

Chapter 570

Violet

My heart pounded hard, but I did what he asked. I kept my eyes on Kylan and did not look away. It stayed like that for a moment. Those safe, deep brown eyes I knew better than my own.

Until they suddenly weren't brown anymore. The brown faded in less than a second, and then I was staring into blood-red eyes.

Baelor...

My body jerked back, fingers loosening around his grip. Everything in me screamed to let go, but before I could even get to that, a voice stopped me.

"Don't!" Varius said sharply. "Do not let go of him."

A gasp escaped me as I desperately dug my nails into his wrists again. Kylan's mouth fell open, and then a dark shadow poured out of him. It was thick, huge and aggressive, traveling around the walls like it had just been let out of a cage.

My head snapped back to Kylan, and his eyes were brown again. Wide and confused, but back to their original shade.

"Wha—"

He could barely finish as his eyes changed once more. This time, glowing a bright purple. I started, seeing a reflection of another pair staring back out of his. It took me a second to understand that they were mine.

My own eyes had gone bright and silver, but differently than normal. I was still there. I could still feel my arms locked around his and the cold stone under me. But it was like I had been pushed to the back of my own mind.

That was when it clicked.

This was what Aelius and Varius had meant. This was the whole point of the ritual.

Valerius and Lumia had taken over.

A sound of deep laughter rolled through the temple, coming from every corner. Though I panicked, my body didn't so much as twitch. It stayed perfectly calm.

It was only because it wasn't mine anymore, but Lumia's. And she feared nothing.

Aelius and Varius remained just as calm. The shadow that had been going around the room settled between me and Kylan.

"Well," Baelor's dark voice echoed. "I see the two of you have come forward after all." He addressed Lumia and Valerius. "I wasn't sure you would," he went on. "But I've been waiting...patiently."

Neither answered. I felt Lumia's cold, unbothered patience and knew she wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of a reaction. Neither was Valerius, whose presence I could feel now too.

"Nothing?" Baelor sounded almost disappointed. "No teeth? No snarling? The two of you were so eager to tear me apart for all these centuries." A slow chuckle escaped him. "It has always been the two of you."

Still, the wolves said nothing.

Baelor let the silence hang for a moment, and even I started to feel nervous. With Baelor's big talk, I couldn't help but wonder if Lumia was still going to apologize or if she had changed her mind.

"You are here to speak to me," Baelor spoke again. "So speak."

A low growl rumbled out of Lumia, and I felt the heat of her emotions through my body. There was no telling if it was anger, adrenaline, or something else.

All I could do was reach for her from the back of my own mind, hoping she would somehow feel my plea for her to hold back. Whatever it was, she had to keep it under control for now.

The heat kept building, spreading, until I was certain she was about to open my mouth and spit something at him that would tear this whole thing apart before it ever began.

But then she spoke. "I will be honest with you," Lumia began. "I am not entirely sure this apology is one you have earned," she said. "You have disrespected our Moon Goddess. You have destroyed, taken from us over and over."

My stomach dropped. "But," she went on, "if you feel we have wronged you...If, in that ancient, sulking head of yours, you truly believe we owe you something." A weak chuckle came out. "Then fine...I apologize and ask for your forgiveness."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. She had done it...

After everything...

After all those centuries, Lumia had swallowed the pride she didn't have to and apologized to Baelor. For me.

"I am certain Valerius feels the same," Lumia added, quickly urging him to follow. Valerius had been quiet, not letting out a single breath until Lumia had called him out.

He exhaled through Kylan, his purple eyes closing for a moment. "A great deal has happened between us," Valerius said. His voice was rougher than Lumia's, making it clear the apology was harder for him, even though he had decided pretty quickly that he would do it for Kylan.

"But for now, that does not matter. Because for once, we want the same thing, you and I," he said. "That is to stop the other half of you. The one running loose with an even more vicious nature than this half I cannot stand."

Baelor laughed. "Same as Lumia, I am not sure whether you have earned this apology...but I will apologize for any wrong I may have done to you," Valerius said. "And in return, I ask that we call a truce."

It went quiet for a breath as we waited for Baelor's response. "A truce," he repeated, savoring it. "Very well. Then here is how it will go."

A sense of relief hit me, knowing this part would almost be over. The shadow traveled the room again.

"I will protect all that is the boy's, including the whole miserable bunch of you," he said. "You will have my loyalty, my strength, my eyes when you need them...and in return, I ask for one thing only," he continued. "Give me respect, and I will make all of you unbeatable."

"Do not grow arrogant," Valerius let out an unimpressed chuckle. "You are half of what you were, and you would do well not to underestimate the other half," he told him. "He is hungry for power, and you know how you get when you are hungry for power."

"I never underestimate myself, Valerius," Baelor said, a fondness in his voice. "I know he is hungry. Why do you think I am so very eager to get him back?"

His words startled me, and I turned them over in the back of my mind. There had been this question I had been careful not to ask myself.

We did all of this...

Free my parents, break the command, win this war...and then what?

Baelor was only doing this because he needed the other half of himself.

The half that was inside Kian. So what happened after Baelor got him back? What did a whole Baelor want? What was his purpose?

No, Violet...

I shook off the thought. There was no room for it right now because if we didn't win this thing, there wouldn't even be an after.

My attention drifted to the shadow that tore across the temple again. It circled the stone wall, slipped between us, and then, without any warning at all, dove straight into Kylan's mouth.

Then it was gone.

Before I could think about what had happened, I felt my own soul rush forward until I was in control again. Across from me, Kylan came back with a gasp, and I looked right at a pair of brown eyes again.

Just like Aelius and Varius had said, Baelor hadn't been able to wait to get back inside him. His new home.

I turned to Aelius and Varius. "Why didn't you say anything just now?" I wondered. "Why did the two of you just sit there?"

They had kept their heads down, acting as though they weren't there at all. "Because we know our place, and it is not to interfere unless we must," Aelius said.

Varius nodded. "That was not our conversation to have. It was theirs," he added.

"That went too easily," Kylan said, not sounding all that convinced. I definitely hadn't expected Baelor to take it easy on them, but he did.

"No, prince." Varius shook his head. "Time is short, and there is no time left for grudges," he said. "They all knew not to waste any time."

He pushed himself up from the floor until he was high enough to grab his

stick. Aelius rose with him, and my eyes locked on his. "The boy will stay with Varius, and his training begins now," he said before pointing his finger at me. "And you? Come with me."

It came so suddenly I barely had time to process it. I scrambled up to my feet, turning to Kylan with a flustered look. We shared a brief smile.

"Good luck," I said.

"You too," Kylan said.

Aelius was already moving, walking past me to make his way out of the temple while I hurried after him.

Just like that, with my heart still racing from one impossible thing, I walked straight into the next...



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