

The Ivory Queen Chapter 91

Evan's POV

"What do you think you're doing?" I snarl as I take in the scene in front of me.

Rio trots in and immediately curls up beside Aurora, laying his head on her hip. Mia's gold eyes look up at me and anger boils my blood.

She's put her under a dream again? After all the damage she's done, she has the audacity to put Aurora through another nightmare?

You don't know that it's a nightmare, Bodhi snaps. Let her explain before you-

I cut off my wolf, not willing to listen to his nonsense. I still haven't forgiven him for kissing Mia without my permission. Aurora was my Luna and more importantly, my adopted little sister. I would never let Mia hurt her again.

"Let her go, Mia," I demand.

"Evan, you don't understand. I'm not hurting her, I'm tryin to-"

Before she can utter another useless word, I storm inside and wrap my fingers around her throat, applying some pressure. She looks stunned as she begins gasping for air and claws at my arm.

Let her go! Bodhi snarls as he fights for control.

Aurora's bedroom disappears, morphing into a snow covered forest. All around me, evergreens wear thick coats of delicate snow and ice crystals and in the horizon I see a gorgeous castle atop a hill overlooking a frozen lake. Despite wearing only a t-shirt and jeans, I'm not cold and I bend over to touch the fluffy clouds of snow.

Damn it Mia, where the f**k am I!

I walk around for a bit, taking in the breathtaking scenery but keeping my guard up in case another demon child shows up. Before I know it, I come up to the entrance of the castle. It's warm and inviting, with flowers lining the gates and pathway. I walk inside to find a warm fire place and comfortable large red chair sitting near it. I plop down on the chair and examine my

surroundings. The castle is completely empty, but regardless is not eerie or terrifying. In fact, it's quiet cozy.

The illusion abruptly crumbles and I find myself back in Aurora's room kneeling on the floor in front of Mia, who is now sitting on the edge of the bed, stroking Aurora's hair. Her gold eyes revert back to their chocolate brown.

"You wouldn't listen, so I had to show you," she says, never once taking her eyes off of Aurora.

Her hand goes to her neck and she massages it gently.

"What was that?"

"It's her dream. It's where she is now...with Oliver," she chuckles. "She wanted a snowball fight with him so I gave it to her. It might not be real, but at least for now, she's with him," she sighs. "She's not afraid or in pain."

I watch Aurora carefully and notice a small smile playing on her lips as Mia strokes her hair.

"You don't listen either," I growl and she turns to give me a confused look. "I thought I told you to never mess with my head again."

Her face hardens, her pretty lips forming a line. "And I thought I told you not to piss me off," she hisses back. "So I guess we're both terrible listeners."

I growl at her. "Leave her. Your work is done."

"No, I will watch over her until she wakes up!"

"I can do that. I'm her gamma. It's my job to protect her!"

"Then stand guard by the door while I finish what I started!" She snaps, pointing towards the door. "I'm not leaving her alone. Not now. Not Ever. You don't like it, leave."

I glare at her. "You're f*****g crazy if you think I'm leaving you alone with her."

She rolls her eyes. "I'm not going to hurt her."

“Don’t care,” I sing as I crouch down beside Aurora’s bed and sit on the floor. “I’m not leaving.” I take Aurora’s tiny hand in mine and watch her as she sleeps.

“Whatever,” Mia mutters.

She inches closer to Aurora and I growl at her.

“What?” She snaps.

“Back up. You’re close enough.”

She ignores me as she reaches over to pet Aurora’s hair and I prepare to scream at her when I notice the marks on her exposed wrists. Fresh, unhealed bruises litter her arm.

“Who did that to you?” I blurt out before I could stop myself.

I shift my eyes down to her arm and she pulls it back in shame, tugging at her sleeve to cover up the marks.

“Don’t worry about it,” she mutters defensively. “It’s none of your concern.”

I ball up my fists and feel a wrath build up inside me. “Did your stupid brother do that to you?”

Why am I so angry? It’s not like I actually care!

Her eyes fill with rage. “My brother would never hurt me. Ever.” She turns her body around and faces the bookshelf on the other side of the room. “Like I said. It’s none of your concern.”

She’s trying to be strong, but I can hear the tremor in her voice. She’s scared and I feel a minor ache in my heart and the urge to hug her, hold her, make her feel safe....

I remain frozen in my spot, using all my will and strength to keep from pulling her into my arms and kissing her. We sit in silence for a moment, the only sound we hear is Aurora’s steady breathing and her occasional giggle. Whatever dream she must be having, it’s making her happy, if only briefly and it eases my anxiety.

“May 11th,” Mia whispers.

My ears perk up and I furrow my brows in confusion.

“My birthday... It’s May 11th.”

“Did I ask-“

“You can reject me on the 11th...” she says quietly before turning her head to look back at me. “Five months. That’s all you have to wait before you can be free of me.”

I feel a pain in my chest as she utters those words and Bodhi whimpers.

Why does my heart hurt?

Regardless of my pain, I remove all emotion on my face and stare blankly at her. Mia’s eyes fill with tears but her voice is strong and forceful.

“That’s what you want, right? To reject me?” She wipes her eyes and hardens her face.

I keep a blank face and nod.

Liar! Bodhi cries. Liar!

She swallows hard. “Why don’t you do it now and just get it over with?”

I clench my jaw and look away, unable to come up with a valid answer. My silence only seems to offend her and she snaps.

“Fine! I’ll do it!” She gets up from the bed and crouches down in front of me, fire in her eyes. “I, Mia Altamirano, reject you Evan-“

Bodhi takes over my body and shoves me to the back of my mind before lunging at Mia and pinning her to the ground beneath me. I watch as her eyes fill with tears again and Bodhi wipes them all away, sparks tingling at my fingertips.

“I want you,” Bodhi whispers. “I want you. My human is an i***t but he wants you too. I know he does, I can feel it. He’s just too stubborn to admit it.”

Bodhi!

He cuts off our link, forcing me to watch in silence as he speaks with Mia.

"You're lying," Mia whimpers. "He doesn't want me. He hates me for what I did. And I deserve it. I'm a monster!"

He lowers my face so that I'm only an inch from hers and brushes aside a strand of hair from her face, tucking it behind her ear. Her cheeks turn red and my breath hitches. She's so beautiful.

"You are not a monster," Bodhi says grabbing her chin between my fingers and lifting her face towards mine ever so slightly. Our noses touch and I can feel her trembling. "A monster feels no remorse for the deeds they've done. A monster is cruel to be cruel, they need no motive to inflict pain unto others. A monster has no notion of what is right or what is wrong and a monster does not seek forgiveness."

Tears spill onto her cheeks and she closes her eyes to stop them.

"Don't cry, my love," Bodhi whispers, kissing away her tears. "I can't stand it."

He lowers my lips onto Mia's, giving her a feather like kiss and she stares back at me, conflicted and a bit confused by his actions.

The sparks are faint but undeniable. She's my mate, hand picked for me by Moon Goddess herself. Try as I might, I cannot hate Mia.

So why then, does this feel so wrong?

She hurt my best friend and Luna. I can't accept her.

Aurora forgave her, Bodhi replies. You can too. We have a very wise and kind Luna. You should follow in her footsteps.

But-

You know Aurora would never object to our union. She'd love it. So why give up Mia when we have not been asked too?

My attention is drawn back to Mia when she cups my face in her warm hands and pulls me into a passionate kiss. Bodhi and I remain still for a few seconds, shocked by her reaction.

The sparks are so alluring, prompting Bodhi to take charge and kiss her back. Our lips move in sync and I crave her more with every passing second, wanting to explore and devour her every inch. I fight for control, wanting her

for myself and after a few seconds of struggle, I manage to claw my way to the surface again.

When we pull back, we are both breathless with swollen lips and dazed smiles and I do something I never thought I'd do.

"Mine!" I growl. "From here on out, you are mine!"

Shock washes over her face before converting to pure rage. I receive a slap to the face and I stare back at her, stunned.

That was not what I expected...

"If you think you can just treat me like garbage and then kiss me like nothing happened, you've got another thing coming!" She huffs, pushing me off of her and getting to her feet. "You don't get to stomp all over me and then expect me to forgive you for it."

Oh, she wants to argue. Fine, two can play at that!

"I believe you kissed me."

Mia stops in her tracks and blushes. "So?"

I raise an eyebrow and smirk at her. "So... You want me just as much as I want you," I say, closing the gap between us and wrapping an arm around her waist. "So I'll say it again. You are mine...." I steal a quick kiss and smirk as her blush deepens. "And I am yours."

She quickly composes herself and pulls away from my arms.

"Ahem," she clears her throat. "I'm not your mate yet," she mutters. "I belong to no one."

I sit on the edge of the bed and pull her into my lap.

"You are mine!" I snap, burying my face in her neck.

A tiny moan escapes her lips as I tease her marking spot but a little tension remains in her shoulders as she weakly tries to push me off. It's amusing to watch her fight her feelings, her body reacting to my every touch and kiss but her mind wanting to argue some more.

“You’re going to be handful aren’t you?” I chuckle as I continue trailing kisses along her jaw.

She’s about to argue with me when Aurora starts whimpering in her sleep.

“Olivier?” Aurora calls out, her voice trembling. She shifts uneasily.

“What’s happening? I thought you said she would be okay with your dreams,” I snap, once again on high alert.

Mia glares at me. “Give me a minute to figure out what she’s dreaming.”

Mia’s eyes glow gold and she’s stares intently at Aurora. After a few seconds, she nods.

“Shhh,” Mia coos, stroking Aurora’s hair.

Aurora sighs and a tiny smile creeps up on her face again.

“What was the problem?” I ask, completely lost.

“She was playing hide and seek with Oliver. I guess he hid too well and she was frightened,” Mia frowns. “His disappearance must be taking a bigger toll on her than she cares to admit.” She frowns at her sister. “Ay Aurora. Always trying to be a soldier. I guess it’s not your fault now is it?” Mia shrugs, grabbing Aurora’s hand. “You don’t know how to ask for help anymore.”

My heart aches for my Luna. Aurora has put on a strong front for us all but I know she’s hanging on by a thread. I slide Mia off my lap and crouch down besides the bed to kiss Aurora’s forehead.

“You don’t deserve this pain, Luna,” I murmur. “But we will find him and you’ll get your happily ever after. I promise.”

I look up to see Mia watching me.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she responds too quickly and I frown at her, prompting her to fidget with her sleeves. When she speaks again, I hear a tinge of envy. “It’s just... you seem to care for her a lot.”

She’s jealous....

"I told you, she's my sister. My family," I shrug, glancing back at my sleeping Luna. "I'd do anything for her. No questions asked."

She goes quiet for a moment, nodding slowly to her self.

"Even.... give up your mate?" she asks, nervously shifting on her feet.

I frown. I know the answer she wants from me but I love my Luna and it's my job to put her life before my own.

I clench my jaw. "Yes," I reply. "I would-"

"I see," she says, straightening her back and lifting her head up high.

"Don't take this the wrong way, Mia-"

"I'm not," she says, shaking her head. "I'm not your mate yet, remember? When the time comes, I'll reject you and you'll never have to chose between Aurora and I. So there's no problem."

"Mia-"

"What?"

For a brief second, her eyes fill with hope. Hope that I might contradict her and say I'd never give her up, not even for Aurora. But I just stare at her, unable to form a single sentence to comfort her.

Say something! Anything! Bodhi snaps.

I'm about to speak when we hear a knock at the door and Valentina comes in.

"Oh good! You got her to sleep," Valentina chuckles. Sensing the tension in the room, she stops in her tracks and smiles apologetically. "I'll check in with her later-"

"No it's fine," I sigh. "I was just leaving." I turn to Mia but am once again rendered speechless and just wave at her like an i***t.

Mia nods quietly before sitting on the edge of the bed and stroking Aurora's hair. I give Valentina an awkward smile as I pass by and leave the room. My heart is pounding in my ears while Bodhi snarls at my royal f**k up.

What did I just do?

The Ivory Queen Chapter 92

Mia's POV

For as long as I could remember, Mom and Dad always fought over the Gamma bond.

In any pack, the Luna is the most beloved and respected individual, even more so than the Alpha. They are the heart and soul of a pack, the glue that keeps us all together. They are the Alpha's strength, their peace.... but they are also their weakness and are therefore always a target for any rival pack.

It is for this reason that Gammas were created.... to protect the heart of the pack. For any wolf, it is the greatest honor to be charged with the title of Gamma. You had to be brave, cunning, a great warrior... but most importantly... you had to be selfless. You had to be willing to put the Luna above all else.

And therein lies the problem... Because a gamma bond can often strain the gamma's own mate bond if not handled well.

A Gamma must always choose their Luna as their number one priority, even above their own family. It may seem cruel to jeopardize the wellbeing of an entire family for the sake of one individual but it was absolutely necessary. Losing a Luna was a pain beyond belief felt by the entire pack and could easily destroy an Alpha.

My father was a brilliant Gamma. He and Ximena became exceptionally good friends during his charge. Miguel would get jealous of their connection but at the end of the day, he knew he could always count on Dad to protect Ximena with his life.

Mom, however, was never at peace with the bond. In fact, she hated it, though she never said anything to Ximena's face. And it's understandable. Who would want to be second place to another woman in their own mate's heart?

The gamma bond was the subject of many arguments between my parents. Dad would rush to Ximena's side at the drop of a hat but he would never do the same for us. Oddly enough, Aurora was the exception to this, further

cementing our theory that he loved Aurora more than he loved anyone else. No matter the occasion, Dad was always there when it came to Aurora.

I remember being furious when Dad missed first my baile folklórico dance recital because Ximena needed his healing services for Javier and Aurora who had both hurt themselves playing a prank on Chava.

Now, after all these years, I find myself in the same position as my mom and I was once again being pushed aside for Aurora's sake. I know Evan saw Aurora only as a sister but it did not ease my mind that he would always put her first.

As I watch Aurora sleep, however, my heart softens. This was not her fault. Evan was chosen for her before she became Luna and their relationship blossomed way before I ever knew Evan was my mate. Furthermore, she had been through hell... losing her parents and now her mate to witches. Perhaps that's why Dad favored her so much ... to compensate for all the loss in her life.

"You look just like your father," Valentina says quietly. "You have his eyes..."

I look up at her and smile sheepishly. Examining her features, I realize she looks oddly familiar although I can't quite put my finger on it. From what I've gathered, this woman is Celina's adoptive mother.

I squint my eyes. "You look -"

"Oh Right, I forgot. We haven't formally met," she chuckles. "I'm Valentina. Emiliano's twin sister."

Dad had a twin?

"Dad never mentioned having siblings other than tio Mateo."

"When we left Mexico, we agreed to part ways and never speak of each other for Aurora and Celina's safety. We hadn't spoken since. It's my biggest regret, not getting a chance to say goodbye to him when he passed. I never got to say good bye to Mateo either. He was on the frontlines while Emiliano and I stayed behind to protect Sofia and the girls." Her eyes fill with sadness. "Goddess rest their souls."

"I miss him so much," I mumble, more to myself than to her, but she hears me nonetheless

"It's clear you still need him," Valentina sighs, taking a seat on the edge of the bed. "He left too soon... No thanks to your good for nothing mother."

"You know?"

She nods. "Celina told me what she did and I will never forgive her for it. And to make matters worse, she poisoned all of you. I curse the day Emiliano met her!"

"What do you mean she poisoned me-"

"I'm not surprised Karina became the monster she is," Valentina scoffs. "But you were just a child. She had no right feeding your anger and turning you against your own sister. It's despicable!"

Right... Valentina had dedicated her life to protecting Aurora and Celina just like Emiliano. She must really hate my guts.

"I don't blame my mother for me hurting Aurora. That was my own fault, not hers."

"Perhaps, but children are impressionable, mija. Like it or not, they often mimic their parent's behavior. Why else do you think Aurora is so forgiving? I can only assume she spent a lot of time with my brother. He was the best person I ever knew. He held no grudges. Not even as a kid. He could turn the other cheek with ease and no matter who it was, Emiliano was there to lend a helping hand. I love seeing Aurora be just like him. She keeps his memory alive by following in his footsteps."

"Yeah... Dad loved Aurora more than anything or anyone. They were practically inseparable," I say, desperately trying to hide the bitterness in my voice.

I loved my dad but I resented how much he favored Ximena and Aurora over the rest of us. I craved the attention he gave to Aurora for so long but I never got the chance to experience it.

"I see you disliked Aurora's relationship with your father," Valentina interrupts my thoughts. She softens her face. "Oh Emi, he was too good at his job... but not too good with his heart." She reaches for my hand, giving it a squeeze.

"It's just... he always put Aurora or Ximena first over the rest of us. I sometimes wondered if he ever loved us-"

"My brother was a great person but he was flawed like anyone else. He was terrible at managing his bonds and it got him into a lot of trouble with your mother and apparently you too," she sighs. "I know you think he didn't love you or your brother as much as he loved Aurora or his Lunas but you would be wrong. You should have seen him when Salvador was born! He wouldn't shut up about being a father for weeks and he took Chava everywhere he went. I can only imagine how excited he was to have you. He always wanted a daughter to spoil."

Tears well up in my eyes and I quickly turn to wipe them away. I didn't realize how much I needed to hear that I had a special place in my father's heart. I thought he only cared about Aurora and his Luna.

Wait....

"You said Lunas.... as in plural," I say. "Was Dad -"

"Your father was Sofia's Royal Gamma and to be honest, I think that's probably one of the many reasons your father perhaps favored Aurora so much. The twins are a spitting image of their mother. He probably saw Sofia in her all the time. I know I do whenever I look at Celina," She chuckles. "Emi was the youngest Gamma in the history of our kingdom," she beams proudly. "A gamma at 17 is almost unheard of but Mateo and Sofia would have no one else. Emi was more than worthy and he was so excited to take on the role. He loved Sofia dearly. As did I. Having grown up with boys, she was the closest thing I had to a sister."

"She sounds lovely," I sigh.

"My Queen was beautiful inside and out. Adored by all her subjects... well most of them anyways."

"What do you mean?"

She hesitates but finally lets out a breath and speaks her truth. "Your mother wasn't very fond of her. But then again, she didn't really like any of us."

I scrunch up my face. "Why?"

She rolls her eyes. "Well, for starters, she and I have always butted heads. Being twins, Emi and I were," she crosses her fingers and holds them up. "We did everything together and Emiliano was always there for me when I needed him. And I'm sure you're well aware of Karina's jealousy. It's her biggest flaw, really. She was probably none too happy to have Emiliano elected as gamma yet again at Lluvia Blanca. She never liked sharing his attention with another woman, especially a Luna. Anyways, she hated Sofia for being Emiliano's top priority."

"Well how else is she supposed to act?" I snap, defensively. "A mate is a mate. You shouldn't have to share them with anyone!" I huff. "The gamma bond is really unfair if you think about. The mate of a gamma matters just as much as the Luna!"

Valentina stares back coolly at me and I suddenly feel embarrassed for my outburst.

"I sense we're no longer talking about your father..." Valentina says after a long pause. "Want to tell me what's really bothering you?"

My mouth opens but no words come out and I clamp it shut once more. I stare at Aurora's sleeping figure, her sweet dream keeping her in oblivion.

"Your anger seems very personal," Valentina offers and after giving it some thought, I decide to confess.

"My mate is Aurora's gamma..."

"I see," Valentina hums. "And this upsets you?"

"Yes... I-I mean no... I don't know!" I huff, annoyed with the subject. "Evan is Aurora's gamma and that means I will always be second place in his heart. I'm not sure I'm willing to settle as my own mate's second priority."

Valentina stares silently at me, a little sadness in her eyes.

“You sound just like Karina when she found out Emiliano was the Queen’s Royal Gamma. And just like her, you seem to believe gamma bonds and mate bonds are the same thing.”

“Aren’t they though?” I argue. “A gamma would stop at nothing to protect his Luna. A wolf would do the same thing for his mate.”

“Protective instinct does not equate to love, mija. A mate is not the same thing as a Luna.”

I stare at her and wait for her to elaborate.

She’s not making any sense. How is that not the same thing?

“Mia, the bond between a gamma and Luna is one of friendship. A gamma offers comfort and support in times of distress. He feels the need to protect her and if worse comes to worse, he would lay down his life for her. The bond between a gamma and his mate, on the other hand, is sacred, forged by pure, unconditional love. While he may share his heart with many, he does not share his soul with anyone but his mate. And therein lies the difference.”

She gives me a warm smile. “Your father loved your mother in a way he loved no one else. And no matter how angry she got, your mother knew this was true. He loved her. No one could ever take her place, not Sofia, not your Luna, not Aurora.”

My heart is split. I want Evan. I had seen his tenderness and fell for it instantly but his affection for Aurora cast doubt. Could he really love me?

“As I said, my brother was not perfect and he did not show his affections as he should have, but do not for a second doubt that he loved You, Karina and Chava. As for your mate, Evan is a different man. He adores Aurora, there’s not question, but perhaps, if you give him a chance and talk about your feelings and concerns, you’ll discover for yourself where you stand in his life. Who knows,” she shrugs. “He might even surprise you.”

She gets up from the bed and smooths her blouse. “Please think about what I said. Moon Goddess rarely gives second chances when it comes to mates and I would hate for you throw away your chance at happiness because of your own insecurities.”

She gives me a quick hug and scurries off, leaving me to my thoughts.

Inez whines. She wants her mate.

But I was worried. Evan was a gamma and up until twenty minutes ago, he hated me. Did we really stand a chance?

Only one way to find out! Ines says. Please give him a chance.

Aurora suddenly sits up in bed, dropping her head in her hands and shaking her head.

“Aurora what’s wrong?” I ask.

“Celina...”

The Ivory Queen Chapter 93

Karina’s POV

Everything is falling apart. My world is falling apart... and it’s all because of that stupid girl! Why couldn’t she just die and leave my family out of it?

As I watch Salvador leave, I quickly collect myself off the ground and run back to the house. Chava knows and soon everyone else will too. I can’t stay here any longer.

Grabbing a suitcase, I stuff it with clothes, pictures, some savings and my documents. In a hurry, I write a letter to Mia and Chava, giving them my last goodbyes. They probably won’t read it but I want them to know I did it all for them. As I open the door to leave, Maira walks by.

“Kari, que haces {What are you doing?}” she asks.

Pinche vieja metiche! {F*****g nosy bitch}

“Maira!” I sing, forcing a smile. “How are you?”

“Good, where are you going?”

I look at my suitcase. “A little trip. I’ll be back soon,” I lie.

She sighs. “Karina, por favor. Don’t comeback a mess. Your kids don’t need to see any worse!”

“Are you done with your sermon? Because I didn’t ask for your advice. Dejame en Paz! {Leave me alone}!” I snap, heading towards the car and I stuffing my luggage inside.

As I drive off, I see Maira in my rear view mirror, frowning at me.

Where are we going? My wolf, Tanya, asks.

I block her out and focus on my driving. When I hit the city, I head to a small motel, the same one Emiliano and I stayed in when we first arrived to California 18 years ago.

Emi. Como te extraño. {how I miss you}.

I check myself into a small room and get settled. My anxiety gets the best of me though and I walk to the nearest liquor store for some liquid therapy.

Emiliano... Tanya whimpers.

My hands tremble as I open the bottle of tequila, desperate to silence Tanya’s whimpering and pour it straight into my mouth. I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the bathroom mirror.

Looks like I became my father after all. Funny how that happens. We become the thing we hate the most.

Emiliano... Tanya cries.

Sober or drunk, Emiliano was always in my thoughts. He left a hole in my heart when he died and no matter how much I drank, I could never fill it. I stare down at the bottle and frown. What would Emiliano say if he saw me like this?

I drink some more, eager to feel nothing for a while in my drunken stupor when I hear someone knock on the door.

Who could that be?

Panic settles in the pit of my stomach as I quickly stuff the bottle in the mini fridge. I find a tall handsome man at the door with deep blue eyes and soft brown hair. He looks familiar but I can’t quite figure out where I’ve seen him. My mind is already starting to feel the effects of the alcohol.

He smiles politely at me.

“Karina, is it?” He asks, gesturing towards me. “Can I come in?”

“Do I know you?” I ask, puzzled by this man’s presence.

“My name is David. I’m here on behalf of some close friends of yours.”

Friends?

He groans and his blue eyes turn bright red.

“Hola querida,” he smiles, his voice morphing into that of a female. “It’s been a few years since we last spoke. Let’s catch up.”

The blood drains from my face as the voice registers in my mind. I stumble back into the room and the man enters, closing the door behind him.

“W-what do you want, Ira?” I mutter, desperately looking for a way out of here.

“Come on, now Karina. Is that how you treat a friend?” He giggles.

My anger boils inside me and I snarl at her. “You are not my friend. You killed my husband! You broke the agreement!”

“Ah, ah, ah, I did not.” She says, wagging his finger. “You asked for your children’s protection. Not your husband.”

“f**k you,” I snap. “You hurt my daughter.”

“Ah, well that was a necessary precaution. She saw something she shouldn’t have and we had to make sure she couldn’t remember. Memory erasing is a tricky task and she’s a fighter. It’s very difficult to cast a spell on an unwilling victim. “

“Get out!” I shout, pointing to the door. “Leave me alone!”

“No can do, darling. We have some things to discuss. You see, I need you.”

“Not my problem.”

“I was afraid you would say that so I came prepared. You help me or I kill your daughter. Very simple.”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“Oh how cute, but you know very well I’m not joking. No, in fact you know exactly what I’m capable of when people don’t take my threats very seriously, don’t you?” She says, tilting his head to the side in amusement.

Flash backs to the m*****e of Miramar flood my mind and I unconsciously whimper as the screams, the blood, and all those lifeless bodies come rushing towards me at full speed.

I close my eyes, furiously shaking my head, to stop the images from ripping through the last bit of my sanity.

“I see I’ve jogged your memory,” Ira giggles.

I scowl at her. “You bitch-“

“No need for the name calling,” she grins. “So deal or no deal?”

“I’m afraid I can’t be much help,” I growl through my teeth. “My children know what I did and I assume Aurora does too. No one trusts me.”

Her grin widens. “That won’t be a problem. I love a challenge Besides, I’m prepared to offer you something you can’t refuse.”

“What?”

“Why, your family of course. One little spell and I can erase all the memories in their heads once this is all over. Think about. Your kids won’t remember the pain you’ve caused. You can go away to a new place, restart your life, and live in peace with your son and daughter.”

Leave this nightmare all behind? Goddess could this be a trap? It’s too good to be true.

Ira smirks. “So deal or no deal?”

I swallow hard. “What do I have to do?”

She smiles triumphantly at me. “I hear you were quite the warrior in Sol de Oro,” she snickers. “Your father was a general, was he not? He trained you mercilessly from a young age... Turned you into a killing machine, if I’m not

mistaken. Very good with all sorts of weapons, but swords were your weapon of choice...”

“Spit it out already!”

Ira tosses me a bag of white powder. “Take this. I need you sober for this assignment. Now, listen very carefully...”

*** Celina’s POV***

“My heart will always belong to you, but I will give you what you want. I accept your rejection. I, Javier Salazar accept-“

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” I scream, covering my ears with my hands and shaking my head. “Stop! Don’t Say anything... Just-Just go! Please just leave me alone. I just want to be alone!”

Javier turns back to me, stunned by my reaction and remains in place, angering me.

“I said LEAVE!” I command.

He stiffens with at the command and begins walking away.

I watch Javier’s figure grow smaller as he walks back towards the house, my heart caught in my throat. Sarai’s wails are unbearable and I could offer nothing to comfort her. I was shattering into a million pieces.

This is what I wanted, so why did I stop him?

Coward! Sarai screams. You coward!

Why am I the coward?

Because you don’t have the courage to love him despite his flaws! COWARD!

But he hurt our sister. He locked her in that closet, watched her get tortured for years. He did nothing for her!

Javier is human! All it takes is a little love to heal his soul. She sneers. You can change him!

I'm so confused. Why did Moon Goddess have to pick him as my mate? Why him?

I bury my face in Javier's t-shirt as tears roll down my cheeks. It still smells like him and much to my surprise, I find that comforting. The cold December air, however, forces me to change back into my clothes. I take a seat on the bare ground, crossing my legs and laying the t-shirt in my lap. Suddenly, I hear a rustling in the trees and a familiar scents hits my nose. Two black paws appear in my line of vision and I look up to see Danny's grey wolf looking down at me.

I hold back a chuckle as I remember Javier being jealous of my own Dad comforting me earlier.

Men as such idiots, I mutter to myself.

"Ay mija," Dad mind links me. "What did you do?"

"I don't know," I mumble, pulling at a blade of grass to avoid his eyes.

I feel his gaze on me and for a few seconds, he says nothing, just stares at me. He sits on his hind legs across from me and waits for me to speak. When I remain silent, he decides to break the silence.

"Grief ... it -uh- it can turn people into the worst kinds of monsters..." he says quietly. "Your mate... I know he hurt your sister but he was grieving Emiliano's death-"

"That doesn't excuse what he did – what they did. Aurora was grieving too and look at her! She still cares about them!" I protest.

"Aurora is stronger than most people," Danny sighs. "It takes a lot of strength and courage to turn the other cheek... to not blame people for their past mistakes ... to give them a second chance to redeem themselves. It takes a lot of courage to forgive. I thought you were brave, mija. You always have been. So why are you so afraid now?"

I don't answer and he nudges me with his snout.

"Hey, princess or not, I am still your dad. Talk to me, Celi. What are you so afraid of?"

“What if he hurts me?” I finally break, a few tears spilling onto my cheeks.

“Then I castrate him,” he shrugs, making me burst into laughter.

Dad always knew how to make me laugh.

My laughter quickly morphs into sobs when the realization that I almost lost my mate hits me. Dad whines and I crawl over to him, burying my face in his fur and crying.

“Moon Goddess works in mysterious way, mi niña. There must be a reason she has given you this burden to carry. Perhaps pairing you with Javier was meant as a lesson for him to treat people more kindly and not jump to conclusions. Perhaps this was a test of your strength and courage. I can’t say for sure, but all I know is, everything that is meant to happen will happen. Just be patient, mija. Your happiness will come.”

We hear some footsteps coming towards us, leaves crackling with every step. When we look up, the Ivory queen stands before us, her piercing pink and purple eyes watching us with sadness.

Danny lowers his head in a respectful bow.

“I’ll let you two talk,” he says, excusing himself, before taking off in the direction of the house.

Once alone, Aurora sits on her hind legs across from me. I expect her to console me but she’s surprises me with her silence.

“So are we just going to stare at each other?” I say, forcing a laugh but it quickly dies down and I sigh.

She shakes her head. “I don’t know.. I just felt your pain.”

She jumps up to her feet and comes towards me, licking my face.

“You okay?” She asks.

“Your breath stinks!” I chuckle, changing the subject. I’ve already cried enough for one day. I wipe her slobber and she growls at me. “I’m kidding. Your wolf has great personal hygiene,” I add with a laugh.

She nuzzles my face and I caress her snout.

We really are just two heart broken sisters, aren't we?

"You know for someone so adamant on forcing me to express my feelings, you seem to run away from yours," she whispers.

"I guess we both suck," I shrug and she laughs, though it doesn't reach her eyes. "Want to train and repress our feelings together?"

She nods happily and her eyes fog over.

I jump to my feet with a groan. "Argh, do you have to invite Evan? Can't we just fight each other in peace?"

She shakes her head.

"I'm honoring my agreement with Oliver.. And besides .." she sighs. "I think Evan could use the distraction as well..."

Ah right. Evan and Mia. I wonder if he's having better luck than I am with the whole evil mates thing. Does she know about them yet?

She kneels down and I climb onto her back. Aurora sprints back to the house and I wait anxiously by the fountain while she changes into an over sized t shirt.

"Javier and Mia went home," she says when she returns. "So don't be worried. They're gone."

I give her a nod but that doesn't make me feel better.

We quickly get on some work out gear and meet Evan at the bottom of the stairs.

"Look at us, the three miserable musketeers," I chirp.

Aurora frowns but Evan gets a kick out of it and laughs.

Just then, Diego comes running in and pulls me into a hug.

"Hey Celi, how are you doing?" he murmurs in my ears. "I'll f*****g kill him, I swear I'll-"

“Shut up,” I sigh. “I rejected him, remember? And I’ll be fine. Now if you’ll excuse us, we’re going training.” I say, pulling myself free from his grip.

“Mind if I tag along? I could go for a few sparring rounds,” Diego asks.

Training lasts for over 5 hours and I’m exhausted. Aurora went hard. I guess she had more pent up anger than I imagined. I didn’t mind though, it was good to blow off some steam. It starts to rain and we decide to call it a day. We finish healing each other and the boys and start our walk back to the house, chattering away to keep our minds busy when Aurora stops dead in her tracks.

“Hey, why’d you stop?” Evan asks, tugging at her hand. “Hey kid, come on! What’s gotten into you?!”

Aurora doesn’t budge, her eyes glued to something in the distance. I follow her gaze and see a black owl perched on a tall branch a few feet away from us, it’s gold eyes suddenly switching to a blood red color.

The Ivory Queen Chapter 94

Aurora’s POV

“Salve Aurora,” the owl says. “Salve Celina. I see you both are doing well,” the bird sneers and we growl at it.

Evan and Diego turn to look in the direction of the bird.

“What are you two growling at?” Evan snaps. “Are you okay?” He asks, placing his palm on my forehead.

They can’t see it?

“If I were you, I’d mind my manners,” the owl snaps. “I do have your mate after all...”

The threat is all too real and I press my lips together tightly.

“Good, now lose the dogs and meet me in the garden,” the bird orders before taking flight deeper into the forest.

I glance at Celina and she nods. I open a vortex to my room directly behind Evan and Diego.

"Aurora. what are you-"

"I'm so sorry, Evan. Please understand," I whisper before I focus on his and Diego's hearing, cranking up their sensitivity to high pitched frequencies.

They both whine in pain as their hearing sensitivity increases and grab their ears in a pointless attempt to block out the sound. Taking advantage of their distraction, Celina swings around and creates a powerful wind blade that knocks them through the portals I opened. I stop manipulating their hearing and close the portal.

I feel extremely guilty having used my powers on Evan and Diego but I needed to follow the stupid owls instructions if I was to receive my daily updates of Oliver. I cut off my pack mind-link so as not to be disturbed.

"We better hurry up. They'll probably get a search party going once they figure out what's happening," Celina snaps once we're alone. "Where's the garden?"

I open another portal and the garden appears into view. My palms light up in flames while Celina's hands form an icy mist. Cautiously, we enter the portal and find the owl perched on the bench with an envelope in its beak.

I concentrate on the envelope and it begins to float towards me, landing in the palm of my now flameless hand. I quickly open it and find two photos of Oliver. He's still chained up in the dark room but he looks very pale and exhausted. His wrists are covered in dried blood and there are bruises on his cheeks.

Anger boils up inside me and I tremble with rage. My palms flash with lightening and I burn the photos. Without thinking, I aim a bolt of lightening at the owl and much to my surprise, the bird shatters like glass into a million black shards.

"You said you wouldn't hurt him!" I scream into the air, crashing onto my knees. "You gave me your word!"

The black shards reassemble in a nearby tree and the owl eyes glow red once more. It looks angry.

“Do that again and I’ll -“

“And you’ll what?” Celina snaps. “Kill him? Do that and you lose your leverage.”

The owl clicks its tongue before erupting into laughter.

“Oh Celina, how cute... You think Oliver is the only trick up our sleeve? You forget, my dear, that we know everything about you. You’re mommy, Valentina, is it? Why she’s such a handsome woman and a spitting image of Emilia-“

“You touch my mom and I’ll-“

“You’ll what? Kill me?” The owl pouts mockingly. “Have you figured out where we are, what we look like or what kind of witches we are yet?”

Celina growls and the owls laughs once more.

“Awe, poor little wolves thinking they have a say in this deal. You know nothing about us. Oliver is just one pawn in the game but we have plenty to choose from. You love quite a few people, it’s hard to make up our minds on who to take should you not follow through with the trade... Let’s see here...” The Owl taps its chin with its talons pensively. “We could kill the gamma or the beta. Oh I know! How about Rosalie! She’s glowing, isn’t she? What is she... 9 weeks along now?”

“Okay fine!” I snap. “We get it. You’re in charge-“

“Exactly. Glad we’re finally understanding each other.“

“So why don’t you stop playing games-” Celina snarls.

“Oh but that would ruin the mystery now wouldn’t it? That’s no fun!” The owl chirps. It gives Celina and I a provocative grin. “You werewolves are truly such stupid creatures, crying like the weaklings you are over two useless mates. All that power coursing through your veins and Aurora couldn’t even protect her precious mate. And Celina! Ha! Truly pathetic. Pushing away a mate you’re so desperately in love with! So what now? You’re just going to let him find another mate? Perhaps Mia will do him the honor. I hear she and Evan aren’t doing too well either...”

How do they know everything?

Infuriated, Celina's hand gives off cold mist and she throws ice crystals at the stupid owl, shattering it once more into tiny black shards.

The owl reassembles just a few feet from us, flapping its wings and staring at us with its cold red eyes.

"You're going to regret that," it smirks before taking flight into the dark sky and disappearing into the clouds.

Oh no, Oliver! They're going to hurt Oliver!

Celina's face drains of blood as she comes to the same conclusion and she grabs my trembling wrists.

"Aurora I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to- I'm sorry." She whimpers, tears welling up in her eyes.

I grab her arms and hold on for dear life as I think about what they'll do to him.

"I-it's okay, Oliver is strong," I whisper, my voice breaking. "H-He'll be okay. Right? H-He can t-take-"

My knees give out and Celina barely manages to catch me before I collide with the ground.

"It's going to be okay," she soothes but I can hear the fear in her voice.

She hooks my arm over her shoulder and grabs on to my waist.

"I gotcha, sis. I gotcha," she coos as she walks me home.

The second we make it to the walkway, several guards come racing towards us, helping Celina carry me to the living room. The guards inform Evan and Carter of my return via mind link and within a few minutes, I hear them arrive along with Diego, Danny and Valentina.

It seems Carter and Evan have a competition between them over who can yell at me the loudest. I tune them out for the next 20 minutes, putting up my mental shield as I let my mind drift off to Oliver.

...Please be okay....

`Evan and Diego cuss us out for using our powers against them and demand both an apology and an explanation. We comply, offering our sincerest apologies and explaining what happened, which only infuriates them more. As I'm being yelled at, I look around the living room and make a sad realization. Christmas is around the corner but with everything going on, we have yet to decorate the house.

I don't think now is the time for decorations! Reyna snaps.

I know, I sigh. It's just ... it's been five years since I've celebrated. I was really looking forward to sharing my first Christmas with Oliver.

Reyna sighs. She knows how much I love Christmas

"Aurora, are you even listening to me?" Evan snaps.

I'm too exhausted to lie. "Can we get a Christmas tree?" I blurt out.

His face hardens. "That's what's on your mind right now? Goddess, Aurora. We have more pressing matters at hand. We don't have time for your stupid thoughts right now. Grow the f**k up and be the Luna we need you to be-

Reyna takes control and is on her feet in an instant. "Silence, Gamma. You don't get to speak to me this way and you certainly never will again. Understand?"

`Evan lowers his head in her presence but the anger never leaves him. He clenches his jaw and clicks his tongue.

"Yes. Luna," he mutters through gritted teeth before turning on his heel and leaving.

Reyna gives me back control and I slump back on the couch.

I look up at all the angry faces staring back at me and even without reading their minds, I knew I was nothing but a problem that constantly needed fixing. From the moment I took my first breath, I was nothing but a burden to everyone around me. My parents went to war for me and in the process lost their kingdom. Emiliano took me in and lost his life protecting me. No matter how hard I tried, everyone was always angry with me. My own family could not stand the thought of me for years. My pack members were constantly

worried for me and now, my gamma and beta were getting tired of my bullshit. Goddess, even I was tired of me.

Much to my horror, my mind drifts off to the scalpel resting in its watery grave at the bottom of the fountain, craving the relief it once gave me.

No! I scold myself. Now is not the time for self pity!

I heave a heavy sigh and remove all the emotion from my face. I would be a burden no longer. From now on, I would be a perfect Luna. I would keep my stupid thoughts and feelings tucked away for now and put my packs needs before my own. Like Evan said, it's time for me to grow the f**k up.

"I'm going to head up for a shower... excuse me," I say, before shuffling upstairs.

When I return, I find everyone at the dinner table waiting for me. My hot shower helped me clear my mind a bit, but I felt my anxiety return once I stood before my pack members. I silently take my seat beside Evan. I can tell he and Carter are still angry with me and I fight the urge to squirm uncontrollably in my seat, sitting completely still.

"You okay?" Celina mind links me, giving me a look of concern. "You're awfully quiet."

I force a small smile on my face and turn back to my soup.

"Aurora-"

I cut off our mind link, determined to finish my food today.

I still have no appetite but I knew turning down a meal would only cause problems I was hell bent on not causing anymore. My hand starts to shake as I bring my spoon to my mouth. After several tries, however, I learn that keeping a tight grip and moving quickly keeps me from shaking too much.

The soup slides down my throat with great effort, each slurp tasting like a spoonful of cement but I continue to force myself to eat until my plate is completely empty. Evan and Carter look pleased that I've finished a full meal today.

After dinner, I head back to my room and get ready for bed. Around 10pm, Evan comes in to check on me. He says nothing for a few seconds and just stares at me.

“Good night,” he mumbles before leaving and closing the door.

I don’t like his coldness but figure it was best to give him some space. I’m sure he had a lot on his mind. I lay in bed for a few minutes, staring at the ceiling and petting Rio.

—

Warning: Violence depicted

I churn the hot chocolate in a hurry. It’s 6:50 am and Chava should be getting up for training soon. Today is his birthday and I’ve been up all morning making all his favorite dishes. The stove timer dings and I excitedly rush over to pull my flan out of the oven.

Goddess, I hope he likes it.

I turn the oven off and run off to my room to get his present. I had gone without lunch at school for almost two months to save up for his gift, a vintage record player from a thrift shop and a vinyl copy of ACDC’s Back in Black album for his music collection. Getting the record was no easy task. I had to sneak off from school and take the bus into the city, a place I was forbidden to go. Karina almost beat me to death when she found out I skipped school. My thighs were still raw with bruises.

I push those thoughts aside and quickly grab the gift from under my bed, placing it on the kitchen counter for him to see. As I finish cleaning up, I realize I forgot to coat the flan with caramel. I glance at the clock. 6:57 am.

I have time.

Pulling a pan from the cupboards, I pour in some cane sugar and stir it gently until it starts to caramelize, careful not to burn it.

“What the f**k is this?” Chava voice fills the room. I turn to see him seething in rage.

“H-happy birthday, Chava!” I say, forcing a smile. I run over to the counter, eager to give him his gift and have him smile at me just once. “I-I got you a present, see? It’s-“

A slap across my face instantly silences me. “You think a little gift and some food are going to make me forget you killed Dad?” he sneers.

“But I-“

I receive another slap and tears spill onto my cheeks.

“Callate la maldita boca. No quiero escuchar ni una sola palabra mas de ti! {Shut your f*****g mouth, I don’t want to hear another word from you!}” he growls, his body shaking violently with anger.

“Chava, I’m sorry,” I whimper.

“Chava, I’m sorry,” he mocks. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Ugh! Is that all you ever have to say? You’re sorry? Sorry won’t bring him back!” he slaps me again. “You want to know what I think about your ‘sorries’?” he grins, sending shivers down my spine. He yanks my wrist over to the kitchen sink and holds it down with one arm before reaching for the pot with hot sugar. “THIS!” he snaps as he pours the hot sugar onto my tender flesh...

The Ivory Queen Chapter 95

Aurora’s POV

I wake with a start, fumbling out of the covers and onto the floor. Beads of sweat dance across my forehead and I bring my wrist to my chest, cradling it gently as silent sobs ripple through my throat. I open my mouth, desperately gasping for air as fat tears roll down my cheeks. Rio is at my side in an instant and I push him away, needing some space.

It was just a memory, Reyna coos. We’re okay. We’re safe.

“Just a memory,” I murmur to myself, hugging my knees and wiping my tears. “I’m okay.”

I pick myself off the floor and settle back in bed, my racing heart slowly coming to a steady beat. I glance at the clock. It’s December 16th, 4:50 am.

In just over 12 hours, Lluvia Blanca gets a new alpha...

When it becomes obvious I won't be sleeping anytime soon, I tip toe to the office to study the black book with Rio at my heels. He watches me as I sit in Oliver's chair with curiosity before laying at my feet.

"I'm okay, Rio. I promise."

Rio tilts his head to the side, a soft whine rumbling through his chest.

"Do you miss him too?" I ask him, patting his head and giving his ears a scratch. He leans into my hand and wags his tail. I hold back tears and flip open the black book.

I miss him, Reyna whimpers.

I miss his hugs, I sigh, closing my eyes tightly to keep from crying.

Rio whines some more and jumps up onto my lap to lick my face. I wipe his slobber off and compose myself. This is no time to mope around. I have to figure this out.

I flip through the book, desperately searching for any clues when I come across a page that seems promising.

It is common knowledge that all werewolves are susceptible to wolfsbane and silver, the Ivory twins being not exception. Silver, gold and ivory wolves however, can tolerate exposure to such toxic elements for greater lengths of time and at greater quantities. In fact, the children of the moon and sun can withstand a wolfsbane dosage lethal enough to kill 20 normal werewolves. This, however, does not mean the silver, gold, or Ivory twins are without weakness.

The Queen of the Night flower (*Selenicereus grandiflorus*) and the Flame lily (*Gloriosa superba*) contain toxins that could easily subdue the Children of the Moon and Sun. The root extract of the flame lily and the crushed petals of a blooming Queen of the night flower create a serum that could temporarily suppress their powers. Under the effects of these flowers, Silver, gold and ivory wolves are susceptible to lethal dosages of wolfsbane and liquid silver. Creating an effective serum is tricky, although no impossible.

The book goes into extensive detail explaining the known side effects of the serum which include : loss of power, loss of strength and temporarily blocks the link between wolf and human. I read a bit further and make yet another shocking discovery, although definitely not relevant to me.

Apart from the serum, pregnancy also temporarily suppresses the powers of the Children of the Moon and Sun

I sigh in relief. Oliver's attempt to put a pup in me had failed, thankfully. I got my period last week. I dive into the web, looking up the plants needed for this so called concoction. The flame lilies are relatively easy to cultivate, concerning me. The Queen of the Night flowers, on the other hand, were not as easy to come by. The flowers bloomed only at night, once a year, and would wilt before dawn.

Could Tais and Ira know about my weakness and if so, had they already figured out the how to create the serum?

They've had 18 years to plan, Reyna replies. It's possible they know..

The thought makes my skin crawl. There were very few silver wolves and gold wolves left in the world at this point, so the chances of the one of our own turning over our secrets to those witches are slim.... But not impossible.

I turn my attention back to the book until I see day break. In a hurry, I run back to my room to shower, change, and conceal my fatigue with a healthy layer of makeup. As I'm getting ready, my phone rings.

When Mia speaks, she sounds defeated. "Mom left."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I found a note in her room. She admitted to having helped Tais and her sister find you. She left..."

"Mia, I'm so sorry.. I- I don't know what to say."

"I'm scared ... but a part of me is a little relieved, I guess. Like I no longer have this burden to carry," Mia says, bitterness in her voice. "I'm a terrible person aren't I?"

"No, Mia. Karina did this to herself. She left you because she couldn't face what she did. She's sick... maybe she went to get help or she went to seek out her own peace. Her leaving isn't necessarily a bad thing. Besides... I know she hurt you guys too."

There is shock in her voice. "You knew?"

"I've seen the bruises. I knew Chava would never lay a finger on you so Karina was the only logical explanation."

"How long-"

"Not long. I first noticed when you came here with Chava and Javier... and then I saw the marks on your arms again yesterday. I'm sorry she hurt you too." Mia cries on the phone and it breaks my heart. "How is Chava handling this?" I ask, hoping he could at least help comfort her.

"I don't know. I haven't seen him. He's been avoiding me for weeks now. We don't really speak anymore."

I find myself getting irritated with Chava. He was her brother. He shouldn't be pushing her away at a time like this!

"Come over. Maybe I can help you track Karina down and make sure she's not in any trouble...."

"I can't. Today is Javier's ceremony. I have to help with the preparations," Mia snuffles. "You're coming right?"

I let out a heavy sigh. Wesley and I agreed to drop off the pack treaty as soon as Javier took the oath but I was not looking forward to setting foot on Lluvia Blanca again.

"Yeah... Wes and I have the treaty for Javi to sign."

"I see... Well you're more than welcome to stay for the party-"

"Mia- I-I'm only there for business. The last place I want to be right now is at Lluvia Blanca."

Her voice goes quiet and she sighs. "Right... You're right. That was insensitive of me...." She mutters. "Hey, Aurora?"

“Yes?”

“H-how did you sleep last night? Did you have any nightmares again?”

I frown at this. “I slept fine.”

She sighs. “You need some sleeping pills.”

I groan. “Mia-”

“I mean it Aurora. You need to sleep.”

I nod despite the fact that she can’t see me. “I’ll ask for some tonight. I promise.”

“Pinky swear?”

I freeze when she says that. “You remember?”

“Of course I do!” She snaps. “So pinky swear?”

“Pinky swear.”

I hang up the phone and race downstairs for breakfast, hoping to avoid everyone today. But of course, my luck has never been great and I find Celina, Evan, Carter, Rosalie and some other pack members already at the table, seemingly waiting for me. I contort my face into a smile and walk quickly to my seat.

“You look better today,” Rosalie says as I stuff my oatmeal into my mouth.

“Did you get better sleep?”

“Huh? Oh yeah. I took a sleeping pill and it knocked me right out. I finally got a full night’s rest.” I lie.

Celina eyes me suspiciously.

“Liar,” she mumbles via mind link.

“Shut up,” I hiss back.

Evan doesn’t seem to buy it either but says nothing and focuses on his food. Carter gives me a small briefing on the company matters and informs me that

there is to be a important meeting later that afternoon with the board. For the rest of the meal, we discuss some pack matters that need to be taken care of. I decide to hold off on the weakness I discovered, remembering there was a traitor among us.

“We need to talk later in private..” I tell Celina and she nods.

Evan’s finally decides to speak and what he says both surprises and annoys me.

“Maybe we can go look for a Christmas tree today,” he mutters.

Rosalie’s face lights up instantly. “Oooh that sounds lovely! We could use some Christmas cheer in this house. Won’t that be fun, Aurora? We could pull the decorations down from the attic and make a day of it!”

I thought that was a stupid idea given the circumstances? Now they want to go through with it?

I hide my irritation and offer Rosalie a simple smile and nod my agreement before excusing myself from the table. As I put away my dishes, I hear Evan enter the kitchen.

He says nothing and just stares at me, so I go back to washing my dishes.

“There are some evergreens near the northern borders of the territory...” He sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. “What do you say we go in an hour? We can take the girls and a few guards. Take our minds off of the situation...?”

It takes all my energy to force a smile on my face. “That sounds perfect,” I say cheerfully. “Rosalie has been locked away here these past few days. I’m sure she and the baby could use some fresh air and sunshine,” I chirp.

Evan nods and turns to leave but stops in his tracks.

“I’m sorry For yelling at you,,” he sighs. “I didn’t mean to offend you and call your thoughts stupid.”

Afraid I might burst into tears, I focus on my dishes and give him a small nod.

“Mia and I got into an argument and you came up. I’m sorry. I just took my anger out on you.”

"It's okay," I shrug. "I think I needed the reality check. I've been so focused on my own pain, I forgot to look at the bigger picture here. Everyone is hurting and I need to step up as Luna and take care of everyone like I promised I would."

"You are a good Luna, though," Evan says. "You've been very brave throughout this whole ordeal. It bothers me that you think you have to force yourself to be strong or shove aside your own feelings to take care of us. That's why I think we should go through with the Christmas decorations." His voice goes quiet. "I forgot you haven't had the chance to celebrate in years. And while these aren't the best circumstances and you can't leave the territory, I want to at least give you a chance to see what Christmas is all about. Family. So I'm sorry for being a jerk-

I rush up to him and pull him into a hug. "You're not a jerk, just an i****t," I murmur into his shirt. He wraps his arms around me and rests his chin on top of my head. "Do you want to talk about your fight with Mia?" I ask, wanting to help him as he always helped me.

He shakes his head. "No," he sighs. "I have to figure this out on my own."

"Well I see you two have finally made up," Celina laughs as she walks in with her plate. "I was starting to worry Mr. Grumpy pants over here would never get over us using our powers on him."

Evan scowls at her. "Oh no, I'm still mad at you guys for that. But being mad at Aurora is like slapping a puppy. It's just wrong."

"Why on earth would you slap a puppy?" I ask, pulling back from him.

"It's just an expression!" He rolls his eyes.

"On what planet?"

We pile into three cars, the girls, Rio and I riding with Evan, Carter and William while about 10 guards accompany us in the other cars.

Rosalie squeals with excitement as we pull up to the evergreen forest. She grabs Carter by the hand and drags him towards the row with the tallest trees, going on a rant about wanting the biggest tree for the foyer. I steer towards

the smaller trees, wanting a tree for the bedroom. Evan, Celina, Rio and five of the guards stick to me like glue, but I don't mind so much.

I check out several trees, none of them really speaking to me when I come upon the last tree in the corner. It's the smallest tree there, a little misshapen and missing a few branches. Evan raises an eyebrow as my smile grows wider. I continue to inspect the little tree when a hummingbird sitting peacefully atop its branches catches my eye. As I get closer, my heart sinks to the pit of my stomach. The hummingbird is as beautiful as I remember it, it's large iridescent violet wings containing gorgeous hues of pinks, blues, and greens with gold speckles all around. It's throat contains a vibrant red stripe with black spots while it's head is bright yellow. There's a note tied to its leg.

"Wow, what a pretty hummingbird," Celina says in awe. "I've never seen one with such colors!"

I stick my hand out to it and as it once used to do, the little hummingbird hops onto my finger and gently pecks my cheek. Rio nips at my jeans, seemingly jealous of the attention I'm giving it and I crouch down to show him the bird. Rio sniffs it and barks excitedly at the little hummingbird. I ignore Celina and Evan's stares and giggle at the beautiful creature, stroking it's colorful feathers before taking the note off its leg.

The words "I believe you" are written in familiar handwriting inside the small note.

I look around, searching for the hummingbird's creator and for a split second, I see him standing in the distance before he vanishes from sight.