

# The Luna Trials by Marissa Gilbert Chapter 1 - 19

## 1. Northern Hospitality

*Skin to skin, hot tongue tracing her every curve, creating burst after burst of tingles. Savannah arched her back, giving her mate better access, and grasped his hair as he teased her sensitive spot over and over.*

*"You are mine, Savvy, only mine!" Zack growled as he entered her in one powerful thrust, locking their eyes and growling from the pleasure.*

The car jumped on an uneven northern road, and Savannah woke up, realising this was just a dream. She sighed in relief, looking around and seeing her best friend Kyle and new assistant Zara by her side.

Savannah yawned as she looked outside of her car window. The views of the North did not impress her much. She sighed again, remembering that this would be her home from now on. It was unlikely that her future husband, the Northern Lycan King, would let her live in the West with her brother and his family. After all, he had been asking for her hand in marriage for so many years. Kai was a known cold-hearted brute, and she was surprised he was interested in her at all. Not to mention that she was still a minor the first time he dared to suggest the marriage. Fast forward to her being twenty now, and he still did not leave this idea.

She, however, did not care about his motivation. She did not care about her future husband at all. This was a sacrifice that she was willing to make for her people. Because after her mate's betrayal, she couldn't feel anything anymore anyway.

Just a few months ago, she was the happiest girl alive when, during a terrible war, she met the perfect man among her brother's allies. Zack Morgan was an Alpha who earned his reputation as a great warrior and ruler. And everything in her life made sense the moment they laid their eyes on each other, and he called her his.

He took her back to his pack and announced her his Luna before his packmates, proving the seriousness of his intentions. And then they had a night of passionate lovemaking. It was pure bliss, heaven on Earth, all her dreams came true... Up until the moment she woke up and accidentally heard about his plans to kill her brother and make her nothing more than a breeding machine for him.

*"Savannah will be busy the next few years mourning her brother and friends as well as giving birth to my pups..."* His cruel words would be imprinted in her memory forever. A scar that would never heal.

Her heart broke into a million little pieces, and she ran away from him. Zack tried to get her back, but she made it very hard for him. And when they were finally able to face

each other again, she rejected him. Only that he did not accept her rejection... which complicated everything for her.

The car stopped, and she blinked a few times, trying to get out of her daze. She promised herself not to go into that darkness anymore. None of that mattered. She would never see him again.

She was here, she was alive, and she was about to fulfil her princess duties and marry the man she did not love, need or even know. All for an alliance that her brother, the Western Lycan King needed, for she knew that if the two kingdoms were not working together now, they might both get destroyed by their enemies very soon. Her brother knew that, but King Kai did not. And they were lucky he agreed to all that in the first place.

The driver opened the window and handed the papers to one of the northern guards.

"Princess Savannah Stormhold," he announced. "The bride of King Kai Fionnlagh."

The guard took his time to check the papers that were handed to him, and another one joined him, looking over his shoulder.

"Is everything okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, just one of the king's brides arriving for the Trials," the first one replied and handed the papers back.

"What did he just say?" Kyle brushed his hand over his red hair. He had this little habit since their childhood.

"There must be some kind of mistake," Zara said reassuringly, checking her iPad. She always kept herself busy.

"Of course," Savannah chuckled. "Relax, Kyle. What else could it be?"

They drove into the territory, and she was finally able to see what the high stone walls were hiding.

It was a castle. A real castle! Huge, dark, ancient, and gloomy. Just like in history books.

Savannah couldn't believe her own eyes. She was a princess, yes, but she used to live in modern-style mansions. This was... so not what she expected. Even though her brother told her not to expect much from the North.

And she didn't. But she didn't expect to get into the Middle Ages either.

"Not important," she breathed out. None of this was important. She just had to find Kai. Get married to him fast and be done with it. Then maybe they could work on some kind of agreement as to how their life together would be. Surely, they could agree on monthly visits. Hopefully, yearly, after she produced him an heir. Then maybe she could find her mate, kill him and just concentrate on her child. This was a good enough plan.

She and her entourage got out of their cars. And Savvy noticed a woman in a dress too luxurious and open for the ugly and cold weather they had today, walking leisurely in their direction with a much younger girl by her side. The latter had some kind of folder in her hands.

But it was the first one that bothered Savannah because she knew exactly who that was.

"My name is Elene," the woman smiled, playing with her heavy golden locks. "I am the Northern Princess and the sister of King Kai."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Savvy managed to curl her lips in a smile. "I am..."

"I know who you are," Elene sneered, and Savannah swallowed. Of course, she did. Elene probably knew everything about her family. After all, all this started with her. Years ago, Kai proposed her hand in marriage to her brother. Gideon declined the generous offer. The first time Kai asked for Savvy as his wife was probably just out of spite. It was no secret that Elene was in love with her brother. And now that he found his mate and was happily married, all her dreams about becoming the Luna of the Western Kingdom were gone.

She probably hated her. Not that the situation was Savvy's fault. But she could see that in the woman's eyes now.

"Follow me," Elene waved to her and started walking. Sighing, Savannah did as she was told.

"Your castle is magnificent," she decided to start small talk just as etiquette required of her.

"Thank you," the northerner smirked and turned to have a look at her. "The other contenders said the same. You will be able to enjoy northern architecture more if you advance in..."

"Excuse me?" Savannah was never slow, and she stopped right there and then. She knew a scheme when she saw one. "Other contenders? Maybe the princess will be so kind as to explain to me what that means?"

"Other contenders for the title of The Luna of the North, of course," Elene gave her the most innocent smile. "What else could it mean?"

"But I am king Kai's future wife," Savvy lifted her chin up to meet the woman's delighted gaze.

"Oh, no, dear. You got something wrong. You are a contender for the position of his wife. Con-ten-der." Elene spelt the word for her, enjoying the moment to the core.

"There must be some kind of a mistake," Savannah insisted.

"There is no mistake, dear," the princess of the North said, "You are a contender in The Luna Trials. Take it or leave it."

"The Luna Trials?" Savannah clenched her fists, "You must be kidding! King Kai is of a very high opinion of himself if he thinks that his future wife should humiliate herself by fighting with other women over the honour of becoming his Luna!"

"This is the North," Elene suddenly became sharp, and all her smiles were gone. "The Northerners will never take a Luna who is not worthy! If you want this place, you need to prove that you are the best among all possible options. You need to be of excellent health and lineage, you need to know how to behave, you have to be smart, but most importantly, you need to prove your strength!"

They were serious. Savannah realised that it was not a joke. They were absolutely serious. This was happening. The Luna Trials or whatever they called it... It was real.

"And by the way," the princess looked at her with some kind of superiority, "That was minus five points. You will be the only contender to start with a negative point balance."

"There are points?!" now Savvy was pissed. How dared they? She was a princess, for the Moon Goddess's sake! The whole situation was an insult like none other.

"Of course," Elene giggled as they entered a huge inner garden, "how else would we find out who is the best?"

Savannah wanted to say something. She actually wanted to say a lot of things but shut her mouth before she lost more points. She needed to think first before doing anything else. And preferably alone.

"Now, wait here," the princess told her, "Your maid will come for you when your room is ready. But we didn't expect you until Sunday, so they just started to prepare it. It will be a while."

"That's quite all right," Savannah smiled charmingly, switching her fake politeness mode too. She knew how this game was played. "The northerners are famous for their hospitality, are they not?"

That was a jab, and Elene's smile faded. No one praised the northerners for, well, anything. And even if they did, hospitality would be at the end of the list.

The princess left without saying anything else, and Savvy knew that it would be hours before she was able to relax in that room they 'forgot' to prepare.

She motioned for Kyle and everyone else to not come close to her. They were her friends, and she did not want them to see the ugly side of her. She needed that ugly to come out of her somewhere else, so she went deep into the garden to avoid any witnesses to her fury. She found the ugliest rose bush she had ever seen, with strange metallic-looking flowers and growing out her claws, she shredded every single one of them to pieces.

It was not fair! It wasn't supposed to be like that! All she wanted was to sacrifice herself for the sake of her people, ensuring their safety. Because the alliance could give them that. That thought was bringing her at least a little bit of peace.

But she wasn't prepared to fight for the man she did not even want! What was that? Hell?

And most importantly, was the alliance even still an option? Considering that her so-called arranged marriage turned out to be a scam.

She had to find this out. And she had to do it as soon as possible.

But even thinking of the Northern King made her blood boil. He must have been atrocious if he did that. What can one expect from the man who called himself the Northern Star? Ugh.

"That lying, cheating, self-absorbed, manipulative, conniving, treacherous piece of a b\*stard!" she yelled as she destroyed the last flower. She was panting, and no, it did not help her to feel better in any way. Not at all.

It only became worse when she heard a chuckle behind her back.

"What did that bush ever do to you?" a husky voice inquired, and she turned to see the witness of her despair..

The voice startled her. Savannah wondered for a second how on Earth she did not notice that she had a spectator. The man who was chuckling at her was sitting under a huge oak tree, hidden behind the rose bushes when she arrived. This was the sole reason she did not see him in the first place.

Anyway, it was her mistake. And from what it looked like; she couldn't afford any mistakes at the moment. She had to think about everything first.

She heard him standing up and turned on her heels to see who it was. A sigh of relief escaped her. Before her stood a tall man dressed in not the cleanest set of clothes she had seen. His jeans were filthy with dirt, and his gray grandad shirt had probably seen better days. He had a beard which gave him a bit of a dangerous vibe, but she could tell that he was one of the northerners who belonged to the castle. Probably just one of the workers, which was a good thing for her. He would hardly know who she was, and she could get away with it.

“Just... trimming,” Savvy stretched a smile onto her lips and avoided looking at the destroyed bush. She just hoped that the guy wasn’t the gardener who was responsible for taking care of those. But he probably was exactly that – the gardener, otherwise why would he have that earthy forest scent with a hint of pine in it. Not that she had a better look at him, he was very handsome and had all those muscles that probably came from physical labour. “Sorry,” she mumbled. “It’s just that I am having a very bad day.”

“You are not from here,” the guy looked her up and down with some kind of interest evident in his eyes. “Although there are a lot of new people here today,” he muttered under his breath. He probably wasn’t happy that all those people were walking around in his garden now, ruining it.

“Are you surprised?” the girl raised her brow questioningly. “It looks like your king wants a show.”

His head snapped in her direction and he sucked in a deep breath.

“As far as I heard, it’s voluntary. No one is forced to take part.” The man shrugged and that little gesture annoyed her more than anything else today.

“Voluntary?” she chuckled loudly, throwing her head back.

This was ridiculous. Were all northerners like that? “Because it’s every woman’s desire to run after a man like a little circus dog, performing tasks and tricks along with many others just like her in the pathetic hope that maybe... **MAYBE** he would be kind enough to choose her! Yeah, **THAT’S** every woman’s desire! We **CHOOSE** that!”

“Who are you again?” the gardener asked. “Did you come with one of the contenders?”

“Contenders!” she snorted and rolled her eyes. She hated that word already. “I came with one of the **political victims**.” There. She said it. “Honestly, I don’t even understand how king Kai will be able to look into his future wife’s face, knowing that he made her go through all this. That his future queen was used as a puppet in his games just because he did not want to marry a certain princess.”

“Ah, I see,” a smirk stretched over his bearded face. “You came with princess Savannah.”

"No!" she blushed and, technically, it wasn't even a lie. She didn't come with the princess. She was the princess.

"I bet she is angry," the stranger went on with some kind of amusement on his face. "The western princess who is used to getting everything she wants just by clicking her finger. I am sure the concept that she actually has to fight for something is hard for her to accept."

"Is that what you think?" she let out a laugh this time. "That a girl who grew up without parents, with herself and her brother under constant attacks just magically gets everything? Let me tell you, if she decides to stay and take part in that nonsense of competition, she will wipe the floor with anyone who'd be stupid enough to compete against her. The question is whether she would still like to get married to a man – although a man is not even the right word here – as your king. Because as far as I see it, he is the one who already failed his first test! Marrying someone like that was already a sacrifice on her part! And knowing that he isn't even capable of keeping his own word is just sad!"

The gardener's mouth parted and Savvy decided that she had done and said enough. It actually made her feel a bit better about the whole thing and now she knew she had to go back to her companions and start strategizing. She had to make a decision whether to meet the king, slap his face and leave. Or to stay and make him regret that he ever dared to start all this, considering that marrying him was already the sacrifice of her life.

She took a few steps when she heard a loud growl. Uh-oh. She offended the gardener after all.

"Listen, little... maid," he gritted his teeth and his eyes shone blue. "The Luna Trials are the ancient tradition of the North. This is something sacred to us and the future Luna of the North will be respectful of that. If your princess cannot respect our traditions, then she indeed came to the wrong place."

"Oh, please, big... *garden boy*," she filled her words with as much venom as she only could. "I studied the history of the North and know for a fact that even if there was such a tradition years ago, it hasn't been done once in the past two centuries. If you did not respect your own tradition for so long, why should we?"

She decided not to continue this and just stormed off in the direction where she left her friends. The faster they could talk, the better.

"Are you okay?" Kyle seemed worried about her. He was her childhood friend and one of the very few people she could trust in this world.

"Never better," Savvy nodded reassuringly. "We have a decision to make. And we need to make it quick. I need to know where the library here is."



"I already got the map from one of the servants," Zara produced a sheet from her red leather folder and handed it to her. She was always efficient like that and Savannah was thankful for the best team next to her.

"Good," she said, studying the map quickly. "I need to get everything they have on The Luna Trials. I've read about it a long time ago in one of our books about the North. But it was barely a few paragraphs. I need to learn everything that was ever written about the Trials."

"Let's go then," Kyle smirked when Savannah gave the sheet back to Zara, knowing that his best friend already memorised everything. This was one of the things they were always quiet about – Savannah had a photographic memory. It was enough for her to see something once and she wasn't able to forget it afterwards. The castle's plan was now imprinted in her mind forever.

"I think I will go alone," Savvy stopped them. "We don't want to miss the time when our rooms will be ready. I feel like there are going to be a few more surprises."

"But are you going to do it? It sounds so... humiliating," Zara shot her a concerned glance. She knew about humiliation first-hand. Just a few months ago she was a part of the harem of the former fox king. Her brother and sister-in-law managed to free all the girls and gave them the freedom of choice. Zara was a bird shifter and, unfortunately, she couldn't return to her former flock because she had denounced them when she was in love with said fox. He took her to his pack and only there did she find out that she wasn't the only one for him. But love made her stay. And after just a few nights and a few experiments in his lab, his interest in her was gone. She spent years locked up in the harem, which was called Eden and where every woman was supposed to only wear red revealing clothes, watching the man she loved scr\*\*wing every other girl around, only staying because she had nowhere else to go.

Until Savannah's sister-in-law, the Western Lycan Queen gave them a choice. Zara chose to stay with them, and they quickly became friends since Savvy was volunteering to find every former red girl a new job and place to live. Since they became close, Savvy chose Zara to become her assistant when it was time to leave for the North. But Zara was quickly proving that this was the right role for her.

"I still haven't made up my mind," Savannah confessed. "I need a way out that will still get my brother the coalition he needs. If I just leave then that will be in danger. But the king clearly does not want to marry me and that makes two of us."

"Your brain is already working," Kyle's lips curled into a little smile as they stood in a little circle, trying not to attract attention. "I am sure you'll figure out the best solution."

"I wish I was as sure as you are," Savvy squeezed his hand and left for the library.



She wished she could talk to someone now about the predicament she was in. But at some level, the gardener was right. This was the first time she had to make big decisions on her own. And so many packs and lives depended on it.

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Kai opened the door to his office and growled when he saw his sister inside.

“Elene, what the hell is all this?”

### 3. Set Up

Kai gave his sister a stern look. He was gone for just a month and only to come back and find all this mess. His home was full of women he did not know and did not want to know. And he found out that apparently he was supposed to marry one of them in the near future. This did not sit right with him and he knew very well who to blame.

“Brother!” the princess of the North chirped and ran in his direction to give him a hug, but stopped halfway and scrunched her nose while scanning his outfit. “What happened to you? You look like...”

“We were attacked on our way back from the mountains,” he motioned for her to stop talking and walked past her to his rightful seat behind the desk. The one that she was clearly using all the time while he was gone. “I was lucky that this set of clothes survived the fight as I didn’t have to shift this time.”

“Lucky indeed,” his little sister did not look impressed.

Kai loved Elene. She was the only family he had left. But sometimes she was reckless and did not think about the consequences of her actions. Especially when her childhood crush, the western king, was involved. He knew that this was the case now. And that he would be the one dealing with everything in the end.

“You need to have some rest,” Elene tried to find an easy way out and was already at the door when he growled loudly, making her stop.

“Not so fast!” His wolf was angry as hell too. “I repeat my question, Elle, what did you do?!”

“You already know what,” she gave up quickly, because there was no point pretending anymore. She knew that she would have to face the music sooner or later.

“Luna Trials,” Kai closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. It was unbelievable that she dared to pull something like that. “Just why did you do it?”

“And what did you want to do?” His sister scoffed, folding her hands on her chest and sat in the chair in front of him. “I saw how angry you were when their letter arrived announcing that Savannah Stormhold graciously agreed to marry you since you begged so many times!”

He indeed wasn't happy about that. In no way was that the plan. A few months ago, he met with his old rival king Gideon from the Western Kingdom, because the latter was suddenly desperate for an alliance between them. The sole reason why Kai even went to that meeting was that he needed a certain piece of land that was in Gideon's possession. A piece of land that was essential to his kingdom. And since he had already asked for the princess's hand in marriage before only to be refused every single time, he was sure that nothing had changed. Gideon and he hated each other since school and then university. But they weren't just rivals, they actively despised each other.

However, Kai miscalculated this time. He asked for Savannah or the land in hopes that he would get the land. But instead, a few months later, he received a letter of acceptance of his proposal and the date when his future bride would arrive on his territory.

Hating Gideon was one thing, but going to war with him was another. Nevertheless, Kai never wanted to marry his sister. He didn't even want this in the past. There was always a different reason behind his proposals and usually, he was getting what he wanted. But not this time.

“Admit it, Kai,” Elene's lips curled into a victorious smile, “I came up with the best solution. The Luna Trials is an ancient tradition of the North. We will fail Savannah early on and will get rid of her. We don't need that alliance much anyway, right?”

“I wouldn't be so sure about that,” the king relaxed his back into his chair and clenched his lips.

“What's that supposed to mean?” Elene furrowed her blonde brows.

“There is a lot of unusual activity in the white bears' territory,” her brother took the first folder out from a huge stack that piled up on his desk during his absence and started looking through it.

“What kind of activity?” The princess did not want to leave this matter alone. Not too many species chose the North as their place of residence and there were some good reasons for that. Some parts of the North were uninhabitable and, because of that, in the past, there were many wars between the northern packs of shifters. The ones between the white bears and lycans were always the worst. No one wanted that part of history to repeat itself.

“It looks like they are up to something,” Kai muttered, checking the latest budget. “So, it's really not the time to piss Gideon off.”

Elene pursed her lips. For years she was dying to get at least a fraction of the western king's attention. And now she suddenly hated him because he dared to find his true mate.

"You are not seriously thinking of marrying Savannah!" The princess stood up and slammed her fists over his desk, almost leaving a dent.

"God, no!" Kai chuckled. "But we need to play it nicely. Gideon wanted this alliance very much if he was ready for me to have his sister as a wife. You know how many times he rejected my proposals for her."

"As if you'd wanted her!" Elene rolled her eyes and sat back in her chair. "I saw her today and, trust me, she is nothing special. I don't know what all the fuss is about." The girl polished her well-manicured nails and her brother sighed, placing the budget papers back into the pile. He had already found two mistakes and that meant that he would have to go through them all over again, despite the fact that all he wanted was a hot shower and some sleep.

"But she is the least of my troubles thanks to you now," he reminded her. "Elle, I really did not plan to get married any time soon. And you set me up with this big time."

"Don't be dramatic!" his sister smiled innocently. "You need a Luna and you know it. But you are not even meeting with anyone suitable. And now this is your chance. Just take a look at these girls and who knows, maybe you will even find your true mate!"

"Yeah... sure," Kai snorted. A mate was the last thing on his agenda. Although his annoying sibling did have a point – he needed a Luna. And a capable one at that. Someone who could lead by his side and take care of things like budget and many other tasks he had no time for. But something told him that this wasn't the best way to find her. Not to mention that his inner voice, aka his wolf Asgard, was insisting that simply taking a partner who wasn't their mate was out of the question.

"Just give the poor girls a chance!" Elene quirked her brow.

"It's not like I have a choice now, do I?" The northern king did the same. "And all thanks to you."

"No, all thanks to Savannah Stormhold," the Princess corrected him. "Anyway, if you don't like anyone, we just fail them all. Trust me on this one, I have prepared tasks that no one will be able to do. But who knows, maybe closer to the end you wouldn't want to let go of a certain girl."

"Why do I have a feeling that you already have someone in mind?" Kai closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"No one in particular," Elene giggled, and this was how he knew that she was lying.

"Who?" His voice sounded much lower than usual because he was tired of controlling his emotions now.

"A few contenders," she tried to straighten the creases on her dress.

"Who?!" Kai was on the verge of letting Asgard handle all of this for him.

"Say what you want, but Penelope would make a great Luna for you!" His sister pouted her lips.

"Not this again!" He muttered in annoyance.

"Just listen to me," Elene got her mobile phone out and handed it to her brother. "Look at what they have to do. Test her. You will see that she will handle all that just perfectly. But no pressure. If you still don't want her, then this is it."

He eyed his sister for a while and then just nodded because he was too tired to argue.

"Great!" She clapped her hands. "You won't regret it!"

"I already do," Kai retorted. "And don't think that you are getting an easy way out. I want to stop all that after a test or two. Got it?"

"Deal!" Elene shrugged her shoulders. "It's going to be wonderful!"

She said something else about Penelope, Savannah and the Trials but he didn't listen anymore. The exhaustion was catching up on him and he chose to dismiss her. He would have to figure out how to get rid of all this mess on his own anyway.

His sister was already at the door when she turned and said, "And, Kai, shave that awful beard! I can barely recognise you with it!"

She ran away before he could even growl at her. But looking at the list of the contenders in his hands and seeing who was on it, he knew that she was right. He had to take care of his appearance and look presentable.

But first thing first. He needed to get everything he could find on The Luna Trials. He needed a loophole to bring it all to an end. So, it meant that he would have to start in the library...

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Savannah was reading one of the many books she found in the library when suddenly she felt a sharp pain. It ripped through her whole body and made it especially hard for her to breathe. Her wolf Athena was howling inside and this could only mean one thing – her so-called mate was intimate with someone at that very moment...

The excruciating pain was too much, and tears were burning Savvy's eyes. She did her best not to scream as her nails dug into the wooden surface of the library desk.

"That mother\*\*\*ing bast\*rd!" she gritted her teeth, calming Athena down as best as she could. The two of them were Alphas; they wouldn't be crying over a man even if it was their mate. Even if he was hurting them. Especially knowing what kind of man their mate was.

Savannah hated how the mate bond worked. When she found out about Zack's betrayal and escaped him with the list of traitorous packs who plotted to kill her brother, she made sure to try and reject him when she reached a neighbouring pack of werecats where she was safe. But Zack did not accept her rejection. She still remembered how he stood there, on the border, naked and angry, his hazel eyes piercing her soul. And she spat out the words only for him to refuse to do at least that for her. He did not wish to set her free even though he wasn't going to be a real mate for her. Unfortunately, since they were true mates chosen by the Moon Goddess herself, for their bond to be broken, she needed him to accept the rejection. And until he did, they were tied to each other forever.

Mates were supposed to take care of each other, love each other unconditionally, and do everything for each other. But her mate only saw her as a good option for breeding strong pups and getting more power. This was all that she was to him, and it still hurt her more than anything.

Then he was gone because he knew that his cover was blown and that Gideon would be ready if they attacked. So Zack escaped, and they never saw each other again. But after about a month, she started to get these little reminders of his existence. The pains were rippling through her body in torturous sharp waves. As if someone was thrusting a knife into her flesh over and over again.

The first time she experienced this, she almost passed out, and it was Zara who found her. But it was Athena who explained to her what was happening.

"It's him," the wolf said, trying her best not to howl from all the pain, "it's Zack. He is..."

She did not need to finish that sentence since Savvy was clever enough to figure it out. Her mate was having s\*x with someone. It was so painful on so many levels, but she ended up laughing through tears. She laughed and she laughed while her elongated claws were leaving marks on the concrete floor. While Zara was holding her and asking if she had to call for help, Savannah only shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut. She did not want anyone's pity. She also did not want her family to be worried about her. All of them had enough on their plates already. So, she made Zara keep her secret, and this was one of the reasons they got so close in the past months.

Over time, she learned to tolerate that pain, to handle it better. She was almost used to it. Luckily, Zack's intimate moments with others were short. A few minutes at best. Not at all like their first night together, where they couldn't get enough of each other.

But Savvy slapped herself the moment she let her mind go there. They were done. Mate or no mate, she would have to kill him to get her freedom. And she would never find herself in his arms again...

The arms around her grasped her tighter, and this was when the pain finally became dull.

"Hands?" Savvy mumbled in frustration.

"Earth to the maid," she heard a familiar voice and blinked a few times. What was all this?

Savannah found herself staring in the face of the gardener she met earlier, his clear blue eyes watching her intently, brows furrowed as he scanned her face. It took her some time to come back to her senses, and she clenched her lips when she did, realising that he was a witness to her weakness. It was bad that he saw her so close this time. He was still thinking that she was a maid, and that part was good, but he would soon see her as a princess. It was inevitable. And who knew what he would be telling people then?

"Space to the gardener," she pushed him away and stood up, fixing her clothes. At least she looked decent. At this moment, anger for Zack filled her heart as the pain disappeared completely. He was done, and so was she.

Previously, he at least used to have his fun during the dark hours; now, it was still the middle of the day. Which was why she was so careless and went to the library alone. Which in turn led to this situation.

"What was that?" The guy sat on the top of the wooden desk she used previously and traced the marks she left on the surface with his large calloused fingers. "You were... out of your..."

"Don't finish that sentence!" she ordered in her princess tone, only later remembering that she was pretending to be someone else. The gardener did not look pleased and hopped off the desk to tower over her.

"Or what?" he asked, his minty breath caressing her skin.

He was much bigger than her, much taller. With an aura of confidence around him that gardeners back in her kingdom did not possess. He was also brutish and still didn't even look clean.

"Or you'll regret this," she smirked, folding her hands on her chest. "The gardening section is that way," Savvy pointed with her index finger. "Hurry up. Your roses definitely need some work."

"Only because some crazy lady shredded them to pieces," he chuckled.

"I heard she only did it because they were that ugly," she tried to get away from him, but he only bent lower, inhaling her scent and pinning his hands to the desk on both sides of her, which got her trapped.

"No wonder you hate roses when you smell like forest flowers," he was so close to her that his beard tickled her. Savannah never liked beards. Or man buns. Those were two things that she hated. But Athena, who was always very defensive about their personal space, was unexpectedly quiet now. "Bluebells?" their eyes met when she heard the word. No one ever guessed that on their first attempt. Not even Zack.

"Look at you," the girl rolled her eyes and tried to push him away, but he didn't move an inch, "a true master of your trade."

"Is that why you hate roses? Because they are more exquisite in comparison?" he teased her, and she did not appreciate it.

"Exquisite?" Savvy scoffed. "Those weeds that grow practically everywhere, that come in every colour and still lack originality. Not to mention that they literally try to hurt everyone who touches them. How can you even compare this to the bluebell, a flower so rare it needs protection that only blooms once a year and in the most secret of places. Although maybe you are just one of those who likes...ordinary things."

"Are we still talking about flowers, feisty maid?" the man's lips stretched into a smile.

"I don't know," Savannah raised her brow, "are we?"

He leaned lower, and his beard prickled her again, the closeness getting too much. However, for the first time since Zack, Athena was behaving. She didn't growl at the stranger, did not protest, did not make Savvy feel sick. And it was so new and freeing.

But she had to stop. It was one thing to pretend to be a maid, and it was another to actually kiss one of king Kai's men. She wasn't risking that much, considering that she already had a plan of action in mind.

So, no matter how tempting it was to kiss that man right now, she knew she couldn't. His lips were almost brushing over hers when she twisted one of his arms quickly, making him lose balance and almost smack his face on the desk while she ran to the other side of the room.



She turned to take the last glance at him and giggled at his startled expression. He was probably the lady's man here and used to getting it easy with all the maids, considering how confident he was.

"Didn't you know you are not allowed to pick bluebells?" Savannah smirked, and the look he gave her was not what she expected. She expected disappointment or maybe even anger. But if anything, he was amused.

"They don't grow in the North, blossom," the gardener chuckled.

"Too bad for the North," Savvy shrugged her shoulders. "They are beautiful in spring."

She turned on her feet and stormed out of the library, not wishing to continue this encounter. It was exciting but so wrong. And she couldn't afford it.

Kai stood where she left him. The little feisty maid with a sharp tongue that reminded him so much of someone...

She irked him. But in a way that piqued his interest.

Which he had to kill, of course. His house was now full of women who belonged to important packs and kingdoms and who came here to compete for his attention. He still did not know how to get out of this, but one thing was certain – he couldn't insult any of them. So, a fling with a western maid was out of the question. No matter how good she smelled, no matter how attractive she looked, no matter how his wolf wanted more right now when he usually barely tolerated females seeking their attention... He came here to look for ways out of all this mess, and he couldn't get distracted.

This was exactly when he noticed the books that the maid was reading, and his mouth opened in shock. He lifted one of the oldest-looking books and saw the title on the thick ancient tome: "The Luna Trials Guidelines."

Whistling, he took it and quickly looked through the other books. He counted at least five, and all of them were about the ancient traditions of the North. It was a good thing that it was literally impossible to study them so fast. He knew that the little maid worked for the western princess. The last thing he needed was for that woman to know all the rules about the event. So, he gathered all the books and went to his room. No one would ever find them there.

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Savannah found Kyle outside, and he showed her the way to her designated room.

"Just don't be angry, okay?" he snorted as he led her in the direction opposite to the main building where everyone else was going.

"What, did Elene give me the worst accommodation possible?" Savvy scoffed. After everything today, it wasn't a surprise. It was something that she expected. But when they entered the dark passages that led to a very gloomy tower, she couldn't hold in her laugh anymore. It didn't look like this part of the castle was used much.

"At least we are not the only ones here," her friend joined her.

"Moon Goddess! Who does Elene Fionnlagh hate as much as me?" she snorted and that was when a door opened right before the two of them. The princess gasped when she saw who had walked out.

"I guess that would be me. Long time no see, Savannah..."

## 5. Friend of Foe?

Savannah couldn't believe her own eyes. After she heard about the Luna Trials, she was sure that she would see a few familiar faces here. But this was one face that she did not expect to see at all.

"Brigit?" she tried not to sound too surprised at the sight of the werebear shifter. She used to be one of the "red girls" from the harem that her brother Gideon and sister-in-law helped to set free. She was also a friend of Riannon. Or at least that was what Savvy thought. When Brigit left, she claimed that she looked forward to her freedom and finding her true mate. Yet now here she was – at the Luna Trials. A place where none of that mattered. And it looked like she was one of the contenders.

"Princess Savannah," the girl greeted her unemotionally. As if they barely knew each other and never fought side by side in the bloodiest battle just months ago.

Then again, Brigit wasn't exactly Savannah's friend. She had a complicated relationship with Riannon too. So, could they really expect any kind of loyalty from her? After all, when a person does something good sincerely, they shouldn't expect to be paid back. Good deeds only remain good when there is no ulterior motive.

This was why Savannah breathed out and forced a polite smile on her face, "I didn't expect to see you here. That's a... lovely surprise."

"There is no need for that," Brigit stopped her with a gesture of her well-trained hand. She was the daughter of a white werebear Alpha and her kind was known for being tall and muscular. From the olden days, both men and women were trained to be warriors. And Brigit was no exception. She was the epitome of a female warrior with her strong, athletic build. Her hair used to be longer than what Savannah remembered and now it was cut short so that it barely reached her shoulders. It was straightened to perfection to give her a more polished look. Yet she remained true to herself, as her dress was metallic grey, resembling armour with a few thin silver chains forming intricate patterns on her shoulders.

“Look,” she sighed, “I know very well that you did not expect any of this in the first place. But I am not going to apologise. I am doing this for my people. I need to win this thing whatever it costs me.”

“Be my guest,” Savvy shrugged her shoulders. “All I need is an alliance. I never wanted to marry that prick in the first place.”

“Sav!” Kyle squeezed her arm as a warning. Words like this could have all kinds of consequences.

“Then we have no problem. Right?” Brigit raised her brow and walked past the two of them. “Don’t worry. When I become the Luna of the North, you will have your alliance.”

Savvy and Kyle exchanged glances. They were both relatively young but not new to political games. When someone promised something so important so bluntly, it was usually not what they intended to do.

“Go home, Savannah,” they heard the werebear’s advice before she disappeared in the darkness of the passage that led to the staircase. They heard her receding footsteps, and Kyle opened his mouth to say something, but Savvy placed her finger to her lips quickly to let him know they weren’t alone.

“Oh, excuse me. I did not mean to eavesdrop.” They heard a sweet voice coming from the opposite direction and saw a young woman walking out of one of the rooms. She had light blonde hair braided to one side and was wearing a chiffon midi dress with puffy off-shoulder sleeves, which was simple and elegant, and made her look fragile at the same time.

“It can hardly be called eavesdropping, considering how tiny this corridor is and how close our rooms are to each other,” Savvy giggled innocently while trying to remember if she knew this girl. “I am Savannah...”

“Stormhold. I know. You are the princess from the western kingdom.” The girl was smiling in a friendly manner, and Savvy felt like she had to respond to all that positivity. “It’s nice to meet you, and it looks like we are going to be neighbours for the Trials. Exciting!”

“Yeah... Very,” Savvy stretched a painful smile onto her lips. Exciting wasn’t the word that she wanted to use. “And you are...”

“Astrid Erling,” the girl reacted quickly, playing with her braid. “I am one of the daughters of Alpha Eric from Black Mountain pack. We are one of the smallest packs from the South, and as you can imagine...”

Savannah could imagine. The South did not have a kingdom. They had a republic with its own Council, members of which were selected and then changed yearly to avoid

someone becoming too powerful. They also did not have lycians since the big revolution when they killed the royal family.

As a result... there was absolutely no gain to having a wife from the South. She couldn't bring any influence to her husband, so unless she was the king's mate, such a match was out of the question.

Then again, these were the Luna Trials. And things were different here. The Luna of the North was supposed to be chosen based on merits.

"That explains why you got into the neglected corner," Savannah chuckled.

"Yeah, I figured when I found out that I live right next to a white bear shifter and..."

"Me," Savvy let out a little laugh. "Yes, my brother and the northern king aren't on best terms with each other."

"I am surprised that he didn't just marry you," Astrid said and immediately covered her mouth with her hand. "Oh, sorry... It's just... Everyone heard that king Kai asked for your hand in marriage before..."

"I guess he changed his mind," Savannah was getting slightly tired from all this. The werewolf girl seemed nice, but she had things to do and decisions to make. "Anyway, I need to go."

"Of course!" Luckily Astrid was understandable. "I will see you at the dinner tonight."

"Probably not," the princess confessed. "It was a long road and I just want to have some rest."

"Got you. Then tomorrow's Welcoming Party?"

"Yes, I will definitely be going there."

They waved each other goodbye and went in the opposite directions. Astrid seemed nice, but Savvy wasn't too naïve to make conclusions based on her first impression. She knew better than that.

Zara was already sorting her things in her room, and the western princess whistled when she saw how small and modest her room was. Minimalistic wasn't even the word for it. Just a bed, a desk, a wardrobe and a little bathroom.

"I am going to file an official complaint," her assistant pursed her lips. "This is outrageous! Your room is just like mine and Kyle's! It's so disrespectful!"

"You will do no such thing!" Savvy carefully sniffed around, ensuring that there were no other surprises in the room. Fortunatley, it seemed clean. Her lycan senses did not find anything suspicious.

"But..." Kyle wanted to say something when she motioned for him to stop and switched on the mind link.

"From now on, everything we need to say about this place can only be said via the link," she informed her friends. "Everyone will be looking at us, watching our every step. And I have already made a few mistakes."

"Yet it sounds like you have a plan," Kyle smirked and sat on the fluffy rug on the floor, letting the girls have the bed and the only chair.

"I think I do," Savannah sighed. "It's obvious that marrying the prick is out of the question after everything they have done. Not to mention that he isn't a fan of the idea himself."

"As\*\*\*ole," Zara made a rumbling sound.

"Yes, but that's a good thing," the princess grinned and plopped onto the bed, stretching her body for the first time today. "That means that when I am done here, I am free. And this is much better than I hoped for on our way to the North. However, before I can leave, there are two problems to tackle. The first one is obvious; we still need that alliance. Even after everything. The threat is too big, and it will be much easier with the North on our side. But at the same time, I need to save my kingdom's face. It shouldn't look like he gave us the alliance as an apology for not marrying me. And I absolutely cannot lose the Trials and leave without the alliance confirmed in writing."

"So, where does that leave us?" Kyle furrowed his brows.

"That leaves us with the one and only option. I need to win this thing," she announced, and both of her friends' mouths parted.

"But..." Zara mumbled.

"Yeah, I know," Savvy giggled and rolled her eyes. "Complicated, huh? But that's the thing. According to their own rules, the winner of the Trials can ask for three things from the King."

"And you are planning to ask for..." Kyle really wasn't getting it.

"The alliance as the first wish," Savvy smirked. "And then, I will ask him to let me go as the second wish, saying that we are not right for each other. But the third wish would be for us to stay best friends forever. You see, the northerners take pride in keeping their word and being honourable. We will have to exploit that."

“Do they?” Zara snorted. “They literally just scr\*wed us over.”

“That’s the thing,” Savannah pointed out, “wording requests matter. Gideon and Kai agreed that I would be Kai’s bride. And technically, I am. It’s just that I am not the only one. His promise is kept nonetheless.”

“As\*\*ole,” Zara repeated, folding her hands on her chest. Kai wouldn’t be getting any fan mail from her any time soon.

“Yes, sure,” Savvy laughed and now spoke out loud. “But two can play this game. Now I know how to play, and it will be different.”

“They don’t know what’s coming for them,” Kyle scoffed. “But why aren’t you going to dinner?”

“Too early to meet everyone and let them see me. I want to surprise them,” the princess stood up and took an invitation lying on top of the desk. “Besides, the Welcoming Party is not that welcoming. It’s the first elimination event. And we need to prepare.”

“Elimination? Really?” Zara was getting angrier and angrier by the minute.

“Yes,” Savvy shrugged. “You are cordially invited... blah-blah-blah... Masquerade with the contenders revealed...”

“Damn, that guy has some balls,” Kyle growled. “He is making a show out of it.”

“It is meant to be a show. And this is the best part because, boy, I am going to use it!” Savannah announced. “The Luna Trials is a complicated event, and everything here has a meaning. Here, look at this invitation.”

They all gathered around her, and she pointed with her perfectly manicured finger.

“Do you see the ink used for the writing? This is the dress code,” she informed them. “My name is written in red, the body of the message is in golden ink, and the signature at the bottom is in blue. That means that contenders can wear gowns only in these colours and their shades. If someone arrives in green, she will be eliminated for insulting the Northern traditions.”

“For real?” Kyle whistled. “What is this guy? Five?”

“He didn’t make these rules,” Savannah explained. “They have them for centuries. Anyway, we need to get everything ready for tomorrow. I wasn’t colour coding my dresses when I was packing them. And I don’t have a mask. You need to be dressed appropriately too. Kyle, men can wear black.”

“What a shame, so that golden tuxedo of mine is a no go?” the young lycan snickered.

"There is always next time," Zara retorted. "Let's see what we can use for a mask. I can fly and get one if we can't come up with anything."

They started working and only took a break for food that Zara had to request straight to Savvy's room.

When it got dark, they finally called it a day and agreed to start early the next morning to finish the preparations.

Savannah wanted to shower and relax, but Athena whimpered inside of her, calling for some fresh air. The princess knew better than not to give her what she wanted. Especially when she needed her wolf on her best behaviour.

So, she gave up quickly and went into the castle's garden, wearing just her silk robe, since all she needed now was a little run. She passed the guards and the warriors, thanking the Moon Goddess that the space around the castle was huge.

Then finally, she got to a little inner pond and decided that it was a good place to shift. She had already untied her robe when she smelled the familiar scent and covered herself quickly, turning to see the intruder.

"Oh, don't mind me," the gardener chuckled, walking from behind a large tree with a smug smile and his hands in pockets...

## 1. 6. Fresh Air

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ELETTR

Kai was sitting through a pointless and boring dinner which his sister arranged. He, Elene and his Beta Lachlan were dining on the upper floor, and he could watch his so-called Luna contenders dining downstairs through the glass window. He could already tell that his last hope for the stupid trials was already dead. None of them was his mate.

"Big deal!" Elene scoffed. "You know that mates are overrated anyway. Sometimes the Moon Goddess likes to laugh and gives Alphas like yourself an omega mate! Imagine an omega queen! That would be such a joke!"

"My mate would never be a joke to me," Kai grunted. "Whatever rank or kind she is. A mate is a mate and this person is always given to us for a good reason."

"Whatever," his sister rolled her eyes, picking at her salad. "You know they are not given to everyone and you are getting too old for this, Kai. The North needs a Luna and I can't always fill in. One day I will get married and who knows... Maybe I will have to leave the North. Then someone will have to step up."



He gulped his wine, knowing that his annoying sibling was right. He had gotten away with it for too long

"Marrying a random girl is not a great solution," he said.

"Then how about you don't marry a random person," Elene snickered. "We have known Penelope for many years. You are good friends. She is loved and adored by everyone here and she is also the only daughter of one of your strongest Alphas."

He knew that she would say that sooner or later. Penelope was her best friend and he knew all about their childhood dream. When they were children they made a pact that they would both marry lycan kings. That was a stupid agreement, but it got worse when Elene actually met Gideon

and fell for him. Since then she started to work extra hard to get him and Penelope together.

And Penelope was indeed the perfect Luna option for him. If only he hadn't considered her a sister. Just thinking of kissing her or taking her to bed was gross.

However, for his kingdom, he was ready to do anything.

"Don't even try this," he cut his sister off and took another glance at the women. Each of them was beautiful in her own way and almost any one of them would make a perfect candidate, yet that did not bring any excitement to him.

"What you did was a bit cruel," Lachlan stated plainly. "We knew that he would have to marry in the next few years but you really sped up the process, didn't you? Not to mention that you cut his options significantly. He had a whole world of possibilities and now he has to choose between... How many women are there?"

"Nineteen," Kai sighed as he finished counting.

"Twenty," Elene corrected him. He just shrugged as he tried to specifically count just the ones who resembled alphas' daughters. But maybe he took one of them for a helper instead. Never mind that.

"still expect you to find a way to stop this, he slightly growled at his sister.

"And I will if I absolutely have to," Elene wiped her lips with a napkin and threw it on the table, standing up. "But first you will really give this a try. You will meet these girls and talk to them, get to know them better. And if after everything you still want to get rid of them. I swear to you, the final task will help us. They will not find fault with us."

"Fine," he grunted, scratching his beard.

"And get rid of that thing!" Elene pointed at it before she walked out. "You get away with this only before someone takes a picture of you."

"That's the whole point," Kai smirked. "They don't take pics of me while I have it."

"Well, tomorrow is the masquerade and at the end of it everyone will be taking photos of you and the contenders when the masks come off. And we need The North Star, not the woodcutter from the neighbouring village!"

The princess left before he could flip her the bird.

"At moments like this I am really grateful that I am the only child in my family," Lachlan chuckled.

"Laugh some more and I will marry you to her!" Kai let out a snort.

"If you really want to avenge yourself, you should marry her to that self-proclaimed white bear king and solve all our troubles," his Beta pointed out. And it was a joke. But not really.

"If he wants power, that would only make things worse," Kai admitted. "He would have a royal lycan by his side. What would stop him from murdering me and claiming the throne in the name of their children?"

"This would be where your children come to play," Lachlan stood up as well and walked to the window to take a look at the contenders. He whistled, running his hand through his blonde hair. "At least she picked you some hotties. Maybe having a sister is not such a bad idea after all.

"You can take mine anytime," Kai let out a chesty laugh. But then his smile faded. He remembered something. "You know, the last time I saw Gideon when he brought that new Luna of his... The way he looked at her..."

"Like a weakling?" Lachlan sneered.

"No, not at all. He loves her." Kai's eyes grazed the women beneath him. "This meeting would have ended the way all our conversations went if not for her. She... she completes him.

"Only because he is not a full package. Like all westerners," his Beta rolled his eyes. "I would still prefer if one of these women was my mate."

"Look, K, I get all this good guy with a big heart vibe of yours. But I am not feeling sorry for you having to spend your time with all these beautiful women!" Lachlan laughed and shoved his shoulder in friendly manner. "I have to go and check on the security in the

castle and around. We have so many new people here now. I need to take extra measures.”

“Yeah, sure.” Kai waved him off and was ready to go to sleep, when he heard his wolf.

“Later,” Asgard’s voice sounded impatient. “Go to the garden. I need some fresh air and a run. Or a hunt. A hunt will be better.”

Kai knew better than to question his wolf’s needs when there was no serious reason to deny him what he wanted. So, he left the building and went to the west gate, where he always went when he wanted to shift and run into the woods.

“Not there,” Asgard grunted. “The pond.”

“What did you forget there?” Kai asked and then the wind brought the delicious bluebell scent to his nostrils. “On another note, we didn’t check this pond for a while! I wonder what its state is now!”

He hurried there, grinning like the j\*\*\*t that he was. He knew that she was just a maid... No, that wasn’t even right. She was princess Savannah’s maid and absolutely off limits. He couldn’t possibly touch her. But... he couldn’t stop going in that direction either.

He saw her standing next to the water with her back to him. A thin silk robe was all that she had on and when her hands moved to the belt, he knew what she was doing. She untied the belt and the golden fabric slid off her delicate shoulders. The pond was illuminated from the other side and Kai could see the silhouette of the maid as if she was giving him a shadow theatre performance. Her enticing curves at full display for him.

And however much he wanted to see the show, he knew that it wouldn’t be right. So, he chose to make himself known to her and stepped closer, knowing that she would smell his scent.

The girl flinched and wrapped her robe back around her, turning on the way, the wind ruffling her golden-brown wave locks. Kai couldn’t help his grin stretching over his lips. After tonight, he was happy to see her again.

“What do you think you are doing?!” she scolded him as if he was guilty of something when he was clearly being a gentleman here. 1. “Me?” he tried his best to look offended even though he was amused by the whole situation. He also enjoyed the delicate blush that kissed her cheeks. It suited her. “I am just getting some fresh air. The question is what are you doing here? Are you trying to flash the guards?” he couldn’t wipe the smirk off his own face. The tint on her cheeks became even more evident and he was enjoying that he made her feel this way.

"For a gardener who likes to spend his time in a library you aren't that bright, right?" she moved closer to him and he watched her, fascinated by the playful smile on her pretty face. He even missed the insult, feeling the warmth of her little body next to his. He liked it. He liked it a lot. Too much even.

"Enlighten me then," a smile tugged at the corners of his lips.

"What's there to explain?" She did not look impressed. "I was about to shift and let my wolf run. And what about you? These aren't your working hours. Were you just trying to find someone to stalk?"

"Stalk?" a scoff escaped him. She was pointing her index finger at him, and he grasped her wrist, spinning her and pressing her back to a nearby tree. "Little maid," he was so close to her now that he could inhale her delicious scent all he wanted, "There is no need for me to stalk anyone. I already have more women than I can handle."

"This is not something to be proud of, you know?" she burst out laughing. She irked him. But also... she excited him.

Savannah couldn't believe the situation she was in. The gardener's beard was tickling her neck and his hot breath was burning her skin. It was a game to him and it was a game to her as well. A game which she enjoyed. For the first time in a while she was enjoying something.

She iabbed him with her elbow and he let her turn to face him, but the moment their eyes locked, he pinned her back to the tree. Forehead to forehead, ragged breathing, his hands on her waist... She wanted to kiss that gardener and to hell with everything. She didn't care about the king anyway. And Athena was eager to do it as well.

She grabbed his t-shirt and wanted to pull him closer, when the familiar pain returned, piercing her whole body and almost making her scream.

"That son of a b\*\*tch!" her wolf growled in fure, ready to burst out and destroy everything just not to feel this torture of their mate's evident betrayal.

"Are you okay?" the gardener brushed his palm over her cheek and she leaned into it because she was so hot and his skin was the coolness that she wanted so much, that she needed. It was helping her and... it suddenly occurred to her that he could help her much better than this.

"Just kiss me already!" she hissed, and he didn't let her have a second to regret her words.

His surprisingly soft lips slammed into hers, his tongue thrusting into her mouth, demanding submission that she was never going to give him.

Kai lost it. He completely lost it with this strange girl. If someone saw him with this maid while his house was full of his potential Luna candidates, a scandal would be unavoidable.

If only he cared when she tasted so good, and when her scent was so intoxicating. He lifted her up, fingers sliding under the robe to dig into her perky bum. She wrapped her thighs and hands around him, making it so much easier. All while his hardness pressed right into her core through his jeans, making her moan and arch her back. The maid's frail neck opened up a bit and he hastily removed her soft silky locks away to start greedily kissing her delicate skin. She felt too good to be true, but he did not want to contemplate about it. Not now. Not when he was so close to having her.

The pain was long gone but Savannah did not care. Her life was already a mess. What could one little fling do? She hated her mate, she hated the northern king. So what if the gardener made her feel alive again?

She could feel Kyle knocking into her mind. She shut the link and did not react. But he kept trying and this made her groan in frustration, which only ignited the gardener's fire as his hands were searching for the ties of her robe.

She wanted him. She wanted him so badly!

But there was also her kingdom... And the people in it... Was it worth it to put them all in danger by kissing some insanely hot gardener?

She hated to admit it but Kyle already ruined the moment. The disturbance was helping her to slowly come to her senses.

"Stop," she muttered and to her surprise the lycan who held her did just that. He stopped and looked at her questioningly.

*"What is it, Kyle?" Savvy asked mentally.*

*"Where the hell are you! They said that apparently all contenders have to be in their room by nine o'clock. You are already late, and they are checking! Find a way back and do it quickly! I will try to hold them back or make a diversion."*

*"Got you!" Savannah closed the link and sighed.*

The gardener looked at her as if he did not want it to end but knew that he had no choice.

"I need to go," the girl smiled but that smile did not reach her eyes.

"You must be kidding," he grunted in her neck, feeling how she unwrapped her legs and tried to get down. He did not want this. His whole essence was against this. But their eyes met again and he knew that she was serious.

"I need to find a way to get back to our tower," she explained and he nodded, placing her back to the ground. She looked so worried that he couldn't bring himself to make her stay. "They

are checking if people are back in their rooms and I am here..."

"Let's go," the gardener took her hand and pulled her in the direction of the buildings. "There is a back entrance for servants." .

"Great," she mumbled as everything between the two of them became awkward again.

Kai thought that maybe it was for the best. What happened right now was pure madness. And he couldn't do that. Not now, not with this girl.

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*5 minutes ago*

Zack knew that there was only one way to remind his mate that he was still existing. So, when his Beta brought him the girl that reminded him of Savvy the most, he didn't hesitate. He didn't like to make it song either. All he needed was a rele-se and to send a message to his mate.

Yet this time was different. As he had hardly started when a piercing pain hit every cell of his body...

He growled loudly, throwing the she-wolf away and dropping to all fours on the floor. His claws were leaving traces on the wood and he almost shifted as his wolf wanted to run and go searching for their mate. The mate that was clearly enjoying someone's company now.

"Savannah!" Zack snarled, requiring all his physical strength not to follow his feral desires.

He didn't know when it ended and how long it lasted. But he knew one thing – he needed to find Savvanah fast...

## 1. 7. The Map

They were walking in silence and Kai wanted to do more for her. He didn't even know why. He couldn't explain it to himself. But she looked worried and it made him unsettled too.

“So, look here,” he showed her the back door that even servants used from time to time. He remembered it well for the sole reason that it was a weakness in his castle and he made his guards do regular checks there. “You go left when entering and then you go up the stairs to your floor. You will probably find yourself in some storage room, so...”

He stopped, thinking of how to explain things to her more clearly while she looked at him with unhidden curiosity in her eyes. He shouldn't have been doing this, but, sighing, he took his phone out of his pocket and within seconds he entered the password for his security app, scrolling through the options until he found the map of his house. The real one. The one that wasn't shared with anyone other than his security people. He would just show her this tower and that was it. There was no way that she would remember the outline of the secret passage. It would be too short to do even when it came to simply understanding what she saw.

He started explaining to her the turns and the doors she needed to use.

“And thanks to that, you'll be in the darkest corner of your floor. There, everything will depend on your luck,” he smiled at her.

Savannah felt lucky indeed. That gardener did not know what he was doing, showing her this precious map. But she was looking at the lines greedily, even if just for a few seconds. It was enough for that image to forever indent into her memory. She wouldn't be able to forget it. Ever.

“Uhm, got it,” she chewed on her lip, trying not to grin wickedly. This was the best thing he could do for her. “Thanks,” she glanced at him again and noticed his eyes lingering on her mouth.

“You are welcome,” he shrugged, and she opened the door. A part of her wanted to ask his name but she knew that she was better not to. She'd better just leave and forget about what happened.

But as she took another step, he gripped her hand and spun her to face him again, crashing his lips into hers for that last taste...

It took them both longer than they realised. Savvy only managed to push him away when Kyle tried to mind link her again.

“I need to go!” she said more to herself than to him, her breathing still ragged.

The maid ran away and Kai stared at the door in front of him. It was a while since he felt this ... lost. Lost in his own feelings.

He had to snap out of it and get back to what he was supposed to be doing. But before he left too, he mind linked his head guard and his sister.



"I want both of you to leave the contenders alone. No one should be on their floors now. No one should be in the tower as well." He shut the connection, knowing that no one would dare to disobey his direct order. A little smile tugged at his lips. At least he could do something for the

little maid. Even if this had to be the end of their story.

Savannah reached the corridor that led to her room and listened, before sneaking back into her bedroom. Kyle and Zara were already gone and she let them know that she had succeeded. before taking a quick shower and going to bed.

And for the first time in a while, her mate wasn't the one she was thinking about when she drifted off to the land of dreams.

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"Are you sure about this?" Zara was helping with the clasp of a blue sapphire and diamond necklace, while Kyle was working on the mask. "I still think we should have gone with the golden

one."

"Something tells me that most girls will be wearing gold since they all want to send the message that they are worthy of being queens," Savvy smirked, looking at herself in the mirror.

They had already done her hair and now she had it up in a relaxed braided crown with a low messy bun with a few loose curls here and there. The braid was a traditional northern one and for

a very good reason.

"Shouldn't you do the same?" Kyle gave her a reproachful look.

"Why?" she scoffed. "I don't have to prove that I can be a queen. I am probably the only one of pure royal blood here. I need to prove something else – that I can belong here even despite being a westerner."

"Sounds reasonable to me," Zara sprayed something over her hair and added the last sapphire hairpin.

"This is why my dress is dusky blue," Savvy chuckled. "In the olden days it used to be the traditional bridal dress colour in the North. They wore it with fur, but fur would be too much nowadays.' So, that's why I asked my seamstress to add a few feathers to finish the look instead, to create a similar effect and shape. Who knew that these would be the

circumstances of me wearing that dress?! But I am happy that I thought about that before arriving here.”

“Good thing that you got their trick with the dress code,” Kyle snorted. “That was so low of them, to be honest.”

“What did you expect after they arranged all that just to get rid of me?” Savvy giggled. Somehow it was easier for her now. She had a mission, and she didn’t have to get married. Life was getting better. And in no way was it because of her kisses with the gardener. Nope, that definitely didn’t have anything to do with that.

Zara helped her to attach the mask and Savannah gave her friends the last twirl. The pale blue fabric was heavy, but the feathers were making it look like it was floating in the air. The glimmering silver sequins and beads were like little sprinkles of night stars. But what she loved the most about this off-shoulder dress was the split front that allowed her freedom of *movement* and gave a good view of her legs.

It was very... her.

Someone knocked on her door and Zara rushed to open it. She was wearing an elegant black dress with a large golden bird claps on her left shoulder.

“Princess Elene asks you not to be late,” a maid handed them a golden envelope and disappeared even before any of them had a chance to respond.

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“She is in such a rush!” Kyle rolled his eyes. Zara handed Savvy the letter and she opened it without delay. Her lips curled into a smirk when she read the contents of the message. “What is it?” Kyle was impatient.

“Nothing much,” Savannah opened the secret compartment of her make-up box and hid the letter there. “Elene really wants us to get to the ball on time. She was even kind enough to give me strict directions on where to go.”

“That’s... unexpectedly nice of her,” Zara checked the time and looked at Savvy reassuringly.

“If only her instructions didn’t lead me to an inventory room at the back of the castle,” the lycan princess snorted. She couldn’t believe that this woman hated her enough to go into this much trouble.

Little did they know that her photographic memory would never let her get lost in this place. All thanks to one very handsome gardener...

"B\*\*ch," Zara swore under her breath but quickly regained her composure. "Anyway, shall we? Now we just have to come early!"

"I like the way you think," Kyle winked, offering them both his hands, which they gladly accepted.

In less than a few minutes, they were already standing at the doors leading to the main ballroom. Elene was greeting the guests, wearing a sparkling golden dress. She was in the middle of ridiculing a girl who had the misfortune to arrive in a purple dress. Unfortunately for her, the purple ink wasn't used in the invitation. Hence, the colour was considered inappropriate today.

"The North always respected wits before everything," she sneered. "We cannot have a queen who doesn't know the simplest of rules."

She clearly wanted to say something else, but that was when her eyes landed on Savannah. Elene recognised her at once. She clenched her lips not to give away her displeasure. But it was obvious nevertheless.

The girl in purple had already left, using her chance to escape. And Savvy left her companions to enter separately, as the contenders were obliged to.

"Savannah Stormhold?" Elene pretended that she did not care much. "I am not mistaken, right?"

"Not this time," Savvy gave her the most charming smile.

"What do you mean? I'd never..." she started talking but cut herself off in the middle of it, realising what the westerner meant. She was talking about the instructions she sent to her room to try and get rid of her quickly.

"Don't worry about it," Savannah leaned forward and whispered to her ear. "I appreciated the gesture and I will return it when I can."

Not waiting for a reply, she entered the ballroom.

The space was filled with guests in masks and she tried to observe them discreetly. The ball was only supposed to start when the king arrives and the contenders are introduced. So, she

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still had time to do whatever she needed to do.

Masks were covering the faces but no one here was able to hide their scents. Savvy tried to remember them now, since that would be valuable information for later.

She was sipping champagne in the corner when the doors on the opposite side of the grand hall opened, a familiar scent hitting her nostrils

Savannah couldn't believe this. That was definitely the scent of the gardener. This scent was more evident and intense for her than any other in this room even if she couldn't see him yet,

She started thinking hectically while trying to stay reasonable. There was no way that a simple gardener would be invited to a grand party like that. And that could only mean one thing. The man she kissed yesterday wasn't a gardener.

Savvy gulped her champagne and stayed in her corner, watching a group of men enter. She only saw the tips of their heads in the crowd but by the way people were greeting them it was clear that they were important here.

"Your Majesty!" someone close to the group said in a voice laced with fawning and Savvy tensed

"Are you sure that's him?" she heard two girls who stood not far from her whispering, trying to cover their mouths to muffle the sounds.

"Yes, I met the Beta yesterday and I am positive that it's his scent. It's the king and his entourage," was the reply.

They were probably other contenders since they didn't know who was who. Locals seemed comfortable at the ball. The masks for them were just a fun outfit element for the party, nothing more.

But this was bad. Really, really bad. If that was king Kai and his most trusted men then it meant that she kissed one of them! It couldn't get any worse than that and Savvy sucked in a deep breath trying to calm down.

Why did she even assume that he was a gardener?! She knew why. Simply because she saw him in dirty clothes and ... in the garden.

This definitely wasn't her brightest moment and she cursed under her breath at the realisation

Savannah remembered pretty well that she called him a gardener in the library and he did not deny it. Moreover, he went with it. So did she pretending to be a maid. But she had a very good reason for that. What was his reasoning to pretend while on his own turf?

The answer for that was too obvious... He knew who she was from the very beginning. And he played her.

Was he laughing at her with his friends? Or even worse – was he laughing at her with king Kai?

Or... was it king Kai's idea?

It was clear that no one wanted her here. Was it another part of their plan to get rid of her? Would they now use it to blackmail her so that she would be humiliated? Did they want her gone that much?

She gripped the stem of her crystal flute so hard that it crumbled in her hand to pieces, drawing blood. But she did not care, as the wounds healed quickly. Not a drop managed to fall on

her gorgeous dress. She needed answers and she needed them now.

Anger was boiling and something that she locked inside of her years ago was urging her to let it out.

"The gardener" and other men stood next to the musicians and were chatting with women surrounding them. Savvy watched them from afar for a few seconds but when some brunette in a red dress slid her arm over "the gardener's" bicep, she made up her mind.

She marched in their direction and placed her hand on his shoulder, squeezing it with a royal lycan's might to send a message.

"Hey there," she smirked as if she was in full control of the situation. "I think you owe me a dance."

He looked at her, startled. She could bet he didn't expect her to be this daring in this situation. Too bad for him. "Who do you think you are?!" the brunette in red gasped.

"The music hasn't even started," some guy in a black mask with a blonde beard stated. And it was a fair point.

Savannah's head snapped to the musicians as she felt Athena surfacing and her eyes glowing

"Play something fiery!" She gave them an Alpha order which she almost never used and they grabbed their instruments.

"What the..." someone was about to protest but the gardener raised his hand, motioning for them to stop

"It would be my honour," he took her hand from his shoulder and kissed it gently, sending shivers all over her body. But she had to snap out of it. It meant nothing to him and it would mean nothing to her

Kai was shocked. The little maid was one of the guests, which meant that she was someone important. And of a much higher rank than he initially thought. He never bothered to check her wolf because he was overwhelmed each time they were together. He let his guard down.

And it was a mistake.

Did she already know who he was? Judging by the look in her eyes she was angry with him. And rightfully so. He was the king of the Northern Kingdom and she probably thought that he was just toying with her. But it wasn't like she told him the whole truth either.

Kai walked her to the centre of the room, and everyone stepped away, leaving the dance floor to the two of them. The first accords sounded, music filling the room in an instant. Their eyes locked and he pulled her into himself roughly, closing the space between them. After this conversation they would be done, and a part of him wanted to at least feel her closer.

A corner of his lip curled into a smile. She was clever since she wanted to do this with music on. This was the only way to speak privately at a party with so many shifter ears in the room.

"So, I guess that you..." He wanted to start but she growled at him. A woman never growled at him before.

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"I hope you had your fun," she gritted her teeth looking at him with a challenge in her eyes. He hated the mask that was covering her pretty face but at least her eyes were still on full display

for him.

"Look, if I knew who you were, I would have kept as far away from you as possible," he told her but, of course, it didn't help his case one bit.

"Goddess," she chuckled bitterly, "are you seriously going to pretend that you didn't know?"

"And you?" he arched his brow although she couldn't see it through the mask.

"I am the one who is new here! I couldn't know!" the woman in his arm hissed and he could feel how fast her heart was beating. She didn't look like she was lying.

"Exactly, you are new here," he mimicked her tone, "how was I supposed to know? I am sorry, but I am not following princess Savannah on social media to know what all her friends look like."

Her lips parted. Was he still trying to play her? If that was the case, she wasn't letting it happen.

"Nice try!" she narrowed her eyes at him. "As if king Kai's closest man wouldn't be checking everyone who was arriving for those stupid Luna Trials."

Kai swallowed. His Beta and Gamma were probably doing this all night and they would know who she was. It all went a bit too far. He had to let her go.

"Listen, it was a mistake," he sighed. "Let's just forget about it and move on from..."

A sudden piercing pain stabbed his foot and he realised that she stepped on it with her sharp metal heel.

"Fine!" The girl purses her lips. "Mistake it is! See you never, *gardener!*"

Her every word was coated with hate she felt for him at this moment and she was ready to leave when he held her in place, grasping her tighter.

"Not so fast, little maid!" He growled into her ear softly. "No one stabs me and leaves."

He didn't even know why he was still holding her. He deserved that and he had to let her go. He absolutely had to.

Only that neither him nor his wolf really wanted to.

"The dance is not over yet," he whispered into her ear, accidentally brushing his lips over her skin as he leaned down. "Leaving early is rude."

"If you are a masochist, just say so," the girl sneered and stepped on his other foot. He groaned, but not from the pain this time. He was used to physical pain. But that audacity of hers required some answers.

So, when she lifted her foot to repeat the same annoying action, he caught her thigh and lifted it higher, wrapping it around his own as if they were in a sensual provocative dance and not a street fight.

"Take your hands off me," her eyes were throwing daggers at him while her cheeks flushed.



"Only when you learn how to behave in a civilised society," he smirked. "And after that you westerners call us barbarians?"

"Aren't you?" she rolled her eyes. "You can't touch a woman like that without her consent."

"It brings me as much pleasure as it brings to you," he glared at her and she did the same.

The two of them didn't even notice that the music was off. They didn't realise that they were not moving anymore. And that everyone around them was staring.

Someone cleared their throat right next to them. "Excuse me," Elene touched her brother's arm. "I am busy," he growled at her.

"Kai!" Elene raised her voice slightly. "You aren't supposed to dance with the contenders before their introduction. That is if they get through it in the first place! And princess Savannah needs to go and take her place because we are about to start."

They both looked at her in awe, processing her words. And then they got back to gazing at each other... "Princess Savannah?" "Kai?" They said the words in unison.

## 1. 9. Bost For Last

Savvy looked at him in shock, and his grasp on her became tighter. Elene cleared her throat again, bringing them both out of their daze.

"Kai!" She hissed. "We need to go. Now! Everyone is watching."

"Right," he conceded, finally letting her go. Savannah straightened her dress, and the realisation of how they might look dawned on her, also considering most people present were aware that he was their king. Not to mention that she was about to become unmasked as

well.

"Excuse me," Kai took her hand and bowed to kiss it, however, she snatched it back before his lips could touch it. A soft growl left his chest, and she wondered what he was thinking. His level of deception was really beyond anything she could comprehend, and all that she wanted at this moment was to slap him. Then slap him again. And more, if it were possible.

But, of course, she couldn't. Too many eyes, too many witnesses. At least he helped her finalise a decision she had been pondering.

There was no way she was leaving humiliated. She would make him and his mean sister regret the day they decided to do this to her. She would win the stupid Luna Trials and get those wishes from her “groom-to-be”. Then she would get her alliance and reject him, making it impossible to hold it against her, her brother, or her kingdom in any way.

“You are excused, Your Majesty.” She filled her words with as much venom as she could muster and turned on her heels to walk toward what looked like a queue of women.

“Please, over here.” A girl in a black dress and a mask gestured for her to stand toward the back. Savannah recognised Elene’s assistant. “I am sorry, you have the last turn ...”

“That’s fine.” Savvy cut her off with the sweetest smile she contained in her arsenal. “In the *West*, we save the best for last.”

She was fuming, and even Athena was unsettled inside her.

“Are you okay?” Kyle mind-linked her. She knew he had seen everything and was probably wondering what was going on. They had known each other since they were kids, and he could sense when she was troubled.

“Peachy,” she replied sarcastically. “I am going all in. You and Zara need to find out everything you can about every single contender. So, keep your eyes open now that they will be revealed.”

“Fine,” he said quietly and closed the link, knowing it was better not to contradict her when she was in such a state.

“Together again,” a girl next to her remarked as she smiled brightly. Savannah looked at her in an effort to recognise her. “It’s Astrid,” the girl whispered. “I’m placed in the room next to yours.”

“Oh, right!” Savvy chuckled. “You are another lucky contender.” “At least I am in good company,” Astrid replied, giggling, but then, the sound of a loud bell

interrupted them. They watched as Elene froze like a statue of some ancient queen at the top of a staircase leading to a throne which was now taken because King Kai was sitting in it and staring at her with his piercing blue eyes.

Savannah pretended not to notice and stood behind Astrid, hidden from his gaze.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” For once, Elene’s voice sounded truly sweet, as if she loved the people gathered before her, not the contenders, of course, but the northerners present in the hall. “It’s time to begin! The Luna Trials are about to start, and you are

present during an historical event which will lead to the appointment of the new Luna of The North!"

They all cheered loudly, and Savvy could decipher one phrase voiced all around her, *by Fenrir's will*. She almost forgot that the northerners often preferred the wolf warrior god to the Moon Goddess, who was worshipped more in the West. Of course, she was respected everywhere, but it was considered that Fenrir was the patron of these lands.

The photographers and cameramen stood between Elene and the contenders, filming everything from different angles.

"Our first contender!" The princess made a gesture, and a familiar brunette in a red dress came up to the bottom of the stairs and curtsied as if this were the Middle Ages.

Savvy rolled her eyes. For some reason, she remembered how that woman was touching Kai moments before she snatched him away and that memory was particularly unpleasant. Nevertheless, she quickly brushed it to the farthest corner of her mind, where Athena then obliterated it. This was war, with no strings attached.

"It's time to reveal who we all are," Elene commanded, as she turned to her brother, who was sitting on a throne behind her. A throne! Savvy scoffed. She had never seen Gideon sit on a throne. They didn't even have one.

Well, technically, they did, but it was in a museum, and no one in their right mind would be sitting on that old thing anyway. She liked the north less and less

Kai slowly removed his mask. For the first time today, she noticed that his beard was now a barely well-trimmed stubble. It was something she had missed during their dance because she was mad at him. She hated to admit it, but he looked even better than he did before.

His eyes grazed quickly over hers, still, once again, she pretended to look at someone else in the crowd. Elene followed his example by removing her mask, and so did all the northerners in the room, finishing off the motion with a round of applause.

Show-offs.

"The Luna of the North can't be an ordinary woman." Elene was working the cameras with her dazzling smile, giving them the show of their lives. "She must be beautiful and have perfect lineage. While all our contenders have these, there are other qualities we value more. The first of them is wit."

The word echoed through the room, and Savvy tensed. She had a photographic memory and remembered everything she had ever learned. Nonetheless, what if the education system in the north was different from the west, and they would start quizzing

her about something she didn't know in the first place? This could be a potential disaster.

"Contender One," Elene raised her chin with a facial expression full of self-importance. "I want you to solve a riddle. Each contender will have one."

Savvy couldn't hold back a snort and a few girls in front of her turned to see who could be so disrespectful. Astrid quickly stood in front of her, covering Savannah and giving her a moment to gather herself. She gave Savannah a wink and continued watching the show.

This girl was starting to grow on Savvy.

In the meantime, Elene continued, "Name a thing that is lighter than what it is made of and more of it is hidden than is seen."

Savvy furrowed her eyebrows. What was this? Year 1 of primary school?

"An iceberg!" the brunette beamed, and Savannah had to use all her inner strength not to make any more sounds.

"Excellent!" Elene praised her. There was no denying that this girl was Elene's favourite by the way she looked at her, as if she already won and this was all just a formality. Consequently, all the other contenders received an utterly degrading glare which could only be translated as – *bow in the presence of the gods, Sheep.*

The princess gestured for the contender to go up the stairs and stand at her side.

"Penelope Summerstern, daughter of the North!" Elene announced although it was apparent that everyone here knew who the woman was. "Our first contender for the title of The Luna of The North!"

When everyone was done with their applause, another woman stepped forward, wearing a navy dress with rhinestones that sparkled as if she was wearing the night sky. Savvy sniffed discreetly and recognised that person as Brigit, the white werebear.

The funniest thing, judging by the face that Elene was now making, was that it didn't appear to be Brigit's turn. Some other girl in golden attire had tried to step forward too, but Brigit growled

at her, and the poor soul quickly gave up.

"Some things never change," Kyle told Savvy via the mind-link. She smirked at her friend. Brigit was ... something. She was one of the least wanted contenders here but decided to fix that as soon as possible. With force.

This was going to be fun!

Regardless, there wasn't much that Elene could do about it, so she sighed with annoyance and said, "Only one colour, but not one size. Stuck at the bottom, yet easily flies. Present in the sun, but not in rain. Doing no harm and feeling no pain. What is it?"

If looks could kill, the she-bear would be done.

Brigit stood there quietly. Everyone here knew that if she couldn't solve the riddle, she would be eliminated. She wouldn't even get to take her mask off. Although, that was probably for the best. The rules were similar for the women who couldn't enter the ball because they arrived dressed in the wrong colours.

The werebear was clenching her fists, and Savvy wished she could tell her the answer mentally, but they weren't from the same pack nor were they related in any way, so that wasn't an

option,

They heard a few giggles here and there. Everyone could now sense that she was a bear and bears weren't liked much in the North because of the constant wars between their packs in the past.

Suddenly, Brigit lifted her head and with a slight smirk on her lips answered, "Shadow." "Someone came prepared!" Kyle pointed out. "I wish it was us!" Savvy replied.

"Very well," Elene pursed her lips. "Our second contender! Bridgit Borg, daughter of Alpha Borg of the White Claw clan. A white werebear."

The last words were said with spite, and the wave of murmurs that went through the crowds of guests confirmed Savannah's suspicions. There was no applause this time, but Brigit did not seem to mind as she took her rightful place on the stairs.

The next two girls had riddles that were so easy a child could answer them. They were also northerners like Penelope, but one of them was a werewolf and not a lycan. By the way they behaved, it could be concluded that they were there primarily to support Penelope than to win for

themselves. Celia, an edgy-looking lycaness with short wavy hair, and Inga, a blonde with two long braids to her front, both looked ready to defend their future Luna's honour and even stood at either side of Penelope yet a few steps behind her so as to make her stand out. Even their dresses were a dull shade of blue with nothing extraordinary about them. The perfect background for their queen.

A girl with long, straight, auburn hair was next, and she was also successful. Savvy wondered who she was until she heard the words, "Autumn Bern, the fox Alpha's daughter from

the eastern Ruby Hill pack."

Now, this was interesting. Foxes were common enemies after the recent attacks. Although eastern foxes weren't actively participating in the war, they were definitely under suspicion, and King Kai allowed one straight into his own house ... This was ... peculiar.

One by one, the girls gave Elene their answers, as Savvy got bored. Their riddles were nothing special

"Mavis Redfeather," Savannah heard a name that made her curious, and looked at yet another woman taking off her mask. She had long wavy hair that was dark at the top and was gradually turning into bright red by the ends in the best ombre effect Savvy had ever seen. "From the Silver Skies flock."

She was a bird shifter from Zara's old flock, one who could be problematic since they all hated her.

However, the next name put Savvy into a state of real shock.

"Nayara Knight, daughter of Alpha Ramina Knight." Her eyes immediately met the eyes of the werecat, who had once given her asylum in her territory when Savannah was running away from her traitor mate. If Zack had managed to capture her then, her life would have had a whole different outcome. She had reached the werecats' territory, and Naya was the first person she met. Their acquaintance was short but very eventful. Especially considering they ended up

fighting side by side in the bloodiest battle of their lives right after they met.

"Did you know that she would be here?" Savvy shot a glance at Kyle. "I had no idea," he shrugged. "I'll try to find out why we didn't know."

Here was the confusion, had Naya known about the Luna Trials, why wouldn't she inform her or Gideon. They were in the alliance after all. Naya's mother was one of the most loyal Alphas to her brother.

B A girl with perfect pink locks wearing a perfect doll dress with lots of golden sequins walked

to Elene. She didn't look any older than eighteen and Savvy was wondering if it was a mistake that she was here in the first place. These weren't the times when women had

to secure a marriage early. Then again, there was a possibility of getting married to a lycan king. A lot of

Alphas probably wanted to seize this opportunity.

"I have lakes with no water, mountains with no stone, and cities with no buildings. What am I?" Elene asked gracefully, and the girl in front of her nervously played with the frills of her dress. She began fidgeting more and more.

Savvy decided to take back her statement on children being able to solve those riddles. That child clearly wasn't able to.

The girl turned to the remaining contenders and looked at the woman in her thirties that arrived with her. Panic was evident on her face, but then, all of a sudden, it brightened, and she found the strength to face Elene again.

"It's a map!" she announced loudly and even clapped her hands together.

It was obvious that her assistant gave her the answer via their mind-link. In spite of this, the northern princess ignored all that and gestured for her to take off her mask.

"Petra Biernat, the Alpha's daughter from the Blue Forest pack." She made the necessary announcement.

"Don't you worry," Kyle chuckled in Savvy's mind. "If you need my help, I am at your service."

"Oh, yeah, Kyle," Savannah snickered. "How many of these did you solve?" A sly grin appeared on his face, and she chose not to react this time.

Astrid was next, and she gave her answer quickly. She was introduced without any problems. Even though Elene made a face as if she ate a lemon when she showed her a place to stand.

It was Savvy's turn next, and for the first time, she allowed herself to meet Kai's blue eyes.

He was watching her just as she expected, his facial expression was unreadable. The northern king looked handsome without a mask, and without his beard. Not that she would ever let him know.

She wasn't mad anymore. Now she was calm and concentrated. Moreover, she was ready for anything

Savannah stepped forward and bowed her head slightly. She wasn't curtsying before Elene. They were equals. So, this simple form of respect was enough.



The northern princess did not like that, but, luckily for her, she had already prepared her revenge. It was evidently written all over her face as she gestured for two guards to bring in a table into the room.

They placed it in front of Savvy and put an old golden weighing scale on top of it.

Of course, she wasn't going to make it simple for her. After all, the whole event was created to humiliate her.

"Elene, what is the meaning of this?" To her surprise, Kai interrupted the event.

"Just another riddle, brother," the princess giggled, "and since it's our last one, I thought that doing something special would be nice. So, I brought in some props."

Savvy was watching her like a hawk when she walked to the table and placed nine old coins on it one by one.

"There are nine coins on the table," Elene smirked, "but one of them is fake. The fake coin is slightly lighter than the rest. Our contender can weigh the coins two times, and no more. Then, she has to tell us which coin is fake. Good luck!"

Giving her one last sneer, the northern princess walked back to her brother and toward the throne. Her face changed as she looked at the king, and for a second there, Savannah suspected they were speaking via mind-link.

However, this was not her main concern at the moment. She took the coins into her hands and sadly realised that there was no way to determine the fake in that way. She would have to use the weights, but she could only use them twice, so she had to use them accurately.

Savvy walked around the table to bid some time when she had an idea. All the coins were in her hands. She was about to place the first of them onto the golden cup that rested on the scales when she heard the king's voice.

"Wait!"

## 1. Northern Blood

Kai had seconds to collect himself as his sister reminded him of his place, letting go of the girl in front of him.

He was the King, and he had a role to play. Especially with all the cameras pointed in his direction.

He would be thinking about Savannah Stormhold later. Savannah. F\*cking. Stormhold.

It was unbelievable that out of all the people here, he was drawn to her. His guilty pleasure, his little maid, turned out to be the woman he tried to avoid marrying in the first place. Moreover, she was the little sister of the guy whose guts he hated the most.

His head was buzzing with a million questions, so he just waved for the event to start, ignoring Elene's displeased gaze at him and his earlier promise to deliver a short speech. She would have to figure all of this out on her own since she was the one who started this mess in the

first place. Which she did just perfectly.

Of course, her bestie Penelope was the first, and he didn't even listen to how she solved an old northern riddle for five-year-olds. Elene could have at least given her something a bit more challenging, so as not to make it too obvious that she was helping her. Penelope wasn't an idiot.

Neither was Princess Savannah. His eyes were searching for her at every opportunity, and each time she averted his gaze. Apparently, everyone and everything in this room was more interesting to her than he was – the lamps, the walls, the floor, the people...

He gritted his teeth, focusing on the women before him. A witch just passed the test. A witch... Elene must have been crazy to invite her. Witches should have been avoided at all costs.

"Salome Gray from the White Tree Coven", she introduced herself and gave him a seductive glance with her onyx eyes, which he did not return as he was staring at Savannah again. Her delicate shoulders were poking out of her feathery dress, bringing sinful thoughts into his mind.

She looked nothing like the last pictures of her that he had seen. Then again, the last time he was interested to see her was years ago, when she was just a cute teen with freckles. Interested wasn't even the right word. He wanted to make sure she was nowhere near ready to get married to piss off Gideon with his offer after he humiliated his sister.

That was stupid, and he knew that now. But back then, it seemed like a good idea after he saw Elene crying for hours. Both he and Gideon were young Alphas back then and it was a given that his elders would try to persuade him to accept such a marriage.

Now the joke was on him. Because Savannah grew up. And the woman she had become was... really something.

It all made sense now. Her destroying the bushes, her looking guilty for kissing him back...

She was no maid indeed.'

The next girl was another werecat, Mikaela something. That meant that now there were two werecats in the game. Two too many. This kind was free and not cut for a traditional marriage.

It was almost Savannah's turn, and he couldn't wait. As soon as this farce was done, he would drag her away, and they would talk about.. everything

He didn't know what that 'everything' meant precisely, but they had to clear the air. Judging by her reaction, she thought that he had been purposefully messing with her all this time on purpose. And although he was initially guilty of creating this whole situation in the first place, he wanted her to know that he wasn't playing with her when he kissed her. It was an honest mistake that he would never repeat again.

That thought felt sour to him, but he had to push it deeper into his mind. This had to be the end of them. He would never allow himself anything with her. After all, they weren't mates, and they were too different. This could never work...

Some girl he didn't know got her riddle that for some reason, seemed to be harder than what the other contenders got. She managed to solve it, and when she introduced herself as Astrid, a daughter of some eastern Alpha, it became clear to him that Elene was playing a game of her own, trying to eliminate the ones she disliked the most first. He wanted her to find a way to stop the Trials, but she also had to understand that they had to keep their face in all of this. Showing favouritism was against everything the North believed in.

He grunted at the thought that they would have to have a conversation about all this again. And although he loved his sibling with all his heart, he had had enough of her for the past two days already

It was Savannah's turn now, and she stepped forward. The defiance and determination on her face was admirable. But then the props arrived and he realised that she wasn't getting a riddle like everyone else. He felt anger rising at the bottom of his chest.

"There are nine coins on the table," Elene smirked, "but one of them is fake. The fake coin is slightly lighter than the rest. Our contender can weigh the coins two times and no more. Then, she has to tell us which coin is fake. Good luck!"

His sister turned and walked to his throne, their eyes meeting for the first time during this whole mess.

*"What the hell, Elene?" he demanded via the mind-link. "Everyone got a children's riddle, and she gets this?"*

*"So what?" she shrugged it off and stood next to him.*

*"You wanted her out. Here is your chance. She fails miserably and leaves. The end."*

*“And then we wouldn’t hear the end of this. The Northern King was so afraid of the little western princess that he made her lose by rigging the contest!”*

His sister’s face

paled. *“Well, it’s too late for that anyway! Just wait and see... Besides, it’s not that hard. They would be talking badly about us whatever we do! You know how they are!”*

But he wasn’t listening to her anymore. His eyes were glued to Savannah who was slowly counting the coins in her palm with her delicate fingers. The same fingers that he loved having

entangled in his hair. ..”

“Wait!” He heard himself saying and standing up. He would give her any other riddle and make up something about his sister pranking the other only other princess present. Elene asked for it anyway. Kai knew that he didn’t want to see Savannah humiliated.

However, the moment she turned to him on her heels, it wasn’t an expression of gratitude that she wore on her face. Her brows were knitted on her forehead, and there was a dangerous glint in her eyes warning him that if he took one more step, he was going to regret it.

Although in just a second, it changed to a fake smile, and she turned back to the cameras.

“I am honoured by the fact that His Majesty wants to see me answering this up close. I am humbled by the attention.” She placed all nine coins in a row on the table, and one of the cameramen came closer to avoid missing anything. “I love this test, and these ancient northern coins are exquisite. I have never held one in my hand before, and however this ends, this was already worth it. To touch the history of the North... It really means a lot to me. You see, a long time ago, a member of my family married a northern noble lycaness. It’s a long and beautiful story, but to cut it short, I have northern blood in me too. And this is the first time I get to experience the culture, and this is... simply incredible.”

Kai would have gaped if he didn’t know any better. The way she just introduced herself and showed respect for his culture was unbelievable. She even mentioned having northern blood, which he wasn’t aware of. He gave his Beta a quick order to check this information and concentrated on Savannah, who bent slightly in front of him to have a better look at the coins.

“My task is to find a fake coin by weighing them.” The woman smirked at the audience and took one of the coins into her fingers. “If I had to choose by just looking at them, I’d pick this one. It’s scratched just like the others, but the scratches seem... shinier. I’d even say newer.” She made

a half turn to glance at Elene, who was turning as white as a sheet of paper and returned her sneer from earlier. "Regardless, I have to weigh the coins, so here goes nothing."

The princess quickly separated coins into three groups and then demonstrated to everyone the one she already considered fake, placing it a bit further away from the other two in its group.

Then she took the first two groups in each hand and carefully put them on the scales, waiting just a few seconds for them to get even.

"As you can see, these two groups have the same weight," she announced with the tone of a teacher. "If the fake coin was in any of the two groups, the scales wouldn't be even. So, we can forget about these six coins. Now we have only three left."

She cleaned the scales and took another two coins from the third group.

"Now," Savannah smiled charmingly, "if I am correct, then these two coins will have the same weight, meaning that the remaining coin is the lighter one. Also known as the fake one."

She placed the coins on the golden cups, and smirked when the scales got even again.

"Ah," she took the last coin, the one she bet was the fake one from the very beginning. "And here is the one we've been looking for!" It was quiet at first, but soon someone started clapping. Then another person joined them, followed by many others.

Savannah bowed gracefully before the crowd.

"Congratulations!" Elene almost growled, trying to end this fast and hurried to their side. "You were lucky and solved your riddle."

"It wasn't a riddle, Princess," Savannah commented calmly so that others couldn't hear them, "And I wasn't lucky. I just have a talent for seeing fakes easily."

Their eyes met, and it was nothing less than a war announcement between the two of them.

"Introduce yourself!" Elene walked back to the throne, not even bothering to pretend to be polite anymore.

Savvy tried to remove her mask but had a slight problem locating the ties in her complicated braid hairdo.

"Here," Kai tried to help her, covering her fingers with his. The simple motion made them both freeze, and he felt his breathing getting ragged. Absent-mindedly, he brushed his thumb over hers, making her shiver.

But remembering where they were, he pulled one of the ties and helped her to get rid of the mask, announcing her himself. "Princess Savannah Stormhold of the Western Kingdom. Our honourable guest and the twelfth contender of The Luna Trials."

Whispers and gasps erupted through the crowd while Savannah walked to the centre of the line of the contenders. This was where he was supposed to stand for their group shot, and something told him that she was aware.

Penelope shot him a concerned glance which he ignored as he stood right next to the Western Princess, trying not to inhale her intoxicating scent of bluebells.

"I am honoured to have such wonderful, strong and beautiful women come to our palace to honour our traditions by fighting for the title of the Luna of The North. I hope to be worthy of their

efforts." The words came out dry, and he could swear he heard a little snort.

She had a right to this if he was honest with himself.

However, she completely shocked him when she slid her arm around his elbow and stepped closer.

"Your Majesty," Savannah beamed at the cameras. "I think it's time for us to announce the main part."

Kai looked at the princess in confusion. What was she doing? That dangerous glint was back in her green eyes.

He was about to laugh it off and lead her out of the ceremony hall. But she turned back to the cameras.

"I guess the honour is all mine." She chuckled. "When I was invited to participate, I only agreed since it was such a wonderful and ancient tradition. As I have already told you, I love history, and I am especially fascinated with the history of the North. One of the ancient rules of The Luna Trials was that it wasn't just the King making his choice. The people of the North were choosing their Luna as well!"

His lips parted, and her lips curled into another smirk as she continued, "During each test, when contenders are eliminated, the people of the North can save one person by giving her the

vote of their hearts. You are all a part of this! Up until the final trial!"

The guests started buzzing again.

"That would be all news for tonight," Kai announced before she threw something else at him with a curt smile and then gestured for the musicians to start playing. "Enjoy the night."

Now all that he wanted was to take Savannah, drag her out of here to his own room and... have a proper conversation. Nothing else. Nothing... funny.

The bedroom wasn't probably the place for it

"Well, this was fun," the princess chirped, and before he managed to do anything, slipped away from him and dissolved somewhere in the dancing crowd. Kai had the firm intention to follow her, but Penelope stood in his way along with several other contenders.

"You already danced with one of us." The girl teased him. "How about giving the same honour to all of us? *We've* been waiting for this all night."

"Sure," Elene appeared at his side and jabbed him with her elbow. "Kai will pay equal attention to each contender. We don't have favourites here."

He glared at his sister. Now she was talking about having no favourites? Really?

The Lycan King quickly looked around, but the Western princess was nowhere to be found.

No matter what she was thinking, she wasn't getting away with this so easily.

He danced with each contender, trying to be polite as his title called for. Some of them were chattering the whole time, especially that Petra girl with pink hair who seemed way too young for all of this. So young that he asked for her birth date just to make sure Elene didn't make a mistake. The last thing he needed was an under aged contender.

She just turned eighteen and he sighed hearing that. It would take her years before she was mature enough to become a Luna.

The white werebear was silent, although she was probably the only one to whom he was at least remotely interested in speaking. Not many bears visited his pack. But he didn't want to push it. Especially since tonight he wanted to wrap this up quickly and go find... her.

He was done in an hour and a half. Much longer than he expected. And, of course, Savannah was nowhere around, leaving him no choice to go look for her.



Savvy was so angry that she couldn't stay in her room. She left as soon as she could. For that one night, she had done enough and just remembering the show made her lips curve slightly again.

In the end, it didn't turn out that bad. Not to mention that she was only starting. Zara and Kyle wanted to talk to her, but she lied that she was too tired tonight and that they would discuss everything first thing in the morning.

In reality, she needed to be alone. Moreover, she needed a good run.

It was risky with the curfew hours here. Then again, all other contenders were still at the ball. So that meant that they weren't in their rooms either. The opportunity presented itself and

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she wasn't going to deny herself the pleasure.

The gates were opened tonight because the guests were coming in and out all the time.

Savannah used the less guarded entrance to sneak out. The garden in that gloomy bastion was enormous, but nothing could compare to the real forest. And after that evening, she needed this connection to nature.

Athena was fast, they would just run a little bit and return safely.

She pulled her dress off behind one of the trees and stepped out of it, shifting almost instantly. Stretching her paws first, she charged deep into the northern woods.

The trees were different here, the scents were delicious, and she was truly enjoying herself. It was also a good idea to learn the local landscape in case of emergencies in the future, so, instead of turning back, she decided to get deeper into the unknown.

However, after a while, she felt someone else's presence. At first, it felt like someone was watching her from one of the small bushy hills. Yet soon she heard branches breaking nearby and decided that it was time to quickly get back to the castle.

She started running but that... something was only getting closer. He was alone, and she knew it. A male... big Massive even. Judging by the footsteps.

Savvy kept running when all the sounds disappeared, and she stopped. Was it this easy? He simply decided to leave her alone after following her for a while?

She wanted to continue her way when the sombre shadows before her suddenly felt thicker. All her senses were heightened now, but nothing was going on.

Until she saw one red eye gleaming in the darkness...

## 1. 11. In The Shadows

Savannah steadied her feet in a defensive stance, ready for battle. Athena has never let her down, but now, she seemed tenser than ever, which could only mean that their opponent was extremely dangerous.

The glowing red eye didn't move, and neither did she, baring her canines as a warning to the intruder. Her paws let out their claws, digging into the ground underneath her. If the creature attacked her, she would be ready to behead it. She wasn't in the mood for jokes.

However, when it took a step toward her, leaving the thick, suffocating darkness of the woods it had used to hide itself in, a chill snaked down Savannah's spine.

Massive, with a fierce-looking scowl, a white bear was slowly moving in her direction, not taking his eyes off her. He looked like a majestic ancient warrior god, and Savvy would have been in awe if she didn't know any better.

Unfortunately, bears were bad news.

She growled. It was the last warning that she was ready to give. Although she knew the chances of him backing off were slim. The werebears that she knew were assholes. Thanks to their impressive size, they were the only other species capable of competing with lycans. Because there was no way that foxes would go into this if they didn't have such strong allies. The upcoming war was on them.

What worried her the most was the knowledge she had knowing no bear should be present this far north as they weren't on friendly terms with the Northern Kingdom. Another reason she was agitated was the fact that the bear had one eye. This sight triggered unpleasant memories from the past, although the only person she knew with a similar injury was a fox. Moreover, he was long dead, and she had seen his body with her own eyes.

The bear took another step toward her, and she let Athena take control. The wolf chose not to waste any time, first charging at the white beast. One sharp, nimble move and she managed to slice her claws through his side hoping that it would be enough to make him give up on whatever idea he had in his head. However, when she turned back to face him, she was looking at a tall man with a smirk on his lips.

She froze, not knowing what it meant. Shifters were vulnerable in their human forms. So, what did he want to tell her by shifting after she attacked him?

The most reasonable explanation she could think of was he wanted to demonstrate to her that he was harmless, despite that she didn't want to make assumptions. Looking at

him, she quickly realised that even as a human, he was dangerous. Not to her though. She was a royal Lycan, after all. He would be a threat to someone with a much less impressive lineage. The man was unbelievably tall and built like a mountain, with sharply carved muscles that testified to his extensive training and old scars that ... were proving he had been through a lot. It was extremely hard to scar a shifter.

Almost impossible. Almost ... One had to go at lengths to achieve that.

The stranger had silver hair that covered half his face and reached his shoulders. Savannah realised that he was trying to disguise the missing eye.

Other than that, he seemed confident and not embarrassed by his nakedness at all.

“Are you just going to watch, not that I mind, or can we talk?” His lips curved into a smirk. ” see you are not from here.”

Savvy snorted. What if he was one of Brigit’s people? The best course of action would be to run back to the castle and pretend that this encounter never happened, but natural curiosity was her curse.

“Shift, little wolf,” he ordered suddenly, adding his Alpha tone to it, which only annoyed her all the more

She didn’t take Alpha orders even from her own brother, the Lycan King of The Western Kingdom. She wasn’t about to take them from some werebear.

Savannah rolled her eyes. The slight motion did not escape him. One sharp jump, and he was beside her. Neither she nor Athena expected this, so they were both utterly shocked when he

abruptly pinned them to the ground.

“How on Earth?” Savvy struggled under him. She was a Lycan, and he was in his human form. Bear or no bear, he had to be weaker than her now.

Yet there she was, nailed to the ground.

He had a handsome face. Too handsome for his own good, nonetheless there was a long deep scar crossing the area of his left eye, and Savannah swallowed, realising that it was missing.

The man noticed her interested gaze, and he wasn’t thrilled about it.

“Shift!” He roared at her, shaking her wildly, and this time she did as she was told, shocked that his Alpha command worked.

The man on top of her enjoyed the frustrated look on her face, and she quickly gathered herself sensing this was clearly now a life and death situation.

"What are you waiting for?" She arched her brow, and now he was the one confused out of the two.

That confusion, however, quickly changed to a smug smile. "Impatient?" He chuckled.

"You said you wanted to talk," Savvy snapped defiantly, lifting her chin. "So, get off me and talk."

It was a long shot, still, surprisingly it worked. The werebear stared at her for a few seconds and then slowly stood up, eyes greedily devouring every inch of her.

He offered her a hand, but she declined it, moving her hair to the front of her body to afford herself some coverage.

"You are not from here." He repeated the words from earlier thoughtfully.

"Neither are you!" The woman shrugged her shoulders, searching for a nearby bush to hide behind. However, the observant bear stepped closer to her, making it impossible to escape.

She took a step back, but he closed the distance between them in a blink of an eye, backing her into a huge ancient tree. The man lowered his head to the column of her neck and took a deep

breath, placing his hands at her sides.

"You are one of Kai's new toys," he stated with a grunt, and this made her anger boil in her veins.

"That's enough!" She gave him a warning, letting Athena closer to the surface so that their eyes glowed blue light, manifesting their royal power. It was just a glimpse of her strength, but usually, it had the desired effect.

Not this time, though. He seems amused, but that was about it.

"I am no one's toy!" Savannah snarled through gritted teeth, and that earned her a chuckle. "Especially not his!"

This whole experience annoyed her. She pressed her hands into his chest to push him away, meeting resistance that proved to her once again that she wasn't wrong about his strength. This would explain why he wasn't afraid to wander here alone.

"Feisty!" He approved of her action with a soft snarl, but then a loud resounding growl emerged from the forest, and the grin on the bear's face widened. "I'll see you another time, Princess," he teased, winking at her and making her gasp.

Did he know who she was? Had he known from the beginning? Or did he just figure it out?

Whatever the answer was, one thing was for sure. It didn't mean anything good to her.

The stranger disappeared in the darkness that welcomed him as if he belonged there, and in just a few seconds, a huge black wolf jumped out of the bushes in front of her.

Their eyes locked, and she knew at once that it was Kai.

He shifted right before her, and she bit the inside of her lip not to make any sounds at the sight of another perfect and naked male body.

She managed to jump behind the bushes this time. Another growl followed her.

"Savannah Stormhold!" He seemed so angry that it caused chills down her spine. "What the hell is the meaning of this?"

She sighed in exasperation, trying to figure out what to say. For some reason, it was harder for her to think now that he was here. When the outline of his perfect body was drawn by the moonlight ...

"Meaning of what?" She squeaked, feeling her cheeks turning red and thanking the Moon Goddess for the cover of night.

"You left the castle grounds alone and without permission." Kai seemed angry as he practically spat each word. "And even standing here, I can smell that you reek of another male!"

Her lips parted in shock. He did not just say that. He did not just simply say what she thought he implied. He didn't.

Otherwise, she would just have to kill him on the spot because this audacity of his had no boundaries.

"Excuse me?" Savvy hissed, almost tempted to walk out to him and let him see her, yet deciding against it at the last moment. Nakedness never bothered her before, nevertheless, her nakedness did bother her in his presence for some odd reason..

"You are not excused!" The Lycan King retorted. "I should eliminate you just for being here!"

"Well, what are you waiting for?" She heard herself shouting at him. "It's not like that wasn't *your* plan to begin with?"

He didn't answer her as they stood in stillness where they were, listening to each other's heavy breaths of frustration for a few minutes.

Hearing his footsteps approach and thinking things were about to get ugly between them, she was surprised when a piece of wrapped fabric flew in her direction.

"What the ..." She began, unfolding the parcel, and to her great surprise, it was an oversized grey sweatshirt.

"Put it on," Kai groaned, pulling on a pair of grey sweatpants. "We need to talk."

## 1. 12. Daja w

"Look at us! We are even sharing clothes now!" Savvy said, pulling on the sweatshirt he gave her. "And here I thought that I wasn't special to you!"

"Savannah..." He groaned, and she imagined that the king of the North was angry with her. He had to be since she was just a nuisance to him.

"Excuse me, Your Majesty," she giggled. "Don't be offended. I know very well that I am just one of the twenty or so contenders. Oops. Pardon me, twelve. Twelve contenders. We don't count those poor girls who came in the wrong colour dresses, right? They committed such a serious offence!"

"Are you done?" Kai growled, waiting for her impatiently.

"Oh, I am far from being done!" the princess snorted when she realised that the sweatshirt was barely covering her bottom. However, she had to admit that it was better than nothing, and she would have to be content with having just this on her. It was better than the two of them staying naked together. Nothing good could come out of that. "In fact, I could go on about all this for hours!"

"That's not what I am asking," Kai cut her off, "Are you dressed?"

"If one can call this short hoodie a dress, then yes...." The girl muttered and didn't even get to finish her sentence when the lycan's strong hand grasped her forearm, pulling her out of the bushes into the moonlight.

"Good," he said calmly and pushed her against the tree where just a few minutes ago, the bear was holding her hostage.

Déjà vu.

"And now tell me who the man you were with a few minutes ago was."

He tucked his nose into the crook of her neck, taking a deep breath of her scent mixed with the intruder's, and his elongated claws sliced the tree bark right next to her.

"Damn, Kai," she chuckled, demonstrating that he wasn't intimidating to her at all. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you are jealous!"

He pulled away from her quickly. *Way* too quickly.

Their eyes met, and he quickly averted her gaze, making her blush at the realisation that there might have been some truth to her joke.

The king cleared his throat. "Don't change the subject. It's absolutely unacceptable that my... one of the contenders is sneaking out with some guy in the woods!"

"Imagine my surprise when I thought I was coming here to get married and found my groom-to-be with twenty other women!" She didn't hold back a smirk that curled her lips, and he finally locked his eyes with hers. They stared at each other as if it was a competition, and Savvy experienced a wave of triumph when he sighed heavily and looked away.

"I didn't know, okay?" Kai ran his hand over his hair. "L'

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a sked for my hand in marriage when you really did not want anything to do with me. And then asked your sister to handle it for you," she said coldly, and he felt respect for her. Her composure was admirable. After all, he was the one clearly at fault here. "And then you decided to humiliate me more and..."

"No," he stopped her right there. "Savannah, I didn't. I didn't know it was you."

"How could you not know?" She wanted to walk away, but he didn't let her, pressing himself harder into her. So, she placed a hand between the two of them, and her touch did something to him that he couldn't explain.

"You didn't know that it was me either," he chuckled, leaning lower. "Because of your ridiculous beard!" the princess pointed out. "I thought you liked it better that way." The man scoffed, and she rolled her eyes at him. "Back then, I thought you were a simple gardener..." She pointed out with a raised brow. He wanted to tell her a lot of things, but instead, he asked, "Does it change anything?"

"It changes everything." The woman in front of him didn't hesitate with her answer, and he knew that she was right. The moment he stopped being a gardener and she stopped being his little maid, it was over.



It wasn't supposed to start in the first place, and he couldn't believe that the one time he allowed himself to enjoy life at least a little bit, he got into that mess with one of the Stormholds.

The North would never accept her, and she would never bend herself to make them accept her. The rivalry and animosity with the West was in their roots. This was what they lived and breathed. There were too many wars in the past, and his people did not forget or forgive easily. If she was his mate or came with a particular piece of land, it would be different. But that wasn't the case...

"For what it's worth, I am sorry it turned out like this." Kai found himself apologising to her. He owed her that much.

"Thank you." Savannah nodded and looked him straight in the eye, still trying to push him away slightly and meeting resistance. She could have pushed harder. He could have stepped back. Yet here they both were, in the darkest shadows of the night forest. Where no one would be able to see them. Alone and oh so close...

"So, where do we go from here since you are sorry and all that?" Savvy snapped out of it first. She had enough men playing with her in one lifetime. She had had enough of those. Unfortunately, even if he apologised, he was still one of them. She was literally a participant in the game he hosted.

"..." He stumbled to give her an answer.

"All right." She let out an annoyed breath and furrowed her brows. She had to be the reasonable one, and this was her moment. "Sign the alliance agreement with Gideon, and I will be

gone the very same day."

Her words hit him like a slap, and he tried scanning her face for any kind of emotions. Yet the Western Princess only raised her chin higher, proud and stubborn, just as her brother.

Kai knew that she was serious. All he had to do was sign the paper confirming that alliance

that didn't even look that bad now since he knew there was a looming threat from the white bear packs. Gideon was a prick, but that white monster...

One signature and Savannah would go back to her kingdom forever. She would find her mate. or her brother would arrange another marriage for her... She wouldn't be his problem anymore.

"Don't!" Asgard growled inside of his mind. That fellow wasn't talkative, but now he was surfacing more often than ever.

"*Why?*" "You know why!" The wolf insisted. "We want her." "She is not our mate. Just forget it." Kai tried to reason with his partner.

"No, she is not. But I will not forget it, and neither will you." He had to shut him off, but deep inside, he knew that Asgard was right. Letting Savannah go felt wrong, and he was used to trusting his instincts.

"So?" she tapped her bare foot on the grass impatiently. "No," he said firmly, and she gaped at him. "No?" Her whole body got tense hearing his words. "No." He repeated himself, still not taking a single step back.

"Okay," Savannah let the air out through her nostrils angrily, "I am afraid I will need an explanation to go with that. Care to elaborate? Why the hell not?"

"First of all, I don't trust your brother too much, and I need to investigate the situation more," he replied calmly and heard her teeth gritting. For some strange reason, he enjoyed that more than he should have.

"You had months for that!" Savvy reminded him, appalled by his arrogance.

"Exactly. So, waiting a few more weeks wouldn't make a big difference." Kai chuckled, and the princess clenched her fists.

"Just wait until I am done, and then maybe I will agree to that alliance." He couldn't even hide his smirk when he declared this. The thoughts of her not wearing anything under that sweatshirt raced in his head. His eyes lowered to her chest, which was rising and falling in a sharp rhythm.

"Well, that's ignorant!" She squeezed both her hands in between them to fold them simply to demonstrate to him how unimpressed she was. "After all, you probably need this alliance more than we do from the looks of it. We got rid of the foxes and the bears on our territories while they roam freely on yours."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kai's smile dropped.

"It means exactly what it means." The girl finally managed to push him away and get out of his grasp. "You have a fox and a werebear in the competition, and I just met a bear who felt as if he was at home here. Not to mention that your sister even found a witch somewhere. I really want to know where she managed to get her! A part of me wants to see her win the Trials. I bet your face would be priceless!"

"Ha-ha, very funny!" The king shook his head, chuckling. "Just when I thought that you could be serious. No bears can enter my land. Even that girl Brigit arrived without other werebears. She

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was provided with a few werewolves to help her instead."

"Maybe this is what you think." Savvy shrugged her shoulders. This conversation was just a waste of time, and she wanted to get back to her room sooner. "But I am telling you, that male you

smelled on me just a few minutes ago was a huge haughty white werebear with a nice body covered in weird scars and one eye missing."

The moment these words left her mouth, it was as if a lightning bolt had struck him. Kai instantly knew who she was talking about, and he couldn't believe that this was the truth.

He couldn't get here. He wasn't supposed to be here.

Kai was personally hunting him for the last month, and his trusted sources fed him the information that the bear in question was either dead or gone to a different continent. The information proved to be not true by the snarky western princess. He considered, of course, that she could be lying about that encounter, yet he didn't sense anything coming out of her. No worry, no agitation of any kind. She was annoyed and slightly bored. Which only led him to the conclusion that she had no idea who she had just met.

No one met Darius Bjorn and stayed alive. No one. Except for Savannah Stormhold.

"Did he touch you?" Kai shifted back to her, trying to take in and check every inch of the stubborn girl who had no idea that she had just avoided death.

"You see," she slapped his hand that was about to contact with her skin, "if we were engaged, you could have asked me that question. But as of now, the answer is: It's none of your business."

"Savannah!" the king growled, grasping both of her shoulders. "Did he do anything to you?!"

However, he knew the answer. He knew it the moment he smelled the male's scent on her. Bjorn touched her. He was so close that Kai could still smell one of his fake scents on her skin.

Savannah couldn't smell like anyone else! He hated it. He hated it so much that he was ready to do anything to ensure it was gone from her.

On an instinct, he dipped his head into her neck, brushing his lips and tongue over it – the fastest way to scent her. And also the most desirable.

“He definitely allowed himself less than you ” She kicked him on the leg. Not hard, but enough for him to feel it.

Without thinking, he threw her over his shoulder and started walking.

“Seriously, Kai, what do you think you are doing?” she demanded, scratching his naked back and not realising that the sensation wasn’t unpleasant for him.

“You can’t get back to the castle smelling like another man, Savannah,” he briefly informed her. “We are going to fix this.”

And with that, he placed a resounding slap on her bottom..

NOTE: We are still voting for chapter length in Marissa Gilbert’s Reading Circle group. Join if you want to have your say. For now, I see that longer chapters and their prices do not bother you

much.

Remember that the new schedule is Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday. I usually post right before midnight London time, but hiccups happen. The schedule is to be used as a guide only.

P.S. Please, do not worry about the notes, I will clear them when the book will go to ptr. I don’t know when this will happen, it’s not signed yet, so it’s too early to think about it anyway.

## 1. 13. Cold Shower

The slap echoed through the woods, and Savvy saw red.

It made her so angry that she was ready to rip this arrogant king’s head off. What did he think of himself? Was it a joke to him? She had never been slapped in her life! Not to mention on such a ... sensitive spot.

The worst thing about it was the heat she experienced in the lower part of her body, thanks to that absolutely inappropriate contact. And she hated that she did not loathe it.

However, she had even more significant problems because the man’s grip on her became tighter and his breathing definitely got heavier. His second hand gently rubbed the spot of its previous contact and stayed there, making her feel all kinds of emotions.

"Don't touch me!" she roared at him and received a defensive growl in response as if it was his right to do that. "Touch me again, and I will bite this hand off!"

Her promise only made him chuckle loudly.

"Don't worry, Savannah," he cooed, "I just think you need to cool off a bit and get rid of that horrible scent."

"What ..." before she could formulate her question, he threw her off his shoulder. She abruptly flew through the air at a much longer distance than expected, landing in the freezing cold water of some northern lake.

It was unbelievably appalling, and the rage she felt was overwhelming as she kicked her legs to swim up to the surface

"Kai Fion...whatever!" She didn't even bother to pronounce his last name right. "You are so paying for this!"

Savvy finally managed to remove wet hair off her eyes and glared at the lycan standing on the top of a small cliff, watching her with a smug smile plastered over his handsome face.

"Cooling down?" He mocked her, and Savvy groaned as she climbed up the cliff. She wasn't motivated to swim to the more accessible bank since she had had about enough adventures for one day

"Scr\*w you!" she grunted, grabbing the rocky surface and glaring at the northern king with as much hatred as she could muster. He lowered himself and stretched his hands out to her.

This was too good an opportunity to pass it. Savannah tried to pull him past her in one sharp move, but, of course, he expected it and only burst out laughing, lifting her up as if she weighed nothing at all.

"Nice try! You can try again another time when it's not too obvious." Kai chuckled, placing the princess back on her feet.

"I don't like to wait!" Savannah hissed and jumped on him, trying to force him into the lake after all. Instead, she found herself held by him again as he managed to stay on his feet even though they were balancing on the very edge of the cliff.

"Stubborn," he muttered, sliding his hand right back to the place where he slapped her a few

minutes ago and grabbed a fistful of her flesh.

“Don’t. You. Dare.” She warned him as he pressed her tighter, her nails digging into his skin. Kai felt her warm core up against his bare abdomen. Her heated core and his knowledge of her nudity caused a stirring of sensations within him. Sensations that he couldn’t describe with words.

The realisation that he wanted her struck him again. He let her slide a bit lower and enjoyed watching her eyes grow wide as she felt his hardness, a beautiful blush finally reaching her wet cheeks.

Her chest was heaving up and down when she finally wrapped her legs around him, securing herself in this position. Faces so close their noses and lips were barely touching, uneven ragged breaths burning their skin with want.

He was parched for a taste of her lips, a kiss right here and now to end this torture. Then ... his foot slipped, and they both found themselves falling right back into the cold northern lake.

The water was freezing to their bones, and when they managed to reach the surface, Savvy turned to give him a death stare.

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” she demanded, as his shoulders twitched apologetically.

“I slipped,” he awkwardly endeavoured to explain, but as she clenched her lips and closed her eyes, clearly trying to hold back some kind of insult, he realised that she wasn’t talking about the fall.

Did he misread things? Did she not want him the way he did her?

The girl turned away from him, this time, swimming to the shore on the other side in an attempt to avoid him. Only he wasn’t ready to let her leave, to go off, alone, in the woods.

She walked out of the water, squeezing her hair, looking like a nymph or some magical deity. Kai was thankful for the icy cold water, or else, there would be no way to follow her without disclosing his not-so-secret desires.

“Savannah,” he called out to her, wishing to make amends between them. Everything was headed in the *w*rong direction.

“Don’t...” Without looking, she lifted her hand in the air and motioned for him to stop. “Don’t speak to me. Don’t touch me. Don’t follow me.”

She started walking, and he noticed she was trembling.

It was all his fault ...

She could have been in her warm and cosy bed if he hadn't overreacted after smelling another male's scent on her. Thinking about her in bed did not appease him one bit, however, the northern king knew that he had already exhausted all the strikes he could with her today.

So, he just followed behind her quietly, not saying a word. He couldn't leave her alone no matter what she said or did.

Observing her at rear view, he noticed wet fabric clinging to her toned body, and this only triggered more lustful thoughts in his mind. He had to think of something else. Something that would be a ... mood killer.

He chose to distract himself by contemplating how Bjorn managed to trespass into his territory. Bjorn's presence here was terrible news and meant that he was probably using lax security thanks to the current Luna trials. He would have to work on strengthening security over his land in the next few weeks. That bear shouldn't be walking freely and touching what was his.

His, no ..., she was his ... guest. Yes, this was what she was. His guest. And a Luna candidate ... A very unlikely one, albeit she could be classified as his. At least for now.

The guards at the castle dropped their chins to the floor when they saw them walking through the main gates, water still dripping from both their bodies.

Thankfully, none of them said a word after being met with their king's warning look.

Savannah solemnly trudged past them with as much dignity as she could muster. Once inside, he caught up with her, not wishing to leave things like this.

"Savvy," he said, and she stopped. He didn't realise that he had used her nickname. For a second there, Kai expected her to turn, to at least look at him. Unfortunately, she quickly regained her composure and continued walking as far away from him as possible.

Despite the burdensome disappointment he felt, he sighed and left her to teave since it seemed obvious this was what she wanted.

The knowledge she was safe and inside castle walls brought some comfort. No one could do anything to harm her here.

His own mood was ruined, and when he gave his Beta, Gamma and warriors a mental command to gather on the bridge as soon as possible, he could feel their fear through the mind link.

"It's a good night to hunt and kill some bears!" Asgard was as angry as he was. He also wished the evening and their time with the princess had gone differently.



"Indeed, my friend," Kai agreed eagerly. "Indeed."

\*tt

Savannah was fuming. Words escaped her rendering her speechless at what just happened. All she wanted at this point was to reach her room in peace and have a run-in with anyone on her way there.

But, of course, it wasn't meant to be. Half of the castle was still up even though it was late at night. The stupid king distracted her, and in her fury she had forgotten to use the secret entrance. Not that it was a big deal, she would probably be eliminated in the morning anyway, unless the people of the North vote for her and choose her as their favourite.

Savannah chuckled to herself, knowing that this was very unlikely. If she wanted their love, she needed at least a few public appearances to win them over, one performance wouldn't be sufficient.

She hated this place, hated the annoying Elene, hated the Luna Trials, but more than anything, she hated that arrogant, self-absorbed, selfish northern bastard who didn't know how to keep his hands to himself. Those strong, firm hands that felt like ...

No, she wouldn't allow herself to think of him that way. She fell for that trap once before with her mate, which ended quite badly. Getting involved with Kai Fionnlagh was not only a bad idea

but also precisely why she was mad at herself, to begin with. Men who lied couldn't be trusted. She knew that. It became her new rule after her heart was broken. Letting him get close would be a mistake. He would use her just like Zack did.

"Oh, Goddess!" Astrid gasped when she saw her in the corridor of their lonely tower. "What happened to you?"

"Nothing." Savvy shook her head. "Just a bit more of that wonderful northern hospitality Aren't you enjoying it as well?"

An understanding smile reached Astrid's lips. "Yeah, we are definitely the underdogs here. They really do not want any of the three of us here."

"Tell this to Brigit!" Savannah snorted. "She already imagines this crown on her head. Who would even want that ugly thing? And I am talking about the crown here. Have you seen it? It's massive!"

"You don't want to marry king kai?" Astrid's eyes suddenly became sharp, scanning Savvy's face.

"No, thank you!" She rolled her eyes. "I just want my alliance and to get away from here as soon as possible! Penelope or Brigit can have him all to themselves for what I care!"

"Talking about imagining the crown on her head," Astrid giggled. "Penelope already has her minions warming up the throne for her!"

"Right!" Savannah smiled for the first time. At least here was someone she could have a normal conversation with.

"You really need to go to your room and have a warm bath," the other girl suggested. "And then get some sleep. Tomorrow we have a long day."

"I thought we would have a break tomorrow..". Savvy felt disappointed again. Was there finally something she didn't remember?

"They say it's a break and an opportunity to have some informal time with King Kai," Astrid whispered so that no one could hear them. "But there will be cameras everywhere, and our every

step will be filmed."

"Awesome," Savvy mumbled unenthusiastically.

"So, you need to look your best and be prepared for more surprises from Elene. They give and take away points for practically everything here."

"Got it." The western princess sighed and started walking away again. When she was at her door, she turned and saw the other contender still watching her. "Thanks, Astrid."

"Don't mention it, Savannah."

Back at her room, she indeed took a luxuriously long hot bath, washing away the lake, the bear and ... the king.

When she returned to her bedroom, she saw that someone had brought her a plate of warm soup. Eyeing it suspiciously, she sniffed it several times to ensure that nothing was added to it. Luckily, it was next to impossible to poison a lycan.

Astrid probably asked the maids to bring it to her, and Savannah enjoyed the warm meal, which was especially welcomed after everything she had experienced today. Deciding to go straight to bed, her mind switched off within seconds of her head hitting her pillow.

"Morning, Your Highness," she heard Kyle's mocking tone. "Time to rise and shine!" "Go away!" She grumbled as she turned away and covered herself with a thick duvet.

"The North is waiting!" her friend sang. Stirring ever so slightly, she felt tempted to throw something at him, although it wasn't a strong enough temptation to actually move.

"Go away!" she repeated. The North could wait.

"We have coffee," Zara informed her calmly, causing her to reconsider her stance on rising out of bed. "Also, you need to see how yesterday was shown on tv. Just trust me on this one

#### 1. 14. Brunch

"Is it good or bad?" Savvy furrowed her eyebrows. She did her best, and she knew it, but it wasn't like they were in a friendly country. Besides, Elene had plans of her own for the contest. which was evident to everyone present.

"Just take a look at it yourself." Zara handed her a laptop and placed a cup of coffee on the bedside table. She never wasted time, an aspect Savannah especially valued in her. She was always punctual and neat, even though her sense of fashion was on the edgier side and could easily suggest otherwise. Her usual put-together and neat appearance were out of replacement, and Savannah was surprised to see a huge distinct stain on her white dress.

"What's this?" she asked without hesitation. "Nothing." Zara shook her short dark hair. "Just a clumsy accident at breakfast." "Are you sure it was an accident?" The princess arched her brow.

"Yeah. Sure. I'll change when we are done here. It's nothing for you to concern yourself with." Zara shrugged her shoulders. She was projecting confidence, so Savvy was about to let it go when Kyle snorted.

"Accident my ass\*." He glanced at her from the chair he was sitting in with his own laptop on his knees. "That bird shifter contestant did it. And the whole room heard what she said to Zee."

"Oh, really? What did she say?" Savvy chirped and took a sip of her coffee, flapping her eyelashes innocently. She wasn't fooling anyone, though, as her eyes glowed golden with Athena's anger as her desire rose to rip off the head of her friend's tormenter.

"Nothing," Zara pronounced the words cautiously and shot a death stare at Kyle.

"She said it made sense that Zee joined a lycan pack since she was now a stray and her flock didn't want her and then suggested a stain on her dress would make her look

the part.” Kyle ignored Zara’s warning because he knew too well that none of them would tolerate the bullying of their team members.

“How lovely!” Savvy put the cup down with a clatter. “And what did you do when you saw it,

*K?*”

“I wanted to bathe that b\*tch in coffee,” he sneered at her but then heard Zara clearing her throat. “But Zee stopped me, and we just walked away. It was ...nice.”

“The hell ...Savvy protested in disbelief.

“Because everything we do will be reflected on you, Savannah.” The assistant said firmly. “And no one here will be doing *you* favours and looking away. We are here to help you and not create problems, remember?” She glared at Kyle, and he groaned, getting back to whatever it was that he was doing on his laptop.

“I’ll deal with it myself then,” Savvy promised him via their mind link, and he secretly smirked at her, knowing that she would take care of Mavis discreetly.

“Let’s get back to that news release.” Zara had lost her patience and sat on the bed next to

her, clicking on the trackpad.

A northern channel’s logo appeared with a beautiful scenic mountain view as a background, and then she saw the hosts, the famous brother and sister, Chloe and Claude Larsen. She read a few articles about them in the past, and, of course, they were imprinted in her memory forever. They won all kinds of prizes for their tv and online programs and were one of those people who were shaping the minds of their kingdom. People loved them, and, more importantly, people believed them.

“And now to the part we have all been waiting for!” Chloe stretched her smile to the maximum, showing off her pearly whites. She was in her late forties but didn’t look a day older than twenty-five.

“The Luna Trials are really happening!” Claude picked up where his sibling left off. “Moreover, King Kai has already met the contenders, and the first elimination took place.

“Shame we didn’t get to find out who failed the simplest test!” Chloe looked straight into the cameras. “But of course, we have saved the best highlights to show you. And, trust me, you want to watch them all!”

One by one, they started to introduce each contender. Praising some of them, like Inga and Celina. They mention some briefly, like the witch and the werecats until finally, condemning all the others.

“I don’t know what this werebear was thinking!” Chloe shook her head with a disappointed impression on her face. That was far from what she really felt, judging by the glint in her eyes.

“You know how those are – crashing things all the time, coming uninvited to the territories that are not theirs. Brigit is just true to her nature.” Claude smirked. “Having said all that, she wasn’t by far the main surprise of the day!”

“You are right, brother!” Chloe agreed with him quickly. “I couldn’t believe my own eyes when I saw her taking off her mask!”

They showed a video of Savvy removing her mask. Kai was cut entirely out of the shot. Then it was revealed that she was saying something, but one could only hear the twins explaining what happened.

“Savannah Stormhold, Ladies and Gentlemen!” Claude announced.

“The Western Princess in the flesh!” Chloe giggled. “And let me tell you, I have always known those rumours about King Kai asking for her hand in marriage were not true. Now it’s obvious who is chasing whom!”

“I have to agree.” Her co-host snorted. “It must be difficult for a princess to show the world that she is the one clinging to our King. Yet here she is! Smiling and waving her hand as she tries to compete with the real deal!”

“Speaking of which ...” The picture changed to showcase Penelope. “If I were to make a bet today, I would be placing all my money in the hands of Miss Summerstern! She was a true picture of grace and beauty in her unique red gown. Just look at how wonderful she looks right next to King Kai...”.

They went on and on about how amazing Penelope was, and Savvy could feel Elene’s touch in all of this.

a “Unbe-freaking-livable!” The lycaness gritted her teeth. “My carefully selected dress, my

performance, my speech! They showed none of that!”

“No worries,” Kyle chuckled from his seat as she tried not to grow her claws out and go to the garden to chop some more roses. “I am on it.”

“What do you mean?” Savannah looked at him with interest.

"I mean that I just created accounts on every known social media platform with the nickname Truthteller." He winked at her. "I had everything recorded and had footage from every angle as well. I spent the whole night editing them together. And now I am planning to spend the whole day sharing them as far and as wide as the internet and social media will allow. I am also adding comments on my personal point of view as well regarding your bravery, the unfair treatment, all of it."

"Show me!" she tiptoed to him barefoot on the cold stone floor and sat on the armrest. "Don't read the existing comments, though," he warned her. "It's a work in progress." However, of course, she went to the comments section first. "They showed her that they didn't want her, but she still tries to cling to the king!" "She is just embarrassing herself." "I don't like her, but the dress is great."

"She can come to my town, and I will show her the northern hospitality! She will forget about the King!"

"I think it was brave of her to do that for love." "Show off!"

Savannah walked away, and for a few seconds, her friends were quiet. She could feel anger rising in every cell of her body:

"Are you okay?" Kyle asked with a concerned voice.

"Peachy." The princess gritted her teeth. "Zara, help me to find that pink dress. Since this is the reality of our current situation, make sure you film everything happening today. And every day after that while you're at it. Remember, we are on our own here."

"Isn't this dress too much for today? It's just a break." Zara pointed out, getting the shimmering fabric out of the wardrobe.

"There aren't breaks here," Savvy took it from her and inspected it one more time just in case. "Every minute, we'll be filmed, and we need to beat them at their own deceptive game."

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Savannah strolled through the garden in her long pale pink dress. The fine brunch spread was another opportunity where the contenders *were* supposed to meet kai to get better acquainted with the Northern Prince. She had already spotted four cameras on her way in, subtly giving them her best angles as she passed them by.

There was a reason she liked this dress so much. The sheer flowing fabric covered with intricate shimmering lace hugged her body perfectly while her chest and arms were covered, creating the innocent and modest look she was going for. At the same time, the gown was backless and see-through from mid-thigh down, letting her stay playful and true to herself.

This wasn't what she would normally wear for brunch, but she wasn't wrong in her choice.

Savvy noticed and quietly applauded herself for her foresight the moment she saw all the other contestants in their sparkly and bedazzling outfits.

Some brunch it was!

And there, right in the centre, she saw none other than the Northern King himself talking to Penelope

Savvy had to clench her fists in her skirt and force a charming smile when someone greeted her. She didn't like them being together one bit.

Truth be told, she hated it.

What she hated even more was that they appeared to be a beautiful couple. Penelope was indeed a stunning woman fit to be a queen.

Today she was wearing a deep purple dress, the colour of the royals. And the golden hairband in her rich wavy dark hair looked suspiciously regal.

Kai said something, and she laughed, placing her palm on his chest as if it belonged there, as if she had done it many times before. What was worse was that it made the king chuckle as well.

They indeed looked like this perfect couple, and Savvy wanted to wipe their smiles off both their faces.

"Savannah! Savannah!" Someone called her name, and she was surprised to see a cloud of pink moving toward her. "There you are! Come with us!"

A small hand grabbed her and pulled her away. In this pink chaos, she noticed pink curly hair done in two pretty buns and decorated with flowers.

"Petra?" Savvy tried to stay polite as the other girl giggled. She let herself throw one last glance in Kai's direction, realising that he was watching her intently now.

"Yes, come on!" Even though it was hard to see her in layers and layers of tulle, Petra insisted. "I like your dress, by the way! Do you also like pink? I love pink!"

She already regretted that she was wearing that colour today. However, when Petra stopped, she saw that some other contenders were already there.



"So, we are sharing information!" Petra announced proudly. "Penelope told us some things that no one else did! Did you know that there are cameras here everywhere filming everything that we *do*?"

"Really?" Savvy tried to sound surprised and caught Astrid's approving gaze.

"Yes!" Petra nodded. "And also Penelope said that everything we do is judged all the time. We have to be really careful not to lose points. And did you know that we were lucky to come in

the right dress colours yesterday?!"

"Penelope is so kind!" Bridgit was staring at her flute with what looked like a mimosa.

So kind to share the information they had already figured out on their own. Which was exactly what Bridgit hinted at, and everyone other than Petra understood her hidden meaning.

"She is," Petra beamed. "I decided to follow her example and tell all of you as well,".

"That's so nice of you." Naya purred, flipping her straight snow-white hair to the back. She looked gorgeous in a silver dress without any extra detailing.

"So, I thought..." Petra was fidgeting with the hem of her dress. "Maybe we could all share useful information? I know we are rivals, but we are also together in this ... We don't have to become enemies."

Sure, kiddo! Count on it!" Mikaela, another werecat, snorted loudly. It was clear that she wasn't going to share anything, even if her life depended on it. "Nice dress, Naya."

She said before leaving in a tone that meant she hated the garment. "I take it you know each other?" Savvy asked the werecat and only received an eye roll. "We went to school together, and she was a bitch back then too," the cat replied. "So, what do you think?" Petra attempted to bring them back to the subject

"I'll share some useful information with you." Bridgit gulped her drink and placed the empty glass on the nearby table. "Beware of what Penelope says, and don't trust the information you get from her."

With that, the werebear turned on her heels and left their small company "What does she mean?" the pink-haired girl gaped just as her babysitter arrived.

"Petra, I think you should mingle some more!" The elegant woman, who had helped her at the first challenge, took her hand, leading her away. She was undeniably beautiful, and, unlike her ward, she knew how to play the game. Obviously, she didn't want the girl to be seen with the least

popular of all the candidates. Chloe and Claude spared Petra in their piece about the Trials, and there was no need to give them a reason to tear her apart next time.

“Okay, Evelyn.” Petra looked slightly startled but obeyed her mentor, waving her hand at the others as she was dragged away toward the “more popular kids”.

“I have to say I like that child!” Astrid let out a little laugh, and even Naya almost reacted to that but managed to keep her calm. She wanted to say something, probably something snarky, but her face changed suddenly, and her gaze shifted slightly behind Savannah’s shoulder.

Savvy turned to see what startled the cat and saw Kai walking in their direction. He was beside them in no time with a polite smile, looking very handsome in a black shirt and trousers while the wind was rustling his hair.

“Ladies, it’s nice to see you all again,” he greeted them.

Astrid stood up, smiling nervously, and Naya nodded slightly, holding her glass with a cat’s

grace.

“We are honoured by your presence!” Savannah didn’t look at him the second time.

“Excuse me, I see someone I need to talk to.”

She was about to leave when he caught her arm.

“Actually,” Kai lowered his head and locked his eyes with hers. “I wanted to talk to you for a moment.”

Everyone around them went silent. It seemed like the whole garden stopped moving and breathing. It was as if they were utterly alone here ...

“Some other time perhaps,” she answered, angling her head at him and then sharply removed her hand from his grasp, making him growl ....

Frustrated and annoyed, Kai found himself in the foulest of moods. After spending the night in the woods hunting for Bjorn, he hadn’t gotten much sleep. There was no trace of the enemy. yet a million scents of all kinds of creatures, which shouldn’t be present in the first place, lingered all around him. It was as if the rotten bear was mocking him. Was this why he touched Savannah but left her alive? To let him know that he touched one of the contenders for the Luna of The North? That he had touched something that was his?

Before that, anyone who crossed him in the woods was later found dead. Mostly in pieces

There was, of course, the option of Savannah working with Bjorn. The more he considered that notion, the more he realised it was unlikely Gideon would ever let him close to his sister. He scratched that thought from the depth of his mind.

Savvy didn't know. She had no idea who she had met and how dangerous he was.

Thinking of her, he remembered how her bare flesh felt against him, how intoxicating her scent was ... and how angry she got with him the previous night. He didn't like her being unhappy with him. Somehow, the more he attempted to create goodwill between them, the worse the

situation became.

Whatever the results, here he was now, unable to remove thoughts of her out of his head while he was attending to an entirely different task altogether.

"Kai, don't just stand there!" Elene jabbed him gently with her elbow. "Go talk to the girls. The deal was that you would get better acquainted with each of them!"

He didn't want to be rude, so he said nothing to his sister, who he blamed for his current predicament.

It could have been different. If there were no Luna Trials, he would be engaged to Savvy at this moment.

She probably wouldn't be thrilled, but he would have pursued her, made her see him from a different angle, a different perspective.

He couldn't believe that his mind had gone there. Again. He had to snap out of it and get back to the responsibilities at hand.

Scanning the garden, he couldn't locate her, and wondered if she did get sick after all. She was trembling when they returned to the castle, and although he ordered his chef to make her a hot soup in the middle of the night, he did not follow up on that.

"Oh, look!" Elene said in a tone that he knew far too well. The tone that meant she was acting again. "It's Penelope! Hi, Pen! How are you doing?"

"Elene! Kai!" The girl went up to them with a happy expression on her face. Her violet dress was a replica of what his mother had worn in one of her earlier portraits, and he recognised it at once.

"You look gorgeous! What a stunning dress!" Elene praised her best friend, although she was probably the one who suggested she wear this outfit. "Doesn't she look gorgeous, Kai?"

"She absolutely does," he nodded, looking for Savvy with his eyes. "Will you excuse me?"

"Of course not!" his sister stepped in his way. "You are not going anywhere, Kai Fionnlagh! You know very well that you have to talk to every contestant. You can start with Penelope, since you are both here. I expect at least fifteen minutes of quality conversation!"

"Fine," he groaned and watched his sibling walk away, happy with herself.

"We can just stand and pretend that we talk." Penelope winked at him the way she used to do since their childhood. "You just do nothing, and I will move my lips. She will never spot the difference!"

"Sounds good," he agreed, looking for Savvy again "Gee, Kai!" Penelope snorted. "Way to make a woman feel special!" He shot her an apologetic glance. They had been friends since childhood, after all.

Well, she was Elene's friend, but it meant that she was in the house a lot. And when their parents died, he thought that he would lose his sister to grief as well. Penelope was the one to step in and help them both. So, he owed it to her.

"Sorry," he muttered. "It's just..."

"You are waiting for someone?" she asked, studying his face, and he nodded. For a second or so, her expression was unreadable, but then she grinned at him. "Is that a contender? Do you have your eyes on someone?!"

"Pen, please!" He stopped her because she wasn't the one he would pour his heart out

"Gosh! It's that serious?!" she giggled, playing with her dark hair. "You surprise me, Kai!"

The girl touched his shirt, gently brushing her fingers over it, finally bringing his attention to her.

"You even dressed up!" she smirked. "I remember that Elene couldn't make you wear this shirt. You absolutely loathed it when she gave it to you for your birthday!"

"It was the first thing I grabbed this morning," he brushed her off.

That was a lie, of course. Kai spent at least an hour staring at his wardrobe, realising that all his shirts looked the same to him. Then he noticed this and remembered how Elene told him he should wear it when he wanted to impress a girl. It was a joke, and he knew it, yet somehow, he wore that one, feeling dumb on top of everything. If Savannah Stormhold would be impressed by anything, it wouldn't be some stupid shirt.

The scent of bluebells hit his nostrils, and his head snapped in her direction. Some girl dressed like a giant cake was pulling Savannah away. He found himself begging Fenrir for her to at least look at him once, and when his wish was granted, he was disappointed again.

The way she glared at him didn't promise him anything good. She wasn't over what happened yesterday. So, he would have to work for her forgiveness.

"Moon Goddess!" Penelope gasped. "Don't tell me you like the western princess!"

"I don't know what you are talking about." He gave her a warning glance and took himself under control. Was it so obvious that he paid attention to Savannah?

: "The way you just stared at her..." The girl insisted, lowering her voice so no one could overhear them.

\*Pen!" he snarled at her, and she pursed her lips.

"Kai," Penelope whispered even quieter. "Out of all girls here, she and the werebear are definitely not the options for you. People would rather go with the witch or the cats than either of them! Trust me on this."

"I think everyone has forgotten that I am the king, and no one decides for me!" He stated firmly. "Now, excuse me. We'll chat some other time."

He left his friend, seeing only Savannah before him and ignoring everyone else who tried to talk to him on his way. He would fulfil his duties later, and now he had more important things to deal with.

"Ladies, it's nice to see you here again," he tried to sound polite and not rushed, but Savannah only scrunched her nose at him.

"We are honoured by your presence!" she said, every word laced with sarcasm.

"Excuse me, I see someone I need to talk to."

She didn't have anyone to talk to here, and everyone knew it, but she intended to escape him, and he wasn't having any of this. So, he grasped her delicate arm in his huge palm, shocking everyone here because it was against all known etiquette rules. Not that he cared.

"Actually," he lowered his head, wishing nothing more than to brush his lips over her skin, "I wanted to talk to you for a moment."

"Some other time!" The girl sneered, and a growl escaped him as she removed her hand from his grasp and tried to walk away.

He didn't hesitate to catch up with her and, to her surprise, lifted her in his arms, rapidly walking away from the scene. She didn't even struggle, simply staring at him in shock.

"What do you think you are doing?!" She demanded, grasping his shoulder for balance. She didn't even trust him to carry her properly, and this only made him angrier.

"What does it look like I am doing?" Kai huffed.

"Being a brute and grabbing people without consent?" She arched her brow. "Then again, it's not your first time, is it?"

"What are you talking about, Savannah?" She chuckled wholeheartedly. "You tripped, and I am ensuring your safety!" She only looked annoyed hearing his words,

"Is that how the news is going to show it tomorrow?" The princess tried to get off him, but he held her in place and added a growl to it that made her eyes go wide.

"How would you like the news to show it?" Kai asked, not understanding why it bothered her in the first place.

"Oh, I loved their clinging story! Let's stick to that!" Savvy rolled her eyes. "They can say that I tripped on purpose and hung on you while you just had to, absolutely HAD TO, *carry me.*"

"What are you talking about?" The king asked, confused, but he could finally put her down as he got them deep enough into the garden that no one could see them, and they could have some privacy, at least for a few minutes.

"You know very well what I am talking about she hissed, narrowing her eyes. The wasn't in the mood for his shenanigans, and everything was merely a repeat of what happened just yesterday. When his goal was the exact opposite.

"am sorry," he said, and she froze. Then she blinked her long lashes, and her lips parted slightly. Those lips he couldn't get out of his mind for a while already. "For everything. I want you to know this."

"What difference does it make to me now?" She averted his gaze. There was no point in all of this. "You already said you didn't know about the Trials, but you are not giving me my alliance so that I could leave this humiliating show. What do you want from me now? I am not going to thank you for your insincere apology."

"I don't need you to thank me." He placed one hand on a tree behind her, backing her into it. "I want you to know that I have my reasons for not letting you leave."

"And that reason is – you don't trust my brother!" She scoffed, rolling her eyes. "I don't," Kai agreed with ease. "But he has nothing to do with why I want you to stay."

"What..." She didn't get to finish her sentence because he crushed his lips into hers, crumpling them mercifully and making them part as his tongue effortlessly slid between her sweet lips. The king's strong hands wrapped around her slim waist, but one of them greedily caressed the bare skin on her back. It slid all the way to her neck, bringing her closer so that he could devour her more.

She probably should have pushed him away, but it felt so right that she simply couldn't do it. It was as if she needed it, his touch, his lips, his closeness. Maybe more than he did....

Kai did not want to stop. The more he tasted her, the more he wanted to continue exploring. Never in his life had he experienced anything like this. If his wolf shouted MATE now, he wouldn't be surprised. Yet Asgard did no such thing. The damn wolf only urged him to give in to his desires.

He broke the kiss to get some air, and their eyes met, only igniting the fire between them.

"Savannah," he whispered into her ear, biting her earlobe gently and then left a trail of soft kisses down her neck, stopping at its base. He wanted to sink his canines into her smooth skin right now and mark her for good. So that no bear could ever touch her. So that no man could ever touch her ... He let them grow, grazing the sensitive spot ...

And this was when Savvy snapped out of it. "Stop!" she finally found the strength to push him away.

"Why?" He didn't move but retracted his canines, replacing them with his soft lips. She was trembling in his arms, and he knew that she wanted this to some extent as well. "I like you, Savannah Stormhold. More than just like you..."

"Too bad!" She tried to distance herself, but he wasn't letting her go, still holding her waist.

"I can't say the same! The more I find out about you, the more disappointed I am." That hurt. But he knew where she was coming from.

"What can I do to fix it?" He asked bluntly because he wasn't one to bit around the bush." am serious about this."

"Then prove it!" She met his gaze again, and he rubbed his chin, thinking of ways to do it.

Someone was approaching them, and their Lycan ears picked it up easily.



“King Kai! There you are!” Savvy recognised Petra’s voice. Only the pink-haired girl could decide to follow them when they left in such a way!

“Oh, look!” Savvy couldn’t help her smirk. “It’s your child bride!”.

He gave her a reproachful look, but she already got out of his grasp and was walking away from him, holding her skirt. He followed her with her gaze until she was completely out of sight.

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Savannah was so glad that she managed to escape him. This whole quandary with Kai was getting out of hand, leaving her lost an avalanche of emotions.

She was supposed to win the stupid Trials, get her alliance and get the hell out of here. However, she was not supposed to make out with that stupid hot king, and she was not supposed

to want him so badly. She had a great plan, and this was definitely not the plan!

All she had to do was to get back to her original intention.

On her return, she couldn’t help but notice that everyone present in the gardens had their eyes on her as she walked out. It only worsened when she returned to the contenders, and she quickly realised that she was probably now smelling like Kai.

“That was fast!” Celine accused as she walked out arm in arm with her blonde best friend, and they both stopped right in front of her with unpleasant smirks on their faces.

“I hope you don’t think that by spreading your legs, you are going to fix your sad situation!” Inga pretended to look at her nails. “Kai never gets serious with his bed warmers. He has them once or twice, and then he moves on.”

“Exactly. He wouldn’t touch a girl he was serious about in such a manner and in front of everyone!” Inga sneered.

“Oh, good then!” Savvy mimicked their tone. “Then Penelope has nothing to worry about, right? He had an opportunity but hasn’t touched her for, what? How many years now? Ten? Twenty?”

They both gasped at her words and clearly wanted to add something else, but it wasn’t meant to be.

“Enough!” A sharp and authoritative voice cut through the air, immediately stopping their banter.

## 1. History Lesson

For the first time since her arrival, Savvy saw Penelope up close. The woman indeed looked as if she was already a queen. Although her brows were knitted together, surprisingly she was pointing her sharp, displeased gaze at her friends.

"Please," she sighed heavily and rubbed her forehead carefully, so as not to ruin her make-up, "I asked you not to do this. We are rivals here, but not enemies. We can still be civil with one another."

"But..." Inga protested, clearly wanting to object, however, a warning look from her leader was enough to close her mouth.

"Let us chat for a bit," Penelope offered, suddenly changing her facial expression. Her two minions backed away, lowering their heads in submission. While they all had alpha blood, Penelope's authority was undeniable.

Savannah mentally prepared for another battle, but the girl surprised her again. She took her arm and led her away from the crowd. A drone flew after them, and Savvy stretched the sweetest smile on her face just in case they were being filmed.

"I wanted to introduce myself," Penelope stated. She was the picture of elegance and friendliness. "I have spoken to every other contender today except for you. Welcome to the North, Princess Savannah Stormhold. It's our honour to have you here."

It did not escape Savvy that she welcomed her on behalf of the whole North as if it belonged to her. The other issue was that although she used her title to address her, she was still holding her hand and leading her somewhere – a sign of them being equals. When they were not. Someone was getting ahead of themselves.

"You are very sweet," Savvy complimented, strategically deciding right now wasn't the appropriate time to clash with Penelope. It was, however, the right time to learn more about her opponent.

"Sorry about that," the girl apologised as she waved off her two friends, who had chosen to remain close by. "I really meant what I said. I think we can be good friends in the future. It will be great for our nations."

Of course, she meant the future where she would be the Luna of the North and Savvy would return to the Western Kingdom.

"Yes, that's true." The westerner nodded, realising that her plan to wait it out was going to the bin. "I heard that your pack have always supported the royal family. Let's keep that tradition alive."

To Penelope's credit, she didn't even blink at the little jab.

"Another person I wanted to apologise for is Elene," the girl said suddenly, sighing deeply. "We are like family. She is overprotective and really wants me to win..."

"Oh, that must be so stressful for you." Savannah tried really hard not to roll her eyes. It wasn't like she was learning anything new after all.

"It is. Kai and I are good friends, but we are just that – friends." Penelope looked up at the

sky. We all grew up together and are very close. But we don't love each other, and we know that."

Okay, this was new.

"Why are you telling me this?" Savvy eyed her curiously. This was getting more and more intriguing by the minute.

"Just so you know I am not a threat." Penelope stopped and looked at the flowers next to them. They were roses, and Savannah did her best not to frown. "Just because so many people see me as their queen doesn't mean I will become one. I'd say it's unlikely."

"I can say the same," Savvy shrugged her shoulders innocently. Two could play this game. "I am here to improve our kingdoms' relationship and learn more about my family's history. I was deprived of the northern part of my heritage, and it's time to fix that."

The drone was right above their heads, and the princess grinned at her companion. "Do you like roses, Penelope?" she asked the northerner to startle her.

"Yes, very much. A rose is the queen of flowers." Penelope's hand brushed over delicate flowers, but Savannah simply cut one of them with her sharp nail. Then she carefully attached it to the girl's hair, not bothering to find a good placement for the flower. It was awkwardly sticking out of the golden headband she wore in a feeble attempt to pass it off as a crown, and now the whole thing looked silly and pompous.

"It suits you," Savvy fixed the rose so it would be difficult to remove from her hair.

"Thank you," Penelope blushed because she couldn't see it herself yet. "You are not at all what I imagined."

"I hope that's a compliment!" the princess giggled.

"Yes, of course.", The other girl let out a little laugh. "Look, I am trying to support all the contenders here. This is what I do."

"You are kind and generous," Savvy told her what she wanted to hear. It would have been rude not to.

"Thank you," Penelope graciously accepted the praise. "This is why I want to warn you now. Elene has something planned for the brunch. It's ...". She looked around as if she was afraid of spies, while the drone was still inches above them.

"Oh, my!" Savannah covered her mouth, pretending to gasp. When in fact, she wanted to yawn. This game was a very boring one.

"It's a history quiz." Penelope pursed her lips, waiting for her reaction.

"Oh, no!" Savvy added as much drama as she could muster. "But it was supposed to be break time for us."

"I am sorry." The girl lowered her eyes as if she was truly devastated. "Elene wants to eliminate more contenders as soon as possible. They can set up these challenges for us when they want."

It was funny how she threw her best friend under the bus with such ease whereas Elene was trying her best to help. For a moment, Savannah felt sorry for the northern princess, however, when she spotted her laughing with a blonde bearded man, happy and unbothered by how she was about to stab pretty much everyone here in their backs, that feeling instantaneously

disappeared. Maybe this was the friendship she deserved.

"My maid has a history book with her," Penelope whispered. "If you want, you can have a look. I know it's not enough time to help you, but, who knows, maybe you will get lucky."

"Yes. I will take what I can." Savvy nodded, doing her best not to burst out laughing. Her rival had no idea what kind of favour this was for her. She, of course, had already read a few history books and planned on relying on her photographic memory, but who knew, maybe she missed a few facts.

Penelope summoned her maid, who gave Savannah a heavy tome. Scanning the garden with her alert eyes, she noticed a few other girls with similar books, which meant the northerner arrived prepared in advance. There was no reason for anyone to walk around with identical history books.

"Thank you!" Savvy sat on a bench and opened the book on her knees. "I will never forget your kindness."

"Can it be my turn now?" Petra asked, taking Kai's arm, after which he decided it was time to return to the contenders.

He wasn't listening to what the werewolf girl was saying. It was something about the weather and how disappointed she was not to have seen macarons on the table. He lost interest in their thread of conversation after that.

"Petra!" He heard someone call out and saw a tall woman almost running to them with a worried face. He recognised her as Petra's assistant and tried not to giveaway how funny it appeared that she was terrified of the two of them staying alone, which was understandable since Petra was nothing more than a walking time bomb. At any moment she could do or say something that a contender couldn't afford.

"Evelyn!" The girl next to him responded. She was either oblivious or the best actress in the world. "I got my time with the king! Isn't it great!"

"Petra" The woman began, trying to hide the disappointment in her voice. She may have wanted to control their time together more, but it was now too late.

Not that he cared. It was an excellent opportunity to get rid of the annoying contender.

"Nice to meet you again," he offered and smiled charmingly as he pushed Petra in the direction of his babysitter. "Thank you for the wonderful conversation. I wouldn't want to take up any more of your time."

"But you are not .." Petra disagreed, her head poked out of many layers of tulle with her lips pouted.

"We are happy you found a few minutes for Petra." Evelyn took her protégé's hand and squeezed it, signalling for her to follow the lead. Luckily, Petra was obviously trained, and he was free from them within seconds.

He still had the task of speaking to the rest of the contenders yet he found himself marching in the direction of his Beta, who was helping himself to mini sandwiches at one of the tables.

"These are good but ridiculously small!" Lachlan complained when he saw his king. He didn't seem the least bit bothered with everything around him as usual.

"How were the Luna Trials shown in the news? What did they say about Savannah?" Kai went straight to the point, and his Beta coughed a few times. One of the snacks was now stuck in his throat, and his king was happy to help, hitting him on the back with enough force to ensure Lachlan would have no doubt of the foul mood he was in.

"Not much, and what little there wasn't good at all," Lachlan admitted, coughing a few times again. He got his phone out, searched for yesterday's program release, and handed it to his king.

Kai watched the whole piece, his face getting darker by the minute. He could now see why she wasn't happy. She had every right to be.

"Damn it," he swore under his breath, his eyes finding Savannah again. "Why is it so biased?"

"Because Elene is in full control of the show. That's why!" His friend chuckled and sent another sandwich down his throat, choking again under the stern gaze of his Alpha. "You should see the scores too! Savannah is the only one with a negative balance after two challenges."

"The hell?!" Kai gritted his teeth and clenched his fists, accidentally destroying his Beta's phone in his hand.

"Man," Lachlan sighed. "I just got that"

"You'll get a new one. Why are the Trials so out of hand?" The king demanded but meeting his friend's gaze, he realised he knew the answer. They both gave Elene carte blanche and reaped the fruit of that bad decision.

"This ends today!" Kai growled. "Is there a challenge tomorrow? I need...".

"There is a challenge right now." Lachlan held yet another sandwich but didn't risk getting it into his mouth this time. "

"But they were supposed to relax today!" The king tried to suppress his anger. His sister really went overboard with everything.

"Elene decided it would be great to test their history knowledge without letting them prepare." The Beta placed the sandwich back on the table, eyeing it sadly under his king's glare. "She said that if they respected us enough, they would have already learned it before arriving here."

"And what about Savannah Stormhold?! She didn't know a thing!" Kai was about to lose

"Well," Lachlan gulped, losing his usual playful attitude. "Isn't that the whole point? To get rid of her?"

A growl emerged from the depth of the lycan king's chest.

No wonder she hated him. He would hate him too. As if the Trials alone were not enough for her to despise him! Was this what she had to deal with?

He found her again with his eyes. Savannah was sitting on a bench and leisurely flipping through a book, not a shade of worry on her face. Kai also noticed that other

girls had their noses tucked in similar books, meaning that they all had been warned. All foreigners looked desperate, trying to grab the last pieces of knowledge.

But not Savvy

Kai felt this weird sensation rising in the pit of his stomach. Why wasn't she worried? Had she already given up? Or perhaps she had simply had enough and wanted to leave this place?

He heard his sister ringing the bell and making an announcement. The contenders were slowly closing their books and walking towards the long table at the head of which his sister stood with a crooked grin.

He found himself walking there as well. Even if it was Savannah's plan to leave today, he wasn't letting her go.

"My, oh, my!" Elene clapped her hands. "You all seem so tense! Why don't we all take our seats and start our brunch! We prepared the most exquisite northern dishes for you!"

Savannah stared at what looked like raw liver in front of her and clenched her lips. As a wolf, she was not new to the taste of limbs but usually preferred to leave those to Athena.

She unfolded her napkin and placed it on her lap as traditions required.

"And to make all this fun," Elene stated with a smirk, "we decided to play a little history game! I am sure you all came prepared!"

The northern princess looked at her with a smug smile, which Savannah returned, knocking Elene's confidence down a notch.

"To sweeten the deal," Elene continued, trying not to waver and lose face, "I will be giving five points for every correct answer."

"Yay!" Petra clapped, happy to hear the news. A native to the North, she probably knew everything there was to know.

"But if you are *wrong*, we'll be taking away five points," the princess announced, and Petra's smile quickly faded. She stole a hurried glance at her mentor, who stood in the crowd behind them, and the woman gave her a reassuring smile.

"Why don't we start?" Elene took her seat and turned to Penelope. "Who was the first Luna of the North?"



That was the easiest question there was in the whole damn book. "Luna Isolde Harold," Penelope replied modestly. "Very nice," Elene beamed. "Five points."

"Inga, which northern king had been blessed with not one, but four mates." The princess was enjoying her game.

"Ladies," Kai greeted as he appeared at the other end of the long table and took a seat without further ado. A wave of whispers rippled through the garden, and Savvy watched with amusement as Elene turned pale. She was now sitting right next to the king, while Bridgit sat opposite her, and Astrid to her other side. These were the worst seats that were usually reserved for the least welcomed guests, but Kai had quite literally just turned the tables.

didn't expect you to be joining us." Elene motioned for the servants to set the table for him, which they did in an instant.

"Surprise!" Her brother chuckled, and then nodded at Inga. "Continue." "King Norbert the Second," the girl answered quietly. None of them knew what to do. Elene continued the questioning, asking each girl about the most notable moments of

northern history. Everyone gave the correct answers except for Brigit, whose question was suddenly a date of some irrelevant event. Petra was clearly using the help of her babysitter, and Savvy rolled her eyes. Petra was supposed to be the one in the best position to answer these questions, and she still required help? Bizarre.

"Savannah," Elene smirked when it was her turn as she missed her title again. Probably on purpose. "Tell us the name of the wife of the lycan who invented wolf armour in the early 13th century."

She would have snorted if not for the drones flying above their heads and filming everything

"Thank you for respecting me enough to ask me such a tricky question," Savvy closed her eyes as if she was grateful when in reality, she was recalling images of all those pages of the history book she read. Her photographic memory worked in a way that she could see them as if she was reading them. Her mind was working quickly to locate the information required, and she was currently perusing the 13th century when a piercing pain stabbed through her body.

She grasped the tablecloth underneath her fingers, clawing it desperately as she tried to cope with yet another present from her mate Zack.

Zack left, probably the most important meeting of his life. His terrible mood now lifted even though his mate was out of his grasp for the time being at least. His plans were finally back on track, and he couldn't believe his luck.

He closed his eyes, thinking of Savannah again. Just yesterday, his Beta showed him something that made him go feral and destroy the little guest house he was staying in. His Savannah... his Savvy was in the North, competing for the position of Queen. Needless to say, he couldn't trust his own eyes when he saw his mate being presented as one of the many contenders.

What was she thinking?! Their connection was still in place.

Yes, what happened between the two of them wasn't perfect, but he intended to fix that and get her back. He decided to let the fact that she let another male touch her slide. After careful consideration, he concluded this action on her part was her desire for revenge against him. It even made him happy for a short while because simply knowing that she still cared meant something to him. It meant he still had some control over her. As long as she cared, she wasn't lost to him

They had been deprived of each other thanks to the big political games he played, and deep down inside, Zack hated that he had to take part in it at all, yet still, his pack came first. It had

1. to.

It was the primary responsibility of the Alpha, and he couldn't ignore it. Only bigger packs were safe. Only domination could keep it this way.

The lycans were ruling over werewolves for a while. Graciously. . . Condescendingly.

It was some sort of peace, no matter how humiliating it has been for him. No one knew how long it would last. It was bad enough that it would only take one lycan to go on a killing spree to wipe an entire pack of werewolves. What if they all decided to do just that? There was only one way to avoid that and that was to be the one to attack first.

Besides, it was tiring to be their vassal.

There was an Alpha Summit, of course. Thanks to that, werewolves of the West always had the illusion that they were making decisions on their own. However, Zack knew that it was bullshit. The moment there were serious issues, lycans were right there, shoving their authority in

their faces.

It happened the moment king Gideon felt that Luna Riannon was his mate. It did not matter that she was married to another or that she wanted to rule her own pack. The

moment Zack saw how the king looked at her, he knew that no werewolf Alpha would ever be allowed to have her. This was when he knew there was no turning back from his alliance with the werebears and foxes.

Now that all felt as if it took place a million years ago.

Savannah changed everything. He still didn't know when it happened. Probably the very moment he laid her eyes on her and recognised her as his mate.

If he could have controlled himself then, he would have thrown her into the dungeon, locked her in the deepest and darkest cell the moment she entered his house. That would have been the wise choice, considering he was planning to kill her brother. That would have been safe. A couple of days wouldn't have meant much, and they would have a whole new life together later, where he would have then earned her forgiveness in one way or another.

He couldn't forget how tense his pack was greeting her and how all he wanted was to get her into his bed. She smelled divine, tasted divine, looked so beautiful... She was his perfection. He remembered thinking that the Moon Goddess knew precisely what she was doing when she paired them together. He was supposed to become the Alpha King, and Savannah was going to help him with that. She would have been his perfect Queen...

Every time he closed his eyes, he pictured her next to him again. He claimed every inch of her body that night, not believing that all the s\*x he had before couldn't even compare to being with his mate. He couldn't have enough of her.

This was probably why the euphoria of claiming her didn't wear off in the middle of the night when he had to get back to work.

He thought about it a lot... of how she found out about his plans and made the decision to leave him. He knew that nothing could give him away in the bedroom where she was sleeping. He kept all his documents in his office, and this was exactly where he went to speak to his partners. They found out who he was mated to, and he persuaded them that nothing had changed. That his plans had remained the same. To kill Gideon and get the wolf throne, sharing lycan lands between wolves, foxes and bears. This was probably when she heard him. It had to be this moment.

On his way back to the bedroom, he smelled her scent but decided it was natural since she was all over him. However, something changed when he got close to her. She was wearing his shirt when he left her absolutely naked.

He didn't want to believe it back then, but now he knew he was right... Savannah already knew everything. He locked her in his arms, and they fell asleep again, but when he went to shower alone in the morning, she was gone...

Far too many times he was picking those events in his head of that night and day. Of how he and his warriors were chasing her, knowing that if she escaped, everything would be over. He couldn't forget how she glared at him when she reached safety in the werecats' territory. Mainly because it was the last time he saw her.

Back then, all he wanted was to get her. Then... after a while... she would understand. She had to. Situations like this were not new to any kind of shifters. Family members were dying all the time, and new families were formed. She would have gotten over it. Especially if he filled her with his pups. The thought alone made him grunt.

Luckily, now he had a chance again, and it was all that mattered at the moment.

His Beta Viktor opened the car door for him and he got inside, noticing that Rita was already there. He didn't want to see her now but decided it wasn't the time or the place for a scene. He knew how to be grateful before the Moon Goddess.

The car drove off, and the girl sat closer to him.

"Keep the distance," he told her dryly and didn't even bother looking at how she reacted to his words. She was getting over the top lately.

"I have something important to show you," she purred, and he knew she was up to something.

"Not interested," Zack got his phone out and started checking his emails.

"It's about your mate," she teased him, knowing that this was the easiest way to get his reaction. The longer he did not see his Savvy, the harder it was on his wolf. Alphas did not take separation well.

"I know everything I need to know about her!" Zack cut the woman off.

"Are you sure?" Rita giggled. "I sent you a link with some footage that wasn't shown on tv. Why don't you check it?"

Zack became stiff. He couldn't lie to himself and ignore it. He had to see what was going on. Besides, it meant he could see more of Savannah.

The Alpha still couldn't believe she was taking part in this farce of a contest and still had to figure out what game his beloved and her royal brother were playing at the North.

He saw a bright Truthteller logo shining on his screen, and then the video began. It was the same masquerade but from different angles. One of the guests must have filmed that.

Attention was paid to every contender, but Zack just scrolled it to the moment he noticed the already familiar blue dress with feathers. He chuckled when he heard the task for Savannah, realising that northerners did not want her there. This was something he counted on, and they did not disappoint..

However, next, he saw King Kai interrupting the event as if... As if he already knew Savvy. The Truthteller made sure to film how the Lycan King of The North did not take his eye off the western princess. He growled when that man helped Savannah remove her crown, and when the two of them stood together as if they were already a couple, he gritted his teeth.

That... he didn't like any of that. He hated it.

He read the description of the video. The Truthteller was clearly implying that King Kai was infatuated with Savvy.

Watching the moments again, he had to agree.

He knew a few things about the Northern King. Kai Fionnlagh wasn't one to show his emotions. He was a man of actions who rarely let anyone know what he thought before he executed his decisions. This was the reason why he was such a dangerous man in the first place.

Zack switched off his phone and looked out the window, not to see Rita's innocent smirk. She knew what she was doing.

Now he was thinking about everything from a very different perspective, and he did not like his conclusions.

Savvy let someone touch her when she was already at the North. His first suspicion was her best friend, Kyle, even though there were no reports from anywhere that they ever had a fling of any sort. But Kyle was the closest man to her. Unless... unless there was someone new.

Someone who made Savannah feel things again. Someone who appeared to be close to her when he happened to f\*ck that other girl.

What if that someone was King Kai?

The thought of that made his wolf furious, and a growl escaped him. The loud and menacing growl made Rita move to the back of the car.

A jolt of pain went through Zack's muscles, and he groaned, losing his breath. Again and again, it felt as if his whole body was electrocuted. His elongated claws ripped the expensive leather seat, and he didn't know how long it lasted. However, he knew exactly what was going on.

Savannah let someone close again.

It took him some time to regain complete control of himself when it was all over. The pain was gone, but the rage stayed with him.

He forgave her the first time, thinking that she was sending him a message. Yet now... now was different. Who was she with? Did she think about that other man? Was she planning to spend more time with him and get more intimate?

Zack knew that he would rip this man's throat out the first instance he could. But for now, he had to teach his little mate a lesson..

"Come here," he growled at Rita, unbuckling his pants. She eagerly jumped on his lap, seeing that it was safe now. Nevertheless, Zack pushed her to the floor instead, gesturing for her to start the job.

For a second, her eyes filled with hurt, but as he laced his fingers in her hair which she dyed into Savvy's shade of golden brown, he forced her to take all of him in. Rita couldn't breathe at first, but as he bobbed her head at the pace he wanted, she quickly adjusted, moaning loudly.

Zack relaxed in his seat, closing his eyes. If he ignored the scent, he could still pretend that it was the one he truly wanted to be on her knees before him.

In some odd way, he felt connected to Savannah again. There was no way she could ignore that...

Savannah froze like a statue, trying to take the pain under control. Zack was an asshole, but she wasn't new to this. This pain could have been controlled. She had already done this so many times before. She could do it again.

However, this time it was worse since she had to remember a small and insignificant fact from the book she saw just for a few minutes while experiencing this. Not to mention that she had to pretend that everything was A-okay.

"If you don't know the answer, then let's move on to the next..." Elene smirked since everything was going exactly as she expected.

"Give her time," Kai said in a tone that brooked no objections, and everyone stared at him, including Savannah,

"Brother?" Elene seemed to choke on her own attitude, searching for the right words to express her surprise without being too evident.

"Sister?" The king arched his brow questioningly, mimicking her tone slightly. The northern

princess' cheeks flushed because of the embarrassment. Her authority was never diminished like that before.

"Eleanor Sigurd," Savvy finally remembered and even forced a little smile on her lips. What Zack was doing did not seem to be a quickie this time. She would cut his member off before she killed him. It was simply a must now.

"Excellent," Elene looked surprised, but just for a moment. She started the second round of questions, and Savannah prayed for her ex to finally come and be done with it.

"Are you okay?" Kai leaned forward, and she felt his hot breath on her skin.

"I am... great!" She lied through her teeth, throwing a quick glance at him. For some reason, she wanted to press herself against his skin. The last time they did this made Zack stop. Shame they couldn't do it again.

Both her palms were still on the table, and she noticed that the king had placed his hand millimetres away. His little finger brushed over hers gently, bringing her more relief than she expected. Kai did not take his eyes off her as well, and she could tell that he had already figured her out and was thinking the same thing.

She exhaled, closing her eyes and trying not to make any sounds. The pain was getting duller.

"Princess Savannah," Elene called her loudly, and she nodded without looking at her. "Name the thirteen male pups of king Bromir the Fourth."

A little smile danced on her lips as she started saying name after name. She was lucky Penelope lent her that book. Savvy didn't even need to look at the northern princess. She knew that it was her little victory.

"What law was proposed but not accepted by the Northern Convocation in 332 after Fenrir's war?"

"Elene!" Kai interrupted his sister. "What kind of question is that? I doubt any northern queen, our mother included, could answer that!"

Elene pursed her lips, but Savvy smirked and replied, "Banning rabbit liver pies. Although, if you asked me, they should have accepted that one."

A few snorts and giggles sounded here and there.

"You should try one," Brigit retorted, helping herself to some pastry. "They are not popular in the West, but here we make them with heart and soul."

"And some guts," Astrid chuckled, adding to the fun.



“Savannah Stormhold!” Elene stood up. “I will demand a check of your mental link usage! One of your people is helping you!”

“Why would you think that?” Savvy raised her brow. Seriously? It did not bother her when Petra turned to her mentor every time.

“You couldn’t know that!” The princess clenched her fists. Savannah saw Kyle filming the whole thing from the corner of her eye.

“And why is that? I thought these are the historical facts that every Luna of The North should know. We have all prepared. I am sure Penelope would name every single pup of king Bromir, male or female. Right, Penelope? It was all in that wonderful book you gave me. It was

— lovely of you, by the way.”

Savvy didn’t even notice how the pain went away. She felt so much better now, not to mention that Elene and Penelope’s faces were so worth the hassle.

“Fine, then answer my next question!” The northern princess regained her composure, but not without a struggle.

“Enough!” Kai growled loudly, making the ground shutter underneath their feet.

## 1. 18. Our Spot

Shaken, Elene’s lips twitched uncontrollably as she looked at her brother. She couldn’t believe he was doing this to her, but she knew better than contradicting her King.

Very well,” she let on. A new fake smile appeared on her lips, and she sought to look as if his interruption did not bother her. “The next contender then. So, Brigit, how about ...”

“No!” Kai thundered, and every head at the table turned in his direction. “Enough history. Allow the ladies to enjoy their brunch, sister.”

“But “She started, wanting to say so much more; however, upon meeting his stern gaze, she forced another smile on her lips. “You are so lucky that the Lycan King of The North is gracious. I had many more questions for all of you, but his wish is my command. As for the points, they will be summed up based on the ....”

“No need for that!” Kai stopped her again. Anger flashed in the princess’s eyes this time.

Savvy watched the show with interest, her hand stretching to get a succulent strawberry. This was a new change of events..

"This is an official challenge, Kai," Elene insisted, "Their points must be taken into consideration."

"Oh, I am aware." The King retorted and gestured for his Beta to come forward. Savannah hadn't had the chance to meet the infamous Beta Lachlan in person yet. The Crimson Wolf got his nickname not thanks to the colour of his fur, which was, in fact, a cream colour on the verge of light golden. A beautiful colour which caused many enemies to underestimate him, thinking he was soft in nature. All of them ended up dead.

The nickname came from the battle where he almost single-handedly killed hundreds of rebellious werewolves. By the end of the fight, his fur had indeed become red from all the blood that gushed onto him from the wounds of his opponents.

So, when a friendly-looking guy in his late twenties with blonde hair and a beard walked to Kai with a grin plastered over his face, she raised her brow in surprise. Looks were indeed deceiving...

"Lachlan will be responsible for the points from now on," Kai announced. Gasps of surprise rippled through the *crowd* next to them, drowning out the buzzing of drones flying above them.

"That's great," Elene fraudulently offered as she smiled, looking like she was about to break a neck or two. "I will give him the information....."

"That will not be necessary," Lachlan stopped her. "I had been counting and am ready to announce the results."

"Begin," Kai gestured, ignoring his sister glaring at him.

"Salome Gray, Autumn Bern, Mikaela Levarro, Naya Knight, Astrid Erling, Mavis Redfeather," the Beta called out and then paused, looking around. Only when he had their full attention did he continue on. "Two correct questions and five points for each question."

"Penelope Summerstern, Inga Finn, and Celia Morr," Lachlan went on. "Two answered questions. Two and a half points each due to their level of complexity. Five points in total each."

The satisfied smile on Penelope's face faded. "Brigit Borg. One question answered correctly. Five points." The werebear girl only lifted her chin higher, ignoring the murmurs behind her back.

"Petra Biernat." Lachlan cleared his throat and sighed. "Mind link detected. Two questions answered. Five points each. Five points were deducted. Five points in total."

“Savannah Stormhold. Three questions answered. Ten points each due to their complexity.” Lachlan announced, and even Savvy was shocked with such a decision.

“Please, announce the final points for the two tasks,” Kai nodded at his Beta.

“Of course,” Lachlan was clearly ready for everything. “In the lead is Princess Savannah with 20 points. Followed by Salome Gray, Autumn Bern, Mikaela Levarro, Naya Knight, Astrid Erling, and Mavis Redfeather, with 15 points each. Penelope Summerstern, Inga Finn, Celia Morr, Petra Biernat, Bridget Borg – ten points each.”

“Congratulations, ladies!” Kai gave them all his most brilliant smile. He seemed very happy with the results. “This wraps it up for today. Enjoy your brunch!”

The King stood up, trying to catch Savannah’s glance, but she was too busy watching the reactions of other contenders.

“Brother!” Elene, however, was already at his side. “Why don’t we speak for a minute?” “Of course,” he offered her his hand, and she accepted. Savannah turned to look at them, but they had turned their backs to her.

She watched as they walked away without saying a thing.

“Well,” Inga was the first to speak, throwing a hostile gaze at Savvy, “whatever services you provide for the king seems to be paying off.”

“I’d watch your mouth when you speak to me if I were you,” Savannah replied without emotion. Having low expectations with these girls was really the way to go.

“That’s the difference between us!” The blonde spat out in contempt as she jumped to her feet, clenching her fists, her chest heaving up and down. “I am not you! I don’t use a man’s protection!”

“Of course not,” Savvy smirked, fixing the non-existent creases on her dress. “You can only cling to your so-called friends.”

“We all saw you go away with him deep into the garden!” Celia joined her friend in the witch hunt. However, the only witch in the crowd watched the scene with amusement, sipping her mimosa

“So?” Savvy arched her brow.

“Ladies, please!” Penelope stood up, rubbing her forehead. “We don’t have to do this. I am sure that whatever Savannah and King Kai were doing there was innocent.”

“Princess Savannah,” Savvy corrected firmly, meeting the woman’s gaze. “If you are using titles, don’t forget about mine.”

"Of course. Princess Savannah." Penelope went pale but managed to keep her composure.

Everyone went quiet for a few moments, but Inga broke the awkward silence. "We still don't know what *you* were doing there!" She hissed.

"Maybe it's because it's none of your business?" Brigit chuckled. "Should the Northern King seek your permission before being alone with someone?"

Celia opened her mouth to say something, but Petra had joined in the 'discussion:

"They just talked," she said calmly but loudly enough for everyone present to hear. "I was looking for King Kai and saw them together. They talked. Nothing else."

Savvy caught her gaze and thanked her with a small smile. This was unexpected.

"Doesn't matter," Celia finally got her chance to speak. "We all know King Kai will only marry a northerner and a lycan at that. So, all of you don't stand a chance."

"Why are you so worked up then?" Naya scoffed, moving off the table.

After a speedy yet careful consideration, Savannah decided it was best to follow her example. However, when she had almost removed herself from her companions at the table, she heard Inga's voice again.

"And don't think that this little advantage in points will stick. These were children's games! The best is yet to come, and everyone here will come for you!"

She disregarded her vicious comment simply because experience had taught her that arguing with ignorant people was useless. Nevertheless, she knew Inga had a point. Since she was in the lead for the Trials, she now had a target on her back. And when it came to the battle challenges that would come later, she would be at the top of everyone's kill list.

Savvy wondered if Kai had known that when he ventured to restore a balance in points. "He wanted to help," Athena hinted, deciding to share her point of view.

"Or he simply wanted the North to look good," Savannah retorted, walking in the direction of the castle. "Elene wasn't doing a good job, you know."

"He likes you, don't deny that!" her wolf insisted, purring inside.

"Zack also liked me," Savvy snorted, "and look how well that ended! I seem to be attracting problems with the men who like me now."

"His wolf also likes us." Athena wasn't one to give up. She was probably one of the most stubborn wolves ever.

"His wolf wants us. There is a difference."

She reached the hidden entrance, one she now singularly used to and from the garden whereby taking advantage of the knowledge Kai provided to the fullest when she heard his voice.

"Savvy, wait!"

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"I can't believe you just did this to me!" Elene clenched his hand so hard that even he could feel her effort.

"You disappointed me, little sister." Kai decided to not beat around the bush. He spent all his life sheltering her from pretty much everything and wasn't sure anymore that he liked the result.

"No, you are the one who disappointed me, Kai! You said that you will always be on my side! That we are a team! That you will protect me and save me!"

"Elene, this is exactly what I am doing now. I am saving you from you." Kai stopped and turned her so that she could see his face. "It's partially my fault. I failed you in many ways. You needed parents, and I couldn't replace them."

"Kai!" Elene pursed her lips, tears clouding her vision. "I am sorry sister, but you lost yourself. I don't recognise you anymore...." "I was just trying to help you!" The girl blinked away her angry tears. "This wasn't the kind of help i needed. The way you treated Savvy was just..."

"Savvy?" Elene looked at her brother with wide eyes and an open mouth. "Savvy, Kai? Since when do you call her Savvy?!"

"Don't start!" He sighed heavily, wishing he could end this conversation quickly. But to no avail.

"No, Kai," she grabbed his hand desperately, "don't you start! You don't seriously think there is any kind of future for you and her?!"

He did not reply because, deep inside, he simply didn't know the answer.

"What is wrong with you?" Elene used the mind link so that she could scream at him now without people around listening to the two of them. "Remember what you told me when Gideon humiliated me?! You said our kingdoms were at war for hundreds of

years, and a simple truce was a miracle! They slaughtered our werewolf packs on the borders in the olden days, stole our lands, betrayed our trust! And not much has changed since then. Don't be fooled. Gideon..."

"He was not wrong to reject you, El," Kai interrupted her speech and received an appalled expression in return. "In the end, he wanted to wait for his mate, and he found her. Everything made sense. He is happy with her, and she is perfect for him. No offence. You will find your mate as well."

"And so will you!" his sister reminded him. "But I will have to get married before then, and Savannah...."

"Oh, Kai," Elene sighed. "I didn't think that I would be the one explaining to you these things... However, I see that I have to."

He scanned the area lazily, knowing he did not want to listen. Asgard also was not interested.

"She is using you. She is using the Trials. When she arrived, she hated the North and us. She didn't want to marry you, and the Luna Trials only made her angrier."

"It's not a big surprise," Kai smiled.

"No, it's not. The surprise is that she stayed." Elene pointed out the obvious. "Don't you get it? She learned about the three wishes. She wins, and she can get anything from you! Honestly, I don't think she would stop at the alliance."

"The wishes have limits...." He reminded her what was important here.

"She still can use them to her advantage." The Princess covered her face with her hands. "You are right. It's my mistake. I shouldn't have arranged all that in the first place."

"That's fine," Kai patted her head just as he used to do in their childhood. "We can still figure

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everything out."

"But Savannah..."

"Elene," he made sure she was now looking him in the eye. "I need you to leave Savannah alone. I will deal with everything myself. All I need from you now is to ensure the Trials run smoothly. Lachlan will help."

"You don't want to get rid of her," the girl shook her head in disbelief.

"I want the Trials to be fair. I want the North to not be embarrassed about how the members of the royal family behave. Can you help me with that? Since it's shown on TV, I want us to be the epitome of our principles."

"Of course," Elene nodded, sadness written all over her face. "You can count on me."

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Kai saw Savannah going back and tried to catch up with her. She looked as if she was lost in thoughts, and he had to call her to get her attention.

"Savvy, wait!" he grasped her hand, but she yanked it back angrily and stared at him with knitted brows

"What do you want?" the Lycan Princess snarled, confusing the hell out of him. "To talk...". He confessed. "Did something happen?"

"A lot happened," she admitted quickly, crossing her hands on her chest, but toned down her hostility. "You just put a target on my back. Do you even understand this?"

"What? Because of the points?" He ran his hand over his hair. "Savvy, they would have noticed our relationship anyway."

"What relationship?" she chuckled. "I am a Western Princess, and you are the Northern King. Everyone knows that you will end up with a northerner. They are never tired of reminding us of that. What kind of relationship are we even talking about?"

"The one where we don't care about the titles," he said, still holding her hand,

She looked at him for a few seconds, and hope flickered inside of him. But Savannah turned away, and the whole world suddenly became colder and... lonelier.

"That's impossible," the girl sighed. "Just... let me go."

"You told me to prove that I care about you, and I did. Maybe it wasn't perfect, but it was my first attempt, and I did try." Kai insisted, stepping closer. "Now, how about you prove to me that you care. Not about the Trials, the alliance, the North, the West, the war... I want us to prove to each other that we care about us."

"How do you even see this?!" she let out a painful, bitter laugh. "We always have to think of these things!"

"King Kai and Princess Savannah have to," he smirked and added, "but the gardener and the little maid don't."



Her lips parted, and it was very tempting to kiss her. Yet the King knew that if he did this, he would ruin everything.

“For one evening, let’s spend time together just you, me, and nothing else. And after that, we will see.”

“Kai...” She was about to shake her head and reject the idea when he placed his finger on her

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lips.

“Nope. Not Kai anymore. Call me... call me Zack!” he suggested with a grin, and her eyes grew wide.

“Anything but that!” she let out an almost hysterical laugh.

“Fine, whatever,” he chuckled. “You can call me what you like, but tonight after dinner, come to the pond, and I will take you on a real date.”

“Kai,” she bit her lip painfully. “I don’t know.”

“Don’t say anything,” he stopped her again. “Go back to your room and think. And I... I will be waiting for your decision at our spot.”

“Our spot?” she c\*\*\*\*d a brow up, impressed by how daring he was today. He sure was working fast

“Our spot,” he nodded. “I’ll be waiting for you. If you come, we have a chance. If you don’t... I will respect your decision.”

He walked away before she could reply, mostly because he was afraid to hear another rejection

All of that was so new to him. He never asked a woman for anything. He simply did not have to. And tonight, he wouldn’t be the one to decide ...

He was at the pond right on time, ready for action and nervous. He had never been this nervous, not even before the most challenging battles.

In fact, he would probably better be fighting now than just standing there, hopeless and alone, not knowing if she would show up... Fearing that she would not.