

Chapter 137

Adelaide

My eyes were glued to Claire, my heart pounding in my chest. How could it not when this was the friend I had worried about the most? The one whose validation I had sought the most.

Even though she was still breathtakingly beautiful with her golden hair and bright blue eyes—there was something in her gaze that I couldn't quite place.

What did Elyx mean when he said she was right?

"Elyx..." Alaric breathed, stepping past me. I followed his movements as he immediately pulled his friend into a tight embrace, still holding Violet in one arm. Surprisingly enough, Elyx reacted instantly.

"It's really good to see you, Addy," Greg sighed, stepping forward. It was good to see he hadn't lost his bright smile. His stance was a bit awkward, like he didn't know whether to hug me, shake my hand, or not to do anything at all.

From the corner of my eye, I caught Aelius sending the villagers on their way, and since they trusted his word—they all retreated, himself included. Since he had left, I knew they meant no harm.

Hesitantly, I took small steps toward Greg, but then I couldn't help myself and ran straight into his arms. Greg was still as warm as I remembered him. He lifted me off the ground, holding me close before pressing a kiss to my temple. "You're still as light as a feather."

Once he had put me down, I moved to James and Jane, who pulled me in at the same time, squeezing me tightly.

"I missed you, Addy," James murmured.

"Yes, we did," Jane said. "Don't ever scare us like that again!"

I swallowed past the lump in my throat. "I'm sorry."

Only when I finally pulled away, I turned to Claire.

She was the one I was supposed to hug first, but for some reason, I couldn't. Out of everyone, I was closest to her—and I had left without a proper goodbye. I was a horrible friend.

The hardest part was knowing she wasn't furious—because that wasn't Claire.

I took a breath, planning to speak—but then my gaze dropped to the small bump beneath her jacket.

She was pregnant...

I gasped, my eyes widening as I attacked her with a hug. Claire let out a laugh, hugging me back just as tightly.

When I pulled away, I saw the tears in her eyes.

"Wow, you're...wow," I said, shaking my head before eyeing Greg. "Did you do this?"

"I hope I did," he laughed, nervously.

"Of course, it's his," Claire added, smiling.

"And is she yours?" Jane nodded toward Violet. Her eyes still held the same curiosity they had the very first day she glared at me. "The too cool for anything, Addy, with a child—who would've thought?"

"Me," Alaric joined in, smiling proudly. "She is ours, and her name is Violet."

Elyx's gaze snapped to me and then to Alaric, like he couldn't believe what he had just heard.

"That's—"

"The name you gave our firstborn?" I finished. "Yes...we never forgot about you, any of you," I let out a breath.

He responded with an impressed chuckle, then reached for my hands. His grip felt warm and familiar, but stronger than I remembered. As Alaric greeted the others, my eyes stayed locked on Elyx.

"Two years ago, two of mine were born on the same day—just like you said would happen," he spoke. "I named them Kylan and Kayden...because I also haven't forgotten about you, Addy."

My throat tightened as I took in his words. I had expected him to yell at me, lash out, blame me—and I knew he eventually would because that was Elyx. He was not the kind of person to just let this go.

However, for now, he seemed calm, and I didn't have a problem with that.

"Why," Claire's voice cut through, barely above a whisper. "Why did you leave?"

I swallowed, not knowing how to answer. At least, not yet. "How did you find us, and why now?" I asked in return.

The air around us changed.

Everyone's faces grew more serious, and I watched as Claire exchanged a glance with Elyx.

"That's a long story," she responded.

Alaric's laughter cut through the tension. "Then I suggest we sit down and talk."

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We all sat on the floor, in the corner of the hut, in complete silence. All of this felt strange, yet so familiar. I should've been happy to see them, and believe me, I was—but something didn't feel right.

Especially not after Aelius' words, which I had not forgotten. He had said they would betray me, but I had figured today would not be that day.

I covered my worries with a smile as my eyes moved to Violet, who was sitting in Claire's lap. The two seemed comfortable with each other to the point Violet even tried grabbing her nose, the same way she would always do to Alaric.

"She is too beautiful," Claire spoke in awe.

"She is," I said back. "Now please—how did you find us?"

Claire frowned. "Remember what you once told me?"

I shook my head. "No?"

"You said that if you were ever in trouble, you'd run to your grandpa. So I tried my hardest to track you down...and I did."

I blinked, feeling my chest tighten. I had said that, and she hadn't forgotten. As expected, that was Claire.

"We didn't want to involve anyone else—so we had to figure it out on our own."

A small smile tugged at my lips. "You're stubborn," I said. "I'll give you that."

Violet squealed loudly in Claire's arms, making Jane giggle. "I think she likes you."

Claire looked down as she brushed her fingers over Violet's soft cheeks. "And I like you too, Violet."

For a moment, it got quiet again as Violet buried herself into Claire's neck.

"It suits you," Greg reached over and gently stroked her tiny head with a smile.

"Both of you," Alaric grinned.

"She looks just like you, Alaric!" Jane spoke.

James smirked. "Poor thing."

Everyone burst into laughter—everyone except Elyx, who had been pretty absent from this conversation. Quite the contrast from his intense welcome earlier.

He just sat there, silent, his expression nearly unreadable. He looked relieved but also angry and confused—it was too difficult to guess. I knew he would open his mouth, I knew it was coming—and it was only a matter of when.

"I can't wait until our little one gets here," Claire rubbed her belly with one hand. "Should be any time now."

"I can see that," I smiled sincerely. I felt genuinely happy for them, and if anyone would make great parents, it was Claire and Greg. They were the kind of people I would trust with Violet's life.

This time I turned to Elyx, hoping to involve him in the conversation. "So, how many do you have—Lixie?"

His eyes shot up, and his jaw twitched upon hearing the nickname he had once secretly loved. He seemed so different now—too serious...boring even.

"Seventh on the way," he muttered.

Well, he was definitely not wasting any time.

"And how many mistresses?"

The others chuckled under their breaths while Elyx let them be. The Elyx I once knew would've thrown a joke right back, maybe even brag a little—but now? I wasn't even sure if I knew this person anymore.

He seemed so cold, distant...

The only thing he had done that wasn't completely out of character for him was threatening to stab someone if he didn't get his way.

Whatever it was he had to say, I wished he'd just say it.

Alaric and I gave each other a look, and I could tell he sensed the tension as well.

"So the two of you?" he smoothly shifted the attention to Jane and James. "I assume you're finally together?"

"Yes, he finally stepped up," Jane nudged James, making him lower his head, smiling. It was good to see them like this, but the silence that followed was horrible.

The vibe was off...awkward, like they all had questions they hadn't asked yet.

Something just wasn't right...

I shifted, glancing between all of them. "Why are you here?"

Claire sniffed, handing Violet to Alaric. It was something she tended to do whenever she got nervous, and it turned out she still did.

"I told you. We missed you—"

"Cut the crap, Claire. You know why we're here," Elyx's tone was cold as he rudely cut her off. His gaze hardened even more as he looked at me. "We're here to take Alaric back to where he belongs—his kingdom."