

The Ivory Queen Chapter 106

Valentina's POV

I lazily open my eyes only to force them closed again as bright light burns into my irises. Taking deep breaths, I try to remember what happened to me.

...Karina... I was stabbed by Karina...Does this mean I'm dead?

My body was no longer in pain and I feel warm sand surrounding me, cradling my body in comfort.

Sand? Where-where am I? I think to myself.

I muster up the courage to open up my eyes to confirm my looming fear and am stunned by what I see.

I'm at the beach, my body nestled on the shore, warm water trickling over my hair. The bright sun shines on me, kissing my tan skin and I bring a hand up to shade my eyes. I look around and see a familiar cave opening in the distance.

Oh goddess, I am dead.

A storm of emotions builds up in my stomach as I let this realization sink in.

I'm dead. I'm really dead.

I look around the empty beach, recognizing its familiar beauty. I was home. After 18 years, I was finally home again. Suddenly the reality of my situation didn't seem so scary. I had craved my return for so long, missing the bustling city and my people. My familia. I get up and dust myself off, walking towards the cave Emi, Teo and I used to explore as kids.

When I reach the entrance, I see a small figure with their back to me hunched over in the corner, seemingly interested with something in their hands. I stare at the person, their tan skin youthful and glowing. They were barefoot and wearing only a pair of red swim trunks.

"H-hello?" I call out to the figure but they don't respond.

Holding my breath, I walk into the cave, maneuvering over stones and barnacles with careful steps until I'm only a feet away from the small figure.

“You’re all grown up now, Valentina,” the figure speaks.

Their back is still to me, but I recognize their voice instantly. I feel my chest grow heavy, a sob caught in my throat.

“Emiliano?” I croak, tears welling up in my eyes. “What-“

“Te vez linda, hemanita {you look beautiful, little sister},” he says, finally turning to face me.

He appears to be in his twelve year old body, his signature innocent smile hanging on his lips.

“I-“

“I’ve missed you,” he says, cupping a small hermit crab in his hands.

“I’ve missed you too,” I sob.

He rushes towards me, pulling me into his arms. My entire body trembles as tears pour out of me and I grip his arms to keep from collapsing.

“I thought I’d never see you again,” I cry into his bare chest. “I thought I was alone.”

“You’ve never been alone, Vale. I’ve always been with you. Always,” he coos, stroking my hair with such tenderness.

I hold onto him, afraid to let him slip through my fingers and we hug for what seems like hours before he finally pulls back. He wipes my tears with his thumbs and kisses my forehead.

“Am I dead?” I ask, looking around the cave. “Am I finally home? Where are Mom and Dad? Where’s Teo?”

He gives me a sad smile and shakes his head. “No, not quite anyways,” he sighs. “You’re in limbo.”

“Limbo?”

He smiles sheepishly, crouching down to place the hermit crab in a small pool of water.

“Not quite dead, not quite alive,” he shrugs as he stands back up. “You’re somewhere in between.”

“For how long?” I ask.

“As long as it takes for you to figure out if you want to stay or leave,” he smiles.

“Well in that case, I’m staying,” I reply and he frowns at me. “Don’t look at me like that, Emi.”

His frown deepens and he lowers his gaze down to the hermit crab crawling along the bottom of the pool.

“Well that’s disappointing,” he says, a hint of irritation in his voice. He turns his back to me. “I expected more from you.”

“I’m tired Emi,” I whine. “I’m tired of fighting. I just want to come home.”

He slowly turns back to me, tears filling in his eyes. “I want you to come home too.”

“Then why can’t I stay?”

He shakes his head, a single tear rolling down his cheek and he forces a smile.

“Because it’s not your time yet...” he says. “You still have a job to do...”

Suddenly, the cave disappears, morphing into a bedroom. Two beds occupy the room but only one of them is being used. I walk toward it, peeking down at the tiny inhabitants and smile. A five year old Chava lays in the middle, Aurora and Mia tucked safely under each of his arms.

“This is my favorite memory,” Emiliano calls out from behind me.

I’m shocked to see him as an adult now, a well groomed mustache living on his upper lip and brown curls hanging loosely on his forehead.

“Mia woke up crying and Aurora couldn’t soothe her. She didn’t understand why her sister was crying. But Chava...” he smiles proudly. “He knew. He came in here, scooped her up in his arms and carried her to Aurora’s bed. He held them both until they all fell asleep. I found them like this when I got up for

training,” his says, the smile on his face contorting into a frown. “I left them too soon. I could heal many things, but I could not heal the broken soul of my wife,” he murmurs, walking over to the bed and stroking his son’s hair. “I made a lot of mistakes in my life time and that is a burden I carry with me even in death.”

“Emiliano, I-“

“Chava was a beautiful boy and she corrupted him. She darkened his heart,” he lifts his eyes up at me, a mix of anger and anguish in them. “Karina was my mistake... I’m not asking you to fix it. I’m simply asking that you not make the same one as me.”

The room morphs into the River moon forest, Celina and Mia fighting off a group of rogues. I feel my chest clenching as Celina tears into a rogue’s throat, ending his life in seconds. Her eyes are full of desperation as she fights and I know she’s looking for me.

Across the forest, Danny defends Diego’s unconscious body from a pair of rogues.

“Your family still needs you, Vale,” Emiliano says, gripping my hand. “It’s not your time, yet.”

My heart is torn. I love my family but I had been fighting this war for years and I was exhausted. I wasn’t sure I had any fight left in me.

“I don’t want to be alone anymore,” I whimper, fresh tears spilling on my cheeks.

“You’re not alone, Vale. You never have been.”

I lean into him, resting my head on his shoulder.

“I know you’re tired, manita {slang for sister},” he sighs, pulling me into his chest and stroking my hair. “I know you want to come home... So if you want to stay, I won’t blame you. I won’t be upset. I’ll bring you home myself and we’ll welcome you with open arms.”

I sob into his chest. I wanted to come home.

“But if you choose to live, you’ll return here one day knowing you left your family prepared to live with out you. You won’t have remorse... you’ll be at peace.”

“Emi don’t do this,” I snap. “Why do you always have to make everything so hard?!”

He chuckles softly into my hair. “The most important decisions are often the hardest ones to make.”

I think long and hard.

Celina. My Celina. She’s was so fragile. I had seen what grief could do to people and I feared my death would turn her bitter as it did Chava and Karina.

And my Dieguito. He had just found love. After years of being bullied by his fellows wolves for loving who he did, he finally found a man to love him back. Goddess, he was so afraid when he came out to Danny and I all those years ago, he was shaking. Celina held his hand the entire time. But little did he know we knew all along and that we loved him. It didn’t matter to us. He was still our beautiful little boy.

And Daniel. My handsome soldier. He was Emiliano’s best friend in the Royal Army. He had seen things I could never understand but he never let it darken his love for life. He always made me laugh when I felt the world was coming apart. His smile was best, a smile that could make you burst with a joy. Would he still smile if I was gone?

I pull away from Emi’s arms and look at my family battling for their lives.

Would the battle ever end? If we won, more creatures would soon try their hand at tearing us apart. And if we lost, we would be torn apart. What was the point in living if I would constantly fear for my family’s well being? What was the point of carrying on when it could all come crashing down at any moment? I had lost so many people in my life, was I prepared to lose more?

I turn to Emiliano, my decision made. My brother smiles at me, the sparkle in his chocolate eyes warming my heart. I had missed those eyes.

“You’ve made you’re decision?” He asks, though it’s more of an statement.

I give him a slight nod and he kisses my forehead.

"I'll be right here waiting for your return. I promise," he smiles, pulling me once more into a hug.

"How did you- "

He laughs, his shoulders shaking with every chuckle. "I know you...I knew you would make the right decision."

I give him one last squeeze before pulling away from him and squaring my shoulders. "So... what now?" I ask, wiping my last few tears and smiling at him. "How do I-"

He lifts his index finger, the tip glowing turquoise. "I send you back."

I nod and he slowly approaches me, reaching his hand out towards me. As he gets closer, I feel panic kick in and I grab his wrist before he can send me back.

"Wait! Will I- Will I remember this?"

He shakes his head.

"Okay... then... then I love you, Emiliano."

"I love you too, manita. Please make sure they're alright."

I nod my head as his fingertip touches my heart, turquoise light blinding me.

My lungs burn as I suck in air, my body screaming with pain. I feel someone smearing something on my wounds and it burns. I open my eyes, straining to see the silhouette of a figure scrambling to cover my wounds with some sticky substance.

"That's right, wolf. Stay with me," a voice says. "Don't die on me, damn it!"

I wheeze, struggling to get air into my lungs as the voice chants some strange words at me. A few moments pass and the burning slowly starts to subside.

"Atta girl," the voice soothes. "That's it."

I narrow my eyes to slits to see who my savior is and growl when I realize it's the witch Aurora befriended. She's covered in blood, a nasty gash slicing

across her forehead and her dress tattered and torn, revealing bleeding wounds.

“Hey, I just saved your life!” she snarls back. “Don’t be an arse!”

She’s right...

Ashamed, I lick her hand and she strokes my fur. “It’s okay,” she murmurs. “I know you’re scared.”

I take in my surroundings and realize this tiny witch somehow dragged my body away from the clearing where Karina and I fought and hid us in a secluded area with thick brush to cover us. Large leaves with sticky black gunk are placed across my wounds. I try to get up but the pain makes me realize my mistake and I whine.

“Shhh!” she hisses. “Those wolves might hear you!”

We hear rustling in the distance, and she curses under her breath, her eyes darting around in search of the source. Suddenly a silver wolf with golden eyes pops its head through the brush and howls. We hear several more wolves come running and a white wolf pushes past the silver wolf.

“Mami!” Celina cries. “Oh goddess, you’re alive!”

I whine as she comes over to my side, leaning her head against mine and licking my face.

“I’m here Mami,” she whimpers.

She places a paw on my shoulder and I feel a tingle electrify my body. I sigh in relief as the wound in my chest closes.

“Where is your brother?” I ask, getting up and shaking my fur.

As if on cue, my son and husband emerge through the bushes, Eric close behind them.

I sigh in relief, happy everyone is okay. From the corner of my eye, I watch the witch pick herself up, wincing as she dusts herself off. She was in pretty bad shape, the gash on her forehead bleeding heavily.

Without thinking, I push past my family towards the witch and bow my head to her, hoping she understands.

“You’re welcome,” she smiles.

I sit on my hind legs and lift a paw up towards her. She laughs before choking on some blood and spitting it out. She wipes her blood with the back of her hand and smiles sheepishly.

I place my paw on her shoulder and she gasps when we both feel a jolt of electricity run between us. Her wounds stop bleeding and slowly, her skin begins to stitch itself back together. She sighs contently when the last wound closes and I stare in amazement at her.

Did I just...?

I turn to see many other stunned faces looking back at me.

But Emiliano was the healer... not me...

I don’t get much time to question my new found gift when Eric’s panicking voice interrupts my train of thought

“Where is Rosalie?” He asks, shifting into his human form. “She- she Where is she?”

Oh no....

“What does he mean?” Celina asks. “She’s not in the safe house?”

I feel tears in my eyes.

“Karina took her.”

The Ivory Queen Chapter 107

Aurora’s POV

“Michael!” I scream with joy, eager to take him in my arms but his menacing growl stops me in my tracks.

Michael's ears are fully erect, the fur on his body stiff and bristled. His lips are curled back, the large canines in his mouth on full display as he growls at me. He's crouched on his hind legs, ready to pounce on me at any moment. But worst of all, his once mesmerizing silver eyes were now blood red, clouded in pure anger.

"Michael?" I call out again, my voice just above a whisper.

I crave his touch but his growling warns me not to get any closer.

"Michael, it's me," I whisper as he inches closer, his snarling never ceasing. "What's wrong with you? Why are you doing this?"

He doesn't listen, coming closer and closer until he's only a few feet away from me.

"Aurora, get away from him," Evan pleads. "Something's not right. That's not Oliver."

My mind is screaming at me to get out of the way, begging my legs to move, but my heart refuses to let me go. I'm frozen in place, every fiber in my body aching for his touch, for his kisses, for him. Somewhere inside this angry wolf was my mate. All I had to do was figure out how to reach him, to pull him out of his fury and free him.

I take a tentative step forward only to take a step back when Michael's jaw tries to clamp down on my outstretched arm.

"Michael... please look at me. I'm right here! Look at me. Fight it!" I whimper, on the verge of tears.

Nikolai roars in laughter. "He's not your mate anymore, Aurora. He's a rogue now. You're just a piece of meat to him!"

He cries out in pain as Evan sinks his teeth in his arms, blood spilling onto the vines currently holding him in place.

"Michael, I know you're still in there... I'm begging you, please come back to me!" I cry, using all my will power not to give into my despair and collapse on my knees.

A few tears spill onto my cheeks as he once again growls at me.

“Olivier please!”

His ears twitch slightly when I call his name and my heart flutters with excitement.

He heard me! He’s still there!

“Olivier?” I call out again, taking a step once more towards him.

His body goes stiff, his eyes still swirling with anger, but he doesn’t growl. As I take another step toward him, he takes two back, almost as if he were afraid of me.

“It’s okay, Olivier. Just come back to me. Please come back.”

He lowers his head to the side, clenching and unclenching his jaw as an internal war wages in his mind.

“That’s it, Oliver, you can do this... Come back to me.”

His ears perk up again and when he looks up at me, the world stops. A pair of deep sapphire blue eyes look back at me and I feel a sob caught in my throat. I reach out a hand to touch his snout, happy tears streaming down my face.

“I love you Olivier,” I whisper. “I’m right here.. I’m right here...”

“Aurora look out!” Evan cries just as Oliver’s eyes shift back to blood red and he leans back on his hind legs before pouncing.

I can’t move, however, bracing myself for impact when a silver blur rushes in front of me just in time to take the blow.

Before my eyes, Michael and Chava battle for control, clawing and scratching at each other viciously. For a second, it seems Chava might win when suddenly, Oliver gets a clean bite on his paw, nearly tearing it off. Chava’s body stiffens and a loud whine can be heard across the battle field. Michael then pins Chava down, clamping his jaw onto his throat.

“Chava!” I scream as Michael slices his throat open, a river of blood staining Salvador’s beautiful silver fur.

Michael looks up at me with those deadly red eyes before a black owl flies over head, it’s own crimson eyes sparkling with joy at my misery.

I aim a fire ball at it but the owl maneuvers out of the way and starts flying toward the woods, Michael in tow. Roots sprout from the ground and rush toward his wolf in an attempt to detain him. The owl flies lower, its wing slicing through the air, opening a portal to a place I don't recognize.

Just as Oliver is about to jump through it, one of my roots wrap around his hind leg and pull him back. The owl, however, flaps its wings, sharp feather like shards flinging through the air and cutting off the root. Freed once more, Oliver and the owl bolt through the portal and vanish into thin air.

With no time to waste, I rush to Chava's wolf, placing two trembling hands on his throat to stop the bleeding.

"You're going to be okay," I whimper, "It's going to be okay."

Chava wheezes, his labored breaths coming in short and haggard. His eyes flutter open and look at me, his muddled thoughts entering my head.

I'm sorry I wasn't there for you...

"It's okay," I cry. "I- I-"

Tell Mia I love her...

"Shh, stop it. You're going to be just fine," I coo, focusing my energy on his body.

He's too far gone... Reyna says. I don't think he's going to make it...

Shut up, you stupid wolf! Shut up! I snap at her and she falls silent.

A jolt of energy leaves my finger tips and enters his body, Chava stiffening with the feeling. I pour every ounce of strength I have left but his heart beat only grows weaker and weaker, until it's only a murmur.

Come on, come on, come on. Please work....

The energy keeps pumping through his body, healing his wounds but his heart refuses to react. Seconds seem like hours as I work tirelessly to fix him when suddenly, Santos appears out of thin air. beside me. The little hummingbird perches on my shoulder, giving me one last peck on the cheek before it vanishes once more.

You'll always be my sister...Aurora

And then his heart stops.

"Chava?" I cry, shaking his body as it goes limp, the life draining from his eyes. "Chava!"

He's gone. Reyna whimpers.

No... I shake my head in disbelief. No, he can't be...

"No! No! Chava wake up! Wake up!" I wail, pulling his head onto my lap and stroking his fur. "Chava please," I cry, burying my face in his fur. "Don't leave me alone again."

Reyna tries to calm me down but to no avail.

This couldn't be the end. Not when we were so close to being a family again. Not when I wanted to give him a chance.

"Aurora-" Evan screams, but it's too late.

I feel the bite on my shoulder before he even finishes his sentence, the rogue's teeth burrowing into my flesh. I let out a scream, clawing at the massive wolf's head in a desperate attempt to free myself. My will to fight drains with the blood pumping out of my body as the rogue bites down harder.

Don't give up! Reyna snaps. Fight back! Fight for Chava! Fight for Oliver.

But I was so tired. I was so so tired of losing everyone I cared about.

Fight! Reyna snaps. You haven't lost everyone. Your pack still needs you!

It's as if the world is moving in slow motion. Despair screams in Evans eyes as he races towards me, leaving Nikolai tied up in my vines on stage. All around me, wolves were fighting on my behalf, laying their lives down if need be. Did I have a right to just give up after all my pack and allies had done for me?

No... You don't. Reyna snaps. So get up and fight!

Forcing myself to react, I grab the rogue's head between my hands, my palms creating a current of lightning that flows into the wolf, electrocuting them. I feel

their body vibrate against me, going numb from the 140 Volts I was delivering. When I feel their jaws relax, I let go of their head and reach for my wound. Before I can finish them off, Evan pounces on the wolf, tearing out its throat so that it lays lifeless on the ground.

I crawl to Chava's side, the attack sparking an idea in me. I could still save him.

"I will not lose you," I whisper to myself, fighting the urge to give into the darkness tempting me to sleep. "Wake up!" I snarl, placing my hands on his chest. "I said 'Wake up', damn it!"

Lightening ripples from my arms to my fingertips, jolting his body.

Nothing happens.

Aurora, stop. Reyna sighs. It won't work.

I ignore her, charging up my hands again and delivering another shock.

Suddenly, he sucks in breath and his eyes burst open.

"Chava?" I call out, afraid I might be hallucinating.

He coughs, his eyes darting around and blinking hard as he takes another breath.

"Chava!" I sob into his blood stained fur. "Oh goddess! I thought I lost you again..." I whimper, pulling his head to my chest. "I thought you left me."

His wolf whines, licking my arms and nuzzling me. I smooth his fur down and pull him to my chest, kissing his forehead. He licks me once more before pushing himself back on his paws, shaking his fur.

He nudges me with his snout, prompting me to get up. I look around at the fight still in full force, Lluvia Blanca's land bleeding with the war Nikolai had started.

Nikolai. The man who had helped cause me so much pain. It was time for him to pay.

On the stage, the vines were still holding him down. Our eyes meet and for a split second, fear flickers in his eyes. I stumble towards him, pushing through

the pain in my shoulder and Reyna itching to be let out. I tighten the vines gripping his limbs and he shakes against them violently.

“Let me go, you b***h,” he growls.

I climb the steps slowly, never once breaking my gaze on Nikolai.

“You think I’m afraid of you?” he asks, desperately trying to free himself from my vines. “This is only the beginning of the end for you!”

He’s mine, Reyna declares. Let me do it!

I crouch down on all fours, my dress tearing to shreds as my bones crack and rearrange into my wolf. Nikolai’s face pales as Reyna bares her teeth at him, leaning on her hind legs ready to pounce.

“What are you-“

He cries out in pain as Reyna tears into his body, ripping out chunks of his flesh, staining her pure white fur in his essence. She clamps her jaws on his arm and it comes flying off in a clean strike. He howls as more of his blood spills onto the stage. Her claws dig into his throat, slashing it open until the life leaves his eyes and his cries end abruptly.

But Reyna wasn’t finished. No, not even close. All she saw was red... the red eyes of that wicked owl... the red eyes of rage that clouded Michael and Oliver’s mind...the red blood that once poured from Emiliano’s wounds all those years ago... the red blood almost draining from Salvador only moments before... Red... all she saw was red...

She was ready to pay back every single moment of pain I lived because of him. She continues to claw at his limp body, ripping him to ribbons so that all that remains are bits of skin and bones.

She only pulls back when Evan’s voice coaxes us out of our rage.

“He’s dead, Aurora. You can stop now,” he says timidly, his gaze set on his paws. “Its okay, we won.”

I look up from the c*****e and notice the fighting has stopped, all the rogues sprinting back into the woods while the Lluvia Blanca and Cerulean Sea wolves gawk at me. The Amethyst Lake warriors are frozen in their places,

anger and anguish lingering in their eyes. I had killed their Alpha and as tradition follows, I was now their new leader.

I step away from Nikolai's mauled body, completely devoid of any emotion. I feel so empty inside as I stare across the field. Chava climbs up the steps as I shift back into my human form, barely managing to stay up on my own.

Take this, He thinks, projecting a cloak in my hands and turning away as I wrap it around myself.

My vision is getting blurry and I find it hard to stay up my own two feet, the adrenaline finally starting to wear off. My shoulder burns, every movement enraging the nerves torn to shreds. I look down at the wound, shocked to see blood still seeping profusely from each tooth mark.

Lean on me, Chava says, stepping in front of me when I my knees buckle and I nearly crash onto the floor.

"Luna!" Evan cries as he rushes up to the stage. "Come on kid. Get on my back. I'll take you-"

His words drown out as I take another step and fall into oblivion.

The Ivory Queen Chapter 108

Oliver's POV

I wake up in a pool of my sweat on a cot chained to the wall with Michael dormant once more.

While I could not remember what I had done, I knew under Tais and Ira's spell, Michael had done terrible things. In my slumber, I had dreamt of Aurora, her sweet voice coaxing me to her. I had seen her. I knew I had. She had been crying and I ached to wipe away her tears, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not reach reach her. Just as the dream had started, it had vanished and I slipped back into the dark abyss.

Oddly enough, the room seems familiar. I was no longer in the musty room Tais and Ira had originally locked me in. Instead, I found myself in a room resembling a jail cell with silver bars and thick red brick walls. There were no windows and the only way out seemed to be through the silver barred door. To my left, there was a wash basin and a metal toilet.

Jail... jail. This is a jail... why is that significant?

The answer comes rushing at me in an instant. I knew exactly where I was, recognizing the old prison system of the Opal Moon pack, the original pack that once reigned over the land before River Moon was established. The River Moon pack hospital had been built over it when my great grandfather overtook Opal Moon over 60 years ago.

As a boy, my father brought me down here, wanting me to understand the history of our pack. The prison wasn't listed on any of the plans of the territory as it was an Alpha secret handed down from alpha to alpha. In fact, the only known entrance to the prison was through the woods outside of River Moon's territory in the northern woods.

My father must have told the witches of this place but why had I been moved from my old cell?

A groan draws my attention and I search the perimeter of my cell only to be horrified by what I see. In the jail cell directly across from mine, I see none other than Rosalie laying asleep in the corner, silver shackles chaining her to the wall. I'm relieved to see she isn't hurt but my fear does not leave my heart. Why was Ro here? What could the witches possibly want with her?

I crawl towards the end of my cell as far as my chains allow me and call out to her.

"Ro! Rosalie!" I call out.

She groans again, putting a hand to her temple and squeezing her eyes shut.

"Rosalie! Wake up!" I call again, shaking my shackles in hopes the noise might wake her up.

Her eyes slowly blink open, darting back and forth in confusion.

"Rosalie! It's me! Wake up! What are you doing here?" I hiss.

She squints her eyes at me before they widen in fear and she backs up in her cell.

"Get away from me!" She cries. "You're not Oliver!"

What? Of course I am!

“Rosalie calm down!” I reassure her, putting my hands up in surrender. “It’s me! I promise!”

She stares at me suspiciously, refusing to get any closer. Her hands fly to her swollen belly and tears spill onto her cheeks.

“You almost killed Diego,” she croaks. “You-you-“

What?

“No, I-I didn’t. I-I would never. I-“

The more I stumble over my words, the less convinced she seems. I try getting closer but she only inches further into her cell, clutching her belly protectively.

“Ro, look at me. It’s me, Oliver! I swear I would never hurt you,” I plead, hating the way she looks at me. I rack my brain trying to come up with a way for her to realize it really was me when it hits me.

“Luci... “ I call out, hoping she remembers the nickname Carter once gave her as a kid.

It was short for Lucifer. Rosalie was quite the demon growing up but she was especially vicious to Carter, pulling his hair and pinching him whenever she had the opportunity. We knew she had a crush on him but she, of course, would never admit that at the time. The more we teased her about it, the meaner she got and so, Carter began to refer to her as Lucifer. I knew then he loved her and it made me happy to know my sister would always be cared for.

Rosalie’s face softens when I call her that and she wipes at her tears.

“Oli? I-is it really you?” She whimpers, tentatively crawling towards me.

“Yes! Yes! Yes it’s me!”

She crawls as far as she can, wincing when the silver chains burn into her skin.

“Oliver!” She cries. “Oli I’m scared! I want to go home!”

“How did you get here? What are you doing here?”

“I don’t know!” She says, dropping her head into her hands. “Karina brought-“

We hear a scraping sound coming from the corridors leading towards us, followed by footsteps and some whistling. We turn to see Karina walking towards us, dragging a black sword across the stone floor.

“Look who’s finally awake,” she chirps, banging the sword against my cell. “You did some great work last night. Quite the little soldier we got here.”

I snarl at her but she just chuckles in amusement. We hear more footsteps before the witches and Adeline emerge from the darkness of the prison.

Tais wears a wicked smile while Ira’s eyes seem transfixed on Rosalie’s belly. I growl in warning and Ira rolls her eyes at me.

“You have to be real idiots to keep us on River Moon territory!” I snarl at the witches.

“Well we would have kept you at the Amethyst lake hideout but it seems your mate was able to overthrow the alpha,” Tais shrugs. She picks at her finger nails disinterestedly. “But no worries. Your father provided an excellent substitute. No one will ever find you here. I’ve made sure of that. Besides what better way to taunt her than to keep you right under her nose?”

I hate that she’s right. No one on River Moon, save for my father, even knew this place existed.

“What is Rosalie doing here?” I demand, and Ira’s answer chills me to the bone.

“Forged by blood and Fed by souls,

the Moon and Sun awake it’s thirst.

First innocence must bleed.

With the Ivory it controls

All of the beings on this Earth.”

First innocence must bleed...?

My eyes widen in shock. First innocence, Rosalie's first born, a child without sin. An innocent.

Rosalie cries, clutching her stomach.

"No, not my baby!" she wails.

"Shh," Ira's coos at her, a sickly grin hanging on her lips.

"You touch her and I'll kill you!" I scream, tugging at my chains.

"You're so dramatic, Alpha," Tais chuckles, turning on her heels.

Just then, David storms in, glaring at the witches.

"Daddy?" Rosalie calls out, stopping her sobs to stare accusingly at the man we called father.

He ignores her, staring directly at the witches.

"My daughter was not part of the agreement."

"You're absolutely right," Ira smiles. "So don't worry, she'll live."

"Then why is she here?" David snarls, his nostrils flaring.

"You never said anything about the child," Tais shrugs, pushing past him.

He grabs her by the elbow but yelps in pain when she turns to look at him.

"Do that again," Tais hisses, looking up at his towering figure. "And I'll rip her tongue out," she whispers.

She turns to leave, but as she does, David lunges at her. Before he even lands a blow, however, Karina digs the sword into his side and he crashes to the ground, blood immediately pooling around him.

It wasn't a fatal wound, but it was enough to keep him immobile. Tais nods at Adeline, rolling her eyes in disgust.

"Clean that up!" She orders and Adeline rushes to David's side, tearing off his shirt to examine the wound. "Oh and Adeline?" She smiles wickedly. "Be very careful with your mission. One screw up and your done. Toodles."

The witches and Karina exit, leaving Adeline to clean up David's mess. Her hands tremble as she works, David groaning and wheezing in pain. Rosalie stares blankly at him, cradling her belly and rocking back and forth.

"I'm sorry," David whimpers to no one in particular, sitting up with Adeline's help.

"You're sorry?" I scoff, furious with his cowardice. "If you're so sorry, let us go. Help us get out of here!"

David seems to contemplate the suggestion but Adeline shakes her head furiously. "David, Don't," she warns. "You know you can't."

"Why am I not surprised you would be against this?" I snarl at her. "Always claiming Rosalie was going to be your little sister and now look at you. Helping her lose the most precious thing she-"

Adeline is at my cell in a second, her anger evident at the accusation. "Do not think for a second I enjoy this. I want you, yes, but I never wished to bring her baby's death! It was not part of the deal!"

"And what exactly was the deal?" I retort.

"I cannot speak for David but mine was quite simple. I was promised my mate."

I snarl at that. I had one mate and her name was Aurora Salome.

"You are not my mate!"

Adeline chuckles, walking back to David and helping him to his feet.

"A mate is a soul mate," she mutters. "And these witches... they're witches of the spirit. Of the soul. They can create a mate bond between two unmated wolves."

No... that's impossible... only Moon Goddess had the power to create mate bonds. Gamma bonds were the only bond a wolf could create by choice.

"They can't-"

“Yes they can...” Adeline reassures. A mist forming near her eyes. “I’ve seen it. And I would give anything to have you look at me the way you look at Aurora .”

“Shut up! You keep her name out of your mouth!” I snap, reaching for the bars of my cell but failing.

“I swear to you, Oliver. I did not wish any harm on Rosalie,” she whispers, ignoring my curses at her. “But I cannot stop it either. They would kill you all and I cannot put your life at risk. And David knows he can’t either.”

“Your mission is what exactly?” I demand.

She gives me a blank look. “Causing trouble,” she says.

And with that she slings David’s arm over her shoulder and they both disappear into the dark hallways of the prison.

I scream for them to return but to no avail and slump back in my cell. Across from me, Rosalie has fallen silent. I call out to her but she’s lost in her own world, clutching onto the growing life in her womb, tears streaming down her face.

The Ivory Queen Chapter 109

*** Aurora’s POV***

My eyes open slowly, adjusting to the bright light coming into the room from a nearby window. I blink a few times to fade away my sleepy haze and wipe at my tired eyes, stretching and yawning lazily. I feel a warmth beside me and look down to Rio sleeping blissfully beside me, Santos laying on his head. I reach out to stroke his yellow head and I swear the bird smiles.

That’s when a few memories come trickling back in fragments, making my temples erupt into pulsating waves of pain as I strain to get more details.

The last thing I remember was being at Lluvia Blanca, Reyna shredding Nikolai to pieces. But what happened before that? I rack my brain to remember anything but it only makes my head hurt worse. After several minutes of hard thinking, I come up empty.

A light snoring at the foot of my bed startles me and I look down to see Chava sitting in a chair, slumped over on my bed with his head resting near my feet.

There's a heart monitor beating rhythmically beside me and an IV attached to my arm. To my left, I see Evan sprawled out on my sofa, Mia laying on his chest with her head tucked neatly underneath his chin.

I was at the River Moon pack house but how did I get here? What had happened to the Amethyst Lake wolves? Where was Celina and her family? Where was Carter?

Carter!

Another memory comes back and I remember he had been hurt at the northern border. Was he okay? Did Rosalie know?

With so many questions swirling around in my head, I could lay in bed no longer and kick the covers off of me, the movement jerking Chava awake.

"Aurora-

He reaches for me as I pull at the machines attached to me. I swat his arms away, needing some space. Needing to get out of here. The heart monitor starts racing as more memories come rushing back, bombarding me with the horror of that night.

Oliver....He almost killed my brother. Nikolai is working with witches. Nikolai helped kill Emiliano. Nikolai is dead. Amethyst Lake has no Alpha. Am I their new alpha? Carter! Where is Carter?

I rest my head in my hands, hoping to alleviate the pain. Chava sits still, giving me a worried look.

"Do you want me to wake up your gamma?" he asks as silence settles between us.

I shake my head, still processing the events that occurred.

"W-what day is it?" I groan, rubbing my temples.

"It's Friday the 18th," he replies, keeping his voice smooth and calm. "You've been asleep for a little over a day."

“What?!” I nearly scream, panic settling into my chest as I once again try to scramble out of bed.

Chava gets up, blocking my way as I try to leave and I snarl at him, waking Evan and Mia up.

“Get out of my way!” I snap, trying to push past him but he doesn’t budge. “How could you guys let me sleep for so long? There are only 2 nights until the solstice! We don’t have time to waste! Where is Celina? Where is Carter? Oh goddess! The Allies! How are the AI-“

Chava grabs me by the shoulders, cutting me off mid sentence. “Calm down. We’ll explain everything but you need to calm down first!”

“Calm down?” I snap, brushing off his hands. “Calm down? You want me to calm down? I -“

Two arms wrap around my shoulders and pull me into their chest, their chin resting on my head. The scent of rain and oranges envelops me, allowing a sense of peace to wash over me.

“Kid, I need you to relax,” Evan soothes, hugging me tighter. “Just come back to bed. Please? Celina will be here soon. I promise.”

Annoyed, I begrudgingly climb into bed, settling into my covers .

“Where is Carter? Is he alright? Did Celina heal him? How are my wolves?”

I start firing questions at them when Celina and Valentina walk into the room, seemingly pleased that I’m awake.

“Good, you’re awake. One less wolf to worry about,” Celina says before turning to Mia. “How is he?”

Who’s he?

Mia stretches and wipes at her eyes. “Still dreaming, I suspect. I just came back half an hour ago.”

“Who is dreaming?” I ask, feeling left out of the loop.

Celina frowns before taking a seat on the edge of the bed. “I need you to promise you’re going to stay calm,” she warns, freaking me out.

“You’re scaring me.”

“Promise. I need you to promise.”

I stare at her, hoping to get a clue but Celina was just as good at hiding her feelings as I was. “I promise,” I sigh, sticking out my pinky. She laughs a little before locking our pinkies together.

Her face grows serious. “Tais and Ira have Rosalie.”

My heart skips a beat, bile rising up in my throat. “N-no,” I whimper. “No, not her! Oh goddess, Carter-“

“Carter is fine,” Celina soothes, pulling me into her arms. “Mia and I put him to sleep. He doesn’t know yet. He’s been asleep for as long as you have.”

“Oh goddess,” I cry, feeling like an utter failure for not protecting my Alpha and my beta female.

“Shh, it’s going to be okay. We’ll find her and Oliver.”

“Oliver... he’s....”

“Under some kind of spell,” Celina sighs, brushing a strand of hair away from her face. “Gwen said she could try to work on an antidote but she’s not certain it will work.”

“Where is she?”

“At the Blood Moon pack helping to take care of the wolves there.” Her eyes fill with sadness. “I’ve been at the pack hospital all day, healing those I could... but you lost a few soldiers.”

My heart shatters. Since becoming Luna, I have managed to lose so many of my wolves. I was a damn curse to this pack.

“We’ll hold a Moon Warrior ceremony to honor their sacrifice,” I announce and everyone seems to agree.

Celina explains everything that happened since the fight, every detail more shocking than the last. And with Nikolai out of the way, we now had to deal with the Amethyst lake wolves. All of the warriors were captured, Javier and Wesley conducting interrogations in hopes of discovering Tais and Ira’s

whereabouts. So far, they have very little information to go off of. It seems Nikolai kept his involvement with the witches a secret even from his own pack.

“I’d like it I speak to the Amethyst wolves myself.”

After a quick shower and some breakfast, Celina and I make our way to The Amethyst Lake pack house with an army of Wolves running along the car.

Valentina and Chava ride with us, Evan and Mia staying at the pack house to watch over Carter. Valentina has been relatively quiet since I woke up and I can tell she’s beating herself up for not saving Rosalie. As we drive, I reach out for her hand and squeeze it.

“So you’re a healer now?” I smile, hoping to take her mind off my missing friend. “How does it feel?”

She forces a smile but a few tears well up in her eyes as she holds back a sob. She points to her chest.

“It’s like I can feel him right here,” she whimpers through her smile, her bottom lip trembling. “I don’t know why I have this gift but I feel like he gave it to me...like I have a piece of his soul and I’m grateful for that. I don’t feel so alone anymore.”

I squeeze her hand tighter as I feel my own tears spill over. The car comes to a halt and I quickly try to compose myself before meeting the wolves of Amethyst Lake. I had decided not to wear my medallion for this occasion. If I wanted respect, I could no longer hide who I was. As I climb out of the car, I am greeted by Chris, Wesley’s beta, and William with a bow.

“They’re in the main dungeon awaiting your arrival, Luna,” Chris says as he takes the lead.

I examine the territory, it’s gothic style pack house alluding to the horrors that most likely took place there. Amethyst lake is a ghost town, with no women or children running around and it seems the pack is overrun with Lluvia Blanca, Cerulean Sea, and River Moon warriors.

“Where are the Amethyst Lake wolves?” I ask, puzzled by the absence of, well, the pack.

“Many of their warriors perished in the fight, several going down with their alpha so there aren’t that many left. Those that survived are currently in the dungeons for questioning... And the women and children...” Chris trails off, looking down at his feet. “They’re in the pack hospital for treatment. The children are mostly dehydrated and malnourished but the women,” he shakes his head in disbelief. “Alpha Nikolai was an animal.”

“Take me to them.”

William goes off to check on the progress of the interrogations while Chris takes us to the pack hospital. I’m disgusted by what I see. The infirmary is in poor conditions, with just under a hundred beds, fifty on opposite sides of the room with a small narrow space in between for walking. The smaller children share beds with one or two other pups whilst the women each get their own bed. The pups laying in their beds are on the verge of starvation, especially the females and the women show clear signs of abuse. I approach a young woman who appears to be in her mid twenties, her body curled up in a fetal position. Her gaze is cast down and she raises her hands over her head, whimpering for mercy.

My heart shatters. She reminds me of me before I met Oliver and it hurts to know someone else underwent the same torture I did or worse. It hurts to know I wasn’t the only one who suffered and I have to take a moment to remind myself of how far I’ve come.

“Shh...” I coo, reaching out a hand to the girl. “You’re okay, sweetie. I won’t hurt you. I promise.”

She bows politely but winces when I touch her arm and lets out a little scream, drawing the attention of everyone in the room.

“Please,” she cries. “Please don’t hurt me!”

I look across the room at the fearful faces staring back at me. I had spent 5 years in hell but these wolves had spent their entire existence in torture, never knowing what it meant to be loved.

But not anymore. Their pain ended with me.

I reach out to the girl again, ignoring her cries and let some calming energy wash over her. She sighs, lowering her hands down and staring wide-eyed at me.

“It’s okay, sweetie,” I say, stroking her hair.

She blinks as I continue to whisper calming words to her and when I try to sit on her bed, she lets me.

“You’re safe now,” I whisper and without a second thought, she jumps into my arms and buries her face in my chest as she sobs.

I wrap my arms around her and let her cry on my chest. She’s so fragile against my body, I fear if I squeeze too hard, I might actually break her. When she pulls back, her eyes still avoid me.

“What’s your name?” I ask.

“N-Nadia,” she breathes.

“You have a beautiful name,” I smile at her and the compliment makes her cheeks tinge red. “My name is Aurora. I’m the Luna of River Moon.” I pause, letting her register the information. “Can you tell me about Alpha Nikolai and what-“

“No!” She shrieks, the mere mention of his name sending her into a frenzy as she curls back up in a fetal position.

“It’s okay,” I soothe, inching closer to her. “He can’t hurt you anymore. He’s gone.. You’re safe now.”

She peaks at me through her hands. “Are you sure?”

I sigh. “Nikolai is gone and he’s not coming back. I swear it on the Moon.”

“What’s going to happen to us?” she whimpers, looking back at the other women. “Are we rogues?”

“Nothing is set in stone yet, but I give you my word, no harm will come to you. You’re under the care of the River Mon and the Allies now and we will protect you. I promise.”

She wraps her arms around me again, thanking me over and over for helping them. For the next hour, I sit with the young women and pups, healing those with injuries and calming down their worries. I hold back tears as I listen to their stories, growing furious with the dead Alpha and his wretched soldiers for what they did.

Chris eventually has to drag me out to the hospital to go deal with the warriors currently held in the dungeon and I leave much to the dismay of the fearful wolves. Promising to return, I let Chris take me down to the dungeons.

There, I find Nikolai's warriors in chains, 3 or 4 wolves placed in each cell. They bow as Celina and I walk past them but their anger is evident in their eyes. When one of them spits in my direction, Chava is quick to react, projecting several hundred tarantulas in the wolf's cell. He screams as the army of spiders come crawling towards him, much to Chava's satisfaction. The other wolves watching, stare in both awe and fear as we make our way down to the end of the of the dungeon where Javier and Wesley are hard at work. I hear groans as I approach the cell and inside see a bloodied wolf laying on the cold stone floor, his body bruised and badly beaten. A quick glance at Javier and Wesley's knuckles let me know the wolf hadn't been very cooperative.

"What are you looking at?" the wolf growls as he bows and spits blood out of his mouth. "Come to finish us off too?"

I ignore him, looking at Javier for answers.

"They haven't said a word," he mutters. "I'm starting to think Nikolai was just bluffing about his involvement-"

"So this little girl killed my Alpha?" the wolf sneers, attempting to get up on his feet. "And you take orders from her? Pathetic!" His eyes narrow to slits at me. "You will never be my Alpha. I challenge y-."

Feeling disrespected Reyna takes over. She grabs his neck, slowly lifting him up with a strength I didn't know I possessed. She pulls his face close to my own until our breaths practically mix.

"You've forgotten what I've done to your Alpha. Would you like me to remind you?" She threatens.

"I'm not afraid of you," he retorts, but his eyes and his thoughts give him away. He's terrified.

An electric current flows through my hand to his neck and his body stiffens with the shocks. She stops the current before he passes out, the message clear as day.

“What do you know about the witches?” Reyna commands and he confirms what I already knew.

“I-I don’t know anything ,” he stutters. “I swear.”

I sigh, letting him go and turning to Wesley. “Keep them locked up. I want the women and children transferred to the River Moon hospital immediately. They’ll be staying with us until I sort this pack out.”

“What!?” The wolf snarls, several of his cell mates joining in his anger. “You can’t do that! You can’t take away our women!”

I’m already half way out on his cell. “Watch me.”

The Ivory Queen Chapter 110

Celina’s POV

Aurora returns to River Moon and asks me to take charge of the Amethyst transfers while she takes care of her pack.

“Name?” I ask the last girl I need to complete my patient sheet.

“Nina,” she murmurs quietly. “Nina Morozov.”

“Do you have any children?”

She’s nods to one of the small pups in the bed beside her. “Ilya, he’s 2.”

“Okay. And your mate’s name?” I ask, jotting down her information on my clip board.

She shakes her head “Sefan is Ilya’s father, but he is not my mate,” she says, her voice just above a whisper

I want to ask more about this Sefan character but sensing her turmoil, I just sit down on her bed. “Shh. It’s okay. He can’t hurt you anymore.”

She closes her eyes and nods her head.

“Okay. I’ll have you and Ilya transferred together in the same room when you get to River Moon, okay?”

She grabs my wrist . “And,” she pauses, fearfully looking around as if some monster might burst through the door any second. “And... Sefan?”

I smile at her. “He’s staying here in prison. I told you, he can’t hurt you anymore. Aurora won’t allow it.”

For the first time since I’ve spoken to this woman, she smiles at the mention of Aurora.

“Luna Aurora... is she my Luna now?” she asks.

“It seems she’s claimed you,” I chuckle. “Won’t be long before she formally announces your entrance into River Moon. Don’t worry though. You’re in good hands. She’ll take care of you if it’s the last thing she does. Now rest up. You leave in a few hours.”

The girl nods and settles back into her bed, seemingly at ease with the knowledge that she would soon leave this place. I walk over to the next bed and find the same woman Aurora had spoken to earlier, Nadia.

“Is it true all the men are in prison?” She asks. “All of them?”

“Yes,” I reply. “Every single monster-“

“They’re not all monsters,” Nina protests. “Not my Misha.”

I raise my brow at this. All the wolves in prison were assholes as far as I could tell.

“Nikolai was ruthless and like his father before him, he did not believe in mates. They were a weakness in his eyes and a potential sign of disloyalty, someone else you would be loyal other than the Alpha. Alpha Nikolai couldn’t have that so we were forbidden to have mates. When we turned 18, we were brought before the Alpha and forced to seek out our mate only to reject them.”

“That’s awful!”

She nods solemnly. “Some of us pretended not to sense our mates among the men or women. I sensed Misha the second I saw him but I knew better than to declare him as mine. We both kept quiet when Nikolai asked if I could sense my mate and luckily, years of practice made me an excellent liar,”

“And crazy,” Nadia mutters. “You’re lucky you two never got caught.”

“Caught?”

Nina sighs. “If you were caught with a mate, you were killed on sight. No questions asked...” She heaves even harder. “Many of the men aren’t evil... just following orders and trying to survive like the rest of us. In the Alpha’s eyes, woman were just breeding whores he could use and of course, some shared his views, taking advantage of Nikolai’s no mate policy to use anyone they pleased. Sefan picked me.” Tears well up in her eyes. “Misha felt everything... but he could do nothing to stop it or he would risk giving us both away. His heart shattered when I became pregnant with Ilya.” A weak smile creeps on her face. “But he still loves him like a son.” She sits up in her bed. “Do you think I could see him before being transferred?”

I call Chris and inform him of the request.

“I’m sorry, the warriors are still being processed and besides, none of them are allowed to be released per Aurora’s request. I’m afraid I can’t bring a prisoner over,” he replies.

Nina looks defeated at the thought of once again being torn apart from her mate. I send a quick mind link to Aurora, asking for permission for his release.

“Are they done being processed?” She asks.

“No, not yet.”

She goes silent for a moment. “Get the name of every prisoner with a good mate and give it to Javier or Wesley. I’ll have them released and brought to River Moon for reunification later tonight.”

I turn to the ladies. “I need the name of every man you want released.”

Nina squeals with unadulterated joy. “Oh thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Bless Luna Aurora’s heart!” She cries. “I’ll finally get to be with my mate!”

I make the announcements to the other woman and a handful rush to me.

“Demitri.”

“My brother Sacha.”

“Mikahail!”

“Ivan.”

Within twenty minutes, I have a list of about 30 men which I hand off to Chris with Aurora’s instructions.

Nina can’t stop bouncing with glee and her joy is contagious. I smile like a fool beside her.

“I’m free to love him!” She cries. “Oh goddess, I can scream his name to the world! Misha is my mate! Misha! Misha!” Nina giggles, turning to me with a beautiful gleam in her eyes. “What’s River Moon like?” she asks. “What are the people like?” Her face turns slightly more serious and her voice grows quiet. “What’s the Alpha like? He hasn’t come to see us.”

A small crowd of women gathers around me, eager to find out about their future home.

“I honestly haven’t had much time to explore it. We’ve been preoccupied,” I respond. “Oliver is…” I pause. The Alpha is missing, I wanted to say but it seemed like a detail they needn’t worry about just yet. “He’s a good man. And he adores my sister. It’s nauseating how much they love each other.”

“Oh, I hope to find a mate,” Nadia says dreamily. “Maybe I’ll find one in River Moon!”

“Do you have a mate?” Nina asks.

My face flushes without my permission as an image of Javier flashes through my mind, giving me away instantly.

“You do!” Nina squeals excitedly. “What’s he like? Have we met him?” she adds, looking around at the guards watching over us.

I frown at her. “He’s …uh…. It’s complicated,” I shrug, suddenly finding my fingernails extremely interesting.

“What’s complicated about a mate?” she laughs. “He loves you. You love him. Seems pretty straight forward to me.”

“I don’t love him,” I mutter.

Liar! Sarahi snarls. You do love him!

I ignore my wolf's comment and look up to see several girls curiously staring at me.

"He's.... Look he's a jerk who's done some bad things that I can't overlook. I just can't forgive him," I snap, my voice making them all flinch. "I'm sorry."

Nina reaches for my hand. "Did he hurt you too?"

I shake my head. "His offense was not against me. It's just.... He hurt someone I care about."

"And this person that he hurt, does he still hurt them?" Nadia asks.

"Well, no... uh.. They're actually on good terms..."

"So then why can't you forgive him?" Nadia asks.

"I... I-I don't know! I Just can't!" I groan, growing frustrated with myself. I didn't even understand my own feelings.

Nina wraps her arms around me and I let her hold me as I try to make sense of my situation.

"Take it from someone who's had to give up their mate for years, don't let your anger ruin this love for you. Don't throw away your mate. Forgive him. You'll regret every moment you spend apart."

Suddenly the doors to the infirmary burst open, Javier barging in. Several smiling children come rushing towards him, including little Ilya, eager to say hello to him.

"Alpha Javier!" they cry, reaching up for him.

Javier lifts Ilya into his arms, another group swarming him.

"Oh it's Alpha Javier!" Nadia blushes, a slight jealous rage building in my chest. It takes a bit of self control for me not to lash out at her.

Why is everyone so excited to see him?

Before I can ask, Nadia leans towards me.

“He’s the alpha that rescued us from our prisons,” she whispers. “He’s the one who made sure no one could hurt us again.”

“And,” Nina adds. “He personally reunited me with Ilya when we got to the hospital. He didn’t leave my little Ilya alone until he made sure a nurse set up the bed for Ilya to be next to me. He truly is a caring Alpha.”

I look up at Javier and our eyes meet briefly. A slight blush reddens his cheeks and he’s the first to look away. Sarahi whimpers, wanting him to look once more at us. He slowly makes his way over to us, setting Ilya down in Nina’s lap.

“Good afternoon, ladies,” he says, flashing a smile at everyone and bowing slightly to me. “Your highness,” he nods.

A part of me wishes he’d say my name but I quickly tuck that feeling away, forcing my gaze onto my lap. I feel his eyes settle on me, making my heart race uncontrollably.

“How can I help you, Alpha?” I finally ask, still keeping my gaze away from him.

He clears his throat. “I- ahem- I came to check the progress of the transfers. Do you have the list of all the people going to River Moon?”

“Yes, its finished. Chris could have given you the list and you could have saved yourself a trip, don’t you think?” I snap, unable to keep the bitterness from seeping out.

There’s an awkward pause, the tension between us thick enough to cut with a knife.

“Right,” he mutters. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking-“

“Whatever,” I say, rolling my eyes at him. I get up to grab the clip board from Nadia’s bed and hand it to him.

Our fingers brush against each other, sending warm tingles up and down my arms. I flinch at the contact, pulling my arm back instantly and letting the clipboard drop to the ground.

Javier and I scramble to pick it up at the same time, our heads butting against each other.

“Sorry,” he mutters as I rub at my forehead. He bends down to pick up the clipboard.

I don’t answer. Sensing my growing discomfort, he clears his throat again and raises the clipboard up.

“Umm... thank you. I’ll give this to the River Moon Hospital staff and have the vans brought over so we can start transferring. I’ll release the prisoners later in the evening,” he says, before excusing himself and turning on his heel to leave.

I feel everyone’s eyes on me but it’s Niña who breaks the silence.

“He’s your mate, isn’t he?”

My silence answers her question and she offers her hand to me.

“Well, it’s clear you both like each other,” she chuckles, her smile softening her features. “You should go talk to him.”

I shake my head. “I-I don’t even know what to say.”

“Anything!” Nina says, pushing me towards the exit. “Go now before he leaves the building!”

The other girls chime in their agreement and without thinking, my legs starting carrying me towards the door.

I’m sprinting by the time I make it out of the building, my eyes searching frantically for any sign of him. When I see Javier turn the corner towards the prison, I teleport right in front of him.

He freezes in place, his eyes full of surprise and confusion. “Your Highness, d-did I forget something?”

I open my mouth to speak, but no words come out. I didn’t think I’d make it this far and I hadn’t thought of anything to say.

“Your Highness-“

“Don’t call me that,” I snarl, making his mouth snap shut. “Just... shut up.”

He nods obediently. We stand there in silence for several minutes, neither of us moving. Javier rolls the list in his hands, tapping it against his open palm.

“Your Highness, you don’t have to-“

“I said don’t call me that!” I growl at him. “Celina! My name is Celina!”

He nods again. “Celina.”

My stomach does somersaults as my name leaves his lips. His perfect, beautiful lips...

“Celina, I’m really sorry if I offended you by coming down here. I-“

“Stop!” I push my hands into my hair, growing frustrated with myself.

Why couldn’t I just say how I feel?

Another few minutes crawl by in silence as I think. Tears well up in my eyes and I can tell he’s itching to comfort me when he takes a few steps towards me. I lift a hand to stop him, knowing if I caught a whiff of his scent, I would lose my mind but he doesn’t stop moving closer.

“Stop,” I whimper, swinging my arms at him.

He drops the clipboard as I land a few blows before he grabs both of my wrists and holds them against my sides. His scent is so soothing and I feel myself drifting off into peace. It confuses me.

“Why can’t I hate you?” I scream at him.

His closes his eyes and leans his forehead against mine.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers. “I’m sorry for everything.”

I feel his hands cup my cheeks, his thumbs tracing patterns on my face. I love how gentle he can be.

But he could also be cruel, I remind myself as I break free from his arms and step away from him..

“I deserve to be happy,” I declare, the sound of my voice making him go still. “I deserve to love my mate.”

A ray of sun bursts through the clouds, giving his brown eyes a red hue to them as he looks at me.

“And I deserve to be loved,” I add, my voice cracking slightly as a few tears spill onto my cheeks. “I’ve tried to get you out of my head. Believe me, I’ve tried.” I wipe at my tears. “But no matter what I do, whenever I think of my happiness, you’re always in the picture.”

His eyes gleam with hope.

“And I don’t know why,” I croak. “I don’t know why I can’t let you go!”

I let my head rest between my hands for a moment to catch my bearings before finally looking back up at him.

“You scare me,” I whimper. “Because if you could hurt her, how do I know you won’t turn on me too?”

“I would never,” He shakes his head. “I would never hurt you.”

“You don’t know that!” I retort, my voice cracking once more.

“I love you,” he says. “I love you, Celina. And I swear to you with every fiber in my body, I will never hurt you. Ever.”

Sarahi howls with joy at his declaration and a kaleidoscope of butterflies flutters in my belly.

“You don’t mean that,” I say, shaking my head in disbelief. “You don-“

An incredible smile stretches from ear to ear on his face. “Yes I do.”

“Do you promise?” I whimper.

“I swear it with my life, until my final breath.”

“You’re mine? Only mine?”

Within seconds, the space between us vanishes and I find myself nestled up against him, our bodies fitting together perfectly like two pieces of a puzzle. My arms go around his neck as his lifts me up into his arms.

“I’m yours,” he whispers as he presses his lips against mine.