

## Chapter 296

Violet

"Offenses are very serious," Kylan told her. "And the crown doesn't give mercy to commoners. Ever."

Camille nodded, then shook her head, looking just as unsure of what the right answer should be. Kylan's eyes bore into hers. "You would do best to remember that."

He released her, and she stumbled back nervously. She nearly tripped over herself as she hurried to Kayden's side. Surprisingly enough, Kayden immediately looked back to check up on her.

Kylan's eyes caught mine, and his expression warmed. It wasn't the same cold glare he had given to Camille, but something genuine and soft. As if he wanted to tell me without words that I didn't need to worry about it anymore...he had it under control.

He began to move toward Nate, and when he reached him, he lowered himself onto one knee beside him. Nate held Chrystal tighter. His arms locked around her as if he could still keep her here, and he had no intent to give her away. He rocked her back and forth like she might come back if he just held on hard enough.

"Nate?" Kylan said.

"No," Nate squeezed her lifeless body. "Not yet."

Kylan's lips parted, but nothing came out. He was clearly struggling. Despite the shield he always put up, he had also learned how to grow softer, but that softness made him vulnerable, now the same way it had always made me vulnerable.



He didn't speak to Nate the same way as he did to Camille just now. There was this boundary he didn't seem to want to cross with Nate, and I think it was because he knew how much Nate loved his sister.

But time was ticking, and something needed to happen...

I let my shovel fall to the ground and walked until I was kneeling in front of Nate as well. I brushed Kylan aside with the slightest push of my shoulder, so I was directly in front of him. My eyes traveled to Chrystal's body, thinking I might feel something again, but I didn't.

I couldn't feel anything. He loved his sister, but I did not.

"Hey, Nate," I whispered, setting my hands gently on his shoulders. He lifted his head to look at me, and there were no tears. His eyes were still cold, empty...

"I know you must want me dead for all of this, and for lying to you."

Nate scoffed. "I don't want you dead—"

"And I know you must hate me, and blame me for this."

This time it was silent. His jaw clenched, and that was all the answer I needed. It was only natural for him to feel that way.

"And I know you might think everyone is taking the fall to keep my secret," I continued, "but you have to keep in mind...we're all dealing with...that."

My gaze landed on Kayden. He sat in his chair with his arms crossed, grinning like this conversation was the best entertainment he could ask for. My stomach turned as I turned back to Nate.



"He already said he would drag everyone down with him," I whispered. "So if you don't do this for me...do it for them, and for yourself, for your dad."

Nate's eyes changed as soon as I mentioned Beta Jack. Using his dad might've been too much, but I knew for a fact Jack wouldn't want his son to go down for Lunarix.

I didn't want that.

Kylan didn't want that either.

No one wanted that.

"Chrissie..." Nate lowered his head until his lips pressed against Chrystal's hair. "I'm so sorry I failed you."

"We don't have much time..." Kylan spoke beside me.

Nate drew in a breath and at last seemed ready. I reached out, hoping to help him somehow, but the moment my fingers brushed his hand, he jerked back like I had burned him. "Do not ever touch me or my sister," he said sharply.

His eyes shifted between me and Kylan because those words were meant for both of us. "You'll one day make a great queen, and you fit this royal family perfectly, Violet," Nate spoke. "All you know is how to be selfish, lie, how to take, and how to destroy."

My heart sank as he pushed himself to his feet, holding Chrystal's body in his arms. He turned without another word and walked toward the grave.

His words hit deeper than the shovel I had just used. I tried to stay strong,



but all I wanted was to scream that it wasn't fair, that I never asked for any of this, and that I wasn't like them. Not Kylan, not me.

But maybe that didn't count for me, because maybe I was. Maybe Nate was right. Maybe all I did was destroy. But in this case, Chrystal asked for it. The moment she threatened me, she asked me to destroy her.

I closed my eyes.

No, Violet...

"He'll get over it," Kylan said. I opened my eyes again, and stared into his. They seemed softer than they had been in a while. He felt sorry for me. I could see it in the way he looked at me, as if he wished I did not have to hear those words. But I did, and that was alright. Nate had the right to feel this way.

I accepted his hand and let him pull me up, a weak smile tugging at my lips. "No, he won't," I sighed. "And he doesn't have to."

"He does," Kylan squeezed my hand. "You did nothing wrong, this was the only way, and he is just being emotional," he said. "But Nate is smart enough to eventually come back to his senses and realize that this was the only way."

Maybe Kylan believed that, but I didn't...

Because the way he had just looked at me?

As I looked over Kylan's shoulder, my eyes caught Jumpie. She lay on her back, stuffing her cheeks with food in the midst of all of this. How nice it would've been to just be a squirrel, and not make these kinds of decisions ...



"Violet..."

Kylan's hand brushed against mine again, and this time against my bare finger, where my ring should have been. His touch lingered there for a second.

"I really don't know what happened to it," I said quietly.

"I'll go look for it tonight," Kylan said, his eyes searching mine. "Can you hold on until then?"

The way his eyes studied me made my heart beat faster. It was like he was looking for a lie, but this time I wouldn't give him the truth.

I couldn't hold on for that long, and I was sure of it.

I had used my powers to create a shield that hurt Chrystal, and now I felt relieved she was gone. I had nearly kicked Camille into the grave because I wanted her gone. And even now, as Nate was about to lay his sister inside the grave we had just dug, a twisted part of me wanted to dance on top of it and thank the Moon Goddess, or Baelor, or whoever else I had to thank for that one besides Kayden, that she couldn't bother me anymore.

All of that wasn't me, and it couldn't be me.

It had to be because the ring was gone...

"I'm fine. Really!" I said instead, nodding quickly.

I pulled away and walked back toward the grave.

Just then, Dylan and Trinity returned, their arms full of the leaves. Lian had also rejoined the group.





Kylan followed me, and we all circled the grave together. Nate gave Chrystal one last kiss to her head, then lowered her without a word. His face was tight as he looked at all of us, one by one, then walked away into the trees.

Whatever pain he felt for her, I felt for him. Why? Because I feared he had buried our friendship with his sister, no matter what Kylan thought.

Trinity and Dylan tossed the leaves gently over her body. It seemed like a soft, kind gesture, but it was only meant to cover the scent so no one could find her. My thoughts were so far gone that not even that could make me feel sorry for her.

Because now all I could see was someone who wanted me gone. Someone who wanted me to lie there in her place.

"And now?" Trinity whispered, tossing the final leaves.

Kayden let out a chuckle. He sat at the end of the grave, grinning proudly. "Now we all share the same secret—"

"Now we cover it," Kylan raised his voice over him. "Go back to the palace, pretend this day never happened, and do not speak of it ever again. Am I clear?"

No one dared to speak because all who were standing there agreed.

Kayden gave a short laugh. "Good. Because to tell is to betray...and I do not take betrayal lightly."

The word betray left an uncomfortable pit in my stomach. I hated the way he said it because I hated that word. There was just no way I could see myself betraying him, because to betray him, I would have to betray everyone.



I would never...

"Don't you think someone will ask about what happened to my face?" Kayden asked, tilting his head at Kylan. "Why would Nate Wyrnsbane ever dare to touch me?"

"Just say I punched you," Kylan answered flatly.

Kayden smirked. "But your fists are clean."

Kylan glanced down at his hands, then shrugged. Without hesitating, he grabbed Kayden by the collar and drove his fist into his face. Twice.

The thud of his knuckles hitting Kayden's face was loud, but so was Kayden's laughter as his head snapped back with each hit. I could only imagine Kylan had been wanting to do that for a long time.

Kylan released him before his gaze swept over the group. "And now they aren't," he said. "Let's cover her."

And just like that, whatever happened died with Chrystal...

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