

Chapter 461

Violet

The team around us had already shifted and quickly filled the area, all of them going in different directions.

Lumia didn't wait. She threw her head back and released a howl louder than anyone else's, then bolted forward into the woods. Behind us, I heard him. I felt him.

Valerius.

The impact of his paws against the soil was powerful as he chased after us.

'Violet, you need to listen to me!'

Kylan's voice pushed through again. I almost felt bad hearing him call out to me. Now that we had fully sealed our bond, we didn't need Lumia and Valerius as translators anymore. We could all communicate together, and I used to think it was the best thing ever. Now I was starting to see the downside.

It was hard not to respond, but I didn't.

Lumia ran harder and faster, the wind threading through her fur as the trees blurred past us. Speed had always been her advantage, but Valerius was much larger, and as expected, it didn't take long for him to catch up.

He fell into pace beside us, his massive body moving in sync with ours as he matched every stride. A low growl rumbled from his chest. 'Lumia. Stop this, now!'



It wasn't a request. It was a demand, and this time Lumia listened. She let out a hiss and came to a halt.

I knew what she wanted. She wanted me to feel. To sense, and finally pay attention...

Valerius stood across from us, breathing heavily. His large chest puffed out as he came closer and towered over us like he was trying to prove something. I concentrated the way Lumia had been begging me to.

I reached through the bond, letting myself sink deeper than I usually did. I would usually stop at that warm feeling and just feel content, but it was different this time.

Lumia circled Valerius, giving me enough time. I felt Kyran, steady and strong like always. Undeniably Valerius. Proud and protective. That didn't come as a surprise anymore.

That was it...

That was all there should be...

No.

I had to concentrate. Lumia wanted me to find something, and I could only rest if I convinced her that there was nothing. I wasn't even sure what I was searching for.

'Can you feel it?' she asked.

I pushed further. Deeper into the parts of the bond I usually didn't touch. When I felt a cold chill go through Lumia, I knew I was right where she wanted us to be.



A third presence...

How could I have missed it?

It was locked somewhere deep within. As if it had been caged, hidden, but it was really there. It wasn't the warmth of Kylan or Valerius's protectiveness. Even worse, it wasn't any good at all. This was bad news.

It was the type of darkness that I couldn't even find the words for, and way too ancient to live inside Kylan's body. It wasn't supposed to be there.

'What is that?' I whispered.

A sigh of relief came from Lumia. 'You feel it too, don't you?' she said. 'Feel again, Violet. You know what it is.'

'Lumia!' Valerius warned.

You know what it is...

I tried once more and felt an uncomfortable feeling once I sensed it again. But the feeling of uncomfortableness...it was so, so familiar.

I couldn't place it at first. It felt familiar because I had indeed felt it before. But the only energy that felt like that was the energy of...

How could this be possible?

I felt everything sink as several flashes hit me. It was the same darkness I had felt inside the Veil, through the box of ashes, the night of the howl...

I felt him clearly.

'Baelor?'



Valerius immediately shrank back. His massive form shifted with unease, his stance faltering for the first time since I had known him. Lumia let out a dry, humorless chuckle.

'So you do feel it.'

'I do...'

'Violet...' Kylan's voice was desperate now. 'I can explain!'

Explain?

He wanted to explain...

'There is nothing for you to explain now,' Lumia spoke. She turned on her heel and bolted, even faster than before. The trees turned into nothing but blurs as she tried putting as much distance between them and us as possible.

But Valerius followed, and the closer he came, the more rage surged through me. I was confused, furious, burning with anger, but more than anything, I was in deep pain.

He lied to me.

He looked me in the eyes every single day and couldn't bring himself to tell me the truth.

Had that thing been inside him this entire time?

And what about Thorne? Did Kylan see me as a fool?

'We need to shift back. Now,' Lumia said. 'We're close to losing it. I can feel it.'



I felt it too. That burning sensation that never meant anything good. The pressure building in my skull, begging me to get out. My eyes were aching, even more than my heart.

'Violet!' Kylan kept calling. Valerius was right behind us. I could hear his paws. 'Violet, please!'

I didn't care.

I didn't care how it happened, about any of the details, the reasons, or whatever excuse he had prepared.

He had already done it, and how he had done it didn't matter to me anymore. No matter the explanation, it wouldn't change that he had taken the one thing he knew terrified me, haunted me, and put it inside his own body without any discussion.

That thing had possibly been inside him for two months, and he had said nothing.

What was his plan? To just keep it hidden forever? To let me find out like this?

'I'm ready to go back, Lumia.'

She didn't argue. The shift happened so fast and went smoother than any other shift I had ever felt before. One second, I was on four legs, the next I was standing upright, the gear attached to my body as it had never left.

The lightning emblem flickered once, then went still. Now on my legs again, I started walking faster as my hands balled into fists at my sides.

I hadn't realized I was crying until tears streamed down my cheeks. If Lumia hadn't shifted us back when she did, I don't know what would



have happened.

We all knew what would happen if I shifted while using my eyes, and I really didn't want a repeat of that. But I still didn't know enough about them or if it was even possible to activate them during an active shift. It sure felt like that was about to happen.

Behind me, I heard bones crack and knew it belonged to Kylan. Then I heard footsteps jogging to catch up.

"Violet, let's talk about this."

I let out a broken chuckle. "I don't want to talk," I said. "I'm not even sure I want to talk to you ever again."

He had caught up with me, was right behind me, but I refused to look at his face.

"Pup—"

"Don't call me that!" I whipped around to face him, my voice cracking. I met his eyes that were as soft as they had been all day. They were a bit too calm for someone who had just been caught.

Did he even realize what he had done?

What this had done to me?

That he had that same poison inside him that had ruined my life and taken my parents away from me. All four of them.

"I'm not your Pup," I spat.

His eyes widened for a split second, and the emotion I had been looking



for flickered across his face. Then it was gone.

“Okay,” he said quietly. “Violet.”

I breathed in and out, steadying myself.

“Go ahead then.” My voice shook because I wasn’t sure what I was about to hear. There was nothing to justify this. “Explain.”



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