

TO HEAL A ROGUE

Chapter 121: Pray

BONNIE

I woke gasping, my body jerking violently as if I had been dragged out of deep water. Sunlight streamed through the window in bright, uneven bars, cutting across the floor and spilling over the edge of the bed. For several seconds, I could only stare at it, blinking against the brightness while my lungs struggled to remember how to breathe normally.

Then Fia's hand found mine.

She gripped it immediately, her fingers wrapping tightly around mine, almost painfully so.

"Thank the goddess." The words left her in a long, shaky exhale. Her shoulders sagged, and some of the tension that had been holding her upright seemed to leave with it. "I was so afraid for you. Especially near the end."

I turned toward her, still trying to orient myself.

"You started getting hurt," she continued, her voice quieter now. "They were appearing across your skin while you were still under, and I didn't know whether waking you would make things worse, if I could even do that, or if I should let the dream run its course."

My gaze dropped immediately to my arms.

I remembered the pain. His fingers closing around my wrist. The pressure of his grip. The sharp, phantom ache that still seemed lodged beneath my skin.

But there was nothing there.

My arms were smooth and unmarked.

I pushed the blanket aside and looked down at the rest of myself, searching for evidence of what had happened. Nothing. Not even a faint discoloration remained.

"There were bruises," Fia said, catching the confusion on my face. "Along your forearms. One across your ribs, too. I healed them the moment you started fading back toward waking, before you had even fully surfaced."

My fingers drifted instinctively toward my ribs.

There was no pain.

That should have reassured me.

Instead, it unsettled me more.

Fia watched me carefully, her expression changing as she studied my face. There was something searching in her eyes, as though she were trying to determine whether I had come back from that place completely.

"Did it work?" she finally asked.

I looked at her as she went on.

"Did you succeed?"

For a moment, I couldn't answer.

I didn't fully know what success was supposed to look like after something like that.

My father, if that word could even be used for a creature like him, had left the dreamscape wearing a satisfied smile. He had wrapped his threats in tenderness, spoken to me with the familiarity of someone who believed he had every right to claim me, and somehow made every word sound like a promise.

I still couldn't tell whether I had won anything.

Or whether I had simply survived an encounter he had decided to let me survive.

"Yes," I said eventually.

The answer felt dangerous in its simplicity.

"Whoever they are, they won't be bothering me again. Not like that."

Fia held my gaze for several seconds. She didn't look convinced, but she didn't challenge me either.

"Good."

She squeezed my hand once more before releasing it.

"Whenever you need my help going forward, you have it. Freely given. You can come find me, or I'll come to you. That offer doesn't expire."

Something tightened unexpectedly in my throat.

I nodded. "Thank you."

My voice came out rougher than I intended.

"You helped me more than you probably realize."

Fia's expression softened, but her curiosity won out before the moment could become too sentimental.

"I do have to ask something."

I waited.

"This person. Who were they?" Her brow furrowed. "And why did they want you dead in the first place?"

The word father surfaced immediately.

It sat heavy on my tongue, carrying years of questions, resentment, fear, and things I still wasn't ready to put into words.

I swallowed it down. *free*

"I don't know."

The lie came more easily than I expected.

Fia's eyes narrowed slightly.

"And honestly," I added, forcing myself to sound indifferent, "I didn't care enough to press for details. I warned him off. He got the message. That's all that matters right now."

It was almost convincing.

Almost.

Because beneath the calmness of my voice, one thought kept circling back.

He had known exactly who I was.

He had known things about me that no stranger should have known.

And when he looked at me, there had been something in his eyes that had nothing to do with hatred.

Recognition. Possession.

Familiarity.

I looked away before Fia could read any of that from my face.

Whatever he was, whatever he wanted from me, and whatever blood tied us together, I wasn't ready to tell anyone.

Not yet.

"I don't know about that," Fia murmured, something skeptical threading through her tone, though she didn't push further. "You should know plenty about your enemies. But let me leave you with one piece of advice, since I doubt this is fully over. Sometimes, to defeat your enemies properly, you have to be willing to be worse than they are, at least for a moment. Good cannot win a fight if it refuses to wade into the same waters evil is already standing in."

I nodded slowly, letting that settle somewhere uncomfortable in my chest, a thought I wasn't ready to examine too closely yet.

"Well," Fia said, rising and offering me a hand up off the mattress. "Let's go find Lysander. Tell him everything's alright now, before he wears a groove into the floor pacing somewhere."

We stepped out into the corridor together, and Delta was already waiting there, straightening the moment she saw us, dropping into a quick bow.

"You're alright, Luna Bonnie."

"I'm alright," I said. "Where's Lysander?"

"In the late Alpha King's study, last I heard."

I motioned for Fia to follow, and we started down the hall side by side, my legs still slightly unsteady beneath me from everything the dreamscape had cost. That's when I caught two Omegas whispering near a shadowed alcove just off the main corridor, their voices pitched low but not low enough to escape me.

"Did you hear what Prince Johann did? He's decided to have the imprisoned retainers executed. Isn't that a bit much, given everything?"

I stopped walking entirely.

"What did you just say?"

One of them went pale immediately, clearly wishing she could take the words back the moment she registered who'd overheard them. The other, braver or simply less careful with her tongue, repeated it plainly, without flinching, and the look she gave me afterward carried an accusation loud enough it didn't need saying aloud at all. This was

my fault. My existence, my survival, had started this entire chain of consequences now unfolding.

Flashes hit me all at once, fast and disorienting.

Cheap alcohol shared after long shifts with the other retainers, laughter that had felt earned rather than performed. Someone patiently correcting the angle of my grip on a blade during training. I had real acquaintances and friendship, somehow, built inside a lie I'd told to survive.

Lysander had promised me. He had sworn, standing in that lounge with his jaw set and his voice steady, that those men would live. That the punishment would be small. Manageable. Nothing close to death.

"Where," I demanded, my voice cracking with something between fury and dread. "When did this start?"

The braver Omega stammered out a location, some courtyard near the west wing, and I was already running before she finished the sentence, my bare feet slapping hard against stone, Fia's voice calling after me as she scrambled to catch up.

"Bonnie, what's going on?"

"I can't let them die," I said, not slowing, not turning back to explain further. "I can't. He promised me. He promised."

We rounded the final corner into the courtyard just as two heads dropped, one after the other, onto the platform floor in the near distance.

I froze mid-stride.

For one horrible, suspended second, I simply couldn't process what I was seeing, couldn't force my mind to accept what my own eyes had just shown me so plainly. I saw Lysander standing there, close enough to have stopped it, and something inside me cracked wide open at the sight of him, because he had failed. He hadn't kept his word.

Two of them were already gone, and no amount of wanting it undone would put their heads back where they belonged.

My hands flickered blue, frantic and involuntary, and even knowing, somewhere rational, that it was likely already useless, I sprinted for the platform anyway. Lysander's voice tore across the courtyard behind me, raw and furious.

"Johann!"

And it was in that moment that our eyes met for one fractured, unbearable second as I ran past him without stopping, climbing up onto the platform itself, my knees hitting the rough wood hard beside the nearest body. I lifted the severed head with both hands, careful despite the panic clawing through my chest, and pressed it back against the torn ruin of his neck, willing the flesh to hold, covering the whole devastating mess of him in the source.

"Wake up," I begged, my voice breaking apart on every word. "Wake up. Please. Wake up."

Nothing happened.

I poured more into him, harder now, my whole body trembling with the effort, sweat beading along my hairline despite the cold morning air, and when the light refused to take hold, when his chest stayed still and silent beneath my shaking hands, I did the only thing I had left to try.

I prayed.

I begged the goddess who had disappointed me my entire life, who had let my mother bleed out on a stone floor while I watched, who had abandoned me at birth to a father I'd only just met and already hated with everything in me, to let me have this one single thing.

"Please," I whispered, pouring the last of what I had left into him, my vision blurring with tears I hadn't noticed starting. "Please let me bring him back. Please, Selene. Please. Just this once. Just give me this."

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 122: Consequences Be Damned

LYSANDER

"Johann!"

I screamed his name. It tore out of my throat raw and ragged, and I was already moving, my body ahead of my thoughts, my mind reaching for Johann's throat before my hand could catch up. All of me was supposed to be reminded that this was the way to go. That I was better than this. That I was rational. That I was supposed to be King. But nothing was enough.

Then Bonnie ran past me.

She didn't slow. She didn't hesitate. Her bare feet struck the stone courtyard and carried her straight toward the platform where the bodies still twitched and bled, and in that single moment when her eyes found mine, I saw everything I had failed her written across her face. The trust I'd broken. The promise I'd shattered. The blood I'd allowed to spill while I stood there shouting like a fool instead of acting like a man who deserved to wear a crown.

I froze. My hands dropped to my sides, suddenly heavy and useless, and the guilt hit me in waves that made my knees threaten to buckle. I'd told her they would live. I'd sworn it with my hand over my heart and my voice steady, and now two men were dead, and their blood was pooling across the wood while she ran toward them because I hadn't been fast enough. I hadn't been strong enough. I hadn't been anything she needed me to be.

She climbed onto the platform. Her knees hit the wood hard enough that I heard the impact from where I stood, and then her hands were lifting one of the severed heads, pressing it back against the neck with a desperation that made my chest ache. The blue light flickered around her fingers, pulsing weakly against the dead flesh, and I understood with horrible clarity what she was trying to do. What she was begging the goddess to let her accomplish.

She was trying to put them back together. She was trying to undo what Johann had done. She was trying to fix my failure with her own lifeblood, and she was failing because death was final even for those who carried the source in their veins.

I turned away from her because I couldn't watch anymore. I couldn't stand there and witness her grief without doing something with my own hands, something violent and permanent that would match the violence burning through my chest.

Johann stood at the edge of the platform, watching her too. A small smile played at the corner of his mouth, barely there but unmistakable, and when he glanced at me, his expression carried no fear. Only amusement. Only the satisfaction of a man who had calculated exactly how much damage he could cause and had chosen to cause it anyway.

"You bastard," I whispered.

He tilted his head, as though he couldn't quite hear me over the wind and the crowd and the wet sounds of Bonnie's weeping.

"What's that, cousin?"

I didn't answer with words. I charged.

My shoulder caught him square in the chest, and we went down hard, tumbling across the stone until my back struck the platform's edge and I used the momentum to roll on top of him. My fist connected with his jaw before he could raise his hands to defend himself, and

I felt the impact shudder up my arm, the satisfying crunch of bone giving way beneath my knuckles.

Johann's head snapped to the side. Blood sprayed from his split lip, and he laughed.

He actually laughed.

"Have you lost your mind?" He brought his arms up to block my next punch, deflecting the blow so it glanced off his forearm rather than breaking his nose. "I'm getting justice for my father. Since when does that warrant an assault from the Almighty Regent?"

I grabbed his collar and slammed his head back against the stone. His skull bounced off the courtyard floor with a wet thud, and I leaned in close enough to smell the copper of his own blood.

"Justice?" My voice came out guttural, barely human. "You call this justice?"

"I call it my right." He didn't struggle beneath me. He lay there with his arms spread wide, as though inviting me to continue, as though my rage were merely a performance he was generous enough to indulge. "Those men failed my father. They let him die. The law is clear on what happens to those who fail their King."

"The law." I laughed, and the sound was ugly even to my own ears. "You want to talk about the law?"

"I want you to get off me before you do something you'll regret."

I hit him again. My fist drove into his cheekbone, and this time he didn't deflect it. This time I felt the bone shift beneath my hand, and the pain that flashed across his face was real and immediate and not nearly enough.

"I promised her," I snarled, leaning my weight onto his chest so he could feel how serious I was. "I promised Bonnie those men would live. I gave her my word, and you made me break it. You knew exactly what you were doing when you pulled that lever."

Johann's eyes narrowed, though his voice remained infuriatingly calm. "Your promises to your pet don't supersede the rights of the Crown. Or have you forgotten that you're not actually King yet?"

I wrapped my hand around his throat and squeezed.

His eyes widened then. The amusement finally cracked, and I saw something that looked almost like surprise flicker across his face as he realized I wasn't stopping. That this wasn't a show of temper meant to embarrass him in front of the crowd. That I genuinely intended to kill him.

"Let me explain something," I whispered, my thumb pressing against his windpipe. "I don't care about the law right now. I don't care about your rights, your prerogatives, or whatever loophole you crawled through to make this happen. You made her cry. You made her beg. You made her suffer. You put her on her knees in front of all these people, and for that, I'm going to end you. Consequences be damned."

Johann's hands came up to claw at my wrists, but his grip was weak. He'd never been a fighter. He'd always been the 'clever' one, the one who manipulated and schemed while others did the bleeding for him. He had no idea how to defend himself against someone who had spent years learning exactly where to apply pressure to make a man stop breathing.

"Lysander," he choked out, his voice barely audible above the blood pounding in my ears. "Think... think about what you're doing. You kill me... you're finished. The council... the nobles... they'll never accept you..."

"Let them reject me." I tightened my grip and watched his face turn red, then purple, then something dangerously close to blue. "Let them crown someone else. Let them put my head on a spike next to yours. I don't care anymore."

I raised my other fist. Johann's eyes tracked the movement, and for the first time, I saw real fear there. The kind of fear that stripped away all his clever words and political calculations and left only the animal instinct to survive.

"Please," he rasped.

I brought my fist down.

Chapter 123: Blood on My Hands

LYSANDER

It connected with his nose, and I felt the cartilage collapse beneath my knuckles. Blood sprayed across my hand, warm and slick, and I hit him again in the same spot because I wanted to feel the bone give way completely. I wanted to reshape his face into something unrecognizable. I wanted to pound him into the stone until there was nothing left but pulp and fucking memory.

Johann made a sound that might have been a scream if he'd had enough air in his lungs. His body bucked beneath me, trying to throw me off, but I had my knees planted on either side of his chest, and my weight anchored him in place. He wasn't going anywhere. He wasn't getting away. He was going to die here, in this courtyard, in front of all these witnesses, and I was going to be the one who killed him.

I hit him again. His cheekbone this time, and I felt something crack that shouldn't have cracked. His left eye began to swell shut immediately, the flesh puffing up and turning purple before my eyes, and I wondered how many more hits it would take before he stopped struggling entirely. Before he stopped making those pathetic wheezing sounds. Before he became just another body cooling on the stone.

"Lysander!"

The scream cut through the red haze that had settled over my vision. It was sharp, urgent, and wrong. It didn't belong to Johann. It didn't belong to any of the sentinels who should have been pulling me off him by now if they were not so afraid of the consequences that came with it.

It was female, high-pitched with panic, and it came from somewhere behind me.

I ignored it at first and raised my fist again.

"Lysander, stop!"

It was then it fully sank into my head who it was.

Fia...

It was Fia's voice, and there was something in her tone that pierced through the rage, something that sounded almost like terror. Not for Johann. For me.

My fist hesitated in midair. Johann's face swam back into focus, and I realized with distant surprise that I didn't recognize him anymore. His nose was flattened against his cheek. His left eye was completely swollen shut, the skin split above the brow and bleeding freely into his hair. His lips were pulped and torn, and blood bubbled from between them as he struggled to draw breath through the ruin I'd made of his airway.

He was choking. I could hear it, the wet gurgling sound of blood filling his lungs, and I looked down at my hands and saw that they were covered in red. It was all over my sleeves, my chest, my face. I'd painted myself in it without even realizing.

Then I became aware of the silence. The horrible, heavy silence that had fallen over the courtyard, broken only by Johann's desperate attempts to breathe and Bonnie's quiet sobbing from somewhere above me on the platform.

I looked up.

The sentinels were staring at me. Dozens of them, lined up along the walls and scattered through the crowd, their faces pale and their eyes wide with something that looked uncomfortably like fear. The Omegas who had gathered to witness the execution had

pressed themselves back against the far wall, as though trying to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the monster they'd seen me become.

Fia stood at the edge, her hands pressed against her mouth, her eyes wet with tears she hadn't bothered to wipe away. She looked at me like she didn't know me. Like the man she'd called friend had vanished somewhere between the first punch and the last, replaced by something savage and uncontrolled that wore my face but had none of my restraint.

I looked back down at Johann.

He was still alive, though barely. His chest hitched and shuddered as he tried to pull air through his damaged throat, and blood continued to bubble from his lips with each failed attempt. His one good eye found mine, and there was no amusement in it now. Only pain. Only the desperate, animal pleading of a man who had thought himself untouchable and had learned too late that he was not.

I should have felt something. Satisfaction, maybe. Or at least the cold certainty that I had defended my honor. But looking at what I'd done to him, at the way his face had become a canvas of bruises and breaks, I felt only hollow. Only the sudden, crushing weight of what came next.

Because I'd let a man who deserved to die push me into becoming exactly the kind of person I'd sworn I never would be.

I stood up.

My legs were unsteady, and I had to brace myself against the platform to keep from swaying. Johann gasped and coughed beneath me, rolling onto his side to vomit blood onto the stone, and I stepped over him without looking back. I couldn't look at him anymore. I couldn't look at any of them.

My eyes found Bonnie.

She was still on the platform, still kneeling beside the body of the retainer she'd tried to save. Her hands were covered in blood up to the wrists, and the blue light had faded from her fingers entirely, leaving only the pale, trembling flesh of a woman who had given everything she had and received nothing in return.

She looked up as I approached.

Her face was streaked with tears and dirt and blood, and her eyes were empty in a way that scared me more than anything else that had happened this morning. She'd gone somewhere I couldn't follow. Somewhere beyond grief, beyond anger, into a quiet place where the only thing that mattered was the dead man in her lap and the failure of everyone who had promised to keep him safe.

I climbed onto the platform. The wood creaked beneath my weight, and I heard Fia start to move behind me, probably to intervene, probably to tell me that Bonnie needed space and time and anything other than my presence right now. But I didn't stop. I walked across the platform until I stood over her, until my shadow fell across the body she cradled, and then I lowered myself to my knees at her side.

"Bonnie," I whispered.

She didn't respond. Her gaze remained fixed on the retainer's face, or what was left of it. The platinum wire had done its work, leaving a wound no amount of fixing could heal. I could see where she'd tried anyway. The skin around the neck was burned and blackened from her attempts to fuse the head back to the body, and the smell of ozone and charred flesh hung heavy in the air.

"I'm sorry," I said. The words felt inadequate, pathetic, but they were all I had. "I'm so sorry. I tried to stop him. But I was too late."

Bonnie's head turned slowly. Her eyes focused on me with an effort that seemed to cost her everything she had left, and when she spoke, her voice was barely audible.

"You promised me."

"I know."

"You looked me in the eyes, and you promised."

"I know." I reached for her hand, then stopped when I saw the blood coating my own fingers. I wiped them uselessly against my trousers, but they were soaked through already, and nothing I did would make them clean enough to touch her. "I failed you. I failed them."

She stared at me for a long moment, and I saw something shift in her expression. Not forgiveness. Not even understanding. Just a weary recognition that I was as broken as she was, that I'd destroyed myself trying to destroy Johann, and that neither of us was going to walk away from this courtyard whole.

"He's not dead," she said quietly.

I blinked. "What?"

"Johann." She glanced toward the edge of the platform, where I could hear him still coughing and gasping behind me. "You didn't kill him. He deserves to die."

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 124: The law

LYSANDER

"He's not dead," she repeated, her voice dropping to something barely above a whisper. "You didn't kill him. He deserves to die."

I opened my mouth to agree, to tell her that I wished I'd finished it, that I should have kept my hands around his throat until the light left his eyes. But there were reasons I could not do that.

But she was already moving, shifting the dead man's head from her lap with a gentleness that seemed impossible given what came next. She laid it beside the body, her fingers trailing through the blood as though memorizing the texture, and then she stood.

Her legs steadied beneath her. The trembling stopped. The tears on her face dried in streaks that looked like war paint.

"He deserves so much worse than death," she murmured, and the courtyard seemed to hold its breath. Even Johann's wet coughing quieted. "Do you know what it's like to grow up knowing that your life belongs to someone else? To wake up every morning and remember that your body, your time, your future, can be taken by anyone who holds a title you weren't simply born with?"

She turned slowly, her gaze sweeping across the assembled sentinels, the Omegas, the witnesses who had come to watch men die. Her eyes settled on Johann, who had managed to push himself up onto his elbows, his ruined face contorted with pain and confusion.

"They practically scrubbed your floors while you slept in beds with silk sheets," she continued, and her voice gained strength with every word. "They ate scraps while you feasted. They would put their lives at any time because it was what was expected of them, and when the tables turned, no one would do it for them. They learned to be invisible because being seen meant being used. I know that all too well. I have lived it. And when any one of us low caste finally finds something worth protecting, when we finally let ourselves believe that someone with power might actually keep their word..." She laughed, and the sound made my skin prickle. "They proved us right. They always prove us right."

She stepped toward the edge of the platform. Her bare feet left bloody prints on the wood.

"The law says he can kill those men because his father died on their watch," she observed, tilting her head as though examining a puzzle. "The law says he has the right to vengeance. But where was the law when my mother bled out on a stone floor for no reason at all? Where was the law when I was starving in the streets for being born like

this? Where was the law when the powerful took everything from the powerless and called it their birthright?"

I climbed to my feet, my legs still unsteady from the adrenaline crash. I didn't need the mate bond to know, but having it by my side was enough to understand the gravity of what was happening. All I could feel pouring out from Bonnie was this ink-black darkness that had crossed anger and had entered pure malice. "Bonnie."

She didn't look at me. "You want to kill him too, don't you? I saw it in your hands. I heard it in your voice when you had him on the ground."

"Yes." The word came out raw. "I want to tear him apart. I want to make him suffer for what he did to you, what he did to them. I want it so badly I can taste it."

"Then why don't you?" She finally turned, and her eyes were different. The color hadn't changed, but something behind them had shifted, moved into a darker place I didn't recognize. "Why did you stop?"

"Because..." I gestured helplessly at the crowd, at the sentinels, at the reality of what I'd almost become. "Because I'm supposed to be better than this. Because if I kill him, I lose everything. The council might revolt. The nobles will demand my head. I'll never be King, and everything I've worked for, everything his father built, it all crumbles. I will not be able to protect you, and I need to be able to." I need to be able to do that."

"So that is enough for you," she concluded, nodding slowly. "As long as the crown is protected. As long as you have it all. Your crown. Your future. Your power. How apathetic."

"I know how it sounds. But it is important I do not act like an animal. Order is paramount, stepping closer. "It protects the kingdom from chaos."

"Does it?" She took another step toward Johann, who was trying to crawl backward across the stone, his one good eye fixed on her with dawning horror. "Or does it just protect the people who wrote it? The people who enforce it? The princes and kings and the... nobles who decide which lives matter and which ones are disposable?"

She reached the edge of the platform and stepped down onto the courtyard stones. The crowd parted before her like water, pressing back against the walls, suddenly desperate to be anywhere else.

"I cannot fix this," she announced, her voice carrying across the silence. "I cannot bring them back. I cannot make the world fair. I cannot rewrite the laws that let men like him destroy lives while men like you stand by and watch because you're afraid of losing some stupid throne."

Then I realized something was deeply wrong. Bonnie had every right to be mad. But this seemed... She sounded... for lack of better words... inhuman.

She stopped three feet from where Johann had collapsed. He tried to speak, to plead, but only a wet gurgle emerged from his damaged throat.

"But I can get them justice."

She raised her hand.

At first, I thought the air itself was rippling, heat rising from the stones in phantom waves. Then I saw them. Bubbles, nearly translucent, forming around her fingers like soap films catching the light. They drifted upward, multiplying, expanding, and I felt a pressure building in my ears like a storm descending.

The bubbles converged around Johann's throat.

He clawed at them, his fingers passing through the membranes without resistance, but then they solidified, tightened, and he rose into the air. His legs kicked beneath him, finding no purchase, and his hands flew to his neck, scratching at the invisible collar that was lifting him higher, choking off what little breath he had left.

"Bonnie!" I vaulted off the platform, my boots hitting the stone hard. "What are you doing?"

She didn't turn. Her arm remained extended, her hand curled into a claw, and I could see the muscles in her shoulder trembling with effort. "What should be done."

Johann's face turned purple. His eyes bulged. He thrashed in the air, his body rotating slowly, and the wet sounds of his straining became the only noise in the courtyard.

"Stop this," I demanded, moving toward her. "You'll kill him."

"That's the fucking point."

"You'll be executed," I warned, reaching for her shoulder. "They'll burn you for killing a prince. Think about this."

She laughed, and the sound sent ice through my veins. "Who cares. Let them. But now... at least now they can see what happens when you push someone too far."

Her fingers closed into a fist.

Johann's body jerked, his back arching, and his mouth opened in a silent scream. The bubbles around his throat pulsed, constricting, and I saw his tongue beginning to swell, his eyes rolling back.

"Die," she whispered.

Then she screamed it. "Die!"

Her feet left the ground then.

She rose six inches, then a foot, suspended by the same invisible force that held Johann aloft. Her hair lifted around her face, floating as though underwater, and the light in the courtyard seemed to bend toward her, drawn into the vortex of her rage.

I lunged for her.

A force hit me in the chest like a battering ram, throwing me backward. I hit the platform steps with my shoulder, rolling, scrambling upright in time to see Fia stepping forward, her own hands raised, her face pale but determined.

"Bonnie," Fia called out, her voice steady despite the tremor in her hands. "Stop."

Bonnie's head snapped toward her. Her eyes were white around the edges, the pupils dilated to pits. "Stay out of this."

"I can't." Fia moved closer, circling to the side, her posture defensive but her expression open, pleading. "I understand that rage. I understand wanting to tear the world apart because it keeps taking from you. I understand believing that justice only comes when you take it with your own hands."

"You understand nothing," Bonnie snarled, and Johann dropped six inches before catching again, suspended between life and death.

"I understand that you're hurting," Fia continued, undeterred. "I understand that you trusted someone and you believe that they failed you. I understand that those men died because of politics and pride, and that the person responsible is floating in front of you, and you want more than anything to make him pay."

"Then why are you stopping me?"

"Because he is a prince," Fia answered, her voice dropping lower, gentler. "Because he did not break the law, no matter how unjust that law might be. Because if you kill him like this, in front of all these witnesses, you will not walk away. They will not let you. Even with a regent's protection. Perhaps this is what they want."

Bonnie's feet touched back down to the stone, but the force holding Johann didn't waver. He spun slowly, his struggles weakening, his consciousness fading.

"I do not care," Bonnie stated, each word clipped and precise. "Step away, Fia. Or I will fight you."

Fia didn't move. She stood her ground, her hands still raised, her chin lifted. "I won't."

Something cracked in Bonnie's expression. A fissure of pain, of betrayal, of exhaustion so deep it seemed to hollow her out from the inside. She stared at Fia, really stared at her, and I saw her throat work, swallowing down grief or rage or both.

"You're supposed to be a friend," Bonnie whispered.

"I am," Fia promised. "That's why I can't let you do this."

Bonnie's face went blank. The emotion drained away, replaced by a cold resolve that terrified me more than her screaming had. "So be it."

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 125: Other-You

LYSANDER

She flicked her wrist.

Fia flew backward, her body lifting off the ground and hurtling toward the stone wall. She twisted in midair, her own power flaring, and she managed to redirect the momentum, landing hard on her feet but stumbling, her boots scraping against the courtyard.

Bonnie didn't hesitate. She charged.

Not on foot. She launched herself through the air, her body surrounded by that same bubble-like force, and she hit Fia like a cannonball. They collided with a sound like thunder, rolling across the stones, and I ran toward them, shouting something, anything, but my voice was lost in the roar of displaced air.

They separated, both rising to their feet in the same fluid motion. Fia raised a hand, and a pulse of force rippled outward, but Bonnie deflected it with a sweep of her arm, the energy dissipating against her palm like water breaking against a rock.

"Don't make me hurt you," Fia warned, her breathing heavy. "Please."

"You can't," Bonnie replied, and she smiled.

It was the worst smile I'd ever seen because there was something empty yet certain about it. The smile of someone who had crossed a threshold and found the other side peaceful.

She thrust both hands forward, and Fia raised a shield, a visible dome of compressed air that shimmered in the morning light. Bonnie's attack struck it, and the dome cracked, spiderwebbing from the impact point, and Fia's eyes widened.

"How are you..." Fia muttered, reinforcing the barrier.

"Powerful?" Bonnie finished for her. "Angry? Broken?" She struck again and again, each blow landing with the force of a sledgehammer, and the cracks spread. "I've been holding back my entire life, Fia. I've been small. I've been quiet. I've been good." She punctuated each word with another strike. "And where did it get me? You were right about what you said. Where did being good ever get anyone? To defeat your enemies properly, you have to be willing to be worse than they are. Bonnie might not have taken that as she should. But I did."

Bonnie might not have taken that as she should. But I did.

The words hit me harder than any of the blows she'd landed. Bonnie might not have. As if Bonnie were someone else. As if the woman standing in that courtyard, her hands trembling with restrained power, her voice flat and certain, had already filed away the person I loved as a separate entity — someone gentler, someone smaller, someone she'd decided to leave behind like a coat too thin for winter.

"Bonnie," I said her name like it could anchor her, like sound alone might drag her back into her own body. She didn't turn. I don't think she heard me at all, or if she did, I don't think the name meant what it used to.

I'd seen her break before. I'd seen her grieve and rage and go quiet in ways that frightened me more than the rage did. But I had never heard her talk about herself like she was reporting on a stranger. That was the moment I understood — This was not Bonnie.

So who was this?

Fia seemed to clock the same thing I did, and it broke her concentration.

Bonnie, however, did not. The shield shattered.

Fia stumbled backward, her hands coming up in a defensive posture, but Bonnie was already inside her guard. She moved differently now, her body loose and lethal, and she struck Fia in the chest with an open palm that sent her sliding backward five feet, her shoes carving grooves in the dirt.

Fia coughed, clutching her ribs. "Bonnie, please."

"Please what?" Bonnie advanced, step by step, her feet never quite touching the ground, drifting just above the stone like a specter. "What would you demand of her? That she go

back to being invisible? Accept that her old friends are dead because some prince decided his grief mattered more than their lives? Please believe that the law will protect her when it has never protected anyone like us?"

She struck again, a backhanded blow that Fia barely managed to block, the impact sending shockwaves through the courtyard. The sentinels were running now, scattering for cover, and the smaller nobles that were around had fled entirely, leaving only me, my bastard of a cousin, and these two women tearing the world apart between them.

Fia fought back. She landed a solid hit, her fist connecting with Bonnie's shoulder, but Bonnie didn't flinch. She absorbed the blow and returned it with interest, her knee coming up into Fia's stomach, doubling her over. When Fia tried to retreat, to create distance, Bonnie followed, relentless, her telekinesis, if that was what I could even call it, pulling at Fia's limbs, disrupting her balance, and most especially keeping her close.

"You're better than this," Fia gasped, blocking another strike.

"No," Bonnie corrected, her voice flat. "We are not. No one should ever be better than this. Why should the victims be the bigger people? Why can't the beasts be the ones to do it!? Time and time again."

She caught Fia's wrist, twisted it, and drove her elbow into Fia's spine. Fia went down, her knees hitting the stone, and Bonnie stood over her, one hand raised, the bubbles forming again, swirling around her fingers like a weapon waiting to be unleashed.

"Stay down," Bonnie commanded.

Fia tried to rise, only for Bonnie to strike her with the invisible force, a hammer blow that flattened her against the courtyard. Fia's cheek hit the stone, blood welling from a split lip, and she groaned, her body going limp.

Bonnie stood over her for a long moment, her chest heaving, her hand still raised. She could end it. One more blow. One concentrated burst of force. Fia wouldn't survive it, not at this range, not with her defenses shattered.

I needed to reach her.

"Bonnie," I called out, my voice hoarse.

She turned her head. Her eyes found mine, and for a second, I saw her again. The girl who had knelt beside a dead man and begged the goddess for mercy. The woman who had trusted me and whom I had failed.

"Don't," I whispered. "Please. She's a friend. She was only trying to help you. We are only trying to help you."

Bonnie looked down at Fia, who was breathing shallowly, consciousness flickering. Then she looked back at Johann, still suspended in the air, his body gone limp, his chest barely moving.

The bubbles around her hand thickened, condensing into something denser, something final, and I understood with a lurch of horror that whatever was wearing Bonnie's face had decided he was next.

"No." *freem*

The word tore out of her, but it didn't sound like the voice that had been speaking a moment ago — flat, certain, and amused by its own cruelty. This was smaller. Cracked down the middle. This was Bonnie's voice, the real one, clawing its way up from somewhere she'd been buried.

Her raised hand trembled.

"No," she said again, louder, and this time her whole body shook with it, the bubble of force around her fingers flickering, guttering like a candle in the wind. "No, no, no — get out, get out —"

She staggered, one hand flying to her own skull as if she could physically dig the thing out of her head. The force around her sputtered and collapsed entirely, and for a moment she was just a woman again, swaying on her feet in the middle of a courtyard she'd nearly turned into a graveyard.

"I won't," she gasped, to no one, to something only she could hear. "I won't be that. I won't—"

Her knees buckled.

I was already moving. She went down hard, and I got my arms under her a half-second before her head would have hit the stone, her whole body gone slack and impossibly light, like whatever had been driving her had taken all its weight with it when it left.

"Bonnie," I said it into her hair, my hands shaking worse than hers had been. "Bonnie, stay with me. Stay with me."

Her eyes were open for one more second, and then they rolled back, and she went still in my arms.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 126: Negatives 1

BONNIE

I woke up on my back, but there was nothing beneath me. No stone, no straw, no cushion of grass. Just a gray that stretched in every direction, flat and blank, wiped clean of anything that might have told me where I was. I tried to sit up and my stomach lurched, the kind of drop you get when you look down from too high, except I wasn't high. I was nowhere, and nowhere had no floor to catch me.

My hands hit the ground. Except it wasn't ground. It was texture without temperature, solid without substance. I dug my fingers in and felt nothing resist them.

"Not again," I muttered, thinking it was another dreamscape mess. My voice didn't echo. It died before it reached anything.

I pushed myself up to my knees. The gray had depth if I stared hard enough, layers like dirty glass stacked one behind the other, and staring at it too long made my eyes water. I blinked, and when I opened them, something was there.

It stood twenty feet away, or maybe twenty inches. Distance didn't seem to mean anything here, and neither, I was starting to understand, did anything else I thought I knew. The thing was massive, shoulder-height to my chest if I'd been standing, and I was no short woman. Its fur was black, but the wrong kind of black. It drank the light instead of throwing it back, each ripple of the coat swallowing the dim glow of the place whole.

I'd have called it a wolf if I hadn't looked at its eyes.

It had horizontal pupils which were rectangular, like a goat's, set in a yellow-white sclera that glowed faintly against all that ink-dark fur. I didn't know what animal had eyes like that. I didn't know what animal grew to the size of a great moose with paws that could crush a skull like an eggshell, either. I only knew it wasn't anything I'd met before, not in this life or the last dream that had spat me out here.

I scrambled backward, palms sliding uselessly against the not-ground. "Who are you?"

It tilted its head. The movement was too fluid, too knowing, like something wearing an animal's shape the way I might wear a coat. It sat back on its haunches, tail curling around its feet, and when it spoke, the voice came from everywhere and nowhere at once, female, and familiar in a way I couldn't place, like a word sitting on the tip of my tongue that refused to land.

"You have forgotten me again." It sounded amused. Tired. Like this was a conversation we'd had a thousand times and it had grown bored of playing its part. "I seem to you to be nothing more than a duvet you crawl into when you don't want to face the world."

My breath came short.

"Why wouldn't you let me finish them?" Its ears pricked forward, waiting.

"Finish who?"

"Don't play stupid."

I got my feet under me, wobbling, legs numb from the not-cold as it continued.

"Johann. The others. You let me take over. We had our hands around his throat, and then you stopped."

"Stopped?"

"Well, let me finish. You stopped when I did not want to. Why?"

I didn't know how I knew that was true. I only knew it was.

"Are you talking about killing people?"

"Little idiot." The voice dropped into something like a purr. It took one step toward me, then another, and each footfall made no sound at all, but I felt it in my teeth anyway, a vibration that rattled my jaw. It closed the distance until I could smell its breath: copper, no iron... it had to be blood. Blood that had gone dry years ago. "You think I stopped because I wanted to? You think I craved restraint?"

It was like it was ignoring everything I was saying and focused on killing. Vague flashes of memory came to me as it circled me, its bulk brushing my shoulder, fur coarse as wire against my skin.

I flinched away, spinning to keep it in front of me, but it was always faster, always at my back, always breathing against my ear before I could turn all the way around.

"You wanted to finish them. You craved it. Especially that Prince. I felt it in your marrow, that sweet, hot want to crush his windpipe until it gave like wet paper. Don't put your shame on me."

My head throbbed. I pressed my palms against my temples and more fragments surfaced, sharp as broken glass. Fia's face, pale and terrified. The crack of my hand against her ribs. Lysander's voice, hoarse, begging me to stop, and something in me laughing at him. It was... It was this thing.

I dropped my hands. "You hurt Fia."

The wolf stopped circling. It went very still, those goat eyes fixed on me, unblinking.

"You wanted to harm Lysander too." My voice cracked on his name. "I felt it. You wanted to crush him. That was my mate."

The air shifted around us, thick and close, like the moment before a struck match catches. The wolf's shape blurred, stretching upward and inward, fur retracting into skin, limbs folding and reforming with a sound like wet leather tearing. I stumbled back, my heel catching on nothing, and went down hard.

A woman stood where the wolf had been.

She had my cheekbones. My jaw. My hands, down to the tiny little discoloration on the left knuckle. But her hair hung black and tangled to her waist, and her eyebrows sat like dark slashes over the same goat eyes, the same horizontal pupils, staring out of a face that belonged to me and didn't.

I touched my own hair without thinking. She looked exactly like me. The difference was the hair. Mine was Platinum white. It had always been platinum white.

"She stood in our way," the woman said. She wore my clothes, or clothes cut like mine, torn now and marked with things I didn't want to name. "Fia. She called herself a friend and stood there with her hands raised, her voice so steady, and chose the crown over you. Over us."

"She was trying to help."

"She was trying to save her own skin." The woman crouched, feral, knees splayed, fingers dragging through the gray like it had current in it. "And Lysander. Your precious mate. Your beloved. He betrayed the trust you gave him. You begged him to finish it, to make Johann pay for what he'd done, and he chose politics over your grief. Over justice."

I shook my head, hard enough to hurt. "He chose the kingdom. He chose to keep us alive."

"He chose his throne." She crawled toward me, unhurried, certain of where this ended. "I did us a favor, Bonnie. I showed them what happens when they push too hard. I showed them the teeth they've spent this whole time pretending to believe that we could not possibly have."

"Who the hell are you?" I scrambled back on my elbows, but she matched me stride for stride, her hips swaying low, her fingers trailing through the not-ground like it was water she meant to drown me in. "How did you get inside my head?"

She stopped. Her head tilted, that same wolf-gesture, patient and inhuman, and she laughed. It sounded like bells breaking.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 127: Negatives 2

BONNIE

"Why are you acting like I hijacked things?" She reached out and grabbed my ankle. Her hand was ice. I kicked at her but she held on, fingers digging into my calf, pulling me toward her across the gray expanse. "You gave me permission. You always do. You know I handle shit when you cannot. Back then. And now."

My vision flickered. For a split second, everything went red. Not metaphorical red, not anger-red, but the color of arterial blood sprayed across a white wall. Screams filled my mouth, coppery and thick, screams that weren't mine but belonged to a younger throat, a smaller body. I saw hands reaching, grabbing, felt the snap of small bones under small fists, tasted dirt and—

The red cleared. I gasped, choking on air that wasn't there.

"What is that?" I clawed at my own chest, my heart hammering against my ribs. "What did you show me?"

The woman—this evil twin, this dark mirror—knelt over me now. She smiled, and her teeth were too sharp. "You do not want to remember quite yet, Bonnie. But when you want to. You will know."

"Know what?"

"The world was harsh after all." She leaned down, her hair falling around us like a curtain, cutting off the gray light. "You did what you needed to do to survive. You always have. That's why you made me."

I shoved at her chest, my palms flat against her sternum. She was solid, real, warm where her hand on my ankle was cold. "Where is this? Where are we?"

"Inside." She grabbed my wrists, pinning them to the ground above my head with one hand. With the other, she traced my jawline, my throat, the valley between my breasts. "Deep inside. Where you put all the things you don't want to be. The anger. The violence. The willingness to do what needs doing when the world demands payment."

"Who exactly are you?"

She released my wrists. I didn't move. I couldn't. She lowered herself onto me, her weight settling against my hips, her breasts pressing against mine, and she smelled like smoke and sex and graveyard dirt. She wrapped her arms around me, not restraining but embracing, her cheek against my cheek, her lips at my ear.

"I am you," she whispered. The breath was hot, tickling, intimate. "I am every dark thing you do not want for yourself. Every cruel thought. Every violent urge. Every moment you looked at someone who hurt you and imagined their throat under your teeth."

I shuddered. She held me tighter, her thighs clamping around mine, her fingers tracing circles on my back.

"It has been a while since you reached out," she continued, her voice dropping to a velvet murmur. "You were doing so well, weren't you? Playing healer. Playing good girl. Playing mate to a future king who doesn't deserve you... deserves us. But meeting with our father has strengthened us. You felt him, didn't you? That quarter-god in us. That evil seed you fear we will become."

I went rigid. "I don't have a father. I have a sperm donor who abandoned my mother to die."

"Exactly." She pulled back just enough to look me in the eyes. The horizontal pupils dilated, black swallowing yellow. "You don't want to be connected to him in any way. You want to stay pure. Stay good. Stay the healer who fixes broken things. And I..." She grinned, sharp and hungry. "I get to be the quarter-god. I get to be his evil seed. I get to do the breaking. And that is fine. It is why you created me after all."

I bucked my hips, throwing her off balance, and rolled away. I got to my feet, swaying, my hands up in a fighting stance I'd learned from Fia. "Create? I created you? If that is the case... I never want to see you again. I don't want to feel you again. Never. Ever. Again."

The woman lay on her back where I'd thrown her, her black hair spread out like a halo. She laughed, low and throaty, and the sound made my skin pebble with gooseflesh.

"You said that last time." She rolled onto her hands and knees, then pushed herself up, fluid as smoke. "You said it when you were a kid and wanted nothing more than to bury the memory of what you did to that man who touched you in the alley. You said it when you were fourteen, and you made me choke the air out of that pimp who was going to sell your virginity to the highest bidder. You said it when you were seventeen, and I tore that sentinel's throat out for beating the younger Omegas."

I shook my head harder, my hands over my ears as flashes came back. "Shut up. Shut up."

She shifted. The form blurred again, bones cracking and reforming, skin giving way to fur. The wolf stood before me, massive, impossible, its goat eyes level with mine even as I stood.

"One thing about your hypocrite ass," the wolf growled, its lips peeling back from teeth like daggers. "Is that you will be back. When the world hurts you again. When the crown betrays you again. When you realize that being good gets you nothing but dead friends

and empty beds. You will crawl back inside me, little Bonnie. You will wrap yourself in my fur, and you will hand me the reins. And I will be ready."

"I won't," I whispered.

"You will." The wolf stepped forward and licked my face. Its tongue was rough as sandpaper and left a trail of wet heat across my cheek. "Because I love you. I love us to the very end. I am the only one who has ever truly protected you. The only one who never asked you to be smaller. To be quieter or be good."

My knees buckled. I sank to the ground, my hands covering my face, my shoulders shaking.

"Sleep now," the wolf murmured. "Forget again. Be the healer. Be the victim. Be the good girl. I'll wait. I always wait."

The gray began to brighten. Not to light, but to white, blinding and absolute, erasing the wolf, erasing the space, erasing everything.

The last thing I heard was her voice, whispering from the fading dark: "I'll be here when you need me. I am always here."

Then it all went white.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 128: Woe is me

BONNIE

I woke to the smell of crushed yarrow and something metallic that coated the back of my throat. The ceiling above me was pale stone, veined with gray, familiar in a distant way that made my stomach clench. I had seen this ceiling before. I had stared at it after I woke from that cruel dream. Was I in the...

I made the mistake of moving, and pain immediately exploded in my head.

My head felt hollowed out, scraped clean.

I tried to lift my right arm and found it pinned beneath what looked like a weight. Then I noticed Fia. She sat beside the narrow bed, her shoulders curved forward, and her hands resting on my chest. Blue light pulsed from her palms in slow, rhythmic waves, seeping into my sternum with a warmth that bordered on burning. It should have comforted me. It did not.

I opened my mouth to speak and coughed instead, a dry, racking sound that sent further pain spiking through my ribs.

Fia's head snapped up. Her eyes were red-rimmed, the skin beneath them bruised with exhaustion and what could have only been an attack, but her mouth softened when she saw me looking back at her. "There you are." ◦

Her voice sounded rough, like she'd been shouting. Or crying.

The thought disturbed me more than finding myself in the royal infirmary and more than the fact that I couldn't remember how I'd gotten here.

"What..." My voice came out as a rasp. I swallowed and tried again. "What happened?"

She withdrew her hands. The blue light faded, leaving her fingers pale and trembling. She flexed them once, twice, before folding them into her lap. "You don't remember?"

It wasn't a question. Something cold settled in my gut.

"I remember..." I searched my skull for the shape of recent hours and found only static. White noise. A blotted space where memory should have lived, inked out so thoroughly that even the edges felt wrong. "The Omegas. One of them had said the retainers were being executed. So... I ran."

Fia nodded, encouraging but guarded. "Keep going."

"I climbed onto the platform." The images came in fragments, disjointed and strange. There was blood on wood. The weight of something heavy in my hands. I was holding a... Goddess... two had been harmed and then nothing. A wall of nothing that rose up and cut off everything after. "There were bodies. I tried to... I think I tried to help. And then..."

I pushed myself up on my elbows. The room tilted. Fia's hand shot out to steady my shoulder, and that was when I saw her face properly.

Her bottom lip was split, crusted with dried blood. A bruise bloomed across her left cheekbone, dark purple against her brown skin. Her hair was a small mess now, hanging in tangled strands around her face, and her top was torn at the shoulder, the fabric stained with dirt and something darker.

I stared at the damage, and my breath came short.

"Fia." I reached for her lip. She flinched back, just slightly, just enough. My hand hung in the air between us. "Did I..."

She didn't answer. She didn't need to. The silence carried the weight of confirmation.

I pressed my palms against my temples. The hollow feeling in my skull wasn't emptiness. It was stolen property. Someone had been here, in my head, and they'd taken the keys with them when they left. I dug for the memory, clawing at the white wall of my mind, and pain lanced behind my eyes like a hot needle again.

I screamed. The sound tore out of me before I could stop it, high and broken and terrified.

Fia grabbed my wrists. She pulled my hands down from my head and held them tight, her thumbs pressing into my pulse points until the pain receded into a dull throb. "Stop. Bonnie, stop. You're going to hurt yourself."

"What did I do?" The question came out whispered. My throat felt stripped raw. "Fia, what did I do to you? What did I..."

She released one of my wrists. Her fingers traced the split in her lip, almost absently, and her eyes held mine with a directness that made me want to look away. "You don't remember attacking me?"

"No."

"You don't remember the courtyard? The platform? What you did to Johann?"

The name meant nothing for a moment. Then it did, and the cold in my gut spread outward. "Johann... The Prince..."

"Yes."

I looked down at my hands. They were clean, scrubbed pink, the nails trimmed short. No blood under them. But I could feel phantom weight there, a pressure in my palms that suggested they had held something terrible or perhaps did something terrible. Johann was responsible for those deaths. Did I... "Is he dead?"

"No." Fia leaned back in her chair. The wood creaked beneath her. "He's in his chambers. Under guard. Breathing through a tube, last I heard, but breathing."

I tried to picture it. Tried to imagine my hands around his throat, or a blade, or whatever had caused Fia to look at me with that particular wariness. The image wouldn't come. The wall in my mind stood firm, white and buzzing and absolute.

In no world could I see myself facing someone like that? Did I lose it and give in to my powers like I did when I was ten? Taking out those sentinels, that evil Beta, and my mother's body. Was that it?

It was the only way I could have threatened anyone.

"I did that?" I trembled. It wasn't a question this time; I knew in my bones it involved me. "I hurt him. I hurt you."

Fia's jaw tightened. "Yes."

"How?"

"You lifted him off the ground." Her voice was flat, clinical; the way she spoke felt as though she was trying to distance herself from pain. "You had him suspended by the throat with the gift of small miracles. You were crushing his windpipe when I intervened."

I shook my head. The motion made me dizzy. "I don't... I can't..."

"You fought me." Fia touched her cheekbone again, the bruise darkening even as I watched. "You threw me against the walls. You struck me. You had me on the ground with your hand raised, and for a moment there, Bonnie, I genuinely didn't know if you were going to stop. I thought I might have to fight back with the intent to kill rather than contain. Because of how rabid you looked. Because of the emptiness in your eyes."

The words landed like stones. I stared at her, at the damage I had wrought, and felt my chest constrict until I couldn't draw breath, because I still could not believe it. So, I repeated myself like a damned fool. "I did all that? To you?"

It made no sense. I was not violent... and to Fia? Why would I be that sort of person to her?

"Yes."

"I'm sorry." The apology came out inadequate, pathetic, a drop of water against a forest fire. "Fia, I'm so sorry. I didn't... I would never..."

"You did." She cut me off, not cruelly but firmly. "You did, and you meant to. You intended to kill Johann, and you intended to hurt anyone who stood in your way. Including Lysander."

The air left my lungs. "Lysander? Where... is he?"

"Since you asked, " Fia stood up. She moved to the window, her back to me, her posture rigid. "He's not here because he's trying to contain the political fallout. Attempted murder of a royal heir carries weight, Bonnie. The council is probably screaming for your head. The nobles will want you burned, if not worse. Lysander is probably in a meeting now, lying, bargaining, threatening, doing whatever he can to keep you from being dragged to a cell. Or worse, a pyre."

I swung my legs over the side of the bed. My knees buckled immediately. I caught myself on the mattress, my knuckles white against the rough wool blanket. "I tried to hurt him? Lysander?"

"You intended to." Fia turned. The sunlight caught her face, illuminating the bruise, the split lip, and even the exhaustion carved deep into her features. "You didn't get the chance. But yes. You looked at your mate with murder in your eyes. You laughed at him even when he begged you to stop. For a minute there, I thought someone or something had taken over you."

The horror of it settled over me like a shroud. Not just the violence. The forgetting. I had become something so terrible that my own mind had rejected the memory, or it had been taken from me, and either option felt like drowning. To have done these things and to carry no memory of them, to have hurt a friend, nearly killed a man, threatened my mate, and to have it all erased by my own head...

"I can't remember." My voice cracked. "I try to think back, and there's nothing. Just white noise and static. Fia, what if I do it again? What if next time there's no one to stop me?"

"You won't."

"You don't know that." I pushed off the bed, stumbling to my feet. My legs held, barely, trembling beneath my weight. "This power. This thing inside me. It's not a gift. It's never been a gift. It's a curse, just like—"

"Stop." Fia crossed the space between us in two strides. She grabbed my shoulders, her fingers digging in hard enough to bruise. "Stop it right now. I am not going to sit here and listen to you blame your powers for your choices."

I stared at her. Her eyes were bright and angry. That clinical distance shattered.

"You think you're the only one who's suffered?" She shook me once, sharp. "You think you're the only one with monsters in their closet and head? My father never loved me. Not truly. He looked at me and saw a tool, a means to an end. My mother sacrificed her future, her happiness, her very life to give me a chance at one. I spent half my childhood dodging my half-sister's cruelties and my stepmother's schemes. I have buried friends and allies too. I have killed to survive. I have woken up screaming more nights than I can count."

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter