

Chapter 548

Violet

We came to a stop as we reached the end of the tunnel.

I gulped loudly, my gaze shifting to the side of Kylan's face. Jason had surprised me by saying that Aelius was ready to speak about the timeline of the battle, and I knew it wasn't just me.

Aelius barely 'spoke', so if he would've seen something while we were away, it must've been something serious.

A small smile tugged at my lips, though a bit of embarrassment came with it. The talk Kylan and I had out there was good. I meant all of it, every word. But I cannot live without you, out loud, to his face, had been a little dramatic, even for me.

I could admit that now. Still, I needed him to hear it, and from his reaction, I was convinced he had.

Feeling my eyes on him, Kylan tightened his grip on the cart handle and looked back at me with a soft smile of his own. I smiled wider, and so did he, until Jason let out a cough that snapped us both back to reality.

"So." He wiggled his brows.

His hand rested on the door as he looked over his shoulder. A chuckle escaped him, but it felt a little forced. Uncomfortable, almost. I wasn't sure what to make of it.

"What's with the face?" Kylan asked boldly, letting out an



uncomfortable chuckle as well.

Jason took a breath, then started talking. "I need the two of you not to fear whatever is on the other side of this." He squinted. "They have all been waiting a very long time for this moment, so it might feel a bit overwhelming."

Probably no more overwhelming than all the faces that stared at us every time we entered.

My face twisted into a frown. "Fear who?" I asked, confused.

"You'll see." He hummed, then let out a short breath. "Welcome home, Violet." His lips curved. "Officially, this time."

The green faded from his eyes. Kylan and I exchanged another puzzled glance. Then the door swung open, and bright daylight hit us.

I raised a hand to shield my aching eyes from the blinding daylight. It only took a second for everything to come into focus.

When it did, a soft gasp slipped past my lips. There was so much happening all at once that I didn't know where to look first.

"Kylan?" I reached for his hand without thinking, and by then he had already set the cart down beside him. He squinted for a better look, and when a flicker of surprise crossed his face, I knew I wasn't imagining things.

Aelius stood on a small rise, facing everyone. The others were gathered close around him. Rochwall, Dylan, Trinity, Nate, and even Sterling, who had appeared again. It was not just them, but also the villagers filling the whole space. All of them.



Every single one turned toward us, watching me and Kylan step out of that tunnel. My body went hot. Whatever this was, I wasn't ready for all of this.

My eyes lowered to my boots. "We were only gone for a little while," I mumbled to Kylan. "I don't understand what's happening."

Kylan scoffed quietly beside me. When Jason said Aelius had something to tell us, I hadn't expected him to share it with all of Bloodstone Haven. It was strange, and unlike him. It almost made me believe this wasn't an impulse. He had known all along that he was going to do this.

As I slowly looked up again, my eyes immediately searched for my friends, hoping one of their expressions might tell me what was going on here. But I got nothing. All of their faces were as unreadable as ever.

"I have an announcement," Aelius finally called out.

His eyes began to glow, the pale blue fading away. It was so quiet that we could only hear the breeze as everyone waited in anticipation.

"These eyes have seen what they have never seen before," he began. "And I will not stand here and pretend it is good news."

A wave of gasps rolled through the villagers. It was loud and full of shock, as if none of them had ever imagined Aelius would say those words. My eyes swept over the crowd, taking in the fear spreading across their faces.

If they had stayed calm, I would have too. But they didn't, and now an



uneasy feeling was climbing up my throat until I had to swallow just to breathe. Was this about to become another disaster after everything we'd already been through today?

"Our visitors have fought bravely today, and some of you have already seen it," Aelius spoke to the crowd. "Because of Violet, I have been able to see further and confirm that my Adelaide and the Alpha Prince are being held in a realm created by our enemy," he said. "They do not intend to let either of them live beyond the next eleven days. Once the ritual is complete and my Adelaide's power has been drained, their lives will no longer have any value to our enemy."

Those words drained the hope straight out of me. I felt my blood boil, balled my fist at my side. What was the meaning of this?

Not even Kylan's hand pressed against my back was enough to calm me.

"Eleven days to bring them home," Aelius repeated. "And I have not seen a single future in which we win."

I stared at him. For a second I genuinely wondered if Grandpa Aelius had lost his mind.

"I have watched us fail." His voice didn't shake. "I have watched the darkness we have feared for generations spread across the world. I have seen us fight, and though it will be a good fight, it will simply not be enough."

More fear rippled through the villagers. People clutched their crying children. Hands covered mouths as Aelius stood before the entire village, telling the people who had waited for years that they were



going to die.

And I couldn't let him keep going. My legs moved on their own as I took a step forward.

"Why are you saying all of this?" I called out, my voice still calm. Every head turned my way, but I didn't stop. "I didn't survive today just to come home and be told it was pointless!"

Aelius let out a sigh, the plain expression on his face slowly melting into something softer.

"I know, my child." His eyes held mine. "I am not the one to challenge fate, but you are," he said. "Today you stood in front of an ending I had already seen and refused to let it happen." He drew a slow breath. "So I have broken the oldest law of nature and given you eleven days in the hope that you will prove me wrong again."

The one to challenge fate...

I didn't feel like that person. I felt like a loser who had nearly died three times today and only made it out because others protected me. One who now had to beg her grandpa to stop speaking.

"Starting tomorrow," Aelius said, "every one of you will train your eyes to their sharpest condition," he stated. "You will support Violet in changing fate and protect the Crown Prince while he learns to master the half of Baelor that sleeps in him and prepares to enter the realm."

A startled feeling washed over me as I looked around, waiting for the flinch. Waiting for someone to clutch their heart at the mention of Baelor living inside Kylan, but it never came.



The villagers looked at Kylan the way they would look at anyone. A few of them nodded like Aelius had only reminded them of something they had already made their peace with. Kylan let out an uneasy chuckle, glancing around him.

"I have seen how Baelor opened himself to the boy," Aelius explained. "And I know he will do it again." His gaze settled on Kylan. "We know the boy's good heart. We have all seen it with our own eyes," he said. "A soul does not carry a thing like that and stay kind unless the kindness runs deeper than the curse itself." His gaze stayed on him. "Here, we do not fear what you carry. We trust the one who carries it."

Some of the weight on my chest lifted, but not too much. I'd rather have heard them before he said we were all going to die. Kylan looked at Aelius with a suspicious look in his eyes, like he didn't quite know what to do with his praise.

"A good heart?" he whispered, low enough for only me. "He must really be dying." He let out a dry chuckle.

"I know it is little time," Aelius said. "But I have given you the number so that you may use every hour of it," he declared. "Eleven days."

He took a step forward. "Until now, you have always listened to me. My word has guided this village for longer than some of you have been alive." His glowing eyes moved across his people. "But to bring our Adelaide home, I will not be the one you follow."

The crowd stirred, and uneasy murmurs spread through the villagers.

"I am appointing a new voice. Someone worthy of this task," Aelius shared. "And it shall only be for the time being while my energy is



needed elsewhere."

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