

Chapter 390

Kylan

My chest tightened the second the words left her mouth.

Kayden, tied up, kitchen pantry...

I stared at her, lifting a single brow while hoping she would back down. Of course, she didn't. The queen lifted hers higher, urging me to give her an explanation.

"What did you do to him?" I asked carefully.

A scoff left her before she pointed at herself, her mouth falling open in disbelief. "What did I do to him?" she gasped. "No, Kylan. What did you do to him?"

As soon as the worry in her voice hit me, my stomach dropped. "Did you free him?"

For a split second, my mind ran through every possible disaster. Kayden being loose meant an angry Kayden, and having that walking around with that look in his eyes and whatever he had planned for that Lord Baelor of his would simply be too tiresome.

The queen rolled her eyes. "Of course not," she said. "I couldn't give a shit about what happens to the boy."

She made a gesture with her hands, inhaled, then exhaled, calming herself. "But I do care about your sister, and I care about her howl not being ruined by any of this nonsense you've been doing."

I had to bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from smiling. Somewhere along the line, the queen had picked up a very interesting

vocabulary, and I honestly wasn't sure whether to be alarmed or impressed. She must've been really, really pissed.

"I told you I have it under control," I reminded her. "And that you don't need to worry about Kaelis's howl. Didn't I?"

She opened her mouth. "You did, but..."

"No, buts."

I stepped in front of her before she could finish, and we stopped walking. My hands moved to her shoulders, and she stiffened at first, clearly not expecting it.

"You do not have to worry," I reassured her, rubbing circles over her shoulders. "I really do have it under control."

The queen studied me for a long moment, her eyes watching me, searching to see if I really did. I tried my best to make her believe, and kept my eyes sharp until her shoulders relaxed and she let out a slow breath.

"You're still not going to tell me, are you?" she asked quietly.

I shook my head. "I can't."

She huffed through her smile and pushed my hands away from her shoulders. We started walking again, and without really thinking about it, I linked my arm with hers.

"This is new," she whispered, glancing down at our arms.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her looking up at me with that same warm expression. I forced myself to stare ahead, but my thoughts drifted back to Kayden. He had always been a little off, but lately it was worse.

Much worse.

Something deep in my gut told me that if tonight failed, if we could not seal Baelor inside Thorne, this fight would be far from over. The battle would only stretch on, darker and harder than before.

I looked behind me, keeping an eye on the queen's ladies, who stood at a respectful distance. "How did you even find out about him?"

"When people start saying the queen closed the kitchen for the day, when I haven't closed anything, I know something is wrong."

I let out a quiet laugh. "That makes sense."

She hummed. "Now come on. We should hurry," she said, locking our arms tighter. "Guests have already arrived, and it's almost time for Kaelis's entrance."

"Right."

My thoughts drifted to Violet. Where she was. How she was holding up, and maybe those weren't the thoughts that mattered most right now, but I couldn't stop them anyway. I wondered what she would be wearing tonight, whether she would frown at her reflection like she always did, blush, look away...

It was ridiculous, really.

The world could be on the edge of falling apart, Kayden was tied up in a pantry, Baelor was close, and yet my mind kept wandering back to her.

I shook my head, amused by these thoughts.

Of all the things that scared me tonight, loving her was the one thing that didn't.

"I wonder if Kaelis is in a good mood today."

The queen looked at me like I had asked if the sky was blue. "Of course she is," she laughed. "Why wouldn't she be?"

"Yes," I said dryly.

Why wouldn't she be?

Maybe because it was always something with her, especially when it came to celebrations. If it wasn't her hair, it was her dress. If it wasn't her dress, it was...

~

"My heels!"

See?

Always something.

We hadn't even been inside the room for a full second before we were already met with Kaelis's screeching. I closed my eyes for a brief moment, inhaled, then opened them again.

I would have to face her dramatic ways sooner or later. There was no escaping this.

The room was chaos. At least six ladies moved around Kaelis, panicking. One locked eyes with the queen and stepped back before everyone else did, their heads bowed.

Even Madam Renata looked unsettled. Stiff as usual, but that composure cracked just enough to be noticeable.

"Greetings, Your Majesty. Your Highness," she said, smoothing her skirt.

It was already surprising enough that she was still here and had not run off to Lady Mona or the devils she called her daughters, especially since that group always found a way to insert themselves.

"Mom!" Kaelis called out.

She stood in the center, arms crossed as she sulked at the queen. Kiora stood by her side, and I couldn't help but pity my sister. She looked torn between sympathy and the urge to laugh.

"The dress is blush pink," Kaelis complained, lifting the skirt just enough to expose the problem. "But the heels are pastelpink. It's a disaster!"

I let out a short laugh, followed by a breath of disbelief. Of all the things that were about to happen tonight, the thing she had to worry about the most was a pair of heels. That must be nice.

"My baby."

The queen stepped closer and cupped Kaelis's face in both hands. I could only see her back, but it wasn't hard to imagine her expression as she looked at the daughter she had always cared about so much.

"No one is going to see your shoes," she said calmly. "And even if they did, they wouldn't care. The dress isn't the highlight tonight."

"Then what is?"

"You are," the queen continued. "And Vayla will be... under the moonlight."

"But the shoes..."

I watched them, trying to figure out what the big deal was. Tonight clearly mattered to her. And yes, the howl mattered to every Lyperian, but this? This situation sat differently with Kaelis, and I didn't know why.

My eyes wandered the room until another thought crept in.

Where was my Violet, by the way?

"Kylan?"

I woke from my thoughts as the queen stepped aside and shot me a glance. A hum left me in response, and I raised my brows as my eyes landed on Kaelis's exaggerated pout.

"Look at your sister," the queen said. "Tell her she looks beautiful."

I chuckled softly.

Honestly, she looked beautiful and had nothing to worry about.

"Kaelis," I said, stepping closer. She lifted her chin and stared up at me like she already knew what I was about to say.

"I don't think you need to worry about something as small as the color of your heels, because I don't know how you managed to do it, but..."

Her eyes lit up instantly.

The voice inside my head screamed not to do it, but I decided to ignore it. A smirk tugged at my mouth.

"But you look even more hideous than you did yesterday."

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]: