

## Chapter 138

### The Departure

#### Sunday Night- Into Monday Morning

The process had been easy, almost too easy, considering how oddly things had been of late.

“We want you to know that we will follow you to the ends of the Earth and back.” Gina whispered into Alexa’s ear, just before *The Princess Bride* started to play. The words, along with the sensation of hot words being spoken so gently into her ear caused an automatic reaction on Alexa’s part. A twinge of gooseflesh arose at the sudden closeness of the words. This caused Alexa to not only shiver, but in a surprisingly good way, but it caused her to turn her head towards her small partner in crime. In that act, their eyes locked and everything and nothing seemed to be spoken all at once. Looking at her, Alexa felt the obvious answer about what was happening come to her almost immediately.

“Telepathy?” Alexa asked.

With that Gina nodded.

Thinking about this, a lot of ideas came to Alexa and she realized one thing. First, she had been blindsided, falsely she had begun to think of herself as invincible, that she didn’t care what was thrown at her, as it didn’t matter, anything she survived she would not only grow more powerful from, but would make it so she could win the next battle that much easier. This assumption on her part had been proven wrong, not only had it and other thoughts like it ultimately led to the death of her father, but it showed just how vulnerable she was, how vulnerable her whole position was. Realizing this, she had been making plans on fixing things, but here it seemed that not only was the pack ready to go with her, but that they had mobilized themselves. Looking around the room, it was clear that members of the pack had set up to do one of two tasks. The first group went around cleaning up the different plates and cups that had been strewn around the room. The second group was bringing in backpacks that they clearly and methodically lined up against the walls of the room. Looking at each backpack, Alexa could see how each pack member added their own individual flair to the pack to make it stand out to them.

Looking at the level of detail the pack was doing, it seemed they realized two things. First, Alexa was once again planning to leave campus again just after the marathon ended, and secondly, they were all prepared to do whatever it took to go with her.

Seeing their level of effort and dedication, Alexa couldn't think of denying them the chance to follow her, especially as it was clear that they would seemingly follow her whether she agreed or not. Realizing this, Alexa turned to Luke.

Luke at first looked confused, but then after a quick glance by Alexa to the efforts being made, and the backpacks lining the walls, Luke relaxed and smiled. Then with a nod of his head, and the pointing of his finger at one of the backpacks, it was clear that he too was ready to follow her. It was his addition more than anything that caused Alexa to truly be thankful for the friends she had, and to realize they all wanted to go with her, follow in her vision.

It was a very humbling moment for Alexa.

Here she was, at her lowest, she even admitted how she recognized the trap, but it was too late before she thought to tell anyone. That she was the reason that her father died.

Of course, Gina wasn't having any of it, "no, your father was killed by elves. You might have been distracted by a new attack vector, one that could have gone off by word, or shaking, or even remotely. You did the best you could to first understand the enemy before you, then to react. As it turns out, the elves are just a lot craftier than we first gave them credit for."

That was it, and any time Alexa tried to shoulder the blame, or admit guilt Gina was there, constantly shooting down her attempts at trying to feel guilty about what had happened. So it was that Alexa finally accepted that it was a mistake, one that she herself would learn from, and most importantly one that she would never let happen again.

This was why, by the end of the night, Alexa didn't even try to argue any more. She had been emotional, especially when she first left the dungeon and arrived here. The entire thing was just as emotionally draining as she thought it would be. This was why she was glad Gina had started off the marathon with her father's favorite films. These were the very same 'Christmas' movies that the entire family had been subjected to every year right around Christmas. Oddly enough, this was the perfect time to start such a tradition with the members of her pack. Also, true to form, Alexa had used those first two movies to mildly doze off, only truly coming to be fully awake when the movies were over and the next movie was being chosen. Oddly enough, those light dozes were more than enough rest for Alexa to feel fully rested and ready to go.

Her initial plan had been to leave sometime after midnight, enter the dungeon and begin Stage IX of her trials, and hopefully come back with Kelvin just before Stage X, then depending on how much time was

left before the funeral, she would either go back immediately in to finish Stage X, or wait until after the funeral. Ideally she would be a full fledged Super, particularly when having to so many Supers and dignitaries alike, all of whom would come to pay their respects, especially as it meant that for the public service, Alexa would only be able to attend as Aru'ka.

Knowing that her pack wanted to follow her, and would do so wordlessly was, well it was beyond what she expected. It seemed that despite her purposefully removing herself as the **Pack Bond**, she was still seen as the only one that could galvanize everyone into action. Honestly, it was more than what she thought she deserved, but she was glad for the feelings nonetheless.

So it was, that the entire pack moved as one, never really saying a word. Apparently, Gina and her use of **Telepathy** was more than enough for the entire pack to move and synchronize as one. This made her look at Gina in new and profound ways, ways that made it clear she truly needed to begin planning to have Gina continue to be around her. It was evident from everyone that Gina had been one of the first people to truly understand what had happened, how everyone had been set up, and how they were all meant to watch the execution of Supers as it was witnessed by the world on livestream.

Alexa had all the time to think about possible contingencies, but by the time the greatest ending line to a movie.

“But I also have to say, for the umpty-umth time, that life isn't fair. It's just fairer than death, that's all.”

That quote more than anything resonated with Alexa at this moment.

Alexa wasn't the only one who seemed to feel that the movie was talking to them all in some way at that exact moment. Sure, everyone knew the movie was a classic, that they were guaranteed to watch, as the final movie of their marathon. Honestly, despite having watched the movie for so many times, Alexa herself had forgotten the last line, but there it was, one of the most accurate statements ever. Life wasn't fair, it was just fairer than death. That one line, more than anything, seemed to resonate with the pack, as they all wordlessly nodded, as they got up from their seats and proceeded to get their backpacks. If anyone had any doubts about what they were all now planning to do, that line more than anything gave them the resolve to carry on. Granted the line originally had been about the fact that there was no happily ever after, but here in this circumstance, it took on an entirely different meaning, a more personal meaning.

Even Luke seemed to have been caught off guard by the profound impact that the last line of the movie would have on him. Seeing his resolve to silently follow the pack meant so much to Alexa that all she

could do was force a smile on her lips, a smile that was oddly easier to express than she thought it would be given the circumstances.

Then as a silent cult, they made their way through campus. Their only real interaction with people was their appearance at the guard shack, and subsequent logging of their activities.

“Trying to burn off some steam?” The guard Bigsly asked.

At that Alexa could only nod.

“Right, well give me a second and I will process you all.” Bigsly said, as he began recording all of their names and the current time, 12:03.

With that out of the way, Alexa made her way to the dungeon. Luke originally was going to go and speak on their behalf, but he was in the back, apparently having to borrow a few crystals from Julie to enter. Still, as she approached the dungeon, she could swear that she saw the dungeon come to life before her very eyes.

Seeing the supposed excitement of the dungeon at just seeing her, Alexa decided to try and speak to the dungeon directly.

“Hello dungeon. My pack and I seek safe *passage*.” Alexa began speaking in the Precursor language, as she spoke the dungeon seemed to come to life with recognition. The minute she spoke, Gina’s eyes lit up with excitement, as it was clear she went from being perfectly quiet, to suddenly up to no good in under a second. Pulling out a knife from her pocket, she began carving into the smooth dirt cropping of the dungeon. Alexa noticed the antics, and dismissed them, as she continued trying to book the passage.

“We would like to go from here to *Bottomless Gorge*.” Of course, rather than speaking the name *Bottomless Gorge*, she spoke the universal designation of the dungeon, one that would be seen as a sister dungeon, or maybe even a neighbor to this one, given how close they were geographically.

*Flash!*

There was a bright flash of light, as the dungeon seemed to not only understand the request, but wanted to gladly accept the request.

*Poof.*

At the sudden burst of excitement from the dungeon, Alexa noted how the flimsy runes that had lined the hallway leading into the dungeon suddenly burst as too much energy had been channeled through them. Honestly Alexa was not surprised by the sudden destruction of the runes. Honestly, she had been surprised that such delicate runes had even managed to survive this long.

With this dungeon seemingly more than willing to help the pack traverse their way into *Bottomless Gorge*, Alexa found her job finished before it had really started. Honestly, Alexa couldn't quite explain why, but after her completion of the Dragon Trials, Alexa couldn't help but feel a deeper connection to the dungeons than she ever had previously. She had felt them come to life when her brother interacted with dungeons, using his class, but that was nothing compared to the way dungeons seemed to spark happily to life just at her mere presence. It was something that Alexa herself couldn't quite put her finger on.

Luke chose that exact moment to make his was forward, "everybody ready?"

Everyone wordlessly nodded their head in silence.

Seeing that, Luke pressed his hand to the wall next to the dungeon entrance, as he focused his mind, letting his **Dungeon Architect (Mythic)** class go to work. However, something was odd about what he discovered while trying to interact with the dungeon.

"That's odd."

"What is?" Julie asked, coming up right beside Luke.

"The dungeon, it already seems to have set up *Bottomless Gorge* as our destination point." Luke admitted.

Hearing that Alexa nodded, she had expected this much, but hearing her thoughts get confirmed by Luke made her feel that much better about trusting the dungeon. Honestly, right now, she felt that so long as she didn't do anything to overtly *hurt* a dungeon, she would be able to ask for similar favors from dungeons in the future.

Alexa was just about to speak, when she noticed the word that Gina had carved into the cave wall. *Croatoan*? Alexa thought about the word for a moment, and then after a brief pause she realized that that was almost the exact phonetical way to spell *passage*, in the Precursor language. Seeing the word, Alexa glanced at Gina. Gina for her part just smiled sheepishly, as she put away her dagger. Seeing her antics caused the smile on her face to grow a little wider, though this was one was nowhere near as forced as the one she had used earlier.

Alexa opened her mouth to speak, but then reading the room, she shortened any speech she would have given to just six simple words. "Thank you all, for following me."

Then with that, Alexa turned and entered into the brightly glowing dungeon. Gina all but lunged in trying to keep up with Alexa, soon after more and more of the pack entered the dungeon, until finally the final two pack members that waited in the entry way were Luke and Julie.

Seeing the slight look of hesitation on Luke's face, Julie felt compelled to ask. "Is it your mother?"

"Yeah, I am afraid she might not be doing as well as she lets on." Luke said, wondering if he should stay behind to see to her.

"I guess the question comes, who do you think you should be with more, your sister, or your mother?" Julie posed.

Luke paused for a moment, then realizing there were no real good options, "I guess Alexa, if for no other reason than mother would be mad that I didn't choose to be with her during this time."

"Then you already have your answer." Julie said.

Luke paused, as he seemed to struggle with something internally. "It's just that mother is so vulnerable right now."

“Do you honestly think you being around would change any of that?” Julie asked.

Thinking about it logically, he knew she was right. His mom had plenty of friends, at one point even Ms. Peacock came to the gathering to speak to her. Also, he heard her talk at length about what Captain Johnston had said and done for her to help get their father back to the states. Given everything, it seemed clear, her mother already had her emotional support group, just as Alexa had her pack as her own. Now it was just one of those times when he would have to choose, go spend time with his sister, or his mother. It should have been a relatively easy choice, but somehow, he felt that this moment would have a profound impact on the future. Of course, he chalked it up to just being noncommittal, and finally nodding to himself and Julie he entered the dungeon, followed shortly by Julie.