

## Poppy POV

Sinclair had that look on his face that you found when someone had seen a ghost. He was looking pale and too disturbed. Damon sat beside me with his hand on my thigh and I didn't even think of removing it. I wanted Sinclair to see it all.

"Hi Sinclair," I said, waving from my place. "Come, join us."

He was so agitated by my casual greeting that he simply stood there and gawked at me.

"You should close your mouth, Sinclair," Killian chuckled sarcastically. "At this time of the year there are many insects."

Sinclair snapped his mouth shut and clenched his teeth. "Poppy, can I talk to you for a moment in private?" he blurted.

I picked up a piece of grilled venison and cut it with my knife. I placed a neat square piece in Damon's plate and said, "You can talk anything you want to right here, in front of them." I knew that I had to show him what Damon meant for me. But I wasn't going to reveal it to him or to anyone that he was my mate because I had plans and they were

pretty dangerous.

He let out a rough breath. "Poppy, this is a matter about our pack. You have to take it seriously!"

I ate my meat slowly as I chewed it properly and let him wait for me. I looked at Damon, kissed his cheek and said, "I will be right back, baby."

He seized my face and then my lips and said, "I will be waiting for you, love."

I pressed my lips together and then got up. Giving a very hard stare to Sinclair I waved my hand to the door. "Let's talk outside." I picked up a packet of cookies as I made my way out. I closed the door behind us and offered him one to eat. He gave it a hesitant look and then took one out of it. As he munched it, I knew that he was only doing so to tamp down his frustration.

"Poppy," he started. "I saw that you shifted."

"Yes," I replied with a smile.

"But how's this possible?" he asked, his eyes going wide with suspicion mixed with anger.

"I think you are trying to congratulate me," I said with a twinkle in my eyes.

"Yes, I mean—" his jaw dropped. "Umm... congrats!"

"Well, thank you!" I offered him more cookies and he took two of them.

"I mentioned about this change to my mother and she was quite surprised. In fact, she was shocked!" he grated.

"I am sure she was shocked Sinclair. She was the one who used to soothe me when my grandfather used to beat me. You have witnessed it all. How my grandfather used to beat me when I couldn't shift and how he would send his Beta to beat me to get my wolf out. Remember?" My voice sounded raw because I recalled every detail. It was Hilda who was behind it all and she even gave me money that she had saved so that I ran away forever, and when I didn't run away, she asked Sinclair to offer me a hand in marriage. Some game she played.

"I— I remember," he said, his voice filled with guilt or frustration. After a while of awkwardness, he said, "I know that you have rejected me, but I am still open to marrying you. In fact, after your wolf has come out, I would be happy to marry you!"

My brows furrowed but only for a moment before I burst into a laughter. "No thanks, Sinclair. You don't have to sacrifice for me. I am good and I don't have any intentions of marrying you."

Sinclair opened his mouth to say something, but he snapped it close. Then he opened it again. "But there one more thing—" he looked away. "I just wanted to ask about—" he didn't know how to complete the sentence. But I knew what he wanted to say but I remained quiet. I wanted him to say it. Eventually, he said, "I wanted to ask if you were still drinking that tea!" He let the cat out of the bag.

I raised my eyebrows in mocked surprise. "Ah the tea!" I tilted my head. "But why do you ask and how is it related to the conversation we are having?"

I saw his shoulders drawing back in tension. "No. It's not that!" he blabbered. "It's just that I wanted to give you more of it." He dug his pants pocket and took out a big pouch. "Here, you must have it. Mother said that now that your wolf is out, you must have this tea a lot more because a new wolf shows many emotions and they shift with every emotion that swells in them. So this tea is going to help you."

One thing I deduced from this conversation—Hilda hadn't said a word about the fact that I have shifted into my wolf to my grandfather. She was still going to try her best to kill my wolf. I looked down at the pouch. "That's very sweet of her, Sinclair," I said with absolute politeness. "Come in now."

Sinclair seemed to relax, seeing my willingness to have tea. "Sure," he said as his face split with a smile for the first time he had come here.

I led him inside and made him sit at the dining chair. There was silence and I swear if a cricket sneezed, I would have heard it. I put the stove on and started making tea. "Please do convey my thanks to Hilda for sending this tea to me," I said, looking over my shoulder.

Sinclair appeared to shift on his chair. "I will," he replied in a low, unsure voice.

I could sense Damon's agitation. None of them knew what was going on but me making tea was getting on their nerves, except Sinclair who was eager to see me have it. After straining the tea, I came back with two cups. I handed one to Sinclair and said, "Cheers to our wolves!"

Sinclair paled for the second time in the day. "I won't have it!"

"Why?" I asked innocently as I sat on Damon's lap.

He was doubly shocked. "B— because I don't feel like!"

"Oh don't be such a spoil sport!" I chided him. "Have it with me or I will drain this cup in the sink and give the tea pouch back to you and complain Hilda about it. I am sure that she will hate it!"

Eliza giggled as Killian snorted.

Cornered by my threat, Sinclair had to pick up the cup of tea.

"Sip it," I said sweetly. And under Damon's predatory watch, Sinclair sipped it.