

The Banished Beta's Saving Grace

Chapter 3: Grace

That conversation with my mother happened five years ago. My father's infidelity killed her slowly over three years. In the end, I believe my father took another mate. My mother had been getting weaker and weaker, but that last day, her scream of pain was something I will never forget.

It was my sixteenth birthday. My mother had taken the day off to celebrate with me. So many of my birthdays had been ruined by my father, but this one ended up being the worst.

The day had started out amazing. We'd gone to a local river, hiking through the forest. Mom wasn't able to shift any more, her wolf had become too weak over the years, but we still made the most of our time.

It was while we were having dinner, in the evening, the time when parties and events would have occurred in the pack, that it happened. At first, mother stopped, food midway to her mouth. She had such a strange look on her face, but then it happened. She grabbed her neck where her mating mark was and screamed. I ran to her and held her, used to her 'episodes' by now. But this time, it was more than she could survive.

She died in my arms, leaving me alone in the world at sixteen.

If it wasn't for Benny, I don't know what would have happened to me. I probably would have ended up in the human foster care system. But, I had already started working at the diner, covering for my mother. Mom had told Benny that she had cancer. It's not something that werewolves get, given their healing power, but Benny didn't know my mom was a wolf, so it worked.

So, he let me work in her place when she was "sick" and when she passed, he covered for me, letting me continue working for him and making sure that I finished school.

He retired from cooking a few months ago, but he still comes in every day, keeping an eye on me and the diner.

I'm always careful when the buses come through. Lots of transient people hit on me thinking they can have an easy one-night stand or a 'quickestie' with me. Benny makes sure that I stay safe, but I'm always careful when the bus people, as I call them, come in to eat during their layover.

Several days before my 18th birthday, a giant of a man came in, reminding me of the warriors in my old pack. It wasn't so much that he was tall, I'm fairly tall for a woman at 5'11", but he was broad and muscular. He stared at me when he first came in, then disappeared before he ordered food. It was bizarre and I was concerned that he might be a werewolf, but he was a bus person, so who knows.

On my 18th birthday, I wake up, having no intention of celebrating. My birthdays have become something not worth remembering. I didn't get my wolf, my father banished me and my mother died. Who wants to celebrate a day where these awful things happen? The only positive is that I am officially an adult by human standards and no one can force me to leave now.

However, all my plans go out the window when I'm in the shower and I hear her.

'Oh Grace, you've been through so much waiting for me. I'm sorry it took so long.'

"Who is that?" I say, looking past the shower curtain to see the bathroom is empty.

'It's me Grace, your wolf. My name is Maia.'

"I don't have a wolf. I'm too old to get my wolf." I say out loud.

'No, I've always been a part of you, but I had to wait before I awakened.'

'Wait for what?' I ask in my head. If it's not my wolf, I won't get a response.

'I had to wait for the Guardian spirit that was meant to be ours. His life was longer than it was meant to be. The Moon Goddess granted the wish of another Guardian and spared his life. I've been waiting to awaken until I received my Guardian spirit.'

'So, you're real? You're my wolf?'

'Yes Grace. You won't ever be alone again. I will always be with you.'

I hadn't realized just how lonely I felt until now, causing tears to run down my cheeks.

'Maia. It's good to finally meet you.'

'It's good to meet you too Grace.'

At work, I told Benny that I needed the evening off. When he asked, I told him it was my birthday and I hadn't planned to celebrate, but I changed my mind. He grabbed me a cupcake and told me to go enjoy my evening.

That night, I went into the forest surrounding the small town. When Maia confirmed that we were alone, I stripped off my clothes and let her begin the first shift. It was agonizing. Usually, the human form shifts at age 10 when the body isn't fully developed. My first shift being at 18 and without any family or a mate to assist made it excruciating.

After hours of my bones slowly breaking and rearranging, I lay panting on the forest floor. Maia pushes forward and picks us up off the ground. We're wobbly, not being used to being on four paws.

I'm mesmerized by everything. Suddenly, I can hear things in the forest that were quiet before. I can smell the river where my mom and I hiked on my birthday two years ago. I can hear and smell the small animals of the forest, foraging for food or moving around in their little dens for the evening. My eyesight is sharper and where I couldn't see in the dark before, now everything is clear.

Maia takes off at a run and I let her have control. Her yip of excitement causing me to be excited for her. We run until we smell a stronger scent of the forest. 'It's a pack. We should be careful to stay off their pack lands.' Maia tells me.

We turn and run in another direction, until we come to another pack territory several miles away. Again we turn, being careful not to cross into the pack's lands and continue our run. When we get to the river, Maia slows to a walk. She takes us to the edge of the river and looks into the water. My wolf is mostly black, with colors of light and dark brown intermixed giving her fur an exotic look that I've never seen on another wolf.

'You're beautiful Maia.'

After running all night, we head back, and I'm able to get some sleep before going to work the next day.

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It's been over a week since Maia showed up and I've settled into a new routine. I go to work, during the day and at night I let Maia run. Now that I have her, I've begun thinking about what I should be doing. She says that as a Guardian, we have a purpose, but she either doesn't know what it is, or she's not telling me.

I'm enjoying my enhanced senses. Everything is new. I've learned that the cook has a crush on me and has since he started here. I learned that Benny tells everyone my mother made him my guardian before her death, and that's why no one ever bothered me. I learned that humans have a rather boring smell, but werewolves smell great, like the forest.

Maia and I skirt along the pack lines at night, taking in the scents. I can tell she misses being a part of a pack, but I have no intentions of going back to my father's pack and she agrees, knowing everything that my mother and I endured.

So, it's a bit startling when I hear the doorbell chime one evening, as I'm getting close to getting off work. The first scent to hit my nose is the forest. It's the first werewolf that has come in since I got Maia. I'm not sure how to react. Should I be nervous, or will it be fine. I don't know if I smell like a rogue to other wolves. Since I didn't get my wolf when I was 10, I wasn't technically banished from a pack like a normal wolf. It's different when a human is banished.

Maia jumps up in my head. 'Maia, is everything okay?' I ask her.

'I need to see him.' She says. So I brace myself and walk out of the kitchen.

As soon as I do, I smell it, sandalwood and cedar. It smells like the forest, and home and something sensual and mouthwatering all at once.

I turn to look around the room, wanting to know who the person is that smells so good and that's when I see him. It's the man from over a week ago and he's looking right at me.

Maia pushes forward. "Mate." She says quietly.

I huge smile spreads across his face. "Mate." He repeats.