

Chapter 223

Kylan

In front of me on the wooden table were bowls filled with dried herbs, fresh leaves, and little jars of basically everything I had never even heard of in my entire life.

We had been here for a while, and with each second that passed, the smell in the room was starting to make my nose itch more and more.

It smelled like...

"The swamps," Nate whispered beside me, finishing my thoughts. "It smells a bit like the swamps, doesn't it? I can't believe we're in Lyperia."

His hand was casually over his nose, and I could tell he was trying to stay polite yet trying to survive. We were both trying to stay polite, though our hearts were very Lyperian by default.

Across from us, Fergus and Dylan were already fully locked in. Both men seemed to be in a good mood as they mixed herbs in small pots like they had done it plenty times before.

Dylan held something under Fergus' nose, and the man sniffed it with the widest smile I had ever seen on him. "That's a good one, son!" he said. "Throw it right in!"

Nate and I shared a look. I raised a brow, and he just shrugged. "At least he's smiling," he mumbled.

And he was, which was a good thing. I wanted to talk to him about Violet and how we could fix things between us so we could all get along. Fix things between them, so my Violet did not need to worry.



Some hard topics had to be discussed, about the way they had been treating her, and the happier he was, the easier that conversation would be.

Only, I did not yet know how or when to start.

A smile grew on my lips as I watched Fergus and Dylan. I had always seen them as cold, stiff, impossible to reach—what was quite a thing for me to say, but I had made up my mind about them today.

They were still cold, stiff, and all of that, but seeing them joke around together, connect with...leaves, made me realize that they were only a bit different.

They weren't as talkative as Nate, or as open as Violet, but they didn't fake anything to make others like them. Even if their opinion was dead wrong at times.

"Kylan!"

I snapped my head up, looking straight at Fergus, who had called out my name. "Violet always used to beg me to make this blend. It's her favorite," he said, pointing to the mix he was stirring. "Started when she was nine. It reminded her of her mom, Claire!"

I couldn't help but smile a little. This man and his leaves...he was so wrapped up in it, he had nearly forgotten how much he disliked me. "At some point, Violet used to sneak in and make it herself," he said with a laugh. "And she was great at it..."

His smile faltered a bit as his eyes met Dylan's. "She always said it reminded her of peace," he added, pouring hot water into his and Dylan's cups. "I don't know how she came up with that, but it stuck."



Fergus handed a cup to Dylan, and they raised them like it was some kind of toast.

"To peace," Dylan grinned.

"To peace," Fergus muttered.

The two clinked their cups together and took a sip at the same time. Right after, they both let out a loud, satisfied sigh, followed by a burp.

I tilted my head as I watched them. Two grown men grinning over burps like it was the highlight of their week. Nate was still sitting beside me, holding his hand over his nose like the smell had somehow gotten worse.

His expression turned even more grim as Fergus leaned forward to grab our empty cups. Then he started preparing the same tea for us. Nate turned to me with wide eyes, horrified, while I shot him a sharp look, warning him not to do anything stupid.

He shook his head slowly like I had just sentenced him to death, but I nodded mine instead.

Because if Fergus Hastings wanted us to drink from this tea, Violet's favorite tea, then that's exactly what we were going to do. Seconds later, he handed us the cups.

He blinked his eyes, waiting for us to take a sip. I hesitated, lifting the cup in my hand, and gave him a weak nod. "To...peace."

Then I drank.

The moment the taste of the tea hit my tongue, I regretted everything. It tasted slightly salty, a bit like sewage, and somehow I had managed to keep a straight face.



I swallowed it down in one go and nudged Nate with my elbow, urging him to do the same. Dylan and Fergus were both watching us, and the last thing I wanted was for them to give their first reason as to why I shouldn't be with Violet.

'You cannot drink her favorite tea.'

As I turned to the side, Nate made the most dramatic face I had ever seen, but managed to gulp it down too. After he was finished, he slammed the cup back on the table and wheezed like he had been poisoned.

"And?" Dylan grinned. "Good, isn't it?"

I forced a smile. "Very," I said.

"Perfect," Nate added.

Fergus scoffed softly, and I could see a small flick of acknowledgment in his eyes as he held my gaze. He just kept staring at me intensely, waiting for me to throw up, like this was all some kind of test, and I was so close—but before I could, a woman appeared at the door.

It was one of the workers for the center. "Your Highness," she bowed. "We are ready for the wood carving."

I stood from my chair, brushing off my hands. The rest followed, and soon after we followed the woman down a hallway, toward the next part of this...whatever this was we were doing.

Fergus walked beside me, his hands still dirty from the leaves. "Have you ever carved wood before, Kylan?" he asked quietly.

"Not once in my life."

"We have. Our whole house is full of wooden junk we made as kids." Dylan snorted from behind us. "Walls, shelves, everything!"

Nate let out a laugh. "Somehow I'm not surprised!"

I chuckled too. A Bloodrose being good at carving was like a Lyperian being good at bragging.

Some things just came naturally.

"If you thought Dad was happy during tea," Dylan said, "you don't want to experience him during wood carving."

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It turned out Dylan didn't lie. If I thought tea time was the peak of Alpha Fergus' happiness, I had clearly been wrong.

Wood carving had turned him into something else entirely, and for a moment, I was wondering where that greenhouse intruder had gone. Dylan was creating quite the masterpiece. He was carving a heart for Trinity, obviously.

Fergus was even deeper in. The man's head was almost inside the block of wood, very focused and very serious. He was carving a werewolf and seemed to be proud of his work in progress.

Even Nate was doing alright. Whatever he was making was starting to look like an elf. Though I supposed the pointy ears kind of gave it away, so I gave him credit.

And me?

I just stared at the piece of wood in front of me.



No shape came to mind. No idea. Nothing. Just...wood.

I didn't have a creative bone in my body, and I wasn't about to fake one now. It wasn't just that, but also the fact that we had been here for a while now, and I had yet to say what was on my mind.

More important than a piece of wood was Alpha Fergus sitting across from me, having the time of his life like we weren't here to discuss Violet.

My eyes were stuck on him as I slowly hesitated to speak up, but if not now, when would be the right time?

How do I even start that kind of conversation? After such a nice day, how would I explain to those two in the most respectful way possible that Violet and I were together, and they would just have to learn to deal with it?

"Are you not going to bring up why you brought us here?" Fergus's voice blasted through the room. Unexpectedly, he spoke first.

I squinted my eyes, a little caught off guard.

"You have brought us here to talk about Violet."

A chuckle escaped from his lips. "So please, do it now while I'm still in a good mood."

I didn't waste any time and went straight to it. "I was going to ask you," I began, "why don't you believe I'm the right fit for Violet, when this is what the Moon Goddess wants...what we want."

Especially when the two of you haven't always been the best either. I had already said that last part before, but this time I kept it in my head, though it burned at my tongue.



Fergus didn't answer right away. First, he looked at Dylan, who kept carving like he hadn't heard a thing. Nate also pretended he wasn't part of the conversation—but in his case, it actually made sense, because he wasn't.

Alpha Fergus drew in a long breath, his eyes shifting like he was trying to find the perfect way to bring me the worst news possible. "Don't take it personally," he hummed.

"But Violet is special, one of a kind, too trusting, too kind, not ready for the real world," he said. "And after all I have gone through...I just cannot trust my daughter in the hands of not just you—but any Lyperian, not even in my darkest hour."



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