



Chapter 555

Violet

"I'm going to die," Trinity announced dramatically. She set her bucket down to shake out her arms. "Not in the realm. Not fighting Kylan's evil clone brother, but right here on this hill carrying water like it's three thousand years before the Moon Goddess was even a thing."

I laughed and dropped mine beside hers, grateful for the excuse to stop. My hands dropped to my knees, and I took several breaths.

We had all been dragged out of bed at six.

Someone had come knocking before the sun was even up. We had breakfast, and somehow, not long after, we ended up doing chores. Because yes, apparently even the girl who was supposed to save everyone was expected to help out.

Not that I was complaining. They had been kind enough to let us stay the night, and there was a lot to be done today, so I understood perfectly well.

Though I had hoped this would be enough to take my mind off things, there was still an uneasy feeling sitting in my stomach. I still had no real idea what today would bring. There was no plan, and I didn't even know where to begin. But that didn't stop all these people from depending on me to bring Mom and Dad back.

Then there was also this teacher of Kylan's...

I looked out across the hill, wondering how Kylan would be doing right now. The others had been put to work elsewhere.

"It's really beautiful, though," Trinity said, catching her breath. "How everyone just pitches in? It reminds me of the mountains."

I showed her a smile. It had been like that through Mom's eyes too. She helped a lot, and even Dad. An Alpha Prince, royalty, hadn't stood off to the side and let others do the work. Sure, he complained sometimes, but he adjusted.

"Are we going again?" I sighed out.

Trinity wiped her forehead with the back of her hand, then bent and picked her bucket back up.

"We saved a man's life yesterday," she said, walking again. "You would think that would buy me one morning off."

I shot her a smile. "Speaking of," I said, "I wonder how Jorn's doing."

"He's under Jason's care." Trinity shrugged, lifting the bucket higher. "So he's probably doing better than either of us right now, honestly," she said. "Getting cuddled in a warm temple while we break our backs out here."

I chuckled at that. If the roles were reversed, Jorn would never have let me hear the end of it. He'd have called me lazy for even taking a water break. Then, when I thought it'd be over, he would've been bragging about how even half dead and bleeding out, he had crawled up the hill with his hands and knees to help.

My smile faded a little. I really did hope he was okay. As harsh as he could be, he was still my cousin. My family, and though it didn't mean much, one of the only bits of blood family I had left standing.



I shook it off and glanced at Trinity. "Anyway," I began. "Jason seemed pretty into you last night."

"Really?" Trinity pulled a face, her nose scrunching up. "You think so?"

"I mean—"

"Because you know I only have eyes for my mate!" She cut me off before I could say anything else. "That's the thing about a mate bond. Once it's there, nobody else even matters. Doesn't matter how nice they are to look at."

A forced laugh slipped between her lips, and I got the memo. She felt uncomfortable and didn't want to talk about it, which was enough for me to shut my mouth.

"Let's talk about you instead." Trinity turned it around. I shot her a quick glance.

"Ten more days," she said, a grin spreading across her face, "until I finally get to meet your parents and tell them exactly how amazing their daughter is!"

Now it was my turn to laugh, and it came out just as awkward as hers had. I felt an itch up the side of my neck, and if I hadn't had both hands wrapped around the bucket, I would've scratched it by now.

Hearing the countdown from someone else's mouth made it seem even shorter. Ten days, and we didn't even know if Baelor would be willing to reveal himself again.

No idea what role to give anyone, who did what, who went where.



The worst part of it all was that I knew we would only get one shot at this.

One.

There wouldn't be a second try if I got it wrong. Not we. I.

"Trinity?"

"Yes?"

"Is it weird that..."

I took a breath, debating whether now was the right time to share my worries with her. When she kept her eyes on me, I knew I couldn't back out now.

"Is it weird that I want them here with me so badly, but I keep hoping someone will step in and take the leading part off my hands?"

Trinity sighed and shifted the bucket, balancing it against her hip. "No," she said, biting her lip. "It's not weird at all."

She narrowed her eyes. "You've never really led anything before. Not until yesterday, when you didn't have much of a choice." Her eyes glanced at me. "But Aelius doesn't strike me as the type to hand something this big to just anyone. He's definitely not sentimental like that." A short laugh escaped her. "He said we were all going to die, sure, so he could just be taking his chances. But the fact that he's willing to try means there's still hope, and he wouldn't gamble your mother's life on anything."

She tilted her head, a small smile pulling at her mouth. Her words



made me calm, so I just let her talk. "I think if even one of us thought you couldn't do this, we would have said so," she said. "You know how Dylan gets."

I gave her a nod. "So here's what's going to happen," Trinity stated. "You're going to go out there, use that pretty brain of yours that put you at the top of every class you've ever been in...well any class that isn't combat, and you're going to come up with the best plan any of us has ever heard," she decided. "And I'm not accepting anything less from you because I know you can do it."

Somewhere inside me, Lumia let out a happy little purr. She must've also felt how much impact Trinity's words had on me.

I drew in a long breath, longer than I had been able to before. "Thanks."

"No problem!" she said, her voice cheerful.

We reached the bottom of the hill and were immediately met with the sound of shrieks. They were children, a whole bunch of them. Screaming, laughing, and in the middle of it all, on the ground, was Kylan.

He was crouched down, and at least four kids had their hands buried in his hair. They were tugging and twisting it into something that was definitely not a braid while he was just letting them. He just sat there and took it, a sulky look on his face that he wasn't doing a very good job of hiding.

"What is he doing?" I laughed, setting my bucket down. Trinity also cracked a laugh.



"I'll take it from here. Go," she said, waving me off.

Shaking my head, I went over to rescue him.

Kylan spotted me coming, and the look he gave me was pure pleading. I almost felt sorry for him.

"It's so nice to see everyone pitching in," I said, stopping in front of him. "And I love the hair, by the way." I giggled.

Kylan's nostrils flared, his eyes glaring at me as if begging me to save him. I crouched down to the kids' level, and they all looked at me.

"Which one of you can find my Grandpa Aelius the fastest?"

"Me!"

"No, me!"

Seconds later, they all scattered in different directions and were gone. Kylan let out an impressed hum and pushed himself up off the ground, dragging a hand back through his ruined hair.

"You'd make a good...village mom," he said, shrugging a shoulder.

"Thank you."

"Help me?" He bent his head toward me like a big baby. I reached up and worked my fingers through his hair, smoothing out whatever damage had been done.

"Maybe I should just cut it short," he said. "Like Jason?" he added in a teasing tone. "What do you think?" 1



I threw my head back and laughed loudly. "You don't have to do that," I said, brushing my fingers through his hair. "I think it's perfect like this."

His lips curved into a smirk as he moved in front of me and began to close the distance between us. "Perfect enough to—"

"I don't know where you're going with that, but I'm not touching you anywhere near my grandpa. Everagain." I snorted.

Kylan gave a small playful huff. I couldn't help but laugh and took a strand of his hair, twisting it between my fingers. Right at that moment, the children came running back.

They all sprinted from the same direction this time, and it was clear they had been inside the cave. They were loud, screaming, but we couldn't make out a word.

Kylan and I shared a look, then turned toward them. "What is it?" I asked, curious.

They all started talking at the same time.

"Wait!" I held up a hand, laughing. "One at a time, please."

A boy at the front grinned wide and pointed toward the cave. "We found Master Aelius!" he said. "And we've got more visitors. So many of them!"

The teacher?

My head snapped to Kylan, who looked just as surprised, and an anxious feeling twisted in my stomach.



We both turned toward the cave entrance, watching the door slide open.