



Chapter 267

Violet

My head spun as my eyes landed on Kayden. Varius's words were still deep in my mind. Who wasn't supposed to be here at the same time, and what was it now?

Kylan had just told me no more riddles, and yet here Varius came with another one, making me lose my mind again. My stomach twisted with unease, and two quick breaths escaped me as I glanced at Kylan.

At least his presence steadied me, even if it was just for a little. And as I looked at him, I made my choice.

He was right...

No more...

There would be no more riddles, no more overthinking, and I would not let these thoughts own me.

"Violet!"

Kayden greeted me bright and warmly as if nothing had happened. He was right because it didn't yet, but for some reason, it felt like it did. He reached us with his maid pushing his chair, and the moment he stopped, Kylan slipped his hand in mine and pulled me closer to him.

His grip was strong, overprotective, and his message clear. He still did not want me around Kayden.

Kayden noticed, and he shot Kylan a cold glare, which had softened when his eyes turned to me again. As his lips curled, I couldn't help but think



that smile of his looked too genuine for anything bad to be behind it, but I knew better than to trust it. I knew better than to trust him.

"Varius. It's always good to see you," he greeted with a bright smile. "I already told Kylan everything, but Thorne must've told you already."

I inspected the man's face and caught a glimpse of an uncomfortable smile, but then he let out a long sigh followed by a chuckle. "He did indeed."

Slowly, both Kylan and Kayden locked their eyes, and it was as if both were trying to find out who could glare harder.

But Varius...he wasn't watching them. His gaze had already shifted elsewhere. I followed it, and was surprised when I realized where he was looking. Kayden's maid.

She stood behind him, quiet as ever, while her hands were steady on the handles. Varius gave her a slow nod, which she returned.

I barely knew her, but that poor girl...

My heart clenched as I thought of how many times she must have had to push Kayden up and down these mountains, probably never allowed to complain, rest, or even talk about what she wanted. Trust me, my life could've been worse...

Varius released a hum. "The two brothers," he said. "I'm sure the two of you must be very close."

The statement confused me, but Kylan was quick to jump in. "We're no closer than the two of you," his voice cut in. "Or that Raven of yours."

I knew exactly what he meant. He was telling Varius to stop bullshitting



and play him for a fool. Anyone could tell that there was some kind of tension between those two.

Varius didn't seem too offended, however, he kept staring at Kylan as if he still wasn't sure what to think about him. I had no idea what Kayden had said about him, just like I had no idea what Thorne had said about him.

But for the short time I got to know Varius, I could very well guess he probably had his own opinion. He seemed to be interested in Kylan, but why? What did he want from him?

"Where is Thorne?" Kayden broke the silence, his eyes scanning the village.

"Not around," Varius answered plainly.

"Ah," Kayden clicked his tongue. "I can only imagine, after being swatted away like some fly by a squirrel, no less."

He raised his brows at Jumpie, who didn't budge. An awkward silence followed. No one reacted, no one laughed...there was just this uncomfortable vibe that lingered.

It only got interrupted by Varius, who tapped his stick against the ground, grabbing everyone's attention. "Come, Crown Prince," he spoke in a low tone. "The truth cannot be spoken, it must be experienced. I wish to show you something."

There he was again with those words that didn't make any sense...

He turned and began walking, tapping his stick with each step. Kayden's maid pushed his chair slowly after Varius.



I turned my eyes to Kylan, who looked at Varius intensely. His gaze was sharp and cautious, and I could tell something didn't sit right with him. But of course, it could also have to do with just the idea of us being in these mountains.

As he caught my look, I gave him a small shrug. We were already here anyway, so what else could we do but follow?

"What do you think he wants?" Kylan whispered, pulling me so close our shoulders brushed. I kept my eyes on Varius and Kayden.

"Who knows?" I whispered back. "But it feels like he's been waiting for you."

Which he had been making clear from the start. We started moving, and not much later, all the children from before ran over again just like they did when they greeted me the first time. They circled around us, talking and laughing amongst each other.

"You're really back, Violet!" one of the girls squealed. "I didn't think you would be back this soon!"

Well, neither did I...

My lips curled into a soft smile as I reached down to pat her head. The light in her eyes warmed me. Maybe it was because I felt a connection with them, or maybe it was something else. I wasn't sure yet. All I knew was that I had a soft spot for them, and if I could have taken them all with me, I would have.

It made me feel awful, realizing how much I had complained about my own little hardships while they were here, smiling and brightening my day instead of the other way around.

Was this the selfi—

No, Violet.

No more...

Even though they were children, Kylan was still as cautious and tugged me even closer into his side. I hadn't expected anything different from him because that was just simply who he was. But I knew his heart was in the right place, and he was only trying to protect me.

Kayden looked over his shoulder with a smile. For someone who had been so eager to be around me, he hadn't said much, and I knew it couldn't be any good. He had to be up to something.

"Are you really the Crown Prince?" One of the children tugged on Kylan's sleeve, staring up at him with curious eyes. "And is it true you waste food and eat more than six meals a day, while we don't even get one? That's what my mommy says."

Kylan's jaw clenched as he pressed a stiff smile onto his lips. "No, that's not true—"

"But he is the Crown Prince," Kayden tilted his head with a smirk. His smile widened. "The one and only, the one with the killer instinct who never lets anyone stand in his way," he said. "Not even his own blood."