

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 21

[/ Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra](#)
Flora's P.O.V

"Ezra will kill us if she finds out!" Emma warned in a hushed whisper as we made our way to the library.

"If she finds out." Daphne shrugged confidently, making us believe that this wasn't the first time she had done something like this.

"It's the middle of the night." I offered. "Wouldn't it look less suspicious if we came in the morning?"

"Do you think I can last till the morning?" Daphne turned to ask me the question. "Will you last till the morning? I'd rather have a good night's sleep than wait eagerly for morning to come so I can find out about some forbidden ritual."

Well...she did have a point.

"Ezra will kill us!" Emma repeated once more.

"Oh, hush, pussy cat!" Daphne scolded Emma. "Ezra hasn't hurt a fly in centuries and she isn't about to start now."

"Didn't you guys hear the rumors that she used to be a Viking Princess?" Emma gave us wide eyed stares.

Daphne and I both burst out laughing, much to her astonishment.

"Emma, I'm sorry to say this but Ezra is only three centuries old. Viking's were gone five hundred years before her birth." I told her with a hand on her shoulder.

"Ezra is as delicate as a freshly budded white rose." Daphne added. "I couldn't even picture her as a warrior in my dreams. Don't believe every rumor you hear, Em. Not all are true."

"But...but you saw how angry she got today?" Emma looked from me to Daphne helplessly. "She never gets mad! And she got really mad today."

"At Andre, for bringing up a ritual she didn't want us to know about." Daphne shrugged. "What if the Blood Moon Ritual is a mate summoning ritual? Or a fertility ritual?" She looked at us hopefully. "Flora has already found her mate so she is fine with it, but what about us?"

"And what if it says to sacrifice something?" Emma frowned at Daphne. "It can be some kind of dangerous ritual as well."

"Well, then we should find out about it rapidly!" Daphne seemed even more determined than ever. "So we accidentally do not perform them."

"Some logic you have, Daphne." I shook my head at her, but I had to admit, even I was intrigued at this point. "Let's get going before someone sees us."

"Yep!" Daphne clapped her hands together. "I knew you would understand my thirst for knowledge, Flora! Let's go!"

Thirst for knowledge? I found myself impressed by Daphne's own explanation of her nosiness, and found myself following her willingly.

Lindersay Library was possibly the biggest library on ancient documents and Moon rituals; however, most of these documents were also classified and reserved only for the Alpha, the Shrine Maiden and some high ranking soldiers. But that didn't mean we didn't know how to get inside the classified section.

Daphne and I used to make a hobby out of getting into the 'forbidden section' to read the ritual books when I had first started working as a Lunar Maiden. On the outside, Daphne might appear to be the perfectly poised young lady, but we both knew she had a wild streak to her as well, that she somehow always came with a rational explanation for her actions.

Right now, we borrowed one of Emma's bobby pins to pick the lock that divided the main Literature and History library section and the section on Ritual books. Once we heard the click of the lock, we took it off and entered the room and shut the door behind us.

"Are you sure we should be doing this?" Emma asked for the thousandth time as Daphne gave her a death glare over her shoulder and frankly, she was starting to get on my nerve as well.

"If you're so worried about getting in trouble, maybe you should've stayed back?" I asked her with a glare of my own.

"But then I'd have been worried sick about you guys." Emma said in a small voice, her head bowed to the ground and I instantly felt bad.

It wasn't Emma's fault that she was a worry wart and it wasn't her fault that we had suddenly decided to do something like this. Emma was a maternal female wolf and that was why she was mostly given nursery duties. She also taught physics to the teens in Lindersay's schooling system.

"Well, we're already here Em," I spread my hands to point at the rows of old hardbound books that were still in pristine condition. "It'll be a wasted opportunity if we backed out now."

Emma didn't have any further arguments, so we started to look through the rows of books, divided by year or occasion.

"This is going to take all night, Flora. We need something to narrow it down." Daphne said after about fifteen minutes of us going through books containing Lunar Rituals. "We need to look for specifics."

"Wait..." Emma came forward. "We are looking for Blood Moon rituals or a Red Moon specifically and Ezra told us directly that the ritual was banned several years ago, right?"

"Centuries to be specific, but yes." I nodded.

"Then there is no way it's going to be out here in the open, just waiting for lock-pickers like you to come in and read it!" Emma pointed out. "Ezra has her eyes everywhere, trust me on this. So she must have hidden all the books that aren't supposed to be for just anyone to read."

"So we search for hidden compartments...or drawers?" Daphne looked around the room as did Emma and I.

"There!" I pointed towards the end of the room, as my eyes landed on an ornate mahogany table at the farthest corner of the room, partially hidden between two book racks.

We rushed over to the table and as expected, found three drawers on either sides of it. Daphne instantly started looking at the drawers, pulling on the knob to find which one was locked.

"Three of these are locked." Daphne said. "The bottom two on the left and the middle one on the right."

"Search the ones that are open." I told her. "Even if Ezra is careful about what she keeps out in the open for us to read, I doubt she had any idea Andre was going to bring up the Blood Moon ritual out of the blue. So she must not have hidden the keys yet."

"You're right." Emma raised her eyebrows at me. "Your mate sure knows some interesting stuff."

"Probably why I don't feel the mating bond yet." I muttered under my breath, only to get a mean look from Daphne. All I could do was shrug in return.

"Got it!" Daphne exclaimed in joy, holding up a bunch of keys in one hand. "Now to find the ones for the drawers."

Emma and I waited patiently behind Daphne while she tried the locks for the drawers. I didn't know about them, but I literally had my heart in my throat and I didn't even know why. My gut feeling kept telling me this was important, this Blood Moon Ritual that Andre spoke about, and not just because of the obvious reasons...there was a deeper meaning to it all.

"Got it!" Daphne's voice broke me out of my trance and both Emma and I hunkered down next to her, to look inside the contents of the first drawer. "Wait...what's this?"

We pulled out the large, thick file like thing that was wrapped in a piece of cloth that looked old enough to have been Cleopatra's floor rag. But when we took it off with care, there was a hard-bound file with several thick papers inside that appeared to be the handmade kind.

"This doesn't look like the book we are looking for..." Emma muttered a bit unsurely. "Should we keep looking?"

"Yeah...I think we can come back to this later." I told Daphne who was looking at the papers with such intensity that it worried me a bit. "Daphne? What's wrong? Can you understand what's on these papers? Is it about the Blood-"

"No." Daphne shook her head immediately. "This isn't a ritual book...this is a record book."

"Record?" Emma frowned. "Like financial records? Daphne, if this is a spending book for the Shrine, we really shouldn't be snooping around! Those are private!"

All Daphne did in return, was place the book on the floor, right in the centre so all of us could read it...and the first paper had my heart literally leaping out of my chest.

Flora Argentine. It was written in bold letters.

"It's a record...of the Shrine Maidens."

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 22

[/ Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra](#)
Flora's P.O.V

"Flora...Argentine? ReedStone Pack?" Emma looked at the paper then towards me, before turning her attention back to the papers again. "They knew?"

I felt my hands and feet go numb from the shock of it all.

Yes, Malachi knew, that much he had made clear to me the night I got my memories back. But this room? This section? These all fell under Ezra's jurisdiction.

She knew! She had known all along!

My knees gave out and I fell to the floor at an awkward angle and if it weren't for both Emma and Daphne's quick response, I would've fallen onto the files, crumbling the fine paper.

"Flora!" Both women said at the same time, settling me down properly against the back wall so I didn't risk falling over once more.

"They knew..." I whispered to my friends, once I was able to speak past the knot in my throat. It was difficult to breathe and I struggled to get air into my lungs.

"Oh shit!" Emma took my hand and began rubbing my palms. "She's in shock. Daphne?"

"Shit!" Daphne wrapped her arm around my shoulder and pulled me closer to her. Emma copied her and sat on the other side, doing the same. And even though I felt completely numb from head to toe, it still helped, having my best friends close to me like this.

"Maybe they researched you later?" Emma tried to comfort me. "They would've let you know but maybe forcing your memories on you would have had an adverse effect so they didn't try anymore..."

I shook my head at her. "I don't want to talk about it."

I couldn't tell them that I already knew who I was, where I was from...because something kept telling me not to let them know this secret. I also couldn't let them know about my conversation with Malachi.

I had gone too deep into this rabbit hole before even realizing it and now, I was in too deep and dragging my friends into this hole with me wasn't an option. Some battles were mine to fight alone...and some secrets shouldn't be brought to light just yet.

"It's not just you." Daphne said suddenly. "I think this has everyone's details on it...like a record of all the Maidens that worked here and a way of remembering them even after they left with their mates! We can keep looking at the files. It might be interesting?"

Daphne was trying to distract me from the state of shock I had just gone into and I had to say it was working. I nodded for her to continue and so she did.

"See?" She held up Emma and her pages. "We're here too! So even if we are to leave with our mates later in life, we would always be remembered."

It was a nice thought, to be remembered forever...never being forgotten, but was that really the purpose of these records? Or was I reading too much into the situation?

"Let's go through them together, shall we?" Emma told me, tugging me towards the papers. "We might find something that we are looking for?"

“Okay.” I nodded and the three of us went back to the pile we had discarded only a few centimeters away from us.

“This is the last one.” Emma picked out the paper right at the back. “Sahara Collin, ReefWood pack, 1823.”

“That’s almost two centuries ago.” Daphne shook her head. “The Lindersay Shrine was build over five centuries ago, according to what we learned about its history. So it’s impossible that there were only so few maidens till now. There must be more in the other drawers.”

Daphne picked up the keys and started opening the second drawer, but this time what came out were actual finance papers and no more of the list of Maidens. “Okay, last drawer.”

I felt my heart leap to my throat as Daphne found the key to the last one and inserted it into the lock. The click of the lock seemed to resonate all around the room and when Daphne opened the drawer, which seemed stuck due to unused...I almost didn’t want to know what was inside, but at the same time I was holding my breath to find out what was in it as well.

And then Daphne pulled out the only inhabitant of the drawer, something wrapped in a piece of cloth, similar to that of the files, but the size was much smaller...closer to that of a book.

“This is it?” Emma asked to be certain. “There’s nothing else inside?”

“No, this is it. This must be what we were searching for.” Daphne looked up at me to be sure. “Flora?”

“Open it.” I told her, my voice husky. “Please.”

Daphne nodded in understanding and started unwrapping the cloth from around the book. It was clear from the state of the book that this hadn’t been used in a while and that it had been hidden here a long time ago. There was dust in the cloth and the smell of it was old, very old.

When she removed the cloth, the book inside was a normal looking, with a dark red hard-bound cover with a picture of the full moon with some finer detailing. But somehow, I felt this iciness around my chest, like I was doing something I shouldn’t be doing. But I couldn’t help it either.

“Here,” Daphne held out the book for me. “Do you wanna open it?”

I nodded and took the book from her hand and placed it on my lap. It wasn’t big, but it was heavy and staying in contact with it made my heart heavier.

I flipped open the cover, found the first few pages almost illegible as the handwriting had nearly faded to nothing. The pages were frayed at the edges and

the paper was a dark yellow, worn from use. I had a feeling that before being banned, the Blood Moon rituals were probably a frequent event.

"I can hardly read anything here." I shook my head. "We need a magnifying glass and better lights."

"We can't do that." Both women shook their heads immediately. "Our break in here isn't exactly something we can brag about. Not to mention the fact that this book is ancient! Who knows what will happen to the book if we take it out of this room?"

"I know. This book hasn't been used in a long time." Daphne rubbed the back of her neck. "It's probably been sitting here, collecting dust for years now. Any thoughts Em?"

"Look, here it says unity." Emma pointed out at a section in the book. "I think this ritual is something about mating? Solidifying the bond?"

"Is it?" I tried to read the context, but everything was in bits and pieces, but from what we deciphered, that was possibly what the ritual was about. "Was it for people like me? The ones who couldn't feel the bond?" Was this the reason Andre wanted me to know about the book?

"If that's the case then no wonder the rituals were banned." Em said. "Anyone could claim to be a mate and then bind them through a stupid ritual!"

I didn't know why, but my mind immediately went to Andre. Was he...pretending to be my mate?

But I shook that thought out of my head immediately. No. Andre was a man of honor...he wouldn't do such a thing. He didn't even know me when he arrived! Why would someone, anyone, fake a mating bond? To what end?

"There's more." Daphne pointed out and we kept looking into the book page by page.

Most of the rituals seemed innocent enough, unless you noticed the use of blood in almost all of them. Moon rituals were supposed to be peaceful, serene...not violent. But the rituals here, the ones we could decipher were mostly the ones that had to do with mating and new beginnings. But why would any of these rituals need blood? It was beyond me and my friends were of the same sentiment.

"Shit." I whispered as I turned the page. "There are pages missing"

Some pages right towards the end were ripped out and not in a neat way either. Large chunks of paper were still sticking to the bind and I felt sorry for this inanimate object...that was until one word at the corner of one of the pages came into view.

Sacrifice...

The icy fingers around my heart tightened around my heart until I couldn't breathe. And somehow, I knew...I just knew, that this sacrifice had something to do with me and Clay.

It was time. I couldn't wait any longer. It was time to talk to the one person I knew would understand me, the one person who was in the same boat as me...Clay.

But before that, I needed answers. And I knew the person who could give them to me.

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 23

[/ Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra](#)
Flora's P.O.V

I knocked on Ezra's door once again.

I was very much aware that it was past two in the morning and she must be tired and asleep, especially after the ceremony tonight, but I didn't...just couldn't wait till morning to discuss this with Ezra.

I raised my hand once more to knock on her ornate mahogany door, but before I could rasp my knuckles on the wood, the door opened to expose a tired looking Ezra in a bath robe and her hair wet. The scent of her lavender shampoo told me she had just gotten out of the shower.

"Flora?" Ezra looked at me in confusion. "What brings you here at this hour?"

"I need to talk to you...its urgent." I told her, the weight of the book unusually heavy inside the bag.

"Of course." Ezra moved aside to let me in and I snuck into her room, feeling much more relieved after she had shut the door behind us.

"What did you want to talk about?" Ezra asked once we were standing face to face, in front of her fireplace. The warmth of the fire made the icy grip on my heart release little by little. Or maybe it was the feeling I got of being safe whenever I was near Ezra.

Taking a deep breath, I took the book out of the bag and showed it to Ezra. Her eyes widened in horror immediately.

"Why is that book with you?" She looked at me sharply, and for an instant...it felt like the eyes of a warrior rather than a priestess. "Flora?"

"Before the rogue attacks...you once told me to let you know when I remember something...anything that belonged to my past." I told her, watching her reaction closely. "But why didn't you ever tell me that you had known all along? Both you and Malachi."

Ezra sucked in a deep breath. "Flora-"

"No!" I snapped at her. "Everyone here has been lying to me from the instant I arrived! You, Malachi and God knows who else! Why, Ezra? What's this secret that everyone is hiding from me? Why was I kept in the dark for two whole years before I remembered that Clay-the rogue Alpha and I, used to be lovers."

Ezra's eyes widened as she took a step towards me. "You got your memories back?"

"Ezra! That's not-"

"How much?" She took a hold of my shoulders and shook them lightly. "How much do you remember?"

"Not much." I told her truthfully, swallowing the lump in my throat. "I have gaps in my memories still...but I remember my childhood in ReedStone pack. I remember my parents, my older brother and...I remember Clay."

"Then you still have a long way to go." Ezra let go of my shoulders and turned towards the fireplace. "I'm sorry, my child. For keeping you in the dark till now and for the fact that I'll have to continue to do so in the future. You are a very special child, Flora, because you've made it this far. But this road you walk is filled with thorns and you must walk alone."

"Then tell me one thing," I asked her. "Ever since Andre told us about the Blood Moon Ritual, I haven't been able to get it out of my head."

Ezra gave me another stern look. "I should be asking you how you got inside the restricted section of the library, but I already know the answer to that. Curiosity isn't always a boon, my child. And one day, it might just get you killed."

"At least I'll die knowing the truth."

"The truth?" Ezra turned to face me once more. "The truth isn't always liberating. And finding the truth isn't always the solution."

Before I could react or understand what was going on, Ezra had snatched the book right out of my hands and thrown it into the fireplace.

"Ezra!" I went to go after it, but she caught my hand in hers and yanked me back with a strength I wouldn't usually associate with Ezra.

The book caught fire almost instantly and the rate at which the fire engulfed the book was phenomenal; the heat in the room no longer feeling comfortable to me.

"Why?" I looked at her in betrayal, but I shouldn't have been surprised. Malachi and Ezra both were hiding secrets and they didn't want me to find out what that was. No one did.

"Some secrets must never come to light." She shook her head, letting go of my hand and massaging the spot she held with a lighter touch. "I know you feel betrayed...confused...I can only wish I could help, Flora. But I can't."

"Stop talking in riddles!" I jerked my hand away from her. "All you and Malachi have done ever since I arrived here were lie and manipulate and hide the truth from me! How low can the two of you go? How much longer do I have to stand this?"

I shook my head and moved away from her. "My family probably thinks I'm dead! My brother...my pack must be going crazy looking for me! I've lost the man I loved and now I have a mate that I feel no attachment to! My life is in shambles and all I get in return is more lies and more manipulation!"

"Those are very strong words, Flora." Ezra's voice was sad and it almost made me change my mind about this confrontation; but I held on. "If you cannot tell me anything else, the least you can do is tell me about the Blood Moon Ritual."

Ezra clenched her hands at her sides, closing her eyes temporarily before looking at me with determination. "Will it make up for everything? If I told you about the book, the rituals? Will it make up for the half-truths and the secrets?"

"Not even close." My answer was instant. "But it's the least you can do. My gut feeling keeps telling me this is important. This...ritual, it's connected to me and Clay and it can be the reason why my memories were lost in the first place."

Ezra sighed and looked me straight in the eyes. "You're not wrong...but you're not completely correct either. For now, riddles are all I have for you, but you have to understand that I have a lot to lose as well, if I decide to help you and no matter what you think I'm capable of, know that I'm always on your side and that is one truth that even the Goddess cannot change."

It would be so easy to believe her...to choose to believe her. But how could I do so again, after everything I had learned in the last few days? The only way out was by getting my memories back and I needed to get them back fast.

"Tell me about the rituals." I asked her one last time. "I already saw the ones that suggested a new beginning and start of a new life or new relationship. I'm guessing the relationship part is the reason why Andre was interested in letting me know about the ritual. But there were pages torn inside the book and I want to know what they held."

Ezra looked at the fireplace once more, watching the last of the pages turn into ash as the fires consumed them greedily. I felt at a loss, like so much information, so much knowledge had just gone to waste.

"The sun will be engulfed by darkness, and the moon drenched in blood, and then the day of longing of the Goddess comes to an end...A sacrifice of blood." Ezra spoke almost inaudibly and if I didn't have superior hearing, I wouldn't have caught it either. "The blood of true lovers who have passes the tests of the Moon Goddess. They must be sacrificed to the Goddess."

Her words had a chill run down my spine. True love's sacrifice? Why would anyone, least of all the Goddess, want to sacrifice true lovers? And what did it even mean? The Goddess had decided upon mates for every wolf the instant they are born...that itself guaranteed true love...then what did the prophecy even mean?

"What it is for?" I asked instead, because I knew the answer to my original question would be another riddle. "Why does the Moon Goddess of all people...need a sacrifice of blood?"

"To wake up the one person the Goddess longs for...to wake up her beloved Endymion."

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 24

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Flora's P.O.V

The winds howled through the walls of the tower; the sky a dark, dark black with the full moon the only source of illumination.

Any other day, I would've admired the moon. Would've praised how it blanketed the world in silver, spreading its tendrils to every corner of the planet...seeping into the waters of the lake.

But now, after what I had learned today...everything seemed to be falling apart. The moon no longer looked beautiful; rather, it felt ominous. In fact, it seemed to swallow all other stars in its vicinity tonight, like a giant black hole ready to suck in anything around it.

I rested my hand on one of the pillars in the tower balcony trying to piece together what I knew and what I learned.

Blood sacrifices...the true meaning of the Blood Moon Ceremony. And not just any blood...the blood of true lovers.

My mind felt like it was about to explode once again.

My hands went up on their own to clutch the pendent. I needed strength right now and the only person who I could truly count on was the man lost to the madness of the beast within. So, not only did I need to get my memories back, I also needed him to recover his memories as well.

"My Lady." Spoke the last person I wanted to speak to right now.

I fisted my hands in my skirt, trying my best to control my temper before I took in a deep breath and turned to him with a false smile. "Lord Andre." I gave him a small curtsy. "What brings you here, at this hour?"

"I was about to ask you the same, Flora." He gave me a genuine smile, the wind blowing back his dark hair onto his forehead. His grey eyes looked almost translucent tonight, and even though I didn't want to admit it...Andre was still one of the best looking men I had ever set eyes on.

He had changed from his regular soldier clothing to a more comfortable set of loose pants and a loose fitting white shirt. He looked like a man from the medieval ages, who was dressed for bed and I wouldn't be surprised if this was what he called nightwear. Andre seemed older than what he mentioned his age was, like he was born in the 1600's rather than just fifty years prior.

"I couldn't sleep." I told him truthfully. "My mind is in turmoil."

"You learned about the Blood Moon rituals." It wasn't a question.

"You did a good job of planting that idea inside my head." I gave him my best attempt at a sardonic smile. "I just had to go appease my curiosity. But you already knew that, didn't you?"

"Forget about every other ritual that can happen during a Blood Moon." Andre moved forward to take my hand in his. "Those are different, dangerous ones. For us, the most important ritual is that of the mated pair. Of new beginnings and a promise of a new, happy life together."

I shook my head, pulling my hand away from his. "I told you, Andre...I don't feel the mating bond between us. To me, you're just another...stranger. And I can't suddenly start thinking of a life together with a stranger, especially when we have nothing in common."

"Why are you so unwilling to give me a chance?" Andre asked instead. "I'm trying my best to reach out to you...to bond with you. And yet, you keep pulling away at every turn. How can we develop a mating bond between us if you aren't willing to give it a chance? It's like you've given up on us even before you gave us a shot."

His words had me rooted to my spot, especially since he was right. I really hadn't given Andre a chance and neither had I wanted to since all that has been filling my mind had been thoughts of another man...a man who wasn't even my mate.

I knew I was being unfair to Andre, but I hadn't considered his feelings even once. Wolves who had found their mates, especially the males, had a hard time controlling their possessiveness, and yet, Andre had given me all the space I needed, all the time I need. He hadn't forced his possessiveness on me, nor had he constantly pursued me. But his wolf must be restless...angry. He was just as turbulent on the inside as I had been impassive.

So...maybe, it was time to do something about it?

I unclenched my hands from my skirt and took a step towards him. The winds howled around me, blowing my hair and my skirt in different directions as I placed my hands on his shoulder almost gingerly and looked up into his eyes. They were a storm barely caged.

By now, I think Andre had understood what I was about to do, no matter how old-fashioned he might be; and that was probably why he stood so still. Lifting on my tippy toes, I finally, finally...took the first step.

I placed my lips on his in a tender kiss.

Clay's P.O.V:

It had been two days since I last heard from or seen anyone from the Castle...especially Flora.

My heart kept yearning for her, even though my mind was confused as to why I even felt this way. So I decided to stop waiting for her to come to me and went in search of her instead.

I didn't know how I would find her. I couldn't come near the castle. There were too many people there now, people that were now trying to kill us. New people that I hadn't scented before.

I didn't know what was going on, but they weren't my concern, Flora was. And I wanted to see her quickly.

I started running through the forest at my best speed, making sure not to alert the patrol guards, although they didn't give us trouble anymore. The castle came into view a mere five minutes later, through the shadows of the trees. It was big and magnificent and bright. So different from the darkness I lived in, even though Malachi was making things better for me now. However, every other thought was pushed to the back of my mind as I started searching for Flora among the windows and balconies.

I saw her almost immediately, standing on the balcony of one of the towers facing the forest. Suddenly my heart was full, like it was bigger. This weird sensation persisted as I continued to come closer to the castle...and spotted another man behind her.

I halted mid-step, my heart suddenly heavier as my eyes seemed to focus only on Flora and that unknown man.

Who was he? Why was he near my Flora?

The thought was so sudden that it startled me. My Flora? She wasn't my mate? Was she? Did rogues even have mates?

Confusion swirled my mind as I watched the man talk to Flora, take her hand in his. A red haze spread into the corners of my eyes as I kept watching. My mind filled with anger.

The wind grew stronger as I watched Flora remove her hands...but then the man seemed to scold her...like he was shouting at her.

The red haze grew, and so did my anger. How dare he talk to Flora like that? How dare he!

My claws extended and I felt my canines lengthen as well. I was ready to climb up to the tower and snatch Flora away from him, no matter what happened to me next. But then...something unexpected happened next.

I saw Flora walk towards the man and place her hands on him.

I clenched my hands into fists, my claws digging into my palms to draw blood.

And then I saw her lean up...and kiss him.

My heart seemed to burst into bloody shards that pierced my lungs and almost made me stop breathing.

No....

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 25

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Flora's P.O.V

Andre's arms came around me instantly, holding me to his chest as he deepened the kiss.

The wrongness of it all hit me full force and I knew I had made a mistake.

This wasn't how it was supposed to be! This wasn't the person I was supposed to be with, or kiss or let him touch me. I felt my skin crawl at the thought of going any further and I hit his chest a couple times to let him know I was uncomfortable.

A growl left Andre's throat as he pulled me even closer, to the point where I was plastered against him. And I knew I had to stop him.

Gathering all my strength, I pushed him back with my wolf's force, making him release me and tumble to the floor, but not before I felt one of his claws slice through the exposed skin on my arm. He wasn't just a werewolf, but a soldier with immense strength and I had a hunch that if I hadn't taken him by surprise, I wouldn't have been able to get him off of me.

Andre looked up at me in confusion, his eyes the gold of his wolf and his hair in a disarray. It took him some time to register what had happened as he looked around in confusion for a few seconds before his eyes fixated on me.

“Flora...”

His voice was hoarse, rough like sandpaper and it made my wolf restless as my claws pricked out just the tiniest bit.

I wanted to rub my lips clean with the back of my hand. God, why did I do this? What on earth had come over me that I thought kissing him was a good

idea? Just because I thought that me not being able to feel the mating bond was some kind of a fault on my part? Since when did I become so stupid?

Andre must have understood something, because the haze of the wolf left his eyes slowly and he regained his composure. He got up from the floor and dusted off his clothes before pinning me with a sharp look.

“I keep finding it increasingly strange that you cannot feel the mating bond, Flora.” His voice was still rough and it grated against my nerves. “Remember you kissed me of your own free will, so do not blame me for losing my composure.”

“I wasn’t going to.” I told him instantly, knowing well that it had been my fault. “It was a mistake.”

“Maybe the mating bond with you is a mistake.” Andre snapped. “A mate who cannot feel the bond...maybe the rumors are correct and you are a defective wolf.”

With that he began to turn his back on me and walk away, but I wasn’t done. With my hands clenched by my side, I stopped him with a hand on his shoulder and turned him back to face me with the strength of my wolf, once again succeeding in startling him.

“Who are you to tell me if I’m defective or not?” My voice was a growl, the strength of the wolf in my veins. “I’ve had to struggle with losing my

memories for two whole years, my entire life erased and meaningless. You think a mating bond will be the first thing on my mind right now? So I'm sorry but being the "defective wolf" who cannot tend to your needs, but maybe it's better that we keep our distance from now on."

"Flora--"

This time, I didn't wait for his answer or his excuses. I dashed to my room, ignoring his calls and shut the door tightly behind me, feeling the entire world trying to suffocate me. I fell to the floor, on my knees, clutching my throat to get some air into my lungs.

What was wrong with me? It felt like the walls were closing in on me; even my humongous room seemed to engulf me, making it hard for me to breathe. I needed to get out of here! I needed fresh air!

I rubbed at my lips vigorously, and I didn't stop until they stung. I knew they would be red and swollen but the kiss felt like a betrayal and I had been the traitor.

Clay and I might not be mates and I might have felt sorry for Andre and thought a kiss might help evoke the mating bond, but now, as I felt tears roll down my cheeks, I realized just how big of a fool I had truly been.

Getting up from the floor on shaky legs, I opened the door to my room and headed straight for that little secret opening from where I could go out into the woods without the guards noticing.

The hallways were almost empty at this time of the night and I made my way to the outer perimeters without fear of getting caught. The only people awake at this time would be a few of the castle guards and some that belonged to Andre. The later were the ones I was trying my best to avoid.

When I finally reached the escape route that I had used the first time to find Clay, I didn't waste time looking left or right, I went for the exit straightaway and leapt out of the hole in the wall, and into freedom.

I could instantly feel relief.

I gulped down the fresh air into my lungs, feeling the tightness in my chest ease away as I made my way deeper into the forest and leaned against a forest giant. I felt safer here, in the middle of the wilderness, free and unstoppable.

A sudden movement from behind one of the trees caught my eyes and I instantly became alert. "Who's there?"

But the next moment, his scent hit my nose, the tones familiar under the wildness of the rogue wolf.

“Clay...” I called out his name in a whisper as he stepped out of the shadows and came to stand in front of me.

He was wearing a grey shirt with black pants but his feet were bare. I don't know who gave him the clothes he was wearing, but I thought I smelled a familiar undertone that I couldn't place just yet.

“I wanted to see you.” Was his gruff reply.

How much of a coincidence was it that I wanted to see him too? That whenever I am in trouble or in doubt, the first person I think about is always him?

“I wanted to see you too.” I told him, taking a step towards the man who was a mystery to me and yet, who I knew down to the bone. “I kept having dreams about our past...about us. I wanted to see you so badly.” I shook my head, unable to speak past the knot in my throat. “It felt like I was suffocating. Ever since I met you...everything has changed. Who are we to each other, Clay? Why do I feel this attraction towards you? Why do I feel like whatever happened to us...you becoming a rogue, me losing my memories...it's all connected.”

“I don't know.” He shook his head, his hair falling onto his forehead as he did so. “I can't remember anything except...”

“Except?” I urged.

“You.” He said finally. “I want to see you. I want to feel you...”

He raised his hand and I instantly moved closer, like some kind of invisible string was pulling me towards him.

I was inches away from his outstretched hands, my own hands raised to embrace him. But then a growl sounded from his throat and he moved away from me.

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 26

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Flora's P.O.V

Clay growled deep in his throat and tore away from me.

At first I thought it was because I had Andre's scent on me, but when he kept looking at my arm, I frowned and looked down to find blood.

“What-?”

When did I- but then I remembered that when I had pushed Andre off of me, he had accidentally scratched me with his claw. The bleeding had stopped and

only a dark red line of dried blood remained that too would heal by morning. But Clay was probably angry I got hurt by him.

“It’s alright,” I told him, cautiously taking a step in his direction. “It’ll heal soon. I’ll be fine.”

“He hurt you!” Clay said, his voice a growl. “I saw!”

My entire being came to a standstill. “You saw?”

“Everything.” Clay nodded in confirmation and I felt like the ground had been removed from under my feet.

He saw everything? He saw me make the biggest mistake of my life? He saw me kiss Andre?

“I’m sorry...” I whispered, my voice barely audible. “I’m so, so sorry.”

“No...” Clay came forward this time, until we were standing face to face.

“Not your fault.”

“No it is!” I shook my head. “I thought I could feel the mating bond with him if-”

Another growl came from Clay, but this time, instead of moving away from me, he wrapped an arm around my waist and pulled me into his chest. The sparks were instant and I felt like this was what I had wanted all along...for him to take me into his arms.

“Mine!” He growled. “You are mine!”

I wanted to tell him that I belonged to no one but myself...but something stopped me. A familiar feeling in that claim, like I knew in my heart that he was right...I belonged to him, just like he belonged to me.

“Yes.” I whispered as I raised my hand to touch his face.

His features softened instantly as he took in a deep breath, trying to calm himself. He was beautiful. Even as a rogue, as his animal instincts rode at the forefront of his being...he was still as beautiful as the day I first saw him in my memories.

I cupped his cheek in my hand and this time when I leaned in, I knew I wasn't making a mistake. Clay met me half-way, our lips touching in a kiss so tender that it had me craving for more even before it started...

A flash of lightning lit up the entire night sky.

And everything came rushing back to me.

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I may not have those rights now, Flora darling. But I do intend to earn them.

Everything concerning you is very much my business!

You and me...it's bound to happen, Flora.

I can scent you in every breath, Flora. Just know that I've waited a long time for you too, fearing about mine and Riley's friendship and what not. But I'm tired of listening to what others will say. This is my life and I want you in it. The rest is up to you.

I'm going to take this nice and slow until you feel just as crazy as I had been feeling this past week.

I want boyfriend rights. I want everyone to know that you're unavailable and that you are now mine.

We're not mates. And I don't need anyone to tell me that, Clay. That realization is bone deep and it's what made me come to this decision.

I don't have the strength to stay away from you. But I don't want to get hurt when you turn twenty eight and find the one you are supposed to be with. What happen to me then? How will I be able to survive when I see you with someone else, madly in love?

I know it in my heart. No matter what the universe has decided, I will never feel for anyone else what I feel for you.

Would you have stayed if the situation was reversed? Would you have stayed behind at the pack house and let the others come find me while you waited to get news?

I love you...Flora. I love you more than I thought possible and I realized it the day you came to save me, risking your life for me. I couldn't breathe when I saw the rogue attack you and I don't want to feel that ever again. My love for you grows every single day until I can't believe how I got so lucky. I want to spend eternity with you, grow old with you by my side.

Let's break-up...until twelve.

I've broken the mating bond. It had no effect on me. All I care about is my Flora. You're the only woman in my heart.

I know I love Clay because I would do anything to be with him. My life doesn't matter if he is in danger and I would go to any lengths to make him happy. My love for Clay cannot be described in words because we can only feel it and I know what I feel for Clay. And that's how I know that even if we die right now, we will find our way back to each other in another life, not matter how different we are.

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I broke the kiss to look into Clay's eyes and for a second, I saw the red rim around the edge leave his eyes to leave it the same crystalline green that I knew, that I loved.

"Clay..." I whispered, feeling myself smile as happiness bubbled inside me.

"Flora..." Clay whispered, taking my face in his hands. "My head...the fog, it's gone! I remember!"

"Yes," tears of sheer joy fell from my eyes as I looked at the man I loved with all my heart. "Yes! I remember! I remember everything!"

How? How had I lived this long without Clay? How had I survived without the man who had been my air, my very reason for being?

“Clay!” “Flora.”

And then our lips met again, this time with a passion that I had never felt before. I was finally reunited with my Clay! We had been able to break the curse that the Moon Goddess herself had put on us! We made it! We made it!

The sound of a twig snapping in the distance had us both pulling away from the kiss unwillingly. But then I scented unfamiliar wolves and they were closing in on us.

“Andre’s men.” I whispered, hold Clay back when he bared his teeth in the direction of the intruders. “Clay, no!”

“I’ll get rid of them.” He grit out, even though he did nothing to break away from me when he could’ve easily done so.

“No.” I shook my head, unwilling to let him go either. “You hurt these guards and they unleash war on the rogues. You have to leave.”

I couldn’t let go of him. I found him clutching close to me instead, but the footsteps grew closer. “Come for me tomorrow, okay?”

“Come with me now.” He told me, desperately. “Come with me and we don’t have to return.”

“I can’t.” There were still answers that I haven’t found and the only person who could answer them now was Malachi. “I’ll come tomorrow and then we can leave. Please, Clay.”

Clay gave them one last look, his face set in hard lines, but he was the first one to let go of me, giving me the strength to release my grip on him too. “I’ll wait for you tomorrow.”

“Yes.” I let go of his waist and stepped back, clutching my hands at my sides so I didn’t reach out for him once more. “I love you.”

“I love you, Flora.” Clay whispered, and then he was gone...just vanished into thin air. He moved so stealthily that even I couldn’t hear his footfalls as he left.

I stood rooted to that spot, trying to take in the last of the sensation of his scent, his touch, before the guards found me. It didn’t take them long to reach me.

“Lady Healer.” The two soldiers bowed as I turned to face them. “It’s too early for you to be awake and out here without protection.”

“I’m aware.” I told them, not in the mood to give explanations to outsiders. “I’ll be returning to my chambers now.”

“We’ll escort you, My Lady.” One of the guards offered immediately.

“I’ve live here for over two years,” I reminded them, but with a smile. “I think I know the way.”

“My Lady.” They bowed once again as I left the forest, striding past them with ease.

Now that I had been seen, there was no point in leading these guards to the secret exit-way. So I came in through the front gates instead. There guards there were familiar, but they didn’t ask questions, nor did they seem worried. It made me wonder if they knew all along that I had snuck out.

I made my way through the mostly empty hallways and towards my room, the sun yet to rise but the birds had already risen and were now chirping their tunes to welcome the Sun God in all his glory.

I wanted to head straight to Malachi’s office and demand answers instead. My mind felt like a mess and I had a headache that made it feel like my head was about to explode. But at the same time, I had never seen things as clearly before. My memories were back...everything single thing that had been wiped away by the Moon Goddess herself, but I had more questions than I had answers.

I must have been too distracted by my thought as I made my way to my room, that I hadn't felt her presence until it was too late.

“Flora?”

I halted mid-step, my eyes wide with surprise as my heart thrashed against my ribcage. Shit!

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Flora's P.O.V

“Flora?”

I turned back to face Daphne, my hands clenched by my side. Out of all the people who could've caught me returning back to my room, Daphne was the worst one.

She might have a wild streak in her; she might like doing some things that were considered dangerous and naughty...but I doubted kissing rogue wolves was something she would consider anything but stupid and risky. Not to mention the betrayal I felt the instant I heard her voice and my brain connected the dots.

“Yes.” I answered her, my voice coming out shrill and overly-friendly. “You wanted something?”

“Yes.” Daphne folded her hands in front of her chest. “I wanted to know what you were doing out in the woods at this time in the morning.”

Shit!

“Come with me.” I reached out and took her hand before tugging her along with me to my room. I had to keep looking left and right to see how many guards were still on duty and thankfully, it was still less than the number of day guards that were usually settled on each floors. Lunar Maidens were heavily guarded and for good reason.

I entered my room and pulled Daphne inside with me before locking the door securely. I couldn't risk any of this getting outside this very room. Once my racing heart was a bit calmer, I turned to face Daphne and bit my lips, trying to find the best way to explain things to her.

“Flora?” Daphne narrowed her eyes at me. “You're hiding something aren't you? You missed flower picking with me and Tanya. You never miss flower picking!”

Shit! I had completely forgotten about it!

I could've face-palmed myself right then if Daphne wasn't around. How could I have forgotten it was a Saturday and me, Daphne and Tanya, sometimes Eliana, went to the gardens at the back of the castle to collect flowers to present at the Goddesses feet? Usually there was a rotation on which Maiden would go on which day and I usually got Saturdays and Wednesdays. No wonder Daphne was awake at this hour and roaming the hallways. She must have just delivered the flowers to the Shrine and was returning to her chambers to rest.

"I'm sorry." I shook my head. "I have so much to tell you...so much that I want to, but..."

"You're afraid I'd babble to others about it?"

I looked up at Daphne sharply at her tone of voice, found her head lowered as she looked at the ground and felt really bad for doubting her. Yes, Daphne loved to gossip and nothing ever stayed a secret with her...but she usually kept our secrets...correction, my secrets.

Till date, no one had ever found out about our little trips to the 'forbidden' sections of the library. She had never told anyone when I had caused a mishap in the Shrine prayers during the early days of my training and these were just a few of the things on the list that she had kept a secret for me.

But the reason I was hesitating to tell her wasn't because I thought she would babble to everyone that I have my memories back. It was because of how

good she had been at hiding the truth from me. I was wrong about her, her gossiping around was just a façade and it hid just how good she truly was at keeping secrets. Especially from me.

“What I’m about to tell you, isn’t something you probably want to hear.” I warned her. “It questions our fate, our believes.”

“Flora, the only thing us Lunar Maidens believe in is the power and justice of the Moon Goddess.” Daphne’s eyes widened in realization not even a second after the words left her lips. “What is it?”

“I remember...everything.” I watched her give me a startled look.

“Everything, Daphne.”

“Flora...do you...do you really have your memories back?” Daphne took a step towards me but I shook my head.

“How could you do this to me, Daphne?” I accused her. “I trusted you as my best friend! I loved you like my own sister!”

“Before you accuse me, let me ask you something.” Daphne stopped me. “Do you remember what happened the first time you got your memories back? Because if you don’t, I can remind you. You were bleeding out of your eyes, your ears, your nose, your mouth! You had a brain hemorrhage and Mercy had to go to extreme lengths to bring you back.”

I remember that time clearly, waking up to find Mercy next to me and then Malachi had paid me a visit. I had been more concerned about the soldier who had been attacked in front of me and if I had been able to save him or not to remember anything else. But now that Daphne mentioned it...it must have been a scary experience for her and the others as well.

“It’s not that we didn’t want to help you, Flora.” Daphne came forward then and took my hand in her smaller ones. “We couldn’t because if we tried, we could lose you. I love you too, as my best friend and my sister, that’s why I couldn’t see you get hurt. What the Moon Goddess did to you...we saw it with our own eyes, but were unable to do anything to help. No one wants the Goddesses wrath upon themselves, but Ezra and Malachi had been trying their best. A lot depends on you, Flora and I wish I could tell you more but I can’t.”

There it was again. Daphne saying that ‘a lot depends on me’ and Ezra saying there was more that was at stake and she had a lot to lose. What was I still missing?

I kept thinking about it long after Daphne left my room after we made up for the misunderstandings. As I lay in bed, looking up at the ceiling and trying to recall through my newfound memories, what could I possibly be missing that was more important than everyone was letting on? That everyone was counting on either directly or indirectly?

An image flashed in my mind then, of the time I had seen the Goddess in all her beauty, in all her glory.

Glorious silver hair, porcelain white skin and eyes that appeared blind. The beauty of her pure white wings as they spread out from her back. The crescent moon headdress...and her voice...deep, lovely...haunting...and mocking.

“We’ll see how long this forever of your lasts.” She had said to us.

“Remember, if you fail to find your way back to each other, no matter what the circumstances, you will die a true death and no wolf will ever be allowed to reject a mate ever again.”

I shot up in bed as realization hit me full force.

No wolf will be allowed to reject a mate ever again...

We weren’t the first ones to reject a mating bond! There were others! There had been others before us! And that was why the Goddess was angry.

A lot had indeed depended upon me and Clay finding our way back to each other! But now that we have...why was Clay still a rogue? And why was the Goddess silent?

There was more to this than what met the eyes and I had a gut feeling that the Goddess was not yet done playing with us.

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 28

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Flora's P.O.V

I needed to get out of here. I needed to be with Clay.

I paced around my room restlessly, unsure of what I was to do next.

No, it wasn't that I was unsure of what I had to do next...it was more along the lines of how I was supposed to do it.

I found myself fiddling with my pendant unconsciously as I paced in front of the window. The last I had seen Clay, he had to flee because of Andre's guards and I told him to return tonight. No matter what happens, I plan on keeping my promise.

****I have a lot to lose as well, if I decide to help you and no matter what you think I'm capable of, know that I'm always on your side and that is one truth that even the Goddess cannot change.****

Ezra's voice kept playing in my head as I kept going over my conversation with her last night. Why would she have anything to lose? Why was I or Clay in any way related to her?

Was she one of them? One of us? The women who fell in love with men that weren't our mates and went on to defy the Goddess? My gut feeling about her and Malachi...could it really be true? But they hardly interact with each other and when they do, it's only as Alpha and Shrine Maiden.

I wasn't going to ask Ezra for answers anymore, because all I would get in turn would be more riddles, but I knew who to get answers from. But before I went to see him, I took out a bag from my closet and began packing all the necessary things I would need to survive outside of Lindersay.

I had made up my mind, and I wasn't about to change it for anyone.

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Malachi had one look at me and his face lit up with a bright smile, an expression I hadn't quite thought about when I had come into his office, but it was an expression I would welcome any day.

He was happy...it meant I had passed some kind of a test.

“Malachi-”

“Why did I tell you to forget about Clay? Why didn’t I help you? Why did I keep on getting in the way of you remembering your past? I’m sure there are more questions, but let’s start with these, shall we?”

I shook my head at him. “You knew what happened to me all along. Why did you make me a Lunar Maiden?”

“To protect you,” he said simply. “An unmated maiden is free game and besides, The Goddess herself put a curse on you, so what better way to win her over than to be in her service?”

“I don’t think anything can win over the Goddess.” I told him truthfully. “She has thousands of Maidens all over the world, worshipping her with utter devotion. What difference would my prayers have made?”

“A lot.” He gave me another smile as he got up from his seat and came forward to place his hands on my shoulders. The power inside him brushed against my senses harshly, but I stood my ground. “You, Flora, my child, are a miracle. You had not only had the guts to stand in front of the Goddesses and tell her that you choose to be with someone that isn’t your mate, but you also defeated the curse that the Goddess had place upon you herself. You have earned your right to happiness.”

“Then why does it feel like this is just the beginning?” I looked up into his impossibly blue eyes. “Ever since I got my memories back...I cannot forget

the anger she had on her face as she looked at me and Clay. I don't think our tests end here. What's to come next, Malachi?"

"That even I cannot tell, my child." Malachi let out a sigh as he let go of me and leaned back against his desk. "You are right in your feelings, the Goddess is quiet even though you have your memories back, which lets me to believe that there is a greater purpose to all this. But even I cannot predict what's to come next."

"There's so much on my mind, Alpha Malachi..." I shook my head. "But all I want now is to be with Clay. I've survived two whole years without him; I don't think I can any longer."

"Then you are free to leave." Malachi told me with a smile. "I've made sure he lives comfortably."

My eyes widened in shock and I realized why the scent on his clothes had seemed familiar. "You've been helping Clay!"

"Of course." He shrugged. "You helped him become human again, so I should have helped him adjust to his new life. It was the least I could've done for the both of you."

It was a huge relief, knowing that Malachi had at least tried to do something for me because he couldn't help me directly. It made me sad that I had to leave him, but I wasn't ready to face anyone right now.

Two whole years without Clay...it was impossible to think how I had made it this far...how he had made it this far as a rogue. I couldn't wait to go to him, to spend my days in his embrace...but mostly, I needed to bring Clay back from the edge.

The thing was, we had all heard tales of how a wolf can become a rogue due to several factors, one of them being the loss of a loved one, but no one knows how to turn a rogue back into a normal wolf. Clay became a rogue because the Goddess had not only separated us, but erased our memories of each other. Now I'll need a way to get his humanity back, turn him normal once again so we could live a happy, normal life together, like we had always dreamed about.

“How do I help Clay?” I asked Malachi one final question.

“Just like you helped him before,” Malachi told me. “By healing your rogue Alpha.”

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 29

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Ezra's P.O.V

I placed the moon crystals in a circle around myself, keeping to my position right at the centre of the circle. The crystals all looked like tiny full moons, all in

perfect rounds in a beautiful milky white colour and bearing some kind of black marbling on them.

Even though the moon was no longer full or at its brightest, it still held power. As the Shrine Maiden, I could harness that power and bestow it upon my Alpha and my packmates, making them stronger, more resilient to the rogues and powerful in their own right.

Shrine Maidens were created because the Moon Goddess needed a medium to bestow her powers on her beloved creations, her werewolves. And since the Shrine Maiden's body alone wasn't enough to hold all the power, the Lunar Maidens were created.

I like the peace and quiet it provided, this meditation a while drawing on the power of the Moon. It was a feeling of being in heaven itself, of being bathed in the pureness of the moonlight and the purity of the soul.

A knock sounded on my door, breaking me out of my meditation.

Usually, I wouldn't be this easily startled, but it was past midnight and the knocks sounded frantic.

Cutting my prayers short, I got up from the hardwood floor and set the tiny moon crystals aside into the basket that stayed on top of the fireplace mantel where it normally stayed. Then I went to open the door.

"Daphne? Emma?"

The two women stood outside the door, looking panicked and watching over their shoulders. I ushered them inside right away and shut the door behind them, locking it secure.

"What happened?" I asked the women. "You are worrying me."

"It's Flora." Daphne took a deep breath before she continued. "She went to see the Alpha this evening and I haven't seen her since."

"Calm down, my child." I placed my hands on her shoulder to calm her worries. "Did you speak to her before she went into Alpha Malachi's room? Have you searched her room?"

"Yes." Daphne nodded. "I spoke to her last night...and she confirmed her memories are back."

My eyes widened in surprise, a sudden sensation spreading through my chest that I had no name for. "All of it?"

"Yes." Daphne nodded, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. "Both her and the rogue Alpha. They have their memories now."

My legs almost gave away from under me but both the Maidens caught hold of my arms before I could collapse.

"Shrine Maiden," they both yelled and helped me sit on one of the seats as they took a seat on the floor next to me.

"I'm alright, my Maidens." I reassured them. "I'm alright."

"But nothing has changed, Shrine Maiden." Emma was the one who spoke. "The curses are still in place. None of us remember."

"I do not know, my child. But this is far from over. The Moon Goddess hasn't ever broken a vow, but the trials are far from over. This seemed too easy."

Emma and Daphne both nodded in agreement. "If Flora has left with the rogue Alpha, then let her be. All we can do now is wait for what could possibly come next."

"Yes, My Lady." My most trusted maidens stood up from the floor and bowed low.

"Go, my children." I commanded them. "And look out for any signs of danger. Alert me at once. I need eyes and ears all around at this uncertain times and I need you to be that for me. I'm trusting you both. I have faith in you."

After my maidens had left, I dressed in an overcoat and headed straight for the Alpha's quarters. Malachi was already waiting for me when I reached the door, as the guards let me in immediately.

"Has Flora left?" I asked the man who was beautiful beyond words.

People often saw his beauty as a weakness, thought him incapable of defending himself and others. But Malachi has held this fort for almost four centuries, when Lindersay was nothing as it was now. And he continued to hold fort with an iron control that everyone respected.

"Yes," that man said now, his endless blue eyes troubled. "But Andre has gotten new of her leaving. One of his men had been on guard while she was leaving. He went after them."

"What now?" My heart thrashed into my ribcage. "Can we send help?"

"Not without making more enemies." Malachi shook his head. "I do not trust Andre. He is here for some purpose that I'm not aware of and I cannot contact his previous pack. I sent a letter two days ago, but I haven't heard back from them yet."

"Did you contact your messenger through the mental link?" I asked, not liking the idea of one of our people going missing.

"Yes, but I could not reach him." He frowned. "Something isn't right."

"I'm worried about Flora and the rogue Alpha." I told him my concern. "The Goddess is too quiet; everything seems too quiet."

"I agree."

Malachi looked out at the forest through the open windows in his office, the vast green of the woods stretching for miles in front of us until it disappeared into the horizon. Today was one of those days where the sky was clear and there were no signs of the fog and thunder clouds that were often spotted around Lindersay. I joined Malachi to look outside the window. There was quiet all around us but I knew it was the quiet before the storm.

And that was when I remembered something.

"Andre mentioned the Blood Moon ritual to Flora." I told him, a sudden sense of panic in my chest. "Do you think it's related?"

"There is a Blood Moon in two months." Malachi frowned. "And the fact that the Goddess hasn't reacted to Flora and Clay finding their way back to each other...I think my mother had played a clever ploy and we have all run into it head-first."

"But the Blood Moon rituals were banned." I told him firmly. "If we stand firm, then no one can do anything to harm them."

"That's what I'm worried about." Malachi said finally. "If Mother had planned this far ahead...then she has always had a plan. We can only hope that the blood of our blood will succeed in this final test. The test that we failed centuries ago."

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 30

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Andre's P.O.V

"General." A soldier knocked on my door at midnight.

"Come in," I called out; placing the book I had been reading on the table in front of me. "What is it?"

"General...it's your mate." He panted, looking as if he had run quiet a distance before reaching here.

"What about my mate?" I stood up from my chair, instantly alert.

"I saw her leaving just now." He said almost fearfully. "She had a bag and she escaped to the woods."

"And no one stopped her?" I asked incredulously. "What about the castle guards?"

"I think they sensed her...but they let her go." He gulped. "I came running when I saw that the guards didn't try to stop her. And I didn't have authority."

"Fuck!" I slammed my hand on the hardwood table and it shook under the force, forming a crack at the point of impact. Alpha Malachi had to have known she was escaping! He is letting her go!

"You did the right thing come here." I told my man. "Stay put. I'll go after her."

It wasn't hard to pin-point her scent as soon as I was out in the open air. Her scent was floral, like her name and I took in a whiff of it, filling my lungs with the sweetness. And then I followed her.

Her scent led me to a corner of the castle where a light pole had fallen onto a wall, creating an escape route small enough for her body to fit through. Her scent was stronger here, indicating that she used this route often. So this wasn't the first time she went out of the castle without anyone knowing.

Although it was clear that people did know about her exit. It was impossible not to scent her leaving the compound with so many guards around. No wonder Malachi didn't let my men patrol outside. He has given her permission.

Since I couldn't fit through the escape route, I jumped up onto the fallen light pole and used it to climb to the top of the wall and jumped down on the other side, landing on my feet almost soundlessly.

The scent trail led me deep into the forest and it was fresh. She couldn't have gotten far.

But right after two meters, I came to a halt.

Her scent mixed with another right here...a rogue!

A growl reverberated through my chest and I took off running towards the scent. Stealth be damned! My mate was in danger.

But when I caught up with their scents, only in a matter of seconds, what I saw was another story.

Flora wasn't in danger...she was fleeing with the rogue.

"FLORA!" My voice was a fierce growl as they halted in their path. Betrayal punched me in the gut. How dare my own mate betray me like this!

The rogue pushed Flora behind him and stood guard as if to protect her from me. A rogue protecting my mate from me? How dare they!

How dare they!

No one who touches my mate will be allowed to live! Flora was mine!

A bright light surrounded my form as I transformed into my wolf. And then I pounced on the rogue.

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Clay's P.O.V

The black wolf pounced at me, its mouth open wide with saliva dripping off its sharp teeth.

I was expecting the bite on my neck, so I moved out of the way just in time to avoid the attack, but what I hadn't expected were the sharp claws and then it was too late.

He slashed into my abdomen, splashing blood all over his face as I doubled over in pain, clutching my abdomen. Blood flowed freely from the wound and if he had used a little bit more force, my organs would be on the ground and I'd be dead.

"Clay!"

My head snapped towards Flora as she came out of the shadows and I instantly told her to back off. Another growl sounded from the black wolf, but this time, before it could pounce, Flora was in front of me, standing tall and strong in the face of danger.

"Flora! Go!" I warned her through gritted teeth, but she shook her head.

"No." She bent down immediately and placed her hand on top of mine on her abdomen. The relief was instant as Flora's healing energy flowed into me. But I pushed her hand away after I felt enough relief to continue fighting the wolf.

A flash of light came from beside me and I saw Flora turn into her wolf, her clothes torn apart from the transformation. Her fur was a rich, dark brown and her golden eyes stared the black down with menace, but he didn't back away.

I hesitated.

What if I couldn't turn back into my human form once again? My wolf howled inside my head, wanting release, wanting the chance to rip at the black wolf that was coming between me and Flora. But still I hesitated.

But then there was no more point in hesitating as the black wolf started charging at me once again...this time with the intent to kill.

“NO!” I shouted as Flora ran towards the black wolf without warning before I could react, trying to bite down on its nape, but the wolf was twice her size and before Flora could even get close, he had her on the ground and was standing on top of her, holding her down by her nape to show his dominance.

Light and darkness. Pain and pleasure.

The next instant, I stood on four paws and jumped on top of the black wolf, throwing him off of Flora and colliding into a tree trunk.

I felt my back hurt, but it wasn't severe. Before the black could get up, I bit down on its neck, piercing skin to draw blood. But not only was the wolf bigger than me, it was stronger too. With ease, it shook me off of its body and went to bite my hind leg, but I dodged it just in time.

This wasn't good. I was injured and still losing blood. It was an unfair fight and if I didn't get healed soon, my abdomen will be infected and there was an even greater chance of me not surviving this fight. But if I retreated with Flora, he will follow and find our hideout, endangering all my wolves. I needed to think fast. How do I get him to leave us?

The black wolf growled at me, baring its fangs in preparation to fight.

A few leaves floated to the ground in front of me and my attention went to the tree behind the black wolf.

There was a branch hanging from the lower extremities of the tree that could break and fall any instant, if I hit the tree with enough strength. I looked towards Flora when she came to a stand beside me and I saw her notice the branch too. I looked at her once and a silent agreement passed between us.

And then we were both dashing towards the black wolf at the same time, going as fast as we could.

The wolf looked startled at first, but he braced itself by spreading its legs wide, preparing for impact.

But just as I was mere inches away from the wolf, it opened its jaws wide to attack...and I leapt above its head, hitting the tree full force and causing the branch to break and fall, right on top of the black wolf's head, rendering it unconscious.