

## Chapter 59 - The Rivalry

*"Love has its own dark morality when rivalry enters in."*  
— Thomas Hardy

### *Kiya – One and a Half Weeks Later*

What do you call it when two people were awkward with one another?

Because that encompassed almost 100% of my interactions with Neron.

After my heat, I understood what a steak feels like on a grill. It wasn't a fun time.

Neron had been nothing but attentive during those torturous three days. I was impressed. He kept his promises and took care of me. Even my friends were shocked when I told them. None of them had faith in Neron, so this moment might change their view on him. Known by werewolf kind, Alphas, despite their strength, were notorious for their impulsivity and animalistic instincts. They were the kings of the pack and denying them wasn't heard of. Faced with fighting his true nature, I admire Neron's abnormal self-restraint.

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He kept me safe and secure. Deep within me, foreign happiness stirred.

It wasn't all sunshine and rainbows, however, I continued to keep my distance from him since then. Unfortunately, because of the heat, I needed him at my side. I was desperate and on the brink of insanity. He was the sole person who could quell the heat that was killing me from the inside out. Without him, who knows what would have happened?

The moments we shared the past three days were intimate. We were close, almost inseparable. The Alpha kept me near him and held me when the pain became unbearable. For a human, we could have been mistaken as an affectionate couple. A couple that couldn't keep their hands off each other.

After the madness ended, I pushed him away. I had to clarify immediately that those days meant nothing.

Neron accepted my words more gracefully than I expected as he left me in the solitude of my room. That conclusion hurt me more than I thought it would. A sliver of doubt swam through my heart, tugging at the heartstrings. I don't love Neron, but I couldn't say I hate him either. He proved through his actions that he could keep his word, so he became tolerable. Still not fond of his presence around me

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but at least I don't have the instinct to vomit yesterday's lunch upon sight of him. Do I trust him?

Of course, not.

The pup trainees were on their hour-long break from training, spending time with their families, or socializing. I was grateful for Jackie and Galen stepping up in their sessions in my absence. I could always count on my friends to have my back, especially since I've been getting a whole slew of problems lately.

I have 99 problems, and Odessa was most of them.

She took back her rejection and it made Darien happy. Whenever I'd speak to him, there was this light in his eyes unmatched by any star in the twilight. He was sincerely happy that Odessa accepted him and was already dreaming of a future with them together: moving into their future home, having a litter of puppies, the whole nine yards. My friends and I would spot him kissing Odessa's cheek lovingly, holding her body during pack bonfires, and more. Darien was bending over backward to make her happy. My best friend was enamored with his mate.

But this was where the confusion settles in.

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If the mate bond is strengthening, then why was Odessa incessantly pining after Neron? Since my heat ended, she amped up her game. Some I had the unfortunate luck of witnessing.

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### Two Hours Earlier

In my hands, I had the trainees' progress reports. I was proud to say that most of the pups were coming along nicely while a few needed a little more support. As for the adult trainees, I have already delivered their progress reports to Kwame. The manilla folders in my hand, each labeled with the names of each pup trainee, some reports poking out from the holds. As I approached the Alpha's office, I heard a soft, feminine giggle from the other side. I arched an eyebrow as my ears picked up the errant conversation.

"You know you want me, Neron. You've always wanted me."

"Odessa, you and I are through. There's nothing between us."

"Your little friend says differently. Why deny your instincts, my love? Your body knows what it wants. Only I could make you feel this way, my dearest

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Alpha.”

“Odess...”

“Let me take care of you, baby.”

I threw open the door. Why? I wish I knew, but I had to. I wasn't prepared for the soft porn scene in front of me. Odessa sat in Neron's lap with her fingers tangled in his black tresses, breasts sprung free from their fabric cages, and a skirt so short I could see her bare ass. It was obvious Neron liked the attention, based on his hands gripping her hips and the forbidden tent in his pants.

I said nothing about it. I didn't have to. A slash of pain entered my heart upon sight. The brunette woman looked at me with a smirk of a champion, winning the prize she hungered for. I slammed the files down in the chair next to me, turning my back. “These are the pups' progress reports. Look over them when you're finished.”

The calls to my name rang deaf in my ears. Because I was focused on the pain twisting my heartstrings. I shouldn't feel anything, but I do. Why? I ran out of the house and into the forest, setting Artemis free.

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Water trickles down my face, droplets raining in the sink. My eyes were hollow, expressionless as I reach for my towel. What am I supposed to do? Watching Odessa play the part of the loyal, loving mate sickened me. She was playing with my best friend's heart while pursuing another man! But why didn't Neron stop her? Does he still love her like he originally claimed? There was no reason for me to feel hurt about this, but I was for many reasons, but one topped them all.

Darien doesn't deserve this.

So many questions, but so few answers. It was infuriating. With a growl, I threw my towel in the hamper and walked out of my room, wanting to clear my head. Yet, Odessa was intent on taking away my mental peace as she stood on the other side of the hallway, arms crossed under her cleavage.

"What the hell do you want?" I asked. "I'm not in the mood for your shit today."

"I know you don't want any problems, Halima." She sneered. "All you have to do is stay the hell away from my men." *Her men?* The amount of disrespect this woman had for me was astounding. And she was the daughter of two warriors?

I wanted to laugh. "You're joking."

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"I'm not. Stay out of my way and you won't get hurt."

"You should be more worried about me hurting you," I snapped. Odessa towered over me by a couple of inches, but I refused to stand down. "Now, about 'your' men, don't think what you're doing escapes my eyes. You're a sick, twisted woman for leading on *my best friend* in your fucked-up game."

Odessa winced, her eyes dulling in sadness momentarily before melting into smugness. "Darien doesn't have a problem with it. He loves me. You can't get in between the love mates have for each other."

"Yet, you're treating him like a side piece while you hunt for a man who doesn't belong to you."

"Neron was mine way before you were born, Halima." She stepped closer to me. "No matter what the Moon Goddess says, Neron belongs to me. Don't forget that he broke your pathetic mate bond for **me**. Everything he ever did was and always will be for **me**. You are but a mere afterthought, sloppy seconds from a shriveling bond. You'll never mount up to me and deep down, you know it."

"You got one more time to call me Halima before I break your face. My name is Kiya, you fool."

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"You'll always be Halima, the crying, sniffling slave covered in ugly scars. Who would want a scarred, useless woman when they could have someone as flawless as me?" She gestures to her body for emphasis, wiggling her hips. "You have no power here. I do. I may be unmarked, but Neron had proclaimed me as Luna. And, from my knowledge, he hasn't taken it back! So, if you know what's good for you, you'd respect me as the queen of this pack. Feel lucky that I'm not ordering your sorry ass back to the dungeons."

My eyes slammed shut, forcing away the horrific memories back into the trenches of my mind. "I don't care what you do to me. I don't care if you're going after Neron. I care about Darien. He is a good man, and your intrinsic selfishness makes you blind to his purity. Break his heart and I would take the utmost pleasure of breaking *your* spine. Messing with something the Moon Goddess holds sacred only leads to trouble."

Odessa released a cackle comparable to the stereotypical witches in children's cartoons. There was underlying evil in that sound, which did its duty of sending chills down my spine. "As if I'm going to fear the word of a weak dog. Without that muscle, you're still a scrawny mutt. Tell me, how long did you cry after the guards got done playing with you?"

My fingers itched to wrap themselves around her

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throat. They itched to squeeze the life out of her body for poking fun at my ordeal. She'll never understand what happened to me in that hellscape prison. No one can and no one will.

Swallowing my anger, I gave her a deep, warning snarl. "Heed my warnings, Odessa. If you screw up, you only have yourself to blame." With that, I walked away from her without an intimidating shoulder shove she gave me.

I wish I could do something. I wish I could make Darien see the ugly truth behind Odessa's sweet facade. But it was my word against hers. As much as I hate to admit it, he would side with his mate. He was so deep into her abyss I was afraid he won't see the light until it smacks him in the face.

The world darkened around me at a sudden realization. Trouble always found its way to me, no matter how far I ran from it. My head pounds at the plethora of difficulties surrounding me from this pack. One problem piled on another, bow-wrapped in recollections that made their humble abode in my mind. Barely a month into this mission and I was already feeling so overwhelmed.

When Adonis came in, emerald twinkling upon sight, everything changed. Children have this bright aura around them that brings the brightest days in the

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darkest nights. "Miss Kiya!" He scuttled towards my legs, looping his arms around my thighs. Trailing behind him was his mother, lovingly observing her baby boy.

"Hello to you too, handsome." I smiled, patting his head.

"Kiya, I have something to ask you." Raina fiddled with her fingers; eyes focused on her child rather than me. I arched an eyebrow, waiting. "Will you join us for dinner tonight?"

"Us?"

"Me, Adonis, Val, and...Mom and Dad."

"No."

"But—!"

"Not going to happen." Swallowing liquid cyanide was better than dinner with Ashley and Steven.

"Kiya, why don't you wanna eat with my grandpa and grandma?" Adonis asked me, head cocked to the side. "They are friendly! And we're having spaghetti tonight!"

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"Adonis, go play with your friends." Raina butted in, patting his back. The little boy took off like a rocket, leaving the two of us behind. "Kiya, please. They want to formally apologize to you."

I scoffed. "I don't want to hear what they have to say. Nothing they say would erase what they did, let alone a cheap pasta dinner."

"Aren't you at least curious to hear what they have to say?" If she means them justifying their past actions, then yes, I was curious. Curious to see what excuses they'll cook up to get me to forgive them. "Please, just this once and you'll never have to do this again."

I groaned, rolling my eyes. "This is stupid."

"So, you'll come."

"Maybe." I sighed. Raina smiled, leaning in to hug me, but I violently recoiled. I still didn't want her to touch me. She acknowledges it and nods in understanding, pulling back. Silently, I walked away from her on my way into the woods.

Well, this would be a *fun* thing to talk about with my friends tonight.

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### Chapter Comments

POST COMMENT

Visitor

Why, Kiya..why do you allow  
yourself to say yes to them??!!



11

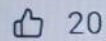
Visitor

never forgive. they will stab u  
again.



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## Chapter 60 - The Dinner

*"Family is supposed to be our safe haven. Very often, it's the place we find the deepest heartache." - Lyanla Vasant* 

### *Later That Evening*

I strode into the dining hall as the Omegas set up the plates and utensils on the long table. On sight, I sought to leave the room because my parents and older sister have taken their seats. Valerian, handsome as ever, flanked on Raina's left and little Adonis on her right, wiggling in anticipation for the food. The atmosphere is tense, like a tight muscle in the neck. At least around me. My growls rumbled softly in my chest, low enough to where only I could hear them. As much as I want to keep my distance from sperm and egg donors, I wonder what bullshit they'll spew from their wretched mouths to win me back.

I took my seat next to Adonis, who smiled at me. His smile was infectious. I smiled back at him. The little beta was the only person in this room I like. I didn't like Valerian either. Although he had never directly abused me, he refused to stop Raina. He turned the blind eye to her horrific actions. He was complacent and thus earns a fraction of my abhorrence. 

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"Dinner is ready." Lead Omega Cassandra announced with a bow, holding a pot full of pasta while her subordinates held pots with sauce, tongs, and ladles. The silence saturated our space as we were being served. Pungent odors of anxiety were noticeable from the Omegas as they trudged towards me. I didn't say a word, nor looked at their disgusting faces. Cassandra's eyes lingered on me before she and the others took their leave, leaving the five of us alone. <sup>1</sup>

Clinks of silverware hitting ceramic played a sour, melodious tune during the meal. I waited for someone to speak while everyone avoided my gaze. My eyes trained on little Adonis; cheeks filled with pasta like a chipmunk. He reminded me of myself at his age—spaghetti is my favorite meal. I'd eat it daily without complaints because Ashley or Cassandra made it.

Now, it does nothing to fill the holes in my heart.

This dish used to make me feel loved. Now, it made me feel empty.

Why the hell was this dish picked for this 'family' meal?

"K-Kiya." Ashley broke the silence. A pleasant, yet nervous smile tore her face as her gaze filled with

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fondness. I resisted the urge to throw a meatball at her face. <sup>1</sup>

"Remember the first time we had spaghetti? I think you were no older than Adonis. You were so terrified of eating it because you thought the noodles looked like those earthworms in your science class." I stared, emotionless. "It took much convincing to get you to eat because we didn't want you to go to bed hungry. I remember your face lighting up when you took your first bite. You became such a ravenous pup that we had to stop you before you got a stomachache." <sup>2</sup>

I remember those rare, happy memories my mind clung to. One of the rare moments I remember the genuine love from these strangers. The feelings of joy and curiosity filled my senses back then. My mind wouldn't let me forget that memory. It made me feel sick. My fork poked and prodded at the floppy pasta, the thieving aroma hacking away at my appetite.

"I remember that too," Raina spoke with a smile. "It was one of those times Cassandra was so worried about her! The horror in her eyes when she dug into her fourth helping of spaghetti and meatballs. I was sure that Kiya would puke all night because she ate too much."

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"Your point?" I asked, raising my head. Irritation poked at me faster than my non-existent pleasure.

"Don't you like spaghetti anymore?" Steven pondered. "You used to ask for it every night."

"No."

The three of them clammed up, bristling in their seats. I rolled my eyes and continued to poke at my food until Valerian spoke.

"That's a fond memory." His fork twirled around his noodles. "Cassandra makes the best pasta dishes. The children love them, especially Adonis." The boy mumbled in agreement, stuffing more food into his mouth. "Adonis, slow down! The food is not going anywhere."

I sighed, annoyed. "Is there a reason you took a trip down memory lane? Because Raina told me you wanted to talk, so stop stalling."

"R-Right. Kiya..." Ashley's dark eyes pleaded with me, glistening into tears. "I'm sorry. We're so sorry for what we've done to you. You can't stay mad at us forever." 

"Not forever." I arch an eyebrow. "How about until I'm dead?"

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"You don't mean that," Steven responded. "We're still your family. We made you. Your mother gave birth to you. You carry part of us."

"Genes, I have learned, don't make a family." I retorted harshly, setting down my fork. "What I learned is that even the most poisonous people on this planet are disguised as family. Want to take a gander at who I'm talking about?"

Raina bit her lip, grasping Valerian's hand from under the table. Adonis was so oblivious to the tension between his family because the taste of the food made him ignorant. "We shouldn't have hurt you."

"Then why did you?" I demanded, glaring at every adult at the table. "Why would people I loved so much raise their hand against me? Not once, not twice, but countless times? It got so bad that I have forgotten what a loving touch felt like."

No one dared to utter a word, so I continued. "Why would people who vowed to our Moon Goddess to love and care for me, turn me into a slave? What cockamamie excuse have you all cooked up to win me back?" I glared at my sister. "Make no mistake Raina. Just because you helped me during my heat does not erase the fact that I still hate you."

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"We...I..." Ashley stuttered, failing to form a coherent sentence.

"Let me tell you what a family does." I took out my phone, removed the case, and pulled out a picture of myself and my adoptive family. I tossed it at the center of the table. "They took me in when I was at my worst. Instead of turning a blind eye as you all did, they worked to help me get better. Not just them, but my friends. The same people training your weak wolves. After the damage that you all inflicted on me, they worked hard to get me back to be a healthy, happy werewolf. They did what you all failed to do: love me."

"We love you!" Steven bellowed, gripping his fork.

"We've always loved you!"

"Slapping the shit out of me and calling me a piece of garbage is a weird way of showing me love, isn't it?" I shouted back, infuriated. "Doing nothing as I cried in pain isn't love, you neanderthal!"

"We didn't have a choice," Ashley replied meekly, eyes in her lap. "Alpha Jonathan's word was the law."

"You had a damn choice." I hissed, rising out of my seat. I took back my family photo and placed it back where it belongs. "You had a choice to protect your little girl, but you didn't. Was living your lavish lives

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worth sacrificing your child for? Was it worth seeing her lose so much weight that shifting would've killed her? You both are fucking failures as Betas and as parents."

"Kiya, let's calm down." Valerian suggested. My fury landed on him, burning hot with orange and red. The nerve of this man telling me to calm down! "We've all made mistakes and your parents and sister are trying to make amends. Holding onto the past would only hurt you more than anyone else."

"Don't tell me what to do, Valerian. You're just as complacent in this mess. You're Neron's best friend and you allowed him to abuse me! You never stopped your wife from hurting me, either! You never defended me or pulled her away, even though I was also your 'family'." I mimicked air quotes on the last word. "Heck, when Raina asked for your permission to hurt me, you agreed! You're just as shitty as they are."

"Kiya, don't talk to Val like that. He's trying to help mediate." Raina defended.

"Fuck you and your husband! I hope the Beta position was worth it!"

"That's enough!" Steven shouted, causing all of us to

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look up. Even Adonis, who wasn't paying attention to the fight until his grandfather yelled. "We organized this dinner so we could calmly talk about our issues and come to a consensus, but you're not making this easy, Kiya. Where is your respect?"

"I lost it thirteen years ago. Never cared to get it back." I crossed my arms. "You don't understand what happened down in that dungeon. The horrible things that were done to me. It took me years of therapy to cope with what had happened, and you expect me to brush that away and to be your happy child again?" 

"That's not what we're trying to do." Ashley stood from her seat. "Look, Celeste was my best friend. We grew up together. Losing her was like losing my sister. I—no, we needed someone to blame."

"I was forbidden to refer to Celeste as my aunt! Instead of blaming the rogues who took her life, you chose your little girl!" The desire to rip Ashley's throat apart ached in my fingers, my claws protruding out from my fingertips. I wanted her to suffer, for all of them to suffer. Their tears were nowhere near the endless tears I shed for years. That pain could never go away. When your blood betrays you, it leaves a lasting scar that would never heal.

"Nuria was my best friend. I lost her that day too."

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Ever cared enough to realize that?" I clapped, mocking a standing ovation. "Wonderful motherly decisions you've made, Ashley. You deserve an award for best mother in the world."

"Goddamnit, would you stop referring to us by our first names?" Steven asked with anger etching into his aging face.

"Unless you want to be called 'fuck face', 'sack of shit', 'bastard' or 'failure', then I'd gladly stop."

"Baby sis." Raina walked over to me from her seat, regret in her eyes. "You're right. We've hurt you. We abandoned you. We weren't the family you deserve. Nothing we say could erase the past, but I want you in my life. I want to hug you and hold you as my little sister. What do we have to do to make it possible?"

"Die." The spaghetti on my plate got cold, bitterly reminding me of the disgusting leftovers I forced myself to eat when my hunger became intolerable. "I already got the family I deserve, and they are the only ones I'll call my parents and siblings."

"Like hell, we'll let that happen!" My head jerked to see Ashley, now full of unjustifiable rage. Moments earlier, sadness became her mask. She ditched it and

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donned an expression full of fury. Her fingers dig into the table edge, cracks shaping a perfect image of her fingertips. "They would never be your true family, and we're not losing you again!"

"Grandma?" Adonis' small voice called out, the only slice of peace in this pie of chaos. "Kiya is family? What do you mean?"

My eyes widened at the child; his green eyes filled with twinkling curiosity. Ashley couldn't do what I thought she was about to do. "No, Donny—!"

"Kiya is your auntie, sweetheart." She revealed, much to the astonishment of her daughter and son-in-law. "She's your mother's sister; the one we told you that was dead."

"Whoa! That's so cool!" The beta pup had a level of excitement that I couldn't match. The world around me faded into muddles and muffles. I didn't want Adonis to know that I was his aunt. An established familiar connection I wanted no part of. If the boy saw me as a stranger, then he wouldn't be affected by my departure.

Now, things have changed. Children were fragile creatures but soak up countless pieces of information like a sponge. They want love. They

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want their family. They want everyone to be happy because it made them happy. Adonis scampers over to me and hugs my legs, rambling that he was happy that a strong lady, like me, was his aunt. As he rambled on about his plans with me, my mind took in the gravity of what Ashley had done. Valerian interrupted our 'happy reunion' by scooping up his son, whispering in his ear that the adults need to talk, and took him out of the room. Once the door closed, Raina exploded.

"What the fuck, Mom?" Raina screamed. "Why did you just do that?"

"Adonis has a right to know and if Kiya would not say anything, then your father and I will."

"That wasn't your decision to make." Valerian replied, returning to the scene of chaos.

"You want to deprive your son of the family he has never met?" Steven asked him, eyes focused on the current Beta. "Adonis had always wanted to meet her and look at him! He's happy! We did you both a favor! This family won't break apart again."

They took away my decision to tell. How do they think they have any authority over my choices? They made my pain and suffering all about them, selfishly

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disregarding how I felt. They saw my anger as disrespect, not from a place of agony.

This dinner had never been about me. It was always been about my former family freeing themselves of the guilt for hurting me. Not once have Steven and Ashley acknowledged that they fucked my life up to revel in their false sense of security and pride. They threw me away to the hounds, an innocent pup, so they could live safely and happily.

They never cared about me. They wanted their messed-up family back together and they sacrificed me again to make it happen. Instead of tossing me in the dungeons, they used Adonis as leverage. They trapped me using their grandson.

I loved children too much. There was no way I would break his heart. They knew this. Anyone could see it with how I trained the pups.

They have put me in an impossible situation where I couldn't find the power to get out. If I didn't hate my family before, I hated them even more now. No fraction of my heart could love them ever again. Guilt and sorrow from them outweighed my pain and trauma. Tears of sorrow and remorse were as deceitful as the trickster gods.

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They never cared about me.

*At all.*

I couldn't cry. I couldn't weep. The anger I worked hard to bury combusted in me, a stronger heat than desire rolled into every synapse in my body.

Nothing mattered anymore. Not my mission, not my friends, nothing. The only thing that mattered is to rid my life of the very people who abandoned me.

*They hurt me. And now, I was going to hurt them!*

All care and rationale flew out of my head, crashing into a sickening heap. Artemis's voice did not calm this deadly fury. Slamming down a mental block from my wolf, I needed to feel this anger.

I must show these fools I was stronger than them. Better than them. That I can snuff their lives out with a single flick of the wrist. My bitter abhorrence towards my egg and sperm donors is my fuel. My purpose. They're dead to me, and I was going to make that a reality.

They will pay for what they've done! They will feel thirteen years of my wrath and there is nothing that would stop me!

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*Tonight, their lives are mine!*

### Chapter Comments

POST COMMENT

Angie G. de Muñoz

That would of been funny as hell. 🤔 I can see it in my min...

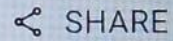
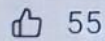


Phenyo Mashudu

they really thought this was going to be easy



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## Chapter 61 - The Wolves

*"I closed my eyes, tried to get as far away from myself as I could." — Catherine Lacey*

**Neron**

Have you ever had to wrestle a bear to the ground?  
No? Consider yourself lucky, then.

Have you ever had to wrestle your feral mate to the ground? Wouldn't recommend it.

Never in my life would I've expected to be called through mind-link to restrain my mate from slaughtering her parents. The sudden urgency in Valerian's voice as he took his son back to his room in his arms told me everything. Screams and shouts reverberated through the walls of the room, making a sudden commotion seem louder than stadium roars.

*"I hate you! I HATE you! You never loved me at all!"*

Droplets of red stained the primeval tiled floors, seeping deep into the crevices. I've witnessed a smaller-than-average wolf use her fists to bash Steven's face into a bloody pulp. She was like a

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machine on autopilot without an off switch.

"You ruined my life! You'll pay for everything you've done to me!"

Raina held her shaking mother in her arms as she screamed for her mate. Purple healed on her skin, but slowly. Steven didn't fight back, the most he did was try to restrain Kiya's vengeful hands but failed as she continued to deliver her fury through the assault.

*"I want you to die! You took my light, and I will take your life!"*

I couldn't let Kiya do this! Her rage was enough to tear the earth to its core, but I couldn't let her kill her parents. Once she crosses that line, there is no return. As much as her anger pulsates through her body, she'll come to regret what she was done.

I cannot allow her to fall into the same darkness I had. She should've taken her rage out on my father and me. We're the ones who hurt her the most.

When I tackled the woman to the ground, fear struck my heart. Not because I might have hurt her, but I'd realize how terrifying she could be. Eyes glowing, piercing javelins into my soul—the color blue

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frightened me. Kiya's strength was inhuman, different from a wolf's strength. Fighting to restrain her was like holding down a rapid, all-powerful Alpha with nothing to lose. Jaws snapping, nostrils flaring, and claws marking deep red lines in my forearm.

Was I like this? Was this how she saw me back then?

5

"Let me go! I will kill them! I will kill everyone that has ever hurt me!"

A grave threat like that earns a stay in our 'hospital' dungeons. But this was different. Kiya was not speaking from a place of genuine hatred.

**"She's in pain..."** Onyx whimpered at the sight of our mate. **"I can't reach her wolf! She's blocked her off completely! Comfort her, goddamnit!"**

That explains it. Without her wolf, Kiya couldn't manage her emotions. Her other half couldn't reason with or tame her. She was worse than a rogue. "Kiya, snap out of it! This isn't you! Come back to your senses!"

A whole slew of vile words flew out of her mouth as she struggled in my grip, threatening to kill me. She truly was the mate of an Alpha, only a Luna could

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overpower my strength like this. Kiya's out for blood, and I was scared it wouldn't stop with her family. She'll slay this entire pack if she wanted to.

What happened next was a blur. Her friends came barreling in, surrounding, and doing their best to comfort her. A twinge of jealousy entered my heart as I watched Kiya slowly, yet steadily, descend from her high. I wanted to be the one to calm her down. I was her damn mate!

Vindictive blue vanished to deep brown, a tsunami of deep sadness varnishing over her face. Kiya couldn't speak. She shook like a powerful earthquake as tears bucketed down from her eyes. My heart shattered. I've wondered how deep Kiya's pain went, and I underestimated its depth.

I wanted nothing more but to take her into my arms and soak up all her agony, so she didn't have to feel it anymore. Her suffering made me suffer. Onyx, though, deep within me, howled in sorrow as he felt it all. He, too, wanted to comfort Kiya.

But we have a long road ahead of us before that happens.

Before any of us could blink, Kiya sprang onto her feet and bolted out of the hall. Out of the packhouse.

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Out of our sight. An arm forced me back, halting me from going after my pained mate.

"That's not a good idea." Beta Jacqueline remarked.  
"She needs to be alone."

Fuck that! With security issues around the pack border and the impending doom of another rogue attack, I was not leaving Kiya alone and vulnerable. I yanked my arm out of the woman's grip and marched towards the door.

"Alpha Neron, wait!" The human, Abigail, used her body to shield the door. "Listen. Kiya should be alone right now."

"Move out of my way," I snarled. Humans were unaffected by the Alpha's command, but it'll be a snowy day in hell before I'd let one stop me.

"Neron, please." I turn my head to see Raina walking over. Ashley gathered the table napkins to clean the blood off her husband. "It's our fault she's like this. I...we've pushed her too far."

"What happened?" I demanded, this time with my innate Alpha authority. Her head bowed as she spilled everything from beginning to end. The urge to tear this family apart had never been greater. I

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swallowed my frustration and looked at my Beta Female dead in her eyes.

"Did you think, after all that happened, it would be easy for her to forgive and forget?"

"At least there's someone with some brains in this pack," Sapphire mumbled. "It took Kiya months to trust any of us, and we aren't the ones who hurt her! What makes you think she'll trust any of you in a few weeks?"

The Lanes bowed their heads in shame, the gravity of their mistake settling. I sigh in frustration, angry with them but also worried for Kiya. Just how far had she run off? Would she come back?

Regardless of what anyone says, I was going after her.

Ignoring their pleas and cries, I took off after her fragrant scent. The house was silent. How odd we didn't gain an audience given how loud the commotion was. I tracked her scent of honeyed strawberries into a deep, darkened part of the woods north of the packhouse. Already, I didn't want to be here.

It was the place where my mother and sister took

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their last breaths. The one place I vowed to never come back to.

But why did Kiya come here?

Through the barks of the trees, the strong vibe of anger faded into silent serenity. Kiya was on her knees near the edge of the large pond, running her fingers through the clear liquid. The half-moon in the sky shone its ethereal light upon her, giving her an enchanting, otherworldly look. Ripples danced through the waters, putting on a display.

Such a drastic change. One moment she was ready to tear the world apart and the next, she was peaceful. Yet, I could feel this wasn't Kiya.

This was someone else.

"I know you're there, Neron." The voice coming from my woman was not her own. It was slightly deeper, solemn, and unwavering. There was the edge of authority not normally heard from Kiya, and I admit, it scared me a little. "Are you going to keep looking at me like a creep, or are you going to speak?"

**"It's her wolf!"** Onyx yipped in excitement. **"My mate! Mine!"**

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### *Artemis*

I rose to my feet, turning to face the Alpha. Preferably, he shouldn't be here. Kiya, deep in her pain and horrifically triggered, retreated into the recesses of her mind. Thus, I was now in full control of her body. It was nothing new but needed if my human cannot hold the reins of the reality that loved to torment her daily. This had happened more times than I could count.

After she retreated to the forest, she begged me to take control. Unfortunately, I knew that meant Kiya wouldn't show herself for some time. Even the strongest humans need a break from time to time.

My eyes track Neron's movements as he slowly approaches, hesitant at my sudden change. I could hear Onyx within him, eager to come out and claim me. It made me sick. I growled, low enough for that blackened wolf to hear and to delete the fantasy of our mating from his horny mind.

"Are you Kiya's wolf?" Neron asked uncertainly.

I smirk. "Did the blue eyes give it away? Yes, I am."

"Why did Kiya relinquish control?"

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"Disappointed?" I arched an eyebrow.

"N-No, I didn't mean it like that." Neron shut his eyes and took in a deep breath. "I want to know if Kiya's okay."

"She isn't," I replied, crossing my arms. "She's taking a break." I found a boulder protruding from the earth and took a seat. "When a werewolf goes through stress beyond what they could handle, they forcibly could give their wolves control over their bodies. A forced switch, one might say. The wolf takes control, and the human rests."

"Yes, I'm aware of that phenomenon." Neron leaned against a tree, hands stuffed in his pant pockets. "If you don't mind me asking, what is your name?" I arch an eyebrow. "After all this time, I realize that neither Onyx nor I knew who you are."

"Artemis," I answered. "Named after our moon goddess' distant twin."

"Artemis..." He savored my name on his tongue as he'd finally found an oasis after a long journey through a desert. "It fits you."

I gave a curt nod before turning my eyes to the majestic moon above. I felt my goddess' presence, although not as strong as if it were on a full moon.

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"Kiya is in a lot of pain, Neron. Deeper than anyone could imagine."

"...How deep?"

"Imagine yourself walking through a valley of endless darkness." I began. "The darkness is a living, breathing entity with claws and jaws, pulling you deeper into their abysmal world. It embraces you tightly, dragging you down quicker than you imagine. It is persistent, cruel, and torments your body, heart, and soul on the way down. It reminds you you're weak, a failure, and that death is a better solace than life. It warms you, yet it brings a mind-numbing chill."

"Occasionally, there was that spec of light. Of hope. You run to it, grasping it as tight as you can. But every so often, the darkness comes back and pulls you into a keyless prison. You scream, but no one hears you. It takes, and takes, and takes...until there is nothing left."

I rose from my rock, inching closer to the Alpha who dared to look at me in pity. "That is what I see every single day in Kiya's mind. Some days are better than others. The darkness...the depression...it is a silent killer. It has taken so much, and Kiya had to fight to get those things back."

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"You felt everything..." Neron's shame forced him to bow his head, unable to look me in the eye.

"Everything that I did."

"Not just you." I huffed. "Your father and everyone else too. When my human hurts, I hurt. I feel her pain. Your father didn't just beat her. He beat me too, commanding me to shift and from there, either he or Angelo would hurt me. I don't know who's worse, the man or the beast."

"I didn't know Dad hurt you too."

"You'd be surprised. He's the only one who ever saw me in my true form." I shrugged, stretching my neck to rid some kinks.

"Artemis." Neron stood up straight. "You're Onyx's mate."

"It is rather unfortunate, but true."

"I won't stop until I earn back forgiveness from both you and Kiya. But, please, don't deprive this chance for Onyx to meet you. He's waited for years, through my foolishness."

"Ah." I rolled my eyes. "Onyx is not exempt from my anger. He didn't do a damn thing to stop you from hurting my human and me."

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"Because he couldn't," Neron admitted. "I didn't want him to. I knew he'd stop me, and I didn't want him to interfere in my twisted sense of vengeance."

"He's an Alpha. He had the strength. He didn't have the courage. The first time we spoke was that fateful day in your ceremony when we touched and confirmed our mate bond."

"Why didn't we feel the bond before?" He inquired.

"As love drives out hate, hate drives out love. Your violence clouded the bond and thus, when you struck, the sparks weren't there. That night during your ceremony, when we touched, it was the first time that it wasn't out of anger. Does that answer your question?" I walked around him, already having my fill of his presence. I was tired and want to go to sleep. However, a hand stopped me. Sparks rocketed through my arm and forearm, involuntarily making me shudder. I turned to be met with striking gold, no longer sapphire blue.

Great. It was fucking Onyx.

"Don't walk away from me. Please." Onyx's voice was rougher, deeper, and more commanding. Once upon a time, that voice would have made me go weak in the knees. "I want to explain myself to you, angel."

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"We aren't at the threshold for pet names," I yanked my arm from his grasp.

"I...I apologize." Onyx bowed his head. An Alpha never bows his head, unless it was someone, he respects like a pack elder. Or his mate. Ugh. "You're right, Artemis. I was too weak to stop my human. I should have been stronger to protect you and Kiya."

"It's too late now, Onyx." I retorted. "Apologies don't and won't erase the years of abuse. I bet, deep down, you believed that Kiya is responsible for the death of Ashia and Angelika."

"Angelika...?"

"Nuria's wolf," I replied. "Our Moon Goddess told me after I died. I'm sorry you never got to meet your sister wolf. But that doesn't deter us from the fact that you did not protect us. It only got worse after I awakened. You were nowhere to be found. Even if the mate bond wasn't established you knew that abusing a fellow pack member was a crime."

"Yes, I know that." Molten gold gazed into my electric blue, his side of the bond reaching out to mine. "What can I do so you don't look at me with such hatred? I can't stand it, Artemis."

"Prove it." He gave me a questioning look, but I

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continued. "Prove to me you are remorseful. I believe in action. Neron needs to prove himself to Kiya, and you to me. Don't give me soft promises, mean what you say and change. You're on a time constraint."

"What?"

"I'm only here for the summer. You have until the end of summer. Afterward, we're not coming back. Ever."

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green rose

except she is attacking people  
who are actually guilty of the c...



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