

## Chapter 253

Violet

I walked beside Jack in silence. It had been going on like this for a long while now with neither of us saying a word. It wasn't awkward or uncomfortable, just peaceful.

Because let's be honest.

What else would I talk with this man about?

The group was large, maybe around fifty of us in total. Trinity and Lian were right behind us, each carrying a crate even though Jack had insisted we didn't have to. None of us wanted to hear it, but Sora didn't need to be told twice.

She walked in the back, too busy flirting with some guys, running her hands over their muscles and offering them sips of her water. They all seemed to be enjoying the attention just fine.

Even though the crate in my hands wasn't the heaviest, my hands were still aching. Still, I wasn't planning to let go. I'd be damned if I gave anyone the chance to whisper about me, the girl who vouched for the witches but couldn't be bothered to carry anything herself.

Not when they probably didn't think too highly of me to begin with.

But if anyone was stealing the show today, it wasn't me. I glanced over my shoulder, a chuckle slipping out before I could stop it. Kaelis was pulling two large carts, not even breaking a sweat, her big smile still plastered across her face, probably thanks to Nate, who was right beside her.

He looked like he felt a sorry for her, but when he reached out to take one of the carts, she clutched it tighter and shot him a look that made him laugh. A real laugh.

"She is one of a kind, isn't she?" Jack's voice broke my focus.

I turned to him, brows raised.

"Kaelis," he clarified. "She has her mother's strength."

I smiled faintly and looked over my shoulder again. Nate was still laughing at her as Kaelis refused to hand over the cart. He tried again, stepping in front of her and planting his hands on the handle, but she only tightened her grip even more and stared at him with a playful glare.

"So does Kylan," Jack went on, "and Kiora. They got it from their mother."

I looked ahead, letting the words sink in. I could still remember Elyx, through Adelaide's eyes, proudly calling himself the strongest. Yet here was Jack, confirming that his children's strength came from the queen.

"Are you and the queen close?" I wondered.

Jack chuckled. "Very. We're good friends."

I hadn't noticed it before, but I could imagine them being friends easily. There was something about them that felt similar. It was hard to explain, but maybe it was their composed nature.

"I guess that's why she allowed Kaelis to join us."

Jack let out a soft laugh, shaking his head. "My dear friend, Queen Cecillia, would not let any of her daughters get a hundred feet past the

palace gates if she had any say in it.”

He lifted a single brow, and then it clicked. I gasped as I realized what was happening. Kaelis had lied. The queen hadn’t given her any permission at all, and telling Kylan to go back and ask was all some silly game because she knew he wouldn’t do it anyway.

I glanced at Jack, my concern growing for Kylan. How could he remain so calm under this? Why didn’t Jack tell her to go back when he had the chance? I was sure she would’ve listened to him.

How could Kylan not have known?

“Kylan knows exactly what his mother is like,” Jack said, reading my thoughts, “but he probably felt sorry for the girl.”

Jack’s words made sense. That sounded like Kylan. Even though he wasn’t the closest with his sisters, he did seem like the type to have a soft spot for them. I guessed he thought he was doing the right thing and would just take the blow later.

“Trinity, Lian?” Jack looked behind him, raising his voice slightly. “Are the two of you still alright back there?”

“Fine!” Trinity and Lian answered at the same time.

“Great,” Jack chuckled, then shifted his attention to Lian. “I haven’t seen you at the training grounds recently. You’re too strong of a shifter to skip out.”

Lian shifted the crate slightly in her grip. “I’ve had a change of duties.”

Jack hummed in understanding. “Well, you are always welcome to join your brothers, and we’re all waiting for you.”

I was met with a sudden sense of guilt because I knew it was because of me. I didn't know much about those girls besides the fact that they were stuck with me, and apparently, she was this incredible warrior in the making, yet here she was, stuck being my lady-in-waiting.

Thank the moon it would only be for one more week.

"Trinity," Jack called out. "What are your plans for the future?"

Trinity sighed, balancing the crate in her hands. "After Starlight, I'll go back to the Bloodrose with Dylan, become the Luna, make some very necessary changes, pop out a few adorable pups."

I laughed softly. She had her answer ready before Jack could even finish. It really did sound like she had her whole life mapped out.

"Oh, and," she added with a grin, "I might even visit the future queen of Lyperia a few times."

Her words were meant to cheer me up, but they only made my stomach tighten. Future queen...

It sounded so serious. A bit too serious.

"At the end of the day, a title is just a title," Jack said, glancing at me. He must've sensed my worries. "But you will do well as queen. You are made for royalty, Violet."

My cheeks flushed. I thought of last night, of Alaric calling me 'princess' again and again. I thought it was just some loving nickname he had given me, but now I wondered if it was more than that. If maybe he addressed me as princess because I was a princess. The princess of the common lands.

Jack had said I was made for royalty. If only he knew...

"Lyperia will have a worthy king and queen," he said quietly, almost whispering to himself. "And that is all this Lyperian could wish for."

I looked at him, catching his smile from the side.

I had quite literally taken the title from his daughter, even if it had never truly been hers to begin with. Yet there wasn't a single hint of resentment in his voice. It amazed me.

"I have never apologized to you, Violet," Jack continued, "and I think part of it was because I was too embarrassed."

I blinked at him. "Apologize?"

"For Chrystal," he said simply. "For everything she has done to you at Starlight and in Lyperia."

I took a slow breath, my fingers tightening slightly on the crate. Another Wyrnsbane with another apology that I didn't need from them.

"I want you to know that I did tell her to stop," he went on. "But I suppose I've spoiled her too much, and I'm lacking too much as not only a Beta, but also a father. For that, I wanted to give you my deepest apology."

"No," I shook my head quickly. "I don't want to hear it because you have nothing to apologize for."

My voice came out the strongest it had been today, and Jack's eyes widened in surprise.

"You and Nate are too kind," I added. They really were. Why would I ever



blame them for Chrystal's actions?

"But I don't need your apologies."

I planted a warm smile on my lips, hoping he would feel my sincerity. Jack studied my face as if he couldn't believe I wasn't waiting for an apology. Then he let out a chuckle. "You have a good heart, Violet," he said.

I didn't answer. I wasn't sure if I even believed that. Someone with a good heart wouldn't keep disappointing the people they cared about. Someone with a good heart would not get a visit from their late mother, telling them it's 'too late'. I tried to be good, but I wasn't sure if I had a good heart.

Jack's voice dropped, and grew more serious. "I'll be upfront with you, Violet," he sighed. "I didn't want Kylan to join the third group because it's the group my wife will lead...and now I fear my daughter might be there."

Even as those words left his mouth, I didn't feel any anger. Maybe it was because I had bigger things to worry about, or maybe because I knew Kylan wasn't interested in her in the slightest, but I just didn't care.

"That's okay."

Hopefully, she would at least carry a crate up the mountain to lessen the burden of the third group. That would be nice.

Jack eyed me, confusion written across his face.

"That's okay?"

Well, yes.

How did he expect me to react?

"It would be a bit strange for me to turn back around and run down the mountain now, wouldn't it?"

A laugh came from Jack, and it made me realize just how much it sounded like Nate's. It was almost unusual. And somehow, standing here beside him, it felt like I was talking to Nate.

"You're right, Violet," Jack breathed, nodding toward the path ahead. "Especially now."

I followed his eyes and spotted the familiar huts and tents in the distance.

"Because we're already here."



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