Chapter 38

A/N
I'm curious! Do you guys have FAN CASTS for the characters? Who do you imagine playing Jon, Serena, Patrick, Alpha Jason, etc?Comment and share them here! I'll pick my favorites and give you a shout out next chapter.

Serena Lancaster

I smiled, surveying the forest. Jon, Patrick, Valeen, and the other generals and I were under a tent surveying the map of the Lightwing grounds. We were hosting a war game for the 15-year-old wolves about to undergo their Evaluation, and it was boys versus girls. Twenty four hours earlier, we set them free to run loose in the forest. The objective: be the first group to find a red flag, protect it, and bring it to base camp by 3pm.

"Isn't it weird doing something like this while the rest of the packs prepare for war?" Patrick asked, tuning his ham radio to listen in on the teams.

"Well, this might be the last time they're all kids together..." I sighed.

"Who's winning?" General Cra asked, listening in.

"The boys found the flag last night at around 10, but the girls stole it just after midnight." General Xerxes laughed.

"Awesome." I cocked my eyebrow challengingly at Clayton. "Get ready to pay up, Cra."

"Did you honestly bet money on this?" Jon growled

"Just a thousand." I smiled apologetically.

"You're gonna bleed me dry." Jon sighed. "You have a history of losing bets."

"That was your fault, and you don't get to joke about that—it's too soon."

"Get over it, Serena. It's been a year." Jon chuckled.

Oh Goddess.

A year had passed since the Claiming Ceremony. A full year since I became a princess—I was a Queen now. In twelve months, I successfully made the transition from planning to join the human world to actually wanting to help the werewolf race.

I contemplated on the year that had passed. Being claimed, being brought to the palace, having a miscarriage, and training the she-wolves—not a bad year for Serena. I even managed to fixed things with Evan, made new friends, gained new insight on my father, and fallen in love.

I, who swore never to be one of those idiot cheesy girls who fell head over heels, was now enamored with a King. A King.Did I just suddenly find myself in the middle of one of those raunchy historical novels?

"Why so quiet all of a sudden?" Jon murmured, taking my hand in his and giving it a kiss.

"It's been a year..." I whispered. He led me outside the tent. The others seemed preoccupied by spying on the teams so they let us be. Hand in hand, we walked until we spotted a familiar patch of yellow flowers.

"I don't know if I'm supposed to be smarter or stronger. I don't feel any different, I just know I'm not the same girl I was last year." I murmured, crouching down to pet the yellow flowers. "Hello, Hector."

"What a year it has been." Jon sighed. I knew his life had been upturned as well. Feeling playful, I nudged him on the shoulder.

"You know, if you waited a year, you could've claimed a Solterra. You wouldn't even have given me second look." I joked. Jon growled, lunging at me. I tumbled back, and he put his arms around me as well rolled around the forest floor. I lay on top of him, my head above his beating heart.

"I would've claimed you anyway." Jon murmured.

"No you wouldn't have, shut up." I snorted. At my words, he rolled us again until he was on top of me, pinning me down. His one hand shackled my wrists above my head and I was powerless to move.

"Take it back." Jon hissed, raising his other hand and wiggling it.

Oh no.

"Jon..." I warned. "Don't you dare..."

"One last chance." He warned. I bared my teeth at him threateningly. He growled and kissed my cheeks before attacking me with tickles.

"JON STOP!" I cried through the giggles. "NOT IN FRONT OF OUR BABY!"

"I'm sure Hector doesn't mind." Jon teased, continuing his tickling attack.

"FINE YOU WIN, YOUR MAJESTY!" I shouted. Jon triumphantly howled.

"Say it..." Jon demanded.

"You would've claimed me no matter what." I said, rolling my eyes. Jon hoisted himself up and helped me up as well, brushing grass from his pants.

"You're such a douche, your majesty? I huffed. Jon growled.

"You know I don't like you calling me that." He said. I smirked.

"I only call you that when I'm pissed, have you noticed, King *Jonathon*?"

"Unfortunately."

Just then, we heard a bunch of screams somewhere west. Jon and I perked up.

"RUN!" We heard a high pitched shout, accompanied by a bunch of other females screaming. Howls followed. Their voices were accompanied by thundering paws and feet across the forest floor.

"My team's about to win!" I cried excitedly, pushing past Jon and running towards base camp. Jon ran as well. When we made it to the tent, the others were excitedly craning their necks to see who had the flag.

Even Valeen seemed to be in a good mood.

It would take a long time before she would be very comfortable with being around a lot of people. She still flinched whenever the men got too loud, but Patrick's presence reassured her. He was totally smitten.

"THERE THEY ARE!" General Cra shouted.

I grabbed my binoculars and stared at the running forms. I gasped.

"One of the boys has the flag!" I cried. General Cra pumped his fist in triumph. I could see Patrick grabbing another pair of binoculars.

"WAIT THAT BLONDE GIRL SNATCHED IT FROM HIM!" Patrick shouted.

The excitement grew as we watched them run towards us. There were a few skirmishes, and just as the boys were about to be victorious, a brown wolf lunged and captured the flag between its teeth.

The wolf came barreling down base camp and knocked the tables down. We didn't have time to react as the wolf shifted to reveal a naked teenage girl clutching a red flag tight to her chest.

"We won." She croaked. The rest of the boys and girls ran towards base camp and skidded to a halt. The girls screamed in happiness, jumping around. The boys were happy for them, whooping and clapping heartily. I immediately put a blanket around the naked girl.

"Well I'll be!" General Cra roared in laughter. "The girls won! Great run, though boys."

Looking at the boys, they didn't seem to be too preoccupied by their loss. They celebrated alongside the girls. It was so endearing to watch.

"Congratulations, ladies! You'll certainly blow those panelists away." I grinned, hugging each of my girls.

"Thank you so much, Princess Serena!" They chorused. I waved their thanks away.

"That was all you, girls. Well done!" I said, my eyes brimming with tears. "Come, let's get you all fed."

"Does this mean we'll go with you across the border?" One of the girls excitedly asked.

"Wait, what? Who told you about that?" I asked, frowning.

"Well, what else is our prize gonna be?" Another girl shrugged. I threw my head back in laughter.

"You each get gift certificates for ice cream. Claim it after your evaluation." I winked. They all groaned. "Sorry girls, you're still fifteen. I can't babysit you guys across the border."

The girls and boys continued talking animatedly about their adventure in the forest. It was an lovely sight, seeing them all united. If they were our future, then we didn't have anything to worry about.

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"Who did you have in mind, love?" Jon asked, thumbing through the pages of names of wolves with silver ranks or higher.

"Hmm...let's see. I need people who I'm comfortable with—people who understand how I work. I was thinking my friends Jane and Christopher, they have silver ranks. Melanie and Paolo can run the operation back in Alpha Adam's territory, we're gonna need eyes and ears where we can't see." I murmured, pulling out my friends' files.

"I think that's a good idea." Jon said. "Your friends are loyal to you. They'll keep you safe."

"I also want Priya Patel." I said, fishing her file out. I opened the folder and saw her pretty, familiar face. I suddenly remembered how she held me together during the claiming, and how she offered to hold my earrings.

"The Alpha's daughter? Really?" Jon curiously asked.

"She's a tough one—silver rank. Unmated, seems like I would've won *that* part of the bet." I chuckled, giving Jon her file. Jon rolled his eyes. .

"Alright. She's good in close combat, I'll give her that." Jon nodded. "I'll have them in Lightwing by tomorrow for the briefing."

"Which of your men will you send with me?" I asked, hesitant about the answer.

"We agreed three of my men, right?"

"Yeah, I thought about that..." I sheepishly said.

"Serena..." Jon warningly said.

"Hear me out. Christopher's a male. Those women probably have a fear of males, so we should at the very least have an equal number of males and females."

Jon sighed, but thankfully he nodded understandingly.

"Fine then. Darien. You have good rapport with him, and I trust him with your life. Agent Ba'yon too—he knows the terrain of the north better than anyone else except for Valeen."

"You're giving me one of your best agents? Are you sure?"

"You're the Queen, Serena. If I could, I'd send a battalion with you." He harshly exhaled. "But even I know that's a bad idea."

"Thank you for trusting me with this, Jon. Not every King...heck, not every male would allow their mate this." I said, cupping my hand on his cheek. I hummed, thinking about how much I loved and appreciated him, and I channeled it through our bond so that he felt it.

I wanted him to know that I loved him wholeheartedly. So much.

"Please promise that you'll come back to me." He said, leaning into my touch.

"I will *always* come back to you." I said, squeezing myself in between him and the table. "You're my mate, my King.My future is with you, my life is with you."

He smiled, and once again I felt those butterflies erupt in my stomach. How the hell was he so dreamy? Even a year after our claiming, he still made me feel giddy inside.

He ran his fingers across my hand, stopping just where my engagement ring was.

"Last chance—run away to the human world with me and start anew?" He teased, leaning in so that our lips were barely brushing. I gulped, feeling the sparks between us flutter. My cheeks turned red, and goosebumps ran in the back of my neck. Jon's finger trailed up and down my arm.

"Oh...I...Jon...come on..." I murmured, looking down to avoid eye contact—he was looking at me way too intensely. I felt his warm lips press against mine. I moaned into the kiss, snaking my arms around his neck.

Jon's strong arms crushed my form to his and he put his hands on my bum and lifted me up, wrapping my legs around his waist. He trailed kisses down my neck and pushed all the papers off the desk, setting my down. He fumbled with the buttons on the back of my dress and I tried to get his pants unfastened.

"Jon...we have...work...to do..." I tried to bite back a moan as his hands roamed my body.

"The king demands your attention, my queen." He growled against my skin.

Holy shit

I threw my head back and let myself enjoy this intimate moment with my mate. War was coming, and I needed to feel my mate's skin against mine to reassure myself that everything would be all right.

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"Thank you for being here on such short notice." I exhaled nervously. I stood beside Valeen as she scanned a map of the north. I inwardly smiled; she was definitely doing so much better. When she first got here she was extra skittish that I wondered how she ever got the guts to escape her father.

She revealed her father had been poisoning her mind. He taught her that normal wolves would always look at rogues as scum, and that she could never have a place south of the border. By attempting to contact us, she had risked condemnation and rejection from both sides.

Brave.

When will I get the chance to prove my bravery?

Slowly, she was realizing that no one in the palace meant her harm—well, not with Patrick always hulking beside her ready to take out any perceived threat.

"She's angry. She says I've brought her to a place where she's unwelcome. How do I convince her otherwise?" Patrick asked, growling as he put his head in his hands.

"Just let her continue with her therapy. It's gonna take time." I said, comfortingly putting my hand on his shoulder.

"She wasn't like this when it was just the two of us, hiking in forests and on the boat..." Patrick murmured frustratedly.

"She's been taught all her life that we all want to hurt her. She was probably surprised by how you treated her—probably why she fell in love with you." I smiled.

"I don't want her to be like this."

Whenever Patrick wasn't around, she seemed to look around nervously, as if an animal would maul her anytime. But now, she seemed calmer—maybe it's because the objective of this meeting was hopeful and close to her heart.

If only the other wolves in the room would stop staring at her but thankfully Valeen didn't notice.

"I've asked you all here because I chose you to be a part of a very special team..." I started. They all sat up, interested. From the corner of my eye, I saw Valeen make adjustments to the map with a pencil.

"As you all know, all warriors head North just after the claiming ceremony. This mission, however, will require you all to miss the ceremony. I've run it by Patrick and he's arranging all the necessary paperwork with the tribunal to allow this..." I said. I looked at Jon, who only gave me an encouraging smile.

"Valeen's statement included details about a den where rogue females are kept prisoner and raped to breed more wolves for Vanir Vanaheim's army. Lightwing has been aware of this mistreatment for almost a year, but thanks to Valeen, we can now take action."

"While the fighting is going on in the central and western borders here..." I pointed at the scale model in the middle of the table. "I will be leading a team east, across the border to rescue children and she-wolves from this den. I'm hoping you will all join me."

I paused to hear their reactions.

There was a quick silence, followed by a chorus of talking. Questions were being thrown, and I didn't know where to start.

"QUIET!" Jon roared, causing everyone to shut up. "Your Queen is speaking."

There was a chorus of murmurs saying *sorry, your majesty*. Jane slowly raised her hand.

"I'm sorry, you want us all to head to this den *across the border*, and take these females to safety...all of us?" Jane asked.

"Melanie and Paolo will be running to operation from base camp in Alpha Adam's territory, relaying our movements to Jon and the generals. In case anything happens to our maps, they'll be our eyes and ears. Jane, Christopher, Priya, Agent Ba'yon, and Darien—you will all be going with me to do the actual rescuing."

Silence reigned. My friends looked at each other and I knew what they were thinking. They were thinking about the girl a year ago frightened by the prospect of being sent to war. That girl was not a princess. She was barely even an Alpha's daughter. But she was still their friend.

However, I saw something else in their eyes that made my confidence soar: pride.

"How many females are there?" Darien asked. I looked at Valeen..

"Twenty fertile ones, three sick ones." Valeen murmured. "When the war begins, my father will have all the children sent to the nurturing den as well in case reinforcements are needed."

"Wait, where do the children usually stay?" Christopher asked.

"Until they turn eighteen? Here." She pointed at a cave in the deep north where there was eternal winter. Christopher swore under his breath.

I spoke up.

"I realize this is a lot to ask, and you are all entitled to say no, but I have known about the state of these females for a long time now and I have constantly kept myself from just running north and rescuing them on my own. But war..." I looked to Jon and somehow the sight of him inspired more courage in me. "War requires strategy and this is the best we've come up with."

There was silence.

"You will all have to miss the claiming ceremony, but I promise you we will all survive to make it to the next one. Our convoy leaves for Alpha Adam's pack in two days. Then we wait until the generals give us the go."

Valeen gave me the revised map and I passed it on to them. "Our route."

"Paolo and I will stay in Alpha Adam's pack?" Melanie asked.

"I need you to keep us updated on what's happening in the thick of danger. If some of Vanir Vanaheim's men are relocating to the nurturing den, we have to be informed." I said.

"And it's just going to be the six of us actually trekking across the border?" Darien asked. He looked at his bronze bracelet, nervously staring at the others' silver ones.

"Yes. A smaller group will attract less attention." I said. "Jon was adamant that you come, Darien."

Darien was surprised, and bowed down respectfully to Jon.

"We're just...teenagers..." Jane murmured. Darien and Agent Ba'yon chuckled. "Can we do this?"

"The King seems to think so." I winked at Jon.

"You're on board with this your majesty?" Agent Ba'yon asked.

Jon took a deep breath and addressed everyone. The talking suddenly came to a halt and everyone looked to their king.

"Protect the Queen at all costs—I am trusting you all to take care of the most precious thing in my life. Bring her back to me safe, and I will make sure you are all handsomely rewarded." Jon gravely said.

"Are you with me?" I hesitantly asked.

One by one, they said their yes's. I sighed in relief.

"We leave for the Northern Pack in two days—5:30 am sharp. Pack light." I said, putting my hand over my quickly beating heart.

This is really happening.

A/N
We're almost there. Who else is sad to see Jon and Serena go so soon?

Much love!

Continue to next part