

Chapter 43

Violet

The atmosphere changed instantly, and my heart sank as Mom's memory was brought up in such a careless way.

How dared he?

Did he even know her like that to bring her up?

I clenched my fists under the table, trying to keep calm. How could he even say something like that?

The rogue attack that took Mom and Dad was something unfortunate, but it was not inevitable.

His comment felt unfair, especially because it was something beyond Dad's control. And the way he said it, with such coldness, made me realize just how terrible he truly was.

He really was a heartless piece of shit—an even bigger piece of shit than his son.

The king continued chewing, completely oblivious. "I was just talking to Jack yesterday about how I miss my Starlight days."

I glanced at Jack, wondering how someone like him had ended up as the Beta of someone like the king, or even Chrystal's dad. All throughout dinner, that man had been nothing but kind and respectful—just like Nate.

A smile tugged at the corners of Jack's lips. "Yes, I remember how we used to sneak out with James, Jane, Greg, Claire, Alaric, and...you know who, during Elite training," he started talking. "We always got into trouble, and you used to come all the way from home just to scold your sister, tell Claire to stay away from us."

He chuckled softly, glancing at the king. "I wasn't even on the team, and his majesty dragged me down with him."

My head spun at all the new information. There was so much to process. Jack knew Mom, the king was on the same team as Mom—and there was a new name. One I hadn't heard before. Alaric.

I mentally ran through the names on the list. Jack had named everyone on that team except Adelaide, referring to her as 'you know who.'

For some reason, he didn't want to mention her directly.

I knew she was one of the crossed off names, which meant the other had to be Alaric. Who was he, and why did he receive the same treatment as Adelaide? Why did Jack mention him, and not her?

Besides Adelaide, there was only one more name Jack hadn't called out, and if the king was on the Elite Team, it meant he had to be him.

Elyx Lythoria.

That was his real name.

I swallowed hard, trying to keep my face neutral.

"Those years...it's not something I talk about often," Dad spoke with a subtle warning in his tone. It was his way of saying he didn't want to continue the conversation, but the king either didn't pick up on it or didn't care.

"Sometimes I miss that little group," the king sighed. "Although I'll never forget what that witch did to Alaric."

The next second, Dad dropped his knife and fork to the plate.

At the same moment, my pulse raced. The witch...Adelaide?

What had she done to Alaric? Could that be part of the reason why they had possibly both been wiped from existence?

I felt a pair of eyes boring into me, and made eye-contact with the king. At first he glared at me, then softened his expression, and tilted his head, slightly, as if he was studying me.

His eyes widened a bit, and then his face paled, like he had seen a ghost.

What was his deal?

"Well," Jack chuckled. "I still can't believe they once let witches into this school. Crazy times."

The king's gaze lingered on me. "Yes..." he muttered, his voice dropping lower than I'd heard it all evening. Then he cleared his throat, turning his attention back to his plate. "We should continue eating. Our food is getting cold."

I dropped my eyes back to my full plate.

The rest of the dinner passed swiftly. My head was too occupied with the mystery of the first Elite Team, that I hadn't focused much on Kylan after that.

By the time we were all finished, we had made our way to the lobby to say our goodbyes. It was getting late, and it was time for the parents to get home.

Feeling a bit lost, I watched as everyone else said their goodbyes.

"Violet," Dad suddenly called out.

"Y-Yes?" I asked, unsure of what to expect.

He grew a smile. "It was nice seeing you," he said, "and it's good to see you've made a friend. A good friend."

His gaze flicked over to Dylan, and Trinity who held little Isaiah in her arms.

The next thing that happened took me by surprise. He pulled me into a hug, something he'd never done before. My body froze at first, but then I leaned into him, letting myself relax in his arms.

"We're so proud of you, Violet," Mom added, gently brushing her hand over my head and giving me a quick kiss on the forehead before turning her attention to Dylan again.

Dad pulled back. His hands rested on my shoulders as he looked at me with remorseful eyes.

Was it guilt for not talking to me earlier?

Was it regret for not paying any attention to me before?

He squeezed my shoulder a bit. "No matter what anyone thinks or says, you are my only daughter, I raised you like my daughter, you will always be my daughter—a Bloodrose—and I do love you. I'm so proud of you."

I chuckled, confused. First he was being all nice, and now he was telling me he loved me. He had never said those words to me before.

"I love you too, Dad," I forced a smile.

He gave me one final nod, one final squeeze before he left to talk to Trinity's family. I joined him, greeting them politely—but then my eyes fell on the king.

While Kylan and his brother stood with Jack and his family, the king stood off to the side, alone without even his guards around him. His arms were crossed, eyes narrowed—as he observed everyone from a distance.

At some point during dinner, he had become a lot more quiet. It was nice, but strange.

I still couldn't wrap my head around the fact that he had been on the same Elite Team as Mom. Would they have gotten along?

A smile tugged at my lips as I shook my head. Of course not. She must've hated his guts, I was sure of it. If there was one thing I remembered, it was that Mom had always been strong-willed and stubborn. She didn't bow down to anyone, so I suspected the two must've bumped heads.

Our eyes connected, and I gulped, knowing I had now forced myself to greet him. It would only be the right thing to do, especially since he invited us to dinner.

I walked over slowly, while he eyed me like he'd been expecting me. "Your Majesty?" I said quietly. "Thank you for dinner."

He hummed in response, scanning me up and down. Taking a step forward, his hand suddenly reached out to touch the rim of my glasses.

Nervously, I lowered my head and took a small step back.

"Those are some nice glasses," he said, his lips curling into a smirk. "Made from extinct Lyperian stone, which means you must've had them for years."

I could finally breathe a little easier. He just recognized the material from his kingdom, and was curious. That was all.

He wasn't some creep trying to snatch my glasses off my face.

A small, embarrassed smile found its way to my lips.

"Who gave them to you?"