

Chapter 275

Kylan

A rush of heat flooded my veins. How dare they?

"I'm your Crown Prince," I reminded them, my tone sharp. "Move."

The two exchanged a quick glance. One of the guards lowered his eyes and bowed a little. "I'm sorry, Your Highness," he began carefully. "But His Majesty has instructed—"

"You better fucking move," I cut him off coldly. "I was already itching to tear someone to pieces. Don't tempt me to start with you."

I didn't give myself the chance to see the fearful look on their faces and shoved both aside before pushing through into the tent.

As soon as I entered, the king was already chuckling to himself. He must've heard everything. Hearing everything...it was nothing new to him.

Other than a table and a chair, the tent was empty inside. The king sat stretched into the chair that looked far too great for a tent. He had a steel cup in his hand, and his eyes were fixed on mine as he took a long sip.

It appeared there had been a few witches he had managed to charm, or threaten, into serving him that, and I wasn't surprised in the slightest.

"I knew you would force your way in," he said lazily, setting down his cup on the table in front of him. "That's what you always do. You threaten to kill someone, but then never do...Well, besides that one time, I suppose." He tilted his head, smirking. "You came close enough back then."

He was talking about Kayden...



In the past, his words always left a lump in my throat. Now, after years of it, it didn't touch me at all.

I hated him. I had hated him for years, even before hearing what we had done to Violet's parents. And after what Varius had told us, after knowing the truth, there weren't words strong enough to describe that hatred.

He was already the lowest thing in my eyes. But now? He was beyond words. There was no language ugly enough to match what I felt when I looked at him.

"Why did you really come here?" I asked, my tone flat. I didn't have time for his games.

His presence never sat right with me. I knew he might show up, and I was ready to watch him in case he worked with Kayden, but seeing him in the same mountains he had ruined still didn't make sense.

The way he came running the second he heard I didn't leave with the first group had been suspicious enough, but now I knew who told him.

Kayden's maid, Camille...

After years of forgetting that name, it had been carved into my mind now, and I doubted I would ever erase it.

Did Kayden even know the same girl he seemed to trust with his life was working against him?

"I know you didn't come here to help the witches," I called him out. "We all know you hate them."

The king played naive all this time, pretending he hadn't known his golden boy was spending time with witches, pretending his beloved Mona hadn't betrayed him, but he did know. And the interesting part of it all was that I knew as well as everyone how much he hated betrayal. He hated it more than anything.



So what was his plan?

What would he do to them?

Would they actually pay for it, or did he love them so much he would let them walk free like he had been doing all these years?

The king threw his head back and laughed. "I'm too tired to deny it," he said. "You are right. I do hate them. All of them."

His eyes cut back to mine, waiting for my next move. Since he was also aware that I knew about Violet, I was certain this was another one of his games. Telling me he hated all of them, Violet included, in the hopes of getting some reaction out of me.

"So what did you come here to do?"

The king clicked his tongue. "I saw you all heading to the root of the Lyperian stone," he spoke casually.

I clenched my fists. There was so much I wanted to say to him, so much to call him out for. I wanted to tell him I knew what he had traded for a small taste of power. I knew he was aware of Violet, Kayden, everything. But how much could I really say with Thorne there, listening to it all?

I forced in a breath instead. "The stone you destroyed?"

His lips curled wider. "Destroyed?" he said, offended. "I just turned it off."

That smirk of his didn't leave, but had turned even more wicked, and I already knew what would come next. He was about to name his price.

"Give me one good reason why I would restore the stone and give these witches back their power?" the king asked. "Do you think they will not turn against their king? Turn against us?"

I wanted to hit him so badly...just wipe that smugness right off his face. If



he was willing to talk about restoring the witches' power, that meant his conditions would be worse than anything I had prepared myself for.

Violet's refusal to use her eyes worked in his favor. It was something he could twist into his advantage.

"You know the stone is their strength," I answered, playing his game. "We can do everything we're doing today, but without it, none of it will count."

We both knew it wasn't really that. I wanted to protect Violet, and he wanted something entirely else. He wanted more power.

"You're right," he exhaled. It was too quick, too easy for the king to agree that fast.

"Did the fossil tell you what the stone requires?" he asked next, tilting his head.

"Yes," I said. "I know it needs both of us. Our hands, and strength."

The king hummed, leaning back in his chair, looking far too relaxed. "Well, son," he began. "It would be terrible if all of this, including that little stunt your mate pulled at the council, ends up being for nothing," he said. "I will help you."

I narrowed my eyes. This was it. It was coming now.

"However—"

Wait for it...

"I'll do something for you, and you'll do something for me...there will be a price to pay."

My jaw locked. "What price?"

He chuckled low, looking down at his lap. Then he lifted his chin and his



eyes to meet mine. His expression turned serious.

"You don't want Chrystal Wyrnsbane," he spoke. "And truth be told, the girl has been getting on my nerves as well lately, so I can respect that."

At that moment, my body stiffened. I already knew what was coming, and just the thought drained me. It was the price I had sworn never to pay.

"But," the king went on, his voice calm, "you will take a mistress before you leave for Starlight, and there will be an official royal ceremony."

Even though I knew what was coming, the words still hit harder than expected. My jaw clenched until it hurt, and my teeth ground together as if that could somehow hold everything inside. The rage, the disgust, the pure hatred.

As expected, he had found the one demand that would cut deepest. I knew Violet would never accept it. She would rather break herself apart than stand by while I took another woman, and yet...I couldn't find it in my heart to let her take all the heat for all that was about to happen. No matter what, I would not let her take the blame for the Veil.

Varius had made it clear that the choice had to be made today. Which meant right here, and right now.

The king leaned forward, his eyes sparkling like he had already won. "So," he said slowly. "What will it be? Do we have a deal...or not?"



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