



Chapter 532

Violet

I had to remind myself to breathe as my lungs forgot how to work. When Gloria stepped out of the fog, that feeling only got worse. The world began to tilt beneath my feet.

This was the monster who called herself my grandmother. The monster who was still holding Mom and Dad captive, who had even found a way to haunt us from inside and outside the Veil.

She had taunted me and orchestrated every terrible thing I had been forced to survive.

And now she stood only a few feet away.

My brain missed the signal to take a step back. I could only stand frozen in place as her dark eyes locked onto mine. Her hair blew in the wind, a wicked grin spreading across her lips. She looked like she was loving every second of it, like she'd been waiting for this exact moment for years, and it had finally arrived.

She wore a dark cloak that brushed the ground. One hand rested on her hip while the other stayed hidden behind her back. Something I didn't like at all.

"You look scared," she said.

No shit.

We were outnumbered, Kylan wasn't at his strongest, and we hadn't prepared for this ambush.



Behind me, I heard several footsteps as the others caught up. When my eye caught something shifting in the dark sky again, I suddenly remembered the one thing probably more terrifying than my own grandmother.

My breath caught.

Those massive red eyes...

Surprisingly, they started to sink. They moved toward Gloria, growing smaller as they disappeared into the fog until they ended up right beside her.

Then a body formed around them, rising out of the fog.

Kian...

I fumbled with my hand, about to press it against my chest before I stopped myself. Gloria had just told me I looked scared. Kian stepped forward until he stood at Gloria's left. His jaw was locked, his red eyes burning through the thinning fog.

Then a second figure revealed itself behind Gloria's right shoulder. My stomach dropped.

"Hmm, we found Esther," Sterling said beside me. He said her name like he was reading it off a grocery list, like he'd expected nothing else but to see her there.

Esther tilted her head. "Sir."

"I assume you will not be returning to Starlight." Sterling cleared his throat.



"I suppose not." Esther clicked her tongue, giving him a shrug. "My apologies...I suppose I never got around to submitting my resignation."

A chuckle escaped Sterling. "Please see that you do," he said sarcastically. His eyes moved past her, back to the wolves. Mine were still on Esther.

Her face hadn't changed much since the last time I saw her. Not at Starlight, but when we traveled through the Box of Ashes. Seeing her again left me with a lot of emotions, especially anger. I hadn't forgotten what she'd done to Mom and Dad...

Together with...him.

I glanced behind me, through the group, seeing Kylan, whose eyes were also still red, as red as Kian's. Unable to stand straight, he was still being supported by the others.

That awful part of Baelor was safe because he was stuck inside the mate I loved, and I wouldn't hurt him. But Esther? I could definitely do something to her.

I promised her I would. I turned my head again, my eyes sharp now as I glared at her. But any feeling of revenge immediately disappeared as more figures stepped behind Gloria.

Witches...

There were around a dozen of them.

Gloria's grin widened. "You will have to excuse the numbers, sweetheart," she said. "Grandmother does not travel light these



days.”

Apparently not...

And they looked even more eager to fight than those panting wolves waiting for a signal. I had to be realistic. We did not have the numbers or the shifters. Kylan, who was definitely needed, was not even in fighting shape.

This was going to get us killed...

My eyes drifted back to Kian, and when our gazes met, there was something in his expression I couldn't place. It wasn't anger or the sadness I'd seen in my dream. It was something I didn't want to put a name to because it didn't make sense.

Regret?

No, it couldn't be.

I tore my gaze away and quickly scanned the numbers again. Then I looked at Gloria and forced myself to speak.

"We don't want any trouble today," I said, my voice soft. "We just want to get back to the bus."

I hated myself for the way I'd said it. Pathetic. The words came out smaller than I wanted them to. When Gloria threw her head back and laughed, that was all the confirmation I needed.

"And which one of you," she cackled, "will drive?"

Her hand came out from behind her back, and she tossed something

heavy through the air. It hit the dirt in front of my boots with a thud and rolled once before it stopped.

Once my gaze dropped, a lump formed in my throat.

Oh my Goddess...

A gasp tore out of Trinity behind me, and I heard Nate and Dylan curse under their breaths. Jorn and Rochwall reacted just as strongly, Rochwall making a gagging sound.

It was the bus driver's head...

That kind, older man from earlier who had treated us kindly. His eyes were lifeless, but still wide open, the same as his mouth, as if he'd been caught in that split second before he understood what was happening to him.

This time, my hand moved to my mouth. Luckily I managed to drop it just in time so she wouldn't notice. This was what she wanted.

I lifted my head again, looking Gloria in the eye. I wasn't stupid. We were in some deep shit. If she had been able to kill an innocent man who hadn't done anything to her, I didn't even want to find out what she would do to get her hands on my eyes.

Or Kylan's. She was looking past me now, straight at him with a spark in her eyes.

"You already have Kian." My voice came out in a whisper. The sides of Kian's lips curled for less than a split second. "Isn't that enough?"

She scoffed at me. "Will you go on your knees like your father and



beg me to stop all of this? Are you that desperate?"

What?

She made Dad do...what?

My whole body began aching.

"I do not settle for half of anything when I can have the whole," Gloria went on. "I need to be certain that no one can rise against me again," she said. "Not you, not your...mate," she spat. "Not that selfish wench I birthed."

A breath left me as I turned my head toward Kylan. His red eyes were already on me, and I could see him still fighting. His shoulders shifted like he wanted to take a step, but then he'd flinch back. Because he knew he couldn't. He knew what would happen if he did.

If he moved, it would not be him doing the moving. It would be Baelor.

I forced myself to turn back to Gloria. "What do you want with our eyes?" Perhaps if I could keep the conversation going, I would come up with something to get us out of this mess.

"My eyes," Gloria corrected. "They are meant for those who are worthy. Those willing to bring this world back in order at my side," she said. "There is so much work to be done, so many heads to rip from bodies...and so few hands willing to do it."

My stomach twisted. This woman was sick, ruthless, and not much explanation was needed to conclude that there was no reasoning with someone like her. The thought of Kian had always terrified me, but Gloria? She was already too far gone.

She even had him under her spell. Kian who had been so terrifying, carried Baelor, yet he looked like her damn puppet. Goddess, at some point she even had just the shadow without the vessel under her spell. He had admitted it himself.

We had to get out of here, and quickly.

"What will it take," I asked, my voice careful, "for you to let us pass today? Just today." I didn't want to beg, but it almost sounded like I was. "Let it at least be a fair fight when we meet again. Despite everything, I want to believe you to be fair—"

"Fair?" Gloria's face twitched. "I raised your mother. Fed her, dressed her, dedicated my life to her. I was fair to her! If she had told me about you, I'd have trained you myself, raised you with her!" Her voice rose until I could hear only her over the wolves' panting. My body flinched in response. "But no...she repaid me by running off with a dog, the same dog whose kind I was trying to protect us from. The wolves have mistreated us for as long as I can remember," she growled. "I do not like the word fair, and especially not from her daughter! A dog!"

I bit the inside of my cheek, thinking. The next step was me kindly asking for my parents back, and I hadn't even gotten to that part.

Gloria sighed. "But from grandmother to granddaughter...I am willing to make you an offer," she began. "Hand me the boy...or join me yourself, and the rest of your little group will walk away unharmed... for today."