



## Chapter 274

Kylan

Thorne flew in, his wings making more noise than necessary before he landed on Varius's shoulder. I felt a deep anger within me as I stared at the raven.

So it is him...

Varius patted the raven's wing. "There you are," he said. "I've been looking for you all over."

My gaze hardened as Thorne's dark eyes locked on mine. He made a low sound, almost like he was counting down the seconds before he would attack again. I reached for Violet at once, pulling her behind me. It was of no use as she shoved my hand away and stepped beside me.

"Stop," she hissed.

Stop?

Stop what...protecting her?

Jumpie scrambled up my arm and settled on my shoulder, her tail twitching as she prepared for another fight. Thorne tilted his head at her, studying her too closely. My jaw tightened because whether he was Baelor himself or Baelor's pet or whatever that thing was, I would choke that bird before I let it get anywhere near her.

Varius's eyes widened from behind. He was sending us a message I couldn't quite understand, but I was sure it had to do with us keeping our mouths shut about all he had just told us.

Thorne let out another scream, but this time Jumpie squeaked back at him. I wasn't a big fan of this Thorne figure ever since I had heard of him, but all of this made it worse. This bird...he knew everything. Every word



we had spoken in here, he had heard, and if he had heard it, then whoever was really pulling his strings, if someone was pulling his strings, knew too.

It would be best to stay careful now. Very careful...

But who exactly was Thorne, and why did he want to attack me?

Would it have something to do with that name I had heard right before he lunged at me? Valerius...

The name I refused to ever speak out loud. Was it Thorne's voice I had heard, or someone else's?

And the beast...

He was quiet. Less active than he had been lately.

My eyes shifted to the raven again, who hadn't looked away from me. I stuck out my hand slowly and cautiously.

A hand tugged my arm. "Don't," Violet whispered.

But Thorne leaned forward anyway. He lowered his beak until the sharp tip brushed against my palm. It was soft, and I could tell he tried not to hurt me this time. He let me touch him.

I took it a step further by sliding my fingers over his rough, dark feathers.

I caught Varius's face out of the corner of my eye. He looked surprised, but also uneasy.

What was the deal with this raven?

Thorne rubbed his cheek against my hand and moved closer and closer, until suddenly his beak snapped open and he released a loud screech. Seconds later, he lunged at Jumpie.



Just as I was about to turn my shoulder, Jumpie's tail smacked him so fast he jerked back again. It was just like he had done when we walked up the mountains, and then it occurred to me. It wasn't me he was after, it was Jumpie.

But why?

Violet's eyes shot to mine, and mine to hers. Neither of us needed words. She had also noticed.

The room went silent, but that silence was soon interrupted. "We're back!" Trinity's voice rang from the doorway. She walked in with a crate, and Dylan at her side carrying two more.

She hummed as she set her crate down with a thud and glanced around. "What's with the mood?" Trinity laughed nervously, her eyes going straight to Violet.

Violet's lips curled into a wide smile, but the slight tremble at the corner of her lips made it too obvious that this situation was nothing to smile about. "What mood? We're fine."

I wasn't.

The more I turned over Varius's words, the more my earlier doubts returned. I began to wonder if any of this was truly needed. At first, I questioned it because I thought they might remain weak regardless. Now I asked myself because, from what I understood, they would heal no matter what.

All these supplies, food, blankets, upgrading their accommodations...was it necessary?

I took a quiet breath, looking at the flower bracelet on my arm. Regardless of my feelings, that would still not change the fact, and that was that those witches needed better living conditions.



I guess the thing that scared me the most was what came after. The moon only knew what kind of evil Thorne had planned for them once they got their strength back.

We had all been played.

"Thorne and I will be on our way," Varius spoke, brushing his hand over the bird's wing. The two turned and headed to the door as I followed closely with my eyes, and the longer I looked, the more it struck me. Varius wasn't the same man he had been before Thorne flew in.

He was calm again, mysterious, and it was all because of...a bird.

Just the thought of it made me want to tear this whole place apart. Everything was heading straight to hell anyway. I would tear Kayden apart first. He was the one who dragged Violet here. Fate or not, I could choke him with my bare hands this very moment.

"Kylan," a soft touch landed on my shoulder.

I turned to look at Violet, her blue eyes speaking without words, begging me not to make a scene. When I turned again, both Dylan and Trinity were still staring at us. "Is it Varius?" Trinity glanced between us. "Did he say something?"

Dylan fluttered his eyes. "What is he supposed to say?"

The way she looked at Violet told me she knew a bit more than Dylan, who looked completely clueless. I suppose Violet must have told her something for her to worry like that.

Violet pressed her lips together, like she was too afraid to open her mouth. I couldn't blame her because I felt the same. It was all because of that Thorne...

That bird heard everything, just like...the king.



My eyes hardened again as my mind went to the man who had been playing me as well. I had to go see him.

"Dylan."

"Yes?"

"I need you to watch Violet for me," I told him.

"Sure..." his brows knit. "But where are you going?"

"Out," I responded coldly. I made my way out of the door before any of them could ask any further. All the other things, such as us being forced to stay in these mountains or whatever fate had planned for us tomorrow, were things I wasn't even going to bother to think about.

That could not be changed, but something still could.

For now, there was only one thing on my mind, and that was finding the king. I had to talk to him and ask him about the stone.

I wasn't sure whether to trust Varius, but what else did the man have to lose? If there was any truth to his words, if it was really between me and Violet being blamed for opening the Veil, the choice was very simple. My decision had already been made, and it would be me.

I wasn't about to let it be her, and I was serious about that. Varius said the choice would have to be made today, which meant I would have to tell the king my plans to restore the stone right away.

I walked past Alpha Fergus, who was lifting wood onto the side of a hut. He set the beam down when he noticed me, and straightened. He raised a brow, giving me that same look he did when he asked how I was doing.

The answer was obvious. I wasn't doing well because there was too much happening at once.

He had no idea how much of my world his daughter carried. No idea how





badly I wanted to keep her shielded, even when it meant putting my own neck on the line. I didn't care about anything else. I just wanted Violet to be safe, and it turned out it wouldn't be as easy as I thought it would be.

"Is everything okay?" he waved.

I forced a smile. "Great," I lied smoothly. "Have you seen the king?"

Fergus rolled his eyes and released a short chuckle. Then he grabbed the beam again. "His Majesty has planted his royal butt on a chair in a tent with a warm drink in his hand while the rest of us are working," he said dryly before nodding toward the far edge of the village.

A scoff escaped from my lips. This was typical. This was Elyx.

I already knew he hadn't come up here to help anyone, but this was going too far. He was just sitting back, drinking, watching everything play out like some kind of game. And if it all went to hell? He would blame everyone but himself. That's who he was.

I gave Fergus a quick wave and followed the direction he had pointed toward. It didn't take long to find it.

"Unbelievable."

I let out a surprised sigh, wondering how on earth I could've missed that.

There was a blue, massive cabin tent with two guards in front of the entrance. One of them was the same fool who had embarrassed himself when we first arrived.

This whole setup was ridiculous, and it proved these witches' point about what the Lyperian royals stood for. This act was selfish and shameless.

I stepped forward, but as soon as I got too close, both guards moved to block my way.

