

## Chapter 406

Violet

I moved before I could think.

My hands lifted as I reached for the shadow, and a surge of energy flowed from my fingertips, wrapping around it like a thread.

I pushed the shadow toward Thorne, and for a moment, I was actually hopeful. All I had to do was lead it to Thorne's beak, and I gave it everything I had, but nothing changed.

The shadow was somewhat in my control, but it wasn't moving toward Thorne. Instead of moving forward, it pressed back, and I knew it would only be a matter of time before it would attack.

No...

It didn't take long before I felt my power slipping and my arms trembling. The thread I had wrapped around it began to loosen, and the shadow grew stronger than it had been before.

"I'm losing it!" I gasped. "It's not working!"

I glanced at the one person I had always relied on, Kylan. I did not mean to, and I did not want to, but it was instinct by now. My mind and my soul both turned to him.

His teeth clenched, and his foot shifted, but he froze mid-step as soon as he remembered the barrier. I had been the one to tell him not to break it, no matter what, and he was right.

What would he be able to do anyway?

His eyes were locked on mine, wide and on the verge of panic.

"I can't do this!" I said, shaking my head.

"Yes, you can," he shot back immediately. "Focus!"

Focus...

'That's right. You can't do this,' the whisper returned.

Gloria's whisper...

'You are not like her. You will never be like her, and she's only using you.'

As if the pressure had not already been enough, it only grew worse. With everyone's eyes on me, my heart raced and my thoughts scattered.

"I can't—"

"You can—"

"I can't!"

Kylan's lips parted, but whatever he meant to say never came as something small and gray climbed up his body instead and made its way to his shoulder.

Jumpie...

That stubborn, unhinged squirrel who had treated Lyperia like her personal playground appeared as if she had been summoned from nowhere, and it surely wasn't me this time. Her cheeks were full of something she had probably stolen, and she climbed from Kylan's shoulder to mine.

"What?" I breathed, still fighting to hold the shadow.

Jumpie shook her head and tapped her tiny paws beneath her eyes. I frowned, trying to understand what she wanted from me. She let out a sharp little growl, as if scolding me.

I knew it meant something because she always showed up at the strangest, most important moments.

Was this another sign from the Moon Goddess?

'Close your eyes!' Lumia spoke to me. 'The rat is telling you to close your eyes!'

I didn't think twice and did exactly as told. As my eyes closed, I managed to block everything else out.

The pressure, the fear...

'And when you open your eyes, I want you to be the better version of yourself,' Lumia told me. 'The Violet from a few minutes ago who would never say something as embarrassing as, I can't do this.'

Okay.

I could do that.

I inhaled deeply and let the air fill my lungs. My heartbeat slowed, my body steadied, and the chaos I had forced upon myself faded. It was just me, my eyes, and my one purpose.

Stopping Baelor.

When I opened my eyes again, the glow was stronger. I immediately felt the power shift and become more controllable. My brows knit together, and my focus narrowed until the shadow was the only thing left in my sight.

And I was not going to let it win.

I pushed the shadow with force, and this time it felt different. The power in my eyes burned hotter, and the shadow dragged toward Thorne's open beak the same way it had when Aelius had done it.

It moved, slowly and certainly—not with ease, but it moved, and that was a good sign. I glanced at Kylan and chuckled. He returned it, Jumpie balanced on his shoulder again.

Sora's eyes closed as she stretched her arms until eventually only a small portion remained outside. The tail of the shadow twisted in the air, and that last piece was the hardest.

'You will not win,' Gloria exhaled. 'Let it go, child. It's not worth it.'

"Never," I responded, pushing harder.

'Listen to your grandmother who only wants the best for you. These people will turn against you and are not your friends.'

There it was again...

They were trying to turn us against each other. Would Gloria be inside their heads too?

Suddenly, my ears filled with voices. Too many voices, and Gloria's cut through the rest, but they were all chanting the same words.

'Lord Baelor, you who walk divided, you who will open the veil and free your other half, seek the Fourth Prince, for he is yours, marked and chosen by the ancient witches and the High Priestess, do not bind yourself, do not yield, take what belongs to you, and rise.'

My stomach twisted as the chanting went on. It was clearly a ritual, and

she was not alone.

Something didn't sound right.

Were those witches from the Veil?

No...

The voices weren't coming from one place. They were everywhere. Around us, above us, inside my skull. My focus returned as the tail of the shadow whipped from side to side, trying to slip away, but every time it struck the barrier, it jerked back.

The shield held and was too strong. It didn't stop my friends from stumbling, but they were holding on too. It wasn't just the shield but also their determination, and I could not fail them.

'Louder!' Gloria shrieked.

'Lord Baelor, you who walk divided, you who will open the veil and free your other half, seek the Fourth Prince—'

The chanting continued, doubling in volume while I doubled in strength and pushed harder. A soft groan slipped past my lips.

I caught a glimpse of Kylan's face as his mouth moved. He was saying something, but I couldn't hear him. All I could see was the fear creeping into his eyes.

He glanced away suddenly, and my gaze followed.

Dylan was shouting something I couldn't make out. His legs shifted as he tried to break formation.

What was he doing?

Trinity yanked him back just in time, shouting at him. Nate and Lian were also shouting at him, but I didn't understand what was happening. I didn't have the time to understand what was happening.

I fixed my gaze forward again and focused on the last part of the shadow.

I was almost there.

Almost...

Something warm hit my arm, and my gaze shifted down.

It was a drop.

A bright red drop.

When another drop fell and my eyes started burning, I finally realized what was happening. The blood was coming from my eyes.

My body felt too light, too weak, but as long as those chants continued and as long as the shadow wasn't sealed, I wouldn't stop. I couldn't.

I wasn't giving him the vessel he desired or anyone else for that matter. Just like Adelaide and Alaric, Mom and Dad, I would push through to protect everyone.

'He is yours, marked and chosen by the ancient witches and the High Priestess—'

I drew in one sharp breath, then forced everything out. A blinding light burst from me as I poured out the last of my strength until nothing remained. Sora screamed as she stumbled backward, clutching Thorne tight against her chest.

Then everything went silent...

The clouds dissolved, the whispers faded, the shield fell, and with it, the glow in my eyes.

Lunia let out a low chuckle. 'That's my girl,' she purred.

I blinked, taking in everyone's faces as they looked just as confused.

Was it really over?

I had done it.

Relief rushed through me so fast my knees almost buckled, and I let out a shaky breath. Everything around me spun, and the weight of how much I had taken from myself finally caught up to me.

My trembling hands fell, and my body gave out, but before I could hit the ground, two strong arms caught me from behind.

Kylan.

