

Chapter 27 – The Truth

“There are so many things that I want so badly to tell you, but I just can't.” — Nina LaCour, Hold Still

Neron

After the fiasco at my ceremony five years ago, I’ve learned that Halima had jumped off the treacherous cliff, five stories to her death. She accepted my rejection and ended her life. The soldiers spent weeks scouring the river below our territory for her corpse, but it was never found as if she disappeared in thin air.

I was elated back then. I broke our bond, so I felt nothing. I didn’t have to worry about someone I’ve considered worthless. Sure, I was pissed at Kwame for body-slamming me, the Alpha, in my ceremony, but I felt free. Free from the burden of housing someone my father and I believed is responsible for the death of my mother and sister.

I blamed her for everything. For leading my sister out to the pond against permission, forcing my mother to look for them, and forgetting about the rogue sightings her father warned about. For not mind-linking anyone about the disaster, not holding onto my sister tight enough, and for not screaming loud enough for the help.

Oh, how quickly love could turn into bitter hate.

I blamed Halima for being ignorant and irresponsible. Everyone did. We, collectively, believed she deserved the abuse she got. It is our own twisted way of exacting justice for our fallen Luna and her daughter. She was guilty in my eyes. She was nine and knew right from wrong. And I believed her selfishness caused their deaths.

But it didn't.

The Gamma Family had been working secretly on Halima's exoneration, working day in and day out to track the bastard responsible for killing my mother and sister. It was only three years ago when the spikes of rogue attacks first began, that was when I was smacked with the truth.

The Rogue King, he called himself, though I knew him better as Uncle Zain, was infuriated with my father for being given the Zircon Moon pack, even though Zain was the eldest son. My uncle was considered unfit to rule and the title was passed over him to my father. Enraged, my father's elder brother set out, breaking his bond with the Zircon Moon pack and plotted revenge ever since. I suppose he finally got what he wanted after so many years of waiting.

We hunted him down like the mutt he was, not without difficulty from his hounds from hell. Upon his capture, he confessed to slaughtering my mom and sister with a smile as big as the planet itself. He laughed right in my face, at my father's face. He sniggered at the fact that it unintentionally liberated him from all crime and was smart enough to cover his tracks.

"All I had to do was wipe the blood on that stupid child, and then I was free!" I had to avert suspicion away from me, and why not make the child look responsible? *Amazing how things turned out, huh?"*

That comment haunted me since that day. Even after my father snuffed his life out in revenge. It forced me to face the truth that Halima isn't the one responsible. It was that monster who placed the blame on her.

How many more wolves did he kill? How many died because of our negligence?

We broke Halima because of him. We all maimed, tortured, and starved her because of his crimes. We all killed the soul of the Beta's youngest daughter without a second thought. We all hold responsibility for how

we treated an innocent pup because we were too deep in our grief to see the truth.

But I...I'm the true criminal here. I've beaten her, starved her, and marked her for death. I marked my mate for death because I was blinded with anger and grief. I rejected our mate bond and chose another she-wolf over her, just to see her suffer.

And I pushed her to suicide. She jumped off that cliff because of me.

"I accept his rejection of our mate bond. May you all burn in hell."

I killed her. I killed my mate. No wonder Onyx hates me. We've lost the one person the Moon Goddess destined us to be with, and it's my fucking fault.

Big, red letters stamped diagonally on her file.

EXONERATED

The news of her innocence spread like wildfire amongst the pack. Much felt heavy remorse for their part while others didn't care. They were swiftly dealt with. But it hit her family the hardest. Raina's wailing could be heard for miles, Ashley lost all light in her eyes, and Steven shut everyone out. They were there that night to see Halima jump to her death. Nothing they said changed her mind.

How could it? We treated her like shit until she had enough. A werewolf kills themselves if they have nothing to live for, and with Halima, which couldn't be farther from the truth.

Her big, brown eyes haunt me in my dreams. The fear, the hopelessness, the loneliness—so many terrible emotions swam in those eyes. We, as a community, put that terror in her and I smiled back then, relishing in it. But in my dreams, they torture me to no end. Sometimes, she would speak to me, asking me why I did what I did to her.

Did I have an answer? I didn't. In every nightmare, she died, and I couldn't save her. The pack had everything while she had nothing. She was alone and she died alone.

The picture in her file is the last photo taken of her as a joyful child. Bright brown eyes sparkling, her cute lips widening into a big smile, her brown skin rich with life, and curls bouncy like springs. It is the only photo I had left of her. It fills my memories with not her beauty, but her brokenness.

I hate myself every day for what I did to her. I ruined the one thing the Moon Goddess blessed me with: a mate. My other half. The yin to my yang. My soulmate. My eternal lover. Rarely does she grant second chance mates, and I highly doubt she would grant one to this stupid dog.

But even so, I pray. I pray for forgiveness. I pray for redemption. What I've done is inexcusable. I deserved to be punished with the broken mate bond, never to rekindle again. I could never have my true Luna or the love that all werewolves yearn for. This is the Moon Goddess's way of punishing me for hurting one of her children.

I shut the folder, settling it back on my desk. Hot tears pricked my eyes as my heart pounded madly in my chest. It hurt so bad. It hurts every time I think about Halima and her final days. But I needed to stop focusing on her. she was dead and never coming back. I hope she is happy in heaven with my mother and sister.

Expelling a deep breath, I blink back my tears, shaking away those thoughts as I pick up the phone sitting at my desk, dialed a number. This was an enormous bruise to my ego, but my pack needed help with these fucking rogues, and I cannot afford to lose anyone else. No mate or family deserves the heartbreak of losing a loved one.

“Alpha Anthony speaking.”

“Alpha Anthony, this is Alpha Neron from the Zircon Moon Pack. I request an audience with you to discuss potential aid.”

Kiya

The guards hate us. We rolled to the front gates, screeching at the top of our lungs, shooting finger guns at them. Their looks of annoyance and indifference only made 3/4ths of us laugh while Darien is a hair away from blowing a wolf gasket. I’ve never seen his face get so red! Then again, we haven’t pushed his buttons far enough.

In five minutes, we arrived at the garage, now doubled in size to accommodate the number of cars we have. We ceased our awful singing and unloaded the suitcases from the back, one dropping on Galen’s foot.

Everyone in the yard had to wonder if we brought home a screaming seal.

Walking towards the packhouse, I took in a deep breath of air. Earth’s perfume along with delicious food wafting from the packhouse is nostalgic. A smile broke out on my face, excited to be back home with my family for the summer.

“Nothing’s changed,” Sapphire spoke, eyes darting across the territory. “Nothing except the leaves are full of color.”

“We’ve only been gone for the spring semester,” I remarked. “The last time we were here, snow blanketed the grounds. Now, I could hear the pups in the pool behind the house.”

We passed by the training grounds, ducking quickly when a warrior went flying above us. The shirtless wolf landed on the ground hard, holding the small on his back.

Poor guy!

His whimpers nearly tugged on my heartstrings until a familiar voice bombarded the surrounding air.

“And that’s what you get for underestimating my mate, you dirty mutt!”

My head quickly jerked to see the culprit who punted the wolf-like a football. Her scent of orange blossoms kissed my senses, widening the smile present on my face. Flaunting in black leggings and a sports bra, the woman’s emerald eyes lit up when she saw me. Immediately I dropped my items, leaping into her arms with my arms and legs locked around her waist.

Chapter 28 – The Welcome

“It is a smile of a baby that makes life worth living.” - Debasish Mridha

Kiya

“Damn! If you missed me this much, I should visit more often!” Jackie chuckled, returning the hug as tight as she could. My first best friend, she was looking amazing as ever. Now sporting braids instead of her usual two-puff style, I hopped off her body and smirked.

“Then these types of hugs won’t happen as often as you like.”

She pursed her bottom lip. “You wouldn’t stop, would you?”

“Don’t try that pouting shit on me.” I giggled, hugging her again. “I’ll miss you, regardless. I have so much to tell you.” I pointed my head at the fallen wolf who is dusting off his ego. “What happened here?”

“Idiot had this misconstrued idea that humans shouldn’t be training to be warriors.” The Beta rolled her eyes and scoffed. “Talking shit is one thing, trying to talk shit about my little butterfly is another thing.”

“I appreciate you stepping in to defend my honor, my love.” Abigail walked over and planted a soft kiss on Jackie’s cheek, instantly relaxing her. She, too, sported bright blue leggings with a white tee, harboring sweat spots on the back. “But there was no need to toss him into the air like that.”

Jackie growled low, wrapping her muscular arm around her mate’s waist, pulling her closer. “He had it coming. I cannot sit by and watch others insult you under my presence. You deserve the highest honor as my Beta Female.”

“But did you have to throw him so high?”

“I could go higher.”

I snorted, taking a step away from the scene as soon as Jackie began snacking on Abigail’s lips. They were so cute! But I agree with Abi, if we need our warriors in their best, Jackie needed to stop hurdling them in the air.

I’m sure you could only do that with babies, but at least you catch them right after.

Speaking of babies...

“Ti!” A tiny voice called out to me as I got closer to the house with my luggage. The other three went ahead without me. A noticeably short pup with curly brown hair, tanned skin, and big golden eyes wearing a pink onesie slowly crawled down one step at a time before waddling fast to where I was.

“Ximey!” Kneeling, I give my tiny niece a big hug, lifting her in my arms. “You’re cute as a button, my darling. Where’s your Mommy?”

“House!” Ximena pointed her short, chubby finger to the entrance. The moment I walked in, I was hugged tightly from the side, the smell of raspberries and sugar invading my nose.

“You’re back!” Alesia smiled widely at me. “It’s wonderful to see you, Kiya. How was your trip?”

“It was all right.” I walked with my Luna deeper into the foyer. “It was long, but Galen made it much better.”

“Did he sing?”

“Oh, yeah.”

We laughed, heading up the stairs as Ximena’s fingers got into an entanglement with my curls.

Luna Alesia helped settle my suitcases and bags in my room. “How’s Anthony?”

“Good, all things considering.” Alesia sighed. “He is in his office. He has been in contact with many Alphas from packs to send and ask for help with the recent spike in rogue attacks.”

“That bad, huh?”

She nodded. “It’s stressing the both of us out. Nothing like this has happened before, and it’s bothering him. It’s as if these mutts were getting smarter with their moves.”

“Well, he’s sending help where it’s needed, so that’s a good thing, right?” I asked as we head to said office. “Darien told me many soldiers and warriors are returning from their assignments.”

“Yep, and it brings us relief that we have enough to send out and to protect us on our lands. They’re showing great promise and many packs

are appreciative in us helping them out, including relocating displaced families.”

“They’re always welcome here.” I smiled, tickling my finger underneath my niece’s chin. In excitement, she yanked my hair once. “Ow!”

For a two-year-old, she definitely has her Dad’s strength!

Before Ximena could yank out more locks of my hair, the three of us arrived at Anthony’s office. It sounds like he was finishing up a call when he allowed us to enter. The tiredness of his eyes disappeared instantly when his hazel eyes landed on his family.

“Hey, lil’ sis!” He exclaimed, walking around his desk to give me a tight hug. The soon-to-be toddler squealed, leaning in sharply to join in on the group hug.

Taking my hair with her.

“Okay, ow! Ximey!”

“Pretty!”

Alesia quickly came over to unlock the tangles that woven around Ximey’s chubby fingers, only to have Ximey put her hands back in my hair again. What about my hair intrigues babies so much? Like a big brother, Anthony chuckles at my discomfort.

“How cute! That Alpha strength is kicking in sooner than I thought.”

“Yeah but tell her to keep that strength out of my scalp.” I groaned, rubbing the sore spot where the baby loved to pull from.

“I’ll keep that in mind.” He smiled. “How was your semester?”

“That’s a very loaded question.” I took the seat in front of his desk, resting the two-year-old on my lap. Ximena took that as a sign to plump her head on my bosom. My boobs were large enough to be her pillows, as weird as it sounds. “But, that’s a story for another time. Are Mom and Dad around?”

“They would be in a week. They are vacationing in Hawaii.”

“I’m so jealous,” I smirk, ignoring Ximey’s pats on my chest. “How are you? The rogue attacks sound awful.”

Instantly, the exhaustion returned on his face. He leaned back in his big chair, rubbing his face. “They are. For the past month, I’ve been getting calls nonstop for help. I’ve been connecting with other Alphas from packs on the East Coast and the Midwest for their help in this calamity.”

The problem was more serious than I thought. My hand rubbed circles on my niece’s back. “I hear a few packs have fallen. Is there anything I could do to help you?”

Anthony looked at me for a long while, a warm smile creeping upon his face. “You’re too kind, Little Bit. But I have things handled from here.”

Suddenly, his face turned serious. The sudden change nearly gave me whiplash. “But there is something I want to tell you.”

Feeling the sudden tension in the air, I hold on to my niece a little tighter. Not sure why I did it, but I just have that sudden feeling of trepidation, something I haven’t felt in a long time. “What is it?”

“An Alpha just called me not too long before you arrived.” He began. “His pack has been receiving the worst brunt of rogue attacks and has requested to meet with me to discuss negotiations regarding aid.”

“Okay.” I nodded. “I don’t understand what that has to do with me.”

His eyes fell, worry and fear etched across his entire face. I've never seen him like this, and it worried me. Sensing the fear, Alesia went to her husband's side, holding onto his hand. I feel like Ximena could sense it too because she started whimpering.

I go into deep thought. Why would he tell me this? What Alpha—

No.

Oh, no!

Tell me it isn't who I think it is. Selene, please tell me this isn't true.

"Is it..." I whisper, my heart pounding at the coming response.

"Alpha Neron is coming here to speak with me."

Chapter 29 – The Anger

"Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart."
- Haruki Murakami

Kiya

This couldn't be happening.

My ex-mate is coming to Garnet Moon territory, *my home*. He is coming into my home to speak with my brother.

The mere thought of the man who helped ruin my life coming into my hearth and home boiled my blood. My anger pulsed in every cell in my body, lighting me up like a flame.

"Take Ximey away, please." I blurted, trembling in my seat. I didn't want my niece to see me in the dark depths of my anger. I don't want her to fear me. Understanding what is about to happen, Luna Alesia quickly

took her daughter from my arms and hurried out of the room, the door quickly shut behind her. I felt my Alpha's eyes on me, searing into my flesh as he watched my every move.

"Ki. I know this is coming as a shock to you."

"You think?" A growl rumbled deep in my chest. My anger isn't the only thing I could feel. I could feel Artemis's anger rivaling mine, destroying and reforming in her cellular make-up. The past had a funny way of showing back up when you least expect it. I thought I had this sorted out in therapy, but it is obvious I didn't.

I hate Zircon Moon with every fiber in my body. I hate every single person involved in my torture. I hated the Lanes. I hated the Omegas. I hated Odessa. I hated Jonathan. But above all, I hated Neron. The bastard who rejected and marked me for death. He was the monster who took pleasure in my pain, just like his old man. It took me five long years to get to where I am now, and his filthy ass will tap-dance across my home? My place of sanctity?!

Am I bitter? Yes. I have every damn right to be. They stole eight years of my life that I would never get back!

My anger is going off the hinges, slipping through the blocks I set on my powers. My fingers tremble as silvered light loops around each digit. My world suddenly becomes more vivid to where I could see the smallest specs of dust floating around the office. My eyes burn, knowing they're changing color as my heart pounded against my ribcage, desperate to keep up with the anger flooding my bloodstream.

I want to punch something. Hit something! I want to hit Neron in his fucking face!

"Kiya, control yourself!" His command didn't register in my mind. All I wanted is to cast Zircon Moon away from the place I call mine. I won't let them take anything else away from me!

Anthony ordered me to calm down again, this time using his authoritative Alpha voice. It is like I was doused with a bucket of icy water. I must get a grip. This won't help me or anyone. Sucking in deep, long breaths, I push my powers back to the depths of my mind and heart.

But my anger didn't disappear. It's still here, but less prominent.

"Are you really helping that bastard?" I asked him, "After everything he's done to me? After everything I've told you, you're going to help him?"

"He is a fellow Alpha whose pack is in danger. They recently suffered from rogue attacks that claimed the lives of countless soldiers and wolves. Their numbers are dwindling, and I promised to lend a hand to whatever pack that needs it."

"To hell with Zircon Moon, then! Let them all die!" I shouted at the top of my lungs, rising from my seat. "They don't deserve your help!"

Anthony glared at me with the force of a thousand suns, a deep rumble erupting from his chest. Instantly, I clammed up, realizing that I overstepped my boundaries by raising my voice at my Alpha. Deep within me, Artemis whined and bowed her head in submission. "You watch your tone when speaking to me, Kiya. I will not tolerate disrespect from anyone; not even you."

Gulping, I bowed my head. "Yes, Alpha."

"Alpha Neron is no friend of mine." He spoke. "I haven't forgotten what he did to you. No one has. However, as of now, he is a fellow Alpha who needs help and I'll welcome him into my territory to discuss negotiations on supply and soldier deployment."

He rose out of his seat, palms flat on his desk. "They need help, Kiya. This isn't about you. This is about the safety and security of the innocent pups and families at Zircon who potentially witnessed the loss of their

loved ones and mates. There are lives at stake here, and more than ever, we need to work together to fight this evil. I will not let you stop me from helping another pack and become the catalyst of innocent people dying when I could have done more to help them!”

I remained silent; my head still bowed as I soaked in his words. I couldn’t make eye contact with him because of my shame. Deep within my anger, I knew my big brother is right. He is one of the most selfless Alphas I’ve ever met—lending help to whoever needed it. Why wouldn’t he help Zircon?

Sometimes, I wish he was more selfish.

But the mere thought of my torturers finding me and dragging me back to my delayed execution terrified me. Underneath all this muscle, I was still a scared little girl. Scared that all my happiness would be taken away from me again.

“I’m sorry.” I croaked out, tears threatening to fall. “I don’t want them to know I’m here. I’m scared, Anthony.”

I heard footsteps, then felt warm fingers curl underneath my chin. He lifts my face to look at him again, this time his expression void of any earlier anger. “I know. And they won’t know you’re here. I won’t compromise your safety. To everyone but us, you’re dead, and it will stay that way. Do you want me to arrange for a place to stay outside of pack territory?”

I shake my head, tears sliding down my face. “No. I won’t let them push me out of my home. How long will they be here?”

“Only for the duration of our meeting, so it might take the entire day.” He answered honestly. That made the dam burst from my eyes. Choked sobs erupted from my throat, painful.

“Goddess, I’m so scared.” I was pulled into my brother’s arms, face buried in his clean black shirt. I felt weak. I felt pathetic. After all this big talk of not letting them rule over my life anymore, here I am terrified of their potential presence. I was a strong Delta, and I couldn’t even deliver.

“Shh...” He whispered in my ear, gently rocking me from side to side. “It’s okay. It’s okay. We’ll figure something out before their arrival. I promise.”

“I thought I was strong enough, Tony.” I whimpered, gripping onto his shirt tighter. “I thought I was better. I thought I was okay.”

“Trauma never fully goes away, Little Bit.” His hand caressed my hair, lulling me with his comfort. “Don’t get angry at yourself for reacting the way you did. You’re still healing. You’re still making progress. I’ve seen you blossom from a meek wolf to a fine warrior I’m proud to call my own.”

He pulled me away from his embrace to look at me directly in the eyes again. “You are not weak. You never were weak. You pushed through life against all odds. Few dare to move on and work on healing as you have. That is a testament to your strength, Kiya. You are strong, so strong. It’s okay to break down and cry. But never, ever let anyone take away what you worked so hard to accomplish.”

Sniffling, I wiped my tears with my palm, regaining my breath again. His words meant a lot to me. Even in the face of adversity, Anthony knew how to help me center myself again. My bond with him is strong. I nodded, my mind working on a plan for their arrival.

“When will they be here?”

“The day after tomorrow.”

“Okay.” I bit my lip. “That gives me one day to prepare.”

He smiled at me. “There is my little sis, already working on strategies. Have I told you how smart and adaptable you are?”

“Only about five hundred times.” I giggled, my negative emotions dissipating. “I’m sorry for yelling at you. I stepped out of line and insulted you by raising my voice.”

“Apology accepted.” He patted my shoulder. “Now, whatever plan you have, I wish you the best of successes. If you feel like things are too much, Little Bit, you find me and we will arrange something, okay?”

I nodded. “Of course.” I turn towards the door. Before I turned the knob, I looked back at my brother one more time. “Thank you for letting me know.” With a nod, I left the Alpha’s office without looking back.

The pain was so hard to forget. I have a life that I’ve always dreamed of having, but the pain was like a cockroach, when you thought you got rid of it, it always comes back. Reminders of what I’ve been through carved into my skin. Literally. Some of my scars would never fade, like the big one on my right shoulder blade.

Zircon Moon is a name I’ve tried so hard to bury. To burn out of my mind. Yet, five years later, it still had the power over me. And it pisses me off.

My anger is dangerous, and sometimes, it scares the hell out of me. Even during my therapy sessions, when it comes out, it’s like an uncontrollable geyser, incinerating everything in its wake. And this was when I didn’t have my powers to worry about.

Kudos to Mayra for teaching me skills on how to combat that anger, but there was just so much. It could morph into an unbridled rage. When I looked in the mirror while angry, I see a different person. It’s me, but with the ambition to destroy.

I wanted to destroy all that hurt me.

It burned me from the inside out, but it made me feel better at the same time. My anger motivated me to be better. I channeled my anger through training, fighting my way up the ranks to be the best Delta possible.

But anger is a double-edged sword. Anger triggers my powers to go crazy. It dances to a different tune, striking down all around it. It could hurt, maim, or even kill. That's a line I refuse to cross. I cannot take a life. I will not take a life.

That's the terrifying thing about anger. It made people do things they never thought they would do. Does this horrific desire to destroy make me like the monsters who hurt me?

Who am I?

Chapter 30 – The Encroachment

“Choices made, whether bad or good, follow you forever and affect everyone in their path one way or another.” — J.E.B. Spredemann

Kiya

Music played on my phone, filling my ears with notes of tranquility and pleasure. The eloquent tune of piano and violin playing in a harmonious, melodious tune. The magic of classical music is an antidote to my anger, its substantial power pushes the anger and darkness back where it belongs. It brings me back to the grips of reality, reminding me I am stronger. To not let my anger control me.

I control it.

Anthony was right. I'm still healing, and controlling my fury is part of the process. I must process it for my sake. I will not let Zircon Moon take control of my emotions or my sanity. I've come too far to let that all go to waste.

I called Mayra to schedule an appointment for tomorrow afternoon. I want to get this out of my system as soon as possible. It's the only thing I could do. That and disguise my scent for the time Neron and his crew are here.

Thank Goddess for Sapphire's Anti Spray. When the time comes for me to use it, it will make sure no one at Zircon can sniff me out.

If they do, then I'm dead. And it won't be by choice this time.

Today is the day Neron and other ranked werewolves arrive on the territory, and my anxiety has never been higher. They were to arrive within the next hour.

My stomach twisted and turned like it is making cartwheels on top of my intestines. My pounding heart didn't respond to my breathing exercises, and I couldn't stop sweating. Moving from my crossed-legged position on my bed wasn't possible because I couldn't move.

I couldn't stomach breakfast this morning. All I could think about is how those monsters could waltz into my home at any moment, so I skipped. Since then, I didn't leave my room. Hiding is all I could do to keep myself safe and to keep my identity a secret. To make sure no one from that pack knew I've been alive all this time.

I took great care to spray the Anti-Spray more generously on myself and around my room. If Neron tracks my scent and finds me, who knows what would happen? Mates could find each other with a simple sniff, even if they were ex-mates. He is older, stronger, and no doubt more strategic with his beatings. He could kill me this time around. The faint memory of his gigantic hands around my neck haunted my nightmares.

And those eyes. Those blue eyes that flickered to black. The beast had come out to play and I was his chew toy.

“He won’t find us,” Artemis reassured me. **“He will not take us back to that dreadful place. We’re protected by our pack and our friends, and they will fight for us.”**

“He can use his Alpha authority to take me back. I’m still a criminal of the pack and escaped my punishment. He will fight to have us executed.”

“I don’t doubt that might happen if we’re spotted.” My wolf sighed, resting her head in between her paws in my mind. **“But we’re safe. We’ll be in your room until they leave. We’ve taken every precaution possible. The only thing we can do is wait it out.”**

The rigidity of my body disappeared, allowing me to plop backward on my bed with a slight bounce. I hated hiding. I, normally, would not have a problem confronting my challenges, I did it with training, magic, school, classes, and everything else in between. But this problem I couldn’t confront. Because I was too fucking scared of my ex-mate.

A couple of knocks on my door startled me. I take two whiffs before opening to see Sapphire, Phoebe, and Olivia with their laptops and loads of food and snacks in their hands. I blinked once before a smile crept its way up my face.

“Soooo, are you going to let us in?” Olivia asked, shaking her bag of chips for emphasis. I giggled, allowing the girls into my room. She instantly plopped on my bed while the other two took their seats on the floor, using some of my pillows to cushion their rears.

“We heard you skipped breakfast, so we’re going to pig out.” Sapphire pulled out plates and utensils from her bags. “Zainab and Cleo made some chicken biryani to cheer you up.”

The smell of spices and chicken instantly made my mouth water. I love them so much more already! Chicken biryani is life!

My eyes dart to Olivia. “I thought you’re supposed to be with Dwayne at the meeting.”

“I am.” She nodded, grabbing a juice bottle. “But it doesn’t mean I can’t be with you until then!”

“You’re going through a tough time,” Phoebe whispered, her abnormal purple eyes giving me a sympathetic look. “We want to lessen the burden as much as possible.” She grabbed my hands and pulled me down to the floor. “You’re feeling stressed. The amplitude of your abilities is fluctuating.”

Phoebe, as the avatar of Hekate, could sense true emotions through skin-to-skin contact. She could read people like a book and guess things about people without knowing them. Her life hasn’t been easy as a witch, but I was proud to have her as my friend and magic teacher.

“Yeah, I’ve been working on that.” My eyes instantly lit up when served a plate of my chicken dish. The first bite melted in my mouth, and I involuntarily let out a deep moan. “This is so good. Zainab has to teach me how to make this.”

“See?” Olivia poked Sapphire’s shoulder. “Food makes the world go around.”

“We could also do a little training later.” The witch suggested. I agreed, wanting in as much training as possible. With my powers under control, I could focus better. I didn’t like the fact that Phoebe could detect the fluctuation in them because of my anxiety.

Within the hour, we’ve gone deep into watching a badly made erotic movie, criticizing the acting but praising the soundtrack. Our laughter and snorts echoed through the air in my bedroom, and soda bottles and cups littered the floor. It was a fun time where all of us bonded with each other. Olivia left a while ago to be with Dwayne, so it is just Phoebe, Sapphire, and me.

I wish I could say that the rest of the day continued like that. But, once Alpha Anthony mind-linked me, my heart stopped.

“*They’re here.*”

Neron

It was a five-hour drive from Zircon territory to Garnet territory. I’ve discussed with Alpha Anthony on the phone about forming an alliance that would help both our packs for the upcoming years. Garnet Moon is a formidable pack, and their requests for alliances from other packs were nothing short of plethoric. However, given the history between packs, it’s a shot in the dark to see if we would ever form an alliance.

But that does not mean I was not willing to try.

Anthony and I can change things. And I can only hope it’s for the better.

My eyes glanced at the redwood trees that passed by us in blurs. One could tell a lot about a pack by the abundance of a certain tree that guards their territory. Redwood trees symbolize wellness, safety, and longevity. Garnet Moon is known for its openness to refugees.

Zircon Moon is surrounded by Gambel Oak trees. Oak is universally symbolic of strength and morale. We are a powerful pack, but lately, I fear we were lacking in morale and it zaps my strength.

“You’re awfully quiet.” I could feel the smirk in Valerian’s voice. In the car with me were my Beta and Gamma, while one of my honored guards, Tristan, is our driver. “What’s on your mind, Nero? Rather be at home with our Luna?”

My eye twitched at the reference of Odessa as our Luna. Since the top three ranking wolves were out for the day, our work was temporarily

passed to our women. Well, mostly Beta Female Raina, since she had more competence than her best friend. And honestly? It is a breath of relief to get away from Odessa, even if it is for the day.

If I must listen to her complain about her hair one more time, I'll flip my desk.

"Planning on what to discuss with Alpha Anthony, if that's what you're looking for." I give my friend a pointed look. "Odessa can handle herself."

A loud snort was heard from Kwame, sitting at my side with his tablet in hand. His dreadlocks, now in a ponytail, rested on his shoulder. "Sure. With a couple of spa days and her keratin treatments, she'd be right as rain."

The car was soundproof with a barrier, so our driver couldn't hear our conversation.

"She's rough around the edges, but she's a good woman. She just needs a little push," I muttered back.

"You've been pushing for five years, and yet, she doesn't budge," Kwame responded with the coolness of a winter day. "She parades around, claiming the Luna title, but did nothing to earn it. She is in love with the title, not the responsibilities that come with it."

Since the beginning, Kwame never liked Odessa. In fact, he despises her but never shows it on his face. He once told me that she leaves a sour taste in his mouth. I understand that not everyone liked Odessa, but regardless, I still love her. She was my woman; flaws and all.

"How long would it take you to flesh an honorable Luna from a spoiled she-wolf?" Kwame suddenly asks, his eyes now on me. "You have yet to mark her. She cannot bear your pups until then, so what are you waiting for? Don't you want an heir to continue your legacy?"

Alphas could only bear pups with their true mates without a mark. But, if they do not have a choice but to mate with an unmated female, then she could bear his pups only after the marking. If I want Odessa to become my Luna and carry my children, I need to mark her.

But I don't have it in me, and Onyx refused to claim her as our mate. He still wanted and loved Halima.

And it fucking hurts.

"Just drop it." I retort with a warning growl. I didn't want to talk about this anymore, nor face the reality. Kwame backed off, but not without a huff. Valerian kept quiet, but I knew he had other things to say but decided against it.

I must get this situation sorted out after this meeting.