



Chapter 434

Kylan

What am I doing here?

"No," I corrected. "What are you doing here?"

Kaelis scrunched her nose, caught off guard.

"I—"

Her words got stuck, her expression flustered, like she hadn't expected to be questioned. Suddenly, her eyes widened, and a gasp escaped her. Her head snapped toward Nate.

She squeezed his hand, as if checking something, then exhaled deeply. "He's finally sleeping," she said, her lips curling into a soft smile.

Sleep or asleep?

I glanced at Nate again.

No wonder he was so still.

He was pretending, for her sake. I was sure we had the same thoughts. He also didn't want her here.

"You shouldn't be here."

Kaelis looked back at me, an offended pout forming on her lips. "I'm his mate," she declared, her voice firm despite how tired she looked. "He needs me. I'm staying here with him."

She didn't waver. Same as when we visited the flower garden, there was



something in her eyes that I hadn't seen before. A determination.

"I know Nate didn't kill Chrystal," she continued. "And I'm not going to let him take the blame for something he didn't do—"

"Did Nate tell you he did it?" I cut in.

She shrugged her shoulder, hesitating. "Well...he didn't deny it," she said. "And even if he did...I'm sure she deserved it."

Her lips pressed together as she inspected my face, possibly wanting to see my reaction. "Nate doesn't deserve it because she was his sister, but she was horrible, especially to him. Wasn't she?"

Her eyes pierced mine as she waited for a reaction, but all I could do was nod. I tried not to think about it too much, but she couldn't have said it better. I felt sorry for Nate. For Jack. For her family.

"You were there when it happened," Kaelis said, her voice just above a whisper. "Weren't you?"

I didn't confirm it, but I didn't deny it either. She was smart enough to figure it out herself. "Then...he must be covering for someone," she said. "Right?"

My eyes flicked back to Nate, my brows pulling together. I had no idea what he told Kaelis, but he had no reason to cover for Kayden. None.

So what the hell was he doing?

"I don't understand," Kaelis said. "Why dad is doing this to him...to mom ...to the grandpa Varius..."

Her voice started to shake. "And everyone else."

A tear slipped down her cheek, and all I could do was watch it fall. I could tell her the truth. That it had to do with the king not caring about anyone but himself, and never being much of a father, but that was a conversation for another time.

"Does he even have proof?" she asked, her voice breaking. "Is he even allowed to do this?"

That...was a good question.

Was he allowed to do this?

Or did he just do it because he thought the rules didn't apply to him, and he could get away with it?

"There are so many laws, and we don't even know half of them," I said, chuckling. "If you really want to help Nate, you should do something useful with your time."

She lifted a brow, her gaze shifting from me to Nate's hand.

"Work on a way to get him out of this," I went on. "Because holding his hand isn't going to do anything."

She stared at me with wide eyes. "You're right!"

That went easier than expected...

"And you should probably get some sleep too," I added while we were at it.

She immediately let go of Nate's hand, then pushed herself off the ground, stumbling a bit before catching her balance.

"I don't need sleep!" she decided. She brushed the dirt off her dress.



"You are right. There are still so many laws we're not aware of, a- and I know mom will be fine, but I need to find a way to help Nate. I need to go to the library!"

She didn't waste a second, spun on her heel, and rushed off.

Did I handle that right?

I wanted to give her something to hold onto. Something that felt like direction. But there was seriously no way she was truly about to dig through every book she could find.

That would take hours.

Days, even.

"You managed to do in a minute what I've been trying to do for hours."

I turned my head, seeing Nate had opened his eyes. A small smile rested on his lips, almost apologetic. Other than that, he seemed fine.

"I only wish she went to bed," he said, "instead of wasting her time in the library."

His gaze lingered where she had gone, and I noticed something in his open palm, the one Kaelis had just released. It was the candy I had given Kaelis earlier.

The candy wrapped in blue and gold, that was supposed to give her luck. She had given it to him instead, and he had accepted.

"Why didn't you tell her you didn't do this?"

Nate let out a laugh, followed by a slow exhale.

"Does it really matter at this point?" he said. "I still used the Lunaris, didn't I?"

A sigh left me.

"It'll get pinned on me anyway," he continued. "Because he's trying to get to you and Violet. He wants something, and he knows the two of you would do anything to protect me."

I closed my eyes for a second. So he had figured it out. "Something like that."

"He even got my dad in here for...whatever reason," Nate added with a chuckle. "I don't want to be responsible for whatever it is the king is doing, and if me taking the fall keeps you all safe, then so be it."

A faint chuckle slipped from him. "I don't exactly have much going on for myself anyway."

My brows knitted. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I actually kind of like it here," he said, glancing around. "It's quiet...clears the mind."

Clears the mind?

I had to hold back a chuckle hearing that one.

"You're stupid," I told him, giving him my honest opinion. This wasn't a vacation where he could clear his mind. This was him giving up.

"We'll find a way to get you out."

Nate shook his head, but this time I wasn't having any of it.

"Your family must be worried...your dad is worried, Violet is worried," I said. "So every thought that tells you this is over...you need to push that out. And my sister—"

His eyes pierced as he looked at me.

"I know you care about her. So do I. And she has made it very clear that her future is with you. You can't do this to her, Nate."

His smile faded.

"So if you don't want to fight for yourself..." I finished, holding his gaze, "then at least do it for them."

Nate looked down for a moment. Seconds later, his fingers slowly closed around the candy. I knew it meant something to him.

And I knew a small part of him had been reached. Perhaps not enough, but it was a start.

"I don't know when they'll drag you up there. The king is unpredictable," I said after a moment. "But when you do get there...deny everything."

He raised his brows. "I already told you—"

"Because if you don't," I continued, raising my voice, "you should not expect me to visit you. Not in here, prison island, your grave, or wherever you'll end up."

I held his gaze. "I won't forgive you."

A short laugh left him. "I see the roles have been reversed."

"It's important you deny everything and trust us," I said, ignoring him. "

Commented [Ma1]:



Can you do that—”

“Yes.”

Yes...

That’s all I wanted to hear.

I turned to the side, my eyes moving further down until I could see a small glimpse of Kayden, who was still lingering by Varius’s cell. He did this.

I felt Thorne shift on my shoulder. “I know,” I muttered under my breath.

My eyes stayed on Kayden for a moment longer, and something inside me hardened. I despised him. I despised him with every bone in my body, and hearing Varius say he would succeed made me despise him even more.

Whatever this trial, this game, this mess became...there would be no sacrifices.

Not on my watch.

Not unless it was the one who started all of this.