

# Kaley??

By xxnataxx

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*I had an urge to write something like this...so i did lol enjoy.xx  
it's about twins (boy and girl). they went into what they thought was their garden when they were 13.  
6 years later, they were still stuck in it.*

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<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/xxnataxx/56366/Kaley>

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## 0 - Prologue

13/4/2006 15:36

### Reminder: Kaley and Jason's 13th birthday

"I'm tired of staying in the house all the time," Jason complained, standing up and stretching. "Why can't we go out into the garden?"

"Because Mom said so. And so did Dad. We're never allowed in the garden."

"Why? It's not like we're going to walk into a tree, suffer from severe head trauma and die."

"Actually, you'd be surprised at how much that happens."

"Don't be stupid." He started walking away from her.

"Jason, where are you going?"

"To the garden."

"Do you have a death wish? If Mom and Dad ever find out—"

"They're not going to find out."

"Oh, really. And how do you know that?"

"Kaley, all I'm going to do is walk around it once and come back. I'm tired of being stuck in here all the time. Look outside. Go on. Look."

Kaley looked outside unwillingly. The garden really was beautiful. She had imagined going there for more times than she could remember.

"See?" Jason said. "It's a nice day outside. And here we are, stuck inside this stuffy old house, when all our friends get to play in their gardens. It's not fair."

"But Jason..."

"You can stay here if you want." Jason disappeared opened the door to the garden and sunlight poured into the house. "I'm going."

Kaley sighed. Having Jason as a twin brother was annoying. She got up reluctantly and followed her brother outside the house.

The garden was even more beautiful than she had known it would be. The breeze rippling through her blonde hair, she went around, paying tribute to every flower and plant she saw, loving the floral perfume that lingered in the air.

“Kales!” Jason beckoned to her. “Come over here for a sec.”

Kaley got up and trudged slowly towards her brother. He was probably going to pull another one of his pranks on her. The problem was that she had to listen to him, because he was older than her. Seven and a half minutes older than her, to be precise. Which really wasn't fair.

“What is it, Jason?” she asked him warily, standing a good distance away from him in case he suddenly dunked water onto her head. It had happened before, and she didn't look forward to reliving it.

“Come here. Closer.”

“No.”

“I swear it isn't some kind of trick. Just come here. I want to show you something.”

“You can show me from here.”

“You can only see it from where I'm standing.”

Kaley looked at her brother suspiciously and decided that for once, he actually looked sincere. “Fine,” she muttered. “But I swear to God, if you—”

He grabbed her and pulled her onto the rock where he was standing and pointed. “Look.”

Kaley looked. “What?”

“Don't you see it?”

“See what?”

Jason sighed impatiently. “Tell me what you see, Kales.”

“Trees.”

“Exactly.” Jason looked at her, and she looked right back at him, wondering what the punch line was.

“What?” she asked him when he looked at her like she was stupid.

“Are you stupid?”

“Shut up and tell me what it is, you freak.”

“Do you see the pond that's at the back of the garden?” He pointed to the pond that was a few feet

away in front of them. "Do you remember what was behind it?"

Kaley looked at him. Was he suffering from short term memory loss? "There's a wall behind the pond, Jason," she said slowly and clearly as if talking to a three year old and not a twelve year old one. "A wall that runs all the way around the garden."

"Exactly," Jason said, mirroring her tone. "And do you see the wall anywhere?"

Kaley frowned. "It's gone."

"No! Really?" Jason drawled sarcastically. "Look at those trees, Kales. We've never seen them before when we were looking at the garden from the inside."

Kaley's frowned deepened. "For once, you're actually right."

"Come on." He ran towards the trees.

"Jason! Where are you going?" she yelled after him, although she fully knew the answer.

"I want to check it out."

"Jason! No! We're supposed to go back in now. Mom and Dad could be home any moment!"

"You can go back if you want." With that, Jason disappeared into the trees.

"Jason! Jason! Come back here!" There was no sign of him. "I swear to God..." Kaley muttered as she sprinted towards the trees after her brother.

"Jason? Where are you? I'm not kidding now."

Silence.

Kaley looked frantically around her. She was surrounded by trees. She whirled around and realised she had no idea how to get out of the forest.

"Where are you? Jason? It's not funny."

Silence.

"Please. I'm scared."

Silence.

"Jason?"

Silence.

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**MISSING**

**NAME: JASON KENDRICK SANDERS**

**AGE: 13**

**HAIR: SHORT, LIGHT BROWN**

**EYES: SILVERY GREY**

**SIBLING(S): KALEY LARA SANDERS (TWIN)**

**Name: KALEY LARA SANDERS**

**AGE: 13**

**HAIR: LONG, STRAWBERRY BLONDE**

**EYES: BLUE**

**SIBLING(S): JASON KENDRICK SANDERS (TWIN)**

**IF FOUND, PLEASE CONTACT THE POLICE OR MR. AND MRS. SANDERS THROUGH:  
(912) 850-0586**

# 1 - Chapter One

13/4/2012 03:25

## Reminder: Kaley's 19th birthday

Kaley rolled around in her sleeping bag, unable to sleep, staring at the fabric of their tent. It was a blood red tent, but at night, with the moonlight shining down on it, it was a dark crimson. She sat up, sighing. Next to her, Ray stirred and woke up, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"Happy birthday, Kales," he murmured, a grin toying with his lips.

"Thanks, Ray. Did I wake you?"

"No." He stopped. "Well, yes."

"Sorry." She kissed his forehead once and slipped out of her sleeping bag. "I'm going out for a while, okay?"

Ray frowned but after a while nodded. "Be careful out there."

She blew him a kiss and shrugged on her jacket. "I will." She picked up her scythes which were lying on the floor, secured them onto her belt and left the tent.

The wind blew wildly around her as she walked and her inky black hair danced around her face. Still walking, she reached up to tie her hair into a loose knot at the base of her neck. She stopped and sat down at the edge of the lake, looking first up at the pure and untainted white moon, then down at her reflection in the lake. Strands of black hair framed her face, and Kaley couldn't help wondering how her hair had turned from blonde to black naturally. Her eyes were still blue, but now they weren't that gentle, baby blue anymore. No. They were a piercing blue, ice cold and unyielding. She looked up at the moon again.

"Happy 19th birthday, Jason," she whispered. She closed her eyes and made her birthday wish.

She wished and hoped that her brother wasn't dead.

So that she could find and kill the bastard herself.

## 2 - Chapter Two

13/4/2012 00:56

### Reminder: Jason's 19th birthday

Alex took the beer can out of Jason's hands. "Dude. You can't drink anymore."

"Screw you," Jason slurred, snatching his drink back. "It's my birthday. I can drink as much as I want."

"Don't come crawling to me for help when you wake up later with a massive hangover puking your guts out."

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13/4/2012 08:23

Jason groaned when he woke up. Oh. The pain. He shouldn't have drunk that last beer.

"I told you so," Alex said from somewhere in their tent.

"Shut up," Jason moaned. "Your voice makes my head hurt." He opened his eyes and immediately closed them again. "Why does it have to be so damn bright?" he moaned again.

"Our tent's black."

A familiar feeling crossed Jason and his eyes sprang open as his stomach suddenly heaved.

Alex handed him a bag and Jason grabbed it and retched into it. Just in time. When he was done, he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

"Thanks," he muttered.

Alex was looking at him disgustedly. "Just don't touch me with that hand. Ever." He stood up. "The tent reeks now. We're going to have to air it out later." He unzipped the tent and stepped outside. "Sanders, get out here."

"Do I have to?"

"It'll do you some good to get fresh air. Get your lazy @\$@ out here."

Jason groaned and crawled out of his sleeping bag and out of the tent. He squinted at the bright light. "Water," he croaked. "I need water."

"We can go down to the lake."

“Please.”

As Jason slurped gratefully from the lake, Alex suddenly tensed up.

“What is it?” Jason asked, wiping his hands dry on his trousers.

Alex handed him his telescope. “Look. Across the lake.”

Jason held up the telescope and looked into it. A red tent. Barely hidden behind the trees.

“Attack or avoid?” they asked each other at the same time. Jason looked into his telescope once more, hoping that the people would come out of their tent. Deep down, he hoped that Kales was there. But he also hoped that she wasn’t. He didn’t want her to be on their side. It’d been six years, and still no sign of his sister. He suddenly realised that yesterday had been Kales’ birthday as well. Suddenly, the tent flap moved, and Jason and Alex immediately moved to hide behind a big tree.

Jason raised his telescope to his eye. A boy ducked out of the tent. He went down to the lake and splashed some water onto his face. He called something over her shoulder and a girl with black hair came out of the tent, laughing. The boy kissed her cheek as she joined him down at the lake. The girl was around Jason’s age.

Jason’s heart sank. Black hair. Not Kales. As far as he remembered, Kales had blonde hair. And he had brown hair. But now his hair was red. Not blood red, of course, but a kind of auburn-y, ginger-y, red colour. It was quite disconcerting. He didn’t like it.

“Attack,” Alex whispered to him.

“What? Why?”

“There’s a girl. They’re in love. In a daze. Off their guards. We’ll take them by surprise.”

Jason noticed that both the boy and the girl were fully armed. Besides, they were happy. Not that it was something he was supposed to feel. The Black Fighters did not feel happiness. Yet another reason he felt like he didn’t belong there. “Maybe...maybe we should avoid.”

“Why?”

Jason racked his brain for an excuse. “If they didn’t even bother trying to hide their tent, that means they aren’t scared. And that means that they must be really good.”

“We’re good.”

“But not really good.”

“Do you think so little of your fighting skills?”

“No. I don’t think little of your fighting skills either,” he added for good measure, because Alex was a

better fighter than he was and wouldn't hesitate to kick his @\$\$. In fact, he was sure that Alex was dying to kick his @\$\$. He just didn't have an excuse to do it.

"Then why do you think we're not good enough?"

"Never underestimate a girl, Kennedy."

"Come on, Sanders. It's only a girl, what harm could she do?"

Suddenly something whizzed through the bushes and stuck on Alex's exposed arm. A Throwing Star. Alex hissed with pain and winced as he plucked the sharp metal disk out of his arm. He inspected it. "It's theirs," he said through gritted teeth. "It has their Sign."

Jason looked out from his tree and saw the black-haired girl scrutinising their side of the lake. She had cold, blue eyes. Jason's heart sank again. That definitely wasn't his sister. His sister had the softest, gentlest, baby blue eyes. Hair could be dyed, but eye colour couldn't change. Coloured contacts were out of the question, because all Fighters, Black or Red, had dragon-like, cat-like, narrow eyes and were shaped in such a way that there was no possibility a contact lens could fit in to it. That's why they didn't need glasses. Perfect eyesight was kind of part of the package deal.

Suddenly, her eyes snapped onto his. Her gaze narrowed as she aimed and threw. Jason was about to duck down when he saw that she had thrown not one, but five Throwing Stars at the same time. And they were all heading straight for him in different angles. His eyes widened and he flipped up and off the tree. The Throwing Stars missed him by less than a foot, all of them landing so close together that Jason was surprised they didn't land in the same place. She had strength, and she had accuracy.

"Never underestimate a girl, Kennedy," he hissed to Alex, just to wind him up.

Alex scowled at him. Jason tossed him two of his Throwing Stars so that they had three each. They each selected a target and aimed, Jason throwing them all at once while Alex threw two, hissing in pain each time. He ripped off the sleeve of his shirt and tied it around—with some difficulty, as he didn't ask Jason for help and Jason didn't offer it. He tucked the third Throwing Star into his bag.

"Pack up your stuff," Alex said. "We're leaving."

"I told you we should've avoided them."

Alex scowled at him. "I'd stay and fight, but the better fighter amongst the two of us is hurt, and we have much more to lose than we have to gain." He held up the scroll.

Jason's eye widened. "Don't hold that up!" He looked quickly across the lake, but it was too late. The girl had already seen the scroll and was talking animatedly with the boy. "You idiot," he groaned. "You were supposed to be the smart one."

Alex swore. "Pack up. We're leaving." They both sprinted for the tent as arrows and throwing knives flew towards them.

Jason stuck his fingers in his mouth and whistled for their wolves. They came running. Alex tied their belongings onto them with bits of strong cord and they all ran. Jason looked behind him as he ran and saw that the girl was running across the lake. And she wasn't sinking. That lake had to be at least six feet deep. She could run on water? She could run on water!

And that's when he promptly ran into a tree.

### 3 - Chapter Three

13/4/2012 08:26

Kaley laughed when the boy with red hair slammed into a tree. Served him right. He had almost gotten her with the Throwing Stars. Almost. She watched as his friend groaned in aggravation, picked him up and dumped him on a wolf before disappearing into the trees.

“Hurry!” She called out to Ray.

“Well, I’m sorry if I don’t have magical powers that let me run on water,” he panted. “I had to run all the way around that damn lake. Do you know how big it is?”

“I’ll answer your question later. Right now we have to get that scroll.”

“Kales, it’s not even our job to get that scroll. We were supposed to bring the amulet home to the RN.”

“I think it’s stupid that we’re called the Fighters, and that our leader is called a freaking Ninja. I mean, really. ‘We’re the Red Fighters, our leader’s the Red Ninja.’ Stupid.”

“Kaley.”

“I know, respect is important. And I do respect the RN, it’s just that...he needs a new name.”

An eyebrow went up. “Who says the RN’s a he?”

“Wow, he’s a she?”

“No, she’s a she.”

She swatted him on the arm. “You know what I mean.” Then she saw what he was doing. “You sidetracked me on purpose! Now we’ll never get that scroll!”

“We weren’t supposed to get the scroll.”

“You’re a jerk.”

“You’re a stubborn girl.”

She pouted. “We could’ve gotten that scroll.”

“And we could’ve lost the amulet in the process. Kaley, the amulet is much more important. The only reason they’re not at our necks trying to get it is because we’re not dumb enough to hold it up like that guy did.”

“But that’s the last scroll! They took the Eleventh scroll! It’s the most powerful one, and they found it!”

“Kales, we have to get back. Please.”

She sighed. “Fine.”

Ray pulled her in for a kiss before whistling for Shyam and Ramani. The tigers bounded over. Ramani headed straight for Kaley, who laughed and stroked its head.

“Hello, baby,” she cooed. She’d had Ramani since she was thirteen and Ramani was a cub, and the two had been best friends ever since. Ramani purred and nuzzled against Kaley while she tied her belongings onto its back and Ray did the same for Shyam.

“So are we going back to our base?”

“Yep.”

“And how long will that take?”

“Three, at most four days journey.”

Kaley sighed. “Really. I don’t understand why you guys don’t use hi-tech stuff. Like cars, planes, retina scans, fingerprint scans, guns, bombs and all that.”

“It’s a tradition, Kaley. Besides, not all people can handle ‘hi-tech stuff’.”

“Like you, for instance,” she teased.

“I’m only a hundred and thirty years old, and I admit, I will struggle if I have to use hi-tech equipment. But think of all the other Fighters...some of them are eight hundred years old, Kales.”

“Geez. You’d think that if they knew they were immortal, they’d try to keep up with times.”

Ray gave her a warning glance, and she knew to shut up. In time, she’d learn to truly respect the Fighters and their traditions. Hopefully.

“Ray?”

“Yes?”

“You know how when you’re immortal, your body stops ageing at a certain age?”

“Yes.”

“When’s that?”

“Usually when you hit your mid-twenties.”

“How do you know?”

“It’s weird how you can feel your body stop growing. You can’t feel it growing because you’ve lived with that feeling since you were born, but once it stops, it’s like...not being able to open your eyes. It’s quite uncomfortable, but you get used to it after a while.”

“Ah.” So the red-haired boy was still growing then, because he looked as young as she did. “So how about once you stop growing? How do people know how old you are?”

“It kind of mixes between age and experience. When you’re old, you’re experienced, and it shows in your eyes. Look at my eyes.” She obliged. Ray had grey-green eyes and Kaley saw a tiny ring of silver encasing the pupil, between the grey-green and the black. “The more experienced you are the brighter that silver ring glows. Of course, the older you are, the more experienced you are, and so we don’t actually know whether it’s the age or the experience which causes this.”

“So there’s a possibility that I can be very experienced even though I’m very young?”

Ray shrugged. “I suppose. Why?”

Kaley shook her head. “Nothing.” If there was a possibility that it could happen, it’d happen to her. She’d make sure of it. So that she can make her brother pay. Make him pay for what he did to her. Her thoughts drifted momentarily to the red-haired boy. There was something familiar about him...but he couldn’t be Jason. Jason had brown hair. But her hair used to be blonde, and it turned to black. So there was a possibility for everything. Or anything.

She was sure she could’ve recognised the boy as Jason if she’d taken a look at his eyes. Jason had light grey eyes, so light they were almost white in colour. It was weird, and it stood out, and it was how she knew it was him every time he tried to disguise himself as someone else.

She tucked her scythes back into her belt. “Let’s go.” Ray grabbed her arm. She raised an eyebrow, and he withdrew his arm. She didn’t like people grabbing her. He knew that. “What?”

“Don’t do anything stupid.”

She snorted. “Why’d you think I’d do something stupid?”

“Because you have that look in your eyes.”

“Ray, I never do anything stupid.” She pulled her arm away from him. “Outrageous or dangerous, maybe, but never stupid.”

“Don’t do anything that’s even slightly dangerous, Kales.”

“Then maybe I should just eat and sleep all day. No wait; if I ate, I might get food poisoning. So I should just sleep my life away. No, no, wait; someone might come to murder me when I’m sleeping. So I

should just sit there all day. No, no, no, wait; I could—”

“You know what I mean.”

Kaley looked him in the eye, and he looked away. Everybody always looked away from her when she looked them in the eye. Her eyes scared people. It was a good thing. “Nothing is safe, Ray. Not here, anyway.” She strode away to tickle Ramani’s chin before straightening up. “We should go. We wasted the morning.”

“This way, then.”

## 4 - Chapter Four

13/4/2012 18:36

When Jason came around, something was jostling him up and down.

“What on earth?” he muttered.

Alex, who was running next to him, stopped when he saw that he was awake. He put his fingers in his mouth and gave two short blasts. Jason’s eyes widened.

“Don’t—”

The wolf shook itself and Jason fell off its back. He groaned.

“Thanks for that.”

“You should. Otherwise, you’d be riding on the back of a tiger.”

Jason scowled at him. “Where are we?”

“Two days away from camp.”

“What happened?”

“We were running away. I, being smart and having common sense, looked ahead. You, being totally dumb and idiotic, ran into a tree.”

Jason snorted. He wasn’t going to fall for that one. “I did not.”

Alex raised his eyebrows. “I beg to differ.”

Jason frowned. “Did I really?”

“Oh yes.”

Jason groaned. “Did she see me run into a tree?”

“She?”

“The girl?”

“Oh yes. She laughed, I believed.”

Jason groaned again.

“Why do you care whether the girl saw you run into a tree?” Alex asked him.

“Because I ran into a tree. She must’ve thought I was stupid.”

“I would’ve asked her that for you, but I was busy running for my life. Besides, the answer to that is pretty obvious.”

“You think you’re so clever.”

“I know I’m so clever.”

“One day, that phrase is going to come and bite you in the @\$\$\$. Trust me.”

“Get up. We’re lucky that the guy from the Reds stopped the girl from coming after us.”

“What? They did? Why?”

Alex shrugged. “Hell if I know.”

Jason frowned. “And you were supposed to be clever.”

“I’m clever, not a psychic or a gypsy with mind reading abilities.”

“Well, let me tell you a theory I have.”

“Go on then. Since we’re wasting our time, we might just as well fill it with your meaningless babble.”

Jason scowled, got up and started walking. “My theory is that the only reason they didn’t come after us is because they have something more important than we do.”

Alex snorted. “Impossible. We have the scroll, Jason. The Scroll.”

“Well, guess what? There’s something more important The Scroll,” Jason shot back, heavy sarcasm on the last two words.

“Like what?”

“The amulet.”

“The amulet?”

Jason gritted his teeth. “Yes, Alex. The Conjunct Amulet.”

Alex laughed. “The Conjunct Amulet is a myth, Jason. Grow up.”

“Well, give me a good reason why they didn’t come over us. You know, with one hurt and the other having just run into a tree and lost consciousness, we wouldn’t be hard to defeat.”

Alex fell silent then. “The wolves?” he offered weakly after a while.

Jason looked at him. Just looked at him. And that was all it took.

Alex groaned. “We should’ve gone after them, shouldn’t we?”

“We? No, no, no. Don’t blame me for this. I was unconscious. You are to blame for this.”

Alex glowered at him. “Our job was to steal the scroll and to bring it back to our base. We’re half way there. A mythical amulet will not deter me from my goal.”

“Yes, but when this mythical amulet turns out to be not so mythical after all, you know we’re going to get our asses kicked if they know that we could’ve had a chance to get the amulet but we didn’t because of some dumb scroll. This scroll isn’t even the important one.”

“The Black Ninja wanted this scroll for a reason, Sanders,” Alex hissed. “This is the Seventh Scroll, which I’m sure that even dumbasses like you, know that they’re almost as powerful as the Eleventh Scroll itself when combined with the Third Scroll.”

“But we don’t even have the Third freaking Scroll.” Jason hated these names. The Scrolls. The Conject Amulet. They sounded so...so...cliché. Ugh. He hated clichés even more than he hated the colour of his hair. And the only thing stopping him from dyeing the colour of his hair was because the Black Ninja didn’t allow artificial stuff. Ugh. The Black Ninja. Another cliché.

“We should get back.”

“The Seventh Scroll can wait,” Jason argued. “We should go after the amulet.”

“The amulet doesn’t exist! The Seventh Scroll is important.”

“The Seventh Scroll can go to Seventh Heaven for all I care. It’s useless except when combined with the Third Scroll, and we don’t even have it.”

Alex’s eyes widened. “One day, Sanders,” he said through gritted teeth. “You will learn to respect us.”

“I hope that day’s coming soon, because I am sick of this.”

“Then why don’t you leave?”

Jason snorted. “What, and be an Outcast?”

“Or be an Exile.” Alex smirked.

Jason flipped him off. “Come on. It won’t hurt to look.”

“But we don’t know where they’ve gone! They could be back at their base already.”

“That’ll take at most three days.”

“Five, actually.”

“At most. If we leg it, we can do it in three, or maybe even two. Besides, our tracking skills are good.”

Alex scrutinised him. “If we get into trouble, you’re to blame.”

Jason hesitated. “Fine.”

Alex sighed and shook his head before whistling to the wolves, which had wandered off. He rummaged around his bag, found the Throwing Star and held it under the wolves’ noses. Almost immediately, they started sniffing around and after a while, sprinted towards the direction of the lake.

Jason looked at his colleague and sometimes friend. There were times when Alex could be quite supportive and did what was best for them.

Alex looked warily at Jason. “You’re to blame if anything goes wrong,” he reminded him before running after the wolves.

This wasn’t one of those times.

## 5 - Chapter Five

**13/4/2012 23:19**

Kaley yawned. "Let's make camp."

Ray nodded. "We've covered quite a distance today."

"You can say that again." Right now, Kaley didn't even care about making camp. She wanted to sleep. In fact, that rock over there was looking quite comfortable.

"Do you want to help?" he asked her after a while when he was untying their belongings from Shyam and Ramani.

"Nope."

He kissed her cheek. "Sometimes I don't know why I asked you to marry me."

"Sometimes I'm glad I said no."

He raised his eyebrows. "So sometimes you regretted saying no?"

"No."

He winced. Kaley, realising the bluntness of her words—well, word—reached over to kiss him on the cheek. "I'm sorry. Now go make camp. I'm tired." She patted his head as he rolled his eyes and left.

Kaley yawned again and snuggled close to Ramani, burrowing herself into its warm, soft fur. Just before she fell asleep, she felt Ray's arms close around her and lifting her up.

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**14/4/2012 01:57**

And the next thing she knew, she was being wakened up by him.

"What the hell?" she mumbled.

"We're being tracked."

"And you know this how?"

"Because I just went out to take a leak and saw them coming."

"I really didn't need to know the first part of the sentence. Besides, how do you know they're coming for us?"

"Because they're the same people you wanted to go after earlier."

She sat up immediately, all traces of sleepiness gone. "The red-haired guy?"

"And his blonde friend."

"Was that guy blonde?"

"How did you not see it?"

"Maybe because I was distracted by the guy who had hair the colour of ketchup."

He shook his head. "You really need to be more observant. The other guy had blonde hair."

"I used to have blonde hair," she mused. "I wonder whether he used to have blonde hair as well. Or maybe he had white hair..."

"Can we not discuss hair colour and discuss escaping plan?"

"Escaping? We're not escaping from anything."

"Well, we will be if we continue to stay here and talk about hair colour."

"Get a move on then," she said, bounding up and unzipping the tent flap. "Actually," she said, poking her head back in. "Scratch that."

"What?" He stopped packing. "Why?"

She picked up her scythes from the floor. "We're too late."

Ray swore under his breath and unsheathed his rapier.

"No." Kaley held up a hand. "You go. Pack up everything and go. I'll catch up. I run faster than you do."

"I'm not leaving you in danger by yourself, Kales."

Kaley snorted. "Ray, this danger consists of a guy who ran into a tree."

Ray shook his head. "No. If anything, you should be the one running."

"That's stupid. Women aren't weak. I should be an example of that."

"I never said they were weak. And you definitely aren't. But I'm not letting you fight them alone. No

way.”

Kaley got up and rummaged around in her bag and took out a pouch. She tightened the drawstrings around it and hung it around Ramani’s neck.

“If anything happens, promise me you’ll take this back to base safely, okay?” she whispered to it. Ramani purred and burrowed its head against Kaley’s leg.

Ray dropped a kiss onto Kaley’s forehead. “Nothing’s going to happen.”

“Just in case.” Kaley ducked outside the tent. It was dark outside, but she could just make out the silhouettes of two figures coming towards them. She held up her scythes.

“Who’re you, and what do you want?” she called out to them as Ray came out of the tent as well holding up his rapier.

“You may remember us,” the blonde boy said, stepping into the moonlight. “You threw a Throwing Star into my arm this morning.”

Kaley smirked. “I was hunting. I thought you were a chicken. Sorry.”

## 6 - Chapter Six

14/4/2012 02:00

"We mean you no harm," Alex said smoothly.

The girl tightened her grip on her scythes. They glinted in the moonlight, one in each hand.

"We were just passing by and we realised that in our haste this morning, we left our water bottles," Alex continued smoothly. "I'm Kevin, and this is my colleague—"

"Jason," Jason cut in. "I'm Jason, and that is Alex."

Alex scowled at him and the girl shook her head pitifully at him.

"No way were you 'just passing by', buddy," she hissed. "Your base is down south. This is north."

Beside him, Jason could feel Alex falter. "We...lost our compass."

The girl smirked. "Are you so inexperienced that you need a compass? Compasses don't work here, *Alex*."

"What's your name?" Jason asked her.

"Why do you want to know?"

"We told you ours."

The girl licked her lips. "Karen," she said. "And that's Richard."

"Lies."

"If you say so." She held her scythes up. "What do you want?"

"We were just wondering, uh, *Karen*, whether you by any chance had...the Conjunct Amulet on you," Jason said after hesitating.

The girl's eyes widened, then she threw her head back and laughed. "The Conjunct Amulet is a myth, Jason." She frowned as she said his name.

Jason shook his head. "It's been proved that it's real."

"Oh, really. Proved by whom? By you?"

Jason reddened, and the girl laughed again.

“I suggest you leave now, Jason and Alex. I don’t want to see your faces here ever again. If I see you within three miles of us, I’ll personally tear you *limb from limb*,” she said, accenting on the last three words and tightening her grip on her scythes as if she was stopping herself from doing so now.

Alex stepped forward and drew his twin swords. “Let’s see what you’ve got, then.”

Amusement toyed with the girl’s mouth, and Jason was momentarily stricken. That smile. It was her smile. Kales’ smile. Whenever she got back at him for pulling a prank on her, that was the smile she had on her face. “Kales?” he croaked suddenly before he could stop himself.

The girl straightened up suddenly. “What?”

He shook his head. “Nothing. I...nothing.”

“Tell me what you said. Now.”

“I said...Kales.”

The girl cocked her head to one side. “Jason. So it is you. I thought you looked familiar. What on earth happened to your hair?”

“What happened to yours?”

“At least mine didn’t look like it got caught in a ketchup explosion.” She held up her scythes again. “Go away, Jason, before I kill you.”

Jason laughed. “Kill me? You? Kales? The Kaley I knew wouldn’t kill an ant.”

Her jaw hardened. “The Kaley you knew isn’t here anymore. She left when she went into the garden on her thirteenth birthday.”

Jason stiffened. This definitely wasn’t the Kaley he knew. He drew his sword. “Is that so? Care to show me the other you, then?”

“Not the other me, Jason,” she said, her black hair gleaming in the moonlight as she clashed the blades of her scythes together. “The only me.” She lunged for him but was suddenly restricted and comically thrown backwards.

It was the boy that was with her. “You know these people?” he asked her.

“I know *him*.” she spat at Jason’s feet.

“How do you know Jason?” Alex asked her.

Kaley glared at Jason wordlessly, as if daring him to say it. Jason swallowed.

“Kaley’s...my sister.”

“Your sister?” Alex and the boy asked him simultaneously.

“My twin sister, to be exact.”

“You two don’t look alike at all,” Alex said, looking speculatively at Kaley.

“Thank God,” she spat. “Ray, let go of me.”

The boy loosened his grip on her. But only a little.

“Ray, *let go of me.*”

Ray took no notice this time. “Kales, we should go.”

“No. They should go. After all, we’re not the ones who’re about to step onto the wrong territory.”

Ray smiled thinly at her before looking at Jason and Alex. “Leave before I let her loose.”

Kaley’s ice blue eyes flashed with anger. “A word with you, please?” she hissed before disappearing into their tent.

## 7 - Chapter Seven

14/4/2012 02:10

"How dare you show me up?" she yelled at Ray as soon as he ducked inside their tent.

"The tent is not soundproof, Kaley," he said calmly as he zipped up the tent.

She stalked right up to him and looked up at him. She could actually feel her eyes glowing with anger. She knew that her eyes would look like blue flames right now to Ray or any one who was looking at them. "How dare you?" she hissed. "What right do you have? When I tell you to let go, you let go."

"So that you could go kill your twin brother? I don't think so."

"I wasn't going to kill him!"

"You could've fooled me."

"See? See? This...this is why I didn't marry you. You can't read my mind, Ray, and you never will be able to. You can't just...assume I'm going to do something. It doesn't work that way." She stormed out of the tent to find Alex and Jason still standing outside. "What?"

"Did Ray ask you to marry him?" Jason asked.

She shook her head. "How is that any of your business?"

"Well, I'm your brother after all, aren't I?"

"Not for the past six years, you haven't been."

"My sister almost got married," Jason mused.

Kaley scowled. "Why are you here, Jason?"

"For the Conject Amulet. I know you have it."

"Do you now?" Did he? How was he so sure? Even they didn't know for sure whether that was the Conject Amulet. But she needn't worry. Ramani had it. Ramani would keep it safe.

"Yes."

"Did you expect that I would just hand it over even if I had it?" she asked them, smirking. Behind her, Ray came out of the tent and stood beside her. She tensed up a little, but otherwise ignored him.

“Well, the Kaley I knew would’ve just given it to me if I asked...nicely.”

“I don’t know whether you had cotton wool stuffed in your ears or not, but the Kaley you knew doesn’t exist anymore.” She held both her scythes in one hand and reached into the hidden pocket of her skirt. It was a black skirt. All the Red Fighters had to dress in black—which was confusing, if anybody had bothered to ask for Kaley’s opinion, but they didn’t—and they all had to wear the same thing. Well, obviously, the males didn’t have to wear skirts. They just wore something that resembled a karate costume, but in black. The girls had to wear a black fitted top and a floor length, swishy grey skirt. Black stripes ran down the skirt, gradually flaring out as they reached the bottom.

She took out four Throwing Stars and held them up menacingly. “Leave now, or find these pierced straight through your hearts. It’s not going to be difficult, considering you’re standing less than a yard away from me.”

The blonde guy—what was his name again? Oh right, Alex—held up his hands. “We don’t want to fight. All we want to know is whether you have it.”

“That’s not what he said.”

“Well he’s an idiot.”

“Oh gee, thanks, friend of mine,” Jason said sarcastically.

Alex ignored him. He was staring at Kaley. She raised an eyebrow and hardened her gaze, expecting him to look away, but to her surprise, he didn’t. She found his gaze quite disturbing. It raised the hairs on her arms.

She licked her lips. “Leave now.” She twirled the Throwing Stars between her fingers.

Alex backed away immediately, pulling Jason with him. “Let’s go, man.”

Jason shook Alex’s arm away, frowning. “No. Give us the amulet, Kales.” He reached his hand out for it.

Kaley would have laughed had they not been in such a grave situation. Did Jason really think she’d throw away all her hard work for him? Did he think that he could just disappear and then appear again after six years? Six freaking years?

“Sorry, Jason,” Ray said smoothly from beside her. “No can do. We don’t have it.”

“But be sure to tell us if you do,” Kaley added. “Because you can be sure that we’ll come for it.”

Jason smirked. “Sis, after all these years, your lying skills still hasn’t gotten any better.”

“If you noticed, I didn’t say anything about me having it, or about me not having it. Therefore, I didn’t lie, nor did I tell the truth. The only truth that was in what I said was that if you have the amulet, you can be sure that we’ll come for it.” She combed her long black hair thoughtfully with a Throwing Star. “Oh,

and also that if you didn't leave right now, you'll get your @\$\$ kicked." She held up her scythes again.

Jason laughed. "You've threaten us with that so many times, it's kind of hard to believe you."

She aimed, and then she threw. A sudden burst of energy burst through her as she threw her Throwing Stars, and as it pierced through the material of Jason's clothing, it knocked him backwards as well and pinned him to a tree.

"Next time that's going to go through your heart," Kaley told him after having the satisfaction of watching his face pale with fear and shock after realising what had happened.

She had to admit, she was surprised as well. She never knew that she was so strong. Ray didn't, either. He was staring at her with his jaw hanging down.

"Keep looking at me like that and you'll choke on a fly," she told him.

He obediently closed his mouth. "You never told me you could do that."

"I never knew I could do that."

Jason gulped and pulled the Throwing Star out of the tree trunk. He fell down onto the ground in the process. "Ow."

"We'll uh, leave now," Alex said after helping Jason up. "Thank you for your time. I think."

"You better thank us for our time. Because of you, I lost at least an hour's sleep. Unlike some people, we have important things to do instead of going around and waking people up looking for imaginary amulets."

"You have the amulet, Kales," Jason hissed in a voice so low only she could hear as he stalked past her. "And I'm going to come back for it."

"Good luck. You're going to need it."

## 8 - Chapter Eight

14/4/2012 03:00

“Six years,” Jason seethed. “We haven’t seen each other for six years. Didn’t even know whether the other was alive or not. And this is how she greets me. By piercing through my new clothes.”

“Maybe it’s because you haven’t seen each other for six years,” Alex said thoughtfully. “And she thinks you’re a prick for not seeing her for that long.”

“Oh, please,” Jason said disgustedly. “Don’t think I didn’t notice you staring at her like a dog staring at a bone it can’t have. You were practically drooling.”

Alex reddened. “I was not.”

Jason waved away his friend’s feeble denial and punched his bag in frustration. “Six years!” He was shocked at his sister’s transformation. The Kaley he knew was gentle, beautiful and always listened to him and did what he said. This Kaley? Well, she was the exact opposite. Except for her beauty. She was even more beautiful than before, but it was a different kind of attractiveness. The thirteen year old was a gentle, pliable, blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty. This Kaley? She was more of a sheer, sharp beauty; her blue eyes glinted strikingly dangerous against her raven black hair that flowed down her back. He could understand why Alex was entranced by her.

“Stop ogling my sister.”

“We’re not going to see her anymore anyway.”

Jason smiled and shook his head. “I have a feeling that we’re going to be seeing her quite a lot from now on.”

“Really?” Alex asked eagerly.

Jason shot him a revolted look. “Can’t you even *try* to pretend—”

“Sorry.”

“Six freaking years!” Jason suddenly burst out.

“Glad to see you’re taking it well.”

Jason glared at him, and he shut up. “She has the Conjoint Amulet. I know it. I just know it.”

“How on earth do you just know things?”

“It’s like a sixth sense.”

“The sixth sense that doesn’t work.”

“It works.”

“Oh, really? Remember the time when you thought Laura—”

“That was an exception,” Jason said through gritted teeth.

“Oh, fine. Then how about the time when you thought Katelyn—”

“She was being very misleading.”

“Oh, *fine*. Then how about the time when you thought *Brandon*—”

“I wasn’t the only one who thought he was gay!”

“What—How...? He has a girlfriend!”

“Well...” Jason trailed off, looking for an excuse. “He could be bi.”

Alex looked at him disdainfully. “Is that the best you could come up with?”

“Well, you give me one, then.”

“Why? I’m not the one who keeps thinking that someone has a crush on me.”

“Hey, Katelyn was being abnormally nice to me! It was just something a normal person would think.”

Alex shot him a look. “Abnormally nice?”

“She gave me that cast on my leg when I broke it.”

“That’s because *she was the doctor*.”

“Oh shut up.”

Alex laughed and unzipped the tent, ducking out. Jason turned away from him. He heard a yelp and a thud.

“What did you do now?” he called irritably over his shoulder.

“He walked into me,” Kaley said coolly as she ducked into the tent.

Jason whipped around and reached for his sword.

She held up her hands. "Whoa. I come in uh, peace. See? No weapons?"

Jason held onto his sword warily. "Sit."

Kaley sat obediently in front of him. "It's really not fair that you're armed and I'm not."

"Life's not fair."

She fell silent then, looking at him searchingly. The silence lasted for what seemed like ages.

## 9 - Chapter Nine

14/4/2012 03:25

Kaley took advantage of the silence to take a long hard look at her brother. The only thing that had really changed was his hair. It wasn't a very appealing shade of red. It was a cross between auburn hair, ginger hair, and blood red dye. A bit like ketchup. That's the first thing that popped into her mind every time she thought of his hair. Ketchup.

His eyes were different too. They weren't light grey anymore. They were a dark, dark grey, almost black, with a metallic hint to it. The thin sliver of silver contrasted brightly with it.

"What do you want, Kales?" he asked cagily.

"Just to talk."

"Why?"

"Well...we haven't seen each other for six years. I would've thought that we'd have quite a lot to catch up on."

"How did you find us?"

"It's not like you got very far. Exactly three miles away from us."

"If that's the closest we can get to you, then you can be sure we're going to be there." He looked into her eyes. "I'm getting that Conjunct Amulet, Kales."

"Good to know. Maybe we can share it when you're done."

He scowled. He really hadn't changed. Not that she'd know. She never stood up to him. But things are different now.

"So," she said, breaking the silence. "How've you been?"

He raised an eyebrow at the ridiculousness of her question. "Fine. You?"

"Good."

"What happened?" he suddenly blurted out. "Why didn't you come with me on that day?"

"You're blaming me for this?" She wished she had her Throwing Stars right now. "You're the one who went in and totally abandoned me."

"I waited for you."

"The hell you did."

"I called for you but you didn't reply me."

"Same here."

"But...there was no way you couldn't have heard me."

"And I thought you were being a dick as usual and was trying to scare me."

"Well, you could've taken the hint when I didn't reply you."

"As I said, I thought you were being a dick. I was lucky one of the Red Fighters found me. I was unconscious and was apparently dangerously ill."

Jason bit his lip. "I was kind of a dick, wasn't I?"

"Most of the time, yeah."

Jason smiled. "Sorry."

Kaley stood up. "Me too." She paused. "It's a shame."

"Yeah."

"What's a shame?" Alex said, ducking into the tent.

"That we're enemies. Or we're supposed to be." Kaley smiled gently before exhaling loudly. It was wrong. First she got separated with her twin brother. And then when she finally found him again, she found out that he was a Black Fighter. A Black Fighter, for God's sake. She held down the tears that were threatening to spill over. "I should go. Ray wakes up quite early."

As she walked past Alex, she gave him a nod, and he gave her a quick smile.

"Bye," he said.

Kaley raised an eyebrow. "Uh, bye." She ducked out of the tent.

"Kales?" Jason called just before she zipped up the tent.

"Yeah?"

"I'm still coming after you for the Conjunct Amulet."

She snorted. "Oh, please." She zipped the tent up in one fluid motion and left, running the three miles

back to her tent.

She unzipped her tent as quietly as she could and found Ray inside, sleeping. Good. She got into her sleeping bag.

“Where’ve you been?” he asked suddenly.

Crap. “Uh...I went for a jog.”

“At three in the morning?”

“I had to tire myself out.” She feigned a yawn.

## 10 - Chapter Ten

14/4/2012 03:25

“Dude,” Jason snapped. “Stop staring after my sister. I mean, she’s not even *in* the damn room.”

Alex blushed. “Sorry.”

“I swear you’re half, if not totally, in love with her already.”

“She’s beautiful, that’s all.”

Jason grunted. Yeah right. Deep down, he kind of felt sorry for him, because Kaley had always been harsh when it came to rejecting guys—and she’d be even harsher now. But Alex was kind of a ladies’ man, so that shouldn’t be a problem.

“Is she going to come again?” Alex asked, sitting down next to him.

“I don’t know.”

Alex sighed.

“One thing,” Jason said, blowing out the candle.

“Yeah?”

“You break my sister’s heart, I break your nose.”

Alex started to argue with him, but then he trailed off. “I’ll try. Not to, I mean.”

Just before Jason drifted off to sleep, Alex spoke again.

“Jason?”

“It’s...I don’t...I feel differently about your sister. Not just how I usually feel when there’s a pretty face.”

“Good,” he mumbled. “That means she’s not just a one night stand.”

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14/4/2012 09:46

When Jason woke up, Alex wasn’t next to him, which was kind of weird, because considering that although Alex wasn’t one of those wake-up-at-noon people, he definitely wasn’t one of those

the-early-bird-catches-the-early-worm people. Hell no.

He yawned and crawled out of his tent and found Alex outside feeding the wolves. Jason froze mid-yawn.

“You’re feeding the wolves? I thought you hated them.”

“As much as I dislike them, I still need them to survive.”

“Just admit you like them.”

“No.”

“It doesn’t make you a sap.”

“I know that.”

“Come on. If you can admit to liking a Red Fighter, you can admit to liking a couple of wolves.”

Alex reddened. “Don’t even try going around telling people that I’ve fallen for—”

“My sister? No thanks. I’d get decapitated if they knew my sister was a Red Fighter.”

Alex muttered something incomprehensible before picking up another piece of raw meat from a bucket. “You’d think they’d know how to hunt for themselves,” he said in disgust, holding the bloody meat gingerly an arm’s length away from him.

“Just drop the damn piece of meat before they bite your hand off,” Jason said through a yawn as Alex yelped as one of the wolves leaped up towards his hand. Alex flung away the piece of meat and the wolves raced to get it.

Jason yawned again. “I need water.”

“You’re going to have to go back to that lake.”

“But that’s miles away!”

“Three, at most four.”

Jason groaned. “Which way?”

“Southwest.”

“If I’m not back in two hours, look for me. Or don’t. Whatever.”

“Maybe I could go tell your sister. She’d need a shoulder to cry on...” Alex trailed off thoughtfully.

“Don’t even think about it. And Kaley—this Kaley, at least—doesn’t cry.”

“Well, we’ll celebrate your death slash disappearance together, then.”

Jason rolled his eyes at him before whistling to his wolf and starting a slow jog towards the lake.

## 11 - Chapter Eleven

14/4/2012 10:53

Kaley gently prised Ray's arms off her waist. She yawned, stretched and ducked outside the tent.

"Hello, Ramani," she cooed, mussing the hair that was on the liger's head. "How are you today?"

Ramani purred.

"Oh, you've still got the amulet." Kaley reached around its neck and took off the pouch. She tucked it in the hidden pocket of her skirt and went back into the tent. She kicked Ray.

"Ray, wake up."

Ray groaned. "Please don't kick me."

"Sorry."

"No, you're not."

She thought about it. "You're right, I'm not."

"Then why did you say it?"

"Isn't it something people say even when they don't mean it? Like 'thank you', 'you're welcome', 'I'm sorry'..."

"I think it's called basic courtesy."

"Oh, yeah, that I don't have."

Ray snorted and crawled out of his sleeping bag. "I know."

Kaley stuck her tongue out at him before going out of the tent again. An eagle swooped down and landed in front of her. Kaley reached out and untied the roll of paper that was tied to its talons.

She sighed. It was for Ray. She never got any letters. It really wasn't fair. She'd been working for them for six years, and they still never sent her stuff. But then again, six years wasn't very long, considering that most of the people had been there for hundreds of years.

"Ray," she called. "You've got a message."

Ray came out of the tent and Kaley tossed him the piece of paper, still tied up with string.

"I didn't read it," Kaley said when she saw him looking suspiciously at her, wishing that she had. "I promise."

He grunted and ripped the string off the paper. After reading it, he burned it. That was the only way to make sure that no one else can read it. "We should go," he said. "We have to be back at base by tonight."

"Tonight? You want us to finish two days of travelling in less than twelve hours?"

"Yep."

"Why?"

Ray regarded her with his dark green eyes. "You'll know soon enough."

"Is it good news or bad news?"

"One bad, and one good that's going to turn bad."

"Tell me," she begged him. "Please."

Ray looked away from her. "Don't look at me like that. You know that if they wanted you to read the letter they would've addressed it to you as well."

"Please." Kaley looked pleadingly at him.

Conflict warred and raged in Ray's eyes. He sighed. "Kaley..."

"Ugh." She turned away. "I suppose we should go."

"We should," he agreed.

She picked up her Throwing Stars and put them in her hidden pocket next to the amulet, careful not to pierce through the pouch. She tucked her scythes into her belt. "I'm ready."

"We still need to pack up the tent."

"Yeah, you can do that."

Ray sighed. "You take advantage of me."

"I take advantage of everyone, Ray. You just happened to be here."

He left to pack everything up while Kaley sat down next to Ramani.

"It's kind of crazy, huh?" she asked Ramani softly, stroking its head. "I found Jason, Mani. I found

him.”

The big cat purred.

“You should meet him. But he’s a Black Fighter now. He has wolves.”

Ramani growled softly at the word wolves.

Kaley chuckled. “It’s like you understand what I’m saying.”

She kissed its head and stood up as Ray came back with her stuff. They tied their belongings onto Ramani’s back and Kaley climbed onto Shyam’s back.

“Are you sure you don’t want to sit?” Kaley asked Ray. “Ligers can bear a lot of weight. Well, these ones can anyway.”

He kissed her cheek. “Maybe later. I need my morning run.”

“I need my morning sleep,” Kaley said, burrowing her head into Shyam’s soft fur.

Ray laughed and started running, and the ligers bounded after him.

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**14/4/2012 21:34**

“Kaley? Kaley. Wake up.” Ray shook her shoulder gently.

“Mm?” she lifted her head up from Shyam’s back sleepily and found that they were back at base in their tent. The one that they actually lived in, not the one they used for travelling.

“We’re here.”

“Wow, already?” She accepted Ray’s hand as he helped her down from the liger, which was resting on the floor.

“Bad news or good news that’s going to turn into bad news?”

Kaley gasped. “You’re going to tell me?”

Ray shrugged. “They kind of told me to.”

Kaley scowled. “The good news first.”

Ray thought for a while. “Actually, you should ask for the bad news first.”

“But you asked me to choose!”

“Well, most people would’ve chosen bad news first.”

“Well, I’m not most people.”

“Yeah, I found out the hard way.”

She flicked his forehead. “So tell me the bad news.”

“Our Seventh Scroll was stolen.”

“What? When? Why? How?”

“Our Seventh Scroll was stolen, this morning, because the Black Fighters stole it, and I don’t know.”

She pursed her lips. “You have to stop taking my questions so literally.”

“I have to have some small pleasures in my life.”

Kaley’s eyes widened and she hit his arm. “Jason and Alex! They stole the Seventh Scroll.”

“No they didn’t.”

“How do you know they didn’t?”

“How do you know they did?”

“Well, smartass, I know because when we were heading north to our base, they were heading south. They only changed directions to track us down.”

Ray paled.

“I’m right, aren’t I?”

Ray nodded.

“Crap. The RN’s going to kill us when she finds out that we had a chance to save the Seventh Scroll but didn’t.”

Ray nodded again.

“See?” Kaley burst out. “That is why I wanted to go after them. But would you let me? No.”

“How was I supposed to know—”

“It never hurts to make sure.”

“Oh please. All you wanted to do was run after them for some excitement.”

Kaley kept her voice dangerously calm. “Ray, you know I have an instinct for these things. So next time this kind of shoot happens, *listen to me.*”

“We may not have a next time.”

Kaley paled. “I think it’s time for the good news.”

“You mean the good news that’s going to turn into bad news. And in our case, very, very bad news.”

“What is it?”

Ray smiled weakly. “The RN’s coming tonight.”

Kaley’s jaw dropped. “You’ve got to be joking.”

“No.”

“Ten years!” Kaley burst out. “She comes once every ten years and this was the day she had to pick. The day we actually did something that was wrong enough to get us exiled.” She punched her pillow. “God!”

Ray shushed her. “You don’t want everyone to know.”

“Don’t I?”

“You really don’t.”

“Can I go tell Serra?”

“No.”

“But...she’s my best friend.”

Ray looked at her. “Kales, listen to me. RN is Serra’s biological mother. You really don’t want to tell her.”

“Why did you say biological mother? Does the RN have another child?”

“She was a surrogate mother for some other children.”

“What? Why?”

“It’s her human job.”

“Her...what?”

“Her job in the human realm.”

“You mean she gets to go back?”

“Yes.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Life’s not fair.”

“So you’re saying that she comes back for about a week, and then for the next ten years she goes back to looking after her kids.”

“Yes.”

“Do they know they’re living with a surrogate mother?”

“They probably didn’t know.”

“Why do you keep referring to the children in past tense?”

“Because they’ve left.”

“Left?”

“Disappeared. Gone. Vanished. Never went back home.”

That sounds vaguely familiar, Kaley thought bitterly. Their tent flap suddenly parted and Serra burst in.

“She’s here,” she said breathlessly. “Mother’s here.”

Kaley grinned. “That’s great, Ser. Let’s go.” She accepted the hand that Ray offered her and he pulled her up.

They joined the crowd that was heading for the clearing about a mile east of their camp. That was where the RN gave her speech. Butterflies fluttered in Kaley’s stomach. The first time she was going to meet the RN just had to be the only time she had ever gotten into trouble. Ray squeezed her hand reassuringly, and she smiled up at him.

The clearing was packed full of people. They were all chatting excitedly in hushed whispers.

“How the hell are we supposed to see her when there are so many people in the way?” Kaley asked.

“Well, she’s going to stand up over there,” Ray said, pointing up to the cliff that towered above the trees. “So pretty easily.”

Kaley was about to make a snarky comment when silence fell over the crowd, and they all turned to look at the cliff. A woman that was dressed in the same way that all the female Fighters was standing on the cliff, except for the fact that her uniform was in red. Blood red. Silver-blonde hair flowed down her back, and she had black eyes that glittered under the reflection of the moonlight.

Kaley's jaw dropped.

"That's my mother," Serra whispered excitedly next to her.

Kaley smiled weakly at Serra.

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**14/4/2012 22:52**

"Are you okay?" Ray asked her once they got back to their tent. "You look like as if you've seen a ghost."

She shook her head. "I'm fine," she said, forcing a smile on her face.

Ray raised an eyebrow. "No, you're not."

"I'm not," she admitted. "But I will be. I just...need some time to think."

Ray nodded. "Do you want me to leave you alone for a while?"

Kaley put her hand on his arm to stop him from standing up. "No, I'll go." She stood up. "I'll be back in a while, okay?"

Ray kissed the hand that was on his arm. "Be careful."

"I'm always careful."

She walked towards the RN's tent—the biggest one in the base. It was always set up and cleaned and tidied daily even though it was always empty apart from a week in every ten years. Two guards stood outside...well, guarding.

Kaley took a deep breath and strode up to the guards.

"Hi," she said.

The guards exchanged a look and nodded at her.

"I was wondering," she began.

"No one is allowed to meet with the RN unless she wants to meet with them," a guard interrupted her.

Kaley blinked. “Right. Not even when her own daughter wants to speak to her?”

“Are you Serra?”

“I am the RN’s daughter,” Kaley said. “Do you question my authority?”

The guards exchanged another look and the guards stepped aside reluctantly after a while.

Kaley smiled at them. “Thank you.” She gently pushed aside the thick red curtain of the tent—it was more like a marquee—and stepped inside.

She was sitting at the far end, her pen poised and her head bent over an empty sheet of paper.

Kaley bit her lip. “Hello.”

The woman did not lift her head. “Serra?”

“No,” Kaley said quietly. “Not Serra.”

The woman’s head whipped up, and she frowned. “Who are you?”

Kaley advanced cautiously towards her. “Have you forgotten me?”

The woman scrutinised her, and she paled when recognition hit her. After composing herself, she put down her pen. “Kaley?”

Kaley smiled softly. “Hello, mother.”

## 12 - Chapter Twelve

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Jason groaned. Finally. He felt like dropping down onto the ground and sleeping, but he had a feeling that Alex would tell everyone else to come see him snore like a pig.

"We're here," Alex said, stopping beside him.

"Why else did you think I stopped?" Jason shot back.

"I thought you were going to drop down onto the floor and sleep." Alex smirked.

Damn him. He always seemed to know what he was thinking.

"I know you too well, don't I?" Alex asked him as they strolled towards their tent, winking to a couple of female Fighters that were passing by. They giggled.

"Too damn well." Guess my sister's forgotten, Jason thought drily. At least, for the time being.

He collapsed once he got into his tent. That four hour run had killed his legs.

"Stop being lazy and do something," Alex said, motioning for the wolves to be dismissed.

"Like what?"

"Like helping to unpack."

Jason reached over and unbuttoned his bag. "You can do the rest."

Alex rolled his eyes. "You're the laziest colleague I've ever had the misfortune to have."

"Lucky you."

Alex flipped Jason's bag over expertly with his foot, and everything inside crashed onto the floor.

"There. I helped you unpack. Thank me."

Jason flipped him off but otherwise ignored him.

The tent was suddenly flooded with bright light as someone opened the flap and ducked in.

"Jason!" A girl that was about eight years old rushed towards him and hurtled herself into his arms.

Jason laughed and hugged her. "Hey, Bran."

The girl pulled adamantly away from him. "It's Brianna. Brianna. I am not a kind of cornflake."

"Sorry."

"No, you're not."

Jason grinned. "I'm sorry, Bran. I really am."

"Brianna," she screeched at him.

Jason winced. "No need to shout."

She pouted. "It's Brianna."

"How about I call you Bree? That sounds nice, and it isn't a kind of cornflake."

Brianna sniffed. "It sounds like that cheese."

Jason flicked her shoulder. "It's either cornflake or cheese. Take your pick."

She huffed and he pulled her in for a hug, laughing.

"Where did you go this time?" she asked when she pulled away again.

He sat up and smiled smugly. "We went over to the Red Fighters' base."

Brianna's eyes widened. "Really? Wow! What did you do?"

"We stole their scroll."

Her eyes looked like they were about to pop out of her head. "Why?"

"Because we were told to, and you know we must—"

"Always do as we're told," Brianna interrupted, finishing his sentence for him. "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

"And have you been doing what you're told to do?"

Brianna shrugged. "Sometimes."

"Tsk, ts. It's always do as we're told, not sometimes do as we're told, Bree."

"They make me do the stupidest things." Brianna pouted.

Jason patted the space beside him, and instead of sitting down next to him, she went to sit on his lap.

"Really?" he asked. "Like what?"

“Like running three miles every morning!” the girl cried. “That’s a lot.”

Jason grinned. “You better get used to running, Bree. You’re going to have to do that a lot when you’re older.”

The girl groaned and buried her head into his shoulder. “Really?”

“Really. I ran for four hours straight coming back.”

“Wow. Four hours?”

“Yep.”

“Do your feet hurt?”

“More than words can describe.”

She nodded, distracted when she heard a cough in the background. “Alex?” she asked.

Alex turned from where he was sitting. “Hello, Brianna.”

Brianna slid off Jason’s lap and scrambled over to sit down opposite of Alex, Jason already forgotten.

“Did you really run for four hours straight?”

“Yes.”

“Do you do that often?”

“Too often for my liking.” He chuckled. “I have something for you.”

Brianna clapped her hands together in delight. “What is it?”

As Brianna continued to salivate over Alex, Jason sighed, got up and unzipped the tent, ready to go out.

“Jason!”

Jason stopped, but didn’t turn around. “Yes, Alex?”

“Where are you going?”

“Out.”

“Dinner’s in an hour. Don’t be late.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” he replied sarcastically before stalking off into the woods.