

# THE INFANT KING

Part III



“You’ve not been much fun lately,” Kofi grumbled as he finished patting the King’s saturated bedtime diaper and rattling off a teasing insult that the young lion simply hadn’t taken in.

Rafe had arrived to his father’s living quarters for his first change of the morning, on perhaps the most important, dread-inducing day into his reign so far.

Since his father had succumbed to his own infantile regressions, Kofi had insisted the King walk the hall to these quarters to be ridden of his bedwetting garments. In some ways, Rafe preferred this lazy arrangement, as it was one less intrusion into his personal space, but it was a limited victory, considering his father was likely in the next room, soon in need of a diaper change of his own.

“I do apologise for boring you,” Rafe replied dryly. The shameful state of his night wear, and indeed Kofi’s bullying comments, had become normalised from their frequency, but they were turning into small problems the greater the walls seemed to close in around the King; she was feeling more isolated than ever.

“Just change it and we can both get on with our day,” Rafe appealed, rather than ordered, walking towards the re-purposed table in the living space.

“First, drink,” Kofi rebutted, holding a full, large baby bottle of milk outward. “Then I’ll change.”

“I’m not in the mood for this, Kofi,” Rafe whipped back grumpily, reaching for the tapes of his own diaper, before the rhinoceros snorted, in warning, stopping the lion’s wandering paw.

“Don’t touch that,” he lectured. “Drink up. It’s a big day, Your Majesty.”

Rafe glared, unmoved, with one finger ready to peel the first tape from around his waist.

“You’d prefer this in my lap then?” Kofi warned.

Rafe growled quietly, walked towards him and grabbed the bottle, pointing the nipple into his mouth to finish it quickly and move on towards a *real* breakfast. Being forced to drink it was a deliberate point of belittlement, not that he needed any more of those with his loins being wiped several times daily, but he’d rather be mocked on his own terms than be cradled in the arms of his brute of a caretaker.

“Climb on,” Kofi then nudged him towards the changing table.

“Which is it to be?” Rafe complained, pulling the bottle from his mouth. He was not in the mood for games today.

“Both,” Kofi chuckled.

Rafe frowned, and climbed over the table, laying on his back and returning the bottle to his mouth. He always feared the bottle, as the sweet, tasty milk was so effective in triggering his regressions. He was sure Kofi and the other conspirators knew this too, considering how targeted his feedings often felt.

The King had managed to fight those regressions recently, seemingly powered by the fury and weakness of his world crumbling around him. It was building an effective defence, not that he would have wished for it. He figured Kofi was doubling down on attempts by combining the bottle with his morning diaper change. It was seemingly important to the unknown string-pullers that Rafe was kept docile and obedient.

That soaked diaper was stripped away as he drank, with the larger rhino working at a lazy pace, no doubt drawing out each wipe, each forced lift of the lion’s backside, and each hefty powdering of his loins. A new diaper was placed under him; Rafe not blinking as a thick stuffer pad was also laid along with it. As the rhinoceros’s paw closed the last tape and shuffled some thick rubber pants onto the lion, even Kofi knew belittling the King was a wasted effort that morning.

Rafe finished the bottle and handed it back to the rhino, pointedly.

“Real big guy today, huh?” the rhino drawled, taking the bottle. “Makes sense. I’ll leave you to Daddy duty then.”

“Excuse me!?” Rafe frowned, sitting up.

“*The Kingfather*,” Kofi reaffirmed. “He’s awake, and he’s going to need a new diaper. He was soaked when I checked in on him a few minutes ago.”

Rafe grunted and hopped down from the table.

“And you didn’t think to change him then?” Rafe argued. He hated when Kofi shirked his duties like this, but he knew better than to create an incident of it.

“You’ll always get priority.” Kofi ambled towards the kitchen. “And he whines less about having to wait.”

Rafe hissed through clenched teeth, and drudged with heavy footsteps towards his father’s bedroom. He found him as expected, awake in the crib, a muscular beast of a lion, mentally reduced onto his knees, paws gripping at

the crib as he drooled around a pacifier. His sleepy eyes gazed helplessly at Rafe.

It was still hard to accept, especially as his daily time as an adult was shrinking with each sunrise. Rafe shut the door behind him; depriving the caretaker of taking pleasure from cruelly forcing the son to change the infantile father.

It had been few mornings since his father woke with his regular, adult mind intact, but it was Rafe's first experience of the fact. His father's infantile tendencies weren't new to him of course, but seeing it first thing in the morning was starkly upsetting compared to watching him gradually fade in the evenings. He was losing hours as the time passed, with no clear stopping point in sight.

Rafe unlatched the bars, and allowed the lion to escape down to the floor, onto his paws and knees, where he turned his head up towards the King, in mindless recognition.

Rafe was unsure how much of his father was left in there, looking back at him, and he wasn't sure if it was worse to learn it was a blank slate, or his father was aware but powerless to his own actions and behaviours.

His throat closed, thinking on Sef's confession; the nurse was responsible for this, partly, and it filled him with a quiet, upset rage; like all of his existing stress and tension suddenly rippled, spiking, filling him with a desire to scream, not that it would help in any way. The scream would have to linger, deep inside, until it became useful.

Upon realising that he had no way to get his father onto the changing table, Rafe walked towards it and plucked what was required from its storage.

He'd long gotten used to needing diapers himself, but the weight of holding one for his father was felt differently.

"Lie down," he said nervously, the words struggling in his throat.

His father did nothing.

Rafe sighed. "Please, lie down," he repeated, but it was clear the words weren't of any use. It was clear this is where Kofi's brute size and strength was needed for an infant of this size.

The younger lion knelt and set the fresh diaper on the floor, and stopped himself from physically trying to guide the infant onto its back. His fingers fondled the pendant in his pocket.

It felt dirty, but it wasn't like Rafe hadn't tried to use it to correct his father's ailment before. This was curiosity, a desperate test of receptiveness now that the adult mind was seemingly miles away.

"Roll over for me," Rafe whispered, while holding it aloft, and letting it draw his father's eye. "Lie down."

To his astonishment, the older lion dropped his shoulder slightly, and rolled over onto his back, legs in the air. Dumb, but more than capable of understanding.

Rafe almost fell backwards in shock. This wasn't fair. Why listen to this and nothing else!?

"Come back," he whispered. He needed him today more than ever. "Be an adult. Be my father. Please. Do *something*."

He watched his father kick his legs in the air, as the soaked diaper between his thigh sagged and rustled, no less in need of a change. There was no adult behaviour to found or demanded.

Rafe's head hung, and he pulled the first tape of his father's diaper open.

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"It is the decision of the Council of Authorities that no evidence or testimony presented today links the accused to any act taken against the former King. No interview with the accused, or indeed with the alleged accomplice since *their own* arrest suggests collaboration, conspiracy, or involvement with the alleged accomplice. There is no accusation from the victim, His Highness, the Kingfather. Our investigation believes the accused to be a victim of time and situation in this matter, no more."

The authority for law stood, addressing the hall. The council were sat at the head of the room, surrounding the throne on either side. They, and the King, faced a crowd, and the accused, Sef, who sat quietly at a table some distance from them.

"Now that this has been dealt with," the antelope continued, "the original accusation of interference with council operations stands, but there is no lawful basis for further punishment, especially considering the accused's time spent imprisoned to date."

“It is our recommendation, Your Majesty,” he spoke, turning to Rafe directly, “that charges of law against the accused are dismissed, that his position is the business of the palace and authority for health alone, and we pass final judgement over to you.”

Rafe’s fist tightened, and he straightened himself in his throne. Sef was silent, his head heavy, staring at the table before him, if not through it entirely.

The lion knew it would be so easy to turn his fury into vengeance. No one would question it. There would be murmurs no matter what answer he gave. He adjusted his crown slightly, and spoke. “The palace respects your findings, authorities.”

Sef’s head raised, his eyes wide. Rafe met his gaze briefly, before turning away.

The watching crowd whispered, as expected, and they were allowed their moment, before the authority for law spoke once more.

“Accused, you may leave freely. Guards, please bring the next accused before us.”

Rafe was sure that Sef tried to catch his eye again before leaving along the side of the hall, disappearing behind the eager crowd.

Sef’s trial had been swift, to Rafe’s relief, though he doubted the council’s private deliberation was as unanimous as their result suggested. The irritated face of the authority for security said enough as the recommendation was read.

Though as angry as the lion was with his former nurse, he couldn’t punish him. Sef’s dejected, vulnerable face during the trial had only infuriated the lion more, forcing him to think of his absent father, too infantile and humiliated to arrive in the hall that morning. But there was just enough empathy to claw the King back from a decision made in anger, and if the result annoyed some of the council, then Rafe had to consider it a warped victory.

The lion’s stomach knotted as they waited for the next accused which, judging by the size of the crowd crammed into the hall, was of known significance far more than any Rafe had witnessed before; the disgraced former advisor that forced the resignation of a King.

If the crowd knew half of the damage the jackal had done...

Rafe’s paws gripped each other tightly as the large doors at the end of the room thundered opened slowly, revealing Sylas, wrists bound, flanked and

dwarfed by a gorilla and a hippopotamus. The jackal walked the gap between crowds slowly, his steps weak, whether it feigned or genuine. His unkempt appearance became more apparent the closer he got, until he took his seat quietly.

Rafe's jaw clenched. This trial was just a formality for the lion. He wasn't expecting it to go too smoothly, but he was resolved in the jackal's guilt. As King, this was to be his first real victory; he'd dismantle this poisonous betrayer, no matter what happened. Even if the council's corruption didn't recommend it, he'd pass the judgement. Whatever fight they put up afterwards would be worth this action alone.

The authority for law finally thumped his fist against his table, hushing the crowd.

"Accused, you arrive before us faced with a considerable number of charges, each of which will be heard. You will be given the opportunity to defend and explain yourself in the face of His Majesty's judgement. Do you understand?"

The crowd watched with bated silence as the jackal looked up, and around. He lingered.

The authority for law exhaled, heavily. "Do you understand, accused?"

Sylas rose to his feet slowly, rubbing either wrist where the cuffs held, weightily, showingly.

"Authority, as you well know, I served the old King, the palace, the council, and these people for many years, including time as advisor to the old King. I do not..."

The authority for law thumped his fist, loudly. "Accused, any attempt to disrupt the procession will only damage your position further. You will have time to defend your position as we move through the charges."

"But I did not come here to defend myself, as I do not expect a defence to be possible under a system as self serving as this, so willing to carve and destroy anyone who dares question its nature from within. You drag me here as performance, to make me apologise and squeal and show the people what happens when you question your *bettors*. I understand how the balance of power truly lies. I have experienced behaviours that would undo the fallacy of rule. Witnessed events that would make this crowd riot. I will not bend to this crown, nor this council that spat me out. Egomaniacs lining their pockets and

propping this kitten, this infant in jewellery, up in jest. I will not bow to this mess. Silence me and be done with it.”

“Are you done?” Rafe spoke, shifting his legs and leaning forward. “Gaol has dulled your oration, but you clearly missed the sound of your own voice.”

Rafe knew this martyr play was a performance of his own. If there was one benefit to having spent so much time with Sylas, it was that the lion was confident he knew his enemy. The jackal’s ego was far too large to sacrifice himself for the greater plan. He might antagonise the court and confuse matters, but Rafe was going to give him exactly what he claimed to want; he’d be silenced, by the time this all played out.

“Not at all,” Sylas dripped. “I had lots to talk about in the cells with your other traitor friend.”

The authority for law glared towards the King, but Rafe already knew it was time to shut up himself. He was already falling for Sylas’s bait by engaging. He could *feel* it. The jackal’s mere presence and voice was enough to rustle the depths of the lion’s mind in ways he could only fear.

“Accused, you will not be warned again,” the authority growled. “Let’s start from the top. You are charged with treason against the kingdom, via the method of poison towards both then-King and then-Prince. A lasting poison that sees the Kingfather unable to attend today.”

Sylas looked confused. “I do not know how to defend against this, as I do not know the poison of which you speak. Perhaps if you presented the evidence I can then offer some pointless comment for procedure?”

The authority for security exhaled slowly, clearing his throat. “No poison was found, however the effects on both members of the royal family have been assessed, recorded, as well as their accusations.”

“So it’s the word of them?” Sylas laughed, darkly, staring towards Rafe. “The biased executioners.”

Rafe gripped the arm of the throne. Execution would be such an easy way to get the jackal’s voice out of his head.

“Is this the defence you wish to offer?” The authority for law said, impatiently.

“If the Kings want to blame their traits on me, then what can I possibly say? It seems preposterous to me that a poison could cause, well, *you know*,” Sylas hung, cluing the crowd into a secret shared between prisoner, council and King. Rafe caught the slightest flicker of satisfaction as their eyes met, as the



crowd rose to it. “My *defence*, if you insist, is to argue that the King is looking for someone to blame for his father’s affliction. I’m sure the authority for health must agree this could not be poison, or indeed, man made.”

“Royal medical records will not be discussed here,” the authority for law spoke quickly, despite the growing unrest in the room. “But they are available to the council for deliberation.”

Rafe could feel himself start to sweat. His stomach tighten. He shook his head. The crowd had caught on to the promise of dramatics. The secret infant Kingfather. The incontinent ruler. He wasn’t letting this become the story, today.

“It did not spring up out of nowhere in this lineage, a fact you well know, *advisor*,” Rafe leered. “You are here because *you* did this to him.” He knew it was bait, but the desire to shut him up crushed all sensibility. His father’s rule had crumbled from this secret alone. It could not spread further. He couldn’t bear the thought of *everyone* knowing.

But here Rafe was, in diapers too, and childishly berated behind locked doors. All because of *him*. The weight of the crown, and the heft of the throne were starting to vanish as his awareness returned to the padding and rubber pants beneath his trousers, hidden behind robes. Thinking about his wet pants, he didn’t feel powerful in front of the room; he felt on display. He quivered.

The authority for law pleaded silently towards the King, no doubt knowing if he too spoke against the King, it could derail and undermine the whole affair.

Rafe sat back quietly, restlessly, shifting his legs once more, feeling the rubber pants shift against his fur as the swollen diaper, unknowingly flooded, squeezed between his thighs. He couldn’t stay comfortable. He wanted out of the chair, to pace or to hide away. Or to throttle the jackal personally. He needed to do something other than sit and listen to this horseshit. Sweat trickled irritatingly from where the crown lay.

He could feel them watching him. Kofi from the side. The inquisitor, with the other attending ministers. The authorities of the council, whether they sided with Syllas or not. Those unknown knives, and traitors. Whether aware or not, they’d tried to destroy what was left of his family. He’d send a message to all of them, here, today. He was the King.

*What affliction!?”* a shout called from the crowd.

Rafe gripped the stone tighter. This couldn't happen. He could feel his eyes water, and berated himself mentally for his un-Kinglike behaviour.

*Is the King ill too?"*

The authority for security stood up, signalling guards. Those few in attendance made their presence known. "This is a trial," he boomed. "Save your outbursts for an audience with the King, or you will be removed."

Sylas sat quietly, maintaining a pained neutrality in the disruption he'd desired. The jackal's head eventually turned to the crowd, drinking in their lust for royal gossip.

Rafe bared his teeth, poised. Sylas turned his head back around, staring at the King, his tongue rolling against his teeth, as if preparing his words as the authority for law joined the authority for security in returning stability to the room.

"I'm sorry, kitten," Sylas said, almost unheard, but Rafe understood all too well and jumped to his feet. Sylas wasn't telling anyone anything. The King was putting an end to this.

"Guards!" the lion shouted, marching down the steps of the dais and past the council until he was level with Sylas, who stood up from his seat.

"That's my good kitten," Sylas said.

Rafe heard it clearly, almost as if the words were inside his head. He stormed forward, his arm outstretched, pointing right at the jackal.

"Cancel the trial!" Rafe found himself yelling. "This is what he wants! He wants all of this!"

He wanted to strangle him. The anger, the fury was there, but he felt so weak, and could do nothing but shout in the face of the smirking jackal. Was this weakness even real? Surely, of all things, he had the strength to hit him.

A giant hand clasped his shoulder. The lion snarled and thrashed his arm backwards, freeing himself. "Get rid of him! He did this to me!"

The giant hands returned grabbing Rafe's arms one by one, trying to control him. How dare they!? He was THE KING.

Rafe fought, pointlessly. He was overpowered, and realised it was the same hippopotamus and gorilla that had flanked Sylas that were holding him in place.

"Let go of me!" he yelled, flailing. "You're all with *him!*"

*RAFE!*

Rafe snapped his head to the sound of his name. Sef was standing, only a few paces away, pushing through the crowd, who the lion suddenly realised were noisy and agitated. The leopard squeezed through to the barrier, unable to get closer, horror stricken over his face.

A moment of clarity washed over the King, as he realised tears had streamed down his cheeks. He'd only remembered shouting. What was happening? When had the noise started? Sylas was standing behind his table, terrified, with his cuffed paws raised in defence. The crowd bellowing and pushing to watch what was happening.

"Get him out of here," the authority for security hissed, whipping into view.

"Oi, something 'stinks!" the hippopotamus said, aggrieved and recoiling, as they held the lion's arms and legs in place eliminating the thrashing.

"No, he's just a *prick*," the authority winced, pointed for another guard to hurry the jackal away from the table under orders of the authority for law.

"No," the hippopotamus repeated, "I think *he stinks*."

Rafe roared and tried to free himself, but he was going nowhere while puppeteered by the larger guards.

"Let him go!" Sef yelled, but was blocked from view as the authority signalled for Kofi.

The rhinoceros lifted the King's robe instantly, pulling his trousers and rubber pants away from the small of his back.

Rafe thrashed once more. Not here. Not now.

"He's had an accident," Kofi said, sighing, while the gorilla rolled his face in disgust, almost withdrawing his grip of the lion. "Follow me."

He hadn't- he'd surely know if he'd done that. Even without control it was never invisible, a mystery when he'd dirtied himself.

Rafe felt himself lift from the ground as they held an arm and leg each, until he was suspended and carried horizontally past the crowd towards a door at the side of the hall. He screamed angrily to be let go, but they were long out of throne room and into a side room in the palace before the guards released their grip and let the lion sprawl to his feet.

“I’ll call the physician,” the authority for security said grimly to Kofi, before turning to the others. “Keep the King here, he’s not himself. No one else gets in.”

Just like that, the doors shut and Rafe was alone with his caretaker. The rhinoceros snorted, and started to undress the lion’s robes.

Rafe was reeling. As his robes were pulled from his arms, he wiped the tears from his face that he had no memory of shedding. He’d lost himself, entirely. He wasn’t even sure what he’d done besides shout at Syllas. What had the jackal done to trigger him like that?

Kofi removed the King’s undershirt and yanked his trousers down over the bulging rubber pants. Rafe ignored him, even as the rhino shuffled the protective layer down around his thighs.

The trial was a disaster. Had he played himself right into Syllas’s game? How much had the crowd seen? How much did they know?

The humiliation of his reign ending here gripped him. A pathetic, short-lived performance of a King out of his depth. He wanted to wail, again, in defeat, but he found himself numb, as if it had all been expelled already; all of his useful rage turned to despair. He was left with the familiar desires for cradling and comfort. To be picked up, bottle fed.

As if on cue, Kofi scooped the lion and turned him onto a large dining table in the room, where a protective mat had already been unfolded from the rhino’s bag, and draped across the surface.

Rafe was going to be changed here, privately, and yet too close to the commotion the trial had caused. He was without fight, complacent as the tapes were stripped open and the rhino wrinkled his face at the task in hand. It was far from his first time, but Rafe neither cared nor paid attention to the theatrics. It was degrading, yet somehow the least of his worries.

He could just stop fighting it and let himself disappear, to let a full diaper become the biggest of his troubles. All Rafe had to do was to lie back and stop caring. To allow his bottom to be wiped and powdered, and dressed in the comfort of a new diaper. He could be whisked away to fade in a playpen, free from this public shame. If he asked, they’d probably do it without question. Remove his piece from the board with glee.

But he didn’t *want* it. The desires weren’t real. He didn’t want Kofi holding him. He craved it, and yet he *didn’t*. His mind was conflicted, in dissonance

with itself. His sense of self shattered. He couldn't trust his gut, because those cravings for infancy and caretaking were *guttural*. What he felt were his real desires were actually hard worn calculations, his mind fighting back against his instincts. It was exhausting, trying to sort his own mind whenever he circled the edge of regressing or blacking out.

It was all Syllas's fault. *That*, he knew. He was sure that was real.

But the lion was out of fury, of anger, and of fight.

The stench of his accident overpowered the room. This was his contribution to the most important day in his reign to date.

Rafe lifted his legs obediently as his diaper was unfurled from his loins. He feared his humiliation would swallow him whole, and he'd find himself waking in a crib or playpen in the near future. He almost welcomed it.

But Rafe wasn't allowed that solace, as he experienced every agonising wipe with full clarity, until cleaned, and presented with a new diaper.



