

## 16. 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 tailed.

"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 owens 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 owens." Penelope's hand brushed over delicate owens, 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 owner. 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 eyed 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."

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"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 give away 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 it.

"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.

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"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 condescence 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 Athena 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.

"I 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 Bridgit, 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 ying above their heads and liming 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.

### Author's note

Don't forget about games in Marissa Gilbert's Reading group. We also choose Elene's face today and tomorrow I will be telling more about myself, answering some of your questions from last week.