

Chapter 255

Violet

A chill ran down my spine, and every nerve in me screamed that it was wrong, unnatural, invasive and creepy. He had reached into the most private part of me without permission.

How dared he?

Was he a mind reader? Could he hear everything I was thinking right now? Every doubt, every fear?

Not even Aelius had done something like this. So how was this possible, and who was this man? What else was he capable of? There were still so many questions.

How could he possibly tell me not to fear him, then do something like this?

"There are five groups coming throughout the day," Jack announced. "They will help rebuild huts, tend to the ill, and bring what is needed to ease your burdens."

Varius tilted his head. "And your king has agreed to this?"

Jack gave a shrug, a smile tugging at his lips. "Council decision."

Varius's eyes swept over the Lyperians as if he were still trying to figure out what they were doing here. The way he stared at them made me wonder if he was speaking in their heads too. Was I the only one hearing him, or was this something everyone else was quietly enduring?

'Even these weak eyes of mine are worth more than these supplies.'

He had done it again...

An uncomfortable feeling filled my stomach as my gaze shot up to meet his. Sure enough, Varius was staring directly at me, as if he wanted to confirm whether I had truly heard him. He was daring me to acknowledge it.

My instincts told me to look away, to pretend nothing happened, so I did. I tried to keep my face steady, but when Varius let out a low chuckle, I knew he knew.

"It is a shame," Varius breathed. "That it took Lyperia so long to come, and that a young girl from another land had to speak up for someone to finally do something."

The silence that followed was sharp enough to cut through air, because no lies were told. It was indeed a shame.

"But since the Royal Mate went through all this effort," he nodded his head toward me, "and my people are suffering, and I do not wish to disrespect your king, it would be foolish of me to decline."

It was not Beta Jack, but surprisingly enough, Nate who had stepped forward. "Listen closely," he turned toward the Lyperians. His presence was strong, and commanding. "We are here to listen to the witches first. Do not come in assuming you know their needs better than they do. Help them, show them who Lyperians are, and above all...treat them with respect!"

He paced back and forth, making sure his voice carried to every corner. "Some of you will carry wood, others will bring supplies, some will help rebuild the huts, whatever it is you are best at. I will tell you what to do, and if you are unassigned, assist wherever you see need. Remember to

behave, because even though we are all Lyperians, here we are still guests.”

“Yes,” Jack added. “Do not argue with the villagers, and do not force yourselves where you are not wanted. We came here to help, not to prove anything.”

I watched the two with admiration. I thought I had done such a good job speaking at the council, but the words fell so naturally from their mouths. It was like Nate was born into this role, and although I knew who he was, I had never seen this side of him.

“Violet, Trinity, Kaelis,” he continued, turning toward us, “you will join the others and attend to the ill. Lian, you’re with me.”

He carried on, assigning people their roles, and soon after, people began moving, gathering supplies, and following his instructions.

Jack patted Nate’s back. “Good job,” he praised him.

I heard a low hum that belonged to Varius, and watched him as his eyes flicked toward Nate. “Like father, like son,” he mouthed. Maybe it was because everything this man did was suspicious to me, but I couldn’t help but wonder if there could be more behind it.

Just like I wondered if there could be more behind him being able to creep inside my mind. The question burned in my throat, but for some reason, I was too afraid to ask. Not because I feared him, but because I knew I would fear the answer.

A breath slipped from me as people started shifting around, and suddenly there were arms hooked with mine on both sides. I glanced left and right.

On one side was Trinity, and on the other, Kaelis. To them, it was nothing

out of the ordinary, but if only they knew how much that small gesture calmed my heart at the moment.

"Did you see him?" Kaelis leaned into me as we walked. She must have been talking about Nate. "He is so..." she pressed her fist against her chest, unable to find the words, then let out a high-pitched giggle that nearly made me snort.

Apparently I wasn't the only one who found it funny. A soft laugh came from the front, and it came from him...

Varius...

He turned his head little by little until his eyes found Kaelis. My grip on her arm tightened without me meaning to, as if that could keep her safe. It was foolish, because I was the one who had led her here. I had led all of them here...

"I haven't heard a laugh like that in a long time," he whispered.

"Well, you will be hearing it a lot today!" Kaelis answered. I couldn't stop her in time as she had already released my arm and darted forward to cling to Varius' instead. "I will help you, Sir," she offered kindly.

"Oh, thank you," Varius replied. He looked at Thorne who was on his shoulder. "That's a brave one, Thorne."

A brave one...or just too trusting like me...

Trinity nudged my shoulder, and I turned to look at her brown eyes, full of curiosity. "Are you okay?" she frowned.

"Yes," I said a bit too quickly. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"See, that's what I'm wondering," she squinted her eyes. She looked at me as if she were desperate to find out the truth. Of course she could tell I wasn't doing okay.

"You do know you can tell me anything, right?" she added softly.

I nudged her shoulder with mine, forcing a small smile. "I know."

There was so much I wanted to tell her about, but she was also someone I did not want to burden. I knew for a fact Trinity would be worried if I told her this man had just read my mind.

It didn't take long before we arrived at the same tent Kayden had taken me to last time, and that familiar sense of unease crept back in. We were here to help, and this was supposed to be a good thing. But deep down, I couldn't shake the fear that I had let them down, that I wouldn't be able to give them the help they were hoping for.

What if this would all be for nothing?

Kaelis had already let go of Varius' arm and was deep in conversation with someone else just before stepping into the tent. Varius, however, didn't follow her. Instead, he turned to face me.

'A dozen pairs of hands fumbling to do what one pair of glowing eyes can manage with ease. These poor people are wasting their time.'

There it was again.

That voice...

His voice...

This time it was something else that bothered me. It wasn't him getting

inside my head, but the edge of ungratefulness in his words. After everything, these were his thoughts?

And Aelius dared to call me the selfish one?

Maybe it was time someone told this man that he couldn't just slip into my mind and read my thoughts without asking, and that someone would be me. Enough was enough.

I forced a breath through my nose and released myself from Trinity's grip. "You should go inside," I told her. "I'll catch up with you later."



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