

Chosen 431

Chapter 431 Relaxation

Scents of all kinds assaulted the girls' noses, instantly forcing them to relax. A thick mist hung about the entire room. Several pools of water of various shapes and sizes filled the room, many of them occupied by women soaking comfortably in the warm water.

"What's this supposed to be?" Honour asked, staring between the ladies and the luxurious pools of rejuvenating water. 'They don't really expect us to wash off in here, do they?'

"Well, I take it that the three of you are with the royal family even though none of you has the eyes to prove it. Don't worry. We don't judge anyone by their ranks here.

The prince won't be making it to the Grand Arena soon. Knowing Martha, she is going to use this chance to return the greatest relaxation spas known this side of the Great Arena," Delila spoke proudly.

The woman herself had unblemished skin and her voice was as soothing as a mother's lullaby, almost like she was trained to speak that way. Now that Honour was paying more attention to her, her voice was similar to that of the queen herself.

"If you put it like that..." Madeline trailed, eyeing the baths with a more accepting look.

"That's the spirit," Delila smirked.

The girls, following the women's lead, allowed themselves the luxury of relaxation. The trio was led to the changing rooms where they were given white towels and led back to a pool designated for them.

The feeling of warm water was against their skin exquisite. It felt like a warm soft blanket wrapped around their bodies, "Oh, that feels great," Madeline's voice rang out.

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"Right? Wait till you get to the sauna and massage. You'll be feeling like a baby by the time we're done with you," another woman spoke this time, her angelic voice almost identical to the first.

'Professionals,' Honour thought.

They placed a bell on a plank at the side of the pool, "If you feel like you need anything or if you feel you've enjoyed the water enough, ring this bell. We'll come to take you to the next stage."

With that, the women were gone and the three girls were left soaking in the bath. The temperature of the path was just right and it never once dropped or rose beyond what was required. It was like a miracle bath that took everyone's burdens away.

The pool was not too deep and not too shallow either, with a smooth undulating rim that allowed one to rest their head. If it hadn't been for Bree's curiosity, Honour wouldn't have noticed the cushions stacked beside the pool.

The girl got experimental and found it even more comforting to lay her head on the pillow as she relaxed.

“Do you think the queen did this to keep us from worrying too much about Katie?” Bree asked the other two.

“Maybe,” was Madeline’s reply before dipping her head below the surface and blowing up some bubbles. Honour didn’t miss the girl’s grey eyes in the mist. She’d stopped forcing their colour to change now that they were alone... and she looked more beautiful that way. Not that Honour would be telling her that any time soon.

“She probably wanted to shed her royal shell and gossip with-” the young goddess froze mid-sentence, coming to a ground-breaking realisation from the way the queen had been acting.

‘Shed her royal shell my foot,’ Honour’s thoughts raged, ‘I should have seen this sooner. Their mocking tones... their welcoming smiles... the way they carry themselves... The queen even knew Delila’s name...’

“The queen must have known this place long before joining the royal family.”

“What makes you say that?” Madeline’s bubbles stopped popping and she rose, paying more attention to the young goddess.

“It’s not normal or common to find a place that completely looks past the colour of someone’s eyes. I thought they were only doing that with alphas, but then, it was the same with the queen. Who does that to the most respected werewolves in the world?”

Not to mention the moment she entered this place, her guard completely fell and she showed she trusted these people without hesitation. It’s like...”

“She knew them personally,” Bree sighed.

“Exactly,” Honour replied.

“Either that or the two of you are reading too much into this whole thing,” Madeline replied, sinking once more with a gurgling sound. More bubbles rose from within the misty pool, “I’d rather just soak and enjoy this while it lasts.”

Once again, Honour was astounded by how much this girl was able to relax. Looking back on it now, she had been the exact opposite when they’d found her. Madeline was timid and plagued by a lot of nightmares... nightmares...

Now Honour had nightmares of her own... although hers were less of scary dreams and more of memories of a life that she very much knew to be true. Memories that she had not yet shared with the rest of her friends. They knew of her dreams, but she never shared the details.

Going into the details was a matter all on its own. It was a symbol of her acceptance of reality. The reality was that she was indeed the reincarnation of a millennium-old goddess of the moon Selene.

Accepting that she would have to return to the moon and might never see her family ever again. Honour didn’t even know what would happen to her when this happened.

So she kept the memories to herself. Maybe this way, she could stay with her friends longer. It was these uncertainties that made her cherish every moment she had with her friends.

Honour sank deeper into the waters, her tears obscured by the thick mist that hung close to the water's surface.

"Oh right, Lina mentioned your birthday is in a week from now," Madeline piped up.

"Yeah..." Honour replied. 'Leave it to Lina to remember every detail about me... I wonder if she also remembers what my parents said about that day. She probably does and doesn't want to think about it.'

"She also postponed her own celebration to that day, so that the two of you can celebrate your birthday together," Madeline continued.

Honour wanted to sink into the pool and vanish, but Madeline wouldn't be willing to let her. One of the flaws of being blindly honest was that Madeline sometimes missed subtle hints, "She said she wanted it to be a day you wouldn't forget. Maybe that way, you'll pay her more visits when you leave."

"I don't want to leave, Mady," Honour sighed... "I want to stay."

The women from earlier walked in on them before the conversation could continue, "I see the three of you have enjoyed this much more than I thought you would. The limit to how long you can spend in the shower has been reached."

"That's one short limit," Bree huffed.

Chapter 432 War with Herself

"You probably haven't noticed but you've been here for an hour and a half. Since you're going to go through a sauna and have massages, then you're not making good time here," Delila chuckled, her melodic voice ringing like bells in the air.

'What sorcery is this?' Honour wondered, 'We only just got here.'

Just when she thought this couldn't get any weirder, Delila held up a clock so they could confirm what she was saying. They had indeed spent a lot of time in the water without even realising it.

The girls gave up their protests and followed the three ladies to another room full of massage tables. They were eight by Honour's count and only one was being used.

The walls of the room had been expertly designed to mimic the lively greenery of a forest, with a waterfall painted on one side of it. A few storks were wading through the calm waters at the river bank.

To complete the scene, the sound of birds and water rushing down the waterfall blended in through hidden speakers. Honour couldn't tell where the scent of the forest came from, but she was sure her nose picked up on the distinct smell of bark and fresh dew within this room.

Even before laying down on the massage table, her muscles were starting to relax.

Delila and her two apprentices led them to four tables lined against one side of the wall of which one was occupied. The girls did their best to keep their eyes off the fair lady that was being tended to with her body face down and tried their best to get comfortable as instructed.

There was an awkward silence for a while before a familiar voice rang through the room, "So... how are you girls finding this place?"

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Madeline was so stunned she nearly rolled off her massage table. The woman working with her, however, was quick to hold her steady.

Looking up at the lady's crimson eyes, Madeline mouthed her gratitude, flinching a little from the unintentional intensity that came from the alpha's eyes. Getting used to this environment wasn't something one could do in a few hours let alone a few days.

Alphas were meant to lead packs... and yet here was one of them massaging her back with smooth tender strokes that made her feel like a baby. The situation simply defied all logic.

"It's... a little overwhelming. I wasn't able to recognise you with your face down," Honour admitted.

"That's because you always see me in a gown or something fancy, so you can't tell what my body would actually look like unless you knew it was me..." Martha sighed heavily. "I like to come here when I'm feeling stressed out.

That hasn't happened in a long time though. The king won't let me worry. Always wants to make my problems disappear."

The woman working with her cooed suspiciously at the queen's statement. The girls went bright red while Queen Martha giggled at her behaviour, "There is also the matter of you thinking of me as old. Werewolves age slowly you know."

"That's not what I had in mind. But if it makes you feel any better, you look the same as you did in the last picture I saw of you... With only your wisdom getting wider," Honour strung her words as well as she could even though she felt she could have done better.

On the bright side, Queen Martha thanked the girl for her kind words. This was just before the masseuse working on the young goddess got to work. The woman masterfully rubbed her trained hands from honour's lower back in an upward stroke that ended with her massaging Honour's shoulders.

Honour could've sworn she lost her arm at that moment. Her thoughts vanished in a whirlpool of relieving sensations. The seemingly magical hands of the masseuse wiped away all the tension left in her muscles.

With the scent of the forest assaulting her nose, the sound of a waterfall, the perfect scene and the soft mist that wafted through the room. Not to mention the fact that she was surrounded by her friends, Honour, as well as her friends, couldn't have felt more at peace.

"Will Lina..."

"Lina will be alright. She's tougher than you know. It's Drake I would be worried about. Then again, he went through the Trials once before," the queen intervened.

"Your Maje..."

"Call me Martha while we are here."

“Okay... Mar-Martha, I don’t understand something about the Trials. Why does Lina have to compete against Drake and shouldn’t Drake have taken whoever he was going to compete with on his team during the Royal Games?”

Martha was quiet for a while before answering, “Personally... I don’t like the Trials...” she paused before continuing, “But it’s never been my place to decide against them and every time a royal goes through the Trials, they are never the same. They aren’t the same after the Trials. It’s that change that makes them hold the Trials.

As you probably know, the Royal Games take place every four years... but that’s only if there are candidates to take part in the Royal Games. The Trials and the games themselves are two separate events that the Royals chose to hold at the same time.

During the Royal Games, the only person that must be a part of the team was the royal that went through the Trials. All the others are up to that specific royal to decide.”

“That’s why Lina was able to participate in the games last year without having to go through the Trials. I still don’t understand something. What’s the purpose of the Trials?” Bree pitched in suddenly.

“The Trials are meant to test the crown prince or princess to see if they are fit to rule. There is a story kept among the royals that says ‘The Moon Goddess is the overseer of the Trials.’ She makes sure the royals that go through the Trials get through them unscathed. However... when they return from the Trials, they return with an answer.

Whether they can burden the title of a ruler or whether they cannot.”

“But Lina isn’t the heir to the crown,” Madeline argued.

“With how things are right now, no one knows what’s going through the prince’s mind. Anything can happen at this point. I can’t say what the king has decided since this is still only a family matter. I ask that you don’t worry about this.”

Honour thought about the queen’s words for a moment. There was something bothering her with how everyone was referring to the prince lately. While everyone had noticed a significant change in the prince’s behaviour, Honour had noticed nothing.

...and it had been nagging at the back of her mind for a while.

With each well-calculated stroke of the masseuse’s magical hands, the girl’s mind grew foggier and her worries began to fade.

The young goddess relaxed, giving in to the calming aura of the massage room. A cruel sensation tugged at the back of her mind, growing fainter as the seconds ticked by.

Bree, against the will of the hands that forced her relaxation, spoke up, “Your majesty, you seem too comfortable in this place.”

It was more a question than it was a suggestion. The girl couldn’t find it within her to let go of her suspicions of the queen. Her mind was somewhat clear when the queen spoke up.

“I thought you would have noticed by now. I grew up near the Great Arena... in this same establishment. Although, it wasn’t always this glamorous.”

The room went silent and the queen sensed the curiosity spike, “The tickets for the royal games were not something we could afford for the entire family, so we had been saving up. My mother wanted me to go and see them when I turned eighteen. I got three tickets as a birthday gift. I brought my two best friends along with me.

It was both a good time to enjoy growing up and a major opportunity for me to find my mate, considering there are very many werewolves that make it to the royal games every time they are held.

It’s an event that brings together so many people. For someone without the means to travel the world, this would be a major opportunity for me. It was only a hope I was meant to keep in mind. Nothing to get too excited about, but also nothing to completely forget.

It was entirely possible that I would find my mate there and also possible that I wouldn’t.

None of us could have foreseen that the mate I was searching for was going to end up being the prince himself.” The queen explained.

“Little Martha couldn’t believe what was happening. I remember she ran away from the prince utterly scared and confused about what was happening.”

“Now now, Auntie. There is no need to make me look any worse in front of my daughter’s friends,” the queen chuckled.

“Oh, I see no problem in shedding that elegant mask you wear once in a while. You’ll turn into a porcelain doll if you keep up that act. Very beautiful... but empty and misunderstood,” the woman replied in a kind caring tone.

“I’m fine being myself when I’m here,” Queen Martha replied, both to her auntie and to the girls with her in the room.

Honour’s suspicions were confirmed, however, she’d had no idea the queen was really home. In this place, she looked happier than usual. Not to say the queen wasn’t blissful when she was at the palace, but there was something different about returning home that made someone glow with a different kind of happiness.

‘Returning home...’ the thought resonated within the goddess’s mind. Images of a white luminous palace flooded her mind. The fragmented memories of the Moon Palace flooded her mind now more than ever before. ‘Do I want to go home?’

Honour wasn’t sure how she could answer this question. Her personality was already at war with her former self.

The goddess Selene, reborn... Honour wondered who she truly was. Was she Honour or was she, Selene? The queen’s nostalgic mood seemed to be more of a bane than a blessing in this young goddess’ mind.

In fact, it only brought the war raging within her even further away from ever stopping.

She was at war with herself.

Chapter 433 Stranger with a Red Hairdo

The massage and sauna proceeded comfortably with the women talking about everything and anything that came to mind. Whether it was for the sake of the girls' entertainment or whether she simply loved a stroll down memory lane was left a mystery.

Queen Martha had so many stories about the spa and her life in the city before being taken away by the king. Most of her favourite memories revolved around the time the king had come into her life and the time she helped her parents around the spa.

During the queen's narrations, Honour came upon a sudden revelation. This place didn't stop caring about people's status from when it had been created. It hadn't always been like that.

Rather, this changed when someone from within them had risen to the rank of a royal by a mere twist of fate. An ordinary wolf could become a delta. A delta could become an alpha or a royal. The conditions only needed to be right.

Looking down on any one werewolf could be the worst mistake anyone could make. That's how this place had become what it was today.

Queen Martha's story had become a tale that instilled humility into those that heard it. Anyone that disregarded the tale as a mere folk tale would be kicked out by the alphas that worked within the establishment.

The warmth and hospitality of the workers were almost unimaginable. It was no wonder the queen was so enthusiastic about coming to this place.

Because of the queen's sudden ascension to the throne, the spa had also become popular, rapidly growing it into the fine facility it was today.

Getting accustomed to the queen's treat, the girls managed to fully relax. It was far into the evening when the queen finally regained her elegant composure.

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Honour was sitting on one of the sofas in the waiting area of the salon poking at her phone when Queen Martha suddenly graced the room with her presence. Clad in an elegant azure flowing gown that lightly skimmed the ground.

"Mady, it's time for your makeover. The king will start to worry if he doesn't at least find that happening."

"I think he would be furious if he does find it happening," Honour sighed, "but don't let me get in the way."

"No, not really. He knows what I was coming here to do. He went with Beta Ryan to take care of where we'll be staying and handle everything with the Arena staff. He should be here in a few minutes," the queen quickly relayed the situation.

“That’s very little time for Madeline to get finished...”

The queen held up her hand for the girls to stop in their tracks, “Don’t worry. The king also has something to do here. It’s not like he’s coming to take us away right now. Mady!” The grey-eyed girl allowed the queen to usher her out.

Honour forced herself out of the sofa and followed the queen. Bree was not far behind, “What would the king have to do here? I haven’t seen any men.”

“He’s going to meet my mother. It would be disrespectful if I stopped by and Davin didn’t make some kind of appearance in front of his mother-in-law,” the queen smiled weakly.

“Ah. I... hadn’t thought much about it then,” to this, the queen did not reply.

Madeline was dragged to one of the black luxurious chairs in the salon and made to sit in front of a mirror. The dark-haired girl looked around in an attempt to get the tension building within her out of her system.

Noticing this, the woman who’d been assigned to work on the girl rubbed her shoulders, “Relax, beautiful. You’ll be unrecognisable before you know it. Just show me those eyes now.”

The woman wasn’t wrong when she called Madeline beautiful. The girl had a slightly round face with full cheeks that made her adorable, well at least, that’s what Honour thought of her. The dimples that formed when she smiled made Honour’s mind scream ‘unfair.’

Her grey eyes reflected more light than normal, giving them a beady appearance that could drown almost anyone that took notice of them.

If Madeline was to ever go completely still, she would take on the appearance of a grandiose work of art. Her skin was fairly pale and delicate.

Her antics though, combined with her clumsy habits and easygoing nature easily dulled all these qualities and in turn, made it harder for her to be noticed by anyone who found her odd.

Now that there was nothing to keep her distracted, she looked completely different, “Martha, this girl is beautiful.”

“I know... Just get it over with,” the queen sighed, “I don’t like it either but knowing your talents, I know you can change it all.”

“I know my abilities well, Martha. I’ve just never felt that they would be a curse until now,” the woman lamented, wrapping a dark towel around Madeline’s body, covering her whole torso and only leaving her neck exposed, “We’ll start with your hair. I think red should do...”

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Two hours later, the girls were seated once again in the Waiting area. Separated by a thin wall of cardboard... or was it wood. The place had been designed to look completely natural and perfumed to smell that way too. It was impossible to tell if what Honour was looking at was fake or not.

Had she not been a goddess obsessed with nature, she would have fallen for it entirely. In the end, she'd settled with being amazed at how well they replicated the feel of the outdoors in an indoor set-up.

'You guys can come in now,' Queen Martha's voice spoke through the mind link.

The young goddess was slightly irritated for not being allowed to be present as the woman worked on changing Madeline's looks. In Queen Martha's opinion, the 'magic' was much more astonishing when one didn't set through the whole process.

And in the next few seconds, she came to know just how right the woman was...

Honour froze at the sight of a stranger in the mirror. Her hair had been dyed strawberry and redesigned to make it fall upon her shoulders in waves. Closer to her eyes, the hair had been trimmed shorter than the rest and curled to hug her face lightly.

Her eyebrows were trimmed thinner than they'd recently been, giving them a sharper look. The make-up that had been applied completely robbed the girl's face of the young childish innocence that Honour had grown accustomed to.

In place of Madeline's adorable face was an image of someone much older with a more angular face. Madeline retained her beauty but in a different form. The Seeker was unrecognizable.

"Where is Mady?" Bree asked, looking around.

"Very funny, Bree," the unfamiliar redhead rolled her eyes.

Bree gasped, "Seriously... No way. Honour, had you recognised her?"

Honour gave a nervous chuckle, "It's the same chair and the same person attending to her. Who else do you know that has grey eyes."

"That's cheating, Honour," Bree sighed.

Honour turned to the woman that had worked on her friend, "Your talent is a blessing and a curse, isn't it?"

The woman that had been working on her sighed in disappointment, "It had to be done. I never thought I'd see the day when changing someone's face would feel so wrong."

"This is amazing," Honour replied, "I was worried about having to hide her under a cloak, but with her looking like this, she can strip for all I care and no one would recognize her."

Madeline gasped at the girl's words, immediately blushing red. Expressions came naturally to Madeline. As natural as they should have been and it was all the confirmation Honour needed to know that it was indeed her friend that was seated before her, "Honour, why would you..."

"I was just kidding, Mady," Honour finally reached the girl and gently placed her hands on her shoulders, staring her in the eyes through the mirror.

The last part of Madeline's face that remained the same was staring right back at her. A pair of soft grey eyes stared back at Honour's amber orbs through the mirror.

Madeline could almost see Honour's intentions through her amber orbs.

Staring at Honour's eyes long enough, Madeline was almost sure she could see a soft blue glow hiding deep within her iris. When she focused on that blue hue, it vanished instantly, like something that wasn't there at all.

Maybe she was imagining things but Madeline found the colour more fitting for the goddess of the moon.

Honour found Madeline's grey eyes peculiar as well. They were silver with a soft glow of them that turned them silver in the right lighting.

The fabled eyes of a Seeker. Madeline was the Seeker's daughter and bore all those characteristics... Except for the fact that she hadn't tapped into that power yet and seemed unwilling to do so. It wasn't like anyone was forcing her either. If she could escape such a burden, Honour would be fine with it.

'Time to deal with those eyes.' Honour's voice broke Madeline out of her short trance, "Just one last thing before you can walk freely. You sure you handle it?"

Chapter 434 One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

"I've been practising. I-I will be fine," the girl drew in a sharp breath before shakily regarding her appearance.

"Umm Martha, I have been meaning to ask you what you're doing with a human girl and changing her appearance no... less..." the lady's voice trailed off when she witnessed the shimmering silver of the girl's eyes start to swirl, "What in the moon's radiance..."

For a moment, the woman thought she would get sucked into the girl's eyes and get lost in the silver swirling abyss, but that's not what happened.

Instead, the silver irises lit up more and began to sparkle with specks of amber-like sparks rising from the glorious embers of a campfire. The flecks of amber started to grow more and more, overpowering and eventually drowning out the beautiful grey.

Before she knew it, she was staring at a swirling amber iris right before it settled and took on the natural glow of the average werewolf's eye. Her transformation was complete. The last part of the Seeker's appearance and identity was gone completely erased.

Queen Martha turned to the woman and placed a hand on her shoulder, squeezing her shoulder tightly, "It's important that her identity remains hidden."

The woman was shaken by the girl's sudden transformation but even more so by the queen's serious tone. It was a tone she hadn't used even after marrying into the royal family.

The harsh reality of this situation was laid bare. It didn't take much for her to understand that this girl was involved in something truly dangerous, "The life of a royal cannot be an easy one but promise me it won't come back to haunt your home."

"I don't intend to let it. I made a promise to protect this place when I left and have no intentions of breaking that promise," the queen responded. The woman nodded, closing her eyes and taking in a deep breath.

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"Very well."

"Is everyone ready?" it was then that the king arrived walking into the salon through the door that had led the girls deeper into the facility. The scents that came off him exposed his whereabouts as well. He had been in one of the deeply scented rooms on the other side. Whichever room he'd been in remained unknown.

Honour wondered when it was that the king had arrived. They'd waited for Madeline's makeover to get done for two hours and still hadn't sensed a sign of the king's arrival. Then again, it wasn't unheard of for the royals to hide their oppressive auras when they travelled.

This allowed them to move wherever they pleased unnoticed. And with the right clothes and training, they could even be mistaken for mundane humans. 'Impressive,' Honour mused.

"How did it go, my dear?" Queen Martha embraced her husband.

"She's as enthusiastic as ever, my love," the king replied with a chuckle rubbing a spot on his cheek that was slightly redder than the rest of his face.

The queen kissed his cheek, "Well, that's what you get for taking four whole years to visit her again."

'Four years... The king only comes here during the Royal Games. Even for a king, that's sloppy,' Honour held in her laughter.

King Davin's nervous chuckle ended when his eyes landed on the girl in the seat. From where everyone was standing, this girl seemed to be the centre of attention... and yet, looking at her face made him frown, "Have we met?"

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After heavy discussion, Lina and her escorts came to a conclusion. They would be carrying meat in one of the bags they were carrying regardless of how messy it was. Preferably, they could add in a couple of wild fruits if they found any at all.

The sight of the mountain only told them there was next to no life capable of living on its barren slopes. The Trials were slowly turning into a battle against the wild.

With less progress being made and more focus on trying to survive, they were quickly starting to lose speed. It wasn't enough that their detour to the stream had slowed them down, they also found that the mountain pass had completely collapsed in on itself.

They'd already run for the better half of the day and at this point, it was beginning to feel hopeless. The mountain pass was the fastest way to the Great Arena that they could find. Any other route would add a couple of days or more to their already long and arduous journey.

After making it to the blocked mountain pass, the princess felt the need to run around the mountain completely, but her friends were not in any shape to continue the journey. Wyatt could barely run and Crysta was reaching her limit soon. The sun was starting its long journey to the western horizon.

The girl paced about the blocked entrance of the mountain pass while her friends tried to rest up. Wyatt shifted back into his human form and held up one of the robes that he found in the bag he was carrying. Spreading it out like a towel, the man was completely blind to Crysta's form.

The delta chuckled at his attempt at being helpful and shifted back into her human form, quickly wrapping herself with the turquoise robe. The two of them collapsed on the roots of the thick trees that marked the end of the forest's advance towards the mountain.

"How long is she going to do that?" Wyatt asked between shaky breaths, gesturing to the pacing slender white wolf.

"As long as it takes her to calm down. We haven't seen a sign of his Highness and to be honest, we've already been held back a couple of times. Things are not looking great for us. We finally got water enough to take us across the mountain and were making progress and now it's all for nothing," Crysta sighed.

"We cannot rush a race through the wilderness. It's a miracle we've made it this far without running into any wild animals."

"It's also a miracle that the only wild animal we have met is a jaguar which shouldn't have been there in the first place," Crysta scoffed.

I was wondering. What if the wild animals are simply getting out of Lina's way? After what we saw with the jaguar earlier, it's a possibility," the alpha ignored Crysta's tone.

"If that were the case, then deers ought to be throwing themselves at Lina's feet, begging for her to rip their throats out. Just saying..."

To this, the alpha chuckled. Nevertheless, he continued speaking, "I've been thinking. The rocks blocking the mountain pass don't have any moss growing on them. They are not even a little bit moist from dew. If I didn't know any better, I'd say the mountain pass recently collapsed. There is a slim chance that the prince didn't make it through here either," Wyatt rested his chin in his palm, his eyes glazed over in thought.

The sight of seeing Wyatt genuinely trying to help them was still raising red flags within the delta's mind. While Crysta had been mean to the princess in the past, Wyatt had been even worse.

The man sighed, pulling a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from his pockets.

Crysta took a look at the boulders barring their way through the mountain pass. It was like the man had said, the rocks there looked freshly cut and far too dry. To compare them, the delta looked at the surrounding slopes and compared the colour of the stone.

He was right...

"You're right about the Mountain pass even though that makes this all the more suspicious. This gorge has stood for very many years without ever showing a sign of collapsing."

“No... it showed signs of weakness a long time ago. That’s why the highway to the Great Arena was never built into the mountains. They were too unpredictable. But that wasn’t the same for people travelling on foot or merchants travelling in small caravans.

“Don’t you find it suspicious for it to collapse during the Trials?” Crysta turned to him, only to move back when a puff of smoke rushed forward. “Hey, watch where you aim that soot.”

The alpha chuckled, “I find it very suspicious. In fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if this gorge collapsed right before the prince went through it. We can still catch up to him. Odds are that he didn’t make it through here.”

“I guess that makes sense. It would really help boost her morale. Now all we have to do...” Crysta threw a worried glance at the pacing royal, “...is try telling that to the girl who has made this whole journey without breaking a sweat... and is getting really restless.”

Lina had been listening to bits of their conversation at the beginning while she paced, but the more logical it got, the more bored the princess grew. In the end, her restlessness won the battle and she resumed her habit with the aim of cooling her nerves.

“I don’t think her energy is that bottomless,” Wyatt chuckled to himself. Crysta, however, was less inclined to agree with him. After two days of constant travel, the royal was yet to show signs of exhaustion.

Chapter 435 Plotting a New Course

Crysta took out the old map from the bag Wyatt was carrying and laid it out in front of the two of them while the royal continued pacing about. She made sure there was space for Lina to join them in case she felt up to it.

After taking a short look at the map, Wyatt spoke up first, “This map only spells bad news for us. Without the mountain pass, there is no way we could make this much distance in one day as we’d originally planned.

Not to mention the predators that reign supreme within the mountains. Mountain lions! They are rumoured to be quite territorial in these parts,” Wyatt pitched in, sitting crosslegged beside the girl.

“Rumours?” Crysta raised a brow at him.

“I was just trying to be positive. There are definitely mountain lions here. We just have to be careful. Luckily for us, they don’t travel in a pride as normal lions do, so we won’t risk finding more than two of them at the same time at which they won’t be working well together.”

Crysta shuddered at the thought of finding just one. “You think bowing to one of those things will get us off the hook like the last one?” the girl asked in a lower ponderous tone.

“I’m not sure bowing to a jaguar was ever meant to get anyone a free pass in the first place. That was nothing short of a miracle. We cannot rely on miracles. There is an old saying that suggests miracles only happen once,” the man responded.

While his argument made sense, Crysta was sure Lina would be less inclined to agree with him, “We can’t rest here tonight. We must make some of the distance into the mountains.”

“You must have a few screws loose. What distance can we make now? The mountains are vast and hunting within them is even more of a myth. I’ve never heard of werewolves surviving within the Sirius mountains. Not to mention they are really steep and finding an entry point is next to impossible.

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Finding a way out after finding said entry point is a dream. We could find ourselves at a dead end. Going around the mountains will take days for the three of us. We won’t be able to make any difference if we exhaust our muscles now. I have my limits, you know,” Wyatt argued.

“We don’t need to go around the mountains or even look for an entry point. Take a look...” the delta pointed at the map, tracing the path of the stream that came from the mountain, “That river doesn’t allow much movement to be made when you chose to use it, but it does create the smoothest path up the mountain, not like these steep slopes that we keep staring at.”

“You intend to use what little river bank the stream has to make it to the top of the ranges?” Wyatt asked.

“Yes, on the other side of the mountain, the slopes are gentler, not like what’s on this side. If we can make it using that route, we cut our journey short by a couple of days,” the delta explained thoughtfully.

“I know what you’re trying to say but what happens when we find a part of the stream that’s completely water and no shore, just steep sides?” Wyatt pinched the bridge of his nose.

“We’ll swim,” the girl responded eagerly.

“You make it sound so easy. From what I can see on this map, the stream doesn’t really start all the way at the top,” he tried voicing his observations.

“Haven’t you wondered why the water from the creek is so cold? The water comes from the melting ice at the...”

“I know it’s a glacial river. That’s why I was about to ask if you had some kind of death wish. We could freeze up there,” the man argued, cutting her short.

“You’re so full of negativity,” Crysta raised a brow at him.

“No, I’m your voice of reason. With the wild suggestions you keep making, one of us has to stay reasonable,” Wyatt countered.

“I am being reasonable. There is no telling how much time we have already lost now. Following this path will only help us reach our goal faster. If it so happens that the prince has taken the long way around, we could make up for lost time,” Crysta tried explaining.

“There it is again. ‘Reaching our goal faster.’ You’re the one that said this was not just a test of speed. There is a lot that can kill us out here. We can’t just get irrational and disregard something that could very well be our doom... all in the name of reaching our goal faster. The cold on that mountain can kill us,” the man argued.

The argument was about to continue when a voice interrupted them. While the voice was loud and commanding, it rattled within their minds instead of through their ears. "I've heard what you both have to say about it. You can stop arguing now. Let me provide a third option then."

Lina's voice sounded more stable over the mind link. The panic that had plagued her when they found the decimated mountain pass was gone, "Something is fishy about this sudden collapse of the mountain pass. If my brother had been injured really badly by this rock fall, I would have known, but I felt nothing through the mind link, so he must be fine."

However, that doesn't mean this was something that happened naturally. It's far too coincidental for the mountain pass to collapse when we were just about to cross it. We cannot rule out the possibility that this could have happened on purpose to target the contestants of the Trials," Lina had been doing some thinking during her pacing.

"Are you trying to say that someone could have brought down the mountain pass? Could your brother have done it to slow us down? Even though I know that's not like him at all," Crysta suggested.

"I was surveying the rocks to see if we could still cross, but they are far too unstable. One wrong move and you could break your leg with a simple misstep. However, I did come across an unfamiliar scent. And it was one that belonged to a werewolf," the girl explained.

"Rogues?" Wyatt's voice was panicked. What were the odds that rogues were involved in this sort of accident? High... very high. There hadn't been any mention of rogue activity for nearly two years.

Aside from the sudden disappearance of a Seeker right after the escape of the Rogue King, there hadn't been a sign of Rogue activity. The hunters had swept the entirety of no-man's-land and come up with nothing which was even more unsettling.

However, in the end, there was nothing that could be done. The Rogues seemed to have vanished. Some theories cropped up that their numbers had been reduced so much that what was left of them would be able to hide really well at which point they would no longer be a threat.

Even then, however, there wasn't even a single sighting... and that was what made this very frightening.

Chapter 436 Pathetic... that's the word

"It's a possibility. I was proposing we hunt and gather some wood, then make our way to the creek. We stop moving at dusk and make camp. We don't have to be moving a quick pace but I don't like the idea of us being too close to this place either," the princess's suggested.

Wyatt was sure she'd heard his arguments. She was only choosing to ignore them now... or maybe she'd found a way to combat the cold he'd warned them against. After all, she was choosing to plan ahead and gather wood.

The barren ranges bore no trees and traversing them without wood would only mean there would be nothing to keep them warm at night but their sheets.

Crysta and Wyatt nodded in confirmation. The delta grabbed Wyatt's bag and retreated to the woods to shift while the man waited for her. When she returned with the bag in her maw, he took it and slung it over his shoulders, "Let's not waste any more time then."

The trio was running through the woods in the direction of the creek when they spotted a ruffle of fur through the trees. Crysta signalled and the three began chasing the creature. A few seconds into the chase and they spotted the full body of an agile hare darting towards its burrow.

Crysta's muscles tensed as she prepared to pounce at the hare but that's when she noticed a hole very close ahead. The hare was much closer to home than she'd expected. Safety was closer to it than she had initially thought and the delta suddenly felt unsure of her capabilities...

The swishing sound of the white wolf's furry tail cutting through the air announced Lina's sudden burst of speed. Before the delta and alpha could follow the slender white wolf's actions, she had the hare in her jaws around the hare's neck.

The creature froze suddenly in fear, eyeing the comfort of its home that was only a step away. This was right before the white wolf's great jaws clamped down on the creature's neck with a sickening crunch.

She waited for a while for the life to completely drain out of the creature's body. With a kill that swift, there wasn't much of a struggle and soon enough, it had gone completely still.

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Lina shifted into her human form and started tying the creature to her back using a rope from one of the bags. "Do you think it will vanish when you shift?" Crysta asked through the mind link.

"It's nothing more than just meat and fur now. It will vanish along with my clothes and bags, just like something that no longer bears life," the royal responded.

She shifted moments later and just like she'd said, the hare was gone. However, her next step looked strained, "I think I know what it is to carry heavy things now," she chuckled.

"Wyatt, try to stay alive. You do not want to vanish like that hare..."

"Very funny, Crysta. You don't have to run fast Lina. We are just trying to get to the stream after all," Wyatt's voice was genuinely concerned or at least that's what Lina thought she heard. It was still going to take some getting used to.

The girls couldn't decide whether he was being himself or not, 'Perhaps he hit his head and is now suffering partial amnesia... or a personality mix-up that will be fixed the moment he recovers,' Crysta whispered over the mind link. The princess chuckled.

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The trio made it to the stream as dusk was approaching. Just as Crysta had suggested, the stream came from the mountain where the slopes were smoother. They could climb the mountain from its shores, however, where it led was only half their journey across the mountains. They would have a harder time traversing the treacherous terrain from there.

With time they realised the river was winding through the mountains, picking the smoothest parts of the slopes and leading them deeper into the dizzying towering ranges.

"Sometimes I forget that these mountains are mentioned in plural," Crysta groaned inwardly as they continued jogging upstream.

“Why can’t we use any other paths and have to follow the stream alone?” The princess suddenly asked. They had noticed several other paths leading away from the river as they ran through the ranges.

“Because every other path will eventually lead us to a dead end, just like this stream eventually. The only difference is that this river leads us to the highest point of the ranges which will then allow us to cross to the other side. You can think of it like the river flows out of the mountains through the only route that’s sure to get the water out of them,” Crysta explained.

Dusk eventually came with night creeping close behind. The trio stopped running to rest. Fortunately for them, they’d found somewhat of a wide flat clearing in the side of the mountain that allowed them enough space to raise their tents. It was the perfect place to rest.

At this point, they were bordered by two very steep walls on both sides of the river that gave them only two directions to follow... straight ahead or back where they came from.

They didn’t have much firewood but just enough to cook their meal and have a sumptuous dinner. Wyatt, for once, had not complained about getting tired, which was why Lina got worried when he wouldn’t get up thirty minutes after they had stopped running.

The alpha remained in his wolf form and closed his eyes resting. While Crysta got the campfire going, Lina knelt next to the white-soled black wolf, “Perhaps I underestimated you.”

The black wolf opened his eyes to look at Lina for the first time since reaching their temporary camp, “I’m a lot stronger than you give me credit for,” he said weakly over the mind link.

With his condition, they weren’t words he ought to have said but his pride wouldn’t let him look weak in front of the same person he had spent years mocking. She was the one who was much stronger than he’d realised. He only wondered how Crysta noticed her strength before any of them had.

She was always so weak and frail. Barely able to stand up to any of them. Her slender wolf was nothing like the strong alphas everyone was used to looking up to for strength. But for some reason, everyone had grown to respect her regardless of this.

There wasn’t a wolf in the royal capital faster than her.

“I wasn’t talking about your physical strength. I’m afraid you’re reluctance to train has left you below your best in that department,” Wyatt was shocked by her words.

He was definitely insulted, but now also curious to hear the rest of her explanation. If she’d known how weak he was all along, what else was she basing her statement on? To him, he couldn’t look more pathetic...

‘Yeah, that’s the word. I’m... pathetic.’

Chapter 437 Not Some Wind of Change

“What are you talking about?” Wyatt gave her a wolfish grin. Curiosity suddenly filtered into his mind, along with wonder... ‘Did she hit her head or something?’

When Lina started explaining, his thoughts vanished.

“You’ve been tired for a while now. I could see that but I still pushed you to keep following. Honestly, I thought you would be more of a burden and complain about it.

But you remained quiet and endured it all without losing your step. You didn’t slow down once even when a normal person would have simply collapsed from exhaustion. You’ve made it this far. I’m grateful for that... and impressed,” the girl explained.

“I still had some energy...”

“Don’t lie... I might just push you harder just to see you collapse for real,” the princess sighed, “I want to make it to the Great Arena more than anything. But the moment I realised I had the two of you with me, it wasn’t just me running anymore. I have been paying attention.

I know when you’re actually tired and when you’re simply pushing past your limits. To push past one’s limits, one doesn’t require any physical strength. At that point, there is none of that left in the tank. All that’s left is pain and weakness.

Strength loses meaning and what keeps them going is no longer a matter of how strong they actually are. The more they push themselves, the harder it gets no matter who they are.

A single step bears the weight of a hundred. At that point, the strong and weak reach a line that clearly defines them. The will to keep pushing past their limits. That is the strength that can keep someone fighting even when their bodies have completely given up...

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To me, that’s true strength. Anyone can claim to be able to handle themselves in a fight but most would rather avoid the fight entirely. You pushed past your limits in ways even I’m yet to achieve and for that... I am impressed,” Lina finally went silent after speaking.

The alpha’s thoughts started to swirl. Was this kind of thinking even supposed to be valid? The werewolves were a community that ranked its members on strength and their ability to protect. This was the same thinking they’d used to put Lina down in the past.

And yet, what she had just said to him made all the sense in the world. It wasn’t like him to do something that would exert him as much as he had done today. Wyatt felt much more pain than he was letting them know. His muscles were sore and burned like hot coals but he wouldn’t let them know.

At first, he didn’t want to be embarrassed by showing weakness but knowing that Lina had known all along changed everything. “It doesn’t really matter. I couldn’t stop moving. I got myself in this situation in the first place.”

Lina chuckled at this, “Do you think Bree would have fared any better? Or do you think she would have persevered as you have?”

This question struck so many cords. He was being compared to the common werewolf... and it was making sense. Bree was ready to travel across the world for her alpha. This was loyalty...

This was... strength.

The man turned to Crysta and noticed the same kind of devotion. Crysta was tired as well. No doubt about it... but all she had done this whole time was complain about how she was slowing down the princess and even then, she was trying her best to do even better. She was pushing herself beyond the limits of a delta.

Hearing Lina speak like someone more experienced than him irked him a little bit, but the resemblance she now bore with her lost sister made it look like she was trying to fill her shoes... and she fit them perfectly.

Lina was insanely fast and had monstrous endurance, no doubt it was the same endurance her sister bore. A question formed within his mind, one that was entirely beside the point, "You sound so much like her... Insanely strong, stubborn and strong-willed, yet soft, painfully kind and considerate. Can I ask you something?"

Lina nodded.

"Who was faster between the two of you? I remember the two of you racing before. You were identical. I was never able to figure out which of you had won."

"Oh, that... yeah, Katie was definitely faster than me that time. But then again, she had that ability that allowed her to change her wolf to look more like mine. If she didn't have that, she wouldn't stand a chance," Lina chuckled to herself.

Wyatt tried to dismiss what the princess was trying to say to him, but it proved impossible. It was nothing like he found himself to be. He didn't want to help this princess win the Trials as much as those that followed her.

His reasons for having joined this party were still his and his alone but he'd never thought the princess would end up complimenting him like some sort of humble devotee.

Even then, he felt something shift deep within his cold being. The princess had just expressed her gratitude towards his actions. He'd done something worthwhile in his life. Something the princess could genuinely thank him for. And he liked being appreciated. His muscles still burned... but now, it was more bearable.

It was worth it.

"I will admit that at the moment, you... along with Crysta are much stronger than I am. But don't mistake that for some sort of wind of change blowing through your little fantasy world.

Wolves are strong and strength is what matters to our kind. It's why the deltas were never given the power to rise above the alphas and why the alphas don't have the power to rise above the royals. It's just how it works," Wyatt shifted into his human form and walked away from the girl. His leg had a slight limp to it, indicating more injury than he liked to show.

When Lina turned to him, Crysta gestured for her to stop, adding a slight bow to her request. Lina found that the show of submission made her more accepting of her request, only proving Wyatt's point. Which is why she wouldn't accept it.

“Werewolves are social creatures. We survive in packs and a pack is only as strong as its weakest member. How can you not see that? When are you ever going to start acting more like an alpha and less like a brat?” Lina yelled at him.

She might have looked like Katie but her patience was thinner... a lot thinner.

“Oh? Do I act like a brat to you? Or has the time with those weaker than us really made you that blind to the way things work?” Wyatt spat, “Don’t answer that. This conversation is over.”

Lina wanted to argue... to smack the man for his one-track mind. Were all men in power like this? No, Lina knew that wasn’t the case. Her brother wasn’t like that. He was... Lina couldn’t find the words. Drake hadn’t exactly been himself.

But before his change, he’d been... kind, considerate and caring towards everyone.

Why couldn’t Wyatt see that he was wrong about everything? That his misconception about their society didn’t get him more followers but got him hated by his subjects instead. Even if he was never demoted by his sister, he would have made the worst alpha in history with his attitude.

She wanted to drill the lesson into his mind. To make him understand the part about him that was so repulsive that Katie had taken away his claim to becoming his father’s heir. When she took a step forward, Crysta abandoned her place around the setup for the campfire and embraced Lina.

‘No, Lina, you cannot attack him. It will only prove his point,’ Crysta tried arguing through the mind link.

‘If I do nothing, he learns nothing at all either. I have to tell him just how stupid he’s acting and beat it into his thick skull,’ the princess argued, gritting her teeth in anger.

‘That will only make him resent you more. You’ll look no different from him when he used to beat you,’ Crysta tried, ‘You’ll look no different from me when I used to...’

Lina’s impulses froze at that moment. Crysta continued to hold her friend, this time with a different reason to hold her, ‘It wasn’t violence that made me realise I was doing the wrong thing. It was you and your sister.

She never cared for the quarrels that were going on through the pack. She only looked at the bigger picture and in the end, she saved us back at that reserve when we were fighting each other.

And you... even after everything we did, you never once looked back on it all. Even when you gained the power and confidence to fight back. You didn’t. You just humbly moved on. It’s actions like that make a difference. You said it yourself.

In the end, strength doesn’t matter. Someone’s will to keep moving forward is what makes the difference between someone that’s weak and another that’s truly strong.’

Lina hugged her friend back, ‘There you go again. Saving me. What would I do without you?’

Chapter 438 First Watch

‘You’d be just fine without me. It is I who needed you,’ Crysta replied making the princess chuckle.

'I'll let this one go to keep us from arguing. You spoke of her again. Everyone still does... even when she was only around for a few short months. I know what my sister did. And it's that same unfathomable drive to save the werewolves and everyone else that got her into the mess she's in today,' Lina said, not withholding the venom that seeped into her voice.

The princess knew what Katie had done was reckless and had not earned her anything in the end. At the same time, she wouldn't have held Katie back if she got the chance. It's what made Katie who she was.

'And yet you've taught yourself to be more like her since the day she left,' Crysta responded.

It was getting harder and harder to beat Crysta's reasoning. Just like Honour, this girl provided Lina with a grounded way of thinking. One that would not allow her to blindly follow her instincts. She gave her an anchor that guided her every time she was about to slip.

Crysta was always there to help her, just like she had been back then... before they'd even learnt how to shift. Her reasoning was flawless.

Fighting Wyatt would only make him believe his own deluded words more. It would be the strong picking on the weak and the vicious cycle he was trying to preserve would never end.

The girl turned away from the alpha, breaking her embrace with her friend, 'Thank you.' She voiced through the mind link and got to setting up their tents.

There was a long silence as the three of them worked on preparing their supper and setting up camp. Lina set up the tents while Crysta lit the bonfire.

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However, when it came to skinning and field dressing the hare, the delta found her abilities somewhat lacking. Chuckling, Lina began instructing her in the art of preparing meat.

With the proper way of holding the knife and the proper technique figured out, Crysta was skinning relatively neatly like the fast learner she was in no time.

"No fair, that took me three whole nights to figure out," Lina grumbled.

"Well, you were a child when you learnt all this stuff, so I wouldn't complain about it if I were you," Crysta chuckled.

"Yeah, but still. Those were three nights of life I could never get back. Now, onto the field dressing. I'm glad you didn't forget the spices and salt. We'd be in trouble if you forgot that, especially the salt. Then again, we are werewolves. Our predecessors would call us wimps for depending on things like salt," the princess laughed before beginning her directions and explanations.

The lessons were so detailed that Crysta was almost sure the royal was making up half of it based on her own experience. Especially when it came to cutting up the meat.

Lina specified the different joints and weak points the knife was meant to slice through. They were so many and the instructions were so intricate that Crysta took a stab at doing it randomly.

When the delta tried cutting the meat wherever she felt was best, the knife vibrated upon meeting a very hard bone.

Lina chuckled at her impatience and even let her have a few more tries before the delta gave up and accepted the royal tutor's lesson. Wyatt didn't help with cooking supper that night and as soon as he was done eating, he bid them good night and slept quickly.

"What's his problem?" Lina asked.

Crysta knew the expression on the man's face all too well. It was one Lina would probably never understand. After all, the girl was nothing like the two of them. She'd been kind even before she was treated horribly, "He'll be fine."

Eyeing his tent a little bit more, Lina washed her hands off with water from one of their water cans and walked to her tent as well, lying inside with her head outside and propped against her hands, "Rest Crysta. I'll take the first watch."

"No, it's alright. I'll do it. You've been taking the first watch ever since we started this trip. Let me allow you to rest first," the delta shrugged.

"I take the first watch because the two of you get far more exhausted than I do. And even when you try to take over for me, you end up sleeping on the job. I would take the whole night, but even I have my limits," Lina argued.

"Your limits, huh... Doesn't feel like you were made with one of those," the delta sighed, "I'll take the first watch, Lina. If you feel like I need to rest so much, you could let me even rest longer."

The princess narrowed her eyes at the delta, "That's very sneaky of you. Alright then. Wake me up after four hours."

Crysta smiled in relief and watched her friend vanish into her tent, "Good night, princess."

"Good night, Crysta. I'll let the title slide, just this..." a loud yawn came from the insides of the tents, "...one time." With that, everything went silent.

Crysta chuckled after hearing Lina express exhaustion for the first time. She was showing the first signs of getting tired since their trip had begun. Somehow, knowing that Lina was starting to scratch the surface of her limits bothered her more than she cared to admit.

The green-eyed woman watched over the camp until the light of their campfire died down. Her eyes took a moment to adjust to the sudden loss of light. Werewolves had incredible eyesight and were capable of seeing in the dark without much problem.

Their bodies also preserved more heat than regular humans which meant the cold would not be a problem for her. For now... Further up, she reckoned it would be a different story. The mountains got colder the higher they climbed and they still had quite the journey ahead of them.

Having no light would not pose the delta any problems with her sight. , but that didn't help her notice the gathering of yellow eyes that watched them from the steep slopes above.

Chapter 439 Catty Guards

Victor and his group of rogues had been watching in the darkness for a while as the trio set up camp. As Victor had predicted, the tired wolves would make camp at the exact spot most suitable to rest. Almost every other spot along the river was too narrow for them to set up a tent... let alone three.

There had never been a moment, except when Victor had seen the mountain pass come down on the Prince of Sirius, that he didn't feel as incredibly lucky as he felt right now.

Not only had he brought down one royal but he now had the chance to bring down another. He felt like the luckiest person on the planet at the moment. After bringing down the prince, his assumption that he'd be satisfied with his revenge had proved negative.

The hunger for revenge felt like it was only starting. He now wanted to take what the prince cared about just like the prince had done to him. He wanted to kill the princess as well.

'At this rate, I could even put an end to the one King Rana fears so much. The one they call the Rogue Killer,' he mused. His dreams tasted sweeter with each passing moment.

The wolf next to him nudged him out of his reverie and he returned his attention to the situation at hand.

The amber-eyed wolf and his cronies were inching ever so closer to the camp, making sure to keep silent. The delta that had been left outside the tents was starting to nod off... her eyelids getting heavier with every second.

Crysta's neck seemed to struggle with the weight of her neck and keeping conscious was becoming a battle worse than anything she'd experienced so far through the Trials. The delta had underestimated how exhausted she truly was.

As the night wore on, Crysta grew even sleepier and it seemed like she was going to give up this fight.

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When the dosing girl finally swayed beyond normal and was on her way to hitting the ground, she caught herself and jerked awake. Crysta shook her head in disbelief and ran away from the camp.

Opposite the great wall of the mountain that shielded one side of this convenient camp was the freezing cold stream.

This was one source of cold that even the rogues feared to touch.

Nevertheless, this girl plunged her hands into the icy water, jolting every nerve. Proceeding to do something even crazier, she splashed this freezing water on her face.

Victor's amber eyes widened in shock, 'That's some scary resolve she's got... but no matter... she's far too tired to keep it up much longer.'

The rogues watched this routine happen a bit longer before they started to get bored of it. Instead of falling to the ground in a heap of exhaustion like Victor expected, the delta always managed to pick herself up and jolt herself up with one painful splash of icy cold water to the face.

They could watch this forever and never be able to accomplish their goal. Fortunately for them, a pattern soon made itself clear. A moment of weakness arose right before the girl realised she was about to drift asleep... right before she jolted herself awake.

At that moment that Crysta was meant to tip off her oscillations, she fell completely into the clutches of sleep, completely oblivious to every sound out of the ordinary... and Victor had noticed.

The soothing sound of the river sped up this process even more.

'For a slight moment before she chooses to douse herself with that ridiculously freezing glacial water, she is completely unconscious and her guard is down,' Victor thought to himself. This is what he planned to exploit.

The other rogues didn't understand his intentions at first. Without the ability to use the mind link, they could not convey messages. So instead, they chose to follow his lead.

The wolf they were following might have been insane but he was getting the most done compared to what the rest of the rogues had in over a year.

When Victor was getting ready to leap out of his hiding place and carry out the bloodthirsty plan that formed within his mind, he felt a paw scratching his side.

At first, he ignored it but then, it kept coming. Something was bothering him. He pushed the rogue beside him away, 'Can't you see I'm trying to do something here? While the rest of you have been seated doing nothing, I have been coming up with elaborate schemes such as this one,' his thoughts echoed within his mind.

'Ugh, one of the downsides of not being in a pack. It might feel like I'm going insane sometimes but being unable to use the mind link also has its upsides. Like no one is reading my mind or emotions every time they feel like it. That lack of privacy was really starting to get on my nerves.'

The other wolf couldn't hear thoughts and therefore continued to nudge him... slowly getting frantic that his superior was not even sparing him a glance.

Victor, losing his patience and finally seeing his opening, leapt out of his hiding place and started the dash toward the dosing wolf.

Halfway to the girl, a guttural growl filled the silent air, draining all life out of his system and replacing the rushing excitement he'd felt with cold fear.

The rogue planted his paws into the ground and brought his dash to a skidding stop. Then he looked up.

Raised not more than three metres above the camp was a stone ledge sticking out of the steep mountain side and on this ledge stood a menacing beast. A mountain lion was standing with its eyes pinned on Victor.

Curiosity mixed with fear. He had no idea how he'd missed the presence of the ferocious beast and now that he was attacking the wolves, he was more curious as to why the lion had made its presence known just now.

There was more prey... 'These palace pricks are practically sitting ducks,' he mentally cursed, 'Why in the moon's shadow would the lion be looking at me? And why...' his thoughts were stopped by another bone-chilling roar, this one much louder.

Another roar came, however, it wasn't from the same lion. He looked up and found that numerous figures of the same species were standing with their eyes trained on him. 'Many of them... But they don't hunt in packs.'

The lions bore their menacing teeth and snarled at the werewolf. Their claws extended and scratched the stone beneath their paws making their aggressiveness fully known to him.

Victor took one uncertain step back... almost worried that he might step into the river.

The first lion jumped down from its perch and started a slow cat-like walk towards him. The wolf took another step back but the lion wouldn't take its eyes off him. Fear filled him to the core as he wondered what the lion was thinking, 'I won't bother your meal again, okay? I take it you already have plenty of cronies to share it with,' Victor thought to himself. At times like this, he felt a mind link that allowed him to talk to animals would be priceless.

'Just devour the girl like you intentionally planned. I won't get in your way,' he mentally cooed. In his mind, he smirked, knowing full well that the campers would not survive the ordeal, whatsoever...

The lions were easily thrice their number.

What happened next, however, ripped the smile off his face... maw all at once. The lion stepped past the dosing girl without paying her a moment's notice. The lion didn't even bother to check if she was looking at it.

Victor took more steps back and snarled when he noticed the lion completely lower its guard around the girl. Its back completely turned, he was now sure this lion did not view the girl as a threat at all.

In fact, two more lions dropped from their perches and surrounded the girl in what looked like a protective circle. Fear mixed with rage, he couldn't do anything against so many creatures of the wild.

But still... all of this was wrong... all wrong.

Chapter 440 Between Scylla and Charybdis!

Amidst the ensuing chaos, Victor's window of opportunity finally came to an end. The delta started finally lost her balance and started to tumble.

If it wasn't for being in his werewolf form, a wide grin would have formed on the rogue's face. Now the girl was going to wake up and alert the lions of another presence they needed to worry about.

Perhaps the lions had stopped paying attention to her because she hadn't been conscious.

The creatures hadn't been paying attention to the sleeping girl, but maybe they would pay attention if she was still unconscious. The retreating rogue started to see hope in getting slaughtered along with the royal's bodyguard.

Crysta caught herself just in time like she'd been doing, embarrassment washing over her. She'd been doing the worst job of keeping watch ever in history. It seemed she was making a habit of disappointing her alpha. While her intentions were pure, her results were less than admirable. 'I'll have to apologize to Lina when I wake her up. Speaking of Lina...'

Her thoughts were cut short at the sight of a furry beast in front of her. A feline tail swished slowly swivelled in front of her face. The delta was going to scream but caught herself when a snarl to her right forced her attention.

Crysta looked around and found that she was completely surrounded by the one creature they had dreaded the most since they started their journey through the mountains, 'I hate it when Wyatt is right.'

She wanted to wake Lina up through the mind link, but looking around, the lions were far too many to take down. Maybe Lina had some trick up her sleeve that could help them even the odds. Maybe...

Her fear was soon replaced by curiosity when the mountain lion that had forced her silence turned away from her and paid attention to something else. Crysta could almost swear the lion was trying to divert her attention to something else.

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The delta followed the lion's eyes and found that all the lions were paying attention to one thing... or three, to be more exact. Three wolves with amber eyes stood baring their teeth at the lions and snarling.

Crysta was about to ask what they were doing when she noticed the consistent dirty grey fur on two of them. The signature coat that every rogue got once they joined the rogue king.

The one in the middle of the other two was only slightly turning grey. He could only be someone new to the rogues.

On rare occasions, a normal wolf would join the rogues and their pelt would undertake a slow transformation until they bore the same colour as the rest of the rogues... A sign of losing the moon goddess's favour. The delta's eyes flashed green in anger... 'A traitor.'

Shocked by her own disregard for the numerous lions that surrounded her, she turned on the rogues and bared her elongated canines at them in a threatening attempt at a half shift. A guttural growl finally mixed into the ranks of mountain lions.

She couldn't quite get the half shift done like Katie but she could at least disfigure her appearance and appear threatening by baring her elongated canines.

The lions roared in response to her own growl significantly increasing their animosity towards the rogues. The lions clawed the ground in challenge, as though waiting for an order.

Clearly outnumbered by a pack of normally solitary mountain lions stalking them, the rogues turned tails and ran uphill.

Lina left the shelter of her tent just in time to see the tail of the last rogue disappear around a bend. The mountain lions paid the girl no heed and ran after the rogues in a frenzy of growls that would chill anyone they pursued to the core.

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Victor couldn't tell how long he'd been running uphill. His sense of fear didn't allow him to stop running. He ran as fast as his legs could carry him and so did the wolves that were with him.

They ran through the night, listening to the roars of mountain lions in the distance. Knowing the lions ruled the entire mountains kept them running through the night. The rogues ran so hard that they didn't notice when they hit the icy cold of the mountain's top.

Victor was almost shocked when they started going downhill, the icy top of the mountain long forgotten. He'd barely felt the cold while he ran. His fear of meeting his death kept him going, along with the fact that he couldn't explain what he'd just seen with his own two eyes. The girl had stood amongst the lions without a care for her life.

The delta had stood with the creatures of the wild... solitary creatures and she had threatened to attack him with all of them as a whole. It was a terrifying sight that wasn't going to leave his mind for a while.

It didn't make sense to him at all that the lions ignored the campers completely. It was almost as though the animals were being controlled by the delta, but he couldn't believe this either. Not after the scared expression she'd shown when she woke up.

Had she been surprised they were there or had they simply disobeyed her orders by coming down from their perches? Nothing seemed to be adding up. They weren't supposed to be working together in the first place... To protect one group of carnivores from another.

This was a violation of nature's laws.

His mind churned with different theories as to what he had just witnessed, but he wasn't certain of any of them. He'd heard of people that could speak to animals but that girl didn't seem like it either... or did she? Nothing made sense to him at all.

When he searched his mind, he realised the mountain lions had been stalking this camp for a while. It made no sense for them to simply watch over the camp, no less group together to do it. Something wasn't adding up.

When Victor finally ran out of breath and his adrenaline faded, he, along with the two rogues he was with, had made it to the bottom of the mountain and were panting wildly under the cover of the trees.

He was no longer capable of thinking. His mind was muddled by the pain from his screaming muscles. It was only now that he was feeling the effects of running through the snow at the top of the mountain.

Panting heavily, a paw nudged the rogue's side. 'I'm tired, for crying out loud. What now?'

This time he heeded the warning and turned to his comrade. The wolf tapping him had gone pale if wolves were even capable of doing that. Fear was written within its eyes which were glued to something ahead of them. It was like before... 'If it turns out to be one more lion, I'm going to...' his thoughts froze. Suddenly a pack of lions wasn't so bad.

Victor had turned to face their newfound danger and found himself paling as well at the sight before him.

Through the trees right before them, he noticed a large mass of fur. At first, he couldn't make out what it was in detail, but he didn't need to get any details to know he was supposed to be scared.

The rough estimate of the size of this creature alone was enough to make him take a step back. His first thought was, 'A bear?'

Although Bears didn't possess black and white fur. Something was wrong with this one. Taking a step closer, the rogue froze as the creature turned and continued its rhythmic breathing that told them it was sleeping.

Victor relaxed when he realised it was asleep and let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. He soon came to curse this decision. For it was the slightly loud sound of him breathing out that stirred the massive creature before them.

From one side of the large black-and-white mass, a massive white head turned in their direction, allowing Victor to finally see what it actually was. Against his better judgement, the creature that now stared at them was clearly... a wolf.

'Not even beta alphas and royals shift to that size...' his thoughts were cut off when the wolf furrowed its brows and rose to its feet. Its eyes were still closed but somehow that didn't matter. Simply hearing his next-to-silent breath was enough to tell him that this creature didn't need sight to know where they were.

The wolf's senses were sharp enough to wake it up from a deep slumber just by hearing the sound of his breath. He needed to see its eyes for another reason entirely. 'Why does it look familiar... why do I feel like he'd seen this wolf somewhere before? I would remember if I saw a towering giant of a werewolf somewhere...' Victor's thoughts continued to string.

Towering over them with a size that was clearly twice that of the largest bear was a black and white wolf with a maw large enough to snap him in two with one bite.

As soon as Victor had taken the first timid step back, the wolf opened its bright blue eyes.