

Chapter 48

I couldn't tell you how long I walked the halls before Elise found me. It was embarrassing enough that I couldn't find my way back to my room but when she told me that I was in the wrong wing of the palace I just gave up.

She guided me back through the twists and turns of the halls and the stairs, it was like a jigsaw puzzle and I had no clue how I would get out of here.

One of these days I needed to sit down and map everything out. I knew that down the right corridor and past two hallways, down two flights of stairs and past three colorless doors was the door that led out of the palace- the one that Gabe used to get me out.

I hated to admit it but that was everything I knew and that was a piece of information that I'd keep safely tucked away until I needed it.

"Has he told you anything about tonight's ball?" Elise asked while she dried my hair. I told her that it wasn't necessary, that I could fix it myself but she insisted, stating that it'd been her job since she was a little girl. Her mother worked for the royal family and her father had been a guard. He died in service to his king and her mother got sick soon thereafter, forcing Elise to step into the role as the King's go-to. Mrs. Smith was the groundskeeper, she held the keys and the secrets while Elise was his hands-on help.

"Only that it's tradition after the Hunt but I already knew that," I said.

She dragged the brush through my drying hair and I felt the sharp bristles scraping against my skull. The beautiful ceramic back with floral print looked regal when I saw it through the mirror but it was her

haunted expression that caught my attention.

"Why do you ask?"

Elise looked up at me through the reflection.

"I want you to be careful with what you choose tonight. Our choices have a way of forming our path,"

I shivered in the chair as though my senses heard something beyond her carefully chosen words.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

Her hands froze in my hair and she dropped the brush down on the table with a wide smile masking her worry.

"I'm sorry, I'm speaking out of place. Don't think twice about it,"

She grabbed the dress hanging on the door and urged me to step out of the robe and into the regal piece of clothing in her hands.

"Let's get you dressed," she said.

How was I supposed to not think about it?

I knew that asking was futile, she wouldn't tell me anything. Her loyalties lay with Darian but I did feel like she was trying to warn me about something.

I had no idea what to expect but it felt like each day brought a new kind of pain, today it was MarryBell and Abby with Darian, I desperately wanted to know how Abby was doing but I was too afraid to ask her myself.

The dress fell to my feet and covered my heels - my back was exposed

with a crystal lining going down my spine and I ran my hands down the silk fabric while framing the question in my mind before asking it aloud.

"Have you seen Abby?" I bit my tongue as soon as I asked her.

The worst thing that could happen was Elise running back to Darian and telling him that I was being nosey.

I never again wanted to be in the position I was in with him today.

I felt powerless, more than powerless, I felt weak and forced into submission by restraint.

Elise pulled the zipper up the side of my dress and laid a soft hand on my shoulder.

"I have."

The vague tone left me craving more of an answer so I decided to take a chance.

"How was she?" Being compassionate better not get me in trouble.

"I saw her when I helped clean her wounds," Elise said quietly and looked at the bracelet in her hands.

She put it around my wrist and stared at her feet while she walked to the door.

My heart squeezed in my chest as though someone held it in a tight fist and I clenched my teeth.

She barely turned her head when she said, "We should leave. You don't want to be late for your first outing as the Lycan King's chosen mate,"

I honestly didn't care whether I was late or didn't attend at all but Darian's words echoed in my ears; Attendance is non-optional, especially for you.

I was hearing voices and sounds that these halls rarely ever heard as far as I knew. The palace was quickly filling with guests; the Alphas who were the guests of honor, one of their mates, and their right-hand man—then there were those of high stature in the Lycan Pack, people from the Dark Guard and the council, esteemed members of the Royal society and of course Darian and his brother who represented the royal family.

I followed Elise through the palace and ignored my heart beating intact with a ticking time bomb the closer we got to the ballroom. Everyone we passed on the way threw cautious glances over the room and some did a double-take when they saw me walking down.

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