

Chapter 252

Violet

My nerves only got worse with each passing second. This was nothing like what I had expected. I thought Kylan and I would spend the day together, but instead it would turn into another lonely day.

After last night, I truly believed that wouldn't happen. After the Veil, after Baelor, I had hoped he wouldn't let me out of his sight.

The hardest part was that I understood why this had to happen. He believed it was important to keep Kayden away from me, and originally, he just wanted to see how Kayden would act around the king, if the king even showed up at all. Besides, even though being with Kylan would have been nice, that wasn't the most important thing. What really mattered was making sure these witches got the help they needed. No matter the cost.

Kayden didn't appear to be all that happy either. His confident smile had vanished from his face, and he looked bothered. "And what about Violet?" he asked, his voice missing its usual brightness.

I looked straight at Kylan, and we locked eyes. He didn't say anything, but his eyes held a silent message that didn't take long to understand. Trust me.

He turned back to Kayden. "Since Violet is already familiar with the witches, she will be going with the first group."

My stomach dipped. Familiar was a big word. Yes, I had seen them, but only once and not without Kayden. Just like that, there was another small detail me and those big brains of mine hadn't talked about.

How would I explain anything to Varius?

Did Varius already see what was coming, or had Kayden somehow warned him?

Kayden's gaze shifted, and a slow smirk curled at his lips. "Oh, right," he gasped. "Violet has already hiked these mountains before... all on her own."

He shot me a wink, and heat crawled up my neck. What was he even doing, throwing that little jab out there like that?

"That's so good of you, Violet!" Sora's voice came from the side, warm and genuine like it had been since the day I met her. "You're such a huge inspiration to all of us. Isn't she, Lian?"

She nudged her shoulder, and Lian responded with a slight smile. My eyes caught Nate's, and he was watching me with a suspicious look. I could sense he didn't quite believe it, and it was probably because he had known me for quite some time now.

Violet, going up the mountains all on her own? Not in this universe.

"I think she was very lucky the first time, but maybe we should join the first group instead, Kylan," Kayden continued, his voice dropping lower. "The mountains can be a scary place. I wonder who will protect her?" he said.

Why was he so desperate to be around me?

Kylan clicked his tongue, glancing casually over the crowd. "The guards, our mothers, Nate, Trinity..."

"Yes, I get it," Kayden spoke through gritted teeth. His lips pressed

together like he was trying to keep something in, and he seemed close to breaking. The next step would probably be begging Kylan to let him join, but did it really matter?

I had already told him I wouldn't be using my eyes, and he was still pushing, which was yet another reason not to trust him. He had to be up to something.

"Wait for me!"

All heads turned to the path where a girl came running toward us. Once she was close enough for me to see her face, I realized it was Princess Kaelis. Only she wasn't wearing a dress this time.

Instead, she had on stylish hiking clothes that looked like they had been put together specifically for this morning, her hair pulled high into a ponytail, and a wide smile lighting up her face.

Her eyes went straight to Nate, and he greeted her with a warm smile and a polite bow. This time he didn't have anywhere to hide and could do nothing but face her.

Kayden chuckled under his breath. "They really are letting anyone on this hike," he muttered, then raised his voice. "Good morning, Kaelis!"

While Kayden could at least pretend to be in a good mood, Kylan couldn't. His expression did not match his brother's. He had an angry frown on his face, and his eyes were cold. "Go back inside, Kaelis. Now!"

Something about the way he said it made my shoulders tense, but I was sure he had his reasons.

"B-but," Kaelis dropped her shoulders. "I want to come with and help the witches!"

Sora beamed, pressing her palms to her cheeks. "That's so kind of you. The king's daughter joining the hike?"

A few of the mistresses around us whispered to each other, and judging by the look in their eyes, it didn't seem to be anything kind. Kaelis noticed, but she didn't seem to care much.

"Does the king know you're here?" Kylan's voice sharpened. "Does Mom know you're here?"

The idea of the queen not knowing hit him harder. I could tell by his voice. Their bond was complicated, and I bet the last thing he wanted was to disrespect her.

"Yes!" Kaelis answered. "I asked her if I could go and she said yes. If you don't believe me, you can go back to the palace and ask her."

It went silent for a few seconds until Kylan exhaled. "Fine," he said. "You will join me in the third group."


"No," Kaelis replied in a gentle tone. She reached up and tightened her ponytail as if she hadn't just spoken back to her brother, the crown prince. "I will go with the first. Nate's group."

The moment his name left her mouth, Nate let out a quiet huff, his cheeks puffing before he exhaled. So much for excitement.

"Nate?" Kylan said, looking straight at him.

Nate raised his brows. "My dad and I will take care of the princess," he said. "Don't worry, Kylan."

Kylan gave him a single nod, and Kaelis cheered. She ran to Nate, practically flying into his arms while he awkwardly patted her back,

looking unsure of what to do with her enthusiasm. 

He mentioned his dad, which meant Beta Jack would be coming with us. That was good news. Even though he was one of the king's men, I felt comfortable around both him and his son.

"Violet."

The sound of my name pulled me out of my thoughts, and I felt two warm hands cradle my cheeks. I stared into the brown eyes I trusted the most as Kylan's thumbs brushed lightly against my skin, his gaze searching for an answer to a question he hadn't asked yet. "Do you trust me —"

"I trust you," I said immediately, not even giving him the chance to finish his question. His eyes told me the rest, and he didn't need to speak for me to understand exactly what he was saying.

Do not use your eyes. Do not do anything crazy. Do not try to prevent anything. Just do what you were meant to do.

He hadn't forgotten about my little visit to the Veil from yesterday, and he didn't forget who he was dealing with. "Violet does whatever Violet wants to do."

Those were the words he had used last night, and he seemed to have accepted it, but this time things would be different. I would be very cautious and avoid doing anything Violet would do. At least, those were my plans.

Jumpie, who was still on Kylan's shoulder, suddenly reached forward and poked me in the cheek. Only this time, it wasn't the aggressive poke like the one at the greenhouse. It was soft, gentle, kind.

Maybe she was starting to like me after all.

I blinked in surprise, my lips curling into a small smile as I reached up to pat her tiny head. "You watch him for me, okay?"

Her tail flicked back and forth, like she had heard me loud and clear and was already making plans to follow through. Kylan's biggest protector.

Kylan laughed at the situation, and I laughed too, but as my gaze drifted past his shoulder, I felt a chill down my spine. Kayden was watching me. Not with his usual grin, but with a cold, steady glare that cut through everything else.

My stomach turned. Had I already betrayed him? Was this it? The moment Adelaide's warning had been about?

"Beta Jack, you're here!" Kaelis' voice rang out, pulling me out of my thoughts.

Kylan leaned in, pressing a quick kiss to my lips before pulling back. I followed his gaze back to the path and saw Jack. He was already giving instructions to a few and organizing the carriages being pushed up the path. A few men were unloading crates while others strapped something that appeared to be bundles to their backs. Jack took the lead like someone who had done it a thousand times before, and seeing him in action made me feel at ease.

"You will all be in good hands," Kylan addressed the crowd. "Beta Jack will lead the first group."

Jack's eyes flicked to Kylan in surprise. "I thought you would be going with the first group and we would lead together."

A bitter laugh came from the wheelchair. "So did I," Kayden commented, lifting a lazy hand in the air to wave at Jack. Something was seriously off,

and I had never seen him this quiet before.

Jack gave him a polite but brief smile before looking back at Kylan. "You're not joining me anymore?"

"Change of plans," Kylan explained. "I'll be going with the third group."

Jack's eyes narrowed, just slightly. He looked at Kylan for a long moment, and Kylan looked right back at him. "Are you sure?" Jack asked.

"Yes," Kylan answered.

Jack sniffed his nose. "Are you one hundred percent certain?"

Kylan let out a short breath as I tilted my head, wondering what I was missing. His eyes had now shifted to Kayden.

"I'm sure," Kylan spoke again, though it sounded like he wasn't. While he had sounded so certain about joining the third group before, I could now hear the doubt in his voice.

"Okay." Jack forced a smile. He turned to the rest of the group. "Group one is heading out!"

His kind eyes locked onto mine. "You should walk up front with me, Violet," he said. "These people have been struggling for a long time, and hopefully today will be their last. None of this would have been possible without you."

An embarrassed chuckle escaped my lips. Mostly because I knew a lot of these people most likely believed otherwise and were either here because they respected the council or because they were curious about the witches and the mountains.

Not everyone had the right intentions, and not everyone's heart was in the right place. At the end of the day, these were still Lyperians, led by a king who held a deep hatred for the witches.

Trinity moved beside me, stopping in front of Kylan. "Thanks." She bumped her fist against his chest, but he stood steady without so much as a stumble. "I didn't want to tell you what to do just now. I would never want to tell anyone what to do, and it might've come out the wrong way, but I really appreciate it, Kylan."

Kylan shot her a small smile. "It's okay, Trinity," he said. "If anything, I appreciate you for having Violet's back."

"Always!" Trinity laughed before pulling me along. I glanced over my shoulder one last time, catching Kylan, who sent me a reassuring smile. Those around us started moving, and there was too much going on all at once. Between Kylan, Kayden, and the rest of the group, I didn't even know where to look.

One by one, everyone began grabbing a crate from the pile near the carriages. Without giving it a second thought, I picked one up too and followed the others up the path.

And with that, we were on our way...



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