

A Kingdom Discovered Bonus Scene

By Deborah Grace White

Timeline: immediately after Chapter Six

Jocelyn

Jocelyn was barely aware of her surroundings as she crossed the battlements, leaving Heath looking out at the vista. She passed back into the castle, her thoughts far away and her emotions churning uncomfortably. Long practice allowed her to maintain a calm expression and a steady, unhurried stride in spite of the turmoil within. She smiled serenely at a servant, who bobbed a curtsy as Jocelyn turned down a corridor, heading once again for the privacy of her own suite.

Heath's face, stressed and drawn, looking too old for his nineteen years, flashed before her sight. She remembered that feeling all too well—hiding something from everyone around you, afraid of how others would see you if they knew the truth, knowing your silence was hurting the ones you cared about. Not seeing any way out.

It was probably for the best that, unlike she once had, he didn't realize the potential danger he was in from the dragons. But if her guess was correct, Rekavidur had realized it. She drew a breath. What had her poor grandson stumbled into?

She reached the sanctuary of her own rooms without having to speak to anyone, and sank down in her receiving room in front of the now-cold pot of tea.

"Joss, did I hear you talking to someone? Don't tell me you've been out and back already." Her husband's cheerful voice greeted her from the doorway to his adjoining suite, and he strolled into the room looking still ruffled from sleep. "Who were you—" He broke off, catching sight of her face. "Jocelyn? Is everything all right?"

He hurried over to kneel in front of her, taking one of her hands between his. She stared for a moment at his familiar hands. The skin was lined with deep grooves now, but his grip was still firm and steady. So many decades had passed, but she could remember as if it was yesterday the way he'd steadied her when she'd been afraid of her very self, and helped her recognize the strength she had within. She had long ago mastered both her power and her fear of it, and she had total faith in herself now. Yet still, he was her rock.

She drew a deep breath, meeting his eyes. "Kincaid, I'm worried. I think Heath is in trouble."

Kincaid stood, then lowered himself onto the settle beside her, grunting as his joints clicked. "So I've gathered. But he seems all right to me. Surely it's Percival we should be worried about."

Jocelyn sighed. "I'm worried about him, too," she admitted. "But Heath's in a bigger mess than he is."

Kincaid frowned, taking her hand again. "Tell me."

"We've just been having a talk. He told me what happened to him, and why he and his dragon aren't speaking." A shiver passed over her. "Kincaid, do you remember what Elddreki said to us once about mermaids?"

Kincaid scrunched his face slightly, gazing out the window as if looking back across the years. "When he was talking about forfeited magic and abominations, wasn't it? Did he actually use the word mermaid, though?"

Jocelyn frowned in her own effort of memory. "Maybe we were the ones to use the word," she said. "I can't remember. It's so long ago."

"What does this have to do with Heath?" Kincaid pressed.

Jocelyn's gaze passed to her husband, returning to the present. "I don't want to betray his confidence, even to you," she said slowly.

Kincaid settled his shoulders more comfortably against the settle. "I'm a pretty safe depository, my dear."

"True," smiled Jocelyn. She sighed again. "Well, I won't go into the details, but they're still out there. And Heath and Rekavidur found them."

"What, mermaids?" Kincaid sat up straight, his eyes widening.

Jocelyn nodded slowly.

"They're actually real?"

Jocelyn was still nodding. "And unless I'm much mistaken, Heath has become a little... entangled."

Kincaid's mouth was as wide as his eyes now. "Entangled? Then these mermaids can't be... they must be intelligent creatures, like humans. I mean, it's not exactly like a unicorn, is it?"

"No, it certainly doesn't add up," Jocelyn agreed. Her voice dropped, as she mused to herself. "I wonder if I should contact Elddreki."

"Too risky," Kincaid said, and Jocelyn was inclined to agree.

"Hopefully he's not watching us now," she said ruefully.

"He will be if you keep saying his name," Kincaid chuckled. He stood slowly and stretched his limbs with a grimace. "When did we get old, Joss?"

"Gradually, over the last several decades," Jocelyn answered dryly.

Something in her tone made her husband pause, and his eyes were serious as he looked down at her. "Heath will be all right, you'll see."

She shook her head slowly. "It's not just the mermaids. He's in such a hard position." She looked apologetically up into his eyes. "Do you know, I'm almost dreading going home? I'm sorry to say it, but..."

"Don't apologize," Kincaid said softly, offering her his hand. She took it, letting him pull her to her feet. "I know things are a bit messy in Bryford at the moment, but we'll sort it out. Matlock is a good boy."

"He's not his father, Kincaid," Jocelyn said seriously.

“I know that,” responded Kincaid cheerfully. “He’s *easier* to work with, if anything. Poor old Ormond had a good heart, but he was about as stuffy as they come.” He got a wistful look in his eye, and Jocelyn gave him a moment, knowing that for all his talk, he missed his brother, who had been five years older, and had died almost a decade previously.

“That’s not what I mean, Kincaid,” she said, once she thought she’d indulged his nostalgia enough. “I mean his loyalty to you isn’t as strong as Ormond’s was. And the loyalty of his offspring to ours...well, it’s getting a lot more remote than siblings, isn’t it?”

Kincaid bent a troubled eye upon her. “You think Matlock might turn on our family? Or if not him, Lachlan?”

“I hope not,” said Jocelyn seriously. “But I don’t think we can afford to take anything for granted.” She let out a long breath that was almost a groan. “I always knew, deep down, that my power was going to cause fractures in the Valorian court.” She threw him a rueful look. “Is it cowardly of me that I just hoped it would be after our lifetime?”

Kincaid laid a hand on her shoulder. “This isn’t your fault, Joss. And having your magic pass to the generations to come is worth the struggle that has to happen to get everyone used to the idea.”

“Yes, I know it is,” she said. “But it just seems so much simpler here in Kyona.”

“Well, it’s too late to wring your hands about that now,” sad Kincaid wickedly. “If you wanted Valoria’s throne to have magic like Kyona’s, you should’ve married Ormond like you were supposed to.”

The elderly princess gave a snort that would have shocked the court, but only made her husband grin. “Poor Ormond. We would each have driven the other into an early grave.”

“I would have *put* Ormond in an early grave before I let him marry you,” Kincaid said staunchly, and Jocelyn couldn’t help laughing at her husband’s pose. His hand had drifted, as if on reflex, toward the hilt of a sword which was obviously not there, since he’d just risen, and in any event, was too old to be fighting.

“You look very noble, for someone talking about regicide,” she pointed out.

Kincaid chuckled. “I suppose I couldn’t have done the old fellow an injury, really. But I wouldn’t have let it happen, all the same.”

“I know you wouldn’t.” Jocelyn stepped forward, leaning against him as his arms wrapped around her. She closed her eyes, breathing in the comfort of his familiar scent. The posture was easy, unconscious, as though their two forms had molded together, and they no longer had to think about where to place their limbs. Kincaid’s arms weren’t as strong as they’d once been, but they were still strong enough to make her feel safe.

“I think I’ll speak to Eamon about it,” she said, stepping back.

“About what?” Kincaid asked blankly.

“About the trouble with the power-wielders in Valoria. Their situation here is different, of course, but he might have some helpful insights.” She tilted her head to the side. “Want to join me?”

“All right,” said Kincaid easily, stretching his back and wincing slightly. “As long as I don’t have to enter into deep discussions on an empty stomach.”

Accordingly, the two of them sat down a half hour later to share a private breakfast with Kyona’s monarchs.

“This is pleasant,” commented Queen Luciana, as she dug her spoon into an egg. “Why don’t we do this more often when you’re here?”

“Because not all of us are at our most social first thing in the morning,” said Kincaid, his usual cheerful demeanor giving the lie to his words. “Only you and Joss.”

“Lucy’s not social in the mornings,” Jocelyn corrected him with a straight face. “She’s just at her fighting best.”

“In another lifetime maybe,” smiled the queen. “I don’t do much fighting anymore.”

“Now you just live vicariously through our grandchildren,” Eamon scolded his wife. “Liesl can take the blame all she likes, but don’t think I don’t know perfectly well that it was your idea for her to challenge her suitors to combat as a means of testing their worth.”

“Well, it’s a time-honored tradition for aspiring suitors to have to fight to prove their love,” said Lucy wickedly.

Eamon shook his head, but the smile tugging at the corner of his mouth betrayed him. “Usually against each other, my dear, not against the lady.”

“Well, I don’t see that there’s any need to speak of blame,” Jocelyn said, coming to her friend’s defense. “It’s not Lucy’s fault that Princess Liesl hasn’t yet had a suitor who was able to prove himself to her satisfaction.”

“Thank you, Joss,” said Queen Luciana with dignity.

“Joss has the same problem as you, Lucy,” Kincaid jumped in unexpectedly. “She’s living through our grandchildren too, but it’s not as fun as your vicarious sparring.”

“What do you mean?” Eamon spoke to Kincaid, but his eyes were on his sister. Jocelyn could tell from the crease between his brows that in spite of Kincaid’s casual words, he grasped the change in tone.

She sighed. “You know things aren’t as simple in Bryford as they are here, Eamon. Valoria still isn’t sure what to do with its magic.”

Eamon frowned. “Are you talking about your grandson who has strength like Steffan’s? Percival, isn’t it? I saw the look in his eyes at the banquet last night, during the magic display. Hunger, I would call it.”

Jocelyn sighed again. “Yes, it’s a concern. I wish he hadn’t come, to be perfectly honest. But there’s nothing we can do about that now. We’ll just have to weather whatever comes of it, I suppose. No, I was thinking about Heath. He’s far too young for this liaison position. He’s carrying the world on his shoulders, and it’s starting to tell.”

“He seems mature for his age,” Eamon put in.

“Yes, and it gives a false sense that he has the resilience of a much older man,” said Jocelyn heavily. “But he’s only nineteen. He feels the growing crisis keenly. Too keenly to be an effective diplomat, I think.”

“I got that sense about him,” said Lucy, nodding. “He’s not a fighter by nature, is he? He has a gentle spirit.”

“We’ll be sure to pass that on, Lucy,” said Kincaid pleasantly. “That’s what every nineteen year old boy wants to hear, after all, that he has a gentle spirit.”

They all laughed, Jocelyn joining in despite her heavy heart.

“You know what I mean,” said Lucy. “Some people have a gentle heart, like Joss.” She sent her friend a humorous look. “And some people, like me, don’t. Much as I spent my own youth trying to convince myself otherwise.”

Lucy had spoken lightly, but Jocelyn thought over her words. “It never pays to try to be someone you’re not, does it?” she said softly. “I learned that lesson myself. I suppose we all do, in the end.”

She fell silent, continuing her train of thought in her mind. What did that mean for Heath? What was he trying to be that wasn’t natural to him? She had no doubt of his capacity, but she still wasn’t convinced he was cut out for the role King Matlock had given him. She understood the logic—Heath did seem to have a foot in both camps. But she was skeptical that anyone could hold off the storm that was growing over Valoria. Heath certainly couldn’t achieve it on his own, no matter how diplomatic he was. And while he wouldn’t be able to fuse the two groups together, she had a horrible fear that the effort would so stretch him that he’d be torn in two.

Jocelyn was too lost in her musings to follow the rest of the conversation very closely. When they all rose, she let Kincaid drift ahead of her, and pulled Eamon aside before he reached the door.

“Do you have a minute?” she asked, her hand on his arm.

He smiled down at her. “For my favorite sister, of course.”

Jocelyn’s eyes crinkled fondly. There were benefits to aging. When she and Kincaid had visited in years gone by, it had been difficult to find time for real conversation with her brother. The life of a king was incredibly demanding, as Jocelyn understood perfectly. But due to Eamon’s advanced age, his son Rory had already begun to take on many of his duties. Eamon would remain king in name—and no doubt in his people’s hearts—until the day of his death. But practically speaking, he had a lot more time to chat with his twin than he used to.

“Kincaid would scold me for saying this,” she told Eamon, “but I can’t help feeling responsible for the crisis that’s growing in Valoria.”

Eamon looked down at her with a knowing expression. “Some things don’t change, no matter how old we grow, hey Joss?”

“I suppose not,” she acknowledged.

Eamon’s forehead creased. “You called it a crisis. Do you really think it’s as bad as that?”

“I do,” said Jocelyn, without hesitation. “We’re heading for a confrontation, and I can’t see the outcome. I really can’t.”

“What can I do to help?” Eamon asked, looking concerned.

Jocelyn couldn’t help chuckling. “Trying to shield your little sister? I guess some things don’t change, do they? No matter how old we grow.”

Eamon smiled, but his voice was stern. “Don’t change the subject.”

Jocelyn shook her head. “I don’t know what you can do. Nothing in the open, obviously. You don’t need me to tell you that interference by the Kyonan crown won’t help anything.” She took a breath and glanced around the room, making sure no servants lingered. “But I’ve sometimes had the impression that you have...some means of discovering things. Things that you couldn’t otherwise know.”

Eamon went unnaturally still, an arrested expression in his clear blue eyes. She’d never spoken of this observation to him before. She knew when her twin wanted to confide something in her, and when he didn’t. Whatever his magical source of information was—and she had no doubt it

was magical, based on many incidents over the years—his decision to keep it secret had been intentional. From leading comments dropped casually at strategic moments, Jocelyn was almost certain that even Lucy didn't know about it.

"I'm not asking you to confirm anything," she reassured him. "I'm not trying to pry. But I wondered if you could...I don't know, check for me. See if there's anything regarding the situation in Valoria that I should know."

Eamon didn't respond immediately, just studied her face with a searching expression. Whatever he saw obviously convinced him, because he gave a curt nod. Satisfied, Jocelyn said no more.

Neither twin raised the conversation again until the Valorian delegation was preparing to leave. In fact, Jocelyn had almost forgotten her request. But when the king and queen came to farewell their guests for another year, Eamon got her attention with a gentle prod from his magic. It was a method of communication they'd perfected many years before, and it was undetectable to all but other power-wielders. Jocelyn thought that Eamon's daughter, Violet, caught the signature of power, because she looked curiously at her father. But she made no comment.

Responding to his prompt, Jocelyn drifted toward her brother, trying not to draw anyone's attention.

"Is everything all right?" she asked softly, once she'd reached him.

He nodded. "I did what you asked."

Jocelyn straightened, her eyes suddenly keen. "And?"

He frowned. "I don't fully understand what I..." He glanced at her. "What I discovered. But one thing I could tell was that the situation is much more complex than I realized. There are more than two groups converging in this conflict. And I believe your grandson is at the heart of it."

"If I wanted cryptic hints, I could have asked Elddreki," said Jocelyn, humor beneath her severe tone.

Eamon smiled. "Unless I am mistaken, Heath is not in immediate danger."

Jocelyn let out a breath. "Well, that's a relief, at least."

"His magic is strong," Eamon added unexpectedly. "Perhaps the strongest of all of ours. And his connection with the young dragon is possibly his most powerful asset. Try to shield him from the politics if you wish, but don't be surprised if your efforts have little impact on what's coming. I am almost certain that it will unfold regardless. And I suspect Heath has more strength to weather it than you think."

Jocelyn pondered his words. "Well," she said frankly, "you sound like a charlatan telling fortunes at a fair. But I can't deny that I'm reassured." She threw him a cheeky glance. "Probably just your power manipulating me into thinking what you say is wise."

Eamon maintained his kingly calm on the outside, but Jocelyn felt a sharp jab of power, the magical equivalent of him elbowing her in the ribs. "As if my power ever worked on you," he said reprovingly. His face softened into a gentle smile as Kincaid came over, ready to hand Jocelyn into their carriage. "Until next summer, little sister."

She returned the gesture. "Until next summer."