

Chapter 544

Violet

My heart sank the second Jason shook his head.

No...

He couldn't possibly tell us that we'd come all this way just to lose him right now. The words caught in my throat before I could get any of them out.

A surprised laugh slipped out of Jason. He looked up at us. "For how long has he been like this?"

"A few hours," Dylan muttered.

"This is unbelievable," Jason said, still shaking his head. "He isn't supposed to be alive anymore."

His gaze moved between Trinity and me. "Did the two of you use the technique I taught you?"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Trinity's shoulders drop, and a small smile broke across her face. "Does that mean he's still alive?"

"He's still alive," Jason confirmed, taking a breath. And every single one of us let out a breath with him. This was good.

"But barely." Jason was already moving. "We need to be quick. I believe I can save him, but not standing out here. Let's go."

I tugged Kylan's hand as we all rushed after him. Jason led the way toward the temple.

"Did you see what happened?" I asked, hurrying to keep up. "In the woods?"

He glanced over his shoulder. "I didn't see. But you can tell me all of that later."

We reached the temple steps. Rochwall carried Jorn through the entrance. Just as the rest of us moved to follow, Jason turned and lifted both hands, stopping Kylan, Nate, and Dylan in the opening.

Both Dylan and Kylan folded their arms, then frowned at Jason. It was a cold frown that would make someone step back, but Jason didn't.

"I do not want to start something," he said, looking at them. "But I need room to work, and a temple full of death weight is the last thing that man needs right now."

Kylan let out something between a chuckle and a scoff. Dylan did the same beside him. Nate was the only one who remained calm, giving him a nod. "Makes sense."

"I'll take it from here." Jason's eyes flicked to us. "With Trinity and Violet."

He had barely turned to go inside before Trinity was already behind him without any hesitation. My gaze locked onto Kylan's cold stare. There was so much I wanted to say and no time to say any of it. I hated leaving him standing out here, tired and quiet and carrying whatever he'd been carrying since everything happened.

Part of me didn't want to let him out of my sight at all after today. But

I knew I had to...for Jorn.

"I'll be back soon," I told him. I turned and followed the others in.

The temple was warm and dim, lit by rows of candles. The air smelled like fresh herbs, and in the center of the floor sat a stone. Around it, Jason had already laid everything out. Bowls of water, cloths, dried leaves.

No wonder he seemed damp with sweat. He had been preparing for this since before we even arrived.

"You knew we were coming," Trinity concluded.

Jason's lips curled. "I was just told to prepare to heal a shadow wound. That's all." He gestured toward the stone. "Lay him down here, please."

Rochwall nodded, then lowered Jorn onto the stone as carefully as he could. When he was finished, he stepped back until he had left the temple, leaving just the three of us.

"I do not have to tell him anything. A smart man," Jason grinned, taking one of the cloths. He dipped it into a bowl of water, soaking it through.

Then he lifted it and wrung it out over the wound.

A scream tore from Jorn's throat, his eyes still black as his body arched.

"Hold him down for me," Jason said calmly.

Trinity and I did as he asked, and each held down one arm until Jorn relaxed again.

He drifted in and out of consciousness. "This is normal," Jason said before we could ask. He dabbed the damp cloth against his skin. "He's responsive. That's a good sign."

None of it seemed to surprise Jason. Not the scream, not the black in his eyes. If anything, he seemed surprised only that Jorn was still alive.

"What are you doing?" Trinity asked. "Aren't you supposed to heal him using your healing powers?"

That was something I had been wondering too.

"I'm just easing the pain for now." Jason let out a chuckle.

"What kind of water is that?" Trinity asked, paying attention.

"Drawn from a spring near the temples," Jason said. "It's only used when ordinary treatment isn't enough."

He wrung the cloth out one more time and set it aside, his expression turning serious again.

"He's been in this state too long," he told us. "The shadow's had time to dig in deep, and every second it stays, it takes more of him with it. So I can't do this slowly and carefully the way I taught you in class." His eyes moved over Jorn's face. "I'll have to pull all of it out at once. As fast as I can."

He rolled his shoulders and flexed his fingers.

"It's going to hurt. More than anything he's felt today." He gave me a look. "But the pain means it's working. Whatever you hear him do, you don't stop me, and you don't let go. Understood?"

Trinity glanced my way, and I gave her a nod.

"Good." Jason planted his hands on either side of the wound. He shut his eyes, and when he opened them again, they were glowing green, brighter than before. His palms lit up, and as I looked around me, so did the rest of the temple. Whatever he was doing, whatever magic he was using for this, it was powerful.

His fingers connected with Jom's body, and that's when a loud painful sound tore out of our commander. He fought against us while Trinity and I did our best to pin him down, using every bit of strength we had left.

It had to be agony. I couldn't imagine what it felt like, something being dragged out of you by the root. Especially since Jom was not one to break easily. He had even told us off with shadow blood pouring out of him. Now he was howling.

But it seemed to be working. Thick ropes of black smoke poured out of the wound with ease. More than Trinity and I had ever managed to pull between us.

Jason's face stayed calm but focused as the darkness left Jom's skin, and the black veins in his face faded. Even his breathing, as ragged as it was at the moment, started to sound like a person again.

He was pulling in seconds what had taken us the entire bus ride and so much more.

"Can I talk to you?" Trinity asked, her eyes glued to his hands. She looked amazed. "While you work?"

"You? Always." Jason's lips curved. "Go ahead."

"How are you pulling that much at once without...fainting?" She let out a chuckle. "When I tried, it fought back the second I grabbed too much. How do you hold it?"

"Easy," Jason said with a laugh. "I have two beautiful ladies sitting in front of me, and a reputation to uphold."

I felt my cheeks grow warm, and my eyes widened as I looked at Trinity. She was less flustered and did quite the opposite. Her head tilted as a soft smile appeared on her lips, and she fluttered her lashes at him. It wasn't to get his attention. It was her way of asking what he was doing.

"You two did well," Jason praised. "I mean that. The two of you saved his life."

I looked down at Jom, his face back to normal. His chest rose and fell steadily as he breathed, and he just stared up at the ceiling. I could tell he was still in pain, but he was doing a much better job of hiding it.

"He saved mine," I said, a pained smile on my face. "He jumped in front of me and took the hit himself."

As annoying as Jom could get, and as much as it would take to get used to this man being my...cousin, I would never forget this.

"But you're right, we did do well." I let out a slow breath, then glanced

over at Trinity. "Trin especially," I said. "I didn't lose hope out there because of her. I froze, but she put her hands down and got to work. She gave it everything she had, even when her body was ready to give out on her. Seeing that motivated me to keep going."

Trinity's head turned toward me, surprise flickering across her face. "Violet?"

"Is that so?" Jason's mouth curved. His glowing green eyes settled on Trinity for a long moment.

Trinity smiled, unable to hide the admiration in her eyes. "There's a lot I want to learn from you," she admitted.

"There's a lot I'd like to teach you." His voice dropped just slightly, and his brow lifted. "It's not too late, you know," he told her.

"Late for what?" she asked.

"To stay here in Bloodstone Haven...be my apprentice," Jason said with a shrug. "I'd like that."

Trinity let out a cackle. "How about you take that up with my mate first? Violet's brother, Dylan?" she said. "And then come back to me."

Jason smirked at her, unbothered. He released a hum.

"You were right to teach us all of this," I said.

"There's still so much I don't know how to do, and I don't even want to imagine how many people will die if nobody had bothered teaching us." I looked back down at Jorn. "If it weren't for you...he'd be gone. We would have watched it happen and not known how to stop it..."

And that thought was terrifying.

Jason chuckled. "That's why I will teach you, and you can go on and teach everyone else," he said. "One healer in a cave saves the people who reach the cave. A hundred healers out there save everyone who never makes it this far."

"And if what Father Aelius and the others have seen comes to pass ... " He closed his eyes for a second. "A hundred healers will not be enough...Not a thousand. Not for what is coming."

