

Part 34. Graylyn

After the incident, Kilah would insist her magical cloak was working. Graylyn had never trusted them; just a piece of cloth, a sentiment she shared regularly. Resistant but not rude, she wore the cloaks whenever they stepped outside the transport. Her compliance couldn't help the magic work against scadogs, as later they found out it was useless.

Even though they couldn't see cloaked lifeforms, scadogs could smell them.

Before the incident, the four of them split up, with Jeremiah and Naltag entering an unmarked compound, while Graylyn and Kilah explored the surrounding area. Woods were sparse, but Graylyn knew better. She promised the group food could be found within the crumbling structures she called "buildings."

Jeremiah had referred to them as encampments, but when she said "buildings," looked surprised, as if he knew her word was better, yet held on in praising her. He was hard to figure. In particular, his constant annoyance with her was a mystery. All Graylyn ever tried to do is be helpful.

For instance, during hunts, she knew to stay close to Kilah, and for that, Jeremiah did appear grateful.

She led Kilah from building to building, gathering up shiny heavy objects. When Kilah asked what the objects were, Graylyn's answer was "food." Kilah said she thought food came from modulators, but when Graylyn seemed sure, she'd nodded as if she understood. She put a small shiny object to her mouth and licked it. Kilah looked to doubt the thing's validity, but pocketed it anyway.

"Not food," Kilah said.

She forgot to keep her words to herself. Outside Graylyn always told them, silence saved you. No time for silly words. Graylyn poked around the spaces in the building, but always advised caution.

Caution mattered little once a scadog overheard its prey. At Kilah's words, a nearby scadog jerked its head. It sniffed the small room Kilah had entered, then pounced like a cat.

Everything happened so quickly, that to Graylyn, Kilah appeared to be a blur. The scadog had jumped at her, then seemed to jump away again a moment later.

Kilah stood, slightly off balance, her face pinched and blood-drained. Graylyn was going to ask if she was okay, but then the child shifted, revealing a bloody stump of an arm.

Graylyn planted her feet, pulling her metal bat from the scabbard behind her back.

A few steps from the girls, the scadog skulked. Its red rimmed eyes watched Kilah, powerful jaws snapping, two small fingers sticking out of its mouth. In one last swallow, the fingers disappeared. The scadog pounced before she had a chance to run, locking its mouth around what was left of her maimed limb.

"Graylyn!" she cried.

Three other beasts appeared. They sniffed at the air, snorting in excitement, seeming to smell Kilah's blood. Their mouths foamed, eyes bloodshot.

Kilah ceased calling out. Her eyes were closed, as she was either unconscious from the pain or dead. Graylyn couldn't tell. The scadog dragged her outside, nearly tearing her limb from her body. A few sinews were keeping her arm from falling off, but the scadog snapped it free, tossing the prize to its friends.

Before they began to feast, Graylyn took her chance. She threw off the magic cloak, and began on defensive. She used the tried-and-true method of appearing large and intimidating. She opened her arms, widened her stance, and revealed her short hair. The movements elicited her second offense: whooping cries.

They're animals, and if you're going to beat them, may as well sound like them. Her brother had taught her.

She mimicked the scadog's own war cries, and two of the weaker ones immediately urinated and ran out of sight. One remained, howling like an Alpha. Her cries seemed to harden it, as it threw back its head to release identical war cries.

Graylyn wasn't worried. One scadog could be dispatched easily, and her bat knew this dance. She smiled, and started to move. Her performance was flawless. The bat whistled in the air as she brought it down and up, and back and forth. She beat down the ravenous scadog, getting bitten twice in the scuffle. Overall, she managed to keep both of her hands, and couldn't help but count herself in better condition than poor Kilah.

A bloody pulp that was once a scadog lay at her feet.

Graylyn stopped moving, but didn't drop her bat. She panted, hating the feeling of warm blood that had splattered across her face. She felt not so different from the animal she'd downed.

Finally, she had a moment to run to Kilah and check if she was alive. The child was breathing, but in shallow gulps. Dark fluid seeped from the remains of her arm.

Graylyn had seen injuries before, but never this severe.

She went back to the animal carcass. With her pocket knife, she cut and dug inside of it, until she found the bladder.

The hole needed to be precise, and Graylyn wasn't averse to using her teeth to open the sack. She spread the potent urine around Kilah, like a protective circle, sparing some of the precious stuff for later. Inside the building, she found a sheet of plastic, and rolled Kilah on top.

Graylyn had no name for the makeshift carrier, but it would work.

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