

Chapter 370

Kylan

The sound of the instructor's loud claps filled the room. She stood in front of us with her hair pulled tight into a bun and shouted at Kaelis in frustration.

"You are not giving it your all!"

I barely held my laughter, looking at the woman's face. It crinkled from all the stress she had probably endured these past weeks because this clearly wasn't going anywhere.

She clapped again, harder this time, making Kaelis stumble. I caught her instinctively and tightened my hand around her as we traveled across the floor.

Even as I guided her, I could feel how stiff and tense she was. She was trying too hard not to mess anything up, and her face gave it all away.

She looked like she was one wrong step away from panicking.

At the side of the room, the queen and Kiora watched quietly.

I leaned in slightly. "You look like you're about to shit yourself," I muttered. "Smile."

"I am smiling!" Kaelis hissed through her teeth, still moving. She had so much to say about me back in the throne room, but if this was the dance she was presenting at the howl, it would just be better to cancel it.

She stepped on my shoe, and I winced. My face twisted before I could hide it. "Ow? You suck at this."

"I know," she shot back immediately, not even denying it.

I snorted. "Not very Lyperian of you."

She glared up at me with a small pout as we moved again. "I think it'd be great," I began, hoping to lighten the mood, "if you accidentally stepped on the king's foot tomorrow."

Kaelis burst out in laughter, nearly missing the next count. "Look at that," I said, grinning. "That's a smile."

She rolled her eyes but didn't stop laughing, and for the first time since we walked in, her shoulders relaxed just a little. I looked at her for a moment longer than I meant to and couldn't help but feel for her.

It was so unfortunate that tomorrow had to be her howl.

It was so unfortunate how badly she wanted tomorrow to mean something good. I wanted that for her too, but I just couldn't shake the feeling that it wouldn't be that way. Things never went smoothly in this kingdom, and if I trusted my instincts, Kayden wasn't going to stay asleep forever.

"So," I said as we shifted back into position. "Now I would like for you to tell me why you have been so excited for this howl?"

Kaelis slowed her steps just a little so she could talk. "Because it's the start of something new," she said. "A new chapter...a chapter where I won't just be Kaelis anymore, but me, stronger...someone's Kaelis."

I hummed, listening to her words.

"Did you meet someone?"

She lowered her head for a moment, but her smile was still visible. I raised a brow. "Don't you want to wait for your mate?" I wondered.

Kaelis's head snapped back up instantly, and her eyes sparkled like she had been waiting for someone to ask her that question. "He is my mate," she said, determined. "The Moon Goddess told me in a dream."

Of course she did.

"He's amazing," Kaelis went on. "He's handsome, kind, caring, and has this way of making me feel safe without even trying," she said. "He listens to my words like I matter, and he is so strong and just so amazing, but...he doesn't know it yet."

I snorted quietly. "Sounds like the real deal."

There was no dream from the Moon Goddess. She just had her head in the clouds, but I didn't say it out loud. I just let her have her moment.

"Do you think I would like him?"

"Like him?" She lifted her brow. "I think the two of you will be like best friends...brothers."

I chuckled, and she glanced at me sideways. "You're so chill about this," she pointed out. "Doesn't any of it bother you since you're my big brother and all?"

I shook my head. "Why should it?" I scoffed. "You didn't tell me what to do at eighteen. I don't get to do that to you."

Her smile softened, and she brushed her hand against my shoulder. It was strange how calm and natural this felt. There was no tension, no fight. It was just a brother and a sister having a conversation.

"Well," I exhaled, "I hope it all works out for you."

She nodded. "I know it will."

The music finally came to a halt.

Kaelis turned to the instructor, her hands clasped in front of her. "And?"

The woman ran a hand through her tight bun, mumbling to herself before straightening. "May the Moon Goddess be with you tomorrow, Your Highness."

She gave us a curtsy, offered the same to the queen and Kiora, then gathered her things as fast as she could and left the room as we all watched the door close.

"I don't think she likes me, but that's okay. As long as my mate likes me, I don't care for any of that," she said immediately.

I ruffled her hair, chuckling to myself. She couldn't stop going on about her mate, and it was adorable. It was adorable that she thought the Moon Goddess would show her something like that, when the goddess had far more serious issues at hand, such as Baelor threatening to break loose.

I heard a voice from behind me and turned. A sliding door was opened by the queen's ladies, revealing a table on the other side filled with food. There was bread, fruit, and perfectly arranged dishes.

This appeared to be part of their routine.

"That dance was wonderful," the queen said, clapping her hands with a proud smile. She placed a hand on Kiora's back. "You all must be hungry. Let's eat."

She gave her ladies a look, and they all exited the room, leaving just the four of us. It suddenly made me wonder whether our little bump in the halls was really a coincidence or a carefully planned attempt to make things right again.

The queen, Kaelis, and Kiora gathered around the round table, while I followed awkwardly behind. I took a seat across from the queen, slowly noticing how the round table suddenly seemed smaller than it looked.

I guess everything had just been much easier from a distance, and that was the way it had been ever since Kayden's accident.

Being this close to each other, to her, reminded me of the breakfasts and dinners we had before I had left for Starlight. The ones where I would always brace myself for her to say something, and she just ended up saying nothing to me at all because in her mind we had nothing to discuss.

Those were her words.

I wasn't her son anymore.

Kiora and Kaelis talked among themselves, passing dishes back and forth. I didn't dare look up, knowing it would mean meeting the queen's gaze. My eyes drifted from plate to plate as I searched for a way to escape the situation.

What was I even thinking?

We couldn't just erase everything from the past and suddenly decide to be a happy family in a single day.

No.

It wasn't supposed to be like that.

"You need to eat too."

I heard the queen's voice as she reached for an extra plate. She filled it with grapes, pancakes, and toast, specifically leaving out the bacon because she knew I hated the taste of it. Well, at least she was trying.

When I glanced up at her, I was met with a small, unsure smile, which I returned. Then she slid the plate toward me. "Here."

"Thank you," I said quietly.

"No problem."

I took a bite of the toast, mostly to give my hands something to do, and caught her smiling at me.

She rested her chin in her hands and just watched me eat while I wondered how long it would take before she said what she actually wanted to say.

That was what she had brought me here for, right?

To talk.

Surprisingly, the moment came sooner than expected. "Seeing my three babies like this," she smiled, "fills my heart."

Kiora and Kaelis stopped talking and focused on the queen.

"But," she continued, her expression changing, "it also reminds me of the mistakes I've made."

Her eyes found mine.

"Especially with you, Kylan."

There it was.

I leaned back slightly, trying to appear relaxed, though I really wasn't.

"I don't know if I can still fix what I broke not only between us, but between you and your sisters as well," she continued. "I don't know if you will ever forgive me, but if we can talk, and if we can clear misunderstandings...if I can bring the three of you closer again...because you all need each other, don't you think?"

She took a deep breath, and I swallowed the lump in my throat.

My talk with Violet flashed through my mind. The promise we had made to talk to our parents and finally tell them the truth, because it was the only way I could move on.

I had to do this.

If all went well, I would be heading back to Starlight soon, and after seeing how little time Violet had with her parents, I did not want the same thing to happen to me.

Building a relationship with the king was a lost cause, but there had been a time when the queen and I did have one.

I knew this was hard for her, because although I had gotten a bit better at expressing my feelings, both of us were terrible at conversations. The queen was a proud woman who rarely admitted her faults, and I still did not know if it was right to say she had any fault in this, but I was willing to work things out.

I exhaled slowly.

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★ +20 Bonus

"I agree."

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