

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 31

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Flora's P.O.V

Coming to a sudden halt, I turned back to my human form, falling to my feet as my legs gave out from under me.

But then Clay was right beside me, taking me into his arms, in his human form as well.

"Clay...you need to heal?" I looked at his bloody form and went to place my hand on the gash on his abdomen, but he shook his head.

"Not now." He stood up with me in his arms. "We need to get out of here first."

I chanced a glance at Andre's wolf as he lay sprawled on the forest floor, the heaving branch lying a few inches away from him. His form was massive, much larger than Clay or any other wolf I had seen and it was almost impossible to have a werewolf this large. This was the first time I had ever seen one so big and now that I had sensed the power from the wolf, I knew Andre had been lying about his age. He had to be the same age, or even older than Malachi.

Any wolf that old and powerful wasn't defeated this easily. Clay was right; we had to run for now. It was foolish to think that we had the opportunity to defeat him and attacking someone when they were down was the biggest form of cowardice in the world.

Clay took me to my bag that I had dropped a few feet away and I quickly took out a dress and put it on since the one I had been wearing was now in shreds. Once I was dressed, Clay and I took off running in the opposite direction.

The sky was clear tonight as well and the fog that I often saw in the distance was gone. So it was easier to find our way to the old broken mansion that the rogues called home.

The weather was windy, so it was an advantage that by the time Andre woke up, our scents would've been erased from the air. And we also made sure to take a diversion through the area in the forest that had several eucalyptus and cinnamon trees. They would have messed up our scents even further.

Twenty minutes later, we crossed the threshold of the broken gate and were welcomed by several red eyes. I halted behind Clay, unsure if the rogue wolves would attack or back down. Surprisingly, they bowed their heads and moved out of the way. It was also at this time that I noticed something interesting, but I stayed quiet until we were inside the house.

"There are lanterns!" I gasped as I looked around the abandoned mansion once again.

The first time I came here, it had been a rainy night and the darkness has been so vast that it had seemed impossible to see clearly. But even then I had remembered entering a dusty, dirty room filled with dried leaves and dirt and absolutely no light. That same room now looked comfortable enough to live in.

There were lanterns at different corners and placed on top of broken furniture and crevices. The room was also cleaner, like someone had actually swiped the floors and the stairs had been mended. The light helped me look at the house properly and I think this was some kind of a pack house with several rooms and other arrangements. Was this the house that first held the Lindersay wolf pack? Before the castle was built? Or did this belong to another pack that moved or were killed?

"This way." Clay pointed to a room upstairs and I was glad that the stairs still held as I walked on them. The slight squeaking was fine but it held.

Even surprising was Clay's room. Not only was it clean and well lit, there was an inflated mattress, covers, suitcases, water purifier and even basic necessities inside the room. All for the comfort and well being of the rogue Alpha.

"Malachi." I whispered, remembering how he had told me about helping Clay adjust to his new life.

"He brought everything." Clay said from beside me. "I'll wash and change. You can change here."

"Thank you."

He was using the fireplace to heat water, as far as I could tell from the makeshift pots and structures that he had arranged to place the pots on. The fireplace also kept the place warm.

I tried avoiding looking at Clay as he crouched down next to the fireplace in all his naked glory to heat some water for me. But what worried me was the trail of blood that he had left all over the place. His wounds weren't healed, but they also needed to be disinfected first.

"You need to wash up quick." I told him. "You're bleeding out."

A low grunt was all I got for an answer as he stood up with the warm water and left it in front of me before grabbing a pair of pants from the suitcase and leaving.

Someone was being moody; I frowned as he left the room. Was it because he wasn't completely in touch with his humanity yet?

I guess I'll find out soon.

Malachi instructed his guards to send the injured wolf to the infirmary at once. He would contact Mercy, their only healer as of now, to take care of Andre and make sure his injuries healed on time. And then he will talk to the man.

No matter how rashly he had acted, Andre was still a guest, a person who he had asked for help personally to guard the perimeters of his castle as Lindersay has had the shortest amount of new recruits this year in a century. The castle had needed security due to the lack of staff and as many a soldier had opted to leave for their packs rather than stay behind.

Contacting mercenaries under a temporary work contract, only for a couple of years till the recruit numbers went up, had seemed like the best choice for the pack, especially since Lindersay had the biggest shrine. But now, looking at the huge black wolf being carried away on a stretcher, Malachi couldn't help but regret his decision.

"Thank you for taking care of our General." Spoke a man with red hair and icy blue eyes. He wore the clothes that were designated to all of Andre's men and he was almost as tall as Andre himself.

"Your General works for me." I reminded him. "And everyone who works for me is under my protection."

"Alpha...aren't we to go in search of who hurt the General?" The man frowned. "If you give us the command, I'll arrange for a team immediately."

Malachi gave him a small smile. "What is your name, son?"

"Henry...Alpha." He gave a small bow.

"Well Henry, we do not follow the rules of an eye for an eye, here. If so, none of us would have eyes left." Malachi gave him a pat on the back. "Your General made the mistake of acting on his own without informing me. In my pack, I must always be informed of every single detail that goes on. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Alpha." Henry bowed once again and it made Malachi curious about something.

"How long have you worked for Andre?" He asked to the boy's surprise.

"About twenty years, Alpha." He stuttered a bit. "The squad was created around that time and we had all joined him willingly. We had all lost people to rogue attacks and when Andre proposed to make a squad that took care of those who needed help from rogues...we all agreed."

"Twenty years, you say?" Malachi narrowed his eyes at the spot where they had found Andre not ten minutes ago, before turning back to the boy with a smile. "You may go now, son. Look after your General well."

"Yes, Alpha." The boy left with one last bow, leaving Malachi alone in the forest, except for a couple of his guards that remained at a respectable distance to give their Alpha privacy.

Andre had been lying and he had more than a few secrets.

It was clear from the size of his wolf that he wasn't only half a century old. Wolves did not become that humongous until they had at least reached their second century on this planet. And Andre was just as big as him in his wolf form.

But what troubled him more was the scent he got from Andre's blood.

It help power and a lot of it. But what was made Malachi even more puzzled was the fact that the power was extremely familiar. It felt like the same power running through his veins.

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I wrapped a bandage around Clay's abdomen, careful not to tighten the cloth too much so his wounds could heal on their own.

I was slowly starting to realize that being a rogue didn't only mean mental instability, but there were certain physical drawbacks as well. Rogues didn't heal as fast as any normal wolf would and they also became highly aggressive when injured. Even now, Clay was gritting his teeth together to stop himself from lashing out.

I wasn't worried though. Clay had always had iron control whenever he was with me, but what I was worried about, wasn't his physical but mental state.

"How are you holding up?" I asked once I was done with the bandages. I kept a set of healing supplies inside one of his drawers, just because he needed it more often than I anticipated.

"You should stay away." His voice was rough. "I'm not myself right now."

"Are you afraid you'll hurt me?" I asked.

Clay nodded, his hands balled into fists by his side. He had his head turned towards the window, trying his best not to face me. But he should've known better, because I wasn't going anywhere.

Walking back over to him, I sat down on his lap and took his face into my hands. Clay's hands went around my waist immediately. And as he turned to face me in surprise, I saw what I had already guessed I would see. His eyes were almost completely red, except for a circle of green around his pupils. He was fighting his inner demon and the injury was making it worse.

"You were alone for two whole years." I caressed his cheeks gently, feeling the light stubbles against my palms. "You don't have to face this alone anymore. I'm right here. So even if you're feeling a bit grumpy, I'm not going to turn tail and run."

This was our fight, our destiny. Clay had rejected his mate to choose me, now it was my turn to choose him. And for me, there had never been any other option. There was a reason why neither Clay nor I could feel our mating bonds and it was because we had already chosen each other as our mates. In fact, we were so much more than just mates. We were the other half of each other's souls.

"But you have to go back...eventually." Clay told me, but his hold on my waist tightened.

"Not for tonight." I broke away from his hold and stood up, only to straddle him instead and bring my lips down on his.

Clay's arms were around me once more, this time, tighter than before. But I wasn't complaining. I had missed this terribly. I had missed being in his arms, feeling the love and comfort it provided.

The instant his lips had touched mine, fire had ignited in my veins, spreading through my system to burn me whole. We had been apart far too long. I had missed this. I had missed the taste of his lips on mine; I had missed his caresses, his lovemaking and I didn't want to waste any more time.

Breaking the kiss momentarily, I moved back to take off my shirt, leaving me in just my bra and pants. I came back for another kiss as soon as my shirt was off.

Clay's arm wrapped around my nape in a possessive hold, deepening the kiss. His breathing was uneven and I went to pull back, thinking that I might be hurting him, but Clay grunted in protest and flipped me over onto the bed. I landed on my back and waited for him to come on top of me.

He took my hands in his hand held them above my head, making sure I couldn't move. And then he started trailing hot, wet kisses down my neck, past my collarbone and between my breasts. He used his other hand to rip apart my bra down the middle, exposing me to his eyes.

He bent down on top of me, taking one breast into his hands as his mouth came down on the other. He scraped his teeth on my nipple, biting down the tiniest bit

to draw out a moan from me before licking on the sensual hurt. When the cool air touched my wet nipple, I felt them harden. He switched on to the neglected breast, still holding my hands above my head while he drove me crazy.

“Clay...” my voice came out a hoarse whisper as I struggled against his grip.

Everywhere he touched me, I felt tingles spread through my veins. I was hypersensitive to his touch. And Clay had taken it upon himself to drive me insane tonight.

Finally, he let go of my hand, only to move down my body so he could peel my pants and panties down my leg and off my body. He looked up at me then, his eyes glowing from within. There was raw hunger in them and I knew I was doomed.

He parted my legs wide with his hands and settled in between them, making me blush a thousand shades of red. I hadn't been intimate in two years and to be suddenly so exposed in front of Clay made me self-conscious.

But then again, this was Clay. He knew my body better than anyone. He knew where to touch, he knew what drove me crazy and he knew how to use it to his advantage.

He touched my womanhood lightly, using his thumb in a circular motion, getting me used to his touch before he dipped one finger inside lightly. A gasp escaped my lips at the intrusion as heat built in my stomach. I could feel myself get wet just from his touch.

Clay took it as an invitation and inserted his index finger inside my womanhood, once again getting me adjusted. He moved his fingers in and out of me slowly before inserting another and scissoring me wider. My back arched off the bed at the sensation, making me clutch at the covers.

And then I felt his tongue at my most intimate part.

“Clay!” I moaned, feeling my breath leave my lungs. Perspiration beaded my forehead and I felt hot all over. My heart was hammering against my ribcage and I feared I wouldn't be able to take the onslaught of sensations anymore. But at the same time, I didn't want it to end. I wanted him closer. I wanted to drive me over the edge.

And Clay delivered. He lapped at me with his tongue, driving me crazy with desire. I pulled at his hair, telling me silently to give me the release I needed, because my voice seems to have deserted me. Clay let out a low grunt and started using his fingers in and out of me while his tongue went to the bundle of nerves at my apex. He increased his speed, adding a third finger inside me and that was when I felt the heat in my core explode.

I screamed his name, coming on his hands as the orgasm rocked through me in waves, making black spots appear in my vision.

I felt Clay move away from me, followed by the sound of clothes hitting the floor. I turned to face him, watching him in all his glory. His shaft was fully erect and pulsating. Pre-cum glistened on the tip of his erection and I sat up on the bed on shaky hands and legs and reached out for him.

A low growl rumbled in his throat and I looked up into his eyes.

"I want to taste you." I told him. "I want you to feel me just like I felt you."

Clay stayed still as I reached for him once again. I wrapped my fingers around his shaft, feeling the veins, the hardness of him. I moved my hand up and down the length of him. He was already fully erect, but I wanted a taste, so I went for it. I brought my face closer to him and flicked out my tongue at the tip of him, feeling the salt of his pre-cum.

With another growl, Clay pushed me back on the bed and climbed on top of me. I adjusted my legs by wrapping them around his hips and he placed the blunt head of his cock at my entrance and pushed in just a little bit.

"Clay!" I moaned, pushing up slightly, taking it slow.

Clay's arms went to grip my waist, holding me in place as he slid in inch by slow inch, filling to the brim, stretching me to my limit. Pain and pleasure exploded in my bloodstream as I moaned out his name. Clay buried his head at the crook of my neck and then he pushed in, burying himself inside me completely, making me scream out in pleasure.

"Flora!" Clay grunted against my shoulders and started to move oh-so-slowly inside of me.

I urged him to go faster and matched his pace by undulating my hips. Clay complied readily, speeding his pace as he moved in a continuous rhythm. I felt the heat in my core once again. The sound of skin sliding on skin reached my ears along with our groans of pleasure. At that moment, the entire world disappeared from around me. It was just me and Clay and our love. Nothing else mattered.

Wrapping my arms tighter around his neck, I transferred my healing powers to Clay as he moved in me. Every sensation was suddenly heightened. Every touch, every kiss, every breath...seemed heightened. And it drove us both over the edge.

Clay and I both screamed each other's names, clutching on to each other for dear life as we rode out our orgasm. The high lasted longer, felt even more euphoric than I had ever felt before in my life.

Even after we rode out the high, Clay and I stayed exactly where we were, wrapped in each other's embrace and unwilling to let go. It felt like if we let go of each other, the spell would break and reality would come crashing in. So we held on, for as long as we could.

Clay kept most of his weight on his arms on either side of me and finally, when he lifted himself up on his elbows to give me a slow, savoring kiss, I looked up into his eyes and let relief wash over me.

His eyes were now back to being mostly emerald green, with only a stubborn rim of red around the edge that refused to disappear. But that was alright. There was still time. And no matter what, I wasn't to give up trying to heal my rogue Alpha.

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Flora's P.O.V

The light of the sun falling on my face woke me up from my slumber.

At first I was startled at having someone's arms around me, but then I remembered everything from last night and snuggled deeper into Clay's arms.

This would be the first time in my life that I had spent the night in Clay's arms. Back when we were still in our pack, we had to sneak behind everyone's back to date. And then, after the rogue attack when everyone found out about our relationship, we didn't have permission to spend the nights together as Riley had still been skeptical. But now, after two years of being apart and having our memories erased, I knew I had finally done the right thing.

Clay was my heart and soul and he had been the first to sacrifice everything for me. Now it was my turn to stand by his side no matter what.

I felt his fingers on my skin an instant later, gliding across my back in slow, lazy strokes. At first I thought he was randomly drawing images on my back with his fingers, but he didn't stay there. He traced his fingers down my arms slowly, as if feeling the textures of my skin. When he went to slide his fingers across my waist, a laugh escaped my lips.

"What are you doing?" I asked, still smiling. "It tickles."

"Remembering you." Clay whispered, his hot breath fanning my neck as he leaned in to place a kiss to my nape.

It was the way he said it that just hit me. I turned to face him so I could look into his eyes, but Clay brought his hand up to trace my pendant, the gorgeous stone that he had given me.

"Did you know that I actually got this stone on my way back from Lindersay?"

"No." I looked at him in surprise, feeling overwhelmed that we finally had our memories back. "You never told me how you got it."

Clay smiled, still tracing the pendant as it lay on my chest. "We stopped in front of this diner in a small town while travelling back to our pack. There was this old lady in front of that dinner, in a tiny stall selling all kinds of jewelry. No one was interested in buying things from her because they thought it was fishy how this dusty old lady could get her hands on such precious gems. They had to either be fake or stolen."

"You didn't think so?"

"No." He shook his head. "The lady looked too sincere to be selling fake or stolen stuff, so I went to take a look. It was then that I saw this heart and I was instantly reminded of you."

My heart felt like it was about to explode. Clay bought this pendant while returning from his training at Lindersay? That was a month before he started his temporary job as a Professor at our pack's college, two months before we became lovers. Had he always felt something about me? The same way that I had always felt this connection to him?

"Thank you for giving this to me," I touched the pendant lightly. "Thank you for loving me even after everything you had to go through."

"I'm not the only one who suffered." Clay wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me closer. "You suffered too and the biggest test we had to face was staying away from each other."

I felt it then, that little sinking feeling in my gut, telling me that it wasn't over yet. We might yet have to face even more tests. I wanted to scream at the sky, yell at the moon to stop testing us. No more! Haven't we had enough? But the feeling won't pass. It wasn't over.

So I changed the subject to distract myself from my worries.

"Did you notice the fact that all your rogues are all males?" I asked Clay. "There are absolutely no female rogues. Don't you think it's a bit strange?"

My mind also went to the fact that not only were all the rogues males, but all the Maidens...

"I never gave it much thought," Clay said now, frowning in concentration. "To me they are just my pack, my brethren and my new family."

To hear him call the rogues his family hurt. He was supposed to be the future Alpha of ReedStone pack. He belonged to a wealthy family who had spared him no luxuries and he had lived a good life till now. But then he fell in love with me...someone who wasn't his mate. And his life changed for the worse.

"Loving you was never a mistake." Clay said now, as if he had read my mind. "I don't care what everyone else thinks, I will always choose to be with you."

"I love you." I claimed his lips then, wrapping my arm around his neck, pulling him even closer.

This kiss wasn't rough or hurried, it was tender and sweet. I savored the moments it lasted and then slept with my head on Clay's shoulders.

We had each other now and for the time being, we weren't going anywhere. I knew this bubble of happiness that I felt now would burst sooner or later, but now wasn't the time to think about it. Today, I won't let what I can't control, ruin this moment between me and Clay.

Andre and everyone else could wait.

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The Moon Goddess watched from her heavenly chariot as the scenes unfolded in front of her.

She had trusted her son to be the judge, but he ended up helping the ones he wasn't supposed to. She sighed in regret.

Maybe she had been too lenient with her child? Maybe she hadn't made her point clear enough?

But the time to play around was over. It was time to finish this game once and for all. She had suffered in silence for centuries...no more. It was time to take matters into her own hand.

Zeus's spell was powerful, but the gift he had given her was no better than a curse. But he was the one who had taught her that in order to gain something; one must lose something of equal importance.

So in order to gain back the love of her life...she will sacrifice the true love of another. Their life blood will give life to her beloved, painting the moon red for one night. But she will not be the one to have blood on her hands.

Two months...in two months, her lover will be beside her, and those who continued to disrespect her would bleed to death.

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Flora's P.O.V

One Month Later...

I closed my eyes in concentration, channeling my healing power into the rogue wolf sitting in front of me. Its fur was dark grey with a white patch on its forehead. Clay didn't know any of their names but he told me he did feel each of their essence separately in his mind.

But after five minutes of channeling my power, I gave up and opened my eyes.

The wolf looked at me through huge red eyes, a whining sound coming from its throat as he lowered his head to the ground.

"I'm sorry," I told him, feeling bad that all my efforts were being wasted. "I'll try again tomorrow."

Nodding its head, the wolf left to join its peers to guard the house while Clay was out hunting with some of the other wolves.

I had gotten accustomed to staying alone with the rogues and even though they were still a bit uncomfortable around me, as if they were afraid they'd end up hurting me, they had surprisingly started to follow orders from me as if I was their Luna. Some of them were even really friendly and loved to hang out with me, like the dark grey one just now.

That's why; I had begun to experiment on them bit by bit, once they were comfortable enough to be touched and petted...and occasionally, showered.

I had managed to heal Clay back to his human form, so I had thought I could work with other wolves too, using my powers to heal them back to their human form. But so far, I haven't had any success. One thing that surprised me was that the wolves I was 'testing' my powers on, had actually started to change their scent. It was no longer the murky smell that most of the other rogues had, but their scents had started to gain different notes to them, unique to that particular wolf.

I got up from the stairs after patting the wolf on its head and headed to the front of the broken mansion to wait for Clay. It was difficult living in the middle of nowhere with little limited resources to rely on. I wasn't aware of just how much accustomed I had gotten to all the luxuries in my life until I left everything behind.

No, I wasn't complaining and this was hardly any excuse that could come between me and Clay, but I missed my friends, my sisters. I missed the calming routines of the Shrine. I missed Ezra's motherly voice and Malachi's overbearing presence that always watched over all of us. But no matter how much I missed them, I couldn't go back as long as Andre was still there.

And even though it's been a month, there was no sign of the Moon Goddess accepting our relationship.

What went wrong? What more did the Goddess want from us? If we found our way back to each other, despite having all our memories erased, then she'll let us be together. Wasn't that the deal? Then what are we missing?

A cold wind blowing through the forest made a shiver run down my spine. I wrapped an arm around my middle, missing Clay's warm embrace. Whenever he went on hunts to gather food, I got this upsetting feeling in my gut that I might never see him again. I realize now that it's a fear that I will probably have to live with for a very long time to come, but it's a feeling I'll gladly accept if it meant that Clay would be beside me forever.

Not having him next to me in the morning sometimes set me into panic, but Clay would always come back. He would always be back in no time, taking me into his arms and reassuring me that we will get through this. And I knew that as long as Clay was beside me, we will be fine.

As if my longing for him had manifested themselves physically, I got a whiff of his scent in the air, a few seconds before he came running out of the woods. His wolves followed behind him with a large deer that they had hunted and I turned to look at Clay instead to avoid looking at the carnage.

Yes, I was a carnivore, that didn't mean I liked to witness all the blood and the gore.

"Hey." I went straight into his arms, taking in his scent until it was all I knew. "I missed you."

"I was only gone for a little bit." But he wrapped his arms around me tightly, engulfing me in his larger form and his warmth. "I'm all dirty."

"No worries." I smiled up at him. "We can get clean together."

Clay's laugh was loud and contagious. It was at times like this that I wanted time to just freeze and stay like this forever. I held on tighter, enjoying the closeness. Even though we had hardly left each other's side in the month that we had been together, I couldn't get enough of it.

"I love you." I told him, suddenly overwhelmed with emotions.

Clay looked down at me surprised. "I love you too." But his eyes looked at me questioningly. Those gorgeous emerald eyes that now held a ring of red.

"Sometimes I feel like I don't say it enough." I shrugged. "I want to say it to you every chance I get. I want you to know just how lucky I feel to be loved by you. I want to sleep in your arms every night, wake up to see your face beside me. I don't know how I survived this long without you, but I don't think I can ever be apart from you again."

Clay bent down and captured my lips in his in a kiss so tender that it made my toes curl. My arms came around his neck as I rose on tippy-toes to kiss him better. How indeed had I survived without him?

When we pulled apart, it was because of lack of air as he wrapped his arm around me tighter, pulling me so close that there wasn't even room for air between us,

before he placed his forehead on mine. "I was supposed to say that." His voice was a hoarse whisper. "Stop stealing my lines."

Laughing at his sour tone, I went to kiss him again, but a shot sounded from the forest then, turning everything upside-down.

Birds started flying away from the trees, panicked at the noise and I knew that my happiness had been short lived. Something was coming our way and it was about to change everything once again. And I knew exactly who it was. The man who claimed to be my mate.

Andre Saltzman.

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"Alpha Malachi!" One of the guards burst into his office without knocking and Malachi was instantly on his feet.

"What's the matter?" He rounded his table and went to his guard who was panting as he bent over.

"It-it's General Andre! He just left with a large number of his men."

"What do you mean?" Malachi stood up from his chair, fear gripping his heart for the first time in centuries.

"I think he's going to attack the rogues," the guard spoke, perspiration beading his forehead. "One of the kitchen staff heard his soldiers talk about finding the hideout of the rogues yesterday...they wanted to wait till morning to let you know, but Andre's soldiers just left, before you could be informed."

"Damnit!" Malachi spoke through gritted teeth before making a split-second decision. "Get my men ready. We are going after him."

"Yes, Alpha."

All Malachi could now hope for, was that he wasn't too late.

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Flora's P.O.V

"What was that?" I clutched Clay's hand as the sound echoed through the quietness of the forest.

"Shots from a gun." Clay's voice was a growl. "They found us."

"They?" I looked up at him wide-eyed. "Who're they?"

"The men from the Castle had been searching the forest recently." Clay said. "We had been successful in hiding our trail for the past few days, but I guess the blood from the deer hunt today was a giveaway."

The castle guards had been searching the forest? "Why didn't you tell me any of this?"

"I didn't want to trouble you." Clay confessed, taking my hand in his. "We were happy and I wanted it to last longer. But now I get it wasn't a good idea."

"We have to run." I told him, pulling on his hand but Clay resisted instantly.

"No." His voice was a growl. "We ran from him the last time; I'm not doing the same again."

"And how do you plan on fighting him when he has weapons with him?" I challenged. "Remember how he attacked us the last time? How massive his form was? And when he came after you and your pack the first time? He has more than a few weapons with him and your wolves aren't trained to dodge bullets!"

"I still have to fight him, Flora." Clay protested. "How long will we keep running?"

"Until you and your pack are ready to fight weapons and guns." I snapped at him, urging him to move. "You need to stop being stubborn, Clay! This isn't about pride, this is about survival! Think about your pack! You are responsible for everyone's lives here!"

Clay stood still for a few moments, his jaw tight as he looked ahead at our house. The ring of red around his eyes intensified for an instant, and then the rogues around us were all dropping what they were doing and running in the opposite direction behind the house.

I let out a breath of relief. Clay must have given them the order to run.

I know it had to cost him his pride to order them to flee, but Andre's men were armed, if the shot was any indication. And if he had fired a warning shot, he wanted to us to know that he was coming and that he had back-up. He was coming prepared.

"There's a hill a few minutes away from here. The caves there can provide us sanctuary for a few days." Clay told me as he took a hold of my hand. "We have to leave all our belongings here. There's no time."

"I understand." I told him. "Let's go."

Clay nodded and we took off running on our feet. Andre's men were close, but I think we can outrun him if we plan carefully.

We went around the mansion and kept running ahead through the forest. There were some cinnamon trees planted here and their scent was strong enough to mask ours. I was sure even Andre's men couldn't sniff us through the scent of cinnamon bark.

The trees kept getting denser and denser as we went forwards. The tree trunks looked enormous and the sunlight decreased with each step we took. This seemed to be the oldest parts of the forest, which was probably why the said hills that Clay mentioned weren't visible from the castle. There was also a layer of fog forming as we went forward, even with the sun bright in the sky and that fog only intensified as we went ahead. But even through it was hazy; I could tell his wolves were right ahead of us.

"There's a small stream up ahead," Clay warned. "Once we cross that, the wolves won't be able to trace our scents anymore."

"Okay." I told him, feeling out of breath, but thanks to the adrenalin kick, I was able to keep up with Clay.

But then, Clay came to a sudden halt and hurled me back towards his chest...just as a bullet hit the tree in front of us, mere inches away from where we would've been if we had still been running.

The sound of the shot still reverberating in my ears, I looked up from Clay's chest and there he was. Andre Saltzman, standing with a gun pointed at us from only a few feet away.

"Andre..." I whispered in horror, my heart beating so fast it threatened to burst out of my chest.

I clutched at Clay's hand tightly, fearing that the instant I moved, Andre might take a shot. He was trying to separate us, I knew it right away.

But Andre had anticipated that I wouldn't move, so he pointed his gun in our direction...and took the shot.

Clay hauled me away from him instantly, falling on his back as I landed on the ground on my hands and knees a few feet away from him. He had fallen for Andre's trap without even noticing.

Within seconds, Andre was at my side, pulling me to my feet roughly with a grip around my arm. He moved back at a safe distance away from Clay, pulling me along with him.

“Let go of me!” I struggled against Andre’s grip as he pointed his gun at Clay. “No! Let him go!”

“Shut up!” Andre growled at me. “How dare you disrespect me by running off with this rogue? And that too after I told you what they did to my family?”

“He’s not like that, you have to believe me! He won’t harm anyone!” I pleaded with Andre, knowing that it was a futile attempt. There was a glint in his grey eyes that was more vicious than the red haze of the rogues. He wasn’t in control of himself and he was out for blood.

“All rogues are the same.” Andre’s voice was dead calm as he looked back at Clay...and then-

A shot resonated through the forest and for a second, everything stood still...that was until blood erupted from Clay’s chest and he fell to the ground, groaning in pain.

“NOOOOO!”

I ran towards Clay but was yanked back hastily by my arm, almost spraining it in the process. I looked up at Andre in betrayal, but found him just as startled as me.

There was no smoke coming out of his gun and the scent of gunpowder was absent too. That mean Andre hadn’t shot the bullet. But if he hadn’t then who-

“Take her back to the castle.” Came a familiar voice from the shadows in the forest and my attention snapped to his form immediately, as he stepped out into the light.

“Malachi!” I whispered desperately.

How could he! Why? After he had helped Clay all this time?

‘Not now, Flora.’ Malachi’s mental command was strong and sharp. ‘You must go with Andre. Go back to the castle and I will take care of Clay.’

‘No!’ I connected with him mentally. ‘He’s injured! I can’t leave him!’

‘If you don’t then Clay dies.’ His voice was a snapped out command. ‘Keep Andre busy. Let him take you back so I can get Mercy to heal Clay.’

I understood what Malachi was doing then. He had shot Clay in place of Andre to keep him from going for any vital organs. He was using me as a distraction to make sure Andre didn’t catch on.

But Clay was injured. He was now laying unmoving on the forest floor, facedown as blood drenched the soil.

'Hurry!'

Knowing I was running out of time, I tried to yank my hand out of Andre's grip once more, as if I was trying to break free so I could get to Clay. It worked. Andre instantly tightened his grip on me.

"Alpha, take care of that filth who dared to lay a hand on my mate." Andre growled as he hauled me towards him, crushing me to his chest. "I must take her to safety immediately."

"Of course." Malachi nodded and pointed the gun at Clay.

But I didn't get to see what happens next as Andre's arms came around me in a vice grip and I was being hauled away from the scene at once. Andre picked me up into his arms and began running away at phenomenal speed towards the castle while I struggled to break free from him. And then I heard another gunshot.

'Malachi!'

'He's alive. Get to safety.'

That was all I got out of Malachi before we were too far out of reach. Now all I needed to do was wait.

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Flora's P.O.V

I walked hurriedly after Andre as he pulled me along with him by my hand, not so gently.

I could see several of my fellow maidens and soldiers looking at the scene wide eyed, but they were too scared of Andre to say anything. Did he really hold that much power over the wolves of Lindersay already?

He took me straight to his office and I saw his own soldiers hesitate a moment before he flung the doors wide open and Andre dragged me inside. I ripped my hand out of his instantly, massaging my wrist with my free hand. I was sure that if I wasn't a wolf, I would've had bruises forming already.

Gone was the nice, polite man I had come to know in the last few weeks. The person in front of me didn't seem as a stable wolf anymore and his behavior definitely hinted at anger issues. Maybe I had failed to notice what had always been beneath the surface.

"What are you doing?" I snapped at Andre as soon as the guards closed the door behind us. "How dare you hurt Clay?"

"So the rogue has a name?" Andre looked rather amused at my outburst and it made me want to hurt him. "And he had a name, Flora. He's probably already buried under, or maybe Malachi left him in the open so other wild animals could feast on him."

My nails lengthened to form claws but I held back my temper with iron control. Because I knew my anger would only fuel his amusement and his sadism. He didn't care about other people's feelings, only his own and hurting others brought him joy. I could not; would not, give him that satisfaction.

"Clay will live." I told him, calming my nerves and my heart rate. "And my mate has a name and it is Clay Scotsman."

The change in his expression was instantaneous and it went from amused to murderous within a span of seconds. He came closer so fast that I had to take a hasty step backwards to keep some distance between us.

"I am your mate!" He spoke through gritted teeth, his face inches away from mine and his hands balled at his sides. "You will never speak of anyone else as your mate, do you understand?"

"And what if I do call someone else my mate?" I didn't back down this time; I couldn't.

"If he's not dead yet, then I'll simply eradicate that person from this earth."

"Clay will live." This time when I spoke, I looked him directly in the eye, letting him know I meant every single word. "And in order to kill him, you have to kill me first."

"FLORA!"

"Clay is my mate. He's mine mind, body and soul." I didn't break eye contact, not once. "And I am his. There is no power in the world that can separate us now."

"How dare you?" The shock was evident in his face as he spoke. "You are a Lunar Maiden! You went against the laws of the Moon Goddess! How could you?"

"I could because the Goddess herself had made that exception." I told him confidently. "I was given the condition to remember my love so I could chose my own mate. And I fulfilled her condition. I remembered my Clay even though the Goddess herself wiped our memories. And now, I have chosen Clay."

"I am your mate!" Andre raged, his eyes spitting fire as he came threateningly close to me.

"No...you are not." I told him calmly, clutching my skirt with my hands to hide the tremors. "Because I, Flora Argentine, reject you, Andre Saltzman as my mate with the elements and the Goddess as my witness."

A growl tore through the silence in the room as Andre fell to the floor, clutching his heart.

For a split-second, I felt sorry for him. Maybe it was the healer in me that felt sorry for his pain, but the next instant, he looked up at me with grey eyes filled with hate and the guilt was gone.

"Get out!" He spoke through gritted teeth and I instantly obliged.

I couldn't wait to get away from him and the way he was looking at me, almost with murderous intension...I did not need another invitation to remove myself from his presence.

I opened the doors and strode out without a backward glance. I was finally free and once the fading rays of the evening sun hit my face, I truly felt it...the winds of freedom as they ruffled through my hair and blew my skirt back.

I was about to head back to my room when my eyes connected with Ezra's on the other side of the courtyard. She was sitting on one of the fountain banks, the statue of an angel with broken wings at her back and I felt sadness in my heart for the woman who was a mother figure to me. I had never seen her this lonely in all the time I had been here. Ezra had always been my guiding light, my pole star in the darkest of nights. But when I looked at her closely, her eyes were worried even though she gave me a warm smile.

She had heard me reject Andre; there was no doubt about it. But she was worried about something? What could that possibly be? She was the Shrine Maiden, under the protection of the Alpha of Lindersay.

I went to take a step in her direction but she shook her head immediately and got up from her seat before walking in the opposite direction. She was right, now wasn't the right time to talk. I could find her easily in the shrine later on and greet her properly, even apologize for leaving without telling her.

A sense of foreboding in the pit of my stomach made me wrap my arms tightly around myself. I didn't like this sudden feeling. Something bad was about to happen...something that probably I set in motion.

What had I done? Was rejecting Andre a bad idea? But I didn't have any other option. Andre was getting too forceful and I didn't want to deal with him anymore. I've always had this strange sensation of uneasiness whenever I was near him and that only seemed to intensify after I rejected him.

What was going to happen now? I did not have the slightest idea, but whatever it was...it wasn't going to be good.

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Flora's P.O.V

"Flora!"

Daphne and Emma engulfed me into their arms as soon as I opened the door and let them into my room, a few hours after I came back from Andre's office.

It was only a month since I had been away from them, but I had missed them dearly. They weren't just my friends; they were my sisters and sisters always stuck together. No matter the secrets and the lies, they were family.

"I'm so glad you're safe!" Emma told me as we pulled away. "Andre went half-mad when you went missing. He even got injured somehow an-"

"I know." I told them. "Clay and I injured him when we escaped."

"Oh God!" Daphne gasped. "Is that...are you injured?"

"What?" I looked down at my skirt, where Daphne had been pointing and found the splatter of blood on the peach colored material. I hadn't been in the right mind to change yet, so I was still wearing the dress from this morning. For an instant, my heart thrashed against my ribcage, before I remembered Malachi's mental voice.

Clay was alive. If Malachi had told me so then I knew I could trust him with my life. Clay was alive and Malachi was taking care of him, along with our healer, Mercy.

"It's Clay's blood." I told them past the knot in my throat. "Malachi shot him to save him from Andre. It must have splattered over my dress at that time..."

"Wait...Malachi hurt Clay?" Emma frowned at me. "Why would he do that?"

I was about to answer her but her words registered then. "You know about Clay...you too?"

At this point I should be past feeling betrayed, but it still hurt that my friends kept lying to me. It was also at this point that I remembered both Emma and Daphne being inside the underground Shrine where I had first been taken when I had wanted to become a Lunar Maiden. They had been there when the Goddess herself appeared and they were definitely present when the Goddess had cursed us. I had been a fool to think that the Goddess would erase all our memories.

"How many of you know the truth? How many of the Lunar Maidens actually knew about me even before I lost my memory?" I asked, hoping for a sincere answer this once.

"Only the four of us." Emma answered. "Daphne, Ezra, me and Alpha Malachi. You hadn't visited any other person before that so no one else knew you."

"I see." I shook my head. "Any more secrets I should be aware of?"

"Flo-"

"Yes, there is." Emma began but Daphne cut her off. "There is a secret that you should be aware of, so you don't think we betrayed you."

I looked at Daphne in surprise, wondering why she was being like this all of a sudden. But when I looked at her expression, I knew she had been hurt by my words.

"I'm sorry, D-"

"No." Daphne shook her head. "I'm not doing this because I'm offended or hurt, but I'm doing this because we have been hiding secrets for far too long. We are friends, sisters! And there shouldn't be secret among sisters...especially since we are all in the same boat."

"What do you mean?" I frowned.

"You lived with the rogues this past month didn't you?" Daphne continued once I nodded. "Did you notice that they were all males? That all the rogues were only men and not women?"

"Yes," to say that I was surprised at Daphne having repeated my sentiments would be an understatement. "I told this to Clay as well, but we didn't give it much thought. At first I thought there was some kind of connection between the rogues being all men and the Lunar Maidens being all women, but..."

Daphne and Emma exchanged wide-eyed looks and it just clicked. Like a light bulb coming to life. Like pieces of a puzzle fitting together.

No...I had been right? Was it possible that what I had been thinking for these past month had actually been right?

"I guess you figured it out without our help." Daphne gave me a sad smile. "You're right...the rogues are all males and the Lunar Maidens are all females...because we are the same as you. We too had dared to make the mistake of loving the men that weren't our mates and we all suffered the consequences."

"That's why Malachi is sympathetic towards the rogues." I breathed a sigh of relief. Even though I knew Malachi would've tried his best to save Clay, now I was certain that he would do anything for Clay. It was the assurance that I needed.

"But this only applies to the rogue near the Lindersay Castle." Emma corrected me. "There are other rogues too, outside, in the world. Most wolves in the outside world become rogues because they disobeyed the Goddess or because their animal instincts are just too strong. And there we have female rogues as well."

"So, what you're trying to tell me is that the rogue pack outside Lindersay, that Clay is now the Alpha of, are all the people that the Lunar Maidens had dared to love by rejecting the mating bond?" It took some time to settle in. "Then why aren't the other Maidens with them? Why aren't they going back to normal?"

"Because you're the only one who has ever recovered their memories." Emma's eyes were moist, as if she was struggling to keep her emotions in check. "No matter how hard we had tried...none of us remember anything. All the Maidens here just go about their day like there isn't a giant hole in their heart where their lovers should've been. All we know is that memory loss is just a side-effect of being transformed into a Lunar Maiden and most of the other maidens are so ingrained in their new life that they don't even care where they came from."

That's why most of the other Maidens didn't give much thought to me losing my memories. No one cared about what they had lost, in fact, none of them remembered.

"We took you to the library that day on purpose since we were already suspecting that you were getting your memories back." Daphne said and my attention snapped to her. "We knew Andre was up to no good, but we also wanted to know what he actually meant about the ritual. Ezra told us later what the ritual signifies."

"True love's sacrifice..." I whispered.

"It looks like Andre is up to something." Emma nodded. "But Malachi has a close eye on him. Nothing will happen as long as we have Malachi."

"Yes, i-"

Someone knocked on the door before I could answer her and the knocks kept on getting frantic.

"What could it be?" Emma's voice was startled.

"I'll go check." I told her before going over to the door and unlocking it.

A familiar face greeted me on the other side. A face I hadn't seen in ages and I had almost forgotten about.

"Samuel?" It was the soldier who had gotten hurt badly while saving me from a newly turned rogue. The soldier that I had healed so he himself didn't turn rogue. "What brings you here? Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Lady Healer." He looked pale as he kept looking over his shoulders. "But something really horrible just happened. You must come with us to look!"

"What is it?" Both Emma and Daphne were beside me in an instant. "What's wrong?"

What he said next, felt like the ground had been pulled from right under our feet.

"Alpha Malachi has been taken prisoner. Andre has declared himself the new Alpha just now and the Castle is under lockdown."

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When the knock sounded on his door, Malachi had already been expecting his visitor.

"Andre," he welcomed his visitor. "Have a seat."

There was something wrong with the other man, that much, he was sure about, but what the problem was, he wasn't aware yet. Andre looked unusually calm and his stance was rigid, robotic almost.

Malachi debated on what he should ask the other man; thought it better to let him talk first. Malachi wasn't a man to get easily intimidated or worried, but he had a feeling that Andre was lying about a lot of things. He was far older than what he had told and stronger too. He had a gut feeling about the other man that he couldn't shake and it had only gotten stronger in the days after he had found the other man injured in the forest.

He held a grudge too strong and he was sure there was much more to his secrets than he let on. Although it was understandable that he hadn't wanted his mate to run off with a rogue and had gone out for revenge, but now that Flora had rejected him...the grudge seems to have only intensified.

"Alpha Malachi," Andre took a seat opposite to him, his eyes hard. "I think it is finally time for me to fulfill my purpose."

"And what would that be?" Malachi asked calmly.

"To eradicate all rogues surrounding Lindersay." Andre spoke just as calmly, except there was frost in his voice. "I was brought here especially for this reason and yet, you keep standing in the way of my duty."

"I'm afraid you had the wrong idea, Andre," Malachi looked straight into his eyes. "I told you to protect our castle. To make sure no one gets hurt. You know as well as I do that there had never been any contracts about harming the rogues, like you did the first night you came here and today when you marched with your army to get Flora back."

"So what had you expected me to do?" Andre countered. "Sit back and watch as a rogue did whatever it pleased with my mate?"

"Flora left of her own free will and the rogue did nothing to harm her." Malachi reminded him. "It was always your aggression that ends up hurting Flora."

"So you knew about Flora leaving?" Andre snapped. "And you did nothing to let me know?"

"I'm her Alpha, Andre." Malachi's impossibly blue eyes glowed amber. "She doesn't need to inform anyone else about her whereabouts and neither do I."

"And I'm her mate!" Andre stood up so suddenly that it upturned the chair he had been sitting on. "I must know about what she does every second of every day!"

"She rejected you." Malachi stood from his chair as well. "And being a mate means being equals, partners. She isn't your slave nor your servant that she must let you know about everything she has going in her life."

A smile formed on Andre's face that was just as menacing as it was unexpected. "Oh, how foolish of you. Just because you rejected your mate to be with Ezra, it doesn't mean all mating bonds will work like that."

Malachi's eyes widened in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, come on now." Andre laughed, his stance changing in a blink of an eye. "No need to be so coy. We both know that you've been trying too hard to figure out what exactly it is that you think is off about me. Let me make it easier on you."

Andre rounded the table to stand in front of Malachi, looking at him eye to eye. "Mother is really disappointed in you, Malachi. So she had to step in."

"No..." Malachi's eyes widened in horror but before he could react, it was already too late.

Andre took out a syringe from his pant pockets and injected it into Malachi's neck. Almost instantly, his entire body started to feel numb and he fell to the floor.

Andre knelt down next to him, his smile menacing. "We always knew you were too weak to be the judge, too soft. So mother had a backup plan. How I wished we could have met under different circumstances, but this is even better. Your journey ends here, Malachi. Everything you own is now mine."

Malachi tried his best to stay awake, but his attempts were futile. All he could do was watch as Andre's guards came into his room upon their master's command and then they picked him up like a sack of potatoes, ready to be disposed off.

"Take him away." Andre smiled. "Make sure no one finds him."

No...Ezra...Flora...

*

Andre's P.O.V:

I came to stand outside on the balcony and saw a crowd forming in the front courtyard to see what the fuss had been about. Good. It was time.

"Residents of Lindersay, I have an important announcement to make." I spoke out loud and clear, so everyone could hear me. "Your Alpha had corrupted the pack and crippled your fellow soldiers! He had supported the rogues till now and had even joined hands with them!"

The women gasped and the men began to chatter in disbelief.

"I know it is hard to believe but it is the truth!" I told them. "If I hadn't found out in time, rogues would've attacked and killed every single one of you! And then they would have taken over the palace!"

More gasps of disbelief, more chatter.

"Malachi knew that I had found out the truth, so to threaten me, he even handed over my mate to the rogues!" I told them, creating the perfect lie. "Today, I saved my mate from the rogues and I took care of your corrupt Alpha."

"How can we trust you?" Someone shout from the crowd. "Our Alpha has ruled Lindersay for centuries and never let any harm come to us."

"Yes! That's right!" Another person spoke out. "If Alpha Malachi had ever wanted to sell us out to the rogues, he wouldn't have waited this long! You're lying! Release our Alpha now!"

I gave out a bark of laughter as more and more people started to raise their voices and everyone immediately shut their mouths.

"Malachi sure has a bunch of loyal followers," I told them after I had my laughter under control. "Too bad he trusted everyone easily."

"What do you mean?" Someone brave enough to speak, asked from the crowd.

"I mean that Malachi is gone for good and he isn't coming back." I raised my hand and instantly, my guards pointed their guns at the pack.

It was fun seeing the fear in their eyes, watching them huddle together and cower away. Even the bravest didn't speak this time as horror filled their veins.

"Listen closely and listen well." I spoke loud and clear, letting the power in my veins resonate in my voice. "I am the new Alpha of Lindersay now. Everything I say will be the law. If you follow me without any complains, then I will treat you justly. If not, your life ends here. So tell me, any objections?"

Not a single person spoke and I smirked down at the crowd. "As I thought. Now, let your peers know about the change in management. Your duties remain the same until told otherwise."

Then I turned to the soldiers who had tried to surround me while I was talking to the crowd downstairs; the soldiers who were loyal to Malachi. "If you follow me from now on, you will be rewarded. If not, you die."

Snatching the gun out of one of my closest soldier, I shot at the crowd and some of them started to scream.

I looked down at the man bleeding on the floor, the man who had just now demanded that I release their Alpha. "I do not like to be disobeyed." I told them clearly and they all fell to the floor weeping.

"Now...where was I?" I turned back to the soldiers once again. "Ah! Your decision. Let me make it easier for you. For each refusal, two people die. The one who refuses and one from the crowd. How about now?" I pointed the gun at the crowd.

Unwillingly, they all let down their weapons and fell to their knees. I heard several gritted teeth, but I didn't care. Lindersay was mine now. I was halfway to what I wanted to achieve. A little more patience and I would have it all.

"Lock down the Castle and guard it heavily." I told the soldiers. "No one comes or goes without my permission."

"Yes...Alpha."

Now for the final step...the Blood Moon ritual.

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Flora's P.O.V

"Andre has...Malachi..."

Everything seemed jumbled up inside my mind for an instant; my mind unable to cope with the shock.

Malachi had been captured? Andre was the new Alpha?

If Andre had taken over the pack and the castle, then everything was over right before our eyes.

"Oh God...Emma!"

The sudden yell had me turning to see Emma falling backwards from where she stood, her eyes having rolled back into her head. Daphne and I rushed to catch her before her head hit the floor and we managed to get to her just in time.

"Emma!" I patted her cheeks, her head resting on my shoulders. "Emma, wake up."

"She's in shock." Samuel told us from the doorway, helping me snap out of my shock.

"Daphne, Samuel," I looked at them both. "Help me move her to the bed. She needs rest."

Samuel immediately agreed and came inside the room, picking Emma up into his arms and carrying her to the bed single-handedly. Daphne shut the door quietly and we gathered around the bed to take care of Emma.

"How bad is the situation?" I asked Samuel. "Why aren't Malachi's army doing anything?"

"Our army isn't as big as several of us opted to leave earlier this year." Samuel told us. "It's why Malachi had to call in the mercenaries since we were short-staffed. But as of now, we have no other option than to obey. Andre killed a common wolf in the pack just for speaking out and now he's given us the condition that if we do not co-operate, two people dies for each rebellion. One soldier and a commoner."

"That's horrible!" Daphne spoke before I could. "Damn it! We always felt something was off about that man!"

"Does Ezra know?" I asked, but Samuel shook his head.

"The Shrine Maiden had retired to her tower early today." He confirmed. "I don't think she's aware."

"Then one of us need to tell her." I turned to Daphne. "Go inform Ezra about what is happening. I'll stay here with Emma."

"Okay." Daphne immediately got off the bed and rushed to the door. She was gone the next instant and it showed just how scared she was as well.

"Will the Shrine Maiden be able to help?" Samuel asked almost hopefully.

"No." I told him as I got off the bed as well. "The Shrine Maiden doesn't have such power and if anything, Ezra might panic as well. But she needs to be made aware."

"I understand, Lady Healer." Samuel bowed, about to leave as well, but I stopped him.

"Samuel, can you do me a favor?" I asked as he stopped half-way.

"Just command, My Lady."

"Look after Emma for a few moments." I told him. "I must speak to Andre."

Samuel's eyes widened in horror. "My Lady!"

"I'm Andre's mate." I told him. "Or so he says. If there is anyone who can speak to him at the moment, it can only be me."

"Please be careful." Samuel bowed and I left the room, leaving Emma in his care.

I had lied to Samuel. I wasn't the best person to be speaking to Andre right now. In fact, I was scared too, just thinking about facing him once again after I rejected him just a few hours ago. Andre was probably waiting for a chance to cut off my head. But I needed this chance. I needed to know what was going on and I needed to find out what had happened to Malachi.

The guards that had once been stationed in the corridors had changed. They were all Andre's guards now and I felt them monitor my every step as I made my way out of the Maiden's quarters and to the main building where Malachi's office was. There were people still moving around, people from the pack that I saw every day, but their faces were ashen as if they had seen a ghost and no one said a word of greeting. The quietness was eerie even though there were several people around. Even Malachi's soldiers, who were now forced to work under Andre, were dead silent with their heads bowed.

I saw the spot of blood on the concrete before entering the building and balled my hands into fists. How could he? An Alpha who murdered his own packmates was no Alpha. Andre was a tyrant and a murderer and he needed to be stopped!

The sense of dread in my stomach intensified as I neared Malachi's office. The stares of the soldiers got worse, like they were waiting for their Alpha's command to rip me to shreds. I felt my skin crawl at their stares and I wanted to run away badly, but I was already here. There was no turning back now.

The two guards stationed outside the office opened the door as soon as they saw me and I entered without a word, only to feel the door slam shut behind me. I grit my teeth to stop myself from panicking. It felt like I had just walked into a trap and it was too late to turn back.

And then my eyes fell on Andre.

"I was waiting for you." Andre smiled, looking completely out of place inside Malachi's office as he sat leaning back in his chair. "Come, we have much to discuss."

"Where is Malachi?" I asked through gritted teeth, not interested in playing games with him. "What did you do to him?"

"Oh, don't worry, he's still alive." Andre got up from his chair and rounded the table to come to stand in front of me. "I figured killing him at this point would be a waste. But I wouldn't be concerned about Malachi if I were you. You upset me, Flora...now I must find a way to retaliate."

This time it was my turn to laugh at him.

"What's so funny?" He asked, his eyes narrowed at me.

"How old are you exactly that you must now 'retaliate' for me rejecting you?" I asked him instead. "I throw sand at you so you now have to throw sand at me? Is that how this works, Andre? Even children would be ashamed to play such games. So if you think by removing Malachi, you can now have some kind of control over me, you cannot be further from the truth."

Before I knew what was happening, I flew back into the wall behind me, slamming into it with teeth-gritting force as all the air was knocked out of my lungs. And even before I had a chance to recover, Andre's hand came around my neck, squeezing so tight that I knew it would leave bruises.

"Look at you talking like you have some kind of control over me." He pulled me forward with his grip around my neck before slamming me back against the wall so hard that I saw black spots dance in front of my eyes.

"Malachi was detained for a very specific reason...but you seem eager to take his place, alongside Clay."

The instant I heard his name come out of Andre's mouth, I started struggling to break free from his clutches. What did he do to Clay? What was he planning?

But no matter how hard I tried to break free, Andre's grip was like iron, completely immovable. He laughed at my futile attempts and must have decided to show pity on me because the next instant, he let go of my neck and I crumbled to the floor in a heap, gasping to get air into my lungs.

Why was I so weak? Why couldn't I have been born a more dominant wolf? A healer hardly had any strength in her body and until now, no man in my life had ever made me feel so small...so helpless.

"If you hadn't rejected me, all this could've now been ours," he spread his hand to point towards the room. "You could've been my Luna, ruling alongside me. But I'm a forgiving man so I will give you another chance."

I looked up into his face as Andre knelt in front of me. I felt myself backing away as he lifted his hand, but he didn't like the notion. Wrapping his hand in the hair at my nape, Andre pulled me forward, yanking my head back so he could look down at me. A yelp of pain escaped my lips, but he didn't care.

"There is a Blood Moon next month, exactly thirty one days from now." He smiled. "I'm sure your Shrine Maiden has already explained to you what it's for? True love's sacrifice. Malachi and Ezra."

"NO!" I whispered in horror. Andre was thinking about sacrificing Malachi and Ezra? It couldn't be! NO!

"Of course, two sacrifices are better than one." His laugh was all kinds of wicked as he yanked harder on my hair. "How about I place you and Clay on the list as well?"

"Leave Clay alone!" I yelled at him, trying my best to get free. But the struggle only made it hurt worse; only fueled his ego.

"Then become my mate." He said simply. "Since I like your spirit so much, I can overlook your little betrayal and give you another chance. Mate with me on the Blood Moon Ritual or die alongside Malachi, Ezra and Clay. The choice is yours."

"Choice?" I asked him incredulously. "You call this a choice?"

"Of course!" He finally let go of my hair and stood up. "And since I'm feeling generous, I'll throw in another penny. How about I let Clay live if you Mate with me? It's too late for Malachi and Ezra, but your little puppy can go free! How fun! I'll give you time to decide, but don't take too long, I get impatient easily."

With that, Andre walked out of the room and the door shut once again behind him.

I wrapped an arm around my middle, feeling my entire body ache in pain. What happened to the man I had met a month ago? Andre seemed like a gentleman, a kind man. But it had all been a façade! He had deceived and betrayed us all!

And now I was left with two choices, none of which were actual choices. Lose the love of my life and die alongside him...or let mate the man who I now despised with all my life to save Clay's life.

Healing the Rogue Alpha by Anna Kendra Chapter 40

I paced back and forth on the tower balcony, feeling dread settle in the pit of my stomach. Something bad was about to happen and the stormy winds were a harbinger of bad omens.

I knew there was going to be something happening as soon as Flora rejected Andre this evening. That man was nothing but bad news and the second he had stepped inside the castle, nothing good has come out of it. He had upset the balance that Malachi and I had maintained since the start of this pack. And now, Flora's rejection might mean he was about to do something drastic once again.

I couldn't blame Flora though. Poor girl had too much trouble to deal with since the beginning and Andre's appearance had caused her nothing but hurt. I can only wish I could do something to help her. But what can I do when I am bound by the same strings as her?

"Shrine Maiden!"

I halted mid-step, my restlessness was making my heart race and my fingers tremble. I clutched at my skirt to stop the trembling, but it didn't help much.

"Did you find any news?" I asked Daphne urgently, my voice coming out rough.

"Yes." The girl almost squeaked, but then I noticed the horror on her face. "Andre has overthrown Malachi just now. He's been taken somewhere."

That feeling of dread inside my stomach intensified and it felt like my heart would burst out of my chest. "Where? How? He is the Alpha of Lindersay!"

"Forgive me, my Lady, I do not know where...I wasn't able to follow." Daphne bowed her head as I saw her fingers tremble before she too clutched her skirt. "But Andre has proclaimed himself Alpha now and the soldiers have no choice but to support him. He killed one of our packmate in cold blood just to prove his point."

My legs gave out from under me as I collapsed onto the floor.

For a few seconds, my mind went completely blank. My ears began to ring and my eyes became unfocused.

"My lady! My lady! EZRA!!"

I snapped out of my trance and came face to face with Daphne. She looked just as panicked as me as she shook my shoulders but her eyes weren't unfocused. She was trying her best to keep from collapsing. And her determination gave me strength.

No! I couldn't collapse right now. I had to stay strong! I was the Shrine Maiden, I was their guiding light! I couldn't lose now! Malachi was gone and we didn't know where, so I had to make decisions in his stead.

"Tell me." I told her once again, but this time my voice didn't tremble.

"Andre...from what I gathered so far, he's planning on doing something on the next full moon, but I didn't get what it was." Daphne told me calmly, drawing strength from me. "I think he's furious that Flora rejected him. But this couldn't just be because of the rejection, could it? There seems to be something else at play here."

Suddenly, everything became very, very clear to me.

"Daphne...I need your help." I told her calmly as I got off the floor with her help. "I need you to gather all the Lunar Maidens and tell them to come to the shrine immediately. We are going to hold a prayer and no one must disrupt us."

Daphne looked confused for a few seconds but she didn't complain. Instead, she bowed her head in respect. "As you wish, my lady."

"And there's no need to call Flora." I told her before she left. "I'll call her myself."

"Yes, my lady."

Without wasting any more time, I headed straight to Flora's room, knowing she wouldn't be asleep now...not after today's events. And my suspicions were proven right when I found two guards stationed in the hallway where Flora's room was. They weren't being obvious that they were guarding her, but they gave me a stern look when I approached the door. I had the impression that if anyone else had come to fetch Flora, they would've been immediately rejected.

I knocked on her door and as I had expected, Flora came out looking weary, but her expression changed as soon as she saw me. "Ezra?"

"We are holding a prayer for turbulent times." I gave her a tight smile.

"At this hour?" Flora looked at me intensely for a second before nodding her head. "Of course, Shrine Maiden."

"I'll wait till you get ready." I gave her a tight smile as I held my ground and thankfully, Flora got the hint.

"Please, wait inside, My Lady." She moved away from the door to let me in and then shut the door immediately before facing me. "What is going on? Why are Andre's men outside my door?"

"We do not have time, you must hurry-" that was when I noticed it, the bruises around her neck. "Flora?"

She tried her best to hide it from me but I pried her hands away and got a closer look at the bruise. They were in the shape of a hand. "He did this to you?"

"I'm fine." Flora shook her head, pulling away from me. "I'm not concerned about what he did."

"You should be!" I wanted to rip this man's arms off his body for hurting my child! "No man is allowed to hit a woman, wolf or otherwise! That is not how women deserve to be treated!"

"Ezra!" Flora snapped at me. "Malachi is gone! He took Malachi to--"

She cut herself off, placing her hand in front of her mouth in shock.

I placed a hand on her shoulder, comforting her. I offered her a smile even though dread settled in my stomach. "I know, my child. I know what he wants. And I will gladly sacrifice myself if it means you and Clay can be together. I know Malachi would do the same."

"You know?" She looked at me with wide eyes; eyes that she got from her grandmother. "You knew?"

"Yes." I nodded. "I understood the second I heard what happened to Malachi. I had been preparing for this day for centuries. I have accepted my fate already."

"No!" Flora took hold of my shoulders. "I will not let you or Malachi get hurt! Lindersay need you both! So many lives depend on you! How can you abandon us like this?"

"Flora, child...this is my destiny." I tried to reason with her, but she shook her head and pulled back.

"You think you can give up this easily? Fine, then I'll tell you what else is at stake!"

The dread intensified as if I was physically in pain. I placed my hand on my abdomen in hopes that it would feel better...it didn't. Whatever Flora had to say, I knew I wasn't going to like it. Andre did something. Something horrible.

"Andre gave me two choices today." Flora finally disclosed to me. "I can either die at the Blood Moon ritual, alongside you, Malachi and Clay...or I can become Andre's mate and Clay get's to live."

My heart thrashed against my ribcage. "Those aren't choices!"

"I know." She nodded. "That's why I need your help. I don't plan on losing to Andre after coming this far and neither will you. We save everyone and get rid of Andre for good. But I can't do it alone. I don't know how."

Can I really do that? Could we really save everyone?

"There is one way," I told her after thinking long and hard. "It'll be filled with risks and it might not work in the end."

"But it's a way nonetheless." Flora added. "I'll settle for anything right now, any way that gives us the slightest ray of hope. Tell me what I need to do."

"Not here." I told her. "Change into your robes. We need to head to the Shrine. It's time."

"Yes, my Lady." Flora bowed to me and went inside the bathroom to get dressed while I waited outside, debating if I had done the right thing.

It has been centuries since I last remembered my Goddess. She might despise me at this point for betraying her, but I didn't have any other choice. I must turn to my creator and my guide as a last resort.

After ten more minutes, Flora and I made our way to the ceremonial hall where the prayers are held. Every single one of the Lunar Maidens had appeared in the hall, despite the late hours and I was grateful for it. I watched as the gates to the hall were closed and Daphne and another one of the maidens locked it securely. Good. I motioned for Flora and she joined the other Maidens while I made my way to the Dias.

"My lady...why are we having a prayer now?" Asked a dark haired maiden.

I gave her a smile before standing in front of the crowd and addressing the entire room. "Thank you for coming on such a short notice, but today I have summoned you all here for some matters of utter importance. It's now time to reveal the truth to all and expose the myths and legends that had bound us for centuries. It is time to tell you about my origin."