

Chapter 11

I open my eyes suddenly, feeling completely awake. I'm still in Damian's embrace, and it's still nighttime behind him. What time can it be? I wonder why I'm awake so early.

I don't feel like moving, though. It feels so warm under the blanket, and I'm surrounded by my mate's smell. We are so close... When we are next to each other like this, I'm not scared at all. On the contrary, I feel totally safe. So why do I get so scared when Damian wants me?

It's our mate.

Very softly, I caress the dark tattoo on his neck. The Blood Moon Clan's black crescent moon. Once I'm officially his mate, will I get one, too? Yesterday, a lot of the lieutenants had it where I could see it. I wonder where I would do mine. Liam, Nathaniel, and Bobo all have it on their chests, and Tonia has hers on her arm.

My fingers go down on his torso, careful not to wake up my man. Sometimes I forget he is six years older than me. He is a full, grown-up

man while I still feel like a child. I don't find myself desirable. I'm thin, with barely any curves, and small breasts. Not to mention my scar...

Maybe that's my main problem. I don't see how Damian, or any man, can find me attractive. Marcus considered me like a toy, an object for sexual satisfaction. Somehow, am I afraid Damian is the same?

While lost in my thoughts, I sense Damian moving next to me. He takes my hand that was wandering on his chest and brings it to his lips to kiss it without opening his eyes.

"Sorry. Did I wake you?"

"No. What are you thinking about? I feel your wolf is... worried."

I don't know how to say this... And I don't want to worry him, either. We both stay silent for a while, and I would think he went back to sleep if it wasn't for his thumb, gently stroking my hand.

"Do you think you would have loved me if it wasn't for our bond?"

"Yes."

His immediate and definite reply takes me by surprise.

“But we were just kids...”

“That’s not when I fell in love with you. I liked you as a child, I cherished you, but I really fell for you at the hospital, when we met again. As a man, attracted to a woman. How strong and fragile you were at the same time. I loved that,” he whispers gently.

“Really?”

“Yes. I told you. I can wait, but I still want you, Nora.”

“I thought that I’m... I’m not... desirable.”

He opens his eyes and moves, shifting to stand on his arms above me. He leans to give me a long, deep kiss. Slowly, his lips take mine over, and I respond unconditionally. When he stops, he is smiling again.

“Moon Goddess, you are desirable, Nora. That’s why I want you so bad.”

He goes down, landing soft kisses on my neck, and I feel one of his hands grabbing my waist gently. I let him do so without moving, just closing my eyes and enjoying this. Is it because it’s Damian that this feels so good? I’m shivering under his lips, but it’s from pleasure this time. I don’t feel

any fear, just this slow fire burning on my skin wherever he touches me. I can tell he is hesitating, watching my reactions, but I really am not afraid the slightest this time. So, I put my hand on his neck, gently stroking his hair while his kisses keep coming.

I feel his large hand adventuring lower. He caresses my leg, my bare skin shivering under his fingers. Damian is deliberately acting gentle and cautious, and I love it. That fire under my skin is not calming down. I caress his cheek and come to claim a kiss from him. He seems a bit surprised, but he doesn't resist. His fingers go up again, shifting from my leg to my waist, under the shirt this time. I gasp. I can barely breathe; this is so intense and thrilling. I claim more of Damian's lips, and I feel his hand hesitate a bit before he starts fondling my breast. Oh, my gosh... Damian's hand is really touching me this way, and I like it, I really do. So much that I hear my own breathing accelerating on its own, and my heartbeat quickens without warning. This is how it is supposed to be. Thrilling, intimate. Something we both really want. I gather my courage and start kissing his neck, right where his tattoo is. I can feel his reaction: a shiver of pleasure. His hand runs through my hair, grabbing it and playing with my curls between his fingers. The other hand leaves my breast, to adventure further down...

“Damian! Nora! Time for breakfast, guys! I'm starving!”

We both freeze, startled by Liam's yelling. I completely forgot he slept here, too! This is so embarrassing! I blush uncontrollably, but Damian growls and takes his hands off me.

“I might really kick his ass this time...”

I can't help but chuckle a bit at his annoyed expression. Liam is so... Oh, well. I still kiss Damian's cheek quickly to stop his frowning. My mate growls a bit, but he eventually sighs and kisses me back.

He doesn't get up right away, and instead leans on the side to look at me, his fingers still playing with my hair.

“You looked okay.”

I felt more than okay. I nod, playing with the little spikes of his beard with my fingers.” I think I'm getting there...”

“That's good to hear, then. Stay in bed a bit longer. I'll take a shower real quick and then we can feed that annoying brother of mine.”

“Okay.”

He gives me another kiss before going, a proper one this time. I can't go back to sleep now, I'm still way too awake and excited! Instead, when Damian leaves the room, I reminisce about what just happened. I can't believe we just almost...! If it wasn't for Liam's stomach!

The places where Damian's hands touched are still hot. Is that what making love is all about? It felt like my heart was about to burst out! Yet, I think I wanted more, and it would have been okay not to stop there. Gosh, since when did I become so confident?

"Nora, Bobo's here!" Liam yells. "He got you some clothes."

Oh, right! I almost forgot about yesterday's events. Most of my clothes must have been ripped out back then. Did Bobo manage to find something he could save? I get up and check myself in the mirror. Aside from being a bit red, I guess I look fine. The wrinkled t-shirt and messy hair can be attributed to the sleeping, anyway. I get out of Damian's bedroom and find Liam and Bobo in the salon.

"Hello, sleepyhead. Hey, what's with those rosy cheeks? Don't tell me you and my brother got naughty so early?"

Gosh, that idiotic and nosy Liam! I ignore him and walk up to Bobo. He is in his human form, wearing some baggy pants and a hoodie. I go hug my best friend, happy to see him.

"Hi, Princess. I got you some new clothes."

He hands me a large bag with some brand's name on it.

“New clothes?”

“I figured you wouldn’t want anything that sicko might have touched, so Tonia did some shopping for you last night. You can just text her if you need anything else.”

He is right on that one... I don’t even feel like I could step into that apartment ever again. I inspect the bag’s content, but Tonia knows my tastes well. All those clothes are ones that I would have picked myself.

“Thank you, Bobo, this is perfect.”

I grab a set of underwear, a winter dress, and thick black tights to go with it, and head back to Damian’s bedroom.

“What about me? I don’t even get a morning hug?”

“Have you changed your mind yet about going to the Sapphire Moon Clan?”

“Nope. I still think this is a terrible idea.”

I had hoped he may have thought it over overnight. It seems like I was wrong. When I get back, Damian is out of the shower and busy buttoning his shirt. He gives me an interrogating look since he probably heard Liam's yelling.

"You're giving him the cold treatment?" He asks with a smile.

"Just for a while. Liam is too annoying, sometimes."

"I can only agree with you on that..."

I take a quick shower and get dressed. I put on my favorite jewelry, the earrings Bobo got me, and Damian's necklace. Once I'm ready, I join Damian, and we both head to the living room. Liam is busy playing on his smartphone, and Damian takes it from him.

"Hey! I was about to finish that level!"

"Liam, listen. You are accompanying Nora to work this morning. You just have two hours of classes, today, right?"

"Yeah. Can I skip those?"

Damian clicks his tongue, and Liam forgets about skipping.

“After you drop Nora off, you go to school, and then you head back to Nate’s restaurant. Got it?”

“What, I’m playing bodyguard now?”

“Exactly. We are still looking into what happened in that apartment and the intruder. So, for today, you are watching Nora too.”

“Yeah, yeah, got it...”

I am a bit surprised that Damian decided to ask Liam to watch me, too, but I don’t say anything. I don’t believe he would make any compromise, anyway. Moreover, this way, I can have Liam with me all day today and not raise any suspicions.

The four of us have breakfast downstairs in the Company cafeteria, like last time. I hope this doesn’t become a routine; I miss cooking for the guys. At some point, Damian’s phone vibrates, and he frowns.

“I have to go... You two, don’t leave Nora. See you later, Love.”

He gives me a quick goodbye kiss and runs off upstairs to his office. As soon as Damian is out of sight, I turn to Liam.

“Liam, please.”

“I said no, Nora! This is way too dangerous!”

“What is it?” Asks Bobo

I explain my plan to Boyan, though I don’t mention the Witch on purpose. It’s not hard to ignore the butterfly on my shoulder since Liam and Bobo can’t see it. When I am done, Bobo is frowning.

“I don’t like it either, Nora. This is risky.”

“Thank you! That is what I have been telling the Princess for two days now!”

I growl at Liam. Why does he have to be such a chicken now!

No matter how long I plead in the car when Bobo drives me to work, Liam is not changing his mind at all. When we arrive, I’m kind of mad at him, but it’s his turn to ignore me. So, I go to work as usual, while he goes to school.

The restaurant surprisingly functions just as usual despite yesterday's events, just with a bit fewer customers. Meanwhile, I'm still thinking about how to go to the Sapphire Moon territory. I have a location, but I am not confident at all about crossing at least two werewolf territories to go there on my own. That's why I was really hoping Liam would help me. When it's finally time for my break, I go to the changing room, and, to my surprise, I get a text from Liam.

"All right, I will take you there. But be ready to follow my terms. This is going to be super dangerous."

He said, yes! I re-read Liam's text, but even with those conditions of his, that won't stop me. I'm tired of being useless and overprotected. This time, with the Witch's help, I can finally do something.

However, Liam is right. So far, I barely know anything about the Sapphire Moon Clan. I am not going to be reckless a second time, going there without any information. So, when I resume work, I try to interrogate Elise and Kathy as we keep working.

Fortunately, both girls' act as usual despite what happened yesterday. Most of my co-workers had no clue about my background until now. After yesterday's events and Damian barging in the restaurant yelling my name, some of the staff changed their attitudes towards me. Apparently, being the Alpha King's fated mate is something scary enough that some of them don't even dare ask anything of me anymore. I don't really mind, though, since Chef Michel and Narcissa have no problem ordering me around as

usual. I don't feel like I'm working less or privileged, just that some of the staff members are wary of me. I try not to mind; it was bound to happen eventually.

Elise and Kathie didn't hide how surprised they were, but that was it. A bit of questioning and gossip, and the day resumed as usual. So, as we are busy cleaning the tables, I try to ask them about the Sapphire Moon Clan, without really giving them the real reasons for it.

"Well, they are a very secretive Clan, you know," says Elise.

"That is right. I heard they don't really like interacting with other Clans... It is hard to approach them," adds Kathie.

"That is what I heard. But don't tell me no one knows a thing about such a big Clan?"

I grab a few dishes to bring back to the kitchen, and Kathie follows right behind with a handful of dirty napkins. While we walk, she keeps talking, trying to remember all she can think of with a cute frown on.

"My father said they came to Silver City when he was a kid. It was before the Black Moon Alpha, when the Snow Moon Clan was still around and the strongest Pack. Apparently, they had to fight a lot to finally find their place in Silver City. That's probably why they don't like the other Clans."

“But they do get along with the Violet Clan, right?”

“Now that you mention it...”

We place everything we are carrying for the garbage boy to take care of, but instead of going out of the kitchen, Kathie takes me to the staff’s meeting room. Some guys from the kitchen staff are there, chatting and laughing around cups of coffee and some leftovers.

“Hey Mickey, you got a second?”

One of the guys raises his head and gives her a smile. “I even got a full minute for you, sweetheart.”

He stands up and walks up to us. Mickey is one of the sous-chefs usually in charge of cooking the fish dishes; I’ve helped him a couple of times. He stands at the door with his coffee.

“What’s up, ladies?”

“Mickey, didn’t your sister marry into the Violet Moon Clan? Nora was curious about the Sapphire Moon Clan; do you know anything?”

He frowns, a bit taken aback by the question, and turns to me. “What do you want to know?”

“Why do they hate the Blood Moon Clan so much? Or even the other Clans? I heard the Violet Moon Clan is the only one they trust, is that true?”

Mickey nods and takes a sip of his coffee before answering. “I don’t know the details, but my big sis said the Sapphire Moon came from the North about fifty years ago. They came here with a large pack, and though they had a lot of wealth, most of the Clans here treated them like rogues and made it hard for them to establish themselves here.”

“Except the Violet Moon Clan?” I ask.

“That’s the thing. The Violet Moon Clan was three times smaller back then, and they were struggling, too— fighting a lot with the others and everything. That’s how they grew to be damn good fighters. So, the only ally they found was the only Clan that was having it harder than they did. Both Clans helped each other and grew stronger together. The Sapphire Moon had money; the Violet Moon had warriors. You can do the math.”

Of course. Those two are the most important things for a werewolf pack to survive. If they had it, no doubt the Sapphire and Violet Moon Clans could make it. It also explains a lot their attitude towards the other Clans,

if they resented them for giving them a hard time. Is that why they hated Damian's father so much?

"You got business with them, princess?" He asks.

I jump hearing Mickey calling me that, but then I remember this is just what he usually calls me when we are not working. He is quite the sweet-talker and has a nickname for every female staff member here, except Narcissa. How ironic it is that mine turned to be that one...

"Maybe. I was wondering if I can get to talk with them..."

"That might be hard, they are as hard to approach as the rumors say. I get you are not a member of the pack yet, but I suppose they would consider you as a rogue with no background, and those guys value blood over anything else. My sister said they are acting kind of mighty, with the Royals and all."

Oh, Moon Goddess, is that for real? I try to stop my hands from shaking.
"What did you say? The Royals?"

"Yeah. You know, the werewolf purebloods? The Sapphire Moon is totally into that stuff. I heard they are loosely related to Royals, so they are really into it. They respect blood purity over anything else. It's kind of old school, but..."

“That’s great!”

They both look at me with surprised eyes, but I’m so happy right now. This is exactly what I was looking for! Kathie and Mickey exchange a look before turning to me.

“That’s great?” Ask Kathie, looking lost.

“Sorry Kathie, I guess I will explain later. But thank you, Mickey, that is exactly what I needed to hear!”

I give him a quick thank-you kiss on the cheek and run off, leaving the two of them stunned. I go back to the changing room and try to calm down. The Witch’s butterfly acts just as excited as I am, flying all around me. Did he understand what Mickey said, too? I look for my wolf internally, and it’s not hard to feel her; she raises her head as soon as I do. She is so in sync with me these days, I forget she is even there sometimes.

“Liam! Liam, I just heard the greatest news! The Sapphire Moon Clan totally respect the Royals! Do you hear that?”

“Great. Now we can go, and I am the only one who is going to get killed. Awesome.”

I growl at him. Can't he be a bit more enthusiastic?

"Liam!"

"Don't yell in my head! This class is giving me enough of a headache as it is!"

"Are you still not done?"

"In ten long minutes. Anyway, when do you want to go to let's-all-get-killed land?"

"As soon as you can come? I don't want to delay this any longer. Plus, I don't work tonight, and Damian will probably be stuck with work until late."

"You mean until he realizes we are gone."

Well, I guess Liam is right despite his pessimism. Damian is really going to get mad at us... I won't tell him that, though, so after I make him promise to come straight to the restaurant after school, I call Bobo. He is not happy about my plan either, and clearly concerned about my security, but he doesn't stop me as long as he can come along.

When my shift is finally over, I'm kind of worried, because Bobo has arrived with the car, but Liam is not there yet. Why would he be late now? His class ended long ago, and his high school is not that far either. I'm nervously playing with my necklace pendant while waiting. Bobo is acting as usual, texting, probably Daniel.

"If he is not here in ten minutes, we should—"

"No can do, Princess!"

I turn around, and to my surprise, Liam is finally here! I notice he doesn't have his backpack or anything. He walks up to us with a confident smile.

"You are late! Where have you been? Did you go home to leave your bag?" I ask.

Liam shakes his head. "No, I dropped by my girlfriend's place to leave it."

His what...? I stare at him, dumbfounded. Even Bobo's jaw drops!

"Since when do you have a girlfriend?"

Liam tilts his head, trying to look innocent or cute, I can't tell. "For a while, actually. What, I can't have one?"

"You never said a thing about having a girlfriend!"

"I never said I didn't have one! It's just that you and my brothers don't ask!"

So, both Damian and Nathaniel have no idea either? Liam is even sneakier than I thought! I stare at him, not knowing what to say. I can't believe this guy has a girlfriend and never said a thing!

Bobo frowns, really surprised, too. "Since when?"

"A few months, but don't ask anymore, my lady is really shy."

"What, so you won't introduce her to us? You could at least tell us more!"

I have to admit, I'm feeling all curious now! Liam pretends to ponder for a while, a bit annoyingly I should say, then he gives me a wink. "I can't, sorry! Anyway, didn't you want to hurry up just a while ago, Princess? We should get going, the sooner the better before Damian unleashes all hell on us for this suicide mission you got for us!"

Despite my curiosity about Liam's girlfriend, there was no way I would delay our trip to the Sapphire Moon Clan to learn more about that. We are running against the clock on that one. So, I give Bobo the address on the business card the Witch gave me, and he heads the car to the southwest. This is a part of Silver City I am very unfamiliar with. With the Jade territory being in the East, and the Blood Moon in the center, I never had any reason to head West until now. Judging from where we are headed, the closest I probably ever got to that part of town was probably when fighting with or against the Sea Moon Clan, located in the southwest.

"The Gold Moon Clan is located in the West, right?" I ask Bobo.

He nods. "Right. Their territory is not that big, but they have several establishments in the city, too, on the Rising Moon Clan's turf."

I really need to study this kind of things more carefully, but now I have a rough idea of how Silver City and its suburbs are divided between all the big Clans. Obviously, the Black Brothers and their packs are located at the center, owning quite a lot, too. In the East, my Jade Moon Clan, with the allied Pearl Moon more to the North. Elena's Clan, the White Moon, dominates the North area, with the Latino and Artsy districts, but some parts like the Silver University premises remain neutral, of course.

The South, on the contrary, is larger and divided between the Sea Moon Wolves, focused on the sea border, the Violet Moon, and the Sapphire Moon. Of course, the borders are not definite and precise, more like a

general idea of who is not supposed to go where. But our wolf instincts clearly tell us when we are somewhere we are not supposed to be.

Like now, when the highway takes us further away from the Financial District, the buildings getting smaller behind the car's windows. This is a different landscape. More like the old part of the city, with historic buildings and brand-new skyscrapers popping out of nowhere. I can't decide if I like it or not. This is really different from the Silver City Damian brought me to, all made of glass, neon lights, asphalt, and steel. The Blood Moon turf is more uniform, urban and concentrated, while the Sapphire Moon Clan looks like a mix of old and new, wood and marble next to steel and glass. As we keep driving further, I notice the car slows down, while more and more wolves and people suddenly surround us. Their eyes are all following us without blinking, and we can't ignore them. Bobo has to pull the car over, and we get out. We are probably just at the entrance of it but driving any further into their territory would have been too imprudent.

As we step down, a lot of the wolves that were following and a few people immediately rush towards us, all of them growling loudly. A sturdy woman comes forward, looking very pissed. "Are you kidding me? How disrespectful is the Blood Moon Clan to actually step into our territory unannounced! Are you prepared to get killed!"

Bobo instinctively comes to place his large body in front of me, growling very loudly in a threatening manner, warning anyone who would try to harm me. Sometimes I forget how large and menacing he can be. Still, now it is apparently sufficient enough— some of them don't dare to

approach his gigantic figure. Liam, with his Alpha instinct, is not holding back his growling, either. I can't fear his Alpha aura, but I can tell it's here, and pretty intimidating, too, as no one approaches him either.

I'm the only one keeping my calm, and not impressed by all this. So, I speak out for the three of us. I address the woman who spoke first. "We did not come here as Blood Moon Clan representatives. I don't even belong to them; I don't have any marking. Those two just came along."

"A rogue, then? Do you think that is any better, young lady? Do you know how we treat strays here?" Says a young guy on the side.

"I don't care if you consider me a rogue, but I just came to have a peaceful talk with your leaders. I have questions."

This really doesn't look good, despite my attempts to look as harmless as possible. About a dozen people and wolves are circling us closely already. I can't have us attacked now, so I ignore Bobo's efforts to shield me and address the woman. "Please let us through, that is all we ask."

"You don't get to make requests, girl. You should go back to where you came from and be glad we are letting you go alive!"

Gosh, this is getting nowhere, and I'm starting to get really annoyed, too. This gathering is not intimidating me the slightest, and all those growls are giving me a headache. So, I deliberately step forward, provoking a

new wave of angry growling around me. My inner wolf, pissed at their disrespectful attitude, starts growling, too. “That’s right, girl.” I click my tongue at them, directing my stare to anyone who is acting hostile.

“Enough! I asked to speak to your leader. Let us through right now,” I enjoin them.

Most are surprised by my imperious tone, stop growling or take it down a bit. Some exchange looks, lost at what to do. I’m pretty sure a couple of wolves even took a few steps back. The woman has lost a bit of her confidence, too, and seems to be re-examining me with caution. She probably is struggling to know how to react.

Liam mind-links me at this very moment, his eyes going all around us to evaluate the situation. “They hadn’t realized you were an Alpha, too. You surprised them.”

“You... Which Clan’s Alpha are you?” Asks an old man.

“None. I said it, I don’t belong to a pack as of now. I was raised within the Gold Moon Clan as a child but got lost. The Jade Moon Clan picked me up, but I never belonged to them, either. Now, the Blood Moon Clan is protecting me, but I have yet to join them.”

“An Alpha without a pack?”

I nod, hoping she will believe me. She is frowning hard, and her eyes go from one member of her pack to another. They are all mind-linking to decide what to do next.

Liam is not acting as anxious as before, either. He is observing them, looking interested but calm, analyzing the situation with cold eyes. Bobo hasn't moved an inch.

After a minute or two, the woman turns to me again. "What are your current relationships with the Clans you mentioned before?"

I'm getting tired of all this questioning. It's cold standing here, and I only have this much time before Damian knows where I am. My wolf agrees, and growls louder, giving them a new scare, enough for more of them to retreat.

"I already said it earlier! Now, let me through. None of you are Beta or Alpha, and I need to speak to a man named William Blue. That's your Alpha, right?"

While talking, I take out the business card and hold it high enough for all to see. They recognize it immediately. The woman finally walks up to me, up until Bobo starts growling, warning her not to come closer. She is only a few steps away now.

“My name is Gloria. You can follow me, but the car stays here. Can I get a name to give to my Alpha, at least?”

“My name is Nora, Nora Bluemoon.”

As soon as I say those words, a lot of them get agitated all of a sudden. People start whispering, and the wolves are fidgeting, too. Gloria looks at me in shock. “Bluemoon? Is that a joke?”

I remain silent, leaving her to believe whatever she wants. Does my last name mean something to them? Anyway, I don’t have time for this now. Can’t we just go already? I don’t have all day! Gloria is lost in her thoughts for a while, but she eventually turns around and starts walking.

As we follow her closely, a few wolves from the Sapphire Moon follow us, too. A lot of them are growling at Liam, but he simply ignores them. He is more focused on our silent conversation.

“Well done, but I wouldn’t say we are fine. They were impressed by your Alpha aura, and your name is intriguing them, too. You probably just made them doubt whether they should kill us or not.”

“I know, but at least now we have a chance at meeting their Alpha, and Damian isn’t looking for us yet.”

“Nora, I think I’m more scared about one angry Damian chasing after us than hundreds of Sapphire Moon wolves trying to kill us.”

Honestly, I’m pretty much the same. No matter how many people are growling and circling us, I don’t feel intimidated, thanks to my Royal Blood. But Damian? That’s another story.

It doesn’t take long until we reach a vast house. I expected a company building, but instead, this is more of a family house. Not your average household, though. More like the old colonial house, all white, a large romantic garden, and a terrace. I count four floors, and so many windows, I bet ten full families could fit in there. How many millions is such a house worth? I feel out of place just by standing in front!

Gloria stops at the front door and a few of the wolves who were still following and watching us scatter around. She doesn’t even knock—an elderly man comes to open before that. He lets us in without a word, and Gloria takes us upstairs. Right before entering a room, she turns around to address Bobo and Liam.

“Just the girl.”

“Hell no,” immediately says Bobo, growling.

“Bobo, it’s okay.”

“Are you sure?” Asks Liam, looking concerned for the first time

I nod, but Bobo is obviously unhappy about this.

“You shouldn’t go alone. I’m coming.”

I see him take off his shirt, and he suddenly shapeshifts in front of us into his large wolf form. I roll my eyes, and Gloria gasps at his enormous size.

“Bobo! How stubborn can you be!”

“Never mind. As long as this one stays here, you can come in,” says Gloria, pointing at Liam.

I guess this is all because of him being a Black Brother. Liam and I exchange a look, but he seems okay with it. I don’t feel good about leaving him alone, though. I turn to Gloria. “You do realize that if anything happens to him, the Blood Moon Clan will react, right?”

She stays silent, but Liam sighs.

“Same for you, Nora. Let’s both stay safe, all right?”

I nod and glare one last time at the woman, using my wolf to make her feel it. If anything happens to Liam, I won't stay still, either. She avoids my eyes and opens the door for me.

I step into a large office, Bobo behind me. It smells like old books, ink, and dust in here. It lacks sunshine, too, so much that the place is a bit suffocating. Half of the walls are actually covered by bookcases, filled with many more old books than I've ever seen in my whole life. The place is so large and dark, I have to keep walking in until I finally see a large leather couch facing a wall. When I turn around to see what that couch is facing, I almost fall on my knees.

A portrait. A large portrait of a woman sitting with a white wolf. I stay stunned in front of her, unable to speak. Moon Goddess mother, I can't believe it. Why does that woman resemble me so much?

I keep staring at the painting, at a loss for words. That woman is sitting straight and fierce like a queen, a hand on her white wolf. Is that wolf meant to be her other shape? Or just a pet? Her dress is as white as its fur, sparkling and spotless. More than that, I am mesmerized by her eyes. The very same color as mine, a very peculiar night blue shade. If the portrait wasn't so large, it might not have been as obvious, but this one is covering the whole wall. I can very clearly see each and every detail of her face. A face so much like mine.

The more I look, the less I can believe it. If it wasn't for a few details, this could even be taken as my spitting image. However, that woman doesn't have any scar, and a few of her traits are different, too. Her nose is a bit more crooked, and her lips are fuller. My hair is a dark brown, almost black, while hers is a bit lighter, of a caramel brown, but just as curly. Is that a... tiara on her head? Now that I'm thinking about it, her dress doesn't look from this area, either. More like something from the previous century. This portrait looks quite old, as well. Nothing on the background can give any clue— that woman sits alone against a dark blue curtain. I don't understand.

Who is this woman, and what is this portrait? It's so imposing, with a gold frame like the one you would see hanging in some old castle. That woman looks important no matter how you look at her. Her expression is hard to decipher. She looks very fierce, but I feel like she could be very gentle, as well.

Bobo suddenly starts growling, and I finally look away from the painting. I didn't notice the desk hidden in a corner. An old man is sitting behind it, staring straight at us. He looks about fifty, maybe older. His hair is white, but long and scattered on his head, giving him an odd look. I don't like the way he is staring. My wolf starts growling, too, feeling threatened.

“Who are you?” He asks in a very annoyed tone.

No one told him? I thought the Sapphire Moon wolves had given him information. Or is he testing me? His Alpha aura is quite imposing. Not as much as Damian, but quite close, I would say.

I breathe in and turn towards him. “My name is Nora Bluemoon. I came to talk to the Sapphire Moon Alpha.”

“What do you want, child?” He talks with a scorched and drawling voice that gives me the chills. This man has something scary about him. Next to me, Bobo won’t stop growling, his whole body bent around me in a protective stance, so close I can’t take a step without pushing him.

What do I say now? The Witch guided me here, and until now, I was so focused on getting here that I never stopped to think about what I would actually say or ask once I did. Think, Nora. The Clans, the war.

“I came to ask for the peace,” I blurt out.

This sounds so childish and stupid, even for me.

“...The peace?” Repeats the old man coldly.

“That’s right. I know you hate the Blood Moon Clan, but we cannot afford any inner battles right now. Something much worse is coming, something dangerous and threatening our city.”

I realize how real this is as I speak. It's as if the danger was at our doors and ready to hit us like a hurricane. As she said, that other Witch will strike again, and we should be prepared. A war among the packs is not something we can afford now.

Facing me, the old man scoffs. "Is that all you have to say, child?"

"Don't you believe me? This is serious, if—"

"I do not care for anything you have to say. Why would you actually dare to come here and plead for that wretched, vile, obnoxious group of mutts?"

What the...? I just can't believe how much hatred and disgust he just spat those words! I can feel my skin crawl hearing that! Calling Damian's pack a group of mutts? How insulting can this old man be to my mate! My wolf is outraged, and I have a hard time staying calm, too. I need to keep a clear mind, but that man is not making things easy.

I breathe in. "The Blood Moon Clan is not looking for trouble. Every pack can remain in their own territory, and we can keep things as they are. If you do not seek war, we—"

He suddenly slams his hand on the table, making me jump in surprise. Bobo growls even louder and uses his body to push me back, putting more distance between the Sapphire Moon Alpha and me.

“Those dogs started it! They are constantly looking for war, oppressing the other packs! Why should we submit once more to their tyranny!”

“What tyranny? Damian has never oppressed anyone!”

“What do you know, child! You come here, on our territory, and have the nerve to talk to me about peace? Do you have any idea of the suffering we went through? You have no right to order us! You have no knowledge of this world and no right to order me to do anything! Make peace with the Black Moon? Never!”

His yelling glues me to the ground, and I have to listen to him all along. It's like facing a wall. A wall built of hatred and anger that started long ago and has gotten stronger and thicker for an awfully long time. He called them the “Black Moon,” too, but that was when their father was the leader. Can he really not accept the difference now?

So many emotions are going through me right now that I can't even decide how to react. I'm so confused and angry! And sad, too, because all of this seems so pointless! What do I do now? I try to think about his words, of how I can try to sort this out. A part of what he said is right. I have so little information! I am barely starting to learn about the Clans, but I wish I had

been more aware of it earlier! All I know is what Bobo and Liam explained to me. Dealing with the Sapphire Moon Clan cannot possibly be as simple.

“What has their father done to you that you would hate the Blood Moon Clan so much? What kind of grudge would be enough for you to not care about war? Enough that you would leave other werewolves to die for it?”

He suddenly starts laughing. His laughter gives me the chills. It reminds me of how Alec broke down once Damian had captured him. Something insane that makes one feel uncomfortable. I could tell there is not a single trace of joy in that man’s loud laugh. So, I wait for him to stop, despite how bad I feel about this. This is not good.

Once he stops and looks at me, his eyes look empty, like some puppet. A scary, crazy puppet. “A war? Why would they fear war? This man was death personified! A god of madness and violence, a demon! And the one he didn’t do with his hands, he caused himself! Peace? He destroyed it, any hope of peace, he tore to shreds!”

As he yelled, he stood up, his voice echoing loudly in the whole room. I won’t step back, but my whole body wants to run away. I want to run from here, from this man. Something about him is really unsettling and hard to look at.

“I do not care for any of his bastard sons! Those filthy mongrels should be exterminated and sent back to the gutter they belong to!”

“Enough!”

I couldn't hold it in any longer. That man may insult the former Black Alpha, even insult me, but there is no way I'm letting him speak about Damian or his brothers that way! My wolf is growling furiously, exhorting him to submit.

“Don't you dare speak about my mate that way! Not in front of me!”

His eyes suddenly spark a new light, and a sinister smile curls his lips. “Your mate, child? Could it be you actually are this mutt's partner? Really?”

This is not good. I step back this time, subconsciously. The old man is getting closer, and I do not want this madman anywhere near me. I gasp, and Bobo is growling furiously while shielding me, all fangs and claws out. My bodyguard is ready to attack the old man any second. This is not what I came for!

“You said you are his mate, right? Black's mate? His real mate?”

He keeps repeating his question, and I don't answer. This man has lost it. His intentions are written all over his face as he keeps stepping closer very slowly. His legs are so weak, actually, that it looks like he could fall any

minute. Is this really the Sapphire Moon Alpha? An old man, driven by madness? So old and weak? This isn't right.

Even if he clearly means to hurt me somehow, no matter what, I don't even think he could. My wolf agrees. We can beat such an old wolf without a problem! But what can I do? He is not listening to me, and I won't let him hurt Damian or me either. What should I do?

“Father!”

Suddenly, someone barges in the room. A young man runs in, exchanges a look with me, and walks up to the old man. He supports him but brings him back to his chair with an annoyed look. The old man tries to push him away and resist him, but he is clearly no match.

“Out of my way! Out of my way, William! This child is Black's partner! I will—”

“You will do nothing, Father! Enough of this! Gloria!”

To my surprise, the woman we saw earlier runs into the room as soon as she is called. Was she right behind the door all along? She totally ignores us and runs to the old man. The young man that just called him father looks annoyed at her, too.

“Take him back to his room, make sure he stays there until I am back!”
He says with an angry tone.

I realize the chair is actually a wheelchair when Gloria starts pushing him. As ordered, she takes the rambling old man out of the room with her, slamming the door behind them. With the three of us here, the situation has completely changed. Neither Bobo nor I have moved, but I have no idea how to react to the guy that just came in. He seems pissed when he turns to face us.

He is frowning, but I am more concerned about something else. This is the same feeling I have when Elena is around. That familiar, invisible sensation down to my stomach. He runs his fingers in his curly hair, taking it off his face.

“I am William Blue, the Alpha of this Clan. Who the hell are you?”

I keep detailing him, trying to grasp this feeling I get. My eyes wander to the portrait again, and back to this man. Those blue eyes, the same as mine, the same as this portrait. How come he has them, too?

“Nora Bluemoon.”

“Bluemoon? You...”

His eyes run to the portrait and back to me several times. He doesn't hide his confusion but stays silent for a while.

So, I speak first, trying to get to him as I did with the man earlier. "Please. I came here to talk about your grievances against the Blood Moon Clan. I thought that man earlier was the Alpha, I—"

"He is the former Alpha. That man is my father, Alcott Blue. He's no longer the head of this Clan, I am. Are you saying you are from Black's pack?"

This guy is younger than I thought, maybe around Damian's age, no more than thirty. I hope he will be more reasonable and listen to me.

"Not exactly. I am his fated mate. I came to—"

"His fated mate? Isn't this guy engaged to that slut from the Gold Moon Clan!"

I can't help but roll my eyes. I wish he hadn't brought that very annoying detail up...

"He will no longer be! That is what I came to talk about. An Oath of Peace with the Sapphire Moon Clan."

He raises an eyebrow and crosses his arms, surprised. Even I am a bit surprised by my own words, but it just came out on its own. What am I thinking? An Oath of Peace? The Sapphire Moon Alpha seems to take it rather seriously, as he observes me very intensely.

“Why would his fated mate come to seek peace with us? Why should I trust you, or that man?”

For a few seconds, I was feeling better seeing that he was willing to listen, but now, I have no idea what to answer to that. He is right. I came here totally empty-handed, with nothing but my thoughts and no way to prove my good intents. I sigh. Why does all of this as to be so complicated? Come on, Nora, think of something. This man doesn't seem as harsh as his father earlier.

“I'm concerned. Not only about the Blood Moon Clan, but about everyone in Silver City. A Witch is threatening all of our packs. This is all linked to the attack. We have confirmed that those vampires were controlled by a Witch, and she will try again. I came here because if inner conflicts arise within the packs, we might be too weak to defend ourselves next time, and that is something no one wants.”

He stays silent for a while, and leans on the desk, staring straight at me. I can't decipher what he is thinking or if he believes me or not. I want to ask him about many things. Why does he have the same eyes as me? Who is this woman? Yet I can't, for now. This is more important.

After a while, he sighs. “We already know a Witch was behind the attacks. She was nice enough to send us multiple threats over the past few years.”

What? The Sapphire Moon Clan received direct threats? This is totally new!

“What kind of threats?” I ask.

“Dead birds, mostly, and some of our sources of water were poisoned. It started a few years ago when I was not even ten. We handled it as we could, so far, but the vampire attack was a first.”

“Why didn’t you tell the other packs? They could have—”

“Helped us? Should I tell you how the Sapphire Moon Clan was treated for years?”

Right... Back then, Damian’s father was still the Alpha King, and the other packs were all struggling for survival. None of the neighboring clans, even if they had been willing, would have helped. This is sad, but he is right. They were on their own until now.

“So, this is why you didn’t help when the vampires attacked?”

“Not exactly. My father forbids our warriors to go help the other packs, but I was mostly concerned about the vampires’ aim. See, all these years, that Witch tried to steal something we never had in the first place, attacking our territory only. Yet now, she suddenly sent vampires on several turfs away from ours. I was curious to see what her aim really was, so I let it be.”

“Wait, so you already know what she was after?”

He slowly nods, looking serious.

“We knew it, but we never believed it. For years, we thought she just wanted something she thought we had. Turns out, what she wanted was really there, but she was looking in the wrong pack all these years.”

My head is buzzing as I start to understand what this all means. Pieces are falling together, and I look at the portrait once again. I remember the attack, what those vampires said. What the Witch wanted, she thought the Sapphire Moon Clan had it. Why would she have thought that in the first place? And as to know why she suddenly understood she was wrong, the past few weeks made it all too clear, too.

I feel my legs going numb, and for a while, I need to lean on Bobo to support myself. William is watching my reactions, too, and we both already grasp what is going on. However, we are still missing some clues.

A silence of a few seconds follows, but the thoughts are too loud in my head. He sighs, and his eyes go to the portrait as he starts talking again. “You said you were the Blood Moon Alpha’s fated mate, right? Is this the truth? The Moon Goddess paired you with Damian Black?”

“Yes. Damian knew of our bond ten years ago, but I only learned it very recently when we found each other again. I have been staying with his pack ever since.”

“You are not mated or marked yet.”

I shake my head. At another time, another place, I might have been embarrassed, but not now. I push my curls onto my shoulder, not caring about exposing my neck.

“That’s right. But we are fated mates, I swear.”

William Blue scoffs, shaking his head and muttering to himself. “Moon Goddess, sometimes she is playing cruelly with our fates... Or is this her way to show us the way, I wonder? “

Those questions are not addressed to me, and moreover, I don’t know what he means to say, so I stay silent. He takes a few steps, walking past Bobo, and sits on the couch. Elbows on his knees, fingers crossed, he raises his

eyes to the portrait. He observes the woman for a long while, completely ignoring us. I don't feel any threat coming from him anymore, and Bobo has stopped growling. We observe his lonely figure facing the painting.

“I've seen this portrait a million times since I was born. She has been here for fifty years, in the Sapphire Moon Alpha's office. Yet I never get tired of watching her.”

I step away from Bobo a bit to come closer, watching the painting, too. William Blue keeps talking, his eyes never leaving the woman.

“Her name was Diane. Queen Diane, my great-aunt. She died long before I was born, but my father talked about her so often, I feel like I know her better than I knew my own grandmother.”

Queen Diane. I have heard that name before. Some unknown man I came across at Damian's hotel called me that. How could he confuse me with a woman that passed away so long before I was born?

The answer is now clear. Queen Dian does look a lot like me. Or should I say, I'm the one that resembles her? I thought so the second I saw this painting.

“My family is a descendant of Royals. The Alphas before me were always so proud of their Royal Blood, but I always thought this didn't mean much

nowadays. Just a few droplets, how much more of the Royal Blood could have been conserved after centuries? But that woman...”

He points at the portrait, with a faint smile.

“Queen Diane is a living legend for our Clan. I don’t know how much of what I heard about her life is true, but if half of it is real, she was a living deity for our kind.”

“A living deity?” I ask, a bit confused.

He nods. “They say Queen Diane was a doctor, but she could heal people just with her hands. Her wolf form was as represented here, white as fresh snow, with blue eyes like a newborn. A blessed child of the Moon. She feared no Alpha, and any wolf obeyed her words. She never had to fight a single fight, all she had to do was talk, and it was as if the Moon Goddess herself spoke.”

All of this sounds all too familiar, and I start shaking unconsciously. I feel Bobo’s fur pressing against me, but no warmth can help me. He keeps talking, unaware of my present condition.

“Everyone thought the Moon Goddess had been reincarnated, but she just wanted the life of a simple she-wolf. Her younger sister, my grandmother, adored her, too. She had Royal Blood and was called Princess Cynthia, but compared to Diane, that was nothing. But those two were as close as

sisters can be. My grandmother was much, much younger than Diane, but her older sister aged very slowly. When Cynthia turned thirty, with a husband and children, Queen Diane was almost fifty years old. However, she still looked exactly like this painting: young and beautiful.”

My eyes are fixated on the painting, trying to imagine the life of that woman. As I listen, a feeling grows inside me, and I say it out loud without thinking. “She must have felt lonely.”

He looks at me, a bit surprised, and nods before turning his eyes to the painting again.

“That’s exactly what my grandmother said. Diane was always alone. She dedicated her life to others, to her pack, but she never let anyone in, as if she had some secret she could never share. Yet one day, she suddenly revealed to her sister that she was pregnant.”

William suddenly gets up and steps closer to the painting.

“When people asked about a father, Diane said there wasn’t one, no matter how many times she was questioned. Queen Diane was preparing her last miracle, a pair of twins growing in her womb without any father. Do you believe it?”

No father? How could this be? She couldn’t have conceived them on her own... right?

“She had a boy and a girl. DNA tests didn’t exist back then, so I guess there was no way to know if they had no biological father or not. I guess we will never know. Back then, everyone knew about what Queen Diane could accomplish, so when she said she carried children all by herself, they believed it. Children conceived as if Moon Goddess had carried them herself, about fifty years ago.”

“What happened to them?”

William sighs, and turns to me.

“When Queen Diane had her children, she said this birth would endanger the whole pack. According to her, her children would have the same characteristics as she did, but that meant they would also become prey for some dangerous people. Sadly, it turned out to be true. As the children grew, more and more attacks came. From vampires, witches, dark creatures lurking after the power of Moon Goddess’ blessed children. Queen Diane, worried for her children, asked my grandmother to seek somewhere safe, somewhere her children could grow in the middle of werewolves, and be protected. My grandmother, Cynthia, listened to her and left, taking half of the pack with her. This is the story of how we came here. Looking for a new place to live, we came from the North, as the Sapphire Moon Clan. As sisters, Diane and Cynthia had equal Alpha ranks, but Diane was the oldest and a blessed child of the Moon Goddess. She was the one with the purest Royal Blood. So, when my grandmother came here, with half of the pack, she was not the Alpha of the main Clan.

So, naturally, this pack that had come with her became a branch Clan, the Sapphire Moon.”

I close my eyes. Something indescribable is growing in my stomach, and I can barely breathe. When I open them again, William is waiting for me to ask, as if he could read my mind.

“What was the original name of your Clan?”

“...The Blue Moon Clan.”

I almost lose balance. William Blue’s words float in my head like an echo that won’t stop. The Blue Moon Clan. So there really was a Blue Moon Clan. It was real. I came here to stop a war, but now I suddenly learn about something I was not prepared to hear. Something about me, about where I come from. My legs are shaking.

I breathe deeply, but William Blue just calmly walks past me to go back to the desk.

“I really didn’t think I would one day meet someone wearing the name of Blue Moon. My grandmother gave up that name when she came here. If you’re the real thing, you are a survivor, miss Nora. So, I really hope you have a good story to tell me.”

A good story? Does he mean about my origins? I don't know anything! Aside from what Alec said, I'm at a loss. Whether it's about my mother or my birth, I don't know a thing. Shouldn't he be the one to tell me more? And why would I be called a survivor? He can't mean... I stare at him again, confused.

“What happened to the original Clan?” I ask. “To Queen Diane and her children?”

I want to ask what happened to my mother, but those words won't come out. This truth hasn't fully sunk in yet.

He shrugs. “You tell me. You came all the way here to introduce yourself with that name, so I want to know what you know.”

“I don't know anything!” I yell out of frustration.

All I could do was gather pieces about my birth that always turn out to be fake or wrong one after another. Now that I finally meet someone who could finally tell me where I really come from, who my birth mother really is, he suddenly wants to hear from me? Moon Goddess, this is impossible to bear!

“I initially came here to ask why you resent the Blood Moon, my mate's Clan, so much. I had no idea I was related to your pack at all! All I wanted

was to find a way to stop the war between the Clans, and a way to stop that Witch! I never imagined this...”

At some point, I start crying, and I feel Bobo worrying about me. He pokes me gently with his nose, but the tears won't stop. All the stress and the emotions are overflowing right now, and I can't stop it.

“Nora, where the hell are you?”

Oh, Moon Goddess. Damian. I completely forgot! How long were we gone? He is already looking for us, and I didn't manage to do anything yet! He must have felt my distress, too.

“I am fine.”

“Stop it, neither you nor your wolf sound fine. Tell me where you are right away!”

“What is it?”

William Blue noticed my expression and can't understand why I suddenly held in my tears. I wipe them away and shake my head. “My mate is looking for me.”

He frowns. “Damian Black? How can you know if you are not part of his Clan?”

“That is an ability of mine. I can communicate with other Alphas as long as I’ve physically met them before.”

“Or you lied about not belonging to him yet...”

“If I was lying, could I do this?”

I use my wolf’s inner voice, but I don’t bother to hide how annoyed I am, and he subconsciously steps back in surprise as soon as I mind-link him. It takes a few seconds for him to get it, but he regains his composure quite quickly.

“Interesting... This ability must be quite handy, I imagine.”

“You still haven’t said a thing about the Blue Moon Clan!”

He shakes his head. “I don’t trust you just based on a physical resemblance and a name. Even if I do, there is no way I would trust the partner of a man like Damian Black.”

“Damian is not his father.”

“It still doesn’t mean I can trust him. Why would he willingly work with us?”

“Because Damian would do anything to protect me!”

My words echo in the room for a while, leaving a heavy silence after them. I used my inner wolf without noticing, but I don’t care who heard me. I’m running out of the time, and this man is so stubborn!

I try to calm down and ignore Damian’s angry voice in my head to turn to face William.

“If I am right, and if what you said is right, then this witch might be after me. My father gave me the name Bluemoon; he knew who my mother was. I am a child of the Blue Moon Clan. Those twins, Queen Diane’s children, were born fifty years ago, you say. Look at me! I look like her, and I have some of Queen Diane’s abilities! I even have the same wolf form! And I am eighteen, the twin girl must definitely be my mother! My birth mother, my real mother...”

I catch my breath, trying to regain my composure, and step forward as I keep talking to him with a pleading voice, trying to convince him.

“That means I’m probably a descendant of Queen Diane, her grandchild. A blessed child of Moon Goddess. The Witch attacked you because she thought I would naturally be with the Sapphire Moon Clan, but now she knows I’m not. I showed my wolf form in public weeks ago while fighting another Alpha. Right after that, vampires attacked, coming after me. She knew where I was. She won’t go after your pack anymore; you guys are safe. I promise I will make sure Damian doesn’t fight with you, either.”

“Even if everything you said is right, didn’t your mate promise an alliance with the Gold Moon Clan? Forget the Witch, what is their aim, other than ganging up against us? When two powers out of three allies themselves, what do you think happens to the last one?”

I have nothing to answer to that. I know Damian feared an attack from the Sapphire Moon Clan most, but what can I say? The Gold Moon Clan probably sought this alliance first, and now it does seem like the Blood Moon was getting ready to get rid of their pack.

I shake my head. “I don’t trust the Gold Moon Clan. I don’t want to see any fights arise right now.”

“We hate the Black family, but we never started a fight in the first place. I am not my father, either. I’m not one to hold grudges either, and I won’t look for a fight when nothing’s happened since I became the Alpha of this pack. The ones who have been a thorn for months are those annoying puppets of King,” growls William.

Wait, what does that mean? Does William mean to say they are not after Damian's pack, but after the Gold Moon Clan? How come? I'm lost.

"What do you mean by that? The Gold Moon Clan?"

"We share our Northern border with the Gold Moon. They keep making intrusions into our territory, testing our reactions, and behaving like they own the land. They even hinder our businesses and help the Rising Moon Clan in taking over our shops in the city. We established ourselves after lots of effort, and I don't like giving up. But if King and Black keep this going on, I will not—"

"What do you mean, King and Black? Damian hasn't taken any part in this!" I cut him off, annoyed.

William Blue stays silent, but it's obvious he doesn't believe me. What is going on? From what he says, it looks like the Gold Moon Clan has been bullying them for months! And why would Damian's name be associated with this? Gosh, I really hope he is wrong! I try to think of something, but Damian's voice is echoing like the thunder in my head.

"Nora! Nora tell me where you are right now!"

I see Bobo's head lowering more and more, and Damian and Neal are probably giving him hell right now. I sigh, and my wolf faintly growls at our mate, a bit annoyed, too.

“Stop yelling! I will meet you in fifteen minutes, at the Sapphire Moon Clan border. Bobo is with me, I’m fine.”

“What the hell are you doing there?”

“Just come and get me.”

After that, I ignore him again, turning to William.

“How can I convince you?”

“Convince me?”

“I need you to trust Damian and me. I don’t care about the Gold Moon Clan, I don’t want anything to do with them, but the Blood Moon Clan is not what it used to be. Damian has no desire to fight with others.”

He observes me silently for a while, then tilts his head. Wow, with his curly hair falling on his temples, it makes it so obvious he has some of my features. His skin is darker, though, and he has some differences, like his square jaw and larger chin.

“You are not going to convince me you are our Princess?”

I roll my eyes. “Honestly, I don’t really care about being a Royal or not. I only learned a couple of weeks ago that my birth mother wasn’t the one I thought. All I want to know is where I come from, and what happened to my mother, who she was, and why did she have to give me up. But at the moment, I’m more worried about a fight between the packs, and calming Damian down. I will ask more later.”

“I see... Well, I heard you, but I won’t make any decision yet. So, you’re free to go.”

That’s it? He heard me, and that’s all? Why do I think this is all a bit too easy? William just stands there, composed.

“Thanks...” I say, a bit hesitantly.

With Damian’s voice echoing in our ears, we really have to go. As Bobo and I go to exit the room, I take one last look at the portrait. To think this woman is probably my grandmother... I can’t think too deeply now, though— we have to go. When I open the door, to my surprise, the corridor is empty. Where the hell is Liam! I turn around to William, but he is still nonchalantly leaning on his desk, staring straight at me.

“Oh, I forgot to mention, we are keeping the young boy Black.”

“What! Why?”

“Liam! Liam, where are you?”

“Hi, Nora. Hm, well, you are not going to like it, but I’m pretty sure I’ve just been kidnapped. They gave me some cookies, and well, I got pretty drowsy after that...”

“Liam Black, are you telling me you just let someone poison you?”

“Not poison, sleeping drugs! I still feel drowsy, actually.”

“Where are you?”

“No clue... It’s all dark in here. It smells nice, though.”

Who cares if it smells nice! This idiot just got captured and he doesn’t sound alarmed at all! And we just left him alone for barely twenty minutes or so! How careless can he be?

“Liam, I’m so going to kick your—”

“Wow, language, Princess. Plus, my brother has already been yelling in my head for five minutes straight, and he’s still scarier than you. Hey, are those brownies?”

“Stop eating the damn food, Liam! Damian is coming in ten minutes! You have to come with me!”

“Release Liam. Why would you keep him?” I ask William.

“As a token of goodwill from Black. The oldest brother, I mean.”

A token of goodwill? He just literally captured Liam! This is bad, not funny, and giving me too big of a headache right now. How will I explain this to Damian? The three of us came here secretly, and now Liam is supposed to stay there? I can’t let Liam be captured now!

I unleash my exasperation at William. “What goodwill! We never agreed to this!”

William frowns and walks up to me. When he is close enough, he reaches out his hand to me, and Bobo growls, but there is no animosity in his gesture. I wait to see what he will do, but to my surprise, he just takes one of my curls between his fingers. He stays silent and looks at me eye-to-eye.

I can tell he is detailing me, looking for any facial feature that may betray me. I don't have anything to hide, I'm not fake. I look like Queen Diane, and that's not a trick. I even look a bit like William.

After a while, he sighs and whispers, so low only I can hear it, "Consider it an exchange, then. Our princess against his brother."

I look at him, surprised. So, he acknowledges it? That I am from the Blue Moon Clan? It's... I don't know what to think of it now, but this is big. His blue eyes don't leave me, and I can tell he has made his decision. He really does think the same. That, wherever I came from, I am a descendant of Queen Diane.

I slowly step back and get ready to leave. I'm too choked up by my emotions to add another word right now. I grab Bobo's fur, pulling him to come with me so he will stop growling at William. We have to leave this place for now, before Damian causes havoc.

"Nora."

I stop and turn around, surprised. William is standing at the door of his office, his hands in his pockets. He's staring at me with an indecipherable expression. Gosh, he really does look a bit like me, with his curly dark hair that stops at his shoulders, and his blue eyes. He waits for a few seconds and suddenly blurts it out.

“Lilyan.”

“...What?”

I look at him, confused. What is he talking about?

He sighs. “Your birth mother, Queen Diane’s daughter. Her name was Lilyan.”

I’m speechless.

Lilyan. My mother’s name was named Lilyan. I finally know who she was! At least... I think I do. If this woman really was my mother. I suddenly remember Elena— Daniel said our parents had to be siblings! Which means... I turn to William.

“What about the boy? Her twin?”

“Gabriel. Lilyan and Gabriel Blue Moon.”

So, I have Elena’s father’s name, too. Our parents. Lilyan and Gabriel Blue Moon, Queen Diane’s miraculous children. Did they really have no father? It’s so hard to believe... I nod. I’m too shaken up to even utter some thanks. Bobo pushes me, and we leave this place in a hurry.

As we exit the mansion, I try to calm down and think of what to do next. We are supposed to leave the Sapphire Moon territory to find Damian, but what about Liam?

“Don’t worry about me, Princess, I’m pretty sure I can escape just fine on my own. I’ll catch up with you guys later. Just let me know when Damian’s done with the yelling.”

“You really shouldn’t be so relaxed, Liam. And stop eating whatever they give you!”

“Yeah, yeah...”

Sometimes he is so childish, I can’t believe him. I’m pretty sure he is staying here on purpose just to avoid Damian’s scolding. It’s not like I can do anything about it for now, anyway. Moreover, if Liam says he can get out of here on his own, I trust he can. After all, he already is an expert at avoiding his brothers and sneaking into other packs’ territories.

Bobo and I run back to where we left the car, and no one stops us on the way, though a lot of eyes are following us. Did William order them to leave us alone? Thanks to that, we reach the border without any issues a few minutes later.

Once we get there, however, there is an unusual assembly of wolves. A lot of them I don't recognize, but two groups face each other, and Damian is leading one of them. Nathaniel is in his wolf form right beside him. Oh, Moon Goddess, I can hear people yelling from here, and that doesn't sound good. Furious growling and insults are flying from both sides, both Clans' wolves are on edge.

I try to sneak in, and thankfully, the Sapphire Moon Clan wolves let Bobo and me through as soon as they notice me. When he finally sees me, Damian runs to me without consideration for the border or the bunch of wolves furiously growling at him. His large hands catch my waist first, and my feet leave the ground right away.

“Nora!”

As soon as they hear him, a few of the wolves stop growling to stare at me with curious eyes. Some of them still in their human forms whisper among themselves, but I can't hear what they say.

“Nora! What the hell are you doing here? You—”

He stops and turns his head around. A young werewolf that was still growling at him a bit too closely is suddenly faced with my annoyed mate. Damian growls at him twice as loud and without holding his Alpha power back. There is no way to compare. The Black Alpha's anger can be felt all

around, and every wolf steps back in fear, including a few of the Blood Moon Clan. And he is not even in his wolf form.

“Truly impressive.”

All heads turn. To my surprise, William is standing there, among the Sapphire Moon wolves, hands in his pocket, looking very calm. Did he follow us all the way here? Damian frowns and puts me down, but his hand is still around me, keeping me close.

The two Alphas stare at each other, and all eyes are on them. I notice some wolves are going back and forth between William and me, noticing our physical resemblance. Damian doesn't seem to care, though; he is just glaring at William.

“William Blue...”

“Mr. Black. I believe this is our first time meeting.”

Is it, really? It seems unreal those two Alphas would have never met before. They exude the very same kind of aura, powerful and fearsome. It's like seeing a confrontation between fire and ice, or a tiger and a snake. Everyone around us is feeling the tension, too.

“I see you really did come to retrieve Nora. How surprising.”

“I don’t see my brother, however,” growls Damian.

“Right. He’s staying with us for now.”

Despite William’s calm, Damian and the rest of the pack immediately start growling furiously at him. The Sapphire Moon Alpha doesn’t flinch.

“You better hand him over right away.” Damian’s eyes have turned ice-cold, and he is speaking with that terrifying, low voice of his. I see a couple of Sapphire Moon wolves’ step back a little, frightened.

William shakes his head and points his finger to me. “No. As long as you have her, I’m keeping him here. Safe and unharmed, but on my territory.”

Damian frowns, and addresses me, still glaring at William. “Nora, what is going on?”

“Damian, the Sapphire Moon Clan is—”

“Her rightful pack.”

William cut me off in the middle of my sentence, and I look at him with shocked eyes. What does he mean now? My rightful pack? I don't have any rightful pack as of now!

Damian glares at William. "What does that mean?"

"I don't have the time or patience to explain this to you. Anyway, I would advise you to retreat back from our territory and take the time to discuss this with her if she wishes to. I promised her I would think things over, but while doing so, I need to guarantee nothing will happen to her. As such, I took your brother."

"Wait! When will you release Liam?" I ask, worried for him.

William stays silent for a long minute, then suddenly goes to unbutton his shirt. What is he doing? To my surprise, he turns around and shows their Clan's marking, a full blue moon, tattooed on his back.

"This is your clan. This should have been your marking, but instead, you walk around unmarked like some stray. We can't have that. I want you to join our pack, Nora, the one you belong to."

I stare at him, speechless. To join the Sapphire Moon Clan? I never thought of this, but William's eyes are resolute. He is serious...

Damian glares. “No. Nora will join the Blood Moon Clan. Soon.”

“Why would she? Aren’t you engaged to another? Are you supposed to keep her as your mistress?” Asks William.

“Hell, I hope not!” Suddenly yells a voice.

Everyone suddenly turns heads. This has to be a joke. Alessandra King, now?

She is standing a few meters away, sided by a few of her own wolves. Were we that close to the Gold Moon Clan’s territory? My wolf starts growling just at the sight of her. I hate that woman. What is she even doing here? No one is pleased to see her, as both sides start growling, too, but she doesn’t lose her self-confidence one bit. She is standing with her arms crossed, looking at Damian like a cat preying on a bird. My wolf and I are both outraged by the looks she gives him.

“Hello, Damian,” she says with a little hand gesture that annoys the hell out of me.

Damian doesn’t reply; he keeps glaring at her with a very pissed look. I slightly shift my position to stand between the two of them, by pure instinct.

“King, are you that bored that you have to come to peek at the border so often?” Asks William without even looking at her. His eyes are still set on me, despite all of his wolves growling at both Damian and Alessandra.

She giggles. “Maybe. Well, my dearest fiancé bothered to come all the way here, I should at least say hi, shouldn’t I?”

“Is that so...?” Whispers William.

I’m sure he is waiting for Damian’s reaction right now, judging the relationship between the three of us. While Alessandra is clearly acting as if I’m not here, Damian pulls me closer to him, glaring at her with all his might.

“I’ve made things clear, Alessandra. Our engagement is canceled.”

She starts playing with her golden necklace, absentmindedly. “Oh, I’ve heard something like that. Father is pretty annoyed at your attitude, you know. You are making things difficult, but I persuaded him it was just a matter of time before you changed your mind.”

“I won’t,” Damian replies without thinking.

I am a bit proud of him, but Alessandra stops smiling, and suddenly glares at him. “Oh, you will. Do you know how many millions are hanging in

the balance right now? Do you think you can actually afford this little tantrum of yours? Don't forget, Damian, I'm the one with the money. You might be powerful, but you need back-up. Who is going to give it to you if not me? Hm? This little tramp?"

"Watch your mouth!"

Not only Damian, but even William suddenly started growling at Alessandra at the same time. I have to hold back my mate; Damian is on the verge of shapeshifting to give Alessandra a piece of his mind. While holding Damian's arm, I also have to calm my own wolf, which more than pissed by Alessandra's attitude. If I let her, she would violently rip her face off in seconds.

To my surprise, William talks in an ice-cold tone that reminds me of my mate. "A tramp...? Aren't you one to speak, Gold? Your kind is nothing but a down-the-gutter breed of slum dogs."

Surprised, Alessandra looks at him, violently offended by his words. "What did you just call me? How dare you..."

"I call you whatever I please, you slut. Tell your wolves to back off from my territory right now, before I send you back myself!"

The Gold Moon Clan is clearly overstepping. However, Alessandra doesn't move an inch. Instead, she sends a deathly glare to William.

“Really? Your territory? Aren’t you the ones who shamelessly took the scraps the Snow Moon Clan left behind? Don’t talk to me about territory when this should have been ours from the beginning.”

William snorts. “Is that what you guys think? Do you own this land? You are nothing but a mass of dogs playing around. Don’t come to me and talk about your rights. You’re merely a pack of stray dogs acting like vermin and thieves...”

Alessandra’s face changes color upon hearing this, but she can’t come up with any answer besides furious growling. It seems like William hit a nerve. Instead, she decides to ignore him and turn to Damian once more. “Are you really going to keep this stupid little act?”

“I have made things clear already,” growls Damian.

“Oh, please! Shutting us out, nullifying business deals? Are you that blind that you would lose millions for the sake of that little... girl?”

She clearly hesitated on the last word, but I guess she ran out of insults, or Damian’s glare shut them up.

Either way, she finally looks at me with a sneer. “Wake up, child. I don’t care if you’re an Alpha or whatever. You are nothing. I stand by what I

said last time. No Clan, no family, no money, no power. Fated mates? Whatever. Damian will marry me, because I am the right partner for him, and for his Clan, to stand as his Luna.”

I hate that woman. She’s not just arrogant, she is also a greedy bitch. Greedy for my mate. Moon Goddess, I hate those conspicuous eyes of hers. I don’t care about the Clans or those struggles of power and money. All I feel is hatred for this other woman who wants my mate, my Damian. My wolf is on the verge of coming out to kill her, and I must say, my human self has the same frightening thought.

Unaware of my anger, she keeps talking. “Whatever you do, you will never be enough, Bluemoon. Do you think you can afford it? Oh, sure, they might like you. You will be the adorable little doll. But his Clan will lose it trying to protect you. No financial support, no business deals, no allies. Watch it. It’s only a matter of time before they all disappear because of you. All because of you.”

I clench my fist, trying hard to hold it in. Damian is holding me tighter, angry. I can tell a lot of eyes are on me, worried or curious, but I don’t give a damn right now. I’m fighting to contain my wolf, and my urge to silence this woman the hard way. I can’t lose control now... This would launch a war between the two packs...

“I guess it’s not too late. If you recognize right now that you were wrong to defy me and acknowledge that I will be the only right one to mate with Damian, I can talk to my—”

“NORA!”

I jump into my wolf form and aim straight at her. I ignore Damian’s voice behind me.

This woman asked for it.