

January 16, 1CR

I walked back into my room and closed the door behind me. My roommate hadn't moved since I had placed her on the bed earlier. I wanted to call Lilia Fairview a fool, but I definitely knew better. When I found Lilia in the street outside of the police station, she had been protecting a group of children for several months. Of the twelve children she had managed to gather into a shelter, two died of starvation, but Lilia had gone without food often to keep them all alive and together. She had proven herself to be quite capable.

This was why it was all the more frustrating to her that she suffered from frequent breakdowns. I had constantly blocked her attempts to leave the colony after her first time back outside; on that particular occasion, a hellhound had bitten her leg before I finally killed it. She went into a state of shock then, too. Not that that was so much a surprise. We called the genetically mutated dogs hellhounds, because they secreted a substance in their saliva much like that of a bombardier beetle. Once the saliva evaporated, the remaining chemical caught fire as it was introduced to oxygen. Lilia had ended up with burns where the dog had bitten her.

I sighed as I surveyed her shaking body. My normal instinct was to wrap my arms around a hurting girl, but I wasn't sure how she would react to that. I settled for the easy chair across the room, pausing only for a moment to grab the book I was currently reading from the shelf. Plutarch's *Lives* was not my favorite, but it was something I hadn't finished before, so I decided to press on. Flipping through the pages dully, I resigned myself to another sleepless afternoon. We only had one bed in the room, and usually there was a schedule we kept to so that both of us had a turn, but Lilia seemed to need rest more than I did today.

Much later, when the sun had finally receded and the sky was turning red, I finally put down my book. I had plans to eat with my sister, but I don't think she would mind if I invited some company to join us while we had dinner. I cleared my throat to get Lilia's attention, but she paid me no mind.

"Lilia, I'm going to get dinner right now. Would you like to join me?" Lilia sat still, looking like a puppet with the strings removed. I gave her a moment to reply, and my eyes turned to the bare bookshelf. My shelf, the lower one, had a few books on it and a small fireproof lockbox. The upper shelf, which should have been Lilia's held only a candle and a small white rose that scented the room. The room looked as though I was the only occupant. I knew that payday had come recently. No doubt if I went to the hall of records, Lilia's half of the payment would be in the book already, despite my constant insistence that I could cover the whole cost. She was always like that. "Well, I'll bring you back something I guess."

"Wait, I'll come with." She said in a small voice after I turned to leave. I walked out the door to give her privacy to change and had to wait only a couple minutes for her to join me out in the hall. Lilia joined me in the hall wearing her best outfit, a slim fitting dress in spring green and brown leather sandals. As always, she wore her hair in a ponytail with an ornamental orchid made of copper, with an onyx set in the middle, tucked behind one of her ears. Her eyes were still red, and her expression still miserable, but at least she had begun to look a bit like herself again.

We walked down the hallway silently; I always had to slow my stride when Lilia came along. It took about five minutes to walk from our little room at the back of the building we essentially had all to ourselves, to the temporary dormitories, where my sister would be staying until she received a room assignment. My sister was waiting outside the door, which was

fortunate because I was pretty sure Lilia couldn't tell her from Eve, and I certainly couldn't enter the girl's half.

"Oh, um, you brought....I'm so sorry, I already forgot your name." My sister did indeed look rather embarrassed as she addressed Lilia.

"Right, I should introduce you. This is Lilia Fairview, and Lilia this is my sister..."

"Minerva. Minerva Marius."

"Pleasure" Lilia was only mumbling her response, but my sister paid it no mind.

"So, cafeteria then? I think I remember how to get there."

"No, I actually eat in my office on the second floor. I have to get work done while I eat or I would never have any free time."

"Your office?" From the disbelief in Minerva's voice, I could tell that she was still having trouble believing that I was an important member of the colony.

"Yeah, I'll make sure they bring us up some food. Lilia, do you remember what the menu was today?"

"Mashed potatoes and bacon or split pea soup."

"Excellent! Some of my favorites." So saying, I lead the way to the grand staircase, less than a few yards away, and went upstairs to the office of the Lord of the Colony. My name was currently on the plaque, though I figured that the post was probably only temporary. My election to the position was not unanimous, and though the position was technically for life, my political opponents were loath to allow me that sort of power, given that I was also grandmaster of the hunters.

The door was open and the light on, but the only person in the room, a woman in her thirties who always wore very businesslike attire, was asleep in one of the easy chairs on the far side of the room. The office was very spacious; it had once been the board room for the school. I had furnished it with an odd collection: a large executive desk, a smaller table, a couple of easy chairs, and a floor to ceiling bookshelf to one side of the room. The wall to the hallway had windows on the entire upper half, but I had covered them with blackout curtains that I kept drawn most of the time. Only when someone seemed nervous around me did I raise them. The windows to the outside remained open almost all the time to get cool air into the stuffy room, since I couldn't rely on the air conditioner to work all the time. On my desk were several piles of paperwork; I groaned as I saw the huge amount of work before me.

"Get up Linne, it's time to get to work." I directed my soft shout at the woman who slept soundly across the room. She stirred only a bit, so I went over and blew into her ear. That succeeded in waking her up, it always did.

"C'mon babe, just five more minutes?"

"Wake up idiot, the Master wants to talk to you." This time Lilia, having found her voice at the spectacle of my personal secretary refusing to wake up, yelled out. "He's not your babe, and you need to finish off some of this paperwork. Besides, poor Minerva is looking scandalized."

My sister did indeed appear to be rather shell-shocked by my familiarity with Linne. "Are you a massive player all of a sudden?" My only response, mirrored by Lilia and Linne, was to laugh. "What? You carry Lilia around like a princess, you flirt with that pretty girl in the hall of

records, and now you wake up this woman by blowing into her ear like some husband from a cheesy romance!”

I cringed as she casually made both of the other girls in the room livid. “Here we go...”

“You did what?!” Linne was the first to blow up at me. For some reason passing my understanding, she always got angry when Minnie was involved.

“You’re seriously gonna go after a girl who has a boyfriend? What the hell is wrong with you? You’re just asking me to punch you in the face!” Lilia wasn’t far behind Linne’s comment. This didn’t really surprise me. Just like Linne, Lilia wasn’t overly fond of me talking to Minnie.

“Besides, why would you go for that underage floozy when you could be flirting with a mature, older woman?” Linne just kept throwing fuel onto Lilia’s fire; the only way I felt I could head off the hysteria was to ask the question that was on my mind.

“Why do you guys only react when I talk to Minnie?”

“What if you decide to replace me as your secretary? What would I do then? I would be out of a job!” Linne’s response was hardly what I was anticipating. It made some sense though; Minnie was very efficient and though Linne was the most important member of the colony’s administration, (not that I’d ever tell her as much) she was always really insecure about her job.

“It’s because you go out of your way to talk to Minnie when you hardly ever talk to me, and we live together.”

Shit was the only thing I could think as Lilia unknowingly unleashed my imminent demise. Both of them had gradually gotten louder as they yelled at me, but that was nothing to

the scream unleashed behind me. **“ANDREW CHRISTIAN BAUMANN!! WOULD YOU CARE TO EXPLAIN WHY THAT GIRL JUST SAID YOU LIVE TOGETHER?”**

“It really is no big deal, I’m telling you. Lilia needed to move out of the dormitories because she screams when she sleeps and I had the only two person room that wasn’t full. It was her decision really, I swear!” My sister steamed even after I gave her my explanation. The only upside was that both Linne and Lilia were frightened enough to stop their tirade against me.

“Don’t worry about it so much Teige, just think about it like the kinsman redeemers from the Bible, like Boaz for instance. Taking care of a poor destitute woman.” Patton had the weirdest timing, as always. “Now that I’m here, what would everyone like to eat tonight?”

“Patton? Where did you come from?”

“From my room. I had just finished reading Job when I realized that it was time for dinner. I heard some yelling, so I figured that tonight was a work while we eat type of night.” He looked at me for confirmation, and I nodded slowly. Unnoticed by the girls, Patton’s hand, which had been resting on the handle of his machete, slid into his pocket. After taking our order, soup for me and Lilia and potatoes and bacon for Minerva and Linne, Patton bustled off to grab our meal. The girls began a quiet banter with Minerva as I examined the stacks on my desk and formulated a plan to knock it all down in one night.

When Patton returned, I turned to each person in to give them a task to do. “Alright, so Patton, please approve these scavenge requests. Linne, please summarize these minutes from the most recent clan meeting. Lilia, could you please draft a letter to the hunters addressing this stupid hierarchy issue. I’ll get done with these disputes and we’ll get this all done tonight so we can go on a trip tomorrow.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“No, thank you though, Minerva. I need people who can read the hunter’s script.”

“Feel free to talk to us though, it’s pretty boring if we just do the paperwork.” Linne’s comment was silly. She loved paperwork, and I held the proof in my hands. The scavenging dispute forms had been summarized with a recommended settlement on a second draft of the reports. Technically, I was supposed to make those myself, but Linne did paperwork when she was bored or nervous. I usually just signed her recommended settlement and gave it back to her. They were alphabetized because of her almost neurotic obsession with order, but she made sure to set aside complicated or important settlements that I had to read through, as opposed to the petty disputes about things like who got a half-credit for finding a hairbrush. I signed the petty disputes quickly and got to the more substantial disputes quickly. Meanwhile, Patton secretly handed me a couple of scavenge request forms under Lilia’s name. Making sure she wasn’t looking, I put them at the bottom of the ‘to shred’ pile on my desk. It made me feel a little guilty, but Lilia had proven that she could be pretty fragile at the worst of times.

“So Marius, I’ve been wondering, how did the hunters get formed?” My sister’s innocent question got attention from all around the room. I had never shared this information, and I was never planning to. I was the only one who knew the story, however, and I felt that history had to be shared amongst the people so it could be learned from. Setting aside a particularly difficult dispute, I sighed. There was no dodging the question this time as I had done before. Perhaps it was time to give people this information.

“Well, I suppose it all began with a man named Drake.”