

Untouchable (The Moonlight Avatar Series Collection)

Chapter 3 – The Hate

“Don’t cry over someone who wouldn’t cry over you.” – Lauren Conrad

Neron

I whipped my head around to see my destined Gamma, Kwame, standing in the middle of the room with his arms crossed over his chest. Wearing his signature white shirt and black pants that brought out the mahogany-brown of his skin, his face contorted into one of annoyance. “Are you saying this just to save it from punishment?”

“I’m saying it because it’s the goddamn truth. I gave her, not *it*, the food. She hasn’t eaten in four days! If you want her to keep working, you need to feed her when she needs it, not when you feel like it.”

I looked down at the sobbing slave, already curled into a fetal position with its head guarded with its arms. I trusted Kwame for his honesty was his best trait. It didn’t mean I had to like it, though. Sucking in a deep breath, I stuffed my anger back below the dirt, catching a glimpse of my reflection in the window of my eyes return from black to blue.

Finally, I backed away from it. I would never understand why Kwame treated it differently from the rest of the pack. It wasn’t anything special. Growling, I walk towards Kwame, glaring deep into his dark eyes. He was one of the very few who didn’t cower at my authority.

“I’ll feed it whenever I feel like it, Kwam. Don’t interfere.”

“Fine.” He put his hands up in defense. “But if you bitch about your floors not being cleaned, and she keels over, don’t come crying to me.” With that, Kwame left, the pack members parting away from his path. The slave’s pained sobs have quieted down, but each hiccup only irritated my ears and heart. I hated the feelings it gave me. The spectators parted to make way for me, leaving the sorry thing behind.

I hated to admit it, but Kwame was right. If I expect the slave to continue to work, I must feed it. Nourish it, as he liked to put it. Something about feeding someone who brought nothing but pain and suffering just didn’t sit right with me. I hated that thing and wanted it dead, but its parents convinced me to keep it around, that the thing was better off maintaining the pack house in silence than buried underground. Hell, my Omegas didn’t seem to complain. Lead Omega Cassandra hated cleaning up after a bunch of dogs, anyway.

But Cassandra’s cooking never ceased to put a damper on my anger. After my encounter with the slave, she made sure that I was well-fed, courtesy of Odessa. I worked up quite an appetite. However, that appetite diminished by a couple thousand when I walked into the main room to see Valerian, my best friend and destined Beta, already having his breakfast.

Raina sat on his lap as he licked crumbs off her l*ps. I understood they were mates but come on! People eat here! Clearing my throat, the two stopped kissing. “Can’t you take that shit to the bedroom? I like to eat in peace.”

“Normally, yes. But we got a lot of work to do for the ceremony tonight.” Valerian chuckled; his arm locked tight around his lover’s hips. His green eyes never left Raina’s brown. “Could I at least have a little sneak preview of the dress you would wear tonight?”

Raina giggled. “No! Why spoil the surprise?”

“But I hate surprises.”

“Too bad.” Her hand reached over and picked up his plate of food. “Enough talk. You need to eat, honey.”

“You or the pancakes?”

A deep crimson blush rose in Raina’s cheeks. “Well...”

“That’s it. Out!” I did the shooing motion with my hand and the couple left with their plates in a gaggle of high-pitched laughter. I was happy that Valerian and Raina turned out to be mates. Val had been pining for her since he first moved here with his parents. As a bonus, Beta Steven was already looking at Val to be his successor, admiring his strength and humility. There was no one else more fitted to be his daughter’s mate. One look at them and one could tell that they fit so well with each other, the perfect blend of light and dark.

I wondered how long it would take Valerian to notice the tiny scent growing in Raina’s belly.

After breakfast, I helped my father to complete the final details for the ceremony. By the mid-afternoon, the Omegas and other pack members had decorated and organized the assembly hall with the help of Beta Female Ashley, standing in place for my mother. The wafting scent of the dinner prep encompassed the pack house, along with the pungent mixture of perfumes.

It made my nose itch.

Despite it all, preparation went smoothly. The ceremony was to happen the minute the full moon rises at 8:30 PM. That was tradition. The Passage of the Alpha ceremony must happen on the night of the first full moon when the future Alpha was twenty-one years old. Standing in front of my mirror in my clean and pressed black and white suit, I couldn’t help but feel nervous about what was coming. This was the day I take over the mantle as the Alpha, and the entire pack would witness me become their new leader. Historically, there have been a handful of times that outsiders or rogue attacks disrupted the ceremony, but I pray to the Moon Goddess that tonight goes off without a

hitch. My hair laid gently on my broad shoulders, framing my face. The reflection of my eyes pierced deep into my soul as if I was staring down Onyx himself.

“This is it.” I heard him say. **“Are you ready to claim the crown? I sure as hell am.”**

“I’m ready, don’t worry. This would be a night both of us would remember for a long time.”

“Lest we agree on something. Let us make our pack proud.”

Yes. Let us make Zircon Moon Pack the proudest of them all.

Halima

The water pressure was too low. The water was too cold.

There wasn’t enough soap. The unscented bar would disappear in two washes.

There was so much dirt all over me. Much I couldn’t seem to get rid of.

I didn’t have a loofah or shower puff. All I had were my hands and nails to wash me.

I’ve heard that humans treated their pet dogs better than this. They were just as part of their family as their children were. Hell, they considered some to be their children. Yet, I’m treated less than what a domestic dog deserved.

The icy water fell on me from the garden hose attached to the ceiling, doing nothing to cool the stinging on my face. Neron’s slaps were powerful, like being hit in the face with bricks. Who knew something as small as an empty

plate near me would be enough to set him off? I should've been more careful. I deserved this. I should've taken that plate back to the kitchen in the middle of the night. I was so damn careless, and I got punished for it.

The freezing water slides down my frail body, my involuntary shivers rattling me to the core. I couldn't remember the last time I got a warm shower. Nothing could warm me these days, not even the sun itself. The cold water glided over my wounds and cuts, sizzling underneath its chill. I hissed. The chill was supposed to make the pain go away, not exacerbate it.

I could only hope Kwame didn't get reprimanded further for feeding me. He didn't need to do that. He got nothing out of feeding me, so why put himself on the line with his best friend? The way he looked at me in the hall—that look of pity and indifference. His only reasoning for feeding me was so I have more energy to work. To continue being the pack slave. To scrub the filthy floors until I die on the job.

That day couldn't come soon enough.

That alone was enough to get Neron off my back to stop him from painting my body further with his fists and feet. He was an artist back in the day. These days my body was his canvas, and his fury was his tool. The stinging on my cheeks continued as I run my soapy hands all over my face.

But there was one thing I didn't understand. I am disposable, and yet, I am not? The leaders of this pack had every opportunity to kill me and yet they kept me alive to do the duties the Omegas didn't want to do. I've heard their snide comments about how they wished I lived long enough so they would never have to touch a mop or the washing board again.

My hands ran down my chest, caressing the outline of bone and fat that couldn't fall off. There were some remnants of my womanhood. I have some inkling of curves and breasts, but it was hard to tell from a distance. My malnourished body made its peace by eating the stored fat in my body to sustain me. If a human were to see me, they might think I was anorexic, but I was just being deprived of food and water. The last time I shifted to Artemis,

the malnourishment hit her too. She was a big wolf but awfully skinny, akin to me. I didn't believe it was even safe for us to shift anymore.

My hands reach my thighs and legs, rubbing profusely to get rid of the dirt that isn't coming off. It only took me a minute to realize that the "dirt" was merely more bruises. Bruises afflicted by the 'special game' that one guard in the dungeons would play with me. I still felt his hands on my body.

In my body.

I suddenly couldn't breathe. I rubbed as hard as I could to get rid of the devilish sensations that refused to leave. They stayed haunting the very fabric of my mind, singing their song of malice. My eyes burned with unshed tears, and the water pressure soon lessened. I wanted to die. I don't want to go another day of being the guard's little doll. I couldn't stand his disgusting hands on me! Why won't the feeling ever leave?!

I want to die. I want to die. I want to F***ING DIE!

"Hali... Hali, focus on me." Artemis's voice was like a soothing song, drawing me away from the abyss of my mind. It was as if I could feel her snout pushing me forward, away from the darkness. Away from the torment. Away from the devil's lair. **"We're in this together. I'm here with you, every step of the way."**

"It's too much, Art. Why am I so dirty? Why did this have to happen?"

"Because they know they can get away with it. No one is there to stop them, so they'll keep hurting us. My words may not seem like much right now, but you're not dirty. We're not dirty, nor have we ever been. We're okay. We...we'll be okay."

She's right. Her words mean little, but there was a certain warmth in them that calmed my palpitating heart. I sucked in a deep shaky breath, slowly emerging back into the awful reality that was my life. The dirty bathroom

that I couldn't clean. The minuscule hose now drips droplets of water from the ceiling. The soap on my body that I didn't have time to wash away.

I still had work to do before the ceremony. Stepping out of the dingy bathtub, I wiped myself down and put on my raggedy dress once again. It was the only piece of clothing I own, so it wasn't like I had a choice. Stepping back into the gloomy room I was given to shower away from prying eyes, I sucked in a deep breath again. Anxiety pooled in my stomach as I stared at the door leading back into the lively pack house. It was time to give what I had left for this ceremony so I could finally sleep.

It'll be okay. I'll be okay.