

Chapter 41

Kylan

My eyes widened, and my head snapped up as everything around us turned silent. I appreciated Rochwall, and he had been there for me from the moment I had met him. He was a good mentor to me, and having that close bond, I understood the need to stand up for me—but this was not the way to do it.

For a second, I braced myself for the king to release the beast and tear this man apart—but he didn't. Instead, he burst out laughing, slapping Rochwall's chest. "James, James—you've always been one funny guy."

I exhaled, relieved as the tension in the room disappeared. "But it's good," the king continued, slamming his arm over Rochwall's shoulder. "This place is always so dull. It could use a bit of fun."

As they walked away, Rochwall glanced back at me, shooting a reassuring smile before their voices faded into the distance.

~

Hours passed, and in those hours, the king made sure to leave his mark everywhere. Each interaction was more awkward than the last—but now that he seemed pleased with himself, I was hoping we could just get through dinner and be done with it, so he could finally get the hell out of here.

Same as I had been doing all day, I pushed Kayden's wheelchair as we made our way to the restaurant.

"I'm jealous," Kayden said.

"Why?"

"Just because," he mumbled. "You get to go to Starlight. Study, train...experience all of this."

I swallowed hard as the weight settled in of what I had taken away from him. This was the future he could've had, and I had taken it all away because of my selfishness, my greed.

Kayden breathed, looking around the quad. "I also visited the others at the their academies. But I like it here the best."

Our brothers were scattered across different academies, each one preparing them for their futures. Each one living the life Kayden was supposed to have.

"Dad didn't visit them, but he really wanted to see you."

After all those years, he still didn't get it. That man didn't cared about me beyond appearances. It wasn't pride or love that brought him here—it was duty. It was because his favorite son possibly begged him to come see me and give me some attention.

"I also wanted to see you the most—"

"Stop," I hissed. "Stop it!"

Kayden tilted his head back, smiling like he always did. "Stop what, Kylan?"

"Stop praising me. Stop acting like everything's fine."

I didn't mean to lash out, but I couldn't listen to it any longer. He always did this—acted like nothing was wrong, like I hadn't poisoned him for my own good.

"You always do this, Kayden. You act like nothing's wrong, like what I did wasn't—"

"Wasn't what?" he asked quietly, his smile fading.

"Wasn't a mistake? Wasn't terrible?" he finished after I failed to respond. "Yes, it was. But you're still my brother. We've both made mistakes. We both grew up under the same pressure. What happened...it wasn't your fault, Kylan. We were young, we were children."

"Children?"

I was sixteen...

"Yes, children—and I've already forgiven you for it!" he lowered his voice only for me to hear.

I fell silent. Kayden might've forgiven me, but I couldn't forgive myself. Not when he kept making excuses for me. I was old enough to know better, old enough to make a different choice—and I failed.

"So what's the name of your mate?" Kayden suddenly asked as if everything we had just discussed was nothing. "Come on, you owe me her name—"

"Violet," I responded, the name feeling strange on my tongue. I had never actually spoken her name out loud before. First it was Four-Eyes, then Puppy—but never Violet.

Violet...

It was a beautiful name for a monstrous thing.

The moment her name left my lips, I caught her scent—even stronger than before.

"Violet," I could sense Kayden's smile as he said her name. "There she is," he nodded ahead.

I followed his gaze, and there she was indeed. She was with Dylan, her friend, and their families and just like before, we were about to cross paths. Knowing that fucked up look she was surely about to give me, I slipped back into character and fixed my eyes straight ahead, wearing my usual cold stare.

I almost failed to hide my amused smile as she did exactly as I expected, glaring at me with those sharp blue eyes. Everything around me seemed to fade. It was just me, her, and that undeniable tension between us.

They were getting closer, closer, and just as they were about to pass, the king interfered.

"Halt!" he called out, making everyone stop in their steps—including them.

He pushed the guards aside, and once they received the memo, they opened the circle a bit more—revealing him.

Puppy quickly lowered her gaze, and I did the same, breaking our eye contact.

"Clarence Richard, Fergus Hastings—why does it look like you're avoiding me?" The king asked.

Well, they probably were—but nobody had the guts to tell him. And judging by the fact that they were on a first-name basis, I was pretty sure it was true.

Fergus slightly rolled his eyes while Clarence stepped forward. "Your Majesty," he greeted. "Avoiding you? Now why would we do such a thing like that?"

Because he's a piece of fucking mould. That's why.

The king's eyes swept over the group. "Right, why would you?"

His gaze landed back on the Alpha of the Bloodrose Pack. "Fergus Hastings—you haven't aged a day."

I glanced at him, watching as the king's words barely got a reaction from him. Out of the two, he definitely disliked him the most. He caught me staring, so I was forced to give him a small, polite smile—one he didn't return.

Instead, Dylan smiled back, trying to be the peacekeeper between us all.

He didn't just despise the king, he despised all of us.

"We were just on our way to eat," the king continued, his tone way too casual. If there was anything this man was terrible at, it was reading a damn room—or in this case, a quad.

"You must join us—my treat!"

"That's not necessary, Your Majesty," Fergus replied. "We were actually just about to head somewhere ourselves."

"Great!" The king's smile widened. "Then I don't see a reason why we can't eat together."

It wasn't a suggestion. It was an order. The kind that left no room for argument.

At this point, all I wanted was to scream.

Dinner with them? Was he insane?

How was I going to have dinner with the Puppy I'd been avoiding like the plague? My eyes snapped back to her, and hers did the same. We both stared at each other, equally confused, as if neither of us could believe the situation we were being dragged into.

Surely Fergus wouldn't agree to this, right?

"You aren't at war with the king of Lyperia, are you?" Dad chuckled, his words sounding much like a threat.

"N-No?" Fergus glanced sideways at Clarence before shrugging. "Dinner is fine."

"Then it's settled," the king declared.

I sighed heavily.

As if it couldn't get any worse, this night was going to be hell.