

Chapter 393

Violet

The doors opened, and the ballroom went quiet. All heads turned to Kaelis as she entered, and her presence alone was enough to draw every eye in the room.

She looked beautiful.

Right behind her came the queen and Kiora, both smiling with pride. It took a second before everyone around me stood, and applause filled the room as the guests clapped in unison. I didn't know what to do, but since this was what they apparently did at a howl, I joined in too.

I felt Kylan's eyes on me and knew what he was thinking.

How could I press my palms together so easily after what I had just heard? Well, he wasn't the problem here. The king was.

I turned my gaze toward King Elyx. He was clapping the hardest and only looked at his daughter, but not even that was enough to make me believe such a man could ever be capable of being a good father. A good father wouldn't try to sabotage his son's mate bond.

Between bringing up Chrystal and now announcing another mistress, I couldn't help but wonder what his endgame was.

What exactly was he trying to reach?

Control?

A reaction?

Or something worse.



What was it?

I followed him with my eyes as he rushed forward. He kissed Cecilia's cheek, pulled Kaelis into an embrace that made the room erupt into another round of applause, then guided her toward the center of the ballroom.

The music shifted, and a softer sound filled the room.

Everyone remained standing, watching the two as they began to dance. It really was odd seeing the king at his softest, and it bothered me that he was only standing there for the wrong reasons. I didn't believe there wasn't at least a bit of love for his thousand children in there, but he loved attention way more.

That's also why he did what he had just done. He craved attention. Lived for it.

"It's not like I wasn't going to tell you," Kylan began, helping himself with the explanation I had never asked for. "He had just told me..."

"You don't have to explain," I said softly, cutting him off. "I know the king long enough now to know what he's doing."

"Good." Kylan let out a quiet chuckle. "And I hope you know that I still have a plan, and that there won't be a ceremony. Not with Camille."

I looked up at him, immediately noticing the certainty in his eyes.

"I know," I said, releasing a small laugh. My eyes turned back to the dance floor before he could say another word.

I believed him. I truly did. Still, I couldn't help wishing to hear that same determination when we had just talked about something else. As silly as it sounded, when I had finally asked him to mark me, I had hoped he



would say yes right away, with that same certainty.

The music ended, and the room burst into applause once more, so loud I was sure their hands had to be aching.

Kylan stepped away, leaving my side as he approached Kaelis. I could tell the smile on his lips was forced and practiced, but the small chuckle that left his mouth when he took his sister's hand and lifted it high enough to show her off was real.

Despite everything, a small smile crept onto my face as the two began to dance.

When I had first seen them interact, I had been convinced it would take a long, long time for them to reach this place. If there was anything good about this trip, it was the way the family was able to reunite.

My gaze drifted again, landing on the queen. Cecilia held on to the king's arm, and Kiora to the other as they admired the dance. The three of them looked like the perfect family, but I wasn't fooled.

They were more dysfunctional than my own, and I had three moms and three dads.

"Hey."

A quiet voice beside me made me turn, and my eyes locked on Nate.

A smile curled at his lips as I shot him a surprised look. He looked handsome tonight. His blonde hair was neatly styled, his clothes fit him perfectly, and while he had always been good-looking, there was something different tonight.

Nate's smile widened. "Apparently, Kaelis changed her dress last minute, and she told me we had to match so..."



"You look great, Nate," I said, shaking my head. Then my thoughts shifted completely, and a gasp escaped me.

"The rav..." I started.

"I hid it inside the greenhouse," Nate cut in quickly, lowering his voice. "Just in case. Barely anyone goes there."

Right.

Except for that one time when Kylan had been stuck between my thighs and dad walked in because he thought I was getting attacked.

Heat rushed to my cheeks just thinking about it.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," I said, letting out a short laugh to cover it up.

I turned my attention back to the dance floor. "Kaelis looks great, doesn't she?"

Nate shrugged. "She always does."

We stood there quietly, taking it in as Kylan guided her across the floor. She struggled a bit with the steps, but it was cute.

"You know," Nate said after a moment, "after all that effort to hide the raven today, I heard a story about Sora supposedly hitting Kayden on the head and..."

"It's true," I said without hesitation. "I know you probably had your doubts when Sora's name was mentioned, but I was there."

Nate opened his mouth, ready to respond, then slowly closed it again. His



brows knit together as if he was trying to make sense of the situation.

The music began to slow, and the dance came to an end. Kylan twirled Kaelis one last time, making her laugh.

When the music stopped, she wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

"How many times are we going to clap?" I asked, making Nate chuckle. "I think they get it now."

Kaelis's head lifted, and her eyes found mine. They lit up as a warm and bright smile spread across her face, which I returned in an instant.

Then I noticed the angle of her gaze and realized it wasn't for me.

It was for Nate, of course.

Kaelis lifted her hand and waved him over. Her gesture drew attention, and one by one, all heads turned to see who exactly the princess was calling for.

Nate scratched the back of his neck, suddenly very aware of the situation. "Well," he muttered, "I suppose I better get going."

"Yes, sure," I said, nudging him lightly. "You should go. Don't make her wait."

He made his way to Kaelis, and she released herself from Kylan's grip before taking his hand. She pulled him away, laughing, and they ended up in a circle of girls who immediately surrounded her as they disappeared into the crowd.

One lord pointed his finger at Kylan, ready to trap him in conversation. Kylan was quick to notice and managed to slip away just in time.



He moved so fast it almost looked like a sprint, and he forced himself through the crowd that began to form again until he reached me. I laughed under my breath, seeing the relieved expression on his face.

"She stepped on my foot," he said, breathless. "Five times!"

I laughed. "Five?"

"At least."

I tilted my head, pretending to think. "Well, I hope Camille will be less clumsy than Kaelis when you have your first dance."

Kylan shot me a look. The kind that asked if I was serious or if I had finally lost my mind. I gave him one right back.

"It's a joke," I said, slightly rolling my eyes before throwing my arms around his shoulders. I rose onto my toes and pecked him, then rested my forehead briefly against his.

"Nate brought Thorne to the greenhouse," I whispered, pulling back slightly. "He said barely anyone goes there."

"Really?" Kylan grinned at me. "Do you remember when we..."

"Yes," I nodded. "There's no need to remind me. I remember."

I pushed his shoulder lightly, taking in the sound of his laughter. He already seemed a lot more at ease than before. I gazed into his eyes, treasuring the moment because I knew it wouldn't last.

"What comes next?"

Kylan took a breath. "We'll be stuck here for a while," he said. "Then there will be speeches, and after that we'll all go to the garden to—"



His words were cut short by the sound of the large doors slamming open. Gasps spread through the ballroom, the music cut off, and every conversation died at once.

No...

My heart dropped, and it felt as if I couldn't breathe. Because like everyone else, I stared at the figure standing in the doorway.

In that moment, only one thought filled my mind.

What was Kayden doing here? 

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