

Episode 16

-Cloud Tower-

Valtor strode through the shadowed halls of Cloud Tower, a stiff unease to his normally confident gait. His little problem from earlier still very much present, fueling his irritation by the second.

“How could I lose control? And because of her...”

The memory of Bloom's coy smile, her wide baby-blue eyes staring up at him, crept uninvited into his thoughts. He felt his chest tighten and had the sudden urge to punch something. Pain, he thought bitterly, would surely be preferable to this maddening thumping in his chest.

Tired and irritable, Valtor finally arrived at his office—not Griffin's gaudy office that she dared call a workplace, but his own. Quiet, peaceful, and filled with ancient tomes of dark magic. Exactly what he needed to clear his mind from a certain red-haired fairy.

But alas, the Great Dragon was not on his side today. Before he could close the door behind him, a shrill voice sliced through the air like nails on a chalkboard.

Icy: *“Valtor! Where have you been?!”*

His patience hung by a thread. Fighting the urge to bash his head against the nearest wall, he slowly turned to face the Trix marching toward him.

Valtor: “I wasn't aware I had an obligation to report my whereabouts to you three?”

Darcy: “Someone's in a mood today.”

Before another sarcastic jab could escape their lips, the sisters noticed Valtor's attire, or rather, lack thereof. Still clad only in his trousers, hair tied back in a high ponytail, Valtor's bare chest was on full display. They weren't subtle about staring, either.

He sighed inwardly. He knew the effect he had on women. Normally, he relished it—his charm and good looks were tools he used to his advantage. He revelled in the power it gave him over others.

It was no secret the Trix followed him as much for their attraction to him as for their ambitions. On any other day, he would have welcomed the attention, perhaps even encouraged it.

But tonight, it grated on him.

Stormy let out a low whistle, snapping him out of his thoughts.

Stormy: “Stars, Valtor, you never told us that you were hiding all that underneath that old coat!”

Valtor couldn't help the roll of his eyes.

Valtor: “If you're all quite done ogling me, I have some business to attend to. You know you're not allowed in my private quarters so I suggest you leave.”

Icy: “Seems like some business indeed.”

Icy's eyes strayed to the bulge in his pants a sly smirk on her face. Darcy and Stormy seeing their sister's gaze also looked down, their eyes near comically bulging out of their heads as they zeroed in on the obvious strain at the front of his pants.

Valtor's glare was ice-cold, daring Icy to continue. Naturally, Icy was never one to back down. Her overconfidence had been her downfall many times before, and tonight would be no different. Her eyes lingered on him, brazenly tracing every line of his bare torso. Once, her gaze might have flattered him—might have even drawn a smirk to his lips. But now, it did nothing but stir a deeper irritation within him.

Something had shifted.

Where he once took pleasure in the attention, in the easy power he held over others, now her stare felt cheap—hollow. It gnawed at him in a way he couldn't quite understand. Icy was an attractive witch, anyone would say as much. But her touch, her closeness, left him cold.

His mind flickered—unbidden—to a smile, not Icy's, but *hers*. Her wide, innocent blue eyes. The way her presence, so unlike Icy's, unsettled him in an entirely different way.

Icy: "You know, I could help you take care of that."

Icy, either oblivious or uncaring, took a bold step closer, a smirk playing at her lips. Her eyes met his, defying the deadly warning in his gaze—one that would have sent a lesser woman fleeing. Ignoring the tension thickening in the air, she placed her fingertips lightly on his bare stomach, tracing a slow line near his trousers.

Icy: "A powerful man like you only deserves the best, after all."

Her hand started to trail lower, but before she could make another move, Valtor's hand snapped around her wrist with a vice-like grip. He twisted her hand away from his body, his irises shifting from deep blue to a glowing, menacing crimson. A dark, oppressive energy filled the hallway, his shadow growing larger, deeper—almost alive.

Valtor: "Get your claws off me, witch."

The venom in his rumbling voice cut through the air, sharp enough to make Icy's confident smirk falter. Her eyes widened, and for the briefest moment, her lips trembled.

"Touch me again, and your sisters will be scraping your remains off the ground."

For the first time, Icy was stuck between indignant rage and pure, carnal fear. She had never felt so utterly insignificant, so powerless. But her pride wouldn't allow her to show it. She lifted her chin, trying to cling to whatever shred of dignity she had left, though the trembling of her hand betrayed her.

Before the tension could explode, Darcy's voice cut through the suffocating silence.

Darcy: "Heeeey Valtor, buddy."

Valtor's furious gaze snapped to Darcy, who was already moving, trying to peel Icy away from him.

Darcy: "Icy didn't mean that, right sis?"

Icy opened her mouth, but Darcy quickly interrupted, her tone forced and overly cheery.

"See, it was a joke hahaha. Isn't she hilarious? She's such a hoot, right, Stormy?"

Stormy was no where to be found.

Darcy: "Aha... Well, uhm, we'll leave you to it, then."

Valtor's patience snapped. His fist collided with the stone wall beside him, shattering it on impact. The crack of stone echoed through the hallway, the force of his anger reverberating through the walls.

Valtor: "Get. Out. Of. My. Sight."

Darcy didn't wait to be told twice. She grabbed Icy's arm and bolted, dragging her stunned sister behind her.

Darcy: "What the hell were you thinking Icy?!!" she whispered furiously.

Valtor watched them go, his brow still twitching with barely-contained fury. Slowly, his eyes faded back to their usual ocean-blue, but the lingering anger didn't dissipate so easily. He exhaled heavily, running a hand through his hair.

Well, one could call that a distraction, at least.

-Alfea-

Bloom sat curled up on the comfy sofa in the Winx's common room, her sketchbook balanced in her lap. Her brow furrowed in deep concentration as she added another line to her drawing, completely oblivious to the lively conversation around her. The scratch of her pencil was the only sound she registered, the chatter of her friends fading into the background like white noise.

Layla: "I still think it's weird, Musa... Why would Valtor let the mermaids go so suddenly? It's as if nothing ever happened. The mermaids are back to normal, and the Ocean of Andros is as clear as it's ever been. It's like Valtor was never even there."

Bloom's hand paused for a moment, hovering over her sketchbook, but she didn't look up.

Stella: "Let's not forget about the witches from Cloud Tower either! I thought they were being held in that comatose state in Cloud Tower with him? Then they suddenly turn up on our doorstep! Ugh, I really don't need their negative energy here, it ruins my skin."

Flora: "Stella!"

Stella: "Oops sorry haha."

Bloom looked up to admire her hard work, her eyes widening as she realized what- or rather who- she had just drawn. Valtor. He stared up at her from the paper, his charcoal eyes locking onto hers with that same intense gaze that had haunted her thoughts far more than she wanted to admit. Bloom felt her temper get the better of her as an unwanted rosy blush coloured her cheeks.

With a frustrated huff, she slashed her pencil across the drawing, crossing out Valtor's face with several angry strokes. As if that would erase his presence from her mind. Still irritated, she began sketching a far less flattering version of Valtor's likeness—this time exaggerating every feature until he barely looked human.

Satisfied with her small act of rebellion, she added a bold "UGLY" next to his distorted face. *It's a lie*, she admitted to herself. But it made her feel better.

She barely had a second to enjoy her moment of triumph before Musa's voice suddenly cut through her thoughts.

Musa: “What do you think Bloom? You have a connection with Valtor. Do you have any idea why he would do this?”

Bloom nearly threw her sketchbook into another dimension at Musa’s sudden question.

Bloom: “W-what do you mean by that?!”

The room fell into a heavy silence as the other Winx stared at her, surprised by her strong reaction.

Musa: “Uhm, nothing, just that you both have the Dragon Flame. I figured you might have some more insight than we do.”

Bloom let out a breath she didn’t realize she was holding, her body visibly relaxing. She thought for a split second that they could see the shame from yesterday night pouring out of her pores.

Bloom: “A-ah yes of course haha! Nope, no idea! Who knows what that guy’s thinking? It’s not like I see him often or anything.”

Bloom debated melting her own mouth shut. Could she have sounded more suspicious?!

Luckily her friends didn’t seem to notice and were already back to their conversation.

Bloom’s eyes drifted back down to the sketchbook in her lap. Valtor’s crossed-out face glared up at her from beneath the frantic scribbles. She hated how even an inked version of him could make her feel so... unsettled. His gaze, even on paper, was a reminder of the previous night. A reminder of how easily her resolve had crumbled under his touch. Of how close she came to betraying everything she stood for. The guilt gnawed at her insides, slow and relentless, like a poison creeping through her veins. How could she, of all people, let herself be swayed by someone like *him*?

He’s the enemy. She repeated the words in her head, willing them to erase the memory of his voice, of his hands, of the way her body had betrayed her in that fleeting moment. *He’s the enemy.*

The sketch in front of her felt like a cruel joke. The more she tried to deny him, the more vivid his presence became. She felt engulfed by him, completely and utterly drowning in the memory of his touch—like the tide pulling her under, relentless and inescapable.

But Bloom made a silent vow to herself, gripping the edges of the sketchbook until her knuckles turned white.

I won’t let it happen again. Never again.

She stared down at the crossed-out image of Valtor, her heart still pounding with the intensity of her promise.

He is the enemy. I will not fall for his dirty tricks.

END