



Chapter 401

Violet

We were deep enough into the woods that the sounds of the party had faded away. The bright moon above us was our only remaining light, and when we finally came to a stop, a cold wave washed over me.

My mind did something I didn't want it to do. It went to Chrystal.

I shouldn't have cared much, but as we stood there, the memories returned and I couldn't help but think of the way we had buried her beneath the cold ground. I shook my head slightly, pushing the thought away.

Not today, and especially not now.

One of Kaelis's friends glanced over with a soft smile. "I'm so honored to experience our friend's howl," she said warmly. "And to stand beside you, royal mate."

The other girl grinned. "Me too."

I blinked, caught off guard. For a moment I didn't say anything, but then it hit me.

That's me.

I'm the royal mate.

"Yes," I said quickly, nodding a little too eagerly. "It's...it's all amazing."

My gaze shifted forward. Kaelis didn't waste any time and had already started to undress, her breaths heavy with excitement as she removed



layer after layer. First her jewelry, then the rest.

"What will be amazing," she said between breaths, throwing everything to the ground, "is when I shift back and run straight into my mate's arms while he tells me how much he loves me!"

"Mate?" I whispered, confused. That was new information. I turned my attention to her friends. "Who is her mate? Do we know him?"

"She hasn't told us yet," one said. "But she did say the Moon Goddess showed him to her in a dream," she gushed.

The other girl giggled. "And according to Kaelis, he's the most handsome man in all of Lyperia!"

A smile reached my lips. That suddenly explained a lot. Kaelis had been very excited about this howl, and it was all for a reason. She believed this would be the night where she would meet her mate.

She had hinted at it quite a lot, but it had finally become clear.

My breath hitched as I heard her bones crack, followed by a low growl that only we could hear. Kaelis's body folded, muscles stretched, and fur burst through her skin. Then Vayla emerged.

She had shifted so easily, effortlessly, and she was stunning.

Massive, elegant, and there was no doubt about her strength. Her dark fur shimmered under the moonlight, and her purple eyes glowed bright.

A royal Lycan was something else entirely, and there was no doubt about that.

Both girls breathed at the same time. "Wow.?"



Wow indeed.

I knew what a royal Lycan could be, and I had seen Valerius before, fought alongside him, but this was different. There was just something so overwhelmingly beautiful about knowing someone like Kaelis had this gem hidden deep within her.

Vayla kept her eyes on us for a second longer, wanting to be seen, and then she sprinted.

She took off through the trees and left snapping branches behind as she disappeared deeper into the forest.

"Where is she going?" I asked, still amazed.

"To the cliff. That's where she'll release her first howl!"

"The people's celebration starts after that," her friend added.

I frowned slightly. "The people's celebration?"

She smiled. "Only when Vayla's howl reaches the kingdom, when it speaks to the land and the people, are the others allowed to shift."

That was...beautiful.

She had an entire kingdom behind her tonight. All the royal children did.

Did most of them deserve it?

I had no idea, though none of them, except for Kayden, were any worse than King Elyx, but the idea behind it was just beautiful.

I looked up again, admiring the bright moon, and for just a moment, everything felt exactly as it should be before my mind ruined it.



Baelor... 1

This was the moon he had been so desperate for, and even though all of this was absolutely breathtaking, time was still moving. He would strike soon and wouldn't wait for Kaelis to finish her howl.

"How long will it take?" I asked.

The two laughed. "Not long."

"Yes. Vayla is huge and fast."

"Really fast!"

I looked between the two, doing my best to follow their conversation.

"I wish we could get a closer look," one said dreamily.

"Me too," the other agreed immediately.

I looked at them, then toward the trees where Kaelis had disappeared. There was no real explanation for why I pitied them, but even so, an idea formed in my head before I could stop myself.

"Then go," I urged. "I'll stay here and guard her...dress or whatever."

It still sounded silly.

Guarding a dress.

Both girls gasped at the same time.

"Really?" they asked together.

I nodded, smiling at the excitement written across their faces. "Yes, go!"



I said. "I'll be fine."

"Thank you, royal mate!"

One second they were there, and the next they were gone, taking off on foot and disappearing between the trees. The regret came after I realized that I was alone. It felt different without them, and a whole lot more quiet.

I nearly shrank, suddenly aware of every sound. Twigs snapped, leaves rustled, and the wind moved faster than I remembered it.

My heart started to race.

I used to be alone in the woods back home all the time, and it never scared me. I didn't have to deal with the crap I deal with now, though, so things felt simpler. I might have changed, but I wasn't as tough as I liked to pretend.

But these were just woods...

How bad could it really be?

I hugged my arms around myself, feeling an unexpected cold. Then I heard a voice.

"Child of blood."

My whole body locked as I felt unsure of what to do. I recognized that voice. The voice that haunted me, traumatized me.

Baelor's voice.

But it sounded off...



A pain reached my head, sharp enough to make me hiss. My hands reached for my ears as I squeezed my eyes shut, and then all I could hear was noise.

Clashing, growls, wolves crying out, and I didn't know where it was coming from, but I wasn't imagining it. It was real. I knew it was.

"We have to protect the Veil, Al! It's cracking!"

My breath caught.

Adelaide?

Then another voice broke through the noise.

"She's here!"

Alaric?

My eyes flew open, and then there was silence again. Everyone vanished at once.

My heart slammed against my ribs. Why were they communicating with each other, and who was she?

'Lumia,' I breathed. 'What was that?'

Lumia hummed low and slow inside me. She knew, and she did not want to say. And when Lumia kept quiet, I knew it couldn't be any good.

'Lumia?' I tried again. 'What was —'

Before I could finish, a loud howl filled my ears.

It sounded so full and powerful it shook the ground beneath my feet. I



stumbled, barely keeping my balance.

That was the first howl.

She had done it.

The echo of her howl was still hanging in the air when something brushed past me. A shadow.

It was dark, fast, and I didn't need to think about who that shadow belonged to.

Baelor... 1

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