

## Chapter 118

Adelaide

“Smile!” the photographer called out.

I wrapped my arms around Claire, pulling her closer, and gave my best smile for the camera. It was the best I could do. After all, this group picture would be hanging on the walls of Lunar Hall. The bright flash went off, and for a split second, his face appeared in my mind—Alaric.

I blinked, trying to shake the thought away. His personality, his presence...there was something unique about him that I had never seen before in anyone. His glow, his kindness, his innocence—and Mom wanted me to destroy that.

It had already been a few weeks since I'd last seen him, and I had been doing everything I could to avoid him. Honestly, it wasn't that difficult. Alaric was mostly surrounded by guards, and even if he wasn't—I was sure he'd respectfully just stay out of my way.

Maybe I was insane, but I wanted to be around him—and at the same time, I knew I couldn't because I had to protect him.

Every time he was near, I could sense it somehow. It didn't make sense, but it kept happening, and I hated the feeling.

The Elite Team had already been formed, and we had been training together for a while now. It sucked going to practices for something I wouldn't even need anymore, but luckily Alaric wasn't part of it, and I hoped it would remain that way.

As for James, I was still with him a lot, but now it felt more like an obligation. Though I wouldn't need him any longer, I didn't have it in me to ditch him—despite Jane shooting me glares during training. He didn't deserve that—not when he seemed too happy whenever we were together.

I liked being around him, and I even had to admit, he had improved a bit in bed. I had misjudged him, and he'd shown me that he truly liked me—not because of some fetish, but because of me.

“Addy?” Claire's voice broke through my thoughts.

Startled, I looked at her. “Yes?”

“We can go now,” she said, pointing to the students who were beginning to leave the room.

I glanced around, realizing I had completely zoned out. Something I'd been doing a lot lately. “Right.”

Claire raised her brows. “Are you okay?”

I locked my arm with hers as I plastered a smile on my lips. “Perfect!” I dragged her along, and we started walking.

“Did I already tell you what Greg said last night?”

I sighed with a small smile. “Yes, Claire, I think you did.”

As we stepped out of Lunar Hall, Claire ignored me and continued. “He said he would drop everything and join—”

“The Bloodrose,” I interrupted. “I know. You've told me like a million times.”

Claire squealed, leaning her head against my shoulder.

She truly had it all together. Greg was simply amazing. Perfect. He'd grown up an orphan and gone through a lot of hardships, but that never stopped him from being caring, kind, and respectful. He was a good match for Claire, and I didn't mind having him around.

“We've already been talking about raising pups right after senior year,” Claire said dreamily.

“Must be nice,” I replied as we entered the main building.

“It is,” she said, beaming. “And maybe you can babysit.”

I laughed, loudly. “Me? Babysit? I wouldn't even know how to take care of a fly, so don't count on me.”

Claire nudged me playfully. “That's true.”

It wasn't that I couldn't do it—I just didn't see myself spending my time that way when I would hopefully have better things to do in the future. I had plans, ambitions, and they didn't involve bringing back a God of the underworld or taking care of Claire's tiny, drooling pups.

“Adelaide...”

I froze mid-step, closing my eyes as the familiar voice I just couldn't get out of my head reached my ears. After weeks of me avoiding him, ignoring him, he'd decided to approach me after all.

Claire and I both turned around, as did the other students in the hall, which suddenly seemed much narrower.

I could only see him.

Alaric...

His voice, as he called out my name, was loud, clear, and confident. Something out of character for him.

His blue eyes sparkled as he stood at a polite distance, staring at me—but this time, he didn't have his dozen guards glued to his side. It was just two, and they surprisingly stepped back, giving him enough space to walk closer.

No, no, please no...

That strange sensation in my veins returned, and I squinted slightly, trying to stop myself from feeling it.

Students whispered as he took determined steps, clearing the way like he'd already been crowned king.

“Wow,” Claire gasped, whispering in my ear. “Is he coming over here? What does he want with you? How does he even know you?”

So many questions, yet I didn't have a single answer.

“I... I...” I stammered, unable to turn away from his gaze.

Claire took a big gulp. “I'll catch you later. Greg's waiting anyway,” she said in a rush.

“No, wait—” I stuck out my hand to stop her, but it was already too late. She had run off.

Since he was the son of the Alpha King, the one they were supposed to worship—it was no surprise she was nervous.

Hell, I was nervous—and he wasn't even my future king.

Before I knew it, he stood in front of me. His height towered over me, and his normally gentle eyes had hardened, suddenly making him look a lot more intimidating.

I knew he had come here for answers about what happened that night, and rightfully so.

“I did as you told me. I got rid of the guards,” he began. Clearly, otherwise, he wouldn't have been here, talking to me.

“What do you want, Alaric?” I snarled, trying to maintain the cold shoulder I had given him. He didn't deserve it, I knew he didn't.

If he only knew...

“I just want to talk,” he said, raising his hand to show me he meant no harm.

I glanced around. He stood close enough for no one to hear us, but that didn't stop the students from secretly trying to listen in. Most were probably curious, wondering what their future Alpha King was doing talking to a witch.

“What is there to talk about?” I asked, folding my arms.

His face shifted slightly, like my words had hurt him. “That thing with your eyes,” he said, lowering his voice.

I stiffened, glaring at him.

“I haven't told anyone,” he added quickly.

“It was nothing,” I said flatly, trying to end the conversation before it started. “Because there's nothing to tell.”

“It was clear to me you didn't want to talk about it, and I respected that—but then...” he paused, his gaze softening. “You kissed me, and I can't stop thinking about it.”

I scoffed, forcing myself to sound unimpressed. That was the only way to get rid of him. “Don't tell me it was your first kiss.”

“And what if it was?” Alaric shot back, slightly raising his voice. He looked stressed, bothered... upset.

Of course it was his first kiss.

This guy had grown up ridiculously sheltered, couldn't even form a sentence without stuttering when we first met—and now he probably thought the kiss meant something.

Maybe it did, but it wasn't fair to either of us. Not when I knew the truth. Every time I kissed him, every time I touched him, I was feeding him darkness, and he had no idea.

“Addy,” he whispered, reaching for my hand. His fingers briefly brushed mine before I pulled it away quickly.

“Don't,” I said, peeking at the passing students. He stopped, dropping his hands to his side.

“You ran away,” he said quietly. “And I was going to respect your decision—but I don't think you realize that I can sense him on you. Smell him on you. Feel this suffocating pain in my chest when you...”

“When I what?” I snapped, irritated. “What are you talking about?”

Alaric took a deep breath, his brows furrowing in frustration. “When you lie with him,” he said. “You're hurting me, Adelaide. You're hurting us.”

Us?

Who was us?

“I wasn't sure at first because I didn't want to believe it, I don't even know how it's possible, but —”

“No,” I shook my head, fearing where this was headed.

“You're my mate, Adelaide.”

His words hit me like a blow. My eyes widened as I stared at him, trying to process what had just left his mouth.

That wasn't possible.

I wasn't a shifter. I was a witch—and we didn't do mates. I didn't even believe in mates.

The look in his eyes said it all. He believed it. Completely.

If it wasn't for Baelor, he could've convinced me—but I knew better. I must've done something to him when my eyes started glowing, and now he was convinced we belonged together.

I had to end this. I had to protect him—before it got out of hand.

“I'm a witch, and we don't do the mate thing. You're mistaken,” I said, forcing my voice to stay steady. My heart sank at the words I was about to say, but it needed to be said. “And even if you were the last guy in the universe, I wouldn't want you as my mate.”

I thought he'd back down. After all, Alaric had proven himself to be soft, timid, weak-minded. A few harsh words would be enough to make him give up, forget about this whole mate thing.

That's what I thought, but with every word I said—his expression shifted. It was replaced with something strong. There was a fire in his eyes.

“The Moon Goddess has decided, I follow her word, which means you are mine, Adelaide,” he declared, his gaze burning into mine. “You are mine to love, mine to protect, regardless of what you think or how much you try to push me away—and I know you're not familiar with the concept of love—but I'm not letting you go, and I'm not going to sit back and watch you with some other guy. You are my mate, and I'll prove it to you, no matter how long it takes.”

The word 'love' hit me deeper than I expected. He was right—I wasn't familiar with the concept, and I wasn't sure if I wanted to be. Yet the feeling in my heart after hearing him say he'd would fight for me terrified me.

This wasn't the Moon Goddess' will.

It was Baelor's...

I opened my mouth, ready to argue, throw something back at him—but the words wouldn't come. Nothing would.

The hardest part was when he didn't stick around for me to find them either. He just turned and walked off after getting everything off his chest, leaving me standing there, completely speechless.

Something told me I wasn't going to get rid of this guy anytime soon.