

Chapter 73 - The Warning

"One cannot answer for his courage when he has never been in danger." — Francois de La Rochefoucauld

Neron

I stood by the window in my office, watching the training sessions on the lush grass. The pup trainees combat each other, getting stronger each day. Small hands and feet swing and land on their targets joined with shouts of power and pride intermingling in the sweaty atmosphere. A small smile creeps on my face at their progress, the pups were becoming stronger every day. Soon, they'll be on par with their adult counterparts.

It was all thanks to Kiya's talent and leadership. Despite missing sessions because of situations out of her control, she bounced back and so did the pups. I couldn't be any prouder.

I needed to protect her at all costs.

After last night's debacle, I boosted border security to the max. Some former warriors came out of their retirement to act as agents of protection. No matter how much I disagreed, they insisted firmly, it was for protecting and preserving the future of Zircon Moon.

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And to protect their Luna.

That statement still irks me. I had every right to shoot it down, but I didn't. No one else, besides my father and I, knew of Kiya's refusal. In due course, I'll announce it to the entire pack. Zircon Moon had gone for so long without a proper Luna, and it was my fault. I drove the true Luna away, and the false Luna couldn't be any more incompetent to assume the role.

We were still a powerful pack, but we were incomplete.

Kiya becoming my Luna was the last thing on my mind. My principal focus was protecting her from that...*thing* in case it ever comes back. I've never seen a human-like—no. That thing was not human.

It was akin to a war machine. It was unstoppable, nearly taking me out every chance it got, and I was the fucking Alpha. I was the strongest in my pack and I couldn't take it down on my own. When I got up close, its face scared me more than its fists.

The entity was...empty, soulless. There was no humanity in those horrific red eyes, its face was haunting. That thing was inhuman. Judging by its atypical scent, I could be right.

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It was a soldier on a mission and every soldier had their commander calling the shots. There was someone bigger out there, lurking in the shadows and watching our every move, and they squared their eyes on Kiya.

"Whoever the fuck they are, they'll not touch her," Onyx snarled. His voice was laced with rage and death. **"I'll tear everyone apart for wanting to harm our mate."**

"Lest you and I agree on something."

Sitting back at my desk, I examine the various documents on my desk. Transactions from various investments across Nevada, progress reports, written requests from pack members, notes from other Alphas, the works. I noted down the recent rogue attacks from neighboring packs in the Tri-state area.

Attacks had not calmed down. Alphas were sending warnings to other packs to beware and prepare, something I was all too familiar with. Many smaller packs and refugees were heading to safer zones, including Garnet Moon. However, because of the recent attacks, it was inappropriate to take in evacuees and throw them in danger once more.

"Pardon my intrusion, Alpha Neron, but I have a young woman at our gates demanding to speak with our t

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rainers."

That stole my attention. Who the hell was this woman and how did she know about the trainers? The thought of another potential threat to not only my pack but Kiya set my blood on fire. *"Keep her there, Geo. I'm on my way. What's your take on this outsider?"*

"She smells like a witch."

My mind recalled the discoveries from both Kwame and Valerian at the Witching Hour some time back. Witches were angry about the taboo magic used to revive dead wolves yet supplied no other leads to a rumored coven of corrupt witches. The woman on the outer steps of my territory could be one of them.

With haste, I jogged to the border where two of my border agents held the witch by the arms. Dressed in a maroon blouse and a black pleated skirt, awesome power radiated from the small woman, catching me completely off guard. Her strawberry-blond hair laid over her shoulders in braids and her eyes...

Her eyes were abnormally purple. How unique.

"State your business, witch," I growled. It was not that I had anything against witches. I hate having

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outsiders imposing themselves on my land without my knowledge.

"I'm here to see the Garnet Moon warriors." She avowed in confidence as her eyes held mine. "There's something urgent I need to speak with them about."

"Whatever you need to say, you can say it to me." I crossed my arms. The witch was growing more panicked but continued to hold a firm gaze. She appeared to be sincere, but I was not taking any chances of potential threats. "How did you know they're here?"

"I'll show you if your brutish men would release my arms!" She demanded. "It's getting uncomfortable."

Through the mind-link, I ordered my men to release the witch but to remain on guard in case she tries something. She wiggled her arms to get some feeling back into them before unbuttoning the maroon blouse she wore and exposed the mark over her left breast.

She held the Garnet Moon pack mark, in the same area as Kiya's. Although, it was strange for a witch to bond to a werewolf pack, but it wasn't impossible. "Name?"

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"Phoebe Lacey."

Kiya

"Phoebe!" There was no way she was standing in front of me. Phoebe engulfed me into a tight hug, her head burrowing in my shoulder. Some pup trainees stopped to see the reunion with their trainer and the strange woman. "What are you doing here?"

"We have to talk." She stated with her purple eyes quivering in fear. Wasting no time, I asked Adama, Kwame's brother, to lead the next training sessions. Jackie and the others caught up as soon as they got a whiff of Phoebe's wild berry scent. In no time, the six of us sat in Neron's office with him. Kwame and Valerian joined us soon after.

"Does Alpha Anthony know that you're here?" Sapphire asked.

"Um." Her eyes darted to the side. "No?"

"How did you get here?" Galen asked, crossing his arms.

"Teleportation. I'm not sitting in a car for five

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hours.”

“You could have called us.” Abigail smiled. “This is such a surprise.”

“I didn’t have time. This is too urgent for a phone call.” Phoebe’s eyes found mine. “Because I know you’ve awakened, Kiya.”

My eyes widened. How? There was no way she could have known. She couldn’t detect that power from afar! Then again, witches were powerful. They had magic and senses beyond that of a werewolf.

“Yeah...I did.”

“That puts you in more danger than before,” Phoebe replied, sending shivers down my spine. “How’s the selenite?”

My gaze lands on the bracelet around my wrist. “It’s fine, but it doesn’t feel or look as powerful as it used to.”

“Your awakening weakened the wards I put in them to protect you, thus rendering them useless. You have more power than before, and the original wards only worked if you haven’t awakened. I brought more that could help you.”

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"Wait," Neron spoke, expression dark. "Backtrack. What trouble are you speaking of? Does it have to do with that beast from last night?"

Phoebe's fear became palpable. "Beast? What beast?"

My mind quaked at last night's recollection; the hunter's emotionless face and robotic killer-like movements. "He was bigger than Neron. Much bigger, about twice his build. He wore black and—"

"White skin? Red eyes? Black hair?"

"Yes!" I exclaimed. "How did you know?"

"Wait, you got attacked last night on your date?" Jackie exclaimed, jumping into protective mode. "Little Bit, why didn't you tell us?"

"I was going to..."

"Stop!" Phoebe exclaimed, sighing heavily as if she ran a marathon. "This is much worse than I thought. They sent Cerberus after you."

"Cerberus?" Kwame asked.

"The avatar bounty hunter. Its sole mission is to hunt down awakened avatars." The witch sighed heavily again, but this time, it was as if the weight

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had visibly added to her shoulders. "Avatars are powerful beings born and created from the hands of the gods. Across the pantheons: Greek, Norse, Egyptian, and others, they make avatars to spread their holy messages to all the species on earth, supernatural or otherwise. Some call us demigods. However, not every deity creates an avatar, and we aren't born in the same lifetime. We may skip lifetimes. Unfortunately, when the avatar awakens to their true power, they become a beacon. A beacon that's hunted down for their power. The fact that Cerberus attacked you means that the Masters know who you are."

"Phoebe, how do you know so much about this?" I asked. "And who are the Masters?"

"The Masters are part of an underground cult cut off from the human and supernatural world." Her eyes cast down to her lap. "They have branches that stretch through multiple states of the United States with different leaders and rules. I spent my childhood in that cult, surrounded by corrupt witches. My parents were corrupt witches as well, using their magic to harm and torment. When I showed signs of being Hecate's avatar, they kept me for a different purpose."

Phoebe took a napkin out of her pocket and wiped the makeup off the back of her neck, revealing a

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brown birthmark. The symbol of the triple moon goddess. "This is the telltale sign. I grew up thinking I would never escape the pain of being used for the cult's purpose. To answer to their leader. The Masters hunt avatars all over the country and use them for their power for a secret cause that many kept to themselves faithfully."

"How did you escape?" Darien whispered, worried.

"I...I don't want to talk about that. I've said too much about my past already." Her eyes were on me again. "But the fact remains that now the cult knows about you and its main leader, whoever it is. You're a beacon of hope and light to all werewolf kind, Kiya. You and Artemis are a powerful duo that no elder or Alpha could ever hope to be. Your power puts a target on your back for others to hunt you and use you. Cerberus is nothing compared to what else is in store."

I slumped back in my chair, taking in the gravity of Phoebe's words. Every word, every sentence, added ten tons of cinder block on my shoulders. It weighed heavily on my heart. "I'll never be safe, will I? How did you remain hidden all this time?"

"Hecate is a deity who takes protection seriously. Garnet Moon is my home, my refuge, and I protect it with the help of hidden wards around the territory."

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She took my hand into her cool, soft ones. "I'll do anything to protect it and you. You're my friend and I cannot let you fall in their hands."

She looks at Neron, Valerian, and Kwame. When I looked at Neron, I noticed his claws digging into the arms of his chair, desperately trying to hold back his fury. Phoebe's past was something she never talked about, and it gave me insight into what was potentially after me.

"What could we do to help, Miss Phoebe?" Valerian asked what was on everyone's minds. "Could we stop the cult members from getting to Kiya?"

"Before you ask that, Valerian, I need to know something." I interrupted. Swallowing a nervous gulp of air, I spoke. "Danger is coming to me, I get it. But does that also mean I'm putting everyone else in danger by being here? Cerberus almost beat Neron to death just to get me. Would he do the same to anyone else?"

"He's a beast on a mission. He'll do anything and everything to complete it...even murder. That's how he was programmed. The cult wants you, wants us because of what our goddesses blessed us with. They would do anything to capture any avatar they come across."

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Phoebe sat up straight, dug into her pocket, and gave me a jingling bag filled with more selenite, this time heavy with power. "You can give me your old selenite and I can use that to put protection wards around Zircon Moon to keep your energy shielded for as long as you remain here."

I nodded, sparing glances at Neron, whose eyes caught mine momentarily. Embarrassed, I look away. There was so much on the line here. All because of me. "Okay, Phoebe. We should call Anthony and let him know that you're here so we can—"

"FIRE!"

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*"Run for cover cuz I'm comin' for ya whether or not!
You're ready or not, are you ready or not?" - "Ready or
Not" Resident Evil 2 Rap by JT Music*

Third Person POV

Red. Orange. Yellow. The trio of bright and vibrant colors, yet also the colors of scorching destruction. The conflagration raged on with its satiety dependent on the earth beneath the werewolf territory. It would not stop until green becomes black and wood becomes ash. Its demolition and violence were on par with its caster, an emotionless juggernaut on a mission to capture the woman who escaped him.

Cerberus' unhesitant march echoed amongst the cataclysmic air of fire crackles and helpless screaming. With stomps that shook the roots of the burning trees, he continued forward, flexing his large fingers, yearning for a neck to squeeze. A monster in his own right. It didn't take long to track down the avatar.

The avatar. The one his Lord desires more than diamonds.

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"Stop at nothing to bring her to me. Allow Zircon Moon to burn to ash, for it has been lucky to live for this long. Burn it all. Kill them all. Let nothing stop you."

His Lord's word was law. What he wants, he shall have. Blockages of copious black smoke didn't stop his besetting trek, he passed right through, unfazed until the packhouse was in the line of sight.

Cerberus was ready for ruin.

Brave and selfless. Two words to describe the pack members who helped put out the flames threatening their livelihoods. Buckets, hoses, anything that could connect and hold water is used to stop the inferno.

Yet, the flames fought back hard.

The ranked wolves and warriors worked tirelessly to save their land. Dancing red and orange continued to spread uninhibited, ignoring the very lives it tried to take. The earth cried underneath scorching black, slowly dying as it painted the air with strokes of billowing obsidian black.

'How could this have happened? Why did this happen?'
Kiya asked herself as she directed people to the underground bunker in paths untouched by fire. U

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Understanding their Luna wishes to protect them, they ran as fast as they could to safety. As much as the woman wanted to deny that she was their Luna, internal torment preoccupies her mind.

She felt responsible for the chaos. Horrible attacks began springing out of the woodworks as soon as she came. Was this fate's way of telling her to leave? Though she didn't voice it, she felt responsible of the danger. It squeezed her heart like a boa constrictor preparing its prey for death. What was next after the fire? Would the chaos stop if she left? So many questions with no answers and the frustration contorted her flawless, brown face.

Just when she thought things couldn't get any worse, that's when she heard it.

Stomp!

Stomp!

Stomp!

"Oh, no..." Phoebe's sweet, melodious voice shook with trepidation. Kiya's eyes darted to her witch friend, unable to look past her shaking knees. Her pale skin got impossibly paler and sweat, unknown from her or the boiling heat, clung to her hair and

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skin. "Cerberus is here!"

Kiya's eyes widened in shock. How did he find his way here? Neron and she made sure he lost their trail before they drove back home. Guilt was a monster that took pleasure in gobbling her heart, tugging violently at the bicuspid strings. She felt responsible. Instead of ensuring Zircon Moon's safety, she brought evil to them unknowingly.

The stomps continued and before long, Cerberus showed himself, his skyscraper, bulking body marching through the flame-ridden woodlands with raw evil and determination pulsating through his body. Ranked wolves and warriors stared horrified and agape at the behemoth, seeing nothing like it before. It was a beast on two feet, height rivaling the biggest of Alphas.

Neron growled, hateful of the flawless white skin of Cerberus. As if Onyx's claws never touched him. That infuriated the Alpha the most, the threat he thought he eliminated came for more and it trespassed on his territory.

His home!

"Don't hold back!" He growled through the mind-link to his men and warriors. *"Take that fucker down at all*
c

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osts!"

"What the hell is that thing?" Sapphire exclaimed through the mind-link the Garnet Moon members share. *"I've seen nothing like it!"*

"It's Cerberus, the avatar bounty hunter," Phoebe explained, grabbing Kiya's hand as the wolf ground her teeth so hard that they might shatter. *"He's here for Kiya. And me."*

"We won't let it touch you. Either of you!" Beta Jacqueline's passion and determination burned hotter than the flames surrounding her. She won't let anyone hurt her friends. She won't lose the people she loves.

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall, right?" Galen's award-winning smirk rose on his face as he shifted into his yellow-grey wolf form with Mikhail as an ash gray wolf. Jacqueline and Sapphire followed suit, their large wolves in front of Kiya and Phoebe, accompanied by their mates, Isaiah as a deep brown wolf and Abigail armored to the teeth.

Inside the packhouse, Darien had his hands on Odessa's shoulders as she glared back at her mate hard. "If you get killed, Darien, I'll kick your ass. I swear to our Moon Goddess."

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"Me? Getting killed? Never!" The black-haired man chuckled humorously. "I'll be back for you, my love. I promise. Now, you need to remain here while I help take care of the chaos."

"I..." She shut her brown eyes, huffing in a deep breath. "Be careful, okay?"

"I will." He leaned in and planted a soft kiss on her cheek. Ariel purred deep at the touch of her mate, wanting to claw out more for Sirius. Odessa, however, held the lid down on her anger. Darien was going out to stop the flames, but through the mind-links, it ensures gossip. She heard about a beast after the avatar from the frightened pack members.

Of course. Darien was going out to protect the wretched cur she hated. No doubt Neron was as well since he had fallen for her like a lovesick puppy. As Darien retreated after Jacqueline yelled for him through the link, she growled deeply.

Kiya's responsible for this. It was all her fault. Her and her stupid magic powers. If Odessa wanted anyone to die today, it should be her. Emily couldn't deliver on poisoning the bitch when she gave her the cyanide. Perks of having human connections through her dead parents. But, now, she needed to figure out another way to push Raina's sister out.

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Kiya was a speck of dirt on her window of life and she needed her gone.

Permanently.

Cerberus was to a tyrant, as the wolves were to peasants. He was an unstoppable machine on par with Kratos, Hercules, or a vengeful Odin. As wolves and soldiers attacked, he fought back. Black armor already drenched with the blood of fallen warriors as he beat them to the ground or crushed their heads.

Wolves attacked at all angles, gnawing on his flesh, but he was unaffected. He was a war machine programmed to fight and kill. Possessing no heart or soul, Cerberus was a robot following its master's orders. A follower of a monster. Obedient to a devilish fiend.

Red eyes spotted the two avatars. Kiya and Phoebe. Bashing wolves and soldiers away violently with his arms, his march increased in speed as he advanced towards them. Phoebe grabbed Kiya's hand and started running away from the flame-torn battlefield.

Cerberus took a swing at the avatars but narrowly missed because the women used their height and

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agility to their advantage. Kwame jumped between the women and Cerberus without hesitation, snapping his jaws onto his thick neck. Roaring, the juggernaut ripped him away and smashed Kwame into the brick of the packhouse.

Brick groaned when shifted out of place. The Gamma fell to the ground unconscious, blood slowly dribbling from his jaw. Valerian and Neron, both in wolf form, howled in pain for their fallen Gamma and thrust forward to drag Cerberus away from finishing him and harming the avatars.

"Phoebe, wait!" Kiya exclaimed, pulling her friend to a halt. "We can't run! We can't leave them to fight Cerberus on their own!"

"Kiya, we have to!" Phoebe shouted back. "We need Cerberus to follow us off the territory, so he won't harm anyone else. He'll kill this entire pack if it means he'll capture us!"

Brown eyes darted to the reddening battlefield. Blood and fire were lovers upon the blackened canvas, painting a horrific picture of gore and pain. Cerberus was a skilled artist. More skilled than anyone she knew. She watched as he beat the fighters into the ground like a heavyweight competitor. Blood sprayed from the mouths of Galen, Darien, Jacqueline, Sapphire... even Neron and

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Valerian. More wolves emerged from around the territory, determined to take the beast down.

Cerberus was *unstoppable*.

There was nowhere to escape the flames that continue to burn. Neither woman would make it out unscathed. Kiya couldn't run. She *refused* to run. Cerberus wanted her and Phoebe. What was the point in leading him away if the others would try to stop him as they were now?

Running wasn't an option for her.

"Kiya. No." Phoebe warned, feeling her rebellion through her emotions. "I know what you're going to do. You can't fight Cerberus, he's untouchable!"

"So am I." Her determination ignited her avatar powers, sending a flood of pure moon magic through her veins. Black shifted to pure white, brown shifted to blue, and white markings etched into deep brown flesh. "I'm not running. You can, but I won't."

Phoebe watched as Kiya turned and ran towards the war, throwing her safety away to help her friends and former pack. The witch admired her courage but couldn't help thinking she was acting like a hot-blooded fool. She knew first-hand that beasts like

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Cerberus couldn't be defeated effortlessly. If an army of powerful wolves couldn't stop him, what made Kiya think she could?

She winced when Kiya was picked up by the throat and thrown hard to the ground. But she bounced back, using her newfound power for good. But, as a recently awakened avatar, she was exerting too much energy. She was going to lose stamina fast...

This was why she, too, ran into the battlefield. Strawberry blond rapidly shifting to midnight black and eyes silver as moonstone, Phoebe whispered a spell hoping to slow Cerberus down. A purple, glowing 'X' appeared beneath his feet, mighty magic thrusting upward and engulfing the goliath. Cerberus, enraged, stepped out of the magic dome toward Phoebe.

Her advancement earned her a hit to the face that knocked her out cold.

"Phoebe!" Kiya screamed but couldn't run to her. Cerberus turned and threw her like a baseball, slamming her body into the packhouse walls. Her body slumped to the charred ground with a strained groan and aches in every part of her body. With energy depleting fast and vision blurred from the impact, she couldn't see the behemoth advancing on her.

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The wolves and warriors fell, either struggling to get up or unconscious. Cerberus lifted a hand, and with a sickly shift, it formed into a monstrous claw designed for the execution.

She couldn't see it.

She couldn't see his arms lengthening like a snake, thrusting toward her.

Neron could smell the danger.

The threat.

Fuck all his injuries as a black wolf. It didn't stop him from bolting forward, swiftly shifting back into his human form to shield Kiya from the hit. Muscled arms wrapped tight around her body and her face shielded in shade.

Everything froze.

No one moved. Or breathed.

Kiya slowly looked up, her vision clearing to see *Neron's* warming smile. Even drenched in sweat and covered in blood and wounds, he was still smiling.

For her.

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"Kiya..."

She felt it. Something wet. Something sticky.

That was when the vile metallic scent hit her.

Bringing her hand up, her blue eyes widened in horror to find it drenched in thick, crimson blood. Kiya stared at it in unadulterated horror, wondering if Cerberus had hurt her worse than she thought. But she isn't. She felt no other pain besides the pulsating aches around her body.

Which meant...

"NERON!"

Wet unsheathing was heard and Neron toppled over to his side, revealing a horrific sight that Kiya wished hadn't burned itself into her mind.

The Alpha laid on the grass, naked, with a deep, punctured wound through his stomach. Blood gushed out like a raging waterfall, soaking the earth with no consequence. The blood on Kiya's hand was never hers. It was Neron's.

He protected her from Cerberus onslaught. A wound meant for her; he took without hesitation. And now, he lays as his labored breaths bought tears to her

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eyes.

"Neron! Oh Goddess, you fucking idiot!" She cried, pressing her hand to his wound to stop the bleeding. "Why? Why did you do that?"

"To...protect..." He whispered like talking expended much energy from his lips. He wheezed and winced from the added pressure to his gaping wound. "I'm...sorry..."

"No! You're going to be okay!" A flurry of tears fell from her eyes as she began screaming for help. Any kind of help. He couldn't die for her!

But help didn't come.

Cerberus tore Kiya from Neron's bleeding body while she screamed for him, hands dripping with his blood. She screamed for her friends. For everyone, she cared about. Tossed over the juggernaut's shoulder with an unconscious Phoebe, she continued to struggle; hitting and scratching his back—anything and everything for him to release her.

All in desperation.

Behind Cerberus opened a darkened portal, swirling with malignant magic. Kiya powerlessly watched her

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friends struggle to stand through their injuries, growing farther away as he took her and Phoebe through the portal.

Zircon Moon closed before her eyes. Gone.

But one thing's for sure.

The scent of Neron's blood would never leave her.

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