

# chapter 266

Chapter 265

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Violet

My feet were glued to the ground as Thorne's dark eyes narrowed, and before I could even react, the raven lunged for us.

My eyes went wide, and Kylan reacted fast. He shot his arm out, pushing me behind his back so hard I nearly stumbled over my own feet.

My heart was already pounding when Thorne dove lower, but Kylan raised his hand. Just as he was about to reach for his wing, something small and fast moved first.

Jumpie jumped into the air and whipped her tail, smacking right across Thorne's face. Thorne let out a painful screech, a few feathers falling down as he hurried back into the air. It had all happened so fast it made the entire crowd gasp. 1

I blinked, stunned. I knew Thorne could get a bit strange, but did that just really happen?

Kylan gave a surprised chuckle, patting Jumpie on his shoulder. "I think you just saved a life, Jumpie," he said, then locked his eyes on mine. "Because I was about to kill that thing."

His expression said it all.

What the hell was that?

I didn't say anything, because honestly, I didn't know either.

Around us, people let out a few hushed gasps, but then they went right back to their work as if nothing happened. Wood was lifted again, crates



were moved as if Thorne didn't just try to kill whoever he was after.

I feared looking into the king's direction because the thought of Kayden's face right now made my stomach tighten. I didn't even want to look, because I already knew he wouldn't be happy about Thorne being swatted away like a fly.

And then I began overthinking again.

Had I just betrayed them? The villagers who trusted me, Varius who followed Thorne, Kayden or maybe even Thorne himself?

Was the 'she' Adelaide had told Kylan about Jumpie? My lips parted as a small gasp escaped me.

I shook my head. No, that was exactly what Kylan meant. I was doing it again. Adelaide's words had gotten under my skin, hearing she had found her way inside of Kylan's head had gotten under my skin, and now I was driving myself insane, looking for any sign of betrayal in the smallest things.

As we moved forward again, walking further into the village, I noticed the Bloodroses walking a little slower as their eyes shifted back toward me. Fergus's worried gaze lingered on me the longest, probably wondering what had just happened.

It was peaceful again until a voice roared through the crowd.

"Your king is here, and you are all still standing?"

One of the guards shouted. "Show your respects!"

At once, the Lyperians of the second group dropped to their knees and bowed their heads. But the witches did not. They stayed standing, their



faces cold.

Of course they weren't going to bow to him.

What had this man ever done for them?

My eyes darted to Kylan. He stood calm, his face unreadable, like this was just another ordinary day. Just King Elyx doing what he did best.

"The witches too!" the guard demanded. "Show your respects for the one who funded your survival. The king of Lyperia!"

Still, the witches didn't bow. Parents pulled their children close, but no one else was foolish enough to kneel.

"I'm waiting," the guard pressed.

My stomach twisted. This wasn't right. He couldn't force them to kneel. They owed him nothing, and especially not since he was the reason for their suffering. Every part of me screamed it was wrong.

"This is not right," I whispered, turning to Kylan. I expected him to tell me to let it go, but instead his eyes softened.

"You're right. It isn't."

He took my hand and pulled me forward, dragging me through the crowd toward the front.

Then I heard the tap of a stick against the ground. It had to be him...

My eyes searched and found Varius. He was pushing through his people, but he was alone. Thorne wasn't on his shoulder.

It took a moment before he arrived, but when he did, Varius's gaze



locked on the king. His mouth opened, ready to speak, but Kylan beat him to it.

"How about you earn their respect," Kylan spoke, dragging me forward until we stood beside Varius. "Instead of trying to demand it?"

It went silent, and only the wind moved. Kylan didn't flinch. His eyes stayed on the king, and as I tried to look anywhere but at him, the mine landed on Kayden. Surprisingly, his eyes weren't on me this time.

They were on Kylan. He didn't look angry...he looked...impressed?

Varius stayed quiet, glancing between father and son.

A moment later, the king let out a laugh. "Well said, my son," he said, clapping his hands as if the whole thing was nothing more than a performance. "Respect is stronger when given freely, weaker when forced."

Kylan scoffed under his breath.

"And I, King Elyx," the king went on, spreading his arms, "would like to apologize for my embarrassing guard. I would never ask for more than what the hearts of my precious Lyperians are willing to give."

The guard lowered his head at once, whispering apologies, but the king brushed him off with a flick of his wrist. Whatever game he was playing, I wasn't fooled.

"I come here only as a friend," he said, grinning. "And perhaps as a curious man eager to see how my people are supposedly...suffering." He wrinkled his nose at the last word. "Nothing more."

"Bullshit," Kylan muttered under his breath. And it was. Judging by the



way Kayden narrowed his eyes at the king, he knew it too.

The tension eased a little. Mothers loosened their grips on their children, and the second group began to rise from their knees.

"Now don't just stand there!" the king called. "Get to work, everyone! Let's help these...struggling witches!"

People moved at once, rushing as if the king's words had lit a fire under their asses. The Lyperians hurried to follow orders, while the Bloodroses strolled along at their own pace.

I caught Fergus's eyes as he passed, and he gave me a small nod. Then my gaze shifted to Trinity, who was grinning while tugging Dylan with her. A moment later, their lips met, and the two of them slipped away.

A smile spread across my lips. She deserved every second with him, and seeing her happy made me happy too.

But the warm feeling vanished as I felt a stare on me. I looked up and found the king, standing with his guards. His hands were on his waist, eyes narrowed as they burned into mine, and that smirk that was just like Kayden's still stuck on his face.

Kayden, who was still beside him, shifted in his chair. His maid leaned down to whisper something in his ear before pushing him forward, and the two headed in our direction.

What did he want from me now?

Varius cleared his throat, and Kylan and I both turned our heads to look at him. The two stared at each other for a long moment, and I could only imagine what was going through Kylan's mind.





There was no doubt he had also been curious about Varius, and had many questions for him.

"I'm sorry about...the king," Kylan said.

A small smile tugged at Varius's lips. A sigh escaped him as he reached out to Jumpie, who was on Kylan's shoulder, and gave her tail the faintest pat.

"That is a very rare and special squirrel you've got there," he said softly.

Jumpie's tail flicked as she pulled away, and Kylan raised a brow at Varius.

"I must apologize for Thorne," Varius said, pulling his hand back. "I believe the raven was overly eager to see you."

Kylan gave a low hum, but his eyes never left Varius.

Then Varius turned to me. His smile faltered, and his frown deepened. "And you," he whispered. "I knew you would come back, Violet."

Though I had expected that much, it still didn't stop the chill that swept over me.

"But you shouldn't have," Varius added, his voice calm. His gaze shifted between me and Kylan. "Not here, and not at the same time."

Who did he mean?

Kayden?

Kylan?

Kylan and I shot each other confused glances, but then tore our gazes away as the sound of wheels came closer. We both looked in the same



direction and saw Kayden.

It was the smile plastered across Kayden's face that unsettled me the most. With just a single glance, I could tell he had been waiting to be near me all day, and this time, nothing would stop him.



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