



CHAPTER 4: THE PLAN

Rose

"WHY DID I EVEN COME BACK?" ROSE WAS EXHAUSTED, but her anxiety held her straight like scaffolding. She shouldn't have let Derrick bring her back. She should have left on her own when she wanted to, gone way out, all the way to a school, if that's what it took, instead of sticking around here for two days with the others only searching close to camp.

"Because heading out on your own is suicide," Bullet sighed, like she was talking to a child instead of a grown-ass woman. She turned back to the table. "Father Carole, we'd like to thank you for coming out to help us once again. You continue to be a tremendous ally."

Father Carole was the Council's man on the inside. Officially, he sat on a board of directors for the school system. Unofficially, he carried information to the resistance. He was the reason they

knew anything about the schools and the people taken inside. That's how they'd found out when Minerva was being moved and why they'd been able to attempt a rescue, even if it had failed in the end.

He sat next to Frenchie's dad now, across from Bullet, her counterpart Clarence, and Miigwans. Rose, Derrick, Wab, and Chi Boy had been invited to observe from a bench behind the main table. Bullet had made clear at the beginning, "Observing is not shouting out whatever the hell pops into your head whenever the hell you want."

"I don't know how much help I can be. It's only been a few days. The weekly report hasn't even come in." Carole spoke slow and soft. He knew the missing boy was Jean's and tried to maintain the calm in the camp that he knew was temporary, perhaps even pulled together for his visit.

"What can you tell us?"

"I can tell you that in the last four days, six young people and two adults have been . . . collected from this general area. There are no specifics yet, only statistics. Are you certain the individual is no longer in the vicinity?"

Jean spoke up. "We've spent the past two days and nights searching every inch of the woods. We took turns, so there was someone looking every hour. The only things we found were small amounts of blood on the edge of the clearing and a few snapped branches on the path."

"Low branches?"

"Yes," Bullet picked up. "Suggesting something or someone had been dragged."

Father Carole placed a hand on Jean's forearm. "I wouldn't worry

oo much about the blood. If it's his, he's not likely to be too injured. t doesn't fit the needs or rules of the organization."

Rose scoffed. Bullet cracked her neck by tilting her head toward ne shoulder, then the other. "Of course, we are grateful for the reassurance." She spun around in her seat, making eye contact with the girl. "And the help. We know you come here at great expense to your own safety."

"It is the only choice I have. I couldn't live with myself otherwise." He folded his hands on the table, his white cuffs peeking out from underneath a dark coat. "I will get word to you as soon as the details are released. I can tell you that two regional schools have added four people to their population charts—no names or descriptions yet. Four more were added to the DOA list." He lowered his gaze.

"DOA?" Jean repeated.

"Four didn't make it out of the woods," Bullet told him in a low voice.

"Which schools?" Jean leaned in, refusing to consider the possibility that maybe his boy was on the second list.

"St. Brebeuf and Sir John A. MacDonald."

"Hmm, both are about eighty miles from here," Bullet said. "Hard to say which one they'd take him to."

"Yes, since the decision to make the facilities coed, it's really anyone's guess."

Rose couldn't hold back. Words popped out like a crow had been released, loud and aggressive. "Well, let's make a fucking guess, then! I'm tired of wandering around the woods and sitting up in trees with shitty binoculars. Or, better yet, let's split up and go to both!"

Bullet stood up so fast her log stool fell over. "That's it. This Council meeting is closed to outsiders. Now." She pointed toward the main cave, nostrils flaring.

"Outsiders?" Rose was also on her feet in a flash. "Is that what we are now? Outsiders?"

"Well, you're not Council members, so yes. Outsiders." Bullet wasn't backing down. She kept her arm out straight, the other one at her waist. They were in a standoff, neither one budging. Chi Boy broke it, getting up and helping Wab to her feet.

"Let's go," he said. "We can get the details later." The rest of the group stood and followed him. Rose was the last one to go, sneering the entire time, not breaking eye contact with Bullet until she was halfway to the cave. She veered left at the opening, walking fast toward her tent.

"You're leaving again, aren't you?" It was Derrick.

She spun around. "Why are you always following me?"

"Well, you're not good at taking others, so this is the only way anyone can get close to you." He caught her arm. "Seriously, you are, aren't you? Leaving?"

"Eighty miles is a three-day hike in this terrain. I saw the map. I know which direction to go."

"But toward which school?" he asked. "What, you gonna flip a coin?"

"Maybe." She was stomping now, wanting to get away, to get to her tent and pack up. No one was going to stop her this time. "Better than sitting on our asses doing nothing."

"Planning isn't doing nothing, Rose," Derrick tried to reason with her. "Planning is doing something the right way."

"Jesus, listen to yourself," she scoffed. "You might as well start wearing your pants high and napping, mosom."

"Hey, you know Cree? Nice." The infatuation was back in full force.

"Not much. Just enough to insult you."

"That's all anyone needs. It's like you really understand the Cree soul," he joked.

"And yes, I'm leaving. And no Cree is going to stop me this time."

She placed her gun against a woodpile and started hauling blankets and supplies out of her tent so she could pull it down.

Derrick sighed. "When do we leave?"

She paused, checking his face for signs of trickery or doubt.

Finding only resignation, she answered, "First light. Not a second later." She pulled the main pole, and the vinyl dome fell.