

Chapter 182

Violet

Walking the palace halls alongside the queen was not something I had expected to be doing within the first hour, yet here we were.

As always, I tried not to overthink, but it was of no use. My brain was already working overtime.

What would the king want from Kylan?

Was this a joint effort to keep us apart?

Why was the queen being kind to me?

Where was she taking me?

She had not said a word since we had entered the palace, and the only sounds filling the halls were the soft taps of her heels against the marble floor. Despite all the things he had said about the queen, Kylan had just let me go with her.

There was no fight, not even a second thought. That had to mean something.

Knowing Kylan, he wouldn't have handed me over if he didn't trust her. And just because she wasn't fond of him didn't mean she wouldn't be fond of me.

Right?

Sighing softly, I let my eyes wander again, taking it all in. Lyperia truly was a special kingdom, and the palace was beautiful beyond words.

The halls were definitely a sight, decorated with tall windows that let the sunlight pour in. The palace glowed with white, endless ceilings and golden accents everywhere I looked. It was so beautiful, I almost felt unworthy just walking through it.

I couldn't help but gawk every time we passed a giant vase with strange looking flowers or one of those old portraits that I assumed were of Kylan's ancestors. I mean, they had to be. They all had that angry look in their eyes.

Trying not to be obvious, I turned my head to glance behind me. The same group of women who had walked with the queen earlier were still present, a few steps back at a respectful distance.

Every time I tried to steal a look at them, they'd drop their heads fast, like they weren't even allowed to look me in the eye.

There was no question about it. I'd be assigned a few of those stiff as well. More ladies-in-waiting beside Trinity, maids, maybe even a personal fan holder like the queen's. I just prayed that whoever they sent my way wouldn't be as stiff and boring as those ladies, because I didn't know how the queen did it.

If I had to be stuck with a whole group who seemed to be shitting their pants every time I turned for these two weeks, I would go insane.

"How old?" the queen asked, breaking the silence. Her sharp tone made it clear that it wasn't a question, but a demand.

I quickly faced forward again. Then I looked at her in confusion, unsure if she was really talking to me.

"Your age, girl."

She kept her head high, eyes straight ahead.

"Oh," I said. "E-Eighteen, Your Majesty—"

"Cecilia," she corrected. "You are the next Luna. For you, my name is Cecilia. Use it."

"Cecilia," I repeated softly under my breath.

So that was her name. I hadn't even known it until now. Kylan never said it. Not once.

He mostly referred to her as the queen, with a few slip ups where he'd call her Mom, but I would always see the regret in his eyes right after. It was the same with the king.

"You fascinate me," Cecilia spoke, the faintest smirk appearing on her lips. "You remind me of me when I was your age."

I gave her a quick look, unsure of how to take it. That sounded like...a compliment?

"Really? Thank you, C—"

"That's not a compliment," she cut in sharply.

Alright, clear.

Not a compliment.

She looked at me sideways, her emerald eyes immediately finding mine. "You have no spine. No fire."

Her words were cold and direct. Maybe they were supposed to hurt, but they didn't. I'd already gone through so much shit these past few weeks

that this wasn't much. Just another thing to add to the pile. It could always be worse.

"You haven't asked me where I'm taking you," Cecilia continued. "You haven't asked me anything. You're just going along with all of this because you think if Kylan says it's right, then it must be."

"I..." My voice came out small, mainly because I had no defense.

Cecilia wasn't wrong.

I hadn't asked questions. I hadn't stood my ground, and I had been going along with everything since I set foot in Lyperia, trusting Kylan knew best. We were in his kingdom, his palace, with his people, so I let him lead, because it was much easier than stepping forward on my own.

"I came all the way out to drag you through the dirt, 'Kylan's' mate," Cecilia's voice broke through my thoughts. "And then I saw those scared puppy eyes of yours and pitied you."

Forget the part about the puppy eyes, because that part was absolutely correct. Still, something about the way she said Kylan's name bothered me. My jaw tensed, but I stayed quiet, listening.

"And trust me," she added coldly, "around here, you do not want anyone to pity you."

I looked down, my throat dry. She had been here longer than I had, and something deep down told me she was right. "Understood," I said.

"Did you bring a friend?"

"Yes."

She let out a soft laugh. "Then I hope your friend can stand her ground. And protect you...the way I wish someone had protected me."

Her words landed heavily in my chest as I could only imagine what this woman had gone through. What had pushed her so far that I couldn't see even a hint of weakness in her eyes?

Then I thought of Trinity.

Trin was bold, sharp-tongued, unshaken by anyone. She held her own against teachers, with Dylan, with me when needed, and probably Chrystal and Kylan as well, if I asked her to. I didn't doubt for a second that she'd fight for me if it came down to it, but whatever shitstorm was about to hit me wasn't her battle.

It was mine...

"She can," I said. "But I'm also capable of protecting myself."

Cecilia frowned in surprise. "I hope you are, flower," she exhaled. "I truly hope you are."

And just like that, it went quiet again.

The more I let her words run through my head, the more I realized Cecilia had a valid point. We were walking, but I didn't know what, or who, we were walking toward. Why was I even still following her?

My thoughts spun faster with every step we took. My eyes shifted from the long hallway back at Cecilia. "I think now would be the right time to ask where you'll be taking me," I said quietly.

Cecilia let out a low chuckle. "The Chief of Staff."

The name made my chest tighten a little. Kyran had warned me about her, twice, even. Once before we left, and again on the plane. She was one of the biggest reasons why he wanted Trinity to come with me.

"Madam Renata comes from a long line of Lycans who've served the royal family," Cecilia said, lowering her voice. "She's been around for years. A difficult woman, clever, and a good manipulator. She's loyal to Lady Mona, and that loyalty makes her feel like she can get away with anything."

I tried to piece it all together.

"And Lady Mona?" I wondered. "Who is she?"

Cecilia responded with a bitter laugh, and for the first time I saw her confidence crumble. "Exactly...who is she."

Her eyes shifted, just for a moment. Something changed in them, but I couldn't quite explain it. All I knew was not to push further. So, I didn't.

One moment we were walking, the next, we had stopped in front of a tall, white door. The Lyperian guards posted on either side instantly bowed their heads.

"Your Majesty," they greeted in unison.

Cecilia gave a low whistle and an unimpressed wave of her hand. "Out."

"Yes, Your Majesty," they said again, before quickly disappearing down the hall. Cecilia waited until the last one turned the corner. Meanwhile, her people still stood at a nice distance.

"That's it," she muttered, nudging the door. "I'm sure she's already waiting for you."

I looked at the door, then back at her. "Madam Renata?"

"Yes." She placed her hand gently on my shoulder. I knew it was supposed to calm me down, but it only made things worse. And then those fierce eyes...

Just a minute ago, I thought I could handle at least this part. But now? I wasn't so sure.

"Will you come with me?"

Cecilia shook her head. "I won't go past that door. I don't like associating with Lady Mona's people." She narrowed her eyes. "However, I will be praying for you."

"What will you be praying for?" I asked, doubtfully.

She took a slow breath, her hand still on my shoulder. "You are not Lyperian. You are not a true wolf. No one really wants you here because the king has spoken, and they will eat you alive. Take all the prayers you can get, Little Flower."

It felt like the ground slipped out from under my feet. I almost lost my balance as she let go of me without warning.

Cecilia turned and walked away, her long gown sweeping across the marble floor. Her people stood still, waiting until she passed them, and then they followed her.

Not a true wolf...

Little Flower...

At first, I thought it was a sweet, endearing nickname. But now it felt

different, like a warning. Flowers were soft, fragile, and easy to crush.

Maybe she wasn't trying to be kind at all.

Maybe she was telling me to either grow or be destroyed.

My heart beat out of my chest as I stared at the large door, wondering what would be awaiting me. Anxiously, I lifted my hand to knock but froze halfway.

No, I wasn't ready for anything...

I couldn't do this...

My fingers trembled, and suddenly, it was even harder to breathe. My head started spinning, and there was only one thing going through my mind.

I had to get away from here.

Desperate, I looked through my blurry vision, trying to find a way out. I had managed to slip just around the corner, only to find it was a dead end.

"Calm down, Violet," I whispered to myself. "Calm down."

What was the worst that could happen?

Screw that. I couldn't even answer that question. Something familiar tightened behind my eyes, and I could feel myself starting to lose control.

No...

I reached for the ring on my finger, Kylan's ring, and held onto it tightly. The easiest solution would've been to trust the ring, but I really couldn't do that.

I closed my eyes and focused, just like Aelius had taught me. When I opened them again, I felt the power flow through my veins and let it happen. The glow.

A warmth filled me, and slowly, the panic faded bit by bit.

Holy shit...

It worked—

"Your Highness, wait!"

I gasped as a voice caught me off guard and turned around at the speed of light.

And there he was...

No...It couldn't be...

My heart pounded as a pair of deep brown eyes pierced through me from across the hall. They were almost the same as Kylan's, only they weren't his.

They were Kayden's...

His head was tilted slightly, eyes wide with surprise, like he couldn't believe what he was seeing. A half-smirk formed on his lips, one that only grew wider by the second.

No, this couldn't be happening. Not right now...

I tried to speak, thinking that I could still maybe explain myself. Deny whatever conclusion he might've already come to. "I...I..."

Before I could finish, someone came rushing over. "Your Highness, you