

## Chapter 258

Kylan

Kayden and I stood at the foot of the mountain. The first group had already left a long time ago, so did the second, but we were still staring at each other as we waited for the third to leave. He hadn't even glanced at his beloved maid, who kept trying to get his attention.

His eyes were cold, and I looked back at him returning that same coldness. I wasn't in the mood for whatever game he was trying to play. Not today.

And I knew it was a game. Because the version of Kayden he had worked so hard to pretend to be over the years would've never looked at me like that.

No.

He was supposed to smile. Act happy, and pretend everything was fine. Make me feel like I was the one losing my mind for thinking he still blamed me for the accident four years ago.

I could've gone with the first group. After everything that happened last night, maybe I should have, just to be there for Violet. To reassure her, but something in me refused to leave.

I couldn't shake the feeling that something was going on with Kayden and these mountains. And knowing how manipulative my brother is, it wouldn't have shocked me if he somehow found a way to get Violet to use her eyes, right under my nose.

When Violet came back from the Veil, I told her the best thing she could do was nothing. I still believed that, but telling her that, and then

watching her walk straight into Kayden's trap, didn't sit right with me either. This was a decision that would've been made regardless of what Adelaide told her.

I knew she would be safe with the first group. She had Jack, Nate, Trinity, those two girls who stuck to her like honey, and even Kaelis. Though, honestly, Kaelis shouldn't have been there at all.

More people from the third group were joining,

but Kayden and I still hadn't looked away from each other.

We just stood there, locked in a silent stare battle, waiting for one of us to snap, and I was sure it wouldn't be me. I wondered what was going through that head of his. Whatever it was, it probably wasn't anything good. After ruining his plan, he had to hate me even more than he already did.

That was fine. I hated him too. Especially right now, when I could be spending time with Violet. But instead, I was stuck here...

'Let me finish what you've started and make it easier for the both of us,' the beast stirred. 'You'll thank me later...maybe by letting me out for a run? Trust me.'

I didn't respond.

For a second, I actually considered it. Maybe I should let him. There was a time I was on my knees, begging for my brother's forgiveness, even though he told me to let it go, and promised he wasn't angry. I pitied him, hated myself for what I had done to him, but all of that had disappeared the moment he set his eyes on Violet.

My Violet.

He wanted to take advantage of not only her good heart, but her eyes as well. He wanted her to heal those witches in the mountains, witches she shared no real connection with through her eyes, and there had to be a horrible reason behind it. One that was connected to Baelor.

Who was this 'Kian' he mentioned to Violet?

What did this Varius man, and this raven, want from her, and what were they plotting?

"What is your stray doing here?" Kayden suddenly spoke, his voice cutting through the tension.

His eyes were still cold, but this time it wasn't meant for me. I frowned at him, confused for half a second.

He nodded his chin toward the path behind me. "The trash. What is she doing here?"

I turned, breathing hard through my nose as I realized who he was talking about. And then I saw her.

Chrystal...

She was walking beside her mother, True, who would be leading the third group. I knew she probably scrunched her nose at just the simple mention of witches, and was only here out of duty, but I truly didn't know what Chrystal was doing here.

Whatever it was, I was sure it had to be for her own gain. That's how she worked. Always. It wouldn't surprise me if she was only here to see Violet's idea crash and burn. She wasn't here to help with the extra baggage, that was for sure.

Her eyes widened when she saw me, confirming she hadn't expected me to be here at all, and her hands immediately brushed her fire-red hair, like it would somehow make her look less like a devil.

Just with one look, Jack had managed to give me a heads-up earlier, and since I was aware True would lead the second group, I already had a good feeling it was about Chrystal's presence. I could've gone with the second group, but I didn't want Violet and Kayden to cross paths at all on the way up here.

Kayden scoffed. "After everything she's done to Violet, she's still standing," he said. "I think that's ridiculous. Shows how much you care about that mate of yours...really."

I scoffed louder. If he thought the sight of Chrystal didn't make my blood boil, didn't make me want to snap her in half, he was wrong.

The Beast growled in agreement.

'I can't believe I'm agreeing with the bootleg, but he's right!' he spoke. 'Let me out, and I'll show you how to love properly.'

'Yes,' I snapped back. 'I'll kill the Beta's daughter and start a civil war in honor of Violet. Sounds great.'

He growled again.

'Then mark her.'

My anger grew even more as Chrystal got closer.

Of course I wanted to kill her. Of course I wanted her to suffer. I had every reason to.

I was going to kill her, and deal with the consequences, right after she had hurt her, but then Violet begged me not to.

And maybe she was right to stop me, because after that, I had time to think. Time to see the bigger picture, and time to realize it wouldn't end well. Not for me, Violet, or Lyperia. No for anyone.

Especially not now, with the King announcing her as the first mistress. But over my dead body would I let that happen.

Chrystal picked up her pace, running the last part of the path until she stopped right in front of me. Her cheeks were flushed, her breath quick, and she stared at me like she was waiting for me to acknowledge her.

"Ky—"

I took a deep breath and brushed past her. It wasn't worth it. Not now. If I did what I really wanted to do to her, the third group wouldn't be going to the mountains at all.

Instead, I fixed my attention on True. She was just as bad, but at least a little more bearable.

"Prince Kylan," True greeted with a smile that never touched her eyes. "I thought you would be leading the first group with Beta Jack?"

I gave her a slow nod. "I thought about it, True," I said, my gaze sliding toward Kayden, who let out a low chuckle. "But Kayden and I decided to join the third group."

Before she could reply, my eyes drifted to the left path where another group was approaching. The Bloodroses. Fergus and his brother, the Beta, walked in front, Dylan only a few steps behind.

"Perhaps," True went on, sounding as uninterested as ever, "you and the king might want to lead the third group instead. I would not mind. I could even sit this one out if there are too many people!"

"The king?" I repeated, frowning. Though I had forcefully been spending a lot of time with him lately, an uneasy feeling settled in my chest.

She nodded toward the other path, and when I looked again, my stomach sank.

There he was...

So he did dare to show his face after all...

The King of Lyperia himself, coming with his full entourage. The moment he appeared, murmurs rose all around me, every head turning his way. Beside him was the face I had already expected, the queen.

She was not alone either. Her ladies followed close behind, and Kiora was right where she always was, clinging to her side.

The sight of them together could only mean one thing. Both of their expressions were bitter, though for different reasons. Hers because her daughter had gone to the mountains without her permission, and she was now seeking answers.

His because he would do everything in his power to sabotage whatever had been planned for today...