

"You're going to be fine." Rory's conviction in Sebastian's ability to conquer anything still baffled the young king.

"Have you ever, in your life, ever actually seen the *real* me?" he asked with a laugh. All around them, a handful of dressers and footmen circled, seeming to both take up all the space they moved through, and yet somehow seeming completely unobtrusive. "There's every possibility that I might alienate my entire nation," he said with a wry chuckle. The dresser tugged on this shoulder, forcing the fine fabric of his suit jacket to lie flat.

"There's a reason you aren't doing this live," Rory joked. "That way if you piss everyone off, we can get rid of it *before* it starts a revolution." He laughed heartily.

"Not funny," the King said as he glanced up at the massive tree that towered above them all in the hall at Windsor Castle. "It's an absurd tree," he huffed.

"It's half the size of the one they set up at Sandringham."

Sebastian rolled his eyes. "We aren't Christmasing here," he said, as if that explained it. "We're Christmasing at Sandringham."

"Yes," Rory agreed. "But not everyone is. You do know that not everyone who works for you just follows you around, right?" he meant it as a joke. "Anyway, the sooner you get this wrapped up, the sooner we can get down to Sandringham." He waved off one of the dressers and made adjustments to Sebastian's suit himself. "Anne's probably already waiting at the platform for us with her beau." He buttoned the middle button of Sebastian's double breasted jacket and ran his hands down the front of the King's chest, smoothing the fabric. "C'mon," he said with a kiss, "go do the thing."

Sebastian nodded and moved forward.

A desk had been set up in front of the tree, with several photos on it, facing the camera, instead of facing Sebastian; photos of Anne, and his mother, Rory, and Queen Victoria II and of course, his late father. His favorite was a photo from last Christmas at Sandringham House, hours before Rory's family had arrived. Rory, Sebastian, his grand parents, his sister and mother all posed around the King, King George, Sebastian's father, that is. They all wore wide smiles, and it was the only family portrait that had both his father and his fiancé in it. Sebastian chuckled a little as his eyes settled on each of the smiling faces.

"Whenever you're ready, Your Majesty."

Sebastian gave a subtle nod, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes, he began.

"Sitting here, in this magnificent hall in Windsor Castle, I am reminded of the centuries of members of my own family who have walked these same halls and passages. Here in Windsor, not too far from where I sit now, lies, forever at rest, both my beloved Papa, and my Gran. The last two years have been a period of great upheaval in my family, as it has undoubtedly been for all of you. For decades, we have all heard the kind, steady, reassuring voice of my great grandmother, our late queen, and I would be lying to you today if I were to tell you that I did not wish for her words and reassurances now.

"Christmas is a time of memories and celebrations. This year we remember not just my Papa, who we lost so abruptly, but we remember so many more. My heart immediately recalls the thousands that I met during my walkabouts. In those darkest days, the incredible outpouring

of affection and condolences I received, along with the rest of my family, provided me the strength to face the days that were yet to come and the days *still* to come.

"And despite the absence of the familiar laugh of my father at our Christmas this year, I have no doubt that the Christmas my family celebrates will be filled with joy.

"Christmas provides us with a moment to slow down, to reflect on what has come throughout the preceding year, and indeed there is much to reflect upon. Not all of it has been as tragic as the passing of my Papa.

"We also remember the celebration and joy I was able to share with you all around my engagement to the Duke of Cambridge. And I look forward, in the year to come, to my wedding.

"In the days to come, we will be reminded that life is ever changing. The United Kingdom and indeed the world, is not the same it was when my great grandmother became Queen, and in some ways, I embody that change. While we may often miss how things were or look with fondness on our memories of days gone by, we must also remember that change can be good. Change can indeed, be healing, and the greatest, most healing changes, often go unnoticed at their start.

"Holy scripture tells us that the most joyous and world altering change of all happened in the most unnoticeable of ways, starting in the feeding trough of farm animals, yet from those humble beginnings, grew everlasting light and life and formed the bedrock of faith for so many, my great grandmother's, my fathers, and my own included.

"I am certain that someone, somewhere, today, will remark that Christmas is a time for children. Perhaps however, that's an oversimplification of it. Christmas is indeed a time for children, but it also speaks to the child within all of us. Far too often, when we, as adults, become distracted and weighted with worry, we fail to see joy in the simple things. Joy that children do not miss. Let us take this season to allow the children within us each to take time and take joy in the simple things. After all, it is with the birth of a child, that we see new dawns and are met with endless potential.

"My great grandmother was particularly fond of what the carol reminds us, that 'the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.'

"While it is no question that Christmas is, of course, a Christian celebration, that search for light, for a torch to shine light in the darkness and for that light that overcomes darkness, speaks to people of all faiths and of none.

"It is that search and hope for light, whatever you take that to mean, that drives us together in community. I think specifically of those wonderfully kind people who so generously give food or donation, or that most precious of all treasure, their time, to support those in need in communities around them, and around the world. It is in those people, we see light clearing away darkness.

"Other translations of scripture say 'The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness understands it not.' I personally prefer this particular reading. It tells us that there will be darkness, but that within that darkness, is light, and our hope comes because darkness cannot comprehend the nature of light—the nature of joy, and therefore, cannot claim victory. The lesson there being that our hope and our own victory comes with the knowledge that even in that darkness, the light shines. In this dark world, we can bamboozle the evil and gloom by being that light for each other.

"So whatever faith you have or if you have none, it is in this life giving light and with the true humility that lies in service to others that I believe we can find hope for the future. Let us celebrate that light together. And let us cherish it always. With all my heart, I wish each of you a truly happy Christmas filled with peace, love, joy, and everlasting light."

The light at the top of the camera clicked off and Sebastian deflated a little.

"Nicely done, Your Majesty," Callum said as he took steps toward the Palace communications director. "One moment while we check, sir."

Rory stepped up and placed his hand on Sebastian's shoulder. The blond nuzzled lightly against it. "One take. How the hell do you do that?" he asked with a smile. "And where the hell *is* your speech?" He glanced around. "You don't even have a teleprompter!"

"I memorized it."

Rory squeezed Sebastian's shoulder, but before he could do anything else, Callum spoke up.

"Excellent job, sir. We won't need any reshoots."

Sebastian nodded and smiled. "That's good. We can get over to the train soon. That'll make Anne happy."

Callum nodded. "Yes sir. We'll actually be a bit ahead of schedule."

Rory leaned down and whispered into Sebastian's ear. "You really are something else. Something amazing, you know that, right, my love?"

An electric chill thrummed along the blond's spine and he blushed. "I love you."

"I love you," Rory replied, claiming the King's lips with his own.

The two kissed for a moment before the Private Secretary cleared his throat. "Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness. We should head for the train."