



## Chapter 428

Violet

The palace courtyard had never felt this quiet before. I thought yesterday was the quietest it could get, but this morning proved me wrong.

There still was barely anyone in sight. Just guards, and way too many guards.

Guards surrounded us, forming a wall around Kylan and me as we walked. We had been woken early that morning when one of the king's people knocked on our door and told me I had been summoned downstairs. Ever since then, my stomach had been in knots.

I still didn't fully know what was about to happen, but one glance from Kylan beside me made me understand one thing clearly. This wasn't the trial yet.

This was the other thing.

The thing he had warned me about yesterday...

The king.

My mind drifted back to Kylan's words.

Do not give in to his game.

My fingers curled slightly at my sides. I nodded to myself, repeating those words inside my head. My eyes shifted to Kylan, who seemed all too calm under all of this.

Thorne sat on his shoulder, looking equally relaxed.



I wasn't able to, because the weight of the situation pressed down on my chest again. So much depended on me at this moment. How I spoke, reacted, played this...

It felt like everyone's fate was somehow sitting in my hands.

The guards continued escorting us down the long corridor until we reached a hall I recognized immediately. It was the same hall where I had been when I decided to stand in front of the council.

The same place where everything had begun to change.

We were almost at the corner when I heard a loud knock against the door, then another one, and they wouldn't stop. Who was that?

An uneasy feeling crept over me, and I instantly leaned closer to Kylan. "Are you not coming with me?"

He shook his head. "I want to," he said. "But I know for a fact that he doesn't want me in there."

I looked up at him, waiting for him to explain.

"He thinks it'll be easier to manipulate you without me."

Kylan glanced down briefly, a quiet chuckle leaving him. "In the meantime," he added, "I'll see if I can check on everyone."

My mind immediately ran through the list without me even trying. Dylan, Trinity, Nate, Lian and Sora, the witches, Varius...

Even the queen and Jack.

All of them were caught in this mess, and the thought that something could happen to any of them because of what the king was doing made



me sick to my stomach.

"Please do that," I exhaled.

My breath caught when we reached the door, and at last I saw who had been knocking all that time.

Kayden...

"Open the door, dad!" he shouted, slamming his fist against it again. A nearby guard stepped forward nervously.

"Prince Kayden!"

Several hovered awkwardly nearby, but none of them touched him. No one dared to.

I exchanged a quick glance with Kylan. Something about this situation felt...off.

Kylan's hand moved to Thorne's back, his fingers resting lightly against the raven's feathers as if he feared Kayden might snatch him away.

"Dad!" Kayden shouted again, slamming his fist against the door. "This wasn't part of the agreement. Explain yourself!"

Agreement...

What agreement?

Kayden slammed his fist against the door again. "Da—"

"Kayden," Kylan called out, making him freeze.

He snapped his head toward us, and his gaze landed on Thorne. Then on me, and finally Kylan.



His eye twitched slightly when he saw the two of them together. The smug little smirk he usually wore, the one that always made it impossible to tell whether he was joking, plotting, or enjoying himself, was completely gone.

It had been replaced with a worried and stressed expression. He turned fully and began walking toward us.

I didn't even realize I had taken a step closer to Kylan until his arm moved in front of me, pushing me behind him. I was so used to the version of Kayden I knew that this was what terrified me.

The defeated one...

"Don't say a word," Kylan instructed. "I'll do the talking."

My fingers grabbed the back of Kylan's sleeve as Kayden got closer. He shook his head as if he was arguing with his own mind.

"No...no..."

He stopped right in front of us, and immediately glanced around. The guards were still close, but far enough away that they couldn't hear if he kept his voice low.

His eyes snapped back to us. "It wasn't me," he said, his voice tense and desperate. "All of this...I swear it wasn't me!"

His gaze moved past Kylan and landed directly on me. "I know I said a lot of things," he continued. "I know I've done a lot of things...but I wouldn't do this to you, Lettie!" he whispered.

Strangely enough, his eyes looked truly sincere, and even though it was Kayden, I wanted to believe him. He was either telling the truth, or he had become frighteningly good at lying.



But Adelaide's warning lingered in the back of my mind.

Be careful of that boy.

Kayden leaned forward, his voice growing more urgent. "Come on, Lettie! You know what I did to keep you safe," he said. "I allowed that girl with that annoying, squeaky voice to hit me over the fucking head and let it go. I—"

He looked around again, then whispered so softly. "I...killed...for you. To protect you."

Kylan let out a surprised breath. A cold chill ran through my veins, my mind instantly flashing to the image I could never erase. Maybe he had expected to score some bonus points since he had done it for me, but putting a dagger to Chrystal's heart, as much as I despised her, was not normal behavior.

"What kind of agreement did you make with the king?" Kylan asked.

Kayden shook his head once. "I didn't—"

He was about halfway through before he decided there was no point in lying about it. His eyes drifted again, this time to Thorne. But still, no coldness.

He reached his hand out toward the raven, but stopped once he caught Kylan's glare.

"If you hadn't interfered," Kayden said, shifting the blame. "And just given him back to me..."

Kylan took another step back, keeping distance between them. "Then what?" he asked. "You wouldn't have given him the box...because it was you, was it not?"



Kayden swallowed.

"You followed our every move so you could get healed to carry out whatever sick and twisted plan you were plotting, and when it didn't work out for you, you ran to the king and told him about the box," Kylan confronted him. "You thought it wouldn't do any harm because he wouldn't know what it means or what it could do, but what you didn't know is that while we've been at each other's throats, he's been fucking us all over and now we both look fucking stupid."

An embarrassed chuckle left Kayden, and that was enough to confirm all Kylan had just said. "Now you have no Baelor, no raven, and no..."

No Camille...

But I guess now wasn't the time yet.

"No what?" Kayden mumbled. "Come on, say it."

His eyes moved between the two of us, searching our faces. Then his shoulders dropped slightly.

"I have a lot of respect for Varius," he murmured. "For the witches too. You know my situation."

"Respect?" Kylan let out a chuckle.

"Yes, respect. If I had known what the king was planning...I never would have involved him," Kayden continued. "What I did was wrong."

He drew a slow breath. "And I know an apology won't mean much right now...but I do regret it."

My thoughts immediately drifted to Varius. They really had that old, calm man who could barely walk locked in the dungeons.



"The Royal Mate, Violet Hastings."

One of the guards standing by the large doors stepped forward and gestured for me to enter.

My stomach turned, and I looked at Kylan. His jaw was locked so tightly I could see his muscle twitching. His eyes were fixed on Kayden.

"Did you go to the dungeons?" Kylan asked.

Kayden nodded. "I have a way to get in," he shared. "I went last night—"

"Good," Kylan cut him off. "Then if you really didn't want this to happen," Kylan said, "you'll help me get there."

Kayden nodded without hesitation. "Yes, I will!" His eyes flickered with hope. "That means you have a plan, right?" He asked. "To free Varius... and the witches?"

He truly had no idea what the king was up to or that he was just using them.

Would Kylan tell him?

Kayden looked at me. "And I hope that plan doesn't involve you traveling back through that box with him to...mess with the timeline."

Look who's talking...

Kylan opened his mouth. "You don't get to—"

"The Royal Mate, Violet Hastings!" the guard repeated loudly.

My pulse quickened, and I looked up at Kylan again. "I better go," I told him. "I'll eventually have to go anyway, so I'd better go now and just get



it over with.”

I didn't wait for a response and forced my feet to move. Each step toward the door felt heavier, but I just accepted it, knowing I could not run away.

As I passed Kayden, I couldn't help glancing back one more time. They were both watching me now. My eyes shifted to Kylan, and I gave him one last nod, smiling in reassurance.

I let out a slow breath and turned back toward the massive doors in front of me. Nerves ran through my body as I waited patiently for one of the guards to push them open, and then I stepped inside.