

## Chapter 103

Violet

Kylan and I exchanged a glance. It wasn't too late to run, and part of me wanted to.

He had even called him the foul-mouthed crown prince. Just the thought of this man knowing everything about us, including some details we didn't know ourselves, terrified me.

It was Kylan's plan to come here, and after the darkness I had felt, I fully stood behind his decision—but now I was unsure.

All he had to do was give me the signal, and I would run out of here.

"Sit," The Soothsayer's voice dominated the cave before Kylan could even think about it.

It wasn't much of an invite—more of an order.

I lingered for a moment before deciding to join the Soothsayer at the campfire, dragging Kylan with me, and took a seat on the plaid on the ground. I kept my distance from the Soothsayer while Kylan still had his hand in mine, as if he was ready to spring into action at any moment.

He had followed my lead. Even though he had convinced me to come here, he didn't force me into anything. He let me decide how far I wanted to go, and I appreciated that.

I watched as the Soothsayer's eyes shifted from our intertwined hands to the ring on my finger. His lips curled into a small smile. "The Lyperian stone," he murmured, chuckling softly.

I didn't respond, just kept looking at him, waiting for him to lead the conversation. Since he knew everything, he must've also known the reason why I was here. Yet, he was treating this like some random visit.

"Would you like something to drink?" he asked, his tone casual as if we were old friends, suddenly looking a little less intimidating.

"We're good, thanks," Kylan spoke immediately, sounding overprotective. I couldn't blame him though. Accepting drinks from a Soothsayer located in a cave sounded like a disaster waiting to happen.

The Soothsayer maintained his smile, reaching behind him before rummaging through a plastic bag. A second later, he pulled out two soda cans, holding them up for us to see.

"I wasn't going to offer you frog slime or monkey balls," he said, poking fun at us. "I was going to save that for the next time."

I covered my mouth with my free hand, releasing a chuckle while Kylan held the other one even tighter, clearly not impressed. The Soothsayer's unexpected humor caught me off guard, but it eased the tension in my stomach.

The Soothsayer shrugged and then placed the soda cans on the ground. "I asked my apprentice, Albus, to get these drinks because I knew the two of you were coming," he said, gesturing toward the fire in the center. "I've been waiting for a while now."

Kylan narrowed his eyes. "You know a lot, don't you?"

"I do."

"The boy who let us into the tent the last time we met," I said cautiously, figuring he was open for questions, "is that Albus? Your apprentice?"

"He is," The Soothsayer nodded. "Albie is a bright one, that boy. Curious, hardworking—but sometimes still a bit naive."

I nodded back, taking in his words. It was almost strange to hear him talk about someone that affectionately. For some reason, I had always expected Soothsayers to lack feelings or compassion—but this one seemed different.

This one seemed like he had lived beyond places like just a tent or a cave, and I suddenly began to realize that the Soothsayer I had feared after our first encounter perhaps wasn't that scary after all.

Other than the fire crackling between us, it went silent. The Soothsayer pressed his lips together as if he didn't plan to speak until I came with another question.

My eyes moved to Kylan. He was quiet, his dark eyes fixated on the Soothsayer as if he didn't quite trust him.

Yet, he was the one who had brought me here for answers, and even up until this very moment, it looked like Kylan knew exactly what he was doing.

"Did you show me the path through the woods?" I questioned.

"I did, child," the Soothsayer said, his blue eyes glowing as if he were happy I figured it out.

"The tent at the market," I continued, "was it fake? A scheme to get me there since you could sense we were coming that day?"

The Soothsayer lowered his gaze to the ground as a chuckle escaped from his lips. "It was."

Of course, it was.

You had fortune tellers at the market, but an ancient-looking Soothsayer like him was rare and unheard of. No wonder it threw Kylan off immediately.

I swallowed, preparing myself for a question I wasn't quite sure I would be able to get an answer to. "And what's your name?"

"Aelius," he said to my surprise. He said it without hesitation, like he wanted me to know his name, to use it.

"Aelius," I repeated softly, testing the name on my tongue. "And how old are you...Aelius?"

His lips twitched into a smile. "I've been here for many many years."

He looked old...really old.

It wasn't quite the answer I was looking for, but I didn't press further. Besides, it wasn't strange for a Soothsayer to make everything feel like some riddle.

"The last time we met," I said, tilting my head, "your eyes were glowing. Now they're not. How come?"

"They were glowing because I allowed them to glow," Aelius said. "That's the privilege you get when you know how to control them."

"And how does one control such eyes?" Kylan jumped in, his tone clear and direct. "We didn't come here to drink soda, we came here for answers."

I gave him a look, telling him to relax—but it didn't do anything. He wasn't here for small talk or riddles, no—he wanted answers, and he wanted them now.

I suppose my questions weren't good enough for him.

Aelius' laughter filled the cave. "Things like that don't happen overnight, and it takes years of practice," he said, turning his gaze toward me before eying the ring. "You'll need that ring for quite some time, at least a few years. You have no choice."

My head snapped to Kylan, my chest tightening.

Would he feel stuck with me now?

Tied down to someone who couldn't control herself for who knew how long?

What did a few years even mean in a situation like this?

But Kylan's face remained calm as if he had already expected this answer. And if he felt any frustration or regret, he didn't show it.

"You are a child of blood," Aelius spoke, making me turn my head. "You will figure it out eventually."

Were those words of encouragement or a prophecy?

A shiver ran through me. "Child of blood," I whispered. "Because we have the same glowing eyes, right?"

Aelius slowly nodded his head.

I bit my lip, feeling frustrated. "I came to you for guidance," I admitted, my voice trembling slightly. "I came so you could help me understand my eyes. I came so you could tell me more about...my mom—"

"I see," Aelius hummed, sniffing his nose. "You've got two moms," a frown appeared on the old man's face. "You'll have to be more specific, child."

I froze, feeling the impact of his words. My heart sank as I thought about Claire, the woman who had raised me, and Adelaide—the woman who had made me this so-called child of blood.

"You know which one she's talking about," Kylan spat, taking over the conversation once again. "The one with the glowing eyes—the witch."

"Ah," Aelius dragged out, opening his mouth. He squeezed his eyes a bit, searching for mine. "Then you must mean my great-granddaughter...Adelaide?"

Great...granddaughter...

I felt the breath leave my lungs, my heart racing as the truth finally came closer. Aelius wasn't some distant descendant—he was her blood, her direct family.

Which meant he was mine, too.