



Chapter 523

Violet

I turned to look at Kylan, both of us glancing at each other at the same time. His brown eyes stared me down apologetically. Even though we had had this conversation before, and many times, in his eyes he was supposed to protect me. Stand beside me to make sure I was okay.

'Go with him,' I told him through the mindlink. 'I think Sterling might be doing this for a reason, and you are the squad leader, so it does make sense.'

But underneath that, a thousand questions ran through my mind. This was my home, so why wouldn't he ask me? Does he not think I am good enough?

No, Violet.

I shook off the thought as fast as it had come.

'Or...what if it's a move to keep me and Rochwall apart?' I theorized. 'Maybe Sterling sensed there was something important being discussed between us, and wanted to stop it.'

'I doubt that,' Kylan answered. 'Rochwall, Dylan, and Nate are all sharp in different ways. It wouldn't surprise me if Sterling sent them together because he has his own motive for it.'

I thought about that for a moment. 'Might be,' I agreed. 'Lumia told me she feels a dark energy around this place...like someone is here?'

Kylan's brows drew together for a second, and I quickly shook my head. 'But don't worry,' I reassured. 'You go with him, and I'll be just fine.'



'Are you sure?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I've got Trinity.' My eyes glanced to Jorn. 'And my...big cousin.'

A quiet chuckle came from Kylan, but not quiet enough to fill the halls. Only then did I realize we had been communicating, just the two of us, while everyone else was watching.

"And?" Sterling asked. "Have the two of you reached an agreement?"

He tapped a finger against the side of his own temple, and my cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

"Yes," Kylan answered. The next second, he reached out to trap my chin between his fingers, and pecked his lips against mine. "If there's anything..." his voice was low.

"I'll tell you."

Then he stepped away from me and walked over to Sterling. Trinity locked her arm through mine, giving me a light tug as the two of us stepped over to Jorn.

Now there was a clear gap between the three groups decided by Sterling. Jorn, who did not appear to be too pleased about this, folded his arms across his chest.

He didn't have to remove those ridiculous glasses for me to see his face was tight.

"You can all look around, see this beautiful palace, but do not forget." His eyes moved between us as he held everyone's gaze for at least a second. "Do not do anything you should not be doing. There are eyes



watching...isn't that right?"

His head snapped toward the man. The Alpha heir. He nodded his head eagerly. "Correct."

Sterling tapped his stick once against the floor and started walking. Kylan waited for a while before he started following him, both his hands in his pockets like a kid that didn't really want to, but had no choice either.

"Well," Rochwall said as the sound of the cane faded away. Just like Kylan, he also shot me an apologetic look. I didn't know what he felt sorry for because I was supposed to be the one feeling sorry. I had told him about Morn and Dad, and now left him in anticipation because we couldn't speak further.

Rochwall threw one arm around Dylan's shoulders, and the other around Nate's before walking the two of them toward the staircase. The Alpha's son had also taken his exit, leaving just the three of us.

Trinity and I looked at each other, shrugging our shoulders. Then we both spun to look at Jorm, who had finally taken off his glasses.

But he had only done it so he could roll his eyes at us. He didn't say a word. Turning away, he took the path to our right, clearly expecting the two of us to follow. We did.

Trinity and I had to hurry our legs to catch up.

"What is his problem?" she muttered under her breath, her voice slightly amused.

"I have been trying to figure that one out for months now," I muttered back. "Please tell me if you figure it out."

"Should I ask him?"

"No, Trin--"

"Commander!"

Jorn glanced over his shoulder, annoyed.

Trinity gave my arm a pull, dragging us closer.

"Have we done something to annoy you, Commander?" she asked sweetly. "Because if so, please let us know. I would hate to spend the rest of this trip wondering what we did wrong."

Jorn squinted at her. "This is my face, Trinity."

"Oh really?" Trinity dragged. "You had a different face when you were talking to Professor Jill the other day, so I was just wondering."

I looked down at my feet. My hand, the one I usually used to hide my face, was unfortunately not available at the moment.

Jorn let out a laugh, and then his shoulder lifted in a one-sided shrug.

Of course, only Trinity could do this. She had despised the man minutes ago, and now she had made him laugh. That girl could have bonded with a leaf if she wanted to.

"Are you okay with us, or would you rather explore with Dylan and Nate?" Trinity teased. "Or with Kylan, maybe?"

Jorn let out a hum, his eyes landing on me for a split second before he looked away again. "I don't mind the two of you. This is better, actually," he said. "This way, I get to keep an eye on Hastings."



"And why would you have to keep an eye on me?"

He turned his head and looked at me again from the corner of his eye. Now I was walking between Trinity and Jorn. I think we both knew the answer, and I had been waiting for him to ask for more, the same way Rochwall had been looking for answers.

Everyone who had set foot on this land today had walked in here with a reason of their own. None of us were telling each other what those reasons were. We were all just moving carefully around each other, like one wrong question could lead this trip to disaster.

But there was this thought in the back of my mind. What if this way just made it more difficult for us?

"Do you know what Sterling has come here to retrieve?" I asked, shamelessly.

His brows pulled together.

"No," he said, flustered. "Do you not know?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "No."

"I've been thinking...you nearly drained yourself running to get first place at that race, Hastings," Jorn squinted, changing the subject. "And I cannot help but wonder why that is."

I gave him the same look right back. He opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by Trinity, who pointed out the walls.

"Wow!" she gushed. "Look at those paintings!"

The hall we had ended up in was long and narrow, with walls on both



sides that were lined with tall paintings in gold frames. They followed the kings of the Common Lands and their families.

"They have ruled for ages," Trinity said softly.

She looked at me with a gentle smile. "That is incredible..."

I tried to take them in one by one, but we were walking too fast and there were too many of them. Though they were just faces to me, it was interesting to see. Because the faces changed, but the eyes mostly didn't.

And when they did, I found myself glancing at Jorn, wondering if one of them might be a close relative of his.

Just when I thought we would most likely pass without me feeling anything, a small ache crept into my chest. This was my family, the people I had come from, and I didn't know any of them.

Kylan had been able to point out all the Lyperians, tell me their names...

When we were almost at the end of the line, I stopped walking. The last two portraits on the wall had caught my attention.

One was of him...

Alpha King Eamon.

He had been painted alone, sitting on a throne with his arms on the rests like he owned the world. His jaw was sharp, hair golden blonde, and eyes as pale as mine. Dad looked like him, a lot, but the two were nothing alike.

There was something sinister behind that man's eyes. Something that did not match any of the former kings.



My throat went dry as I stepped closer, my legs stopping right in front of the painting. This was the man who had ruined this entire family.

The monster who had played a huge part in taking my parents away from me, and it was also because of him that they were now somewhere in a cave while Mom's powers were getting drained by some flower.

My hands lifted up in front of me. They hovered in the air about an inch from the painting, but I knew there were eyes around, so I did not let them touch it. Though part of me wanted to claw the painting off the wall and rip it in half. Spit and curse at him for all he had done.

I felt my blood boil, and in an attempt to stop it I slid to the next painting. Jorn did not say anything, did not force me to move along. He just waited.

This painting was of Eamon again, but he was not alone. Beside him stood a woman in a purple dress, with ginger hair and a face beautiful in a way I wouldn't forget.

Everything was beautiful about her, except for those empty eyes. There was nothing behind them.

That had to be the former queen.

My grandmother, who had died before any of this even began.

Standing between them was a young blond boy who could not have been older than ten. He had a smile on his face that did not match the queen or king's because it was real.

Dad...

My breath caught.



For a moment, I wondered if it was only because, back then, he had no idea what was coming for him. But then I remembered him inside the Veil, and how much he had smiled even then. He was just a sincere person. It was as simple as that.

I heard Jorn's footsteps, and he coughed to make his presence known. "That young boy was the last king's only child," he said. "Perhaps that is why he was so...obsessed with him."

Trinity joined us, and Jorn continued. "I heard...he wanted him to be the best."

My eyes glared at Jorn. "Do his duty, marry the right woman...father the right...daughter."

His face shifted at the last part, and I saw that as a sign to continue. "Pretty sad, isn't it?"

Jorn chuckled. "It is a pity what happened to the boy," he said. "The king never even got to experience a grandchild."

I let out a small breath. "No."

Jorn slowly closed his eyes, then opened them again. "You seem to know quite a lot about this family."

I held his gaze. "So do you."

There was a small silence between us. Neither of us looked away. Would this be the part where he would finally ask me a question that mattered?

Suddenly, my fingers moved on their own, reaching for the painting. For the small blond boy in the middle. For Dad.



I couldn't tell why, and knew I wasn't supposed to, but there was no stopping it. I tore my gaze away from Jorn as my hand drifted up. Closer, and closer.

"No touching, Hastings," Jorn said firmly.

His hand shot out and wrapped around my wrist, but he did not pull me back. Whether he meant to or not, his own hand pushed mine forward instead, allowing my fingertips to touch the painting.

A sudden jolt shot through my arm, and I let out a gasp. "Hey!" Trinity called, slapping Jorn's arm before catching my wrist.

"What are you doing?" I panicked, turning to him with my mouth still open. He took a breath, his hazel eyes wide like he had also been surprised.

Suddenly, my thoughts blurred as dizziness washed through me.

Then a flash came to me.



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