

Chapter 65: The Results of My Actions

Kylorian

Well, I'd completely and totally messed that up.

Not that this was surprising. I'd been messing up a lot of things lately, so this newest version of it didn't make me want to recoil as much as some of my other mistakes had done.

Still. I couldn't believe I'd accused Raimie of... that. He'd never shown any sign of being the sort of person who would intentionally hurt another person, and he certainly wouldn't hurt someone in that specific way, but when I'd run across him and Ren on my way to visit Ivelais, my mind had jumped off of its track. For a single moment, it hadn't been *them* on that blanket, and a piece of the past had spliced into the present.

I'd still been trapped in that long-gone moment when I'd come roaring into Ren and Raimie's presence. That didn't excuse what I'd done, not in the slightest, but it made me feel less like a worm for it than I'd felt about other things lately.

Besides that, Raimie had already forgiven me. I didn't know why he'd done that—I'd have had trouble doing the same in his place—but I wasn't going to question it.

Now, I needed to find Ren so I could apologize to her, begging for her forgiveness if I must, but once that painful conversation was over, maybe I could *finally* take care of the problems that had inadvertently caused so many of my screw ups lately.

It took a while, but I eventually came across Ren in the palace, which wasn't at all where I'd expected to find her. She'd always professed a deep wariness of this building, claiming that when she was inside its black walls, it felt like the dead were looming over her head.

I could understand that. Given how gloomy the palace was—with its shiny, dark walls and sparsely placed lanterns—it certainly reminded me of a graveyard, or at least, a graveyard found anywhere but in Tiro. Most cities used a more traditional burial of the dead when compared to my home.

When I ran across her, Ren was in a random hallway in the east wing of the palace, talking to the guard Raimie always had around him. Seeing them together, I slowed down, keeping to the

shadows as I approached. I didn't want to interrupt their conversation, especially if it concerned anything I shouldn't know about, but I also needed to speak with Ren as soon as possible. Better to be nearby once she was done with the guard.

"-appreciate what you did today," she was saying as I came closer. "Seems you remembered our conversation from years ago."

Crossing his arms, Oswin said, "Of course I did. Do *you* remember everything we talked about that day?"

Flushing, Ren ducked her head, kicking the floor.

"Yes, I do," she said before fixing her gaze on Oswin. "I'm not going to cause him problems again. I know I've complicated his life simply by being near him, what with his betrothal and the coming investiture, but this time, I mean to let him make the decision about how he wants to handle this part of his life. Whatever he decides to do, I'll help him with it, even if it means I can't be in his life. I do not want to hurt him, Oswin. I promise you."

After examining Ren for a moment, the guard jerked his head in a sharp nod.

"I believe you," he said. "If you or Raimie have any trouble with resolving the mentioned issues, please come to me or my subordinates. We can help, if you want us to."

"I'll keep that in mind," Ren said. "Meanwhile, where is Raimie? He and I need to talk sometime soon."

When Oswin stiffened, already looking uncomfortable, I decided this was the best time to reveal my presence, if the two of them hadn't already known I was here. With this, I could start paying back the debt that I owed my friend.

"He and I just finished speaking, actually," I called. "He asked me to share that he'd forgotten about a task he meant to undertake, so he's leaving for Qena to do that. I'm supposed to relay his apology and his promise to find you as soon as he's back in Elisk."

Jerking her head to me, Ren narrowed her eyes before returning her attention to Oswin as if I hadn't spoken. Right. I hadn't apologized to her yet, and based off of how she'd already greeted me, I was probably in for some harsh words from her soon.

Meanwhile, the guard held my gaze for the time it took me to join the two of them, presenting nothing but neutrality to me, but I knew how much I'd probably upset him too. He'd been there when I'd *royally* fucked up. I didn't know how I could fix that piece of my mistake, though, so I focused on Ren.

Resolutely keeping her eyes on Oswin, she said, "You're not accompanying him this time?"

After a moment more of staring at me, Oswin turned to Ren.

"No. I have to make preparations for the investiture in a month's time," he said.

"Of course! That makes perfect sense," Ren said with a half-smile. "Then, who's with Raimie? I remember how utterly reckless that ridiculous man can be, so please tell me you'll send someone with him."

Oswin responded with his own smirk.

"Naturally," he drawled. "Little will be with him for his trip to Qena and back. Unless Raimie decides to ditch my subordinate, he'll have someone watching his back."

"But given how *idiotic* he can be about that sometimes, that's not guaranteed," Ren said with a sigh. "If things turn out well between us, you and I will need to have a long conversation about how I can help you and your people with convincing Raimie that it's ok to rely on others at times."

Oswin's smirk grew into a full-blown smile as he chuckled.

"I'll preemptively wish us good luck with that. Raimie's always been stubborn about asking for help," he said, "but that's for the future. I have a few things I should take care of before he leaves the palace. If you don't mind?"

"No, of course not. You should do what you must," Ren said, waving at him. "Besides, Kylorian and I have a few things to discuss. Don't we?"

On acknowledging me for the first time, Ren glared at me, positively steaming with annoyance, and seeing that, I meekly nodded. This was going to be *fun*.

"In that case."

Oswin performed the shortest bow possible to me and Ren, leaving me unsure if he'd meant that as a slight or not, but he raced off soon afterward, and I was left with an exceedingly upset woman.

Before she could get started, I threw up a hand.

"Let me say something first, all right?"

Ren might narrow her eyes, but she also gave me a tight nod.

"Everything you said after I fucked up. You were right about it all," I said. "I'm sorry that I barged in on you two like that. I know how much that reunion must have meant to you, and I thoroughly messed it up. I'm sorry for accusing Raimie of anything untoward. He didn't deserve that, and I'm sorry for implying you couldn't handle yourself. It's been years since... Josenik. I should have known better than to assume you need protection by now. You can be mad at me for as long as you want, but please know that *I* know I made a mistake. Ok?"

Ren silently watched me for a while, long enough that I was incredibly tempted to fidget, but I kept still, waiting for her judgment. After a long while of this pure torture, she let out a long sigh before

rubbing her temples.

“Ok,” she said. “Have you apologized to Raimie yet?”

Thank *Alouin* that Raimie had shown up during my conversation with Eledis. Otherwise, I’d have Ren hounding me about that for however long it took me to gather the courage to approach him.

But because he had, I got to say, “Of course. He was more gracious toward me than I have any right to, and I’m grateful for that. We still have a lot to talk about when he returns from Qena, but I think we might be good now, despite all the ways our relationship has been complicated over the last few years.”

Hearing that, Ren relaxed more fully.

“Ok,” she said once more before jabbing me in the chest. “I’m still *pissed* at you and probably will be for a little while, but I’ll get over it soon enough.”

And wasn’t that a relief to hear? Still, it left me with no idea about what else I could say to her. I stood, fully captured by this awkwardness, until Ren clicked her tongue.

“So? Didn’t you have something you were planning on doing before all this drama happened?” she said “We’re good for now, you and I. So, get going!”

Nervously laughing, I said, “I will. Just...”

Hell, I shouldn’t say this, especially given everything that had happened over the last day, but I couldn’t make myself stop.

“I know you can watch your own back, Ren, but please, be careful when getting involved with Raimie again,” I said. “I’ve learned how things went down the first time, so I don’t blame him for it anymore, and given how badly you’ve been missing him over the last two years, it seems pretty obvious that you should try again.”

No matter how much that was going to kill me.

“But I can’t stand to see you like you were after the first time your relationship broke down,” I continued. “I just... can’t. Watching you cry like that and being unable to help with it was incredibly painful, no matter that you had every right to mourn what you’d lost, in both senses.”

At the reminder of how closely Hadrion’s death and the ending of Ren’s relationship with Raimie had coincided, I managed to slam my lips closed. Hell, I shouldn’t have gone that far, especially given how much of an ass I’d been to her about it at the time, but fortunately, Ren simply half-smiled at me.

“I hear what you’re saying beneath the word bumbling you just did,” she said. “You’re worried. I get it. I promise I’ll be careful with protecting my emotional state. How about you start doing the same with yourself?”

I didn't understand what she was talking about. For the most part, I tried to stay out of anything that would be emotionally risky. Why would I need to be more protective of myself in that way?

After a beat of quiet, Ren raised an eyebrow, perhaps realizing that I didn't have any clue what she meant.

"The thing you were planning to do?" she said. "On the way to the capital, you mentioned it might help with your anxiety?"

Oh, shit. I'd actually admitted that out loud to her? Damn.

Grimacing, I said, "I take your point. Thank you, Ren. I'll see you later?"

"I'll be somewhere around here for the rest of the day," she said, "and from what I understand, we're staying at the same inn tonight, so yes. I'll see you there."

I badly wanted to hug Ren and release the leftover tension hanging between us, but she'd said she was still upset with me. I didn't want to make her more uncomfortable right now, so before I turned to go, I only smiled at her. Then, I was heading down the palace's hallways, hoping to reach its exits as soon as I could. Ren's anxiety about this place seemed to have affected me today as well.

Or maybe that was the general state of anxiety I'd been dealing with since conceding in the contest for the throne. My head was throbbing something fierce right now, but considering how constant that pain had been over the last two years, I'd gradually learned to deal with it when it came around, or at least, I'd learned how to deal with it over short periods of time.

The solution for it lay in my next destination.

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