

## **Chapter 72 - The Hunter**

*“You can be the hunter, or you can be the hunted.” — Lisa Gardner*

**Kiya**

“We shouldn’t have done that.”

“No shit, Sherlock.”

My lips were still swollen from our kiss, the dull throbs pulsating as vivid reminders. The excited chatter of the amusement park muffled in my ears as my heart beats against my ribcage like a drum. Neron and I crossed a line that should’ve never been crossed. A line I promised myself I would never cross.

We kissed, and we kept kissing until the ride operator opened the side door for us and awkwardly cleared his throat.

Blaring heat made its home under my skin as I thought about it. His hands roaming my body felt like heaven, his heat held mine in a tight embrace, and his lips. Goddess, his lips were witchcraft incarnate! They ignited a fire I didn’t know I had. Coupled with his skillful tongue, I was a goner. An absolute goner.

It felt so good. So **right**. So...loved.

But even what felt good could be wrong.

The kiss shouldn’t have happened. At all. All my internal promises and determination went down the drain, and I only had myself to blame. I wavered. I let the bond take over me. I let this all happen.

I'm weak. I've always been weak. How could I fool myself all these years thinking I was strong? One stupid kiss and I threw away all I worked hard to achieve. I was an idiot, a fucking fool. Everything just became more complicated.

Neron and I walked towards his car with me following a few steps behind. I didn't want him to see my face. I was ashamed of myself. Hot tears slowly blurred my vision. I hugged my teddy bear against my chest, the only source for my comfort I had now. The softness of the pelt relayed a message that I could cry into it when I was in private. That it was here to soak up my sadness and self-guilt. That was all I could do now—relish in my stupidity.

We entered his car in silence, neither of us daring to address the elephant in the room. Shame rolled off Neron in waves as he struggled to focus on starting the car. He dropped his keys several times before he was able to turn on the ignition, gradually driving away from the park into the silent night.

Needing a distraction, I reached for the radio. He did too. Our hands jerked away like we've touched an open flame when our fingers touched. Goddamnit! Huffing, I turn the volume knob as *Los Delphines* thumped through the car. It reminded me to look up where Violetta and her band were playing next.

Silence persisted. Anxiety persisted. But it didn't change the fact that we kissed and potentially strengthened the bond when there was no need to. How were we going to manage this? The lines were too blurred, and I felt the deep desire to kiss him again. The desire for his lips to set ablaze my core. To surrender into our animalistic lust and just...

"FUCK!" My fists slammed on the dashboard, shaking under the force of my hands. "Why the hell did you have to kiss me, Neron?"

“I didn’t mean to, Kiya.” He admitted with his tired eyes glued to the road. “I... I got caught up in the moment. Onyx fighting with me didn’t help and...” He sighs. “It shouldn’t have happened.”

“What are we going to do?” I mutter. “We can’t pretend like the kiss hasn’t happened.”

“We have to,” Neron replied, his voice void of amusement. “Especially around Dad. Once he catches a whiff that something’s happened between us, he’ll use it to further his agenda.”

“Right. Because he still wants me to be Luna.”

“But it felt good.”

I arch an eyebrow, catching sight of Neron’s reddening cheeks. “The kiss?” He nodded, timid. I groan miserably because I agreed. The damn thing felt so good and that’s what was wrong with it. How long until I completely surrender to the bond? Could I hold out for much longer? Judging from Neron’s side view, there was turmoil in him.

Why did he ask me to reject him? If this was when I first arrived on Zircon territory, I’d be more than happy to do just that and call it a day. Now? I was not sure. My indecisiveness to reject him would be my downfall.

The road back home was lengthy, but I was grateful for it. Since we live some distance away from human towns, we must remain as disguised as possible. However, something felt off. The music was blaring inside of the car, but outside was so still. I’d typically spot a few animals or insects mingling in the dark woods, uncaring to the world around them.

But there was not an animal or bug in sight. This was too strange, added with an unidentifiable stench that assaulted my nostrils. Chills equal to the Arctic slid down my spine, forcing an involuntary shiver. The longer the feeling marinated, the more I felt on edge. Neron had to be feeling

this too, right? My eyes caught his eyes darting from the rear-view mirror to the side mirror with his jaw working tight.

“Something’s wrong.” His hands tightened around the steering wheel, “We’re going to take a detour back to pack territory.”

“Good idea.”

Well, someone sure as fuck didn’t think so.

Suddenly, we both jerked forward from the forced stop of the car. It caught me off guard, stopping so fast I got whiplash. A heavy thump on the hood of the car caught our attention, but the night and the thick trees lining the road was a skillful camouflage. We couldn’t see the head of whoever or whatever we might have hit because the front lights only illuminated the bottom half of the unknown entity.

Sooner rather than later, I found out what the thing was. An impossibly powerful person busted their fist through the windshield, grabbed me by my shirt collar, and threw me from the car. I hit the ground hard, back first. Glass shards rained all around me with a few inhabiting my skin.

“Kiya!”

I slowly rolled to my side, gasping as more shards sliced my skin. Loud, heavyweight boots echoed in my ears as the pursuer made his way to me. I found myself lifted in the air once more by a metallic gloved hand. That was when I was able to get a look at the perpetrator.

Incredibly bulky with a height towering over Neron’s, this man—or beast—could put the world’s famous bodybuilders to shame. With skin as white as snow, its deep red eyes pierced my soul. Its oily black hair did nothing to curtail the menace that laid behind the crimson orbs. This beast must be five times my weight and twice my height. It picked me up like I weighed nothing!

“Let me go!” I shouted as I tried to wiggle out of its iron grip. It said nothing. It just stared at me with emotionless red eyes. I wiggled my pocketknife from my back pocket and jammed it into his wrist, forcing the first human emotion I could see in him, rage.

Unfathomable growls resounded in the air and the black-cloaked beast was barreled into the floor by Onyx. Eyes full of anger and claws ready to shred flesh, the Alpha was aiming for the kill. The humanoid beast stood up on his enormous feet and fought back.

Beast versus beast. Who would win?

The fight looked like something out of a movie. Onyx, big, black, and beautiful was trying his hardest to tear down the malignant, brutish man-like monster who delivered violent punches repeatedly, fearlessly drawing blood from black.

“**We need to help him!**” Artemis yelped. I had never heard her so panicked before. She was always calm and collected while I lost my shit. “**That thing is too much for him to take on his own.**”

“*Where the hell did that thing even come from?*”

“**I wish I knew! Are you going to shift or not?**”

At least the wounds without the glass healed. Tweezers were going to be my best friend tonight. Tossing my clothes aside, I shifted into my beautiful Artemis and went to work on aiding Onyx in battle.

I thrust forward, clamping my jaw on the arm of the beast. His blood tasted awful—if I would even call it blood. Bites, clawing, tearing, anything and everything wolves did, we did. We’re two powerhouses, two predators tearing down our prey. The beast fought back hard without fail. Onyx snagged a leg and effortlessly tossed the beast to a tree, the sheer force almost knocking it over from the roots.

From my jaws, I spat out the blood. Ugh. I was going to be brushing my teeth for the rest of the night. Onyx trotted over and nudged my side with his snout, his way of asking if I was okay. We may share a mate bond, but there was not an established mind-link, so we couldn't communicate naturally. Sometimes, if a message was powerful enough, it would get through. Like with Orion that day.

I bump his snout back, responding with a low growl. Onyx's frayed fur relaxed, his horse-like stature standing tall as his watchful eyes glared at the beast, slowly getting his bearings. It looks like it was ready for another fight.

"*The avatar*." Its deep, grumbling, gritty voice struck fear into my wolf heart. "*Give me the avatar!*"

This changed everything. All this time, this son-of-a-bitch wanted me. It knew that I was an avatar! My mind echoed back to the passage I read in that mysterious book I found in the library. White wolves have been hunted for their power for centuries because we're connected to our Moon Goddess. This beast was a hunter.

Hunting me. Wanting to hurt *me*.

That declaration riled up Onyx again, his teeth unsheathed, and drool dripped from his gums like rain. He was pissed. With a mighty, earth-shattering howl, he attacked again and tore the beast apart. He didn't stop for a breath. The blood never bothered him. He quenched his thirst for blood like an apex predator and left the gargantuan hunter bleeding on the black soil. Mother Nature, unfortunately, soaked up the blood on her earth.

The wolf panted, but not without snarling and kicking the mangled corpse. Onyx trotted to the side of the car where he shifted back to Neron. Cracking bones is a sickly, melodious tune in the empty air. I

grabbed my clothes by my teeth and went to the other side, shifting back into my human form, and quickly got dressed.

Before long, Neron came to my side. “Are you okay?”

“I...I think so.” That’s not true. I was far from okay, I’m being hunted. If Neron wasn’t here, who knows what might have happened. Huffing in a deep, relieved breath, he pulled me into a tight hug. Neron’s large hand rubbed circles on my back as his chin rested on top of my head.

He’s shaking.

“Let’s get you home. Sit in the back, okay? I don’t want you sitting on glass.” The Alpha released me and opened the side door, gesturing for me to get in. Normally, I’d say something snappy, but I didn’t. I spent all my energy subduing the hunter. As I was about to get in, I heard shuffling sounds and deep moans and my fear came straight back as I saw the form of the mangled hunter begin to move.

“He’s getting back up!” I yelled. Neron’s head jerked behind him and entered survival mode. Pushing me into the back seat, he slammed the door and got into the driver’s side as fast as a cheetah and started the car. The mangled hunter made his way towards us, ready to take me again when Neron’s foot slammed on the gas. Wheels screeched against concrete and raced down the road away from the calamity on two feet.

We drove around for twenty minutes, taking extra precautions to make sure the hunter lost our trail. Once the coast is clear, we took the detour and drove back to Zircon Moon territory. When the guards saw the damage to the windshield, none could get a word out because Neron silenced them. He didn’t feel like explaining what had happened. Honestly? I don’t blame him.

We were in no mood to talk.

Once we rolled into the garage and parked, I stepped out and leaned against the car door. Who knew a night of fun would turn into this mess?

Neron appeared next to me, “One hell of a night.”

“Yeah.” I run a hand through my hair. “How are you taking it?”

“Honestly?” He shoved his hands in his pockets as he also leaned on the car door. “I’m in the mood for sleep. This night was...crazy.” We both share a laugh before falling into silence again. “Meet me in my office tomorrow after training and we’ll talk about...you know...what happened.”

He wasn’t just talking about the hunter. He was also talking about the kiss. Sighing, I give him a curt nod before turning away. Neron called for my attention again and when I turn back, I saw that he was holding my teddy bear, unharmed from the chaos.

“Thanks.” I smile, taking the bear in my arms. Not a glass shard in sight. It was safe. We went our separate ways in the packhouse. I walked past my friends in the common room having a movie marathon. They were engrossed in the moving pictures until Jackie noticed me, her excitement turning to concern when she looked at me.

“What the hell happened to your clothes?” She asked, prompting everyone to look at me. I looked at my shirt to see it littered with cuts from the glass during the attack.

I chuckled, uneasy. “Um...Neron and I got into an accident.”

“Are you okay?” Galen asked, worried. I wasn’t okay because some cuts aren’t healing because of the glass in them. I’m exhausted.

“Yeah, I will be.” I nodded. “I’ll talk to you all in the morning about it, okay?” My friends wanted to protest but decided against it. Grateful, I



walked to my bedroom and settled my teddy bear in the corner of my room.

It was time for my date with a pair of tweezers.