

THE MOON AND HER SECRET

CHAPTER 4 NO.4

“You’re early,” Ray said with a surprised look on his face when Lana walked into the rangers’ station. Lana offered him a weak smile, not really in the mood to explain that the only reason she came in early was to get her mind off River and his shitty attitude towards her. Lana placed her stuff in the locker before glancing out the window to gaze at the forest. The sun was setting and the longer Lana stared out at the forest, the more she remembered her consistent dream.

Rosecliff may be a small town with nothing much to do, but there is a large forest in between Rosecliff and its neighbouring town Highcaster. This forest is a well-known tourist spot for people who are into recreational hobbies such as hiking, camping and even hunting during certain seasons. But to Lana, it was a place where she could come to escape.

Her duties as a ranger was not too taxing, all she had to do was occasionally go on patrols with the other rangers and make sure the campers at the campsite were obeying the forest laws.

“Lana,” Ray called her over as she was tightening her boots.

“What’s up?”

“We got word that there’s a disturbance in the south part of the forest, Jack and I will head over to check it out.” Ray said urgently as he grabbed his tools. “Could you man-the-fort until Hannah comes over?”

“Yeah, of course. Do you know what’s wrong?”

“Apparently some campers wandered out too far.” Jack replied as he opened the door for Ray.

Lana nodded and watched the two men leave.

After a while, Hannah, another part timer and Lana’s senior arrived, the two chatted until the sun went down. Lana was starting to get worried since she hadn’t heard back from Ray or Jack. Feeling her anxiety overwhelm her, Lana stood up suddenly causing Hannah to jolt in surprise.

“What’s wrong?” Hannah frowned.

“I’m going down to the campsite, just to check on things.” She said as she grabbed her walkie-talkie from the table and fastened it on her belt.

“Okay, I’ll signal you if I hear anything from Jack or Ray.” She said reassuringly, somehow knowing that Lana was antsy about it. “Be careful!”

“Thanks, and I will.” she waved at her before leaving.

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Down at the campsite everything seemed to be in order. There were some children chasing each other around in a game of tag. Their parents were close by, deep in conversation. Lana approached a group sitting around a campfire and reminded them to put out the fire properly before they rest for the night. Nothing seemed out of place so Lana decided to head back to the station.

She paused for a second—feeling the cold breeze brush against her cheek. Somehow, her instincts were screaming at her. Something was not right. Just in cue, she heard a loud growl. She turned around towards the campsite but the campers did not seem to be affected by the sound. Lana reached for her walkie-talkie from her pocket.

“Hannah, are you there? Over.” Lana whispered through the device.

The loud static that emitted from the walkie-talkie echoed through the quiet forest. “I’m here, what’s up? Over.”

“I think there’s a potential threat east of the campsite. I heard a growl. Over.”

“Shit, I think you should come back. We’ll try to get in contact with Ray. Over.”

“I think it might be a bear. Over.”

“Lana, come back right now, okay?! Over.”

Lana stayed silent. She knows it’s not logical for her to venture through the forest alone but thinking about how close the threat was to the campsite, her moral compass was not letting her walk away—she has to protect the campers from threats like this after all.

“I’m going to check it out. Over.” Lana said. Before Hannah could protest, Lana turned down the walkie-talkie’s volume and walked towards the source of the sound.

Lana wrecked her brain to bring out all the knowledge Ray taught her when it came to tracking animals. She walked swiftly yet silently, trying her best to not alert any creatures or frightened them. Lana sighed when she realized she walked quite a distance away from the campsite and there was no bear in sight. Feeling a bit silly that she might have overreacted, Lana took out her walkie-talkie to inform Hannah about the false alarm.

Rustling of the bushes nearby made her freeze. She moved carefully towards it only to find a large creature on the ground. Although it was night, the soft moonlight penetrating the clouds above made it clear to Lana that the creature was injured. Lana steeled herself as she made her way closer to the animal. Now that she was close enough to the creature, she recognized it

as a wolf covered in dark grey fur. Its mouth was slightly opened as it struggled to breathe through harsh pants.

Lana's eyes trailed down to its body where its torso was bleeding from what seemed to be three deep slashes. The dark liquid painted the grassy ground below them.

"What happened to you...?" Lana whispered. The wolf's ear twitched but its eyes remained shut. She knew that if she did not help it, it was going to bleed out. She pulled her walkie-talkie towards her lips. "Hannah, I need some assistance. Over."

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With the help of Hannah and some nice campers, they managed to carry the wolf to the back of the rangers' pickup truck after much difficulty. Lana turned

to Hannah who looked sick at the fact that her hands and clothes were covered with the wolf's blood.

"When Ray comes back, let him know I'm going to take the wolf to the vet."

"...okay...be careful." Hannah replied, not even trying to hide the fact that she was getting nauseous.

Lana got into the driver's seat and shut the door. "I have some spare clothes in my locker, change into that okay?"

"...Thanks," Hannah said as she weakly waved goodbye to Lana.

The drive to the animal clinic took around 10 minutes from the rangers' station. But to Lana's dismay, it was closed for the night due to the vet being out of town. Lana sighed deeply as she went over to look at the wolf. Before moving the creature to the truck, they managed to loosely wrap the wounds up but Lana knows that the wounds need to be cleaned to avoid infection.

To her better judgement, Lana got back into the driver's seat and decided to drive home.

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Lana cleaned and bandaged the wolf's wounds as best as she could. She was worried that the longer she spent with it, it might wake up and attack her. Since she was alone at home, she parked the truck in the garage and left the wolf in the back of the truck. After the entire process, Lana was famished and her back was aching.

“Get well soon, buddy.” She muttered to the wolf as she dared to gently run her fingers through its soft fur. Again, its ear twitched but its eyes remained shut. Lana walked to the door, she switched off the garage lights before heading to the bathroom to take a long awaited shower.

Feeling refreshed from her shower, Lana decided to cook something for dinner. Her phone rang while she was stir-frying some chicken.

“Lana?!” Ray’s panicked voice made Lana jump.

“Y-Yeah?” she answered hesitantly as she switched off the gas.

“What’s this about a wolf???”

“Well, it’s a long story...” Lana muttered. As though Ray had reminded her about the large animal resting in her garage, she took a large bowl and filled it with water. She thought that if the wolf woke up, it might be thirsty.

“This has to be the most reckless thing you have done! What were you thinking being that close to an injured animal? Where is it right now?”

“Um...in the garage?”

“WHAT?!” Lana had to move the phone away from her ear from Ray’s sudden shouting.

After making sure Ray was not yelling anymore, she brought the phone back to her ear. “The vet wasn’t in and what did you want me to do, leave it at the

side of the street to bleed out?”

Ray let out a choked laugh. “You talk as if it’s a dog instead of a fucking wolf.”

Lana sighed as she pushed the garage door open. She had her back to the truck as she navigated blindly to where the light switch was. “Calm down already. It’s not a big deal. The wolf was asleep the entire time.” She reassured him. She finally found the light switch and turned it on. “I managed to clean its wounds but we probably need to take it to a vet tomorrow-”

Lana’s grip on the bowl loosened as it fell to the ground with a loud thud, water splashing everywhere.

“Lana?” She could hear Ray calling out to when she suddenly got quiet.

Lana wasn’t sure if her eyes were playing tricks on her or if she was going crazy. She stared at the back of the truck where she was certain the wolf was resting. Almost as though she was in a trance, she stared directly into that all so familiar icy blue glare. A boy sat at the back of the truck, naked with bloodied bandages hanging loosely around his torso. There was no sign of the wolf as though this entire situation was some sort of sick prank someone was pulling.

“River?” she called out, immediately feeling doubtful that this was even reality. River responded by standing up, fully displaying his naked body to Lana who instantly averted her eyes.

“Forget everything you saw today. Speak of this to anyone and I’ll...kill you.”

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