

Chosen 491

Chapter 491 Spitting Image Of The Luna

The match had only just begun and the Sirius team had scored one basket, earning them 2 points in the race to make eleven. They weren't far ahead but with an opening that flashy, the crowd had tipped in their favour and any more points they were to score would considerably boost their momentum and damage the Lycaon team's morale.

What was worse was that Lina hadn't revealed the height of her abilities in the game yet... which kept Cole on edge, 'When did she even learn to play basketball?'

The question, considering how she was Katie's sister, felt rhetorical in some way. If Lina was going to be the spitting image of the Lost Luna, then basketball simply came as part of the package.

Jason passed the ball back into play from behind their hoop.

At the moment that the ball left Jason's hands, the two werewolves felt a sudden shift in the atmosphere, as though they'd already lost the ball when it was right in front of them.

Cole rushed forward and grabbed the ball tightly, making sure to hold it in place as though it would vanish. When he was confident of his grip on the ball, the pressing aura vanished. Everything seemed to be just fine.

'Did I just imagine it?' Cole asked his beta alpha through the mind link.

'No, I felt it too. The opening that was about to be exploited,' Jason sounded uncertain.

This didn't make much sense and yet the fear was clearly there.

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Lina and her team were already on the other side of the court, preparing their defence against them.

"Be on your toes. They've got another trick up their sleeve," Cole called out, alerting Bella to get serious.

Cole's team distributed themselves well, trying to steer clear of their marks. Each time the ball left Cole's hand—even when it was simply bouncing off the ground and back into his hand—the same tense fear gripped him again.

It felt like the moment the ball left his hand, he'd given it willingly to the enemy.

It wasn't until he locked eyes with Lina that he realised just where this pressure was coming from. The princess wasn't moving about the court like the others since she was his mark and therefore meant to stop him.

There was a dangerous air to her stillness...

"Someone's been training," Cole said, before crouching low and increasing the speed of his dribbles.

Lina's eyes followed the ball intensely but she never once made a move to swat the ball from him. Her lack of movement unnerved him. He wanted her to fall for a feint or at least make a move... but she wouldn't.

Cursing, he looked to the side for one of his teammates.

Like a steel vice in his heart, his fear gripped him once again. This time, his fears came to fruition... for in the next moment, Lina had vanished right in front of him.

He'd only taken his eyes off her for a second... and that was enough for the princess to completely vanish. The ball he bounced never made it back to his hand.

When he did turn around to give chase, he was met with the sound of the buzzer and the scoreboard switching to 0:4 in favour of the Sirius team.

He turned to his teammates and noticed something unexpected. They'd been completely shut out from following Lina, almost as if they had anticipated an opening like this.

The two werewolves were on the wrong side of the semi-circle the defence was supposed to occupy, keeping Jason and Bella from making a recovery.

It wasn't just Bree, Lina or Crysta as individuals—well, they each had their strengths and weaknesses for sure— but the whole team was made of extremely talented werewolves that seemed to be in perfect sync.

'They are not alphas though... Why?' Cole found himself asking this question as he jogged back to their side of the court.

Jason gripped the ball with his hands and unconsciously twirled it on his fingers, "Are you okay, Cole?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Why would you ask that?" Cole barked.

"I'm not pointing fingers. Believe me... It's just that, I couldn't follow her. Even though I watched everything," Jason mentioned, "Pass to me... and pay close attention. I get the feeling we can't beat Lina one-on-one."

Cole decided to lean on Jason's rationality to form a solid plan. The blonde rushed forward after giving Cole the ball, switching sides with Bella to throw their marks off while they searched for an opening in the opponent team's defence.

Jason was a powerful beta alpha who almost never lost his cool... almost.

But that didn't make him invincible and that limit was soon approaching...

Or perhaps he'd already hit that limit.

Cole wished he could soothe the beta alpha's aching heart and fan the flames of his spirit back to the way they used to be... but that wasn't as easy as it sounded.

Jason was always the jolly type that strove to put a smile on everyone's face in any way that he could. At first sight, he was simply someone that liked cracking jokes...

But if that was the case, then Jason would break this routine but he never did... even when Cole knew he had no reason to smile.

The king had never seen him crumble even once. It didn't matter how bad his situation got.

He was also the only person—other than Cole— that wasn't the least bit intimidated by Kyle, which was a powerful achievement all on its own.

Cole snapped out of his thoughts as he saw an opening for Jason. He thrust his hands out towards Bella, only to bring the ball back and throw it to Jason.

Even without Lina showing many reactions to his dribbling, there was a slight likelihood that she wouldn't be able to avoid the temptation of intercepting his passes with her insane speed.

A smirk formed on Cole's face when he noticed the princess shift her weight towards Bella, only to brake as the ball was thrown in the opposite direction.

The king would have been happy with this development but the lack of surprise or shock on Lina's face only made him realise something...

They weren't out of the woods yet.

In three swift dribbles, Jason had gotten around Crysta. His breath was erratic, indicating just how much he'd strained to pull off something like that. Crysta, also turned, seemingly unfazed by the sudden burst of speed.

Everything seemed to slow down for Cole, allowing him to feel the sheer intensity of the game and his heart pounding loudly in his ear. Jason didn't take three steps away from Crysta before a pair of blue eyes appeared before him.

The alpha had to grit his teeth to keep himself from crumbling under the intense pressure rolling off Lina's form. That, along with the small amount of foresight that his experience with the game had earned him.

Before Lina could steadily mark him, he let the ball fly, bouncing right by her foot and straight into Cole's waiting arms.

Lina turned almost instantly and nearly staggered back at the sight of Cole soaring through the air, airborne and a metre above the ground. His target... the hoop, was unguarded.

Lina's team could only watch as Cole jammed the ball into the hoop. The buzzer rang out, announcing the Lycaon team's first score.

The crowd that surrounded them erupted in applause from the brief seconds that had just been witnessed. This little friendly game had turned in a demonstration of power in a matter of seconds.

"Kyle, get in here," Cole yelled as the Lycaon team jogged back to their seats, "Bella, sit this one out for me."

Bella clenched her fists in frustration but marched off without a word.

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"They are good!" Kyle stood up from his seat after watching the short few seconds that the game had gone for. He could already feel his body get flooded with the adrenaline of a challenge.

"Do you think you stand a chance?" a feminine voice asked from his right.

Honour was standing with Madeline on the sidelines. For Madeline's comfort, Honour was standing between the two of them, working as a shield to keep their situation from getting weird.

Unfortunately, her presence made it even harder for the two of them to talk which felt like a miscalculation on her part. Honour had assumed Kyle would speak up even though she was around but to her surprise, the man remained silent.

It was already clear that he had stepped off the court just to talk to Madeline.

"Of course, we stand a chance. If anything, this just got a lot more interesting. Close wins are the most exciting ones. A win where your opponent fights with all they have. It's always fun to go all-out on against a strong opponent," Kyle mused enthusiastically as he walked up to the centre line.

He shook hands with Bella and stepped onto the court, getting into her position.

'Kyle knows how to make this complicated...' Honour sighed. To her side, Madeline was fidgeting with her thumbs, keeping silent for the longest time Honour had ever known her to be.

Her eyes stayed pinned on the beta alpha of interest... and her thoughts remained a curious mess.

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It was barely a minute since the start of the game and the pressure was already this intense. Despite Cole's play, Lina smirked mischievously, "What are you happy about, Lina?" Crysta chuckled.

"We can win, Crysta. It's a nice feeling," Lina shrugged.

Bree got the ball and stood behind the hoop, "You think I could score one?"

"Oh yeah, definitely. Do you want the next one?" Lina asked.

"You're not seriously making such a decision now. It will make the game infinitely harder," Crysta whined.

"Think about it, Crysta. They've brought Kyle back in. That means they are scared. And if we can decide who gets to score and make it happen, then they'll realise just how much of a handicap they are in," Lina explained with a mischievous smirk on her face.

Noticing the awkward pause by their immobility, they switched to speaking through the mind link as they started the game. Bree passed the ball to Lina and the two girls ran ahead to face off against the Lycaon defence while Lina jogged calmly.

"Lina, I know what you're saying... but they brought Kyle in. From the little we watched earlier, he's good. I would say he's more dangerous than Jason in this situation. That sneaky giant probably tapped out to get a chance to talk to Madeline," Crysta replied through the mind link.

"You might be right. In that case, Kyle's your mark the next time we're on defence," Lina announced through the mind link.

For now, Lina noticed Kyle marking Bree and Jason still stuck to Crysta.

"Will you be okay, Bree?"

“Yes, I will,” the amber-eyed wolf replied with a rush of determination that didn’t reflect her situation on the court.

Kyle was much larger than her and given his astonishing speed and reflexes, he had the capability to mark her tightly with no gaps for her to receive the ball.

Crysta, on the other hand, seemed to be an equivalent match for Jason... which still came as a surprise that Lina humbly dismissed from her mind.

As expected, the blonde beta alpha seemed to be expending a minimum amount of energy against Crysta. His eyes depicted thought... fast thought as they darted about the court, seemingly in calculation.

“It’s all futile,” Lina chuckled out loud, dropping low and dashing straight for Cole.

At that moment, Cole’s body betrayed him... freezing with a massive wave of nostalgia. There were many things that could have put him in this state. The explosive burst of speed that nearly blurred the princess out of reality stunned the prince... but that wasn’t all.

The sheer inability to stop Lina’s drive...

Everything about her form was perfect and frighteningly precise, leaving no openings. The speed she’d used was nearly unimaginable... and in every way, nostalgic.

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For werewolf kind, this was borderline impossible. The princess of Sirius was incredible.

But to Cole, in the moment that she’d started her drive. Her sapphire orbs had glowed with intense sparkle and determination that he’d gotten accustomed to a long time ago... and the look of bliss as she went against strong opponents.

Coupled with the striking resemblance to the Lost Luna, Lina Sirius had completely assumed the character of his mate, stunning him all at once.

For a brief moment, Cole could have been playing with Katie...

If it hadn’t been for the odd shuffling sound of sudden movement to his right, Cole would’ve stayed like this... Lina wasn’t going for the basket as he’d initially thought.

Chapter 492 Bag of Tricks

Cole watched as Bree weaved around Jason, feigning a move to the right before pirouetting completely around the alpha and dashing forward from his back, outside of his line of sight.

Jason’s focus disoriented, there was now a wide opening in their defence.

Jason already had a terrible experience with the nimble wolf... and watching him get completely outmanoeuvred once more did not bode well.

Bree was dashing forward a short while before the ball landed straight in her hands as though she’d expected it.

Cole turned to block her and collided with Lina. The princess planted her feet on the ground, blocking his way to the amber-eyed wolf. On his other side, Kyle started a dash to close the gap, easily accelerating beyond what Crysta was capable of.

Bree, however, seemed to notice and stopped her run before making a vertical jump with the ball above her head, aimed at the hoop in perfect form.

Her ascending motion seemed like a scene out of a sports anime, like a slow-motion shot that would never miss, landing a point at the last second.

Cole stepped back and attempted to side-step past the princess since he was closer to Bree. He could still make it.

The ball left Bree's hands and sailed effortlessly through the air.

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Just as Cole thought to make the jump that would intercept it, Lina stepped forward and invaded his space. If he tried to push through, he'd hurt her... but Cole could already guess that this was the point in her strategy. Attempting another sidestep would earn him nothing.

The Lycaon team's players watched as the ball sailed straight into the basket.

"Are you going to start taking us seriously? Sooner would be better than later," Lina giggled before jogging back to her side of the court, ponytail happily swishing.

The buzzer had already sent the crowd into a frenzy of applause in favour of the Sirius team.

Jason jogged to the back of the court and held the ball firmly, "They are tough," he mumbled, trying to think of a way out of this situation.

"Got anything, Jay," Cole asked.

"Well... I can think of something... but it only helps us when we're defending. I haven't figured out a way to get past their defence yet. With Lina's speed, it's almost like they'll always be several steps ahead.

From what I've seen, Crysta is the least active. Like something's holding her back. I can't imagine what that is... but for now, she's their weak link, weird as that sounds. I'll be happier switching marks with Kyle.

That little devil totally got me that last time... It's like she's faster with her eyesight," Jason mumbled.

Cole chuckled, "She must really get on your nerves."

The beta alpha passed the ball to Cole and the conversation proceeded within their minds. Cole made sure to send his voice to both of his teammates so Kyle wouldn't be left out of their planning.

"They have the raw power... That's for sure. But that's not all one needs to win a basketball game. There is much more to that than simple speed and agility. So I will ask that you all get your heads in the game. We can win this. Don't make it seem like the team of three alphas is weaker than a team with only one."

With that said, the three of them faced the Sirius team once more. Lina, like before, watched Cole's every move, her eyes glued to the ball, "Someone's watching me like a hawk."

She didn't reply... Her focus was seemingly impenetrable...

Now that he'd had some time to relax, he knew what had happened earlier. And with much more clarity. He knew why fear kept gripping him as if he'd already lost the ball and yet it had gone nowhere.

This was simply the princess's determination and conviction towards getting the ball. Every time the ball seemed to be within her reach and she was confident that her speed could reach it with no problem, she released an intense aura that was impossible for Cole to ignore.

It was... intimidating. Even for a royal.

But now that he knew that, the prince had an idea.

Everything seemed calm for a moment before it wasn't.

Lina's arm swept forward for the ball at a speed that still stunned everyone no matter how many times they'd seen it, only to grasp at nothing. A smirk appeared on Cole's face as his left received the ball, creating an opening at the princess's left side.

At the moment that Lina had struck, Cole had anticipated this as anyone would after playing the game a lot... and in that dribble, he'd made the ball faster than she'd gotten used to, throwing off her timing.

Then again, Lina was capable of getting the ball even without needing to time it like normal players. She was fast enough to get it without having to do that.

But habits were hard to break...

The princess planted one foot in front of her to brake and turned immediately, missing once more as the ball bounced right next to her feet and into Cole's right hand on her other side. This time, recovery was even harder and the prince seemed to be making his way for the basket.

With that much of an opening, anyone would have panicked, trying to cover the wide gap in hopes of preventing the point from being scored.

Lina's high speed and reflexes allowed her to recover in record time... however she was right on time to see Cole passing the ball to Jason, who'd gotten around his mark, Crysta.

The delta had no way of recovering to help the princess which meant Lina would have to stop Jason from making the point.

To her everything was moving slowly and smoothly... and yet for some reason, the ball seemed to fly when her body was going in the opposite direction or right past it.

Something felt off...

She rushed towards Jason, her eyes darting to a winded Crysta for only a moment. A moment too long and one that was enough for the ball to sail right past her ear, whistling a cruel tune and heading right into Cole's open arms.

The prince made his way forward with no one in his way. Lina braked hard on the court, only to trip and tumble across the court. Then watch helplessly as the king sailed through the air, propelled by the insane jumping power his werewolf strength allowed him.

On the other side of the court, Kyle wore a smug expression as he blocked Lina's last hope of making it to Cole in time, Bree.

Kyle hadn't involved himself in the play.

Instead, he'd cut off one of Katie's allies and created an opening for Cole to make the point.

The buzzer roared with the sound of the hoop being slammed by a five-foot-ten-tall alpha.

The crowd had erupted into chaos long before the prince made the basket, marvelling at the athleticism presented to them by the very monarchs that ruled over the two empires.

"Yeeeahhhh," Jason yelled over the sound of the applause. It seemed the game was starting to get interesting. Lina was barely winded... but she didn't feel so confident anymore.

She felt... excited.

Against her incredible speed and reflexes, the Lycaon king had managed to score a point and make it look effortless, "You still have a ways to go. But I think you'll be getting better than me in no time too."

"Oh, shut up, Cole," Lina spat, remembering the same words she'd said about Kyle. The king was strong... probably stronger than any wolf Lina had ever met—with the exception of Katie Sirius.

That was still an ongoing internal debate.

And it seemed Cole was only starting to prove what kind of strength he had. "Lina, are you okay?" Crysta asked through the mind link.

"Yeah, I-I guess I got cocky, didn't I?" the princess replied.

"We're still in the lead. We can still leave them in the dust. This game has only just begun. Later on, it will start depending on who has more stamina... and I know yours is nearly limitless. Don't lose hope yet," Madeline tried soothing the princess.

The game had only just begun... and yet the pressure was thick and they felt like suffocating. Cole hadn't shown any signs of strain during that play... which scared Lina even more. Could there be more untapped power that the king was harbouring to himself?

She almost missed the ball when Bree sent it to her hands, putting the ball back in play and bringing their minds back into the game. "We have to make up for this game."

This time, when they attacked, something felt off. Lina wasn't facing off Cole anymore...

Standing at the centre of the semi-circle that surrounded their hoop was none other than the colossal beta alpha, Kyle. Kyle's arrogant grin was gone, replaced by a look of intense concentration.

Lina thought she imagined it when part of his curly hair extended down the middle of his head... 'An attempt at a half-shift?' she wondered.

She couldn't say for sure... but she also couldn't shake the weary feeling that invaded her senses.

'Let's get this over with,' she thought as she suddenly accelerated. With her speed, getting past someone wasn't hard. Even Cole couldn't keep up with her...

And it was this kind of thinking that left her stunned when Kyle suddenly appeared in front of her, blocking her way completely. The princess dribbled the ball through her feet and spun to get around him... but when she turned to make a break for it, he was there.

Despite his size, Kyle was fast, quickly covering any opening the princess made before she could even utilise it.

"Lina."

The princess turned and passed the ball to Crysta who'd just got clear of Jason at the right moment. The delta made it back outside the large 'D', allowing them to re-assess the situation.

Lina moved out expecting Kyle to follow, but the big guy stayed behind, keeping to the space around the hoop... 'A Zone Defence. With Kyle near the hoop like that... Damn it. How many cards do you have in your bag of tricks, Cole?'

Lina muttered under her breath as the ball sailed back to her hands. Jason stayed diligent in marking Crysta that she barely got a chance to get past him. Bree seemed dangerously overwhelmed as well with Cole rendering her nimble efforts useless with his agile covering abilities.

"Lina, can I suggest something?" Bree's voice suddenly invaded her mind.

After a very short mental conversation, the princess smirked and dashed forward toward Kyle before abruptly bouncing the ball to his right.

Lina marvelled at the look of surprise on his face as Bree appeared out of nowhere, grabbing the ball in her hands. The amber-eyed wolf didn't bounce the ball and instead pushed off the ground with all her strength... aiming for the hoop.

Kyle was in for a shock when she launched far higher than ordinary wolves should have been capable of. "So that's what she is. Frightening."

The confirmatory tone in his voice struck a chord of curiosity. 'Bree's normal right? She just trains extra... just like Crysta.'

She didn't have much time to think about this as Kyle leapt into the air as well, heading into the air for the aerial battle which he was bound to win. When he was about to touch the ball in the girl's hand, she pulled it down and sent the ball back to the princess.

Lina wasted no time jumping as well. The hoop was open. With Kyle stuck in the air and the other members of the Lycaon team preoccupied, there should not have been a way...

She gasped as the ball suddenly tipped out of her hands, forced out by an external force. She locked eyes with Kyle who wore a smug smile on his face.

The large beta alpha had arched his back and reached back in time to tap the ball out of Lina's hand. And even worse, the ball landed in Cole's hands... as though he'd expected.

The chase back to the other half of the court was cut short when Cole launched the ball into the air when he'd barely passed the centre of the court, scoring a solid 3-point basket...

This not only allowed the Lycaon team to catch up, but it also put them a point ahead.

The crowd was a roaring mess.

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Sirius 4-5 Lycaon

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Chapter 493 Must be Going Senile

Caden brought his car to a stop inside a hospital parking lot and turned it off, sighing with contentment. Peaceful, quiet and private... A rarity for the king's stand-in.

Ever since Cole and the other beta alphas had left for the royal games, running the kingdom had automatically fallen upon his shoulders.

Bracing himself for his next order of business, he stepped out of the car and took a few looks around to confirm no one was around before he lazily stretched his arms.

'That morning drill is bound to kill someone. Right... let's get this issue over with.'

Walking out of the parking lot, he was greeted by a timid man dressed in a green uniform. The man was of average build for a security guard but in the presence of a beta alpha, he was just another man.

And his nerves showed just how aware he was of his weakness.

Caden had long learnt to ignore that reaction.

"Beta alpha Caden, you have our gratitude for gracing our humble establishment with your presence."

"Yeah yeah, just show me the way," Caden sighed.

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"This way, sir," the man timidly turned and started a jog up to the hospital.

"Are you going to make me run?" Caden didn't notice his voice go up when he asked this... until the man flinched.

"I'm sorry... Isn't this an emergency?" the man asked.

"Just show me to the lady I spoke to over the phone. She said the situation had been contained for now," Caden sighed. This man bowed timidly once more and apologised profusely before leading him to the reception.

At the double doors admitting them into the hospital, a scent invaded the beta alpha's nostrils. It was sweet and calling out to him... but just as it had come, he rubbed his nose and completely shut it out, "Do you grow strawberries nearby?"

"Uh... no," the man replied with a hasty tone, "But we can get you some if you need any. A quick run to the supermarket and you could have them in under ten minutes."

"No, never mind," Caden sighed.

'I must be going senile,' the beta alpha thought to himself.

Reaching the receptionist's desk, he noticed a blonde woman, standing with her eyes glued to a notepad, scribbling a few words onto the pad of paper. A stethoscope was draped around her neck and the labcoat she was wearing seemed to suit her very well.

Not to mention the glasses that seemed to enhance the intelligent gaze. The sight of this woman deep in thought seemed to be a sight for the ages...

'I found the First Wonder of the World. Talk of Effortless Beauty,' Caden's mind sang.

As he followed the beta alpha, he noticed the security guard was taking him in her direction. For some reason, that made Caden anxious.

'Me, a beta alpha, anxious to meet a woman. You live as long as me, you're bound to meet a couple of anomalies...' he inwardly chuckled at his own joke.

"Uh, Miss Catherine... I, uh... brought—"

"Oh, thanks Cal, I can take it from here," the woman spoke, her words sounding like a waterfall of pure caramel in Caden's ears. Like a river of honey flowing down a crystal waterfall. Like a—

'Yeah, definitely going senile.'

The woman dismissed the timid security guard, turned to Caden and flashed him a bright smile, "It's a pleasure meeting you, Alpha Caden. This way."

She placed down the notepad and beckoned for the alpha to follow as she led him deeper into the hospital.

Caden followed, the image of the nurse's smile getting carved with utmost detail into the deepest parts of his brain, 'I've seen a smile before, right?'

"Thank you for coming on such short notice. We deeply appreciate it," the woman snapped him out of his... questionable thoughts.

While she had a smile fit for a goddess, the beta alpha had also noticed the colour of her eyes. The nurse had a pretty set of hazel-brown irises that seemed to reflect more light than they should have.

She was human.

"Oh, no problem. How long has the patient been like this?" Caden asked the nurse leading him through the plain white-walled building with only a few portraits here and there.

“Sh... She’s been showing this erratic behaviour since we brought her in. At first, she was having seizures so we gave her the required medicine and they seemed to stop but after a while... the medicine stopped working... and something else started happening to her.”

“What happened?”

“I think it’s better if you see for yourself,” the nurse, scrunched her eyebrows, as though unable to explain exactly what she had witnessed.

She led the man through a steel door that led down a staircase to a clandestine bottom floor. This entrance was positioned at the back of the hospital. A place one could only get to after several turns through the convoluted maze of halls and with prior guidance.

The door had three locks, each of a different kind and the smell that hit Caden’s nostrils once he was inside was an assortment of medicines, poisons... and blood.

It was similar to the smell that was to be found in the hunter’s torture chambers. Only this one was a lot less pungent and there wasn’t a hint of wolfsbane.

The beta alpha got a face mask that was handed to him and followed the woman to a large glass pane. The glass was opaque when they walked in but at the push of a button, it became transparent and exposed what was on the other side.

Caden froze...

The scene inside erased all his half-conscious thoughts of picnics and the secret room’s sanitation that lingered in his mind.

His first assumption had been that this was an experimental facility where the doctors were experimenting on werewolves but the woman they had come to see was a human who had gone out camping when she got attacked.

There were three doctors inside, surrounding the hospital bed with looks of concern written all over their faces. Their eyes were glued to the restrained person lying in the bed. Caden didn’t know what to think of the peculiar situation at first.

The woman was bound from head to toe in chains. The sheets that could be seen were stained with blood and shredded from what looked like claws. Thankfully, the woman seemed unconscious.

The machine that detected her heartbeat had been silenced but the visuals were left there to show what was going on within her body.

At that moment, the heart spikes were starting to get sharper, shifting from the calm heartbeat of a person sound asleep to someone stirring awake which explained the concerned looks on the doctors surrounding her.

‘I have a bad feeling about this,’ Caden thought to himself, feeling his stomach twist in knots.

“What happened to her?”

"I was hoping you could tell me what's going on. This woman... she 'was' human. Now I don't even know what she is. Werewolves are aggressive but not... mindless."

"How did you manage to secure her? I didn't see any hunters on our way here."

"If it hadn't been for the restraints we put on her while she was having seizures, she would have torn through every last living thing in this hospital and even then, she nearly escaped. We don't have hunters here.

This is a public hospital that deals with only human patients. And with everyone going off for the Royal Games, there was no one to spare for this hospital."

"Was anyone injured?" Caden asked.

"A few doctors were injured when she was trying to escape. Alpha Caden, what is the meaning of this? The king mentioned it would no longer be possible for humans to be turned into werewolves," the woman asked frantically.

Unfortunately, they were out of time before Caden could reply. The chains rattled... and the woman woke up.

When the chained woman arose, her amber eyes locked on the alpha's eyes through the mirror. The two of them locked eyes for a moment before she grinned, revealing a pair of sharp canines nearly thrice the length of normal human canines.

She was the mundane type of werewolf and yet the report he'd read from the king's office suggested something else, "That's not the colour you said her eyes were..."

"I know... She's also lacking one more pair of canines in her upper jaw," the woman added to the information, rubbing her temples to massage the incoming migraine.

"You're suggesting she was bitten by a royal but no one has seen the Rogue King in nearly two years. If she was out camping with hunters, then they wouldn't have missed his presence," Caden tried reasoning.

"I don't know the details of how your society works... Hunters and Werewolves... Rogues and Royals... I only know how to treat humans. My degree doesn't stretch into the Supernatural. When I see my patient start to grow canines and go rabid like a dog, I'm reduced to nothing more than a worthless human that can't defend herself."

"How many were injured?"

"Two doctors and one of the male nurses. If it wasn't for my colleague bashing her head with a fire extinguisher, you would be looking at mass murder—"

"ALPHA... CADEN..." Caden turned to the deep voice that had just rumbled through the room, interrupting the nurse's words.

The voice rumbled loudly and commanded power. Fortunately, it was a power that the beta alpha was resistant to.

A power that belonged to a royal that had no control over him. The doctors surrounding the woman took a few steps back. The woman turned to the people walking away from her, "OH, DON'T BE AFRAID OF ME. AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO MAKE ME BETTER?"

"What are you?" Caden whispered, his words of curiosity aimed at no one in particular.

The woman's face snapped to his, displaying awareness.

She'd heard him.

Caden held back a breath as he noticed a significant change in the woman's appearance.

Her eyes were no longer the harmless amber he had failed to fear. They were now a deep crimson...

'How does someone's eye colour just change on a whim?'

"OH, ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT MY BENEVOLENT VOICE WOULD BE ENOUGH TO TELL YOU WHO OR WHAT I AM?" the voice echoed.

The voice was so out of place that when the woman opened her mouth to speak, it felt like someone else's voice took her place. The voice that escaped her small delicate lips was nothing like it should have been.

It was the voice of a killer... the voice of a predator, the voice of a bloodthirsty tyrant. Nothing like the person it came from.

Knowing that it became hard to even perceive the deep voice as coming out of the woman's mouth. And as a result, it sounded like the voice came from everywhere but her.

"IT IS I, THE ROGUE KING... AND MY GRAND SIEGE ON THIS WORLD... HAS ALREADY BEGUN."

Chapter 494 First Shift

Caden watched the crimson-eyed woman writhing violently against the metallic hold of the steel chains. The chains groaned against her terrifyingly powerful efforts, going so taut that it seemed like she would break them. Just when it looked like they would snap, however, the woman would run out of steam and try again.

For now, they held.

'My attack on the world has already begun,' the statement bounced through Caden's mind. It meant so much that the beta alpha was having trouble grasping the true meaning of these words.

His mind didn't want to come to terms with what it could mean but for some reason, he felt compelled to jump to the worst possible conclusions. 'It can't be, can it?'

His hand instinctively flew to his pocket when his mind link failed and latched onto his phone.

At the same time, he remembered how it had been impossible for him to reach Cole from the palace. It wouldn't work here either.

'I thought it felt familiar that communications had been cut off,' he sighed.

"Order those doctors to get out of there now," Caden told Catherine with a slight hint of urgency.

“What! Okay,” the woman placed her hand on a button and spoke through the microphone.

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“Get out of there now,” she yelled.

The groaning of metal chains filled the room as the woman in the bed continued to struggle against her binds. Caden’s hand flew to the same button and this time, he spoke through himself, “Get out, now!”

One of the metal links snapped in two, the pieces shooting off in random directions and a chain burst loose from the ensnared woman. She let out a loud growl and gave the chains another powerful push, struggling to break free.

A door clicked at the side of the glass pane and the three doctors filed out as fast as they could, “Lock that door.” Caden ordered and they did.

Caden turned back to the woman and noticed the chains would get any looser than they’d been. The doctors had done a good job of securing her with more than one chain. When the previous one shattered, it hadn’t necessarily meant the woman would break free. She still had plenty more chains to break.

The crimson-eyed woman stopped struggling against the chains and switched to cackling madly, “There is nothing you can do to stop it, poor beta alpha. I have many... many pawns I can use in this war. Just how many places can you be at once? How many people can you save at once? I will watch the world burn and the goddess’s original wish will be fulfilled.”

Caden turned away from the room, “This room is to be sealed off and a dose of wolfsbane sprayed into it to keep that werewolf weakened.”

“That’s a human,” Catherine argued.

“Not anymore. I don’t know how but she’s not a human anymore,” Caden argued. There was so much that didn’t make sense and the fact that the woman had suddenly been turned into a werewolf was only the least of his suspicions.

For starters, she had sounded like the Rogue King and gained a ridiculous amount of energy the moment her eyes turned red, which was meant to be an impossibility all on its own.

Caden didn’t have time to worry about that. His mind was racing faster than ever in his life, “You said there were other doctors she injured earlier. Where are they? Were they bitten?”

“They are...” the woman’s voice got caught when she realised what the man was insinuating by asking these two questions, “You don’t think?”

“Hurry, please. Lives are at stake.”

“Okay... this way,” Catherine hurriedly led the beta alpha away.

Before walking out, Caden turned to the other doctors, “When you’re done securing this room, start evacuation procedures. I’ll need your help.”

“Evacuate the hospital? But...”

“Not just the hospital. The Crisis Bunkers! Get as many medical personnel to those shelters and inform everyone you can go there immediately. There, you and your fellow colleagues will receive further instructions that I’m going to relay to the pack doctors right now,” Caden ordered.

“Get as many patients as you can out of here and straight to the shelters.”

Caden’s words carried heavy meaning. The Bunkers had come to be known by many names but intuitively, everyone knew what they were for.

In case anything like the battle of Lycaon for two years was to happen ever again, these Bunkers were to help protect the masses.

Caden had just skipped several levels of alerts and gone to the absolute extreme, the pinnacle of panic... and he’d left no room for debate either.

Caden followed Catherine through the hospital, ‘Jogging would be better right now.’

Catherine approached a red button in a plastic case and flipped it, sending an alert through the hospital and red flashing lights. From her pocket, she retrieved a phone and started dialling numbers and relaying orders as she led the beta alpha up a flight of stairs.

Caden remained silent as he voiced his own orders over the mind link broadcasting his voice far and wide, exceeding the boundaries of the Capital as far as he was capable.

“WOLVES OF THE LYCAON EMPIRE THAT CAN HEAR ME. THIS IS BETA ALPHA CADEN SPEAKING FROM THE LYCAON ROYAL CAPITAL.

AS OF RIGHT NOW, EVERYONE IS ORDERED TO MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE WORLD SHELTERS THAT WERE RECENTLY BUILT BY THE HUNTER’S ORGANISATION. THIS MESSAGE IS TO BE PASSED ON TO THE HUMANS AS WELL. I ASK THAT WE TAKE THIS INFORMATION WITH CALM MINDS AND FACE THIS SITUATION AS ONE UNTIL IT IS RESOLVED.

BEFORE ENTERING THE SHELTERS, THERE WILL BE A MEDICAL CHECK AND EVERYONE IS TO COOPERATE. PACK WARRIORS, PROTECT THE PEOPLE AND REGULATE THE SITUATION UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. EVERYTHING WILL BE EXPLAINED WHEN EVERYONE HAS BEEN PROPERLY SECURED.”

After saying this, the beta alpha opened a private mind link with the pack doctor, “Something’s wrong.”

“No kidding. What was with that cataclysm-class announcement?”

“It’s complicated.” Caden sent images of his encounter with the captive human, along with the words of the Rogue King to the pack doctor, “I’m on my way to check three doctors that were attacked by this woman earlier to confirm my suspicions. From what she said, I can only assume the worst.”

“But... where could she have been bitten from?” the doctor asked.

“There is no time to make assumptions. You can already imagine what the worst-case scenario is like. Draw up a set of guidelines that everyone entering the shelters should undergo before they are allowed in and have those orders relayed to all the medical personnel. From what the Rogue King’s voice said, there could be more just like that woman.”

“Understood,” the woman replied before going silent.

Caden had kept his communication as short as possible whilst following Catherine through the large facility. Catherine, on the other hand, had her hands full as well. They climbed a few flights of stairs, passing swarms of rushing doctors and patients before she finally came to a set of isolated rooms on the top floor.

These rooms seemed undisturbed at first sight. This is why Catherine was shocked when Caden suddenly caught her hand and pulled her back to the stairs.

“What is it?” the woman asked, frightened by the sudden actions.

Caden stood still and placed a finger on her lips, straining his ears, oblivious to the reddening doctor. The two of them remained like this for a bit while Caden waited patiently. He almost relaxed when his ears picked up on a low growl, “They’ve turned too.”

Now more than ever, Caden was happy that he’d told the other doctors to run out of the containment room while they had the chance.

“Seriously?” the woman cried.

“I’m afraid so... Are those doors locked...” the creaking sound of an opening door stopped Caden in his tracks, “Oh, never mind.”

“I’m sorry!”

“It’s fine. No one expected you to know. This is not your fault. Stay behind me,” with that said, Caden advanced, leaving the woman by the stairs.

The beta alpha strained his ears to locate the three doctors.

From the open door, a hand grabbed onto the side of the door, exposing a set of elongated claws. A doctor staggered out of the room with his face already shifting uncontrollably and disoriented with the throes of his first transformation.

Caden noticed the man’s eyes were still amber. “What’s going on?” the doctor asked, clutching his head in pain.

The beta alpha rushed over to the man and hit the back of his head, hard, “I’m sorry but you need to take a nap.” The alpha then proceeded to push another door shut before the second victim could emerge.

Caden turned to the woman, “Come and help me lock them up. That will buy us enough time at least.”

The female doctor shakily replied, “I-I don’t have the keys.”

“Oh, that’s just great,” Caden grunted before opening the door and entering the room.

On the other side of the door, the wolf was already going through a full shift. The wolf lay on the ground writhing in pain as its body went through the harrowing pain of the first shift.

“Sorry about this,” Caden whispered before placing his hands around the wolf’s throat and squeezing tight. The wolf struggled, opening its eyes wide to look at its assailant.

However, Caden’s iron grip didn’t falter and he held the wolf steady until the male passed out. The beta alpha had just sighed when he heard a desperate scream from the hall.

His eyes got tinted with red fury, his heart threatening to pound out of his chest while his mind came up with all sorts of worst-case scenarios. He was out of the room in a heartbeat.

Out in the hall, a wolf was stalking the female doctor who bore a frightened look all over her face as she stared at the creature, “Over here,” Caden growled, his canines flashing dangerously.

The wolf turned swiftly, baring its teeth at the new arrival. Now it was torn between two targets. One was frightened and trembling in fear while the other oozed confidence and rage, eager to put him down.

The wolf snarled at the alpha and began to circle him.

‘Amber eyes...’ Caden thought to himself, trying to make a connection. The woman before had not turned violent until her eyes shifted from amber to red. This wolf was not yet dangerous... exactly.

It was dangerous in a way that the two empires had managed to get rid of for more than a century. This wolf lacked... control.

The wolf had only gone through its first shift. Without knowledge of how to control its animal instincts, this wolf was a danger to any and all that crossed its path.

In this state, it would even be unable to recognise its own parents and given the right conditions, would tear them to shreds.

Caden shifted into his larger coffee-brown form and let out a growl loud enough to shake the halls of the hospital. The amber-eyed wolf facing him cowered at the might of its opponent, tucking its ears and retreating to the room from which it had emerged.

And among those instincts came the ability to identify a werewolf with significantly more power and rank.

Caden then shifted back into his human form and breathed out a sigh of relief, “Are you okay?” Catherine stiffly nodded, still shaken with fear, “Go and get the keys. Then return with them so we can lock them up.”

The woman did as she was ordered, left and quickly returned with a set of keys and got to locking the doors. Caden stood at one door and watched through the small glass window as a restless wolf paced around the room, “How long are they going to be locked up in here?”

“Hopefully not too long. Preferably till this matter is resolved. Until then, I will send someone to bring them food and water three times a day. It is not much else we can do other than that,” Caden replied.

“So that’s it. They are prisoners now?”

“They are lucky to be alive.”

The alpha's words hit the mark. Knocking out the rampaging wolf earlier had been a chance and it was a blessing that these three doctors had retained mere bites and scratches because of it.

In a worse situation, all doctors involved would have been killed by the wolf which would have proceeded to rampage across the city, killing any and all that came across its path.

They were indeed lucky to be alive... and had no right to claim to be prisoners. This was for their own good and for the good of those that were still human.

Chapter 495 Mystery of the Disappearing Rogues

Over the course of the next twenty-four hours, Caden was swamped with a ton of work. Interfering with the daily life of the entire empire was no simple thing.

What was more was that he had to spread this information across the two empires to ensure a total world lockdown.

For the sake of everyone's safety, he had to do it.

It seemed like he was acting rashly at first, but after a few phone calls, he came to the realisation that the same thing was happening in many other places.

There seemed to be violent incidents similar to his description going on across the two empires, random acts of aggression which were followed by feral transformations that had—until only recently— been considered a thing of the past.

It went without saying that he had to deal with the whiplash that came with this decision. Offering solutions to each and every problem that was sent his way took a toll on him... but this was what he'd been training his mind for.

Caden stood at the entrance to the dome-shaped shelter that was meant to house the civilians from the capital and nearby packs through this crisis, overseeing the procedures.

The medical officers were meant to check everyone for identification, which was followed by a check of their bodies for any signs of bite marks or high fevers, checking them for signs of transformation before they would then be allowed to enter the Bunker.

Inside the Bunker, they would then be assigned living quarters, and if capable, duties to allow the smooth running of the facility through these tough times.

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Numerous citizens stood in line waiting to be tested and checked by the nurses and doctors. Thanks to the pack warriors, the situation was easier to control.

'I hope they manage to get communications back in order on time,' Caden thought to himself.

After hearing about the lack of communications with the Great Arena, the remaining hunters had been sent on their own dangerous mission to get communications back up. Despite everything that was happening, Caden was yet to see a real threat... which he hoped he wouldn't get to see.

The citizens' essential luggage was labelled and taken in while the people themselves stayed behind for registration and check-up.

Caden could already feel the pressure of dealing with all that was happening. Families didn't want to be separated, young children found the drastic changes and tense atmospheres too frightening.

Short-tempered residents argued and called him incompetent and unreasonable. Business managers felt they were going to lose everything because of all this... and made sure their disapproval was heard loud and clear by the imposing beta alpha.

'It's funny how the weak ones feel entitled to order around the strong,' he mentally scoffed.

It was only when this commotion was getting out of hand that the beta alpha walked to the front of the line, 'Some of us have work to do, families to come home to at the end of the day and relatives in the hospital. We can't afford to hide out here for goddess-knows-how-long.'

'I can't stay here for this long. I have to visit my niece two packs over.'

'What's all this about anyway? What's the proof that we are in any real danger, to begin with? This makes no sense at all.'

'This is what happens when you let children run a nation. They don't have the experience or knowledge to properly handle this situation. Businesses will fall. Lives will be lost in all these shenanigans. Did King Cole even authorise this? The king would never allow this to stand,' a woman wailed.

Negativity fueled more negativity which resulted in chaos. The sound of crying children didn't help either.

Caden watched it all with an oddly calm expression. Taking in a deep breath, the beta alpha called out to everyone, infusing as much power as he could into his voice and broadcasting his voice through the mind link as well, "May I have your attention please?"

The crowd grew quiet at the boom of his voice and turned to face him, "I know most of you are panicking but I ask for your patience as we get through this difficult time."

"How long are we going to be in there?" a man yelled from the crowd.

"Until this matter is resolved," Caden replied firmly.

"And how long do you suppose that will take?"

"If we all cooperate, it will be over before you know it," before the man could react, Caden raised his voice, "I know you're all scared, worried, frustrated, angry... Frankly, I'm not happy about this either. It's not easy trying to protect people who feel they know better when all you're trying to do is keep them from getting murdered... or worse, turned into rogues. I won't stand by and watch as my people get murdered. I will do what I must to ensure your safety."

That said, I will get straight to the point. Rogues were sighted yesterday. And they were sighted within the capital, not outside. That's why we are going through this check-up. Before going into the shelter, everyone will be checked for Identification and bite marks."

“Bite marks? What’s that got to do with anything?”

“We’ve been led to believe that the rogues have regained the ability to turn humans into wolves. If we all...”

The crowd was thrown into chaos once more as the frightening information finally registered in the brains of the citizens. At this point, the slow progress they’d obtained was all but gone.

“This is hopeless,” Caden sighed. The crowd seemed even harder to control now.

“Alpha Caden?” a female doctor—who Caden was more than happy to assist—called out to him from the large entrance.

Caden left his place on the raised table and approached the woman. The beautiful blonde was wearing a mask, leaving only her beady hazel eyes exposed and standing on the other side of the table was a man with shifty amber eyes, “What seems to be the problem?”

“This man won’t show us his ID.”

“Don’t you know who I am?”

“Oh? I currently hold the position of Acting King. Who might you be?” Caden asked the man. The amber-eyed werewolf snapped at the alpha with an angry scowl. Cole raised a brow in suspicion.

This was a first.

“I am the manager of the Goldsville hotel. You dare to treat me like a commoner. I ought to have your license revoked for this,” the man was fuming.

“What’s a man as important as you doing without some form of identification?” Caden asked the man. The man furrowed his brows in frustration before reaching for something in his coat. From the pockets, he retrieved a plastic card, “That didn’t seem so hard now, did it?”

The two males waited as Catherine typed the names into the computer, “Not another one!” she sighed.

“What do you mean?”

“His registration dates back to less than two years ago. I’ve seen two others like that but they had convincing alibis so I let them through...”

“Less than...” Caden’s eyes widened and flashed a bright crimson as his wolf violently surged forward.

The suited man noticed this behaviour and backed away just in time to avoid Caden’s clawed swipe at his face. This small advantage lasted a short time before the beta alpha had the man pinned to the ground, “Find the others you let inside. No one with that kind of identification will be allowed through.”

The nurse shuddered at the beta alpha’s words and darted into the shelter to find the other people she’d let in. “What is the meaning of this?” the ‘manager’ growled.

“Less than two years ago... How many of you are there?”

For a moment, Caden was convinced the man would not let his facade fall... that perhaps his assumption had been completely wrong and he was mistaken.... that perhaps this man was innocent and there weren't rogues amongst them.

But there was no better explanation.

Nothing else made more sense other than this theory. The rogues had been silent for a really long time which was supposed to be impossible. The hunters' Flush-out plan had failed except for finding a few breeding homes. This man's existence made more sense than any conclusion they could have come up with in the past few years.

The man whose face was firmly pinned to the gravel chuckled darkly... "Just how many of us do you think you'll find? How many do you think will have died by the time you find us all? It's futile. You've already lost."

Caden's blood went cold in an instant upon hearing these words. However, that was not all that made his blood go cold. While the man spoke, his hands started giving more than simple resistance. His biceps were bulging beyond what they should have been capable of.

The man's voice was getting deeper and slower as he spoke, filled with malice, murderous intent and... power. To top it all off, his amber eyes were getting dyed a bloody shade of red.

With one powerful jerk, the suited rogue threw the alpha off his back and stood up, towering higher than he had before. The people that were recently arguing amongst themselves all scattered, fearing the sudden monster that had arisen from the crowd.

Caden had crashed into a thick pillar at the entrance, pain radiating through his back. Caden groaned, peeling himself away from the cracked wall and stretching his muscles to get rid of the stiffness that ailed them.

The recently obnoxious businessman had mustered so much strength that it probably rivalled that of a beta alpha. He'd not sustained any injuries but the measure of new strength this man had mustered was enough to give him chills.

The sudden increase in strength had caught Caden off-guard.

But now... something else caught his attention. In addition to the man's sudden transformation, a collection of wolves stood surrounding him, staring at them with dark smirks and snickers.

There were more of them...

Caden turned to a delta that was standing guard at the entrance and spoke through the mind link, 'Go and help the nurse that went in to find the other rogues. One scratch on her and you're as good as exiled. The rest of us will deal with the ones here.'

The delta's eyes widened in shock before he ran off as fast as his legs could carry him.

Caden stood with three deltas facing off against a force of ten that seemed to have materialised from the crowd. Even with this number of rogues facing them, something told Caden that they had barely seen the true number of rogues hiding within them.

The red-eyed rogue in a now-torn suit stared at the four wolves challenging them and tipped his head back, laughing in amusement, "Four of you... only. Really, do you underestimate me that much?"

The man's deep voice continued to strike all the wrong cords in the beta alpha's senses. 'You've got to be kidding me.'

Surely ten normal wolves wouldn't pose a threat to his skilled deltas. Then again, there was a deep-seated root of doubt growing within the beta alpha. The Lycaon pack had been training its citizens in the art of self-defense and teaching them how to fight.

Had these rogues also joined in those lessons?

And what was with this rogue's voice? His transformation had seemed so familiar to the one he'd noticed with the chained woman in the hospital.

Caden didn't have much time to think this through as the rogues launched straight into attack in a fashion much similar to what was taught by the Lycaon pack warriors.

'This might be a lot harder than I thought.'

Chapter 496 Outnumbered

Facing off against ten normal rogues would have been easy for the beta alpha.

He was a lot stronger now than he had been two years ago and the added power he got from becoming a beta alpha gave him a significant advantage over these amber-eyed werewolves.

Caden had challenged Alpha Duncan and Cross a few times in the past and they had shown him the vast difference between the power of an alpha and that of a beta alpha. He was no stranger to that difference and didn't even have much trouble adjusting to the well of power he gained access to when Cole became king.

Nevertheless, something felt wrong with this group.

They mirrored their stances with a familiarity that suggested they'd been training for this exact moment... or at least a moment similar to this one. The odds weren't looking good...

The rogues stared them down with mixed looks of hate, bloodlust and disgust.

Caden could already tell that the rogue with bloodshot eyes was far more dangerous than the average alpha.

After watching the red-eyed woman they left locked up at the human hospital, Caden had assumed he was safe and fine...

But now that he saw the transformation again, he realised that was only wishful thinking on his part. He couldn't draw conclusions yet but he could at least assume this transformation was erratic and could happen at nearly any moment.

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Was it so bad for the beta alpha to hope?

The rogue's deep voice already confirmed a striking similarity between him and the most dangerous werewolf in the world... the rogue king.

Then again, he didn't feel as powerful as the alpha they had faced at the reserve in Sirius nearly two years ago. Back then, a single rogue general had managed to overpower, Cole, Caden and Jason combined and make it look like a mere training exercise.

Caden wasn't sure if this abominable copycat was stronger or not. The way he held himself looked slightly unsteady... as though he wasn't yet used to his enhanced physical abilities yet.

Caden could at least confirm that they were in big trouble...

'Could be worse though,' he took a stab at self-motivation.

"Give them hell," Caden said over the mind link.

The leading wolf lunged forward and leapt into the air, claws extended, fangs bared in a stance so feral and primal to werewolves going for the kill.

His grotesque appearance was the perfect depiction of a rogue... the description they used to scare little children to keep them from wandering out at night.

This rogue was that perfect image.

Caden sidestepped and struck the wolf square in the jaw with as much force as he could muster, which was a lot for a beta alpha of his calibre. The crazed rogue flew a few metres to the side from the force of the hit rolling numerous times following the sound of crunching bone.

Caden was about to relax when the wolf got up on his feet and swayed lightly. The wolf tilted its head and faced Caden with a deranged mishappen smile.

Caden watched the man's jaw unnaturally reset to its normal position, "We didn't get to spar the last time... and I was right. My enemies have been getting stronger over the years. It's like you knew I would return. Anyway, it doesn't matter. You're just another obstacle that I must bring down."

"Another?" Caden asked, however, there was no time for questions.

The rogue blurred from vision. If it hadn't been for Caden's relentless training in the past several months, he would have failed to pull his head back in time.

Caden's back muscles bunched up instinctively, pulling him back just in time to watch a set of razor-sharp claws swipe right where his head had been, nicking a small cut in the side of his cheek.

The beta alpha wasted no time and took several steps back, dodging a clawing frenzy and synchronizing his timing as well.

When the next downward swipe, Caden stepped in and hit the man's wrist with the right amount of force to stun his hand.

The rogue's eyes widened in shock before a fist went connected painfully with the werewolf's gut. The force of Caden's attack pushed the wolf back several paces.

This time, he didn't wait for the rogue to recover and followed through, slamming the rogue's head on his knee. The previously pompous businessman staggered and dropped to the ground, unconscious.

Caden turned his attention to the other nine and froze. The small cut on his cheek was now closed and he didn't have a scratch on him. Even the pain of crashing into the pillar was all but a memory by now.

But the same couldn't be said of his comrades. Two of his deltas had been overpowered and knocked unconscious.

'They work fast!'

The situation had turned from hopeful to dreadfully desperate in a matter of seconds. He'd downed the most powerful of the rogues but the other deltas weren't as powerful as he was.

After all, there were two whole levels of power above deltas before they got to the beta alphas.

Alphas and their betas were stronger than the deltas, which meant the power difference was staggering. They were outnumbered and their enemy knew their fighting style. Caden didn't blame them for going down so fast but...

He was now seriously outnumbered.

Two of the original nine rogues lay on the ground, unconscious and bloodied. Three surrounded the last delta, growling and snarling at him while four turned from the unconscious alphas and turned to Caden.

The delta clutched his left hand which seemed injured and gritted his teeth in pain and defiance. Blood was dripping down his hand. Caden could only guess there was a large gash in his hand. His pain could be felt through the mind link and so could his defiance and unwillingness to back down.

Caden let out a loud growl that rumbled through the air and caused the air to hum. The humans keeping their distance had to cover their ears to protect their eardrums from rupturing.

Caden had lashed out as a way of drawing his attention to the rogues that were surrounding the delta. Despite the fact that he was facing his own group of rogues, he couldn't help but be distracted.

The delta was in worse shape than he was anyway.

Unfortunately, not all the rogues surrounding the man fell for this ruse.

Two of them turned their attention to the surrounded alpha, wondering what kind of death wish he had. While they weren't watching, the delta struck one with a full-force uppercut and clawed at another's throat, sending the maimed rogue tumbling in an effort to keep his life intact.

Caden was almost sure he heard the sound of crunching bone as the rogue who'd been punched sailed into the air. The beta alpha smirked and chose to use this confusion to his advantage as well.

The rogues surrounding him had also got dazed by his sudden outburst, growing warier. Perhaps they really weren't that qualified to fight the beta alpha.

Perhaps...

These thoughts were wiped from their minds as the beta alpha started picking them off one by one. Caden, despite his size, was full of explosive energy, a fighting style he'd copied and improved after watching the Lost Luna fighting.

He dashed forward, completely taking the rogue in front of him by surprise and struck the man in the gut so hard that he flew a few metres away. While the rogue recovered from a fit of painful blood coughs, Caden turned to another to his right and focused his weight on his left leg before swinging his right aiming for his side.

The rogue got down swiftly and brought his guard up, catching the alpha's kick in his palm. Caden backed away only to fall into the hands of two other rogues that were conveniently positioned behind him.

Were they still two though? The alpha wondered as a third presence struck the back of his knees and forced him onto his knees.

"You fight well... but not well enough. Not as frightening as a few others I've had the glory of meeting," the rogue that had caught his kick rumbled.

His voice was painfully familiar as well.

'I'm getting tired of this,' Caden mentally groaned.

Chapter 497 [Bonus chapter] A Familiar Face

Not just that, but all the rogues around were reacting to him now, acting as though they were his subordinates. The group had lost all manner of order when he downed the previous leader, but now something was off once again.

When he looked up, he noticed this rogue's eyes had changed colour to crimson... just like the one before him.

'Again?!'

Seeing it once, twice...

Caden felt he could ignore the fact that this was an anomaly. After all, he'd dealt with it both times... but now, he had the impending suspicion that this would keep happening.

And he couldn't deal with an infinite number of Rogue-King-infested rogues.

Caden pulled at the wolves holding him, easily overpowering them with the immense difference in their strength. They were weak amber-eyed werewolves who he could easily dispatch.

As he got up, a gasp escaped his lips and he was forced back to the ground. The sound of ripping fabric rippled through the air as something got buried deep into the flesh of his lower back.

The beta alpha froze and gritted his teeth, red fury staining his vision, "Will you keep struggling? You could hear me out at least. I'm not that unreasonable, am I? Someone as strong as you would be more useful to me alive."

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The rogues he'd thrown off him quickly grabbed his hands and forced him to the ground again. Caden could almost feel the mischievous grin on the face of the rogue that had stabbed him.

Gritting his teeth in pain, he heard the hoarse voice from his assailant, "These beta alphas are something else. I can already feel the flesh trying to mend itself against the knife. Haha! This is insane, even for a werewolf."

Caden ignored the rogue's words and turned his head to the last delta and noticed the man had also been knocked unconscious.

After watching him for a short while, he noticed the man's chest rising steadily. For some reason, the rogues weren't killing them... which was completely the opposite of what rogues were fond of doing.

"You're leaving them alive... why?" Caden barked.

"Oh, I think you know the reason for that," the rogue grinned, flashing an abnormal set of canines. The body that this abomination of a royal was inhabiting wasn't meant to hold that much power.

There hadn't been time for the natural transformation from a normal wolf to an alpha... or whatever rank the presence of the Rogue King's mind elevated the werewolf to.

As a result, the extra growth of canines had ruptured the gums and stained the teeth with blood.

Staring at this grotesque grin, Caden's mind made the connection he'd been trying to avoid. The reason people were suddenly shifting and acquiring the power of werewolves. It was starting to make a little bit of sense... and bringing even more questions at the same time.

For starters, shifting one's mind completely from one body to another, along with a large pool of power should have been impossible and that were only a few of the questions that plagued his mind.

"YOU..." Caden growled.

"Yes... me!!!"

"Why would... Never mind! It's pointless."

This was the rogue king after all. How he was able to inhabit someone else's mind and boost their power was a mystery all on its own but he had to be stopped.

"I'm glad we're finally on the same page. Now then, as I was say..." a loud screech cut the Rogue King short.

Under normal circumstances, anyone would have ignored a loud screech but the rogue king didn't.

The rogue turned around completely and gazed skyward, focusing on a creature soaring high in the sky with a look of frustration... "Not again!"

Caden looked up as well and noticed a solitary eagle soaring high in the sky. The alpha scrunched his brows in confusion. Eagles were powerful creatures capable of lifting even adult humans but they rarely interacted with humans.

Why would the Rogue King be bothered by an eagle soaring in the sky?

But that was just it...

There wasn't supposed to be an eagle in this part of the empire. Eagles kept to places closer to waterbodies like the reserve they'd visited in Sirius two years ago...

'Luna?' the beta alpha wondered.

It was a misplaced bird but did this eagle have to get on the Rogue King's nerves that much?

Caden was a beta alpha and the Rogue King had looked much more confident in front of him. He was so confident in his ability to dispatch the beta alpha that he had his whole concentration focused on the eagle in the sky... as though the eagle was a much more dangerous threat.

"My Lord, what seems to be the problem?"

"She's here... and that's not a good thing," the Rogue King replied.

"I don't follow," the rogue asked, confused.

The rogue king didn't get a chance to explain himself once more as another loud screech tore through the sky. The eagle suddenly tucked its wings and banked into a nosedive.

One eagle was a problem that could... if dealt with well, be solved with minimum injuries and the rogues hadn't found reason to worry... until a large symphony of feathers and winged began to hum loudly from the forest surrounding the Bunker.

The rogues shuddered with worry and started shifting their attention to their surroundings. The civilians had long since been pushed into a group aside, closer to the edge of the forest and protected by a formation of pack warriors.

The Rogue King growled at the eagle before turning to the beta alpha and baring his teeth. There was a glint of desperation in the rogue's eyes as he launched into a dash heading for the beta alpha.

Caden's eyes widened in shock. His instincts jumped to one conclusion. Caden was a hunter and knew what the face of a hunter looked like... be it a werewolf or animal.

'He wants to bite me?!?' he mentally screamed.

The rogue let out a bloodcurdling roar and leapt high into the air in a smooth arc aimed at the restrained beta alpha. His jump was well calculated and when Caden struggled against the rogues holding him, their grips got tighter and the knife in his back dug deeper.

'Screw it...'

Against his pain, Caden pulled his right hand with all his might. To his surprise, two rogues stumbled forward, overpowered... 'Two of them!'

Caden was being held down by five wolves but the beta alpha wasn't waiting to be bitten.

He would fight his way out. The knife in his back was pulled out only to strike his shoulder and force him back to the ground.

Caden grunted and looked up in time to see the airborne rogue collide mid-air with a plummeting eagle.

That moment of distraction was enough for the scene to get completely overwhelmed by a myriad of birds of all colours and sizes.

Pigeons, weaver birds, parrots, doves, eagles, owls, robins, sparrows... It didn't matter what creature it was... the birds descended on the humans and werewolves, leaving no one untouched... and just like in a scene two years ago, they sorted out the rogues and attacked them in a flurry of feathers, claws, talons and beaks.

Amidst the commotion, the clear sound of whizzing steel whistled through the air, followed by several more as a myriad of arrows flew out of the forest aimed at the outnumbered rogues. Caden felt instantly lighter as five arrows whistled past him and a myriad of birds flew past him and covered the rogues that had been restraining in.

From the dark cover of the woods, a black hooded figure walked out, bow in hand, effortlessly letting another arrow loose.

'Where have I seen this man before?'

"I'm glad I could make it in time, Alpha Caden. Long time no see..." the hood fell to reveal a face Caden never thought he would see again. The beta alpha's eyes widened in shock, relief and excitement.

Chapter 498 Wolf's Fury

The chaos from the birds, seemingly erratic, was well orchestrated to peel the rogues away from the civilians. Caden had witnessed this same occurrence back at his King's coronation and knew what would happen.

What he hadn't expected, however, was for there for Jeremiah to show up at the same time as the birds. His arrival felt too perfect to have been an accident. Nevertheless, Caden was happy to see his Luna's old friend after such a long time.

Something was different about him though. Whilst he'd smiled upon seeing Caden, his face was now set in a focused expression as he let loose one steel arrow after another.

When the hooded man aimed at one of the rogues, the birds would clear an opening and his arrow would sail through, downing the rogue in a single shot.

Even under the overgrown mop of black hair that tumbled to his shoulders and the stubble that had now grown to give him an older appearance, Jeremiah had a face that was impossible to forget.

Caden recognised him immediately and a plethora of questions assailed his mind but before he could ask any, the man yelled out—his voice, like everything else about him, sounded older too— "I'll handle everything out here. Hurry up and get to the ones that already went inside."

'Catherine!' a single thought gripped the beta alpha wiping the questions that surfaced within his mind.

Caden set his jaw tight and pulled the knife out of his shoulder. The wound was already starting to heal, finally unobstructed by the foreign metal that kept the tissues apart.

The beta alpha rushed into the shelter at top speed, deciding against shifting as it was bound to scare the civilians inside. As he ran through the open steel doors, he could hear Jeremiah speaking calmly at the top of his voice.

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“Nobody panic. The situation is under control now. You’ll all be settled safely within the Bunker in no time.”

‘Will they really listen to him,’ to his surprise, the chaos seemed to lessen, ‘Ugh, humans have always trusted hunters more anyway,’ Caden mentally grumbled as he rushed deeper into the establishment.

The bunker had been built to hold numerous facilities within it, from essentials such as toilets to storerooms and kitchens meant to hold food that could last a month at most.

It was a surprisingly large facility with so much to offer, with sleeping quarters numbering far more than anything inside.

That said, navigating this place would be hard. It was not like he could simply find what he was looking for by simply running through the facilities.

And since this was a facility that was rarely used, even Caden was unfamiliar with its layout. For some reason, it felt even harder than navigating the Great Colosseum.

He strained his ears in search of any signs of trouble. Using the mind link to try and track for any irregularities. Without direction, he wanted to use everything at his disposal to find the rogues.

He didn’t even know if Catherine had found them yet... or if the delta had been able to find her.

If they had noticed the commotion that was going on outside, then they were probably hiding somewhere in the shelter...

Caden wasn’t fond of playing a game of Hide and Seek but what choice did he have?

‘Asking around?’

The beta alpha looked around and thought it wouldn’t hurt to ask around. Perhaps the civilians had seen something amiss and spotted where the nurse or delta had run off to.

Wiping the look of worry off his face, he made his way to the first person he could see with the hopes that they’d seen a stunning doctor running around.

No one could miss her. She was like a flower that had been plucked from the Moon Goddess’s garden and placed on the earth for him to find.

‘Strawberries...’ he froze as a familiar scent hit him.

Now that he was catching that scent a second time, he didn’t need to ask what or where or to whom it belonged. He simply rushed off in its direction, weaving through the endless grey halls and facilities that covered the ground floor of the Bunker.

It wasn’t long before he heard the sound of a scream.

The scent had led him into one of the residential wings, filled with minimum-sized rooms aimed at maximizing the space on which they had been built in order to hold as many people as possible.

In one of the residential rooms, the scent of strawberries poured out, getting stronger the closer he got to reaching it.

Caden found the room from which it came locked tight. He could tell from the scent that the woman was panicked. Not being able to withhold his anger, as well as that of his wolf, he took a few steps back and came barreling at the door like a battering ram.

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Catherine had rushed into the Bunker as soon as Caden ordered her to and after asking around, she'd discovered that most of the civilians that had been let in, hadn't started settling into any of the rooms yet.

Some of them were waiting for the rest of their families to make it through the checkpoint at the entrance while others were simply getting used to the sudden changes that were happening in their lives.

That said, a few did tell her of a pair of men that, unlike the rest, went to look for a room to sleep in.

That's how she ended up walking through one of the residential wings in search of the two people that Caden wanted her to find. Could they have been rogues? Or was there something else the beta alpha wanted to know about them?

Questions swarmed through the female doctor's mind as she searched the rooms for the two men. Eventually, she opened a door and found them.

Seated on one bed facing each other were the same men she'd admitted into the Bunker, claiming they'd only been registered less than two years ago.

She'd found that information fishy but considering they had other workmates that could vouch for their day-to-day activities, they seemed legal enough. But why then, did she get the feeling that they were a lot more dangerous than she'd thought them to be?

"Is there something wrong, doctor?" one of them asked her.

"Uh, I'm not sure. Alpha Caden wants to see the two of you. Would you follow me out? It should only take a short while since you already passed the checkpoint," the woman told them.

"Oh okay," one of them responded. They made it to the door and stopped at the threshold, the taller one stopping to ask another question, "What's this about, doctor?"

Catherine took a step back and gave a tight-lipped smile, "He just wants to confirm you finished your registration correctly?"

"Hey, Bartrum, I think I don't want to see his Majesty's lackey anymore," the shorter one sighed.

"What about her?"

“Just grab her already,” as soon as this was said, Bartrum’s hand flew to Catherine’s and pulled her violently into the room. The shorter rogue closed the door and bolted it.

“Hey Steve, have you noticed?” Bartrum strained against Catherine’s struggles pulling her further from the door.

Steve stood by the door, checking through his bag for something, “Noticed what?”

“This is the same one. The same doctor that checked us on our way in. She smells good too. You think we could have some fun with her before disposing of her,” Bertrum chuckled.

With one hand clasped over the doctor’s mouth and another wrapped tightly around her arms, he sniffed the woman’s neck.

Catherine struggled even more, getting on hand loose. The rogue quickly let go of her mouth and grabbed the free hand. The doctor used that moment to let out a loud scream... if at all anyone could hear her.

The rogue quickly secured her hand once more and covered her mouth to muffle the scream.

“You scream really loud for a human. I noticed the way that alpha was looking at you. A werewolf can tell. You’re important to him, aren’t y...”

The door came crashing down, stunning the wolf inside.

Caden barged in to find Catherine restrained to the opposite wall. The rogue had his hands around her, restricting any movement and from the looks of it, he seemed to have ulterior motives.

Caden’s eyes turned red with rage as he rushed forward, oblivious to the second rogue in the room. A prick in Caden’s back alerted him of another presence.

He turned in time to see the rogue regaining his balance and brandishing his knife once more. Because of Caden’s sudden rush, the man had missed, only delivering a shallow cut.

“So she is important to him. Turning this one would definitely throw the monarchs into a frenzy,” the man holding Catherine snickered.

After dodging the knife and momentarily stopping to reassess the situation, the rogue quickly grabbed the woman and held her between himself and the beta alpha, keeping a set of claws on her throat, “Careful. I might slip and accidentally kill her.”

“You won’t get that chance,” Caden growled, his eyes flashing crimson. Rage flooded his veins and he fought to keep it contained... He was seeing red.

Chapter 499 The Value of a Healer

Caden’s control was nearly impossible to acquire. His wolf surged forward, forcing its will onto him. ‘Kill... Rip his throat out. Make him regret laying his hands on her.’ The wolf roared in his head, saying actual words for the first time in his life.

Caden wanted to let the creature through as well. The sight of the rogue’s hand on Catherine’s throat fuelled this rage.

If it hadn't been for the look of fear on Catherine's face, he would have let his wolf through. Since he'd met her, she'd shown fear towards werewolves. If that look of fear was ever directed towards him, Caden couldn't imagine how much it would break him.

And it was this same reasoning that kept his wolf from completely breaking through and running feral. He could easily end all this..

The rogue's voice brought him out of his thoughts...

"Damned monarchs! They remain arrogant even when there is no way they can win. That's what I've always hated about these damned royals and their alphas. They think they're invincible... like nothing can stop them. Well, newsflash fake king, her life is in my hands. You better start acting like it. You won't get another," the rogue snarled, exposing a measly set of canines that belonged to an amber-eyed werewolf.

Regardless of the searing rage that he felt towards the rogues, Caden found the display nothing short of amusing. If it hadn't been for the person being held hostage, he would have actually laughed at this attempt.

But they had Catherine. And that changed a lot.

These rogues weren't noteworthy opponents and when he listened to the tone of their voices, they weren't that experienced in combat either.

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Perhaps the ones earlier had been confident in the presence of the Rogue King but without their leader, they were like scared lost pups.

If it hadn't been for the time in Brigadia when he'd learnt how bad rogues could be when they surrendered, he would have taken them lightly but Caden knew how dangerous a rogue that had something to lose could be.

"What is it you want then?" he asked, "I know the two of you don't want to die... because that's what killing that woman would get you. Since she's still alive, I can assume you want something. So, mention it."

"Goddess's mercies, Bartrum, he's actually negotiating with us," the rogue holding Catherine gasped, disbelief written all over his face.

"I knew this one was smart. He knows what a hostage situation is all about. Hehehe," the other rogue holding a knife chuckled, "Now, Acting King, you're going make the right decision to allow us to get out of this shelter with our lives and no one will follow us or else the woman dies."

Caden sighed, 'What a hassle!'

"How about this? I will let you leave this room and I'll personally walk you to the exit and see to it that you are set free," Caden said to them, masking his fury.

"That sounds like a..." the rogue holding the knife was cut off.

“No, Steve. That’s not how this is going to play out. I’ve changed my mind. We want protection,” the man said, his voice getting shaky.

Perhaps Caden’s calm demeanour had gotten to him... or maybe he was finally seeing just how futile his attempts were. Either way, Caden could ignore how unexpected this man’s words were.

They were the first signs of an unsteady collaboration.

Steve turned to his comrade with a murderous expression on his face, “You trait—”

The words had barely left his lips when Caden’s fist struck his throat. He followed through with an intricate well-executed throw that rendered the rogue unconscious.

The beta alpha stood and faced Bartrum. The two were silent for a bit before Caden tilted his head, “You know what you just asked for, don’t you?”

Bartrum nodded his head feverishly and pushed Catherine out of his hands and into Caden’s arms. The female doctor stumbled into Caden’s arms and continued to shiver in the beta alpha’s arms gripping his shirt with all her strength.

Caden wrapped his arms around her and rubbed circles in her back, doing his best to ignore the intoxicating scent of strawberries and comfort the female doctor.

“There is a hunter that came and got rid of your friends at the entrance. Since there is no royal around right now, we can’t carry out a Prometheus evaluation to rid you of the Rogue King’s control...

So, in the meantime, we’ll isolate you and give you the protection you need before we can get you an evaluation,” Caden announced.

“It can’t be that simple,” the rogue snarled.

“Killing you is simple. This isn’t. Be grateful,” Caden said sharply.

Through the mind link, he called for some pack warriors to come and clean up the mess. Steve’s body was disposed of along with the other rogues that Jeremiah had killed at the entrance.

Bartrum—to his surprise— was taken away from the beta alpha’s presence in a rather gentle manner.

Caden stood still with Catherine in his arms, losing track of how much time passed. The woman was shaken and needed time to recover. But nothing could tell Caden how long that would be.

He couldn’t imagine what she’d been through. His hand balled into a fist when he remembered sending her to get the two rogues. At the time, he hadn’t confirmed his suspicions... but still.

She’d rushed into danger and the number of things that could have happened to her started pouring into his mind.

“Are you okay? You’re not injured, are you?”

Catherine nodded feverishly, pulling away from him as she wiped her slightly puffy eyes. The sight of tears tugged at the beta alpha’s heartstrings.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I am. I should be asking you that,” the woman replied, her hand flying to the beta alpha’s shoulder. A large bloodstain covered Caden’s shoulder but no pain came from the spot she touched.

“I’m fine. I already healed,” Caden replied, “I didn’t think before sending you after them. I’m sorry.”

“No, I’m the one that knew their faces. I could identify them. I’m sorry... for making you worry about me,” Catherine argued, looking down as she spoke, “As you’ve noticed, I’m useless in a fight. I can’t do anything to defend myself.”

“Hey, you’re more important than you know. When the fight’s all over, you’re the most important person around. To heal the wounds, to fix what can be fixed and to save lives that only you can save,” Caden cooed.

“Oh my! Caden’s good with the ladies? The world must really be coming to an end,” a cheerful voice interrupted the couple’s moment.

Catherine turned red.

Caden would normally be angered by an intrusion of this nature but the man that had spoken was Jeremiah. He wouldn’t have been able to come to Catherine’s rescue without the hunter’s help... and for that, he was grateful.

“Jeremiah! I—”

“Nah! I was just messing with you guys. You look adorable though. Keep that one safe this time. I’m heading out for now... to make sure there aren’t any other rogues left out there. We’ll catch up later. Get your... damsel taken care of,” the hunter cut him off with a cheeky grin before vanishing.

After a short while, Catherine asked, “Do we... umm, look like an item?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Don’t play dumb with me. Werewolves have that pairing system of yours that your kind dream about their whole lives. Are we? How can you even tell when that’s the case?” Catherine’s questions were getting rushed as she forgot to breathe between sentences.

Caden mentally acknowledged her bravery. Simply for how boldly she could ask such a question with her face as red as it was.

“Well...” the beta alpha locked hands with her, sparks shimmering through their hands from every point of contact... “It’s usually something like what you’re feeling right now.”

The feeling, for Caden, raised two very opposite emotions within him. One was everything light, a mixture of hope, love and bliss while the other put a damper on this light. Fear...

With a light chuckle, he added, “But considering I saved you a couple of times, we’ll have to wait a bit to make sure it’s not just you feeling attracted to me for that.”

Catherine hadn’t realised she was looking him in the eye while he spoke and quickly whisked her eyes away from him.

'Attracted to him because he saved me? I know that's a thing... but I've been like this since I met him. Since before he saved me in the hospital.' She wanted to say but held back.

"Okay... we'll wait for a bit. But until then, we..."

"Alpha Caden... Alpha Caden... Alpha Caden, I couldn't find the woman you sent me to find. Lotuses, this place is huge! Alpha... Oh dear!" a delta came stumbling into the room.

The same delta Caden had sent to find and protect Catherine had come running into the room, panting like he'd run a marathon.

Caden's brow twitched in frustration while Catherine's hand flew to her mouth, holding in her laughter.

Chapter 500 Unexpected Trouble

Caden could barely believe what he was seeing. The delta he'd sent in after Catherine was barely holding himself up in front of him, winded and sweating from head to toe. Having run through the large facility, it was clear the man had failed to find the doctor and was only now finding them.

'Even after I told them where to find me and got those two fools taken care of, he was still searching aimlessly! Catherine could have been killed... and the delta supposed to protect her had been... Calm down, Caden. He's clearly sweating and very tired. He clearly did his best, right...' the beta alpha tried to calm himself.

"Sir—I... I looked everywhere, I swear. I'm sorry..." the delta ran, his pleas for mercy getting dimmer as he ran further away from the room.

'...And for some reason, he still had the energy to run away from me,' Caden's brow twitched even more.

Catherine let out her first giggle. The sound of her laughter completely erased the wave of fury that threatened to grip Caden, "Is something funny?"

"Oh, it was just the way he ran away. It reminds me of a scared little child," she responded, covering her mouth to keep more laughter from spilling out.

Caden chuckled, "Let's get you settled in and... preferably changed into cleaner clothes. I'm sorry to ask this of you but you'll be working quite a bit with everyone to keep the Bunker running."

"It's fine. I wasn't planning on sitting pretty either..." in a more sombre tone, "It's going to be a war out there, huh?" she asked quietly.

Her angelic laughter vanished, replaced by a crestfallen expression.

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"More or less... The Rogue King has gained an extra ability that makes every rogue extremely dangerous if my assumption is correct. So for everyone's safety, this is how it's going to be. It's not like we can reason our way out of this," Caden gave her an apologetic look.

"And you? What if you get bitten or worse—killed?"

'She's asking about me. I'm a beta alpha of the Lycaon kingdom, dammit. There is no way out of that!'

"That's highly unlikely but... not impossible. Even then, I have a duty to my people, just like you have yours. Without me, the pack warriors and the hunters, there would be no one to fight... And without you, we'd have no one to protect," Caden replied after careful thought.

"Cheesy reply," Catherine groaned. She could tell he was holding back the gruesome details of what he was up against. As a doctor, she knew how bad wars could get. She was not new to the sight of someone struggling to hold on to life because of a feud.

Still, this was the most dangerous werewolf on the planet they were talking about. Caden could really die if he wasn't careful. Healers had their limits in how much they could do, "But there are some injuries even I can't treat. I don't perform magic, you know?"

"I know. I will be careful," Caden replied, partly wondering when it was that she became his physician, not like he was against it. Caden had almost never been to a hospital because of his fast healing but if going to one meant he would get treated by Catherine then that was a whole different matter on its own.

"Why can't you just stay behind and protect everyone from here?" Catherine's mind was no longer holding back her concern. It seeped into her voice, making itself unmistakable.

Even after what she'd been through, she'd somehow managed to rotate the conversation into her own worries about what he was going up against.

"And send who to fight? Them? Did you see the man who just ran away from me?" Caden chuckled.

"Oh! I'd almost forgotten you were a formidable fighter amongst your people..." she sighed. After a short pause, "Will it be the last?"

"The last what?"

"The last war?"

"I don't know. Where are all these questions coming from?" Caden raised his voice slightly, trying to understand what was happening.

"Don't get hurt... That's what I'm saying. Dammit, is there even a way you can fight without getting hurt? Why do you have to do something when you know you might not come back alive? Look at your shirt. There is blood. Was that a stab wound? Oh dear!" the woman facepalmed, retreating from his embrace and sitting down on the bed that still lay untouched nearby.

Catherine hung her head in her palms, drowning in the confusion and worry that threatened to swallow her mind. Emotions and reasoning were at war. And neither side was winning. The fallout of this battle would be her mental state.

Caden was clueless as to what was going on...

And that's when emotions that weren't his tore through his mind link, invading his very being and demanding his attention.

This wasn't the same as when he felt the emotions of another wolf. These ones made him want to tend to their owner's every need. He felt these emotions as though they were his very own.

Worry... Deep-rooted worry and concern.

Caden lowered himself to one knee so he was at eye-level with Catherine and held her hands in his, "Hey... I will be fine. A beta alpha doesn't go down so easily."

"I'm sure that's what every other muscle-head of a husband told their wives before dying in the Battle of Lycaon two years ago," Catherine huffed.

Chuckling, "Yeah... and that's clearly how you stayed alive long enough for me to find you. So don't worry... I'm not about to give that up. If it makes you feel any better, it's easier when a warrior has someone to come back when the war is over."

Catherine nodded in understanding, avoiding eye contact. If it wasn't for the surging emotions that started to settle in the mind link, Caden would have thought she didn't hear him.

The beta alpha stood to his full height and offered the doctor a hand, "We should get going."

Reluctantly she took it, her thoughts still swarming with questions. She couldn't help but notice how much he avoided the topic that was right in front of them.

From what she knew about it, werewolves never usually spoke in riddles. His words hinted at his knowledge of it... and yet he never confronted it.

She wanted to approach it... but what could she say about it?

She was human and therefore had the slightest knowledge of how it worked, 'I wonder if he feels it too. This unnatural attraction towards him. How is he this composed? I've done my share of research into human emotions and psychology. I know this isn't normal... and I also know that he shouldn't be this casual about it.'

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Caden found a clump of rogues gathered at the edge of the forest away from the entrance to the Bunker, bundled together by a steel cable that was kept taught by a 'special arrow'.

'Hunters will never run out of ideas!' he sighed, turning to the withering line of citizens.

It had grown significantly shorter since the evacuation had started and there was less of a commotion this time. Standing at the entrance was a group of nurses and doctors that were responsible for carrying out the check-ups.

Caden scanned the area around the captured rogues until his eyes noticed a pair of black leather-clothed legs dangling in a tree above the restrained bundle of rogues.

Caden made his way to the tree, paying little attention to the hostile expressions on the rogues standing before him. They were covered in bite wounds, feathers and scratches. Their clothes were severely tattered from the furious beak-and-talon assault.

Each of them had at least one non-lethal wound with a patch of dried blood surrounding the spot where the hunter's arrow had impaled them.

"Did you have to tie them all up like this? It's like you're shipping them off somewhere," Caden grumbled.

The black-clad figure peeped down from the trees and regarded the beta alpha with a bright smile. Jeremiah swung himself off the branch and landed gracefully in front of Caden, "It was easier that way. Are you done calming your girlfriend down?"

Caden pursed his lips and skipped over the question, "Where have you been, Jeremiah?"

"Oh? Were you worried?" Jeremiah smirked, "I didn't know I'd left such a mark on one of Cole's beta alpha."

"Hmm, I'll admit you were interesting. A double agent working for the rogues and werewolves at the same time. Luna Katie trusted you... and as a result, I trust you too. So, tell me," Caden folded his arms across his chest as he explained.

Jeremiah chuckled humourlessly and lost his smug expression, "Yeah, that's the ever-serious Caden I remember. Never cracks a joke when it's time to be serious. I'll tell you everything. Just not now... You have more important things to tend to."

With that, the hunter beckoned to something behind Caden.

The alpha turned in time to see the pack doctor approaching him. Before he could be addressed, he whipped around, "Well then, don't..."

"I'm not going anywhere... At least, not yet," Jeremiah sighed, "Your pack comes first. Take care of them, then we'll talk."

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After a brief talk, the pack doctor asked Caden to follow her inside. The check-ups were just about to be completed and most of the citizens were inside the Bunker.

However, something had become a cause for great concern within the facility.

The female werewolf silently led him into the Bunker and through to a section that had been completely cut off from the rest of the facilities.

Caden noticed the pack warriors and medical officers helping the civilians settle into the Bunker and many other workers bustling around, diligently starting on their assigned tasks and duties.

When he wanted to ask what was going on, he stopped... noticing a tense expression on the pack doctor's face.

Something was amiss.

Within this part of the Bunker, only pack warriors—noticeably the skilled ones with higher ranks—, authorised workers or medical personnel walked, keeping civilians regardless of whether they were human or werewolves away from this place.

Caden noticed a large metal door at the end of the hall that everyone seemed to be getting in and out of, the rest of the hall... locked and unused.

At the entrance, a pair of pack warriors stood firm, guarding the door and checking everyone that came in and out. When Caden approached them, they bowed in respect and let them through.

Inside, the Bunker expanded immensely, stretching far to the right and to the left with bunk beds lined against the walls, capable of holding three people each.

The people inside were many as well... but something was off.

Most of the people here were either alone or gathered into small groups of no more than five and gave each other uncomfortable glances.

They easily numbered in the hundreds.

Caden wanted to guess what he was looking at but his mind remained blank, "Who are these people?"

"These, Alpha Caden, are the people we found with werewolf bite marks on their bodies. As per your request, we made sure to examine the bite marks to make sure they'd been made by a high-ranking wolf... and they all were. Stories from every one of them are random and most borderline traumatic. We—," the pack doctor mentioned.

"What's going to happen to us?" a woman rushed forward, her tear-stricken face holding tumults of worry.

Caden was quiet for a moment, his eyes scanning her body. Just as he'd feared, there was a white bandage on her leg, "What bit you?"

"That doesn't matter. I have a daughter out there. I have to..."

The beta alpha raised his hand to silence her and in a serious tone, asked, "Would you perhaps prefer biting your daughter's head off yourself?"

"What's that supposed to mean? I'm human. We're not cannibals like the lot of you," the woman screamed, getting agitated. However, when she looked around, no one backed her up.

"I'll let that 'compliment' slide this once because of the situation. However, that bite on your leg... suggests you're anything but human. I'm going to need you to calm down first. It's imperative that you do," Caden's expression softened.

The look of fear in this woman's eyes was one he was seeing all too often these past few days, "We can get you all through this."