



Chapter 270

Violet

"Kylan!" I gasped, spinning to him.

Kylan's blunt solution made Kayden release a growl. Varius didn't look as surprised.

"I think you should consider it," Kylan shrugged, as if he had just made the simplest suggestion in the world.

Varius let out a low chuckle. "And abandon these mountains again?" His eyes hardened, though his tone remained calm. "No. You don't seem to know the way of the witches, crown prince, but these are our mountains, and you would have to drag these witches out of here."

My chest ached hearing that. They were stubborn, loyal, bound to these mountains, even if it killed them. And you know what? I respected it.

At the end of the day, these were Lyperians, and these were their mountains.

"It's not what I want either, but I cannot help you with the stone. You haven't given me any reason to trust you. There are many things here to consider," Kylan said coldly. "I apologize for what the king has done to you and your people. They didn't deserve that, and if necessary, I will make sure people will walk these mountains every single day and restore the village to the way it deserves to be," Kylan said.

The words hit deep because they were true. I wanted to speak, to argue, but my lips stayed shut. All we had to go on was a raven that nearly clawed into us, Adelaide's warning, and...Kayden...



I wished it were a different situation. That Kylan trusted Varius, and the king wasn't an asshole, and the two of them could indeed restore the stone. Unfortunately, it didn't work like that.

"But I won't take responsibility for you refusing to leave these mountains and putting your people's lives in jeopardy," Kylan continued. "That will not be on me."

"Oh, yeah?" Kayden's voice snapped through the cavern.

His chair rolled forward, splashing through the pool of water with force. He bent quickly, his hand darting into the water as the corners of his mouth twitched. My heart jumped when he pulled something out.

A bone...

He threw it at us with force, and it hit the ground hard in front of Kylan's boots, rolling once before stopping. The sound of it made my own bones crack.

I gasped, stumbling behind Kylan's back. My chest squeezed so tight I could hardly breathe.

"How about now, 'crown prince'?" Kayden snapped. "Will this one be on you? Will you take responsibility for this? Because I have!"

"Kayden!" Varius's voice boomed through the cavern. His eyes burned with anger, louder than I had ever heard him before. Kayden breathed hard, staring at his lap.

I carefully stepped aside from behind Kylan's back and took one more look at the bone. It had to be one of a witch. There was no doubt about it.

Kylan lowered himself to the ground. I felt a lump in my throat as I



watched him pick it up, his fingers brushing over the pale surface like he needed to be sure. He could pretend all he wanted, but I knew him too well. That look in his eyes said enough.

It was one of regret, sadness, and embarrassment.

Varius spoke again. "The people drop the bones of the dead into these waters, in the hope that the god who once blessed them will listen again," he said, his voice softer this time.

Kylan's head lifted, his eyes piercing through Varius's. "And what god might that be?" he spat. "Baelor, the god of the Underworld?"

The cavern went still. My heart thudded so hard I thought it might break me. I looked at Varius, waiting for him to speak, waiting for him to explain the way he had before. For him to tell him no, and that these people did not follow him. That it wasn't true.

But he didn't...

His eyes flickered toward Kayden, and Kayden just shook his head with a smirk. "See, Varius?" Kayden spoke. "Isn't he exactly like I told you he was?"

Varius's gaze shifted between them, his jaw tight. Meanwhile, Kylan rose to his feet, the bone still in his hand. "I've seen enough. We're going back down," he decided, his voice final.

"Of course you would say that!" Kayden scoffed, as if he had known all along. He shifted in his chair, rolling a bit forward. "That's what you always do, isn't it? Run away from your problems." He then shot me a smirk. "That's your Kylan."

Kylan's eyes turned to steel, his fist clenching. "Don't start."



"Or what?" Kayden barked. "You'll poison me again?"

The words crashed through the air, and my head snapped to Kylan, fearing he might finally lose it and pull him out of that chair after all. Surprisingly enough, Kylan didn't move, didn't break. Whatever he felt, his face gave nothing away. But I knew those words had hit deeper than Kayden could ever know, because I knew Kylan regretted everything.

"Nothing to say?" Kayden pressed, hungry for a reaction. "Will you not go on your knees' and beg for my forgiveness while celebrating behind my back this time like some coward?"

Kylan's eyes never left him. "I won't stand here and trade blows with you," a slow breath slipped from Kylan. "You do not want to go there with me, Kayden. Trust me."

It seemed as if the world stopped, and even the cavern was holding its breath. I badly wanted to tell Kayden to fuck off, but then there was that warning I had sworn I wouldn't think about again. It felt like no words could leave my mouth.

I waited for Kayden to strike back, but instead... he went quiet, and his jaw tightened. For some reason, he really didn't want to go there with Kylan.

His gaze slid to me, and his eyes softened. Whenever he had that look, it was so hard to see any evil behind it, yet I couldn't forget what he had just said to Kylan.

"You see, Lettie?" he spoke through gritted teeth. "He doesn't understand...but you do."

What?

Kayden took a breath. "You will go back down there, and you will keep thinking about that single bone because that is who you are."

My heart pounded in my ears, listening to his words because that was exactly what I was going to do. I glanced at the bone still in Kylan's hand, and already felt sick to my stomach.

"And I can understand why you don't want to use your eyes," Kayden went on. "But Kylan...he doesn't care about anyone but himself. He never did. It's because he never had a hard life like us —"

"You?" Kylan cut him off. He let out a sharp chortle that echoed through the cavern. "You are telling me you had a hard life?"

"Yes." Kayden nodded without hesitation, his chin high.

The bone in Kylan's hand slipped through his fingers, hitting the ground. His eyes went wide, and another laugh escaped him. "You had a hard life?"

"Yes," Kayden repeated.

Kylan shook his head. "Hard life? You mean the life where the king always puts you first? Where he there the day you were born and paraded you around like some trophy? Where you never got yelled at, blamed, or had to bleed to prove yourself?" Kylan said. "Even then, I never once said my life was hard. What gives you the right to say yours was?"

Somehow we had gone from my eyes, to the stone to the two of them getting into a shouting match about their unresolved past. I looked at Varius for help, but he just clutched his stick, his eyes glued to the ground.

"No wonder you connect with these people," Kylan muttered. "It's because you've also had a 'hard' life."



Kayden twisted in his chair, his hand gripping the armrest. "Are you hearing all of this, Lettie? This is how he feels about your people. This is how much he loves you," he began. "He acknowledges they had a hard life, and he can do something to stop it, but he won't."

I could see what he was doing, and it wasn't working. He was trying to twist Kylan into something he wasn't, trying to make me question him with every word.

"I bet he would even let you rot if it were you stuck in these mountains ..."

"I would've never introduced her to these mountains, Kayden," Kylan responded calmly.

"And are you so fucking stupid you don't see all of this is making her uncomfortable? You are making her uncomfortable."

He spun, sweeping his hand over the cavern. "Everyone! From the squirrel inside my jacket to Violet...that old man. Even he seems to be getting tired of you."

Kayden's face shifted. His glare disappeared, and for a moment, he seemed small, insecure. I hated this, being caught in between them, even though I knew Kylan was doing all of this for me.

Kayden's eyes slid to Varius. It seemed like he was waiting for him to jump in, but Varius didn't look up. All he wanted was to convince Kylan about the stone, only for Kayden to make it harder...

Kylan grabbed my hand again, giving it a slight tug. "Now," he breathed, "let's go down. Somewhere I can really be of use."

I walked with Kylan, but when I glanced back, Kayden's eyes were still on



me. No glare, no smirk. Only a look that made me wonder the one thing I shouldn't have been thinking about.

Should I have said something?

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