

Chapter 18

“Are you sure?”

Liam’s voice. He sounds so impatient...

“Hundred percent. She’s definitely waking up. I can feel her wolf again. Can’t you?”

“Nope. But then again, I don’t have your bond, so...”

Our bond. I can feel him, Damian’s wolf. A magnificent jet-black wolf, waiting for mine to come back. She’s waking up slowly, reaching out to him. I am waking up, slowly, steadily; It’s like reaching the surface and catching my breath.

I open my eyes.

“Holy Moon Goddess Mother!”

I'm facing the ceiling. When I turn my head slowly, the first thing I see is... Him. Damian, so close and smiling to me. I smile back to him, feeling overwhelmed. He leans over me, gently kissing my forehead.

“Good morning, my Love.”

I've never seen him look so overjoyed... It's contagious, I can't stop smiling at him, even though I'm feeling so drowsy. I hear footsteps running, and suddenly Liam comes in the room, panting, followed by people in white coats.

“Damian! Damian, is she still awake? Oh, Moon Goddess, she really is! Doctor, she's really awake, right?” He asks without catching his breath.

What's going on? I recognize Granny Ariana, smiling at me, and people start patting my wrists, checking my condition, and discussing my vitals. A doctor shines a small flashlight in front of my eyes and moves his finger.

“Miss Bluemoon, can you hear me? Can you follow my finger, please?”

It's a bit annoying, but I nod and do as he says. I'm a bit confused and overwhelmed by all those people in the room asking me questions. Still, Damian and Liam both look thrilled. My mate isn't letting go of my hand and stays by my side as long as the medical team keeps examining me.

“Her vitals are normal; she is indeed completely awake... This is amazing. Miss Bluemoon, are you feeling discomfort in any way? How do you feel?”

“I am... drowsy.”

Behind the doctor, Liam squeals, totally excited. Why won't he calm down? The man examining me nods while taking some notes.

“Well, that is perfectly normal in your condition. But your reflexes are fine for now, and your vitals, as well. We will have to work on your reeducation, of course, but overall, this is... A positively great return. Welcome back, miss Bluemoon.”

Welcome back? I turn to Damian, a bit lost. I feel like I've been sleeping, but now I'm a bit confused again. He raises my hand to his lips to kiss it, and I realize I have trouble moving my fingers. I frown and try to move my limbs again. It's like my whole body has gotten twice as heavy as I remember it.

Granny Ariana gives me a reassuring smile. “Don't worry, sweetheart, it's going to take a while. Your body will need some time to readjust, but it will.”

“Who cares? She’s back! Damn, Nora, I’ve missed you!”

I take a look at Liam, smiling from ear to ear behind Granny Ariana. He looks... Different. He’s visibly slimmer, a bit more muscular and taller, and his hair is a bit longer, too. He has a new piercing on his left ear. It’s like he’s lost all the teenage attitude to look more like his brothers...

I turn to look at Damian.

My mate, too. His hair is cut shorter, and he’s not wearing a beard anymore, either. His eyes look darker and more profound. He looks thinner than I remember, too... How did they change so much?

“How do you feel, Love?” Asks Damian in a soft voice.

“I’m okay... What happened? You look different. Liam, you, too. I... How long was I...?”

Liam sighs and nods. “Nora, you saved my brother’s life with your Moon Power, remember? He was dying, and you did that whole kissing thing. Next thing we know, you were unconscious, and he was completely fine!”

I turn to Damian, who’s still caressing my hand.

“You healed me, Nora. You used your power, but it put you into a very deep sleep. You stayed in some sort of coma for a long time.”

I gradually remember everything from before now. At least, my farewell to Damian, and the sight of his injuries... But a lot of my memories are still blurry. I have vague images of a big battle, a forest, a hospital... It's gradually coming back to me. My whole life here. My childhood, life with the Jade Moon Pack, my life with Damian...

A long time? That would explain why they changed. I take a second to process and look at the window. It's snowing outside... I turn to them again to finally ask.

“What day are we?”

“December 23rd...”

I try to remember vaguely.

“The fight... It was last Thursday, right? The 20th...”

Damian looks at me and sighs, a bit surprised and uneasy.

But Liam laughs awkwardly. “Nora, that Thursday wasn’t two days ago but two years ago! You stayed in the coma for 23 months and over three weeks, girl.”

Moon Goddess... Two years? I was asleep for two whole years? I’m in shock. It did feel like awakening after a very long time, but... I turn to Damian. He waited for me to wake up for two whole years? Oh, Moon Goddess... I open my mouth to apologize, but he shakes his head and holds my hand against his cheek.

“It’s okay, Nora. I don’t care how long it took. Don’t apologize, Love. I’m just happy you’re back...”

“Everyone will be happy you’re back! Holy shit, I have to tell everyone!”

Liam takes out his phone and walks out of the room in a hurry, but I don’t care. All I’m focused on right now is Damian. No matter what, I can’t hold back a tear.

“Two years...” I whisper, still astonished.

“727 days,” he says. “I counted every single day without you... That’s a long time to catch back up, Love.”

I slowly nod, smiling at him. I realized how much I've missed him now that I can contemplate him. The warmth of his skin, and his lips against my palm. His beautiful, unique silver eyes. He's even more handsome than I remember, with his new haircut and clean-shaven face. I concentrate on moving my fingers and caressing his smooth chin.

"...What happened to your beard?"

He smiles. "I was waiting for someone to grow it again. I'm happy you're back. It was a pain shaving every day..."

I giggle and nod again. "All right, you can start growing it again, then. I miss it. You..."

I stop talking, suddenly noticing something shiny on my hand. This is new... Damian realizes I noticed and smiles proudly while holding my hand up for me to see. I gasp. A gorgeous ring is placed on my finger, mesmerizing me. It's a thin ring, but I can't miss the shining sapphire stone on it, flanked by two moon-shaped diamonds.

"Damian, this..."

"Your engagement ring. ...You like it?"

I can't ignore his mischievous smile. He's obviously enjoying my surprised reaction, playing with my fingers, and waiting for my answer. I smile, too, but I'm just overwhelmed by emotions right now. Eventually, I can't hold back a little laugh.

"Damian Black, when did I ever get engaged to you?"

"Since you saved this stupid man twice, miss Bluemoon. I thought that you had paid a huge price for my life, so... It might as well be all yours."

He shows me his hand and the matching ring he's wearing, too, a simple platinum one. Oh, this man... I can't believe him. Damian has changed. He looks more peaceful now, not as restless as when I met him. His eyes have this gentle warmth to them, too.

"So?" He asks.

I smile.

"I like it... Mr. Black. I'm glad I woke up before we had our wedding ceremony, though."

He laughs and leans in to kiss my forehead.

“It was high time you woke up, Nora. I don’t know how much longer I would have waited for that, too.”

Right after he finishes his sentence, someone suddenly bursts into the room. Oh, Moon Goddess, my Bobo! I smile like a child, and he looks at me in disbelief, like he can’t believe his own eyes. My best friend has changed, too. His hair is way shorter and arranged in neat little braids instead of his former dreadlocks. He seems bulkier, too. Moreover, a pale scar is visible on his left temple.

“Nora!” He exclaims, before running to me.

“Hey, hey, easy, big boy!” Says Liam, holding him back. “Don’t knock her out!”

Bobo stops right on my bed’s side, and grabs my free hand gently, holding it tight.

“Seriously, Nora... I can’t believe it...”

“Hey, Bobo... I missed you, too.” I say. “How are you? That scar...”

He shakes his head. “It’s nothing. Danny says it makes me look cooler.”

“Hey, we got cool scars, too, okay?” Says Liam.

“What are you talking about? You barely had any scratches...”

I turn my head. Sylviana just entered the room behind Bobo, and she gives me a soft smile, sitting at the end of my bed. She’s the only one that hasn’t changed a bit, surprisingly, even looking a bit younger than I remember.

“Hi, Nora. We all missed you a lot...”

“Hi, Sylviana. Looks like I made it, after all.”

“Yes, with a lot of luck. Moon Goddess obviously loves you too much to let you go...”

I can only agree to that, though I feel the weight of those two years. I turn to the guys as Bobo is pushing a button that puts my bed in a sitting position.

“You’re going to have to fill me in.”

“What do you remember?”

“Not everything. Until a few days before the fight, and after that... It’s a blur. I vaguely remember us taking the car to the meeting, I think. And the Alphas came... And we started talking... I remember bombs exploded, and there was a huge fight.”

Damian nods, and Bobo starts talking.

“We lost you in the confusion. I think The Gold Moon was targeting you from the start to weaken the Boss. Some wolves jumped at me right after the first explosions, and you were taken away.”

“They isolated Damian and me too,” adds Liam. “So, Damian was badly injured, as you know, but Nate and I made it through the first attack thanks to Sylviana. We had to participate in the fight, but we were worried about Damian and couldn’t reach out to you. We realized something was wrong when the fight stopped with the Gold Moon wiped out and the Rising Moon surrendering. But you were nowhere to be found, and William told us the people he had sent to protect you had died. None of us could reach you.”

“I... I was taken...”

Boyan nods.

“We realized that soon. Witnesses said they had seen a man taking you out, but they thought you were being evacuated, not kidnapped.”

“Someone gave a description that was exactly that of... Marcus Sickels,” says Liam. “We soon understood what must have happened, and we looked around for clues. But Damian was taken here in critical condition meanwhile. We didn’t have many people to send to look for you that were not already helping evacuate the Stadium...”

“William helped,” explained Damian. “The Jade Moon, too, looked everywhere for you...”

“Believe I or not, it was Alec that found you.”

I turn to Liam, shocked.

“A-Alec?”

“Yes,” he nods. “It turns out your brother was in the hospital, and when he saw all the werewolves coming in, he had somehow heard everything about you being missing. He knew about Sickels having a secret hide-out somewhere in the Jade Moon forest, so he went first to look for you. The Jade Moon Clan spotted him, so Sylviana and I ran there as fast as we could right after that.”

Sylviana nods.

“You were in a critical state,” she says. “Alec was arrested, and we took you to the hospital. You went several hours under surgery to stop your internal bleeding and save your leg.”

The more she talks, the more it all comes back to me. Marcus’ voice, his kicks in my stomach, stomping on my painful leg. Just the memory feels so painful... And Alec’s hands taking me out of there. He carried me to safety. So, it wasn’t some faraway dream. My brother was really there, he took me out of there.

“Why...”

I can’t understand why Alec went there to help me. I still can’t understand how he appeared out of the blue to help me. He felt different, too...

“Your brother had been in rehab for a while, Nora,” explains Sylviana. “Since the last time you had seen him, he was... thriving to get better, to get out of drugs.”

“Sylviana actually helped, too,” adds Liam.

“I didn’t do anything he didn’t want,” she says. “Alec was... remorseful of what he had done.”

I choke up a little bit, hearing those words. Alec did? Are we talking about the same person who abused me for years? That Alec, my brother? The one who tried to sell me to a rapist? It is still a bit too hard to believe.

I don't want to think about that now. I turn to Damian.

"Then?"

"Liam and Sylviana brought you back here," he says. "You were in critical condition like she said. Yet, when you woke up, you decided to do something even more dangerous."

Yes, I remember that too.

I remember the sad memories. How people died in the attack or succumbed to their injuries. Damian was one of the first to fall, but my mate was still alive when I came to. I remember my discussion with Sylviana, and my eyes naturally go to the witch.

I decided to use my Moon Power to save Damian. My mate was on the verge of dying when I woke up from my first coma, and I just couldn't have that. Sylviana nods, reminding me of what happened, but it's all coming back to me now.

Once she's done talking, Damian sighs. "That was a crazy thing to do, even for you."

"I wouldn't have lived without you," I answer.

He nods. "I said the same... If you had died in the process..."

He frowns from the thought, as we all know the result of my bet could have taken my life instead of those two years.

Liam claps his hands, taking us away from any depressing thinking, and smiles. "Anyway! Our princess is back now, for good! Right, Nora?"

I smile. "To be honest, I feel awfully sleepy..." I whisper, playing a bit.

Liam shakes his head. "Oh, hell, no! Girl, you are not going to play sleeping beauty again! You're back to the living now, so get ready, because you have a lot of people waiting for you and a whole bunch of things to catch up on, too!"

I nod to Liam's words. He's right, I missed two whole years! Those two years I will never get back... It saddens me a little bit, of course. I look at Damian, Liam, and Bobo, my three men, all looking a bit older. I smile and turn to Damian, with a mix of curiosity and apprehension.

“So, what did I miss?”

“Well first, it took a few days to settle everything after what had happened... Surprisingly, the events served as a lesson for everyone. All the remaining packs finally agreed to your idea of a Peace Treaty between the Clans. Sylviana used her magic to seal it, so no Alpha can break the peace vow as long as their turf is located in Silver City.”

“Oh, come on, Damian, tell her about the Liege,” says Liam, visibly excited.

I frown. The Liege?

Damian nods. “They also... agreed to recognize me as the official Alpha King of Silver City. It’s more of a title than anything else, but everyone thought it would be best to make it... official. That way, no one would dare to raise up any more conflicts or take advantage of others under my name again.”

“You should have seen it, Nora. Even William agreed to it, and all the Alphas discussed in one room, like equals.”

“Anyway,” resumes Damian, “there was a month of mourning, and then we began the reconstruction of the stadium. We also had to reconsider all

the packs' territories and sort out the situation of the ones who had lost their Alphas."

"The Jade Moon is all yours, by the way," says Bobo. "They didn't have any Alpha or Beta left, so they just agreed you were their legitimate leader now. Until now, they answered to Damian while you were in the coma."

"Most importantly, we abolished the physical boundaries between the territories within Silver City," explains Damian. "No more frontiers between the turfs. Anyone is free to go wherever they want. Each pack still has its own establishments and properties, but when it comes to the streets, no more fighting."

Moon Goddess, that's amazing... Before that, any wolf was constrained to their own pack's territory, and would go anywhere else at their own risk! It also kept Damian from finding me all those years, as he couldn't go everywhere freely. This is such a huge change; I can't believe everyone agreed to it so quickly!

"This is great... Is it really happening?" I ask.

Damian and Liam both nod.

"Yep! It made things easier for a lot of people, actually, and reduced the fighting by an awful lot. I mean, there's still some bickering here and there, but trust me, it's nowhere what it used to be. And now we have a lot

of new couples from different packs, too! Do you remember Marina Seaver? She got engaged to a guy from the Violet Moon!” Says Liam, looking all excited.

While listening to him, I suddenly remember another couple, much closer to us, that was struggling about being from different packs and turn to Damian. “What about Nate and Elena? And their baby? It must be born by now!”

As soon as I ask about them, Damian’s expression suddenly goes dark, and Liam’s smile drops. Both brothers look sorry, and I’m scared of their lack of answers. What? What’s going on?

“Damian? What about them?”

“Love, Nate and Elena... They aren’t together anymore.”

I stay stunned for a few seconds.

“Wait... What? How come? What about their baby?”

For once, Damian stays silent, and Liam is suddenly the one looking angry. Since neither of them is talking, I turn to Bobo.

“Bobo! Tell me!”

“Elena left Silver City, Nora. A few weeks after you fell into a coma, she... she and Nate had a big argument. I think she had issues with her pack, too, and she... she left while still pregnant.”

What...? She just left? Months ago? How could this happen? And the baby, too, did she decide to give birth to her child alone? I can't believe it...

Sylviana moves over and takes my hand, softly smiling at me.

“Nora, don't worry. I went with her when she left and made sure her baby was fine. I helped her find a place and give birth. They are both doing great. I came back a few weeks later.”

I sigh in relief. So, Elena is fine... Elena and her baby are okay. Although, that doesn't erase the rest. I turn again towards Damian and Liam, angry.

“You do realize I'm going to kill your brother once I'm better?”

Liam, looking pissed off, nods. “Trust me, we both did it for you already. Nate is a fucking idiot, and he knows it, but he's one damn stubborn dog.”

Damian's hand tightens around mine, and he gently caresses my cheek.

“Nora, you’ll get angry at Nate later. You just woke up, I don’t want you thinking about anything but getting better for now, okay? And Elena and her baby are fine, I swear. So, you can scold Nate all you want, but later, Love. Later.”

I frown, but I don’t have the energy to face Nathaniel about his attitude now, anyway. Despite all the medication I’m probably on, I’m well aware of my sore muscles and drowsiness. I sigh and push my head back on the pillow. While doing so, I realize my hair is back to its dark black color.

Sylviana sees my expression. “It went back to black right after your kiss, although it turned white again a few weeks later. Turns out, it changes color into a pale white at night, when the moon rises.”

“So, I’m...”

“I would say you’re harvesting Moon Power every time the sun sets. Whatever happened two years ago, your power unleashed completely. You can use your aura again and somehow recharge it as long as the moon rises.”

Damian lets out a low growl. “She won’t use it again. I’m not risking Nora going back into the coma.”

“You should have been dead, and Nora used way more power than her body could handle to bring you back. No wonder she had to pay for it. I doubt she will ever fall into such a state again unless you are severely injured. Her power probably works just like mine: Too much power has to be paid at a high cost...”

I exchange a look with Damian. Sylviana’s probably right about this, but I think it will take some time for my mate to accept it. He decides to ignore her and turns to me, kissing my hand again.

I want to chat with them some more, hear what else I missed, but before that, the medical team returns. They have even more people and has most of my friends leave as I need to go through a few more medical examinations.

For the whole afternoon, I pass several tests, checking my memory, control of my limbs, and cognitive response. As the hours go by, it’s obvious I retrieve all my memories and mental faculties back, but my body is still in a weak state. Though the doctors explain that it’s natural and expect a quick recovery, I must adapt to sitting in a wheelchair and being taken everywhere like this. My legs can’t hold me at all and moving my arms ask me a lot of energy and focus.

When the head doctor comes to explain everything, Damian is sitting with me. “Your results are great, miss Bluemoon. As predicted, you were not in a regular coma; hence, your cognitive faculties all returned within a few hours. Your body, however, will need longer to readapt.”

“How long are we talking about?” I ask.

I feel like a puppet, some doll that can’t stand on her own.

“I don’t usually give optimistic estimates, miss Bluemoon,” he says. “But judging from how you can already move your head and arms, I would confidently say a few weeks. With a good therapist and efforts, it shouldn’t be an issue.”

“Can I go home, then?”

I just want to leave the hospital, breathe some air, and go back to a normal life as soon as possible. I miss it so much already. The doctor exchanges a look with Damian. My mate gives him his imposing glare, until the poor man clears his throat, coming back to me with a weak smile.

“Well, I will ask you to stay for the next 24 hours, at least, so we can prevent any unforeseen issue with your awakening. However, this is clearly a magic issue linked to your... wolf, miss Bluemoon, and a grey area for us. If you can have a proper caretaker and constant surveillance, going home tomorrow shouldn’t be an issue, miss Bluemoon. I would still request you come back within the next few days for a couple more check-ups, though.”

I smile brightly and turn to Damian. I can go home tomorrow! I don't even have to spend Christmas there! My mate smiles back at me and kisses my forehead.

After that meeting, I insist on Damian to take me to the inner garden of the hospital. It's covered in snow, but Moon Goddess, it's beautiful. Damian pushes my wheelchair on the little road. He wraps me in a thick blanket, but I lean back and enjoy the cold air on my face. It feels amazing... Being alive.

He finally sits down on a bench, next to my wheelchair, facing me.

"It's good to be back," I say.

He nods, taking my hand in his, playing with my engagement ring. "I've missed you so much..." He whispers. "I came here every day to see you. Before and after work. I knew you weren't there, but I just wanted to see your face, remember that you were still hanging on somehow. I slept so many times on the chair in your room, and Neal and Liam dragged me to work countless times. Nora..."

He takes a deep breath.

"I bought us a house a few months ago."

I stay speechless for a moment. Did I hear that wrong?

“...A house?”

“Our house. Your home. I didn’t want to keep living on my own in my apartment at the Company building. I wanted... A place I could look forward to living in with you. A place where we could be together, a place we could call our house.”

I look at him, speechless, as my heartbeat accelerates. He really bought a house. For the two of us, for when I would come back? I take another look at the ring. He really was preparing everything for when I would come back, no matter when it would be. I feel a little tear running down my face, my heart tightening at the thought. My poor Damian... How lonely must he have felt for those two years I made him wait... I cross my fingers with his.

“Tell me about it. The house.”

He smiles. “I’ll take you there tomorrow. It’s a big white house with a little garden. I took my time choosing it. I wish I could have given you a choice in the matter, too, but... I picked one on an uphill, with a view of the east forest. There are five bedrooms aside from the main one, and a big kitchen, fully equipped—everything you could possibly need or want when you cook, Love. I didn’t take a big house, but one you would feel

home in. With more bedrooms, and enough space to welcome our friends... And our children, later.”

Gosh, I love the idea. I lean in for a long kiss. Whichever house Damian picked, I’m sure I’ll love it. I really want to see that house he got us and resume my life with him. Damian even thought about our future children... We had that talk before, so I know it’s for a later future, but I already look forward to it.

“Damian?”

“Yes, my Love?”

“I... really want us to get married. Soon.”

“Soon?”

“Yes... I’m now twenty-years-old, right? I already missed two years we should have spent together... I don’t want to be late for anything else. I want to start living with you, I want to catch up on the time we have lost. I don’t need a big ceremony, just to be yours as soon as I can.”

He stays silent for a while and smiles. “Anything you want, Nora. We can even have the papers signed today if you want. The mayor is not really in a position to say no...”

I laugh a bit and give him a quick kiss. “Maybe not that fast, my Love. Let me be able to catch up on everything I’ve missed first. Also, when I can stand up again. Plus, I want all of our friends to be there.”

He frowns a bit. “That’s a lot of people. You know your cousin will harass me if I want to marry you?”

“William? I thought you two had solved your differences already, two years ago.”

Damian makes a sour face.

“I thought so, too, but I clearly underestimated his... overprotective instinct towards you. He opposed strongly to our engagement.”

“Don’t tell me he still wants to marry me!”

Damian shakes his head. “That was just an empty threat to test me, Nora. Sylviana said that the whole thing about Royals being able to change mates was a total lie. And William doesn’t feel that way about you; he sees you as a little sister, that’s it. He’s annoying enough as it is...”

I laugh. Imagining William and Damian bickering about me is a lot funnier now that the tensions between all the packs have eased up.

“He already got engaged a few months ago, anyway.”

“What, really? To whom?”

“Remember Tiffany Pearl, from the Pearl Moon? Well, it seems like those two had never actually met face to face until the gathering...”

“You’re kidding!”

I’m in shock, but Damian laughs. Oh, Moon Goddess! I would never have imagined... Tiffany is indeed the most beautiful she-wolf I’ve ever seen. I don’t know her well, but from what I’ve seen, she’s smart and beautiful. Yes, those two are probably a good match.

Around us, snow slowly starts falling, and we contemplate it a long time, my head resting on Damian’s shoulder and his arms around me. From time to time, his lips reach for my forehead, as he whispers how much he’s missed me...

“I can’t believe you’re really awake.”

Daniel is holding my hand, giving me a big smile despite his teary eyes.

“We’ve missed you.”

“Thank you, Danny. It’s good to be back.”

It’s Christmas Eve, and I couldn’t be happier. As promised, I left the hospital a few hours ago after another round of check-ups, and Damian took me to our brand-new home. I love it.

It’s an old traditional family house, with wooden floors, a fireplace, and stone brick walls. The decoration is the opposite of his cold apartment. Damian picked warm tones and wooden furniture, with Tonia and Bobo’s help. The more I visited, the more I fell in love with it. He thought of everything, even to include a little library where I could relax and read my books on a comfy sofa by the window.

Tonight, it’s especially welcoming with all the Christmas decorations. I don’t know how they managed to do so much in such a short time, but Bobo, Sylviana, and Liam made it all happen, just like one of those old Christmas movies. Tonia pushed my wheelchair in the salon, in front of the fireplace and Christmas tree. As the doctor said, I can still only move a little, but I know my muscles will remember their former strength soon enough.

For now, I don't really mind. The house is crowded with our friends and family. Sylviana is in the kitchen cooking with Neal's wife, an adorable woman named Angela. Neal is chatting with Damian and Sean. Being an orphan, I learned earlier that Sean doesn't have anyone to celebrate Christmas with, so we invited him over as well.

Next to us, on the couch, Tonia and Bobo are busy keeping the children entertained. Bobo's nieces, the twins Juliet and Phoebe, are six years old, and Isaac, Nathaniel's Beta, just had a baby boy. As I watch them playing with the kids, I wonder when will Damian and I have our own children. Somehow, as soon as we became a couple, I always knew we would have children someday. Daniel catches my glance towards the children.

"So, this wedding?"

I chuckle.

"Probably in May. We would have had it sooner, but everyone around us insists we have a proper ceremony, so..."

"I bet so. Everyone missed the Luna; how can they not have a proper occasion to celebrate your return?"

I turn towards him and whisper, even if only Tonia and Bobo can hear us.

"Do you have news?"

He smiles and nods. “She calls from time to time. She’s fine, Nora, I promise. What happened with Nathaniel... really was hard, but her baby girl is more important to her. I think it’s for the best, really. She will come back when she’s ready.”

“...but why did she have to leave?”

“I advised her so,” replies a feminine voice.

Sylviana just joined us, and she takes a seat next to Daniel. I notice that despite playing with the twins, Bobo is listening, too.

“Her baby was in danger if she remained here, Nora. The Dark Witch knows or will know that there is another Royal in Silver City, and she would have targeted Elena just as much as you. Even more so, if she had known she was pregnant. So, I helped her find a place to hide for the time being.”

“So, the Witch will continue to target us?” I ask, worried.

Sylviana sighs and nods. “She is weakened for now, but in a few years, she will probably try again, though I have no idea how. I will try to keep her away for as long as I can, Nora, but my power isn’t unlimited, and her thirst for power will keep growing. She will look for more targets.”

From her eyes, I know what she's thinking about.

“You mean our children. Like Elena's baby.”

“I fear so... Your children will be of Royal Blood, Nora, just like you. They will inevitably become her targets, as well.”

“You think we shouldn't... have children until we stop her?”

Sylviana smiles and shakes her head, putting her hand on mine.

“No, Princess. Nothing should stop you from living your life. After everything you've gone through, you more than anyone deserve it. I promise I will do anything I can to protect you and your children, and all of Silver City, for as long as possible. Get married, Nora. Have the children you want with Damian, and when the time comes for a battle, we will be ready.”

She looks so confident when saying this... I don't want to think of another war coming up. Behind Sylviana's shoulder, my eyes meet Damian and Liam, who have probably been listening. While Damian is gently smiling at me, Liam has a frown on while staring at his companion. He looks... worried.

“Did you try calling him again?” I ask Damian.

But he shakes his head. So, Nathaniel is still not answering... I can feel his wolf, but he’s obviously ignoring us. Isaac did say he was in bad shape since Elena left.

Liam clicks his tongue. “I don’t give a damn about this idiot, Nora. After what he—”

“Liam, not tonight.”

Sylviana gets up and goes to him to talk, but he still looks annoyed and walks out of the room. I sigh. I miss Elena, and I wish I had been there when all this happened. Daniel gets up to join Bobo and the kids, while Damian takes his spot next to me, taking my hand.

“Don’t worry about Elena. My brother is an idiot, but he’s really in love.”

I can’t help but smile. “You three brothers are so alike... When it comes to love.”

Damian laughs a little and kisses my temple. My eyes follow Liam and Sylviana, who are still talking a bit further. They seem to be disagreeing on something, but I can’t hear what this is about.

“I think Sylviana is right.”

“About what?” Asks Damian.

“About that witch. This is only a break we should enjoy before she comes back. Once she does, we will probably have to face a war... A worse one.”

My mate nods.

“I agree. I’ve talked about it a few times with Sylviana, she’s... She knows a lot. About the future, but she won’t say anything. I think that’s why Liam is so worried about her.”

He stays silent for a while, observing the little twins, who have decided to play with Bobo’s hair. Or more like mess with it. Next to my giant best friend, his nieces look like adorable little dolls. Daniel is carrying Isaac’s baby and laughing at Bobo’s new hairstyle. I like having the laughter of children resonating inside the house...

“Let’s have children,” I whisper.

Damian turns to me, a bit confused.

“I thought that was already in our plans?”

“I mean... Soon.”

“I thought you wanted to put your work first? I don’t mind, but Nora, I don’t want you to rush because of the Witch or something else.”

“It’s not about the Witch, it’s... I already missed two years of work, anyway. And I really want to enjoy my time with you. Talking about the future, I suddenly feel that what I want to see most is not a career, but raising our children. Starting a family, here. I don’t want to worry about the Witch until then, I just want to live our lives as we would have.”

Damian observes me for a while, then slowly nods. “I understand what you mean. To be honest, since I saw Neal’s children, I’ve been thinking I really want to have a family with you. I’ve focused on work only before we were reunited, but now I want to focus on you, on us. Getting you better first, then our wedding, and having kids.”

“What? Who is taking a break from work?”

Neal just entered the room and is looking at us with panicked eyes. Damian laughs, but his Beta is not really happy.

“No, no, no, don’t you dare! Do you have any idea of the mass of work that we have? You already took a couple of days off, and the Company is going nuts!”

“Nate can take over for a while. As I recall, he’s drowning himself in work these days— you may as well have him use his position as my second for once.”

They start to argue about Damian leaving his position for a while, and Isaac jumps in to protest against Damian switching position with Nathaniel as well. Funny enough, everyone else finds their argument amusing since both Betas are almost begging Damian not to do it. While they keep bickering, Sean comes to a seat next to me, looking a bit awkward.

“Luna, I wanted to thank you for inviting me.”

“No, it’s nothing. I wanted to thank you, too. I’ve heard that you’ve been... looking after my brother Alec.”

“Yes, he sends his... best wishes to you.”

“Thanks, Sean.”

He nods, a bit awkward, and doesn’t dare add anything else.

Alec is probably the one which, surprisingly, changed the most during those past two years...

According to Sylviana and Tonia, my brother is now totally clean from drugs. After he was done with rehab, he kept up his psychological evaluation while trying to repair his past mistakes. That will probably take a while...

Alec chose to leave the Jade Moon pack, and Damian welcomed him in the Blood Moon Clan, under Sean's command. My brother is now working in the slums and entirely devoted to taking care of the orphaned children, who, like we did ourselves years ago, end up in the streets without a family to care for them.

I have yet to face him, though. He sent me two letters that I have yet to find the courage to open and read. I think I'm going to need time to be able to forgive him and face him again. Even if he saved my life two years ago, my brother has left scars behind that won't heal so quickly. No one here asked me about anything about it, but I think they already understood.

Sylviana and Angie finally bring the argument to an end when everyone joins for dinner. I wish I had been in a condition to help with the cooking and enjoy all the equipment my brand-new kitchen has to offer. Still, our good witch and Neal's wife did a terrific job by themselves. Everyone around the table eats and chats happily.

I find myself thinking that I want to have this kind of Christmas every year. Next year, maybe, Elena and my niece will be joining us, as well as my own child with Damian...

A few hours later, the children are happily playing by the fireplace, and all the adults are enjoying coffee or tea in the living room. It's a heart-warming sight. Sylviana comes back from the kitchen and comes to sit by my side. She has a mysterious smile on, intriguing me.

"Nora," she whispers. "Liam and I will be going home soon, but before that, I have a little gift for you."

I frown. A gift? But before I can even ask, she suddenly puts her hands on my temples and closes her eyes. I don't even realize I'm in the dark until a second later.

When I open my eyes again, a woman is suddenly above me, smiling at me. She looks young and tired. I can't move, I'm... wrapped up in something smooth and warm. I try to say something, a bit confused, but the only sound that comes out is a baby's squealing. The woman smiles, and I notice her beautiful sapphire eyes.

"Hello, my little princess..."

The more I look at her, the more I see how much she resembles me. She's younger than I am, but her sapphire eyes, her pale skin, and those soft traits are the same as mine. I notice her freckles and long chocolate brown hair when she leans to kiss my forehead gently.

“Oh, you're so beautiful, my baby... My little Eleanora...”

She hugs me tenderly, her eyes shining with infinite love.

“Nora?”

I suddenly come back to my senses. Sylviana is facing me, smiling. Damian is holding my hand, looking worried.

“Love, are you okay?”

“I'm... fine...”

I look at Sylviana, still in shock from what I just saw. I realize I'm crying, flooding with emotions.

“That... that woman... That was my...”

“Your very first memory I could find,” explains Sylviana. “She was beautiful.”

Oh, Moon Goddess.

That was my mother. My real, my birth mother. Princess Lilyan. I try to control my emotions, but the tears keep coming.

“Nora, what is it? Sylviana, what did you do?” Asks Damian, worried.

“I’m okay, she just... gave me a very beautiful present.”

“I’m happy you liked it, Princess,” whispers Sylviana.

I can’t believe it... I just saw my mother! My mom, when she had just given birth to me. Oh, Moon Goddess... I’m just so happy right now, I can’t describe it. Her eyes were radiating with love. She loved me so much. I’m trembling with emotions, Damian hugging me to calm me down while I explain what I saw to him and the others. After a while, I turn to Sylviana, still a bit shook up.

“She... She called me Eleanora.”

“Yes, I heard it with you. It’s a really pretty name for a Princess.”

Damian smiles. "I like it, too..."

We discuss a bit more about my mother, and the revelation of my real name. I had no idea. I like it, but I think it's a bit late now, I've gotten too used to just being called Nora. Eventually, that's the name I've grown by. I'm just grateful to Sylviana for giving me a glimpse of my origin.

That night, when everyone goes home or picks a guest room, Damian carries me to our bed. I don't really feel sleepy yet. This is the best Christmas of my life, and I'm still thinking about my mother.

My mate helps me change, and we lie facing each other in the bed.

"I've waited so long to be able to sleep beside you like this..." Whispers Damian.

"It feels good to be in your arms again. And I really love our house. Thank you, Damian, I love this Christmas present."

He smiles softly, and we lie for a while, just staring at each other. His fingers are running through my hair. As Sylviana said, it turned a shiny white again. It's still a bit odd to me, but Damian is used to it, though he prefers it black.

After a long while, I hear him breathe in deeply, and I wonder if he's asleep. But his eyes are wide open, and still on me.

“Nora... I was thinking. Sylviana's present... There's something I have yet to give you, too.”

“What is it?”

“A story.”

I smile. “A story? A book you mean?”

He chuckles and gets closer to me. “Not a book, my Love. A memory. The beginning of our story.”

I gasp? Really now? Damian smiles, and I feel his breath as he softly starts talking.

“Twelve years ago, I was fourteen... Liam already told you about it, but life with our father was a nightmare, even more so after our mother died. He came and went as he pleased, not giving a damn about us. When he did come home, he was just a violent drunkard. He hit anything or anyone he could until he fell asleep or went out again. We were barely getting by. I had dropped out of school to work, but I made sure Liam and Nate still went.

“I tried to provide so they wouldn’t suffer from it, even if they obviously did. Nate had to get a night job, too, at some point. But we made it work, somehow. We had the apartment to live in, and enough food and supplies for the three of us. I didn’t really care about anything else. As long as my father didn’t hit Liam or Nate.”

“But he was beating you instead...” I whisper.

“You know, I wasn’t as strong as him, but I could handle it. My mom had left us, and my brothers were the only ones I cared about. I would rather suffer a thousand hits from my dad than let him touch a strand of Liam’s hair. Or Nate’s. Well, Nate did get hit, too, while trying to defend me.”

“He loves you. They both love you so much.”

He smiles tenderly at me. “I know, Love. That’s how our mom raised us. She was the sweetest woman, all she wanted was for the three of us to get along. Raising three boys, three Alpha brothers, she probably feared we would end up fighting each other, but we actually only sided against our dad.”

Now that I think about it, we might have the same issue with our children, since they will most likely be Alphas only...

Damian sighs and gets closer to me. Now, my head is resting against his arm, and his fingers are gently playing with my hair. I close my eyes, listening to the familiar deep voice of my mate.

“The first time I shape-shifted, I was ten. I was in a rage after my father and just jumped into my wolf form without even realizing it. He beat me up good that day. Even in his human form, I couldn’t even stand up to him. I never did, for years. Honestly, it was... hard. Being an Alpha that never wins. Every time, I had some hope I could finally fight off my father, chase him out, but no, it ended only when he decided it or when I was out. I knew he was the strongest Alpha of the city, but I woke up in my own blood so many times, beating him became an obsession, as much as protecting my brothers. As the years passed, every time made me angrier. I don’t think someone else can hate like I hated my father at that time. He knew it, and that made him more and more violent every time. Until one day.”

I hold my breath and grab his shirt. I know I’m not going to like what comes next...

“That night, I had come home late, and Nate and Liam were in our bedroom. My father suddenly barged in, so drunk he was yelling like a mad man. He hit me before I could even say a word. I tried to fight back, but he didn’t leave me a chance. I barely remember what happened, honestly, except that it was the most violent fight we ever had. We both let our wolves take over, but...”

Damian shakes his head.

“When he was sure I couldn’t fight back anymore, he took me outside. I was half-conscious, but I felt his grip on my hair. He dragged me down like a bag of dirt through the streets. I think he really wanted me dead. He took me to the slums and beat me again until I passed out.”

What a monster. Damian was already unable to fight back or defend himself, and he really tried to kill his own son...

“It was December, and freaking cold, too. When I came to my senses, it was still the middle of the night. That’s when you appeared.”

Me? I don’t remember this...

“I remember every detail. You were thin and dressed in rags, but you were the prettiest little girl I had ever seen. You ran up to me from across the street. All the snow around me was red, but you didn’t seem to care. You were almost crying, and you asked me if I was in pain or cold. I could barely talk. You kept asking if I was hurt, but you were just a kid. Moreover, you had your scar, and it was obvious it was fresh. You didn’t want to talk about it, you just kept asking and asking about my injuries.”

“Sounds like I was annoyingly stubborn...”

He laughs. “Right... You refused to leave me alone, no matter who many times I told you to. You just stayed with me. You even cried for me, you said you were sorry you couldn’t heal me. You kept repeating that while crying. I lost consciousness again at some point. When I woke up, you were gone, but your scarf was around my neck, and a pile of blankets was on me. I probably survived a few more hours, thanks to that. My healing had begun, but my injuries were... serious. I honestly thought I was dying. I had never been in such pain or lost so much blood. But you came back a few minutes after I had woken up. You were crying again, and had that bruise on your face...”

Probably Alec... He started hitting me after our parent’s death, and he was the only one I lived with, in the slums.

“You were crying because you thought I was dead. You said you had gone to seek help, but your brother rejected you. So, you stayed with me. You said you had a brother, and that the next day would be your birthday... But you refused to give me your name.”

“Why?”

“You said I might kidnap you.”

I laugh. Oh, Moon Goddess, what a stubborn girl I was! Talking for hours with a stranger but not giving my name so he can’t kidnap me? What a unique idea! And Damian was too injured to move, anyway!

Damian laughs, too, and kisses my forehead briefly. “You were so adorable. Stubborn but caring and sweet. You said if I fell asleep again, you would give me a kiss, like the princess from your book.”

“I said that?”

“You did. You laid next to me in the snow, and you said you would watch me so I couldn’t sleep again. You were... Moon Goddess, I remember it so well. You were laying just like this, facing me and smiling at me. At some point, I closed my eyes a few seconds, and you suddenly kissed me.”

Oh, Moon Goddess, how could I be such a shameless seven-year-old brat! I blush, even though I can’t remember it, but Damian is smiling from ear to ear.

“It was like a fire suddenly took me. My wolf went crazy. I felt... better than I had ever been in a very long time. Even my injuries suddenly stopped hurting. I knew you were my fated mate right away, but I couldn’t believe it. We were just kids! It was so unbelievable... Even now, it feels like it was a dream. Laying in the snow, somewhere lost in the slums, with you. I... I had never known or even imagined something like that before. That was the very moment you became so, so painfully and beautifully precious to me. Because you were just you, caring for a total stranger and worried he might be cold or in pain, even though you were injured yourself.”

Damian hugs me tightly in his arms, and I hide my face against his shoulder. I wish I remembered any of this...

“I knew we were fated mates, but I had never imagined we would be separated so quickly... I lost consciousness again, and you gave me a little kiss. Every time, I would wake up instantly, and I realized my injuries were healing incredibly fast, so I understood. That you were, somehow, healing me with those. What I hadn’t realized was that you were getting weaker each time you did. At some point, you totally lost consciousness. I freaked out, but you wouldn’t wake up. You stayed like this for a whole three hours, but I couldn’t do anything. I had never, ever felt so powerless in my life. When you came to your senses, I told you never to do it again. Of course, you didn’t listen. You kept going. Until I woke up, and you were gone. I was completely healed, but there was no trace of you. I looked for you. In the slums, and after that, I kept looking after I went back to my brothers. You saved my life and had vanished... but we were still linked.”

“So, you knew I was alive.”

“Alive and suffering. I could tell anytime you were in pain, and that made me feel worse about not finding you. So, I kept looking. Month after month, years... Nate told me so many times to reject you, to cut our bond, but I never wanted to. I loved you too much already, I couldn’t give up. Until we found you.”

I smile. I know what happened after that... Thank Moon Goddess, he did. I sigh. I can't imagine how different our lives would have been if I was still in the Jade Moon basement, abused by Alec.

"I think I know why the Moon Goddess paired me with you," I whisper.

"Why, Love?"

"Because you're strong, and never afraid to fight. I am... Or I was, the opposite. I don't care about suffering, but I avoided fights at all cost, while you never backed away from one, even if you knew you would lose. You taught me that."

I hear him sigh, and he kisses me softly.

"Nora, you're the bravest, strongest wolf I know. I don't think I've seen anyone able to endure as much as you endured, yet still deeply care for others. Even after everything he did to you, you never betrayed Alec, because you still had some love for him, and for your pack, too. You're gentle and forgiving. I could never forgive my father, I only hated him to the core. I think... I'm the one who needs you. I can't care or be as patient as you are towards others. I would be as cold-blooded as my father if it weren't for you. ...I'm always terrified you might hate me, that you might get scared of that violent part of me. So, I learn, every day, how to be a better man, a better wolf, because of you. I want to be a fair King. Not

someone that is only feared like I used to be, but someone people can think of as a protector, someone you can truly love, a real Alpha King.”

“You already are. People look up to you.”

“This is all because I have you, Nora. They have seen the best of me because I have a Luna as gentle and caring as the Moon Goddess herself. You bring out the best of me. You’re the one everyone in this city really needs.”

His words bring me to tears, and I hide my face against his shoulder. I’m needed. The girl that used to hide in a basement, the weak, pitiful wolf. They need me.

Damian soothes me, caressing my hair and my skin gently, covering me with tender kisses on my neck, my cheeks, my lips. When he stops, his silver eyes look at me with a gentle gaze.

“I love you...” I whisper.

“I love you so bad, too...”

He resumes kissing me again. I kiss him, too, and we get lost in each other’s embrace in this long, long night of December...