

Chapter 284

Violet

Just when I thought he was going to tell me, he shook his head. "Never mind," he said softly. "It's not relevant to the story. You wanted to know why the beast doesn't deserve a name."

I raised my brow at him, making him shake his head once more. "I don't know if I should tell you that part," he spoke, almost too calmly. "You won't believe me anyway."

"Is that what you think?" I wondered. "That I won't believe you?"

Because I would...

Kylan could tell me the sky was pink, and I would still try to find a way to believe him. That's how much I trusted him.

"I can't force you," I said softly, "but I want you to know that you can tell me."

He let out a slow breath. "I don't think it was a fae," he said. "More like a ...witch, maybe?"

His voice was unsure. Even after all these years, he still couldn't place it. "Or maybe a hybrid? I don't know."

A witch?

That alone was enough to send a chill up my spine. I knew there were good witches, but there were also those like Esther, Gloria, and her people...

They weren't all good. If Kylan said a witch had dragged him into this mess, I wouldn't question it.

"What happened?" I whispered, carefully.

"She knew why we were there, everyone knew..." Kylan said. His eyes lifted to the tent's ceiling as he spoke. "She told me she had been waiting for me. That I was meant to be king...but that someone would stand in my way, and destroy everything, and everyone I care about."

A pain spread through my chest. Whoever that woman was, she had played with his emotions, and I hated her for it. I didn't know who it was, but I hated her.

"I don't know why I believed her." Kylan scrunched his nose like he was disgusted with himself. "I had always been cautious, but when she spoke about the people I care about, and offered to help...all of it was gone."

He swallowed hard before speaking. "She gave me a small bottle to pour into the water of my biggest competition right before the battle."

I froze, wondering where this story was headed.

"I asked her if it would hurt him," Kylan continued. I could hear the anger in his voice. "She promised it wouldn't. That it would only weaken him long enough for me to get ahead."

Then his eyes flickered with regret and shame. It was the same look he wore when he first opened up about Kayden.

I really felt for him. The Kylan I knew now, the one beside me, would never do something like that. It was proof of how much pressure he must've been under. How badly he wanted to protect the people he loved, and the thing I hated the most was that I hadn't been there to hold him

through it.

"I wasn't raised to be like that," his voice cracked as he shook his head. "In that moment, I was everything the queen raised me not to be. Jealous, desperate, reckless, immature...and all for a title." He lowered his head again, burning his eyes into mine. "The title wasn't even for me, it was for them...my family. I just wanted them to live a comfortable life, and not to worry about anything."

And they would...all because of him. One mistake wouldn't erase who he was. I had seen his bad side before, he had seen mine, too, because I believed everyone had one.

Kylan gazed into my eyes, like he was waiting for me to judge him. Only, I wouldn't. I definitely had no right to talk after almost scratching someone's eyes out.

"And then?"

He released a relieved breath. Maybe because I didn't judge him, or maybe because I wasn't afraid to hear more. His lips pressed into a thin line. "I took the bottle, and then came the battle."

He paused for a moment before continuing. "Before the competition, we all had to drink from the Cup of Strength," he said. "I didn't just drop the bottle into Kayden's cup for no reason. I wasn't even planning to do it, but then he said something that day that pushed me over the edge."

"What did he say?"

With Kayden, it could be many things. That mouth of his was capable of anything.

Kylan's gaze sharpened. "He said I would make a loyal second...that he

would be honored to have me as his second."

See?

A huff escaped me. To anyone else, those words might not have sounded cruel, but I knew what they did to Kylan. Kayden had known exactly how the king treated him, how much Kylan hated being pushed under his shadow.

Kayden knew, and he still said it.

"I now know I should've just let it be, but I didn't. I poured it into his cup, thinking it would only slow him down," Kylan admitted. "But it didn't. It harmed him, and Nerok...in ways I couldn't imagine."

Kylan closed his eyes for a moment. "Kayden was on the ground," he breathed. His voice cracked just enough for me to hear how deeply he still regretted it. That was why he had not been able to finish the sentence when we first stepped into the tent.

I imagined he had often thought he wanted to kill his brother, the way I sometimes said I wanted to kill Dylan, but it had never been serious.

"He was shifting back and forth in pain. He reached out to me, and I wanted to help...I really wanted to help," Kylan's chest rose and fell with each word. "I never meant for it to happen."

I bit down on my lip. I hated seeing him like this.

"But Valerius told me not to disappoint him, my family, my people. He told me to leave Kayden behind, that he was always destined to become a monster, and it would be for the best."

"But sometimes I think I'm the monster." Kylan's eyes met mine. This

time, they were full of shame. He was bracing himself for me to flinch away, run out of the tent.

"I trusted Valerius more than anything, I respected him...so I did as told. I ran and just left him there."

A broken chuckle escaped from his lips. "I won the crown that day, but I lost everything else," he said. "Kayden was paralyzed," he continued, "he lost even more...I confessed and told the king and queen what I had done."

"What did they say?" I asked.

"The king was furious," Kylan muttered. "But he told me I would have to live with my mistake, and that no one could ever find out."

"And the queen?"

"The queen..." Kylan exhaled. "I'll never forget the look on her face. I went against everything she taught me, and that was the day she told me I wasn't her son anymore."

Silence stretched between us, but I was in no rush to end it. I'm sure Kylan had a lot to think about again as well.

"I don't blame her," he spoke under his breath. "I didn't even recognize Kylan anymore, so how could she have?"

I could tell he didn't blame her because, despite everything, he still seemed so gentle with her. I would never forget the way he had looked at her when we first arrived in Lyperia.

"Do you blame the beast?"

"Not just him, no," Kylan shook his head. "Pouring the poison into Kayden's cup...that was me. My choices, and I regret it every single day," he acknowledged. "I was young, stupid. No one held a blade to my throat and told me to do it, so there are no excuses for that."

He sucked in a breath. "But the years of manipulation, the constant pressure...that was him. The beast."

The way he said it sounded certain. I could tell he had thought about it for years before reaching this point. He felt Valerius had manipulated him.

"The queen used to tell me she wanted me to win, but that she would survive if I didn't," Kylan went on. "The beast told me I had to win, and if I didn't, it would destroy everyone." He let out a bitter laugh. "But the king isn't safe either. He's the one who dragged us into this in the first place."

I took in his words and went over the differences. Both pushed him. One could live with victory, and the other couldn't.

There was something in me that wanted to believe that Valerius wasn't all bad, but perhaps just a bit too ambitious. Maybe all he wanted was the best for Kylan, even if it broke him in the process.

Maybe Lumia was the same...

Maybe the two weren't that different...

"Were you and Kayden close?"

Kylan shrugged, laughing a bit. "We were...okay. Our bond has always been complicated. There were moments I confided in him, because I knew he understood what I was going through," he said. "But there were also moments I hated him with everything I had for the way the king

treated him."

"And what was Kayden like when he found out what you'd done?"

I remembered Kylan telling me in the woods that Kayden never resented him...but clearly, that wasn't the whole truth.

"I've apologized more times than I can count, cried my eyes out, even went on my knees and begged for his forgiveness," Kylan admitted. "But Kayden never blamed me."

I could see the struggle in his face as he continued to speak. "I know now it was all to mess with my head, and to remind me that I owed him." A weak smile appeared. "But that doesn't change anything, because I really didn't do it on purpose. Kayden might not believe me, the king, the queen, maybe you, but I regret what I've done to him—"

"I believe you!"

Kylan's eyes widened. Just the thought of him thinking I might not believe him was too much for me.

"Everything you've just told me." I rested on my elbow so he could see my face. "I believe you. I believe you about the fae or witch, or whatever, that you didn't mean to harm your brother...but I also believe that you're a good person."

I reached out to grab his chin, refusing to let him turn away. "You are not your mistake, Kylan. You are the one who has carried all that pain and still shows up every day. You fight for people who don't even deserve you, fight for me, even when I make things harder than they need to be. You've given me more than I ever thought I could have."

His eyes were intense as he stared at me. It looked like he wanted to

believe me but didn't know if he was allowed to.

"I know you," I whispered. "I know you have such a big heart, and how much you do for me, and I also know it's not some mark that I don't even have that's making you do that, but your good heart."

I pressed my hand to his heart, feeling it beat.

"I believe you, Kylan."



Comments



Support



Share