

Betrayed Luna's Second Chance Alphas

Read – Chapter 51-60

– Chapter 51

-Roman-

Someone knocked on my door. I opened it with a frown, thinking it was Adrian, but it was Ash. She looked sweaty and tired.

“How is Riley?” She asked with a concerned look. I nodded.

“She is sleeping. But did you see Adrian?” I said. I didn’t know where the hell he disappeared when he should be right here with Riley.

“I saw him running behind the yard. I – I didn’t know where he went. Mom sent me to tell you that Hiran is now in the cell, and dad has set the Alpha Court date two days from today. He has already sent the messages to all the Alphas.”

Hiran would stand trial for all the things he had done, in front of the Alpha Court, preceded by the king and the Red Watchers. Every Alpha in the country would come for trial if they could, and because Hiran’s crime was big, the punishment would most probably be death. I would watch him die with satisfaction. I wished I could kill him for her, but now that he was in custody, I was not allowed to kill him. I almost wanted to let him escape and then hunt him down, but I wasn’t stupid enough to take the chance that he might escape.

“If you see Adrian...”

Ash nodded her head. “Just call him. I have to go meet Bella. I told her I would be there in a few minutes. Bye,” she said before she walked away. I closed the door behind me and walked back to the bed and sat down next to Riley.

She was sleeping peacefully. Her tears had dried along her cheek. My heart broke when I saw her like this. She looked so vulnerable, and I had the intense urge to protect her from the world, from everything and everyone.

“Thought she was our mate?!”

“I thought so too? How could she not be?” Karl said with a disappointed frown. It broke both our hearts when I realized we weren’t hers. Even though she was ours in every way, she was still not ours and I hated the thought of that.

"I don't care if she isn't my fated one. She loves me. And I- I love her."

"You keep confessing only to me. How about you confess to her, before it is too f.ucking late?" Karl said with a shake of his head.

"It isn't the right time, but I will. She deserves everything and I will give it to her. Now I need to call the idi.ot and yell at him."

I grabbed my phone and dialed Adrian, cursing him as I did. He knew she needed both of us right here with her, when she was hurting. I knew how it felt- the pain of breaking the bond. I went through the pain of it, and I wouldn't have survived it if Adrian wasn't there for me back then. My dad's power helped to heal the brokenness, but it was Adrian who pulled me out of the dark pit I was in. He always had the right words.

Where the f.uck did he run off to now? He picked up his phone and I was threatening him when I heard the loud roar. It almost- it sounded like how Riley had sounded when she attacked Hiran.

What the hell was that?

"Adrian? Adrian?"

There was no answer. My stomach twisted as I called him again. The roar from the other end was loud now.

"Fu.ck my luck," Adrian's voice said. His voice was pained, too. What the hell was happening? I gripped the phone tighter as I listened.

"If you don't come, I might probably die. It will make your life easier, though. s**t, this thing is fast. And there are two of them."

Who was attacking him?

"Where are you right now? Is it Ramsay?" I shouted, so that he might hear me through the phone. The phone was still on, so whoever was attacking him was not overly concerned about the phone.

"Oh, Rome, I love you. Tell Riley I love her, and I am sorry, and that I didn't mean to run away like a stupid coward. I should have stayed. I should have-"

"I don't want to hear any of this. You can tell her everything for yourself. Just tell me where the hell you are, you dumb

fu.ck?"

“Oh right. Send the Red Watchers. I am in the woods. Central Park. It is so freaking dark too... Oh, Rome, don't leave Riley. You stay there. Just send Dustin or someone else. It is the creatures, you know, the dead humans in the photos you showed me. Ow, it hurts, you ugly sh.it,” Adrian growled. “There are two of them. They are feral, rabid. They look like a very ugly mix between a vampire, a skinned chicken with chicken pox and Nosferatu. I thought Nosferatu was only fictional. Maybe he isn't.”

“Stop talking and try to stay alive. I will be there in a few minutes.”

I mind-linked my mom as I bent to k**s Riley on her forehead. “Mom, please come to my old room. Adrian is in trouble and I have to go.”

“I will be there in a minute, Rome,” my mom said. It was too hard to leave her now, but I knew Adrian needed me right now.

“Sleep tight, Kitten. I will bring back the idi.ot. I know you will miss him terribly if he is gone,” I whispered, and she moved with a soft whimper, and then settled down. My heart clenched.

Goddess. I love this woman so damn much. How could I love her more than I love myself?

I grabbed my gun and a few weapons I kept in this room, including one of the tranquilizer dart guns, but I had no idea whether it would be enough or not. I grabbed a backpack, pushed two pairs of trousers in just in case he needed some.

My mom came after a few minutes. “What happened to Adrian? Rome, we already lost Dean and we can't lose-“

“We will find Dean, I promise. It is the creatures who killed humans from dad's photographs. Call someone from the Red Watchers and ask them to follow my trail to Central Park. Tell them to bring tranquilizers. A lot of them,” I said before I ran out and quickly took the elevator. I ran until I hit the woods.

Soon I was shifting into my wolf and running. Karl followed Adrian's scent. It hadn't faded yet.

“Don't be fu.cking dead,” I thought as Karl let out a loud growl and barged inside the clearing. The scent of b***d was thick in the air.

The two Lycans glared at each other before they turned to the creatures before them. I winced. They were really ugly as Adrian had said.

I was sure there was no way Ramsay would have let them leave. They must have escaped somehow. What the f.uck was he even trying to do? What kind of experiment would turn someone into this?

I mind-linked Adrian. "You have so much to explain, you dumbhead."

"Don't be angry. I wasn't thinking."

"You never think at all."

"Stop screaming at me and stop these things. My body is already hurting. I would have died long ago if I wasn't a ginormous Lycan. The humans who died had no chance at all."

I turned towards one of the creatures, and it growled at me, baring its teeth. Even Karl shuddered in disgust. It had gaunt cheeks, long boney hands with sharp claws that looked like they were made of steel.

It leapt at my Lycan, roaring and grunting, and I heard it once again. The sound... it was familiar to the sound Riley made when she was blindly attacking Hiran. Something felt off, but I had no time to think about that right now. Clay gripped it by its throat and threw it away from Karl's back.

Karl took the backpack and grabbed the tranquilizer dart. He shot it at the two creatures, one after the other.

They roared, howled and kept coming.

What the hell? That was enough tranquilizer to fell a dinosaur, or closer.

"S.hit, these things are not going down."

One of the creatures pounced at Karl while the other gripped Adrian's throat, its long claws digging into his throat.

"Not happening," Karl let out a loud snarl as he kicked the creature away before pulling the other by its leg. The thing whirled around and its eyes... a patch of red... it was fully red.

I heard voices soon enough and sighed.

The Red watchers were here.

"Do not kill. We need to find out what the hell they are," I growled through Karl, and the watchers nodded before they started to shoot the tranquilizers filled with special drugs. The two creatures hissed, roared, and after a few minutes they fell down with a thud.

Adrian and I shifted and quickly pulled on the pants.

“The fu.ck is that?” Adrian said as he sat down. The guys from the Red Watchers were tying the creatures with ropes and silver shackles. I wasn’t even sure the shackles would help. These creatures were frail, but they had strength. So much strength.

“Ramsay...” I growled as I slumped next to him and winced when I saw his back. It had claw wounds. “Turn around.”

“What?”

“Your wounds are still not healed. Let me help.”

“No, I am sure you have used a lot of your power to help Riley. It will heal soon enough.”

I growled at him and he sighed.

“You do realize I am an Alpha, too, right? Your growls won’t work on me, idi.ot.”

“Just stop arguing with me and turn. You will lose, anyway.”

Adrian sighed as he turned around, showing me his back. I winced. The skin was torn from his bones.

I touched the wound and he flinched.

“Stop moving.”

“It hurts like hell.”

“Stop being a baby. Now tell me. Why the hell did you run?”

“I-” He hesitated as the wounds started to close. I concentrated on the crackling power from my fingers as I moved it along his spine. Thank Goddess his spine was not hurt. Some injuries took a long time to heal, even with the wolf’s healing power. Like a broken arm, or spine, or crushed balls.

“What is wrong with you?”

He had never hesitated to say anything, not with me. Sometimes I wished he would stop sharing too much, but he never had. He told me every freaking thing. He told me that he wanted to taste Riley, too, after she had spent the night with me. “Just spit it out.”

“You know I would never hurt you, right?”

My stomach felt odd. I stared at him and he looked pained. I had a feeling about what was coming next. My claws dug into my palm as I fisted my palm and looked at Adrian.

“Riley is my mate.”

I knew it was coming, but even though I had anticipated the words, it felt like a train had barrelled through my chest, making a big hole in my heart. I almost staggered back.

I thought I was the one who was sacrificing for my best friend. But what he did for me... How did he keep it inside and asked me to help her?

I stood up and my body shuddered. No. My heart... I felt empty. It felt like a big, Riley-shaped black hole had formed right there in my heart.

“Please don’t go.”

I remembered Riley’s nightmare. It was real. He was the one who was lucky enough to stay with Riley. He was the one who was fated for her. I took that first night from him. She was flirting with him at first. I shouldn’t have- I shouldn’t have touched her, taken her, knowing Adrian was interested, too.

“But how can I stay?” My heart broke. I didn’t want to leave, but I couldn’t stay, could I?

“Because I am begging you. Because she loves you. And I love both of you.”

I had never seen Adrian crying, but he was crying. I wanted to cry, too, I wanted to beg. I wanted to beg him to let me stay, but here he was begging me to stay.

I shook my head as a tear rolled down my cheek. He looked at me with a helpless sigh.

“I don’t think-“

“You don’t have to think. I will think for both of us. You just have to STAY.”

-Dean-

The familiar sound of the door sliding woke me up from my fitful sleep. I rarely slept. Nights and days merged into one. Red and blues and whites and blacks just became a fuzzy mess of unrecognizable rainbow bleeding down the skies. Moments and hours

became a circle on the web.

The doctor pulled out the empty IV bag filled with pain medication. It was over. The soft sense of relief. The fleeting moment of solace from this excruciating pain would always go away. The doctor pulled out a big IV bag with bright red b***d with a hint of green. Vampire b***d. Pain, again.

The woman was back with the doctor. “Did you check his b***d? Do a complete b***d count, too.”

“I already did, Nadia. It is an amazing thing. He shows the exact progress as Marcus did. Dean’s b***d proteins are already a greater match for a vampire’s b***d than a wolf’s. The A antigen molecules on the surface of red b***d cells also show a closer resemblance to a vampire’s agglutinogens than the wolf’s. I have a feeling that we can start the next phase of the experiment soon.”

“Next phase. Injecting into humans, right?” she said as her bright eyes flashed down. Her red hair was now down her back.

“Yes.”

“Do you already have test subjects?” the woman’s voice was eager. I whimpered as the doctor stuck a needle into my vein. No. I wanted pain medication. Not this b***d. Vampire b***d burned my body. It felt like a volcano was erupting inside my body.

“We don’t have to worry about the test subjects. We found a few homeless people. They are being prepped in our other facility. That part is going smoothly. The only thing we have to worry about is right here.”

“He looks healthy, doctor, and strong. I do think he will be our first success after sixteen years,” she said with a smile as she ran her fingers through my hair and smiled down at me. Her eyes were sinister.

“Yes, Nadia. He is. He is as strong as your mate was.”

The woman’s smile fell and her lips pressed together in frustration and anger. Her eyes changed into a bright yellow.

“I should have kept a close watch on Marcus. I thought... I thought he was all in. This was our dream. We spent a long time researching. He went through the pain himself, because he wanted to succeed, but then he changed. He chose her in the end, he chose to give up our hard work for her.”

“Did you try to find him?”

“What do you think? Of course, I did, but I couldn’t find Marc or my daughter. I don’t know where he took her, or how he hid her.”

“Well, he was a scientist, the best. It was no wonder he found a way to curb the other side of her. Your side.”

The woman’s eyes glowed, as black silky fur formed along her skin. It looked different.

“It is such a loss. She would have made all of this easier. My precious, perfect specimen. My darling daughter.”

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– Chapter 52

-Roman-

I looked at Adrian with a sigh. Everything in me was a jumbled mess and my head and heart hurt.

Karl whimpered softly. He didn't like this.

I just wanted to run and run, and never stop again, but my legs refused to move. They felt like they were made of frozen ice. I couldn't imagine walking away from Riley, from this. I loved her so much to give her up, just like that.

“What should I do, Karl?” I whispered as my wolf shook his head, looking agitated. Desperation rolled off him in waves.

“I want to stay. I want her with everything I have.”

“But how can we stay when she isn't-“

“Do not start. She is ours. Mate bond doesn't matter. She promised that she would choose us if there is a choice. But there is no choice now. She didn't have to choose. She can have both of us. I want to be with her, Roman, everything else be damned.”

Adrian stood up with a wince and I saw that his wounds had closed had healed.

“Let's go back to Riley, come on.”

“I- I have to go to the Red Watchers' Guild to talk about the creatures and-“

“You don't have to go anywhere. Dustin will take care of all of that. Come with me. You said Riley needed both of us there. So let's be there for her.”

“But Adrian, I can't be there-“ I pulled my hair as frustration and desperation filled me.

“I know how you feel right now. But you don't know how I feel, Rome, do you?” His voice was broken as he looked at me. His gray eyes, the ones that were always shining

with laughter, now reflected only his brokenness. “She chose you. You are her first. And now I have this bond, and everything in me begs to claim her, to make her mine, but you know why I walked away? Because I knew this was something she could have lived without – that I was someone she could have lived without.” Adrian sounded sad. Broken. “But that is not the case with you.”

“No, I don’t think so. She might have said it before, but I don’t think she meant it.”

“Let’s go, Roman. I have the bond, but you have her heart. I would have loved to be the one who has her heart.” Adrian started to jog as if he had said enough. He didn’t shift. I grabbed the backpack, hesitated for a second, before I started to jog with him.

“We both have her heart. And you have a bond, in addition to her heart.”

“You are only saying that to comfort me and I appreciate it, Rome, but we both know you are lying.”

We didn’t talk after that until we reached Nightshade. “She is in my room,” I said as we ran to the elevator. Adrian pressed the button. It was weird, seeing Adrian like that. Silent. Quiet. He had always been a chatterbox.

When we reached my room, he paused. He looked nervous.

“Do you want to talk with her alone?” I asked him, knowing very well they must have a lot to talk about.

His eyes were conflicted as he looked at me and back at the door.

“I don’t think I want-“

“Come on. I won’t be butt hurt over this. I understand that you have your own sh.it to deal with. You don’t always have to look after me, Ad. I am a big boy and I can take care of myself. For once, why don’t you just take care of yourself? Go talk with her,” I said with a frown. I knew he always chose me and my needs over his, and I knew this was my time to choose him over myself. If anyone deserved absolute happiness, it was him. He was always looking after the others. “Stop being a wuss and just talk with her.”

“I don’t want you to go. I am scared. I can’t- I-“

I sighed and shook my head.

“Scared? What? Riley wouldn’t swallow you.”

“What the hell should I do? You are my rival, and my best friend, too. I have no one to talk to.”

I laughed as I pushed the door open. My mom was standing next to the door. She looked at me and Adrian, and her eyes turned gentle as she caressed my face before ruffling Adrian's hair. We both sighed.

I didn't know how she knew or how she understood, but she knew what was going on. Just looking at my mom calmed me and my wolf.

"Mom..." I whispered and she grabbed my hand in one hand and Adrian's in another. She was as much a mom to him as she was to me.

"She is your mate and your love, isn't she, Adrian?" she said to him and he nodded.

"And she is the love of your life," she said to me, her voice as soft as lullaby.

We both nodded and she let out a sharp breath. "Just don't let anything come between you. I know you will find a way, I know you can. You two are amazing," my mom said with a smile. "I will bake your favorite mixed herb focaccia bread, okay?" she said as she let our hands go. She knew we both loved her bread. Karl and Clay, too.

I was always amazed by my mom.

"That is my favorite scent in the whole world, next to Riley's, the scent of butter and bread... It calms me down," Karl said with a deep sigh.

"I know. Mom knows, too."

"That is why she is the best!"

Adrian and I sat down on the couch after mom walked away. I told him about Hiran and his trial and we talked about the creatures.

"Should we tell her?"

"When Hiran's trial is over, maybe?" Adrian said. "She has a lot to deal with already."

"You are right. So... did you visit Bella? How was she?"

"Briefly before the – you know, the rejection ritual. She kept driving around, and she wants to go back to the club. Is she- do you know about Dean and her?"

"Dean and her?"

"I think she- she likes him, I think they are more than friends," Adrian said with a sigh.

"I have never noticed anything like that," I said with a shrug, and Adrian shook his head with a frown.

“Yeah, you have always been oblivious. I mean, you don’t get s.hit like that. You are love blind.”

“What do you mean?” I narrowed my eyes and he squirmed in his chair. He looked like a worm caught in a bird’s beak.

He looked away from me as he mumbled, “Ash-“

“Ash? Ashelene?”

“She likes me. Oh, not anymore, but she liked me. She confessed to me when she was seventeen, and I said no, and then she saw me kissing Riley... It was a mess.”

My eyes widened and I stood up with a growl. What the hell was he saying? Ashelene? Him?

“What the hell are you saying? I mean, why did you never tell me?”

“I just- I just couldn’t.”

“You are that guy who told me you were worried that you might have broken your di.ck having s*x, remember?” I growled as I glared down at him. How the hell did I not know that? What kind of brother was I? Was I too lost in my own life that I didn’t think about my sister’s life?

“Did she know you and Riley share a bond?”

“She knows I like Riley, of course. Nobody knows I am mated to Riley, except you and Riley.”

I stared at him, at Riley and sighed. This was too much. What the hell was going on around me? I wanted to pull my hair out one by one, and then break some bones. Ramsay’s or Hiran’s would be preferable.

“That was why she was sad and angry,” A soft voice said. Adrian jerked up as if he was electrocuted. His eyes widened and a look –something I had never seen in his eyes, ever — filled his eyes as he stood up. His body was turned towards the door as if he was ready to flee from this, from her.

“Do not run,” Riley said, as if she could hear his thought or something. Maybe she could.

Adrian turned to look at her, and I felt like I was... an extra limb nobody needed to walk, but I stayed. I couldn’t move.

"You know, don't you, Roman? About the mate bond? I wanted to tell you," she said as she looked straight into my eyes, and motioned us to move closer. She sat up and winced.

"Are you alright?" Adrian whispered, looking pained, as if her pain was somehow affecting him, not only emotionally, but physically, too. "You don't have to sit. Just lie back down, Red."

"I am fine, Adrian," she said as he sat next to her. She looked at me. "Won't you come? I hope you won't leave like you did in my nightmare," Riley whispered. "I know I am asking a lot. I know I am being unfair to both of you, but I can't-" She closed her eyes and sighed.

"We don't have to talk about it now," Adrian said.

"We have to. You know, we have to," she whispered. "If I was the bigger person, I would say Ash could have you if you wanted her, too, but I am not. I am not as good as I though I was. It seems like I am quite selfish. I know I said that Roman always comes first...but- it isn't true anymore, Adrian."

"But why?" Adrian blinked and I could almost see his heart in his eyes. He looked vulnerable, open. And I wanted to protect him this time.

"You stood there and you pushed Roman to help me, because you didn't want to hurt him. You ran away and didn't say anything to him because you wanted him to stay, and not leave me, because you didn't want to hurt me. How can I not choose you when you have done so much for me? When you have given up your own happiness for me and Roman, too? You are always in the background, always trying to save me, protect me, help me, make me happy, and I might not have looked at first, but I am looking at you now, Adrian, and I am seeing everything you have done for me. For us, for the three of us and I won't choose." She looked at me. "I hope there won't be a day where I have to choose, Roman, because I can't choose. Not anymore."

And I understood her. I understood the desperation, the need.

"I won't ask you. He won't, too."

Adrian stood there and kept blinking. She had broken my best friend.

"Riley?" he breathed out.

"You heard me, right? You are mine, Adrian Mercer. Mine and do not ever run away from that or from me."

“And you, Roman... I don’t care if we don’t have a bond, and because we have already established that I am selfish, you have to stay. You are mine, too, and I want you in my life, with or without the bond. I want you both in my life, with or without the bond.”

“Kitten, I think you have broken my friend.”

“Ha, he will be alright.”

“Are you feeling okay?”

“Now that you both are here, I am. I am feeling great.”

(TWO DAYS LATER)

-Riley-

It was the day of Hiran’s trial. The two days had passed quite quickly. I had spent the last two days in my bed, being pampered by Roman and Adrian, whenever they were not searching for Dean with Finn. My pups also visited me, and it was not a bad two days, all in all.

“You ready to go, little Red,” Adrian said as he ran his fingers through my hair. He sniffed. “You smell so beautiful.” I sighed as he turned me towards him. “What is wrong? If you don’t want to come, you don’t have to come to the trial.”

“It is not that. I am just worried for no reason. I should stop, shouldn’t I? I should stop being a worrywart.”

Adrian pressed a k**s on my lips. “It is okay, little Red, I promise it is going to get better from here.”

I trusted every word he said. We had talked a lot, the three of us, over the past two days. It was sometimes awkward, sometimes overwhelming, but I knew this was my new normal. I knew Roman was still over thinking this, and I couldn’t blame him, because it was like a slap in my cheek, too, but...

“You coming?” Roman poked his head in and I nodded as I walked out. I grabbed his hand in mine and he froze for a second before he walked with me towards the court.

This time, the council court was filled with powerful Alphas. I could feel all their powerful aura. A familiar face caught my eyes. I blinked. He stood up.

“Riley...”

“Alpha James.”

He was the Alpha of my old pack. The one before Crystal Park.

“How are you? Where did you disappear? I had looked for you.”

“Looked for me? Why? You didn’t care when I was in the pack,” I mumbled under my breath.

“Because I don’t want anyone to look closer. If I had shown you special attention, the others would have started to sniff around you, and I couldn’t- I promised your dad I would keep you safe.”

“M-my dad?” I blinked as I looked at him. “What do you mean? Do you know my dad? Who- who is my dad?”

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Q: Can we talk about your aim in life, Karl? Are u for real? Also, what is your favorite food (next to Riley’s dash dash).

Karl: Well. A wolf wants what a wolf wants. Favourite food: I could eat pizza for every breakfast, lunch and dinner next to Riley’s c*m. (Oww, Hazel, that hurts. Do not pull my tail!)

– Chapter 53

-Riley-

I felt like my world was tilting once again. Why wouldn’t it just stop? Why did this keep happening to me?

“Who- who is my dad?” My voice came out weakly. I just wanted to bury myself under a hole and never come out.

“Can we talk in-” Alpha James looked around as if he was scanning for some threat. “Somewhere private?”

I thought I was an orphan, and nobody knew anything about my parents. Why would my father abandon me with Alpha James? I looked at Roman, who was standing dutifully next to me, his body rigid, as if he was waiting to save me if needed. My hero.

He nodded. "Yes. You can use my dad's study. Come on, let me take you there," he said as he motioned to Adrian, who was just walking in. "Stay here. We will be back soon."

"What happened? Is everything okay?" Adrian said as he moved closer to me and my body gravitated towards him on its own accord. It was the bond. It somehow made everything better. Calm. The storm was slowly receding.

"Yes, it is. This is Alpha James. He is the Alpha of the pack I was in before I came to Crystal Park. Roman will tell you everything else through mind-link," I said, and looked at him. Adrian's eyes widened as he nodded and sighed. Roman shook his head.

"Go. I will make sure Hiran gets everything he deserves," Adrian said as he softly rubbed my arm, trailing his fingers down my hand before entwining his fingers inside mine. He looked at me as his fingers tightened around mine as if he didn't want to let go.

"I will come back," I whispered and his eyes widened. "I could see the look in your eyes."

"Yeah, yeah, the whole world could," Roman said with a grunt. "Now, can I take your mate away?"

"You can beg," Adrian said and Roman bared his teeth at him. I chuckled a little as Adrian let me go. I grabbed Roman's hand and waved at Adrian. He smiled before he walked to the front to talk with some of the Alphas.

The elevator ride was silent. We reached Roman's dad's study. He pushed open the door and motioned us to go in.

"I can stay outside."

"There is no secret I want to keep from you, Roman, and you have to know that." I sighed as we all walked in. Roman poured three glasses of drink, and handed one to me. I gripped the cold drink and pressed it against my cheek as I looked at Alpha James.

Alpha James looked warily at me, before he cleared his throat. He was clearly agitated, and my stupid Lycan standing there like a stalking animal ready to hunt, was not helping. I shook my head at Roman and he relaxed, finally.

Alpha James took a sip of his drink. "Marcus... your dad... he brought you to me and made me promise to keep you safe. You were around six or seven."

Marcus. I silently whispered the name, hoping it would strike something. A flash of memory? Nothing came though. My past was as dark as it had been before.

“Seven? I thought I was a baby when I came to the pack. Why did I not remember anything then? How do you know my father?”

“No. You were seven, but he said something happened, something bad and that it erased your memories or something. He was my childhood friend, but he left for New York when he was young. He was a doctor, and a scientist.”

Seven was an age when a child could remember her father, but I didn’t remember anything. “Is my father alive? Why did he want you to keep me safe?”

I had a feeling that this was about what happened to me when- when I attacked Hiran. What was I?

“I don’t know if he is alive. I tried to call his old phone number. He never picked up. When he came with you to my pack, he was wounded. I asked him to stay, but he refused. He also made me promise not to say anything to anyone about you.”

“Oh.” I looked at Roman and his forehead was crinkled. He looked deep in thought.

“You told me you were looking for me. Why?”

“Marcus left me with another job. He gave me a vial of something. Every December, he asked me to give you the contents of the vial. One vial for one year.”

“December 21. You will always give me a glass of juice. I thought it was my birthday.”

“It is your birthday, Riley. And that cup of juice-“

During every birthday, Alpha James would give me ‘the juice’. He said it was special and just for me. It always tasted a bit weird, but other than the taste, I felt nothing weird when I drank it. That must have been whatever drug my dad had left with him. What was that?

“The juice is... whatever my father gave you in that vial. Do you still have more vials? Do you know what was in the vial?”

“I do have more vials, so much more, but I don’t know what’s in them. The vials are the reason why I have been searching for you. I have a lot of things that belong to you, things your dad wanted me to give you when you turned twenty.”

My father’s things? When I left the pack, I had nothing that belonged to me, and I felt so sad that I had nothing meaningful that belonged to me. My heart constricted. I couldn’t wait for my father’s things. I wondered what he left for me. Did he write anything for me? A letter, perhaps?

“My friend is in Crystal Park. If you give me your number, she will call you and maybe pick up everything from you?”

Alpha James nodded. “So you were in Crystal Park all along. It was only a few towns over.”

“Yes. I was. Thanks for telling me all of this, Alpha James. It means a lot and also, thank you for keeping me safe from whatever my father wanted you to protect me from.”

“Of course, but I feel like I have failed you, and your father. I wanted to tell you everything when you turned sixteen, as your father asked me to. Once she has a wolf, she will have the power to protect and fight for herself – that was what your father told me before he left.”

“And then I left at sixteen.”

“And you lived only a few towns over, and yet here we are, meeting after six years at a trial.”

“I don’t know what to say to that, Alpha James, but I do want to say thank you.”

“I should go back. The trial will start soon,” Alpha James said and left, leaving me alone with Roman. He opened his arms wide and I buried myself in his warmth.

“Why is this happening to me, Roman? Did I do something wrong? Or am I just so f*****g unlucky?” I breathed in his scent and let his heartbeats calm me down.

“You are not. You are absolutely strong, and lucky too. If you are not, you wouldn’t have two amazing men doting on you, right?”

I laughed as I pulled away from him.

“Roman Night? Joking? Is the world going to end?”

“Kitten,” he said as he tugged at my hair. “Let’s go and end Hiran. You have me and Adrian and whatever happens, you will have us, and we will stand by you. You are not alone in any of this.”

“That is the only consolation. That I have you and Adrian. I have Dee and Reid and my pups and... even Keller. It won’t be so bad.” I looked up at him. “So? You talked with Ash?”

Roman puffed out a breath. “Well. She was holed up in Bella’s house. I talked with Finn, and he didn’t know either.”

"Finn came the other day with Claire and your mom. He was nice and not so grumpy," I said with a chuckle and Roman puffed. I laughed and stopped when we reached the council court.

Adrian walked towards us when he saw us. A young woman followed him.

"You are Riley?" she said, her eyes narrowed, when I nodded my head.

"Bells, stop glaring at her."

"I am not glaring. I am just looking. Why don't you bring her for dinner tonight? Mom wants to meet your precious-" She stopped and shrugged. "You know."

Adrian must have told his parents and sister, too, and his sister didn't look too pleased. I was sure I would have reacted the same way if someone was the reason for Dee's broken heart. So I couldn't blame Bella for that.

"She can't com-"

"Oh, that will be my absolute pleasure. I have spent two days cooped up and I think I am ready to see a bit of the outside world. Thank you for the invite," I said with a sweet smile that was a bit on the salty side, and her eyes widened before she gave me an appreciative nod.

"Hmm. I can see why my brother fell for you."

My eyes widened as I looked at Adrian and then at Roman. Adrian flushed before he growled at his sister. Roman gave Bella a blank stare.

"Shut up, Bella," Adrian hissed and she rolled her eyes. My cheeks heated and I felt like I was standing in a burning forest or something. "Forget her. Come on, let's find a place to sit."

And soon two men walked Hiran inside the court. He looked weak. I realized how hard it was to heal from the broken bond without the kind of support I had from Roman and Adrian. Of course, they didn't spend all their time with me. They had to leave often to talk with other Red watchers about Dean. They met with Feyona one day, to talk about Ramsay, but Feyona didn't have anything useful. But when all was done, they always came back to me.

I knew it wouldn't have been easy without them.

Roman walked to the front as Adrian gripped my hand in his.

"He is done for, Red. Don't worry. This is just a formality."

Hiran's eyes met mine and I saw his loathing. If he could, he would kill me right here, right now.

"He is done for," I said as Roman started talking about all the accusations against Hiran.

He was truly a monster, but today was the end of him.

Our eyes met. He snarled. I smirked. I almost wanted to show him the middle finger, but instead, I leaned closer to Adrian and kissed him on his lips, and I winked at Roman. A loud growl left Hiran's lips as he moved against his shackle.

That was my middle finger.

-Deidre-

I kissed Reid on his cheek, hoping I could somehow make it all better for him. "I am sorry, Reid."

"It is alright. He deserved it."

Today was Hiran's trial. Riley and I talked yesterday about it and she also told me about everything that was happening and I was happy for her.

Reid decided not to go to the trial, even though every Alpha was invited to it. I understood why he didn't. It would be very painful for him. Even though Hiran was a monster, he was Reid's only family left.

"But he is your only family."

Reid shook his head. "No, I have you." My eyes widened as I looked at him and he nodded as he grabbed my hand in his and pulled me to his lap. His arms went around me as he pulled me closer to his body. "You are my family, already, Dee, and I want it to be official."

"Official?" I blinked and flushed. My throat felt dry. What the hell was he-

"Will you be my Luna, Deidre Lynn Torres?"

I pulled away from him and stared into his blue eyes. My breath left in a gasp.

"Don't you want to wait for the -"

"I don't want to wait for anything, because I have been waiting for two years for you, Dee, and I have you now. I don't want to wait anymore. I want you to be mine, Dee. Only mine."

I gasped. My heart raced. But I knew the answer.

"If you find your mate—"

"After I have marked you, I will not recognize my mate, at all, and it doesn't bother me, because I love you, Dee. I fell in love with you the first moment I saw you. You were beautiful, fierce and hilarious. You were all of my dreams and I want you with everything I have."

"I never knew you could talk like this, but Reid... I have to say no."

He blinked and gasped and looked utterly broken. I pressed a hand to my mouth and snickered as I looked at his stricken face. He looked pale.

"I mean, you don't even have a ring." I laughed and he grabbed me by my waist and pulled me closer.

"You are a bad, bad girl, aren't you? I will make you a good girl, darling. A good f*****g girl." His breath hitched as his hold on my h**s tightened. My lips parted and I recognized his look. He wanted me. He wanted to take me, mark me, make me his, and I couldn't wait to be his.

"Dee..." he hesitated.

"What?"

"It is Liam. My wolf."

"Hmm?"

"He wants to... umm... to put it elegantly, f**k you."

I gasped. My body throbbed to his response.

"Your wolf?" My voice came out husky, wanton.

"Yes."

"What exactly did he say?"

"Nothing elegant."

My eyes widened as I leaned closer to Reid. "Tell me everything he said."

"He wants to bury himself inside you until you lose all of your rational thoughts. He wants to f**k you hard and long until your legs become jell-o, until you go crazy. He wants his c*ck to be coated with your juices, and then he wants you to suck him until you clean him and then he will make you dirty-"

"Enough," I said as I removed my pants. "I have heard enough. Now, get the hell away, Reid, and give me the wolf."

"Very rude, Dee, very rude."

"Well... what can I say? I am a curious person, and he has ignited my curiosity."

"Well, hello there human. Are you ready to be a good girl?"

A soft m**n left my lips as I looked into the wolf's bright eyes. He gripped my a*s in his hands and pulled me against his e*****n.

"Yes, Liam. YES."

!!!

– Chapter 54

-Riley-

Hiran was deemed guilty. Of course, he fu.cking was. Even if it wasn't anything else, I would have loved to see him burn just for threatening my pups.

"Hiran Waites, you are guilty under the wolves' laws. Selling and hurting other wolves for the sake of personal gain and selling them off to vampires is a big crime, and the penalty for that crime is death."

Hiran looked defeated as he looked at the crowd.

"Riley. Save me. Where is Reid? Did he not- not come?" Hiran's voice sounded desperate as he looked around. Dee had texted me that Reid wouldn't come. I was hoping to see Dee and Reid when they visited, but I couldn't blame Reid for not coming.

"What the fu.ck is wrong with this man? How can he even look us in the eyes and ask that after everything he has done?"

I shook my head as I looked down. How could he ask me that after all that he had done to me?

"It is the Vampires. I will- I will confess, I will testify against Ramsay. I will be your witness. Please, I don't want to die."

He looked at the king and the man preceding the trial. Adrian told me he was the head of the Red Watchers. Each organization in different countries had different leaders.

Roman's dad looked like he was thinking.

"No, we can't trust him to do any of that. He is manipulative and he did what he did knowing very well that it was wrong. He doesn't deserve a pardon."

"It is not a pardon, but we need witnesses when we bring the case to the supernatural court. We need evidence against Ramsay's crime, and he is... he will be useful then."

Roman gritted his teeth and his body trembled.

"No," Adrian sighed next to me.

I would love to have seen Hiran die, but the king did make sense. They did need witnesses if they wanted to prosecute Ramsay.

"Sometimes you are too logical."

"I learned from the best. You, Gem."

She poked her tongue out. I loved that she was always there for me.

Adrian looked at Roman and Roman turned towards Adrian and me. I knew they were mind-linking right now.

"Do not lose it here. You know your dad is right. Ramsay is the bigger threat right now. Once that bastard is dead and rotting, we can kill this one," Adrian mumbled under his breath. I was sure he was doing it for my sake.

I tightened my fingers around his hand as I nodded at Roman. He snarled before he walked away. The same two men who brought Hiran in walked him away.

Roman looked angry and frustrated as he walked towards us. I understood how he felt, but sometimes, you had to use the smaller fish to catch the big ones.

"Why did you stop me?"

"He did the right thing. Your dad is absolutely right, and I don't feel the judgment is wrong. He did so many bad things, but we do need him to stop Ramsay. You said Feyona doesn't have any evidence, right? So we only have Hiran right now."

"How can you- how can you be so logical right now? I just want to kill him."

"I want that too, but maybe later."

Roman gave a curt nod when a guy walked towards us. He had dark blonde hair and a smile.

"Man, those creatures you bought..." He stopped talking when he finally noticed me standing there. "I am Dustin. You are?"

"Oh, you are the famous Dustin. I have heard about you a lot. I am Riley."

"Hi Riley. You are new here, aren't you?"

"She is, and she is off-limits," Adrian growled under his breath, looking possessive suddenly, and it amused me. Dustin gave me a flirty smile before he turned to the guys.

"About those creatures... they are messed up. They keep grunting and slamming against the cages-"

"We will talk about it later." Dustin ignored Roman, and continued, and both the Lycans looked anxious. They kept looking at me as if they were scared or something. Were they hiding something from me?

"It is dumb. They kept banging against the iron. It is a miracle that you two fought those monsters and lived to tell the tale."

I blinked. What was he talking about?

"What creatures?"

"I have a bad feeling about this," Gem said with a worried look on her face. My stomach twisted. I felt nervous.

"Didn't they tell you? The ones Ramsay is doing experiments on, they attacked Adrian and-"

My eyes widened as I whirled around to look at Adrian. Why did he hide it from me? My heart shuddered. I couldn't imagine- my whole body felt so f*****g cold as I glared at the Lycan standing in front of me.

"How could you hide that from me?" I growled under my breath.

"I- I can't lose Adrian and Roman. No, I just-" Gem's breathing hitched as she gasped.

"And Roman went to save him, and he asked the Queen to call us."

"You have said enough, Dustin. Go," Roman said with a shake of his head and Dustin bit his tongue as he gave him an apologetic look. He had finally caught up with what was really going on here.

"You two. Back to YOUR dad's study, NOW," I said as I walked away, knowing very well they would follow. I punched the elevator button with enough force to break it, and they both winced. I glared at them as we all entered the elevator.

Adrian cleared his throat and adjusted his shirt. "I really have to pee, and I can't-"

"You can keep it in, or you can pee right here. I don't mind," I said with a growl, and he gulped and looked at Roman.

"What, don't look at me? You asked me to-"

"Don't you dare lie, you traitor. You are trying to push me under the tractor now."

"Are you calling me a tractor?" I looked at him, tilting my head and Adrian shook his head, his eyes wide with bewilderment and fear.

"No, not you. I only meant-" He stuttered.

"Riley, calm down, Kitten. It is nothing."

"No. I know it is not nothing. You two almost died and you think it is nothing?" I gripped the handrail in the elevator tight as my body trembled. Fear and panic gripped me. "Is it after you ran away?" I said as I let out a deep growl. My heart raced like a bullet train, refusing to quiet down.

The elevator stopped with a ding. We entered the study, and I locked the door behind us. The two Lycans looked like they were worried for their safety.

"What? What do you think I am going to do?" I hissed and they shook their heads in sync. "You shouldn't have run. If you hadn't, you wouldn't have run into them."

"But now that we have these creatures in our control, everyone is safe," Roman said as he placed his hand on my back. "It is alright. See, we are grown a*s men, and we can take one measly creature down."

"He said two things."

"Okay, yeah, two."

"I just- I don't want anything to happen to you, Adrian," I said and he nodded.

"Nothing will happen to me, Red. Nothing will."

"But that is not all of it, right? Go on, spill."

"When you attacked Hiran... your eyes flashed red. These things... their eyes are permanently glowing and red like how yours looked."

"Oh. So it is confirmed I am a freak."

"You are not," Adrian said quickly.

"I think... the vial my father gave Alpha James, it is some kind of drug to keep that side of me repressed. I haven't once lost my s**t like that, and then years of not taking the drug... and that happened."

"That does make sense. Also, maybe that was why your dad was so worried about your safety," Roman said.

"But who did that to me? What happened? Why don't I remember anything?"

"I think you do. At least, subconsciously," Adrian said as he motioned me to sit down on the couch, before he handed me the glass of water. "Your dream... the one you said where Claire was in a glass room. What if- what if it was you?"

My body shuddered. He might be right.

"That girl did have my eyes. In that nightmare, I heard voices talking. A woman's voice. Two men." I nodded with a frown. I couldn't fully remember the dream now, but I was sure that the girl changed and it was me. I took a long gulp of water.

"Oh, Riley," Roman whispered as he sat next to me.

"If the dream wasn't really a dream-"

"You have spent the first few years of your life locked in a cage? I am so sorry, Red. I wish I knew how to comfort you."

I stood up and blinked. "I am alright. We have a dinner to get ready for, right?" I looked at Adrian and he shook his head.

"No, we don't have to go."

"I want to go. I can't- I want a distraction. I want to get the hell out of my head and- just run."

“Let’s run, then,” Roman said as he ran out, motioning Adrian and me to follow him. Adrian shrugged and did. We ran down the stairs, until we reached the ground floor panting and dizzy and smiling.

Some of the people wandering around the lobby gave us weird looks, but I just didn’t care. I had too many things going on in my life to let these looks bother me.

We ran to the long stretch of lawn that leads to the woods. The smell of trees and wood filled the air. We ran deeper before Roman stopped.

“Let’s strip and shift.”

Gem howled in my head, looking excited. “I can’t wait to meet the wolves. They must be gorgeous.” Gem was dancing in happiness.

“Karl is excited.”

“So is Clay. But I am warning you, Clay, do not fight with Karl,” Adrian said and I smiled.

We stripped and my eyes feasted on both men. Damn. They are hot as hell, and they are both mine.

And soon they shifted into their wolf forms. Not the primal, Lycan ones, but the wolves.

I shifted too. Gem looked at the wolves with adoration and wonder as Clay and Karl bumped against her and licked her fur, trying to flirt with her.

“Oh my God, our mate is so f*****g sexy. So is Karl,” Gem said as she looked at Clay and Karl.

“We are indeed lucky,” I said to the wolf. I felt her emotions, and I felt her attraction for Clay. But she loved it when Karl licked her, too. She was just as much a glutton as me.

Oh, she was glowing and preening at the amount of attention she was getting from the two handsome wolves.

“Hmm, they should stop licking my fur. There are places that need more attention,” Gem said with a snarky smile and I laughed. This b.itch was... um... worse than me. “Well, I have been waiting for a long time for this.”

“Are you ready?” Adrian asked, and I opened the door. He gasped as he saw me in my dress. Roman’s mother helped me pick it up from a boutique right here in Nightshade. It was a soft blue dress that fit perfectly. “Now, I want to rip it off your body and stay right here. Let’s tell my parents that we can’t come.”

“Not happening,” I said as I walked out. He was wearing a shirt rolled up to his elbows, and he looked handsome as hell. My body tingled when he grabbed my hand in his and pulled me closer to him and kissed me on my lips. “Do not wrinkle my dress,” I said as he finally pulled away.

“Who cares?” he whispered. “So, are you ready?”

“Is Roman not coming?” I asked and Adrian nodded.

“Yes. He says he has some work, but I know he just wants us to have a night alone with each other.”

My heart thundered as I nervously looked at him.

“If you don’t want to, it is alright. I can wait for a decade and some. We will just talk the night away.”

“Wait for what?”

“To get you into my bed, Red, but I promise I will...”

“Well, I am not that patient,” I whispered as I gave him a heated look, and Adrian laughed as we walked towards his car. He opened the door for me.

“We have time, right?” I said and he nodded.

“Can we go- you know... On the Subway?”

“Tourists...” he said with a teasing grin and nodded. “Of course, Red. Anything and everything for you.”

We drove around the city for a while before we stopped at the subway station. When he got out, he handed the key to a man waiting right there.

“Do you know him?”

“He is from my pack. He will drive it to my parent’s place.”

I shook my head. “I still can’t get over the fact how rich you two are and still so down to Earth.”

“It is just money,” he shrugged as we walked through the sea of people and sweaty bodies. I smiled. It is different. I think Crystal Park has less people than the people in this subway station.

Adrian bought the tickets and then we waited for the train.

“So, are your parents nice like you?” I said as I leaned closer to him. Adrian put his arm around me and pulled me closer.

“They are amazing and they will love you.”

“Adrian?”

“Yes, little Red?”

“Thank you. Thank you for everything.”

“You don’t have to thank me for anything.”

The train arrived and we boarded it. We took a seat and I started to look out the windows. It was strange that I had never seen this or anything like this. My life had probably started in a cage, and then... even when I was out of that cage, I was in a different kind of cage afterwards.

Even Crystal Park was a cage. It had this illusion of not being a cage, but it was. Hiran made it into a cage with his rules, with his words. I was just too blind to see it and break free from it.

For the first time, I felt free. Different. I felt like flying. The train was so fast.

The woods eats the woman and dumps her honey-body in the mud.... hmmm...

Someone was singing. It sounded familiar. The voice was a soft hush, but I heard it loud and clear. My body trembled. I looked around, trying to find who was singing. It was a man. He was leaning against the seat, his eyes half closed as he kept mumbling the song.

I- I had seen that face somewhere, but I didn’t know where.

Her dress floats down the well

I saw a flash in my head. My body burned. Everything in me ached. My b***d felt like hot liquid scorching through my skin. A soft whimper left my lips.

“Baby? Riley?” Adrian’s touch was cool on my heated skin. “You are burning up. Oh....” he gasped as I looked up at him. Sweat dripped down my face. I shook my head.

“Adrian, help me. Stop me. It- it is happening.”

Random, unconnected thoughts filled my head. Dark. Pain. The song. Loud voices arguing. Beep. Beeping.

“One more, for mommy, baby girl. Come on, you are my strong little girl, right?”

The girl shrieked as the needle was pushed inside her veins. She didn’t want that.

I closed my eyes tight. No. I heard a loud roar in my head. No, not here. I couldn’t lose it here.

And it assumes the shape of the body of a little girl...

!!!

– Chapter 55

-Riley-

“Shift,” Adrian whispered next to me. His voice was soft, his touch even softer, as if he was afraid that I would break. I was afraid I would break someone. I looked around in panic. So many humans. No.

The song had finally stopped, but the memories coming in and out, they wouldn’t stop. It felt like I was trapped inside them.

Fear. Pain. Those were the most potent emotions in my head.

“Just shift. Let Gem takeover, baby. Come on. It is going to be alright.”

I didn’t trust a word he said. It wasn’t going to be alright. I shouldn’t have- I should have just gone with him in his damn car. Why did I want to travel by train, again?

“I just want to go to dinner and be with you. I am sorry, Adrian.”

“No, trust me. Come on,” he grabbed my hand and I stood up and followed him, hoping, praying I wouldn’t lose it.

I felt eyes tracking me and looked up to see the man who was singing. He was staring at me with a weird look in his eyes. Did he know me? But there was no recognition in his eyes.

I had seen him somewhere.

And I had heard that song somewhere.

My eyes were getting blurrier. It didn’t happen as quickly as it did with Hiran, but I knew what was coming.

Adrian stopped once we reached the less crowded space. "Listen to me, Riley. Just close your eyes and let Gem come out."

"But she feels- feels so far away."

"Yes, so let her come before she is lost, okay?"

I nodded my head.

"Gem... We can do this. I can do this."

And soon I could see Adrian, and he was back to his handsome self. He didn't look like a red mist anymore.

"Now Gem. Just listen to my voice. You know I won't let anything happen to you or Riley, right? It is alright. Take a deep breath. And fight. You are strong enough to fight this creature in our girl, right? You are strong and-"

"But I could feel it, pushing... pushing against me like an oppressive force field," Gem said.

Adrian hugged us closer. "Take a deep breath. You can smell me, right? Close your eyes and just feel my touch."

And his touches sent tingles running along my nerves. I felt what Gem felt. Everything.

"You feel it, right? The tingles. That is proof that you are mine. And Gem... Clay wants to tell you that he thinks your wolf form is so beautiful."

Gem nodded and m****d as he ran his fingers down her chin. Even though the train was almost empty in this part, there were still some people, but it didn't look like Adrian cared. He only cared about me and Gem right now. My heart felt complete. Like that hole I had been feeling all my life was suddenly full. With Roman and him.

I didn't know how it happened, but it happened. I couldn't live a life without Roman and Adrian and I knew it now. There was no choice. Absolutely not. I couldn't lose this man.

I did like Ash so much, and I understood why she would fall for Adrian. He was amazing, compassionate and just- just so magnificent. But she couldn't have him. No one could. She would find someone who would love her, just her, but Adrian was mine.

"When you touch me, Adrian, I feel like I am burning, but it is a good kind of burning," Gem whispered as she leaned closer to him, as if they weren't already close. She closed her eyes and took in a deep breath and he smelled so delicious.

She licked her lips. "And you smell delectable. If we were alone, I would have taken a big bite off your butt."

I gasped. Gem shrugged. This wolf was f*****g scandalous.

Adrian laughed.

"I won't mind if you do it right here."

"Perverts," I said and Gem rolled her eyes with a smile.

"We are here," Adrian said as the train finally stopped. I blinked and took a deep breath.

"Thank you, Gemmy."

"You should thank him. You know what you should do, don't you?"

"Of course," I said as I shifted back.

I looked back and saw the man was gone. Adrian and I walked outside and his car was ready for use when we walked out.

"OH!"

He smiled as we got inside the car.

"Adrian."

He turned towards me, his eyes soft and tender. I grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and crashed my lips against his. He m****d, and pulled me to his lap and gripped my hair in his hands. I ground against him and m****d as his lips continued to assault my lips. My body felt like it was being electrocuted by every touch of his hand.

When we finally pulled away, we were both flushed and panting.

"What was that for?" he said with a smile as he softly ran his fingers through my hair.

"For being amazing, selfless, kind... for just being yourself."

"Am I getting lucky tonight, then?" He winked at me as I pulled myself away from him. I wanted to stay right there, but we had a dinner to attend.

"Probably." I winked. "If you play your cards right."

William Mercer and Josephine Mercer were kind, and welcoming. William was charming, and I understood where Adrian got his charm. Bella Mercer, though, was not warming up to me.

“Come on, tell your friend to eat more, Adrian,” Josephine said as she tried to pile my plate high with more food. I already felt like I was going to explode. If she fed me anymore, her son was not going to get lucky tonight.

“She is not his friend, momma,” Bella said, with a look in my direction. Adrian growled softly under his breath, and started to say something. I gripped his thigh and he stopped and gave me a look. I shook my head.

“What is wrong with you tonight? You are unusually cranky. Is it about Dean?”

Bella’s face fell and she looked broken, before she composed herself and shook her head.

“No, pap, it is not. It is nothing.” Bella gave me an apologetic grin.

Adrian looked at me and grabbed my hand under the table as he looked at his parents and cleared his throat. “Mom, Pap, she isn’t my friend. Bella is right. She is my mate.”

A loud gasp. Silence. Squeal. Laughter.

There were just too many emotions.

“Oh, darling, my darling boy,” Josephine stood up and hugged Adrian before she turned to me and hugged me, too. “Welcome to the family, Riley.”

William congratulated us. I was only looking at Bella. She still hadn’t recovered from the shock. She looked pale as she stood up.

“Congratulations.” There was no life in her words as she shook her head. “I have to go.”

Josephine let out a noise of disappointment. “What? The dinner isn’t over yet.”

“I am sorry, it is not you, but I really need to go,” Bella said as she looked at me, her eyes worried.

“Bella, what is this? You are being very rude to Riley. This isn’t like you at all.”

Adrian looked at me, his eyes soft as he caressed my cheek. “Sorry for that,” he mouthed, and I nodded.

“No, I understand why you need to go. Go. Take care of her.”

Bella nodded as we both shared an understanding look. I did understand what she felt, how she felt. She walked away and Josephine apologized to me.

“No, it is okay.”

“She isn’t like that.”

Adrian chuckled. “Why are you lying to my mate, mother? She is always like that.”

After the dinner was over, we bid goodbye to William and Josephine and we walked to Adrian’s car.

“Where are we going?”

“You tell me. Wherever you want to go.”

“Your place... take me to your place.”

He growled as his burning gaze met mine. The car raced through the streets before he braked in front of an apartment building.

“Come on, little Red,” he said as he threw the keys to the valet. The valet looked at me and him with a knowing smile.

As soon as the elevator door closed, Adrian pressed me against the wall and assaulted my lips until I couldn’t stand straight. My head was spinning from his touch, his k**s... and it was intense. I could feel the pleasure running along my skin, and the tingles from his touch intensified the pleasure.

I pulled away his coat and unbuttoned his shirt.

He pulled me closer to him and kissed me again, his tongue dancing against mine.

The elevator dinged, and Adrian looked around before he grabbed my hand and we ran through the corridor. He stopped in front of his room and opened the door and we barged in, impatient to finally be inside. He slammed the door close and then slammed me against the door, before he started kissing me again.

My body was wrapped around him so tight, but I still felt like I wanted to get closer. Closer. Until I was buried in his skin.

Gem g*****d. “I feel like I am going to combust.”

“Wait here for a minute,” Adrian said and left, leaving me blinking. It reminded me of the night when Roman left me and went to his couch.

“Is something wrong with these guys? Where the hell did he go?”

My question was answered when I heard music fill the air. Adrian came back a few minutes later with two glasses of wine in his hand. He handed one to me.

“It is my favorite,” I whispered and he nodded.

“Let’s dance?”

“I am thinking of another kind of dance,” I whispered as I took a sip of my wine. He chuckled darkly as he unzipped my dress, and pulled it down.

“You are gorgeous, Riley. I just want to keep looking at you always.”

He took me in his arms and we moved to the soft music that’s filling the air. The dance was slow, seductive. I felt the tension of the day melting. Everything faded back until it was only this moment. Soft and full. Content. I felt content.

Adrian’s hands ran along my spine as he pulled me closer to his chest. My bra rubbed against his naked chest and he g*****d.

“That is enough dancing,” I growled. “Get rid of your pants.”

He laughed and kissed me once again, this time softer. “Inside,” he said.

Our bodies were pressed together, his hand holding mine, and the heat grew between us. We reached his bedroom where he pushed the door open and I gasped. There were candles and flowers. It smelled beautiful. He pushed me onto the bed and stripped off his clothes. I watched him move towards me, naked. A soft m**n of appreciation left my lips.

He looked almost reverent as he gazed at me, his eyes like deep ocean, where lights couldn’t enter. I was aching for him.

The first touch of his lips sent shivers down my spine. My n*****s hardened under his warm fingers, and my thighs trembled. He moved slowly, taking his time to explore every inch of my body, until I could barely breathe.

His soft k*****s were a mixture of desire, l**t and love.

He pulled my panties down and I cried out when his fingers touched me.

He kissed me deeply, slowly moving his lips down my throat to my breasts. I arched my back to give him better access, wanting more than anything to feel his tongue on my n*****s.

When he reached my nipples, he flicked his tongue. The sensation made my head spin. I was now almost desperate to feel his c**k inside me, but I also loved how he took his time. I wanted to know how hot and thick he would be.

He moved closer to me and I pushed myself up for him. He thrust inside and I screamed as pleasure filled me.

“So good,” I breathed out and he chuckled, pulled out and then pushed all the way in, making me scream.

When he finally began to thrust his h**s forward and move faster, and faster, I clung to him tightly. Each push of his c**k drove me closer to the edge, and I knew I wasn’t going to last long.

“Oh my sweet, sweet Red, my little spitfire... you feel so damn tight and hot around me. So damn tight.” He enunciated his words with another thrust.

“Adrian, I can’t- I am cumming.”

“c*m for me, Mate,” he growled, his voice dark and delicious as his movements grew frantic.

As I came, I grabbed a handful of his hair, holding him to me as my entire body shook with pleasure, and soon he followed me.

“I love you, Riley. I love you so damn much. Please don’t- don’t leave me!”

-Dean-

My hope had already died. I didn’t think I was going to survive this. Not anymore. Nobody knew where I was. I had no idea how to get away from this place. I felt weak, fragile. I felt like my bones would crumble if I even stood up. Tears kept running down the side of my cheeks from the constant pain. I couldn’t stop the tears or the pain.

I prayed for death. But the goddess wasn’t hearing me over the loud, dissonant beeps of the machines.

I heard a whistle to the same creepy song the doctor would always sing. I looked at the b***d bag. It was almost empty. I hated it when he came, but sometimes he came with drugs that would stop the pain.

“It is a good day,” the doctor said as he checked my b***d transfusion bag, adjusted my IV tubes, before he sat down on the chair, and grabbed his phone.

“Nadia, you won’t believe me.” His voice was unusually excited.

I couldn’t hear what was said from the other side. The doctor gave a slight nod and smiled. His smile was sick. It made my stomach roll.

“I saw her. I saw her right here in NY... It is your daughter.”

The doctor laughed.

“No, I am not going insane in my old age. I know it was her. She looks like you, Nadia. There is no mistaking that. Also I saw her eyes glowing bright green and red for a second, and then the Lycan with her said something to her and the red went away.”

There was a long pause as the doctor waited.

“Now that we know she is here, we can find her. Of course. Don’t worry. I am going to find her for you. It is going to be so good. She will be happy to see you, see us. We have done so much for her.”

He chuckled again.

“Oh, don’t worry, Nadia. She is your daughter and you two will be reunited. You two must be.”

!!!

– Chapter 56

-Adrian-

“I love you, Riley. I love you so damn much. Please don’t- don’t leave me!”

We both froze as she looked me in the eyes and I winced. Why the hell would I say that out of nowhere? But I was always worried she might leave me, because I knew she loved Roman, and... she didn’t love me, not yet.

She caressed my cheeks as she pulled me down. My heart felt strange. Suddenly, she was the world, the bigger part of the word, and I didn’t think I was ready for that.

Before her, everything was just a pit-stop. But she was the destination and it still scared me to think that I might not be her destination. What if-

"You are overthinking, Adrian. She told you we are hers, and we are. You don't feel what she feels, what Gem feels?"

"I am heavy," I said, and she chuckled.

"Just stay there," she whispered. "Can you hear my heart, Adrian?"

I listened closely and it was thundering, almost in sync with mine. She ran her nails along my spine and then pushed her nails into my skin.

"I told you, Adrian. Why don't you believe me? Why do you think I will leave you?"

I rolled down from her and looked into her eyes. Softest of green. Like the grass that dotted the ground. When I looked into her eyes, the world disappeared. Everything disappeared.

"I didn't mean to say it. Just forget it, Riley."

"You were thinking it, Adrian, and I don't want you to think it. I don't want you to feel it. I won't leave you, I can't leave you, Adrian. I already told you you are mine, and that is the only truth I know right now. Everything else in my life is like a shredded piece of paper right now, and I feel like I was flying along with the papers, just moving along with the wind, but you and Roman, you are the only truths I believe, and you stop me from disappearing into thin air."

She cupped my face and moved closer to me, until her legs were tangled with mine.

"This is where I always want to be, and I would never leave you. Okay?"

She poked my forehead and yawned.

"Go to sleep, Red."

She nodded and curled closer to me and closed her eyes.

"Good night, Adrian."

"Good night, my mate," I said with a smile. Clay was right. I should stop overthinking and just enjoy this, enjoy her.

Because she was everything.

-Riley-

The room was nothing but a cage. The soft whimper accompanied the songs of machines.

The girl's small body was folded like a fortune cookie.

I banged against the door. This time, it wasn't Claire. I knew who she was. Me.

She looked up and showed me her teeth in a snarl.

Long, sharp canines and she grinned as she licked her lips. Her eyes were wide, dotted with b***d red.

"Come on, let's go."

She laughed.

"You can't save me." Her voice slapped against the glass walls, making a thundering boom. She laughed and then she cried. "Mommy is coming."

I quickly turned back and, sure enough, I saw a woman with long, silky red hair, with a man wearing a lab coat. I tried to find somewhere to hide, but it looked like they didn't see me.

The man wearing a labcoat was humming.

The woods eats the woman and dumps her honey-body in the mud.... hmmm...

Her dress floats down the well

And it assumes the shape of the body of a little girl...

My body shuddered as the girl screamed.

"I hate this song. The song meant- pain," she whispered so that only I could hear.

The woman was talking. "She is a miracle, isn't she, doctor?"

The man she called doctor laughed. "She is yours and Marcus's daughter. How can she not be a miracle."

"I never thought the experiment Marcus went through would affect her, but it is a surprising turn of our experiment. We have come a long way in seven years."

The woman walked into the room and the man followed.

"Please mommy, make him stop."

“Oh, baby girl, we are going to make history. The world will remember us.”

“I want- I want daddy,” the girl whimpered and wailed and thrashed.

“What did mommy tell you, baby? Why are you crying? Only bad, ungrateful little girls cry and waste tears.”

The doctor checked the girl’s vitals. She sniffled, and big tears rolled down her eyes as she kept asking for her daddy.

He grabbed a syringe and a vial full of transparent yellow liquid. “This makes the third, cooler side of you dominant, and it will also allow you to control it.”

“I don’t want the third side. I love Rene and dad says I will hear my wolf’s voice soon.”

“Rene is cool, she is perfect, but imagine... being so strong and powerful that no one can match you in a fight.”

“Let me go, please,” the girl wailed as the doctor grabbed her hand and stuck it into her veins. Her scream was heart-breaking.

I whimpered and took a step back, tears dripping down my cheeks. I felt her pain. I felt her loss and suffering.

“Mommy loves you. Here, you can have your coloring book back, because you are a good little girl.”

The girl shook her head. She didn’t look up as the woman and the man walked away.

She looked up at me, her eyes accusing.

“I told you you couldn’t save me. You can’t even save yourself.”

“Riley, Riley...”

“Riley, wake up. You are dreaming. It is okay, you are safe here with me. Baby, Wake up.”

Adrian looked blurry. I blinked and tears rolled down my face. He pulled me closer to him and wrapped me up in a blanket as he rocked me back and forth.

I remembered. I remembered so many things. The song. The cage. The smell of antiseptic and b***d. The dissonant sound of a broken roar in my head. The red and black blurry haze that came whenever that side woke up. They didn’t have a name for that. What they created in me was... an accident that made them greedy for more.

My body froze from the memory.

"It was a dream, but- no, it wasn't. These are my memories. I was back in the cage..." My body trembled and Adrian embraced me tighter. "And a woman- my mom... she was a part of all of this."

"S**t, baby, I am so sorry," Adrian said as I curled against his chest.

"And-"

Someone knocked on the room door.

"Who is-"

"It is Rome. I tried to wake you up for a long time, Riley, and you just wouldn't wake up. You were sobbing and thrashing and clawing... I called him."

Roman walked in and took one look at me and sighed.

"Oh Riley..."

"Her mom was a part of all of this." Adrian repeated everything I told him to Roman.

"Shit."

"And the man in the subway... Adrian, I know why the song... was familiar. The Doctor was always singing that song. He is the one from the subway. It is him. He was the one doing the experiments, the trials. I am sure he is the one who is doing it now, too, and I am sure he recognized me. Now, they will be looking for me."

"Doctor?"

"Everyone called him doctor. But his name is Doctor Kaspar Evansky."

"Doctor Kaspar? Isn't he- F**k... Roman..." Adrian looked at Roman and Roman blinked.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, a little. He was once very famous in the field of gene therapy," Roman said with a hiss. "He was a very good friend of my father."

"Was? What happened?" I looked at Roman and Roman stood up with a growl. I could see the anger rippling off of him in waves. A loud growl filled the room and I felt the room shudder. And then somehow, he controlled himself and shook his head.

“He died. Doctor Kaspar Evansky is dead.”

“If what Riley said was true, he isn’t dead. He is just hiding. The man in the subway is old and wearing a trench coat, and I couldn’t recognize him, but...”

“You said he was famous. His pictures must be on the internet?” I said as I pulled away from Adrian, my eyes suddenly focused. Yes. I wasn’t the little girl anymore, and she was wrong. The little Riley was wrong.

I could save myself now. And now, I was not alone. Now I had people who would go to any length for me.

“Yes, you are right,” Roman said and pulled out his phone. Adrian grabbed a t-shirt for me, and I realized I didn’t even remember I was naked. I quickly pulled it down and waited for Roman.

“Here...” Roman handed me the phone. My heart froze and then started to race.

I nodded. “It is HIM. He is the one who stuck all those needles inside me. He is the one who- who made me scream in pain. Roman, I don’t want to kill Hiran anymore. I want to kill HIM, Adrian. I want to make him scream just as he made me scream.”

“Yes, Riley. Yes. We will kill him. We will hunt him down and destroy him.”

“And my mother, if she is alive... I want to hurt her, too.” I only felt anger for that woman. She wasn’t my mother.

“Oh Riley, I wish I was there for you,” Gem said.

“You remember your mother’s name, Riley?” Adrian asked as he ran his finger up and down my arm.

“Nadia. Nadia Lowe. Marcus Lowe, that is my father...”

That makes me Riley Lowe. I had grown up without a last name, either. That made me even more odd. Alpha James did really try so hard to keep me under the radar.

“Nadia?”

I nodded.

“Let me check the name,” Roman said as he grabbed his laptop and opened what looked like a database website. He typed her name in. “Nothing pops up.”

“Try Nadia Andreas.”

“There is one result. She was a scientist too. She had received an Edwin Grant Conklin award for her research in developmental biology, and a big research fellowship, before she disappeared a few years ago.”

“That is her. My mommy. Look how happy she looks with the award.” I scoffed, as I glared at the image. I felt the red haze in me rising, and I wanted to find her and rip her into pieces.

Roman pulled me closer and shook his head.

“Go back to sleep. We will talk in the morning, okay?”

Adrian brought me a glass of warm milk. “Here, drink this.”

We slept together, the three of us. I felt safe with both Roman and Adrian next to me. When I woke up, they were already drinking coffee.

“Want a cup?” Roman asked as I walked out of the room, and I nodded. It reminded me of that first morning at Hotel Delta.

I sat down and took a sip of coffee.

“Did you find anything more?”

“Not yet, but Riley, we were blindly searching in the darkness for so long. This is everything. Now I have hope we can save Dean, and the others too. I called Captain Matthews and Finn, and the Red Watchers. We are going to keep searching.”

I leaned against the couch and closed my eyes. My eyes still burned from the lack of sleep.

“I remember something else,” I whispered. “I almost forgot about it, but... Rene. In my dream, I said to the doctor I had Rene.”

“Who is Rene?” Adrian asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t remember.”

“And one more thing.”

“Yes.”

“The doctor called the side- you know when I become a Hulk-” They laughed and I smiled a little. “The third side. Why? Does That mean...”

"You are a hybrid with a third side too? A tribrid? But the third side is made in a lab? It is impossible, isn't it?"

"I don't know anything anymore."

!!!

– Chapter 57

-Riley-

"A tribrid?" Adrian whispered again, his eyes wide as he looked at me like he was looking at me for the first time or something. "So you might actually be stronger than the two of us combined? Sick."

Sometimes, I couldn't believe how he could be like this... He was the complete opposite of Roman, but maybe that was why they both made sense as friends, they both made sense in my life.

"I don't know."

"Do you know what your mom is? Your dad is a werewolf. You have Gem. If your mom is something else..." Roman looked at me and I shook my head. I did not know.

"I wish I could remember everything."

"You will. Just give your brain a rest. You know... it is a lot to process." Adrian said.

"It is alright, and Reid called. He got the drug from Alpha James. He said he will send it with someone. It will reach you tonight or tomorrow morning."

"Already?"

"Look at the time, Red," Adrian said and I blinked and sure enough, it was ten in the morning. "And Dee wanted you to get it as soon as possible. So she made Reid drive all the way to your old pack, so early in the morning."

"Yeah, you just couldn't say no to that woman. For a human... she is... scary," Adrian said with a shudder.

"She is amazing. I miss her so much. It has always been the three of us. Even after I married Hiran, she was the most important person in my life, her and Keller, too."

"I am sorry, Riley. I wish we can take you back there, but there is a lot of s**t we have to deal with right here. Maybe once all of this is over."

"I know. It is alright. I do understand how important this is."

Adrian made breakfast, which we ate at eleven. The sandwich was cheesy and delicious. I m****d as I bit into it and closed my eyes. "Did you add magic to this?"

Adrian chuckled. "No, just cheese, but then again cheese is magic."

It was cozy and comfortable, just being here with them. We were silent the rest of the breakfast, each of us lost in our own thoughts.

"We are going to – you know to the HQ of Red Watchers later tonight. Do you want to come?" Roman asked.

"Will that be okay?"

"Of course. Maybe you will find something more than we could find?"

"Why? Because we are all freaks?" I chuckled. Roman's face fell and I shook my head. "Sorry, I didn't mean that. I was just trying to be funny, and that was my mistake. Of course, I will come, and do whatever I have to. You know that."

Later that evening, we were on our way to meet the creatures. Adrian stopped the car in front of a tall building. I stared up at the building as I waited for the guys.

"It is so tall," I said when Roman finally joined me. He nodded and pulled me against him. "Does it have prisons here?"

"Oh yes. The first three levels are prison cells."

I looked at him with astonishment. "This is the headquarters, but there are smaller ones everywhere, too."

"Of course, I knew about Red Watchers, but I never- this was a well connected network, isn't it?"

"Yes, and it is in every country, too. We are the ones who has to keep the wolf laws, and we work closely with other supernatural organizations and councils to keep peace."

"It is amazing," I said as the three of us walked inside. The elevator only had buttons from fourth floor. I gave them a look and they nodded.

"The prison has a seperate elevator."

“So the creatures... they aren’t in the prison?”

“No, in the lab.”

I felt a moment of sadness for them. Lab. A part of me was made in the lab, and these creatures, they were made in the lab too. It was neither of our faults. We reached the lab and the smell of antiseptic was too powerful. It was like a punch in the gut. I stopped as my hands trembled.

My head pounded.

“You alright?” Both of them asked at the same time.

I blinked as my ears rang. I nodded. “I am alright.”

We walked in and I could immediately see the creatures. My first instinct was to scream. The creatures kept banging against the cages they were in. I remembered the cage I was in. Yes, mine was a bit more modern, but it was still a cage.

“Roman, the information you gave about Doctor Kaspar... you were right. No, that old bastard is not really dead. We found a few properties linked to his name, his family name. At first, we were searching for properties under Ramsay’s name, and we went everywhere and searched and none of it turned out to be the secret facility we were looking for. I think maybe this new information will help us.”

A man walked towards us. He looked at me and smiled. “You must be Riley. Thank you. You didn’t know how much you have helped us.”

I nodded as I walked towards the creature. I could see that their pupils were fully red. Bright, b***d red.

They snarled and roared when I reached closer to them. Ugly. That was my first thought. What the hell changed them like this? How could something turn a person into this?

The doctor, my mother, Ramsay... all of them must be punished for this. This wasn’t making history as my mother told me once. This was destroying lives.

These two in the cages... they were once someone else’s mate, someone else’s love, father, mother. My heart felt heavy as I looked at them.

“Adrian...” I turned to him. “You know the drugs Alpha James had... if it is for curbing this side of me... could it work? You know on them?”

Adrian blinked and nodded. "I didn't think that, but you are right. It might, but then again, they aren't exactly like you, either, but we can try. We have our own scientists, and maybe they can recreate the drug, too, or study it."

A doctor approached me. "I- we-" he hesitated and looked at Adrian and me.

"What? Go on."

"Will it be okay if we have some of your b***d to test? You know because..."

I nodded. "Yes, of course."

He swabbed my skin. The sound of my heart felt like a beat of drums closer to my ears.

"Mommy, I hate needles..." I heard myself talking. Nadia gave me a cold look, before she smiled. I shuddered.

"You aren't a baby anymore." Her voice was freezing.

I looked up at Roman and Adrian.

"What?"

I wondered whether I should... tell them.

"You should. You know they aren't your mom, Riley," Gem said with a soft sigh. "I am so, so sorry."

"I hate... needles," I whispered and the both of them came closer to me. Adrian took my hand while Roman stood behind me like he was guarding me. I could see his power emanating.

"Close your eyes. You won't feel anything," Roman whispered. I did as I was asked.

"It is done," the doctor said.

"Do you want anything, Riley?" Adrian asked. I shook my head with a sigh.

"My mother... she would look at me and say I am not a baby anymore." I bit my lips.

"I am beginning to hate that woman more and more..."

-Ashelene-

Bella kept rambling. I didn't understand head or tails. She told me she would be staying at her parents's place, and then she came home late at night. And then this morning, she was acting like a caged monkey. At first, I thought it was about Dean, but...

"Bells... what are you not telling me? Why did you go to your parents' place last night?"

"Because Adrian brought Riley for dinner."

OH!

"That was- that was nice," I said as I felt the familiar twinge in my chest. This meant... it was official. Adrian had a lot of girls before, but he never brought them to meet his parents. "Riley is amazing."

"She really is, but she is the reason you are- hurt and-"

"No, just no. It is nothing like that. She isn't the one to blame."

"You blame Adrian, don't you? But Ash, he isn't the one to blame, either," she said and then stopped as if she had said too much. What did she mean? "Don't you have college today? Why don't we get you ready for college?"

I knew she was changing subject, and was not being very subtle about it.

"Tell me what you meant. I don't have to go to college, because it is saturday."

Bella's face twisted as she sat down on the couch and motioned me to sit. Now I was feeling really nervous. Why did she look so serious? The only other time when I saw her looking like this was when we talked about Dean.

I sighed.

"She is his mate."

I gasped and stood up. My body shuddered. I felt like I had been hit by thunder or lightning. My heart felt weird and strange, like... there was a wide chasm of emptiness. I felt like I was being hit by my ribs with baseball bat, repeatedly. The pain wouldn't go away.

"I am so sorry, baby. I just knew last night."

"That is why you came home," I whispered as I sat down next to her.

"Yes, but then you looked better than the last few days, and I didn't want to spoil that, but I knew I had to tell you this." Bella's concerned eyes met mine. I shook my head.

So Adrian wasn't the one who was pathetic. I was the one who was pathetic all along. I was the one who believed in something that really wasn't there. But it was love. I loved him, and I really felt the pain of it, pain of this loss.

Adrian Mercer would never be a part of my life the way I wanted him to be, and the knowledge of that almost destroyed me. He was kind, funny, charming.

Everything felt new and alive when I first realized I had feelings for him, and then it died when I realized he would never reciprocate my feelings. But somewhere deep inside, the root of that desire lived.

Not that I knew I had to cut the root out, I felt- I felt naked. Bare. I had loved him a long time, and I felt empty without it, but I knew I had to stop. Even before Riley, I knew.

The heartbreak was tangible. The pain, physical. I wondered why it felt like this. I sat down on the floor and sighed. "This time, I really have to move on."

"I am so so sorry, Ash."

"I am sorry, too, Bella. I am sorry for a lot of things."

"You must apologize, you know... You were so rude to him when he told you about Riley."

"I was..."

God, the things I said to Adrian. I made him feel bad, feel shame for liking Riley, and that was a terrible thing to do. Now I didn't know how I could ever face him. Maybe I would never.

I knew that was impossible though. He was a part of my life, and that wouldn't change, but I needed distraction. I needed to run and hide. For a while. No. More than a while.

And then I realized something else. Roman... Oh Roman. I wondered how he was feeling right now, what he was doing. I had been hiding in Bella's apartment, but I should have stayed. I wasn't there for my brother when he needed me.

"No, no Ash. You shouldn't have to apologize for anything. You are allowed to feel your feelings, and that is alright, just as Adrian is allowed to feel his. I was a terrible sister to him, but..."

"You were thinking about me, and being my friend first, but like you said, he deserves the best and Riley is... I know she is the best."

I sighed. I felt like crying, too, wailing, but the tears just wouldn't come.

I knew it would come soon, but for now, I was comforted by the knowledge that no matter what happened, Bella would always be my friend.

After losing Adrian, I needed that reassurance.

"I love you, Bella Mercer. You are the sister I have always wanted."

"I love you, Ashelene Night."

"And for now, that is all I need."

– Chapter 58

-Riley-

After the doctor took my b***d, Adrian and Roman went to talk with someone else, and I stayed in the lab. The walls were too white, too clinical.

It wasn't quiet, though. The creatures kept roaring and snarling. I walked closer to the cage and they both stopped banging against the bars, and stared, eyes blazing with fire red. I felt the gaze straight at my soul. Penetrating. Scorching. And they roared together.

They didn't deserve this, whoever they were.

"I am so sorry you have to go through this," I said in a soft voice and the creatures stopped roaring and stared at me as if they understood me. "You don't deserve it. Nobody does. I don't deserve it either. But I am going to do everything I can to help you two," I said, and the creatures' eyes widened.

"Do you understand me?"

Could they?

One of them... it looked like a man, even though both of them were bald and wearing loose, ripped clothes.

"B***D."

The word came out like a rusty, loud growl, but I heard it. B***d. Did I hear it right? They said the creatures only grunted and roared. Nobody said they talked.

He was asking for b***d. They said the creatures couldn't talk. So how could it ask me for b***d?

I looked around, and everyone was busy doing whatever they were doing. Roman was talking with a few men, as one of them kept typing on his laptop. I assumed they were looking for more locations where they might be hiding.

"No other place linked to the doctor's name. We checked the properties and they were all empty," the man typing on the computer said. "I had tried Ramsay's name, Hiran's name, too. Nothing is popping up."

Roman scratched his chin and growled, looking agitated and angry.

"The other name. Did you search for it?"

"Nadia, right. I did it, too, but nothing came," the computer guy said. I winced a little when I heard her name.

"Nadia and Kasper, they are both assholes," I hissed in anger. "I wish I could hurt them somehow."

"We will. When we find them, I am going to pinch them straight through their hearts for putting you through this," Gem said. "You are a part of me, and it is my job to protect you now, and I will."

"I know you will, Gem. I know you will."

Roman looked nervous as his eyes flickered to mine before he looked at the computer guy.

"Search Marcus Lowe," he said finally, and I sighed. I hoped they would find something, and find Dean. It was getting desperate. It had been so many days since Dean was lost, and I could see how much it affected all of them, even when they tried to be brave.

My eyes met Roman's and he whispered sorry before he looked down on the floor. He had nothing to be sorry about. It was logical, what he did, and my mother, she was smart. She could have used my dad's name to purchase property that would turn into a secret facility where she experimented on wolves.

I turned away from them and flinched when I met the eyes of the creature. The second one kept looking at me, its red eyes narrowed into a slit. It didn't look too pleased.

They looked really ugly, but I felt sad than disgusted. Before this, they would have had a life, and now, they had nothing.

The one who asked for my b***d shook his head, growling as he did and then he let out a loud, painful howl. He scratched his face with his long claws, until weird whitish red goo oozed out of his skin. I winced.

"I am sorry. I am so sorry."

"BABY."

He growled again and grabbed on the bar and pushed his face between the bar, roaring as he did. His front incisors looked more noticeable as he snapped his teeth at me.

"B***D."

"Roman?"

He stopped talking with the man and turned to look at me. "What is it, Riley? Don't get too close to them," he said in warning as he walked towards me. He put an arm around me as he pulled me closer. "What?"

"He- he talked."

"No way," the doctor Roman was talking with said. Roman called him Doctor Ayman. "These creatures have been roaring since they came here. No talking. We tried, but nothing happened."

I shook my head. "I heard it. He said B***d, and then baby."

"Are you sure?" Doctor Ayman asked and I nodded. I was sure. I heard it loud and clear, and I wasn't hallucinating this time. The creatures had stopped roaring, too. "They have also stopped growling."

I took in a deep breath. "He said, baby. He must have had a mate and a newborn before Ramsay and Kaspar did this to him," I growled out. Anger filled my insides like a fierce storm. "It makes me sad to know that I could have- I could have turned out like this, too. No one deserves a fate like this."

Roman tightened his arms and I snuggled closer, relishing his warmth. My body felt freezing cold, though.

"Why did my mother do this, Roman?"

I knew it was stupid, because he didn't even know my mother, but sometimes I believed Roman had all the answers. He definitely had all the right words. He rubbed his hand along my arm before entwining his fingers with mine.

"Why did she hurt me, hurt them like this? What really happened back in that place? How was I like that? Who was Rene? Was she like Gem, or was she someone I knew when I was inside the..."

The creature next to the man howled, its voice laced with agony. Somehow, I could feel the creature's pain. My stomach clenched. I looked into its burning red eyes, and the thing blinked and raised its claws. Sharp and shining. They were the perfect weapons.

"What?" I looked at the creature and she banged her head against the bar. "You want to say something?" I mumbled and shook my head. My stomach hurt just from looking at them.

The creature banged its head again before it snarled, and saliva dripped down the side of her mouth.

"RENE."

My eyes widened as I looked at Roman. "You heard it, right? Roman..."

"Yes. It said Rene. I heard it."

"What? Why?" I blinked and before I could march closer to where the creatures were and asked questions they might not even understand, Adrian walked in. "The drugs and your things came."

"Oh. Did you ask anyone to bring it here?"

"Yeah, Finn will be here soon with the vials and the box, too, if you don't want to wait to look at your father's thing. I know you would want to see them," Adrian said, -Cre and I gave him a nod. Adrian was always taking care of others, thinking about others. It surprised me. I had always thought I was a good person, but I had realized, I wasn't as good as I had once assumed. Now, Adrian, he was truly good. The world needed more men like Adrian and Roman.

"I- the creatures were talking," Roman said as he looked at Adrian. "To her."

Adrian's mouth hung open. "Is it true?"

"I nodded. This one... it said RENE, when I was talking with Roman about my dream..."

The creature howled again, and repeated once again, clearer than before...

"RENE."

"What if this is Rene?" I whispered finally. I knew they were thinking about it and worried about saying it. "Are you Rene?" I looked at the creatures. I still couldn't remember who Rene was, the one from my dream. Was it her?"

The creature shook her head, and pointed a finger towards me. "RENE."

"Me? Rene?" I blinked. "Riley. I am Riley."

The creature growled. Did she know me? How? Why?

"Ew. Ugly as fu.ck."

I turned to see Finn walking in with a small bag in one hand and a box in the other.

"This is the drug," he said to me before he handed me the other bag. "This belongs to you, Riley." His smile was warm. Finn didn't talk too much, either, but he had been kind to me since we met. He was just as good as Roman.

"Thanks for this," I said to him and he nodded.

"Of course, Riley."

Doctor Ayan opened the box with drugs, and he took out a vial containing bright yellow liquid. "Should we try it on them?" Finn asked and Doctor Ayan shook his head.

"First I need to find out what exactly is in it. We couldn't hurt them any more than they already were."

"But Alpha James said I had been using that. And I am okay, so I don't think it is going to hurt them."

Doctor Ayan nodded. "True, but I still need to run at least a few quick tests."

"Of course, doctor," Roman said, and the doctor walked away with the vial. "I know you want to open the bag. Come on, I will take you somewhere private," he said, and took my hand in his.

"Stay with me?" I said to him and he nodded. I didn't think I could do it alone. I looked at Adrian, and he was nervously looking around, not meeting my eyes. I sighed. "Come on, Adrian," I said to him and he gave me a smile that was brighter than the sun.

"I will stay here with the doctor and link you when he is done?" Finn said as he grabbed a chair and sat down. "Go on."

"Thank you," I said, and he smiled.

"Stop thanking me. One time is enough. And why would I not do this for you? We are family," he said with a shrug, as if he was talking about something universal, something certain. He wasn't even looking at me anymore. He was typing on his phone. I chuckled a little and looked at Roman. Roman shrugged.

We walked out, and walked along the narrow corridor before we reached a big hall that had so many cabins. We crossed the hall and soon Roman stopped in front of an office room. The door had a nameplate.

ROMAN NIGHT.

"This is your office?"

He nodded and grabbed a key from his backpocket and opened it. He took in a deep breath and smiled.

"I haven't been here in a while." He slumped on the couch as Adrian pulled open the window, letting the air and light in. I sat next to Roman, and Adrian joined me on the other side.

I took in a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves, but I was sure they could already hear my thundering heart.

"Go on," Adrian said. My fingers slightly shook as I pulled the zipper open.

There was an old wooden bobblehead doll, a figurine of a wolf, a ring with some weird stone, and an old journal. I picked up the journal first and opened it.

His handwriting was an unrecognizable scrawl, and I could read half the s**t.

"This might take a decade or some to decode," Adrian said with a grin as he leaned his head against my shoulder and looked at the journal.

Roman laughed. "Yes. His handwriting is more terrible than Adrian's."

"Mine is not terrible," Adrian said.

I picked up the ring from the backpack and felt something passing through me. It was like a spark of power. The ring slipped from my fingers and fell on the rug with a soft thud.

"Did you see it?" Adrian asked and Roman nodded.

"The stone glowed when she touched it."

"I-I feel weird," I whispered as I grabbed my chest. My heart pounded furiously, and I felt it everywhere. "I felt like someone had shocked me when I touched-touched that."

"It is alright," Roman said as he grabbed it. It didn't glow. "Here..."

I touched it and it glowed again.

“What the hell is that?”

“Whatever the hell it is, it only reacts to Riley’s touch. Like they were connected.”

The ring looked pretty. I stared at it for a second, before I pushed the ring into my finger and screamed as soon as I put it on. I felt the ripple of pain all over my body. It started from my back, slowly traveling up and down. My spine felt like someone was stomping on it. My intestines... it felt like someone was tearing it from the inside out.

“NO.”

“Riley? Riley? Get that ring off.”

Adrian grabbed my hand in his when he realized I couldn’t move my hand or fingers.

“It won’t f*****g come off.”

I screamed again as my bones felt like they were snapping into five hundred pieces and some more.

“Let me try... no, you are right. It looks like it is glued to her skin.”

!!!

– Chapter 59

-Roman-

Riley screamed again, and I felt the vibration of her roar along my skin.

“What the hell is happening? Get that fuking ring off her finger,” Karl growled. “She is hurting so much.”

I could feel his pain, and his helplessness. I felt the same helplessness as I tried to get that ring off her finger. It just wouldn’t come off.

Riley curled to the floor, as Adrian rubbed her back up and down, but not even the bond was helping her.

“Is it the- red haze?” Adrian whispered to her and she shook her head, as drops of tears rolled down from the intense pain she was feeling. Somehow I could- I could sense her pain and suffering, too.

"No, no, Adrian," she said through gritted teeth. "My bones... it feels like how it felt during my first shift. No, it wasn't that painful during my first shift."

I shuddered remembering my first shift. It was always the most painful. If what she felt was more painful than that... I couldn't even imagine it.

"I shouldn't have put the damn ring on. What the hell is this? Ring of f*****g pain?" she said with a scowl, as she shook her head. Even with tears running down her cheeks, she looked like a warrior queen.

And then she stilled before her body twisted into a weird pretzel. A loud growl left her lips and her eyes snapped up to meet mine. They glowed a strange yellow. It wasn't Riley's eyes. It wasn't Gem's glowing green eyes. Those weren't the weird red eyes.

f**k me to hell.

"What is this woman? Where the hell did we find her?" Karl said as he stared at her. She blinked and sharp claws protruded out of her nails and dark black silky fur covered her hand.

"Rene..." I whispered, surprised and shocked. The creature was right. It was her, but how did the creature know it was her?

Karl howled inside my head, feeling cranky and agitated. He wanted to come out and destroy everything and everyone who dared hurt her. He was always overprotective of her, but now it was even more intense than before.

"You okay, Karl?"

"Just protect her. Stop this, whatever this is. It is hurting her."

"I will, but this- it is part of her, and we can't keep it away from her. She deserves to know what she is. You know that, right?"

"Riley? Riley?" Adrian took a step closer to her and she snarled at him. His eyes widened as he stumbled back. She shook her head as her fire red hair slowly, slowly turned into a dark, midnight black, matching the silky fur on her hand.

"What is happening?" Adrian whispered as he tried to get closer to her again and she snapped her teeth. She looked like a feral, but also a skittish animal. "This is- madness."

"Get away, Adrian. Just- just wait for her to calm down. She doesn't trust you or me, or any of us. This isn't Riley or Gem, or that other creature," I said to him as I studied her. She kept looking around, her eyes frustrated, confused. She pushed the things that were on my table with a single swipe of her hand and roared. A vase was next. She smashed my chair next.

“What the hell is this, then?”

“Something else, but... it doesn't matter. We just need to give her some space for her to calm down and understand all of this. She looks spooked and scared.”

“She does,” he said. “I wish I could help her, but my bond... I don't think it is working on this one. I could even calm Riley down when she almost turned into that like when she attacked Hiran,” Adrian said with a pensive look in his eyes. We looked at her. She was crouched low, her body bent, as if she was waiting to pounce on us if we took another step forward.

“We are not going to hurt you. You can ask Riley. She knows us.”

She snarled again and swiped her paws forward, and I could almost hear it cut through the air.

The sound was metallic, tinny.

“Look at me. Look,” I said to the – whatever the hell she was. She stared at my laptop in her hand. I was sure it was going to die. But it was alright. I could buy a new one. She was the one I had to help right now. “It is alright. We don't know who you are, or what happened to you, but you are a part of the woman we love... and we will not let anything happen to you. It is okay to be afraid. Take your time. Just realize that we won't hurt you ever,” I said and she

Thank the goddess that all the rooms in this building were soundproof, or the whole gang of Red Watchers would be here. They were all nosy.

She hesitantly put the laptop down, and grabbed her hair in her claws and tugged. Sharp canines came out of her lips as she looked at me, finally at me. And her body stopped moving. She placed a hand on the laptop.

“You remember who you are? What you are?”

She shook her head and blinked and then walked forwards. Toward ME? Her eyes were hard and her lips were still peeled open to show those sharp canines.

Was she going to kick me in the nuts for asking question?

“Oh hell no, not my nuts,” Karl said. “We need them for making little Rileys.”

“The hell Karl? Is this the time to think about little Ril-“

“You were thinking too.”

“Yes, only after you mentioned.”

I took a step back as she stopped in front of me. She raised her hand up and I stood there, not knowing what to do. Claws, like f*****g knives. Oh, no, no.

“Come on, run. What is she doing?”

A sharp breath left my lips when she finally placed her palm on my cheek.

“Thank Goddess.”

“Yeah, it is alright, Rene,” I whispered and her eyes widened as she let out a soft whimper.

“Rene,” she repeated, and I nodded. Her hand softly traced my jaw before she looked up at me. “You?”

“She is asking your name after almost giving me a heart attack?” Karl said with an indignant huff.

“Me? I am Roman, Rene. It is nice to meet you.”

“Roman,” she repeated again before she looked at Adrian and pointed a sharp claw at him. He was still looking shocked. He finally blinked and shook his head.

“Adrian. I am Adrian. Do you know what you are, Rene?”

She shook her head.

We had seen a lot, but neither of us had any idea what was really going on here.

This wasn't a Lycan. Lycan was a part of our wolves, too. Like I only had Karl, and he shifted both into his Lycan and into his wolf. And a werewolf could only shift into their wolves.

And also this wasn't Gem. This was something else entirely. And it was strange. It didn't usually happen like that, but Riley was... something different, unusual, already.

When a hybrid is born, only one side of the hybrid will be potent and discerning. Usually, the other side will remain dormant.

Even when they are a hybrid, they can only shape shift into the one with the dominant gene. The recessive genes will be there, but they won't contribute to anything more. Maybe it will add more strength, agility, and improve the physical traits of the human host, but they could only shift into one species.

A baby born between a werewolf and a werecat would have both the wolf and the cat's reflexes, healing power, and the consciousness, too, that one would hear as voices. But

because a wolf's gene is dominant when compared to the cat, the offspring hybrid would only shift into a wolf, but not into a cat.

"No," she whispered. "No? What am I? Dark. So dark."

"Take a deep breath. Do you want something to eat? Drink?"

"Drink..." she poked her tongue out through her canines as if to show me she was thirsty, and I nodded as I walked to the mini-refrigerator to the side and grabbed a bottled water. I handed it to her and her fingers trembled before she took a quick gulp of it. She looked like she had been thirsty for years. Maybe she was.

If Riley knew Rene... when she was only a little girl, then this part of her was there even before Gem. How could it even be possible?

The more answers we found, the more confused I became. This was impossible. This was against everything we had learned as kids in the school where only we went, that would teach us about supernatural species around us, and how they worked. This was definitely not how they worked. I knew that much.

She looked like she had calmed down a little. She still had her yellow eyes and claws and her black hair and fur though.

Was that all? This looked only like a half-transformation.

"Do you have any idea what the hell is going on here?" Adrian whispered/hissed next to me, looking just as confused as me. "Should we call-"

I shook my head. I didn't want to call anyone until we figured this out first.

"Grab that diary. Find any entry that mentions the ring?"

"We should have done that first before Riley wore the ring. We were idiots," Adrian said with a frown as he grabbed the diary and started leafing through the page as I stood there, just staring at Rene.

And then I saw her flinching, and the ring glowed. The light scattered inside the walls as a small whimper left her lips.

It was happening again.

"Could this be the full transformation?" Karl looked worried. I was too, but I was also curious to know what the hell she was.

"Rene?"

“Ow. STOP, no,” she hissed as her hands hit the rug. She clawed against the rug, and I winced as her claws dug into the rug and tore it.

I touched my back and she snarled, her eyes burning bright. The yellow shone like bright amber and soon fur started covering her body as her body bent out of shape. It twisted. She cried out.

Adrian stood up, the diary still clutched between his fingers.

I tried to use my power to ease the pain, but I had a feeling that she still felt the pain.

And then I saw it. She finally stood on four legs. Her bright eyes met mine.

Karl stilled.

My body buzzed with energy and power.

She snarled.

“She is a werepanther. I – they were extinct, weren’t they?” Adrian’s voice was a distant echo, amid the clamor in my head. Karl’s body trembled.

Something was odd. I didn’t know what, though.

Her lips peeled back as she walked towards me. She was massive, bigger than Gem.

If she could... she could take me. And Adrian, too.

The room felt small when she was there.

And then she bumped against my leg and our eyes met.

My whole world stilled and the tilted.

She looked like she was smiling. Was she? She knew, didn’t she.

“MATE.”

The word I had been wishing, hoping to hear for so long rang through my head.

My eyes felt... weird.

“Are you crying, Rome?” Karl said with an amused smile, but he didn’t look much better than me. His eyes were just as wet.

"It is allergy," I said to the wolf before I looked down at the panther in front of me. She was marvellous, and she was... unique. She was powerful, too. I could feel her power, her strong aura.

Riley's Alpha b***d was not from her wolf. It was from this creature, that was mostly extinct.

She bumped into my leg again, as if she wanted more attention. I ran my finger through her silky black fur.

I had been wondering how what I felt for Riley could just be, only be love, but it wasn't just that. It was everything.

The pull was stronger than before. It had always been there, though, from the very first night.

"Our kids are going to be little hybrids with beautiful gree eyes and red hair. With a Lycan, a wolf and a panther. How cool would that be?"

"You- you are- mine, too."

—

– Chapter 60

-Riley-

A panther. I could feel the animal's confused thoughts. It was like a flash of lightning inside my head. Pulsing. Skidding. She didn't know what was happening, and neither did I. How could I comfort her when I was feeling the same panic?

A freaking panther? How could that be even possible?

"Gem?" I needed someone familiar, and now that Rene had shifted, I only had one person to turn to. "You okay? Do you understand anything that is happening here?"

Gem blinked. At least she was still there and hadn't disappeared like she did when I became a f.ucking Hulk and almost smashed Hiran's skull in.

"I understand that you have a werepanther. I also understand that it is impossible."

I sighed as I looked at Roman through Rene's eyes. Roman was looking down at her with adoration in his eyes. He wasn't scared of her.

And then he whispered, "Mate," at the same time I heard Rene's thought in my head. It was the first clear thought I had heard from her.

"He is mate," she said with wide eyes. "Riley."

She was talking to me, like Gem and I used to talk with each other. The foggy thoughts were slowly becoming clearer.

"Wait, back up. What did the b*tch just say?" Gem asked with a nervous giggle. My eyes widened. I was too lost in all of this I almost missed Rene's nervous voice saying MATE.

She was looking into the honey brown eyes I so loved.

She called Roman mate. My Roman. Oh! It felt like the whole world was finally starting to make sense again.

My heart hitched and right now I wanted nothing but to shift back and run into Roman's arms, and let him hug me, take me.

My mate. I loved him even without the bond. Even when he wasn't my fated mate, he was mine. But this only made it all the better.

Roman ran his fingers through Rene's silky black fur and we trembled together at that touch. Tingles shot from the tip of his fingers to my body. It felt perfect. The remaining puzzle piece finally clicked.

I felt like I was home. He was home. Both him and Adrian.

"He is kind," Rene said again, her voice hesitant. She looked nervous. The anger was now long gone, and now she looked like a little lamb who didn't know where she was or what she was doing.

I felt sorry for her. Why could I not remember her fully?

In my dreams, though, the little girl –me — said that she had Rene. That meant I had shifted when I was only seven? Six? I felt like I would faint. So many information, so many new... new tidbits I didn't even know about myself. It was too hard to process. My brain felt like it would short circuit.

"He is, and you will be alright, okay. You have Roman and Adrian and -"

"Why did you- why did you not want me, Riley?" Her voice was not hesitant anymore. It was accusatory.

I flinched. I didn't know how to answer her.

“Oh mama,” Gem whispered.

“I didn’t know what happened. I don’t remember, but I promise, I wouldn’t have chosen this, even if this was the only option. Dad- dad did this.”

“Why? Why didn’t dad like me? He must have wanted a wolf like him.”

“You remember dad?”

“Once I shifted, I remembered most of it. Can’t you feel it from my memories?”

“I don’t know. But I am still not ready to take it all in. Give it to me in small doses, okay? I am sorry but...”

“Understand.”

I didn’t have answers to her question though. Why did dad kept Rene dormant?

“Or...” Gem said with a sigh. “He was worried that you might put Riley in danger.”

“But why?”

Two voices? Having one was already too much. I blinked and tried to not go crazy from all of this.

“I don’t know. We have to find this father I don’t know about and ask him,” Gem said.

“I remember father. He was funny and kind. Mother was...”

“A b***h,” Gem said without blinking.

Rene blinked. I was once again reminded of how new this was all so new to Rene. She was like a freshly hatched chick.

“Hey Rene, I think we should shift back. Do you think you can do that?” I asked with a sigh. I wanted to touch Roman, to make sure that this wasn’t a dream, that this was real.

“It is real,” Gem said with a shake of her head.

“You jealous that you have to share him with Rene?”

“I have Adrian,” Gem huffed.

“I will try to shift,” Rene said.

I saw her looking at Roman with her heart blinking in her eyes, and he looked at her with a smile that made my heart twitch and tilt. It was the kindest, most beautiful smile in the whole world.

"You will be alright, Rene. Shift. I am right here." His hand on her head softly ruffled her fur, and it calmed her down. She whimpered softly as he caressed her body. "It is okay. It will get better. It will get easier. The pain will go away."

She nodded and then growled out in pain. I felt the pain, deep in my stomach. If I was standing, I would have collapsed.

I hissed out and cursed, but this time, the pain wasn't as intense or long as it was the first time.

Soon I was standing in front of Roman, naked. He gave me a smile that was like a punch to my heart. I had never felt so happy in my life as I was at this moment.

They were mine. Both of them. I didn't have to worry about the phantom woman who might come to claim Roman as hers. No. I was the one who got to claim him.

His eyes darkened as he traced my naked body. "Roman..." my voice came out desperate, and needy.

"My Kitten," he whispered as he pulled me against his body and crashed his lips against mine. "You are mine. ALL MINE. Tell me you are mine."

"I am yours. I have always been yours."

"And mine..." Adrian said as he turned me around and looked me in the eyes.

"And yours," I m****d out when his fingers softly caressed my throat.

"You alright, Riley? That Panther was...um... a bit wild," Adrian said with a smile.

"She was scared. It is alright. She is calm now."

"She almost bit my head off. We were scared," Adrian said as he pulled me closer and hugged me.

Roman bit the back of my neck and then blew hot air against my neck. I trembled in their arms, as Roman's hand slowly moved lower until he was rubbing his finger against my cl.it.

"OH."

Adrian sucked my lower l*p between his teeth and tugged.

“Red... you are magnificent.”

“I know right,” I said with a soft laugh and they both chuckled. Their laughter vibrated along my skin. I felt liberated. Like somehow, everything was finally, finally alright.

Someone banged against the door.

“Oh, s**t,” Roman said before he whirled around and walked towards the door. “Finn?”

“Yeah. The doctor had tested the drugs, and he wants to give it to one of the creatures first.”

“We will be there in a few minutes.” I could hear Finn’s footsteps walking away. I looked at the guys and pointed to myself.

“I need something to wear.”

Roman looked at Adrian. “You might have something.”

I growled at Adrian and he gave me a mischievous smile before he walked out and soon came back with a dress. I narrowed my eyes and he shifted from one leg to another, looking edgy.

“It is, it is all in the past,” Adrian said finally and Roman laughed, looking very amused. I pulled the dress down and frowned at him.

“What are you laughing about? You aren’t any better. Come on, let’s go,” I said as I walked out.

Finn gave me a weird look. I was sure he had noticed I wasn’t wearing this dress when I left the lab. He didn’t say anything, though. He just gave me a smile.

“Okay, I am going to fill these tranquilizer dart with one vial and shoot it at him,” Doctor Tim said as he pulled the trigger. The creature growled and roared.

“Nothing is happening.”

“It has only been a second,” Doctor Tim said.

The creature was still howling and roaring.

And then I saw it. It was like a miracle. The red in his pupils slowly started to blur to show blue.

His skin, still ugly, though was not as pale, or patchy.

“Hey? You remember your name? Anything? What happened to you?”

He howled and snarled and banged against the iron rods.

He shook his head and then he looked at me and whispered, “Mirabel.”

-Nadia-

I was talking with Doctor Kaspar when I felt it. I hadn't felt it in years. The last time was when Rene was just seven. My little pantera. How I had missed her.

My eyes flashed, as I looked at the doctor with a smile.

He looked confused for a second. “You are right. She is here, and I can- I can feel her. Rene.”

“Do you mean she shifted finally? Into her panther?”

My eyes gleamed with happiness and pride. Yes. Somehow, she found a way to come out of the prison Marcus had locked her in. I knew he did that to keep her away from me, but not anymore. After years, I finally found my daughter and I would be bringing her home. Soon. I couldn't wait.

“Yes. I knew why Marcus did what he did, but Rene is back, and I know she will come looking for us,” I said with an excited grin. I couldn't wait to see Rene.

“If she didn't come?” the doctor said with a curious look. I ran my fingers through my red hair, and smirked.

I had been waiting all these years for this one moment. To feel the connection, and nothing was going to stop me.

“If she didn't come on her own, I would make her come. She belongs with me. She is mine. My daughter.” I had always loved Rene, more than I loved my daughter.

Rene was everything. Rene was the one who was a part of me, a powerful part. My little Alpha queen.

Usually, panthers could only shift after they reached fourteen to sixteen, same as any other species, but my perfect daughter had always been special. She shifted when she was just 5. No one had ever seen anything like that. She was so small, but still so big...

I still remembered the look in her yellow eyes when she first shifted. Pride. Strength. Her aura was strong even back then, as it should be. Her dad was only a werewolf. But she was a royal Pantera, with Alpha b***d.

When Marcus took her and left, I wasn't worried at first, because I knew the bond would always keep us connected, and I could find her. But then... I felt the bond break and the pain was impossible to bear. It was too much that I had to leave my precious project for a while. For a long while.

But she was back, and so was I.

I looked at the man lying on bed. He looked delirious, feverish. He was slurring and b***d dotted his forehead and his tanned skin.

"He doesn't look too good, doctor," I said as I poked him. "Dean, right? He was doing so good just a day ago. What the hell changed?"

The doctor's face twisted as he studied the comatose man who was mumbling something under his breath.

"I need more time, to adjust the dose, prepare his b***d, but he will get better. I know it. And then we will be extracting his b***d and pumping into the humans. And our second phase would begin then."

"If you say so," I said as I looked at Dean again. He didn't look like he would get better soon, but Doctor Kaspar was one of the best I knew, and I had always trusted him.

For now, I only wanted one thing. To find Rene and bring her back home. She belonged right next to me.

Panthers were mostly extinct. I only had Rene, and my brother. And when I lost Rene, it was like a hit in my chest, but I would be getting her back soon. Marcus would lose this game.

I had always loved winning, and this time, I wouldn't let him win.

"Get her room ready for her, Doctor Kaspar. I will find her and bring her home."

"The same room?" the Doctor asked as he started at the glass room.

I looked at the empty room. It was so lonely without her. The glass walls had pictures drawn by a child. The child was a stick figure, and in her legs were massive chains.

But sometimes chains were there to protect you and keep you safe. Poor baby never understood that.

“Yes. It always belonged to her. Only her.”

!!!