

Cursed Wolf Chapter 5 - Tips

Luna grabbed the keys off an end table and started downstairs. On her way through the shop, she passed an open deck of cards. She was compelled to pick them up and shuffle through them. The faces were designed with beautiful paintings of animals.

She shuffled them a few times, enjoying the feeling of the cards in her hands. She'd had her tarot cards read before. But she thought this was a deck of spirit animals or something like that.

Since she was in a totally new world, she was interested in what cards she might draw. She didn't want the bakery to close before she got to buy a treat, so she shuffled faster, not really sure why she wanted to play with cards all of a sudden.

Several cards flipped out of the deck and flew onto the floor. She startled and then set the deck on the table before bending to pick up the escaped cards. She flipped them over and her heart lurched.

The first card was of a stunning fierce white wolf. It read "Alpha Wolf." Her breath caught in her throat and her heart raced. Luna had no idea why the card affected her so much. Sweat broke out on her brow.

She picked up the second card. This one was of five white wolves standing together. It read, "The Pack."

She stared at these cards for several moments, trying to take them in. She wanted to understand why she was suddenly so flustered. Her emotions had been raw and chaotic since she'd driven off the ferry an hour ago. She needed a pastry and some tea by the fire to calm down.

Luna placed the cards back on the deck and hurried outside. It was dusk and the streetlights had popped on. In her current state, she didn't see the pedestrian coming toward her and she stepped right into the solid form of another person.

"Oh gosh, sorry!"

"I was just coming to see you." The woman laughed, taking a step back.

"I guess you found me," Luna chuckled. "I was on my way to the bakery. I'm in terrible need of some sweets."

"You're in luck. It's my store. Come on!"

Luna felt more at ease than she had since arriving. She followed the dark-haired woman into the bakery. The smell of pastries and chocolate filled the air, and it made Luna a bit light-headed.

The room was filled with warm light from crystal chandeliers and candles on the tables. It had a strong Parisian design, with curved white wrought-iron chairs, upholstered the same pink as the checkered tablecloths. The long display counter was full of the most delectable looking treats, Luna's mouth watered at the site of it.

"I'm River Malaya. And this is Malaya Pâtisserie."

River swept her arm out, showing off the beautiful, busy cafe. There was a line of customers at the counter and people filling most of the tables.

"What kind of tea do you like?" River asked.

"Uh, chai?"

River walked behind the counter, filled a teapot and placed several bite-sized pastries on a platter. She raised her eyebrows at Luna as she walked by, leading her to a quiet corner at the back of the shop.

Her new best friend dished her up several small pastries on a white plate and poured her a cup of tea with cream and honey. Luna took a bite of the tiny chocolate croissant and was in heaven. The tea was equally delicious with just the right balance of sweet, cream and spice. Her stomach sang with happiness.

She tested all the samples on her plate. The pink macaroon and custard tart took her to heaven. She took the last sip of tea in her cup and River filled it again.

"You have no idea how much I needed this right now," Luna said with a grateful, satisfied sigh.

"I'm just so glad you're here! When Luisa died, it was tragic. I loved that woman. She was like a grandmother to me. You have no idea how much she taught me. Even after all my travels and training as a pastry chef, Luisa Pleasant was one of my greatest teachers."

"I didn't even know she existed until a few weeks ago."

"She'd tried to send you cards and gifts when you were a child, even though she never got a reply. She told me that she knew you belonged here."

"My father lied to me." Luna's stomach dropped, despite the pastry goodness and spicy tea running through her belly.

River shook her head. "Sometimes family doesn't always have your best interests at heart. I can relate."

Luna raised an eyebrow, knowing there was a story there, but she didn't ask River why. She was too overcome with her own emotions to take on anyone else's. It was one of her greatest weaknesses. Her feelings always seemed to get the best of her, no matter how hard she tried to rein them in.

"You're here now. That's all that matters," River said, reaching out to pat Luna's hand.

The friendly gesture hit her hard in the heart and she had to use all of her sugar rush energy to keep from crying in front of her new friend. Everyone had been so kind since she'd arrived. She wasn't sure how to process it. People weren't so open and friendly in the city. Even after over half a decade, she still hadn't connected to some of the people in the bookstore back in Oakland.

But here she was with this brand-new person who seemed to know and love her late grandmother. Who fed her tea and cake, and gave her true sympathy when she needed it most.

"You've been so kind," Luna said, trying not to cry. She really did need to rest after over a week of driving and sleeping in cheap hotels.

"Don't mention it. Losing Luisa was rough. But you're here now. Rebecca Doolittle told me you're going to run the shop. That's the best news I've had all year. I opened the bakery to be next to New Moon. We belong together like peanut butter and jelly."

Luna wasn't quite sure how a witchy bookstore and a French bakery fit together. But somehow, it seemed to work.

"I almost didn't come home. After all my years abroad working and studying in France, Italy, Malaysia and all across the US, I could have opened a bakery anywhere. I'd won every important competition. I had backers everywhere I turned. But when I came home to visit for the last time, I came to New Moon and talked to Luisa, just like I had when I was a teenager.

"She told me she knew I'd be coming home. And that I'd make the best pastries of my life here. I didn't believe it at the time, but a few months later, when I was back in my apartment in Colorado, I had a dream I'd open this shop and I'd meet the man of my dreams here.

"The next day, Luisa emailed me, letting me know the shop next door was up for sale. I bought it the next day."

"That is a wild story," Luna said, remembering the wolves on the oracle cards she'd just seen. "Do you believe in omens and stuff like that?"

"Of course I do. Fate is the strongest force on Earth. I know I'll meet my mate here. And the business, while it's small and quaint, is exactly the kind of shop I always wanted to

run. I wanted to go see the world, learn everything you could do with sugar and flour. But in the end, I brought it back home. To my roots. So that I can share my experience with my family and my kind.”

“Your kind?” Luna asked, unsure of what she meant.

“I’m a raven shifter. My clan is descended from the Raven God himself.”

“Oh, wow.” Luna covered her mouth in surprise. She’d met a few shifters in her life. Despite shifters being open to the human public, they were still rare. “Your family is related to a god?” She felt awkward asking River about her lineage since she knew so little about shifters and didn’t want to be rude.

“So they say. I’ve never met him personally.” River winked and Luna laughed. River’s dark sienna eyes danced, and her full lips curved in a smile.

“Shifters have fated mates, right? Two people who are meant to be together no matter what?”

“A good match can be like heaven. And nine times out of ten, that’s what you get. But when the match is bad, there’s no greater hell on this Earth.”

“That’s terrible.”

Luna had witnessed some horrific human relationships in her life. Her relationship with Gavin hadn’t really been one of them, even though he’d just up and left her like nothing. But she’d volunteered at the women’s shelter in her old neighborhood a few times in the years she’d worked at the bookstore. She’d seen the result of bad human relationships firsthand. She wondered if shifters could be worse than that.

“You haven’t found your mate yet?” she asked with a gulp. She’d hoped River had found a heavenly match.

“Not yet. Though I’ve been on mate.com for five years. Used to be a female shifter would find her mate in seconds after signing up. That’s not really the rule anymore. Not now that the numbers of males and females are basically even. Many of us have found human mates. Which has its own challenges.”

“How does fate play into all of this?” Luna asked, thinking about the wolves on the oracle cards.

“It always happens at exactly the right time. Or exactly the wrong time. And there is only one. No other.”

"I've heard of mate.com," Luna said, biting her lip. "It's funny, I just picked up some of those fortune telling cards with animals on them in the shop. And two cards with wolves fell out. Do you think that's fate?"

"Sounds exactly like fate to me. And exactly the kind of sign that Luisa would get. You really are her granddaughter."

"You think so?"

"I do. I also think you should sign up for mate.com. My shifter sense is telling me there are wolves in your future."

Luna blushed and took another sip of tea. Just the idea of finding a man who was fated for her, a relationship that was like heaven, made her weak in the knees.