

Chapter 2 - The Dark Influence

"I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced." — Joseph Conrad

Odessa

Manicured fingers brush through the dark, silky strands of my soulmate's hair. Beautiful as he's formidable, I'm presented with a different picture of him. A picture of bliss and peace. His nose flares gently with every silent inhale of my scent. The bed we share in his room is warm, like a gentle ember underneath this blanket. With the air conditioning humming behind us, I can't tell July from December.

It's a wonderful feeling.

While admiring my mate, my mind reminisces, contorting the image of Darien into Neron. He and I used to share moments like this: we'd watch each other sleep until the sun beckons us to start our day. Memories of the love swimming in those sapphire blues engulfed my mind and senses into deep, power nostalgia. No different from Darien's sapphires. Neron's touches, his sweetness, his lips; I remember all. It ignited a fire within my core that made my legs quiver. Neron's love was consuming, and it was a storm I refused to take refuge from.

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Doesn't he know how much it hurts?

To watch him give that same love to someone else?
To watch him pine for the love of a woman who
doesn't care for him and their bond?

I was the golden apple in Neron's eye as he was in mine. Even as young teenagers, he's the one I knew my heart wanted. Powerful, attractive, funny; he's the total package. I still remember the Valentine's Day card he made for me when we were sixteen. Heart-shaped, doused in red glitter with fine calligraphy print on the inside. It symbolized the day we officially became boyfriend and girlfriend. It still rests in my drawer underneath my clothes.

I loved him back then, and I still do now. Despite my mate bond with Darien, part of my heart aches for Neron. It beats for him in the rhythm of drums every time I inhale his woodsy scent. It aches for his touches once more.

Darien's touches are near the same caliber as my Alpha's, except the fire blazes. Wild, passionate, and untamed. Every time we made love, it's as if I saw heaven itself. I'm taken to pleasure beyond my comprehension with nothing to reign me in. It's inhibited and stunning. Right now, I see no sign of the passionate man that thrusts into me day in and day out. His love is just as consuming, and it fills me with completion. Just how the Moon Goddess

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destined us to be together.

But it's not enough.

Not enough for me.

Darien is my soulmate. Nothing can change about that. Ariel howls only for him. However, soulmate or not, Neron is my first love. Humans say that you never forget your first love, and I agree. He's the first person to wear my heart on his sleeve. Like a pirate with his treasure chest, I was Neron's diamond. He's the soldier, and my heart was his blade. My beloved Alpha made me feel powerful, wanted, and seen.

Seen by all. A soft chuckle bubbled in my chest; I'm not so useless now, am I?

Neron sacrificed destiny to keep me at his side. He defied all for me. That was all the proof I needed to see how intense his love for me is. My happiness mattered to him. Such a strong, authoritative man Neron is; he can have anything he wanted with the flick of the wrist. My Alpha gave me anything I wanted and treated me like a queen. His queen.

Yet...

He went from an intimidating Alpha to a lovesick

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puppy. For someone else. How can he forget everything like that? All we've been through together? I've been nothing but faithful, and he tossed me away. The chuckle shattered into a sea of anger, bubbling and toiling like scarlet lava. It threatened to overflow and incinerate everything in contact. But just as quickly as it appeared, it disappeared.

I can't find it in my heart to be mad at Neron. He's just overrun by guilt! That's why he's been acting this way. Once Kiya fucking dies, he'll love me again. And I'll do anything to make him love me, yet I can't abandon Darien.

Ariel loves him. She can't let him go. I love him. I can't let him go. And I still love Neron.

My wolf and I have different wants and needs. We're two sides of the same coin, yet complete opposites. I want my Alpha and she wants her Delta. Why have the best of both worlds? The Moon Goddess is a fool to give all werewolves a singular mate. One mate cannot fulfill all our needs. Well, at least mine. So why can't we have two? Can't she see my heart belongs to two men, and I'm forced to choose one over the other?

I still remember the promise Neron and I made long ago. The memory is as fresh as the moment of its

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birth. We carve our destiny. Our destined mates are damned, and we'll be together as we want to be. Had no werewolf thought to throw away the blessed gifts our Moon Goddess gave to pursue our paths.

He's forgotten his promise. Bewitched by midnight-colored curls, he forged a commitment and refused to abide.

All because of that—!

"Don't make that face, dear. It'll get stuck."

My head shot up to see a swirl of smoke hovering at the foot of the bed. With eyes unseen, I feel them peering into mine. Innate instincts reach out for Darien to protect me, but I know it's not possible. This is my problem because I made a deal with the devil to regain what I've lost.

"Don't wake him." I requested softly in hopes Darien doesn't stir. He's a heavy sleeper, but better safe than sorry.

"He won't if you come with me quietly. We have some things to discuss. Into the bathroom, now."

There's a pull I couldn't resist. Invisible threads controlled my limbs, forcing them to move on their

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own. Robotically, I sprang out of bed and strode into the bathroom, locking the door behind me. The smoke quickly materialized into a human form. Osiris emerged with his white hair flailing and dressed in a dark suit, complimenting his deep skin.

Wow. Even during his dealings with darkness, he dresses sharply.

"We'll make this quick." He grinned with his fangs displayed. Soft hisses echoed between us, reminding me that his disgusting pet snake is with him. The juniper-green reptile coiled around his right arm; scarlet eyes watchful of me. "Any recent developments from the last time we met?"

"N-No." I shake my head, head bowed in submission. "New pack members are coming in upon the Alpha's decision to accept refugees, training for the warriors has increased, and the Gamma Female is with child."

The devil or whatever-the-hell-he-is nodded. "And of the avatar?"

Irritation clawed through me at the meager mention of the 'A' word. I hated that bitch and my impatience beckons for her fall. "She and the Alpha... they look as if they're becoming closer. She continues to reject his advances, but Neron won't give up the pursuit

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for her heart."

Osiris regarded me with a knowing look, with his finger tapping his cheek in the rhythm of my heartbeat. His look is enough to send shivers down my spine, gripping it forcefully. "Your anger carries a scent, dear, and I must say...it's sweet. Not my type of sweet, but sweet. I think it's time to implement my plans."

"What do you plan on doing with Kiya once you have her?" I ask curiously. Not that I care, but why the hunt? Maybe he wants her powers? If he kills her, that's fine with me. Deep in me, Ariel doesn't stir. She hasn't spoken to me since I made the deal with Osiris.

"Don't ask questions that don't concern you, pet." He hissed. Deadly and ready to strike, his snake hovers his head next to its owner, sharp fangs glistening under the bathroom lighting. Recoiling, my back hit the bathroom door because the raw memories of the snake biting me infested my mind.

I've had nightmares ever since.

But it's what it took to have Neron again. To have the pack listen to my every command.

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To take *my* rightful place as Luna with two men to love me.

Osiris grabbed my arm, and his sharp nails sunk into my flesh. His other hand went to cover my mouth to muffle my whimpers. Blackness filled my veins, mapping them out from my arm to my shoulder. The burning sensation is unbearable, charring every nerve. Stray tears escaped my eyes, dripping from his strong hand.

Goddess, make it stop!

"This power must be used wisely and cautiously, pet." Osiris retracted his nails from my skin as it began healing. Black faded underneath the olive undertone, leaving behind no evidence of its existence. "You, now, have the power of influence. With a single touch, you can command the will and mind of anyone of your choosing. You can make them your obedient slave or willful minion. However, as overzealous as you are, I've put some restrictions."

"...Like what?" I ask, feeling the dark power gripping at my heart. It's frightening. It's horrific. And yet, I liked it. It felt **good**.

"With every use, it will cause you pain. Dependent on the person you attempt to influence, if their will

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is strong, it may not work. So, go with the weak-minded mutts first. They'll be easiest to recruit, so don't even think you can easily sway the Alpha to love you when he's so infatuated with the moon's avatar. And I'll know who you influence; this is an extension of my power."

"How long until I can get Neron?"

"So impatient." Osiris sneered, rolling his eyes. "By rushing, you'll be pushing the destined mates together. The Alpha is pussy-whipped by the avatar and a willing victim to the bond the Moon Goddess cast upon them in birth. He falls at her commands, when really... it should be you, right?"

He leans in, wrapping his long fingers underneath my chin. Gently, Osiris lifts my head to meet his eyes. He's powerful. He's deadly. My knees buckled under his intense gaze as the grapples of his dark soul hold mine hostage. "Do you want them to be together because you couldn't be patient?"

"N-No."

"Then you need to work, little girl. Patience is a virtue, as the humans say. I want Kiya and you want Neron. Keep them apart and we'll get what we want. I'll be happy and you will be too. After all, that's why

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you made the deal with me; so you can be happy with your true loves."

My heart thumped to the truth in his words. It knows what it wants. It knows what I want. It's frightening that Osiris knows all about my desires. But he's right. Roadblocks are preventing me from reaching my goal. All are named Kiya.

Halima.

The former slave turned warrior. She's the only person standing in my way of reclaiming Neron's heart, and I must take her down. But how do you turn a lovesick Alpha into one who hated her existence?

I must take it slow. Slowly break her and the love Neron has for her. And then I'll come in and sweep his broken heart off the ground. That bitch is just a rabid dog bound by a chain to the neck.

Neron is mine. He's my prize and my rightful claim.

She'll lose everything. And I'll gain it all, starting with my mate.

"I know you want to try your newfound powers out. Go ahead." Osiris' chilly hands gently pushed me out

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the bathroom door, urging me to sin. Urging me to take what I want. The door swung open in silence to reveal the still body of Darien. His chest continued to rise and fall with signs of life. He's what I want. I'll take him from that bitch and rid his mind of her presence.

Darien is mine, and Neron is mine. *All* will be mine.

Curling my fingers around Darien's thick wrist, I watched as I willed the black magic to flow from my palms into his, mapping his veins underneath his flesh. It's so sickly, like snakes slithering and bulging on their way to swallow their prey. I was their commander. A rush of power washed through me as I watched Darien writhe from the pain.

It'll only hurt for a moment, my love.

"That's right. Just like that..." The devil himself purred with his hot breath tickling my ear. Through my mental blocks, Ariel beats and batters against it. My wolf demands my cessation, growling and howling at me in unadulterated fury. Another wall separates us; I'll not let her ruin my plans to claim what we rightfully deserve.

Ariel will understand one day. I'm doing this for her own good!

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Darien soon stopped writhing. His body stilled as if he died. I reached out for him, engulfed with worry, but immediately retracted. I was met with a pair of blue eyes... but they're different. Both of his cerulean orbs had a thick, red ring around them. Lifeless. Unmoving. Staring at me as if he's a hollow shell.

They wait for me. My authorization. My command. A sinister smile makes way to my face, curling the sides of my lips in pure delight.

"He's yours."

"He's mine," I whispered as I crawled onto the bed with my face itching close to his. My brown stared deep into his blue in search of something. A sign of him or his wolf. I find none. He truly is under my submission...

Let's take a crack at it and see how this works!

"You'll no longer care about Kiya. She means nothing to you. Your feelings for her, any and all, are dead. You'll love me and only me. I am your one and only."

Once the command settled in, bright blue dominated. Full of boundless love for one person: me. Only me. If Darien wasn't mine before, he surely is now. Before I could blink, I was immediately

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pulled into a smoldering kiss that left my mind numb with blissful pleasure. It's a kiss full of love, passion, and possession. Strong arms tightened around my waist as I returned the kiss in the same vigor.

I felt confident. I felt power. I'm invincible!

"Enjoy your fun, dear. I'll return later." Osiris cackled before his form faded into his billow of smoke, fading into thin air. As Darien kissed me like I'm his sole breath of fresh air, cool air licked my exposed skin as my pajama top and bottoms were peeled away with force. He wanted me and demanded that he have me on top of the mattress we shared. The scent of passionate and heavy sex soon filled the air along with our moans and grunts.

Darien is putty in my hands.

One down, the rest of the pack to go. And then my Neron.

Want to steal everything away from me, Kiya?

You have another thing coming.

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