

Chapter 40 – The Arrival

“When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about.” — Haruki Murakami

Anthony – Several Hours Later

I should have left this damn group on the side of the road when I had the chance.

The consistent battering of loud bass music paired with shrieks comparable to angry crows is slowly driving me into an abyss of insanity.

It is hard to believe that I was transporting fighters in their twenties, not prepubescent children.

The Moon Goddess is testing my nerves. I get it, it’s a five-hour car drive. Even wolves get antsy after being stationary for a long period of time. I stopped along the road a few times to let the group stretch or release their wolves for ten minutes, minus Abigail. Arriving at Zircon Moon couldn’t come any sooner.

I don’t know if I could take more dance music screeching in my ears or Galen twerking in his seat. That’s an image I did not find any use for.

Finally, the madness had ceased. Everyone either had their headphones in listening to their music or dabbling in their apps. I sigh in silent relief, relishing in the peaceful atmosphere. We were to reach Zircon Moon territory in ten minutes, putting an end to the long ride.

“Hey Darien.” I hear Galen say.

“What?” He retorted, annoyed.

“Do you think pigeons have feelings?”

“... I’m going to give you one more chance to shut the fuck up before I staple your lips shut.”

“It is a valid question!”

I snort silently, swallowing the laughter that bubbled at the base of my throat. Galen is one of the strangest Deltas I ever met, eccentric and zealous, but he is not to be underestimated. This man, who loves to sing badly to Korean pop music, is the same man who can become the fiercest and deadliest warrior on the battlefield. I admit, I underestimated him. I didn’t think he had what it takes to become a Delta, but he surprised me.

Yet, I don’t know how he and Darien were best friends. They couldn’t be any more different from one another. That’s why they work so well together. They complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses and make one hell of a duo.

“And yes, pigeons have feelings, you neanderthal.”

The van slows down, coming up to the gates of Zircon Moon territory. My ears caught a sharp intake of breath from behind me. I knew it is from Kiya. Glancing at the rear-view mirror, I could see her dark eyes clouding over with fear as she stared out into the familiar land.

“We’re here...” She whispered. My heart keeled for her. It can’t be easy to come back to the land that holds nothing but terrible memories. “Give me the Anti-Spray.”

Once Sapphire handed her a full bottle, my sister sprayed generously over herself, the entire interior of the car, and going to great lengths to

spray the suitcases. She wanted all traces of her scent gone. She wanted to continue the illusion that her old self is dead.

Yet, even I knew that wouldn't last.

After conversing with the guards and getting confirmation from Alpha Neron, I drove the straight and narrow path towards the mainland. Oak trees zipped passed my window, its faint scent tickling my nose. I 'll be leaving my sister here, in the place she hates so much. I've prayed to the Moon Goddess every night to this day to protect Kiya, although the prayers were not needed.

Kiya is Selene's avatar. She always protects her.

"Hey, Little Bit." Jacqueline turned her head to the young Delta. "Are you sure you'll be okay?"

"I will be." She answered with burning determination. "I'm not the scared slave they loved to push around anymore. I'm stronger than ever before. I won't allow them to push me around again, even after they figure out who I am."

Pride swell in my chest, throbbing against my rib cage. My baby sister had always been strong, she needed a chance to let it out.

I want Kiya to face her past and to prove herself. That is why I selected her to be on this mission. She was an excellent trainer, a powerful fighter, and a formidable werewolf. She is everything a Beta wolf should be, and a future Luna. Neron is a fool for rejecting an amazing person. All I was hoping is that I made the right decision in doing this.

The four-story pack house does not differ from mine, albeit it's a little smaller. Instead of howling wolves as their statues, its wolves snarling, a representation of their ferocity. Moss and white brick made up the exterior and their windows were plethoric. As I drove up to the main entrance, I noticed the Alpha and Luna, Beta and Beta Female, and

Gamma and Gamma Female awaiting us. Eyeing the rear-view mirror once more, I glanced at all my warriors, a mix of human and wolves.

I couldn't be any prouder of them. Each is powerful, and their influence will shape this pack for the better.

“Are you all ready?”

Kiya

I sucked in a deep breath, calming my palpitating heart. This is it. This is now or never. I saw them from the faintly tinted window, standing cordially on the front steps of their home, their eyes expecting who will emerge from this van.

As expected, Neron and Odessa were still together, with his arm locked around her waist. I should be angry at this picture-perfect couple, but I wasn't. I felt nothing. I didn't care if Neron and Odessa were Alpha and Luna, I didn't care about them as people. But I couldn't help but notice that the five years enhanced their beauties. Neron is still very handsome, with a subtle stubble growing on his chin. His wavy hair is much longer, cascading over his shoulder blades, and his eyes were still a deep ocean blue. He has gotten bulkier and stronger, his muscles standing stark from his black shirt and dark pants.

Odessa is cymotrichous as always, her brunette hair barely brushing her waist. Her hazel eyes were brighter, her skin is flawless, and her cupid-bow lips still make any man fall to their knees. The confidence and haughtiness that oozed out of her aura made me want to cut her down a size, not because she is with my ex-mate, but because of what she did to me.

My eyes went to Raina and Valerian, still madly in love and powerful in their stances. Raina looked as youthful as I last saw her, the only difference is her corkscrew curly hair reached mid-back. Valerian is also very handsome, his brunette hair laid a neat curly mess on top of his head with his fringe barely brushing against his eyes, failing to disguise the sharpness of his green.

I see Kwame standing next to a tall beauty who is his mate, judging by the identical mate mark on the base of her neck. She was cute with deep tan skin, wavy auburn hair with golden brown highlights, brown, almost-black pools for eyes, and full rosy lips. She looked beautiful with my friend at her side. Out of them all, I couldn't wait to get to know her.

“Are you ready, Artemis?”

“Always. It’s you and I against them all, Kiya.”

A gentle hand gripped my own, and I turned to see Abigail flashing me one of her best smiles. Despite being human, I knew she could feel what I was feeling. She is naturally intuitive. I give her a nod, letting her know I was okay.

“Are you all ready?” I hear my big brother say.

“As we’ll ever be.” Unbuckling our seatbelts, we all exited the van from both sides, mine facing my old pack. Hopping onto familiar territory, a violent wave of nostalgia struck me and not the good kind. I shivered momentarily but pushed it down. The trunk popped open as the six of us gathered our suitcases with Darien grabbing Alpha Anthony’s travel bag.

“Alpha Neron.” My brother greeted, shaking his hand. “It is a pleasure to see you again.”

“Likewise, Alpha Anthony. I thank you for your generosity in lending my pack your finest warriors. I assure you that their stay on my land will be nothing short but comfortable.”

From the corner of my eye, I notice other pack members gathering to see the newcomers on their land. Many faces were familiar, some were not. Keeping my eyes forward, I slam the trunk of the van close, walking behind my friends.

“*I hate them all already.*” Jacqueline opened the mind-link between us all, minus Anthony. “*Say the word Kiya and I’m hurdling them over these damn trees.*”

“*It’s all right, Jackie.*” I reassured my best friend. “*I’m fine, really. And please, no violence on my behalf.*”

“*They don’t seem like much.*” Galen sneered, rolling his eyes. “*Although the Alpha looks absolutely scrumptious!*”

“*Dude, that’s Kiya’s ex-mate!*” Sapphire snapped. “*And he looks taken. Ugh, I won’t like that haughty bitch. Her aura is gross.*”

I hear a soft growl erupting beside us. Our eyes look at Darien, who looks as if he was struggling to hold back his wolf. His eyes were glued to the back of Anthony’s head, like he was trying hard not to look elsewhere. I’ve never seen the stoic and collected Darien so bothered.

“*Are you okay?*” Abigail asked him through the mind-link.

“*I’m fine.*” He blurts before slamming his mental wall between us all. What was his problem?

We all eyed each other in concern, worried about our friend. I’ll ask him what the issue was after we settle in our rooms. We all gathered behind our Alpha, standing tall.

“Welcome to Zircon Moon territory.” Neron announced to us. “This is my Luna, Odessa. My Beta Valerian and his mate Raina, and my Gamma Kwame and his mate Lorelai.”

“You all know me to be Alpha Anthony of the Garnet Moon pack. This is my Beta, Jacqueline and her mate and pack warrior Abigail. Sapphire is my other pack warrior, and my three Deltas, Darien, Galen, and finally Kiya.”

Artemis growled deep within me, ready to launch herself at the familiar faces. I feel her sizzling desire to claw their faces raw. Each face brings one painful memory after another of my abuse, but, as usual, I push them away. They cannot smell me, and they won’t recognize me. That is the hope, anyway. I was different from how they last saw me, packing on muscles and curves could change one’s looks.

Everyone shook hands, but I retracted, refusing to touch any of them. Especially Neron and Raina. The thought made me want to vomit. Shaking hands with my tormentors is out of the question. From a single touch, both Raina and Neron could know who I am. Mates don’t forget each other, and neither does family. They’ll take my behavior as rude, but I didn’t care.

Their touches broke Halima, but they’ll not break me.

I’m untouchable.