

Chosen 391

Chapter 391 Do Not Forget, Thine Goddess... Never Forget

From the shroud of darkness, a man emerged ever so slightly illuminated by the glow from the moon lotuses. His face was one that clawed at Katie's sluggish memory. The hunter struggled to find the name of the man she'd only seen moments ago. Her deep unconscious state seemed to affect even the most recent of acquired memories.

Fortunately for her, the memory surfaced this time, much faster than her previous attempts to remember something. This man was named Cirrus, the brother of the king of Lycaon. 'Yes, Cirrus, that's the name... yay...' the girl chided herself for following the story, but the chills that ran down her spine sent these brief feelings of triumph fleeing to the depths of her soul. Something about this man rubbed her the wrong way. In her ghostly form, she could only hiss at the man like a cat detecting danger. The goddess from the past, however, could not see her and so her attempts were all futile.

Celeste looked up from the handsome sleeping figure in response to the disruption, "So you're the reason I haven't left this place yet," she observed, casting a withering smile at Cirrus.

The man was quiet for a while before taking a few steps forward, unknowingly passing through ghost Katie's wispy body. He stopped walking when his eyes landed on the man lying before the goddess, then scanned the rest of the field as though in search of something else, "Where is the goddess of the moon?"

Katie was stunned by this statement. She'd heard the other royals comment frequently that something was amiss with the goddess's appearance, but she'd thought that only had to deal with her expressions... and, as recently mentioned, the absence of her bow, but now that this man was present, she had a feeling the change was much more pronounced... 'From now on, you will call me, Celeste,' the phrase returned to her.

'Huh, a memory when I wasn't even trying. Convenient,' she thought to herself. Could it have been that the moon goddess actually looked profoundly different before meeting the human that was currently lying before her? Katie banished the thoughts when she realised the flow of events was not going to pause for her to think.

"I'll overlook that just this once," the goddess replied gracefully, "What are you doing here, Cirrus? I summoned your leaders and not anyone else. Last I checked, you are not the King of Lycaon and neither are you the Queen of Sirius."

"I came here of my own volition. When the king said where he was going and how he thought you'd been acting, I just had to see it for myself. I don't see your bow or any of your hunting tools, my Lady. If you are the goddess Artemis, then perhaps you're not feeling well," his voice rumbled.

It wasn't just his voice that sounded completely bossy, but his whole posture was wrong as well. Instead of kneeling before his patron goddess as the royals had done before him, this man was standing upright without a hint of respect in his voice. If there was anything in his posture that showed some sort of emotion towards the goddess, it was his look of contempt towards the goddess's current form.

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“You walk in here and forget your manners completely, then expect to order me around and demand I answer your questions. Have you lost your way, Cirrus? This is not like you. Perhaps you hit your head and wandered in the opposite direction of your capital. It’s common for warmongers like you,” the goddess’s voice dropped in gentleness. The air changed pitch slightly, signifying her slight irritation with his behaviour.

Calmly, the royal replied, “You don’t know anything about me. All you know is what you order me to do. You’ve never let us keep our free will, so you think we are exactly what you think of us.”

“You know that’s not true. It might have been true the first time I sent Lycaon and Sirius out to purge all of humanity, but I’ve long since abandoned that kind of rule over my creatures,” her voice came cold this time. The royal before her emanated only malevolence. No matter how she tried to look past it, there was no hiding his intentions. He wasn’t here simply talk to her. He wasn’t here to ‘receive orders.’ He was here to have previous orders withdrawn and changed. Before his goddess, all was laid bare for her to see, “Where have you been hiding this hate for them?”

“I have not been hiding anything, my Lady,” Cirrus said with a mock bow, “The wolves that I command have claimed the most humans in the history of the empires and will continue to do so. I will be the one to finish the job you gave us years ago. I will bring the human race to its knees and have them begging for their lives. I will exact your vengeance more spectacularly than you could have dreamed even at the peak of your rage.”

‘Evil...’ a familiar feminine voice resounded through Katie’s mind. The girl recognised this voice all too well. It was Ashley’s voice. The wolf was finally awake... and she was watching this as well.

“I think you’re mistaken. You will do no such thing. Instead, you will apologise for it all and help your brother bring peace to the two races. There has been enough bloodshed already,” Celeste bellowed. Her fists trembled in anger and the blue mist rolling off the flowers swirled around her. No matter how angry she got though, she couldn’t directly harm the human. There were divine rules against this sort of thing... otherwise, the human race would have perished long ago.

“I won’t forget, my Lady. You might have forgotten, but I won’t. I’ll never forget it. The king before me cast his memories unto me... and I saw it all. The brutal massacre of your sisters on that fateful day. They were brutally murdered and I will never forget what I saw in those memories. The grief, the anguish. It’s partly the reason why I rejected the throne in the first place.”

“Enough,” Celeste shrieked, covering her ears. Storm clouds rumbled overhead in resonance with her anger. A furious wind began to swirl in the air, tearing away the calm peace that had taken over the Origin, “You won’t rekindle old hatred by springing up memories of the past.

Those are ghosts, ancient visages of a nightmare long past while the future lies ahead of us. I wouldn’t pick a world of destruction when peace stares me right in the face... Not again... Never again... My sisters were sworn to serve me until they die in battle... and that is what happened.”

“So now you choose to hide from the past. To sully the memory of your dying sisters with a false hope of peace. What’s peace going to do to bring them back? Calling their deaths ‘the past’ doesn’t make their deaths any less cruel and unjust. I stand before you with a blue shimmer in my eyes, not because I

wished it, but because you did. All of this is for you... and we will fulfil your wish," the man remained calm even when the goddess seethed in rage before him.

Finally seeing her anger as futile, the goddess forced herself to simmer down. Cirrus was unshaken by her display of power and wasn't going to change his mind regardless of what she did. That didn't wipe away the anger she held towards his foul words, but it did force her to resort to different methods of expressing herself.

Celeste took a few deep breaths and Cirrus watched the storm clouds leave and the howling wind settle. When the goddess opened her eyes, the warm smile returned to her. Her tone, however, was borderline insane, "I can see you're already too far gone. For that, I apologize."

"Something's not right here," Cirrus narrowed his gaze at the goddess, "What are you plotting?"

"You will not harm the humans," the goddess spoke with a steeled expression. Her kind facade was gone and replaced by something else entirely. This wasn't a suggestion, but rather an order and the moment she said it, it took root in the royal before her. Cirrus struggled with the pain in his mind, but the goddess's power was already taking effect.

By the time the painful ringing had quieted down within his head, all the hate he'd born towards the humans had seized to have an impulse on him. He didn't notice it then, but his hate still had an effect on him, one he was bound to realise soon.

Cirrus felt empty and everything about him felt cold. His eyes were lifeless, void of all the drive that had driven them before. He'd spent so much effort trying to fight the humans that he'd never noticed what he was without this mission. Without the mission to kill the humans, he was nothing... He knew nothing else. His whole life until this moment had all been about revenge in the name of the goddess, but now even that was gone leaving him nothing but a husk, "Now, doesn't that feel better?" the goddess asked him, her smile returning to her face.

'He... he can't do anything, right?' Katie internally asked herself. She'd watched the man get completely drained of the will to keep on fighting, but then... why did she feel like this was not over...

'I'm not sure, Katie. Something feels very wrong,' Ashley echoed.

Chapter 392 Mate?

The world was silent and Cirrus felt the will and fire he'd had moments ago diminish and wither away. The goddess had robbed him of everything he was and still claimed it was all better. All his aspirations turned to dust by a command, "How is this better?"

"You've been misguided, Cirrus. You might want to use the rest of your life to rediscover what this world is all about. There is a lot you could learn. I'll make sure to give you a mate that suits you. Probably then you can look past mindless bloodshed," Celeste grumbled.

Straining against the goddess's orders, he wanted to deny everything she told him, but his struggles were all in vain. His body went limp and the words got stuck in his throat when he thought of defying her. The pressure would build within his mind, forcing him to abandon the treacherous train of thought.

It had been a long time since the goddess had commanded them to do anything for her. Not with this level of power infused into her voice anyway. Now that he had been given some perspective, he could see what kind of free will he'd been taking for granted before, "This... isn't over, Lady Artemis." he mumbled through gritted teeth before standing up to leave the clearing. Right, when he'd reached the edge of the Origin, the goddess spoke up, her voice infused with more divine energy as she issued another order.

"I would prefer it if you called me by the name, Celeste from now on. The same goes for all the wolves under my patronage," she said to him, "And one more thing. Wolves are forbidden from returning to the Origin. From this day forth, the Origin is to be wiped from their minds and wither into nothing but a myth in the minds of my subjects."

With that said, a beam of blue light shot from the moon in the sky above, taking the goddess, along with the body of the man on the ground with her.

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Cirrus Lycaon barely made it back to the Lycaon capital in one peace. Strangely, his wolf had grown significantly weaker and even hunting was starting to feel like a chore. As the days drifted by in the wilderness, he discovered the source of his diminishing strength.

With the slightest hint of returning strength, his thoughts immediately took on a train of thought aimed at reducing the number of humans in the world. The moment his thoughts went in this direction, the strength was sapped out of his bones, leaving him with barely enough to walk. In this state, he was crippled... in a sense.

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During his travels, he wandered upon a town of humans and walked into an inn, making sure to keep his head down and not draw much attention to himself. He sat in the corner of the inn and waited for the waiter to approach him.

The writing at the front of the counter mentioned the different dishes they offered. He had enough money on him to get a meal, but none to get a room, 'I guess I'll be sleeping out in the woods tonight,' the thought to himself while he drummed his fingers on the wooden table before him.

"Hello sir, how may I help you?" a sweet alluring voice made its way into his ears. With it came a sweet scent that forced his wolf to the surface. All his instincts heightened and a fraction of his strength returned to him in an instant... like an adrenaline rush...

The reaction he had brought him untold happiness and at the same time, filled him with unfathomable dread. When he raised his head to meet the waiter's shocked face, he thought he'd never seen anyone more beautiful than the girl before him.

The girl before him appeared much younger than he was and like every waiter was required to appear, she was dressed to the nines, making her stand out in contrast to the quality of the rundown establishment.

Cirrus Lycaon was never one to care about women he found on his travels. With the money and power at his disposal, getting a woman to bow to him was no task and yet the one he saw before him felt utterly different.

He couldn't tell what was going through her amber orbs either... Wait, amber... The recognition of her eye colour snapped him out of his daze, "Mate?" her voice rang out, with a hint of confusion. Hadn't the message of such a thing only got out from the palaces recently?

The inn went silent at the mention of the word. It wasn't long since the announcement had come through from the King of Lycaon and Queen of Sirius.

They all knew what a mate was, but not many had met their mates yet. This was officially one of the first pairs to meet in the entire two empires and in a town as small as this one. The owner of the inn came out from behind the counter to meet the couple, "Would you look at that? Jane, are you sure this man is..."

The burly innkeeper went silent when the prince's cold blue expression turned on him. The man that had just walked into his small inn was a royal, "Your h-highness, I hadn't noticed. I'm sorry for not noticing early enough. What would you like? We can spare a room for you to rest in for the night. You can rest with your mate as well if that pleases you."

"None of that will be necessary," the prince cut him off, standing up and walking past the girl without sparing her a second glance, "I was just leaving."

Just like that, the prince rushed out of the inn. The door slammed shut behind him, shaking the thin streams of dust off the exposed girders. Jane's heart felt like it was shattering into a million pieces and yet still straining to stay whole. When they'd been told about the mates they would all be receiving, no one mentioned there would be a chance of meeting one that was icy cold and an inconsiderate real piece of work.

Among her raging emotions was one known to all werewolves... anger. She was angry, 'Who does he think he is?' she mentally yelled. Tears threatened to spill from her eyes, but the stubbornness within her wouldn't let them fall without having a chance to say something.

"Jane, now I know what you're thinking..." the girl sidestepped the innkeeper and rushed out the door before anyone could talk to her. Sighing, the old woman stared at the gaping doorway. It was already turning dark outside and a harsh wind was picking up, "This won't be good."

Chapter 393 Jane's Resolve

Jane reached the outside of the inn and began searching for the royal that had just left the inn. 'He didn't look too good. He couldn't have gotten far.' Before long, her nostrils perked up as she picked up on a sweet entrancing scent, 'There you are.'

Her wolf spurred her in the direction she needed to go and she soon found the man about to exit the town and disappear into the forest. Despite his sorry state, he looked serious about what he was about to do. Something told her he would be fine, regardless of what he looked like now, "Where are you going? It's night and it's cold. You can spend the night at the inn. You can have your supper at the inn and continue your journey tomorrow."

No one will charge you anything because of who you are. I've noticed from your bare feet that you have been in a bind or two, but you don't have to sleep outside," Jane tried.

"Perhaps you should be more worried about yourself. My health is not of your concern. Just because the goddess thought you fit to serve me doesn't make you worthy of my attention. The colour of your eyes alone speaks volumes on that," the prince arrogantly spat.

His words were like needles to her heart even though she'd only just met him. It was frustrating. Even so, his attitude towards her, his tone... it all hurt.

Something within her told her to turn away from him before he continued on this destructive path, as though sensing he wasn't done talking, while at the same time, turning away in itself felt like a painful thing to do. There was no way out for her... and she hadn't asked for any of it either.

A total stranger... someone she had never met, was about to cause her more heartache than her own parents were capable of.

"What's your name, Royal?" the girl asked, her composure completely changing.

"It's Prince Cirrus to you, runt," the blue-eyed man responded harshly, cementing the decision she'd come to only moments earlier.

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"Very well then," Jane placed her hand on her heart and began speaking formally, "I, Jane Riverwood, reject you, Prince Cirrus Lycaon, as my mate." In a more informal tone, hot tears streaming down her face, "I... I honestly hope I never see you again."

With that, the girl turned on her heels and fled the scene as if the prince was a plague, disappearing into the small town. The prince stood frozen in place... wondering what had just happened. He knew nothing of the girl that had just spoken to him... and yet he felt like he'd lost his only and last source of happiness.

Why was something within him trying to encourage him to chase after her? More importantly, had he just been rejected by a mere commoner? 'The nerve on that girl... To reject someone of status as high as me... Noble women can only dream of being with a man like me. Ugh... her loss, not mine...' Not knowing better, the prince also turned away and continued on his journey to the capital. The world was already quickly changing... and Cirrus had just missed the main focal point that was bringing about this change.

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He shifted and dashed through the woods, hoping to make quick time on his journey, however, his wolf felt slower this time than it had been through the entire journey, drained of more than just mere strength... He was drained of the very will to return home.

Images of the beautiful girl crying as she rejected him flashed through his mind and his heart involuntarily jerked at the memory of her. His chest felt heavier and doubts worked their way into his mind.

'I know nothing about this woman. Why won't I stop thinking about her? She knew nothing about me... why then did she cry while rejecting me? Why did she reject me in the first place? I'm the prince... Any woman in the two empires would be lucky to be adored by me,' his thoughts ravaged in his mind, shifting between two perspectives, one that wanted to know more about the girl, while the other... an over-bloated ego that wanted nothing but to see that same woman come rushing back to him in the realisation of the mistake she'd made. No matter how much these two sides fought, no answer would not present itself to him.

The prince reached the castle a few days later. The courtyard was filled with more people than he was normally used to. At first glance, it looked like a pack had been invited to the palace grounds, but eventually, among the people that regarded him, he noticed one with hazel eyes. What's more, was that they didn't have a glow to them. All about this person, wolves walked by without sparing a worried glance.

In fact, this odd personality fits into their society quite neatly. The image disturbed him greatly, increasing the weakening effect of the goddess's orders. It was soon clear to him that several of the excess people in the courtyard were indeed human. Not just any humans, but hunters.

In addition to the repulsively dull eyes and obnoxiously mixed eye colours, they all carried weapons unique to themselves, but kept them sheathed as though they were a natural part of them that were placed there for show or ceremoniously, "You finally returned. Get to the throne room this instant," the king's voice boomed in his head.

"Did you finally muster the courage to order me around?" Cirrus chuckled.

"Yes... and surely you know that means I'm not pleased with your recent endeavours," the king responded.

The man sighed and started his trek to the palace throne room, shoving his way through the milling hunters. None of them appeared to be in the mood to fight, but when they noticed him draw close, their hand rested on the pummels of their blades, but never once unsheathed them.

The prince smirked at their reflexes, 'They are afraid of me. If only I wasn't cursed, I wouldn't mind messing with them a little.' Alas, the goddess's orders were absolute. "Your highness, I knew I sensed you close by. W-what happened to you? You look horrible," Rana's deep voice made the beta alpha's presence known to the prince.

"Thank you for the compliment, Rana. Have my bathwater prepared so that I might wash off... It's been a tiring trip," Cirrus ordered, glad to see his loyal beta alpha in the flesh. Rana bowed to his alpha and was gone in a flash to carry out his bidding. The prince soon made it to the door of the throne room... 'I wonder which endeavours he speaks of... the visit to the goddess or the girl in that small town. I didn't even get to know the name of the town. Oh well, it doesn't matter. I'll never see her again and don't intend to either.'

Chapter 394 Something about a River... And something about a Forest

The prince took his time to clean himself up and tend to his aching muscles despite the king's urgent summons. He was far too tired to take his younger brother too seriously. There was also the matter of hunters walking freely on royal grounds. Now that he had the time to think about it more clearly, he

gritted his teeth in anger, 'The nerve on those hunters. How dare they waltz in here carrying weapons and act like they are friends with the wolves.'

The warm water was soothing and allowed the man to recover from his angry fit. It's not like he could do anything against them anyway. His energy was immediately drained at the thought of retaliation, so there was no point in running himself mad.

'Where are the women though?' he thought to himself, 'Did Thane happen to forget? Odd...' Cirrus froze in the bath, finding himself repulsed by his own thoughts. This new reaction to having women around him was severely intensified by his canine alter-ego. As though making a point, a hallucination of a beautiful woman appeared before him, albeit highly exaggerated.

Cirrus dipped his head into the water, 'So this is the power of the goddess... It's frightening. No matter... I am still alive, aren't I? She could have killed me, right? And if that's the case, then perhaps she left me alive for a reason.' Cirrus's thoughts brought him a hounding headache but did nothing to break his unrelenting will to see the goddess's mission through.

Sighing, he exited the bath and wiped the thoughts from his mind. 'Let's see what the king is so worked up about?'

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Cirrus soon stood before King Hamedale in the throne room, wondering what he'd done to irritate the great man. The king cared for the werewolves a tad bit more than the mission the goddess assigned them and he did so without letting it show.

Cirrus was one of the few that had been able to see right through him. However, seeing him livid was one of the few rarities he never wanted to get on the wrong side of, "You summoned me, your majesty?" the prince dipped his head in a mock bow.

"Yes, Cirrus, I did," the king pinched the bridge of his nose. The anger he was trying to soothe was clear through the mind link, "Where have you been, Cirrus?"

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'Ah, so he hasn't heard of the short encounter with the peasant of a mate I was granted. Either that or he's holding that information for last.' "I followed you. I won't deny that, but merely to confirm the moon goddess's 'questionable' state."

"You assaulted the goddess with your... I can't believe I'm saying this... 'twisted' ideals. That goes against a myriad of rules," the king looked like he might blow up at any time and the mind link reflected that anger with pristine waves of fury directed at the prince.

"You don't have to scold me, brother. I already got my fair share of that," Cirrus sighed. The energy in his body was only getting less and less. Even more so with hunters roaming the palace grounds. If Cirrus had his way, he would unleash carnage on those filthy bipeds, but alas, this would not come to pass.

As he turned to leave, he heard the sound of rushed footsteps and a surge of fear gripped him. His instincts kicked him, but his body didn't respond. Cirrus was far too slow... far too weak at the moment to react. The attacking footsteps were too fast for him to follow and before he could react to them. The

king's imposing figure appeared in front of him and his hand gripped him by the neck and crushed him against a pillar in the throne room.

The king held him up with one arm, choking him by the neck. Cirrus grabbed at the king's hand, trying to break free, but it was all in vain. His hands were barely any use against the king's superior strength. No, correction... an amber-eyed wolf would probably put up more of a fight than he was doing. Cirrus grunted in pain and stopped struggling... It was futile. Instead, he stared his brother in the eye with a dark cold expression... 'Do you mind?' he growled through the mind link.

The king's eyes widened in horror at the realisation of this weakness and he let the man drop to the ground. Hamedale backed away from the prince, watching the man before him cough and struggle to regain his breath. Black spots stained Cirrus's vision and his thoughts echoed loudly in his aching mind, 'So this is how it feels to be weak.'

"Explain, Cirrus," the king's anger had vanished completely, now replaced with concern for his brother.

Having recovered, Cirrus scoffed, "Nothing I'd openly admit. In any case, I'll say this. I'm resigning from the army. I won't be much use to them in this state, anyway."

"You've had a long journey, Cirrus. You should get some rest. Let's not make hasty decisions like that," the king tried, helping his brother up.

"I'm not weak because of the journey, brother. I'm weak for entirely different reasons. It's the reason my journey was long in the first place. It took everything just to get here. A week is too long for a journey from the Origin, Hamedale," the man sighed, accepting the king's help.

"This is not like you though. Did the goddess say something to you? I know your actions caused her to banish us from the Origin, but I didn't know she'd done something to you," the king comforted.

"Oh, she did something alright," Cirrus replied as the two royals left the throne room. A crowd of humans was walking up to them as they exited the nearly empty throne room.

"Is something the matter, King Hamedale?" one of the hunters spoke up.

"Oh no, my brother is just tired from his journey. I'm escorting him to rest in his room. My beta alphas can guide you for now. I'll return shortly," the king replied in a tone Cirrus was not familiar with.

When they were finally alone, "Did you practise how to use an authoritative voice?"

"I did. I spent a while on it too. Did I sound cool?" Hamedale perked up, grinning from ear to ear.

"Now I don't know if I'm speaking to a child or a deranged adult," Cirrus groaned.

The king chuckled, "I met this woman out in the woods. She could speak to animals and she was delighted to meet me. I entertained her for an hour since she had always wanted to meet the King of Lycaon. What stunned me out of all her abilities though was the way she spoke to the creatures of the wild.

She spoke with an air of confidence and authority. She sounded like the Queen of the beasts when she was talking to the animals. So before leaving her, I had her teach me to speak like that."

“Your story gets more unbelievable the more I hear it. You know there is no one with the power to speak to animals,” Cirrus raised a brow at his younger brother.

“Oh, but there is someone with such a power. I should remember her name. Ah, what was it again? It sounded like a river... and had something to do with a forest... Riverbark, no... Waterwood, no, that wasn't it either...” the description the king used struck several cords at the man's heartstrings. ‘It can't be, can it?’

“Riverwood?” Cirrus asked, his heartbeat speeding up a bunch.

“Oh yeah, that's the name. She was a kind soul and had one respectable ability. I wish I could have had more time to speak to her, but...”

“Of course, she wasn't an average werewolf,” Cirrus chuckled himself, having long tuned out of his conversation with the king.

“Huh... Cirrus, did you meet her as well?” the king paused to observe his brother's expression. Cirrus was the kind of person to show either anger, amusement, disdain and a wide range of emotions on his countenance, but the one he wore now was unknown to Hamedale.

Something was wrong with Cirrus... He looked... ‘broken.’

Chapter 395 Rana's Proposal

“I'm not sure if we met the same person, but I did meet a... Riverwood. She just wasn't speaking to animals though,” the man responded dejectedly.

“Are you okay, Cirrus?” the king asked, concern seeping into his voice once more. The gloom and depression that hung about his brother were not lost on him. He'd noticed it for a while. His eyes were glazed over as though his mind were somewhere else and it was only getting worse. The will and fire he'd witnessed from him for the larger part of his life were gone from his eyes. He was a walking husk of his former self, “What happened to you?”

“Let's just say... I lost everything, Hamedale,” the man responded to him.

As the king led him up, a voice reached them, “Your Highness, I've been looking for you. Your majesty, can I take him off your shoulders?” Rana asked the king, bowing to him.

The king searched his brother for an opinion and when Cirrus nodded to confirm it was okay, Rana looped an arm over his shoulder and took over the role of a crutch, “The hunters are waiting for you, your majesty. Lady Jeanie and the noblewomen of the Sirius empire have also arrived.”

“Thank you, Rana. Today marks the start of a new era,” the king walked off, brimming with so much pride and excitement that it made the prince smile, not for the reason behind it, but because he hadn't seen his brother this excited in ages.

When the king was gone, Cirrus wiped the smile off his face and asked his beta alpha, “Do you feel the same way as he does?”

“My Lord, you know I only feel the same as you do... which I cannot understand at the moment,” Rana said to him, “Did something happen?”

“Yes, Rana... I was stripped of my purpose, but now that I think back on it, that was nothing in comparison to what she did after. She granted me a mate almost immediately after,” the man replied.

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“That’s amazing. Where is she? Your mate must be powerful indeed and worthy of being your Luna,” the man replied, ecstatic. The prince smiled at his enthusiasm, but wouldn’t mirror his emotions.

“Quite the opposite actually, Rana. She was an average wolf. She was beautiful and I could tell from the moment I met her that she was kinder than any creature I’d ever met. She reminded me so much of Lady Jeanie,” the man spat.

“If you speak so highly of her, my Lord, then why do you sound so sad?” the beta alpha replied.

“I might have been a bit harsh in how I spoke to her. You just heard that she was a normal wolf. To grant me a mate that’s not even a delta. The nerve on that goddess,” the man cursed.

Rana gasped at the man’s words, “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Cirrus was appalled by the beta alpha’s reaction, “I thought your emotions were the same as mine. What’s this?!”

“Your majesty... with all due respect, and I mean that since you’re the person I respect most in the world, you’ve done, perhaps, the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard you do,” the man chuckled at the end, finally making it to his room.

“I was not the one that rejected the other,” the prince huffed.

“Rejected by your mate? Wow, you might be the first. You also must have been more than a ‘bit’ harsh. What did you expect her to do when you were a ‘little’ harsh to her? Have you even thought about it one bit?”

Have you put yourself in her shoes at the moment? A stranger you’ve never met shows up and is supposed to be your mate, then they treat you like gravel just after laying their eyes on you. What else was she supposed to do?

At that moment, you were the one person that could cause her the most harm in the world, so she had to protect herself from you. I wouldn’t be surprised if she doesn’t want to ever see you again,” Rana voiced his concerns.

The memory of her last words echoed through the prince’s head, ‘... and I honestly hope I never see you again in my life.’ “She’s not as smart though. Anyone would want a royal to be their mate. The power that comes along with that is just...”

“Anyone like that would be shallow and not worth your time. The woman you just walked away from didn’t care one bit about your title. She rejected you because of the kind of person you showed her you are. Royal or not... she knew what she wanted and that wasn’t what you showed her,” the beta alpha continued.

“Women throw themselves at my feet because of my title. What’s one less average wolf?” the prince spat.

“Oh, dear. Where is your head, my Lord? Didn’t you take the hint when you had to have your bath by your lonesome when you returned from your trip?” the beta alpha helped the prince to his bedding and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“So that wasn’t a mistake on your part? You did that intentionally, didn’t you?” Cirrus narrowed his eyes at the prince.

Rana stared at the prince before him, mystified, “Yes, I did and not because I was trying to displease, but simply because there are no women allowed to spend their time with someone other than their mate. Didn’t you hear the king’s new orders?”

“WHAT?”

“Oh, dear... You’re so clueless...” Rana took two steps forward and pressed his forehead to his alpha’s, transferring a plethora of memories of the prince instead of explaining it all, which would take forever.

By the time the last of the memory transfer was done, the prince had a mortified expression on his face, “My days just keep getting better and better...” he screamed sarcastically, falling back into the soft covers.

A moment of silence took over them before the beta spoke up. His tone was inquisitive, almost as if he was only now coming to terms with what the prince had just disclosed, “Sooo... you actually met your mate?”

“Yes, Rana. What part of that do you want me to spell out?” the prince replied, irritated.

Rana didn’t seem to notice as his curiosity had grown stronger than the fear of angering his prince, “And you’re very fine with having her out of your life. Nothing wrong with your wolf or anything...”

“What do you expect me to do, Rana?” Cirrus forced a yell out of his weakened body.

“I expect you to look for her, your highness... and apologise,” the beta alpha sighed, “I can feel the emptiness within you. It exposes the sadness you’re trying to ignore. I propose you go out and look for her. I could come with you. She might turn out to be much more than you judged her to be.”

Rana’s words hit home. They gave Cirrus the encouragement he needed to sit up from the covers. They gave him the courage to look past his over-bloated ego. He wanted to know more about Jane Riverwood. ‘Is it just me or has Rana been talking back at me?’ the prince regarded his beta alpha, ‘What is the world coming to?’

Chapter 396 Winds of Change

“Rana, I need some time to think?” the prince finally told his beta alpha after a moment of silence. Rana’s emotions were far too distracting for him to focus on what he wanted for himself.

The beta alpha wasn’t like he’d been before. Rana had expressed his opinion strongly when it came to how he should have treated Jane and had left his alpha feeling slightly guilty for his stupid actions.

Noticing the prince’s turmoil, the beta alpha bowed in respect and excused himself from the room. With the man gone and his door closed, the prince dropped into his bed, exhausted.

This short moment of relief was short-lived. An image of his sad mate materialised in his mind. Cirrus's wolf wasn't willing to stay quiet either.

'Damn it. Why can't I get that image out of my head?' he cursed in his mind. When Cirrus left the town, he'd not thought much about his rejection, but his wolf didn't agree with him. "Hey, Rana... about my usual escorts. I'm not sure I heard you right the first time."

"Your usual escorts dismissed themselves, sir," the man responded before he had asked.

"Find me one, Rana," the prince ordered out of desperation. Rana's response didn't come through from the other side, but he was sure the beta alpha would begin his search even if it was futile. It was just how their connection worked.

Thinking through his illogical orders, he asked in a calmer, more sombre tone, "You're sure they've all left."

"Yes, sire. After the news from the king a few days ago, most of them changed their opinions of the royals and tried to chase after the power they wielded. They were of the opinion that none of them would ever be able to compare to the royal's true mate in the end. It would all be for nothing to have some random female come in a swoop the alpha off his feet without even breaking a sweat.

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King Hamedale has already shown his distaste for the women that hung around him. After issuing these orders, he showed that he was even more irritated by their presence, so they all... quit," Rana explained once more with a hint of hope in his voice. Hope, that the prince would come to terms with what was going on.

Cirrus sighed and sank deeper into soft covers, "Don't bother searching then," he relinquished his orders.

His mind, once more brought forth the image of the woman that had rejected him a few days ago. He'd not even noticed before, but his wolf projected her body with staggering clarity and detail.

Her features were every bit attractive as her strong personality from the little he'd gathered from their brief encounter. 'She rejected a royal when others would be trying to do otherwise... Ugh, screw it,' the prince cursed, getting up from beneath the covers, his eyes burning with the fire from his new goal, 'I'll find her... and probably make her pay for causing a royal so much trouble.'

To his surprise, when his thoughts completely stopped humming on about the goddess's revenge, his strength returned to him completely and when he remembered, it was cut in half yet again, somewhat like an encouragement for him to go looking for the woman.

"We leave soon, Rana. Get ready."

"Yes, your highness," the alpha responded, his voice regaining its formal tone. 'I can feel you smirking through the mind link, Rana.'

'I do not know what you mean, sire,' Rana replied.

Cirrus paused in his advance to the walk-in closet. Rana's voice had gone up a few octaves. He was definitely smirking, wasn't he?

Shaking off the thoughts, he changed into clothes suitable for travel and donned a pair of leather boots before making his way for the kitchens.

The kitchens were busier than usual in preparation for the guests they'd received, so he asked they carry on with their duties and serve him discreetly and without breaking their workflow.

While he ate at the table he'd been provided, he couldn't help but tune into the conversation of the wolves in the kitchen, "Do you think they will agree to the king's conditions? Do you really think werewolves and humans could ever be at peace?" went the first wolf he heard.

To this, he scoffed almost silently, wondering what foolishness could make them assume something like that. After all the carnage that his platoon had reaped through the humans, he was sure that would be an impossibility.

"I hope so. You know I have a human family out in the Sirius empire. Ever since I was bitten, we haven't spoken. I would hate to lose the opportunity to reconnect with them," another replied, turning the pieces of seasoned venison he had boiling in a hot pot.

"Wow, seriously. I have a sister in a remote town. She's the prettiest thing you could have ever imagined. I got bitten while I was out hunting and led the rogues away from the town. I've never seen her ever since and have never even risked a visit for her safety," another woman replied. The other members of the kitchen staff offered their sympathies to the two wolves before moving on to speak of their different hopes for the future.

Cirrus stared at the wolves working in the kitchen. He didn't know whether to be disgusted by them or angry... 'Insolent... The nerve...' Instead, he finished his meal and marched out of the room with his fists clenched, 'Wimps, all of them. They only care for themselves. They should have given their lives for the cause...'

His destination had now changed, shifting away from the village he was supposed to be looking for and his energy diminished significantly as he changed course and made for the throne room.

Without knocking, the prince pushed the large double doors open, ignoring the warnings of the men at the entrance. The king was in the middle of his speech when he saw his older brother standing at the entrance of the throne room, "Now there is a face I didn't think I'd be seeing. Are you feeling better brother?"

"Yes, I'm feeling a lot better, thank you," Cirrus replied with a practised smile. The pretentious prince walked up to the king and took a position beside him, pushing his beta alpha further away from the king, "Apologies for the tardiness. I wasn't exactly here on time."

"It's been a while, Cirrus," an angelic voice resonated through the room, capturing the prince's attention and withering away at the frustration that had been building within him. The voice belonged to the only other royal with a higher status than his own. The Queen of Sirius. Jeanie was clad in a beautiful white dress that went well with her snow-white hair. Her sapphire eyes were as sharp as ever as though they could see into the depths of the prince's soul.

Despite her intimidating appearance, Cirrus wasn't fooled. Jeanie was the kindest being he'd ever been graced to meet. A sentiment that was rarely ever awarded to a royal werewolf.

"Queen Jeanie, I see you're looking fair as always. It's a pleasure to see you doing well," he said with a slight bow.

"Yes, Cirrus, I am well. Although I wouldn't say the same about you. Are you sure you're doing alright?" the Queen asked him.

"I am. I just thought I wouldn't want to miss such a pivotal moment in our history," the man responded, regaining his quiet composure. He stood by the king like a statue while the hunters spoke with the two royals. They drafted terms for a peace treaty between them and the humans and began to pick out new roles for the hunters.

As they spoke, Cirrus noticed a few things that were peculiar to him. The hunters no longer laid their hands to rest on the pommels of their weapons. They didn't flinch when the king or any other wolf for that matter made a sudden movement.

Not to mention, the wolves didn't show any signs of this kind of reaction either. What he noticed later tore at his heartstrings even more. The hunters and wolves had abandoned any semblance of order of sitting at the large table. They had all mixed with each other.

Generals of the king's War Council were seated with notorious hunters known for slaying some of the most decent werewolves in their history. They shared drinks that were brought to them and talked as though they were old friends. The last hints of fear towards the hunters still existed, but only as mere scars to an old darker time.

The world was really changing. The hunters were accepting of this new peace treaty. If there was anyone in this room that wasn't fine with what was happening, it was Cirrus. 'This is wrong...' he thought to himself, but his thoughts... like his voice, held no power to the thundering winds of change.

Chapter 397 The Realisation of a Impossible Dream

Cirrus now realised he'd made it to the throne room a little late. Lying at the centre of the large hardwood table was a golden scroll on which the seals belonging to both empires were stamped along with a signature of the lead hunter's representative.

The Peace Treaty he had been hoping to try and put a stop to had already been concluded. What he was attending now was a meeting drafting the guidelines that would guide the world into the new era and it was going smoothly... almost like both sides had been wishing for something like this to happen.

'Those hunters knew they didn't stand a chance against us,' he screamed internally. Speaking up now, however, was only a recipe for disaster. Not a soul in this throne room still had the mind to go against the hunters anymore. Cirrus wasn't one to act out impulsively when the odds weren't in his favour and very rarely were they stacked against him this much.

Hunters were to be deployed into all towns and their roles drafted. The hunters were to keep the peace between the werewolves and the humans. Wolves were to refrain from attacking humans and humans were to do the same.

Cirrus almost smirked at the sheer ridiculousness of the words that were exchanged in the throne room, but all that vanished when the queen spoke up. Despite Lady Jeanie's tendencies to dream of a world that was too good to be true, she was rather down-to-earth.

Queen Jeanie pointed out the pitfalls and difficult parts of their plan and also pointed out that it wasn't going to be easy. Her speech went on to encourage the werewolves and hunters in the room that this was exactly what made their mission all the more worth it.

In a matter of minutes, the motivation swirling through the room was impossible to ignore. This wasn't a mere dream they were discussing. This was a plan that was going to be implemented, regardless of how long it took.

The two sides were ready to put everything on the line in the name of peace. The hunters were to act as the peacekeepers to make sure this would happen as written. The two empires were recognised and the werewolves were all to be placed under either banner, organising the packs all over the world to bow to one of the monarchs.

The royals were to abandon the power that allowed them to control other wolves and were to never use their alpha tones ever again. This part of their power was deemed too powerful and detrimental to the goal of peace since a wolf could be made to act against their will.

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'Oh, I know for a fact that Hamedale would never...' this thought was cut short when the king of Lycaon was the first to agree to this term. The prince had been sure the king and queen would reject this condition, but when they embraced it without an ounce of resistance. The prince was dumbfounded.

The wolves were to keep their claws and teeth to themselves. Biting a human was strictly forbidden and even more so for alphas and royals.

Royals were not allowed to possess beta alphas except for the king and queen of the two empires. When all was said and done, the hunters expected each empire to have only two beta alphas and no more.

The hunters and the empires were considered partners and none a servant to the other. This allowed autonomy of the hunters within the empires, however, a hunter that was found in violation of the rules or upholding justice wrongly was to be handed over to the monarchs of the empire they were found in and the royals would then be allowed to pass their judgement.

By the time the peace summit drew to a close, Cirrus was rooted to his spot and unable to take a step nor utter a single word. He'd watched the rules and guidelines for a new world be drafted right before him and they were all going about it as though nothing had happened for the past decades.

The war had raged on for so long. It was impossible to believe it was coming to an end right in front of him. His mind simply failed to make the transition.

The hunters and werewolves around him were overjoyed by the developments, including the royals. Hamedale was more chipper than usual, the strong and powerful king that usually sent chills down the spines of everyone that heard his name... was celebrating.

'When...?' he wanted to scream out. If he hadn't blocked out the mind link, his voice would have been thundering in the minds of those that were connected to him, 'When...?' the numerous smiling faces before him only made it harder to keep coherent thought. 'The audacity... The pretence... The hypocrisy... The nerve on them all,' he raged on within his mind.

His face kept a calm and regal warm expression he'd learnt to put on in front of those ranked higher than him... who used to be his brother and Jeanie. Now, it seemed the hunters were now a part of that list. All about him, the royals moved about, greeting each hunter personally and the occasional hug from time to time. The formal part of the summit was done and now, they were allowed to get to know each other more. All of it worked to enrage the prince, 'WHEN DID THE ROYALS GET RID OF ALL THEIR BLOOD LUST?'

'You fail to realise that your parents had this ruthless animosity toward the humans much more than Jeanie or your brother ever did. Deep down, all of them were hoping for there to come a time of peace. A time when all the meaningless bloodshed would come to an end. Do you have any idea how many families were torn apart? Even I only came to learn of that recently. Your brother and Jeanie, however, have always shouldered this burden,' an ethereal voice rang through his mind.

'Oh, so now she talks to me,' he mentally argued, but there was no response. He was about to scream back at the nothingness that had echoed in his mind when he remembered a faint image of a man laying on the floor of the Origin, 'That explains a lot.'

After a short pause, he noticed the queen staring at him. The king ended the meeting and allowed everyone to exit the throne room, inviting them to the backyard of the castle that had been prepared to house all their guests with a grand feast for the ages.

The hunters, yawning and stretching from the fatigue of having sat through the peace talks, accepted his invitation and exited the throne room talking amongst themselves and the members of the War Council that had warmed up enough to be considered friends.

Cirrus observed them better this time. None of them even dared to touch their weapons. Their guards were completely down. They didn't fear the wolves anymore now...

"Someone doesn't believe what's happening. Did you think it wouldn't work?" a feminine voice interrupted his focus. The room had been cleared, leaving Cirrus, Rana, Jeanie and Hamedale in the throne room. The king and queen had dismissed their beta alphas, hoping to get a conversation with Cirrus alone. His odd mood had not gone unnoticed by those with a connection to the Royal mind link.

Cirrus noticed they were all looking at him and sighed, "You're right, as always, Lady Jeanie. I didn't expect them to go along with this 'petty' attempt at achieving peace."

Now that they were royals alone, Cirrus didn't mind letting out a bit of the venom he had stored within him. It wasn't a surprise either. He was the most notorious general when it came to the Royals' former mission, claiming the lives of countless humans and also becoming the one responsible for Lycaon's impressive military might.

"Petty?" the white-haired monarch raised a brow at him. Now that he got an even closer look at her, she'd lost all the signs of the previous warrior that she was, taking on a more graceful feminine appearance... all in preparation for the peace talks.

“That’s what I would call it. I see no reason for them to simply bury the hatchet and yet... they speak with the attitude and tone of noblemen and women who have wanted peace all along. It’s almost like they couldn’t win and they knew it, so the option of peace was a lovely opportunity for them,” the prince spat.

“I was sure you’d changed your mind about the humans. Do you really still harbour such deep hatred toward them?” the king asked with a chuckle.

“You’d be surprised. However, that doesn’t really matter at the moment. I don’t have the strength to fight them anymore anyway and you all look invested in this pipe dream,” Cirrus shrugged, “So I’ll play along. Don’t you have a party to attend?”

“Yes, we all have a party to attend,” the king replied, raising a brow at his brother.

“I’m afraid I must decline the invitation, your Majesty. I have something else to do now. Did you pack, Rana?” Cirrus turned to his beta alpha.

“Yes, my lord. Everything’s ready,” the beta alpha replied.

“Where are you going?” Hamedale’s voice went up a few octaves in curiosity.

“Somewhere far from all this. Might help me clear my mind,” the man replied walking away with a wave, “Send them my regards on my behalf. And don’t worry, brother. I’d never do anything to jeopardise something you’ve worked so hard on. The goddess made sure of that anyway.”

The king sighed when the man was gone from the throne room, “Do you think he’ll be able to accept this new world?” Jeanie asked him, her eyes stuck to the place his body was last seen.

“I don’t know. Our parents forced their ideals on him at a very young age. It was that exact same reason that he chose to give up the throne. He never did show me what they showed him. The will of the Old Kings lives deep within him. I worry for him,” King Hamedale replied with a sad expression on his face, “Maybe he’ll be able to fight the old kings’ will and become a man of his own. One that can accept this new world we’re building.’

‘See that, Ashley. I’m not the first to want such a world...’

‘I know that Katie, but then... Why didn’t that world come to be? What happened to change all this? It doesn’t add up.’

‘Don’t go detective on me, Ashley. Stay with me...’ the Luna shrieked.

Chapter 398 Her Home?

The prince started his journey feeling his wolf’s enthusiasm towards this mission. It was refreshing to run through the woods in pursuit of something so wholeheartedly again without the feeling of his energy being constantly drained from him.

This, however, was different from his usual hunts that involved a lot of blood lust. This hunt was for something he was not used to looking for at all. His mind projected thoughts of hope and happiness like nothing he’d felt before.

He'd almost given up on this journey, but one look from Rana wiped all his doubts away from him. The beta alpha had never encouraged him to do anything so independently before. It almost felt like the goddess had visited him in his sleep, but that would have been obvious considering he could feel the faint remnants of her divine energy if that had been the case.

Wiping the conspiring thoughts from his mind, he let his thoughts wander and was almost shocked by what he had to think to himself. 'I wonder what she's like. What her life has been like? What the... ugh, perhaps I can dream as well... Albeit restrained,' He continued to rush through the woods, searching for something his wolf yearned for... a little more than he himself did if he was being honest with himself.

Cirrus knew what it was like to deny one's wolf's desires. It escalated from a little mental discomfort to excruciating irritation that wouldn't let one sleep regardless of how soft the bed was.

To Cirrus's surprise,(one of many surprises he'd witnessed that day) his wolf retraced his tracks with deadly accuracy. It didn't matter if it had rained the day before or if he'd been weak on the way to the palace. The wolf simply knew where to go. The black starry wolf behind him followed diligently, keeping up even when the prince's wolf ran at top speed.

The sun eventually set and with the approaching darkness, they had to bring their journey to a pause. Fortunately for them, they had been prepared and set up camp in the forest. They hunted, had a warm meal and spent the night in nature. The next morning, the Cirrus was up before dawn, "Get up, Rana. We are almost there," Cirrus nudged the beta alpha awake.

Cirrus, who was still sleepy, lazily lifted his eyelids and felt the sensation of the sleep draining out of him. Sometimes the power of his alpha's commands fascinated him instead of scaring him. If the orders were acceptable, he could work tirelessly until the work was done. The beta alpha's blind loyalty made it impossible for him to see the effects of being overworked. Either that or there really was something magical about the prince's absolute orders.

After packing their belongings, they started the journey once more. Cirrus followed his instincts to the letter, more than he'd ever trusted them in his life. Not like he had a choice, but because he'd never felt his wolf vividly participate in a hunt like it was doing today. He practically had no reason to deny his senses.

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Sooner than Rana had expected, they reached the town Cirrus had run from a few days ago. He stopped at the spot it had happened. The place he'd watched the most beautiful girl cry and reject him after he'd been nothing but cruel to her, 'I-I... I'll need to apologise about that.'

He shifted back into his human form in a swirl of blue divine energy, his clothes materialising and settling back on him. Rana shifted back into his human form as well and the two walked into the small town. There were murmurs from those that recognised his eyes, but nothing he wasn't used to.

Soon enough, Cirrus stood before the inn where he'd met her, taking a moment to breathe... and entered it. They were just opening up when he entered. The man at the counter was wiping it when two men entered the inn, dressed in expensive tunics that screamed royalty. The man that had returned was nothing like the rugged royal they'd witnessed a few days prior.

“Your highness,” panicking, the man bowed to the highly-respected wolf that had just entered the little inn, “I wasn’t expecting someone of your status ever to grace this small establishment with their presence. What’s mine is yours, your highness?”

“I have no need for anything of yours. I only seek one of your employees. A woman by the name of Jane Riverwood. Have you seen her?” the man was shocked by the mention of the woman’s name.

“Jane, sir? I’m afraid Jane quit her job yesterday, your majesty,” the man quickly answered.

“Explain yourself,” the prince demanded, masking the pang of guilt that involuntarily made its way to his heart.

“After a strange royal she claimed to be her mate a few days ago left her, she hasn’t been the same since. She was always jolly and kind, but that spark of light in her eye had completely vanished from her. She quit, claiming there was something else she had to focus on and needed to dedicate her life to it,” the man rushed his explanation.

When he recalled the royal, however, he looked up from the ground and regarded the prince for a second, trying to discern the face of the royal before him and that of the one he’d seen that night. ‘They can’t be the same, can they?’ the innkeeper kept his thoughts to himself.

“What do you mean by ‘quit’?” the prince asked the man before him.

“Exactly that, sir. She quit her job. I could show you the way to her home if that’s okay with you?” the innkeeper offered.

Heaving a deep exasperated sigh, the prince allowed him to show the way to the woman’s home. Knowing the woman had quit her job rubbed him the wrong way, ‘Did she quit because of me or is there another reason? He said something about her focusing on something else. I wonder what that’s about. Maybe it’s an excuse she was using.’

They finally reached a small cabin at the edge of town. The innkeeper knocked at the door and bowed before leaving the two gentlemen at the door to the woman’s house, “Thank you very much for your help.”

The prince flashed the man a smile and fished a gold coin from his pocket which he offered the man his thanks. The man was stunned by the prince’s token of gratitude and shook his head in denial. Suddenly, he was more willing to offer more information to the royal. ‘This is not the same cruel man,’ he convinced himself before adding to his story, “You might want to go easy on her. She wasn’t the same after the man left her days ago. Either the man was actually her mate or she was embarrassed for claiming he was. I don’t know which is which or if any of this is helpful to you, but...”

“I understand, kind sir. I will keep it in mind,” the prince was slightly glad the man hadn’t recognised him from the last time he was in the town. His clothes were so rugged at that time and he was in a weakened irritated state that would explain why the people couldn’t recognise him. With that said, the innkeeper left them at the doorway of the small cabin. Despite the location of the cabin, it was well-taken care of. All the wood was masterfully polished and without a sign of termites.

The prince knocked at the door once more and this time, the door slowly swung open by just a slit to allow the person inside to peer out at them from the inside. On the other side, a pair of amber eyes

stared back at them from behind the door. Normally, werewolves with this colour of eyes would be frightened by the blue-eyed royals, but this amber pair only narrowed its eyes at him in detest.

“So you finally return,” a hoarse voice came from behind the door.

“Do you plan on letting us in? I know those aren’t the eyes of the person I seek,” the prince replied, his wolf having confirmed this was someone else in the span of seconds. While there was the lingering faint scent of the person he was looking for, the one before him was not Jane. ‘Why is her scent faint? Isn’t this her home?’ Cirrus wondered.

“No, I don’t plan on letting you in. If you’re looking for Jane, she’s not here,” the woman spat back.

“Then simply point me in the right direction,” the prince commanded.

“With a rotten attitude like that, I’d rather she took her chances with a toad,” the woman on the other side scoffed, letting the door open wider and casually walking back into the cabin. There was no use arguing with a royal loose canon. That was only a recipe for death and any sane wolf could easily realise that.

The prince entered the small establishment and took a look around. There wasn’t much in the house, but what caught his attention was the slightly stronger scent of his mate. She was not in the house, as the woman had said and from how faint the scent was, it was as though she’d been gone a while.

Even then, however, the prince was fairly sure this is where she was supposed to be. ‘Was this... Jane’s home?’

Chapter 399 Higher Calling

Cirrus took a second look around what he could see of the cabin’s living room. Unlike every other place in this town, this house still held traces of his mate’s scent, and what was more was that he could tell these traces weren’t going anywhere for a long time. This was Jane’s actual home.

Cirrus let his eyes settle on the woman before him once more. The amber in her eyes was the same as all the others he’d seen growing up, so there shouldn’t have been anything in those eyes that could tell him if she was related to Jane... and yet, his wolf held suspicions.

Maybe it was the way the woman talked back to the royal with a tad bit less restraint than a normal wolf, or maybe it was how her sad expression made images of his heartbroken mate flash through his mind.

“Are you... Jane’s mother?” Cirrus asked.

“Who’s asking? Huh, Prince Cirrus of Lycaon or Commander Cirrus of the Death platoon, or maybe the crown prince that declined the throne so that he could kill more humans than any other monarch in history. You know, when I heard you were her mate, I almost...”

“That’s enough,” the prince growled, balling his fists in anger. ‘The audacity of this woman... Is her daughter just as...’ Cirrus, however, didn’t get a chance to finish his rambling thoughts as the woman continued speaking, paying no mind to the prince’s angered mood.

“Surprising, I would have thought you’d be proud of those titles,” the woman narrowed her eyes at him, “Just give up on my daughter. You treated her like trash the moment you laid eyes on her. I don’t want her to ever see you again. I thought I would be blessed enough to spend the rest of my days without getting the chance to, but I guess we can’t all be winners, can we?”

“You speak of me as though I’m a scourge. I was merely following the will of our goddess,” Cirrus forced himself to calm down before this woman and leaned against one of the wooden pillars that held the structure of the cabin. She was the mother of his mate after all. He mentally wondered how long he would have to endure this torture before she could talk, but still managed to suppress the urge to threaten the woman into telling him what he wanted to know.

“Someone who kills that many people and still sleeps peacefully at night. What more am I supposed to expect from you?” the woman spoke with him with so much distaste that it irked the prince. Nonetheless, he held his composure.

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“Will you tell me where she is or not?” he asked coldly. ‘How long is she planning on keeping her sister’s location hidden from me? More importantly, if she’s so happy that I was finally out of her life, why does she look sad?’ he thought to himself, however, no answers came to him.

The woman took a seat at a table to the side of the wall opposite the prince, twiddling her thumbs somewhat nervously, “I don’t want to...” she sighed, choosing to change her words, “Will you first tell me why you want to know where she is?”

“That should not concern you.”

“And yet it does. She’s my daughter. I would never let her into the custody of someone that will never show her happiness. You only know to take the lives of others and tear families apart.

You wreak havoc everywhere you go and yet... Taking you to her suggests you want to do something other than take lives. You would be committing to bringing life into this world. Something you’re not good at... You broke her heart once before. What more could you want with her? Perhaps you want to kill her now that she’s rejected you,” this woman’s words were like daggers to the prince’s heart.

Hearing these words from the goddess or the royals was one thing. They knew why he had done what he had done, but hearing it from someone that had never met him before. Was this what everyone thought of him? The wolf that tears families apart and leaves a trail of death everywhere he goes.

“You dare to speak to the prince of Lycaon in such a manner,” Rana bellowed angrily, finally blowing a fuse. The beta alpha had chosen to remain quiet and let his alpha handle all this, but he also had his limits of tolerance.

“Rana,” the prince raised his hand to stop his advancing subordinate. The beta alpha settled down and stepped away from the two of them with a slight bow in respect of his alpha.

The glow in his eyes dimmed once more notifying them that he had cooled down, “Forgive me for overstepping, my Lord.”

"It's fine, Rana," the prince sighed before turning his attention back to the slightly shocked woman, "I didn't come here to cause your daughter any more pain. I came here to apologise for the way I treated her," the prince paused... The rest of his speech felt like something that would carve a hole into his very being just by uttering the words.

Nevertheless, he knew what he wanted to say. The past days had shown him enough for him to come to this conclusion, "You're right in many ways. I only know death. I've brought it upon so many that I've lost count, but alas, the goddess robbed me of the power to reap any more lives. Now I am in search of the last flicker of hope and light that is still within reach."

"Forgive me if I don't believe a word you've said," the woman scoffed without giving the prince's words a second thought.

"I don't intend to convince you of this. The only one that matters to me now is Jane, no offence. You might be her mother and I will treat you with the respect you deserve and also thank you for giving birth to someone as beautiful and intelligent as her, but I must find her first. Maybe I could find a way to..."

"You won't find her," the woman stopped him short. Cirrus wanted to lash out and he did... However, as he did, he couldn't help but notice the way she'd kept her tone indifferent when she cut him off.

"Will you not tell me where to find her?" Cirrus was starting to lose his patience.

"No, that's not what I mean. I'm just speaking facts that you will not find her, at all. She left with her belongings and said she'd gone to fulfil her purpose in the wilderness... And trust me, if she doesn't want to be found, the wild itself will shield her from you," the woman replied in a sombre tone.

She continued to twiddle her thumbs nervously in a reaction similar to a nervous tweak or a side-effect of staying away from an addiction. The woman wasn't exactly dressed regally, but her appearance was in no way graceful either... even for someone who lived in a village as small as this.

"You're not making any sense. What are you saying?" the prince pinched the bridge of her nose.

"It's been like that her whole life. She can talk to animals but has never had a use for the ability. It was a few days before you wandered upon this village that she received her calling from the goddess. She was to conceal the Origin from the rest of the world. Her role is to obscure the location of the Origin completely. That means, she will vanish as well," the woman replied, "If you'd made it here this morning, you could have caught her before she left," the woman tried to explain.

"I'm a royal. We can access the Origin if we want to," the man replied.

"You're not listening to me. She's been planning this for a long time. The moon goddess is determined to hide the Origin from the rest of the world and a girl was born that would help her bring that dream to fruition. We've always known of her miraculous ability and respected her for it, but we didn't know that this is what it would be used for."

"You've lost your child to the goddess. How are you not..." it only made sense then why the woman's voice was hoarse, why she looked dishevelled, why she didn't care what she sounded like in front of the most dangerous werewolf in the world, why she constantly twiddled her thumbs... It was no wonder that the scent of booze hung in the air. The faint traces of tears were finally clear to the prince, now that he took a closer look at the woman, "You've been crying."

Like a dam breaking from intense pressure, the mother of Cirrus's mate broke down before him, "Of course I have. My little girl will never come back to me. What did you expect? Maybe... just maybe if you'd come here sooner, you could have kept her from leaving. I never thought I would look to the Commander of the Death platoon for help, but... My dear Jane... my Fauna..."

"I'll find her," Cirrus rushed to the woman and squeezed her hand in an effort to comfort her. He gave her his word, promising to find the girl before rushing from the cabin with Rana diligently following behind.

The woman continued to silently weep inside her cabin, pondering the words of the prince, his determination against what she knew to be true of her daughter's disappearance. In a low hoarse voice, void of all hope, the woman silently lamented to no one at all, "I don't think even you have the power to make such a promise... your highness."

Chapter 400 Veering off course

The prince dashed through the woods, following his mate's scent as best as his wolf could follow. After getting out of the girl's home, he'd been able to pick on the trail it took... and just like her mother had mentioned earlier, the trail led straight into the forest and in the direction of the Origin.

It was only a matter of time before Jane's scent grew even stronger, spurring him to strike his paws even harder on the ground. The grey wolf, together with the starry black wolf, tore through the forest at dizzying speeds in search of the prince's runaway mate. The night was upon not long after they'd begun their search. Cirrus had no desire to give up chase. In fact, he was sure he could keep running for days on end without stopping.

This, obviously, wasn't the case with his beta alpha. The more hours that ticked by, the shorter the prince's patience grew... and so did the growing feeling of anxiety. What if he didn't find her like Jane's mother had tried to assure him earlier? The thought was just as terrifying as it was dreadful. "Your majesty, we should stop and camp," the man's beta alpha interrupted Cirrus through the mind link.

"I can't do that, Rana. She had a large headstart and I don't know how far she's gone already. I can't even tell if she's even alright. What if something happens to her in all this madness? What if the goddess offered her some sort of sanctuary and reaching the Origin will only spell our failure?"

What if she's not even stopping to rest just so she could get away? If she does sleep in the night, that's only a chance for us to catch up to her," Cirrus went frantic, "We'll hunt, then continue our search when we're not as hungry as we are now."

The beta alpha didn't argue... not like he could anyway. Soon enough, they'd spotted an unsuspecting doe and killed it with barely a chase. Their movements were silent when they hunted and painted an image of the experienced hunters they were.

When they were full and had just rested for the smaller part of an hour, they continued their search for the girl.

Overflowing with determination and a burning desire to see this through, the prince led his beta alpha through the forest, following his mate's scent once more. What got on the prince's nerves, however, was how the scent had almost vanished over the span of a few minutes.

It was almost... unnatural.

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The two of them ran like this for two days before the prince realised where they were going and got the bright idea to just race for the Origin. Since it was now clear that she was heading for the Origin, the prince switched his attention to going back to the place where the goddess had forbidden all wolves from ever going again.

With this slight change in means of navigation, the prince was able to rush faster, unhindered by the role of having to focus on Jane's scent.

Knowing her destination, Cirrus allowed them to rest for the first time in two days. Rana collapsed to the ground as soon as the prince allowed it, revealing how tired he actually was. Cirrus, on the other hand, had a hard time sleeping that night, but when he did drift off, the clutches of sleep were tighter than they'd ever been, holding the two wolves down for longer than the prince had ever slept in his life.

The sun was high in the sky by the time the prince awoke. The man got up feeling groggy. The tree he'd been leaning against seemed several times thinner than it had been when he fell asleep and groaned slightly against his body's weight.

Cirrus dismissed the thought and turned to his beta alpha. "Hey, Rana, get... up. What the...?"

Unlike Cirrus, who'd woken up to an oddly immature tree, the crimson-eyed man was in a similar, but several times more dire situation. The king froze at the sight before him. Growing around Rana were creeping plants that thickened by the minute and looped around his limbs and torso at frightening speeds, ensnaring the beta alpha in a growing cocoon of green.

"Rana, wake up," the prince snapped out of his daze and rushed to his beta alpha. The unintentional command took root in the beta alpha and his eyes shot open. However, when he tried getting up from the ground, the vines stopped growing and took hold of his body, securing the roots' purchase of the earth and holding him firmly close to the ground. Cirrus willed his nails to extend into sharp claws and began slashing at the vines that held his companion's body captive.

"Your Highness, what is the meaning of this?" Rana's voice was panicked while he fought against the surprisingly sturdy grip of the rogue vines. Cirrus, at some point, wondered whether his beta alpha was playing a prank on him, but shook the thought upon remembering the man's loyal character.

With the strength the man was capable of, he'd been sure breaking out of the vine grip hold would have been a walk in the park... but that wasn't the case. Rana's muscles were bulging in his struggle against the vines. He was using more strength than he normally required to lift a full-grown human and even that wasn't enough.

Rana groaned against the vines holding him down, summoning all the strength he could muster. Having cleared his mind from the morning grogginess, he was finally able to assess the situation he was in and summon all his strength to escape his flower prison.

The prince saw an opening and slashed at the taut vines, striking at their thinnest points. His claws cut notches into the vines and weakened their overall grip on the beta alpha. After a short moment, the weakest of them began to snap, giving the beta alpha some room to move.

Rana wasted no time once he'd noticed an opening. The man braced himself for another powerful tug at the vines. This time, he was in a better position to tear himself from their grip. After a loud groan, the sound of snapping vines filled the air, some being ripped from the ground at their very roots, raising a small dust cloud around the beta alpha in the process. The crimson-eyed wolf was soon torn free from the green cage.

The moment the last one had snapped and there was nothing else pulling the man to the ground, Rana collapsed yet again, panting with exhaustion. The vines didn't move again and the rumbling of the green life around them had come to a standstill, "What the hell was that?" Rana coughed.

Cirrus retracted his claws and ran his hand along one of the trees surrounding them. Something felt completely wrong with their surroundings. The trees weren't at all in any way he remembered them. He wasn't in the habit of memorising his surroundings before he slept, but when he looked around, his instincts were all wrong.

Where he expected to lean against a tree like he had the night before going to sleep, there was nothing. The ground was moist and slightly less disturbed than the bed of torn vines that Rana had ripped himself from. At first, he'd thought it was just his mind playing tricks on him, but something was definitely wrong about this. 'Plants...?', "I don't know, but let's keep going."

The two wolves shook off the shock and hunted, prepared a meal and ate to their fill, they turned in the direction of the Origin and resumed the journey.

A second before leaving their camp, Cirrus looked back to the spot his beta alpha had almost gotten encased in vines and noticed there wasn't a shred of the odd wriggly vegetation left.

The vines were nowhere to be seen and all the signs of the recent struggle had vanished. What was even more peculiar was that the grass had grown back to normal and assumed a clean carpet undisturbed. 'Something is very wrong,' the prince's grey wolf snarled at the patch of green before turning away.

He took a reluctant step in the direction they were following. His mate's scent had gone even fainter over the course of the night it made him feel like he'd made the mistake of resting that night. He could not tell how much further they were supposed to be going before finding her. The two of them tore through the woods in pursuit of Jane Riverwood, the woman Cirrus was fated to live the rest of his life with.

"Your highness, if we are going to the Origin, shouldn't we be following the flow of the Great Sirius River?" Rana suggested after they had been padding through the forest for a while.

The prince would have scoffed at the beta alpha the moment he heard this question, considering the best way to find the Origin was to follow the Great Sirius river. Everyone knew that... and so did the prince.

Cirrus had actually been listening to the sound of the rushing water to guide him through the forest and south to the Origin. It was that simple, really... and yet, now that he strained his powerful sense of hearing, he heard... nothing.

"Yes, Rana... we should... be following... I was listening to the tide a while ago, but... When did we veer this far from the Great River?" Cirrus asked, shock and anxiety rattling his nerves.

“I thought you were listening for it as well. But yesterday, as the dusk drew near, I noticed how quieter it got the more we ran looking for the Origin,” the large starry wolf rumbled replied, “I thought maybe that her scent had gotten stronger and that you’d figured she wasn’t going to the Origin exactly. Now, however, I know the river is nowhere near us.”

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‘Ashley...’ Katie looked around the scene surrounding the two wolves, wide-eyed.

‘Yes, Katie... I see it too...’ the wolf replied, mirroring Katie’s horrified tone with one of her own.