

Chapter 11 – The Rebirth

“There comes a time in your life when you have to choose to turn the page, write another book or simply close it.” — Shannon L. Alder

Halima - Back on Earth

Babble and burble of a brook echoed in my ears, intermingling with the distant chirping of baby birds. The scent of mud and earth tickled my nose, slowly drawing my consciousness to the limelight. Pain seared throughout my body, my wet dress only adding to my agony. My eyelids lifted and my vision cleared to a small blue jay perched in front of me, peering at me curiously.

I was no longer in the Realm of the Moon Goddess. I was back on Earth. Unfortunately, I was cold, wet, and hungry, but I was alive. The blue jay flew away when I moved my head, retreating to its family up in the trees. My body jerked forward violently as I fell into a coughing fit, heaving river water out of my lungs. I pushed myself off the large rock, I was splayed over and looked around at my unfamiliar surroundings.

The mountains stood quietly in the distance, their sharp peaks blending with the cerulean sky. Stretching below were endless miles of lush green trees shielding my eyes from the orange sun on the horizon. Spots of gold light shone through the gaps of the leaves dotting the forest floor beneath my bony knees. Beside me was a riverbank lined with mud and greenery, staining the bottom hems of my raggedy dress. The diamond-clear water eroded the rocks in its under wash, carrying pieces of the earth downstream.

It took me a moment to realize just how far I'd drifted from Zircon Moon territory. The pack lived a distance away from the cliff, so it was no surprise that I wound up so far. I sniffed the air for a familiar scent,

but there was none. Nothing from Zircon Moon. I didn't sense a fellow wolf nearby. I was alone from all angles of the near-empty forest.

I was packless, mateless, and branded. I was officially a rogue, and I never felt so free.

The chains of my torment had finally broken, and the holder of my pain was far from my reach. I won't lie. It was scary being alone in an unfamiliar place. Anything could happen to me here. But that was the price I paid to be away from the disgusting pack I once called my own.

I steadily rose on my bare feet. The back of my head still pounded from its recent injury, and the slash on my shoulder blade still stung. Despite being alone in the physical, I knew I was not truly alone.

"*Artemis?*" I reached out through our mind-link. "*Are you there?*"

"**I'm here, Hali. We're back!**"

"*Yes, we are. But what are we going to do now?*" I asked, scared.

"*Selene sent us back, but now we have to fend for ourselves. Should I shift into you?*"

"**I don't think that's such a good idea,**" Artemis warned. "**Your body is very weak. Shifting might do more harm than good. We should find shelter.**"

She's right. Shifting might just send me back to Selene, and that'll defeat the purpose of sending me back here in the first place. I walked downstream along the river, wondering if it would lead me somewhere safe. While walking, I thought about what the Moon Goddess had said to me, that I have a purpose here on Earth. The memory of our conversation was fleeting, but I remembered clearly how warm she felt.

Her hugs. Her kiss on my forehead. Her touch alone made me crave more. Selene made me feel protected, like a child in the arms of their

mother. I'd forgotten what a mother's love felt like, and yet, Selene awoke those old feelings back from the depths of my memory. Would I ever feel that again? From someone else other than Selene?

Sooner than later, I spotted a gloomy-looking cave in the distance. It was small but secluded enough in the deep trenches of nature. I could only hope that it was empty. Walking toward it, I took in a deep whiff to detect any scents in the cavern. Luckily, I didn't smell another wolf or a bear.

It smelled of rocks and dirt.

I got on my knees and crawled inside the dark hole, wincing at the tiny pebbles pressing against my bruised flesh. It wasn't so bad once I cleared the dirt and rocks. The far corner of the cave could be where I sleep. It was far enough from the entrance. The ground wasn't the most comfortable, but maybe if I collected some leaves, I could make a makeshift pillow?

"*Well, this is it,*" I spoke to Artemis. "*This will be our new home for a little while.*"

"**It's unfortunate, but it is what it is.**" She answered back. "**I noticed a few squirrels around here. They can be our dinner for the time being.**"

I cringed at the thought of eating raw squirrel, but it was better than starving to death.

"**We will be okay, Hali. We just got to brave the weather. Who knows? Maybe something good will come out of this.**"

"*Maybe.*" I hugged my knees to my chest, ignoring the chill that blew through my wet dress.

Whatever 'good' was coming out of this better come soon.

