

Chapter 3

I wake up slowly, feeling the sunshine on my skin. That is so amazing...

When I open my eyes, I realize I'm not in the hospital room anymore. Where is this? I sit up and try to analyze the room around me. Is this a bedroom? It's even bigger! I'm in a ridiculously large canopy bed, with a dozen cushions. Two large windows illuminate the room, with some of the sunlight falling directly on me.

And the view! I can view the whole city from here, like from one of those skyscrapers. I get up to approach the window and realize I indeed am in one of those skyscrapers! This is insane. I step back and turn around.

Someone left a silk kimono on my bed, and I take it to cover myself. There are two large wardrobes, a dressing desk in front of my bed, and an entirely stored bookshelf. The book I was reading at the hospital has been placed on the bedside table. I open one of the wardrobes and recognize some of the clothes Tonia bought me, while some are clearly brand new.

I exit the room, a bit confused, and as soon as I open the door, I almost trip on some huge mountain of fur.

“Bobo!”

The big brown wolf gets up to greet me. Does he ever get into his human form at all?

“Bobo, what is this place? Where are we?”

Of course, he won’t respond, but he leads me to another room. I smell something burning as soon as we enter. In a big and modern kitchen, Tonia is busy cooking, with a frown on, but smiles as soon as she sees us.

“Hi, baby girl!”

“Tonia, what are you doing?”

The smell worries me, so I go over to where she is indeed burning some sausages. What a mess... I take over by reflex, and she only seems too happy to let me.

“Sorry, I wanted to make breakfast, but I really suck at this...”

“It’s okay, I can do it. Can I borrow some things?”

“You can take whatever you want, Nora, go ahead.”

I quickly grab a few things I can find in all the cupboards and the fridge and decide to make an omelet with mushrooms and the sausages I could save from Tonia’s attempt.

Bobo hungrily watches me through the whole process.

“If you start drooling, Bobo, I’m not cleaning!” Tonia says.

While the siblings argue, I can only enjoy this fantastic cooking space. Everything is brand new and top-notch material, too! I’ve never cooked in such a big kitchen before, though I’m only cooking for three. I’m done soon enough, and we can finally sit to enjoy it. I was kind of hoping Bobo would shift to eat on the table with us, but as usual, Tonia just puts his plate down on the floor for him.

“Go ahead, you piggy. Thank you for this, Nora. I knew you liked cooking, but I didn’t know you were that good! Where did you learn?”

“My father taught me when I was young. I just loved cooking with him, and after he passed, I just kept cooking for the pack, so...”

I drop my fork. The pack! How could I be so stupid and mention the pack now? I was so happy with my cooking, I forgot to stay on guard. Tonia looks at me, shocked.

“So, you do belong to a pack!”

I gasp, not knowing what to say. Of course, it's too late to lie now. Gosh, I'm an idiot! Even Bobo stopped eating. He starts growling. At first, I think he might be angry at me, but then Tonia slams her fist on the table, making me jump. Why couldn't I shut up...?

“What sort of pack is this! Nora, I examined you; you were abused for years! And your fucking pack never helped you?”

What can I say now? I just stay quiet and bite my lip, confused about what I should do. I can't tell her that my pack was abusing me! She looks so mad, and I'm terrified about the consequences if Damian knows about this. But Tonia is all agitated now, and Bobo won't stop scrutinizing me either.

“What's the name of your pack? I got two words for your Alpha!”

“Tonia, I... I'm okay!”

“Okay? Don’t tell me you’re okay, Nora, do you have any idea how long your medical chart was?”

I shake my head. “It was because I was attacked the night before, Tonia. Otherwise, I’m okay, it’s just... I got scolded a few times, that’s it.”

She suddenly gets up and exits the room, not the slightest calmer. When she comes back, she has a couple of pictures in her hands, and she shows me. They’re pictures in black and white, and I recognize the entrance of the hospital I was at. The caption is yesterday’s date. Were these taken from surveillance cameras?

“Who is the guy at the help desk, Nora? He was looking for you; he gave your name to the secretary but ran when we arrived.”

I look more closely at the photos. That individual is wearing a dark cap covering his face, but I can recognize the cap itself. It’s my brother’s. Is that really Alec? The size and shape of the silhouette look about right. Alec was looking for me? Why? Was he concerned, or...? I shiver. Tonia is waiting for my response, and so is Bobo. I sigh and put the pictures down on the table.

“That’s my brother... I think.”

My answer surprises Tonia, but she calms down a little.

“Your brother? Oh, you did mention you had one. Well, it seems like he is looking for you. Do you want me to find him so you...?”

“No!” I screamed. The siblings were startled, but now they’re both looking at me with surprise. I don’t want Alec to find me. That’s the main reason I agreed to stay locked in this hospital room before—I was scared.

“Nora? Nora, what’s going on?”

“Tonia, I don’t want my brother to find me. I... I ran away.”

That’s not totally a lie, is it? At least I don’t need to tell them Alec was the one that tried to choke and kill me. Tonia looks a bit confused, and I can tell she’s thinking hard right now. She turns her head to Bobo, frowning, and after a while, I understand they’re arguing. But soon, Bobo starts eating again, ignoring her. Tonia eventually sighs.

“Okay, I get it. For now. To be honest, we moved you out of the hospital for that reason, anyway. We were worried about having some unidentified guy looking for you... I take it that you’re hiding from your pack then?”

“Yes... Sort of. Can we... just not mention it for now?”

Tonia frowns. I can tell she's not happy with my response and is still thinking long and hard, but she doesn't ask any more questions. So I just concentrate on eating my omelet, and that's it.

After a while, I'm done, and we are both silently drinking -tea for me and coffee for Tonia- while Bobo finishes his third plate. It looks like his stomach doesn't mind the burnt sausages.

"Tonia, where are we?"

"Oh, this is your apartment."

I almost drop my cup of tea from the shock. What does Tonia mean "my" apartment? Did she make a mistake?

"What? Tonia, I don't have an apartment. And surely not something as... impressive as this!"

I wouldn't even dream of having such a large place to live in! The whole basement could fit in the bedroom alone, and everything looks so new and modern, and high-quality, and... And now I am enjoying some fragrant tea by a great glass-wall, with a full view of the city. A month ago, I was used by my pack like a slave, doing chores all day, and my brother was ready to sell me to cover his debts. I don't own anything, nothing at all.

But Tonia just smiles.

“Well, you do now. The Boss arranged this place for you. The whole apartment is yours! Oh, of course, you can tell us if there is anything you don’t like, and we can always have it replaced...”

“Tonia, I can’t have an apartment out of the blue, this is ridiculous. You have no idea how poor I actually am. I really appreciate you trying to help me, but this is... This is too much.”

She rolls her eyes with an exasperated look.

“Nora, for someone so cute and tiny, you can be unreasonably stubborn, you know that? Listen now, baby girl. You’re the Boss’s mate. You got nowhere to go as far as I know, and for some unknown reason, you’re hiding from your useless pack. Now, the Boss is the most powerful man in this city, and trust me, buying an apartment like this is nothing for him. I mean it. Just consider it as him lending you a room, okay?”

It’s not okay, even if she says it like this, but... Indeed, I don’t have much choice either. Where would I go otherwise? I really don’t have anyone I know that I could trust...

But being here doesn’t feel right either. Everything is too... too much. I feel like I’m stepping in a shoe that’s way too big for me.

After breakfast, Tonia gives me a tour of the place that I'm now supposed to live in, temporarily, as I insisted. I'm glad there are not too many useless rooms like in those huge luxury houses. There are three bedrooms, the biggest one occupied by me, and one of the tinier rooms by Tonia. Apparently, Bobo sleeps wherever he wants, but I suspect he's guarding my room, anyway. There's a big kitchen where we had breakfast and a dining room for eight people. Then, Tonia takes me to another place: a study! With a desk, a computer, and more bookshelves! I can't help but take a tour to see all the books, making Tonia laugh.

"You give her a latest-generation, super cool computer, and all she cares about are the books. You were born in the wrong century, baby girl."

"I don't really care about computers; I just love reading!"

"I can see that. Well, you can always use the computer if you want more. Come on, there's one more room."

The last room turns out to be... a living room. I stop at the entrance. There's a large sofa with multi-colored cushions, a large TV, a game station, and even a stereo with a shelf full of CDs and DVDs.

"Oh yes, Bobo and I didn't know what kind of music you like so... Nora, what the hell? Why are you crying?"

I just can't stop.

It's all coming back to me. I could never even step into the Jade Moon's main house living room before! And now I have a full room I can use all I want?

"I'm... I'm okay. Sorry, Tonia I just got a bit... overwhelmed for a second."

She looks at me suspiciously, but I'm just busy wiping off my tears. Bobo rubs his head against my leg, trying to cheer me up.

"Okay, Nora, stop crying. You're making me want to punch some people, and I don't have names yet, so I can't. You know what you need right now?"

I shake my head, confused.

"What is it?"

"You, baby girl, need to sweat it out."

Tonia makes me change into a workout outfit. This is my first time wearing one, and I'm surprised how comfy it is. After braiding my hair quickly, I join Tonia at the entrance of the apartment.

Apparently, the building has a gym upstairs for its tenants, and Tonia, having changed clothes too, takes me there. As usual, Bobo the wolf-bear follows us like a shadow, and once we're in the elevator, I can't help but ask him.

"Bobo, do you change into your human form sometimes?"

Tonia laughs and answers in his stead, "He likes his wolf form much better, actually. You know, he shapeshifted super early for the first time, when he was just five! I remember our mom thought it was Neal. She totally freaked out when we found out it was him, and he was big already."

"I didn't know we could shapeshift so young!" I say while looking at her brother.

Tonia shakes her head and fondly scratches her brother's head. "Oh, this is a rarity! Most werewolves turn around ten or twelve for the first time. He's a natural, I guess... But honestly, this doesn't change much from where he's on two feet. He's not a chatterbox in his human form, either."

I can't really imagine what Bobo looks like as a human. He is so dog-like, it's hard to remember he's a werewolf sometimes.

"What about your big brother?" I ask, curious.

“Neal? No, Bobo’s the only one who thinks he is a house dog. Neal likes his human form. He’s a copy of Bobo, just a bit smaller.”

“And what about you?”

“Hm, I think I’m a tiny bit darker than the guys, and my size should be the same as Neal’s. We are still pretty big, anyway. The giant size runs in the family. I’ll show you sometime.”

I nod, a bit happy to know more about them. We finally reach the gym, and I suddenly remember a question I had in mind for a long time after meeting them, though I never actually dared to ask.

“Tonia, can I ask how old you are?”

“Twenty-four. Neal is twenty-six, and Bobo is nineteen.”

Wait, Bobo is still a teen? I thought he was much older than me! It turns out he’s not even two years older. No wonder Tonia treats him like a big baby! How funny. I’m looking at my bodyguard in a totally different light now. He doesn’t seem to care at all and leads the way in front of us.

The gym is empty, despite being so big. There are two rows of machines like treadmills and elliptic bikes, free weights disposed on shelves, colored mats, and a few punching bags.

“Come over here; let’s get started,” says Tonia.

She makes me run for twenty minutes, putting me on the treadmill. She uses another one right next to me and watches how I do. Compared to me, Tonia is incredibly fit. Now that she is wearing this kind of outfit, I can see she is slightly muscular, not a once of fat. How lucky. I envy her tan and tall body. When I look at myself in the mirrors, I just look... petite and skinny.

After what she calls the warming-up, she takes me to a boxing ring and makes me put on two boxing gloves. A bit perplexed, I search Bobo for help, but he has started a nap on one of the benches and couldn’t care less about what we’re doing. I’m pretty sure he’s snoring.

“Ok, baby girl. Now that you are better, it’s time to get back in shape. Punch this.”

She’s wearing some big, weird cushion-glove, waiting for me. I try to hit it, but she gives me an annoyed look.

“Nora, you call that a punch? Come on, girl, do it seriously. Again, and don’t hold back.”

I'm not holding back! I try punching a few more times, but every time, Tonia won't budge. It's like hitting some wall. She looks at me like I'm some fly. A very weak fly.

After a while, she rolls her eyes and asks me to stop.

"Nora, you're holding up. Trust me. Even a five-year-old kid can punch harder than that."

"I'm not used to this! I've never hit... anyone before." I defend myself, blushing

I'm usually the one receiving the hits... Tonia shakes her head.

"That's my point. Learn how to throw a good punch, and next time, you can defend yourself. Come on, try again. Get angry."

I put my fists up as she shows me and go at it again. This time, I'm trying to get angry, as she says. It's easier than I thought. I just think of all I've endured these last few years, how wrong and unfair it was, all of it, and it's coming to me. More strength, more anger, and I put it all into my fist before I punch.

“Good! Much better. Again, Nora, keep going.”

One after another, I start punching harder. This time, Tonia has to use her strength to block me. I’m getting the hang of it. Tonia keeps directing me, and I’m sweating, but it surprisingly feels incredible. All this anger I never knew I had in me, all of it comes out and hits one punch after another.

Suddenly, my wolf starts growling. She’s with me, getting all her anger out, too. She’s being fierce and stands firm. I’ve never felt her this way before! I smile, happy to feel her.

By the end of our little seance, I’m feeling great. I’m all sweaty and exhausted, but it is such a thrilling feeling! Tonia seems happy, too. She even showed me how to stand and block to defend myself against an opponent, wolf or human. After that, she had me train on a punchbag while she exercised on the treadmills.

“How do you feel?” She asks.

We are sitting on the living room’s sofa after a well-deserved shower, and we both changed to new clothes. Tonia is wearing jeans and an oversized jacket over a sports bra, while I picked up a wrap midi dress from my wardrobe.

“Much better, thank you, Tonia. And, I felt my wolf a lot.”

“Do you not hear her usually?”

“Not always. Just when I’m really scared, or sad, or when... when Damian is there.”

I blush a bit while saying this, but it’s the truth. Tonia laughs and shakes her head.

“Don’t be embarrassed about it, baby girl. Anyway, it’s great you connected with her better. I’m going to keep training you. I feel like you need it.”

“I think so, too. I never really expressed myself before. I was always keeping it all to me.”

“You know, that could be part of the reason you’ve never shape-shifted, Nora. Our wolves are like our real selves. They reflect what we want and what we feel deep down. If you’re used to staying silent, never saying what you think and ignoring what you feel, it’s no wonder you don’t feel connected to your wolf.”

Could it be? It’s not that I never felt close to my wolf before. But she always seemed so... weak. I could only feel her in emergency situations,

like when I got a beating or when I was scared. But it never felt like she wanted to take over, though. As if she always thought it was... worthless.

“Tonia... Where’s Damian?”

I’ve meant to ask all morning. I’m sure I fell asleep in Damian’s arms last night. It’s as if I can still feel his touch, his smell on me, despite the shower and all. It just lingers on me like some warm shadow. And it makes me want more. But Tonia just shakes her head with an apologetic look.

“He’s... busy for now. I’m not sure where he is exactly, to be honest. He didn’t stay long last night. He put you to sleep, and he left right after that.”

Why is it like this? Am I the only one craving his presence? It seems like he won’t stay every time we see each other. I felt so safe and serene in his arms... I want to see him again. So why is it that he’s never here? He’ll provide me a VIP room in some hospital, now a fancy apartment, but he just comes and go. We remain strangers.

I might be wary of his background, of his dark history, but whether I like it or not, he is my mate. All my instincts push me into his arms. My wolf yearns for her counterpart. At the hospital, he visited me twice, and I was half-sleeping. Now, when I thought he had finally come back, he just lands me here and leaves again?

I just stay close to Bobo and spend the afternoon watching a movie with him snoring loudly beside me. Surprisingly, Tonia went out for a couple of hours, saying she had to run a few errands.

When she comes back, I'm in the study, with Bobo sleeping at my feet. She laughs from the doorstep, surprised I'm using the computer instead of reading some of the books.

"Well, someone has remembered she's living in the twenty-first century! I'm even surprised you know how to use it!"

"I'm not that clueless!" I protest, a bit offended.

"If you say so, baby girl. Now, tell me, what are you doing? Getting more books? You couldn't have finished reading the whole library in one afternoon."

"Stop making fun of me. I'm just looking at job offers."

"Wait... You are looking at what?"

Uh-oh. Judging from Tonia's expression, this is not going to end well...

She crosses her arms, looking visibly pissed at me. What, are we also going to argue about this now? This is ridiculous!

“Are you trying to make my job difficult? Why do you have to work?”

How can this be a real question! We agreed earlier that I was just... borrowing this apartment for now, but that also means I don't intend to live here forever!

I must think about when I'll have to leave eventually, and when that happens, I don't want to be as hopeless as I was before. I almost died by the hands of my brother, and I let my pack step all over me. I'm not taking chances a second time. But I can't tell her any of this for now.

“Tonia, I need a job, I need money. I told you, I don't want to feel indebted or anything. Staying here is already too much for me.”

“Will you stop with this stupid money issue? You haven't been here for 24 hours yet, and you're already talking about leaving!”

“Because that is the correct thing to do, Tonia! I've never relied on anyone, and I don't want to!”

Tonia lets out a growl of frustration, but I don't care. How am I just supposed to accept this dream life and let myself be sheltered like a kid?

Life is no fairy tale! I appreciate what Damian's been doing for me, but I don't want to stand back and do nothing. I'm done with fearing my own shadow. I need to learn to speak and live for myself. And it starts with getting a life on my own. And a job.

"Bobo, say something!"

I doubt her brother will step in to help her. He didn't stop me when I said what I was about to do. Even now, he's pretending to sleep under my chair, even though we all can tell he's just ignoring his sister.

"Nora, I don't think you realize your situation. You're the Boss's mate. From now on, you are going to be in danger 24/7. Do you think you're here just because he is nice to you? Well, there's that, but this is also for security reasons. I thought you wanted to get away from your pack. Just consider that now you have to avoid all the other packs!"

As far as security go, yes, I did notice the 200-pounds wolf following me around all day... But I bite my lip as I realize she's a bit right, too. I know how far Damian's reputation goes, and it's nothing pleasant. If anyone wanted to harm him, they could try and attack me. We may not be an official couple or have mated -yet-, but what I've experienced of our link so far tells me we would feel it if something happened to the other. My wolf agrees, too, she doesn't want to part with him or let her mate be hurt. I don't think she cares about the "getting a job" part at all. That's human stuff. I turn to Tonia.

“How many people know I’m his fated mate?”

She looks a bit surprised by my question and stops frowning to think about it seriously.

“Not many, for now. We tried to keep it to a minimum. Only like, ten or eleven people perhaps, including the Boss’s brothers and mine.”

So they’re basically concealing my existence. Not that it bothers me; I also prefer it that way.

“But nobody needs to know, right? Tonia, I could find a job far from my Clan’s turf, act normal, and no one would know I’m related to him in any way.”

“No.”

I can feel some tension in her voice, and somehow, I think there’s something else. Something she doesn’t want to tell me. But what could it be? Is it that I’m really in danger, more than I thought? But neither Tonia nor Bobo really seem to be on guard. And Tonia did leave us for a couple hours earlier, something she never did when I was at the hospital.

After a long silence, both of us doing our own thinking, Tonia lets out a sigh. “Gosh, when you were mute for a few weeks, I never imagined you

could be that stubborn, baby girl. You know what? If you want to work, I get it. I really do. But please, talk to the Boss before doing anything. He'll definitely be against it, and very mad."

I really hope Tonia's wrong. He wouldn't get mad over something so trivial as letting me get a job, right...? I try not to think too deeply about it and just nod at her answer.

"Okay, then. I will ask Damian first, I promise. But do you know when I can see him again?"

She hesitates.

"I asked him earlier, but... he's busy, Nora."

The busy excuse again. I get that Damian is an Alpha and must be quite busy with such a large pack to handle, but I'm getting tired of it. He's out there doing werewolf stuff while I'm stuck here cooking and reading books, and I hate it.

"I'm sure he'll find time to visit you real soon," says Tonia with a sorry look. "But meanwhile, no more talking about you getting a job, okay?"

"...Okay."

I can see the relief on her face.

So, I did wait.

To be honest, living in the apartment wasn't as dull as living at the hospital. Maybe Tonia trying to keep me busy had some effect, too, but there was a lot more to do here. Every morning, she would take me to the gym and guide me through a proper workout. She insisted on how I should get healthier by doing so and gain some more energy. It certainly did help me get more confident and stronger, I think. Then, I would prepare lunch for them, my favorite part of the day. Tonia and Bobo are no picky eaters, and I can cook anything I want.

After that, the afternoons were... long. Watch a movie, read a book or two on the terrace, play video games with Tonia, or study.

The days went on, and I had yet to hear from Damian. The worst thing is, Tonia would have him on the phone about three to five times a week, and he never wanted to speak with me no matter how many times I asked.

After two weeks, I got to the only conclusion I had left: he wasn't busy, he was avoiding me. And I'd had it. We were on the couch, and Tonia had just taken the call in the middle of some old sci-fi movie I wasn't really interested in anyway.

“Tonia, let me talk to him.”

But she quickly hangs up, ignoring me. She shakes her head, and when I see her open her mouth to answer me, I go first before she even gets to speak.

“Not the ‘he’s busy’ excuse again, Tonia! It’s been days! And at the hospital, it went on for a full month, too! Let me talk to him. Please.”

I see her hesitate, turning the phone in her hands, again and again, confused about what to do. But I’ve made up my mind. I’m done waiting for nothing. Bobo, who was at my feet, suddenly jumps between us on the couch and takes her phone to hand to me. His sister protests, but it’s too late. With Bobo keeping her from taking it back, I quickly search through her contacts, and though she has a lot, I finally find him, simply registered under “The Boss.” So mafia-like.

I breathe in and press the green phone button. The first ring isn’t even over yet when someone immediately picks up.

“Tonia?”

I’m surprised; I didn’t expect to hear someone else! It takes me a few seconds to recognize this voice.

“...Nathaniel?”

“Oh, is it our princess? Hello there. What is it? Everything all right?”

“Yeah, I just... I just wanted to speak to Damian. Is he there?”

“Sure. Damian, Nora is on the phone, she wants to speak with you.”

I finally hear Damian’s voice over the phone, but he’s not talking to me. I can listen to both brothers speaking in what must be French, and I suspect they’re arguing. Though Nathaniel sounds very calm as usual, Damian sounds angry. It goes on for a few seconds, and I’m biting my lip, anxious. I wish I could understand French...

In front of me, Tonia is also tense and scrutinizing me. I get up to avoid her gaze and go stand by the glass wall.

They stop arguing eventually, and after a short silence, I finally hear Damian’s voice on the phone.

“Nora.”

I skip a heartbeat. How can the simple sound of my name with his voice through a phone feel so good?

“What is it?” He asks, making me realize I didn’t say anything.

“I... I wanted to talk to you. When can I see you?”

“I’m busy.”

I roll my eyes. I’m really getting tired of this sentence.

“Why won’t you see me? Don’t say you’re busy again, please.”

He stays silent, and I don’t like it. I hate it. Why can’t he give me a proper reason? I’m sure he is avoiding me; I just wish I knew why. Even now, I’m suspecting the only reason I can talk to him is that Nathaniel talked him into it. I wait a bit more, but it’s still silent on his side, though I hear some sounds in the background. Otherwise, I would have checked to see if he didn’t hang up. I decide to give it a go again.

“I need to discuss some things with you, please.”

“Are you okay?”

His question surprised me. Did my tone get him worried now? I nod unconsciously and start nervously playing with my hair.

“Yes, everything’s fine. It’s just, I something I want to discuss with you.”

“You can’t discuss it with Tonia?”

No, I want to talk to you! Gosh, he really is unwilling to see me! What have I done that he will avoid me at any cost? This is so infuriating. Am I the only one with a whimpering wolf who longs to see her other half? He can’t be that cold-hearted that he would ignore his own instincts!

“No! Damian, please. I want to see you.”

I wait, praying he won’t say no or hang up without warning. I can feel the siblings staring at me from the couch, but I try to ignore their gazes and wait for Damian. I fiddle my hair with my fingers for what seems like forever. Then, I suddenly hear him.

“Okay. I’ll come tonight. I might come late, though.”

“Sure, I’ll... I’ll wait for you. Thank you.”

He hangs up.

I take a second to breathe deep. I’m seeing Damian tonight!

My wolf is acting crazy, jumping around like some happy pup. I turn to Tonia with a smile, totally ecstatic. She, on the other hand, has gone pale from all the anxiety.

“Tonia, he said yes! He is coming here tonight.”

“What? Really! Thank Moon Goddess, now you can stop harassing me.”

I stick my tongue out to her, but I don't care. I've gone from anxiety to happiness in just a few seconds, with one word from him. That's crazy.

...And now I'm all nervous again. Damian's coming. My fated mate is coming. Here! He's coming here! And this time, I'm not half-conscious or sleepy. Get a grip, Bluemoon!

“Nora, you're bright red, baby girl. Bobo says it's cute. And he wants to know if we can have lunch now.”

I'm anxious all afternoon after that. I keep looking at the clock on the wall, waiting for hours to pass.

Knowing my mate is coming is the most terrible feeling ever. It's like I've become someone else, not controlling my own body. My wolf is acting

crazy all afternoon, and I think I might have been just as insufferable for Bobo and Tonia. I felt feverish, anxious, and clumsy.

What was I thinking?

Now I realize how bold I've been. Damian Black is the Alpha of the strongest pack in Silver City. No one is more powerful than him for miles around. He's controlling the Blood Moon Pack, and anyone who doesn't belong to that pack should fear it. And here I go, the seventeen-years-old Nora, not even a proper werewolf on some aspects, commanding that he comes to me. Tonight.

Since when did I get so brave?

So here I am, at almost eleven o'clock, waiting for him.

I'm curled up on the sofa, in my silk nightgown, trying to get interested in that random book while Bobo is happily and loudly snoring next to me. He's taking advantage that Tonia went to bed already to sleep on the couch.

I have no clue about when Damian will come. Tonia didn't hear from him after that. I've been anxious all day, but it just won't get better until I see him. Leaving my book aside, since I've been trying to read the same page for twenty minutes, I think of everything I've been waiting to ask him.

Why is he avoiding me? Why leave me in the apartment? Why can't I work? Does he... Gosh, I think I might need to make a list.

I sigh, and pet Bobo without thinking, but he doesn't complain. I'm hoping I won't fall asleep, but the apartment is so quiet, it's unsettling. Rain is pouring against the glass wall, but I can barely hear it. The view is stunning... The skyline of Silver City by night, like any major city, is full of artificial lights from buildings, streetlamps, and cars altogether. So lively and pretty.

If I look far enough, I can even see part of my Clan's turf on the outskirts. I never really realized how remote the Jade Moon was. There are a lot more different packs living in the city, and I only know a few of them. The Gold Moon, the Blood Moon, the Sapphire Moon, the Rising Moon, the Violet Moon, the White Moon, the Pearl Moon, etc... All those clans do their best to coexist peacefully while also defending their turfs. Some are part of more prominent packs or have old alliances, and some can disappear overnight. Silver City has always been full of werewolves and humans.

Suddenly, Bobo gets up next to me, and I stop petting him. Did I wake him up?

"Sor..."

No. It's Him.

Something stirs me up inside, and my heartbeat quickens without warning. My whole body knows before I do. Even the way I'm breathing slightly changes. My wolf is all ears, waiting. I'm so tense!

Bobo silently leaves the room, but at this moment, I couldn't care less. I'm frozen on the couch, my eyes on the door, waiting for him. How is it that I can sense him before I can see him? Are all bonds that strong? I can tell he's standing behind the door for a few seconds. What is he waiting for?

Then, the door opens, and he takes a step in. Moon Goddess, he is so handsome I can barely think straight anymore. He gets rid of his leather jacket, leaving it on the floor, and walks into the room with this simple t-shirt, showing off his broad shoulders and muscular build.

Before I realize it, Damian's already in front of me, standing a few steps away from the couch. He won't come close, but he looks... exhausted. He lets out a sigh and brushes his hair with his hand.

"Are... Are you okay?" I ask, concerned by his worn-out look

"Yeah."

So why is he avoiding my gaze then?

He's looking anywhere but at me. It's awkward, and I don't even know what else to say. Thank Moon Goddess, the room is quite dark because I must be red right now. I can't help but touch my hair nervously. Try and remember your list, Nora.

"Thank you for lending me your apartment. "

"It's yours," replies his deep voice.

And here we go. I shake my head.

"It's nice of you to let me stay here, but this... this isn't mine."

"You don't like it?"

"No, no, I... I do like it, but that's not the issue. I just can't afford to buy such a place, and if I can't, then I can't say it's mine."

I'm so nervous, I can feel my voice trembling. Damian is so intimidating! He's standing a few steps away from me, and neither of us can bear to look at the other. What kind of conversation is this?

“It’s a present then.”

“No.”

I can tell his silver eyes have gone ice-cold. Oh no, he’s definitely mad. He crosses his arms but won’t add anything. What does this silence mean? This distance between us is so infuriating! I can barely contain my wolf who wants to run to him, so why is he so distant? He looks like he doesn’t want to be here and doesn’t want to see me. Does he have any idea how awkward this is for me? And quite intimidating, too. I feel so tiny facing him. He’s right there, standing totally quiet and imposing, domineering the room effortlessly. I get up from the sofa, tightening my kimono around me.

I couldn’t tell where I find the courage to stand in front of him. I’m trembling. “Why you won’t let me work?”

“It’s dangerous,” he says in his ice-cold tone.

“But I need the money.”

“No, you don’t.”

What does he mean? I can’t expect him to shelter me indefinitely! That would be way too optimistic of me.

His short answers are annoying. And scary, but still irritating. It's like his aura suddenly turned the room darker. I want to step back, but my wolf won't have it. Something is chilling down my spine, something I can't describe that has to do with my instincts. My werewolf instincts.

But I'm still hopelessly attracted to him, and that makes his rejection attitude even more painful. I nervously bite my lip, trying to think of what I can do, what I could say. Why is this so difficult? I wish I could trust him; I wish I knew what he's thinking right now. But here he is, indecipherable, cold, and barely talking. Doesn't he want me? Is he rejecting me? My body grows cold just from that scary thought alone.

"I need to work. I want to."

"I said no."

"Look at me!"

Oh, Moon Goddess. I just screamed.

Why am I like this? I'm shaking, I'm tearing up, but I don't care. This whole situation is so impossible! And I'm tired of it! Tired of waiting for a sign from him, tired of his distant attitude. I know we're basically strangers, I know I'm not pretty and not mate material, but still!

My cry finally made him look at me, and he seems shocked. Okay, I am surprised by my own reaction, too. I wipe the beginning of a tear with my hand, trying to act tough like I'm not refraining a sob. Calm down, Nora. I take a second and look at him in the eyes.

“Why are you avoiding me like this? I... I know I'm not the girl one would wish for as his mate, I get that. But I...”

“Stop it, Nora.”

I obey immediately, I can't help it. Damian is an Alpha, giving me a direct order. Stupid wolf instinct...

I turn my head to the window, avoiding his gaze this time. Is this it? Will he reject me now? I put my arms around me, feeling colder than ever. My wolf is whimpering continuously, and I feel like crying, too, but I won't.

I hear him sigh, and he steps closer. I shiver, unable to raise my eyes up. I feel him coming. I want to step back; I want to run. But I stay, frozen and terrified. His smell again, and I can feel him facing me, dangerously close.

I hold my breath. Damian stopped right in front of me, so close I can feel his warmth. What is he going to do now? Scold me? Hit me? Hideous flashbacks come to me, and Moon Goddess, I don't want to remember.

He raises his hands and slowly puts them around my neck.

But... Not in a forceful, threatening manner like my brother. No, Damian's touch is incredibly gentle against my skin, his thumbs caressing my cheeks. Before I can even realize what's going on, I feel his lips, very softly, kissing my forehead.

...What is this feeling? I feel a wave a warmth flowing through my body, starting from my forehead. I close my eyes and breathe again. His lips linger on my skin, and I raise my hands to put them on his wrists, as if I wanted to keep him there, close to me.

This simple kiss chases away all my worries. I feel so many things right now, I'm overwhelmed with emotions. I want to stay like this forever. The two of us, so close, in this dark room, with only the sound of the rain.

After a few seconds, he stops and stares at me in the eyes. Our faces are so close, I feel hypnotized by the silver in his. I can see my reflection in it, and I suddenly remember my horrid scar. I turn away and try to hide it with my hair, but he grasps my hand to stop me.

“Nora, don't hide it.”

“But, it's...”

“Don’t.”

I look up to him, embarrassed. He really doesn’t mind it? He sighs, and caresses my cheek once again, on the side where my scar is.

“I don’t want any other mate than you, Nora.”

How can I believe him? Anyone would want someone prettier than me as a mate. I’m ridiculously weak. I’ve done nothing but tremble in fear for the last ten years of my life. Yet his gestures towards me are so gentle...

“Why didn’t you want to see me?” I whisper.

Damian sighs and takes his hands off me. Why is he stepping back now? Did I say something wrong? He looks at me, and I can’t tell what he’s thinking. I see him crossing his arms on his chest, and he seems to hesitate. He looks at me again, seeming hesitant. What now?

I’m about to ask him what’s wrong when he speaks up again, looking straight at me. “I wanted to see you, Nora. I wanted it so badly, I could barely contain my wolf the past weeks. I’m... containing myself. I don’t think you realize how much self-restraint I need right now.”

...Oh.

I turn entirely red as soon as I understand. How stupid am I! Well, I suppose it is to be expected that his wolf-self would make him desire me... And he is a fully grown man, too. So embarrassing! I really didn't expect that.

And suddenly, I remember Marcus. He wanted me, too. I know Damian's not the same as that pervert, but I... I start shivering when I remember. His hands, his disgusting breath close to my ears. I unconsciously step back, and Damian notices it.

"Nora?"

"I'm okay, just... Just give me a minute, please."

I breathe in deeply. Damian is not Marcus. Calm down, Nora, you know you're safe here.

But what am I supposed to say now? Damian was clear he wants me... That way. And I get it is werewolf nature, how our instincts want it. But I'm not ready for that. And there are so many things that should come first. How should I do this? I don't want to refuse him point-blank! I should be so happy that he won't reject me. And it's not like the idea completely disgusts me, either. I'm just... I still can't get used to the

thought of doing this kind of thing yet. I know nothing about men, nothing about dating!

“Damian, I don’t... I’m not sure I’m...” I stutter.

He shakes his head.

“Nora, I don’t want to force you. I do want you, and I am barely restraining myself from taking you right here, right now. But I won’t.”

Oh my gosh, why does he have to be so blunt! And with his poker face, too! I’m the only one blushing so much that I have to look somewhere else. I’m feeling so hot right now, this is ridiculous! I try to get back to a normal heartbeat, but It’s hard to look at him after hearing that kind of thing. Should I thank him or something? How awkward... And I can feel him staring at me, too, waiting for my reaction.

Unable to come out with a proper answer, I just nod stupidly. “...Can we talk?” I ask.

My question seems to surprise him, but it did come a bit out of the blue. I’m fidgeting a bit, but...

“We’ve barely exchanged more than a few words before, so... I thought that maybe we could... get to know each other a bit more?”

“...Okay.”

He comes to sit on the sofa with me, though we each sit in the opposite corner, making sure we are not too close. I just hope he is not too tired. He lays his head to rest on the back of the sofa and closes his eyes. I just grab my cup of tea, feeling embarrassed now that we were supposed to talk but don't. But what could I ask? With that dark background of his, there are lots of questions I wouldn't dare to ask... Like what it is to be Alpha, or how did he get so rich. I didn't feel comfortable about asking stupid stuff like his hobbies or his favorite movie, either. After pondering for a while, he surprises me by being the first one to talk.

“...You look better.”

I let out a shy smile, happy he noticed the changes.

“Ah, yes... I feel much better now. Tonia's watching me. And she's teaching me a bit of boxing, too.”

“You're still too thin.”

I couldn't disagree with that, so I just nod a bit and take a sip. I still have a long way to go to be as healthy as girls my age. But for some reason, I

feel so relaxed now that my mate is in the same room. He's not any less intimidating to me, but his presence is something that my wolf needs.

"Thank you for all of this," I say, realizing I didn't have a chance to thank him so far.

When I look back at what my life was before, I would never have imagined such a thing happening to me. Before that, every day was a nightmare. I would work all day long, fearing someone might scold me or hit me for any reason. The days were long, exhausting, and straining. I had no friend, no one that would care for me. All I could do was pray the sun would set soon so that I could hide back into the dark basement...

Even now, I seldom wake up from a nightmare, thinking I'm back in that cold and frightening place, on that yellow couch. I never dare to say to Tonia how cold I feel sometimes.

"The siblings are the ones that saved your life."

His voice has suddenly gone colder. I look at him, and he has that terrifying, angry look again. Is he thinking about the day they found me? I don't want to remember it... I can still feel my brother's hands on my throat, tightening, tightening, tightening so much while I struggled to breathe.

He would have killed me. He really would have, had Tonia and Bobo not found me. How did you get so despicable, Alec...?

“Tonia said you wouldn’t tell us which Clan you’re from.”

I stay silent. They may have been cruel to me, but those people are still my pack. I don’t want Damian’s wrath to unleash on them. Some of the pack members are not that bad, and no matter what, I still owe the Clan somehow...

And I’m afraid of what Damian is capable of.

“What will you do if I tell you?”

This time, it’s his turn to remain silent for a while. The room stays quiet for a couple of minutes, and I take my gaze to the glass wall. It might be past midnight now, but the rain isn’t stopping at all.

“Did they hurt you?”

Yes.

“No.”

“Nora.”

He knows I’m lying, we both do. But I just can’t say it. I can’t.

He suddenly turns to me, scaring me a bit. But he looks serious, not angry at me. Gosh, how can he be that intimidating when he’s only sitting?

“If I let you work, can you tell me?”

“No!” I reply, shocked by his bargaining.

I’m not going to trade my pack’s lives just for the sake of letting me work! All of this is wrong in the first place. I shouldn’t even have to ask him!

“Just let me work; I will be cautious, I promise.”

“You don’t need to work.”

“I do! I need money. I don’t have anything.”

“What do you need money for?”

Why did he suddenly get angrier? He's looking at me with such a menacing look, I feel like he might shred me to pieces if I give him a wrong answer! I can't help but crawl back a few inches on the sofa. What is wrong with him? What is he thinking now?

"You're scaring me..."

"I asked what you need money for, Nora."

Stop looking at me like this! I'm shivering all over already!

"I just... just don't want to be in need again," I stutter anxiously.

He keeps looking at me for a while and finally stops glaring. He doesn't look so angry anymore, I can relax a little. Moon Goddess, what was that? What answer was he thinking of that would make him so furious?

"...You won't."

I look at him, still shaken up from what just happened. He doesn't seem to realize what state he got me in. I do understand how people can fear him so much now. Even when I angered Vincent in the past, he never scared me to that level. What's going to happen with Damian from now on? He is my mate, and I can't get out of that. But what if I make him mad someday?

I catch my breath again, trying to regain some of my composure. I run a hand through my hair with my fingers, getting to relax a little with my tea.

“Damian... What did you think I was going to say?”

I didn't really want to ask. But I thought, maybe if I knew, I might get to understand Damian a bit better and get closer to him somehow. After all, I had no idea why he was angry. And we barely know each other, so how would I get to know without asking?

“Nothing.”

Is he playing the silent one now? I sigh. We have so many secrets to keep from each other... I wonder how long this will last. We might have been the worst people to be picked to be each other's mates if I think about it. Aren't we opposites somehow?

A long silence follows, but I don't really mind.

I grab one of the large cushions to put on my legs and observe him. He does look tired. His black hair is disordered, and his shirt is slightly wrinkled. I guess he didn't entirely lie about the being busy part.

“How is it? With... the Clan?” I ask.

“Annoying.”

I frown at his weird answer. He doesn't look like a very enthusiastic Alpha, for someone at the head of such a large pack...

“What about Nathaniel? Why isn't he your Beta?”

“Nathaniel is an Alpha; he rules his own part of the Clan. My family wolves are not Beta materials...”

I suppose that can happen, too. Being an Alpha usually runs in the blood, and considering how intimidating Damian is, he probably couldn't submit to anyone. But I thought Nathaniel to be a bit less dominating. I suppose their pack is big enough for them to split the work... That's not unusual among large packs, as sometimes they have way too many members for one Alpha to handle, so they would divide between smaller packs and have other wolves be Alphas to handle it better.

“What about your younger brother?”

“Liam is too young. He's just training as Lead Hunter for now.”

Too young? He looked like a teen around my age when I saw him. He may be young, but he could perfectly be an Alpha also... Maybe he seems older than his real age is, then. Or he's too immature for now. But if he is already Lead Hunter, it means he must already be well respected within the pack.

Talking about Alpha stuff, I wonder why the Moon Goddess chose me to be his mate. We have nothing in common, and I don't really see myself as an Alpha material either... How could I ever stand as equal to Damian? Surely his pack would see me as a joke. I was the lowest on my previous pack, and now I must prove myself to the Blood Moon Clan? Was there a mistake somewhere? There should be hundreds of other women more prepared and ready to take the job! Being the mate of the Alpha leader would mean I have to be above all other wolves!

How could that wolf ever be... me?

I wake up a bit later, and I realize I'm in my bed.

Damian! Did I fell asleep on the couch? I panic a bit, but after a second, I realize he is sitting just next to me. I feel his hand gently caressing my hair. Behind him, I can see it's still dark outside.

"What time is it?"

"Almost two in the morning. You fell asleep, so I carried you here. I didn't mean to wake you."

I realize he has his jacket on, and frown.

“Are you leaving?”

“I have to.”

“When will you come back?” I ask immediately

He sighs and leans over to kiss my forehead again. “I don’t know. Soon.”

How soon is soon? My wolf whines, she doesn’t want him to go, but my human self knows he has other responsibilities. He caresses my hair a few more seconds and exits the room as silently as a shadow. Tiredness and the sound of the rain pull me back to sleep as soon as the door shuts.