Chapter 209 Farewell and Forever

"It's a lovely morning, isn't it?"

Ethan, Vicky, Paul, and I were outside playing with Rowan when I saw Soren's familiar form walking slowly toward us.

My stomach twisted into knots. For some reason, I knew that he had something important to say to us, and the way he was walking made me think that, whatever it was, I wasn't going to like it.

Rowan waved and said, "Uncky!" his attempt to say uncle. It was adorable, and Soren's face lit up. He went over to his nephew and carefully stopped the swing Vicky had been pushing.

"You're such a smart little guy," Soren said. He bent down and kissed his nephew's cheek, and Rowan patted him lovingly on the face a bit before he shouted that he wanted "mower!" which meant more swinging.

He handed Rowan to Vicky and Paul. The couple took Rowan away over to the swing, leaving the three of us some privacy.

"You look much better now," I said, very happy to see Soren's recovery progress.

He pulled up a silly smile. "Of course! Not that many people get fed by the White Queen's priceless blood on a daily basis for an entire week! Goddess, my body is so energetic that it feels like I'm ten years younger!"

Ethan commented, "Your IQ too."

I choked on the sip of water I was taking.

"I take it as you're jealous of my youthful strength and dare not face the challenge."

Ethan arched his brow. "No interest. I'm not an eleven-year-old."

"Come on! Why don't we go for a race through the woods, down to the river? We can watch the sun finish rising from there."

I looked at the horizon where the sun was nearly up. Pinks, oranges, and yellows still painted the sky, a beautiful sight.

"It sounds like a good idea." I smiled at them both. It wasn't often that I got to run side by side with the two most powerful he-wolves in the world.

Also, I had a feeling that Soren hadn't picked this task randomly. It meant something to him.

"You asked for it," Ethan finally agreed with a smirk.

I picked up a bag of clothes for us to change, and the three of us took off running through the dew-covered grass.

We headed to the woods, running at full speed down a winding trail that meandered between large pines and bright bushes full of berries.

As fast as they were, I managed to keep up, just slightly behind them. It was nice to watch the brothers run side by side, each of them trying to get the upper hand.

They would nudge one another in the shoulder or try to steer the other one of course by running too close together. I chuckled under my breath every time one of them did something to torment the other.

After about thirty minutes of running, I could hear the river in front of us. I was looking forward to sitting next to it and taking a rest. The scent of the water hit my lungs, and I breathed it in deeply, feeling refreshed.

The waves crashing against the rocks drew us in, and then the greenish-brown water came into view before us.

Ethan got there first and turned to smirk at Soren who promptly pushed him a few feet into the water with his shoulder. Ethan rushed out of the cold water and shook off his fur, getting Soren wet, too.

I couldn't help but giggle.

Behind a bush, I shifted and got dressed before I brought them the backpack so they could do the same. Then the three of us took a seat on some large rocks overlooking the water as the sun finally climbed above the horizon.

The palace was visible in the distance behind us, and with the golden morning light glinting off of the stone, it looked like something out of a fairy tale, or a dream.

"Do you remember," Soren began, "when we were young, we always tried to beat each other to the river back in Drogomor."

"I remember," Ethan said with a nod. "I always won."

"Hey, you were a lot older than me and bigger," Soren reminded him.

"That has nothing to do with speed," Ethan shot back.

I giggled while Soren let out a grunt, but he was still smiling.

"I thought you were… a superhero back then," Soren said, his smile faltering a bit. "My big brother. The toughest guy in the world. I thought… you could do no wrong."

Ethan said nothing, but a somber look took over his face as Soren continued.

"Then… when everything happened… with Dad… I just didn't understand. I couldn't make any sense out of it. How could this guy, my big brother, my hero, do something that seemed so… villainous? And then, after I left, all I heard about was how devious you were. It hurt even more to think that you were actually evil because I had worshiped you for so long. I felt betrayed."

"Soren, I owe you an apology… I'm sorry that I ruined your childhood." Ethan finally spoke up, Soren fixed his gaze on his big brother, waiting for him to finish. "However, I don't regret what I've done."

Soren smiled and nodded. "I know it, and I understand all of that now." He sighed. "But I didn't for the longest time. I spent years with Kal, over on the islands, plotting your demise. I used to lay awake at night and dream of ways to kill you, or at the very least, ruin your life. When Damian presented me with the opportunity to help him get what he wanted and help me destroy you, I took it. For that, I'm very sorry."

Ethan said coolly, "You tried and you failed. We're all good."

"Um…brother, don't be arrogant. That apology was for Rosalie, not you."

Ethan, "....."

Soren burst into laughter, finally winning one point back for himself.

I gently squeezed Soren's hand and told him, "I've already forgiven you."

He smiled at me and then continued. "It's taken a really long time and lots of events along the way for me to get to where I am now, Ethan. But… I'm finally returning to the state of mind I was in when I was a little kid, and you were my big brother that I admired so much."

Ethan seemed to have sensed what Soren was about to say. "Soren…"

"I guess what I'm trying to tell you is… I admire and respect you, Ethan. And that's why this time… when you beat me to the river, as much as it stung to lose, I was glad that the prize was yours."

My face heated a bit, knowing he wasn't talking about the foot race we had just run. He was talking about me.

"Nevertheless," he said with a deep breath, "just because I know you won fair and square, that doesn't mean it'll be easy for me to stay by and watch you enjoy your reward."

"What do you mean?" Ethan asked. Not that he hadn't followed the analogy, but that he wasn't sure what Soren was getting at now. Neither did I.

"I've always wondered what lay in the uninhabitable forest in the West," he replied. "Maybe I'll go up there. Or perhaps I'll visit the jungles down south. I could even go on an adventure through the southern pass."

"Soren… are you saying you're leaving?" I asked him, and my eyes felt warm.

He shrugged. "Hey, it's not so bad. At least you won't have to listen to me crying at the wedding, right? Or worry about me being the i***t who stands up to interject?"

He chuckled and I wiped my eyes as he added, "There is going to be a wedding… isn't there?"

"Why don't you stay to find out?" Ethan suggested. This was his subtle way of asking Soren to stay.

"Brother!" Soren exclaimed exaggeratedly, "do you already miss me? I knew it! If you're willing to share Rosalie…"

Soren successfully ruined the sentimental moment.

"All right, get lost!" Ethan ordered.

"Ah, brother, you're sending me away again. So cruel!"

Soren pretended to be hurt, and he cracked me up. Even Ethan, finally shook his head and chuckled at his brother, who always had a way to lighten the mood. That was part of Soren's charm.

After a long pause, Ethan sighed, "I'm not very good at saying goodbyes..."

"Then don't say it," Soren told him. "Com'on, it's not like we live in some ancient times when it takes ages to get across continents. Trains, cars, seaplanes…" Then he turned around and winked at me.

"Promise you'll come back to visit!" I demanded, my vision blurred.

He pulled himself to his feet. "You can count on my words this time!"

Ethan was already up, stepping toward him and wrapping him in a tight hug. I did the same, and when Soren's arms wrapped around me, I knew I was going to miss him.

He was an important person to me and to my family.

After that, Soren backed away from us. He lifted his hand one more time, his eyes locked on mine, before he turned around, leaped into the air, and shifted into a gorgeous wolf.

I watched him go with tears trailing down my cheeks. Ethan wrapped his arm around me, and we stood like that until Soren was completely gone from our sight.

Ethan bent down and kissed the top of my head. "I'm sorry, baby," he whispered. "I know you care deeply for him."

"I do," I said. "But I hope… at least you will never say goodbye to me."

I looked up at him, and he was smiling at me. "You can be sure of that, Rosalie. I will never, ever leave you again."