

## Chapter 192

Violet

The hallway that felt so big before now seemed smaller, almost like it was closing in. Guards stood along the sides, their eyes following every move.

Far ahead, King Elyx was walking toward us, his people close behind him. On our side, Fergus walked in front, leading the Bloodroses.

The king moved slowly, like he was afraid his crown might fall if he rushed. His chin was held high. Right beside him was Beta Jack, whose face looked much more friendlier.

It felt like two storms were walking straight toward each other, ready to crash in the middle.

Before the two groups passed each other, Fergus looked back for a moment, and so did Dylan, who walked beside him. Their eyes landed on my hand, still wrapped in Kylan's. They both let out quiet sighs before turning their heads forward again.

They didn't look angry...just tired. Disappointed. Like they still didn't understand, or maybe didn't want to.

Uncle Fergus still thought all of this was just an act. And since I had told Dylan the truth, I had hoped he would've calmed down at least a little. But maybe it only made things worse.

Because deep down, he probably knew my love for Kylan was real. That it wasn't something I could fake, even if I tried.

And maybe that's what hurt the most. Knowing that same love was not

reciprocated. At least, not in the same way.

Before I knew it, footsteps stopped on both sides, and we were standing right in front of the Lyperians. Everything went quiet. The kind of silence that makes you hold your breath without even noticing because you don't want to make a sound at the wrong time.

King Elyx did everything he could not to look at any of the Bloodroses, like we weren't even worth his attention. His eyes landed only on Kylan, and the second I saw the mix of anger and disappointment in them, I knew whatever they had talked about earlier wasn't good.

Fergus was disappointed in me.

And the king was disappointed in Kylan.

Nothing new.

I looked over at Kylan. He hadn't moved or even blinked. But his eyes were sharp, locked on the king's.

The two were speaking without words.

Maybe the king was waiting for us to bow. But when he realized we weren't going to, he let out a long breath, and right on cue, Beta Jack stepped forward.

"The king welcomes you to Lyperia," he spoke.

"And His Majesty would like to know how your journey was," Jack said, his voice steady as he lifted a weak hand and pointed toward Kylan. "I hope my son, Nate, was a good host."

Silence followed.

For two full seconds, no one said a word.

Then Fergus finally spoke.

"Your son told us a lot. The journey was eventful," he said, his voice dry and flat.

Jack clasped his hands together, his lips pressing into a thin line. The silence that followed was heavier than before, making the air feel tight and awkward.

A low growl came from the king's chest. Then Jack quickly stepped in again.

"We understand the journey was long. The palace is ready to make your stay as comfortable as possible. It's the least we can do for the people of the future mother of our kingdom."

His eyes landed on me, and then he smiled.

I knew it couldn't be easy for him. Everyone had expected Chrystal to be standing here, not me. But you wouldn't be able to tell just by looking at him.

His smile wasn't fake or stiff like the others. There was real kindness in his eyes. I didn't know if it was his calm voice or the way he carried himself, but something about Jack reminded me of Nate.

The king was Jack's own version of Chrystal.

Sadly, he was stuck with the devil.

Jack gently tore his gaze from mine. "There's much to discuss," he said. "But for now, let's settle in. We've prepared a private wing for the

Bloodrose guests."

A woman stepped forward with a warm smile and bowed her head.

"She will lead you there and help you get settled," Jack said politely. "So you can...shower."

"We have showered," one of the Bloodrose elders called from the back.

A few of the Lyperians broke into laughter, just a little too loud, a little too mocking. Even the king chuckled, clearly enjoying the moment.

This was a disaster...

Jack, who I was sure didn't mean any harm, quickly raised both hands, still smiling.

"B-But of course! It was only a suggestion!"

The king grinned beside him like he was pleased Jack had managed to sneak in a small insult.

Still, I was thankful Jack was the one doing most of the talking. Who knew what words would come out of the king's mouth if he had decided to do it instead.

"I can't entertain Alpha Fergus and his people all day. Not when I have a kingdom to lead," the king's voice rang out for the first time.

I swallowed hard, hoping nothing too awful would follow. Fergus was a tough man, and that's why I knew he was really holding himself back, for the sake of the Bloodrose name. He didn't like playing nice, especially not to royals, and I was honestly surprised he had lasted this long.

Not just Fergus, but everyone in the pack.

They had walked into a place built to hate them, and still kept their heads high.

And I just couldn't imagine it would last forever.

"I have some council meetings, and I'm certain your people would like to hear your opinions, son," the king spoke.

Elyx glanced back at his people like he needed their silent approval, and when they all nodded, he turned around again, wearing the most satisfied smile I had ever seen.

"I hope the Bloodrose girl understands that this place follows order, and your duties take priority."

Then, slowly, his head turned, and his eyes finally met mine. I had braced myself for this moment, told myself I might lose it, that my eyes would glow—but there was nothing.

Why?

Because he wasn't giving me anything. I already knew I wouldn't see any shame or regret on him, but this? This was just ridiculous.

All he cared about was getting his way. And he was doing exactly what Kylan said he would.

Keeping us apart.

Who knew what he had planned for him? The king was predictable, so I could already see it happen. Him introducing Kylan to countless potential mistresses.



I looked up at Kylan, whose face was tight with control. His eyes didn't move, but I could feel the tension in him. He was holding back, either for the sake of peace...or for me, because he knew losing it in front of the king would only make things harder.

"I understand, Your Majesty," I said.

If Elyx wanted to test me, he would have to try harder. I knew I wasn't easy to deal with, so maybe he would get to me eventually, but not today. I had bigger things to worry about, such as Kayden and how much he had seen earlier.

That was still hanging over me, and I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Either way, it was better not to show too much of a reaction. Everyone knew Elyx was unstable, and even Uncle Fergus didn't have any time for this.

The king's smirk disappeared, and he wrinkled his nose a little, like he hadn't gotten the reaction he wanted. "You can go with Madam Renata," he said, brushing it off. "She'll put you in something proper, teach you a few things. How to sit, how to hold a knife, a fork—"

"She is not a pig," Fergus cut in, sharp and annoyed. "My daughter knows how to eat."

Well, never mind.

Maybe he did have time for this.

A few people behind the king laughed quietly. Even Elyx laughed, throwing up his hands like it was all a joke.

"Still," he said. "There must be something for her to learn. Wouldn't you

agree, Vi..."

He paused like saying my name out loud could burn a hole through his tongue. The same name he had pushed my mom, Adelaide, to give me.

The same name that had meant so much to her when she had longed to see the friend who would later betray her.

This was how he honored that name...

You know what? Maybe there was a bit of shame after all, but he was just too good at hiding it.

"Madam Renata?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," the woman stepped forward and bowed with a pleased smile, clearly proud to be publicly acknowledged by him. Her puppets stepped aside with her.

"The Crown Prince must be so in love he has ripped her away from me this morning, and we weren't even finished yet," she said with fake kindness. "I will still have to prepare her for the feast tomorrow and begin appointing her ladies-in-waiting."

Before I could even process what her words meant, I felt an arm slam over my shoulder. It was Trinity.

"I'm coming too," she said, in her usual good mood. "Since I'll be one too!"

Madam Renata's smile twitched. "Then you must be the Miss Trinity I've heard about," she said through her teeth. "Sure."

Everything after that moved fast.

"I'll be back soon," Kylan whispered beside me as he let go of my hand, his fingers brushing mine one last time.

I nodded, even though my chest ached. "Go."

He didn't say anything else. He just turned and followed after King Elyx and the others, his footsteps quiet but steady. Nate walked right behind him.

The woman who had been told to guide the Bloodroses stepped forward again. "Come," she said. "I'll show you the wing."

Dylan looked at me with a stare before his gaze shifted to Trinity. "You know what we've talked about," he bopped his head.

Trinity rolled her eyes. "I got it," she replied, waving him off. "Now go."

Wait, what?

What did they talk about?

I watched them all walk away. Uncle Fergus, Sonya, Dylan, Nate, Ewan, everyone as each one of them slowly faded into the distance. There were no hugs, but I didn't take it personally. It was just the Bloodrose way.

Now that they were all gone it was just me, her, and Madam Renata's people. Trinity's presence did make a huge difference because I didn't feel as small as before.

"Well," Madam Renata clapped. After the king and Kylan's departure, her tone had suddenly changed and she was back to the same cold sharpness as before. "Shall we begin?"

"Yes," Trinity stretched her arms above her head. "But first, I would like



a drink, please. I'm so thirsty, and that trip felt like it lasted three years."

Madam Renata nodded tightly. "Of course." Her eyes dragged over Trinity's outfit, and I could practically hear her thoughts. 'At least that Bloodrose wench wasn't wearing a tank top.'

But Trinity did, and she wore shorts underneath it too, because that was just who she was. She wasn't the type to change herself for anyone.

"I should also prepare a dress for you. Get you cleaned up," she suggested, like it pained her to be nice.

"That would be great!" Trinity didn't take any offense. "Preferably something yellow. Dylan says yellow looks great on me, or maybe something gold!"

While I could giggle at Trinity's excitement, Madam Renata raised her brows and let out a small sigh as we started walking.

I trailed behind them, still trying to make sense of everything. I didn't feel alone with Trinity by my side, but it felt like Kylan had vanished too quickly.

"When will I see Ky...the prince again?"

Madam Renata's loud scoff rang all the way down the hall before she broke into laughter. It was the first time I had heard her laugh, and hopefully the last.

"The crown prince has a busy schedule. And so do you," she chortled. "With good luck, perhaps you'll see him right before the feast tomorrow."

Her laugh hit harder than I expected. I knew Kylan had things to do. I wasn't stupid. But the way she said it, like I was silly for even asking,

made my heart drop a little. I just nodded like it didn't bother me.

So much for all those nights we had planned in Lyperia. The day had already gone to hell, and now I could only cling to the idea that maybe tomorrow wouldn't.

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