

### Chapter 358

Violet

"You're lying," I whispered. I didn't want to believe him. How could it? It was Baelor, and he knew exactly where to strike.

Just seal him, Violet...

That's all I had to do, but there was this voice in my head saying, What if?

Aelius was still alive in our time, so what if I spared him in the past so he wouldn't have to go through this hell?

"Do you not believe me?" Baelor's voice appeared again. "Look at him. Look!"

I did not want to look again, but the moment Baelor raised his voice, I flinched and my eyes betrayed me. Aelius's shoulders were slowly giving in, and he looked weaker by the second.

"Seal me away, and you will bury your grandfather with me...And your friends."

"No," I breathed. "Stop!"

"Release me," he said. "And he lives."

Lurnia called out my name, but I couldn't hear her anymore. I could barely hear myself breathe. My hands trembled as the shadow above me pulled harder, slipping slightly from my control.

Around me, the fight was still in full motion.

Claws tore into the ground, bodies slammed against each other, and it

wasn't an easy fight. The wolf my friends were fighting was still too strong, and Valerius was right. They wouldn't be able to hold her for much longer.

'I know you want this to end,' Baelor said calmly. 'So do I.'

No.

My jaw clenched, and something inside me snapped into place. After all we had gone through to get to this point, I refused to let Baelor decide how this would end.

My hands moved, this time determined. I worked hard to guide the shadow toward the portal again, giving it my all.

'Violet,' I heard Aelius's voice. It sounded weak, but so gentle. 'I am proud of you, my Violet. I am grateful to have lived long enough to see what that little girl has become.'

My eyes widened, and my breath hitched as I forced myself not to cry. He was proud of me.

'Listen to me,' he continued. 'When the vessel is empty, the witch will fall. Do not kill her as she wishes. I can't fully explain now, but do not kill her. Do you hear me?'

I swallowed. 'I understand.'

'Good,' he sighed, relieved. 'This grandfather will always love you and will always be in your heart, Violet. You will never be alone. Farewell.'

My chest burned as I listened to his words.

Words I had never expected to hear from someone as stone cold as Aelius. Words I couldn't simply accept while knowing I had the chance to save

this man's life, and had done it before, which was why I had met him. And despite everything, despite dealing with such a grumpy figure, I loved him too.

He was my family.

My blood.

My only blood.

I couldn't do this...

The shadow had almost reached its end, but then I changed my mind at the very last moment. I dropped my hands and could only stare as the shadow no longer traveled toward the portal, but freed itself and circled above us instead.

It had to be like this...

"No!" Aelius shouted, his voice echoing. My mind went numb as he kept repeating that one word.

"No, no, no!"

His voice broke, his knees buckled, and he nearly fell before Valerius, and Jason caught him. He was shocked and visibly angry.

"What did you do!" Aelius shrieked. "What did you do!"

My heart raced, but my mind was clear in a way it hadn't been all night.

I did what I had to, and I would've done it again. For him...

Because it wasn't only him I had saved, but everyone. Thorne pulled back, the wolf that had been attacking my friends stepped away, and all

the fighting stopped.

A truce...

I stared at the shadow that had found its way back toward the wolf and Thorne, hovering above their heads. I wondered how long Baelor could exist like this. Without a vessel or something to hold onto.

Would he find shelter in Esther's body again?

How would that work?

"I've made a deal with the girl, and a deal is a deal," his deep voice announced out loud. "The God of the underworld declares a truce. For now."

A shaky breath left me, followed by relief. But then he continued.

"Oh," a breath drifted through the air. "I almost forgot to mention one little thing."

My stomach dropped as I prepared myself for the worst.

"I gave you my word. These were my terms," Baelor chuckled. "Not theirs. They act on Gloria's command, and even I do not interfere with her will. As a god, I have officially declared her crazy."

No...

It all happened in a blur. Esther's wolf let out a loud howl, Thorne screeched, and then they were moving. It was too fast, and they were heading straight for the children.

Even if I wanted to move, I couldn't. Thorne had released some kind of wave that made everything feel heavy. I couldn't run, couldn't move my

legs, no one could. It was like we were all stuck.

No...

My heart beat fast as my eyes locked on the two wolves guarding the children. I had no idea where they had gotten the strength from, but even through everything, they pushed through. They defied the odds and placed themselves in front of the children without hesitation.

Little Dylan still held onto his cousin. His small arms wrapped tight around her shoulders, and he just wouldn't let go.

Valerius roared behind me, trying to break through the wave, but it wasn't working. None of us would ever be able to reach them fast enough.

It was Esther's wolf that was still running, panting so heavily I was only left to imagine the foam at her snout.

Thorne latched onto her back mid-run, and his black wings spread wide. As they closed in, the two almost flew, the wolf's paws barely touching the ground as they closed the distance.

Mom and Dad leapt into the air and hit the wolf from both sides, slamming into her with every ounce of strength. The impact was so loud, a cold chill ran through me.

A loud thud echoed as they all slammed into the dirt.

They hit the ground hard, all three bodies crashing into the earth. Loud snarls followed as they rolled across the ground, fighting at close range. It was terrible, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Thorne circled above them, screeching loudly.

Dad wrestled beneath Esther's wolf as they both fought for dominance.

He let out a growl as he went for her neck, and for a split second, it almost looked like he had her.

But Esther's wolf was too strong. Too fast.

Her head snapped sideways before her jaw closed around Dad's neck with a sound I knew I would never forget.

A loud crack.

I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. Dad's body went limp instantly and collapsed back into the dirt. All the strength had been ripped from him.

Mom took his place and lunged. She slammed into Esther's side, knocking her off balance. Once more, two wolves rolled across the ground. Mom fought to get her jaws around Esther's throat, but for the second time, the stronger wolf had the upper hand.

There was another snap...

Mom's body hit the ground beside Dad's, their wolves lying next to each other in the dirt. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't think. All I could do was stare as it went completely silent.

I was still unable to move, and I could not understand why Mom and Dad could. Was it because their love to protect me was too strong for Thorne's dark magic, or was this what Esther wanted?

Maybe they let them move so they could fight back, knowing they could never defeat her.

Esther's wolf pushed herself up and turned around. I could see the blood dripping from her muzzle. Instead of going after the little girl, she decided to retreat.

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Her movements were uneven, shaky, and there was no more energy left. Whatever injury she had sustained in those final moments had done real damage. Her claws scraped against the ground in one final attempt to move, but then she collapsed hard onto her side, struggling to breathe.

It was only when she hit the ground that the world seemed to move again, and the heavy weight beneath my soles finally disappeared.

"No!" A scream ripped from little Violet's chest. It was painful to hear because that was the moment her entire world shattered.

Sobs escaped her as she tried to reach them.

"Mommy! Daddy!"

Little Dylan caught her from behind, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Violet!" he called, his own face twisting as he tried to hold her back.

"No, please!" she cried, fighting him. "You can't leave me, Daddy!"

Cold air brushed past my skin as Valerius moved. He ran forward with a speed I hadn't seen before, and another wolf sprinted right behind him.

Dylan...

I stood frozen, still refusing to move as I watched them race past me. My mind was not ready to understand what my eyes were seeing. Everything happened too fast. I had never meant for any of this to happen.

"No," I whispered. "No..."

I didn't know how I managed to move at all, but my legs felt like jelly as I stumbled forward until I reached them. When I truly saw the damage that lay in front of me, my legs gave out, and I dropped to my knees.

They had already shifted back, and two human bodies lay where the wolves had been. Their necks were torn open, blood soaking into the earth beneath them.

I gasped for air, wrapping my hand around my throat. I was unable to breathe, and knowing the part I had played in all of this, I wasn't even sure whether I wanted to. If I deserved to.

This was the part where I was supposed to bawl, cry, sob, but I couldn't. I couldn't ruin it any further than I already had.

My hands shook as I crawled closer to take a better look at their injuries, but I already knew it wouldn't matter. They were still alive, but this wasn't something that could just be fixed.

Not by my eyes.

Not by my healing.

Not by anyone...