

Chapter 62 - The Mall

"The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you. You just got to find the ones worth suffering for." — Bob Marley

Artemis

It has been two weeks since the fiasco. Kiya hasn't made her appearance since, and I don't blame her. The things that happened at that god-awful dinner weren't for the faint of heart, especially to someone heavily triggered by her 'family'.

Since that night, neither Ashley nor Steven confronted me. The steaming stench of guilt and anger permeated from their scents whenever I walked by. They still haven't grasped their culpability in my human's suffering. Even their wolves hide from me.

Whatever. They weren't worth my time. They're lucky I didn't tear them down from where they stood.


Raina tried hard to talk to Kiya. She knew I was in control and tried to pass on her messages through me, but Kiya wasn't listening. I was not her messenger. I don't think Raina fully understands how awful my human feels. Kiya values choice,

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having the power to choose her fate. Her parents selfishly took that away from her again.

Valerian tried to apologize for his part in the fiasco, but neither of us was in a forbearing mood. I respect him as this pack's Beta and Adonis' father, but he was not our friend. I don't believe we'll ever see him as one. At least he tried to defuse the situation, although the execution was terrible.

Neron was trying his best. I admire his tenacity in his attempts to speak to Kiya. She gives him a listen from time to time, out of curiosity. Onyx tries to get closer to me, and I hate it. Persistent as hell. Sometimes, when I go for a run, he was there. Big, strong, and unfortunately, beautiful. He blends easily in the shadows that sometimes he catches me off guard. Whenever he was close, he made me feel good and I wanted to barf.

Damn this bond. 

It is a sweltering day in June and all the trainees have the day off. They've been working hard, and their progress is astounding. There haven't been rogue attacks since the last one, aside from a few false alarms, but Neron had beefed up border security.

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While the pack frolicked under the hot sun, I was tucked in my bed, asleep. It was nice and peaceful. Sleep was an escape from the mayhem of reality.


But it was cut short when a pillow hits my face. Growling, I grabbed it and hurled it back at the perpetrator, who let out a yell of pain. I open my eyes to see my friends standing around me, with Jacqueline sitting on the bed with a smirk on her face and Galen rubbing his nose. "Hi, Art! Wanna go shopping?"

I glared, unamused. "You woke me up to ask me that?"

"You sleep like a sloth on your days off." She countered, hopping on her feet. "We haven't had the chance to head into town since we've been here! I'm sure you're itching to be out of this stuffy ol' pack."

I groan, rising from the bed. "You have a point there. I guess Kiya could use some new clothes."

"You could pick out stuff for yourself too, Artemis." Sapphire smiled. "I'm sure you have a style."

"I'm a wolf. I don't wear clothes." I rolled my eyes, kicking the covers off my body. "And Kiya choses the clothes, not me. I just go along with it." 

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"Well, it's time to try something different." Galen pipped as I trudge my lazy body to the bathroom. "Perhaps a crop top and booty shorts? Or skinny jeans?"

"I'll see once we get there."

"So, does that mean you're coming?" Abigail asked.

"It's not like I have a choice."

Cheers erupted from the room as I wipe my wet face with a towel. Scarce water droplets clung onto the tendrils of my curls as I walked out, noticing my room was empty except for one person. "Something on your mind, Darien?"

"Is Kiya okay?" His eyes darted around the room, unable to look at me. His anxiety was palpable. "I've been wondering for a while and...I miss her. Things aren't the same without her. I understand that she needs time after the bullshit her parents pulled, but at least give me an inkling of how she's doing."

"You care about her. We both know that," I walk to the vanity, grabbing a scrunchie to tie up my hair. "She appreciates you checking on her. She's doing okay. I don't know when she's coming back, but at least she knows she has people waiting for her."

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Darien offered a smile that warmed me from head to toe. Yet, another part of me was saddened that I, too, couldn't say anything about Odessa's infidelity. The little bitch is getting on my last nerve with her ridiculous mission. However, she hadn't tried anything since she realized that it was the wolf she was irritating, not the woman. The fear contorting her damn face made me smile.

"Of course." He sighed. "We'll be leaving for the mall in an hour, which gives you enough time to get ready." He left my room in silence. Opening the large closet, I rummaged through the colorful assortment of hanging clothes, lips pursing in confusion.

"What the hell do you even wear to the mall?" I asked Kiya.

"Go with the black skater dress with red flowers! It is my favorite and mall appropriate." She retorted.

With a shoulder shrug, I laid out the dress on the bed. It was beautiful to look at and it fits with my dark skin. Without hesitation, I stripped out of my pajamas and took a much-needed shower.

Dressed in the skater dress, black converse shoes,

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and my selenite necklace, I walked to the living room. The thick straps covered the scar on my back and the flared bottom covered the various scars on my thighs. My cross-body purse bounced on my hip with every movement. During my journey, I ran into an old friend.

"Hi, Kwame. How are things?" I asked with a smile. I was gifted with one of his own.

"Hello, Artemis. Things are going well! I was just looking for you."

I cocked my head to the side. "What is it?"

"Are you and your friends interested in the pool party we're having tomorrow afternoon?"

I pondered in thought. "We could be. What is the party in celebration for?"

The Gamma shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing in particular. We figured that we all need a break from the rigor we had over the past month. The pups are excited about it. It'll be fun for our wolves to mingle with the Garnet wolves outside of training."

I agreed wholeheartedly. Everyone deserved a break once in a while. Even trainers. "I'll ask them and see

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if they are up for it. I'm sure they would be."

"Excellent." Kwame's eyes crinkled with his pearly smile. "How is Kiya?"

"She's doing alright." I nod. "My friends and I are about to head to the mall and—"

"What a coincidence! Lorelai is about to head out as well and..." His eyes turn to the living room to see his mate chatting with my group. "It looks like she wants some company."

"It'll be fun." I never got the chance to sit down and know Lorelai as a person. All I knew was that she comes from a pack in Louisiana, had a bachelor's degree in psychology, and was applying for graduate school. Plus, getting away from a testosterone-ridden environment would do her some good.

After bidding Kwame farewell, Lorelai dragged us to her car. Somehow, all seven of us could fit. The nearest shopping mall was about twenty minutes away, with plenty of time to get to know the Gamma Female. She loved night walks on the beach, hated spicy food, and fond of spiders. The spider fact made me shudder, a dislike both Kiya, and I shared. Music blared in my ears the entire ride, mixed with meaningless conversation from the others. It felt

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weird, socializing when I was a solitary creature.
Kiya normally did the socializing for both of us.

"It takes time, but you'll get the hang of it. I promise."
Kiya told me.

"Are you planning on coming out soon?"

*"Yeah. I think I'm ready. I just needed to
recuperate, but don't worry, I'll put you out of
your misery soon!"*

I chuckled silently to myself, sitting back in my seat.
My eyes watched the whizzing trees turn into
whizzing buildings as we entered Carson City.

Kiya

*"I'm not wearing that bikini! It'll be a chilly day in
hell before I do!"*

*"Come on, it can't be that bad!" Galen chuckles were
muffled when I tossed the scandalous red bikini back
in his face. "Hey!"*

I giggled, looking through the assortment of
swimwear, ranging from conservative to damn near

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naked. I mean, I've worn bikinis back on San José beaches, but it feels different considering I'll be wearing swimwear around my old pack. Heck, for a species that had no problem with nudity, I still get self-conscious about my body from time to time.

"How about this?" Lorelai scampered over holding a one-piece swimsuit with a flounce around the bust. It was solid black with white and purple polka dots. "I think it'll fit you if you're not looking for wild colors."

"I like it." I smiled, examining the item in my hands. It was in my size too. "I'll take it! Thanks, Lori."

I liked Lorelai. She had a warm energy that matched well with Kwame's. I felt comfortable around her presence, like she was an old friend. As the others continued to look for their swimsuits, finding the best ones to make their mates go wild, I paid for my items and walked around the mall.

It wasn't a big place, but the bellowing of multiple scents was enough to make a young werewolf sick. From greasy food to bad body odor to Sephora's collection of makeup and perfumes, it was insane. Getting out of pack territory did me some good. I felt like my old self again.

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A particular scent hit my nose. My stomach rumbled as I salivated. I smelled Mexican food—*authentic* Mexican food! I sped up my pace, following the delicious scent like a starved beast. However, I didn't realize how deeply enamored I was with the scent until I crashed into a bulky body, embarrassingly sending us both to the ground.

"Ow!"

"Damn." A deep voice rumbled in my ear. "I didn't think I'd get run over by a tiny tank here."

I was about to give this man a piece of my mind until his eyes captured mine in an iron grip. Deep brown, almost maroon, bursting of many emotions. Powerful, deadly, bone-chilling.

I felt calm. Why?

His enormous hands gently seized my upper arms, sending powerful sensations through me. It was nothing like the sparks of the mate bond with Neron, but these sensations demanded me to submit. However, I was unafraid. My body was laid out directly on top of his, chests pressed up to each other.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean for this to happen." I mumbled, embarrassed. Peeling ourselves off each

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other, we both stood up, and that's when I realized how incredible the height difference was between us.

This man was tall. Almost Neron's height. With skin as deep as mocha and white tresses in a ponytail, I found myself wildly attracted to this man. He's hot as hell, I admit! Never have I felt an instant sexual attraction to a man before. I mean, there is Neron, but I blame the bond for that. This man is a thing of beauty, and boy did the Goddess blessed him well.

Why am I feeling this way? I have never felt this way toward anyone before and it was uncomfortable.

"No worries, my dear." He smirked. "You were walking mighty fast there. Were you in a hurry?"

"U-uh, no. I...um...I got hungry." That's it. Time to die. I bulldozed over an innocent man because of my stomach. Kill me now.

The man let out a hearty laugh that was nice on the ears. It made me laugh along too. "I understand. I learned to never impede between a woman and her food. You must have a keen nose."

"Something like that," I smirked. "I smelled Mexican food, and I just had to follow it."

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"Oh, Mexican food is excellent food. *Los Lupes* is not too far from here." The handsome man pointed behind him. "Just take the escalator down one floor and it'll be right in front of you."

"Thank you, Mr...."

"Octavius." He extended his hand, and I shook it. Upon touching, I felt something strange. Like something mysterious wanted to latch onto me. It was possessive, almost dark. Before I could retract my hand, he released it. "And you are?"

"Kiya."

"Kiya..." Octavius savored my name on his tongue like it was the sweetest chocolate he's had. I don't know if I should feel flattered or creeped out.

"Beautiful name. Well, Kiya. I must get going now. I'm meeting up with a friend and he must wonder where I am."

"O-Of course. I don't want to keep you away!" I smiled in understanding. After we bid each other farewell, I felt eyes pierce my back. Patient. Wanting. Demanding. It sends violent chills down my spine. When I looked back behind me, various shoppers paid me no mind.

"*He carries no scent,*" Artemis spoke. "*He doesn't s*

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mell like a human or a werewolf. I wonder why we felt the way we felt."

"Do you think he's a bad person?"

"I...I don't know. For once, I don't know."

I rode the descending escalator in silence. Octavius was nowhere to be found, yet I wanted to see him again. Half of me wanted to listen to the warning bells. *Stay away from him.* But the other half was full of lust and desire. *I want to see him again.* It was a foreign feeling that I was not used to, and it bothered me. Mexican food became the least of my worries.

Who was that man?