

Untouchable (The Moonlight Avatar Series Collection)

Chapter 23 The Bonding

“Being a family means you are a part of something very wonderful. It means you will love and be loved for the rest of your life.” – Lisa Weed

Third Person

Halima pushed open the mahogany double **doors**, taking **her** first steps into the Garnet Moon assembly hall. Immediately, she was overwhelmed by the boisterous volume of excited conversations muddling in the energetic atmosphere. Her deep brown eyes scanned the hall from the stage to the last tables, everything decorated with some shade **of** blue and silver, reminding her of **Selene’s** aesthetic months **ago**. Unlike the decorations, every member dressed in an assortment of colors that would rival the rainbows after a **rainy** day. For **once**, she was taking part in an event versus **working** behind **the** scenes. It made her happy yet scared at the same time.

“How long **are** you going to stand there?” Artemis asked impatiently. The human didn’t hold the same amount of excitement her wolf did.

“I don’t know where to sit! Every seat is taken!” Halima retorted, clutching her glittered purple purse tighter. **She** was **nervous**. She was in a room full of happy strangers while she **stood** awkwardly. However, in a flash, **her** eyes spotted the Alpha table near the front, noticing Luna Lyra waving her down with a beaming smile. Relief rushed over her like a hurricane as she trotted

towards the table. Immediately, Halima was engulfed in a hug **from** Lyra, embracing her **face** against her **bosom**, almost suffocating.

“Mija, you look beautiful!” Pulling the girl out of the hug, Lyra cradled her cheek. She wore a deep red dress that complimented and hugged **every** curve she had, her hair neatly curled to perfection rested **on** her back **and** her gold jewelry jingled with every movement she made. “I’m so happy you’re able to join us.”

Heat flushed in Halima’s brown cheeks from being called beautiful. She wanted to reject that **statement** but couldn’t find the words to say so. A squeaky “Thank you.” were the only words that escaped from her embarrassment. She took **a** quick look **around** the Alpha table to **see** the mated couple, Anthony **and** Alesia, in matching ensembles of white and blue, Lyria dressed in a **simple** yellow two-piece **dress**, **and** Nikolai adorning a black suit with a red tie that matched his mate’s attire. They all look like the picture-perfect, powerful family and she felt like an awkward bird that fell into the wrong territory.

“**You** look lovely.” Nikolai rose out of his seat to give the girl a hug which she gratefully accepted. “How **are** you feeling?”

“I’m alright,” Halima replied with a curt nod. “This is the first passage ceremony I’ve taken part in, **so** I’m curious to **see** how it goes.”

“There is nothing much to it,” Lyria commented. “People say a few things, bonding happens, we eat, and then **we have** a bonfire—the best part of the celebration! You **have** to come to that.”

Halima beamed with excitement, expecting a good night. “So, where do I sit? I don’t **see** an empty seat anywhere.”

“I think two people already made a spot for you.” Following Alesia’s line of sight, the girl spotted Jacqueline madly waving her down, patting a **chair** next to her while Dwayne pinched the bridge of his nose in

frustration.

It made sense, Halima had Beta blood, so she should sit at the Beta table. Bidding the Alpha family goodbye, she walked towards her designated seat. Jacqueline leaped to hug her, yanking her down to her chair.

“You came!” Jackie cheered. “Now the entire pack is here!”

“I’m not part of the pack, yet. You know this!” Halima corrected. “But, I’m glad to be here, anyway.”

“You know,” Dwayne spoke, glaring at his sister. “You should have a little more dignity. You’re about to become this **pack’s** Beta. Waving like a madman would draw the wrong attention.”

“No one likes a stiff neck.” Jackie shrugged, smoothing out her black dress. “I can do my job and have fun at **the same time.**”

Dwayne rolled his eyes. Halima chuckled and looked to the adults at the table, Violet and Alan Seals. She met Alan a couple of days ago when he was finishing up a meeting with Alpha Nikolai. She liked him and admired his firmness with his children. Especially Jackie when she goes off the rails.

“It looks like my products are doing your hair justice.” Violet smiled proudly. “Your hair is lively and growing well.”

“Yes, and I can’t thank you enough for it.” Halima felt proud that her hair was finally getting itself back to normal. With the amount of abuse it endured, she thought it was hopeless. But, with Violet’s help and expertise, it had become healthier in two months than it had in **years**. Plus, the smell of the products brought her boundless joy. Her eyes darted to the stage where the elders finished setting the ritual table, chalices, and ceremonial daggers. She noticed a pure white chalice and dagger for the passaging Lunaship. “What are they for?”

“The passage ritual.” Beta Alan explained. “We pass the torch through blood, so our Moon Goddess recognizes the new successors.”

“Ah.” Halima didn’t recognize the items as an integral part of the ceremony, but it interested her.

“Speaking of which, it looks like it’s time to begin the ceremony.” Beta Female Violet pointed out as Nikolai and Lyra rose out of their seats. Beta Alan and **Gamma** Ahmed followed shortly after to join their Alpha and Luna on stage, preparing to take a step down from their legacies.

Halima was in awe as she bared witness to the passage of power right before her eyes. Used to being on the sidelines, not by choice, it made **her** heart swell to take part in a once-in-a-lifetime ceremony. She watched Anthony assume the role of **Alpha**, Alesia assumed her role as Luna, Jacqueline and Dwayne **as** Co-Betas, and All as the new **Gamma**. She could feel Selene watching over the sacred ritual, giving her blessings for the new generation. It made her happy to the point a lone tear fell down her cheek. Artemis, deep within her, was elated at the sight, ecstatic to be a witness to her new friends assuming their rightful roles.

Thundering applause and ear-piercing cheers erupted throughout the assembly hall. Each member feeling their bond grow stronger and that new, young blood would lead them on the path of righteousness. Garnet Moon was a powerful and formidable pack, their power was not to be trifled with foolishness. It took **a** great deal of strength, courage, and honor to lead one of the most powerful packs in America. Halima saw her friends in a new light, a light cast by the Moon Goddess herself. She joined in on the **applause**, grinning with pride. They will lead with greatness. **She** could feel it deep within her heart.

But the ritual was not over yet. Unbeknown to Halima, there was something else planned for the second part of the ritual that involved her. **Anthony, now** Alpha Anthony, walked towards the podium and used the power in his Alpha voice to calm the pack down of their mini celebrations.

“We are not done yet, my friends.” Alpha Anthony announced, grasping at Luna Alesia’s hand lovingly. “There is one more thing that must be done before the Great Feast. Many of you have come to us for aid, for a home, and we welcomed you with open arms. Whether you were born into Garnet Moon, or have joined ritualistically, you are family. We all are composed of many species and we work harmoniously together. strengthen and better this pack. Our strength does not lie in our numbers, but in our honor and compassion for one another. But not everyone here is bonded with us, and we need to change that.”

His eyes turned to Halima, sitting next to Beta Female Violet at their table, “Halima Lane, would you please come to the stage?”

“WHAT?” Both she and Artemis screamed Internally. Anxiety racked her body, her heart raced and sweat accumulated around her body, glancing a pleading look at Violet, the girl a prideful and loving smile, as if she knew what was about to happen. Halima felt dozens upon dozens of eyes focused on her, making her the center of attention—The role she hated the most.

“Go on, dear,” Violet whispered, grasping her hand. “The Alpha is waiting.”

“I don’t think I can do this...”

“Here.” A pale hand stuck out to her, warm and inviting. Halima looked up to see the girl the hand belonged to. Golden, curly hair cascaded down her shoulders, eyes electric blue, skin void of any blemishes, and in a deep blue dress that hid every curve underneath its veil. **Glancing** back at Violet once again, she took the blonde’s hand, allowing her to gently pull her up on her shoes.

“It isn’t so bad.” The girl whispered to her as they approached the stage. This is a very special time, and you’ll see why.”

“Um...okay.”

“I’m Sapphire.” The **blond** smiled. They both walked up the steps to the group of high-**ranking** werewolves. “I hope we **can** become friends.”

“**Sure!**” Sapphire left Halima to them, bowing to her Alpha politely before returning to her seat. Everyone wore wide smiles, which **made** the girl arch an eyebrow. “**What’s** going on here, **everyone?**”

“Well, I **was** informed **a couple** of days back **that you** want to join Garnet Moon,” Anthony spoke.

“That’s right.” Halima nodded.

“**Well, we will** make it official. Tonight.”

Halima gasped, jumping at the crowd clapping for her. Her eyes swelled with unshed **tears that** threatened to fall **when** Jackie encompassed her in a hug. **She** expected the bonding ritual but didn’t expect it to happen on the night of the passage ceremony.

“I-I couldn’t!” She shook her head. “Tonight is your night. I don’t want to take that away from you.”

“You’re selfless by default, an admirable trait.” Alesia giggled, cradling one of Halima’s hands in her own. aren’t taking attention away from us. We’ve done our part. It’s time for yours.”

“You guys...”

Everyone except Halima **and** Anthony took a step back, to **give** them enough room to complete what they must do. Anthony raised his right hand **that** now **donned** the **Alpha** Ring, and his left gripped the ceremonial dagger. It’s such a big step for Halima, but she was ready to leap. Swallowing **down** her fears, she took her spot in front of the Alpha and raised her right hand to match his stance.

“Halima Zira Lane.” Anthony began. “Your request to join the Garnet Moon Pack has been **accepted** and acknowledged. By standing here today, you will

honor the **pack** as your own. You are to pledge your loyalty to **Gamet** Moon, stand for and with your fellow **pack** members, and honor your community with your heart and soul. Upon joining, you will be bound to **all** of Garnet Moon and proudly wear your **Pack Mark** with honor **and** humility. You and your wolf will be family, and with family **you** honor yourself. Do you accept?"

Halima gathered all the confidence she could muster, she gave a firm nod. "I accept this honor and pledge my allegiance to Gamet Moon from now to the day I pass."

She winced **when** Anthony cut through her palm, but the **pain** quickly subsided. After cutting his palm, the two joined hands and squeezed, their blood intermingling as it dripped in the **Alpha** Chalice. Immediately, Halima could feel the livelihood of Garnet Moon flow through her veins. She felt connected with every **pack**. member, each welcoming her into their family. The blood bubbled and misted into silver wisps, rising into the clear air.

Selene **had** accepted their offering.