

Chapter 203

Violet

It had already been a while since several families had stepped forward to introduce themselves and present their gifts. Lords, Ladies, Dukes—names I couldn't remember because all their greetings sounded the same, and it was all too overwhelming.

Luckily, Kylan had taken the lead and helped me keep up with everything. Each time, he would whisper into my ear, give me names and backstories.

"That's Lord Eddrick," he murmured as an old man took his time to step forward. "His family has owned the land by the toll bridge to the Common Lands for ages, and his granddaughter is the seventh mistress, Lady Isolde."

The old man stepped forward with a bow. "Your Highness," he greeted Kylan before he let his eyes travel to me. "And the royal mate."

He pulled a small silver coin from his pocket. "One of the very first Lyperian coins ever made. It belonged to my great-great-grandfather."

I couldn't accept that.

"I can't—"

Kylan nudged my shoulder. "She can't thank you enough for your generosity. Thank you, Lord Eddrick!"

He had jumped in by accepting the ring with both hands, giving Lord Eddrick a small, polite smile.

"My honor," the man bowed again, then disappeared back into the



crowd.

"When a Lyperian gives you something, you take it," Kylan said, setting the coin on the small round table behind me. "They're prideful people, most of them are wealthy, and they want you to know it."

I took in his words, eyeing the small round table behind me. It used to be empty just a while ago, but now it was full with gifts. Jewelry, money, rare fabrics, makeup, perfumes...

Gifts that probably wouldn't make it to Starlight, and go straight back to the Bloodrose because I didn't know what to do with it as there were just too many.

To be honest, I didn't even care about the gifts at all. I didn't care about any of this.

Kylan just told me he loved me. I wanted to run to the balcony, yell out he had finally said it. I wanted to go back to the conversation we were having before just so I could hear it again and again.

"I think you're doing really well," Kylan said. He brushed his fingers against mine, and a jolt shot through me. "I'm proud of you, Violet."

Proud?

Well, I guess he had to be hopelessly in love because I sucked at this.

It was really Kylan who was holding it all together.

I looked ahead, waiting for the next person to arrive. It was a man dressed in an emerald robe with layered gold. He wore rings on every finger, and a heavy crown, decorated with green rhinestones, on his head.



But even without it, I could still guess this man's identity. There was no doubt about it.

"That's King Tavi of Aevenor," Kylan said, his voice low. "And that's his son, Halden...and his bastard."

My breath caught as they neared. The two younger men were a few steps behind. I had never seen another Lycan king before, and seeing Elyx the first time had already been a happening for me.

How would I even face a second one?

"Rochwall is from Aevenor."

"Good. That means we like him, right?" I swallowed.

The sigh that slipped from Kylan's mouth was answer enough. We did not like this guy.

"He had his Beta's whole family executed for a supposed rebellion, locked his queen in a tower over some accusation of treason, and..." his words faltered as they were several steps away. "We just do not like him."

I let out a small gasp, my stomach tightening as it all came rushing back. The Bloodrose women didn't usually get too involved in foreign politics—actually, none of us did, but I had heard something along those lines about ten years ago. It wasn't much, and certainly not uncommon, since several power-hungry packs used to do the same. But I remembered it making my skin crawl even back then.

"Your Majesty!" Kylan greeted. "We are honored by your presence."

King Tavi made a noise that sounded like a grunt. "My sons. Crown Prince Halden and Lord Darian."



The one he introduced as Halden shot me a brief smile. His eyes were soft brown, nervous, and even though he tried to keep his gaze on mine, it flickered every few seconds.

The crown prince looked to be around my age, but even shyer, and absolutely bored to death.

The older one, however...he didn't even try to hide it. His gaze dropped the second he stepped forward, first to my lips, then lower, tracing the line of my dress. Unapologetic and hungry. He licked his lips like I was some kind of prey.

I stiffened, confused and perhaps a bit disgusted. Kylan was quick to place a firm hand on my back, instantly pushing me behind him.

I feared he was going to kill the guy, but he didn't. He drew in a long breath like he was trying to count to ten. And then he spoke. "Bastards aren't required to come forward," he said dryly.

King Tavi narrowed his eyes with a crooked grin, looking back and forth between Kylan and Darian. "I thought since we happen to be in Lyperia, the land of the bastards, you wouldn't mind much."

Halden's eyes were glued to the floor as Lord Darian laughed softly under his breath and didn't seem to care at all. It was clear he found all of this amusing. "Forgive me, Your Highness, but she can't wear something like that," he said, eyeing the dress again. This time, I covered myself with my hands. "And not expect an animal to lose their manners. Your mate is one of the most gorgeous women I have ever laid my eyes on."

I could hear Kylan's unsteady breath beside me and gently tugged at the ends of his suit to calm him down. I knew how his mind worked, and that he was probably seconds away from ripping this guy apart. But he didn't



need to kill anyone, not for me.

I would rather he saved that kind of rage for someone who deserved it.

Like his father...

"People are waiting, Your Majesty," Kylan spoke through gritted teeth.

I turned to look at him, shocked. He hadn't snapped, hadn't growled or lost his temper. He had kept his composure like a true prince. That was unusual.

King Tavi snapped his fingers, and a servant came running from the side, holding a velvet box.

The king grabbed it, then opened it slowly to show us. Inside were a pair of blinding crystal earrings, a green necklace, and an emerald ring. "All handcrafted, and Aevenor's best crystals for the beautiful lady."

"My son is right. You are very beautiful," he added. "That dress looks... just right on you, and the Moon Goddess has done her job yet again."

Hah, who would've thought?

It turned out the son wasn't the only creep, but the king as well.

I accepted the box. "Thank you, Your Majesty," I put on my best smile, same as Kylan had done before. "They're beautiful."

"Yes, I told you they're from Aevenor," King Tavi stated. "The best."

He gestured for his sons and walked off without another word. Prince Halden gave an apologetic smile, but Lord Darian glanced at me and Kylan as he passed, a grin playing at his lips.



"Did you see that!" I called out in disbelief. I dropped the box behind me, not bothering to make it look nice on the table. Then I turned to look at Kylan, but his eyes were...different.

They weren't just angry. No.

There was a fire behind them. His whole body was tense, and he was blowing air like a bull ready to charge.

Those eyes full of fury were still locked on Lord Darian's back even though the man was halfway across the room by now. Kylan barely held it together, and I feared this time he would actually lose it.

"Do you want to help me kill him later," he breathed, "or do you want to watch?"

My eyes widened. I waited for him to tell me he was joking, but his voice was way too calm, way too sharp for that.

"Kylan," I squeezed his hand. "I need you to let it go."

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