

Chapter 205

Violet

What was that smile for?

He had promised not to tell, for some odd reason said he would keep my secret. But what if he changed his mind? What if this was all just a setup?

What if he wanted his revenge on Kylan and thought the best way of doing that was by hurting me?

What if?

"Violet!"

My body jolted as I jumped back to reality. My head snapped toward Kylan. "Yes?"

I could just read the curiosity off his face. If this was me trying not to look too suspicious, then I really sucked at it.

"I called your name like four times." He pulled his brows together. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I said, though I knew he didn't believe me. Kylan had read me before, so what made me think he wouldn't do it now?

"No, you're n—" He cut himself off, eyes suddenly narrowing. He wasn't looking at me anymore, but his gaze traveled elsewhere. It landed on one of his sisters who I hadn't seen before.

It was a girl in a salmon-colored dress, beautiful, but her face twisted in something close to pain. She bit down on her lip and winced with every step while awkwardly holding one hand behind her back.

Beside her walked two other girls and Prince Khaedric, who I had met earlier. I supposed these were all the children who I had been instructed

to avoid, but they didn't look all that scary. They looked miserable. Frightened.

There was only person with a smile on his face, and that was Kayden. Even Lady Mona seemed strange.

The King's first mistress...

I knew I was supposed to hate everything about her, just out of loyalty, but I had to admit, she looked drop-dead beautiful, and I could tell she was well aware.

She walked like she owned the entire court, and she probably did.

Her gown was a beautiful light purple, with white stones that shimmered even more than mine. Her hair was pulled into an elegant braid that swept across her shoulder, and her eyes were cold and pierced, scanning the room as if everyone else was beneath her.

As soon as our gazes met, my eyes flicked to Kylan. Only, he wasn't looking at me, not anymore. His eyes were locked on the girl in the salmon dress.

"She is definitely a sight, isn't she, Mom?" Kayden said as they reached us. Why would he say that?

My heart raced as I thought through every possibility. Did he tell her? Did Lady Mona know who I really was, or had she always known because she was the king's favorite?

I looked at Kayden, my panic rising. He gave a small shake of his head and used both hands in a slow gesture, telling me to calm down, but I wasn't sure if I could.

Perhaps it was his way of telling me that she didn't know, but I wasn't sure if I could calm down.

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Lady Mona stepped forward and reached for both of my hands. Her hands were cold. Ice cold.

Her eyes studied my face carefully, like she was trying to solve a puzzle. She let out a small hum before speaking. "You're beautiful for a Bloodrose," she said. "Interesting."

That was...backhanded.

Lady Mona let go of my hand and took a small step back so she could take a better look at my dress, or maybe even compare—who knew. There was something strange about this woman. She was trying to be polite, but it didn't quite reach her eyes.

Even as she dipped her head to greet Kylan with a fabricated smile plastered on her lips, it still didn't look sincere. "Your Highness."

Kylan, who had been watching the girl behind her, finally turned his attention to Mona. He gave her a quick look of acknowledgment, nothing more. Then she stormed off.

Not to the side like the others had. No. She walked straight out of the room. It was like she couldn't even be bothered to pretend for a second longer.

Of course there were murmurs around us because why wouldn't there be? The king's favorite mistress not giving a damn was definitely something

to whisper about.

Kayden blew a bit of air between his lips, his eyes following Lady Mona. "I would like to apologize on my mother's behalf," he said. "Let's just say she took the news of the king walking in with the queen instead of her..." He pressed his thumb and index finger together, leaving a small space. "A little too hard?"

I glanced at Kylan beside me, waiting for a reaction, but he wasn't even looking at Kayden. His eyes were back on the girl in the salmon-colored dress.

Kayden tapped the armrest of his chair with both hands, grinning. "Come on, kids," he called out, loud enough for the whole hall to hear. "Show our beloved brother and the future queen some respect!"

Khaedric, the one I had seen earlier, stepped forward first. His steps were stiff, same as his expression. Couldn't he see the poor guy looked completely mortified?

He fell to one knee, then took my hand. Gasps were around us, and some even placed their hands over their chests in disbelief. And I was just as startled.

I felt his hand tremble as he brought his forehead to my hand, then pulled back again. "W-Welcome to Lyperia. We will treat you with the respect you deserve," he muttered, barely above a whisper.

His words sounded too unnatural, too rehearsed.

The moment he stood again, his face was red and tight, and just like Lady Mona had done, he rushed off without looking back.

There was just no way Khaedric decided to do all of that on his own. It

was clear someone had told him to do it.

I knew it had to be him.

Kayden...

"Who's next?" Kayden looked back at the rest of his siblings. All the girls looked uncomfortable, and one of them looked like she was barely ten years old. It broke my heart to see them like that.

What was he doing?

"Kiyenna? Kristina?" His gaze then slid to the older girl who Kylan still hadn't stopped staring at. "You, Kahlia?"

The girl's chest began to rise and fall quicker, and her eyes widened. Her hand was still hidden behind her back like she was trying to hide something, and she seemed so scared, I could almost feel her fear.

The two younger girls ended up stepping forward together, their faces pale and legs shaking. They looked at me with eyes full of fear, then dropped to their knees at the same time.

"Oh no, you don't—" I started, reaching forward, but it was too late.

Both of them grabbed a hand and bowed their heads just like Khaedric had done.

"Welcome to Lyperia. We will treat you with the respect you deserve," they said in unison. It was the same words Khaedric had used, and now I was sure of it.

Whatever show this was supposed to be, Kayden seemed to be the one running it.

The girls scrambled back to their feet, and also they had run off afterward.

Kayden snorted in amusement and shook his head, grinning. "Kiyenna and Kristina. Adorable little things," he said. "But very mischievous."

An uncomfortable silence followed. Kylan still hadn't said anything to acknowledge his brother, and hadn't even blinked. His eyes were still on her...

Was he noticing something I failed to see?

"And now it's your turn, Kahlia."

The older girl, Kahlia, shot Kayden a sharp look that lasted for less than a split second. It was the look you'd give someone when you wanted to kill them, and I knew that look because I had worn it myself a few times before. She hated him.

It seemed like the two were communicating through their eyes, and Kylan had joined in like an intruder. I was the only one out of the loop.

"Don't be such a drama queen." Kayden rolled his eyes. "I can manage without my legs, and I'm sure you can manage with one hand," he said dryly.

I could hear the smallest breath as Kahlia moved forward, her gaze fixed anywhere but on me. She dropped to one knee like the others had and took my hand. She tapped my hand with her forehead, although it took her a bit longer, as if she couldn't bring herself to actually do it.

Also she had recycled the same words. "Welcome to Lyperia. We will treat you with the respect you deserve."

Out of all the siblings, she definitely seemed to struggle the most. And in

that moment I was so shocked, so flustered—that I couldn't even do anything about it.

Kahlia was already trying to get back up when Kayden bumped against her feet with his chair. "Nuh-uh," he sang. "I think you owe someone a big apology."

Who did she owe an apology?

I looked at him, then at Kahlia, wondering what this was about. Her body stiffened. She slowly lifted her eyes to mine, and for the first time, I saw them.

There were so many emotions behind them, and I could see them all. Fear, embarrassment, anger, rage that she was trying to hold back.

And then she looked at Kylan. His eyes had already been on her, and even now nothing had changed.

Kahlia mumbled something I couldn't make out.

"What?" Kayden asked. He tapped his ear with exaggerated movements, making clear he didn't hear. "We didn't catch that. I think you need to speak up, Kahlia."

"I said I'm sorry," Kahlia raised her voice just a bit louder. "I'm sorry for referring to our future queen as...Wolfie."

Wolfie?

Wait, where did she find the time to call me Wolfie, and why had I missed it?

I looked over at Kylan, waiting for an explanation, but he didn't react. He

just stared at his sister with an unreadable expression.

"It was wrong of me, and I hope you can forgive me," Kahlia continued, still kneeling. Her voice was flat, like she had memorized it or was reading from a script. "I feel disgusted and ashamed of myself, and I am so grateful to you, Kylan, that you decided to spare me by sending Kayden to correct my mistake instead—"

"Get up," Kylan barked, his voice cutting through. It was the first thing he'd said in some time. This time, Kahlia answered to him instead and scrambled back to her feet without a word.

"Let me see your hand," Kylan demanded.

Kahlia's breath hitched. She looked between all of us and began stuttering. "M-My...?"

"Your hand," Kylan repeated. "I need to see your hand."

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