

Chapter Six

Ayla

The trip to the northern kingdom felt never-ending. After that morning with Kaden and the guilt I felt over Xander, I just wanted to get to the temple. The Black Pearl temple. I needed to see the goddesses and demand to know what was going on before moving forward to find my mother's claim. There was so much going on and my head was spinning. And my wolf is still refusing to speak to me.

The northern palace came into view and as the chopper flew closer, I could see people standing by the chopper pad. I didn't want to see anyone. I just want to get to the temple and demand answers. I think after everything, I at least deserve that. The goddesses are attempting to destroy my relationship with Nate and I won't allow them to do that.

As soon as the chopper touched down, I got out of the seatbelt. I jumped out and started to run towards the temple. If people were calling after me, I didn't hear them. I needed to get answers. I followed my instincts as I ran as fast as I could through the forest behind the palace. The northern kingdom was supposed to be my home but it felt more like my prison. Being the black pearl felt like a life sentence. I was trapped in this nightmare with no way out.

I believed things were supposed to get better after everything that had happened, but it was just stage one. How many more stages will there be before I finally break? It was like I was drowning and no matter how hard I kicked, I couldn't break the surface. I'm scared. And desperate for some kind of answers.

I slowed down as soon as the cave came into view. This place was supposed to feel like home but it only brought me dread. It brought me back to the reality that my life is not my own. That I have this higher purpose that I never asked for.

As I entered the cave, my clothes were replaced by my scale armor. It was eerily quiet as I walked further inside. The air was damp and musky. And my eyes are struggling to adjust to the darkness. Outside was bright, being the afternoon. But this place seems sinister, almost. A completely different feeling than before.

The further I walked, the more on edge I became. I felt like someone was watching me. But how could that be? How could this place have such an eerie atmosphere now? Before it was home and now I knew something was wrong.

I could hear muffled voices echoing off the cave walls. Nate and the others surely have caught up with me now. I moved faster, finally entering the main room. This was the same room I appeared in after I proved I was worthy. Now I feel proving myself was a mistake.

"Goddesses," I yelled out. My voice echoed off the stone walls.

"I need to speak to you and I'm not leaving here until you answer them!" I walked up the stone stairs and sat upon the throne. My throne. This was my temple. The temple of the great Black Pearl. Well, this Black Pearl is falling apart and I need help. I need to understand what is going on. How can Xander also be my mate? That doesn't make any sense.

I was told the first Black Pearl had multiple mates, but my understanding was they were chosen, not fated. There is still so much I don't know about these worlds. And the goddesses have been anything but helpful. I have no one to ask, because the one person I could, was now dead. She died to protect me from her claim. The guilt over her death was overwhelming. It was hard to sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw her lifeless body. And I still haven't told my father. I just wanted someone to fucking answer me.

"Hello!" I growled out into the empty room.

"I know you can hear me. And I need answers. Because that goddamn book was empty and you made my wolf claim another mate. I'm done playing this game with you." I screamed. I ripped a scale off of my arm before forcing them to retreat off my wrist.

"Now you will answer me, or I will do it," I yelled.

"Babe?" I heard Nate. I looked up to see him standing with the others. Tears filled my eyes as I stared at Nate. My heart twisted painfully.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I can't handle this anymore. This is just too much. And no one who can help me will," I cried. I dropped the scale and broke down into sobs. I cried into my hands as I curled my body on the throne. The weight of everything has become too much for one person to carry. I jumped when a hand gripped my shoulder. I lifted my head to find the moon goddess looking down at me. She knelt in front of me, her eyes were full of concern. Once my eyes met hers, I could feel my wolf. The pain and the confusion of the last few days came rushing to the surface.

"Oh, my sweet child," she whispered, as she wrapped me in her arms. I cried on the shoulder of a goddess. I felt weak as my sobs calmed down and I was able to breathe again. I can't do this. I can't do any of this.

"You are stronger than you know, Ayla. You believe we have given you too much to handle, but you are the only person, the only hybrid that can handle this. And you are not alone, you have Nate and Xander." She said, taking my cheeks in her hands.

"Why would my wolf claim Xander?" I stammered.

"A soulmate is not just for lovers. A soulmate can be a friend or a protector. A person who sees you for who you are. And Xander sees you that way. He has chosen to be your protector, Ayla. A protector that will lead the mermaids. Nate will protect you on land, but in the water, you will need a loyal army. Kaia will help find them for you." She explained.

"I don't understand, if I claim him, he won't be able to be with another?" I questioned.

"This claim is different. He won't be able to be claimed by a mate or have children. His life will forever be your protector."