

The Rejected Werewolf Princess by Didiadeyemi Chapter 76-80

Chapter 76

RYKER'S P.O.V

Everything happened so fast, one minute, Camilla was talking to that man and the next minute, there was an arrow sticking out of the right side of her torso.

I

caught her as she fell and the entire square fell into chaos. I could see the doctors rushing to get to her but my focus was finding what direction that arrow came from. I looked around until I saw Frederick mounted atop a building holding a crossbow. His eyes met mine and he smirked.

Pure and undiluted rage filled me and threatened to spill over. I glanced at Camilla and although I didn't want to leave her, I knew I had to get Frederick. I made sure she was safe in the doctor's hands and took off after him. I could hear a few guards following me but I didn't care about them I had one target and I was not going to rest until I was standing above his dying corpse.

Frederick took off into the woods and without a thought, I followed him. He expertly weaved through the trees and it struck me that Frederick knew the woods. A little too well. The trees were dense and difficult to navigate but somehow, he knew where he had to go. My wolf pressured me to shift but in this kind of forest, it would be harder to navigate in wolf form because of how close the trees were. I forced his pressure into the back of my mind and focused on my target. Once I got close enough, I launched myself on him and we both tumbled to the ground. Before he could recover, I slammed my face and I felt a sick.

fist into *his* sense of pride fill me when I heard the cracking of bone and I saw blood rushing from his nose. I wanted to beat him to death but I also knew that I would have more fun with him in the palace dungeons so I dragged him to his feet. Despite being caught, he was smirking and it grated on my nerves.

"Even if you take me back now, I already got my target. If she dies, you cannot hurt me because I am heir to the throne," he laughed maniacally. "If she lives then. I die a happy man knowing I got a part of

of my vengeance.”

“She will not die and you will not be heir to the throne.”

“Your children can be easily disposed of,” I didn’t let him finish his sentence before I punched him again. He spat blood out of his mouth and glared at me. “Tell me, Prince consort, where are your guards or are you yet to notice that we are alone?”

It was at that exact moment that it hit me just how quiet the forest was. There were no crickets or birds chirping and I knew that meant only one thing- there was a greater predator keeping them silent. I was on edge immediately and I looked around trying to find the attackers through the dense trees. Frederick used my momentary distraction to deliver a swift elbow strike and once he was out of my hold, the others, rushed out.

There were at least five of them and they rushed me at once. I was so grateful for

the extra knife I always kept in my pants because as soon as the first one got close enough, I slit his throat. It caused the other four to pause in their tracks as if they were rethinking their decision. I looked around only to notice that Frederick was nowhere to be seen. He used the attack as a means to get away and I was furious. I turned to the men who were responsible for his getaway and I slaughtered them save for one who tried to run.

I grabbed him and knocked him out then dragged his limp body by the arm back towards the square. The square had been cleared and I noticed the only people still waiting were guards. As soon as they saw me, they sighed in relief. I just tossed the limp body at their feet.

“Frederick got away but he was working with him. Make sure he is watched day and night in the cells. If he gets away then you will take his place.”

Their eyes widened in fear and I saw them swallow deeply as they lifted the body. It had been a while since I had a need to threaten anyone but I was done playing the nice guy. If threatening people was the only thing that could keep my mate safe then so be it. Everyone steered out of my path as I got into the last carriage remaining. I was told that Christine had left with the girls and Camilla had been taken to the palace hospital to be treated.

“Where to, your majesty?” the coach asked without meeting my eye.

“Take me to my mate.”

The ride was long and the entire time, Camilla was all I could think of. As soon as the carriage stopped, I was out and rushing inside. Prior to today, I had always wondered why a physician's office needed to be in the palace but now, I didn't need to question it. It was in a part of the palace that I had never been and I never thought I would need to be. As I got to the door, I hesitated, I was not ready for what I would find.

I took a deep breath to calm myself and opened the door. The physician was a man in his fifties. He was a pack healer and his family had worked with the palace for years. His son was a little over twenty and rushing around to get him some vials. My eyes went to Camilla who was lying on the table. The shaft of the arrow had been broken off but it was still embedded in her. I didn't make a sound because I didn't want to alert them to

my presence.

I watched as they had to rip the top part of her dress to see the arrow. On a normal day, I would be jealous and possessive but I couldn't even bring myself to conjure up those emotions. I held my breath when the physician wrapped his hand around what was left of the arrow and pulled. A low moan of pain left Camilla and that was when I moved. I had no idea she was still awake because her eyes were closed. I brushed past the physician and his son and went to stand by her side.

“Are you alright?” I asked and she managed a weak nod.

“You left me,” she accused and I felt a part of my heart shatter.

The physician and his son were working in silence trying to pretend like they couldn't overhear our conversation but I didn't care for their presence. As long as they did everything in their power to make her better, I didn't care if they listened in. I lifted my hand and stroked her damp hair

“I am so sorry that I didn't come with you. I wanted to catch up to Frederick. I couldn't let him get away with what he had done. Please, forgive me.”

She didn't speak but when I slipped my hand into hers, she squeezed it. She closed her

eyes and flinched slightly as they cleaned up her wound and bandaged it. I kept my eyes fixated on her because I couldn't bear to look at her knowing that I had failed to catch the man who did that to her. It took fifteen minutes for them to finish up with her and once she was bandaged, I caught the eye of the physician. I could tell he wanted to speak to me.

I leaned down and placed a kiss on Camilla's forehead. "I will be back in a second, okay?"

She managed a weak nod and I reluctantly let go of her. The son fussed over her and gave her a mixture to take. I didn't know what it was but I decided to trust that they wouldn't try to hurt her with me in the room. I followed the physician to the far end where they wouldn't accidentally overhear us.

"What is it?" I asked and he cast a wary glance at Camilla who was still lying on the bed.

"The arrow was dipped in poison, I believe whoever shot it meant to kill," he explained slowly. "The potion my son gave her is meant to neutralize the effects of that poison but there is no guarantee that it will work. If the poison has seeped too far into her system then we may be too late."

"Is there no way to know if it has gone too far?" He shook his head. "What do we do now?"

"We wait for her to wake up."

"What do you mean by wake up? She is awake,"

lying limp but the steady rise and fall of her churned to Camilla who was now served as a reminder that she was alive. I turned to the physician and grabbed his shirt. "What did you do to her?"

"For the tonic to work, she had to fall asleep. I am afraid that we will not know anything until she wakes up- if she wakes up."

"You are telling me that you may have put my mate in a sleep that could end in death," he swallowed deeply at the coldness in my tone.

"I am sorry, your majesty, it was the only way."

I squared my shoulders and stood up straight. "For your sake, you better hope it was the right way."

Chapter 77

RYKER'S P.O.V

The worst part about having Camilla lying in her bed without moving wasn't the fact that she was in her room and not ours. It wasn't the fact that I feared that she would never wake up, it wasn't even the fact that I was doing most of the work in the palace- I didn't mind that. It was the kids. Audrey didn't understand why her mother had been lying in bed for three days unmoving and why she wouldn't just get up. She asked me if Camilla was going to the same place that Leanor did. She didn't understand the concept of death completely, she just knew that people left and never returned.

Aurora was a completely different ballgame. For a child who enjoyed being in my arms every second of every day, she wanted nothing to do with me. She wanted her mother but I couldn't risk that so she screamed her head off day in and day out. It was exhausting having to combine all of that with trying to find Frederick and trying to keep the people from losing their minds out of fear. I felt like I was going crazy.

Christine helped as best as she could but there were things that she could not do. The only thing I got that made me feel remotely better was when I got a letter from Damien asking if I wanted him to come over I didn't want to bother him and I also didn't want to put Christine in that position. I never asked about their situation because I knew whose side I would pick if it came down to it and I also knew that Camilla wouldn't agree with my choice. Their situation was a recipe for disaster.

"Ryker," Christine's voice snapped me out of my thoughts and I turned to her. My fingers were still tracing circles on Camilla's palm. "I know this isn't the time but the elders have the list you asked for. What do you need the list of current pack members for?"

I reluctantly let go of Camilla's hand. "Frederick has help in the pack. I had him in my grip and he had men who came out of the woods and distracted me.

He

has allies here and I need to know how he got to them. If he wasn't raised here then they must have met elsewhere."

"I can help with the list," she offered. "The goddess knows it is way too long for you to look through yourself."

I was about to refuse when I heard an ear-splitting scream. Camilla and I's room was just opposite this one and that was where Aurora was sleeping- or at least, supposed to be. I ran my hands down my face in frustration and made my way past Christine and towards her. Her little face was red and scrunched up as she wailed. I gently picked her up and checked her napkin first but it was clean. She had also eaten less than thirty minutes ago so she wasn't hungry.

"Hey, princess, what's wrong?" she continued to wail and I rocked her gently over my shoulder. Her cries reduce but they were still loud. Christine walked into the room and I turned to her. "Get the files from the elders and take what you want from it. I just need to calm her down before I start on it."

She looked like she wanted to say more but she changed her mind last minute and turned on her heels. I watched her disappear and turned my attention back to my daughter who had stopped crying and was now sniffing. Her lower lip was wobbling and her eyes were teary. I gently wiped the tears from her cheeks and lay her gingerly on my chest.

"I miss her too, princess," I whispered. "We just have to believe that she will be fine because I can't do this without her." She gazed up at me as if she understood and I placed a soft kiss on her head. "Come, we have work to do. You can sit in daddy's

office."

It was difficult but not impossible to work with a child in my arms. She didn't like to sit in one place and I had to stop her plenty times from grabbing the files with her tiny hands. I felt like I **was** going nowhere with my search but I had to keep going else I would have felt like I was doing nothing to help Camilla. Frederick had somehow thrown the entire palace for a spin and we were struggling to find our bearings.

By the time the sun was going down, I was frustrated. The only thing I had achieved was getting my infant to fall asleep. I hated the pace we were going at so I summoned the elders. Thankfully they were still in the palace and were able to assemble in the council room within minutes. I could see a few raised brows at Aurora on my chest but neither of them risked saying anything out loud. I knew I scared a few of them because of how rarely I spoke but now that Camilla was hurt I **was** volatile and they knew it. They had avoided meeting with me until it **was** absolutely necessary.

“You should be with your family,” one of them began and I raised a brow **at** him. “I am just saying that you don’t need to bother yourself with us. We can handle things on our end.”

“How is that going?” I asked. “Have you weeded out the traitors yet? Have you found **a** way to narrow them out? We have some in this very palace as **we** speak.”

“Yes, but, our main focus is on Frederick and not his followers. If you strike the shepherd then the sheep will scatter.”

“The sheep are an inconvenience that I could do without. I need answers and I need them now. He has people helping him get in and out of the palace and I need to know who they are.”

“We can ask our sources but our professional opinion is that you would do a lot better without finding them. The most important thing is Frederick and stopping him before he does anything worse.”

“It is a good thing that I did not ask neither do I care about your professional opinion.”

“It is our job to give it to you and we know this palace well. There is no need-” his voice began to raise with annoyance and I didn’t care until Aurora stirred in my arms. I let out a low grumble and he fell silent immediately. His words died in his throat and he swallowed deeply.

“If you wake my child, I promise that it will be the last thing that you ever do. Am I clear?” he nodded. “This conversation is over. I expect answers and results *by* to

morrow. I don't give a shit how you get it as long as you get it. Do you understand me?"

There was a chorus of, "Yes, your majesty," before they all disappeared.

I waited until the last person had left before I sighed. I had no idea what I was doing. Contrary to what Camilla thought most times, I wasn't born to be a royal. This was her life. Ruling a pack was much easier and every *day* it was like trying to draw water from a rock. I had no idea how Lleanor did it for so many years but I suddenly had a lot more respect for her.

I left the council room and put Aurora in her crib. She whined a little but eventually settled down to sleep. Once she was down, I made my way to Audrey's room. In the past three days, I had seen my daughter try to become more independent because of how much stress she noticed was on me. I tried my best to be at her room every morning for her lessons and every night before she slept but I could barely squeeze time to see her during the day.

When I got in, she was already dressed and tucked in but she was still awake. I realized that I had missed her bedtime by thirty minutes but when she saw me, I saw pure joy fill her. It broke my heart to know that even for a second, she had doubted me. I never wanted to be that parent and I was worried that I was turning into exactly that. I said nothing as I sat by the edge of her bed and kissed her forehead.

"I'm sorry that I'm late," I whispered to her but she waved me off. "Do you want me to read you another story?" she shook her head. "What do you want?"

"Tell me how you and mummy met."

I was shocked by her request. It felt like a lifetime ago that I saw her for the first time in the cells of my pack. I couldn't help a small smile from growing on my face as I thought about how far we had gone since then.

"Well, your mum crossed my border accidentally and the guards thought she was one of the rogues so they took her in. I saw her and knew she was my mate so I brought her home."

"Did you love her then?" Audrey asked with hopeful eyes and I nodded.

“I loved your mother since the moment I laid eyes on her. It was the same way I loved you and Aurora the moment I saw you,” I could see how much those words meant to her. “Your mother will be fine, I promise.”

I knew it was reckless to make that kind of promise to a child but I couldn't help myself and when I saw how wide she smiled, I knew I did the right thing. I kissed her once more and left the room but I was met outside the door by Christine and she looked worried.

“What **is** it?” I asked but she stayed silent. “Christine, fucking tell me. Your silence is making me uncomfortable.”

“I am so sorry, Ryker. We tried everything we could.”

I feared I **knew** what she was talking about but I refused to believe it until I heard **the** words.

“I don't **know** what you're talking about. Stop speaking in riddles and tell me.”

“It is Camilla, the physician said she might not make it through the night.”

Chapter 78

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

I remembered the arrow and I remembered the pain but after that was complete darkness. I always thought that if I died, I would be welcomed by the goddess with open arms. I may not have been the best person in the world but I

knew I wasn't the worst and I deserved a happy ending. I was terrified at first because it felt like I couldn't move or breathe. I tried to count to have an idea of the time but it went on for what felt like an infinity.

I tried to fight it. With every second that ticked by, I tried to remember my family waiting for me. I tried to remember the palace and everyone that was under me. It was my job to defend them and I had to fight for them. I tried to move, I tried to breathe but I was stuck in a perpetual static. It was exhausting and there was this nagging voice at the back of my mind that kept telling me to give up and let go. I didn't want to and I tried *my* best to remain strong but I soon forgot what I

was fighting for. When I had finally given up and decided that I was ready to embrace the unknown, I fell. There was no other way to describe it besides falling. It felt like I was falling through the air until I landed in the sand. I wasn't hurt from my fall. I looked around wondering where I was. The landscape looked foreign to me. I knew it was my imagination but I thought the mind was capable of showing only places that a person had

been to.

I analyzed the place once more. The sand stretched on for miles before it met with the sea. The sea was surprisingly calm and it was so shiny and clear that I wondered if it was possible for anything to live inside of it. I couldn't help but wonder if maybe I was in paradise. Maybe the darkness was to determine if I was worthy enough of paradise and my giving up had brought me where I deserved even though it wasn't where I wanted to be.

"I suppose you could call it paradise," a voice spoke from behind me and I instantly jumped to my feet.

Standing behind me was a girl who looked to be no older than sixteen years old. She had long silver hair that was thrown over her shoulder in a braid, her eyes were a turbulent shade of grey that almost reminded me of a storm and she was in a small dress that was made from threadbare grey fabric. She wasn't standing there before- or at least, I hadn't noticed

her before. She gave me a warm smile that was inviting but I couldn't help but be wary. There was something about her that put me on edge and it wasn't just the fact that she had answered the question I asked in my head.

"I won't hurt you," she assured me. "Come, let us take a walk." I hesitated before standing and I glanced at her outstretched hand. "If I wanted to hurt you, I would have by now, Camilla."

"How do you know my name?"

"I know everyone's names and everything about them. I suppose it gets exhausting after some time when you remember everything about everyone. A human is just a speck in the grand scheme of humanity." Immediately I recognized

her and I bowed deeply. Very few wolves had the privilege of meeting the moon goddess after death and here she was standing in front of me so casually. She smiled softly and gestured to her outstretched hand. I took it immediately and her hand was cold to touch. "There is no need to bow to me Camilla. If I wanted that, I would have appeared to you in a divine form. I am here as your friend," she told me softly.

"Am I dead?"

"In a way," she shrugged as we began walking. "You are stuck in a limbo of sorts. I have never had a hard time deciding if a person should live or not before. It is easy to compartmentalize with my creatures because there are so many of you but I have a certain fondness for your line. The royals were some of my first creations, that is why your line has powers that the others do not. I have watched you since your birth and you are a special breed, Camilla Caine."

"What do you mean?"

"Your job on the earth isn't done yet and I have a feeling your mate is more likely to burn down paradise than leave you to die."

"Ryker wouldn't do that."

"You underestimate him," I realized that somehow, we had gotten to the edge of the water and right there was a small boat. "Get in, Camilla. You have more work to do."

"You're just going to let me go?" I asked confused and she cracked a smile.

"Would you rather stay?" I shook my head. "Go back, Camilla. Your mate is waiting for you."

She turned on her heels before I could utter another word and I just stared in confusion. There were no oars to row the boat but I got in. As soon as I got in, the boat began to move on its own. The further it moved, the darker it got until I couldn't see anything. My body went numb and I couldn't feel anything. The first thing I heard when I came back to reality was incessant banging and the flurry of inaudible voices. The first voice that came into focus was Ryker's and I tried to speak but all that came out was a low moan.

“Camilla, baby, can you open your eyes for me?” I moaned once more and I felt his warm hands against my cheek. “Is she supposed to be this cold? What is wrong with her?”

I heard someone respond but they were too far away for me to audibly hear what they said. I tried to open my eyes and it took a lot of tries but when I finally did, I had to squint my eyes in order to adjust to the brightness of the light. When I finally managed to open it, Ryker was clutching my hand and staring down at me.

“Hey,” he whispered softly as if he were scared that I was going to disappear. “How are you? I thought you were gone.”

I opened my mouth to speak but my voice was too dry. He quickly grabbed a cup of water and brought it to my lips. I drank it greedily and allowed it to soothe my dry throat. Ryker kept smiling at me in encouragement and I could see the palpable relief in his eyes. I looked around the room and noticed that Christine as well as the royal physician were standing in the room. They were all looking at me as if I were a miracle and I couldn't help but know that something had happened. “What happened?”

“It doesn't matter,” Ryker tried to assure me but I shook my head. I needed to know exactly what happened. “Camilla, it isn't important.”

“Tell me.”

He sighed before speaking. “The poison from the arrow had gotten into your bloodstream. You were flatlining. You weren't supposed to make it through the night and your,” he hesitated before continuing. “Your heart stopped. For two whole minutes you were dead. I didn't- I- Fuck.”

He stopped to take a deep breath. I could only imagine how traumatic it was for him to relive that moment. He ran his hand through his hair repeatedly to calm himself.

“It doesn't matter because you're here now.”

“The goddess sent me back.”

All eyes turned to me in shock. Christine blinked, Ryker looked confused and the physician looked like he was about to pass out. I relayed everything that had happened in my encounter with the goddess and by the time I was done, everyone was staring at me with varying levels of shock and awe. I still couldn't believe it myself that I had seen her. A part of me wanted to believe that it was all a figment of my imagination but I knew it was real. I could still feel her hand in mine.

“You need to rest, your majesty,” the physician was the first to break the silence. “Your body has been through a great ordeal and it is important that you are well rested before anything else.”

I ignored him and turned to Ryker. “Did you catch Frederick?” Guilt took over his features as he shook his head. “We will, together.” It was hard to believe considering everything that had happened so far but I decided to have faith. It hurt to know that someone I thought so highly of would have tried to kill me but it was part of life-making bad decisions. Now, I was sure that Frederick wasn't looking for mercy but it didn't make it any easier to swallow. He had managed to get into the pack and shoot me in front of everyone. That was no small offense and I knew it would not be easy to catch him but I forced a small smile on my face.

“We will.”

Ryker stroked the back of my hand with his thumb. “You have two daughters who want to see you more than anything.”

I watched as Christine and the physician filed out of the room but Ryker stayed. Since we mated, he hadn't stepped foot in this room so it confused me when I saw him settling pillows on the couch close to the bed. I was even more baffled when he pulled a comforter out of the closet and laid it there.

“Are you staying?” I asked and he turned to me incredulously.

“Did you really think I was going to leave you here?” he asked as he settled on the couch. “I need to make

sure that you don't need anything." I could tell there was more to it so I levelled him with a hard look and he sighed. "I need to make sure that you don't disappear again. You have no idea what it felt like to feel that bond break. I need to be here with you."

I gave him a watery smile and moved over a little to create space for him on the bed. "Then you might as well sleep right next to me."

"I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"I won't be uncomfortable if I am the one asking. Please, Ryker, just for tonight."

Chapter 79

CAMILLA'S P.O.V

It took two days and a written letter from the physician for Ryker to even consider letting me out of bed. He was worried- anyone with eyes could see it. The only people he allowed within reach of me were Christine and the girls. Speaking of the girls, Audrey had all but launched herself into my arms when she saw me. She muttered something about being happy that I didn't go with my mother and I teared up.

Audrey wouldn't even go for her lessons yesterday, she spent her entire time by my side. Neither Ryker nor I had the galls to tell her to do her lessons. As someone who had lost my mother twice, I knew how she was feeling. I wanted to assure her that I was never going to leave her but I couldn't bring myself to say the words because I knew they were a lie. Sooner or later, I was going to leave- I just hoped it was later.

"Your majesty," I looked up at the elders who I was currently in a meeting with and I suddenly realized that being in a coma for three days had its benefits because I could avoid them. "You did not answer our question."

"What question was that?"

He pursed his lips in annoyance but he managed to hide it well. "We were able to narrow down the names of the potential helpers that Frederick could have in the palace. We took out the names of the people who were fiercely loyal to your mother and the older people who could not help even if they wanted to."

"What are we left with?"

"Mainly guards and maids. It is impossible to know for sure that they are helping Frederick unless we catch them in the act. The first idea was to put guards to trail them, if you agree with that then-"

“No,” I shut the idea down immediately. “If you pick wrong and miss a spy then you could ruin all of us. Find another way to follow and track them down without potentially putting the entire operation at risk.”

I could see they didn’t agree but they couldn’t speak against me. I wasn’t there to cater to their needs and wants, they were to cater to mine and my want was that Frederick and his allies were found with the least possible number of casualties.

Once that was settled, I cleared my throat. “The poison that was used on me, did the physician find out anything about it? If we know what it is then we might be able to find out where it came from and by extension where Frederick might be.”

“That is a brilliant idea, I don’t know why we never thought about it,” I turned to Ryker and I saw him sporting a look of pride on his face. I couldn’t stop the small flush from creeping up my cheeks at his appraisal. “According to the physician, he used a mixture of wolf’s bane and a rare poison called anathis. Anathis is so rare and difficult to come across and also illegal because of its properties.”

“That narrows down our search by a lot. Find out how many people in the palace will have access to anathis and if Frederick was part of their buyers. If he wasn’t, find out who was.”

When I was done, I stood to my feet. There was no need spending more time than necessary with them. Ryker followed behind me with a hand at the small of my back. Ever since that incident, he was always touching m

’t sure if it was his of telling himself that I was alive or his way of telling me that he was there but I loved it. W

t to be overly affectionate in public because apparently it wasn’t decent for the royal couple but lately, neither of way

ed to care.

The rest of our day went by very uneventful until sometime during the evening when I felt Ryker’s presence invade my mind. Hi voice was soft and like velvet in my mind. “The physician found someone who might have access to anathis.”

I was out of my seat in an instant and I made my way towards the front of the palace where they were readying the carriage. Ryker was standing there with the physician who looked a little worried and out of place. They were talking and as I got closer, I got an idea of the conversation.

“I’m not sure if he would have,” the physician began slowly. “But if anyone will know where to find anathis then it has to be him. He dabbles in a lot of things but he is my friend. Will he be fined for dealing with illegal substances? I know it is wrong but he has never hurt anyone before.”

“If he is able to help us find who is responsible for harming the Queen then he will be let off with a warning but should he be found dabbling in illegals again then he will face the full extent of the law. I believe that is a fair enough exchange.”

I could tell the physician would have liked to say more but he was aware that we were already doing him a favor and it was unwise to push further. He got into the carriage with the guards while Ryker and I went into one alone. The ride was quiet. but he had our fingers intertwined the entire time. The guards didn't act as if they knew anything had happened to me and I couldn't help but turn to Ryker.

“How many people knew that I was unconscious?”

He paused before speaking again. “None, it would have been foolish to inform the public that the crown was weak. They think you took a break to heal from the injury.”

“What if I never woke up?”

The carriage went deathly silent and I saw Ryker breathing deeply through his nose. I knew it was something he didn't want to talk about but I also needed to know what he would have done.

“You would have woken up, even if I had to crawl into the afterlife and bring you back myself”

There was no bluff to his words, he spoke with fierce determination and I was certain that he would have done that. I suddenly remembered the goddess' words. When she had said them, I hadn't paid more attention but now, they held new value to me.

I stayed quiet for the rest of the ride. It seemed longer than it actually was. We ended up in front of a small wooden shop. There were a bunch of carvings lining the entrance and some knitted fabrics. The store was so congested that we had to maneuver around the wares to get inside. The inside was even worse with dust coating the ceilings. It looked almost abandoned, like no one had been there for a while.

“Are you sure this is the right place?” I asked the physician who nodded.

“This is his shop, it is where we always meet up.

I walked further into the shop and got to the front desk. I didn't notice the movement from my left until a hand wrapped around mine. It happened so fast that I barely had time to process but within a second, all the guards behind me had their weapons drawn. The man was covered in dust and soot and wearing grey clothes that were falling apart from the seams. I didn't know if his hair was naturally that shade of black or if it was because of the dirt.

“It would be in your best interest to release me,” I began slowly and he swallowed but slowly let go. I saw him eyeing the back door and I shook my head. “We have guards surrounding this shop. If you run you will get caught.

All we want is your co- operation.”

He looked like he would have rather swallowed glass but he nodded and took a step back. “My apologies, your majesty. I had no idea that you were the one. The areas have been unsafe recently and I didn’t want to be a victim. What can I help you with? I have the best hand carved furniture and knitted rugs.” I smiled coldly. “I need the name of the person who bought anathis from you.”

There was a flash of guilt in his eyes but it quickly disappeared. He looked over my shoulder and his eyes met with the physician’s. There was anger and betrayal in them and I knew that if he weren’t currently trying to would have attacked him. From the look being leveled, I knew there was more to the story than w curiosity was piqued.

“I don’t know what my brother has told you but I do not deal in anathis, it is illegal for a reason”

own life, he

new and

my

My brows rose as he spoke. I looked between them once more and I could see the similarities. They had the same nose and the same curve of their lips but it ended there. The shop owner turned to leave but I stepped in his way. His hand twitched with the urge to move me aside but being Queen came with its own perks and unless he wanted to die a slow and painful death, he had to stand still.

“Were you at the town square a few days ago?” I asked and he nodded. “I am sure you saw the part where I was shot with an arrow,”

He hesitated before nodding and I could see the wheels in his head turning.

“That is the reason I said the area was not safe. If they could attack in public then they will attack me. It is getting late, you do not want to be out by the time it gets dark.”

“Spare me the fake sympathy,” I brushed him off immediately. “The arrow was dipped in wolf’s bane and anathis. Wolf’s bane is illegal but very easy to obtain while anathis is rare. The preparation is so delicate that one wrong move could kill the handler. The way I see it, you could either tell us who bought the anathis from you or I can take you in for a conspiracy to murder the Queen. It is your choice.”

Chapter 80

CAMILLA’S P.O.V

His eyes widened and I saw raw fear inside of them. I wish I could have said that I was joking but I wasn’t. If he wasn’t willing to give up the names then I

was going to do whatever I needed to in order to ensure that Frederick had no more access to forbidden drugs.

After a second of silence, he turned on his heels and walked around the front desk. He rummaged through his papers and brought out a plain piece of paper along with some charcoal. I watched in confusion as he began to scribble on the paper.

“What are you doing?” I asked. “All I need is a name.”

“I don’t have his name,” his response was gruff. “You don’t run an illegal business by asking names. He came in a little over a week ago and said he needed a small quantity of anathis in a short period of time. I don’t like to deal with the stuff because it is messy but he was offering twice of what anyone normally would and I’d be damned if I wasn’t going to take it.”

As his scribbling began to take shape, I realized that he was drawing a sketch. I glanced over at Ryker who just shrugged. It took five minutes for him to be done and once he was, he all but shoved the sketch into my hands. I took one look at it and crunched my brows in confusion. I had never seen the person before but I was certain that he was in the palace somewhere.

“Are you going to arrest me now?” the gruff voice asked and I shook my head.

“You helped us out so you get a warning. Clean up your act. If you actually had a decent shop in town then maybe you would make a decent earning without having to dabble.”

He didn’t say a word but I could see that he was grateful. I turned on my heels and walked out with Ryker. I vaguely heard the two brothers whispering harshly between themselves and I knew that whatever trust between them, that had been broken today would not be so easily repaired.

I waited until I had gotten into the carriage with Ryker before I handed him the sketch. He took one look at it and his eyes darkened in anger. “Do you know who it is?”

“I definitely do.”

As soon as the carriage got to the palace, Ryker led me out and began walking with determination towards the back doors. I didn’t know where he was going but I trusted him and if he said he knew the man in the picture then he was the only one who could find him.

“How do you even know him?” I asked unable to keep the curiosity out of my voice. I was shocked that he knew more of the guards than I did.

His steps faltered and for a second, I thought he was going to ignore me but he finally spoke and his voice was soft. “I asked him to watch the girls while you were unconscious.”

It was at that moment that I realized there was a lot of guilt in his stance. He was uneasy and although I understood why, he had to understand that it was not his fault. He didn’t know that the man was a traitor then, none of us did. I

reached out with the intention of placing a comforting hand on his shoulder but Ryker moved and I allowed my hand fall to the ground.

At the back of the palace, there were a few guards pacing and talking. It didn't take long for me to sight the man we were looking for. He had curly hair and dark eyes and he was a dead ringer for the photo. As soon as all the guards saw us, they stood at attention and bowed. We ignored them and made our way towards the man we were searching for. I saw him shuffle awkwardly on both feet as if wondering whether or not he should flee.

"You," it was Ryker who spoke. "Come with us."

He started to move forward but at the last second, he turned on his heels and ran. I rolled my eyes in frustration because I was tired of everything. I saw the other guards preparing to chase him but I stopped them. Right ahead of him was a stream, it had been a while since I had used my powers but I reached deep into myself until I could— feel the water moving. I tugged at it and used the water as a rope to grab him and pull him down into the stream. He went down with a scream and I saw everyone staring at me with wide eyes.

"Go and get him," my voice snapped them out of their daze and they all nodded and ran off to get him. He was gasping for air and trying to cough out water from his lungs.

When he saw that he was getting closer to us, he began to fight against the other guards but he was unable to get himself free. They brought him to his knees in front of us and he looked up at me with a sneer. I simply cocked my head to the side and analyzed him. If not for the sketch, I would have never thought to suspect him. He looked so innocent and unassuming; he was the kind of person to easily blend into a crowd of people.

"Why did

you run?" I asked but he stayed silent. "Is there something that you're hiding?" "F**k you," he spat in my face and I had to take a step back to avoid his saliva hitting me. Ryker was furious because the next thing I knew, he had punched him so hard that we went unconscious.

"Take him to the dungeons," Ryker ordered the other guards and his voice was so devoid of emotion that even I was concerned.

I noticed that the other guards were looking at him with a healthy dose of fear that wasn't there before. They respected him for his position but now there was fear as if they had just realized that not only was he a royal- he could defend himself too.

As soon as they had gone, Ryker turned to me. "Are you alright?" I nodded but he still spent his time doting over me and checking to make sure that I was alright. "Did he touch you?"

I shook my head. "Everything is fine, you don't have to worry."

He finally sighed in relief. "Good, you should go in and rest, I need to

interrogate him.”

“No, I’m going with you,” his ‘no’ was so quick that I paused and crossed my arms over my chest. “Why not?”

“Camilla, please, he was responsible for you almost dying. I don’t want you anywhere around him and an interrogation room is not the right place for you. It is too bloody.”

“I don’t care,” I shot back and he raised a brow. “I am going, Ryker, with or without your permission.”

He seemed to realize that there was not much he could do concerning it so he sighed. “Once it gets too much, I want you to leave, okay?”

I nodded, that was an easy promise to make.

I felt out of place in the dark dungeons. The walls had grime and blood splatters and the room smelled like a mix of piss, fear and blood. There were not a lot of people in the dungeons because according to my mother, she hated having people down so she killed them as swiftly as possible. Only one other cell was occupied and I couldn’t help but wonder what he had done.

Ryker walked ahead of me to the cell where the guard was being held. He was awake and sporting a black eye but that didn’t stop him from trying to look like he was not a second away from pissing his pants. His fear was so tangible that I could feel it wrapping around the room and threatening to choke us all.

“I will give you one chance to make this easy,” Ryker began as he rolled up his sleeves. “Tell us where Frederick is and who the other people are. If you do this then I will make this as slow as possible.”

“I will never help you,” he spat then turned to me. “Frederick is the rightful king, the throne is no place for a spoiled little brat who needs her mate to protect her.”

His words were barely out of his mouth before Ryker had grabbed his chin in a bruising grip. “If you talk to or look at my mate again, I will cut out your tongue and shove it down your throat. The last time I checked, you didn’t need a tongue to write down names.”

That had him shutting up immediately. “I am not helping you.”

“I hoped you would say that.”

Ryker took out a rag and shoved it into his mouth. I was so confused as to why he did that until he took a pair of pliers and pulled out the nail on his thumb. The scream was muffled through the rag and even I flinched. Ryker did not hesitate before pulling out another and it suddenly hit me why he didn’t want me here. He glanced over at me and I nodded to assure him that I was okay, I just hoped I would be.

It took me fifteen minutes to realize that I wanted to leave. I managed to stick through the pulling out of the nails but when Ryker started to strategically

break ff his fingers, I realized I had enough and I quietly walked out of the room. I knew he noticed and I knew he was worried but I also knew that if I stayed any longer then I was going to throw up.

I passed by Christine on my way and she looked concerned. She reached out for me but I shook my head and briefly explained what happened. She wrapped her arms around my shoulders and led me to my room because my legs were shaking badly. She helped me run a bath and even helped me get in. She sat on a stool by the tub just keeping me company. No words were spoken between us but her presence was enough.

I didn't know how long we stayed like that but the next thing I remembered was the door opening and Ryker walking in. There were blood splatters on his shirt and hands. Christine shot me a look as if asking if I were okay and it wasn't until I nodded that she walked out.