

Chapter 400

Violet

The party had been going on for hours.

At first, it had been careful, measured, and respectable, but once the younger ones were escorted out and the night grew darker, something shifted.

Voices grew louder, people made out in every corner, most not even bothering to slip away into the woods, while others still fought for attention. The full moon was bright above us, making wolves bolder, warmer, needier.

Poor Kaelis was glued to her mother's side, clutching Cecilia's arm and deeply traumatized by the state of her own party. Kiora had already left with the younger children, which meant it was just her.

Even though Kiora wouldn't be present, Vayla, Kaelis's Lycan, was so impressive that she would hear it from her room. That's what she had told me.

I drew a breath, clutching the cup in my hands. Lumia was losing it. She had that restless, aching pull she'd been fighting for days now, and as needy as she was at the moment, even she knew this wasn't the time. She strained to keep herself composed, just as she had been doing these past days, though it was clear every instinct in her screamed otherwise.

My gaze drifted across the garden and landed on Kylan. He was standing a little farther away with Nate and Dylan, holding a drink. He had been enjoying his night as well, looked calm from a distance, but I knew better.

Between Cecilia telling us she was surprised no one else had found out



about my identity, and it being close to midnight, he couldn't be that calm.

His eyes suddenly lifted and found mine. My cheeks warmed instantly, and it was too late to look away when he already knew I had been staring. As soon as he shot me a smirk, Lumia stirred again.

Beside me, Trinity let out a dramatic groan.

I snapped my head toward her. "What?"

She rolled her eyes. "I should be getting my back blown out by Dylan right now," she muttered, raising her hands in disbelief. "Instead, we're stuck waiting to seal a shadow inside a raven!"

I made a gagging noise, completely missing her other words. "Please don't say that...about him."

A snort left her. "Right. That's your brother, and you don't want to hear that," she exhaled. "Sorry."

We broke into shared laughter, and she leaned her head against my shoulder. Her eyes glanced upward to meet mine. "How do you do it?" she asked. "Do you seriously not want to jump on top of him right now?"

"I do want to," I responded.

The first time Lumia had grown restless, it had nearly killed me. I had barely been able to think, let alone breathe, and ran straight to Kylan's room to fix it. But after that first time, we had both learned how to ground each other.

"But unlike you and Dylan...we know how to wait—"



"Yes, sure," Trinity chuckled. "And that's why Alpha Fergus found you in the greenhouse."

"Yes, let's not talk about that anymore."

Trinity's eyes rolled back. She scanned the garden. "So where is our target anyway?"

I followed her gaze, and we both found him at the same time. Trinity cooed. "His craziness aside, the way his Mommy takes care of him just warms my heart," she said sarcastically.

I tilted my head, staring at the scene Trinity had pointed out. Lady Mona stood with a smile as she tickled Kayden under his chin before pulling him into a hug. The moonlight caught the red streaks in his hair, making them stand out even more. He couldn't fool me. He couldn't fool any of us.

Baelor or no Baelor, he just wasn't a good person.

The two stood close to the king. Also the mistresses who lingered like honey. They touched the king's arm, fought to draw his attention, but none of it worked. Elyx barely looked at them.

His eyes were only on Cecilia, and as I looked back to see who she was staring at, I realized it was the same for her. She gazed back at the king.

Elyx was an interesting case. The more I watched him, the more it felt like he was waiting, counting the minutes as if he were waiting for something to happen.

Although I doubted he was just as dangerous as Kayden at the moment, there was a lot to unpack. Too much.



Suddenly, his eyes pierced through mine, and my heart stuttered. His gaze was sharp and dangerous, as if he didn't want me staring at him. But then the corner of his mouth curled into an exhausted smile.

He smacked his lips and rose from his seat, holding a glass in one hand and a small spoon he had grabbed from the table in the other. As soon as he tapped them together, the music faded, laughter trailed off, and conversation died down.

Every head turned toward him. He chuckled, pleased with the attention, and cleared his throat while slowly extending his hand.

"Now," he said calmly, "it's time for what we have all been waiting for."

He stretched his arm farther. "My beautiful queen, Cecilia, and my precious daughter, Kaelis."

Cecilia and Kaelis shared a small smile, and stepped forward together. The crowd parted, clearing the center as the king met them there.

"It's happening!" Trinity said excitedly.

All the lights around us shifted to Lyperian blue, and waves of gold washed over the garden. There were gasp after gasp as everyone was mesmerized. It was unreal, like something straight out of a dream.

I barely noticed Kylan slipping away until he was suddenly beside me. Dylan and Nate had joined him.

He wrapped an arm around my waist and gave it a gentle squeeze, drawing a giggle from me.

"Kaelis is my eighth child to have her howl," the king announced, "and the second born of my queen."



Cecilia's smile was proud and glowing.

"And as many of you know," he continued, "she is my favorite daughter, by far. The others never quite measured up."

I scoffed under my breath. "Who even says something like that?"

Kylan leaned closer. "The king," he muttered. "And I'm pretty sure it was Kahlia before I left for Starlight."

I glanced around, my smile fading a little. The faces of the mistresses and his other daughters stiffened, especially Kahlia's. Even Kaelis and the queen looked uncomfortable and did not know where to put their eyes.

The king went on, completely oblivious. "When she runs into the woods and howls beneath the moon, she will step fully into who she is meant to be."

Kaelis smiled softly. "Thank you, Dad."

"Of course," the king beamed, stepping back. "Now go ahead, my daughter!"

The guests cheered, and two of Kaelis's friends rushed to her side. Kaelis turned her head and smiled at me. "Come."

I froze.

Me?

Kylan chuckled quietly at my side. "I think she wants you there."

"I don't want to shift," I whispered back, panicked. That was the last thing that needed to happen tonight, on top of everything else.



He shook his head, still smiling. "Not to shift, Pup. To guard her dress."

"Oh," I breathed.

I stepped forward, making my way toward Kaelis. When I glanced back, Trinity gave me an exaggerated thumbs-up, grinning.

The two girls beside Kaelis beamed at me, their eyes bright with excitement. I forced a smile back, hoping it didn't look as nervous as I felt. Would something like that be a big deal? Guarding a dress?

They linked their arms with mine, and Kaelis led the way as we followed her down the path.



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