

Sirius, Book IV
A Slave's War

Comments or Questions?

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Chapter 3

Misty sat perched upon the throne of the queen, feeling very much not like the queen. She had heard some news that was distressing, and was going to have an audience with someone she had not seen in a while who was there to formally deliver this possibly very bad news. This was the side of being royalty, of being in charge that drove Nita to such darker feelings as to be unkind to Alps when she first met him. It was easy to become jaded when all one ever received was bad news. With Alps around, somehow things had gotten better, and Misty hoped some of this bad news would be slow to come while she took over. She adjusted her glasses as the door opened. Leal, the guard that she had met in a more intimate fashion only a night before was the one manning the door.

She might not have given him a second look had the previous night not happened, but there was an appreciative, reassured glance that passed between them. She felt immediately a little bit stronger. It became readily apparent why Nita's attitude had changed so much with Alps. Leal comforted her by just being there. Alps had been Nidaja's most genius tactical move. Perhaps the general had no idea that he would mean so much to the empire as he ultimately did, but the original intent had been sound. He pulled Nita back from her depression. He helped her more than Nidaja likely ever intended.

Now, as the door opened, a black-robed figure entered the room. Leal closed the door, but remained close at hand. A guard had to remain in the room any time the doors were closed for a meeting, even though Misty knew the person well, and did not fear anything but the news they would bring. Her head down already, the dark-robed figure bowed, and then lowered the hood of her cape. It was Alps' childhood friend, Tia. She looked sadly at Misty, who regarded her with sympathy.

"It's true then?" the councilor asked, adjusting her glasses. The grey-furred female regarded the guard in the room, and then looked back to Misty.

"My deepest apologies for being a dark harbinger, Milady... But the rumor which preceded me is the very definition of truth." Tia said, her voice as heavy as her heart appeared to be.

"Then Azia has been murdered?" asked the gold-furred wolf. Tia choked a bit at that. They had been friends and lovers, deeply close. Misty stood up and moved over

to Tia swiftly, wrapping her in her arms. The young girl broke into sobs. She had likely cried like this a great deal coming from Kishu Valley where they had based the Spirits of Silverlight.

"It happened in the night... a coward's quest. I was only out of the room for a moment, and when I came back, the monster was upon her, stabbing and stabbing and stabbing." Tia inhaled deeply, clenching her fists.

"Was the murderer caught?" Misty asked.

"I caught him myself." Tia responded darkly. "And I was foolish. I ended his life before I could find out if he acted alone, or even why it happened. But, I heard him when he was killing her. Saying that too many died to bring the Silverlight their power and that Azia would not forsake them to the crown." Misty gritted her teeth at that. That was a very bad sign indeed.

"So there was discontent within the Spirits of Silverlight itself?" asked the councilor. Leal gritted his teeth as well.

"There were always those within the rank that we knew joined because they wished to remove the queen from power." Tia stood up again, seeming to be distracted from her mourning by the discussion, at least. "Azia did not particularly embrace their ideals, I think, but their support was, at least financially, quite necessary in the early days of our group, you see. The original plans did not consider that Nita would change her policy in dealing with Mannus, and never considered that the Spirits of Silverlight would tolerate the royal house, but things, as you know, changed." Tia sighed, and leaned against one of the columns that ran along either side of the violet-colored carpet that cut its path to the throne.

"But not everyone in the Spirits of Silverlight thought that they had changed. Or else, they were not going to change." Misty reaffirmed.

"Not only that. Azia became aware that there were those who did not care about the resistance against Mannus, which is what our group was originally about, they cared only about removing Nita from power. This makes no sense to us. To have us united against Mannus makes more sense than starting a war against the crown, especially when the opinion of the people was rapidly changing in her favor. Azia ejected four of the highest ranking members of our group, which they said she did not have the power to do. She was the tactical leader, they said, not a political fixture, and she could be removed. She was not afraid, and told them not to even return to Kishu Valley." Misty spoke up sagely.

"It would seem they did. I think it is important that you provide us the names of those individuals who would conspire so against the queen as to kill her allies and destabilize our lands. Now is a very sensitive time. They likely do not even know how fragile things are." Tia nodded, providing Misty with a scroll, which had, as she glanced

over it, a more detailed account of the matter, including the names of those she suspected to be part of the plot against Azia.

"I was not able to gain the... the support of the Spirits of Silverlight before I left." Tia said with a stammer in her voice. "I was forced to flee. They turned against me like animals when it was learned Azia was murdered. They accused me of making a power grab, but I knew that idea was put into their heads by the ones responsible. It was widely known that the four were dismissed, and yet, there they were, in the meeting hall. Azia was a thorn in the queen's side, I know... but this lot... they are more like a dagger in her side, waiting to push into her. They are dangerous. Nidaja and the Queen should be warned, and security around them should be increased tenfold."

"I can go to her villa in the mountains and see to it this is done." Leal stated, bowing reverently to Misty. He had not forgotten his place in her company when the location was public the way Alps tended to, the councilor found.

"I will have you do so later. By cover of darkness, Leal." Misty looked to Tia, shaking her head sadly. "I am deeply sorry that things have come to this. I know it has been hard. It sounds like you have nowhere to go presently, as your home was in Kishu, and if they know that you were aware of these things, that place is not safe for you. You may stay here in the castle for now. I will get this all taken care of. I thank you for bringing us this news, dire though it may be. I do not doubt that we will be able to get it under control. Azia gained support with the impression that the Queen was weak. That illusion has been largely dispelled. It will be hard for them to get support now, and we will act against them first, and spread the news of their betrayal. I am glad that you have been delivered to us alive, Tia, and I commend your ability to escape them, because I can assure you that they did not intend it."

"If it is your will, then, Milady..." whispered the grey-furred lady wolf, pulling her hood back up, "I would retire to the guest quarters for now. I remember its location." She looked about, seeming to try to locate others that she knew. Alps, Nita... Nidaja... All of them were not present for this. Misty frowned. She needed a friend in this, and the place was nearly empty of those she could count on. She had missed by days the ones that she had come to for comfort in the hardest days of her life. Misty would see to her safety in this place. The young lupine turned and ventured back out the way she came, walking slowly, choking back her tears again. It would be a hard time for her, Misty knew. She looked back to Leal, and sighed.

"Never good news, is it?" he asked. "Will I take a missive to the queen's mountain retreat? Or shall I take it to Lunaris, and have him assure its safety, and her majesty's?" he asked.

"Leal..." Misty said in a hushed tone.

"Yes, Milady?" the attentive and energetic grey-furred guard asked, standing tall with determination.

“Lock the door, and come here.” Her words were solid and commanding, something that he had not heard her speak before. The guard did immediately and loyally as told, and came back to her throne, looking through her round glasses, into her green eyes.

“What is it?” he asked. “I know I will be sworn to secrecy. It’s a matter of her highness’ safety.” He stated this, punching at his chest through his chain mail shirt.

“We cannot take warning to the queen.” Misty explained.

“What? Why?!” asked the guard incredulously.

“Because I am unsure of her current location.” Misty answered matter-of-factly. Leal furrowed his brow.

“She’s missing?” he asked, seeming suddenly fearful. “I just get this post, and she’s missing?” Misty waved her hand dismissingly, shaking her head.

“No, she’s not missing, she’s just travelling. She’s with Nidaja and Alps and her friends. I was not kidding when I said things were really sensitive right now. You have heard some funny rumors around the castle, yes?” asked the councilor in a hushed tone. The guard lowered his voice as well.

“Yes, but Master Lunaris has strictly forbidden me from rumor-milling.” The guard bowed again reverently to show that he held himself to a high standard. He was very serious about doing right by the royal house. Misty was pleased to see it. She took his hands in hers.

“Tell me a few of the rumors you have heard?” she asked. He perked up.

“Oh, nothing involving plots or dangers to her majesty! All I speak to here love her!” he barked. Misty smiled wryly.

“Yes, but what *do* you hear?” she asked.

“I don’t know.” The Mountain Grey male thought a moment. “Weird stuff mostly. The kind of things you would expect to hear in a tavern by people with too much time, too much drink, and big imaginations. I haven’t paid it much of a mind.” He leaned against the throne, and then caught himself, seeming appalled that he would do such a thing. He thought a moment as those green eyes scanned him some more. “I heard that there’s hyena’s hanging out in the castle. Asuna, they said. Just walking around unguarded, but no one can prove it, y’know?” Misty smiled at that.

“That’s an interesting one, certainly. Any others?” she asked. Leal wagged his tail, seeming to enjoy making her smile.

“Yes, right. Well, there’s one that said someone got out of a Shadowfall Crystal, which is pretty good drunken babble. They said that the queen is getting married, but that one seemed almost credible because of who was saying it. They said that it was to the guy who killed a bunch of Uruk out in the mountains on the old continent. I hear little things about people and stuff here... Mostly intimate things about what goes on in the gardens when no one’s around. People love those kinds of rumors.” Misty stroked Leal’s ears a bit, which made him beam a wide grin to her.

“Well, more or less, all of that is true.” The councilor said this very mildly. “Those are actually pretty mundane compared to some of the things that are really going on.” The guard stood up again, looking blankly at Misty.

“What? It can’t all be true. The Shadowfall thing...” Misty shook her head.

“That one’s definitely true.” Leal seemed to understand the weight of that.

“And it actually gets bigger than that?” he asked with a sinking tone.

“Nita and Alps and Nidaja have gone with the Asuna who were here to attack ... the enemy... right in his homeland. They have something that will do great damage to the Uruk, and this is a serious, serious opportunity. No one knows where she’s going. She is in more danger just in what she is doing than the Spirits of Silverlight could ever actually pose to her. She has really powerful friends with her and it’s still more dangerous.” Leal rocked side to side slowly.

“Oh dear heavens...” he whispered softly. “So, what is to be done about the attempt against the royal house? If they find out that Nita’s not there at her retreat, they could start saying that the queen’s already gone, and make an attempt at you. Nidaja is away, and the armies are not based in Diera right now. A real attempt to overwhelm the castle might be successful.” Leal paced a bit.

“Right. Which is why you are going to bring me Lunaris. Ask him to find Ceriss and bring her here. The castle is a little safer than you think.” Misty stated, smiling. “For everything this group thinks they know about what is going on, I have a really big surprise for them when they make their move, and I intend to deal with them before they ever get to the castle. Azia was a friend, and Tia was hurt in all of this too. I don’t get to say it often, but it’s time to inflict a bit of preemptive damage. Are you with me, Leal?” Misty asked, leaning over the throne and looking at him. The lupine guard narrowed his eyes and nodded.

“For my entire life, Milady.” He stated this while saluting his leader and rather unexpected lover.

The white-furred former slave stood with his back against the mast of the ship, watching the distant heat-lightning, the orange-colored flashes so distant he could not even see the clouds. It was in the opposite direction that they were going, and the storms, as typical to that area of the ocean, were popping up, raining themselves out, and dissipating. They were not likely to impede the journey of Nidaja's ship. Alps looked around. Everyone was likely below deck, as the sun had set an hour ago, and it was rather calm seas with smooth sailing. One took rest as much as one could on the open water. The world on the waves could be unpredictable.

The young Letai decided to climb up to the top of the mast to see if he could get a better look at the storms, as they flashed, even far distant, so vibrantly. He climbed up to the small crow's nest that capped the mast, hearing the flutter of sails occasionally, and the lapping of water under the keel of the ship. As he pulled himself up to the level of the crow's nest, he nearly fell by letting go, catching himself at the last minute. There, neatly seated in the bottom of it, looking perfectly comfortable, was Ellis. Alps sighed.

"I was wondering if you would be here." Alps sat down on the edge of the crow's nest, and looked to the fox, who had a small metal flask with her. She sipped it. The white lupine regarded her a little longer quietly, and then broke the silence himself. "Why are you here?" he asked, wanting to know if she intended to help on the mission. Knowing he had someone else with him helping was always a comfort.

"I prefer to watch the lightning as I enjoy my tea." She said this with a very pure and sure tone. Alps laid his ears back a bit.

"I mean, why did you come on this journey with us?" He wondered if she actually knew what he was saying and just liked toying with him. He had always suspected. She took another pleasant sip of her tea, watching the flashing lightning. It was much easier to see up on the mast. She finally answered.

"Nobody stated that I could not go." Alps sighed a bit at her answer.

"No one would have even considered it." He said with some exasperation.

"I am glad to hear this." Ellis said softly with a slight smile, eyes closing to enjoy the breeze. Her long, white hair moved gently in the breeze. Alps shook his head a little, watching her black and silver robes move a little in the wind as well, her robes matching the markings of the fox as well, her silver eyes and silver throat seeming to show she was made to wear the robe. He finally spoke with some authority.

"No, I mean, no one would have thought to tell you not to come because no one would have thought you wanted to." The fox looked at him blankly. For how wise she often seemed, she had to be playing him. It was impossible for her to not really understand. She just took another sip of tea and softly answered.

"I come because I want to. That is why. That should be no mystery to you by now, Aris." Alps widened his eyes a bit as she used the name that his mother had given him. Hearing it in her voice haunted him for some reason.

"What are your thoughts on this plan? Do you think it will work?" he asked. Hearing a vote of confidence from the eerily knowledgeable vixen would do much to bolster his bravery. She sipped her tea again, looking out toward the storm. She finally looked back to him with those pupiless silver eyes. He found himself oddly less spooked by them the more he saw them. They had started to feel familiar. She spoke in her calm, measured tone.

"I think you need your friends, Aris. No going off alone now. And they need you. You should see them if it's comfort you desire. All I shall tell you is that you have been lucky until now. I hope that your uncanny ability not to lose your life doing foolish things holds out."

"If you think I will fail, why in the world would you come?" asked the wolf, not at all sure how much help she intended to be. Ellis held her flask upside down to display that she had no more, and closed her eyes as she offered an answer to his anxious question.

"No sadder story was written than one that was never told." Alps felt a chill run through him, feeling like he had heard that before, in a similarly stressful time. Was it a Letai saying or something? He looked down and nodded a bit. The lonely deck below seemed so far away from his private conversation up here.

"I suppose. I hope that our story is not sad. It's for everyone, not just us. If we fail, it might mean an end to all stories." He stated. He looked back up and flinched. The crow's nest was empty. He hadn't noticed her move, heard her climbing down, or any indication that she was leaving. She was just gone, in as long as it took for him to reply to that. "Oh come on!" he barked, and then sighed, climbing carefully down the mast to the deck below.

Alps wanted to clear his head so he could sleep. Talking to Ellis had not quieted his worries. She was right, he needed to talk to friends. He went immediately to the cabin he shared with Nita, and found her to be sound asleep, her weary mind finally letting her drift off a little before, leaving him tossing and turning in the waning light of day, unable to sleep. He had left to go on deck to let her rest, but he didn't want to wake her now. He closed the door to that cabin quietly, and wandered over to Nidaja's cabin. She was sharing it with the Asuna brother and sister, Lyat and Reika. He didn't know how comforting the somewhat eccentric and violent Reika could be, but Lyat was calm, and Nidaja would certainly make the wolf feel better about everything they were doing.

He opened the door, and faltered a bit.

Alps knew that Nidaja and Lyat had become good friends, but he was embarrassed to realize that he had not even considered the thought that they might like some privacy. When he opened the door, he found Nidaja seated on the bed, leaning up against the large hyena's side, his hand down between her thighs, spreading her sex wide around two digits, his other hand pulling up her breast to his lips, gripping tightly at that round mammary and suckling wetly at one of the green-furred warrior-general's tits. Alps began to back up, hoping he wasn't noticed so as to allow them privacy.

"Oh! Alps!" Nidaja huffed with her eyes a little heavy, thighs still wide-spread so he had a delicious view of the penetration of Lyat's charcoal-colored digits, spreading pink flesh so obviously. The wolf paused and chuckled meekly. He didn't mind that Nidaja shared herself with another, but he was embarrassed at having just walked right in on it. Being a slave for most of his life made him not at all possessive.

"Sorry about that. I didn't even consider that you might be relaxing down here with others. Not used to you having the option." He laughed warmly, trying to make it clear to Nidaja that he was not at all upset. She seemed to understand that and moved a hand up to her other breast, rubbing it slowly.

"Lyat..." she whispered, "Don't stop. Alps, come over here." The lady wolf huffed. The white lupine folded his ears back a little in surprise. He didn't want to irritate Lyat by ruining his fun, but the hyena had been told not to stop. Would she allow him to continue, and have Alps watch, or even help? He had not assisted another guy in tending to someone yet, and worried that he might get in the way. It was easier for him with two or more girls, because he was the one pleasuring them, but this was a little more taboo. Yet, to the wolf, it was still arousing. It would satisfy Nidaja, he was sure, since she was asking it. He moved closer to her, swallowing reflexively as her tangy sweet aroused scent reached his quivering nose pad.

Alps already felt the budding arousal through his tense form as he stood before Nidaja. Lyat smiled to him, eyes narrow with coy consideration. He did not seem to mind whatever direction Nidaja was going with this, but Lyat was likely used to this kind of thing around Rios, who could have anything she wanted in her homeland. The former slave smiled at the hyena in kind, wagging his tail a bit as he looked to the general again. Alps gasped a little as he felt her hand go from her breast right to his crotch, stroking him through the black slacks he typically wore after being asked to by his now sleeping beloved. He watched Nidaja, who panted softly as Alps heard the soft, slick sound of Lyat's undulating hand, pushing and stroking into her wide-spread sex. He felt a soft throb through his cock under his slacks as the general grasped him and stroked him.

"Sorry to interrupt, Lyat..." the white wolf panted lightly, a little surprised at his unchanged demeanor with Nidaja. He didn't seem embarrassed at Alps' arrival, a least.

“Nothing to apologize for, Letai.” Lyat pushed his fingers in harder, making Nidaja whimper sweetly. Her hips rose a little, and rolled against his touch. “We both enjoy her affections by her will, so what shame is there in enjoying what she gives?” he asked. Alps flicked his ears at that. It was a pretty sensible way of looking at things, certainly. Alps gritted his teeth as he realized that Nidaja was undoing his pants. He stood there and allowed her to help herself. He would certainly never deny her that if that was what she wanted. He lowered his gaze to watch Lyat’s dark, strong fingers work his lover’s pussy. She rolled her hips softly with a hot pant to her breath as she fished his cock free of his trousers. Alps let them slip down his thighs and stepped free of them, and undid his top, casting it finally to the side, not wanting to spoil his clothes with no means of really washing them. Saltwater did not do black formal clothing any favors. He heard Lyat give a hot grunt, and looked beside Nidaja’s thighs. She had worked him free of his heavy leather pants. She gripped him tightly in her hand, letting him just twitch in her grasp.

The hyena was more impressively built than Alps, but that certainly did not surprise the lupine. Lyat towered over him, and was easily a quarter of his weight heavier. He should be a bit bigger. His masculinity was already wet with his desire for Alps’ lover, and he could not blame him. The wolf, so distracted, still felt every stroke that gentle feminine hand worshipfully guided over his own turgid masculinity. He was grateful, in his slight shyness, to feel his cock vanish into a warm and savory mouth, his lover’s muzzle taking him as she began to slowly allow him oral pleasure that he knew only so rarely and enjoyed so completely. His thighs tightened and relaxed as he felt himself savored over her tongue. The Letai wolf was a little surprised at how quickly his arousal was working over him, but the moment was a little unfamiliar and intense. Having help with his lover in this fashion was new, and he was finding that the pleasure of another close to him still made him feel happy, regardless of who.

“Is nice to be close to Nidaja, yes?” Lyat asked. Alps huffed out his answer in affirmation, nodding a bit as he let his hips drift toward her mouth softly, looking back down to Nidaja’s lap, seeing those strong fingers dipping in and out of her a little faster, his hand rolling heavily, fingertips surely rubbing over her clit. Lyat knew how to pleasure the wolf, and Alps found he was thankful for that, as she certainly knew how to pleasure him. Nidaja’s white-furred lover glanced back to what the general was doing as well, her hand now fully in motion slipping over the ebon-tinted turgid length of the strong hyena, spreading his wetness up and down his shaft. Alps tilted his head back again. Seeing what she did to Lyat made him far more aware of what it looked like when she did it to him, and it was all the more arousing. He felt Nidaja’s muzzle separate from his aching flesh, holding it tight in her hand, letting it twitch as her pre drizzled down over her chest. The wolf felt a little self-conscious, but the pleasure was fast making it a moot point to him. It was enjoyable even with Lyat right there. Nidaja made it enjoyable, and the hyena was respectful. The lady wolf only let him cool in the evening air for a little while, however.

Her next move had her slip to the side, guiding Alps to the side with her as she straddled Lyat’s lap. The Letai wolf blushed softly as she slipped her opposite hand, not

holding his own turgid member, down between Lyat's thighs. The general murmured in a soft tone,

"If either of you knew... how much I had thought of this these past few weeks..." She panted a bit as she tucked the tip of that ebony spire between her wet, puffy folds, enticed so wetly by Lyat's fingers, and gave a ragged sigh as she sank down in his lap. Alps could only stare shamefully down his body where he could see his lover's hips push down into Lyat's. She spread wide around the meaty girth of the hyena's masculinity and took him in completely in a single hot, undulating stroke, pushing herself tight into his lap, and groaning happily. "Oh, so intense, loves..." she gasped, making Alps wag his tail as the Asuna male slipped his hands over Nidaja's thighs.

Alps gave a shuddering groan as he watched his lover lean forward and take his cock into her mouth again, slowly gliding hand and muzzle over his aching length, having it twitch against her tongue as he spilled pre along its silky length. He wondered if this was entirely new to Nidaja. Her desperation seemed to indicate that it was at least very uncommon. He watched as she began to undulate her hips heavily, and Lyat leaned back a little, giving her some room as he held one hand on her thigh, and moved the other up to her breast, pulling and rolling a fat, eager nipple between his thumb and forefinger. Alps grinned and seized the other plump, unattended mammary, giving her a similar treatment.

"Yessss.." the general sighed hotly, her hips jerking a little harder, having pulled off Alps' cock a moment to stroke him in her hand. "Both of you, oh so heavenly..." She was nearly at a loss for words it seemed, to describe how much she enjoyed that. This only encouraged Alps more. He let his hips roll, moving his other hand to the back to the back of the general's head, holding the point where her red and gold headband cinched below her ponytail. He let his cock slide slowly in and out of her deep muzzle as she let her hand work his base. He felt that familiar throb returning, telling the wolf he could cum easily if this kept up.

He was impressed at how steady she held her mouth for him given how heavily her hips worked the hyena between her thighs. Lyat gave a hot, lusty grunt of need as his hands clutched the edge of the small bunk that he and Nidaja had been sitting on. Alps grinned at the pair and rolled his hips steadily. He had taken this rare treat from Nidaja only a handful of times, and he had never been so aggressive as to actually move his thighs like this while holding her head. He had never outright pushed into her mouth as he did then, but she seemed to only enjoy it more. The white lupine sped up a little, and Nidaja's hips sped up too. Lyat gave a hot growl, his strong body rising up and holding her hips a bit, as if to slow her down, but she just rolled them harder once he was hilted in her.

"Mmmnnph.." Nidaja gave a plaintive whine, and then another, higher pitched. Her hips jerked a little harder, and Alps watched her, his eyes almost hazy from the sexual need building, making it hard to keep them open. He ached to give her all of it, every drop, but he wanted to know when Lyat gave in... For some reason, he found

himself extremely focused on Nidaja being flooded by his Asuna friend because he wanted to see his friend rewarded with the same pleasure that Nidaja would give. He could feel the warmth of the essence in the room as well, something that, over time, he was becoming more and more able to feel. He panted happily as he stroked his thighs for Nidaja, feeling his sack drawing tighter. It was okay for him to release, because she could then ride the hyena under her as hard as she liked.

"I'm close, beloved..." he whispered into Nidaja's ear. The warrior general tightened her hand a little on the lupine's cock and huffed through her nose, but pulled her mouth off him, puffing heavily, unable to breathe through her nose anymore.

"Nnn..." She began heavily stroking him in her wet hand, angling him at her chest. Alps widened his eyes.

"There's not bath on the ship." He panted.

"So make her wear it to shore, if that's what she wants." Lyat panted out mirthfully, hips rising and falling a bit under hers as he worked his own pleasure in appealing selfishness. Alps for that brief moment only let himself slip closer to climax by imagining the look of his climax hitting and sending thin gooey ropes of his seed all over her velvety breasts, face, and neck. However, at the thought of being unable to get it out of her fur, she did stop, twitching softly.

"I am gonna pop, lovers... Then I can tend Alps properly." The general panted this out raggedly, and then leaned back, bouncing harder in Lyat's lap. Alps let Nidaja just hold his pink-toned masculinity as that thicker, slightly longer phallus of his Asuna friend was ridden roughly by the general. Alps bristled and decided to take a moment to just focus on the appearance of the essence as it happened, and to try to draw upon it the way he did in the Shadowfall. He was sure they would not mind. The halo of energy around Nidaja was impressive, glowing in a gentle green tone, extending out a couple of inches from her rolling body as her tongue lolled out almost comically in her enjoyment of Lyat's filling girth. The hyena, he found with some surprise, had essence, though not as strong, just barely extending beyond his fur, but it was crimson in color. Alps was surprised in finding that not everyone had the same kind of essence.

He did not get to consider that long, however. He was distracted by his lover's sudden shivering halt over Lyat's lap, his hands wrapped around her to hold her chest, mauling her with rolling, grasping, clawing hands. She held achingly still a moment, and Alps glanced down to see the base of Lyat's dark flesh jerking softly, not from his muscle movements, but hers. Nidaja finally gave a hard, heavy groan, and her essence flared brightly. Alps grinned, his pre slowly trailing down Nidaja's arm as she still held his member in her hand. He let his own essence mingle with Nidaja's own, and felt a warmth flow through him, perhaps a sensation that went along with her release, but as he connected his essence to hers, it mixed and drew to him, letting him actually see it come to his own energy. It was exciting on his own to actually know he was drawing, a

skill the Letai valued, but far more he enjoyed how it made him feel. It was utterly euphoric.

Lyat grunted loudly as Nidaja's inner flesh seized around him again and again, and began to twitch hard as well, his own essence flaring out almost as wide as Nidaja's had. Alps drew upon it too, and felt a rush of excitement and adrenaline with it, feeling almost static as he connected with the powerful Hyena warrior's own essence. And as he watched that black base twitch as Nidaja squeezed around it, he saw pearly fluid spill down his base, over his dark sack, and onto the navy blue sheets. Alps groaned hotly, his own body twitching as he found, stunned, that he nearly climaxed just from seeing his lover flooded as he had down so many times before. He had just never watched it, and it was one of the most intensely erotic and incensing things he had ever witnessed. Lyat was not sparing in how much he gave, sinking back a bit, pushing his hips up and just pumping his lust into her claiming depths as Nidaja cried out.

"Yes! Oh Lyat yes, so deep... Mmmh!" Her hips jerked a little to help Lyat along in his release, and Alps drew upon the male just before watching Nidaja's essence flare again. Curious, Alps tried to touch both.

This turned out to be almost a mistake. The flood of pleasure he felt from joining the two climactic energies made his sack draw tight, and he had to force himself to calm down as he nearly joined the pair in rushing orgasmic bliss, which would have been a shock to Nidaja, and probably hilarious to the still spasming Lyat. He managed to pull himself back from the edge, but whimpered out meekly to his lover.

"I'm still close love... take me... I need it..." He groaned softly as Nidaja panted raggedly. She was not able to use her muzzle for how heavily she breathed. She slipped off of Lyat as he gave a hot groan of satisfaction, onto her knees on the floor, and stroked the still wet ebon shaft as she looked over her shoulder to Alps. The slave looked at Nidaja, a bit stunned at the offer, and unsure how to feel as he looked at the pearl-lined pink folds of his lover. Something felt wholly taboo about taking her right after the hyena, but he had rather enjoyed breaking taboos with his lovers before, so he sank to his knees.

"Nnnh... Careful, sensitive." Lyat grumbled as the general stroked his shaft in her hand lovingly. The general panted happily and gave a soft whimper. "Looks like is having something of addiction to feeling full of your lovers, General Nidaja." The Asuna chuckled at this. "Rios is suffering same affliction. Very pleasant, she say." Alps moved his hands to Nidaja's hips, and then pushed forward, his thick, aching shaft slipping into her. In the short time she had let him think about what he was about to do, he had slipped back from release. If it had been instant from hand to her sex, he would have probably gone over the edge right away, but as he sank into her now, he felt he had a little time to play. He was surprised at just how wet playing with Lyat had left her, and while he knew full-well that part of the wetness was from Lyat, he simply did not care.

He lurched heavily into his lover, who embraced the hyena's hips, and panted against his tummy. Alps throbbed again, letting his eyes focus on the essence again, seeing Lyat's die down a bit as he rested from his release, but Nidaja's only expanded more, pleasure at having a second lover bury himself in her sex crackling through her. Alps contacted that essence and drew upon it as he pumped harder, slapping his heavy sack to Nidaja's soaked sex, and grunting out just as gutturally as Lyat had. The Letai wolf sped up some, the lewd, wet sounds of his union with Nidaja rising between them.

"Oh heavens – Uuuunnng!" Nidaja hunkered against Lyat and exploded around Alps' pistoning shaft. The wolf felt the heat of her release in his lap, and knew the mess that it made, but the lupine male found only that he liked it when Nidaja made a mess of him, marked him, claimed him with her body the way she did. Her inner flesh squeezed him tightly, stroked him, suckled his cock inside her. He was close as it was, but this was just too much. It made him throb hard inside her, and he doubled over her, cheek against her back as he felt himself finally slip over the edge. Nidaja yipped loudly, an almost hiccupping sound he had not heard her make before. Alps gave a sinking groan loudly against Nidaja's back as he felt his climax and Nidaja's through her essence. His tail even bounced a bit over his back with each powerful clutch of his prostate as he spewed his load hard inside her already flooded passage. Swept away were his concerns about taboo or how much of a mess it was, the experience was raw, unparalleled pleasure, sharing himself with his lover not only for his pleasure, but to experience hers. Nidaja's excitement, the powerful "want" that he felt from Lyat, the sense of control and power he felt, and Alps' own deep love for this lady general all collided inside him as he drew the essence around him.

Lyat remained silent for a while as Alps panted against Nidaja's back, wagging his tail slowly. The quiet seemed relaxed, but when he finally looked up to Lyat to thank him for being willing to share that with his lover, the hyena looked afraid. It was not the expression that the wolf was expecting. The Asuna male was staring right at him, having gone a bit soft in his post orgasm in Nidaja's still quivering, clutched hand. The lady wolf looked up and licked his tip a few times, before looking up and noticing his expression.

"You okay Lyat? Oh, I didn't bite you did I?" she asked, seeming uncertain if she could have during her climax, and inspecting his inner thigh and other bits.

"What is... why is wings on wolf?" Lyat stammered. Alps slipped out of his lover, onto his knees behind Nidaja.

"What?" he asked, not understanding the Asuna's question at all. He looked at the horrible mess of his lap and grinned sheepishly. He would be enduring saltwater, he was sure. It would take nothing less to get him presentable on deck again. Nidaja looked at Lyat, who stared at Alps, so she turned to look at her lover. She gasped loudly, her face surprised, though not fearful. It was at that moment that Alps realized that there was light other than that of the torches, glowing softly with pure white on faces that should have had only yellow-tinted lamp light. Alps swallowed. It was him.

Was he glowing? Then he remembered what Lyat had just said. Wings. He thought back to the Shadowfall crystal, and his most recent escape. Those massive wings that had unfurled from his back, glowing with bright light were still bright in his memories. He looked over his shoulder to see their massive form, but saw something a little different.

The wings were there, just as he remembered, but they were not large. They were quite small. Stretched out, his entire wingspan would likely only have been the length from his elbow to his fingertips, so he could barely even see his wingtips as he looked over his shoulder. Was it because he drew too much energy all at once? His back felt warm, but he didn't feel uncomfortable at all. He felt quite pleasant with them.

"Oh Alps those are adorable!" Nidaja cried suddenly, making the white wolf flinch. "That's the cutest thing I've ever seen! How did you do that!" she giggled. The general sat up on the bed beside Lyat, who softened his expression a bit because it didn't seem to distress Nidaja. Perhaps she knew what it was about and was not cause for alarm. Alps shrugged a bit, feeling a little more meek.

"I... I'm not sure." He answered. "I was practicing essence drawing with you and Lyat, and I think maybe I drew too much. They went away when I used energy to get us out of the Shadowfall before, so maybe if I use energy these will fade away too? I think they are just light." He reached back to touch one of them, and furrowed his brow.

He could feel it. Not only could he feel the slip of silky warmth between his fingers as if feeling the purest silk glide between them, but he could feel his touch on his wings. They were not an illusion, they were a part of him. He worried a bit. It would be really hard to just wander around with these. What if he was stuck with them for good?

"These are not exactly... low profile..." Alps stated with some concern. Nidaja covered her muzzle, trying to hide her smile. The white lupine was happy that they caused Nidaja such delight, but they would be a pain if he could not travel on a hot day without wearing a cloak.

"I think I shall get Luna." Nidaja said helpfully, picking up a satiny cloth and tending her wet thighs. She could not get completely clean, but she didn't have to go out positively pouring wolf and hyena love. After tidying up a little, she put on her leather-plated skirt and her red and yellow blouse and the armor cuirass. Alps was actually rather surprised at how fast she was able to dress. She padded out, giggling again. The experience with two lovers had made her a little giddy, it seemed. Lyat sprawled out on the bed, stark naked, panting still. He didn't seem to care if Luna saw him naked. Then again, Alps felt that Lyat had little cause for shyness. The white wolf tried to tidy up with the same cloth that Nidaja used. It would have no other use on this voyage, he was sure. It was pretty well soiled by the encounter. He then pulled on his black slacks, leaving his top off, since it would not have really fit over his wings anyway.

"I think they are a manifestation of drawing too much essence." Alps tried to explain a little to Lyat, who nodded stupidly. He was obviously feeling very good from his play with Nidaja. The wolf smiled at him. "You really know how to fill a girl out." The Letai laughed, poking gentle fun at the Asuna. He chuckled in his deep and masculine voice.

"You are lucky fellow, Alps." He stated. "That Nidaja, she loves you. Finding girl like that to love you is rare, and you seem to have many. Is maybe from Letai power, but is a good thing. Rios say you need them." Alps sat up and looked over his shoulders. He moved his wings, a little surprised that they were so easy to control, since he hadn't tried before. It felt odd, but not really bad. He fluttered them a little. It cooled his back, and that was rather enjoyable, so he did that some more.

"I do need them, and I hope to always make them happy." The white lupine rested his chin on his knees. "Do you think they look silly?" he asked.

"No, they is all being strong, powerful, and intelligent girls." Lyat stated wistfully. Alps looked up at the sprawling, lazy, well fucked hyena. He shook his head, rubbing his face.

"The wings, Lyat. Do these wings make me look silly?" he asked. Lyat looked up, and then shook his head.

"No." he said softly. "Old Asuna priestesses is wearing wings for powerful ceremony, maybe that size. It is mark of power. Mark of freedom. The wings is supposed to bring victory and good fortune. It is surprising seeing them, but is never silly. Maybe you will be hiding them from Reika. She probably pulls them." Alps gritted his teeth, not wanting to know what it would feel like to have even the feathers plucked out. He considered the thought that the Asuna might revere his wings. It would certainly be necessary to hide them if he were stuck with them. He gritted his teeth. Would Nita like them? His heart sank a little. Would they cause her worry? Luna walked in with Nidaja then, rubbing her eyes, obviously having been awakened. She looked back to Nidaja and groggily murmured,

"You smell like you've been into the hyenas." She had a playful tone in her voice. "I don't know what that's got to do with me, what did you mean a Letai-specific emergency – oh by the *stars!*" she cried the moment she looked through the door and saw Alps. He fluttered his little wings in full indication of why Luna was called. Nidaja wailed with delight at seeing him use them. He lowered his head, blushing. He was so embarrassed by the little things.

"I was with Nidaja and Lyat and they just... appeared." Alps explained. "I think I drew too much essence." The white-furred priestess sat down on the bed heavily.

"Alps, how often do you draw energy?" she asked incredulously.

“Just a couple times since I figured out how. I wasn’t told this could happen.” He fluttered them again rapidly, and Nidaja bounced with a happy giggle. Luna blushed a little as well; perhaps having just figured out that Alps was drawing from both the hyena and his lupine lover. Having his mother aware of that was a little embarrassing too, but she might have been the only one that could help him.

“Alps, I think you may have been drawing naturally. Maybe not as much, but at least some... How often have you shared pleasure with others? Not just intimate stuff...” Luna looked a bit wistfully at the naked Lyat, who waved to her happily. She looked back to her son. “... How often have you, to your knowledge, been around people who were absolutely elated, full of happiness and joy?” Alps lowered his head in thought. Since he left Chana’s side, he lived his life very clearly to cause that in everyone he surrounded his life with. He loved having people happy around him, and already knew it was perhaps a subconscious desire to draw that caused it, but had he been drawing the entire time?

“Priestess Luna...” Nidaja said softly, sounding more serious, “Making people happy was his purpose in the castle. He’s been around it for two years now. And intimacy has been, at times, more frequent than meals. If he’s been drawing without training, he’s got to be overloaded. Are the wings permanent? I certainly don’t mind them, but...”

“... But it will make it harder for him to travel openly, to be sure.” Luna stated. “We will have to remove them.” Alps whined loudly, cupping his hands over those silky feathers. Luna shook her head. “Oh no! I don’t mean like that. They are an effect of being over-loaded with essence. We just have to use up some of your essence.” Luna reached out and felt the wing in her fingers, Nidaja taking her turn to do the same.

“Do we have to?” she asked meekly. “How do we use up his essence?”

“He has to learn some kind of technique to manipulate the essence and actually practice with it to use it up. At least as much as he drew tonight, which was probably plenty. Lyat’s been chosen by Rios as a lover for a damn good reason. He’s probably the most essence-heavy Asuna she could find.” Alps blushed again, certain that his mother knew he had drawn from him.

“Is there an easy technique I could learn that would also be helpful in our journey?” the white male asked, wagging a bit, trying not to dwell on it.

“Healing techniques are my specialty, Alps, so nothing I could teach you without harming someone, which would probably not go over well. They take a long time to teach, and the few destructive abilities I have, as well as the warding abilities I am capable of, are even harder to control, and require months of practice to even get good enough to burn off your essence.” Alps fretted a bit, and looked at Nidaja.

“How about your abilities to enhance your fighting? Speed and strength?” Alps asked of Nidaja.

“Bad idea.” Nidaja and Luna both answered simultaneously, looking at one another a moment.

“What? Why is that?” Alps asked. Luna answered.

“If you use too much energy in those techniques, you can do severe or even life threatening damage to your body.” Alps cringed. Nidaja elaborated.

“I can’t draw energy nearly as efficiently as my sister. I learned those abilities because those and simple seals are the only ones I can control. If Nita tried them, and over-did the energy, she could break her legs or tear her muscles or even catch fire. It’s not pretty.” Alps shook his head softly at that.

“So, how do we get rid of my wings before we get to land?” he asked, worried that he would be stuck wearing a cloak the whole way. He was not looking forward to that, and even less looking forward to not being allowed to be intimate with Nidaja or his other friends because he could not help but draw their essence. Luna sighed a bit, and rubbed the back of her head.

“I do have one technique that can help. It’s not exactly... allowed. It’s very taboo, but I am capable. I learned a lot of things I was not supposed to near the end. We were getting pretty desperate, and there are things that were not allowed that do not use energy from a forbidden plane. One of the most valued and strict rules had been that we can only draw the essence naturally shed, that which is not attached.” Alps nodded to that.

“I think I read that, yes, but they said nothing about techniques that would allow anything different.” He explained.

“There was one. It is not simple, but it’s not unpleasant.” The priestess looked to Nidaja. “You or Nita will likely want to help with that, given my personal relation to him.” Luna chuckled. Alps blinked at that. She would still be with him though. Would that be okay for Nidaja or Nita.

“Sounds like fun!” the general barked. Alps gritted his teeth. Apparently so. Luna smiled.

“Very well. We will give him a little time to recover from the drawing he’s done tonight, and let me retrain myself to focus the way I need to. We will do this before we embark on land in a couple of days.” Luna stated before standing up tiredly. “For now, I sleep. It’s getting late, and sleep is hard depending on the waves.” She smiled to Nidaja.

"You and Nita can decide who gets to help. Your hyena fell asleep." She nodded to Lyat, who was shamelessly on his back, dozing rather soundly. Alps rolled his eyes at that, and fluttered his wings again, this time subconsciously. He caught himself and stopped just as Nidaja noticed and squealed with delight. This would be a long couple days, and Nita, his beloved Nita, was in for a surprise when she woke up. Alps rested his chin on his knees again. They were a couple days out, and the trip was already overwhelming and crazy. What would the future hold for this dangerous expedition?

In the same private room of the library that Misty had vented her frustrations with a new castle guard a night prior, the golden-furred councilor regarded those at the table, seated around it in official meeting quietly by candlelight. She drummed her fingertip on the table softly. Leal stood by the door, ready to deal with anyone who might venture too close, given the privacy of the discussion. He seemed to take very seriously the level of secrecy that was required for what he was witness to, and he was already involved just because of being present when Tia discussed it.

Alps' young friend had been allowed to retire for the evening, but another castle servant frequently checked up on her and saw to her needs. Misty was concerned because few of the girl's friends were present, and she was grieving terribly. She wanted to make sure she was cared for. Misty had explained everything to Ceriss and Lunar, who sat side by side, blotting out much of the light the candles provided just in how very black their fur was. Ceriss' fur was so much darker, not even having a shine to it. Something about it seemed to make the light fall away into nothingness, and it made her seem like a shadow. It made Lunar stand out in comparison, and he seemed obviously unsettled by it, though he was getting used to seeing it.

"So, there it is. I am open to suggestions on how to address this. I think that we should act against the traitors before they have a chance to cause another life to end. They have taken a source of hope and soured it." Lunar nodded emphatically.

"I suspect they are but a day behind Tia, if that. They will not want Nita to have time to react, to protect herself or call back forces to the island city." He spoke with the same tactical understanding that Nidaja had. He was, after all, her stand-in.

"If they find out Nita's gone, they can make it very bad for us, and will likely attack me instead, knowing I am not so well defended, and don't even have essence abilities or Nidaja to help me. I want to deal with this before it becomes an assault on the castle. A direct attack will be far more destabilizing, and might allow these fools to have claim of real power against the crown, and garner support out of fear, or lack of confidence in the Razelle family."

"Never!" cried Leal. Lunar cleared his throat to quiet his subordinate.

"How do you wish to deal with them ahead of an attack on the castle?" asked the dark-furred head of the security forces. Leal looked back to him, then to the councilor, and back to the very unusual-looking Ceriss. He had been peering at her since she arrived after him and Lunaris had taken their seats. She looked very unusual. The fur was just uncanny, and wearing a blood red cloak only made the insanely black fur stick out more.

"They cannot be allowed to know Nita and Nidaja are not in the mountain retreat. We have to stop them... All of them... Right there." Misty was very determined in this. "I just do not know how to accomplish this, and bait them into attacking the villa. People have to actually see Nita and Nidaja there. They will do their research, they will check to be sure, and I am certain if they see it's not heavily defended, they will attack." Misty thumped her fist on the table, making Leal jump a little.

"We will make them see Nita and Nidaja then." Ceriss said, her voice sounding cold and dark as her fur appeared. Leal obviously shuddered.

"We do not have a suitable body double for Nita, and the one for Nidaja is still in Jalana, we don't have time to send for her." Misty was irritated with having not considered the necessity of calling for at least her sooner. Ceriss murmured softly,

"When you look at me, what do you see?" she asked, pulling up her sleeve to show her dark arm. It was like looking into a hole where a wolf was supposed to be, and it was made only more obvious when she held her arm up close to the light.

"The scariest freaking thing I've ever seen in my life." Leal stated flatly.

"Don't be rude." Lunaris objected. Leal bowed apologetically. Ceriss spoke up in his defense.

"No offense was taken, it is supposed to be imposing. He compliments me." She pulled her sleeve back down. "It's essence manipulation, of course. I don't let the light that strikes my body return in a direction where it can be seen. I allow it to filter through the soles of my feet, typically. It took years and years to master."

"An Emerald Amanian then?" Leal asked. "I have never heard of such powerful visual essence use. It's quite fascinating."

"I'm a Letai Priestess, actually." Ceriss stated flatly. Misty gritted her teeth, having not explained exactly everything to Leal. He sat in his seat, staring right at her.

"What." His word fell flat, and he looked like he was unable to even hear an answer.

"Wasn't told, was he? You said you brought him up to speed." Ceriss chastised Misty.

"I didn't mention that part. A lot happened." Misty rubbed the back of her head, looking at the stunned guard.

"Leal is trustworthy. He knows enough anyway, he better be." Lunar is offered for him.

"Letai Priestess?" Leal asked. "You are serious?"

"I've escaped a Shadowfall Crystal." She said this softly. Misty had told him that was not a rumor, but not elaborated as to who escaped. That was enough for the guard. He nodded emphatically.

"An honor to meet you... This... This changes a great many things, yes?" he asked.

"It changes one thing for certain." Ceriss murmured. "Before, you had no Letai Priestess in the castle. Now, you have a Letai Priestess in the castle. But, I opted not to go on the crusade Nita and the others went on. My part of the bargain was I would defend this place. I had hoped to be left alone to rest. If I cannot, I shall make it very, very unpleasant for those who would deny me that." She stood up.

"You still did not explain why having the ability to manipulate essence on your fur like that means you can help make everyone see the queen." Leal stated. He was still very openly stunned.

"I get to decide what light everyone sees... It's not easy, but..." Her dark fur shimmered, and Leal and Lunar is both gasped, standing up suddenly, their chairs sliding back as Misty looked in stunned utter silence into a near mirror image of herself. The duplicate wore the red cloak to mark her as obviously being Ceriss in disguise, but except for a few minor details, white whiskers instead of dark, and perhaps a little tinting of fur here and there, it was a very, very believable disguise. Her pattern was not perfect, but even her fur seemed longer, like Misty's.

"Oh, this... This could work!" Misty barked.

"I shall go with her to make sure that it seems that the queen is being adequately guarded and make it more believable than just a double staying at a mountain retreat." Lunar is stated, bowing to the councilor. "I agree, this should do nicely." The real Misty answered.

"Thank you, Lunar is. This is a good course of action, I agree, I like the direction this takes. Ceriss, do you feel confident you can handle a few assassins?" she asked. "After all, they will be coming after you." The dark Priestess grinned at that.

"I am capable." She turned and left the room, calling after herself, "I shall gather some things and meet back here shortly.

"Leal." the dark-furred stand-in general barked in a commanding tone.

"Yes sir?" he asked, looking up at the larger canine.

"You are coming with us. One guard alone, even if it's me, won't be very convincing, and I want to give the priestess all the support she needs." Leal snapped to attention.

"With Milady's leave?" he asked Misty, in case she did not like being left alone.

"This is a critical task, Leal. You may go." She bowed her head to the brave guard. "You do not mind this?" she asked.

"I am being asked to risk myself in a mission to draw out assassins who would move against the crown, with the help of an actual, live Letai Priestess. This... is every guard's secret fantasy." He gave a hearty laugh, and fell into step behind Lunar.

Misty watched him go, and then sat back down in her quiet library. She would leave nothing to chance. She would ensure the castle was defended to, and to make sure that happened, she would need to get to work quickly. It was going to be a long night.