

Chapter 527 Suspicion

The moment Cole stepped through the front door of the Evans estate, he disappeared into the study.

A dense, uneasy stillness settled in his wake.

Paulina, alarmed by the tension, caught Hugh just outside the study. "What's wrong with Mr. Evans?"

Hugh didn't bother sugarcoating. He relayed the entire episode at Nightfall, finishing with a weary sigh. "The whole thing was ridiculous. Mr. Evans and Ms. Marsh were bickering like children."

"It wasn't ridiculous," Paulina said quietly, her expression grave. "Ms. Marsh's heart is genuinely broken. It sounds like she's finally done chasing Mr. Evans."

Hugh blinked. "She's giving up?"

His heart skipped a beat. How on earth would he ever see Mabel again if Elliana gave up on Cole?

Of course, Hugh wouldn't voice his concern—not to Paulina. Instead, his brow tightened, worry etched deep across his face. "So what do we do now?"

Paulina looked stricken, her voice low and heavy. "I don't think there's anything we can do. As long as Mr. Evans hasn't reclaimed his memories of Ms. Marsh, he'll keep wounding her without even realizing it. And Ms. Marsh's starting to build walls. Once they're up completely, there's no mending what's broken."

Hugh was left visibly agitated as there was nothing he could do to fix the situation.

Then, from behind the study door, Cole's voice rang out, deep and commanding. "Get in here!"

Paulina spun around instantly and hurried inside.

Hugh, his mind still reeling over the fate of Cole and Elliana's relationship, followed close behind.

They entered the study quietly and shut the door behind them. "Mr. Evans?" Paulina asked gently. "You called?"

Cole's expression was a thunderous mask of irritation, but now there was a sharp edge of alarm in his eyes. He fixed his gaze on Paulina. "My ring. Where is it?" he said, each word clipped and charged.

The ring that bound all of Blaze Wildfire to his command was missing. Of course, Cole was rattled.

Paulina and Hugh exchanged a glance. They knew exactly where the ring was—Elliana had it. But Cole, without any memories about Elliana, had no idea he'd once placed it in Elliana's hands. How were they supposed to answer him now?

"Well? Why aren't you speaking?" Cole's eyes narrowed, his frown deepening as he took in the tangled expressions on Paulina's and Hugh's faces. "That ring is vital. I always keep it locked in the safe right here. I opened it just now, and it's gone. Did someone barge in and steal it here while I was away?"

"Impossible!" Paulina answered quickly, her voice steadier than she felt. "No one has entered this room. I've kept a close watch."

Cole's eyes sharpened into slits. "Then explain how my ring disappeared into thin air."

Paulina's pulse pounded in her ears. "You might not recall," she said, keeping her voice as composed as possible. "You entrusted it to Blaze Wildfire's second-in-command. It was a classified directive. Myles delivered the ring on your orders, to grant temporary authority while you recovered."

Cole stared at Paulina, silent for a long moment. He'd given the ring to Blaze Wildfire's second-in-command? He had absolutely no recollection of it.

Sensing his hesitation, Paulina eased her tone, threading warmth into her



words. "The accident affected more than just your body. Memory loss is common after trauma. But it's usually temporary. It'll return slowly, bit by bit."

Cole turned her words over in his mind. Finding no immediate flaw in her logic, he accepted the explanation—for now. Still, the doubt gnawed at him. The ring wasn't some meaningless trinket. It was a symbol of power, trust, and responsibility. How could he forget ever handing it over?

But his trust in Paulina was absolute, so he let the matter drop. He wrapped up his work and retreated to his bedroom, hoping a hot shower and some much-needed rest would quiet the turmoil churning inside him.

Yet, no matter how he tried to banish Lilah from his mind, she crept back into his thoughts. Her last words echoed in his ears, slicing deeper each time they resurfaced. His jaw clenched. His chest tightened, the weight of her rejection pressing down on him like a stone.

With a scowl, he stripped off his clothes, leaving them in a scattered trail behind him, and stepped into the shower. He turned the water on full blast, letting the heat beat against his skin.

But it didn't help. His mind remained a battlefield.

Afterward, he rubbed a towel vigorously through his hair and reached for the robe slung over the hook.

Then, as he turned toward the foggy mirror, something in the glass caught his eye. A faint shape, barely visible, etched into the skin of his shoulder blade.

His hand froze halfway to the bathrobe.

He knew every scar, every line of muscle, every inch of his skin. He didn't have birthmarks. And he definitely didn't have tattoos. So where the hell had that come from?

A chill ran through him as he stepped closer to the mirror, contorting his body for a better look. There, inked just below his shoulder blade, was the delicate outline of a hummingbird. A tattoo? On his body? With no memory of getting it?

His gaze locked onto the unfamiliar ink, and a shadow passed over his

face, hardening into something grim.

He felt his world had slipped into something unreal. How could it be real when he had no memory of where that vital ring had disappeared? And even more baffling, he couldn't recall the moment the delicate female hummingbird had been inked onto his shoulder.

Reality felt warped. What was going on with him? It was as if parts of his own story had been redacted, sealed behind an invisible door. He could feel the edges of something vital just beyond reach, like fingers brushing against a locked box.

The confusion calcified into fury. With a clenched jaw and eyes stormy with questions, Cole slipped on the robe, turned on his heel and stormed out of the room.