

## Chapter 16

After Eshe checked me out, she determined I could go home, but she still told me to keep the bandages on and to obviously redress my hands when they got too filthy, and Akilina took me home. But I still hadn't seen Jack, I'd heard his voice, and felt his presence nearby, but never saw him. And I began to accept that he didn't want to see me, which, was okay. I understood I hurt him, and he didn't deserve to be around someone too conflicting for him, in personality and powers.

Akilina noticed my change in mood when we arrived back at my adobe.

"What's wrong?" She asked. I shrugged.

"Nothing, why would something be wrong?" She raised a pale eyebrow.

"I know what look. What's on your mind?" She followed me inside to the living area, sitting across from me, wings gone. I sighed, laying down on a pile of furs, savoring how much I missed them.

"I just- I haven't seen Jack... at all. I'm just accepting that he doesn't want to see me anymore, which is okay. I hurt him, and he doesn't want to be around me. We're too conflicting with each other." Akilina's pale violet eyes were wide with a mix of bewilderment and dismay.

"Catori, Jack does not hate you, he does want to be with you, but he feels that you need some space considering everything what happened to you. Your back was bleeding! And you were under Pitch's control for weeks!" I looked up at her, eyes welling up with tears.

"I feel so ashamed for everything..." Akilina's face softened in sympathy.

"We've all been there, I promise you what." She moved to sit next to me and hugged me, "we all go through these times, you just need time to think and work things through, you know me, Heath and Eshe are here for you, right?" I sniffed and nodded, hugging her back.

"Askwali."

"You're welcome, Catori. Get some rest. I'll see you soon." I bid her goodbye and watched her disappear into the night.

I thought about her words, Jack wanted to be with me. I didn't know exactly in what form but... it sounded good. But he was right, I needed space. Time to myself, be away from the Guardians.

I immediately got to work, cleaning up home. And, I'm a naturally traditional person, stick to what I knew, what I was familiar with. I did things my mother and my cousins and I used to do together...

I got lost in time, reliving old memories, smiling as I did so as if they were all right here next to me. But it struck me, I never got my tooth box, so, how would I be able to remember everything so clearly...

I dropped the bowl I was holding when I realized it, and remembered, Pitch forcing me to open my tooth box, which he'd stolen. He used my own memories against me, for what purpose, I didn't know. But it horrified me, knowing Pitch had done that, but, I was powerless to do anything about it.

I had to move forward. I didn't want to dwell on it anymore, and honestly, my tooth box was lost, it wouldn't be worth going back there to look for it.

A few days after coming home, I was reunited with a few fellow spirits I had gotten to know after meeting Akilina, Heath, and Eshe.

Bluebird, Coyote, Roadrunner, and Thunderbird, all respectively, and the last I met was Ashkii, he and Thunderbird were the eldest spirits of the Native population that I knew. They'd passed their extensive knowledge and wisdom onto younger spirits such as myself and Bluebird, we were the youngest and the newest.

I was beyond overjoyed to see them again, and despite his blindness, Ashkii told me the pain of my scars on my hand would fade with time. When I told him about the black fire I was supposedly using, he became alarmed. He did not go into detail, but I couldn't pry the answers from him. I guessed I needed to learn on my own.

But truly, despite it all, Bluebird and Coyote brought me to a Spirit Powwow to celebrate my safe return, I hadn't had this much fun in ages and I was more than happy to participate, even if I didn't dance well, nobody minded.

I danced my heart away that night, feeling the pain of what had happened with Pitch and Nascha blow away with the embers of the fire, but I knew deep down, I needed to do something about Nascha though. I needed to free her somehow from Pitch's grasp. Sure, she was a skinwalker, but Pitch was certainly influencing her.

But I wanted to be happy tonight, and I danced to the beat of my heart and the drums.

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