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Dive

Chapter 4 - The sun warrior

"Let me look at you. Why are you so pretty? Your hair is so blue. I love it so much."

"You are pretty too, Evelyn."

I loved my life this morning. Last night, Nam and I returned to our cabin, leaving Aria and Bethany to their fun, and we had torrid sex all evening until both of us passed out from exhaustion. Earlier, when Nam woke up, she had tried to sneak out to go mining, but I grabbed her wrist and pulled her back in bed. I needed more out of her little tongue.

This virtual world was fun. No matter how hard we had sex, our bodies stayed fresh like roses and good-looking. Very good looking. We didn't even get bad morning breath. Sitting on Nam's hips, I massaged her soft breasts and rubbed her perfect nipples. No matter how much I had nibbled on them, they weren't getting any redder. I could do it again and again without fear of making her uncomfortable.

"You know what, Nam?"

"You love my breasts?"

"Yes. A lot. But, you know when I said that I wasn't into girls?"

"Yes. You said that often."

"I changed my mind."

"I know. We had a lot of sex, and you loved it."

"Guilty as charged. So, I'm sorry. I won't tell you that I'm not into girls anymore, and I'll even tell Aria and Bethany if they ask. I won't hide what I like when I'm playing Dive. What would be the point anyway?"

"None. It's your world, and you do whatever you want in it. I'm lucky that you like doing those things with me."

"Of course. And you know what. When you said that I should do the same with Aria, well, I will consider it."

"Aria is very pretty."

"I know. And Bethany too. You are all a bit different, but all equally beautiful."

I lowered my naked body on top of Nam's and restarted kissing. Yes, girls were good. I generously rubbed my tongue on hers, trying to get more of this good feeling. One of her hands found its way to my crotch and began fingering my already warmed-up pussy. It was nuts and even made me a bit torn. I wasn't even out of the game that I kind of wanted to try dating a girl in real life. If my experience with Nam were close to what a lesbian relationship could be, then I would certainly want to explore this aspect of life. Too bad, hairy males, you just had to be awesome like Nam.

A knock on the door pulled me out of my thoughts. It was as if my AI friends were learning; they didn't just walk into my home while I was having sex anymore. But since this hot time with Nam had intoxicated me and that I had just promised her that I wouldn't hide my sexuality from anybody in the future, I felt emboldened to expose myself.

"Come in!"

The door swung open, and Aria's head popped in.

"Hi... Oh... Are you having sex?"

"Hehe. Yes. Come in. It's okay. Actually, come here."

A bit unsure of herself, Aria walked in and came close to the bed. I wrapped my arm around her neck and pressed my lips on hers. At that rhythm, I would lose all interest in going back to the real world.

"Mmm..."

"Aaah!"

"Oooh... You kissed me."

"Hehe. Yes. It's because I'm sorry I was harsh on you yesterday."

"Yay! I will kiss Evelyn every day while Nam is fingering her!"

"Hey! Watch your mouth, Aria. Don't push your luck. Aaah!"

Nam was indeed still fingering me, and it clouded my judgment... or not. I pulled Aria back into a deep kiss. Her soft hands grabbed my naked boobs and began to squeeze them hard. That was different. Nam was so gentle, so it was interesting to see that my AI friends didn't all have the same behaviors in bed.

"Aaah! Aria! Nam and I might let you sleep with us tonight if you continue like this. Haha."

"Oh, nice! And me who came here just to tell you that someone wanted to see you outside. That's a bonus."

"... Uh? Who? Bethany?"

"No. Bethany is hiding in our cabin. She is scared."

"..."

What was she talking about? If Nam and Aria were here with me, and if Bethany was in the other cabin, then who wanted to see me? And why was Bethany scared? I had no idea, but I was quickly getting scared too.

"ARIA! Who is outside? A new person?"

"Yes. Twenty of them, actually. They are waiting for you by the frozen lake."

"TWENTY!? What the hell? Are they all dressed up like us? Wearing bikini armor like ours?"

"Oh, no. They don't look like us at all, and they are riding horses too."

"HORSES!?"

"Yes. I've never seen one before. They are super cool animals."

I tumbled out of bed and quickly went to my menu to dress up, and so did Nam. For some reason, her facial expression had changed. She was usually quite neutral unless she was sexually activated, but I could sense some sort of worrying this time. It was the same face she had when we got caught by this nasty snowstorm a while ago.

"Nam? If they aren't wearing the same clothes as us, who are they?"

"I... I don't know."

"Are you sure? You are acting strange."

"I'm... just an assistant."

"Gah! You are going to drive me nuts! Let's go take a look. Aria, you go back to Bethany. There is no point for us all to go see them."

We exited our cabin, and then Aria jogged toward her home while Nam and I walked in the direction of the frozen lake. In the distance, I could see the group of horsemen that Aria had described, but from what I could see, they were, in fact, horsewomen. I didn't want to be sexist here and suggest that women couldn't be dangerous, but a group of men, at least to me, would have been more intimidating.

We weren't even halfway to the group that my assistant pulled on my arm.

"Evelyn, let's run away."

"Uh? What? Why?"

"I... I don't know... but I think we should... leave..."

"What do you mean, Nam? You want to go back to our cabin?"

"... No... I mean... leave. Far away."

"Why? I worked hard to build this little camp. Why would I leave now?"

"I... I can't tell you... They are just... too early."

"Too early? And what is this supposed to mean?"

"I... I don't know."

"Why are you always so cryptic? Are you scared of the horses? Come on, I know you've never seen one, but they are gentle creatures."

"..."

"Alright, stop looking so anxious, and let's just go check who they are and what they want first, and then we can decide what to do."

"O... okay. It's your world."

Why was she acting all strange like this? And like with the nasty snowstorm, she told me something that I was probably not supposed to know, even though it didn't make any sense to me. They were too early? Was this a scripted event that wasn't supposed to occur? In any case, there was no way I would abandon my beloved camp, not after having made so much progress and new friends.

We dragged our inefficient metal boots in the snow, approached the strange group, and right off the bat, I confirmed that they were indeed all sexy women shaped similarly to my own AI characters. They just looked way more badass than us.

Instead of wearing metal bikini armor, they wore fur bikini outfits, which made them look wild, almost feral, and instead of our metal headbands, they wore wolf hats, which was almost frightening. Were those made out of... real wolves? It certainly looked like it. It made me gulp, and I started having regrets for not having listened to Nam's suggestion a moment ago.

And the more I looked at them, the more I understood the trouble we were in. I could see swords, spears, and shields.

I stopped at a fair distance before engaging the dialogue,

"Who... who are you?"

The leader of the pack advanced toward me, not bothering to climb down her horse. At least the other ones didn't follow her. Her skin was dark as the night, and her aura overwhelming. Her face markings prevented me from reading her intentions. There was a real possibility that I would get decapitated by this new AI character in a few seconds. Nam must have thought the same thing because she clung a bit harder to my arm.

"I'm Aisha, head warrior of the Wolf Guard. I'm serving the Queen of Valhalla! Are you the leader of this village?"

"Queen of Val... Uh? Leader? Me? Oh, no! There is no leader here."

"Is she away?"

"No. I mean, this is my world, but I'm not a leader."

"This is NOT your world! Valhalla belongs to our Queen."

"Oh... Sure. Whatever... If it makes her happy. Alright, then... I'll go back to my activities... Have a good one."

I grabbed Nam's hand and turned around.

"You were SO right... Not friendly at all. Let's get the hell out of here while we can!"

"Yes. I agree."

But before we could even start walking away, Aisha maneuvered her horse around us and blocked our path. With our stupid slippery metal boots in the snow, there was no way we could outrun a horse.

"Halt! How many of you are here?"

"..."

"How... many?"

"F... four..."

"Where are your weapons?"

"Weapons? We don't have any weapons."

"Yes, you do. Where are they?"

"No, we don't! And what is your problem anyway?"

"If you didn't have weapons, I wouldn't be here."

"Well, as I said, I don't. So get off my property!"

"This is NOT your property!"

"Aaah, whatever, wolf head. What do you want from us?"

"Where are your warriors?"

This was getting irritating. She seemed convinced that I owned a military force, but all we did here was cutting wood and gathering magical winter plums. I knew warriors were a thing, but I had not assigned that role to anybody in my group yet. We didn't have any weapons either... oh... that was not entirely accurate now that I was thinking about it.

I turned to Nam and asked her something I maybe shouldn't have asked.

"Nam... That spear we gave Aria for hunting... she said it was not for hunting... Could it be..."

"Shhh!"

"A SPEAR? So you DO have weapons!"

"Oooh! You didn't hear that... That spear was just a mistake! We just wanted a hunting spear. My bad!"

Now we were in trouble. That dark-skinned girl didn't look very happy that we lied to her even though it was an honest mistake. She circled us with her horse and gave us a clear picture of our future. One that I would have preferred not to hear.

"Listen to me carefully. You have five minutes to send your best warriors to face us. If you don't send them, we will kill you all. If your warriors are defeated, we will also kill you all."

"Heeey! That's super mean! That's not a choice. That's not fair! I told you. We have no warriors."

"It IS fair. If your warriors defeat the twenty of us, you'll then have a victory and live... for now."

"Look... What was your name again?"

"Aisha, head warrior of ..."

"Yeah, yeah. So, read my lips here. We DON'T have a warrior. Let's talk this out like adults, okay?"

"Then, in five minutes, you'll all die."

She hit her horse in the flanks and bolted back to her group of wolf cosplayers, sending snow flying everywhere. Clearly, she wasn't interested in negotiating a peace treaty. We were so screwed; horses were such powerful creatures. We didn't stand a chance.

"Let's run, Evelyn!"

"Run where? There is no way we can escape them. Hurry, let's go back to Aria's cabin. I got an idea."

Nam and I clumsily went up the little hill through the deep snow. I was starting to think that now would be the perfect time for a very deadly snowstorm. If there had been magic in this game, I would have cast those nasty clouds right away. But fortunately, it was just that, a game, so I knew exactly what to do.

As soon as we reached Aria's cabin, we slammed the door shut behind us and found the two girls hugging each other on the couch with a scared look on their faces.

"What... what do they want from us?"

"To kill us, apparently. That wolf girl didn't get enough love when she was a kid. She needs a hug. But fear not, I have the perfect plan."

"You do?"

"Yes. All of you, you disappear. Then I will log out of the game and come back tomorrow. In the game, it will be like three months. There is no way those idiots will stick around for that long. HA! I'm a genius!"

Nam pulled on my arm.

"Uh? What is it, Nam?"

"I'm your assistant."

"... Yes? I know that. What's your point?"

"They are not."

"..."

"..."

"So... They can't vanish as you do?"

"No. If you leave, they will stay here and get killed."

"..."

"..."

"DAMNIT! It was a super clever plan!"

"No, it wasn't."

"Oh! Shush! What do we do then?"

"I don't know. This is your world, Evelyn."

"Well, based on this howl-at-the-moon bitch, it is not. Who is this Queen of Valhalla anyway? It sounds like I'm walking in her yard."

"They are lying. This is your world. Not hers."

"Well, that's not helping, Nam."

"Sorry."

As if it wasn't enough, Aisha's voice pierced the thin walls of our refuge.

"THREE MINUTE LEFT! Come fight us, or die like cowards!"

"Why do you give them all that extra time, Aisha? The Queen demanded that we kill them all. Are you not going to obey her?"

"It will happen. However, I want to give my enemy a chance to defend themselves. Doing otherwise would be honorless."

"But, did you look at them? They can barely stand in the snow, and if it's true that they only have one spear and no warrior, there is nothing they can do against the twenty of us."

"Stop underestimating our enemies. It's unlikely that it will happen today, but one day, you'll lose your life from it."

"Ah, whatever. Aisha. Can you at least leave the blue girl to me? I think I have a crush."

"Do as you please."

I could easily leave this place and let them massacre my friends, but it wouldn't be cool at all. I was just starting to have fun in this game, so it was not fair that Dive made me face such an impossible challenge. I was an incompetent player. What was I supposed to do? Google the solution on the internet?

Bethany grabbed my hand gently.

"Evelyn... You know, you gave Aria a spear."

"Yeah... And since it wasn't for hunting, I think it triggered those bastards. Oh, wait! Bethany, you don't have a role yet! Are you saying that if I were to give you the warrior role and the spear, you could defeat them?"

"Oh no! I'm way too scared for that. I just thought you could use the spear to fight them by yourself while we watch. You are so awesome."

"AH! Are you insane! I don't like violence. I don't like wars! I'll never be able to kill people even though they are AIs."

"Aww... Then we will die."

No way I'm going out there to fight people. I was too uncomfortable with death. When Aria murdered the deer the other day, it had turned my stomach upside down. But her little nonsensical speech gave me an idea.

"Hey, Nam. If I were to give Bethany the warrior role right now, that means she will be specialized in warfare? The same way Aria was suddenly good at finding plums and nuts."

"I don't know. Probably."

"Well, let's try that."

"Nooo, Evelyn! I don't want to be a warrior!"

"Look, Bethany. If you do it for me, I'll give you all the sex you want, whenever you want."

"... Really?"

"Yes."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Alright then... It's worth the risk, I suppose."

At this point, whether she wanted this or not, it was our only option. If her new warrior role could give us some intel on the way to survive this, I would certainly welcome it. It was worth whoring myself out for it.

Feeling a bit guilty, I double tapped Bethany's forehead, which opened her menu. After hesitating for a second, I changed her role to Warrior. I then closed the menu and waited for the change to occur. The last time I've done this with Aria, a spiral of light had enveloped her for an instant, and her armor had changed color to represent her new functions.

The same thing seemed to happen. Bethany began glowing like a firefly, and a tornado of light surrounded her. Even though our situation was hopeless and my priorities should have been elsewhere, I was still curious to see what color she would adopt. White would be nice.

But then something odd happened. The transformation was taking a bit too much time to my liking. And as if I didn't have enough bad surprises for a day...

wwwwooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo...

"Uh?... Nam? What is that noise... And why is the light increasing in intensity?"
"..."

What could this be? It was as if a giant turbine slowly accelerated or charged. If I had hair on my arms, it would surely have stood. This was ominous on so many levels. No matter what it was, it left Nam speechless.

WWWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO...

"Nam?"
"..."
"NAAAM! Speak to me! NOW!"
"This... This is... IMPOSSIBLE! EVELYN! RUUUUN!"
"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, RUN!? WHAT IS HAPPENING!?"
"JUUUUST RUUUUUUN!"

As Bethany's light became unbearably bright and the charging noise grew deafening, Nam, Aria, and I all ran out of the cabin, alarmed by this insanity. This COULDN'T be good!

We barely had time to run ten meters away when it happened.

The loud noise ceased, the light vanished... and a second later, a MASSIVE explosion vaporized Aria's cabin, blew all the snow off the surrounding trees, even flattened the closest ones, and, obviously, swiped us off our feet and sent us flying.

"EEEEAAH!"

"YIIIIKES!"

"AAAAAH!"

Witnessing the same thing Evelyn and her friend were experiencing first hand, Aisha's group of warriors tried to calm down their frightened horses. The distance had kept them safe, but their astonishment was palpable.

"WOAH! What was that, Aisha?"

"I... I have no idea. I've never seen anything like it."

"That cabin is gone! They must all be dead now!"

"Yeah, that was so violent. What in the world did they do? That wasn't normal."

"Hey, guys! Look! Where the cabin used to be... There is something glowing... What is this? Is it... a person?"

In the middle of the destruction site, a humanoid form bathing in a bright golden light silently stood there. Even if the logic stated that it could have been Bethany, it was unlikely. The form didn't stand like her, and it didn't feel like her.

The golden silhouette turned to Evelyn and began walking in her direction. As it advanced in the snow, it immediately melted and vaporized, and in addition to that, the soil underneath her footsteps burned, causing small flames and sparks to surround its ankles. Surrounded by steam and smoke, it approached the person who had called it.

"Evelyn! Evelyn!"

"Oooooow! Naaam! What the hell happened."

"No time to explain! Look! Look!"

"AAAH! What is this thing? Why... why is it coming toward us?"

"Evelyn! There is no time! Listen... Listen to me!"

"Nam... You are scaring me... What is this thing?"

"No, listen. This is a message from Dive. Evelyn, you have unlocked a unique character. If you accept this character, it will replace your previous one, Bethany. Warning: Accepting this character will unpredictably change your gaming experience. Do you want to accept this unique character and replace the old one? This cannot be undone."

"Uh? Nam? Why are you talking funny all of a sudden?"

"I repeat? This is a message from Dive. Evelyn, you have unlocked a unique character. If you accept this character, it will replace your previous one, Bethany. Warning: Accepting this character will unpredictably change your gaming experience. Do you want to accept this unique character and replace the old one? This cannot be undone. You have ten seconds remaining."

10...

9...

"Naaaam? This is not funny? Why are you talking weird? What should I do?"

8...

7...

6...

"Naaaaam! Stop that! Stop counting! You are scaring me! Tell me what to do here! I don't know how to play games!"

5...

4...

3...

"NAAAAM!"

2...

1...

"YEEES YEEES YEEES! DO IT! JUST DO IT!"

"Unique character accepted. Please standby as we are reconfiguring your character."

No matter what was happening here, it was well above my paygrade. Not only did I know nothing about games, but this didn't seem like a normal event at all. I have never heard about pretty girls causing a house to explode into a million pieces before.

As I watched the glowing humanoid form pulse and morph, Nam kept spitting nonsense.

"Health, maxed..."

"Maintenance, unrequired..."

"Armor, maxed..."

"Weaponry, maxed..."

"Strength, maxed..."

"Agility, maxed..."

"Speed, maxed..."

"Defense skills, maxed..."

"Attack skills, maxed..."

"Renaming the new character..."

"Cleopatra, the sun warrior is born."

"Type, Unique Hero..."

"Class, Warrior..."

"Allegiance, Evelyn..."

"Allegiance type, unbreakable..."

"Replacement completed. Bethany has been deleted."

The blinding light around the new character finally faded enough for me to see what happened with my own eyes. Blinking helped a bit, but it still took me a few seconds to wrap my head around what I was seeing.

But, it was just not possible... What I was seeing wasn't mentioned anywhere on the box the game came in.

It was a woman, it looked like one at least, but her entire body was covered in sand-colored fur except for her white chest. She wasn't any bigger than me, but her naked body was so incredibly athletic. A long tail wagged slowly behind her muscular butt and her face...

... Her face...

Was she human, or was she a beast? It was a very esthetic mix of both. That white muzzle and whiskers were probably hiding a nice set of fangs while the severity in her yellow eyes betrayed some gentleness. Her round fluffy ears confirmed what I thought, even though it didn't make any sense.

"A... A lioness?"

As soon as I said that, I wondered if I had insulted her because she turned her head to look straight at me. At that point, the glowing light had entirely vanished, which made her feel way too real.

She then addressed me with a low yet still very feminine voice.

"Those horsewomen, I sense hostility..."

"You... you can put it that way, yes..."

"Shall I dispose of them?"

"Heee... Suuure... Be my guest. But, you may want to put some panties on... We can see your..."

"It won't be necessary."

"And what in the world is that creature? I've never seen something like that before."

"I don't know."

"Aisha, as the head warrior, is it not your role to know things?"

"I cannot know what I don't know. Let's gather knowledge. She is yours."

"Ah! The first sensical thing you said today. I won't even need my horse for that one. She doesn't even have any weapons."

"Be careful..."

"Aaah! Relax. It's not like she is going to explode again. I hope! Hahaha!"

The lioness stepped over me, allowing me to have a very good look at her naked crotch. She definitely needed panties. Her tail brushed against my belly, just enough for me to get a sense of how soft her fur was. Seeing how effortlessly she walked through the snow compared to us helped me understand how badass this character could be. And at the same time, her aura puzzled me. She was nothing like us.

"Hey, lion girl..."

She paused without looking at me. Perhaps I had offended her by calling her this nickname, but I forgot what Nam had said earlier.

"Just... don't kill anybody, okay?"

"Really?"

"... Please?"

"... Very well."

She resumed her slow walk toward the danger. In the distance, I could see one of the enemy warriors getting off her horse and grabbing a sword and a round shield. Even though my lioness looked tough, this sight didn't inspire confidence. How did she expect to block a blade while being naked? Even me, the least warrior person ever, knew better. Yet, the lioness didn't seem interested in common sense.

"Heeey! I have a spear that you can use if you want."

"... That won't be necessary."

I sat back up in the snow. Aria was out cold, upside down in a snowy bush, and Nam had passed out as well after having translated the Dive message for me. I was the only one left to witness whatever was going to happen next.

"Hey! Idiot! Do you want to die? Go grab a weapon if you plan on taking this fight seriously. I'm not going to take it easy on you just because you are naked."

"Name a bone."

"... Uh?"

"I said... Name a bone."

"A bone? Like what? The femur?"

"Then, I will break your femur because you called me an idiot."

"Ghk! Go to hell, idiot! Yaaaaaa!"

The wolf warrior, clearly skilled, shrank the distance with the lioness and swung her sword with the intent of decapitating her opponent. She had no interest in making this fight drag longer than necessary; her Queen had requested killing. The good news was that the lioness didn't seem to care one bit.

As the sword cut through the air, it would have been reasonable to expect that the lioness's head would have rolled. But that didn't happen. She raised her knee and, accompanied by a flash of light, slammed the ball of her foot deep into the wolf lady's stomach. Her blade and shield flew high in the air.

"Uuaaaarrrrh!"

Not caring about the sword, the lioness grabbed the round shield mid-air and slammed it down so hard on the warrior's leg that a cracking noise ensued.

"AAAAAAH!"

"Your femur is now broken. You can now return to your companion. Evelyn has no wish to fight any of you. She doesn't like violence."

"Aaaah! My leeeeeeeg! It's broken!"

From afar, Aisha felt a bead of cold sweat running down her neck. She had not necessarily expected her warrior to win against an opponent displaying such self-confidence, but to see her lose so shamefully against an unarmed individual was quite shocking. The lioness had destroyed one of her best warriors effortlessly and with precision. She had a single question, one that was burning her tongue.

"WHO ARE YOU?"

The lioness placed her foot atop of the moaning wolf warrior she had just obliterated.

"I am Cleopatra, the Sun warrior, and you cannot defeat me!"

In her statement, there was such conviction that it was received like a shockwave by the nineteen remaining horsewomen. But Aisha knew her situation, and fear would be of no use. Being defeated was not an option unless she wanted to end up in a dark dungeon under the care of the Queen of Valhalla.

"I believe you, Cleopatra! However, we cannot fall back! Would you grant me the honor of a real fight? You are missing armor and weapons. If I am to be defeated, I would like to see the extent of your skills."

"Granted. But you'll suffer the consequences of this ask."

"I understand."

Cleopatra raised her left arm and slid her finger on it. The little blue screen opened in front of her face, and she began adding different items to her body. It seemed more complicated than it should have been; boots, leg armor, knee armor, leather under armor, full-body armor, armored gloves, forearm protectors, shoulder protector, helmet, and so forth. Every single piece of equipment was of a polished gold color. It wasn't nearly as sexy as the typical metal and fur bikini that others around her wore, but it was beautiful nonetheless—every single piece was a work of art displaying admirable carvings. The sun warrior title suited her. Even her abs were covered by a plate replicating what it was hiding. Only part of her thighs and face were still visible, and of course, those fierce yellow eyes.

To complete her armor, she spawned a very large rectangular shield, almost shoulder height, and a spear. This was a very impressive look.

Aisha, who witnessed the intimidating metamorphosis, had not changed her mind. She and her wolf warrior would attack and try their best to nullify Cleopatra's confidence. Since the band had been training together for so long, it wouldn't be impossible to win. When she told Cleopatra that she believed she could win, this was simply part of a strategy to boost the enemy's self-confidence further. It could force a potential mistake and open a window for victory.

"WOLF-WARRIORS! ASSEMBLE AND CHARGE!"

The maneuver seemed disorderly at first, but it was not. They had done this so many times. All the horses and their warriors aligned in a wedge formation and then advanced toward their single target. Compared to this wall of equines, the lioness's stature didn't appear very imposing. From an outsider's point of view, the contrast between the two opposing forces was so extreme that there could be no doubt about the battle's outcome. Just using this term, battle, to describe the situation sounded asinine. However, the lion-woman, who was void of anxiety, planted her shield in the snow, lowered her spear, and adopted a stance adapted to her attackers.

As the horses advanced faster and faster, making the ground tremble and rumble, Cleopatra murmured to herself...

"This is a lie. I can see you."

She pushed her shield deeper into the snow, which could have been seen as a mistake. Instead of avoiding the charge, she confirmed that she would stand her ground, no matter what. Nineteen large horses were heading in her direction, and she didn't seem to care.

"Nobody drew their weapons yet. They are underestimating me."

The strategy was obvious. Cleopatra knew the exact number of horses on the battlefield, yet, she could only see eighteen of them. So her focus was on the nineteenth one that she couldn't see. It would have been easy to take care of that missing warrior in one spear throw, she knew where it was, but Evelyn had asked her not to kill anyone. This condition wouldn't make her victory any harder but possibly just a bit longer. The total time would depend on her opponents' resilience in the end.

They were very close. Anybody would have peed their pants by now if they had been facing the same predicament, but since the lioness knew what to expect, she could calmly focus on her defense. As predicted, nobody wanted to attack her other than the invisible horsewoman. The wedge opened at the last second, half of the warriors passed to her left, and the other half on her right, and then, the unsurprising surprise attack was revealed. The nineteenth warrior, leaning sideways on her horse and carrying a lance, appeared from behind her companions and headed straight to Cleopatra.

It was supposed to be an unpredictable strike while the target was distracted by the other horses brushing on each side of her body, but it wasn't.

The heavily armored lioness thrust her spear forward and hit the very tip of her opponent's lance, something impossible to achieve, which caused the weapon to explode in the wolf warrior's hands.

"GAAAH! How... how did she do that!?"

That was a problem. Cleopatra could have used a plethora of different responses to her aggression, but since she was unallowed to kill anybody, most of them would have been too dangerous to use. She needed the wolf warriors off their horses so she could safely finish the work. As the stunned cavalry regrouped, she addressed them.

"I do not want to harm your horses. They have done nothing to me, plus, it would be too easy to defeat you. Face me on foot!"

"Nice try. But that's not going to happen. Those horses are part of who we are. Warriors! CHARGE!"

The head-warrior wasn't a fool and understood how much stronger they were when sitting on their mounts. The lioness's attempt to get them off their horses was a strategy denoting intelligence. However, she had seen through it and wouldn't give her already mystifying opponent an even better chance of success.

This time it was a legit charge. Everybody drew their sword and headed at full speed toward the lonely lioness.

"SHATTER HER SHIELD!"

A terrible idea that forced Cleopatra to display an expression of contempt. They had just inadvertently told her what their next attack would be. From what she could see, they had not tried to mislead her. Their first sneak attack had failed miserably, and now they reverted to brute force to go through her. She planted her large rectangular shield in the snow once more and hid behind it while reinforcing it with her shoulder.

Once more, the warhorses flew on each side of Cleopatra while a long series of strikes battered her shield. The noise was deafening, and sparks flew in every direction as the metal of the blades scraped on the gold shield. The sun warrior found this somewhat relaxing. She always loved to fight, and casual skirmishes like these were always pleasant.

"Impossible! We didn't even scratch her shield! Aisha! This is not normal!"

"It's... unusual... yes."

Cleopatra returned to her feet, kicked the bottom of her large shield a few times to dust the snow off it. She seemed more concerned about the cleanliness of her shiny equipment than the risks that the enemy posed to her life. She turned to the horsewomen.

"I can do this all day. But I'm already tired of this lack of effort. Get off your horse, or pay the price."

"In your dream, creature! CHARGE!"

"Fine, but don't say I didn't warn you."

And once more, Cleopatra planted her shield in the snow, but this time she had no intention of deflecting the attack. She needed those warriors off their horses, and she knew exactly what would do the trick. After kneeling behind her shield, she began a chant.

"O Sun Mother. The darkness has blinded the warriors. Turn my shield into your strength and make them see the light. HELIOS FLASH!"

FLASH! FLASHFLASHFLASH!

Out of nowhere, the external face of her large golden shield turned all white, as if it had turned into overheated glass, and sent a few rapid bursts of blinding light right in her attackers' eyes, including their horses who went into total panic. Some of the wolf warriors crashed to the ground with their horses, others were kicked off their saddles, and the remainder just decided to climb down safely while trying to rub their crying eyes.

Cleopatra didn't wait for a second longer. She rushed her enemies with absolute self-control. Screaming wasn't necessary to muster her courage, but a few words could help her achieve her goal faster.

"SUN WARRIOR! BURNING SPEAR!"

Magic was not a thing in this world, yet, her spear instantly caught fire, which didn't seem to cause her any discomfort. She was the sun warrior.

And the artistic work began.

There was nothing fair about this fight. One by one, she struck the confused and disoriented wolf-warriors. All they could see was a barrage of fire disarming them and a large shield knocking them off their feet. Yet, their courage was remarkable, and some still attempted attacks.

Everything they threw at Cleopatra was deflected effortlessly. The shield was moving even faster than its yielder. Sometimes it was on her back, sometimes protecting her front, and because of its large size, it made it impossible to know who the lioness was facing.

The truth was, she faced them all at the same time.

"Woooooow! She is amaaaazing!"

"Mmm..."

"Naaam! You are awake. Look at that! Look at Cleopatra go!"

"Mmm... who?"

"The lioness. Look!"

"I don't know who that is. Is she on our side?"

"Yes, I hope so. She is giving all those warriors a very bad time.

"Her spear is burning. How is that possible?"

"I don't know. It must be magic."

"Mmm, Evelyn. I don't think there is magic in Valhalla."

"Well, look at her. I'm not making this up."

FLASH!

"Aaaah! What was that?"

"Haha. I'm not sure, Nam, but she used it earlier. It might have something to do with the fact that she is a unique hero in the game. At least, that's what you said earlier."

"I never said such a thing."

"Oh yes. You were like, maxed this, maxed that. And then you were talking all weird. Then you passed out."

"I don't recall. Why does she have a tail?"

"She is a lioness. She is super cool."

"What's a lioness? I don't think they exist in Valhalla."

"Nam! Enough. Just look at her go. She knocked them all out without killing any of them."

"Not all of them. The black wolf-girl is still up."

"Ah... Yes. She is the mean one who wanted to kill us."

"Ghk!"

"Leave! You've been defeated."

"... No! I have nothing to lose!"

"So be it."

Aisha was running out of energy, yet she desperately and uselessly still tried to break through the impenetrable fortress. Unfortunately, her sword didn't even come close to solve the mystery of the shield that was blocking all her efforts. All she could see was a big golden wall, and occasionally, a pair of yellow eyes or the tip of a tail. Her opponent manipulated her weapons as if they were an extension of her body.

There was nothing the pretty night-skinned warrior could do. Her companions had all been defeated, she didn't have any other strategy to use, and this last hit that knocked her off her feet for the tenth time was too much.

"Aaar!"

"Give up."

"Kill me, at least."

"I'm tempted! Your actions scared Evelyn."

Cleopatra lowered her spear and pressed its sharp tip against Aisha's throat.

"STOP!"

Nam and I clumsily ran toward Cleopatra and Aisha. Aria, who had managed to extract herself from the bushes after regaining consciousness, was not far behind us. Definitely, none of us could move with the same ease as our new lioness fighter, particularly in this knee-high layer of snow. It just made us look like hopeless idiots.

"Cleo! Stop! Don't kill her!"

"I'm not. I was merely trying to coerce her to leave, but she is more stubborn than her companions. She is willing to die. Can I break her bones as I did with the first one?"

"No! No more bone-breaking!"

Around us was a field of moaning bodies crawling around aimlessly like a bunch of maggots. Nobody had died, but there were certainly a few bumps, bruises, and cracked ribs, which didn't make me feel a whole lot better. But considering the gravity of the situation we were in, this wasn't a bad ending.

I crouched next to Aisha, who was kept in check by my new warrior. In her current position, there was nothing she could do to harm me. But as I was about to talk to her, thanks to Nam's hot sex session that had conditioned me to like women, a pleasant feeling grew inside my guts. Aisha was one attractive chick, and my body responded a bit too strongly to that. If she had been on my side, I would have loved her as my assistant. Whoever the artist who had created her was, he did an amazing job.

I tried to put my sexual pulsion aside to engage in a half-decent dialogue.

"So, what's your deal?"

"..."

"Why did you want to kill us? That was super mean."

"It's nothing personal. I'm just carrying an order. The Queen of Valhalla wants you eliminated."

"Well, your Queen is a bitch. You can tell her that."

"You... you don't want to mess with her..."

"I'm not! She is! This is my world, Nam told me, and I don't want any trouble. Now, go home, wherever that is, and tell her to leave us alone! We did nothing to her."

Somehow, I pitied Aisha. It must have felt awful to be asked to kill people for no reason. That said, she didn't seem to regret her actions even though she seemed a bit depressed about having failed her mission. Perhaps she knew she would be in trouble once she got back home. That last part wasn't my problem, though. I wasn't the aggressor here.

Aisha pushed Cleopatra's spear with the back of her hand and rolled to her side to get back on her shaky legs. Again, I couldn't help but think that this chick was crazy desirable. Her round butt and perfect boobs, I would have loved to grab them. Too bad she was a meanie.

"Everyone. We are leaving. Help the injured and find our horses."

"Yes, head-warrior."

Aisha placed a few fingers in her mouth and whistled loudly to call back her horse. I found it fascinating to see her mount trotting out of the woods and heading directly to her. How could she have this much control over such a big animal? Perhaps her sexy feral outfit with the wolf hat had something to do with it; she must have had a special connection with animals. As long as she couldn't control my lioness, that was fine by me.

Once her horse arrived, she climbed on it and took one last look at me.

"This is not over. We will come back."

"Whatever you say, Balto!"

"... Balto?"

"Ah, don't worry. Just a cartoon character from where I'm from."

"... You... You are not... an AI?"

Her question and her curious gaze froze me. What did she mean by that exactly? Considering all my friends in the game were incapable of telling the difference between me and an AI character, that question was quite odd. As I was about to ask her what she meant, the other warriors pulled her away from me, killing our conversation.

"Come on, Aisha! Let's go! We are in enough trouble as it is!"

"... Right."

She turned around and galloped away with her friends.

"Feeew! That was something! But... Why am I so... tired..."

"Me... me too..."

"Yes. I think I'm going to go for a nap too."

Nam, Aria, and I were all in the same boat. When the cabin exploded in our face, it had obliterated our health bars, and, Dive being Dive, it meant that we had to sleep to recover. But we should have reacted faster because it was way too late to do anything about it.

Aria was the first to faceplant in the soft snow after only two steps. Then Nam fell on top of her while trying to help, and I got beyond dizzy at this point. I only had time to turn to our new companion, wondering what she would do to us if we were all out of commission at the same time. Additionally, after such an intense battle, she must have been exhausted too, so if she were to pass out, those wolf-bitches could very well come back and slaughter us during our sleep.

I pressed my hand on her warm golden breastplate...

"C... Cleo... I..."

And everything went dark.

"Mmm... Nam... You are so soft."

Warm, soft, comforting. I squeezed my arms around this fantastic body and pressed my cheek on her boobs. Yes, women were the best; in this game at least. I was glad there were no males in my Dive game. After all, it would probably have ruined my fun with their big muscles and manly attitude. I felt much safer with my smaller companion in my arms and her soft fur.

"Wait... fur?"

"Good morning, Evelyn."

"KYAAA!"

I abruptly pushed myself away from my cuddling partner and fell butt first in a big pile of freezing snow.

"AAaah! Cold! Cold!"

"This is why I kept you warm under this blanket. I'm not sure why you'd jump in the snow when only wearing this bikini armor."

"... Lion-lady? Wait... where... where are we?"

"My name is Cleopatra, the Sun warrior. Not lion-lady. I don't even know what that means. And we are next to your village. I only found one cabin, so I put Nam and Aria in it, and I used one of the spare blankets to keep you warm under this tree while you were resting."

"You... you did all that for us?"

"Yes."

Well, that was unexpected. Or was it? After protecting us from the wolf-warriors, she took on herself to take care of the weaklings we were. I vaguely remembered passing out due to exhaustion and having turned to her for help. It was nice to see that she had not devoured us during our sleep.

In a reflex, I wrapped my arms around myself. The temperature had dropped drastically; it was one of those stupid-freezing days in Valhalla.

"You are cold, Evelyn. Come back under the blanket."

"... Well..."

"..."

"..."

"Is there a problem?"

"No... but... I... don't know you... and..."

"And?"

"Well... you are a bit... different?"

"..."

Why did I say that? What an idiot! It was so mean. I was not a racist, far from it, but... she was a lion-girl, and I had never seen one before. Actually, I couldn't have seen one before because they didn't exist. So how was I supposed to react? It was so unnatural.

"Sorry, what I mean is..."

"Are you scared of me?"

"No... No... I mean... A little. I mean, you did just destroy about twenty super tough warriors like they were a bunch of cute puppies."

"They were weak."

"Haha... That seems about right."

"I'm your friend. I have no intention of hurting you."

"Oh, I know. But still, you are a bit intimidating. I've never seen a lion-girl before."

"I'm Cleopatra, the Sun warrior."

"Yes, but you look... a bit... like a lion."

"I don't know what a lion is. I'm just the Sun warrior."

What was I trying to achieve here? Convince her that she was a scary predator? Clearly, she didn't know what a lion was and didn't seem to understand that she was special-looking. The problem was with me. There was something in my brain that was uncomfortable with what I was seeing. Perhaps it was something innate to human beings to be scared of big cats. In the real world, facing a lion would be pretty scary.

As I observed my surroundings, I noticed that Aria's cabin was gone and that the granary next to it had also sustained some damages. When Bethany exploded, it really was something. Talk about an odd way to introduce a new character in the game; that almost killed us all.

My cabin door opened, and Aria walked out of it and waved at us.

"Hiii!"

"Feeling better, Aria?"

"Yes! I slept a lot."

The green-armored hunter-gatherer walked to us, all happy and refreshed. It was good to see that she was back to her normal baseline.

"Oooh! It's cold today."

"Very."

"Then I'll do this."

Aria walked right past me and went to sit next to Cleopatra before wrapping the blanket around herself.

"Aaah! Cleo! You are so soft and warm. I want to stay next to you forever."

"Evelyn doesn't want to. So you can."

"Yaaay! Soft! Soft! Soft! Can you sleep with me in my cabin?"

"If Evelyn builds you a new one, sure. I would love that. I need a home too."

Ugh! That made me feel even worse. Aria didn't even hesitate before snuggling with our new companion. She wrapped her arm around Cleo and even kissed her on her cheek. Now I was standing and shivering in the snow like an idiot who had missed a great opportunity. It was a well-deserved payback for my prejudice. Seeing Aria happily buried under the blanket made Cleo look even more comfortable and even somewhat cute.

To forget my shameful behavior, changing the topic seemed like a good solution.

"So, Cleo. Did you sleep a bit too? You worked so hard against those wolf-warriors."

"No. I don't require sleep."

"Really? And what about your hunger? Do you want some plums and nuts?"

"I don't need to eat."

"Uh? Seriously? How come?"

"I don't know. I just don't?"

"Okaaay. So, you are a hero?"

"Yes."

"Is this why you are super strong?"

"I don't know. I just am. Nobody can defeat me."

"We saw that. You were awesome out there."

"They were easy opponents."

"And, why do you look like a fancy legionnaire?"

"A what?"

"A legionnaire... You know? Rome? You totally looked like a badass praetorian guard with your big rectangular shield, armor, helmet, and spear."

"..."

It was as if I was speaking Chinese sometimes. All those AI characters only knew so much, which made it difficult to communicate sometimes.

Aria looked at Cleo, pushed her face in her neck, and patted her on the chest.

"Don't worry, Cleo. Evelyn is weird sometimes."

"Okay."

"Gaah! You know what, you two!? I'll go see Nam."

Throwing my arms in the air, I turned around and headed to my cabin. Anyway, it was freezing, and Cleopatra's warm fur was no longer available. At least, that was my excuse to escape the sarcasm I was a victim of.

I found Nam and her long blue hair, deep asleep under the blankets, so I took off my armor and joined her. Some skin-on-skin contact with her little warm body was all I needed to feel better.

"Your Majesty, Aisha is here to see you."

"Oh, good. I wondered where she was. Let her in."

"Yes, my Queen."

The throne room was quite big and echoey, which made it suitable for larger official events, but it also made it way more intimidating for someone who had a private meeting with the Queen, even more so when the news wasn't particularly good.

Aisha slid through the barely opened oversized door and walked confidently toward the throne. The distance allowed the Queen to get a first impression of any potential visitors before they could even open their mouths. A person's gait could tell a whole story.

In Aisha's case, her fur boots allowed her to glide silently on the shiny marble floor and somehow drain some drama out of the heavy ambiance. The consequence of her failure was crystal clear in her mind, but showing weakness would not help her case.

When she arrived at the steps leading to the throne, she kneeled. In front of her was the Queen of Valhalla. A busty woman who wore a black dress that had more to do with satin bands running across the most intimate parts of her body. Her voluptuous breasts and crotch were barely hidden, and her perfect curves suggestively exposed. The wolf mask she wore hid her upper face, only allowing her subjects to see her glossy lips and long black hair.

"Majesty, we were defeated."

"... Oh?"

"Most of our wolf-warriors are injured, and the enemy village has only sustained minor damages."

"This is... unfortunate. And what kind of army did you face that was strong enough to defeat twenty of my best horsewomen?"

"It... wasn't... an army..."

"... I beg your pardon?"

"It was... a single warrior."

"..."

The Queen uncrossed her slender legs and rose to her feet. Words were unnecessary to express her disappointment. As she went down the few carpeted steps separating her from Aisha, she thought about what would be her next course of action.

She crouched in front of her warrior to be at her level, which was almost a crime for a Queen to do. She then placed the tip of her index under Aisha's chin so she could look at her in the eyes.

"And, who are they?"
"I... I don't know..."
"What do you know, then?"
"They are very strong."
"Is that all?"
"Their leader... She had a message... for you."
"A message? What is it?"
"She said that you are a... bitch."

Not offended the slightest, the Queen just smiled as if she was amused.

"Kiss me."
"..."
"Give me what I want, Aisha."
"Y... yes, your majesty."

The Queen and Aisha engaged in a warm and tender kiss that made time stop. There was no warrior, no royalty, only two women appreciating the moment. Their tongues caressed each other as if they were lovers.

"Mmm... remember when we used to do this every day, Aisha?"
"Y.... yes..."
"You still love it, right?"
"Yes... I... I do."
"It turns you on?"
"Y... yes."
"Play with yourself."
"..."
"Come on. I want to see the pleasure in your eyes as I'm kissing you."
"Y... yes."

Unable to reject an order, Aisha slid her hand inside her fur panties and reached her most sensitive spot. It felt so good. And when the Queen pressed back her lips on hers, it was just incredibly erotic. Doing this in the middle of the sacred throne room for the first time while some guards were watching from afar was so unusual.

The Queen was patient. Aisha was her most beautiful girl, by far her favorite, and spending this quality time with her was always a great source of joy. Kissing her while listening to her adorable moans was such a treat. For many long minutes, she helped Aisha reach the edge by

simply kissing her with genuine love. There was no ill intent here. She wanted Aisha to have a great orgasm. It was not to reward Aisha, it was for her own pleasure.

So when the black wolf-warrior began spasming and going over the edge, it was a happy moment.

"Aaah! Aah! Mmm!"

"Good girl, Aisha. You are so beautiful when you cum hard for me."

"Hmm... Y... yes... aaah!"

The powerful woman resumed her perfect kiss, making Aisha squirm some more as she returned to the present moment, but after another minute, the Queen coldly turned heels and returned to her throne.

"Guards. Take her to the dungeon."

"There. Don't make it explode this time."

"Aww... It wasn't even my fault."

Four people to build a cabin made it so much easier. I still had plenty of points left, so buying a new building core wasn't painful, unlike when I spawned my first one. Even though it still made me jealous, I couldn't get myself to give Aria a smaller cabin than the one she had before. Mine was so small and basic that I was seriously thinking about an upgrade.

I also kept learning about the game mechanics. Even though Cleo was stupid strong, she said she couldn't transport more material than we could. It was a bit disappointing. I thought she would have been able to lift ten rocks and twenty planks to speed things up, but no, she said it was too heavy. That hero was definitely better at fighting than building. I would have to keep that in mind. At least, I convinced her to wear a basic outfit because she kept walking around naked. I understood her fur hid some features, but still. If she didn't want to wear her full armor, she had to wear a little something at least.

The good news was that Aria and Cleopatra got along well. Since they were going to share a cabin together, I didn't want my lion girl to murder my only food source.

"So, Aria and Cleo, you are all set for the night?"

"Yes. Thank you, Evelyn. I love my new cabin."

"I don't require sleep."

"I know, Cleo, but Aria would be happy if you spent a bit of time with her."

"I should guard the village while you are resting."

"I don't think it's needed. Those wolf-bitches won't come back anytime soon. You scared them good. Come on. Aria would be happy."

"Very well. I will spend time with her."

Of course, Aria rushed to her new companion to hug her. She really seemed to love how soft Cleopatra was. But then, she looked at me.

"And you Evelyn? Are you going to spend time with Cleo too?"

"Uh? What do you mean? I will spend time with all of you. You are my friends."

"Yes, but you promised her that she could have sex with you whenever she wanted."

"..."

"Remember, you said that before Bethany exploded."

"... I told Bethany that. Not Cleopatra."

I was a bit surprised when Aria brought that topic up. Fortunately, I had an excellent excuse to take back what I had promised. Cleopatra was not the same character. She had replaced the old one.

But, apparently, that was not as accurate as I first thought.

"I remember you telling me that, Evelyn."

"... Cleo! You... you remember?"

"Yes... It's a bit vague to me, but it was generous. I will make sure to tell you when I want to do it."

"Oooh... Wait a minute. Do you have Bethany's memory?"

"I don't know. I just remember."

Aw, crap!

"Nam! Is this possible?"

"I don't know."

"I mean, Cleo is a different person, right?"

"Yes."

"Aaah! See. Then it doesn't count. The promise was for Bethany only..."

"No. I disagree."

"NAM! You don't have to side with them!"

"I'm not. You like sleeping with me, Evelyn, right?"

"Well, yes. But..."

"If I were to transform as Bethany did, would you reject me?"

"...No! Of course not, but..."

"Then I don't understand why you wouldn't treat Cleopatra the same way as you treated Bethany."

"But... but... she is a..."

"... a what? A warrior?"

"Aaah! Nevermind!"

What did I expect? They couldn't understand how I felt. Sleeping with pretty humans was one thing, but doing the same with a mythical creature was a whole other ball game.

"Cleo. You should ask Evelyn to have sex with you right now. She loves it and will have to do it because she promised."

"NAM! Stop it!"

"But, you promised... mmmph..."

I slapped my hand over Nam's mouth. That blue assistant was going to get me in trouble. It was already hard enough not to offend Cleopatra and not to make her feel rejected, which was not helping. But it might have been too late because Cleo approached me and adopted a shy posture.

"Can we sleep together, Evelyn?"

"... You... you don't understand."

"I think you are nice. So I would love it."

"... Yaaarg! No! Sorry! Tonight you can spend time with Aria. We... we will talk about this later, okay?"

"Aww... Okay."

Yes, I hurt Cleopatra a bit here, but it was my world after all, and I wasn't ready to sleep with all the wild creatures of this land. And also, I was getting annoyed by something, and I had to fix it, right here, right now.

"And listen to me! All of you! I am not sure where your passion for sex came from, but that's enough. Stop expecting it from me. I barely know you guys, and in my world, it takes more time to get to know people before doing sexy things with them. So stop pressuring me."

"Sorry."

"So tonight, I'm sleeping alone, and that is the end of it. Nam, you sleep with Aria, and you Cleo, you stand watch since it was what you offered earlier. Does anyone have a problem with that?"

"No. I like Nam."

"I like Aria too."

"And I like standing watch."

Good. A normal night of sleep would help me think about everything that happened today. As Nam repeatedly said, Valhalla was my world, and I wouldn't let anybody influence my decisions or push me to do things against my will. Maybe I would miss Nam tonight, but it was for our own good.

"Alright. So, have a good night, and I'll see you tomorrow. Don't go to bed too late. We used a lot of resources today, so we need to go cut wood and mine some ore to replenish our stockpile."

"Okay. Good night, Evelyn."

"Good night."

I walked out of Aria's cabin, happy with my own determination, but Cleopatra followed me.

"Uh? Why are you following me?"

"I'm going to stand watch in front of your cabin."

"Oh... Okay. It's very cold tonight. Are you sure you are going to be okay? Do you need a blanket?"

"I'm the Sun warrior. I don't feel cold."

"With a name like that, it makes sense. Hehe."

It was so strange to walk at the side of a human-lioness hybrid. It was a good thing to see that Nam and Aria had fully accepted her without any judgment. All there was left for me to do was to treat her the same way they did. I fully understood why I was a bit uneasy around her, but I should definitely make an effort. Cleo had done nothing else but save our lives today. She deserved all our gratitude. It was the least we could do.

When we arrived at my cabin, there was something I wanted to do.

"Come here, Cleo. Give me a hug."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, yes. Give me a hug. Come on."

She wasn't any taller than me and not much bigger despite her more muscular build. I pressed my body on hers and wrapped my arms around her torso. She did the same.

"Oooh! Aria was right. You are very soft."

"I don't know. You are soft too."

"I wanted to say thank you again."

"... What for?"

"Saving our lives, silly."

"Oh, it was fun. I love fighting."

"Well, I'm glad you are on our side, that's for sure."

"I will never leave your side, Evelyn. I'm your hero."

"Hehe. That's good to know. Okay... Your fur is kind of addictive."

"I don't know."

"I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Yes. I will make sure nobody disturbs you."

"Thanks!"

I ran my fingers one last time on her back. Doing that was so comforting and reassuring, but at the same time, it allowed me to discover how feminine she was under that lion pelt. Maybe cuddling with her wouldn't be so bad after all.

We let our hug go, and I entered my tiny cabin.

"Urgh! I'll have to look into that upgrade soon. Dive is a construction game, I think, so why not spoil myself."

After my back hit the cheap mattress, I slid my finger on my arm to look at my menu and browse my available options. There were way more structures than I needed at the moment, and plenty of them, I didn't even know what they were for. Also, I didn't know if I liked Dive more or less than yesterday with everything that happened today. On the one hand, I didn't particularly appreciate the fighting, but on the other, I had to admit that I would never have a chance to experience all those emotions in real life. I could log out whenever I wanted and return to my boring life, but the fact that I wasn't in a rush to do so betrayed that the balance still leaned more toward the fun part.

Seriously, seeing Cleopatra dance around and use the power of the Sun in the middle of a pack of sexy bitches was so entertaining. Sure, she did break some bones in the process, but they did deserve it. They were AI bones anyway. They probably can heal themselves by chewing on

some magical herbs. I would have to ask Nam if she knew anything about injuries and healing methods. That could come in handy.

Additionally, there was some more mystery to uncover. The biggest one was about the Queen of Valhalla. Nam told me about a hundred times that Valhalla was my world, so why was there a Queen? That sounded like an official title. But Nam said it was a lie... so did this Queenie thing really exist, or was it wolf-shit?

And those horses? I wanted one. I would have to make sure Aria didn't hit it with a big rock to turn it into meat, but that aside, I would love riding one in this game. I had never ridden one in real life and was a bit tired from dragging my feet in the snow.

In the top corner of my screen, I noticed my points going up.

Nam and Aria were at it already. I regretted having asked them to sleep together tonight. I would have preferred to have fun with Nam. But I had to stand firm on that one. They couldn't just tell everybody that I liked sex and that I would be willing to sleep with everybody. Sure, they were not lying. It was a good description of who I became in this game, but dropping all social conventions seemed drastic. I would have a lot of sex on my own terms, whenever I wanted, and however I wanted.

But I did feel guilty about one thing. Even if I had tried to find a way out, I did break my promise to Bethany. I knew now that Cleopatra remembered it, and even though she wouldn't accuse me of lying, maybe she was a bit sad. I forced her to accept the risks of turning into a warrior in exchange for giving her a good time whenever she felt like it, and then I refused. And the sad part in all that was that I had only rejected her because she looked different from what I was used to. It was a game, not real life. Did I really want to bring in this world the same crappy values we experienced in real life? How fun would that be? In real life, I didn't like it when people rejected me because I was too fat. I didn't like it when some extreme group made racist comments. I didn't like it when people made fun of gays and lesbians. That was against my values. I knew I was nothing like those people, but I somewhat opened the door to the kind of behaviors I didn't want in my world with my attitude toward Cleo.

Because of what?

I turned off my screen and sat on the edge of my bed.

"I'm such an idiot."

Cleopatra loved standing watch at night. Observing the stars was a privilege that offered her an amazing spectacle. Shooting stars were her favorite events. She believed that those white lines were the Sun's reflection on the metal tips of the spears used by the Gods who fought evil forces. As long as those shooting stars existed, she knew Valhalla was well protected. All there was left for her to do was to protect Evelyn's land. It was her duty.

The cabin's door opened.

"Evelyn?"

"Hey, Cleo. Do you want to come in?"

"... I'm standing watch."

"I know, I mean... I would like you to come in."

"But, I'm not cold. I'm fine, really."

"It's not about the weather. I just would like you to come in."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I am. I want to get to know you."

"I would like that."

"Good. Me too."

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