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Flora's P.O.V

Clay and I hid behind one of the forest giants at the very edge of the grassland, peeking from behind the trunk so as not to get caught. Clay's pack was right behind us, hiding in the grass and behind boulders or tree trunks. We were ready to attack.

But what we saw happening in the open had us speechless.

Andre slashed at Ezra's arm with a dagger and held a clay jar under the spray of blood. Ezra yelped in pain, but Andre didn't care. He was collecting her blood, for the Blood Moon ritual.

"Stay here." Clay warned me. "I'll try to sneak up on him while he is distracted."

I wanted to protest, but that was probably the only way to help Malachi and Ezra now. Clay's scent had changed now that he was no longer a rogue, as had the scent of the rest of his packmates, but Andre would recognize my scent easily.

"Be careful." I whispered.

Clay gave me a nod before lying flat on the ground and started crawling forward on his hands and knees, making as little disturbance on the grass around him as possible.

I looked up at Andre to find him switching over to Malachi, without even bothering to close up Ezra's wounds. Malachi, however, was in way worse shape than Ezra. His clothes were torn and dirty and entire body was covered in black and blue bruises. Andre hadn't just detained Malachi; he had tortured him as well.

I clutched the bow in my hand tightly as I watched Andre slash the dagger across his arm, a bit too deeper than necessary. Blood gushed out of his wound and once again, Andre held the jar under the spray, collecting as much of his blood as possible.

Once he had collected enough blood, Andre moved closer to the altar in between the wooden poles where Malachi and Ezra had been tied.

"Goddess of the Moon," Andre called out, holding the jar up to the sky. "Today, on the occasion of the Blood Moon, I present you the blood of true lovers. Accept their lives, their sacrifice as your gift and wake up your beloved from his eternal slumber. Accept this sacrifice and descend from your heavenly throne onto earth."

With that Andre started to lower the jar onto the altar...

Clay jumped up from the grass and headed straight for Andre, pouncing on him with his claws extended. The jar of blood fell from his hands before it could touch the altar and onto the grass, spilling blood everywhere.

"Look what you did! You fool!" Andre hissed, slashing out with his claws, but Clay jumped back right on time. "I would've come for you right after the ritual, but you fools saved me the trouble."

With that, Andre lunged at Clay, forcing him on the ground and several other wolves came running out of the woods and headed straight for the duo.

"Go! Now!" I yelled at Clay's wolves and they shot out into the clearing, as if waiting for my command.

It was war. There was no way around it anymore.

The wolves clashed with each other, claws and fangs bared. Blood splashed everywhere. It was a horror I never wanted to witness but now I was in the center of it all.

Andre and Clay fought with their claws, and every time I saw blood on Clay, I felt my heart sink to my stomach.

Suddenly, a wolf jumped out from behind the altar and landed on top of Clay, biting down on his shoulder. Clay yelped in pain as blood dripped down his shirt, turning the dark green into black.

Adjusting my bow, I ran out into the open and shot an arrow at the wolf on Clay's back. He went down almost immediately, thanks to the paralyzing poison.

Clay jerked off the dead weight and hurled the man at Andre, who sliced his claws through the man's abdomen, not caring that he was hurting his own men.

But I got distracted halfway as two wolves came running at me from the distance. I kept shooting arrows at them, missing once before the next arrow embedded itself into the wolf's chest, taking him down. The second wolf had come too close already for me to shoot my arrow, so I did the only thing I could. I took out the dagger that Ezra had given me, from my belt and slashed it across the wolf's belly as it lunged at me for an attack.

Since I was already out in the open, I headed straight for Ezra and used my bloody dagger to cut through her ropes. I placed my hand on top of her gash and sealed the wound so there wouldn't be any more blood loss.

"Flora...the last sacrifice?" Ezra asked, her voice faint but the grip she had on my arm was firm.

I lowered my head. I had failed her, failed my maidens in completing the ritual to call Artemis.

"It's alright, Flora." Ezra tried to comfort me even now. "It's not your fault. We never knew if we could complete the ceremony or not. But you were able to heal the rogues. Come, let's help Malachi."

Since dwelling in guilt wouldn't help anyone, I wrapped an arm around Ezra and we made our way to where Malachi was tied. Freeing him with the dagger, I healed the wound that needed immediate attention, but when I went to heal him further, he stopped me.

"Save your energy. The fight isn't over yet." He said, leaning against the wooden pole with Ezra by his side.

"Flora!" Clay shouted then, holding Andre down with all his strength, only a few meters in front of me. Blood flowed down his arm freely, but Clay didn't show it on his face. He was counting on me to make the last move.

I took out another arrow from the quiver, finding out too late that it was the last arrow I had, and pointed it at Andre. If I missed this one, it would be too late.

"You can't win!" Andre shouted back, smiling through bloody teeth. "Even if I go down, my men will continue fighting! There is no way you can win now! The Goddess has accepted the sacrifice. Malachi and Ezra are as good as dead!"

Shit! What to do-

A glow coming from the forest caught my attention instead and I felt my eyes widened in shock. It couldn't be...could it? Right in the place where there were so many predators?

But there was no more time to think. This was the only shot I would have.

Stretching the bow string, I focused on the target as best as I could, chanting a prayer in my mind as I did so...and let go of the string.

The arrow shot past Clay's head, heading straight for the woods.

Everything seemed to stand still for an instant and I watched the scene unfold with my heart in my throat. Clay looked at me with wide eyes, unsure of what to do.

Andre's maniacal laugh cut through the silence, drawing our attention to him. He gave me a wide grin, as if he had already won the battle and spoke through his laughter. "You missed."

This time, I returned his smile and his laughter cut off immediately. "Did I?"

“What?” Both Andre and Clay turned to look behind them, at the woods where I had shot the arrow and watched as the deer fell to the forest floor, blood sprouting out of its chest where the arrow had embedded itself.

“No...” Andre whispered in horror, realizing too late what I had done as thunder and lightning rumbled through the sky.

‘Goddess Artemis, the great Goddess of beasts, of the moon, of childbirth. Help us, Goddess. Help us in times of dire need. Descend onto earth and vanquish evil. This I pray to you with the sacrifice of this deer. Answer our prayers, Goddess Artemis.’

The wind suddenly turned into a hurricane and the sky just above the altar turned a bright gold.

“Clay! Move!” I screamed at him and he got out of the way just in time, before lightning fell from the sky...and struck directly at Andre.

A flash of blinding light filled the sky.

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Flora's P.O.V

The figure of a woman appeared from the center of the column of light that stretched up straight to the sky.

Clay was by my side in an instant, holding my hand in his as the winds swirled around us wildly. Thunder rumbled, lightning struck the land around the column of light and we moved back further to shield Malachi and Ezra from the flying debris.

The war among the wolves had also come to a sudden halt and everyone was now looking at the column of light in fear and anticipation.

And then the light disappeared, leaving behind a Goddess.

Just like the Moon Goddess, Goddess Artemis stood taller than us by a few feet. Her skin was the color of ivory and it held a glow to it, like the blood inside her veins were illuminated. She had long dark brown hair that reached her mid-back and her eyes were a dark brown.

She wore a white tunic with a short skirt that reached her knees and on her hand was a golden bow. A leather quiver was slung over her shoulder, resting on her back and all the arrows inside were made of gold as well. A golden headdress

adorned her forehead and her ethereal beauty shone through the simplicity of her form.

My wolf called to her and I felt a connection to her that was far deeper than the connection that I felt with the Moon and its Goddess. This truly was Artemis, the Goddess of Beasts and the Goddess of the Moon. And the power in her made my wolf bow its head in respect. However, I wasn't the only one who bowed to her. Friends and foes, everyone lowered their head to the Great Goddess, both out of respect and fear.

"Who here summons me?" Her voice rang out loud and clear, echoing around the clearing. "Who here hunts the deer?"

I looked up at the Goddess, swallowing the fear. "I did."

"Brave wolf healer." Artemis tilted her head to the side, studying me up and down. "Tell me, one wish that you truly desire and I shall grant it for you."

But before I could speak, another lightning struck not too far away and another column of light appeared to descend down from the heavens.

Dread settled in my stomach as I realized what was happening. Turning to Clay, I motioned towards Malachi. "Shield him. The Moon Goddess isn't going to be happy that we interrupted the ceremony."

"Is there no way we can stop her?" Clay asked, looking away from the blinding display of lights.

"We are mere wolves..." I shook my head. "How can we interfere if a Goddess wants to sacrifice her own son?"

Clay looked at Malachi with wide eyes. "Her son?"

"Selene..."

I whipped around to the scene in front of us and as we had expected, there she was, the Goddess of the Moon in all her beauty.

Her long silver hair blew back in the wind and her pure white robe floated around her in waves. This time, her pure white wings spread out from her back, fully open in a span of about six feet on either side of her body and just like the Goddess Artemis; her form was tall as well, almost as tall as Artemis herself.

Selene's translucent eyes sparked fire as she looked at Artemis.

"How dare you hurt my son?" She hissed at the other Goddess, her wings flexing even wider.

"Now you worry about your son hurting?" Artemis gave Selene a smile. "Weren't you about to receive your other son's blood as a sacrifice? Father isn't too happy with your meddling."

For an instance, Selene looked visibly shaken to hear the statement. It took me an instant to understand why.

Artemis's father was Zeus, the God of all Gods in Olympus and Selene had once been his lover as well.

Shit! This was bad. Did we end up creating a war between two Gods? If so, then the mortal realm would suffer for our consequences. Because when Gods fought, everyone else died.

"Goddess!" I called out before they could talk to each other any further. And at that moment, I knew I was done for.

"You dare interrupt us." Selene screeched, raising her hand as a sphere of light appeared in her hand.

"Hold, Selene." Artemis interrupted her. "This wolf is the one who summons me. I own her a wish. You cannot interfere until she had made her wish."

The sphere of light disappeared from her hand as Selene looked at me up and down. "Ah, I remember you, little wolf." She gave me a cunning smile, somehow still managing not to look evil doing it. "Before you make your wish, remember that each wish comes with a condition. If you think you can save yourself from my wrath, then your lover shall take your place. So wish wisely."

I looked back towards Goddess Artemis helplessly, but she gave me a sad smile. "Selene is correct. Every wish comes with a condition. So wish wisely."

Wish wisely?

I looked back towards Malachi, Ezra and Clay, all of them nodded in unison, letting me know that whatever I wished for, they were going to accept it.

But that was my biggest dilemma. What was I to wish for? What could I possibly wish for that would benefit everyone here and not just me and Clay?

I could choose to stay happily with Clay, but what about Malachi and Ezra? What about the other wolves that rejected the mating bond? And if I chose that the Goddess Selene revoke the law of the mating bond, there was still a chance that she would want to continue the Blood Moon ceremony and Malachi could become a sacrifice along with Ezra.

Then what could I choose that would be helpful for every single person here, every single wolf.

I looked up at the sky in exhaustion, looking for a sign, any sign to help me decide what to do next...and then I saw it.

The red sky.

The Blood Moon.

And everything became clear to me.

"I'm ready to make a wish." I told Artemis, balling my hands at my sides. I dared not look behind me at anyone else, because if I did, my will would falter and I couldn't risk that happening.

This was it. It was now or never.

"Tell me, child." Artemis spoke. "What is your wish?"

I looked at the Moon Goddess once; saw her looking at me with a smile. She thought she had me trapped, but I wasn't. And my wish was for her, not me.

"I..." I shook my head before starting again.

"We wish for Endymion to wake up."

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Flora's P.O.V

"We wish for Endymion to wake up." I told her, shocking almost everyone around us.

Goddess Artemis tilted her head to the side, studying me. "You wish for Endymion to wake up? Why?"

"Because every time the Goddess Selene curses one of us wolves for rejecting the mating bond, it's the pain that she herself has been suffering for centuries." I explained. "Yes, she sees her lover every day, but he rests in an eternal slumber. She can never hear his voice again; never hear him tell her how much he loves her. We are vocal creatures and no matter how much a person shows us they love us...those three words can do so much more than just give us reassurance. Words. That's why I want Endymion to wake up, so he can hold the Goddess in her arms and tell her from his own lips how much she means to him."

The Moon Goddesses looked at me in stunned silence. They hadn't expected me to make such a wish, but I do not regret making it. If this is my last day on this planet, then I will make sure no other couple has to bear the same fate as me

ever again. Everyone should have the right to choose the person they love and not be forced into a bond that makes you believe you were meant only for them. That choice, that feeling, should come from the heart.

I could feel almost everyone hold their breath, awaiting the judgment of the Goddesses with our hearts in our throat. Anything could happen at this point and I knew I was ready for it all to finally end.

"I cannot revoke a spell cast by the almighty Zeus, for he is far too powerful. And I cannot go against my Lord, my father." Artemis said finally. "But I can create a loophole that should suffice."

Artemis raised her bow high and closed her eyes. "From now onwards, on the night of every new moon, Endymion will wake from his slumber for the night and go back to his slumber in the morning."

Artemis struck the end of her bow on the ground and thunder roared in the sky, causing a bright flash. I closed my eyes out of fear, but then the thunder stopped and the skies began to clear.

"Zeus has accepted the condition." Artemis spoke to me when I looked up at her. "Your wish has been granted, little one. Now for the condition."

I bowed my head and knelt on the ground in front of her. This was it...the moment that decided I lived or died. If I get to spend the rest of my life with Clay...or not.

"From now onwards," Artemis spoke and I shut my eyes tightly, awaiting judgment. "Lindersay must have a Shrine dedicated to me as well and I must have my own worshippers, my Huntresses. Make sure my wish is fulfilled."

My head whipped up at the goddess, my eyes wide in shock. "I get to live?"

"And what good would your death have done for me?" Artemis smirked. "You now have a greater purpose. Gods aren't often this lenient, but you were able to win my heart with your wish. So live well, Flora. You have been spared."

A flash of light fell from the sky and Artemis disappeared with it, like a shooting star returning back to the heavens.

Now, all that was left to do was face the Moon Goddess, Selene.

"You have some nerve interfering with the work of the Gods." Selene spoke and it wasn't directed to me but Malachi and Ezra. Clay was still beside them, helping support Malachi. "You called for Artemis in my Shrine and almost caused me to go into war with the Goddess of War herself."

"Forgive me, My Lady." Ezra bowed low, her forehead to the ground. "It was all my fault. Punish me, please. But let the others go. I take full responsibility."

"Ezra." Malachi tried to reach for her, but he was too weak. His hand dropped by his side and he looked at the Goddess helplessly. "Mother...please."

"And now you want to take the blame and the responsibility for her actions?" Selene raised her eyebrows at her son, her almost translucent eyes filled with amusement.

And then the Goddess turned to face Andre.

His form was lying immobile next to the altar. At first, when he had been struck with lightning, I had thought he was dead, we all had. But now that I saw him closely, I found his chest moving at a steady pace. His breathing was shallow, but he was most definitely alive.

"My son had gone above and beyond to help me find happiness," Selene spoke gently. "But no man should be so arrogant as to raise his hand against a woman. I failed in raising him properly, so now he must forget who he truly is."

Andre's body disappeared with a flash of light and I heard Malachi's faint voice calling out to the Goddess.

"Fear not, he is alive." Selene confirmed. "But from now on, he will have no memory of who he is or who he was. He will wake up in a peaceful pack, where he will learn to live all over again, and this time, I hope he is able to overcome his flaws."

Finally, the Goddess turned to me.

"Flora, blood of my blood." She came forward, her glorious white wings stretched wide before she pulled them back. "You...I am indebted to."

"Goddess!" I shook my head immediately.

"You showed me what true love looks like and that it lies in sacrificing oneself for the sake of others." She held out her hands for me and I took them hesitantly, rising to my feet to look up into her beautiful face. "You gave me my biggest joy. You gave me back my Endymion, even if it is for a few nights."

"So to repay you for your wish...I revoke the law of the mating bond." Selene spoke loud and clear. "Mates will still exist, but if your heart is truly taken by someone else, you will be able to reject the mating bond and live with your chosen mate, forming a new bond with them."

I almost collapsed on the spot with relief. It felt like a mountain had been lifted from my shoulders and if the Goddess hadn't been holding my hand still, I would've indeed collapsed on the ground.

"All of you..." the Goddess looked across the clearing at everyone present. "Go live your life the way you want, with who you want. Love shouldn't come with conditions, I understand that now. Live freely. Love freely."

Selene let go of my arm and stepped back and this time, the light coming from her spread across the field in waves, making us all close our eyes immediately.

When the light had disappeared and we opened our eyes once again, all of Andre's men had disappeared, leaving behind only the wolves from Clay's pack and Malachi and Ezra.

It was finally over. The war that we had fought for years had finally come to an end. And miraculously...we had all come out of it alive.

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Flora's P.O.V

Cheers went all around the castle as we entered through the main doors.

Mercy came rushing towards us along with four guards carrying a stretcher. Malachi was immediately escorted to the infirmary and Ezra went along with him.

I saw almost all of the maidens rush toward the wolves that belonged to Clay's pack. They turned to their human form to embrace their lost lovers and everyone started rejoicing all at once. I had never seen my friends, my sisters so happy. The entire castle felt vibrant, alive.

"Come," I took Clay's hand in mine. "Let's get out of here."

I brought him upstairs to the maiden's quarters where my room was located and shut the door behind us. Clay's wounds were healing faster now, but they might leave scars.

I went to use my healing on him but Clay caught my hand. "Aren't you going to see your packmates first?"

"No." I shook my head. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be than here with you."

"Then I think we better head to the shower first." Clay took my hand. "I'd rather not have the scent of blood mixed in with ours."

"Agreed."

I pulled Clay along with me in the direction of the shower, discarding our clothes as we went. I could always clean up the mess later.

Turning the shower to hot, I got under the spray with Clay and locked our lips together.

Clay lifted me up with his hands at the back of my thighs and I wrapped my legs around his hips. He held me up against the wall, somehow managing to keep us under the spray and never once breaking the kiss.

I felt the blunt head of his cock at my entrance and undulated my hips against him telling him I was more than ready for him. There was no foreplay required.

Clay pushed into my core, making my back arch. I gasped in pleasure and he took the opportunity to enter his tongue into my mouth. His tongue roamed freely, tasting every nook and cranny as he moved inside me with a slow steady pace.

I tangled my fingers in his hair, sending him my healing to fix the bite wound on his arm. It was already a lot better with only red marks remaining in the shape of teeth, but now I watched them heal in front of my eyes.

And just like the last time I did this, the sharing of healing energy during an intimate moment heightened our senses once again.

"Clay!" I moaned, feeling heat built up at my core.

"I know." Clay groaned, increasing his pace, going faster with each thrust as I moved my hips to keep up with him.

And then there was no more thought, no more sensation than the euphoria of my orgasm as Clay groaned out my name, burying his head at the crook of my neck and I dug my nails into his shoulders, hard enough to draw blood.

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I woke up to the sound of someone knocking on my door.

Getting up from beside Clay, I pulled the covers over him and donned my robe before I went to open the door. Samuel stood outside with a huge grin on his face.

"Samuel?" I asked, unable to help smiling back at his energetic face. He was covered in cuts and bruises too, but they didn't seem to bother him now.

"Alpha Malachi has called for you and Clay." There was pure joy in his voice as he spoke Malachi's name. "He and the Shrine Maiden will be waiting in his office."

"Malachi is healed?" I asked surprised. "His wounds were quiet severe."

"It's a miracle," Samuel nodded. "Lady Mercy said he almost healed on his own. I suppose the Goddess helped."

I nodded too, agreeing with his theory. "Thank you, Samuel. We'll be right down in a few minutes."

"Who was it?" Clay asked groggily as I closed the door and I went straight into his arms when he reached for me.

"Malachi has requested our presence." I informed him. "It looks like the Goddess helped him heal."

"Would've looked bad for her if she hadn't." Clay shrugged. "Do we have to go? I'd rather stay in bed with you."

"Can't help it. We've been in bed since yesterday." I gave him a peck on the lips before getting up. "I'll get someone to get you more clothes."

Almost an hour later, Clay and I knocked on Malachi's office door. It had taken a bit of time trying to get clothes for Clay that would fit him, but we had successfully managed to get our hands on new clothes at the end.

"Come in." Malachi's voice rang out loud and clear and the guards outside opened the door for us.

Malachi was sitting on one of the sofas in his room, dressed in comfortable clothing rather than his army-like attires and Ezra sat next to him in a beautiful lavender gown. None of them had any scars on them and I was glad for it. It was also a bit weird to see Ezra in anything other than white, but she looked beautiful nonetheless and I was happy that she no longer had to follow celibacy because of her oath.

"Come, have a seat." Ezra urged with a smile, one of her hands held tightly in Malachi's larger ones. "I thought we could have dinner together."

"Thank you for inviting us." Clay said, a bit awkwardly. Since the healed rogues will now be integrated into the Lindersay pack, he was no longer their Alpha. It was a bit difficult for him to adjust to his new role in this pack.

"It's our pleasure." Malachi smiled.

Dinner passed by comfortably. The conversation was nice and light and Clay felt welcome as well when Malachi indulged in small talk with him. None of us discussed events from yesterday and it was nice not having the Goddesses dagger dangling on top of our heads. We were now free to choose.

"Now...there is something important we must tell you," Ezra said after we had finished desserts and the plates had been cleared out of the room. "Especially to you, Flora."

"Of course," they had my full attention almost immediately. "Is something wrong?"

"No, it's nothing to worry about." Malachi comforted. "Do you remember in the grassland, when the Moon Goddess had called you 'blood of my blood'?"

Come to think about it, that part had struck me as odd. But the fact that the Goddess has told me she was indebted to me and then with the events that had followed, I was trying my best not to have a heart attack, so the part about her calling me 'blood of my blood', had completely skipped my mind...until now.

"Yes." I nodded. "Which was very strange, to be honest. What did she mean by that? Blood of her blood?"

"It means you are our blood, Flora. You are our descendent." Ezra said, knocking the air right out of my lungs.

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Flora's P.O.V

"W-wh-at?" I stuttered.

"You are our blood, Flora." Malachi smiled at me like a loving father, his eyes glossed with unshed tears. "It was a knowing deep in my bones the instant I set eyes on you. We have been waiting centuries to find you."

I shook my head, trying to make sense of it all. "If you are my ancestor...that means...the Goddess..."

"Yes," they nodded. "You are the descendent of the Goddess as well. You are our grandchild's child."

I shook my head in denial...but how could I deny the connection? I had always felt comfortable around Malachi and Ezra. I had always felt like they were my guardians, my blood. Now that they were saying that I was actually their blood...it did make sense, but at the same time, it seemed like a farfetched fairytale.

"How is that even possible? My parents...they are your descendents too?"

"Yes," Ezra nodded. "One side of your family comes from us. I cannot tell who our blood is unless we see them, but either your mother or your father is our descendent. You are possibly the fourth generation."

"But wolves can live up to a thousand years...then what happened?"

As far as I knew, my grandparents on my father's side were still alive and belonged to a neighbouring pack, but my mother had been-shit! My mother had

been an orphan! She had been found by Alpha Nicolas inside the woods and he had assumed it was a rogue attack that might have killed my grandparents and thus, he had given her a new family. We always avoided talking about my mom's family like it was a taboo subject to prevent her from feeling hurt. So it had completely slipped my mind.

"I think it might be my mother," I told Malachi now. "She was found in the forest by our Alpha."

"Then our child had survived," Ezra gave a sad smile. "Our daughter had been taken away from us the instant she was born, by the Goddess herself. We had thought it was the end of her life. We had been hoping to be wrong for centuries, but it wasn't until we saw you that we realized our child had survived....long enough to keep our bloodline alive."

"And now we want to retire from our duties and spend the rest of our days together." Malachi took Ezra's hand as he spoke. "That's why we called you here today; to hand over our duties and leave Lindersay in your capable hands."

"Leave Lindersay?"

Clay and I spoke at the same time, exchanging worried looks.

"It's fine." Ezra shook her head with a smile. "The Goddesses gave you permission to be together. They revoked the law where a wolf can only accept the mating bond. So now, Lindersay must change along with the changing times. And who better to bring these changes than the ones who were the harbinger of that change?"

"I'll hand over the title of Alpha over to Clay." Malachi confirmed. "And Flora will take over the Shrine. Flora will also be in charge of building the new Shrine for Goddess Artemis."

"Malachi...I've always known that I was born to be the Alpha. But to be the Alpha of Lindersay is too big a responsibility." Clay spoke this time, his voice filled with emotions. "I'm not sure I'm ready for this."

"When I took over Lindersay, I was the same age as you." Malachi told him. "I had just met Ezra, a warrior from the enemy pack and fallen head over heels in love with her the instant she shot her first arrow at me."

Both Ezra and Malachi laughed at our bewildered expressions.

"I know it's strange, but at that time, it was love at first sight with my warrior." Malachi and Ezra shared a secret smile. "We had struggled to make our packs accept our love as well, but eventually we did and Ezra and I started our lives together. Soon we found out Ezra was pregnant and I was over the moon...that was until my mate showed up."

"Malachi told her that he couldn't feel the mating bond and ended up rejecting her." Ezra continued. "But the rest is history. We can finally be together now. The

curse of Selene has been lifted and love has prevailed. Now, we can finally spend the rest of our lives the way we want to. We will always be near you, but Lindersay had been our prison for far too long. We want to be free, explore the new world together, meet new packs and grown old together...I hope you understand."

Clay and I exchanged nervous looks. Yes, we did understand them, but the responsibility they were putting on us was huge. Would we be able to live up to their names?

"Don't worry," Malachi reassured. "We won't abandon you just yet. We will help you until you're well settled into your roles. Your packmates are also having difficulty adjusting after spending so many years in the wolf form and you need to stay by their side to walk them through these changes." He told Clay.

"I have faith in them." He nodded. "Thank you for giving me this opportunity...I could never have gotten to this point if it weren't for your help."

"I didn't do anything to help, just nudged you in the direction you would have eventually found on your own. But I am glad I have a worthy successor to Lindersay." Malachi looked around the room as if trying to memorize every detail. "Take good care of this land. I had spent most of my life building it, now it's your turn to cherish this place as your own."

"I will always cherish Lindersay." Clay bowed to Malachi, kneeling on the ground in front of him. "This had been my home for ten years and if I hadn't left my heart back at my previous pack, I had every intention of staying. You have given me an opportunity of a life-time."

"You earned that opportunity yourself," Ezra placed a hand on Clay's head. "You saved us all by going against a Goddess. You made us proud. Lindersay now belongs to you."

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Hours after we returned to our room, Clay and I stood in front of the windows, looking out at the forest drenched in the light of the full moon.

There were no rogues in the forest any longer, no more red eyes staring back at us. Every single one of them was now sane and healing, adapting to their new life and coping with the lost time. And they were now being watched over by not one, but two Goddesses.

"Everything still feels so...unreal." I told Clay, looking up into his beautiful emerald eyes. "Like I had just woken up from a bad dream."

"In all this time...did you ever think that maybe it would've been better if you had chosen Ruth as your mate?" It was a question I had to ask. If people thought I was a superficial person because of it then so be it, but to me, words mattered

just as much as actions. Clay had showed me multiple times that he would die for me, but I still wanted to hear him say it. Still needed that verbal confirmation.

“Maybe it would’ve been for the best. It would’ve made the entire pack happy.” Clay said and I felt my heart beat a little faster. “But how could I have made Dorothy happy if I wasn’t happy myself? I would’ve always had regrets and I would’ve come to resent Dorothy. A failed mating was no better than a prison with no escape route. So, yes, I had thought about what would have happened if I accepted the mating bond and just how miserable the three of us would’ve been.”

Clay turned to face me, cupping my cheeks in his hands. “I knew it sounds creepy, but I had always felt this bond with you ever since you were young. At first it was nothing sexual, only a fierce protectiveness. I would stand in the way of anyone who tried to hurt you, no matter what the cost. But when I came to Lindersay, that protectiveness turned to longing. I spent night after night thinking about how you were growing up and how every boy in the vicinity would want to stake a claim on you. It made me angry, but I kept waiting for the day I could finally return to ReedStone and see you again.”

“The first time I experienced true desire was the day I saw you once again, in that classroom, sitting at the back and avoiding my gaze at all costs. I had put off going to see you because I knew my obsession with you wasn’t just obsession, it was so much more. But at that time, neither of us was ready to face the true power of our connection.”

And then Clay knelt down in front of me, making all the air in my lungs gush out in a single breath.

“Fifteen years ago, I made a promise to a child that one day, when she is all grown up, I would marry her.” He pulled out a ring from his pocket, sans the box and held it out to me. “Today, I want to ask that same woman...will you, Flora Argentine, do me the honors of becoming my wife and making me the happiest man alive?”

Tears flowed freely from my eyes as I saw the ring. It was a simple diamond and yet, to me it was the most precious gem in the world. The words seemed stuck in my throat and no matter how I tried; I couldn’t say it past the swell of emotions, so all I did was nod my head, trying my best not to start wailing.

But thankfully Clay understood and slipped the ring into my ring finger and picked me up into his arms, spinning me round as his laughter reverberated across the room.

“I love you.” We both said at the same time, sealing the deal of this lifetime, with a kiss.

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"This is excessive." I told both Emma and Daphne as I looked at myself in the mirror.

"No!" They both protested at the same time. "This is just perfect!"

"But...but...it's supposed to be a wedding dress," I pointed out. "This looks like someone robbed a Queen!"

"Today, you are no less than royalty," Emma came forward to adjust the veil of my dress. "You deserve it, after everything you have been through. Besides, it's pretty much your coronation to the position of the Shrine Maiden. So enjoy the spotlight girl and stop complaining!"

I gave Emma a wide eyed look. "Since when are you so forward?"

"This one's been rubbing off on me." Emma shrugged, pointing over her shoulder to a smirking Daphne.

I sighed and looked back at my reflection in the full-sized mirror. The dress was extravagant, with pearls and diamonds attached to the bodice to make intricate patterns that would give the biggest brands a run for their money. It fit me like a glove till my waist and then flared out into a princess skirt with even more pearls and diamonds. I was given a bouquet of freshly plucked giant white roses with a single blue orchid in the centre, from the gardens behind the palace and on my head, securing the veil was an actual diamond tiara. A tiara!

I was also wearing pearl drop earrings that Ezra had given me and my makeup had been kept natural, which had been way more make-up than I had ever worn in my life. My blonde hair was in a fancy bun on the back with a few curled tendrils hanging on either side of my face. To be honest, I didn't even recognize myself in the mirror. I looked completely different and I kinda thought it was perfect.

I hadn't been one of those girls who talked about their wedding and planned their dream wedding since they were ten. I hadn't even given much thought to finding my mate. But that had been all before I met Clay. As a child, I had once told him that I wanted to marry him and now, fifteen years later, that dream was about to become a reality.

I looked down at the ring on my finger once again. It was a single diamond, the size of a small pea. It was set in a gold band and the design looked old. But it didn't matter if it was old or new, diamond or any other stone. I would've been happy if clay had given me plastic, because it wasn't about the ring, it was about what it signified. This ring meant that I belonged to Clay forever and that was all that mattered.

"I'm curious though," Daphne asked, dressed in a teal blue gown that hugged her in all the right places. "How did your man get the ring?"

“Apparently, Malachi had given it to him before we left his room that night.” I shrugged. “Sometimes, I have difficulty understanding if Malachi is my great-grandfather or Clay’s.”

“Well, he’s definitely fond of his great-grandson-in-law.” Emma laughed, her dress a light pink that suited her warm skin tone. “Let’s get going. They might call us an-”

A knock sounded on the door before Emma could finish her sentence and she shrugged at me before heading for the door.

“Flora.” Malachi called as he entered the room and his eyes widened as he took me in. “You look absolutely stunning.”

“Thank you,” I told him, tears welling up in my eyes. “For everything you have done for me and Clay.”

“And I would do it all over again if need be.” He came forward to cup my cheeks and press a feather-light kiss to my forehead. “Let’s not keep the groom waiting, shall we?”

He offered me his elbow and I took it with a smile. There was no veil as this wasn’t a normal marriage. It was a mating ceremony.

The entire hallway was decorated in flower garlands and their sweet, sweet fragrance filled the air as we made our way to the aisle. The wedding was being held in the front courtyard and all members of our pack were present there, not just to witness the wedding, but to hear what Malachi had to say in the end. He had decided to announce his retirement from his Alpha position today as well, as hand over his responsibilities over to us.

It was all the more reason for me to be nervous as we turned the corner and stepped onto the red carpet that led to the altar. I heard several gasps from the crowd as they guests all stood up to welcome me and soft music began to play. The sunlight hit my dress and the diamonds scattered the light onto the floor, on the carpet, as if urging me to move forward.

I didn’t know why I was so nervous though. My heart was racing inside my chest and I was clutching my bouquet tightly.

But then I looked up and all my worries vanished at that very instant.

Clay stood alone at the altar, with a garland of huge white flowers at his back. He was wearing white too. A white jacket, white pants and a white shirt underneath, with a black bow tie and a black bordering at the collar of his jacket the only dark elements. A wide smile spread on his lips as soon as he saw me and when he wiped at the corner of his eyes, I knew he was feeling just as overwhelmed as I was.

It was our wedding day. It was finally the day where we officially became one.

I clutched Malachi's hand tighter as we made our way to the altar and then he handed me over to Clay, placing my hand in his. He then proceeded to take his place and begin the mating ceremony.

"We are gathered here today, to witness the joining of these two pair of lovers in the holy union of matrimony." Malachi called out and everyone went silent.

"Flora Argentine and Clay Scotsman." Malachi spoke. "You have been through hell and back for each other and you have fulfilled the conditions set out by the Goddess herself. This ceremony is just a necessary formality and so, without further ado, we commence the ceremony."

Ezra appeared at the end of the red carpet then, carrying two silver goblets in a tray as she made her way to us. She wore a beautiful sky gown that lit up her eyes and her golden hair was loose down to her hips, swaying in the wind.

Once she reached us, she handed us the goblets filled with what looked like wine.

"Flora Argentine, do you take Clay Scotsman to be your husband, your mate and your faithful partner for as long as you both shall live?" Malachi asked.

"I do." I took a sip of the wine, feeling the alcohol burn down my throat and then held the goblet up to Clay's lips.

"And do you, Clay Scotsman, take Flora Argentine to be your wife, your mate and your faithful partner for as long as you both shall live?"

"I do." Clay took a sip from his goblet and held it to my lips.

"Drink the wine from each other's goblets thrice to complete the ritual."

Clay and I both took three sips from each other's goblets and then placed the goblets back into the tray and Ezra stowed it away to another woman, to carry it away from us.

"With the power of the Moon Goddess and with her permission, I now pronounce you as a mated pair." Malachi spoke, his smile radiant. "You may now kiss the bride."

Clay's lips met mine an instant later and cheers went up in the air as flower petals rained down on us. I tried not to get lost in the kiss, since we weren't alone, but it was a bit difficult letting him go.

Clay's eyes were burning emeralds as he gazed upon me with wicked, wicked promises. It made me blush and hide behind the bouquet in my hands. But then Malachi cleared his throat, ready to make his announcement.

"I know rumors have already started floating around Lindersay and many of you are concerned if they are true or not." Malachi addressed the crowd. "And I want to clear the facts once and for all."

Clay and I looked at each other a bit nervously, before we went to stand on either side of Malachi. I didn't know what the reaction of my packmates would be, but I wanted to support Malachi.

"I had taken care of Lindersay for almost four centuries." Malachi began. "I had watched it grow and evolve, but no one person can remain Alpha forever. As Lindersay grows and moves forward, so must we. So...after four centuries of being the Alpha, I will now hand over the baton to Clay Scotsman. I hope you accept him as your new Alpha"

"And I will be leaving my duties as the Shrine Maiden and handing my responsibilities to our great-granddaughter, Flora." Ezra added, holding my hand to show her support.

I think it was the word 'great-granddaughter' that did the magic because the next thing we know, the entire crowd was bowing their heads to us.

"We respect your decision, Alpha."

"We respect your decision, Shrine Maiden."

Everyone spoke at once, not only accepting Malachi and Ezra's decision, but also accepting me and Clay as the new Shrine Maiden and the new Alpha of Lindersay, respectively.

Thus began our new journey, our new lives together, leaving the shadows of the past exactly where they belonged...in the past.