

Chapter 369

Kylan

I never thought I would be back in this room, but here I was. In Kayden's room.

I closed the door softly behind me and stood still for a moment, watching the morning light slip through the tall windows. My eyes followed the light all the way from the floor until it finally reached Lady Mona.

She was sitting in the chair beside his bed, her face resting between her hands as she slept. She still wore the same dress from last night, only the fabric was wrinkled now. It looked like she hadn't moved once.

There was no doubt she must have stayed with him all night, just like she said she would.

I knew I was unwanted, so I didn't bother waking her. I ignored her and made my way to Kayden.

Not much had changed from last night. His fragile body still lay in the bed, and as I looked down at him, I felt the strangest thing. That feeling was the reason I hadn't closed an eye last night. Neither had Violet, for obvious reasons that I was sure didn't involve Kayden's condition.

A few days ago, I had wanted to kill him myself, and I was going to. The only thought that consumed me was anger, and yet now, standing here, I felt none of that.

I felt pity, and I knew I wasn't supposed to.

Pity, for what?

There was no real need to pity him because I knew that when he woke up, for whatever the fuck he had planned, he would be back to being the sneaky Kayden.

He looked pathetic like this, stripped of that big mouth of his that made him dangerous. But I hadn't come to the East Wing to cry over him.

I had come to see if he had woken up, and he hadn't. Aside from that, there was still no doctor.

Something was off, and I was sure of it. Someone this important didn't get left alone like this, and certainly not in this palace.

There was no chance the king would let his favorite son rot unless he knew something the rest of us didn't. Or maybe Violet's outburst yesterday had caused things to happen here, and the king was in on all of it.

It was the not knowing that left an uncomfortable feeling. The thought settled deep in my gut and stayed there.

Whatever it was, we had to figure it out, and our time was very, very limited.

I took a slow breath and turned away, but not before glancing back one last time. Lady Mona stirred slightly in her sleep, her shoulders slumping forward like the tiredness was finally catching up to her. She released a soft breath, and her body shivered.

Her cruel words from last night hadn't stopped echoing through my head, but I understood them more than I wanted to.

I did do something to Kayden the first time. She knew and had kept it inside for all these years, and now she thought I had come after her son again.

She was just a mother.

Not a smart parent, because she couldn't really see what her son had been doing, but a parent regardless.

Perhaps that was what pushed me far enough to grab a soft blanket from the foot of the bed. I exhaled, surprised by my own actions, as I walked back and draped it over her shoulders, careful not to wake her.

She murmured something in her sleep but didn't wake.

For a second, I couldn't help but watch her. She had been doing all of this, but for what? Strangely enough, it didn't even seem like the king wanted her anymore.

This time, I really turned and walked out of the room. But not without the uneasy feeling that whatever was happening here wasn't finished yet.

As I moved through the halls of the East Wing, I noticed the guards were still stationed everywhere. There were too many of them, but now I knew it wasn't the king's doing.

This was all Lady Mona.

I had only been allowed through because of my title, Crown Prince. Otherwise, I would have been stopped like everyone else. Even Camille wasn't here, and that alone said enough. It had to be that, or she was choosing her dress for the ceremony that would definitely not happen.

Either way, Lady Mona truly believed someone was coming for her son. If only I could tell her that her biggest concern right now shouldn't be invisible enemies.

It should have been Baelor, that raven. Kayden himself.

Because I still believed that Kayden lying unconscious while Thorne was inside that cage was not a coincidence. All it showed me was that we all needed to come together soon to discuss our next steps.

Kayden would surely wake before Kaelis' howl. Baelor had to be sealed, and there was only one person who could do that.

My thoughts drifted to my Violet, who had already been through too much.

After everything she had endured, and the weight she was carrying, I just wanted all of this to be over for good. To hold her in my arms, see her breathe without the world asking something of her, and look forward.

I wanted to give her the peaceful life she deserved.

I was so deep in thought that I didn't even notice I had reached the main hall until I heard the sound of bright, familiar laughter.

I recognized it instantly, and my shoulders tensed. I turned, not really in the mood for any awkward altercation at the moment. I had to find the group so we could figure out what to do.

"Kylan!"

Fuck.

Seeing no way out, I exhaled slowly and turned back.

I saw the queen from a distance, with Kaelis and Kiora beside her. The three of them looked happy, relaxed, like the perfect family. And the queen... she was smiling at me like she hadn't almost torn Lady Mona apart for me last night.

It had shocked me when it happened, but seeing her now stirred something in my chest. I wasn't sure whether it was gratitude or unease, but it was something.

"Hey," I said, forcing a small smile as I walked toward them.

They met me halfway, the queen's ladies standing behind them. The women dipped into polite bows, and I gave them one in return.

Kaelis scrunched her face. "Do you have any idea what's going on with all these guards in the East Wing?" she asked. "The First Mistress and those

things she has walking around are acting even stranger than usual."

I glanced at my mother as she shook her head at me, barely noticeable. A warning not to tell them.

"N-no," I said carefully. "No idea."

Kaelis studied me for a second, then shrugged.

"Did you sleep okay?" the queen asked.

There was worry in her eyes.

Real worry.

I nodded because it was the easiest answer. It was either that or pouring out all my feelings, and unless it was Violet, the latter was too out of character for me.

Kiora frowned slightly. "You don't look very well rested," she decided. "You need to take better care of your health."

My mouth opened, but no words came out. Kiora and I barely spoke as it was, so her concern caught me off guard enough to steal my tongue.

"Yes," Kaelis agreed. "You need to be well rested for my howl tomorrow," she said, fluttering her lashes dramatically. "It's going to be a very special day."

Special indeed...

I laughed under my breath and shook my head.

The queen looked between us, her features softening with kindness. "Kaelis was just about to practice her dance," she said. "Kiora usually helps her, but since there's a brother dance tomorrow...perhaps you'd like to join her?"

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I hummed, thinking of the kindest way to tell them it wasn't going to happen. But then I thought of Violet again.

I would get the group together, discuss things, and then what? Violet was probably with Madam Renata right now, and pulling her away when she was barely holding herself together would be cruel. She deserved to get her mind off things. The talk could come later.

"That's only if you're not busy, of course," Kaelis added, though I could tell she didn't mean it. She really wanted me there. "I completely understand either way."

I shook my head. "No. I can help."

Kaelis beamed instantly, clapping her hands. My lips curved into a smile as I realized how much time had passed. How was that little, annoying sister who used to force me to play with her having her first howl tomorrow?

For a split second, she looked maybe one percent less annoying than usual.

The queen carried a wide smile. "I'm glad we can all spend time together," she said. "We all need to talk anyway, and have been putting it off for too long."



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