

## Chapter 217

Kylan

A few guards nodded as I passed, heading wherever Nate decided to drag me today, but my focus wasn't there.

All I could think about was her.

My Violet...

Her name barely left my mind, and I didn't want it to. I couldn't get enough of her, and even though it had only been a few minutes since I walked away from her, I already missed the way her hand fit in mine.

The way her eyes softened when she smiled, the way she kissed me like I was her whole damn world, the way her lashes fluttered when she arched her back and moaned my name like it was the only thing she knew, and trust me, I had her like that more than a few times last night.

But it wasn't just me. She had me too. Fuck, she had me losing my mind. I wasn't just in it. I was gone.

I was so gone, her happiness was the only thing I cared about. Whatever I felt for Violet went beyond love. It wasn't just about keeping her safe. It was about seeing her, being there for her, protecting her from all evil.

My mouth began hurting from the smile that hadn't left my face.

Her mind might be strong, but her heart was too soft. So soft, I wanted to undo every bruise the world had left behind. Her family had left behind.

How could my Violet, who had been through much more than anyone could possibly handle, ever think she is not fit enough to be queen?

A deep breath slipped from Nate's lips, and I glanced over at him. He walked in silence. His eyes were blue again, not that blood-red they had been yesterday.

His shoulders looked more at ease. There was even a quiet smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, and it made me wonder what was going through his head.

I had known something was off with him yesterday. And when the king announced Chrystal, it all made sense. He was high on Lunaris. That was the only way he could stay numb enough to play both sides.

"You knew," I said, the words slipping out before I could stop them.

Nate's brow lifted slightly. "Hm?"

"You knew the king was going to humiliate Violet. You knew."

Nate shrugged, as if it wasn't a big deal. "So did you," he said plainly. "Did you not?"

I stopped for a split second, letting his words settle. He wasn't wrong.

I did know.

Well...I had a good feeling.

While I didn't know how far the king would go, I couldn't say I was surprised when he gave Chrystal the entrance she definitely didn't deserve. It was only right for her to kiss Violet's feet, and she should be happy I didn't petition for her to be sent to the dungeons for what she had done to the royal mate.

Out of respect for Nate.

My future Beta.

The only one who's earned the right to be in my corner, and who had stayed there for me even when I hadn't always been the best to him.

I let out a dry laugh, then slapped Nate on the back. "It's whatever," I muttered, shaking my head. "What's on my schedule today?"

Nate smirked faintly, checking a note he had rolled into his sleeve. "A few Council meetings. Final review with the commanders. Briefing on the visiting royals and—"

He stopped.

So did I...

A lump formed in my throat before I even dared to look up, because right across the hallway, just a few feet away, stood the one woman who had exactly what it took to make me nervous.

Queen Cecilia.

My mother.

It wasn't a surprise that Kaelis and Kiora stood beside her. Those three were usually attached at the hip. Behind them were the queen's ladies, and it wasn't long before they offered a curtsy.

"Your Highness," they greeted.

Nate gave a full bow. "Good morning, Your Majesty."

My feet were stuck to the marble floors. I couldn't move. Cecilia's gaze met mine, sharp and icy as it had been for the past four years.

However, something deeper seemed to live in her eyes this time.

It wasn't the usual anger or disapproval.

It was like she was reading me...

Reading the way I stood, the way I didn't flinch like I used to, didn't bow or fight for her acknowledgement like I used to.

Kiora's curious eyes bounced from my face to the queen's, then back to mine. I could see it in her posture, the way she nearly bounced up and down. She wanted to say something. Her mouth opened slightly, then closed again as her teeth sank into her bottom lip.

Was the queen just going to stare at me?

Why wasn't she walking?

Between what they believed to be a 'monstrous' brother and a mother with two daughters she was trying to protect in this awful place, there was not much left to say. Unfortunately, this was what we were like. What the king had forced us to be like.

"Nate!" Kaelis's voice rang out. She didn't hesitate to rush forward, but before she could reach him, Nate took a sharp step back.

He pressed his palms together and dipped his head. "Princess."

Kaelis's smile slowly faded, while I caught the tiniest smile tugging at Nate's lips. Of course, he was kind and respectful toward her. He always had been.

No matter how much had happened, how badly things got, he never stopped being that way.

There was one thing I couldn't understand, and that was why the two of them were still stuck inside this place. They had so much potential and should've been at school right now, starting their term like everyone else.

They were smart.

Driven...

Too good to live their lives trailing behind the queen without a clear goal.

I had no doubt that that's what they wanted. But it wasn't about them. It was about her.

My eyes shifted toward the queen. She still had no intention of moving. If there was one thing she was good at, it was letting her presence do the talking.

With no other option, I forced the words out. "Good morning, Your Majesty."

"Your Highness," she said, lifting her brows. Only after I spoke did she give a small nod to her ladies, and they finally began to walk. As she passed, a sudden chill crept down my spine.

Nate and I shared a quick glance as she walked past, then we started to move.

"Wait!"

The queen's voice stopped us in our tracks. My lips twitched as I slowly turned around.

Whenever she did have something to say, it was rarely good, and I had a feeling this time would be no different.



The queen's eyes met mine again. "You did great protecting Violet last night," she said, to my surprise.

My breath caught. I hadn't expected her to say anything. Let alone...that.

I thought back to the feast. To the moment the queen had risen from her seat to let the one introduced as first mistress bow down, just like she had apparently once done.

Her relationship with the king was complicated. She hated him, yet she didn't have much choice but to love him. She had been seeking his approval for years, and though she had done it a few times before, she would usually not dare to embarrass him in public.

What she had done last night was something that deserved to be praised.

"So did you," I said.

Nate bowed his head again, this time even lower. "I want to apologize for my sister's improper behavior, Your M—"

"Don't."

"She is not sorry. So how can you be sorry on her behalf?" she added, her voice filled with sympathy. The slightest smile touched her lips. "I have never had a problem with you, Nate Wyrnsbane."

Nate straightened again but said nothing.

The queen let out a low chuckle. "I like her...my little flower."

I had no doubt she did. And it became even clearer when she chose to speak against the king for her. Something light settled in my heart, and I smiled. "I do too."

A long pause followed as both of us waited for the other to walk again. Kaelis whispered something to the queen, gently nudging her side.

"Ah," the queen gasped. "Your sister will have her first howl next week."

I nodded slowly. "I see. Already?"

The First Howl was a Lyperian tradition. Every wolf, once they turned eighteen, went up to the mountain on the night of the full moon and released their first true howl. It was something every wolf looked forward to.

I had mine celebrated two years ago, and since I was the Crown Prince, it was celebrated big, throughout the whole kingdom.

I knew Lady Mona's daughter, my sister, Kahlia—had hers recently, and I had been more than relieved to miss it.

But this...this was Kaelis'.

"I want you and Violet to be there," Kaelis said softly, not daring to meet my eyes. Her voice was small, but sure.

I exhaled. It was the first thing she'd said to me in a long time. Maybe longer. She must've gotten close enough to Violet to even consider having me there.

She turned to Nate. "A—and you'll also be there, right, Nate?" she asked, looking directly into his eyes.

I frowned and looked at him. I didn't want him to feel obligated because she was my little sister, the queen's daughter.

Nate offered a small, polite smile. "I wouldn't miss it for the world,

Kaelis."

Kaelis' face brightened. "Great!"

"Yes, great!" Cecilia spoke. "Then it's settled. They'll all be there."

She turned like she was ready to leave, but then she turned back around again. Her finger was raised in the air like something had just come to mind.

"By the way," she furrowed. "I heard a rumor that Fergus Hastings is packing to leave. Did you know anything about that?"

I stiffened, feeling at a loss for words.

He what?

"I don't know what that man is thinking," she continued. "But he should not embarrass her like he did yesterday at the feast. She needs her family's support. It's important."

She let out one last hum, then turned around and walked off, her entourage following closely behind.

The queen was right.

The Bloodrose support was important. They had to show Lyperia that Violet was one of theirs, and that anyone who dared to mess with her would have to answer to more than just the crown prince.

I closed my eyes for a second. My throat clenched.

Seriously? That coward. After everything?

How could Dylan let him? Had he completely lost it?



Fergus Hastings couldn't leave. And it wasn't because Violet had said she would go on her knees for me if he stayed. It was because I had looked her in the eye and promised he wouldn't.

I stood there and promised her...

As soon as I opened my eyes, I caught Nate staring at me, just as puzzled. "I didn't even know he was thinking about leaving."

"But I did," I growled.

If it came to it, I would tie him up myself, but he was not going anywhere.

My jaw clenched as I picked up my pace. Nate followed. "Kylan?"

"I need you to cancel everything for today."

"C-Cancel?" Nate stammered.

"Yes. And pack an 'our get along shirt.'"

"Why?" Nate blinked fast.

"Because we're going on a men's trip with the two Bloodrose cowards, and we are all coming back as bestest friends."



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