

Kiersten Chalker

The world was dark.

So little light filtered in through the thick canopy of trees. Birds of iridescent hues sang their enlightened songs, calling back and forth to each other as they flew between the trees. Small creatures scampered through the undergrowth, ruffling dry leaves.

I crept silently through the foliage, keeping low to the ground, my talons barely making a sound as they sank into the soft dirt. I pressed my wings in close and ducked my head as I slipped under a low branch, making sure to not have my horns disturb it.

The world was silent.

*Snap!*

I froze, not so much as a breath left my throat.

Another snap followed by the rustling of leaves. Something was moving, something big. It didn't sound like a boar, there weren't enough footfalls, it sounded like two steps so it must stand on two legs. This thing must be a human, there is nothing in this forest that walks on two legs that makes this much noise.

The rustling continues. I press my body to the ground, my scales shifting to look more like the forest floor, filled with browns, greens, greys and black.

I crept closer to where the noise was coming from. I kned the dirt softly below my claws, the creature comes into view, I feel my pupils grow from their slit form, I ready myself.

I let out a roar as I pounce on the creature, it turns its face towards me at the last second before being pressed into the ground.

The creature laughs, big and heartily.

"Get off me you overgrown lizard!" He says between breaths, I jump off him. The boy stood up, he had caramel colored skin, his hair was just slightly darker and full of curls. He brushed the dirt off his face, flicking some at me. I twitched back as it hit my snout, I shifted out of my dragon form back into my human form.

We were both wearing our school uniforms, his was black with gold designs whereas mine was dark blue near black.

"I had the jump on ya, didn't I?" (pun totally intended) I grinned mischievously at him.

"Oh completely! It wasn't like I saw your wings brush against the leaves above you ever so slightly, or that I heard the leaves being pushed into the ground right before you attacked. Yes, you absolutely had the jump on me." He gives me an innocent look, the sarcasm thick. My frown couldn't go any deeper, least it would hit the ground.

"I know you can use your magic to heighten your sense, but come on, that's a little excessive."

"Well the point of the exercise is to use our powers to the best of our abilities."

"Yes well, I still had the jump on you!"

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“Enough talking you two!” Our instructor's voice fills the room, the forest scene fades away to reveal a large white and grey gymnasium, with large windows lining the uppermost part of the wall on one side of the room, and a viewing station opposite of that.

Our instructor goes on. “That was immensely better than last time Kahlia, but you still made mistakes.”

“Mistakes only Jackson would find,” I mumble under my breath, pouting.

“What was that private?”

“Nothing Corporal Evergreen!” I shout, putting my arms back to my sides. Jackson stifles a laugh besides me.

“And what are you laughing about Private Jackson?” Jackson stiffens next to me.

“Laughing at a sneak attack? You’re supposed to be fighting not playing,” Evergreen scolds.

“And you didn't even try to fight, if you knew she was coming you should have tried to stop her, instead you got caught.” Jackson stares at the ground, accepting his criticism.

“You are both free to go.” We snapped to attention and saluted towards the viewing chamber, our fists resting against our left breast.

We walk out of the gym in silence, the next pair walks in sniggering at us. I snarl at them, baring my teeth. They stop and hurry in, the doors sliding shut behind them. Jackson and I continued to walk in silence until we rounded the corner and got to a buiser hallway, with students of different shapes, sizes and colors crowding about.

“You know what makes me feel better after training all day?” I look at him and smile.

“Oh, and what’s that?” His voice low and void of emotion.

“Pudding!” I startle the group of kids that was next to us, they give me strange looks only to smile and roll their eyes when they see it was me who shouted.

“You know I don't like pudding.” He gives me a sideways glance.

I pause for a moment, still smiling like an idiot, “well, then you can watch me eat pudding! Let's go!” I grab his wrist and push our way through the crowded hallway. He can't help but laugh when I take us straight through groups of people talking with each other, causing them to scoff loudly at us.

We make it to the dinning hall, it's too late for lunch and too early for dinner so most people here are either studying or hanging out during their free time.

Releasing Jackson's wrist I bound over to the desert table and grab a handful of chocolate pudding. The staff nearby frown slightly, but do nothing.

I make my way over to where Jackson sat down.

“I thought that training sequence went very well!” I say as I crack open a pudding cup.

“For you maybe but not for me, Evergreen was right, I should have attacked.”

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Jackson stared solemnly at the table, I know he'll get out of this funk, it always takes him a few minutes before he realizes he's literally the best 14 year old in this school, best student overall!

"It's only our second year, it'll be ok." I say. Jackson smiles at me.

"You're right, we'll do better next time!"

"That's the spirit!"