

## Chapter 7

As predicted by Tonia, I had quite a fever that day. Too many emotions at once... I slept until the next morning, only waking up a few times to take medicine and eat. More than being sick, I was concerned about Damian not contacting me.

I did act as if I was rejecting him, but that wasn't my intention! I was just scared, that's all. I thought about it all night when I couldn't fall asleep. When morning came, I was well-rested and totally awake. Bobo had slept in my room, back to usual, but I was waiting for Tonia. When I heard her knock and enter, I was almost on the edge of the bed.

“Hi, baby girl! How are you feeling?”

“Much better! I think I'm healed. Tonia, what about Damian?”

“Easy, girl, I don't think you've healed already. Let me check your temperature first. Did you forget about your slow-healing thing?”

Is she eluding my questions right now? She sits next to me on the bed and puts a hand on my forehead, but I avoid her.

“Tonia!”

“Looks like you’re okay... And yes, the Boss called me last night, to know how you were. I said you were resting, and that’s it. I have to give him an update this morning.”

“Is he angry?”

“Angry? At you? Of course not, Nora, he’s just worried. Now, will you explain to me what happened yesterday? Without the unnecessary details, please.”

She has her big sister tone, but that’s not necessary. I need to talk to someone about this, and Tonia is the only one I can confide into here. Plus, she is a woman, and older than me, too. I don’t know how much she will understand me, but I don’t want to keep this bottled up. I sigh and start talking while nervously playing with my hair.

“Yesterday, Damian comforted me. We started kissing and... we got a bit passionate. I liked it, but when Damian started touching me, I... I couldn’t... I got petrified. I felt like I couldn’t stand him touching me like that.”

She listens to me with a frown, looking genuinely intrigued. After a while, she hesitates, then asks me a question on her own. “Nora, have you ever been... intimate with someone?”

I bite my lip. The only one who knows is Liam, and he doesn’t seem like he told his brothers... How do I explain this? I barely avoided Alec being killed yesterday, and now this.

“Not willingly. But I... This guy, Marcus Sickels, he... touched me several times back when I was still with the Jade Moon Clan. Just before Alec tried to... to kill me, Marcus almost...”

“...Raped you.” She whispers to finish my sentence.

“Damian knows,” I immediately add. “He felt through our bond that someone had tried to force me, and I told him about that guy. But now, sometimes, when Damian touches me, I... I can’t help but remember. I don’t want to feel like this when I’m with Damian!”

“It’s okay, Nora. I think you’re experiencing some form of PTSD. It’s not your fault, baby girl.”

PTSD? A traumatism? It might be... But how do I get out of it? I don't want to feel like running away every time Damian touches me! I get up and head to my wardrobe, looking for something to put on.

“What are you doing, Nora? Come back to your bed!”

“No, I'm done resting. Let's go to the gym.”

“Punching sandbags won't solve this! What you need is some time, Nora, and talking to the Boss.”

I turn to face her, annoyed. “What do I tell Damian, Tonia? Sorry, some douchebag touched me before you did, so now you can't touch me because I'm traumatized? I hate this!”

She rolls her eyes. I know I'm stubborn, but I don't see anything better to do! I need to blow off some steam. But Tonia gets up and takes the workout clothes from me with a resolute look. She throws them on the floor and crosses her arms.

“Enough, Nora. I wasn't talking about speaking to him about this issue. More like getting to know the Boss and letting him know you better. The two of you might be close because of your bond as fated mates, but the truth is you two barely know each other! I say you need to talk to the Boss, get to know him for real. Maybe this way, you will learn to trust him, and that will help you overcome your fear.”

She has a point... The attraction I feel to Damian from the start is probably mainly our bond's work, but what else is there? All I know of him is what I heard from others. I don't know his hobbies, his tastes, his habits, nothing. How can I even describe our relationship, then? And Damian, too, seems to know things I don't, but... when do we ever really interact? He is often busy and only calls me from time to time to inquire how I am.

It's not enough. I want him, but I want all of him. Tonia's probably right. If I get to know Damian better, I will probably be able to overcome my fear, and trust him, won't I?

"Bobo says you should have him take you on a date. Isn't your birthday tomorrow? Ask him then."

I almost forgot about my birthday! Do I want to celebrate it? After what I learned from Alec yesterday, I didn't think about such things, but now it seems a bit unreal. Is it even my real birth date? Dad probably knew... I hesitate a bit, biting my lip. It might be an idea. I look at Bobo, sitting next to my bed. Sometimes I really wish the big wolf would take human form and talk to me.

"You really think so?"

The brown wolf nods. I sigh and turn to Tonia. "Okay... Can I borrow your phone?"

After a few minutes, Damian finally answers the call. “Nora. How are you?”

Thank Moon Goddess, he doesn’t sound angry or anything. Is he really over what happened yesterday? Gosh, I feel so awkward now...

“I’m fine. I feel much better. Damian, I... I’m sorry about yesterday.”

I hear him sighing softly. “It’s okay. I figured out what happened afterward. It’s not the first time. I’m the one who should apologize, I got carried away.”

“No! No, Damian, it’s... it’s just me.”

It’s my fault because I’m damaged. I’m scared, way too scared. And I still don’t know how to overcome it, even for you. I nervously run my fingers through my hair, fidgeting.

“I just need a bit of time. I’m still... shy.”

Shy, really? It’s the understatement of the year! I’m literally terrified by the idea of a man touching me, yet that’s all I can tell him? How pathetic, Nora. I need to get stronger. Didn’t I promise myself to leave my past

behind me? How will I if I let myself be restrained by such things? I need to work on it.

I need to tell him the truth, to Damian, at least.

“...Nora?”

“I’m still scared, Damian. I still think about what happened whenever someone touches me. I swear I don’t want to, but it just... I don’t know how to handle it for now.”

A long silence follows. What is he thinking? Does he regret having such a complicated mate? Or will he search for Marcus once again? Alec only implied he had died, but that’s still an unsolved issue for now. When are we going to find the truth? I did stab him, but what happened afterward? If he died, what about his body? I’m still feeling uneasy about this. And it’s hindering my relationship with Damian.

“I told you, it’s okay.”

“But what if... It takes a long time for me to get better? I’m scared.”

“Scared of what?”

Scared that you might not want me anymore at some point. It's already a miracle for Damian to be interested in me! I'm not pretty, or remarkable in any way. Compared to Damian, to his brothers, I'm utterly insignificant. And yet here I am, making him wait for me. I hate it, I wish things were different.

"Nora, don't cry."

I wonder how he knows. I'm tearing up a little bit. If only all these nightmares with my parents, Alec, the Jade Moon Clan, Marcus, all this, never happened... It would be so much easier. I could have lived a completely different life, where I might actually be deserving of Damian's affection. I wipe my tears away. Enough crying, already.

"I'm okay. Damian, can we see each other?"

"I can come tonight. After work."

"No, I meant like a... an actual date."

I'm red, definitely red. I wish I could hide somewhere. I stepped away from Tonia and Bobo, but I feel their eyes on me still.

"...You want me to take you on a date?"



“If you’re busy, it’s okay, I just... It was just an idea, I...”

“Okay. Where do you want to go?”

Oh, Moon Goddess, he agreed! I feel like jumping around the room right now, but I have to control myself a bit. I’m still blushing, though. Where do I want to go? I have no idea; I’ve never been on a date!

“I... I don’t know.”

“You want us to celebrate your birthday together? I can take a day off. What do you usually do then?”

For my birthday? Nothing. Back at the Jade Moon Clan, nobody would have bothered to celebrate or even remember which day it was. I would do my chores, like always, and the 3rd of December would pass like any other day. It was a bit different when I was young, though. My parents celebrated my birthday with a cake and a nice dinner. But I can’t just ask for a cake from Damian... Can I?

“Nora, tell me.”

“An Opera Cake.”

“What?”

“I... I want to eat an Opera Cake...” I confess, blushing.

I hear him chuckling at the end of the line. It’s embarrassing enough!

“Okay, my Love, an Opera Cake. What else?”

Oh, my Goddess, what did he just call me? Can I get any redder than I am now? So embarrassing! I’m blushing so much my cheeks are on fire. What was that? And Tonia and Bobo are both watching, I must be looking crazy right now! I need to answer, Damian is waiting at the other end of the line.

“I... I don’t know. Anything’s fine...” I mumble.

“Okay. Let me know if you think of anything else. I need to hang up, I have a meeting.”

“I’m sorry, are you going to be late?”

“Neal’s glaring at me, and about twenty executives are staring, too, so I suppose I already am.”

Oh, Moon Goddess... I stutter a “bye” and hang up as quickly as I can. This is so embarrassing, I could die... His staff heard me requesting a date! And this stupid Opera Cake, too! How could I be so shameless! I’m never, never, never asking for anything over the phone again, this is way too dangerous! I turn around and see Tonia laughing.

“This is not funny!” I protest.

“Oh, hell yeah, it is. Moon Goddess, you are so cute, Nora!”

“I’m not cute, I’m embarrassed to death!”

“It’s okay, Nora. You got yourself a date for tomorrow, girl! And for the whole day, too!”

“So you did hear everything!”

“Of course, I did. Now we need to decide on what you’re going to wear tomorrow, so let’s go shopping!”

What shopping? The wardrobes are already full! I argue with Tonia for a long time before she finally gives up. Instead, she insists on helping me

choose my outfit for tomorrow. But the thing is, I have no idea what we are going to do...

I finally find a minute where Tonia is too focused on the wardrobe to watch me and step out of my bedroom, Bobo behind me. I go to the main room to lie on the sofa, and he comes to sit next to me.

I'm happy about going on a date for my birthday, but I can't stop thinking about Alec. Did Nathaniel take him to the hospital, as he said? I hope he didn't lie about that... Thinking about Nathaniel makes me remember something. I was about to get up, but Tonia enters the room carrying three different pairs of earrings in her hands.

"Which one do you like most?"

"I don't know, the white one? Anyway, Tonia, I have a question for you. Who is Nathaniel's Beta?"

"Nathaniel's... It's Isaac Graves. He was their father's Beta's son. Why do you ask?"

I thought the creamy white wolf might have been his Beta, but it seems like I'm wrong.

“I was just curious... You remember when you guys came to get me at the Jade Moon Clan?”

“Excuse me, you mean when we kept you from being killed after you and Liam sneaked out? Yes, I do remember.”

When is she ever going to forgive me about that? I ignore her remark and keep going. “There was a white wolf with Nathaniel that day, who went with him afterward. I just wondered if she was his Beta.”

Tonia looks a bit surprised, and exchanges a look with Bobo, frowning.

“I’m not really supposed to talk about that, Nora...”

“Why? Is it something you can’t tell me?” I ask, intrigued.

“It’s not about you. She’s... part of Nathaniel’s private life. I think they just happened to be together that day, and that’s why she came along.”

Oh. I think I get it. It explains her smell in Nathaniel’s car... but I thought Nathaniel doesn’t have a mate? From Tonia’s embarrassed look and her words, I suspect she might not be an “official” relationship... Why would she be interested in me, then?

“So, she’s not part of the Blood Moon Clan?”

“No. That woman is from a different pack, I don’t know which. I don’t even know her name, and I’ve only seen her a couple of times.”

Great, so the only person who knows about her is Nathaniel, to whom she doesn’t want me to talk to...

I wanted to wake up early the next morning to get ready for my first day of work. I had set the alarm for six o’clock. Instead, I gradually got awoken by noises coming from my bathroom. I open my eyes, making sure I’m not dreaming.

There are sounds of the shower running. I quickly check my smartphone, which Tonia gave me back yesterday. I had left it on the site of my fight with Vince... It is not even 6 am yet! Who is using my bathroom at this hour? Tonia always uses her own. Is it Damian? But we agreed to see each other tonight, and I’m pretty sure he mentioned he would be busy this morning.

It’s okay, it’s our friend.

Our friend? My wolf doesn’t seem worried one bit. Could it be the white she-wolf? How would she get all the way here without being noticed by the siblings, though? And where is Bobo, anyway?

I grab the dark blue kimono lying at the end of my bed to put it on, unsure about what to do. Should I get Tonia? What if it's Damian and I'm alarmed for nothing? I don't think a stranger would be brazen enough to come all the way to my room and take a shower!

While I'm hesitating, the sound of water running stops, and I hear someone putting on clothing. I step back, unsure. Why are you not worried, wolf! But she clearly isn't. Who did she recognize?

The door opens, and to my surprise, a stranger comes out. The first thing I notice, he is really, really tall. About two meters high, I would say. He is quite muscular, too, and he only wears a pair of jeans, so I can't miss the sizeable crescent moon tattooed on his torso. A Blood Moon Clan member?

He sees my empty bed and turns around with a worried look until he sees me. He softly smiles once his gaze meets mine. He looks young, but I wouldn't be able to tell his age. With his large build, his thin black dreadlocks, and soft features, it's hard to say. However, I do feel something strangely familiar about him.

“Hi, Nora. Happy Birthday!”

He has a really soft and low-pitched voice and a warm smile. But it's only when I look up that I finally recognize those familiar dark green eyes. I can barely believe it.

“...Bobo?”

He gives me a big smile and opens his arms. “It took you a while!”

“Oh, my Goddess, Bobo!”

I run into his arms without thinking. I can't believe it's my Bobo standing there! He hugs me back and laughs softly. I never imagined I would get to see Bobo's human form today! It's weird, like meeting a friend after a long time of not seeing each other, but we saw each other literally every day for weeks now! I don't care, I'm happy to be able to finally see the human Bobo. He is as big as his sister said, too! While he hugs me, I feel like a baby trapped in his massive arms. He is still half-naked, though, and I back away a bit to look at him.

“Sorry I didn't shape-shift earlier. Being a wolf is just so nice, you know. But I wanted to be able to wish you a happy birthday, so...”

I can't believe he shapeshifted just for me! I smile back at him, overjoyed. “Thank you so much, Bobo! I like your wolf self, you know. It's just nice to finally talk to you!”



He laughs softly. “Sorry about that. But you can talk to me anytime, you know. Even if I can’t answer, I can listen to you whenever you want. I know my big sis can be fussy, so just know you can confide in me, too, okay?”

I nod, and he pats my head. “Good girl. Now listen. There’s another reason I wanted to talk to you.”

He grabs my hand and takes me to sit with him on the bed. He looks a bit serious suddenly, so I wonder what this is about. He grabs one of my rubber bands and ties some of his dreadlocks to keep it out of the way, then turns to me, speaking softly.

“When we were chasing your brother, Alec. You ran ahead, and I thought you caught up with him. But when I arrived, he was alone. What happened?”

I bite my lip, hesitating. Is it okay to tell Bobo about her? I did ask Tonia yesterday, after all. But that she-wolf acted like she didn’t want anyone to know she was there that night. Before I can actually make up my mind, Bobo speaks first.

“Nora, I know someone else was with us. I felt a third presence, someone who was a stranger but not hostile. You didn’t mention it to the Boss.”

I realize Bobo knew something was off about this chase all along. Still, he never mentioned it to anyone before talking to me today. If not, Tonia or Damian would definitely have asked. I decide to tell him the truth. After all, Bobo has been siding with me every time.

“It was a white female wolf...”

“I knew it. What happened?” He asks, frowning.

“Alec caught me by surprise and threw me into the sea. I thought I would drown, but she came and pulled me out of the water right on time. It was the white wolf I was asking Tonia about yesterday.”

“So, I was right. I thought I had caught her smell, but I thought it just came from Nathaniel.”

Does that mean he knows her? Tonia seemed to barely know of her existence. How come Bobo identified her smell so quickly?

“Bobo, you know her?” I ask, whispering.

He nods. “Her name is Elena. Elena Whitewood. She’s from a different pack than ours, as Tonia said. The Opal Moon Clan, a branch of the White Moon. She’s one of their fighters.”

Finally, I get more information about that mysterious she-wolf! “How do you know her? Tonia said she doesn’t really know her...”

“That’s because she and Nathaniel aren’t an official couple, so they avoid being together in public, usually. They shouldn’t even be together, being from different Clans. My sister isn’t really into gossip, especially when it concerns Nathaniel— she never liked him.”

I noticed that, too, a while ago now. Tonia and Nathaniel are polite to each other, but they never interact unless it’s necessary. She seems more comfortable with Liam or Damian, though I don’t really know why.

“...The other day really was a coincidence, I think. Even I only learned by accident that they have a relationship. I know Elena from another place, actually. She likes to go to clubs on weekends, and I’ve seen her around a few times.”

Oh, right, Tonia did mention that Bobo likes to go out.

“So, you met her at a club?”

“Not directly, but yeah, we have friends in common.”

“Then, do you know how I can meet her?”

He frowns, intrigued. “Why do you want to meet with Elena?”

I forgot Bobo doesn't know we are mind-linked. I decide to tell him the truth, starting from when I heard her voice during my fight against Vince and everything else Elena and I exchanged after that. He listens, intrigued, but stays quiet until I'm done. I'm glad Bobo woke me up earlier. I feel comfortable sharing this with him, but for some reason, he is the only one I want to tell about all this.

“Interesting. So, you and she are probably related somehow...”

“You think she might have clues about my birth mother?” I ask.

Somehow that's what I have been thinking about since I learned the truth surrounding my birth. The information Nathaniel found about my father and his wife matches what Alec told us about them belonging to the Gold Moon Clan. However, it also raised questions about my birth mother. I'm curious about her. Why didn't I grow up with her? Why did my dad bring me to his wife instead? If that girl, Elena, has more information...

Bobo seems to be lost in his thoughts for a while, then sighs. “Maybe. I'm not sure, Nora. Perhaps Elena already knows why there is a link between you two. I can't say.”

“Can you help me meet her?”

He scratches his head, thinking, but shakes his head after a while. “Not for now. I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to meet her in private at the moment. Nathaniel and the Boss will be watching you more closely from now on. But if Elena told you she will find a way to meet you, I would believe she will. Just be patient, baby girl.”

I smile unconsciously. So he picked up this nickname, too. He seems to read my mind because he immediately says, “Sorry, I hear it in my sister’s head all day...”

“Do you guys use the mind-link often? I didn’t think we could use it so easily in our human form...”

“That’s because we are closely related, and I’m very comfortable with my wolf form, so it makes it easier. Except for the Alpha, few people use the mind-link in human form. Too complicated.”

“You have to teach me someday. I struggled to speak to Elena.”

“I will be happy to chat with you once you join the pack!”

It reminds me that I don't belong to any Clan anymore. I severed all my ties with the Jade Moon Clan if I had any, and I don't belong to the Blood Moon Clan either. I wonder what is going to happen from now on? Will Damian make me join? It's a bit surprising that we never mentioned this earlier now that I think about it. Am I considered a rogue then...?

Bobo notices my worried expression and puts his arm around my shoulders. "Don't worry, Nora. I don't just guard you because of orders. I like you, baby girl. After all, I've been by your side all along, haven't I? There was supposed to be a rotation, you know. But I refused and took the job full-time. I'll be on your side no matter what. I bet you're going to be a great Luna, and I will be right by your side then."

Bobo's words bring me to tears. He chuckles and ruffles my curls, making me laugh. We chat about trivial things for a while, things he couldn't say before, like how much he loves my cooking or his fights with his sister. I don't feel uncomfortable at all being so close to Bobo; it's like I'm chatting with my best friend.

When my alarm clock strikes six, Tonia enters the room with a large bouquet of flowers in her hands.

"Happy Birthday! Look at what came for you this morning!"

Just then, she notices her brother, surprised.

“Bobo, you shapeshifted! When?”

“Just this morning, for Nora,” he says while giving me a wink.

“And you actually have some pants on! What a day!”

What does this mean? Tonia looks at her younger brother with a conspicuous look, but Bobo ignores her. She hands me the flowers. There is a card with it, from Nathaniel, wishing me a happy eighteenth birthday. How nice of him, considering he will see me in less than three hours! I get up and take my present to the kitchen to find it a vase, the siblings following me. To my surprise, once I reach the room, there are several gifts on the table! I turn around to Tonia, perplexed.

“What’s all this?”

“Your birthday presents, of course!”

All of this? Impossible! I see about a dozen wrapped boxes and bags! And I haven’t gotten anything in ten years... Tonia is smiling from ear to ear, waiting for my reaction. I’m speechless! I slowly walk up to the table. There are three birthday cards: one from the siblings, one from Neal, and the other one from Liam.

“Wait... All of this is from you guys, Liam, and Nathaniel?” I ask, dumbfounded.

Tonia nods, excited. “It is! So, considering you are saving your evening for your date, we thought you should open them this morning! Both Liam and Nathaniel can’t be here, so it will just be the three of us though, I hope you don’t mind.”

If I mind? Gosh, Tonia doesn’t realize I haven’t even celebrated my birthday in years! I’m overflowed with emotions right now; I don’t know where to begin. Well, I’m trying hard to hold my tears in, for starters.

“Thank you so much, guys...”

Bobo laughs and gently pushes me towards the pile of presents. I start by opening and reading the birthday cards, and I can’t stop smiling all along. Tonia and Bobo chose a pretty one with a winter theme, while their older brother went for a simple one. Liam picked a very girly one with purple and blue ribbons on it to tease me. All of them wrote really simple but touching birthday wishes.

After the cards, Bobo gives me one of the presents.

“But you guys already gave me a present: the smartphone!”



“Oh, stop it, Nora, and open it. You said you haven’t gotten birthday presents in years, you can let us spoil you today!” Says Tonia while giving me a large box.

For some reason, Bobo is smiling and waiting to see my reaction. What is this? The box is a pale blue with some golden letters on it, like a chic brand... Not anything unusual from Tonia so far. However, as soon as I open the box, I blush and close it just as quickly.

Oh, Moon Goddess!

She got me super sexy, embarrassing, shameless French lingerie! I turn to look at Tonia, red with embarrassment. Why did she have to go and pick something like this! Even if I glanced at it only for a few seconds, I already know that this... piece of clothing is way too sexy and revealing!

Bobo is laughing out loud, and Tonia is acting innocent. “What? You might need it sooner than you think.”

“Tonia! How can you buy me such an embarrassing thing? It barely has any fabric!”

“Well, it’s not meant to be worn long, after all...”

“Tonia!”

Is she enjoying getting me embarrassed, or what? I can't believe it! I'm still struggling with having Damian touch me, how could I be thinking about the appropriate outfits for a physical relationship now! I'm already stressed enough about tonight's date as it is!

While the two siblings are still laughing at me, I take a shy glance at the piece of clothing once again. It's a night blue ensemble with a bit of embroidery, laces, and ribbons. I do have to admit that it's beautiful, but I can't picture myself wearing it. I push the box aside, for now, trying to regain my composure.

Bobo holds in his laugh and gives me another big box.

"This one's from me."

I really hope his present is less embarrassing than his sister's... I open it, and to my surprise, it's a brand-new pair of boxing gloves! I can't believe it! I turn to Bobo, and he is smiling.

"I knew you would like it. Next time you need to throw some punches with me, too, okay?"

I nod, delighted with it. I love those new gloves! I try them on, and they are the right size, too! I play with it for a while and put them back after

thanking Bobo. Aside from the lingerie, Tonia also found the time to buy me a stunning winter dress for tonight's date. I wonder when she got it. I like it a lot. It looks warm and pretty, too. I'll definitely put it on tonight. Tonia also booked me an appointment at some famous salon after work so I can have my hair and makeup done by a professional. She always complains about how I'm never putting any makeup on, so I guess this was her way of cornering me into this...

Nathaniel's present is a very expensive-looking pair of pretty shoes from a French brand, which I think is supposed to go with my new dress. I am a bit worried about the high heels, but they do make me gorgeous once I try it... It seems like I have another fairy godmother.

Liam, on the other hand, offered me a selection of movies and CD albums of his own choosing. He was a bit surprised about my lack of knowledge in pop-culture last time we talked about it, so I guess it gave him ideas. I really like it, though, since I do feel like I've missed a lot all these years. He even put sticky notes on some of them, stating which ones we should watch together or his personal favorites. I really like that he actually took the time to write these down.

Once I'm done opening all of these, I turn around to thank Bobo and Tonia once again. "This is definitely the best birthday ever!" I say, ecstatic.

Tonia laughs and gives me a wink while pushing me into the kitchen. "Save that for your date, baby girl! Now let's get to breakfast before you get late on your first day of work."

Bobo agrees with her, and I happily start preparing breakfast. I'm in the best mood today and even put one of Liam's CDs on the music station to play while I'm cooking and dancing around in the kitchen. Bobo happily joins me in my dancing, trying to teach me a few steps of Latino dancing and making me laugh. At the same time, his sister takes pictures of us with her smartphone. I really love my Bobo in his human form. He is not a big talker, as expected, but I find that he does express himself with his gestures and smiles. It's like having a big brother, but a caring one. We get along incredibly well, as we keep chatting over breakfast.

Once we are done eating, I get ready for my first day. I'm quite nervous, actually, but I do want to make a good impression, so I pick an ivory shirt with black pants. It's good that I can choose to wear pants... Robert always made me wear short skirts whenever I was working at the bar, and I hated it. Tonia helps me put on a bit of mascara and lip gloss and styles my hair into a pretty bun. While she goes out of my bedroom to go get her own makeup done, Bobo swiftly enters, while I'm still anxiously examining myself in the mirror.

“Hey, pretty girl.”

“It's not too much, is it? I don't want to make a bad impression...”

He shakes his head and walks up to me. “Don't worry, it's great. And it will be perfect with this.”

He takes out a small box from his jean pocket and gives it to me. What is this? There's only a tiny ribbon on it. Another present? I look at him, confused. Bobo smiles. "It's another present for your birthday. I didn't want to show it to my sis, she can be naggy about this kind of stuff... Open it."

I take it and open it. It's a pair of earrings! And they are so cute and pretty, too! They are blue and tear-shaped, and about the size of my pinky-nail.

"It's blue topaz, your birthstone. I noticed your ears were pierced."

That's true, my dad had them pierced when I was young because I wanted to wear pretty earrings like mom...

"Oh, Moon Goddess, Bobo, I love it..."

I really do. The earrings are delicate and not too garish, perfectly suitable to wear anytime. I immediately put it on. He smiles and nods, visibly satisfied. "They match your eye color. Really pretty."

"Thanks, Bobo, I love them lots."

I hug him quickly as thanks before looking once more in the mirror. Bobo is right, they do look like my own iris color, a deep London blue. My eyes are the one thing I've always liked about myself. Their dark blue color is uncommon, but somehow, I still loved it anyway. If only it wasn't for my scar... I look in the mirror again. As always, the red line running across my face is hard to miss. Bobo seems to follow my train of thought, and lifts my chin up gently, giving me a reassuring smile.

“Hey. Don't worry about details, baby girl. Okay?”

I nod obediently. Bobo's right. No matter what, my scar is there and won't go away, so I might as well cope with it. It's my first day at this job, so I can't start with a negative mindset. I need this change.

About an hour later, I'm in the car, nervous but quite excited at the same time. I keep playing with my phone between my hands, and Bobo is observing me with an amused smile but says nothing. While Tonia is looking for a parking spot, my phone suddenly vibrates. It's Damian! I blush before I even get to answer.

“Hi...”

“Happy Birthday, Nora.”

“Thank you. Are you at work?”

“I am. Trying to get it all done so I can have a date with my princess tonight.”

I blush a bit. Bobo taps his sister’s shoulder, and they exit the car to give me some privacy.

“Please tell me you’re not saying this in front of a lot of people again.”

It’s like I can hear him smiling. “No, I’m not.”

“Good. Because it’s really embarrassing.”

“Not for me.”

Well, it should be! I know he is playing with me, but I still fall for it and blush.

“How’s your day so far?” He asks.

“It’s... Really great. No one has celebrated my birthday in years, you know. But this morning, I woke up, and I had people me wishing a Happy Birthday, birthday cards, and presents all over the place.”

I keep talking, making me realize how happy I really am. Damian listens to me, and we discuss for a few minutes, about things like my presents, Liam's music, and how happy I was to see Bobo in his human form. I love how we can have trivial conversations like these over the phone. I feel a bit closer to him that way. However, there is still this wall between us, something holding me back and making me shy.

“...I got a couple of surprises for you tonight, too.”

I smile and bite my lip. What plans did Damian make? We barely talked about our date since last time. We only agreed to both diligently go to work, as I didn't want to ditch my first day, and Damian still has work, a busy CEO. Only at night did we plan to reunite to celebrate my birthday together. I wanted to go as soon as my job was over, but Tonia intervened, saying I needed to pretty up first, and would need a few hours for that. I didn't dare to oppose that. It's my very first date, after all, so I should at least listen to her advice on this.

“I can't wait for it,” I whisper. “But I still want to go to work.”

“I know. Have a good first day, then.”

“You are not going to wish me good luck or something?”



“What luck? I will get rid of anyone who dares...”

“Damian!”

How can he say such things so easily? That is ridiculous! I’m just going to start a new job, what does it have to be a threatening situation for some people? And what could possibly happen? I’m just going to work...

“Okay, I’ll call you later. Just let Nathaniel know if there’s anything you need. And stay with Bobo.”

“I know. Have a good day.”

We both hang up, and I sigh. My bodyguard’s presence was the only condition Damian refused to discuss. No matter what, if I wanted to work, Bobo had to be there. Even Nathaniel agreed to it right away. I was the only reticent one. Who goes to work with a bodyguard? I’m not some royalty! But no matter how long I argued, no one agreed to let me go to work alone, be it the siblings or the Black Brothers.

I exit the car, and Bobo’s waiting for me. Tonia is not supposed to come with us, so she drives away, leaving us alone to walk to the restaurant La Rose de l’Aube. I’m as nervous as one can be...

When we get there, Bobo opens the front door for me, and a gorgeous young woman comes to meet us right away.

“Hello! You must be Nora, right? I’m Narcissa Brookes. Nice to meet you.”

We shake hands, and she has this professional smile on all the time. I feel a bit intimidated. Her brown hair is tied in a perfect chignon, and her crimson dress is impeccable as well. There is not a single thing out of place. I’m glad I took the time to dress up and am wearing my new earrings.

“Nathaniel asked me to show you around, so you will be under my wing for today!” She says with a smile

“Thank you for that.”

“Please, I am doing my job. So, please, follow me.”

Narcissa gives me a tour of the restaurant. I love it. The decoration is delicate, not too fancy. Glass, pale cherry wood, white velvet, some floral elements, and marble. It’s big enough to hold about fifty people, and it does look as high class as I heard it is. I can’t believe I will have my shot at working here...

Narcissa is the Maître d'hôtel and quickly introduces me to the people already present, the kitchen staff. Most of the team is werewolf and part of the Blood Moon Clan, as expected, and welcome me warmly. All of them seem to know Bobo, though they are surprised to see him in his human form.

“I heard you have a bit of experience as a waitress?” Asks Narcissa.

“Yes, but just in a local pub.”

“I see. Then you can grab one of the menus and start learning it. The other waiters will arrive in about an hour or so to get ready, you can join them then.”

I do exactly as told, though I find the menu quite easy to remember. Once the rest of the staff arrives, I naturally join the other waiters and help with the dressing. I befriend everyone quite quickly while working, especially two girls my age, Kathie and Elise. Apparently, aside from Narcissa and the chef, no one really knows who I am or how I'm related to the Black brothers. Some question Bobo's imposing presence in a corner, but Narcissa dismisses them.

Truthfully, I feel quite happy to be working and useful. As soon as I show how fast I can learn, everyone looks glad to let me participate. Narcissa protests a few times that I'm only supposed to observe for now, but as the day goes on, I can't ignore it when someone needs help, and step in when

I can. As the lunch service starts and goes on, I act as a support to all the waiters, and Narcissa has no choice but to let me do so, considering she gets quite busy herself. Nathaniel didn't lie when he said the restaurant was understaffed. I run all day to help one waiter then another, and even the chefs start asking my help for the service.

La Rose de l'Aube is busy, due to its reputation, but nothing I can't handle. I make sure to clear or set the tables quickly, assist anyone who seems in need, and keep an eye on all the tables to make sure nothing is amiss. The rhythm is quite peaceful compared to Rob's bar... By the end of the service, I'm a bit proud. Everything went well!

However, Narcissa suddenly calls everyone in the restaurant, including the kitchen staff, looking unhappy.

"What was with today? I said Nora should observe! Why did you guys give her your work?"

"I volunteered, Narcissa," I explain, immediately stepping up. "I couldn't just stand aside when I saw some of the waiters struggling."

Narcissa answers with a smile, clearly only meant for me. "They should have been able to handle it themselves, Nora."

I frown. What does Narcissa mean? They are clearly understaffed! Though it was all very professional, everyone was running around until

the end of the service thirty minutes ago! How is it their fault? No one made a mistake, they just had too much to handle!

“Oh, shut it, Narcissa,” says the Chef, Michel. “The girl did just fine, and she was exactly where we needed her to be. It’s been weeks since we had a service going so well. We do lack some waiting staff and everyone’s overworked. Let them breathe a little.”

Michel is a strong man in his mid-forties and a force of nature, as expected of a head chef. He was a bit surprised to see me come at the pass a few times today but let me take the dishes without saying a thing. Behind him, Elise nods. “That’s right. I had to handle fifteen tables by myself, and if it wasn’t for Nora, I’m not sure I would have made it so swiftly, Narcissa. But every time I thought I had forgotten something or missed a detail, Nora had already taken care of it.”

“And she helped everyone that way, the whole restaurant,” Adds Kathie. “I barely noticed her for the full service, but she was always there right to handle things when I thought a problem might arise!”

I start blushing from their compliments, not knowing what to say. Narcissa still seems pissed, but she rolls her eyes and puts her hands on her hips. “All right, if all of you guys are ganging up against me, I won’t argue anymore. But I insist that no matter how efficient Nora might be, she is still in training. Nora, you will keep working as a busser for now. Let me know if you have any problems.”

Yes! I guess that means my first day went well! Narcissa sighs and steps out with Chef Michel to discuss the menus. Everyone else disperses to start the cleaning. Kathie and Elise run up to me, smiling.

“You were great, Nora!”

“I can’t believe you memorized all the menus and table numbers so fast!” Says Kathie. “And you can endure the pressure like it’s nothing, too!”

Well, try working for a hungry pack that won’t hesitate to hit you if you’re late...

“Thank you, guys, but you were the ones that helped me. I couldn’t have learned the ropes so fast if it weren’t for your help.”

They both laugh and disagree, and then Kathie puts her hand in her apron and hands me a bit of money. Elise does the same. I look at them, confused.

“What is that?”

“Oh, come on, Nora, we want to share with you!”

“Bussers don’t get any tip, but you helped us so much today, I will feel bad if you don’t get your share! Here!”

They put the money in my hands before I get to say a thing. I’m so shocked, I can’t say a word for a few seconds. I can’t believe they are sharing their tips with me! I start tearing up unwillingly, and Kathie frowns, while Elise puts a hand on my shoulder, worried.

“Are you okay? Nora, what’s wrong?”

“I’m okay, I just... This is the first time I earned money for myself!”

I’m so touched by Elise and Kathie’s gesture. No matter how long I protest, they insist I take the money, so I eventually accept it, though their kindness means much more to me than the amount. What a great first day! From the corner of the room, Bobo gives me a thumbs up. After thanking my new friends and colleagues, I join everyone to clean the restaurant in a cheerful atmosphere. Everyone chats happily, and some of them seem eager to know more about me.

“Are you a fighter, Nora?”

“Not really... I’m kind of a late-bloomer werewolf.”

I'm a bit awkward. From his corner, Bobo is sending me amused looks, not helpful at all. I'm glad everyone in the staff seems accepting of me, but this is a bit... Narcissa quickly intervenes as she comes back.

“Are you cleaning or chatting? Why do I find you annoying Nora? Stop being so curious!”

An hour later, I finish working with a large smile stuck on my face and join Bobo, who was waiting with a large cup of coffee. He smiles when I approach him.

“Hi, there.”

“A macchiato?” I guess from the smell.

He nods and finishes his cup in one go. Bobo really has childish tastes... I sit in front of him, watching my coworkers go one by one, all of them saying bye to me.

“You look happy,” says Bobo

“I am. It went great! And everyone is nice, too.”



He smiles as an answer. I hope he wasn't too bored while I was working, just waiting in a corner. Bobo didn't help at all and barely interacted with others. I only saw him talking with Michel at some point.

“Do you know the staff here well?” I ask.

“Michel's one of our Blood Moon Clan warriors when he is not cooking. So are a couple of others from the kitchen staff. Elise is among our hunters too. She's good.”

It's a bit weird to imagine them as wolves when I saw them working all day as a perfect-looking staff. But my wolf did analyze their smell out of habit, and about two-thirds of the team are werewolves. I should learn to be more aware of the other Clan members now, I guess... All the staff slowly leave the restaurant until we are left with only the head chef and Narcissa. They are still discussing menus, but Bobo and I are useless in that, so we just casually chat.

Then, around 3pm, Bobo raises his head, and I see Nathaniel walking in. Narcissa immediately walks up to him with her perfect smile on. From the expectant look in her eyes and her attitude with him, I gather what's going on immediately. She might be trying to act natural, but I can tell she is mindful of her every move and slightly changed her tone, too. I exchange a quick look with Bobo, who nods. She is either after Nathaniel or already one of his “private” relationships. I recall what Tonia and Bobo mentioned earlier. Behind the gentle and smiling face, I guess the angel-like brother really is the player they described, then...

He listens to Narcissa and Chef Michel for a while, then dismisses them and walks towards us. He greets Bobo with a nod and gives me a smile.

“Happy Birthday, princess! How was your day? Narcissa told me you did great.”

“Thanks, Nathaniel. And thank you for the birthday present, I loved the shoes! And yes, it went well! Thank you so much for letting me try this job, I truly love it. And the team is great, too.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Well, it seems like everyone is happy, so I guess we can think of making this a long-term position for you.”

I nod, happy. It would be awesome! A real job, with no pervert customers, my own paycheck, practical working hours, and friendly coworkers, too!

“Let’s give it a week and see if it works well for you. You can discuss the details with Narcissa since she’s basically in charge of this one. I come often, but I just oversee it and only intervene if I’m needed.”

“Okay. But will Bobo have to wait for me every time? It’s a bit long for him, and Tonia has to drive me, too...” I can’t help but ask.

Nathaniel shakes his head. “That’s not for me to decide, princess. Personally, I don’t think you’re at risk being here, but we both know how my brother can be overprotective. I suggest you bring this matter to him yourself, but I wouldn’t get my hopes up if I were you.”

Indeed. Damian is stubborn when it comes to my “safety”, though nothing happened so far... What is he fearing? Could something really happen? I proved that I could take on an Alpha, so who would attack me after that? There is no point, I don’t even belong to a pack as of now! I exchange a look with Bobo, but he doesn’t seem really interested in the matter either. Is it because he won’t disobey Damian? How could he not be bored after waiting for me all day? I still feel guilty, somehow.

Nathaniel and I discuss a bit longer about my work at La Rose de l’Aube until Tonia comes to get us. I forgot about the appointments she got me...

One thing I have to admit: I’m really not used to people taking care of me. It’s like in those movies we watched together, where the lead actress gets a total makeover after going through the hands of beauty specialists and putting on brand-new, expensive clothes. Well, one thing those movies have wrong: it’s incredibly long, and there is no entertaining background music. Instead, I need to stay seated and wait for hours while Tonia and the professionals take care of my skin, my hair, and my nails. I refused the massage after the perfumed bath, despite Tonia’s protests. I don’t want to lay while some unknown lady touches my bare skin. Bobo’s older sister argued for a while, but I said no and stuck to it, I hate people seeing my bareback! In the end, Bobo stepped in to tell his sister to stop insisting. Tonia sulked for a while, but she let me move on to the hairdresser lady.

After two hours and a dozen products being put on my head, both Bobo and I are helplessly bored. Tonia obviously doesn't care, as she keeps discussing with the hairdresser and makeup artist. How can it take so long to get ready for a date? I know I have no experience in taking care of myself, but still! I make the silent promise to myself to learn how to style up my own hair and use makeup from now on.

While she is arguing about going for a braided chignon or styling my curls, Tonia's phone suddenly rings. She frowns and immediately picks up. Sitting next to me, Bobo, who was half asleep until now, sighs.

"That's the Liam-is-going-to-get-scolded ringtone," he whispers.

I listen to Tonia's conversation, and it does seem like it.

"What do you mean he went to the eastern territory...? Why did he have to go there again! That makes it three times this month! Three times! I don't care... No Neal, I'm not going to get him again, I'm busy! Find someone else! I'm done fetching that brat! He... No, I don't care! Just send Erik or someone else! ...So what? He asked for it! Didn't the Boss tell him to stop? He got in this mess himself. I'm done with the Purple Clan, let them kick his ass!"

I frown and turn to Bobo. The Purple Moon Clan? They are known for their rude behavior and constant fighting with others. Out of all the local

packs, they are the most agitated and ruthless, always looking for someone to pick a fight with. Bobo doesn't seem worried and shrugs. With that and Tonia's heated conversation, I guess this isn't the first time... I wonder why Liam went to mess with them.

“Why does it have to be me? I said I... No Neal, I told you, let the brat handle his own mess! He... Well, I don't care, he is not my Alpha! ...So what? You can't let me handle this every time! ...Oh yeah? And how long do you think this will work? Lysandra is... Oh, shut up!”

They keep arguing for a while, loudly. Bobo leans to me to explain quickly. “Tonia has ties with the leader of the Purple Clan. She almost joined them before we met the Boss. Liam often picks fights on purpose with their fighters, so she's usually the one to intervene.”

From what I know, the Purple Clan has a lot of young members, but I never imagined Tonia almost joined such a reckless pack... Well, I guess the Blood Moon cannot be considered as soft-hearted, either. She and Neal argue for a while on the phone, but eventually, she hangs up, angrily, with a look of defeat written all over her face. Well, I guess she can't really say no to her Beta after all.

“I got to go settle this. Bobo, you stay with Nora. I'll be back quickly.”

She leaves angrily, leaving Bobo and me alone in the salon, with the confused hairdresser.

“Ahem... For your hairstyle...?”

“Hair down,” I say in unison with Bobo.

Leaving the lady to her work on my impossible curls, I start playing some games on my smartphone while Bobo is reading a magazine. After a few minutes, I hear the entrance bell. Bobo turns his head like a watchdog, and I follow his gaze.

A young woman just entered the room. She walks up to us, confidently, silent as a cat despite her heels. She is wearing a baseball cap, and a men’s large denim jacket, making me think she doesn’t want to be recognized. But despite her disguise, I find her radiant. She is a bit taller than me and has very feminine curves. Once she gets closer, she takes out her cap, showing off long, honey blonde hair. I immediately recognize her amber eyes.

“Hi, Bobo,” she says with a beautiful voice.

I see my bodyguard frown, a bit annoyed. “...Elena. You’re not supposed to be here.”

“I know. Are you going to stop me?” She asks with a confident smile. They stare at each other for a while, and I wonder what’s between them.

Bobo did imply they knew each other, but now he seems a bit taken aback by her presence. And Tonia just left, too. Her timing is a bit too perfect... However, Bobo doesn't act defensively at all, making me think he trusts her.

He looks hesitant about what to do now that she's here. After a long silence, he sighs, "Okay. You're already here anyway."

She smiles and takes the seat next to me. How can she act so confidently? She is on another Clan's territory! Isn't she worried about being attacked? But she seems totally carefree, openly smiling to me.

"Hi, Nora."

"Hello..."

What should I say in such a situation? This is too sudden! Elena doesn't let me think before she starts talking. "So, you recognize me, I guess. Sorry, I had to leave suddenly last time, but I don't really want Nate to know that you and I are acquainted."

"Why?"

She shrugs, looking a bit uneasy for the first time. "Personal reasons. Let's just say it would make things a bit more complicated... It made it hard for

me to get to you already. Your security is quite tight! Thankfully your bodyguard is a friend.”

A friend? That’s not really what Bobo said, but judging from his embarrassed expression, I guess Elena isn’t exaggerating. She winks at him, and Bobo blushes a little. How is she actually able to make the aloof Bobo blush?

“You owe me one, Elena,” he says.

“I know, I know, big boy. I’ll talk to him, I promise.”

I wonder what and who they are talking about, but before I can come up with any theory, Elena turns back to me and speaks softly. “Anyway. I really wanted to meet with you, Nora.”

“Me, too. I have so many questions for you! What happened last time? How can we be mind-linked? I never did that with anyone!”

“Easy, girl. I know you have a lot to ask, but I can’t stay long. And I may not have all the answers you are looking for. First, our mind-link suggests we are related somehow, though I’m not sure about the details. When we met on the Jade Moon Clan’s turf, I felt it. My wolf reacted strongly to your presence, so I came to your fight against the Alpha to confirm it. That’s why I tried the mind-link, and it worked!”



“Yes, I heard you during my fight. And after that.”

“Exactly. You did great, by the way!”

I smile back at her, a bit flattered. I love how natural she is while talking. “Thanks. But I still have no other clue about how we are related... I just learned that my father was from the Gold Moon Clan, but I have no clue about my mother. All I know is that I didn’t inherit my father’s last name. When we searched for it, Nathaniel said the name Bluemoon doesn’t appear anywhere.”

“Because that is not a last name, Nora! Didn’t you notice that it sounded a lot like a Clan’s name...?”

Elena looks at me, waiting for my reaction.

“...You mean, like a Blue Moon Clan?”

Elena nods. ...What? But I’ve never heard of a Blue Moon Clan! Of all the Clans of Silver City, I’m pretty sure I’ve never heard of that one... I turn to Bobo to see if he knows something about such a name, but he doesn’t react, looking just as confused as I am.

“There is no Blue Moon Clan in Silver City,” he says.

Elena nods. “To be exact, there is no Blue Moon Clan at all. Not anymore. But from what I’ve discovered, there used to be one, far up in the North. I don’t know why or how, but they were all... killed. The full pack. About eighteen years ago.”

That’s when I was born... What happened then? Who could have decimated a full Clan of werewolves? Usually, it’s settled with a fight between Alphas, or the pack warriors. Still, there are always survivors who would become rogues or submit to join other clans to ensure their survival. For a full pack to be killed... Unless they were attacked by humans or witches? Or vampires?

“Killed? An entire pack? But... how?” I ask.

“I still don’t know yet. But you and I are proof that some people from this Clan survived...”

“Wait, you are... I mean, you think you are from this Blue Moon Clan, too? Did you grow up in this Clan then?”

“No, no. Someone saved me when I was an infant, and brought me to a childless couple of the Opal Clan here, in Silver City.”

Now that I look at her from up close, it does seem like Elena is in her early twenties, maybe younger... But I never imagined she might be an orphan too.

“The woman who saved me told that a Royal’s family had been killed and that she had found me alone in the middle of the... slaughter.”

I gasp, stunned. A Royal Family? I’ve heard of it, but...

Among werewolves, the Royals are the purest! Descendants from the very first werewolves, blessed by Moon Goddess. They have kept their bloodline so pure, staying away from humans and other species, that they are all born Alphas and deeply respected by other werewolves. Some say they have abilities granted by the Moon Goddess herself, but most of those are legends, I didn’t think there were any Royals alive!

“Royals? Are you sure?” Asks Bobo.

“For now, I am not sure of anything! I have no memories of surviving a massacre either. I just got pieces of information from the woman who saved me... But I’ve seen Nora’s wolf, and you did, too.”

I frown. What does she mean with that? How is my wolf shape related to this Clan...? Both Elena and Bobo stare at me for a while, with complex expressions I can’t decipher. I don’t get it!

“What do you mean?” I ask Elena.

“You are a pure wolf, Nora. Dark blue eyes and a perfectly white fur. Do you have any idea how rare is that combination among werewolves? It’s almost legendary! And you even have a Clan’s name as your given name!”

“No, no, you said yourself, it is probably only the Clan’s name. Even if I am from this Blue Moon Clan, it could just be...”

“Royal Families do take their Clan’s names as a symbol of power, Nora,” says Bobo. “They carry it for generations until there is no more descendant, and usually a new Alpha from a dominant but non-Royal family takes over. Any Clan’s name can be really old or newly made up, but only the Royals are entitled to carry it. Your father definitely knew who your mother was. Why would he have told you this was your last name otherwise?”

“One does not give a Clan’s name to their child!” Adds Elena.

I look at both of them, stunned. No, I can’t be a Royal’s child! That makes no sense...

“Then why wouldn’t that make you a Royal’s child too? Aren’t we related?” I ask Elena.

She laughs softly and shakes her head.

“We are related indeed, but I don’t believe I am the child of a Royal. Not directly, at least. I have gold eyes, and my fur isn’t completely white like yours. One of my parents probably wasn’t a pure werewolf.”

But she is an Alpha, isn’t she? My wolf can smell that she could be a dangerous opponent. I shake my head, lost by too much information.

“So, you think my birth mother was...?”

“A Royal, yes.”

But my dad was most definitely not... And until now, I thought there weren’t any Royals left! Centuries have passed since the very first werewolves. How could we keep the blood so pure until now? I know that there were still some of them a few generations ago. Among Clans, it is known that Royals were treated like treasures because of their pure blood and abilities, and ruled any Clan they were in. By nature, they had to lead and govern; they cannot be submitted. But for me? How many times did I give up while facing Alec or Vince?

Bobo gently pats my shoulder.

“You’re probably mixed, Nora. He might not have been an Alpha, but your father’s blood was most likely pure enough for you to keep some of the characteristics.”

“Not all of them. I can’t heal properly, and my shape-shifting isn’t ideal either.”

“Wait a minute... You can’t heal fast?” Asks Elena, surprised.

I shake my head. “No... I still heal faster than a human, but my healing ability is not as good as regular werewolves.”

She looks shocked and points to herself. “Nora, I have the same issue! As far as I recall, I never healed properly!”

“Really?”

“Yes! So far, I thought it was just me being weaker than other werewolves, but now...”

She’s right. If we are right about being related, and both experience the same problem with our healing capacity, that means it must be an issue with our blood. If we are indeed related to the Royals, shouldn’t our abilities actually be more reliable than our peers’? Why are we slow healers? Is it because we are mixed, then?

“Did you experience anything else that’s different?” I ask.

“Mind-linking. I’m much better at that than anyone I know, including my own Alpha. No matter the distance, I have no problem communicating with my pack members. I can even communicate with other packs’ Alphas.”

“Wait, aren’t you an Alpha?”

She frowns. “No, I’m not. And I don’t want to be.”

But she definitely has Alpha potential, like me! I was sure she was her own Pack leader and can’t imagine her in any other position. I want to ask her, but she’s annoyed by the subject, so I give up for now.

“What about you?” She then asks.

“I can’t, for now. I don’t belong to any Clan at the moment, so...”

You should try it. With your Alpha mate.

I don’t really get how it works yet...

Nora, you're mind-linking. Like, right now.

I look at her, surprised, and at Bobo. Gosh, she's right! I did it without realizing it because she started talking to me that way, and her voice sounded so clear in my head that I couldn't tell the difference. Elena smiles at me, amused by my reaction.

"Don't use it too much on others, though. If you're like me, people might... not really like it."

"Why do you mean?" I ask, intrigued.

"You'll see."

She checks the time from the clock on the wall and frowns. Bobo nods and takes a look at the entrance. "You should go, Elena. Our pack will have noticed your presence by now."

"What? Wait! We are not done talking!" I protest.

I still have so many questions, and Elena is the only person who knows anything about my origins! But she shakes her head and puts her cap back



on. “Sorry, Nora, Boyan is right. I already stayed longer than I should. Don’t worry, I’ll keep searching about the Blue Moon Clan.”

“When can we meet again?”

She winks at me. “I will find you, don’t worry. For now, don’t tell anyone about what we discussed today, okay? No one but Bobo must know, Nora, it is crucial.”

What about Damian? I don’t want to have to lie to him! Not when we are starting to trust each other! Elena seems to read my thoughts and answers right away.

“Not even your mate, Nora.”

“But...”

“If it makes you feel better, you are not the only one with secrets. I wouldn’t trust Damian Black so easily if I were you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll see.”

She turns around to head to the exit, ready to leave. But just when she's about to go out, Nathaniel suddenly appears at the entrance of the salon. When he sees Elena, his face has a stunned expression I've never seen him make before. She clearly didn't expect to run into him either.

They stare at each other for a few seconds, in awkward silence. He seems confused, but she's very calm while facing Nathaniel.

"Elena... What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Bobo."

"Bobo?"

He looks in our direction, and Bobo immediately nods. Nathaniel stares at me, too, but I act innocent. I don't know if he buys it, but his eyes go back to the pretty blonde, with an angry expression this time.

"You're not supposed to be here."

"Are you going to kill me then?"

Her straightforward question clearly destabilizes him, and he drops the hostile act. I'm amazed by how composed Elena is, compared to

Nathaniel. They stare at each other for a while. Their eyes express so many things, I feel like I'm eavesdropping on a private exchange. They might be mind-linking, but I can't tell. After a while, Nathaniel silently steps aside, letting her leave without another word. He watches her figure go, and I can't help but wonder once again what's between those two...

Once she's out of sight, Nathaniel turns to us, frowning. This is the first time I've seen him looking annoyed.

"Boyan, what was that?" He asks in a cold tone.

"Just as she said."

I feel bad for letting Bobo handle Nathaniel alone, but I remember Elena's words. Nathaniel and Bobo stare at each other for a few seconds, and I wonder if the Alpha will interrogate him again... Against my expectations, he doesn't ask anything else. Instead, Nathaniel breathes in, regaining his composure, and turns to me.

"Sorry about that, princess. Anyway, you look beautiful, and I hope you have a great date tonight with my brother. Enjoy your birthday."

His words sound a bit empty, and I can't help but think that his mind is somewhere else. I had almost forgotten about the salon's staff around us during my talk with Elena. They quietly and swiftly resume working, and Nathaniel leaves. I wait a bit before turning to Bobo.

“That scared me...”

“Don’t worry. I doubt he would do anything to Elena, but let’s be more careful next time. It might not be Nathaniel that shows up.”

I nod. It usually doesn’t end well for a werewolf trespassing on another Clan’s territory. Elena did seem pretty confident, but I still wouldn’t bet she was totally out of danger by coming here. The lady behind me clicks her tongue when I turn my head to talk to Bobo again, but I ignore her.

“Is the Opal Moon territory far from here?”

Bobo shakes his head and scratches between his dreadlocks while thinking. “Not really... They are mostly located in the Art District and around the University Campus. As I said, they’re part of the White Moon Clan, which is even bigger, so they can walk freely on most of North End. They have good bars with live music. They are tolerated on the Blood Moon turf, though, as long as they don’t push it...”

Of course. If the other packs’ members weren’t tolerated on the Blood Moon Clan’s turf, a third of the inhabitants wouldn’t be able to take a step in the city. Usually, everyone tries to stay on their own land, but we all live in Silver City. There has to be a bit of tolerance between most packs, or it would be impossible for other werewolves to even go downtown. What could raise suspicions is if a strong wolf adventured too far alone

and unannounced on another territory like Elena did today. Basically, once on another pack's turf, any wolf is at the mercy of that pack. They don't need a reason to attack; they make their own rules on their domain.

This makes me wonder how Elena will be able to meet me again...

I get lost in my thoughts while another lady comes to do my makeup. As my preparation goes on, Bobo asks if I want a cup of tea, but I politely refuse. I know he is just trying to help me ease my mind, but I still have a hard time processing everything I learned just today.

The child of a Royal? How could that be...? I look at my reflection in the large mirror facing me. Is it even possible? Until now, I didn't even know the Royals still existed in this day and age. Now Elena comes in and states that I am related to such a legend. As a mixed child. Did my father know? If so, why did he take me from my mother? Was she killed along with that family?

Somehow, I feel a hole in my heart whenever I think of my birth mother. Is it because I never really got along with the one who raised me? I wonder if she looked like me. She was probably the one with blue eyes. I want to know more about her, but where to start? And what about Damian? Elena advised to not tell him a thing, but why? If I really am the child of a Royal, I think I should tell him. I want to ask Bobo, but there are too many ears around us for now, so I hold it in. Anyway, this is all too sudden. I need to think about it.

I get lost in my thoughts and forget about the time. When my makeover is finally done, Tonia comes back just in time to witness it. I'm standing in the middle of the salon wearing the beautiful winter dress she gave me as my birthday present this morning, with Nathaniel's shoes. To be quite honest, I love what I see in the mirror, though I can barely recognize myself. With the heels, I don't look so petite anymore, and the dress fits me perfectly, making me more feminine than ever. It is sea-blue, with a silver ribbon and beads around the waist, and stops at my knees. My hair was very nicely done as well, giving my dark curls an elegant but natural look. The makeup is light, too, with a bit of blush here and there, a touch of mascara, and camellia-pink lips.

This girl facing me is beautiful, and I feel a bit embarrassed, staring at myself. Behind me, the siblings are both smiling.

"Very pretty."

"Pretty? She is stunning!" Claims Tonia.

I don't know what to say, so I just whisper some shy thanks. Now I'm starting to feel anxious. Seeing myself all ready and dressed up reminds me that I am about to have a date with Damian. My very first date! I'm both excited and nervous... I have no idea what he prepared. I feel like I barely know him already; how could I guess what plans he made for tonight?

As I suspected, Tonia is driving me to the rendezvous. In the car, I'm as anxious as one can be, and no one speaks. The girls from the Jade Moon Clan always argued about romantic moonlight strolls, going to the movies, or candlelit dinners. It's a bit hard to imagine Damian doing any of these... Tonia puts some music on the radio, and I try to relax.

About half an hour later, it's already dark outside when we stop in a location I can't recognize. It is pretty quiet, actually, except for the sounds of the seashore. Why are we at the waterfront? The last time I came close to the sea didn't end well... But the atmosphere is quite different this time. Tonia covers me up with a large white fur coat, and we walk a couple of steps to face a large boat.

It's actually a superb white yacht with its lights on and elegant wooden floors. Pushing me gently, Bobo helps me get on board while I'm still in awe. I have never been on a boat before! A private yacht to boot! I take shy steps inside, but the siblings don't follow me, staying on the dock, waving with big smiles on. Oh, well...

My wolf detects five... No, six people inside while I slowly walk in, though I don't see anyone. My heart is already thumping loudly. My wolf feels his presence, and that's all she can focus on for now. A romantic song is floating in the air, coming from the deck, so I head that way. This is so intriguing...

Once I finally reach the deck, I'm left completely speechless.

As if in a dream-like setting, the deck is decorated with white flowers and fairy lights all over. On the floor, there is a thin layer of snow, perfectly even and white. In the middle of it, a wooden table was set for two, with white napkins, crystal glasses, and silverware, with a centerpiece composed of candles, sand, and seashells. All of it is arranged in an elegant, but intimate, and unbelievably romantic setting.

Everything is absolutely perfect.

And in the frame of this incredible sight, stands Damian.

I find him more handsome than ever. As always, he is wearing only dark clothes, but this time it is a jet-black suit, with a silver tie matching his glowing eyes. He appears effortlessly handsome standing there, and I find myself falling for him once again. His muscular figure, the marble-chiseled traits, his thin lips... He even got a fresh haircut and a clean, short stubble beard.

...How can one be so handsome? I'm tearing up when I walk up to him. He catches my hand, entangling his fingers with mine as our faces come close. Our eyes meet, and I feel happier than ever. My heart is so warm and loud; I feel like it will explode any time now. Damian's eyes lock onto mine, sheening love on me. How can such an icy gaze make one burn with feelings at the same time?



Before we say a word, his lips find mine, and we lose ourselves in a long, tender, and passionate kiss. He is intense but gentle. I follow his rhythm, answering his kiss with more confidence than before. This taste on my lips is addicting, and I don't want to stop. Ever. I kiss him back, putting my free hand on his chest. I don't need air. I just want this man's lips against mine.

I feel Damian's hand sliding into my hair, his fingers playing with my curls like he loves to. He grasps and holds it, keeping me close enough to melt under his embrace. Winter means nothing. I feel myself burning from this man's delightful kiss, almost like I could get drunk on it.

When our kiss finally comes to an end, Damian holds me close against him, and his lips slowly slide all the way to my ear to whisper.

“Happy Birthday, Nora.”

I blush again, uncontrollably, because of those three words. Damian's voice so close to my ear, it makes me crazy. I can even feel his breath softly brushing my neck. How can one endure that! I avert my eyes, the blood rushing to my cheeks. He chuckles softly from my reaction and gives me a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Blushing already, Nora? So cute...”

“You're the one making me like that!” I protest shyly.

“Then I must be doing something right because you look adorable that way,” he whispers while putting a slight kiss on my forehead.

I try to push him away from me a little, or I will never be able to regain my composure otherwise. He smiles and stops with the kisses, though he has no intention to let go of my hand. Instead, he takes a step back and observes me from head to toe with a smile. He even raises his arm and makes me take a slow spin.

“You are beautiful tonight...”

I smile at him and step closer to him again. “You, too. I love the beard,” I whisper, brushing my fingers against the little spikes on his chin.

“I’ll remember it,” he says, kissing my fingers when they get close to his lips. “...Come.”

Holding my hand, he takes me to the table and helps me to my seat like a gentleman. I take my arms out of the sleeves of my coat, but keep it laying on my shoulders. Next to us, a small brazier is burning, slowly warming up the air around us, but it’s not enough. Damian grabs a blanket that was on a side and covers my legs with it. I love this.

We are having a candlelight dinner on the deck of a boat in December! I hadn't realized the ship had started moving, but we are slowly getting farther and farther away from the port. We are headed toward the vast sea, leaving Silver City's night lights behind us. I wonder if we have a set destination? Either way, I'm just overwhelmed by all of this. Even the most romantic movies I've watched with Tonia never had something like this! This is something out of a Fairy Tale, and I feel like I might wake up any minute.

I'm still very much awake when Damian opens up a bottle of French Champagne. Gosh, I hope there aren't too many alcoholic beverages planned. I don't have any experience with it... All I have is the few times Elizabeth made me try the beer at her father's pub, and I hated it. And now I'm being served a glass of fancy Champagne... However, Damian purposely gives me only half of what he pours for himself; he knows I can't drink too much.

He raises his glass, and we clink the crystal glasses together before taking a sip. It's actually quite good! It's a bit sweet, and I love the fizzy feeling on my tongue.

"So, how was your first day?"

"It was great! I loved it. The restaurant is amazing, and the team was really nice, too."

I start telling him about how the day went, from my arrival at the La Rose de L'Aube to the end of the service, so happy to share this with him. I tell him about the service, how I helped as much as I could, and even about a few memorable customers. Damian's eyes don't leave me for a single second all this time.

"So, I take it you want to continue then?"

"Of course! Nathaniel said I could keep working as a busser for now."

"And then? What do you want to do?"

My goal? I never really thought of any professional perspective before... Not that I could dream about any from Robert's dirty bar I used to work in, anyway. But I guess I could start if this is to be my first real job! I think for a few seconds, but the answer is suddenly crystal clear to me.

"I want to learn the ropes about the catering business."

"Cooking?"

"Not just that. How to cook, make menus, plan things, manage the staff, handle customers, and oversee it all. When I was young, I dreamed of having my own restaurant someday. If I can still try..."

I realize he is smiling, and I blush a bit.

“What?”

“...You remind me of my mother.”

Wow. This is the first time Damian has ever mentioned their mother. I wait a bit to let him speak. He puts his hand on mine, slowly drawing circles with his thumb.

“She was always a dreamer, despite her sickness. She missed France a lot, so she wanted to have her own restaurant to serve French cuisine there. The flavors of her childhood. Nate gave his restaurant her name.”

“Do you mean La Rose de l’Aube?”

He nods. “It means the Dawn Rose, literally, but another word for Dawn in French is Aurore, our mother’s name. Roses were her favorite flowers. Nate inherited her passion for cooking.”

That explains why he is the one in charge of almost the restaurants of the Clan, though they are not all French.

“What was she like? Your mom?” I ask.

He smiles softly. “The sweetest person you could think of. She always saw the good in anyone, a real pacifist at heart. Everyone in the pack loved her. And she was beautiful, too. Blonde, with blue eyes and pale skin. Her eyes were much lighter than yours, though. She had very soft traits and always looked young. Nate got her blonde hair and blue eyes, but Liam is the one who most looks like her.”

Which means Damian takes after their father... I wonder what their childhood was like with such parents. Their dad probably wasn't so violent at the start, like Liam said. What kind of brother was Damian to Nathaniel and Liam?

“Liam said you were studying together,” he says, changing topics.

I nod and tell him about all the books I go through at the apartment, how I somehow started taking Liam's homework. I'm only seventeen, after all. Not going to school was really something that bothered me for a long time.

“Don't you want to take classes?” Asks Damian.

“Maybe private lessons... Just so I could get a diploma. It feels too late to start school now, though. It'd be awkward.”

“You can think about it, Nora.”

I nod, but I’m still not too confident about this...

A young waiter suddenly appears to serve the appetizers. Damian went with an entirely French menu to please me. I wonder if chef Michel participated? Some of the dishes look familiar. Anyway, it’s delicious, and we talk about more trivial matters as we eat.

After a while, I notice the boat has actually stopped, and the view is fantastic. We are a few miles away from the coast, and, more importantly, we have the most incredible view over Silver City’s night lights. It’s breathtaking. Below the starry night sky, all the skyscrapers assemble, shining with colorful lights and neons. Yet, we are far from the noises of the city. This scenery is so peaceful, with the soft ambiance of waves and the piano in the background.

I take a moment to stare at it. My city.

Damian notices that I stopped eating and follows my gaze. How does he feel, as the silent King of this modern realm? No title, yet the most feared wolf in town. Sometimes I forget he is not just my fated mate or an Alpha. He is Damian Black, the most powerful man and werewolf of Silver City.

For so long, I thought I wasn’t a good match for him, that we were too different. I had no idea about my Alpha potential or my heritage. If I really

am a Royal, then it turns out I might be much more useful than I thought to him. And I want to be. I don't want to leave him to fight on his own. The brothers went through so many hardships already, and who knows what's next? We live in a dangerous world.

“Damian?”

“Hm?”

“What happened to your father?”

He turns to me, frowning a little. He probably never thought I would ask. For a while, he remains silent, and I wonder if he will answer me at all. He might not. I heard about the Black Brothers' story from others, but I don't believe that's something they would spread themselves.

Damian sighs and starts talking while looking at the city. “Our father was never able to handle his Alpha compulsions. Alphas are born to dominate. We have strong fighter instincts and don't react well to orders. That also means we experience stronger urges to fight and are more prone to violence. My father was such a man. If he was annoyed, he would hit. If he was bored, he would fight. The constant fighting with the Vampires made it worse, and our mother's Luna power was too weak to help. He was addicted to this.”



He stops for a minute while the waiter takes away our plates. When he resumes talking, his hand is on mine again, though his eyes are fixated toward the city.

“...Addicted to all that violence. It might have been okay if he was only fighting vampires or rogues, but he just didn’t know when to stop. He killed ruthlessly, even members of the pack. No one could stop him at the time. He was way too strong. He even beat up some of his closest friends, even the Beta. Even us. His sons were Alphas, so why shouldn’t he fight them, too? We were just kids, but it made no difference. Anything that upset him was a good enough reason to hit us.”

“What about your mother?” I can’t help but ask. “Wasn’t she around to protect you guys?”

“No, she was already at the hospital at that point. We never said a thing, but she knew. That made her worse. She couldn’t endure being powerless, but her sickness was... Anyway, she couldn’t do anything for us. We had to endure it for years, tiptoe around our father or wait for it to pass when he used his fists. I still have so many memories of when he suddenly got crazy and hit anything around him... Even his own children. ‘Werewolves are fighters,’ he always said. He almost killed me several times. He sent Nathaniel to the hospital once. I had to carry my brother on my back all the way there. He broke Liam’s arm when he was just eight. I hated that man so much, Nora, you have no idea. Just the thought of being of the same blood as that asshole made me want to puke. We were too young to fight back, but Nate and I trained. As time went on, we stopped being passive and started hitting back.”

I can't even imagine what kind of life they had growing up... And they were only children! It's a miracle the three of them got to where they are today with this kind of story behind them.

"What about Liam?" I ask.

Damian shakes his head. "He was too young. We did what we could to keep him out of it. Nate and I knew how it would end, and we didn't want Liam to be in the middle of this mess, too. I didn't even want Nate to be part of it, but of course, he didn't listen. So we trained, and we waited. We waited for an opportunity to kill our father."

I can't act scared or even shocked by Damian's words. With what the brothers went through, they might have been the ones to die if things had gone differently. Also, I realize that what Damian did was also his way of protecting his brothers. How could he endure seeing his younger siblings hurt for so many years while holding his hatred in? Back when Alec beat me, I had no one to hold dear, no one to protect. Things were different for the Black Brothers. Liam knows his older brothers shielded him from their father's madness, yet he still couldn't escape it.

"His Beta knew what we were planning, but he didn't say a thing to our father. He had come to hate him, too, yet he had to obey. Our father even beat up his son once, to punish him. How could he not despise him? That's when I understood I had more allies than I thought."

A faint smirk appears at the corner of his lips for a split second. He helps himself with a glass of wine while I drink some water. The dishes between us are getting cold, but neither of us cares. I'm too immersed in his story to think about my plate.

“So, Nate and I got ready, taking our time. We allied with rogues like the Mura siblings.”

“Bobo's family?”

“Yes. Our father was so harsh, he never wanted to take in new wolves in the pack, even some desperate families that stood at our borders. It was almost too easy. When they saw how strong Nate and I were getting, and our Alpha potential, many submitted without a fight. They didn't ask for anything as long as I wasn't like my father. The pack got so big so quickly, we couldn't believe it. Until then, we had thought we would have to wait for years until we could take my father head-on!”

“Why? Wasn't it only about dueling him for the Alpha position? What does it have to do with the size of the Blood Moon pack?”

Damian stays silent for a while, and I wonder what he is so reluctant to say. Eventually, he sighs and looks at me straight in the eye. “We wanted to be sure that, no matter the outcome, my father wouldn't be able to survive.”

“...What do you mean?”

“I wasn’t sure to win, Nora. If I died during the fight, Nate and I wanted to be sure someone would finish the job. And if someone did, we had to be sure my father’s wolves wouldn’t take him out.”

It takes me a few seconds to realize.

“...It was about Liam. You wanted to be sure that even if you died, Liam could kill your father and take his place.”

Damian nods. “I knew I could hurt him badly enough, but I wasn’t sure I could win. Nate came up with that idea. That even if he and I died, we would make sure Liam killed him. We also had to make sure no one would kill our little brother before he could get to our father and that people would support him afterward.”

“Hence the Blood Moon Clan. It wasn’t just a branch clan; you wanted it to be able to take on your father’s pack.”

Damian chuckles. The waiter comes back to take away our empty plates. My mate grabs my hand once again, intertwining my fingers with his.

“Back then, it was still called the Black Moon Clan, but yes, that was the idea. However, it didn’t even come to a real fight between the two groups. When I turned nineteen, I defied my father while we were alone. He didn’t take me seriously and attacked me. We started fighting in his office. We made so much noise that a lot of people came. Nate, Liam, the Betas, and about twenty people each from the Black Moon and Blood Moon Clans. But it turns out, most people from his pack were actually cheering for me.”

They once again underestimated how despised their father was. Or maybe people felt Damian already had what it took to be a better Alpha. In any case, I’m not even surprised.

“The only people still rooting for my dad were holding onto the fact that he was the one that had chased all the vampires away. I can’t really blame them for that, though. He was an insane and violent man, but as an Alpha, he was still the strongest wolf around.”

“But you did beat him,” I said.

“Not easily, trust me. People were shocked by how adamant I was about finishing him off. Most of them had no idea about what he had done to us all those years. If anyone tried to intervene, Nate, Neal, or Seamus killed them on the spot.”

“...Seamus?”

“My father’s Beta, Seamus Graves. I told you, he had our back. He couldn’t attack our father directly, but he did kill anyone from the Black Moon pack who opposed us. Lots of people were shocked, but Seamus had made up his mind years ago. When I finally won, I wasn’t in good shape, but he killed two wolves who tried to attack me. He was a traitor, the one who helped us the most to take over the Black Moon Clan.”

“What happened to him?”

Damian shakes his head. “He left the territory, saying he should have died with his Alpha, but he still had his sons, and he didn’t want to do that to them. So, he asked me to banish him. We don’t know about his whereabouts. Maybe he joined another pack or is still alone.”

I feel a bit sorry about the man. If we look at the bigger picture, he helped the Black Brothers in so many ways, for the sake of protecting his own. Yet it cost him so much: betraying his Alpha and leaving his family. Now that I think about it, Bobo did say one of his sons was now Nathaniel’s Beta. Isaac Graves, was it? I suppose the Beta genes run in their family...

“Anyway, after the fight, many other packs that were fed up with the Black Moon tried to attack us. It was chaotic for a few days.”

I remember that. The word that the “Black King” had fallen spread quickly, and many packs got crazy, hungry for power. The Black Moon’s

Alpha had overshadowed so many people for years. As soon as he was gone, many seized the opportunity.

However, the Black Brothers quickly made it known that the Blood Moon Clan could take on anyone and was not to be underestimated. The former pack had become even more significant, and all of that had been done secretly, to boot. Clans that tried to fight were wiped out, and opposing werewolves were submitted in no time. Just like that, the previous territory established by their father got even larger in only a few weeks.

“I can’t believe this all happened when you guys were still teens...” I whisper.

“Our mother’s death accelerated things. Things got way with our father, and if we didn’t act, I was afraid he was going to kill us first.”

I nod. If Judah Black had no problem hitting his children when they were young, who knows what it would have been like once they reach adulthood... It’s a miracle they survived that far.

Once again, I find myself thinking about their mother. I can’t even imagine what she went through, being unable to help her children. Her sons, enduring her husband’s insanity. I imagine young Damian, Nathaniel, and Liam living each day in fear while their powerless mother was on a hospital bed. And yet all they did was protect each other and love her.

I silently make the promise to myself to never be as helpless as she was. Not only do I want to stand by Damian's side even more, but I also feel like I should do what their mother couldn't. I want to be that Luna, the one that can protect her pack and her children. I feel my wolf growling fiercely inside, and she's more than up for that challenge.

While I'm thinking, so is Damian. He is frowning, and his silver eyes are fixated on his meat, though it's evident that he doesn't see it. I can almost feel his thoughts echoing mine. I can guess what's on his mind right away.

"You are not going to be like your father, Damian," I say softly to him.

He raises his head, surprised, and this time I'm the one putting my hand on his and doing the talking.

"I know you are afraid of being like he was, because you are both strong Alphas, and I understand. But you two are different. You can control yourself. All you wanted was to protect Nathaniel and Liam. Even now, you are always trying to protect me. And you listen to your brothers, to your Beta. Your father didn't care about anyone but himself. You are a fighter, but that doesn't make you an evil person. Just a strong Alpha."

He stays silent for a while, making me wonder if my words had any effect on him. But after a while, he finally smiles. Then, he brings my hand to his lips, kissing it while looking me into the eyes with a resolute look. "I



will protect you, Nora, I swear to the Moon Goddess Mother. I'm not letting what happened to my mother happen to you; I won't lose you. You have no idea how much I need you. I need you to keep me sane, to remind me what's right and what isn't. I've never been afraid to fight, but I'm afraid of losing you."

I smile, but why do I feel like his words have a deeper meaning than what I hear...?

Before I can get any further into my interrogations, the waiter comes back. I blush a little, as Damian is still holding my hand and keeps kissing it shamelessly. He sends me playful looks, amused by my reactions. I feel embarrassed, but the waiter doesn't say a word and takes away our empty plates.

Once he is gone, I click my tongue and try to have my hand back. Of course, he won't let go so easily.

"Stop it..." I mumble shyly.

But Damian ignores me, and instead gets up, leading me to do the same. He puts a hand on my waist and puts my hand he was holding onto his chest. I smile and wrap my fingers around his neck, brushing the baseline of his hair. He slowly starts dancing, small steps that I can easily follow.

For a while, we don't say a word. I let him lead our little dance and rest my head on his chest while listening to the music. It's like we are alone in the world, and for now, I love it. Surrounded by the sea, fairy lights, and Damian's arms. I feel his fingers gently brushing my skin, and the shivers I get have nothing to do with the cold. Can't we pause this moment forever? My eighteenth birthday is a dream I couldn't have dreamt of myself.

Two songs pass, and we can't separate from each other. I feel safe in those arms. Far from all the worries, the mysteries, the secrets...

And I find myself thinking about Elena's words. What did she mean? Why shouldn't I trust Damian? Moon Goddess wants us together, so why is it that I can't trust my fated mate completely? It's not just Elena's words. Something tells me I've only scratched the surface. Getting him to talk about his past was already a big step, yet I still want more. Much more. He is always keeping me away from the real world. It's like being trapped in a golden prison. I can't go out as I wish, and I have no idea what's going on outside. Why do I need to be so protected? It can't just be related to our bond...

Just for tonight, I close my eyes, and I forget all about my questions. That can wait until tomorrow, can't it? I don't want to ruin this, my first date with Damian. He is gentle, loving, and just for tonight, he is all for me.

I feel him leaning slowly towards the side, and his lips gently land on my neck. Soft kisses, running with a small fire on my skin. Anything he

touches burns, and it's addicting. I blush again and close my eyes. Suddenly, I feel his hands leaving me, and I frown. What is he doing? Then, I see him put something around my neck, and I gasp. A necklace! He puts the thin platinum chain around my neck and helps me put my hair back around it. Oh, Moon Goddess...

"You didn't think I wouldn't give you a present, did you?"

I smile and grab the little pendant with my fingers to look at it. It's a magnificent crescent moon, made of a myriad of tiny white diamonds. The design is so elegant and pure, I love it... Though the moon is not too big, it shines like a treasure against my pale skin. I can't take my eyes off it for a few seconds, making Damian smile.

"You like it?"

"Damian, I love it!"

I jump to kiss him, standing on tiptoe and putting my arms around his neck. My gosh, why does he have to be so tall! But it does not matter, as I feel him smile against my lips and bend over to kiss me some more. I play with his hair under my fingers, and he suddenly grabs my waist and hoists me up, before putting his arms under my thighs to carry me while I face him. Our playful kiss goes on, with the two of us chuckling from time to time, trying to take over the other's lips. It's funny to stand a little higher than him for once, and I like the way he looks up to meet my eyes.

I hear the waiter coming back, and I'm red again as he sees me straddling Damian. I try to break free, but of course, the man won't let me go and keeps holding me against him. I hide my face into his neck, too ashamed to face the young waiter. Can't he be a bit more decent sometimes?

"Nora, look."

I frown against his shirt collar. What does he want now? Is the waiter gone, at least?

When I finally turn my head, another surprise is waiting for me. A cake! A small cake is now on the table, with two lit 18-shaped candles on it. Damian puts me down so I can approach it. I can't believe it! He really got me an Opera Cake!

I smile subconsciously, happy to see my favorite dessert. Someone even wrote down a "Happy Birthday" in white chocolate on top of the cake and drew flowers with the icing and spread some gold powder, too. I bite my lip, not knowing what to say. My first birthday cake in forever, and it's so perfect!

I finally turn to Damian, smiling from ear to ear. "You really got me that cake!"

“You can thank Nate for that, actually. I had to ask for his help. So, this Opera Cake you wanted so badly was just a chocolate cake?”

I laugh and shake my head. “Not just a chocolate cake! It’s several layers of almond sponge cake, soaked in coffee syrup, with layers of ganache and coffee buttercream! And it is covered in the chocolate glaze,” I recite with assurance.

Damian looks at me, surprised. “Sounds like you could do it on your own.”

“Maybe I’ll try it sometime. I read the recipe long ago, and I always wanted to try it.”

“What, so this is your first time eating one?” He asks.

I nod and head back to my seat. I really want to have a taste of it now! Damian chuckles and joins me, putting his chair next to mine. The waiter comes back quickly to serve us some champagne once more. I take a new sip, feeling fine. I’m just a little bit light-headed, nothing wrong with that, and it might even not be to blame on the alcohol...

I lean toward the candles, and close my eyes, trying to think of a wish to come up with. I feel like I can’t ask for anything more than all that is given to me now... In the end, I just silently ask Moon Goddess Mother to watch over the people I love for this new year. I blow out the two candles quickly,

and my fated mate puts a quick kiss on my head, wishing me a happy birthday once again.

Damian puts his arm around my chair while I grab the little forks. I decide to ignore the plates the waiter gave us and eat directly from the cake. Gosh, this is so good. I take another bite, a bit greedy. We are still facing Silver City, and I'm having an Opera Cake on a boat, with pretty clothes and a birthday present from my fated mate around my neck... If someone had told me that three months ago, I wouldn't have believed any of it.

“Are you going to eat all that Opera Cake on your own, or do you intend to let me have some of it, too?”

I laugh at him with my mouth still full. I was so absorbed into my tasting that I even forgot to hand him his fork... Instead of giving it back to him, I take some of the cake with it and feed it to him.

He makes a frown as soon as he tries it. “Too sugary...”

“You don't like sweet stuff, anyway! Why did you want it then?” I ask, amused by his grimace.

“I was curious about what that cake you wanted so much tasted like...” He grabs his glass and drinks some champagne, probably to take off the taste. Well, it seems like this cake is all mine then!

I keep eating happily, and Damian keeps drinking, watching me stuff myself with a smile. I know he still thinks I'm too skinny. They all do, though I'm pretty sure I'm not underweight anymore.

After a while, I finally stop eating, too full to have any more of it. I lean back and rest my head on Damian's shoulder. "You didn't smoke all night."

"How do you know I usually smoke?"

"The smell. I've never seen you with a cigarette, but you always have this faint tobacco smell on you. How come you never smoke in front of me?"

"I couldn't smoke at the hospital, and the Mura siblings hate it, so... I don't need it that much, anyway."

"Do your brothers smoke, too?"

"I don't think so. Maybe Liam, but he knows we don't want him to. Nate is more of a drinker, but I don't think I've seen him smoke."

I nod. I got that impression, too. And he works around kitchens all day, so I guess he would try to stay away from it.

When I'm about to ask him something else, I suddenly feel him tense up. He stays completely immobile for a minute, his eyes fixated on the horizon. I try to see what he sees, too. Isn't there too much agitation at the north end of the harbor?

"Damian...?"

He suddenly gets up and runs to the back of the boat, yelling orders to go back to the bay. What's going on? I focus on the mind-link from earlier, looking for her...

"Elena!"

"Nora? Where are you?"

"On the sea with Damian. What's going on? There's too much agitation at—"

"North End, I know! I'm headed there now, we're under attack!"

"Rogues?"

"No, damn vampires!"



A vampire attack now? That doesn't make any sense! I thought the former Alpha Black had chased them far to the North? And Silver City is entirely dominated by werewolf packs now, so what's the point of attacking us? It's suicide for them!

Damian is still yelling orders, and the boat is now going back full speed to the harbor. He comes back to me just when I am holding the rail not to fall, looking furious. He walks up to me, having no problem to walk despite the boat's speed, and puts his arms around me.

"I'm sorry, Nora," he says, "We have to go back. It's a massive attack."

"It's okay, I know," I answer, nodding against his shoulder.

"You stay on the boat, I will..."

"No, Damian, I'm coming with you."

"No!" He yells, making me jump, though I expected a refusal. I saw it coming the second I decided to go, too. His silver eyes have turned into an ice-cold stare, as he is fixating on me furiously.

“You stay there, Nora, don’t you come an inch close to those blood-suckers. I’ll handle it.”

“You can’t put me aside, Damian; I want to go! And it’s not even your territory!”

“It’s not yours, either! You don’t have a territory, for now, Nora!”

Thanks for the reminder. Now it’s my turn to glare. I’m well aware that not having a pack makes me a target anywhere I go, aside from the Blood Moon Clan’s territory. But this is my city, and I refuse to sit while it’s attacked.

Damian realizes his words hurt me more than he thought and shakes his head. “Sorry. But I just want you to stay safe, Nora. You stay there, and that’s final.” He walks off, taking off his jacket.

I bite my lip. I don’t want to stay back! I have to go. What if someone really gets hurt or worse, killed? Vampires might be weaker than us, but they are still dangerous! It took years to chase them all out of Silver City. My eyes go to the harbor, trying to get a hold of whatever is going on there.

“Elena, are you there yet?”

“On my way. But my friends told me there’s a lot of them. Really a lot.”

“Is your pack okay?”

“For now. The White Moon, is there, too, and some of the Sea Moon pack warriors joined, as well. But those damn vampires just keep coming.”

“The Blood Moon is on their way.”

“I figured so. Nate’s guys just arrived.”

“What about the other clans?”

“They have to watch out for the other sides of the city. This might be a massive attack. I just saw some guys from the Gold Moon and Rising Moon packs heading south.”

I didn’t think of that, but Elena might be right. Vampires are known to be smart— they haven’t been around for years for nothing. Those cunning creatures wouldn’t attack recklessly like that. Not only must they have an aim, but they probably have a plan, too.

Our boat reaches the shore, and Damian takes off his shirt. He comes back to me and quickly kisses my forehead before looking at me in the eye.

“I’ll be back, Nora. Stay in the harbor. Bobo and Tonia are coming to get you.”

And with that, he turns around and shapeshifts in a split second. The big, jet-black wolf immediately starts running toward the North, growling furiously. Moon Goddess helps anyone who will stand in his way. The guy who served us dinner helps me out of the boat, but my thoughts are somewhere else. Elena’s words got me thinking.

Didn’t she say she could contact any Alpha? Then maybe I should be able to do so, too. But I only know one personally other than the Black Brothers... Gosh, I really didn’t want to make use of this, but this is an emergency. I ought to try.

I feel my wolf inside, ready anytime I need. She’s on edge, too. She felt the intrusion on the territory and doesn’t like it. She wants us to go and help our mate.

“I know, I want to go too, but there is something else we need to do first,” I tell her. Then I call out: “Vincent.”

“What the... Nora?”

Gosh, it worked! And so quickly, too. I feel like I can almost see his brown wolf, and mine growls immediately, making him submit right away. I was

afraid he might try to refuse me somehow, but he shows no resistance to the mind-link.

“Yes. Listen, there is a vampire attack in the North. Right now.

“I know, just heard of it. I was about to give orders for our warriors to—”

“No! Stay there and guard the East forest. The White Moon, Pearl Moon, and Blood Moon Clans are already focusing on the North, but these might be multiple attacks. Our territory is the first line of defense in the East of Silver City, we can’t leave it defenseless.”

He stays silent for a while, and I feel his wolf being restless.

“...Okay, it makes sense. I’ll do as you say and send more sentinels to the East. If something goes through, we’ll know.”

“If it happens, send a distress signal to the neighboring clans. Everyone is on the look-out, so they’ll help.”

“Got it. I just sent word to the Pearl Moon Alpha. She’ll definitely help.”

“Okay.”

Satisfied with that, I cut the mind-link. I can't believe I just mind-linked Clark! And it went well, too. I feared he wouldn't listen to me, but it looks like Vincent will keep his word.

I feel a bit better, knowing the other sides of Silver City aren't defenseless. Out of all the big Clans, most are going to defend their position or help somewhere. Though the packs usually fight a lot among themselves, werewolves are quick to gather as one to fend off an enemy.

Still, I feel restless. This attack really makes no sense! The North is the easiest to defend, with the White and Opal Clans there, and they are close to the Blood Moon's territory, too. They are bound to have reinforcement in a few minutes once they request help. Why would the vampires choose this spot to launch an attack? That is suicide! Or are there really many of them, like Elena said? Could they outnumber us?

I'm starting to feel worried. Why aren't Bobo and Tonia there yet? I've been waiting at the harbor for a while now! Did they get held up somewhere? Are they okay? While I'm worried about everyone, Elena's voice echoes again in my head.

"Nora! Some passed through our defense! They are running through the city!"

"What? Where are they aimed to? They're targeting the humans?"

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t look like it. They are staying West on the Sea Wolves’ turf! Following them now!”

That’s just North to my position! I can’t stay there. I take off my heels, my jewelry, and my dress, leaving them on the ground. The waiter looks at me, standing in my underwear. Well, I’m a werewolf anyway, and I don’t want to rip this dress! And there is no time for shyness or blushing now!

“Okay, girl, time to shapeshift.”

I breathe in and let my wolf take over. It’s been a while, but it’s as easy as closing my eyes. She is only too happy to make her appearance. I’m in my white wolf shape within a few seconds and start running as soon as my paws touch the ground.

Gosh, this is my second time going to the Sea Wolves’ territory within a very short time. I hope they won’t mind because I can’t afford to fight them, too. I keep running as fast as I can, going up the shoreline. It doesn’t take long before I start hearing growls and sounds of fighting ahead of me. They got even further into our territory than Elena thought! When I arrive at the scene, about twenty wolves are ganging up on about a dozen vampires.

Those creatures are taller and thinner than humans, with blood-red eyes and pale skin. All of them are dressed in black leather, and some of them are even carrying daggers or swords. I see them glowing in the dark. Those are made of silver! It explains why twenty wolves are not enough to hold them, everyone is cautious because of those weapons.

I immediately jump on the one closest to me, who is about to stab a young grey wolf. Without the slightest hesitation, I bite off the hand that held a dagger. I may not be a warrior, but my wolf knows how to follow her instincts, and she won't show mercy for bloodsuckers. He didn't see me coming and screams in horror. The wolf that was under him seizes the moment and aims for the throat directly. With a third wolf joining in, we finish this creature off, tearing it to limbs. While the other two end the job, I look around. We still have the upper hand, and no one seems to care about me coming there. I need to talk to the Alpha.

It only takes a second to notice him among his own. He is dark-grey, bigger than the others, though he looks old and has a lot of scars all over. I try to focus on him while staying cautious of my surroundings, establishing a mind-link. I see him react, raising his head.

“Wait... Oy, who is that? He turns his head around, searching for a while, and his eyes fall on me. The white wolf? What are you doing here, kid?”

“I came to help. More are coming.”



“I know. My wolves are watching all over the harbor. Those bloody vampires are all headed there. Bet they want to stay close to the sea.”

The sea! I didn't think of it earlier, but vampires are excellent swimmers! They don't need to breathe, and their eyes don't mind the water, either. It will make a good escape route if things go badly for them. But then again, what is their aim?

I help another duo to fend off a vampire, and we kill it quickly. Even armed, a vampire is no match for three werewolves. What annoys me is that they keep coming. How is that possible? I wish I knew how Damian and the others are doing in the North.

“Marina!”

I turn around. A young female is pinned down by a vampire. Somehow, she got isolated from the rest of the group, leaving her almost defenseless. Using a wolf next to me, I jump off, and, with a big leap over several heads, I fall on her enemy. My fangs find his neck, but he immediately swings with his dagger to try and shake me off. I feel a sharp pain on my arm, but don't let go. The young she-wolf doesn't miss her chance and furiously bites his shoulder, making him drop the dagger. As we are still struggling, another wolf that has the same fur as hers jumps in and rips the vampire's head off with a single bite.

Ouch, silver really hurts... I feel blood on my paw, but I'm okay, I guess. I'm a slow healer, anyway, so I think this doesn't change much. The young she-wolf comes to me and immediately starts licking my wound. It's the first time someone did this for me... She stops once the bleeding slows down and puts her muzzle to touch mine. I know she's saying thanks. The other wolf, probably a relative of hers, nibbles her ear quickly. We must go back to the fight.

The three of us jump back into the fight, and for a while, we are doing good. Other than me, two other wolves are hurt, but that's it, while numerous vampires who are already on the ground.

“Nora, you were right! Vampires are coming from the East! But we can hold them off, for now. The Pearl Clan's warriors are here, too, and the Gold Moon pack is fending them off in the South.”

I don't have time to answer to Vincent, but he didn't sound too worried. And the Gold Moon Clan is one of the strongest, also, so I know they can hold the Southern position for a while. What I'm more worried about is the North. If that many vampires are getting past our defenses, what is going on up there? Are Nathaniel and Damian okay? And Bobo and Tonia are still not here!

This is my very first fight, and I don't have a second to rest. Though we kill many of them, the vampires keep coming. How come there are so many of them? Vincent and the other Clans are doing fine in the South and East, but I wish I knew what's going on in the North!

“Elena! Are you okay?”

“Yeah, doing my best. I’m just a few blocks ahead of your position, but the situation’s worse here.”

My wolf tenses. “She’s in danger.”

My wolf’s right. I would have said so even without hearing her obviously tired tone. Moreover, every time she mind-links me, I feel she is not in her wolf, but in her human form. Why wouldn’t she shape-shift now? Did she got hurt by silver or something?

“Damn it! What is he still doing here? Stubborn wolf!”

“Elena?”

“It’s Bobo! I keep telling him to go to you, but he won’t leave me! His sister is running to you, though!”

I’m a bit relieved to hear about Bobo and Tonia, but what is going on? Damian told Bobo to come to me, so why is he staying with Elena? Though, if she is not in her wolf form, I still feel better knowing my friend is with her. Maybe she’s even injured, and that would explain Bobo

staying with her. I can do fine on my own here, and the Sea Moon Wolves are cooperating with me like I'm one of them.

After a few minutes, Tonia indeed appears to join the fight here. She isn't injured, thanks to Moon Goddess. She is almost as big as her brother, though she's thinner, and her arrival cheers up the tired Sea Moon Wolves. She jumps to me, and immediately takes a defensive position, growling at the closest vampires. I wish I could ask her about Bobo and Damian!

“Nora, something weird is going on here!”

“Vincent?”

“All the vampires are... I don't know, something is attacking them!”

“What something? Is it attacking our own?”

“No, it's... Whatever it is, it's protecting my injured wolves! The... Shit, I can barely believe it, but roots are growing from the ground to hold the vampires!”

Roots? Like actual tree roots? Is he kidding? Did Vincent hurt his head or something? But he sounds fine to me. What is going on now?

“...It’s like the forest is attacking the vampires! They were about to get the upper hand on us, but all of a sudden, the trees have started pinning them down! The trees!”

Our forest is attacking the vampires? What is this now? I hear Vincent exulting in my head, and I close the mind-link. Well, at least now I can stop worrying about the East. Though I really wish I knew how the hell the forest is suddenly stepping into this fight!

We are now clearly getting the upper hand. A few Sea Moon Wolves are injured, but werewolves from another Clan stepped in, I’m unsure which. Anyway, these new wolves are fighters, seeing how they attack the vampires without mercy and take them down one by one. They are now enough to defend themselves here. I leave this part of the battlefield, avoiding enemies to head North. I need to join Elena, Bobo, and the Blood Moon Clan.

Behind me, I hear Tonia growling, but I ignore her. I know Damian told me to stay back, but I never agreed to it. The harbor isn’t any safer now, anyway. She follows me, and we soon reach another fighting ground, more into the city this time, somewhere in-between the Port and the Latino District. I spot Elena right away: As I suspected, she is the only one standing in her human form, other than the vampires.

Even so, I have to say, she’s obviously a great fighter. She is fighting with some sort of wooden pole, and her moves are like those fight choreographies you see in action movies. Not even one vampire can get

close to her, she is fiercely standing her ground. Plus, she has two wolves siding with her: one is Bobo, and the other is a smaller tawny wolf unknown to me.

“Elena!”

“Nora! Are you okay? Moon Goddess, you’re bleeding!”

“It’s okay. Why aren’t you in wolf shape?”

“Don’t worry, I can defend myself fine this way.”

That’s not what I asked! She obviously ignored my question, so I don’t ask again. We have more urgent matters at hand. Elena didn’t lie when she said they were not doing great here. The number of vampires is starting to grow, and there are only about a dozen werewolves.

I try to defend another wolf who having difficulty, but Tonia is hindering me in attempting to protect me. Can’t she let me fight by myself!

Bobo, too, is fighting harder, trying to protect both me and Elena. Is it because of her heritage, because she is a mixed Royal like me? I feel like there is something else. He is also very protective of the other male wolf next to Elena, though this one is doing just fine. Elena and this tawny wolf seem used to fighting together, completing each other’s moves like a

synchronized dance. At least I can stop worrying about her since she really is doing great on her own.

I, on the other hand, can't say the same. I've been keeping this up for a while now, and the exhaustion is growing on me. I'm glad I stuffed myself up with cake earlier, giving me extra energy for all I'm burning right now. But somehow, more and more vampires come at me one after another. My wolf and I aren't ready to back down, however. I ignore the pain in my arm and jump with Tonia on a female vampire close to us.

"Nora, there is something weird."

"What is it?"

"I feel like they're targeting you!"

"What?"

I look around, and though it takes me a few minutes, I realize she might be right. No matter how hard Tonia and I fight, it's like the vampires focus on our duo. As more keep coming, a lot of vampires do keep the other wolves busy, but I still notice a bunch of them aim directly toward us. That's why we have been doing triple work all along! Elena's right, there are a lot more vampires lying around Tonia and me than anywhere else. I jump to another position, and our opponents ignore Tonia to rush towards me. Why now?

I keep fighting them off, Tonia and Bobo helping me. For my first real fight, other than the duel, I never thought I would be fighting vampires alongside other packs! But there is a mix of Opal Moon, White Moon, Sea Moon, and Blood Moon wolves gathered all around, and everyone is doing their share.

“Nora, we are pretty much done here! The forest stopped attacking the vampires a while ago, but we are finishing the job! We sent a lot of our valid warriors straight to the North to help now!”

Finally! I relay Vincent’s news to Elena, who immediately shares it with her own Alpha and the Alpha of the White Moon Clan. Realizing she was talking with them all along, I ask her about the situation in the North while shredding a neck off.

“Not good. Xavier said something odd is going on over there, too. The vampires are using some sort of poison, slowing our people. I know it sounds weird, but our river is attacking the werewolves. Tell the Sea Moon Wolves to stay far from the water, it’s attacking the packs!”

Seriously, the water now? I wouldn’t have believed her a few minutes ago! I was glad some sort of force from the forest was helping the Jade Moon Clan, but then how come the water is attacking us? The Northern territory is right on a river, too! If this is what the vampires were relying on, it explains why they choose to attack from the North. I use the mind-link to pass the information to the Sea Moon Alpha.



“We’re good here, kiddo. No attack from the sea, but I’ll tell the guys to be careful!”

Whatever it is, it’s only in the North now. But it’s powerful enough to let the vampires dominate four packs allied together! Gosh, I hope Damian is alright! I ask Elena, but she says she doesn’t know. It’s probably too chaotic in the North, so no one can stop and look for a black wolf. I pray to Moon Goddess for him to be okay and focus on my own fight.

Suddenly, Tonia takes a violent hit from a duo who ganged up on her. I want to step in, but I’m already fighting off another one of those bloodsuckers a few meters away. Bobo is also too far away, helping the other tawny wolf. They managed to scatter our group somehow, this is not good. I hear Tonia whimper— she’s really hurt. The second I turn my head to look at her is a mistake. I feel a vivid pain, and a kick throws me a few steps back. The pain blinds me for a second, and my wolf whines in response, the distress echoing in our mind.

“HELP!”

“Nora, don’t...!”

For a second, all the wolves around me freeze and turn their heads to me. It’s like they all heard me, and in a few seconds, they all fight harder than ever. I realize some of them are trying to fight off their opponent to come

and help me, but it's useless. I'm too far from any of them. I'm on my back, and that damn vampire has a hand on my throat, pinning me down. He lost his dagger earlier in the fight, so he focuses on trying to hit me. I bite furiously anything that comes close. Gosh, those creatures are damn strong! I need to break free before he breaks my neck!

Suddenly, we hear a loud howl, and everyone turns their heads. A new pack has joined the fight! I hear Elena's cheer of joy in my head.

"It's Lysandra Jones! The Purple Moon Clan!"

It's my first time seeing her, and the dark wolf launches the attack as soon as she's here, starting by the vampire that was on Tonia. Their pack is small, but they are notorious fighters. The fight resumes, and this time no side has the upper hand. Lysandra's wolves are helping others, taking over for the hurt wolves. But they are not on my position yet, and I must keep fighting the vampire on me. Just when I thought he was about to kill me, his hand tightening around my throat, I suddenly hear the vampire next to him, a woman, yelling: "Idiot, don't kill her! She needs us to take this one alive!"

What the...? Before I can realize what she just said, a dark form jumps over us, and a loud growl follows. I see a black fur above me, covering most of my sight. The furious wolf bites off the vampire's shoulder, pushing him off me, and attacks again. I struggle to get back on my feet. For a split second, I thought it was Damian, but I notice this wolf is a bit smaller than my mate and has reddish hair around his collarbone.

“Liam!”

He turns to me and helps me get up; his fur tainted with vampire blood all over. I probably don’t look any better, either...

“Hey, Nora, what’s up?”

“Don’t “what’s up” me! What are you doing here? Why aren’t you with Nathaniel and Damian?”

“Don’t yell, I sent them reinforcements already! But my brother was worried about you, so I went to you first. We heard your distress call! How the hell did you do that?”

They heard me what? Oh, Moon Goddess, did they actually hear me all the way to the Northern territory? I just mind-linked without thinking!

I don’t really have time to focus on anything else, as, despite our arguing, Liam jumps into the fight right away. I can catch some rest while he fights off my opponents, but I’m too worried about my friend. I look for her on my left side.

For some reason, the Purple Moon Alpha is protecting Tonia fiercely, not letting anyone approach her. However, my friend is trying to push her off. Bobo, too, is busy defending Elena and her friend. I notice the tawny wolf also got hurt, he is limping a bit.

Around us, the fight is slowly dying down. The arrival of the Purple Moon warriors totally shifted the power balance to our side. Liam, too, is exceptionally efficient. It's my first time seeing the youngest Black brother fighting. Still, he's doing great, taking vampires down one after another without stopping. He even scares off a few of them.

"Elena, how is the...?"

"The North is okay; they are almost done! The water stopped attacking them, and the wolves that were hurt are getting back on their feet, too. I don't know what it is, but whatever it was is gone."

We both start mind-linking our sides to check, but it's the same everywhere. Vincent is busy taking care of his injured pack members, and the Sea Moon Wolves are dispersing to chase the remaining vampires on the harbor and hunt them down.

Elena starts to check her friend's leg, frowning. "You're hurt... I told you to not shield me! Idiot!"

Though she sounds angry, she seems genuinely worried for her friend. Moreover, I'm observing Bobo, who is walking in circles around them, not coming too close or leaving them, visibly anxious. What is this, Bobo? I wish he would go back to his human form to talk to me, but he just walks up to me once he sees me. He whines a bit, bowing his head, putting his ears down.

Gosh, don't apologize, Bobo. I'm okay, aren't I? I wish I could communicate with him, too, but instead, I just push him off gently with my muzzle. Once she's done tending her friend, Elena starts setting the vampire's corpses on fire, the usual thing to do. To my surprise, the Purple Moon Alpha then shifts back to her human form.

She's a tall, dark-skinned woman with long purple hair and lots of tribal tattoos. She obviously doesn't mind walking around naked, as she helps Elena with the fires. Once she goes back to Tonia, my friend growls furiously, obviously trying to fend her off. Didn't she spend the whole fight protecting her? What's with Tonia not wanting her close? I remember Bobo saying they have a connection, though he didn't get into the details. Well, it's probably not of my business anyway.

Liam walks back to my side. "My brother is nagging me about you. They are coming here."

"Are they okay?"

“Nora, it’s my brothers. Of course, they are fine.”

Though his arrogant tone is a bit annoying, I’m finally relieved. I look around, and sadly, there are a few dead werewolves from each clan. I bet it’s worse in the North... The Sea Moon Alpha joins us, and he shifted back to his human form, though he is clothed. He is an old man, rather short, with a sailor look.

“Jones, you little rascal,” he says to the Purple Moon Alpha.

She waves back at him. “Hi, Old Man Seaver. How’s your side?”

“It’s not pretty, we lost a few good people. How’s yours?”

“We’re okay.”

She won’t say more. It must be hard on the Alphas whenever they lose people in a battle like this... And because of vampires, too. The Sea Moon Alpha turns to me. I can’t really shapeshift now, I would be too embarrassed to stand naked. Still, it doesn’t matter since I can communicate, anyway.

“Thank you for your help, young lady. I almost lost my daughter today, but you saved her. You helped a lot of my boys and girls. The Sea Moon Wolves have a debt to you, I won’t forget it.”

“It’s nothing. I did what I had to.”

“No, no, a Sea Wolf pays his debts. Sooner or later. Anyway, which pack are you from? I haven’t heard of a pack with a white Alpha.”

Oops. How am I supposed to answer that? I can mind-link other Alphas because of my genetics, not because I’m a pack leader... I exchange a look with Elena, but she just shakes her head, telling me not to disclose my origins. I know. But I can’t think of what to answer. I’m not the Jade Moon Alpha, and I don’t belong to Damian’s pack either. Before I can answer, other wolves come running to us.

“Nora!”

Damian runs up to me. He and Nathaniel took the time to shapeshift and put on pairs of dark jeans, though they are still bare-footed, and their naked torsos are full of blood. It’s quite a gruesome sight, making them both beautiful and scary, like angels of death. And to say I saw him in a perfect tuxedo not two hours ago... A dozen other wolves come following them, all looking a wreck.

My mate comes to me, putting his hands in my fur, checking for injuries underneath all the vampire blood. He soon sees my arm injury and growls in anger. The two other Alphas tense up immediately.

“Stop it, I’m fine...”

“I told you to stay right where you were!”

“Yes, and if I did, I would have been alone fighting vampires, anyway! They ran through the whole harbor, Damian! I had better chances with the Sea Moon pack than alone.”

He growls again but doesn’t talk back. We both know I’m right, and this is no time and place to argue. He stands up to face the others. The atmosphere totally changed upon their arrival. All wolves gather behind their Alphas, except the purple-haired woman, who is still by Tonia’s side. Elena is also standing with her friend and other Opal Moon Wolves that arrived in the meantime. I notice Nathaniel is stealing glances at her, but she ignores him.

“The Black youngsters,” says the Sea Moon Alpha. “I don’t like seeing the likes of you on my harbor, but I guess this is what they call an emergency situation.”

“Indeed,” adds Lysandra. “How is the North?”

“We are fine. The remains are being burnt as we speak, and we chased them far enough. The White Moon Clan is taking care of whatever is left,” says Nathaniel.



Once again, he looks at Elena while mentioning the White Moon Clan, but she doesn't say a thing.

“What was that? They attacked at the South-East, too.” Asks Lysandra, annoyed.

“They struck the North first. We received the Northern packs' distress calls early enough and went to help them, but there were about a hundred vampires.”

“You mean only a hundred? How come the White Moon couldn't get rid of that? Did they get soft or something?”

Elena, her friend, and the other Opal Moon wolves present immediately growl at her, vexed by her words, but she ignores them.

“It wasn't only vampires. Something was helping them. I saw the water from the river catching and trapping wolves. Some were poisoned, too; we had many victims that way. Something was definitely off.”

“Sounds like a witch to me.”

All eyes turn to the old Alpha, Seaver, who is scratching his beard. Damian turns to him, frowning.

“A witch?”

“Witches are elemental creatures. If a Water Witch was helping them...”

“It would explain how they got past the first defenses so easily...”  
Whispers Nathaniel.

“Then what drove her off? Did anyone get her?” Asks Lysandra, looking around.

“We didn’t even see one. Only vampires. But she could have attacked from further away. I don’t know how their magic works.”

“Send some people to look at the bodies. See if they find a Witch among them,” orders Damian to some of the Blood Moon wolves.

I didn’t think of a Witch... I know very few about those, they are by far rarer than other creatures, too. All I’ve heard is that they look like human women and have mystical powers they use to cast spells and manipulate elements, as old Seaver said. The presence of a Witch could indeed explain what happened. They are our natural enemies, like vampires. But would they ally with vampires?

“What about what happened in the South, then? That time, the trees helped the packs. I don’t think a witch would have changed her mind,” says Lysandra.

“And they can’t change their elements, either. What if there is another Witch left in the South?” Asks the Sea Wolf Alpha.

“If there is, she helped us. She was on our side,” says Elena.

All eyes turn to her, surprised to hear someone else other than the Alphas talk, but they don’t have time to discuss hierarchy now.

The old man sighs. “I don’t like the idea of a remnant witch here.”

“Me neither,” says Lysandra.

I don’t blame them. Who wants to keep a natural enemy anywhere near? I see Elena frowning, exchanging looks with the tawny wolf. Is she worried about a witch being around?

“Let’s send people to search for her in the Sou—” But before she can finish her sentence, Liam is loudly growling next to us, making everyone jump. I never heard him so angry before!

“I will take care of it! Let me look for the witch!”

His voice is echoing in my mind, but he is obviously talking to the Alphas. Why is he so adamant about looking for that witch? Damian and Nathaniel both put on the same surprised expression. Obviously, they didn't expect this. They stay silent for a while, but none of the other Alphas dares to speak as the three brothers keep exchanging looks for a while, obviously mind-linking. Eventually, Nathaniel sighs.

“If you want, Liam, you take care of it. We have our hands full as it is with this mess anyway... Just ask if you need help. Don't take on a Witch by yourself.”

“...Understood, brother.”

He looks enthusiastic about this, but I'm a bit worried. If this witch helped us, whoever she was, is it okay to try to find her? But I can't say it here. I will talk about this with Liam later when things cool down.

After that, the Alphas keep talking, mostly about the casualties and damages. I exchange a look with Elena, who isn't listening.

“Is your friend okay?”

“Yeah, he injured his leg, but it’s going to heal quickly. I’m more worried about the rest of my pack... We lost some people, so I want to go there soon.”

“Why don’t you go now?”

“My Alpha wants me to represent him here, seeing what the other packs will do. It’s only the White Moon and Opal Moon Wolves to clean the mess up there now, so we got to make sure we will get some help.”

Saying this, she looks to Nathaniel, and their eyes finally meet. I can guess he is asking her if she’s okay with his lips, but she soon shifts back, her eyes to the group.

“Nathaniel will help you.”

“Nh.”

Her response is a bit odd. Why is she hiding so many things now? Not shape-shifting, avoiding Nathaniel... I bet he doesn’t know she can mind-link other Alphas, either. I don’t want to put my nose in a business that isn’t mine, but I feel concerned whenever Elena’s involved. Is it because I know we are related?

While I'm lost in my thoughts, the Alphas are done talking. The Sea Moon Alpha, whom someone called Patrick during the conversation, draws back his wolves. He nods in my direction, and with that, the Sea Moon Wolves head back to the South.

Lysandra turns to Damian. "It was nice, making peace to kick some blood-sucker's asses. But don't think I'm going to get nice with you dumbasses because of that."

"Just get the hell back to your turf, Jones," growls Damian.

It seems like the short-lived alliance is over... And the Purple Moon Wolves have no intention to behave well because of what happened, either. Lysandra sends a kiss in Tonia's direction, who answers with a growl, before their pack leaves. Right when I think they will now talk with Elena, I notice she and her pack members are gone already. I didn't even see them leave!

"We are not on our turf either, we should go," says Nathaniel. "And then, Nora, maybe you can explain to us how you mind-linked the whole werewolf population of Silver City."

Oops. I had forgotten this detail.

“Okay, I really wouldn’t want to be you right now...”

“Gosh Liam, shush. You are not helping at all.”