

Chapter 297

Violet

I sat in bed and rubbed the bronze box in my hands, letting my thumb brush over the carved symbols, but nothing happened. A frustrated breath escaped my lips as I looked at the empty place on my finger where my ring used to be.

Three days...

It had already been three days since Kayden killed Chrystal. Three days since my ring vanished, and three days since Kylan and I had been searching everywhere, but it was still nowhere to be found.

And now?

Now I was stuck with these strange and dark thoughts crawling through my mind.

I thought maybe the box would let me reach Varius. Maybe he could help me, tell me how to control my eyes, what to expect with the Veil, and guide me. But every time I tried, nothing happened.

Lumia, who had been ignoring me completely, wasn't that much of a help either.

"Open," I whispered, squeezing the box in my hands. I knew there had to be a way to make it work, a way that didn't require my eyes. Perhaps the same way I had made my hands glow.

Just as it had been doing for the past days, the symbols flickered, glowing faintly, but nothing happened.

A frustrated scream tore out of me, and then I threw the box across the room. It struck the door before falling to the floor with a loud thud.

I gasped, surprised by my outburst, but I suppose this had been happening quite a lot.

Why did I do that?

My hands shook as I clutched my finger. I needed it. I needed it back, and as soon as possible.

I jolted at the sound of three knocks on the door, then rushed to the box. "Yes?" I said, trying to sound as normal as possible. I brushed my hand over the box as if it could somehow undo what I had just done.

My first thought was that it might be a guard worried about the noise, but then a familiar voice rang out.

"It's Kaelis!" I heard. "You told me you'd join me for my dress fitting, remember?"

My stomach dropped as I remembered. Madam Renata had said I could, and I promised Kaelis. That was my schedule for the day, while the other three would help prepare offerings to the Moon Goddess.

It was all for this First Howl of hers.

The truth was, I didn't want to go anywhere or do anything. Not without my ring. Other than the lessons with Madam Renata, which I couldn't hide away from, I had pretty much locked myself in this room, and that had turned out fine.

Kylan had told us all to pretend nothing had happened. Move on, act like someone hadn't just been murdered in front of us, and we had buried the

body, but it was definitely easier said than done.

I hadn't spoken to Kylan about it. We had buried it among ourselves, the same way we had buried Chrystal, but that didn't mean I believed silence was the answer. I could see it wasn't easy for him, no matter what he said or tried to make himself believe, but he didn't want to talk about it. The one who was murdered hadn't just been anyone...but once his childhood friend.

Someone who, whether I liked it or not, he had shared a bed with.

Nate's sister.

"Just give me a minute!" I called back, clutching the box to my chest. "I'll be right out!"

I hid the box away in the woven bag before shoving it under the bed.

A few minutes later, I stepped outside. Kaelis was already waiting, her lips curled into a wide smile even before she had laid her eyes on me.

"Sister!" she squealed, throwing her arms around me. I let out a startled gasp as she hugged me tight, swaying me side to side, and somehow found myself doing the same.

I had to say I was quite surprised when she asked me to come with her. We weren't close, close, and maybe that's the reason why, despite everything, I said yes. I just didn't want to start anything with her or anyone else for that matter.

Things were already overwhelming as they were.

"I am wondering," she began, looping her arm through mine as we started walking. "What is that lovely brother of mine up to today?"

I blinked, giving her a strange look. "Lovely brother?"

"Yes!"

Her eyes sparkled, like her words were the most natural thing in the world. I almost laughed. Lovely? The two of them weren't even close. She must have been in a really, really good mood today.

"Just like every other day," I released a breath, "he's out on business with the king."

All of it left a strange feeling in my gut. Maybe today would be the day where they would make preparations for this royal ceremony of his. The one that kept ticking closer while Kylan still hadn't spoken a single word to me about his plans with Camille, despite promising me he wouldn't go through with it.

All he said was that he had a plan, but what did that mean?

He wanted me to trust him, but it seemed like that was all we could do these days. Trust.

He had also told me he trusted me not to use my eyes until we found the ring, and that was yet another thing I couldn't trust.

I hadn't even seen Camille since that day.

How could I? I had been avoiding everyone, and especially Kayden.

Not because what I saw scared me. No...because what I saw amazed me. That was worse. My feelings had shifted so much in just two days, and I didn't know what to make of them anymore. All I knew was that Kayden amazed me, and I couldn't decide if that was good or bad.

He had gotten rid of Chrystal without caring about anyone's feelings, and he had supposedly done so to protect my secret, though I had a feeling that he just wanted to kill.

And Nate...

I had been avoiding him, too.

It was not out of fear, but because I didn't know what to say. Or maybe I did know, but I wasn't sure he wanted to hear it yet, and didn't want to push him.

I felt sorry for him, I really did.

But I did not feel sorry for Chrystal, and I wanted to feel sorry for her...But I just couldn't.

It was because I didn't have the damn ring...

"I know you're bored without Kylan," Kaelis sulked. She must have noticed the flicker in my expression and thought it was because of that. She gave my arm a light squeeze. "But don't you worry. I promise that in a few years, when you live here, Kylan will have so much time for you it won't be like this at all!"

I frowned, turning my head to her. "How do you know that?"

She hummed softly, tilting her head. "I just know."

I studied her for a moment before forcing a smile. "Do you already know what dress you're going for?"

Kaelis nodded eagerly. "Mom had four made," she explained. "I don't even know what they look like yet, but I requested them in light blue."

"Is that your favorite color?" I wondered.

Her eyes softened. "I believe so, yes," she spoke in a dreamy tone. "At least, now it is!"

I laughed under my breath. Kaelis was kind of cute. I never liked when people used that word to describe me, but as I looked at Kaelis just then, I thought it fit her perfectly. She seemed so energetic, kind, and positive that it did make me wonder what misunderstanding beyond everything had occurred for Kylan and his sisters to drift so far apart, and whether it could have been avoided.

After some time, we reached the front of the palace where a car was already waiting. A blue flag with the Lyperian emblem fluttered from the hood, and a driver stood beside the car.

"We have to wait on Mom and Kiora," Kaelis said. "They should be here soon! Mom hates being late."

The queen would be joining us? Of course, Cecilia would. It was not supposed to be a surprise that the same woman who climbed the mountains to get her daughter would join a dress fitting.

"There they are!" Kaelis suddenly pointed, her smile wide. Then her expression shifted to surprise. "And...Dad...without Lady Mona?"

My heart jumped, and I quickly followed her gaze.

King Elyx walked beside the queen. Cecilia looked as elegant as ever, her smile calm, beautiful, and almost too perfect as if she were happy to be walking at his side.

Her eyes were on him, but his eyes, though...his eyes were on me.

And as he neared closer, and closer, I had to remind myself not to do or say anything reckless.

But fuck, I really hated that man.

I took a short breath and pushed out a smile.

"Dad!" Kaelis beamed. She unlocked our arms and ran straight into his embrace. Elyx wrapped his arms around her, returning some of the affection I didn't even know he was capable of any longer. He reached for Kiora too, pulling her into the hug. "My beautiful daughters," he said with pride, holding them both.

Cecilia's smile warmed as she watched the three.

At least they were fond of him, but I hated him with every bone in my body. I hated the man for all he had done, and for all I knew, he would still do. He could fool everyone, including the queen, but I knew better than that. This man just wasn't a good person, and beyond any point of redemption.

He was poison in human form...

"What are you doing here, daddy?" Kaelis asked him.

"Your brother went to visit Nate," the King said. "He apparently hasn't been feeling well these days, and then Jack and True have been having some issues with Chrystal, so when your mother mentioned the dress fitting, I thought it would only make sense to let them do their own things and be here for my daughter!"

All throughout Elyx's bullshit, a ringing filled my head.

Kylan would visit Nate?

Of course Nate wasn't feeling well, but I had no idea he hadn't shown up ever since...and Jack...True—Chrystal? Why hadn't he told me any of this?

I didn't have much time to think because I suddenly felt warm arms wrap around me. Queen Cecilia.

"It's so nice of you to join, Violet," she said gently. The queen, who also seemed to be in a very good mood today, pressed a kiss to my cheek. "And you look wonderful."

"Yes, wonderful," a voice behind her spoke.

A chill went through my body as I realized it was Elyx, and honestly, I didn't want that man speaking to me at all.

I stiffened as Cecilia pulled away, leaving me directly in front of him. A smirk appeared on his lips as he stared at me with his dark eyes, searching and waiting.

He wanted me to bow, but I didn't.

I couldn't...

Even as I told myself to calm down, my blood wouldn't stop boiling. If anyone had the power to make me lose it, it would be him. When he finally accepted I wouldn't bow to him, his gaze dropped, and he frowned when it landed on my hand.

He shot me a suspicious glance but didn't say a word. No one else had asked or noticed, because it wasn't a big deal to them anymore, but to the king? The one who knew exactly what could happen if I didn't have the stone, because Claire had begged him to help me? He knew what it meant.

His eyes seemed almost worried, but of course, I wasn't buying it. I bet

he'd love nothing more than for me to lose control and blow up the whole palace, just so he could get rid of me the proper way.

At last, a small smile tugged at his lips. "Do try to contain your excitement today...it would be a shame if anything happened."



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