

Chapter 562

Violet

I sat on the cold floor of mom and dad's hut and had been sitting there for hours now.

I didn't know how many, but it felt like forever. It was long enough that my legs had gone stiff underneath me. I had hoped a plan would just come to me, or maybe if I'd stayed quiet enough and looked at the ceiling, the answer might drop into my lap.

The pressure was so suffocating, my mind had gone completely numb from it. There was this emptiness, and the harder I pushed, the worse it got.

"Please," I whispered to no one in particular. "Just help me. Please..."

My eyes drifted over the scraps of paper spread out on the floor around me. It was two words, three words, and then nothing. Everything had been crossed out. It was like a math problem that needed solving, only I was actually good at math.

Every now and then, before I could make things worse for myself, I'd get up from the floor and pace around. The time had come again.

I paced around the hut, fidgeting with my hands as deep breaths left me, one after another. My eyes flicked toward the clock on the wall, but before I could get a glimpse of the time, I made myself look away.

I didn't want to know. Whatever time it was, it was later than I could afford, and seeing the number would only make me stress more.

I was going to fail.

I said I would be able to do it, especially now that I knew Kylan would be okay—and I was going to fail.



That was the one thought that kept pushing through the numbness in my mind. Aelius, and Bloodstone Haven had looked at me and decided I was the one, and I was going to stand in front of Lumia at midnight with a handful of crossed-out scraps and nothing else. All of this was too embarrassing.

I opened my mouth to curse but dragged both hands down my face instead. I turned away in frustration, and when I lowered my hands, my eyes landed on the bookshelf.

My eyes wouldn't look away. It was a bunch of books that were way too advanced for me, but it was more about the thought behind it. They were the same books I had seen the first time I ever set foot in this hut.

Mom's books.

I thought about her. How amazing she could be, and how she had the ability to do things nobody else could do, and I was not just talking about her eyes. Adelaide was just someone who had never once quit, not even when they came for her and Dad, tried to take everything...tried to take me.

And I wanted nothing more than to follow in her footsteps. Crossing out every single word was not going to do that.

If she could do the impossible, then so could the daughter she left behind. The only thing standing in my way right now was me.

I pulled in one deep breath and shut my eyes, a small smile finding its way to my lips. The corner of my lips trembled as what I saw in front of me wasn't my beautiful mom, but an image I had made up in my mind of how her own mother and Kian must've had her tied up somewhere inside that cave while she was waiting.

Then my eyes snapped open. This time, when I looked at the room, everything felt sharper. My body, my eyes, my mind. It was like a thick fog had been wiped off.



I knew exactly what to do now. I let my gaze linger on the scraps of paper scattered across the floor for a moment, shook my head, then walked over to the table and sat down.

I had been going about it completely wrong. There was no point writing everything down when there were only four questions I needed the answer to.

Who, when, how, and what came next...

Who did what, when we moved, how we got in, and what happened once we were inside.

If I could answer those four, I would have something worth putting in front of Lumia.

I took another piece of paper, and finally started to write...

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By the time I lifted my head again, most of the light coming through the small window had faded. I was sure the sun had vanished somewhere behind the hills.

I had been at it for hours, but the reward was a plan. A real plan. One I actually felt confident about.

Especially when Lumia's low hum rolled through me. She hadn't said anything, but in a situation like this, I took it as a good sign.

I gathered all my notes, having ended up with three sheets of paper in total, and held them against my chest as I looked down at them with pride. This had to be it.

Now that I was finished, I finally glanced at the clock. It was almost six, which meant I had been in this hut for over ten hours. Thinking.

It had been worth every hour. I had done everything I could, and I



couldn't have come up with anything better than what I had written down.

Now I just had to hope everyone would see it the way I did.

With my notes in my hand, I pushed myself from the table and rushed to get out of the hut. On my way to find Aelius, Kylan, and everyone else.

As I stepped outside, it felt like everything had stopped for a moment. The sky outside had turned the most beautiful shade of orange, and a warm color spread across Bloodstone Haven.

The clearing was empty, which meant everyone was still out there somewhere, still training and giving it their all. It was not too surprising since we would only have a few days. Literally a few with the plan I had in mind.

A sigh escaped me as my thoughts went to Kylan. I could only hope he was holding up okay. Unfortunately, my plan would require a lot from him too.

I started walking and ended up on the same path Aelius had made me walk alone, right after calling Kylan and me out for leaning on each other too much. Honestly, I still thought that was ridiculous.

My best guess was it had something to do with what he had walked in on the night before, but if separating us for a moment made him feel better about it, then fine. Whatever helped him sleep.

I kept walking, holding the papers tight against my heart as if they held my whole life in them.

I didn't have to go far before I heard Jason's voice. It sounded like he was giving some kind of speech. I searched for him and found him standing at the front, everyone gathered around him.

The villagers, the mountain witches, including Varius, and all of my



friends. I was way too focused on my own plan to hear anything he had said, but seeing the way everyone had their eyes locked on him made me believe that Aelius had chosen well.

I tucked myself somewhere in the back, not wanting to draw any attention to myself. It only worked for a second until a pair of piercing dark brown eyes found mine. Kylan's eyes.

My lips curved into a small smile. Kylan pushed his hand onto the grass to get up, but I shook my head and tipped it toward Jason, telling him to keep watching. But he had already moved by then, and the moment he did, everyone else noticed me too.

"It's Violet!" someone called out.

Just like that, every head turned at once, and Jason went quiet mid-sentence. Kylan shot me an apologetic smile and let out an awkward little chuckle.

I avoided looking at anyone aside from Dylan, Nate, Trinity, and Kylan, who gave me curious looks. When I dared let my eyes wander again, they locked right onto Aelius. He stood beside Jason like he had been there the whole time.

I guessed even he hadn't seen this one coming, because for once, there was something that resembled surprise on his face. He had probably expected to see me either a few minutes before or several hours after midnight.

"Violet," Aelius greeted. Even though he had only said my name, my heart filled with unease. When he extended his hand toward me, I already knew exactly what his next words would be.

"Come, child." He beckoned me forward with one finger. "You seem well-prepared. Do not keep us waiting...please present this plan of yours."

