

**Sirius, Book IV**  
*A Slave's War*

*Comments or Questions?*

*Contact Alps: [sarsis@gmail.com](mailto:sarsis@gmail.com)*

*Or just drop a note at: <http://www.furaffinity.net/user/sarsis/>*

---

**Chapter 8**

---

The sky was dark with low-hanging clouds that swept in front of two moons, one a sliver and one nearly full, hanging large and low in the sky just over the perimeter wall that divided the courtyard from the substantial limestone cliff that lead down to the ocean. The pale silvery light cast long shadows up to the manor itself. Outside was Ceriss in her Nita essence-disguise, appearing to just be sitting on a bench by a fountain that slowly bubbled its pure water from the ground below. An occasional ocean breeze rustled the tall, slender firs that bordered the manor on the side facing the city proper. It seemed like a very peaceful scene as Leal and the lady thief skidded to a halt on the cobblestone walk that cut across the well-manicured central garden. Right by the "Queen" was an ornate garden lamp, an intricate lantern at the end of a tall wrought iron pole to cast light on the pretty lady wolf.

"I don't see anyone." proclaimed the grey lupine guard. As he said that, he saw a bluish light rise from behind Ceriss, flicker a bit, and then be whisked away as if by the breeze. It was faint, almost like a glowing wisp of smoke.

"The spirits of guardians past tell me they come." 'Nita' said in a soft tone. A spirit? That thing was a spirit? That sight did not comfort Leal. Ceriss was able to talk to ghosts? Even as he knew what she was, he was never quite sure if ghosts were even real. Until he met her though, he was not even really certain the Letai were real, or they had nearly the power the stories all seemed to agree that they had. That had been made perfectly clear all too recently as truth. He shook away his troubled mind. He did not have time to worry about it now.

"Nita's a spirit-keener? I thought she was more into fire magics?" Neit slipped behind the taller guard. She then squeaked as Lunaris slapped her backside, flailing at him wildly. "No! NO!" she scolded. The large black wolf grinned and nodded to the manor.

"Up on the roof, thief. I know you know how." He beamed toothily at her. Leal folded his ears back. Lunaris was about as bold as he could ever be afraid to be.

"*Former* thief, thank you!" she barked, rubbing her bottom indignantly.

“Fine, but I need you watching the perimeter. If you see anyone lurking around outside the fight, watch them carefully. If they leave when the fight heats up, I want you to shadow them. Do not fail in that, Neit.” She huffed, and moved swiftly toward the wall, breaking into a dead run. Leal flinched, as it seemed she would just barrel headlong into it because she was not slowing down. She turned a little, taking an angle toward it, making it appear like she was trying to turn away at the last second but was moving too fast. Instead of hitting the wall, she jumped and took four rising steps up the side of the wall at an angle, catching a support beam, pulling herself up, then launching up to an under-support for the third floor, pulling up that, and then scaling a wooden trim at the corner of the building, right up to the clay-tiled roof. Leal was quietly impressed. It also made a little more sense as to why Lunariss chose the girl. He was not stupid; he may very well have picked the best one he could under the circumstances. The guard turned to speak with his captain only to find that he was gone. He stood alone in the courtyard with the queen’s double. They stood out there in awkward silence for easily ten minutes before Leal had to speak up.

“Interesting evening.” The guard noted as he walked up closer to Ceriss.

“We should kiss.” Ceriss stated flatly. Leal folded his ears back. Was she kidding?

“That would distract me.” He remarked.

“And encourage an all-out attack.” The lady wolf answered in a whisper.

“Why?” he asked.

“Think about it. Would the queen do such a thing with a lowly guard if anyone was watching? They will believe it’s just the two of us out here.”

“It *is* just the two of us.” Leal retorted. He was fearful of his captain’s reaction to seeing it, especially if he found out his subordinate’s other indiscretions with someone who held the image of her majesty. ‘Nita’ glowered at him.

“You start kissing me now, or tomorrow, I disguise myself as you, and go down to the shops in Diera and steal embarrassing items in broad daylight.” Leal winced at that, and then pulled the queen close, deeply kissing her. Leal imagined this would be particularly confusing to the thief, who thought this really was Nita. He felt himself almost on fire with sensation as he kissed her. The imminent danger made him more sensitive. Time seemed to stand still for him and the disguised priestess before he finally heard a soft shuffle. He pulled out of the kiss and turned in time to see they were surrounded. “Nita” straightened her robes.

"Halt!" shouted Leal nervously. He felt almost weak with anxiousness. He had been in scuffles before, but not like this. A variety of lupines, two female, six male, all stood in a circle around them. Ceriss had intended to make it so they could be surrounded, perhaps to encourage more out at one time.

"You had better have a very good reason for interrupting me in my private manor." The faux-queen stated. Leal was careful to note that there was no worry or fear in her voice. It sounded the same as when she addressed Neit.

"The era of your rule, and the slow decline of our species, has come to an end." One of the eight stepped forward, a slightly older female. Her long golden fur made her look a lot like Misty, though her hair was pulled under a rounded red felt hat that made her look kind of like a furry yellow mushroom.

"I still seem to be the ruler of this nation... so you do not tell the truth." Ceriss spoke darkly. "I do not suffer liars in my summer home." Leal put his hand on the hilt of his sword. How could she be so confident? He was not aware that he would be right in the center of this right from the beginning. He knew his hand had to be visibly shaking. A smirk from two of the males who put their hands on their own long, heavy swords confirmed that.

"We do not lie, we make that prediction." The older female stated.

"I have no intention of retiring my position." Ceriss stated flatly.

"Are you daft?" the other female, a younger one with black fur and red-trimmed armor barked. "We are here to kill you, whore!" Leal felt his fear ebb, replaced by genuine rage. That was the queen they spoke of, even if not who they spoke to. Ceriss, however, remained icy calm. It was eerie to the guard, watching her. These eight people were here for the sole purpose of murdering the person she was pretending to be. Every one of them sought her demise, and left her heavily outnumbered.

"Who are my killers?" the priestess asked, folding her arms behind her.

"Watch her hands, if she starts visibly drawing essence..." One of the two males drew his sword. The others followed suit, preparing to attack when given the order by their leader. The older female stood still, seeming perturbed, but not afraid.

"We are those who wish to see our species survive to fight another day. Even if under the same conditions as the Asuna, at least we will live, and we might live to see better days. But we won't if you take after your mother and provoke the dark one as you do. The royal house will never submit, so this is the answer."

“Your *name*, assassin. Tell me your *name*.” The tone of the queen was more irritated than worried. “I don’t care about your cause; it is folly and shall be short-lived.”

“I am Russe. I will not be the new queen, if that’s what you ask. I am just here to make sure you do not remain.” After her introduction, she made a short grunting noise, and went kind of stiff. She then stumbled forward toward the fountain and planted her hands against the edge of it, as if she were going to vomit into it. Leal stepped to the side, not drawing his sword as he watched, dumbfounded. The look on her face was absolute terror. She looked like she was trying to keep herself from falling into the water.

“Russe!” cried the other female. “Russe, what are you doing?”

“Hey, are you okay?” called one of the males, lifting his sword to the ready. Inexplicably, Russe plunged her head into the cold fountain water. She went to her knees, and began kicking her feet, as if struggling to get out. Ceriss stepped back as two of the attackers ran to try to pull Russe out. The priestess had not stepped back out of fear, Leal realized, but to keep from getting water splashed on her, more concerned with remaining tidy as this horrible thing happened.

“It’s the queen! She’s attacked her somehow! Kill her!” called the second female, but her expression switched from anger to fear. Leal drew his sword, ready as he could be for the attack, and glanced at the queen. She was no longer Nita. Ceriss was in her place.

“It’s a trap!” screamed one of the males. Ceriss grabbed the iron garden lamp she had stepped closer to and its appearance changed. The light faded and vanished as it metamorphosed into something very different. The lady priestess held a scythe with a four foot crescent blade with three round white jewels at the end of a six foot iron pole, the weapon gleaming silver in the moonlight. Leal held his sword at the ready, but faltered a little. He was seeing something that no one had seen in hundreds of years. He was seeing a Letai priestess in battle, something even legends glossed over. Her darkness spilled out from her, hiding her outline a bit, making her seem like a shadowy mass, a flickering darkness, her eyes glinting as they reflected light. They were left uncovered most likely because even she could not see through that spell.

“What the hell is it!?” cried one of the other guards.

“Russe! Russe!” Leal gripped his sword and snapped his focus back at the other two, still struggling with the older lady. Her feet slid outward finally, shaking a bit fully extended, and then still. Ceriss had grabbed her invisibly somehow with the essence and drowned her right in front of all of her allies. Leal knew battle was never pretty, but that seemed almost unnecessarily brutal. There was absolutely no defense from something like that.

“Attack, damn it!” cried the younger female, seeing Russe die. Leal gritted his teeth and turned, digging in his heels. They were surrounded on all sides. The shadow shrank a bit, and then bolted forward faster than anything Leal had ever seen could move, a gleaming white crescent glinting under the moonlight as two soft impacts were heard. The first two who drew their swords moments before now lay in four parts on the cobblestone path, making Leal’s stomach lurch. He turned away both to face attackers that were still alive, and not to have to look at the remains Ceriss had so quickly fashioned out of those fighters’ misguided intentions.

“Run!” cried one of the other fighters.

“Stand your ground, or we are compromised!” shouted the younger female. She rushed toward Leal, apparently not having the nerve to attack that black mass. Leal held his sword up, but she stumbled and fell at his feet, a very large knife protruding from her back. The panicked fighters turned, their numbers already halved. Lunaris had thrown the dagger from some distance and was approaching fast, his two handed sword held high for its first crushing blow against the assassins. Leal glanced just in time to catch an attacker lunging toward him, perhaps having seen that he was looking at Lunaris and not at the fight. He cursed himself for not being more professional in combat, and parried the thrust with a loud clink of steel, swung his sword to the side, down, then up in a flipping motion to end just at the rib-cage of his attacker. Leal had never had to actually kill before, so he was surprised at how hard the jolt was to his arm when the grey-furred, shaggy young lupine impaled himself on it. He was just as surprised to find the blade required a very significant tug to pull out. Ceriss’ shadow trimmed a bit, making her look more the way she did when she met Leal, and she moved toward the remaining three who realized that in the middle of the courtyard, now they were the ones who were outnumbered and essentially surrounded. All three went for Leal, who braced his foot behind him a little. He knew very well he had given the appearance of weakness in his response to this fight, and that was why the enemies came to him. He vowed not to let that happen again as he prepared for the fray.

They were unaware perhaps that he had trained heavily in his youth, and chose to be a guard at a young age and not just when the need for money arose. He was a career fighter, and deflected the first attack with ease, spinning on his left foot and cleaving the neck of that attacker, before dodging the next incoming stroke. He cast a hard blow at the one who had just missed it, but that wolf, perhaps with more experience than Leal had, was able to hop back, and jump back in with a thrust, putting a couple inches of steel into Leal’s side, making him wince with agony, but not enough to make him falter. He staggered back slightly, feeling the sensation of heat well around the wound, blood pouring from it. He didn’t have time to look to see how bad it was. He readied himself a little more weakly for the next attack, but it didn’t come. A massive sword protruded from

his attacker's chest, then drew back briskly, Lunariss pulling the blade out of him. The captain was perhaps not the best thing to ignore on the battlefield. The last potential assassin threw down his weapon and went prone, crying out.

"Stop! Stop, they made me!" Leal watched him wail in fear as Ceriss approached him. He clutched his side a bit, feeling how wet it was with blood. It was not immediately too bad. Lunariss forced his hand to move, and checked on him. The chainmail that the wolf guard wore protected him from what might have been a fatal thrust, but his flesh had been opened all the same. The captain murmured faintly,

"It looks like it's not wide enough to indicate that the sword made it all the way in. Organs should be alright. We will get you patched up later." Leal was hardly paying attention to his wound, however.

"You chose this path." Ceriss' tone was indifferent. She was not angry. "The Spirits of Silverlight have brought this darkness upon all of them, tarnishing what had been their high standing in this nation for what? Idealism and greed? Do you think the dark one would have treated you better? You see how I treat traitors to the crown, liars and assassins. *This* is how the Uruk, controlled by the dark one, treat *children*. That is what you wanted for this world. Then you show even greater greed to believe you can be spared."

"If you kill me, you will never find out who is behind all of this! The Spirits of Silverlight didn't just decide to do this; we were taken over by a bigger group. Kill me and their identity will never come to light!" He sat up, looking confident.

"You would betray this group to me?" Ceriss asked. Leal gritted his teeth, taking an offered handkerchief from his captain and pushing it to his wound to stop the bleeding. He knew immediately where she was going with that question.

"Yes! They deserve to be punished for this foolish act, do they not?" The sable-furred wolf stood up shakily, his sword still on the ground. Suddenly, he lurched upward, hanging three feet off the ground. Ceriss seemed not to have to even move a muscle to do it. He struggled, kicking and flailing, holding his throat, which apparently was where she was holding him as he gasped and gagged.

"You have proven yourself a traitor twice now in ten minutes. I am not so foolish as trust you a third time.

"You will never know!" he coughed.

"I will know." Ceriss growled, looking at him angrily.

"I will take the secret with me. Once I'm dead, *ulk!* Once I'm dead it's gone for good." Leal felt kind of bad for the fighter, but he was there to kill the Queen, so he certainly did not feel bad enough to try to tell Ceriss to stop. What was coming would have been his fate even if Nita herself had to decide. It was the law. Still, murder was a hard thing to stomach, justified or not.

"That is your choice." Lunariss stated coldly, interjecting on behalf of the law. Leal looked to him. A fight against eight assassins, and he was not even breathing hard. Leal realized why Lunariss had been so confident. If he knew even half of this priestess' skill, he knew they were never in any real danger. Leal's hesitation and inexperience had been the only reason why he was even slightly hurt. It made a lot more sense why the dark one wanted the Letai wiped out. An army of these priestesses would have been unstoppable, but it was a blow to his senses that the Letai were wiped out anyway. That was a real testament to the dark one's power.

"It's *your* choice, you mean. This won't be the only attempt on the queen. You can stop it, but you need me." croaked the struggling wolf.

"No, it's *my* choice." Ceriss stated flatly, and then the suspended lupine lurched hard, as if thrown, and sailed, flailing, right over the wall that separated the courtyard from the seaside cliff beyond. A long drop awaited him, and an impact was never even heard as the sound of the surf drowned out his unpleasant encounter with the shattered boulders below. Leal stood there quietly a moment, not wanting to look around at the other results of that fight. The wound, though shallow, was feeling more and more painful as he stood there. Still, the wound was valuable to a guard. Being harmed as one stands for the Queen was a gleaming honor to the royal guard. It was the sort of thing that earned one a seat at the royal table. Lunariss spoke up.

"You know... We could have at least tried to get some information out of him. He seemed willing enough, even if it would not have changed his sentence for treason." He looked over the wall, perhaps seeing the unpleasantness on the rocks below. It did not seem to faze the more veteran warrior.

"There was little to guarantee he would give us real information." Ceriss murmured. "He would have known that his fate would be unchanged. He was likely instructed to feed us false information if captured, and if we are the ones to kill him, he's not happy with us anyway and he would surely like to inconvenience us. There is a better way to get that information."

"Neit is gone, so she either followed someone as asked, or she ran when she saw what you were." Lunariss said quietly. "She's our only chance for more info now."

“Not quite.” Ceriss stated, getting both wolves’ attention. She held out her hand, and a small bluish sphere lit up, slowly rising skyward from behind the wall. It jolted suddenly from its upward floating, and moved to the courtyard. It flickered a bit, and Leal heard a long, plaintive, horrified scream that sounded like it was close, but still somehow far away, like it was in dense forest, hard to get a fix on, and beyond all help.

“A spirit? For the one who just...” The grey lupine wrapped his arms around himself, recoiling. By all that was righteous and lawful... Ceriss could attack people who were already dead!

“There is no escape, traitor. No rejoining the essence for you. This could be your fate... for centuries if need be. Not having a body anymore doesn’t mean I cannot make you remember pain.” Leal backpedaled a bit fearfully. Ceriss was bordering on being a monster before him. He could hardly believe that this was what the Letai were really capable of. He could not fathom she was the same one who had such a short time ago shown him such incredible pleasure. Now, she showed herself capable of torture beyond anything his darkest thoughts were capable of.

“I don’t know where they are!” the spirit cried. He then wailed in agony again.

“I have to exert force on your body to make you feel pain, but with you in this state, I can make you feel pleasure or pain with my own memories, and I promise you, I know more about pain than you remember, so this can be much worse than anything you have ever experienced. Tell me what you *do* know.”

“Well, this is actually pretty horrifying.” Lunaris stated under his breath. “Gonna have to maybe have her assist us sparingly. I would not wish this on any but this sort of traitor.” Leal nodded, ignoring his wound again. He was not suffering like *that* at least. The voice of the spirit seemed tinny, echoless, as if coming from inside instead of out as it called out again.

“They called the shots for the Spirits of Silverlight before Azia took over with a more moderate stance. They were not happy when she allied herself with the crown. I don’t really know *who* they are, but they are an old group, and I do know they are the ones who had the former queen assassinated. They want to give the empire to Mannus, even if it enslaves us like the Asuna. It’s as we said, it’s our only hope against the dark one. The attack is bigger than just overthrowing the crown here in town. We know the people would likely revolt. They have to be able to keep order. They are bringing the Uruk over the ocean to overtake the city. They will be here in two days, hundreds of them. There is nothing you can do. Tell people not to fight, and the Uruk won’t harm them – NggyyaaaaaaaaAAAAA!” He screamed again and that light shifted from blue to red. Ceriss snarled.

“Fool! The Uruk can’t function here! They need a special crystal. There would have to be one right here on the island!” There was a pitiful, weak squeak from the glowing orb.

“There is! Oh there is! I saw them bring it ashore. I don’t know where they took it, but they said it was for the final solution.” Leal’s heart sank. He didn’t understand all the talk about the crystals, but he knew well what would happen if the Uruk got into Diera. Not fighting back would not mean no one got hurt. It would be the worst slaughter the people of Amani had ever known. Ceriss snarled out furiously, and the light went darker red, the color of blood as a whisker-crimping scream echoed through the night. It went on for several minutes, before the priestess stopped. She was blistering with rage, her shadow extending out in a horrifying tangle of bramble-like mass, moving and coiling and shrinking and growing.

“Your treachery may well have caused the death of everyone in Diera, do you understand that?! This city won’t be held by the Uruk, the people would fight to the last child, and you know that! Is that what you wanted?!” Leal felt less and less sorry for the spirit. He was a monster, even if he did not believe it.

“I had no choice! They would kill us!” cried the ghost.

“I killed you!” Ceriss barked. “Is this so bad that you would have innocent children slaughtered by unfeeling Uruk for weeks until this city was a crumbled burned out tragedy of the Amanian people? Is you being dead worth every moment of their suffering? Your selfishness would bring an end to all things!”

“You only assume that! They assured us that only those who fight back will be killed!” The ghost shifted back to blue, safe from the priestess’ abuse as she tried to make him understand what he’d done.

“When has that *ever* been the case, worm?” Lunar is finally shouted. “Never! That means that everyone here, upon seeing the Uruk attacking, *will* fight back because we have absolutely no reason to believe that anyone would be spared. This city will be destroyed in two days’ time because of your selfishness!” The light became darker blue.

“I’m sorry!” the spirit sobbed.

“You are not sorry that you caused it. You are sorry that we know that you caused it. You are sorry that it makes you suffer. That is not enough.” Ceriss growled.

“I told you what I know! You still intend to torture me?!” the light wailed.

"No." Ceriss stated. "You do not deserve to know any kind of continued existence." There was a short pause.

"Then, you would allow me to return to the essence?" he asked dolefully.

"No." Ceriss stated icily. "You will not. Your essence is tainted with the worst kind of darkness, an inability to feel for anyone but yourself. The level of darkness that stains your memories and your spirit will poison the essence more than it already is, and give power to the dark one. I cannot allow that to happen."

"What can you do? Just hold me here forever?" he asked. "Even you will eventually die, whatever you are." His words were cold and unfeeling. That mockery of sobbing was gone. Leal was unsure how Ceriss was able to so easily see through it.

"If you knew what I was, you would not have had the nerve to answer that." Ceriss' form snapped to a more defined and recognizable appearance, though still dark. Her eyes, however, glowed a deep violet. "Naros forarthu'tir istastah winos'renstar tirhurarthunar bineldacuruuthumiristanargil narostirhuristanargil." As she said those words, three rings of light formed, spinning around the light. It brightened suddenly, bright white, and screamed loudly.

"What is this?! No! No! What is this darkness! Please, I can change!" The echoless words were lighter than before, despite obviously being screamed. The rings formed strange symbols and continued spinning, and then broke, as if thrown apart by their spinning, and the bright white light shattered, smaller lights thrown off, scattered, then fading away. Ceriss' fur flickered from black, to her true white color a few times, making it obvious that took a lot of power. She regained control a moment later, and crossed her arms.

"I apologize for that unpleasantness. I assure you it was warranted." She stated.

"What the hell did you do to him?" Lunar is asked loudly.

"I destroyed him." The priestess stated calmly.

"You already killed him." Leal stated in slight confusion. "How else could you destroy him?" His heart sank the moment he asked the question as he realized what she meant. She spoke.

"His energy has been separated from the lifestream. His memories, his energy, his story, and all that he ever meant or wanted or hoped or dreamed... All of that is completely erased from the universe. If our world lives to see happier days, no part of him will ever know them." Her words rang in his ears. This

priestess had the power to kill him without touching. She had the power to trap his spirit after he was dead, and continue to harm him, make him suffer beyond the limits of his body. She had the ability to obliterate his very essence and deny his being a part of the flow of time itself. Whoever that assassin was, he suffered death in a way that almost no one else would. Leal felt himself for the first time actually genuinely horrified of someone. Ceriss had this power, and she still fell to the Shadowfall. That was what the Queen was facing, and she did so every day with a smile, there to support her subjects, and give them strength. As he feared Ceriss, he loved his Queen more and more.

"How are you feeling, Leal?" The words from the Priestess seemed a complete juxtaposition of what he just witnessed. She cared for him. She was the same one who he spent intimate time with again. Was that really what war was like? Did battle have the ability to change a person so much?

"I am feeling fine. It's not a bad wound. I can wait to get to the castle infirmary and get patched up I think. It hurts, but injuries do." He tried to put on a strong front. After what he witnessed from Ceriss, he felt it would be silly to whine about his little stab to the side. After all, his spirit wasn't just shattered after being tortured after having his body splattered on jagged rocks after being choked half to death by unseen hands after being forced to watch his friends and colleagues hopelessly slaughtered for their endeavors. No, Leal was feeling much better than all that.

"You do know assassins typically use poison on their blades, right?" the priestess asked. Leal felt a spike of panic through him. Suddenly, everything hurt, and he felt like he was burning, and he felt sick to his stomach, and he knew he was dying.

"He'd be dead already." Lunariss said confidently. "Don't mess with his head, this has been rough on the lad." Leal felt sudden love for his captain for taking up for him, but was still visibly shaken.

"Are you sure? I don't feel good." The grey furred guard stated.

"Relax, Lunariss is right, you would be dead already if you had been poisoned in the fight." Ceriss stated calmly.

"Don't *do* that!" Leal gasped, clutching his chest, heart still hammering in fear. "That's not funny! So... why did they not poison their weapons? I know that's how assassins usually do, right?" he asked.

"They did, but fortunately for you, they had their blades out plenty long enough for me to push the poison down to the hilt with my essence. They would have had to run you through to poison you, Leal. That's why I drowned the first one, to get everyone close enough to the water for me to get it on their

weapons.” Leal wavered. She thought that far in advance? Not only was she powerful, but she was a tactician as formidable as the general herself. He suddenly felt sheepish near her. The wolf had been so candid and careless with this powerful and respectable individual.

“S... So what do we do now?” asked the guard, his fingers tingling as the sudden jolt of adrenalin wore off slowly.

“We get you patched up, return to the castle, rest, and then we try to find that crystal before the Uruk get here.” Lunariss stated.

“The Uruk! No, I almost forgot! We have to evacuate Diera!” Leal felt that adrenalin pumping right back into his system.

“To where?” his captain grunted. “We do not have enough boats to get everyone off this island in six weeks, let alone two days. We have to find and destroy the crystal.” Ceriss held up a hand.

“We cannot destroy it.” She began heading for the manor. Leal and Lunariss followed.

“Isn’t that what Alps and the others intend to do? Do you mean to say they can’t be destroyed, or just that you don’t have the ability to?” he asked.

“If the Avatar realizes that we know what the crystals are, he will dramatically increase the defenses around the crystals close to him. He does not consider them yet to be a weakness. He does not take them seriously. Even at the risk of Diera falling, we cannot risk Alps and Nita failing in their mission.”

“Then what do we do?!” exclaimed the guard. Ceriss resumed being calm.

“We take it off the island. The dark one can feel if a crystal is broken, I am sure, but he would not be able to tell that it’s been taken miles west over the ocean and dropped into the dark depths where it would be useless to him.”

“How do we find it?” asked Leal.

“We don’t. You do.” The guard backed up a bit.

“Alright, how do I find it?” he asked.

“I will teach you to see it... to follow it, I have a very short time to do it, but it’s the only way.” Her tone was very authoritative, and he felt as if he were actually talking to a general, or to royalty. The Letai held a lot of power when

they existed in their full glory so long ago, and it showed. Lunaris did not challenge her, but he did speak up.

“I would be willing to learn and to search as well.” Leal thought the captain might be the better choice for such an important task anyway.

“Lunaris, you will need to prepare a boat, a crew, and get the rest of the town guard prepared in case we fail. We might not be able to save everyone, but we certainly will be prepared for what we are to face. They are not expecting us to know what’s going on, they expect the town to be in mourning, numb shock from the assassination of their queen, and unable to even look to see what’s coming. They are not prepared to deal with a fully aware, alert, and eager city defense, and they sure as fuck aren’t ready for me.” Her eyes glowed red briefly as a reminder to Leal that very unpleasant things were ahead for the Uruk. Would it be enough, though? Did Ceriss fear death with such a fight ahead? Leal followed her inside as he resolved to do as the priestess asked. He would not fail her. They had to find that crystal and move it. He never wanted to see the dark Letai priestess in battle again.

---

The fight for Alps and the others had gone well and that gave them a lot of energy to continue traveling with. The good mood that it placed them in was something that the former slave could actually feel. He wondered if his mother would be disappointed in her son if she thought he was able to draw essence from the others because of battle. That surely was not what the Letai were supposed to do, but Lira and Reika especially enjoyed it so much that he got as much passion and energy from the event as he felt he might a quick lusty encounter with one of them.

Luna did not seem to mind that the others were happy about it. Whale commented that he had always made the Uruk more durable, and that new management was sloppy about it. Reika took offense as the Asuna were the ones who had to make the things, but Lyat convinced her that it was not a slight against the Asuna, since Whale had made the original Uruk and he was not starving to death in a mine like those currently making the avatar’s war-golems. The travel took them along that river bed for a long distance before they opted to go into the forest just a bit to set up camp deep enough in the trees that their fire would not be easily visible from the likely more heavily travelled riverbed.

There was an eerie calm for having been fighting such a short time before, but Whale helped Luna set up camp close by Lira’s little selected spot among the leaf litter. Nita and Nidaja set up their very minimalist shelter in similar fashion, no sides but a nice silky canopy to keep things from dropping onto them. Alps assumed he would likely sleep under that, while others had squat lean-to style

shelters to enjoy. It was rustic, but very quick and easy. For the kind of travel they were doing, it was as good as one could hope for. Lyat and Reika intended to sleep under the stars. Once camp had been more or less set up in the silvery light of the moon, Nita asked Alps and Reika to gather firewood, which they were more than happy to do.

The drawback, Alps found, was that after what had happened between him and the Asuna in the tub on the boat a couple days before, he felt a little awkward alone with her and did not know exactly what to say. She was not as crazy as he originally thought, since Bone was actually conscious, or at least, linked to something that was, but he was sure that she was still at least a little emotionally troubled, and probably not the safest person to get close to. She might not understand the unusual dynamics of his relationship with Nita, and her willingness to share just with her closer friends. He might not be able to give Reika the direct love that she wanted, if that was in fact what she wanted. They silently collected choice bits of wood for a bit, padding back and forth to the camp, and into the darker trees, before he felt her take one of his hands. He gasped lightly as she turned him to look into his eyes, his muzzle tilted slightly downward to gaze at the slightly shorter hyena.

“Alps...” she said softly. The wolf held his breath. He was not sure what to tell her. Was she falling in love? Was he making things harder for his friends? He did not want to hurt any of them.

“Reika...” he whispered, not sure at all what she wanted. She leaned in and pushed her cheek to his chest. He slipped his arms around her to hold her. Would Nita be angry that he showed her affection? She would let him know if he was starting to cause her unhappiness, he was sure.

“Thank you.” The hyena girl whispered to him. He perked his tall ears a bit. She was thanking him? For what?

“For?” he asked sheepishly.

“You take Asuna with you on this trip. Is dangerous, yes, but Reika is joyful. Reika is happy to go with Alps.” The wolf swallowed at that, touched, but still worried about her emotionally.

“I hope that you and Lyat come out of this okay. It’s not going to be easy. Don’t worry your brother too much.” Alps was trying to be supportive, but not overly affectionate.

“Reika will be careful, yes.” Her tone was as non-insane as he had heard her. She seemed to relax that extreme nature when she was alone with him. Was this the real Reika? Was everything else a show? “Bone was right about you. Reika is glad she did not rip out wulf’s throat as she wanted before. Is glad

she is not killing you.” She then threw her arms around the white lupine and squeezed him close, before picking up a heavy piece of wood and bounding off with it. Alps sighed a bit, and leaned back against a sturdy tree. He supposed he would just be glad for that.

“You are very kind to her.” A female voice spoke from behind him. Alps turned suddenly to see Luna standing there. He blushed a little and nodded to her.

“She is a little odd, but Reika’s a good girl.” He offered meekly. The priestess smiled.

“I know. I worried at first, but spending time with her I found that to be the case. You have grown up to be everything I would have wanted you to be Aris. I wanted to tell you that.” Her feathery tone was like a glowing white caress of love to his heart, and he felt a jolt of joy spike through him, tears welling in his eyes.

“Mother...” he murmured in a hushed and reverent tone. Saying it only pulled him closer to tears. His mother was proud of him and happy for him. He had not considered how she really felt about what his life was like before because of how fast things were happening. There was so much to consider that was larger than himself that he had not spent much time “feeling” about some of the things that really only affected him. Luna pulled him close in an embrace. Alps put his arms around the robed priestess. He thought for a moment. Her bloodline was his. He belonged in this embrace. As dangerous as these days were, this was the life he was intended to have. Not long before, he had been a slave, fearful as he ran home to his mistress to face punishment, and now, he was living the life that perhaps had always been intended for him, and Luna was proud. He gritted his teeth and squeezed her tighter.

“What you do is hard, and I would never have wished you to do it, but I am glad that you have the strength. Know that the love you have given each of these people is why we are here now.” The white male leaned back and looked into his mother’s green and violet eyes. She continued to speak. “Nita gains strength from your love, and you made her life better. Nidaja, who loves her sister, also loves you with no less passion than Nita, and welcomes you as family. She will do for you everything she would do for the Queen. You belong with the two of them. The love you taught Nidaja caused her to forgive the Asuna, and fosters a deepening important friendship with Lyat. The love you show Reika brings her closer to friends she would never have allowed herself to have, and a happiness that Lyat has always wanted for his sister. Uri and Misha are bound closer than ever because of the hope you have given them for a future for this world. Ceriss and I have the same hope that your love has given us.” Alps positively glowed under the compliments, and then blushed, realizing that Luna

might very well be drawing essence from him. It was alright. She was being honest with him, he could tell. He then sighed a bit and murmured,

“Vhale does not seem to be very... happy to have me around. Do I frighten him?” Alps asked. Luna leaned back a little and stroked her son’s cheek. She thought about that a moment and then folded her ears back.

“You have pretty well already figured out why he’s frightened of you.” The priestess spoke in a secretive tone.

“Because I broke his Shadowfall?” he asked. “But he regretted putting me there. I would think he would be happy I got out.” Alps leaned back against a wide and sturdy slightly tilted tree.

“If that was all you did, that would surprise him but not frighten him, Aris.” Luna looked sadly into her son’s eyes. She seemed to regret there was some discomfort between the two.

“Then he is frightened?” Alps asked. It was a little stunning to find that out for certain. This was Mannus. He nearly single-handedly erased the Letai from history, misguided though he may have been.

“Yes, he was. Before you told us of your dream, I felt that it was overreaction. Alps, he is not overreacting. He alone, more than me or anyone else, knows what happened to you.” The priestess leaned in closer, making her son blush a bit as her bosom pressed to his chest. “You did not escape your Shadowfall the first time, I think you know that. You caused it to collapse. You are better off knowing nothing of where you went then, but Vhale knows. And I think he’s seen it. I think he knows what’s actually there.” There was a slight pause in her voice. “Vhale did not come out of that experience with his right mind. You seem to have avoided the damage he suffered, but it’s what caused him to do the terrible things he did. You were stuck in there as a child, and surely went through things he does not even want to imagine, and not only are you okay, but you escaped it. We may never know what happened in there, but you surviving that as a child is what makes Vhale afraid. When he looks at you, all he can see is the innocent child that his actions put into that terrible place. It’s a bit much for him. He is getting better as he sees what your life is like now. He sees that you are happy, and it eases the burden upon him.” Alps looked down for a bit, off to the side, still blushing at Luna’s closeness. It was impossible not to think, for that moment, about that rather shameful dream. He swallowed and then looked up at her again.

“Do you think Vhale will ever be able to be happy?” Luna’s face softened, and he felt he could see her eyes become wet. Had he said the wrong thing?

“Alps... those words are what make me realize that you have grown to be everything I would have ever hoped for.” His heart jolted a bit again. “That you would feel him deserving of it, after all that was done.”

“He made mistakes, but they were driven by something else. He’s not without blame, but I think he is worth saving.” Luna leaned in suddenly, gasping back a sob, and embraced her son tightly. He felt her quiver, and he just held her there. The essence that he could see around her appeared like ribbons, swaying like thick silk underwater, coiling around him and letting him feel her joy. He was finding that the Letai were very good about sharing their emotions with one another, and he tagged her with his own essence, letting her feel his joy in return. He was happy to get to hold his mother, and he was filled with contentment to know that she was proud of him. She shivered a bit again, perhaps in response to the wolf’s own emotions, and then slipped back a bit, holding his hands as she regarded him.

“Would you allow me to draw from you, Aris?” the priestess asked. The wolf flicked his ears a bit at that.

“Haven’t you already been drawing from me? I thought that’s what you were doing...” He was a little puzzled. Why ask permission now?

“I have been, yes, and your essence is very intense... very copious. I feel that for the trials we have ahead, we both need to be very deliberate in keeping our energy levels high. You have a nearly overwhelming amount as it is, but not much ability to do anything with it. Would you be willing to share it with me?” she asked.

“If you keep complimenting me the way you have been, I will probably cry.” Alps said sheepishly with a chuckle. Surely she was not suggesting what it sounded like.

“There is nothing to be shy about, Aris. This is fine...” Luna whispered, slipping her arms around her son. Alps’ eyes widened a bit, and he stiffened up a bit. Fine? He whispered softly,

“You do know that Amanian culture holds this... rather taboo.” The priestess’ lips were so near his own. His thoughts were awash with a mix of memories of the time he spent with her in the crystal, and the odd and heated dream he had of her. She remained pressed close.

“They hold an even stronger taboo for what you did to Reika.” Luna’s words were thick with accusation, but still gentle and soothing. It was true, however. One might be thought strange for what Luna intended, but sleeping with an Asuna was grounds for being marched out of town. He then shook his head a little.

“How did you even know about Reika?” He had not told anyone, fearing Nita might have misgivings. He would tell her, of course, but it was not the sort of thing he had time to bring up just yet.

“Aris, you have intense essence, you know that. I was with everyone else that it could have been at the time. Reika was the only one left.” Alps folded his ears back at that.

“I fear that Nita might have misgivings... concerning what you ask.” He lowered his head a slight bit, knowing that he was blushing enough to be visible even in the silvery moonlight.

“Said someone who routinely sleeps with two sisters together.” Alps’ blushing easily and impossibly doubled at his mother’s words. He wanted to say that it was different, but was it? Before he could answer, Luna spoke again, “I would stop if I knew you were genuinely displeased by the thought, Alps, but that’s not what I feel. You worry that your friends would disapprove. Nita already knows what I intend to do. And she knows why.” The former slave perked up.

“You asked her about this?” he was incredulous. What a thing to ask his mate! Luna was either terribly confident, or absolutely shameless. Luna put her hand around Alps’ muzzle to silence him, pointing his nose to hers, and speaking sternly for a change.

“Aris, we will be facing things more difficult than what we did today, and you know we will rely more and more on my abilities, both to defend Nita, and to heal those you care about. I want you to think carefully. Would you want to even *think* that your pride and your fretting about a taboo that’s only a taboo to those who are not out here risking their lives... was the reason one of your friends- one of these brave travelers here today... did not make it home?” The wolf leaned back against the tree again, looking into his beautiful mother’s eyes. She was as right as she could be about why it needed to be done, but...

“And no one else here can assist? Lyat would perhaps not have anything against it, and I know he’s okay with being with wolves.” Alps blushed a bit in memory.

“I know he’s okay with it too, I’ve been with him.” Luna’s reply made Alps dizzy for a moment. She really was very up-front with that kind of thing. Had she really been with the Asuna? Why would she need to?

“So, we know he is okay with it.” Alps stated.

“Aris, you are drawing incredible amounts of energy, and you cannot actually use that energy for anything. We do not have time for me to teach you

valuable essence techniques on this journey. But, I can draw upon some of that energy, and I can use it to protect us. I can use it to heal us. I can use it to make sure that this mission does not fail. Nita understands the value of this, she knew without me even having to explain it.” The white male lupine looked at his feet for a bit, and then sighed, nodding as he looked into Luna’s eyes. She smiled kindly. “That’s better. Come... a little further away from camp... There’s a nice little wall of holly...” She led Alps further from camp.

“Should I tell Nita where... I mean... I don’t want her to worry.” He felt a bit dizzier. This was happening so fast, and he was somewhat embarrassed by the quick throb in his loins that told him that the act that was to follow had more control of his body than his worries about the ethical ramifications of it. He stumbled along in the near darkness of the forest with Luna.

“She knows what I’m up to Alps, she won’t worry.” The white-furred lady wolf towed along her hesitant son, and he found himself far enough away from the camp that he could not even smell the kindling fire anymore. There was a small clearing that Luna had selected, and the half-ring of holly bushes at the center seemed to shield them nicely from anyone wandering closer from camp. It wasn’t likely anyone would come to look for him if Nita said that there was nothing amiss. Alps looked around the silver-bathed clearing, soft grass waving in the gentle breeze as Luna put her hands on his shoulders, paying more attention to him. He swallowed reflexively.

“It’s been a while.” He noted. Luna actually blushed just a slight, barely noticeable amount, and nodded. She slipped in closer to Alps, and pulled him to the ground slowly. He felt his heart hammering rapidly. He wondered if she could have just had Nita or Nidaja tend to him, and be able to draw the energy that way. Surely she would have considered that. Maybe she had to be the one in contact with him for it to work right. He didn’t know much about the drawing of energy, but his mind went back to the roots that she used to ruin that Uruk. He thought of how she held up Vhale with a powerful invisible force. The effect of her power was great. If he was needed for that level of protection, he would not allow himself to feel badly about what was to come. Alps leaned in against her as she got onto her knees before him, and pushed her onto her back, kissing her. Luna slipped her arms around her son, and drew back from the kiss, touching her nose to his ear as she whispered.

“You know, you don’t have to kiss me for this... Unless it’s absolutely necessary to your pleasure.” Alps’ ears, already scarlet, burned like summer roof tiles. He lifted up a little, shamefully pinning his mother.

“Uh... I am...” He was not sure what to say. Her face lit up in a warm and beautiful giggle and she embraced the white wolf closer.

“Stop worrying, Aris. I love you. We all do. What else should matter now?” The white lupine male sighed, and lowered his head again, nuzzling and kissing along Luna’s cheek and neck, his body responding with the familiar rush of sensation to his loins as he watched Luna undo the clasp of her robes, drawing them open for him. They made a rather nice ‘picnic blanket’ for them to enjoy themselves on under the bright light of the moon. She put herself to the task of undoing his armor, an act that seemed to come easily enough for her. She worked at removing his blazer and finally tucked her hands down, getting a gasp from him as she undid his trousers. He tucked his nose downward, kissing the bare bosom that sustained him in his distant infancy. He chased that sense of taboo away. Luna was right, he had broken worse with Reika with less guilt. He did genuinely love Luna, and this act could very well save Nita’s life. He took one of those firm pink nubs between his lips and kissed and suckled in a way he had not done since learning of her identity. Alps’ tail began to sway from side to side as he found that he did not care in that moment as much as he feared he would.

And in seconds, the tension melted away and pure lust overwhelmed him. Luna pushed his trousers down with her heels, pulling her son closer as he pinned her tighter to the ground semi-surrounded by holly shrubs. Bare bodies gripped and pulled and writhed in a clearing under the moon, and little entered their minds but the act that they had resolved to commit. Alps’ mind barely offered up more than the memories of the time they spent in the crystal, and the passion and love this lady wolf was capable of. She had been so alone for so long and needed his touch so much back then. He felt suddenly vile for even coming close to regretting those encounters. She needed that. She wanted to be held and it allowed him the power to free her.

There was a hot gasp and shuddering release of air from the lady wolf beneath him, and the older female buckled a little, hooking her heels on Alps’ rump as his thighs drew up tight to hers, his teeth gritted in pleasure as she spread so tightly around him. Forgotten were his worries from before as he jolted her body a little in that heavy hilt, then he drew back, and thumped his thighs to hers again.

“Spare me your release, Aris...” huffed Luna, a very miniscule pang of guilt rippling through Alps at hearing her say his real name. “Tell me and hold back...” Her actions and level of need did not seem to suggest timing was an issue, but Alps felt perhaps there was a specific plan she had concerning that final moment of pleasure that required she have control of it, so he nodded in agreement. He would enjoy himself up to that point without restraint though. His pleasure was what she needed, and he would provide gladly.

Luna gave an exasperated squeak as she rocked her own thighs back and forth a little to push Alps faster along. Her strong young son reciprocated, the

soft chuff of leaf litter under Luna's spread out cloak signifying the force of their union. Luna clutched Alps close and bounced a bit beneath him.

"Good boy, Aris... Faster... Faster..." She let her feet relax off of his rump, which made her sex actually tighten since she held her legs up off the ground for him, parted wide. She received his attentions very nicely. Alps was rarely given to a quick and easy tryst, but there were times with Nita and Nidaja where what they wanted was to just know he enjoyed them, and they asked only that he give himself to them as easily and quickly as time would allow. Sometimes this was because they were too tired for a more involved encounter, other times it was because there was not enough time before a meeting or other engagement required their attention. This was one time where Alps assumed correctly that time was something that they were not wasting, this was more about the intent.

Still, each successive stroke of his thighs, he cared less about the energy he was providing, and became more keenly aware of the energy Luna was giving off. Was he drawing upon her? Would that hurt the amount of energy she could draw? He could not help it. He saw from the outline of the holly that his wings were glowing brighter. He was definitely drawing. He was also drawing close, which slowed him a little. Luna whimpered a bit.

"Oh not yet, please, I just..." She perhaps felt that Alps would hold back a bit longer. He chuckled at the way she writhed. This was again Luna the High Priestess of the Letai, deserving of the pleasure this subjugated slave wolf could give. He slipped down her body, the lady lupine arching hard as his mouth sealed over her puffy parted petals. His tongue swirled and darted over tangy flesh. It pumped hard in and out, fluttering at that well-studied point as she sang beautifully with pleasure. For this being about his pleasure, she certainly did not refuse her own. Perhaps her arousal and need had been unintended? That actually stoked the wolf's ego a little.

A hard shudder, and Luna's lilting cry of joy made her son's wings actually pulsate with energy, glowing brightly. She held his ears, shaking softly as his tongue hammered her clit feverishly. She finally had to push him away, before he pulled himself up her body roughly, making her squeak in alarm as he drove himself deep inside that quivering channel. He thought that the break to pleasure her with his mouth would have been enough to drive him back from trigger point, but he gave her only a few shaking strokes before he drew out, panting.

"I'm gonna cum..." he held himself up, looking into her beautiful eyes, that white-furred lady lupine spread out on her robe on the grass, her hair long, spilling outward, her bare form a vision of perfection in the moonlight. He did love her, as a mother, and just as much in this way. What was so taboo? She scooted down suddenly, her body pushed between his thighs until he was

straddling her chest. His pink spire vanished into her muzzle and he grunted in loud pleasure.

Alps did not have to move an inch. Luna moved her tongue in such a way that it was more than enough, swirling and grinding rapidly at the point just under his glans. He embraced his chest as he sucked in a deep breath, and then let it out in a shaking, surrendering moan. His thick seed flooded his mother's suckling muzzle as her tongue continued to flick him in a way that made him almost hurt from the force of his release. His eyes were pinched shut in the shock of his pleasure, but when they opened, he saw something he was not expecting. In a near ring around and above him were broad ribbons of light. They waved and swirled like bands of silk under water, lifted and coiled by a current. They drew downward in an elegant and beautiful spiral, to his mother, at her lower back as if tied above her tail. Alps grunted in shocks of pleasure. Each little shock of heaven through his body made a little pulse of light reflected on the ribbons. Alps wavered in bliss as he watched them wave and coil around him, closer and closer, as if they were tentatively wanting to touch him.

Finally, the two ends of those ribbons daintily touched his wingtips. The ribbons turned bright gold, and Luna groaned loudly, almost agonizingly in pleasure, arching hard under her son. Alps actually wore an expression of worry a moment from the volume and intensity of her groan. Those bands of light glowed brightly, and he felt both heat and wind from the contact. Was this how drawing was always done, or was it different because of how much essence Alps had? Would this get rid of those wings? The ribbons suddenly flicked outward hard, as if blown off of his wings, and Luna just went limp, heaving and gasping beneath him. The lupine male looked over one of his shoulders, finding a glowing wing still stubbornly there. He panted softly himself, recovering slowly from his release, and looked to Luna.

She was conscious, but seemed very happily out of it. She writhed almost pitifully between his thighs. Alps blushed as he saw that, in her loud moan, she had expelled a copious amount of his seed over her bosom, the pearly seed spilling down both sides. He grinned to her.

"Was that okay?" he asked warily, not sure if he did anything incorrectly to negatively affect the drawing, even if she did not seem to mind the experience at all.

"There was... a lot more... energy there... than I thought. I misjudged... how much you have been drawing." She puffed. She pulled a silken kerchief from her spread out robes and began tending to the spill upon her heavy breasts. "You did well. I have a nice reserve of that... very wonderful energy. When I teach you more, you will appreciate what all of what you just saw meant. For now, just know that you are a very good boy." She smiled.

“Those ribbons... are those essence manifestations? Like my wings?” he asked. They actually seemed to be fading away, so he assumed those ethereal things were different. Luna nodded to him however.

“Yes, Aris. Exactly the same.” She used the ribbon seemingly intentionally to stroke her son’s cheek, making him blush a little at the sudden sensation of pure motherly love that swept over him. Her genuine maternal feelings for him had not wavered or changed, even after all they had just done. It was a pure, untainted tenderness that made him feel vulnerable and innocent.

“Why are they fading away, while my wings stay?” he asked.

“Essence manifestations occur when you draw more than your body can hold. It’s an overflow. It wears off because you can’t hold onto more than a specific amount of essence.” She teased Alps’ wings with the ribbons again, and jerked softly, as if smacked with bliss at each connection. Essence to essence, there was apparently a transfer of some kind that Alps didn’t understand, but it made those ribbons glow a little brighter for a time, before they started to fade out. “Everyone’s manifestation is a little different, but most cannot store so much as to cause an overflow, Aris. You however, are gathering and somehow holding more essence than your body naturally holds on its own. It’s not unknown, but it’s very poorly understood.”

“Can it hurt me?” Alps asked, not sure what was meant by holding more than his body could hold.

“In the past, nothing indicated it was harmful, but you bear the trait of those in the past who had that ability.” Luna murmured.

“What is that?” her son asked.

“You seem barely able to use the essence that you draw. You can carry unbelievable amounts, and it does affect those around you in a positive fashion, as positive essence will, but you have trouble expending that energy.” Alps remembered what he was told before. The attraction others sometimes inexplicably felt toward him was caused by how they reacted to the positive essence that was boiling off of him.

“Would that have made me so different if we were still among the priestesses and temples of the past?” he asked.

“Aris, this trait would have given you the choice of any temple you could have ever wished to serve. It’s a very attractive property. And it has a great use in our current day as well. It’s often hard for a priestess to regain lost energy. It’s very easy with you.” Alps laughed a bit, and then turned suddenly as he heard a soft sound of someone moving away from them.

Lira stood there, looking dumbfounded. Alps held his hands out.

"It's essence drawing." He explained immediately. Lira held her hands up.

"I'm aware of what it is, I studied the Letai... just... it doesn't involve me. It's fine..." Her ears were as bright scarlet as Alps could imagine an Emerald Amanian having. She backed up a bit more and then turned.

"Hey, it's not-" There was no pause as she stalked off briskly.

"Aris, it's alright, it will be explained better to her later. She is in a lot deeper than she intended to be, so there is a lot she needs to absorb." The priestess sat up as Alps pulled his trousers back on and carefully put his blazer on as well, looking over at Luna as she rather casually dressed.

"I am glad that I could... help everyone. That my strength is still important." Alps told his mother.

"You are a help just in being here... And make no mistake Aris..." Luna leaned in close. "That was not just about drawing. A Letai Priestess is allowed such contact as we have had, as we train our progeny in the ways of drawing and pleasure. While it may be a taboo now, it was not back then, as our numbers dwindled in those last days. Neither will I hesitate nor do I regret. I enjoyed that. I shall every time." With that, she padded back toward camp, leaving a very embarrassed white lupine in the clearing, his wings casting harder shadows than the light of the moon.