows those tunnels. If he wanted those things then he would have taken them," I eyed the new journal sitting atop my pillow. "I'm not worried about them finding him, he won't show himself until he is ready. I'm more worried about what we don't know. Doesn't a part of you feel like this is wrong?"

He stopped everything he was doing so that he could turn to me. "I'm not sure if I am following correctly. Are you talking about everything he is doing or everything we are doing?"

"Both," I answered honestly. "He just wants recognition and I can't exactly fault him for that. I feel like he would make a great ally and we need to focus on trying to get him to consider that."

Ryker stared at me as if I had grown three heads. His mouth was wide and he had to remind himself to close it after a split second. He walked around the bed until he was standing next to me and made me sit on the bed. He stood bet

ween my legs and softly stroked my hair. He slowly cupped my cheek and made me look up at him.

“I love you,” he began slowly, “but you cannot tell me that you believe that he will become your ally when you represent every single thing he wants but cannot have.”

“He could have killed me but he didn’t.”

“Look, I know you don’t agree with me but-”

“There are no buts, you are about to enter a war, Camilla. It might not be the kind of war you are expecting but when the people find out that there is another potential heir, loyalties will be tested. You cannot think like this right now. You need to look out for yourself and the best interests of this palace.”

I didn’t agree with him but I knew that there was no use arguing so I simply nodded. Ryker narrowed his eyes as if he knew I just agreed for the sake of peace. He took a step back and instead of waiting for him to say anything, I picked up the journal and pretended to read. There was too much on my mind for me to actually enjoy the words on the page but I was willing to pretend if it meant that he didn’t speak on the matter again and thankfully, he didn’t.

The next morning, things were a little awkward on my end. Ryker didn’t bring up the conversation but I couldn’t help but think about it. Despite knowing that his hideout had been compromised, I subconsciously waited for a page to appear at the palace doors but nothing came. I was both relieved and worried. It had served as some sort of countdown and now that it was gone, it felt like something even worse was going to happen.

The first thing I did once I was able to get away from my children was train. I hadn’t trained my powers since my mother died. A part of me felt stupid for not using them in the fire. I felt like I couldn’t rely on it and it scared me. If it were left to me, I would have avoided the training for longer but everyone was worried about the threat that Frederick posed and as it stood, I was the only royal with powers. They were all counting

on me.

Ryker somehow knew that I was dreading training and he stayed by the sidelines watching and cheering me on. Using my powers felt like second nature but I still could not shake the underlying nature that when push came to shove- it would fail me. The instructor- a middle aged man by the name of Lois kept telling me that I would get to a point of mastery where I would be able to create water from moisture or air but I couldn't believe that. I didn't believe I would be able to learn it in time for it to

matter.

After training, I felt drained both physically and mentally but I couldn't rest. I was dragged into another meeting with the elders. I made up my mind that it was going to be the last meeting I had with them concerning this matter. They were more of a hindrance than a help but as far as I

knew, they were the only ones who could tell us where to get information on Eva.

They were waiting for us as soon as we got into the room and I didn't waste any time before speaking.

"Does anyone know a maid by the name of Eva? She was my mother's servant." They were all silent but I saw a flicker of recognition go through all of them. "What I don't understand is why you knew she was fucking my father and did not see fit to tell me."

"It was never confirmed," I heard someone mumble and from the death glare that Ryker shot him, he went quiet.

"You could have saved us hours and days of searching if you had simply told us," he growled running his hand through his hair. He was more frustrated than I was which said a lot.

"Who would be the best person to go for information on her?" I asked. "There has to be someone in the palace that she considered a friend or family who might be willing to share information about her or Frederick."

“She was a loner,” the elders spoke. “The only person she was truly friends with was your mother. It was the Queen who requested for her to take a year off and gave her job back to her the moment she returned.”

That was not what I was expecting because I sat up immediately. “Are you saying that my mother knew about Frederick? Could she have known that he was my father’s son?”

“Only the Queen can answer that.”

I couldn’t form words. I waved my hands to dismiss them and I heard rather than saw them leave. I felt like I was in a daze. If my mother knew about Frederick then why did she not do anything? Why didn’t she bring him into the palace or ensure that he would never be a problem? Why didn’t she tell me?

“Camilla,” Ryker’s voice was like an anchor keeping me rooted in reality. “Baby, you will make yourself sick if you think about this. Your mother had her ways of doing things and we might never understand them but we have to trust her.”

“I don’t know what or who to trust anymore,” I whispered and he sighed. “I need some air.”

I stood to my feet and began to make my way outside. I could hear Ryker following me and it filled me with a sense of relief because I knew he

would keep me safe no matter what. I was going past the front door when I heard some noise. I was going to ignore it until I heard the word Queen so I took a quick detour and walked over.

“Is everything alright?” I asked and the guards there instinctively parted to reveal a young shaggy looking man. He was in pants too big for him and a dirty shirt.

“He was insisting that he needed to see the Queen,” I heard someone say.

The man reached into their pockets and all the guards took out their weapons. The man looked frightened and opened his hand to reveal a scrunched—

up piece of paper. "I don't mean any harm; I was told to give this directly to the Queen. There was some guy. I swear I didn't even read, it."

"It's alright." I assured him as I took the paper from him,

As soon as I did so, he rushed off like he couldn't bear to be there for another second. I watched him disappear then quickly turned my attention to the letter. Once I read it, I balled it up and turned on my heels. I didn't want the guards catching a glimpse of my expression or the potential contents. I waited until Ryker and I were in the private garden before I handed it to him.

"What does it say?" he asked as he hesitantly took it from me. "Is it from Frederick?"

"It is," I couldn't look at him as I spoke. "He is giving us two days to make a decision before he takes his first course of action."

"What are you going to do?"

"The only thing we can do- prepare for an attack."

Chapter 72

RYKER'S P.O.V

We spent the next two days preparing for a potential attack. The guards were prepped and ready and border patrol was tightened. We knew that Frederick was within the borders but if he had an army, there was no way they were going to cross our territory. I wasn't worried as worried about the war as I should have been because most of my energy was spent worrying about Camilla.

Ever since our last conversation about Frederick, I noticed that she has been more sympathetic to his plight. Her kindness was one of the things I loved most about her but Camilla needed to learn that it was not needed in every situation. She was under the delusion that Frederick would change his mind but I had fought enough wars and seen enough of them to know that Frederick was

not going to stop until he got what he needed and he was going to damn everyone else to do so.

At the end of the two days, the tension in the palace could be felt. Not everyone knew the situation but everyone knew that something terrible was going to happen. Even Aurora was extra frolicy and I could see that Camilla was at her wits end trying to navigate everything which was why I took the child from her and handed her over to Christine who was more than happy to have an excuse to stay away from her duties.

“What if he was just bluffing and he isn’t going to attack?” Camilla asked as we were walking out of a meeting with the head generals. “If he was going to, don’t you think he would have by now?”

“It is a battle strategy,” I tried to explain it as calmly as possible. “He wants to keep us on edge and make us wait because he thinks it will make us sloppy,”

It was clear she didn’t like my response because she frowned. “Do you really think that he is incapable of change?”

“Not in the way you’re thinking. Power can be a dangerous thing, Camilla, you have not seen what the want for power had done to people and to families.”

She sighed and dropped the conversation even though it was clear she didn’t

want to. We went off with the rest of the day in silence and I could feel a visible distance between us over it. I hated it but there was nothing I could do about it. I knew better than anyone else how stubborn Camilla

could be when she wanted to and I knew that unless she saw with her own eyes that Frederick wasn’t going to change then she would continue to believe in him.

It also didn’t help that Frederick didn’t attack. Camilla **was** relieved thinking that it was a testament to her faith in him but I knew otherwise. That threat wasn’t a mere threat, he had every intention to attack and I knew that he must have done something that was small enough that it went unnoticed but I knew that we would see the repercussions soon.

While Camilla went for dinner with the children, I managed to hold a very quick discussion with the generals. I could tell that even they were confused at the absence of an attack.

“I am going to make this as quick as possible,” I said as soon as I walked into the council room. “Send out some of your best men to make sure that everything is fine in the pack. I don’t believe that Frederick had a change of heart and decided to stand down. Make sure that everything is where it should be and that tomorrow will not bring in a new wave of problems.”

There was a chorus of “Yes, your majesty,” and I waited until they had all left before I allowed my hands run down my face in frustration. The worst part about all of this was not knowing. It was scarier than it should have been because I was not just worried about myself, I was worried for my family. Unless I was certain that what he did would not affect my family in any way, I knew I would not be able to get some rest.

I didn’t need to wait long to know because the next morning, Camilla and I were woken up by frantic knocking on the door. It wasn’t even six a.m. yes but we dressed and rushed out of the room. No one would tell us exactly what was wrong but we were ushered into a carriage and taken into the town. I could feel Camilla’s confusion mixing with mine whenever she glanced at me but I couldn’t say anything because even I didn’t have the words.

The sky was a beautiful orange and on a normal day, I would have enjoyed the view with Camilla but something told me that my day was not going to be normal. There was tension and anxiety in the air and the further into town we were taken, the more worried I got.

The ride took over half an hour and we were led into a part of town I had never been to before. It was quaint and I was shocked that there were not more people roaming around. I would have expected to see people going about their day but the town was all but deserted. Some guards were waiting there in front of what looked like a small stream. Everything looked fine at surface level but I could feel the unease in the air.

“What happened here?” I asked because Camilla was having a hard time speaking.

The guards led us into a house where a woman who looked to be in her sixties was lying on the bed. Her skin was pale and sickly and if I didn't know better, I would have said she was already dead but her chest rose and fell every few seconds.

“A few of the villagers started to display these symptoms,” one of the guards explained.

“It started last night and we found out that someone had poisoned the water. We described Frederick to them and this woman recalled seeing him around their village in the early hours of yesterday morning.”

Camilla took a step back and I could see the disbelief coloring her face. I felt bad that her hope had been dashed but I knew it was bound to happen sooner or later. I placed a comforting hand on her shoulder in an attempt to remind her to gather herself because we were in public and the last thing these people needed was for them to think she was on the side of the man who was causing them so much pain. She thankfully got the hint and warped her expression into something unreadable.

I turned to the guard. “Take us to the stream.”

We were led out of the house and towards the stream. It looked normal on sight and if I hadn't been informed that it was poisoned, I would not have guessed. I could not imagine how many people had drunk from it between yesterday and today. It was obvious that it was their primary

water source.

“Take a sample to the palace physician so he can figure out what kind of poison was used and if he can come up with an antidote,” I instructed. “We have already done that, your majesty.”

“In the meantime, test the other water sources in the pack. Test the dams and the streams and make sur

e that this is the only place he hit. We will have the doctors here as soon as they can to ensure that these people get the best treatment that money can buy.”

The guards nodded and went to do as instructed. I watched them all leave and I grabbed Camilla’s hand and led her into the carriage. She hadn’t spoken at all and I was beginning to worry for her. I could have pushed and ensured that she spoke but I knew that wouldn’t help matters

at all so I waited.

It was ten minutes into the ride that she finally lifted her head. “What happens now? Do those people die?”

“Let’s hope not. The doctors will do their work and we will do ours by making sure that Frederick is found and brought to justice.”

“I didn’t think he would do something like this,” she admitted. “Is it wrong that I still feel like he is redeemable?”

I sighed and grabbed her shoulders so she was facing me. “Forget about Frederick and think about the people. They put their faith in you, you are their Queen. Whatever you do has to be in their interest and if that means getting rid of Frederick then you have to do it. It doesn’t matter if he is redeemable or not.”

It was clear that she wanted to argue but she knew I was right so instead, she changed the subject. “How was he able to move around long enough to get to that town? There are guards crawling everywhere and searching for him. Don’t you find it suspicious?”

“I do but I think I know the answer,” I leaned back. “Frederick has allies in the pack and we need to find out who they are or there is no telling what he will do next.”

Chapter 73

CAMILLA’S P.O.V

The entire palace was in an uproar that morning. Everyone was trying and failing to find out where Frederick was and how he managed to pull off an elaborate scheme. The guards were combing the towns to see if anyone had sighted him but we soon realized that eye witness testimony was almost always unreliable because everyone claimed to have seen him and no two statements were the same. It was frustrating but I had to applaud him, it was not easy to avoid palace soldiers.

“Didn’t he leave a message?” I asked for the umpteenth time. I could not imagine that Frederick who had dropped pages from my father’s journal for days would suddenly do something like this without leaving a message.

“The guards said they didn’t see anything by the stream or in the houses. If he left a message then we haven’t seen it yet.”

Ryker had been speaking to me as he would a child and I was beginning to wonder if somehow, I had upset him. I knew he disagreed with my trust in Frederick but I didn’t know how to explain it to him. I thought that having a sister would make him understand. I didn’t have any family and I wasn’t willing to condemn the only sibling I had to death over a simple hurt. I knew he would listen if the situation was right and I was determined to get him to listen which was why I was partly grateful that the guards hadn’t found him. If they did find him, it would have been game over.

There was a knock on the door and one of the generals walked in. He bowed to Ryker and I before making his way closer. “We found something at the Eastern border than we believe is from Frederick. There is no way to confirm it but it was addressed to you and it was nailed to a tree.”

I reached out for the letter but Ryker grabbed it first. I could feel and see the confusion in the room because Ryker usually stayed out of things like this and he reached over me to grab the letter. His eyes scanned it and once he was done, he nodded to the guard and dismissed him. There was so much I wanted to say in that moment but I didn’t because I still wanted to maintain the image of a united front.

Instead of letting the frustration win, I schooled my expression into one of indifference and turned to the elders. “You can leave. Inform me as

soon as we have anything on Frederick.” They nodded and I watched as they left the room in a single file. I waited until the door shut before I turned to Ryker. “Am I going to get that back?”

He hesitated for a second before handing it to me. At that point, I wasn’t interested in reading it anymore but opened it. I took the time to admire Frederick’s writing because it was a perfect cursive. There were just a few even words written boldly in ink: Step down or it will get worse.

I folded up the paper and placed it on the table. Ryker finally turned to me. “Do you still think he is capable of redemption?”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes when I realized that this was what he was annoyed about. I exhaled deeply as I tried to find the words because I knew that the last thing we needed was to have a fight especially not in the council room where anyone could walk in.

“Do you want to do this here?” I asked and he ran his hands down his face.

“I just want you to think this through. He is not above killing innocent people to get what he wants. What part of that screams redemption to you?”

“Everyone is capable of change if they are given the chance.”

Ryker was taken aback by my words. He opened and closed his mouth repeatedly as if he could not believe I had said those words but I had and I didn’t regret it. I just wanted peace and I wasn’t above trying to get into a truce with Frederick so that I could get that. One thing I knew for a fact was that war was not the answer.

“Okay,” he said finally and I scrunched my brows. I had not expected him to give in that easily and I couldn’t help but doubt his true intentions. He rose to his feet and when he spoke again, I realized that I was right for doubting.

“You do what you think is right and I will do what I think is right.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means I am going to protect you from everything- including yourself,” he grabbed the files on the desk. “I have never once made you feel like this wasn’t your kingdom and I have never made you second guess y

our decisions before today but I will make you a promise, Camilla, even if I have to run through everything you have built to ensure that you are safe, I will do it I just hope you can forgive me for it.”

He didn't wait for me to respond before walking out of the room. I sat

there in silence thinking about what the hell had just happened. Ryker never spoke to me in that manner, not even when I was wrong. I knew he hated

Frederick but I didn't know it was that bad. It took me around ten minutes to gather my wits and leave the council room but Ryker's words stuck with me.

When Ryker spoke, I knew he was serious but I had not expected him to implement his words so soon. I was locked in my office for majority of the day and when I left, I noticed that I had more guards than usual following behind me. I tried to dismiss them but they informed me that they were put there by a unanimous council vote.

I had learned

the hard way that although the Queen had power- so did the council- and when it came to the safety of the royal

family, the council could take a unanimous vote. Ryker had approached them and convinced

them that I was in danger spurring that action. I couldn't even be pissed at him because I had expected it. Besides, it was just a few guards or so I thought.

I soon came to realize that

those guards were my shadow and I couldn't go into the town. The town was in a panic and it was a widespread belief that I was in danger so it

had been strongly advised that I stayed indoors. By

night time, I was at my wits

end and I wanted nothing more than to strangle Ryker. What made everything worse was that he didn't seem

to care about what he had done. He was unapologetic about it. By the time we got back to the room at night, I wasn't speaking to him. I got dressed in silence

and

curled up into myself to read the journal. The one I had gotten from Frederick was very interesting to say the least. It was more

personal than the others and he spoke about his parents, his contempt with being the crowned prince, he spoke about the tunnels and how he would speak out and a few times, he had mentioned Eva but never in detail.

“Camilla,” Ryker sat at the edge of the bed facing me but I refused to look up. “Baby, please, you can’t possibly be upset with me.

I stayed quiet.

“I did what I needed to keep you safe.”

27

“I am a prisoner in my own kingdom. You cannot possibly expect that I – would be happy about that?”

“You are safe and that is the only thing that matters,” he cut in. “If it makes you feel any better, I cannot leave either. It is not just your safety that has been threatened.” I frowned at him and he sighed. “I didn’t want

to do this but I don’t trust that you will not go looking for him to broker peace.”

He was right, I was considering that. I had thought about it while in my office and decided that maybe if I found him again then I would be able to convince him. I couldn’t say that to Ryker but I didn’t need to, my silence spoke volumes.

“We are a team, Ryker.”

“Not in this case and you know it. You have a twisted sense of loyalty towards him and I am not trying to combat that, I am just trying to keep you safe.”

I finally dropped the book and turned to him. There was something in his expression that had me pausing and I spoke so softly that my voice was barely over a whisper. “You’re scared.”

“I am terrified,” he admitted and he gestured for me to come closer which I did. “Facing an enemy is hard enough, facing one that we know nothing about is even harder.”

I knew I couldn’t stay upset at him for long because although I didn’t agree with his methods, I understood why he was doing what he was doing. We had two daughters to protect and we wanted the same results, we were just taking different paths.

I shoved down my ego and straddled his hips. He stayed completely still as if trying to give me the chance to take back my actions if I w

anted to. When I didn't move, his hand cupped my cheeks and he placed the most featherlight kiss on my lips.

"We'll figure it out," I mumbled against his lips and he cracked a small smile.

"We always do?"

Chapter 74

RYKER'S P.O.V

To say that

Camilla hated being locked in was an understatement but I couldn't bring myself to regret the decision. If it were a choice between her happiness and safety, I was going to choose her safety each time without hesitation. As long as she was safe, I could focus on the most important thing which was finding Frederick who seemed to have disappeared into thin air.

Thankfully, the doctors and physicians were able to come up with a cure and there was only one casualty but it was enough to inspire fear in the hearts of the people. There was unrest and unease and I couldn't say that I blamed them.

Most people still didn't know exactly what was happening but I knew it was only a matter of time before the news spread so my main focus was quelling it before it became a threat and that meant finding out who was helping Frederick.

It would have been easier if his mother were alive or if she had any family but no one seemed to remember her much because she kept to herself. I managed to find the address of the woman in charge of the maids while Eva was in the palace and I went with Camilla to see her. She lived in a small cottage a distance away from the palace and when we arrived, she was out in her garden picking

herbs. The file said that she was around eighty by now but she was still nimble for her age.

When she sighted us, she bowed. "Your majesties, I was not expecting a visit. How can I help you?"

"We need some information on the maid, Eva," Camilla said and I saw her feign ignorance as she tried to wrack her brain.

“There were so many people by the name of Eva while I worked at the palace. It would be impossible for me to remember each one. I am sure the palace has records of everyone. You might find what you are looking for there.” “There was only one Eva who did not have a last name and only one who was having an affair with the king,” Camilla cut by

. Don’t waste our time and – pretending not to know. Believe me when I say that I do not want to have this conversation as much as you.

The old woman hesitated before finally clearing her throat. “Please, come in.” Despite the fact that she was old and harmless, we still went in with our guards. There was no guarantee that she didn’t have people inside or that she wasn’t helping Frederick. She led us into her house which had a soft feeling to it. There were potted plants lining all the windowsills and fresh flowers on every table. It was clear that she took great care of the space.

She sat on one of the chairs. “I might not be of as much help as you think, your majesties. Eva never spoke to anyone and even if she wanted to- no one would speak to her. It was a well-known secret that she was having an affair with the king and a few despised her for it but that was not why she was a loner, she was a loner

because of how horrible she was.”

That managed to catch my attention and I sat up straighter. “I’m not quite following.”

“Eva was under the delusion that the king was in love with her and was going to make her Queen. He may have told her that himself but the king,” she glanced at Camilla as if she were unsure of whether she should speak or not.

“It’s alright,” Camilla assured her. “The dead cannot be hurt by our words.” “The king was like that. He got bored of women quickly and while he may have loved her at some point, he definitely got bored later. She didn’t want to believe that and it got worse after she became your mother’s maid, she was so proud of herself for being able to deceive the Queen but the Queen knew, she just wanted to keep her close. What she didn’t expect was for Eva to stop taking her tonic because she wanted her child to be heir. She hoped that by having a child before the Queen then she would be recognized.”

“She was not,” I finished and she nodded.

“It still didn’t break her faith in the king but it made her bitter and resentful. When she came back after a year she was not the same. It was worse when the Queen got pregnant and it was announced that her child would be the heir. I personally overheard an argument between her and the king where he told her that it was all a mistake. She was never herself after that. Everything settled down and she was planning to leave the palace then you went missing and she disappeared shortly after. People believed she was the one who took you but there was never any evidence.”

“To blame her, they would have needed to provide a motive and that meant exposing the fact that the king had another child,” Camilla’s voice was soft and the old woman nodded.

“I know you came here for information on her son but unfortunately, that is something I do not have. I have never met the boy and I don’t know what he looks like. I don’t even know where she raised him. Like I said earlier, she was very secretive. She kept her cards very close to her chest.”

“How did you know this was about her son?” I asked and the corner of her lips pulled up slightly.

“I was in charge of the maids in the palace for thirty years. I know more than half of the people in there. News like this never stays hidden for long especially with that recent attack on the stream. He has his mother’s ruthlessness, that is for sure.” “What do you mean?” I asked. “She had never mentioned anything about Eva being ruthless before.”

She hesitated and dropped her voice into a whisper. “There is a girl, her name was Gabby but she will not be on your lists. She worked in the palace for two days Gabby was beautiful with blond hair and innocent eyes. Everyone wanted her, even the king. Eva was furious that Gabby had the king’s attention and she made

sure to voice it out. One night, Gabby told a friend about how the king had called her beautiful and asked to see her’

I had a feeling I knew where the story was going but I found myself inclining my ear to listen.

“The next morning, Gabby was found tied to her bed with a horrible haircut and she was blind. Someone had gone into her room at night and poured washing fluid into her eyes. She would not say who it was but Gabby was never heard of again,” the old woman sat up straighter. “If that boy was raised by Eva alone then goddess help you all.”

We left her house shortly after that but her words didn't leave me. Even Camilla seemed to be pondering over her words and I hoped it was enough to change her mind on Frederick. If anything that woman said was true then Frederick was not the innocent and redeemable child that she thought he was. I wanted to talk to her and find out where her head was at but as soon as we got into the palace, we were ushered into the council room where the elders were waiting.

“Is there a reason for this last-minute meeting?” Camilla asked sounding as annoyed as I felt. “I thought you were supposed to be helping with the damage control from the stream incident.”

“We were doing that, but we are afraid that it is more than that,” one of them spoke. “The people know about Frederick.”

“What do you mean by that?” the words left me before I could stop them.

“They know that he is the son of the king and the people are torn on it. He has a lot of supporters among the people and even those who do not support him fear that you cannot defeat him. The kingdom is divided and torn by fear. It does not make it any better that you have not been seen leaving the palace since that incident.”

“Whose fault is it that I have not left the palace?” Camilla quipped and the elders fell silent. “It was your idea to keep me locked in. Do not make it seem like I did it out of cowardice.” There was annoyance in her tone and when she realized, she exhaled deeply to calm herself down. “What do you propose that we do?”

“If you could hold an emergency meeting in one of the squares. The people will come and they can hear you publicly discredit Frederick and his claims.”

“His claims are true.”

“No one knows that. The only people who do are dead. Anything he says will be seen as a lie and a desperate attempt to steal the throne.”

It was at that moment that I realized just how brilliant the elders really were. If only they could put aside their pride and animosity once in a while then they would be a formidable asset to the kingdom.

“That is going to hurt him,” Camilla looked unsure.

I always knew her kind heart would be a stumbling block on the road to being a great Queen and while I didn't want her to lose it, I wanted her to be able to identify times where kindness was not the right course of action.

“You know it is the only way,” I mind linked her. “You are Queen now and it isn't just about you or him. There are thousands of people looking up to you. Think about your kingdom, Camilla. Do what is best for them.”

I broke the mind link but she still said nothing.

“You are in a war, your majesty,” I could hear an undercurrent of frustration in the elder's voice. “This is a kill or be killed situation. You can either discredit him or watch him take your throne from under your fingertips. It is your choice.”

Chapter 75

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

Two days later and I still hated the idea. It just felt wrong to me and I tried searching for another solution to the problem but there was none. The people were worried and there had been more fights breaking out in the last two days than in the last month combined. Everyone had a different opinion on how what they thought was supposed to happen and the rumor mill was alive with theories. Some were closer to the truth than I would have liked while others were so unbelievable that I could not fathom how anyone possibly came up with it. A small gurgle interrupted me and I glanced down at Aurora lying peacefully in her bassinet. I couldn't leave her alone for an extended period of time so she was going with us. She and Audrey were going to be in a safe tent with Christine but it still didn't stop me from worrying. There were so many things that could go wrong and I couldn't help but feel like something bad was going to happen.

The door to the room opened and I turned to see Ryker. He was dressed in tailored slacks with a button—

up shirt. His coat was slung over his shoulder and despite the more casual look to his

outfit, he still looked every part of the royal that he was. He crossed the length of the room and came to stand right next to me. I put on a practiced smile hoping he wouldn't see the worry on my face. "I felt your anxiety," he said casually without looking up at me. "Do you want to talk about it?" I shook my head. "It will be a quick meeting, in and out.

It doesn't have to last up to half an hour. All you need to do is tell them that you heard the rumors and they are unfounded."

"You should have been king instead," I muttered. "You're so good at this already, I have no idea what I am doing."

"Cut yourself some slack, you've barely been queen for a year. You'll learn and you will get better at it. You're already a great Queen as it is."

"Going to war in your first year as Queen does not exactly scream 'great,'" I couldn't keep the condescending edge out of my tone. Ryker sighed and opened his mouth to respond but was cut off by someone mind linking us both.

"The carriage is ready," Christine said. "It is time."

She broke off the mind link and I just stood there in silence. Ryker offered me a small smile of encouragement before picking up our daughter. Audrey was already with Christine. He held out his hand to me and I gingerly took it. That uneasy feeling hadn't left but for the first time since I woke up, I felt a little confident that things weren't going to end up badly.

I was quiet for the entire carriage ride. Audrey chattered nonstop while Ryker entertained her. As soon as we got out of the palace, I was handed some notes to serve as pointers for what I was supposed to say. As I read through them, I couldn't help but feel a certain level of guilt. I knew I couldn't say half of the

things that were written down.

Basically, the strategy was to expose his mother but paint her as a whore who tried to pin a pregnancy on the king. They wanted to make Eva and Frederick look so unbelievable in the eyes of the people by painting them as deranged and desperate. It was a brilliant strategy but it was also cruel and for the entire ride I pondered on whether or not I wanted to do it.

The meeting was to hold in the large town square. It had already been set up. Christine led the children into the hall where they would be safe while I was taken to the back to ensure that I was ready. Immediately we were alone, I went to the elders.

"I can't say this," I told them and there was a collective sigh.

"You don't have to say it all but you need to keep to the script," I still didn't budge. "You need to figure out whether you are more worried about Frederick or about this kingdom. As Queen you will have to make terrible decisions, you should know that by now and you should get used to it."

I wanted to protest but my crown was brought over and I knew that my time was up. I placed the notes on the table and allowed myself to be led towards the doors. I peeked out from the curtains and I felt a stab of anxiety when I realized that the square was

filled up. My heart rate started to pick up and I felt a comforting hand on my shoulder. I didn't need to turn around to know that it was Ryker.

He glanced over my shoulder at the sea of people. "You'll be fine, I will be right there with you."

"There are a lot of people. What if I say the wrong thing?"

"You won't. Forget about the notes and forget about what anyone wants you to say. Say whatever you think is right and we will deal with the aftermath together." I was shocked. I turned to him with wide eyes. "We are on the same team, remember? I will support whatever you choose to do. Follow your gut."

Everyone had been trying to control me and force my hand yet Ryker was here, telling me to do whatever I wanted. It was like a breath of fresh air and I couldn't help my small smile.

"Thank you."

Before he could respond, one of the guards pulled open the curtain- it was show time.

Ryker and I walked out while keeping our heads high. I reached out for him and he wasted no time in intertwining our fingers. His touch was like an anchor

rounding me and keeping me stable. I could feel the watchful eyes of the people on me as I stood in front of the podium. **The** square was as quiet as a graveyard, there were no crickets chirping or any sounds of any sort.

“It is a pleasure to meet with you all today although I wish it were under better circumstances,” I began and I glanced at Ryker. He gave me a discreet nod encouraging me to go on. “There have been some rumors going around since the

poisoning that it was done by a son of the late king who wants to ascend the throne. I came to add some clarity to that.”

I glanced back at the elders who were all smiles and I had to do.

“I regret to tell you all that it is true. The late king- my father- fathered a child three years before I was born with a maid by the name of Eva. This child is the man that you all know, his name is Frederick.”

Went under their breaths before

There was an immediate uproar. I saw the elders curse disappearing into the curtains again. The people were filled with confusion and it took almost five minutes to calm them down. I held onto Ryker’s hand for dear life. My decision could have potentially cost us everything but I was hoping and praying to the goddess that I had done the right thing. I hoped and I prayed that my actions wouldn’t doom us all.

“Did the king and the queen know about it?” someone yelled.

“Did they hide him from us?”

“Why are we just knowing about this now?”

“Are you going to step down?”

“Does this mean that you aren’t the true heir?”

Questions were being shot at me from all corners. “If you can all settle down then I will answer your questions. I cannot respond in chaos.”

It took another five minutes to get everyone to settle. I could feel the confusion and the unease. If Ryker was not next to me, I would have been overwhelmed by it but he was like a silent confidant.

“You’ve got this,” he told me via the mind link. “Just take a calm breath.”

Once everyone was quiet, I continued. “It is unsure at the time whether the king knew of the existence of his son but I was not made aware until two weeks ago when he showed up.”

My father may have been the cause of the issue but I was not going to throw him under the bus like that.

“Frederick expressed a desire to claim the throne but according to the laws, he has no right to it. The throne belongs to the heir of the King and the Queen. Frederick is a member of the royal family regardless and I want to use this as an opportunity to speak directly to him,” I paused and inhaled deeply before continuing. “I know you’re listening and I want to tell you that we are willing to forgive everything that you have done if you stopped now. No more innocents have to get hurt.”

There was silence as people waited with bated breath in case Frederick was going to respond. When there was nothing, I squared my shoulders and plastered on the closest I could to a smile.

“That is all I have to say on the matter. I will be entertaining questions so if you have anything you want to-” I was barely done when a hand shot up.

It belonged to a man and he pushed through the sea of people to stand directly in front. “How can we be sure that you can protect us? He already attacked us once and you’re a woman. What **can** a woman do against a man?”

“I assure you that the threat will be dealt with. My gender has nothing to do with it.”

“How can you defend us when you can’t even defend yourself?”

“What do you mean?”

He just smirked and I heard it. It was a sound like the rushing of air and I heard it

before I felt the searing pain in my chest.