Chapter 582

Violet

It had already been a few seconds since I had let it out, but the relief I had braced myself for wasn't there yet.

At least not the way I had hoped. I was met with an uncomfortable silence I wasn't quite sure where to place. It turned out that was so much worse than any reaction I could have prepared for.

"So...that's it," I muttered, my eyes moving around the group, frantic as I still waited for someone to do something. Say something.

Even if it was a flinch or a gasp.

"Hah."

The first reaction came from Mandy. It was a small sound, but one that seemed to break the silence. I swallowed, looking into the eyes of one of the first friends I had made on this team, but her face had gone unreadable.

Next, my eyes moved to Kaelis. Her eyes were still narrowed as she studied me deeply, her brown eyes boring into my soul. What was going through her mind right now?

"Does that mean," a voice asked, careful, "that Dylan is also—"

"I'm not a Hastings," I said quickly, cutting it off before it could finish. "I mean, I am...but...well."

Only after the words had already left my mouth did I take the time to look toward where the voice had come from.Sienna.

After that, it went quiet again. I glanced at Jorn and Rochwall, silently begging for some kind of help to get me through this. But they just stood

there and let me handle it.

The silence was short-lived as Cassian lifted a finger and pointed it at my face. "I knew it!" he let out. "I knew you cheated."

For a moment, nobody moved. But then the whole room broke out in laughter. Even Kylan couldn't hold back a chuckle, and before I could stop myself, I was laughing too.

Of course, that was all Cassian really cared about. Not the witch part, not what happened before or what would happen next. Just that race, and the fact that he had finally found something to blame his loss on.

The knot in my chest loosened. Actually, the lack of reaction almost disappointed me. Was that it?

"You really don't have any questions?" I asked once the laughter had died down. "About who my parents are? About why I'm telling you all of this now?"

They looked at each other, glances passing around the circle. When they all came to a decision, they shook their heads in unison.

"Honestly," Jules began, "we always figured you were a little odd. Now we just know why."

Jules was a science major in her third year and had always had a mouth on her.

I laughed softly, my hand already finding Kylan's arm to give it a light squeeze. A warning to let it be and not 'kill' anybody. Lian and Sora, who had already known the news, also stayed very calm. Lian's eyes were a bit sharper, though. As clever as she was, I knew she was aware there was a reason they were also present.

And Kaelis...

She was still watching me. Eyes narrowed, head tilted, and that was all I could see. I had no idea whether she felt betrayed that I had kept this from her, or impressed. It was hard to read.

"Is there a reason?" Idris asked. "That you're telling us all of this now."

He was a fourth-year, close to Cassian, but completely different. Cassian was all about ego, and Idris was calm and soft. He thought before he spoke, and only spoke when it was worth it.

"There is," I admitted.

"There's actually a lot more I have to tell you. So much more, but honestly, it would be better if I just showed you." I looked around the circle. "So I want to ask if you'd all be willing to come with me. Early tomorrow morning. There's somewhere I need to take you."

Mandy scratched at the back of her head. "How early are we talking, exactly?" she asked, earning herself another round of laughter.

"Six," I said. "At the gates. But it's not an obligation, okay?" I made it clear. "Only if you actually want to come. No one has to—"

"Yes, they do," Dylan jumped in. "They'll be there." He had said it so plainly that it left no room for discussion. Actually, no one argued with anything.

That was the part I couldn't quite wrap my head around.

I kept waiting for it...

The disgusted looks, the whispered comments. At least one person backing away and deciding I wasn't one of them.

None of it came...

I almost didn't trust it.

"Does this have anything to do with why everyone kept dodging our questions about that abandoned palace?" Wes asked, his eyes flicking toward Jorn and Rochwall. He had put two and two together faster than I expected.

I nodded, a small smile forming on my lips. "Yes," I said. "It does."

I had walked in here tonight with a plan. Dump everything on them all at once, lay it all out, and find out then and there whether they would help me, because we had no time to waste.

However, sitting here now, I realized how unrealistic that had been. Just because they didn't look surprised didn't mean they weren't shocked at all.

What if those disgusted looks I'd been bracing for just came in the morning?

Before I could sink too deep into the thought, Rochwall stepped forward and took over. It seemed like he had been ready to jump in, in case he needed to. "I want to say something, while we're all here."

His lips curved into a gentle smile as he looked around them, then at me. "As you all might imagine, Violet has carried a great deal on her shoulders," he said. "More than most of you can imagine," he chuckled under his breath, then recovered.

"Anyway, the way every one of you just took what she told you, without flinching?" He nodded slowly, a proud smirk on his face. "That's exactly why I never worry about this team. I always knew I'd raised a good bunch ...You just proved me right."

He shot me a smile, and I gave one in return. "Was that everything, then? "

"Almost," I said. "I just...I want to ask you all one thing." A breath escaped me. "Please keep this between us. At least for now."

It didn't take long before a chorus of agreements went through the room because no one had to think about it. That was perhaps the moment that melted my heart the most.

"Then Elite training is dismissed," Jorn announced. He had barely finished before they had already gotten up, one by one. They were stretching and groaning as they all moved to gather their things.

Kylan and I shot each other a confused look. Then that same look went around the whole group, one face to the next.

"Was this it?" Trinity let out a chuckle.

Even after they got their stuff and walked past me, a few of them reached over to give my shoulder a squeeze. An easy, see you tomorrow, and a pat on the back.

When the commanders headed for the doors too, it really seemed like any other day. With everyone leaving, it was just us.

Me, Kylan, Dylan, Trin, Lian, Sora and...

My gaze traveled to Kaelis again. She hadn't moved, and still had that same stunned look on her face. Nate waved his hand in front of her to grab her attention, but she wouldn't budge.

"Kaelis?"

When he said her name, she finally snapped out of it. I watched her get to her feet, then start closing the space between us. The look on her face began to shift, and with each step a grin spread across her lips, wider and wider until she stood in front of me and Kylan.

"I think," she said, eyes moving from me to Kylan, "that you and I need to have a talk."