

Chapter 312

Violet

Nate sighed as if it wasn't a big deal. But I knew it was...

"My parents have been searching for her."

"Oh no!" Kaelis gasped dramatically. Even through her tone, I could hear the fake concern. She didn't care about Chrystal and had made her opinion on her very clear the first time I met her.

"Have you seen her around?" Jack asked.

Kaelis shook her head quickly. "No. I'm sorry."

Please don't ask me, please don't ask me...

Then his eyes landed on me. "Violet?"

My chest rose and fell, and I began to panic. The blood was probably draining from my face because what could I even say? How could I ever lie to this man?

A warm hand brushed against mine. Shocked, I eyed Nate, who gave me a reassuring smile. "Have you seen her?" He played along.

I swallowed hard. "No," I said softly. "I haven't..."

Jack hummed. "It's not the first time she's done this," he exhaled. "She'll make sure we can't find her to worry us, and usually her little disappearances only last a day or two, but for some reason, something just feels...off this time."

He moved behind Nate and placed both hands on his shoulders. "But I'm

sure she'll come back," he said, his tone hopeful. "And then your mother won't have to worry anymore."

My heart sank at the sound of his faith. He seemed so calm, so sure that his daughter would come back, even while her body was rotting as we spoke. Just because I felt no remorse for her didn't mean I couldn't feel sorry for the rest of her family, just like I did for Nate. All of it was terrible

...

"I'm heading out again!" Jack raised his hand to greet us. "But you kids have fun, alright?" he said. "And thank you for visiting Nate."

He waved one last time and walked out. The second he was gone, I realized my hand was still trembling beneath Nate's.

"Don't do that," Nate murmured with a slight chuckle. Kaelis was too focused on her soup to notice what was going on. Nate's lips curled into a weak smile. "Please, don't."

I gave him a weak smile in return, because if he was able to hold it together after all that happened, I should be able to too.

Kaelis cleared her throat. "Will you dance with me at the Howl?"

"I will," Nate said without a second thought.

Kaelis's eyes sparkled. "The second dance?"

"If you want me to," Nate replied. It was too obvious he was just trying to please her because he knew how special that day would be. The way he spoke to her was gentle, like the kind of voice people used when they didn't want to disappoint someone.

Kaelis clapped her hands together excitedly. The two of them started

joking around, laughing about who would trip first, but for me, the mood was already gone.

Jack's visit had ruined it...

Nate sat there laughing, but I could only hear the way Beta Jack had spoken about Chrystal, and how sure he was that his daughter would come home soon. I truly didn't understand how Nate could sit there, smiling, and pretending that everything was fine when he shouldn't have to.

I should've been the one comforting him, but somehow, he had ended up calming me down instead. In my eyes, Nate was one of the strongest people I had ever come across. Just for doing that.

We stayed there for a few more hours, and by the time we finally left, it was early afternoon. I had to be back at Madam Renata's by one, so it had been the perfect time to leave.

As we walked, my mind drifted back to the way Nate had embraced us and thanked us for coming, while I was the one who was supposed to thank him for not slamming the door in my face. And not only for that, but for everything.

For staying strong, for keeping my secret, talking to me, forgiving me...

"I know the soup sucked, by the way," Kaelis suddenly spoke up. We were already about halfway when she had made the sudden confession.

I turned to look at her. "Huh?"

She had a huge grin on her face. "I know the soup sucked," she repeated a bit louder. "I saw the grains of salt on the table."

It took me a second, but I burst out laughing. "Then why didn't you say anything?"

Kaelis huffed dramatically. "Because Nate's always been careful with my feelings," she said. "I know he would feel awful if he thought he had hurt me in any way."

"Really?"

"Yes," she said with a little nod. Her expression turned almost sad. "Nate isn't just sick...well, yes, he is...but not in the way everyone thinks," she said with a slight pout. "I already sensed it, but seeing him like that today still hurt."

Her honesty caught me off guard. I stared at her for a moment, surprised she had said that so openly. I think I knew where she was getting at, but I wanted to be certain.

"What do you think it is?" I asked cautiously.

Kaelis shook her head, her voice dropping to a whisper. "I don't think I can tell you that. I hope you understand."

That was all the confirmation I needed.

There was something in her tone...something that made me believe she knew about the Lunaris, and if she did, that meant she had been paying attention to Nate on a deeper level than I thought.

Although the signs were literally there, and it didn't always seem as if Nate attempted to hide them, most people didn't seem to notice the signs. They didn't see the redness in his eyes, the way his hands trembled sometimes, or the way his voice cracked when the Lunaris took hold...but she did. Kaelis noticed.

"What about the surprise you mentioned earlier?" I asked, trying to shift the conversation. "At the Howl? Can you tell me about that?"

She shot me an apologetic smile. "I can't tell you that either," she said. "But I can tell you that it will be great."

I nudged her shoulder playfully. "You're full of secrets, Kaelis."

She giggled, linking her arm with mine. "I guess I am, but if I can share one thing with you that's not a secret, it's that I like you, Violet. I enjoy hanging out with you," she told me. "I know I can be a bit much at times, but you're still so kind to me," she said. "Thank you for spending the morning with me, and for not getting tired of me."

I smiled. "Thank you for inviting me, and for not getting tired of me."

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