



Chapter 550

Violet

I had shaken so many hands by now that they had started to ache. It was the strangest thing to be happy about, but I was.

I was just as happy, sitting on a log with Kylan by my side as we ate with what felt like the entire village watching us. All the others had already escaped, as did the younger villagers, so it was just the two of us.

My eyes drifted to the bowl of vegetable soup that had been pushed into our hands. I stirred it, then took the smallest spoonful I could get away with.

"And?" an elder woman asked. She had been watching me all evening and clearly wasn't going anywhere until she had an answer. I took a bite, then nodded, barely savoring the taste. But it was Mom's favorite, so I would like it too.

"It's good," I said once I had swallowed. Then, because they were all still staring, I said it again. "It's really good. Wow!" I gave a bigger reaction.

Relieved looks passed between the villagers, followed by soft murmurs. Kylan let out a breath beside me and gave me a look.

"Wow," he repeated under his breath, mocking.

I gave him an elbow in response.

"When our Adelaide is back with us," the woman said, clasping her



hands together, "I cannot wait to make it for the both of you. To sit you down side by side and serve you properly," she beamed. "Won't that be a day."

I gave a small hum and nodded, unsure what to say. She said it so plainly...When our Adelaide is back with us.

There was no hint of doubt anywhere on her face. Aelius had stood up there and told them that he had seen us lose, and they all chose to forget about it.

My eyes wandered to Kylan, who was quietly eating his soup. If anything, he was the one who was supposed to go inside the cave. Of course things were uncertain after what had happened with Baelor today, but still...

I couldn't help but wonder if he was so focused on his soup just to avoid having to talk. It would be very him, and it wasn't a bad idea, actually.

I looked back down at my own bowl and did the exact same thing. It, of course, didn't take long before it turned into something else. I caught Kylan going a little faster, so I did the same. Then he noticed and picked up the pace even more until we were both eating the soup like our lives depended on it.

A laugh slipped out of me mid-bite, and my eyes went to his. He was already looking at me, laughing too.

Though the happiness was still there, it felt like we were both hoping for a reason to call it a night. It wasn't surprising that neither of us lasted much longer, and the bowls were empty within a minute.



But even then, none of the villagers moved. They all continued watching us.

"Violet should probably get some rest," Kylan said finally, glancing at me. "It's been a long day. She needs it."

His words seemed to have broken a spell as they all started nodding to one another, murmuring in agreement.

"Tomorrow will be a long one for us too," one of them said. "Master Aelius will want us training our eyes at first light."

"I'll walk them to the hut," another offered, already halfway to her feet.

"No, no!" someone waved her back down. "Aelius said that I could do that. I already took their bags over."

I couldn't help but smile at them going back and forth over something as simple as who would walk us to my parents' hut.

"Sure," I said.

Kylan stood first and took my hand, pulling me up after him. I glanced back at everyone, trying to memorize their faces. Today had been short, and my mind had been somewhere else for most of it, but I was still grateful for the time we'd had.

My people.

"Goodnight," I greeted. "And thank you for all of it."

I was hit with a chorus of goodnights, hands waving in the air enthusiastically. The woman who had promised to show us the way



led in the front.

It wasn't like we didn't know exactly where we were going, as we had seen the hut before, but we followed her anyway. It was the thought that counted.

Suddenly, Kylan huffed out a quiet laugh beside me. "What?" I asked.

"Nothing." He shook his head, then started speaking anyway. "First I have to watch you be the princess of a palace so big it makes Lyperia look like nothing," he said. Then he glanced down at me. "Now I have to watch you get loved by a whole village, lead this whole thing." He glanced down at me. "It's a lot to take in in one day."

"Are you jealous?" I bumped his arm, teasing.

He looked at me with furrowed brows as if he was asking me whether I was being serious. Then he shook his head.

"Just proud and happy for you, Pup," he stated.

Something warm fluttered in my chest. After everything that had happened today, hearing that he was still able to be happy for me, to be proud of me, made me feel a bit better.

"I mean it," Kylan said. His gaze never let go of mine as we continued walking in silence, his thumb brushing over my knuckles.

"Here it is!"

We both blinked and came back to ourselves as the woman pointed out the hut. She pressed a small key into Kylan's hand and shot him a wink. "Make sure you rest. Please."



Kylan gave her a polite nod. I gave her a quick wave as she already turned and drifted back toward the fire. Now it was just us.

He put a hand at the small of my back, and we walked up to the door together. Then he slid the key into the lock and turned it.

My heart jumped the moment the door clicked open. This time felt different from the first. I knew this was Mom and Dad's place, somewhere I was supposed to feel safe. But now there was another thought I couldn't push away. If I didn't come up with a plan and somehow pull off the impossible task Aelius had given me, my parents might never walk through this door again.

I drew in a long breath and stepped inside the warm hut. It was still as clean, with the little kitchen tucked in one corner and a bed against the wall. And even though I had spent the whole night feeling stiff and out of place around the villagers, not knowing where to put my hands or what to say, none of that followed me in here.

Kylan came in behind me and pushed the door shut. I already found our bags sitting at the foot of the bed.

Moving further inside, I took everything in again. Kylan stayed a step behind me, letting me lead the way without ever trying to move ahead.

"So how was it?" he asked.

"How was what?"

"Meeting all those people," he said. "Didn't look like you weren't really feeling it."

I glanced back at him. "I have a hundred things I want to say to them,



ask them," I admitted. "But every time I open my mouth I'm scared something stupid is going to come out." I ran my fingers along the edge of the little table. "So I just smile and nod like an idiot instead."

Kylan found his way beside me. My eyes locked onto his.

"Just be yourself," he said with a brief smile. "Everyone loves you."

"I'm trying." I let out a breath. "And I do feel like I'm home, which is the strangest thing, and I can't explain it." I turned to face him properly. "But at the same time I feel like I'm trespassing. Like I don't get to have any of this yet." I searched his face. "Not until I bring them back."

Kylan nodded slowly. "I understand."

Even though those words left his mouth, he gave me a look that made me think otherwise. A soft and apologetic look.

"You want to say something," I noted. "Just say it."

A short laugh slipped out of him. "You're supposed to lead these people, Violet," he said. "So you'd better get used to them fast. If we're actually going to pull this off, if we're going to get your parents back, we're all going to have to move as one."

He tilted his head, smiling at me. "And that means you're going to have to stop nodding and start speaking." His voice softened. "I've seen you do it before. I know you can."

