

Chapter 46 – The Training

“Arrogance is a creature. It does not have senses. It has only a sharp tongue and the pointing finger.” — Toba Beta

Kiya

It was time to see just what these wolves were made of. My eyes scanned the field before me, all wolves of shapes, sizes, and genders were mingling, waiting for the start of training. Some women were in deep conversation while some men were roughing each other up or stretching. The training regimen my fellow warriors and I came up with was approved by Gamma Kwame since Neron hasn't been seen since our little encounter in his office.

I cross my arms as I sit on a rock with one leg folded over the other. Next to me was a pile of training weapons I obtained from the gym, including fake swords. From the naked eye, I could not tell which of these wolves was worthy of the Delta title. My hopes were high when training had begun, but as time went on, I became unimpressed.

“I say we have them pair up,” Sapphire suggested, tying her long blond hair in a high ponytail. “I want to see where they are at.”

“Hmm. I think that's too easy.” Darien shook his head. “We need to test their resolve. We won't know who is strong unless we test them ourselves. I'm sure there are a few cocky individuals who don't take kindly to newcomers.”

“There's always a couple of those in every pack.” Jackie huffed as Abigail trailed next to her. “Pairing them up would help us gauge who would start with what specialty.”

Getting down to business, she placed two fingers in her mouth, ringing out a sharp whistle that snapped all heads towards the six of us.

“Everybody line up!” In seconds, the men and women formed a horizontal line in front of us.

“Before we all get started, let me ask you all a question,” I spoke, my voice rigid with authority. It felt good. “By a show of hands, how many of you believe that your wolf strengthens you?”

Unsurprisingly, many hands shot up in the air. I nodded. “Okay, hands down. How many of you all believe you are nothing without your wolf?”

Again, many hands go up.

“All right, all right. Final question, how many believe because you’re a werewolf, you are superior?”

I could see slight hesitation in some faces, eyeing their peers for help. I cross my arms, warning that I would not repeat myself. Several hands go up.

“Okay.” I sigh, careening my head left and right to rid muscle tension. “I appreciate the honesty amongst this crowd. However, I didn’t expect there to be many idiots in this lot of warriors.” Buzzes of complaints were promptly silenced when Jackie let out a deep, rumbling growl. All wolves respect a Beta, no matter what pack they were from.

“I want you all to remember something from here on out.” I stand on the boulder I previously sat on, giving myself some added height. “Your wolf does not strengthen you. You strengthen your wolf. It is important to not get caught up in the idea that because you were born with a living, breathing animal within you that makes you superior. The ego has no place on the battlefield. You lean on your wolf for many things, rapid healing, quick metabolism, enhanced speed, and so on. Your wolf leans on you. They are your consciousness; they are that little voice in your ear that warns you of danger.”

“You all became warriors for a reason, and it is important to strengthen not only the wolf but the man or woman behind the wolf. Goddess forbid that there comes a time you lose your wolf. If you do, however, the human must be strong enough to hold his or her ground in battle. The enemies don’t give a damn if you are a human, wolf, man, woman, old, young. All they see is a target, a thing that needs to die. Your survival depends on you, your skill, and your resolve. You fight until your last breath because I guarantee that all of you have someone or something that you want to protect. Never forget that.”

“Now. Here is what would happen today.” Galen spoke up, his signature sly smirk never leaving his face. “You all will pair up with someone and demonstrate what you’ve learned. Tomorrow, you all will be placed in three groups to begin the nitty-gritty of training, weapon warfare, wolf combat, and hand-to-hand training, led by yours truly. If you don’t have a partner, you’ll be paired off with one of us. Now break!”

As quickly as it began, everyone is training in pairs. Some in wolf form, some as human, and others opted into weaponry. The six of us walked around, eyeing the successes and faults in some wolves’ movement, making mental notes about who would begin in which group.

As I walked, I felt a light tap on my shoulder. I turned around to see a man with shaggy dirty blond hair, pale blue eyes, and a cocky smirk looking down at me. I recognized him as one of my many pursuers at the party last night. I groaned.

Great.

“Kiya, isn’t it? I was wondering if you could spar with me.”

“Couldn’t find a partner, Orion?” I questioned, noticing the mischievous glint in his eyes.

“As you could tell, no.” He shrugged. “Plus, I think I’d benefit a lot better if I was under...your expertise.”

“Is that so?” I brushed my curls behind my neck, glaring razor-sharp daggers. “I think Darien would fit to be your partner. He’s tall, about your build, and he takes no prisoners. If you want a challenge, I suggest you go to him.”

“But I chose you. A short cute werewolf like you had to make it up the ranks somehow.”

I raised an eyebrow. From my peripheral vision, I could see the ranked werewolves exiting the packhouse to form a silent audience. Placing my hands on my hips, I frown. “Care to enlighten me? How do you think I got to where I am now?”

“Well.” He brushed back his hair, his egotism profound. “With that pretty face, you could do and get whatever you want.”

I get straight to the point. “Are you suggesting I slept my way through the rank?”

“No need to be so crude about it.” Orion sniggered, covering his mouth with a hand. “But yes. Tell me, how many wolves did you have to seduce? I mean, with that body I’m sure you didn’t have to do much. The human girl is only here because she’s mated to a Beta and the blond... well... she’s not much to look at. But you? A trainer with an ass and tits like that? I highly doubt you didn’t use at least one of those assets.”

The smile made its home on my face. It refused to leave. I tick my head to the side, eyeing this bastard carefully. It didn’t take him long to show his true nature. The arrogance was so thick around this man that I could grab a chunk of it and chuck it back in his face. This isn’t the first time I was accused of sleeping my way to the top by ignorant men, but I quickly earned respect back home. It was amusing. Laughable.

Shoving my hand in my pocket, I pulled out a scrunchie, tying my hair up in a high ponytail. Some corkscrew strands fell on my face, brushing against my cheeks. “Get in position.”

His eyes widened. “W-what?”

“Get in position,” I repeated. “There is no shortage of men like you. Arrogant. Cocky. Thinking they are the best in everything when, their egos are as small as their dicks.”

His smirk quickly faded into a scowl.

“If you think that way of me, I shudder to see what you think of your female comrades in battle. I wouldn’t be surprised if they left you dying under the jaws of a rogue.”

Flames of anger licked within his eyes, flashing black. I’ve stoked the flames of his wolf too. “No one talks to me that way!”

“Well, that’s too damn bad!” By now, some warriors stopped to see the hubbub between Orion and me. By the looks of the women, many were pleased to see someone calling him out, finally. “You wanted to spar, so we’ll spar. I’ll give you the honor to choose human, wolf, or weapon.”

“Wolf.” He growled, throwing away the air of confidence he had earlier. Now, the air around him throbs with anger. Ignoring the tears of his clothes, Orion shifted into a big brown wolf, heated golden eyes failing to set me alight. My friends smiled and took a step back.

“*Ready, Artemis?*”

“**I will tear him apart.**” With that, I shifted. The growls of my wolf blended with the tears of my clothes, my skin sprouting snow-white fur. Within seconds, I’ve fully shifted into Artemis, her coat glistening under the beating rays of the sun. Many gasps and whispers erupted from around us, many in awe at seeing a white wolf for the very first time.

Orion faltered slightly, realizing his mistake at challenging me, but quickly recovered.

He wasn't backing down, and neither am I.

Chapter 47 – The Forsaken

“Congratulations, you did it! You gave me a great desire to hate you!”

– Unknown

Artemis

Orion lunged at me the moment my paws hit the ground. He was quick. But I was quicker when I took a sidestep, brown blurring in my peripherals. His jaws snapped at me, lunging for my neck.

Since I am a Beta wolf, I was bigger, towering over him by several inches. I ducked, ramming my head into his chest before twisting around and biting his leg, sinking my sharp teeth into it.

I toss the hound to my side, blood dribbling from my jaws. Orion hoisted back on his paws, ignoring the damage to his leg. Like a warrior wolf, he was trained to fight until he couldn't anymore. Lucky for him, so was I.

He snagged me a couple of times, a swipe of his claws to my sides, a bite to the leg, or the tail. But I was better, stronger, and faster. I countered every move he made, making a clean brown wolf into a marred mess of brown and red.

As my last act of offense, I sunk my jaws into his neck, biting down harder every time he struggled. I won't kill him but leave him with a reminder to never challenge me without proper training ever again.

After a minute of struggling, Orion relents, kneeling in surrender, I unsheathed my teeth from his neck, spitting the blood from my mouth and shaking off my fur from all dirt. My blue glared deep into his gold,

conveying a silent message that only wolves could hear, regardless of pack links.

“Never underestimate your opponent. I let you off easy, but the enemy will not. Consider this your only warning.”

I turned, leaving the wolf to his devices. From the stairs of the packhouse, I could see Neron. But more importantly, I could see his wolf within him. Onyx. He looked forlorn, eyes beseeching mine. With a soft growl, I jerked my head away from him.

“Great job, Artemis,” Kiya cheered. **“I knew you could do it.”**

“Not without you, Ki.” Sapphire, Abigail, and Jacqueline surrounded me at all sides, using their bodies to shield me from prying eyes. Galen came over with an oversized t-shirt.

It’s time to bid adieu to the world around me. With ease, I allowed my human control as our bodies shifted.

Raina

The scent was unmistakable. It wafted my nose the moment the woman shifted back. It was the scent that I pleaded every night to the Moon Goddess to bring back. It was the scent that faded from her child’s clothes my parents keep in their house to remember her by. It was the scent that brought me back to the happier days of my childhood before things fell into horse shit.

I watched as Kiya emerged from her huddle of friends wearing an oversized t-shirt that covered her essentials. I came to see the new warriors’ training when instead, I got the spectacle of a lifetime. White wolves were rare, and I never thought I live to see one in person.

But I saw the face.

Her face.

Her face much like mine. Her curls, her skin, her eyes...the big chocolate eyes I missed so much. Hot tears stung my eyes, swimming down my cheeks as I stared at the face of my lost family.

Of my baby sister.

“Halima!” I cried out, my heart beating a mile a minute in my chest. She looked up at me, and I winced, backing up a step. Her eyes didn’t hold love like they used to, but repugnance and malice. It shook my very core, sending shudders down my spine. It made me want to curl up into a hole and hide, for the sheer power of her stare is fearsome.

“Hi, Raina.” She responded, but not without an added snarl. Unable to control my legs, I ran. I ran to my baby sister. I ran to the woman that I wished upon every fallen star to see again. I wanted to hold her, tell her how much I loved her, and how sorry I am for hurting her.

But I didn’t get that chance.

Halima pushed me to the ground.

“Don’t fucking touch me!” She shouted at me as I landed right on my ass. “Don’t ever touch me!”

Now that I am closer, her glare is more powerful. The inferno of hatred and revulsion pulled me into the pits, searing me like a slab of steak on a grill. The woman standing above me was my sister, but she was different. She was stronger and better than I ever thought she would be.

I knew, if she had her way, she would tear me apart in seconds. She was terrifying.

“Halima, it’s me, Raina. Remember? Your sister!” I pleaded, my tears unending.

“Oh, I know who you are.” She glowered. “You are no sister of mine. My sister s back in California.”

Her words stabbed me in the heart, tearing my heartstrings out one by one. “No, you don’t mean that.”

“I do. Wholeheartedly.” Halima bent down, leaning in so close that our noses almost touched. “And my name is Kiya now. Not Halima. And unless you wish to be hurt, you’ll leave me **alone**.”

Kiya stood back on her feet, glaring at the warriors who all stopped their training to look at her. “The hell are you all are staring at?” That was more than enough to kick the wolves’ asses back into gear, like the spectacle with Orion never happened.

I tried to reach out to my sister again, but she jerked her hand away like I was a piece of hot coal. My heart continues to break piece by piece the more she rejects me, leaving me on the ground in my tears. It wasn’t long until Valerian came over to help me up. But I was in so deep of pain that even his touch couldn’t calm me. I pushed my husband aside and ran back into the packhouse.

My sister is here. My sister is alive.

And her hatred will tear me apart.

Chapter 48 – The Concern

“Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” —
George Bernard Shaw

Kiya

“You sure know how to stir up a big ol’ pot of chaos, don’t you?” Galen slumped next to me on the couch in the common room, passing me my dinner plate. At the center of the sea of tomato sauce was a big, steamy piece of cheesy lasagna that I happily dug into, ignoring the pointed inquiry.

Word spreads like a virus around here. The display from training today didn’t go unobserved. By mid-afternoon, the entire pack was buzzing about the “returned slave”. Many grew silent when I passed by them, or swiftly moving out of my path in fear. I haven’t seen Neron or Raina since I pushed her to the ground, but I couldn’t find it in me to care.

It felt good to give my sister a taste of what she did to me.

“The wolves gossip more than they train,” Jacqueline mumbled in disdain, crossing her feet on top of the wooden table. “You can’t believe the shit I’ve been hearing all over. These mutts don’t know when to keep their snouts out of business that isn’t theirs.”

“It must be a shock to them,” Abigail added, resting her head on her mate’s shoulder. “I’d be talking too if someone from my home suddenly returned from the dead.”

“It’s funny.” Sapphire snickered, munching on her piece of the pasta. “To see alleged strong wolves so spooked. I wonder how long it would take for them to beg for her forgiveness.”

“They aren’t getting any,” I spoke up, shoving a piece of lasagna into my mouth. “I’m not here to rekindle relationships.”

“Yeah, but...” Galen sat back, resting his back on the pillows of the couch. “What are you going to do about Neron? Alphas don’t let their true mates go without a fight.”

“He rejected me, remember? There is no bond between us, so he is free to mark whoever else he wants.” Preferably Odessa. Speaking of which,

I noticed she doesn't have a mate mark on her neck. Neither did Neron. Why haven't they fully mated yet? Had this pack been Lunaless for five years now?

This pack was in more disarray than I thought.

Before we could get another word out, Darien stomped past us. From his side view, he looks furious. His normally neat dark hair is disheveled, his nose was flaring with every inhale, and the entirety of his eyes were pitch black. The rest of us looked at each other in silence before dropping our plates on the table and running after our friend.

"Darien!"

"Darien, bro, wait up!"

"Darien, stop!"

Darien threw the front doors open, his fury striking cracks into the wood. None of us could catch him because he uncaringly stripped down nude, shifted into a fully grown pitch-black wolf, and raced into the woodlands deep into the shadows. Our fears rolled into each other through our mind-link, unanimously speculating what made our friend take off in a fit of fury.

"Something is very wrong," Galen murmured. "Dari never acts like this. I've never seen him so upset." He starts to remove his clothes. "I'm going after him."

"No." Jackie pressed her palm against Galen's chest. "He needs some time to cool down. He'll come back to us when he is calm."

"He's in his wolf form on territory he doesn't fucking know!" Galen bellowed, shocking all of us. Galen cares deeply for his best friend and was always the first to come to his defense if something goes wrong. I understand why he felt this way. I felt the pull to do the same.

“What if he gets hurt? What if there is a fucking rogue out there and attacks him?” Galen implored.

“Galen, we must trust that Darien will make it back on his own,” Abigail mused, her hand on his shoulder. “He is a Delta and an extraordinarily strong one at that. If anything happens, he knows how to get himself out. Sirius will guide him back to us.”

Sirius is Darien’s wolf, intelligent and cunning. As much as I agree with Abi, I still wonder what set him off. What in this world could have turned that calm and collected man into a disheveled mess?

Galen begrudgingly fixed his clothes and walked towards the common room, along with the rest of us to finish our dinner. We had to keep our optimism alive that our friend would be okay. I made a mental note to talk to Darien once things cool down. By the time we finished, we headed towards the kitchen to set our dishes away.

I noticed two Omegas fishing the piling dishes along with Lead Omega Cassandra wiping down the island. She gave a curt nod to my friends who set their dishes down on the counter, but I lingered at the doorway. Cassandra’s pale green eyes found mine, her movements faltering.

“Aren’t you going to set your dishes away?” Sapphire asked me.

“I just want to know if I’m allowed in the kitchen.” My glower pierced Cassandra’s orbs, chilling her core. My friends trailed out of the kitchen, leaving me by myself at the entranceway. “Am I?”

She stammered, gripping her white rag in a useless attempt for relief. I could smell the fear rolling into her repugnant scent of mint. Her eyes trembled, casting themselves away from mine. “Y-Yes. Of course, you are.”

Rolling my eyes, I walked in. I knew I could have just walked in and got my shit over with, but I wanted to see how Cassandra would react. A

deep part of me longed to see the monster that loved to strike me with a metal spoon, mock my voice, and tease me for eating out of the garbage. The nickname of raccoon still gives me nightmares whenever I enter a kitchen, even back at home.

Cassandra had effectively left her mark on my essence, springing up when I grow hungry or if I so much as think about walking into a kitchen. Some days were so bad that I'd stop eating for weeks. Her presence in my mind weakened over the years, now a squeaky voice in the depths of the gloom. I toss my plate and fork into the pool of soapy water, ignoring the splashes of water that landed on Samantha and the other Omega, Alice.

"H-How is the food?" Her gritty voice inquired. "I hope it was to your liking."

"I had better," I open the fridge and rummage for a water bottle. Cassandra's cooking would never compare to Cleo's. In her food, I could taste the love and care she puts into it. Cooking for so many wolves is not a simple task, but she does the work effortlessly along with her Omegas I've gotten to know over the years. Many of them have found their mates or have a baby on the way.

"I apologize," Cassandra murmured, bowing her head. "If you could tell me where I need to improve, I'll make it up to you next time."

I didn't answer. I felt sick. I half expected that any moment now, that woman would whip out her spoon and smack me on the back of the head. Instead, she was kind. I didn't have time for the onslaught of repentance from people who don't deserve my forgiveness. Alice and Samantha grew silent, tensing up at our interaction, their bated breaths expecting something to happen.

Nevertheless, they're left with disappointment. Unscrewing the cap, I chugged my water down, already on my way out the door before Cassandra blurted, "I'm sorry!"

I stopped in my tracks, screwing my bottle cap on.

“I’m sorry for treating you the way I did years ago! Please find it in your heart to forgive me, Halima.”

Anger rolled out of my pores yet again. No shortage in sight. I huffed, rolling my eyes. “Save it for someone who cares.” I left them alone in the kitchen, ignoring the echoes of her pathetic sobs. They had their chance. I would’ve forgiven her if things went differently. But whether these people changed, they still hurt me. They had a choice to hurt or help, and it was clear what they decided. Fuck them.

As I walked towards my room, I noticed Odessa heading to the fourth floor toward Neron’s room. We made eye contact, our brown eyes staring deep into one another. However, there was a strange glint in hers. A glint that spoke of nastiness and victory. Her lips curled up into a leer, flipping her hair before disappearing from my sight.

O-kay?

Shrugging my shoulders, I head to my room, locking the door behind me. I was exhausted from today’s events and the new training routine for the fighter wolves starts tomorrow at 7 AM. I quickly changed into my pastel purple tank top and matching shorts, opening the window to allow some air in before hopping under the covers.

Before I knew it, I drifted into a deep sleep.

Chapter 49 – The Request

“Please tell me the truth about yourself.” — Diane Samuels

Neron

Sometimes I find myself in these dreams.

On my knees with my hands clasped together.

I'm in a void of darkness, stars dotting and twinkling around the cosmic space. Above me shone the full moon, bright as a diamond-flame. White light projects itself upon me, dousing me in a chill. I did not falter—I remained as still as a statue, silently praying to the Moon Goddess.

All my dreams that begin like this take a terrible tumble. I was either tossed into a nightmare or the darkness, the latter not happening often. Yet I feel as though this dream would be different. My heart and soul beg for an audience with my omnipotent goddess, the silent watcher of all werewolves, rogue or not. She is merciful and kind. All I was asking is a chance to speak with her.

I shut my eyes, shielding the tears that threatened to escape. My mind was filled with images of my mate, the mate I disgracefully threw away. All I could see was her anger and abhorrence, her snarls of hatred wishing to tear my limbs apart. Her anger contorts her face into one I fear, but also one I find beautiful. Kiya was beautiful when she was angry.

But that was not what I want. I don't want her scowls. I want her smiles. I want to be the one who makes her lips curve upward, showing off her glittering white teeth. I want to give her the happiness my pack and I took from her.

I want her to be mine.

As my thoughts run rampant of Kiya, I feel something cool brush against my cheeks. It is feather-like, so soft that it could go unnoticed in the blink of an eye. "Open your eyes, Neron."

I did. My eyes were met with captivating grey, sparing a glance into the depths of my soul. The moonlight cast a beautiful halo around the Moon Goddess, giving her an impossibly otherworldly look. My matron Goddess, the protector of Wolfkind...

“Moon Goddess...”

“That is me.” Her smile is small, annulled of humor. “I have heard your prayers, Neron. However, I found no reason to answer them.”

My heart was shot, shot as if her words were a bullet of silver. This couldn’t be the end. Tears began to form in my eyes. I knew all along she had ignored my prayers, punishment for harming one of her many children. Could this treatment have been stretched to the rest of my pack? How many of our prayers had she ignored?

“Moon Goddess,” I spoke. “The dark deeds of myself and my pack cannot escape your eyes. I’ve done you wrong, insulted you, and laid my hand upon one of your children. Your child, who was my destined mate.”

“Ah, yes. Kiya is her name now, isn’t it?” I nodded. “It hurts my heart to see my child cast her birth name like garbage because she wanted, desperately, to separate herself from the pain.” Her eyes darted to the side, almost reprehensible to look at me. “Why have you relinquished the destined bond I blessed you with, Neron? And now you wish for it to be repaired?”

“I am a fool. A blind fool.” I admit ruefully. “There is no excuse for what I’ve done, my Goddess. There is no reason for me to harm her as I did, but I did it. Deep in my grief, I believed that punishing a young pup for the loss of my mother and sister is retribution enough. Never did I once think about her, But I did not realize just how much I was changing her, how much karma is building up to come crashing down on me when I least expected it.”

“What you and your pack did to her is unforgivable.” There is an edge of rage in her voice that struck fear into every nerve in my body. “You’ve subjected years of abuse onto a defenseless pup. That trauma is a part of her now. It grew with her through her development, imprinting in her

spirit. That part of her cannot be erased. I want nothing more but my wolves to live happy and healthy, but life is merciless. Life gives, and it takes.”

“Kiya is the mate I made for you. She is the other half of your soul, the light of your life. Instead of embracing her with open arms, you dismember her flesh and choose another female over her, who belongs to another. Rejecting your mate is the worst crime you could do against them, and in turn, insulting me. I pair wolves up for a reason, but you didn’t want to see it back then, did you?”

Like a child given punishment, I shook my head. “N-No...I didn’t. I realize my mistake now, Moon Goddess.”

“Neron. What is it you want?” She leans down to my eye level, striking silver gazing into my eyes.

“I want to take back my rejection,” I admit, timidly looking her in the eyes once more. “I want to make up for the time I’ve wasted. But I want the forgiveness of my mate. I want to rekindle our bond and make her my rightful Luna.”

“Then you are, indeed, a fool Neron.” The Moon Goddess sighed, shaking her head pitifully. “You cannot come to me and ask me to erase the initial rejection. Besides, have you truly learned from this experience? Do you want to take back the rejection because you feel you have to, or is it because you genuinely love her?”

I went silent. The brutality of her words hit me hard. After losing Kiya and her exoneration, I realized just how much her presence matters in the pack. When she died, everything slowly, but surely, fell apart. But then again, how much do I know about her?

Her personality is drastically different from when she was a child. I remember her younger self parading after her big sister or hanging out with us on school holidays. She was a happy, high-spirited child with a

smile that could light up the world. Now, she is a strong, intelligent, and untouchable woman with enough anger to burn the territory to the ground.

I want to love Kiya. I want to know who she is now and get to know my mate as the person she is today. But only if I get that chance. She wants nothing to do with me and the rejection hurts.

But my pain is incomparable to what I've caused her. She had every right to want me to burn under her gaze. Odessa would always be my first love, but Kiya is who my heart truly belongs to.

The Moon Goddess gazes upon my face, eyes searching for a twitch. Sighing, she stands erect, her holy presence indescribable. "Kiya is an incredibly special woman, Neron. She has more power than anyone realizes. She is a force to be reckoned with and in time, all will know of her true strength. However, as for you, I cannot find any reason for your rejection to be reversed."

"Moon Goddess, all I am asking is for the chance to prove myself," I say. "When I look back at who I was before, I am sickened. I hate the monster that paraded around my home, high fiving with my fellow wolves and then beating her the next second. I don't want to be him anymore. I want to prove to you and to Kiya that I can and will change. That I will be a better man, a better mate, and a better lover. I'd give anything to have her in my arms, to give her everything and anything she wants. After all the crap and hurt she's been through, she deserves happiness."

"And what if that happiness is not with you?"

I swallow painfully, not wanting to face that possibility. "Then I will accept it. I don't deserve her, but I want to prove myself worthy to her and you."

“It’s true that you don’t deserve her. I am a benevolent goddess Neron, but I will not hesitate to cast rightful judgment upon you and your pack for harming my precious wolf.”

I gulped in fear, wincing at the thought of a god’s punishment. It can’t be any worse than what Kiya went through under our roof. “Yes, Moon Goddess.”

“The decisions you make, and the actions that follow reflect who you are. You rejected Kiya as your rightful mate, celebrated in her misery, and chose another wolf as your lover. That defined you as a heartless, selfish man. Your inability to face the truth until Kiya made her way towards your land defines you as weak. You cannot hide from your actions from the past as they directly affected both Kiya’s future and her actions towards you. She is not a woman who forgives easily, and you are not the only one asking for it.”

That part I am aware of. After the whirlwind that caught the drift of Kiya’s identity had the pack in controlled chaos, many fearing of what repercussions would come from their actions of the past. She had every right to hate Zircon Moon, her family, and me.

“If you wish to prove yourself to both Kiya and me, you need to change your actions and make the appropriate decisions. You need to own up to what you’ve done. Trust is easily broken, but difficult to get back, and Kiya has absolutely no reason to trust you or anyone from your pack. I will not reverse the rejection because it is not my job. Second-chance mates are rare, and there is a reason Kiya does not have one. The retraction of the rejection is up to you and what you do from here on out.”

I nodded in understanding. Everything is all on me now. My Moon Goddess is right. It’s my fault that Kiya hates breathing the same air as me. It’s my fault that she would never forgive me.

But I will try as hard as I can to win her heart back.

“One more thing, Neron.” Moon Goddess spoke. “Forgiveness is not easily given. It is an arduous process. Do not expect Kiya to forgive you on a whim. It will take time, if ever. Wolves are inherently very impatient and demand things to happen instantaneously, but I am warning you. Rush, and you will lose her again.”

“What about our bond? Is it dead?”

“Kiya accepted your rejection, thus severing the bond between you both. It has been dead for many years. It is only recently you recognized her as your mate had your side of the bond revitalized. I cannot say the same for Kiya’s side. Bonds are not instantly repaired. It is like a wound; it takes time to heal. Only by committing to your goal would your efforts be fruitful. It is not guaranteed, however.”

“But I will make it work.” I rose to my feet, the flames of determination burning in my core. “I will prove myself worthy and capable, Moon Goddess.”

“Hmm. See to it that you do. But do NOT harm Kiya again. I will be watching you.”

The Moon Goddess faded into the moonlight, her final words lingering in the cosmic space. As the moon drifts farther from my reach, dimming the surrounding space, I growl to myself at my newfound goal.

I will not fail.

I couldn’t fail.

The early morning sun peeked through my curtains, kissing me awake. For once, I didn’t wake up in a cold sweat but with newfound resolve.

Today embarks the long and hard journey to earning my mate back. I don't know if I would get her back, but at least I could say that I tried. It is better to have tried and failed than to not have tried at all.

I look to my side to see Odessa sleeping soundly. The touch that used to ignite a fire in me is now dead. I don't crave for her anymore, as heartless as it sounds. She is a beautiful woman, but my heart no longer beats for her. Could I say I fell out of love with her? Probably. She belonged to her mate, whoever that is, not with me.

Slipping out of bed, careful to not make noise, I quickly got dressed in front of my mirror. Faint shouts of combat and authority rang from outside of my window, poking at my curiosity. Kiya and her friends were awake, commanding the slew of soldiers to run laps around the territory. For a moment, I didn't care about the progress of the fighters.

My eyes were on Kiya. Dressed in black and pink sporty gear, her short stature did not compensate for the power in her voice. Arms crossed in an authoritative stance; her eyes remained locked on the wolves. The sun blessed the black curls in her hair, highlighting the deep brown undertone underneath them. It kissed her melanated skin, brightening the gold in her brown.

She's so beautiful. My heart thudded at the thought of her but soon stilled when I spotted the mark that I mercilessly cut into her right shoulder blade, the place that formally held her Zircon's pack mark.

I cannot erase the damage I put on her body. I cannot wish that scar away. Deep regret festered in my stomach, eating away at it. That scar would forever be a reminder that I maliciously brutalized her. The old me smiled, laughed, and celebrated at it, forever damning her to a life of suffering.

But I won't be that person anymore. I cannot.

I will be a better man. A better Alpha. A better mate.

First things first, I need to end things with the woman in my bed.