

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 41

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Ezra's P.O.V

"Till now, we have been made to believe from birth that the Moon Goddess, the creator of all werewolves, had given us a blessing...a chosen mate who is born just for us." I looked at my Maidens as I spoke, as I laid out my heart and hoped for the best. "But even us wolves have a heart. A heart...that sometimes has a mind of its own and that wants to make choices even though it might not be the right one."

"Four centuries ago, when Lindersay castle hadn't yet been constructed...a war broke out between two rival packs. The Lindersay wolves and the WoodlandHunters." I told the Maidens, remembering those days like it had only been yesterday. "The war started for very obvious reasons; because the wolves wanted more territory, more power and also because the packs worshipped two separate Goddesses. Lindersay worshipped the Goddess Selene and WoodlandHunters worshipped Artemis, the Goddess of the hunt and also of the moon. I was the beta of the WoodlandHunters."

More than a few shocked whispers came from the room and I knew that no one here had imagined me being a beta of a pack. They were used to seeing the calm and collected woman that I had become, not the warrior I had been in my youth.

"Malachi had recently become the Alpha at that point and I met him at the battlefield. I shot an arrow at him and he caught it with his bare hands. And just like any fairytale...it was love at first sight." I could remember that day clearly...the first time our eyes met. Those impossibly blue eyes that had entranced me with just one sight.

"The war ended in a draw, after fifteen days and several casualties. Both packs surrendered and since my Alpha was getting old, he decided to merge the packs instead of going separate ways. Everything seemed to be falling into place. Malachi took over as the new Alpha and the packs merged and the Lindersay castle started being built along with the shrine."

"WoodlandHunters got dissolved and we left our house in the forest to come here as this palace had more space. And Malachi and I were finally together. But there was one problem, a problem that we, at that time, had no idea of its magnitude...we weren't mates and even after decades of being together, the mating bond never formed."

"We thought we could deal with it, that the bond might form eventually; but we were dead wrong. Because one day, right after the castle was finally completed...Malachi's mate appeared in front of him and instantly wanted to claim him." My eyes connected with Flora first and then several other maidens. They held understanding as well as shock. I knew a lot of my maidens had already

suspected that Malachi and I had a connection, but speculating and saying it out loud was another thing.

“So Malachi did the only thing he thought was right. He rejected his mate.”

Gasps and looks of horror. Rejecting a mate went against everything that the Moon Goddess Selene has taught us. It was considered blasphemy. But my story had only just begun.

“Malachi couldn’t feel the mating bond, as in his mind; in the mind of the wolf...the bond didn’t exist. So rejecting her was his only option to spare her the pain. But even though Malachi’s mate accepted her fate, it angered the Goddess Selene immensely. Not only because Malachi had gone against her rules...but also because Malachi was her own son.”

Shocked silence filled the room. I couldn’t even hear them breathing for an instant, as if the revelation had been too much for them to take. Just when I thought I had to stop for today, one of the maidens spoke, almost in a whisper.

“What happened next, my Lady?”

I gave her a sad smile. “What could’ve happened? The Goddess couldn’t turn her own son into a rogue, so she warned him to go back to his mate. But Malachi was adamant. He told the Goddess that in his mind, he had chosen me as his mate and he shall mate no one else. He rejects the mating bond. And that angered the Goddess beyond words. So she erased our memories of each other and made me the Shrine Maiden as punishment. If I could gain my memories back within five years, then I would’ve been free to mate Malachi, but unfortunately, I wasn’t able to regain all my memories back on time and Malachi and I were forever doomed.”

“However, even though I was the first to reject the mating bond and love someone else...I was certainly not the last.” I looked at every maiden in front of me and I saw realization dawn in their eyes, especially Flora’s. “Each and every one of you standing here has suffered the same fate as me. Each and every one of you here have dared to love someone other than your mate that had ended in a rejection and committing a sin...and almost everyone here had failed the test of the Moon Goddess where you regained some of your memories, but not the memories of the people you loved...except Flora.”

Everyone turned to look at Flora and she gave me a nervous look, but I smiled reassuringly at her, telling her it was going to be alright.

“The women in this Shrine are one half of the pair that the Goddess herself separated, while the men we had chosen as our mates had been turned into rogues and now reside in the forests around Lindersay. It is precisely the reason why Malachi has always been against hurting or hunting the rogues. He had always held onto hope for all of us, even though we all failed the test. But we have a new hope now, Flora has managed to regain her memories of her lover and so has he...but the Goddess hasn’t kept her side of the promise.”

“That’s unfair! Why would the Goddess betray us?” One of the maidens asked.

"I cannot go against the Goddesses words and neither can any of you. We still stand in her shrine, in her robes...but today, I want to apologize to each and every one of you for not telling you the truth sooner." I knelt on the floor, hoping to earn my maiden's forgiveness, even though I felt I didn't deserve it. "I had no right to keep the secrets you had every right to know, but my hands were tied by the Goddesses oath and I didn't have the strength to bear her wrath, not until she took away the only man I had loved for centuries away from me. And...because she wants to sacrifice a couple of true lovers on the next full moon, to wake up Endymion, the lover who had been cursed to eternal sleep."

"She wants to sacrifice Flora?" Daphne and Emma spoke in horror.

"No." I lowered my eyes. "Malachi and I are to be the sacrifice."

"So that's why Andre captured Malachi? To sacrifice him? What do we do now?"

"What do we do now, my lady?"

I sigh of relief left my lips as I closed my eyes momentarily and stood up straight. When I opened my eyes once more, everyone was still standing and they all had determination in their eyes.

"Now, we pray."

"To the Moon Goddess? After everything she has done to us?" Came the incredulous reply from several.

I gave them a bright smile. "Yes, to the Goddess of the Moon and beasts. To the Goddess of vegetation and of chastity and childbirth. To the sister of the Sun God."

Several eyes lit up in anticipation and understanding and then everyone started chanting together, at the same time.

"All hail Artemis, hear our prayers."

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Clay's P.O.V

Since I got my memories back, my mind has been more open, my thoughts have cleared.

Although I knew it was all thanks to Flora and her healing, I couldn't do anything to thank her. Malachi had warned me that for the next month, my life was about to get even more difficult and he hadn't been lying.

Several men had searched the house I had been living in. They had destroyed what was left of the house we had called home for the past two years. Now we were truly no better than strays.

And once again, I had been separated from Flora. It felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest once again; thrown to the ground and trampled on. How long would we need to keep fighting just so we could be together? Why couldn't we be allowed to be happy just once?

The Moon Goddess has gone too far with her testing, with her ego. She never had any intension of fulfilling her promise and I understand that now. It's always been about power and a mere wolf has no right to challenge the Goddess's power.

The only person, who can challenge a Goddess, is another Goddess.

I heard a whining come from behind a nearby tree and was instantly alert, but an instant later, I found one of my wolves come forward with an offering. It appeared to be the carcass of a squirrel.

I took the offering from the wolf as waited as it went to sit in a semi-circle behind me with the rest of my pack. I then broke of a clear bone from the carcass, one that hadn't been decaying yet and wrapped that bone in a willow leaf from the tree that was growing on the bank of the lake I was on. It was a small lake but it reflected the light of the moon right in the centre. The water was shallow and the moon wasn't full, but this would work. This was the best I could work with.

I added a small piece of bark from the willow tree into the leaf to keep it secure and then I went into the water, holding out the offering to the sky.

"Goddess Artemis! Great Goddess of the hunt, of the forest and of the Moon." I looked at the crescent moon in the sky as I spoke loud and clear. "Hear our prayer, Great Goddess. I offer you this sacrifice to call forth your power and your mercy. Bless us with your presence."

I let the offering fall into the water. Let it sink to the bottom.

It was just the start. This battle had only just begun.

I turned back to my wolves and got out of the water. They bowed their heads.

"It is time, my brethren." I told them. "We have been looked down upon for centuries. We had been punished for crimes that shouldn't even be considered crimes. We have been hunted down like rabid dogs just for fun! But we will no longer be an easy target!"

I looked at each and every one of my wolves; saw understanding in their red eyes.

"Tonight, we mourn the fallen brothers of our pack." I said. "But tomorrow, we start to train. We become an army. To defeat those who killed our brothers and

to gain back our sanity. We will fight till the very end, but before that, we will learn to fight as a team, as one unit. And no one will stand in our way ever again.”

I heard the agreement in their low growls and I knew that I had a loyal pack. But they were also only able to access their wolf form for now, so I’ll need to make new strategies for them to be able to dodge the weapons that the new castle guards were using.

‘I am not your enemy, Clay.’ I remembered what Malachi had told me as his healer healed the wounds he had made. ‘But I had been foolish enough to invite the enemies into my home. Please forgive my mistakes and help me fix this. I know that danger is lurking in the shadows and I can do nothing to prevent it. But you are my hope. Both you and Flora. Don’t let me down. If I survive, I’ll meet you on the other side.’

“Tomorrow.” I told my wolves. “We get stronger.”

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Flora’s P.O.V

The head cook looked at Daphne and me with doubtful eyes, unsure if he could trust us or not. I didn’t blame him.

“We lost one of our packmates because he was foolish enough to show bravery.” Eugenie said; his white hat clutched tightly in his hands in a white-knuckled grip. “We cannot lose any more of us! How did our pack turn out like this...Malachi...”

I moved forward to place a hand on his shoulder. “We will get him back.” I reassured him. “Malachi had been Alpha for centuries. He won’t give up and neither would he want us to give up.”

“And what about Andre?” Another staff asked us doubtfully. “What happens if he finds out?”

“Providing us with a bone or two for a ritual is hardly going to be considered a crime, but we cannot defy him outright.” Daphne came forward. “So slip them into our meals. Mine, Flora or the Shrine Maiden’s. For now, trust no one, but on the outside show loyalty to Andre. In that, we do not have a choice.”

I nodded, agreeing with what Daphne had to say and I saw the staff agree as well. For now, all of us have to show loyalty on the outside even if there is a storm brewing on the inside. Andre won’t hesitate to take another life. He had already taken three.

Last night, while we had been inside the shrine, a soldier had tried to sneak up on him with a blade. But not only had he been unsuccessful, he had to witness Andre’s men brutally murder his eighteen year old son before he too was beheaded.

If he didn't care about a child who had barely stepped into adulthood...who was to say he wouldn't harm the younger ones? What was stopping him from massacring the entire pack? His goal is to sacrifice Malachi and Ezra on the night of the Blood Moon. And he would stop at nothing to get what he wants.

So now, we'll have to play the game his way. Right behind his back.

The only thing I can wish for right now is for our prayers to be answered and for the Goddess Artemis to descend down on earth to grace us with her presence...to set everything right. No matter what price I have to pay for it.

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Flora's P.O.V

One of Andre's soldiers was stationed outside of Ezra's room along with one of Malachi's men. Both of them gave me followed me with their eyes as I came to knock on Ezra's door, wearing the robes of the Moon Goddess.

Ezra opened the door almost instantly and I went inside, only to realize exactly why the guards had been looking at me suspiciously.

Daphne, Emma, Rosa and three other Maidens who I only knew briefly in passing, had gathered in Ezra's room and it looked like we were about to have a meeting. Although it was normal to have this many Maidens at Ezra's door, these weren't exactly normal times. We were under an enforced lockdown, a prison of sorts where we weren't allowed contact with anyone. Andre might not be allowed to interfere with what happens in the Shrine, but he was bound to get suspicious.

"We have arranged for the bones to be delivered every day by the kitchen staff." I informed Ezra in a low voice. "They will hide it in the food stray and I had specifically told them to provide smaller bones."

"I'll collect some willow or oak leaves in the morning while collecting flowers," Emma joined in. "And I'm good at wood-carving, so I have some carving tools in my room. I'll make arrowheads for all the Maidens from the firewood and have them delivered inside the Shrine within the flower baskets."

"Good." Ezra gave us thankful looks. "Always keep your moonstones with you; it will be a part of the rituals from tonight onwards."

"Yes, Shrine Maiden." We all spoke collectively and I went to take a seat beside Emma on the sofa.

Ezra went to stand in front of her fireplace instead. "The reason I have called the seven of you here is because of a very specific reason. All of you here are my most trusted Maidens and I have a task that only you will be able to fulfill."

"What would you want us to do, Shrine Maiden?" Rosa asked calmly.

"Learn archery." Ezra said, much to our surprise. "And I know you have the ability to do so because you are all descendants of warriors."

"Archery?" I whispered. It wasn't that I was against the idea; I actually found it very helpful and reassuring that we were taking offensive training, but... "Where would we learn?"

"Mostly inside the bathing chamber or in your rooms." Ezra said. "Those are the only two places safe enough so no one notices. Flora, you have prior experience, am I correct?"

"Yes," I nodded, remembering my short session with Clay back when we were still at ReedStone. "But I'm not very good at it."

"All of you have a month's time to practice. And I will help in the initial training, but from then on, it is your responsibility to follow through."

Ezra took a key out of a small box on top of her fire mantle and then unlocked an ornate mahogany trunk that was kept at the side of the room. From there she took out seven half-sown handkerchiefs and handed them to us.

"Take this with you to your room." Ezra instructed. "There is a needle inside all the handkerchiefs and they are actually tiny keys to open a similar box on top of the mantle of your fire place. You'll find a trunk under your bed that holds a bow and arrows. Keep them hidden well and practice whenever possible."

"Ezra...why are there weapons in a trunk under our beds?" One of the three maidens, Valery...I think her name was, asked her suspiciously.

"Because of emergencies such as this." Ezra gave her a sad smile. "This isn't the first time Lindersay has been under attack. The first time, we had been unprepared and even though we won in the end, it came at a great loss. Half of our packmates were dead. That's why we have built weapons boxes inside the Maiden's rooms to protect them from harm. This will be the first time we use them voluntarily."

"We understand." The other maidens stood up, holding their handkerchiefs, ready to leave, so I stood as well.

"Flora, can I have a word?" Ezra stopped me. "The rest of you can go, but be very careful with your behavior once you step out."

"Yes, Shrine Maiden." They all put up smiles on their faces, discussing sewing techniques as they went outside, to act as if they had been given sewing assignments. Ezra shut the door and came to sit beside me on the couch, taking my hand in hers.

"Are you sure you're alright, my child." Her voice was gentle as she searched my face and neck.

"Yes," I lowered my eyes. "The bruises are gone." But they had left behind mental scars.

Never in my life had any man ever hurt me like Andre had. Not even my mom had ever raised her voice at me, let alone raise a hand. I had always been the cherished princess; even Clay had treated me like his Queen.

Andre's words and his physical assault had been a wake-up call and an extremely rude awakening. I had been stupid to think that he would act civil after I had rejected him. But assault? I hadn't even imagined it in my dreams. Only I knew how I had picked myself up from the floor after Andre had left and how I had returned to my room. I had been the one wronged and yet, the stares from the other soldiers had felt like I was the sinner.

Thankfully, Samuel and Emma had both left by the time I had reached my room, because I had been feeling ashamed to face them, even though it hadn't been my fault. But then, only a few minutes later, Ezra had arrived and caught me off-guard.

"Not all scars are visible." Ezra said now, cupping my cheek with her hand. "You are a very strong woman, Flora. I'm so very proud of you."

I shook my head instantly. "I'm hardly strong enough, Ezra. But you on the other hand...how do you do it? How did you have the strength to stay away from Malachi for centuries? I can't even imagine staying away from Clay another month...where did you get the strength? Especially since he was in front of you all this time?"

Had she watched Malachi take a lover? Did she have to watch him hold another woman's hand, even if it were for one night?

"It was easy," Ezra said with a warm smile, breaking me out of my thoughts. "Malachi had never taken a lover, not even once since we had been separated. If I had been celibate for over the past three centuries, so has he. So I never had to worry that his love for me had faltered even for a second."

The revelation was something completely unexpected and yet...completely wonderful. To have that kind of willpower...especially for an Alpha who were supposed to have higher drives than other male wolves...It was the kind of love that not everyone got to experience. A love where all you saw was your soulmate, not the one chosen for you, but the one you chose yourself.

But somehow deep in my mind, I knew that Clay and I would do the same if we were in their place. I could never imagine being with someone else and I knew Clay felt the same. We had both rejected the mating bond, the bond that the Goddess had decided for us. And we had found each other once again, despite the odds and were still standing. Our love was still new, still growing, but I could

only hope it aged just like Ezra and Malachi's love had. A love that was truly eternal.

"I know you are not bound by the mating bond," I told Ezra a bit hesitantly. "But you are still bound by the bond of the Alpha and you had been bound for centuries. Then...can you..."

"Feel if he's still alive?" Ezra finished the question before nodding her head. "Andre won't kill him until the Blood Moon, so yes; I can still feel him in my bones. Malachi is alive but he is weak. He doesn't seem to be inside the castle, however, because the bond seems like it's being stretched. He's around us, but somewhere we don't know about. Since we can't go out any longer, we can't find where he is. Our best bet is the Blood Moon ritual itself."

"But what are we to do then?" I asked her. "How will we find Malachi on time before the rituals?"

"There's only one way for us to do that now...and you're not going to like it."

I knew from the tone of Ezra's voice exactly what she was going to ask of me and every fiber of my being rejected the idea. But at the same time...I knew there was no other choice."

"You have to agree to become Andre's mate."

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Flora's P.O.V

I stretched the bow string, feeling the strain in my upper arm.

My eyes were set on the target that I had placed on the opposite wall. My room was big but not big enough that I could place the target further away. But this was the only place I could practice archery, because this was the only place where I wasn't being monitored.

I let go of the string and it shot out, hitting the target a second later.

'Keep the height of the arrow a bit higher than the target.' I remembered Clay once telling me that when I had been practicing with him. 'Gravity will pull down the arrow at least a few centimeters, so you need to shoot it higher.'

Clay and I had been training with different weapons secretly for a couple weeks already. It had right after I had stopped training with Garrick and Clay had taken over my training.

'You're a healer, so even if danger is right in front of you, you might not always be able to fight head on. So use weapons.'

Clay's voice rang in my ears now and it instantly increased the ache in my heart. I missed Clay. I missed the days that we spent together in secrecy, in each other's embrace or training in the forest. Our lives had been simple and our lives had been happy...before Clay turned twenty-eight and my best friend turned out to be Clay's mate.

It wasn't the first time I had wanted to be just human, to not be so tangled up in the vines of the supernatural world. If we had been human, then Clay and I could be happy now, far away from all of this and we would never have to worry about mating bonds and war between Gods. If only...

I went to the opposite wall and pulled out the arrow from the makeshift target. It wasn't a bull's-eye but it was close. I had gotten better in the past month at using a bow and arrow and several of our trusted maidens were practicing too. This was war and none of us could go unarmed. And with security getting heavy day by day, we had to practice inside the comfort of our rooms. It was a plus that I had had prior training, even though it had been limited.

I stowed away the bow and arrows and the target in a chest inside the bathroom, under the sink. Then I came to stand in front of the big glass windows to look outside at the forest.

I haven't seen Clay in a month since I was dragged back into the castle. Andre had increased security at every turn and it was getting more and more difficult sneaking around. He had even raised questions as to why Ezra was holding prayers every single day. But Ezra had been brave enough to let Andre know that it was for their safety. The Maidens were afraid and they were insecure about the change in ruling of the pack and praying to the Goddess was the only thing that gave us comfort.

Andre had taken it as a huge boost to his ego. He thought that he had been successful in making us fearful and implementing his rule over us. But we never specified which Goddess we were praying to.

A knock sounded on the door then, breaking me away from my thoughts.

I hesitated a bit in opening the door. Somehow, I knew who was outside even before I went to open it, but I knew stalling won't get me anywhere. If anything, it would encourage Andre to break down the door and create a scene. I couldn't let him do that, so I went to open the door hurriedly.

Andre stood outside with a bouquet of red roses, his smile that of the perfect gentleman...as if he hadn't physically assaulted me a few weeks ago.

"What do you want?" I asked, stepping back out of his reach. But that just gave him the excuse to come inside my room and close the door behind him.

My heart started beating rapidly in fear. There wasn't anything that Andre wasn't capable of doing and he was very, very strong. I couldn't keep up with a regular dominant soldier, and Andre was now the Alpha. If he tried to do something, I couldn't win against him.

But Andre's smile remained gentle as he held out the roses towards me.

I took them from him, trying my best to hide the tremors in my hand. Thankfully, Andre didn't notice. I was grateful that I had removed the bow and arrow just in time before Andre's arrival. If he had found out about it, I don't think he would've waited till the Blood Moon to end my life and he wasn't above hitting a woman, as I've already witnessed.

"See?" He said now. "That wasn't so difficult was it?"

"What do you want?" I clutched the roses to my chest, as if they could defend me from Andre. Thankfully, there weren't many thorns on them, so I only felt a few pricks.

Suddenly, Andre's face was inches from mine as he lifted up my chin with a grip on my jaw. "If you continue to be civil with me, we won't have any problems. I will give you everything you want and beyond. But if you try to act smart and go behind my back...I cannot promise to spare your little puppy. In fact, I'll kill him in front of you, ripping out his organs one by one. I'll save his heart for last, making sure that he begs for death every waking second, until I finally grant his wish."

"Stop it! Please!" I whispered in horror, clutching the stems in my hand so tightly that they snapped.

Andre looked down at my hands in amusement, letting go of my jaw. The roses fell from my hands and it wasn't until Andre took hold of my hands and held them up that I saw the thorns embedded on my palms, as droplets of blood rolled down my arm.

"Poor thing." Andre shook his head. "If you continue to resist, blood will become a permanent sight for you; pain will be your most trusted companion. So decide. Become my mate and let your rogue puppy live or let him die a slow painful death. I have decided not to sacrifice you though. It would be much more fun watching you suffer every day for the rest of your life, regretting not choosing the right path."

I felt icy fingers clutch my heart in their iron grip. "That wasn't what you told me-"

"You're in no position to negotiate, Flora." Andre looked at me with vicious grey eyes. "My terms, my decisions. I can change them any time I want."

No...he wouldn't...he couldn't...

"Tell me, Flora." Andre said finally, his smile turning menacing. "What is your final decision?"

I grit my teeth, balling my hands into fists at my sides, pushing the thorns even deeper into my skin.

I was trapped. Time was almost up and I was really trapped. If we didn't get to sacrifice a deer by tonight, it would all go in vain. The ritual that we had been performing for the last thirty days was at its peak and tomorrow was the blood moon. So I could either be a bride...or watch Clay be sacrificed at the altar, which wasn't even a choice for me.

Either way, it would mean my defeat. But if there was one person that I trusted wholeheartedly right now, it was Ezra. So I did exactly what she had told me to do. I followed her command even though it felt like a block of ice was blocking my throat.

"I'll be your mate tomorrow." I told him, my voice gravel.

Andre gave out a dark of laughter. He thought he had already won...and maybe, he had. But even if he does win, I'll make sure Clay get's out of this alive.

"Perfect! I have just the dress for you!"

It was at this point that I knew Andre had already anticipated the answer. He had always known he would win, no matter what we did to stop him.

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Cold water splashing onto his face woke Malachi up from his unconscious form.

Groggily, he opened his eyes to look into the face of the man who had him chained to the walls in a cell under Lindersay. It was a room even he had no clue existed.

He was exhausted and drained both physically and emotionally. He had also lost count of days and nights a long time ago. Andre's men occasionally fed him to keep him alive, but not enough so he could get back his strength.

Today however, Andre was standing in front of him, something he rarely saw. But if Andre was here...it meant time was almost up.

"Hello, little brother." Andre knelt in front of Malachi, his smile twisted. "Mother is extremely disappointed in you."

"How come I didn't know about you?" Malachi asked. He knew his other brothers and sisters, or had at least heard about them even if he hadn't had direct contact with them. But Andre? No, he had never seen him before. How could that be possible?

"Because you and I were born on the same day," Andre said, surprising Malachi even further. "I was born two hours before you and mother decided to put us in different packs. She didn't want us knowing about each other."

"Why would she do that?" Malachi asked, not understanding the reason his mother would want to do something like this.

Yes, she was eons old and Gods worked in mysterious ways. But to separate him from his own twin? There was no rhyme or reason to her decision. Or was she really a believer in the legends that one twin was always born evil and she had separated them to test out which of her sons had been the evil one?

"Ah! You realize now." Andre clapped his shoulders and got up from his crouch. "But don't worry. That's not why I'm here today. I have wonderful news!"

Malachi didn't like the sound of that. Any news that Andre brought was ominous. There was nothing wonderful about them.

"Flora has agreed to be my mate!" Andre said with flourish, his maniacal laughter echoing inside the room like a knell.

Malachi felt his heart thrash against his ribcage. "No..."

"Why, yes! She said 'Yes'." Andre shook his head at his pathetic twin brother. "But don't worry, you won't be left out. The mating ceremony will be on the same night as the blood sacrifice. My wedding will be the same day that you and your beloved Ezra...die."

With that, Andre left Malachi to struggle against his chains like a madman, closing the door on his face without a backward glance.

No! No!

Malachi raged and struggled, but the chains that bound him to the wall were unbreakable.

His Ezra...his beloved Ezra was about to be sacrificed with him? Was his mother truly that heartless? Has she really no mercy for children she herself birthed?

Ezra was his heart and Flora was his blood. And he now had to watch them both suffer. Flora would suffer a fate worse than death if she mated to Andre. Then why was she doing something so foolish?

But no matter how much he struggled, they were all futile. Andre was winning and his time was almost up. It would now take a miracle to save them all. He could only hope that Clay had listened to his pleas and had started the ritual that was now their only hope.

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Clay's P.O.V:

The winds howled past the trees as I crouched on top of a lower branch, holding on to the trunk to keep steady.

Wolves weren't good tree climbers, but I had to keep an eye on the castle tonight. There was movement going on and some of the men were carrying large boxes out of the castle and to some place I didn't know about. So I decided to follow them.

In the last few weeks, my wolves had gotten better at dodging bullets and high speed objects. If only they had connection with their humanity, they would be unstoppable. But I had hope.

The moon was almost full in the sky. Tomorrow was the night when the world would be shrouded in the red light of the Blood Moon. It was time. I didn't know what was to happen but the sense of foreboding was heavy in the air. We needed to be prepared, but right now, I needed to find out what the soldiers were preparing for.

I kept to the shadows of the trees, making sure not even my shadow was visible. I was one with the darkness, one with the night.

I had never been to this part of the forest before. As I moved forward, the trees became lighter and more wide spread. More and more shrubs appeared and the density of the forest decreased and as I had expected, after about ten meters in front of me, the forest gave way to a vast grassland.

Thankful that at least the grasses were tall enough to hide my form, I lay flat on the ground and crawled ahead until I had a clear view of what the soldiers were doing.

Two large poles stood at the centre of the grassland and the soldiers were collecting dried grass and hay to lay at the bottom of the wooden poles, as if preparing for a bonfire. There was also a stone table right between the poles and different objects were placed on top of them. By the way the light of the moon was glinting off of the objects; I knew they had to be something similar to blades.

I didn't understand what these preparations were for, but they couldn't be for any good reason if Andre was in the centre of it all. His scent was different...not in the way of a rogue, but...different. It rubbed against my senses in a wrong way.

Crawling back into the shadows of the woods, I retreated back to where I had come from. The castle still seemed eerily quiet, as if the people inside had been forbidden to talk. My eyes went to the windows where I had last seen Flora. The lights were off but I kept looking in hopes of seeing her again.

Ultimately, I had to return as I scented the patrol guards coming my way. But no matter what happened, I will never lose hope. And I will never stop fighting for her.

“We’ll be together, Flora. Just a while longer.”

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 46

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

“Alpha Andre has requested your presence.”

Spoke one of Andre’s men at five in the afternoon. He was accompanied by Aiden Lang, one of the two men who had brought me to Lindersay in the first place. He kept his head down, avoiding eye contact with me as if feeling guilty.

“I’ll be there in a bit.” I told him and closed the door in his face.

I took a deep breath to steady myself. I had avoided Andre as much as possible for the past few days, but I think that was no longer possible. Tomorrow was the Blood Moon and the day of my ‘supposed’ mating ceremony with Andre. Ezra had said she had a plan, but with guards keeping their eyes on us at all possible times, it seemed impossible to escape now. What was I supposed to do?

I took several deep breaths, trying to calm my nerves. It wasn’t working, but I had to go see Andre anyway. If I didn’t, he would come here instead.

Placing a hand over my heart, I gripped the cool crystal of the pendant and called out Clay’s name in my mind a few times. It helped. Slowly but surely, I felt my heartbeat even out and my body stop trembling. I had never feared any man like I feared Andre. But tonight, fear wasn’t going to get me anywhere.

Tucking the pendant into my dress, I turned the knob on my door and came out of my room. It was now or never.

I walked down to Malachi’s office, which now belonged to Andre, all the while my heart raced against my chest. He had told me he would show me the dress he had for the mating ceremony. Was it some kind of trap? Did he plan to force himself on me?

No...he wouldn’t...would he? If Andre had wanted to cross all limits, he would’ve done it a long time ago and not wait till the day before the Blood Moon ritual.

The guards outside opened the door for me as they saw me approaching. Swallowing nervously, I entered Andre’s room and felt my heart skip a beat as the doors slammed shut.

Memories came rushing back to me and my hand instinctively went to my throat. The last time I was here, Andre had assaulted me without hesitation, even though he claimed to be my mate. I didn't trust him one bit to be alone with him, but the entire castle was now under his reign. There was no other option than to obey him or he could actually hurt another one of my packmates.

"Ah! There you are!" Andre came up behind me, scaring the hell out of me as he wrapped his arm around my waist. "I've been waiting for you."

My skin crawled at having him touch me, but there wasn't any other option. If I moved away...what if he got violent again? So I stayed quiet and let him escort me to the sofas where he helped me in and took a seat on the opposite sofa. There was a feast laid out on the table in front of us, all set in nice dishes and decorated like it was some kind of a joyous festival. I balled my hands at my sides. Do I have to dine with him now?

"I've prepared us dinner." Andre said with a warm smile. "Since we are going to be mated tomorrow, I thought it was appropriate to hold dinner with you here."

No matter how warm his smile was now, I didn't buy it. Andre was a psychopath. And once I had witnessed the dark side of him, there was no way I would ever buy his acts ever again, no matter how convincing they seemed.

"W-what about the rest of the pack?" I stuttered past the knot in my throat. "They should celebrate our mating as well."

"Oh, of course!" Andre laughed. "You didn't think I forgot the pack, did you? I'm hosting a feast for all of them. In fact, I was going to go celebrate once we finish dinner in peace."

He set out the cutlery in front of my plate and cut out slices of meat and placed them on my plate. The table held so many of my favorite dishes, but I had lost my appetite. I had no idea how I was going to get it past my throat.

"Come on, dig in!" Andre urged, taking a bite of his own food.

I forced a smile at him and picked up my fork with trembling hands. I cut out a small piece of meat and placed it into my mouth as Andre watched me with narrowed eyes.

My stomach revolted almost instantly, but I forced the food down with sheer strength of will. Eat, chew, swallow...eat, chew, and swallow. It was a familiar motion and I used it like a meditation to divert my attention from Andre. If eating dinner meant I got to avoid talking to him, then so be it.

But after a few more bites, I knew I couldn't have any more of this torture.

"I'm full." I placed the fork down on my half-empty plate and forced a smile at Andre.

He laughed in delight. "Ah! Already? No wonder you're so thin. I like my women with a bit more meat on them. But there's nothing to worry, we can fix that starting tomorrow."

The thought of tomorrow made my stomach revolt and I had to take a quick sip of water to keep myself from throwing up. Just a little while longer, Flora. Just a little while longer.

"Alright! Let's get to the good part shall we?" Andre stood up. "I'll get your dress."

"But, isn't seeing the dress before the ceremony an ill-omen?" I said immediately, trying my best to avoid staying in this room for even a second longer. I couldn't do it. I felt like I was about to start having a panic attack.

"Oh! What nonsense!" He rounded the sofa and went for his desk and picked up a large box that I hadn't noticed before.

"Here we go!" He opened the lid and pulled out the white dress and held it up for me to see.

It was made completely of lace, completely see-through. I couldn't even look at it without hyperventilating. My heart slammed against my ribcage in horror and the mating started to feel all the more real. There really wasn't any escape was there?

But just as I thought that, a knock sounded on the door.

"What is it?" Andre snapped, sounding more than a bit annoyed as he folded the dress and kept it inside the box.

"Alpha, the Shrine Maiden is here. She's looking for the healer."

Oh, God! Ezra!

A low growl sounded from Andre's throat and for an instant, I feared he would hurt Ezra too. But then he asked the guards to open the door.

I sprang up from the seat immediately and headed straight to Ezra. "Shrine Maiden. I'm sorry for being late." I told her as soon as Ezra came in, pleading her with my eyes to play along.

Ezra nodded. "It's no worry, I found you just in time for prayer." She took my hand in hers and it was only then that I noticed just how cold my hands have gotten.

"Alpha," Ezra gave him a small bow. "I hope you don't mind me stealing your mate for the time being. It is her final prayer to the Moon Goddess before the mating."

"Not at all." Andre gave her a smile. "Let her have her last prayer, after all, from tomorrow onwards, she'll be all mine."

I gripped Ezra's hand tighter and we both bowed to him one last time before exiting the room. We walked briskly back to my room, moving at a steady pace so as not to alert Andre's soldiers.

"What now?" I asked her, my heart in my throat.

"Now, I help you escape."

#####

I am extremely sorry for the repeated chapters. I've asked my editors and they will help me remove it as quickly as possible. If you are reading this story after the removal of the double chapter, please ignore and keep on reading! Thank you to everyone for your support!

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 47

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

As soon as Flora was inside, I went straight to the bed and opened up a compartment at the side that hid a dagger for safety measures. All Maidens had these daggers in these secret compartments along with the weapons drawers, but their location was only told to them when times were turbulent. Just like now. I took out the dagger and hid it inside my skirt.

Flora came out a few minutes later, dressed in pants and a shirt in dark colors. Before I had a chance to warn her, she put on her white gown and tucked in the sleeves to cover what she wore underneath. Good, she had understood that this was all a cover up.

The guards followed us with their eyes as we exited the room and then I took Flora's hand and we both set out in the direction of the Shrine. However, just as we entered the Shrine, I started pulling her in a different direction altogether, a direction I hadn't thought I would ever need to use. Lindersay Shrine had an escape route that went under the Shrine and opened in the middle of the forest. It was a long and dark tunnel, but thankfully, we were wolves with superior night vision.

"Ezra...where are you taking me?" Flora asked unsurely as she followed. "What about the ritual?"

"There is no more time, Flora. You need to leave immediately." I told her urgently. "Andre's men are celebrating tonight, so the guards are all in the front courtyard, celebrating with him. This is the only opportunity you will get to escape before tomorrow comes."

"But what about you? What about the other Maidens?" There was fear in her voice but she kept pace with me. "We could all escape together."

"Andre is going to get suspicious if his men don't hear chanting or prayers." I told her. "We stay and we fight."

Flora gasped as we came to a halt in front of our destination. "You planned this all along..." her voice was a whisper but I heard her still.

"Yes." I turned to her. "So you must go and heal the rogues. You must bring back their humanity in order for them to win the fight."

"No... Ezra, I can't leave you like this!" She held my shoulders. "I can't abandon my sisters!"

"You aren't abandoning anyone, my child." I told her calmly. "You are going to save us all. You are our last hope. So don't hesitate child, do the right thing."

I took out the blade from my sash, where it stayed hidden for good measures and then I brought it to my palm and made a cut. It wasn't deep, just enough to draw blood. When Flora tried to heal it, I stopped her and offered her the blade. "No. You must make a bond with me. Malachi is missing and they must be blocking his power so you can't use them. So you will use mine and the strength of the Maidens to fulfill your purpose."

"Ezra it's-"

"I know it's a big responsibility, but you didn't come so far just to lose." I put a hand on her shoulder, giving her the support she needed. "Don't let your love lose to the Goddesses' power like the rest of us. You are our hope. You overcame the Goddesses' magic and regained your memory. Now it's your turn to heal the rogue Alpha and break the curse for all of us."

"What are you planning to do now?" She asked, her eyes holding understanding and pain.

"What I must." I handed her the blade once again. "Now, do what you must."

Flora nodded and cut a line down her palm, similar to mine and then she held my hand, palm to palm, blood to blood...and a faint glow lit the darkness as our blood mixed. I felt tingles move up my arm. Flora's soul was warm and kind as I felt our powers mix and that was how I knew I had done the right thing.

"It's done," I removed my now healed hand and pointed to the tunnel in front of me. "This tunnel will lead to a small, empty well in the middle of the forest. It will take you outside the walls of Lindersay and to your destiny. After that, everything is up to you."

"Thank you." Flora pulled me into her embrace unexpectedly. "For everything."

“Save us all, my child.” I told her before handing her the quiver of arrows and her bow that I had brought here early this morning when Andre had given Flora her dress.

I helped Flora strap on the quiver after she discarded the clothes she had worn over the shirt and pants. Those would give her much more freedom of movement and agility.

With one last goodbye, Flora went ahead into the tunnel and I stood there, watching her for as long as I could until her form disappeared into the darkness.

“Dear Goddess...whichever angel in heaven is listening, protect my child. Protect our hope.” I sent the silent prayer, hoping that someone...whoever it was in heaven that was listening, would heed my prayer.

I made my way back to the Shrine silently, feeling my heart grow heavy with every step I took. My maidens weren't warriors, they weren't trained in war-craft or weaponry, and yet, they had decided to stand beside me without questions. I was truly lucky to have been a Shrine Maiden.

We go into war tomorrow, at the crack of dawn and I know there would be casualties. But all I can do is close my eyes and bear these losses.

For the thousandth time, I wished Malachi was beside me, but I knew he was alive and he had faith in me. So I must live up to his beliefs. We couldn't let four centuries of struggles be in vain. We couldn't lose this fight even if the ones we would be fighting were our own people.

“My Lady?” Daphne and Emma came rushing to my side as soon as I entered the Shrine through a trap door at the back, which was connected to the tunnel. There was dread in their voices, but their eyes held determination.

I nodded finally. “It's time.”

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Flora's P.O.V

I ran through the tunnel as fast as my legs would take me. My heart was pounding in my chest as I escaped the place that had been my home for the past two years.

But never in these two years had I thought that Andre, a mere soldier, would be able to overthrow Malachi and take control of Lindersay. He was no ordinary soldier and his men were trained far better than any of us had expected.

Malachi was the son of the Moon Goddess herself and he was extremely old and powerful. For Andre to have the power to remove Malachi from his position meant only one thing...Andre was somehow related to the Moon Goddess herself and his coming to Lindersay and being my destined mate was no coincidence. It was all planned.

The Moon Goddess was involved in everything right from the start and she had no intention of fulfilling her promise. Instead, she was going to sacrifice Malachi and Ezra at the altar to bring back her lover. That had been her goal all along. That had been the reason why she hadn't appeared or given us any signs to show us she'll be keeping her side of the bargain.

Clay and I proved to her that our love could withstand even the curse of the Gods, but it wasn't enough for her. She had betrayed those who worship her, who turn to her in case of danger. Then why should we worship a Goddess who trampled on our faith?

I saw a faint light at the end of the tunnel and knew that the opening was nearby. The tunnel came to a stop about ten meters ahead and when I looked up, I saw an opening, but it was partly closed with a wooden trap-door and filled with vines and roots. There were also cobwebs and insects crawling around but I tried my best to avoid looking at those.

But when I reached up to climb, there was nothing to climb up with. Sighing in frustration, I strapped my bow over one shoulder, securing it tightly before extending my claws and digging them into the concrete to find a hook. The sound of my claws scraping against the concrete made me cringe but I shook off the uneasiness and began to climb, occasionally using a larger root for support. Once I was at the top, I fisted my hand and punched the trap-door, making it fly out of the way.

Moonlight streamed in through the opening and I climbed out safely, landing on the ground on my feet. I looked around the place trying to determine where I was and it looked familiar. This opening was near to the herb patch that the maidens and I often came to collect medicinal herbs from. I took a whiff of the air and the scent of rosemary and mint hit my nostrils almost immediately.

Good. I wasn't lost and I was far enough from the castle that the patrol guards wouldn't be able to scent me. So without wasting time, I sprinted to the abandoned mansion, that I now know used to be the pack house to the WoodlandHunter wolves. One of my hands rested on the dagger that Ezra had given me and I kept it ready in case I got any unpleasant surprises jumping at me from unexpected corners.

Once near, I approached the mansion with caution. The scent of Clay's pack was strong here and I could scent some of the wolves I had been trying to heal, but the scents weren't new. They weren't here and haven't been for some time now.

And then I scented it...Clay's scent. It was fresh like he had been here only a few hours ago. Without thinking, I started to chase it. I had to get to Clay no matter what.

I ran past the mansion and into the woods behind. It brought back memories of the day Malachi himself had to shoot Clay to save him from Andre. Clay had said that past the thick canopy of forest giants and cinnamon trees, there was a stream that would be able to mask our scent and past that stream were the hills.

The caves! Clay and his pack must be living in the caves there! It was the only explanation I could find, but if I was wrong, I was going to be in big trouble, because the scent from the cinnamon trees was already covering up Clay's scent...and once I crossed the stream...the scent will be completely lost.

Shit!

The forest came to an abrupt halt and right in front of me was the stream Clay had told me about. It was wider than I had imagined and the water currents were mild. I stepped foot into the water and almost pulled back. The water was freezing!

Balling my hands into fists, I started crossing the stream and by the time I came out on the other side, I was almost completely soaked and my teeth were chattering together from the cold. I hadn't expected it to be so deep; the water had risen almost to my neck.

Wrapping my arms around myself, I started walking once again. I couldn't stop now, not when I was so close. I could see the hills in the distance already. The land on this side of the stream was rocky with lesser trees. There were tall grass and boulders all over the place and I tripped more than once of protruding roots and stones, but kept going.

The moonlight helped me find my way and so did my advanced night vision. Just when I was only a few hundred meters away from the hilly region, I heard it...his voice.

"Flora?" the voice came from nearby and I whipped around to find him standing a few feet away from me, as he came into view from behind a large boulder.

"Clay!" I was running into his arms the next instant, feeling safer than I ever had.

Clay engulfed me in his arms tightly, chanting my name over and over again as he kissed me on the side of my face, my shoulder, my temples, wherever he could reach me without breaking the embrace.

"Oh God! Clay, you're alright!" I held onto him tightly, feeling the texture of his skin under my palm to make sure he was truly alright. "I knew Malachi had a plan, that he would never let anything happen to you, but I had to see it with my own eyes."

I pulled back slightly, looking at his chest where he had been shot, touching him with my hands. But there wasn't even a scar left. Mercy had healed him well.

"How are you here?" Clay asked, cupping my face with his hands. "How did you find me?"

His voice was concerned, but his questions helped me snap out of my distracted state. It helped me remember what I was truly here for and that time was running out.

"It Malachi." I told him urgently. "Andre has Malachi detained somewhere and no one can find him. Ezra and the other Lunar Maidens have shut themselves inside the shrine. Lindersay is a mess and things are about to get even worse. Tomorrow is the Blood Moon and Andre plans to sacrifice Ezra and Malachi to the Goddess."

"No!" His word was a growl, his eyes suddenly turning gold...and for an instant, I saw the red rim disappear before it appeared once again.

This was it...this was what I had been looking for! Clay was close to regaining his normal form!

"We need to hurry." I told him, taking his hand in mine. "Take me to your pack, Clay. It's time to bring them back. It's time to heal the rogues and their Alpha."

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Ezra's P.O.V

I put on the vest that my ancestors had once gifted me, when I had surpassed all the men in my pack to become the beta. The colorful eagle feathers were added once I won a battle, or beat a challenger. My vest was now had a layer of feathers to signify my achievements.

I strapped on my quiver filled with arrows that held a poison in the tips. It wasn't to kill but to paralyze the opponent and the effects would last for almost ten hours once it was in the bloodstream. The sword I placed on my waist-belt had the same poison as did the dagger hidden in my boots. I had used every weapon possible to defeat the enemy. Lastly, I picked up my bow.

But it has been three centuries since I had last held my bow or yielded my sword. I was afraid I wasn't that strong any longer, not efficient enough. But this was a battle I couldn't bow down from, no matter what. This was the ultimate test for my love.

I came out of the spare room behind the prayer hall and found my maidens all ready for battle. They too were dressed in attires that would help them move about freely without getting tangled in their robes and falling over. And each of my maidens held a weapon they had been able to master enough in the short span of time that had been given to them.

Swords, knives, whips and metal rods. My maidens had chosen any weapons they could find and tried their best in the limited time that was available to them. It

was more than I could ask of them and I was proud of my children for coming this far.

"My Maidens." I called forth as I stood behind the Dias. "The time is finally here. Tomorrow is the night of the Blood Moon, the night of the final sacrifice. Tonight, we go into war with our own kind. Do not be afraid of failure, my children; be afraid of what might happen if we do not succeed."

I picked up the final sacrifice; a lamb bone wrapped in cedar bark and leaves and placed it inside the bowl of moon water at the centre of the Dias.

"Great Goddess Artemis, the Goddess of the hunt and the moon, sister of the Sun God," I called out to the Goddess. "Give us your strength, mighty Goddess. Your children need your blessing. Give us the strength to bring back peace to our land and defeat the intruders who kill without mercy. Hail Goddess Artemis."

"Hail Goddess Artemis."

The Maidens and I bowed low to the ground, to gather strength and honor the Goddess...and then we rose as one unit. Warriors of Artemis.

We waited till morning, for the early hours of the morning before I walked up to the door that separated the Shrine from the rest of Lindersay and ordered two of maidens to push the doors open. Andre and his men were celebrating his mating today. They had been up all night drinking and making merry. Even intoxicated, I knew his soldiers were trained extremely well, but it was a chance we had to take.

But then the doors opened to reveal an army unit standing right outside our Shrine and a man named Hector, who I knew to be Andre's second in command, standing in the center, and ready to battle.

Hector gave a startled laugh just as my heart thrashed against my ribcage.

"Holy hell!" Hector clapped his hands together. "Andre was right! You bitches have been too quiet and accepting all of a sudden."

And then there was no more time for words.

"Charge!" I snapped at my Maidens, pulling an arrow out of my quiver and shooting it at the first soldier that tried to come forward.

The arrow hit him right on his shoulder and he went down almost immediately, the poison potent enough to spread through his bloodstream. It made Hector instantly alert and he too ordered the men to charge.

There were only fifteen men here, but taking them down with inexperienced warriors turned out to be more of a struggle than I had anticipated. I took out my sword and slashed the arm of one of the soldiers before ducking down to avoid a

blow. I used my sword to cut through the second attacker's leg and watched him fall to the floor in a heap.

Several other enemy soldiers fell as well, my maidens having painted their weapons with the same paralyzing agent. And then there was only Hector who was left standing in front of me.

"Don't worry, we aren't monsters like you." I told him, holding my sword ready for battle since I didn't trust Andre's men to play fair. "None of your men are dead, but they will be immobilized for quite some time."

"You bitch!" Hector shouted, charging at me with his sword drawn.

I moved out of the way just in time, but I had underestimated the length of the sword and felt it slice into my arm. Damn! I couldn't get weak here! I needed to get to Andre. He was a far greater and a much more powerful threat.

So when Hector turned around and charged once again, I catapulted over his head and slashed my sword across his back before landing in front of him. Hector hadn't expected the attack. He went down immediately, his eyes wide in shock, but I was sure that he had sent a mental message to his master about what had just happened.

"Get ready for the real battle." I warned my maidens, taking a pouch of the paralyzing herbs out of my belt and reapplying it on my sword. "It's up to us now."

With that, we ran across the hallway and headed straight for the main courtyard and as expected, Andre's party was over and he was fuming. But much to my surprise, a battle had already begun in the courtyard. Malachi's soldiers were fighting against Andre's men and even though they were outnumbered, Andre's men weren't easy targets. Our men were failing.

"FORWARD!" I pointed my sword ahead and charged through the soldiers, heading straight for Andre. My maidens made sure my path clear as they fired their arrows and swung their swords.

Andre gave a cunning smile before picking up a candle stand from the table next to him and blocking my sword with ease and before I had time to react or move away, a bottle was smashed right on top of my head, making me see black spots in my vision momentarily.

A warm liquid rolled down the side of my face and I knew he had done damage without even touching me. I stepped back out of reach immediately, finding it a bit difficult to maintain my balance. Andre laughed at my state as I heard more than a few screams from my maidens.

No! I cannot lose! I was the Shrine Maiden of Lindersay! I was the beta of WoodlandHunters! I will not lose.

Letting out a battle cry, I charged towards Andre once again with my sword. This time, he took out a dagger from his belt and blocked my advances. Sparks flew as our blades clashed, his hits forceful and violent, but I managed to match his strikes.

But then Andre caught my blade with one hand and swung his blade at me. I let go of my blade instantly and kicked out at his abdomen with all my might, sending him flying back. Picking up the bow I had dropped, I pulled out an arrow and shot it at Andre, hitting him in his shoulders.

And then something happened that I hadn't expected. Andre got up from the ground and pulled out the arrow like it was a mere thorn. Blood gushed out of his wound, but he didn't drop down like the others.

Was it the wrong arrow? Did this one not have the paralyzing herb?

Without wasting any more time, I shot another arrow, hitting his other arm...but once again, nothing. The poison had no effect on him.

This time, Andre gave out a maniacal laugh and charged at me full force, punching me in the gut with all his strength.

The wind knocked out of me as I crumbled to the floor. I felt blood dripping out of the corner of my mouth. The pain was blinding, but I didn't get time to recover as Andre came back with another hit.

With difficulty, I blocked it with my fists...and then I felt the power being drained from me like a tidal wave.

Flora...

That was the last thought I had before Andre's fist connected with my jaw and darkness consumed me.

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Flora's P.O.V

The first rays of sunlight hit the earth as Clay and I reached the hills. The road was tough and the land unwelcoming, but the pack had been able to find shelter; that was all that mattered.

I saw several of the wolves come out of their hiding spot as soon as they scented us approaching, and the ones that I had worked with closely, they came to greet me, walking alongside us to brush their bodies against my leg in welcome. I

patted the heads of those who came near, nodded at the ones who stayed away. They were weary and I didn't blame them.

Clay took me inside a cave and handed me a shirt to change into. My clothes weren't wet but it was probably better to change in order to avoid getting sick. So I put down my weapons and took off my wet shirt before putting on his larger shirt and tying it in the front so I didn't swim in it.

"You're connected with all your wolves mentally, right?" I asked Clay when I was done.

"Yes." Clay nodded. "They are my pack."

"Good." I patted the area in front of me, telling him to sit. "Then I can reach them through you."

"What do you need to do?" He asked, sitting in front of me, face to face.

"I don't know, but I had no idea when I used my healing power on you to turn you into your human for either." I held out my hand and he placed his on mine. "So I'm going to channel all my healing power into you and the Alpha bond should help channel it to your wolves. If I'm able to heal you, then your wolves should be able to turn back as well."

It was all theory and had no real proof, but in a world filled with the supernatural, Gods and magic, how can I not believe it was a possibility? I had to try my best. This was my only shot at saving Malachi and Ezra. Saving Clay.

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on the powers within me. I felt a tingle on my palm where I had cut myself to form a bond with Ezra.

Ezra...kind and courageous and loving. Her light shone a bright golden in my mind and I imagined that light inside my mind.

At first there was nothing, only darkness, but then a flare lit up, tiny at first, but the light kept getting brighter the more I concentrated, the more I thought about my pack and I grasped onto that light.

Now, I imagined Clay's essence. A bright emerald green with a rim of red around the orb. It was the colour of his eyes and I imagined it inside my mind, next to the bright golden orb of Ezra's light.

Something trickled down my nose and I had a vague feeling that it might be blood, but I paid it no mind. I was going to complete this ritual even if it meant I was to die.

The orb of green with the red rim appeared in my mind, a bit far away from Ezra's orb, but now I had two essences inside my mind. I only had to connect the two so their energy could flow.

I imagined myself as the medium. I caught hold of the golden light, feeling the warmth of it in my body and stretched it across to the green orb...connecting the two together.

It was like an explosion of energy inside my head. The golden orb was now joined with Clay's red rimmed green with a thin blue thread and the light of the gold was being transferred to the green. Sparks of gold were battling the red, shoving it back with all their might.

The red rim was resilient at first, refusing to budge, holding on to the green. But then I saw it retreating inch by slow inch.

More sparks flew and the warmth that had spread throughout my body now felt like fire consuming my flesh. I wanted to scream, but it felt like my mouth was glued shut.

And then came the explosion. The red disappeared from around the green orb, leaving an emerald so pure it hurt to look at it, before my mind was consumed by darkness.

*

"Flora...Flora..."

Groggily, I opened my eyes with much difficulty. My head was pounding and my body was still hot, but whoever was calling me, didn't stop until I looked up at them.

Clear emerald eyes stared back at me from the face I loved the most in this world.

"Clay..." I reached up with my arms, touching his face to have a better look.

"I'm back, Flora." Clay's smile was radiant. "You did it! You healed us."

I got up from the ground immediately, looking outside the cave to find three men standing behind Clay, looking at me in wonder.

"The rest of them?" I asked Clay. His pack had almost seventy rogues. Were only a few of them able to transform back to their human forms?

"I didn't have that many spare clothes." Clay said almost sheepishly. "But we need to head back now. Something is happening."

"The sacrifice!" I gripped Clay's arm tightly. "We need to head back to the castle."

Clay shook his head. "That's not where the ritual is going to take place. I followed the soldiers yesterday. I know the location."

"Let's go." I got up with his help and Clay's wolves were instantly ready to head out with us.

I looked into their eyes, happy to see different colours instead of just red. We had really done it. We were able to heal the rogues.

But when I came out of the cave, the air got knocked out of my lungs in horror.

The sky...had turned blood red.

*

Ezra's P.O.V

"...tie..."

"...no time...Andre..."

"...now!"

Bits and pieces of conversations reached my ears as I floated in and out of consciousness.

My entire body ached from the beating I took and it was getting difficult opening my eyes. That was until a whiff of a familiar scent filled my nostrils and my eyes snapped open.

I was in a clearing somewhere. This place was unfamiliar and yet, the woods were there all around us. I tried to move but found myself tied to something at my back. My hands were tied at my sides and another rope was tied around my shoulders and my waist. I felt another rope at my knees and they were all holding me standing to a wooden pole at my back.

I tested the grip, but it was firm. I couldn't escape using my strength, not when I was this weak from the drainage of power.

The scent came again and I whipped my head around in the direction of the scent...and there he was. My Malachi.

He was tied to another pole not far from me, in a similar fashion. But he looked to be in really bad condition. His clothes were torn and his body was filled with gashes that looked old. He needed healing urgently.

"Ah! Look who's finally awake!"

My attention immediately went to the man who was now standing between me and Malachi...with a gleaming dagger in his hands.

“Let the rituals begin.” He smile a sinister smile and the sky, I now noticed, had turned blood red.