

## Chapter 12: Strenuous Task

~Alexia~

"Why did you do that? Why did you humiliate me like that?!" Kieran growled. His hands held his waist as he questioned Alexia. "No one seeks the king that way. He is our king! He is above us, and there are rules to follow when speaking to the royal family! He was about to leave with the queen, and you chased after him?!"

Kieran snarled and added, "Then you almost fell on your face and let the king catch you?!"

"Is - is it so wrong to seek answers, Alpha Kieran?" She asked while keeping her head down. As she revealed, her voice trembled, "I - I just wanted to know why he chose me to be your wife."

"Do you think I haven't already asked, Alexia?!" With an exasperated sigh, Kieran said, "You should have asked while we were at the table! It was more appropriate to seek his time, then! He was already talking to you!"

"I'm - I'm sorry, Alpha. I didn't have the courage then. I was hoping to speak to the king alone," Alexia reasoned. "I - I just thought, maybe the king would be considerate of me since - since I am now your wife -"

"Know your place!" Kieran snapped. "You are only a contract wife!"

'Contract wife.' The words stabbed her heart like a knife. 'Did he really have to rub it in my face? Did he forget she was also forced into this situation?'

"Be thankful that the king did not shame you!" Kieran said. "This shall not happen again, Alexia. You hear me!"

"I promise." Her lips trembled. She stuttered in her reply, "I'm - I'm sorry, Alpha Kieran. I know my place. It - it will not happen again."

Dead air fell upon them, and in the next few seconds, she fixed her gaze on the floor.

During the ceremony, she allowed a small part of her to be mesmerized by Kieran. Thanks to Rae, she considered the possibility of having a real marriage with him, but now, hearing Kieran's words, she was reminded of how they were not equal.

The truth awakened her. She was only a contract wife to him. She should evade him and avoid breaking the rules at all costs.

Keeping her head down, she asked flatly, "May I be excused, Alpha?"

"Was there anything new to what he told you? Other than trust your king?" Kieran's tone appeared to have changed as he sought.

Alexia shook her head and replied, "No. His words were the same as yours."

Earlier, Alexia had hoped to find answers, but King Balthasar simply said, "I am a king for a reason. I do not toy with your lives. Stop asking the reason, and instead, trust in your king."

"This is your fate, Alexia. Accept it and make the most out of it. I don't want to be asked about this again. Remember that." Without giving her another chance to speak, King Balthasar turned to leave for that night.

Alexia did not get the answer she sought. The worst part was how she had created a scene on her own wedding day, a scene that led her here, in Kieran's office, with him raising his voice at her.

"I won't seek for the king that way or any of the royal family," Alexia repeated, her eyes still glued to the floor.

"Remember the social standards," Kieran said. "You can only speak to the royal family if you are spoken to or if your eyes have met, suggesting they are ready to hear you. If you are not in the king's presence, you course your concerns through me, your alpha! It will be my job to request his private time."

"Alexia, occasionally, the king bends these social standards for the alphas and the lunas, but we should not abuse it, especially in front of the queen. Queen Helen is strict in keeping things as they should be," Kieran added.

She nodded. Alexia didn't care to look at him anymore. Why should she? Just when she felt so attracted to him that day, he had to ruin it by reminding her of her place.

Alexia heard Kieran groan. She could feel his eyes on her as he repeatedly breathed in and out. Eventually, he said, "Go up to your room and rest. We all have had a long day. Alexia, I'm -"

"Thank you, Alpha Kieran. I shall take my leave." She stood up and turned around without waiting for his approval. She did not care. She

did not want to care.

Alexia just... wanted to be alone.

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~Kieran~

'I hurt her. I must have hurt her,' Kieran said in his thoughts while staring at her. Since he pointed out that she was only a contract wife, she refused to look him in the eye. 'I shouldn't have yelled at her. The king didn't seem bothered.'

However, recalling the queen's earlier reaction, he knew Queen Helen disliked how Alexia had chased after the king. Kieran could only imagine what went through the queen's head.

'She still refuses to look at me,' he observed in silence. He groaned and said, "Go up to your room and rest. We all have had a long day." He breathed in and tried to express his regret. "Alexia, I'm -"

"Thank you, Alpha Kieran. I shall take my leave," she left without letting Kieran finish.

Kieran meant to atone, but she cut her off. She was in a hurry to leave his presence and did not wait for his approval. He did not know how to feel about it. He was offended, but at the same time, he felt guilty.

Guilt was not in his vocabulary. He was a ruthless alpha, but this was the first time he had to look after a wife.

"Fuck," he cursed. He raked his fingers through his hair as he faced the widow from his office. He looked at the sky and asked, "Moon Goddess, what have you done?"

Before Alexia arrived at the packhouse, Kieran was determined to make her life miserable. He meant to punish her for requesting to be wed to him. However, even before he could prove or disprove her innocence, Kieran felt strange about being around her. It was a foreign feeling; he did not want to acknowledge it.

Maintaining his gaze up to the sky, Kieran said to the Moon Goddess, "I've never had to deal with a woman in this way. I never sought a mate for this reason! Goddess, why? This is far more difficult than fighting a war! Why have you sent me this strenuous task?"

"Marriage," Kieran concluded. "I'm not cut out for this."

He growled.

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~Kieran~

"Where is she?" Kieran asked. Dark circles formed around his eyes. He was not able to sleep well for two days. "Did she forget her luna responsibilities to me?! I am leaving tomorrow, and she dare not show herself?!"

His voice raised, his eyes tightening at the thought of the past two nights. Somehow, Alexia must have guessed or thought about his probability of entering her room. On their wedding night, he tried to enter her room through the adjoining door. He simply wanted to check on her, but something else was blocking the door!

Sure, he could push the door open, but that would give away how he entered her room without her knowledge. There was no way he would give himself away! His pride would not let him.

The front door had a chain lock. Even if Kieran had the spare keys, he would not be able to pass through without alerting her.

The following day, when she was out, he entered her room and saw the dresser blocking the adjoining door. He purposely moved it, but it was the same in the evening. The dresser blocked the adjoining door again!

"Alpha, but doesn't your contract state that she should avoid you?" Jaxon had been sitting in front of his desk, listening to his badgering. He added, "What luna responsibilities do you expect her to do?"

"Right now, Alexia went with Rae to the foot of the mountains, east of our territory's border. They brought food to our patrol, exactly what a luna must do; help the pack. She is... performing her luna duties," Jaxon pointed out.

"May I give you an advice, not as your beta, alpha, but as your friend?" Jaxon asked.

Kieran looked at him, raising his chin. Somehow, he knew what his friend was about to say. He shut his eyes and hissed, saying, "Go ahead."

"Kieran, if you want to change things with Alexia, then you must... change the terms of your contract," Jaxon suggested.

A low growl escaped Kieran's lips. He thought deeply, but Jaxon jerked up from his seat just when he was about to answer. His eyes thinning, clearly mindlinking. He announced, "There is a breach in the east border! Rae and Alexia are being chased by rogues!"

Kieran's eyes widened. Rae could defend herself, but Alexia? She has yet to come of age! In a split second, he dashed out of the packhouse. He leaped into the air, his clothes tearing into pieces before landing on his paws.

'Alexia!' He mindlinked with his luna.



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