

Chapter 10

I feel safe... Something warm is surrounding me. Damian's familiar, reassuring smell. This is where I belong.

I breathe in deeply. Suddenly, a cold chill runs down my spine. I'm... scared. I can't sense my wolf anymore. Where's Damian? I can't feel him anymore! There is a dark, frightening shadow coming closer, reeking of blood. Of sweat. A memory that scares me. I want to run away, but I can't move. I don't feel my legs; I don't feel my wolf!

“Nora, Nora! Wake up, Nora!”

I suddenly open my eyes. Damian's facing me on the bed and holding my trembling hands. What was I...? A nightmare? I'm on his bed, in his room. The sun is rising outside. I catch my breath, slowly coming back to my senses. Damian puts a hand on my cheek, worried.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah... Sorry, I think I just had a nightmare...”

What was it about? I forget already. I can vaguely remember a chill and something that made me panic. Gosh, this was so intense...

Damian leans to kiss my forehead, caressing my cheek. “You’re okay, Nora. Sorry, you were asleep so deeply, I went to take a shower before waking you up.”

Now that I notice it, his hair is dripping, and he is wearing a new pair of dark jeans. He is still half-naked though, with a bath towel around his shoulders, and I can see the black crescent moon tattoo on his neck in full. He smells like mint-scented shampoo. I smile.

“I like a clean boyfriend,” I say while giving him a quick kiss.

“Noted, princess.”

“Can I borrow your shower if you’re done?”

“Sure. I’ll try to find you something clean to put on.”

I go to his bathroom to wash the remnants of my nightmare away. I can’t remember what was scaring me so much in that dream... Maybe that’s for

the better. I realize I just spent the night sleeping with Damian and blush. I felt so great into his arms, I could get used to it. If only I could overcome my fears. I'm all right as long as it's kissing and hugging, but whenever we go past that, I just can't do it; I'm frightened. Moon Goddess, I wish I could get rid of these feelings... Damian is already more than patient with me, and even my wolf is going crazy about it now. What is wrong with me?

I finally get out of the shower, and I have no choice but to roll a large towel around me. When I go back to the bedroom, I find a plain grey t-shirt Damian left for me on the bed.

"Sorry, that's the best I could find. I can ask—"

Damian stops, staring at me in my bath towel, and my bare legs underneath. I didn't realize he would still be in the room! He averts his gaze immediately, and I get all red, grasping the situation.

"Moon Goddess, you're really not making it easy, Nora."

"Sorry... Can you give me a minute?" I mumble, deeply embarrassed.

He exits the room with a sigh, and I run to grab the clothes. How bold can I be? Stupid Nora! You're the one making him wait, and now you walk around half-naked in his bedroom! What kind of torture is this! Moon

Goddess, I really need to be more self-conscious around Damian from now on...

I quickly put on my underwear and denim skirt from yesterday, with the new t-shirt. It's obviously oversized, but I remember seeing how Elena wore stuff like this, tucking it in her skirt and all. Once I'm ready, it does look alright in the mirror. I dry my hair quickly, leaving my curls to take a natural shape, and find my earrings. When Damian comes back, I'm busy texting Bobo. He is now wearing his usual black shirt and a dark tie.

"Sorry about earlier..." I mumble, still embarrassed.

"Well, I can't say I didn't like what I saw."

He approaches me with a smile, putting his arms around my waist, and leans a quick kiss on my lips. At least I know he likes my body...

"Let's go get breakfast, I still think I need to feed you a bit more."

"Do you have a kitchen here?"

I don't remember seeing one yesterday while I was exploring his place. He shakes his head, proving me right. "We are going to the Company's cafeteria. It's not Nate's restaurant, but it's decent."

He takes my hand, and we exit his apartment. This time the windows are all open, and the whole place certainly looks better than yesterday, in the sunlight. To our surprise, Neal is waiting for us at the entrance of Damian's office. He greets us quickly.

"You look better, Boss. Hello, Nora."

"Thanks, Neal. What are you doing here?" Asks Damian.

He sighs. I haven't seen Neal often... He is wearing a dark suit like Damian's, and I notice his wedding ring. So, the oldest Mura sibling is already married... I wonder if Bobo is an uncle?

"Your job. We canceled yesterday's meetings, but seeing how your lady came back last night, I figured you would come to work today. We have a lot to catch up on, and a board meeting in two hours."

He hands a thick red folder to Damian, but my mate frowns.

"I just got up, and I intend to have breakfast with Nora."

Seeing Neal's upset expression, it doesn't seem like those matters can wait... I take the folder from his hand and give it to Damian. Both men look at me with confused expressions.

"You can review this over breakfast, okay? I already feel bad enough that you skipped work yesterday because of me," I explain.

A broad, satisfied smile appears on Neal's face, the first one I've seen, actually. "Now I know why my sister and brother love you so much, Nora. On behalf of the other employees, thank you."

It sounds like he didn't really like me before... Well, I guess he didn't have many occasions to meet me. Now, at least, he seems satisfied. Damian, however, is quite unhappy. He takes the folder but growls at Neal when we walk past him toward the elevator.

"I didn't think you would side with Neal on that one..." He sighs as the elevator goes down.

"I had to. We probably made things difficult for him lately, and you are a CEO. Even I can understand that you have responsibilities."

"My girlfriend is my principal responsibility for now. Neal can do well by himself..."

I kiss him on the cheek to have him drop that grouchy face. He may complain, but the truth is, he has already opened the folder to check its contents. I take a look, too, but it's full of detailed reports, numbers, and graphics that I can't understand at all.

"How is your company doing?" I ask casually.

"Not bad, despite the Sapphire Moon Clan embargo..."

In our time and City, werewolf Clans fight with their fists but also with business deals. The Black Corporation is related mainly to the Blood Moon Clan; thus, what happens to one always impacts the other.

I keep thinking about it over breakfast. As Damian said, it's quite decent for a Company cafeteria, but empty at this time of the day. Which is good, because my outfit is still a bit too casual here, especially when I'm eating facing Damian. My mate, imposing in his dark suit, frowns a lot as he reads his files. I don't dare to speak, but his hand is on mine for the full breakfast, and that's enough for me.

Now I finally feel like we are a couple. Last night's discussion was really an eye-opener for me. I want to stand as an equal next to Damian, not just his scared and weak mate. The vision of Alessandra King is still engraved in my mind. She wasn't just introduced as his fiancée; she was radiating by herself, a strong presence anyone could feel. I want to be the same.

“Nora?”

I raise my head, realizing I got lost in my thoughts, and he noticed it. Damian is done eating and looks at me with a worried expression.

“You were frowning. What’s wrong?”

I shake my head and smile at him. “Nothing, I’m good. Can we go? Bobo will be downstairs anytime, and I’m pretty sure Neal will have found a whole bunch of other folders to keep you busy with...”

He gets up and comes to hug me, kissing me passionately once again. Am I getting used to this? I don’t feel as shy as before while moving my lips against his... I still get butterflies running wild through my whole body every time we do, though.

When we part, he sighs. “I don’t want to go to work... I missed you so much this weekend.”

“You have to, Damian, and me, too. I’ll see you tonight, okay?”

“You’re more reasonable than me. Okay. Stay with Bobo.”

I roll my eyes. “Did you forget the whole part about me being able to take care of myself?”

“You may be able to fight, my Love, but you still can’t drive! So that gives me an excuse to keep your bodyguard close,” he laughs.

A few minutes later, I get in the car, still sulking. Bobo laughs when I tell him the reason. “So, I got promoted from your bodyguard to the driver?”

“It’s not funny, Bobo!”

“It’s okay, Nora. Even the Boss rarely walks alone; it’s too dangerous. He’s just looking out for you. Plus, it gives me an excuse to stay with you, isn’t it great?”

Well, he’s right... I do like having Bobo close, so I can’t really complain. He takes the highway, and I stop pouting.

“Bobo, what were you doing before you became my... bodyguard?”

“Some errand boy for the Black Corp, mostly. Neal often made me deliver important papers from one place to another, even when I was in high school, confidential documents. I liked it, too. I only had to fight an ambush once in a while, and I got a good paycheck for really flexible hours. My brother was a bit bossy, though.”

“You sound like you were some corporate spy!”

He laughs. “Aren’t I a bit too noticeable for that? More like a bodyguard for secret paperwork! I like being your bodyguard much better,” he says with a wink.

I smile, pleased by the little compliment. It’s good to know I didn’t change Bobo’s life too much. I would have felt bad if they had him resign from some position to be my bodyguard. Now that I think about it, Bobo should still be aware of the Black Corp’s whereabouts...

“Bobo, that engagement with the Gold Moon Clan girl... It would be quite profitable for Damian’s company, right?”

He gives me a surprised look and stops at a red light. I can tell he’s looking for the right words to answer. After a while, the car starts moving again.

“The King Family owns most of the Gold Financial establishments of Silver City; that’s the reason their Clan is doing so well. The only other Clans in the same field are the Pearl and Sapphire Moon. The Black Corporation is mostly in techs and telecoms.”

“The kind of field that requires lots of money and transactions...”

Bobo nods. So, being allied with the Gold Financial would be incredibly beneficial for them... I feel a bit depressed now. That Alessandra King really has everything that would make her the perfect wife. A strong Clan backing her, the looks, the power...

“Bobo, could you give me a crash course about those things? What the other Clans specialize in, the big companies they are represented with, and such?”

“Sure, but why?”

“I just feel like it’s high time I knew about these things...”

Even if Damian and I are together from now on, I can’t keep walking around totally clueless about my surroundings. It’s not all about fighting with my fists, I get that. It may not be my primary field, but I still ought to know the basics. Maybe this way, I will finally be able to find a solution on how to help the Brothers from now on.

Bobo parks in front of the restaurant, and hands me a bag. “As you asked, I brought you some clothes. I took what I could find in your wardrobe, hope that will be okay.”

I check the content, but what Bobo chose seems perfect for work.

“Thank you, Bobo. I’ll just use the restaurant’s changing room.”

“And you also have mail.”

Mail? But I’ve never received any mail before. I don’t even know my own address! I check the envelope Bobo hands me, it’s indeed my name on it... I don’t recognize the handwriting. For a second, I thought it might be Liam, but he would have texted me, and this handwriting is obviously a female’s. It doesn’t seem to be Elena’s. I open it.

“Dear Nora,

We have never met yet, so I decided to write to you first. We have many things in common, but first, I believe we both want to preserve the peace in Silver City. I know many people are acting in the shadows to disturb that peace, and I do not intend to let them do so. I figured you might like having a new ally. You will feel suspicious: I cannot tell you my full identity yet, but I am a Witch.

Of course, I am fully aware werewolves and witches aren’t always on the best terms, but we might have to. As the only Witch of Silver City, I have no intention to leave, and no intention to let another Witch on my territory either. That other witch who attacked Silver City a while ago, is the one I think about. She might be gone for now, but I believe she will return.

A War between the packs would be precisely the kind of opportunity she will wait to strike again. I do not usually meddle in those kinds of things, but I cannot let that happen. However, I am powerless in that situation. So, I decided to rely on you, Nora Bluemoon.

I will give you my help, if you help me preserve the peace in Silver City. I will not ask for anything else. Keep the butterfly with you, he can be of help. Please, do not talk about my letter to anyone. The contents will hide from any eyes but yours, so you may keep it.

Finally, be careful about who you approach. The Gold Moon Clan may have presented a golden offer to your mate, but they are much more dangerous than they seem, and their interests may lie somewhere else.

Have faith in yourself, Nora Bluemoon.

Sincerely yours,

A Friendly Witch”.

I keep staring at the letter, stunned. A Witch? Does a Witch want to ally herself with me? I still can't believe it, this all sounds so unreal! I check the envelope, but there is no name, no clue to who sent this and how. At the bottom of her letter, next to her signature, a butterfly is beautifully drawn. How am I supposed to keep it with me? Shall I keep the letter? While I'm wondering this, I see the drawing suddenly move by itself! The

little butterfly flaps its wings twice, and takes off, flying away from the paper. Amazed, I watch the now very living butterfly fly around a few seconds before it comes to land on my hair like some ornament.

What sorcery is this? This butterfly is now very alive and standing proudly on one of my curls.

“Nora?”

Bobo looks at me, worried. I’m speechless, and before I can formulate any thought, I see his eyes drawn to the letter.

“What is this? It’s blank?”

Blank? He takes the letter and flips it over several times like he is looking for something. Oh, my Goddess, this is real. Bobo can’t see what is written there. It’s just as the Witch said. I raise my finger, showing the butterfly in my hair.

“Bobo, do you see this?”

He frowns. “What, something wrong with your hair?”

He really can't see it? This butterfly is bright red, and rather large, too. Anyone would see it right away, but because of some Witch's trick, it seems like I'm actually the only one who can... Is it really okay if I keep it with me? It seems to be peacefully resting in my hair like some ornament. It's not going to attack me or something, right?

"Nora, are you okay?" Bobo looks at me with worried eyes.

I nod and quickly fold the letter to put in my pocket. "Yes, sorry, Bobo, I'm fine. Maybe just a joke, who knows?"

"But—"

"I'll be going before I'm late, okay?"

He nods, and I quickly get out of the car before he can ask more questions. Once I'm in the restaurant's changing room, I change really fast so that I can re-read that letter, making sure I didn't dream it.

The contents are still precisely the same, and anyway, the butterfly is still in my hair. It just seems to fly away when I move around, but it always comes back to me. Is it going to stay there indefinitely? Is it fragile like a real butterfly, or will it throw fire or something if I try to mess with it? My wolf isn't reacting at all to it, so I guess it should be okay. She is much more interested in the letter. There's actually a sweet smell coming from

it. Something like an autumn forest after the rain, and wildflowers. Is it that Witch's smell...?

My colleagues arrive one by one, and I start my day as usual. I focus on my chores, though it's a bit harder today, Narcissa is picky. She gets mad over very trivial things, and everyone is annoyed with her.

During our break, Elise keeps complaining about her. "It's not our fault she has issues in her personal life! Why does she have to put her bad temper on us? It's not like it will solve anything!"

"Issues in her personal life?" Asks Kathie. "How do you know?"

"I heard her. Before entering the restaurant, she was having an argument with her lover on the phone. It seemed like a jealousy thing."

"I didn't even know she had a boyfriend."

I nod. Narcissa seems like the type who is married to her job... But I do remember seeing her react around Nathaniel. Was he the one on the phone with her? That reminds me, I should give Elena a call after work. I promised I would tell her how things went with Damian, and I just texted her quickly this morning to say I was okay. While the girls keep talking, my phone suddenly vibrates. It's Damian. I take a few steps to isolate myself while answering.

“Hello, my Love. How is your day?” Damian says.

“A bit long, actually. The manager is in a bad mood... What about you?”

“You were right. Neal found a lot of paperwork to keep me busy for the next three hours, and a lot of executives for me to get angry at in case I would get bored.”

I chuckle. “Is it all the bosses who like to terrorize their staff, or just you?”

“I would say it’s a personal hobby. And I have to get prepared if I want to cancel that engagement soon.”

“Damian... Are you really going to cancel it?”

I don’t feel good feeling about it now. It’s not just about us. After talking with Neal and Bobo, I realize there is a lot more at stake. People’s jobs, business deals, financial issues... Damian’s whole company could be in a wrong position because of this.

“What, do you want me to marry her?” He asks, seeming amused.

“Go ahead, marry her. That way, I can crash your wedding like in movies, fight her and kidnap you,” I reply back, a bit annoyed.

“I would love to see that...”

I roll my eyes. I know Damian is just trying to make me feel better about this whole thing. I can't help but feel restless, though I don't intend to give Damian up either. He is mine, my mate. Or my mate to be, if I want to be precise...

“Nora, don't worry. I've already made up my mind, and Nate and Liam agree with me, too. I will find another way to reach an agreement with King.”

It won't be so easy, I'm sure of it. Isn't there any other way out than allying with them?

“Nora?”

“Sorry, Damian, I have to go. Can I call you back after work?”

“I want to see you after work. I'll come and pick you up.”

“Okay. See you later. ...I love you.”

I'm red as a beet after those three words. Plus, Kathie and Elise are giving me looks that clearly indicate they heard that. I hang up and scurry to them, trying to calm down my heartbeat.

"Nora, you have a boyfriend? Why didn't you tell us!" Screams Elise.

I try to explain myself to my two excited colleagues, but before I can really get to the depth of it, Narcissa arrives, looking annoyed.

"You three! Your break is long over, go back to work! Elise, table fourteen is waiting for you to take their order. Nora, someone requested you on table two."

Someone asked for me? I'm not even among the waiter's list. Is it someone I know? I follow the girls back inside, and quickly walk up towards table two. When I see who is sitting there, I freeze.

Oh, Moon Goddess. Alessandra King?

She is sitting alone at a table for two, looking very proper in a black dress. You can tell she is from a wealthy background. I may be wearing a diamond necklace, but she is wearing flashy gold jewelry, and her designer dress is probably just as expensive. Gosh, I'm really in no mood

to face my boyfriend's fiancée now. When I walk to her, she is smiling like a perfect lady.

“You asked for me?”

“You must be Nora! I recognize your horrible scar.”

Seriously? That's how she wants to start, bringing up my scar? When she looks at me, I can tell her eyes are obviously fixated on it, too. Most of the time, Bobo and the brothers act perfectly normal around me, so even if other people can't help but look at it, I feel okay about my scar. However, here, Alessandra's eyes are fixated on it, and it's making me uneasy. I try to ignore it.

“And you are Alessandra King.”

“That's right. Damian's partner.”

She is doing this on purpose, isn't she? I cross my arms. Obviously, she doesn't want me to take her order. “Do you actually have anything to say, or did you just come all the way to my workplace to annoy me and make me lose my time? I have other customers,” I say, not hiding how much she is annoying me

She keeps smiling and takes a sip of her wine. “Don’t be so angsty, I just came to talk. I heard Damian wants to cancel our engagement because of his attachment to you. I hope you will help me reason him.”

His “attachment” for me? I’m not some damn pet! Moon Goddess, that woman really has a gift for pissing people off just by talking. If it wasn’t my workplace and there was no one around, I would be growling at her already. My wolf has been at it for ten minutes already, and though I agree with her, I must fight to contain her.

“Why would I convince my man to marry another woman?”

If she wants to play with words, I can do that, too. I may be a pacifist, but when it comes to Damian, I’m ready to show my fangs anytime, you pest.

“Oh, please, Nora, you know there is much more at stake, don’t you? Damian Black is not just a common guy who can marry anyone,” she says confidently.

“I am not anyone. I am Damian’s fated mate. You know what it means, right?”

She starts laughing, a high-pitched and annoying sound. I just hate how confident she acts while obviously looking down on me.

“Do you really believe in that kind of thing? This is so... ancient! This is the twenty-first century, honey. No one cares for that kind of thing anymore.”

If she calls me honey one more time, I’m seriously not going to stand for whatever happens next. And “ancient”? Who does she think she is! What are werewolves, then? Does she have any respect left for our Moon Goddess mother?

“I do care, and so does Damian,” I reply right back.

“Unfortunately, whatever bond you have with, it’s not going to be enough. Are you still a child? Well, you do look like one... Let me teach you something then: If Damian stays with you, he’ll lose everything. If he marries me, he will be the King Alpha of Silver City, and no one will be able to resist him.”

I clench my fists. I need no lessons from that woman. Yet, she keeps talking, while I feel my anger rise.

“If he marries me, he will have the full support of the Gold Moon Clan. Do you have any strong Clan supporting you, Nora? I doubt it. You are a penniless orphan. You have nothing to bring to him, no financial support, and no power whatsoever. So, you should learn your place right now, before I put you right back where you belong.”

...Put me back to my place? Is that bitch threatening me now? My wolf is on all fours, growling furiously already, ready to rip her head off any time. You're right. I won't let her speak that way to me. Not to us. She is the one who has no idea who she is talking to.

I slam both hands on the table, looking at her eye to eye. I draw all the strength and anger I can from my wolf for the first time.

“Listen to me, King. I don't care about your money. I don't give a damn about your Clan, either. I don't need a pack, and I don't need support. I don't need anyone but myself. I don't take any threats or orders, not from you, not from anyone. So, don't you dare speak to me that way ever again. If you want a fight, I will gladly give you one. You don't know me. You have no idea what I'm capable of, but you are going to learn that the next time you have the nerve to come to claim my mate. I will give you a lesson you will remember. Are we clear?”

I stop, my eyes still burning with anger.

She is shivering with fear. Alessandra is staring at me with a shocked expression, completely speechless. She stood up and took a couple of steps back by instinct, scared by my wolf, still furiously growling at her. I feel myself surrounded by something hot and fuming right now: my Alpha aura.

“You... You're an... an Alpha?” She stammers.

Hell yeah, I am. That woman clearly wasn't expecting that. Moreover, she probably doesn't get yet that I'm not just an Alpha, but one with Royal blood, too. No wonder she got so frightened, despite being an Alpha herself.

"Surprised? I hope you weren't expecting an easy fight. I'm not the type to submit."

Damian would be proud of me. My eyes are throwing daggers right now. I step forward, and Alessandra steps back right away, not hiding her fear.

"Now, you go back to wherever you came from, and don't you dare show your face around here anymore, because I promise I won't go easy on you next time."

She grabs her bag in a very awkward way, her eyes on me all the time like she is expecting me to attack her. Truthfully, I have a hard time holding back my inner wolf, who is dying to give that woman what she deserves.

"We are not done, Bluemoon. You and Damian will definitely regret this..." She mutters while stepping back.

"Scram!"

She runs off, and I'm still trembling with anger. I can't believe what just happened, and I can't calm down, either. A lot of eyes are on me, but I don't really care right now.

I close my eyes, using Elena's technique to calm down my wolf. I was that close to letting her out when that wretched woman opened her mouth again. But I'm still in the restaurant, in front of a lot of surprised customers. I just can't. Calm down, Nora, calm down...

"Nora?"

I turn around, and Narcissa is standing there. She doesn't look annoyed this time, just a bit wary of me. She points out the kitchen.

"Go, we can handle it here. Take a break if you need one."

"No, I'm okay. Thank you, Narcissa."

She nods, and I flee to the kitchen, getting away from all the stares, including some from my colleagues. When I step in the kitchen, Chef Michel gives me a questioning look, but I just shake my head. I find something to do and try to immerse myself into work to forget it all.

I just can't. That woman's words keep going in circles in my mind, and I'm unable to forget it. At some point, I step out, because I'm unable to

calm down, and at this rate, I'm going to make a mistake. I rub my temples.

“Nora, come here.”

I walk up to join Chef Michel at the pass and rest my back against the wall while he is checking the orders and passing plates. He gives me a look before placing the order. After a few seconds, when everyone else is busy, he starts talking, keeping an eye on everything else.

“How are you?”

“Not great, Chef...” I confess.

“Elise just told me what happened.”

“I'm sorry, Chef.”

“Don't be.”

He gives a new order that just came into the staff, and I help him arrange the entrees meanwhile.

“You can’t always be nice to everyone, Nora. It’s not the world we live in, and it’s not what we were born for, either. Especially if you’re an Alpha. Fight for what you want. Or who.”

“But even if I do, that woman, she’s right.”

We keep working side by side, talking while not even looking at each other, focused on whichever plate we must get ready.

“I don’t have anything. That’s why I’m so mad. Even if I can fight her, she’s still someone who can support my mate better than me.”

“What about your mate? What does he want?”

“He wants... me,” I confess a bit shyly.

“Then that’s all you need to know. Don’t let others interfere with your relationship. A fated mate bond is way too rare and precious to give it up because of a stranger.”

“It’s not just about us... The fate of several Clans is at stake.”

He shakes his head and yells to remind one of the chefs about the meat’s cooking. I step out a second to give a hand to the sous-chef, who is having

a hard time with all the desserts. I quickly get his workspace cleaned up and take away a couple of ready plates. He thanks me, and I return to chef Michel's side.

“Don't think too hard about the consequences, Nora. It's not all about your own decisions, either. Your mate is an Alpha; he can make his own judgments.”

“I'm afraid he will make bad judgments because of me.”

“Maybe. But that's his call, not yours. Instead of thinking about mistakes, start thinking about solutions. When you cook, do you think about how you might fail or how you should do things?”

The Chef is right... My decision is taken anyway, and so is Damian's. There is no way I would ever let that woman get anything she wants from my mate. I know I couldn't take it, the same way I could never submit to her.

“I get it, Chef. Thank you.”

“Good then. Now go and help that moron with the sauces before I get there myself.”

I tried to keep the Chef's words in mind all day after that. I didn't make a wrong decision, and I won't regret it. This woman had no right to come here and make a scene. I just put her right back where she belongs. Those thoughts keep me preoccupied for a while, enough for my coworkers to leave me alone. A lot of them even act slightly differently around me now, probably because they discovered I'm an Alpha. When we are done, Narcissa calls everyone for the usual meeting at the end of the day, but I just listen to it absentmindedly. No one mentions what happened with Alessandra King.

When the meeting finishes, I'm the first one in the changing room. My clothes smell, so I change back to Damian's t-shirt and my denim skirt, feeling better in it than in my work outfit. Probably because I can smell a bit of my mate on it, too. I realize the crimson butterfly is still around. I had forgotten about that... If I try to touch him, he doesn't really react, and just flies away, only to come back if I insist. He really acts like a regular butterfly, except for the fact that he is set on hanging around me.

I check my phone. No news from Damian, but I decide to call my mate quickly. It takes a few seconds before he can answer.

"Nora. Are you done already?"

"It's not already, the lunch service ended late, actually. I just got a couple of hours before the dinner shift."

“Really? Crap, I didn’t look at the time...”

He sounds preoccupied, but I can guess right away why.

“You’re still busy, aren’t you?”

“Yeah... I’m sorry. I still got a ton of work.”

I knew it. There was no way he would be done by four; he took a full day off yesterday, and Neal looked exhausted this morning. They probably have a lot to catch up now that Damian’s back to work; I can’t possibly blame them.

“It’s okay, I figured so. I’m going to hang out with a friend until my night shift, okay? You can come and get me if you’re done by then.”

“A friend?”

“A female friend,” I specify, because of his inquisitive tone.

“Okay. Take Bobo with you.”

“Does Bobo ever get a day off?”

“Sure, when you’re with me.”

I roll my eyes. Seriously, this man... For a second, I hesitate to tell him about Alessandra and my show-off, but he’s probably busy with work right now, and I’m afraid he might drop it all and come here if I tell him. Surely this can wait for later.

“When does your night shift end?” Asks Damian.

“Around ten or maybe eleven tonight. I’m not too sure, we don’t have a lot of reservations yet.”

“All right, I should be able to get you then. Just text me when you’re done.”

“Okay. See you later.”

“Later, Love.”

I hang up, trying to control my blushing. When will I ever stop feeling like this every time I hear Damian’s voice...? I still don’t really feel too great because of what happened earlier, though. I need some fresh air. I grab my things and exit the restaurant. Bobo is right there waiting for me,

phone in his hand and his back against the car. He stops smiling when he sees my expression.

“Bad day?”

“Mh. I’ll explain later.”

He nods, and we both get in the car. I open the window to enjoy some fresh air. Gosh, I needed this...Getting away from the restaurant helps me finally calm down a little. I still resent Damian a bit about what happened. If only he hadn’t gotten engaged to that woman...

Hanging around and having a cup of tea with Boyan makes me feel better. I tell him in detail what happened with Alessandra earlier, and Boyan is proud of me for standing up to her. Overall, it feels great to enjoy a cup of tea while chatting with my friend. For ten years, I never had any friends to hang out with. All I had was my abusive brother and a pack that hated me. Now, I can freely talk about trivial matters, and Bobo will listen. And I have Tonia, Elena, Liam, and even Danny, too.

When Bobo takes me back to the car to head back to work, I feel a lot better already. I’m playing with my necklace, watching the scenery. Bobo, too, is humming to some Latino music coming from the stereo.

“Bobo? How did you meet Daniel?”

I've been wondering for a while now, but with everything going on, I forgot to ask. The big guy smiles at my question.

"In a nightclub, a few months ago. I was working, delivering documents to someone. I noticed Danny just when I was about to leave."

This is the first time I see Bobo smiling so much. It seems like this is a fond memory for him, so I'm even more interested.

"What was it like?"

"...Love at first sight. He was dancing, and I just fell for him right there. It was the first time I ever felt like this. Nothing else mattered; it was as if he was the only one in the room. I still remember it all perfectly. The music, his clothes, everything. I just thought, I wanted this guy, bad, right then and right there. I would have kissed him in the middle of the crowd if we hadn't been total strangers."

I laugh, a bit amused by that last sentence said with such an honest face. That's my Bobo, so straightforward and blunt. He keeps driving, but I want to know more now.

"What about Danny, then?"

He sighs. “It took a while for him to accept me. He didn’t want a younger lover, so he tried to ignore me, but it was my first time wanting something or someone so much, so...”

“You were persistent?”

“Quite so. He eventually gave up after a few weeks.”

A few weeks? Oh my gosh, Bobo sure is persistent! I chuckle, imagining Bobo’s relentless pursuit of Daniel’s heart. The two of them are just so adorably cute when they’re together... I totally get why Elena teases Daniel so much. He’s the only person I know who can blush redder than me!

Bobo smiles at me. “What about you? How is it with the Boss?”

“We are fine, I guess. I just wish I could overcome my fear of physical relationships once and for all...”

Bobo is the only one who knows, aside from Tonia. He was a bit disappointed about me not telling him sooner about Marcus, so I ended up telling him all about what I remembered and my traumatism.

“You want to be with him?”

“Of course, I do. But, every time we start... touching each other, I just get those cold shivers, and bad memories come back. The worst part is, I don’t even remember exactly what happened, how far Marcus went, and when I... supposedly stab him. I know he didn’t rape me, but whenever Damian wants more, I just...”

“Nora, it’s okay. With what happened to you, it’s completely normal to be scared. Just take it slow, treasure yourself, and build your trust with the Boss, Nora. Put yourself first. You deserve it, okay?”

I feel tears coming back again. Bobo notices, and parks on the side of the road. Without saying a thing, he hugs me and lets me cry all I want. After a while, I breathe in, trying to calm down.

“What if that woman is right, Bobo? What if Damian was better off with her instead of a mess like me?”

“What, you are going to let King have him now?”

“No way! I don’t want to break up with Damian, ever! It’s just... sometimes I can’t help but wonder how the Moon Goddess could pair him up with someone as powerless as me. I know I am a Royal’s child now, but that’s it. You know why I was so mad earlier? Because that woman was right, Bobo. I don’t have a Clan backing me, no money. I have any way to be useful to my mate.”

Bobo sighs and pats my head gently. “Sometimes, you are too mature, Nora. Maybe you don’t have all the answers yet. Anyway, you are powerful enough on your own. You are equal to any of the Alphas out there. I don’t think King can say the same, and she knows it, too.”

While Bobo speaks, something suddenly came to mind. I might not be powerful or anything, but I do have some other options now... Well, one, but that might help a lot.

“Mm... Bobo?”

“Yes?”

“Sorry but, could I ask you to leave me alone in the car for a minute?”

He looks at me, not hiding his surprise. I know my request is odd and coming at a totally unexpected time. How do I explain this?

“Please?” I ask again, trying to look sorry.

He sighs and points out the little café across the road.

“All right, but just a couple minutes. I’ll go grab some coffee. You want something?”

“I’m good, Bobo, thank you.”

He goes out, and I’m finally alone in the car. I watch him cross the road, making sure he is not looking, and grab a strand of my hair, agitating it. The little butterfly, annoyed at all this rampage, flies away and lands on my hand. My idea might be really, really stupid, but...

“Okay, Magic Butterfly. I hope you can understand me because I could really use some help now. I need to contact the Witch. I’ll accept our alliance if she can give me some help. How do I contact her?”

I really hope it understands because otherwise, I’m probably looking crazy talking to a butterfly. I wait for a few seconds, and suddenly, it starts flapping its wings. They turn green. What does that mean, green? Is that a good sign? Does it mean I can talk or something? I suppose a butterfly can’t talk, anyway, but I have no idea how a Witch’s powers work... Okay, I can try, I guess.

“Witch, if you can hear me this way, I want to ask you a favor. I’m trying hard to stop this war, but I think I just added oil to the fire, so I’m looking for other options. Can you give me a hint, anything? I stood up to King, but I’m not sure that’s going to help. If we can’t trust the Gold Moon Clan,

then who? I tried to think of options, but I don't know where to start! Can you help? You said we were allies; how can you help?"

I wonder what else to say, but my mind is too confused for now. All of a sudden, the butterfly takes off, flying away from me for the first time. Where is it going now? Did I annoy him? Or did he get the message? He flies around for a few seconds in the vehicle interior, but it doesn't make any sense. His wings turn red, then blue, then red again. What now? Did I break it or something?

Just when I'm wondering what I should do, Bobo comes back. So soon? The butterfly keeps flying around, but Bobo can't see it.

"Are you done?" He asks.

I sigh and nod. I don't know what else to do, anyway. I feel a bit stupid now. Bobo starts the car again, and I'm angrily staring at the butterfly that won't stop flying around.

When we are back at the restaurant, a few minutes later, as I step out of the car, the butterfly suddenly takes off. What? I see it fly away, headed to the south. Where is it going? Is it annoyed at me or something? Should I follow it? It doesn't seem to be waiting for me...

"Nora?"

Bobo is waiting for me, looking confused by my attitude. I sigh and follow him into the restaurant to resume work.

We have more reservations than when I left and, as expected, the restaurant is quite busy. I keep running from one table to another and then to the kitchen, as both Narcissa and Chef Michel keep asking for me. I'm doing fine, though, and it's going smoothly so far.

“Nora, do you know when I can get my desserts for table seven? The customer said twice he is in a hurry...”

“I'll go get them for you, but the table three needs—”

Before I can finish my sentence, a huge racket can be heard from the entrance. A few customers scream in surprise, as a dozen wolves suddenly barge into the restaurant. What the...?

“Nora! Nora!”

It's Damian's voice. I see him running in, still in his dark suit, obviously looking for me. What's going on? I drop whatever I was holding in Elise's hands and run up to him across the restaurant. He is accompanied by Bobo, Neal, and Nathaniel, all in their human forms and looking serious. Damian's Alpha aura is probably going wild right now, scaring everyone

who hasn't already left the room at the sight of the werewolves bargaining in.

“Damian!”

When I walk up to him, he finally sees me. To my surprise, my mate runs to me and takes me into his arms, hugging me tight.

“Nora, thank Moon Goddess, you are fine...”

“Damian, what is going on? What happened?” I ask, worried.

Instead of answering, he turns around and starts yelling orders.

“Neal, I want this place empty and closed, right now. Nate, take the staff out, too. Everyone here gets the fuck out!”

The wolves start growling, and the customers run away in a panic, emptying the restaurant in seconds. I watch the scene, completely lost about what is going on. Damian looks furious; I've never seen his eyes so cold before! I grab his arm, trying to get his attention.

“Damian, tell me what's going on!”

Neal who walks up to me, while still watching the wolves taking everyone else out of the restaurant.

“Your apartment was attacked, Nora.”

Oh, Moon Goddess. Attacked? Attacked how? By whom? Damian suddenly puts his arm under my thighs and picks me up, carrying me as he walks across the now almost empty restaurant. Before I can say a word, he takes me to the Staff Room. Behind us, Nathaniel and Neal are following closely, while the wolves guard the entrance.

When we enter, Damian puts me down, but his arm stays firmly around my waist to keep me close.

“Damian, calm down, I’m okay. What happened?”

“Liam noticed something was wrong when he came back from school. When he went to check your apartment, he said the door was wide open, and the whole place has been sacked.”

Nate walks up to me, handing me his smartphone. I look at the pictures. Oh, my Goddess... I can barely recognize the apartment. Someone splashed every room with a red liquid, and some of the furniture was destroyed. The whole place was sacked, I can’t believe what I’m seeing.

“Oh, Moon Goddess...”

The last picture was taken in my bedroom. My wardrobe is on the floor, a lot of my clothes torn apart. Even the bed was shredded. But, most of all, on the glass wall, a message in the red liquid was left: YOU WILL BE MINE.”

I feel like I’m going to be sick looking at those words. Seeing my shocked expression, Damian takes the phone away from me, throwing it back to his brother and kisses my forehead to comfort me. He is just as agitated as I am, but I can tell he is trying hard to control himself right now, so I keep him close, my hands on his chest.

“It’s okay, Nora, I’ll find who the hell did this, I swear.”

His words are burning with anger, but he is still worried about me. I shake my head, slowly processing everything I just saw and heard.

“I can’t believe it... Is Liam okay?” I ask.

“He is okay, Nora, no one was there when he came up,” says Nate.

“It happened this afternoon. Everything was normal when I went there earlier,” Bobo says.

Bobo is right; he went back to get me clothes only a few hours ago.

“The surveillance cameras didn’t give anything,” says Neal, looking at his phone. “Someone disconnected them.”

“How the hell did they get in?” Growls Damian.

“Liam said the door’s lock was... shot. ...He found silver bullets.”

I gasp. Oh, Moon Goddess, this is serious. Someone armed with a gun to kill werewolves broke into my place. What if I had been there? Or if they had met Bobo? Or Tonia, or Liam?

“And the blood?” I ask. “Is it really blood?”

Moon Goddess, I hope it isn’t. So much of it would be really, really bad news. No one can answer me: Neal is now busy taking one call after another, speaking so fast I can’t understand a thing, and Nate is reading texts, too. I turn to Damian, and once again, his eyes are terrifying. My mate looks like he is about to kill someone. However, he can’t scare me, so I just lean onto his chest, and I feel his hand in my hair a second later.

“What do we do now?” I ask.

“You’re coming with me; I’m taking you back to my place. Neal, find as much information as you can, and get Liam to Nate’s place.”

“He said he already has a place to crash,” says Nathaniel.

Damian immediately growls at him, annoyed. “I don’t give a shit, Nate. I want to know where Liam is, and you bring his ass back whether he likes it or not. We are not playing games now. Boyan, you and Tonia go help Neal, too, Nora will stay with me. I want the full Clan gathering in two hours, with no exceptions. Clear?”

Everyone agrees and disperses right away, leaving the two of us alone. I turn to Damian, but before I can say a thing, his arms surround me, and he is carrying me again across the restaurant. I would probably be quite embarrassed if the situation wasn’t so urgent, but now is certainly not the time to fight with him. None of this makes sense anyway. I was working just a few minutes ago, but now, it turns out I’m in a life-threatening situation.

Damian takes me to a black sports car and starts driving at full speed across the city. I can’t say a word during the full trip. I’m too shaken up, and I wouldn’t know what to say. Moreover, Damian takes one call after another on the car monitor. Neal, Nate, and some other people’s voices give him more information as soon as they get it, and I just listen. It’s not much. The building surveillance cameras went down for two hours in the afternoon, and they are still looking in the neighborhood for some decent

footage of the closest streets. No one heard the gunshots, either, but they found a total of eight bullets; most of them were used to destroy the door's lock.

At some point, I stop listening to close my eyes. This is all so unreal like I'm in one of those movies Tonia loves, where they talk about crime scenes and ballistics. I look at the city outside, wondering what happened that it would come to this. At some point, I feel Damian's hand on my knee, and I take it. I can feel his emotions so clearly; my wolf just translates it all for me. Our mate is worried about us and furious. He is on the phone, but we don't need to talk for now. We are next to each other; we don't need any words.

Once we arrive back at the office building, Damian stays close to me, putting his arm around me to take me inside quickly. He only seems to ease up a little when we finally arrive at his flat.

There, he heaves out a deep sigh and hugs me once more now that we are entirely alone. I lean into his embrace, the safest place in the world to me.

"I was so worried something might have happened to you..."

"I know. I'm okay, Damian. I'm fine."

He nods, and for a while, just keeps me in his arms. I feel his shoulders relaxing a little and get on my toes to give him a kiss. I know we are both

shaken up. Damian takes my hand, and we both sit on the large grey sofa, facing each other.

“Are we going to tell the police?” I ask.

“Already did, Nate is on it. We are going to need forensics to know who did it.”

“The message on the wall... This is clearly someone who is personally after me.”

“Your brother is still in the psychiatric ward. The only name I can think of is...”

“Marcus,” I whisper.

Damian nods. I really didn’t want to believe it, but that’s the most plausible answer. I can’t believe he is still alive, and after me. How did he even find me? Why now, after all this time? He got to my apartment, with a gun full of silver bullets. The more I think about it, the more I think that all this doesn’t look like Marcus at all. He is a rash man, and not that smart either. Leaving blood all over the room and sacking my apartment, that’s like him. The message, too. That sicko has been eyeing me forever. But sneaking into the Blood Moon’s territory, finding my location, and deactivating the building’s surveillance system?

“What is it?” Asks Damian, noticing my frowning.

“Something’s not right. Damian, I think Marcus is the one who did this, too, but a lot of things don’t make sense. Like, how did he get access to the surveillance system? Or how was he able to find me, and get a gun too? He shouldn’t have any resources left in Silver City, so how did he pull something like that? I know him. That psycho is definitely not smart enough for something so elaborate.”

“You think someone helped him... But who would?”

An answer immediately comes to mind, but I really, really don’t like what that would imply. That person would have the resources to pull this off, and an excellent reason to use Marcus, too. Damian is not going to like this at all...

“...Nora?”

Someone comes in before I can reply. Nathaniel, followed by Liam. The third brother looks exhausted.

“Hi, Nora,” he says

“So, you came back after all?”

“Well, I heard Damian was going to spank me if I didn’t...”

I chuckle, and Liam comes to sit next to me. Nathaniel is glaring at him but doesn’t say a thing. He probably wasn’t happy to have to go look for him now.

“So?” Asks Damian.

“The cops took over. The CCTV from the shop across the building showed a man going in and out, exactly in the time slot Boyan and Liam gave us. He was wearing a cap and a large coat, so I don’t think we will be able to identify him.”

Nate sighs and goes to get himself a glass from the kitchen, some whiskey, judging by the smell. Damian frowns while his brother does so but doesn’t say a thing.

“I bet it’s Marcus.”

“We think so, too,” says Damian. “But Nora thinks someone helped him, and she’s probably right. That sicko couldn’t have gotten in so easily.”

“Who then? The Jade Moon banished him, right?” Asks Liam.

“What about the Sapphire Moon? They hate us.”

“They wouldn’t stoop so low has to help a shithead like Marcus,” Growls Damian.

“Guys, I have something to tell you.”

All three of them turn their heads to me, and I suddenly feel awkward, but I must tell them. Damian promised not to keep secrets anymore; I should do the same. Moreover, this is important. I turn to Damian, trying not to worry too much.

“Damian, promise me you won’t get angry.”

“Wow, now coming from you, that doesn’t sound good.”

“Shut up, Liam. Damian, please.”

He looks at me for a few seconds, visibly lost by my request, and retakes my hand. “I won’t, but Nora, what is it?”

“I... I had a bit of a fight with Alessandra King earlier today.”

“You had what?”

Damian’s Alpha aura immediately acts out, and for once, my wolf isn’t feeling too great about it. Both Nate and Liam look at me with shocked faces, too, but their oldest brother worries me the most. He jumps off the sofa and looks at me with an expression I can’t decipher, something between rage and incredulity. Well, I don’t care, but he better not be angry at me now! My wolf remembers the very disagreeable experience and agrees with me.

“You said you wouldn’t get angry!” I protest. “Plus, she started it, she came to the restaurant looking for me.”

“Looking for trouble, you mean. How typical of King,” mutters Nathaniel.

“What did she say?” Asks Damian, in his ice-cold tone.

I tell them all about Alessandra’s words and how I stood up to her. Liam can’t help himself and interrupts me a couple of times to react, but both Nathaniel and Damian are staring at me until I’m done. Telling them about that stupid fight annoys me again when I have to remember all of Alessandra’s words. When I’m done, I’m just as mad as I previously was.

“I didn’t want to have to stoop to her level, but she started it, Damian, and I was not going to back off.”

A few seconds of silence follow I’m waiting for their reaction. Finally, Liam breaks the silence first. “That’s our girl! I’m proud of you, Nora, though I wish you had bitten her, too.”

“Well, I’m not going to say you were wrong, either,” says Nate. “And King was wrong from A to Z, coming to look for Nora in the first place.”

Eventually, all eyes turn to Damian, waiting for his reaction. I get it a second before his brother, through my wolf. Our mate is mad. Really, really mad.

In a split second, I see a sudden movement, and the large table loudly breaks in two under Damian’s fist.

“That’s expensive...” Sighs Nathaniel, rolling his eyes.

“I can’t believe the nerve of that woman! How dare she threaten you! And making fun of our bond on top of that? Who the hell does she think she is!”

“I don’t care about her threats, Damian. I don’t want that woman anywhere near you or telling me if I deserve to be with you or not.”

“Well, I care! If the Gold Moon Clan wants war, they are going to have it!”

Oh, Moon Goddess, this is so not what I planned. I get up and grab his arm, trying to have him calm down. To my surprise, Nathaniel and Liam don’t move a finger to help me reason with Damian, just watching the two of us.

“Damian, calm down. This is not worth blowing your partnership with their Clan.”

“Nora is right, Damian,” says Nathaniel. “The current situation is too tense to make such decisions.”

“King overstepped her boundaries. She came on our territory to threaten Nora and, indirectly, she threatened Damian, too. And what if she really is the one behind the attack at the apartment?”

Suddenly, I remember the Witch’s words. What if the Black Brothers’ alliance with the Gold Moon Clan really turns out to be a trap? Does that mean they don’t have any reliable allies? The boys start talking about the situation at the border and arguing about what to do with the Gold Moon Clan, but something else catches my attention.

The Witch's butterfly is back! I don't know how it came all the way to Damian's apartment, but it flies all the way to me, carrying something. It drops it at my feet and lands on my shoulder. A business card?

I bend over to grab it, reading: "William Blue, CEO, Sapphire Holdings."

"Nora?"

While Damian and Nathaniel are still talking, Liam catches my expression. Can he see the business card? Probably not. I quickly put it in my pocket and walk back to sit next to him on the sofa, using the mind-link to talk to him without his brothers listening. That ability sure is convenient for keeping secrets...

"Liam, do you know William Blue?"

"Of course, the son of the Alpha of the Sapphire Moon Clan, remember? The guy that hates us to the core."

"You said his father hated your father. Did you guys ever try to negotiate with him?"

"Yeah, Nate and Damian tried to talk to the man a lot of times, but he never wanted anything to do with us. The guy is a stubborn jerk."

“I’m serious, Liam.”

“I’m serious, too! Try going into a territory where the pack hates you. I did it, quite a few times in a lot of places I should never have, believe me. But the Sapphire Moon territory? That’s a no-go, even for me, Nora. I can have a few fights with the Violet Moon wolves, but the Sapphire Moon watchdogs would kill me on the spot.”

So, things are at a dead end. Why would the Witch give me their Alpha’s business card then? Did I miss something? There is what I suppose to be their headquarters’ address written on the back but going there would be suicide! I know where their turf is, but if I go, there is no guarantee I will come back safe and sound. What is that Witch’s plan exactly?

“Hey, what are you thinking about?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

Liam gives me a suspicious look, but I realize Damian and Nate stopped talking to look at us. My mate comes back to sit next to me.

“What are you guys talking about?”

“Nora was asking me about the Sapphire Moon Clan, just filling her in.”

“We can’t exclude the possibility that they are the one behind the attack,” says Nate.

“I’m still not going to let what that woman did slide,” growls Damian.

“What do you...?”

Before he can end his sentence, we can all hear Nathaniel’s phone rings again. He takes the call.

“Tonia, you got anything new? No? Then... Oh, really? What, seriously? Are you sure? That’s...”

I see his eyes aiming my direction a few times, and I wonder what this is about. He looks surprised. What is going on? After a while, he hangs up, asking Tonia to email him everything. Damian frowns.

“Nate, what’s going on?”

“It’s Nora’s blood test results, they just came out.”

“And?” I ask, curious.

I already know the results, and I thought we all did by now, but Nathaniel’s expression is a bit off— he seems too surprised. Is everything okay? His phone beeps, and he looks at it.

Damian growls, impatient. “Nate!”

Nate jumps, and shows his phone’s screen to Damian. “Seventy-eight point six! Nora has almost eighty percent of Royal genetics...”

My mind goes blank. 78.6%...? That’s too much! I thought I would be half Royal at most, because of my dad, but that number is way higher than expected! I can’t believe it! Damian and Nathaniel seem stunned, too, but Liam is internally screaming.

“Oh, Holy Moon Goddess mother! Nora! Eighty percent! Nora, you’re a freaking princess!”

A princess? What princess? I don’t understand. Nathaniel shows Damian the email detailing the results, but I’m just sitting on the couch, not knowing what to think. Nathaniel starts reading out loud.

“According to Tonia’s grandmother, common werewolves have above five percent of Royal genetic markers. For Alphas, it goes up to ten

sometimes, but this amount is only possible for a Royal! Nora is not a Royal's child; she is a Royal herself!"

"That's not possible! I told you my dad was a normal wolf!"

"If he was your dad, Nora, you don't know about that yet. Maybe..."

"This is nonsense, I look like him, Nate!"

"It doesn't mean he was your father! We don't know what exactly happened between your parents, but I have your blood test results right here, and there is no way this is wrong. Nora, no Royal is a hundred percent Royal, okay? With time, fights with vampires, and mixing with humans, a lot of the Royal Bloodline was lost. Now, any werewolf with about twenty percent of those genes could claim to be a Royal. But you have four times that amount! Liam is right; according to our standards, you have the pedigree of a werewolf princess."

Granny Ariana probably told him all this anyway, so there is no point in arguing anymore. I sigh and cross my arms, a bit annoyed. I don't really care about all that princess stuff, but I'm certainly tired about all this questioning around who are my birth parents or not. I thought this was settled when we interrogated Alec weeks ago!

"Okay, I get it. But I don't want to talk about my father anymore. Can we go back to the main subject, please?"

“You don’t seem too surprised, Nora,” says Nate.

“Not really, we had suspicions from the start, anyway. I don’t plan to change anything just because I’m some werewolf royalty...”

“You could try ordering Nate to wash your dirty socks. Or take over Damian’s spot. That would be funny to watch.”

All three of us glare at Liam, making him stop with his stupid jokes. How can he be spouting nonsense like this now?

“Anyway. What do we do from now on?” I ask.

Nathaniel scratches his chin and sighs. “Damian’s right on one point. King came to my territory unannounced to seek a fight with you. She had no right to do so. The Gold Moon Clan might be powerful, but it would be good for them to remember they are not above us,” says Nathaniel.

Damian nods. “Right. I’m sick of her father’s pathetic arrogance, too. They are getting bolder by the day, using our name and their money. We might be on good terms for now, but I think a little reminder of who is the real King of Silver City might do them some good.”

“I like the sound of that, Brother.”

Honestly, I like it, too, but I can't help being worried. Is that really all right? Liam catches my eyes while his brothers start talking about business deals and numbers.

“Don't worry, Nora. That Gold Moon Clan had this coming anyway. And it's not like Damian is going to fight them; this is barely a slap on the hand.”

“What if this upsets them? Aren't you afraid they will get back at us or terminate all deals?”

“They won't, they would be on the losing hand. I told you, the Gold Moon Clan is hell rich, but that's it. Their wolves are not powerful, and they really don't want to get on Damian's bad side, trust me.”

“Hey, what are you guys talking about?” Asks Nathaniel.

Liam shakes his head.

“Our Princess is scared about the Gold Moon Clan getting mad.”

“Don’t be, Nora,” says Damian. “If we go soft now, we are not wolves. King should never have threatened you in the first place.”

“You mean us.”

“Same thing.”

“So, what now?” Asks Nathaniel.

Damian smiles, but that’s more of a scary smile, the kind of smile when someone else is about to get in trouble. Liam and I exchange a look, and I know he is way too content right now.

“Let’s make them see how angry we can get. Gather the Clan as we planned. All our Alphas, hunters, warriors, and family heads. I’m going to introduce Nora at the same time and tell them the Gold Moon wolves are no longer welcome onto our territories.”

“Got that. Everyone is already assembling anyway.”

“Wow, introducing your girlfriend one week after introducing your fiancée. That’s what you call bold, Brother.”

“Liam’s right. Not that I’m going to complain, however. I still despise King, and so does the rest of our Clan. That was a bad idea, to begin with, especially with Nora in the picture, Damian.”

Well, I’m happy Nathaniel and Liam are saying this. I glance at Damian. See? You messed up really bad by getting engaged to that vixen. My mate gives me an apologetic look and kisses my hand quick.

“I’ll repeat it, I’m sorry. I’m going to make things right about that engagement, too.”

“Is that still a thing? I mean, you just drank some champagne and walked into a room together. There is no contract yet, is there?”

“It’s more than that, Liam,” sighs Nathaniel. “By now, all the Gold Moon Clan will have used this engagement for business issues and consider it as valid. Even if Damian turns out to have a lover, I doubt they will even care. They will most likely just pretend they don’t know or pass it off as a baseless rumor. The news of this engagement is too big; the Gold Moon Clan took things to their advantage to put pressure on other companies, saying the Black Corp is backing them up. If we want to stop them, Damian will need to make a formal statement.”

So, this is an even more significant issue than I thought. To think a simple engagement could have so many consequences... I remember my conversation with Bobo in the car earlier. Don’t waver, Nora. Even the

Witch said the same thing. I should have faith in myself. Maybe I will find a way to help Damian later.

I keep thinking about that business card. Maybe I have a chance to turn tables now. This can't just be a coincidence. I bite my lip, thinking about what to do next.

“Damian?”

He turns his head to me, and I point the bedroom.

“I'll get changed before we meet your clan. I'm all sweaty from work. Okay?”

He nods, and I head off to the bathroom. Thank Moon Goddess I still have the clothes from this morning, because I don't feel like putting on anything that was in my room if there is any left. I still can't believe someone did this to the apartment. I shiver just thinking about it. What would have happened if I had gone home during my break? If it was Marcus...

Elena! I suddenly remember my cousin. I haven't heard from her... I'm under the shower but, now that I think about it, I don't need a phone, do I?

“Elena?”

“Nora! What is it, too lazy to use the phone now?”

“I’m showering. Plus, Nate is right next door. You still don’t want the brothers to know we know each other, right?”

“No, no. Are you all right, Nora? Your wolf seems all shaken up.”

Quickly, I tell her about all the events since we last saw each other, what happened in my apartment, our suspicions, and about the blood tests, as well. I grab a towel as I finish talking and start dressing up.

“Nora, that’s a lot of information. I’m not so surprised about the blood results, to be honest, I always knew you were more... Well, more Royal than I am. But what happened at your place? That’s really no good.”

“I know, I’m totally freaked out, too, though I don’t want to worry Damian.”

“I understand. But stay close to your mate until they found this psychopath, okay? And you can talk to me if you need help, anytime.”

“Thank you, cousin.”

Cousin...

I like the sound of that. Elena and I keep talking through the mind-link for a while before I finally exit the room. To my surprise, Liam is waiting for me in the bedroom. I frown.

“Liam? Where are Damian and Nate?”

“They are waiting for us downstairs. Neal and Bobo just came back. So, we have a few minutes to talk before they come back.”

“Talk about what?”

“About this?”

Oh, Moon Goddess. Why does he have that business card! I walk up and take it back from him. Don’t tell me he took it from my clothes while I was showering? I can’t believe him!

“Liam, that’s not your business! Don’t go through my stuff again!”

“What, you’re hiding little secrets now? Why do you have that guy’s business card, anyway?”

So, he can see what's written on it. Couldn't the Witch have hidden it from other people, too, like her letter? Apparently not. How do I explain this? I know Liam is good at keeping secrets, but gosh, he is good at spying, too! Moreover, there is no way I'm telling him about the Witch; he is the one supposed to hunt her down.

"Someone gave it to me," I mumble.

"Oh, really? I wonder who."

Gosh, can't he be less curious just for once! And while he's at it, drop that stupid smirk of his, too! I know there is no way he is going to let this go, so I might as well give him something else to think about instead of telling him about the Witch.

"Okay, I was thinking of going over to talk to their Alpha."

His smile drops immediately, and he crosses his arms, looking a lot like Damian when he is unhappy. "Nice. Did you completely forget the part about them killing intruders on the spot? Because I'm pretty sure I mentioned it something, like, ten minutes ago."

"You said they hated you guys. Doesn't mean they will be as hostile towards me."

“They don’t like strangers at all, Nora. Do you really think you can just walk in there and try your luck? I think you’re a tiny bit overconfident here, Princess.”

“Liam, it could be the solution! Moreover, you said it, I’m a princess, a Royal. Maybe that will help...?”

He rolls his eyes. “Nora, even I am not that crazy! And you? You are a Princess, but you are still a 5’2”, underweight, eighteen-year-old girl who learned how to control her wolf not two months ago! This is not like an Alpha fight; this is you running into a freaking dead-end!”

I cross my arms, annoyed at him. For the record, I’m not as thin as I used to be, and he knows this isn’t a matter of size either. I’m disappointed. I mean, Liam has been one of my most trusted friends since the beginning, and always the first one up for any crazy plan! I mean, isn’t he the reckless one among his brothers?

“What, you don’t trust me now? Liam!”

“I trust you, Nora, but this is a suicide, and I’m not a big fan of that! Wait till my brother kills me, too, if I let you to go there alone! You think Damian handcuffing you to the bed was unreasonable? Wait until you see how he punishes me!”

“Actually... I thought you could come with me.”

“Excuse me now?”

He looks at me with shocked eyes, but I’m still not giving up. I really think this might help. I try to make a pleading face, putting my hands together, and stepping closer.

“Please, Liam? You know Silver City like no one, and all the packs would let you on their turf.”

“All except for the Sapphire Moon Clan! And they don’t let me in, I just sneak in, Nora. Most of the time. What you’re asking me is...”

“What about Lysandra Jones? You guys are on good terms, and her Clan is an ally of the Sapphire Moon!”

Liam shakes his head. “No, Nora. First, we are not friends, she just likes to fight with strong people, and I’m one of those. Secondly, the Purple Moon is only a branch Clan of the Violet Moon. Lysandra doesn’t agree with her father, so assuming her pack is allied with the Sapphire Moon Clan is a bit risky. Finally, I’m not even sure, even if Lysandra agrees to help us and an ally of the Sapphire Moon wolves, that this plan would work. That’s way too many ifs!”

I know this idea is risky with the way things are now. but with Damian breaking the engagement, I'm afraid the balance of power between the Clans will shift way too fast, and I must act before that. "It might be my only to help you guys."

He shakes his head. "Nora, this is a really, really bad idea. Damian would be super against it, and with all the right reasons for it!"

I do feel bad about acting behind his back, but he would prevent me from going there if I did. I know I'm the one who came up with this "no lies" thing, but I don't see any other way to help my mate. I sigh. "Okay, let's talk again about this later. You think about it, please, Liam."

"You better think about it, too, Nora! Like, as an awful decision you should not make!"

He sighs and turns around to leave the room. I know this is unreasonable, but this is the only thing I could think of after receiving this business card. I look at the butterfly flying around me while I quickly brush my hair. Is this little thing going to get me killed? The Witch wouldn't let such a thing happen, right?

I try to chase away those depressing thoughts and get downstairs to join the guys. Liam ignores me, but I just naturally walk up to my mate. Damian puts his arm around my shoulders, and it's time to go.

We don't need to get far; the elevator takes us way downstairs. The brothers guide me through a couple of corridors, and we finally walk into what looks like a vast reception hall. Except that nothing is put up for a reception, no decoration or furniture whatsoever. Instead, it is just crowded with a lot of people. It looks more like some shady business reunion. The curtains are closed, and everyone is dressed in dark outfits, mostly black. Most are between their twenties and forties. Some wear suits, others wear some street clothes like hoodies or leather jackets. I finally understand. Neal didn't gather the full Clan, but its lieutenants.

The Jade Moon Clan was not that big, only eighty or a hundred people, so Vince was enough as its Alpha to control it, with the Beta's help. For the Blood Moon Clan, however, that wouldn't work. From what I've heard, this Clan has hundreds, perhaps thousands of members. With so many people, a single Alpha could never oversee it all. Hence, like any prominent Clan leader, Damian, has an organization that allows him to control all the wolves without being himself on the scene.

That's where the lieutenants come in. Those people are Alpha werewolves, but of lower strength than the main Alpha. Just strong enough to control smaller groups. I look around, and that seems about right. Headhunters, top fighters, family heads, gang leaders. Every single person in this room is an Alpha, leading their own smaller pack, but moving under Damian's orders.

As we walk in, all of them react to my mate's presence, willingly lowering their heads in respect, calling him "Boss."

Despite the room being full of Alphas, I can tell none of them are on Damian's level. He has his own aura, on a whole different scale. And here I am, walking next to him, with no idea how to act. Gosh, I can't believe I'm just standing there with a denim skirt and this plain t-shirt! Maybe I should have dressed up a little? I feel awkward facing all the lieutenants with their severe looks in this casual attire.

Damian walks up to a small stage, where all of them can see him. Taking a quick look, I try to estimate how many people are there. Maybe about a hundred or so? How large can the sub-packs be, then? Some of them look young, maybe my age or so. They don't look childish at all, though, more like punks and street gang people. It really looks like some Mafia gang gathering...

"Hi, everyone. Apparently, Neal already filled you in, so let's go over this quickly," says Damian. "From today on, no more favors for the Gold Moon Clan. They overstepped their bounds, and we are to make them regret it."

To my surprise, most people in the room cheer or applaud, and a couple of them whistle in appreciation. Are they happy about pissing the Gold Moon Clan off?

"I like that, Boss!" Yells some guy with a large beard.

“Let’s ditch those money-suckers!”

“Who do they think they are!”

A few more people are heard before Damian growls. Immediately, everyone goes silent again, all eyes focused on him. A woman with a black leather jacket raises her hand.

“What about King, Boss? The engagement? Judging from the young missy next to you, I bet you found better!”

Damian smiles and takes my hand gently before making me face the crowd with a fierce look.

“I found the best one, Vane. All of you meet Nora, my fated mate.”

A few seconds of silence follow his words when all eyes turn to me, and all sudden, the cheering starts again, ten times louder this time. People clap their hands, and congratulatory words are flying all over the room.

“Finally! We’re so happy for you, Boss!”

“Blessed Moon Goddess mother, a fated partner for the Boss!”

I can't believe all these people are genuinely happy for us. Aren't they disappointed I'm not of a powerful family, or as pretty as Alessandra King? Do they think I have some significant backing they don't know of yet? I blush, embarrassed by so many people cheering for our relationship. Damian pulls me back next to him, putting his arm around me in a showy manner. Once again, the crowd calms down as soon as he gestures it.

"From now on, Nora is my one and only partner. The engagement with King is no longer. Don't let the Gold Moon Clan use it anywhere. No more favors, no more special treatment."

I see the Alphas wearing black suits all nod. They are giving off a businessman feel. They are probably the ones handling businesses and dealing daily with the Gold Moon Clan. Damian then turns to the side with the most street gang people, the younger Alphas.

"I don't want them anywhere in my territory. Let everyone know they are not welcome anymore. No more coming unannounced, no more going through our territory. If they don't like it, show them it's not up to them."

A young man with red-colored hair nods. "Got it, Boss! I was tired of seeing them acts like they own the place! We will drive them off and make sure they don't dare step in our streets again!"

“Spread the word, Sean. And tighten up the security; from now on, I want more people watching our borders. Some psycho managed to go past our defenses; make sure that doesn’t happen again.”

“Sure, Boss.”

Damian keeps giving instructions to chase the Gold Moon Clan off their territory. Not just geographically, but they also start talking about land property and corporate actions. None of this I can help with. Meanwhile, I notice a few people looking at me with curious eyes.

Well, I kind of dropped in out of the blue, so that would be logical. Everyone probably wonders where I came from, how I met Damian, but surprisingly, no one dares to ask. They listen to Damian’s orders religiously. From my perspective, no one seems really worried about what’s coming next. All that matters to them is the Boss’s orders. A hundred Alphas, all gathered in one place and listening to my mate with no discussion. I feel like this is the first time I’m really witnessing with my own eyes the extent of Damian’s influence.

The meeting takes longer than I expected. Damian’s orders were clear, and some of the lieutenants left right away. Still, some stayed to ask him about some border issues like the rogues, or how they should handle business deals. I notice a few of the lieutenants still look at me from time to time. I go to sit aside with Liam and Bobo, leaving Nathaniel and Damian to handle the Clan issues. To my surprise, five people shortly walk up to us.

I recognize the woman who spoke earlier, and Sean, the teenager with a large hoodie. Three other guys are with them. One is wearing a completely black suit and glasses, like an office worker. The one next to him has an entirely different look, with a leather jacket and tattoos all over his arms. I'm pretty sure he's a biker. The last guy wears a casual outfit and a beard, but he has a large burn scar on half of his neck.

"Hello, miss Nora. I hope we are not bothering you, we just wanted to pay our respects to the future Luna," says the woman, Vane.

Bothering me? I'm just sitting next to the wall, doing nothing! I get up to salute them. What am I supposed to say? This is a bit awkward, but they act politely and respectfully, so I do my best.

"Oh, thanks. It's nice to meet you all, I'm Nora Bluemoon."

"That's a pretty name, young lady. Nice to meet you, I'm Joshua Hale, in charge of the North highways," says the biker guy. He gives me a handshake with his gigantic paw, and a big smile.

Next to him, the teen just nods, his hands in his hoodie's pockets. "Sean Pierce. I'm in charge of Rock Park, and all the dark alleys a lady like you shouldn't go."

“Hello, miss Nora. I’m Thaddeus Cooper, in charge of the Financial district and M. Black’s accounting assistant,” says the guy with the office worker look, bowing in a really polite manner.

The last man gives me his hand, too, and a gentle smile. “Isaac Graves. We have met before, but I was in my wolf form, at your fight against the Jade Moon Alpha. A beautiful fight, by the way.”

“So, you’re Nathaniel’s Beta, right?” I ask, suddenly remembering where I heard his name before.

He smiles and nods. “That’s right.”

“And I’m Vanessa Brookes, in charge of South Main Street and the southern border. You can call me Vane, everyone does.”

I shake hands with the woman. I feel like I’ve heard her name before. Her face reminds me of someone, too, but I can’t remember who. She is tall, with her brown hair falling on a red leather jacket. She gives me a warm smile. “We are happy you’re here, miss Nora. The Boss has been looking everywhere for you, you know, so we were curious. It’s good to finally see you in person.”

“You guys know about this, too?” I ask, surprised.

The biker guy, Joshua, laughs loudly. “Everyone here knows! The Boss gave orders a few years ago. Find a teenage girl, blue eyes, black hair, a scar on her left eye. And here you are!”

“Thank Moon Goddess. If the Boss really married that King, I would have killed that whore,” grumbles Sean.

“Well, you won’t need to get things that far, it seems like the Boss will take care of things after all,” says Isaac.

“I was surprised earlier. Are you guys all against that woman? I mean, this alliance with the Gold Moon Clan should be full of advantages...” I say.

They look at me with surprised eyes. Sean rolls his eyes, but Vane gives him a slap behind the head right away, telling him to watch his attitude.

It’s actually Thaddeus who clears his throat to answer me. “Putting the financial benefits aside, miss Nora, the Gold Moon Clan is not a popular choice for the Clan. Their wealth is mostly due to a long history in Silver City, not smart business decisions. If I may say so, their wealth went up naturally, but they’re poorly managed. The Alpha is...”

“...A nutjob who just got lucky,” mumbles Sean.

“Well, you may also put it that way,” says Thaddeus.

“It’s as the guys said, miss Nora. The Gold Moon Clan may be rich, but that’s it. They are not good fighters and not smart either. They just act like they are. The same goes for Alessandra King, she acts as if she owns every place she goes, but that only if she got her purse in hand. If anything, she is the queen of disrespect, and nobody here likes that.”

I nod to Vane’s words. So, therefore everyone was so happy about Damian’s announcement concerning the engagement’s cancellation.

Joshua smiles at me once again. “We may have submitted to the Boss, miss Nora, but we are not ready to accept anyone as the Luna. But you look like a fine young lady, and if the Moon Goddess chose you as the Boss’ pair, I’m all for that.”

“That’s right. We already know you’re a decent fighter, too. A lot of us heard about that fight, even if we didn’t go. I like a Luna who’s not a wimp.”

This time, it’s Joshua’s turn to slap him behind the head. “Watch your words when talking to the future Luna, punk!”

“Don’t touch me! You want to fight, fatso?” Growls Sean.

The two of them start growling at each other, but Vane grabs them by the collar and pushes the two guys away like kids.

“Okay, enough, you two. If you want to fight, take it outside. Sorry, miss Nora, those guys tend to get excited quickly. We will leave now, but if you need anything, don’t hesitate; you can count on us.”

She takes the two guys, still bickering at each other, away, trying to separate them, and Isaac and Thaddeus follow behind. I feel Liam coming up to me, and he gives me a quick smile.

“They’re good guys. And super loyal to my brother, too.”

“They all look very different.”

“Well, Damian gathered a lot of people from different places. Isaac, Thaddeus, and Vanessa’s families used to belong to our father’s Clan, but they sided with us as soon as we rebelled. Joshua is a former rogue, but he is a good guy, so my brother allowed him in the pack.”

“What about the young guy? Sean?” I ask.

Liam shrugs, still looking in their direction. Joshua left, and Sean is sitting next to Vane, his hood hiding his eyes.

“Sad story. He grew up in the streets as an orphan. No one knows where he came from, but he’s a real little punk. A good fighter, too. I think he looks up to Damian a lot. He is the only one Sean listen to, with a couple other people.”

“Like Vane?”

“Yeah, she’s like the big sister of the group. She was one of our first lieutenants, so...”

It’s interesting, getting to know the dynamics of Damian’s Clan. So many people are counting on him now. I understand more how the whole Blood Moon Clan works. A lot of them are either people who turned against the former Alpha, or outsiders, strays. Werewolves the other Clans wouldn’t have wanted. Especially Alphas. The natural reaction for any alpha werewolf is to consider other Alphas as their rival and push them off. It’s a common situation in huge packs— they would try to chase off any potential threat.

However, Damian didn’t do that. Instead, he let those Alphas lead smaller groups and gathered them around him. It wouldn’t have been possible if he wasn’t strong and charismatic enough himself. Would I have been able to do this?

While I'm still thinking, a few more of them come to salute me. I try to remember the names and areas they are in charge of, but before I get any rest, more than twenty lieutenants have come and gone, and I'm a bit lost. I hope I will be able to remember most of them, though. I share my worries with Liam, but he laughs at me.

“Don't worry, Nora, you'll have plenty of time to get closer to them! Plus, even I don't know everyone here, there are too many faces! Just do it like me, and if you're unsure, ask us with the mind-link.”

Oh, right, there is this solution, too. I never thought of that before. How convenient.

“Nora?”

Damian is back, and he takes me in his arms right away. “Sorry, that took a while. Are you tired?”

“Now that you mention it...”

It's true. I don't know what time it is, but it's late, maybe past midnight, even. I look around and realize almost everyone left, aside from a few groups of people talking here and there. Nathaniel arrives behind Damian, looking exhausted as well.

“I’m going home, guys, I’m dead tired.”

“Home? You’re actually on your own again tonight?” Asks Liam with a smirk.

To my surprise, Nathaniel glares at him. Judging by his reaction, I would guess Elena is still avoiding him... Without saying a word, he turns around and leaves.

Damian frowns and turns to Liam. “What’s wrong with him?”

But the youngest brother shrugs. “Don’t ask me, he is the one with relationship issues...”

Damian frowns, but I act like I don’t know about it. After all, this is Nathaniel’s business, not mine. I just hope everything would settle down with Elena. Unfortunately, that’s not my place to interfere.

“Can we go, Damian?” I ask, trying to change the subject.

Thankfully, my mate nods and takes my hand. Bobo, Neal, and Liam follow behind us when we walk back to the elevator. I’m feeling so tired, I’m almost sleeping against Damian’s chest already. The elevator stops, and the Mura brothers exit first a few floors below Damian’s place. Does

Neal live here, too? That wouldn't be too surprising. To my surprise, Liam follows us to Damian's apartment.

"All right, I'm going to bed. Good night, guys!" He says, leaving towards what is probably a guest room.

As soon as he is gone, Damian carries me like a princess, taking me to his room to land me on the bed. I yawn irresistibly, and he laughs.

"You're so cute when you are tired. I should make you stay up more often."

"No way, I need to go to work tomorrow..."

Gosh, work. Can I go back to work after what happened? Damian doesn't discuss it, and I wonder if he heard me. He exits the room for a minute, and I head to his vast wardrobe. I pick a sleeveless shirt, big enough for me to wear to sleep. I understand why Elena loves wearing oversized clothes so much. This is so comfy! When Damian comes back, only wearing pajama pants, I'm already in bed, and drowsy. He smiles and joins me. He puts his arm around me, holding me close against his bare chest.

"How do you feel?"

“Just tired...”

“You’re getting stronger. I thought you would be more shaken up by all that happened today.”

I know. It’s been a long day. The Witch’s letter, Alessandra King barging to my workplace, the attack at my apartment, the Blood Moon Clan’s gathering... I sigh. “I won’t get used to it, but... It’s not like I can sit in a corner and cry either. I promised myself to get stronger.”

I feel his lips pressing against my forehead. “You’re doing great, Nora. I’m proud of you, my Love.”

I like it when he calls me that... I wish he’d say it again, but I fall asleep to quickly to ask.