Chapter 364

Violet

I closed the heavy doors behind me, entering the bedroom.

Everything went quiet for just a split second before I got interrupted by the sound of my uneven breaths. I had been crying too hard for too long and didn't know how to stop.

I pressed my back against the door in an attempt to steady my breath, but it didn't help. Nothing did.

The tears kept coming anyway.

My head hurt, my heart felt like it had been ripped open, and I didn't know what to do anymore.

I had watched my parents die, just stood there and let it happen.

"No," I sobbed. No matter how many times I tried to breathe through it, the same thought kept crashing back into me, over and over again. I had made so many mistakes before.

Some bigger than the others, but I could live with most of them.

But this? Trusting Baelor?

This one had cost Mom and Dad their lives.

I paced back and forth, my hands curled into fists as another sob broke free. I covered my mouth, trying to shut down the sobs when a voice broke through.

'It isn't our fault, Violet.'

I froze, then my breath hitched. It was Lumia who had spoken to me, and her voice was so soft and gentle in a way I hadn't expected. I had been so sure she would hate me now and thought she would be angry, silent, gone ...

I thought she would abandon me again, but she didn't.

'It isn't our fault,' Lumia repeated. 'It never was.'

Hearing her words made me crack completely. I hated how much I needed to hear that, but I hated even more that I was actually trying to believe her while she was only trying to make me feel better because I let her out for once.

I also knew I had disappointed her.

'This is what Baelor does,' Lumia continued. 'He manipulates and twists things until you doubt yourself. Anyone would've fallen for it. They always do.'

Yes, maybe...

but I should've known better.

I had already seen what he was capable of through Adelaide's eyes, but still...

I felt an anger rise within me, and then an overwhelming guilt. It wasn't like I wanted to make all those mistakes. Every time I tried so hard to do the right thing, to protect the people I loved, it somehow blew up in my face.

I wiped my tears aggressively with the back of my hand. My eyes landed on the first thing in front of me.

It was a golden vase standing on the cabinet, and before I could think about it, I walked over and grabbed it. My fingers tightened around the heavy vase as my arms raised, ready to throw it to the ground.

Then the door opened. "Hey!"

Startled, I turned just in time to see Kylan step inside. His hands reached out, eyes widened as he looked at the vase in my hands. He almost flew across the room before he gently took it from me and set it back where it belonged.

A small gasp slipped past my lips.

What was I thinking? I was a guest in his room, trying to break things that did not belong to me because I couldn't control my feelings.

Kylan let out a small, surprised chuckle and gave the vase a weak pat. " What are you doing?" he asked softly, his eyes searching mine. "Violet Hastings doesn't do stuff like that. I do."

My lips trembled as I looked at him. The relief hit me so suddenly it made my head spin. I had almost lost him too due to my own actions, yet he stood in front of me, smiling.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I'm so, so sorry."

They were once again the same small, useless words I had used on Mom and Dad, but they were all I had.

I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around his waist, pressing my forehead against his chest. Kylan's arms wrapped around me instantly as I melted into his warm embrace.

"Sorry for what?" he murmured, kissing the top of my head. "I'm doing just fine. Most of all, you're still here. Everything is the same as where we

left off, and nothing has changed."

Another sob escaped me, quieter this time. His voice was so soothing that it almost convinced me none of the horrific things we had just experienced had happened.

"I love you," he whispered.

I slowly looked up at him, and he met my eyes with a soft, warm smile that made my chest ache in a different way. He moved his thumb beneath my eye to wipe away my tears. "I don't like seeing you cry."

"I know," I breathed.

He shot me a sad smile. "But if you have to let it out tonight, I understand, and I will be there with you until the end."

He took my hand and gently led me over to the red velvet sofa by the window. As we sat down together, his hand never let go of mine. Kylan shifted slightly, guiding me without a word until my head rested against his lap.

His expression remained calm as he observed my face. My breath was still hitching every now and then, but the crying had stopped. For now.

I shook my head slowly. "I don't know what to say..."

"Whatever you do, just don't push me away," Kylan replied right away. His fingers moved through my hair, carefully brushing it out of my face.

I knew I could say anything to him, and that he would always listen, but the humiliation I felt at the moment would just not go away. I felt fragile... weak.

"I really wanted to seal Baelor," I began, desperate to explain myself. "I

was going to do it, but then I started thinking about all the what ifs," I told him. "Baelor knew exactly when to slip into my mind. He said if I let him go, we could both take our people and leave until we would meet again next time, and when he promised me a truce, I…"

"You thought you could save them," Kylan finished. "I understand… Valerius understands."

"He does?"

Kylan nodded. "Anyone would have wanted to save them. They were good people," he said. "They would have protected you no matter what, and we can't let their deaths be for nothing."

An instant frown appeared on my face again. "It won't," I swallowed. "I will kill her."

Kylan squinted at me. He didn't appear to be all that convinced, and I had no idea whether he thought I wasn't capable of doing it, but I had already decided. Esther would die, and it would be by my hands.

They would all die.

Kylan released a sigh. "I was happy I got to meet them," he said. "They were kind, and I can see where your kindness comes from because they raised you well," he went on. "They were proud of you, and every version of you, Violet. I saw it in their eyes."

I stayed quiet, letting his words sink in, even though they hurt. It hurt to know that I had failed them in those very last moments and had still made them proud.

Mom knew how it would end because I had told her. She had already figured it out herself, but that didn't change anything at all. She still

stood there.

I didn't want to talk about them, didn't want to think about them because I would never, ever forgive myself for being the cause of what had happened.

My thoughts drifted back to Baelor and to how it felt when he was inside me

The surrender, and power...

"When I had him inside of me...that part scared me the most," I admitted. "Because it didn't just feel wrong. It felt...good."

Kylan's expression didn't change. The smile remained on his face, but his hand stilled for a second. "I know," he said. "I know because I felt it too... when he was inside me."

His words left a pit in my stomach. His eyes changed, and his jaw tensed.

"And that's why it can't happen again," he added. "You have to promise me, Violet."

My lips parted, but before I could respond, there was a knock on the door. "Violet?"

Nate's voice.

My head lifted immediately. "Yes. Come in!"

He must have been so worried, like everyone else. Poor Sora...

I had stormed off after a single comment, furious, but it wasn't her fault. She couldn't have known.

Nate stepped inside, closing the door behind him. He wore that familiar, kind smile, but I could still tell it didn't fully reach his eyes.

"I saw all the guards heading in the same direction," he said, worried. " And I feared you might've..." He shook his head. "I know it's stupid to ask, but are you okay?"

I gave him a small smile and extended my hand, wiggling my fingers. " Yes. Come."

Kylan chuckled and scooted over slightly, allowing Nate to sit down beside him. I shifted my weight without thinking, moving my head from Kylan's lap to Nate's. It felt natural and safe.

It wasn't like he didn't have his own stuff to deal with, but that hadn't stopped him from going with us tonight or checking up on me. He was a good friend.

"I'm still wondering what's going on with the guards," Nate commented.

Kylan shrugged. "Probably one of Kaelis's tantrums again."

"Not enough sparkles on her dress?" Nate laughed. The sound faded as he looked down at me, and his expression softened.

"Forget about the guards. What's important to me at this moment is that you're not okay, Violet," he said firmly.

My voice cracked. "I am okay."

He shook his head. "You are trying to convince yourself that you have to be okay, but I can see it in your eyes. Today was hard on all of us, but especially you."

"No, I—"

"Just listen to him," Kylan said, his tone as firm as Nate's.

I fluttered my eyes closed, obeying. It was two against one, and there wasn't much I could do.

Nate ran his hand through my hair. "Shutting down feels easier at first," he said, his blue eyes fixed on mine. "But it only hurts more later, and this isn't the first time you lost them. I am so sorry, and I know nothing I say will bring them back."

His voice went quiet. "I've lost someone too, and I handled it wrong," he said. "And now I don't want you making the same mistake. Let me help you."

My throat tightened. I closed my eyes, and a sniff came out. "How?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

Nate rested his hand on my arm. "You start by talking."