

# Chapter 91: Left in the Dark

## Kylorian

I looked down at the woman on the ground in front of me, who was struggling to breathe through the hole I'd put in her lung, and everything in me screamed white-hot pain and lurched-

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*The world is fuzz. I'm floating... somewhere. In the back of my mind? Outside of it? Just like every time HE touched me.*

*I watch Ivelais talk with their mortal enemy, a tall man with a being of shadow flickering beside him.*

*"If I do this, you'll owe me, more than you already do," he says. "I can't perform one of my ordered functions in the coming chaos, as it requires me to be in two places at once."*

*He rolls his eyes, perhaps annoyed by such contradictory orders. Even I know better than to try getting a subordinate to double themselves. I think. It's hard to be truly logical right...*

*"Maybe I should be grateful. The first of those tasks will involve me meeting my long-estranged son," Ivelais' mortal enemy says before dismissively waving a hand. "As for the other? I will pass it off to you."*

*Ivelais bows, gritting their teeth.*

*"I accept the burden, my better," they hiss.*

*Their mortal enemy cuts a hand through the air between the two.*

*"Don't call me that," he coldly says.*

*Then, he turns, inspecting something at his feet. Dark emptiness bubbles down his arms to make a black pool in his hands and I-*

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When I woke up the day after the Anniversary Ball, dreams clung to me, making it difficult to tell what was real and what were nighttime fantasies. Something felt... wrong. Something besides...

Wait. Why was I still in the palace?

I shot upright on the cot in my office, quickly scanning the room, but everything looked... fine. Nothing was out of place, exactly as it had been last night. Why had I thought it wouldn't be? What was-?

"Kylorian."

Freezing, I glanced over my shoulder, frowning when I saw Ivelais smooshed between my back and the wall.

Lying in my cot. In the palace.

"What are you *doing here*?" I hissed. "How did you get in? Did anyone see-?"

Sleepily, Ivelais waved a hand at me.

"Calm down," they yawned. "I snuck in when you came to get me last night. With the celebration as a distraction, no one noticed a single, hooded person in the crowd. Don't you remember?"

"I..."

Wincing, I shut my eyes, rubbing them. My head was killing me, a sign of all the alcohol I'd downed during last night's fun, and I couldn't remember much through the haze cast over the time I'd spent in its embrace.

Alouin, I must have drunk *a lot*. Usually, it took more to get me into that blacked-out state. I hadn't achieved it since... since the last time I'd seen my adoptive father.

"My memory is a little patchy right now," I admitted. "Why did I get you? Did something happen last night?"

Ivelais didn't respond, staying quiet for so long that I peeked at them from between my fingers. They were looking at me with a frown, concern pinching their eyes.

"You hurt someone, Ky. Bad!"

Their words faded out, lost to the pain blooming behind my eyes. With a grunt, I closed them again. Hell, this hangover was worse than usual for me.

When Ivelais stopped speaking, I said, "Fine, fine. Is there anything I should take care of? Any problems that still need solving?"

For several long moments, Ivelais' look of concern deepened. I could literally see their racing thoughts reflected through their eyes, but then, they closed off, going blank.

"No. I took care of it," they said. "All parties involved have been satisfied or... removed. You don't need to worry about a thing."

That... had felt like a lie.

Cocking my head at them, I tried to figure out why they'd keep me in the dark about the resolution to whatever disaster I'd caused last night. I knew it must have been bad. Alcohol helped both me and them with our inner monsters, but sometimes, those monsters more fully came out to play, especially when I was the one under the influence. I'd been in quite a few altercations since moving to Elisk, some of which had almost landed me in one of my own jail cells. Fortunately, nothing had gone that far.

Yet.

Had last night's disaster finally tipped the scales out of my favor?

I didn't know if Ivelais saw my doubt, but whether they had or not, they reached over, pulling one hand off of my face.

"Seriously, Ky. We're good," they solemnly said. "You know I'll keep you safe, right? Just like you do for me."

"Yes..." I drawled.

Of course they would. But could I trust them to accurately assess the severity of whatever I'd done? They'd gotten worse since moving in with me, especially with how our monsters fed off of each other. Perhaps their perception of morality had shifted alongside the worsening of their Kiraak symptoms.

"Then, you should know that I'd tell you if last night's activities could get you hurt," Ivelais said, breaking into my thoughts. "It wasn't pretty, Ky. I'll give you that. But I don't think it will come back to bite you or me. I asked for a favor from... an old acquaintance. He's vicious but thorough when cleaning up after himself or his friends. The best I know."

For a moment, I could only gape at Ivelais.

"A Kiraak?" I hesitantly asked.

Because who else could they be referencing? And what had gone so badly last night that we'd gotten one of *them* involved?

Shrugging one shoulder, Ivelais said, "More or less. Please, Ky. I need you to trust me. I think... I think this is one of those times where if you push, it'll make your inner monster worse."

That shut me up, quickly silencing any other questions I might have asked. Ivelais had always been good at sensing when I was about to reach a meltdown.

Still.

"Hell, Ivelais. A Kiraak? In the palace?" I said under my breath.

Here. Near Raimie. Near *Ren*, who was *with child*.

Because of something I'd done.

I consigned my face to my hands again.

"This isn't working anymore," I said, waving between us.

When Ivelais failed to respond, I reviewed what I'd just said, hurrying to follow up with.

"I don't mean *us*."

Reaching for Ivelais, I clutched their hand tightly.

"We are still more than good," I said with a slight smile at them.

That grin quickly faded away, though.

"I mean our efforts to keep ourselves under control," I said. "It's not working. Honestly, I don't think they've ever worked. They've just kept our eventual collapses delayed."

One corner of Ivelais' mouth quirked upward.

"I *may* have been saying that for a while now," they said.

Which only made me groan.

Quiet fell, stretching between us where the tension had lain not long ago. It quickly gained a toehold once more, ratcheting in intensity until I couldn't hold it in any longer.

Smacking my hands to my thighs, I snarled, "Damn *him*. Damn *him* for everything *he* ever did to me. If *he'd* only acted the way *he* should have, I wouldn't have to deal with all of this bullshit, but no. *He* just had to have a piece of me."

Somehow, I kept back the scream I wanted to unleash alongside those words. I kept my jaw locked, staring into nothing, until Ivelais' face came into focus again. They looked stricken, and I wondered if I'd shocked them by speaking the smallest piece of my trauma aloud. In the past, we'd always danced around it.

They quickly relieved that worry, though.

"Ky..." they whispered. "Who do you think *he* is? Who do you think has caused this bloodlust? Your craving for atrocities that you'd usually never desire?"

That briefly startled me. I'd always thought they knew who I meant when saying *that word* with that particular inflection. Apparently not.

"Tanwadur, of course," I said.

With widening eyes, Ivelais drew back. They bit their lip, narrowing their eyes at me for an uncomfortable moment, but then, intensity drew deep lines over their features. They grabbed my hand, squeezing it.

“You need to talk to King Raimie,” they said. “Now.”

And... I was lost. What did Raimie have to do with their last question?

“Why-?” I started.

Ivelais cut me off with a painful squeeze of my hand.

“For me,” they said. “I need you to bring him here. I need you to show him the black under my skin. I think if we try that approach, never outright *telling him* what we need from him, that we'll finally get his help. Because it's become quite clear that you can't ask it of him.”

When I sharply inhaled, they lifted their free hand.

“I don't mean that you're too weak to. I mean that something is stopping you from doing it,” they said. “And we badly need his help. We have for a while. So, go. Talk to him now, while we're both in his palace. Bring him to a room I'm trapped in, unable to leave until much later tonight. Open his eyes to the trouble brewing in the center of his court. If we're lucky... if he's as merciful as you've always made him out to be, maybe it won't be too late. Maybe he'll help us both, and we can...”

I waited for them to continue that thought, but they seemed stuck on it.

“We can what?” I said, hoping to prompt them.

Ivelais shook their head.

“That'll come later,” they said. “Can you do as I've asked?”

“Yes. That'll be no trouble at all,” I absently said.

I was a little taken aback by their intensity. Sure, I may have accepted that Ivelais and I needed to change our approach when dealing with our inner monsters, but they seemed almost desperate to test this new idea, although maybe that wasn't so shocking. After all, Raimie could help Ivelais, ridding them of the Corruption under their skin. They'd be human again, unafflicted by that dark power's temptations.

But what about me? I'd already gotten Raimie's help with my father. I wasn't sure what else he could do to quell my inner monster.

Pushing on the hand they held, Ivelais snapped, “Now, Ky!”

“Right.”

I scrambled to my feet, heading for the door. When I reached it, I looked back at Ivelais with concern, but they only stared at me with the same pleading in their voice now on their face.

I hurried away.

I searched the palace for my quarry, spending far too much time doing it before looking for the next best thing.

Ren was holding court today, something she sometimes did for her husband when he was busy. When she broke the proceedings for the midday meal, I trapped my adoptive sister in a corner, asking about Raimie. It seemed odd that I couldn't find him this morning. As a minister, I shouldn't have needed so many hours to find my superior.

When I asked, Ren huffed, rolled her eyes, and gave me the unfortunate truth.

Raimie wasn't here. He'd left at sunrise, apparently on his way to Nephiron.

Ivelais and I had lost our chance.

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