

## Chapter 11 - Blind Love

*"Love is not blind but it leads to blindness." — Auliq Ice*

**Neron**

*Clink! Clank! Clonk!*

Metal against ceramic. These sounds made for a sour tune in the kitchen air as I sat alone at the island. Coming back from my early morning run, I watch as the golden sun steadily rises over the horizon. It's a lovely view to eat cereal to. Frosted Flakes—Valerian and Kwame will never let me live it down if they see me eating this.

I can't help it. They're great!

Moments like this are scarce as Alpha. There's hardly any time for peace and leisure because of the responsibilities of running a pack. Everything pulls at my attention; from the other Alphas' I'm in an alliance with, to the children who need their thirst for my attention quenched. Yesterday, with the obstacle course test, it was a fantastic day. The air of competitiveness and fun nicked at the cloud of tension hovering above me, the light of freedom making daybreak.

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And I got to see Kiya in her prime. I didn't miss the bout where she encouraged Isabella to finish despite her wishes to give up. The flames of determination and care burned brightly in those mocha-brown orbs, plunging me deep in a sea of love. She cares for the trainees like they're her children.

No wonder the children of this pack speak highly of her. Not because she's my mate, but because she is a genuine and loving person. And goddamnit, she's an amazing competitor. Kiya can go toe-to-toe with me, yet she remains humble. She doesn't boast about her strength or tenacity, but is in it for the fun.

Once again, we ended at a stalemate.

My mate has all the power in the world. Literally. Sometimes, I forget that she's my moon goddess' avatar; given with abilities beyond my wildest comprehensions. Kiya's a normal wolf to me.

But the looming words of my father reminded me she's far from normal. She never was normal. With each passing day, my father continues to fall deeper into the pit of madness. That day when he entered my office reminded me just how far he's from reach.

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### Flashback

*"That girl has no respect for her superiors." My father spat out as soon as Kiya left my office, telling him to kiss his ass. "If that girl has one thing, it's the audacity."*

*"Dad, she's a woman, not a girl. Second, she shouldn't have respect for anyone who condemned her to a life of suffering." I huffed, taking my seat behind the desk. My eyes are trained squarely on my father's aging face, remarking the wrinkles and ridges as they crinkled with emotion.*

*"Yet, she respects you."*

*"Toleration and respect are two separate entities. She's far from respecting me, and I don't blame her. Can't hold it against her. Now, is there something you need?"*

*"Already getting back to business, I see." He takes a seat in the chair that Kiya formally sat at. "Are you any closer to marking her? You two seemed pretty close when I came in."*

*"No, and it's the farthest thing from my mind. And she was going to tell me something important before you interrupted and ruined everything."*

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*Anger grew on his face. "You're continuing to play the waiting game? What the hell have I've told you about staking your claim, boy?"*

*"You've taught me a lot." I shrugged my shoulders. "Alphas take what they want, leave no prisoners, blah blah blah. Given it's a path I refuse to walk on, I've elected to ignore it."*

*"Do you realize what you're letting slip through your grasp?" He gritted his teeth. "That woman, so you say, is a powerful being. One-of-a-kind. She belongs to you. Yet, you allow her to parade on this land unmarked and unclaimed. You're sending an obvious message to the unmated males that they're free to stake their claim on their future Luna because you're too weak to do it yourself."*

*The thought of the unmated men of this pack lusting over Kiya made my blood boil. Onyx growled possessively, hating the idea. It's true; she's easy-pickings. But she can handle herself. Kiya doesn't need a knight-in-shining-armor to rescue her whenever a man gets too close. I'll not hesitate to rip the throats out of those who think they can steal my mate, but she'll tear them a new asshole first.*

*"I will not mate with Kiya for her power. We've been over this! I don't know how many times I have to repeat myself for it to penetrate your thick skull, D*

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*ad! You're insane!"*

*"You're out of your mind, boy. You watch what you say to me. I'm no longer Alpha, but I'm still your father."*

*"A father pushing for an unhappy union," I growl. "I don't care about Kiya's powers or that she's the most powerful werewolf in existence. I love her for her. If you'd take off your rose-tinted glasses and see her as a full person, we'd be having a different conversation!"*

*"So, that's it? You won't fight for what is yours? Think about the blessings and prosperity, Neron. You'd be one step closer to our beloved Moon Goddess. With Kiya's power in your blood, you'd be the most powerful Alpha with equally powerful heirs. You'd be a fucking king!"*

*"May I remind you I never wanted to be Alpha in the first place?" Dad's glare is powerful enough to incinerate me, but I won't waver. "You'd always push this rhetoric that I needed to be powerful. Strong. Feared. Only when Mom died, you pushed harder. How do you think she'd feel if she sees you the way you are now?"*

*He shot up from his seat, slamming his palms on my*

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*desk, formally his, with venom dripping from his jaws. "Don't you ever bring your mother up! Bless her beautiful soul, but she knew the potential you have. You're a pureblood Alpha with the moon's avatar as your mate! You're throwing away a good thing, and for what?!"*

*"Kiya's peace." I shot back, now rising out of my seat. "Now, I know you're hiding more from me. What else is there, Dad?"*

*A dark chuckle erupted from his chest, sending chills down my spine. Powerful enough to make me buckle. "You truly don't know the history of your bloodline. I'd crack open books about the Prince and Johansen families once in a while."*

*What does my bloodline have to do with any of this?*

*"But, tell me this, Neron..." He leans in close to the point our noses almost touch. "Do you want to be viewed as a weak Alpha? Too weak that he won't claim what belongs to him? You think Kiya is your redemption ticket, but she's your ticket to security and power. Thank Goddess the little wench Odessa found her mate; she'd be disastrous as our Luna. No poise or dignity. Your weakness to mark her saved you; because now, you can mark your true mate. I won't stand to have our bloodline end because you want to pussyfoot around!"*

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*"Dad, look at me. I'm the goddamn Alpha now. Just because you want true power under the Prince name doesn't mean I want to!" I'm beyond angry. My claws throb at the base of my fingertips, ready to slash my father's face. He's a lot of things, but I'll be damned if he forces me to mark Kiya without her consent. Damn her to a life of misery so I can savor her power?*

*Absolutely the fuck not. Kiya is more than that!*

*People will come after her for her power. Coveting only for what she can provide for their selfish benefit. The warning Luna Lyra gave me echoed in my mind. **'Keep your father away from Kiya'**.*

*"I don't give a shit about power. Whatever it is, I don't want it. Kiya deserves freedom of choice, even if it means sacrificing the Prince bloodline."*

*"You stupid fool! You're so lovesick like a puppy you don't see the disaster in front of you! Be rational! You'll put her silly grudge above your pack? Without a Luna, Zircon Moon will fall into chaos. Without a future heir, we'll cease to exist!"*

*"I'll deal with it when the time comes. I'm done with this conversation." I reply coldly as sat back in my seat with a heavy sigh. "I'm a fool, but a fool in love w*

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*ith Kiya just as you love Mom. I won't cause her suffering. Not again. Never again. Take this power talk and, kindly, shove it up your ass. Besides, having you as a father-in-law would be a nightmare."*

*My father was taken aback by my words, but recovered with a prominent scowl on his face. "You will regret this, Neron. I will not sit and watch you push this great pack on the path of destruction over the selfish desires of that disrespectful bitch. Your blind love will doom us all. Yourself included."*

*Without another word, he left my office in a blaze of fury.*

*Leaving me behind in ash.*

### **End Flashback**

"...I wish you were still here. Maybe things would have turned out different." Sometimes I hated coming here. It's painful. It's debilitating. Occasionally peaceful. I'm sitting cross-legged on the ground, staring at a pair of granite headstones amongst others.

These two are special. Beautifully crafted with howling wolves; one with a small one and the other with a bigger one. Pictures encased in a



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protective sphere stared back at me with their bright blue eyes and pearly white smiles. I avoid coming here, sometimes. But today, I feel as though I need to be here.

The words on each tombstone read simple, yet important messages that made Onyx whimper in sadness.

*Celeste "Essie" Johansen-Prince*

*Beloved Luna and Mother*

*The Golden Heart*

*Nuria Aine Prince*

*Beloved Daughter*

*The Golden Angel*

"I'm sorry I haven't visited in so long. I just...I wish Dad can understand what I'm doing, Mom. He keeps pressuring me into mating as if I'm on a time constraint. Why can't he understand that his idea will lead to disaster? You always knew how to calm him down and now, he's lost his way."

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History says that when a wolf loses their mate, as time moves on, they slowly grow mad. Maybe I was too blind to see it. Or I didn't want to see it. Or I knew and did nothing about it. The latter is the most accurate option since I watched him hurt Kiya for years.

And I followed in his footsteps.

"You'd be ashamed of me, Mom. I found my mate, but even you would tell me I don't deserve her. Dad hurt her. I hurt her. And I'll never have her, despite being an arm's length away. Hell, Nuria might push my head into the oven and hold me there for hurting her best friend." I chuckle.

"I want to do right by her, but according to Dad, I'm putting the pack in jeopardy for doing just that. Kiya doesn't want to be with me, and I won't force her. Goddamnit Mom, why does this have to hurt? I'm torn between my duties, between my mate and my pack."

"Zircon Moon is my pride, but Kiya's my heart and soul. I love her. I won't listen to Dad; not this time. You always say, '*when there's a will, there's a way.*' One day, Dad will see Kiya trumps everything; especially once I let her go."

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"I know I'm doing the right thing."

*"Hoo!"*

I look up from my mom's headstone to see Diana perched on top of Nuria's, eyes fixed on me. Once I sat up straight, she flew down to my lap, careful not to pierce my thigh with her sharp talons. With a warm smile, I pet the cute bird, relishing in her softness. "What do you think, Diana? Am I doing the right thing?"

She bobs her head in a nod. *"Hoo!"*

"At least someone thinks so. You're a peculiar thing, but I'm grateful for your company."

And that's how I spent my early morning: with an owl on my lap next to the graves of my mother and sister.

