

Chapter 141

Adelaide

Asking whether someone was okay was just a normal question—but deep down, I had already started panicking.

It was just words, and I hadn't meant anything by it—but the look on Claire's face sent a cold chill down my spine.

What if today was the day our friends would betray us?

What if that was the reason why Aelius acted so strangely in the temple?

"Everything is perfectly fine," Claire's voice trembled as she swallowed. She reached for Violet. "Let me hold her, please?"

I hesitated but then gently passed her over. Claire had always been careful with her. She smiled warmly and pressed a soft kiss to her forehead while Violet stared at her. The color of their eyes was nearly identical, both a beautiful shade of blue, and their blonde hair was not that different either.

Violet was a carbon copy of Alaric, but one could easily mistake her for Claire's.

My heart ached. It ached because I could tell she genuinely shared a connection with Violet, yet she would go as far as betraying me. Why?

"I know what will happen, Claire," I whispered suddenly, keeping my voice low so no one else would hear. I had always said I would let everything play out the way it was supposed to—but when it came to the friend I once called my sister, I just had to know why.

Claire froze, her grip tightening around Violet.

"I know you will betray me," I continued, watching her body stiffen even more. "And I know the decision must not have been easy... and that you will carry that guilt with you."

Claire's hands trembled as she slowly looked up at me. Her lips parted like she wanted to speak but couldn't.

"A-Addy, I-I—"

I grabbed her hand before she could continue, giving her a reassuring smile. "It's okay. Breathe."

She tried. She took a few breaths, but it didn't help much. The poor girl was terrified when she shouldn't have to be.

I wasn't angry. It was Claire, so I couldn't be. I only wanted to know why.

"You can tell me, Claire," I said, glancing at the group. Alaric was laughing with the others, still unaware of what was coming—but it had to be this way. In terms of panicking, Alaric was even worse than Claire, and I didn't want him to carry that stress with him.

"I swear to you," Claire breathed. "Greg and I—"

"Breathe," I interrupted again, brushing my thumb over her knuckles. Her eyes were watery, her chest rising and falling, and she looked seconds away from bawling. For a moment, she looked just like that same insecure girl I had met all those years ago.

"You know you mean the world to me, right?" I said.

She bopped her head repeatedly, her body still trembling.

"And so does Violet," I added. "I don't care what happens to me, but I need you to promise me that you will keep her safe."

Claire's attempt to hold back her sobs failed when a tear rolled down her cheek. Her free hand pushed Violet closer to her chest. From a distance, I caught Greg staring at us with a worried expression. Of course, he could sense it—it was the mate bond.

"Shhh," I soothed, brushing away a tear from her cheek. I tried to make it seem as if we were just sharing a heartfelt moment and gave Greg a reassuring smile, which he quickly returned before turning back to the group.

"When the Alpha King found out Alaric might still be alive, he threatened us to get him back, and Elyx told him he would," Claire admitted quietly. "And when we found out about your baby... Elyx made a deal with your mom so Alaric could return safely."

My world stopped for a second.

What did she mean?

"She promised to let Alaric be..." Claire continued, looking down at Violet in her arms. "In exchange for—"

I sucked in a breath. "In exchange for what?"

Claire didn't answer right away. All she did was look down at Violet, and then I knew what she meant.

Were they insane?

Did they really think Mom would ever let go of a healthy vessel?

"No," I whispered, feeling the air leave my lungs.

"Elyx knows Baelor isn't to be taken lightly," she murmured. "But the Alpha King made him choose, Addy—between our lives...or Alaric's return to the kingdom...and he did what he thought was best to save us."

My heart pounded so loudly I could barely hear anything else.

Not her.

Not my Violet...

I would go inside the Veil, Alaric would go inside the veil—but Violet?

"It's just for now. He said he would find a way to get her back before your mom can use her as a vessel—"

"What?"

Panic surged through me as it all started to make sense. Mom needed Alaric for the vessel, she needed me to complete the ritual—and Violet was a piece of both of us.

She was smart enough to make Elyx believe that as long as she had Violet, there would be no need for us anymore—and they were stupid enough to believe it.

"We want to tell everyone what your mom has been up to, but you have to admit—it sounds stupid. No one will ever believe us."

"And that's why you guys decided to let me choke and hand over my daughter?" I spoke flatly.

Claire took a quick breath. "I can't just go against Elyx' orders, against the Alpha King's orders—I'm a Bloodrose. I can't just..."

Out of instinct, I immediately reached for Violet, but Claire pulled back—refusing to let go.

"You have to believe me," she whispered desperately. "I love this little girl with all my heart. We all do, and I won't let anything happen to her."

I stared at her, unsure of what to say. She was telling the truth. I could feel it. Claire loved Violet like she was her own, and I had never doubted her.

It was Elyx whom I doubted. What would he gain from saving the baby whose very life he had put in danger?

Perhaps I would have to lock him up inside that Veil as well...

"I can't do much about Alaric," Claire said, her voice breaking. "But Elyx, Jane, James, Greg... we've all promised each other that we won't let your mom hurt you or Violet—"

"Just Violet, and it has to be you," I cut in. "You don't have to worry about me or Alaric, or our parents."

Claire's eyes flickered with confusion. She didn't understand, and she couldn't—because she had no idea about the Veil.

She also had no idea that everything Elyx had ever done and would do was only for himself and Lyperia. His only true obligations were to them. He didn't really care for any of us.

"This is all my fault, and I led them hear. I swear to the Moon Goddess, I will keep her safe," Claire promised. "I will protect you too, Adelaide, and I will make sure Violet gets to you until my very last breath."

I looked into her determined eyes.

"No matter what," she whispered. "I will protect her like she's my own, and the two of you will not be apart."

I squeezed her hand gratefully. She still didn't get it. She thought she was making a promise to reunite us—but she was really making a promise to protect Violet when I no longer could.

And that look in her eyes could only mean one thing.

I exhaled deeply. "They're already here, aren't they?"

Claire gave a small nod.

"They're outside the caves," she said. "The royal warriors, the Lyperians, the coven...they will strike tomorrow during the full moon—"

"So they can take back Alaric with full force, and Mom can get rid of me so she can take Violet," I finished.

Claire gave another nod, her lips pressing into a thin line. "Not all of them are good people, Addy. They are ruthless, and only have one goal—so you will have to protect the villagers, and I'll protect Violet."

I felt empty, lost because there was absolutely nothing I could do other than put my trust in her that she would keep Violet safe.

"I didn't want to do this, Addy," Claire sniffed quietly. "None of us did—not even Elyx."

Bullshit...

"He might not show it, but he still has so much love for you, and even Violet. He considered all possible options but he just...he couldn't put your happiness above that of thousands."

I took in a slow breath, letting the reality sink in.

"I know, Claire. That's what a king does." I whispered, exhausted. "I don't want you to worry about me. All I want is for you to keep Violet safe like you promised because she can't get into Gloria's hands under any circumstances."

I looked at my sweet Violet and brushed her hair, holding on to every second—because tomorrow, everything would change.

The day I had been dreading for so long was almost here.