

Chapter 63 - The Pool

"All she wanted was that special someone to reach beyond the surface and discover her heart." — Terry O'Neal

Kiya

Entering the mall foyer, I immerse my ears in the intense melody of punk rock. It fills the blitzing tunes with riveting emotion, amazing vocals, and harmonious instruments molding together into the perfect recipe that captured my attention. I followed, the music getting louder with my approach. An audience, in their seats, watched and listened to the rock band.

Los Delphines. Fascinated, I took a nearby seat, settling my bags around my legs. As the music raged on, I was enamored by the band. They give off an otherworldly vibe, deepening my curiosity. All the band members were exceptionally talented. Yet, I couldn't take my eyes off the lead vocalist.

Long, curly jet-black hair curled to perfection with one side shaved. A thick streak of teal poked proudly out of her ringlets. Deep blue-green eyes with skin light tan. Dressed in all black leather, she truly was a star. My eyes spied the blue choker around her neck with an oddly shaped pendant.

Is that...a seashell?

There was something about the vocalist I couldn't put my finger on. Something told me she was someone special, even Artemis could feel it.

As special as Phoebe.

Within several minutes, the group finished their song, and the spectators roared in applause. I clapped along. I never found punk rock to be a genre I'd be interested in, but this band piqued my interest.

As the band packed up, I lingered, shuffling around the seats. Something in me was urging me to talk to the vocalist. Would she be mean? Snobby? Would she find me unworthy of her time? Too many nights of reading internet horror stories of fan interactions with musical artists made me wary of approaching.

But it never hurts to try, right? If anything happens, I'll lick my wounds at home. Huffing a breath of gallantry, I grabbed my bags and walked up to the singer. "Um, hello?"

The moment our eyes met, I felt like my breath snatched from my lungs. She was stunning and her eyes reminded me of the deep seas. Her natural scent was interesting, I could smell an oceanic scent radiating off her. How odd. I've never met anyone who smelt this way before.

The three other band members have the same scent marker. The two men were deep in conversation in the background. Judging by their closeness, I assume they're in a relationship. The shorter woman with rose-gold hair was packing away the microphone stands.

"Yes?"

I silently cursed myself for losing focus so quickly. "I just wanted to congratulate you on your performance. You're talented."

She smiled warmly, almost beaming with pride. "Thank you! It's nice to hear from a fan." Her shoulders relaxed. "Are you a local of Carson City?"

"Sort of." I shrugged my shoulders. "It's complicated. My name is Kiya."

“Violetta.” We both shook hands. Hers were so smooth and supple.

“Have you heard of *Los Delphines* before?”

I shook my head. “This is the first time I’ve heard you guys play and I’m impressed. Were you all always a punk rock band?”

“Pretty much.” Violetta pointed to her members. “The short one with the rose-gold hair is Marina. She may be small, but she packs one hell of a punch. The lovey-dovey couple over there is José with the black hair and Chase with the green mohawk.”

“Wow. You guys sure are...”

“Different?” She smirked. “We try to be. We weren’t allowed to be ourselves growing up. I sure as hell wasn’t. Glad I left that cult so that I could watch movies and wear whatever the hell I want.”

I stared at her in silence, eyes wide as saucers. “Cult?”

“I didn’t mean to say that!” Violetta stammered, shaking her hands in front of her.

“N-no worries. We say a lot of things we don’t mean.” But deep down, I feel there was some truth to Violetta’s words.

“Nice necklace. Is that clear quartz?”

A weird sense of protectiveness came over me, my hand instinctively covered my moon pendant. “It’s selenite. Is that a seashell charm on your choker?”

“Yup. You could say...I have a thing for the ocean.” She shot a wink at me, which made me chuckle.

“Interesting. I have a thing for the moon.” Wink wink, nudge nudge.
“Anyway, would you guys be staying in Carson City? I’d like to hear you play live again.”

“Yes, we are. We have a gig coming up in two weeks at a dive bar called the L&L Tavern. You should check us out there if you’re around. Look up online for a run-down of where we’ll play.”

“Will do! Thanks!” A text chimed on my phone from Galen, saying everyone was done and on their way to get some pizza. Bidding Violetta and her bandmates farewell, I write a note on my phone to check deeper into the band.

The next day, I stood in front of my full-length mirror in my black, polka-dotted swimsuit. It exposed all my scars, from the ones on my back, my thighs, and ankles. It feels weird to have them visible in the place they were born in, but there was not much I could do about it. Grabbing my sunglasses and slipping on my flip-flops, I met Abigail at my door.

“Ready to go?” Goddess, she looked amazing in her plain, bright yellow bikini. Jackie was going to be all over her, swimming in something other than water. Smiling, I put my shades in my hair and loop my arm with hers.

“Yup!”

The pool party was as active as an amusement park. Wolves of all shapes and sizes swimming, mingling, or dancing to the blaring music. There was a minibar serving all sorts of drinks from juice for the pups to alcohol for the adults.

There were several pools, the big one for adults and teenagers who could swim. There was a smaller pool for the unshifted pups who wanted to

hang out with their peers and parents teaching their smaller children how to swim. I spot my friends and their mates, huddled near the pool or on the grass. Pink blossomed on Galen's cheeks as he swam with his mate, Mikhail.

Adorable!

Unfortunately, that feeling faded when I saw Darien and Odessa making out like they couldn't breathe without one another. I want to be happy for Darien, but I couldn't because his mate was a conniving cheater. The happiness in his eyes made my chest tighten because he was ignorant of Odessa not holding the same amount of love he did.

"Mine!" Abigail was ripped from my arm and lifted in the air by her strong mate donning a forest-green two-piece. "By the Moon Goddess, you look so delicious, my love."

"We're here to have fun, so try to keep your hands to yourself." She teased, smooching the Beta's nose as she was slowly put back on her feet. Jackie scoffed, rolling her eyes as her biceps bulged with her arms tightening around Abigail's waist.

"Impossible, my sweet. I'm not letting you out of my sight."

"Gotta go!" It was my cue to leave when they started making out. I found a large pool raft near the pool and took a seat, not wanting to go in the water yet. My eyes spotted many mated couples around the pool, enjoying each other's company on and off the waters. The stench of love was potent, making me gag a little. The sun was out, but it didn't warm me.

A pang of jealousy ached in my heart, recapping that I wanted what I couldn't have. I was sitting here, feeling the unwelcoming sting of loneliness around destined love. Everyone I knew was mated now, even Sapphire who I have yet to see arrive. It wasn't even the stupid bond I

wanted! I wanted someone to look at me with pure admiration in their eyes, holding me close in their arms as the world faded around us.

I wanted to mean the world to someone. I wanted someone to just...love me for me. Not because they had to. Was that a bad thing? Was it a bad thing that I wanted the love to blossom naturally, not because of destiny?

I hated that the first person I thought about with this love was Neron. That damned Alpha. I am determined to not have the bond affect my rationale, but the good feelings it gives were mind-boggling. I couldn't love Neron. But goddamnit, I hated how his touch made me feel.

Stupid bond. Stupid Alpha. Stupid werewolf bullshit. Stupid—!

“AAH!”

My world blurred around me before I plunged deep into the cold, chlorinated water. Swimming to the surface, my ears were bombarded with laughter. I turn to my right to see Isaiah and Sapphire cackling as they rose off the inflatable raft I was just sitting on!

Those assholes catapulted me into the pool!

“Need some help there?” Sapphire mocked, shooting me an infuriating wink.

“You two are so dead!” Wet and angry, I shot out of the pool like a rocket and chased the pair down. They ran fast, but I was faster.

Too fast.

I smacked into someone and we both went tumbling hard into the grass. Upon contact, I knew who it was when the sparks ignited by our touch. I open my eyes to be pulled in by his bright blue. He smirked as I slowly realized the compromising position we were in. I laid there splayed out

across Neron's body. Neron was shirtless in only his swim trunks, his arms wrapped around me, holding me tight against his hard body.

"Wow, Kiya. It looks like you've fallen for me." He chuckled. "Get it? Because you fell?"

He liked to make puns? What a nightmare! "Don't ever become a comedian, Neron."

I struggled to move my wet body off him, but his arms locked around me tighter, pressing my body into his. My eyes couldn't look away as our breathing slowly settled as one. That's when I suddenly realized just how close our faces were.

How close our lips were.

One fatal move and I'd be kissing him.

"Neron..." I whimpered. "L-Let me go."

"You feel it too, do you? Our bond revitalizing?" As one arm remained locked around my waist, Neron brings a hand to brush my wet curls from my face, thumb caressing my cheek. I had to resist nuzzling into his large palm. "Goddess, I want to kiss you right now. You're so beautiful."

I saw it. That love I wanted simmering in his deep cerulean blue. The waves of his desire and admiration crashing violently against the shore, pulling me deeper into the depths of his soul. It was suffocating, seductive. It urged me to sink deep, to lose myself in the unmatched azure. I didn't want to look away.

I couldn't look away.

His lips moved closer to mine, his breath becoming hotter and more ragged as he closed in. I didn't want to move. There was a deep part of

me that was curious about what would happen if I did just let go. I wanted to have a single, soft taste of what his lips offered.

“N-Neron...”

“Kiya...”

The world faded into black. It was only the two of us in our smoldering bubble. It felt good. It felt peaceful. My resistance wavered and my resolve crumbled. At that moment, I wanted nothing more but to feel his lips on mine.

Just...a single...taste...

I shut my eyes, leaning into him, enjoying the heavy aroma of his sandalwood scent swallowing me whole. I wanted to feel what it was like to be loved deeper than familial. I want to feel this love that Selene destine all werewolves to have. I wanted to feel him.

Our lips brushed up against one another, sparks shooting off like detonating fireworks. It felt amazing! I wanted more! I needed more! I wanted—!

“What the fuck is this?”

We jumped, bashing our heads against each other from the shrill voice. Our faces turned to see Odessa glaring down at us with burning intensity and hatred, most aimed at me. Realizing what had happened, or was about to happen, I gathered off the Alpha, who also scrambled to get off the grass.

I felt something brush up against my leg.

Something large.

OH, MY GODDESS!

My face burned the brightest shade of red it could muster as I rose on my feet, taking several steps away from Neron and Odessa. “Nope! Don’t worry, that won’t ever happen again!”

“Kiya, aren’t you overreacting just a bit?” Neron asked me, arching an eyebrow while ignoring Odessa’s pointed glares. I could see the anger rolling off him, pissed at the woman in the white, cherry-designed bikini for interrupting the kiss.

Our almost kiss.

“Take care of that, will you?” I pointed to the noticeable tent in his swimming trunks. Panicked, I ran to the other side of the packhouse. I hid behind a wall with my hand over my chest, trying to calm my pounding heart.

I couldn’t believe that happened. I almost kissed Neron! I became so enraptured in his beautiful eyes that the mate bond pulled me closer to him. I almost surrendered to destiny.

Goddamnit! Why did things have to become that much harder?

After fifteen minutes, I returned to the party, walking towards the bar. Cursing myself for falling so easily, breaking my years’ long promise to always hate him. Goddamnit Selene, could you have chosen someone else to be tied to this damn bond with me? At least all my friends were having fun, even Sapphire and Isaiah whom I did not catch.

“Give me the strongest drink you have,” I demanded the female bartender. The blond arched an eyebrow in curiosity and shock.

“For a little thing like you? We have the Long Island Iced Tea—”

“Give me that with extra vodka.”

“Delta Kiya, I wouldn’t—”

“**Now**.”

My growl meant business. In under a minute, my order was made and handed to me. I chugged down the strong drink to take my mind off what happened. Not a good coping mechanism, I know, but I do what I want.

While walking back to the pool for a much-needed dip, the wind was suddenly knocked out of me. My world spun rapidly like a merry-go-round. My muscles, strong and mighty, suddenly went weak and limp, sending me to my knees.

I couldn’t breathe. No air could get in my lungs like someone’s squeezing the life out of me.

My stomach toiled and tumbled wildly. My head pounded like jackhammers to concrete.

As I gasped for air, something dribbled out of my mouth. Staining the grass red. Is that blood?

“**Poison**!” Artemis exclaimed. “**You’ve been poisoned**!”

Nothing she said registered in my mind. Not even the shouts and screams heard all around me. The last thing I remembered was tumbling onto the ground in intense pain.

Then my world turned black.

Chapter 64 - The Investigation

"Promises are only as strong as the person who gives them." — Stephen Richards

Neron

"If my mate dies on your fucking watch, I will tear you apart! Save her!"

Dr. Jackson's amber eyes stared in mine with sheer terror, stuttering his promise to save Kiya. Nurses and doctors rush past me towards my beloved, hooking her to IVs as they work quickly. Running my hand through my hair, I roar in frustration.

I don't know how this happened! In the blink of an eye, everything changed for the worst. One moment I almost kissed Kiya for the first time, and the next, she was fighting for her life. The screams from my pack alerted me to the commotion, and there I saw Kiya convulsing in Galen's arms.

I've never acted so quickly in my life in a sea of chaos. Her wellbeing became my priority as I rushed her to the emergency room. Nothing else mattered to me. The pool party was shut down at once to preserve the crime scene. This wasn't an accident. Someone did something to Kiya.

Someone *harmed* my mate.

When I find the bastard, they will pay with their life. I swear on my honor!

"Neron, the investigation is underway," Kwame told me through the mind-link. "Valerian and I are speaking to witnesses and they say before Kiya collapsed, she was at the bar."

"Tear it apart. Investigate every nook and cranny and report back to me as soon as you find something. Don't stop questioning, press if you must!"

A stampede of footsteps echoed behind me, belonging to Kiya's friends, Raina, and oddly enough, her parents. "How is she?" Raina asked, throwing her hands on her knees to catch her breath.

"I don't know. The doctors are working on her right now." I answered, trying my best to suppress my anger. Onyx was beyond pissed. He was enraged and out for blood. Our mate being hurt was equivalent to stabbing silver in my chest, it fucking hurt! Through the bond, her pain became my pain. It was burning as if someone lit her on fire.

The culprit is dead man. Point blank. They signed their death certificate the moment they hurt my beloved!

Kiya must pull through. She is too strong to go out like this.

My lips still tingled from our almost-kiss. I felt nothing like that before. It was like being bathed in the purest, cleanest of enchanted waters. Her body fit perfectly in mine and her scent held me prisoner. It felt right. I wanted to feel that again. I wanted her in my arms again, to touch her, to feel her, to breathe her into me.

Goddess, if I lose her again, I'll lose my mind!

"I need to see her! Raina, let me go!" Ashley shouted, trying to push through the crowd but was held back by her daughter.

"Mom, please. Let the doctors do their job! There is not much we could do without getting in their way." Raina soothed, pulling her mother to an empty chair.

"Who would do this to her?" The older woman whimpered. "Why? Why did this have to happen to her?"

"Alpha." Steven walked up to me, his neck vein throbbing with anger, "I won't hesitate to tear their throats out for harming my baby girl. That evil being is still out there! Please find them or I will."

“That is if you get your hands on them first,” Jacqueline growled before looking at me. “Remember the promise you made to our Alpha. If it was one of your wolves that harmed Kiya on your territory, Alpha Anthony will hold you responsible for your failure in the agreement.”

She’s right. Per our agreement for allowing his soldiers to remain on my territory, I must ensure their safety. And I already fucking failed, and with my mate, nonetheless. This realization only enrages me even more. I ball up my fists and bite my lower lip.

“I realize this, Beta Jacqueline. I will find the person responsible and their punishment will be swift.”

“Alpha.” I jerk around to see Dr. Jackson standing with his clipboard. “I have news on Delta Kiya’s condition.”

That was fast! I kept my mind-link open so Valerian and Kwame could listen in. “Spit it out.”

“She was poisoned. Her blood analysis results detected high amounts of potassium cyanide. She ingested the poison through an alcoholic drink because her Blood Alcohol Content is elevated. If you acted a couple of minutes later, she would have died. We’ve supplied the applicable antidotes intravenously and oxygen therapy. Unfortunately, to flush the poison from her system, she must remain here for a few days.”

“*The bartenders*,” I revealed to Valerian and Kwame. “*Every single one of them. Bring them to my office and bag up all the glasses and send them to the lab. I want to know which glass Kiya drank out of. It should have traces of cyanide.*”

Valerian exclaimed. “*Someone wanted her dead quickly.*” Valerian concluded with a low growl “*That shit kills humans within minutes.*”

“*We’re on it, Alpha*,” Kwame reassured me. “*We’ll alert you when ready.*”

“Couldn’t she have detected the cyanide in her drink?” Abigail asked curiously.

“Unfortunately, not everyone can detect cyanide. This goes for both humans and werewolves. She wouldn’t have known until it was too late. Not all types of cyanide carry a scent or a taste. Potassium cyanide carries a bitter taste, but most likely the alcohol disguised it.”

“Can we see her?” Sapphire asked, clutching Isaiah’s hand. “Is she awake?”

Dr. Jackson shook his head. “No. She’s unconscious now, but her room is open for visitors. I recommend one person at a time—!” Ignoring the complaints and protests behind me, I rushed past everyone, barging into Kiya’s room.

My heart never broke so fast.

Kiya laid in her bed, unmoving, with arms hooked to several IVs. Her coily hair splayed on her white pillow, oxygen tubes inserted in her nose. Splotches of bright red and dark blue covered her russet skin because cyanide blocks her cells from receiving oxygen. Her lips were parted, taking on a faint, sickly blue. Onyx howled in pain because he was unable to connect to Artemis.

I walked to her bedside, gently taking her small hand into mine. Leaning down, I kissed her forehead, growling at the very faint almond scent wafting from her mouth. “Kiya, on my honor, I’ll find whoever did this to you. They marked themselves for death, for hurting you. I don’t know if you can hear me, but I promise you, they will suffer. I love you. Get well.”

I squeezed her hand and left her room, marching towards my office to interrogate the bartenders. One of them did this. And I’ll fuck them up for almost killing my mate!

Witness accounts confirmed what my Beta and Gamma told me. Someone had laced Kiya's drink with potassium cyanide. I've interrogated all the bartenders working the bar at the time. All five of them reeked with fear. If someone were to step inside my office, they'll smell the volcanic rage erupting from my pores. All knew to not waste my time with useless details, I demanded straightforward answers. Using my Alpha command was something I didn't like to do, but it was needed.

One of them almost became a murderer.

One bartender, Emily, displayed more signs of guilt than the others. After many grueling questions, she admitted to serving Kiya the poisoned drink. As much as I wanted to rip the bitch apart, I withheld my claws and threw her in the prisons. There was much more to be done with her before I decide her fate, such as how the fuck she could smuggle potassium cyanide into pack grounds without my knowledge.

There was something deeper in play, and that's a terrible feeling to have.

As I made my way back to my mate's hospital room, I was met with a surprise. My father stood over Kiya, watching her like a hawk. He turned his head towards me, holding a serious expression on his aging face.

"Son."

"Dad. What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Kiya. She'll be alright, thank the Moon Goddess." He cleared his throat. "But my question is, when will you make her your Luna?"

I blinked, astounded at the sudden bluntness. I've never given much thought about Kiya becoming my Luna, although it crossed my mind many times. However, Kiya's made it clear she doesn't want to become Luna and I cannot force her. "I don't know if I can, Dad."

"Hmm." He grunted. "Yet, you wouldn't make Odessa your Luna when needed."

"She has found her mate, but even that has its complications because she's still coming for me. Regardless, I won't mark Odessa and I, certainly, won't mark Kiya as mine until I get her full consent, if a time like that would ever come."

"Want my opinion?" He asked. Not really, but I nodded. "It's a good thing your true mate has returned. Odessa would have led this pack to ruin. However, with Kiya at your side, you'd be a powerful Alpha. Zircon Moon has gone long without a proper Luna, and its prime time you make your move and claim what's yours. Alphas don't wait, they take."

"Dad. Kiya hates this pack and her home is Garnet Moon. I won't force her to do anything she doesn't want to do." I sighed. "I understand the importance of having a Luna. I want Kiya to rule at my side more than anything, but I will not rush because of my impatience."

"You don't know what you're wasting here, Neron." My dad growled. "Kiya is...incredibly special. A rare diamond in the rough. Do you know what she's capable of? She has more power than you think. More than any high-ranking Alpha in the world."

I didn't like the sound of this. The ominousness in my father's voice didn't leave me with any positive feelings. It was as if he was asking me to force the mating process on Kiya. To take away her ability to choose. He turns to me, his blue eyes on mine.

“You need to think about the future of your pack, son. Your pack needs a strong Alpha and Luna, and with Kiya, you’d be the strongest Alpha out of them all. The blessings from the Moon Goddess would be plentiful and you’d go down in history. I know I’ve urged you to mark Odessa in the past, but that means nothing now that Kiya is alive. I’m urging you to put her in her rightful place, regardless of what she believes.”

“No!” I retorted, furious. “Dad, I can’t believe you’re asking me to do this. What is it about Kiya that you’re not telling me?”

“If you paid attention to your history lessons about our kind more, you’d know.” My dad replied voice etched in contempt. “She’s a white wolf. A white wolf our Moon Goddess blessed you with. She holds power unmatched to anything or anyone on this planet, and you’re going to waste this opportunity to become stronger because she’s a little angry?”

“She has every right to be angry after the shit we put her through!” I roared. Snarling at my father was something I never thought I’d do, but at Kiya’s defense, I proudly would break all the rules he has instilled in me since childhood. “I’m not losing her again by forcibly marking her! I refuse to put my desires above her own. I lost her once, but never again. I won’t repeat my mistakes of the past.”

My father glared at me. Long and hard. My eyes went to Kiya resting peacefully in her bed, her chest rising and falling with the rhythmic beats of her heart monitor. There was a power within her that I detected when she arrived on this land. It was immense, intimidating, and lethal. Was that what Dad was talking about?

What secrets are you hiding from me, Kiya?

“Fine. Continue to play the waiting game. But, if others come to steal away what’s yours, you have only yourself to blame.

An unbearable chill trundled into the room upon his departure. I looked at Kiya one more time, worry scrunching the muscles in my face. What is going on here? My father knows something but refuses to say it.

But one thing's for sure, I won't rush Kiya into the Luna position. I promised to take things slow, and I would. Above all, no one will take her away from me again.

I love her so much. Her well-being is too important to me.

Damn **all** the expectations!