

# The Rejected Luna's Prince Chapter 43 -

14–18 minutes

---

## The Rejected Luna's Prince Chapter 43

43 – John

(Cali)

I turned on my heel slowly. Nerves coursed through me, I couldn't suppress them fully.

Did someone recognize me? See through me?

A man walked toward me on silent feet. The air around him fell silent, but it wasn't the same as when Caspien entered a room. He didn't emit an almost oppressive air that screamed authority, it wasn't cold or ancient or powerful.

I actually felt nothing, but there was a shift.

I crossed my arms, raising an eyebrow, "If you're going to ask to buy me a drink, no, thank you, I already overpaid for that fire water." I gestured to the bar, I saw the old woman gaping at us, but she closed her mouth when she met my eye.

The man was hooded, and one side of his lips tugged up, meeting a scar across his face. He looked like the main character of a video game.

I still couldn't believe this was real life, my reality now. I pushed that thought away; the show must go on.

"I wouldn't insult you by insinuating you needed someone to buy you anything," His voice was low, smokey even.

I tilted my head and pushed my hair behind my shoulder, running a hand through my long curls. I made a show of studying him, but I couldn't see anything with his hood besides his full lips and faint pale scars that stood out against his tanned skin.

"You also wouldn't insult me by hiding yourself while speaking to me," I held my ground, "I thought gentlemen didn't wear hats, or uh, cloaks, inside," To be honest, I was really upset I didn't have my cloak now, Caspien refused to let me wear it tonight and even threatened to burn it if I tried to sneak it out. Kill joy.

“Who says I’m a gentleman?”

“Just the company you keep, the bars you frequent,” I motioned to whatever this place was, “Screams nothing but class.”

He smiled again, that half-smile that looked actually amused, “Sit with me?” He motioned to a table behind him.

I nodded once and followed him, taking the seat he offered. I glanced at the bartender; the woman was shooting daggers at me, or him, no me, definitely me.

Was this him? It couldn’t be.

“I heard you were looking for someone,” He leaned forward, intertwining his hands.

“I am, but one person specifically. I need a job filled and I require an in-person meeting before starting a long-term relationship.” I leaned back and twirled a curl in my finger, absentmindedly looking at it. It was unnerving, to be only able to see half of his face, and annoying, really annoying. But I could play whatever game he was starting and win.

“Who sent you here? Who are you working for?”

I stopped playing with my hair and pinned him with a dead stare, “Why do you think anyone owns me?” I let some anger flicker in my voice that I tried to keep contained; it sparked up, “I am here on my own accord; I have no master but myself.” I let some more of that fire out before I reigned it in, but it still lapped up, willing to be unleashed.

He nodded once, “Apologies, I just-”

“You just assumed,” I cut him off, “I don’t like assumptions.”

“Noted,” There was an amused undertone in that word.

“I do have to be going; I’ve overstayed my welcome, it seems,” I smiled at him, and we both looked towards the old woman who wasn’t even pretending that she wasn’t watching us, “A friend of yours?” I asked him.

“Something like that,” He closed his eyes, shaking his head once. A smile tugged up both sides of his lips as he looked at the woman who had turned her back on us now, “You want to meet him?” His attention was back on me before I noticed.

“Yes,” He looked me over for a long while, or I thought he might be. He sniffed his drink before downing it.

He pushed back his hood, showing himself in the dim light. Black hair fell over his face, and he tucked it behind an ear. More scars than those visible peppered his face and almost looked like wrinkles adorning his lightly tanned face.

An assassin's wrinkles must be scars; they probably didn't live long enough to be awarded actual ones.

His gray eyes met mine, and I swallowed. In my past life, I might have found him attractive. Someone that was so clearly wrong for me, but the only thing I could think of now was going back to Holden and telling him everything about this weird night. I couldn't wait to see his response and hear his input on it all.

A smile darted across my face before I could stop it, thinking of him.

"See something you like?" He purred.

"Gross," My smile faltered.

"I do admire the confidence; where does it come from?"

"I would say it's a coping mechanism from years of carefully constructed facades," I shrugged, "But if I said that, I wouldn't be telling the full truth." I met his impassive stare with a fiery one, "I was born with this, I have always known what I deserved, and I will not apologize for it."

"I respect that," He ran a hand through his unkempt hair.

"I don't care," I honestly didn't, "Who are you?"

"I go by many names."

I closed my eyes, "I really don't have the time or energy for riddles."

"I'm the one you're looking for." My eyes snapped open.

"I don't believe you. Why would he be here?" I never thought to get a description from Caspien, and he never told me. There was no way in hell that he would be here.

"I like to keep tabs," he shrugged, motioning to the bartender for another drink, "It's not so bad."

I looked around and scoffed, crossing my arms.

"It's not," he repeated and fixed me with a smile that seemed too old for his face.

"So, why show yourself? You don't know me," I c.ocked my head.

“Are you here to kill me?” He asked, “Do you think you can?” His voice dropped. He tilted his head towards me, and some of his dark hair fell forward.

“No,” I replied honestly, no way in h.ell.

“Most people think they can,” He smiled at the old woman who brought him his drink; she lingered at our table.

“I’m assuming those people are dead,” I pinned him with a stare that earned me a full smile, the first one directed at me this evening.

He tilted his glass to me, “You’re right.” I gave him a few moments to drink, not sure why he invited me here if he was even who he claimed to be.

It didn’t add up; none of it did.

“You wanted a meeting, and I’m here,” he motioned to himself.

“Allegedly,” I countered.

“Well, I don’t have proof,” he smiled, amusement dancing on his sharp features.

“What? Your passport doesn’t say ‘The Silent Assassin’ on it,” I asked, leaning forward and whispering, “Or one of your thousand aliases,” I waved my hand.

Still smiling, he shook his head once and placed his glass on the table.

“As I told that woman, he can contact me if he wants to meet,” He opened his mouth to say something, “As I also told her I would not conduct business here,” I moved to stand up, “Thank you for your interesting company,” I looked down, dismissing him.

He donned his hood again, “It has been,” He agreed, “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Names don’t matter. Besides, you never told me yours.”

“It’s John,” He said.

“You poor thing,” I turned on my heel and marched out, not stealing a backward glance at him, the woman, or the bar.

(Willa)

I waited with the kids and Nora while our guys went out to back up Cali. I trusted her, but I didn’t trust the situation. It sounded like we had no idea what we were going up against. All the rumors I heard had been more of fairytales, dark ones. An assassin king with an ever-changing

team that roamed taking jobs not caring about who was at the other end of it as long as the jobs paid.

An assassin able to be bought by the highest bidder was something out of a nightmare.

“They will be fine,” Nora looked at me with sleepy eyes. I had just put the kids to sleep.

“How are you so sure? I feel like Griffen is the type to be first on the battlefield,” I went to pick up a blanket and draped it over her. She smiled at me appreciatively.

“I could be worried every time he walked out the door, and I used to be,” She shrugged, “But it did nothing for me, and I have seen him in action,” She looked at me, seeming a bit more awake, “They’re good, Willa. Like good good. I know you haven’t seen them fight but,” She shook her head, “I haven’t seen anything like it, not even close.” Her eyes dropped but a faraway smile donned her face.

“Get some sleep. Can I get you anything?”

She groaned and sat up a bit, “Easier said than done, I keep getting jabbed every time I get comfortable,” She repositioned herself on a pillow and winced, “I guess you know what it’s like at the very end,”

“I do,” My voice sounded quiet. I didn’t remember much about my pregnancy besides the hurt and anger. I was so angry at Nolan for taking away any happy memories of my pregnancy, but that wasn’t the important part. I was there for Emmett, even when I couldn’t be there for myself.

“I thought I would be catching up on sleep before the baby gets here, but no matter how many naps I take, I never feel rested. I feel bloated and achy and uncomfortable.”

I gave her a sympathetic smile, “It will all be over soon, and eventually you catch up,”

“When?”

“Two years, three?” I shrugged, smiling. I wanted to lessen the blow that I wasn’t joking.

My phone buzzed, and I grabbed it, sitting up. Nora tracked my movements and I put Caspien on speaker.

“Hi,” I clutched the phone.

“All good here. Cali is heading back; I got confirmation from her driver,” I let out a deep breath and sunk into the chair.

“Amazing, see you soon,” I hung up.

Nora smiled at me, “I told you so,” She shrugged and let her eyes close.

Cali got back before the guys and walked into Caspein's wearing her cloak, a gleam in her eye. I raked my gaze over her confirming she was in one piece.

She took the seat at the end of the couch where Nora was balled up, "I think I'm drunk," She announced, smiling widely.

"How?" I asked, laughing.

"From drinking?" She gave me a wry smile, "Anyone want a drink?" She asked, moving to stand.

"Sit. I'll get something, but first fill us all in, and then you can continue on your path to drunkenness."

"Continue on my quest," She gestured to her coat, "I'm medieval now,"

"Apparently," I shook my head and walked up behind her on the couch and placed a kiss on her head. She smelled like cheap beer, strong liquor, and smoke.

When I went to choose some wine from Caspien's cellar, I heard the guys come in. I felt Caspien's presence behind me; it was solid and warm. He wrapped his arms around me, leaning his chin on my shoulder.

"That's a good vintage. She's tipsy; she won't appreciate it," He frowned, looking at the bottle I chose.

"Oh, I liked the flowers on it," I put it back, shrugging, "We all can't be wine snobs. Plus, she did just go into an assassins' den for us."

He laughed once and kissed my neck, "Fine, let's bring out the champagne."

He stood up and reached above me for some bottles, and I went to grab some glasses and a sparkling water for Nora.

Cali was in Holden's lap on a chair, and Griffen had Nora's feet in his lap, massaging them. It was such a nice scene. Cali and Nora seemed like complete opposites, and so did Griffen and Holden. But everyone balanced each other and completed us and I couldn't imagine this group without any one of them.

"Start," Caspien said. Cali reached for a bottle, "Start talking first," He commanded. She sat back and crossed her arms, "Fine," Caspien popped the cork and poured her a glass, earning him a satisfied smile.

"Why didn't I get one?" Holden complained, and Caspien sighed, pouring everyone a glass before tugging me into his lap. I leaned into his steady warmth, savoring his strong presence behind me.

“I met a guy claiming to be him,” Cali rolled her eyes.

“That was it?” Griffen asked.

“I literally said one thing. You’re going to need to hold your questions,” Cali stared at Griffen, who held his hands up and muttered an apology.

“I talked to a woman at the bar, strange woman actually,” She paused, shaking her head once, “I told her that I wanted to meet him, give him a trial run. I handed her a wad of cash which hurt me to my core, and the card you gave me,” She took a long sip, “Also had some horrid liquor,” She winced.

No one said anything, waiting for her to go on.

“When I was leaving, someone stopped me and asked me to sit with him. He claimed to be the person I was looking for,” She snorted.

“What did he look like?” Caspien asked.

“Black hair that was shoulder-length, gray eyes, lightly tanned skin, scars, full lips-” Caspien tightened under me.

“Okay, okay stop,” Holden cut in, “He sounds f.ucking handsome,” He muttered, wrapping his arms around Cali, almost spilling his glass.

“Get this; he was wearing a cloak. I would have fit right in,” She arranged her cloak, admiring it.

“Is that him?” I asked Caspien.

“I can’t be sure. When he came to me it was years ago. His sides of his head were shaved, but yes, black hair and gray eyes.”

“Nice lips?” Holden asked.

“I guess you could say that,” Caspien responded. Cali snorted once into her glass.

“Did he give you a name?”

“John,” Cali shrugged.

“You’re joking,” Griffen cut in. Cali shook her head.

“I have never heard him use anything other than one of those ridiculous aliases,” Caspien said.

“The Silent Assassin, The Blade,” Griffen ticked off names on his fingers, “The Deathless Night,”

“Loved that one,” Holden laughed, “This guy really is poetic,”

“Midnight Assassin,” Griffen went on.

Holden shrugged, “Eh, not his best.”

“Blaze, The Beta Killer,” Griffen looked at me, “He was going through a phase.” He explained.

“Clearly,” I shook my head, smiling.

“Cheshire Wolf,”

“Doesn’t even make sense,” Holden said, taking a slug of his drink.

“Does he get these names, or is given them?” I asked.

“Both,” Caspien said, placing his arm around my stomach and pulling me closer, I settled into his chest and let the warmth radiate through me.

“Five knives,” Griffen went on, “The Serpent, and now John,” he shrugged.

“That is one hefty list,” Cali noted.

“I want details, everything that you saw, heard. Everything you can remember from your conversation.”

Cali sighed but went into full detail, everyone’s attention was on her, and I think she was enjoying it.

“Well, if that truly was him, then I think he will call,” Caspien said. He interlaced his fingers with mine and squeezed my hand.

“So now we wait,” Holden said.

“For how long?” Cali asked.

We all looked toward the burner phone sitting on the middle of the table. It was supposed to be unable to be tracked, the number untraceable, or something like that. I didn’t really understand it, nor did I care to.

“There’s no way to know,” Caspien said.

“Do we retract the hit?” Griffen asked.

“No, I don’t want anything that could be seen as a link,” Caspien responded, and Griffen nodded once.



The phone buzzed on the table, the small square lit up on its front.

Unknown Caller

Cali wore a satisfied smirk and leaned back into her mate.

“I guess we don’t have to wait anymore,” Caspien said, motioning for Cali to answer.

## The Rejected Luna’s Prince Chapter 44 -

7–9 minutes

---

### The Rejected Luna’s Prince Chapter 44

44 – A Man of Many Names

(Willa)

Cali grabbed the phone, letting out a breath before she plastered on a smile.

“Yes?” She stood up the phone clutched in her hands.

“I’m doing this your way, which is a first for me,” a low voice sounded over the speaker.

“John, how nice of you to call,” Holden rolled his eyes, “But how can I be sure you didn’t just bribe the bartender for my information?”

“You can’t,” I leaned forward in my seat, tracking Cali’s movements. The room had fallen completely silent, “But I don’t know many who would cross him. You said yourself they would end up dead.” Cali chewed her lip and nodded once, “So, you want to meet?” The man went on.

“Yes, somewhere outside the city. Tomorrow.” Cali’s voice didn’t waver, I would have been consumed by nerves. I admired her steady confidence.

“I know just the place. I’ll send you coordinates when this phone reaches outside the city-.”

Cali shook her head, “This phone is untraceable. I’ll text you on this phone when I’m outside town, and you send me the coordinates.”

He was silent for a long moment, and I held my breath, worried this deal would be off and we would be back to nothing.

“Okay,” He breathed.

“How will I confirm it’s you? That you’re the person you claim to be?”

After another long pause, I even felt Caspien tense up next to me.

“I’ll bring confirmation.”

“Your passport,” Cali snorted, and the guy on the phone laughed once.

“Some men that only answer to me.” He responded as if that meant anything.

“And I have to take your word for it?” Cali asked a playful note underlying her hard tone.

“You do.”

It was Cali’s turn to pause.

“See you tomorrow, John,”

“I want to know your name-,”

Cali hung up, somehow getting the upper hand on the assassin king himself.

She sat back in Holden’s waiting arms, her face passive, but I could see an amused glint in her eyes.

“If only we had some leverage, some collateral,” Caspien idly stroked my thigh, and I welcomed his comforting touch.

“He doesn’t have a mate; my sources say he’s not marked,” Griffen said, looking at Cali, “That John guy, was he marked?”

“I didn’t look,” She chewed her lip and shook her head, “I don’t think so, though,”

“I heard a rumor he killed his own mate,” I spoke up, and Caspien chuckled once behind me.

“Fairytale, love,” he said, brushing his lips to my temple.

“Don’t patronize me,” I scoffed, but scooted back into his touch.

“If he does have someone, she’s probably locked away, with all of those that surely want him dead, she would be the first target.”

“He’s always surrounded by his enemies,” Holden shrugged, “Keep your enemies close and all of that,”

“Wait,” Cali jolted up, and Holden almost spilled what was left of his drink. Again.

She paused for a moment and chewed her lip, deep in thought, “The old woman,” she whispered.

“The bartender?” Griffen asked.

Cali nodded once, still seeming lost in her own mind “There was something weird about her, something off. I noticed it immediately.”

“She does seem to have an in with The Silent Assassin.” Griffen nodded, “But would it be enough? I doubt he has much affection for his employees.”

“No, that’s not exactly it.” Cali said, “It was her that was weird, her mannerisms. She was watching him, us, almost jealous,” Her brows tugged together, “Her movements, her actions, they seemed so out of place, so jarring.”

“How so?” Caspien stopped rubbing my thigh, and I nudged him to continue.

“Sorry,” He whispered. I could feel his smile on my neck, and it sent a shiver coursing through me.

“She seemed young, acted young,” She shook her head again, “I can’t describe it.”

“Your age is only a number or whatever,” Holden shrugged, trying to grab his mate’s hand and pull her back to him.

“If I were him, I would hide my mate in plain view,” Nora mumbled, her eyes closed, “No one would think he was that stupid, and it would be so obvious no one wouldn’t think to look there...” She trailed off. Griffen tucked the blanket in around her for the tenth time.

“You think this old woman is his mate?” Caspien asked, his voice sounded incredulous.

“I don’t know,” She shrugged, “But I don’t think she really was an old woman. Is that even possible?”

“Yes, magic,” Holden nodded, “I’ve heard of some shapeshifter types too,”

Cali turned to him, shifting on his lap, “You’re joking.”

“He’s not,” Griffen said.

“And all I got was a puppy in my head?” She crossed her arms, downing the last sip of her drink.

Caspien chuckled once. I could feel the vibrations on my back.

“I think I’m in with the wrong crowd,” Cali went to fill all of our drinks before she stopped hers up.

“You’re in this for life, baby,” Holden said, nothing but affection in his eyes as he looked at her.

“So, we take the woman as a bargaining chip?” Griffen got back to the point.

“It’s a stretch,” Caspien said.

“This whole thing has been though,” I added, “We still don’t know who we are dealing with and if he’s even the right guy. He could be someone used as a diversion,” I shook my head.

I trusted them, I did, but dread curled deep within me. There were too many variables. I wanted whoever tried to take Emmett gone, and I had never felt so much hatred or anger towards another before, not even Nolan. But I couldn’t risk losing any of them on a hunch.

“His features check out,” Caspien said, running his nose along my neck, helping me come back to the present moment and away from my swirling fears.

“I’m sure there are ways to change an appearance,” I muttered, but I let him distract me.

“Let’s go with what we have now,” He whispered, I nodded once and he wrapped his strong arms around me enveloping me in his steady warmth.

“Do you think she would be there again?” Griffen asked Cali.

“She said she knew everyone there.”

“Can it be done?” Caspien asked Griffen. I remember him saying once that Griffen was pretty much his spymaster.

Griffen looked down. His eyes seemed to dart back and forth, and he muttered something before turning his dark gaze back to my mate, “I think so,” He loosed a breath, “But I can’t guarantee it; there are too many variables and no time to work through them all, or even many of them.” He shook his head once, seeming annoyed.

“If you think it can be done, I want safety to be the top priority,” Caspien said.

“I’ll do it as safely as possible,” Griffen responded, “But you know the situation. I’ll do it myself.” Griffen nodded once, resolutely.

“Don’t they know who you are?” Cali asked.

“I’ll be there,” Griffen spoke mostly to himself, “Either way, I’ll lead.” He nodded once again before standing up.

“Want help?” Caspien asked.

“I got it, I just need to talk to some people,” Griffen looked at his sleeping mate, “Can you guys watch her?”

“She’s not a dog,” Holden said.

“Well..” Cali replied.

“We can watch her,” Caspien said, and Griffen relaxed a bit before leaving.

“Now we need to figure out what happens after we have her,” Caspien leaned forward a bit, “Let’s finish planning.”

## **The Rejected Luna’s Prince Chapter 45 -**

13–16 minutes

---

### **The Rejected Luna’s Prince Chapter 45**

#### **45 – The Meet Up**

**(Caspien)**

Cali went ahead of us in a car driven by one of our lead trainers chosen by Griffen personally.

I didn’t trust this guy, this John. But then again, I didn’t trust the Silent Assassin either.

He wasn’t dumb enough to go anywhere without backup. Even though he got his title, titles, for a reason, even an assassin king couldn’t go himself against that many trained warriors alone. There were a lot of people that wanted him dead. Other assassins, family members of those he has killed or have been killed in his name, the long list of those he wronged to get to this position, and me.

I was the one he should fear.

The difference was that many weren’t that stupid to even try. But I wasn’t stupid. I knew exactly who I was facing, and I was ready for it. I let the rage that I had carefully tucked away come to the surface. One thought about what could have happened to Emmett and Atlas pushed forward, demanding blood.

Easy, we will get blood, all of it. I had to reign him in just a bit.

Muffled screaming came from behind me.

“Can you keep her quiet, please?” I growled, “I’m trying to focus.”

“On what?” Griffen asked, sounding annoyed, “She’s already gagged,”

I looked behind us at the woman sitting bound in silver next to Griffen. He had a silver knife pointed to her throat, and even though her mouth was taped shut, she was still screaming, or what I thought might be a scream, she could have been trying to talk.

“Are you sure?” I asked Griffen again, but I already knew the answer.

This woman changed even in the past few minutes as we drove closer to the city’s edge. Besides, I doubted there would be many old ladies around that establishment.

I couldn’t put my finger on the change, but there was a shift. Her wrinkles seemed to lessen, or maybe her eyes were sharper.

Her eyes turned to slits at my gaze, and she glared at me but thankfully stopped struggling.

Griffen said he grabbed her outside, or one of our men did. A very straightforward operation despite the messiness and uncertainty of it all.

The thing about these kinds of people was that they had one motivator, well, two. Money was first, then power, and usually, those two things weren’t mutually exclusive.

Operating without a moral code turned people into monsters, thankfully for us, monsters that could be bought. Not all assassins were like that, though. Ezra, who came to me, seemed to want to establish a different life for himself. I knew others who only took jobs against people that could be proven guilty on some level or another.

But the types that were associated with The Silent Assassin weren’t those kinds, and for once I was happy about it.

I didn’t want to know how much Griffen’s men paid to get the information we needed, and I didn’t ask. I knew it was a small fortune to risk the wrath of the assassin king himself, but I would pay it ten times over without blinking if it helped us even get a chance of figuring out who tried to hurt my son.

Cali texted my burner phone with the coordinates, and I sent them to Holden and our team behind us. We had a loose plan. Cali first, then Griffen and I with the hostage. He hopefully cared about this woman enough to talk, or at least enough to throw him off guard. Holden would be behind once we assessed the situation and would stay in mindlink reach with a team. Something he vehemently insisted against. He wanted to be the first to arrive after Cali, but I

couldn't have him ruining this because of his protectiveness. I wouldn't let anything happen to Cali, no one would, but I knew if it were my mate there, I wouldn't be able to think straight, and we had one chance.

I told our driver the coordinates. He put it in a handheld GPS that looked like a brick. We weren't taking any chances of having the coordinates somehow be tracked. Nothing was connected to the internet, nothing that could be traced.

It wasn't that far from here, probably some innate clearing that was seemingly randomly chosen.

I didn't like going in blind, and we were.

Cali couldn't mindlink or risk a text to us when she got there. I promised her five minutes before we showed up, but that was more than I wanted.

We had no signal for danger, not one she could give us anyway. I had an uneasy feeling about all this. I wasn't worried about myself. I wasn't sure if it was cockiness or confidence, but I didn't care. I was worried that we wouldn't get him, that he would escape, and then I had to deal with this fear for longer. Fear of losing someone I didn't know I had the capacity to care so deeply for.

It was a feeling I was unfamiliar and uncomfortable with.

Fear.

(Cali)

I indicated to the driver to stop. We were close, and I told him I would show up alone. At least that part of the plan I was sticking to.

I slid my sunglasses up, but my hair protested and pushed them back down. I grunted, ripping them off, ignoring the pain of the hair that came out with them, and shoved them in my pocket. The afternoon sun gave way to clouds, and I appreciated the break from the sweltering heat. I was sweating enough internally as it was.

I eased out of the car and nodded to the driver, who pulled off. Even though I knew he wouldn't be far, my stomach did little flips. I was left on the side of a road with a thin layer of dirt covering it. We weren't far from the city, but this seemed isolated. The city loomed in the distance, and I had never felt further from it.

I was alone.

What the f.uck was I thinking?

I shoved that thought aside. It would do nothing for me. Not now that I had already made my decision, a decision I would choose over again without question.

I settled into my cool, confident facade. One that was a second skin to me now. Even if I didn't feel calm and collected, I knew full well I could act it, and that others would believe me.

I walked towards the dot on this massive GPS that looked like something straight from the army two decades ago. It indicated that I was close, but I couldn't exactly tell how close. A green dot was pulsing, and I stepped toward it. It moved slightly, barely at all.

I looked up and saw nothing as out of the ordinary as I moved through the trees. I focused on my feet, stepping over some fallen twigs and underbrush.

A few steps later, I stumbled into a clearing. I was so focused on what was below me I didn't see it coming between the condensed trees. I grabbed a tree for balance and took a brief moment to compose myself, checking the GPS. I was on the green dot now.

John, or whoever he really was, was standing in the middle of the clearing. No hood this time. He was wearing a long-sleeved white shirt and black jeans. He looked so normal; it was jarring.

It threw me off, but I didn't know exactly what I was expecting. But him in a full cloak and swords strapped across his back made more sense to me than him in jeans looking so casual.

A light wind picked up, and his black hair ruffled, moving across his face. Besides that, he was eerily still, statuesque.

I paused, assessing my surroundings, something I did not do at our first encounter. My heartbeat thankfully evened, and I took a few steps into the clearing.

I couldn't sense anything out of place, but everything I sensed still felt new in this new form; new body, upgraded body, whatever. I could smell him faintly, the smell that I now knew to be werewolf.

Griffen gave me a myriad of quick tips. The basis of what other species smell like, the difference in sound between an animal snapping a twig and one made by a man, the subtle changes in someone's face when you caught them off guard, and they had to lie.

Holden cut him off and told him he wasn't helping and just to trust my instincts.

Both of their advice was vague, and neither was particularly helpful.

I took another step, keeping my eyes on the man. I didn't want to look untrustworthy or nervous, but I kept my senses open, whatever that meant.

I stopped, still fifteen feet from him, and held his stare. I didn't want to make the first move. One side of his face tugged up in a slight smile; his gray eyes raked over me, appraising me, his first movement.

"I wasn't sure if you would show," His voice was smokey; it seemed to come to me on the wind.



“I told you I would,” I found my voice, thankfully hard and confident; it didn’t waver with my nerves.

“I don’t trust people.”

I snorted, crossing my arms; that was an understatement.

“So, now I’m here,” He opened his arms to the bare field.

“You said you would bring proof,” I quirked up an eyebrow, tilting my head, “I don’t see anything besides yourself.”

“You don’t believe me,” A whisper of a frown crossed his beautifully marred face.

“I asked for someone, and magically you showed up saying you were him. At a place, he was not known to frequent and at a place that was supposed to be the first step in even getting a deal with him, let alone meet him.”

He sucked in air between his teeth. I wouldn’t have noticed it when I was a human.

“I got your number,”

“Obviously,” I looked him over, “But from a woman who didn’t seem to like or trust me.” Both the sides of his lips tugged up at the mention of her. Interesting.

He looked behind me, and I tensed. I was worried Caspien was here too soon. S.hit, he only gave me five minutes, but I didn’t know how much I could assess in that amount of time. I didn’t know much assassin lingo and wasn’t sure how much more I could fake.

“This job of yours,” He took a step to the side, not towards me. Then he took another.

I followed his movements, mirroring them, “Are you trying to circle me? Because no,” I stopped pinning him with a stare, and he stopped too. I wasn’t sure if he was trying to move me, but I didn’t like it.

“Smart girl.”

“Gross, don’t,” That flared my anger, and my fists clenched against my will. He looked down at my hands, a flicker of something crossed his face so fast I couldn’t figure it out.

“You have a past?”

“Who the f.uck doesn’t?” I scoffed, trying to reign in the anger, but I couldn’t help the edge of it that came out in my words.

“Fair point, but there’s a difference between a past and a past,” He tilted his head, studying my face, but I kept it impassive, cool, and unchanging.

“Poetic,”

“I usually deal with the latter; most of my business actually deals with them,” he went on, shrugging lightly.

“That’s why I’m here,” I tried to reign in the conversation, back to something pretend, something not so real.

“Jealous ex?”

“Something like that,” I tried a smile, but it didn’t work, “It’s not your job to care about the details, is it? Or do you get off on a tragic backstory?” Half of his face pulled up, and he stepped toward me. I fought to keep myself calm.

“I do love a story,” He locked his gray eyes on mine, “But I have to admit I’m intrigued to see why you’re actually here. You say you work for yourself, have jobs lined up for me if I pull this off, but yet,” He paused his brows scrunched a bit, “But yet, I don’t know anything about you. I am a very busy man, you see.”

“I don’t doubt it,” I jutted my chin a bit, not enough to seem petulant but enough to hold my own.

“I’m not dying for contracts, I don’t need to, nor do I take every one that comes my way. I don’t need you, but it seems you need me.”

Now it was my turn to smile, “As I told that woman, I know you’re the best; if you are who you say you are, that is,” I gave him a look, “However, others can fulfill my needs.” I shrugged, “So I don’t need you either, and I never insinuated that you did. This is to decide if this is mutually beneficial.”

His eyes squinted slightly, and he nodded once, bringing a finger to his chin, “Where do we go from here?”

“I was hoping you were in the position to tell me.”

“You requested the meeting.” He parried.

“I did, but this is your expertise.” I motioned toward him, keeping up a partial smile.

He nodded once, “Tell me who the hit is, and it will happen,”

“When?” I asked.

“Do you have a timeframe in mind?”

“How long does it take?”

“Depends on the hit.” His head tilted slightly, but his gray eyes stayed on mine.

The hit, I mulled that over. It made a person seem so one-dimensional, but I guess it might make it easier to justify.

I nodded, “Do you have any people you won’t..?” I trailed off, not knowing the right word. Murder, Kill, all felt too harsh for his cryptic conversation.

“No,” he replied too soon, any inflection gone from his voice.

The blood in my veins seemed to cool, a strange feeling. Icy resolve settled through me, quelling the anger that had been flaring since I got here.

I thought of all the innocent lives taken. For what? Money?

I thought or wanted to think that everyone could be redeemed, but I remembered why I was here and what this was all for.

One life to save so many others. That must mean something, must add a coin or whatever to my morale scale.

“You don’t like that,” He commented, his lips set in a line.

“I’ve offended you?” I laughed once without thinking.

“I don’t think anything or anyone could at this point,” he admitted, his voice devoid of emotion, “But I would like to work with you.” He added a bit more playful.

“Agreeing without talking payment?” I quirked an eyebrow.

Where was Caspien?

“You said money isn’t a problem.” he countered.

“It isn’t.” I took a deep breath, “I’ll give you the name. How much do you want up front?”

“Let me ask you something,” I held my breath, his gaze changed, and I couldn’t tell exactly why “Who followed you?”