

## Chapter 91

Run

Soon, the human was gone, and the auburn Wolf stood in her place, taking in the sensations of a world that were all new and unfamiliar. Although it had been a long while since she'd allowed herself to feel and experience the outside world, she hadn't expected it to feel so...alien.

But she'd feared as much.

Mia bulked, shying backward only to yelp when her flank unexpectedly came into contact with a tree trunk. All of a sudden, it all became too much. In the darkness, the sounds, the smells, the very feel of the air around her became too ominous. It felt as if she could feel the presence of the forest around her as it loomed over her, pressing in on her from all sides.

She didn't know where it was safe to turn to, where to run to in order to hide from the oppressive darkness that threatened to crush her - was crushing her. Mia whined in fear, hunching down against the base of the tree she'd stumbled into. This had been a mistake. She'd felt the call and known instinctively, with every fiber of her being, that it wasn't only Ava's task to follow. If there had been a sign that it was time to leave the shadowy depths of Ava's psyche, the pull initiated by the witch's spell had been it.

If she'd realized how...overwhelming the darkness of the outside would be, she never would have taken this leap. Being trapped in Ava's tortured and repressed mind was uncomfortable and demoralizing because she knew that in her current state, there was nothing that she could do to help her human, the other half of her spirit.

But...on the inside, she could use Ava's eyes to see. Out here, there was nothing.

"No," Ava's voice rang out like a beacon cutting through the never-ending pitch. "There isn't nothing. The world is still here, Mia."

That was the problem. It was too much, too unexpected...too dangerous.

"For a regular Wolf, maybe," Ava's gentle voice reassured her. "But not for you, because you have me. I know that I didn't put my faith in you

when I should have, but do you think that you can bring yourself to trust in me?"

Mia whined in uncertainty, cautiously pawing at the ground before her, struggling and failing to get her bearings. There was a world of sensations to differentiate from, and she didn't know how to do it! The inky viscous feeling of panic began crawling its way back up the Wolf's throat, threatening to swallow her whole.

"Mia," Ava implored. "I will not let you fall."

Ava's steady presence brought her back from the edge, calming her wild nerves. This was new and terrifying, but she wasn't alone. She had to hold onto that. On unsteady limbs, Mia pushed herself off of the ground and rose to her feet. "That's good. Focus on the call and focus on me."

Mia did just that, doing her best to tune out the deafening cacophony that made up the forest at night. She disregarded the unending barrage of scents that pulled her in every which direction. Instead, she focused on the need she felt.

They were being pulled in a single direction, so Mia followed it - first with cautious hesitation and then with growing confidence as Ava took on the role of her eyes, steering her away and over obstacles. The feeling was both strange and familiar because she was usually on the other end, acting

as Ava's early warning system, guiding her away from danger the best that she could.

Now, her human was returning the favor, giving her the ability to navigate a harsh new landscape that she would never have had the strength to weather alone.

As the fear of the unknown began to fade, the debilitating sensations around her gradually began to lessen and separate, becoming individual elements that were much easier for her to identify and compartmentalize.

The rustling of a hare and the whooshing of an owl's wings took form in her mind's eye once more. She reminded herself that she'd never had to see those things before to know that they were there. This was not so terribly unfamiliar from her life before. She could still exist in this new world.

With every passing moment, Mia grew emboldened, her movements becoming more lithe, and every tread even more sure than the last. With Ava's help, a new landscape formed around her, one that she traversed with relative ease. With confidence came the gradual serenity of letting go that gave her the confidence to let instinct guide her way.

As soon as she allowed it, the calling that had been leading them ever deeper into the forest coalesced into a single trail - a scent that drew Mia in like an otherworldly compulsion. It was sweet and succulent and left

her feeling heady even as it urged her powerful legs to move ever faster across the forest floor.

She rushed toward the source of the trail, sensing the edge of the forest growing nearer. Mia, stop!

Suddenly, Ava reared back within Mia's mind, causing Mia's Wolf body to follow on instinct.

They skidded to a stop, and it was through Ava's mind's eye, colored with awe and apprehension, that she saw a massive jet-black wolf step into view. Shock was clear in its honey golden eyes as she stopped short, only a few scant yards away. It seemed so improbable, yet here he was all the same. Xavier.

Alexandre bucked at the reins, ecstatic to see Mia, his mate out here in the open, suddenly before him. But more than his excitement to see Mia was the concern that consumed the both of them upon first sight of the female Wolf's face. She was as beautiful as ever, petite and dignified, autumn-colored fur gleaming in the pale light of the moon. In this forest, kissed by fall, she was deep within her element, and it showed. The concerning development was the deep scar that ran horizontally across her face..

The deepest part of the old wound curved along the left side of her forehead, perfectly in line with the much fainter scar on Ava's. It continued

on to slash across both of the Wolf's eyes, leaving them a stark opaque white instead of the vivid, striking silver he remembered.

Xavier felt Alexandre's heart break for his mate and Xavier for the pain their mate had endured alongside him. These weren't the revelations Xavier had arrived in Shady Oak expecting to find, but he was damn glad that he finally had an answer. And possibly a solution if Ava would accept his help.