Overdue reunions

by Ajalea

Summary

Two years after the events of Kings Rising, Erasmus gets a letter from Damen and is asked to return to Akielos. There is a surprise waiting for him, but he isn't sure he is ready for it.

Part of the CaPri Secret Santa 2017 Event!

Notes

This turned out to be way longer than I intended OOPS! I had fun writing it tho, and this is the thing that got rid of my writer's block for me so I'm hella happy I signed up for this event :D

Dear buddy #20, thank you for your prompt and I really really hope you're happy with it!
This one's for you~

See the end of the work for more notes

It was in the second summer after Damen’s ascension that an invitation came for Thorveld – or more importantly, Erasmus. It looked different from all the official messages, addressed to the Royal family, that arrived every now and then. It surprised Erasmus that it was written in Akielon, after he had been allowed to read it.

He winced slightly at the first line. He’d hoped everyone had forgotten how he had come to Thorveld. Though, he had to admit he wasn’t surprised that the King of Akielos had not forgotten. Maybe, someday, he would, and Erasmus could only look forward to it.
To Erasmus, former slave, now free man in Patras.

Hereby, you are requested to come to the joined court of Akielos and Vere, where a surprise awaits you. You are welcome from the moment this invitation is sealed until you have either come or have decided to refuse this gift. We are very looking forward to seeing you arrive. Naturally, you are free to bring whoever you desire with you to the court.

King Damianos of Akielos

&

King Laurent of Vere

Underneath was the royal seal of Akielos and Damen has personally written his signature. It was as personal as he could get it. And cocky. Either way, King Damianos surely would know Erasmus would take this bait.

Thorveld looked at it with a frown.

“What would the King of Akielos want with you?” He asked Erasmus.

Erasmus, who had no idea, could only answer truthfully. “I do not know.”

Thorveld’s eye returned to the invitation.

Erasmus could see him considering wanting to refuse the invitation. “What are the chances it is a trap?” How long had it taken him to be less formal with Thorveld? Erasmus didn’t remember.

“You can see right through me, can’t you?” Thorveld sighed. “I suppose you have a point. It is simply impossible for anyone to have obtained to royal seal of Akielos without any notice.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“What will you decide?” Thorveld looked at him with curious eyes.

Erasmus knew he had already decided. Even if he knew who – or what – was expecting him, he would face it. “I’m going.” He said with confidence.

Thorveld smiled. “Good. I was afraid I had to force you to go.”

Erasmus put on his serious face. “No need. When can we leave?”

~~~~

Damen was sitting on his throne, on a stage on the other side of the room. He smiled as Thorveld approached, with Erasmus following behind. As he saw the men come nearer, Damen smiled. “Welcome, my dear guests.”

Thorveld and his men bowed appropriately. “It is good to see you again,” he said as he rose.

“Indeed it is.” Damen nodded.

Thorveld eyed the empty throne next to Damen’s. “Is King Laurent not with you?”
Damen shook his head. “He had some business with an old friend of ours. He should be back in a few days’ time.”

Erasmus had heard the stories to have an educated guess on who the old friend was. Thorveld having regular contact with Damen at least resulted in one thing: more gossip.

“I hear that everything is going well with your shared Akielon-Veretian rule,” Thorveld half inquired, fishing for news.

Damen laughed. “Not as smooth as it could be, but the country is doing well. Everyone is adjusting to the change much more peacefully than we initially expected.”

“That is very good to hear.” Thorveld got to say just when Damen turned to Erasmus.

“And how well are you?”

Erasmus startled. Damen had no reason to talk to him. Right? “I am well,” he stuttered, “and a bit nervous.”

Damen grinned. “There is no need for that at all. I think your surprise is equally nervous.”

Erasmus exhaled. “That’s not really helping.”

“Don’t worry about it too much,” Damen nodded to him. “For now, eat something, get some rest and the rest will come tomorrow.”

~~~

For a moment, Erasmus doubted his clothing choices. If he were to see Kallias again, his long-lost friend, he really wanted to wear a chiton, and in this heat, it was definitely excusable. But he had gotten used to the Patran clothes and the chiton felt too light on his body. Still, he wore it. It was too late to change clothes anyway.

Damen had received Erasmus and Thorveld the next morning after breakfast, all smiles. Erasmus hadn’t eaten in his nervousness. Damen led the both of them to a corridor behind the throne room.

Standing there, it was as if Erasmus was a boy again, waiting for a surprise. Only this was much, much worse. It was the most nervous he had ever felt in his life. His heart was beating so very fast in this chest, pumping hard to break free. He pushed himself forward, step for step. Somehow, he knew what – or rather who – was waiting for him, but his heart told him that wasn’t possible. That boy, who, just like Erasmus, should be a man by now.

Worry took over him. What if someone else had been looking for him? What if too much time had passed and neither Kallias or he were not what they once had been.

Erasmus automatically looked at Thorveld for permission, an old habit from the past.

Thorveld remained still, his eyes signalling that he wasn’t going to decide for him.

Erasmus took a deep breath and squared his shoulders as much as he could. Somehow, he took that first step, and then the next one. No one followed, not even a royal, and just like that, he had entered the room.

The room was empty, aside from two comfortable looking chairs and a table filled with sweets and two carafes of water. Movement drew his attention from the corner of his eye.
Kallias stood there, hand in his neck, looking sheepishly in the other direction. The first thing Erasmus noted that he had not changed a lot. From a distance, he still looked the same, although he had more lines in his face and a long scar next to his eye. It suited him. His hair was longer too than when Erasmus last saw him, it was pulled into a too-neat ponytail. That, too, suited him.

Erasmus flew into Kallias’s arms, deciding that he wasn’t ever going to let them be apart for so long ever again. “I’ve missed you so much. Where have you been?”

Kallias awkwardly returned the hug. “I’ve missed you too.”

It took Erasmus long minutes to let go of Kallias, only to keep him at arm’s length to study him better. “Where have you been?” he repeated, worry on his face.

“I—” Kallias looked away again.

Erasmus dropped his hands. “I’m glad you’re here,” he smiled. Looking at Kallias, so much the same yet so different from their days in the slave’s garden, Erasmus could only feel grateful for fate bringing them back together.

“It’s good to see you.”

“Even when you won’t look at me?”

That caught Kallias’s attention. Slowly, his eyes shifted to Erasmus, who was waiting expectantly. His eyes softened the tiniest bit, but fear was overly present.

“Tell me, Kallias,” Erasmus pushed softly, pronouncing his friend’s name clearly.

That seemed to do the trick. Kallias’s mouth tightened, but he notably forced himself to look at Erasmus. “Sit with me.”

Erasmus sat on the edge of one of the two chairs, while Kallias mimicked him.

“I want to ask you something.”

Kallias looked away. “What is it?”

“How did you get that scar?”

Kallias touched the scar absentmindedly, his face closed, making it difficult for Erasmus to read him. Luckily for him, his friend had not changed too much to make it impossible.

“Why are you afraid of me?” He asked instead.

“I feared that you hated me after what I did to you in the slave’s gardens.”

Erasmus caught Kallias’s attention with a smile. “I have no reason to hate you, my dear friend.” His smile wavered for a moment. “Naturally, I was confused at first, and hurt, but I have come to understand why you did what did a long time ago.”

He grabbed one of Kallias’s hands and held it gently. Somehow, this felt more intimate than the hug they shared just a moment ago. And yet, Kallias flinched slightly, his fingers twitched.

“I never meant to hurt you,” Kallias admitted, closing his hand around Erasmus’s.

Erasmus squeezed in return. “I know.” It hurt him to see the once so happy Kallias be so insecure
about their relationship. An idea popped up in his head.

“Is someone keeping you in this room?” With that, Erasmus hinted at either Damen or Laurent, unable to guess the motive of either of them for bringing him and Kallias together.

Kallias frowned at the question, but shook his head.

“Come with me then.” Erasmus changed his grip as he stood and took Kallias by his hand.

Kallias followed him into the gardens. Even in the middle of summer, the grass was a healthy green and the flowers were blossoming.

They stopped in the shadow of a tree, where Erasmus sat down.

“You’ve changed.” It wasn’t a question. Kallias sat beside him awkwardly.

Erasmus thought about it. “I wonder if I have. It doesn’t feel like I have.”

Kallias carefully, almost hesitantly, touched Erasmus’s curly hair. “How are you so blind to your own change?”

There, underneath that tree, Kallias looked more relaxed than in that simplistic room. It felt like the old days, when their lives had been much simpler.

Erasmus dreaded the part that came next. He took a deep breath.

“They took me, you know. They took the golden lion of my chiton and then they took me.” Erasmus shuddered, but felt comforted by Kallias brushing his fingers through Erasmus’s hair.

“They took you to Vere.” Of course, Kallias knew that part of the story.

Erasmus nodded. Slowly but surely, he opened up about what happened to him in the following months. He told Kallias about Damen the slave, who turned out to be Damianos, and what he did for Erasmus.

Kallias quietly listened. Even if Erasmus was paying attention to him, his reactions were minimal; a slight tightening of his fingers, his lips turning into a fine line, his eyes burning when Erasmus said how he was mistreated by the Veretians.

When he finished, the sun had long started its descent. Erasmus was shaking. He hadn’t realized it would take such a toll on him by talking about it.

“I’m sorry, I don’t like talking about this,” he sniffed.

Kallias stilled. “I am so sorry I put you through all of that.” He looked sad.

Erasmus shook his head. “You saved my life, probably even put yourself in danger for me, that’s not something I can easily forget.” He offered Kallias a smile. “Besides, you are not personally responsible for any abuse that happened in Vere.”

A guard walked past them, not paying any attention to the two young men sitting under a tree. Kallias eyed him warily.

“They’re not going to take you away,” Erasmus commented.

“I know that, but…” Kallias voice died down.
“But what?” Erasmus wasn’t sure he wanted to know what his friend was going to say next. Still, he waited.

“I keep thinking this is all a dream and I’m about to wake up,” Kallias finally admitted. “You’ll be gone and Akielos is in chaos again. I can’t believe you’re here, actually here.”

“And yet I am.”

“And yet you are.” Kallias agreed. “I never dared to hope it would end this well.”

“What did Kastor do to you?”

Kallias looked at him. “He gave me my First Night,” he shrugged. “After that, he wanted me near him at all times, just in case, but nothing like that ever happened again.”

“Then how did you know what was going to happen?”

“I had to follow him around like a puppy, so I joined him at all his meetings. Apparently, he does that with all of his new slaves.” Kallias grinned to himself. “Besides, it was sometimes too easy to listen in on his secret conversations. I heard way too much for my own good.”

“So, when I heard of his plans to kill Damianos and everyone associated with him in the palace, I knew I had to act.” Kallias folded his hands. “I knew I couldn’t help everyone, but I could help you at least.”

Erasmus averted his eyes. He felt uncomfortable knowing his life was put above dozens of others.

“I made sure no one had any reason to associate you with Theomedes’s heir, but I hadn’t anticipated – couldn’t anticipate – that they’d sent slaves as a peace offering to Vere and that you would be sent there too.” Kallias was speaking fast now, as if he wanted to tell everything at the same time. Meanwhile, his hand had stilled and was hanging in the air. Erasmus tried to sit as still as possible.

“And most importantly, I never expected he’d keep Damianos of all people alive and that you’d end up at the same place as him.”

Erasmus spoke softly. “I think it was fate.”

“What do you mean?”

“You were meant to overhear the conspiracy, just as I was meant to go to Vere alongside the King. We were all pieces of a puzzle that had to fall into place.”

Kallias cocked his head, his brows knitting together. “For what?”

“Today, or maybe tomorrow. Maybe we’re important in a future event.” Erasmus smiled. “If that’s the case, wouldn’t it be important for us to still be there once that happens?”

Kallias cracked the tiniest smile. “Your reasoning is so flawed.” He finally noticed his dangling arm and let it fall at his side.

“You can only prove me wrong by continuing to live, so I don’t see any problems.” Erasmus’s smile grew, happy that Kallias seemed to relax more.

“I’m not sure I like that.”
“You don’t have to like it, as long as you do it.” Erasmus snapped his mouth shut. “Maybe you were right, I have changed.”

That made Kallias truly laugh. Erasmus, too, got a little giddy.

“You are so blind to yourself, it’s unbelievable.”

Erasmus pushed a stray curl out of his face. “That’s what you’re for, to help me realize what has changed.”

“Surely that isn’t why I have come here.”

“So why did you come here?”

Kallias shook his head. “Ask me something else first. Ask me how I got away.”

“How did you get away? Surely someone must have noticed you went to the slave’s garden without permission?” Erasmus had wondered what had happened to Kallias ever since Kastor had been crowned King.

“I’m sure they did, but I wouldn’t know. After I left the gardens, I ran,” Kallias admitted. “I ran like hell.”

Erasmus wanted to hold his friend’s hand, but was afraid he would come over as too childish.

“I hid in the city the first few days, scared to death every second of it that a guard was going to find me, but they never did. I don’t know if it’s because they noticed I was gone too or if they simply didn’t care enough about a mere slave.”

“But you were a Royal slave! It’s impossible they didn’t miss you,” Erasmus said.

“Your way of thinking is still too naïve. Dozens of people were killed during Kastor’s purge, so why would they care about one more slave going missing? They had other stuff to worry about.”

Kallias shrugged it off, but Erasmus could see he was hurt by how little he had been worth in the end. The knowledge was always there, but experiencing it was a huge slap in the face anyway.

“I stayed in a small abandoned house at the edge of the city until after the funeral of Theomedes and Damianos. There were whispers that Kastor deliberately sped up the process, because he couldn’t bear to look at his dead father and brother.”

“They were wrong,” Erasmus stated.

Kallias nodded. “Very. Only they didn’t know that until Damianos returned from Vere as the rightful King. When things died down, I had a blacksmith remove my slave bands, with the promise he would keep his mouth shut if he got to keep most of the metal.”

Erasmus remembered Kallias with his golden accessories, the night they had seen each other last.

“With the little money I received, I bought my way onto a cart to the country. By that time, I didn’t exactly look like a palace slave anymore, or like I had ever been near the palace, so nobody raised any questions.”

“Where did you stay?”

“A small village in Thrace.” Kallias smiled at the memory. “I walked up to a random farmer and
asked if he needed another worker as if it was the most normal thing in the world.”

“I’m trying to imagine you working on a farm and so far, the farm is winning big time,” Erasmus laughed.

Kallias laughed too. “You’re completely right about that. They let me stay and boy, did they let me work.” He pointed to the scar next to his eye. “Want to know how I got this?”

Erasmus nodded vigorously.

Kallias leaned forward, like he wanted to share a secret. “That happened in the first week. I was so tired from working from dawn till dusk I wasn’t paying attention, and someone actually hit me with a shovel.”

Erasmus oh’ed and once Kallias’s face cracked, his did too.

“They didn’t know I hadn’t worked on the field a day in my life,” Kallias said between wheezes, “and they were surprised I had made it that far without any injuries.”

Without thinking, Erasmus reached out to touch the scar. “It’s healed well.”

“It has, thanks to the famer’s wife.” Kallias put his hand over Erasmus’s and touched it softly. “Everyone there taught me everything about farming. I didn’t know there was so much to learn!”

“I can’t really say I know much about farming,” Erasmus admitted.

“I could teach you now, if you want. We could get a farm somewhere and live there for the rest of our lives.”

Erasmus hesitated. “I don’t know if that’s possible.”

“Why not?”

“I have responsibilities now, in Patras.” Erasmus pulled back his hand, leaving Kallias dumbfounded.

“That’s not what I thought you would say.” Kallias looked hurt.

“I thought you were dead for two years,” Erasmus tried to explain to himself, “I still find it hard to believe you’re sitting next to me. I’ve tried to move on from everything and do something for myself.”

“I see.” Kallias stood. “It was wrong of me to come here.” He stepped back.

Erasmus followed him, stumbling on his legs. “Of course it wasn’t. I have never been happier to see you, but I can’t leave with you just like that.” He stopped a few feet from where Kallias stood. “Why did you come back?”

Kallias’s shoulders sacked. “The famer died a few months ago and his wife – little as she knew about me – told me to go looking for you. In fact, she sent me away to do so.” He looked at Erasmus over his shoulder. “I didn’t know where to start, so I returned home.”

*Home* didn’t sound like the palace to Erasmus. Or rather, the palace didn’t feel like home. Never had been and now his home was somewhere else.

“She gave me enough money for the journey – more than enough actually. I arrived here a couple
of weeks ago and on my way to the palace I got recognized by one of the guards. He brought me to the King.”

Erasmus wondered how Damen must have looked to Kallias. Like the true King or like an imitation of the man who ruined everything they had?

“He let me tell my story and I was surprised to hear he knew you. The King knew what happened to you after I had you sent away, and he even was willing to contact you for me.”

“And that’s how it all started.”

“That’s how it all started.” Kallias repeated.

“Kallias,” Erasmus said, stepping in front of his friend, “I loved you more than I would have loved a brother, and there’s nothing that can ever change that. But don’t make me choose between you and my life right now. You were never this cruel and it doesn’t suit you to start now.”

Kallias gave him a sad smile. “I really like the new you so much more.”

Erasmus stared back defiantly. “Good, this me isn’t going anywhere.” He noticed he had caught up to Kallias in height in the years they had been apart. “Why don’t you come with us to Patras?”

Kallias blinked in surprise. “Could I?”

“Maybe? I’ll have to ask.” And idea popped up in Erasmus’s head. “What’s your status right now?”

“Kastor’s dead, so my ownership went on to the King, but since everyone assumed I was dead, I have no contract anymore. I am a free man.”

In his excitement, Erasmus closed the distance between them and pushed their cheeks together. It was one of the few old habits he hadn’t gotten rid of.

When he pulled back, he had a cocky grin on his face. “Maybe Patras needs another farmer.”

Kallias returned it cautiously. “Let’s hope they do.”

End Notes

Okay, so I know I shouldn't apologize, but this isn't proofread at all but that will happen! I have been way too busy in the past few weeks and it was a struggle to finish this when I had to prioritize my homework. It also turned out way longer than I had anticipated, so that didn't work in my favor either but we're here now!

The thing might change a little in the upcoming week, but nothing big, I promise ^^'

Please let me know what you think!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!