



Chapter 549

Violet

My eyes immediately traveled to the line of Soothsayers gathered near him. It had to be one of them.

Aelius took a step forward.

"Jason will speak for me," Aelius said, surprising us with his next words. "Whatever he says, you treat as my own."

A murmur of agreement rolled through the villagers. Nobody looked surprised or offended. They had already expected it. Not even Jason seemed fazed by it.

But the real question still remained. Why would Aelius suddenly decide to take a step back? He turned his gaze to me.

"Regarding the realm," he said. "That is not a matter for the village's voice. It is a matter for the one who is stubborn enough to change what I have seen."

I blinked at him, hoping whatever came next would be one big joke. Why was he looking at me?

"I doubted this child once. I am not ashamed to say it." His voice dropped, gentler than I had ever heard it. "But today she stood in front of death and did not step aside. She was willing to die so that others would not."

The glow faded from his eyes, and what looked back at me were soft blue eyes. "I will put my faith, and the future I have never once seen



come to pass, in her hands. Gladly."

My throat closed up as I couldn't find the words. I couldn't comprehend that Aelius, who could see the future yet had never once told me the full truth until today, was handing over this whole operation like it was mine to carry. Sure, it was mine to carry, but I didn't want to lead it alone. I couldn't. After today, I didn't feel worthy of it.

"That's all for today," Aelius ended. He had barely stopped talking before all the quietness shattered at once and the villagers came rushing toward me.

It was nothing like the careful, watchful way they had been before. Looking at them now, I wasn't even sure if it had really gotten through to them what Aelius had just told them. Not even the ones who had nearly been crying before.

My breath caught as the first woman to reach me suddenly pulled me into her embrace. Then another one, and another, tugging at my sleeves, asking me questions, and grabbing my hands.

Kylan wasn't safe from all the attention either, as they were doing the same to him. I gently pat their shoulders and put on a polite smile to greet them.

"If you'll point out which bags are yours," a man said, "I'll carry them to Adelaide and Alaric's cabin. You and the prince are to stay there. Master Aelius said you would like that!"

I opened my mouth. Mom and Dad's home? It had been nice to visit the last time, but was that even something I wanted?



"What do you want to eat tonight?" someone else asked. "Adelaide loved vegetable soup. Do you—"

"I don't know," I shook my head. "Excuse me...just give me a second." I managed to slip away, leaving a trapped Kylan by himself. Then I turned and speed-walked past the crowd to find Aelius, but he was already gone.

So were Sterling, Rochwall, and Jason...

Every single person I'd wanted to grab and lean on, gone and vanished off to wherever Aelius had taken them. What were they doing?

"So." A voice spoke. Dylan had suddenly appeared beside me with Trinity at his side. Nate had gone to Kylan. "You'll be leading this whole thing. That's a great honor, you know." His voice was soft.

I sighed and shot him a look.

"It's good for you," Trinity said, watching the villagers. "These people really seem to like you!"

My chest started heaving, and I pressed a hand flat against it like that would help. They liked me because Aelius said I'd beat fate and save them.

"Hey. Breathe," Dylan urged.

"I just found out I have eleven days to save my parents." The words came out too fast. "Eleven. And I have no idea how to do it, where to start, I don't know what I'm doing, and everyone is looking at me like I do, and everyone is smiling while Aelius just said...and...I can't..." I



dragged in a breath, using my hands to speak. "How can you ask me to breathe?"

A light chuckle came from him. He took my hand and turned me around. "Look," he said.

The villagers were spread out, some pulling bags off the cart and passing them around. Others were talking, laughing, still pointing at me with soft eyes. There was still a crowd gathered around Kylan, and now Nate too, asking them too many questions.

A small smile pulled at my lips as a little boy reached up and gave a strand of Kylan's hair a firm tug. "It's so long!" I read from his lips.

Kylan looked politely, deeply bothered. I couldn't help but chuckle at the adorable sight.

"They weren't like this minutes ago, but they are now because they trust you," Dylan said. "Every single one of them, and we do too. So maybe you can try trusting yourself for once too."

He put his hands on my shoulders and turned me to face him. "Think about it," he said, looking at me. "You and me? We were never supposed to get along. Fate had that all figured out." He smiled. "But you flipped it anyway because that's what you do, Violet. You never let fate have the last word, not once." He gave my shoulders a squeeze. "So don't start now."

Trinity's mouth fell open, and she gave Dylan a nudge. "Since when did you learn how to speak like that?"

He gave her a proud look, shrugging his shoulders. I didn't even



notice I had reacted until a startled laugh burst out of me.

Whatever was in the air at Bloodstone Haven, it had made him even softer. I almost didn't recognize him.

"Whatever you're doing is working," I said, defeated. "Please keep talking."

"Aelius will answer all your questions, I'm sure of it," Dylan continued. "He has just stepped away for now. He gave you space so you could finally meet all these people who've been dying to meet you."

I looked at them again. Trinity released a big yawn. "Today's been a long day, and that's coming from me." She stretched her arms over her head. "I don't have it in me to panic anymore until I know for certain that Jorn is completely in the clear. We can all panic tomorrow, and that will leave us with ten days," she pursed her lips. "Can't get any worse than today. Plenty of time."

I exhaled, taking in her words. My eyes went back to Kylan, and through all the chaos, our eyes locked. I smiled at him, and he returned it before his face grew serious again as an older woman reached up to tickle him under the chin like he was a toddler.

"As you can see, these villagers are...a bit strange, like you, so we finally know where you got it from," Dylan hummed. He couldn't stay too nice for long. "I feel like if you want to get to know them, now is the time."

Maybe...

I closed my eyes for a moment, having finally decided. For now, I



would let it go. The eleven days, the realm, the ending Aelius saw...

But after that, I would carry all of it.

For tonight, I was going to sleep in Mom and Dad's home, with the mate I loved beside me, in a village full of people who had already decided I was worth believing in.

And days from now, we would find out if they were right...

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