

"I'm trying, I **swear** I am!" Oleander's voice was thick with anxiety from over a decade of scolding in the crisp Autumn air.

Trev shot her with one of those quizzical looks she often got when Oleander spoke.

"This is new for you, yes? You have never tried to pin a leaf to the ground?" Trev confirmed.

"Well. No," Oleander agreed glumly. "But I *feel* like it should be simpler than this... I've been practicing archery for *months*!"

"Most people, they learn to hit a target on a tree," Trev reminded her with a crooked grin. "You are trained to hit the bullseye, to arc the shot. This is different," she gestured. "You must hit a bullseye from a completely different angle *without* a wide arc," she tilted her head. "This is hard. You are doing well! Shall I show you again?"

"Please!" Oleander perked brightly at the mention of a demonstration.

Trev nodded with a bright smile. In rapid succession she turned, pulling three arrows from the quiver and, one after another, she fired them, hitting the single orange leaf resting on the ground of the forest floor in a neat cluster. For each shot, Oleander studied her form intently, her expression going almost comically focused as she did.

"You see?" Trev asked as she gestured to the cluster of arrows. "You need to make sure to shift the angle of your elbow. I think this will help."

Oleander frowned, looking down at her bow as if it contained all of the secrets of her inadequacy. She looked up and nodded.

"You will get it," Trev said with complete faith, patting Oleander affectionately on the shoulder and turning to collect her arrows from where they had pierced the leaf.

The only warning was the hairs on the back of her neck standing up and the barest shift of a shadow across her and the huntress was spinning on reflex, throwing her bow up.

"**Trev!**" Oleander's voice called out in shrill alarm just as the open jaws of the leaping wolf that had been aiming for Trev's throat met with her bow. She felt the heat of its snarling breath and the drips of saliva on her skin, the wolf's jaw a few inches away from taking her life.

Trev pushed the wolf off of her and shifted reflexively to put herself between the beast and her student, taking two quick steps back as she moved to pull her sword from her belt.

As she did, the wolf did not follow. After a brief second of confusion, Trev cast her eyes down and saw where the fletching of Oleander's arrow was protruding from the back left paw of the wolf, pinning it to the ground. Trev spared the barest glance back over her shoulder and saw Oleander standing, pale as a sheet, with her elbow lifted slightly as she was already moving to put a second arrow to the string. The girl's expression was drawn and horrified, but Trev's was sunny as she backpedaled.

"Look! You did it!" the huntress said with bright enthusiasm as she resheathed her sword in a single fluid motion. "I knew you could!"

"I-it almost killed you!" Oleander said with tremulous horror.

"What?" Trev said, unconcerned as she tilted her face forward and pulled another arrow to put to the string and pulling it back to her ear. "The wolf? Oh, they try this very often. I am a huntress," she let it fly, piercing the wolf in the chest.

Oleander gave Trev another alarmed expression before shaking her head and looking forward again and mimicking the other archer's gesture, drawing the string back to her ear. She aimed for a beat before letting the arrow fly. The shot mirrored Trev's arrow on the wolf's right as

it tried to duck to the side, straining against the arrow piercing its paw. The wolf let out a yelping sound of pain.

"Yes! Excellent! You see, their range of motion is more limited when you have stuck their paw to the ground, so you must try to predict within a smaller window. It is easier to land more hits on the vital areas," Trev enthused as she drew another arrow by instinct more than conscious thought, loosing it with half the time it took Oleander to line up the shot.

This arrow pierced the wolf's eye and the beast went still on the ground.

Trev nodded brusquely and looked back to Oleander with a bright sunny smile.

Oleander, slowly lowered her bow and looked towards Trev with a slightly more uncertain expression. "You're sure you're alright?" she asked, her voice smaller and thick with adrenaline and worry.

"Yes!" Trev said cheerily. "It did not get me. I am fine," she assured with another small pat to Oleander's shoulder.

"Should we be getting back? Don't wolves hunt in packs?" Oleander looked back in the direction of the closest inn and then to Trev.

Trev chuckled and moved to collect her arrows from the corpse, studying the arrowheads to make sure they weren't damaged and looked back.

"You may go back if you wish, but I should see if any of them remain nearby. This is a major trail and they might hurt someone. I could not allow this," she said, no judgment in her tone, just calm certainty.

Oleander's expression flickered and Trev could see her swallow heavily. There was a long moment of indecision before she jerked her head down in a small nod of agreement as she clumsily reached to tighten her belt around her waist and make sure all of her various pouches were secured.

"Let's go," she said, although her voice still wobbled.

"Let's go," the huntress echoed with pride and the pair moved deeper into the woods.