

## Chapter Eight

Alpha Nate

We were about halfway back to the palace when I scooped Ayla into my arms. Everything was weighing heavily on her and this was just more weight added to things she had no control over. I know I told her I would support her with whatever she chose to do, but I was praying she wouldn't claim another. I wanted to be selfish and have her all to myself. But I didn't want to put any more weight on the decision she had to make. I also didn't want to put her in more danger. The Moon Goddess said she would be in more danger if she didn't claim her mermaid army.

"We are more than capable of protecting our Luna," Duke growled. He has been more possessive of Ayla than I have been. Alpha wolves don't share mates with anyone. I'm friends with Xander, but not that friendly.

"And we will never be that friendly! It's bad enough she's been with two other males. I won't share her," he scoffed.

"She may have been with another, but she's with us now. She didn't know about mates, Duke. We can't fault her for something she knew nothing about," I told him. He grumbled before returning to the back of my mind.

"Nate, how are you feeling?" Queen Laura asked me, walking beside me.

"How am I supposed to feel about this? None of you here are wolves and don't understand that we don't share. And then, having my goddess tell me, I have to in order to keep her safe." I retorted, before looking down at my sleeping mate. She never asked for any of this.

"I'm not going to accept her, Nate. You should know me by now. I would never come between you and Ayla." Xander said, walking beside me on the other side.

"You both may not have a choice. It would seem her destiny was prewritten. And failure is not an option. If she loses whatever battle is coming, we all lose." The queen sighed. I realized this was taking a toll on everyone.

If Ayla fails, the mermaids could be wiped out of existence. And the next battle will be in the water. Wolves would be useless. I won't be able to protect her.

"Then let's bring the battle to the land. If we can't protect her in the water and she has to claim an army to protect her, then we force the battle to happen on land. Our pack will protect her." Duke chimed in.

"How can we prepare for something when we don't know the who, what, where or why?" I replied. This wasn't as easy as waiting to see what happened. People will die if we don't know where they will strike.

I walked into the palace and straight up to our room. I didn't want to speak with anyone. I had too much on my mind. Ayla and I were about to walk into the unknown and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't scared.

I didn't know if we should just head home and wait for whatever threat to come. It could be weeks, months, or even years before this new threat reveals itself.

I sighed as I placed my sleeping Luna on our bed. I'm not mad that she's sleeping. She hasn't slept since her mother passed away. She has been worrying about her sister and telling her father. And then her wolf claimed another. The last few days have been a mess and I wish I knew how to help her. How to shoulder some of this burden with her? I'm her mate and alpha, but I feel completely useless.

I covered her with a blanket before going to have a shower. Even when she was sleeping, I could still feel her turmoil through our bond. She needed time to grieve the loss of her mother. And she needs time to process what the Moon Goddess has asked of her.

I stood under the hot water, hoping it would relax my tired, achy body. I've slept as much as Ayla has over the last few days. Her emotions were worse when she was awake, bleeding into my own. I've been trying to be patient as best I can, but I don't think I can if she chooses to claim another. And I didn't know how to bring this up to her. I know she is going through a lot and she needs my strength, not my insecurities.

When the water ran cold, I hopped out of the shower, wrapping a towel around my waist before walking into the bedroom to get dressed. Ayla was sitting up in bed, with her back resting against the headboard. She was staring out the window.

"Baby," I called out. Her eyes were red and puffy when she turned to look at me.

"Nate, I can't do it. I can't claim another. I'm sorry if I die, but I can't do that to you," she sobbed. I rushed over to sit beside her, wrapping her in my arms.

"I won't let anything happen to you, my Luna. It's us against whatever is coming." I told her, reassuring her.

"I love you, so much, Nate. You are my entire world and I won't do anything to hurt you or our relationship. I would rather die than hurt you," she cried, and I squeezed her against my side. Her words warmed my heart.

"I love you. More than anything, Ayla. And I will support you. And Xander will also support you. We will just have to find another way," I said and she nodded against my chest.

"Thank you," she whispered, sniffling.

"For what, baby?" I asked her, kissing the top of her head.

"For being perfect. I don't deserve you."