Chapter 283

Violet

My cheek was pressed against Kylan's hard chest, listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat as we cuddled on the blanket. He had let out too many breaths.

They were long, heavy, and made me wonder just how much was going through his mind. I was still waiting for him to speak on the Beast, but not a word had been spoken yet.

"That's a really good story," I murmured after a long moment of silence, tracing my finger beneath his shirt.

Kylan looked down at me, his brows drawn. "But I haven't said anything yet?"

A giggle escaped me. "Exactly!" I teased. The sound of his warm, surprised laughter followed after.

I felt happy to hear he was somewhat in good spirits, but when my eyes lifted to his, I saw the fear hiding behind them. He looked so strong and untouchable most of the time. That's why I always depended on him, in a way kind of expected him to lead me down the right path.

But right now I saw a different part. The part he kept buried from everyone.

"Or is it something you can't tell me right now?" I whispered. Maybe he was worried about Thorne? One couldn't be too sure these days.

"I can tell," Kylan answered. "I don't mind telling you, Violet."

Then he took a deep breath. "I was thirteen when I first shifted," he said at last. A small smile reached his lips, the kind of smile that came from remembering.

Thirteen...That couldn't have been easy, especially not for him.

"Were you not scared?" I asked softly.

"Scared? No," Kylan chuckled, shaking his head. "I felt like I was on top of the world. The beast was strong, unstoppable, a force no one could ever bring down...and the queen told me he carried the name of a legendary warrior."

I brushed my lips against his jaw. Maybe it was because I was going to do it, ask him the forbidden question. "And what was...his name?"

Kylan's eyes locked with mine. I thought it would take him a moment, but to my surprise it didn't. "Valerius."

I allowed the name to roll off my tongue. "Valerius," I repeated softly. I didn't know what it was, but something about that name warmed my chest instantly. It wasn't a name I was familiar with, but it still happened to reach into a place inside me. My heart fluttered, and I buried myself tighter against Kylan's chest, clinging to him as if the name somehow tied us even more together.

It was a name I'm sure he hadn't said often, but he had said it to me, and that meant a lot.

"And why is Valerius not worthy of such a beautiful name?" I blinked up at him. "He sounds like everything you could ever wish for."

Strong, unstoppable, a force no one could ever bring down...

But then again...so did Lumia. And even despite Lumia being stubborn, reckless, and impatient, back then, I still loved her. I loved her because she was still mine.

Maybe Valerius had been the same for him once, but it didn't look like that anymore.

Kylan's gaze darkened. "He was...at first." His voice dropped low. "I took him on runs, asked him for advice, confided in him, because as strange as it sounds, I felt like I didn't have anyone else."

Once again, I could totally relate. Maybe not about the run, but definitely the other things. I had felt completely alone for the longest, and Lumia's voice was the only one reminding me that I wasn't invisible.

Kylan kept going. "He's the one who pushed me to prepare for the battle," he confessed. "The king only had eyes for Kayden, and Nerok... Kayden's Lycan. But Valerius told me to be sharper, stronger, harder. He made me into something else." His jaw tensed. "Into a beast...his beast."

I lifted my head slightly, searching his face. The man I was looking at was not a beast, not even close.

"He told me I had to win it no matter what," Kylan said. "That Mona and Kayden would take everything from me. My mother, my sisters...that if I lost the crown, I would fail my family."

His fingers brushed my cheek as a sad smile reached his lips. "And though I didn't really feel like I had anyone, I did have them. All I wanted was the best for them."

It felt as if my own heart was breaking. I knew who Kylan was, and I knew that behind that tough act of his, all he wanted was the best for everyone.

He always carried the weight of everyone else on his back, but who was carrying his? It's what I had expected of him. But wasn't there supposed to be a balance?

"I never wanted to be king,," he continued. "Now I do...but back then, it wasn't a must," Kylan told me. "But he just kept pressing me, pushing me...scaring me. And it wasn't only him. It was her too. The queen."

I felt a lump in my throat, thinking of my own wolf. Lumia.

Yes, she had pressured me, begged me to let her out, to stop hiding, and while I had been scared of what she could do, I had never been scared of her. Maybe the situation wasn't quite the same after all.

"And then?"

"And then..." Kylan whispered. "I worked harder than I ever thought I could. I spent three years trying to be better than Kayden," he gave a small chuckle, as if it were all ridiculous.

Maybe it was. Because he had been working so hard, and for what?

"Have you ever heard of Orrithyl?"

My eyes lit up. "Yes, of course I have!" I said in excitement.

It was a place I always wanted to visit. The land of Orrithyl was Fae territory, but everyone was welcome. They had many temples dedicated to the Moon Goddess, where people from all over would honor her and pray for luck.

Kylan exhaled through his nose. "Right before the competition, the king brought me to visit so I could pray for good luck," he explained. "It wasn't just me, but all my brothers who could compete."

His eyes softened a bit. "Eronis, Kody, Eryas, Korin, Kenric...Kayden."

I studied his face, stunned by the mix of emotions. There was sadness, yes ...but not only that. There was also this glimmer of light which made me think this had to be one of the rare good memories. Quality time with his brothers.

"That day was one of the worst days of my life..." Kylan suddenly spoke. " Something happened that day," Kylan spoke. "I lost myself...let someone else's hand shape who I became, but that wasn't Valerius."

His smile faded, and just like that, mine did as well.

"What happened that day?"

It didn't take long for it to happen again. Kylan pulled back. Maybe not with his body, but with his mind.

If he didn't want to let me in yet, that was okay. He had never forced me, so I wouldn't force him either. Although I was very curious, I didn't want to push him, not if it meant making him feel cornered or uncomfortable.

"We can stop talking about it if you want to—"

"When we came up to these mountains, I heard someone whisper his name...Valerius," Kylan's voice cut in.

I fluttered my eyes, utterly confused. What did any of this have to do with Valerius, and his name?

"But I think it was just me stressing over nothing," he muttered. " Because I think a part of me is still so broken, and can't stop thinking back to that time at the temples...when a voice whispered a name. Only it wasn't his that was whispered...it was mine."

I only nodded and kept my eyes on him. My head was full of thoughts, but I didn't know how much to show.

I thought about earlier, when Varius had gotten into my mind. It was too unsettling, too invasive, and I hadn't even let myself think about it ever since. I guess it kind of felt like that for him.

"I snuck out of the temple while my brothers were still inside," Kylan explained further. "I followed the voice, and it led me into the woods, where a woman had been waiting for me."

My breath hitched. "A fae?"

The idea made my skin prickle. I wasn't too familiar with different kinds of creatures, so seeing even one thing that wasn't a werewolf could be beautiful, terrifying, or both.

Kylan frowned. "It wasn't quite a fae...more like a..."

He suddenly stopped himself, pressing his lips together. My heart hammered as I waited for his answer.

"A...?"

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