

Chapter 481

Violet

I was so anxious, I didn't know what to do. Even Lumia had gone unusually quiet inside me.

Aelius's eyes were still on me, his face expressionless. I parted my lips, but no words came out.

What was he going to do?

Was he going to scold me for something I didn't even know I had done? Tell me he couldn't stand the sight of me, and that I should've stayed behind? My mind was already preparing me for the worst.

I braced myself for the worst, but it didn't come.

Instead, his lips slowly curled into an unexpected smile. Believing I had to be mistaken, I closed my eyes. But when I opened them again, the smile was still there.

It wasn't just any smile, but the one that reflected the warmth he showed toward Mom. His eyes were softer than I had ever seen them, and I didn't know what to do with it. I hadn't expected him to hug me, didn't know if that man was capable of doing that, but this was a lot already.

He lifted his hand and gestured behind him, into the cave. "Come in."

I looked at Kylan. He shot me a small smile and placed his hands on my shoulders to calm me. Then he walked me in slowly, the others following close behind us.

The cave was just as I remembered. Warm and cozy. Even the scent of herbs was the same. A campfire had already been prepared in the center,

with a small pot resting over the flames.

But the one place my eyes were really drawn to was the back of the cave. The tunnel that led toward Bloodstone Haven.

“Master Aelius, how did I do?” Albie asked, his voice cheerful.

Aelius smiled down at him and reached out to caress the top of his head. “You did well, Albie.”

The little boy’s face lit up, and after gave him an appreciative nod, he immediately ran off. Then he disappeared into the tunnel.

“Sit,” Aelius instructed.

We all moved without saying a word. I sat down beside Kylan, the others taking their place around the fire. But no one spoke. Not even Nate or Trinity.

I knew why.

Although they had already met him through the Box of Ashes, being this close to a Soothsayer in person was probably the kind of thing that made you forget how to talk.

He scanned all of our faces slowly as the fire flickered through the cave. “It’s good to see all of you again.”

“Dylan, Nate, Trinity...” His eyes shifted to Kylan, and he just hummed. Then he skipped right over him to look at me instead. Kylan scoffed beside me.

“And you,” Aelius nodded. “How have you been?”

How had I been?

I had to think about that one. Bad, awful, and stuck with eyes I could barely control anymore. Kian was missing, the Veil was uncertain, I had a fight with Kylan that almost destroyed me...

I swallowed. "Good."

A small chuckle escaped him. "Good..."

Then it went silent again. His eyes never left me, and I felt heat crawl up the back of my neck. He knew. Of course he knew.

Aelius didn't need to ask any of us anything to know what was going on with us. He saw it. Aelius always saw everything.

Dylan cleared his throat. "What's in the pot? Poison?"

Aelius's eyes flicked to him. "Tea," he said calmly. "Trinity had a long walk."

A flutter rolled through my stomach. "You saw that too?"

"Of course I saw that." He raised his brows.

An uncomfortable sensation traveled down to the pit of my stomach. If he had seen even that, then he had really seen all of it.

Every mistake and reckless decision I had made. The times I lost control, and cried for no other reason than being too weak. My fingers curled in my lap.

"Then..." I breathed, "you've seen that you had been right all along? About me being selfish, and—"

Aelius shook his head. "I was wrong, Child of Blood," he said. "I was wrong to call you selfish when you defied my orders to save your

grandfather's life, and I was wrong to ever doubt you when you are stronger than anyone I've ever met."

The confession left me speechless.

"I have seen everything you have done, and what you have gone through," Aelius continued. "I have seen how you have dealt with the loss of Claire and Greg, how you have helped your people, how the glow has been forced out of you, whether you wanted them or not," he said. "You have fallen, failed, and made decisions I would not have made."

His eyes held mine. "And yet...you are still standing."

A sigh left me.

"I have seen," he continued, "that my granddaughter has Alaric's heart. Adelaide's spirit...and her incredible eyes."

"But my eyes..."

The rest of what I was going to say died in my throat.

"Your eyes are tired," Aelius stated. "And that is understandable."

Tired...

Maybe that explained it.

I had relied on them a lot.

"I wanted to see how far you would get on your own," he continued. "How far you could push through, and I must say...I am impressed, Child of Blood."

His soft gaze rested on mine. "Your eyes are already at a level that takes

most of us years to reach, and many never reach it at all."

He gave me a small nod. "You have impressed me."

My eyes burned, but I managed to blink the tears away. This was everything. Every single thing I had ever needed to hear from him, and he had told me all at once.

Just one of those things would have been enough...

Kylan rested his hand behind my back. He knew how much those words meant to me, and how nervous I had been coming here.

I could also tell saying those words so openly didn't come easily to Aelius. He awkwardly cleared his throat and looked like he didn't know exactly what to do. So he pushed himself up and moved toward the pot instead.

After picking up a small wooden cup, he dipped a large spoon into the pot and filled it with the tea. He then handed it to Trinity, who accepted it with both hands. "Thank you," she said gratefully.

She didn't waste time and brought it to her lips to take a small sip. All while I still had to process all of Aelius's words.

"Wow!" Trinity's eyes widened. "This is really good!"

She immediately handed it to Dylan, who pushed it into Nate's hands instead. He eyed the cup for half a second before taking a sip as well.

His eyes lit up the same way hers had. "You're right," he said. "This is really good!"

"This tea is enough to keep you wide awake for days. It is my mother's recipe," Aelius said calmly. "You will be spending plenty of time here, so I can teach you."

Plenty of time?

I glanced up at Kylan, who had also realized what he was implying. His brows had pulled together, and he leaned slightly forward.

“What do you mean by that?”

Aelius’s eyes shifted to him slowly. The corner of his mouth twitched into a grin.

“So the boy with the devil inside of him does speak.” 

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