

Chapter 5

Nathaniel took us back to the city, and a car is waiting for us. Almost all the other wolves have already dispersed one after another, leaving only a few of us. Tonia changes into her human form as soon as she retrieves her clothes from the trunk. Visibly pissed, she quickly puts on her jeans and a tank top and takes the driver's seat without a look for me. Bobo, who was busy licking the blood off his face and cleaning himself, goes to lay on the back seats. Liam takes his backpack back and changes to his human form, too. The whole time, Nathaniel's eyes won't leave him. It seems like I'm not the only one in trouble...

"Nora, you get in the car with Tonia. Liam, you come with me."

Liam and I exchange a look, but we don't dare protest. He rolls his eyes and obeys his brother's, following him to another car. I bet he's going to get scolded...

I take the first car's passenger seat and notice a cream wolf with mesmerizing amber-colored eyes jumping in Nathaniel's car behind us. Aside from Bobo, she's the only wolf left from the ones that came with Nathaniel. She naturally stands close to him, so I assume she is a member

of the Blood Moon pack. So pretty... Who is she? I don't think I've ever seen her before.

I try to get a look at the trio, but Tonia starts the engine, and I lose sight of the other car in a few seconds. We drive for a while, clearly aiming back to the apartment, but a heavy silence is taken over the vehicle. She doesn't even put the radio on, and the oppressive atmosphere is unsettling. After a while, I decide to give it a go.

"Tonia, Bobo, I'm sorry..."

"Oh, really?"

She sounds pissed. She must be. I did sneak out of the apartment while Bobo was sleeping... What can I say now? She seems focused on the road, but I'm sure she is boiling inside. Everyone stays silent for a couple of minutes, but suddenly, Tonia explodes and starts yelling.

"Nora, what did you think you were doing! Do you have any idea how mad the Boss is now? Nathaniel could barely keep him from coming! And you know what would have been the result of him coming to get you? Do you know? A slaughter! And you! Do you have any idea how dangerous and stupid of you that was? This idiot Alpha of yours could have hurt you! Or any of those wolves! Do you want to go back to the hospital again? That was a foolish idea to go there alone, Nora!"

“I wasn’t alone...”

She hits the dashboard, making me jump.

“Don’t mention that idiot Liam! This brat is no better than you! Always getting into trouble, why does it have to be the two of you now? Two weeks ago, he got into a fight with five rogues! And now he is skipping school and helping you in getting yourself killed? If he’s still alive once Nathaniel is done, I’m going to teach him a good lesson, too! I’m so mad about you two! What is wrong with teens!”

I’m feeling sorry for Liam. I think I can handle being scolded by Tonia, but I bet Nathaniel might be giving him a hard time right now. Judging by their interactions earlier, he really respects his brothers.

Tonia keeps talking and goes on about my recklessness, but I’m not listening anymore; I’m thinking about what happened today. This is crazy...

My brother made me guilty of everything that happened in the Clan’s eyes. Then, Nathaniel’s intervention... I see Peter, Amber, Marc, and his sister’s corpses. Four people died within ten minutes before my eyes. I knew the Blood Moon Clan lived up to its reputation, but...

I’m well aware this kind of thing happens with werewolf Clans. We are not gentle creatures; our instincts push us to use our strength to mark our

territory and fight for more. I've seen people die before. Rogues we killed, other Clans members fighting to death... But now, I know what they mean when they say the Black brothers are ruthless. Nathaniel didn't even sweat or blink while killing Marc's sister. Liam and Bobo both attacked to kill from the start. None of them showed the slightest hint of hesitation.

They have nothing in common with the Jade Moon Clan, which is always avoiding trouble. The Blood Moon takes what it wants. That makes me think about Nathaniel's words. How could they possibly have been looking for me? They couldn't have known who I was to Damian back then! Now that I think about it...

"Nora, are you listening to me?"

"Sorry, Tonia, I was... thinking. But why did you save me that night?"

She looks taken aback by my sudden question, and her angry expression vanishes as quickly as that. She looks at me, confused. Behind us, Bobo stopped pretending to sleep and has raised his head and ears to listen.

"What do you mean? You were attacked and..."

"No, I mean, why me? You didn't know I was Damian's mate. It was cold and pouring, nobody was out in the streets that night, but you guys were there. Not only were you there at the right time to save me, but you also took me straight to a hospital and treated me like... like a princess from

the start. It doesn't seem like something someone from the Blood Moon Clan would do at all. Not for a random stranger, some unknown girl you found in the street."

This time, she goes silent. Tonia seems hesitant, and I can see her exchanging glances with Bobo through the mirror. Are they talking using their telepathic bond? Hard to tell. The siblings stay silent for a long moment before Tonia finally sighs.

"Okay, you're right, baby girl. We were looking for you."

"But you didn't know me!"

"No, but... We were looking for a seventeen-year-old girl with blue eyes, black hair, and a scar on her face. We knew you were in danger. Bobo smelled your blood, and we tracked you all the way to that street. It's not just us, Nora, all of the Blood Moon Clan was roaming the streets looking for someone fitting your description that night."

What? How could that be? This is nonsense...

"The Boss knew you were in danger. He felt your panic and sent everyone out to find someone fitting your description. I don't know how he knew precisely what you looked like, Nora. He just said his mate was in danger before we all went."

This is impossible! First, how could he have known I was in danger that night? To know our mate is in danger or hurt, we need to have met him or her at least once and made eye contact, to awaken the bond between our wolf-selves! How could Damian possibly have known I was his mate before having met me first?

Moreover, even if, somehow, he could feel our bond, how did he know what I looked like? The description Tonia gave me is too precise to be luck. He even knew how old I am and about my scar. And why couldn't I know about our bond? My wolf recognized Damian for the very first time as her mate when we were at the hospital. I'm positive she had never felt any connection like this before; she never met him. None of this makes sense!

"I don't get how this could be possible... Tonia, Damian and I met for the first time at the hospital. I didn't even know I had a mate before that."

"Me neither, baby girl. The Boss didn't explain anything, you know. He just confirmed it was indeed you when he saw you lying in the hospital bed after that. He never told us how he knew about your bond. From what I saw, the only other person who might have known about the Boss even having a mate is Nathaniel, since he wasn't surprised at all. He acted as if he knew about you right from the start. I am not sure about Liam, though."

I take my head in my hands, trying to process everything. That is way too much happening in one day for me to handle. Not only everything going

on with my Clan, but now even my bond with Damian is... I sigh. Behind us, Bobo lets out a whimper.

“He wants to know if you’re okay,” explains Tonia.

“I’m fine, Bobo. Sorry again for sneaking out on you...”

Tonia seems about to scold me again, but she exchanges a look with her brother and rolls her eyes.

“He says he’s not really mad. He understands you wanted to go out, but he was anxious something might have happened to you. He says next time you ought to bring him, too. And that I... Hey, I don’t nag too much, shut up!”

“Aren’t you guys supposed to stop me?”

“Well if you’re going to sneak out anyway, we would rather come along, though it’d be better for you not to.”

I smile at Bobo, thankful to him for being so understanding. He probably felt as trapped as I was in that apartment. I don’t get why Damian is so persistent in having me locked in. I’m done with the golden prison.

We finally arrive back at the building, and by the time the elevator takes us upstairs, most of my confidence has vanished like snow under the sun. Liam is standing next to me, pouting and avoiding Nathaniel's gaze. Guess the Big Brother talk really had some effect on him... Now that I see them, it seems like they are several years apart. If Liam's my age, I would guess Nathaniel is around 22 or 23... But he might be even older, I'm not sure. What about Damian then? I need to ask Tonia later.

With the two wolves and four people standing in the elevator, space is quite crowded, but I wish we stayed there longer. As soon as it stops, I feel a pain in my stomach starting. I'm so nervous, I can barely breathe.

The door opens, but only Nathaniel, Liam, and the pretty she-wolf exit the elevator. This is two floors beneath mine. Is one of the brothers living here, too? Or both?

"We will see you later, princess."

The door closes again, and this time, the siblings and I exit the right floor. How can I be so tense already? I feel like a storm is waiting for me behind the door. Tonia opens it for me, but both siblings flee to the kitchen, leaving me alone to face Damian.

I take a deep breath and step in. I take out my sweater to leave on one of the chairs, as it got tainted with blood somehow, and I feel way too hot.

When I finally enter the main room, Damian is standing against the glass wall, looking right at me with his silver eyes, arms crossed.

Even when he is fuming like this, I find him breathtakingly handsome. I feel scared, but not as much as I was before. I slowly walk up to him, and his eyes won't leave me. I stop when I'm within arm's reach from him.

"I'm sorry."

"For what?" He asks with that cold tone again.

"For leaving the apartment without warning anyone or saying where I went."

I really am. I should have at least left a note for them to know. I realized it while speaking with Bobo in the car. I only wanted to exit the apartment, but I didn't think about how much it would make Bobo or Tonia worry. Or Damian.

"You could have been killed."

I sigh. "Liam was with me."

"Liam is an eighteen-year-old brat!"

“An eighteen-year-old lead Hunter. And what choice did I have?”

“You should have stayed right where you were!” He suddenly yells with a bang on the wall.

“Don’t get mad, please,” I whimper, taking a step back.

“I am already mad, Nora! You knew I didn’t want you to go out, and you still did! You put yourself in danger, and you told no fucking one!”

His voice echoes on the wall, and I can’t help but step back again. This situation is much scarier than the one before. I find myself defenseless facing him, and he so furious right now I have no idea what he is capable of. I have flashbacks, no good memories. Damian breathes heavily, his fists are clenched. Why does it have to be like this?

Well, I’m not giving in to him. I feel like if I don’t step up to him right now, I will never be able to express myself ever again.

“You can’t keep me locked here forever, Damian. I will go out again, with your permission or not. I shouldn’t even need to ask you!”

“Why won’t you listen!”

He suddenly steps forward and grabs my shoulders.

“Nora, you could have been hurt or killed! You went out there, and if anything had happened to you... If anyone had put a hand on you, I swear I would have slaughtered each one of that wretched Clan! The only reason I stayed back is that Liam said you were with him, Nathaniel was coming, and you were finally taking them to your Clan!”

I grab his shirt and try to push him back, but he just won't let go. I use all my strength to repel him, but he won't move an inch. Why is he so strong! Though his hands are not hurting me, I hate to feel trapped like this! I can't help but start tearing up, exhausted from everything that happened, from yelling and fighting with him.

“Let go of me! Why are you so interested in finding my Clan in the first place? You don't know anything about me, yet all you talk about is getting to those people! Let me go! I hate this!”

“They hurt you, Nora! Those people abused you for years! I will never forgive them for what they did to you! And they are going to pay for every single time they dared to touch you!”

His voice is so cold I get the chills. Why is he so mad? I try to push him away from me again, ignoring my stupid crying. I understand that he saw

my scars, but that's not enough for this murderous intent I can feel from him!

...No, there is something else. I remember what Tonia said in the car, and suddenly, the reason for Damian's anger becomes so clear. I stop trying to push him away, slowly realizing the truth.

“...You felt it.”

I look up into his eyes to see if I'm right, and he suddenly releases me, his arms falling to his sides. I stare at him, completely stunned by what just hit me. I would never have imagined such a thing a few hours ago, but now that explains it all. Everything about Damian's actions towards me. His eagerness to know where I come from. His hatred for my Clan, and even his extreme protective attitude towards me. My hands tighten on his shirt, and I whisper in a breath.

“You felt it all, didn't you? Every single time I was hurt, you felt it through our... bond.”

A long silence follows my words.

I was right. Damian is avoiding my gaze, but that is way too late. I... I feel like crying again. How did he feel, all those years? I remember each hit I took, every slap I got unfairly. Feeling my pain through his wolf and being

unable to do anything about it, how could he endure it? That's the worst feeling!

"I'm so sorry..."

"Don't."

He stops me, putting his hands on mine and holding them tight. He looks down at me, and even if he is still angry, I can tell he is trying hard to hold it in.

"I don't want to hear you apologize, Nora. What I want is to make sure those bastards never approach you again. I'll never forgive what they did to you. That night... My wolf was going crazy. Someone was trying to take my mate by force, Nora! Do you have any idea how I felt back then? Why won't you tell me anything!"

I'm crying for good now, reminiscing what happened. Marcus' grin, his dirty hands on me. My screams, my wolf begging for help. I never imagined my mate could have been... hearing me, feeling my despair. I understand his anger. He is not just mad for no reason. It's not like he wanted any of this. I get it. Damian had to endure it for years. Not being able to do anything, feeling my wolf's suffering day after day. And now, this... He must have been mad, so mad... But not mad at me. At them. Once I realize that, I shake my head. He is boiling with anger, but all I can feel is sadness. I'm feeling guilty that he had to endure all my hardships

with me. How can he not hate my Clan? All of this, everything that happened is so wrong! And with what happened... I shiver, overthrown by disgust. Alec tried to sell me to Marcus. I fought all I could, and I escaped somehow. What if I didn't make it? If I didn't protect myself, what if Marcus had...? I would have been destroyed entirely inside, and Damian would have felt it, too.

I'm the one being unfair to him. He's been powerless, in the dark for years, and all I've done is push him away every time he wanted answers. Protecting my pack from Damian's wrath seemed right until now, but they deserve his anger and payback as much as mine. I look up to him and try to stop my frenetic sobbing.

"...Marcus Sickels."

"Who?" Asks Damian with a frown, putting his hands on my shoulders again, more gently this time.

"The guy who assaulted me. His name is Marcus Sickels, from my Jade Moon pack, but... Damian, I think he might be dead."

The fog is clearing up. The blood on my dress, on my hands... Oh, my goddess. I think I... Suddenly, I feel nauseous, like I'm about to collapse. Black and white dots cover my vision. I stagger, but Damian notices it right away, and his hands catch me before I fall.

“Nora? Nora, what’s wrong? You... Nora! Nora! Shit, Tonia!”

All my strength has left me at once. I hear rushing steps and panicked voices around me. They grab my wrist, and I lean against someone’s chest. Damian’s reassuring smell gets to me, and I wish I could get even closer to my mate, where my wolf could feel safe.

“Her blood pressure is low, Boss; she needs to lie down.”

I feel him carrying me, and a loud growl. Then, I feel something soft beneath me as he lays me cautiously on my bed.

“Bobo, go grab some of yesterday’s leftovers, she needs to eat something. And some water.”

“I’ll call the hospital.”

“No need, Boss, Nora just fainted from fatigue. That’s too many emotions for her today, and Bobo said she barely ate anything this morning. She just needs some rest. If anything, you could ask Nathaniel to have something nutritious delivered.”

“Okay.”

I feel cold hands on my arms, palpating me, and I feel a bit better from lying down. I somehow manage to open my eyes, and Tonia smiles at me. She is putting some blood pressure monitor on my wrist.

“Hey, baby girl. Stay with us, okay? Let’s see your tension.”

The device makes some weird beeping sounds, and Tonia doesn’t look too satisfied with the result while she takes it off.

“Yeah, not in top shape today. You are staying in bed for the rest of the day, baby girl.”

I don’t feel too good, either. My head is not spinning anymore, but it’s like all strength has left my body. I want to close my eyes again, but I’m worried about Damian. I don’t know where he is, I can only hear him, somewhere not far, speaking French. I feel something large and fluffy, hopping on the bed next to my legs.

“It’s just Bobo, baby girl, he’s going to keep you warm.”

I manage to nod, feeling a bit better. At least, I can stay awake without too much effort or feeling numb all over. I feel Tonia’s hand patting my head, and Damian comes back into my vision field.

“How’s she?”

“She is okay, Boss, just tired a bit. Nora, you think you can eat something?”

The three of them help me get a bit of yesterday’s dinner, and then Tonia insists they let me rest. I do feel tired...

When I wake up, I immediately realize I’m not alone. Someone’s arms are wrapping me, and another pair of legs are on top of the sheets. I feel warm, and this is the first time I ever woke up and instantly felt so secure. I recognize Damian’s smell, and vaguely remember collapsing in the living room.

“How do you feel?”

His mouth is close to my ear, I can’t help but blush a little. I wish I could hide somewhere, but I feel his chest against my back, and there’s no way I could even move a toe without him knowing. At least I’m glad he can’t see my face. Is it okay for him to hold me like this? He even avoided seeing me before, and now we are, well, sleeping on the same bed...

“Much better.”

It’s true. I’m still a bit numb, but my head isn’t spinning, and I don’t feel too tired anymore. However, I don’t really want to get up right now. Lying

next to my mate feels so warm, so right, and my wolf is almost purring. I wonder how he is holding up, being so close.

“Is this... really okay?” I ask, hoping he understands what I mean.

“...Don’t ask.”

I can’t help but giggle a little, hearing his grumble. He must be fighting against his instincts like crazy right now. I’m grateful for that. It feels so good to be lying next to him... Being close to my mate feels like I will never feel incomplete again... And it makes me want more.

I don’t want to act greedy now; I know it’s not the moment. But that closeness with Damian is something I will want more of again. I remember how I sometimes envied the mated couples of my pack... The girls always looked so loved and happy whenever their loved ones were in the same room. It’s so rare for a fated couple to be able to find each other—most werewolves live their whole life hoping to find their mate. Some give up at some point and get married anyway, and others run miles to search for the One. And some just don’t get the ending they hoped for...

“What is it?” He asks.

“I was just thinking... You could have rejected me. If you did, our bond would have been severed and ...You could have lived your life normally.”

“No.”

His firm tone surprises me, and I wonder why he was so set on not abandoning me. I am still missing pieces of this puzzle... A long silence follows, but I must ask.

“Damian... How did you know about me? Tonia told me. It’s not only that you felt our bond, but you already knew exactly what I looked like. How come?”

He sighs, and I feel him move to bury his face into my hair, his forehead on my shoulder. One of his arms is under my head, the other around my waist, and both suddenly hold me tighter against him. This closeness makes me blush even more, and I can feel my wolf getting agitated. She likes it, but she somehow wants more. Hush girl, we are talking about some serious stuff right now!

“...We’ve met before,” he whispers.

“It can’t be. My wolf didn’t feel anything like a bond before I saw you at the hospital, she had never met you.”

“That’s because you were too young. Your wolf wasn’t awakened yet. Mine was. He recognized you right away, even if our bond was one way at that time.”

The age gap. I hadn’t thought about that... Most werewolves only start feeling their wolf-self for the first time around seven to ten-years-old, a few months before they begin shapeshifting. Before then, we are just like humans. No enhanced sense of smell, no night vision, no mind-linking to our pairs... And no way to recognize our mates even if they’re right in front of us. But I didn’t know we could bond even if our mate isn’t awakened yet. Doesn’t that mean the bond is that strong? How impressive...

“How old were we then?”

“I was fourteen... You were about to turn seven.”

“We have a seven-year-old difference?” I ask, surprised.

I did guess he was twenty-four or older since he was older than Nathaniel, but still, it’s amusing to hear it! He growls, a bit annoyed.

“Six years and three months.”

“...You even know my birth date?”

“December third. You told me back then.”

Then why can't I remember it at all? Well, I was young, indeed, but... I would have sworn I had never seen his silver eyes before. Moreover, it somehow explains the digit code...

“How did we meet?”

I wait a long moment, but he doesn't answer. Did he fall asleep? I try to turn around to face him, but he stops me, still holding me tight in his embrace.

“Damian?”

“I'll tell you some other time.”

“...Why?”

“It's... It's not a happy memory. For neither of us. I just don't want to reminisce now, Nora. Some other time, I'll tell you, I promise.”

Not a happy memory? But I want to know! Why can't I simply remember it... I thought my “unhappy” memories started when I was seven, when

we lost our parents... I wonder what Damian would say if he knew about that tragedy. My worst memory so far... with Marcus' episode. I shiver.

“What is it?”

“Nothing, I just thought about the man that tried to...”

“Don't worry, I swear we'll get him. Liam sent the hunters to get him, wherever he is hiding. Alive or not, we will find him.”

I had forgotten I finally gave Marcus' name to Damian. I am aware that by doing so, I basically condemned the guy to death, but I have no pity for that rapist. And I will feel safer once he's caught. I wish we could at least know for sure if he's dead or alive... The memories from before I fainted come back to me, and I move my hands to find Damian's. I weave my fingers with his, looking for some strength.

“Damian, I... I think I stabbed him.”

“...What do you remember?” He asks softly.

“I tried to defend myself. He grabbed me and tore my dress. I remember scratching his face, and him slapping me. We fought, my wolf was going nuts, and I almost lost control. I think... I think he grabbed me by the hair at some point; he wanted to take me away from the entrance because...”

because I screamed. I... I think he took me to a kitchen, and I took a... a knife and I..."

I stop, unable to say one more word. I felt Damian's anger on the rise as I was reminiscing, but I didn't stop. I feel like if I didn't tell him now, I would never be able to talk about it again, to anyone. He holds me tight, breathing in with his face buried in my hair. His closeness is the most comforting thing I have ever experienced, but that doesn't wash away the guilt.

Moon Goddess, I really stabbed someone. I'm a criminal. I could be charged for assault, or punished by the packs... Feeling my distress, his thumb gently caresses my skin.

"Nora, it's okay. It's okay. I swear, I won't let anything like this happen ever again to you, Nora. I swear to you."

I feel Damian's lips on my shoulder, but I can't help but cry bitterly. I don't want to be a murderer; I didn't mean to hurt him. I just didn't want him to touch me. I keep crying silently, soothed by Damian's voice, whispering to me until I go back to sleep again.

I drowsily wake up, but it doesn't feel like that much time has passed since I talked with Damian. What time is it? I turn my head to my bedroom window, and it's dusk. I slept the whole afternoon, how embarrassing...

And now there's no way I'll go back to sleep tonight. I realize that Damian's gone, but Bobo is there, sleeping on the floor.

"Bobo?"

He raises his head immediately and walks up to me. He puts his big head on my mattress.

"I really hope you brushed your teeth since you chomped that arm, Bobo," I sigh with a frown.

Gosh, that was disgusting to even remember.

Where is our mate?

I sit up, shocked to hear my wolf. I can feel her so clearly now! She is sniffing around for Damian's smell, and I find myself doing the same thing unknowingly. What a sensation... I can read in her as clearly as I can think now. I think she's grey... Or no, maybe even white. She doesn't mind Bobo's presence, she likes him, but she wishes it was Damian. And I can smell Tonia's not far, too. How strange.

Bobo lets out a short, low-pitched sound, and I know he asks if I'm okay. I wouldn't call it a sentence, more like a... feeling. It doesn't come as

precisely as if we were mind-linked, but my wolf still understands what he means to say for me.

“I’m okay, Bobo. I... I can feel my wolf!”

He tilts his head to the side, his tail wagging a bit like a curious dog. I just want to enjoy this new range of sensations. It feels different, yet the same. As if I had just awakened a sixth sense, or a second me, no matter how weird that sounds. I breathe in deeply. She is checking out our environment, and I feel it through her. The smell of fresh sheets, and some lavender coming from the wardrobes. Bobo mostly smells like food and dead leaves. No smell of blood, thankfully. She picks up something good ... cold chicken and onion soup? I look around me and notice a closed Tupperware on the nightstand.

Now that I think about it, I’m starving. We both are. But as I reach out to grab the cold soup, something weird holds me back from my ankle. ...Did I just hear a metallic sound?

I frown and push away the sheets to look at my legs. ...What the hell...?

“Damian!” I yell, too shocked to say anything else.

Instead of him, Tonia rushes into the room, alerted by my screaming. She has changed into dark jeans and a sports bra, and her hair is all over the

place. She walks to my bed to try and check me with a worried look, but I push her away.

“Baby girl, are you okay?”

“No, I’m not! Tonia, why the hell am I chained to the bed!”

I’m totally panicking right now. A shackle is running from one of the bed’s feet to my ankle, with a big leather bracelet holding it up. Why the hell am I chained to this bed? I look at Tonia, trying to get a decent, logical answer to what is going on, but she just seems uneasy.

“Nora, I... Sorry, I couldn’t stop him...”

“Tonia? ...Don’t tell me this is Damian’s idea.”

Her silence is more than eloquent for me, but I can’t believe it. Is Damian crazy? Why would he chain me to the bed like a dog! I try to force on it, but of course, it won’t go off. He can’t do this to me! I get out of bed, only to realize the chain is about ten feet long, just enough for me to reach my bathroom. I take my head in my hands, unable to believe what’s happening.

“Nora, are you okay?”

“I’m not, Tonia! Why would he do this? I’m chained to a bed!”

She really looks sorry, exchanging glances with her brother.

“I swear I tried to stop him, Nora, but he didn’t listen. He said he doesn’t want you out until they have caught that guy, Marcus.”

Oh, my Goddess, is it because of what I told him? Did he freak out because I told him the details of when Marcus assaulted me? I remember his last words before I fell asleep. He really meant it. He won’t let me out until they have caught him. But he didn’t have to chain me to that bed like some animal! I try pulling on it, but Tonia intervenes to stop me.

“Stop, stop, Nora, calm down. You really shouldn’t be moving around so much when you collapsed earlier...”

“Tonia, I don’t care! I don’t want to be chained! Not by Damian or anyone else! Where is he?”

“He had to go back to work. He left about half an hour ago...”

“Call him,” I order her with a clear voice.

I won't calm down until I can talk to him. Tonia sighs but takes out her phone. I'm so angry, I'm almost shaking right now. She gives me her phone, and within a minute, Damian is at the end of the line.

"What is it?" He asks coldly.

"Damian, you can't chain me to a damn bed!"

"...I'm in a meeting right now."

"I don't care!" I yell. "You just can't do this! You undo it right now! I can't believe you did something that crazy to me!"

"You are safe where you are, Nora. I don't want to risk you sneaking out on Tonia and Bobo again and getting yourself in danger."

"Damian, I promise I won't do that again without telling you. I swear. But I don't want you to force me like this. I don't want to be chained like a dog!"

"No."

"Damian!"

But he hangs up on me without letting me finish. I let out a scream of frustration. How can he do this to me! I know I shouldn't have snuck out, but that doesn't mean he can go ahead and do something like this to me!

Tonia is nervously playing with one of her braids, visibly feeling sorry about the situation.

“Tonia, do you have a key to this thing? Answer me honestly.”

“No, baby girl, I swear I don't. The Boss knows I was against this, so he won't trust us with a spare key.”

“Bobo, can you break this bed?”

He lets out a growl and shakes his head. I can't blame him. This thing is obviously too big, but I had to ask. I sigh. I can't believe this...

I need a clear head. I grab new clothes in the closet and head to the bathroom. It really is long enough for me to take a shower with this horrendous thing still hanging on my ankle, but it's a real pain to take my clothes off, even for a dress. I take my time in the bathroom, washing my hair and body with cold water to try and think. I'm too angry to make good decisions right now. I keep thinking about what to do. I can't let Damian do this. I know how stubborn he is, but I just can't let him win. I understand I went too far, but this is not security, this is a punishment.

I get out of the shower and start dressing up. I randomly picked some black lingerie, but I realize this shackle is a nightmare to even put my panties on! I can somehow manage to pass the underwear through the hole, but that means I can't wear pants if I have this thing on! By chance, I choose a sweater dress that I can put on with no difficulties, but I'm still mad!

I glare at my reflection in the mirror, with my wild black curls falling all over my shoulders. I look like an angry lion, but I also realize my eye color has slightly changed. From a natural dark blue, my wolf's recent awakening has given it a new shine, like two sapphires. Even if I like this change, it doesn't minimize my anger one bit. I'm not going to go along with this change. ...But what should I do?

"...I don't understand," says Tonia. "You can get mad like this at the Boss, the most powerful wolf in the City, but you let your pack abuse you for years? What's wrong with you?"

"It's not the same fight," I sigh.

And I know this won't be an easy one either...

"Nora, please."

I keep ignoring him, sitting as far as I can on the bed, watching the sunset outside. It's already been two days, but I won't give in.

"Nora, I don't mind if you give me the silent treatment, but you have to eat. Please."

I'd rather starve than allow this. I need Damian to realize that. I tried yelling, begging, crying, but since putting myself in danger is the only way to make him react... I'm never going to allow this. I need him to understand how mad I am. He hasn't been violent, but this isn't any better than the days I was locked up in a basement.

With Bobo lying behind me, like a big cushion, I feel a bit better despite the hunger and dizziness I'm trying to fight off.

I know Damian is mad at me for doing this to myself. But he doesn't have any right to do this. He's torn between the fear of losing me to someone else, to a pack that wants to hurt me, and seeing me like this.

"Nora, look at me, please."

I finally turn to him, and I can see the horror in his eyes. I've lost weight. More than I can afford. I see him try to breathe, calm himself. He takes my hand, and I don't fight him. I don't have the strength to push him off, to be honest. He brings them closer and slowly kisses my palm. I can't hold back a smile. He's about to surrender; I know it. He understands.

I'm starting to understand how hard it is for him. To let go, to trust me. Damian is a man who controls absolutely everything around him, including his family. But I won't give him that power over me, and it... terrifies him. If he could, he'd probably lock me away just like this forever, in his golden tower. He sighs, and his hand goes to the shackle. He uses his strength and tears it in a few seconds with an annoying metallic sound.

"...Thank you," I whisper.

I caress his cheek. I'm strangely proud of him. I know I should be angry, but I don't have enough strength left for that. I see all the craziness in his eyes. His fear, his anger, his love for me.

"Boss, she needs to eat..."

"Leave us."

Tonia and Bobo exit the room without discussion.

We keep staring at each other for a long, long time. Until the sun sets, until it's completely dark outside. After a long while, I smile.

“Damian, I promise I won’t leave again without telling you. But you can’t, ever, do that to me again. Don’t restrain me. It’s like I’m back in that basement all over again.”

His eyes darken, hearing my words. I know how much Damian suffered from all that happened to me, but it’s over now. He finally nods and leans forward to kiss my forehead.

“Don’t do something like that again, Nora. Take Bobo and Tonia with you, and tell me, or Nathaniel.”

“So, you are okay with me going out again?” I ask.

Why does this feel like such a victory? I’m so happy, my heart goes wild. I see him frown.

“Yes, I am, if you just promise me to not do such a reckless thing ever again. Don’t let these people hurt you again, Nora.”

“I won’t, I swear. All I want is for you to trust me. Look.”

I place a bit more space between the two of us, and focus on my breathing, closing my eyes. I hear my clothes tearing up and slowly, let my inner wolf take over in front of his eyes. I shapeshift completely into this pure, white wolf. He smiles, amazed.

“You’re beautiful...” He whispers.

I come closer, using my four paws, and he caresses me. His eyes are on my paws, and slowly, he seems to understand.

“You could have left anytime... If you shapeshifted, you would have been thin enough to...”

I chuckle internally, happy he realized that. I see his eyes widen when he understands this was all on purpose, to show him that if he wants me to trust him, he needs to trust me first. I hesitate a bit before shapeshifting back again, so we can talk. He closes his eyes and hands me his shirt right away. I blush and put it over my naked body quickly.

“Thank you,” I say, blushing a bit.

“Nora, don’t let anyone hurt you again. You’re strong.”

I nod, agreeing entirely with him. Things are certainly different now. I have people supporting me, and my wolf finally awoke. I’m no longer defenseless. Damian seems about to say something but, he looks at me again and, before I can say anything, he suddenly grabs my waist and draws me into a kiss.

I can't believe it. Damian's lips are on mine, and he is kissing me so passionately, my breath can barely keep up. And yet, I want more. I respond to his kiss, my hands on his torso, my whole body on fire. His grip on my waist brings me even closer to him, sitting on his lap, and his fingers in my hair are making me crazy. I'm losing control. I need him like I need air, I crave for more each second his lips are on mine.

It's not a sweet, innocent kiss. Damian is passionate, claiming his hold on me, wanting me. Our bodies entangle dangerously, and I can feel a wildfire igniting inside me. I'm... Gosh, I'm going insane. I didn't know I could be so indecent, but here I am, responding to Damian's kiss with all my might. My clumsy hands are on his neck and on his bare torso. It's almost like my wolf has taken over. I'm so... reckless and hot all over. The taste of his lips, his hard breathing, and his hands all over my body are driving me crazy.

Suddenly, he interrupts our kiss and pushes me on the bed, holding my wrists down. We are both panting, looking into each other's eyes.

“Okay, stop, stop, Nora. If we keep going...”

I nod. I know, I felt his wolf going crazy. I can barely hold mine, too. She might be ready, but I don't think I am. I mean... I'm not sure about it. I just know I feel like I went through Hell and Heaven altogether, but I know my wolf is also doing her share, too. She is so excited that I don't know how I feel myself anymore. I need a clear head, and for now, I'm

just dizzy. I need to catch my breath. Gosh, I must be so red from blushing...

“Sorry, I...”

But I don’t know what to say. Everything’s so confusing right now. Damian leans on me and kisses me, a quick, innocent one this time.

“Stay there. You really need to eat something. I’ll go get Tonia.”

He could just use their mind-link to ask her, but we both know it’s best to put some distance between us for now. He exits, or should I say escapes the room quickly. I’m such a mess right now! I must be red from blushing, and I can barely catch my breath. I sit up, pulling Damian’s t-shirt down, and put my fingers in my hair to try and brush it roughly.

Oh my gosh, I can’t believe what just happened. I feel like I just got off an emotional roller-coaster. My heart is beating like crazy, and my wolf is not acting any more decent either. I can’t stop smiling. I’m happy I finally managed to get Damian to understand and trust me, but... I didn’t expect what followed! I was so glad to show him my wolf form, but I couldn’t possibly have imagined he would... kiss me next!

“Nora?”

Tonia just came back, carrying a table tray. I feel so embarrassed facing her after what just happened, and I just have a t-shirt on! It's big enough to cover up to my thighs, but still! I go to grab a new outfit from one of the wardrobes and run to the bathroom.

"Nora, I know that t-shirt!" She laughs. "You naughty girl!"

This is so embarrassing I could die, though I do try to ignore her laughing while I get dressed up. I grabbed a blue denim skirt and a white top that match my taste. Once I'm a bit more decent, I look at myself in the mirror. My hair is a bit all over the place, and my cheeks are bright red, but it's not that bad.

When I exit the bathroom, I flee straight to the bed and stubbornly concentrate on my lunch to ignore Tonia's amused glances.

"Well, happy to see you feeling better, baby girl. Bobo was worried, too, you know."

At least she doesn't look like she will try to ask difficult questions. I catch a bit more rest in the main room after eating while Damian left to go back to work. He said goodbye with a surprisingly innocent and swift kiss, but just remembering it makes me blush, too. Bobo volunteers to accompany my nap on the couch.

When I wake up again, it's dinner time. Bobo is snoring loudly at my feet, curled up like a giant, furry ball. I get up and join Tonia in the kitchen, but to my surprise, she is not alone. Nathaniel smiles at me as soon as I come in, dressed in a formal shirt and dark jeans, his blonde hair shining like he just stepped out of some magazine. How can the Black brothers be so handsome, all three of them?

"Hello, princess. How are you feeling today?"

"Much better, thanks. Are you staying for dinner?" I ask as I walk over the counter to check what's left in the fridge.

"No, princess, I'm just dropping by. I was hoping we could talk a little."

I frown and close the fridge. What does Nathaniel want to talk about? He may be smiling, but I can tell he's pretty serious. I walk over and sit at the table next to him. Tonia brings us drinks, and I know she wants to listen, too.

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Remember, you mentioned you wanted to work?"

I nod, intrigued. I did more than mention it, considering the argument I had with Damian that night, but I didn't think Nathaniel would be the one to bring that matter on the table again. He gives me a reassuring smile.

“Well, I've discussed this with Damian, and I wanted to know if you would be interested in working at one of my restaurants, La Rose de L'Aube. You could have a trial period there and see if you like it.”

“Are you serious...?”

I'm so shocked, I can barely breathe. I can't believe Nathaniel is offering me a job! He laughs at my surprised expression.

“Yes, I am, Nora. I happen to be short on staff now, and as we both know, my brother wants you somewhere we can watch you. My restaurant is secure enough for that, and I know you have a knack for French cuisine, so, isn't this perfect?”

“But you've never seen me at work before! And to get such an offer...”

Even I have heard of that restaurant! Of course, I didn't know who it belonged to, but La Rose de L'Aube is famous for being one of the top restaurants of Silver City. I only have experience as a waitress in a pub and cooking for a pack! Nathaniel laughs at my confused expression.

“Don’t worry, Nora. As I said, just give it a try! No pressure, princess, it’s all up to you. You can take your time, and when you’ve made your decision, you’ll give me your answer next week, okay?”

I nod, but I’m still going to need some time to process this. It’s like having my dream job served on a plate! It feels too good to be true, and in a certain way, it is. But I know of Damian and his brothers’ influence. It is not an exaggeration to say they own half of the city. Liam did mention his brother had several hotels and restaurants to manage. Finding a spot in one of them probably was a piece of cake. But still, it is hard to believe how lucky I am!

“Nora? There is something else we need to discuss.”

He looks a bit more serious this time. He puts his hands before him, taking a thinking pose for a second, searching for his words. Then, he looks at me in the eye, not smiling for once.

“We are facing a... rather odd issue. Damian and I looked into the city records, trying to get to know more about you.”

When they were searching for my Clan, I suppose. It is probably no surprise, either, that they can freely run through the city’s classified documents to get information on someone. It must be as simple as walking in a library for them. But what would be the problem with my legal information? The city records should hold every citizen's data, such as our

birth date, the city of origin, and parents. The night creatures like werewolves also can access some information concerning the Moon Clans we are related to this way. But I don't see where there might be an issue on any of these.

Nathaniel frowns, and takes out several documents that I have never seen before.

“When you told us your name was Nora Bluemoon, we started looking for you. My brother knew your birth date, and I originally thought we would be able to discover your background information quite easily. But we didn't.”

What? I don't get it. How could they not find a single piece of information about me? I look at the documents scattered. Register of births from 1995 to 2003, list of family names established in Silver City since the eighteenth century, several Clans registers, and a few family trees with names similar to mine.

“What do you mean?” I ask, confused.

“That means there is absolutely no trace of your existence, nowhere, Nora. Legally, you have no records in any of these documents. You should be in at least half of them, but you are not. No girl named Nora was born in 2000 or any of the years around it. There is no family name like Bluemoon

registered in Silver City, and you are not even mentioned as part of the Jade Moon Clan!”

I look at him, dumbfounded. How is that even possible? I have never lived anywhere else as far as I can remember, so how can this city records be utterly unaware of my existence? I check the documents he’s brought, trying to find some clue, anything to prove he’s wrong, but after a few minutes, I have to admit Nathaniel’s right.

I don’t appear anywhere.

“...How is that even possible?” I ask.

Nathaniel frowns.

“I’m not sure, princess. It seems like your existence has been concealed from the very first moment you were born.”

“But why would someone hide her birth?” Asks Tonia, perplexed.

I have no idea... The Jade Moon Clan was simply ignoring my existence so they could use me as a slave and could not have been bothered about it. But I should still have some legal presence somewhere, shouldn’t I? If so, then what is this?

“...What about Alec?” I suddenly ask.

Nathaniel frowns.

“You mean your older brother?”

“Yes. Alec was born in 1997, did you find any trace of him?”

“Not in the Jade Moon Clan’s registers, but we can find him somewhere else...”

He grabs the 1997 births register, and we quickly go through it, when I finally spot him.

“Here! Born on October 3rd, Alec... Blackwood?”

That’s the right birthdate and first name, but why is his last name different? It doesn’t make sense. I know my last name! Bluemoon, Nora Bluemoon! I grab the 2000 births register, thinking I may have missed something. Maybe my name was misspelled, or I was registered as... Blackwood, like Alec. But after checking twice, still nothing. No name even remotely similar to Nora Bluemoon or even Nora Blackwood. There

is a Luce Norwood, born in early October, and a Janice Bell in January, but those two are the closest I could find.

“Alec Blackwood,” reads Nathaniel, who’s still looking over the 1997 register. “Firstborn son of Stephen Blackwood and spouse Alice Blackwood, born Alice Frost. It says your parents got married in June the same year.”

I nod. Those are the names of my parents! So why am I not registered under their names like Alec? I can’t believe it!

“Do you know of the Blackwood family?” I ask Tonia.

“There are a few Blackwood, in the Gold Moon and Rising Moon Clans mostly. It’s a rather common last name for werewolves.”

Nathaniel and I both grab each Clan’s register and start looking. I find it first and show them. My parents and brother are indeed in the Gold Moon’s Clan register, along with a long line of ancestors.

“Do you remember living in this Pack?” Asks Nathaniel.

I shake my head.

“No, I was too young. Our parents died when I was seven, and Alec and I lived in the slums until the Jade Moon Clan took us in a few months later... I don’t remember much before that.”

The trauma of my parents’ death is still lingering somewhere in my mind, but I really don’t want to think about it now. All of this is unbelievable! How can I be totally omitted from all of those documents? Did my parents not record my birth? If we were part of the Gold Moon Clan, I should have been registered like any of their pack’s children!

Nathaniel sighs and grabs those documents back. He tries to give me a reassuring smile, but I’m too confused right now.

“Don’t worry, princess, there must be a logical explanation. For now, let’s not focus on this, ok? I will try to look deeper into this. At least we now know your parents’ names, and we are still looking for your brother. Maybe he will be able to help you understand some parts of your story you didn’t know about.”

I nod, but I still don’t know what to believe about Alec. I didn’t mention to anyone yet that my brother tried to sell me to Marcus. I don’t know what Liam understood from my conversation with Liz, but for now, Nathaniel and Damian don’t seem to know about it, and it might be best to keep it that way until we find Alec. He is still my brother, after all. I hope he is still in the area, and we can talk things out.

I get up, trying to process everything that just happened, and Tonia and Nathaniel are thoughtful enough to give me a moment. They start chatting about trivial matters, making it visible they are changing the topic on purpose.

I make myself some herbal tea, trying to calm myself.

“Nora? I still have one more thing to discuss with you, princess.”

I come back to Nathaniel, my cup in one hand, and he smiles as I sit facing him again.

“About?”

“The Jade Moon Clan.”

I had forgotten about that matter. Nathaniel did leave them with an unambiguous warning, and summoned Vincent as the Alpha for a fight in five... No, four days now? This is going to be dangerous. People from other Clans might even come and watch, and the Jade Moon Clan's turf is exceptionally well located, and thus, envied by others.

“You challenged Vincent for the Alpha position. Are you going to fight him yourself? Do you really want to take over our Clan?” I ask.

He has a sneer on for a second, looking at me with a mysterious expression. What is he thinking now?

“No, Nora. I thought you would fight this Alpha to take over the Jade Moon Clan.”

...Excuse me?