

## Chosen 401

### Chapter 401 [Bonus chapter]The One That Got Away

"I want to agree with you, Rana, but we haven't changed course since we started running for the Origin," the prince argued. The world was now starting to spin with his mind providing incoherent pieces of information. Cirrus was running for the Origin... he had been running for the Origin, right.

Somehow, the sound of the Sirius River did not reach their ears. If someone was indeed looking for the Origin, this would be the first thing they ought to look for, but the river was nowhere in earshot.

"No, we haven't. Well, that's what it seemed like when you figured she was following the river, but we've been slowly drifting away from the river. At some point, you started running so fast that I couldn't focus on the sound of the river. I simply had to keep up with you," the man responded, trying to make sense of all this as well.

Now that Rana had the chance to think about it, he could now tell his alpha had been acting a little bit out of character since their run began.

The prince pondered, pacing about the forest floor in search of an answer to their sudden misdirection situation, "I followed the sound of the river and we ran downstream. I've made this journey countless times before, Rana. I wouldn't make such a mistake..."

"I don't doubt your familiarity with the way to the Origin, my Lord, but do you recognise where we are at the moment?" the beta alpha asked him.

Just as the man turned to look around, the scent he'd been tracking vanished completely from his nostrils, like someone had blown out a candle, leaving his last sign of direction gone.

Without the certainty of his mate's scent, all he had to look for was the Origin. Cirrus had been searching for Jane and not the Origin and somehow, he had lost track of both.

The prince looked around, the grey wolf's eyes widening in shock, "Rana... I'm going to ask you an odd question. Which way are we running?"

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Rana, who'd also been pacing about, spun in a random direction and pointed to his back, "We came through..." the trees he pointed to were completely identical to the ones he'd perceived as the forward direction and those on the sides.

It was only then that the beta alpha noticed that all the trees around them had turned completely identical to each other, surrounding them in a clear circle that couldn't be distinguished from any side. What was worse was that the canopies had ground thick enough to obscure the sun in the sky.

They couldn't tell which way was North... which way was South either. The streams of light that managed to make it through the thick canopies tore straight to the ground, bending in no particular direction.

The prince had woken up at an odd time and lost his sense of time. They couldn't tell which side the sun was supposed to be headed, which way was east or which was west... "No, this is impossible."

“It’s not that we lost track of where we were going, Rana. We were led off track, but the forest itself,” Cirrus observed, remembering the odd behaviour of the vines that had almost buried his beta alpha alive that morning.

The prince frantically scanned the ground, but just like he’d suspected, their pawprints had also vanished, replaced by a fresh vibrant patch of green grass. It was like they’d never taken a step before.

To test how dire their situation was, the prince forced a paw print into the ground and watched with his own eyes, as the soil bulged back up and the grass repaired itself, completely obscuring the signs of his movements in a matter of seconds.

“What do we do now, my Lord?” the beta alpha asked, turning yet again in an effort to tell where they had come from. Even the sound of the wild had gone completely still. There wasn’t a creature in sight. No birds... no squirrels... nothing. There wasn’t a sign of life at all in all directions, “We could try picking a direction and running that way.”

“That could take us forever, Rana. We’ve already been running for days now. Who’s to say we won’t die of starvation if...”

“Right now, there is no other thing I can think of, your Highness and I can tell there is nothing going on in your mind either. Every direction looks the same and we both know nothing is going to change. There are no animals near us and that means we can’t hunt. The rations we have right now can only take us a day at most. We need to focus on surviving, my Lord,” the beta alpha argued while he still had the chance to talk back to his master.

“You’re suggesting we give up our mission. Is that what you’re saying, Rana?” the royal bellowed, assuming the tone he used when commanding the Death platoon.

Rana flinched at the man’s tone, “No, that’s not it, sire. Fine, let’s follow the woman’s scent then. That could give us some sort of direction.”

The prince stopped in his fury and took a couple of steps away from his beta alpha. Rana narrowed his eyes in curiosity, “What’s wrong?”

“The scent, Rana... It’s gone. The trail went cold moments ago... As if it had never existed,” the prince admitted. Cirrus shifted back into his human form and sat on the ground, massaging his temples in frustration. They were officially...

Lost...

“We’re lost, Rana.”

The starry wolf was stunned by the sudden confession. The prince was not one to admit to something like that... but then again, he wasn’t one to hunt for an amber-eyed woman either. Their very presence in the forest at the moment was a miracle in and of itself.

“Might I make a suggestion then?”

“What would running in any one direction do for us, Rana?” the man groaned.

“It can help us get closer to any form of civilisation. Sitting here won’t do us any good at all...” Rana explained his plan to the prince once more. This time, the prince was paying attention to what he had to say, having calmed down.

“If we keep running in one direction, Rana, we would get exhausted and...”

“We can hunt, my Lord. That’s the easiest part to deal with,” the beta alpha replied.

“Feeding on meat alone for days. Is that your plan to beat hunger and starvation in a wilderness that’s against us?” the prince asked humourlessly.

“Yes, my Lord and our main priorities are to find a village or town to give us directions or the Great Sirius River. Water would be nice as well. We know one thing is for sure. Whichever direction we take will either lead us back to the capital, to an unknown town, the Great River or to the Origin. We run with an open mind, knowing that any of these destinations is better than sitting here and waiting for the Lord of Death to claim our lives,” Rana offered.

The prince thought through the man’s words for a moment before replying solemnly, “Have we really given up then?”

The question bore a distant tone that suggested it was rhetorical. The prince was the only one capable of tracking the woman’s scent, so asking this was more of a question directed at himself. If Cirrus couldn’t track her down, then there was nothing Rana could do either.

They had indeed given up.

Without warning, an ethereal voice broke the unnatural silence of the reorganised forest, “As you should...”

Chapter 402 Enough... Enough of it all.

Rana stared on, speechless as a bright silhouette formed before them, taking the form of a being he didn’t think he would be seeing any time soon. The goddess looked as divine as ever... even when most of the natural tone of her skin paled in the form of a holographic visual.

The words that had come from her upon her arrival, though. Those felt like salt being rubbed into his wounds. The moon goddess materialised before them... something she had never done in history. This was the first time the goddess was appearing to anyone somewhere other than the Origin and without appearing to them through a dream.

“The girl you were supposed to be mated with was a rare one. A rare breed of talent indeed...”

“What kind of talent, our Lady?” Rana spoke up, bowing in respect of the goddess, his voice filled with curiosity. What surprised the goddess was the beta alpha’s ability to speak in her presence. For a first-time appearance, the wolf was acting rather odd.

He was meant to be drooling at the mere sight of the goddess, but instead, this wolf was asking her a question. What was even more peculiar was that there wasn’t a hint of fear in her tone at all.

The prince, on the other hand, hadn't bothered to how to the goddess when she'd shown up. Instead, he stood up from his place on the ground and turned his eyes away from the goddess. 'That's the last person I wanted to see.'

"She has the power to speak to and control nature," the goddess explained, "She was blessed with this power when she was young. All her life, she was able to listen to the animals and communicate with them. She only realised the full potential of this power, though... The power to speak to nature itself. Not just animals, but plants as well.

You will find a shifting forest unnavigable. It can lead you in circles even when you feel like you're travelling in a straight line. She can ask the forest to spread this scent of your following in the wrong direction and lead you in the wrong direction entirely while obscuring your entire path and stranding you in a natural prison from which you can never escape no matter what you try," the goddess explained in a mix of fascination and melancholy.

"Can we talk to her?" Rana asked, dismissing the anger that the goddess's fascination roused within him.

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Celeste hesitated before answering, taking a moment to think herself through, "She's... unreachable at the moment."

"You're a goddess."

"Yes... that I am and I am always aware of that. I offered her the chance to help me conceal the Origin for me. Something she's done marvellously, seeing as you're extremely far from it right now," the goddess replied.

The prince gasped at the revelation. Just how far had they run off course? How long had they been running in the wrong direction? Had they even been listening to the Great River in the first place or had she ordered the trees to carry that sound as well and misguide them completely?

The goddess continued, "I don't expect anyone to find the Origin in this generation or the next and I will wither away the information of its location as time goes on. That place will never be..."

"I don't care about the Origin," Cirrus snapped at the goddess, finally turning to face the goddess. On the prince's face was a look of rage directed towards the goddess. All her words were meaningless to him. He wanted her to speak about Jane and yet she went on and on about how her plan was going marvellously, "Congratulations on hiding the Origin from the rest of the world. Where is Jane?"

"Jane... is at the Origin. The one place you can never find..." the goddess answered, watching the prince's hands ball into fists, "If it makes you feel any better, I am not holding her there to spite you. She decided to seclude herself at the Origin, despite all my efforts into convincing her against it.

It only got worse when she realised who you were. The Commander of the Death Platoon, Herald of Death and the royal that had killed more humans than any other royal in the history of the two Great Empires. She wanted nothing to do with you... On the upside, she had a greater motivation to conceal the Origin, but that also means... she's stuck there.

You lost her when you turned away from her after she rejected you. If only you'd claimed her as yours at that moment. I wouldn't have minded if you'd forcefully taken her away from that village. She would soon come to know who you are and the mate pull would work out the rest.

However, now that she's rejected you and made it impossible for you to find her, that bond you share will wither away with time until you're no longer bonded to each other.

Sensing the prince's raging emotions, the beta alpha spoke up, "How do we escape the prison she's locked us in right now then?"

"When I disappear, the forest will offer you a path back home. Do not stray from this path because the forest will imprison you once again. You will not be able to find your way back home if that happens," the goddess spoke up, "I can't appear like this too often,"

"You're taking your time leaving then," Cirrus grumbled, turning his back on the goddess, "I've had enough. Just leave me alone, Celeste."

The cold in his voice was almost unbearable for the goddess. While she had been hoping the prince would find someone to give him a purpose in a world where killing humans was no longer their goal, she hadn't seen this outcome.

It made sense to her now that he would be paired with someone as headstrong as Jane, but she'd never thought the same gift the girl had would act as a barrier to fostering a relationship between the two of them. The girl was too stubborn for her own good... and that attitude had just put a stop to one of the moon goddess's wishes. Celeste had enough limitations as it was. The decision of a heartbroken village girl just had to be one more reason for her failures.

The prince already had his back turned away from him. She knew he wouldn't listen to anything she had to say no matter what she tried. Disappointment rolled off him in waves, "Don't give up all..."

"Just go already... Haven't you ruined my life enough? I've had enough of your interventions for one lifetime. I don't need you to find my own path to happiness," the prince cut her off before she could speak. Just like the prince had been the first to experience the pain of rejection, this was the first time one of the goddess's creatures was rejecting her as well.

"Very well," with a defeated sigh, she vanished in a shower of blue sparks, leaving the prince and confused beta alpha to the darkness of the Shifting forest. As soon as she had left, the trees began to rustle unnaturally. The ground ruptured under the pressure of twisting roots.

The very trunks of the trees were slowly shuffling through their foundations, forming a pattern much less confusing than before. Instead of a maze of unnaturally organised trees, they lined in a specific manner and allowed streams of light to peek through the canopies, lining the path they had created with tendrils of sunlight.

"Let's go, Rana..." the prince ordered, shifting into his grey wolf and dashing away at top speed in the path that had been laid out for them. At the rate the prince forced them to run, they reached the palace faster than they thought they would.

Either they had been really close to the palace or the prince had rushed them really fast. None of it made the slightest of sense, but Cirrus was in no mood to ponder the wonders of the powers that brought them back home in the span of a single hour.

Readjusting their sense of direction alone after the harrowing ordeal was a pain in and of itself. The prince reached the palace and rushed in, heading for his chambers without sparring anyone a greeting or caring for his appearance. He just wanted time to himself.

As Cirrus reached for his doorknob, a voice interrupted him, "There you are, Cirrus. We've been so..." the man stopped speaking when he took in his brother's state. His previously exquisite clothes he'd worn were now dirty and torn, his boots worn out and muddy.

The king thought he'd imagined it, but now that he took a closer look at his brother, he could tell the man standing before him had clearly lost some weight.

"Is there something you want from me?" Cirrus asked him in a raspy tone.

"I don't need a reason to call on my brother. If anything, I thought you would be interested in accompanying me on a hunting trip with the royals of the Sirius empire. It was Jeanie's idea, so..."

"No, you'll have to count me out of that one," Cirrus replied harshly.

"Cirrus, did something hap...?" the question was cut short when the king's brother entered his room without warning, slamming the door behind him.

From the inside of the room, he yelled, "Just leave me alone, Hamedale."

Hamedale had never seen his brother act so out of character and when he tried to read his emotions through the mind link, he got nothing. The prince had locked himself out from the pack link.

Trying to get into his mind using his power as a royal would have been an invasion of privacy, so the king backed away from the door, "If you do need someone to talk to, you know where to find me, Cirrus."

Cirrus listened to the king's receding steps from the other side of the door. Leaning against it, he allowed himself to slide to the floor and wrapped his arms around his legs, "Nothing... I have nothing left. She took my purpose, and then had the nerve to mess around with my emotions like that. I've had enough. I've had enough of it all..."

#### Chapter 403 New Hobby

For the remainder of that day, Cirrus allowed himself to brood and let his heart bleed quietly. He allowed his thoughts to wander, getting only darker the longer time passed. In constant search of an answer, of a reason, of something to blame... In search of something to help him up once more.

Whatever he was looking for, however, was to come from inside of him. He blocked out the pack link and kept to himself, staying inside the room... and allowing the great Commander of Death Platoon to break down. He stood at a crossroads, without a purpose and with no goal to look forward to.

An existential crisis...

What he wouldn't let himself do at all costs... was suicide. It didn't matter how low he went, that was the one thing he was sure of. 'I'm not giving up... never...'

The images before Katie began to speed up and bits of information about events were filtered into her mind, explaining the events that followed the prince's heartbreak.

After that day, Cirrus was able to pick himself up. He regained his quiet, calm and collected demeanour, however, it soon became clear to the two empires that he had been severely weakened after his visit to the Origin. That something had happened between him and the goddess.

No one ever got to know what happened to him at the time. The goddess, however, knew what it meant for him to stay in this weakened state. In fact, it worried her to watch him stay this way.

The conditions for his weakness were clear... and yet, it never vanished. Not even once... If anything, the prince seemed to be getting weaker with each passing day. Celeste knew her powers wouldn't incapacitate him to the state of being paralyzed, but they would make him incapable of working with others if all remained as it was.

Appearing in his dreams didn't help either. The prince would simply turn his back away from her like always... and shut her out completely.

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Nothing she'd done had helped him give up on his mission to eliminate humanity. If anything, his hate for the race burned even brighter now, for he was far weaker than he'd been when she'd first cursed him.

During the time that he was weak, he took on a rather peculiar new hobby. Reading...

What was more that he wasn't just reading novels, but books of all kinds and he was also making research, a change that shocked the werewolves and hunters that heard of this new development.

However, without having any real reason to worry, they gracefully allowed him to pursue this newfound ambition. The prince made his research on so many things, some of which he kept concealed from the king.

King Hamedale soon found his mate and got married. And during this time, Cirrus did nothing to move other aspects of his life forward.

The king had tried talking to him plenty of times, having noticed how 'stuck' Cirrus was. Before finding his mate, he would arrange for the prince to go out with him to search for their mates in the different packs around the world, but prince Cirrus declined his offer each time.

The images finally stopped fast-forwarding and zoomed in on a walking Cirrus seven years later. He carried himself calmly and acknowledged everyone he passed by with a kind smile that never reached his eyes. He picked his words carefully as he spoke, speaking little and making sure to conceal his real emotions and intentions.

At this point, the prince knew what it was like to be completely isolated from the pack link and he'd even grown used to the sensation. For a normal wolf, it was one of the worst forms of torture. One that was even used against criminals that went against the king's orders.

Cirrus, on the other hand, found this easier to do once he'd been rejected. Somehow, being alone felt like his element and felt remarkably familiar to the loneliness he felt when the goddess brought him news of his partner's escape... that he would never see Jane again.

The only person that wasn't fooled by the prince's facade was the King of Lycaon, Hamedale and he had approached Cirrus on the matter. An argument had broken out where the king was the only one yelling... addressing a calm prince with a heart that had turned to ice.

'Just give it up already, Hamedale,' he'd told the king and walked away from him, leaving him unable to do or say anything else. He'd said all he could, but nothing got through to Cirrus anymore. Nothing fazed him... nothing interested him... Nothing was important to him at all... Nothing, but his research and books.

Cirrus walked up to the doors of the throne room and pushed them open, not waiting for the guards to do that for him.

Inside the throne room, the king and queen were seated on their matching thrones listening to a tale from one of the hunters that had come to present a progress report in the capital.

The trio had gotten sidetracked and somehow the hunter, forgetting his place, had spiralled into a tale of a hunter who'd gotten himself into a bar fight with an alpha and gotten the lion's share of the resulting injuries.

The Agency had turned a blind eye on account of his foolishness. Nonetheless, the gruelling details of the two men that had duked it out seemed quite the spectacle to pass up during the narration of this event.

Cirrus stood behind the hunter waiting for the man to finish narrating the story. At this point in the story, the drunk hunter mistook his steak for a sword and went swinging without thinking twice.

"The alpha thought he was being insulted and ended up lunging straight for the hunter who began defending himself with the stake. I don't understand how someone forgets the feel of a sword, but with everything before my eyes, I just had to accept it," the man laughed.

"Am I interrupting something?" Cirrus asked when he couldn't take it much longer.

The king stopped laughing, "Oh my... Cirrus. What's the time? I hadn't noticed how time was slipping by. Why does it always rush when having fun? You'll have to forgive the intrusion, Hunter Russel," the king apologised when he realised the hunter had overstayed his welcome.

"It's on me, your majesty. I'm sorry for taking too much of your time," the hunter chuckled, bowing in respect to the king.

"Oh no, it's no problem at all," the king chuckled, "It's always a pleasure to have you." Cirrus remained quiet as he watched the man leave. The room finally settled into a peaceful silence.

"Have you finally chosen to ask for a tour through the empire? The empire is filled with potential..."

"No, that is not why I asked to meet with you, your majesty," the prince cut the king off. Hamedale withheld the subtle frustration that came with each time his brother did this.



“My research has finally brought me to something astonishing. I wanted to share with you the details or at least... the simplified explanation of what I have been working on,” the prince responded.

“Oh? I thought you were simply learning about different plants in the empire and their reactions to the bodies of other animals. Is there more to it than that?” the king asked him.

“Oh, there is much more, little brother. I assure you of that... I also might have held back on telling you everything I have been working on,” the prince added sternly.

“Okay then, you have my attention,” the king replied, leaning back in his seat.

The prince took out the rolls of parchment from under his armpit, gesturing to one of the king’s beta alphas to hold one and another to take the other as they presented them to the king. The king read through the work for a moment, his eyebrows scrunching in concern before widening them in shock, “This research... Are those moon lotuses?”

“Yes, they are. I have always wondered why they glow in the moonlight, so I started using them in my experiments. They are not easy to find or many for that matter...”

“They only grow in places where the goddess has landed before. That is the Origin from which we are forbidden from going,” the king cut him off sternly.

“The Origin is not the only place the goddess has landed. I found another place and my research has really been going well ever since,” the prince’s eyes sparkled with what looked like excitement for the first time in seven years. The king reluctantly let the subject go and continued reading.

His eyes shot open once more, this time filled with mixed emotions... the most prominent emotion, however... was rage, “Cirrus, what have you been doing? This is...

This is a recipe for something that could weaken werewolves and you have the audacity to call it Wolf’s Bane, what are you thinking?” the king was livid.

No matter how angry the king got, the man before him stayed perfectly calm. The level of power between the two royals was insurmountable and yet the new Queen could have sworn she saw him smirk.

Chapter 404 Questionable Hobby... and the Frightening Revelation of a Seven Year Mystery

“What do you find so funny, Cirrus?” the new Queen asked the prince. Despite all she’d heard about the king’s brother in his former state of glory, she still felt uncomfortable around him.

His calculating gaze and the fact that he always seemed to be thinking irked her to no end.

“Oh, nothing is funny. I have just never seen my little brother look this threatened before. Before you jump to conclusions, Hamedale, I did not create this to weaken werewolves.

That was just a fact I happened to stumble upon during my tinkering with the peculiar flower,” the prince replied, waving off Hamedale’s angered state as nothing more than a misguided tantrum.

“Then what were you looking for?” the king asked, allowing himself to calm down, regardless of how hard it was. It was getting even harder to deal with his brother. Cirrus had completely ceased listening to anything his brother had to say anymore.

“I was trying to find something to cure me of my weakness. You... obviously don’t know what it’s like to have all your strength sapped from you. I hoped to find something in the moon lotuses that could help me regain my lost power,” the prince started his explanation.

“Oh, I know something. You could train your body back into shape. When was the last time you looked in the mirror, Cirrus? You’ve not only lost your power but your physique as well. You look smaller than I’ve seen you in a lifetime,” the king tried... ‘Who looks for strength in a plant? This is getting out of hand...’ Hamedale wanted to scream at his brother.

“It’s nothing like that, little brother. I was weak long before I started...” looking at his wrist, he started comparing it with that of his brother, grimacing at the staggering difference in girth, “-shrinking.

I knew there was something else involved in my abnormal weakness, so I was hoping to find a way to reverse it with the spark of the goddess’s power that resides within the flowers. Instead, I found that the flowers only work as poison the moment they are plucked and juiced. It was frustrating.

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I tried isolating the different compounds but only came up with different versions of the poison. I planned to destroy that information after telling you about it so that you might pass a law or something that stops that from happening,” the prince continued his explanation.

“Adding different things to the compounds also yielded different results. Some were disappointing while others were nothing short of magical, but all weren’t within the normal scope of what plants should be able to do.”

The king finally calmed down and leaned back on his throne, rubbing his temples while listening to his brother’s explanation. The fluency with which he explained his work and the terms he used as well, spoke volumes of the amount of research and effort he’d put into this work... and yet, something turned within the king’s stomach. Something was wrong with all this... but what was it?

Hamedale took a look at the second roll of parchment and started skimming through it. When the prince noticed this, he decided his initial explanation was enough and went silent as the king perused through his findings.

This next document, however, was much more peculiar than the first. It held contents as gruesome as they were despicable. King Hamedale squinted and blinked, hoping the works, as well as the crude drawings, would change into something else, for he couldn’t believe what he was reading.

After a short moment, Hamedale came to terms with what he was reading, continued further down with the writing, and chose to hold his tongue till he was done reading it all.

“So, you found a way to transfer the power of a royal to another werewolf,” the king surmised when he was done reading the disturbing details on the parchment.

“Yes, I was not happy about those findings either, but the more I researched, the more I found answers. Knowledge can be addictive once you get a hold of a rare piece of it. I couldn’t stop until I’d discovered it all in detail,” Cirrus shrugged, rolling up the scrolls and tucking them under his armpit.

The prince continued, “Of course, I only made that research in case there was ever a king that didn’t have an heir. We wouldn’t want the bloodline to end abruptly because one of our own was unable to find their mate.”

“First of all, that won’t happen and secondly, I’ll be taking those scrolls... along with all the research you’ve been conducting,” the king ordered solemnly, staring at the ground with a stern expression. A drifting myriad of emotions flashed through his sapphire orbs as he struggled to come to terms with what his brother had been spending his time on, “Seven years, brother!”

“What are you going to do with my research?” Cirrus tensed up.

“I’m going to destroy it, Cirrus. It’s far too dangerous,” Hamedale replied, holding his brother’s gaze.

“You will do no such thing,” Cirrus furiously approached the king.

The king stood, towering over his older brother, “There will be no further discussion on this matter. I will cover up what you’ve done and take responsibility for having made these ‘discoveries’, then I will burn it all to the ground before we have another war on our hands.”

Cirrus balled his fists in frustration but sighed. He knew how weak he was. Seven years was a long time... Long enough to pound the bitter truth of his weakness into the depths of his soul.

There was nothing Cirrus could do against the king even if he wanted to and going against Hamedale would be considered an act of treason. His hands were tied, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“You’re entitled to your opinion, but I made the final call. From now on, you will accompany me when I go visiting the other packs. This... this brooding you’ve been doing is not helping you. You’re only hurting yourself,” the king tried reasoning.

“You know nothing, Hamedale, nothing,” Cirrus barked at the king. It was the first time the king was getting some kind of reaction from him. In the name of progress, this was good.

“Then please, Cirrus, enlighten me,” he yelled him, “I’ve been waiting to hear what you have to say for seven years.”

“I already met my mate, Hamedale. Seven years ago... I met her only after the goddess had robbed me of all my strength. I almost died... just looking for her,” Cirrus admitted, a burning rage burning in his eyes. This reaction... this anger, bothered Cirrus a lot. For a woman that he barely knew... barely met and never got the chance to really have a conversation with, to have this much of an effect on him.

Even now... after seven whole years.

“That day... seven years ago,” a look of recognition sparked through the king’s eyes, “Why didn’t you tell me? I could have helped you look.”

“Oh, no, Hamedale, you don’t understand yet. She can’t be found because she’s hidden from me by powers we cannot go up against. Trust me, Hamedale, I tried. The planet itself wouldn’t let the two of us meet,” the man continued arguing.

The king went silent for a moment, his mind going momentarily blank. Imagining his life without his significant other by his side was next to impossible. The image of his brother when he’d returned from his... ‘trip.’

“That time you left with Rana...”

Chapter 405 My Last Order

Cirrus’s mind flashed back to the night he chose to abandon the search for his mate. He clenched his fists as emotions he thought he’d buried a long time ago began to resurface.

The pain he’d gone through... pain he’d fought through to keep his sanity was only coming back. He’d managed to distract himself for a long time but now that he’d opened up for the first time, it was like tearing open scars to old wounds... and he hated it.

Taking a deep breath, “I won’t speak more on the matter and I won’t be having a mate... nor do I want one.” With that, he walked out of the throne room. Rana, who’d been acting as his shadow followed him out of the throne room.

The prince’s emotions flowed wildly through him like the rushing currents of the Great River, once again for the first time in seven years.

He was almost happy that the king had been able to rile him up, but what was happening afterwards wiped the smile off his face.

Cirrus did not return to his room or his lab either to continue his research nor did he try to stop the king from destroying everything he’d worked on for the past seven years.

Instead, he walked out of the palace and went for an evening stroll through the surrounding woods.

The emotions that had been stirred only continued to swirl through the man despite his calm demeanour. Cirrus might have been able to learn how to suppress his emotions, but after that shocking display in the throne room, he simply didn’t have it in him to force down his menacing mess of feelings.

Cirrus along with his loyal beta alpha, Rana walked for a while in a peaceful silence. The sun was starting to make its descent over the horizon, casting a kind warm gaze over the land and bathing it in a beautiful amber hue.

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“Her name was Jane,” the prince suddenly spoke up.

“I remember, your highness. I was with you that time,” Rana replied calmly.

“Yeah... I bet you do. You don’t forget anything that concerns me. It’s a predicament much like the one the royals got themselves in we chose to follow the goddess... more like she chose to make us follow her. We cannot defy her, none of us can... once she’s issued a command,” the prince quietly rambled,

“When you ask them to open their eyes, they almost don’t realise it and I don’t blame them. They wouldn’t want to believe their decisions were being influenced by the goddess at all.”

“Do you mean to say it’s the same way royals command beta alphas even when they simply make a suggestion?” Rana asked.

“Something like that,” the prince paused, “And not at all... at the same time. The goddess has a desire... and it will start to sow a seed long before she ever makes the order. At least, that’s a theory I have. The other one is that she can command us the way alphas do with betas.”

The sound of the flowing river the man seemed to be heading to began to get louder and louder until it was in view. Cirrus’s emotions were starting to settle, almost like the sound of the rushing water was all he needed to calm down.

“Are you okay, your Highness?” Rana rushed forward and caught his master as he nearly collapsed.

“I will be... if all goes according to plan,” the prince responded.

“What are you talking about?”

The prince sighed, letting a tear roll down his cheek. The first tear he’d allowed to escape in seven years, “My hate towards them runs so deep and I’ve learnt to be so patient. Now the time has finally come that I can do what I wanted to. I can finally break free of the curse the goddess placed on me.”

“I don’t think I follow, your Highness. You need to take it easy or else you’ll get weaker. Who knows how bad it can get?” Rana started checking the prince for any signs of illness.

The diligent beta alpha had taken some first aid lessons to try and be of more use to his master, but the more he learnt about the craft of healing, the more he was bewildered by his master’s condition.

The prince was very healthy, “I don’t want you to follow. At least not right until the time you have to play your part. You will know when it’s all over,” the prince replied.

“You’re still not making any sense, your high...” the words stopped flowing from Rana when a skull-cracking headache suddenly thrummed with the sound of his heartbeat suddenly magnified tenfold, disorienting him for a moment.

The prince watched the beta alpha struggle with the pain in his head with an expressionless face, “I guess you can sense my intentions already. That’s just like a loyal beta alpha to do so.”

“No, whatever you plan on doing, don’t do it,” Rana yelled through gritted teeth.

“Try to keep your voice down and your mind disconnected from the pack link, Rana,” the orders took hold and the beta alpha in pain disconnected himself from the whole pack.

Cirrus stood up and walked up to the river bank looking away from the struggling man under the trees at the edge of the forest, “I’ve always wondered where you got the will to talk back to me. Where you got the power to oppose me when my reasoning didn’t make sense to you... I guess that was all just a fluke. My orders are still absolute in your eyes. And so I will now give you your very last order, Rana...”

Rana growled, trying to resist the impulses that took over him. His nails extended, against all his resistance into sharp claws. In an effort to stop the change, the beta alpha made a fist, but the claws started cutting into his palms.

This was only the beginning, however, his face began to change as well, the fangs in his mouth drawing blood from his resisting lips. Black fur sprouted from the sides of his face, painting the familiar starry pattern that the prince had now grown accustomed to.

“There’s the Wolf Star I’ve come to honour and respect. It’s futile to resist, Rana. In the end, you will do it. You will... kill me.”

#### Chapter 406 Birth of the Rogue King

Rana gasped out of his unconscious state, his mind a muddled mess he could barely unravel. The beta alpha couldn’t remember much after he’d been ordered to...

\*Thrum thrum...\* went the throbbing headache that dulled all his other senses with a ferocious vengeance. His memories were once more... blended into a dizzying mess. The beta alpha clutched his head in pain, dismissing the slippery sensation of his hands sliding against his skin. Somehow, the sensation was... expected.

When he tried to remember the little human brother he had growing up, he would get confused when that little brother’s face suddenly glitched and was replaced with that of a young Hamedale before glitching back.

Rana shook off the confusion, trying some other way to find his bearings. This time, the smell of blood hit his nose like a drug. His eyes finally shot open and he forced himself to sit up.

Suddenly, he noticed his hands were coated in the same warm crimson liquid. His clothes were stained in it as well. Strength beyond what he knew to be his limits surged through him.

Staring at his bloodied hands, the beta alpha noticed he was smaller than before but far deadlier. A pigeon’s wings fluttered as it took flight from its nest, the sound of its cooing tore at the man’s ears, bringing with it, the sounds of the entire forest’s wildlife... like a loud battle cry for survival.

He battled the overwhelming senses for a moment, instinctively going through the training he’d had as a young wolf. The prince had personally taken it upon himself to teach all there was about control and these lessons were engraved into the alpha’s memory.

When the loud cries of the wild had finally died and only the smell of blood remained, fear began to claw at him again.

Rana followed the trail of blood to a bloodied corpse by the river. Dread settled in, and the alpha unconsciously took a step back.

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‘No, confirm the kill,’ a voice ordered him, freezing him to the spot. His legs felt weak against the commanding voice despite his newfound strength.

Just like it had been before he had gone unconscious, he was compelled to move forward. Lying by the Great River's shore was the mauled corpse of Cirrus Lycaon.

Disgusted by what he saw, Rana rushed into the water and started washing his face.

A wave of nausea washed over him quickly followed by his wrenching gut forcing everything in his stomach out. The sight made him sick to the stomach even though the river rushed it away.

Rana washed his face more times than he cared to count. He wished the water could wash away the cruel reality that had come to pass, but nothing vanished. If anything, now he remembered it all... All of what he had done before passing out.

As he was frantically trying to get rid of the blood on his hands, face and hair, he froze suddenly when he noticed something in the water. The beta alpha stood frozen there for a long time, holding in his breath at the sight of his face in the water.

The rushing water didn't show his face clearly, but he didn't need that much of a clear picture to see what had him frozen in place.

Instead of the crimson orbs that always stared at him when he looked at his reflection, sapphire blue eyes stared back at him in the water. The increased senses... the increased strength and change in physique... It all made sense to him now... or did it.

His mind rang with memories of a life that wasn't his along with urges and ambitions he had no clue about... at first.

With time, the memories would make a decent enough order for him to understand where his ambitions came from even though they weren't his at all.

Humans were the one thing he wanted to wipe off the face of the earth while at the same time, his original personality was repulsed by the thought of genocide.

An ethereal voice echoed through his head, "You won't do any of the things he wants you to do." The feminine voice ordered him.

A will other than his own gripped him, forcing words in response, "You cannot control me, goddess. I am not part of the lineage of Sirius or Lycaon. The power I have now is out of your control."

The ethereal being was shocked by the sudden response... and so was Katie... the images before her receded and were replaced with darkness. Katie felt like she was floating in a space with no gravity.

Unlike the beta alpha who had gone unconscious and woken up unconscious, the Luna had watched it all. Katie and Ashley had watched in horror as the starry crimson-eyed wolf had torn apart his master with no restraint.

The scenes were gruesome and yet the two had been glued to the scene, watching Cirrus's orders being carried out. The prince hadn't even resisted as his body was being mauled. The memories made the Luna sick to her stomach.

Finally shaking the thoughts, she tried to get her bearings in the endless black void that her consciousness now floated in aimlessly, neither drifting nor remaining still. It was a perturbing existence that she wished would come to an end.

She could not tell up from down, there was no ceiling or floor, just darkness that stretched out for miles in all directions. In the dark, a soft glow began to emerge before her.

Willing herself towards it, she found that she could move simply by wanting to move. In no time, the light grew until she could tell what it was.

The moon was looming over her or was it below her, the Luna could not tell. Her speed slowed down and soon enough she made it to the surface.

Her body was nearly weightless on the extensive body she stood on. She looked about in all directions, astonished by the grey land she had landed on. It seemed no life flourished on the giant body.

'I wonder how it's glowing,' she wondered, squatting to pick some of the grey dust that lay on the moon's surface. It never even occurred to her how she was breathing in the first place.

"You've seen it all now," a beautiful voice started her. The girl turned abruptly and nearly tripped in an attempt to put some distance between her and the goddess that had just appeared out of nothingness.

"Yes, I have and I have also seen that this is partly your fault," the girl argued.

"You dare..."

"Oh, don't start with me. Cirrus could have been with Jane. You, out of all people, saw what happened when you met Seth. He changed your opinion of humans and showed you what love is like. Why then would you deny Cirrus a chance at redemption?" Katie argued.

"I didn't... Jane wouldn't let me reunite them. We cannot interfere with humans directly. We cannot influence their fate or change the way it was written. It's complicated, and honestly not my idea.

Even then though, I didn't give up. I chose another mate for him, but the prince made his choice. Cirrus made his choice and thwarted any other attempts I made at redeeming him.

He wouldn't let go of his anger and in the end, it is what led him to do what he did to Rana," the goddess explained.

"Why did you show me all of that if you're not going to admit it was your mistake all along?" Katie argued.

"Did I create werewolves? Yes, I did. Did I order them to stop the genocide? Yes, I did. Did I tell them to enslave females and force them to give birth to armies? No, Katie.

It was never my intention to enslave the creatures I created and force them to give birth to more that would bring the end of humanity. I never once asked Cirrus to do all that," the goddess fumed, "If that had been the case, then I would be able to reverse it directly."

Katie sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose, "You have a mountain of issues."

'The two of you are like mirror images to me...' Ashley snorted.



Katie and Celeste paused at the sudden intervention. It took a moment to sink in, but when it did, the two of them were laughing uncontrollably on the desolate moon's surface.

The goddess's melodic laugh rang through the moon's surface, soothing the fatigue the Luna didn't know she had. When Celeste stopped laughing, she finally replied, "Yes, Katie, that I do."

Chapter 407 [Bonus chapter]Just because you asked nicely

"Yes, Katie, that I do. So, what do you say? Will you help me?" the goddess asked.

"It's not like I have a choice," the girl shrugged.

"No, that's not it. You do have a choice. I won't let you help me if you feel I'm only commanding you," the goddess retaliated, getting deadly serious.

Katie was shocked by her sudden change only to remember what Cirrus had said at the end. Celeste didn't want to have to command her into helping with her current problem. 'Does she think that was part of the reason Cirrus did what he did?'

"I will help you, goddess... and I don't say this because you ordered me but simply because you asked nicely. Also because I was already planning on bringing down the rogue king," Katie spoke formally.

"No, that's not it. I don't want you to kill him," Celeste panicked.

"I don't follow. Isn't that the whole aim of what you've been doing?" Katie raised a brow.

"Well... partly. It's partly what I've been doing this whole time. I want you to kill the rogue king, but... I also want you to save Rana."

Katie stared at the goddess for a long moment, her cogs turning extensively to decipher this annoyingly cryptic piece of information and when it finally clicked within her mind, she thought she heard her wolf facepalm in her mind. 'Rana and Cirrus are living in the same body... That's so messed up.'

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Now that Katie had made that connection, she frowned. Celeste's request was so vague and staring at the beautiful goddess whilst trying to figure it out wasn't helping either. "How is that even possible?"

"Well..."

.....End of Origin Story.....

Selene was a peaceful goddess who spent most of her time in her palace either tending to her precious flowers or chatting with the occasional visitor that stopped by every once in a while.

As a titan that had been spared by the lord of the skies, she had no place in meddling with anything more that could attract his attention.

Selene simply had to carry out her duties as was expected of her. Over the centuries, the goddess became close with another particularly female goddess who would stop by every once in a while and the two of them would have a chat over a cup of nectar.

Dressed in a nearly translucent flowing gown, Selene tended to her lovely garden of moon lotuses. The goddess was nearly lost in their luminosity when a flourish of yellow light breached her peripheral vision, "I was assuming you would visit me in no less than another century," Selene smiled, however, no reply came back.

The goddess turned around and nearly dropped the flower in her hand. She quickly placed the sapling back in its place and rushed over to her friend. Artemis's hands were covered in blood, her normally graceful warrior attire was tattered and her face was frozen in a look of shock and despair.

Selene rushed over to her friend and hugged her tight, "Oh Arty, you don't look so well."

While the goddess of the hunt remained in her frozen dishevelled state, unable to answer her friend, Selene began to check her body for any wounds. The blood on her hands was red and not golden ichor, the blood of the gods which signified it belonged to a mortal and not hers.

But then, the goddess of the hunt wasn't one to get emotional at the sight of blood. A closer look at the blood on her hands revealed the slight glow of divinity. This was the blood of a mortal alright, but one that had been touched by the gods.

Selene shook the thoughts clear of her mind and continued checking her friend for any injuries. Finding no sign of injury, the woman got to cleaning her friend, however, at the first sign of getting rid of the blood, Artemis flipped out, "What do you think you're doing?"

"Artemis, you don't look..." finally coming up with a few theories as to who the blood belonged to, the goddess of the moon changed her question, "Arty, whose blood is that?"

The scowling goddess looked at her hands once more and the depressed expression returned once more. Hot tears began to stream down her eyes, "It's the blood of my sisters."

Selene gasped before pulling her friend into a heartfelt hug, "Let's get you inside."

Artemis did not object to her friend's consolation and even allowed her to take her into the moon palace. After a little more resistance, the goddess allowed Selene to help her wash off the blood on her hands.

It did not take her long to get washed up and was soon seated in a room that looked much like a living room. Selene offered her a glass of nectar and sat beside her on the soft cushion, "Would you mind telling me what happened?"

"They are dead. What more is there that I can tell you, Selene?" the goddess snorted. Her tone was bitter, unlike the usual tone the goddess had when they spoke.

"Well, you came here of all places. Tell me why you did that then?" Selene asked.

"Because this is the last place I was before finding their corpses strewn about the lake from where they were killed. All of them, dead and bleeding before my eyes and the toxic smell of... sulphur in the air," the goddess cursed, the memories returning to her mind, "I'd found one that was still breathing, but even then, another assault rained down on us, explosions, unlike anything I've ever heard before."

"You're not making much..."

“What’s the use of the overseeing moon if you didn’t see that much? You could have told me what was happening to my sisters,” the goddess was getting frantic.

“Artemis, we were here together. How was I supposed to know it would happen? You needed a place to...”

“I know what I needed, Selene,” Artemis’s voice broke, “and I don’t blame you. I was the one that kept you from the Scrying Pool, but now I wish I hadn’t and all I want... is revenge against whoever did this.”

A look of sadness washed over Selene’s eyes as she watched her friend break. She pulled her into a hug, rubbing circles in her back, “That is not always a gift that can be granted to immortals. I would know.”

Selene was a titan and one of the last surviving titans. Her entire generation of celestials, slain by the ones that reigned supreme now, “But... we can take it upon each other’s creations. Can I use your pool, Selene? I want to know who did this.”

The goddess of the moon sighed, seeing no way out, she nodded, “Go ahead... A word of advice though... No good can come of this. If...” the goddess of the moon went silent when Artemis suddenly glared at her, “It’s all yours.”

#### Chapter 408 Ancient Memories

The crystal-clear bottomless pool shimmered and shone with images, bringing to life the scene that the goddess wished to witness. As it so happened, this pool also possessed the ability to look into the past, something it was rarely used for.

This moment was a rare one indeed. The pool showed a peaceful visage of Artemis’s hunters setting camp near the water. Melodic laughter rang through their ranks as they exchanged naughty tidbits of banter.

At the edge of their camp was a mountain of carcasses to be prepared for the night’s meal and their banter mostly involved events during this recent hunt.

While some readied the tents, others chose to wash off in the nearby lake. Some got started on preparing their night meal while others set away their weapons and got started on polishing what they could before the night drew too dark.

The day’s work had yielded a good catch indeed with next to no casualties and they were to dine on venison from not just one but two stags, a rare occurrence considering the speed and agility of the nimble creatures.

Artemis smiled at the image of her joyous sisters. Just as they were getting comfortable, round objects began to fall from the sky. The hunters didn’t notice these objects at first. And they continued their activities while these ominous spherical objects continued to fall from the sky.

The goddess’s smile was wiped off as they watched these ominous spheres descend. When the first of these black balls touched the grounds, all hell broke loose. An explosion unlike any she had ever heard before... one that shook the ground and roared like a great drakon.

The explosions became more frequent, sending shockwaves through the air and causing others to explode in mid-air. The resulting chain reaction painted the scene in the pool in flame, soot and blood.

The hunters hadn't seen this coming and even if they had, how were they supposed to know that these were explosive projectiles, to begin with? Something of the sort had never been seen even by the gods.

Without their armour or weapons to defend them, they were sitting ducks. There wasn't anything the two goddesses could see through all the smoke for a while.

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When the soot had cleared, there was barely a hunter alive and the goddess of the hunt was only arriving to find her comrades dead. Artemis paused the scene and started zooming out until she found an encampment not far from where her sisters were camping.

An encampment of humans working on a lot of odd machines that she had never seen in her long life.

They would load large black balls into barrel-like machines and light a wick at one end then quickly cover their ears. The sound from the launch was menacing. Every time they launched one of the perilous balls, one of them would take notes of the results from the... 'experiment.'

Selene squinted her eyes at the scene before her and noticed something. While the humans were indeed doing something very dangerous, they didn't celebrate when they launched these strange objects. Instead, they returned to tinkering with the machines and got ready to launch more of them.

The humans had no actual target in mind, but Artemis was less likely to listen to that. Her immortal sisters were dead... there was no calming this goddess's rage.

"Forgive me, dear Selene for the request I am about to make of you," it seemed as though Selene's peaceful life was finally getting disrupted. She'd never thought getting involved with one of the Twelve gods of Olympus would yield her any harm, but here she was rethinking every cup of tea she'd made for the goddess of the hunt.

'Life can be cruel sometimes...' she sighed, for she knew Artemis was not making a request. The gods of Olympus never made requests... They just took what they wanted... Why would Arty be any different?

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Honour woke up to a start, covered in sweat. The temporary headache that attacked her every morning gradually sizzled down until it was gone. Pushing down the cover of her warm futon, the girl sat up and took in her surroundings.

Unfinished cans of soda, numerous bags of chips along with any other kind of snack her friends had brought with them on their mad shopping spree, "Oh right, yesterday was the last day of school," she groaned, rubbing her head in an attempt to soothe the lingering embers of her morning headaches.

These headaches came as aftershocks to the memories that swarmed her mind while she was close to waking. The warning she'd received from her grandmother never left her mind... and it wasn't long after that the memories had begun. The girl shook the visage of the goddess of the hunt from her mind and turned her attention to the real world.

To reality, a reality where she had friends and family that cared about her. A family that wouldn't betray her in the name of... 'vengeance.' People, she'd come to love and trust very much.

In the futons next to her, four other girls slept soundly. Bree, in particular, snored louder than Honour would have liked... but the young goddess wasn't complaining. She wouldn't have it any other way.

Honour smiled fondly at the friends that surrounded making camp in her mother's living room. The night before had been filled with fun craziness that had knocked the lot of them senseless.

Madeline's restless body, which had somehow made its way outside the futon, chose that moment to roll until her foot crossed over to Lina who wasn't far.

The sleeping royal responded by simply hugging the other girl's foot tightly. Madeline was trapped. The girl's body struggled against sudden restrictions for a while before giving up.

Honour covered her mouth to keep the laugh that threatened to escape her. Whether Lina was awake or had taken her friend captive on instinct remained a mystery. Nonetheless, it made for an interesting sight.

Honour got up, trying her best to keep from stepping on the chips that covered almost every inch of the velvet carpet.

A buzzing sound came from a device by the television, catching Honour's attention. Carefully stepping over her friends, she made it to the phone by the television and picked it up, reading the notification that had come up.

"Where are you, Lina? The Trials are about to begin," the message left Honour completely frozen in shock and too stunned for words.

Those were today? Wait, what... But, we've barely had any time from school. How... Well, I guess the school's agenda was different from that of the rest of the world, but still... she's only just... ugh...

"Everyone, get up," she screamed at the top of her voice, forgetting one detail about herself when her emotions got riled up.

After finding out what she was, a plethora of changes had happened... and one of the effects was just about to be felt. Honour's voice boomed through the house, shaking it from its very foundation as though there was an earthquake in the room.

Bree leapt up from her futon and grabbed onto the closest living thing, scared out of her wits. This living thing happened to be... Crysta.

"For goddess's sake, can you keep your divine shriek to yourself?" the emerald-eyed delta grumbled, rubbing circles in the frightened girl's back, "It was only Honour, Bree. You're safe." The delta cooed.

Lina chuckled, unmoving, "That's a goddess' shriek alright." Honour turned around and flashed an apologetic smile at her friends.

Bree's shivers finally died down and she reluctantly let go of her delta friend, "I can't believe I'm not used to it yet. Just how many things can one goddess do?"

Madeline, on the other hand, remained dead asleep. "There is only one person in this entire world that can sleep through that," Honour face-palmed, "Lina, you have the Trials this morning."

That was the one thing they all needed to get up from their sleep, including Madeline. Honour watched them panic with a mischievous grin on her face. When Lina finally started to get her bearings, Honour was waving her phone at her, "Drake was texting."

"Honestly, with the pack link, one would assume texting was not a thing, but here is my dorky brother using his phone like a teenager," the girl complained, "No offence, Honour."

"None taken, Lina. Although considering the night you had, the mind link would be useless. Now get into the shower. We have to get ready," Lina started pushing her friend upstairs before she could complain.

When the princess was gone, she turned back to the others in the living room and they began tidying up, "Do you think she will win?"

"I'm not sure, honestly. There is a lot I'm not sure about these days," Honour sighed, joining in to help with clean up, her mind drifting back to the dream she'd had that morning.

It was a recurring dream that came to her every once in a while, along with other memories of a life she knew nothing about. The memories were hard to hold on to, but they seemed to be in no rush to return either since she would only relive them again the next night.

Almost like a nursery teacher patiently repeating the alphabet to a young child, knowing they will learn it all with time... Time... that's all that was needed.

"You rise early these days, Honour. Is there something you're not telling us?" Madeline interrupted her thoughts, yawning unceremoniously, "Feels like you barely get any sleep anymore... and I'm still... sleepy."

"You'll catch a fly if you keep yawning like that," Honour shook her head at the waking wolf, "I get enough sleep, Mady, but perhaps I need less of it considering what I am."

Bree shook her head while she dusted off one of the cushions, "Still takes some getting used to."

Bree had come to know about Honour's decision not long after Ginger's memorial and after Honour's approval. At first, the girl acted awkward around Honour, but after a long conversation with her, it was agreed that Honour was to be treated like she always had.

The only difference now though, was that Honour was no longer mocked for being weak. If anything, she was considered the most powerful amongst them all. I mean... she was a literal goddess. "I do hope she wins though. I wonder who she will pick to represent her in the games."

"I don't know. I'm more worried about Drake than anyone else," Honour replied absentmindedly.

"Yeah, it's not every day you hear a royal offering to step down from the throne," Crysta replied with a sigh of her own, dusting chips off Lina's futon and folding it appropriately.

The news was still fresh in their minds. News of the prince's newfound intentions. It wasn't long ago when the prince had announced that he wanted to step down as crown prince.

For those that were allowed to know this information, it had come as a shock to all of them. Honour, most of all, for Drake hadn't said a thing about this to her. She hadn't even noticed a change in his behaviour that would suggest this.

Drake was still the same sweet, thoughtful royal that liked taking walks with her and taking his time off to spend time with her.

#### Chapter 409 Falling Behind

The cleaning continued as the girls took turns washing off. Despite their tardiness, rushing would do them no good in the end. The Trials weren't something Lina could rush into without a calm mind.

At least, that's what Crysta told the princess when she started to panic. The delta was able to temporarily calm the princess down enough to keep a normal coherent conversation. The signs of worry did not completely vanish, but Lina knew there was nothing she could do about her situation... so she reserved her complaints.

Halfway through the cleaning, Honour's mother came down from her room and embraced her daughter, planting a kiss on the divine girl's forehead, "Hey, sweetie... and her lovely friends, did you have fun last night?"

"I'm sure you heard it all," Honour replied, hugging her mother in return, "Did you sleep well, mother?"

The woman soon let go of her daughter and covered a yawn that escaped her. There were dark circles under her eyes, indicating the opposite of what she said next.

"Oh yeah, totally," the woman lied, "It's not like the five of you were trying to wake up the whole neighbourhood."

"It's called Karaoke, mother," Honour replied, turning her attention to tidying once more.

The woman proceeded to the kitchen and called back, "It's called noise, that's what that was. I'm glad neither of you chose to be a musician."

"My mother has always complimented me on my beautiful voice," Bree piped in cheerfully.

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"Which lasts barely a second before you start asking for a glass of water," Crysta threw a pillow at her friend.

"Hey, these magnificent pipes are high maintenance. It's not my fault those high notes are so tasking," Bree replied smugly, shielding her face as the pillow soared towards her, "And please watch the face, Crysta."

The girls giggled before proceeding with their aimless banter. Honour's mother listened in with a smile on her face while she got the tea ready.

After the disappearance of Katie Sirius and the death of Ginger and Honour finding out she was a goddess's reincarnation, it felt like they would never get back to the happy family they used to be.

It had been the darkest time in their family and Honour had struggled very much with everything that was happening around her.

Honour wasn't the only one that had struggled through... No, that was far from what had happened. Honour's struggles only seemed the most significant because she was the woman's daughter... and her world.

Fortunately, time and companionship had healed their wounds and the five of them had become as thick as thieves. Even Madeline had stopped having nightmares of her missing grandmother, Beatrice.

For as long as the five of them were together, they were happy. Listening to the harmony and the melody of laughter that surrounded the group of friends never failed to put a smile on the woman's face. Eventually, all of them were done tidying.

Lina asked them to leave, showing how nervous she was about being late for the Trials. But with a little coaxing, the woman had them eat the breakfast she'd prepared before bidding them all farewell.

Lina led the girls out of the house where a car was waiting outside. "Good morning, Simon. Would you get us to the start of the Trials?"

"Yes, my Lady... If you must know, however, your parents have asked that you take your time to check yourself before you set off," the man replied calmly.

If it hadn't been for the fact that Lina expected her parents to be furious instead, she wouldn't have noticed his implications.

The princess stopped in her tracks and turned to her friends, "Hey Bree, did you bring the bags?"

"Crysta and Madeline are bringing them out right now," the girl replied. Right after she'd said it, the delta walked out with Honour following behind. Crysta had a large rucksack on her back and another in her hands.

The last one was resting unsteadily in Honour's weak hands, "Umm, Lina... a hand," the girl squirmed as she tried to carry the bag, "What's inside this thing?"

Lina rushed to help her friend with the heavy bag. She reached for the bag and helped it out of the girl's hands, "Try to lift with your legs next time."

"It's easy for you to say," Honour replied, sighing with a slight hint of exhaustion. While the princess carried the bag away, the girl couldn't help but acknowledge her significant transformation.

It had been nearly two years since the disappearance of Katie Sirius and Lina... had gone through a tremendous transformation since then. Not just in strength because of her strenuous training, but her looks as well...

She'd grown more beautiful with time... but the most significant change was her striking resemblance with the missing Luna of the Lycaon pack.

Lina hadn't simply grown taller and stronger, she'd also grown to look very much like her older sister, both in spirit and in strength.

The girls took turns exchanging hugs with Honour's mother before the car set off for the palace. The start of the Trials wasn't exactly at the palace, but it was significantly close.



At the edge of the forest, peering into the welcoming treacherous wilderness, a banner with large letters written into it was waving lightly in the wind.

The words 'Safe Journey' were written into the banner and the meanings of these words were reflected in the eyes of all the wolves that had come to see the princess off.

The five girls stood still outside the car, taking in the magnitude of the crowd. A clear path had been made to the banner peering into the forest, "I'd almost forgotten what the excitement for these games was like," Crysta rubbed the back of her head nervously.

"It is amazing, isn't it?"

"There you are, Lina. Why are you so late?" the king's voice broke the serenity surrounding the five girls.

"What do you mean, Father?" Lina turned to her father, mimicking her big brother while she did. Speaking of her brother, the princess looked around and started to fear the worst, "Where is Drake?"

The king pinched the bridge of his nose, "The Trials have already begun, Lina and this part is right up your alley as well."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Check your phone," Queen Martha spoke up, approaching them. Behind the royals, a detail of cars was parked and ready for a long journey.

Lina unlocked her phone and found an official text from the king and queen. When did that come in? she cursed before reading the text out loud.

"Race to the Great Arena..."

The two candidates are to race to the Great Arena that stands at the border of the two empires. The first one to make it there will be chosen as the empire's representative. You can take your team as well as this trial will take a long time and is better done by more than one person."

"Drake left thirty minutes ago. He tried waiting for you when it was time to set off, but... well, you know how he is these days," the woman sighed at the end, her brows knitted in worry for the prince.

"Did he take his team with him?" the princess asked the queen.

"No, he denied all help he was offered and left on his own. He worries me more each day. It's like he's going through the same thing that... Never mind, I just wish he could let us in on what he's thinking. Any ideas, Honour? I know the two of you spend a lot of time together," the queen asked.

Honour gasped at the blunt revelation. The queen didn't seem bothered by how close she'd gotten to the prince, but for some reason, the girl couldn't disregard the fact that she discussing matters concerning the prince with the queen, his mother.

"N-No, none that he's told me of," Honour replied. The girl really didn't know if there was anything wrong with the prince. He was just the same as he'd always been. And yet, from the reactions she read from the other members of the royal family, something was completely wrong. 'I better ask him when we meet next,' she thought to herself.

“That’s no good. Well, if you get the chance to ask him, please do. We are all worried and he won’t let us know what he’s thinking. And it’s not like we can break into his mind either,” the queen requested. The young goddess nodded in reply to the queen’s words.

The king suddenly spoke up, quickly changing the subject, “Lina, I suggest you announce the members of your team and leave as well. There is a map on your phone, but just in case you lose that...” from a bag Alpha Jackson brought her, she produced a roll of parchment.

“Who still uses this kind of...?”

“This map has been used for a long time and is one of the first-ever accurate maps that was ever drawn to map the empire,” the king cut her off, “Use it well and...” the king’s expression softened and he pulled his daughter into a warm hug, “Be safe out there.”

Alpha Jackson stepped forward and offered the princess his hand, which she gladly took, “Don’t do something I wouldn’t do,” the beta alpha advised.

“I won’t make any promises,” the princess chuckled.

“Yeah, I tried. Good luck, your highness,” the man bent at the waist and gave a well-practised bow before stepping away from the princess.

With that, the queen hugged her daughter and left the girls to themselves, “Lina, who are you going to pick?” Honour asked when the adults had left, “Just make sure you don’t pick me. I’d only slow you down.”

“Yeah, I know. I’ll go with Crysta and Bree. They are much more physically capable of a task such as this one. We’ll be going through no-man’s-land as well. I don’t want to endanger anyone.”

“In other words, Honour and I would only get in the way,” Madeline asked to clarify.

“If you put it like that, I feel guilty,” Lina groaned.

“Don’t be, Lina. There is no shame in protecting your friends. I learnt that from a certain werewolf,” Crysta mentioned, gesturing to Honour, “You already know I would give my life for you. Bree would do the same, just not before me...”

“Hey...”

“So, there are no hard feelings in this matter. You’re only doing what’s best,” Crysta replied.

“Thanks, Crysta. You hear that Madeline... I’m protecting you.”

“Of course you are... I just wish there was something I could do,” the grey-eyed girl pouted.

“Well, if you can keep your eyes hidden the whole time, that will be more than enough,” the girl princess ordered before turning to the Delta to her side, “Crysta, I’m not losing to my brother. That means you two should keep up with me.”

All of a sudden, Crysta was not feeling so lucky.

Madeline chuckled and slapped the girl on the back, "I was feeling jealous at first, but now, I wish you all the luck in the world. You're going to need it."

#### Chapter 410 The Trials... and Sudden Change of Plans

Lina had chosen who she was going to take with her on the Trials, but that didn't ease the tension in the pit of her stomach. Whether it was because of the headstart her brother was getting or something else was beyond her comprehension.

"Do we have everything we need?" Lina asked the girls.

"I'll double-check just to be sure," Crysta replied, removing her rucksack from her back to start the check.

"No, that will take a lot of time. We need to catch up with my brother. Just make sure you've packed the map, we need to go," the royal stopped her anxiously. Somehow everything around her seemed to be moving slower and slower.

Crysta's reaction time and actions seemed overly relaxed and... slow. 'At this rate, we'll find Drake fat from stuffing himself while waiting for our arrival at the Great Arena,' the girl thought to herself.

Crysta packed the map like she'd been instructed and the three Trail candidates approached the Farewell banner where a large crowd of werewolves and hunters had gathered to see them off while they left.

Students from the school they'd attended, pack warriors that had watched them prepare for this very day and many other groups of people that Lina could mention at the tip of her tongue.

Her arduous training was not the only thing that had changed for her after Katie's departure. Lina was also more outgoing now that she didn't have to worry about being shunned by her fellow werewolves.

After defeating Liam, she was even more respected by her peers and more so by the elders. Lina knew many more faces than she thought possible. The princess felt warm at the sight of everyone who'd gathered to bid them farewell. In the world before Katie, their focus would have been on the prince alone.

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A chorus of cheers came from a less organised group that Lina soon recognised to be her former schoolmates, 'Make us proud, Jeanie.' 'We believe in you, Lina.' 'Show him what it feels like to land on your face.' Lina giggled at the Liam reference.

"What a send-off?" Bree exclaimed excitedly.

"Yeah, quite indeed. Did they have to be that loud though?" Lina chuckled to herself.

They waved, flashing smiles at the group before turning to the looming forest before them, "Any of you guys feeling like our odds at winning the Trails aren't as high as we would like them to be?" Bree was the first to voice her concerns when she peered into the darkness of the woods.

The Trials... Every four years, The Royal Games were held between the two empires. The game to be played would be completely random, but the venue was the same every time. The Royal Games would be played at the Great Arena located at the border of both empires.

To remember the long journeys made by the first to Werewolf Kings, Sirius and Lycaon, the royals taking part in these games would have to test their might through a journey through the wild. A journey to the Great Arena.

It was this journey that was then named the Trials. During this journey, the royals would prove their might against the elements and dangers of the wilderness and they would only be allowed a maximum of two helpers for this journey and no more.

It felt like the forest had gone creepier when they turned to start the journey.

"Maybe two years ago, but it's been a long time since then. We're not the same pups we were back then. I..." the princess's speech was interrupted by another voice.

"Hey, Lina, wait..." a male voice called out to them.

The three girls turned back to witness a red-eyed male jogging up to them. Wyatt's dimly lit red eyes beamed in excitement, "I can see you're a bit understaffed," he observed.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Crysta regarded him coldly. She was currently standing with two other candidates for the Trials... or was the alpha finally snapping a fuse?

"Exactly what it sounds like, your Highness," the alpha shrugged, glancing towards Bree.

"And your solution is?"

"Well, I think that is obvious. I would like to take Bree's place- no offence Bree," the alpha replied, switching his attention to the princess.

"You've got some nerve, Wyatt," Crysta spat, but when the princess didn't react in a similar manner, the delta turned to her, "Lina, you can't be thinking about switching out Bree for this..."

"Crysta," Bree stopped the delta in her tracks, "The Trails aren't about you or me. Do not forget that. I want to come along with you on this trip, but... well, the prince has already got a large headstart. I would only slow you down."

"What? Bree, no..." Crysta panicked.

"I think we've all come to the obvious conclusion. I get to switch with Bree and this whole expedition can go much smoother and faster. Rejoice, Crysta, I'm not usually this generous... and try to keep up with us. We wouldn't want you slowing us down, now would we?" the man snickered.

"Oh? What happened to your twin then?" Crysta asked him, crossing her hands over her chest, seemingly unbothered by the braggart's words.

"The other two alphas know better than to try and pry you from the princess's clutches. Liam had no interest in coming with you. Derrick, on the other hand, wanted to come here and offer his hand, so I

wrestled him for the opportunity to join this team. You can already guess who won that duel,” the man scoffed, his face holding a look of disdain at the memory.

“This is no time to argue. Lina is already late as it is,” Bree smacked the two bickering wolves, “And you will apologise to Derrick the next time you see him.”

They both rubbed the back of their heads, regarding the girl for a moment before turning to her new object of attention. Oddly enough, Wyatt didn’t argue with Bree on the matter. Whether he’d taken her advice seriously or not was left to time.

Lina had been quiet, weighing her decisions and trying to choose between going with an alpha and Bree. It made all the sense in terms of speed and efficiency, but none when it came to who she trusted more with her life.

‘Lina, if you’re thinking about my feelings in the matter, I’ll make it easy for you. I want to see you beat your smug brother in the Trials and I know that you can do that if you have Wyatt with you and not me,’ Bree’s voice came through the mind link.

‘But...’

‘Madeline, Honour and I will be cheering you on the entire way. A goddess wished you good luck... and one of the goddess’s chosen bound Wyatt because of going against you. If I didn’t know any better, I would think he was trying to get his sentence lifted... Do your best... even though I’d like to say ‘Don’t lose,’ Bree didn’t give the princess a choice in the matter. Her mind was made up.

Lina pulled Bree into a hug, “We’ll win the Trials, Bree. You can count on that.”

“I have no doubts, Lina. Make us proud,” the girl quoted one of the fliers she’d seen their schoolmates holding up in the fray.

Lina finally let go of the girl and watched her return to the ranks of supporters. ‘I have awesome friends,’ she thought to herself as she turned to her travel companions.

“Hey, Crysta. Hand over your bag,” Wyatt asked the delta.

“Why would I do such a thing?”

“Deltas don’t have the power to shift with their clothes on. If you shift with the bag, we’ll have to tie it to your back so you can run with it and that will slow us down,” Wyatt argued, “That is supposed to be obvious.”

Reluctantly, the girl relinquished her rucksack to the alpha along with Bree’s... which was now his. “You didn’t come with a bag of your own,” she observed.

“I’ll be fine as I am. Let’s just get this journey underway,” Wyatt slung both bags on each shoulder and shifted into a black wolf with white paws and ears. The bags, as he’d said were nowhere to be seen. It was a power that was only reserved for alphas and royals and one they would be needing a lot on their trip.

“Boys can be so... foul,” the delta turned away from the alpha and regarded the palace one more time. By some odd twist of fate, her eyes glided to the magnificent towering spires.

She wasn't sure why or how it was there, but she noticed an eagle perching on one of the palace spires. Towering above the forest, the eagle had a view of everything and Crysta thought she imagined the eagle's gaze locked with hers before it took to the sky.

"Crysta, are you okay?" Lina asked her.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Let's go," the delta replied, shifting into her own grey wolf. Taking this as a hint that they could start the journey, Lina shifted as well.

Unlike the rest of the werewolves who spent an average of thirty seconds shifting into their beast forms, it seemed as though her body vanished and was instantly replaced with that of a magnificent powerful slender snow white wolf.

...The same colour as that of her lost sister's wolf.

Crysta was about to say something over the mind link when the white wolf vanished from sight, leaving behind her a gust of wind that blew nearly caught the grey wolf off guard, "That never gets old," Wyatt chuckled before starting the journey with a gentle trot.

"Don't encourage her. Lina, wait..."

While the princess's speed was exactly what they needed to catch up with the prince. In fact, if they could all run at her pace, catching Drake wouldn't pose a problem in the slightest, but that wasn't the problem.

The problem was entirely different. There simply wasn't a wolf alive that could keep up with Lina after two years of training her unnatural speed... and the nickname of Jeanie had finally caught on. 'Does she realise we won't make half the journey at that speed?' the delta cursed in her mind.

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