

## Chapter 131

Adelaide

Hearing the sound of a loud gasp, my eyes immediately shot open.

Alaric's wide blue eyes locked on mine, his breathing heavy and uneven. Worried, I placed my hand on his chest as it rose and fell.

"You're okay!"

Before I could stop myself, I threw my arms around him—not caring if he would return the affection, but he did. He pulled me into a tight embrace.

My heart felt a bit more at ease, and tears pricked my eyes at the relief I felt. Alaric holding me in his arms was all I needed right now.

His hand moved to the back of my head, rubbing it like I was the one who needed comforting more than he did.

"You were never going to do it," he whispered against my hair. "You were never going to feed me any darkness."

I drew in a sharp breath, realizing what he meant. He knew—he had seen everything through my eyes, just like I wanted him to.

"Of course I wouldn't," I stated, pulling back to look at him. I wanted to meet his eyes so he could see how serious I was. "Alaric, I would never do anything to hurt you on purpose."

"I know now," he responded.

"So...you don't hate me?"

"Hate?" Alaric frowned, resting his hands on my cheeks.

He brushed his thumb against my skin. "I never hated you, Addy. I was just disappointed that you didn't trust me enough to tell me the truth."

"I know," I nodded, desperate to explain myself. "But I was only doing it to protect you. I knew if I told you, you would want to fight back because that's the kind of person you are—"

"And you're right!" Alaric blurted, giving me the answer I had feared the most. "I will fight back. I'm not letting them get away with this."

This wasn't just Alaric speaking. This was the Alpha Prince, raised to do the right thing, no matter the cost.

He tried to push himself up from the bed, but I pressed my hands against his chest, forcing him back down. "No!"

"I have to," Alaric said, his eyes burning with determination. "I need to get back home to my people, my family—who knows what vessel they'll try to use next?"

"They can't," I said in a rush. "They can't use anyone else. They'll need you, and they'll need me."

Alaric clenched his jaw, listening to my words.

"Only you are strong enough to hold that much darkness, and only my eyes are strong enough to feed that kind of darkness. That's just the way it is."

He was quiet for a second, and I hoped I had gotten through to him—but then his expression shifted again.

"I need to get back to my family and my people," he stated. "They won't let this go. Once they find out I'm missing, they'll come looking for me—and they'll put all the blame on you."

"So what?" I argued, grabbing both of his hands tightly. "I don't care what they think of me, Alaric. I don't care what anyone thinks as long as you're safe—and right now, you're safe here!"

He sighed deeply, running a hand through his hair while looking anything but convinced.

"I can't just sit here and do nothing when that thing is out there, Addy," he said, his tone final.

My heart sank as he got up from the bed and headed for the door. His steps were steady, and he seemed to have healed quickly—as expected from the Alpha Prince. Call me a bad person, but in a sense, I had hoped he wouldn't have.

It would've made everything a whole lot easier.

"Please don't leave me here!" I called after him, my voice breaking. I wasn't sure if it would change anything, but I had nothing to lose.

Alaric stopped in his tracks, then turned to face me. He looked conflicted—I could see it in his eyes. Maybe if I pushed a little harder, I could stop him from making the biggest mistake of his life.

The choice would ultimately be his because using my powers on him for my own benefit was something I wouldn't do anymore. Not to him.

"They know how much you mean to me, that they can't do anything without both of us—and they will hurt you to get to me—so please," I pleaded.

Alaric clenched his jaw. "People should know what your mother has done, what that woman... Esther, has done."

"And then what?" I shot back. "I have never asked for a lot, but now I'm asking you not to walk out on me," I added, my voice trembling. "Not when I have sacrificed everything to be with you."

My words were selfish, but I didn't care. I couldn't go on without Alaric by my side, and neither could he. We needed each other.

I brushed my finger against the gemstone of the necklace he had given me.

"I can't lose you," I sniffed quietly, though that was not my intention. I had already cried enough for a lifetime, and it was pathetic.

Alaric's eyes widened before he rushed toward me. He wiped my tears away with the back of his hand, then pulled me into his arms, pressing my head against his chest.

"I'm not leaving you, Addy."

He kissed my temple. "I'll stay here with you, and we'll figure it out together."

I closed my eyes, melting into his embrace. That was all I wanted to hear...that we would figure it out together.

Crazy enough, those words didn't make any sense because deep down, I knew there was nothing to figure out.

I had no plan, no answers...

Nothing.

Silence filled the room, until the sound of a creaking door caught both of our attention. We pulled apart, turning our heads at the same time—and there he was again.

Grandpa Aelius stood in the doorway, watching us like he knew something we didn't—and he probably did.

"Grandpa..." I breathed, nervously. "What did you see?"

I knew he wouldn't tell me anyway.

It never worked like that.

"The two of you should rest," he said calmly. "Something big is coming, and you'll need your strength. In the future, a choice will have to be made."

My chest tightened as Alaric and I shared a look.

"What choice?"

Aelius tilted his head, squinting his eyes. "I can't say," he murmured before turning away. "All I can say is that it will have to be made."