

Chapter 477

The very thought of sending her daughter away was unacceptable, though Ava had to concede the other women had valid points. She pondered on their words, looking back down at the child who had maintained her silence, apart from when she'd called her mama. Making up her mind, she let out a small sigh. "Very well, Terra can take the children to the rendezvous point, but Natalia and this little one are staying here. Roland may want to talk to the child."

She could tell the other two women didn't agree with her decision but they held their peace, and both headed over to the larger tent where the handful of children were still sleeping. Ava turned her attention to one of the other tents, the one that contained the most precious person in her world, not counting Roland.

"Tali..."

There was a moment's silence and then a muttering under breath, as her daughter pulled herself out of her tent. She pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose and blinked into the sunlight, a frown marring her pretty features. Her brown eyes appeared slightly glazed, as was wont to happen when Natalia was dragged unceremoniously away from her science books.

"Mama? What's happening?"**www.NoVdIw©Rm.com**

Ava couldn't help smiling as she stared at her daughter. Her Natalia lived in another world within their own, often being the last to know anything that was happening within the pack. There was no way in hell she would ever be separated from her often-distracted daughter. She relied too much on her mother to guide her through life.**www.(n)OvElIw©RM.c00@**

"This child just wandered into the camp a moment ago. Your father and the others are out trying to find where she came from. Terra is going to take the youngsters onto the next rendezvous point as a precaution."

Roland wasn't Tali's real father, though he had brought her up as if she were his own since the day he had found Ava dying from blood loss after being attacked by a vampire. Tali had been less than six month's old, and it had only been her love for her child that had helped Ava withstand being turned to a Were to save her life. Roland had taken them both under his protection, and as time had passed, the mate bond had formed between him and Ava.**w0w.n0VElIw©rm.c0M**

They had been a family ever since, even though Ava could bear no other children. It hadn't mattered to her mate. As far as he was concerned, Tali was his daughter.

While Natalia was processing what she'd been told, the child's initial reaction to Ava's hair had quickly waned, and she wriggled in her arms. Ava set her down as she felt the little girl's fear rising. Whatever had happened to her was so traumatic it was as if she couldn't bear to be touched. Her natural maternal instincts were to comfort the girl, but she didn't want to frighten her any further.

Ava's heart swelled with pride a second later, as her daughter reacted to the child's distress, her instinctive empathy kicking in as tears well up the little one's eyes.

"It's okay, sweetheart. That's my mama and she's very kind. She won't hurt you." Natalia's tone was soft and soothing as she sat down on the ground to bring herself closer to the girl's height. It was clear she felt sorry for the child, a little girl who was as lost and out of place as she was. "I'm Tali...what's your name?"

Natalia held her breath, trying to be as non-threatening as she could. Truth be told, in a pack of wolves, that usually wasn't too hard to achieve. She was worried about whatever may have happened, and what that could mean for their pack, but she wanted to help the little girl, she just looked so haunted and forlorn.

The child stared at her for a long moment and then she sniffed noticeably, recoiling a couple of step backwards, her mouth dropping open. "You're not a wolf." It came out as an accusation, as was to be expected from one who was so young she hadn't had any life experience with the other races that made up her world.

Natalia didn't let the girl's tone upset her though. She smiled to show her that she understood her confusion as she nodded her head in agreement. "Not yet," she answered. "I am still human. My mama's a wolf though, and one day soon I will choose to become one."

The unexpectedness of her answer seemed to capture the child's interest, and she moved forward again, sitting down a couple of feet away from the human girl. "I'm a wolf and my Mama and Papa were wolves. How come you're not one?"

Were...Natalia didn't look at her mother, keeping her gaze fixed on the child but she knew she would have caught the past tense the girl used. Something had clearly happened to her parents, something bad. "I was only a baby when I came to live with the pack. Our Alpha is very wise and she decided that I should be allowed to grow up before I made the decision if I wanted to be a wolf or not."

When she saw she had the child's undivided attention, she decided to press for some more information, trying to maintain the build-up of trust that had begun. "Are your Mama and Papa close, little one? Can you tell me your name?"

The child's face turned sombre at the mention of her parents, sorrow causing tears to well up again, and her voice to drop to a whisper. "He called me that. The monster who could do magic..." Though she named this person monster, there was no fear on her face or in her voice. It was as if she was telling a secret, one she didn't want the others to hear.

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Natalia could sense the instant tenseness within the pack, and knew that she needed to hide hers so as not to spook the child. She put as much wonder into her tone as possible, leaning a little closer, and dropping her voice down to a whisper too. "You met a monster who could do magic? Wow, that sounds amazing! Is the monster still here, sweetie? Did he bring you here? I'd really like to see him if I could."

Big tears spilled over onto the girl's cheeks and she let out a little hiccup as she tried not to sob. "He went away again...after he cut up the bad people who hurt Mama and Papa. He told me to come here. He said you would look after me now that Mama and Papa are dead."

"Mama?" Natalia didn't know what to say. Her heart automatically screamed yes they would look after her, but she knew better than to agree to anything on behalf of the pack. Technically, the decision was the Alpha's, though Natalia was reasonably sure that she would take the child in, it was who their Alpha was.