

A Gift from the Goddess Chapter 119 book 2

"You were never meant to grow up in a city like this. Our kind stays together for a reason."

I could hear what Kieran was saying, but I was struggling to fully grasp it.

"Not human"

"Our kind".

"Werewolf".

The words kept swimming around in my head.

An explanation that seemed too impossible to believe.

And yet, at the same time, what he was saying somehow made sense.

He was right.

I wasn't human.

A part of me had always known that, dating back to when I was a child. I was never like the other kids at the house.

Turning eighteen had just manifested that part of me in the form of a beast.

So...was this what had been missing then? I was a werewolf? Like in those scary stories? Like...in those *monster* movies...?

"How do I make it go away?" I asked after a few moments, my voice barely louder than a whisper.

"How do I stop being...a werewolf? To be normal?"

"Raven...it's a part of who you are. There isn't any way to remove it."

"But I don't want to live with this burden of losing control at any moment," I argued.

"I can't afford to have slips when things go wrong, or have this constantly interfering with every little thing I do. I'm living in a nightmare every time I lapse."

He took another few cautious steps towards me but I didn't back away this time.

With every word he spoke, my resolve to push him away faded a little bit more. It was as though his presence had a soothing effect on me and I couldn't deny that I needed that right now.

"..It doesn't have to be a curse," he said slowly.

"I can help you manage it. You didn't grow up learning about the things you needed to...but I can teach you. It's not too late."

He held out a hand to me, as if inviting me to take it.

Offering me something that no one else had ever before; A chance to live my life without fear.

...But what would it cost me?

"I just need you to trust me, Raven," he said, making my gaze shift from his hand to his eyes Familiar.

There was familiarity when I looked at him, the same feeling I'd experienced when I first met him.

As if I'd always known him.

Whatever this reaction to him was, it was strong enough to sway every behaviour in my life.

If I believed him and accepted that this influence wasn't due to foul intervention, then did that mean that my body had been telling me to trust him this whole time? That it was recognising in him the same condition I was born with? Was that just a normal connection between what we were? However, getting close to someone was dangerous.

Especially someone who I was meant to have investigated and then disappeared from entirely.

If my father found out about this.....But wouldn't my father be just as upset if I continued to fail because of what I was? Medications, strict daily routines and punishments had been the only 'solutions' given to me up until now.

Solutions that clearly didn't work since it continued to happen regardless.

Kieran wasn't pretending to offer me a solution, filling my head with false promises if I kept conforming to the rules. He was offering me a way to take back control despite that very issue plaguing me.

A way to learn how to harness it instead.

“..Will I be able to stop the blackouts from happening?” I asked carefully, taking a slow step towards him.

“And the sickness? Will I stop wanting to throw up every time it’s about to happen?”

His brow furrowed slightly at what I said.

“...Blackouts? I can’t say I’ve heard of that being a common symptom...but it’s possible you’ve been fighting against yourself too much. The more you try to stop the shift from happening, the more painful and uncontrollable the whole process is. I can walk you through it and help you so that it won’t happen.”

He sounded so genuine that I wanted to believe him.

In fact, it was increasingly becoming harder to deny those feelings inside, the ones urging me to just run to him already.

But it was those very feelings that brought me here today. I still needed answers.

“And this...thing...between us. These feelings...,” I vaguely said, my cheeks starting to burn a little.

I was used to faking romantic interest in people, but this was different.

It was an uncomfortable new situation for me.

“...The stuff you spoke about at the charity event before I left.”

“The sparks?” he clarified.

“Right...,” I agreed, trying to push through it.

“So, if you really didn’t drug me, then is this a normal thing between our kind? Is that how you recognise others who are the same?”

Now it was his turn to shuffle a little uncomfortably.

“Ah, well, no, not exactly...that’s a bit of a complicated question,” he fumbled as he looked around the room awkwardly.

But this was something that had been bothering me since the day we met. I needed to know if there was a way to manage this too so I could stop becoming so overwhelmed.

“Is there a way to make it stop?” I pressed when he still didn’t answer.

Oh.

...That seemed to be the wrong question to ask.

His eyes immediately snapped back to my own, a look on his face that I was struggling to decipher.

It was serious...but there was something else there too.

“...Did you want it to stop?” he asked.

And I felt as an ache pulsed in my chest, the question bringing with it a wave of distress I hadn't expected.

So much connection to someone I didn't even know.

Surely, this couldn't be healthy.

It was far stronger than anything I'd ever felt before, a gravitation pull around him that was so hard to ignore.

Was he also feeling the same thing I was? I couldn't be the only one who found this frustrating.

But then another question came to mind, taking me by surprise.

..Did I even want the feelings to go away? Truly? It was at that very thought that my head then started to burn up again, my headache returning.

“Raven?” I shook it a bit, trying to get over it, but ended up wincing involuntarily and touching my temple.

“Hey, you okay?”

I heard him ask, but I wasn't able to focus.

“You're probably overwhelming yourself too much for one day.”

That was probably true. I'd spent the last few days in a basement.

My body was worn out and still recovering.

“Hey,” he said again, though I still didn't reply.

Suddenly, he was right in front of me, his hands softly moving mine out of the way so he could lift my face up to look at him.

“..Are you alright?” he repeated, feeling my head for a temperature.

His touch was so unbelievably soothing.

Within seconds, I felt as the burning started to ease, and I shakily exhaled in relief.

So much had happened today. So much stress, confusion and confliction.

I must have been pushing myself too hard.

Wait...

today...

today....

Oh shit.

I'd completely forgotten about Noah in the cupboard.

“I-I'm alright,” I said, though failing to hide the slight falter in my tone.

“But I need to leave. I have someone waiting for me. Before I go though... I just need to know one more thing.”

A part of me didn't want to, but I gently took a step away so I was out of his reach.

His scent and warmth were already far too tempting.

“I ah... I need to know how to shut out the voices,” I said.

“I can't seem to go through with what I need to do, almost as though it's a mental block physically stopping me.”

“..What do you mean by—.”

****BRRRRRRRT**

BRRRRRT

**** ..Huh?**

***BRRRRRRRT**

BRRRRRT

I felt something vibrating and reached into my pocket to grab it, finding the burner phone I'd brought with me.

With a jolt of surprise, I saw the number flash across the screen and recognised it immediately.

"Sorry...I have to take this..." I said turning around, and proceeded to hit the 'answer' button.

"Hello? Rae?" the voice on the other end asked.

Clearing my throat, I tried to sound as natural as possible.

"Hi, Zac."

"The boss said you had a job tonight but you didn't call yet. It's been a few hours. Is everything okay?"

"uh..."

Of course Zac would think it was strange.

He was I meant to be cleaning up a dead body by now.

A body that was still very much breathing.

...Fuck.

"I, uh, I had to postpone," I lied, conscious of the fact that Kieran could hear me.

"The client wasn't home so I said I'd come back later. I should be heading there soon."

"What? Rae, I thought—."

"I'm actually just talking with someone right now," I stressed, praying that he'd pick up on what I was trying to tell him.

If he said something incriminating, then it would make this more complicated than it needed to be.

"I promise to call you once I have more news."

"Who—."

"Bye, Zac."

And I quickly hung up.

'If there was a god out there"

I silently thought to myself, 'please don't let Zac tell my father about my odd absence"

But the phone call brought yet another problem with it.

"And what exactly do you do for work that keeps you busy until almost one o'clock in the morning?" came Kieran's voice behind me.

Immediately, I froze at the question.

'Espionage', 'assassination', and 'kidnapping', were the first job descriptions I thought of, but I kept that to myself.

For obvious reasons.

"..I work for my father's business," I replied loosely, slowly turning back around to face him.

"Deadlines wait for no one, especially when there are millions of dollars on the line."

That sounded business-y enough to be believable.

And it was probably somewhat true too...in some way, shape or form.

"Funny how barely anyone knows Eric Reid even has a daughter," he said.

"I wonder—."

**BRRRRRRRT*

BRRRRRT

I looked down and saw Zac's number flashing on the screen again.

Seriously?

"I have to go," I repeated, taking a few steps back to leave.

But Kieran reached into his pocket and grabbed something.

"Wait," he said quickly.

"Take this. Come find me when you're ready."

I looked down and saw a hotel room keycard.

Number one hundred and fifty.

Pretty sure that was a penthouse level or similar for a building this size.

“It’s a spare. Just use it to get past security and say you’re with me.”

Hesitantly, I reached out and grabbed it, but as I went to pull it away, he held onto it for a moment as he continued to speak.

“I’m only going to be in town for a little bit longer,” he added.

“If you really want to find out more about what you are and agree to let me help you...you know where to find me. Just don’t leave it too late to make the decision. I’m not sure when I’ll be able to come back to Lockdale City again.”

My gaze lingered for a moment, meeting those eyes of his that held me in place so easily, before, finally, he let go of the keycard.

What would happen once he went home? Was that what he meant earlier by saying ‘our kind stays together for a reason’? Was he saying that I might never see him again?

“Thanks...,” I said, still in thought.

“I’ll keep that in a”

**BRRRRRRRT*

BRRRRRT

I was quickly becoming more certain that someone was going to be killed tonight and, at this rate, it was going to be Zac.

I sighed and looked back up one last time towards Kieran, a part of me not wanting to leave despite the situation.

But I knew it needed to be done.

“Until next time,” I said, not wanting to say goodbye.

And I quickly exited the building before I completely chickened out, heading through a side door into an alleyway.

**BRRRRRRRT*

BRRRRRT ..

**BRRRRRRRT*

BRRRRRT

BRRRRRRRT

BRRRRRT

“WHAT?” I answered a little too angrily.

“Do you have any idea how close you were to blowing my cover?” I fast-walked through the alley, back towards where I could see the main street up ahead.

With any luck, it wouldn't take long to hail another taxi.

‘What’? What do you mean ‘what?’ Zac replied annoyed.

“Do you have any idea how close I was to calling the boss?” That took me by surprise, making me pause a second.

“why?”

“I thought you'd been caught and were being forced to answer the phone. You were talking weird.”

“Please tell me that you didn't call him,” I said.

“Please, Zac.”

“No! No,” he said hastily.

“But what the hell is going on? Was the body found already?”

This was going to be too difficult to explain and it was something that I wouldn't be able to do alone, no matter how much I hated that thought.

And so I gritted my teeth, saying something I never in a million years thought I would ever be saying.

“Zac...I need your help,” I said begrudgingly.

And, internally, I sighed, regretting this decision already.

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“Rae...I do believe this guy is alive,” Zac said.

The two of us were peering into the cupboard, looking at a very tied up and very terrified looking Noah.

“Yep,” I replied.

“Right...right....And, just to make sure we're on the same page here, you are aware that normally I don't see this part, right? That I come in afterwards?”

“I'm aware.”

At the sound of the conversation, Noah immediately started to squirm and plead to Zac with his eyes, hoping that he would help free him.

Not that it would do him any good.

“So, what's the hold up?” Zac asked, still confused.

“Isn't this just another Thursday for you? I've seen you do worse.”

He was right.This really wasn't that abnormal of a job for me to do.

But I gritted my teeth at his question nevertheless, hating how I had ended up in this situation.

“I...can't,” I said, deflating in defeat.

“I can't do it.”

“You can't...do it...,” Zac repeated slowly.

“And why is it—.”

“Look, I just can't, okay?” I said, cutting him off, irritated at all the questions.

“I've tried.I even tried again before you got over here.I can't do it, I can't do it, I can't do it.End of discussion.”

“...So why am I here? Just tell your dad that —.”

“No.”

Of course, Zac would suggest that. He didn't know about every dark secret my father was hiding, only ever seeing as far as he needed to.

"No, I can't tell him," I said.

"...And you can't tell him either."

"Rae, the boss is expecting this guy dead," he said, taking a step back to look at me.

"I'm not really sure what's going on, but you do realise he'll find out sooner or later, right? You can't just keep him locked up in a cupboard forever."

"Okay, fine! Fine..." I sighed in frustration, before slowly locking up to meet his eyes.

"...Then you do it."

Immediately, his face paled.

"What?! Rae, no! No," he blurted out.

"I don't do that."

"c'mon, Zac," I whined.

"It's not that different from cleaning up. Both have a lot of blood. I can talk you through it. Here...just grab this dagger like this...and then hold it in your hand facing—"

"Raven, stop!"

I'd been trying to get him to wield the weapon but he immediately held his hands up and stepped away.

"Just...chill," he said.

"I'm not going to kill someone."

"Argh! I spun around and angrily started pacing the room, beginning to get more worried as every second passed. I didn't understand why this had to be so difficult. It shouldn't be this hard. Any other day, I could have done this job with my eyes closed. Why was I struggling to kill one random man? Who even was this guy? A small brown wallet then caught my attention as it sat on top of a table, and I walked over to inspect it.

"Hey, doesn't this guy look sort of familiar?" I heard Zac say behind me.

However, I ignored him as I went digging through his different cards.

He had a grocery store reward one...a rental shop...a membership to a laundromat? I didn't even know those had memberships.

But then, finally, I found his driver's license.

"Rae...he sort of looks like that guy,"

Zac continued.

"The one from a few days ago.You know...—."

"...Kennedy," I said, reading the name on the card.

"Right.Miles Kennedy.Wasn't he the guy from the clean-up a few days ago?" I slowly spun around to look at Zac, my mind now racing with new information.

"No, Zac...Kennedy is this guy's last name," I said.

"Noah Kennedy."

And, simultaneously, we both then turned to look at the man tied up in the cupboard.

Just what was his connection to him? I'd thought that Miles was an underground businessman or some sort of gang leader.

Someone who'd tried to pull a fast one over my father.

Why else would he have acquired problematic documents relating to him? But...'clean up'.That's how this job had been described.

Was Noah involved in whatever Miles had been up to? ...Or was I sent here because he was digging into his disappearance? ...If that were true...then didn't that mean Noah's death sentence today was because of me? Because of my accidental lapse in control? "Ah shit."

I walked over to Noah and pulled out the cloth I'd stuffed into his mouth.

Normally, I would have agreed that talking to the future murder victim was possibly the dumbest thing I could ever do...but I felt we were already past the point of no return.

"Please, let me go, please," he immediately started begging.

"I'll do anything.Just...don't kill me.Please."

"You're related to Miles?" I asked, disregarding the crying.

His face blanked for a moment before becoming confused.

“What about Miles?”

But I really wasn't in the mood for people not answering my questions plainly. I'd already had my fill of that from Kieran today.

Instantly, I crouched down to his eye level and sunk my dagger into the wall directly next to his head, causing him to jump in fear.

“I'm asking the questions,” I hissed, pulling the knife back out to point it at him.

“Now. Let me repeat myself for the last time. Are. You. Related. To. Miles?”

He squirmed in fear but managed to huff out a 'yes', his head quickly bobbing up and down.

“Howe”

“M-my...he's m-my brother,” he stuttered.

I closed my eyes and pinched the bridge of my nose, already knowing I was going to hate where this was going.

“And when was the last time you heard from Miles?”

“He never showed up at the bar on Saturday. I think he's missing,” he hurriedly answered.

“I-I don't know where he is, I swear! I've been looking for him but it's like he's just disappeared....Is that why you're here? Does this have something to do with him? ...Or the business?”

That caught my attention.

'Business'.

It was something that held my curiosity and yet I knew I shouldn't ask.

Asking the questions I had already asked was already way too far.

My job wasn't to investigate my father's dealings, it was just to carry out his orders.

But...but a part of me wanted to know.

To find out whether or not his death sentence today was actually because of me.

..And so I asked the question I knew I shouldn't have.

"..What business was Miles involved with?" I asked.

"Rae—."

"What.Business?" I repeated, interrupting Zac before he could stop me.

He would know how bad of an idea this was, just as I did.

After all, he was also under the same orders to not pry too hard.

"Smuggling," Noah answered.

"He's a smuggler for that wealthy businessman in town.Gets in supplies and rare goods from all over.The best at what he does, in my opinion.Even better than me."

I should have stopped there.I knew I should have stopped.No, I *definitely* shouldn't have wanted to keep going....But I couldn't seem to stop myself.

"..Which businessman?" I asked carefully.

And he looked at me as if I were stupid for not knowing.

"Eric Reid, of course.Who else in this city would be shady enough to need a smuggler?"

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

An employee.

Miles had been a goddamn employee.

He wasn't some random criminal or a rivaling businessman.He was on the freaking payroll.

...I killed an employee*.

But why had I been given instructions to bring him in at all? Was he trying to run away or snitch on my father? ...Did he find out something he shouldn't have? And those documents allegedly pertaining to the business...

just what was in them? If they were harmful, then what could make someone want to betray aman as powerful as my father? Someone who would know better than most in

this city what going against him entailed? There were too many questions already asked and far too many answers left unknown that I shouldn't go looking for.

I needed to pause for a moment and stop tunnelling down a thought process that had no end in sight.

Because, regardless of the why, I was now left with a very important 'what'; As in, what the hell was I going to do about Noah? And I quickly stood back up and stepped away, my brain swimming with a million different thoughts as for what I should do.

This wasn't like the jobs I'd had before.

I wasn't killing him purely for the sake of business this time...it was more personal than that.

His blood really would be on my hands this time.

Both physically and morally. He was, for lack of a better word, a loose end.

Someone who would go looking for Miles.

My intervention here today was meant to be cutting off that loose end.

'Cleaning up'

"Rae, I kinda think that this has gone far enough," Zac said, watching as I began to pace again.

"Just kill him and we can pretend that none of this ever happened. Here, I'll just turn around and you can quickly do your thing."

"I can't," I groaned in annoyance.

If I couldn't do it before, I *definitely* couldn't do it now.

"Miles was an employee," I said to Zac, pausing to face him.

"Don't you have someone you care about outside of work? What if Noah was them? Just trying to find out what happened to you?"

"Since when do you care?" he argued back.

"No offense, girl, but seriously. We've been in this business for...how long? You being employed even longer than me. I can't say that I've ever seen you even bat an eyelid at having to do something like this in the past."

He was right. I knew he was right. I didn't know why I cared so much.

This newfound reluctance, conscience even, was so incredibly unlike me.

But that nagging voice inside was still telling me to not do it.

That I shouldn't.

...That I didn't need to.

"We need to come up with a plan," I finally said, taking a step towards Zac.

"We!? Rae, no. There is no 'we' here," Zac said, moving away.

"You finish the job or someone else has to come in and do it.

That's how this works."

"I-I can't fail again," I said desperately.

"Do you have any idea what my father will do to me if I come home empty handed?"

"That's not my problem. I'm not getting involved in your family issue—."

But his voice abruptly came to a stop as I lifted up my shirt, revealing the many different shades of bruises still riddling my skin.

"I can't fail again," I repeated.

And Zac visible gulped in disgust. I pulled my shirt down but it was another few moments before Zac finally found his voice.

He coughed, clearing his throat, and did his best to compose himself.

"So...what plan did you have in mind?" he asked.

And, suddenly, I had the perfect idea.

Something that just came to me out of nowhere.

It was so simple.

Why hadn't I thought of it earlier?

"Zac Greene..."

I started, a smile beginning to twitch on my lips.

“The kind of man who can hide a body without leaving even a single drop of evidence behind.”

..And recognition slowly spread across his face as he understood exactly what I was implying.

“Wait, Rae, no,” he started to protest, almost tripping as he tried to move backwards away from me.

“That’s not the same thing. I don’t—.”

...So, anyway, that was how Zac ended up hiding Noah for me. Maybe this whole friendship thing wasn’t so bad after all.

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I left Noah in Zac’s capable hands and got his word that he’d call my father to say the job was completed per normal. He was risking a lot for my sake, I knew that.

A lot of risk for what seemed like absolutely no reason.

The level of danger associated with this insane plan wasn’t lost on me.

After all, the last thing I wanted was for Zac’s name to end up in my next manilla folder. I headed home as soon as I could, leaving enough time to arrive well before daylight, and walked towards my front door.

But it was as I was entering through the front gate to our property that something caught my eye.

It was an old lady, huddled up in a shawl, standing just on the street outside.

She had grey hair and eyes to match, clearly at an age that would suggest a retirement home or carer was required.

And yet she stood randomly outside my house at three o’clock in the morning, staring directly at me.

I paused for a moment and looked around, trying to see if she was with someone.

But when the empty street was completely silent and devoid of all other life, I started to wonder if maybe she’d gotten lost.

...Did I really have the energy to deal with this right now though? I was already so exhausted and just wanted to go inside to sleep in my own bed, something that would be a first after many days.

I could already perfectly visualise how soft my pillow would be...

just begging to be laid on and—.

“I can save her,” the old lady suddenly said.

“I can save the girl.” ...

What? I took my hand off the gate handle and turned back around to fully face her, part of me still wondering if she was even talking to me.

“..Pardon?” I called back.

Wasn't it common for older people to lose their minds at a certain age? What if she was a dementia patient who wandered off? I should probably just look up where the closest hospital or retirement home was and tell them where to find—.

“The girl. Clarissa,” she said.

As if that was of any real help.

I blankly stared back at her.

“I'm not Clarissa,” I clarified.

“I think you've—.”

“I know that,” she snapped sharply, making me flinch a bit in surprise.

“Oh...kay. Well, is that...your daughter?” I asked, still trying to be polite.

“Or your carer? Do you want me to call someone for you—?”

But then she started to walk towards me, her stride more steady than I would have expected given her appearance.

There was something oddly strange about her too.

A weird atmosphere around her.

Or maybe I was just slightly unnerved by the whole creepiness of the situation.

“Do you not know who I am?” she asked once she stood within a few feet of me.

“Ma’am, truthfully, I’m not even sure if you know who you are.No offence,” I said, starting to get more uncomfortable the longer this drew out.

“If you just wait here a moment though, I’ll head inside and wake up one of the maids.They can maybe help you out or something.”

I really didn’t care about courtesy anymore and just wanted to leave as soon as possible.

There was something about this entire encounter that just rubbed me the wrong way.

Almost as if I could feel the hair at the back of my neck standing up.I turned around and tried to open the gate, but she quickly moved forward to stop me.

“Wait,” she said, and I had to bite back my instincts telling me to go.

Rational logic would suggest that there was nothing to be worried about.She was just an old lady.

Frail enough looking to be pushed over by the wind alone.

“Wait, a moment,” she repeated.

..And I reluctantly turned back around to meet her eyes.

Eyes that seemed to hold an intelligence there that I wasn’t expecting.

And she spoke in a tone so low that I almost didn’t hear her.

“...Do you know the true story of the Winter Mist?” she asked.

Her expression was completely serious as I shuffled uncomfortably under her gaze.

It was as though I could feel her scrutinising me, analyzing my face for any sort of recognition that I knew what she was talking about.

Which, of course, I didn’t.

“Is that like a fairy tale?” I asked.

“Was it a book you used to read to your grandkids or something?”

But to my immense discomfort, she only continued to stare at me silently.

“..Ma’am...?” I really wanted to leave.

I was so close to home, merely a foot away from being back on the property.

Just a step forward and I could close the gate between us.

But she was so close to me that I wasn't sure what she would do if I tried.

Clearly, she wasn't right in the head.

However, at the sound of bird wings loudly flying into the air somewhere, she finally turned away, pulling the hood of her shawl up.

"I can save her," she simply repeated.

"Don't forget that." And she started walking back down the street towards town.

...What the hell had that just been? I didn't waste any more time in stepping through the gate and locking it behind me, my chest still pounding slightly from the whole ordeal.

So much fear caused by just one crazy old lady.

But if I had to say one thing that was far more terrifying than the old crone, I would have to answer that it was the man waiting for me once I finally entered inside.

As I walked through my front door, I saw a light had been left on in the living room.

A surprise given most people in the house should have been asleep by now.

Naturally, after everything that had just happened, I had every intention of just ignoring it and heading upstairs to my room instead.

...

However, I couldn't help but catch the familiar scent of someone I knew only too well.

My father. My foot had been on the first step of the staircase as I came to this realisation, so close to finally being able to go to bed, but I knew that the light had been left on for a reason.

He was expecting me.

With a small sigh, I stepped back...and headed towards the living room instead.

"My Raven," he greeted me, sitting in a leather armchair.

From where I was standing, I could only see his arm as he held a drink in his hand, the chair facing away from me.

“Father,” I replied.

“I just received the call from Zac not long ago,” he said, taking a sip from the glass.

“You’re later than expected.”

“Oh...Well, there was this old lady outside,” I started.

“I think she was lost.Kept trying to talk to me and wouldn’t let me leave—.”

“I meant the job, Raven.You’re several hours late from the job.The agreed upon time should have seen you home a long time ago.”

“Ah...”

“Did everything go...smoothly?”

No.No, it had not.

In fact, I couldn’t think of many ways in which it could have gone worse.

I’d dug into things I definitely shouldn’t have, opening a door to a liability of my own creation.

Firstly, by accidentally killing an employee for a kidnapping job...then by failing to take care of the consequences of that mistake.

Now, I was continuing to hide that consequence because I didn’t want the death on my hands.

Though, I couldn’t mention any of this to him.

By this point, I was already in far too deep to come clean.

Besides...and I knew I shouldn’t be...but I couldn’t help but feel a little...curious.

Just what had that smuggler managed to find out? Was it related to the documents?

“Yep...it ah, it all went smoothly,” I lied.

“I just had some issues getting into the building, is all.A crowd of people were drinking outside and, well, intoxicated o r not, they’d still be witnesses.I decided to play it safe.”

“Is that so...?” he mused.

A nervous feeling was bubbling in my chest. He couldn't know I was lying...could he? But then again...there was no such thing as a secret from Eric Reid.

I knew that better than anyone.

The silence seemed to stretch on for what felt like an eternity, quiet enough that I was painfully aware of how loud even my breathing seemed inside the room.

Could he sense how nervous I was? Hear the loud thumping of my heart? But, no, that was impossible.

Because love him or fear him, at the end of the day, my father was still just a man.

A man.

Not a... 'werewolf'.

And, as a normal man, he didn't have the heightened senses I possessed.

That was always going to be something that kept us apart.

Thinking on that now, it was a stark reminder of where I'd accidentally found myself now.

Facing a crossroads of two paths.

On the one hand, I could continue to live blindly in fear, hoping that the eggshells around me would not crack under my mistakes, revealing to the world just how different I really was.

A path where I would follow the rules, taking each day one at a time.

Forgetting about everything I'd found out, everything I'd seen...everyone I'd met.

All so I could continue to loyally serve my father.

The man who raised me, doing what he thought was best for both me and the business.

And, in doing so, trying to save me from myself...and others...Or I could reach into my pocket to where that hotel keycard now laid.

A promise attached to it that maybe things didn't need to be like that.

A warm hand extended towards me through the darkness, offering sparks and a light that I'd never experienced before.

That I never thought even possible.

A way to take back control over the things that constantly scared me, learning to use them for myself instead.

To become a version of myself that had no limits.

If Kieran was telling me the truth and I really was what he said I was, and he was the same, then didn't I have no choice but to at least try and explore that option? To at least take a chance that maybe one day I wouldn't need to be so afraid? My father could try a million different things to help me hide my secret.

To contain the creature and keep me protected under his umbrella of power, hidden from the world, but at the end of the day...he didn't really know anything.

Just like how I currently didn't either.

He was...just a man.

Just a human man.

Someone who could never truly understand me.

The only real question now was...

Am I actually doing this for him? Doing this out of love for him and for the business I was raised in? ..Or am I actually doing this for myself? I heard as my father then inhaled sharply, standing up from the chair he'd been seated on, and turned to walk towards me.

That fearsome gaze of his still pierced through me, as if he could see everything I was hiding from him inside.

But I held my resolve, keeping my expression steady, committed to this decision I'd made.

He walked until he stood right in front of me, staring into my eyes as he watched me carefully, bringing a hand up as he slowly reached for my face, and....

..And he gently touched my cheek.

"Good work," he said simply.

"You've done well." And, with that, he walked past me, leaving towards his own room to rest.

My shoulders relaxed the minute I heard his footsteps fade upstairs, but despite that minor relief, I was still helpless to the thoughts swimming around in my head.

Because for the very first time in my life, I had knowingly and willingly disobeyed my father, going even as far as to lie to him.

And yet, somehow, in spite of all of that...by some goddamn miracle.....I had gotten away with it.

Or, at least, that was the case for now.