

## Chapter 498

Violet

"I am going to lock myself in the bathroom," I said dryly. "I'll see you after the race."

"Don't say that," Kylan frowned. It was easy for him to say. He didn't have to run, and even if he did, his legs were long enough to keep up.

I lifted a hand to drag it down over my face but stopped halfway up and just let it hang in the air instead. I was exhausted. All of this was exhausting.

My hands dropped beside me while my back hit the wall. Nate was still standing in the doorway with a now flustered look on his face. Perhaps he had just realized maybe he should have led with something softer.

"It is so over."

Kylan let out a small chuckle. "No, it is not."

He extended his hand and reached out for me, a soft smile plastered on his face. Not feeling like I had much of a choice, I accepted and allowed him to pull me in.

Together, we made our way out. Jumpie was still perched on Kylan's shoulder while Thorne, who also didn't want to miss this, walked behind them.

"You can still win this," Kylan said as we moved down the hall. "Just because you have to use your legs does not mean that it has to be over."

Nate nodded in agreement, slowing his steps so he could match us.



'It is definitely over,' Lumia muttered in my head. 'With those wobbly legs of yours? We can shake hands and go home.'

I started shaking my head.

Go home...

For some reason, I really hated that she had said that. Mom and Dad were my home, and the only ones I was trying to get to at the moment.

Get your shit together, Violet.

Dylan's voice appeared in my head because that's what he would say to me if he were here right now. I took a breath and straightened up, anything to keep my shoulders from dropping. The change made Kylan stop for half a second as he shot me a surprised look from the side.

'Do not tell me what to do, Lumia.'

'Okay. Then I won't.'

That was easy. It was the way she had said it. She had said it on purpose. Well, whatever her plan was...it had worked.

"I know we're all probably getting tired of this, but there has been a change of plans again," I told them. "I don't know how I will do it...but I really need to win this thing."

Nate laughed. "That is more like it!"

Kylan bumped my shoulder, and he seemed to be in good spirits. If there was one thing that had surprised me the most, but also made it a bit easier to breathe, it was that he was being so chill about all of this. He just let me do my thing and supported me through it.



When we walked out into the courtyard, it was already half empty. Lots of students had already moved past the gates, and the remaining students in the courtyard were all moving in the same direction we were.

I knew they had canceled classes for this, but I had no idea it would be this serious. But then again, just the fact that Principal Sterling would be leaving his tower for this was already something.

"So," I said. "How many students did they say would be watching again?"

I tugged awkwardly at the belt of my gear.

"Looks like the whole academy," Nate said cheerfully.

I drew a breath in through my nose and closed my eyes for a second. My stomach was already turning. Sure, by now they all knew Violet Hastings, the Bloodrose who had been 'lucky' enough to mate the future king of Lyperia.

But a lot of them weren't familiar with the real Violet. The one who simply never received the training all of them had.

"It's okay," I whispered to myself. "I can do this. It's okay."

I would be fine. Trinity and Dylan should already be out there waiting, and the second I saw their faces, I would be fine. Nate was here. Kylan too.

He bent a little to bring his head closer to mine.

"Wes and Sienna are fast," he said. "Both of them. Shifted or unshifted, it does not matter."

Wes was in Kylan's year. A CSI major and a Lycan from the kingdom of Elarin. He was quiet and didn't really say much unless spoken to, but he



always seemed to be three steps ahead of everyone else in class.

Sienna was the leader of Squad Four, the full girls squad, and Mandy's friend. She was Lyperian like Kylan and Nate, and same as the majority, a combat major.

Kylan was right. Legs, wolves, it wouldn't matter. They were going to be fast either way.

"Cassian is so focused on being the best that winning is all that is in his head," Kylan continued. "Sure, it's annoying...but it has always worked for him."

"Hah," I said sarcastically. "Thanks for your encouraging words!"

Nate laughed beside us. Kylan rolled his eyes with a slight scoff. "There is something they all do not have that you do," he continued. "And I know you will win because that is what you are going to use."

"What is it?"

We walked past the gates, and the voices around us grew louder. Jumpie jumped off Kylan's shoulder and ran off. Thorne quickly took his place. Nate gently knocked his fist against the side of my head.

"Survival instinct." He completed Kylan's sentence for him.

I looked at him, lost. I still did not get it. We weren't exactly going to war with each other. It was just a run.

"Everyone can run, some better than others," Kylan said. "And sure, they'll all have strategies, because that's what they're taught, but they do not have your heart. No one does," he went on. "So what I need you to do is be smart and figure out how you're going to survive...only you can do that."



### Survive...

I looked ahead and saw that everyone had already gathered, standing in a large U shape around the edge of the woods where the race would possibly start. Almost the whole academy had gathered, and I had never seen this many people in one place at the school before. Professors, students...everyone.

Heads turned as I came into view, and my eyes scanned the crowd. It didn't take long before I found Trinity. She was with a few of her friends near the front, and as soon as her eyes fell on me, she gave me a thumbs up.

Dylan stood in the center of the circle with the Elite team. Rochwall and Jorn were, of course, present. Even Jane.

Nate made his way over to Dylan. I stayed lingering behind with Kylan.

The three who would be running the race were already stretching, wearing their Elite gear. My throat bobbed, seeing them prepare. While the others were more focused on themselves, Cassian locked his eyes with me, and a grin appeared.

Then he lifted one finger and drew it slowly across the side of his throat. Was he out to kill me?

Kylan let out a chuckle. "I'll get him for that later," he said. "Just don't let him get to you. You've got his."

As soon as Cassian came up out of his stretch, the grin faded and was replaced by a wince.

His weight shifted off his right leg, and I caught him sneaking a quick look down at his knee like he was checking it.



He thought no one had seen.

I had.

That was what Kylan and Nate had meant.

That was it.

If I would be taking them down, I would have to hit them where they would least expect it.

Cassian had his bad knee, Wes had his soft heart, and Sienna...as she finished her stretch, her eyes instantly moved to Cassian.

I let out a small hum, scanning the situation.

They were both seniors. Both top of their class, and eager to beat each other. In her head, this was not a four-person race.

This was a one-on-one between the two of them, and we were just noise. She had already decided I wouldn't win this thing, and that this was about her and him.

That meant her eyes were not going to be on me. Not during the first part or second part, and after I would take Cassian down during the first, she wouldn't even try anymore.

"Hastings!" Jorn called out. My body flinched.

"If you'd speed things up a bit, we can explain the rules and start the race!"

His tone was kinder than usual, but still a bit too loud. My eyes shifted to the crowd and landed on Professor Jill. I was certain it had something to do with that.



"You came up with a plan," Kylan said quietly beside me.

I turned my head and looked up at him as he smirked down at me.

"It might be because of you...but I think I know exactly what to do now," I sighed, a relieved smile on my face. "Let's go."

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