

Chapter 512

Violet

I stepped into his embrace, and his arms wrapped around me. They were stronger than expected.

His cloak smelled like herbs, the scent warm and welcoming. I had braced myself for it to feel odd. For my body to lock up the way it was supposed to because I guess you could say we were both on the awkward side. But it was far from it.

I closed my eyes and pressed myself a little closer against his chest. A warm flutter spread through me as I settled into the feeling.

My grandfather.

And this time, using that word felt real. It no longer felt like I was the only one searching for validation. Kylan stayed silent, giving us the space we needed as we held onto each other.

We stayed like that for a long moment, and Aelius was the one to break the silence. I felt his lips move against the top of my head. "If I have ever, even for a moment, made you feel as though this grandfather does not care for you or love you, my precious Violet, then I am truly sorry. That was never my intention."

A tight feeling reached my chest. I wanted to tell him that he was right. He had made me feel like that. There had been small moments when I had wondered if he was just tolerating my presence for Mom's sake.

If the bit of affection he would show was meant for her and not for me.

But I could never say it out loud. Not after this moment.



"I had too high expectations of you," he admitted. "From the moment I knew you would return to me again, I had been waiting for another Adelaide. You have your mother's eyes, came from her body. But Adelaide..." he paused. The tiniest breath left him. "Adelaide was raised in these woods. I helped Gloria train her eyes before she could walk and dedicated my life to teaching her."

A knot formed in my stomach, and a thousand thoughts raced through my head. I had been raised somewhere else, by people who loved me but could not give me what Bloodstone Haven would have given me.

There was always this small thought at the back of my mind about who I was and who I might have been if any of this had gone the way it was supposed to. Hearing Aelius say he had had such high expectations of me left me feeling conflicted.

I opened my mouth. "I—"

"You are not your mother, and that is fine," Aelius cut me off.

He pulled back just enough to look at me. "You are powerful in your own way. You were born inside this beautiful home, yes. But you did not grow up in it, and it is time for me to accept that," he said. "You were just a child when I last saw you, but the young woman who came back to me is not the same girl I had been picturing all those years...she is much greater than that."

He kept his eyes on mine as he nodded his head. I had forgotten about Kylan until I heard his footsteps before I caught a glimpse of him carefully heading toward the door.

"Stay."

Aelius's voice came out firm, yet his eyes were still as soft as he looked at



me. Kylan's footsteps stopped. It was obvious he wanted to give us some space, and Aelius knew I needed him here. With me.

I swallowed. "I know we've talked about it before, but that day..." I began. "When I stopped the sealing, even though you told me not to, I couldn't lose you. I was terrified of what losing you would do to the future."

I looked down for a moment. "Back then, you were the one person who still made me feel close to her. But that doesn't excuse what I did. I shouldn't have acted so selfishly."

I met his eyes again. "I know you said you understand, but I'm truly sorry for failing you that day."

"Never. You could never fail me," Aelius denied. "Look at you, Child of Blood. Standing here in front of me."

I couldn't help but chuckle. "What do you see?"

"People follow you," Aelius said. "They listen when you speak. They would lay their own lives down if you so much as asked them to because you are you...and you are so special."

A tear slipped down my cheek before I had even felt it coming. I pulled away, brushing my hand against the side of my jeans in an awkward gesture. If he got to know me better, he'd learn that I didn't do well with praise and hopefully spare me from it.

I took a few small steps back without paying much attention to where I was going until my back hit a hard frame. Kylan's body. He wrapped his arms around my waist to steady me, making me tip my head back to look at him.



'You don't want to hear it, but you are special.' Kylan linked.

My eyes wandered around the cabin, then landed back on Aelius. My voice came out small. "You should have just kept me here." I lifted a hand and gestured around the cozy space. "We could have lived here. Together."

A sad smile formed on Aelius's lips. "If I had, my child, I would have isolated you out of fear of losing you as I have lost those closest to me," he confessed. "You would have grown up inside these walls and never set foot beyond them. You would have known only me, these woods, your wolf, and that would be it," he said. "You would never have come across all of the people who love you now."

I knew he was right, and I could feel it as he was saying it. Kylan, my family, my friends, and even professors like Rochwall and Jane.

I could not imagine a version of my life that did not have any of them in it.

Aelius's smile faded just a bit. "When you reach the abandoned palace, your true powers will surge," he began. "That is the land of your royal line. Your eyes will react, and so will Lumia."

"That is great!" I beamed.

"It is," Aelius said. "But you must learn to tuck it down, Child of Blood. Eyes will be watching."

I tilted my head. "Eyes?"

Aelius let out a short laugh. "The one I felt yesterday...the one who remembered. You said that could not have been Theron Sterling."

"Yes?" I asked eagerly, urging him to continue. It would be good to get some more information on that.



"It is my theory that whoever I felt was a descendant of the same royal line as you," he continued. "Someone whose blood has remembered, but whose mind is still catching up for now. As your powers continue to grow, they will know exactly who you are." 1

A thousand faces flicked through my head all at once, and they had all disappeared within seconds. I had no idea who he was talking about.

Kylan's voice came from behind me. "So what you are saying is that there is someone else somewhere on Starlight grounds who might know who she is?"

Aelius hummed. "I am not certain," he said. "It is only a theory I have put together. But it is one I believe makes the most sense."

"A werewolf?"

"Probably, but it doesn't have to be," Kylan mentioned. "For all we know, it could be a Lycan with the same royal blood as yours."

Before I could push the thought any further, the door opened and three sets of footsteps walked in.

"Five minutes are over," Nate announced, smiling. "We counted."

"Yes!" Trinity giggled behind him. She wandered into the room with her eyes everywhere at once. Dylan was right behind her, his hands in his pockets as he glanced around as if he were already comparing it to Bloodstone Haven.

They walked in further to look around, and Aelius cleared his throat.

"I told them to give us five minutes," Aelius explained.

"I see. They must've been curious too."



"Indeed," he said. "As are the villagers, and I promise you, Child of Blood. The next time you come here, I will introduce you to every single person in Bloodstone Haven. Properly."

"Finally," I breathed out.

His smile grew gentler. "And during the trip," he said, "if you ever feel lost, close your eyes and picture this cabin, this moment, and your dad's book you stole."

My eyes widened, and my cheeks flushed in embarrassment. At least I now knew who it had belonged to.

A mocking chortle came from Kylan.

"What is right here, where you are standing, is what you are fighting for. Do not forget it."

After speaking those final words, he walked off toward the others.

A smile worked its way onto my face as he approached Trinity first. She was definitely his favorite out of the four of them.

"So...you might have some more family at school, huh?" Kylan said.

I turned to him. "Looks like it."

"Unfortunately, I doubt we can figure that out without something more to go on."

"Exactly," I shrugged. "We would basically have to look at every student...probably blonde, who was at the race."

Kylan's brow lifted. "How do you know it would be blonde?"



"Well..." I mumbled, scratching my head. "I look like my dad, my dad looks like his evil father, and his evil father looks like those two royal elders who came traveling from Elarin," I explained. "So it's just a hunch."

Kylan studied me for a moment. "That...actually makes a lot of sense."

Suddenly, a buzz went off in my back pocket. I felt Kylan's phone vibrate against me and caught the faint sound of a few more across the room. However, none of them seemed to have noticed yet.

We both pulled our phones out at the same time.

I tapped the screen open and read the name first.

'Commander Stellan Jorn

Information regarding tomorrow's expedition.'

"So he'll be coming with us...that's unfortunate." I released a huff, lifting my eyes to Kylan. 1

"So tomorrow it begins."

