

## Chapter 206

Violet

Kahlia was hesitant.

Kayden sank into the chair and stretched his hands behind his head, looking completely relaxed. "Do it, Kahlia," he encouraged. "Listen to your brother. Show him your hand."

This time, Kahlia slowly revealed her right hand from behind her back. It was wrapped in thick bandages, and from the way her fingers barely moved, I could tell it hurt. Badly.

Something about the way she tried to cover it with her dress, almost like she was ashamed, made my stomach turn. The situation was making me nauseous.

Did he do that?

Shocked, I turned to Kylan. This time he did have a reaction. He was fuming, and I could tell it took everything in him not to react, not to throw something, not to pull Kayden from his chair and slam him through the floor.

"What happened to your hand?" he asked, sharply.

Kayden puffed out air. "She —"

"I was asking, Kahlia."

Kahlia raised her brows, the expression almost a silent plea for help. "I was pouring myself some coffee, and it spilled on my hand."

There was a hint of doubt in Kylan's voice. "You made yourself coffee?"

"Yes," Kahlia nodded.

Kayden opened his eyes with a chuckle. "You can go now, Kahlia," he decided. "And do us all a favor, keep that hand out of sight. I'd like to keep my appetite, thank you very much!"

His hand kept shooing her away from the moment she turned and took her first step, all the way until she had left the room. Once she was out of sight, he rubbed his face with both hands. "Coffee, really?" he mocked. "Have you got any idea how hard it is being the smartest one out of the bunch."

"But don't you worry, Kylan!" he added. "I got them all under control for you. Even Mom."

As bothered as he looked, Kylan responded to his brother with a dry laugh. "The king next?"

Kayden shrugged with a small chuckle. "Maybe. Though that one might be a bit harder," he said, his eyes shifting to me. "But I don't want to talk about that right now. Today's Violet's day, and she looks breathtaking!"

I was just about to respond, but Kylan spoke for me. "She does," he growled softly, gripping my hand with force. He shifted his weight in front of me, clearly placing himself between me and Kayden. Kayden noticed, and his jaw tightened for a moment.

I couldn't explain it. But something about Kayden scared me.

Back at Starlight, he had seemed kind. Mysterious, maybe, but approachable. There had been warmth in him then, and something gentle I had failed to see in Kylan. And after Kylan told me his brother

was a kind soul, I had actually believed him. I thought maybe he was different from the usual Lyperian.

But the first time I saw him here, back in Lyperia, something twisted in my gut. That same warmth was gone.

And now?

He was just annoying in the kind of way that made my skin itch.

Even after our talk in the East Wing, I was prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt, thinking maybe we shared the same scars, but now it had confirmed that we didn't.

Because I knew what he had done to Kahlia.

He had hurt her, for me. Over a nickname. Wolfie.

And judging from how Kylan had reacted, he had been in on it too. Maybe not the method, but he wasn't buying that coffee excuse either.

Thinking I might've been responsible for that girl's hand made me feel worse.

I didn't agree with his tactics. Not one bit.

Kayden's behavior wasn't noble or sweet or protective. It was something else. Something darker. Obsessive.

If he was willing to hurt people like that just because they had said something bad about me, then a whole lot of bodies would drop, including his father's.

What was his reason, anyway?

Why was he acting like this?

Was it the idea of a witch that excited him? Is that what it was?

"I'm very happy for you, brother," he spoke to Kylan. "I'm very happy that after everything you've accomplished, the Moon Goddess chose to bless you with a mate like Violet."

Kylan and I both turned to look at each other.

We didn't say anything, but I could tell we were thinking the exact same thing. What was that supposed to mean? His words made no sense. Maybe he meant it, but the way it came out...it just felt off.

"What have I accomplished?" Kylan asked.

There was a short silence. Even Kayden didn't know how to answer that. Then he finally spoke. "Due to an unfortunate accident, I'm a Lycan bound to this chair," he said, a bit too lightly. "So probably more than I have."

That did something to Kylan.

I felt it first in the way his grip changed. It hadn't just become tighter, but heavier as well. His fingers pressed into my hand, not painfully, but with enough pressure to remind me that he was very much still trying to stay calm.

This time he didn't speak, and didn't smile either.

After the King Tavi situation, he really had been holding himself back all day, and probably even longer with Kayden. When Kayden brought up the accident, I doubted, looking by Kylan's expression, that he had ever done something like that before.

He wanted him to feel guilty.

Kayden wasn't a big fan of Kylan...but where did that leave me and my secret?

"Well," Kayden smiled, looked off to the side, "I'll be on my way then."

He sounded relieved. It was like he had said everything he had to say, and now he could finally go. His maid, who I only just noticed, rushed over and moved behind him, then began to push him away.

I turned to Kylan who watched him the whole time, his eyes tracking every movement until Kayden was out of sight. This was the most quiet he had been.

He had this look in his eyes. The kind that said he had known all along that Kayden wasn't fine with how things went, and that beneath that charming smile and calm demeanor, bitterness had still remained. And that no matter how many times Kayden claimed not to care, he obviously did.

If there was one thing I was sure about, it was that I couldn't keep lying like this any longer. And I had to tell Kylan the truth.

Because if I didn't, it would come back to bite me later. Just like Kayden had kept his siblings in line, cruel as it was, Kylan needed to do the same. We couldn't trust him.

He hadn't told anyone who I was, at least not yet. But that didn't mean he wouldn't.

"Your sister's hand..." I whispered. "Has he ever—"

"Hurt her before?" Kylan finished. "Not that I know of."



I thought about telling him right then.

About the hallway. About what Kayden saw, and our conversation in the East Wing.

But I couldn't—not now.

Not like this, not here, in front of all these people.

I just had to find the right moment. A moment where I could explain it all, including why I had waited to tell him.

"I don't know what he said to you," Kylan's eyes narrowed, "but I can tell he makes you just as uncomfortable as he makes me."

He wasn't wrong.

I was uncomfortable.

My mouth opened, but nothing came out.

Kylan gently turned my hand in his, the way he always did when he wanted me to really look at him.

"I don't want you to make a mistake and...you know," he brushed his finger under my eye, holding my gaze. He didn't want my eyes to glow. "If he ever bothers you, I need you to tell me. Can you do that for me?"

I froze.

Shit.

My throat tightened, but I nodded anyway. "Yes," I said.

Why did I do that?

Why did I lie to him, again?

It was the word mistake.

I hated making them—especially in front of Kylan. And yet, by not telling him, I knew I was making another one.

So why?

But I couldn't take it back now.

He was already focused on something else.

The sound of the trumpet cut through the room again, and by now, I had heard it so many times I didn't even flinch.

I already knew what it meant.

"Please welcome the king..." a voice called out.

There was a pause, then some hushed whispers as one of the guards leaned into the man's ear.

"Oh?" the announcer said, blinking. "I've just received word that the king is not ready for his entrance yet. We shall begin the feast!"

Okay?

That wasn't a bad thing, right?

I looked up at where the Bloodroses had been earlier, but even they weren't there anymore. I hadn't seen them leave. The crowd began to move again, voices rising, laughter echoing through the room, and everything seemed to be back to normal.

Even the music started up again, and soft strings could be heard from the back.

I know I said I didn't want this feast, but was it mine, or the king's?

My eyes turned to Kylan. "What was that?"

He let out a frustrated breath. "This is who he is," a faint smile tugged at his mouth. "He knows we can't leave until he gets here, and he can't survive a day without the attention being on him."

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