

## Epilogue I

Serena Lancaster

Location: Somewhere beyond the border.

I stared at the twinkling stars, silent as Jane and Priya counted our remaining weapons a few feet behind me. We were camped out in a hidden cave that luckily provided a vantage point of outline of the nurturing den: a mass of rough spun tents connected to a large cave.

Time was running against us, we couldn't stay North of the border for too long with a war going on. We had crossed over a night ago and had thus far only encountered a few lone rogue patrols, all of whom attacked us. Thankfully we managed to dispatch them without drawing too much attention. But I knew our luck was running out, anytime now word could reach Vanir Vanaheim about our group infiltrating his territory and then we'd be goners.

We were constantly on the move. We had spent the entire day walking towards the den with Agent Ba'yon leading us.

The more we trekked north, the more cell service became scarce. Communication with base camp had been virtually impossible for a few hours now.

Before we left, Valeen had given us a rough sketch of what the den looked like from the inside. Christopher and Darien had gone scouting the territory an hour ago, and were expected to be back in the cave soon.

I was worried that something might have gone wrong.

As if sensing my fears, Priya slid up beside me and gave me a hug.

"Don't worry, Christopher and Darien are two of the most resourceful people I've ever met. They'll be back." Priya comforted.

"I know..." I sighed. "I can't help but worry."

"I understand." She said. She was silent for a few minutes before giving a soft laugh. "You know, I never thought holding your earrings last year would have led to this." I grinned, the memory of that night still fresh in my mind as if it had been yesterday.

I stared at Priya admiringly. She had already proven herself to be an agile fighter, having saved my life just a few hours ago from a rogue who had almost clawed my innards out. I could see a haunted look in her eyes, though. That had been her first kill.

She would never be the same again. None of us would be.

Suddenly, a rustling was heard and I snickered, immediately feeling relief when I recognized Christopher and Darien's scents.

"Are you guys okay?" I hurriedly asked.

"Yeah." Christopher grunted, warming himself up by the small bonfire.

"How's the den?" Jane asked, coming up to us.

"I make ten males at the most, they look weak and unrested. We won't have any trouble getting those females out." Darien confidently said.

"I'm afraid that won't be the problem." Agent Ba'yon said, jumping down from his place at a ledge near the roof of the cave. He had been reaching towards the top tinkering with his phone and ham radio trying to communicate with Melanie and Paolo back in base camp.

"What do you mean?" I asked. This wasn't good. Agent Ba'yon was usually calm and composed. He looked rattled. My heartbeat started slowing as we waited for him to speak.

"Princess Valeen mentioned twenty females? Most likely they'll be weak and won't be able to run." Agent Ba'yon started.

"Run? We don't need to run! We'll just take the northeast trails so that the river can mask our scents!" Jane remarked.

"We're behind schedule. We should have the females by now, getting back to the border!" Agent Ba'yon frustratedly said.

"So there's been a delay, that's expected of any mission." I hissed. "What's wrong?"

"Base camp thinks we have them already. They think we're on schedule. I heard them on the ham radio." Agent Ba'yon explained.

"So? Tell them we aren't. That's why you were up there, right? To get cell service?" Jane demanded.

"I didn't get cell service, only a one way listen on the radio. I'm afraid..." He gulped. "I'm afraid there's no way to communicate with them."

Oh no.

I tried to calm myself and sound reassuring.

"So? We'll be a day or two late. No big deal." I shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant even though my heart was about to leap from my chest. Agent Ba'yon shook his head.

"That's not all. Queen Serena, we have a huge problem." He said, and the air suddenly became thick and tense. "The Generals have ordered the borders to be shut in exactly forty-eight hours. There's been an outbreak of a deranged, mutated wolf or something...like a deadly, contagious disease. I heard our contacts saying that we could get infected, or we might not be able to get back in time." a

"In time? In time for what?" Jane asked, her eyes widened in disbelief.

"In time for the borders to be shut." Agent Ba'yon patiently repeated, his voice laced with fear. "We still have troops and agents across the border. Forty eight hours is ample time for them to get back. Whoever's beyond the border after that is on their own, at least for the foreseeable future."

Shut the borders? With us still up north?

"That's preposterous! Jonathon would never shut the borders until I was safe across them!" I scoffed. "Even if there was a zombie apocalypse!"

Of course he wouldn't.

I tugged on our bond incessantly, reaching through our marks. Jon, can you hear me?

"That may be, your majesty, but the warriors don't know about this mission." Agent Ba'yon said.

"Then the King should tell them!" Christopher said. My face paled when I realized that that wasn't a viable solution.

"No." I whispered. "Too risky. If they knew, they'd all go North to get me. I'm the Queen, and if the tribunal gets even an inkling that I'm here, they'll send a whole battalion. And that will get the attention of Vanir Vanaheim, he'll follow and he might get to us first. No, this mission still has to be kept secret."

I need options. I need solutions. I need Jon's brain.

"Wait, the king thinks we're on schedule? Is there any way to inform him otherwise?" Darien asked.

"Again, no cell service. A lot of our tech got busted during last night's scuffle with that stray rogue. I could fashion a communicator, but it would take at least a day." Agent Ba'yon frustratedly said. a

Jon, I know you can hear me! My wolf perked up and started pawing at our mate bond.

"We can send a raven? That's how Valeen communicated with you when she was still here, right?" Christopher offered.

"Snowfall. I haven't seen any birds since we got here." Priya growled, looking up at the sky.

"What if they just reopen one part of the border when we get there? I mean, the watchmen who let us pass are in on the secret, right?" Jane demanded.

"After the borders are shut, they're ordered to shoot on sight no matter what. Even if the King ordered lookouts for us, it's still a risk—who knows? The warriors or watchmen might get paranoid. We can't barrel through open fire long enough for them to recognize us." Agent Ba'yon quietly said, staring straight into the fire.

"Wait, they can't shut the borders until we get there! They can't!" Priya hissed, as if it was the most absurd, preposterous thing in the world.

"The orders have already been given. This outbreak is serious and they don't want it crossing the border to infect our army. Already our troops are being quarantined. In forty eight hours the borders will be shut, and if we arrive one second late, they're ordered to shoot on sight." Agent Ba'yon gravely said. a

Motherfucker.

My frustration grew as I continued to tug on our bond, and with no response to hang on to, I could feel the burden rest entirely on my shoulders.

Jon and I haven't been mated long enough for us to practice communicating across long distances. And even if we were, such a thing was truly rare among mated couples.

We were on our own.

Give me options.

"Can't we split up? Two people can go back to tell them there's a delay or something." Christopher suggested, his voice hurried and panicky.

No.

"I'm not taking the risk. We could run into rogues. We are not splitting up!" I adamantly said, the alpha command leaking into my voice.

"So what does this mean?" Jane fearfully asked. "Should we head back now? Wait for a more opportune time?"

"No. If we go back, a lot of variables could change that would make another attempt impossible. Plus, there's no way Jon's letting me out of his sight." I stubbornly said, my mind quickly delving into all possible solutions. "It's now or never."

"Serena, we can't..." Jane began but Darien cut her off.

"So what do we do, Queen Serena?" Darien asked. The whole cave fell silent and everyone looked at me expectantly. I stared into the fire.

I took a deep breath and looked at Agent Ba'yon. He gulped when he saw my determined face, and as if surrendering to my will, he spoke.

"We stick to the plan." Agent Ba'yon quietly said. I nodded my assent.

"What?" They all chorused in disbelief. I silenced them with a quick wave of a hand. This was my moment. I was the commander of this unit and they were all waiting for me to give my orders.

Time to earn my place as Queen.

"Agent Ba'yon, set the timer. We have forty eight hours to get to the border, right?" I asked.

"Yes. It's a day and a half trek back to the border at most, and that's assuming we don't get into any fights." He said, unfurling a large map and pointing out directions.

"We'll make it work." I said confidently, hardly daring to believe my own words.

"Wait, so what's the plan?" Priya asked, her eyes eagerly looking at me.

They waited with bated breath, looking at me expectantly. I squared my shoulders and stared them down.

"Grab every weapon you can carry. We are getting those females now and you all better pray to the fucking Goddess we make it to the border in time."

One last time, I tugged on our bond.

Just then, a spark rippled through my veins. My wolf perked up and incessantly began to yip. I felt a surge of confidence rush through me as the mating bond zinged with energy.

Jon?

My lips curled into a smile as I watched my teammates prepare themselves to finish this mission. I was ready to lead them into this.

Wait for me Jon. I'll be back like I promised. a

**Continue to next part**