

Chapter 194

Violet

"My beautiful flower!" Queen Cecilia called out as we drew closer.

Trinity gently slipped her arm from mine and stepped back, keeping a respectful distance.

"Trin!" I whispered, glancing at her, but she gave me a small, reassuring nod.

My eyes wandered to the beautifully arranged table. Light pink napkins rested beside polished plates and silver cutlery, with a few snacks carefully placed around the round table.

A group of maids stood quietly in the back, keeping their distance. The two other girls at the table watched me closely, their deep, dark eyes full of curiosity, studying me like I was something strange and unfamiliar.

Queen Cecilia stood, lifting the ends of her gown and scooting away from the table before anyone could help her. Then she made her way toward me with her arms opened wide and pulled me in for a hug.

Startled, I hugged her back.

That...was different.

"Violet," she smiled once she pulled back, squeezing my shoulders. "How did things go with Madam Renata yesterday?"

"Good."

"Good?" she repeated. "And how are you this morning?"

Before I could answer, one of the girls behind her spoke. "She looks like she hasn't slept at all!"

"Was it Kylan or the Renata bitch?" the older one commented with a grin. She twirled a strand of her black hair with her fingers.

Cecilia clicked her tongue sharply and looked back. "Girls!"

Then she gave me one last pat, looking over my shoulder. "And that must be your friend?"

Trinity stepped forward and extended her hand to the queen. No curtsy, nothing, and Cecilia seemed completely fine with it.

"Trinity Richard. Nice to meet you," she introduced herself. "And I just have to say, you have a beautiful kingdom, and I love your dress. Lavender looks great on you."

Queen Cecilia gasped dramatically, holding a hand to her chest. "Thank you, beautiful."

She looked over at her daughters. "See how she compliments me? The two of you could really learn something from her."

The girls gave lazy thumbs-up and mumbled something under their breaths, their mouths full, causing me to hold back a laugh. They were nothing like what I expected them to be. Honestly, I didn't know what I expected, but certainly not this.

"Trinity Richard?" the queen repeated, focusing on her again. "Alpha Clarence and Luna Ayana's daughter?"

"You know my parents?"

"I've met them once. Good people." She gave Trinity a light push on the arm. "And you'll soon be Luna yourself."

She then waved her hand and turned toward the table again. "Come, sit with us," Cecilia spoke, grabbing my hand as she walked. "You too, Trinity!"

I ended up sitting directly across from Queen Cecilia. Trinity sat to my left, and to my right were Kylan's sisters. They leaned in with curious smiles.

"So," I began, trying to be at least a bit social. "What are your names?"

The older one spoke first. "I'm Kaelis. And this is Kiora."

"The two of you are the same age," Queen Cecilia chimed in, sounding too excited about it. "Isn't that amazing?"

I nodded at Kaelis, trying not to look as awkward as I felt. Before it could get any more awkward, maids appeared from all sides, carrying more trays filled with food. My eyes widened, mouth nearly watered when I saw a big pile of crispy chicken sandwiches placed right in the middle of the table. My favorites.

My stomach growled. So loudly I wanted to hide under the table. How did they know?

"You must be starving," Kaelis noticed, grinning. "I'm afraid we don't have our usual chocolate-covered strawberries, but we do have a whole lot of crispy chicken sandwiches!"

Kiora made a disgusted face. "Kylan's request...I mean, command."

Wait...what?

This couldn't just be a coincidence. He had been so surprised, and cutely unaware, back in the woods during the team picnic. Did he do that for me?

My heart flipped in my chest. It was such a small thing, it wasn't even a big deal, but maybe that's why it meant something to me. He remembered what I liked, disliked...

I reached for a sandwich and took a bite. It was perfectly crispy, and delicious just the way I liked it. It tasted so good I had to prevent myself from letting out a full-on moan.

From the corner of my eye, I caught Kaelis shaking her head disapprovingly. "Removing strawberries and adding chicken sandwiches is definitely a choice."

Well...

Trinity chuckled beside me. "Isn't that funny?" she said. "Dylan told me what happened at the picnic —"

I gave Trinity one look, and she shut her mouth instantly. These girls were just starting to like me. The last thing I needed was for them to realize that I had touched their beloved chocolate-covered strawberries.

"Dylan?" Kiora's eyes lit up. "You're Dylan's mate, aren't you?"

Trinity nodded slowly.

Kiora gasped and held her hands in front of her mouth like a squirrel. A high-pitched squeal, loud enough to startle the birds, came from her lips.

Queen Cecilia and Kaelis started laughing, while Trinity and I just looked at each other, brows raised.

"My little sister has a crush on him," Kaelis yawned, covering her mouth with her hand. "It's cute I guess."

Kiora beamed. "I touched his hand yesterday. He was all like, 'You dropped something,' and then he smiled and handed me my handkerchief. Our hands touched." She squealed again. "You're so lucky he's your mate!"

Kaelis rolled her eyes. "No offense, but your man is too serious for me," she told Trinity. "I'm more of a Nate type of girl. He's so..." she closed her eyes and balled her fists, "Sexy!"

I stared at her in shock. There was so much happening right now, even I didn't quite understand what exactly was going on.

"Do you have a crush on anyone, Violet?" Kiora asked.

"Just Kylan," I replied immediately. The words slipped out before I could think about it. Maybe that's what made it real. For me, it was only Kylan, and no one else had ever even come close.

"Boring!" both girls groaned at the same time.

Queen Cecilia burst out laughing, throwing her head back like they had just told the funniest joke in the world. I looked at her for a moment. She was really laughing, really enjoying this. She genuinely adored them.

It was so different from how she was with Kylan. Looking at it felt bittersweet.

Because I liked seeing them. Cecilia and her daughters. It made me think of how it could've been if my moms were still here. How it might've felt to be loved like that, surrounded by laughter and love.

But at the same time, I felt bad for even smiling at it. Like I was betraying Kylan somehow. Like I was enjoying a version of her that he never got to see.

Kaelis smirked and leaned back in her chair. "Please find a crush, and don't let history repeat itself. Why settle for one when Kylan can eventually get as many..."

"Kaelis!" Cecilia snapped.

Her voice was calm yet sharp. It was enough to make both girls freeze. There was no doubt about it that the topic of the king's mistresses was a line they weren't supposed to cross.

"We don't say things like that," she added sweetly.

Kaelis raised her hands and pursed her lips. "Just saying."

I laughed softly. It wasn't supposed to come out, but it felt good. Although I'm sure Kylan wouldn't agree with it, his sisters kind of reminded me of him. They had the same dryness to them.

"Do you got any tips for us?" Trinity asked, leaning forward. "Or for Violet in particular so she can at least survive at court."

Kaelis tapped a finger against her chin, thinking deeply. Her eyes slid to Cecilia, who looked at her with a tight smile. Eventually, she gave a small shrug, like she was giving Kaelis permission to speak freely.

"Alright. Tip number one, and quite frankly the only tip," Kaelis began. "Stay far, far away from Lady Mona and her little nest, which also includes all her chickens."

Kiora nodded quickly beside her. "Seriously. If you hear the names Mona,

Kahlia, Khaedric, Kiyenna, or Kristina—run. Like, really fast!”

I blinked, caught off guard. Trinity and I shared a look. Was that Lady Mona really that terrible?

I had heard things, but part of me had hoped it was perhaps just a bit exaggerated. Whatever it was, I had this weird feeling that I would find out for myself at the feast tonight.

Still, something tugged at my mind. There was one name she hadn’t said. The one I was the most curious about. I now knew he belonged to her, the king’s favorite mistress, so why didn’t they mention him?

“And Kayden?” I asked carefully. “What about him? Should I run?”



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