

Chapter 238

Violet

"What?" I shook my head in disbelief. "You want me to...speak in front of them? Me?"

"You said you wanted to help without making your eyes glow, and I agreed to help you," Kylan pointed out. "This is how."

My throat tightened, my heart pounded. I could barely open my mouth to greet anyone at the feast, where I had also failed to give a speech. How could he possibly believe I was capable of even uttering a word during a council meeting?

And most importantly...

"Will the king be there?"

"He is the king," Kylan lifted his shoulders. "Of course he will be there."

My lips parted again, but the words refused to come. I kept waiting for him to laugh, to tell me it was all some kind of joke, but there was still nothing. "Why me?" I asked. "Why do I have to be the one to do the talking?"

Kylan kept his eyes on mine. There was something steady in them, something that told me this wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision. He had thought this through.

"When I was younger," he began, "and I wanted something from the queen, I would always send someone else to ask, because I knew it would be hard for her to say no."



He tilted his head slightly, his gaze never leaving mine. "It's kind of like that now."

I lifted my brow. "Is it?"

"You don't see it," Kylan went on, "but you're special, Violet. They see you as this interesting girl from the Bloodrose, and when it comes to matters of sympathy, your voice has more power than mine. Believe it or not...even the king wouldn't dare to shut down a request coming from you, not in front of the council."

I studied his face, wondering if he really believed that. "These people do not like me very much, Kylan," I released a chuckle.

Kylan chuckled back. "It's not because they like you," he said. "It's because everyone's watching you. You're in the spotlight, and if there's one thing these people can't stand, it's looking bad."

He reached for my hand again. "You are the only one who can make them listen."

As I took in his words, everything he said, as scary as it sounded, made perfect sense. Forcing the kingdom to follow, letting me speak because my heart was in it, it all added up. But I didn't answer. I just sat up straight, leaned against the headboard, and stared ahead. My heart was pounding, and it felt like I had just been given something I didn't know how to hold.

Kylan noticed.

He lifted my hand and pressed his lips to my knuckles. "You'll do fine," he murmured against my skin. "We've had this talk before, and you are stronger than you think, Violet. And I'll be right there when you speak."



"I'll sit by you, if you want, or stand behind you, but you won't be alone."

He pulled back just enough to meet my eyes again, his gaze warm. "I believe in you."

I let out a long breath. If all the people I loved believed in me, then maybe it was time I started believing in myself too. Maybe, with time, I would figure it out.

My eyes shifted to Kylan again as he let out a quiet hum and let his gaze wander over my body. His other hand drifted slowly onto my thigh, slipping beneath the edge of my nightgown as he slid it up to where my knees were pressed together.

"You can do this. You don't have to be perfect for me. Just be you...and I'll meet you halfway."

My breath caught just slightly, lips parting as his gaze landed back on mine. His fingers kept moving up, slow and steady, and something deep inside me started to ache, and then he stopped.

I let out a soft breath. "What?"

He gave the inside of my thigh a quick squeeze, then pulled his hand back with a smirk. Heat crawled up my cheeks, and I bit my lip as I looked back at him.

"Why did you stop?" I asked.

An amused laugh came from Kylan's lips. He leaned over to ruffle my hair. "Because," he murmured, "if I didn't, I fear we wouldn't even make it to this council meeting."

He stood up. "And I have some more stuff to do before that."



Just as he started to turn away, I reached for his arm, but my grip slipped. Kyran looked back, one brow lifting slightly.

"I hope you'll make it up to me tonight," I said, my voice flat. His brows pulled together for a second, then he laughed under his breath, like he hadn't expected to hear that from me.

"You don't need to worry about that," he said. He gave me a small nod, and I let go of him. Then he turned and walked away. I watched him leave, but today, as he walked out of that door, it felt nothing like yesterday.

~

Soon after Kyran left, I decided to get myself ready. Anything was better than having Madam Renata show up with her army of maids to scrub the life out of my skin.

By the time I stepped out of the room, three familiar figures were already waiting at the door.

Trinity, Lian, and Sora.

Knowing Trinity, I was pretty sure she had convinced them I was capable of dressing myself, and I silently thanked her for that. Either that, or my presence just wasn't all that special anymore, because none of them had even noticed me.

The girls were laughing at something, and Trinity seemed to fit right in. "Morning!" I called, smiling as I joined them. All three turned toward me, still laughing like crazy.

"Good morning, Vi!" Trinity cackled. "Sorry, but Sora just told us the funniest story about—"



She stopped, glanced back and forth between Lian and Sora, then looked back at me, grinning wider than ever. Sora's warm brown eyes met mine and squinted just a little. "I just told her about the time I was dating my stable boy and the fourth prince from Elarin at the same time."

My eyes fluttered as I shared a look with Trinity, who was now chuckling. "Interesting," I said, amused. "You will have to tell me more about it."

Whatever the energy was this morning, I was here for it. Everyone seemed to be in a good mood, and nothing bad had happened yet. I was also surprisingly calm, considering Kylan had told me I would have to speak at the council meeting.

"And did they find out about each other?" I asked as we started walking.

"Oh, yes." Sora nodded, her bob swaying side to side. "I was going to go for the stable boy and let the prince go, but they both ended up dumping me instead."

She shrugged, completely unbothered. "It's okay though."

She said it like it was the most casual thing in the world, and I had to admire her for having such an eventful life. I turned to Lian.

"Do you have a story like that?"

Lian's expression shifted, and she suddenly looked a bit more guarded. She shook her head.

"I don't...I'm not..." she stuttered. "No."

"Yes, me neither," I exhaled softly. I feared my question might've made her uncomfortable, and there was something about the way she said it that made me want to take the pressure off.



"My dating life was pretty much nonexistent until I found Kylan. He's my first everything!"

"Aww," Trinity and Sora cooed in unison.

"That sounds great," Lian cracked a small, grateful smile in my direction.

"Madam Renata gave us another free day," Trinity said cheerfully, tossing a strand of her hair over her shoulder. "She said now that we have two 'proper' ladies by our side, she can start taking a step back."

I squinted at her, my nose crinkling. "That's weird."

It was. I mean, Madam Renata didn't exactly strike me as the 'taking a step back' type. And even if she was, the timing felt...odd. I tried not to overthink it, but I couldn't help but wonder if this was perhaps one of Kayden's little favors. The one I never asked for.

"So where are we headed?" I asked, curious about whatever plan they had made without me.

Sora responded first. "Breakfast or maybe a little walk in the gardens."

"Really?" I bumped Trinity's shoulder. "And you couldn't let me sleep in?"

If I had known this beforehand, I would've slept a few more hours and gotten an even better rest.

"There's no need for that!" Trinity wrapped an arm dramatically around my shoulder. "You look beautiful today. Well rested!"

"Speaking of breakfast!" Lian raised a finger in the air, her eyes glancing at me. "I had plans to personally claw the eyes out of whoever keeps



forcing those crispy chicken sandwiches onto us every morning, but then I heard a rumor that it was you!"

Trinity and Sora burst into laughter, and I couldn't hold it back either. I lifted my hands innocently. "What? They're good!"

There was something different in the air. As we walked together, I couldn't help but notice it. The girls seemed more relaxed today. Maybe it was because Trinity had spent time with them yesterday, possibly broken the ice, which was what she was good at, but they didn't seem that stiff anymore. They felt like us. Just individuals who joked and sighed and rolled their eyes just like I did.

Everything appeared to be going well until we reached the corner with the narrow staircase. The one I had gotten lost at not too long ago. The one where I had first learned that Kayden was...well, Kayden.

I stopped walking. The girls did too, though they looked a little confused. I didn't mean to make a scene. It wasn't just that something had suddenly hit me.

I was thinking about Kayden. Wondering if he was up there at his usual place, and if he was, whether it would be for the best to tell him about my plans. Because I needed to make it clear to him that this wasn't some secret mission we were planning together. I wasn't his Lettie. I wasn't his companion, and if he had any more fantasies about that, I needed to shatter them before they went any further. This was happening, yes, but it was happening on my terms. On Kylan's terms, and not his.

I also wanted to see how he would react. If he really cared about those people like he said he did, or if this had always been about me. If I told him the truth, no glowing eyes, no Thorne talk, just a basic help, and he lost interest, then I would have my answer.



"I have to do something," I announced. "You can go ahead to breakfast."

Lian furrowed her brows. "We can go with—"

"No, I'm good," I shook my head gently. "It'll be quick."

Lian swallowed hard, looking up the stairs she knew led to the East Wing. Before I could say anything else, Trinity stepped forward and slipped her arm through mine. "Yes, you two go ahead to breakfast," she said brightly. "Violet and I will meet you later, okay?"

I gave her an uneasy smile, knowing full well that saying no to Trinity was not really an option. Not after yesterday, not with that determined spark in her eyes, and not when she had my back before I even realized I might actually need someone there.

Lian and Sora exchanged a look. "Okay," Sora said, forcing a smile. She placed a hand on Lian's back, who was frozen in place, and gave her a gentle nudge. "We'll see you guys later."

The two girls walked off together, disappearing around the corner.

I glanced at Trinity, and she gave me a look that said I wasn't getting out of this one.

"So," she rested her hand on her hip, "do you want to tell me what Kayden wants from you or do you want to tell me why you and Kylan didn't join us yesterday?"

I let out an exhausted breath. "How about both?"