

## Chapter 11

I needed to lose her. I flew into the darkening storm clouds, waiting until she flew past me before taking a sharp nose dive down, right towards the mountains, where Kim and Jacob said was unsafe.

I made my way through the crevasses and canyons, suddenly getting lost in a cave system. It reeked in here, I did my best to avoid stepping on animal bones and carcasses. I found feathers trailing everywhere, the same feathers of the skinwalkers wings. She must live here.

I felt the ground begin to heat up rapidly, odd... There was no volcanic activity here... Suddenly the trail of animal bones and feathers led me to a chamber, and I suddenly fell into a dark chasm. I steadied myself, landing on my feet but feeling the nerve pain. I saw familiar hanging cages and smelt the stale air. I coughed out the dust.

It was Pitch's lair. Could it possible-

"Catori!" I shouted, not caring that I was bringing more risk to myself. I heard a crash and the sizzling of a fire in the distance. That had to be her. I followed it and ducked behind a pile of rocks, a few feet away, Catori was trapped in a cage.

Black kohl was streaked around her eyes, making her eyes appear brighter than they were. And she had a few nicks on her left cheek, and one above her eyebrow.

"Catori...?" I whispered, inching forward, not wanting to scare her. She turned to look at me, and I swore I saw a hint of recognition in her eyes. She stood up and held a bar in her hands. I put my hand above hers, holding another hand through the bars. She looked down and timidly took it in hers.

Despite the scorching pain, the contrast of our body temperatures, I held it and brought her hand to my lips and I kissed it. I saw her eyes flash with surprise.

She spoke but in a different language. She must've been speaking in her native tongue, but I heard my name thrown in there a few times. She definitely recognized me.

"Jack..." She whispered. She was fighting whatever had taken over her, a single tear escaped her beautiful golden eyes and fell down her cheek.

"Oh... don't cry. It's okay. I'm gonna get you out of here." She shook her head, pulling her hand out of mine and slinking into a corner, being overtaken by shadows and... black sand, I whipped around to see Pitch and the sk\*walker coming over.

"Ah Jack, I didn't realize you held such an attachment, coming this far to rescue a girl."

"What did you do to her?!" I shouted, creating a ring of spiky ice around me and the cage, forming a protective barrier around us.

"Stay away from her! She's just a kid! She doesn't deserve this!" Yelling was heard from above, and the ceiling caved in, creating dust to explode everywhere and light to flood in.

Yelling and crashing surrounded us, and flashes of red and gold and green were everywhere. Akilina appeared in the hole in the ceiling and with a wave of her arms, sent a massive blast of wind inside, sending everyone flying around.

"Достаточно!" She screamed. The commotion ceased and I finally saw all the Guardians, looking rather disheveled and Pitch and the sk\*walker quite angry.

"Jack!" Tooth exclaimed, I lowered my staff and moved to the side, revealing... nothing. She wasn't there anymore. That was it. I attacked the sk\*walker, hitting her with my staff.

"WHERE DID YOU TAKE HER?!" North and Bunny pulled me back, but I fought them, "WHERE DID YOU TAKE MY GIRLFRIEND." I screamed, causing everyone to stop and fall silent. The sk\*walker cackled and smacked me in the face, sending me flying backward.

"About time." She snickered, vanishing into a flurry of shadow and feathers.

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