

My Husband \$Chose Her Over Me Novel

Chapter 26

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Her kiss wasn't just a kiss—it was an uprising against my self-control.

Her lips collided with mine like a storm, hot and urgent, pulling me under. Her breath seared my skin, her taste dizzying, and for one blinding moment, thought vanished. Instinct surged forward, betraying every barrier I'd ever built.

Her tongue brushed mine, and I exhaled a groan into her mouth, guttural and raw. My hands found her hips without permission, drawing her in until our bodies locked, every curve of hers pressed tightly against me. Her chest molded to mine, her breath catching as we moved in rhythm.

She moaned, low and husky, a sound that reverberated straight through me. Her hands clawed at my back, nails biting through the fabric of my shirt, and I welcomed it—the sting, the need, the proof that this was real.

Her hips rocked against mine with maddening precision, and I could feel the heat between us even through the layers of clothing. She was fire and temptation incarnate, and I was already burning.

“God,” I murmured against her lips, my voice thick with need. “You’re driving me insane.”

She leaned back just enough to meet my gaze, eyes dark with desire, lips flushed and parted.

“Then make me yours,” she whispered, breathless.

Her hand slid down my chest, over my abs, and straight to my cock, palming me through my pants with a grip that made me see stars. I groaned, my hips bucking into her hand, and she smirked like she knew exactly what she was doing to me.

She pulled back just enough to look at me, her eyes dark and wild, her lips swollen from my kiss.

“Caden, stop thinking,” she whispered, her voice dripping with sin. “And fuck me.”

I didn't need to be told twice. In one fluid motion, I lifted her, her legs wrapping around my waist as I carried her to the wall, pinning her against it with my body. The impact knocked a painting askew, but I couldn't give less of a fuck about interior decorating right now.

“Is this what you want?” I rasped, pressing my hardness against her center, making her gasp. “You want me to take you right here? Against this wall?”

“Yes,” she breathed, her head falling back, exposing the delicate line of her throat. “God, yes.”

I kissed her neck, tasting salt and sweetness, sucking hard enough to mark her. Mine. The thought was primitive, possessive, completely unlike me. But nothing about this was like me I didn’t lose control, didn’t let desire override sense. Until her.

“Caden,” she moaned, my name on her lips sounding like both prayer and profanity. “Don’t make me wait.”

Her fingers tangled in my hair, pulling hard enough to hurt in the best possible way. The slight pain only heightened everything else—the scent of her arousal, the heat of her body, the desperate sounds she made as I ground against her.

I slid a hand down between us and found her soaked and aching. She gasped, bucked into my touch, her hands grabbing at my shoulders as I teased her, circled her, drew her higher until her legs trembled.

“Caden, please,” she moaned, biting my shoulder to muffle the sound.

I couldn’t wait anymore.

With one thrust, I buried myself inside her, and we both cried out, raw, broken sounds that shattered the silence like glass. She was so tight, so ready, her body gripping me in waves that made my vision white out. I pulled back, slow and deep, just to feel it again—the way her body clung to mine like she never wanted me to leave.

We found a rhythm—fast, desperate, then slow again, like we were learning each other’s language one thrust at a time. She rode every stroke like she was trying to etch me into her skin, her hips rising to meet mine, her hands everywhere—my hair, my back, my ass—urging me deeper, harder.

“You feel so good,” I growled against her neck, biting down gently. “So tight around me.”

She moaned my name again, but it came out broken—high and breathless. “I’m so close... don’t stop—don’t you dare—”

I didn’t.

I drove into her harder, deeper, her body arching like a bow. Her walls clenched around me as she shattered, crying out my name in a voice that turned me inside out. I followed her over the edge, spilling into her with a growl, every muscle tight, every nerve singing.

And even after the rush faded, I couldn’t stop kissing her—her lips, her jaw, her throat. She was panting, glowing, completely undone beneath me. And somehow, I’d never felt more whole.

I was still inside her when the knock came.

A sharp, deliberate rap on the door. Three measured beats.

She froze beneath me, breath caught in her throat. My hand instinctively slid to her waist, grounding her as we both stared at the door like it might vanish if we stayed quiet.

Then a voice—deep, commanding, unmistakably noble.

“Lord Caden,” came the drawl. “Lord Brennan requests your presence in the west drawing room. Immediately.”

Silence fell thick between us, broken only by the sound of our racing hearts.

Her eyes met mine, wide, still hazy with afterglow but rapidly sharpening with dread. Her lips parted to speak, but I pressed a kiss to them first—soft, reassuring.

“I’ll handle it,” I murmured.

Because Lord Brennan wasn’t just any noble. He was Lady Isolde’s father. And now, after what we’d just done, I was about to face him.

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The weight of Lord Brennan’s disappointment hung on his face as I stood before him.

“You requested my presence, Lord Brennan?” I kept my voice steady, neutral.

“Tell me, Prince Caden,” he finally said, setting down his quill with deliberate slowness. “Is it common practice in Verloren to break sacred betrothals on a whim?”

I met his gaze without flinching. “There was nothing whimsical about my decision, my lord.”

“No?” His eyebrow arched. “Then perhaps you could enlighten me as to why my daughter—who has been preparing to be your wife and queen for over a year—now finds herself abandoned and humiliated before the entire diplomatic corps?”

The words were designed to cut, to provoke. But I had spent too many years mastering my emotions to rise to the bait now.

“Lord Brennan,” I said carefully, “I hold your daughter in the highest esteem. She is intelligent, accomplished, and would have made a formidable queen. The failure here is entirely mine.”

“That much is obvious,” he snapped, leaning forward. “What is less clear is the reason. Political alliances between our houses have been in place for generations. Your father and I spent years negotiating the terms of this union.”

“Yes, you and my father,” I emphasized. “Not I.”

“So it’s childish rebellion, then?” He scoffed. “I expected better from the King’s son.”

My jaw tightened. “It’s not rebellion to acknowledge a truth I’ve been denying too long. I am already married—”

“To a woman you haven’t shared...,” he interrupted. “A political arrangement that everyone understood was a youthful mistake.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” I said, keeping my tone respectful but firm. “My marriage to Elara wasn’t the mistake. The mistake was letting others convince me it was.”

Lord Brennan studied me in silence, his shrewd eyes taking in every nuance of my expression. I’d seen that same calculating look at diplomatic negotiations, sizing up opponents, looking for weaknesses.

“You love her,” he said finally, not a question but a realization.

“I do,” I replied simply.

“And Isolde?”

“Deserves someone who loves her with his whole heart,” I answered honestly. “Not someone who’s merely performing his duty.”

He leaned back in his chair, tension draining from his posture. “I should be furious with you.”

“By all rights, you should,” I agreed.

“Yet I find myself,” he sighed, “remembering what it was to be young and in love. Before duty and politics consumed everything.”

This unexpected turn caught me off guard. Lord Brennan had always been the epitome of the pragmatic politician, emotions firmly in check.

“Love is a luxury in our position,” he continued, almost to himself. “One I thought my daughter understood.”

“She did,” I said quietly. “She accepted our arrangement knowing exactly what it was. The fault is mine for allowing it to progress when my heart was elsewhere.”

He nodded slowly, then reached for a small bell on his desk, signaling our conversation was drawing to a close. “I’ll have to reconsider our trade agreements with Verloren, of course. Can’t appear too eager after such a slight.”

I recognized the political maneuvering for what it was—saving face. “I understand completely. Verdana is prepared to offer generous terms to maintain our alliance.”

“See that you do,” he said, but there was no real heat in his words. “Tell me, Prince Caden, is she worth the political fallout this will cause? The whispers, the renegotiations, your father’s anger?”

“Without question,” I replied without hesitation.

Something like respect flickered in his eyes. “Then I wish you luck. You’ll need it.”

I bowed formally. “Thank you for your understanding, Lord Brennan.”

I left his study feeling strangely lighter, one hurdle cleared. But as I stepped into the corridor, I saw Isolde herself waiting, eyes red-rimmed but her posture regal as ever.

“Isolde,” I said softly, approaching her with caution. “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“I wanted to hear it from you directly,” she said, her voice remarkably steady despite the tears tracking down her cheeks. “Not through intermediaries or gossip.”

I owed her that much, at least. “I am truly sorry, Isolde. The engagement—it was unfair to both of us.”

“Because you still love her,” she stated matter-of-factly. “Your wife.”

“Yes,” I admitted, seeing no point in denying what was clearly written across my face. “I tried to convince myself otherwise, but...”

“But the heart wants what it wants,” she finished for me. “Even when it’s politically inconvenient.”

Her perception had always been one of her greatest strengths. In another life, another world, she would have made an excellent partner.

“You deserve someone who cherishes you completely,” I told her, meaning every word. “Not someone who’s divided.”

“I know my worth, Caden,” she said with quiet dignity. “I don’t need your validation for that.”

I nodded, properly chastened. “Of course not.”

She studied me for a long moment. “Is she good to you? Does she make you happy?”

The question caught me off guard and I smiled without a word.

Something like wistfulness crossed her features. “Then I wish you well. Truly.”

With that, she turned and walked away, her head high, every inch the diplomat’s daughter. I watched her go with a mixture of regret and relief.

Chapter 28

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The journey back to the palace was a blur of thought and memory. Now that I'd severed the engagement, the reality of what came next loomed before me. Elara and I had reconnected, yes, but the path forward remained uncertain.

I went straight to our chambers, no longer separate rooms connected by a rarely-used door, but truly ours again. The space was empty, no sign of Elara. These days, she was constantly coming and going between Verdana and diplomatic missions, always in motion, as though staying still might trap her.

I needed to ask her when she would finally take her position as true heir. The court was waiting, the people were waiting, and selfishly, I was waiting too. For stability, for certainty, for the future we might build together.

Finding our rooms empty, I made my way to my father's chambers. Perhaps he would know where Elara had gone. As I approached, I heard soft sobbing from within. I knocked once, then entered without waiting for a response.

My mother sat alone by the window, her handkerchief pressed to her face. She looked up as I entered, quickly trying to compose herself.

"Mother?" I moved quickly to her side, alarm spreading through me. "What's happened? Is Father—"

"Your father is fine," she assured me, though her voice trembled. "He's with the council."

I knelt beside her chair. "Then why are you crying?"

"Oh, Caden," she sighed, fresh tears welling in her eyes. "I've been trying to speak with Elara for days, but each time I see her, I can't find my voice."

"To speak with her about what?" I asked, though I suspected I knew.

"To ask her forgiveness," my mother whispered. "For how I treated her when she first came to us. For not protecting her from your father's schemes and the court's cruelty."

I smiled, taking her hand in mine. "Mother, you don't need to worry. Elara has forgiven everyone."

She looked at me with surprise and hope. "How can you be so certain?"

My mouth opened to reply, but before I could speak, the door burst open. Kaela stood in the doorway, her face ashen, chest heaving as though she'd run the entire length of the palace.

“Caden,” she gasped, gripping the doorframe. “Come quickly. Elara just fainted.”

Kaela’s words registered, turning my blood to ice and my legs to water. Yet somehow I was moving, faster than I’d ever moved before.

“Where?” The single word tore from my throat as I bolted from my father’s chambers, not waiting for anyone to follow. “Where is she?”

Kaela was already rushing down the corridor behind me. “The eastern drawing room! She was meeting with the ambassador’s wife when—”

I didn’t hear the rest. My mind narrowed to a single point of focus—Elara. Everything else fell away as I sprinted through the palace, taking corners so sharply I nearly collided with a pair of startled servants. My boots slid on the polished marble as I skidded to a halt at her chamber door, kicking it open without hesitation.

“Elara?” My voice echoed in the empty room, panic clawing higher in my chest.

The bed was made, untouched since morning. Her writing desk was organized with military precision, scrolls and correspondence neatly stacked. But no Elara.

“Damn it!” I slammed my fist against the doorframe, the pain barely registering.

I whirled around to find Kaela, my mother, and father all rushing toward me, my mother’s face ashen with worry.

“Where is she?” I demanded again, desperation making my voice crack.

Kaela pointed frantically down the grand staircase. “The main level—the eastern drawing room! I told you—”

I didn’t wait to hear more. Taking the stairs three at a time, I leapt the final section entirely, landing hard enough to send a shock of pain up my legs. I didn’t care. Nothing mattered except reaching her.

I burst into the drawing room, the heavy doors banging against the walls with enough force to make the crystal decanters rattle on the side table. And there she was—my Elara, sprawled on the Essenian carpet like a broken doll, her golden hair fanned around her too-pale face.

“Elara!” I dropped to my knees beside her, gathering her limp form into my arms. “Elara, can you hear me?”

She didn’t respond, didn’t so much as flutter an eyelash. Her skin was cool to the touch, but I could feel the faint pulse at her throat—too rapid, but there. She was alive.

“What happened?” I demanded of the room at large, suddenly aware of the ambassador’s wife hovering nearby, wringing her hands in distress.

“We were just talking,” the woman stammered, her accent thickening with nerves. “About the spring festival and the traditions of Verdana. She seemed perfectly fine one moment, and the next, she went so pale and simply... collapsed.”

“Get the royal physician,” I barked over my shoulder, not caring who followed the order as long as someone did. “Now!”

Chapter 29

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I heard Kaela’s footsteps receding at a run, the sound of my parents entering the room, their worried murmurs. But my focus remained on Elara’s face, willing her eyes to open, searching for any sign of consciousness.

“Come back to me,” I whispered, too low for anyone else to hear, brushing a strand of hair from her forehead. “Please, my love. Not now. Not when we’ve just found our way back to each other.”

My mother knelt on Elara’s other side, her regal composure cracking as she reached for one of Elara’s slender hands. She pressed her fingers against Elara’s wrist, then examined her face with a curious intensity before looking up at me.

“When did she last eat?” she asked, her voice calmer than I expected.

“I don’t—I’m not sure,” I admitted, feeling utterly useless. “We had breakfast together, but she was called away before she ate much. Something about revised trade agreements with the northern provinces.”

My mother nodded, then checked Elara’s eyes, gently lifting one eyelid and then the other. A strange expression crossed her face—something almost like... recognition?

“What is it?” I demanded. “Do you know what’s wrong with her?”

But my mother merely shook her head, a curious little smile playing at the corners of her mouth despite the tense situation. “Let’s wait for the physician.”

The minutes stretched like years as we waited. My father paced the room, barking orders at guards and servants alike, demanding updates on the physician’s whereabouts with increasing irritation. Under other circumstances, I might have found his obvious concern for Elara touching—proof that he cared for her more than he let on. But in this moment, his restless movement only aggravated my own mounting terror.

“What’s taking so long?” I growled, cradling Elara closer as if I could somehow transfer my own strength to her.

“The physician was attending Lady Merriden’s new baby,” one of the guards reported from the doorway. “But he’s on his way now.”

A new baby. The words echoed strangely in my mind as I looked down at Elara’s still face. We had never discussed children, not seriously. Our marriage had fractured before such conversations could take place. And now...

“She’s going to be alright,” my mother said suddenly, squeezing my shoulder. The certainty in her voice made me look up sharply.

“How do you know that?” I asked, searching her face. “What aren’t you telling me?”

A strange expression crossed her features—knowing, almost amused despite the gravity of the situation. She leaned closer, lowering her voice. “Have you been intimate with her recently?”

The question caught me completely off guard, blood rushing to my face. “Mother! That’s hardly—”

The doors burst open as Kaela returned with the physician in tow, a tall, severe-looking man with spectacles perched on his nose and a leather case clutched in his gnarled hands.

“Move aside, Your Highness,” he ordered without ceremony, and for once I didn’t bristle at being commanded in my own home. I gently laid Elara back down but remained kneeling at her side, unwilling to move any farther away than absolutely necessary.

The physician examined her with brisk efficiency, checking her pulse, her breathing, examining her eyes and feeling along her neck and abdomen. He muttered to himself as he worked, indecipherable medical jargon that did nothing to ease my growing anxiety.

“Well?” I demanded when I could stand the silence no longer. “What’s wrong with her? Will she recover?”

“She’s beginning to stir now,” the physician replied, and true enough, Elara’s eyelids were finally fluttering. “Let’s give her space to breathe.”

I ignored him, leaning closer as her eyes slowly opened, confusion clouding their emerald depths.

“Elara,” I breathed, relief making me dizzy. “You’re alright. You’re safe.”

“Caden?” Her voice was weak, barely above a whisper. She blinked several times, trying to focus. “What happened?”

I pulled her into a fierce embrace, beyond caring about propriety or who was watching. “You fainted. You scared me half to death.”

“I... fainted?” She pulled back slightly, glancing around the room in confusion. “I don’t remember...”

I turned to the physician, who was now engaged in a hushed conversation with my mother. To my surprise, both of them were smiling, my mother's hand pressed to her mouth as if containing some powerful emotion.

"What is it?" I asked, suspicion and hope warring within me. "What aren't you telling us?"

The physician turned to us, adjusting his spectacles with a smile that transformed his severe face into something almost grandfatherly.

"Congratulations, Your Highness," he said, bowing slightly. "The princess is pregnant."

For one breathless moment, time seemed to stop. The world narrowed to Elara's wide eyes finding mine, the shocked 'o' of her mouth, the sudden trembling of her hand in mine.

And then my mother's joyful scream shattered the silence, echoing off the vaulted ceiling as she clasped her hands together in delight. "A baby! A royal heir!"

Chapter 30

– Chapter 30 – The music had stopped. The murmurs quieted. And all eyes turned to me.

I stood at the edge of the dais, heart thudding in my chest like the drums that had opened the gala only hours ago. My palms were damp inside my gloves, and for a moment, I couldn't feel the ground beneath my feet.

My eyes swept over the crowd nobles in glimmering brocade, foreign envoys with measured stares, and courtiers waiting, watching, whispering.

I took a breath, and I stepped into the light.

The grand court ballroom of Verdana glittered with golden chandeliers and silken banners, but nothing in that room shone brighter than the expectation burning in their gazes. This was more than a gala. This was a reckoning.

A slow hush fell over the crowd as I walked to the center, the train of my midnight-blue gown trailing behind me like the night sky itself. Caden's presence behind me grounded me. His hand brushed mine as I passed, a quiet promise. I didn't need to look back I knew he was watching with that fierce, steady pride that had never wavered, not once.

I reached the podium. My fingers gripped the edges, just to feel something solid.

I scanned the room once more then I spoke.

"This kingdom has been torn apart by greed and ambition," I said, my voice ringing clear through the chamber. "And I've been just as guilty of that as any of you."

A ripple went through the crowd. Gasps. Stiffened shoulders. Some looked confused, others curious.

“But tonight,” I continued, “we have a chance to change that. To rebuild. To rise above our past mistakes.”

I paused to let the silence breathe.

“Let us work together to ensure that no more lives are destroyed for power. Let us work together for the future of Verdana. I accept my place fully as the heir to the throne of Verdana, and as the future Queen of Verdana!”

There was a standing ovation and I let out a slow breath as the room erupted in claps, cheers, and voices calling my name.

“Elara!”

“Elara of Verdana!”

“Our queen!”

From the crowd, a lone voice cut through the noise. “Long may she reign!”

I laughed—not out of amusement, but out of pure, unfiltered relief. The tightness in my chest loosened. I had stood in the fire and come out whole.

And then I saw my father. King Dorian. Towering in his royal black and silver, but with his heart fully in his eyes as he stepped forward from the upper dais.

“Elara,” he said, and I descended the steps without thinking, and in a moment I was in his arms, wrapped in a fierce embrace that held three months of distance and decades of unspoken understanding.

He whispered into my hair, “You were always meant to come back.”

“And I have,” I murmured, pulling back just enough to meet his gaze. “Not just to return... but to reign.”

He smiled—no, *beamed*, like the sun had finally broken through storm clouds. “You were magnificent.”

I gave him a knowing look. “That was the easy part.”

“Was it?” he chuckled.

“I’ve faced dragons more polite than our court.”

He barked a laugh. “Fair enough. But I think you’ve finally won them over.”

“Maybe,” I said, glancing back at the applauding crowd. “But I’m not here to win favor. I’m here to lead.”

“And I couldn’t be prouder.” He reached for my hand again, squeezing it. “Three months in Verlada have made you sharper. Stronger.”

“I needed that time. To find myself. And to let go of the fear.”

He nodded, the weight of that sentence not lost on him. “And you’ve come back with fire.”

“I’ve also come back with news.”

He quirked an eyebrow. “News?”

I gave him a measured smile. “Do you want the mild version first or the full shock?”

“Good gods,” he muttered. “Just say it, girl. You know how I hate suspense.”

I drew in a slow breath and lifted my chin. “I’m back with Prince Caden.”

He blinked. Once. Twice.

“Back?” he echoed. “As in...?”

“As in,” I said slowly, “we’re together again. Committed. Entirely.”

He looked over my shoulder. I followed his gaze. Caden stood there in full royal regalia, watching us with quiet confidence. When our eyes met, he gave me the faintest nod.

“He asked me not to announce anything until after the gala,” I said. “But I couldn’t wait.”

“And he... accepted you back? Just like that?”

“No,” I replied. “He *fought* for me. Even when I gave him every reason not to.”

My father exhaled, his shoulders loosening. “That man. He’s got more patience than I ever did.”

“You’re not wrong,” I said with a grin.

Then I hesitated. My fingers toyed with the jeweled pendant at my collar. My heart thundered again—not from fear this time, but from anticipation.

“There’s more,” I said softly.

“Oh, gods,” my father groaned, half-laughing. “There’s always more.”

“I’m pregnant.”

The words hung between us like the still air before a storm.

He stared.

And stared.

Then, his mouth parted. His eyes bulged.

“You’re what?”

I fought the smile creeping onto my lips. “With child. Caden’s child.”

His eyes flicked from my face to my stomach—no visible bump yet—and back again.

And then—he laughed. A full, hearty, kingly laugh that echoed through the hall.

“By the Ancients,” he said, voice rich with emotion, “I’m going to be a grandfather?”

“Yes.”

He grinned. “Does he know?”

“Yes, he does.”

He beamed again and pulled me into another tight embrace. “Oh, Elara. This is the beginning of something new.”

I closed my eyes, sinking into the warmth of his embrace.

“Yes,” I whispered. “It truly is.”