

Chapter 221

Kylan

The car ride to the city felt like it was dragging on for hours, even though we hadn't even been in the car for longer than ten minutes.

Nate had already made all the arrangements. Some herbal tea experience, followed by a wood-carving class at the cultural center that was apparently popular with the outsiders. Both horrible, but this wasn't about me.

Alpha Fergus and Dylan sat on the opposite side of me and Nate. It was as quiet as it could be, and although Fergus hadn't spoken a word, his presence alone filled the car with something heavy, making it clear this wasn't going to be easy.

I bet Violet was having a better time right now, even while being stuck in Madam Renata's grip.

A weak smile appeared as I thought of my Violet. Just how much did I love her for it to have come this far to share a car with Fergus and Dylan Hastings?

"You must come here often."

Startled, my gaze shifted to Fergus, who had opened his mouth. His eyes weren't on me, but it was clear who he was talking to. "The Lyperian landscapes are quite something."

I blinked, cleared my throat, and followed his gaze toward the window. Outside, open fields stretched as far as the eye could see. The grass was a bright, vibrant green—just the way anyone would want it.



There were no walls, no noise, no cold marble floors. Just wide open space, hills stretching out forever, and the mountains clear as day in the distance. A few deer moved slowly across the field, blending into the peaceful stillness.

It was breathtaking, looked like something out of a fantasy. Knowing how much the Bloodrose valued nature, it wasn't surprising that this had caught his attention. I knew it had caught Violet's, too.

"I used to," I replied.

Fergus nodded once, but said nothing more. He tried, but as expected, he couldn't lead a conversation.

I used to come out here all the time. Mostly to keep him quiet...the beast.

We used to run these fields. It helped keep him calm, let him burn off his wild energy to prevent him from snapping at me, pushing me around in my head, and demanding things.

I hadn't been here in a while. Haven't had time. And honestly? I think he was still mad at me for the way I treated Violet. Hell, I was still mad at myself.

'Look at the Starlight brat getting sentimental,' I heard the beast drawl from within. 'Remembering your master, the one who made you. Now I'm waiting for the day you'll remember my name.'

Never...

'Shut up,' I urged, my jaw tensing.

'Oh, he hears!'



Yes, and now I want him to shut it.

'I've been quiet,' he grumbled, 'allowing you to play around. But now that you finally have our girl...now that you're almost worthy of my time again—'

Shut up.

'I have to make sure you don't ruin this for us.'

The words hit harder than I expected. My fingers curled into fists in my lap as I was trying to remain as calm as possible. This was the very reason why I hated that thing. Only one could be in control, and it had to be me.

Because if not...

Just as I took a breath, Nate's words cut through the silence. "It's beautiful, isn't it?" he said, brushing his foot against Fergus's. "You should come visit again in the summer. Have you ever been, Alpha Fergus?"

Fergus seemed taken aback by Nate's cheerful approach. The man's brows lifted for a second. "Yes, I've been in the past," he gave a small nod. "It was...memorable."

I could hardly believe my eyes the moment his lips curled into the slightest smile. That was the most emotion he had shown since the ride started.

So he could smile...just not with me.

Got it.

Nate grinned. "I've always believed the best place for people like us isn't



in the middle of all that pressure, but out here, surrounded by nature. We can breathe...clear our heads, and gather our thoughts."

Fergus' eyes softened, and the two looked at each other as if they shared a mutual understanding. "That's a good way to put it," he said. "I like your way of thinking, boy. You should come and visit the Bloodrose whenever you feel like it. Maybe during your break?"

So now Nate even got himself...an invitation?

This trip seemed to be going great so far!

Amazing!

Today was going to be a long day...

Annoyed, I grabbed a bottle of water, twisted the cap off with more force than necessary, and took a long drink. Some of it even slipped past my lips, dripping down my chin.

Dylan glanced sideways at me, his expression full of pity. Yes, it had gotten to the point where even Dylan Hastings, the guy who damn near wanted to rip my head off yesterday, pitied me.

"D-Dad," he said, sitting up a little straighter as he cleared his throat. "Did you know Kylan's actually one of the top strategists in our year? I mean, you love strategy, right? That's basically what got him chosen as captain of the Elite team."

Fergus turned to him...then to me. His face didn't shift much, and he looked so fucking stiff, I couldn't even find the words for it.

"Really, son?" he hummed. "Then tell me, what real battle has he led where he proved those strategy skills of his?"



Fair enough.

Dylan gave me a look, encouraging me to say something. I let out a breath.

Fine.

"So," I looked at Fergus. "What did Violet like doing when she was younger?"

Fergus scoffed. "She liked working in the greenhouse," he said, his eyes piercing right through mine. "Just like you."

"Greenhouse?" Nate frowned, then chuckled. "Since when is Kylan into gardening? Did I miss something?"

"I suppose you did," Fergus responded.

Dylan shook his head in disbelief, lowering his head. I squeezed the bottle in my hand. I knew what he was doing, and I knew he perhaps wanted to get a reaction out of me so he could prove to himself that he had been right, and I was 'too aggressive' for Violet, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

I looked away and shut my mouth. Because if I said anything else, it wouldn't come out calm.

'Wow. You really showed him, Captain. I bet he's terrified now. I can smell the respect dripping off him.'

Couldn't this damn beast just shut up!

Who had asked for his opinion about this trip, anyway? I sure as hell hadn't. He had been doing his job, staying quiet for a while, so why



choose now to start talking?

'Starlight brat...you let him look down on us... again. I thought you were trying to win the swamp king over, not hand him the damn shovel to bury us with.'

Suddenly, a deep breath escaped from Fergus' lips. "She used to climb the roofs," he began. I didn't know what had shifted, but the man had suddenly changed his mind. Maybe this was his way of trying. Who knew?

"It didn't matter the weather. If she was upset, or thinking too much, or hiding from someone, that's where she would be...the higher the better."

My chest tightened at the thought of my Violet being upset.

He went on. "She once saved a dying frog in the summer...she was ten, I think. She kept the frog in her room with sticks and leaves and gave them a dramatic backstory," he let out a quiet laugh.

"Yes," Dylan smiled. "I remember she used to think the frog was royalty in disguise...she cried for hours when Dad told her to free the frog... said she just wanted a friend."

Fergus swallowed, looking at his son. "I think I held her for hours while she cried in my arms."

"You did," Dylan confirmed, smiling.

I looked back and forth between the two, trying to take in as much information about Puppy as possible. It was nice hearing he had once cared, but what about all the times he had failed to show up for her? And what about now?

One hug didn't make a great parent. Even the king had held me in his



arms before.

"That so sounds like her," Nate laughed. He wasn't wrong, but the stories still came as a surprise. All this time, I thought I really knew her. But there were parts of her life I had never touched.

There was so much more to learn about each other, but one thing I was certain about was the goodness of Violet's heart, especially toward animals. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't have had Jumpie.

It was all her doing...

"She was always out in the dirt," Dylan mentioned. "Never cared about looking clean. Always had scraped knees, grass in her hair, mud on her cheeks...but that's just the way we were raised. Violet is the perfect embodiment of a true Bloodrose, and we Bloodroses...are not the greatest at blending in with the outside world."

Dylan stopped there, his smile fading. The last words came out in a tone perhaps a bit too serious. I knew what he was trying to tell me.

'Do not keep my sister inside that palace because she isn't made for palace life.'

The one thing that they didn't seem to understand was that nothing would change. We had great woods here, great rivers. She could still be Violet.

I would even build her a hut near the lakes if she wanted that...I would take care of her. Forever.

I knew their biggest issue was way more than that. It was her other half...

But she would never have to be afraid of her identity as a witch being



revealed, because even if it happened, I would burn the entire kingdom to the ground, every last person in it, if that's what it took to keep her safe.

Violet would be safe with me.

The rest of the ride was quiet. But not the awkward, heavy kind from before. This one...it felt okay.

Calm.

Even the beast had decided to keep his mouth shut again.

The story of Violet had somehow eased the tension between us, and when we finally pulled up near the cultural center in the city, it felt as if we weren't just strangers stuck in the same car anymore.

The car went around the back, where it was quieter and more private. Having the Crown Prince in the city was a big deal, but I didn't need any attention from the public. I wasn't here as the Crown Prince of Lyperia today.

I was here as the man trying to earn the respect of Violet's family, so the one I loved could finally breathe again. I was trying to be someone Alpha Fergus could look at without hate, trying to be someone her brother could one day learn to trust again.

I was ready to do my part, but it wouldn't matter if they didn't meet me halfway. Respect had to be built from both ends.

"You put a lot of effort into today, Crown Prince," Fergus said as the car came to a stop. I looked up to meet his sharp gaze.

"Let's hope it counts for something."