

THE MOON AND HER SECRET

CHAPTER 13 NO.13

It was a slow night at the forest ranger station and since it was the weekend tomorrow, Lana decided to work the night shift with Ray. She sat beside Ray with her feet propped on the chair, her knees pressed against her chest as she lazily looked out at the forest with a pair of binoculars. She was not looking at anything in particular, just mindlessly zooming in and out at the surrounding trees as she attempted to get rid of her boredom. It was late and most of the campers were already putting out their fires and got ready to rest for the night.

The static sound from Ray's walkie-talkie buzzed, causing both of them to be alerted. Ray reached to increase the volume.

"The last of the campfires are out, over." Hannah's high-pitched voice spoke.

Ray pressed the button to reply, his eyes focused on the map in front of him. "Alright, head back to base, over." He said as he replaced his walkie-talkie.

"Roger, roger!" Hannah playfully said before the static of the walkie-talkie died down.

Lana leaned closer as she tried to get a better view of the map Ray was examining. She noticed certain spots of the map were marked with circles and x's. She tried to visually imagine where these spots were in the actual forest and why Ray had mark them. She was about to open her mouth to ask him but lost her balance and fell off the chair, her face hitting the wooden floor with a painful thud. She allowed herself to groan aloud.

“Lana!?” Ray was on his feet immediately as he went to help her help. “Are you alright?”

Lana whimpered at how her cheek was throbbing from its contact with the hard floor as she pushed herself into a sitting position. Her eyes locked with Ray’s, noticing the worried expression plastered on his face. Lana averted her gaze, trying her hardest to stifle the sudden urge to laugh at her own humiliating clumsiness.

“S-Sorry! Hahaha!” she laughed, feeling her eyes tear up.

Ray sighed dramatically as his hand wrapped around Lana’s arm. He pulled her up with ease. “Seriously, what are you doing?” he asked. His calloused hands cupped her cheeks as he checked Lana’s face for any wounds.

Lana exhaled as she tried to catch her breath after laughing at her own silliness. “I’m fine, sorry, I was just trying to see what you were doing.” She said as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“You could’ve just asked instead of falling off your chair, you know. Is that the new way of gaining attention?”

“Hmph, that was honestly an accident.” She huffed, feeling embarrassed now that the adrenaline rush she had earlier from falling faded away. Ray went back to his seat when he confirmed Lana was not injured. He beckoned her to come closer. Lana rested her arm against Ray’s shoulder as she peered down at the map. “So, what does the circles and x’s mean?” she asked.

“It’s nothing too serious, just observations for when Jack and I do our rounds further away from the campsites.”

“Wild animals?”

“Yeah, the circles indicate sightings of small animals such as foxes, deer and rabbits.”

“And I’m guessing the x’s are animals that are more of a threat? Like bears?” she questioned. Ray nodded. Lana frowned, noticing that the amount of x’s on the map is dangerously close to the campsite. “What about wolves?” she added. She could feel Ray stiffen. She moved away from behind him and tilted her head to the side to glance at his expression.

When Ray noticed her looking at him, he faked a smile. “What about them? You’ve seen one yourself, right?”

“And what about you? Have you never seen one?”

Lana wanted to see what Ray’s response would be. Ever since she started working as a part-time forest ranger, Ray and the other full timers reassured her that wolves did not reside in this parts of the forest. And yet, she found one, noted that it was River in his werewolf form but this begged the question if Ray and the others knew about the existence of the werewolves and were hiding it from her.

She recalled River telling her how the werewolves protected the forest, and in a way, the rangers did the same. Lana refused to believe that they never encountered a wolf since Ray’s map was evident at how much observation he

did over this very forest. Lana was not necessarily trying to find out who is a werewolf in Rosecliff, she just wanted to know if Ray knew since she noticed that he never gave her a proper answer when she asked him about these things.

“Why do you sound like you are doubting me?” he asked.

Again. Here he was deflecting from the question yet again. At this point, Lana was thinking that maybe she should just drop the topic but seeing his reaction made it clear to Lana that Ray knew something and was trying his hardest to keep it a secret from her.

Lana leaned against the table and crossed her arms around her chest. She stared directly at Ray who was clearly trying to avoid eye contact. “It’s just a question. You don’t have to be so defensive,” she smiled. “But then again, I’m just trying to understand what are the chances of me finding a wolf here when you claim that they don’t come to this part of the forest.”

“Are you trying to say that I lied to you?” Ray sighed. “There many factors that could’ve resulted in the wolf showing up nearby the camp grounds. Maybe it strayed away from its pack, maybe it got lost, and so on.”

“Okay. But you still haven’t answered my question, Ray.”

Ray stood up suddenly, towering over Lana whose gaze did not falter. “Lana can we just drop this? You’re making me feel like I’m being interrogated or something.”

Before Lana could reply, the door to the station was pushed open with a bang,

causing both Lana and Ray to flinch from shock. Hannah always deemed herself to be as athletically inept. She can't be bothered to run during any sports and even though being a forest ranger meant that she still had to do a lot of physically activity, that didn't mean Hannah had to run.

But seeing Hannah now, sweat drenched and panting desperately for air as she leaned against the open door to steady herself made Lana know that something urgent must have happened.

"We...have a problem..." she gasped.

Ray and Lana immediately went to her side. "What's wrong?!" Ray asked, reaching out to grab Hannah's arm so she wouldn't fall to the ground.

"The child..." she said as she pointed outside.

Lana turned to the direction Hannah was pointing and caught the gaze of a middle aged woman who was panting as much as Hannah was. Her hair was messily tied into a ponytail, her clothes was smeared with dirt and dried leaves. She looked as though she's been crying, her bloodshot eyes stared into Lana's.

"Please...help me find...my child," she cried as she fell to her knees.

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