Chapter 579

Violet

"You are improving faster than I thought you would," Aelius said. "Far faster."

I couldn't stop the smile from forming on my lips. Coming from him, that was practically the same as a standing ovation.

We had been at it since the early morning, and had moved from the hill to the temple. It was hours and hours of working on the Life Sense, Aelius pushing me beyond my limit, and somewhere in the middle of the day, I had found out just how much more I could get out of myself.

One thing was certain, the Life Sense was working for me. I could smell out half the village, feel their heartbeats, whether they were calm, frightened, angry, all of it. I could feel the way things happened before they had even started.

Kylan had been working with Varius again, while the others were working with the villagers.

I looked over my shoulder, out of the temple, and finally noticed the orange sky. The sun was already beginning to set, and we had been so deep in training that I had almost forgotten about the Elite training.

"You will have to head back soon, will you not?" Aelius said.

I nodded at him. My feelings were complicated. I couldn't wait to see everyone again because I did have a few friends on that team and looked forward to training. I also couldn't wait to see Jorn again.

Even though we were "cousins," and it would only be natural to check up on him, especially outside of training—there was still this fear of being rejected. So I was playing it safe.

Training it is.

"You are planning to share something big tonight," Aelius stated.

I chuckled. "Since you can see everything," I said, feeling the nerves creeping back in. "Can't you just tell me how they'll react? Save me the trouble of worrying about it?"

Aelius smiled, the corners of his eyes creasing.

"I hope that one day you will finally realize just how loved you are, child."

Something caught in my throat as those words came out of his mouth. He let out a low groan before I could ask any further and pushed himself up. Fearing he would trip over himself, I was also quickly on my feet and reached out to steady him.

"You're getting old," I teased, holding his arm.

"Getting?" he grumbled.

My smile had quickly faded as I let his words turn over. Standing there, feeling his thin and frail arm didn't make the situation any better. He said he was fine, but what if he wasn't?

There was always this thought in the back of my mind.

"We only have a few days left," I began, moving on to something else

before that dark thought could get the better of me. "And I still haven't given everyone their tasks yet. I swear I have it all written down, all of it, but—"

"It is not you I worry about," Aelius breathed. "It is the prince. You, I already know will be alright now."

"Kylan?" I asked, squinting. "What about him?"

Aelius released a hum, breathing slowly through his nose. "You have changed, and have finally begun to listen." He had jumped right into it. "Whereas with him, I fear that part may never be fixed."

A small smile formed on his lips. His hand settled behind my back as he led me out of the temple.

"Varius told you about Kylan and the realm," I concluded. He nodded back.

"I've been thinking...we'll have to open a portal to the realm to get everyone inside...but something isn't sitting right with me," I shared my thoughts. My eyes went to the temple Kylan would've been in right about now. "Even with Baelor's eyes, Kylan got thrown out eventually," I said. "So how are the techniques I read about supposed to hold a portal open long enough for all of us to get in, do what we need to, and get back out again?" My throat tightened. "I said five minutes...but the more I think about it, the more it's starting to feel like five seconds."

Those were the things one would think about while meditating for hours, working on a Life Sense.

I looked over at Aelius, hoping for something.

But Aelius just kept walking, his eyes fixed straight ahead.

His silence only gave my brain the chance to think ever harder. Not about the Elite Team, but about Kaelis and her words. About what she had said in that last room last night without knowing the impact.

A purple crack in the sky...

She had called it rage. Made herself believe she had been so furious she had almost lost control, and that was what she might've seen. The exact same way it had started with my powers, but her emotions were probably even wilder.

Kaelis had more energy and feeling inside her than anyone I had ever met in my life. If anger was the thing that unlocked it, then I was pretty sure that girl could see a purple crack or even tear a hole straight through the world without even trying.

Suddenly my mind stopped. I remembered something. Something important...

Something Mom had tried to tell me once, a long time ago, inside the Veil. It had been locked away somewhere in the very back of my head, and now it had decided to come back all at once.

She had told me that if I ever needed guidance or needed to hear her voice, I could ask the Moon Oracle. The one whose howl is strong enough to reach through the portal.

It was about Kaelis...

She had been talking about her, and if Mom claimed that howl was strong enough to connect to the Veil, I was sure it could hold a realm. Give us those five minutes we needed without having to worry about everything crashing down. Literally.

"The Moon Oracle," I said, stopping in my tracks for a second.

"Your friend who has come to Starlight," Aelius frowned. "Yes?"

I hadn't even noticed we had reached his hut until he opened the door and led me inside. I waited until he had closed it behind me before I started speaking again.

"If even a little of Kaelis's power, one howl, just one, is enough to reach through the Veil...then couldn't she use it to strengthen the portal and hold it open long enough for all of us to get in and out?"

Aelius was quiet for a moment. "It could," he said, but his tone was careful.

"But?" I pressed.

"But she is untrained," he said. "Untrained power like hers is a dangerous thing for a wild and reckless princess," he went on. "She could hold that portal open, but she could also shatter it with all of you inside of it."

"Could you train her?" I asked. "The way you're training me?"

Aelius let out a long, tired exhale. "Her mother should have done that years ago," he said, his pale eyes meeting mine. "It is not my job, and unfortunately not something I can do for her. Same as I couldn't train Kylan."

I went quiet, thinking it through. "It is your plan, child," Aelius said. " And in the end, whatever choice you make is not mine to decide. It is yours."

Recruiting Kaelis...

I turned it over once more, and was starting to notice how risky it sounded. Nate would hate it, and Kylan probably even more. Though every bit of me pushed me toward that plan, I knew they wouldn't even let her anywhere near the realm.

I shook the thought off, deciding to push it away for now. "Either way, " I said, "I'll be back tomorrow night and will bring the whole Elite Team with me. Hand out everyone's tasks."

A faint, gentle smile appeared on Aelius's face.

"I will be anticipating it," he said, stepping closer.

His eyes found mine, all the way until he stood in front of me. A shiver went through me as the back of his fingers brushed against my cheek.

"What?" I asked softly.

He shook his head slowly. "I am still trying to work out," he said, " whether you are like your mother...or your father."

His finger trailed to my chin. "Or some impossible, perfect blend of the two of them."

I frowned. What was that supposed to mean?

"What do you—"

"We will see...soon enough." That was all he said before he released my chin, and stepped back again.

"You have all worked hard enough today," he told me. "Go on now," he instructed. "Gather your friends."

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