

Season 2 Episode 3

Tomorrow's Haunting Past

The sparkling blue petals of Alfea's gate unfolded, letting Bloom step through with a huff. The bright midday sun caught in her copper locks as she marched past a couple of confused students, but she barely noticed. Her hands were clenched at her sides, still burning with anger at the thought of having Valtor's mark anywhere near her skin again.

Stella: "Bloom! Stars, there you are!"

The sound of her best friend's voice made her stomach twist. Right. She'd vanished in the middle of class—of course her friends had been worried. Her anger dissipated, leaving only guilt. She barely had time to brace herself before Stella ran across the courtyard and threw her arms around her.

Stella: "I'm so glad you're okay! When we couldn't find you anywhere in Alfea, we panicked. We even called the Specialists, we were about to take the ship and come find you!"

Bloom forced a laugh, trying to ignore the guilt clawing at her ribs. If she'd come back any later, they might've seen her flying in from Cloud Tower.

Bloom: "I'm alright, Stella. I just... needed a walk to clear my head."

The smile she managed felt tight.

Musa: "Bloom! Thank the Great Dragon you're okay!"

The rest of the Winx had gathered around her, faces filled with relief.

Tecna: "Don't scare us like that, Bloom. You were gone exactly five hours and forty-three minutes. That's... a long walk."

Bloom winced. Of course Tecna had timed it. If anyone was going to connect the dots, it would be her. Bloom really hoped she wouldn't get too suspicious. If the incident with the fake Avalon last year was any indication, Tecna would not rest until she knew exactly where Bloom had been. Thankfully, Flora's soft voice diffused the tension.

Flora: "Let's just be happy she's back and safe. She clearly needed some space. Next time, please do tell us where you're going, okay? Stella was about to call the Solarian military to form a search party."

Layla: "Luckily we were able to convince her the Specialists would do." Layla grinned.

Bloom: "Haha, thanks for worrying guys. I'm okay, I promise. I was just tired and... well, Professor Avalon caught me a bit off guard."

Layla: "I still don't think it's good for you to be in his classes... Even if it's not *him*, he still has his face."

Flora: "You really should talk to Faragonda again, blossom."

Bloom: "It's okay, really. Faragonda is right, I still need to take his class in order to graduate and she can't make an exception just for me. People already think I get special treatment."

Layla opened her mouth to argue, then sighed.

Layla: “If you say so... I still think it’s stupid.”

Flora: “Next time, just come sit next to me. I’ll share my notes with you so you don’t have to pay too much attention.”

Bloom: “Thanks, Flora.”

Bloom felt her heart warm, she was incredibly grateful for her friends. They always knew how to make her feel better. But their kindness only made the guilt heavier. She didn’t deserve this.

Brandon: “Hey, Bloom.”

Bloom turned to see Brandon waving at her, the other Specialists right behind him.

Bloom: “Hi guys! Sorry for the false alarm. You really didn’t have to come all this way for me.”

Helia: “Of course we did,” Helia said while wrapping a loving arm around Flora. “When we heard you disappeared, we were worried Valtor had gotten to you.”

Bloom let out an awkward laugh. If only Helia knew how true his concerns actually were.

Timmy: “Just a heads up; if you vanish again, Tecna will place a tracker on you.”

Laughter rippled through the group. Bloom forced herself to join in, praying Tecna hadn’t already started her plan. She would undoubtedly go that far. Bloom decided to change the topic as fast as possible.

Bloom: “Is, uh... Sky with you?”

The laughter died instantly.

Riven: “He’s in Eraklyon. Don’t worry about him.”

Brandon: “He went home for a while... after what happened.”

Riven: “Tch, coward.”

Bloom managed a faint smile at seeing the boys stick up for her.

Bloom: “It’s okay. I just hope he’s alright. I did kind of burn him.”

Riven: “He’s fine. You don’t have to worry about an asshole like him. He got what he fucking deserved.”

Musa: “Riven, language!”

Brandon: “Don’t worry Bloom, he’s fine. I promise. About that actually, could we maybe talk for a bit? In private?”

Bloom was somewhat surprised to hear that Brandon of all people wanted to talk to her, he seemed awfully serious. She glanced at Stella, who gave her a reassuring nod.

Bloom: “Of course, Brandon.”

Bloom: “So, why did you want to talk to me?”

Brandon hesitated. His eyes stayed on the ground, jaw shifting. Finally, he sighed and looked up, looking into Bloom’s eyes with surprising sincerity.

Brandon: “I’m so sorry, Bloom. I’m so sorry for what he did that night and for everything else that happened to you. You truly don’t deserve that.”

Bloom: “Stars, Brandon, it’s not your fault.”

Brandon: “I know... but I should’ve said something to him sooner. I’m his best friend. I saw how possessive he’d become, how jealous. We all did. But Sky’s always been a decent guy, we didn’t think he’d go that far. After what Avalon did to you, he should’ve known better.”

Bloom didn’t know what to say. Her throat closed up, and the courtyard seemed to fade around them. She had never imagined Sky’s actions had left scars on anyone but her.

Brandon: “I know it doesn’t fix anything, but I want you to know he’s so sorry for what he did. All he can talk about is how much he messed up, how much he hates what he did that night. His anger got the better of him and he took it out on you, he wants you to know he’ll never let that happen again.”

Bloom felt uneasy about where this conversation was going, Sky couldn’t possibly want her to take him back? Right?

Bloom: “Brandon, I-”

He raised his hand gently.

Brandon: “Don’t worry, Bloom. He knows it’s over,” Brandon said quietly. “He just wanted me to tell you he’s sorry, for that night, and for not being the person you deserved. He still wants you to know he’s on your side, if you’ll let him be.”

A weight lifted from Bloom’s chest. That was the Sky she had known, not the stranger who hurt her that night.

Bloom: “Thank you for telling me, Brandon. I do want to see him again, as a friend. And I want you to tell him that what happened that night, it doesn’t haunt me anymore.”

Brandon let out a quiet laugh, the kind that trembled a little at the edges.

Brandon: “Stars, you’re stronger than I ever was, Bloom.”

She frowned slightly, unsure what he meant.

Brandon: “When... when I was captured by Amentia, it almost broke me.”

His hands were clenched together so tightly they trembled.

Brandon: “I never talked much about what happened in Downland when me and Stella got separated, but... Bloom, I know what it’s like. Being trapped, powerless, having someone else have control over you in such a way.”

The courtyard suddenly felt too quiet. Even the wind seemed to hesitate, carrying only the faint rustle of leaves.

Brandon: “If it wasn’t for you guys coming to save me, I don’t know what would have happened. Amentia didn’t care what I said, she was the princess and she would get what she wanted from me. I know it’s not the same as what happened with Avalon, but I want you to know Bloom, that you’re not alone in this.”

The words cracked something inside Bloom. Tears welled before she could stop them.

Bloom: “Brandon I’m sorry I - I didn’t...”

Brandon: “It’s okay. I never wanted anyone to know. I felt... ashamed. A Specialist, trained to be the strongest, not being able to...”

His voice faltered. Then, softer,

Brandon: “Stella helped me through it. Pulled me back when I couldn’t do it myself. And when Sky hurt you, I realised you didn’t have anyone like that anymore. Someone to pull you out when it gets dark.”

Bloom’s heart stuttered. Her mind flashed back to earlier that morning—to a pair of intense dark blue eyes pulling her from the void.

Brandon: “So if you ever need someone... Stella and I are here.

END