

Untouchable

/Chapter 10 – The Choice

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“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.” — William Shakespeare

Halima

“Artemis!” A smile spread across my face as my wolf trotted toward me. I broke out into a run and hugged the big snout of my other half. Large and magnificent, Artemis was a thing of absolute beauty. As big as a horse, her pure white fur glided through my palms like silk, and her soft tongue against my cheek was wet with drool. “I knew I’d see you again!”

“It’s great to see you too, Halima,” Artemis spoke through our mind-link. Her jaw didn’t move, but her sweet voice was clear as day. She affectionately nuzzled her snout into my belly, her enormous tail wagging in excitement behind her. Gosh, she was so cute! I peered into her eyes, noticing they were a bright, piercing blue. It was strange to never see the eyes of your wolf before, but mirrors weren’t exactly my best friends when I was alive. As I pet her ears, I noticed something else. There was a glowing silver patch on her forehead, shaped like a crescent moon.

I petted the crescent mark, and she purred, eyes fluttering close. I smiled widely and planted a soft kiss on her snout, resting my head on it.

“That feels nice.”

“I hope it does.”

Selene laughed behind me, walking toward us. “Wolves are in their physical form when passing to their final resting place. Just as you both were together in life and death; you’re together in the afterlife as well. How does this feel?”

“It feels great.” I sniffled. “I’m glad to have Art by my side. We really are in this together, aren’t we?”

Artemis and I spent another moment together before turning back to the goddess. She waved her hand to the space next to her and a bench made of what I believe to be a moon rock rose from the ground. She took a seat and patted the empty one next to her, motioning for me to sit. Artemis rested her head on my lap once I took my seat, huffing silently.

“Why was I blessed with a white wolf?” I asked suddenly, scratching behind my wolf’s ears. “My, um...parents, have red and brown wolves. Raina is also a red wolf. Where, in my werewolf genetics, did white come from?”

“That’s because it didn’t come from your genetics. I’m responsible for that.” Selene chuckled, also scratching behind Artemis’s ears. The pretty wolf loved the pampering she was getting, judging by the powerful gusts of wind her wagging tail was making. “White wolves are rare for a reason. A white wolf is made in the image of the Moon Goddess and serves as her avatar—both her sacred child and her representative on Earth. They are born once every century, destined to carry my message to all werewolves. I believe in acceptance, love, peace, and harmony. Many are not lucky to ever see a white wolf, but if they do, they know that I have blessed them and their pack with protection.”

“Um...” Heat rose to my cheeks as I thought of how to plan my next words. “I don’t mean to be rude, Selene, but...if I’m your avatar...you didn’t do a good job at designing me. I look nothing like you. Have you noticed how dark my skin is?”

Selene burst into laughter, pressing her hands on her chest. The heat on my cheeks intensified, wondering if I thoroughly embarrassed myself in front of the werewolves’ matron god. I died inside; no pun intended. There was a eulogy and everything.

“You have it wrong, dear. Your human looks have nothing to do with it. In fact, all my previous avatars look nothing like me. It was for your protection! It is only when you shift does one see the avatar of Selene. White wolves are powerful, more than the average wolf. You and Artemis are bound for life, death, and everything after. You’re a white wolf because I have chosen you. After all, you were born to do wonderful things. Magnificent things! Your true self was to be cultivated and only then could you fulfill your destiny to bring peace.”

I sighed heavily, feeling Artemis shift on my lap. “I’m sorry that it didn’t come to fruition. Being beaten and condemned to servitude didn’t really help in ‘finding my destiny’.” I leaned back on the bench. “I’m sure my former pack is more than happy to get rid of me—wait!” I shot back up, my thoughts pulling puzzle pieces together left and right. “White wolves help protect the pack they are born into, right?”

“Yes.” Selene nodded. “White wolves have a direct connection to me; thus, their presence protects their community. Think of it as a silent guardian.”

That made total sense. I always wondered why Alpha Jonathan kept me alive all these years. It wasn’t just to clean his filthy floors. He kept me around to protect the pack. Rogue attacks vanished completely only after I shifted, and the pack grew prosperous. I was more than just a slave. He selfishly kept me around just to leech off Selene’s protection, and yet, he failed to protect me from the threats that lay inside the pack.

My disdain for Zircon Moon was limitless. He should’ve disobeyed the laws and killed me before I reached shifting age. But alphas work for the betterment of the pack. Why kill the source of their protection?

“I can feel your anger, my dear.” I looked back at my goddess. “You have every right to be. What your family did is unforgivable. By my word, they will learn the consequences of their actions.”

“I don’t care!” I shouted, anger twisting in my chest. “They ruined my life! The best thing about all this is that I never have to face them again.” Sucking in a deep breath, I squashed my anger and turn back to the prior conversation. “You said all wolves meet you here before they pass into heaven. Does that mean...”

Selene nodded as if she could read my mind. “Your former Luna, her wolf Ashia, and her daughter are beyond the gates of Heaven together. They are doing well if you’re wondering about that. Nuria had grown to be a lovely woman. Her wolf Angelika is the cutest pup.”

Tears burned my eyes again. My best friend was okay! She made it into Heaven! Artemis looked up at me and bumped her nose into my arm, her way of asking if I was okay. “I’m okay. I’m happy.” I turned back to Selene. “Can I see them?”

“Those who pass through the gates of Heaven don’t return to my realm.”

“That’s fine! I’ll see them when I get through the gates, then!”

Selene was suddenly quiet, her eyes finding interest in her pale feet. The surrounding atmosphere changed from serene to tense. Artemis noticed the change, now sitting upright on her rear next to me. She towered over me by two feet. If I wasn’t nervous before, I sure was now. “Selene? Is there something you’re not telling me?”

“Halima, you aren’t going through the gates of Heaven,” Selene revealed, her tone laced with seriousness. “You are to return to Earth.”

I sucked in a sharp breath at the unexpected news. She dropped a bombshell on my head with no warning. I stared at her for a good while, curling my lips into a snarl. “No. Absolutely not. I’m not going back there!”

“I know you don’t want to, but you must. You are here before your time.”

“Are you kidding me?” I shouted, standing on the soles of my feet. “I killed myself for a reason! I ended my pain, and you’re asking me to go back to that?”

“I’m not saying it out of maliciousness, my dear.” Selene also stood.

I turned away, my back facing her. My shoulders heaved as my sobs returned to me in full force. “I don’t...I can’t...!” Artemis reached over and rubbed her snout in my belly again, this time with the gentleness of a feather. “I rather die a thousand deaths than to return to that life.”

“**Halima**,” Artemis spoke. “**Let’s hear what Selene has to say**.”

“But...”

“**Please, for me**?” I peeked into Artemis’s electric blue eyes and felt my sobs quieting. She knew exactly how to calm me down. My wolf was my security blanket, always there for me when no one else was. I exhaled a heavy sigh, nodding before turning to face Selene again.

“Sorry.” I sniffled. “Explain, please.”

“You have a mission...nay, a destiny, to fulfill and you have not yet completed it.” She slowly brought the both of us down to sit again. “You have not fulfilled your

purpose on Earth. I was not joking when I said you are meant to do great things. Yes, you've died. Your death is one to cause a systemic change that history had failed to recognize. Your death was a catalyst for what is coming, but your rebirth is one to bring peace."

"I can't go." I whimpered again, my body trembling at the thought of returning to a world filled with monsters in human flesh. It made me want to crawl into a hole and never come out. I kneeled from the bench to hug my wolf, feeling her trembling fear. Our old life terrified us both. "They hurt us, rejected us, beat us...they did so many horrible things to us. We can't...I can't...please, Selene. Understand why I did what I did."

"I do, Halima. I do." She kneeled with me, taking one of my hands into her own. "But you are no ordinary werewolf. You are special. You are a diamond in the rough, a rare find. The world is a cruel place, and you will face many obstacles and adversities at all angles. It's not a question of whether you can manage them, but how."

Her warm thumb wiped my tears again, sending pleasant shivers down my spine. "There shouldn't be so many obstacles to deal with."

"Yes. They all can come at once, but you cannot conquer them all at once."

"Do we really have to go back?" Artemis asked Selene, bowing her head. **"What would happen if we don't?"**

"Werewolf kind would fall." That got our attention. "I cannot reveal too much, but there is a reason my avatars are born once every century. That answer you must find on your own. But know this, I'm not sending you back to hurt you. I care about you, Halima. You are my sacred child. I hold nothing but love for you, something your family did not give you. Understand that there is much I cannot reveal to you, but the answers lie back on Earth. In your new life."

Half of me refused to go back out of self-preservation. Zircon Moon will hunt me down, and I'd be back here faster than I could blink. The other half of me wanted to go back. I wanted to see the better life that I could have gotten; the life I rightfully deserved. But what was the better choice? Am I that important that the Moon Goddess would defy the will of death?

She wasn't doing this for herself. She was doing this for me. Selene saw something in me I couldn't. Was going back to Earth worth finding it?

I turned to Artemis, unable to battle the internal conflict of my own. "What do you think?"

"I'm terrified, just like you. There is no telling what may or may not happen to us when we go back. But if there is a better life, and we have a greater purpose in life than in death...then I want to see it. I want to experience it together with you."

I thought about my choices, weighing the pros and cons of every situation I could think of. "What about my old pack?"

"Don't worry about them. Fate will deal with them. I'm returning you to Earth, not your birth pack."

That made my decision a lot easier. Sighing once again, I take both of Selene's hands in my own. "I'll go back on one condition."

She nodded. "Go on."

"Well, we both know my mate has rejected me."

"Yes, I know."

"My only condition is that I don't want a second-chance mate." I looked over to Artemis, who nodded in agreement. "After that experience, I prefer to be mateless than to go through this pain again. The rejection is unbearable for the both of us."

Selene struggled a bit but nodded reluctantly. "Second-chance mates are granted on special occasions. Rejections are almost unheard of, but they aren't impossible. Since that is what you want, very well. I agree with your condition."

I smiled, feeling the weight melt off my shoulders. "What would happen once I return?"

"Your body is taken care of, don't worry. You're long gone from Zircon Moon." We both rose together on our feet. "I know I keep saying this, but you deserve

much better than what your first life had dealt you with, Halima. What happens from here on out is what you and destiny decide.”

“Will I see you again, outside of death, I mean?”

Selene’s laughter was melodious, echoing throughout her realm. “Maybe. Only if it’s truly needed.”

That was odd, but I don’t question it. I trusted the Moon Goddess and her intentions, whatever they may be. Glancing back at Artemis, I offered a smile. Her aqua-colored eyes stared deep into mine, the bond between us now stronger. Whatever was waiting down for us on Earth, we’ll survive it together, I hope. We had each other and would protect each other no matter what.

“It’s a shame. I like you better this way, Arty. I can see you instead of shifting into you.”

“I’m saddened that I cannot be in this form forever, but it must be this way. I was getting used to standing beside you. And don’t call me Arty! We’ve been through this!”

“Sorry! I didn’t know that applied in death too!”

“Well, it does!”

“You two are made for each other.” Selene smiled. “Ah, I will miss you both terribly.” She waved her hand again and behind us, silvered stairs emerged from the ground, leading downwards into another area of light. “Once you both leave, you will be back in your body. Make wise decisions, my dears.”

The Moon Goddess gently took my head in her hands and planted a soft kiss at the center of my forehead. Warmth bathed me from head to toe, her soft lips tickling me gently. The kiss was motherly, filling the void in my heart my birth mother couldn’t fill. Instinctually, my hands wrapped around her torso and I hugged her tight. I didn’t know when the next time I see her would be, so I wanted to savor the connection that only she could provide.

“I’ll miss you, my child. You will be great.”

“Thank you.”

After a while, Selene released me and went to Artemis. Her soft hands ran through her silky fur, relishing in its softness, “Will you protect her and be there for her, my sweet wolf?”

“**On my honor, I will**,” Artemis answered with confidence.

“Very well. You both must be off and remember that the moon’s blessing will always be with you.”

I waved goodbye to the Moon Goddess, already missing her holy presence. Artemis and I turned to the stairs waiting for our approach. Now, it was us against the world. The new dynamic duo. Each step we took descended us back down to a world full of suffering. A world full of prejudice, corruption, and malice. But, with Artemis at my side, and a newfound purpose, I knew we can overcome anything.

It would be hard to cope with all I’d gone through. That part I wasn’t excited about, but alas, there was nothing I could do to change it.

I must push forward.

Even though I didn’t want to.