

Chapter 561

Violet

As soon as I opened my eyes, I pressed a hand to my chest and gasped for air. It felt like I had been underwater, even though it had only been my own mind.

My breathing calmed as I looked into a pair of brown eyes. Kylan was still sitting in front of me, quietly watching. "Wait. Just give me a second." I lifted a finger.

He gave a slight tilt of his head, waiting patiently.

"I don't know if it's my own mind that made me feel so lightheaded," I complained, pressing my palm to the side of my head. "Or the conversation I just had with Lumia."

A quiet hum escaped him. I squinted at him, expecting him to say something back. Perhaps a complaint about the equally stubborn Valerius. He didn't. I noticed he had already been sitting there by the time I opened my eyes.

"I'm guessing yours didn't go so well," I decided for myself. "We already expected this, of course. That's why you're not surprised."

He pressed his lips together, shaking his head as a single brow lifted. Then a sheepish chuckle escaped him. "It went pretty great, actually," he said. "He said he'd do it. Conversation was over in about ten seconds."

I scratched at my head and tilted it to the side.

"Huh?"

He shot me a calm smile, his eyes drifting to his lap. "Valerius has spent all this time working himself to the bone, helping me hold Baelor down," he explained softly. "So a truce must be like some kind of peace where he



doesn't have to suffer anymore?" He shrugged.

Poor Valerius...

"Well," I said, dragging a hand down my face. "Yours definitely went smoother than mine."

"What did Lumia say?" Kylan asked.

I opened my mouth to tell him. Right then, footsteps entered the temple, and Varius appeared in the entrance again. He walked back in, tapping his stick against the stone.

As I looked up at him, his dark eyes looked between me and Kylan, patiently, as if he were waiting to see if any of us had anything worth reporting.

"I spoke to Lumia," I said. It was meant for both Kylan and him. "She is willing to apologize." I gave them the good news first. "But not for nothing. She wants to hear a plan out of me first...a real one so she knows she won't be wasting her time."

Varius let out a slow breath through his nose.

"As expected, the road always bends the way Aelius wants it to," he sighed. "You did not walk with him today, yet here you are, working toward the very plan he asked of you." A dry chuckle left him.

I couldn't even argue with that.

He was right.

"What more did she say?" Kylan asked.

"I have until midnight," I turned to him again. "But I'll have a plan by then...and we'll be back in the morning so Lumia can give Baelor his..." I swallowed. "His apology."



My nerves were out of control. My body felt hot as I said it because it sounded more like a promise. But it was one thing to promise it. It was another to actually have a plan by midnight that was good enough to convince my own wolf.

Varius held my gaze and stepped closer. Once he was close enough, he lifted his hand and rested it on top of my head. An unexpected smile crept across his face.

"You seem sure of yourself," he said. "And you are not one to sound sure when you are not. So I know I will be seeing the two of you in the early morning."

A slow breath escaped me, caught off guard by the whole thing. That was definitely not the reaction I expected, but I'd take it.

He let go of my head and turned his attention to Kylan. "In the meantime," he said, "I will prepare something to present to Baelor."

"Present?" Kylan asked. "Isn't letting him out already enough?"

Varius's lips curled slightly. "Baelor works in mysterious ways. He will need to be flattered more than usual." His mouth twitched. "The old shadow would want that. I haven't forgotten what he's like."

I got up, seeing Kylan push himself off the ground, and brushed off my clothes. "As for you," Varius continued, turning to me. "I want you to find someplace quiet and think of this plan you've promised."

It didn't sound much like an order, but more like some piece of advice. His eyes stayed on me. "It is not only Lurnia who needs convincing," he said. "I doubt Baelor or anyone will do something they do not fully stand behind."

My stomach turned at the thought of that thing sitting somewhere inside Kylan and deciding whether my plan would be good enough.



As if Lumia wasn't enough already, now I had to impress the oldest darkness in the world too.

I felt Kylan move closer, his shoulder brushing against mine. He slipped his fingers between mine and took my hand. Varius nodded his head at us, then stepped aside to let us pass.

"Now go."

We walked out of the temple together, back into the light. The second we were outside, I was finally able to let out the longest breath. I thought we would be here all night, so seeing it was still daylight made it all feel more ridiculous than it already was.

"Well," I said, clearing my throat. "That was humiliating."

Kylan laughed, shaking his head. He patted my back a couple of times. "For both of us, Pup." His gaze shifted to mine. "Will you be okay?"

"Yes," I said. "I just have to figure out what to do before midnight. That's all..."

"You mean, what we have to do," Kylan jumped in.

I shook my head, a weak smile curling my lips.

"I do want you there, but I think this one is on me," I said. "I will figure it out."

Whether I agreed with it or wanted it or not, I was starting to accept that Aelius had put it in my hands in front of the whole village, and Lumia had just done the same. It was mine to carry.

Kylan shrugged, a soft smile pulling at his mouth. Luckily, he didn't push, but just let me have it. We followed the path and walked past the first temple again.

I glanced inside for a moment and immediately noticed Trinity was there

on her own. It was just a split-second, but I saw her with Jorn, looking every bit as focused while dabbing something along his cheek.

"What do you think Aelius is going to say?" Kylan asked as we walked further.

Good question.

"Honestly?" I sighed. "You never know with him. It might be a 'you were wrong, and I knew you'd be wasting your time,' an 'it's okay,' or a—"

My words were cut short by a sudden burst of light spilling over the top of the hill ahead of us. It was so strong, we both had no choice but to squint our eyes. And when I did, all I could see were glowing eyes. Too many to count.

It was everyone in Bloodstone Haven, including those who had traveled with Varius. They had only just arrived, but that didn't stop them from training their eyes.

"What are they doing?" Kylan asked.

"I don't know."

Jason stood at the front, leading. They were gathered in a circle, and when a small gap opened as we stepped closer, I could clearly see who stood in the middle. Nate and Dylan.

It seemed like even they had started their training already. Everyone but us.

They walked the circle, looking into everyone's glowing eyes, though I couldn't work out for what reason they would be looking straight into the light like that.

"Wow," I breathed.

"Yeah," Kylan said beside me.



I scanned the edge of the group until my eyes found Aelius. He stood off to the side, his eyes their usual pale blue.

When he realized I had finally seen him, he knitted his brows and extended his hand toward us.

"What are they doing?" I asked as we reached him.

Aelius ignored the question entirely and focused his eyes on the circle again. "I take it," he said, "that things did not work out the way you had hoped."

My lips parted, but quickly pressed together again. I knew very well anything I'd say at the moment would make me look ridiculous.

"I do not need my eyes to see that much," he added. "I just hope you know now that I am usually right, and Varius is not. That's why he ended up in the Lyperian mountains." He gave Kylan a short glare. "And I did not."

I let out a short breath. "Baelor wants an apology from Lumia and Valerius," I explained instead. "And Lumia won't give it unless I come to her with a plan first. A real one...before midnight."

Aelius grinned, being without a doubt the winner in all of this. He nudged his head further down the path. "Well," he began. "If you are not going to train with the rest of us...the clock is ticking, so you'd best get to work."

My body froze for about two seconds before I bopped my head and turned in a hurry. I already felt Kylan's presence beside me, following.

"Not you, prince," Aelius ordered.

We both stopped and turned our heads at the same time. Aelius's eyes had already gone back to the circle of glowing faces.



"The two of you," he spoke sternly, "you are attached at the hip, and it's worse than Adelaide and Alaric ever were, and that is saying something." He waved a hand in the air. "I intend to fix that, and you will learn to stand on your own two feet." He huffed. "Both of you."

Kylan stuttered, flustered and probably too tired to argue with a Soothsayer. Aelius pointed one finger toward the light and the other down the path.

"The prince trains. The girl thinks," he said. "Go."

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