Chapter 362

Violet

"Next time," I promised, although the promise was difficult to make. "I will be strong enough to do what I want to do, and no one will stop me."

"But this time," I continued, swallowing hard, "I will show you mercy."

The words tasted bitter, and saying them out loud was harder than expected. It made my throat tighten because I knew this wasn't what she deserved. Mercy...

Not after everything.

Not after mom and dad.

"I will make you forget."

Esther's breath stuttered, and her chest rose as her memories slipped away, piece by piece.

"You will forget this day," I said calmly. "You will forget all the harm you've caused my parents and their friends, and that you were Baelor's vessel. You will forget that you were ever part of his schemes...and you will wait for me at Starlight."

My teeth clenched as I leaned in closer. "And

"When we meet again, I want you to remember everything slowly and painfully. I want you to remember why I hate you so much, and I want you to remember the fate that will be waiting for you."

Her breathing slowed, and then her eyes closed. She looked way too peaceful for someone who shouldn't even be breathing.

My hand stayed against her head. I thought this would relieve me, but all I felt was emptiness. I hated her. I hated her with every single bone in my body, and I would kill her.

"Remove your hand," Aelius demanded.

I did as told and stepped back with Trinity by my side.

"Will she even survive in this state?" she asked, curiously.

Aelius let out a soft chuckle. "Oh, she will survive," he said. "She is gravely injured, yes, but her power is still very much intact, and when all of this goes away, she will wake up elsewhere because she doesn't belong here."

He always said he could feel others' energy, though I didn't quite understand how. After everything I had done today, things I never imagined I could do, I couldn't help but wonder if that was something I might one day learn to do.

I had expected him to scold me for my words, but the scolding never came. He only nodded once.

"That's how you plan revenge," he acknowledged. "Not by losing yourself or by borrowing darkness that will demand something back someday," he said. "You think...you wait, you prepare, and when the time is right, you strike."

I let the words sink in and made a promise to myself to not ever forget them. Think, wait, prepare, then strike.

"Come with me to the children."

Aelius walked ahead without waiting. I glanced at Esther one last time as she lay unconscious.

Dear Goddess, I really wanted her dead.

"Let's go," Trinity urged, tugging at my arm. Soon after, we walked right behind Aelius, and she leaned in closer.

"Varius and the raven..."

Trinity stopped mid-sentence as Aelius turned his head slightly. He wasn't even trying to hide that he could hear every word.

I lowered my voice. "I think he knows," I whispered. "But there's not much he can do. Is there?"

Trinity hummed, the question remaining unanswered. Aelius was a man who followed fate, and if it asked him to wait and watch, then that was what he would do.

As we neared the two small bodies on the ground, I did everything I could to not look past them. I didn't want to see mom and dad, and just kept my eyes fixed on the children. Because if I didn't turn my head, none of it would be real.

Aelius knelt first. "Come," he said quietly.

We joined him, and I looked down at the two children. The thing that really broke me was that they were just children, and they shouldn't have to carry the weight of what had just happened.

Little Dylan seemed to be asleep, but little Violet wasn't. Her lashes fluttered, and the wet tears were still visible on her cheeks. She had just decided to stay quiet, and seeing her...seeing me like that, broke my heart.

Her lips moved as she murmured something under her breath. I leaned closer. "What?" I whispered.

Her lips moved again. "The ring?" she asked weakly. "Do you have your ring?"

Startled, I reached for my pocket. It was still there.

"Yes," I breathed. "I do."

She nodded faintly. "I think...you might need it later. I don't know why."

She took a shaky breath. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "For the things I said to you. It was really mean, and I don't hate you."

I brushed her hair gently away from her face and smiled. "I know," I said softly. "You didn't mean it."

Speak first, regret later.

That was something that had affected me all my life.

Little Violet looked up at Aelius. "You need to help him forget," she said quickly. "Dylan. I don't want him to suffer. I know he'll blame himself, and I don't want that. Please help him forget..."

"But what about you?" I interrupted.

Even now, even like this, she was thinking of him first. She shook her head slowly, then glanced to the side to look at her cousin.

I followed her gaze, then looked back at the older Dylan who stood at a distance. His back was turned against us, and he had no intentions of turning around.

She was right.

Dylan was already beating himself up over this at this very moment, and

as annoying as he could get, as reckless and stubborn as he was, I never wanted him to lose the part of himself that made him, him. Ever.

"I don't ever want to forget what that lady did to Mommy and Daddy," little Violet whispered. "But please...protect Dylan."

Tears spilled from her eyes again, and that's when I understood. If she had remembered this moment, truly remembered it, it would have destroyed her. My life hadn't been easy, but if I had carried this with me growing up...I wouldn't have survived any of it.

Little Violet blinked up at Aelius. "You have to take me with you," she pleaded. "I want to stay with you and Jason. You have to train me."

Aelius' lips parted as if he were trying to find the right words. This was the moment where he should've picked up that little girl, stepped up, and taken care of his granddaughter, but he didn't.

I always wanted to know why, and really hoped he would now answer.

His expression shifted, and the faintest smile appeared. It was so small, it almost didn't exist at all.

"That is not your path."

Her brows pulled together. "You don't want to take care of me?" Her voice shook. "You don't love me, do you?"

I felt an ache in my chest and felt all of her pain.

Aelius inhaled slowly. "I...I...You don't know even half of what I feel for you."

My breath caught. I stared at him with a pounding heart, because for the first time since I had met him, he had almost cracked. Almost.

His gaze lingered on her too long, but I could finally feel all the love he had for her...or me.

"Then don't leave me here," little Violet said, her voice small. "Take me with you."