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I open up my eyes suddenly, feeling completely awake. I find myself still in Damian's embrace, in the very same position we both fell asleep. It's still night time behind him. What time can it be? I wonder why I'm awake so early.

I don't feel like moving, though. It feels so warm under the blanket, and I'm surrounded by my mate's smell. We are so close... When we are next to each other like this, I'm not scared at all. On the contrary, I feel safe like never before. So why do I get so scared when Damian wants me?

It's our mate.

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

My fingers go down on his torso, careful not to wake up my man. Sometimes I forget he is six years older than me. He is a full, grown-up man, while I still feel like a child. I don't find myself desirable. I'm thin, with barely any curves, and small b.reasts. Not to mention my scar...

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

While lost in my thoughts, I sense Damian moving next to me. He takes my hand that was wandering on his c.hest, and brings it to his I!ps to k!ss it without opening his eyes.

"Sorry. Did I wake you?"

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

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

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

"Yes."

His immediate and definite reply takes me by surprise.

"But we were just kids..."

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

"Mind and body?"

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

"I was thinking that I'm... I'm not... desirable."

He opens his eyes, looking at me for the first time today. He moves, shifting to stand on his arms above me. He leans to give me a long, deep k!ss. Slowly, his l!ps take mine over, and I respond unconditionally. When he stops, he is smiling again.

"Moon Goddess, you are desirable, Nora. That's why I want you so bad."

He goes down, landing soft k!sses on my neck, and I feel one of his hands grabbing gently my wa!st. I let him do so, without moving, just closing my eyes and enjoying this. Is it because it's Damian that this feels so good? I'm shivering under his I!ps, but it's from pleasure this time. I don't feel any fear, just this slow fire burning on my skin wherever he touches me. I can tell he is hesitating, watching my reactions. But I really am not afraid the slightest this time. So, I put my hand on his neck, gently stroking his hair while his k!sses keep coming.

I feel his large hand adventuring lower. He caresses my leg, my bare skin shivering under his fingers. Damian is deliberately acting gentle and cautious, and I love it. But that fire under my skin is not calming down. I caress his cheek and come to claim a k!ss from him. He seems a bit surprised, but he doesn't resist it. His fingers go up again, shifting from my leg to my wa!st, under the shirt this time. I gasp and don't resist it. I can barely breathe, this is so intense and thrilling. I claim more of Damian's I!ps, and I feel his hand hesitate a bit before he starts fondling my b.reast. Oh, my gosh.... Damian's hand is really touching me this way, and I like it, I really do. So much that I

hear my own breathing accelerating on its own, and my heartbeat quickens without warning. This is how it is supposed to be. Thrilling, intimate. Something we both really want. I gather my courage and start k!ssing his neck, right where his tattoo is. I can feel his reaction: a shiver of pleasure. His hand runs through my hair, grabbing it and playing with my curls between his fingers. The other hand leaves my b.reast, to adventure further down....

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

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

"I might really kick his a*s this time," growls Damian.

I can't help but chuckle a bit at his annoyed expression. Liam is so.... Oh, well. Never mind. I still k!ss Damian's cheek quickly to stop him from frowning. My mate growls a bit, but he eventually sighs and k!sses me back.

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

"You looked okay."

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

"That's really good to hear, then. Stay in bed a bit longer, I'm going to take a shower really quick and then we can feed that annoying brother of mine."

"Okay."

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

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

Hey Nora, Bobo's here. He got you some clothes.

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

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

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

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

He hands me a large bag with the name of a brand Tonia loves on it. All I remembered from that brand is that they only had three digits price tags.

"New clothes?"

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

He is right on that one... I don't even feel like I could step into that apartment ever again. I inspect the bag's contents, but as usual, Tonia played dolls with me. At least she is definitely starting to know my tastes. A lot of those clothes are ones that I could have picked myself or in colors I like.

"Thank you, Bobo, this is perfect."

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

"What about me? I don't even get a morning h.ug?" Yells Liam from the living room.

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

Nope. I still think this is a really bad idea.

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

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

"Just for a while. He is too annoying sometimes."

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

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

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

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

"Yeah. Can I skip them?"

Damian clicks his tongue, and Liam forgets about skipping his classes right away.

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

"What, I'm playing bodyguard now?"

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

"Yeah, yeah, got it..."

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

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

"It's Neal, I have to go... You two, don't leave Nora. See you later, Love."

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

Liam, please.

I said no, Nora! This is way too dangerous!"

"What is it?" Asks Bobo

I decide to explain to him my plan, though I don't mention the witch on purpose. Even though it's actually hard to remember to ignore the b.utterfly on my shoulder since Liam and Bobo can't see it. When I am done, Bobo is frowning.

"I don't like it either, Nora. This is risky."

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

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

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

While the restaurant surprisingly functions just as usual despite yesterday's events, I'm still thinking about how to go to the Sapphire Moon territory. I have a location, but I am not confident at all about crossing at least two werewolf territories to go there on my own. That's why I really was hoping Liam would help me.

When it's finally time for my break, I go to the changing room, and, to my surprise, I got a text from Liam.

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

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I re-read Liam's text, but even with those conditions of his, that won't stop me. I'm tired of being useless and overprotected. I realize my appearance has

changed a lot of things for Damian and his Clan. This time, with the witch's help, I can finally do something.

But Liam is right. So far, I barely know anything about the Sapphire Moon Clan. And I am not reckless enough to go there without any information about where I am going. So, when I resume work, I try to interrogate Elise and Kathy as we keep working.

Fortunately, both girls' att!tudes didn't change at all after what happened yesterday. Most of my co-workers had no clue about my background until now. But after yesterday's events and Damian barging in the restaurant yelling my name, some of the staff changed their att!tudes towards me. Apparently, being the Alpha King's fated mate is something scary enough that some of them don't even dare ask anything of me anymore. I don't really mind, though, because Chef Michel and Narcissa have no problem ordering me around as usual. I don't feel like I'm working less or privileged, just that some of the staff members are wary of me. I try not to mind since that is bound to happen eventually since I am with Damian.

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

"Tough question, Nora, they are a very secretive Clan, you know," says Elise.

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

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

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

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

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

"Now that you mention it..."

We place everything we are carrying for the Commis to take care of, but instead of going out of the kitchen, Kathie takes me to the staff's meeting room. A couple of the guys from the kitchen staff are having a break, chatting and laughing around cups of coffee and some leftovers.

"Hey Mikey, you got a second?"

One of the guys, a dark-skinned man in his twenties, raises his head and gives her a smile. "I even got a full minute for you, sweetheart."

He stands up and walks up to us. I know Mickey, he is one of the sous-chefs usually in charge of cooking the fish dishes; I've helped him a couple of times. He is great at his job, and really passionate, too. He is young, but a student of Chef Michel. He stands at the door with his coffee.

"What's up, ladies?"

"Mickey, didn't your sister marry into the Violet Moon Clan last year? Nora was curious about the Sapphire Moon Clan; do you know about them?"

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

"Anything? But mostly, why do they hate the Blood Moon Clan so much? And even the other Clans? I heard the Violet Moon Clan is the only one they trust, is that true?"

Mickey nods, and takes a sip of his coffee before answering. "I don't know the details. I will just tell you what my big sis said. Apparently, the Sapphire Moon came from the North about fifty or sixty years ago. They came here with a large pack, and though they had a lot of wealth, most of the Clans here treated them like rogues and made it hard for them to establish themselves here."

"Except the Violet Moon Clan?" I ask.

"That's the thing. The Violet Moon Clan was three times smaller back then, and they were struggling, too— fighting a lot with the others and everything. That's how they grew to be damn good fighters. So, the only ally they found was the only Clan that was having it harder than they did. Both Clans helped

each other, and they grew stronger together. The Sapphire Moon had money, the Violet Moon had warriors. You can do the math."

Of course. Those two are the most important things for a werewolf pack to survive. If they had it, no doubt the Sapphire and Violet Moon Clans could make it. It also explains a lot their att!tude towards the other Clans, if they resented them for giving them a hard time. Is it why they hated Damian's father so much? Was he already the head fifty years ago?

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

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

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

"That might be hard, it's not a legend that they are hard to approach. I get you are not a member of the pack yet, but that might be worse. I suppose they would consider you as a rogue with no background, and those guys value bl00d over anything else. My sister said they are acting kind of mighty, with the Royals and all."

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

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

"That's great!"

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

"That's great?" Ask Kathie, looking lost.

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

I give him a quick thank-you k!ss on the cheek and run off, leaving the two of them stunned in the Staff Room.

I go back to the changing room, and try to calm down. The witch's b.utterfly acts just as excited as I am, flying all around me. Did he understand what Mickey said, too? I look for my wolf internally, and it's not hard to feel her; she raises her head as soon as I do. She is so in sync with me these days, I forget she is even there sometimes.

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

Great. Now we can go and I am the only one who is going to get k!lled. Awesome

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

Liam!

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

Are you still not done?

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

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

You mean until he realizes we are gone.

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

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

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

"No can do, Princess!"

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

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

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

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

"Since when do you have a girlfriend?!"

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

"But you never said a thing about having a girlfriend!"

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

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

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

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

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

I have to admit, I'm feeling all curious now!

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

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

Judging from where we are headed, the closest I probably ever got to that part of town was probably when fighting with or against the Sea Moon Clan, located in the southeast.

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

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

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

The South, on the contrary, is larger and divided between the Sea Moon Wolves, focused on the sea border, the Violet Moon, and the Sapphire Moon. Of course, the borders are not definite and precise, more like a general idea of who is not supposed to go where. But our wolf instincts clearly tell us when we are somewhere we are not supposed to be.

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

out. We are probably just at the entrance of it, but driving any further into their territory would have been too imprudent.

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

Bobo instinctively comes to place his large body in front of me, growling very loudly in a threatening manner, warning anyone who would try to harm me. Sometimes I forget how large and menacing he can be, but now it is apparently effective enough— some of them don't dare to approach his gigantic figure. Liam, with his Alpha instinct, is not holding back his growling, either. I can't fear his Alpha aura, but I can tell it's here, and pretty intimidating, too, as no one approaches him either.

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

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

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

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

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

Gosh, this is getting nowhere, and I'm starting to get really annoyed, too. Their gathering is not intimidating me the slightest, and all those growls are giving me a headache. So, I deliberately step forward, provoking a new wave of angry growling around me. My inner wolf, pissed at their disrespectful att!tude, starts growling, too. That's right, girl. I click my tongue at them, directing my stare to anyone who is acting hostile.

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

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

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

"You... Which Clan's Alpha are you?" Asks an old man.

"No one. I said it, I don't belong to a pack as of now. I was raised within the Gold Moon Clan as a child, but got lost. The Jade Moon Clan picked me up, but I never belonged to them, either. Now, the Blood Moon Clan is protecting me, but I have yet to join them."

"An Alpha without a pack?"

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

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

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

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

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

While talking, I take out the business card and hold it high enough for all to see. They seem to recognize it immediately. The woman sighs and finally

walks up to me, up until Bobo starts growling, warning her not to come closer. She is only a few steps away now.

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

"My name is Nora, Nora Bluemoon."

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

But I stay silent, leaving her to believe whatever she wants. What is wrong with my last name now? Anyway, I don't have time for this now. Can't we just go already? I don't have all day! Gloria seems lost in her thoughts for a while, but she suddenly turns around and starts walking.

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

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

I know. But at least now we have a chance at getting where we are aimed in the first place, to where their Alpha is. And Damian isn't looking for us yet.

Nora, I think I'm more scared about one angry Damian chasing after us than hundreds of Sapphire Moon wolves trying to k!ll us.

Honestly, I'm pretty much the same. No matter how many people are growling and circling us, I don't feel intimidated, thanks to my Royal Blood. They might as well be kids cheering in the middle of a crowd. But Damian? That's another story.

It actually doesn't take long until we reach a very large house. I expected a company building, but instead, this is more a family house. Not your average household, though. More like the house you could see in a magazine, sparkling white, with a hundred yards large garden, a fancy pool, and a terrace. I count four floors, and so many windows, I bet ten full families could

fit in there. How many millions is such a house worth? I feel out of place just by standing in front!

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

"Just the girl."

"Hell no," immediately says Bobo, growling.

"Bobo, it's okay."

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

I nod, but Bobo is obviously unhappy about this.

"You shouldn't go alone. I'm coming."

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

"Bobo! How stubborn can you be?!"

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

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

She stays silent, but Liam sighs.

"Same for you, Nora. Let's both stay safe, all right?"

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

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

A portrait. A very large portrait, of a woman sitting with a white wolf.

I stay stunned in front of her, unable to speak. Moon Goddess mother, I can't believe it.

Why does that woman resemble me so much?

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

Judging from where we are headed, the closest I probably ever got to that part of town was probably when fighting with or against the Sea Moon Clan, located in the southeast.

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

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

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

The South, on the contrary, is larger and divided between the Sea Moon Wolves, focused on the sea border, the Violet Moon, and the Sapphire Moon. Of course, the borders are not definite and precise, more like a general idea of who is not supposed to go where. But our wolf instincts clearly tell us when we are somewhere we are not supposed to be.

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

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

Bobo instinctively comes to place his large body in front of me, growling very loudly in a threatening manner, warning anyone who would try to harm me. Sometimes I forget how large and menacing he can be, but now it is apparently effective enough— some of them don't dare to approach his gigantic figure. Liam, with his Alpha instinct, is not holding back his growling, either. I can't fear his Alpha aura, but I can tell it's here, and pretty intimidating, too, as no one approaches him either.

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

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

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

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

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

Gosh, this is getting nowhere, and I'm starting to get really annoyed, too. Their gathering is not intimidating me the slightest, and all those growls are giving me a headache. So, I deliberately step forward, provoking a new wave of angry growling around me. My inner wolf, pissed at their disrespectful att!tude, starts growling, too. That's right, girl. I click my tongue at them, directing my stare to anyone who is acting hostile.

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

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

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

"You... Which Clan's Alpha are you?" Asks an old man.

"No one. I said it, I don't belong to a pack as of now. I was raised within the Gold Moon Clan as a child, but got lost. The Jade Moon Clan picked me up, but I never belonged to them, either. Now, the Blood Moon Clan is protecting me, but I have yet to join them."

"An Alpha without a pack?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My name is Nora, Nora Bluemoon."

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

But I stay silent, leaving her to believe whatever she wants. What is wrong with my last name now? Anyway, I don't have time for this now. Can't we just go already? I don't have all day! Gloria seems lost in her thoughts for a while, but she suddenly turns around and starts walking.

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

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

I know. But at least now we have a chance at getting where we are aimed in the first place, to where their Alpha is. And Damian isn't looking for us yet.

Nora, I think I'm more scared about one angry Damian chasing after us than hundreds of Sapphire Moon wolves trying to k!ll us.

Honestly, I'm pretty much the same. No matter how many people are growling and circling us, I don't feel intimidated, thanks to my Royal Blood. They might as well be kids cheering in the middle of a crowd. But Damian? That's another story.

It actually doesn't take long until we reach a very large house. I expected a company building, but instead, this is more a family house. Not your average household, though. More like the house you could see in a magazine, sparkling white, with a hundred yards large garden, a fancy pool, and a terrace. I count four floors, and so many windows, I bet ten full families could fit in there. How many millions is such a house worth? I feel out of place just by standing in front!

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

"Just the girl."

"Hell no," immediately says Bobo, growling.

"Bobo, it's okay."

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

I nod, but Bobo is obviously unhappy about this.

"You shouldn't go alone. I'm coming."

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

"Bobo! How stubborn can you be?!"

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

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

She stays silent, but Liam sighs.

"Same for you, Nora. Let's both stay safe, all right?"

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

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

A portrait. A very large portrait, of a woman sitting with a white wolf.

I stay stunned in front of her, unable to speak. Moon Goddess mother, I can't believe it.

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

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

For a few seconds, I was feeling better seeing that he was willing to listen, but now, I have no idea what to answer to that. He is right, I came here totally empty-handed, with nothing but my thoughts and no way to prove my good intents. I sigh. Why does all of this as to be so complicated?

Come on Nora, think of something. This man cannot be as harsh as his father earlier.

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

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

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

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

"What kind of threats?" I ask.

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

"Why didn't you tell the other packs?! They could have—"

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

Right... Back then, Damian's father was still the Alpha King, and the other packs were all struggling for their own survival. None of the neighboring

Clans, even if they had been willing, would have helped. This is sad, but he is right. They were on their own until now.

"So, this is why you didn't help when the vampires attacked?"

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

"Wait, so you already know what she was after?"

He slowly nods, looking very serious.

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

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

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

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

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

"You are not mated or marked yet."

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

"That's right. But we are fated mates, I swear."

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

Those questions are not addressed to me, and moreover, I don't know what he means to say, so I stay silent. He takes a few steps, walking past Bobo, and I to go sit on the couch. Elbows on his knees, fingers crossed, he raises his eyes to the portrait. He observes the woman for a long while, completely ignoring us. I don't feel any threat coming from him anymore, and Bobo has stopped growling along with my wolf. We just observe his lonely figure facing the painting.

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

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

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

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

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

"My family is a descendant of Royals. The Alphas before me were always so proud of their Royal Blood, but I always thought this didn't mean much nowadays. Just a few droplets, how much more of the Royal Blood could have been conserved after centuries? But that woman..."

He points at the portrait, with a faint smile.

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

"A walking deity?" I ask, a bit confused.

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

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

"Everyone thought the Moon Goddess had been reincarnated, but she just wanted the life of a simple she-wolf. Her younger sister, my grandmother, adored her, too. She had Royal Blood and was called Queen Cynthia, but compared to Diane, that was nothing. But those two were as close as sisters can be. My grandmother was much, much younger than Diane, but her older sister aged very slowly. When Queen Cynthia turned thirty, with a husband and children, Queen Diane was almost fifty years old, but she still looked exactly like this painting: young and beautiful."

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

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

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

William suddenly gets up, and steps closer to the painting.

"When Cynthia asked about a father, Diane said there wasn't any. She always said the very same thing no matter how many times she was questioned.

Queen Diane was preparing her last miracle, a pair of twins growing in her womb without any father. Do you believe it?"

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

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

"What happened to them?"

William sighs, and turns to me.

"When Queen Diane had her children, she said this birth would endanger the whole pack. According to her, her children would have the same characteristics as she did, but that meant they would also become prey for some very dangerous people. Sadly, it turned out to be true. As the children grew, more and more attacks came. From vampires or witches. Dark creatures who were lurking after the power of Moon Goddess' blessed children. The pack protected them as they could, but it was endless. So, Queen Diane, worried for her children, asked my grandmother to seek somewhere safe, somewhere her children could grow in the middle of werewolves, and be protected. My grandmother, Queen Cynthia, listened to her and left, taking half of the pack with her."

So, this is the story of how they came here. Looking for a new place to live, they came from the North, as the Sapphire Moon Clan. As sisters, Diane and Cynthia had equal Alpha ranks, but Diane was the oldest and a blessed child of the Moon Goddess. She was the one with the purest Royal Blood. So, when Queen Cynthia came here, with half of their pack, she could not pretend to be the Alpha of the main Clan. Naturally, this part of the pack that had come with her became a b.ranch Clan, the Sapphire Moon.

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

"What was the original name of your Clan?"

"...The Blue Moon Clan."