

## Chapter 256

Violet

Trinity glanced between us, and I could tell she didn't want to go, but she didn't resist me either. With a frustrated sigh, she turned and walked into the tent, leaving me alone with Varius.

What was I even doing?

My stomach twisted, and for a second I thought about following her, but I stayed. I stepped a little closer, and the closer I got, the heavier his presence felt.

His eyes locked onto mine, and as I held his gaze and looked at him, I could see the wrinkles on his face. He seemed even older than Aelius, which meant he had to be over a hundred years old. What was this man's deal, and what was he doing in these mountains?

He was a Soothsayer, supposed to be with his own kind, yet here he was with the witches. Maybe it was a bit too late to freak out now, but the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't help but feel that all of this was just strange.

"You have questions," Varius said. "Speak."

Luckily, this time his voice wasn't inside my head, but it still carried the same power.

I lifted my chin. "How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"You know what," I pressed through gritted teeth.

"Get inside my head like that. Speak to me when no one else can hear. That's not normal, that's sick and..." My thoughts slipped toward Kayden without meaning to.

I was sure that even he, with all his weirdness going on, would've never forced his way into me like this. "There is this thing called boundaries, Varius."

Varius clicked his tongue, looking at Thorne. "The child will bring five different groups of Lyperians to these mountains, and dares to speak of boundaries," he mumbled, watching closely as people walked in and out of the tent. "You are the one who led me in, Royal Mate."

"How?" I asked, confused. That wasn't possible. I didn't even know how to do that.

His lips curved into that mysterious smile that made me shiver. Varius knew more than I ever would, and it seemed like he enjoyed watching me stumble over the unknown.

My breath hitched as I prepared to attack, but before I could say anything else, he spoke again. "But if you wish for me to stop, I will stop."

Well...

That caught me off guard.

For some reason, I had expected some kind of resistance or maybe even cryptic words, but not that. My heart raced as I gave him a small nod. "Good. Thank you."

"But it is a shame," Varius sighed, his hand brushing his eyes. "That you have the ultimate weapon to help these people, your people, but do not care enough to do anything about it."

My blood boiled as Varius released a breath before tapping his stick against the ground twice. He spun his body toward the tent. "If you weren't planning on using your eyes, you should've at least made them find something to replace the Lyperian stone."

Now I had had it.

Before the old man could walk away, my hand reached out on instinct, pressing against his shoulder. "Hey!"

Varius turned his head just enough to let me see his smirk. "Yes, Royal Mate?" he said calmly.

My chest burned with anger. "Do you even realize how ungrateful you're being?" The words tumbled out before I could stop them. "I stood in front of the council and risked everything to speak for these people. I nearly fought with my mate because of you and this...this Kian of yours!" I snapped. "I climbed these mountains, brought help, brought supplies, brought Lyperians —"

"Yet all I asked for were those eyes of yours, Royal Mate."

"And I hate to disappoint you, but you will not be getting them," I said, my voice steady. "I will not be using them, and if all of this isn't good enough for you, then I will cancel the mission and we will go."

Varius slowly turned all the way to face me, and his eyes narrowed slightly. He was probably trying to decide whether I was bluffing, but I wasn't.

I just wanted some clarity. I knew that if Kylan were here, he wouldn't have asked. He would have just left.

I met Varius's stare with a glare of my own. While I did feel sorry for

these people and wanted to help, I wasn't about to be dragged through the dirt by a man I barely knew. The king was more than enough already.

For a long moment, neither of us moved. Then, unexpectedly, Varius let out a laugh that shook his shoulders.

My stomach turned at the sound, and for a moment I feared I had gone too far. But then his expression eased.

"I did not mean to upset you," Varius said in a low voice. "I must admit, it could be a good thing for these people to have proper accommodations." He exhaled. "And I am sorry for my ungrateful reaction."

I was silenced by surprise.

Sorry? He was sorry?

"Now did you not say you were here to help?" Varius spoke, tapping his stick again. Then he entered the tent.

In a hurry, I followed him inside.

The moment we stepped in, the smell of herbs filled the air. A lump formed in my throat as I forced myself to look at those sick people again. All I wanted was for them to feel better. If that could happen today, even just a little, I would be satisfied for now.

The tent was crowded. Lyperians moved carefully between the beds, doing their best to help. Still, it was impossible not to notice the coughs. They had doubled from last time, and the sound gave me goosebumps.

My eyes searched the tent until they landed on Trinity and Kaelis. They were beside a young girl curled up next to a woman. Trinity knelt at her

side, her hand stroking gently through the girl's hair, while Kaelis sat close, smiling brightly as she told her something. It looked like she was doing everything she could to distract her from her pain.

The moment should have warmed my heart. Yet the way the woman desperately clung to her daughter, and the way the girl's frail body trembled as she reached out for Kaelis's hand, spoke louder than smiles. It told me there was no strength left in her.

"She will die," Varius's voice cut through the sound of coughs. "Both she and her mother will die."

My eyes widened as my head snapped toward him. How could he speak those words so plainly, as if he were commenting on the weather?

"They will all die," he continued, looking straight ahead. "And no amount of food or medicine will be able to save them. The only thing that can save them are—"

"Then I hope their bodies can hold on a little while longer," I cut in, my voice sharp. "Until we find a solution that works best for everyone."

I already told him I wouldn't, but he just kept pushing, and pushing.

My heart told me to go and help these people, use my eyes for just this one time and get it over with, but I refused. I would not let him finish that sentence, and I would not let him corner me into something that could never be undone.

No matter what, I wasn't going to be manipulated into using my eyes. Not here. Not like this. Maybe that would be the real betrayal... not to Kayden, not to Varius, but to Kylan.

And I could never betray him again.

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."



Comments



Support



Share