

## Chapter 104

Violet

My eyes were wide open as I stared at Aelius, my thoughts spinning out of control. He was my family—my great-grandfather? How could this even be possible?

He was a Soothsayer.

They weren't even supposed to have families.

"W-We are family?" I finally managed to get out, my voice trembling.

Aelius nodded slowly, his expression calm. He was the first real family I had ever met face-to-face, and he had said it like it was nothing.

"How?" Kylan demanded.

Aelius sighed, reaching for a stick by the fire, then stirred it around. "Adelaide's father, Aries, was my grandchild," he said simply. "Although he skipped the eyes. Some have it, some don't...most don't."

I tried to piece the information together but didn't get far. The only thing I was sure of was that Aelius had to be at least over a hundred years old—probably even more.

I glanced at Kylan, who looked just as confused as I felt. None of this made sense.

"If you're related," Kylan asked further, his brow furrowed, "then why was she with the Bloodroses and not with you, her family?"

It was a question that had immediately been on my mind as well. If he was alive and well—even taking care of this so-called apprentice of his—he could've taken me in and taught me how to use these eyes.

Aelius responded with a chuckle, making it clear he had nothing more to share.

A chill crept over me as one of the candles on a table suddenly went out. I gasped, scooting closer to Kylan as a smirk appeared on Aelius's lips. He lowered his head for a moment, and when he looked up again—his eyes were glowing white.

I gulped, terrified at the familiar sight, even though I now knew I had the same eyes.

Aelius began speaking in that strange tongue again, the one I'd heard before in the market tent, his voice suddenly much lower.

"The truth," he then suddenly whispered, "means so much more if you experience it yourself."

I blinked, looking around the cave. "What?"

What did I have to experience?

Aelius began speaking in tongues again, and I moved my body even closer to Kylan. I could feel a strange presence in the cave. It was strong, dark—but I couldn't tell where it was coming from. Aelius was clearly communicating with someone.

"I cannot tell you about her life," Aelius muttered. "She says you'll have to live it to understand."

He closed his eyes, whispering some more words I couldn't understand.

"Kylan," I shifted my eyes to him, my voice uneasy, "who is he talking to? Is it us?"

"I don't think so," Kylan shook his head. "But it's not too late to make a run for it," he added sarcastically.

I let out a shaky laugh, knowing he wasn't being serious. He was the one who had brought me here—he wanted me to do this.

Aelius extended his hand toward me, his eyes still glowing. "Come, my child," he said softly. "Let me guide you."

His glowing eyes made me want to run for my life, but the comforting smile on his lips—the one that made me feel safe—made me want to accept.

He wouldn't hurt me.

Aelius was family.

Aelius's fingers moved impatiently, encouraging me to take his hand.

My hand moved on its own as I let go of Kylan and reached forward—but then I was held back.

"Violet, wait!" Kylan hissed, pulling me back. "We don't know what he'll do to you."

"No, we don't," I said, our eyes locking. "But I need answers, and I'm willing to take the chance," my voice was firm—I had already decided.

For a long moment, Kylan's gaze searched mine as if he wanted to know whether I was sincere about doing this, but then he let go.

"Then I'll make sure nothing happens to you," he whispered. "I'll protect you."

Of course, he would.

He had always protected me.

Taking a deep breath, I reached for Aelius's hand. His fingers were cold—freezing—but they felt safe. The moment our hands touched, a surge of energy went through my veins.

And then, everything around me vanished.

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When I opened my eyes, everything around me was white—endless and silent. It was just like that strange dream I'd had before, the one where I had seen the wolf with red eyes—the one Kylan believed had to be Alaric.

Where was I?

What was this?

I spun around, taking in my surroundings. "Hello?" I called out, my voice echoing through the empty space.

No answer.

Panic rose in my chest as I turned in circles, searching for something—anything—that could explain where I was.

Why did I have to be this stupid and believe that old man? Why did I feel compelled to let go of Kylan, the one person I truly trusted?

My breath quickened as I gasped for air. "He—"

"Violet..."

I froze, hearing a soft and familiar voice. It was that voice—the one I had heard countless times before, guiding me, protecting me...her voice.

"Turn around, Violet."

A tear slipped down my cheek, and I clenched my fists, too terrified to turn around, knowing who I would face.

I drew in a sharp breath before slowly turning my head, and there she was. From a distance, I saw a beautiful woman with long, pitch-black hair and glowing white eyes.

Adelaide...

My lips trembled as I stared at her, unable to breathe properly. Another tear fell down my cheek.

"M-Mom?" I whispered, my voice cracking.

The woman nodded, her glowing eyes softening to a warm brown color as the light faded from them. "I've been waiting for you, Violet."

Nervously, I took a small step forward, then another, before breaking into a run. She opened her arms, and I threw myself into them, the weight of my emotions crashing over me.

Her embrace was warm and comforting in a way I had never felt before. In her arms, it felt like hugging Claire...Mom.

This time, tears streamed down my face as I cried into her shoulder. I knew I had said I wouldn't cry anymore—I had promised Kylan—but I couldn't help it.

I couldn't believe she was actually here.

"Shh," Adelaide soothed, stroking through my hair. "Let me look at you."

She pulled back just enough to meet my eyes and looked at me with curiosity. A chuckle left her mouth as she wiped a tear from my cheek.

"You're so big, look at you—you look just like him," she said, her voice filled with awe. "You're so beautiful."

"I-I," I stammered, my throat dry. I had too many thoughts and didn't even know where to start. "I have so many questions," I managed, my voice trembling.

"I know," Adelaide breathed. Just as she was about to speak, a wave of cold, wicked laughter filled the space, sending instant shivers through my body.

Adelaide gasped, her expression hardening. "We don't have much time," she said urgently, looking around. "Hold my hands."

"Who was that?" I asked, grabbing her hands. "And where am I?"

"You are in the Veil," Adelaide explained. "We are not alone here."

"What is the Veil?"

Adelaide shook her head, her grip tightening. "We don't have much time," she whispered before her eyes began glowing again.

"Wait, no—"

"You'll have to live it to understand," she cut me off, repeating the same words Aelius had spoken. "You have to understand that I didn't abandon you—I never wanted to leave you."

Abandon me?

What did she mean by that?

The light in her eyes grew even brighter until everything vanished in a blinding flash. Then, suddenly, an image appeared.

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I found myself in the woods. A group of children danced in a circle, laughing and singing a song. In the center of the circle stood a young girl with black pigtails, wearing a birthday hat—Adelaide.

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The image faded, and now I found myself in the woods again. A woman—the High Priestess, Adelaide's mom—caressed her cheeks with her hands. "Your eyes are my eyes—they are our eyes."

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It shifted again, this time to a familiar face. Adelaide stood beside Aelius, her small hand gripping his tightly as she placed a flower on a grave. My stomach turned as I read the name on the stone.

Aries—her father.

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Then it changed again. Adelaide appeared a bit older. She was on her knees as her mom hovered over her. "I didn't sent you there to fall in love with him. You were sent to report back to me," she snapped. "You're the High Priestess's daughter—a child of blood—but you've done nothing but disgrace your name!"

The loud voice of the High Priestess made me take a step back. Then the scene had changed again.

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Adelaide was screaming in the woods, holding a baby in a blanket as the ground beneath her began shaking.

Fearfully, I stepped back once more, only to find myself in yet another location. Adelaide was standing near the edge of a cliff, fear written across her face. An unknown figure stepped toward Adelaide as she stepped back, and then she tripped—falling backward.

Her screams were so loud they made my ears ring—it sounded horrifying.

Then everything went black.

"Now you will see through my eyes," I heard her whisper again before I was sent to yet another place.

I immediately noticed that I was neither in the Veil nor in the cave, but my surroundings looked familiar—too familiar.

I was standing right in the campus grounds of Starlight Academy, but it looked different—older.

It didn't take long to realize something was off.

I was at Starlight, but I wasn't supposed to be here—this wasn't my time.

But why?

I snapped my head to the gates, hearing a dull tap of a cane against stone path. It was principal Sterling and behind him was a group of girls—and at the front was someone I couldn't miss... Adelaide.

What was I doing here?