



## Chapter 342

Violet

I took a slow breath, letting the thought settle inside me. Dylan had a point. Mom and Dad...they wouldn't even have wasted their time shifting unless there were other people there to protect me. People like...

"Those who protected you must've been those they trusted," Kylan read my mind. "People who they knew would keep you safe no matter what."

Something warm moved through me, and it was surprising, considering my thought went to the man who hadn't exactly been 'friendly'.

"Grandpa Aelius..." I whispered.

If there was someone Mom and Dad trusted, it was the man who had put me into their care and given up his granddaughter. Varius was the one who gave me the box, and he had been the one to bring up Aelius, so it had to be Grandpa. Or just like Little Violet had said...two grandpas.

"Do you remember when you looked through Adelaide's eyes?" Kylan asked. "You mentioned a boy Aelius was close to...and Little Violet said she made a friend. What if it's him?"

"Jason?"

Immediately, an image of him came rushing back. The curls framing his face, his warm smile, and the way he looked down at the baby, ready to give his life if he had to, just so he could fulfill Adelaide's request.

The boy Adelaide trusted, and the boy whose mother...

My chest tightened, and I swallowed.



He had lost his mother, Angela. The woman whose kindness I still remember.

My smile faltered. "I think you're right," I said softly. "I think it could be him. Aelius, Jason...and whoever else they were with."

But then another thought crept in. That must have meant I had already met Aelius before, in the past.

There was a chance he had already met Little Violet and this version of Violet, too. He had looked me in the eyes here in the present and acted like he didn't care at all.

But that wasn't surprising for him.

Aelius was a strange man. Aelius was...Aelius. Mysterious, cryptic, strange in every possible way.

"So if we land in that time again, our priority is finding them," I said, confirming it to myself as much as to them.

Nate jumped in. "The travel from the Starlight Woods to the Bloodrose territory takes a long time. We'll never make it in time."

"I doubt they're far," Kylan shook his head. "If they've been protecting Violet all this time, it must mean they're close. They just don't want to show themselves."

"Then we'll make them," Lian suggested. "We can hold a claw to Little Violet's throat, threaten her a little?"

She shrugged like it wasn't my life she was playing with. Every single one of us turned to stare at her.



"Uh..." I whispered, squinting a single eye. A part of me wanted to be horrified, but another part, the exhausted part, kind of understood her logic. Though I had to admit, it did scare me a little. That I was willing to traumatize that little girl, just to get some answers now.

Lian lifted her hands. "If she's in danger, they'll surely show themselves. I'm not saying we should kill her...obviously, but just hurt her enough for them to show up...No offense, Violet."

"None taken?" I pulled a face.

A breath left Kylan's mouth, and he lowered his eyes to the table. "I don't think we should do that," he spoke, just above a whisper. "You should've been there when we..."

I knew what he was about to say...

When I had almost pushed Little Violet to her limit, just for some answers, but they did get us somewhere.

I was sure all of this must've been just as awkward to him.

After all, he had just gotten Greg's approval. And whether Greg knew or didn't know who we were, I doubted he would stand by this time and watch as we threatened...me.

I bit my lip, feeling the guilt crawl up my spine. It wasn't for Little Violet, but mainly for Kylan. Because while everyone kept saying Kayden, and while the stories kept circling Kayden, around whatever Baelor wanted from him...it wasn't just Kayden.

It was Kylan, too.

Two halves of one prophecy, one target.



They were Baelor's backup plan, and the choice we would make to stop him back then would've ultimately been a choice that had possibly saved my life, but had ruined him in return. Baelor knew what he was doing when he was betting on Kylan and Kayden.

And even though this would be for the good of the world, my heart ached. What if all of this were for nothing, and he would end up going after him anyway?

What if stopping the past wasn't enough to save Kylan's future?

I looked at him.

"Kylan?"

His eyes locked on mine instantly. They were sharp, attentive, and just begging for me not to say anything reckless. I gave him a small nod, even with the fear sitting in my chest.

"Whatever is necessary to stop Baelor from any evil...we will do it," I told him. "Even if I have to sacrifice myself, I will do it."

His gaze held mine for a long moment, and my heart beat in my chest as I awaited his answer.

"I actually agree with Kylan," Sora spoke, her tone soft. "I don't think you should be doing all of that to a child just for some answers."

Kylan let out a low growl, and his expression hardened as if the thought of Sora agreeing with him sounded so horrible. Then he released a small chuckle, as if he had suddenly come to terms with Lian's solution.

"Claw to your throat it is."



A laugh escaped me as he shook his head in disbelief.

"Good," I said, placing my hands on the table.

I pushed my chair back, stood, and looked at all of them. The people who had chosen me even when they didn't have to, the people I would die for if that was what the Goddess required.

Because whatever had happened in the past, I would make sure it would never happen again in the present.

"Now," I forced a smile, "let's go and end this thing."

...

Kylan dismissed the guards for the night and returned with the box, which now rested at the center of the table, all of us surrounding it. I had been so confident just moments ago and was still as determined, but I couldn't ignore the pit in my stomach.

After all, I was the one who could speak the words. Only I could open the box, and the pressure felt heavy. It was completely silent as everyone waited for me to make a move.

Sora fluttered her eyes dramatically. "I don't know what thought scares me most," she exhaled. "All of you going inside that tiny box...or me sitting alone in this dark library."

Kylan's jaw clenched. He pressed his tongue to the inside of his cheek and shot me an annoyed look. "I swear to the goddess, I will..." he muttered beside me. "This girl might be worse than Baelor."

A soft chuckle left me before I could help it, and Nate leaned forward to smile at Sora. "Your job here is very important," he told her as if he were

speaking to a child. "Our lives depend on you protecting this box, Sora."

She straightened instantly. "Right," she said. "Of course, and I will guard it with my life."

As Trinity took it upon herself to speak some more words of encouragement, I reached into my pocket and patted it quickly to make sure Kylan's ring was still there.

Little Violet wouldn't sabotage herself, and I believed her. If she said we would need it, I wouldn't challenge her words.

Now there were no more excuses left.

My heart thudded as I placed my hand on top of the box, feeling the cold beneath my palm.

"To wherever this thing will lead us," I whispered.

Kylan immediately placed his hand over mine.

Dylan added his next, then Trinity, Nate, and Lian.

I took a deep breath. "I call, I claim..."

My fingers pressed against the box. "I open."

By now, I had gotten used to the white light that burst out of the room and squeezed my eyes shut as it swallowed everything around us.

This was it.

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]: