

Chosen 501

Chapter 501 Indefinite Slumber

"You cannot be serious right now!" the woman scoffed, shaking her head in disbelief.

Caden sighed, "I know it's not fair... and that none of you asked for this. I don't like this any more than you do. You're not the only one in a difficult situation right now. Every one of us has something to lose. But if I can make sure that lives are not lost, then I will do everything in my power to keep it that way.

Each and every one of you, in this room, has been bitten by a rogue that had the potential to turn you all into werewolves. Now, I don't know when you were bitten or how long ago it was.

As werewolves, we've all been through the first shift before. It's different from all the others that come after it. With your cooperation and with the help of the empire, we can get you all through this... and life can return to normal, hopefully with no casualties.

I know some of you are scared and some of you are angry. Some of you probably don't even know how to feel about this. Alone, you cannot do much. As someone who went through my first shift as a child, I know what that's like.

And together, the first shift can go smoothly... as smooth as possible," Caden spoke, raising his voice so that everyone around would hear him.

There was a lot more he could say about the matter. The truth of the matter was that the lives of everyone in this room had been changed completely. The rogue king wasn't killing people because he was so busy turning them into this...

...into more werewolves.

As someone who'd been a werewolf his whole life, Caden had a number of experiences that he intended to use in guiding these people through this tough time.

.....

"Nice speech! But that doesn't solve all our problems. I have a daughter out there. Her father is dead and she's all alone with no one to take care of her. I can't leave her out there," the woman that had confronted him earlier spoke again, however, this time, her voice bore no venom.

Caden faced her, "Tell me her name."

"What?"

"I'll personally make sure she's taken care of and safe. How does sound?" Caden asked her.

"Am I supposed to believe that? You have far more people to attend to... I can't..."

"Leave my job to me. I can let you talk to her before I take her where she'll be residing through all this," Caden said firmly once more.

"You make it sound like she's the only one with a problem," a man seated cross-legged at the top bunk of one of the beds grumbled.

"I was getting to that part. Everyone with an urgent matter is to report it to the pack doctor. She will bring them all to me and one by one, I'll solve everything I can to the best of my abilities," Caden announced.

The pack doctor gasped at the sudden announcement but kept her mouth shut. Instead, she stood forward and produced a notepad and pen, "Everyone, take a bed and I'll move around talking to each of you."

Caden asked one of the guards for a pen and pad as well and started at the opposite side of the room to make the pack doctor's job as well. He had a lot of things to do and he had to start somewhere... so the beta alpha chose to start with this while he coordinated the rest of the activities carried out in the Bunker through the mind link.

Resources weren't as abundant as he'd thought they were and he had to improvise most of the time but there was never an issue that he found impossible to deal with. Something had to be done about everyone in here to make sure they were comfortable.

Riling up a group of people that could undergo their first shifts at the slightest dose of adrenaline was bound to cause unprecedented chaos. Keeping them comfortable and content was the best way to delay their transformations... and that's what Caden intended to do.

Some of them wanted something as simple as writing a letter to their loved ones while others wanted more complicated things like gadgets to distract them and rare books that they could read.

From the nature of the requests that Caden was getting, it seemed everyone had come to accept the terms of their stay here. After his speech, they were all more willing to stay here for the sake of others.

Some of them were afraid of the first shift and the beta alpha found himself playing therapist for these cases.

"Being a werewolf is not that different from being a human once you get the hang of it. Your senses get clearer and you become more powerful. But that's not all, you can talk to anyone you love through the mind link... or anyone really which means you don't necessarily have to use your phone. That might not seem like much... but it also means that you'll never be alone again."

A girl he'd just told all this visibly relaxed at his words, smiling shyly, "You sound like someone living in a dream."

Caden chuckled, "I do find it magical sometimes. I've definitely seen my fair share of miracles..."

The beta alpha froze when a voice suddenly cut through the calm silence in the large room, "What's going to happen to us?"

Caden stood and left the girl's bed to seek the person that had just spoken. The man was seated cross-legged on the top bunk with his head in his hands, "I mean... I know we are going to become werewolves. We all know that. But... I mean, why are you being so nice to us? What aren't you telling us?"

Caden sighed heavily, "I guess there is no use keeping it a secret. All of you here have never shifted before. And that's both a good thing and a bad thing. Because you've never shifted, your eyes haven't gained the glow of a werewolf yet. The transformation is not complete yet.

The good news is that the rogue king won't have control over you until you go through your first shift."

"And the bad news?" a woman asked with a hint of fear in her voice.

"The first shift can be... troublesome. It's during this shift that your body first feels what it's like to have your entire structure reconstructed. It can be painful, especially if you try to reject it. That kind of pain... it's enough to render your human side unconscious.

A newly shifted wolf comes into this world confused and without the guidance of their human counterparts. Werewolves are violent creatures and because of the pain of that shift, they become really dangerous.

That said, there are ways to go through the first shift smoothly without any casualties. Unfortunately, there is still the matter of the Rogue King's control. And with that in the way, we cannot let you go through your First shift right now."

"So what are you going to do with us?" the girl from earlier asked, picking up on the severity of things.

"We are going to put you all to sleep and have you taken care of for as long as we can," Caden announced.

"Were you ever planning to allow me to see my daughter?" the woman from the beginning yelled out.

"Yes, you will see your daughter. It's imperative that you are all comfortable by the time you sleep," Caden turned to her.

"So what if we go through our first shifts? It's not like any of us would harm our families," a man in his thirties spoke up, a hint of frustration in his voice.

"Not intentionally, no..." Caden answered.

The room fell silent once more before Caden proceeded with checking the rest of the civilians. It was a lot harder for him to talk to them after that communication. Most of them were tense.

Nevertheless, a smile and assurance of their safety went a long way. These were humans who'd just realised they were going to become werewolves. It was known that under certain circumstances, humans would be killed by hunters before they became a danger to anyone else.

Now that the beta alpha was offering them a life in which they could keep going with next to no hindrances, most of them were willing to comply.

When he was done talking to his half of the group, he picked up the pad the pack doctor was holding onto and sent her to call Catherine. The woman raised a brow at the beta alpha but didn't say anything as she left to call the human doctor.

Caden then started on the list of items on the doctor's list.

One of the younger boys had asked for a deck of cards while another had asked for a small radio. Items, calls and requests to meet with their families or loved ones.

When Catherine arrived, Caden was almost pleased to take a break.

“There you are! I need your help.”

“Sure! What do you need?” Catherine replied with a bright smile that was sure to melt the beta alpha’s insides.

.....

Caden watched at the entrance of the room as mother and daughter were reunited. Beside him, Catherine stood with a smile on her face as doctors went around the whole room attaching cannulas to the civilians in the room. It wasn’t long before they were all hooked up to bags of distilled water laced with powerful sedatives.

“How long... How long will they be like this?” Catherine asked.

“I’m hoping they don’t have to go through it for long. This is a delicate matter,” Caden replied quietly. The girl’s mother pulled the little bundle of joy into a teary hug and stayed like that for a while before gesturing to the beta alpha.

Caden smiled at the girl who took a few steps back from her mother and skipped over to Catherine.

“Stay safe... And don’t give the nice lady any trouble, okay?”

“Mm-hmm,” the little girl nodded with tear-stricken eyes.

Her mother allowed herself to rest in the bed just like everyone else as Caden and Catherine led the little girl out, leaving the inhabitants of this secluded zone to a slumber that had no known time limit.

They were being sent into an Indefinite Slumber. Caden balled his fists, trying to find another way this could be solved but no matter how he looked at it, there was never a way out. The Rogue King would be capable of leaping into their bodies the moment they completed their transformations into werewolves.

Waiting longer would make it harder for them to control their tempers, getting irritated as the body tried to induce the First Shift. Then there was the matter of the full moon that was bound to force the First Shift to manifest.

No matter how he looked at it, he found no other way to help them other than this...

Sending them into a slumber in which they weren’t a danger to anyone or anything.

Chapter 502 Ghost Helper from the Past

Caden and the little girl, hand-in-hand followed Catherine through the halls of the Bunker, going up a couple of flights of stairs before reaching the second floor where Catherine started navigating the convoluted grey halls, bringing them to a section of the facility that seemed to house the medical personnel.

For a facility that had been built as fast as this Bunker, it was a lot larger on the inside than Caden had expected it to be.

The doctors and nurses bowed when they saw the beta alpha and waved at Catherine as they watched the trio walk past. Caden noticed how fondly they smiled with Catherine even though they kept their distance. He guessed they did this because of his presence.

A couple of times, he noticed a nurse open her mouth to say something, only to go silent when they noticed him.

The door she brought them to let them into a small room, set with everything essential for someone to survive. There was a door that led to a washroom and a trunk at the side of the bed, probably holding Catherine's essentials.

"Hey Lia, I know it's not much but you can stay here with me here until your mother is all better," Catherine told the little girl.

"Okay... Can I sleep in the bed?" the little girl asked.

"Sure, you can sleep wherever and whenever you want," Catherine replied. The bed was not much but enough to hold two small bodies. Lia ran up to the bed and leapt into it.

"How about you—" Catherine panicked, but it was too late, "—have a bath first?"

.....

"Oh! Sorry," the girl quickly jumped off the bed before attempting to strip.

"NO NO, not in front of... Come with me," the female doctor panicked, covering the girl up and dragging her into the bathroom.

"Did I do something wrong? Mother always lets me take off my clothes in the bedroom," the girl whined.

"No, you did nothing wrong. Just try to keep the big scary man out there from seeing you naked," Catherine cooed.

"I don't understand," the girl grumbled.

"Well... you'll understand in a few... years, hopefully," Catherine replied with a sigh, leaving the girl inside the bathroom to handle the rest. The rest was nothing an eight-year-old couldn't handle.

Caden kept his back turned to the woman, holding his laughter in. He didn't do a good job of hiding it, "I'm doing you a favour... and you're laughing."

"Oh no, forgive me. I didn't mean to. Will you be alright taking care of her?" Caden asked her.

"Yes, I will be fine. I'm good with kids... sometimes. And she isn't as much of a handful as some children I've dealt with," Catherine sighed.

"I'll just put this here," Caden placed the little girl's backpack on the trunk and returned to his place close to the door. Catherine took a few steps towards the beta alpha.

Caden took a few steps back, "What is it?"

"You look exhausted. Do you know what time it is?" Catherine asked, raising a brow.

The beta alpha retrieved his phone to check the time. His eyes went wide with shock... "You should get some rest, Caden. You can leave Lia to me."

"Thank you. I owe you for that. I'll be sure to visit her when I can and bring reports of her mother's well-being," Caden gave a slight bow before exiting the room.

Out in the hall, the beta alpha had to hold his shaking right hand, staring at the claws that had forcefully extended in the presence of the doctor. The scent of strawberries still tormented him, making his wolf restless.

Every time he convinced himself that he was getting the hang of it, it caught him off guard and the longer he spent in Catherine's presence, the more his control wavered. He wiped the thoughts from his mind and turned away from the door and walked away.

.....

The beta alpha had spent so much time taking care of the citizens that he didn't exactly know where he was going to spend his night. He couldn't return to the palace and leave this place unprotected, so he was bound to find his lodgings.

With his thoughts heavy and his heart burdened with stress from the day's activities, he chose to take a walk. Before he knew it, he was at the exit of the Bunker... with no directions whatsoever.

"Are you okay, Alpha Caden?" one of the guards at the exit asked the man as he walked out.

"Yeah... yeah, I'm fine. I just need some fresh air is all," he replied, walking out and into the woods... Anything to put some distance between himself, Catherine and the chamber of slumbering newly formed werewolves.

His wolf helplessly struggled against him as he walked further and further away from the bunker.

'Just a walk... We'll go back eventually,' he mentally growled at the wolf, agitated by the beast's one-track thinking.

He was so distracted by his storm of thoughts that he was shocked when a bright blue luminescence breached his eyesight. Caden looked around himself, bringing himself back to the present in the hopes of solving the mystery of where it was he'd wandered off to.

'I've never seen a field of moon lotuses in the Lycaon,' he wondered to himself, squatting down to touch one of the flowers at his feet.

"I didn't think you would come," a feminine voice interrupted him, freezing him to the spot.

'Familiar...' was an understatement.

He'd heard this voice once before. He had this particular voice engrained into the deepest parts of his brain.

And he'd longed to hear it again for a very long time. He wished he could hear it again even though that was impossible.

Now that he'd heard it, he was sure he was going crazy.

As he raised his head up to stare at the source of the voice, he nearly forgot to breathe. Standing before him was a short girl with short black hair waving in the wind. He'd seen this face before, albeit not as carefree.

The last he'd seen this face, she'd been far too timid to put on a smile this carefree.

Her hair was different too. Before, she used to gel her hair a little too much, which made her appear boyish. At a time in her life, this had been a part of her cover that she used to masquerade as a boy in the school back in Brigadia.

Now that he stared at her again, he wasn't sure what to say. Was he dreaming or was she real? Standing before him with a carefree smile on her face was Ashley.

"Am I dreaming?" Caden asked.

"Depends... I'm not coming back to life. But you're not dreaming either," she giggled.

Caden stared dumbfounded, "How?"

While she looked real, it slowly became evident that she wasn't. After all, real people didn't float a foot above the ground covered in a halo of blue light.

No, she most certainly wasn't real.

But Caden wasn't sleeping... He knew he was sober, "I don't even know how to begin answering that question, Caden but I was hoping to talk to you one last time at least."

"Why would you need to talk to me? Did you have trouble moving on? Is that a thing?" Caden dropped to his knees, the exhaustion of the day finally catching up to him... along with something else. A tight vault of emotions he'd managed to seal off a long time ago was starting to crack.

"No, I had no trouble with that. I've been watching you though. It feels like you're the one having trouble moving on," Ashley replied.

The beta alpha chuckled, "I don't even know anymore... How can I? Every time I feel like I have, I remember everything. You were alive one moment... and the next, you weren't. I'm sorry, Ashley. I'm sorry I wasn't able to keep you safe. I..." like an avalanche of emotions, Caden's past demons came pouring back into him.

Memories he'd long suppressed and resisted and kept at the back of his mind, protecting him from the reality of what happened that day.

"No, Caden. There is nothing you could have done..."

"That's no excuse, Ashley. I'm the king's beta alpha... Before anyone else dies, I should have something to do about it. The strongest werewolves on the planet, probably even stronger than the royals themselves. If I can't protect one person, then how can I... protect anyone?"

Ashley watched the beta alpha break down. For as long as she'd watched him, he'd never broken down this much... almost like seeing her had been the last missing piece of the puzzle he needed to finally lose it.

Caden remembered it all, the smell of wolfsbane. The sight of her blood tinged with a repulsive purple ooze from the poison. The cut that went across her throat and the lifeless look in her eyes as she passed on.

One moment, she was fine... and the next, she was a lifeless corpse, her future stolen away from her and her life snuffed out in a moment like it was nothing.

The girl floated down and knelt in front of the beta alpha with a sigh, "So what if I'm dead?"

"What?" Caden's thoughts came to a standstill, shocked by the statement.

"I mean... I would have liked to stay alive. To live a life outside the rogues that had enslaved me. To enjoy the happiness on the other side of the war. But I wasn't that lucky. Life had different plans for me and it made me happy that you were willing to help me that much. I'd never been happier in my short life.

I'm glad I died after knowing someone like you. And not just the cruel rogues I'd come to know my whole life. When I saw what my death did to you, I was saddened. You have a good heart, Caden and you want to protect your people with everything you have.

You have a big heart. You care about your loved ones. You might not be the best at cracking jokes... but you'll do anything to put a smile on someone's face.

You're right, Caden. Being a beta alpha means you get to protect so many. There are many people that depend on you... but you can't do that if you can't move on. You have to accept that you won't always be able to protect everyone... and that you also have the power to save more people than anyone else around you.

If you worry about the ones you couldn't save, you'll lose the ones you can still save, then it will all be for nothing."

Caden remained silent for a while before letting out a sigh. He'd noticed something in her tone, "You saw her then?"

"Oh yeah, I did. She's really pretty... and she cares so much. It was like seeing a female version of you," Ashley chuckled.

"Whenever I see her, I get... flashes..." the beta alpha didn't have to finish the explanation. The sight of Ashley's brutally butchered body was still clear as rain in his mind.

"I know... and that's all the more reason to be there for her. Stop running away. I was in the past but she's your future," Ashley's words hit the mark, bringing the bitter truth to light.

Caden felt a wall crumble in his mind and with its destruction came a realisation of his wolf's overwhelming presence. The beast had been tucked away for a very long time. Being connected to his emotions, he'd unconsciously pushed him back as well to protect himself from the painful emotions and memories.

The coffee-brown wolf grumbled a message into his mind.

A message that he otherwise, wouldn't have heard, 'Protect our Mate.'

Chapter 503 Jeremiah Undercover

Caden felt as though an unfathomable weight had just been lifted off his shoulders, pried from the innermost depths of his heart... and it had taken talking to a mirage of the person his grief revolved around.

He didn't know what to think of the spectre before him. 'Was she real or was she not?' He could not say. But one thing he was certain about was that it wasn't have been a figment of his imagination.

Ashley was standing—floating in front of him. His eyes were not playing tricks. The ghost had memories that only she could have had, sounded and spoke just like her.

Ashley had died. There was no amount of divine energy in the world that could change that. But because of this same fact, he'd lost himself to grief. Caden wasn't the same person he always wanted to be...

A beta alpha capable of protecting all those around him. A beta alpha they could look up to in times of need. The proof of this was all too clear. He hadn't gone with the king simply because he was now the weakest of the three beta alphas...

He'd hit a wall... a wall that was now crumbling. He didn't have to be afraid anymore. If he could put his emotions into one word, it would be 'Grateful.'

Grateful for the second chance Ashley was offering him.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Look at me... Coming to your rescue this time. Seriously, Caden, what would you do without me?" Ashley puffed out her chest in mock superiority.

.....

"Quite a lot actually. I can breathe, sleep, run, eat, shift, clap, jump, sniff, hunt, crawl..."

"Okay okay, I get it. You're a big boy with a wide range of verbs," Ashley chuckled.

Their conversation seemed to be coming to a close. After what she'd told him, there was no doubt the beta alpha would be headed back to his mate... this time to let events unfold the way they were supposed to and not hold himself back from what could be.

"Yes... a grown-up indeed. I was meaning to tell you. Kyle became one of Katie's beta alphas and she..."

"I know all that, Caden. And... I'll say I'm proud of Kyle for opening up to a new world. I wouldn't call him a fitting replacement but... it is how it is," the girl replied, her voice laced with subtle irritation.

"I don't think Kyle has accepted..." the beta alpha's voice was cut short—

"Cade—Caden... Why you?" a male voice snapped behind the pair.

Turning around swiftly, Caden came eye-to-eye with Jeremiah. The black-hooded hunter was clenching his fists till his knuckles turned white. His eyebrows were set in an expression of resentment towards the alpha.

“Jeremiah? How long have you been there?” Caden hurriedly asked, wondering how much the man had heard from their conversation.

Jeremiah squinted his eyebrows before his expression softened, “Have you been... crying!?”

“No, I haven’t. How long have you been there? How much did you hear?” Caden asked, this time more desperately.

“I just got here. I didn’t hear much, okay,” the hunter raised his hands up in surrender, taking a few steps back to avoid any rash confrontation, “I promise.”

Caden sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose with a sigh. There was no hiding the signs of his tears. Thankfully, he could live with Jeremiah only knowing the story but not as a witness to the events, “That’s a relief.”

“Welcome, Jeremiah. It’s been a while,” the floating girl stopped Caden’s sentence in the middle.

For the beta alpha, a storm of confusion roared through his head. Could the hunter actually see Ashley and if that was the case, was Ashley actually alive? Could she assume a form like this one more time? Perhaps that way, he could see her again.

Then again, the last time he checked, the girl didn’t know who Jeremiah was. Caden looked between the hunter and the spectre and noticed something he didn’t want to believe.

Both of them bore looks of recognition in their eyes. They knew each other... and from the looks of it, they knew each other well. “When...”

His words were cut short when the hunter knelt down on one knee and bowed in respect of the girl, “My Lady, it’s an honour to be in your presence. Forgive my sudden outburst earlier.”

“No need for formalities. You’re creeping Caden out,” Ashley sighed.

“I would prefer to give you the respect you deserve. However, forgive me if I misstep, but how is it that you know Alpha Caden?” the hunter asked.

“What kind of question is that?” Caden scoffed.

“Caden is one of my most trusted friends. You could say that I met him in a previous life... and that I came to him to offer him some help and guidance,” Ashley replied.

“Now, I’ll ask. How is it that you know Jeremiah?” Caden interrupted, starting to hate the way the hunter was ignoring him. For some reason, Jeremiah was treating Ashley’s spirit like a queen... like a holy grail of some sort.

It was unheard of for a hunter to bow to a wolf in the first place... which made this situation all the more bizarre.

Ashley turned to Caden, then back to Jeremiah before sighing, “I think it would be best if Jeremiah explained that part. I believe you had questions for him.”

Caden reluctantly turned his attention to the hunter and raised a brow at him, “Well, get on with it. Where have you been all this time? I’m guessing there is an answer in there to how you met Ashley.”

Jeremiah sighed, taking a seat on the blue carpet of moon lotuses, tapping a spot in front of him, “You’ll want to seat for this one.”

Caden did as he was told and allowed the hunter to gather his thoughts before he started talking.

“When—when we defeated Aidan two years ago, I was not sure what would happen to me. I was already wanted for shooting Katie with arrows. She might have forgiven me but there were a lot of unanswered questions I would be hounded with and I wasn’t in the capacity to answer them at the time.

More like, it wasn’t my place to reveal a lot about myself. I worked for someone else... and revealing anything about my work would jeopardize that person as well and I couldn’t let that happen—not that it matters now since he’s imprisoned.

...so, I ran.

I ran and did not look back. I didn’t know where I was going but anywhere was better than staying behind. I just needed to disappear and gather my thoughts on my next move. I needed to figure something out. But I guess I never got the chance.

Almost immediately I started running, a secret sect of hunters found me. It was like they were waiting for me when I started running.

They called themselves, ‘The Bane of Cirrus.’

At the time, I didn’t even know who Cirrus was, let alone Rana. But I stayed with them and they taught me a lot, along with what they do.

Under the Bane of Cirrus, I watched as the world crumbled. As the rogues attacked the Lycaon capital and killed hundreds. Katie’s fight against the rogue king and her eventual disappearance.

I wanted to help so badly. Seriously, there was a lot that I could do. But the Bane of Cirrus forbade me from taking any action. Hunters—Capable hunters who could turn the tide of the war. Doing nothing!

I was infuriated... and that’s when they chose to reveal to me their motives and what they were doing.

I was taken to a secret place where I met with their leader, their previous leader now though, was an even more capable individual.

The Bane’s last moment of action was twenty years ago... Against the two capitals. It was the Bane of Cirrus that aided the Rogue King in attacking the Moon Goddess’s Chosen.”

“WHY WOULD THEY DO SUCH A THING?” Caden suddenly bellowed.

“There were a lot of reasons why they did this. One of them was to destroy the notion of loyalty that everyone had towards the hunters of Prometheus. By working with the Rogue King, it was made clear that Prometheus’s hunters weren’t incorruptible.

With that out of the way, it was possible for spies like me to infiltrate the rogues.”

“But... King Trevor...”

“On behalf of the Bane of Cirrus, I apologise. It was never intended to have the king caught in the crossfire. To be honest, if it hadn’t been for the healer they sent after Queen Martha that night, she would have died as well.

The Bane of Cirrus didn’t have control over everything but what little they could control, they used to the best of their abilities.”

Caden’s mind was swirling in search of answers. This all made no sense to him. Why would a sect of hunters just choose to remain dormant and do nothing? Was it even possible for that many hunters to exist without the knowledge of the Hunter’s Agency?

“How come no one has ever heard of this group? Where do they get hunters to join them? Everyone who gains an ability is immediately taken for a test and is required to get a license to operate as a professional hunter,” Caden asked.

“Prometheus grants humans that prove themselves worthy of his gift without fail. That means that all the humans out there that end up proving this to him without the intervention of hunters also earn his gifts. It could be something as simple as a boy saving his sister from a bear out in the woods.

Or a little girl selflessly rescuing a baby from a house going up in flames. I met a lot of hunters who gained their abilities without the skill or training of a junior hunter. But then again, with their kind of drive and determination, they quickly grew into fearsome warriors. With their gifts, it wasn’t so hard to catch up to their peers,” Jeremiah explained.

Jeremiah chuckled, “Honestly, learning from them was like training alongside Katie. They only care about getting stronger... and not competing to know who’s stronger. Their principles appealed to me so fast... and through hard work, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of my ability. Far greater than I ever thought possible.”

Caden remained silent for a bit digesting this information. It seemed Jeremiah had chosen to end the tale of where he had been at that note... which made the beta alpha’s brows twitch.

This... Bane of Cirrus, was not making much sense to him. He still had a grove of questions swarming within his mind. None of them answered, no thanks to the black-hooded hunter.

“I have two more questions. One... How is this all connected to Ashley? And two... Why? Why now? Why has the Bane of Cirrus decided to go active again?”

While these questions hadn’t been answered, there seemed to be a hint of suspicion going through the beta alpha’s mind. Jeremiah’s opportune arrival and the way the birds had responded to his attacks, almost like they were fighting alongside him.

And there it was again... that intense nostalgic feeling of his Luna’s presence.

Chapter 504 Ashley’s Farewell

Jeremiah stretched his arms, yawning while he did. There was a short period of silence as his eyes followed a wandering butterfly that was interested in the nectar of a moon lotus in full bloom.

Caden, on the other hand, was struggling to contain his nagging frustrations and battling impatience. ‘This brat just told his whole story without actually getting to the point.’

“Those two questions, believe it or not, are quite interconnected,” the hunter sighed, “The Bane of Cirrus has laid dormant for a very long time waiting... Waiting for the time to strike at the Rogue King.

Staying in the shadows is what made the organisation dangerous. There is nothing more frightening than an enemy whose true strength is unknown. And for a long time, they watched... and waited.

Searching for an opening in this long pointless war. And that opening had to be perfect... It had to be the way to bring this war completely to an end. Even the Hunter’s Flush-out plan didn’t provide that kind of opening,” Jeremiah explained.

“Then what opening did they find?” Caden asked, getting more curious.

“That’s quite simple. The opening was Katie Sirius. I could personally testify to the tenacious nature of the princess and to her fiery determination to bring down the Rogue King. I was one of the people that noticed how powerful she was bound to become after all.

The prophecy that announced the coming of the Moon goddess’s Chosen was an interesting one. It presented an opportunity to plan many more moves ahead.

Even with that kind of power entrusted to two people, it didn’t guarantee success unless they happened to have a will strong enough to pull it off. And that same kind of indomitable will is what they were looking for.

.....

Katie got the Bane moving from within the shadows. Why would the whole world have to depend on two miracle wolves when they could depend on an entire army of hunters?

They infiltrated the rogues that day and started the rumour of a sect of rogue hunters that worked with the Rogue King which was a deep cover to make the Rogue King lower his guard.

It was a gamble... a dangerous one but they were ready to die for the cause... and many of them did. With time, the Rogue King actually bought it.

There is no doubt that he’s noticed now though...

After all, nothing seemed to be going his way. It was as though every plan he came up with was conveniently put to a stop. What he didn’t realise was that his plans were doomed from the start. The Bane of Cirrus was always a step ahead.

Even now as we speak, numerous hunters under the Bane of Cirrus are working to stop the Rogue King’s vile plan from coming to fruition.”

“Forgive me if I find that hard to believe,” Caden shook his head.

All this sounded far-fetched.

“Hmm, proof would explain this better. How many packs does the world have?” Jeremiah asked.

“I don’t know... hundreds of them!”

“Well, dear Caden, they are three hundred and fifty-eight packs. And just like the capital, they too were attacked by rogues and many of their members were bitten.

The Great Arena is cut off completely from the outside world but that’s where most of the hunters in the world currently are. The Bane of Cirrus has been tasked with containing these attacks. Hunters have been dispatched to all these packs to help deal with the situation.

With Lady Ashley’s help, it’s easier to locate and isolate the affected civilians and even find the rogues that are hiding within the masses before irreparable damage has been dealt,” Jeremiah mentioned.

“Ah, see that’s the thing. You lost me there. What’s Ashley got to do with this?”

“The animals, Caden. We noticed two years ago that they were acting oddly. Right before Luna Katie vanished, the animals began to behave weirdly. It was soon apparent that they were acting on orders from someone else...”

“Someone else? Did you already know someone who could speak to animals?” Caden asked.

“You could say that. When we noticed their odd behaviour, we decided to investigate and that is when the weirdest thing happened. They took us to her... to Ashley. She only appears in fields of moon lotuses. You’re lucky to have found this one. I thought I was the only one that knew of its existence.”

“Yeah... Really lucky,” Caden struggled with this information. He turned back to Ashley, “You can speak to animals?”

“Well, yeah... It’s one of my abilities. They help me identify the rogues since they see a lot. That way, we can do a lot at the same time and cover much more ground,” Ashley explained.

“Ashley is dead!”

“You’re correct, Caden. While I am indeed Ashley, I’m not exactly the same Ashley you know. I bear the memories of the life she lived and I often revisit them... but when I return to my other half, I’ll lose them and she’ll awaken.”

This time, Caden didn’t ask the question that cropped into his mind.

It seemed every time he asked a question, they only left him with more questions.

But this time, hints came through as well. ‘One of her abilities... Other half... Appearing in only fields of moon lotuses... Speaking to animals.’

Everything he knew pointed in one direction though.

He didn’t want to believe what he was hearing but it was the only way anything made sense. The only person he knew that could control animals this well had shown that power a long time ago.

Katie had controlled a swarm of pigeons at Cole’s coronation just like the birds that had saved him earlier that evening, “Katie...?”

The dark-haired girl nodded in response, “I am Katie Sirius’s wolf. I was tasked with bonding with her during her first shift to keep her from going feral and allow a smooth transition to the life she was meant

to live. Since she already had a connection to my past self, she didn't fight the changes that were happening to her."

"So you're the reason her wolf didn't go on a rampage," Caden sighed, remembering the events of the first time Katie had ever shifted.

The princess had hunted Kyle down as though being a werewolf came naturally to her. Now this made more sense... Well, almost.

"How?"

"A little bit of divine intervention," Ashley replied warmly.

Caden nodded... piecing everything together, "Let me get this straight. Ashley found the Bane of Cirrus and the two of you just decided to start working together to put an end to the Rogue King's plans."

"Yes, that is true."

"Does that also mean you have a plan that will end this once and for all?" Caden asked, "If you haven't noticed, I initiated a worldwide lockdown to contain the current problem. Resources are limited and without knowing where the Rogue King will strike, all packs are unprotected.

I can't be in over three hundred places at once," Caden complained.

Ashley giggled, "You worry too much, Caden. We're not asking you to protect all packs at once. You forget that I'm using my ability to keep track of nearly everything. The Bane of Cirrus will handle the protection of the other packs. You also have Jeremiah here to help you."

Jeremiah stood abruptly, his face turning white with shock, "What?! No, I'm supposed to be going back to Brigadia. I said I would be going there."

"I've decided to assign that task to Brunhilde, Jeremiah. I've already given everyone their assignments," Ashley sighed.

"No... I was supposed to be there for the Awakening. I can protect her better than that hammer-wielding brute," Jeremiah was now yelling at the girl, almost pleadingly.

"I know you want to do this but I need you here. I want you to help Caden," Ashley replied, disregarding everything Jeremiah had just said.

The hunter clenched his fists in frustration, "That's not fair."

"How come? Who else am I supposed to trust with something as important as this?" Ashley floated closer to the ground dejectedly.

"What's that supposed to mean? This place is safe enough as it is. You can just switch me out with anyone you see fit. The Bane is under your control after all," Jeremiah's tone softened and he wouldn't meet the spirit's eyes.

"Well, I can't find anyone else I can trust with this. Protect Caden for me," Ashley asked him, pouting.

"I don't need protecting," Caden intervened but the girl was not listening.

“Please, Jeremiah. I don’t have much time and you know it. Don’t make me spend the time I have left begging your stubborn head to help me,” the girl argued.

“Fine... I’ll help Caden, only because he’s already useless without me. Just don’t cry,” Jeremiah turned away with his hand covering his face, “Sheesh... When will you ever learn to change your mind for me?”

“Thank you very much, Jeremiah. I couldn’t change my mind about this. Caden is really special to the king and in turn, special to me. I wouldn’t just leave him to just about any—” the wind suddenly picked up, muffling her words. It seemed as though she still had a lot to say but Caden stood up and approached her. A small twister was surrounding her body and wrapping her presence with divine blue mist.

It was nothing the beta alpha had ever seen before. Then again, he’d never seen a ghost before either, “What’s happening to you?”

His voice was drowned out by the roaring of the wind. It was strong... but oddly enough, it didn’t carry anything, almost like it was meant to blow anything other than matter.

The wind was focused solely on Ashley and the calm resigned smile on the girl’s face translated to her knowledge of this.

Caden reached out to her only to freeze when a hand touched his shoulder. Looking back, he noticed Jeremiah holding onto his shoulder with an emotionless expression on his face.

His facade broke quickly, showing a tinge of sadness, “She’s out of time, Caden. This is just how the world gets rid of her presence.”

Caden turned back and watched in silence as the blue tornado engulfed her body completely before exploding outward at once, leaving nothing in its wake.

Still, within the chaos of the blue wind, Caden had been able to discern a movement of her lips as she mouthed the words:

“Farewell, Caden.”

Now, all that was left was the empty peacefully quiet field of luminescent moon lotuses.

“What does this mean for her?”

“A better question would be: ‘What does that mean for all of us?’” Jeremiah chuckled.

“I’m not sure I follow... Or at least, I don’t want to believe what it is that you’re insinuating,” Caden sighed, holding his breath. The possibility was almost suffocating.

It had been so long.

“Very well then. I’ll spell it out for you. With the disappearance of the spirit that’s guided the Bane of Cirrus for the past two years will come the Awakening of the Rogue King Cirrus’ Bane, Katie Chase Sirius,” the hunter announced with a proud smile.

.....

Several hundreds of miles away from the capital of Lycaon, in a remote town that was home to the legend of the Rogue Killer, a pair of incandescent blue eyes belonging to a great white wolf fluttered open in a field of brilliant moon lotuses.

Chapter 505 Frustrating Hindrances

Hunger was a funny thing, wasn't it? As well as the time with which it chose to torture its victims.

A reaction the body fabricated to inform the person to eat something or else it would start deteriorating... feeding on itself in an effort to acquire energy to survive, right?

Well... after spending nearly two years stuck in a beautiful garden of bright blue lotuses, this concept was starting to lose meaning.

Thane, the Rogue King's beta alpha, had done exactly that. He'd gone nearly two years without food or water... and oddly enough, he hadn't felt a tinge of hunger. He often chuckled at the sheer impossibility that was him being alive with no signs of malnourishment whatsoever.

Under the guidance of his master, the king of all rogues in the world, he had spent an impossibly long time without going hungry or even showing signs of dying.

When the goddess had trapped them here, he'd thought, 'WE ARE GOING TO DIE WITH NO FOOD OR WATER TO SUSTAIN OURSELVES!!! WE ARE GOING TO STARVE TO DEATH!!!'

But the king showed no similar form of panic.

Yes, he was frustrated beyond compare but he wasn't frustrated over the same trivial matters such as food or water.

To the beta alpha, this had been the first concern. His survival instincts had kicked in and warned him of the most immediate and fundamental danger they faced:

.....

Death by Starvation... or even worse... Death by Thirst.

Which would get to them first? He didn't want to find out. He wanted to survive.

Back then, he'd really thought they were dead. The moon goddess had tricked them and they were going to die in a prison of her own design—he thought. They were going to die without the royals lifting a finger against them... but King Rana didn't even think of that for a second.

Rana had simply flopped on his back in the grass and rested for a while, thinking...

For fear of questioning his alpha, Thane had remained quiet, awaiting the moment when his stomach would growl loudly enough, announcing their disaster instead of himself. A day went by... then a week... weeks turned to months... and they were still alive.

The feeling of stabbing hunger never came... and the king didn't look surprised one bit that they never got hungry. In fact, he looked like he could stay there for a century before asking for a plate of warm food to sate his century-old hunger.

King Rana's frustrations sounded much more... 'childish' when the beta alpha first heard them.

Rana wanted... to 'bite' people.

Well, who wouldn't?

The man had just got regained his power and could transfer the werewolf curse onto many more humans, replenishing the dwindling numbers that were left of his army of rogues.

He could continue to expand the power of the rogues and achieve his dreams like he'd always wanted...

With them trapped like this, however, Thane wasn't sure that would be happening any time soon.

Or so he'd thought for while...

Who knew how long they would stay caged like this? Trapped in a cage of plants.

At some point, Thane had tried clawing at the trees with all his might, mustering a large pool of endurance and might as he claws his way deeper and deeper into the bark of one of the surrounding trees.

After what felt like thirty minutes of endless toiling in an effort to break out of the plant prison, the king had raised a brow at him and gone... "W-What are you doing?"

"Trying to get us out of here..."

"Take a look at your claw marks!"

Thane curiously turned back to the tree he'd been clawing at and there it was... right before my eyes.

The parts of the wood that I had just clawed began to knit together until there wasn't a sign of his pathetic attempt at escape.

After that incident, King Rana promised to find a way to escape their prison. All Thane had to do was leave it all to him.

It wasn't like there was much the beta alpha could do anyway.

All Thane could really do was watch... patiently...

He watched the king meditate for several days, attempting to achieve a feat never heard of. When he got too bored, Thane trained his body as he continued to watch the king meditate.

In this prison, even protecting the king's body felt like a waste of time. Nothing could pose a threat anyway.

After several days of no success, Thane witnessed his master's body go limp the first time his spirit travelled out of it. He watched the swirling blue mist that seemed to rotate around the Rogue King's body as he performed these long meditation sessions.

This process was repeated countless times as the king explored the scope of this opportunity... learning...

So much time passed that Thane lost track.

.....

It was just another evening... like all other evenings when Thane was doing a couple of push-ups, challenging himself to see how many he could do before his body screamed for sweet relief.

'1,858... 1,859... 1860... One thousand... *grr'

"Damn it!!!" the Rogue King slammed his fist into the ground abruptly, startling the struggling beta alpha. Thane quickly launched himself into the air, his exhaustion forgotten as a new hidden pool of strength flowed into his body, ready for action.

The beta alpha facepalmed. He couldn't even tell if anything he'd done was real anymore.

"What is it, my lord? Was it her again?" Thane asked, hiding his disappointment.

The Rogue King rubbed his temples in frustration. It wasn't the first time he'd returned to his body with this much anger brewing within him. Apparently, he was facing far more resistance out there than he'd expected.

The first few times he'd returned like this, he'd brought reports of several gnats that attacked him when he least expected it. Humans that shouldn't have had as much strength as they exhibited.

And for some reason, he seemed to be running into them far too frequently to be a coincidence. Nonetheless, this frustration was akin to that of a person being bothered by small insignificant rodents.

With how much combat experience the Rogue King had from his long years, the hunters were nothing but an irritating bother.

This rage, though, was much more pronounced. It was the kind of rage he bore when he'd come across something that shouldn't have existed. Something that would make his mission significantly harder.

The first time he'd returned with searing rage like this, he mentioned something about a divine wolf that was capable of killing him even if he was at the height of his power.

The sudden transformation of Drake Sirius was just the first of many hindrances. The next time he'd returned cursing was after facing off against a jaguar in the woods bordering the Great Sirius mountains.

The Jaguar, which was in the wrong habitat, seemed to be protecting an alpha for some reason. The moment Rana had started fighting the wolf, the jaguar intervened and let the wolf escape and not him...

Sometimes, the rogue king shared the memories with Thane and the beta alpha was able to witness very odd occurrences that transpired during his king's spiritual quests.

The king wasn't stopped by a jaguar alone.

Every time Rana left his body to grow his forces, he only had a short amount of time before some creature or animal interfered with his plans. With time, these creatures would even be found in an unusual collaboration with hunters.

Chapter 506 [Bonus chapter]Change Of Plans, Thane

The animal-hunter team-ups proved to be more problematic than they should have been. Because at times like this, the fight quickly became impossible to win.

An eagle... a bear... an elephant... pigeons... foxes... wolves... soldier ants... There was no limit to what could attack him.

Memories of different times when he was defeated. Sometimes by a terrifying creature like a bear and other times by something as small and insignificant as a rat.

One rat was fine... but a swarm of them was something else...

At some point, he was bitten by a swarm of bees as he stalked a human couple in the woods.

Another time, he found himself having to dive into a river just to avoid being attacked by a swarm of locusts. And after escaping into the safety of the rushing water, the wolf he'd inhabited was incapacitated by a school of 'fish'.

It wasn't just the carnivores that were acting out of sorts or even the insects.

It was every living creature that wasn't human—with the exception of the few hunters that popped up here and there.

For as long as the creature had life... it was against the Rogue king.

.....

Granted he always had a bit of freedom running around and seeking new victims but his time was always limited. As soon as the creatures of the wild caught wind of his presence, it would be a futile battle with the infinite force of nature working to put a stop to him.

It was frustrating.

Despite how strong or compatible the body he inhabited was with his immense power, there was simply no way of escaping the countless enemies in the wild that were out to get to him.

The conclusion was all too simple to come to.

After a mental communication with Alpha Aidan, they confirmed the wielder of the bizarre power to control the wild. The scope of this power, it seemed, had become as endless as the king's spiritual journeys into the bodies of his subjects.

Thane snapped out of his memories and asked his king, figuring it was the same reason the king was angry, "What did she do this time?"

"At first, it was an eagle... a mad suicidal one. Then a flock of... BIRDS," Rana rubbed his temples, spitting the word 'birds' like it left a bad taste in his mouth.

A draft of wind tickled the king's ear, triggering a reflex. The king quickly wiped his hand over his ears and all over his shoulders, shuddering at the sensation of numerous beaks and talons all over his body, "BIRDS, EVERYWHERE!!!" he screamed in exasperation.

"What kind of birds?" Thane asked.

“Does it matter? They were so many colours. Seemed like there was no order to the way they attacked. Species don’t really matter when it comes to her. They just do what she bloody says... like a bunch of puppets,” the king argued.

Thane remained silent for a bit before talking, “Feels like her absence is more troublesome than her presence.”

Rana chuckled, “I want to believe that... but I’m still in the land of mortals. There is no telling if she will be capable of doing this when she returns.

Weakened as I left her, she probably pushed herself to find another way to protect her people... Just like I forced myself to learn how to leap from one body to another.”

“Have you perfected this ability, my Lord?” Thane asked.

“You’re more inquisitive than you usual, Thane,” the king raised a brow at his beta alpha.

“Forgive me, sir. I’m growing... bored from all the inaction. Apologies for depending on you for some form of entertainment,” while Rana found Thane’s words disrespectful, they were true to a fault.

It’s not like he was capable of lying. The beta alpha had been trapped here with him for the lion’s share of two years and it was eating at him, “Very well! I’ll need some time to recover before I can body-jump again anyway. Any questions you have for me?”

Thane’s eyes widened in shock. He had a ton of them... so many questions that he’d held back for fear of disrespecting his king.

“Well, I don’t where to start... I’m not hungry. And I’m pretty sure I should be dead right now,” Thane chuckled.

Rana laughed at the question, “Look around you, Thane. What do you see?”

“Endless blue...”

“Exactly, moon lotuses. The marker of the goddess’s divine presence on earth. Every time the goddess walks on the earth, her power seeps into the ground and it’s manifested as moon lotuses. I’ve said this plenty of times.

It was once my theory that her divine power escapes back to the moon through the petals of these flowers. They only die when that power runs out.”

“How does that relate to me being alive?”

“Well, think about it. Place a werewolf in the power of the patron goddess of werewolves and they can live for eternity,” Rana explained, “How long have you been alive, Thane?”

Thane stared at the lotus-covered ground for a while, trying to discern the start of his memories, “I...”

“You can’t remember... because you’ve been alive for more than a century. To protect your mind and preserve your sanity, you forget everything irrelevant... like your age. It’s only natural,” the king explained with a shrug.

“But... that’s not possible,” Thane gasped.

“You’re still alive without food, aren’t you? Everything’s possible with a touch of divinity,” Rana explained, “I know it’s a lot to take in but I’ve used the same power to keep you and Aidan alive all this time. We’ve trained many rogues over the years in search of some powerful enough to live as long as we have. And we’ve only just found them.”

“The generals, huh! So that’s their gift for the potential they’ve shown you. What are they up to, by the way?”

Rana smirked, “Rest assured, Thane. They are busy. The only one I haven’t been able to get my mind on is, Amanda. After rescuing Aidan, she went completely docile.”

“You think she was captured?”

“Aidan said she was along with our royal puppet. I’m surprised they were able to contain her. Maybe she was unlucky to be caught by one of the Mighty Warriors... but no matter. We’ll get her back once we’re done levelling this world. And with the new era that we shall usher-”

The Rogue King suddenly went silent, his eyes opening wide in an expression that was similar to disbelief... with a touch of fear.

A cold breeze blew through the Origin, a shimmer of blue rippling through the flower-covered ground. It seemed the Origin itself resonated with the energy of something that was not of this world.

Something wasn’t right...

“What is it, my lord?” Thane asked hurriedly.

The air in the Origin suddenly picked up and howled with the trees that surrounded them. An eerie feeling took over the atmosphere bringing with it a crushing sense of overwhelming power.

This power, however, was familiar. Thane had been in the presence of this pressure years before.

It almost felt like he was in the presence of his death, “Change of plans, Thane. I believe we won’t be here much longer, Thane. She simply won’t let that happen.”

“Who won’t let that happen?”

The Rogue King sighed, balling his fists that had started to tremble, “The Rogue Killer.”

Chapter 507 Panicked Messenger

‘Boredom... blue... bored... blue boredom... Is there something this old crone cares about other than these obnoxious flowers? I get the feeling she’d be a princess if she was ever given the chance... and not Katie’s kind of princess’ the thoughts of a blonde hunter swirled lazily within her mind as she leaned against the hilt of her steel katana.

Part of a pair that she kept with her at all times... and was even sure not to lend to just about anyone. Not after a certain princess had misplaced one of them.

The weapons were as much a part of her as her own body, always within reach and ready to strike at anything that wished her harm.

“Why do you keep coming out here? It’s not like you’ll find a secret hidden within those flowers. They are the same as they’ve always been... Glowing flowers that grow near places the moon goddess has been. Plain and simple, it doesn’t get any more interesting than that,” Samantha groaned, trying to stir her companion out of this monotonous... boring routine.

Her companion, contrary to the hunter’s dull mood, looked very comfortable where she was. The old woman held onto a frail glowing lotus and inhaled its scent deeply before retrieving a pair of scissors from her pocket.

She snipped the flower at the stalk, ending its life, holding the base of the petals in her fingers as she brought the flower up to her nose.

What happened next... was different from what Samantha had gotten used to seeing.

The ethereal glow that shone from the lotus petals began to flow upwards and leak out of it in form of a blue mist. The woman took in another deep breath... and with it, the mist sailed right into her nostrils, spreading a web of blue glowing veins across her face.

The woman grimaced and gritted her teeth, struggling against the mist as the blue veins pulsed underneath her skin. After a few moments, the bizarre sight of luminous veins vanished and she returned to normal.

.....

A resting mountain of fur stirred from its sleep not so far from them and approached the old woman, nuzzling her face and licking the last signs of pain from her face. Fauna was chuckling, “I’m fine, Brian. You don’t have to worry.”

The bear responded with a guttural rumble before ending its slobbery mission to soothe its charge.

Samantha tried to disregard this bizarre scene before as a figment of her imagination... but the Voice of the Wild looked... younger and this was hard to ignore.

‘I take it back... not boring anymore!’ the hunter corrected.

“Is there anything else you would like to show me before you explain what it is you just did?” Samantha asked, keeping her voice as calm as she could.

“Nope, nothing at all... Bothered, huntress?” Fauna asked, rubbing the brown bear’s head affectionately. The bear responded in a manner similar to that of a house cat.

This sight alone was almost enough to wipe Samantha’s mind of the questions that plagued her... Almost, “No, I’m perfectly fine. I just...”

“That’s wonderful. How’s the rogue investigation going?” the woman asked, cutting Samantha off before she could ask her questions.

The hunter balled her fists and withheld the frustration that threatened to get to her. She was trained to control her emotions after all. Somehow, this woman was the first creature capable of riling her up so much.

It was obvious she knew more than she ever told anyone... and yet she chose to remain silent. It was like she was intentionally keeping everyone around her in the dark. And whenever someone was about to ask, she seemed to conveniently have a way to evade them.

It was frustrating...

Nevertheless, the hunter was not going to let that get to her, "We're still in the dark. Citizens get randomly attacked and have no recollection of what happened. The only proof of the attack is always a single bite mark on their bodies. If I didn't know any better, I'd say the rogues are trying to turn more humans."

"Are they?"

"I don't know. That should be impossible. We know what happened in Lycaon two years ago. Not a single person turned into a werewolf after that incident," Samantha replied.

Fauna remained silent for a moment, deep in thought. The forest around them was as calm and undisturbed, showing no signs of the enemy... and yet, because of the frequent attacks, Samantha had been assigned to protect the Voice of the Wild while the rest of the hunters were each assigned to protect different parts in the border of their little town.

The old crone was fond of wandering off into the woods which meant they needed someone to always keep an eye on her.

Just when Fauna was about to speak, a loud screech disturbed the air. The sound of rapidly flapping wings invaded the calm serenity of the forest, alarming them of an approaching bird.

Normally, hunters didn't care about such things but things were different around Fauna. The woman had a way with animals and any creature in her presence would immediately start acting odd... as though they were in the presence of their fellow kin.

In a few moments, an eagle tore through the canopies, crushing violently through a net of branches and twigs. Samantha leapt back in shock as the eagle continued tumbling down through the trees, landing in a heap beside the brown bear, feathers amok.

Fauna's calm expression vanished as she left the bear's side to tend to the bird. She approached the eagle with shaking hands as though it was made of fire. Its body kept rising and falling with a frightening rhythm, "What is it? Talk to me."

The Voice of the Wild reached for the large bird, cradling the creature and repositioning it so it wasn't in any more pain than necessary. The eagle winced at almost everything she touched, making it hard for her to take care of it.

"Why would you be so reck..." the words were cut off from her mouth when the eagle started screeching again.

This went on for a petrifying minute before Fauna placed the eagle's head on the ground, her hands trembling violently. She quickly wrapped her hands around the bear and turned her head in the one direction filled with more moon lotuses than everywhere else.

Chapter 508 Awakening

The bear nudged the petrified woman, snapping her out of her trance, "Right! Thanks, Brian. Follow us, huntress."

With that, the woman jumped onto the brown bear, exhibiting more energy than someone her age was supposed to be capable of. 'What was in that moon lotus?'

Samantha bore the Agility Prometheus gift which allowed her to easily keep up with the dashing bear. The three of them tore through the woods, the lotuses surrounding them slowly increasing in number the deeper they ran into the forest.

Fauna stretched her hands outward and formed fists as if she was holding onto cables tied between two pillars. In a strained motion, she pulled her arms together...

Nothing happened.

"Was that supposed to do something?" Samantha asked.

She'd heard of her extraordinary nature powers that allowed her to manipulate her surroundings with frightening precision and power. This was meant to be such an incident... but unfortunately, nothing happened.

"Not unless there is a stronger power around... and there are few of those. I can't believe it. Isn't this too soon?" the woman dipped her hands into the thick fur of the bear, containing her emotions as they dashed into the woods.

Ahead of them, the lotuses exploded outward as the trees stopped, giving way to a memorable field of bright blue moon lotuses. This was the same place where the Lost Luna had vanished a few years ago.

.....

'What are we doing here?' Samantha wondered.

Her question, however, vanished from her mind when she noticed someone in the clearing. A large hulking figure was kneeling with one knee on the ground and the other supporting her elbow as she bowed to nothing in particular.

Samantha easily identified the figure as that of a woman mainly because of the hair that she had pulled back in a tight ponytail.

That, along with her face, were the last features that could easily convince Samantha of the woman's gender.

Everything else about this woman screamed masculinity. From the brown furs that covered her body, to the steel sledgehammer that lay on the ground beside her, she looked like a warrior who'd fought many battles, abandoning the delicate features of her femininity to the throes of war.

Samantha couldn't recognize her.

"Hey, Stranger. You're not from around here. Identify yourself," the hunter ordered. For all she knew, this woman could be one of the rogues causing all the chaos in town.

"Huntress, she is not our enemy," Fauna mentioned.

"How do you figure? Do you know her from somewhere?" Samantha snapped at her.

The woman looked up from her position, "I'll identify myself in a moment. But until then, I would like to perform my duty here without hindrance, please. It would be a shame for 'her' to find allies bickering."

"What?!"

"Care to join me?" the woman's beautiful face cracked into a mischievous smile. Something about her expression made Samantha feel... diminished.

Fauna didn't let her answer. Instead, she jumped off the bear's back and knelt next to the large woman, bowing in an identical position.

The bear, Brian, shuffled over to Fauna's side and bowed its head as well. Samantha wanted to scream at them for explanations but that's when her brain started to pick up on the subtle meanings behind this.

It was one thing for the two humans to bow their heads... but another thing completely for the bear to do so. Other than Fauna, the bear didn't show any interest towards anyone or anything else but its lunch unless ordered by the Voice of the Wild.

The wind suddenly picked up and the leaves rustled loudly, howling greatly as a blue mist rose into the air. Waves of blue pulsed through the blue flowers, bringing with them a feeling of otherworldly power. With each passing moment, the hunter felt like she would be crushed by some unknown force that only seemed to be getting stronger.

The swirling mist continued to spin and condense at the centre of the field of lotuses forming a large glowing ball of blue air.

Samantha watched with a frozen expression as the ball began to glow brighter and brighter. Till it was too bright that the hunter was forced to close her eyes completely.

Listening to the chaos and feeling the intense pressure of whatever being was contained within the ball of wind, she found that she had to get on one knee as well lest she risk being carried away by the sheer ferocity of the wind. Or crushed by the powerful aura coming from within the ball.

She waited for what felt like an eternity but when the wind finally died down, something had changed. She could feel it... Her bizarre companions could feel it too.

It was a feeling so familiar that she could never forget it. And with it came an overwhelming sense of hope... and crazed conviction.

Samantha opened her eyes.

A thick blue mist hung over the clearing, rising from the ground in sizzles. The hunter attempted to take a step forward, only to be held back by a calloused hand.

The large warrior-looking woman had a firm and careful grip. She beckoned for the hunter to get back down and wait a bit longer.

After what felt like forever, the mist began to clear, revealing the being clothed by it.

Curled up in a ball at the centre of the clearing was a large snow-white wolf, the blue mist swirling around it in an odd ethereal embrace.

The flowers surrounding it had grown taller, as though providing the wolf with the same kind of nourishment that Fauna had extracted from one much earlier.

The longer she stared, the more certain she was about what she was staring at... or rather 'who'.

Two furry triangular protrusions flickered from within the ball of fur, scanning the surroundings like antennae before a big white head rose, its ears directing it to face directly at them.

At the same time, its bright blue eyes opened, revealing a storm of emotions within them and a piercing level of clarity that was absolutely rare to find... except when staring at one person in particular:

Katie Sirius.

Chapter 509 Testing the One's Might

Katie Sirius was back... Katie was really back.

Samantha didn't know how to react to what she was seeing. The little girl she'd raised was finally back.

Samantha was happy... ecstatic, blissful along with a plethora of emotions she couldn't describe. For a hunter that had learnt to keep her emotions from affecting her, this sudden inflow was overwhelming.

The wolf before her looked fluffier than she remembered. Katie's large white form stretched its front paws and yawned loudly, exposing a dangerous set of fangs before smacking its lips.

With a swirl of blue mist, the white wolf was again enveloped and replaced by the familiar girl Samantha had known and raised. Dressed in deep blue velvet garments that were not too tight, providing her with just the right amount of mobility.

Katie took a few steps forward and pulled a petrified Samantha into a heartfelt hug, "Samantha! I missed you!"

The hug was warm, emotional and everything one would expect. However, it also forced the hunter to notice the differences between this Katie and the Katie she'd raised.

Katie almost looked the same...

Almost.

.....

Her long silky hair which used to be black and beautiful had turned snow white like the colour of her wolf's coat. Her hair was also longer. Samantha didn't want to mention but she could feel subtle changes in the girl's physique as well.

The way she carried herself was more effortless than before... as though walking was as simple as breathing now. The last thing was:

The hug.

Katie's hold on the hunter was tighter than it had ever been through her whole life. Katie had never been good at expressing her emotions... This was different.

The hunter hugged the Luna back, still unable to believe what she was witnessing.

Katie Sirius was hugging her...

After nearly two years away, she'd returned to them. Appearing in the same place she left.

"I—I missed you too, kiddo," Samantha replied, "Are you... okay now?"

"Yes, Samantha. I'm fine now," Katie nodded, "But I have much to do... I'll need your help. And everyone's help."

The phrase alone left Samantha whiplashed...

She pulled out of their heartfelt hug and narrowed her eyes at Katie, "Okay, who are you and what have you done with the real Katie?"

Katie chuckled, "I can't save the whole world at once!"

"You got that right. I love the new look!" Samantha clicked her tongue at the girl's hair and whistled, wriggling her brows, "Someone'll be surprised... and pleased."

Katie giggled at the woman's silliness, holding a bunch of her white locks up to her face before flipping it away. It was an unusual colour on her... but she didn't mind it.

"Ahem... My Lady," a gruff female voice interrupted their reunion.

Katie looked around Samantha and walked past her, "Pleasure meeting you at last, Brunhilde. Rise."

Brunhilde stood from her subdued kneeling position, easily towering over the princess's height. Katie didn't look bothered having to look up at her. For some reason, she still seemed to be looking down on her even though their heights were painfully different.

Brunhilde's own warrior aura clashed with Katie's as though fighting the aura of superiority the royal effortlessly gave off. The large woman grunted, "Hmph!!! You're shorter than I thought you would be."

Katie tilted her head, staring at the woman, a flicker of irritation in her sapphire orbs.

In the next moment, Brunhilde's knees gave out and the hulking woman dropped to her knees with a look of disbelief, "And you're a lot slower than I thought you would be."

"W—What did you do?" Brunhilde stammered.

Fauna and the brown bear backed away from the two dominant females, giving them all the space they needed.

The large warrior's fear lasted a moment before it was replaced by a bloodthirsty smirk. She gripped the heavy sledgehammer laying at her side and stood, easily picking it up and swiping at the princess in a horizontal swing. The force of her attack was powerful enough to send strong torrents of wind in the direction of the hammer.

Petals violently flew through the air as flowers were severed by the very force of the attack.

Despite the speed or strength behind the sudden swing, clearly meant as a sucker punch, Katie had crouched down low and completely out of the hammer's way. Brunhilde twisted her foot and planted her other in the direction opposite to the hammer's movement, halting its movement before turning it back to Katie.

The warrior quickly launched her next attack, swinging with all her might.

Brunhilde had an exceptional perception of her surroundings and was normally used to fighting fast opponents, capable of predicting where they could be and what their actions would be in response to her own situation. As a result, it wasn't hard for her to adjust the path of her hammer to both block and provide the best offensive tactic, bound to strike anyone who underestimated her.

However, when the hammer returned, Katie wasn't anywhere in sight.

"Hmm! Not bad," Katie's voice came from behind the warrior.

This time, Katie had completely stepped behind the warrior and momentarily leaned against her back.

Brunhilde grunted and spun in place, swiping with the sledgehammer with tremendous speed and agility. Speed fast enough to catch a hare before it got the chance to blink.

Once more, however, the princess was not there.

'She's fast!' the hunter thought.

"Are you going to keep running from me? Show me why we follow you. Show me why we risk our lives for you. I won't follow a leader who doesn't have the guts to face me."

Brunhilde screamed her concerns with conviction, "Come at me, princess."

Katie had taken several steps away from the hulking woman, relaxing at a distance thrice the hammer's reach.

"Very well," Katie sighed, sounding almost bored.

The princess leaned forward, her eyes flashing a bright blue as she got ready to charge at the warrior. An excited smirk covered Brunhilde's smile once more...

But only for a second.

For in the next moment, the princess vanished from sight and Brunhilde was sent flying across the clearing, the wind knocked out of her.

Gritting her teeth, Brunhilde gripped the sledgehammer and planted its handle into the ground, resisting the force of the attack and bringing herself to a stop. Years of training kicked in.

Adrenaline boosted her senses allowing her to perceive the impossibly fast female dashing towards her.

'Very fast,' the hunter grunted.

The blurry mirage of the princess was followed by a punch to the gut that sent her flying even further. Brunhilde, having experienced her fair share of pain, tightened her core and planted her feet, bracing herself within the scores of incandescent flowers.

Brandishing her heavy steel sledgehammer, the warrior swung with all her might at the darting blur of the princess and for the first time since the battle started, the hammer hit something.

Chapter 510 Troublesome Call

Brunhilde's muscles roared in agony as she struggled to control her hammer. The princess had sent her flying twice, making her weight seem like a trivial matter.

Despite her smaller stature, it seemed the large warrior's size was nothing if not for show. Katie was gracefully throwing her around.

In one ungraceful swing of desperation, Brunhilde had unleashed all her strength in a feat to hit the princess's attacking form.

'I know there is a large power gap between us. I've always known that... but you won't just throw me around like a toddler,' the woman wanted to scream.

What worth were all her years of training if this was all she could do against the princess? It was embarrassing... No, it was a complete outrage and betrayal of all the years she'd spent in training.

It couldn't have all amounted to this.

Brunhilde let out a loud battle cry, swinging at the blurry image of the fast princess... and for the first time, she hit something.

The collision sent a shockwave through the clearing blowing torrents of wind outwards from the impact of the attack. Flowers were ripped from the ground and dust violently raised from deep underneath the cover of nature.

When the wind and chaos finally died down, the scene left was bizarre. Brunhilde's hands were trembling against a stationary sledgehammer.

.....

The force she'd used was enough to down a tree, which meant anything that resisted that kind of force was bound to break her fingers.

Against all reason, the large menacing head of the mighty weapon was resting firmly in the princess's palm.

Katie had stopped the hammer with the bare palm of her hand, “You are strong, Brunhilde. I won’t deny that. Stronger than most of the hunters I’ve met so far.”

The warrior dropped to her knees, letting go of her weapon and bowing low in submission to Katie’s superiority, “I yield.”

Katie effortlessly tossed the hammer to the ground and placed a hand on the warrior’s head, “You’re strong... and I know it couldn’t have been easy attaining the power that you have now.

I hope, after all this, that you won’t be forced to train your body any more than this dark world has forced you to. Now rise, Brunhilde. We have work to do.”

“Yes, my Lady,” Brunhilde replied, rising to her full height and retrieving her hammer. Now that the matter of who was stronger of the two had been resolved, the warrior woman no longer seemed interested in asserting her authority on anyone.

“Brunhilde, I must apologise for my current confusion but... my awakening has left my mind somewhat muddled,” Katie sighed.

“We thought something like that would happen. Perhaps I can be of some assistance. In the last moments that Lady Ashley communicated with us, she mentioned something about the Rogue King’s plans.

She—She said it was imperative that you visited the packs across the whole world. I don’t know what good that was meant to do but it’s what she said.”

Katie rubbed her temples, straining her brain, “Huh... So it’s that bad.”

After a moment, she sighed and turned to Samantha, “Samantha, I need your help getting a message to the rest of the hunters.”

“What kind of message?” Samantha asked, “And who is this woman?”

“This is Brunhilde. She’s a hunter from a group known as the Bane of Cirrus. They are going to help me end this horrid war,” Katie explained.

“You’ve only returned. Why are you...” Samantha stopped talking when something started vibrating in her pocket.

The woman angrily fished a device out of her pocket and checked the caller:

Director Anthony

She answered it.

“Damn it, Anthony. Your timing is...” the woman froze mid-sentence, her frustrations completely vanishing.

“Where are you, Samantha? We need everyone we can get. It’s a mess... Save anyone you can while you make your way for the Agency,” Anthony yelled over the other side of the phone. His voice was somewhat laboured as he spoke.

Before the hunter could respond, the call disconnected... but not without the sound of a growl making its way through the phone. Samantha stared at the phone in her hand with trembling hands.

"We can still help them," Katie told her calmly, her eyes flashing a bright blue.

A swirling blue mist covered the princess's body and in her position stood a slender white wolf, very different from the wolf they had seen moments earlier.

This wolf, whilst looking weaker, bore an equally dangerous aura.

In the next moment, Samantha came to know why it was that she feared the wolf just as much as her normal wolf form. This wolf blurred from sight the moment her transformation was complete, tearing through the forest with incredible speed and agility.

"You... newbie, get this old woman back to the town and make sure she's safe," Samantha ordered before blurring from view as well, following Katie's explosively fast wolf.

Brunhilde stood in place watching the spot the two women had occupied only moments ago, "The nerve on that woman... Calling me a newbie. And you! Forgive my insubordination, but why do you continue to play the fool? Don't you think you should tell them who you are?"

"No... It's better this way. I personally stepped down from the position as the leader of the Bane, you know," the old woman sighed.

"Why did you step down? Katie is not as experienced as you when it comes to leading the Bane," Brunhilde asked, suddenly curious, "She might be stronger... much stronger but you are wiser."

"Hmm, let's see. Katie was the first person in centuries to make my mate feel fear. If that isn't someone destined to defeat him, I don't know who he is. I've led the Bane for a very long time... centuries. Held back by..." the woman scoffed, laughing humourlessly, "...fear of losing to the Rogue King's bloodlust.

But Katie... she launched straight in, her determination to protect stronger than his determination to destroy. She stood up against the Rogue King without a shred of fear... and for the first time in centuries, he was the one to show fear. I'll admit.

Her powers far surpass my own but she doesn't hide behind them as I did.

I've never made a more confident or wiser decision than the day I chose to appoint her the new leader of the Bane of Cirrus," Fauna sighed.

Brunhilde sighed, staring in the direction Katie had rushed in, "Very well... I trust you will be fine on your own."

With a nod of approval, the warrior female dashed away from the woman, leaving her in the company of her large loyal bear.

"May the goddess of the moon be with you, Katie Sirius!"