

### Chapter 357

Violet

As soon as I was on my feet again, I steadied myself and didn't waste a second. I didn't think too much about it and just went for it.

The returning burn hit my eyes, and they glowed white. I turned just in time to see Aelius step forward through the small path that had been created for him. His hands lifted, and his eyes matched mine, glowing even heavier than before.

Whatever had been drained from him before was back now, which meant his plan must have worked. He had somehow borrowed strength from his ancestors.

I watched as he moved his hands in slow circles, and the air began to tear. A clear portal opened behind him, and he gave me a small nod from a distance. He was ready to seal Baelor.

A small gasp left me as my eyes snapped back to Esther, and the shadow threatening to escape from her mouth. She was still struggling and screaming beneath Valerius. His purple eyes locked on mine, and no words were needed.

Valerius was waiting.

Aelius was waiting.

And I didn't know what for, because I had never done this before...

What do I do?

My chest rose with panic, but then I took a deep breath.

Focus, Violet.

You are a child of blood. You should know what to do.

Deciding to give it a go, I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, I looked straight into Esther's.

Those green eyes widened, and then a broken gasp came from her lips.

"Adelaide," she mouthed, her voice breaking.

Adelaide?

For a split second, it was like Starlight all over again. I would never forget the day I first met her in that hall, when she had called me by a name I had never heard before. Now I knew what it meant, but she had been wrong then, and she was wrong now.

"No," I said firmly, my gaze hardening. "Violet."

I gave her no time to react as the energy rushed through my veins, forcing the shadow from Esther's mouth. A large black cloud flew into the air and tried to escape, but before it could, I pushed my eyes harder and felt myself take control of it.

The only way these eyes worked was if I did not think too much about it and simply let them do their thing.

I glanced between Aelius's portal and the shadow I managed to control with my eyes. Then I took a step back, and another. Each step was slow and careful, because I knew one wrong move was all it would take for hell to break loose, literally.

The noise was overwhelming. Esther's moans filled the air, along with the raven Morn and Dad, and my friends were still holding back with all

their strength. Still, there was only one thing that mattered to me now, the shadow.

I felt the heat of the portal as we moved closer, and it grew brighter. It responded to the darkness, ready to take it in.

It wasn't easy. My head throbbed, my vision blurred, but I didn't stop.

Not now.

Not when I was finally this close.

'You're doing well,' Aelius's voice slid into my head. 'The shadow is too close to the girl. Keep doing what you're doing, and do not let go. No matter what happens.'

"I won't," I whispered to myself. "I can do it."

The closer I got, the more the shadow fought against me. It felt like pushing something through a tornado, but I held on to that something anyway. I was still standing. Still moving.

But just when I thought it would all soon be over, fog appeared out of nowhere. It was thick and heavy, swallowing everything from the ground to the trees to the portal...

One second, the end was in sight, and the next, I couldn't see anything at all.

My breath hitched as I hoped for the best and focused on the spot where the shadow had last been. I could hear the howls break through the fog, unrecognizable and too many to count. Of course, Baelor wouldn't surrender that easily.

For heaven's sake, what was I thinking? We were talking about the god of

the underworld.

Stay focused, Violet.

Don't mess this up.

'Dove!' Valerius's voice entered. 'It looks like Thorne has revealed himself at last. Our senses are off. Sight, scent, everything. He has blinded us.'

My heart skipped.

After wearing everyone down, he had taken away the one thing they depended on.

I was well aware the raven was also not one to be underestimated, but the things Thorne was capable of? It was no joke, and something told me this would just be the start.

I heard cries, snarls, thuds...I couldn't tell anymore.

'Do not stop, Violet!' Aelius urged. 'You are almost there, and you are doing perfectly. Do not stop, my child!'

'Seal it!' Lurnia added. 'Do not disappoint me!'

I clenched my jaw and kept going. As long as everyone was still breathing, I believed Baelor was still under my control. I was almost there. Almost.

Suddenly, a new and unfamiliar roar ripped through. Then I heard a growl that raised every hair on my body.

Valerius?

What was happening?

"The witch has shifted!" Valerius roared. "Watch out!"

Esther?

A lump formed in my throat as I heard the panic in Valerius's voice. If even he was unable to keep her from shifting...

I finally understood. Whatever she lacked in magic, she made up for in this, which was why Gloria had perhaps been so drawn to her. She wasn't completely useless.

I heard movement around me and knew my friends were close. I couldn't see them, but I felt their presence. Their claws tore through the dirt, and their roars sounded strong.

"I'm right here," Valerius reassured. "We all are. Focus on your task, and we will cover you."

The sound of Esther's paws reached me. Her wolf was desperate, aggressive, and she was circling them to find an opening. She wasn't there to attack them, but to reach me. To stop this before the shadow would reach Aelius's portal.

"She's strong," Valerius growled again, this time louder. "We don't have much time!"

"I can't see where it's going!" I finally shouted, my voice cracking.

"Just like my Adelaide," Aelius said gently. "You are a daughter of nature. There is a reason why you are the chosen one, and I need you to focus. Only you can see through this."

I squeezed my eyes shut, taking in Aelius's words. He was so confident

that I didn't even bother to question him. I blocked out the noise, the fear, the fighting, the screams...all of it.

And when I opened my eyes again, the fog moved away from my sight like it was talking to me. It didn't vanish completely, but I could see through it now.

The others had formed a wide circle around me while stopping a big brown wolf, Esther, from finding her way in.

Up ahead, I saw Little Dylan covering Little Violet's body, his small frame shielding hers. Two wolves moved around them, growling, refusing to give in to the raven's threat as Thorne began losing his mind.

And then there was also the portal...

Aelius's eyes were still glowing as he held it open. Varius and Jason had a hand on his shoulder to support him. Their eyes were glowing too.

They were still giving it their all. Everyone was, and I could not stay behind.

I once again focused on the shadow and pushed to guide it to the portal.

'Foolish girl.'

My breath caught as a deep voice slid into my head.

'Do not let others pay the price for your mistake.'

The sound of it made my skin crawl. It wasn't loud or aggressive. Just deep and terrifying.

Cold spread through me, and my legs nearly gave out.

He was inside my head.

It was Baelor...

No, no.

Don't listen to him...

My teeth clenched as I forced myself to keep going.

'Has the old man told you the truth?' Baelor rumbled. 'Sealing me away always comes with a price.'

Just lock him out...

'The price is your grandfather.'

My gaze flicked to Aelius, and then my body stiffened. Only now could I see that he was visibly strained. His shoulders were trembling, his jaw was tight, and his eyes were still glowing but much duller than before. Holding the portal open was costing him everything, and I didn't know how much longer he could go on.

'He is just trying to get to you, Violet,' Lumia interrupted. 'Don't listen to him!'

'It doesn't have to be this way,' Baelor spoke. 'You are a wise girl. Let me go.'

I swallowed hard, my throat dry.

'Thorne will take my revenge if you don't release me,' he warned. 'More people will die than necessary, and I know you don't want that. I, the god of the underworld, am suggesting a truce. I will take my warriors, you will take yours, and we will let it go for today.'

A sharp pain reached my chest.

Mom...

Dad...

Was it Thorne who would kill them?

Was this the way to prevent it, and if it was...would it really be that smart to mess with the past and the present?

'I acknowledge your strength, same as I have acknowledged your mother's strength,' Baelor continued. 'You are powerful. More powerful than Valerius. More powerful than the wolf inside you.'

I froze, and with it the shadow I had been guiding in the air.

'If you do not wish to join me, and do not wish to be my vessel, then so be it,' Baelor went on. 'We will meet one day again, and I shall either convince you again, or we will end this once and for all. Just you and me, and it will be a fair fight. No one else has to die today, and no sacrifices will have to be made. You have my word.'

Sacrifices...

My gaze went back to Aelius. His breathing was harder now, more uneven. His face had gone pale...he would die soon. Varius and Jason weren't just supporting him. They were helping him stand straight so he could finish the job.

Grandpa...

