

Chapter 15 – The Friend

“Courage isn’t having the strength to go on – it’s going on when you don’t have strength.” - Napoleon Bonaparte

Nikolai

I never thought I’d hear about the Zircon Moon Pack again. Unfortunately, there was a dark history between Jonathan and me with a fractured alliance between our packs. Our friendship shattered and we went about our ways. We’ve never been the same since. The last I spoke to Jonathan Prince was to give my condolences for the loss of his mate and daughter eight years ago.

Now, he reentered my life through a broken and abused pup. Never in my life would I’ve expected Jonathan to stoop so low as to torture one of his own, and a girl at that. How far had this man fallen?

I’m in my office at my desk, gazing out the window in deep thought as Lyra took her seat next to me. It had been a day since Halima arrived on my territory and to my surprise, she had agreed to stay. There was no chance in hell I was sending her back to Zircon Moon, especially with the news my mate revealed about her history. I was tempted to give the ol’ bastard a call to give him a piece of my mind, but a hand on my shoulder from Lyra convinced me not to.

It was better to not let them know that Halima is still alive. They would surely force us to give her back and thus, take her to her execution. Casting the Mark of the Betrayer on her was unjust, it only serves to prologue her suffering until her death.

Losing your Luna and your daughter at the same time I’m sure was devastating. I’d surely fallen apart if I lost Lyra and Lyria, my daughter

in such a horrific way. However, subjecting a pubescent girl to almost a decade of slavery and mistreatment for it cannot and would not bring back their lives.

Then again, pain and anger could make people do unspeakable things completely out of their character.

“There is nothing we can do about Zircon Moon.” I say to Lyra. “I don’t know how long it has been since Halima abandoned her pack, but what I do know is I rather keep her here, safe and alive. You say she’s a white wolf?”

“Yes, that is what she told me.”

Simply put, white wolves are avatars of our precious Moon Goddess. They hold a lot of power and are destined for greatness. “Teresa says it’s too dangerous for her to shift, given her current state. Only when she’s healthy enough, can she shift again.”

“It is a crime to abuse a child, but Jonathan has allowed the abuse to persist. Selene’s avatar should be protected, not broken.” I sighed, pinching the bridge of my nose. “I don’t think I would ever understand how he could raise his hand to protect his pack and use that same hand to strike an innocent pup.”

“A wolf without his mate is not a pretty sight, an Alpha even more so,” Lyra explained, taking my hand into hers. A wolf who loses their mate doesn’t differ from a feral wolf. They lose their sanity. Many commit suicide after the loss. Some lucky ones were granted a second chance mate, but those who don’t grow mad over time. A mate was not just their destined lover, but the other half of their soul. Mates complete one another. And to rub salt in the wound, he lost his daughter. I sympathize with my former friend. That pain does not go away. However, that’s no excuse to hurt someone else.

That pain was an endless cycle where no one wins. Everyone perishes at some point.

Taking Lyra's hand to my lips, I gave the supple skin on the back a soft kiss. "Yes, that is true. I hope one day he could see the errors of his actions." Leaning my head back, I focus on more pressing matters. "So, have you picked the colors for Anthony's ceremony?"

"Yes! We both finally agreed on blue and silver after much debate." My beloved chuckled, her smile was contagious. "Lyria tried to convince him to go darker, but he insisted on having colors that best represent our Moon Goddess."

"Ah, how thoughtful." I smiled. It was time for Lyra and me to step down from our roles as Alpha and Luna. Since Anthony is our oldest child, the Alpha title will pass to him as opposed to his younger sister Lyria. But regardless, Lyria still had much command because of her Alpha blood. Now that Anthony had found his mate, it made the process that much rewarding. "Has Halima's room been set up?"

"Cleo notified me that it was ready for whenever she's released from the pack hospital."

"Excellent."

Several hard knocks sounded through my office. "Enter." My Beta, Alan Seals, walked through the threshold, stolid like a marbled statue, lips at a thin line on his ebony face.

"Alpha. Luna." He bowed to the waist. "Alpha Amari from the Cerulean Moon wishes to discuss negotiations regarding the unoccupied land between our territories. He is due to arrive on our territory next week."

"Very well. We will prepare for his arrival before then. Anything else?"

“Yes.” Alan crossed his arms. “Word has gotten around that we have a newcomer. And she’s a rogue?”

“Yes.” Lyra nodded. “She’s very...fragile. Normally, I’d ask if you could send Jacqueline over to cheer her up and get her acclimated, but I’m not sure it’s wise to do it now.”

“Oh...” Beta Alan’s stoic demeanor broke, running his hand through his coiffed black hair as his smile feigned nervousness. “She’s on her way there now.”

Halima

I couldn’t believe that I have a goddamn tube down my nose.

After failing to hold down the small breakfast the hospital was kind enough to give me, Dr. Nava suggested a feeding tube. I’ve lost too much weight, so this was the alternative.

The insertion of the feeding tube was uncomfortable. I coughed several times as the tube slid down from my nose to my throat and finally my stomach. It was violating, but it had to be done. Desperate times called for desperate measures.

During rounds, the doctors and nurses checked up on me, from changing my IVs to drawing more blood to helping me get to and from the bathroom. Despite being in a foreign place, I felt safe. Everyone here was doing their best to take care of me, although I still feel that I don’t deserve it. I feel like a burden on the medical staff.

Right now, I was reading from a stack of magazines the nurses were so kind to give me. I’ve seen the women in Zircon Moon read these, but I never had the chance to. The magazines were about the latest fashions, healthy food recipes, expensive perfume, and jewelry. The human

women who modeled in the expensive clothing were tall, had beautiful hair, baby faces, and unblemished skin. Humans were picky about who they premiere as their best models to attract the attention of the consumers.

I look down at myself, trying to pinch a tiny flab of fat only to be met with bone and tight skin. The women were skinny, for sure, but they had a healthy amount of fat on them. Their bones weren't showing like how mine is. They look like actual women while I was a skeleton with a flesh suit.

I wondered if I'd ever be beautiful like them.

While reading, an unfamiliar scent hit my nose. Orange blossoms? I look up from my magazine to see a girl, not much older than me, leaning against my door with her arms crossed. She wore a black tank top with tight blue denim shorts. She was about a shade darker than me with black kinky hair tied in two large puffs. Her eyes were emerald green and her full lips were glossy. She gave me a knowing smile.

She's pretty!

"I wouldn't read that trash if I were you." The mysterious girl commented. "Humans are so superficial. Everything is air-brushed. Besides, there's no one darker-complected in any pages of those. Imagine what kind of message they are sending to young girls who look like us."

I didn't reply, but she took that as an invitation to grab a seat next to me. "You're the newcomer I heard about, right?"

I nodded slowly, eyeing the girl suspiciously while setting my magazines on my lap.

"Well, I'm Jacqueline Seals, you know, like the sea animal? But call me Jackie! Daughter of Beta Alan Seals, twin to Dwayne Seals, who is

currently having his ass handled by the Deltas.” She offered her hand, but when I stared at it, she retracted. “Not much of a talker, huh? Well, that’s fine! I’ll do the talking for us!”

Good, because I forgot how to talk. Her extrovert personality was intimidating.

“I’m sure our Alpha and Luna have told you about how Garnet Moon is full of warriors and blah blah blah. But!” I jumped at her loud voice.

“We may look tough and scary, but we’re friendly! Most of us, anyway. You’ll notice some humans around because they are mates to a lot of our wolves. We have a lot of investments and businesses around California, so we never run out of money. Are we rich? To human standards. My family runs a business selling natural hair and skin products down in San José. See?”

She suddenly propped her bare leg up on my bed, showing off her silky-smooth brown skin. “I just shaved! See how my skin just glistens under these drabby fluorescent lights? Touch it!”

I stared wide-eyed at the girl, then to her glistening leg. “U-Uh, I rather not...”

“Ah, so she speaks!” Jackie cackled as if it was the funniest thing she’s ever heard. “That trick gets them speaking every time! If a weird girl told me to touch her leg because she just shaved, I’d say something too. Or would I?”

“**This girl talks too much.**” Artemis spoke, drawing my attention away.

“**Her wolf is excited. I can hear her yipping and jumping.**”

“*She seems nice.** Her scent is lovely*.” I replied, my lips forming a small smile. “*I had no one this excited to talk to me before.*”

“I know that look in your eyes! You’re talking to your wolf, right?” I blinked in shock, nodding to answer her. “I wonder what she’s like. My

wolf, Rosaline, can be nice most of the time. But believe me, I'm sure when the Moon Goddess was making her it went like this." She acted as if she had saltshakers in her hands. "A bit of sugar, some spice, and a dash of everything nice, like the Powerpuff Girls. But, let us not forget the most important ingredient! A heaping handful of BITCH!"

"Jacqueline." We looked at Luna Lyra standing at my door, now wearing a floral blue dress. She was frowning, giving Jackie a silent warning as a deep sigh escaped her mellow pink lips. "Watch your language around our guest. She just got here yesterday, and we don't want to scare her."

"Who says I'm scaring her?" Jackie looked at me, offering me the biggest puppy dog eyes she could muster with her bottom lip pursed and quivering. "Am I scaring you?"

"N-Not really?"

"See!"

"Did you use that leg trick again?"

"Works every time!" Jackie's smirk gave way to her oozing confidence and mischievousness. I couldn't help but stare in awe at her beauty and strength. She was not afraid to be herself and judging by the slight indentation of muscles in her arms, she was one hell of a fighter too.