

Sirius, Book III

The Essence

Comments or Questions?

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Chapter 11

Alps slapped his feet along the muddy clearing in a quick side step, panting as he felt the weight of the rain pressing him down as the storm proved just how heavy it could be. Reika launched herself at the white servant wolf, raking her claws at him, an expression of pure fury in her eyes. The lupine pushed himself out of her way with as mighty a leap as he could manage, only barely clearing the ends of those outstretched claws. Shirtless, his white pelt bore patterns of a few crisscrossing lines of pink where blood was being pushed hard out of his fur from the driving rain. The wind whipped the curtains of rain over him like chains pulling him in directions he didn't want to go. Alps' chest heaved heavily in his panting.

"I get it! You are really good at this, but if I just get used as a straw dummy for you to beat on then I'm not learning anything!" The Asuna ignored his complaint and hurled herself with a feral-seeming leap at the lupine again. This time, instead of getting slashing claws, Alps took a crunching, crushing blow to his left shoulder, and it spun him so hard that he actually felt his eyes bulge against their sockets before he splattered into the thick, pasty mud in the middle of the grassless field that Reika had decided would be perfect to "play" in.

"Pain is being good motivator, soft clay wolf thing!" the young hyena barked. Alps rolled instinctively, not feeling like the girl was done with her punishment. He was right, as she seemed to just belly-flop right where he had been. Alps panted as he struggled back onto his feet, his muscles all hurting even though this fight had only lasted a few minutes thus far. They had been sparring off and on for a couple of hours though. The rain had not been nearly so heavy at first, but it seemed like even the threat of being killed by wind and rain and lightning was not enough to discourage Reika from her practice. At first, Alps had been elated when she finally agreed to practice with him, to let him get a little stronger and capable of fighting off an attacker, but it only seemed to become an excuse for Reika to give a self-sanctioned beating to the wolf. Alps felt glad that Chana was never able to hit him that hard.

"Letai aren't made for battle, Reika... we get our ability from something that doesn't involve leaving our opponent in a bloody mess. I don't need to practice getting hit, just getting away from being hit." Alps held his knees, wheezing a little as he panted so hard. With the saturation of the rain, it was almost hard to breathe the air here. "... I will learn other things to protect myself in the future, I bet... when we get where we're going." Alps looked to the east, in the direction of the mountains they were

approaching. They appeared grey and indistinct. It would only be another day, but they still seemed to loom so far away. He'd been seeing them for two days now, rising larger and larger in the distance, bigger and sharper and more vicious-looking than even the mountains that rose over Kishu valley where he buried the gathering Uruk army in snow. Alps paid for looking at the mountains instead of his opponent, however. He felt a blow between his shoulders as Reika kicked him, and he actually somersaulted twice in the mud, getting a very hefty helping of mud for his open jaws as a treat. Alps spat out the mud as best he could, looking up at Reika.

"You is doing better to learn to fight like this!" she barked savagely.

"This is how animals fight, Reika! Surely I can defend myself better if I were shown actual techniques!" Alps flailed a bit, motioning some of the things Nidaja had shown him. Reika kicked her foot suddenly, sending a ball of mud right to Alps' face. He was laid out on his back from the force of it, sputtering more mud from his mouth.

"Letai use frilly fighting like that, yes?" Reika barked. Alps coughed a bit.

"Yes.. pth.. Yes, Letai use frilly fighting, but it's elegant and effective, even against hordes of brutal bandits, I read." The wolf sat up, and dodged another ball of mud. Reika had to be just picking on him at this point.

"And with this fighting, what?" the hyena girl asked.

"What do you mean?" Alps replied with his own question. "They beat back many enemies. They were so well renowned that Mannus knew his only hope of gaining power would be to eliminate them first. That's a pretty stout claim to fame, right?" The white lupine got up, wiping mud off his face, thankful that Reika appeared happy to just stand there a moment, getting some of his strength back.

"So, you can show me a standing Letai army who can demonstrate this fighting and teach you?" she asked. Alps flattened his ears, knowing now where Reika was going with that.

"Point taken, but they didn't get made into slaves." Alps narrowed his eyes, making the implication boldly that the Letai would not have been made slaves, and that it was a sign of the difference in fighting ability. He immediately regretted it when he saw the vicious expression take hold of Reika's face. He'd just called her entire species weak, which he was adamantly warned not to do. He gritted his teeth as she approached.

"Wolf... If Reika is wanting to kill you, you not even see it coming. You is weak beyond that of Asuna babies. You defenseless, and yet you insult? You not having warm effect on me wolf. Reika not having problem killing you. Is time for nap." She began to approach Alps with a purposeful glare in her eyes. The white lupine knew what it meant. She was going to beat him unconscious for his transgression.

“Reika, I am sorry, I didn’t mean it that way, I just meant-“ the wolf was cut off by a ball of mud that was slung at his face with a strong kick of the hyena’s foot. He’d been dodging those for half an hour, so he had no trouble dodging that one, backing up slowly as the rain drove down harder as if to illustrate the girl’s rage. Her muddy dark shirt clung to her body in a way that would be attractive if she were not about to render the wolf unconscious. Her trousers were so caked in mud that it was hard to tell if she was even still wearing them. Alps’ trousers were in the same state. It was a very ferocious, brutal looking scene already, he knew, but it just took a turn for the worse!

“You is thinking the Letai is better. They is indestructible, but that is why they is all on inside of crystals, alone forever. That never happen to Asuna, Mannus not even TRY!” she barks. “To be there is giving up life! Life is most dear to Letai and they is rolling over and giving it up! You give up Nita and Nidaja and all your friends when time comes like every other Letai because you think you is better and can’t fall down somehow. You leave entire world to burn and decay because you is so big and important. You love no one but yourselves!” she screamed. Alps gritted his teeth, suddenly furious. There were a lot of things that someone could tell him, calling him weak, or useless, or insignificant, but to say that he would just let his friends be hurt because he was too good to help them was a different kind of attack all together. The wolf balled up his fists.

“Take that back, Reika. You know I would die to protect them!” he barked, baring his teeth.

“Reika is knowing this!” she yapped back, approaching a little faster. “But that all you do! And how is you protecting them if you is dead?!” she hissed, taking a swing at him. The flick of her arm was so fast that, just as promised, Alps could barely even see it. It grazed his cheek, and he felt fur actually pulled out just from her hand passing by him. If that hit him, he’d have likely suffered a broken jaw. Reika meant business this time. Alps backpedaled a little, and then kicked his foot, slinging mud back at Reika as she’d been doing him, with a wet thump of splattering thickness over her tummy and chest, rather than her face, where Alps was aiming.

“What am I supposed to do?!” Alps barked loudly at Reika, backing up more as she smeared the mud off her chest with a scowl. “It’s me against Mannus and his entire army, and against everyone else who is afraid to defy him and lose their life, and I am even fighting against my own desire not to let others get hurt for standing up for me! I need to be able to fight the way the Letai did, one against a hundred if need be. This style will just get me buried!”

“What is outcome of fight then?” Reika said icily, throwing another brutal punch. Alps tried to block it, but it felt like he’d just swung his arm as hard as he could into a tree. He felt the snap, and grabbed his wrist, shouting out. She broke it! She was going to kill him if she hit him directly with one of those. The pain raced up his arm and seemed to well right in his heart, a death-grip of fear suddenly on him. Reika was out of

control. Her promise didn't matter with this kind of rage, Alps was going to die! He screamed back at Reika, trying hard to ignore the searing pain.

"I will die before I let harm come to them! I will die, and there's nothing any of us can do to stop it!" he shouted, holding his wrist, going to his knees. He was weak. He was so weak that even with a broken wrist he could not bear to go on. The pain made him want to scream, wail in utter horror and disbelief. He'd had that arm broken twice before by Reika, and somehow it wasn't this bad.

"Then you die! You not get to live! If you is not wanting to live then you is not able to protect them. Asuna live because even if dangerous, we protect each other, together! We standing united under Rios, the great empress, and we fight to our last breath for her, as we know she fight till last breath for us, even in the face of greatest horrors ever known! Your queen is doing the same for you, and you push it away! You is having so much power in those who protect you, and you is afraid to use it! You is afraid to stand together, and that is why Letai wiped out!" Alps coughed as he felt a foot punch into his chest, cast back on his shoulders, kicked so hard he slid through the mud a good ten feet, his feet actually coming up into the air as he nearly somersaulted. Alps retched, almost vomiting from the pain in his arm and the impact to his chest.

"I can't, Reika! I can't let them die over me, I can't!" he cried, tears streaming from his clenched eyes, the rain blinding him. He rolled onto his side.

"Then your choice assures their death. And your own." She growled, lifting her foot. Alps closed his eyes tightly, knowing what was coming. He only hoped the damage she was about to do would not be permanent. As angry as she seemed, despite her promise, she seemed perfectly capable of killing him. But nothing happened. He looked up, seeing her towering over him, despite the fact that she was nearly a head shorter than him. She had her foot up, gritting her teeth, seeming to struggle with herself as to whether or not to crush his head. Then, through the blinding rain, Alps saw a rapidly approaching shadow, which only showed its shape for a mere second. Reika's bone club came sailing through the rain, and impacted the hyena's head, before falling into the mud by Alps' face, it's crudely drawn-on eyes looking at him in their eerie blank stare, as Reika's eyes rolled back, and the hyena girl came to her knees, then fell over Alps' hips with a soft thump, head in the mud.

The wolf was dumbfounded by that. He didn't see where the club's sailing arc started, and no one could have seen well enough to hit Reika in the head with it if they were not even close enough when they threw it to see their outline in the rain, but it was a dead shot. Alps struggled a bit to get her up, trying to shake her awake or at least keep her from drowning in the mud and rain and muck. His arm still burned like a wildfire from pain.

"Hello?!" the wolf cried out into the rain, but no one answered. No one was there. How had the club struck the girl if no one picked it up? He shook the Asuna again, trying to make her stir. She was sure to be murderous if she thought Alps hit her! She

didn't move. The hyena was breathing normally enough, so she wasn't injured critically. Alps sat in the rain, looking at the bone club. Had he made it move somehow, or had it moved on its own? The wolf shook his head. Neither answer made any sense. Sure, Reika seemed to think the club had a will of its own, but even if it had a personality, it could not have attacked Reika. Alps picked up the weapon, holding it, inspecting it for a bit, before he heard Reika stir finally. He froze. Of all the times for her to finally rouse, it had to be when he was looming over her with the thing that hit her.

"Are you okay?" Alps asked. Reika slapped a hand on the back of her head, curling up into a sitting position. Her eyes were not focused yet, and she seemed dizzy.

"What... What you DO?!" she asked. Alps had no answer to give her, but he realized that if he appeared weak right then, the beating would start over.

"Bone attacked you. Hit you from behind on his own." Alps stated, knowing full well even he could not believe that, and he saw it.

"Give!" Reika said, holding out her hand. Alps handed her the club, and backed up. His arm was in so much pain he felt like he was going to pass out. The rain was beginning to let up.

"We is being alone! No one else here, I would know. Asuna have good senses for that. Open field. No one sneak in close. Bone, is hitting me though, Reika knows what it is feeling like!" she complained. "Bone, why is you doing that?!" she yelled at the club. Alps gritted his teeth. That wasn't a positive direction for the conversation to go. She narrowed her eyes at the club. "Norock! You is hitting Reika, you say someone is throwing you, but no one there. You say is girl, but girl is no where near!" she shouted. Alps looked to the side, suddenly considering something. But to say that brought in other problems. He knew that for whatever reason, the fox was following him, and was not likely far away. She had the ability to move around unseen, coming and going without warning, so she could have done it, but to accept that as a possibility also would mean that Reika really was talking to the bone club, which was as unacceptable as the club attacking her on its own!

"Reika..." Alps said softly, rubbing the back of his own head, his broken arm pulled against his chest.

"No talking!" the hyena growled to the wolf.

"Reika, we should continue. I need to get to ... to Puranasse..." he said, having to think of the name of the place again. Reika shook her head, snapping out of it.

"Yurevanstin..." she growled in the affirmative. She glared at the club a moment longer, and then offered a hand to help Alps up. He gave the good one. The hyena looked at his other arm skeptically. "Is alright? Bruised in fight?" she asked.

"Broken, I'm pretty sure." Alps growled, suddenly irritated that she was unaware she'd even hurt him. He wasn't that fragile.

"Wolfs is made of clay for real. Comes apart too easy. Fix it in Puranasse. We go for now." The hyena began to plod off, the rain barely falling at that point. Alps sloshed through the mud after her.

"Reika..." Alps said again softly.

"What is it, weak wolf?" she asked.

"I'm sorry I insulted your people... For calling them weak, I mean..." he offered.

"Apology is for weak things. Asuna need no apology." The girl walked quietly a few steps and then looked hatefully back at Alps. "Reika is sorry for wolf's arm." The slave flattened his ears, getting the drift. He hung his head, nursing his agonizing arm as he walked behind her. A whole day of walking with this was going to be a nightmare. He felt it in every step he took. He was not sure if he'd even make it all the way there without passing out from the pain. But, he also didn't dare show his weakness again.

As the rain cleared, Nidaja looked up, sweeping the water from her hair as best she could, the green-tinted mane pulled back in a ponytail tightly behind her to keep it from retaining as much water to spill back into her eyes, a few trails of it still managing to fall down her face as she kept in step behind Lyat. Even with the fact that she was a soldier, and had been traveling in her duties most of her adult life, it was hard to keep up with the very hardy Asuna, who had probably been running and fighting from the day he could move himself around.

The place they approached was in the middle of nowhere, it seemed. A palisade that was erected around it jutted out at painful looking angles, obviously intended to keep things bigger than a lupine or Asuna out. Nidaja wondered what that might be. The emerald Amanian then fell closer in step behind the larger Asuna. There were two other burly-looking males at the gate, and they automatically brought their spears to bear at the sight of Nidaja. One of them growled out,

"Yuruld, stintanockpri." His tone and words seemed somehow darker and more crude than when Lyat spoke his own tongue. He answered the words in similar ones, which Nidaja could not quite follow. The taller of the two males, both dressed in heavy-looking leather and cloth armor, strode forward, bringing his spear to Lyat's throat. Nidaja tensed up, a little surprised as she found herself ready to leap to Lyat's aid. She

already viewed him as a friend, even when a few days before, she hated everything about the Asuna.

“Stay back.” Her hyena friend held his hand up to make sure she didn’t get involved.

“You talking like them! Not allowed!” the shorter of the two barked, and then, both launched themselves at Lyat with their spears. Nidaja had not forgotten what it was like to fight Lyat, but she found out, that moment, that not all of them were trained the way he was. He seemed to just flow around their weapons as they thrust at him simultaneously, and then seized both males by the backs of their necks and slammed their heads together so hard it even hurt Nidaja to witness it!

In that single motion, so perfect and relaxed and efficient, both forms crumpled to the ground. The wolf female looked in awe at Lyat as he seemed to take quick vital signs. He had not intended to kill them, so he did not. After feeling satisfied that they were not dead, he pushed the gates open slowly. Inside, there was a nice welcoming party, all with wooden spears drawn, facing him. He dusted himself off as a form moved through the crowd. An older-looking Asuna female.

“Lyat! What is the meaning of this? Why have you brought an Amanian among us – oh dear heavens!” the older female cried, cupping her charcoal muzzle. “Lyat are you *mad*?!” she cried.

“Lyat is catching up with sister. She is coming through here, yes?” he asked.

“Lyat, that’s General Nidaja Razelle, she’s dangerous, why would you lead her here?!” the older female shouted. The spears bristled even more, all aimed at Lyat, and not the general. They apparently felt that he was more dangerous somehow, which gave her a good idea of what they saw the average Amanian abilities to be.

“I am knowing this. Where is Reika, is being important. Wolf is bad news. Rethinking is maybe necessary.” Lyat explained, looking around as if his sister might be standing in the crowd.

“Reika is pressing on with her objective. It will not be stopped. It is the will of the empress. You know this.” The older female said darkly. Nidaja gritted her teeth. How large was the conspiracy to take him? What did they really want with him? The general looked up to the older female.

“You don’t understand, you are about to start a war!” she barked. “He was intended to marry the queen. This has to stop now! I don’t want war with your people! We have to avoid this!” she shouted.

“I am aware of this. Reika and Alps explained it to me. But they must press on.”

"Alps... He spoke to you?" Nidaja asked, Lyat looking back and forth between them.

"He was awake?" Lyat asked, seeming even more surprised that he was not out cold.

"He was following Reika willingly. There is something he must do. He knows this. He has continued by his own volition." The older female stated. "By the end of the day, they will be in Puranasse. There is nothing you can do to prevent the meeting from taking place."

"What will they do to him?" Nidaja asked, grabbing the hilt of her sword, ready to show her strength if she needed to. She was sick of not knowing what this was about.

"They need his blood." Lyat said softly, in answer. Nidaja bristled.

"*What?!*" She drew her sword, facing Lyat. No one moved. Again, no one seemed to regard Nidaja as a threat to the village, or to Lyat.

"He means his bloodline, general." The older lady corrected. Nidaja snapped her focus back on her. She was silently rather impressed at her ability to speak Amanian. The emerald Amanian decided it would be a good idea to know who this was for future engagements with the Asuna. If the conflict was to end, they would need a good contact who understood the language.

"Who are you?!" the general demanded.

"Kiranna... Elder of this village, and close servant to the empress." Her answer was dry and fearless. Nidaja knew she probably had nothing to fear with the numbers stacked against her.

"What do they want from his bloodline?" She fumed at the older Asuna. Lyat tugged Nidaja.

"Come, we go. We are having less time now." He stated.

"Less time for what?" she cried, the general wresting herself free from his tug.

"Alps is going without Reika forcing. He is taking less time to convince if he is understanding. We are having much less time.

"It's too late to stop it Lyat, even if you tell her why." Kiranna said. "You won't help matters by going."

"I am taking him back!" Nidaja threatened.

"Who, Alps? If he will come back with you, you are welcome to keep him. We need him, but we won't need him to stay. He will be free to go home when it's done." she stated matter-of-factly. Lyat tugged her again. Nidaja turned and strode off as several large Asuna pulled the two guards inside and slammed and locked the gate.

"Lyat is surprised they let you live, knowing what Asuna is after now." He stated.

"I still don't understand!" she barked, following along.

"Lyat will tell you..." he said softly. "Kiranna is right.. If Alps is going willingly, is too late to make any difference, so is not mattering if you know." Nidaja plodded along through the mud and rock and listened to the Asuna as he explained why all this had to be...

The trip had been just as painful as Alps had imagined it would be. He nearly fainted every thousand steps or so, and he had thrown up three times from the pain. Even Reika seemed to be a little more concerned. She tried to inspect Alps' arm a few times, but he would not let her. It hurt too much to even move it. Alps didn't want Reika to see his weakness, still furious with her for his injury, and her lack of control. He hoped not to see her again when this was done, which he found to be a rather rare feeling for him to have.

Against all the odds the slave had stacked up against him making the trip with his injury, they stood now at what looked like a wall stretched between the steep canyon entrance to a mountain valley. The air was cooler here, and there were trees everywhere, so it seemed like an alien world in comparison to the last place they had been. There were dozens of warriors standing about, but none moved from their post or even looked at Alps as he moved slowly among them with Reika. The gates, enormous and thick, made of blackened and hardened wood and reinforced with iron, stood over him at easily forty feet tall. They wrenched open slowly, as if by screws, slowly drawn open by an apparent pulley system inside the gate. They did not need to open far to let the two of them through, and that is all they opened, before slowly closing.

Before Alps stretched a city that, while the design seemed completely different for every building, the size and scope were almost equal to Jalana, even if a little smaller than Diera. There were no signs of battle or conflict in this place. The buildings were angular, seeming to be flat-topped pyramid-like structures mostly, made to handle extreme weathering, and even damage from falling rocks perhaps, which Alps assumed might happen based on the sheer canyon walls that towered more than two hundred feet on either side of the city. The canyon ended about two miles in the distance, coming to a point, and in that point existed a castle or fortress built right into the canyon

wall. The place was made to withstand a kind of assault that Alps knew the Amanian army would not be capable of. It was a shocking display of the real strength of the Asuna. Still, while he was the only Lupine among them, walking along the cobblestone and dirt streets, he was not accosted, approached, or even looked at. He knew why. To notice Alps would acknowledge his threat, his strength, and they had likely been told not to look at any escorted Lupine to remind them how weak they were. He could guess that much from how Reika treated him, not even talking to him as they walked along the street. He looked up the steep canyon walls for a while as he walked, and discovered immediately that it was a mistake, as he became dizzy from the vertigo and pain.

Alps crumpled to the street, that wave of pain taking over him and upsetting his tummy again.

“Don’t. Not on Asuna street.” She said warningly. Alps whined, swallowing back his bile, and staggered to his feet.

“I can’t keep...” the wolf whimpered.

“You is not hurting soon, you see.” Reika said softly. Alps was a little surprised at how much he didn’t care what that meant. He plodded along behind his captor, in more pain than he could remember having been in the past. He felt as sick and weak as every one of those Asuna thought he was. The streets were fairly quiet, comparatively. Alps realized it was because no one would even talk when he was nearby. It was as if they were trying to be invisible.

A about two hours of walking through the city, the sun slowly waning, had Alps at the steps that led up to the massive fortress. He looked up the stairs and shook his head at Reika. He could not do it. The hyena looked at him quietly a moment, and then moved to his side and whispered into his ear.

“It is being alright. They not expecting you to walk in on your own.” With those words, Alps felt a sudden thump at the back of his neck, and then, thankfully, he felt nothing. Unconscious at last. He never thought he would be so thankful to be knocked out.

The white-furred wolf felt like there was a powerful rainstorm going on in his head, and the thought of rain reminded him of his injuries, but he didn’t feel any pain. He looked up at the ceiling. It was ornate and structured, the kind of thing he was sure he’d see in the castle. Was he home? Had it been another case of Twilight Fever, all of it? He sat up.

“Oh look... The Amani housewife is awake.” came Reika’s likely carefully planned insult. Nope, it was definitely and unfortunately not a dream. He looked over at his captor. She was dressed quite nicely, actually, wearing a somewhat exotic looking white blouse with large silver frog buttons on both sides and dark sheer-fabric pants, and slender dark shoes upon her feet. She looked very clean and far better kept than Alps remembered her. Her short hair was clean and well groomed. She actually looked quite attractive despite the wolf’s personal distaste for her.

“So, did we make it? We are in Puranasse?” he asked. “How long was I out?”

“Only maybe half day and a half. Reika is thinking you be out for like... a week. Rios attend your wounds.” As soon as Reika spoke, Alps’ focus snapped back to his arm, expecting stabbing pain when he tried to move it, but, while it felt weak, it didn’t hurt. He moved it around, rotated, waved, and even clenched his fist, looking carefully at his arm.

“That... That’s impossible. It was broken. I felt it moving around in there.” The wolf knew what a broken arm felt like. He’d endured them before. He then laid his hand in his lap, realizing that his blanket had fallen away, exposing him a little. He didn’t know why he bothered being embarrassed. She had plenty of time to inspect him if his clothes had been removed.

“It was impossible for your doctors where you come from, but not impossible for me... and not impossible for you, if you could believe that.” A new voice spoken was soft, silky, and flowing, like smoke in the breeze. Alps turned. On the other side of the room, sitting in a tall, ornate chair, one foot on her knee bouncing casually, sat a creature unlike anything Alps had ever seen before. She seemed very much like an Asuna, but her ears were taller and triangular, like his, and her tail, instead of being shorter and more slender, was every bit as long and full as his own. Her markings were all those of an Asuna, but her features seemed a little less blunt and more angular. It was like looking at a half-breed. Was that even possible? He was sure he’d have heard of them or seen them before now.

“Empress Dominis...” the white slave murmured softly. Somehow, he just knew. She wore simple silky and graceful black robes, so she wasn’t dressed like a leader or anyone special, just comfortably, as if she might be going to bed shortly. But her power was obvious, just in looking at her.

“That obvious, is it?” she asked.

“I had assumed you would be different, for the kind of power you had over your people.” Alps sat up fully and murmured, “How can my arm be fully healed in less than a day?” he asked.

“Letai draw life energy. I am sure you already know this.” Rios said, getting up and stepping over to Alps, stroking his cheek. A chill ran down his spine. Something about her felt a lot more powerful than even being in the presence of Nita. Maybe even more than being around a Letai priestess.

“I had been told, yes.” It was true, even if only days before it had been explained to him. “But I didn’t know that Asuna were capable of using the essence like that. I thought it was just a Letai thing... But I guess the Emerald Amanians aren’t Letai, and they can use the essence, so it should not surprise me.” the wolf stated, rubbing his arm, as if unable to believe it had been made whole while he slept.

“It is a Letai-only trait. The Emerald Amanian tribe is descended directly from a Letai bloodline.” Rios stated calmly. Alps arched his brow. He’d heard that, but there was not really ever any proof given, and many, including him, thought that it was something to help elevate the people’s opinion of their ruling family. The lupine then blinked at a realization. The lupine features of the Asuna sitting before him. His head snapped up, looking Rios in the eyes. They were violet as his, and like all the emerald tribe.

“Wait... You mean you are ... You are part Letai?” he asked, suddenly finding himself visibly excited. Kiranna had been right. Rios was likely to be able to tell him more about the Letai than Misty ever could, and while he could have learned a lot from Luna, he’d not have been able to learn that some had escaped, maybe to join the Asuna.

“I am, but only a quarter.” Rios’ answer was remarkably humble for someone with the kind of power that she needed to possess to be able to heal his arm the way she did. She stroked the slave’s face again, seeming to actually admire him. The look in her eyes was not that of an enemy, or even of someone who knew they were more powerful, but Alps could feel her strength, her power in the room. He also felt a little dopey and hot, not entirely sure why.

“I guess now would be as good a chance as any...” Alps whispered, trying to find the best words, as long as he’d waited to ask them, “... Could I please ask what you needed with me? In taking me, you risk open war.” He explained. Rios smiled at that and shook her head.

“There will be no war. I will be releasing you safely back with your people when you are finished here, do not fear.” Alps listened to her words, but it didn’t tell him anything. It did make him feel a little relief. There had always been the doubt at the back of his mind that he’d get to return without a fight. He found it hard to feel that the empress would bother lying about that to him when she had all the power in the world to just keep him there against his will.

"What will I be doing here?" he asked. "What must be done?" He suspected it had something to do with releasing more Letai from crystals. Reika spoke up softly, moving over to sit at the edge of the bed.

"See? Is asking so many questions. Stupid weak wolf." She announced. Alps flattened his ears. He was still angry at Reika for breaking his arm, even if it wasn't broken now.

"I willingly walked into the very citadel of the enemy without having to be dragged to face what fate had in store for me. How is that weak?" the wolf asked. Reika rolled her eyes, but the empress made an odd clicking noise with her teeth, like biting the air, which seemed to have some kind of significance to Reika, as her ears went back and she seemed apologetic immediately.

"Reika, he's right. That took more strength than most Asuna or even Letai could muster. But what comes next won't require strength, just understanding, and maybe a little endurance, I hope." There was a pause, and Alps looked over at the Letai-Asuna mix, tilting his head curiously.

"I am not sure I understand..." the wolf rumbled softly. "I'm an understanding Amanian, or I would not be here, I can assure you. Not alive at least. And I grew up as a slave, so I have endurance, as it were, what is it I need to know? What is it I need to do?" he asked.

"Amanians and Asuna cannot mix. Their bloodlines are barren to one another. Reika could take you every day for the rest of her life and not have an heir to show for it." The words that Rios spoke were so matter-of-fact and shameless, but it made Alps' ears go scarlet almost as bad as the first time Nidaja spoke openly to Misty about Alps having sex with her. Surely he didn't have an effect on the Asuna from afar so much that they would kidnap him. He tried to piece together why she would even say it. Then another question came to mind.

"The Letai are Lupine..." He folded his hands in his lap, a little defensively, given the subject. "... If Asuna and Lupines can't mix, how could you even exist?" he asked. Rios smiled a bit.

"Quick on the uptake, huh? That's helpful," she said softly, "Amanian and Asuna can't mix, this is true, but Letai are a different story." Alps perked up. Different in what regard, he wondered. Rios let Alps mull that over, and then waited more, perhaps trying to see how fast he'd get it. She placed her hands over her head, stretching a bit as she seemed to revel in the awkward silence a bit, and seeming to actually show off her form a little for Alps. Reika was paying attention too, as if she'd not even been told the plan. It would not surprise the slave if she hadn't, of course. She was the empress after all, and didn't have to share everything with her subordinates. Remembering this, Alps found himself feeling ashamed for how irreverent he'd been acting. But, it was not any different to him than when he was with Nita. She was the ruler of her kingdom, just like

Rios was with hers. It didn't feel odd at all to be in her company. How strange Alps' life had become...

"So, there is something about the Letai that let them pass their progeny on to Asuna, leading to what is now the ruling class, just like they could pass their progeny on to the Amanians, leading to what became the Emerald Tribe?" Alps considered his words as he spoke, still not able to see where capturing him fit into all this. Then, his eyes widened, a possibility fluttering through his head. Impossible. She could not have meant that. That made no sense to him. He waited for the empress to answer, not wanting to insult her with the idea that had rooted itself suddenly in his mind.

"Correct. The Letai are bound close to the life essence, and as such, the divisions physically that prevent a mix from occurring with the Amanian and Asuna are blurred a bit. More than a bit. A lot. That kind of life energy in their blood gives them the ability to cross those impermeable lines." Rios walked back and forth in front of Alps as she explained, the white wolf sitting on the bed, hanging on her every word. "It's a very powerful tool of survival they have had all along, but they opted to keep their bloodline pure for a very long time because of the worry of the sudden influx of new power in a group not used to having it causing open war, which was definitely counter-productive to what the Letai valued. Some time long ago, however, a new tribe was born in the Asuna, and the High Asuna tribe held a seat of power as a result of the abilities we were born with. It is suspected that the Letai may have finally mixed in an effort to form an alliance. It was too late perhaps, but quite a lot of the half-breeds existed for centuries, most of them keeping hidden from Mannus' watchful eye, but he did manage to find them, over time, and whittle them down." Alps winced at that.

"Whittle them down? Surely that would have been hard to do if they were trying to hide, and they looked similar enough..." he noted. Alps was sure they would have been able to grow in strength over time. Creatures with that kind of power and wisdom would not be removed easily, just as the Letai had not been. It took a century, so he'd been told. The empress shook her head softly.

"The Asuna-Letai had immense power, this is true, but Alps, we had a major disadvantage. Amanian Letai are born of the Letai who were, themselves, Lupine. The Emerald Tribe was able to pass their progeny to other Amanians, Emerald or not, and even though it thinned the bloodline to do so, and reduced their power over time, they were able to continue the bloodline still, and through carefully planned marriages and family-structure, they started to bring the power back after a time. It was part of the reason for selecting the Emerald Tribe as a focus of power and governance for the Amanian Empire." The explanation still didn't connect all the dots for Alps. It only left him more confused.

"So why didn't the Asuna do the same thing, if the high Asuna were losing their strength or their hold on the empire here, even in secret?" he asked. Rios looked down, seeming a little sad at that notion.

"We can't. We can only produce offspring with those who were also directly descended of the original Letai Asuna." she states. "There were originally twelve families, but Mannus killed them off over time, until there were only four, and it was hard to prevent inbreeding, and ultimately, those High Asuna that were still being produced were insane, violent, underpowered former visions of the esteem we once held, and led the Asuna into four warring tribes. A hundred and twenty years ago, a few of our last wise leaders who were *not* part of the High Asuna took children from each of the four families, and began to work out the flaws, carefully making a more stable, cleaner High Asuna who would be able to lead again. In the process of all of this, the stronger family line that arose, my grandparents, and my parents, and finally myself... united the clans. Now, we are under one banner, even if still under Mannus' thumb. Yes, I am the result of that powerful family, but there is some misfortune involved in all that. Mannus found out what we were, and dealt with the matter himself." There was a heavy tone of regret sounded in the empress' voice.

"There aren't any more High Asuna. Just you." Alps stated, widening his eyes again. He finally latched onto the direction this was going, and his ears flattened at the very stark and obvious reason for all of this now.

"Right. I am the last one," the empress explained, "The other families were killed off, and those who do remain are so badly diseased and flawed that even if they were not sterile, I would not want to bear their progeny I can openly say." Alps sat up straight, looking at Rios sternly.

"So your only chance to continue your bloodline and give strong leadership to the Asuna in the future... is to find a Letai male." As Alps said it, his heart raced. With the promise for his life together with Nita, he could not dream of betraying her like that... giving his first born to the Asuna empress whom he'd just met. It was unconscionable. Rios smiled at him as he got the drift.

"Right. Not only would you allow the line to continue, but you would dramatically strengthen it. When I first heard the report from Diera that a male lupine with violet eyes who was not a part of the Emerald Tribe had been Shadowfallen, I was crushed. I knew that you had to have been Letai, at least in part, and I thought the only chance I had went with you, but then, I heard something that was even more incredible, and my heart soared with joy. You broke out. You destroyed your prison. I don't know if the Amanians were doing the same work that we tried, to make a pure line, or if somehow your line was just missed by Mannus, and that there are Letai hiding in the world today, but you are here now, and I cannot pass up this chance, my only chance to have an heir. This power is needed for us to get out from under the yoke of our horrible master, and once we have broken free, the High Asuna will no longer be needed. The path has been laid out before us. We must embrace our destiny. Will you do this for me, Alps?" Rios asked. The wolf looked down at his hands.

There were a number of things to think about, to be sure. If he accepted what she desired, the effect could be that the strife between the Asuna and the Amanians

would end immediately, because it would be Alps' wish, his deal to make with her, but in the same process, he'd be giving rise to a powerful enemy if that notion did not stick, or the progeny grew up to hate his kind.

The offer that had just been made was not that unusual from how the rest of Alps' life had gone since he left Luca. He lived for the pleasure of others, but this was different. It was not about pleasure. What Rios wanted from Alps was a lot bigger than that, even if he was allowed to go home when he was done, it would mean that he chose to do something that could forever haunt him and Nita, and bring her much sorrow. On top of that, what world would his blood be born into? Warring factions of violent Asuna ready to kill one another, Mannus himself hunting down the bloodline as relentlessly as he could, it would be a nightmare existence. Alps shook his head.

"I cannot. I belong to my love, Nita Razelle. I cannot betray her like that." He said softly.

"Except with her sister, from what I was told by Reika." Rios retorted. Alps gritted his teeth.

"That is with her permission, her choice." Alps stated, knowing full well in the past he'd been allowed to have others if he wanted, but now that he was to be married, he wanted to only give himself to Nita, or to those of her family that she saw fit. He was hers to keep or share as she intended. That was not hard to express, surely.

"I won't be asking her permission this time, Alps." Rios said standing up, moving her hands to her shoulders. She began to draw down her robes. Alps sat forward like he was going to try to leave. Reika's hand came to his shoulder and pulled him down heavily, forcing him to the bed. Alps widened his eyes. Surely they were not silly enough to think they could take something like that by force? Physically it didn't work like that. The beautiful Asuna stood over him, slowly letting the robes fall from her shoulders, hugging her chest to keep them modest a moment.

"Empress, you can't be serious! You know if I don't want this, it won't work." He growled. Reika lifted her hand to strike Alps, and he winced, but when he looked up, Rios was holding her subordinate's wrist. The smaller, but more brutal Asuna looked miffed about it. Rios looked back down to Alps.

"I don't think you understand... You won't be leaving here, ever, unless I get what I need from you." The Asuna leader looked very serious about what she was saying. "And you have the next two days to think on it before you have to wait until next month, and I shall allow Reika to be your caretaker for that month. Believe me when I say you do not want that. Just do this and you can leave." Rios said firmly. Alps blinked at her.

"I... I might be able to free another Letai from a Shadowfall Crystal," Alps offered, trying to find a way to get out of the fix he was suddenly in. The thought of being forced

to this and explaining to a heartbroken Nita was more than he could bear. Rios looked at him curiously.

“An ability I certainly did not realize you had, but you did get out of a Shadowfall, so I imagine you capable...” she stated. She thought on it, then shook her head, Alps’ hopes sinking. “A neat idea, but typically, females were Shadowfallen, males were slain. Not sure why. But even if a few did get cast into the darkness instead, like you did, getting them out would be nearly impossible. Even if we could get our hands on one of those coveted crystals, which would not be easy, it’s a lottery. We don’t know who we would find in there, or if it would be a male, and in that time we’d be wasting valuable time. That’s a risk far larger than I am willing to take when I have a sure thing naked on the bed right in front of me.” The empress growled a bit to make the point that she would not be flexible on that decision, even if it were possible.

Alps’ eyes flitted side to side quickly as he tried to think rapidly about what needed to be said or done. There had to be another way. He had an entirely different angle to think about it. He perked his ears, speaking again.

“How about an Emerald Amanian? Couldn’t you get one of them, and join the Letai side of both?” he asks. Rios frowned at Alps, seeming irritated with the stalling.

“Do you really think that over the centuries we would have failed to try that? Repeatedly? We used to call captured male Emeralds ‘ferns’ because they were kept like pets, and frequently ‘watered’ by their keepers at that, all in hopes that it might work, just once. Hundreds of years, and nothing. No, it doesn’t work. They are just different enough to prevent it, it seems.” Alps drooped, considering this. He suddenly felt a pang of guilt for what he was doing. He was denying Rios something that she obviously wanted all her life. Not just the chance to allow her people to have a stable leader, and perhaps have a brighter future than the last hundred years had given, but the simple chance to be a mother, which she would have absolutely no other way. He sighed softly, rubbing the back of his head, uncertain.

“So... I Just... do this and I am free? How will I get home through Asuna territory?” he asked.

“I will have Reika escort you right to whatever location you desire. You will be safe, you have my word, so long as I have yours.” Rios stated. Alps considered this for a bit, working out a plan in his head. He would get to go home when he was done, but she might allow him to leave even before she knew whether or not she was carrying a child, so he could allow her to think the gift had been given, and by the time she knew otherwise, perhaps he would already be safely back with Nita. That at least was worth a chance, and if it didn’t work... well... maybe he really had no choice. Alps nodded slowly to Rios.

“If I have your word, I will do it.” He murmured. “Your people have a right to the stability you offer, and will continue to offer from your family line.”

"I knew you'd understand." Rios said softly, a genuinely joyful smile spreading over her charcoal muzzle, her ears laying back fondly as she regarded the wolf sitting on the bed before her. The other Asuna in the room, however, growled a bit. Alps looked back over to her curiously. He'd agreed to her empress' wishes, why would she be angry?

"You cost Reika so much gold..." the other Asuna said darkly. She scowled at the slave, making it apparent that she'd bet against his going along with the plan. He gritted his teeth, wondering what might have happened to him if he refused outright. Still, he felt he could manage this, so long as he could make it back with his love, and his family, in his own home. He was less worried about Mannus following mention of him if there were matters of greater importance happening closer to home, like an Asuna insurrection. Reika got up and moved over to the heavy door at the side of the room by a long silk curtain. She opened the door, speaking in her guttural tongue to the guards waiting outside, and then closed and obviously locked the door. Alps swallowed.

"Wait... Right now?" he asked, feeling greatly surprised. Rios finally let her robes spill around her. Alps' eyes followed the robes, and then shot back up, the wolf sitting at attention as Reika came back beside the bed. The younger Asuna seemed to not be very surprised or shy about this at all. Had this always been the plan? She had certainly been serious about not waiting any longer than needed, right down to the minute.

"We not be disturbed, Empress." Reika said softly, looking back to Alps. "I stay to make sure." Her words were solid and did not offer the opening for argument. Rios nodded to the shorter Asuna and stood before Alps, her hands on her hips as if trying to decide what exactly she wanted to do with him. Alps looked up and down her strong-looking form, and knew exactly what every cell in his body wanted to do to her, though he dare not make it so obvious. He was afraid of insulting the empress, especially in front of Reika. Rios had a build much more like Nidaja's rather than like Nita's. Strong and sure, solidly built for battle if need be, even though she was the leader, and surely didn't have to fight that much. If she were insulted, Alps imagined she would not need Reika to punish him.

"This can be pleasant if you want it to be." Rios said softly, crawling up on the bed. Alps looked at her intently, his nose quivering as he took in her scent. The hot feeling he felt earlier, that tangy, musky feminine scent, was his natural attraction to her during her season of fertility. He was surprised that an Asuna would have that effect, but she was part lupine too, so he could understand. He got on his knees in front of her, nude, and shameless, but he looked to Reika. Was she just going to watch? Why wouldn't Reika leave them to do this on their own? The younger Asuna folded her arms in front of her, crossed as if waiting to see what he'd do. Alps suddenly realized that Rios, due to her position, and due to the warlike nature of the Asuna, was not *allowed* to be alone. If the wolf tried anything, he'd be dead faster than he could finish. That put a

bit of pressure on Alps. He had to make sure that he was not being too aggressive with this.

"I would hope it to be pleasant for you as well." Alps spoke regally bowing to the Asuna leader. She smiled to him and murmured softly,

"I had expected this would be more difficult, so by you being so understanding, I think it will be pleasant for us both." She moved toward Alps and stroked his cheek again, before pulling his blanket away, leaving his firming shaft rather obvious, pink, thick, bobbing softly up and down between his thighs. He suddenly felt a little embarrassed, not because of what he was doing, but because he wondered if he was bigger or smaller intimately than an Asuna would be? Would he be a disappointment to the Asuna leader? She did not seem to be unhappy, but Reika merely smirked, which made the wolf more self-conscious. That weakness thing again. He swallowed a bit, knowing that he had to have seemed weak with his phallus doing the swaying in the breeze thing before him. He was very uncomfortable and worried. It was not going to be easy to perform unless he had a little time to get into it.

There was a short pause as Alps and the Empress looked at each other. The wolf looked up into her eyes, seeing their amethyst shine and the brightness of the life that lay behind them. She was powerful, but here she was, bare before him, someone that she should have seen as an enemy. And she seemed the weaker of the two. Alps' eyes traced her form up and down slowly, measuring everything about her. Her breasts were modest, closer to Nita's than Nidaja's, so her body looked even more athletic as a result, but where the fur along Nidaja's sex was a little longer and silky in a neat, well groomed tuft, the fur along the front of Rios' body was thin and velvety, more like Misha, and her flesh almost bare where her mound pouted warmly between her thighs, a very obvious sign of her nudity, enough to make Alps blush a little for looking so closely, committing that body to memory. He snapped out of it and shook his head, commenting softly,

"Err... I don't want to seem callous and do something you would never..." Alps spoke in a soft tone, looking away, realizing he had definitely been staring.

"I'm not new to this, you know." The empress seemed to try to regain her composure a bit. "I was wondering the same thing. I mean, what not to do or what you might like. I'm experienced with lovers of my own kind, but don't know what you... I mean..." there was another long pause. Alps looked back at her, his eyes trailing up and down her form as they both looked at one another from either side of the bed. It was Reika who broke the silence.

"You boring, wolf." Her tone was rather frustrated.

"I know very well how to tend to my lover, I will have you know." Alps said defensively, "I just don't know if those are the right things to try with the empress is all." His final words were a little meeker, as he fought back his blush.

“Just do that then.” Reika said, motioning to Rios. “You is insulting if you is not accepting the right to bring pleasure.”

“To bring pleasure...” Alps said softly, remembering the discussion with Kiranna before. He got his power from it. He’d get stronger, healthier if he brought her pleasure. And bringing pleasure was something he was well equipped to handle, both in his strength and his training with his new family. He would have the chance to show the empress what he’d been taught. At the very least some of it could be the same, and if it was, he had his confidence about him he could do this right, and leave her so oversensitive she’d not know that the wolf didn’t really flood her womb. She’d surely not be able to tell. He then snapped out of his thoughts, smiling boldly to the empress, and then suddenly laying on his side, rolling onto his back in front of her, and pushing himself between her outstretched thighs.

“What are you...” she started, and then, as his muzzle clamped closed over her dark, soft, bare folds, the hyena-wolf mix squeaked. Alps closed his eyes, savoring the bare flesh of her mound, her folds parting over his sliding, swirling, stroking tongue as his back arched, the wolf getting more comfortable. Alps found that he actually very much liked the bare flesh of those tangy folds as he let them dance against his tongue in Rios’ trembling anxiousness. It made him remember, very easily, that she was a lady, and felt this just the way any other lady would!

“Dumb wolf, that is not being right at all, you-“ Reika started, but Rios made the clicking sound that she seemed to use to shut Reika up again. Alps grinned. It might look odd to the young Asuna, since that was an odd thing to do even for the Amanians from what Alps had been told, but the slave knew very well how potent the effect was on his lover and his friends. He was happy to find it had an effect on Rios as well. He folded his ears back and set to work, also happy that the act of doing this made him hard as a rock very quickly, something that the empress took note of quickly, placing a hand on him and stroking his pink length against his tummy sensually, exploring him. She didn’t give too much attention, however, as she seemed a lot more lost in the attention that her companion was now giving.

“Nnhnn... I will... admit... This is a first for me, but I promise it won’t be the last. I know a few Asuna who will be cursing your name for... ooh... showing me this... They will have to learn... to like it...” she huffed. Reika moved back to the bed, sitting down, watching what Alps was doing apparently. She didn’t move to touch either of them, but she seemed curious. With how insane the younger Asuna had seemed to Alps, he wondered if seeing this was just pointless to the girl.

Alps continued to slather his tongue over those tangy folds. He was delighted to find that, essentially, there was absolutely no difference between an Asuna lover and an Amanian one where this act of pleasuring was concerned. The little button that Alps had learned to focus on with Nita was right where it should be, and responded exactly the same, and Rios responded as well, hands planting beside the wolf’s thighs as she

huffed over his lap, not brave enough, perhaps, to take him in her muzzle in return, but being that she was the empress, and was being watched, Alps didn't expect she would. She did, however, offer the attention of her caressing hand from time to time, but could never give it very long before the pleasure Alps was working upon her distracted too much and she just had to hold the bed.

"Is feeling so good?" Reika asked, still sitting on the edge of the bed, watching. The wolf beneath the hyena empress grinned a bit at Reika's obvious question. The younger Asuna would probably never know what he was making Rios feel, but he was suddenly proud of the power he had in that moment.

"Huh... huh... Huhhhh..." Alps felt Rios tensing up. He held her hips as they began to softly jerk. Surely she would not be this easy... Alps pushed his tongue deep into the strong, slightly older hyena, her body held ridged over his muzzle as she placed both her hands on his thighs, then arched back, squeaking out as the wolf rapidly fluttered his tongue over Rios' little bud. She grunted, clutching his thighs just above the knees, and her hot, tangy honey just *poured* down either side of his cheeks, head, and ears. It was more copious than any of his lupine lovers, to be certain. The comment Rios had made about the other Asuna with their Emerald pets 'watering their ferns' came to mind, suddenly very clear in their meaning. Alps then whined softly. In his eyes. It got in his eyes, and it *burned* so much. He clutched his eyes shut and continued licking feverishly, the wet slapping of his tongue cutting the sound from his whines, but it wasn't enough to prevent Reika from realizing what happened. She audibly snickered. Rios was too involved in her shuddering, anxious climax to notice, though.

Alps eventually either got used to the stinging, or cried it out, and was able to go back to his deep, heavy licking, the intent being to penetrate completely, roll his tongue inside her, like a tube, and then draw it in and out rapidly, giving a nice sensation of penetration. She leaned forward to take this, and Alps brought his hands down by his hips, lifting them to begin to tease at Rio's modest breasts. Her nipples capped them large, thick and hard. Alps could not help but think that she'd be a good mother with nipples so easy to get a mouth on, but he chased the thought away, given the intent that she had. He didn't want to start thinking about that openly. She stroked Alps' heavy orbs softly, seeming to want to worshipfully coax them to provide more of his gift for her. Her lupine playmate parted his thighs a bit and groaned happily as he cupped his lips against the apex of the empress' sex, pulling her clit between his lips and suckling upon it, fluttering his tongue.

"Wolf is not weak in natural element." Reika stated, probably watching Rios' face as Alps began to suckle her clit. At least, the wolf was pretty sure she had to have made some kind of face, since she shuddered hard and poured over his ears again. The wolf had the sense to tilt his face in such a fashion that it would not get in his eyes again. He fluttered his tongue over that little bud of her clit, drinking in her potent scent. This was perhaps too much for the over-sensitive Rios, who suddenly jumped back and

moved away on the bed, cupping her soaking wet mound, trembling, looking hazily, drunkenly at Alps a moment, panting. The wolf sat up, grinning, and rumbled softly,

“Seems wolf techniques work fine, but I don’t want you to think that’s common even for our kind. I’m trained to do that.” He knew he was boasting a bit, but if there was anything he could have done to impress the two of them, it seemed that was it. Rios had felt so much pleasure she had to stop to recover. She panted raggedly, nodding, looking at Alps with her eyes fixed on his, seeming as if she were almost afraid of what he might do next.

“Alps... I don’t know who taught you that, but they have my appreciation and respect... If you give me a moment to... cool down...” Rios panted heavily, still on her knees before the white slave.

“Then her coffers are being ready for your offering.” Reika chuckled. Alps quirked a brow. A tax joke? From her? He looked back over to the empress, who now had her eyes locked on the wolf’s twitching shaft. It had been a while, obviously, since Alps had been relieved in any way. This entire trip hadn’t stoked his loins much with the promise of loving, but the pressure was there. His vein-lined length bobbed with need, longing to be touched. He gritted his teeth as Reika was the one who ultimately touched him, taking that spire in her hand, stroking up and down slowly to make a bead of his pre form at his tip, then smearing it down. By the way she did that, it was obvious that she knew at least something about lovemaking. Alps sat up a little and rumbled,

“Careful, Reika... Your empress would be cross if I were to go off now and spill it all.” He chuckled at his jest and then winced at a tight squeeze from Reika’s hand. He barked out, “Kidding, kidding. I have a bit of life in me I promise.” The wolf got on his knees, looking at Rios. The empress then rolled over softly onto her back, sprawling before the wolf, welcomingly. There was something so utterly seductive and begging in the way she looked at him, Alps knew that he could not possibly deny her the pleasure to come.

“If there is so much life in you, wolf, then I want it in me...” she whispered softly. Alps swallowed a bit, and Reika let go. The wolf moved over the empress. He was hardly able to believe that he was even able to think about doing what he was very definitely about to do. No one would stop this. It would happen, and he’d live with the knowledge that he had done this for the rest of his life. It might sadden Nita, but he would do it to get back home with her. She would understand. He could not let war happen if he had any say in it, and if this is what he’d have to do to prevent it, he counted himself lucky and happy.

The white wolf moved carefully and slowly over Rios, and Reika sat back down at the edge of the large, heavy bed. She watched as Alps slid himself up against her empress. She tilted her head back, making it apparent that she didn’t want Alps to kiss her. This was not an act of love, she was breeding with him. It was a solid reminder of how different this was from what he did with Nita, even if the oral pleasure was very

much the same. Alps slipped his hips gently against the prone Asuna's own, gasping slightly at the slick, hot feel of her bare sex kissing the tip of his twitching member. Rios didn't give Alps a chance to change his mind. Her legs hooked behind his rump and pulled him forward, sinking him into her searing, tight depths in such a deep, hot, heavenly stroke that he felt his sack draw tight immediately, and, biting his lip, barely kept himself from gushing in that first hungry gulp of his shaft from that longing, fertility-driven hyena beneath him.

As he held himself deep inside Rios, he felt her tremble, and she gave out an excited squeak, similar to her climax, but didn't gush over him this time. She just seemed happy. Alps frowned a little, looking over her, at the head of the bed. He felt bad that he might deceive her, but he had promises of his own to consider. If he could, he'd free another Letai male, and send him to her as soon as he freed him as payment for his release, he promised himself. Reika slid her hand along Alps' back, encouragingly.

"Fill Empress." The younger hyena said, pushing at the wolf's haunches. The motion made Alps remember what he was supposed to be doing. He drew his hips back, and with a wet sound to signify their hot union, their bodies came together again. Rios released Alps' haunches from her legs, her slender charcoal feet bouncing in the air a little, legs bent at the knees as she received her wolf. Alps pushed in deep and hard, but slow at first to let Rios get used to him.

The wolf was actually surprised by how tight the empress held him. She was very much like Nita in the build of her body internally, so Alps felt that she'd likely not had a lot of experience with this before hand, which might account for how easily she went over the edge with his tongue. Rios made a lot of various noises that had little or no meaning to Alps. Either they were in her own tongue, or they were parts of words mangled as he plowed her harder and faster, building up, his mind focused on making the act of release seem as real as possible for her the moment she climaxed.

Alps' tail tucked, not bouncing high over his back any more as he clutched her shoulders from underneath in his heavy hip-pounding, his mind spinning. She was taking longer to light up this way than he thought, and the wolf worried that he might not be able to hold out long enough for her climax, as slick and perfectly clutching as her inner flesh was. Reika was not helping him hold back as her hands pushed at his rump to push the wolf in deeper, actually helping him take her empress. The act in itself was lewd when in consideration of who he was "mating" with, and the fact that he was being so encouraged just to spill his essence all through her, the fact that both of these hyenas wanted nothing but that, drove Alps wild.

Still, the wolf managed to hold back, pitching himself harder and faster, feverishly against Rios. Reika held the base of Alps' tail, letting it slide through her fingers as the wolf thumped his hips hard against the elder hyena's own. The wolf gritted his teeth, trying to get into Rios' mind a little, growling out,

“Can’t hold it...” his ears folded back flatly. “I’m gonna pop... Gonna fill you... so full...” he grunted, making Rios squeak as he thumped his hips harder and faster against her still, his entire cock aching for release, but his desperate muscular contractions, even into the base of his tail, made sure he didn’t give that up.

“You is not speaking to Empress so crude, wolf. You is showing resp-“ Reika started, and got *loud* clicking from Rios, who whimpered out hotly,

“Ngff.. Mmff.. Hff.. Do it! Saturate... flood me... fill me... Ohh.. Ohhh...” the hyena began to thrash under Alps and he whined loudly, having not thought she might talk back and stroke his own loins hotter in the process. She was about to release. He had to hold out a little longer, but he could not seriously think of anything other than the bucking, thrashing, heaving, panting hot empress he was slamming against the bed with his vicious, heavy sexual frenzy, and he felt that need riding, the seed boiling in him.

“Yes... That is being good... Give!” Reika barked, seeming to actually be having fun at that point. Alps yipped loudly as Reika slapped his haunches, spanking him. He felt a race of panic rush through his veins, thinking, with that impact, he actually had exploded inside that suckling channel. He yipped out loudly!

“HuhaAAAH!” his hips grinding hard, the wolf intentionally coming to a stop, thinking he was actually already coming from the rush of pleasure that bolted through him. He had not really been hit like that during sex before, and was startled by the positive effect it had in nearly making him spray his thick load inside Rios. He trembled as he tried to hold still to keep it from happening, but Rios cried out,

“Cumming! He’s cumming, I feel it!” Alps ducked his head, gritting his teeth, his thick cock jerking and spasming inside her channel as he tried to hold back, but he suddenly wasn’t sure if he *wasn’t* cumming at that point. But he would perhaps not be able to tell easily anyway, as Rios went tight around him, clenching hard, and then a loud *splurch!* announced her wet, messy climax over his shaft, and she wailed with a volume that made him sure guards would start pouring into the bedchamber, but none arrived. They likely knew better. Alps felt pain in his tummy from how close he was to climax and still not letting himself burst, which at least made him feel better that he had not actually gushed already. He held perfectly still, his cock still twitching and jerking hard inside Rios as she splashed violently around him, making no secret of her own climax.

Alps tilts his head back, barking out loudly, “Yis! Yis! C-Cumming!” he cries, letting the pair think that Rios was right in her assumption. The jerking, spasming of that thick wolf meat inside the empress hyena was actually caused by his fighting tooth and nail not to cum, and she seemed to think he was climaxing. He held himself as deep as he could inside Rios, which let him hold a little more still and feel less of the suckling that her sex was giving him as she spasmed around him, but she took it as meaning he was spraying her deep, sinking, surrendering moans spilling from her, and an issuance of her guttural tongue, her own language, probably swearing madly all

kinds of vulgar happiness about what the wolf was supposed to be doing inside her that very moment.

The wolf held her like this a little longer, letting her slowly calm, and then slowly lowered himself over her, his thick cock still rock hard, jerking quietly inside her as he held his hips mashed wet, tight against hers, trying to ignore the soft rocking motion of her after-climax savoring of the wolf. He laid against her and tried to feel like he was soft and weak and spent from his monster climax, hoping this would be enough. He pondered whether she would make him do this multiple times, just to be sure. Alps was sure he'd not be able to make it like this repeatedly. He lowered his head a little, before slowly, carefully drawing himself free. He sat before the lovely empress, on his knees, his still tightly swollen cock bobbing over her sex, a trail of his pre and her juices linked with a little strand of that thick wetness for a second and then breaking. He blushed a bit at the view. The hyena did look very satisfied. He felt bad that he had misled her, but it was important to him.

Reika spoke softly, in her native tongue, and her empress spoke back, the two of them seeming to have some kind of playful exchange as the elder Asuna rubbed over her body, sliding her hands over her chest, then over her puffy, beaten folds, smishing and squishing her thick, tangy juices around for the wolf to watch, making his cock bounce and twitch in front of him. His tail hurt from how hard it was to hold back, and all things said, he felt like if she decided to masturbate right there in front of him, he'd not even need to be touched before he'd send thick, gooey streamers of seed all over her belly for it. He had come so dangerously close to that release every strand of fluff on his body begged for. He panted raggedly, watching the pair through half closed eyes as they talked, perhaps discussing what they had enjoyed about the little tryst they had been party to with the wolf. Then, Rios spoke up.

"Reika is embarrassed to ask..." and the younger Asuna barked with a squeak at Rios, who giggled and waved her hand dismissively at her subordinate. "Reika wants to taste a wolf to show she's as strong as you are." The empress laughed as the short-haired Asuna battered her softly with open hands in protest. Alps blushed at that. Taste him? Like, lick his tip? He didn't forbid such an idea, though he secretly feared she might bite him on principle. Still, he didn't want to insult her, especially if she would be taking him back home, hopefully soon. Alps answered softly, panting.

"Sure... I would be happy... to let her prove her strength..." he rumbled. Reika shuffled a bit at the edge of the bed, and then Rios sat up a little, and pulled Alps against her chest, letting the wolf feel her warm breasts mash against his back. He blushed at how motherly she already felt holding him that way. Rios looked to Reika and murmured,

"Go on. You can have it..." Her tone was both coaxing and teasing, as if she didn't expect Reika to actually do it. Both Alps and Rios got a surprise when the mildly psychotic hyena sank hand and muzzle both over Alps' cock. The wolf flattened his ears, eyes rolling back at the screaming rush of pleasure through his body.

“Uuuunnngghh..” he groaned, tail tucking, instinctively fighting the urge to explode right then and there. It would be too obvious he’d held back if he did, but oh how he would feel better if he got that weight out of his loins after the lustful breeding he’d just pretended to give to Rios! He gritted his teeth, lowering his head. That was more than a taste she was taking. Her hand and muzzle slipped up and down his throbbing spire. The empress watched over Alps’ shoulder, nuzzling and biting at his ears playfully as she viewed the playful Asuna subordinate enjoying her wolf-steak.

“Reika, he just went, you can’t make him just pop again!” the empress laughed, hugging Alps up to her chest. Alps panted raggedly, his body aching all over from his muscle clenching to prevent the inevitable. She very well could make it happen if she kept that up. Even if she just held him in her hot mouth and rolled her tongue around, he’s probably drown her with how he felt now. He huffed a sigh of relief as her muzzle slipped off of him. Barely made it!

“Reika is proving she is strong as wolf! She does this fast, you see!” she barked playfully.

“Fu-“ Alps yipped out as his throbbing, hot, vein-lined flesh was engulfed in hot chocolate muzzle again. She bucked her head and fist up and down his spire, the wolf curled his toes, whining. Rios whispered into Alps’ ears softly.

“How about it pretty wolf? Is she that strong? It would make her feel strong, I bet, if she tasted you. Tasted what you gave to me...” Her words were provoking, but made Alps realized two things. First, that he was allowed to cum now, which was the best news he’d had all week, and that if he did climax, Reika would feel strong, and probably vindicated and may be in much better spirits for the trip back if he just gave it to her. Quickly.

“Uhhhng..” Alps murmured out darkly, in warning, his hips tightening, rising to meet that sweet stroking hot muzzle, the feel of that broad, flat tongue under his glans working him to that point already, even if he had not decided it was okay, finally. Alps was actually surprised that he made it another five or six strokes after deciding to let go, but his body finally convulsed, and he threw his head back and howled, a nice, long, echoing howl of relief as he sprayed streamer after thick, heavy, almost painful streamer of his hot, sticky virile and potent seed into that suckling, greedy muzzle, not even able to feel bad that it was going where Rios would never have wanted it if she knew she’d been denied. Alps’ tail tucked, his back hurting from how hard he sprayed the back of Reika’s tongue. She drew off of him partly, keeping just his flaring, burning tip in her muzzle as she pumped his squirting length with her soaking wet, slick hand, making him spill every drop in her muzzle.

Alps nearly fainted from the force of it. He had been asked to hold back before, but not under these kinds of relentless, almost cruel and impossible circumstances. It had been nearly too much for him, and every second now felt like heaven. After a few

moments of trembling, and dry-twitching in Reika's hand, she pulled her lips free of his tingling, burning tip, and Rios let him drop onto the bed. The two looked at him as he lay there. Alps rolled onto his side and looked up at them dizzily.

"Reika... is definitely a strong Asuna. Stronger than a wolf." Alps complimented. Rios smiled at the lupine as he lay there, and she laid back on her back, thighs parted, alongside him. She looked at the slave with happy, knowing eyes. Reika was facing away slightly, so Alps could not read her expression. He worried a little that he'd somehow insulted her by complimenting her. She had not said it was against the rules. He lay there, still twitching in post orgasmic bliss, barely able to move.

"Reika is also one of my most trusted and dear friends. As close to a sister as I have ever had." Rios spoke softly, Alps sitting up with some concern as he watched her. The younger female Asuna reached back and pushed Alps, making him slide to the edge of the bed. He stood up, looking at her from behind on weak legs, wondering why she was making him get off the bed, not speaking, not facing him. Was this some kind of superiority ritual? Rios certainly did not seem to be unhappy.

"Is... everything alright?" Alps asked, warily. Then, Reika moved over Rios' prone form, looking down at her lovingly. Alps blinked at her expression, not sure what to make of it. She looked like she had her cheeks puffed out... Then he froze.

"Everything is fine. You didn't think we had overlooked that you might not be entirely... cooperative, did you?" the empress crooned softly. Alps felt like he was going to faint, not just from the afterglow. Reika lowered her head, placed her hands on the back of Rios' thighs, spreading them and cupped her mouth over the bare, puffy, wet sex of her empress, and the wolf heard a loud *squoultch* from the heavy, rather forceful exchange. His heart dropped in his stomach. The potent, thick, copious contents of Reika's muzzle emptied deep inside Rios, the older, stronger Asuna dropping back, crying out happily as she received her gift from her trusted servant.

"N... No... That..." he stammered, realizing that they had worked out the plan the moment they knew, somehow, that he'd held back as they spoke in their native tongue. His plan had come undone so easily, and now, if there was to be a life to gain from him, if he really was Letai the way they said... Well, he was certainly going to find out if he was Letai soon enough. He dropped to his knees. "That was so... unfair..." he whimpered.

"Such a weak wolf." Reika murmured softly, Rios spreading the smaller hyena's ears affectionately ruffling her hair. Alps put his head in his arms, fighting back tears of ... of what? Why was he upset? He was going to be forced to do this? What was he afraid of now? He gritted his teeth, choking back his tears.

"You selfish thing! For the last time, I am not weak! I have more power than you will ever dream of, but it doesn't come from hurting people and taking advantage of

people. It comes from doing what I think is right, and making those I love happy!" he barked. "Kiranna said so herself! If I am Letai, I am far stronger!"

"Wulf can't protect himself or his friends." Reika said, laying against Rios' thighs happily. Rios, however, looked a little less happy. Alps didn't care if she regretted what she did, though. She got what she wanted from him. Now he'd just go home. To what? How would Nita feel about this? Would she even believe the scenario played out the way it did? Surely she would know he couldn't lie to her. And Nidaja could find the memory of it in her Mindwalk sphere. So what was eating him up?

"Alps, the life you give, this gift, be it stolen or freely given, will give the Asuna a future. You should be proud. It is my vow to try to foster a peace between our people, as it will be needed if either the Asuna or the Amani are to face Mannus. Believe me, Alps. That is my intention. You should not be upset. You bring about a glorious change for both our people." Alps looked down, shaking softly, not sure if it was from fear, rage, or just being blitzed from his climax.

"Can I go home?" Alps asked.

"Not yet." Rios answered. The wolf thumped his fist into the bed, making Reika get onto her knees, defensively, as if he might attack Rios. Alps wasn't that stupid.

"You promised." the lupine growled.

"Yes, when I know I carry new life. It will be a few weeks before we know. And I would appreciate your cooperation in the meantime, given that you can be sure now that you have no choice." Rios' words were firm and soft, making Alps think even more that she would make a good mother, but it made him realize even more that her intentions had been for this all along. Reika said softly,

"Empress Dominis... is keeping promise." Reika said.

"Rios." Alps stated coldly. Reika glowered at Alps and attempted to slap him with the back of her hand. Alps caught it, a little surprised at the fact that he had, given the force behind it. Reika jerked her hand back. Alps looked at her with narrow eyes, and then back to the empress. She looked back at him very seriously.

"I will let no harm come to those I care for." He stood back up, hands at his side, looking into Rios' eyes. "... and if this is what fate has decided for me..." he looked between the pair. "... then I shall care for the Asuna as well."