

## Chapter 18

Violet

The mood changed instantly. The cheating part was somewhat acceptable, but poisoning your own brother? He might've taken the crown from Dylan with that one.

"I didn't mean for it to... I didn't mean to nearly kill him. The poison was supposed to weaken him, just enough for me to win," Kylan tried explaining himself. "But...it left him damaged. He can't walk. Can't shift. He can't do anything, he's bound to a wheelchair."

He closed his eyes after the last part, then looked down. "He was never the same after that."

I could hear the regret in his voice, and I could understand his initial reaction about not wanting to say anything at first.

This confession was brutal.

"My Mom knows, and she hates me for it. The only parent who ever cared for me calls me a monster, a demon—doesn't want anything to do with me," Kylan said. "I did it for her too. I did it for both of us, but she's so humiliated by the child she's raised she told me to die soon, and take it to the grave with me."

He kept looking at the box, but the color hadn't changed. He still had to keep going, whether he liked it or not.

"My Dad knows. The Lycan King...he knows what I did. He's never forgiven me for it. I harmed his favorite son. His strongest son."

His eyes were still fixated on the box. "I don't know if I would've won without the poison. I don't know if I deserve that throne. Every day I feel like I'm getting punished by the Moon Goddess for my sins, over and over."

I swallowed my breath, fearing he might've been talking about our mate bond. Did he see me as one of his punishments?

"Kylan..." Nate's voice was soft, careful. By the looks of it, even he didn't know he carried this kind of secret with him. "Does Kayden know?"

Kylan didn't answer right away, he grew an uncomfortable frown. "Yeah," he finally admitted, his voice almost broken. "He knows."

Nate's expression tightened. He looked just as uncomfortable with the conversation as the rest of us. He practically worshipped the ground Kylan walked on, so I could only imagine how hard all of this had to be.

"You know what Kayden's like," Kylan exhaled. "He has always been too soft. He doesn't treat me any differently, doesn't hold it against me. He protects my image, pretends like it never happened. He's kept it to himself this entire time."

His anger grew with each word that left his mouth. "He makes me sick. He should hate me for what I did, but he doesn't. He just accepts it. Accepts me."

I failed to understand how something like that would make him angry. Despite everything, his brother still chose to stand by him.

"I don't want him to like me, I want him to hate me," Kylan expressed his feelings. "I want him to hate me so I can properly beg for his forgiveness and repay my sins by knowing he'll never accept my apology," he spoke. "That's how I need to punish myself—by living with the fact that he'll never forgive me."

In my eyes, Kylan had never been one for deep words, but this time his message was clear. There was so much more behind him, and it made me wonder just how much more of himself he had been hiding all this time.

"Maybe you need to find your mate," Dylan tried. "It'll give you something else to live for."

My heart skipped a beat as those words left his mouth, and then it skipped another when Kylan shook his head.

"When I settle for someone, it won't be because the Moon Goddess decided for me. The king forced me to be with Chrystal for years, and I don't want that either," Kylan stated. "I want to choose someone myself. I won't trap someone I don't respect or love, like the king did to my mom—just because of the Moon Goddess."

He glanced at me for a moment, and his words stung, knowing I was his mate. They were directed at me. They had to be—he only had one mate.

But one thing bothered me. If we didn't love or respect each other, then why wouldn't he accept my rejection?

Why would he go crazy over me supposedly flirting with Nate?

Nate cracked a laugh. "So, you'll just take a thousand mistresses?" He concluded. "I can't even imagine you truly loving anyone."

Kylan chuckled. "It's not that I don't want to love—but I just don't think I'm capable of doing so. Those are two different things."

The box in Kylan's hand slowly began to change into a dull copper. He released a breath, probably relieved he could finally stop talking.

Everyone had confessed.

"It looks like we did it," Dylan grabbed the box from Kylan, then inspected it. "Now we can finally deliver this damn thing and get back to the academy."

He didn't have to say it twice. We all started packing our belongings, and soon after, we were back on the path. Kylan and Dylan walked in the front again, while I walked in the back with Nate.

My thoughts kept drifting back to that one name, Adelaide. No matter how much I tried to push it aside, I just couldn't find a reasonable explanation for why my mom's former best friend had called out to me.

Those voices, those ancient witches—they knew her, and they were terrified of her.

Something told me there was far more to the story than her just being Mom's friend, and that's why I'd decided to dedicate my day off to uncovering the mystery of Adelaide. Who was she, really?

About an hour later, we reached our destination, where Kylan placed the box in a small boat in the river. Without wasting any time, we immediately began the long walk back to the academy, knowing it would be a long journey.

I felt grateful for Dylan's brains, because without him, we would've been stuck listening to those voices for hours, and it would've easily turned into a twenty-four-hour mission.

By the time we arrived at the academy, it was seven in the morning. The sun was just beginning to rise.

Rochwall stood at the gate, waiting for us with his arms crossed.

"First group back," he announced with a satisfied grin. He waved a small golden pin in his hand before tossing it at Kylan. "Congrats, captain."

Kylan, who had not said a word the entire walk back—ran his thumb over the star-shaped pin. "Thanks," he spoke with a forced smile as he slipped it into his pocket.

In everyone's eyes he had won the battle, but I could tell that being forced to talk about his feelings, opening up to everyone made him feel like the loser.

Rochwall turned his attention to me. "And what about her?" He nodded in my direction. "Is she making your team?"

A lump formed in my throat. This was it—the moment where Kylan would cut me loose. I hadn't done a damn thing to prove myself. Nothing.

Kylan's gaze met mine, his eyes locking onto mine for what felt like forever. My heart raced, expecting the worst.

"Yes."

What?

My eyes widened in surprise as Dylan and Nate pulled me into a hug.

Yes?

"Congrats, Violet!" Rochwall spoke, opening the gates. "You guys enjoy your free days off?"

As we walked through the gates, across the empty campus—Nate instantly slapped Kylan's back. "Congrats."

"You deserve it," Dylan followed Nate's gesture.

Kylan smirked. "You know what, Hastings—you're not that bad."

Dylan chuckled softly. "Neither are you."

So both of them had been treating me like crap, and now, after just a few hours together, they were starting a bromance. It was annoying.

Nate groaned dramatically. "I'm starving. Who's coming with me to look for some breakfast?"

"I'm in," Dylan said, slamming his arm over Nate's shoulders as they walked off together.

Now it was just me and Kylan. I turned to face him. He looked at me with a serious gaze, waiting for me to say something. Despite my opinion of him, he was the reason why I had made the team. The least I could do was show my gratitude.

"Thank you for—"

"Don't thank me," Kylan cut me off. "I've grown fond of your brother. Turns out we've bonded over useless parent figures, and he asked me to put you on the team—so, I did."

"S-So you don't think I deserve to be on the Elite Team?"

Kylan responded with a chuckle, then turned to walk away. "I'll see you at training, Puppy," he called over his shoulder with one last glance before striding off.

I sighed at my newest nickname.

It was definitely an upgrade from Four-eyes, but just as horrible.

Puppy.