

Chapter 114

Adelaide

It was already dark when I sat on the grass, leaning against the big oak tree in the woods. Cold shivers ran through my body as I thought about the words Esther had used to describe Alaric.

The chosen one...the vessel.

What did it mean, and why hadn't Mom told me about it? The worst part was sticking to the plan and doing as I was told without knowing exactly what she was planning.

I only knew one thing. It was for the good of the witches—my people.

They were my priority, and all I had to do was follow Mom's instructions. So what was I so worried about?

After a while, I started to feel impatient, wondering if I had pushed things too far. Alaric was timid, careful—and maybe I had overestimated him, thinking he would really sneak out to meet a witch he barely knew.

Maybe it was time to consider other options, like waiting out that Elite team that Principal Sterling was planning.

At least, that's what I thought—until I heard faint footsteps rustling through the leaves. I shot my head up, and there he was.

Alaric.

He stopped in front of me, his warm blue eyes almost glowing under the moonlight. For the third time since I had met him, my stomach fluttered with that same strange feeling again—but this time, I knew I had to get it together.

I smirked. "I was beginning to think you'd bail on me."

"Of course not," he replied quickly, smiling. "Why would I?"

I smiled back, watching his every move as he sank down beside me against the tree. He respectfully kept a few inches between us.

"I—I brought you a drink," he said after a moment, holding out a bottle of water.

I laughed, taking it from him. "Safe option?"

He nodded. "Safe option."

We sat together in silence. I scooted a bit closer, our shoulders almost touching. It was time to get closer to him, and it was easier said than done. Same as in the cafeteria, his presence somehow left me speechless.

I just didn't know what to say to him because I knew there was nothing I could have in common with an isolated prince.

"Although they're not here tonight—I really don't know how you do it," I said. "With all those guards constantly watching you."

"Me neither," Alaric admitted, meeting my eyes. "What I do know is that I treasure moments like these."

He seemed comfortable and had only stuttered once.

So far, so good.

Alaric looked deeply into my eyes, and for a moment, the world stood still. That tightening feeling in my chest returned, and it drove me insane. Why was he looking at me like that in the first place?

"Why did you want to see me?"

"Because I was curious," I said simply.

He raised his brow. "Curious about what?"

"Curious about you," I replied, holding his gaze. "I want to know more about you...everything there is to know."

A flush reached Alaric's cheeks, and he scratched the back of his neck. "Well, there's not much to know—and I'm not that interesting."

"Try me."

He exhaled. "My life is...complicated, I guess. Lots of rules, expectations, and people always telling me what to do," he vented. "Sometimes, I just want to be left alone, you know?"

I nodded, letting him speak. I knew exactly what he meant. Somehow, I had convinced myself we had nothing in common—but we weren't that different after all.

I followed Mom, and he followed his dad—the Alpha King.

"Don't get me wrong," he continued. "I'm grateful for what I have, but sometimes it can get—"

"A bit lonely," I finished, earning a surprised glance. "Like everyone expects you to be this perfect leader one day, and it feels like no one cares about you—the real you without all those burdens."

Alaric seemed impressed by my ability to read him. "How do you—"

"High Priestess' daughter," I cut him off. "I'm not a princess or a future queen, but I will have to take care of a whole lot of people someday. I know what you're going through."

Alaric released a breath. "Sneaking out is out of character for me, but when you asked...I just knew I had to come."

My lips curled into a smile. "Why?"

"Because you're easy to talk to," Alaric admitted, his shoulders drooping. He lowered his eyes to his lap. "I tend to avoid others because I'm not good at talking, but I want to talk to you. I want to get to know you."

My heart melted as his words reached my ears. Those words weren't supposed to mean something, but they did. Mom had always convinced me that their kind had no interest in getting to know ours—but they had already proven her wrong more than once.

They were interested in getting to know me, yet here I was...doing her dirty work.

But it was for the good of the witches.

"You are the future Alpha King, so you should take back your power," I said, nudging his shoulder lightly.

Alaric shot me a questioning look. "How?"

"It's easy," a sigh escaped my lips as I leaned my head against the tree. "Tell this Alpha King of yours, no more isolation, no more guards, no more rules—while you're still asking nicely."

"Or else?"

"You'll rebel," I stated. "He's not just the king, he's also your dad. If he doesn't listen, you should just make him."

Alaric responded with a loud chuckle, slowly nodding his head. "No one's ever told me that before, but maybe I can try."

I wished I could have that same courage—the one I wanted him to have—but I didn't. The High Priestess would have my head for that.

Talking back to others was never an issue for me, but when it came to Mom—I was terrified.

We sat quietly for another moment before I broke the silence again. "What's your major?"

"Shifting specialist," Alaric said. "It's what I'm best at, I guess."

"Shifting, huh?" I asked, my eyes lighting up. Although I wasn't a big fan of those animals, the idea of them being able to shift into something else—something big—had always piqued my interest. "Can I see it?"

Alaric gave me a doubtful look, squinting one eye. "I don't know..."

I leaned closer, almost pressing my cheek against his. "Come on," I pouted. "Please? I've never seen a royal shift before."

He laughed uncomfortably, but the slight pride in his eyes told me he would do it if I pushed him just a bit more. "If you show me your shifted form, I'll show you something in return."

Things like that always worked. Outsiders were suckers for a glowing flower or a floating crystal.

I closed my eyes.

No, Adelaide—this is not what you're here for. Your job isn't to entertain the prince.

"Okay, I'll do it!"

My eyes opened just in time to see Alaric raise himself from the ground before brushing his hands against his pants. "I'll shift."

This was the part where I could tell him he didn't have to—but that wasn't what I wanted. Instead, I got up, preparing for whatever he wished to show me.

Alaric, who had been surprisingly confident just seconds ago, now stood awkwardly. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, giving off the same vibes as the stuttering crown prince I had grown used to.

"So, now what? How does this work?" I clapped my hands, excitedly. "Do you just...take off your clothes and start swinging around your monster c—"

He burst out laughing before I could finish, so loud that his shoulders shook. The sound caught me off guard, and I couldn't help but laugh with him. It was nice to see him like this—so carefree.

"I'm not sure your boyfriend James would like that."

"Well, he's definitely not my boyfriend," I clarified now that no one was around. "We're just close friends."

His smile faded as his expression turned to surprise. "Still, I'll spare you my monster...you know," he chuckled shyly, pointing to a bush. "Please give me a moment."