

Chapter 412

Violet

I waited for an answer, but Kylan seemed to have different plans. He turned away and swam back a little, creating just enough space between us so I wouldn't bother him.

But I wouldn't leave it at that.

Not tonight.

I followed him until my body pressed against his again and looped my arms around his neck so he wouldn't disappear.

"Pup," he warned.

"Kylan..."

His eyes softened as they locked on mine for a long moment. "I will mark you," he said. "I want to—"

"I understand that," I softly hummed. "I'm not asking if you want to do it. I'm asking why you haven't yet."

He swallowed. There was a hint of surprise in his eyes, as if he hadn't expected me to push further. An uncomfortable knot formed in my stomach. It wasn't this conversation that made me uneasy, but the fact that I had never asked him about it so directly before.

My hands slid from his shoulders down to his arms. "And please don't tell me this is about a ceremony," I added. "I know you don't care much about traditions."

He let out a quiet huff. "You're right. I do not," he admitted.

The look in my eyes shifted. I tried not to seem too eager, too desperate, but I didn't need a mirror to know my eyes were probably giving everything away.

I was pretty desperate.

A sigh escaped him, but there was a small smile now. "The day I mark you," he said slowly, "will be the best day of my life."

My pulse quickened as I anticipated the words that would leave his mouth.

"But before that day comes, I still have a few things to take care of, and I need to take your happiness into consideration too," he continued. "It's not just about what I want."

I softened immediately. "It would make me happy," I told him, "if you marked me."

His jaw locked, and a frustrated breath escaped him. I didn't care at the moment whether I was being annoying or not. I just wanted to know if we were on the same page.

"Would it make you happy," he began, "if my plan to stop the ceremony with Camille fails? If I fail you?"

I went quiet, and he continued before I could think of an answer. "Or what if, over the years, you get sick of Lyperia? Of the palace, the politics. What if you wake up one day and decide this isn't the life you want, but you feel trapped because of my mark?" he asked. "Just like...my mother."

His voice cracked at the end, and my eyes fluttered. It seemed like all of these thoughts had been on his mind for the longest time.

"Not to forget, that mark would follow you everywhere," he said. "



People wouldn't see Violet anymore. They would see the crown prince's claim and define you by it. And I do not agree with that at all, but that's unfortunately the way it will be."

I opened my mouth to speak, but a breath came out instead. He was just throwing fact after fact at me, and he was right. But I could also take it a bit further and do the same.

"I will always want what's best for you, and you can do these incredible things, Violet," he said quietly. "More than this kingdom even understands. You could become this amazing healer, do something big with your eyes, help people, explore your land, the Common Lands, and take back what's rightfully yours one day," he said. "And I want to see you do all of that without the world narrowing you down to something you can't undo."

We could reverse it, but everyone knew that pain would be worse than any rejection. I listened to his words and took in everything.

I knew what he was thinking.

What if, after graduation, I realized I wasn't the same girl I had been freshman year and wasn't willing to give up certain things for my mate?

The water moved softly around us. "I understand where you're coming from," I said after a moment. "I really do."

He watched me carefully.

"But it doesn't change anything for me."

Kylan's eyes widened slightly, as if he couldn't believe I was still going. "If you're saying all of this only because you're afraid of losing me —"

"No, listen to me," I said, cupping his face.



I lifted my chin so he had to hold my gaze. "I am not asking you to mark me because I'm afraid of losing you," I made clear. "I'm asking you to mark me because you're my future, and no matter what happens, I do not see a life that doesn't have you in it."

I pulled him a little closer in the water. "I love you, I want you, and I feel safest when I'm standing beside you."

The tension in his face eased.

"And if one day I decide to travel the world," I added with a small smile, "you'll be running beside me. If I build something new, you'll help me build it. And if I ever leave Lyperia, it will be with you...not away from you."

His throat bobbed. "I'm trying to protect you..."

"I know, and I don't need protection from you," I continued. "I need honesty, and if you're afraid I'll regret it someday, then trust me enough to let that be my decision."

I brushed my thumb over his cheek. "I know the past made you cautious," I said softly. "But this isn't something you have to protect yourself from. I'm here, and I'm staying."

His eyes held mine for a moment. There was no teasing now, only the look of a crown prince forced to carry the weight of Lyperia on his shoulders because the rest of his family wasn't up to the task.

He laughed quietly, shaking his head. "I'm glad to hear you're willing to risk everything to suffocate here with me."

"Don't say that!" I gave his shoulder a light push. My eyes scanned my surroundings, then landed back on him. "I actually kind of like it here."



He nearly chortled. "Don't lie."

"I'm not!" I protested.

Sure.

I couldn't wait to get back to Starlight, and even the Bloodrose felt more like home than these marble halls I would never fit into. But this? This was his place. His Lyperia.

And because of that, I liked it.

There were plenty of painful memories here for him, but I was determined to create better ones.

"We've been so busy with everything," he exhaled, "you've barely even seen Lyperia."

He wasn't wrong.

Between all the conspiracies, Baelor, siblings, politics, and a near-death experience, I had barely seen anything at all.

I could already imagine Rochwall asking us how our trip went while I had to lie to our Commander's face and pretend everything had turned out completely fine.

"We could always come back during the break," I suggested.

Kylan's arms slid around my waist again, pulling me closer. "Over my dead body," he said. "I will take you far, far away from the palace."

I laughed. "Sure."

He smirked. "I mean it."



There was still a thought tugging at the back of my mind, and I couldn't just let it go. How could I when I had felt the lump in my throat when he had said her name?

"Is there still no sign of Camille?"

His expression hardened immediately.

"No."

"Where would she even be?" I muttered. "Do you think Kayden is looking for her?"

Kylan shrugged, not bothering to deny it.

A tight feeling settled in my chest. The idea of Camille suddenly appearing at the ceremony in some big gown made my stomach twist.

What did she think would happen? That Kylan, of all people, would just embrace her that easily?

"There's still one thing I don't understand," I said. "You keep saying you have a plan. You keep saying Kayden wouldn't allow it, but what makes you think the king would let you break your oath just because Kayden doesn't approve?"

Kylan's lips curled into a weak smile. I could tell he had already thought this through.

"I don't think the ceremony is the end," he said. "I think it will be a statement."

My brows drew together. "A statement of what?"

He looked toward the waterfall for a second, then back at me. "I believe



the ceremony is small compared to what the king actually has planned," he said. "A mistress isn't his endgame. He is plotting something."

"What?" I whispered.

He shook his head. "I can't say."

I watched his face carefully, and guilt washed over me as I took in his tightened jaw. He was thinking too much again.

We had just managed to make something positive out of our awful night, and here I was ruining it with Lyperian politics.

"Do you know what I'm plotting?" I asked suddenly, a smirk tugging at my lips.

He narrowed his eyes slightly. "Well?"

"Tomorrow," I said, "we will go out into the city. The real Lyperia. And we will walk around, meet people. Your people."

He exhaled slowly, thinking it over.

"That's not a bad idea," he said, to my surprise.

"Right?"

"Maybe Fergus would like to come."

The mention of Dad made my breath catch.

I hadn't talked to him, and we would all be leaving soon, which meant there wasn't much time left to avoid it.

I hadn't even seen him or more than half of the Bloodrose since the celebration inside.



We would have to talk, whether we liked it or not. And not just about the small things. There was still so much to clear up.

I nodded slowly. "You know what?" I said. "Let's do it."

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