

Chapter 12: A Dragon's Restraint

KIERYGAN'S POV

I shut the door behind us carefully—deliberately so—as Evander and I stepped out of her room. If it weren't for the jumpy, easily-spooked girl inside, I would've slammed it just to take the edge off my frustration.

Evander walked beside me, hands tucked casually into his pockets. I didn't say a word, just picked up my pace as I headed down the stairs. Of course, he kept up with ease. His vampiric speed made that effortless.

"I have already admitted it was my fault, alright? And I said I'm sorry," he said, far too casually. "Why are you still fuming about this?"

My jaw tightened, and I kept walking.

Evander raised a brow. "Is it just because I forgot about the girl," he said, "...or is there something else?"

I didn't answer right away, choosing my next words carefully. Because this bastard wasn't just too smart for his own good—he knew me far too well.

Yes, I was still angry—no, furious—that his negligence had nearly cost her her life.

And maybe... maybe I was angry about something else too. But I wasn't ready to admit that. Not even to myself.

I turned to him slowly. "You're right. There is something else," I said at last. "Not only did you make a mistake, but now you're downplaying it."

He opened his mouth to respond, but I raised a hand to cut him off.

"You know damn well, Malric wants her

back. He's probably watching, waiting for an opening. What if today had been it?" My voice dropped, cold. "We would've lost everything we've barely begun to rebuild."

Evander drew in a slow breath. "Look, I know I messed up," he said. "But meeting with the traders was necessary if we're going to rebuild."

He dragged a hand through his golden hair, tension showing in the movement. "I just didn't expect her to find the courage to go off on her own," he added with a sigh. "And I definitely didn't think she'd be brave enough to try to see Ashteryn."

He shook his head, still baffled. "I still can't figure out how she managed to wander that far."

"Regardless," I snapped, not looking at him or slowing my pace, "you still failed to follow a simple order."

Evander's footsteps slowed behind me, but his voice still carried. "I can take over babysitting duty. Bring her to Ashteryn," he said. "I don't have anything pressing tomorrow."

That made me stop, half-turning toward him. "No." The word came out sharper than I intended.

I didn't wait for his reaction. Just turned and kept walking, faster now. To my relief, he didn't follow. Or argue.

I stepped into the main courtyard, where the winter wind swept through like an old ghost. But the cold, as always, dissolved before it ever reached me.

Snow dusted the cobblestones and gathered on the statues lining the perimeter, remnants of the last storm clinging stubbornly to their outstretched arms.

In the center, a stone fountain trickled with enchantment-warmed water, its slow cascade catching the silver glint of morning light. Even in winter, it still sang.

Mirael lounged beside the fire pit, one boot propped on the stone rim, a goblet of red wine balanced in her hand like it had been born there. Her hair spilled in loose waves over one bare shoulder, and her crimson velvet dress looked expensive enough to have been stolen from a royal vault.

She'd made good on her promise that once we reclaimed Solmere, she'd wear every dress she never had the chance to during exile, reclaim the life of nobility Malric stole from her. And judging by the sight of her now, she was savoring every second of her freedom.

She spotted me at once. Her eyes lit with familiar heat as she rose in one fluid motion, her mouth curving into a slow,

sultry smile.

"Kier," she purred, her voice silk-draped and inviting. "I hope you're not still brooding over earlier. The girl shouldn't have run off like that."

It took effort not to snap at her complete lack of accountability. "I'll deal with you about that later," I said, my anger held on a tight leash. "Right now, I need you."

Her smile widened. In a blink, she closed the space between us, her fingers curling around mine. "Mmm. I was hoping you'd say that," she whispered, already tugging me toward her chambers.

I yanked my hand free. The force made her stumble slightly to the side. "That's not what I meant," I said, my voice cold. "I need you for a mission."

Her expression didn't falter, but the warmth between us cooled a degree. "A mission,"

she repeated, the word no longer sultry but edged in glass. "Of course."

"Malric and Morwenna," I said, watching her closely. "I want them found."

Mirael's brow lifted, just barely. "And you want me to track them."

I nodded. "It could take days. Maybe longer."

She didn't answer right away. Just took a slow sip of her wine, her gaze unreadable over the rim of the goblet. I could tell she didn't like it. Being sent off so soon after getting a taste of comfort again. But she didn't protest either.

"They're not in the north," I said. "I've scoured the skies. They're hiding somewhere warded, protected by magic strong enough to mask their trail, even from me."

Mirael set the goblet down, slow and

deliberate. "So I'm the bloodhound."

"That's your role, isn't it?" I said evenly. "We all pull our weight. That's how we win."

She gave a small, almost imperceptible nod. "Very well," she said quietly. "I'll leave before dawn."

I turned to go, but she moved quickly and fluidly, stepped into my path.

Her smile curled with intent. "Since you're sending me away," she said, fingers trailing over my chest, "you owe me."

I shot her a glare and swatted her hand away. "I don't owe you anything," I said, voice flat and cold.

"Oh, come now," she purred, her hand gliding down to my waist. "I'll be gone for days. On a dangerous mission. Surely you can spare a few hours."

I clenched my jaw. "No, Mirael. I thought I

was clear about this.”

She drew closer, lips brushing near my ear. “I know, I know,” she whispered. “The bond won’t hold. But that doesn’t mean we have to stop... enjoying ourselves.”

Years ago, Mirael and I underwent the binding rite. At her insistence. Dragons like me are rare, not only by blood but by the limits of our nature. We can't procreate with just anyone. For our kind, the soul must bond. Without it, there is no legacy.

I refuse to accept that I’m the last dragon. If I am, it means Malric won. Eventually, I’d need an heir, someone to carry on the bloodline. Mirael, being the only one I knew with dragon heritage, seemed a logical choice.

We attempted the rite. Twice. But the bond never took. Our souls and our energies were simply not compatible.

I told her we had to move on. That we should give ourselves the chance to find those we were truly meant for, if such bonds still existed at all.

But she refuses to let go. And sometimes... sometimes, I've been too weak to make her.

I was about to tell her no. Again. The word was already forming on my tongue when I caught movement over Mirael's shoulder.

Evander strolled past the corridor entrance, smiling easily at one of the maids. She blushed, laughing softly as she dipped into a curtsy.

People were naturally drawn to him. Women especially—though he didn't seem interested in any of them. He didn't even need to use his compulsion ability; they just gravitated toward him.

That charm came in handy during negotiations, so I never minded it.

Not until now.

Not until he showed a kind of fondness toward the girl that he'd never shown anyone before. Not until he managed to make her smile. Twice.

When all she's ever given me is a look of fear.

As if I wasn't the one who tore her from that cursed tower.

As if I wasn't the one who caught her before her skull hit the floor when the bracelet shocked her.

As if I wasn't the one who dragged her from the frozen lake, half-drowned and shaking.

And just like that, whatever restraint I'd scraped together unraveled.

I turned to Mirael. "Fine," I muttered. "But only for a couple of hours."

I clenched my fists and narrowed my eyes at her. "And this is the last time. We can't keep doing this."

She smiled like she always does—like she'd already won. She didn't answer. She just grabbed my hand and turned, hips swaying, her pace light, deliberate, confident.

I followed her. Toward her chambers.

Just a few hours.

And I already knew I'd regret every one of them.



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232

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