

Chapter 355

Violet

Another crack followed, and a burning heat spread across my skin. A vague flashback hit me, and I instantly remembered. I also remembered that I didn't like the feeling of it.

Lumia was right.

This was her payback.

A gasp escaped as my fingers curled. I couldn't speak, couldn't scream, and didn't even have the time to because everything happened so fast.

'You are the one who is hurting herself. Just let go,' Lumia purred. 'Stop fighting and let me through.'

Desperate for the pain to end, I finally gave in. My body stretched, and dark fur pushed through my skin. My jaw cracked, and bones shifted until they weren't human anymore.

Lumia surged, and my senses exploded open all at once.

I heard and smelled everything. The dirt, the wind, the dark magic surrounding Esther. The beating of every raven wing as everyone continued to fight.

I felt huge, strong, and alive in a way I had never felt before.

Unlike before, Lumia and I moved as one. I had so much hope she wouldn't try to overpower or replace me.

'I behave, you behave, and there won't be any problems,' Lumia hummed.

She lifted her head and let out a loud and dominating growl. It sounded like a release of everything she had been holding inside for years.

Valerius made a rough sound in response, and I could hear the excitement rumble through his chest. 'Finally,' he greeted warmly. 'Welcome back, my love...my Lumia.'

Welcome back?

What did he mean?

Lumia bumped her snout against him. It was rough but affectionate. Then she circled him once, like she was showing off how good she looked.

While she did that, I could not help thinking that maybe this was what Kylan had been referring to when he would refer to us as 'Pup.' It was actually kind of cute.

'My Valerius is still as strong and handsome,' she said proudly. 'And now that we are in charge, we can finally get things done for once.'

A chuckle escaped before I could stop it.

'I never said you were in charge!'

I had expected Lumia to speak back as she always did, but it seemed like I wasn't her priority anymore. She didn't respond.

'Are you ignoring me?' I asked.

Valerius huffed. 'Let the Dove be, my love.'

'Don't tell me you've actually taken a liking toward her,' Lumia scoffed.

I felt annoyed, embarrassed, but also something warm because Valerius had stuck up for me. He was amazing.

But why did Lumia always find a way to get under my skin?

Even when I thought we would at least be on the same page for now? Still, it was much better than it used to be. I was actually very alert and did not feel like she would rebel and destroy everything around her just because she felt like it.

'Let's go.'

Lumia suddenly shot forward, sprinting straight toward Aelius and the children. Valerius followed beside us, his calm steps enough for his large frame to match our speed.

As we reached, Little Dylan and Little Violet stayed behind Aelius, the boy holding onto her protectively. It didn't seem like he was about to let go of her anytime soon.

"We will be okay, and I will protect you, Violet. I promise," he whispered as she buried her head against his shoulders. Valerius and Jason, who had already returned, formed a protective barrier around them.

Aelius released a long sigh. "Speak to me," he said, snapping his fingers. Lumia lowered her head immediately, and Aelius placed his hand on her dark fur, even though his eyes no longer glowed with power.

He reached out and touched Valerius as well.

'Can the two of you hear me?' he asked.

'Yes, Soothsayer,' Valerius and Lumia answered together.

Aelius nodded. 'The two of you are wiser and older than even I am. You

have faced Baelor more times than we can count.'

Confusion hit me. Earlier, I thought I must've misunderstood Valerius... but here it was again. Valerius said they were too old for this, and now Aelius was implying they had already fought against Baelor before.

How?

When?

Aelius continued, 'Unfortunately your knowledge is also a disadvantage,' he said. 'Baelor is taking a different approach this time. One, I assume neither of you has seen before.'

'It doesn't matter,' Lumia replied. 'We can still take him.'

Her voice sounded strong, like nothing could hurt her. I knew this was just Lumia being Lumia, always sure she knew best. That was part of what made her the wolf she was. As annoying as she was.

'Listen to the Soothsayer, Lumia!' Valerius growled. So even he seemed to be getting tired of her already.

'We're already on Grandpa's bad side,' I warned, backing him up. 'Please don't test him!'

Lumia released a dramatic sigh.

'Yes, Valerius,' she said, still ignoring me completely.

I was both irritated and impressed. Mostly impressed by the way she listened to Valerius without question. It was just so satisfying to experience, and I knew we would have to work on that later, so we could be on the same level, and she finally understood her place. That would be assuming I survived tonight.

'I have a new plan,' Aelius announced. 'But the plan will only work if you all do exactly as I say.'

Lumia's gaze snapped toward Esther. She was still standing at a distance, looking down while muttering words under her breath. Her hands were making symbols, symbols I had never seen before. I didn't know what spell she was casting, but the energy around her made it clear that it couldn't be any good.

Baelor was preparing something big. Something that could be the end of all of us.

He was coming for Little Violet with everything he had.

'What were you thinking, great Soothsayer?' Valerius addressed Aelius.

Aelius squinted his eyes, focusing. 'I was thinking we could catch Baelor off guard, he began. Tire him the same way he planned to tire us.'

'How?'

'He is too fixated on the younger version of Violet,' Aelius explained. 'He doesn't know what this Violet is capable of and doesn't seem to care much. So you and Lumia will attack the vessel and wear her down, he said. Push her until Baelor cannot hold the connection anymore, and the shadow will be forced to expose himself.'

Valerius made a low hum. 'And then?'

'At the very last moment,' Aelius said, turning to Lumia, 'you give control to Violet, and let her shift back. I will connect to my ancestors to get our powers back, and once we do, we will support her from afar so she can challenge him from up close. With no vessel left to return to, Baelor will try to flee toward the child. I will open a portal and trap him inside.'

What?

How many times did I have to explain that I did not know how to control my powers fully before they finally understood?

I could not match Baelor. Not after the vessel took our powers. Fighting him would be like fighting myself, and I was not sure I could win that fight.

'No, no, I can't do that!' I panicked. 'Lumia, tell him I can't do that.'

'Can we not send him into Adelaide's Veil?' Valerius suggested.

Aelius's face hardened. 'His other half is still in there, and once they unite...opening the Veil is far too risky. A single second is enough for something to escape. Look at what happened to the raven.'

I felt like throwing up. This was only one half of Baelor whom we were fighting against, and it wasn't even a fair fight.

The fact that Adelaide had done all of that on her own was something beyond praise. She truly was amazing. But she was my mom, and if she could fight a full Baelor...then maybe I could manage a half Baelor. Right?

I could hear the sulk in Lumia's voice. 'S-So I won't get to kill Baelor?'

Aelius shook his head. 'Just as I know it...the two of you must know as well,' he told her. 'Baelor never truly dies, and after what happened with the shadow beast, I do not believe killing the vessel is the right move. Times have changed, Baelor has become smarter, and he seems to have a plan.'

Valerius snorted. 'Whatever you say, Soothsayer. Lumia will shift back later so the Dove can help you seal him.'

Lumia gasped. 'I will?'

'You will,' Valerius dominated without raising his voice. He had already decided for her.

'Grandfather?' Lumia said sweetly. So now she was playing the grandpa card?

'I have just been informed by our Violet that she cannot do it,' she said. 'May I remind you that that little girl, and the present-day Violet are not cut from the same cloth?'

So she did hear me?

What was she doing?

'And are you really going to let your granddaughter shift back naked? I'm worried.'

'No, Lumia!' I fought back. 'I can do it. Tell him I can do it!'

Aelius glared at her. He was not fooled. 'An ancient wolf like you does not care about that,' he said. 'And if by chance your thinking has become more modern, I will tell you that she will still not be naked. This is a magical realm. She will shift back the same way she has shifted the first time, and because she has my blood, I know she can fight Baelor.'

Lumia let out a small, disappointed growl. 'Well, it was worth a shot.'

Valerius chuckled. 'Thinking you could fool a Soothsayer? You haven't changed one bit, my love.'

Aelius straightened. 'Relay my message, he said. The wolves must keep fighting the ravens with full force. Without Thorne and without a vessel, Baelor has limits,' he went on. 'We will protect the child with our bodies

while I reach out to my ancestors.'

'Understood,' Valerius obeyed, his purple eyes glowing brighter right before they locked onto Lumia. 'It's showtime, my moon-blessed.'

Lumia did not need to hear any more. Her fur rose slowly, and our senses grew stronger as she followed Valerius, and the two of them sprinted toward the vessel.

'My fellow Bloodroses, listen up!' she opened the mindlink. 'The Soothsayer has asked me to relay his message. Stop dragging your paws and embarrassing us. You are fighting ravens, not dragons!'

Dear Goddess...

This was not Aelius's message.

'Please fight harder, and put in a bit more effort, while we will take care of the real threat!'

The moment her voice hit the link, all I could hear was chaos. Including Trinity's, there had to be four wolves in there who were completely losing their shit.

'It's that crazy stray again! Who put you in charge? Do you know who you're talking to?'

'My paws are bleeding, what do you mean, put in more effort?'

'Please be patient with us. There are too many of them.'

'Do it yourself, bitch!'

Way to make friends, Lumia...

Lumia huffed in disbelief. 'I told them. They are disrespecting me, and I am older than all of them, Valerius.'

'Disrespect? Try living inside the crown prince for a day,' Valerius answered.

A growl came from Lumia as the distance to the vessel had almost been closed.

Esther finally lifted her head. Her red eyes snapped open and were still sharp and glowing. Red sparked at her fingertips as a wide and vicious grin reached her lips.

"Today must be my lucky day. So it is you!" A dark voice rumbled. "Valerius and Lumia!"

The ground began shaking again, her arms stretched, and then both Valerius and Lumia lunged.

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