

Chapter 321

Violet

Dad's glare softened into something else as his eyes landed on Dylan. For a second, he gave him that same puzzled look he had given me, which made me wonder if he truly had no clue who we were.

Another wave of warmth hit my chest just by watching him. He wasn't looking at me anymore, which gave me this strange freedom to stare, remember, and think about what I had lost. I wanted to hold on to the sight of him for as long as I could, let my eyes trace every line and detail I had forgotten before it faded away again.

There was one thing I had never forgotten about him, and that was his auburn shade of hair I used to love so much. It was the same color as my favorite doll's hair, the one I still kept and was tucked safely away in my room at Starlight.

Funny enough, his eyes were that same warm shade. I used to compare them all the time, tugging a strand of his hair and holding it beside his eye just to see how perfectly it matched. Thinking about it, I could only imagine how annoying that must've been, but Dad never complained. He would always let me and look at me as if I was his whole world.

I had no complaints or bad memories when it came to my parents because they had been amazing to me. Too good.

A lump formed in my throat. I shouldn't have come this close...not when I knew those memories would hurt that much. If it wasn't for that box or the answers we needed, I would've melted into his arms and not ever let go, no matter how crazy he would call me.

"Have you kids lost your tongues?" Dad asked, raising his voice just a little. Little Violet buried her head in her dad's shoulder as his tone was strict, or at least...he was trying to make it sound that way. "What is your business here?"

Even though the situation was quite serious, I had to keep myself from smiling. It was impossible to take him seriously when I knew he had probably already looked us up and down, wondering where our coats were or if we had already eaten. That was Dad.

You know those people who just have kind faces? Greg Hastings was one of them. Even when he frowned, he somehow managed to look gentle.

"Sir," Kylan said, stepping forward, his voice calm and respectful. He let go of my hand and stood in front of Dad.

"We didn't mean any harm," he forced a smile. "We were just a little worried, seeing such a young child playing out here all alone...without any supervision."

His words were polite, but it was hard to tell whether it were just simple words or a jab. Dad, who probably must've felt the same way, shifted his weight and adjusted Little Violet on his hip. "I trust my daughter. She's perfectly capable of protecting herself, and she knows these swamps better than anyone," he replied, then looked down at her. "But she also knows that she shouldn't be talking to strangers."

Little Violet sighed dramatically, resting her chin on his shoulder. "Yes, Daddy."

The swamps had always been safe, but knowing how much Dad trusted me made my heart happy. Mom and Dad...they had always been the ones who trusted me the most, no matter what. Sure, they had always been

cautious, but they had never taken away my freedom. The isolation didn't happen until I was left in Fergus's care.

"Lycans?" Dad questioned, nudging his head at Kylan. "I mean...you look like one."

Kylan nodded. "Yes," he answered. "From Aevanor."

Aevanor?

Dad's expression eased, and he relaxed his tensed shoulders. "Ah," he breathed. "As long as it's not Lyperia, you're all welcome here."

Dylan let out a quiet snort, covering his mouth, and Trinity did the same. Kylan's jaw twitched a little. I assumed it would've been funny to anyone who wasn't from Lyperia.

Anyway, it was a good move for him, not to mention the kingdom.

Quick thinking, Kylan.

I had never heard it directly out of Mom and Dad's mouths, but then again—why would they ever discuss politics with an eight-year-old? After all the crap that had happened between them and Elyx, it wasn't hard to understand that they weren't too fond of Lyperians.

"How long are you guys planning on staying?"

"Not long, we've just arrived, but we'll be leaving today," Kylan shrugged. "We're on an excursion through the swamps, and were wondering if we'd find any Bloodroses," he continued. "And I must say it's an honor to meet one for the first time."

I blinked at him, a little impressed. His lies came so easily, and his words

sounded so natural that even I almost believed him.

Dad turned his gaze back to me, his eyes softening. I felt my pulse in my neck as he looked into my eyes, still trying to figure something out.

“So you’ve just arrived here today?” he asked, curious.

I opened my mouth to speak. “I...I...”

Dad’s eyes narrowed slightly. He appeared to be somewhat suspicious, and I couldn’t help but wonder if I had already messed it all up. This wasn’t supposed to be hard, right?

What if we told him?

Yes, we are from the future, and I need to find out what it is that Little Violet needs to show us before we return.

Kylan stepped in quickly. “I arrived here today,” he said. “But she’s been here a few times before, so she knows her way around.”

My heart jumped, and I glanced at Kylan. Why would he say that? Then it clicked. He must’ve remembered that there was a possibility that Dad had seen me yesterday and was trying to get our story straight.

“So it was you!” Dad’s expression brightened. “I knew you weren’t a ghost,” he muttered to himself.

An uncomfortable laugh escaped me as I rubbed the back of my neck.

“You really are from Aveanor, aren’t you?” Dad laughed softly. “Is that why you aren’t wearing coats? You kids must be freezing! Not even shifters can survive this weather!”

I smiled faintly. There it is...

He had always been the kind one, even to strangers. But my smile faded just as quickly, because now I knew there was a chance that his kindness toward strangers, the very thing he used to warn me about, might have been what led to their end.

"Daddy, I have coats!" Little Violet chirped, tugging at his sleeve. Dad let out a laugh, tugging her hair with a gentle grin. "Those are too small for them, princess."

Little me pursed her lips as she went into deep thought, and I felt my cheeks heat instantly. Even hearing the nickname, princess, did something to me. He really loved that little girl in his arms, and it was so obvious. He looked so alive, so full of light, and I had never ever doubted his love because they used to tell me they loved me every single day.

Kylan nudged my shoulder with a chuckle, and I shot him a look. I already knew this wouldn't be the last time I heard about it, and he'd probably tease me about it for a long time.

"Sir," Trinity smiled at Dad. "Can I just say you have the most beautiful eyes?"

Dad fluttered his eyes, caught completely off guard. He pointed at himself. "Me?" His ears flushed red. "That's...that's too kind of you," he stammered.

"The weather's getting rough," he said after a moment. "If you kids want to come in for shelter, we're not far."

"Yes!" Little Violet clapped her hands.

I didn't know how Trinity had done it, but it seemed like Dad liked her

compliment enough to invite us to their home.

"We would love that," Trinity said, poking Little Violet's cheek. "And maybe you can tell us all about your game, right, Violet?"

Dad frowned playfully. "Game? What game?"

"I don't know what that lady's talking about, Daddy," little me said, shaking her head with wide eyes. "I never said anything about a game!"

But she did...

Why would she deny that?

Dad shrugged it off with a chuckle. "We don't live far from here," he said, setting her down. "We'd better get to walking!"

As soon as she reached the ground, Little Violet grabbed Trinity's hand, and they walked to the front together. A smile touched my lips. I guess it didn't really matter what lifetime I met Trinity in, because I would always love her, no matter what.

Dad walked beside them.

Kylan stayed beside me, while Dylan waited until Dad had walked past him. There was something so careful about the way Dylan moved, as if even breathing too loud would give him away. And maybe he was right...

Kylan and I shared a look. I reached for Dylan's hand as we walked, placing myself between them. "You're so quiet," I whispered. "Are you alright?"

His jaw clenched. "We should be careful, Vi."

Goosebumps prickled my skin. "Did you guys also see it?"

Kylan nodded once. "The way he looked at the two of you? It'll only be a matter of time before he finds out."

"Maybe we should turn back," Dylan muttered. "Make Vi cry so we can leave—"

"Hello!" I snapped, glaring at him. "What do you mean, make Vi cry?"

Dylan was serious. He didn't even blink. "It would work."

My mouth dropped open, and Kylan let out a chuckle beside me, shaking his head.

"We need to get inside that house," Kylan stated. "We need to keep that man—"

"My dad," I corrected. "Greg."

"Your dad," he repeated. "We need to keep him busy, and someone needs to ask motor-mouth Violet about this 'game' she mentioned, because whatever she's talking about, that has to be the reason we're here."

Motor mouth?

"That's a good strategy," Dylan agreed.

Kylan turned to me. "I know you don't remember much, but do you have any idea where your mom could be?"

I frowned, thinking back. Then little bits and pieces came to me. "Didn't she...I...she say her birthday was two months ago?"