

Chapter Eight: Full Confession

Forcing her legs to remain steady on her passage through the hallway, Rachel slowed a bit when Roy—the green beret that spoke Korean—motioned for her to stop after obtaining the order from Mateo.

“Lt. Thompson only wants to talk to you, Rachel; a place is being set up for Selvaria, Anthony, and Scarlet. Lt. Herrero will be joining us shortly after handing over command to Second Lt. Falcon.”

Rachel sighed, swapping to the wall to close her eyes and wait for everyone to finish with the most urgent matters. Anthony shifted the unconscious vespertine reaper in his arms as the others came to a halt in the hall, soldiers hustling through it following orders.

Most of the coast guard personnel were looking up to Mateo’s green beret platoon after word spread they’d been part of the reason they’d taken out the aliens; they’d taken out two of the Crystal Hubs, and, apparently, as the rumor went, lured one to the ‘Sea Dragon’ that had some circles buzzing with speculation.

Her part was surprisingly being kept hushed over the radio, but that wouldn’t last for long as her presence was made known from circle to circle. Now, most of the soldiers were supplying relief and organizing the dead.

Despite the Crystal not being active for long, the quick and deadly brown-skinned toads had murdered over two hundred and sixty people, mostly from the residential area, where a large group had gathered for prayer.

Zoe’s ears drew back as her name was left out of those that would be going to the rest area. “What about me?”

“Unfortunately, you’ll need to return to the Beastkin area for further instructions, Ma’am; we’re still receiving instructions as to how to proceed from command,” he said with a strained smile as his three buddies mirrored him.

“No, I get it...” the cat girl groaned, rubbing her arm and smiling at her. “Thanks for letting me tag along, Rachel; it really was crazy, scary, and, I know I shouldn’t be saying this... but it was really fun.”

Rachel chuckled, going forward with a pun while opening her tired eyes to give her a thumbs up. “You helped more than you know, Zoe. Now you’re a battle vet loli cat-girl, huh?”

“C’mon!” Zoe groaned, seeing Selvaria snicker. “Do I really look like a loli?” Selvaria shrugged, holding up her fingers that said, ‘a little.’ “Aww. At least I can pull off some fun cosplay ideas, I guess...”

“That’s the way to look at it,” Selvaria grinned.

“Yeah... Still, I have an amazing story to tell Adam and my other small group of friends... Thanks, Rachel.”

She watched one of their green beret escorts take the cat-girl to the area where the Beastkin were being segregated; they were now organizing them into specific categories after Mateo informed them about the different types Rachel had explained to them.

Selvaria moved to lean against the wall beside her, studying the raven-haired girl in Anthony’s arms. “Is she going to be okay; doesn’t she need blood? She’s not healing.”

Roy clicked his tongue a few times before hissing. “We can’t do anything until the lieutenant gets here, and he’s being pulled in all sorts of directions with the OIC over the campus relief effort right now.”

Rachel drew her damp, braided hair over her shoulder before shifting to the ground, feeling like she was going to pass out if she wasn't on the move without purpose; Anthony didn't look tired in the least after everything they'd done, which told her he'd put points in his Stamina and Endurance.

"Ugh. Yeah, they're talking to command right now, reporting the damages, casualties, and specifics to give them an idea of what kind of supplies we need... The campus hospital was already overrun, so they're now redirecting resources to clear roads to others in the area. Everything's a mess..."

Selvaria's mouth tightened as she lightly tapped her tail against the brick; it still sent ripples that Rachel felt while leaning against the wall for support. "On another topic, I don't think your sports bra is going to last long; it's pretty damaged."

Anthony and the other men made faces that said they were of the same opinion.

"Haaa. I'd love to go back to my dorm and get a replacement, but my legs already feel like jelly, so..."

"I can do it!" Selvaria chimed in her monotone way, pushing away from the wall to show a bright, helpful smile as her lethal tail wagged left and right, causing the passing soldiers to give them a wide berth. "Won't you need a change of clothes and pajamas anyway?"

Rachel wasn't sure she wanted to let a random girl—much less a leviathan-girl—near her things, at the same time, she didn't have much choice in the matter.

"Hah. My pajamas are more of a loose sports bra and elastic shorts, but if you want to pack up one of my suitcases, that would be nice. One of the boys wants to join you since we can't be alone, I'm guessing," she added, gesturing between the three remaining green berets.

Roy nodded, selecting one of his men after calling it in. "Tanner can join you, Selvaria; pack light, and there will probably be some relief coming from companies soon."

Selvaria waved her hand dismissively at the statement. "That's never as good as your own clothes, and clothes are *very* important. Also, you can call me Selv—all my friends do. Do you have a nickname?" she asked Tanner while Rachel took the map the man produced to mark her dorm and room. "Tanny or Tae sounds pretty cool."

"Haha. Tanny? No. Just Tanner... My mom calls me Tae," the tall, muscular soldier said, with his buddies joining in his laugh; things were calming down after the tense night.

They moved to execute the plan while Anthony puffed out a long stream of air, showing her a forced smile, and Rachel could guess what the man wanted to ask.

"Yes, Anthony, hehe, I'll mention your fiancé when I get the chance."

"You remember the—"

"HCA Florida Mercy," Rachel grinned, holding a finger up to her head. "I remember everything."

His shoulders lowered as if a huge weight had been lifted off them. "Thanks, Rachel."

"Hey, I think we're a bit more than acquaintances now," she teased, carefully adjusting her sports bra and shorts now that she had time before shooting a tired, playful leer at him. "Wait..."

"What?" he asked, following her gaze to Scarlet.

"How many girls have you been princess carrying in the past twenty-four hours? Some girls might get the wrong impression if their fiancé is showing so much attention to other girls."

"Haha. No doubt," he laughed. "Amelia will probably beat me senseless when I tell her about all the dangerous situations I've been in; she worries about me."

“She sounds sweet,” Roy muttered, shifting to stare down the hall as Mateo exited with two other soldiers by his side. “Looks like we’re about to be on the move. Need help with Scarlet, Anthony?”

He shook his head. “Nah. I can hardly feel the weight; these new powers are wild.”

“Tell me about it. What’s the deal with that keg you brought back anyway—just beer?”

Anthony shrugged as Rachel forced herself up with a groan. “No idea, mate. They just gave me the stuff, and I’m not even sure what kind of alcohol it is. Want to break it open when we get things settled down?”

Mateo gave them a lifted eyebrow as he joined them. “What’s this about starting a party? Once it’s logged and samples sent off, I’m not against it; the boys need something to kill the edge anyway. Are we ready, Rachel? You’re... not looking too hot.”

Rachel snorted, running her fingers through her hair. “Thanks, way to destroy a girl’s confidence. I’m managing.”

“Hehe. I’m sure. Roy, I’ll take Rachel from here. Start setting up some R and R for the platoon; we don’t know when we’ll be on the move again and need our strength. Henry, keep hold of that sword they brought back; a team from command is coming to take it for study. Blood is being prepared for Scarlet from the university hospital. As for cleanup, the coast guard is handling it; let’s move, boys.”

“Roger.”

They broke apart, Rachel waving at Anthony goodbye and hoping it wouldn’t be the last time she saw the fire-haired, muscular Legend. Who knew what might happen when Scarlet woke up; she could turn into an insane demon after she went to war against the toads.

Just before turning the corner and losing sight of the vespertine reaper, Rachel’s mind lingered on the gashes in the eighteen-year-old girl’s clothing and skin.

Despite all the power I gained from The Oscillation, there was no way I could have come out of this Crystal attack alive... even after leveling up in Anthony’s training grounds. There’s something different about Scarlet that this cult knew about; she believes her parents started all of this...

She blinked as the world spun, and the next moment, Mateo held her steady; she’d lost time.

“You okay, Rachel?”

“Hmm? Uh, y-yeah... I, umm, just got a little dizzy,” she mumbled, brushing him away to stand on her own with some effort while taking a shuddering breath; several other passing soldiers seemed to have noticed her going down and moved to help, but the lieutenant got to her first. “I’m fine.”

Mateo hissed out a sigh while following close by as she pushed on. “Have... you considered it wasn’t just your adventure into that other world but Scarlet that is causing this effect on you?”

Ears rising a bit, Rachel’s brow furrowed at the question. “I... haven’t,” she admitted, fingers brushing against the wrap on her injured arm as chills ran through it. “I could be a little low on blood, which would explain my foggy mind, but...” she trailed off as he guessed what she was going to say.

“You’ve been operating in combat mode since this started, Rachel; whatever your body uses as adrenaline has been keeping you going seems to be winding down. I’m just saying... take it easy, okay?”

“Heh. Thanks, Mateo; I just feel like if I stop, I might collapse again... Better than being poisoned and dying, huh?”

He laughed at her joke, and, thankfully, he dropped the subject, more than likely figuring it wouldn't get them far after he'd offered his thoughts on the matter; plus, she was the only one that could explain all the questions the OIC of the area needed. She had to power through, and Rachel could see the army veteran growing to respect her, which was what she wanted.

Rachel paused when they made it to a brightly lit hallway and pulled them back the way they'd come to take another route; if she lost any more Lunar Energy, she really would be on the ground seeing stars.

Mateo said he knew she'd refuse out of pride—he'd do the same—but offered to get her a wheelchair nonetheless; naturally, she grinned and shook her head. She had to prove to herself she could stand on her own when all of this was done.

On the way to the office, Rachel's slow brain fixated on what the military man had brought up; perhaps there was more to Scarlet's bite than simply drawing blood like a vampire and why Cerridwen intervened, snapping the terrified girl back to her senses. After all, her blood was apparently infectious with some kind of rose-like toxin or virus.

Mateo opened the door when they arrived as a secretary outside motioned them to proceed. Lt. Thompson sat at a cleared desk, four monitors, and a laptop cramped on the wooden surface that monitored multiple feeds, emails for orders, and many other sectioned-off windows showing wiki pages—one snatched her attention—the man had one open to 'moon rabbit,' suprisingly.

“Take a seat, Rachel, Lieutenant,” he said to them, sounding exhausted while rubbing his eyes; they complied, sitting next to each other, and Rachel sank into the cushions with a thankful sigh. “Give me a second to organize a new sheet; I'll need to take notes while we chat to compile a report.”

They waited patiently for him to get things ready as the officer's hands skated across his laptop keyboard and moved things around on the screens behind the desk.

While Mateo and Thompson sounded like they were the same rank of Lieutenant, the Army and the coast guard had differences in their rankings; Mateo was an O-2 and Thompson an O-3. The coast guard had point right now since it had such a big presence in Florida and the US homeland's shores while the State National Guard worked in union with the federal military during martial law.

It took a full minute for him to get everything organized before he sat back to address them with a weary sigh. “Huu-haaa. Alright, let's begin by confirming a few things, Rachel—I will be recording this for my superiors to review if needed—a simple yes or no will make this quick. Is that acceptable?” he asked, flipping on a recorder that had been set up beside the monitors before she responded; the question was more of a formality.

“Of course. Hehe. I might pass out halfway, though—just fair warning,” she said, hoping to break the ice a bit; the officer was under a lot of stress, and a lot of influential government and military officials' eyes were looking to him for answers. “I'm an open book.”

He started with the simple questions regarding her being a Mythickin lunar hare and went through her government records, asking her to recount specific information that only Rachel Park should know, such as her social security number, birth date, parents, schools she attended, age, and other details regarding her family.

It seemed tedious but was to confirm to those watching that she truly was the same girl before The Oscillation, and there was a significant minority that was in question about that fact.

Once that finished, he threw a curve ball at her by asking her to go through an overview of her actions over the past month leading up to her change; she was a little uncomfortable admitting to her fights with her sister-in-law and general feelings toward Alexa.

Unfortunately, given everything she'd heard thus far from the military, Rachel knew many government agencies would be combing through her entire life history—it was only natural given what other Mythickin were doing that put heat on them all—she couldn't lie, and Rachel wasn't dumb enough to think she could outsmart hundreds of specialists investigating her. A single slip could throw doubt on everything she said.

Compliance and being useful to those in power, along with looking for answers would get her the ear of those who truly had influence; one issue she could see was if the Scarlet Hand had infiltrated high positions in government that could cause her problems, and it was a possibility she made clear to the two officers when they got to the topic.

Judging by Mateo and Lt. Thompson's reactions to her speculation, it was a real concern; they had private information regarding Scarlet and what they'd found at her parents' house, no doubt. There was already an investigation going through everything related to Scarlet and the associates close to their family, but everything was kept tight-lipped, so Rachel hadn't discovered much beyond the surface level.

Sadly, Rachel's mind decided it needed a break after forty-five minutes of being grilled. A reflexive, hard lump pushed down her throat as Rachel cracked open an eye with a groan, spotting the two military men eyeing her.

"How... long was I out?"

"About ten minutes," Mateo groaned, scratching his arm before pointing at a kitchen tray of fruit, vegetables, hamburgers, and other goods, including an assortment of drinks. "If you are low on blood, you should probably eat... Can you go forward? I wouldn't be asking, but..."

Rachel cleared her throat with a laugh, trying to orient herself while blinking. "Shit's hit the fan... No, I get it." Sitting back and rubbing her hot forehead, she refocused on them. "As for food, honestly, I get the feeling I get more nourishment from the moon than stuff like this now, but it can't hurt, right?"

Lt. Thompson forced a smile. "We can only hope it doesn't. You are a citizen, Rachel, despite how hard Lt. Mateo and I seem to be pushing you, and we *do* recognize you do have rights and don't have to cooperate with us. So, I'll ask again, do you want to continue?"

Her eyes settled, emphasizing her tone since this was everything she'd worked to achieve, and all of it could collapse if she bailed out due to something minor like exhaustion or pain. "Yes."

"Okay." He nodded, seeing Mateo do the same. "You've been very helpful thus far... More than I can express, and I'm sorry we've been so hard on you, but the information you're providing could *literally* save millions of lives, if not tens of millions."

"No, like I said, I get it," she mumbled, taking an apple to start with as her stomach growled, but she didn't think it was for typical food. "Where were we—my decisions from the change to now?"

She kept the bitten apple pressed against her lips as Mateo shook his head with a serious frown and shake of his head. "You were telling us about this goddess figure that Scarlet mentioned stopped her—Cerridwen," he added, looking at a screen that had been flipped to them and showing a few websites describing her.

Rachel's mind came to a screeching halt. "Huh... I did what?"

She was drawing a total blank as to the conversation as she internally cursed at the gap in memory; apparently, she'd stubbornly gone on with the discussion to the point she'd forgotten about the entire reveal—and it was a touchy reveal to be given in her delirious state.

Lt. Thompson chuckled. “I thought you were a bit incoherent there at the end; I’m guessing you wanted to bring this topic up in a different way. It sounds crazy, but all of this does, and if Scarlet was brought back to her senses due to this goddess’ influence... we need to know more about this angle than any other.”

Rachel’s ears rose from their drooping position, tilting left with her head. “Scarlet...”

Mateo nodded. “When you were out, we were able to bring some blood for her to absorb. We gave her enough to stabilize her wounds, which did heal her; a military doctor oversaw it, and now she’s resting with Anthony and Selvaria, last I heard.”

“Okay...” she mumbled, feeling a tiny bit better after the short rest; she straightened in her seat, grimacing at the fire that lit in her muscles.

“Mmhm. Give me a second to collect my thoughts... To be clear, I’m not 100% sold on the goddess angle, but I have been entertaining the idea since she seems to be connected to some of my Feats. Should we go into that next for context? I experimented a lot in Anthony’s Quest to understand my change while not putting people at risk.”

The blond-haired OIC behind the desk smiled. “It was a smart decision. While you are recovering, I’ll continue my conversation with Lt. Herrero.” He shifted his chair to the green beret, shifting his laptop on his lap to continue making notes. “What has been your opinion of Ms. Park thus far?”

Lead dropped into Rachel’s gut at the sudden topic. A lot would be extrapolated from the soldier since he’d spent the most time with her in the field, and her actions with Scarlet could certainly draw red flags; as she feared, his comments weren’t all positive.

Mateo adjusted his posture while keeping his focus on the officer, speaking dispassionately to offer his unfiltered opinion.

“Ms. Park is reckless, prideful, and undisciplined in *many* areas; that being said, she’s also intelligent, and I would even say she has a shockingly military mind for a civilian—to an extent. I’d say she has an overinflated ego regarding her abilities, which, while being *very* useful and powerful, she doesn’t have the experience to utilize them to the degree she operates... She’s been extremely lucky.”

Thompson’s fingers skidded across the keyboard, making Rachel’s tail stiffen and ears twitch. “From what I’m reading about the mythology she’s associated with, couldn’t it be extrapolated that it is a part of her powers?”

“It’s conceivable,” the green beret shrugged. “However, from what I’ve heard while paying close attention to her comments and actions, I’d say she falls more in line with what we’ve read regarding the hare in the way of misfortune she can bring others.”

His even tone and gaze shifted to her as he continued. “When the toad entered the building, and we were moving to intercept, she ran on ahead, despite her physical state after exiting the other world to reach the enemy first. I initially thought it was her reckless behavior, but later learned that she sensed many of my men would die and put herself in danger to prevent it.”

Rachel turned away, trying to act natural as her heart thumped against her ribcage; there were so many ways this could go, and anxiety was pushing the fog back clouding her mind as she ate in silence. It was best she didn’t interrupt until being called upon; this was also a test to see how she’d respond to criticism.

“I see...” the blond man hummed, lightly tapping a finger against the keyboard without pressing it in as his knuckles came to his mouth. “Hmm. One could say the act was selfless and courageous then?”

“I’d like to believe so,” Mateo said, folding his hands in his lap. “Although, Ms. Park made it clear when we first met that her plan was to meet with you; therefore, many of her actions of bravery could be seen as her trying to score brownie points for that purpose.”

Rachel internally groaned. *Dammit! It is a valid point, though... and not entirely wrong. Military men really are observant; he’s been watching me closely.*

“She mentioned her Feats or abilities help to connect a pathway to her goals by acting as a sort of memory bank for everything she’s heard while drawing points of actions that can bring her in that direction.

“That’s not to say she doesn’t have good intentions or that everyone doesn’t act in the same way, but it is worth pointing out that she is a very rational and practical girl with high motivation and drive. She wants something from you, Lt. Thompson, and that cannot be denied...”

He paused, narrowed eyes shifting back to her. “If there’s one criticism I have, though... It’s that Ms. Park has no inhibition toward murder from her story against the goblins or when facing the toads. No fear. No sympathy. No remorse. Despite her claim that they were intelligent creatures with culture, as vile as it may have been.

“Everyone thinks they’re prepared to kill something until the gun or knife is in their hands; people have a hard time killing pets. It’s almost as if she’s taken lives before this, and her school records show that, while having top marks in academics, she has a habit of getting into fights.”

They even got into my records while I was out? Rachel internally sighed. All of it shows I wasn’t the one to start them, though... and there it is! I couldn’t help attacking anyone who tried to bully, throw racist remarks, or any other aggressive challenge someone made against me. Although... I did manipulate things where they’d throw the first punch for an excuse.

Thompson slowly nodded, scrolling down on his hidden screen. “It does show she’s been in a decent amount of school scuffles, and done... some damage to a few girls with records of their own. She’s never stated to have thrown the first punch...”

“True,” Mateo agreed, fingers tightening against each other. “However, given what I’ve seen of Ms. Park’s behavior, I can see her easily being capable of guiding things down that route and pushing the right buttons. She’s methodical in her approach to things, which showed with how she handled Scarlet, manipulating her into a position to rely on her in the girl’s manic state... and that can be dangerous.”

Rachel knew the topic would come up; if she decided to press the right buttons, Scarlet could become her puppet attack dog. What other choice did she have with the unstable reaper girl? Yes, she did play Scarlet, to a degree, but she could also empathize with her, and it wasn’t like she wanted to hurt the broken teenager.

Thompson scratched his temple, showing a deep frown. “Yet, in the warning report you sent me between the incident, you mention that Ms. Park likely curbed a horrible disaster by keeping the girl stable and calming her down. It is hard now that they’ve established a connection since we can’t separate them... You’re right; it’s a calculated play and calls into question motive.”

He turned to her with a tight mouth, appraising her as she calmly waited; Rachel’s actions only further highlighted her mind and mental state. “What do you have to say about your actions

after Mateo described them from his point of view; do you have anything you want to respond to?”

Rachel breathed out a long stream of air while setting aside the partially eaten hamburger she'd chosen after the fruit and cleaning her fingers and mouth with a napkin.

“I promised you I would be honest with how I responded, and I could twist my words and events into a favorable light, but you want the visceral, cold truth of who I am without the bullshit. Ever since I've gained this Feat called Strategic Mind—which happens to be in the Cerridwen Branch of my abilities—I've been able to analyze my own actions in ways I wasn't able to before, heh... think of it like an enlightenment of sorts,” she chuckled, settling into her seat.

Her unshaking, eclipse-like eyes were held on the military officer across from her. “I am cruel to those I view as my enemies—without a doubt—and I won't deny it; I don't have a hint of regret or shame for the noses I've broken or girls I *did* manipulate into striking first to have an easy escape from punishment.

“I don't run from conflict; I find a way to win at any price. It's how I've won multiple Muay Thai competitions, and I *love* to fight; the reality is, I feel the most alive while in a fight, and when I was under the Azure Moon on the other planet, as the Lt. said, my inhibitions were shoved away, and I was able to see myself unfiltered...”

She heard the men holding their breath as she spoke to them, unfiltered, holding every word with clarity. “I learned I'm brutal. I can kill—without hesitation—not that I enjoy *that* particular part of the process... I enjoy combat, and the goblins bored me after I learned how weak they were.

“So... I tried to manipulate their commander into a feud by killing his subordinates. In hindsight, it was a waste of time; he didn't care about them. I did overestimate my abilities against him and almost died. Do I regret it? No. I *loved* it,” she laughed, wincing at the painful daggers that ripped into her lungs and chest.

“If I were to make an educated guess, I'd say The Oscillation unlocked more about who we really are from experience. Does that mean I want to take on the US military or kill random defenseless citizens? Absolutely not. I'm not an idiot. I know I can't live a normal life the first hour after analyzing my change, so I've tried to position myself here to tell you this... I need direction.”

Her fingers tightened in her lap, vision shifting to glare at her much less muscular arms. “I think most of us do... We can't enter society like we were, and to think otherwise would be delusional; it would be a mistake on the government's part to do that.

“I came here to tell you about my experience in the last twelve hours, and what I need, which can translate to other Mythickin. I don't know about Legendkin; Anthony has his own problems and concerns regarding his fiancé; he'll probably sneak out if you don't let him go to check on her by the end of the day.”

“Your family?” Mateo pressed, crossing his legs while studying her.

“Oh. Haha. Yeah, I love my family... I don't want to disappoint my dad or mom, and I'm terrified of how my mom is going to respond to all of this... I was going to ask if you could have someone pick them up because they're likely stuck in the blockades and traffic jams on the way here.”

Thompson gave her a nod. “I can certainly put out the word to the troops stationed along the freeway. So, you're a very aggressive young woman who is looking for a direction to point

her ambition, and you think the military has a place for that... All of this has sort of been a showcase of your skillset?"

"In short, I suppose," Rachel said, closing her eyes and sinking back into her chair. "I don't know what I expect from the military. All I know is that my original plan to become a lawyer feels so... meaningless to me now. I still want to make my parents proud, but in a different way, I guess."

"I'm worried about the Scarlet Hand cult going after my family after that woman freaked out about me getting close to Scarlet. I hear other changed people's paranoia about the government using us as guinea pigs or treating us like aliens. I want a direction I can be happy to push forward because there is so much chaos right now. I don't want to be trapped or locked up like some animal..."

Eyes opening, she forced a smile. "So... what is your verdict... or can you even give one?" she asked, looking between them after spilling her heart. "I'll tell the military everything I know about this System and the goddess thing... which, if we're being honest here, heh, I was hoping to reveal to someone a bit higher in ranking, but I'm too tired to play games now. So..."

Mateo and Thompson chuckled, rubbing their faces while processing her confession.

The blond man stared at the screen and streamed out a long puff of air. "I can't tell you anything, and... I think you're right when it comes to some of this information. I'll only reference some of the things you talked about and push it up the ladder; we're being looked at by a lot of high-ranking officials, and I'll wait to see who decides to slap their weight on the table."

He stood with Mateo, making her groan to mirror them, and to her surprise, the men shook her hand before saluting her with a smile, the coast guard officer speaking.

"No matter the reasons, Rachel, you've saved a lot of lives today, and on behalf of everyone under my command, I thank you for stepping up and being an active, positive force that has allowed thousands of people to return to their loved ones."

Rachel's ears fell back a little at the respect in their eyes. "I... just did what I thought was the most logical choice... If I did nothing, I felt like my life was over with how Mythickin are being viewed. It was strategic... It was the only way I could see myself seeing my family again."

"And that's a key distinction," Mateo commented, and Thompson nodded his agreement.

"The way I see it, Ms. Park, you took a stand in an impossible situation—as a citizen without the call for duty—and provided critical intel with—while reckless—courageous action nonetheless that *has* saved thousands while possibly saving millions in the future. Thank you for your service."

"Thank you for your service, as well, Lt. Herrero, Lt. Thompson," she finished, rubbing her legs while trying to stop their shakes. "Now, if you'll excuse me... I'm going to go lay down before I collapse again."

"Allow me to escort you," Mateo said, motioning her to the door. "We can talk when you wake up; someone higher in command will likely want to go into further detail with you soon enough."

"Sounds good."

Heading to the area they'd set up for them, Rachel found cots where Selvaria and Scarlet were already resting; well, the leviathan was on the ground since her weight flattened the bed. Anthony was staring up at the ceiling, waiting for her return in the dim room.

"How'd it go?" he asked as Mateo talked with the men standing guard outside, leaving them alone.

Rachel breathed a sigh of relief when she spotted the suitcase Selvaria had gathered for her and went to select some replacement garments.

“Hehe. Translation: when can I see my girl? Probably after we wake up; they can’t give us any definitive plans for the future, but I tried to make a case that forcing us to sit around doing nothing isn’t the best strategy... We’ll see tomorrow. For now, I’m going to change behind those curtains Selvaria set up and go to bed. Night!”

“Heh. Night... Thanks for asking. What’s going to become of us?” he mumbled to himself, likely pondering much the same as her; there were countless ways this could go, and many not so good.

“Hopefully, things will be clearer when we wake up... I gave them a lot of things to consider. Time will tell.”

Silence took the room as Rachel passed Scarlet and reached down to squeeze the sleeping girl’s hand; her wounds had recovered, and it looked like Selvaria had stolen a few of her clothes for them to use, as well, or possibly Cloe’s by the nightgown the leviathan wore.

I don’t know if I’m being stupid by giving so much to the military, but it’s my only path forward... I can’t fight the world and need people in power on my side. I have leverage thanks to Cerridwen and all the details the fantasy nerds provided... Will it be enough, though?

She wanted to cry while gritting her teeth and pulling off her bra and bottoms; Rachel wanted to enter her mental state to upgrade her System but knew it would be better to do it when she had a rested mind. If she blacked out and talked about sensitive stuff with Mateo and Lt. Thompson, she didn’t want to make the mistake of throwing all her points into Endurance, which would have a terrible return by the low Grade.

Flopping onto her back on the cot, Rachel puffed out a hot breath while settling in; yet, even her dreams were plagued by an assortment of chaotic images and sensations.

A fire-haired goddess—colored almost like an amethyst—with burning, coal-like eyes gave her a tight-lipped stare; flames erupted around her, showing her influence over nightmares and the underworld. A black, crescent moon marked her forehead, and a fist-sized ruby hovered in front of her, showing a slitted eye.

Rachel glanced around in confusion, seeing the dream-like infinity burning to cinders with a steaming cauldron nearly empty between them.

The heat pulled back the woman’s thick hair, showing one of her thin, elf-like ears and drawing attention to the obsidian collar she wore as her violet dress smoldered, and a beautiful autumn-haired goddess with flowers in her flowing locks stood beside her, studying Rachel with doubt in her lilac-hued irises.

In the next instant, she was falling over a large city—a blood moon overhead—spotting a colossal tree that sprouted out of a canal, where a massive clocktower rang; the branches soon overshadowed the buildings, and everything went black to show a mixed, coral orange, pink, and white coated rabbit as a soft voice caressed her thoughts.

Keep those who are supporting you close. Find the Mythickin fairy and unicorn; they will provide you a path toward me... Rachel, your world... all worlds are in great danger, and you must enter the World Tree. Moongmor will guide you to his mistress. Eostre has agreed to watch your path forward. Be cautious, Rachel, you have enemies far stronger than us, but your power will see you through what is to come.