

# Chapter 77: Consequences

## Kylorian

Around the corner and at the end of the hall, I waited with my back pressed into resin-coated obsidian and listened as Tanwadur's roaring voice echoed from Raimie's resting place. He hadn't wasted much time getting here, but I'd still spent every moment of it waiting for him with frayed nerves.

When I'd heard him coming, I'd plastered myself far too closely to the wall, feeling its rough edges dig into my back as I futilely tried to merge with it. It would have been so much easier to walk away, to maybe find Ren in the hope that she would tolerate my presence, but I *needed* to be here. I *needed* to know when it was truly over. To ensure Raimie was keeping his word, even if I already knew he would.

Tanwadur's echoing voice fell silent, turning the hall dangerously quiet. I itched to check on Raimie, making sure my father hadn't hurt him in his vulnerable state.

Fortunately, the guard, Dath, did that for me. I heard a door creak open.

"Is everything all right in here?" Dath stiffly said.

I had to strain my ears to hear Raimie's reply.

"Everything is fine. Is that not right, Tanwadur?"

I didn't bother to hear how my father answered that question, too busy reveling in relief to care. Their conversation seemed finished, and Raimie was safe. I could go. I walked away, surprised by how easy that had been to do.

Was this it? Was I finally free of... *him*?

"Kylorian!"

Of course, as soon as I'd considered that forbidden thought, *he* showed up to ruin the beginning of my cautious celebration.

I stopped in place, internally hiding everything inside. Once I'd schooled my face into pleasant neutrality, I turned toward Tanwadur.

He was at the corner I'd just left, which made me wince. I'd gotten pretty far from there—the turn onto another corner was right beside me—but not far enough. Of course I hadn't. Luck had never been on my side, and I couldn't expect that to change today, no matter how well it had been going before now.

"Hello, Dury!" I said. "How unexpected to meet you here."

Perhaps I could conceal the fact that I'd been listening in, of a sort, to his conversation with Raimie.

For a moment, Tanwadur looked uncertain. I could see the remnants of murder, of at least my emotional wellbeing, in his eyes, but it quickly cleared away into a half-smile, as if he'd changed tactics.

"I just heard of your good fortune!" he said in a jolly voice as he strode to join me. "Minister of Public Safety? I knew you had something special in you, my boy!"

And I froze. This was *not* what I'd expected from Tanwadur so soon after hearing about the death of his dreams for me.

"Thank you," I carefully said.

Smiling, Tanwadur slapped a hand on my shoulder, which along with his forward momentum, jostled me into a walk at his side.

"Would you get a drink to celebrate with me?" he asked. "I've learned how busy you'll soon be. If I won't be seeing you for a while, I'd at least like to celebrate your change of prospects with you before we're apart for so long."

I wasn't sure how to respond. After speaking with Raimie and acquiring his help, I hadn't intended to speak with Tanwadur again, not for a long while at least, but I wasn't sure how to avoid it now. Plus...

Plus. Much as I'd caught the warning glimpse of his anger just now, I couldn't help hungering for a last moment with him when he was in a good mood. When he actually acted like a father.

And if we were in a public place, he'd have much less of a chance to take off his pleasant, public mask.

"Sure," I said. "The inn I'm staying at has a decent selection of food and drinks in their kitchen. Why don't we go there?"

Tanwadur jovially chuckled.

"That sounds good," he said. "Lead the way!"

My father fell silent as he followed me to our destination, which put me on edge. Only the distracted smile on his face kept me from muttering an excuse and heading right back into the

palace, where he soon wouldn't be welcome.

When we entered the inn, Tanwadur curiously glanced around before spotting the rather obvious entrance to the dining room. Then, he hustled that way with me trailing him. He got us seats at the bar without my help while one of the inn's waitstaff hurried to take his order.

She'd already bustled herself to the other end of the bar by the time I'd sat down.

Turning to face me, Tanwadur said, "So. How've things been since your last visit to Tiro? The last I'd heard, you were on your way to Sotchal to try gaining the town's support, and now, you've thrown your weight in with the upstart. How did that happen?"

Fortunately, while his expression turned bitter at the mention of Raimie, he still seemed more amused than anything, which was a minor miracle. Because of that and our location, I decided to be truthful with him. Mostly. I still tailored my responses to this and all his subsequent questions so that they wouldn't greatly upset him.

Sharing the events of my past few months got us through our first round of drinks, and by the time I was nearly done, the alcohol had already made its way through me. With an excuse, I headed for the kitchen's small privy while Tanwadur ordered us another round.

This was going shockingly well, which both scared and elated me. I kept waiting for Tanwadur's soft criticism, all the things he could get away with saying in public, to materialize, but... it hadn't. Tanwadur had politely listened to my tale, asked questions when appropriate, and to this point, had seemed relatively supportive of my choices.

As I headed back to my seat, I tentatively let myself hope that I could end things with my father on a positive note.

He handed me a full mug of brandy when I sat down beside him.

"From what you've told me, you did well these last few weeks," Tanwadur said, "and while I hate that you've given up the fight against the upstart, I also understand why you did it. So. I propose a toast."

He raised his own mug into the air.

"To you. You've accomplished less than I'd have liked, but becoming a Minister is still worthy of praise," he said. "I'm proud to have raised you into the man you've become."

He lowered his mug to his lips, raising an eyebrow when I hesitated to join him. Honestly, the toast he'd begun had sounded more like an ode of praise to him and his... *interesting* approach of child rearing than anything else.

But the happiness and appreciation on his face seemed genuine, and I really didn't want that to change.

So, I lifted my drink and took a big gulp of it, grateful that Tanwadur had catered to my tastes today instead of forcing his preferred beverage down my throat. The brandy tasted wonderful, heating my body to its extremities as soon as it had hit my stomach.

Tanwadur watched me the whole time before taking his own sip. Setting his cup down, he lumbered to his feet.

“My turn to relieve my bladder,” he muttered before turning away.

I leaned on the bar top, cupping my drink. How much longer should I stay here before begging off for the night? Staying in Tanwadur’s presence was always a risk, especially when alcohol was involved, and I was, at the least, satisfied with where this last conversation had landed us.

At the same time, if I tried to escape before Tanwadur was done with me, it might provoke one of his temper tantrums.

I should leave now, while he was preoccupied. It wasn’t like he knew which of the rooms in this inn was mine, and I could always lock its door behind me.

I waved for the barkeep’s attention, but as I started getting to my feet, a wave of intense exhaustion swept over me, and I crashed back into my seat, barely steadying myself before I could collapse to the floor.

What... the... fuck? I couldn’t be *that* drunk! I’d only finished off a shallow mug of brandy, which was nothing compared to the seemingly endless rounds of the past. Besides that, I usually became broody and withdrawn when drunk, not so light that I’d laugh at the slightest of humor, like I felt now.

Whatever. This reaction was unusual, sure, but I couldn’t deny that it felt *nice*. Why not enjoy it while it lasted? I so rarely felt this...

Tanwadur’s heavy drop into the seat beside me jerked me upright from a slow slump to the wooden counter in front of me. Alouin. Had I been about to nod off? *Here?* In such a public, unprotected place?

“Are you all right?”

Slowly blinking, I stared at the woman who’d appeared in front of me. What had she just asked? And why did she look so worried?

“Ah, that last drink must have hit him hard. I’d hoped we wouldn’t meet his limit so soon but... oh well. I should get him to his room before he falls asleep.”

The woman narrowed her eyes at... my father. What... was he doing here? Had he found out where I was staying? That was...

Oh no. Right. We’d come here to share a drink.

“And you are?” the woman drawled.

“His father,” Tanwadur said with a half-smile. “I appreciate your concern for my son, truly, but just this once, it isn’t warranted.”

The strange woman suspiciously stared at him for a moment more, which made me want to cringe. Didn’t she know doing that could start *problems*?

“All right,” she slowly said. “You two have a nice evening.”

She turned to the customers who’d appeared on the other side of me, which made me stare at them. How had they gotten so close without me noticing them? Magic?

“We will! Thank you.”

Someone grabbed my arm, and I barely noticed that it was Tanwadur in time to contain my flinch. Something distinctly unpleasant cascaded through me from head to toe as he flung my arm around his shoulder and pressed a hand to my side, but I swept the feeling aside. I was too tired to indulge it or figure out where it had come from.

We made our way out of the dining room and staggered up the stairs to the inn’s rented rooms. Tanwadur was quiet at my side. He didn’t complain, even when I tripped over my own feet and smooshed him into a wall. He simply propped me back upright and tugged me along, almost insistently.

Then, we were in my room. He tossed me onto the bed and stepped back. I barely felt his eyes on me through my drowsy haze, which felt... wrong. Why did this feel wrong? My danger sense...

Oh, who cared? I was certainly too tired to.

When I woke up, my body was both incredibly relaxed and hurting in a distinctly familiar way. I clenched my eyes more tightly closed and ground my teeth together.

It seemed Tanwadur had decided to gift me with his version of a *reward*.

“Shit,” I hissed into the tense quiet.

When no one reprimanded me for my less than polite verbiage, I knew I was alone. Thank Alouin.

It took a while, but soon enough, I felt the release of hot tears as they slid sideways over my face. I stayed there for... I didn’t know how long, just feeling. It was so much. Too much.

But I couldn’t shut it down. Not again. Over the years we’d worked together, Ivelais had taught me how much worse avoiding this pain would make me feel in the long run.

I needed to see my friend.

Getting out of bed was a long process of starts and stops. Cleaning myself up was... humiliating. I didn't think it could be anything else.

I found a set of clothes with the longest and loosest of sleeves and pant legs and tugged them on before leaving the room.

The barkeep from last night was cleaning the dining room when I passed its entrance, presumably finishing her shift. She took one look at my stiff and wobbly gait before jerking away with her shoulders rising to her ears. I vaguely remembered her concern for my unseemly state last night and knew that now, she knew.

Great. I'd have to avoid her until I found different accommodations.

The shame of that... I couldn't handle it. I sank into the safety of the fog in my mind, watching with interest as my body automatically followed Ivelais's signs to their hideout once more.

I stopped in the empty house's threshold. I didn't know how long I stayed there, swaying in place with my gaze absently skipping over and then, returning to different parts of my surroundings.

Ivelais found me there. Carefully, they maneuvered into my field of view, and my focus snapped onto them.

Once they'd noticed that, they cautiously asked, "What happened?"

Dutifully, I opened my mouth to answer.

"He..."

My words ran out. Understanding dawned in Ivelais's eyes. I looked away.

"Ok," they whispered.

In incremental movements, they took my hand and tugged me inside. We ended up in the room from weeks ago, when we'd last met. When I winced while lowering myself into a chair, Ivelais sucked in a sharp breath, as if she hadn't expected *that*.

I couldn't take it.

"I met with Raimie yesterday. He agreed to help me," I said. "He met with... *him* to deliver an ultimatum. I left the palace with... *him* for a drink. I don't remember much else of the night. Just snippets."

"Oh, Kylorian."

Ivelais had been so gentle and soft with that exclamation. I turned to them, taking in the concern plainly written on their face.

“What do you need?” they asked.

That stopped the beginning of an incipient spiral. The only other people who’d asked me questions like that were my siblings: Hadrion, long gone, and- and Ren. Ren, who always centered me. Ren, who was safety. Ren, who I loved.

*“You’re in WHAT with your sister?” he roars.*

*“She’s not-! It isn’t-!” I stutter.*

*He advances and snatches my arms.*

*“Not her. Never her,” he growls. “Only I can make you feel that was.”*

Fuck. No. No, no, no.

He’d... he’d said that last night. I didn’t- I *couldn’t*-

“Kylorian?” a much gentler voice asked.

Ivelais. They weren’t *her* but maybe... And if they were amenable...

“I need to change the narrative,” I said. “I need to take back what *he* just took. *He... he* told me...”

Alouin, this was hard to say.

Ivelais reached over to squeeze my hand, which made one corner of my mouth quirk. I didn’t deserve them.

*“He said that only he could make me... feel. Certain ways,”* I made myself say. “I need to know that *he’s* wrong. I need to wash away what *he* did. Something that should have been good.”

I’d thought maybe we could part ways, having found some sort of understanding. I thought that it was *over*.

Ivelais pulled their hand away. I stopped talking, knowing I’d just made a mess again.

The sound of rustling fabric jerked my head back toward them. Holding my gaze, Ivelais dropped their removed tunic onto the floor.

“I can absolutely help with that,” they said.

I let out a relieved sigh, even as they started crawling onto my lap.

“You’re sure about-?” I started.

They cut me off with a kiss.

“Stop thinking,” they whispered against my lips. “Just feel and do. Erase the crime that your father has committed against you.”

By the void, they were... everything.

I did as they'd said.

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