

Chapter 7 - Nothing Between Us

"Oh it was meant to be. It just wasn't meant to last."
— Kate McGahan

Neron

Trouble is brewing below the surface, and I cannot figure out why.

Since yesterday, an unsettling feeling cast a thick haze over my spirit, poking and prodding. The hairs stand on the back of my neck and Onyx is on edge with the ambition to strike. A dark cloud billows from all corners of my territory, trapping us under a translucent dome of trepidation. It's there, but it's also not there at the same time. And it eats away at my pride and confidence as the Alpha of this pack.

Call me crazy, but I feel a trespass. Someone is cavorting through my lands undetected, and the worst part is I cannot see them. I can only *feel* them. Being a werewolf blessed with amazing abilities has proven to be a horrible disadvantage in this case. How do you fight an enemy you cannot see? Or smell? How do you protect others from an invisible adversary?

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The atmosphere around this mighty pack has taken a drastic turn.

My mind cannot help but reiterate what Kiya had said to me before; about a presence in her room watching her sleep. The main cause of her sleep issues. That matter buzzed around my mind like an angry hornet since then, demanding me to take action to protect her. Blood within me boils under the fire of hatred at the thought of someone or something bothering my mate to the point she cannot sleep.

I made a silent vow to guard her peace and I will to the best of my ability, but it doesn't make it any less frustrating. Sitting at my desk with a fist to my chin, I ruminate over my options. I refuse to let Kiya sleep in her room until it's scoped out for intruders. She shouldn't be subjected to sleepless nights over this.

And I know how Kiya is heavily adamant about her privacy, which is why I asked her friends to do a full sweep of her room. If this is the work of magic, it's only fitting for a witch to be here. However, my pack doesn't have witches and the only one I know of is back in California. After the kidnapping debacle, Alpha Anthony increased security around his territory and Miss Phoebe isn't allowed to leave without permission. Her and

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Endo.

I shouldn't be worried, right? That madness is behind us and everyone's back in action. We have our slice of peace. I shouldn't be concerned, yet I am. A dark presence lurks within these pack walls. I don't know how, and I don't know where, but it's *here*.

My mate and I can feel it. And it *terrifies* me to think there could be another enemy after her. History is repeating itself before my eyes. Kiya will *never* be safe because of the power she holds.

There are moments where I want to throw caution to the wind, damn the expectations, and keep her to myself. Keep her close as a surefire way to ensure her safety. My innate instincts as the mighty Alpha beckon me to take what is ours and do anything and everything to keep her close, even if she'll forever hate me for it.

No.

It'll only lead to ruin. It's not bad to be optimistic; she's slowly, but surely, softening at my presence. Kiya doesn't look at me with the flames of hatred anymore, for all it's worth. I continue to fall in love with her daily with the smallest things she

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does. That fills my heart up; fills the void that realizes that I'll never truly have her.

This is the next best thing.

As I think, my hands rummage through the pile of paperwork, and manilla folders plastered all over my desk. Training reports, investment reports in Carson City and Las Vegas, requests from pack members—all the boring parts about being Alpha. As much as I'd love to shed my clothes and run through the forest, I have duties to perform. I admit I've been slacking.

All because of my curly-haired beauty. I love it. But I need to focus and get this work done or else it'll be never-ending. Kwame and Valerian would have to hear me bitch and moan during our meetings.

"You bitch and moan all the time." Onyx, my oh-so-helpful wolf, decided it's an appropriate time to add his input. **"It isn't anything new. I just had to put up with it for the past few decades."** I can feel the eye-roll in his voice.

"Once again, you add no value to the conversation." I shot back. *"Unless you plan to help me with all this paperwork, go back to your nap."* Onyx is-a big n

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apper when things are at a stalemate. It's one of his famous hobbies besides reprimanding me for my stupidity.

"It's your fault for falling behind on them. But I don't blame you; our mate is a beautiful distraction from this boring shit."

"Too much of a distraction."

"I don't hear the disappointment in your voice, so you approve! Speaking of distractions, have you thought about doodling again? It was your favorite pastime."

"There's not enough time in the day for it, Onyx."

That's history. Back in the day, I loved to draw. Drawing was my escape from the pressures of becoming Alpha, my schooling, and so much more. The pencil to paper allowed me to channel my true self and translate it into images important to me. In all honesty, I miss it. I miss that freedom. I miss the happiness tied to the pencil. But there's not much I can do about it now.

Alphas must remain focused. As Dad always says. But goddamn, it's hard sometimes. There's always something that required my attention, and there's

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no choice to ignore.

The doors to my office swung open abruptly, revealing a smiling Odessa. Her scent of plum blossoms permeated through the air yet did nothing to stir my heart. Not like it used to. She sashayed in with a slight sway in her hips and took a seat in the chair, separated from me by my desk.

"Hello, Neron!" She says chipperly. "You look good today."

"Thanks," I replied flatly. Not to sound like a narcissist, but I always look good.

"But I can't help but feel that you're stressed out. I hope your mate is taking care of you." She suddenly said. "I mean, it's her job, is it not?"

I arch an eyebrow in suspicion. Everything about Odessa sitting in my office is suspicious, and I blame the change in her surrounding air. It was once light-hearted and sensual, but now, it's heavier. And it weighed on me like a ton of bricks.

"You think you can do better? I need not to rely on someone else to take care of me, Odessa. I'm managing fine."

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"You say that now, but you know deep down you wish for someone to take care of you. You're a big, tough Alpha and she's out there frolicking without a single care about you. All men deserve someone who'd take care of them, hmm?"

"Those types of men are incompetent."

"And so is your so-called mate."

"Get her out of your face before I eat her," Onyx growled.

"Relax. I got this." I took in a deep breath, forcing back the burrowing rage of my wolf. It lusts for the destruction of those who disrespect Kiya. He's as dedicated as me. "Watch your tongue when speaking of her, Odessa. You're walking on thin ice."

She scoffed. "God, do you truly realize what's going on? You're an Alpha separated by your mate who wouldn't care if you fell in a sewer hole. You deserve someone better. You deserve someone who won't deny your deepest desires and makes you feel like a real man."

I indeed have a lot of desires that only Kiya can fulfill. Tortured every other night with the

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thoughts of her kisses and her body against mine. With thoughts of her proudly wearing my mark on her neck. I cannot help but think of those as she's a hair apart from me and I cannot have her. And I know I never will.

But I love her enough to respect her decisions with me. We're fated partners. We're meant to be together. But none of it is worth it if she's unhappy. I fucked up. I only have myself to blame.

"With or without her, I'm a real man. I'm not defined by who I mark and when I mark them. Unlike you, I have respect for Kiya, and her personal decisions override my selfish wants. Odessa, heed this warning: tread carefully with your next words. One slipup and you'll be thrown out of here faster than you can blink."

"Do you tell yourself that shit every night in hopes it'll make things better?" The woman rises, slamming her palms against my desk in fury. "Lest not forget that we had a history, Neron. You were mine. We made a promise to be faithful to one another and once the ghost of the past comes forth, you throw it away like trash! I thought an Alpha is supposed to honor the promises he makes."

"You have a mate, Odessa."

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"And is that supposed to erase everything we've been through together? What about the promise?"

"We were kids back then. We knew nothing about what our Moon Goddess has planned for the both of us, and it's unwise to go against her wishes. We're adults now. I'll treasure the moments we shared, however, now you have a mate and I have mine. Darien is a good man who'll treat you better than I ever could. Don't go against the bond you have with him to chase after what isn't meant to be."

"Yet, you're doing the same with her. You don't have a ghost of a chance to be with her, fully mated. And you follow and pursue her affection and attention like a lovesick puppy. May I remind you that ever since she landed here, danger sprung out of the woodworks? This land was almost burnt to ashes because something hunted her! We've lived in peace before she rose from the dead. You want *that* over someone like me?"

I stare at Odessa. Long and hard in those hazel eyes, I once fell in love with. Specks of green shimmered underneath the brown, lighting in her anger. They're still beautiful, but unmatched to the deep pools of coffee brown from Kiya. "Yes. I'll go into the depths of hell if it meant her safety, Odessa. We may have been teenaged sweethearts,

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but I've grown up. You have an amazing mate who'll fight for you and I'll fight for you too, as I am your Alpha. But my heart belongs to Kiya, and I'll do right by her. I'm sorry, but that's our reality."

"There's nothing between us. Not now, and not in the future. Don't throw away a good thing you have with your Delta."

Silence. Her lips pressed to a fine line, but her eyes did the speaking. Flickers of sadness, pain, and a morsel of betrayal glittered before drowning from the anger. Fury. In a deep breath, she stood erect, stretched her neck from side to side before nodding.

"So, you don't want me anymore?"

"No."

"But what if I still want you?"

"That's your problem, not mine. And I don't think Darien will like that you still have feelings for someone else since you've mated." Not exactly, since she has yet to bear his mark on her neck.

"I love you, Neron. Always will. But you're no less

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than a damn clown. You're a fool, in more ways than one. Remember that when karma comes to bite you in the ass."

With that, she stormed out in a flurry of brunette hair, slamming the doors behind her. A breath of relief escaped my lips as I slumped back in my chair. Odessa and I are over. Her pursuit for me makes no sense.

That should be the end.

Yet...

I have this awful inkling that it isn't. Onyx knows it and I know it.

This isn't the end with Odessa.

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
Aardvark Donnenhoffer

I wish Neron could just snap Odessas' neck.



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