

Chapter 560

Violet

This time it happened rather fast. One second I closed my eyes, and the next I found myself in that in-between place again. Inside my own head.

I looked down at my hands, opening and closing my palms as I got used to the feeling again. Then a weak howl came from somewhere ahead, and I finally lifted my head.

It was Lumia. Who else? It could only be her. She lay stretched out on the ground, her tail flicking like she wanted the attention. Her head was turned away from me like I wasn't worth the effort at the moment.

Despite her act, she looked really calm. Too calm for my liking, considering everything that was going on.

'Lumia?'

This time she responded with a bored purr. A sympathetic smile reached my lips, and I reached out for her dark fur. Then I came back to my senses and pulled my hand back.

I took a deep breath, taking a few steps toward her instead. 'You've heard, then,' I said. 'About all of it?' A small laugh slipped out of me.

'Of course you've heard,' I muttered to myself. 'I am you, and you are me. There's nothing I know that you don't.'

Lumia let out another sound, her tail moving once to brush against my feet. 'Are you listening to me?' I asked.

This time, I let myself sink to the ground beside her. I still kept my distance, knowing better than to touch her.

'I am listening,' Lumia finally spoke back. She didn't change her position.



I grew a bit more hopeful and continued. 'I know what Varius just told us isn't an easy thing to ask,' I went on. 'I do...but I also know that somewhere in there, you understand why it has to happen.'

She kept quiet again. 'This is bigger than my parents now, Lumia. It's not just about me finally getting them back, so please!' I said, almost pleading. 'If we don't have Adelaide and Alaric, we don't win, and that's the truth.'

Still...nothing.

'We can't beat what's coming without them,' I whispered softly. 'Kian is only getting stronger, Gloria is completely out of control, and the moment any of that steps out from behind the Veil, it's over,' I said, desperately. 'For everyone.'

When she still didn't respond, I pressed my lips together. I'd rather have her scold me, so I would at least have something to work with.

Whenever Lumia was angry or didn't agree with something, talking to her was like talking to a wall. I knew that from years of experience. But now, I also knew what it took to get through to her. Hopefully Kylan's talk with Valerius would be going a bit better than this.

'I know I just told you it isn't only about that,' I tried again, softer now. 'I also know what it would mean to you, to have Lumen back. I know you'd do anything to get him ba—'

'Not anything,' Lumia hummed.

A soft chuckle slipped out as I repeated her words under my breath. So even she had her limits.

Lumia shifted, and I knew she was preparing herself to actually speak with me. 'I have a few things to say,' she announced. 'The first thing I want to say is that I am still proud of you and how you handled that fight. You can be incredible whenever you want to.'



The corner of my lips twitched into a surprised smile. 'Really? Thank you ...'

'Second,' she raised her voice. 'You should have gone with the old man with the rotting teeth. Baelor is offended, and he is bored. This is what he does when he is both. He invents little cruelties to entertain himself.'

I nodded, even though she couldn't see me from where she lay. 'So about the apology?' I asked carefully.

Lumia released a laugh, then a scoff. 'The old man with the rotting teeth already told the whole village we would die anyway.' Her tail flicked. 'So why should I bother? There is no sense in bowing my head to Baelor for a cause already lost...I wish you good luck, but I will not do it.'

'But...'

Lumia snapped her head toward me, and I shut right up. Her snout lowered, forcing me to look into her silver, hard eyes. 'Do you remember what this Baelor has done?' she spat, showing her fangs. 'Not just to Claire and Greg, but also Adelaide and Alaric. Every last person in your family he has touched.'

'I know,' I said, my voice small. 'I know.'

Perhaps that was the worst part. She had every right to be furious, to disagree, but I couldn't let her win this one.

'And you?' I threw back at her. 'You've crossed paths with him more times than I can count, and I think you know what happened to all the people you couldn't protect,' I said. 'This time it won't be ten or a hundred...if you don't do this, it will be millions.'

Her ears went flat against her head, and for the first time, I felt like I was finally getting somewhere.

I kept telling myself one thing, and that was, don't stop now. If I stopped



now, she'd have time to think, and I wasn't supposed to give her any.

'Do you think this is easy for me? Because it's not,' I pushed further. 'Asking you to apologize is the hardest thing anyone's ever asked of me. I know exactly what 'this' Baelor did to my parents, and I feel it every single day, right here.' I pressed a hand to my chest. 'But this isn't about me anymore...I don't get to make it about me.'

I squinted, thinking it through as I said it.

'This is about Kylan being the only one who can walk into that cave and pull out the two people this entire war depends on,' I reminded her. 'This is about him not being able to do that without Baelor's help, and a single apology that can save this world.'

Lumia's snout softened, and a weak howl came out of her. I extended my hand, waiting for her to move forward instead, and when she did, I slowly pressed it against her fur.

My chest ached as I did it, as this was my way of apologizing to her. My other half.

I had half expected her to pull away, but she didn't. Instead, she moved her large frame closer and rested her head against my shoulder until I could feel the warmth of her fur all through me.

'I will do it.'

My eyes went wide, and a smile broke across my face. Perhaps a bit too soon.

'But...' she added. 'Only on one condition.'

Then the smile dropped off my face again. I pulled back just enough to look into her eyes.

'Anything,' I said, and I meant it.



A low, satisfied sound rolled through her. 'Come up with a real plan,' she began. 'Tell me how we get into the realm, how the prince gets in and brings your parents back. Every part of it...and have it ready for me before midnight.'

She bumped her head against my shoulder.

'Only if it is good enough to convince me. I will bow my head to Baelor and give him his apology...not one second before.'

I stared at her, my mouth falling open. For a moment, I wondered if this had been her plan all along or if it was really just a coincidence. Lumia had played me completely, and she knew it.

She had just taken the one thing I had been running from all day and thrown it right back at me.

I had until midnight...

And this time, I had no way out of it.

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