

To heal a Rogue #Chapter 9: Blood in the Royal House - Read To heal a Rogue Chapter 9: Blood in the Royal House

LYSANDER

The ceiling was the first thing that registered in my mind.

Clean white plaster, with crown moulding at the edges. This was a room that wore its simplicity like expensive perfume. Nothing like the ceiling in any room in Lily of the Valley. I knew those ceilings the way I knew my hands, and this was a stranger's. I lay there, letting my eyes adjust to the unfamiliar light, and then memory crashed back in.

It didn't return in fragments. It hit all at once.

The ball. The library. My uncle's voice, even and deliberate, handing me the throne I had not asked for and the secret I had not wanted. The corridor after. The room. The honey scent that had preceded everything, the woman who had come through the door, and the way my wolf had simply stopped negotiating and taken over entirely.

The bite at the back of her neck.

I sat up.

My body took inventory, one sensation at a time. The rut had broken—either the suppressants had finally worked or exhaustion had finished what they couldn't. The clarity that followed was cold, clinical, and just a little accusing. The sheets beside me were empty. The wig had vanished from the floor. Every piece of her uniform was gone, leaving nothing but the faint ghost of honey on the pillow and the ache at the base of my palm where the mate bond had knotted itself into the grain of me.

I touched the back of my neck out of reflex, then stopped.

She had run.

That was the obvious conclusion, and I let it settle before the next one surfaced. She hadn't just run. I remembered waking—the hands, the precise pressure under my jaw, and the single word she spoke before everything went dark.

Sorry.

She had knocked me out with skill. Not instinct, but deliberate, practiced technique, aimed at a precise spot. She knew exactly what she was doing and did it cleanly. Beneath the irritation rising in my chest, I found something dangerously close to admiration.

My mate had taken me out with a nerve strike and then walked out of the room.

I pressed the heels of my hands against my eyes and breathed.

The floor-to-ceiling windows unleashed the full assault of early morning sun, a light impossible to ignore. It sliced through the glass in long, flat panels and struck my face as I stood. I turned away, searching for my clothes. Trousers first. My shirt was near the door; a detail about last night's sequence I refused to examine. I pulled it on, buttoning

from the bottom up. I was on the third button when the bells began.

I stopped.

The royal bells of my uncle's estate were never decorative. They didn't ring for ceremonies or guests. There was only one reason for their particular sequence, and every wolf in the estate would know it instantly.

Death.

The full sequence tolled, each note falling into the morning with the weight of finality. I stood in a borrowed room, shirt half-buttoned, and felt the sound surge through me like a current.

Uncle Cornelius.

I was moving before the last bell had finished.

The corridor outside was alive with movement. Sentinels in full tactical gear filed past, weapons drawn, earpieces in, radiating the focused urgency of people responding to a nightmare come to life. I fell in behind them, unchallenged—either recognized or simply not the strangest sight at six in the morning.

The library was not too far.

I knew where they were going before they turned.

The library door stood open, and the light inside was all wrong. Overheads blazed, harsh and clinical, illuminating a scene, not a room. Furniture and books were scattered around. A chair near the desk lay overturned, the rug was dragged askew, and dark stains on the floor left nothing to the imagination.

My uncle was on the stretcher.

He lay flat, covered to the chest, the sheet white except where it was not. His face had taken on that color only the dead wear, the stillness of him unmistakable. I had seen dead men before. I knew the absolute stopped-ness, the way a body declared its vacancy. His face had settled into it, muscles finishing their last work hours ago.

Rigor had fully taken hold.

Hours ago.

I crossed the room before I realized I'd moved. My hand found his shoulder, registering the rigid resistance, the immobility of death. Something in my chest cracked along a fault line I hadn't known existed.

"No," I said. The word came out quietly. Then again, louder, because quiet felt wrong for this. "No, no, no."

The sentinels nearest to me stepped back.

I looked up, and whatever was on my face made the nearest sentinel freeze, the way prey animals freeze when they sense a predator.

"What the hell happened?" My voice came out rough and low. "How does this happen? He was here. He was in this room. Where were the guards? Where was his detail? How did this happen inside his own estate?"

Then, as those words came, it crushed me all at once. I had been the one to request a private meeting with him in the library, which only the retainer assigned to him was allowed to enter. And as for the detail which happened to be his retainer... she had been with me. *Fuck!*

One of the lead sentinels present, a broad-shouldered woman with captain's insignia on her collar, held her position and met my eyes with the kind of careful steadiness that came from training rather than comfort.

"Alpha Lysander," she said. "We found the culprit."

She turned and nodded once.

The sentinels to her left parted.

The mate bond burned alive as they did.

The retainer was on her knees in the center of the cleared space, wrists bound behind her, rope wound from her forearms to her elbows in overlapping loops. The rope was dark and wet against her skin, and I knew wolfsbane-soaked restraints by sight. The places where the fibers touched her skin were visibly raw, the flesh mottled and red in lines that tracked every point of contact, and she was holding herself with the rigid, controlled stillness of someone managing a level of pain they were refusing to perform. Her head was up. Her eyes found mine immediately.

The wig was gone.

The semi-short platinum hair was loose around her shoulders, unmistakable in the harsh overhead light, and the sentinels around her had the look of people who had been told they were handling something dangerous and had believed it.

My wolf woke up before I finished the thought.

The bond snapped taut between us, that hook-and-hold I'd first felt in the corridor last night. It cared nothing for the scene, the evidence, or the captain's careful authority. It cared only that she was kneeling on the library floor, wolfsbane burning into her wrists.

I kept my face where it was.

"She infiltrated the royal house under false documentation," the captain said. Her voice was measured, the recitation of someone reporting facts they had verified. "She entered service presenting as male, and with an identity entirely fabricated. We have no record of her under any registry." She held out an evidence bag. Inside it, sealed in clear plastic, was a handgun. "The weapon was found in her hand. The King's wound is consistent with the caliber."

I looked at the gun.

I looked at her.

She watched me with an expression I couldn't quite decipher—pain working across her features, but control layered over it. Beneath that control, though, was something urgent and something afraid, and that was not the shape of guilt. I'd seen enough people try to hide guilt to know the difference.

This was not that.

"The rope," I said. "Take it off."

The captain's expression shifted. "Alpha Lysander, protocol requires—"

"She is burning," I said evenly. I did not raise my voice. "Remove the restraints."

Silence followed as they decided whether to obey or defy. While that call was being mentally made, I reached toward the bond.

It was instinct, not decision—like reaching for a wall in the dark. I'd never done it on purpose before. Last night, my wolf had found her without my say-so; now I reached deliberately, and the connection was immediate, vivid, like pressing a thumb to a bruise. Her mind was closed, not broadcasting, but fear has its own texture, even behind walls. What I felt from her wasn't the fear of being caught. It was fear of something else. Something she'd seen. Something she carried.

She was scared of me.

I walked to her.

The sentinels around her held their positions, but none of them stepped in front of me, because none of them were going to step in front of me, and everyone in the room understood that without it needing to be said. I crouched in front of her and looked at her face directly, close enough that there was no performance available to either of us.

"Did you do this?" I said.

She held my gaze. Her jaw was set, and her breathing was controlled, even as her wrists were burning. She made a conscious effort to look me directly in the eyes, and she shook her head.

I felt the truth of it through the bond like a clean note struck on metal. Clear and singular and without interference.

I straightened up.

"Release her," I said. "She's innocent."

The captain started to speak. "Alpha Lysander, the evidence—"

"The evidence was placed." I turned to face the room. "She didn't do this."

Nobody moved immediately. The sentinels looked at their captain, and their captain looked at me, and the silence in the library had the particular texture of a room full of people doing rapid calculations about authority and consequence and which one outweighed the other right now.

"I do not think I can do that, Alpha Lysander. Only a—"

She did not get to finish when a voice came from the doorway behind me.

Familiar and unhurried. Carrying the specific weight of someone who had never needed to raise it to be heard.

"And who are you," the voice said, "to make that decision?"

I turned around slowly.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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To heal a Rogue Chapter 10: The Cousin 1

LYSANDER

I knew the voice before I finished turning around.

Johann lingered in the library doorway, hands buried in his pockets, collar askew, the embodiment of someone who could rush and still command a room. Ownership radiated from him, as if every inch of space had been crafted for his entrance. His gaze swept the room, cataloguing its contents, before settling on me with a mask of deliberate emptiness.

"Cousin," he said. Not warmly.

"Johann."

He walked in.

The sentinels stepped aside for Johann as they had for me, and I watched him glide across the library with the unhurried assurance of someone raised to believe rooms anticipated his arrival. He seemed taller than I recalled, though perhaps grief distorts memory. His father lay just feet away, shrouded, and Johann passed by without a pause, without a glance, betraying nothing of the history beneath that sheet—the lessons, the hand-holding, the legacy.

He stopped in front of her.

She remained kneeling, wolfsbane rope biting her wrists, platinum hair spilling in the harsh light like a silent accusation. She looked up at Johann with a familiar expression—a person bracing to be made an example, scanning the room for one face that might disrupt the inevitable.

Johann looked down at her the way you looked at something you had already decided the value of.

Then his hand shot out and closed around her throat.

A brief, involuntary sound escaped her as her bound hands strained against the rope. Johann crouched, meeting her eyes, his grip tightening with calculated precision.

"Criminals," he said, his voice pleasant and conversational, "do not deserve the air we breathe." He tilted his head slightly. "But you will confess. One way or another, you will tell this room exactly what you did and why, and then we will discuss what comes next."

Every muscle in my body pulled tight at once.

My wolf surged forward before I could name the impulse—a rush toward the door, toward Johann, toward his hand on her throat. I caught it by reflex, barely. I anchored myself, gripping the nearest chair, steadying my breath, refusing to cross the room. Moving now would answer every silent question Johann's eyes hurled at me when they found mine above her head.

He saw me holding still. Something in his expression settled, satisfied.

I let go of the chair.

Her face deepened in color as she fought to control her response, denying him the satisfaction of futile struggle, refusing to collapse. She held herself upright with the fierce resolve of someone determined not to give the room the spectacle it craved.

"I didn't do it," she said. The words came out compressed and rough, but they came out. She found my face across the room and held it. "I didn't kill him. You have to believe me." Her eyes stayed on mine, not Johann's, not the captain's. Mine. "It was two of them. Assassins. Both masked. One of them had a scar, here," she pulled at the rope trying to bring her hand up and failing, "from the corner of the mouth to the ear. A long one. Deliberate. They shot the King, and they put the gun in my hand before they ran."

Johann released her throat and straightened up.

He faced the room, wearing a mask of exaggerated, almost performative fatigue.

"I heard all I needed to hear about this girl on my way here," he said. "She lied about her name. She lied about her identity. She lied about her gender and walked into my father's home under false documentation and false pretenses." He spread his hands. "And now she would like us to believe her account of two mysterious masked assassins." He looked at the captain. "Take her to holding."

"She's telling the truth." The words were out of my mouth before I had fully decided to say them.

The room went quiet.

Johann turned back to me slowly. "I am sorry, cousin. But why should I give a damn about what you think?"

"I do not know, cousin. I... I just... well... it is just that I find it odd," I said, "that you're here."

"My father is dead, Lysander. Why would it be odd?"

"Your father died hours ago. The bells rang twenty minutes ago. You are dressed, you are present, and you walked into this room without looking at his body." I held his gaze and kept my voice level. "I find that odd."

Something moved through Johann's expression. Fast, and then gone.

"Grief takes people differently," he said.

"It does."

We looked at each other.

The captain cleared her throat. "The prisoner—"

"Take her," Johann said, without looking away from me.

They hauled her up. I listened to the struggle, the resistance, the ragged breath, and kept my eyes averted—watching would have been its own confession, and I was not ready for that. The bond stretched as she left, not painful but insistent, a steady tug in my chest that no one here could understand.

The sentinels departed. The body followed. The library drained slowly, leaving only

Johann, me, and the aftermath—the scattered furniture, the stained rug, the overhead lights casting their cold judgment on it all.

Johann sat down behind the desk.

His father's desk.

He sat in his father's chair with the ease of a man settling into something that had always belonged to him, and he looked at me across the surface of it, and I looked back.

It made me think about what his father had said before this tragedy.

"Do you actually believe," I said, "that a girl trapped in wolfsbane rope killed your father?"

"I believe the evidence."

"You believe what is convenient."

"Lysander." He said my name in the patient tone of someone explaining something to someone who was being deliberately slow. "She was found with the weapon. She was found in the room. She had no legitimate reason to be in this estate. She is a rogue, unregistered, operating under a stolen identity. The evidence does not require my belief. It exists independently of it."

"She described a scar."

"Criminals invent details. It makes the fiction more convincing."

I drew out the chair opposite him and sat, knowing that looming over Johann would send the wrong message. We regarded each other. Our childhoods had run parallel—close enough for familiarity, distant enough for formality, like neighboring nations negotiating. I had never hated Johann, but trust had always been elusive, and now I wondered if those feelings could ever truly coexist.

Given all that had happened, all that uncle said, and how he was acting now.

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