

## Chapter 96

Kylan

I glanced over my shoulder as Puppy disappeared into the woods with Alpha Fergus. Then I focused ahead, walking the path on the opposite side of the woods with the king right beside me.

Behind us, at a respectful distance, was his entourage, including Beta Jack—and the Lyperian guards.

The king walked with his head held high, as he usually did, his steps confident, and his air suffocating. His presence always had a way of sucking the life out of everything around him, and at times—I feared people would see me as the same.

Truth was, I didn't want to be anything like that man, but ever since childhood, my entire persona had been built around him. I had always gotten the feeling that I was expected to be like him—cold, cruel, heartless—while all my other brothers at least had the chance to be their own person.

Unfortunately, things were different for the son of the Lycan king's mate, and had been even more complicated after becoming the crown prince.

The only one I began feeling like I could be my own person around was her...

I always called her out for needing my validation, but I needed hers just as much—if not more.

I looked behind me again, but this time Puppy and Alpha Fergus were out of sight. I couldn't help but wonder how deep into their conversation they would be.

The man looked like he had just jumped out of bed upon hearing the news and wasn't going to leave without putting a stop to it—so it probably wouldn't be any good.

I couldn't help but wonder if he was worried about Puppy because she was half-witch, or if he saw her as a threat he needed to control. Either way, he cared for her like a daughter—and I could see it in his eyes.

I knew she had a lot of things to say about him, but the man I just saw was not a man who didn't care.

"I came here for one thing," the king said, making me turn my head again. I waited for his words. "I don't like wasting time, you know that."

As expected...

I chuckled under my breath.

Small talk had never been his thing. There was no 'How are you doing? How are you holding up?' because he didn't care. Plain and simple. The man had too many children who he saw as products, and if he wanted something, he would get straight to the point.

Now, one of those products had malfunctioned by mating with not just any werewolf, but a witch as well. The thing he despised the most. The thing he warned me against.

"Letting that girl walk around with a ring like that is humiliating, and you will take it back," the king stated as if it was a fact. "You will tell everyone that you've changed your mind and—"

"I can't do that," I said, not letting him finish the sentence. "How do you think it will look if your son spits in the face of the Moon Goddess right after you arrive? One might say you discriminate against werewolves...the king."

The king's nose twitched. He was so predictable. I had already suspected he would do that, and that's why I was one step ahead.

Taking Puppy's hand, waiting until the king would arrive so he would draw a crowd—it was all part of the plan.

The king had eyes, he knew she wasn't wearing the glasses, and knew the stone in the ring was protecting her—but he just didn't care.

Maybe he wanted her to lose it, to let her powers spiral out of control so he wouldn't have to lie about what she really was.

It was a rare occasion, but the king ran out of words. He knew I was right, he knew working against Puppy would be breaking Lyperian law—and he knew there was nothing he could do about it.

"The Moon Goddess has already spat in your face," he barked, his tone filled with aggression. "She punished you for what you've done to Kayden, and she should—but as the king, I'm telling you to think about your people."

I clenched my jaw, barely listening to what was being said beyond Kayden's name getting mentioned. Once again, this is what he did.

He was manipulative, knew Kayden was a sensitive topic—and now tried to convince me to wash away my sins by rejecting someone he didn't deem as worthy.

She wasn't worthy—we were on the same page about the last part, but I would not bail on Puppy.

At the moment, she was still weak and since I could already feel part of her emotions, it meant that I was getting weak—and I could not allow that to happen.

Deep down, I hated myself for even thinking that way—but it was the truth. I didn't want to mate a werewolf—or a witch. Everything I was doing was to help Violet control her eyes, to protect both of us.

Yes, both...

Just because I didn't want her didn't mean I didn't care.

"No son of mine lies with a werewolf and a...a..." The king began, but he didn't get any further. The hatred in his voice was unmistakable, and I knew what he was getting at.

"A what?" I challenged, my gaze never leaving his. "Say it."

But he didn't. All he did was grunt before turning his head to check on the entourage behind us. They were still far enough away to not hear, but close enough to see the commotion.

I saw the way they all looked at her, and other than Beta Jack, who had a solid reason to dislike her—all of them looked at her like she was dirt.

"Son, someone like that girl has no place in our kingdom, let alone as the crown prince's mate."

I made a sound in the back of my throat. The king had yet to mention anything about her being a witch, which meant Puppy was right. None of them were talking—not even the king.

"You're supposed to mate Chrystal," the king said. "You know that."

I shook my head, feeling my anger bubble upon hearing her name. "I don't know what Chrystal has told you—but all I know is that she crossed the line," I told him, my face tight. "She broke the law, tried to kill my mate—and she should be thankful Violet wanted to settle it quietly."

"She should've finished the job. It would've been worth the execution," the king muttered under his breath. His words shocked me. Did he really hate the idea of her that much, that he would say the execution of his Beta's daughter, someone he wanted me to mate with, would've been worth it?

At the moment, the strongest man in the kingdom was going insane. He was at his weakest because he couldn't fight ancient law—and the sight was satisfying.

"You don't know what you're dealing with here—trust me."

"No, I don't know," I said, calmly. No matter what, I could not let him see his words affected me because if I did, he would only provoke me more.

That was the king.

"But if there's something I'm not aware of—I would love to hear about it from you."