“Hey, Adam. Check this baby out.”

“Are you being serious, Low?” I groaned.

“I think this is giving me a boner.” Still grasping the black-painted machine gun in one paw, Lowell peered down at his crotch. “Yep, definitely got a boner.”

“Lowell, quit your shit.” Olivia rolled her eyes while handing him an extra magazine for the unloaded weapon. “For all we know, the enemy could be coming in.”

“What makes the past ten-plus years any different now?” He asked us.

Olivia didn’t retort the timber wolf, and instead inspected her own rifle. Lowell reluctantly fell into the same silence as well, answering his own question. Mostly emptied boxes of handguns and automatic weapons were strewn across the granite countertop. Meanwhile, I fidgeted while leaning against the wall in what used to be the kitchen, watching them and recalling the previous conversation I had with Johanna minutes prior.

After my talk with Stephen, I followed Lowell with the intent of making myself useful. Not a second that I asked, Johanna pulled me aside, asking me to join her in the yacht’s master bedroom. Well, bedroom could imply there happened to be a bed. Like the rest of the *Sunlit Evanescent*, very little furniture filled the open space. All that remained were the wooden supports that once held the king-sized mattress, as well as skid marks signifying that it and a large nightstand had been tossed over into Lake Michigan.

Old Nick sat in the room, glaring at a tablet as he typed furiously. The mongoose’s gaze didn’t even register when I walked in, or when Johanna closed the door shut. As well as the yacht’s owner, I also noticed another item I didn’t see around the corner. A plastic blue box I recognized from my father’s work at the hospital. It was no bigger than a football, had a shoulder strap connecting each side, and possessed a large cross sticker and another below it indicating the box always needed to stay closed.

“Any word from Canada?”

“Huh?” Nick peeled away from the tablet. “Sorry, I was distracted, Mrs. Cardinal.”

“I said did you get any word yet from Canada?” She crossed her arms at him. “If you’re playing any fucking games on there, I’ll—”

“No, of course, I’m not!” Nick hastily stood up with his paws held high, one of them still clutching the tablet. From an angle, I saw a paused video showing fire. “I just got a little distracted, that’s all. There’s stuff going down near Mexico, but to answer your question: I talked to Lucius and Oscar. They told me to tell you a C.A.F. squad from the 405th battalion’s coming their way from Thunder Bay. They’re just finished with taking back Winnipeg.”

“They’re that close already?” I gasped.

“Yep,” he chirped, “they also can’t guarantee they won’t be held up by locals.”

“Better than nothing, I guess,” Johanna sighed, then relaxed her arms as she walked over to the box in the corner. “Adam, there’s something I need you to do for me these next several hours. It…involves Lowell.”

I immediately stood at attention. “I’m listening, ma’am.”