

Chapter 281

Violet

The whole circle was quietly watching as Varius clutched his finger to his chest, his face tight with pain.

What was he even doing?

What was he thinking, pushing Thorne that far?

My eyes found Kayden's, searching for something on his face, but all I saw behind those cold eyes was pure rage. His chest rose and fell with each breath he took, and his brows pulled together as if he had been the one bitten.

Maybe he was.

Not directly, but by the impact of Varius's words.

"Bad bird!" Sora suddenly shot up. She scolded the bird with her finger, then stomped toward Varius. It had all happened so fast, but the next second she snatched Thorne from Varius's shoulder, perhaps a little too rough, and threw him in the air.

"If you do not know how to behave around cute, old people," Sora huffed, "then you can leave!"

Thorne shrieked before he disappeared into the dark. The instant he vanished, Jumpie jumped off Kylan's shoulder, as if she had been waiting for Thorne to disappear.

His behavior...



No matter how many times he sat on Varius's shoulder like a tame pet, there was nothing tame about him. Thorne was still a mystery, and one I wasn't sure I ever wanted solved. I was still unsure about his connection to Baelor.

Sora crouched, inspecting Varius's hand. "Are you okay?"

Varius lifted his eyes to her, a weak smile appearing on his lips. He chuckled lightly. "I will be...thanks to you, dear."

My gaze lingered on Varius, but my thoughts were with the words he hadn't been able to finish. Was it a warning meant for Kayden or for us?

'You shall lift from the ground, but the earth shall not answer. You shall lead armies that march only in your mind.'

It didn't sound like any good, and Thorne's silencing of Varius only made it that much more obvious.

Sora had already gone back to her seat, while Varius shifted in his, still holding his finger. He gave the group a small smile. "I guess that brings us to our round of secrets," he said, his voice calm. "I'll start."

Kayden's head snapped toward him as if he feared the man might be telling his secret.

His eye twitched, and for a moment I thought he might interrupt, but he didn't. He just waited in anticipation like the rest of us.

"My secret is..." Varius began, his eyes moving slowly around the circle before landing on Kayden. "That I am slowly learning that enough is enough."

Enough is enough...



What would he mean by that?

The two of them just stared at each other for what felt like an eternity. Whatever was being said wasn't for any of us, but only for them.

I looked at Kylan, hoping to read his expression, but his attention wasn't on Varius or Kayden. It was on Camille.

His eyes were as sharp as blades as he stared at the girl who had lowered her head again. "And now it's your turn, Camille."

I knew she wasn't perfect, but still...why her? What was his deal with her?

Camille fumbled with her hands and slowly raised her head to look at Kayden. For someone who worked alongside the king, it seemed an awful lot like she needed his permission to breathe. When Kayden gave her a nod, she finally began to speak.

"My secret is...that I keep quiet because in Lyperia, if you're a nobody, you don't draw too much attention."

I had to hold myself back from rolling my eyes. Because, sure, spying for the king was the best way to not draw attention at all. I couldn't help but wonder how long she had been hiding in the shadows like that, if she really believed her own words.

Kylan let out a hum, then a small chuckle. "Then I hope you'll be able to keep doing just that," he said dryly. "Stay a nobody. Stay in the background."

Camille's eyes widened in surprise, but then she lowered them again. For some reason, his words seemed to have gotten to her.

"This game is over," Kylan suddenly announced.



"But we haven't gotten to anyone else's secrets!" Sora blurted, sitting up straighter.

Kylan let out an exhausted breath, not even trying to hide it. It wasn't hard to guess that Sora was the type he just couldn't stand at all. He probably thought she was too much of an airhead, whined too much, smiled too much.

I didn't mind. I loved her bright energy.

All heads turned to the next in the circle, which was Nate. Surprisingly enough, he had been quiet the entire time, almost blending into the background, but now every eye was on him. He shifted in his seat, clearly uncomfortable.

Of course he was. Why would he want to share his biggest secret? Why would he even risk it? If it were about Lunaris, I knew he would never say it.

It was not a small thing, and also something that could cost not only him, but his whole family, everything. He had only confessed that one time because he had no choice, and even then, it had nearly broken him.

"Since Nate is like an open book, I don't think he's got any secrets to share," Kylan jumped in.

I exhaled, relieved. He wasn't dismissing him...he was protecting him. Kylan had never intended for this game to go any further than Camille. I strongly doubted someone as private as he was in any mood to share a secret.

Nate scoffed. "I do have one."

Was he really going to tell?



He suddenly leaned forward, and his eyes locked directly on mine. "My secret is...that I used to have a crush on Violet."

He squinted his eyes as he spoke my name, like he almost couldn't believe it himself. My cheeks burned at his confession. They burned even more as he laughed right after, shaking his head like someone who had lost their mind.

What was funny?

Kylan cleared his throat. "What made you grow out of it?" he asked. His face was serious, and there was no smile on his lips. This topic was not something to joke about to him.

Nate smirked faintly, then shrugged. "I realized it wasn't really a crush," he explained. "I was just fascinated because she was so different from anyone I ever knew. That was all."

I couldn't decide if I should be flattered, offended, embarrassed...perhaps relieved?

"Dylan's turn," Trinity broke through my thoughts. "Maybe if we move a bit faster, we can all go to sleep." She then tilted her head to Sora. "No offense."

A sound of nervous laughter came from Dylan. "A secret?" he spoke, his gaze dropping to his lap. It went completely quiet as his brows furrowed in thought. Then he lifted his head again.

"My secret is that I do not want to be Alpha."

I blinked, stunned. I wasn't sure I had heard him right. Dylan? Not wanting to be Alpha? That was his entire path, the role everyone had expected of him since birth and what he had been training for.



A small smile reached his lips. "I would rather live somewhere secluded... quiet. Be a good dad without pressuring my kids, grow old with Trinity. Just...lovey dovey stuff. I don't care about being Alpha, I care about making Trinity happy."

My mouth parted slightly in surprise. Of all the things I expected him to say, it wasn't that. I didn't expect him to talk about his feelings at all. I guess he had changed a lot as well.

Trinity immediately cooed, Sora following.

"That's the sweetest thing I have ever heard," Lian admired.

"That is very cute of him," Trinity agreed. Her voice was soft and firm. "But he will be Alpha, and I will be Luna." She bopped her head, then met Dylan's eyes. "From what I've observed, the pack desperately needs us, baby," she sighed dramatically.

Dylan exhaled. "I know," he said, his tone almost sulky.

"I believe we can do both," she added. "Take care of the pack, and each other."

Her answer didn't come as a surprise. She came from a steady family, always knew her place, and because of that, she knew his.

Dylan could dream of quiet, simple love all he wanted, but the truth was that the Bloodrose needed them. It was good for him to have Trinity by his side, who was strong enough to remind him of that.

"Those are wise words," Varius joined the conversation. He had been listening quietly to everyone's confessions. "I believe the two of you can achieve many great things together."

Everyone listened to Varius, and no one rushed to speak after him. I wondered if they thought the same as I did, if they were weighing and reweighing every word he had spoken. It was hard to see the line between a prophecy and his own opinion.

I noticed how all eyes one by one shifted to Kylan.

He leaned back on the log, looking completely unfazed. "Right, now you're all waiting for my secret," he said with a huff, cheeks puffing out. "Maybe...it's that, unlike Dylan, I cannot wait to become king."

I wasn't surprised. Kylan had made his stance clear from the beginning, and as Alpha Fergus's daughter, I understood better than anyone. He had sacrificed too much not to become king.

His people needed him. Like the Bloodrose, Lyperia had many things that needed to change, and it was time to break free from the madness that had ruled it for far too long.

Kylan shifted his eyes to Kayden, and Kayden looked right back at him. Kayden had also been too quiet, too strange, but he had been like that all day.

"I think Lyperia needs a different kind of leader," Kylan continued, "One with common sense, one willing to stop whoever and whatever must be stopped, and that leader will be me."

I knew exactly who it was aimed at. Yes, it was for Kayden, but maybe also Camille. He knew she would run this straight back to the king, and maybe that's what he wanted.

There were too many thoughts going through my mind, I hadn't even noticed that all eyes were now on me. It was my turn.



What was my secret?



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