

Chapter 9

CLAIR

I spent the whole day locked up in my room trying to decide whether I should stay or just go away from here and move on with my life.

Before I came back here, I already had everything planned out.

Come back - shift - leave.

But I didn't expect Jake to consume my mind since I got here. And that hug we shared yesterday had me hoping for something. I actually decided to stay longer to get to know him again.

However, the news Aaron brought me last night bothered me so much that I was not able to sleep at all. I spent the whole night turning and tossing. I was confused, and for the first time since I got here, the feeling of being unwanted crept in again. 1

After a constant battle with myself, I finally got the courage to gather all the clothes and things I came home with and tossed them in my duffel bag, not even bothering to fold them. 1

Flashes of my conversation with Aaron last night kept playing in my head. Jake will have a Luna soon and I didn't want to be here when it happened. The easiest way was to walk away from here while I still could.

I couldn't explain what I felt for him, but I knew the thought of him having a Luna was piercing my heart. I tried to hide it from Aaron last night, and I almost believed the words that came out of my mouth when I told him that I only saw Jake as a brother.

It was a lie. He will never be just a brother to me. But Aaron was right, this couldn't go on any longer.

I looked around my room and gave myself a small satisfied smile despite my heavy heart. I have everything I need to take with me when I go tomorrow.

I shrugged the guilt building up inside me as I thought of leaving my dad and Aaron. They knew I didn't intend to stay and that I was here just for the shifting and although we haven't really talked about this since I came back, they should be expecting that I would leave any time soon after I was able to summon my wolf.

A knock on my door took me away from my thoughts. I opened it to see Dad smiling at me.

"Hey Dad, you're home!" I beamed at him.

"Yes, but I need to head back to the town and I just want to ask if..." He cut himself from talking when his gaze shifted from me to the duffel bag sitting on my bed. He returned his gaze to me with a pained expression. "What's the meaning of this, Clair? Are you not staying? It's the full moon tonight."

I swallowed hard and gathered all my courage before I answered in a casual tone as if this was just a normal occurrence. "Yes, that means I'm shifting tonight, and

tomorrow, I'm going back to Atlanta."

"No! No! No! We didn't talk about this." Dad kept shaking his head and pursing his lips. I knew he was trying to control his emotions.

"Yes, Dad, you know about this." I rolled my eyes and let out a sigh like the spoiled brat that I was, adding more pain to my father's expression. "I don't intend to stay longer. I told Aaron I was just here for a few days and I was sure he told you that."

"You're not leaving. Do you hear me? We need to talk about this first, but definitely, you aren't leaving tomorrow!" He raised his voice on the last one.

"Are you serious? You can't stop me!"

"I am and I will! You're not leaving! Not yet! We're just starting to be a family again..."

I cut him off before he could finish. "A family? Who said I wanted one? That I need one? I have my own life now and I don't want to get stuck up here when I know there is so much out there to see!" I started to freak out. I didn't foresee that I would have this argument with my dad.

"I'm still your father, and you do as you are told." His nose flared while his eyes were glaring at me.

"You can't just boss me around just because you're my father. Did you forget that you threw me away? Well, that day, I became fatherless! And another thing, I'm turning 18 soon and I don't care anymore what you want or what everybody wants. I'm done with people telling me what to

do and I'm leaving!" I was so pissed off that I slammed the door in my father's face before he could say another word.

He let out a loud growl before he spoke, and I felt my braveness melting away.

"Try that one more time, Absaline Clair, and I swear to the Goddess, I will put you in your place!" He left as soon as he said those words.

As soon as I heard footsteps going away, I let out the sigh I'd been holding and lay down on my bed. My mind wasn't working, and all I knew was that I wanted to get away from here. I threw a glance at my table clock and saw that it was almost five in the afternoon. I made an abrupt decision to put on my jeans and a white shirt before pulling my bag from my bed and running out of my room. I skidded my way down and rushed outside towards my pickup truck. 1

I started my engine without thinking rationally. I had to get away before Aaron came back from training and before he could stop me.

I didn't know which way I should take, but I just followed my instinct and drove past the packhouse and off to the direction where I remembered we came when Aaron picked me up from the border. I was not sure if anyone saw me, but I wished nobody did, so I could leave without any problem.

After driving for more than thirty minutes, I was already in the middle of the forest ground and just following the path where it looked like cars had been passing.

Then I felt a slight pain crossing my stomach and tilted my

head up and checked outside the windshield to look at the moon. It looked like it was already at its peak.

I stopped the car and rested my head on the steering wheel, glancing at the moon from time to time. I regretted leaving now that I felt pain arising from my stomach to everywhere in my body. I gritted my teeth as I tried to calm my nerves. I could do this.

With my head still resting on the wheel, I closed my eyes and waited for the pain to subside.

I didn't know how long I stayed in that position. I must have drifted off to sleep having had no sleep at all from last night when my body suddenly jerked up from the shot of pain that erupted from my spine. I let out a tortured scream as it continued to build up.

"No! No! No!" I cried while trying to open a mindlink to Aaron.

'Please! Please! Aaron...' Nothing happened.

The pain made it hard for me to concentrate enough to mindlink him. I started to lose hope that I could reach Aaron when a voice reached my head.

'Clair? Clair Where are you?' I could sense the worry in his voice.

'Jake?' I couldn't deny the relief I felt of being able to reach out to someone. 'I think I'm shifting! Tell Aaron to help me... I can't...'

'Where are you? Answer me, dammit!' He snapped at me impatiently.

Forest. I drove the way we came when I arrived. I think it's south of the pack house. I don't know.... aaargh! It's too painful!

'I'm coming. If you're inside your truck, you need to get out.'
His voice changed to a soft tone. 'Take your clothes off so it won't constrain you when you shift.'

'Okay..'

'And don't close our mind link. I'm coming!'

'I'll try. Please hurry up, I don't think I can make it.'

I looked at the full moon above me as I crawled on the ground. I struggled to pull my pants down and finally kicked them off my legs, but I could not do more and just left my shirt on.

I was already on all fours when pain erupted again all over my body. It was too much that I couldn't stay still. I was shaking, but I knew I had to keep moving. I let out the loudest and scariest scream I ever heard from my own voice as the heat took over my whole body – my eyes were burning from within.

"Goddess, help me!" I cried out at the full moon.

I had heard stories that shifting was painful, but I had no idea how painful it really was. The pain and the burn inside me were eating up my sanity. I panted through my mouth, but nothing was helping.

I closed my eyes, waiting for my bones to snap or for death to take me over - whichever came first. I was ready to

surrender all to the Goddess when I heard twigs snap and hurried paws were thudding the earth as it approached.

My eyes grew bigger this time with fear, my tears falling. "Please, Goddess, let it be Aaron or Jake," I whispered to the moon, hoping rogues were not the ones about to find me.

I kept the pain at bay while panting, waiting for the wolf to emerge from the bushes. It didn't take long before a big black wolf stepped out of the bushes and towered over me.

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