

## Chapter 36 – The Longing

*"The irony of the human heart is that it's tormented both by the presence and absence of its own soul's counterpart." — Crystal Woods*

### **Neron**

"I doubt it." My dad shook his head. "Honestly, I'd prefer it that way. Another wolf carrying your mother's scent would make Angelo and I go crazy."

He stood on his feet, walking towards the fireplace ledge that held our family picture frames. His hands take one of my mother on their wedding day, cloaked in white with a smile as pure as gold. "The mind is a powerful force, Neron. It governs everything in our bodies. Without it, we're nothing. It could empower us and ruin us at the same time. It could take us to the highest of pleasures or the lowest depths of our misery."

His thumb runs over the picture of Mom, his blue eyes misting. "Thirteen years. It's been thirteen years since she joined with the Moon

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Goddess, and I miss her terribly. I miss my baby girl, too. Her smile and laughter were the best medicine for an awful day. I always wonder what she could have been if she lived this long. She would have made a powerful Alpha, courageous in her own right.”

“Some days, I smell their scents. Before I sleep or when I awake. It is worse when I was in the depths of my alcoholism. When you miss someone too much, the mind likes to trick you to believe that your loved one is still there. It has been in pain for so long that it tries to ease the burden in ways it thinks it should when only it makes the agony worse. I would think my Celeste was just around the corner or in the kitchen, but when I approached, there is nothing. It is one painful reminder after another that I no longer have my beloved or my angel.”

He smiled, deep sadness reflecting in his old face. “Sometimes I hear your mother’s laughter, or Nuria calling out for me to read her a bedtime story. Either your old man is going crazy, or my mind has been in pain for so long it wants to get out.”



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I say nothing. What am I supposed to say? He missed Mom and Nuria just as much as I did. Humans say that time heals all wounds, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. There were days where I spot Dad at their graves, reading Nuria her favorite stories, or chatting with Mom. That is his mate—the other half to his soul. That pain never goes away.

I knew exactly how he was feeling. And I wish I never did.

"I smelled her, Dad." I feel his eyes on me, but I don't dare to look up. "At the Garnet Moon territory a few days ago. I wanted to chase after it, to see her again, but...I couldn't."

"You're speaking about Halima, aren't you?"

I nod. Onyx is certain that Halima is alive, despite all evidence proving otherwise. I want to have that same level of assurance, but, how could I? Was her ghost tormenting me? Everything I've seen and heard proves that my mate is no more.

But why do I have this feeling that she was alive? That she was okay? Why do I still feel the broken

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bond when I couldn't feel the person on the other side?

A hand gently grips my shoulder, thumb rubbing circles in the back. My father sat back down next to me, our coffee mugs now cold. I sigh in frustration, my head in my hands.

"Son, you need to let her go." My father whispered. "Letting go of your mother and Nuria is the hardest thing I've ever done. I miss them terribly, but my heart is at peace knowing they are happy with our Moon Goddess. Do the same."


"Dad, I can't!" I gritted my teeth, tears threatening to fall down my face. "I can't let Halima go..."

"Why can't you? That girl is never coming back. By the grace of our beloved goddess, there could be a chance that you have a second-chance mate, perhaps it is Odessa and—"

"It's not her!" I growled. "Dad, don't you ever feel guilty? For what we've done to her? We brutalized her for years and I fucked everything up! I hated her for the longest and now that

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she's gone, my heart burns at the thought of her."

"I do feel guilty, Neron." My dad retorted with a heavy sigh. "Every single day. She was a special girl and I destroyed my best friend's youngest daughter over what my brother did, and no amount of repentance could ever amount to the pain we all inflicted on her. But, son, this pack needs a Luna. And you need to do what is right for your people." 


"What is *right*?" I scoffed. "That's what I kept telling myself every time I laid my hands on her. Every time I watched her bleeding and crying on the floor." I shake my head. "And the Moon Goddess would never grant me a second chance mate after what I did to Halima. Why the hell would she?"

"Tell me this, son." His gaze was like a hawk, watching for faulting movements. "If Halima is still alive, what would you do? What would you tell her?"

"That I'm sorry." Halima wasn't just Nuria's childhood friend, but she was mine as well. Who



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knew that child would grow up to be my mate in the future? But that future is gone. Pain wracked my body from head to toe, threatening to burst from my chest. Could Onyx feel this pain too? I didn't just ruin our friendship, but I took away his wolf mate without giving him a chance to know who she was. I've never seen Halima shift, despite knowing she had. "That I would spend the rest of my life repenting and making up for what I did to her. To show her I can and will change, and that I'm not the same man she was unfortunate enough to grow up with. I want to tell her I love her." 

"Yo, bro." Valerian's voice rang in my head.  
"Odessa and Cassandra are arguing again."

"They're grown-up women, they can handle themselves." I shot back.

"Not when it's bothering Adonis and his nap. Raina is three seconds away from strangling them both, and I don't think I'll stop her."

I sighed, pushing the coffee mug away and rising to my feet. "I have to go, Dad. I'll talk with you later." Without looking back, I left his modest


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home back to the packhouse. The passing thoughts of my mate continue to burn a hole in my chest, dripping acid to incinerate every barrier I put up to protect myself.

I'm grateful for this fight because I needed to take my mind off the brown eyes that haunt me daily.


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### *Kiya*

Birria tacos are amazing. 

One bite and my taste buds ascended in heaven. Who invented this wonderful concoction? They deserve a medal!

The delicious blend of the flavors, tender meat, veggies, and cheese is better than sex, I think.

I'm sitting on the couch in my parents' home, devouring tacos one after another. I couldn't help it. Isn't it obvious how hungry I am? The consommé soup with the tacos is a combination of the gods. 



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“*Mija*, I think you should slow down a bit.” I heard Mom say. I quirked an eyebrow, my eyes on her and cheeks filled with food.

“Why?” I muffled, still stuffing my face with food.

“Because you ate ten of the tacos already!” My dad bellowed from the couch, crossing his arms. “At least leave some for your old man, damn! And don’t talk with your mouth full.”

I paused, my cheeks flushing with heat. I notice the empty plates. Several empty plates, and empty cups that were once filled with soup littering the coffee table. Embarrassed, I swallowed what is in my mouth, burping. “Oops. Sorry.”

“It’s all right, *mi rayo de luna*. There is something on your mind.” The nickname never fails to send delightful chills down my spine. I was my parents’ little Moonbeam. Mom planted a soft kiss on my forehead before handing me a napkin to wipe my mouth. “You never eat this much unless something is bothering you.”



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She was right. I could eat out the entire kitchen if I felt an inkling of anxiety. My favorite coping mechanism. I couldn't help it, food made me feel better. It made me feel good and it helps me forget my troubles. Plus, my stomach was a bottomless pit. Tossing the dirty napkin down on the empty plates, I began talking.

"Anthony allied with my old pack and now he's sending me and a couple of others to their territory to train their soldiers for the next few months," I revealed. "I don't want to go back to that hellhole and face everyone that hurt me."

"Ah." Dad sat next to me, handing me bottled water. "I see why you're so nervous. But *Mija*, this could be a wonderful opportunity for you."

"To what? Implode?"

"To face your past."

"Your father has a point." Mom took a seat on the other side of me. "Kiya, you are much stronger now than you were before. You worked hard to get where you're at and you should be proud. However, do you think it's time to stop

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hiding and start confronting?”

My eyes were on the floor, the vinyl tiles catching my interest. So shiny. “I know. I know I’ll be safe from death since they have exonerated me, but...” Mom and Dad knew about my talk with Gamma Kwame. I told them over dinner the day it happened. “I just...”

“You don’t want to face your ex-mate again.” Dad finished.

“What if he recognizes me? What if he tries to hurt me again? I’m strong, but...not against an Alpha.”

“I could recall a couple of times during training where you beat Anthony.”

I scoffed. “Please. He went easy on me.” Twiddling my thumbs, I look at my parents again. “I’m still angry, Dad. Angry at him, my old family, and the pack. I don’t have it in my heart to forgive or help them. I don’t want to. What if they didn’t change? They could still treat me as bad as they did before, all over again. I don’t feel strong when it comes to them. I feel...small.”



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Mom drew me into a hug, her chin on top of my hair. “No one said confronting your past was easy. It’s terrifying. There are a lot of what-ifs, but unless you try, they will never be answered. You’ve done the work through therapy and trusting us and your friends more. You proved time and time again that you can rise above it all.”

“And what better way to prove yourself further than to show Zircon Moon that they can’t make you submit?” Dad added. “People change. You’ve changed. They might have changed. I’m not saying that you must forgive them—you do that on your own time if you chose to. What we’re saying is it’s time to fight against your demons head-on. You aren’t just strong, you’re a warrior, *Mija*. It’s in your name and your blood. You can and will win.”

I look to Dad, and then Mom, the two people who found me and helped heal me from the very beginning. They’ve always believed in my potential and strength, especially where I couldn’t see it. Their smiles of encouragement and hope pulled me out of the darkest moments of my life here in Garnet Moon.

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They know I will come out strong. Better.  
Successful.

Alive.

Don't get me wrong, I was still nervous. I don't know what they are like now. There is that dark little voice in the back of my head telling me that I am weak and pathetic. It loves to tear me apart. But I need to fight against it when facing my demons. Kwame didn't tell me too much about Zircon, nor did we have the time. But another part of me was curious to see how they were doing, minus all the rogue attacks. It is in my honor as a Delta to help those who are in need, and that's what I'll do. I'll do my job for the duration of my stay, and I'll leave.

I would do my best to give them the skills to stop this onslaught of rogues.

Smiling, I kissed my parents on the cheek, thanking them for listening to me. When you have people around you who would listen to you without judgment, that's the best feeling in the world.



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"...Could I have some more tacos?"

They scampered to the kitchen in a gaggle of merry laughter, setting up plates for me and themselves.

And I happily ate my eleventh taco.

### Chapter Comments

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Angie G. de Muñoz

Gee's... Now I want tacos. 🌮



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Deb

I want Tacos too 😊



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