

Chapter 356

Violet

They hit the vessel at the same time.

Lumia came from the left, while Valerius slammed his heavy weight into her from the right. I felt the impact in Lumia's bones, and the ground shook beneath us.

Esther's boots dragged through the dirt as she slid back and fought to keep her balance, laughing loudly as if nothing could break her. There were deep marks carved into the ground, but she still held on.

And if that force wasn't enough to take that thing down at least a little, I feared nothing would.

A sound tore out of the vessel that didn't belong to Esther. It sounded ancient, furious, and proud.

It was Baelor.

"After all these centuries," the voice growled, "our paths cross again, and this is all you weaklings can give me?"

I felt Lumia's fur tighten. Someone like her would never admit it, but if she had truly faced him before, she must have known too. This kind of strength was more than we could probably handle, and we had to at least weaken that thing for Aelius's plan to work.

'He appears to be stronger this time, Valerius,' Lumia warned. 'And he is not holding back.'

Valerius let out a roar. 'Then neither will we.'

His purple eyes landed on Lumia, and then they moved again. It was much faster this time. They attacked the same way as before, hitting from both sides, but it didn't work.

Esther slammed her feet into the ground again, the impact throwing both Valerius and Lumia back. Their claws dragged through the soil as they struggled to steady themselves.

'This time, I focused on the technique more than anything else, and could finally see what was happening.

Her palms had been glowing red earlier, but she wasn't pulling power from her hands.

At least not anymore.

It was like whatever thing she had just done when she was preparing herself was meant to transfer her energy to her lower body. Since it didn't make much sense, I suspected it had something to do with her not being as strong as Baelor, maybe thought, she must have been.

A witch's power came from her hands, but Esther was a witch with nothing. Summoning the shadow beast, the ravens, all of it must have cost her a lot. Even with Baelor's powers.

Baelor's vessels had weak spots, and if Esther's were her hands, then there would be no doubt about what Kayden's must be...

'Lumia!' I pushed through. 'Watch her feet. She's drawing power from either her feet or the ground. She has been without magic for such a long time. Her hands are useless!'

Lumia responded with a thoughtful hum. She wasn't completely shutting me out and was listening for a change.

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'Hmm,' Lumia murmured. 'Interesting.'

Valerius growled softly. 'The brat is trying to tell me something.'

Kylan...

'Your brat too?'

I felt like screaming. Even in the middle of all this, Lumia found her way to offend me in some kind of way.

Valerius ignored her tone. 'The crown prince says that her strength is in her feet. Instead of taking her down from each side, he suggests we strike together from one direction and target her left side. That one is the weakest.'

As expected, Kylan had noticed it too.

Lumia sighed. 'I'll admit. He's a smart kid,' she acknowledged. 'But my brat noticed it sooner.'

Really?

Since when were we comparing brats?

'Once the vessel is down, Baelor will know he's running out of time,' Valerius said. 'He'll use what he has left through her hands and send the ravens for the child,' he continued. 'We should not forget that one of them could be Thorne.'

I gasped as I remembered one small detail. 'Or that Esther is also a shifter, remember?' I told Lumia.

Eager to prove herself, there was no saying that the woman wouldn't shift after Baelor left her weak body and try to take matters into her own

hands.

'We should also not forget that—' Valerius began.

'Yeah, yeah, the vessel is a shifter,' Lumia cut in. 'Your dove has already told me. I'm not worried. Let her try to shift if she dares. I'll take her with my eyes closed.'

For someone who had been let out again after such a long time, she was way too confident. Perhaps a bit too much.

'The wolves need to be ready,' Valerius said.

'And they will be,' Lumia said calmly. 'I already told them not to embarrass me, and I'm sure they don't want to hear from me again, especially the one who referred to me as bitch.'

I couldn't help but let out a scoff.

It was very much deserved.

Valerius seemed to be good at ignoring Lumia's nagging. 'Once the vessel is down, you let the dove shift back,' he instructed. 'Then the Soothsayers will begin sealing.'

A wave of nerves hit me. The time was near when I would actually have to show up and do something again, without hiding behind Lumia's strength.

Lumia's ears flattened. 'I understand, Valerius,' she gave in, though her tone was sulky.

Meanwhile, the vessel stamped her foot again. The ground cracked beneath her and made a straight line until it reached us. She was daring them to come closer.

'What is it?' the dark voice called out again. 'Are you scared?'

Lumia purred. 'I know the Soothsayer said we mustn't kill, but please leave the toes for me,' she requested. 'I've been craving some witch meat for a while now.'

Ew?

Valerius let out a dark chuckle. 'Only if you save me a bite.'

Before I could even process those disgusting words, we lunged again, and this time it felt even faster.

'Don't go off and do your own thing, my love,' Valerius said. 'Just do as you were told.'

'Always, Valerius,' Lumia replied.

The two seemed to have a mutual understanding, which I suspected had to come from the battles they might have faced together. The ones Kylan and I definitely weren't aware of.

I felt small next to that bond, but also strangely safe inside it because I knew we were one. Me and Lumia, Kylan and Valerius...

'I'll take the other side to confuse the vessel,' Valerius said as he moved further away. 'I'll meet you behind her and pin down the vessel so the dove can take over.'

Lumia released an unimpressed grunt and kept running.

Esther's eyes shifted back and forth between the two, unsure of who to focus on. She slammed her foot into the ground again. It cracked open and chased in both directions.

Commented [Ma1]:

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Still, we didn't slow down.

Lumia danced between the cracks with a precision only she could manage. The words that came from her snout were dangerous, but at least she could back them up with her skills.

Valerius matched her moves with ease, his massive frame moving with the same control I had always recognized in Kylan.

'Feet first, and I'll pin her a second later,' he said.

'On it,' Lumia answered.

Her pace quickened. She was much faster than I remembered. Her fangs showed, and a hiss came out as she launched herself into the air with her claws stretched wide.

Esther's red eyes widened with shock, and she lifted her feet, but she didn't get the chance to stomp again.

Lumia hit her like a storm.

She wrapped her claws around Esther's legs and dragged her down with brutal force. The ground shook as the vessel hit the earth, and at the same moment, Valerius pinned her down.

'You weak vessel!' A dark growl rumbled. 'I guess I'll have to do it myself.'

Baelor...

Each time he spoke, there was just this awful chill I felt through Lumia, and I still couldn't fully tell if it was fear or excitement.

Even as Valerius tried to cover Esther's hands, she managed to make a

symbol with her fingers, and the ravens began crying. Then they suddenly shifted direction. All of them, just like Valerius had said they would.

They swarmed toward Aelius and the others.

Lurnia was also right about one thing. Nothing had to be said because everyone was already on their way.

Four wolves and two Lycans threw themselves forward as they sprinted across the Veil. They were even faster than the ravens, and the next second, they formed a wall between the birds and the others, continuing the fight with everything they had.

There were hundreds of ravens, and one of them was Thorne, just waiting for the right moment to attack.

Lurnia chuckled and tore our gazes away. She bit Esther's boot and tossed it aside with a swing of her head.

With my senses heightened, the horrible smell hit me instantly, and Lurnia gagged. It was too much even for her.

"The smell is worse than back home," Lurnia mumbled. "But I already went through all this effort to get a taste."

"What?" I blurted. "Lurnia, wait..."

But she didn't.

With one sharp bite, Lurnia dug her fangs into Esther's foot and ripped off her pinky toe.

The scream that followed was high-pitched, loud, and painful. It was really Esther, and not Baelor.

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'Bleh,' Lumia complained, spitting it out. 'Disgusting.'

Valerius howled, tightening his hold as Esther's body suddenly began to shake beneath him. 'Lumia, her eyes are fading!' he managed to get out.¹ Let the dove take over. Now!

Black smoke began appearing from Esther's mouth, and her red eyes faded back to green.

It was Baelor trying to escape.

Valerius slammed his massive claw over her mouth, basically covering her whole face as one scream separated into two, Esther's and Baelor's.

'Ready to break your bones again, Witchey?' Lumia asked.

I sucked in a sharp breath.

No...

And then I felt it.

That same familiar pull, warning me that it was time to shift back.

It was my turn again... ¹

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