

Chapter 572

Violet

"Give me your hands again."

I followed Aelius's instructions and slid my hands back into his. My back straightened as I pulled in a slow breath, feeling his fingers close around mine.

How was any of this supposed to work?

What was he expecting me to do? Just...feel?

"From what I understand," he said, watching me, "you believe your eyes answer to your emotions. Correct?"

I gave a small nod. That was exactly what it felt like until he had just told me that it wasn't. Grandpa Aelius tilted his head, studying me the way he always did.

"Then tell me, child," he said. "Have you never once felt something you could not explain? A sense of a thing before you had any reason to sense it?"

I opened my mouth to say no, but it never came out. Because that wasn't the truth. My mind went straight to Sonya. To that day in Lyperia when I had felt a second heartbeat, before anyone had told us we would get a younger sibling.

But that wasn't the only time...

Though it wasn't quite the same, there was also that moment with Kian in the woods. I had been able to sense his emotions, and it had even brought me to tears.

I had only pushed it aside because I thought it had to do with that strange

ritual of his, and however he had gotten those red streaks in his hair.

I looked up at Aelius. "Yes, a few times," I whispered. "But I thought I was just imagining it. Making things up in my head."

"You were not." He gave my hands a gentle squeeze. "I believe that is a gift you had already mastered long before you ever learned to make your eyes glow," he said. "It has been awake in you this whole time."

He let out a pleased chuckle, his eyes almost glowing with delight. "Life Sense," he said. "That is what it's called."

"Life Sense?" I repeated, lifting a brow.

"The ability to feel the living thread that runs through all things."

I raised my brows higher, urging him to explain further. "It will tell you what beats, what suffers, who you can trust." His blue eyes held mine. "And so much more."

My breath caught in my throat. "So that's my specialty?" I asked. "That's the thing I'm best at?"

"For now," Aelius confirmed. "I believe you have many more gifts still sleeping inside you, child," he said. "But they will not all wake at once, and we do not have enough time to draw each of them out." His gaze sharpened. "So we begin with this one."

I nodded, listening to every word.

"We take the gift you have most likely been using by accident your whole life," Aelius said, "and we teach you to do it on purpose."

After he said it, something in my chest finally eased. For the first time, it felt like we were actually making progress.

And something about the way he said it made my chest go tight and warm at the same time.

"Okay," I breathed, tightening my grip on his hands. "Then teach me... I'm ready."

"Close your eyes," Aelius said. It was a simple instruction, yet it was one that made me hesitate. It wasn't as if closing my eyes had done any good for me lately.

Every time I did shut them, I ended up somewhere I wasn't quite sure I wanted to be. Aelius caught my worries.

"I will not let anything happen to you," he said, his voice unexpectedly soft. "Not while you sit in front of me. You have my word, child." He gave a small smile. "Now close your eyes."

Though they were just words, because they had come from Aelius I believed them and finally closed my eyes. There was only dark behind my eyelids. Nothing more.

"Do I—" "Do not reach for the glow," Aelius said before I could finish. "The glow is already inside of you. It is part of you."

I took a breath.

"You need to feel, Violet," he went on. "Just concentrate and let yourself feel."

I bit down hard on my lip before I had even made an attempt, already expecting to fail. Perhaps that's why I was so shocked when something happened. I heard the sound of my own heartbeat in my ears, and the distant murmur of villagers somewhere down the hill. Murmurs I wasn't supposed to hear because they were too far away.

"You were born for this," Aelius spoke in between. His words encouraged me to push a little harder, and then I felt it...

Him...

It was a strange, ancient presence that could only belong to him. But it also felt safe, warm and like something I had to protect.

A surprised gasp slipped out of me. Aelius chuckled like he already knew what was happening. "Open your eyes."

I did as told, and blinked at him.

"I know," he breathed. "Now I want you to see beyond what you believe you can see," he said. "Look around, and focus on one point. Just one."

I let go of the questions for once and just did what he asked of me. With excitement, I let my gaze drift toward the hill until it landed on a random cluster of villagers. The few that were not meditating anymore.

I could hardly believe my eyes when suddenly colors appeared, wrapping around their frames. They were gold, blue, green, every single one of them different, and they followed them as they moved.

I finally understood why Aelius wanted me to focus on one point. It was beautiful, but far too much all at once.

"I don't know what's happening," I said. "I can see...all this light around them, I don't—"

A man crossing the space with his head down. Just as he did, he bumped shoulders with a woman coming the other way.

"Sorry." His apology echoed in my ears. I saw the warm color around him change into a blue shade. Then I heard the sound of his steady heartbeat. The apology was sincere.

My gaze slid to the woman he had bumped into. A red color wrapped around her, only deepening with each second. I could feel her heartbeat too, but hers was a bit too fast.

Suddenly, a sharp feeling rushed through me. It only took me a second to

understand it wasn't mine. It was hers.

"She's angry," I breathed. "He bumped into her and she's furious about it," I told Aelius. "She's not going to let it g—"

Before I could even finish, the woman shoved the man in his chest. I saw it would happen...I could've stopped it. Was this really Life Sense?

"Hey!" As soon as Jason's voice rang out and he rushed across to get to them, everything went back to normal. The colors had faded, and so did the sound of their heartbeats.

A startled laugh came out of me, and I turned back to Aelius. "I felt all of it before it happened!" I said. "I knew she was going to do it before she did."

A smile tugged at Aelius's lips. "This is where you will start," he decided. "One cannot lead a village into a realm when they cannot feel. One cannot protect what they cannot see coming."

Aelius was right. My plan was great, but it was also built around me depending on being able to move through that realm. To calculate the situation and feel danger before it reached the people I would drag in there with me.

This could be the key to make sure everyone got out of that realm, alive.

After the first time, Aelius made me do it again and again until I had lost all track of how many hearts I had listened to. And each time, I felt myself growing a little stronger.

By the time Aelius finally let me stop, I suspected it already had to be nearly late afternoon.

We had stayed on that hill for hours, but it wasn't just us. All across the village, people were still hard at work. Even Trinity had been in the exact same spot all this time, still working on herbs while Jason had been

leading the villagers.

"We will take a short rest," Aelius said. "But not too long. It is important that you work under pressure. Resting this gift too often only makes it harder to wake again."

"I understand," I said.

I truly did. I felt tired, but it was a good kind of tired. Aelius got up to leave for a while and made his way to Jason.

Meanwhile, my thoughts drifted to him. Kylan...

I turned and looked back over my shoulder, toward the temple where I had left him hours ago. Alone with Varius...and with Baelor.

I let out a slow breath, secretly wondering if he was somewhere in there feeling exactly like I did right now.

Tired, but hopeful. I wondered if he was making the same progress I was.

At least, I hoped he was...



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