

THE MOON AND HER SECRET

CHAPTER 16 NO.16

An abundance of questions swirled through Lana's head as she made her way back to the station with Autumn in her arms. She couldn't really determine whether or not she was surprised to find out that Ray, her guardian of 10 years, would end up being a werewolf just like River. Ray must've worked incredibly hard to keep that a secret from her and yet in a blink of an eye, the truth came crashing down.

As for Maddison and Luis, she somehow expected them to be werewolves as well since they were always so close with River, almost like family. Lana tried to understand why she could hear them speak in their wolf form. Since the four of them were openly surprised by that fact, it meant that it was not normal for a human to be able to hear them. Lana could feel a headache approaching the more she thought about the situation and felt like she just wanted to crawl into bed and hope that this was all just some weird dream.

Autumn stirred and Lana silently thanked the heavens that the girl was finally awake since her arms were getting sore from carrying her. She stopped walking and placed the girl down on her feet. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and finally looked up at Lana.

"Autumn?" Lana called out. "How are you feeling?"

"Sleepy..." the girl mumbled.

Lana smiled, glad that Autumn was a heavy sleeper and slept through everything that happened earlier. "My name is Lana. Your mum is waiting for

you back at the station and I came to bring you back.” Lana cooed as she held out her hand to Autumn.

“Okay...” Autumn said as she took hold of Lana’s hand. They continued walking ahead.

“Could you tell me what happened? How did you get separated from your mum?” Lana asked, wanting to keep Autumn awake by stirring up conversation.

“I saw a firefly and wanted to catch it to show mummy,” she answered.

“That’s very sweet of you.”

“But it disappeared and I became lost,” she frowned. “I tried to look for mummy but then I got sleepy.”

“And you took a nap?” Lana asked doubtfully, surprised that the child was brave enough to just sleep in the middle of the forest by herself.

Autumn nodded. “It was very cold but then it wasn’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“A big dog came to sleep with me!” she announced happily. “I had a good dream during that nap too,” she beamed.

“A dog?” Lana asked.

Autumn nodded enthusiastically. "It kept me warm during my nap!"

"Ah...what a sweet dog." Lana muttered, hiding her smile from Autumn as she could imagine River's horrified reaction at the thought of being called a dog.

"Do you think we can go look for the dog?"

Lana let out a small chuckle. "Why do you want to look for the dog?"

"To thank it of course! Mummy always told me that we must thank those who help us and we must do good things for them in return."

"What do you think a dog would want in return?"

"Hmm...a big bone!!"

"Pfft!" Lana could not help herself from laughing. The images of River getting a bone as a thank you gift was making Lana's eyes tear up.

"Is it not a good gift?"

"No! I mean yes, it is a good gift!" Lana said as she tried to calm herself.

"Right? I think the dog will be very happy," Autumn said with a small smile.

"You are such a sweet kid, Autumn. But please remember, you shouldn't wander off on your own ever again, okay? Your mum is worried sick."

"I know...am sorry," she pouted.

Lana never thought of herself as someone who was fond of kids. They were always loud and messy and never had a care on earth but seeing Autumn's chubby rosy cheeks made Lana's fingers itch as she wanted to squeeze them affectionately.

Soon, the both of them were approaching the station. Lana noticed familiar figures standing around the building. Ellie was there, nervously fidgeting beside Hannah who was close by to accompany her. The sheriff and a few other officers were also standing around the area talking to Taylor and Jack.

Lana's eyes quickly found Ray among the crowd. He wore a serious expression as he looked around the forest, probably waiting for Lana to finally appear with Autumn. She could feel her heart pounding harshly from anxiety, or maybe it was the thrill of finally knowing that soon she will not be kept in the dark anymore. All the secrets about the night creatures that cohabit with the townsfolk of Rosecliff were finally going to be revealed to her, or so she hoped.

Before she could say or do anything, she felt Autumn tug her hand away from Lana's grip. "Mummy!!" Autumn suddenly exclaimed as she ran forward.

"Autumn! My baby!" Ellie cried out as she ran towards her child.

Lana watched as the two reunited with a tight hug. Ellie was in tears, this time it wasn't from distress or fear of losing her child. They were tears of relief as she buried her face deep against Autumn's hair. Lana felt a strange sting in her chest, somehow watching the two of them made Lana think of her own mother.

Strangely enough, this was the first time after a long while that Lana caught herself reminiscing about her mother. In her mind, broken fragments of memories she has of her parents were vague and sometimes Lana would question if these memories were really hers or not. She was always afraid to mention this to Ray, feeling as though she would let him and her parents down if she admitted that she did not have proper memories of them.

She often tried to justify her situation, thinking that it could've been childhood trauma that caused this problem. Losing both her parents at a young age is bound to have its repercussions after all, and yet to Lana she refused to even acknowledge it as a problem.

Lana brushed away the complicated emotions that were crawling into her mind as she made her way to where Ellie and Autumn were. She wanted to comfort Ellie but also to guide them back into the station as it was starting to get colder now that it was already late at night. Lana tensed when Ellie suddenly grabbed her arm.

“Thank you! Thank you so much for bringing my baby back to me! I don’t know how I could ever repay you!” she sobbed.

“Don’t mention it—” before Lana could finish her sentence, Ellie tugged Lana’s arm roughly and pulled her into a tight embrace. Lana stiffened, not sure what to do in this situation. She could hear someone giggle and felt two little arms around her neck. It was Autumn, wanting to join in on the hug.

“Thank you Lana!” Autumn chimed in.

Lana smiled and allowed herself to enjoy the warmth that the two were emitting.

“Miss Ellie.” A voice called. Lana peaked up only to find Ray standing above them. Lana pulled away from the hug and stood up, averting her gaze from Ray as she somehow felt embarrassed that she was in a group hug with Ellie and Autumn for a long moment.

“Y-Yes?” Ellie replied, her attention fully on Ray now.

“The sheriff would like a word with you. If that is alright with you?” He smiled as he offered his hand out to her.

“O-Okay, sure!” she said as Ray pulled her up. Lana watched silently as he guided both Ellie and Autumn towards the sheriff.

Lana wanted to then sneak into the station to get some rest after hours of tracking the forest. Her entire body was aching but she was stopped by Hannah who was standing at the entrance with her hands on her waist and her dark eyes glaring daggers at Lana.

“You punk!” she exclaimed.

“Excuse me??” Lana asked in surprise.

“How many times do we have to tell you to stop switching off your walkie-talkie?!” she grumbled.

Lana let out a nervous laugh. “Autumn was sleeping and I didn’t want to wake

her,” she lied.

Hannah studied Lana’s expression for a long moment before finally sighing. “Jeez, you had us worried. I tried contacting you after you told me you were going to change your spot but I couldn’t get in touch with you at all! And then Ray suddenly shows up and tells us that you found Autumn and ugh!! Everything was a mess, Lana! A mess!” she complained as she flailed her arms around dramatically.

“I’m sorry for stressing you out! But it’s over now, right?” she reassured her as she patted Hannah’s shoulder.

Hannah pulled Lana into a hug. “But seriously Danley, if you do this again I’m going to make Ray fire your ass.” She whispered into Lana’s ear.

Lana flinched back, only to see Hannah’s sweet smile. “You wouldn’t...” she muttered.

“I’m not a fan of gaining wrinkles due to how much I worry about you, okay?” she huffed as she pushed the door open and entered the station.

Lana followed her in with a sigh. “Yea, yea, I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

Hannah scoffed. “As if, you said that last time too and that promise ended up in the gutters!”

“...right...” Lana muttered as she glanced back to where Ray was standing. His eyes caught Lana's for a second. She wondered if he could sense that she was looking at him. She frowned and turned away as she made her way

to the break room. She plopped onto the couch in the breakroom and attempted to get some rest. Somehow, Lana had a feeling that it was going to be a long night, especially after she goes home with Ray later.

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