

**Chapter 371**

Kylan

"I'm willing to listen."

The queen smiled as those words left my mouth. "Willing to listen," she breathed. "That's what I should have said years ago."

It was that smile on her lips that bothered me, because this was no smiling matter. A hot sensation burned within my chest as I suddenly began to wonder what the fuck I was doing here.

I had this fear that I knew exactly how this would end.

She might have taken responsibility for the way she handled things, but I just could not see her apologizing. That wasn't her.

The queen would tell me to apologize so we could all start over, I would refuse, and lose all the progress I had made regarding my anger. That's how this would end...or how it could end.

Kaelis and Kiora had gone completely quiet. I glanced back at them, then back at the queen as I waited for her to speak.

"I spoke with Kaelis and Kiora," she said. "About family, how much has changed over the years." Her eyes shifted to my sisters. "And there's also a lot I haven't told you girls either...about what happened between me and your brother."

Kaelis and Kiora frowned at each other as the queen continued.

"The two of you obviously know a lot has changed between us, but I never really told you why."

It was true they hadn't known. They had ignored me for years, sure, but I had pushed them away just as hard because I didn't want to bother or disrespect the queen. Those two didn't even know why things were broken in the first place and just followed their mother like they always had.

'If mother hates Kylan, we must hate Kylan also.'

Kiora took a bite from her crispy chicken sandwich.

It went silent, and I took that as my cue to speak.

"During the battle for the throne...I poisoned Kayden."

Kiora opened her mouth in shock, and the piece of bread fell onto the table. She stared at me as if she had misheard. Kaelis leaned back in her seat and met my eyes. She could be silly at times, but she was also smart when it mattered, and she had been fourteen back then. From the look on her face, it was clear she already knew what had happened.

The queen opened her mouth. "Your brother—"

"No," I cut in.

The queen shot me a startled look. My voice had perhaps been a bit too sharp, but she had left me no choice.

"I'll tell them myself," I stated. "You never believed my version anyway, so don't give them yours."

I could see the hurt in her eyes.

Good.

It couldn't have been any worse than the pain I had lived with all these years.

I looked back at my sisters. After all this time, I was finally ready to tell them the story. My story.

"The day we went to Orrithyl to pray at the temples, I met someone in the woods," I told them. "Someone who told me that if I didn't win the battle, our brother would destroy everything I love."

A small chuckle escaped me. I knew all of this sounded crazy, and it was even crazier that I couldn't fully remember the woman, but all of it was true. Yet after the queen called me crazy back then, I began to think of it that way too.

My sisters could turn on me again. The three of them could laugh at me and accuse me of only trying to make excuses, but I didn't care for their validation.

At least Violet believed me, and that was enough.

"I have never seen her again after that. She gave me a small bottle and said it would just slow him down. I threw it in his drink, and later, when he collapsed, it was already too late," I explained. "I kept running. I didn't turn to help him because all I kept thinking about was securing the crown and protecting the ones I love, which includes..."

I didn't know how to say it out loud, but I could only hope the message got across. Because after learning how to love again, I realized that even after all those years of silence, after all the distance and pretending we weren't related at all, I had never stopped loving them. How could I?

Kaelis cleared her throat. "After the battle, you and mom used to fight a

lot," she said softly. Her eyes squinted like something had finally clicked into place. "I figured you had something to do with Kayden's condition, but that's all I knew."

"If you say it was an accident, then it was an accident," Kiora said right away. "I believe you."

The two shrugged at each other.

"Me too," Kaelis said.

I could only stare at them the same way I had stared at Violet. I had expected them to call me a liar, a monster...but not this.

"Just like that?" I asked, confused. "You believe me just like that?"

Kiora let out a shaky laugh. "You can be an ass," she said bluntly. "You are cold, annoying, insufferable, bossy, scary...but my brother is not a liar. Never has been."

Something inside me cracked. If they could believe that, why couldn't she?

I lowered my gaze to the table, then lifted it again to look at the queen.

"And you?" I asked, my hand tightening around a napkin on the table. "What do you think?"

My voice hardened. "Because the last time we talked about this, you called me a liar. You looked me in the eyes and told me I was a monster, not your son."

From the corner of my eye, I saw Kaelis blink rapidly. She snapped her head toward the queen. "Mom?" she whispered, stunned.

The queen didn't look away. Her back stayed straight, chin lifted. At least I knew she wouldn't walk out on me and would face this conversation head-on.

"It's true. I have made many mistakes, and not communicating with all of you has been one of them," she admitted. "I isolated Kaelis and Kiora because I didn't want them to get hurt, and I was hard on you, Kylan...but only because I wanted to prepare you for a world that has been cruel to me."

Bullshit.

"I know you didn't have it easy," I said, irritated. "We all know."

My voice started to shake as I tried not to lose my cool. I truly believed we were getting somewhere and didn't want this conversation to fail. I didn't want it to turn into a situation where I forced myself to pity her and keep everything inside for her sake.

"Do you know what else was cruel?" I asked. "Opening up and telling the truth about what happened in Orrithyl, only for you to call me a liar and a monster!" I called her out. "You never believed that the perfect son you tried to raise could be foolish enough to be manipulated, so you chose to make him a liar instead, because that was easier to accept."

Her breath hitched, throat bobbed, and that's when I knew I got her.

"What was cruel," I went on, "was raising me to believe being the best mattered more than being human, and when I chose to be the best, you put all the blame on me."

I glanced to the side and noticed Kaelis and Kiora both had their heads down. The queen had never told them to be the best, but she had always

pushed them to be proper.

They couldn't defend this because they had also suffered.

I looked at the queen again, and as I held her gaze, I saw her eyes slowly turn wet. "I know," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

It had never been my wish to make her cry. Despite everything, seeing her like this was hard.

I considered stopping, but she shook her head.

"Just tell me," she urged. "Don't hold back, and tell me."

I took a breath.

"What was cruel," I said, forcing myself to keep going, "was that because of you...I forgot how to love, and Violet had to suffer because of that. I knew not to expect much from the king, but you..."

Violet had gone through a lot because of me and my extra efforts to push her away. I had bullied her, made fun of her, threatened to reject her.

My jaw clenched. "I wasn't the mate I should have been from the start, and it was all because I stopped believing in love. Because the one who loved me first had abandoned me."

The room went completely still.

"I felt so lonely, so confused, and so sorry," I admitted, breathing heavily. "There were moments when I wanted to die, just so I wouldn't have to feel anything at all."

My eyes pierced through hers as I nodded, showing her just how serious I

was. "Kylan...I had no idea."

Of course not.

She slammed her hand over her mouth, and quiet sobs came from my sisters.

"Do you know why?" My voice cracked. "Because I had no one to talk to. You and the king made me promise to stay silent, and I carried this awful thing I did all by myself."

My eyes burned with tears. I let out a small chuckle in an attempt to hide it, but when I realized it was no use, I let a tear roll down my cheek and kept looking at her.

I hated crying.

I absolutely hated it.

But in this moment, I needed them to feel my pain. I wouldn't be embarrassed as there was nothing to be embarrassed about.

"You should kiss the ground Violet walks on," I said, my voice rough. "Because she's the reason I'm sitting here...having this conversation instead of running from it like I've done for four years."

"I know," the queen whispered, removing her hand from her mouth. "I know."

"It wasn't just Mom. We weren't good to you either," Kaelis said, her voice shaking. "I wasn't...I didn't know how to talk to you anymore. I influenced Kiora and take full responsibility for that."

"That's not it," I whispered, shaking my head slowly. She still couldn't

see it.

"Kylan is right," the queen said, giving a small nod. "The two of you followed me, and everything that has happened between you and your brother is on me."

She pressed a shaking hand to her chest as tears spilled from her eyes.

"And all I can say is that I am sorry for failing you as your mother."

Her composure crumbled in a way none of us had ever seen before. A way no one in the kingdom had ever seen before.

"I didn't believe you when I should have and chose my position over my own son. Even when you stood in front of me, hurting, begging to be believed, I turned away."

Kiora sniffed, reaching up to wipe the queen's tears as she continued.

"I called you things no mother should ever call her child," she said. "I let you believe you were unlovable, unforgivable. I pushed you to be strong while you were just a boy...my boy."

Her tears fell faster.

"I pushed you to be strong, to be perfect, to be worthy of a crown, but I forgot that you were still just a child. I prepared you for a harsh world, and somewhere along the way, I became as hard as the lessons I taught."

"Yes," I agreed.

"I know an apology won't change anything, but I am sorry," she sobbed. "I can't undo the past or take back the years I lost with you or the pain I caused, but if you'll allow me, I promise I will be better."

Be better?

I laughed through my tears, unsure what it even meant. It felt good to finally let everything spill out, but now I had no idea what to do with it.

I was an adult now, perfectly fine with Violet by my side, and I'd already grown used to the idea of not having a mother.

What would happen if I forgave her, only for her to let me fall again?

I had just started healing, and although she'd finally said what I'd wanted to hear all those years ago, I didn't know if it was worth risking what had only just been pieced back together.

"Be better, how?" I asked, defeated.

"By being a mother."

Hearing those words, it felt like my heart stopped. To anyone else they would have sounded simple, but to me they were everything that little boy inside me ever wanted. Not a ruler. Not a queen.

Just a mother...

She bowed her head, tears falling into her lap, and for the first time in longer than I could remember, I could finally separate the woman from the crown.

This was a mother who had finally realized she had broken her own son.