

Chapter 337

Kylan

We walked deep into the woods. Jack was up front, and Nate was beside me. I stayed close enough to Nate to catch him in case he would fall, literally.

It was Jack who had suggested the walk, only reinforcing our suspicions that he already had somewhat of an idea of what was going on.

He wasn't the type to play games or try riddles. Jack was a wise man who had seen far too much to beat around the bush. He had taken us away because he was going to ask a question, and was already expecting the answer.

I glanced at Nate.

He had his eyes on his father's back, his shoulders tensed. His jaw began twitching with every step he took, and it was no surprise. Nate had always been the perfect son. The son who never disobeyed, never disappointed.

And now he feared that perfect son would have to explain why he hadn't protected his own sister.

But I wouldn't let that happen.

I would do the talking, and I was serious.

Jack suddenly stopped, and we both halted mid-step. The man turned slowly, his eyes kind but sharp enough to cut through, even in the darkness.

"My daughter isn't with us anymore, is she?" he asked, though it

sounded more like a statement. His eyes darted to Nate, who drew a shaky breath.

"Dad—"

"Sir—" I took over. I took one step forward and shifted a bit to place myself in front of Nate without even thinking.

"When you say...isn't with us—"

Jack cut me off. "I need you to confirm that Chrystal is dead."

Those words hit me harder than I expected. I had accepted she was gone, told myself I couldn't give two shits, and had made peace with it...but hearing her father say it.

Not Chrystal, not any other bad name in the book, people called her, but my daughter. That one took the breath out of me for a moment.

Because even monsters are someone's child...

I forced myself to look into Jack's eyes and didn't back down. "She's dead."

I could've settled for 'gone,' but that could mean a lot of things. It was better to give it to him straight, so I wouldn't have to repeat myself.

Jack's expression twisted over three times within seconds. First it was anger, then sorrow, then confusion, and at last something tired that almost looked like peace...acceptance. That was the one that stayed.

Nate's voice came out in a whisper, "Dad—"

Jack held out his arm without even looking at him. A single gesture for

him to stop talking. Then he looked at me again.

"Did my boy do it?"

"No."

Jack inhaled, then exhaled.

"Did you do it?"

"No."

His breath hitched, but his face remained strong.

"Then help me understand...who did it?"

I gulped before the name left my throat. I said it carefully, but also honestly. "It was Kayden."

I had no shame in telling the truth, or that she somewhat had it coming, but I truly wished this man had never had to hear it. He didn't deserve that.

Jack looked between us. "And you and Nate were there when it happened?" he asked, his tone softer.

"Yes, sir," I said. "We were there when it happened, and then all of us buried the body—"

"When you say all of us," Jack began. "I assume you mean the maid, Camille, your brother is always with, Violet, and her ladies, Trinity Richard, and Dylan Hastings?"

"Yes."

Jack rubbed both hands over his face before smoothing back his hair. Then he pressed his palms over his eyes for a moment, like a man bracing himself for the last blow.

"And if you were in Kayden's position," he asked, "would you have done the same?"

I swallowed because how would one even respond to that? Yes, sir. I would've killed your daughter, whom I have known all my life. Still, I couldn't lie to him.

"I believe so. Yes."

There was no point in lying. Chrystal had become a threat.

One that had to be stopped, and Kayden was right about one thing. If it wasn't him who would've done it, it would've been any of us.

A sigh escaped from Jack's lips. He didn't ask why, didn't demand that I drag Kayden out of bed, or threaten to do something about it. He just... stood there with that look in his eyes.

The look of a father processing a truth he always feared was coming.

I glanced behind me at Nate. His breaths were heavy, his chest rising and falling too quickly with each breath he took. He had been holding himself together all day, but this was where he couldn't anymore.

I knew this would happen because I knew how to pay attention now. Nate was good at pretending. Hiding it, sure, but from now on I would be able to see through it even better.

Jack breathed. "Then I suppose...this was something that couldn't have been prevented."

I shook my head slowly. There was no comfort in that, but it was the truth.

Jack's eyes softened. "And did she suffer?" he asked softly. It was like he already knew she did, but was somehow hoping to hear a different answer.

A flash hit me in the head, and I could see all of it again. Kayden throwing himself over her, the pink dagger, Nate's scream...

I forced myself to speak. "I wish I could tell you she didn't...but she did."

Jack's jaw clenched, but he quickly recovered himself. "Okay," he said.

He bopped his head several times, probably trying to tell himself it was 'okay' that his daughter had died. Crazy, right?


He forced a smile, shifted his weight, then leaned forward with his hands against his knees. It was almost as if his palms were the ones stained with the blood, and he didn't know what to do about it.

"It's okay," he whispered, shooting me a glance. "Thank you for being honest."

Then he straightened. "Nate..."

I followed him with my eyes as he brushed past me and slammed his arms around his son. Nate reacted instantly, folding his arms around him.

He was having a hard time, but it wasn't like that day.

He didn't break down, didn't crumble, just held onto Jack. 

I couldn't ever dare to imagine the king ever holding me like that. Elyx

Lythoria would've punched me. One punch for every confession, and then another for every truth, and then another just because he felt like it.

"Son."

Jack pulled back slightly and pressed his forehead to Nate's, resting his hands on his cheeks. "None of this is your fault, and we will get through this," he said. "I love you, you hear me? We will be alright." 1

Nate nodded. Jack gave his cheek two light taps, then turned to look at me once more.

"We will discuss this," he said calmly. "But can you first take me to where she's buried...so I can say goodbye to my daughter?"

As those words left his mouth, I almost forgot how to breathe. Little Violet's words about the missing ring had suddenly returned to me.

'The one kept in the dark will point you to the stone you've been hunting, and you'll need it far sooner than expected.'

It was Jack who had been kept in the dark, and now he wanted us to walk him right back up that path. The same path where Violet lost her ring.

Could it be?

"We'll take you."