

## Chapter 263

Kylan

'Only you can stop this...'

We had been walking for a while again, but those were the only words running through my head. Even as I felt Dylan and Fergus watching me, still worried about the headache from earlier, I could only think about Violet.

I didn't want to play with fate. I didn't even want to think about it. But if Violet was in danger...what else could I do? I couldn't just stand there and let it happen.

I hadn't understood Violet's question when she asked me what I would do. The answer had seemed so simple back then. But now?

How could I fail her mother, when she had come to me herself?

A hand rested on my shoulder. I looked up and met Fergus's eyes. "Are you sure you're alright, Kylan?" he asked carefully.

"Do you really not want me to call for the doctor?" Dylan added. "Maybe that pet squirrel of yours?" He chuckled. "I think I saw her up ahead somewhere."

"I'm fine," I said quickly. They were overreacting, even taking the carts I had been pulling. Fergus especially looked only seconds away from tossing me over his back like I was a child.

I let out a slow breath and tried to smile, though my lips trembled. "It was nothing. Just a headache, and no sleep. I'm fine."

'If she reaches them, the thing she despises will be her weapon.'

Those words had also come from Adelaide. There was no doubt she was talking about Chrystal. It had to be her.

And the thing she despised...

The thing...

I knew it had to do with Violet, but her own mother sure wouldn't dare to refer to her daughter, our Violet, as a thing. If there was one other thing Chrystal despised, it could be the witches...which connected back to Violet.

Heat rose in me with anger.

Did she mean that going to the mountains would lead to her finding out about Violet's identity, and using it against her? Could that be it?

'Do not let her reach those mountains.'

Those words haunted me most. Because we were headed there, and unless I threw her from the cliff, I had no way to stop her.

'Just let me out, and I'll deal with her for you. I'll make it quick and clean,'  
'The Beast spoke lazily.

I frowned. This time, his offer sounded far too tempting. If that was what I had to do to keep Violet safe, I would, and that was no joke. I would risk everything to keep her safe.

'You think too much. Tear her throat out, and it's solved.'

The only problem was that Violet would be left carrying the blame.

'Let me out, brat,' the Beast tried again. 'I'll take care of everyone. The crimson leech, the Beta's runt, the bootleg, that royal maggot. I'll spare Alpha Fungus since you two are all cuddles now—'

Nope.

Not an option.

I locked him away, not in the mood for his threats, and searched the crowd ahead. My pace quickened when I couldn't see her anywhere in sight.

"Kylan!" Dylan's voice called after me. I barely heard him as I kept walking in a hurry, until my eyes landed on fiery red hair. I had found her. Chrystal...

As if she felt me staring, her head turned. Her eyes widened in slight surprise, then a smile curled her lips, bold and seductive.

I kept my glare hard, the sight of her bothering me more than it ever had before. Because it wasn't just Chrystal I was staring at. I was staring at my enemy. Violet's enemy.

I had only one mission, and that was to make sure she would not reach those mountains. No matter what.

Before I could think further, the group suddenly stopped. I froze and looked around. Why? What was happening?

Then I heard a voice from the front.

"Where is Violet Hastings?"

Dylan and I turned to each other at the same time. His face was filled with

confusion.

It was the king's voice. For someone who once refused to say her name, he spoke it perfectly. That had to mean we had caught up with the first group already. But why was he asking for Violet?

My legs moved before I had even thought about it. I pushed through the people in front of me, heading straight toward the king's voice.

It was all too much. First Kayden, then Adelaide's voice, then Chrystal, and now this.

By the time I reached the front, everyone had already lowered their heads in respect. Through the path they made, I saw her standing there.

Violet...

"Violet, there you are!" The words rushed out of me. Relief washed over me the moment her eyes met mine, and the rest of the world faded.

There was only her...

My Violet.

In that second, the king, Chrystal, Kayden...none of it mattered.

And then the guilt hit me once again. I had let her go up those mountains alone, back to that man and that raven, when I should have been by her side. It stung deep, but her warm smile eased the weight on my chest. I smiled back.

Fergus and Dylan were suddenly beside me, the other Bloodroses close behind. I could tell they were wondering the same thing I was. Why was the king calling out her name?

"Who knew the mountains would host such a touching reunion?" the king said with a smile. His words dripped with sarcasm. Knowing him, this was exactly what he had hoped for. He had been planning to cross paths with Violet. Whether it was to talk to her or embarrass her, who knew. King Elyx was capable of anything.

"Kaelis!"

The queen's voice cut through the air.

"Yes, Mom," a small voice came from the crowd.

Kaelis stepped out from behind Jack's tall frame. Her head was low as she hurried toward the queen, who pulled her into a tight embrace, as if Kaelis had just come back from the dead. I knew the scolding would come later, but she couldn't do it here, not in front of the crowd.

When Kaelis moved, several of the king's mistresses moved as well. They ran up to him, tried to cling to his arms with wide smiles and fluttering lashes. He pushed them away just as he had pushed Chrystal before, as if they were nothing more than insects.

His eyes were fixed on one person alone.

Violet...

"Violet Hastings," he said again.

Violet froze. Her gaze left mine and turned toward him. She drew in a quiet breath before lowering herself into a curtsy. When she lifted her head again, something had changed in her eyes.

It was not fear. It was strength. She was not bowing out of respect, but out of choice.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

The king's brows pulled tight. His frown deepened like he had not expected her to play the game this way.

"It is good to see that you now know who I am." Violet's lips curved into a calm smile.

The king let out a sound of surprise before it twisted into a wide, mocking grin. "Are you going down already?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Violet responded. "My work here is done."

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding. I had rushed forward, ready to defend her against his words, but she did not need me. She could stand on her own...just like she had at the council.

The king seemed to have noticed it as well. A small twitch formed at the corner of his eye. The same twitch that always came when something seemed to bother him. He did not like her tone one bit.

"The one who comes up with a plan like this," the king said slowly, "is usually expected to go up and down with every single group. To show commitment, and see things through."

The king turned back to the crowd. "Isn't that right?"

His question came more like a command, and Lyperians from both groups looked at each other, one by one nodding their heads in agreement while I bet they didn't even know what they were agreeing to.

My teeth clenched, and irritation burned through me. Maybe I should just let the Beast rip into them, shred them all until they learned to keep their mouths shut. There was only so much I could control, and right now I was

being forced to worry about too many things at once.

I had been so certain Adelaide's words had to be about Chrystal, but she had warned me just before the king tried to get Violet up again, and I could not ignore that.

It could be about anyone at this point.

I had to think, and fast.

"I'm sure my daughter is tired and will return to the palace to rest," Fergus spoke, stepping forward. His eyes shifted from Violet to the king. "She has already done enough for this kingdom. You can do the rest."

Violet's eyes softened instantly, and I saw the grateful smile she gave Fergus.

"Well, I actually agree with the king," Kayden started, but I cut him off just as quickly.

"But you do not have a say in this!"

Kayden's jaw locked, his eyes narrowing at me.

It wasn't just Chrystal who I didn't want around, and I certainly hadn't forgotten about Kayden.

I let my gaze sweep around the crowd, mainly the Lyperians. "And neither does the king, me, or anyone else."

Finally, my eyes found hers again.

Violet...

I shot her a reassuring nod. "Violet says her work is done here," I made it

clear, my voice steady and cold. "So her work is done here, and that's the end of that."

The king growled. "And I am the king, and I—"

"And I am her father," Fergus cut in, stepping forward. His voice was even colder than it had been in the greenhouse. "And you are not going to tell my daughter, the Alpha's daughter, what to do."

I caught both Jack and Nate releasing a huff and looking the other way like they didn't want anything to do with this. The air shifted and people exchanged uneasy looks.

"I'll go!" Violet suddenly broke the silence. Every head snapped toward her, including mine, because I couldn't understand...

What was she doing?

"I'll go up," she repeated, her eyes determined. "But only if Chrystal Wyrnsbane goes down."



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