

## Chapter 175

Violet

Other than the sound of our boots on the grass and the wind through the trees, we walked in complete silence.

Every once in a while, Rochwall and I would glance at each other, then look away just as fast. It felt weird, awkward, especially since he was the one who wanted to talk.

As we walked, I just kept wondering what this was about, and why now. There was only one simple explanation for this, and that was Adelaide. At least, I hoped it was.

I would've been lying if I said I hadn't been waiting for one of her old friends to speak up so I could hear from their mouths why they decided to betray her.

Not so I could resent them.

No, just so I wouldn't be making those same mistakes.

Rochwall broke the silence with a light chuckle.

I frowned at him. "What?"

He looked straight ahead. "Nothing, it's just..."

Just what?

I looked like her?

Or him?



Rochwall shook his head, still smiling. The man beside me was completely different from the man who had just wrecked us in training. He was still tense, only a whole lot less.

“How are you feeling nowadays?”

Here we go again.

Another Esther...

For some reason, that question made me sick. Someone checking on you wasn't supposed to be a bad thing, but when you heard it every single day from people who knew not much had to happen for you to snap, the tone was suddenly a bit different. It started to sound more like a reminder that you weren't okay.

“Good!” I said quickly. “I'm good!”

It came out a little too cheerful, and it was clearly a lie. I wasn't doing good. Better yet, I was shitting my pants for the trip to Lyperia.

Rochwall smiled slightly. “That's great!”

I nodded, forcing myself to keep the smile. But my mind wandered again. Mandy had mentioned he'd been off all week, and then he had this outburst during training, and now he suddenly wanted to know whether I was doing alright or not.

I tilted my head toward him. “And how about you, Commander?”

He fluttered his eyelids, surprised.

“How are you doing?”



He let out a long breath. "Been better."

We had been walking for a while now, and there had yet to come something useful from his mouth. I didn't know whether he was waiting on me to speak on Adelaide, or if he was planning on doing it himself, but I was tired of everyone circling around each other like they were scared to reveal the truth.

"So you just wanted to see how I was doing?" I asked, my tone clear. "Because you could've just asked me in front of the group."

Rochwall stopped walking for a split second, then continued. His expression didn't change much, but I could tell he wasn't expecting me to call it out like that.

"Violet," he said gently, "did you know you've always been one of the students who caught my eye the most?"

I shook my head, playing dumb. "No. I did not."

But now I knew exactly what this was.

He really was fishing.

He was trying to find out how much I knew, and maybe testing how much he could say in return.

Well, if he was going to play that game, I could too. Just like he was testing me, I was testing him.

Would he be an ally or an enemy?

Rochwall hummed, then chewed on his words like he couldn't find the right ones. "I guess you could say...that day in the library."



The day he got his memory back...

Now I knew it for certain. After all, that was the only valid explanation for his reaction when I had asked him about Adelaide. It had obviously triggered something in him.

All it took were a few questions and he'd avoided me like the plague ever since. Maybe that was why this walk felt so awkward. Because the two of us never really talked. Not the way he did with the other Elite members.

And Jane...

She had been so talkative that one time during lunch, and had even promised me to tell me more about Adelaide's secret weapon. The one thing she did remember.

But once she remembered the bad memories, also she was difficult to talk to.

Now I couldn't help but wonder.

The king knew, James and Jane knew, but did the king know those two got their memory back? Did they even address it?

All of it was too confusing.

"When did I catch your eye?" I asked softly.

"Why are you asking?" he said suddenly.

"No," I narrowed my eyes. "Why are you asking?"

We stared into each other's eyes, both of us squinting like we were waiting for the other to crack first. Both of us knew where this



conversation was headed, but neither of us wanted to be the first to say it.

"I think you're a smart girl, Violet," Rochwall spoke. "But still, as someone who has dealt with a fair share of Lyperians, I wanted to give you a few tips before you leave," he offered. "I owe that to you."

My stomach tightened.

Owe?

Was he talking about guilt? Was this about Adelaide?

It wasn't my grudge to hold, but did he seriously think giving me a few tips would erase his hand in what happened that day in Bloodstone Haven?

I glanced at Rochwall. I hadn't noticed it before, but he was actually really tall, maybe even a little taller than Kylan. But that wasn't the most interesting thing about him. What truly caught my attention was how much he had grown as a person. His real height wasn't just physical, but in the way he had changed for the better.

I couldn't say I wasn't shocked when I had first seen him through Adelaide's eyes. Back then, he was pushy, immature, and perhaps a little too bad at reading a room. Now he was a leader. Someone who supported others, someone who showed up, and someone everyone could depend on.

That's why I really hoped he was one of the good ones...

He had to be...

"Violet," Rochwall suddenly stopped walking. So did I.



I turned to face him, curious. His eyes were sharp this time, and his smile had disappeared. There was something heavy behind his gaze, like whatever he had to say had been sitting on his chest for a long time.

"I didn't say the whole truth back in the library," he said quietly. "I told you I barely knew your mother," he continued. "Claire."

My body froze.

This was what I had been waiting for—for one of them to give me more answers, and it was finally going to happen.

I nodded slowly, not trusting myself to speak. I feared that if I did, I would ruin it.

"That wasn't true," Rochwall said, shaking his head. "I knew Claire Hastings better than almost anyone on that team. She was one of my closest friends."

I nodded.

He took a deep breath, like it hurt just talking about it. "And I know you read that page dedicated to me."

I nodded again, feeling my throat tighten. My eyes were desperate as I begged him for more without using any words.

"She was kind," Rochwall sighed. "Too kind for the world we were in." He smiled a bit. "Claire was beautiful, smart, and...the most loyal out of all of us. Greg was the same, but I think you already know."

My throat tightened as I waited.

How did he know I was aware?



Rochwall looked me up and down before he continued. "You've been digging for a while now, and you have found them, haven't you?"

I nodded again, slowly. "Yes."

"And I don't know how you found out, but something tells me you also know about...them."

He didn't have to say who.

I knew.

"Adelaide and Alaric," I whispered, like their names were taboo. "Do you know who they are to me? Do you know what I am?"

Of course I know," Rochwall confirmed, stepping closer. He closed his eyes as he took a breath, then opened them again, eyeing me with a burning gaze. "You are the little girl I once held in my arms and vowed to protect but I failed to protect you...all of us did."

"Y-Yes?" I gulped, waiting for more.

"Your name is Violet. The daughter of Adelaide and Alaric. Witch, princess, child of blood, and heir to the Common Lands."

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