

## Chapter Ten

Luna Ayla

I was on the verge of vomiting by the time Nate pulled up in front of the pack house. My father and Thea, along with Nate's mother and father were waiting for us. My body was shaking as I stared at my father. Nate squeezed my hand before getting out of his truck. I jumped when Nate opened my door.

"Ayla, breathe, it will be okay," Nate mumbled, kissing my cheek.

"I don't think I can do this," I whispered, closing my eyes. Tears were threatening to spill and my lungs were unable to take in a breath.

"Sweetie, is everything okay?" My dad called out from behind Nate.

"It's okay, baby, I got you. We'll do this together." Nate said, taking hold of my cheeks. I nodded, unable to speak. I was standing on the ledge and one move, I'd fall into darkness.

Nate helped me out of the truck, pulling me into his side as we turned around to see everyone. Everyone was looking with concern but it was my father's face that had me almost breaking down. I wanted him in my life, more than anything. I want to meet my sister and brothers. I crave being a part of a family. But this pain is unlike anything I've felt before. I thought losing Nate scared me but losing my newfound family was crippling.

"Ayla, sweetheart, are you okay?" Thea asked. I stammered, not knowing how to answer her question. Physically I'm okay, but mentally not so much.

"We should all talk in private," Nate announced.

"Come, the lounge is empty. I have a feeling I'm going to need a drink," my father scoffed.

"I'll take one," I told him. I followed him inside while Nate greeted his parents. Thea walked up beside me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders.

"I'm so glad you are safe," she squeezed. My dam was about to break. Thea was the perfect stepmother and I didn't want to lose her.

As soon as my father entered the lounge, he went behind the bar to pour himself a drink. As soon as he lled a glass with whiskey, I downed it in one go. I slammed the glass down on the top of the bar.

"That bad?" My father questioned, grabbing another glass before lling it for himself and pouring me another.

I downed the glass just as quickly as the rst. I don't normally drink and this can go one of two ways. I break down into sobs or I blurt it out.

I was about to down another before Nate was beside me, stopping me. He took the glass and downed my drink himself.

"I think you had enough," he scolded me.

"Ayla, Nate, and your father have lled us in with what happened with the vampire and the attack. Did something else happen?" Nate's mother asked. I took a deep breath hoping the alcohol would kick in before I had to answer.

"Dad, I need to tell you something, but before I do I just want to tell you how much I want to be a part of your family with Thea." My voice cracked as tears started to fall. My father placed his glass down before taking a sip of his drink.

"Sweetie, you're scaring us," Thea exclaimed. She was sitting on the other side of me but I couldn't take my eyes off my father.

"Melody is dead," I stammered out. Others in the room gasped, but my father remained silent.

"She's faking, Ayla." My father growled.

"I watched her die, Dad," I whispered, trying to hold back my sobs. My father stormed out of the room. I jumped when the door slammed closed behind me.

Nate spun the bar stool around to face him before wrapping me in his arms.

"Nate, what happened?" His father asked him.

"Melody was pregnant. She came to warn Ayla about her claim: the father of her child. But she went into labor. Ayla helped deliver her sister but her mother died. We learned that mermaids only have one safe pregnancy. The second will kill them without medical intervention." I heard them all gasp.

"Ayla, sweetie, it wasn't your fault," Thea said, rubbing my back. I pulled away from Nate, wiping my tears.

"But it is. She risked her unborn child to warn me and it killed her. And if I hadn't been there, it would have killed my sister. If it wasn't for me, she would still be alive," I cried. She wrapped her arms around me, replacing Nate.

"He hates me," I sobbed on her shoulder.

"He doesn't hate you. He loved her. He grieved about her death and now he has to grieve again. He just needed a moment to clear his head. We love you so much. And we are so proud of you." She said, taking hold of my cheeks.

"How is your sister?" She asked.

"Matt and Julie adopted her. I'm in no position to take care of another," I answered.

"And you say you're not a Luna, not a queen."

"I don't feel like a queen. I'm a failure. I couldn't help my mom. My best friend almost died and my bond with Nate was broken. People died because of me. Because I have no idea what I'm doing." I ranted, unable to hold it all in.

"Ayla, life is about learning. Do you think I knew how to be a Luna when your father claimed me? I had no idea what I was doing; it felt like too much most days. But I never gave up. The grief will never go away, but it will become easier to live with. And you are not alone. You will always have a home here with us." She kissed my forehead before wrapping her arms around me again.

"Thank you," I mumbled through my sobs. She had no idea how much I needed to hear her words.