



Chapter 271

Kylan

I leaned against one of the huts, my arms folded as I scanned my surroundings. People were moving all around me, carrying wood, crates, helping the villagers, but my head wasn't there.

It was still back in that cavern.

The Lyperian stone...

Kayden...

His accusations...

The way he had thrown a bone at my feet. He had done a lot of things, but that one really topped it all. Was he insane?

I had been close, so close, to losing my shit right there, but I believe I hadn't. My reaction was actually quite mild compared to what it could have been.

I could've snapped completely, but I didn't because of Violet. I hated that she had been caught in the middle of this. I hated even more the thought that she might believe I could slip back into the cold, uncaring person I had been when we first met.

I glanced at Violet, who was holding a crate with Trinity, laughing as the two spoke about something. Dylan was with them too, carrying one of his own. He was in a good mood, but with Trinity around, he was always in a good mood.

Despite all that had happened just now, Violet appeared to be doing fine.



Her smile was bright, eyes full of joy...

It always amazed me how she could pick herself back up and carry her burdens silently without bothering anyone else, even with everything thrown her way.

But it bothered me too...

It bothered me because people took advantage of her kindness. She gave too much of herself away, thought too much about others, and I knew one day it would come back to hurt her. I didn't want to see that happen.

A familiar weight pressed on my shoulder, and it was Jumpie who had never left. She blinked at me with her dark eyes, tail flicking as if she was wondering why I hadn't moved yet. "I don't know, Jumper," I let out a quiet sigh, brushing my fingers over her back.

My thoughts were interrupted when something suddenly wrapped around my leg. Startled, I looked down, only to see a little girl hugging me like I had given her permission to.

It was one of the kids who had gone up with us to the cavern. She grinned widely, showing the gap between her teeth. What did she want from me?

"Thank you for bringing us food and blankets, Sir...Your Highness," she said, blinking at me. "I made something for you."

I knelt so we were eye to eye, and looked into a pair of big, green eyes. "What do you have for me?" I asked softly.

She opened her small hand, showing me a purple, handmade flower bracelet. Before I could say a word, she grabbed my arm and slid it over my wrist. I stared at it, too shocked to pull my arm away.



When she was done, she brought her hands to my face, pressing them at the corners of my mouth until she stretched it into a smile. "Is it true that you're grumpy all day?"

Grumpy?

A chuckle escaped me. The girl gave a satisfied nod and ran off again.

Jumpie let out a squeaky sound, making me look up at her. She puffed up her cheeks as if she were mimicking me. "That's not true," I muttered. "I don't look like that."

She flicked her tail proudly, disagreeing. If anyone here was the grumpy one, it was her. She was the one who smacked a raven out of the sky like it was nothing. I didn't even know she had it in her.

I stood back up and looked down at the bracelet. It weighed almost nothing, but why did it feel heavier than any weight I had carried before?

She had thanked me for my help, but I didn't do anything. I had seen the stone, the bone...

I knew how to stop their suffering, but refused to let Violet use her eyes or to step to the king and tell him to stop their suffering once and for all.

Should she really have thanked me? The prince who knew it would only be a matter of time before it would've been her bones, but didn't care enough to stop it? The answer sat right in front of me. There were multiple, but none of them were the ones I liked.

The guilt settled heavy in my chest, and I released an exhausted breath, dragging a hand over my face.

Fuck, I hated this feeling.



I closed my eyes, trying to steady myself, but the thoughts kept coming. The bone, the bracelet, the girl's smile...

When I opened my eyes again, all the noise around me seemed to fade. I could only see one person across the path, and that was Varius, who was staring straight at me.

When had he appeared?

His eyes gave nothing away and were just like they had been inside the cavern. Too complicated, and too unreadable. I think that's the part that made him the most confusing. Even when I accused him of being one of Baelor's people, he hadn't argued or defended himself. He just stood there.

Varius tapped his stick to the ground once, then turned and walked away like the moment hadn't happened. I never cared much for other opinions, but I did really wonder what that man thought of me. I still didn't care, but there was still this part of me that wondered.

The king was out of sight, Kayden was nowhere to be found, and everything was a mess...

I exhaled, dragging a hand through my hair, but my thoughts didn't get the chance to run any further because Violet suddenly stood before me.

A big smile was plastered on her face, the kind that made it impossible not to smile back. It only lasted a second as she had already grabbed my wrist, turning my hand over with a cute frown. She gasped at the bracelet, her eyes wide with wonder.

"Who gave you that?"

"Don't worry." A chuckle escaped me. "Your competition is a ten-year-



old."

She giggled, inspecting the bracelet further.

"One of the witches gave it to me."

Violet hummed as she wrapped her fingers around mine, pulling me with her. I was just laughing at Dylan for doing the same, but all I could do was follow.

Jumpie let out a squeak and moved from my shoulder to Violet's.

"You said we should go down where you could really be of use," she said in a mocking tone, "but you're just standing there, and haven't done anything yet."

I laughed softly under my breath. "Can you blame me?" I muttered, glancing around the village. My eyes went back to the bracelet, and the guilt returned. "I'm sorry, by the way," I lowered my voice. "For that thing in the cavern. The stone, and Kayden."

Violet stopped walking and turned to me with a smile. She stood up on her toes, cupped my face, and gave me a quick peck on the lips.

"You haven't done anything wrong," she said softly. "I know what Kayden is like, and I know he's trying to come between us, but I won't let him." Her eyes were determined. "Not after we've gone through so much to get here."

A smile curled on my lips as I brushed a strand of hair out of her face. She had only addressed the Kayden situation and completely skipped over the stone because she didn't fully agree with me on that part.

My thumb lingered against her cheek. "Does it not bother you at all that I



told you I won't touch the stone?" I asked. "That everything we're doing here could end up being for nothing?"

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