

Road to starlight chapter 1-3



had shown up for Nate. Even Lady Mona and Kahlia had come to show their support.

Lian and Sora were somewhere in the crowd. Fergus and Sonya stood at the back, together with Dylan and Trinity. They also looked a bit confused about all of this.

"Those two are seriously taking their time," the second prince, Eronis, muttered, rubbing his eyes. "I'm getting tired."

A wave of laughter rippled through the crowd. Kylan closed his eyes and exhaled slowly through his nose. "I know," I mumbled, reaching over to rub his arm.

He had been trying so hard to seem unbothered tonight. Smiling, making small talk, playing the supportive big brother...

But I could tell this was still a lot for him. Kaelis in there with his best friend.

Still, it was kind of cute to see him struggle.

"You're not weird for being weirded out, by the way," I whispered. "I am too."

Kylan let out a quiet chuckle. "Good to know."

"Remind me to ask Kaelis what ancient law book this tradition is written in," I added. "So I can rip out the page."

A loud laugh slipped past his lips, clearly showing he agreed. Our moment got interrupted as Kody, the sixth prince, walked up to the door and knocked loudly.

"Hey!" he called out. "Just get it over with. We still want to cut the cake

before tomorrow!"

Everyone laughed while Kylan turned to look at me with a hilarious frown. I couldn't help but giggle at his expression.

Just as I was about to poke his cheek and tease him some more, the door opened.

Nate walked out carrying Kaelis in his arms, bridal style, and the hallway exploded. People began cheering, clapping, whistling, and throwing flower petals into the air.

Kaelis's arms were wrapped around his neck, and both of them grinned so wide it made my heart swell.

Kaelis threw her head back and laughed as Nate pressed a kiss to her forehead, then her cheek, and then her lips.

"Show us the mark so we can all go to bed!" Princess Elaria exclaimed.

Everyone got louder as Kaelis rolled her eyes dramatically and tilted her head to the side. She showed off the fresh mark on her neck, and the cheering only doubled.

So this was it.

I watched Nate's eyes find Kylan through the crowd. The two of them held each other's gaze for a moment until Kylan chuckled softly and gave him a small nod.

"He looks happy," he sighed. "They both do."

Something warm spread through my chest. They did look happy, and I knew I shouldn't be jealous. I knew that. It hadn't been easy for Kaelis, and she had fought for this. She had earned it.

But still...

My hand moved to my own bare neck without thinking. It would be nice to have a mark.

"What's wrong?" Kylan asked, his voice pulling me back. I shot him a startled look and blinked at him.

"Nothing," I said quickly. "I'm okay!"

He studied my face, giving me that look he always did when he knew I wasn't telling the whole truth.

"If this isn't what you want," he said softly, "how do you imagine it?"

My cheeks flushed, and I looked down at my feet.

"I don't know," I admitted. "I just...I want it to be us. Private and quiet." I shrugged weakly. "No crowd or traditions. Just us."

A short silence followed as we both stared at the happy couple. Kaelis pouted to hide her tears while Nate kissed them away. Those two would be cute, but insufferable. I could already tell.

"Pup."

Kylan's hand wrapped around mine, making me look up at him in surprise. A gentle smile reached his lips, and his dark eyes softened.

"Come," he said, giving my hand a small pull.

"Come where?"

He didn't answer, just pulled me through the crowd. We walked past the cheering, the flowers, and the people gathered.

"Kylan!"

I laughed as he dragged me through the halls, my heart racing. "Kaelis will notice we're gone!" I said. "Where are we going?"

He looked back at me with a grin. "You'll see."

The route he took was too familiar. It was the way to our room.

"I know you're tired of seeing them together, but this is a bit cruel, isn't it?" I joked.

When we reached our room, he stopped in front of the guards. "You're dismissed for the night," he said. "Don't come back here."

They exchanged looks but didn't argue. They bowed their heads and walked away. It didn't take long for Kylan to push the door open and pull me inside.

"What are you doing?" I asked, breathless and confused. Had I done something wrong? Said something I shouldn't have?

Lumia purred within me. 'If only you were as bright as those eyes of yours,' she teased.

Kylan closed the door behind us before turning to face me. His gentle eyes from before had now turned more intense, burning into mine.

"It's private and quiet," he chuckled. "Just us."

My breath hitched as I finally understood where this was headed.

Dear Goddess...

A squeal escaped me before I could stop it.

"Are you serious?"

Kylan's lips twitched into a smirk. He walked over to me and wrapped his arms around my waist, pulling me in closer. "Depends," he said. "How serious are you about going back to Starlight with a mark?"

My heart slammed against my ribs. I couldn't even form words. I just nodded, over and over like an idiot. "Oh, I'm serious!"

His smirk shifted into a soft smile.

"Then I'm serious."

Road To Starlight (2/3) PT 1

Violet

A laugh rumbled against my lips as I fumbled with the buttons of Kyran's shirt. "Slow down, Pup."

But I couldn't slow down. I was too impatient and way too desperate for that mark. So I kissed him with all I had instead, swallowing whatever else he was about to say. Part of me feared that if I didn't keep going, he might take it all back.

Deep down, I knew things were different this time. I knew it wasn't just some spur-of-the-moment thing, because he wasn't like that. He wanted it as much as I did.

"I don't want to slow down," I breathed against his mouth. Eventually, I just gave up on the buttons and pulled. A chuckle left him as one popped off and flew somewhere across the room. I would have kept going too, ripping every single one off if I had to, but then his hands moved to my cheeks and everything just...stopped.

His lips curved into a smile. "Violet?"

"Yes?"

My cheeks flushed as I stared into those beautiful brown eyes. I hadn't even noticed my fingers were still tugging at the fabric of his suit until he lowered his gaze.

He didn't say anything about it. He just let his hands slip from my cheeks, trailing down my back until they reached my hips. When he squeezed me to lift me from the floor, I gasped against his mouth. My legs barely managed to wrap around his waist because of that giant,

stupid dress.

We both started laughing as I squirmed, trying to fix it.

"I've got you," he murmured. Then he started walking backward. The bed was soft against my back when he set me down.

"Turn around," he said, his voice low. I looked into his eyes once more and let him guide me as he turned me instead. My head rested against the mattress as I tried to remember how to breathe. How to take it slow.

I just didn't know how long it would last.

A deep breath left him as his fingers found the ties of the dress at my back. I remembered what it felt like to breathe again when he loosened them, one by one, and the fabric slid down.

"I'm afraid of hurting you," Kylan said, his lips pressing hot kisses to my shoulder. When I felt his tongue press against the curve of my neck, a small sigh escaped me. Goosebumps rose everywhere.

"But I will try my best not to."

The dress slipped from my body, and cool air touched my skin. I shivered, realizing the moment was getting closer, nothing but my underwear and bra between us now.

He turned me to face him again, settling between my thighs while his eyes locked with mine. It wasn't a look of hunger in his eyes, but something much more than that. It was the gaze of someone who had just found something precious.

"You're staring," I whispered.

"How can I not?" His voice came out rough. "When I'm looking at the

most beautiful woman I've ever seen—“

“Please don't,” I chuckled, my face burning. I pulled him down to me instead, connecting our lips once more. This time, the kiss was slower, deeper, not as rushed. His tongue slid against mine in a way that made me melt into the mattress, into him, letting me get lost in the taste of him.

Somewhere along the way, his clothes disappeared too, including the dress shirt that had been bothering me. Now there was nothing left but his boxers and the heat building between us.

He pressed against my thigh, hard, and a sigh escaped me. I broke the kiss to wrap my arms around his neck, pulling him closer. I needed more.

As soon as his lips found a new spot, brushing against my jaw, I closed my eyes and exhaled. I let myself get used to the warmth of his breath, the softness of his mouth, the way my whole body seemed to hum wherever he touched me.

“Kylan,” I sighed his name as his trail of kisses moved lower, down my neck, across my collarbone until he reached that spot again. Right where my shoulder met my throat. A satisfied hum escaped him, and my head tilted on instinct. Exposing more, offering myself to him.

I felt Lumia growing more impatient. The one thing I needed at the moment was for him to sink his fangs into my neck. For him to mark me, claim me...but nothing happened.

“You're taking...too long,” I managed to get out right before my hips rolled up, seeking friction against his thigh.

“Patience, Pup.” A smile pressed against my skin.

I rolled my eyes, a breathy laugh escaping me. He was still going on about that whole patience thing. He dragged his lips across my skin like we had all the time in the world. Like every inch of me needed to be memorized. Treasured.

His fingers moved to unclasp my bra, and before I knew it, that was gone too, tossed somewhere I didn't care to look. I didn't even have the time to look as his mouth had already moved to the swell of my breast. Hovering and teasing.

"Just...please."

I caught his lips curl, his breath over my nipple, before his tongue finally flicked out, swirling in slow, deliberate circles. A moan escaped me as his hands found both breasts, kneading, touching, driving me insane. My fingers tangled in his hair as I gasped, arching beneath him.

Though he wasn't exactly speeding things up either, he didn't stay there for long, and his lips traveled down. Kisses pressed down to my stomach, all while he was still taking his sweet time. It was absolute torture.

By the time he finally reached my hipbone, I was already an aching mess.

"At this rate, you won't have a voice left by the time I mark you," Kylan breathed, his fingers hooking into my underwear. "Keep it up, and people are gonna start lining up outside our door too."

"Yes," I smirked. "So much for those soundproof walls of yours."

My breath hitched as he looked up at me, pulling them down slowly while his eyes never left mine. I was so wet already that I could feel it.

The evidence was likely glistening in the dim light, and when Kylan lowered his head, his breath brushing against me, the gentle air made

me sigh.

His tongue dragged through my folds so slow it was almost cruel, teasing me. A sound tore from my throat, and my head fell back against the pillows.

"So fucking good," he murmured against me.

Then he did it again, and again, at the torturously slow pace that made my thighs tremble. Made my fingers grip the sheets, forgetting how to think.

And when the tip of his tongue circled over that sensitive bud, I gasped loudly. My hands flew to his hair, gripping, pulling, needing something to hold onto.

He sucked gently at first, as if he was testing my reaction. Then harder, focusing on that bundle of nerves in a way that made my vision blur.

If it weren't with him, the sound that came out of me would've been embarrassing. "Right there," I gasped. "Don't stop—"

He didn't. His mouth kept working, setting a rhythm that nearly had me screaming. I pulled his hair so hard, I almost felt sorry. The pressure kept building, my stomach tightening, toes curling, and I could feel it coming.

I came with a loud gasp, my whole body shuddering as he kept going. Gentler now.

His hand was circling my stomach soothingly while I rode it out. Until my breathing slowed and my body stopped trembling.

Several breaths left me as I looked down at him through heavy-lidded eyes. Kylan was watching me with this satisfied little smirk on his face, and I felt a blush creep up my cheeks.

"So," I hummed, squinting my eyes. "Definitely way better than the last time, but could still use a bit of prac—"

A yelp tore from my throat before I could finish as he bit down on my inner thigh without warning. It was so soft, I had barely felt it. My leg kicked out on instinct and caught him somewhere in the shoulder, making him burst out laughing.

"How are you going to take a mark if you can't even take that?"

I started laughing with him. Fair point.

"That's going to be different!"

"Is it?"

"Yes!" I grabbed his face and pulled him up to me, still giggling as I kissed him. The taste of me lingered on his tongue.

"And you'll warn me before you mark me," I said against his lips. Kylan pulled back to kiss the tip of my nose.

"I will do that," he said. "I promise."

My hand moved down between us until it found his erection pressing against my thigh through his boxers. I tugged at the waistband, and he helped me, both of us fumbling a little until they were gone and I could finally wrap my hand around him.

I stroked him slowly, looking up at his face. His jaw tightened as he looked down for a moment. A soft growl rumbled through his chest as he twitched in my palm, and he exhaled hard through his nose, clearly fighting to keep his composure. He was losing.

Before I could do it again, he looked up at me.

"Pup," he warned. His hand shot out to grip my wrist before he pinned it above my head. I shot him a questioning look.

That familiar smirk spread across his face as he looked down at me. "If you keep doing that, this is going to be over in seconds."

I laughed, finally understanding what the problem was. "Trinity would love to hear about that."

"I know she would," he agreed. "That's exactly why I can't let it happen."

Still holding my wrist, he positioned himself at my entrance. I could feel him so close, pressing against me.

"So, uh—"

I raised an eyebrow. "Uh?"

"Should we..." He cleared his throat. "Say something? Before, you know ..."

Before the marking?

I let out a small laugh, almost in disbelief that this big, powerful prince who had just made me come so hard I forgot my own name seemed to be that nervous about all of this. He was so adorable, so ridiculously awkward.

"I don't know," I admitted. "I've never done this before."

A frown appeared on his face. "Wow, really? You haven't?" His tone was dripping with sarcasm. We both shared a nervous laugh, and I thought about it for a second.

What did people say before something like this? Before their whole lives changed?

"We should've done this a long time ago. It would've saved me a lot of stress."

He let out a breath of a laugh, shaking his head. "Can't argue with that."

The smile slowly faded from his face as his gaze shifted into an intense look of focus. He positioned himself again and slipped past my entrance.

He pushed in so slowly I felt every inch of my skin prickle, every inch of him stretching me, filling me until there was nowhere left to go. I felt whole.

We were both breathing hard by the time he stilled. He let go of my wrist and my hand immediately found his back, nails digging in, holding on just to feel closer to him, and then he started moving.

He pulled back, almost all the way out. Pushed back in. A moan slipped from my lips at the same time a groan left his. Our mouths brushed together, breathing the same air. Sharing this moment.

Every thrust drew sounds from both of us. A gasp from me when he pushed deep, and a low grunt from him when I clenched around him. I felt him everywhere.

Lumia purred beneath my skin, reaching for something more than usual. And I could feel him too...Valerius, just beneath Kylan's skin. Both of our wolves were straining toward each other, desperate to be joined just as badly as we were.

Both realized that it would actually happen this time.

I locked my legs around his waist and rolled my hips, pulling him in until

there was nowhere left to go.

His hips drove into me with a hunger that made my eyes roll back. Each thrust deeper than the last, his body grinding against mine in a way that made my thighs shake. My fingers twisted in the sheets because I didn't know what else to do with my hands. It felt too good.

So good that I almost couldn't believe something as painful as the mark was supposed to follow this.

But it would...

"Stop!"

Kylan stopped immediately, concern written across his face. Before he could ask what was wrong, I held him close and rolled us over. Never letting him slip out of me until I was on top.

As I looked down at him, my worries slowly faded away. The sight alone made me catch my breath. His hair was a mess against the pillows, chest rising and falling while his soft eyes stared at me as if they had already seen through my fear.

He rubbed small circles against my hips. "You're scared."

A chuckle escaped me as I traced my finger along his jaw. "Perhaps a little." We both released a sigh as I began moving again. "But that's for me to worry about. All you have to do is mark me."

My hands found his shoulders for balance. I lifted myself, feeling him slide almost all the way out, then sank back down. Slowly this time.

I rolled my hips and felt him sink deeper. My mouth fell open, but nothing came out except a breath I didn't know I was holding.

"Fuck, Pup," he breathed. His hips jerked up hard, hands desperately pulling me down against him.

I gave in to it, and let my body do what it had been aching to.

My hips took over, and I let them, moving against him faster, harder, until his breath caught every time I sank, and that became the only thing I wanted to hear. Curses left him, one after another.

His hands roamed up my stomach, over my ribs, and when his fingers found my nipples, my head tipped back, making me lose my rhythm for a second. A sob of pleasure slipped past my lips as I arched into his touch.

His arms were around me before I even came back down, pulling himself up until his chest was against mine. He held me tight, like he was afraid I'd slip away if he didn't, forehead pressing against mine, breath shaking against my lips.

"Stay with me," he whispered. I didn't know if he meant right now or forever.

"I'm not going anywhere."

I cupped his face in my hands, thumbs brushing his cheeks as we moved together.

A low groan rumbled through him, vibrating against my chest as I felt myself unravel with each thrust. My fingers tangled in his hair, pulling him closer, needing something to hold onto before I fell apart completely.

An unfamiliar warmth spread through my body as he brushed his lips against my collarbone. Then higher until his mouth hovered over the curve of my neck. Goosebumps rippled across my skin as

He stayed there, breathing me in, and every exhale made me breathe a

little louder.

"You smell so good," he murmured. "Do you know that?"

I couldn't answer. Couldn't do anything except whimper and tilt my head to give him more. Fingers traced up my throat until they gently wrapped around it. Soft lips dragged across the spot, savoring the place he was about to claim.

The anticipation alone was enough to destroy me.

Then he finally asked.

"Can I mark you?"

Road To Starlight (2/3) PT 2

My eyes widened with surprise. It suddenly felt like everything stopped. Like I had found myself in some kind of dream, and all of this couldn't possibly be real.

These were the words I had been longing for since our first moments together, and he had finally said them. I felt butterflies in my stomach.

This was it.

This was really it.

I swallowed before I answered and slowed my movements until they came to a full stop. "Yes."

Both of us breathed hard. I squeezed my eyes shut, waiting for the impact, but nothing ever came. His lips kept hovering, so close now that I could feel the heat of his breath. Something was stopping him.

I knew how much he wanted it, but I also knew what could be holding him back.

I don't want to hurt you...

Those words came from fear and love, and now he was second-guessing. "Kylan," I sighed, shifting my neck closer. I gave him everything I had.

"I know it will hurt," I said, my voice steady. "But I can take it. I promise."

Several seconds passed with his breath still hot against my neck and neither of us moving. I could feel his heart pounding against his chest. A final breath escaped him before a soft growl built in his throat.

Suddenly, a purple light appeared through my nearly closed eyelids, so bright my eyes flew open. It was everywhere. On the walls, ceiling, moving across the room like it was alive.

I looked down, noticing the reflection on my skin as well. It traveled from my arms, down to my breasts, and it all came from him.

I should have been scared, but I wasn't. Because I knew exactly who it belonged to.

Valerius.

He was present, right at the surface. I could feel them both. Kylan and Valerius, their energy mixing against my throat where his mouth still hovered.

Inside me, Lumia rose to meet him. She pressed against my skin from within, reaching for the mate she had been waiting for.

'Mate,' she roared. 'We will finally be one.'

A breathy sound escaped me as fangs extended against my neck, and sharp points pressed into my skin. My pulse quickened, heart hammering so hard I was sure it was about to explode. But I knew what I wanted. I knew what I had signed up for.

"You do not have to be afraid."

His voice was different now. It was deeper and layered. Almost like two voices speaking as one. "I will take care of you."

I let out a whimper and flinched just a little as his tongue traced, preparing me for what was coming.

He roared. "Mine."

His fangs sank into my flesh before I could take another breath, and a scream escaped me. My nails clawed down his back as the blinding pain hit me. It was more than I expected, more than I could have possibly prepared for. It felt like fire spreading through my veins, tearing me apart and putting me back together all at once.

Goddess, it hurt.

It hurt so much.

I felt his fangs sink deeper, breaking through my skin, through my muscles. He was claiming every part of me, and I didn't want him to stop. The deeper he went, the more confused I became.

Did it hurt? Yes. But there was something else, too. Something so raw and so incredibly overwhelming under the pain that I didn't know whether to scream louder, cry, or moan.

A blinding white light exploded behind my eyes. They started glowing, and Lumia surged to the surface with a howl of joy. 'Now you will know,' she breathed. 'They have always cared about you.'

The memories hit me before I could react. They were not mine. His.

Flashes rushed through my mind like a timeline of his years, everything he felt laid bare in front of me. There was an emptiness that stretched on forever, born from a place no person should have to bear. Never being enough.

The need to always be hard, always be cold, so no one would ever dare try to take him down.

But beneath all of it, there was this anger. It had been there since he was a little boy and had never left. It only grew, year after year. Every time the

king looked past him, every time the queen pushed him, he had to swallow down what he really felt.

Then the anxiety crept in. A tightness in his chest that became so familiar he forgot what it felt like to breathe without it.

But once I came into his life, it slowly faded.

There was no time to think about that because something new entered the chaos, and it was something he couldn't recognize. Something he didn't understand.

His blood boiled the first time I spoke back to him. This Bloodrose girl who wouldn't stop talking, who looked at him like he was just a person. Not a prince or a threat.

And underneath the anger, that new feeling kept growing until he couldn't separate it from the rest, so he made himself believe that the feeling was not supposed to be there for one simple reason. He wasn't all too familiar with positive emotions.

I felt his fear. His fear of feeling, and most of all his fear of ruining me. It terrified him, so he pushed me so I would hate him, made himself say cruel things. He watched me walk away and hated himself every single time.

And then there was the shame. So heavy it kept him up at night. He replayed every word in his head. Every look on my face when he hurt me. He caused himself more pain than he ever caused me, and I didn't know. I had never noticed.

The shame never stopped. It just doubled with every harsh word until he saw just how much it was breaking me, and he forced himself to stop. Not for his sake, but for mine.

That's how it happened. How the chaos he carried for years began to settle, and all that anger and emptiness made room for something else. Something that finally let him breathe.

As I neared the end, I finally understood what that feeling had been. It was love.

He had loved me from the very beginning. Even when we both didn't know what to call it.

My eyes flew open with a loud gasp. Everything was different now. I could feel him, not just inside my body but inside my soul. His emotions tangled with mine, so intense I couldn't think straight.

I gasped, feeling him thrust up into me again with his fangs still buried in my neck. A deep groan left him as his hands gripped my hips, pulling me down onto him as he pushed up.

I moaned against his ear and clenched around him at the same time, and the sound that left him made my whole body shiver.

"Violet..."

A low, needy whimper caught in his throat. An unexpected sound I had never heard from him before. He was always so composed, in control, but right now he was falling apart just as much as I was.

Louder moans escaped me with every thrust.

His fangs shifted in my neck as his lips brushed my skin. "Are you gonna come for me?"

I hummed, my nails digging into his back as my body started to shake. He groaned loudly against my neck, and I felt him losing it, his thrusts turning sloppy and desperate. I was close. So close it was almost painful,

and so was he. I could feel it.

"Kylan—"

I came with his name stuck in my throat, squeezing tight around him. A growl left him, but he didn't stop. He kept moving, kept pulling sounds out of me I didn't know I could make, dragging it out until I was nothing but tremors.

He followed right behind me.

A deep groan rumbled against my neck as his hips jerked. He spilled inside me, warm, pulsing, filling me up while I held onto him.

He shuddered against me one last time, a shaky breath leaving him as his body went slack. Still trembling, breath coming out in ragged puffs against my neck while his heart raced against my chest. It took a while for it to slow down.

We breathed together as we came down from whatever that was. His fangs retracted slowly, and I winced at the sting, feeling his tongue trace over the fresh wound.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, his tongue dragging across it slowly, soothing the sting. I shivered at the sensation and moved my fingers through his damp hair. A chuckle left me. "Don't be," I said. "I wanted it."

We shifted until we were lying down. Our bodies were tangled together, legs intertwined while he was still inside me. Neither of us ready to let that go yet.

The bond was loud and alive, perhaps a bit too alive. I could feel so much of him now. Not just his body against mine, but everything that came

with it. Every emotion. Every feeling.

“Kylan?”

My fingers reached for his chin, and I moved it so he had no choice but to look at me. His eyes were brown again, soft and more vulnerable than I had ever seen them. I even felt Valerius beneath his chest, settled and content.

“He’s pleased with you, Violet,” Lumia said.

So was she. I could feel the warmth spreading through my body that belonged to both of us. Kylan’s gaze dropped to my neck, and his thumb brushed over the still-sensitive mark. A small wince left me.

“You’re in pain.”

“A little,” I admitted. “But it’s okay.”

“I know,” he chuckled. “I can feel it.”

Our eyes locked again. A gentle smile reached his lips as he brushed the hair from my face. “I can feel you,” he said, sighing softly. “All of you.”

His thumb traced my cheek. “I can feel your joy,” he continued. “Lumia’s joy too... but there’s something else. This feeling I can’t quite place.” His brows furrowed slightly. “What is it?”

I knew exactly what he was feeling. Vulnerability.

There was still a part of me that couldn’t wrap my head around this being real. “I never thought I could have this,” I admitted. Tears pricked at my eyes before I could stop them.

“Someone who would actually want me, and—”

His brows knit together. "I'm sorry—"

"No." I pressed my fingers to his lip, smiling a little. "Let me finish."

He went quiet, but I could still feel his concern. This urge to fix whatever was hurting me. And now that he could feel everything, I had a feeling I would be hearing those two words a lot.

I'm sorry.

I trapped his jaw between my fingers gently, making sure he was looking at me.

"I keep thinking about all those times I felt like I wasn't enough," I said softly. "Wasn't enough for you...for anyone, and this whole time..."

A laugh escaped me. "You loved me from the start, even when you were terrible to me. When you pushed me away and made me believe you felt nothing." My voice cracked a little. "I know why you did it. I saw it, felt it, but I wish you had told me sooner so I could tell you the same."

We could've saved ourselves so much pain. All those wasted moments.

"So do I." His face changed to regret. "I was too stupid to know what to do with it. Too scared to admit it," he said. "I know I can apologize over and over for the rest of my life, but it won't erase what I did or the way I treated you." He swallowed hard. "I just hope that you can feel how much I love you."

"Of course I do." A chuckle escaped me. "You have shown me so much love before this mark. Ever since you told me you love me, I have never once doubted it."

As soon as a relieved laugh slipped past his lips, my heart fluttered. A tear escaped down my cheek, and he caught it with his thumb, wiping it away

gently.

"Happy tears," he said.

"Yes," I confirmed.

He shifted slightly, pressing deeper into me, and I gasped. I was still so full and sensitive. A soft groan left him as well. "I don't want to move," he exhaled.

"Then don't."

"We have to eventually. If we want to get out of Lyperia tomorrow."

Tomorrow...

I thought about that more times than I could imagine today. About leaving, going back to Starlight, and living inside this bubble like everyone was normal again, even if it would just be for a little while.

He dropped his forehead to mine, and we just stayed like that for a moment. I hadn't expected all of this tonight.

I thought we would go back to the room and sleep, maybe talk about the ceremony. But now here we were, bonded and marked and tangled together in a way that could never be undone. Because I wouldn't allow it.

"We should probably keep this to ourselves for now," I suggested. "Kaelis just had her ceremony, and I don't want to take away from that."

"Yes," Kylan hummed. "Also, my mom will lose her mind when she finds out I marked you like this. Without some...grand ceremony."

Right.

That was also a thing...

I hadn't even considered that until now. I always had a feeling our marking wouldn't be traditional, but not like this. Unfortunately, I knew how huge these people were on tradition. On doing things properly and making everything into a spectacle.

This was perhaps the biggest moment of the kingdom, and we had done it without anyone's involvement. I groaned and dropped my face into his shoulder.

His chest rumbled with a laugh. "Don't worry. She likes you, so she'll probably give us a pass."

"Probably," I mumbled against his skin. "Or she'll have us do it all over again in front of the entire kingdom."

"That too."

I lifted my head and looked at him. My mate. My everything. Mine.

"Not a lot has changed, but everything feels so different now," I told him. "Whatever happens, nothing can ruin this for me."

I felt a flicker of something through the bond. Either worry or anxiety, though I couldn't tell from his face. How often had he done this?

"Yes?" I asked. "What are you thinking about?"

"It's stupid."

"Tell me."

He hesitated, and his lips curved into a smile. "I'm thinking about what comes next," he said. "And then I started thinking of pups, and..." He let

out a breath. "I can barely raise a squirrel."

I burst out laughing and slapped his chest. "You have just marked me a few minutes ago, and you're already thinking of pups?"

I rested my arms on his chest and looked down at him, still giggling. I knew that wasn't really what he was worried about. I could feel that there was something deeper underneath, but I wouldn't push. Not tonight, and not ever.

If he wanted to tell me something, he would tell me.

"Well," I said, trying to keep my face serious, "the Moon Goddess and I have been pretty tight lately. I'm sure she'll spare us from having to raise a bunch of Violets for a few more years."

He raised an eyebrow. "How do you know they'll be like you?"

"Just a hunch."

He hummed, his fingers finding my mark again, tracing it softly. "You're perfect so I wouldn't mind though," he said, taking a breath. "If they were like you. With your heart, your strength, your fire, hopefully those amazing eyes..." His gaze found mine. "I know they'd turn out to be unstoppable."

His words left me speechless. How could I respond to that?

He took my hand and placed it over my heart, holding it there for a moment. Then slowly moved it down from my ribs to my stomach before letting it rest there.

We both looked down at his hand covering mine.

"That's where they'll be someday," he said. "Our pups." His fingers

brushed across my skin. "When I'll be ruling with you by my side, raising them with you. Building something special for them."

I still didn't know what to say, so I pressed my lips against his instead, giving him everything I couldn't put into words. When we pulled away, a wide smile stretched on his lips.

"I can't wait," I whispered. "For all of it."

He brushed his nose against mine. "I love you."

"I love you too."

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Road To Starlight (3/3) PT 1

Violet

9 AM

I fumbled with the scarf around my neck for what felt like the hundredth time this morning, huffing and puffing as we stood outside, waiting to say our goodbyes to the Bloodrose.

At last, Fergus and the pack would finally travel back home today. Though the morning sun was bright and warm against my skin, an occasional breeze forced me to keep the scarf in place.

I kept adjusting it, and the more I touched it, the more paranoid I became that everyone could see exactly what I was trying to hide. The mark. Kylan's mark.

"Stop making it so obvious," Kylan spoke beside me. I scoffed and looked up at him, immediately meeting that stupid smirk on his face, the one that made me want to kiss him and punch him at the same time.

He was enjoying all of this a bit too much. I let out a soft grunt and looked ahead again. The courtyard was filled with the pack, servants, and guards. They all moved back and forth, loading luggage while I was trying not to lose my mind.

My eyes landed on Dylan and Trinity, who were both talking to Fergus and Sonya. The smallest smile reached my lips as they pulled both of them into a warm hug.

Fergus hugging Dylan, or anyone for that matter, was still a strange occurrence. It was safe to say this trip had really changed him.



All of us would be leaving for Starlight later. Me, Kylan, Dylan, Trinity, and Nate. We had decided to travel together by jet. Back to school and normal life, whatever that even meant anymore.

A frustrated growl escaped me as the itch returned. "I'm dying over here," I whispered, scratching at my neck through the scarf. A low chuckle came from beside me.

"Violet?" Fergus called out.

My head snapped forward again, and all eyes were on me. I put on my best smile and took Kylan's hand to join the others.

Goddess, I really, really hoped they wouldn't notice.

My heart stopped beating for a second as Uncle Ewan passed us on the way, ruffling my hair. "Good job, kids."

Good job?

Good job on what?

I shot him a smile as he continued toward one of the cars.

Would he have noticed?

No, I doubted it. Beta or not, Uncle Ewan was one of the kindest, but certainly not the brightest.

He was the only one who had been completely unbothered this entire trip, treating the whole thing like some kind of vacation. Then again, he treated everything like a vacation.

We had reached the others, and there was this silence. We all glanced at



each other. Everyone knew someone needed to say something, but nobody wanted to be the first. What would we talk about?

The king, who was in the dungeons, or the fact that I would actually miss them this time and wished to spend more time with them.

"I can't get over how awkward this family is," Trinity said, swinging her arms in the air. My cheeks flushed as Kylan's hand pressed against my lower back, urging me to do something.

"I'm sorry," I blurted. "For causing so much trouble."

Sonya laughed softly, and Fergus let out this long hum. "There are individuals who owe me an apology," he said. "But you are certainly not one of them, Violet."

Then he opened his arms, pulling both Sonya and me in. For a second, I forgot about the scarf and melted into the hug, pressing my face against his chest. He smelled like pine and something earthy. Home.

"It's always hard to let go of my only daughter, but it brings me peace to know you'll be taken care of."

My breath hitched hearing those words.

His arms wrapped around me tight, one hand cradling the back of my head like I was still a little girl.

"Come here, Kylan," he said over my shoulder, implying Kylan should join. "Or is it Your Majesty now?"

A chuckle escaped me because I knew exactly how much Kylan hated stuff like this. Group hugs, public displays of affection, basically anything that made him seem soft in front of other people.



But he did it anyway.

I felt his warmth as he wrapped an arm around both of us, and Fergus made a satisfied sound. He did really seem to be fond of him.

"I'm not king yet," Kylan corrected. "Thankfully."

"The only thing holding you back from that title is a crown," Trinity shrugged.

"And I hope it stays that way for a long time," Kylan responded.

King...

Those words hit me harder than I expected. Trinity was right, though. He had shifted all responsibility to Cecilia because he was determined to finish Starlight, but if he really wanted to, he could announce himself as king.

Which would make me...

Nope, not yet.

I was way too young to be queen. Way too unprepared, inexperienced, immature.

Fergus pressed a kiss to the top of my head, pulling me out of my spiral. "I want all of you to visit before the pup gets here," he said.

"We will," I said, pulling away. My gaze connected with Sonya, who had the softest smile on her face. "I can look you in the eye and promise that I will be one of the first to hold my sibling—"

"After me, of course," Dylan interrupted.



"And you should come too, Kylan," Fergus decided. "No offense, but the next time I come here will probably be when?" Fergus continued, stroking his chin. "Your marking ceremony, I assume." His eyes found mine. "But I trust that won't be for a long, long time."

Well...

A high-pitched laugh escaped me, and my hand flew to my neck to scratch the scarf as the itch suddenly returned.

'Stop scratching your neck.'

I froze.

Kylan...

That was Kylan, in my head. Through the mind link. I hated people being inside my head. I despised it, absolutely hated it as every Bloodrose probably did, but this I didn't mind. He could be inside my head all he wanted.

Lumia laughed low inside me, amused by my shock.

I dropped my hand and tried to keep my face neutral even though I wanted to grin from ear to ear. All of this was new, but kind of amazing.

'He won't hurt you. Did he not encourage you to mark me?'

'Yes, but I'm afraid that doesn't stop him from wanting to kill me,' Kylan's voice echoed in my mind again. 'He has been searching for a good reason for a while now. So please, control your...itch.'

I burst out laughing before I could stop myself, slapping a hand over my mouth.

Dylan squinted, his eyes narrowing with suspicion. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing." I cleared my throat, waving a dismissive hand. "Just thought of something funny."

He didn't look all too convinced, but thankfully let it go.

The next few minutes were full of more hugs and goodbyes. We all watched as Fergus and Sonya climbed into one of the cars along with Uncle Ewan and the rest of the Bloodrose behind them.

Not long after, engines started, and the cars disappeared down the long driveway until there was nothing left in the distance.

"I will miss them," Trinity sighed. "Your dad is just adorable, isn't he?"

"Not really," Dylan said dryly. "I'll miss my mom, though."

The four of us walked back toward the palace entrance. "I hope you have a lot of scarves, by the way," Dylan said casually.

"Huh, scarves?" I asked, flustered.

He gave me a nod. "So you can, like, alternate. Because if you two are trying to hide the obvious, you're doing a terrible job."

He knew?

My whole body went stiff. Kylan and I turned to each other. I panicked, but he had a calm smile on his lips.

The biggest reaction was Trinity's. She released a loud squeal. "No way!"

It had all happened so fast, but she was already reaching for my scarf, her fingers grabbing at the silk. "I don't believe you. Well, I believe you. I

Commented [Ma1]:

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don't believe Kylan. Let me see!"

"Keep your voice down," I whispered, grabbing her wrists. I looked around frantically to make sure no one else was watching.

"Yes, okay. I'm sorry!" she whispered back, jumping up and down. She pulled me into a hug, and I felt her curls bounce against my skin with every hop. "I'm just so happy for you! This is huge."

She finally let go of me only to move straight to Kylan, wrapping him in the same bone-crushing hug. Rather than being awkward about it, Kylan just wrapped his arms around her. I suppose he had gotten used to it by now. "I thought the two of you would wait until you were eighty."

I couldn't help but laugh. Dramatic, but true.

My eyes found Dylan. He had his hands in his pockets, this unbothered expression on his face as he watched me. He didn't seem all that surprised.

"Congrats," he mumbled. "But if you come to regret it and want me to kill him for you—"

"Dylan!"

Kylan's eyes found his over Trinity's shoulder, brows raised. Dylan raised his hands in surrender. "All you've got to do is say the word. Just saying."

"I think I got it," I smiled.

He finally cracked a smile.

Trinity released Kylan from her death grip. "This is so...you," she said, looking between us. "Doing it without a ceremony, without telling



anyone, and being all secretive —”

“We didn’t plan it,” I said. “It just sort of happened.”

“That’s exactly what I mean.” She gestured between us. “You two have never done anything the normal way. Why would this be any different?”

Dylan snorted. “You have a point,” he said. “But it isn’t Violet. It’s Kylan,” he concluded. “Let’s not forget how long it took for him to claim her in na—”

“Okay, we can all move on now,” Kylan interrupted. I could hear the annoyance in his voice. His hand found my lower back again, warm but firm. “As entertaining as this is, we still have a few more things to pack.”

Trinity nodded, finally calming down. “So do we,” she said. “And I did so much shopping. I don’t even know where half my stuff ended up.”

“Then we’d better get moving,” Dylan chuckled, already walking away while pulling Trinity with him. She looked over her shoulder, her lips parted as if she still had so much more to say. So much more to ask.

I released a breath. “I don’t think this conversation is over. Trinity loves... details. She’ll have a lot of questions.”

I turned to him just in time to catch the slow, exhausted breath that slipped past his lips, but there was a smile pulling at the corner of his mouth. “I’m already looking forward to it.”

He was not.



Road To Starlight (3/3) PT 2

10.35 AM

My eyes scanned the empty room and our suitcases while Kylan moved around behind me, gathering the last things.

So this was really it...

Jumpie was perched on Thorne's back, both of them resting on top of one of Kylan's suitcases near the window. They were being civil today. A miracle, honestly.

My mind drifted as I stared at Kylan's back, a soft smile forming on my lips. He looked so calm in that moment, and it was everything I wanted. For him. For us.

To finally breathe.

I truly believed leaving Lyperia would be for the better because too much had happened since we got here.

The mountains, the trial, Baelor, the king locked away in the dungeons refusing to tell us about the box, Chrystal, Kian disappearing with Camille ... too much.

It had all been so intense that we hadn't really talked about it. At least not properly. Maybe we all just needed to breathe first. There was still a lot that was uncertain, but at least one thing wasn't. I would be going back with a mark, and no one could take that away.

My fingers drifted to my neck again, and a low chuckle came from across the room. "It's not magically going to vanish, Pup."



"I know."

I kept my gaze on him, watching him grab a bag from the corner. A small one that had been sitting there for a while now. I hadn't really paid that much attention to it before, but judging by his grip, it must've been special to him, and it made me curious.

"What's in that anyway?"

Kylan froze. He moved the bag behind his back and turned around slowly, his jaw twitching. "Nothing. Just...stuff," he played it off. "It's not important."

He was lying. I could feel this pulse of embarrassment that definitely wasn't coming from me. But why? What could be in that bag that would make him like this?

"Whatever it is, I hope you'll show it to me one day," I said, smiling. "Perhaps later on our way back."

"Maybe," he mumbled. I walked over to him, sliding my arms around his shoulders and pressing my forehead against his. He relaxed into me immediately, his hands finding my waist.

"How are you feeling about leaving home?"

"I'm happy to leave this place behind," he said quietly after a moment of thought. His thumb traced circles on my hip. "I don't want to leave my sisters...my mom, my people," he admitted. "But I'm ready to leave behind most of it. Everything that has been holding me down."

"Yes?"

He gave me a nod. "Yes, and next time we stand here, we'll stand here



differently." His nose brushed against mine. "Prepared."

Prepared...

What did that even mean?

Prepared to rule the kingdom together?

I patted his chest with a soft smile.

"Are you ready to go?"

"I am."

I pulled back and moved toward the suitcases, reaching down to grab the handles. Kylan's hand caught mine before I could.

"Right," I remembered. "You've got people for that."

It had also been like that the first day.

He hummed, lacing his fingers through mine, and pulled me toward the door, leaving the suitcases behind. Before we left, I glanced back over my shoulder one last time, taking in the room where everything had changed.

Then I turned around and didn't look back again.

~

As we walked through the Lyperian halls, my eyes took in everything one last time. The marble floor, high ceilings, and the paintings on the wall. I didn't know when I'd be back here, but I wanted to remember it. All of it.

We had reached the end of the corridor when giggles filled the space.



"That's Kaelis," I said, tugging at his hand. "She must be with Nate."

Kylan gave a slight roll of his eyes, but it was not enough to protest, as I was already dragging him around the corner, and there they were.

Nate and Kaelis, completely wrapped up in each other. Nate had his arms around her waist, hugging her so tight, like he couldn't bear to let go. Then he lifted her off the ground and spun her slightly, and the giggle that left Kaelis made my heart soften.

They looked so happy. So in love, like nothing else in the world existed except the two of them. It was strange seeing Nate like this, but definitely not out of character. He did have a lot of love to give.

An annoyed hum came from Kylan beside me, but when I glanced up at him, his expression had gone gentle. I was still not sure whether he liked this bond or not. I couldn't exactly feel it either.

"I don't think I can allow you to leave," Kaelis sighed. Nate chuckled as he set her down. Then he cupped her face and kissed her. Slow at first, then deeper, his fingers sliding into her hair while she grabbed at the front of his shirt.

She made a sound against his mouth that we probably weren't supposed to hear. They didn't notice our presence, and it was getting a little too intimate to watch.

When Nate's hand lowered, Kylan wasn't having any of it and coughed loudly. So loudly Nate pulled away so fast he almost tripped. His eyes widened as he turned to stare at us, and his face went red.

Kaelis didn't seem to mind much. She grabbed him by the collar again and pulled him back in, pressing one last kiss to his lips. "Just ignore



him," she said. "It will take him some time to get used to this."

"I don't care what the two of you are up to," Kylan said, rolling back his shoulders. He tried to sound casual about it but failed miserably, and I had to press my lips together to keep from laughing.

He cleared his throat. "What I do care about is the plane we have to catch, so..."

"Yes, sure," Nate said. He took Kaelis's hand and looked down at the ring on her finger with a soft smile. His ring.

Although it hadn't been long since he had left the dungeons, he looked good. Actually, better than he had in weeks. Whatever damage these past days had done was more mental than physical, and being with Kaelis seemed to be the cure. I really hoped it would stay this way.

We all started walking together. Nate and Kaelis moved in front of us, their fingers intertwined.

"Vivi," Nate said, looking behind him. His honey eyes found mine, and a warm smile curled on his lips. "If you're trying to hide that mark, you're going to have to try a bit harder."

So they knew...

Of course they knew. Nate practically knew everything about him. He probably knew from the moment those two exchanged glances after his own ceremony. It must have been a silent encouragement for Kylan to do the same.

"Or you can just not hide it," Kaelis said, showing off her mark. "I want everyone to see mine."



Kylan released a soft scoff. "That's good for you, but we have decided to do it this way—"

"And it suits you," Nate finished. "I'm proud of you. Both of you."

He and Kylan did that thing again. That look that even a mate bond couldn't get through or try to understand.

"I do feel kind of bad for Mom," Kaelis shrugged. "She was looking forward to the royal ceremony. The dress, flowers—"

"If anything," I cut in, "the entourage you two had waiting outside your door last night convinced me I definitely didn't want one."

Kaelis gasped. "That was tradition!"

"It was...something."

"It was beautiful!"

"There were like a hundred people standing in the hallway listening to you two—"

"Okay!" Kylan held up a hand. "I think we get it, Pup. We don't need to relive that."

A flush appeared on Nate's cheeks, one Kaelis kissed away with a laugh.

"With Starlight being a Kaelis-free zone, you'll be able to breathe again, Nate," Kylan commented, teasing his sister. "Good for you."

It was supposed to be a joke, but that joke only made Nate's grip around her hand even tighter. It didn't really look like he wanted to let go of her either. Nate shook his head. "Hey, let's not talk about her like that," he



scolded softly. He had said it so kindly there was even a smile on his lips.

Kylan responded with a chuckle. I was sure he felt conflicted. A bit bothered that he couldn't joke around about her anymore, but at ease knowing that Nate had his sister's back.

"I bet you didn't see that one coming," Kaelis sang, grinning. "Also, haven't you heard the good news?"

His jaw tightened. "What news?"

"Madam Renata recommended Sora and Lian for the transfer program at Starlight Academy." Her grin widened. "And Mom agreed that I can join them. We just have to pass the entrance exam first, which I will, and then Nate and I never have to be apart again."

She looked up at Nate, who pulled her closer. "That's right."

"If everything works out," she continued, "I should be there by Bloom term."

Bloom term?

That would already be in a few months.

"Ah, that's wonderful news," Kylan said flatly.

I felt his emotions. This tiny flicker of jealousy that he was trying very hard to hide. Cute.

Having them at Starlight would be great. Madam Renata had done quite a lot. Recommending the girls, protecting them during the trial. She really had no reason to, but she did it anyway. The best thing was to leave such an impact on someone that they had a change of heart, because that's



what happened to her. Her heart had softened.

The halls opened up, a bright light appeared, and suddenly we were outside, back in the courtyard where everyone was waiting for us.

"That's...a lot of people," I commented.

The mistresses stood in a line with their children, along with more familiar faces from the court. At the very front, Queen Cecilia stood beside Beta Jack and Kiara, her hands clasped in front of her and a warm smile on her face.

Dylan and Trinity were already there too, ready to go.

"There they are. Finally!"

Cecilia opened her arms, her voice rising across the courtyard. She still looked as graceful as ever, but there was a warmth in her eyes that hadn't been there when we first arrived.

Nate and Kaelis walked over to Beta Jack while the queen walked past, making her way toward us.

"Don't be awkward," Kylan reminded me.

"Awkward? I'm not aw—"

I swallowed as she stopped in front of us. My pulse quickened as her gaze dropped to my scarf and stayed there a beat too long.

Would she have noticed?

"Walk with me," she said, raising her chin. It wasn't a request. "Both of you."



Kylan and I exchanged a glance and followed her away from the crowd. The noise of the courtyard faded behind us, and suddenly it was just the three of us.

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Road To Starlight (3/3) PT 3

Cecilia let out a small breath, her eyes moving to the scarf again. Yes, she definitely knew.

"I'm going to ask you something," she said calmly. "And I want you to be honest with me."

Kylan chuckled. My throat bobbed. "Okay."

"Did you..." Her eyes squinted. "May I?"

I nodded before I could talk myself out of it.

Her fingers were gentle as she reached for the silk, pulling it aside just enough to see what was underneath. A soft wince escaped me as she pressed against the fresh mark.

I watched her face for any sign of anger or disappointment, but there wasn't any. Her expression hadn't changed much.

"I knew it would end like this," she murmured. "After all, Kylan wouldn't be Kylan if..."

She took a breath.

"Mom—" Kylan started.

"Quiet." She let the scarf fall back into place but kept her hands on my shoulders. A tender smile spread across her face. "Let me look at my flower."

My throat closed up. Flower...

That's the name she gave me when we first met. Kylan and I had both



been absolutely terrified of this moment, but the queen seemed to be in a good mood today.

"It's beautiful," Cecilia admired. "He did well." Her eyes flickered to Kylan. "Better than I expected, honestly. I feared you might botch it somehow."

Goddess, she was even cracking jokes today.

"Thanks for the confidence," Kylan laughed.

"You're welcome."

I choked out a laugh, and Cecilia smiled.

"I understand why you did it this way," she said. "After everything that happened, wanting something private. Something that was just yours." She paused. "But..."

Here it comes.

"I am still going to throw you a proper celebration when you return. A real one, with flowers, music, and those awful crispy chicken sandwiches."

"Morn, that won't be necessary—"

"It is absolutely necessary," Cecilia argued. She shot Kylan a look that silenced him immediately. "My son marked his mate, and I wasn't there to celebrate. Do you have any idea how that feels?"

Kylan shifted his weight. "I don't have a son," he mumbled. "So no. I do not."



I couldn't help but laugh at his dry reaction. At the end of the day, even Kylan feared his mother.

"We will be celebrating," she decided. "Besides, we're going to need some happy news to share with the kingdom. Something to distract them when word about the king gets out."

Her words hung there for a moment. It would only be a matter of time before his crimes were exposed to everyone, and the kingdom would have to pick itself back up.

"People will have questions," Cecilia said, her voice lighter now. "They'll want to know what happened. Why their king is suddenly gone, and what better way to redirect their attention than announcing a royal mating?" She smiled. "The future king and queen of Lyperia."

"S-Sure," Kylan breathed.

She patted his cheek. "Trust me. You'll thank me later."

Seeing the exchange between the two made me laugh. They had always seemed so uncomfortable to me, and seeing this, I couldn't help but wonder if this was the kind of affection he had missed. A demanding but loving mother.

Cecilia reached for my hands, and I accepted. All my nerves were gone now, replaced with a smile. Her eyes studied me as if she were trying to memorize every detail. "You are exactly what he needed, Violet. I hope you know that."

I nudged his side. "I think he's exactly what I needed to."

She looked between us, her gaze lingering on him for a moment longer. "You two are more special than you realize." She touched my cheek. "



There's a reason your wolves called to each other the way they did, a reason the Moon Goddess united two souls bound by oracle blood."

"Oracle blood..." Kylan tilted his head, his brows knitting. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well," Cecilia breathed. "The two of you are both from royal families, are you not? Oracle blood."

"I don't think that's what you meant," Kylan stated.

I could sense he wanted to ask more, to push for answers, but something in Cecilia's expression told him now wasn't the time.

"It is exactly what I meant," Cecilia said. "Now go say your goodbyes before I have to drag you back to Starlight myself."

Kylan still wasn't fully convinced, but he set it aside as we moved through the farewell line. I joined him as he greeted each mistress with the same quiet respect, pulling them into embraces.

Of course, the ones he loved most he held a little longer. What surprised me was watching him reach for Kahlia, Khaedric, and Lady Mona's younger daughters, too, one by one. There was genuine warmth in every hug.

Lady Mona watched from a distance, lifting one hand in a small wave. This was supposed to be a happy moment, but watching all of them, I couldn't help but wonder what would become of all the mistresses. Not to forget, one of them was pregnant.

Kiora was last. The two stood facing each other for a split second before she threw herself at him. He caught her with ease, pulling his sister closer while his lips pressed to the top of her head over and over.



"You need to come back soon," she said, her voice muffled against his stomach.

"And you need to come visit soon," he said back.

When she finally pulled away, her eyes were wet. She blinked hard, trying to hold it together, but once she spotted Dylan, she redirected entirely.

It was still the effect of the cute one-sided crush. Perhaps her first crush.

She launched herself at him with the same force, and a startled sound left him. His arms hovered, completely lost, until Trinity stepped behind him and gave him a quiet nudge. "Hug her."

Only then did he wrap his arms around her. "It was good to see you, Kiora," he said, awkwardly patting her back. "I'll take good care of your... handkerchief."

She pulled back and looked up at him. "You're coming back, too, right?"

I knew Dylan would rather not.

He exhaled. "I'll try."

"Violet!"

Startled, I turned around. Lian and Sora appeared

out of nowhere, rushing through the crowd with their hair flying behind them.

"Violet!" Sora reached me first, nearly knocking me over with her hug. "We were studying for our exams and lost track of time. We wanted to see you before you left!" She was out of breath.

"Have you heard about the transfer program and how we might be joining you soon?" Lian spoke with a smile. She didn't smile a lot, so that smile on her face was basically the same as laughing out loud.

"I did," I nodded, excitedly. "And I can't wait!"

"Madam Renata said our chances are high. She thinks we'll make it!" Sora beamed, her fingers pointing at the woman who stood at the door.

She didn't come closer, didn't say anything.

Just stood there with her hands clasped in front of her, and a small smile on her lips.

I blinked my eyes at her, showing her I had seen her and she dipped her head in response. A small hint of acknowledgment. In the meantime, Sora and Lian had already said their goodbyes to Trinity and Dylan who they had also gotten pretty close to.

Once they reached Kyran, both girls lost their usual composure and threw their arms around him before he could react. I muffled a laugh, enjoying the sight of it. He had received more hugs today than he himself would ever give in a lifetime.

He wrapped his arms around both girls, smiling softly. "Thank you, Your Highness," Sora said into his chest. "For protecting Lady Violet, and for being so kind to us even when you didn't have to be."

Kyran cleared his throat. "I wasn't that kind to you," he frowned. "But I'll take it."

Lian pulled away and gave him a proper bow. "Safe travels, Your Highness."

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"Lian." He nodded at her. "Take care of yourselves, and make sure to pass the exams so we can meet again at Starlight."

He then looked at me. "Violet doesn't have any friends at school. She could use a few more."

I folded my arms with an angry frown, ready to argue, but there was nothing to argue about, honestly.

Nate and Kaelis were standing near one of the cars, wrapped around each other like the rest of the world didn't exist. They were saying words to each other, but I couldn't make out what. I didn't need to, because the way they held each other said everything.

My lips curled into a smile, seeing Beta Jack beside them, staring at the two as if he were watching a movie. He wrapped his arm around Kaelis's shoulder, and I guessed that he had probably promised him he would look after her until they would reunite again.

It was just him and his mistresses who had come to send off Nate. True was not around.

She had shown just how much she loved Nate, and I was sure the two of them must've had a private conversation. Still, I felt bad that things had to be this way. That she had to lie for us, to protect what she loved.

A warm hand was on my shoulder, and I looked up at Kylan.

"Look," he whispered. "Nate is happy, Jack is doing fine, and there's nothing more you could've done."

I bobbed my head in agreement.

"And do you know why?"



"Why?"

His lips parted. "Because it isn't your fault, Violet."

A small breath escaped me as he led me away, and we all got into the car. I settled against Kylan's side. Dylan and Trinity sat across from us, while Nate, who came to join us last, forced himself in between them.

"Who is ready to go back to school again?" he asked cheerfully. At least we were all on the same page, as we all responded with a groan. The car started moving.

I watched through the back window as the crowd grew smaller, and by the time the palace slowly disappeared, I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

Kylan's hand found mine. "It's okay."

It was...

His hand in mine, this bond between us, being surrounded by the people I loved the most.

"Yes," I chuckled. "It's okay."



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Road To Starlight (3/3) PT 4

6:30 PM

Hours had passed, and the flight back was more peaceful than I expected. After all the exhaustion, I was determined to remain on these plush leather seats and never move again.

I leaned against Kylan's side, my head on his shoulder. He released a yawn. I guess the exhaustion of these past few days had caught up with all of us, including Jumpie and Thorne.

Laughter came from all the way in the back. Nate sat squished between Dylan and Trinity. Not too strange, considering the three had been attached at the hip the entire time.

As I looked behind me, I caught Nate pressing a kiss to Dylan's cheek, making Trinity burst into fits of laughter while Dylan aggressively wiped away the evidence.

A soft laugh escaped me.

"What are they doing?" Kylan murmured against my hair.

"Nothing. Just..." I gestured vaguely behind us. "Nate kissed Dylan."

A frown crossed Kylan's face. "Who kissed who?" he asked before releasing a deep breath.

A laugh escaped me. "Don't even ask," I murmured. "I guess this has something to do with him missing Kaelis too much."

He hummed and pulled me closer. I let my eyes drift shut, enjoying the warmth of him. I felt the steady beat of his heart against my cheek. Both



he and Valerius were calm and at peace. We all were.

I was just about to fall asleep when I suddenly remembered. My eyes opened again. "The bag!"

Kylan stiffened. "What bag?"

"Don't play stupid. The one you were hiding in the room." I sat up to look at him properly. "You brought it with you, didn't you?"

His jaw locked, and I could feel a wave of embarrassment so strong it almost made me laugh.

"Since you can feel everything now and think this is funny," he said flatly, "you must already know how humiliating this is for me."

I trapped his cheek between two fingers, giving him a pinch while he shot me a side-eye. "I don't care. Just let me see."

He stared at me for a long moment. Then, with a heavy sigh, he reached under his seat and pulled out the small bag. He didn't hand it over right away, but held it against his chest like he was protecting it.

"Don't laugh," he warned, though his voice was weak.

I held back my giggle, pressing my lips together, but it was too late. The corners of my mouth were twitching.

"Never mind. You're already laughing."

"I'm not!"

"Then what is this?" he snarled, stretching the corner of my lips with his hands.



"Okay, fine, I'm a little bit laughing, but only because you're being so dramatic about it." I reached for the bag, and he didn't resist. "Just let me see."

Something shifted in his expression, and he sat up straight as if he were preparing himself to snatch it away again, just in case.

I opened it carefully, reaching inside. My fingers brushed against something smooth and carved, and when I pulled it out, my breath caught.

It was a beautiful wooden sunflower, carved by hand. Every petal was perfectly detailed, and as someone who had grown up carving more times than I could remember, I could tell he had put his whole heart into it.

Strangely enough, my favorite flowers weren't violets but sunflowers, and that made it that much more special. My fingers moved along the edges, and memories flooded through me.

Memories of Mom and Dad bringing me sunflowers whenever they got back from excursions, and how we used to make herbal teas together using the petals.

It was something I held close to my heart and certainly nothing to be embarrassed about.

"It's bad, isn't it?" Kylan's voice was tight. "I knew it. I told Fergus the petals looked wrong, but he said—"

"Bad?" I looked up at him, holding back my tears. "You think this is bad?"

His brows furrowed. "Well...you're almost crying."



"Because it's the best thing anyone has ever given me." My voice cracked. "Even if it did look bad, I would still cry because you made this for me."

I clutched the sunflower against my chest. "I hate you for not showing me this before. You really are talented."

Kylan smiled softly, his thumb reaching over to wipe my cheek. I looked into his deep brown eyes so he could feel every bit of my sincerity. I wasn't lying.

"What else is in here?" I asked softly.

A sigh left him. "Just some teas. Fergus said you'd know what to do with them—"

Before he could finish, I opened the bag all the way. My eyes went wide, my mouth nearly watered at the sight of the jars and pouches.

"Wild chamomile?" I gasped, surprised. I began pulling out more and more. "Lavender root, and this one looks like the blend my mom used to make me, and..."

A louder gasp escaped me as I clutched his arm with my free hand. "And this is lunapetal! Kylan, do you know how rare this is?"

"No, I—"


"Let me tell you about it!" I blurted, barely containing my excitement.

"It only grows in the north during the first frost, and you have to harvest it at exactly the right time or else it'll taste like shit, but that's not all!" I rambled. "It's amazing for anxiety and sleep issues and—"



"Violet."

I stopped to look at him. "Yes?" I asked, my cheeks glowing. "Too much for your brain to handle?"

A surprised laugh burst out of him. "Don't worry, nerd," he said. "We'll be back at Starlight soon enough, and you can make all the tea you want." 

I laughed and shook my head, carefully putting everything back in the bag. "You're going to regret saying that. I'm going to make you try every single one."

"I know," he chuckled. "At least I've got some more time left."

I turned my gaze to him. "For what?"

"To plot my escape." He nodded toward the small screen at the front of the cabin, and I read the words.

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