Chapter 407

Violet

"How do you feel?" Kylan asked, his tone urgent. He had moved the second the shield broke.

As I searched for an answer, I saw a small blur move near his shoulder. It was Jumpie.

She bumped her tiny head against him, flicked her tail, and started squeaking. Kylan looked at her, then back at me. "That means you're okay, right?"

"I...what?"

I let my weight fall back into him and broke into laughter, still in disbelief over everything that had just happened as he pulled me closer.

The others gathered around us as Sora gently placed the calm raven back into the cage.

Jumpie rushed toward her and began circling the cage, sniffing and inspecting it like she was personally making sure Baelor stayed sealed.

I smiled and lifted my arm to wipe beneath my eyes. When I pulled it away, another streak of red marked my skin. The blood was still fresh, still there, but the burning sensation had faded.

Nate, Lian, Trinity, Dylan...they all stared at me without asking the actual question.

"I'm okay!"

Dylan suddenly dropped to his knees in front of me and pulled me into a

hug so tight my ribs compressed.

A laugh slipped past my lips. "Hello? I can't breathe!"

He didn't let go immediately. He pulled back just enough to grab my shoulders, squeezing like he needed to make sure I was still there. Then he pressed several hard kisses against my temple.

"Ew," I muttered, scrunching my face.

Dylan swallowed. "I thought you were…"

"Going to die?" I finished for him. "So did I."

It wasn't a joke. For a moment back there, I really had. My eyes met Nate's as he chuckled softly.

Lian released a relieved breath. "So you weren't kidding," she said. " When you said your eyes are more powerful than the Soothsayer's."

I gave her a soft smile. It had just been a good guess, and I couldn't help but think what would've happened if it hadn't been. If Aelius had told me to take back the knowledge so I could give my life the same way he would have.

Sure, I had been prepared to give it, no matter the cost, but it was ultimately not what I had wanted.

Still…

Something felt off, and I couldn't name it yet.

Gloria's voice, the chanting, the witches.

Had the others really not heard it?

I scanned their faces, particularly Kylan's, and when I saw his lips curl, that was enough confirmation for me that he hadn't heard it. Because if he had, there was no way he would've been smiling.

Maybe those voices had been meant only for me.

I took a slow breath and decided to let it go for now.

Baelor was sealed, and at the end of the day, that was what mattered. 1

"I think we should head back," I breathed, attempting to stand on my own. Everyone's hands reached out to steady me, but it was Kylan who helped me upright.

"Do you want to rest?" he asked immediately.

"No. I'm fine."

Which was strange. I waited for another wave of weakness or dizziness, but there was nothing.

Not even a bit.

"I actually…" I frowned slightly. "I've never felt better."

Physically, maybe I was tired.

But mentally?

It felt as if I was in a good place and something had finally clicked into position. Perhaps the realization that I wasn't weak, but exactly the person Aelius thought I was.

The one carrying the eyes of Adelaide.

"You can't head back like this, Vivi," Trinity clicked her tongue. She

walked up with a handkerchief and began gently wiping the blood beneath my eyes.

"You had me a bit worried there," she said. "I almost thought Baelor had possessed you again."

Everyone laughed, and for the first time that night, all of us seemed equally relaxed. Kylan slung his arm around my shoulder, and I looked into his brown eyes.

There was still concern there, but beneath it was something softer. Pride.

I suppose I could be a bit proud of myself too. I had just stepped into something much bigger than I thought was possible, and we were both still catching up to it.

"You're amazing," he said, his voice low enough so only I could hear. " Truly."

I shot him a small smile, unsure how to take the praise. Sora came toward us with the cage swinging in her hand and a huge smile on her face. Jumpie was now on her shoulder, though her eyes were fixed on the raven.

"The bird is actually kind of cute!" Sora announced proudly, like she had just discovered something.

When she reached us, she held out the cage to Kylan with both hands. " Here you go, Your Highness," she said. "So how did I do?"

Everyone went quiet for a second, awaiting Kylan's reaction. Sora's smile faltered slightly, and she seemed embarrassed that the question had slipped past her lips.

In my eyes, she had nothing to prove. I valued her pure heart more than

anything. That was the most important thing she carried. But at the same time, I knew how much the crown prince's acknowledgment meant to her.

Kylan hummed thoughtfully and took the cage with his free hand. "You surprised me today. It seems I may have misjudged you," he said calmly. "And call me...Kylan."

Sora beamed, bowing her head. "Thank you, Your Highness—I mean Kylan!"

We walked past her as the others laughed and teased her. But when I glanced back, I noticed it was only them, not Nate. He was lagging behind.

His hands were in his pockets, and despite everything, he was quieter than usual.

He must still have been thinking of her.

Kaelis...

The public rejection, the look on her face, and how his words had destroyed her in front of everyone.

I turned my head to Kylan, only to find he was also looking back at Nate.

Of course he was.

Kylan turned away with a quiet sigh, and his eyes found mine. I quickly pretended I hadn't noticed and simply raised my brows.

"Wonder how long things will stay quiet," he muttered.

I exhaled slowly. "So do I."

⭐ +5 BONUS

The Veil felt steady, and I couldn't sense any cracks or distortion. There was no Adelaide or Alaric inside my head, which I'm sure they would be by now if the situation were any more serious.

"Veil seems intact," I told him, sharing my thoughts. "We would've noticed by now if something was wrong."

Kylan gave a low hum, not entirely convinced. "I'd say we wait that one out."

Our analysis was cut short by loud laughter exploding behind us. Trinity was clinging dramatically to Dylan's arm while Lian nudged Sora, who still had a pink flush on her cheeks from Kylan's comment.

Jumpie darted from Sora's shoulder to Dylan's head and back again, matching their energy.

Kylan and I exchanged a look. Then we both chuckled.

A while later, the glow of the garden lights came back into view. The lanterns flickered, and music and chatter filled the air.

We had barely reached the end of the path when Dylan and Trinity slowed. She grabbed his arm and pulled him sideways with a cheeky grin.

"Well," she called loudly over her shoulder, "if my best friend didn't die and the world didn't end, I'd say we deserve to celebrate properly, and I don't think I have to explain any further what Dylan and I will be doing," she said. "You all know."

I choked on a laugh. "We didn't ask."

"Well!" she shot back. "The moon is out, and I have needs. I'm sure the two of you do too!"

+5 BONUS

Dylan waved his hand and didn't argue as she dragged him off toward the deeper part of the gardens.

Meanwhile, Sora slipped her hand into Lian's.

"We still want to shift," she said, glowing with excitement. "I'm not letting tonight end without running at least once. Goodnight, Violet... Kylan!"

As if remembering something important, she removed the ring from her finger. "This belongs to you," she said, placing it back into my palm. " Thank you."

She locked arms with Lian, and dragged her away.

And just like that, it was only the three of us left. A faint smile reached my lips. This was exactly how I had wanted it to end.

Kylan tightened his arm slightly around my shoulders. "You need to rest."

"Rest?" I asked, offended.

"Yes?" he replied flatly.

I tilted my head at him. "You made me a promise last night, and I expect you to keep it," I gasped. "You had so much to say about what you were going to do, how you were going to do it, and when!"

A chuckle left him. "You almost died tonight, Violet."

"Kylan."

Nate's voice called out. We both stopped automatically. Kylan took a deep breath, bracing himself, and then he turned us around.

We waited until Nate reached us. He stopped in front of Kylan, his eyes apologetic as they stared at each other without a word.

Something I didn't understand passed between them. Something I couldn't understand. Something between two brothers.

Whatever it was, I knew one thing.

It was heavy.

Finally, Kylan spoke. "You'll just have to do whatever you feel like you have to do," he said calmly. "I understand, and whatever you choose, I won't hold it against you. Ever."

Nate lowered his head slightly as a sad chuckle escaped him. He nodded once and turned away, walking toward the path that led to the woods.

"Where's he going?" I asked softly.

"To find Kaelis," Kylan replied, sighing deeply.

I studied his face.

Find her, and then what?

Did he want Nate to fight for her?

Did he hope he wouldn't?

Was it okay for me to pry any further?

"Have you already decided where we're going?" I asked, changing the subject.

Kylan's eyes hardened slightly as he looked down at the cage in his hand. "I need to get back first," he said. "And see Kayden..."