

Chapter 265

Kylan

There was a long silence. It felt like we were both waiting for one of us to take it back. But neither of us did.

"Adelaide...spoke to you?" she whispered, as if she was afraid to believe it. "But I don't understand. How?"

"That was what I wanted to know too. "I don't know how, but I know she did." I gave a short nod. "She told me not to let 'her' reach the mountains, and she said everything would fall apart if she did."

Violet's breath caught. "Varius pressed his hand to my forehead and told me not to betray him."

My stomach turned. Adelaide and Varius had both given us warnings, Varius had repeated his by telling her the same words. That couldn't be a mistake. It couldn't.

The group was still moving. There were murmurs, carts rolling, but for me the world had narrowed to only those warnings. "I don't think this is a coincidence."

I looked ahead and caught sight of Kayden and the king. They were still glancing over their shoulders, watching us closely. The last thing we needed at the moment.

"You didn't use your eyes to heal anyone, right?" I asked Violet, worried. Kayden smirking wasn't something new, but there was always this doubt in the back of my mind, that it meant he already had something over her, something I hadn't noticed yet.



She let out a sharp huff. "No, Kylan. I haven't," she said, clearly annoyed. It was not a fair question, but I had to ask.

"Do you think she is Chrystal?" Violet asked suddenly, her voice small. "Or do you think Adelaide made a mistake?"

The name made my blood boil, but I forced myself to think. Adelaide had said her. Varius had said him. They were speaking about two different people, or Adelaide made a mistake. But that didn't make sense. From what I knew, Adelaide was too sharp to make a mistake like that.

"Varius said something else before," Violet whispered, her voice trembling. "He said fate was sealed the moment I stood before the council, and—"

"Stop," I cut her off. "I don't need more riddles in my head, Violet. There's already too much as it is."

There were too many moving pieces, and the harder we tried to change fate, the quicker it would snap back at us. I was sure of it.

Violet bit her lip, and I knew that look. She was already thinking too much, trying to find a way to stop this before she even understood what this was. Even I was overthinking, now wondering if agreeing to let Chrystal back down had been the right move at all.

I always had a plan. This time, I didn't, and it bothered me. Adelaide and I wanted the same thing, to keep Violet safe. But her voice in my head only twisted things further. She shouldn't have been there at all. Not in my thoughts, and not in Violet's.

If she had something to say, she should have been clear. Either give us the truth or say nothing at all. Half-warnings about something this



serious only made things worse.

I let out a breath and looked at Violet. "Their words aren't guidance. They're distractions," I told her. "They make you try to do everything at once until you end up doing nothing at all."

Her eyes widened, but she kept listening.

"We could spend all our time trying to block what's coming, and it'll still find another way through," I went on. Because no matter what we did, it was already here.

Violet would betray someone, and darkness was waiting...

"The smarter move is to be ready when it comes."

She blinked. "How?" she asked. "And when?"

How...when...

That was a good question.

I went quiet. The more I thought about it, the more I realized it would happen soon. Violet said it herself. Varius claimed fate was sealed the moment she stood before the council, and every prophecy pointed back to these very mountains.

Adelaide had spoken to me out of desperation. She knew we both loved Violet. She knew her daughter would do something she shouldn't, and as a mother, she could not bear to see her suffer. She said I was the only one who could stop it, but no one could stop what was already here. That was the truth.

"I don't know yet," I admitted. "But I'm working on it."



She looked at me with hope anyway, as if I had all the answers. Maybe I should have told her the truth, that I was just as unsure. But I could not take that hope from her, not when she needed it to keep going.

Looking ahead, I caught Fergus watching from afar. His eyes narrowed, as if he was trying to read us. Anyone could tell something was not right.

"Violet," I said quietly, leaning closer.

Her eyes widened, locking onto mine, waiting.

"I know it is a lot to ask, but I want you to forget Adelaide's warning. Forget Varius's words. Just do what you came here to do."

She drew in a breath. "But Kayden and the king—"

"I'm not asking you to forget that I don't want you near them, or that I don't want you using your eyes. I only want you to forget the prophecies and stay close to me," I cut in. "And I'll protect you."

Her eyes softened. Slowly, her worries began to fade, and I gave her the only thing I could offer right now. A reassuring smile.

As I looked at her, I could only think about what I could lose if I ever failed her. I thought of how easily the world could break her, yet she still smiled at me while I could see the pain behind her eyes.

All I wanted was to shield her with everything I had. To put myself between her and whatever waited ahead, and as I kept staring into those beautiful eyes, a selfish thought went through my head.

I could mark her, claim her as mine so there would be no more doubt. No more second-guessing. Everyone would know she was mine, and no one, not Kayden, not the king, not fate itself, would be able to take her from



me.

But even as the thought burned inside me, I knew it would not come from the heart. I loved her, but doing that would bind her life to mine forever. A part of me still wondered if I had the right to make that choice for her.

If the darkness that was on the way had the right to make that choice for us...

Violet tilted her head, shooting me a suspicious glance. "What?"

"Nothing," I smiled weakly. "You're just beautiful."

Violet's cheeks flushed, and I brushed a strand of hair away from her face. "Let's talk about something else," I suggested. "How was your day?"

It felt strange to pretend as if nothing else was happening around us. Danger was everywhere, and yet here I was asking her about her day. I almost felt guilty for trying to ease her mind, but I could not help it, especially since I felt responsible for making her worry even more.

Maybe telling her about Adelaide had caused more harm than good.

I wanted to give her something normal, even if it lasted only a few minutes.

Her smile widened, bright and genuine, and then she began to talk. I listened to every word that left her mouth. About the elders, the children, how much she enjoyed spending time with them.

And when she laughed through every word, I swore I would do anything to keep that sound in my life, and be prepared for whatever would come our way.



Violet was still talking when the village finally came into sight. Huts and tents stood scattered, people were outside, and the second group was working hard. Some carried wood across their shoulders, while others pushed carts and carried crates.

For a moment, it almost felt normal. That was until Jumpie let out a squeal and buried herself deeper into my neck as if she sensed danger. I felt her small body shiver, and instantly worried.

"Is she okay?" Violet chuckled, patting her back.

I was about to respond, but then a loud croak tore through the crowd. The sound came from above, and every head snapped to the raven in the sky.

People dropped what they were carrying, wood tumbling to the ground, voices breaking into whispers and gasps, and several ducked.

I looked over at Violet. Her smile was gone. "That's him," she whispered, her lips barely moving. "Thorne..."

The raven circled in the sky, and just as it turned toward us, a voice rumbled deep inside my head.

'Valerius.'

The sound crawled down my spine. It wasn't Adelaide, and it wasn't the beast. It was something else, someone else. But how could anyone know that name...the one I refused to even speak myself?

My chest clenched as the raven flew down.

Its wings spread wide, and it was coming straight for us.