

Chapter 65 - The Flowers

*"Everything that happens to you matters to me." —
Cassandra Clare*

Kiya

Never get poisoned. The recuperation is brutal.

I feel like I've been hit by a freight train. Twice! My head feels like a jackhammer to concrete with my muscles feel like a mass of limp noodles, and my chest aches with every breath. My treatments will continue because there was still cyanide in my system. It shocked the doctors and nurses that I survived ingesting an astronomical amount of poison.

However, I knew that if I died again, Selene would just toss me back to Earth again.

Adonis was cuddled at my side when I woke up, curled in a ball with an arm over my stomach. Raina revealed that he wouldn't leave my side. My heart fluttered like bird wings. Raina stayed by my side all night, too. Deep happiness sprouted underneath the soil in my heart. I appreciate my sister and my nephew staying with me.

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Adonis said he did it to protect me from the bad people who wanted to hurt me. Oh, little guy, I'm the one doing the protecting!

After they left, Dr. Jackson and Nurse Amara came in to draw more blood and to check my vitals. I never liked Dr. Jackson. He was the doctor that did nothing to treat my injuries when I was a slave. Many wounds and cuts festered and got infected because of his improper care. Now, he was making sure my stay in the hospital was as comfortable as possible.

I must stay for a couple of days before I'm cleared for discharge. That means I'll get many visitors. Including my favorite ones! My friends were camping out in my room with Criminal Minds blaring from the television. They brought takeout too! I may be sick, but not sick enough to indulge in Chinese chicken dumplings!

"Your Alpha is going to kill the bartender who poisoned you by the end of the week," Galen revealed, chopsticks digging at his noodles.

"He's not my Alpha, Gal." I rolled my eyes. "As for the bartender, I heard she confessed to the crime. But I don't know if killing her would serve any justice. I'm still breathing."

"You're laid up in that hospital bed because she

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laced your drink with enough cyanide to kill a cow," Jackie replied, folding one leg over the other. "The bitch deserves it for hurting you."

Okay, I know she deserves punishment for what she did, but I feel as though there was something else going on. This was bigger than Emily. I remember that blond bartender, but our interactions before that were non-existent. Why would she want me dead? The only person who I knew hated my guts to the point of harm was Odessa.

But was she capable of taking me out? I don't know.

"Neron worked fast. I admire that." Sapphire hopped on my bed. She was careful not to snag herself in the IV tubes. "He wasted no time hunting Emily down and securing the crime scene. Gamma Kwame found the glass with her fingerprints. She didn't clean it in the chaos."

"That's so sloppy," Darien grunted, scooping up some rice. "Speaking hypothetically, if I wanted to poison someone and save my ass, I'd get rid of the evidence as fast as I could. They have the glass and found potassium cyanide in her room. She didn't plan her escape through."

"Maybe she's dumber than we originally thought."

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Jackie shrugged. "She's a blond."

Sapphire shot up. "Hey!"

"Except you, babe. You're so smart." The Beta shot a wink at her friend, who rolled her eyes before settling. All of this left a foul taste in my mouth. Did Emily want to be caught? Or was she working for someone else? So many questions, but so few answers!

"Kiya, I wanted to ask." I perked up as Abigail tossed her empty water bottle in the trash. "What happened before the poisoning? You came back to the party looking like a disheveled mess."

I dreaded this. The memory of Neron's lips brushing against mine seared itself in my memory. The imprint refuses to disappear. The intense emotions, his touches—everything about it, I recall every detail. Even his eyes, looking at me with so much love. My hands covered my face while I groaned in irritation.

"Something happened between Neron and me."

"Do we need to fight him?" Jackie asked, already rolling up her sleeves.

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"Do we need to kill him?" Sapphire inquired, crossing her arms.

"Want me to castrate him?" Galen grinned, holding up a flimsy plastic knife.

"Want me to spoon his eyes out of their orbitals?" Darien implored, holding up his spoon.

"Must we resort to violence?" Abigail sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose.

"No! To all of your questions!" I yelled. "It isn't anything bad. We almost kissed and—"

"Hol' up." Everyone responded in unison. Darien shut off the television and everyone scooted their chairs closer to my bed. I, now, had five pairs of colorful eyes staring me down. Goddess, I hate being the center of attention.

"...You kissed him?" Sapphire asked, the corner of her lips rising to a smirk.

"No!" I defended. "I-I don't know, almost? An actual kiss didn't happen!"

"Did your lips touch?" Galen asked. I nodded, cheeks heating up like a bonfire. "Little Bit, that is considered a kiss!"

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"No, it is not! Who made that a rule, anyway?"

"Focus!" Abigail ordered, silencing everyone. "Kiki, tell us what happened from the beginning."

I told everything. I spared no detail. Their eyes widened the more I told. I revealed that Odessa interrupted us, which made Darien arch an eyebrow in confusion, but I went no further than that. I ran off before I could see her and Neron argue or not.

Their silence was deafening. Their stares were unmoving. Were they even breathing? I resist the urge of waving my hand in front of their faces but, luckily, Galen cracked.

"Oof." He huffed before laughing. "Girl, you're in trouble! You got him hook, line, and sinker. He's never going to leave you alone."

I whined, hitting my head on my pillow. This was a nightmare! Pinching my side didn't help. I was stuck in this madness. "I was afraid of that. What am I going to do?"

"I don't know. Continue to fight against the bond like you normally do?" Abigail asked with a shoulder shrug. "It's harder for you since your mate is an Alpha, and Alphas love to take and lay their claims."

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Neron wouldn't do that, would he? While I was unconscious, I overheard the conversation he had with his father. Neron understood me. But his father terrified me. The former Alpha was a nightmarish beast dressed as a refined gentleman. Jonathan Prince still scares the shit out of me. I have Lady Luck on my side for not running into him at all. He was the one person who could put fear into my soul. Even Artemis buckles at his name.

He still made me feel like the meek slave.

I don't like the idea that he is forcing Neron to mark me. The former Alpha knows, for certain, that I was Selene's avatar. Jonathan was inserting himself into a business that didn't involve him. For what? He knew more than he was leading on...but I was too terrified to ask him.

Once I was out of this bed, I'll look for answers myself. To what other powers I hold. To know exactly who and what I am.

I run my hands through my hair, huffing in exasperation. "This dumb bond is not claiming me."

"The mate bond is a powerful thing, Kiya." Darien grips my hand in his, rubbing soothing circles on the back of it. "I commend you for holding out for this long, especially against someone you hate. But

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you're working closely with him, and after what happened, he'll try harder to get you. Also...you felt the sensations, too. You might want to feel those again."

No! I couldn't let that happen. I'll do whatever I can to not get close to him. What happened at the party was dangerously close. If we'd kissed...I'm afraid that I wouldn't have stopped. It would have been a full make-out session.

As much as a deep, *deep* part of me wanted to feel Neron against me again, I refuse to fall. I refuse to surrender. I don't want him. I'll never claim him as my mate.

Stupid man! Make it easier for me to hate you!

"I don't," I say through my teeth. The doubt in the room is palpable, and these folks were supposed to be on my side? "I can't! This stupid bond is fucking with my mind like it is doing to him! It is dumb luck the almost-kiss happened. Yes, I admit, it felt good. Why does something so wrong feel so *right*?"

Galen smirked, patting my shoulder. "Good job! The first step is acceptance!"

I brush his hand off me. "I'm not accepting shit! This

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whole thing is stupid. Everything about this bond is stupid! Why couldn't he just leave it broken? Idiot!"

"Um. Kiya?" Abigail asked.

"Stupid man with his stupid body and his stupid lips!"

"Kiya..." Sapphire sang, poking my arm.

"Stupid fated sparks with those stupid good feelings!"

"Uh..." Galen scratched the back of his head, averting his eyes away from us.

"Why couldn't wolves fall in love like normal people? Out of the millions of wolves in this world, why did I have to be bound to that six-feet-five-inch building of rock-hard muscle and—!"

"Kiya!" Jacqueline yelled.

"What?"

"That 'building' is at the door!"

The six of us jerked our heads towards the hospital room entrance, to see Neron leaning against the

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doorframe with a warm smile on his face. He was dressed in a tight black shirt with blue jeans—the fabric molding into his muscles. His black hair rested on his shoulders, framing his sharp jawline. The fluorescent lights of my room did nothing to disguise the beauty of his deep blue eyes.

In his hands is a large bouquet of pink, red, and yellow flowers in a glass vase.

“Oh, my Goddess,” I muttered, turning my head away from the door. He got me get-well flowers. This couldn’t be happening. My cheeks were heating at this simple gesture. “Please tell me I’m dreaming.”

“I assure you aren’t dreaming,” Neron replied. I could hear the damn smirk in his voice. I didn’t answer. I refused to look at him. “I got you flowers. I hope you like them, Kiya.”

“That’s so sweet...” Abigail whispered, her hands going over her heart. I shot a glare at her face, silently telling her to shut up. Yes, it was sweet, but it’d be sweeter if it didn’t come from him!

“Do you all mind if Kiya and I could talk in private?” Neron asked my friends. The five of them eyed each other in silence, knowing smirks growing on their faces. Before I could demand them to stay, they all

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flew out, slamming the door behind them.

It was the two of us alone in my hospital room.

The Alpha took a seat in a chair, scooting to my bedside, and handed me the flowers. Sighing, I turn to him and kindly took the vase out of his hands. It nearly dropped in my lap when our fingers touch, sending the fated sparks through my body.

"What flowers are these?" I asked, admiring the bright colors. "I recognize a couple."

"Each flower is symbolic. The pink peonies symbolize healing and good health. The yellow chrysanthemums mean joy, and the red roses... well..." He looked away for a moment, suddenly nervous. "They mean that love and respect. You know I love you, so I thought having a physical reminder would help."

Pink blossomed on his cheeks at the confession. I resist a smile, but it was hard. His blushing cheeks were the most adorable thing I've ever seen, but I'll never admit it out loud. My fingers brushed up against the waxy texture of the petals, soothing me. The sweet smell wafted up to my nose, bathing me in peace. 

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"Thank you," Honestly, I love the thoughtful arrangement. Only Mom and Dad ever brought me flowers. Anthony and Lyria would get me food if I ever landed in a hospital, like today. "Did you have the florist help you with picking the flowers?"

"Um...u-uh..." He stammered. I smirk, placing the vase on the table next to me. "Does that matter?"

"Not really." I laughed. "Again, thank you, Neron."

"Anything for you, Kiya." A comfortable silence fell between us. "How are you feeling?"

"Not good, but not bad either," I revealed, toying with the hem of my blanket. "I heard you have the bartender in custody. Are you going to kill her by the end of this week?"

"I have to." His cheery expression suddenly turned grave. "I can't let her get another opportunity to hurt you again." Neron took my hand in his own, squeezing gently. "I made a promise to protect you to your brother, and I'll honor that promise. When I saw you convulsing, I was so scared. I felt you... I felt your pain."

"You felt my pain?" I asked him, allowing him to hold my hand.

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"You know the bond makes wolves feel more than love for their mates, right?" He asked, drawing circles on the back of my hand with a finger. "The bond also alerts us when the other is in pain by sending it to us through the connection. Usually, we'd learn how to block that mechanism, but sometimes, especially in dangerous situations, it forgoes the block and forces us to feel." His eyes shined with unshed tears when he gazed upon my face again. "I felt everything, Kiya. I thought...I thought you wouldn't make it."

I sighed, rubbing my forehead in shame. I didn't want Neron to feel what I was feeling, but as the bond strengthens, it makes us more aware of each other's emotions and vulnerabilities. This was exactly the thing I wanted to avoid. "I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry for. It's the reality of the bond we share." Neron gifted me with his white smile, dazzling. "I'll always keep you safe from harm. Anyone who tries to hurt you is a dead man or woman. What kind of Alpha am I if I let my mate get hurt?"

I look at my lap briefly, feeling the weight of his words. Neron would kill for me. Emily's days were numbered, and I didn't know how to feel about it.

"Neron, I heard what you said to your father," I revealed, looking back at him. "About not claiming

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me before I'm ready." I offer a small smile of appreciation. "Thank you for that."

His other hand went to my hair, fingers brushing up against the curls. His affection was profound, touching my flesh as gentle as a feather. Neron smiled at me again. "It's my pleasure, Kiya. I don't want you to doubt my care for you." I wanted to say more, but he held a finger to my lips.

"We'll talk again, later. You need to rest. I'll visit you later." What? That was it? Neron patted my head before walking towards the door. However, when he opened it, my friends spilled onto the floor, landing on top of one another. I groaned, pinching the bridge of my nose.

They are fools, but *my* lovable fools!

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Suddenly, I could hear Meg from Hercules Disney singing, ...



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