Chapter 144 Rose

Rose sat in the small cell.  It was a stone room with a small window and iron bar door.  The bed was a thin mattress.  On the shelf were the five textbooks she had to read a dozen times in the past few months.  The door was not locked, and the iron bar door swung inward as her Prefect walked in, “Rose, good news.  You have completed your training and will be initiated with Aryan and Sameer.”  Rose just nodded and was not surprised.  Her Prefect left the door open as he left.  That meant she was free to wander the old prison on her own.  She had passed all their trials.

This prison was deep in the hills of some Middle-Eastern country.  She had not seen anyone outside of the Purists.  Only the arrival of the Inquisitors had broken the monotony of her daily training.  She stood and wrapped her head slowly and carefully.  It was not required, but the sun was hot today.  She walked out of the cell and into the blinding sun.  Only scrub and dried earth surrounded the old prison.  Common soldiers of the Purists trained in the old prison yard.  She had passed all their tests and was going to be named a Hunter, an Elite.

A Hunter was a warrior caste of the Purists who hunted down all those not of human blood.  The scripture she had memorized said anyone with magic ability was not descended from humans that originated on this planet.  Therefore, they needed to be ‘weeded out.’  That included the demi-humans, werewolves, vampires, elves, and a myriad of other creatures she previously thought were fantasy.  At first, she had thought the Purist cult was just insane, but then they had brought a vampire to prison.

Her teachers had strapped the inhuman beast to a table as they tortured the creature to show them how it healed and how to deal with it effectively.  And the vampire was not the last.  A red-haired elf boy was whipped and beaten to force him to demonstrate his magic.  That had made her sick, but Rose had held in the vomit as the elf bled to death after a particularly hard beating.

Rose had learned how to avoid getting beaten herself.  Just work incredibly hard and remember everything.  She was the ideal student, just like she had been in high school.  She was also fairly deadly with a number of weapons.  She liked the shamshir, a type of scimitar they taught.  Her short weapon was yataghan, a short, thin dagger.  She also carried a belt with three throwing daggers.  But all these ancient weapons were more for training, fitness, and discipline.  She had two Glock 42 pistols.  She was surprised at how good a shot she was with them.

They trained and tested everyone at 5, 10 and 20 meters.  The targets at five and ten meters were just the size of a phone case.  Rose was accurate at 100% at five meters and usually only missed one out of ten shots at ten meters, even on the move.  The target increased to a person cutout at twenty meters, and she never missed.  She was just a natural. The hardest part was keeping track of the different bullets.

They used a standard 0.38 shell, an explosive shell, a silver sliver shell, an incendiary shell, and a soft lead ball shell that expanded on impact.  Each one for a specific set of circumstances.  Her mission belt had two clips of each type of ammo, and the two Glock 42s had a clip of the most likely needed rounds for the current mission.

Rose walked outside the old prison wall.  She had remained strong through this trial and planned to flee as soon as possible.  They had never raped her as long as she continued to perform.  Others were not as lucky, being rewards for upper echelons of Purists after failing their training.  They also had taught her one thing they should ever have.  How to kill. She could now do so without remorse.

As she circled the outer wall, she was shocked to find Archbishop Esposito around a corner, apparently waiting for her. “Rose!  Thought you might be out for some exercise.”

She wanted to recoil at the old man’s voice and disposition but put on a fake smile.  “Yes, I just needed to stretch my legs before being initiated as a Hunter.”  She tried to move past him, but he grabbed her arm.  The grip was not hard, but enough to stop her.

“Wait a moment, child.  I think Inquisitor Arturio is coming.  He wanted to ask you a few questions.”  The old man did, in fact, come around the corner.  Rose immediately figured out the two men had circled in opposite directions to intercept her.  She would have panicked if not for her training.

Inquisitor Arturio was old but fit and muscular under his robes.  The Archbishop was not the physical threat.  Rose stepped back, “I apologize, instructors, but I wish to be alone with my thoughts to prepare.” The two men had taught classes on various supernatural threats that the Inquisition dealt with regularly. It was no secret that their organization had banished the two.

Arturio smiled evilly, “Now, young one, do not leave so soon.  We only wish to talk.”  Rose’s mind began to cloud, and she focused on Arturio.  “Good child.  Now, why do we not go and sit down and discuss some things.”

Rose wanted to say no, but she felt like a spectator watching a TV show.  She followed the two men.  The Archbishop asked, “Any problems?”

Inquisitor Arturio replied, “No, she is not an adept like we thought.  She had no resistance to my influence.  She must just be gifted athletically.”

The Archbishop growled angrily, “Damn it, Arturio.  We need powerful, higher-tier soldiers in order to stamp out the demon.  Did you know the Magus Arcanum is praising his assistance with the aboleth creature?”

Arturio responded calmly, “An aboleth is a fearsome foe.  We are taught never to engage and request the Magus Arcanum and summon divine aid if we confirm one’s existence.”

The Archbishop swore, “Fuck divine aide!  We have been throwing messages in the bottle for decades, and no one has responded!  They are probably too busy dealing with their own politics on the twenty-second layer!”

Out of nowhere, a man appeared sitting on a stone in blue jeans and a white tee shirt.  Rose did not recognize him, but she was sure he appeared there in the blink of an eye.  No, he had been invisible as even her clouded mind could see the trail his heavy footsteps left on the earth. He spoke with an amused tone, “What you say is blasphemes, priest.”

“I am an Archbishop, boy,” Esposito started to say but quickly found himself suspended in the air by the man’s extended arm. The young man had moved so fast that Rose had barely caught the movement.

“I think I have failed to introduce myself properly, as you are not giving me the respect I deserve,” the man gritted his teeth in anger and impatience.  “I was sent to this aether-deficient planet to help.  If my journey has been wasted, I will be quite irate.”  He put the Archbishop down slowly and without straining his extended arm.  He bowed a little mockingly, “I am archangel Kushiel.”

Rose was staring at the interaction through a haze, but she could see both men had fear clouding their eyes.  Rose did not know what this all meant.  The Archbishop regained himself, “Thank you for answering the request, Archangel.  We have much to talk about.”  A grin was spreading on his face even though he remained fearful of the Kushiel.  He turned to Inquisitor Arturio, “It is time to subvert and control the Purist Assembly.  I think we can move on the demon now.”

“Demon?”  the Archangel questioned.  “I was told there was an aboleth spawn on this backwater planet.  I am here to make sure it does not reproduce and spread.”

The Archbishop chose his words carefully, “The aboleth has been dealt with, but it was in contact with a demon that has been thwarting the works of the church.” The Archbishop’s tone was serious and stressed the demon’s involvement. The impatient angel cocked his head like a dog, listening.

“Demons on Earth?  Just one?  What species?”  he replied, gaining interest.

“Just a single demon.  We believe it to be a greater demon.  It is not strong enough to be a Demon Lord.  Can you handle a greater demon, Kushiel?”  The Archbishop asked sweetly.

“Depends on the species,” the angel said, sounding unconcerned but thinking.  “We should let the demon come to us.  Do you have a plan, human?”

The Archbishop did not realize the demon was taking down to him but Rose recognized the signs.  The Archbishop smiled, “I do.  This creature conspired with the demon.”  Rose would have panicked as Esposito pointed at her, but all her emotions were muted.

The angel stepped in front of Rose and looked deeply into her eyes.  He bent over and kissed her, suckling on her lips and then tongue, tasting her.  After a long kiss where Rose’s body just stood there and let it happen, he broke the kiss, “You are right.  She is tainted with demonic enhancements.”  He looked at Rose, “Her mind is trapped but not by the demon.”

Archbishop Esposito came up with a reply, “That was my servant.  We did not want the girl contacting the demon and warning him we would come.”  Kushiel nodded as that made perfect sense.

“Where is the demon, and when can we confront him with the advantage?” Kushiel asked of the Archbishop.

“It will take some planning.  Once Arturio gets the locals here on board, we can plan a flight to America.  We will trick the demon into coming to us there,”  he smiled at the Archangel.  “Rose, get ready for your ceremony.  You can manage that on your own.”

Rose was left behind as the Archangel and the Archbishop walked off talking.  Rose’s mind was connected, but her actions were a weird dream, and she remained a passenger in her own body.  She went to the temple to pray, as that was required every day. Then she read the Testament of Humanity, one of the books in her room.  Her mind was numb as her body did the things expected of her on autopilot.

The ceremony was at midnight under a full moon.  The three new Hunters were stripped and washed in front of everyone.  A number of the men ogled her body, but it did not affect her.  They had to lay on an altar, and each got three tattoos.  Six artists worked in the moonlight in the open sky as Rose’s body was branded.  She watched them work, detected from the pain and hands.

The three tattoos were the black crow in flight on her hip.  It symbolized the searcher for the arcane in the world.  It was a fairly intricate piece of artwork, and she would not be ashamed of it if she had control of her body.  The second tattoo was supposed to go on her left chest, but her fleshy breast prevented it.  Instead, she had the tattoo on her sternum.  This tattoo was a compass to remind her of the right direction to travel in her endeavors. The final tattoo was on the back of her hand. This tattoo was being done with ultraviolet ink. It was the simplest tattoo of an ouroboros, a snake eating its tail.

This was the Purist’s symbol of their neverending fight to free the planet of the invaders and reclaim it for the true humans.  When the artists were down, the three stood in a row as the sun rose into the sky and revealed the new Hunters of the Purists to the world.

The next week passed, with the entire compound coming under the control of the Inquisitor.  Shockingly, they had let someone with aetheric powers in their midst.   She would have thought this all ironic if she was in more control. These were the type of people they were trained to hunt.

One thing the Archbishop was not afraid of doing was talking in front of Rose.  Rose learned the extent of the Purist organization.  Six camps in the Middle East and a little over five hundred men and a handful of women.  They hunted very selectively so as not to bring the wrath of the array of demi-organizations down upon them.  The Magus Arcanum looked the other way as well, using the Purists as a secret gun to eliminate undesirable demis.

She should have been happy when she heard they were flying back to the United States.  But she felt nothing.  The plane was packed for their flight, and two dozen Purists, the priests, and the Archangel were on board.  They landed in DC, and a motorcade took them to a hotel in Baltimore.  There was one long evening of planning, and then they all moved to an old warehouse south of the city.

There were more Purists now, almost thirty.  Inquisitor Arturio was in control of the four highest-ranking members of the Purists.  He directed them on behalf of the of the Archbishop. Rose actually felt his control loosen slightly over her when he added another Purist leader in America.  So, he did have limits on how many people he could puppet.  Not that Rose felt any desire to break his spell over her.

While waiting, the group constantly argued about a plan to draw the demon to the trapped warehouse.  The Archbishop, for some reason, thought the one call he made was going to be enough.  But everyday, the demon did not show the tension built. Kushiel, even though he was immortal, got angrier every day at wasting his time on the planet.

A few days after arriving in the States, a conversation started with Rose being the center. Arturio mentioned, “Could we not threaten the demon with the life of the Hunter?” Arturio indicated Rose.

Kushiel responded, “Demons do not care about their pawns. He is just as likely to kill her out of spite.”

The Archbishop turned to Rose and asked absently, “Would the demon come for you if you were bait?”

Rose did not know what to say. She needed to respond truthfully and searched for what the right answer may be. The pause had everyone look at her. She finally said, “He keeps his harem close. I think he values them. I do not know if he still considers me one. He has not come for me to date.” Rose’s mind was questioning why Caleb had not come for her as the conversation continued.

Kushiel brought her back to the conversation: “Who in his harem does he value the most?”

Rose did not need to think too long. “Iris Cartwright was the first.”

The men looked at each other, and Arturio asked, “Child, do you think the demon would come for her if she was taken?”

“I believe so,” she said with confidence. The men looked around the room, and it was Kushiel who spoke.

The Archangel directed the Archbishop, “It is a plan. Send men to collect her.” He rose and left.

Arturio asked Rose, “What is the best way to get Iris Cartwright to come to us?”

Rose’s mind whirled for the best answer. She did not want to say her best friends name but did, “Mary Taft could convince her.”