

## Cafeteria Incident

KELANI POV

"You should totally skip orientation," groaned Riley, helping me arrange my clothes in the wardrobe she made available.

An hour had passed since I stepped into the room, and we were unpacking my things. Riley volunteered to help, but she also took the opportunity to talk my ears off.

I guess I should be grateful; at least, she shared some information about the school's traditions and off-limits areas, although not in much detail.

Unlike Lia, who might smother me with a pillow while I slept, I was lucky to have Riley as a roommate.

The room Riley and I shared was more spacious than the one back home. Combining my room with the one my dad shared with my stepmother would barely match it.

On the wall near Riley's bed hung a painting of a starry night, featuring a woman holding a torch with a wreath around her neck and a crescent moon-shaped crown on her hair.

My side of the room was devoid of paintings; maybe Riley left it that way- she might have assumed I would flip if she touched it, which I wouldn't have minded. Her choice was unique, emitting a strange vibe that suited her well.

"Lani," Riley nudged me, and I let my gaze leave the computer that sat on her desk.

"Yes?" I raised a brow.

"You're not even listening to me," she pouted, sitting on my bed.

"Why should I skip orientation? It's how I'll get to know the school. I'm not great with locations, and I don't want to miss it," I said.

Riley snorted. "You're just like everyone else."

"Who are 'everyone else?'" I creased my brows, placing my last belongings on top of the wardrobe before sitting on the swivel chair near the desk beside my bedside.

"The goody-two-shoes, the 'do everything the headmaster wants' kind of people, the annoying nerds, and, might I add, the highest hypocrites," Riley wrinkled her nose.

"Are they bad?" The only description she got right about me was the goody-two-shoes and doing everything the headmaster wants. I wasn't a rebel by nature, and I didn't want to be.

Riley rolled her eyes, scoffing. "Please, don't get me started."

She then came towards me, squatted, and gripped my hand, saying, "I can be your tour guide. I'll take you to places Mrs. Anna will never show you, and trust me, I'm the best at this."

"If I'm skipping orientation, where will I be?" I didn't know exactly where she wanted me to be, but it seemed better than orientation.

"Cafeteria," her dark brown eyes twinkled, highlighting the excitement.

"Just to go to the cafeteria, I need to skip orientation?" I asked in disbelief.

"Anywhere but orientation, and there's nothing 'just' about the cafeteria," she said. "You should freshen up; I'll pick out some clothes for you."

Riley pulled me up and shoved me into the bathroom. I stepped out a while later, wrapped in only a towel, to find Riley had changed her clothing.

Instead of the mini grey tartan skirt, fishnet stockings, white packet shirt, and high boots she had worn earlier, she was now in a floral print knee-length A-shaped gown with spaghetti-thin straps. Her hair was curled, and she had subtle makeup on her face. She grabbed a varsity jacket from her bed and put it on.

I frowned as she swirled, "Is that legal? I mean, it's the cafeteria. Aren't you supposed to abide by the rules of wearing the uniform in a school environment?"

"Perks of being from one of the founding families. I can bend the rules whichever way I desire," Riley shrugged.

It didn't look like it was her first time doing so, and I guessed she broke the rules a lot.

"I picked that out for you; you should change." She pointed to blue skinny jeans and a polka-dot top she had laid aside for me.

"I'm not one of the founders," I started shaking my head, but she cut me off.

"Hey, you're with me. Let's call it a roommate benefit. No one is going to trouble you unless they want to get on my bad side," Riley said, and I nodded.

It wasn't like I had many choices anyway. I was sure if I didn't wear it, she was going to force me into it.

After I finished dressing up, Riley practically dragged me out of the room towards the cafeteria. When we reached the entrance, I halted, suddenly nervous.

"Why are we here again?" I asked her.

"Are you kidding me?" Riley snorted.

"What?" I asked her. If she had told me the reason we came here, I believe I wouldn't have asked again.

"It's the Mystic Delights. You wouldn't want to miss it for anything in the world, and it only happens quarterly," she said.

"What is that?" I asked her, confused.

"That's all the more reason you shouldn't miss it. Come on," she grasped my hand, pulling me inside.

The cafeteria was near the residential hall, not on the school grounds. I wondered why it wasn't placed within the school premises. Even though the walk from the residential hall to the school grounds took no more than ten minutes, it still struck me as weird.

Not many students would want to make such a long trek when they get hungry

Walking around several tables to find a suitable place to sit, Riley finally stopped at a table just before the largest one. Many students were already seated, and their eyes turned to me.

"Hi, everyone. This is Kelani, my roommate. Be nice to her," Riley said, stressing the last sentence.

"Hi, Kelani."

"Can I call you Lani?"

"Yes, hi," I smiled, waving back. I let out a breath. I had thought I was going to get rejected, as they seemed very intimidating, but then again, it wasn't okay to judge a book by its cover.

"Is she a part of the coven?" a girl with pigtails and chubby cheeks asked.

"Oh, no, she's not one of us. She's a wolf girl. But that doesn't matter. Does it?" Riley raised a brow.

"It doesn't," the girl said, glancing at my side. "We are one after all."

"We are," Riley agreed.

I let my eyes wander around the cafeteria. It was a large hall that could house thousands of people. I wondered how many people were present here.

The cafeteria was a simple yet welcoming space, had large windows that let in ample natural light. The aroma of various foods filled the air, creating an inviting atmosphere. I saw many of the food served but I didn't recognize any. I guess that was what Riley meant as the Mystic Delight.

Also, I noticed the seating arrangement was kind of clique-like. At the center of the room was a large, fashionable round table with very few people gathering around.

Unlike the table I was currently sitting at, where a few students were in uniform, like the others, I believed because they weren't part of the founding families as Riley had said, the people at the center table were all in casual clothes, fashionable, and, might I add, extraordinarily beautiful.

I saw Lia there as well, and the boy from earlier.

"Who are they?" I whispered as Riley leaned into me.

"The Mystic Elites," she said, her voice matching mine.

"Are they like the popular kids?" I asked. It seemed like it, but then again, the vibes they gave off were different.

Riley had the same vibe, and I wondered why she wasn't sitting with them.

"They are much more popular than the popular kids. Think about royalty popular, kids from old money, and members of the founding families," Riley explained.

"Amazing," I muttered, "Why are you not with them?"

"I am my person, and I can sit wherever I please," she said.

I opened my mouth to speak further but was cut off by a loud voice.

Wincing, I gazed at the speakers around the whole cafeteria as the voice continued.

"Everyone sticks together, and no one should venture far away from the school ground. A creature infiltrated the school grounds, and we are currently investigating." The voice said, then added, "I repeat, stick together."

The warning was evident, and I wondered who wouldn't want to abide by the rules.

"You'd think the number of layers of protection covering the school is enough to hold any monster; they keep coming in. Jokes on them," a girl from a table near us said.

"Stupid she-wolf," Riley hissed.

I guessed the jibes were for her.

No sooner had she said that, a shriek erupted from one of the students and filled the air.

"What's going on?" Riley muttered.

"What is happening to me?"

"I am aging. Is this some sort of a joke?"

"What happened to my pasta?!"

Several people were talking at once, and the confusion went on for a few seconds.

"Riley..." I turned to my side, hoping to see her near me, but I saw Lia instead.

Confused, I saw Riley was at the far end of the room. I guessed whatever was happening had something to do with us swapping positions.

"You are doing this, are you not, freak?" Lia narrowed her eyes on me.

"What, no!" I shook my head.

"Barrius Luminara, protego hoc locus ab Chimerachronus potentia," Riley yelled, strutting from where she was, with her hands stretched out and her eyes narrowed. (Barrier luminous, protect this place from the power of the Chimerachronus)

"I should be the one doing that!" Lia complained, stomping her feet.

Ignoring her, I concentrated on Riley as she spoke the words again, this time powerfully.

At first, I didn't see the creature. I guess that was what caused the confusion in everyone, but as soon as Riley finished speaking, it became visible.

The most hideous creature I had seen was Krampus - a blend of goat-like features, malevolent aura. But this, I couldn't quite describe it.

From its massive, dragon-like wings to the serpentine tail that trailed behind, it wasn't anything like I had seen before. Its large body was a pattern of intertwining scales, feathers, and fur, reflecting fusions of creatures from different eras.

Sparks of temporal energy crackled along its form. Roaring, it slammed its body into the barrier Riley had created several times, its eyes gleaming with malicious intent.

"Everyone snap out of your thoughts; we need to contain it more. I don't think the spell I did can hold it for much longer," Riley yelled, and that seemed to snap everyone from the daze they were in.

Everyone started working together. I could only watch because I didn't know what to do.

I had only defeated one monster, and I doubted I could stand a chance with this. Besides, the other students looked even more skilled than I was. Also, I guess the fact that I was still trying to find out who I was exactly contributed to it.

Soon enough, everything returned to normal. The creature wasn't defeated; I wondered why.

"It was returned to the sender. The chimerachronus is a special creature that only comes for certain students. It isn't the first time, and I doubt it is the last time. But now, we have no idea who is special amongst us. Perhaps we will later," Riley said.

"A lot of things happen here," I said.

"It surely does. Also, it is the best place anyone of us can ever be because it is even more dangerous in the outside world," she said.

My ears perked up as I listened to some of the jokes the students were making. It was over, but then, it didn't feel as though it was to me.

Everything felt off. Lia was watching me. From the corner of my eyes, I saw her glancing towards me at intervals. But she wasn't the only one watching me. Something else, or was it someone else? I couldn't tell, but I felt their eyes on me.