

## Chapter 416

Kylan

As promised, we had ended up at the flower garden. It was much quieter there. No sound of the busy streets, the yelling people, curious stares and prying eyes.

It was just us and the guards who stood at a respectful distance.

I also stood a little further away, my hands awkwardly playing with a leaf, pretending to care while my eyes stayed on Violet. We weren't far from each other, just far enough to give her the space she needed.

She was laughing, standing with her parents, Dylan and Trinity. Her eyes brightened, her hands moving as she talked with Fergus, but I could not make out what she was saying. All I knew was that the weight from last night hadn't followed her here, and that was good.

She was good.

A loud gasp escaped her as Fergus held a pink rose out to them like it was some rare treasure. All of them seemed to be completely in their element and had dragged Trinity into it too.

Violet was focused, her brows slightly drawn as she took a closer look at the rose. I chuckled under my breath.

She was so impressed by something that small. There were hundreds of flowers around us, but none of them came close to her. Violet.

Truthfully, the garden itself was a bit boring to me, but I would never get bored watching her. Not when she looked so alive.

A sharp squeaking sound pulled my attention, and my gaze dropped to the ground.



It was Jumpie. She had somehow slipped out of my pocket and forced her way onto Thorne's head. The raven's wings spread wide, and he let out a croak, but he didn't shake her off.

Jumpie squeaked again, not satisfied with the lack of reaction.

"Jumpie, be—" I started.

Then I stopped and just exhaled slowly.

Maybe she had a point...

Perhaps I was an idiot for walking around with that raven on my shoulder like it was normal, but I didn't have much of a choice. I had seen the look Kayden gave me earlier and how his eyes searched for Thorne.

I knew in my bones that if Kayden ever got his hands on that raven again, it would be bad news.

I didn't know how. I didn't know what he still believed he could do. But I knew one thing, and that was that he was too calm.

I lifted my gaze again and scanned the garden. Nate stood in the back, leaning against a pillar. His head was down, one foot pressed against it as he tried his best not to fall asleep. This wasn't exactly his thing either, and besides that, he had looked too exhausted from the moment I saw him.

He didn't want to be here.

It was as clear as day that he had only tagged along to prove a point.

I released a breath as my eyes scanned further, landing on Kaelis. She sat on a stone table, her hands perfectly folded in her lap.

Her gaze was fixed on him, but she didn't dare walk up to him. She just watched with those sad eyes that made me realize everything earlier had been a facade.



The snarky comments, the stubborn tone...

She was hurting, and not just a little.

"This is for the better," I whispered, bobbing my head. The match just didn't make sense. She must've known that too.

They would both get over it, and she would find someone else. The Moon Goddess would be kind to her.

"Your Highness?"

I turned and came face to face with the man who had welcomed us into the garden earlier. He was bowing so low his head nearly touched the ground.

The king surely would have enjoyed it, but it made me uneasy. I never liked that.

The way people would literally fold themselves in half to greet us, knowing they did it out of fear rather than respect.

"Do you want something?" I asked, trying to keep my tone normal.

He looked up, his eyes almost shining.

"You truly are as radiant as the first light over Lyperia," he said. "And your gaze is as strong as the northern stars that guard our kingdom."

I let out a small chuckle, not knowing what to do with that kind of praise. The man held out a small candy wrapped in blue and gold.

"For you, Your Highness."

"Thank you." I accepted it, forcing a smile.

"This is a rare sweet," he went on. "It comes all the way from Orrithyl and is said to bring good luck. I can only hope it shares its luck with our

kingdom."

I smiled politely, studying the candy. Behind him, I noticed some of the staff watching from a distance. They all looked nervous, waiting to see how I would react.

My hands closed around the candy wrapper.

"I hope so too."

Relief washed over his face. It was still so strange to me how a simple sentence could shift someone's entire mood. I watched as he bowed again, then stepped backward with his head still lowered.

Meanwhile, my eyes drifted away from him and found Nate again. He still hadn't moved a single muscle. He really seemed to be going through it.

I hadn't been too sure how his talk with Kaelis had gone, but seeing the lack of interaction between the two, I supposed Nate might have done it after all. The hardest thing for any Lycan to do. What he had done last night couldn't have been easy, but it was the right thing.

I knew he needed someone to talk to, both of them, and I was determined not to make the same mistake as last time.

My legs started moving, and I made my way toward Nate. I was only halfway there when he lifted his head, his eyes slightly widened as if he had just woken up.

As if he knew this conversation was coming before I even reached him. A soft hum came from Nate as he lifted a brow at me and stood straight.

"I didn't even say anything," I chuckled. He shook his head and exhaled through his nose.

"How are you feeling?"

He let out a huff. "Like shit."



That figured.

"I understand," I said. "It's never easy to reject someone, but I believe you did the right thing. Both you and Kaelis will look back at this and realize..."

His throat bobbed as he swallowed, and something just didn't seem right. His eyes shifted past me, scanning the garden but avoiding mine.

A small wave of unease ran through me. "You did...reject my sister, right?"

Nate's eyes softened as they slid back to me, and he gave me a light shrug.

"Right?" I pressed.

His lips parted, and his hands lifted as if he wanted to explain something, but then they just fell limply to his sides. He didn't answer.

Why?

Because he hadn't rejected her.

If he had, he would have said it plainly. He wouldn't have avoided the question or tried to turn the conversation around.

"You told me you didn't want a mate—"

"And I still stand by it," Nate interrupted.

"Did you accept—"

"No," he said firmly.

"Good."

My jaw locked, and I stepped past him without another word, making my way to my next target. Kaelis.



She was still sitting on the table, her arms now crossed as she watched me with pursed lips, waiting. There was no clear reason why this bothered me so much, but it did.

When I reached her, I gently wrapped my fingers around her wrist, and she pushed herself off the table. "And?" she asked.

I shook my head. "Walk with me. Now."

She didn't protest. She just tugged her wrist free and followed me in silence as we moved down one of the paths. When we were far enough away to keep the conversation between just the two of us, I stopped walking. I turned and looked at Kaelis, who had a nervous smile on her face.

"What did he say?" she asked. "Did you manage to change his mind?"

What?

I blinked, waiting for her to correct herself.

"Change his mind?"



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