

Chapter 75 - The Trio

“There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.” — Laurell K. Hamilton

Violetta

“Piece of shit! Let me go! Let me go!!”

The world was a fucked-up place if it allows a seven-foot-tall, muscle man-animal to kidnap me. One minute I was heading to my hotel to meet up with my bandmates to discuss our next gig and the next, I was snatched into an alleyway. I didn’t stand a chance.

I could’ve fought back if only I could access power, but as before, it was like hitting an impenetrable wall. A wall that refused to budge no matter the amount of force I hit it with. Frustration boiled through me like a rumbling geyser threatening to shoot out of its prison. But there was not much I could do. I was a squirrel compared to this behemoth.

Arms bound behind my back in metallic wrist cuffs, my body was thrown into the back of a moving truck. Head hitting the floor, I groaned in pain as the buff man gagged me with a piece of cloth, tightening it on the back of my curly hair. Within seconds, the doors sealed me inside the truck, bathing me in darkness.

Breathing. I hear gentle breathing. There were other people here with me. I couldn’t see them through the pitch-black darkness, but I stay put than to risk a broken ankle. As the truck moved, I crawled to the wall and sat silently, thinking through all that happened.

Never have I thought I’d get kidnapped. I worked too hard to get my life on the path I deserved, and now it was going down the drain. Again.

After escaping the underwater hellscape I once called home, to forming my new family with those I love, I ended up in a shitshow once more.

Life must love me. Note the sarcasm.

The ride is far from comfortable. With every bump in the road, it knocked me on my side. Getting up wasn't easy with my hands bound behind me. Heat rolled into the dark truck, trapping me and the others in a slow-stoking inferno. Breathing became a task comparable to pushing a boulder. My ears picked up the sudden changes of breathing in the darkness with soft moans, but it all soon fell into silence.

Having a conversation with my fellow kidnapees was off the table, it seemed.

After what seemed like hours, the truck came to a sudden halt. A minute went by and the truck doors open to reveal my abductor. Stone-faced, he yanked me out of the truck and tossed me on my feet, but his strength miscalculated the velocity of the toss. I ended up face planting on the ground.

Fucking hell! Fucking brute!

"Stay." Was all it demanded, cold and firm. Like he was speaking to a lowly peasant. While I struggled to stand like a newborn fowl, the kidnapper forced two more people out of the truck, gargantuan hands wrapped firmly around their upper arms. One whimpered while the other struggled like a trapped bird.

One woman looked familiar. The strawberry-blond was a beautiful woman, but I've never seen her before. The shorter curly-haired one I had seen; I was sure of it.

"Move. Try to escape, and I would crush your skulls." With a hand bigger than my face, the threat became real. He'll kill us if we tried

anything funny. I couldn't die! I have so much to live for and a partner who must be so worried about me.

My heart aches at the thought of Manny and Marina, frantically calling my bandmates about my whereabouts. They all must be freaking out. I've never stay out this late without calling.

Oh, graceful Amphitrite, what have I gotten myself into?

The two women and I forcibly marched down an isolated path in the middle of a heavily dense forest with the brute behind us, watching our every move. The sun was setting below the horizon, but the deep orange lights couldn't penetrate through the thick leaves. Earth's scent was normally refreshing and calming, but all I smelt was... fear? Death?

Whatever the smell was, it didn't leave me with a good feeling.

Babble and burble of a riverbank echoed as we drew closer to a large facility. Concrete, grim, secluded—not an ideal place for kidnapees. My brain was the worst at handling stressful situations because every horrific possibility floods my mind like hurricanes in Florida.

Organ harvesting. Sexual slavery. Human trafficking. All morally depraved scenarios continued swimming in. And my knees buckle with every step I take. Walking toward the entrance, the doors opened for us.

I didn't want to enter, but I also didn't want my brain squeezed like a stress ball.

I spotted several people around the facility, some held close to the hip by what I assume were their 'handlers' and others working to maintain the place. The prisoners were pulled by chains attached to what I assume were cuffs tight around their wrists. They were taken some down various mysterious hallways while some were scrubbing them. My stomach toiled and tumbled.

What the actual fuck is this place?

A woman dressed in a clean, blue floral summer dress walked to us, hands up in a silent command for us to stop. She surely was dressed weirdly in a gloomy place like this. Her blue eyes and exhausted and held the weight of sadness. Like she was forced to do this. Blond hair that long lost its shine cascaded to her shoulder blades, swaying with her every movement.

“Thank you, Cerberus.” She whispered in shame. A silver multi-arrow choker rested around her neck. “T-Take them...” The woman took a deep breath. “Take them downstairs where they’ll stay before the Cuffing.”

Excuse me, cuffing? What ‘cuffing’? My shouts of protest came out as deep muffles because of the cloth gag around my mouth, heavy in my mouth by saliva. The mysterious woman led us to a set of descending stairs, beckoning us to follow.

Not like we had a choice.

As we descended, the pungent odor of bleach and cleaning solutions burned my eyes. Someone was down here cleaning up, probably to hide evidence of what happened before our arrival. We passed by several steel doors with tiny windows, each several yards apart from one another, separated by a thick wall.

I heard whimpers behind me. Pained whimpers. It was from one of my fellow kidnapes. I don’t know why, but hearing those sounds tugged my heartstrings. Agony backed up those whimpers, and it broke down my heart further.

But, once the brute, Cerberus, opened a door to an empty holding cell, that was when all hell broke loose.

Kiya

No!

I'm not going into a cell! I couldn't go back to that thing!

Panic floods my system faster than adrenaline, taking the reins of every bodily system I have. Fight or flight mode activates, and I was given the choice to stay and fight or flee. I chose to flee. Flee from the impending doom that laid behind the steel door.

Do you know how cockroaches were hard to get rid of? Like when you thought you got rid of them all, they come back at the most inconvenient of times? That's like my memories. Dark memories of my endless days in my cell beneath the packhouse crawled their way into my mind, infesting it with the disease of pain.

One.

Five.

Twenty-Five.

Hundreds.

It overwhelms my mind with the sudden intensity of my flashbacks. My heart, normally gentle, palpitated in a beat I was all too familiar with. Bronchial tubes tightened as my lungs burned for the oxygen they couldn't get. As fast as I was inhaling, nothing gets through. Tremors and quakes rippled through my muscles like mini earthquakes on a mission to disrupt its anatomical processes. Sweat dropped rapidly like bullets from my head, underarms, and anywhere else with sweat glands.

In desperation, I turned and ran. Ran from the horrible place all my torment was born from. It taunted me, cackled at my weakness. It

laughed at my choice of flight, reminding me repeatedly that I'll always be the weak little girl crying for her mommy to save her.

I didn't get far because Cerberus yanked me back. I struggled and screamed through my gag, tears rushing down my eyes as a dam had burst. Heartless as he was, he threw me in the cell with my arms still cuffed behind my back. Phoebe and Violetta were forced inside before the harsh echo of a door slam were heard.

We're trapped.

And I wanted to die. For the first time in five years.

"Kiya, Kiya!" Artemis yelled in worry. **"Focus on me, please! Don't let the pain take over!"**

But I couldn't focus. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't stop crying or shaking. I didn't want to be here. I felt like Halima. I felt like the little girl forced to live in prison for years, making a home with the chill and a dingy mattress. Echoes of insults covered my ears like earmuffs, forcing me to relive all I buried.

Phantom hits and bites pulsed and stabbed through my body, bringing forth special memories of the physical abuse. All the times my brown flesh was marred with blue, black, red, and yellow. All the times I was forced to exist with the reminders of my family's hatred and neglect. Reminders that I'll never truly be loved. Or respected. Or cared for.

All I felt as a little girl beat me senseless. Taking me back to the dark times, locking the door, and swallowing the key.

"Kiya, sweetheart," Phoebe whispered, using her cuffed hands to help me sit up. I don't know how she got her gag off. Or how her cuffed hands were now in front of her body. But when she pulled down my gag, my screaming came out in full force, ricocheting off the steel walls. My

witch friend may be in front of me, but my surroundings were still in my old kennel.

“Get me out of here! I don’t want to be here! They’ll hurt me again!” My stomach gyrated, breakfast gurgling up my esophagus. Retching, I turned to the side and threw up, emptying my stomach as my eyes burned with tears and my throat burned with hydrochloric acid.

I’m going insane!

“Who do you think would hurt you, Kiya?”

“Everyone! They’ll hurt me like they always did! Make it stop! Please!” Snot dripped down my nose and tears coated my face like a gloss. “I don’t want to be here anymore...”

“Hey...” Violetta kneeled next to me and Phoebe, arms also cuffed in front of her, rubbing my arm soothingly. “I don’t know what you went through, Kiya, but we’re going to get out of this together.”

Although cuffed, Phoebe pulled me close into a tight hug with her arms circled my strained, shivering body. She held me long enough to leave a puddle on her shoulder, bound wrists rubbing circles on my back. Each stroke worked its magic at batting away my panic. My fear.

My labored breathing slowly stabilized to a constant rhythm while my body stilled. The torment skittered away back into the dark, hiding away from the repellant of comfort. Panic attacks were never a fun thing to deal with. They halt the world around you and toss you in a sea of chaos. Then it overrides all your bodily responses, short-circuiting vital organs, and plunges your mind into a whirlwind.

I don’t know how long it took until I could fully calm down. Panic left from my body, leaving behind pure exhaustion.

Everything hurts, but I was alive.

I'm alive.

“How are we going to get out of this?” I croaked. Phoebe sighed heavily above me as she rested her chin on top of my head. Violetta’s hand was still on my arm, her warmth adding to the comfort.

“I don’t know...” The witch whispered. “But we will. We will.”

Remembering what happened prior, my head snapped up. What happened to our friends? Is Jackie okay? What about Sapphire, Darien, and Galen?

Neron...was he dead?

I still feel the stickiness of his blood on my hands. Part of his life clung to the flesh of my palms.

Nothing about it told me of his condition. I don’t know. I just...don’t know.

What I did know, was that the three of us were far from our homes.

And who knows if we’ll get out unscathed.

Chapter 76 - The Aftermath

"Possessiveness destroys love. And they should not be possessed, because that again destroys your love." - Rajneesh

Third Person POV

Who ends up picking up the pieces after a battle?

Who ends up mending and healing after a tragic loss?

Ash litters the ground with faint wisps of smoke ascending to the air. The flames met their demise, but not without leaving behind damages, even on the untouched. Hearts were weary, fear is prevalent, and worry hits the souls of Zircon and Garnet alike. However, it is a time for unity.

Pack members worked to repair the inferno's damage to their home while their bodies were on the brink of exhaustion. No one could think to rest if the beautiful earth around them was charred with black. Pup trainees, with an awakened sense of leadership, led the charge with the adult warriors. Those who haven't been hurt badly in the war with the behemoth in black.

While their arms worked tirelessly, their hearts were heavy. From the blood on the ground to burial preparations for the fallen and with the news of their ranked wolves and the disappearance of their future Luna.

An overrun hospital was not a pretty sight. Doctors and nurses whizzed by to help the bleeding and injured wolves, some worse off than others. It was controlled chaos threatening to spill out of control. Raina sat in a seat in the waiting room, leg bouncing as if it could take away some of her anxiety.

“Mommy?” Adonis asked from the seat next to her. “Will Daddy be okay?”

“He will, my baby boy.” She whispered, caressing his hair with her nimble fingers. When Raina heard the news that Valerian had been badly hurt in the fight, she raced over with her son as soon as she was able. Through their bond, she felt his pain. Every hit, every cut—like she was in the battle herself. It was a common feeling that many mated women and men felt through their bonds. All she could do was pray to the Moon Goddess that Valerian would be okay.

Lorelai sat in a seat across from her, eyes glued to the floor, still as a statue. She had yet to know Kwame’s condition. The doctors wouldn’t tell her anything because there were so many wolves needing treatment, especially the Alpha who had the worst of it all. Raina noticed her Gamma Female.

In empathy, she picked up Adonis and walked over to sit next to her. “Lori? Please talk to me.”

“What’s taking them so long?” Her hoarse whisper grated at the Beta Female’s heart. “They have to tell us something soon, right? I just... I need to know if Kwame would be okay. I’m so worried. Maia can’t stop howling for Moses.”

“Our mates are strong.” She took Lorelai’s hand and squeezed, lending her some of her courage. “The Moon Goddess blessed us with amazing men. They’ll make it through.”

“What about the Alpha? Or the Garnet Moon warriors?”

Those questions Raina couldn’t answer. She doesn’t know if Neron was okay and the rumors amongst the hospital weren’t helping. He suffered a serious wound and was being operated on since his healing wasn’t acting fast enough to repair the damage. Each Garnet Moon warrior suffered significant injuries.

Raina didn't even know where Kiya was. She waited for her body to appear from a hospital room or the front entrance, but she was nowhere in sight. That only added to her anxiety. The chief protectors were hurt, and her little sister was missing. Times like these were when Raina wished she still had a familial bond with Kiya, at least she would know if she was okay.

Odessa burst through the front doors moments after. She spotted Raina and Lorelai and marched towards them. "Heard anything yet?"

"Not yet," Lorelai answered.

"They call themselves medical professionals and can't even work fast!" Odessa complained, running a hand through her brunette tresses. The Beta Female quirked an eyebrow.

"They have a lot of wolves to treat, Odess. Their hands are tied."

"Whatever." She rolled her eyes. "I need to know if my man is okay. Is that too much to ask?"

"We all want to know if our men are okay." Lorelai butted in with a growl, dark eyes on the woman. "Just be patient."

With a scoff, Odessa dropped into a seat next to her childhood friend and crossed her arms. Raina already felt a headache emerging, and it wasn't from the chaos of the hospital atmosphere. Within a few minutes, Dr. Jackson walked over to the trio with a clipboard in hand and thick black glasses on his nose.

"Beta Valerian and Gamma Kwame are alright." His smile was warm. "You can go visit them."

"Let's go see Daddy, Donny."

“Yay!” Raina and Adonis hurried to Valerian’s room and Lorelai to Kwame’s. Only Odessa remained.

“How’s the Alpha?” She asked, her voice cold.

“Not good.” Dr. Jackson began. “He suffered immense internal damage from the impaling. We’ve worked to close the wound with stitches. Now, it’s up to his healing ability to help him out. He’s sedated with pain medication.”

“And...Darien?”

“Luckily, his injuries aren’t as bad as the Alpha Neron’s. He’s awake and in recovery if you wish to see him.” Dr. Jackson moved on to the other families waiting for news on their loved ones. Odessa had a choice: go check in on Darien or Neron. Her mate or her former lover.

She went to Neron’s room.

Upon entering, the brunette’s eyes burned with tears. Neron laid on his hospital bed, shirtless with thick gauze bandaged around his torso. Small spots of red dotted the deep layers. Her heart lurched as she walked closer, grabbing a seat to sit next to her Alpha.

“**He’ll be fine,**” Ariel insisted to her human. “**We need to see our mate.**”

“*He’ll be fine. I need Neron.*”

“**Odessa, for the millionth time, you must let Neron go. He isn’t yours and would never be yours. You lived in your little fantasy long enough. He belongs to our avatar.**”

“*That superpowered bitch would never love Neron the way I do! He’s always been mine and will always have my heart, and I’ll do everything to make him look at me like he used to.*”

“And that gives you the right to treat Darien like this? He loves us more than Mother Earth. His heart is pure, and you’re blinded by old feelings! Blinded by the power you felt when you were with the Alpha. How could you be so cruel to our mate?”

“Who says I can’t have both?”

“Now you’re being selfish. No one can have two mates, and it’s unethical to have a true mate and a paramour. You can’t be Luna and Delta Female.”

“Don’t be stuck in the old ways, Ariel. We’re in modern times. Humans can have multiple lovers, so why can’t wolves? Why can’t I have two men to love me at the same time?”

“Because you’ll be taking Kiya’s soulmate away from her.”

“I don’t give a fuck! She could burn in hell for all I care!”

“Why do you hate her so much, Odessa?”

That’s the end of the conversation. Odessa slammed down a mental block between her and her wolf. She’ll never understand her, so there was no point in reasoning with her. Her attention was pulled to Neron when he shuffled, moaning in pain.

“Neron...” Her hand went to his forehead, pushing his hair away from his face. He was so warm. Neron would always be the most beautiful man she had ever seen. Powerful and precious. “I love you so much.”

Taking his hand in her own, she planted a soft kiss on the back. “I’m here, don’t worry.”

Neron shuffled, groaned, and muttered a name. It isn’t a name Odessa expected. The name ignited volcanic fury within the woman, causing her

to stand abruptly from her seat. The force nearly knocked the chair down behind her.

“*Kiya*...” Neron muttered through his sedation. “*K-Kiya*... *she*...”

Even in his sleep, he yearns for her. Awake, he yearns for her. No matter what Odessa did, Neron would always yearn for Kiya. Halima. The former slave. Mate bonds were powerful things, and she was unequipped to sever it herself.

“She doesn’t belong to you, Neron,” Odessa muttered, infuriated. “She’s not even here to see you. She’s evil! She brought that monster here that hurt you and you still want her? You still love her?”

Scorching hot tears swam down her face upon exiting Neron’s hospital room, heavy sobs hiccupping through her quaking body. Kiya had made a name for herself in a pack that once hated her. Since former Alpha Jonathan announced her as Neron’s mate and future Luna, the pack had pushed Odessa to the side. She had no authority anymore like she used to. All that power, the glory—gone.

Odessa hated Kiya more than ever. No prayers to the Moon Goddess could ever wipe that bitch from her memory. Suicide didn’t get rid of her. Poisoning didn’t get rid of her. She was a bane in her existence.

‘*I must destroy her. For good.*’ She declared in her mind, wiping away her rapidly falling tears. In her head, Odessa could see Kiya as if she was standing in front of her. Standing tall in her Delta might, overflowing with the power of a Beta wolf. Those damned corkscrew curls, shining smile, and big brown eyes. A spitting image of a younger Raina. Even she, who once hated her and would work with Odessa to make Kiya’s life miserable, was now groveling for forgiveness at her disgusting feet.

Odessa had to take drastic measures to ensure that Kiya would forever regret crossing her. For taking her man away from her. For taking space in Darien's mind as his friend.

Desperate times called for desperate measures.

Abigail

"My love, I promise I'm fine. It's just a broken arm."

"You've broken one of your beautiful wings, my butterfly. I can't let that go."

My love, Jacqueline, holds me tight against her chest as we sit on her hospital bed. A cast is on my right arm, resting in a dark blue sling. That juggernaut had done horrific damage to the territory and my wolf family. My heart ached in pain as the mate bond allowed me a glimpse into the pain of my sweetheart's emotions.

She often hid her pain. As a strong Beta wolf, it was in her nature to protect those she loved, including me. Now, she was in deeper pain than I originally thought. Not just because of the injuries she had littering her body, from bruises to broken bones, but because her best friend was gone. Kiya was gone. That monster took her and Phoebe to goddess-knows-where.

I'm lucky enough to have my love alive and holding me, but what about Phoebe and Kiya? What was happening with them? Were they hurt? Hungry? Scared? My heart couldn't imagine the pain they must be in.

"Hey, hey." I look up to see Sapphire hobbling into the room with the aid of Isaiah. "How are you both feeling?"

“Like shit,” Jacqueline grumbled, and I made it a point to flick her nose. No profanity in this holy room! “Sorry, babe.”

“I feel that,” Isaiah muttered, sitting in a chair, holding Sapphire close with his dark arms. “What the hell was that thing?”

“Cerberus. Phoebe said he’s an avatar bounty hunter, but that’s all there is about him.” Sapphire sighed with the heaviness of titanium. “And he got what he wanted. What are we going to do? We have to find them!”

“Where do we start?” I ask. “We know nothing about this, and who knows where those two could be right now.”

“This is more than what we could handle, guys,” Galen revealed, walking into the room with Darien and Mikhail trailing behind him. “Zircon Moon wolves are down, the territory is charred bacon, and the avatars are missing.”

“Where’s Odessa?” My love asked Darien. His eyes suddenly cast down on the ground in sadness but quickly perked up.

“She hasn’t visited me yet, but that’s not the issue here,” Darien responded, but I didn’t miss the wince as he rubbed his chest. “We need help and we need it now. Two of our members are missing. The longer we wait, the more danger they’ll be in.”

“So, what do you suggest?” Mikhail asked.

“We need to call Alpha Anthony and let him know what happened.”

I already knew that once the Alpha knows his little sister was kidnapped, all hell would break loose.

And ‘hell’ was putting it *lightly*.