

## Chosen 71

### Chapter 71:

Caden did as he had said when he was leaving the couples behind and went out for a run passing by the layers of hunter defence that had been set up around the school. Every stall he saw made him dislike the place even more. He didn't want to be near it much longer. He didn't want to bother his friends either. The more they showed that they were moving on from Ash's death, the more distant he grew.

He couldn't blame them though. They didn't know everything that he did about the girl for even before she was dead, Caden had already found out that she was a female and even had a long conversation with her that got the two quite close at a level no one had gotten the chance to see.

He shifted once he was well away from the festival and shifted into his coffee brown coloured wolf before starting his run. Thoughts ran through his mind, the memories of his time with Ash starting all the way from the beginning this time. He promised himself he would move on once he'd gone through this and done what one might have called solo mourning.

On the day Ash was taken to the suite when she'd just been freed of her rogue status, Caden had told her to feel at home while Jason went on to try and make her feel uncomfortable. It was a sweet way of taking the pressure off someone, however, Caden was not convinced that the pressure of no longer being a rogue was all that she was hiding.

Once Jason and Cole had gone to sleep, the two stayed in the living room a bit longer, silence taking over them. Caden had either projected an understanding brotherly appearance to her that made him look approachable or she had reached her limit of how much she could hold it in. It didn't really matter after she began talking.

Several days ago in the Lycaon suite...

"Are you okay, Ash? I know Jason's questions must have been tough to withstand," Caden attempted to start a conversation, taking down Jason in the process.

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"I'm fine. His questions don't bother me that much. It's just that they hit the wrong spot every time he asks them," she said. At the time, Caden knew that he was speaking to a boy and not a girl.

"That is very confusing. Would you try to shed some light on that? Coffee? Tea?" he asked while he stood up to make himself something in the kitchen.

"Any would do... I mean they hit the wrong spot because they are gender-sensitive," she said.

Caden was frozen for a bit while he tried to decipher what she'd just said. It was true that what Jason asked her were things only boys would ask boys... "I feel like I'm halfway to what you're trying to say," he stopped to look at her face clearly. The gel that went through her hair was excessive, but now that he looked at her clearly, this was a distraction. "Are you a girl?"

"Yes, I am," she replied. He would not have guessed it in a million years for it was known for nearly all rogues on the battlefield to be males. It was almost unheard of for a female to fight amongst the rogues when they had a more important job of increasing their numbers.

He finished making coffee for the both of them and returned to the living room handing her the cup, "Careful, it's hot... Do you mind telling me your story? If you don't want it out, you don't have to worry about that. I'll keep my mouth shut. I'm just of the opinion that you need someone you don't need to hide from while you're here."

"Well, I was planning on telling everyone someday, so I'll start with you. But you have to keep it a secret until I'm ready," she said. Caden nodded and made a cross above his chest along with a gesture of death where he stuck out his tongue, 'Cross my heart and hope to die.' The girl laughed at his antics, a melody that Caden was only hearing for the first time. Now that he knew that secret, she didn't fake her laugh and he was almost tempted into making her reveal her gender immediately just to keep hearing her laugh all the time she did.

"My full name is Ashley, but I cut it short when I decided to pretend to be a boy. Myster is what I was named when I was going undercover. We aren't exactly given full names since our mothers don't know the father and considering how many children they are forced to give birth to. I only knew my mother in the rogue camps.

It's rare for children who are born rogues to know their fathers since it was never official who got the woman pregnant. Breeders lived a harsh life in the rogue camps. They were supplied with everything they needed to survive, but as long as they started to look young and fertile, they were raped again and again until they conceived. It wasn't unheard of for a beautiful one to be raped even after conception.

Ashley's mother was always sickly after having her. Her siblings numbered twelve and each one of them was male. They were naturally aggressive since they lived in a world where it was every man for himself until the rogues came to pick them up for training. Boys would go for training at age five while girls would stay behind and help their mothers with the daily activities and take care of them until they became of age.

The camps that the breeders were in were guarded heavily by rogues as the young girls were always trying to run away from there so that they didn't suffer the same fate as their mothers. This almost never worked and when it did, the girl would later be discovered dead in the woods. A fate that many found to be much more peaceful than what they were subjected to in the camps.

Ashley was soon to turn six when her mother gave her a proposal, "I want you to escape and find peace and a home outside the life of being a rogue." At first, Ashley had brushed off the idea in the hopes that her mother was just being delusional. The possibility of being free, however, was just so alluring that she came right back and asked for a full explanation. She was to pretend to be a boy and go along with them when the rogues came for the next recruitment.

This plan only worked because the children were many and since she rarely played with them, they couldn't recognize her. Keeping her identity secret was barely something easy to keep during her times in training. She was always making excuses and keeping a low profile such that she was never discovered. At some point, it looked like she would never be free of the life that she had now gotten herself into.

They were taught cruel ways of life. They were taught that the moon goddess created werewolves for the sole purpose of ridding the world of humans and that's what they were trained to do. Anything else was irrelevant. Well, that was until they found something useful to do. Once she was recognized as

someone who knew how to blend in, the rogues took action in deploying her to the one place they never ventured, the home of the rogue killer.

She didn't know why she survived the rogue killer. It was the first time she'd ever seen blood in her life. The rogue killer moved swiftly and bore unimaginable strength. She killed without hesitation and looked graceful doing it. Ashley was both moved by her efficiency and disgusted at the sight of blood and corpses. Everyone that was a part of her escort was killed while she hid in a bush watching it all happen.

This was how spies were transported into the town of Brigadia. The Rogue king ordered five rogues to transport a spy with a mission already given. The rogues were decoys for the Rogue killer to get rid of. The plan was effective as she didn't seem to notice her hiding. From that point, she followed the directions she was given and arrived at a house that looked empty at first glance, but once she had reached the backyard, it was clear that there was someone inside.

She knocked and was let in by the other spies that lived there. This is how her life in Brigadia began at age fifteen, having only been deployed from training and straight into the field, her bag filled with werewolf inhibiting drugs that could take her till her birth date, she had three years to do everything that was required of her. The house they were in comprised six fellow spies who had the money for rent from God-knows-where.

The rogues in that house were pretentious and had a knack for bad-mouthing students that they'd befriended, making sure to show how disgusted they were with the job they were given while enjoying the luxurious life they were living in a house with no adults. It was only a matter of time before they wondered what made Ashley so different from them or at least one of them, Chandler, who was starting to get suspicious about their new arrival. Among the rogues, trust was a luxury that one would find themselves regretting.

## 72 Chapter Seventy Two

Caden did his best to listen without interrupting the girl's story. Ashley's life was filled with hardships, making it hard for him to keep a straight face when she spoke of the times she felt like she was trapped. Having kept her identity a secret for nearly ten years before being deployed into Brigadia as a spy by a convoy that was meant to be killed by the Rogue Killer. Up until this point, Caden was yet to know who the rogue killer was and stayed patient throughout the story.

Before coming to Brigadia, they had noticed from the statistics of rogue attacks that there hadn't been a single one in the past four years and yet Ashley continued to speak of their presence and knowledge of the peculiar town like they had been there the whole time. He couldn't keep himself from asking the question when it irked him, "You're telling me that rogues know of this place and only keep away because once they get within three miles, they are killed immediately?" he asked while she nodded.

"Yes, that is true. The one they refer to as the Rogue Killer always shows up without fail and there is no escape for rogues that get within that distance of the town. I was made to take the drugs far before I got into that radius so that once I hid, I would not be detected, however, that was also just speculation. No one knew how the Rogue killer would get alerted once rogues were in Brigadia," she explained.

After this Caden asked that she continue her story, intrigued by the fact that there was someone of that much power in Brigadia. They were used to seeing just the Chase hunters at the Lycaon palace

performing such rare feats. Perhaps it had something to do with the Chase family that lived here as well. There was no reason for there to be a family of Chase hunters here either which also sent his suspicions into a frenzy about what secrets they held for being here.

Ash continued the story of the time she lived with the rogues in the house South of Brigadia town. This house was barely big enough for the seven of them. Since it wasn't permanent, there was no real reason for setting it up like a permanent home and so they only made the kitchen and living room presentable. The rest was up to whoever felt they had the need for order. It was not long after she moved into the house that one of them began to suspect her.

Chandler began picking on her and making her stick out like a sore thumb among the rest. Soon enough the others had started talking to her and sending her for errands and something of the sort since she was the youngest in the crew. They didn't mind what she did or where she was which was fine, but Chandler did. And one day he decided he wanted to see her without all the gelled hair.

She never noticed that by refusing, she only made him even more curious to know what she was hiding. As a result, he'd poured water on her while she was walking through the hallway and watched as the hair let loose and fell to her shoulders. Her clothes stuck to her and revealed the entire secret. She might have been lucky that the rest of the rogues weren't around to see her, but Chandler was bad enough.

The barbaric boy did not hesitate in taking advantage of the girl. Using her secret as leverage, he'd threaten her and falsify the results of her secret coming out. It wasn't clear what would happen to her once they found out about her, but she didn't want to find out. There was no doubt that he would make sure to put ideas into their heads so that they had the worst-case scenario ready for her. Chandler had her moved to his room claiming there was something that he needed to teach the newbie concerning being a spy for the Rogue King.

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Chandler then used this tactic to force her into sleeping with him," Ash was shaken as she revealed this part. Caden had been gritting his teeth and barely noticed when he shattered the hollow handle of the ceramic cup that he held spilling its contents on the floor. He paid no heed to the cup and pulled Ashley into an embrace, rubbing circles in her bag and trying to wear down the shivers. She did not have to say the rest of the story as he could feel that she was about the end of her story.

"I later realized who the rogue killer was when we were in the forest today," she said.

"Who was it?"

"It was Katie. Katie moved like her when she was fighting the others this evening. When I saw Cole walk into the school building that day, I saw my fight ray of hope. I'd already known of his arrival as that was the information that I was sent to confirm though rules stated that I was not supposed to tell the others of my mission. If I could only get Cole to start a Prometheus evaluation for me, I could finally be free of being labelled a rogue and free of Chandler and the others," she said.

"It would make sense considering she is the one that possesses two Prometheus gifts and is part of the Chase family," he said.

“She possesses both of them, are you sure?”

“Yes, I am sure. She demonstrated it while you were going through your evaluation. It was scary,” he said, still holding the girl in his arms. Ash remained silent for a bit enjoying the warmth of the werewolf with her. She’d been told stories of men who weren’t rogues. Stories of how dignified they could be. Outside of the camp, in the world outside the rogues, the life that females lived felt almost untouchable and fictional.

“I haven’t felt this safe or relaxed since I could understand what fear was...” she said. Caden tightened his embrace, partly because he was boiling with rage. He’d always frowned upon the ways of the rogues, but being in the presence of a survivor of that life made that hate even more intense.

“That will never happen to you ever again. Forget everything about what happened to you when you were there. You have a new life now,” Caden was compelled to comfort the girl in his arms. His protective instincts were completely alert. Rogues had caused a lot of suffering in the world and most werewolves trained to fight the rogues were also tested in the matter of rescue. Part of rescue was rehabilitating those that were psychologically affected by an attack.

“I appreciate everything you guys are doing for me. I’ll do my best to lessen the burden that I impose on you. I’ll...”

“Hush, Ashley, there is nothing you have to worry about. Let us take care of you,” he tried.

“No, I won’t be a liability. There is a lot I want to see in this world. My mother spoke of rivers and lakes as far as the eye could see. She spoke of carnivals and festivals similar to what I hear every time I’m told about the Founder’s festival. Foods that can make one moan the moment they touch someone’s tongue. I was told that in the world outside of the camp, children were allowed to follow their dreams.

I envied those stories and the people who were born with the privilege and freedom of such a life. The mission of the rogues disgusts me every time I find something about the rogues that is repulsive,” she said.

“You’ll get to see all of that. All in good time, Ashley. You’re far from the reaches of the rogues now,” he said.

“It gives me a lot of hope to feel that. I do want to know something though. Can I ask you a question?” she asked him.

“What do you want to know?”

“What’s a mate?” the question seemed to break his heart hearing it. Rogues didn’t care about that sort of thing and it would only stand to reason that she didn’t know anything about them. It still didn’t make sense though. Ashley might have heard a weak wolf and didn’t know much when it came to using her newly awakened senses, but knowing nothing about mates a whole new level of ignorance for a werewolf.

“How is it that you don’t know what a mate is?” he asked.

“I’ve heard the word plenty of times and from the way I hear werewolves speak of the term, it sounds amazing and sort of like what every female hopes for, but I don’t get how it all works,” she said.

“Well then, perhaps you might need an education on what that means then. Ask anything that you don’t understand, okay?” Caden went through the entire explanation of how every werewolf was granted another that supplemented them in every way. Ashley listened quietly at the description of the bond that the two shared that even allowed them to feel each other’s emotions, feel what the other wanted and the effect that mates had on each other. When Caden was done, she had tears in her eyes.

Caden, on the other hand, was determined to help make her time with the rogues nothing but a distant memory. It wasn’t something that was going to be easy, that much he knew, but he wasn’t going to give up without trying and this he swore to himself that night as she fell asleep in his arms. He took her to her room and laid her to sleep. On that night, two ladies slept in their suite and none of them had even seen it coming.

When Ash was found dead, Caden started losing his mind over the promise he couldn’t fulfil. While the others were trying to get through the process of grief, he was stuck far behind them and could only distance himself for he couldn’t go through the process as fast as they could. ‘Ashley was not supposed to die,’ he would yell at himself. But nothing he did could change the fact that she’d been murdered. His wolf let out a howl once he was far away from Brigadia collapsing on the forest floor, exhaustion and grief taking their toll on his body, ‘She didn’t have to die...’

### 73 Chapter Seventy Three

Katie walked through the festival with Cole, thoughts of what the girl from the ice cream stand had said still haunted her mind while she walked on with Cole. Katie was just about to take Cole to check out one more place before she was stopped. “Can you wait for me here for a bit? There is something I saw back there that I want to get,” he said.

“Well, I won’t hold you back. Just don’t make me wait too long,” she crossed her arms while waiting for her.

“Someone is enjoying the festival. I thought you were the Head of security,” someone called to her. She turned to see Samantha standing behind her with a smug look on her face.

“Well, my real job begins after lunch, so I don’t really have something to worry about,” she said innocently.

“Well, have fun. You deserve it, but I do want to know how you’re doing in terms of hunger,” she asked. Katie’s hand rushed to her stomach, she wasn’t hungry, but there was no sensation of food in there either. This was normally something that wouldn’t cause her to worry one bit, but today was a different story. It was only a matter of time before she’d have to find a way out of all this.

“How long do you think you have?” Samantha asked reading the girl’s expression.

“I’m not sure. I wasn’t paying attention to my condition. So it could be anywhere between thirty minutes and two hours,” she said.

“Then find a way to wrap this up... that is if you don’t want him to hear your stomach growling like a bear. It would be cute. The boy would have found something to spend on to please you,” Samantha giggled.

“Who do I have the pleasure of meeting?” a familiar voice gripped Katie’s mind, the topic of discussion immediately escaping her as she wanted to know only what kept Cole away from her that long. Cole and Samantha looked between each other until they realized the person supposed to be introducing them was not going to.

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“Samantha Conners, I’m a hunter. Watched Katie grow up. What’s a Lycaon doing with this hunter?” she asked.

“Well, I was receiving a tour of the festival, though I think it’s almost done,” he said.

“Well, if I know Katie, then she saved her best part of the fair for the last. The part of the festival that only hunters can survive,” she said, “I won’t spoil the fun, so I’ll let you two get on with the festival.”

The two bid each other farewell, Cole being careful to keep one hand behind his back making it obvious he was holding something behind his back. Cole snapped his hands in front of the girl’s face snapping her back to reality, “She’s gone, you know.”

“Yeah, that must have been embarrassing,” Katie’s cheeks were turning a slight pink.

“That’s a very new look,” Cole sounded genuinely surprised by the reaction.

“Yeah, I’ve been getting that a lot today. Are you done shopping so that I can take you to my favourite part of the festival?” she asked him.

“Yeah, I’m done, but before we can proceed, I have something to give you,” he said, bringing his right hand out from behind him. In his hands, he held a black box made of hard thick paper. The box showed no sign of what was inside it. Katie’s curiosity spiked when she saw the box. She got it from him and opened it, freezing at the sight of the silver ornament that lay within the box. A silver chain necklace lay within the box, but the one thing about it that captured her attention the most was the giant sapphire pearl it held, the silver around it swirling to give it a nice finish.

She was at a loss of words and quite sure her burning cheeks should have been bright red. She wanted to complain about the price of the ornament, but Cole was a prince which meant that argument wouldn’t go anywhere. “It’s beautiful,” the words finally escaped her.

“I’m glad... For a second there, I thought you’d forgotten how to speak,” he joked, before getting a hold of the necklace, “Let me put it around your neck and see how that goes.”

“Sure,” she said, getting her black shoulder-length curls out of the way to expose her neck. Cole was forced to grit his teeth as his wolf surged forward in response to the bare neck he was seeing for the first time. ‘What’s this supposed to mean? You haven’t told me if she’s our mate and now you want to mark her. What aren’t you telling me?’ he mentally yelled at the wolf within him, fighting the urge to mark the deadly hunter before him, ‘She’ll have our hide before we can blink,’ he tried to sway the animal part of him.

“Are you going to put it there or not?” she asked him, pulling him out of his trance.

“Oh yes, here you go. I was just thinking of how much the ornament reminded me of your eyes,” he said, saving his hide in a different way.

Katie did not know how to reply to the compliment and blushed red. 'I must look like a freakin tomato. This isn't exactly a private place. Oh, what the hell... this is the last day with him in the dark. This won't have to be secret much longer.' "I'm flattered, Cole," she said in reply.

Cole watched her let go of her hair, numbing pain in his canines as he lost the chance that should have never been his in the first place. He didn't know why this one girl had this much effect on him. It felt like he was being unfair to the person the moon goddess was keeping for him, but he couldn't help himself. A stupid move, but one he was ready to take full responsibility for... or at least that's what he told himself to help him sleep at night. He knew one thing for sure, he couldn't declare Katie his... 'Did Katie know that though? Did she know that she couldn't be his regardless of how sweet his actions were?' the thoughts plagued his mind as he fazed in and out of reality.

"Hey, Cole, are you okay?" he snapped out of his thoughts to see the person before him. The sapphire matched her eyes perfectly that it felt like he was staring at her for the first time that day. She looked nothing like a hunter at the moment and for a slight moment, he forgot that she was the same scary hunter that possessed two Prometheus gifts and was potentially stronger than he was. (It was yet to be proven).

"You look beautiful," he said.

"I thought you found didn't like my eyes," she started, remembering his reaction on the first day they met.

"They were intimidating at first. Humans don't usually have eyes that colour, but I found that they suit you quite well. Prometheus blessed with a nice set of orbs," he defended himself.

"That's quite flattering, Lycaon," she summarized, "Now follow me to the Archery range such that I might cream you in a game that only hunters were born to do."

The evil laugh that followed had him laughing, draining his memory of the troubling thoughts that had plagued him only moments ago...

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The Archery range was set up in an enclosed area to protect people from any stray arrows. It was as Samantha had said it, Archers were everywhere here. Competitions were held in pairs. The junior hunters had already had their turn and left everything to the professionals that had now shown up. Cole found Katie's enthusiasm cute as she couldn't wait for their turn. He hadn't even noticed when she'd signed them up.

She just turned up with their number and they sat on the sidelines to watch the pairs before them compete. The professional hunters were boisterous and highly competitive. Most of them got bullseyes, intimidating Cole to his core, "Are you that good?" he asked his partner.

"No, not really. I love using the bow, but not in real combat unless absolutely necessary. I like to let my fists fly in a real fight, that way, I don't miss," she said.

"Oh, gotcha... I have to ask though. Were the hunters always this many?"



“Not really... The VIPs come with their own escorts. The scouts usually get here first and call the convoy informing them of the situation. That way they aren’t in any real trouble. Though I must admit they are more than I thought they’d be at this time,” she answered.

Soon enough it was their turn and were called up to the starting points. They were each given five chances to shoot and no second chances. Cole was not the best with a bow. All he knew about it was what he learnt for the Royal games. This was one of the contests where Drake had beaten him. They handed them the bows and arrows. “Have you done this before?”

“Yes, I have, but I can’t say I was that good at it,” he said.

“Don’t panic and listen to the wind and you’ll be all good,” she said to him whilst nocking her first arrow. Planting one foot firmly in front of the other and pulling the string back, she looked the part of a hunter with her entire stand flawless. After taking in a deep breath, she let the arrow fly. It soared through the air and landed next to the bullseye. “Your turn.”

“For a second there, I thought you were going to hit a bullseye...” he sighed in relief before nocking his first arrow as well. Katie chuckled at him and watched the man take up his stance as well. Flawed as it might have been, he seemed to know what he was doing as he let his arrow fly, having given himself enough time to get ready. The arrow hit the bullseye, leaving no room for negotiation. “That’s going to sting,” he sighed, for the next three arrows, Katie did not miss a single one, while he strayed ever so close to the outer circle.

“Was your first shot a lucky one?” she asked.

“Yes, it was... I know you held back with your first one, so I gained a bit of confidence that it would be a close match. Once I made that lucky shot, I didn’t stand a chance,” the Royal whined.

Katie couldn’t contain her laughter on hearing that. She got ready with her last arrow and made a quick shot hitting close to the bullseye effortlessly. She placed the arrow in its rack and came back to Cole.

“How about I guide you for your next shot...”

“I’m all ears...”

“Alright then, nock your arrow and show me your stance. You have a few adjustments to make if you want that arrow to hit the mark,” she ordered and the Royal did as he’d been instructed. Katie walked around him making the necessary adjustments to his elbow and hands. She forced him to align his feet right so that he was in line with the target.

“Now listen for the wind and make sure to let the arrow go once it’s at its calmest. That was you won’t have that much of an adjustment to the position of the arrow,” she ordered. Cole thanked the goddess for making him a werewolf, for the bowstring, was screaming to be released. His werewolf strength, however, allowed him to hold it this long.

The arrow seemed to soar through the air for ages before it hit right at the centre of the bullseye,

“Nicely done.”

“I had an amazing teacher,” he said.

"If you wouldn't mind the interruption, might I cut in and ask the fair lady for one round with me," a voice interrupted them catching their attention. What stood out most about the new arrival was the fact that he hid his face behind a mask. Katie couldn't quite place his voice, but she was certain she'd heard it somewhere.

"Sure, go ahead," Cole answered, hiding his now-clenching fist.

#### 74 Chapter Seventy Four

The gentleman that had interrupted them was dressed to kill in a black tux. He looked suited to be one of the VIPs that were supposed to be coming, easily outmatching the unprepared royal who'd come casually dressed in a pair of jeans and a black shirt that was only slightly tight on him. He didn't look too bad in Katie's eyes though.

"Do I get the pleasure of knowing the name of my Challenger?" Katie asked the masked arrival.

"Oh, where are my manners? The name is Lawson," the man said. The name rang a thousand bells in her mind, but she couldn't quite place it. These were irritating times though.

"Feels like I've heard it before. Are you from here?" Katie asked, nocking another arrow and getting ready for her next shot. Something was different about the way these two were competing though. The entire archery range had gone quiet to watch their bout. Katie noticed this and decided she was not going to lose to this man. She closed her eyes feeling for the wind and let the arrow loose, hitting the outer part of the bullseye. It wasn't a perfect shot.

The man then took his arrow and continued their conversation, "No, not for a long time, but I am back for the festival. It is just as magnificent as they say it is for a small town such as this one." The man went quiet as did Katie, focusing on the target before him. From how long he could hold the string taut, she could tell that he wasn't an ordinary human.

He let the arrow loose and it soared through the air whistling as it went and impaling itself into the target at the centre of the bullseye. The man had drawn the string so far back that the arrow bore enough force to bury itself half into the wood they were shooting at. A ripple of gasps filled the crowd. Holding an arrow back with that much of the string drawn back was hard enough in its own right.

Katie was quiet for a bit as she watched the arrow within the board waiting for it. The boards were changed as per her request so that they had a new one to use. "You're quite skilled. I'll give you that," she said, nocking another arrow.

"You don't sound like you're ready to give up though. Does that mean you've been holding back on me?" he asked.

Katie chuckled while she rested her cheek on her arm, listening to the wind with her eyes closed. Cole was getting worried, watching how far back she'd drawn the string. However, the arrow still remained steady in the bow. The more force one needed to hold the string back, the harder it was to hold it steady. When Katie saw her window of opportunity, her eyes shot open and she let the arrow fly soaring through the air at blinding speed and whistling louder than the last one. It impaled the board dead centre, threatening to tear through completely to the other side of it.

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“So, you were holding back. I’m slightly offended by that,” he said.

“You should be proud. You got me to take this seriously,” she replied chuckling, “I don’t normally get much of a challenge in this unless it’s the professional hunters.”

“Am I to assume that you are a professional hunter as well?” he asked, nocking his next arrow, but waiting for the people who had gone to tend to the target board. The wall behind the board was being reinforced to make sure no stray arrows went through to the other side just in case someone was passing by.

“You really aren’t from here then. Or if it was a long time ago, then you must have been here before I became a hunter,” she said dismissively.

The man nocked his arrow whispering to himself so that she couldn’t hear him, “I guess you’ve really grown. If the stories are right, then I was right about you.”

Cole’s werewolf hearing, being superior to even that of normal werewolves picked up on the words that the man said. This man knew Katie and he’d not challenged her out of spite. He was using this opportunity to talk to her before he got the chance to reveal himself to her. From what he could tell, he was a hunter and he was sure of how important he was to Ciara.

Lawson couldn’t have been his first name. Cole didn’t like the encrypted messages he was getting off the guy. Katie looked like she wasn’t bothered one bit about the man’s identity. Her head was too deep into the game to notice that there was something suspicious about the man, but then again, Katie would have detected something if he was hostile given her Chase heritage. For this reason, Cole kept his distance and watched the two compete.

The man drew his arrow back until it the string began to groan from the tension it was under. The arrowhead was now at the same level as the bow. He’d completely drawn the arrow back to its limit and now he held it there waiting for the wind to calm down. Katie was impressed by this feat. The man just kept pushing past his limit. Considering these bows were designed for hunters that were trying to learn archery, they could handle the force that the man was putting into the string.

Normally, the amount of force he was using would have snapped a normal bow in half. He let his arrow fly and it struck right through Katie’s arrow forcing the both of them through the board. Murmurs started running through the crowd as they all stared at the two competitors. This bout had easily caught the eyes of many that were present. Katie was at a wit’s end. Considering her earlier blunder, this man was going to win. There were points awarded for the force the arrow packed as well and he was dominating that as well.

“The rogue killer has gotten herself into trouble this time,” someone chuckled beside Cole. He couldn’t deny that. Her opponent was quite formidable and made his stomach turn with envy. His bout with Katie hadn’t been so interesting.

Katie, on the other hand, was at her human limit. If she was going to win this, she was going to have to add some Prometheus strength to it, but the bows that were being used could not handle that kind of force. She jogged back to the booth and asked for a Hunter’s Bow, something that was reserved for contests such as what she’d just gotten herself into.

She came back holding something that amused the crowd beyond what they would have thought. The bow was made of thick metal and strained her muscles just by carrying it. There was no doubt that it was heavy and its string was made of an elastic carbon-based component that was almost impossible to snap. The hunter running the booth ordered the juniors that were responsible for replacing the board to use the ones with twice the thickness of the wood.

"Someone is getting serious," the man mused, leaning against the post next to him that marked the standing point.

"You should be scared. This one is going to knock your socks off," she said, smirking at him.

"Oh, I quiver in fear," he mocked her, chuckling. He was still remarkably calm. This was Katie's third arrow and she was sure she wasn't going to miss at all in the next rounds. She nocked an arrow and pulled back on the string until the arrow was halfway to the bow, tapping into her Prometheus gift to achieve this feat.

"Sure you don't want to use more force than that," the man taunted.

She let the arrow fly and everyone watched as it impaled the board halfway through. "Try to beat that... Maybe then I'll add some more force."

"You'll find that underestimating me is not a good thing," the man said beckoning for the men that Katie only noticed now to bring him something. The men he called were dressed to kill as well although they looked more like butlers as they brought the man a bag, suffering under the weight of the equipment contained in it. Lawson opened it and pulled out a bow similar to the one Katie was holding, only that Katie could realise that this one was custom made and packed twice as much of a punch as the standard-issue she wielded.

"You are having fun with this," she whined, burying her head in her hands.

Lawson chuckled as he also summoned his strength to draw the string back. "You know, I would advise you to give it all you have when you face me in a battle. Don't look down on me just because I look weaker than you," with those words striking a thousand chords of nostalgia within Katie's mind. The man let the arrow loose after having drawn it all the way, his string screaming from the strain.

The arrow whizzed through the air cutting straight through Katie's arrow as though it was nothing and taking the both of them through the thick wood. Katie looked into the bag that had been brought and noticed the man had a quiver of steel arrows. The kind that could be shot through metal and barely have an effect on its effectiveness. She was outmatched in all ways here and wasn't even sure she could keep her arrow steady under the force that he'd just used to shoot his last arrow.

"I must admit. You are formidable... and remarkably familiar. Though I do have to tell you that I have no idea who you are," she said before letting her next arrow fly. It shot through the board completely, leaving only a hole at the centre of the bullseye and slamming onto the wall on the other side of the target, completely out of power.

"Maybe you will recognize me later on when we are allowed to meet officially," he said to her.

"Oh, you mean you're a stowaway VIP? I didn't know hunters could be VIPs," she said.

“Why would you think I was a VIP? Can’t I be a hunter as well?” he let his arrow loose and it whizzed through the air. From the force it held, it forced the board to fall back as it passed through the same opening that Katie had made, impaling itself into the wall at the back of the secluded archery range.

“Might I ask the both of you to tone down the force you are using? I don’t want casualties,” the hunter in the booth yelled. The crowd that was present began to groan and whine at the buzzkill that had just ruined the fun. Katie chuckled at the silliness of the situation she’d gotten herself into. It was clear that she’d lost. In fact, she knew she lost right after the man had shot his first arrow. At the moment, he was trying to get her to take this seriously and he’d succeeded.

When they were done, he bowed and bid her farewell, “We’ll meet under different circumstances. Maybe then you’ll figure out my first name,” he said.

“Would it be so hard for you to just tell me?” ‘Why did he have to be so cryptic?’

“There will be no need for me to do such a thing,” he chuckled before walking away, his butlers following him with their bags.

Katie watched the man leave, her mind trying to figure out who he was, but alas, there was nothing that she could come up with, “He seemed like an interesting fellow.” Thoughts of Lawson vanished when she heard the man behind her. This was the reason she’d come to the archery range in the first place.

## 75 Chapter Seventy Five

“Cole,” she hugged him, forgetting her boundaries, “Wait, you mean him? Can we go for another round?”

“I don’t think I can manage one more round of archery after what I just watched. I knew you were good, but I had no idea you were that good,” he said. He genuinely looked shaken by the bout he’d just watched the two of them have, “That was some demonic level archery.”

Katie couldn’t hold back her laughter. She pulled away from him, “Fine then, let’s check out the rest of the fair then.” A familiar feeling gripped her as they reached the exit, turning her face red as a sound, all too clear for her liking, rumbled. She brought her hands to her stomach and sighed in embarrassment.

“Let’s first get you something to eat. I would get hungry if I had to shoot arrows with that much force,” Cole chuckled, wrapping his arm around the embarrassed beauty and dragging her to the nearest stall that had been set up to look like a restaurant. It was too early for a meal, but a small snack to fill an empty belly couldn’t hurt... or so he thought...

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Cole did the best he could to try and hide his amusement when he saw Katie eating. She ordered a plate of fries which had to be prepared. He wasn’t sure if she was going to finish that which was no problem for him, but what happened after they arrived was beyond his imagination. One by one, the fries vanished into a bottomless pit that was Katie’s stomach. “It’s bad to stare at Lycaon,” the girl said.

“I was just wondering where the rogue killer gets her energy and now I know,” he tried to save himself.

“Yeah, I guess that’s right. Is it...”

“Totally normal among the werewolves, yes... completely. I was just under the impression that the hunters were more human in that regard. Is your stomach still the same?” he couldn’t help but ask.

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Katie chuckled at the man’s silliness, “Yes, it’s normal. This is embarrassing, honestly.”

“It shouldn’t be. You’re different today, though. You care what others think of you. What happened to bring about this change?” he asked.

“Oh, I don’t care what everyone in this room thinks about me. I just care about what a few people think of me. A subject I’ll explain later as I find it quite embarrassing to talk of right now,” she said.

“With that necklace around your neck, it’s hard for me to find anything you do embarrassing. You look amazing,” he said.

“Security guards aren’t supposed to look that good,” she joked.

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Soon enough they were out of the restaurant to enjoy the rest of the trip through the festival. As they got out of the restaurant, Cole felt a pang of pain through his chest as a howl reached his hypersensitive ears. A howl of loss and loneliness. A howl that mourned the death of a companion. It was coming from none other than Caden and he was very far from them. He couldn’t help the tear that ran down his face.

“What is it, Cole? You seem to be crying,” she asked.

“I just heard a howl of sorrow from a wolf that I know,” he said. She understood it was probably from Caden as he was the only one she knew who was still howling that loudly.

“When will he be back?”

“If I know him well, he will come back when he knows that he can try to move on. For now, he will let himself feel the entirety of the grief. Werewolves can’t move on as easily as humans can. Most especially if they share a deep connection to the one that has died. Caden will need time to get back to himself.

“Aren’t you worried about him? Considering I didn’t hear that howl, isn’t her far?” she asked.

“He is far, but rogues know better than to attack an alpha. He will be fine...” he paused, “No, I am worried, but if I go to him when I don’t know what’s going on, I just might make it worse and send him on a rampage,” he said.

“Is Caden capable of going on a rampage?” she asked bewildered. There was something wrong with that picture since she knew him as a calm person who had a good grip on his emotions.

“Yes, he is capable of doing that,” the two continued the tour. Katie took Cole through it and forced Cole into doing a bunch of other silly things like shooting targets for a prize. He mocked him saying this was what he was supposed to be doing instead of archery. Surprisingly, he was able to win three of the bears without a problem. These they gave to random children that had been let loose to run through the festival and failed to win themselves toys of their own.

Cole found himself having more fun than he'd expected with the games that they went through. This festival was similar to the Royal games in some ways and different in others. It forced memories of the Royal games back into his mind. He'd toured the place that day with none other than Lina Sirius along with her brother. The three were the most esteemed guests of the competition and had become good friends after that.

However, after Drake Sirius had been made Crown Prince to the Sirius throne, he became busier and stopped communicating as much as he used to. Cole didn't get the reason behind why the palaces of the werewolf Royal families were so far apart.

"Oh my, would you look at the time," Katie exclaimed, looking at her phone.

"You had a phone this entire time?" Cole groaned.

"Huh, what did you take me for?"

"I know you have one. It's just that you rarely use it that it slips my mind," he complained, taking his out to check if he had her number. Surely enough, there it was in his phone labelled with the cutest hearts. He switched the phone off immediately before Katie could get a look at the embarrassing method of saving. It bothered him that something like that had slipped his mind. "What's supposed to happen now?" he asked taking another spoon of ice cream from the one they'd bought.

"Well, it's almost lunchtime. The VIPs will be arriving at that time for their introductory meal. Something to welcome them from their long trips and lift their spirits as prepared by the school in the staffroom. The whole thing was already prepared. I, as the Head of Security, am supposed to be there to brief them about the security if necessary and also coordinate their hunters as required of me. I wish I could hand the job to someone else," she said.

"You handle the job quite well. I would not be safer under anyone else..."

"That warms my heart, thank you," she blushed a soft pink at the compliment. She was just a rainbow of colours on that day.

"Sorry for stuffing you with food though. You might not want to overdo it during that lunch," he said, apologetically.

"It's okay... I appreciate it. I don't think I was capable of waiting that long anyway," she assured him. To be honest, there was still the feeling of absence in her stomach, but she wasn't about to mention that to him. Instead, she pretended the ice cream was filling her up and decided to respectfully leave the rest to him, "Thanks for everything though..."

Cole called back to her while she was leaving the table they'd settled at after the trip, "Hey, would one call this a date, given the question?"

"Would one want to call it one, given the opportunity?" she asked him.

"One would like that very much..." 'What are you doing, Cole? She'd never say yes to something that silly knowing that you are a werewolf that is one day going to...'

"Then one might call it so..." she cut his thoughts off, winking at him before running off. He stayed frozen for a bit. She wasn't hesitating when he approached her and was letting him in. She was still

guarded, but from what he deciphered, she was growing fond of him 'Maybe she actually likes me... No, the rogue killer wouldn't do such a thing, would she?' his thoughts were a mess until someone contacted through the mind link.

"Hey, where are you? Sandra left to go for some meeting," Jason called out to him. Cole directed him and soon saw his old friend coming about the corner, covered in paint from top to bottom. His face and hair were wet along with his hands showing that he'd washed up, but the rest of his clothes were filthy.

"What happened to you?"

"You have no idea," the alpha replied, wiping his face once more and grabbing the ice cream on the table, "Mind if I take this?"

"Help yourself," Cole flipped his request over even though the ice cream had cost quite a sum.

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Sandra and Jason came out of the booth and looked around for the others while waiting for their pictures to be printed. The children at the booth presented them with their pictures and charged them accordingly. The pictures were as goofy as they could get through few they hid for there was no way they were going to let the others see them like that. "You know, we could just go on the tour ourselves," Jason proposed.

"Yeah, that would be fun," Sandra replied, looking at the pictures more clearly, "Your eyes were closed in this one."

"That was the most logical thing to do at that point," he said, chuckling. The picture was of Sandra giving him one hell of a peck on his cheek. His smile was the epitome of goofy as he received the very enticing gesture.

"So what should we do... wait or leave?"

"I know Caden could have left. That much I could tell from the vibes he was giving off earlier, but Katie and Cole will be back soon. The tour will be much easier in pairs. I know Cole wants that as well," he said.

"I'm not sure Katie is bothered about either conclusion. She'll be fine with either outcome," Sandra knew Katie was trying to get comfortable with Cole considering after today, everything was going to be different. However, she wasn't so sure about leaving those two alone, "It would be nice for those two to bond. Let's get out of here."

Minutes later, a phone call from Cole reached Jason and he asked that they split up and take the tour in pairs. Cole was quick in accepting the new developments and even hung up the phone before Jason had a chance to say his goodbyes. "That was quick. Is he really that eager to spend time with that hunter?"

"What's wrong if he does want to spend time with her?"

"Well, she's not his mate and from what I hear, he's about to meet her soon. This could be dangerous," he reasoned.

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“Well, I wouldn’t mind it much. I’ve heard werewolves find females that aren’t their mates quite repulsive,” Sandra said.

“Yes, that is true. Which makes it quite difficult when someone can’t tell where a female lies between the two categories?” he said, sighing. He had just described his current situation. Although from what he was seeing with his friend, he was starting to see that the two of them were in the same situation. Cole just didn’t want to admit it, but he was also in the same situation with the hunter.

“How can something like that happen?” Sandra asked.

“Well, it can happen if the person in question is their mate and not yet of age although the moon goddess rarely does that. She lets the connection through so that the two might stay in touch until the partner comes of age and their wolf matures. On the other hand, it’s not advised for one to dwell on these suspicions as this is only a rumour and not proven by the moon goddess herself,” he said.

“That’s one widespread rumour,” she said.

“Yeah, that’s true. It creates a lot of uncertainty,” he replied, shaking his head to take the topic off his mind, “Enough of that... Let’s talk tour... Where to next, mademoiselle?”

“Oh, well, if you’d follow me, my good man,” she replied, taking him further away from the school. Sandra took Jason through what must have been the most tiring tour of his life. Wasting no time to gape at anything, he barely got any time to think to purchase anything for her. Sandra hadn’t thought of anything of the sort and was only trying to get him to her favourite activity at the festival. She’d saved it for last, but also barely lacked the patience to wait for it.

As a result, Jason went through a crash course of the entire festival. The people of Brigadia were warm and welcoming. There wasn’t a hint of hostility in the entire place. Finally, they found themselves at a booth by the roadside labelled, Paintball, tickets. A whole section of the forest had been designated for the sport and additional obstacles and hiding spots were added to complete the scene. “So this is what has had you excited this entire time?”

“Yeah, I always want to have a good game each year. Normally, Katie and I try out archery first before coming here. I’m sure Cole is getting his ass handed to him in that sport as we speak,” she chuckled.

“Well, my boy won’t go down so easily and neither will I in this game of paintball,” he said proudly puffing out his chest.

“You too, Sandra. What is going on here? Fancy a game of paintball,” a familiar voice came from behind her.

Sandra turned to see Samantha walking up to her with three junior hunters flanking her. She walked up to the booth and signed their names in the books, paying for their entry as well. “I’m not so confident as I was earlier...” she mumbled.

“Come on, you can’t chicken out on me so fast,” she said, you’re missing two players though.

“I can get her one more, but the fourth is up to her or one of the players on the other team can sit this one out,” the bulky man said, adjusting his baseball cap.

“You would join in the game, Henry. I haven’t seen you in that field in quite a while,” Samantha joked.

“Haha very funny... No, I wouldn’t be the one who’d be joining you. I asked the Agency for assistance and they gave me troublemaker to work with. I want him to stretch his bones before I get him working again,” Henry said.

“No problem, sign him up...” Sandra asked.

“Hey, Shaemus, get over here and greet your new teammates for the next round,” he shouted. The hunters gasped at the name that was uttered. Shaemus came from the back of the booth dressed in a white messy apron. The boy had bags under his eyes indicating a lack of sleep and he looked to have lost weight.

“I’m going in. I didn’t know that I’d... the chance to play,” he slowed his excitement when he spotted Sandra.

“What is he doing out of detention?” Sandra asked coldly.

“Oh, him, the Director said something about having to do a number of chores to atone for the trouble that he caused. However, I was not told of whatever trouble it was that he caused. I was just happy to receive the assistance. He’s worked hard and diligently for me ever since. He makes it to his shifts after classes and still manages to get his training in. I can tell that he’s a good boy,” Shaemus couldn’t meet Sandra’s gaze.

“Well then, might we want to play this game then?” Samantha interrupted the brief awkward moment. Sandra was sure she must have heard about what the boy had done and was surprised when the female brushed off the matter lightly. Come to think of it, she hadn’t heard Katie talk about the issue either and now she was getting suspicious about it.

“Yes, indeed, let’s...”

“May I cut in?” a voice spoke behind them.

They turned to see a man dressed in a tuxedo and wearing a mask. Samantha and the man stared each other down for a while before she spoke. “Might I know the name of the man that shall taste defeat at my hand?”

“The name’s Lawson, dear Samantha,” the man chuckled bowing in front of the hunter.

The female hunter immediately picked up on the clandestine manner of the man addressing them and decided to avoid exposing him, for she knew exactly who they were looking at, “I see you’ve grown. Well, today we shall test that, now won’t we?”

“Yes, we shall. Sandra, it’s been long,” he said, turning to the girl. Jason felt attacked by the man’s familiarity with the people before him. He could tell that this man probably had a history with them. If he was to place his age, he would be in his mid-twenties. His tuxedo did nothing to hide his built body and even made him look much more majestic compared to him.

“I don’t think we’ve met. I’d know... are you going to play dressed like that? It would be a shame to get such a nice outfit stained,” Sandra spoke while still taking in the person before her. The name Lawson tried to ring a bell, but everything she tried to pull up from her memory had something to do with Katie and in the end, she was unable to pinpoint where she’d heard the name.

"I have a change of clothes ready for me. I came prepared for the experience," he said.

"Aren't we going to wear camouflage suits?" Jason asked Katie. Everyone present looked at him, finally acknowledging his presence after the young man in the tux had stolen it.

"Someone hasn't had the standard Brigadia paintball match before," Lawson spoke up.

"And you have?" Sandra asked.

"Yes, I have. It might have been a long time ago, but I remember it like it was yesterday," he mused, his eyes glazing over as he zipped back into the past.

"Jason, I'll go through the rules for you then," she said, leading him through a gate that closed off the interior of the site that had been set aside for paintball. There was something different about this paintball site. For one, there were monitors strapped to trees in random places. The displays were scoreboards for the blue and red teams.

"I don't understand why scoreboards are needed," he said.

"Well, I'm afraid you are in for a treat. This paintball game runs on a timer. There are two teams of four. In each team, there is someone that is designated the leader. When the leader is head five times, the team loses, but unless that happens, there is no need for the game to stop. A hit scored on the leader is immediately awarded thirty points while hits on the other players are awarded two points," she said.

"I think I see where this is going," he whined.

"Probably, we start at different bases and hunters and not allowed to use their Prometheus gifts to attack anyone," she said.

"Wait, that only means agility Prometheus gifts are allowed and the strength gifts can be used to remodel the site," he whined again.

"You catch on quite fast. I'm impressed. It was always unfair for me to team up with Katie, so she would be asked to pick a gift and give up the other during the game," Sandra informed.

"Is he caught up yet?" Shaemus asked as he walked in with the others behind him, holding two extra weapons for Sandra and Jason.

"Yes, he is..." she announced.

"Everyone to their base... the match starts in five minutes. You have three minutes to pick out your team leaders and declare them on the tablet in your bases," Henry said over the megaphone.

"We are the red team," Lawson said, his mask already on his head for protection and his gun safely secured, ready for action. Sandra led them to the base where they were to come up with a strategy to beat the hunter that they were going to face. This was going to be an interesting match... 'If only Katie was here...' Sandra mentally groaned.

77 Chapter Seventy Seven

Sandra had gotten herself into quite the team, she looked from one to the other while they huddled up in their base. Jason, on her right, was a werewolf alpha that she had dragged into a game he'd never

played and one that she was starting to grow fond of. Shaemus was a junior hunter that was viewed as a traitor in the eyes of many. And finally, to her left was Lawson, the mysterious handsome masked man who'd showed up out of nowhere claiming to know her and taking their third spot.

The four of them were people who all had a history with each other. 'How did I get myself into such a situation?' she couldn't help but think as they began their discussion.

"We need to pick a leader. This should be someone who is good at evasion and should stay behind while two of us go-ahead to claim the victory," Lawson began.

"What happens when they decide to choose one of their junior hunters as a leader and send out Samantha for the win?" Shaemus asked.

"What Prometheus gift does Samantha have?" Jason asked.

"Agility," the three of them answered all at once. It wasn't new to them in the slightest.

"How are we supposed to compete with that when we don't have a hunter amongst us?" Sandra asked without thinking too much about it.

"Ouch, that hurts. I'm a hunter, you know," Lawson defended himself.

"Oh, I didn't know. You looked more of a VIP than a hunter dressed the way you are," she said. Jason covered his mouth tight with his palm, looking away from the two to try and hide the laughter that wanted to escape him.

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"I'll have you know that I was made a hunter at such a young age of twenty-one. I am more than capable of holding my own against a fellow hunter," he said.

"That's some big talk considering you're still young. Samantha is older than you by a lot and has far more experience than you," Shaemus returned, jokingly.

"You might be right there, but that would have been a problem if we had the same gifts. She had experience in the agility gift while I have the strength gift, and she doesn't know that so we have the element of surprise," he said to them.

"Yes, that is important, but then, how are we going to use the strength gift to our advantage?" Shaemus asked, deep in thought. Sandra couldn't help but notice he wasn't acting as silly as he did back when he threatened to dethrone Katie. Something was different about him. He'd lost his dramatic flair and his smile never reached his eyes even though it was warm all the same. He bore a constant feeling of sadness about him.

"I'm not sure about that. Perhaps we should figure out our strategy first and figure out how it will help us in that way," Lawson said.

"Well, we don't have all the time in the world. The agility gift will allow Samantha to be on top of us and whoever is our leader in no time. So we cannot leave the leader unprotected," Jason said, rushing them.

“You are right about that. None of us possesses the ability to evade an attack from her if she chooses that approach. Is she still as competitive as...”

“Yes, very much so. She’s as competitive as ever. There is nothing that can stop her when she gets that fire of competition running...” a beeping sound caught their attention forcing them to look at the tablet that was placed on the desk at the back of the room. The leader of the team was one of the junior hunters.

“She’s still as impulsive as ever though,” Lawson said, “I think I have an idea about how we might approach this situation.”

“We are all ears,” Jason said.

“We shall go out surrounding our leader and giving them cover from three directions to protect them from the bullets coming from Samantha. Our mission shall be to advance to the enemy base, where they will no doubt hide their leader as they come out to fight. All we need to do is land five hits on the leader and the game ends in our victory. As long as our defence is airtight, the leader of our team won’t have to get hit,” he said.

“That sounds like a sound plan indeed, but let me get this straight. Are we acting as human shields for the leader?” Jason asked.

“Yes, that is true...”

“Damn, you must not like that suit,” was his reply to his statement. They all chuckled before Shaemus asked the question they’d all needed to answer.

“Who’s our leader, then?”

“I vote Sandra,” Jason said almost immediately. The other two guys looked at him, shocked at how fast he had started the election.

“I was going to vote the same. What about you, Lawson?” Shaemus asked still giving the werewolf a weird look.

“Aren’t you afraid of alphas?” Jason asked, surprised at how long the boy could stare into his red eyes.

“Well, not as much as I’m afraid of my father and Katie,” he said, sincerely. Lawson walked to the tablet and set up Sandra as the leader.

“Who’s your father?”

“Director Anthony,” Sandra finished.

“Is that why he’s already out of detention?”

“No, the Director has a reason for doing this. We’ll just have to wait until we get the answer for him,” Sandra confirmed.

“Am I missing something?” Lawson asked, Jason, feeling good about himself for not being the odd man out this time. He’d not even noticed how alienated he’d been amongst these three old friends. It was

clear that the rest did not remember Lawson, but he wasn't bothered by it... that is if he wasn't a professional at hiding it.

"Not much really... just that this boy here was supposed to..." the bell signalling the start of the match stopped their conversation in half. All of them except for Lawson put on their protective helmets and as Lawson demolished the back wall of the wooden makeshift cabin. Picking up the entire wall as though it was made of paper. He looked back to the others as they stared at him through their masks.

"What..."

They all shook their heads mumbling, "Nothing, nothing..." as they fastened the rest of their gear. They were ready to move out. Shaemus was the first to take a lookout, peeping through the window that they had for observation. A whizzing sound followed reached the werewolf ears first and he was forced to pull the human back down. Dozens of paintballs rushed in hitting the back wall that Lawson had decided to carry and colouring it all the same.

"What in the world," Sandra exclaimed.

"Samantha brought her A-game for this one. We proceed as planned," Lawson said. The team huddled up against the wall, protecting Sandra as best they could. Before they could move, Lawson punched large holes into both sides of his giant shield. "Use these to try and spot their leader. My best guess is that the leader is somewhere in their shade.

"If I'm getting this right, the opponents are not allowed to touch each other?" Jason asked.

"Yes, that is the essence of this plan. Otherwise, Samantha would be able to push one of us away from Sandra and score her five shots," he said.

"Why five shots? It's not that hard to score five shots on someone..."

"We don't have time to figure out all those little details, just protect Sandra," Lawson repeated the order.

"You make it sound like I'll be doing nothing in this entire battle," Sandra mumbled under her breath. Lawson pretended he had not heard her and lifted his shield, leading the team to the other side of the base for their march that was no doubt, going to be the hardest to pull considering, the other teams were at liberty to shoot Jason and Shaemus.

"I just realized you will be hidden behind the safety of that shield that you've made for yourself," Jason noted.

That way we can reduce their range of fire. You three will be shooting whoever crosses over to the other side of the shield and increasing our points in the process while protecting Sandra, the one person that Samantha doesn't have to get her eyes on.

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Their plan commenced smoothly and they were soon in the middle of the battlefield, Jason and Shaemus experiencing the full force of the assault from both sides of the protective shield. "We didn't account for the fact that the enemy could blind us, now did we?" Jason yelled at the top of his voice. His

mask was a mixture of colours and more paintballs continued to riddle his body randomly. They tried shooting back but seemed cornered at the moment.

Through all the paint, Jason got the distinct scent of the woman's perfume. Samantha was in motion, the question of where was soon answered as he breathed in deeper. They weren't allowed to be touched and yet, she was headed straight for them at a blinding speed. Thanking the goddess for reading the message as fast as he did.

"Sandra, get down," he turned to her, covering her small frame as the hunter that was headed for them leapt in an attempt to shoot Sandra from the air where she was unprotected. Lawson used the opening to swing the shield into Samantha's position, blocking the shooters from that side. The shots that were fired by the airborne hunter all hit Jason in the back thankfully, leaving Sandra untouched.

## 78 Chapter Seventy Eight

The battle had only just begun and Sandra, who had not been hit yet, felt like they'd been fighting forever. Samantha had stationed two of the junior hunters on both sides of the field so that the shield was rendered useless. That left two of them at the base which meant moving the shield to a different position during their formation was not a smart choice as it would open them to three lines of fire instead of the two they were currently under.

Lawson had told them the plan once they were cornered in this kind of situation. Having confirmed that none of the players on the field was the leader, they were to wait for Samantha to make her move, a decision that was fatal in judgement, by they took it due to lack of any other options. Once Samantha had made her move, Lawson swung the shield to the side flank that she was trying to access, blocking off two lines of fire at once. It all came down to the last call they had to make.

"Jason, go for their leader now... they left him in the base. I'll hold off Samantha, but my best guess is that we have thirty seconds before this window of opportunity closes. Make haste, you don't have much time," this might have not been war, but it pained Jason to leave Sandra behind in pursuit of the leader that was the key to their victory.

Shaemus immediately covered Sandra and opened fire in the direction that had been left open, shielding Sandra in the process. Thanks to the time he'd spent working for Henry he'd become quite the marksman and finally got a chance to blind the junior hunter on that side of the field. He continued his rapid-fire at the spot he was hiding to delay the boy's recovery.

For the moment, everything was looking good, until Lawson hooked one hand around Sandra and spun the shield in the other, following the hunter that was trying to get around them and shielding Sandra from the junior hunter on the right side.

Sandra and Shaemus immediately picked up on his intentions and lined themselves along the field, leaving Sandra open only to the enemy base where the leader was meant to be preoccupied and their base, a position now blocked by the shield, "That's some unique strategy you came up with. I've never seen anything like it. Using yourselves as human shields. I'm jealous, Sandra," Samantha joked running to the side Shaemus was on.

"Shaemus switch positions with me..." there was no need for more words as Shaemus was not new to orders given by someone who already had a plan in mind. Switching quickly and having blinded the

player on the other side, it was possible for Lawson to swing the shield about and continue their evasion of the female hunter. "Jason, hurry, we can't keep this up for much longer." Sandra used the chances she got to score hits on the other players given she had excellent aim with a gun, but watching the battle that was taking place was seeming to be more interesting than taking action.

The scoreboard all of a sudden began to shoot up on the side of the red team... Jason had found the leader of the other team. No one, but Samantha noticed the smirk on Jeremiah's face when he noticed they were about to win. Out of a desperate attempt to win, the female hunter ran at the shield and stepped on it using it to shoot upward in an attempt to get a visual on Sandra. Once Sandra was in view, the finger didn't stop pushing the trigger. She managed to score three hits on the girl's head and back before the shield blocked her view once more. The bell that signalled the end of the game sounded. The red team had won the match. Jason had finished the job and Sandra was still in shock that they'd beaten Sandra.

"Ah, damn it... You won by a hair," she spat, frustrated.

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"We still won, didn't we?" Lawson asked placing down the contraption of wood that he'd vandalized.

"That you did... I don't think Henry will be happy about that though," Samantha replied. The junior hunters came to group up with them. This battle only succeeded because there was one hunter on their team who could make up for Samantha's speed with strength.

"I would have complained about you vandalizing the base of the red team, but that was one hell of a match to watch. It was totally worth the vandalism," Henry laughed boisterously coming into the site from the entrance, "If you don't mind, the next teams want to play. That was the most interesting match I've watched in a very long time. Hunters never cease to impress," the man continued to muse.

Jason came jogging up to them to Sandra's side, matching her steps and walking up to her so they walked at the same pace. He was covered in pain, just like Shaemus. Lawson, on the other hand, wasn't as dirty as he ought to have been given that strategy he gave. If Jason hadn't enjoyed himself, he would have found himself accusing the man of coming up with the plan intentionally to get him dirty. However, he was not feeling so bad about it. "You guys are quite close, aren't you?" Lawson asked after noticing the obvious signs.

"You could say that," Sandra answered while she handed the equipment back to the bulky man.

Jeremiah removed his safety helmet a tad bit too fast and watched as the mask that obscured his face fell to the ground. Sandra froze at the sight in front of her. It was someone she knew... no, it was someone Katie knew. "What are you doing here?" she asked Lawson, a mixture of emotions welling up inside her. Jason was as confused as he could ever be when he saw this reaction. He pulled Sandra back defensively, a reflex that werewolves always had when they were protecting their own. Since Jason had no knowledge of the man before them, there was nothing else he could do in the situation.

Sandra placed her hand on the paint-covered shoulder of the sweet male in front of her. She would be lying if she said she didn't enjoy the way he was always ready to protect her. Even during the game, these protective instincts had taken over him and he'd covered her when Samantha first attacked them.



She couldn't hide behind him for too long, "Jason, it's fine. This is just old acquaintance and besides, he's a hunter."

"What does it mean for him to be a hunter?" Jason asked.

"Well, for starters, a hunter is by virtue bound to their fellow hunters with a bond that cannot be broken. It's not similar to that of werewolves, but a hunter can never be found to be a threat to another," she said.

"What if one doesn't know that the other is a hunter? Can the hunter then kill the other hunter?" Jason asked.

"Smart question... I asked it a while back and turns out, the concept is a bit more complex. A hunter is only allowed to attack werewolves and not humans. Until it is discovered that the target is a werewolf, a hunter does not have the liberty to attack them," Lawson spoke up to his defence.

"Was that a threat?" Jason asked, his red eyes flashing brighter.

"Just a mere point of information... I don't see any need for hostility here," Lawson said, raising his hands up in surrender.

"Slow your roll, youngsters," someone interrupted, "Lawson here is a VIP. I don't know what he's doing here this early, but he's to be treated with the utmost respect."

Sandra had a gut feeling that wouldn't go away. The only reason she did not see something wrong with Lawson was the fact that Katie also had no reason to have doubts about him. He was a hunter that she knew. "Do I have your name wrong or something?" she asked the man.

"No, you don't. Lawson is my family name and the one that I would like to be called for clandestine reasons," he said.

"That's such a pain... You come this early to see one person, no doubt and stop by here without even going straight to see her..." Sandra started ranting.

"Who says I haven't seen her yet?" he winked. Samantha pulled her phone from her pocket, her eyes widening as she took in the context of the message she'd just received.

"It's time for the luncheon with the VIPs. Sandra go get ready, quick... Lawson, hurry up and get back to whatever 'clandestine' hideout you are using and find a way back into the group that you came with," Samantha barked the orders, dragging Sandra off in another direction. Just like that Jason was left alone with Shaemus, colourful and single once again. He turned to his rainbow-coloured neighbour.

"You know a place we can wash up?" he asked.

"Well, I know somewhere you can wash up your face, hands and hair, but the paint is meant to stay as a mark that you've been here. If it bothers you that much, you have the liberty of returning to your home for a change of clothes," he informed him.

"Will it bother you if I ask why you did it? The riot when we'd just come to the school," Jason asked, going straight to the point, "If I wasn't any wiser, I would have said you intentionally led all those people there to have them killed."

“That is true... I did lead them all there, but I did my best to notify Katie as well. I was glad she got my message as I passed out,” he said.

“You told Katie... I didn’t know that bit of information. And I was there the whole time,” Jason said.

“Well, I did tell Katie. It wasn’t through the use of words, but I was sure she could have told that something was amiss when I wouldn’t give up attacking her...”

“Then why did you do it?” Jason asked.

“Because they had my mother... In fact, they still do,” he said. Jason froze at the statement. Sandra’s determination in the bond hunters shared was not that misdirected and neither was her trust in the director. Wait, the director...

“Didn’t Sandra say the Director was your father? Does that mean...”

“Yes, the Director’s wife was captured by rogues and they were using her to blackmail me into having a large crowd of people killed...”

## 79 Chapter Seventy Nine

Cole found himself laughing loudly at his friend’s tale. The state of his clothes did nothing to calm the laughter either and Jason couldn’t blame him. The story of how he got his clothes multicoloured continued to sound funnier the more he narrated it. Although Cole had gotten quite serious when he heard the name Lawson, there was nothing that could have stopped him from laughing at his friend.

Eventually, it was Cole’s turn to tell how his tour had gone and the tables inevitably turned in Jason’s favour. Hearing how Lawson had easily outclassed the two werewolves was just amusement to the both of them. Luckily for them, the girls didn’t look that interested in the new arrival despite his attempts at standing out.

“I heard he’s one of the VIPs...”

“Yeah, Samantha said something of the sort. I also know that he used to live here though,” Jason added, finishing the bowl of ice cream that he’d very proudly salvaged from the royal when he arrived. “Can we go back to the suite and get changed?”

“You definitely need a change of clothes,” Cole said to him.

“Are you forgetting the dance tonight?”

“No, I’m not, but I also know that Katie won’t be coming to that dance. I’m not so enthusiastic about it after knowing that,” Cole said. Jason denied his urges to ask what was going on between the two of them as it would not be a good conversation to have while he was unsure of what was going on between him and Sandra. Sandra and he were just friends, right? Well, the idea of finding out that it was the reality was starting to seem unappealing to him. ‘All the more reason to stay out of that train of thought...’

“That’s terrible. Why can’t she come?” he asked his friend.

“Well, it’s something about a family thing they are doing for her birthday,” he shrugged while he said the answer. It was crystal clear that he still didn’t like it no matter what excuse was being given. Jason stood up as did his friend and the two walked up to the woods. Once they were a reasonable distance in the woods, they shifted and began the sprint back to the suite...

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The staffroom had been redesigned and all the tables moved such that it suited the occasion. If one didn’t know it was a staffroom, they wouldn’t have guessed it was so. The tables had been covered with white cloths, dressing them completely and adding other coloured tablecloths to it to bring the room to life.

The chairs that were being used were much more luxurious and only seen on such occasions. Even after all the time that Katie had spent at the school, she didn’t know where they kept this kind of furniture or even how the school was capable of affording it. It was things like this that made it clear that the Founder’s festival was held by more than just the school and rather the entire town.

The hunters were the first to arrive and they were led to their seats, Katie taking the seat that was designated to her as the Head of Security and her mentor right next to her. The seats looked to the doorway and allowed her to see whoever got in. It wasn’t clear whether this was intentional or not.

“I always feel out of place on these occasions,” Katie whispered to her friend.

“That’s probably because most times you do things that make you stick out like a sore thumb,” she replied.

“Talking back to a VIP should not be a crime. How was I supposed to know there was a protocol as silly as that when talking back to someone from a noble werewolf family?” she tried defending herself.

“There was and you nearly cost a student a scholarship that time. Of course, you are bound to feel out of place at such an event,” Sandra countered, amused by her friend’s dismissiveness at the grave matter.

“I hope you are not forgetting what that particular noble was suggesting that time. I could not just stand by while he said such things to me, you know. The nerve on that one...” she huffed remembering a particular werewolf that had taken a liking to her and tried adding her to the hunter escort that he’d come with. He’d gone as far as to threaten to revoke the scholarship of a student that he had only recently accepted to learn in his region.

“Can I have your attention, please?” a voice cut through the murmurs that were milling through the hunters present at the luncheon. Anthony stood at the entrance dressed in a suit custom made to fit his bulky physique. He wiped his face with his handkerchief just as he was about to speak. It was rare to see him this nervous.

“There is something that I have to talk to you about, Katie,” a whisper came from the opposite side of the table. Katie turned to see Samantha gesturing for her to check her phone. In her messages, a text appeared, ‘After this luncheon, I need to speak to you privately. It won’t take much time since I know you will have other matters to attend to. I was told that you must know of this as soon as possible.’

'How is someone supposed to focus on a luncheon after hearing such an urgent piece of information?' Katie sighed before texting back her confirmation of the request. "If I could have your attention. Before wasting any more time, I'd like to present the VIPs of this year's festival. If everyone could just stand up so that we might give them the welcome they deserve."

The hunters stood and abandoned their seats, standing ready to see the new arrivals. "Because of the information that was sent out on the speech early this morning, a number of the VIPs cancelled their trips here, but I am glad to announce that two of the convoys still came as planned," Anthony proceeded, sweat beading his forehead once more. He was not one for wearing suits and the one he currently had on was trying to drain him of all bodily fluids...

"The nobles of the Haelstrom family from the Southern region of the Lycaon empire grace us with their presence once again this year. It was nice of them last year to grant one of the students a scholarship to their esteemed academy back in their homeland," as he spoke, three hunters walked in dressed in the right attire for bodyguards. They all oozed the power they wielded quite nicely and kept a firm gait. Behind them, a man dressed in a luxurious red suit followed, a smile on his face that he didn't seem to have the capability to disable.

His eyes were a searing red as he hailed from one of the families that came from the original alphas that aided the Lycaon Royal family in the war centuries ago. Behind him, a girl dressed in a blue shimmering dress that dropped down to her ankles hugging her athletic body and fanning out at her knees. She had a calm air around her and bore a smile much warmer than the one her brother wore.

Katie smiled at the girl and she returned her gesture, her red eyes lighting up along with her smile, something that was enough to leave an ignorant human with a thousand underlying questions that would not be voiced even if they were forced to. The two only knew each other on such occasions and had come to see eye to eye on most things. Her brother, however, was a different case altogether, having been the one to force Katie to step out of line and speak out of turn during the previous festival.

"Kendra and Lionel Haelstrom are representing the Haelstrom Royal family this year as it was confirmed that they came of age. We congratulate you, Lionel, for being granted the title of heir to your family," Anthony was being overly formal with his speech. Those that knew him could only imagine how difficult he must have been. Pulling out a paper, he started to read the next group that was coming in.

"The next group is one that once lived here. A family that was elevated to the rank of nobles after their prodigious son gallantly risked his life to save King Sirius' uncle, gaining a Prometheus gift in the process," this came as a shock to the hunters that were present becoming eager to hear what he had to say next, "The Lawson family is currently one of the most prestigious families in the Royal capital of the Sirius empire..."

"Come on, Anthony. You're giving us too much credit," a voice came from the outside of the door, sounding so familiar. Chuckles rippled through the audience while Anthony relaxed a bit, "Well, I would like to keep adding more credit to these guests, but I guess they don't need it that much since this is where they came from. Please welcome, Clark Lawson, his lovely wife Tina Lawson and their multi-talented and ambitious son, Jeremiah Lawson."

Sandra turned to see her friend's frozen expression. Katie could not take her eyes off the door at the moment they mentioned the other name to the man they'd met at the Archery range. 'Could he really

be the same Jeremiah from years ago?" she asked herself, doing her best to keep her composure. She breathed in twice and allowed all the emotions to vanish from her being and get buried deep down within her.

The man that walked in was dressed in a fine brown suit though not nearly as luxurious as the one that Lionel Haelstrom wore. The fair lady that followed was dressed in a red gown that accented her beauty quite nicely, the jewellery just doing enough to make her final image not less than stunning to everyone that saw her.

Finally, the man Katie had been waiting to see came in, dressed in the same tuxedo she'd seen him in earlier. He wasn't as neatly dressed as he'd arrived though. His hair was messy but in a way that didn't damage his good looks and he carried himself in a way someone that was familiar with a place did. It was like he'd come back home. Jeremiah had only changed in one aspect and that was the power he wielded... Well, that's all Katie could say about how much he'd changed. Everything else about him seemed irrelevant and inconsequential.

"Oh, I had heard of a new family of nobles declared by King Sirius himself. How is the new life going for you, Lawson?" Lionel spoke up, his tone barely going unnoticed. It was true that nobles were also ranked, the ones that were younger were of a lesser rank than those that were older, but the rankings didn't matter if they were from different empires.

## 80 Chapter Eighty

"Everything is going great. I'm honoured that you've heard of our family," Clark spoke up in response to Lionel's gesture. Tension had started to lift in the room but was quickly calmed by the noble's calm response. Lionel got the message that he'd only caved to avoid trouble and decided against goading him further. Something that Katie saw as an improvement.

"I see someone no longer needs to come here with his father as part of the escort," Kenneth pointed out.

"Indeed, Sir Kenneth. I will soon be head of my father's pack. That is as soon as my mate is revealed to me. I found that Hunter's festival might have been a good place to look since all the werewolves and Humans from Brigadia will be attending," he said, sending a glance Katie's way. Jeremiah noticed the subtle gesture and smirked when Katie did not indulge him.

"You still chasing the hunch of having felt the presence of a weak mate bond in the town of Brigadia?" Brian asked, chuckling.

"Sometimes I forget who's noble and who isn't when I come to this small town. The hunters here are all so confident when speaking to high ranking members of society. One that has less to offer should learn that their opinion is less desired by the whole." he retorted. Brian gritted his teeth, clearly offended by the remark, "Might I greet the famous Rogue killer. I was pleased when I heard her moving speech early this morning."

"You're welcome to our humble town, Mr Haelstrom. I will now address you as I did your father last year," she said earning a frown from the man.

“There will be no need for such formalities when it is you that speaks to me. Although, this luxury is only extended to Katie and no one else,” he said.

“Shall we get seated then? You must have had a long trip here. Besides, that way this luncheon can get moving...” she said, pausing before saying his first name through her teeth, “Lionel...”

“Oh, sure... As you wish,” with that said, the guests sat down followed by the hunters. Anthony stood at the end of the desk, a place that was reserved for the Director of the Hunter Agency, a position that he did not seem to like very much.

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“Oh dear, Director Anthony, must you wear that coat? The sight of sweating is quite painful to witness,” Tina spoke up.

“I would say I find it quite amusing. To think someone would have to pay a price for training that got him to that size,” Lionel mused while Anthony took off the coat that he was wearing, leaving him in a black waistcoat that also fitted him quite nicely. He looked much more relieved to be out of that furnace.

“Once again, I’d like to welcome you to Brigadia. As you can see, there are fewer Royals here which means this time will be much less lively. The students worked hard and I hope you find their exploits inspiring. I know I was inspired this year by the students. Regarding the current situation, they were still able to pull through and make the most of the time they had to produce something that you will all enjoy. Moving on,” he clapped his hands and maids began moving in arranging the table the way they’d been ordered.

“I would like to hear more on what happened with the rogues that attacked this place. I was told this is the most secure town in the whole of the world. I’m not one to brag, but I always thought the compliment was a bit overrated,” Lionel continued. The whole table seemed to be in tension while he was present, for his comments were always around to make everyone uncomfortable.

“It was all scheduled to be published in the daily newspapers around the globe. You won’t miss a single detail when you read them,” Katie spoke up.

“Anthony dear, I was wondering where Claire was... The two of us used to spend a good time during the festivals when I was still here,” Tina spoke up, cutting the conversation that was currently underway in half. Another attempt at silencing the man at the table. The luncheon had barely begun and Lionel was already imposing his overwhelmingly foul attitude over everyone that was present and creating what one might have called a fight with words.

“You ever heard of the rule about speaking out of turn?” Lionel spoke before Anthony could answer.

“Last I heard, it doesn’t apply to nobles from different empires,” Clark finally spoke up. It was clear the two weren’t going to get along.

“On another note, there are Royals in this town from the two families. Surely we wouldn’t want a dispute in the presence of the Royals themselves who clearly outrank everyone in this room,” Anthony spoke up to try and calm the room.

“What does the Director go on about, Katie?” Lionel asked.

"It is as he has said. What part am I to clarify?" she asked, trying her best to hold back her nerves. The maids began to serve them with drinks, a perfect distraction for the near-hungry hunter.

"Well, you could clarify on who exactly he speaks of?" Lionel answered.

"If you wouldn't mind, I'll let the Director speak on the matter as I was not assigned to protect the Royals while they enjoy their stay in our town," she said, taking a sip of the mango juice before her and gesturing for the Director to continue.

"The Sirius Royal family is present along with Cole Lycaon," he said, stunning the VIPs.

"That's quite a gathering you've got there. Any reason why they'd come to this place. I know it's not for the festival as they would have been here," Kendra asked, her voice being heard for the first time since they'd arrived.

"I happened to come across Cole Lycaon when I came here ahead of time. No one in the entire festival seemed surprised to see him which only means he's been here for some time. I had no knowledge of any other Royal in the vicinity," Jeremiah spoke, his urge to report his findings taking over before the Director could explain what was supposed to be going on.

"You are correct. Cole Lycaon happens to be a member of the student body here as his parents sent him over to see what life is like in the safest school in the world. Clearly, we have no idea what will happen after the school drops down the rankings and word reaches out to the Lycaon Royal family," Anthony sounded worried as he spoke.

"That murder seriously did a number on the school and the town. To think a hunter would kill a rogue," Lionel chuckled.

"Excuse me..." Katie asked him, failing to hold back the venom in her voice, but keeping her calm all the same.

"What difference does it make? The child was killed using a hunter's weapon. It only stands to reason that..."

"I think I've had enough of your opinion," there she went again stopping Lionel right in the middle of his speech. This did not please the werewolf one bit... in fact, he was livid.

"Does the fact that you have blue eyes all of a sudden give you the right to act like you own the world as the Royals do?" this was a sore spot for Katie and Lionel knew it.

"Get your story right... A rogue killed a former rogue for betraying them and it happened to be on school grounds..." Katie spoke ignoring his remark.

"Spin the story any way you want. Those of us who know better will not be easily fooled. Until you catch the rogue you so gladly want to blame, we have no choice but to use the evidence before us to come to a reasonable conclusion," the table was perfectly silent as the two stared each other down. Katie now remembered why she hated these events so much. It was because of one sole lonely bad apple.

"Fine then, take it any way you would want to... I don't really care anyway. Come up with all the speculations that you might want to come up with. They are all irrelevant to me in the long run. Just

don't get in my way and you'll be nothing more than the ignorable disturbance you are now," she said, finally pushed over the edge. She wasn't taking anything from someone as inconsequential as him.

"Katie, that's going too far," Samantha tried to reprimand the teenager. For some reason, this was the statement that stirred her the most to attack the excuse of a man before her. The feeling of a hand tugging at her shoulder stopped her next statement. Sandra knew Katie wasn't one to take insults so lightly, but this was something else. If she was allowed, she was going to end up angering the noble into abandoning the festival altogether.

"How am I supposed to stay quiet while he questions the integrity of the hunters?" she asked Samantha, before sinking back into her seat rubbing her temples. Lionel was a pain to deal with and now that his father wasn't present to do the talking on behalf of the Haelstrom family, he was at liberty to run his mouth as much as he desired.