

Chapter 76

“Could we maybe go for a walk?” I ask Benjamin after we all finish eating. I should probably help them clean up, but I really need to speak with him.

“Sure,” he says, looking a little surprised that I asked. He stands and walks around the table, offering his arm to me. I take it and he leads me over to the line of trees where the woods become thicker.

“I’m trying my best,” I say quietly to him.

“I didn’t expect you to stay here,” he says. “I think, perhaps, I misjudged.”

“I think, perhaps, that you don’t know me,” I say, looking up at him. “I’m not the little girl you left. That little girl was locked away. I had to become who I am, and you just don’t know that person.”

He sighs a little, placing his hand over mine on his arm. “You’re right, but I’d like to get to know you.”

“I grew up as a respected alpha’s adopted daughter who had a broken wolf. No one would say anything to me about it, or my dad, people talked about me though. We didn’t KNOW I didn’t have a wolf until I was older, but there were signs, and kids can be mean.” I tell him and we stop at a fallen tree, taking a seat.

“That was probably really difficult,” he tells me. “You always looked so happy when we would catch a glimpse of you, though.”

“I wasn’t unhappy, and I always loved being outside,” I try to explain. “But there was a lot of hurt. I wasn’t as strong as the other kids and the older we got, the more it showed. I just tried to avoid playing with them. That’s how I became such good friends with my friend Oliver. We’d go hiking and play in the woods- it didn’t matter that I wasn’t as strong as the other kids then. When we had to go on lock down, I realized that I was a liability to the whole pack, because I couldn’t defend myself. It’s how I started to cook.”

“You couldn’t defend yourself so you started to cook?” he asks, confused.

“Yeah,” I say with a small smile. “I didn’t want to be completely useless to the pack, so I started working in the kitchen. I didn’t have to have werewolf strength, or sight, or reflexes. I just fit in there, finally.”

“I always wondered why Randall would let you do that,” he says, shaking his head. “I was worried he wasn’t treating you as well as we thought.”

I smile at him. “He was amazing, and they treated me so well. Mom had to convince him to let me be in the kitchen, because he thought it was beneath my rank in the pack. She knew how much it meant to me to be able to help, though.”

I look at Benjamin and realize he has tears in his eyes. “It’s hard to hear you call them mom and dad.”

That’s not what I was expecting him to say, at all. I think for a moment about what he’s said. “I appreciate you telling me, but I won’t stop, or apologize. They ARE my Mom and Dad. They loved me and cared for me when you weren’t able.”

“I’m glad they did, truly,” he says with a sigh. “It’s just uncomfortable, but it’s for me to deal with, not you.”

I look at him, and he looks so sad. “You know, he found me in the woods before. The day Jason died. He lied to the King, and sent them the opposite way to protect me.”

“He did?” he asks, looking over at me, eyes wide.

“Yeah,” I tell him with a small smile. “I didn’t know until after the spell was broken and remembered it. I think it’s why I always felt safe around him. Deep down, I knew.”

He nods at me. “He was always a good and honorable man. And a great Alpha.”

I want to tell him that he’s the best, but I don’t think that will help how he’s feeling. We sit there for a few minutes, listening to birds chirp, both of us unsure what to say.

“I know you came to see if I’d gotten my strength back,” he says, looking down at the ground.

I sigh, not wanting to admit it. “I don’t think anyone would have been worried about it if there weren’t men pacing the border. You could have reached out and told us.”

“She-wolves have gone missing from the rogue lands since before I was even sent here,” he says. “No one cared then. Why would they now?”

“I care, as does Seth,” I say quietly.

Benjamin sighs and shakes his head. “I don’t know if I trust him. He was raised by his father.”

“He’s a good man,” I try to convince him. “He treats me well, and he’ll do the same for the kingdom.”

“I truly hope so,” he says with a small smile. “I just want you to be happy. For the official record, I have regained some strength, but I’m not what I used to be. Just between us, I don’t know when, or if, I’ll be able to shift again, but I will tell you if I do.”

“You can’t shift?” I ask him, astonished at this.

Benjamin shakes his head slowly. “I have barely shifted since we left you, and not at all since you were adopted. My wolf was very upset. He didn’t want us to leave you, he wanted to try to keep you safe here. It was just too risky, though.”

“I didn’t realize…” I say, my voice almost a whisper.

“I’d do it again, Molly,” he says, looking over at me. “I’d do anything to keep you safe.”

“I hope you never have to worry again,” I tell him with a smile. “Besides, I don’t think anyone will try anything with Seth around.”

“That just puts a bigger target on you,” he says, his face marred with concern. “But you have him, and me. Alex and Albert will always protect you, as will Randall and his son.”

“And Peter,” I say, my voice barely a whisper. “I know you don’t believe me, but he’s treated me well from the moment I met him. And with the unique way Seth and I are linked, he would never take a chance of anything happening to him.”

He sighs deeply, clasping his hands together and looking down at them. “I’ll try. For you, I’ll try.”

“Thank you,” I say quietly and I lean my head onto the side of his arm. It feels odd, but it also feels so familiar. We stay like this for a while, just enjoying the sounds of nature when Benjamin finally breaks the silence.

“A she-wolf went missing a few days ago. Her father was on patrol and her mother was with a friend. We don’t know exactly what happened, but they went into their home and there appeared to have been a struggle,” he says to me.

“Her father?” I ask quietly and sit up to see his face. “How old is she?”

“She’s only 14. Not even old enough to shift,” he tells me, clearly upset about the situation. “There have been reports of younger she-wolves missing, some even younger than her. They were on the outskirts though. This was the first time it’s happened within our group for years.”

“I’m sorry,” I whisper. “It’s not OK. We’ll be sure to get it worked out.”

“I didn’t tell them everything yesterday. I knew they would all report back to the King,” he says and looks at his hands again. “I don’t want him involved.”

“Seth and I can handle it without him,” I tell him. “I believe it may be happening in other places, not just out here. We’ll have to work with him, but we’ll handle things here ourselves.”