Chapter 17

A/N

Hi all! This chapter is going to give you more insights into what kind of world these werewolves occupy. It's not a exactly a great world to live in.

Tell me what you think! Leave comments and votes!

Serena Basco

This was a huge mistake.

I had managed to dig out appropriate training wear from the depths of my closet—I only had one good tracksuit and it would have to do. I tried not to show Jon how nervous I was, but I think I was failing.

Is it possible that 15-year-old she-wolves could smell fear?

We were in a small gym decked with training and exercise equipment. There were about a dozen girls in front of me. They were sitting cross-legged on the floor, idly chatting with each other looking bored. I had been staring at them from behind the door for about five minutes until Jon finally nudged me inside.

When they saw me, they immediately sat up. Their eyes zoomed in on my bracelet and I immediately felt self-conscious. They stayed silent, just blinking up at me in awe.

One girl decided to break the silence, a tall, curly haired brunette. She stood up and motioned for the others to do so also. They gave awkward bows before the room went silent again.

"Hi." I said, gulping. They all looked up at me expectantly. I winced, turning to Jon for support. He gave me an encouraging smile before taking a step back.

"I'm Serena...Prince Jon's mate...but I guess you already knew that..." I mumbled. They all looked at each other awkwardly.

They were probably thinking, this is the Gold Ranked female?

I took a deep breath and straightened myself. I walked over to stand in front of them.

"My mate told me you haven't been progressing with your training? I'd like to help. Would you all please take a seat?" I asked. I sat cross-legged on the green mat and motioned for them to follow. They gave each other awkward, pointed looks before following suit.

"What are your names?" I asked. They stayed silent. I rolled my eyes "Come on, guys. It's only gonna get more awkward so you might as well just introduce yourselves."

They chuckled gently, and I smiled. I looked over to Jon and he gave me a thumbs up. I grinned.

"I'll start. My name is Serena Basco, I'm from Eastern Claw, my father's an alpha and I got this..." I motioned to my bracelet. "When I was 16."

One by one, they started introducing themselves. They were daughters of guards, warriors, and palace staff and they all lived in the nearby town. I felt the tension dissipate and I sighed in relief.

"So you're all gonna go to your Evaluation next year?" I asked. They all nodded.

"Okay...well, if you have any questions about the Evaluation, I'd be happy to answer them. But first, I'd like to know why you're having trouble in your training. General Craft is in charge of you guys, right?" I pressed. I saw them look pointedly at each other, some motioning slightly to Prince Jon.

"Oh, don't worry about Jon...he's the one who suggested I take over...so whatever your issues were with the General, hopefully I can make up for it." I soothed. They visibly relaxed.

One of the girls, Peyton, raised her hand.

"He just...screams at us. I mean, it seems to work on the boys...they like him..." Peyton started. "But most of the time, we can't even understand what he's saying." They all murmured in agreement.

Another girl raised her hand. I nodded at her.

"Also, he just teaches us to just attack...be on the offensive...I mean, that's great but we'd like to study strategy and defense too. They get to play war games and have teamwork exercises." She shrugged. I heard a chorus of yeahs.

"Do the boys get to study strategy?" I asked.

"Yep. They said so." A short, blonde girl said. I nodded thoughtfully.

"Well that's unfair. I mean, I don't know much about fighting strategy...we did war games a few times back home but I don't like the idea of girls not learning the same things boys do." I indignantly said. They all nodded eagerly.

"We told him we wanted to learn, but he said it's not for girls." Peyton rolled her eyes. I frowned. I did not like this General, and looking at Jon, he seemed surprised and disgusted at these revelations.

"But you're training for the Evaluation. The Evaluation is the same for boys and girls." I frowned. They all murmured in agreement.

"Okay. Let me tell you all something. Girls can be just as strong as boys. Yes, my bracelet is evidence that the werewolf world could use a bit of feminism...I mean, don't even get me started on that sexist Claiming ceremony." I grumbled. Once I got started, there was no stopping me. I was glad Jon was letting me take the lead, that he wasn't refuting my statements.

"This General Craft seems to have missed the women's lib movement, but I haven't." I said. There was a moment of silence, and then the girls started clapping and cheering.

I was surprised, and instinctively I looked at Jon who in turn was smiling at me. He looked so proud, and I felt the mate bond between us glow much more.

"So that does mean you'll train us?" A girl piped up. They looked at me expectantly, and I almost swooned at the puppy dog eyes they were giving me.

I turned back to them and bit my lip thoughtfully. I sighed, hearing of their situation, I knew they needed a new and better trainer. I wasn't sure if that should be me, but the way Jon and I talked last night, I think I could do it. But I needed to be honest with these girls first, they at least deserved that.

"Look...I don't know what you girls have heard about me, other than the fact that I have a Gold Rank...but if you want me to train you, I wanna tell you about me." I began. They looked at me curiously.

"I...I didn't do well in training back in Eastern Claw." They looked at me in disbelief. "In fact, if there was a situation like this, I probably would have skipped it. I skipped training. A lot." I let out a shaky breath.

"B...but you have a...how..." One of the girls stuttered out. The girl beside her elbowed her in the ribs, asking to her keep quiet.

"I guess, like you, I didn't have a trainer who inspired me to progress. Don't get me wrong, the Evaluation panelists aren't idiots...I do know how to fight. If you'll let me, I'll help you." I finally said. They all looked at each other hesitantly.

One girl grinned and nodded.

"Well, it's not like we have anything to lose." She trilled. The others snickered under their breath. I let out a hearty laugh.

"That's the spirit. Don't worry; I'm not gonna let you guys be left behind. The next time there's a war game, we'll make it girls versus boys and we will win." I winked at them. They all cheered, whooping loudly.

"Okay...now that we have that out of the way. Do you guys have any questions about The Evaluation?" I asked. Immediately, they all spoke up at the same time. I couldn't understand a word.

"Whoa, whoa, one at a time." I chuckled. They quieted down, and began to raise their hands.

"Is it true that the panel is tougher on girls?" Someone asked. I bit my lip thoughtfully.

"Honestly, there are girls out there who are better warriors than me and they only get a Silver Rank. Maybe that goes back to the sexism...the last Gold Rank female lived a hundred years before me. I think yeah...girls do have a disadvantage. That only means we have to work twice as hard, even if we shouldn't have to. Even the panel is unevenly matched—3 men and 2 women." I shrugged. I wasn't going to sugarcoat it—these girls had a huge roadblock in front of them if they wanted to be taken seriously as warriors.

"How long does The Evaluation last?" Someone asked.

"Most of them take about ten to twenty minutes, then the deliberations take another five to ten. My deliberation took an hour. I actually thought something had gone wrong—that there wasn't a rank fit for me." I let out a shaky breath.

"How do they judge the fighting?" Another girl asked. I smirked at this.

"Okay, let me drop some knowledge. The biggest misconception is that the panel only judges fighting skill—that's what you all think, right? If you actually read up on the old, ancient laws of The Evaluation, the actual phrase reads to judge a werewolf's value." I explained.

How did I know this? Well, I had gotten a bit paranoid over my Evaluation, seeing as I frequently skipped training. In the months leading up to the test, I kept sneaking into the my father's library to read up on the history of the Evaluation—that maybe there was some secret loophole that could get me out of it or something.

"Value?" They all murmured.

"Yes, but I guess over time that has been convoluted or even bastardized to just simply mean 'fighting strength'. The Evaluation was created to know how useful a werewolf was in the pack system and hierarchy. This was essential because there were no royals back then to create order amongst squabbling packs." I said. Their mouths hung open in awe.

"So it's not supposed to be about who can kill better?" One girl asked in disbelief. "That's what General Craft said!"

I growled, feeling my hackles rise.

"Girls, listen to me. Killing is an awful, awful thing. You should not be judged on your ability to take another person's life—that is barbaric and we have evolved past that. Bloodshed is not something to be proud of." I said. They all nodded, murmuring quietly

"Any other questions?" I asked. They all shook their heads. "Great. I'll see you guys on Wednesday? We can train MWF for like an hour after school? How long does General Craft train you?"

"He spends like thirty minutes on our fighting. The rest of the hour he just lets us run laps." One girl shrugged.

"Yeah I'm definitely gonna need to work out a schedule." I murmured to myself. "See you all on Wednesday at four?"

They all agreed, and one by one they all exited the gym. When the last girl went out and the door slammed behind her, I turned to Jon and smiled.

"How did I do?" I asked. Jon leaned in and gave me a peck on the cheek.

"You did well, mate." He said, his voice deep and husky. I knew what that meant—he was aroused. How in the hell did all of that arouse him?

Maybe it was me taking charge and showing Luna qualities.

I didn't even need to show some boob. Kidding.

I turned and wrapped my arms around his waist, hugging him tightly.

"I have no idea how to talk to teenage girls. Teenage girls are the worst—I should know, I still am one." I mumbled.

"You seemed to connect with them. I'm sure you'll do well...I'm just upset, I didn't know what Clayton had been teaching them, I never thought..." Jon sighed.

Clayton.Oh, right. They were good friends.

"Things need to change around here. It's 2017—it's not like women's suffrage was yesterday." I growled under my breath.

"I know, and you're exactly the Princess to enact change." He murmured soothingly.

"You'd let me do that?" I teased. "You didn't mind me saying all those things?"

"Last time I checked we wore the same bracelet." He smirked at me. "I see you as my equal, Serena. Maybe you don't feel it now because you're just starting out but once you get the hang of this...you're technically entitled to as much power as I am."

"Thank you." I gently said. "I don't think we'll ever be equals, though. It's not because I wanna put myself down, but because, well...you're you." I shrugged. He held me tighter.

Silence followed. Something came to my mind, and I slowly detached myself from him.

"I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable when I said those things about killing. I will never change my opinion about it—I hate bloodshed, and killing will never be necessary. But I know you share a different view." I said, looking down. He put a finger under my chin and tilted my head to look at him.

"I don't want you to change who you are, Serena. We don't always have to agree on everything—that's what's gonna make us good rulers someday." He said, looking into my eyes.

Queen. I can't believe I'm going to be Queen.

"Why the hell are you so wise?" I teased. He opened his mouth to respond, but his phone rang.

I took a step back and nodded at him. He looked at me apologetically before he answered.

"Clayton, what is it?" Jon barked at the phone. It seemed he was still pissed at General Craft. I was too. I did not like that man one bit and I haven't even met him.

"No, I'm at the gym. My mate was just talking to the she-wolves." There were murmurs on the other side. "I'll be right there." Jon curtly said.

"Duty calls?" I asked. Jon nodded.

"The agent from the North has arrived. We'll find out more about this defector." Jon sighed.

"Will you tell your father?" I asked.

"There's a war council convening next week, that's when I'll give the update." Jon explained.

"Oh, I see." I murmured. "Well, don't let me keep you."

"Do you want to come with me?" Jon asked. I thought about this. If I saw this General Craft now while I was still pissed, I wouldn't be able to resist throttling him.

Besides, I wanted food.

"Maybe next time, I still have some files to digitize. Is it okay if I make camp at your office? Patrick's in a meeting right now and I can't use his." I shrugged.

"Of course. It's your office too. Do you know where it is?" Jon asked.

"Yeah, but I've never been inside. How do I get in? Is it locked?" I asked. Jon nodded.

"I actually had the code changed to make it easier for you to remember. It's your birthday, 03-01." Jon casually said. I blinked up at him.

"You know my birthday?" I narrowed my eyes. I didn't recall telling him my birthday.

I didn't know his.

"Of course, you're my mate." He said, leaning in to give me a peck on the lips. He gave me a playful wink before exiting the gym, leaving me dazed and flushed.

What a stalker.

A/N

Hope you enjoyed this chapter! Finally, we'll get to see Serena handle some responsibility. Do you think she'll do well?

The next chapter's pretty dark and heavy on the heart, so be warned. The storyline with the war is beginning, so moving forward expect a faster pace with the timeline. Shit's about to get serious.

I really wanna hear from you guys! How are you liking everything so far?

All the best!

Continue to next part