

## Chapter 198

Violet

I was breathing so hard, I could see my own chest rising and falling. The corset on my waist suddenly felt way tighter than I remembered.

My palms, which had just begun to settle again, had turned slick with sweat.

He had seen...

Kayden knew...

And he was just sitting there in his chair, smiling at me like it was the most normal thing in the world. "Let me guess, Kylan knows?"

This wasn't supposed to happen...

"L... L..." I stuttered, not even sure what words would leave my mouth. Was I supposed to deny it? Confirm it?

He had called me a witch...

I could barely think of what to say before a voice interrupted us. "Mom is looking for you, Kay!"


I flinched, turning around. Moments later, a boy appeared from around the corner. He was undeniably one of the siblings. It was a new face, one I hadn't seen before. He looked around sixteen, maybe even younger, and for now was one of the few siblings with shorter hair.

The boy had a lazy look on his face as he held some kind of gaming device in his hands, but the second he looked up and saw me, his eyes grew

wide. It was like he had just spotted a ghost. One that wasn't supposed to be here.

And to be fair, I wasn't.

Yes, I got it now.

I wasn't supposed to be in the East Wing, but hey? Someone could've given me a heads-up. 

My heart was still pounding from everything that had just happened in the past minute. I was still focused on Kayden, and the moment he had said it.

Witch...

"Well, don't just stand there, Khaedric!" Kayden called out.

Khaedric...

He tensed, clearly startled.

"Show her some of that Lyperian hospitality," Kayden said, his tone unbothered, as though the earlier moment hadn't fazed him at all. "Introduce yourself to your future queen!"

Khaedric looked between us, confused but obedient. He stepped in front of me and gave a quick, awkward bow. "Prince Khaedric," he mumbled. "Lady Mona's second son."

I nodded stiffly, forcing a smile. "Violet."

Now I remembered. It was one of the names Kylan's sister warned me about. One of the children from Lady Mona's nest.

But in this moment, I honestly didn't care. None of that mattered.

Not when Kayden had just confirmed everything without even saying the word glow.

And now my thoughts were out of control. What would happen? Would he tell someone? Would he go straight to the king? To his mother? Would he blackmail me? Use it? What was this?

My throat was dry. I wanted to scream, or cry, or just do something, but I couldn't. Instead, I was forced to interact with the one who had interrupted us. His brother.

"Let's not tell Mom that Violet got lost and ended up in the East Wing, okay?" Kayden said.

"O-Okay!" Khaedric gave a quick, nervous nod. It almost seemed as if he feared his older brother, and that made me even more nervous. What was there to fear? And if there was something, I had failed to catch it just now.

Kayden's eyes returned to me.

"I've made a promise with Violet," he said, smirking, "that I won't ever tell anyone any of her secrets."

Wait, what?

When had we ever made that promise?

I felt confused and breathless until I figured out what was going on here. He had made that promise just now.

But why?

Why would he do that? Was he messing with me, did he think this was funny? Was this a game to him?

My head spun so fast, I could barely collect my thoughts. Kayden leaned back in his chair with a deep puff and stretched out his arms like this was just another morning.

"The good thing is, all the guards are busy prepping for the feast," he said casually. "Not a soul saw you come in or out."

I stared.

"You should go right," Kayden advised, "and then take the stairs. It's a shortcut to Madam Renata's."

How did he know where I was supposed to be?

"It was good seeing you, Violet. I'm sure we'll talk some more tonight," Kayden waved a hand. "Khaedric. Push me."

"Yes, brother," he said quickly. Khaedric bowed one more time in my direction before pushing him down the hall.

I didn't move.

I couldn't.

Because what the hell had just happened?

A dizzy feeling overtook me. It felt as if I was barely in my body, just trying to survive. Every part of me was tingling, and it was because I didn't know what to do.

Was this the moment to put my pride aside and tell someone about what

happened? Did I have to find Kylan?

And do what?

Tell him I had failed, and shatter his heart when he had such high expectations of me?

My lips parted as I took deeper breaths, but it wasn't working. Nothing was working.

A sharp whimper came from within me as I pressed a hand to my chest, then another to the wall.

Was this panic? Fear? Shock?

Or was I just dying? Maybe that would be for the best. It would make things a whole lot easier.

The moment I felt the familiar glow pushing to get through, I pressed my back to the wall and squeezed my eyes shut.

No. Not now...

Pull it together, Violet...

I didn't have time to fall apart. Not here, and not with the feast tonight. I had promised Trinity to be down on time, and I could not fail her.

Just like I couldn't make the same mistake again and glow my eyes. I could not fail anyone.

Come on, Violet.

Think!

What would Adelaide do? Before Aelius' way, before Kylan's touch, there was something Adelaide had taught me when Chrystal was drowning me.

"What was it again?" I whispered softly. "Unos, Duo..."

And then?

Forget about it...

Desperate for any other way, I forced myself to picture Kylan's face. The first image that came to mind was that warm smile he gave me right before he told me I was overthinking. The second was his soft eyes right before he would kiss me.

Then I remembered the way his hand felt wrapped around mine. The way his voice sounded when he said my name, my real name.

My heart began to slow, and I inhaled. Then exhaled.

When I opened my eyes again, everything felt... fine. My hands had stopped shaking, and while my waist still felt tight, I could at least breathe again.

If only I had done that the first time...

Then I wouldn't have been in this mess.

I pushed off the wall and looked down the hall in the direction Kayden had told me to go.

Could I trust it?

Maybe. Maybe not. But I didn't have much of a choice. My twenty minutes were almost over, and I really did not want to disappoint Trinity.



I started walking, following Kayden's instructions, and soon enough I found myself back in the familiar halls.

He didn't lie.

That meant maybe he wasn't lying about keeping my secret either. Stupid comparison, but still...

Guards stood at their posts again, nodding at me as I passed, and that choking feeling that had been in the East Wing, even before Kayden had called me a witch, was no more.

Everything was back in place.

Almost everything.

For now, I had decided to put on my best face and focus on the feast. Only the feast.

"There you are!" a voice called out.

I spotted Trinity from a distance, standing in the hallway just outside the door. Her arms were crossed, frown visible on her face, and fingers tapping her wrist like a mother scolding a toddler.

"I know, I know, and I'm sorry!" I apologized, breaking into a little run, or at least the closest thing I could manage in this dress.

Trinity narrowed her eyes. "We were almost dead because of you!"

"I'm sorry, you're right!" I sulked as she pushed the door open.

Madam Renata wasn't here yet, but a few maids were already running around, doing whatever she had probably instructed them to do.

"Madam is in the back!" one of the girls said as she walked past, holding neatly folded clothes in her hands.

This time I knew what to do and headed straight for the round platform in front of the mirror, lifting my dress as I climbed on. It was much better to save everyone the trouble because that was where I would end up anyway.

Trinity followed me. "How is Dylan?" I asked, trying to start a conversation. Anything to help me think about something else.

"Looking sexy as always," Trinity responded, showing her teeth.

I made a face. "Ew?"

She laughed, and I shook it off. "Anyway...did he ask about me?"

Trinity pressed her lips together, then looked up as if she was replaying something in her head. "No," she said finally. "Not really."

Not really?

Did anyone ask about me?

Fergus?

Sonya?

I didn't get any time to think too hard about it as the curtains opened and Madam Renata came rushing in. Three other women followed, each pushing massive racks filled with blue dresses in every shade, cut, and length imaginable.

The woman's bun looked even tighter than usual. So tight I feared her



brains might snap.

"Well, look who decided to show up on time today," she said, lifting one finger in the air. "And...she's already on the platform!"

I couldn't help but feel sorry for my eyes when Madam Renata did a little happy dance, wiggling her arms and swaying her hips. Trinity and I exchanged a look while the maids laughed quietly behind their hands.

She was in a good mood. Very good.

And it was absolutely terrifying, by the way.

In a sense, it felt almost ridiculous. Me, standing here, pretending to be in a good mood too, when only minutes ago I was nearly dying from hyperventilating over Kayden's shocking confession.

"Madam Renata loves feasts," one of the maids spoke up.

"Really?" I asked, raising a brow.

Madam Renata's fingers snapped in the air, and dresses began to fly from the racks.

"Yes," she confirmed herself. "Especially if I get to put a blue dress on a rough, little creature and turn her into a proper lady."

Ah, there she was again...

"Oh," Trinity gaped. "I didn't know you were going to wear a blue dress, Madam Renata?"

A snort escaped me, and definitely a few of the maids as well. I didn't know how Trinity managed it, but somehow she had made me crack up

when there was absolutely nothing to laugh about.

Madam Renata paused.

"No, dear," she corrected. "Mine will be purple."

Trinity chuckled. Either Madam was ignoring the jab or had just forced herself to get used to Trinity's little comments.

"Then I'll be looking forward to your purple dress and the feast tonight," Trinity told her.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the same for me.

I didn't know if I was looking forward to tonight because I would be seeing the prince who held my heart or dreading it because I would also be facing the one who held my secret.

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