

His Blue Moon Princess

By Jenny Fox

Introduction

Running Away

I'm running as fast as I can.

I'm running for my life, through the rain and the cold. I'm so, so cold. But it doesn't matter right now. I keep running, the farthest I can, the fastest I can. Tears run down my cheeks, along with the rain.

"Come back here! You whore!"

I can hear his voice behind me, and fear makes me run even faster. He is chasing after me, shouting like crazy, calling me terrible names in the night. How can he do this? How could he do this to me? What did I ever do to deserve such a thing? He is my brother!

I take a right turn down a narrow street, looking for a place to hide, but unsure where to go. Can I really escape? The pouring rain is my only ally, as I know it will cover my scent. I keep running, barefooted on the asphalt, running for my life as I try to escape my only family member...

Don't make a sound. Don't cry, don't move.

I cover my mouth with both hands. I won't even breathe. I'm curled up next to a garbage dumpster, closing my eyes and trying to stop my erratic sobbing. I'm so scared, I'm shaking like never before. I close my eyes and pray. Please, don't let him find me, please, please, please...

My heart is pounding so loudly in my ears; I'm deaf to anything else. Even the downpour seems almost quiet. Never have I been so scared in my life before.

This time, he will kill me. I'm dead if he finds me.

Moon Goddess, mother, please, don't let him find me...

As I can't hear him yell anymore, I sneak a peek behind my hideout. Is he gone? Did he go somewhere else?

"Gotcha! Come here, you whore!"

I scream.

He grabs my hair, and the first blow is so violent, I fall to the ground. The pain is terrible. My vision goes blurry, and tears flow. I scream again, out of fear, trying to protect myself. He punches me again and gets on top of me, pinning me to the ground.

He keeps hitting me, one punch more violent than the previous. I keep screaming, crying, begging, but he won't stop.

I'm going to die.

"Stop! No! Please, stop!"

I keep screaming, but Alec won't stop. My pain and supplications never made him stop before. And he was never this mad. My head hurts; my entire body hurts. My arms feel so weak that I can barely hold them up while trying to protect myself.

"I'm not done with you, Nora! Stop resisting! Die! Die! I'm going to kill you!"

No, no, no, I don't want to die! Please, make it stop! Won't anyone help? The rain covers my screams. Alec is beating me so hard; I can't take it anymore. I'm going to die here on the asphalt. I feel each of his punches on my face, my ribs, my stomach. His fists just mercilessly hit wherever they can reach.

He stops.

Is he done? Oh, Moon Goddess, I hope he's had enough... This pain is killing me. I can taste my blood in my mouth and feel some running on my face, too.

Suddenly, I feel his hands on my neck. He is... He's choking me! I try to fight him, push him away, but his grip is tightening so hard around my throat. I can't breathe! Let me breathe! Black spots start blurring my vision, and my head hurts. I gasp helplessly, but nothing comes; his hands won't let go. My hands try to push him away, but he won't budge. I see the look in his eyes. He will really do it.

I feel my consciousness give up; I can't see anything. The headache overtakes it all.

I can't...

“Hey! What the hell are you doing!”

Chapter 1

“Nora!”

I tremble in fear. The voice calling my name from next door freezes my hands immediately. He walks in with his bloodshot eyes, and I can guess what is coming. I bite my lip. The small kitchen seems way too narrow at this instant, and I instinctively step back as he approaches.

He raises his hand, and before I can say a word, slaps me.

“Don’t run away when I’m calling you!”

I can feel the burn on my cheek and do my best to keep my eyes down. If I look him in the eyes, he will get even madder. He unleashes at me, his voice echoing with anger in the room.

“Why is the food not ready, huh? Everyone is waiting because of you! Do you feel you can make everyone wait? Are you happy to

make us wait? You useless trash! The Alpha is mad at me because of you!”

The slaps keep coming before I even get a chance to talk back. He doesn’t care for my explanation. Why is it so unfair? It isn’t my fault! Rory and Bill came late with the groceries they were supposed to bring hours ago! I had to start later than planned, and despite that, I tried to get it done as fast as possible, I really did! But it was just an impossible task. Why do I get a beating?

My brother doesn’t care; he won’t listen to me. He is just a mad, angry beast. I can only try to cover my face with my arms as the blows keep coming.

“Brother, please, stop!” I beg as my tears run down.

“Who are you calling your brother? I have no useless trash sister like you!”

But I am his blood sister! How can he say that? His words are as painful as his hits. Alec used to care for me. He used to love me and play with me. But that was a long time ago, in our childhood.

Everything changed for the worst when our parents died. He was twelve, and I was seven.

He found us late, on a stormy night, in a bloodbath. I remember it all. The horror on his face, the shock in his eyes, and how he ran away from the scene. His attitude changed completely after that.

He finally stops hitting me, out of breath, but still red from anger. It hurts so much. I keep my arms up around myself, just in case, but he steps back. “Hurry up! I’ll kill you if you don’t hurry! You useless thing!”

He leaves the room, and I slowly lower my arms, still shaking. I try not to cry, but I can feel tears filling my eyes. I get up, ignoring the pain. I need to resume cooking...

I try not to touch the painful areas. It hurts so badly. New bruises will add to the ones I already have. Sometimes it hurts for days, and the pain won’t let me sleep. Can I ever escape this? Sometimes I fear he will really end up killing me.

I finish cooking and bring the plates to the dining hall. Many pairs of eyes follow my every move. Some pack members smirk after

me, and some pretend I don't exist. I prefer the latter. I keep my eyes down and put one plate on the table after another, hoping no one is in the mood to mess with me today.

I'm almost done serving when I can feel something on my thigh. A big hand is gripping me! I get away from the disgusting touch with a shiver and realize it's Marcus. He is more than twice my age and a real pervert. I can't hold a squeak of disgust and step back hurriedly.

At the end of the table, our Alpha, Vince, hits the table with his fist as soon as he hears me, making me jump. "Nora! Shut up and get out of there! Who wants to see your face when we are about to eat! Get out!"

I run away from this room filled with looks of hate and disgust. Some members of the pack even smirk or whistle when I walk by them. I quickly cover my scar with my hair as I exit the room.

I can only breathe again when I finally reach the empty kitchen. Grabbing some leftovers from the fridge, I hurry downstairs. I don't want to be there when everyone comes out of the dining room.

The basement of the main house is a large, dusty room, filled with overused furniture, broken things, and old stuff no one wants. And me.

I retreat to the yellowish rundown old couch and sit to eat my cold lasagna. This place is where I feel the safest. No one comes here, and no one knows I live here. Yes, this is my room. It has been for the past nine years... I tried to sort it to make it comfier, but I can never get used to it. It's dusty, no matter how many times I try to clean it, and there is just one small window. It doesn't have any heater. The winter nights are almost unbearable, even when I gather all the old clothing and blankets I can to cover myself.

Facing me, a large, broken mirror shows my shattered reflection.

The scolding from the Alpha comes back to me. I had forgotten about my scar. I must have put my hair behind my ear without thinking while cooking. I don't like it either. She runs from my eyebrow to my jaw in an irregular, vivid red line. I brush my hair with my fingers, trying to hide this hideous scar with my dark curls.

I find the girl in the mirror so pitiable... She's scrawny, petite, and pale. I look like a sickly kid when I'm already seventeen. I envy

the other girls from the pack. Girls like Jessica or Amber, with their feminine looks, curvy bodies, and confident attitude. They are the same age as me, but we are nothing alike. All I can do is try to live as quietly as possible, avoid my brother's wrath, and the pack members' mean looks. They all hate me.

Suddenly, I wake up, still on the couch. Oh, Moon Goddess, did I fall asleep here? My brother is going to kill me! I get up as quickly as I can and run up the stairs, but as I exit the basement, I can already hear him.

“Nora! Useless freak! Where are you hiding! Wait ‘till I get you!”

I freeze next to the basement stairs. What time is it? I try to think of something to explain my absence, but nothing comes to mind. Alec is yelling again, from outside. He must be looking for me, thinking I went to the forest. Our pack is on the outskirts of the city, making it easy for us to take a run whenever we want to. For those who can shapeshift...

I take a few steps in the kitchen, hesitating. Should I try to go to the dining room and start cleaning up like nothing happened? Or I could try going upstairs to hide in one of the rooms...

A wave of pain violently hits me from my scalp. My hair is violently grabbed from behind, and I lose balance as I'm forcefully pulled.

“Found her!” Says a feminine voice. “Alec, I got your bitch sister!”

It's Amber, not letting me go no matter how I try to escape her. My brother storms in and hits me hard—so hard that I hit the floor.

“I'm sorry! I'm sorry!” I beg, sobbing already, “Alec, I'm sorry, I just...”

“Won't you shut the hell up! Where were you hiding, you bitch! You thought the chores would get done by itself? Or were you hoping someone would do it for you, huh?”

“Why the hell is the Alpha keeping this girl, again? She's so useless and dumb!” Says Amber.

“I'm sorry, I'll do it right away! Sorry!” I sob.

I get up to reach the sink and run the water to start washing dishes, trying to keep my tears in. My brother and Amber keep growling, but at least he has stopped hitting me. He won't get too violent whenever someone else is in the room, especially a girl.

"If you run away or hide from your chores again, I will kill you!" He swears as he exits the room, followed by Amber, who can't resist smirking at me.

...I'm so sick of it.

When will this stop? This is my hell, day after day. I've tried running away. I did. But Alec is faster than me, and I got the worst beating ever when he caught me. How could I outrun any wolf when I can't shapeshift myself?

I wish they just let me go, but where would I go next? I don't have any other relatives and no friends. I'm penniless too. Where would I go...? Don't cry, Nora. Stop. It's useless.

"Give it to me, I said!"

I shake my head, confused. “I don’t have anything, I swear! He didn’t give me anything, Alec, he really didn’t! You know he gives it all to you!”

He growls in anger, but it’s true. What is wrong with him? I just got back from work, and he started searching, even emptied the content of my bag on the floor. Now he keeps asking me for the money. But what money? He knows Robert gives him all my salaries! I never see a single cent I work so hard for!

Even the customer’s tips, Robert just takes it from me as soon as my shift is over! I could never hide any of it! And Moon Goddess knows I wish I could!

“Why do you ask? Do ... Do you have money issues again?” I ask.

He glares back at me, furious. “Again? Isn’t that your fault I’m ruined! You are just a damn waste of money! Can’t you work harder? How am I supposed to make it through with this measly paycheck you get?”

I’m astounded by his words. How dare he? I work like a slave all day and night! The Alpha makes me do all the chores for the pack,

from cooking to laundry to cleaning the whole house, everything on my own. And Alec got me this job at the local pub when I was fifteen, making me work those crazy shifts for half of the night! I can only get a few hours of rest at night, and it is never enough.

He, on the other hand, has never had a proper job. He is twenty-three, but Alec says he doesn't need a job because he must focus on the pack, for when he will be chosen as the next Beta. As if that would ever happen. Even I know there is no way my brother will ever get that position. No decent Alpha would ever appoint someone so lazy and self-centered as a Beta.

However, Alec is convinced otherwise. That only makes him act even more unreasonably. He just spends money whenever he wants and shows off in front of his friends while I must watch. That money is what I earn with my sweat, and yet Alec is the one who spends it. How can he pretend I'm the one he uses it on? I don't own anything but a few clothes! I don't even have a bed, and I can only eat leftovers if there's any.

So why is he now interrogating me like I'm some thief?

"Anyway, you will be working tomorrow night," he says.

“What? But I haven’t had a day off in weeks! And the Alpha wants me to make dinner– another pack will be visiting! I won’t make it in time if…”

“I don’t care!” Alec yells. “It’s your problem, not mine! You will go to work, and I’ll kill you if you don’t! And the Alpha better not be mad at me because of you!”

I stand there, shocked, as he exits the room. What’s wrong with him? He has never told me to do anything that might upset the Alpha, and now he wants me to go to work? At least he or the Alpha will be mad at me!

I take my head in my hands. What do I do now? The Alpha was so adamant about me preparing all this dinner! Some people from the Blood Moon pack are coming, and that is big for our pack; he will never forgive me if I don’t help him welcome them.

Our Jade Moon pack is one of the oldest werewolves Clans of Silver City and the best located, but we are also one of the smallest and humblest.

We are nothing next to the Blood Moon pack.

I only know what I heard from other people, but it's enough. The Blood Moon pack, despite being only a few decades old, is the strongest in the area, and unrivaled. Even the Sapphire Moon or Gold Moon packs are no match.

But it's not about their numbers. The Blood Moon pack is fearsome because it is wealthy, hungry, and ruthless. Some say the Alpha leads with an iron hand, and no mistakes are permitted. They're scary, but they are like royalty to this City's werewolves. Our Jade Moon Pack is on neutral terms with them, so far. I don't believe any Alpha leader would willingly become their enemy.

So, what will happen if I ruin this dinner? I could ruin relationships between the two packs and lead ours to a disaster! The Alpha will banish me, or worse. I try to sleep, but I'm too worried.

What is wrong with my brother? I have seen him in need of money, but now he acts like he has gone crazy! And his bloodshot eyes... He was down here in the basement when I came home, looking for money. I even heard him ask Amber for cash. What kind of trouble did he get into this time? I don't like this.

What will I do tomorrow? I can't do both! My shift starts at four, and the dinner must be ready at nine. Should I do as Vince said and skip work, or obey Alec? Neither of them will let me off.

Vince hates me as well, and I fear his beating more than I fear my brother's; he is way too strong.

Either way, this won't end well for me.

The next day is a nightmare. My brother is already after me when I'm making breakfast for everyone, threatening me non-stop. "You'd better not let me down, Nora. I want this money, you hear me? You are going to work as long and as hard as Robert wishes you, and you better come home with that paycheck in your hand! Or else you're going to regret it, I swear!"

He doesn't stop until the Alpha comes downstairs to eat. Vince glares at me, and I lower my head, as submissive as I can be. A few other pack members enter after him to join the breakfast. Among them, Marcus sends me a lewd glance, making me shiver with disgust.

“What are you waiting for, you stupid girl?” Says Amber. “Won’t you hurry up and serve us the food? Do you want the Alpha to starve or what?”

To add to her words, Vince growls. I can feel my wolf whimper inside, afraid. I can barely feel her nowadays. I serve breakfast as fast as I can, feeling the glares on me. My wolf whines continuously inside. She doesn’t want to be there, and I don’t either.

I’m about to leave the dining hall when the Alpha calls me again.

“Nora. Tonight’s dinner is essential for our pack. If you make any mistake, you will be banished from this pack for good, you hear me?”

I glance at my brother, sitting away from the Alpha, but he acts like normal. Alec will blame me in any case.

“Nora!”

I jump. The Alpha got impatient from my silence. I nod slowly, and he growls once more before starting his breakfast.

I leave the room and exit the house for fresh air. What do I do now?

My eyes set on the forest. This green, vast, and beautiful forest. My wolf wants to go; she wants to run among the trees, feel the fresh cold air. The autumn's fallen leaves, the gentle breeze of the wind, the smell of the grass. I know. How I wish I could let her out, too...

I bite my lip. I wish I could be a free wolf. Free of my brother, free of my pack, and free of those painful memories.

It's so tempting, and I can almost feel my wolf who wants to run there too. But I can't, I can't...

"I won't go," I say.

I'm shaking, but it's been two days, and I won't change my mind. Alec stares at me with a furious look. I ignore him. I may be afraid of him, but the Alpha's wrath is even scarier.

“What, did you say you won’t go? You just shut up and go already; I am not asking for your opinion! You bitch!”

I bite my lip and clench my fist, holding the spoon. I try to focus on those appetizers, ignoring the angry eyes of my brother. Alec starts yelling at me, as I expected. I can take his insults. I am no bitch, no whore, no slut. I have never once done anything that could make me deserve these names, but he keeps going on and on. Why would he call me such things? I’ve never even been kissed before or been with a man!

Hang on, Nora. This is not something he’s never done before.

He slaps me, but I don’t care. I ignore the pain and keep making those toasts. A new slap, and one of the appetizers falls on the floor. Don’t look at him, don’t. Keep going.

“You are going to go to work right now!” He yells in the kitchen.

No, I won’t. I know it’s no use talking back, so I don’t. Even my wolf is proud of me. She is being fierce, showing her teeth, sharing her strength with me. We won’t submit to him. If I don’t make this dinner successful for the Alpha, the whole pack will be

mad at me. We all know how merciless the Blood Moon pack can be. Everyone still vividly remembers how they destroyed the Snow Moon Clan two years ago. They didn't just fight them; they killed all of those who didn't pledge allegiance to the Blood Moon emblem.

Compared to that kind of threat, those of my brother are not as fearsome.

He keeps the yelling going, but I ignore him. He slaps me a couple of times, pissed, but that won't work. When he suddenly stops, I raise my head, surprised. The Alpha, Vince, just entered the kitchen.

“What’s going on here?” Vince asks. “I can hear you all the way from my office, Alec, keep it down.”

“Nothing, Alpha. Just telling this eyesore to work faster...”

“You mind your own business! I need your sister working, stop hindering her work. You want to be useful? Go help upstairs. And shut up!”

Alec glares at me but has no choice but to obey and leave. Vince looks at me with disdain, peeking a glance at my work so far. It's not much, but it's not even 4 pm yet, and I know I'm going to be ready on time. Without saying anything, he exits the room. Apparently, he recognizes I've been working diligently and won't get mad. I let out a sigh of relief and go back to my task. At least now I know Alec won't dare to come back here.

The hours go by, and I can feel the tension rising within our pack's building. Everyone is anxious about this meeting. Vince came down to check on my work five times within the last two hours. But I am proud of everything I have done and even feel somewhat confident about the dinner.

“Nora! Stop daydreaming!”

“So... Sorry, Alpha. But I'm almost done!” I defend myself, showing the completed dishes.

Vince nods, but won't compliment me. Then, he looks at me and clicks his tongue. I glance down. I spent all afternoon cooking, and thus, my clothes were dirtied. They weren't pretty, to begin with, but now... I look like a beggar. Even my hair is messy.

“I will change into new clothes as soon as I’m done.”

“Whatever. Just go to your room, and don’t you dare come out tonight. I don’t need the Blood Moon leaders to see your... face.”

His eyes are set on where my scar is, behind my hair. I was careful to braid my hair the right way so my curls would hide it, but it’s no use, he knows it’s there. I avoid his gaze and lower my head.

At the same time, a group of pack members walks by to go to the recreation room, laughing and jokingly pushing one another. Alec is among them, and he stops as soon as he sees me. He goes from a smile to a pissed-off look in no time and keeps glaring at me. I know my brother still thinks about this shift, but it’s way too late now. I wonder why he wanted tonight’s money so badly. Is he having money issues again?

But he can’t say anything right now; Vince is still facing me and watching my every move like a hawk, making sure I finish in time. I feel, however, that this will only delay Alec’s punishment for opposing him...

An hour later, I'm in the kitchen with my completed dishes, giving instructions.

“...And this is called crème brûlée. All you need to do is burn the sugar on top a little when you serve it like I just did.”

Jill and Maria are frowning, trying to remember it all. They will be the ones to serve tonight, as Vince doesn't want anyone that is not part of the pack to see me. Jill and Maria are my age, but they are way prettier, though they are not really smart.

“Wait, why did you have to make a Russian dessert?” Asks Maria while playing with her blonde hair

“It's not Russian, it's French! Vince said the Black Family is originally from France, so...”

They give me suspicious stares, but I don't care. All I need is for them to remember a few names and how to serve it!

Thankfully, about ten minutes later, I think they finally get it. I hope so... They leave upstairs to get ready, and I can finally clean the kitchen.

It's almost time. Everyone is ready, and it is time for me to go hide in the basement. I'm so exhausted from cooking all afternoon, I just lay flat on my familiar couch. I'm about to fall asleep when I can hear it. The people from the Blood Moon Clan are here!

I get up, totally awake, and run across the room to the small window. I climb on top of a rundown drawer to reach the opening. I need to stand on my toes to get to see something. My eyes are at ground level, and, for a while, all I can distinguish are feet and paws. But I can clearly hear Vince's voice.

"Welcome! Welcome to the Jade Moon Den. I am Vincent Greene, and this is my Beta, Peter."

I can distinguish his big brown boots among the crowd, and Peter, in his wolf form, next to him. Actually, a few members of our pack shapeshifted, too, before the guests' arrival, just in case... I suppose both sides can't trust the other.

However, facing them, the Blood Moon pack members are easy to recognize, even from my position. All of them are in human form and wearing dark suits and classy black leather shoes. Look

like some mafia gang has arrived! I'm shocked not even one of them is in their wolf form. Are they that confident? Or just trying to act arrogantly? One of them replies with a gentle voice I didn't expect.

"Thank you for having us. You have a lovely turf indeed... How lucky of you to be able to enjoy a run in the forest anytime you want."

His tone is peaceful, so why is it his words seem so... menacing? I feel like he is threatening instead of thanking! Vince must be tense, but he won't show it.

"Oh, we are very attached to our land. My family has protected it for generations. But the forest is everyone's, of course, so please do not hesitate to come whenever you want to escape the city!"

I don't believe they would wait for permission...

Vince finally invites them in, and I leave my spot to go put my ear against the door. The basement is next to the kitchen and close to the dining hall. I can hear all the chatting as they go by, with Vince introducing some pack members and showing them the

way. He is the only one talking; none of the Blood Moon can be heard. I wonder what they look like...

I listen to them enter the dining hall, and then the kitchen goes quiet.

Meanwhile, I change quickly into some clean clothes. I grab a clean pair of jeans that I have left in the old wardrobe and put on a dark blue sweater that's too big on me. At least I feel clean.

I'm putting my messy hair into a low bun when I hear some steps coming from the kitchen. Jill and Maria came to take the first plates, chatting as always.

"Gosh, I could barely breathe in there; everyone is so tense! If only they would relax a little," says Maria.

"Oh, I wish I could relax with that Nathaniel guy. I'm sure he's a wild beast behind the pretty boy look..."

"Keep your paws off, girl. Amber already is eyeing him. That girl is such a slut... But even without her, I wouldn't go near one of

them. Those Black brothers are scary. I mean, those guys killed their own father and Alpha!”

“And it’s only two of them here. But I heard the oldest brother is the worst; he is the crazy one. Okay, you got everything?” Jill whispers.

They go back, and the kitchen goes silent again. Did they really kill their Alpha and father? I didn’t know that part! No wonder everyone is so afraid of them... Jill and Maria come and go again in the kitchen, but the chatting is reduced to them trying to remember what they are serving. It’s nerve-wracking to hear them struggle when I’m just behind the door, but I can’t disobey Vincent’s orders just to help those two!

Thankfully, it seems the dinner goes well. I can hear everyone exiting the dining room, and the voices reach me again when they go out.

“... was impressed. It’s been a while since we’ve enjoyed some authentic French cuisine,” says the guy from earlier.

They liked it! I find myself smiling and let out a sigh of relief.

“Glad you enjoyed it! It was our honor to have you here tonight.”

“Who knew the Jade Moon Clan had such cooking-skilled members... By the way, you have some exquisite ladies here.”

Vince must be overjoyed. This is the same as saying they would agree to let our packs members court each other, right?

“Hey. Is that all your girls?” Says a voice I haven’t heard before.

Judging from his arrogant tone, that must be the other brother. What’s with his question? He sounds so disdainful!

“Hmm, well, yes. You’ve seen all our young girls who have yet to find their mate tonight...”

“Never mind. Let’s leave.”

They exchange a few greetings and soon leave. I can hear some of our pack members letting out sighs of relief.

“What’s with this attitude of his? Are we not pretty enough now?”
Growls Amber.

“Anyway, that went well. We should be content with that alone. I don’t want any issues with the Blood Moon Clan. Their brother is pissed at the Sapphire Moon Clan these days and trust me. No one wants to take their place...”

I step down, as Vince is now just giving orders for the patrols. What a night... Even without being in the room, I was still on edge because of this dinner. Again, I wonder why the Blood Moon bothered to come all the way here. They own half of the city and scare the other half. Are they interested in the outskirts of the city now?

I just keep thinking about the dark rumors surrounding those three Black brothers and slowly fall into a deep sleep...

Something’s wrong with my brother.

Since the dinner with the Blood Moon Clan and me not obeying him, Alec has been acting weird. I thought he would come and

punish me afterward, but he didn't. For some reason, he just keeps watching me from afar.

Even today, as I am working, he is standing at the bar, watching my every move and drinking without saying a word. Robert frowns, unsure about what is going on. At some point, he grabs my arm, almost making me spill the beers.

“Hey, what's with Alec? You did something? Looks like he's pissed at you or something’.”

“I don't know. Now let me go, customers on table six are waiting for those,” I just answer and shake his arm off.

He may not be pleased with my answer, but I really don't know. It's his fourth beer already, and he hasn't said a word for hours! It's almost scary how silent he is.

Knowing he is watching, I keep working. It's not like I'm bored, anyway. Rob's bar is crowded tonight, and the orders keep coming in non-stop. Liz and I have been running around all evening. Elisabeth, Robert's daughter, is the only member of the pack who's kind to me.

I'm cleaning a table for the next group when someone loudly orders more beer from across the room. I nod and go behind the counter to pour the drinks, and Liz joins me, grabbing a towel.

"Those drunkards spilled some of their damn beer on me! How am I supposed to go party after this if I smell like a barrel of beer!"

"It should come off with just water and soap from the ladies' room," I say.

"Really? You better be sure because I'm not going like that!"

I nod, and she runs off to the bathroom. Liz isn't bad. She's just a bit self-centered and still acts like she's sixteen instead of twenty-six sometimes. But I like her. Sometimes she gives me some of her clothes she won't wear anymore, even if it's just because she is too lazy to throw it out. Thanks to her, I can wear something new sometimes, as Alec won't ever leave me any money to buy anything.

I keep working, and the bar is so full, even Robert seems in a good mood. Liz and I run around without stopping to keep up until about 11 pm.

Now the groups are paying and exiting the bar one after another, going to find some more fun somewhere else. I can clean the tables without stopping every time to take a new order, and even Robert went outside for a quick smoke. I realize Alec is still there; only he isn't alone anymore. Why is he talking with Marcus?

I don't like this. This pervert is leering me, whispering with my brother, who doesn't seem very happy. Alex's fidgeting. I wish I knew what they're talking about...

“Nora! If you're done, come clean the glasses, girl!”

Liz has decided she's done for tonight. She takes her apron off and waves me good-bye before heading to the back exit. She probably was waiting for a chance to go while her dad is not watching.

I take over behind the sink, and I'm almost in front of my brother and Marcus now. They immediately stop talking, and both stare at me. One is looking at me with disgust, the other with lust.

"Hi, Nora," says Marcus

I ignore him and keep washing one glass after another. Even if I concentrate on my hands, I can feel his gaze piercing me. It's so unsettling.

"Playing hard to get? That's not what this pretty skirt says, you know."

Won't he stop? My own brother is sitting in front of him, and neither of them minds his trashy talk! This man is so disgusting. My wolf is growling inside, annoyed, too. Can't he just drink and leave like everyone else?

"Isn't your sister good at this, Alec? She's a freak, all right, but a hot one..."

The freak doesn't want any attention, you pervert. There are so many hot girls in the pack, why is he always after me? I'm not

pretty, I wear ragged and oversized clothes, and I even have a scar across my face! Is he blind or what?

Suddenly, his hands go over the counter, and he grabs my wrist.

“Hey, don’t run away, sweetheart. Come on; I just want to chat a bit.”

Let me go! I struggle to break free, but he won’t let go. He is grinning and holding as hard as he can until it hurts.

“Let me go!”

“Oh, here’s your pretty voice, sweetheart. Do you have any idea how enticing it sounds? You could...”

“Enough!” Robert is back, and his yell surprises Marcus enough that he loses his grip, and I can free myself. I massage my painful wrist and step back. Marcus looks pissed, but he won’t win against Robert’s angry face.

“Marcus, why the hell are you annoying her when she’s working! Get out!”

Marcus grunts, but he knows who the stronger wolf in the room is. He pays and leaves, to my relief. That was close... He’s gotten physical a few times before, but these days, he really is pushier than usual.

Alec, still silent, gives me an annoyed look and leaves behind him. I see him catching up with Marcus outside, a pissed-off expression on his face, talking to him. Robert starts counting today’s tips while looking at them across the window.

“Tsk, this guy is such a pain... And you, hurry up with the cleaning. I’m tired.”

No need to tell me twice.

The bar is located downtown, thirty minutes away from our Jade Moon territory. I don’t mind the walk. Most people don’t even notice me, and I can enjoy the quietness of the night. And it’s mid-October, so it’s not too cold either.

Though Silver City can be dangerous at times, we cohabitate peacefully with humans. They don't meddle in our pack situations, but it's different between the werewolf clans. We get into fights with other packs sometimes, but the Jade Moon Clan never looks for trouble willingly. We don't want to upset a bigger, stronger Clan by mistake.

I finally make it back to the main house, but surprisingly, someone's still up. Rory and Bill are talking in the kitchen over some drinks. I just head right away for the basement, but they call me when they see me.

"Hey, freak! Come here for a second."

I'm in no mood to entertain them now... I want to flee to the basement and get some sleep! But they insist with a hand gesture, and I guardedly enter the dining hall.

"Oh, come on; we are not going to eat you or something'." Says Rory, seeing me so defiant.

I don't trust them. My brother's friends can be quite vile and cruel when they're bored. They've locked me out a few times, for example...

I stop a few steps after the door, within a safe distance from them.

"Hey, where's your brother? We've been looking for him all day!"

I frown. What, so they were just waiting for Alec? I shake my head. "I don't know... He came to Robert's Pub with Marcus, but they left together before I did. I really don't know where he went..."

"Tsk. This dumbass is evading us!" Growls Bill.

"He can't keep it up for long, anyway. Even Peter's looking for him. Bet that idiot was actually stupid enough to borrow some money from the Beta, too."

"Alec borrowed money from you and Peter?" I ask, nervous.

Bill slams his glass on the table, making me jump.

“Hell yeah, he did! And we’ve had enough of it! That idiot brother of yours owes half of the pack and smokes it away!”

Not good... Alec doesn’t win any money on his own! All he has is my salary and the inheritance from our parents. Why is my brother going around borrowing money? There is no way he can pay them back! Rory keeps complaining, but he’s obviously drunk and gabbling. I can leave the room without either of them noticing.

Back to my familiar basement, I’m exhausted. Why is Alec so... reckless? He won’t get a decent job; he just pushes all his chores on me and beats me up when he’s upset.

What was that talk with Marcus for, anyway? Is he trying to borrow some money again?

That night I lay on my old couch with an uneasy feeling...

The next day, my brother isn’t in the dining hall for breakfast. And I am not the only one concerned about his absence: Peter comes

to me to ask about his whereabouts, but I'm just as clueless as he is.

Borrowing money from the Beta and his friends, what was he thinking? Peter could have Vincent banish him from the pack for this kind of thing; our clan is not easy on troublemakers...

I try not to think about it too much and just focus on my chores for the day. But after cleaning the breakfast dishes, doing the laundries, and cleaning the first and second floors, I keep wondering where he could be. No one has seen him all day, I heard Vincent and Rory complain about it.

I wish I knew where Alec was, too! A lot of people stared at me suspiciously as they came for dinner time, and I realize he might have borrowed money from more people. Wait, he wouldn't have run away, right? My hand freeze on my sponge. Could he? No, it's just been a day; maybe he's...

"Nora, come here."

"Alec!"

My brother is here! He's in the kitchen, fidgeting and looking at me with a weird look. I approach him cautiously. He looks sober, but his bloodshot eyes... Suddenly, he hands me what he's been holding in his hands. Isn't that one of our mother's dresses? I recognize the beautiful embroidery and the lace on the back. I didn't even know he had it!

"I found this. Just put it on."

Is this supposed to be a... present? He's frowning and won't look at it. I am not sure about what to do. Isn't this dress too thin and too big? Why would I put on such a pretty and daring dress here and now?

"Just put this damn thing on, I said!"

He violently slaps me, making me step back. I don't answer and flee down to the basement to obey. I don't want to get hit a second time.

I get dressed in front of the mirror, but my reflection is... unsettling. This dress is pure white, it doesn't look too good on my pallid and bruised skin. And it's mother's...

“How long do you need to put on a damn dress!”

Alec comes down without warning and looks at me, visibly pissed. Seeing that I’m done, he runs up to me and grabs me by the arm without a word. I try resisting, but he’s way stronger. He takes me out of the house and starts walking toward the city.

“Wait, Alec, stop! I can’t go out looking like this! What are you doing? Stop!”

He stops, and I get a new slap, a second, a third, one after another.

“Will you shut the hell up! I don’t fucking care! Just shut up and walk!”

I don’t dare to say a word anymore. I don’t want any more hits, but where are we going? I’m barefooted, and he makes me walk looking like this in the open! I am starting to get really scared of what’s coming now. He makes sure we avoid the rest of the pack, making us take the long way around the houses. Everyone is having dinner, is that why he only came now? To avoid others? I don’t like this...

Twenty minutes later, we finally enter one of the buildings on the outskirts of the city. I know this one: It belongs to our Jade Moon Clan, so a few pack members live here. Who are we meeting, then? Without a word, he pushes me into the elevator and finally lets my arm go. I'm freezing, and my arm aches...

"Alec, what's going on? Why are we here?" I ask.

"Settling my debts."

"What, how?"

He doesn't answer and pushes me to the sixth floor. He grabs me again as he sees me hesitating and pushes me. I trip and almost fall on my knees as we enter one of the apartments. When I raise my head, I see Marcus.

Marcus, staring at me with a grin, half-naked.

"There you go," says Alec.

“Wait, what? Alec, what is this?” I ask, panicked.

Oh, Moon Goddess, no, no, no. Marcus won't keep his hungry eyes off me, and my brother looks so... detached.

“I told you we are settling my debts. Marcus will do that.”

“Exactly, sweetheart. Now you are going to be a good girl and let me have my fun, and your brother walks out with all that money he needs. How great is that?” Exclaims Marcus, with a broad smile.

Have they gone crazy! I don't want to spend even a minute with this lecherous dog! And now he wants to sell me to this old pervert for money? What the Hell!

“No, no, I'm going,” I say, turning back to the door.

But Alec is in my way and grabs my arm forcefully.

“Stop it, Nora! All you have to do is let him fuck you, and our money problems will be over! What, are you going to say you

don't want to? You think I give a damn about you? But look, we need that money, so you're going to be a good girl and..."

"And screw you, Alec!" I explode. "What money problems? You're the one who got in trouble in the first place! Why do I have to do this! I don't get a single cent for myself! Now you want to make me pay for the money I earned, and you stupidly wasted? No way I'm doing this!"

He hits me violently —a full punch, throwing me on the floor. I land painfully on my arms, letting out a cry.

"Shut the hell up! Whose fault is it I'm broke in the first place! Who made me an orphan, huh? You freak! Who gives a damn about what you think!"

He grabs me by the hair, forcefully making me stand on my knees, and looks at me with those crazy eyes.

"You're going to do it, Nora. You're going to have sex with Marcus. And after that, you better not complain, not a word, to anyone, because if you do, I will kill you for good this time, you hear me?"

He lets me go and storms out, slamming the door behind him.

He has gone mad. I'm shaking all over, from the panic and the shock combined. What nightmare is this?

“Well, well... It seems like you have your orders, now. So, let's be a good girl, Nora. I'm paying your brother a good sum to have my way with you, so don't you play hard to get now.”

Hell no.

I don't want this pork anywhere near me, and there is no way I'm going to let him touch me in any way. My wolf is growling like crazy inside, ready to defend herself.

No way.