

Chapter 450

Violet

I took a sharp breath as Kylan stood in front of me, his hands on my shoulders. He looked down at me with a sympathetic look on his face, grounding me the way he always did.

Yesterday still felt like a blur. The trial, the king getting dragged away in chains...Kayden almost shifting for the first time in years and disappearing with Camille.

All of it replaying in my head over and over like a dream I couldn't wake up from, and the worst thing was that all of it was real. Now we were here, in front of that door that led to the dungeons.

I had told Kylan last night that I wanted to see Varius one more time before he would leave later today. I needed to thank him for everything he had done, for believing in me when I didn't even believe in myself, and for allowing me to find myself.

I just had to see him.

Tonight was Nate and Kaelis's ceremony, and tomorrow we would leave for Starlight. We had a long journey ahead.

"Okay, I'm ready," I breathed. It wasn't Varius whom I feared, but those scary dungeons that hadn't done any good for Lian, Sora, or Nate.

The guard stepped aside, and Kylan pushed the creaking door open. Right in front of me was a dark, narrow hall. Torches flickered on either side, but they didn't do much.

As we walked, I stayed close to Kylan, and after a while, the cells came into view. Prisoners were yelling, pushing, kicking...

My breath hitched as we walked past the witches who hadn't left for Prison Island yet. "We have kept your secret, hypocrite. You're lucky you're her granddaughter, traitor," one called out from the cells.

Her eyes watched me through the bars as I passed, and my heart skipped a beat.

"Ignore it," Kylan murmured, pulling me closer. I tried. I really tried, but hearing that, especially from a witch, hurt. What more could I have done about them casting spells for Baelor?

Another prisoner shook against their cage. "I recognize you, crown prince!" the voice called out. "It is you who has allowed those witches to misuse the stone. I've heard all about it!"

Kylan released a loud, unbothered chuckle. I worried for him, but he didn't seem to mind much. "It will pass," he said. "If not...what are the odds of me being a more hated king than King Elyx?"

I snorted, unable to hold back my laughter. At least he could make fun of the situation.

When we turned the corner and stopped at the first cell, I saw him sitting on the ground. Varius.

He had his back against the wall and already looked better than yesterday. Not by much, but there was a difference. There was color in his face again, a bit of life...

"You came again, crown prince," he said, forcing himself up from the ground. A small smile tugged at his lips as he walked closer to us. "Without the raven this time."

"A friend is watching him," Kylan said.

He had left Thorne with Nate. Nate didn't have a lot to do today. He was getting ready for the ceremony and had offered to look after him for old times' sake.

Varius's eyes moved to Kylan's pocket, and his smile grew. Then Jumpie climbed out and made her way to Kylan's shoulder, her little nose twitching.

"A special girl," Varius commented.

His gaze shifted to me, and I wasn't sure whether he meant the raven or... Violet. I pressed my hand against the cage while he did the same, and I felt my eyes water immediately.

I didn't even know why. I just didn't want this to be a goodbye. There was so much more he could've taught me, so much more we could've talked about.

"Do not weep, child," Varius said gently. "This is not an ending. Merely a pause."

I choked a laugh. "Let us hope so."

"You came down here because you want to ask something," he said. "So ask."

As always, he knew everything.

"Are you going to be okay?"

He considered the question for a moment, then nodded his head. "Fate works in mysterious ways," he said. "I thought it was the end for me, but I have been granted another chance. I will be okay for now."

Relief flooded through me. "Where will you go? Will I see you again?"

"When the time is right."

That was not a no...right?

We would meet again.

He leaned forward, his eyes holding mine.

"Thank you, Violet. For being exactly who you are," he told me. "You are more powerful than you know. You and the crown prince. You must keep believing in each other. No matter what comes."

Why would Kylan and I ever stop believing in each other?

"Don't forget who you are," he added. "You are a special child, and the Veil isn't done with you yet. He is not done with you yet."

"Who?" Kylan asked.

"He."

Cryptic as he could be. I didn't fully understand what he meant, but I nodded anyway. Time would tell.

Kylan shifted beside me. "Do you know what happened after you left yesterday? With Kayden?"

Varius's expression didn't change. The smile remained. "I knew Kian would show himself...every path leads to Kian." He exhaled. "And he hasn't even revealed half of his strength."

So it was really Kian.

I had been wrong before, but this time it was really him.

There was more?

No one had been able to stop him yesterday, the Lyperian guards had yet to find him, and there was more?

"Do not worry. You do not need to worry for now. When it's time...you will know," Varius revealed. I really hoped it would be a long time because I didn't want to go through all of that again.

I just wanted to finish my school years, knowing Mom and Dad were still safe inside that Veil.

Varius's eyes moved to Kylan, lingering there for a while. "Take care of what you carry, crown prince," he said. "But know that it must be before she will see. Those halls aren't completely safe."

Kylan stiffened a bit, but I noticed. "Esther?" he asked.

Varius gave him a shrug. I tried to follow their conversation, but Kylan seemed just as confused, and I was certain he didn't understand either.

"What about...Elyx?" Kylan asked. "Or the box?" he whispered the last part.

Varius smiled faintly, and his eyes shifted to the right. Deeper into the dungeon. "Why don't you go down there and ask him yourself?"

Kylan and I looked at each other. We were aware the king was here, but now we knew he was further down.

"Thank you," I whispered to Varius, ending the visit. "For everything."

"Thank me by living, child." His eyes crinkled. "You need to live, and I do not mean you will die. You need to enjoy and live your life while you still can...that's all I ask."

Another cryptic speech. I locked his words inside my mind, and we

exchanged one last smile before we walked further into the darkness. My eyes glanced behind me until I couldn't see him anymore.

"Are you still okay?" Kylan asked.

"Fine."

The torches were fewer, the cells emptier, before we reached the last one. Elyx's cell.

He didn't notice us at first. He sat on a small bench against the wall. No crown, no robes, just plain clothes and chains around his wrists. He looked so much smaller like this. More pathetic than he had already been.

He had done all of this just to end up in a cell.

"Ah," he said after a while. He turned his head, his teeth showing in a grin. "If it isn't the happy couple."

He was still as arrogant, and the chains didn't change that. He still believed he was better than anyone else.

Kylan's jaw tightened beside me. "All that needs to leave your mouth is the location of the box you stole," he said.

The king's eyes pierced through mine as he ignored Kylan's words. "You're making a mistake, Violet," he warned. "I-I know Kayden is a demon, I know he lied about the Wyrnsbane boy killing the girl, I know what he'll do next and how to stop him!"

I didn't respond.

"That box," he continued, leaning forward slightly. "You have no idea what you're throwing away. You have the power to bring your parents back, and you won't use it," he said.

Commented [Ma1]:

Damn right, and after Kayden exposed what he was really after, I was done even thinking about it. They were probably safer inside that Veil.

"They would want to come back. They would want to see you, hold you, and be a family again—"

"I already spoke to them," I said, cutting him off. Of course, I wanted them back. I wished things could be different, but I knew the truth now.

Elyx blinked. "What?"

"I traveled to the Veil," I told him, my gaze hardening. "I want you to know that they are at peace, they are together, they do not wish to come back...and they hate you so, so much." A chuckle escaped me. "I can't even tell you who hates you more."

His face changed, and the arrogance cracked. He hadn't expected that and hadn't prepared for it.

"You're lying," he breathed. "They don't hate me anymore..."

"They do!"

A suffocating silence stretched between us. One that only broke when Kylan released a breath. "If you won't tell us where the box is...we're done here."

Elyx's eyes snapped to him. "Kylan!" he warned. "I am your father, and I am your king—"

"No." Kylan's voice was cold. "You were the king...and you stopped being my father a long time ago. Before I was even born..." He shook his head. "You're nothing to me now. Not my king, not my blood...nothing!" he said. "And when I'll be king...I won't be like you."

The king stared at him, then started laughing, the sound echoing through the dungeons. "You think you're so different from him, but you're not," he said. "You're more like him than you want to admit. You are ruthless, obsessive, willing to protect what's yours." His eyes glinted. "One day you'll see it, Kylan!"

Kylan didn't bother to respond. He just reached for my hand, laced his fingers through mine, and walked away.

"Kylan!" Elyx screamed. "Do not leave me here. Come back here, Kylan!"

We left him behind, and I knew, deep down, that neither of us would come back anytime soon.