

Chapter 17

I slowly wake up to the beeping of machines. Everything is so white... It's blinding me. I close and open my eyes several times, making sure I'm awake. It feels like I've had a very long dream...

Something smells good. Flowers... roses? I turn my head slowly and notice several pastel-colored bouquets all around me. This hospital room... I have a strong impression of déjà-vu. About the pain, too. It's a quiet pain, though, like from behind a wall. I recognize the effects of some painkillers... My leg and stomach feel the worst, but it's bearable. What I can't endure, though, is this hole I feel inside my heart.

“Nora?”

I turn my head. Bobo is leaning on my bed, looking very worried. He is using crutches, and his usual braids are undone. He looks so tired... I feel his big hand on mine.

“Can you hear me? How do you feel?”

“I can... Bobo, where is Damian?”

He lowers his head and avoids my gaze. “You... You should rest, Nora. You’ve been in the coma for four days. It’s probably best if...”

“Bobo.”

I use my Alpha voice. I want to know where my mate is, right now. Why can’t I feel him? Is he too far? I’ve never felt this horrible void since I met Damian. I need him.

Bobo hesitates and slowly makes a head movement, gesturing behind me. I turn around to my left and finally notice the other bed. Oh, Moon Goddess, Damian...

I start crying as soon as I see him. He’s so horribly pale! For a second, I even think the unthinkable, but a slow beeping is echoing next to him—a very slow beeping. My mate looks like he’s in a deep sleep, not moving an inch; I can’t even see his breathing. Machines are surrounding him, one helping him breathe, others linked to his arms, tubes going through and through. I can’t believe what I’m seeing. How did Damian become like this? How is he even alive? And why can’t I feel him at all!

Tears are pouring down, and I breathe erratically, unable to calm down. I want to move, to want to go to Damian, but Bobo's hands grab my shoulders, keeping me down in bed.

“No, no, Nora, you have to stay put, please.”

“Bobo, why is he like this? Why is Damian like that?” I ask, desperate.

“He... he was shot, Nora, remember?”

Shot? The gathering... Now I suddenly remember everything—the Gold Moon's bombs in the stadium, the surprise attack. I remember the gunshots, each one of them. My Damian, lying on the ground, bleeding. Bleeding so much...

“I can't feel him at all...” I whisper, in shock.

I can't. My wolf is going nuts. Damian is right here, I can see him with my own eyes, so why can't I feel him at all? I look at him, and it's like I'm staring at an empty spot. I can't accept it, I can't.

“When will he wake up?”

A long silence follows. I notice we are not alone. Liam is sitting right next to Damian's bed, his head on the mattress. He's sleeping, but his eyes are red, and he looks like a mess... He's holding his brother's hand tightly. It breaks my heart to see the usually smiling Liam like that. I reach for Bobo's big hand again, but I can't stop looking at Damian.

"Bobo, when will he wake up?"

Once again, no answer. I try to hold back my tears.

"Bobo, when!" I scream. I can't take it: this heavy silence, this awkward and wary atmosphere.

Bobo raises his head to meet my eyes with a somber and sorry look. "Nora, the doctors said he will... probably never wake up."

"You're lying," I retort right back.

Damian has to wake up. I can't imagine, for a second, that he will stay like this. I gasp, trying to catch my breath. I just can't understand, I can't believe there is a world where Damian would die like that.

"He's right there, Bobo, he's alive."

“Nora, his body is... They did their best with the surgery, but his wounds are too great. He... he didn’t wake up after they operated on him. He’s in a deep coma, and all those machines are keeping him alive, but...” His voice breaks.

I don’t get it... I can’t process what he’s saying. All I can think of is this horrible, insufferable sensation in my chest, ripping my heart apart. I close my eyes, leaving my tears to flow out because I need to break right now; I can’t contain it. What’s going on? What is this nightmare I woke up into?

“Nora?”

Liam just woke up. Moon Goddess, he looks so miserable... His messy hair, the dark circles under his puffy eyes... He bites his lip and breathes in. “Good to see you up... How do you feel?” All the while, he doesn’t let go of Damian’s hand.

I shake my head. I don’t feel anything but terrible right now.

He frowns. “It’s... it’s going to be okay, Nora. He... he will make it, I’m sure of it.”

His voice sounds so weak and sorrowful, I know he wants to believe it. I want it, too, so I just nod. I can’t imagine... So, I try to keep it together.

I breathe in, take time to calm down my tears. Bobo is caressing my hair gently. He pushes a button, and my bed gets me on a sitting position. Now that I can look around, I notice I really am back in the hospital's VIP room... Only that there's an additional bed and lots of flowers.

“What... what happened? What's going on right now? Bobo, you said... four days?”

“Four days and a half, actually,” says Liam. “It took us a while to find you. You remember?”

I do, or just enough, I think. The cabin, Marcus... Right, he's finally dead. It's a blurry memory, but I'm sure of that, at least.

“Alec...” I whisper, suddenly remembering I saw my brother... Or I thought I saw him.

Liam sighs. “We found you with your brother Alec, in the woods... He was carrying you here; we found him half-way. You were taken in surgery right away. It took hours... You had a bullet lodged in your left leg and internal bleeding.”

I look down at my leg. Indeed, I have a thick bandage all around my leg, and a strap holding it up. I vaguely remember that, too... But I can still feel the pain a bit. It doesn't really matter for now. I ignore it and turn to Liam again.

“What... what happened then? And Alec?”

He shrugs. “Your brother disappeared right after he brought you here, so I’m not sure. We tried to look for him, but honestly, you were our top priority... We did our best. Once you were out of surgery, they said it would take you a while to come back, so Bobo, Tonia, Sylviana, and I took turns watching you two. Somehow, I think your new... look helps Damian, so...”

My new look? I look down and finally notice white, curly hair. What happened to my hair? It went from jet black to a silvery-white. It looks totally unnatural...

“Yeah, it shocked us, too. No idea how you pulled that one off.”

“That’s the only change we noticed about you,” adds Bobo.

“Sylviana said you’re all charged up with Moon Power if that makes any sense to you,” says Liam. “Anyway, you and Damian were out, so Nate and William somewhat took over. With the Gold Moon out, everyone started working together.”

“What happened? Back at the stadium. I saw... bodies...”

I'm sure of that. People died—a lot of werewolves. Everyone was fighting, some were fleeing the scene, but I can't forget the sight of dead bodies I came across. No face I recognized, but I can't imagine they were only the Gold Moon Clan's people.

Liam sighs and massages his neck, looking tired. "Yeah, it was a mess... Most of the Gold Moon people died, but all the packs had casualties. We lost people, too. Andrew Jones was killed, and Vincent Greene, too."

"Marcus shot Vincent. I remember now... I was trying to run away, and I ran into Vincent..."

He shot him dead right in front of me. How could I forget that?

Liam slowly nods. "So, I guess now we know who killed him... Taaron King probably killed Andrew Jones. People saw them fighting right before. Greene's new Beta died, too, by the way. And... Old Man Seaver passed away, too. Two days ago."

Oh, Moon Goddess...

"So, it's been a bit... complicated. People are trying to pull it together. Lysandra took over the Violet Clan, and Arthur Seaver did the same with the Sea Moon Wolves... The Jade Moon people are listening to us for now, and the Rising Moon surrendered, too. A couple other packs lost their Alphas, so... And there are still people in severe conditions."

Moon Goddess... I remember the stadium; it was a war scene. It's been a few days, but how can we expect things to go back to normal so soon? With so many people dead, injured, or grieving...

And Damian. The Alpha King, being in a coma...

"What... what did Sylviana say?" I ask, full of hope.

Liam frowns. "She's helpless. His injuries are..."

His voice breaks again, and he lowers his head. I see a couple of tears falling. Oh, Liam... I choke up, too, and a long silence follows. Neither of us wants to speak. I can only contemplate Damian.

Even when William or Elena come to visit, I don't really react. All that time, I'm thinking. I'm thinking about Damian and me. About us. I'm so weak, but I don't want to sleep a single second I might miss with him.

I feel calmer every second that passes by, and more resolute. Bobo notices the change in me but doesn't say a thing. He can't possibly know. He probably thinks I'm in denial, but that's wrong. I can't ignore the obvious.

He told the truth. Damian is dying.

My mate is in a deep coma right now. Tonia comes to visit me with the surgeon, but we talk more about Damian's state than mine. The doctor explains it to me, but all I can remember is that his injuries are too great. It's a miracle he's still holding on, and Liam thinks it's because of me, but... I can't feel him. To my wolf, Damian's already in a place where I can't reach him, and I can't have that. I just can't.

Every one of our friends visits us. All of them, and the Alphas that made it out too. They're glad I woke up, but it's impossible to ignore Damian's fate. Those visits have a bitter taste, no matter how much we try to keep it in. Me, too. I don't want to pretend I'm fine. I'm dead inside. This black hole is eating me up, destroying me as my mate is fading away.

When nighttime comes, I'm perfectly calm and waiting.

Liam never left his brother's side a single second, neither did Bobo leave mine, even when the nurse came to change his bandages. Now, they are both dozing off on their chairs. I'm sitting up, looking at Damian.

A smell of wildflowers enters the room, one I've been waiting for.

"Good evening, Nora," she whispers.

I smile gently to Sylviana as she approaches. She takes a quick stop to caress Liam's hair, looking sorry for him and walks up to me. She sits on my bed, on the side where she can face Damian.

For a while, we both silently look at him.

"...Are you sure?" She asks.

I knew Sylviana would understand right away. I don't know why I was so sure of it, but there wasn't any need for me to explain anything— she just knew.

I slowly nod.

"Nora, you will most likely... Even if you've never been so powerful, his injuries..."

"I'll do it anyway."

She turns to me, but I keep speaking in a soft voice, not wanting to wake up the guys.

"I know, Sylviana. I will probably... not wake up, but it doesn't matter. I just can't let him die like this."

“He wouldn’t want this...”

I shake my head. “It’s my choice. I’m probably acting selfish right now, but... I can’t live without him. And there’s Liam, Nate... The Blood Moon Clan, the other packs... So many people need him.”

“He needs you.”

I smile softly. That’s probably what Damian himself would say. I know that, but my decision is taken.

Sylviana understands and sighs. Her eyes shift to Liam. “Did you... say goodbye?”

I feel a tear rolling down my eye.

“Not really... It’s always too late for farewells, anyway,” I mutter, choking up a bit.

She silently starts to cry, too. I know she doesn’t want to do this; she doesn’t want to be the one to see me go. I’m leaving her with a heavy burden, but no one else but Sylviana would have helped me, and we both know that.

She takes my hand. Around us, the flowers silently start growing out, branches crawling all around us on the floor and walls. It's actually pretty... Roses are blooming all over as the branches keep progressing. They get to my bed and softly carry me to Damian's bed while Sylviana steps away. They gently set me right next to him. My heart suddenly warms a little as I can finally caress his cheek.

"Hello, my Love..." I whisper softly to him.

He can't hear me, but it doesn't matter. I take a while to look at him. My Damian, my fated mate... Moon Goddess, I love him so much... I don't want us to part yet, but if I don't do this, he will leave me into a world I can't live in...

I have a long thought for everyone who loved me. Liam, Bobo, Nate, Tonia, Elena, William, Daniel... It's hard. It's hard to leave them, without saying goodbye, without even apologizing for this. But it's too late for that now.

I lean towards Damian, look at him for the last time, and give him the longest, the most loving farewell kiss of our lives.

I'm floating. I'm numb, drifting in a world of unknown colors: no smell and no sensations, nothing but emptiness around me. I'm a whisper in a

sea of emptiness. I'm free, in a place that's nowhere. ...Is this what dying is like?

It could be a second, it could be a year. I could be an instant mixed with eternity. Time makes no sense here; I wait without expecting anything. Where, When, Who... No questions make any sense to me. I'm just there. Free and... trapped. An ethereal space, a dive in emptiness. My soul on a lock, my mind in a blank. Slowly drifting apart, losing anything I gathered.

There's no light or warmth to accompany me; there's no one here. I'm trapped in this mute world, a deaf world. A lonely place, peaceful and scary at the same time, a black hole of emptiness. A long, long thread of loneliness.

I'm so numb and so tired. I'm asleep. I try to fly, I try to soar and climb, to find myself again. I want to go back to them... back to Him.

Ghostly memories echoing on my mind, striving to come back to me. Who am I? What have I lost...? The whisper of a forgotten voice, the shadow of a touch... Something I've long forgotten, something I yearn to remember again—memories barricaded behind an invisible wall, a lock keeping me a thought away.

I hear... sounds.

A prolonged wind... Someone's soft breathing. A little, regular beeping sound. The rumbling of something soft. Footsteps, soft voices... Life. I'm alive.

Or... almost.

I can't feel a thing, nor my own body. Just hear those sounds, like an echo reaching me—a glimpse of life from behind a heavy veil. Something I can't touch, but I can gather. Finally, a peek at life.

It comes and goes like a wave that never dares to approach. Sometimes it fades away, sometimes it's brighter than ever before. I wait for it, I'll be patient. Please, please come back to me. Wait for me. Forgive me. I'll be back. No matter how long it takes. I'll come back to you.

I hear them again.

It's a long road, a long way up. Wait for me. I'll come to you, I'm coming.

A ghost of mist holding me back, losing me again. I'll try again, I'll find my way back. I'll catch my breath, I'll grasp my life again. Wait for me. Give me some time, give me a chance.

The voices come back again. Calling my name, a name I can't recall. I'll listen to what I can't hear. Catching a thread, following it back. How do I get back?

Listen, listen to them. I need those voices. Guide me. Show me the way back home. I'm coming home, coming back to you.

I'll come back into my life. I'll get it all back, I will be with you. Wait, wait just a little bit.

One more time, and one more chance. One more breath.

“...Something changed?”

“I think so... Her heartbeat, it's faster. Look. Even her breathing looks more natural.”

“Check again. We need to be sure this time. We can't give him false hopes again after so long.”

I'm fighting my way back.

Sensations crawl back in, one after another. The gentle caress of the air on my skin. The heaviness of unconsciousness. The inner echo of my breathing. My heartbeat pulsing in my ears...

“You think she can... hear us?”

“Maybe. I always feel like she can. I talk to her a lot, just in case.”

“I miss her, too. It’s weird...”

“I know. Like, she’s there, but... An empty shell. Even her wolf’s gone, too. I miss her voice.”

I miss you, too, and I want to come back... I must keep going. No hesitation, no looking back. Just this long, blind search for a way to return. A fog of unconsciousness, trapping me then and again. When will I finally wake up?

“I need you... I’ll wait, Nora, no matter how long. I miss you, I miss you, Love... Can you hear me? ...Or maybe you’re dreaming? I want to join you in your dreams. I miss you so much... I... I...”

A silence breaks and something painful holds my heart. A memory choking me, overflowing me with emotions. Did I lose you? Will you be

able to wait a bit more, when you've already waited so long? What are you going through?

"I'm so sorry, Nora. I wish you were here... I wish I could tell you goodbye in person. I... I hope you'll be back soon. They all miss you. I'll miss you the most. Do you know how much you're loved, Nora? He is coming every day to see you... Liam and Bobo, too. Everyone loves you. They are all waiting for you... I hope you will be back soon. I'm so sorry we have to part this way. I hope you'll understand, Nora. We will see each other again, I promise. Forgive me."

Lips softly press against my forehead, and there is a gentle caress in my hair. Footsteps going away... Where are you going? I need you again. Where are you leaving? Why are you leaving me alone...?

The smell grows stronger. Fresh roses.

"Hey, Nora... Done playing sleeping beauty yet? We miss you, you know. Don't worry about us, but you got to come back. Damian misses you. Again. My poor brother deserves the price for most patient boyfriend, don't you think? Well, he's not your boyfriend anymore now, but still. I can't wait for when you'll be back... I'm bored here. I miss Sylviana, and Nate is..."

"Do you have no one else but her to talk to behind my back?"

“What are you doing here, mister blockhead?”

“Fuck you, Liam.”

“In a good mood again, I see. What are you doing here, anyway?”

“What, I can’t even visit Nora now?”

“As if. You don’t give a shit about Nora; you were hoping to know about them. Well, I don’t know a thing, and as you can see, Nora’s not giving you a hint either, so fuck off, Nate.”

Trapped in darkness again, I breathe slowly. When will this be over? It’s getting more and more painful now... A heavy sleep catching me, a consciousness it’s hard to come to. Words coming back to me, and sounds reaching my ears again.

“I know I said I’d wait but... it’s hard without you... Can you hear me, Love? As long as you’re not suffering again... I don’t know how I’m getting by every day like this... I just wish you’d wake up... I miss the color of your eyes, Nora. The sound of your voice, too. I don’t know how they keep going with their lives while I’m stuck here. I want to be by your side every day, every minute. I think of you every second. I...”

Fingers running through my hair, and something gently brushing the back of my hand. A smell I love. A familiar warmth, and that voice... A deep sigh.

“I just keep going. I wake up, go to work, talk to people, live every minute... And I come back to you. I’m the Alpha they want me to be, but... Everyone’s waiting for you. For the Luna. They never mention you when I’m in the room. Do they think I’ll break if they call your name out loud? They don’t get it. I’m waiting for you, my Love. I’ll wait, Nora, as long as it takes for you to come back.”

How long will it take? How long has it been? I feel like I’ve been here forever... I have no idea. Days? Weeks? Months? Years? I’m so sorry... I keep fighting, looking for my way back, trying again. Why is it so hard? Why am I so weak...?

Moon Goddess... How did I lose my way? How do I go back to them? I’m scared I’ll be too late, I’m afraid I’ll be trapped in here forever. Eternity isn’t for me. I want to feel again. Life is waiting for me, but I’m a step aside from the world, in-between.

Tell him I love him. I’ll be back. Tell them I love you, I love you so much. I’ll tell you when I’m scared again, I’ll let you know when I’m in pain. I’m coming back.

I'm tearing down the wall, I'm screaming again. I'll let you feel my pain,
Damian, I promise this time I'll share it all with you. I'll be a wolf again,
I'll be your mate, forever.

I will cry, I will laugh, and I will share it all with you. Your Luna is coming
back to life, your Luna is finding her way back.

I'm right there, where Love was waiting for us.

Where you're waiting for me.

I'm back. I love you.