Chapter 360

Violet

Esther shifted back. Her fur vanished, bones reshaped, and suddenly she was human again.

The world narrowed down to one thing only, and that was Esther. I could literally smell her fear, her heart beating inside her chest as I made a run for it.

Esther crawled on her hands and knees, her body shaking as she tried to get away. She looked so small and pathetic. I was so determined to snap her neck the same way she had done to mom and dad, but when those green eyes met mine...I stopped.

My claws were in the ground as I froze in place, just watching as she tried to crawl away, dragging herself forward inch by inch while leaving a trail of blood behind her.

I could end it.

Right now.

So why wasn't I?

Deep down, I knew it had to do with how weak she looked. It would have been so much better if she had fought back, but she looked nothing like the monster I was ready to attack. She looked like someone who had already lost.

And I knew she was in fact a monster, but I just couldn't do anything...

'What are you waiting for?' Baelor snapped inside me. 'Show me how powerful we are. Do it.'

What was I waiting for?

I stepped forward again, slower this time, until my nose hovered inches from her back. She was still trying to get away. The power I felt was so incredible, I knew that if I really wanted to, I could put an end to it.

What would it feel like? To use Baelor's power?

All it would take was one bite, one snap, and then it would be over.

For mom and dad...

I raised a paw, and then a force slammed into my side. It was magic. It could only be a kind of magic.

A sneer escaped me as it yanked me away so hard I stumbled back, barely keeping my balance. I snarled, ready to tear into whoever dared to touch me.

It was Aelius who stood between Esther and me. He was barely holding on, looked extremely weak, but despite everything...he was still standing.

"I already told you," his voice rang out, "killing her would not be smart. You don't know Baelor's next move. You don't want her to become any stronger."

I growled and surged forward again. Varius and Jason were quick to join Aelius, and the three of them spread out, forming a triangle around me.

"Now!" Aelius commanded.

'Kill!' Baelor roared at the same time. It was the only thing he could say, and the only thing that mattered to him. He didn't care who. He wanted me to kill, and his power felt so dangerously addictive that I was actually willing to do it. Just to try it out.

But I didn't want to fight them...

I couldn't fight them...

All of them waited calmly because even like this, even with Baelor inside me, I couldn't take him. It wasn't exactly like I was willing to try either.

A weak howl escaped me.

'Kill!' Baelor screamed again. 'Kill, kill, kill!'

All the control I thought I held over him suddenly vanished as darkness spread through my body. My vision blurred, and my body leaned forward. Baelor would force me to charge, whether I wanted to or not. He only needed to say that one word. Kill.

The three created a shield, but I still ran. Fast and hard. I knew what I was doing, but it felt as if I had no control as I aimed straight for them.

Then a voice rang out that made everything stop for a moment.

"Violet!"

Kylan...

I froze mid-step and felt the darkness pull away. Because whenever he was on my mind, there was no darkness. Not even with Baelor present.

He was the only one able to pull at me harder than the darkness ever could. And suddenly, all I could think about, all I could feel, was him.

I didn't want to look back. I feared that if I did, he would frown at me with those brown eyes and ask me what the hell I was doing. Something which I didn't even have the answer to.

Still, I couldn't help myself and turned to look. He had shifted back and stood at a distance. Those eyes I feared would judge me only held love and warmth.

He stretched his hands, taking one careful step forward, then another. " Violet," he said softly. "I know you're angry, but if Aelius says this is not the way, then this is not the way."

'It is the way!' Baelor roared. 'Kill!'

Kylan came closer.

No...

He was right. I should listen to Aelius.

'Kill!'

Just like before, a darkness spread through my veins, but this time it had no effect. Whatever Baelor thought he was doing, he could not use it to make me hurt Kylan. I would never.

"No!"

I pushed back with everything I had and tried to shift back. A sharp ache and a painful crack tore through my body, and I felt Baelor fight against it.

'I had high hopes for you, both versions, but you might be a disappointment after all!' Baelor sneered. 'Like your mother, like your father!'

The shift back wasn't as graceful as the first time, which suddenly didn't hurt as much anymore. I felt myself go weak as the wolf faded, and I was just me again.

My legs gave out, and before I could hit the ground, two strong hands caught my head. It was Kylan who had dropped to his knees with me.

He released a small chuckle of relief as his arm wrapped around my body. "Violet..."

His words faltered as he froze, and his grip tightened.

I drew my brows, confused. "What?"

"Your eyes..."

'If you won't do the killing,' Baelor whispered, 'then I shall. In a worthy vessel of the child whose name stood next upon my list.'

Baelor was still inside of me.

No...

I wanted to shout at him to run, but as soon as my mouth opened, a black smoke poured out of me and found its way to Kylan.

Baelor's shadow...

Kylan's eyes widened just before it made its way inside his mouth. I couldn't breathe, and neither could he as the shadow traveled between us. I reached for Kylan's arm, gasping, while his face tightened as he fought for air.

It felt as if my lungs had collapsed. Kylan looked at me, his face set with determination as he managed to give me a weak nod.

"I've got you," he rasped. "Always."

Panic rushed through me.

What was he going to do?

He lifted one hand and gently wrapped it around my throat. When he gave it a little squeeze, air rushed back into me as the last bit of the shadow came out and fully entered him.

Kylan drew in a breath. His whole body jerked, his eyes flashed red, and then he collapsed.

"Kylan!" I screamed, shaking him violently.

This couldn't be true.

This couldn't be happening.

"Hold him!"

I flinched as Aelius's voice cut through. A feeling of relief rushed through me as I looked up at his face. His eyes hardened as he looked down at Kylan like he was weighing his options.

He could fix him, right?

He had to.

"Kylan!"

My stomach dropped as his body began shaking as if Baelor was either trying to take over control or tear him apart. I held onto him tightly, and before I knew it, several pairs of extra hands helped me pin him down.

Nate, Trinity, Lian, and Dylan.

They must have shifted back already without me even noticing. Their faces strained and teeth clenched as Kylan fought to be released.

"Hold him!" Aelius repeated before his hard gaze met mine. "Not you!"

My hands trembled as I removed them from Kylan's body. Did he think I was going to hurt him? I would never...

"Grandpa..."

"Palms on the ground. Now," Aelius ordered.

My mouth fell open. "W–What?"

"Do as I say," he said firmly, leaving no room for argument.

I obeyed, immediately pressing my hands into the cold soil.

"You are the reason he's in this condition, and you have already drained me of my power, child, so we will have to do this another way," Aelius said. My heart ached at the well–deserved scolding.

"Your father did you one last favor before he entered the Veil," he went on. "You, child of Alaric, have been blessed by the Moon Goddess."

The Moon Goddess...

She must have been so disappointed in me.

"Focus. No questions. Just repeat after me," Aelius instructed. "I am Violet."

I blinked at him, not sure where this was going.

"Do you want to save the boy or not?" Aelius hissed.

My voice came out strong this time. "I am Violet."

"Princess of the Common Lands," he continued. "Daughter of Alaric,

and under Lumen's light."

"I am Violet, Princess of the Common Lands, daughter of Alaric, and under Lumen's light."

"And I ask the Moon Goddess to answer my call."

My hands pressed deeper. "And I ask the Moon Goddess to answer my call."

As the last words slipped past my lips, the ground beneath my palms shook. My breath hitched as I looked around, expecting the sky to split open and the Moon Goddess herself to appear.

To my surprise, it was a squirrel that came running out of the trees.

My eyes squinted, taking in the grey fur, big eyes, and full tail that flicked around like it owned the place.

It looked an awful lot like...

"Jumpie?" I whispered.

A surprised chuckle came from behind Aelius. "Their Moon Goddess sent a...squirrel."

It was Jason, and Varius stood beside him. Varius held Thorne in his hand. The raven was completely still, asleep, his wings tucked in. Whatever Varius had done, it had worked.

Aelius cleared his throat. "Do you acknowledge this squir—"

"Yes, yes!" I breathed. "What do you need her to do?"

"Anything!" Nate urged, struggling to keep Kylan down.

Aelius gave Varius a look, and Varius gently opened Thorne's beak. The raven woke with a screech as the squirrel's eyes turned bright yellow.

Was it really Jumpie?

Since when could she do that?

I stared in shock, watching the shadow pull from Kylan's mouth straight into Thorne's.

Thank the Goddess, Kylan released a gasp as air slowly rushed back into his lungs.

Varius held Thorne steady, stroking the raven's feathers like he was calming a frightened child.

"It's okay, my poor boy," he murmured. "You're okay now."

Kylan opened his eyes, and as soon as I saw those brown eyes again, I didn't hesitate.

"Kylan!"

The lump went down my throat as I wrapped my arms around him, pulling him close. He hugged me back instantly, and I held him even tighter.

"Please," I whispered into his shoulder. "Please don't let go."

He chuckled softly. "As you can tell, I'm not going anywhere, Violet."

"Unfortunately," Dylan let out a breath, patting his back, "I thought you were dead and was just about to celebrate."

His words were met with laughter. Nate patted Kylan's back as well while

Trinity ruffled his hair. Even Lian had a bright smile on her lips.

"You're okay, Your Highness," she breathed, relief written all over her face.

I should have felt happy, but all I felt was guilt. Because this was my fault. All of it.

Breaking Aelius's seal...

Letting Baelor in...

Letting mom and dad die...

Disappointing Lumia...

"Don't do that," Kylan whispered, reading my mind. He pressed his lips to my temple. "Please don't do that."

I was going to do just that, and while doing so, my eyes drifted to Varius.

His attention was on Thorne, and a small smile was plastered on his face. He patted the raven, and I couldn't help but wonder whether this was where it had all begun for him. If watching Baelor inside my body had planted this twisted fantasy in him that we could somehow control Baelor and use him to our advantage, for our kind.

Speaking of, did that squirrel really seal Baelor inside Thorne?

"Is it over now?" Trinity asked Varius, her eyes full of curiosity. Of course, we already knew, but she was fishing for more information about his intentions.

"For now, this raven is nothing more than a raven, and Baelor is nothing more than a shadow without memories. But that will not last," he

responded. "The age of Baelor is never truly over, and once he regains his memories, he will find a way."

"He is right, Violet," Aelius nodded. His broken, exhausted eyes pierced straight through me. They were like that because of me. Because of my selfishness.

He was looking at me like whatever he saw was nothing he could be proud of, and now I knew he had carried all of it with him to the present day. It's no wonder he didn't want me inside Bloodstone Haven.

"We have two sleeping children, matters to discuss, and some other situations to take care of," he said quietly. "And then it's time for you to go home...now that all of you have learned what not to do."