

Chapter 724

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?"*wxW.m0vEIWorm.©0m*

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.

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.

Ava moved to kneel beside the weeping girl, tentatively touching her back and supressing a sigh of relief when she didn't pull away. "I am sure you must have a little knowledge of pack life, sweetheart. We must speak with our Alpha who is away at the moment. She is a good Alpha though, caring and wise. Most of our pack once travelled alone or in smaller groups. Our Alpha accepts many into the fold, and I see no reason why she wouldn't accept someone as brave and strong as you, little wolf. We will take care of you until she returns. You have our word on that."

The child swallowed hard, brushing a hand against her wet cheeks. "I can stay here with you? I don't have to go away with the others?"

Natalia met her mother's eyes, a hint of unease filling her soul." "Why do you need to stay, little one? Is there a reason?"

Nodding her head, the blonde wolf scrubbed at her cheeks once more, her expression lightening a little. "He said he would come back for me. He said he would remember this place and come and get me when he was finished."

The unease blossomed into full fear, Natalia struggling to keep her face as expressionless as possible. "The monster said he would come back?"

When she nodded again, Natalia felt a bead of sweat trickle down her left temple. "Do you know what it was that he had to finish first, sweetheart?" She held her breath as she waited for the answer, afraid of what it might be.

"I think he's going to kill some more vampires, though he didn't say that."

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Natalia gasped out loud, her fear-filled gaze meeting her mother's once more as she was unable to contain her rising terror. If what the child said was true...

"He's coming back for her, Mama. He's coming backhere."

"Frankie! Astrid! Get Terra and the kids moving now!" Ava barked out, rising quickly as Frankie hurriedly exited the children's tent at the urgency of her voice. "One of you go find the men, tell them to get back here ASAP. Natalia, grab what you can quickly from your tent. Take the child with you. We need to be ready to move out when the others get back."

"I want to wait for the monster!" the little girl wailed, her composure slipping and her voice rising shrilly. "He let me bite the vampire that killed Mama and Papa! I want to go with him!"

Natalia gagged, all colour leeching from her face. "Sweet Jesus!" she gasped, her expression turning horrified. He had let a baby eat a vampire? What kind of a monster let a child eat a...she couldn't finish the thought. Her stomach suddenly lurched, and with another muffled gasp, she ran to the edge of the camp and promptly vomited up her breakfast.

Something was nagging at the back of her mind, an inner warning that was clambering for attention. She'd had the feeling a few times since she'd reached puberty. It was something akin to an inner awareness when true danger was near. Twice their Alpha had changed the direction of their travel when her fear level had spiked harshly. Twice, it had been proven a wise decision when they'd heard tales of a smaller wolf pack being decimated by a hidden coven.

This time, the fear was so intense it was nothing short of terror, and that could only mean one thing. The threat to the pack was great, but the personal threat to Natalia was off the scale. It had blossomed the moment the child had said the monster was coming, and that could only mean that she was in close, immediate danger from the man.

Natalia wretched and vomited again the instant the thought crossed her mind. Tears welled up in her eyes as she heaved, sweat trickling down the side of her face. A monster was coming, and he was coming get her. The worst part was, by the way her terror refused to abate, she was certain he was going to find her.

She turned back around to see her mother glancing sideways at her as she tried to comfort the now distraught child. The look of horror in her eyes just served to increase her own sense of terror, and her certainty that something ominous was coming to get her and it wouldn't be deflected.

It was evident her mother could tell by her reaction that the threat was directed more greatly towards her. Her eyes were frantic as she watched her daughter, her voice breaking as she spoke. "Move, Natalia! Now! Don't wait to gather anything. Just run!"

Natalia's feet wouldn't obey her though, her fear so absolute she could only hunch over once more and clutch at her stomach. She knew it was pointless to run, to try to hide from him. There was nowhere she could run to that he wouldn't find her, of that she was certain, so she was as well as staying with her pack where she had at least a modicum of safety.

Finally straightening up, Natalia wiped her mouth with the back of her sleeve, and fought to find some inner strength. She would stand with her family, with her pack, and she would meet the danger head on. This was the only life she knew, and it was the only life she wanted. Paradoxically, the fear of impending doom had suddenly crystallised her decision about her future. If she made it out of this in one piece, if the pack made it out alive, then she would make the change to Were. She would join the pack properly.

"There's nowhere to run to, Mama," she whispered, crossing back to them and kneeling down beside her mother and the little girl. "I won't leave you. I'm not going anywhere until we all do."*(w)wxW.m(ç)vëL(w)orm.c0m*

Natalia didn't wait for a response, instead she turned her attention to the child, framing her face in her hands. She brushed at her wet cheeks. "Come and help me in the tent. We won't be leaving right now, sweetheart, but you can help me get prepared." Her words settled the child a little, and she brushed her lips across her forehead. "What should we call you? I can't keep calling you sweetheart."

It was odd how her own heart was calming a bit too as she spoke. Her fear should have been increasing but it was starting to abate. Did this mean the decision she was making was going to turn out to be the right one? She was still very afraid, but not as bad as she had been. Perhaps it was only because she was taking charge of her own life. Whatever it was, if today was the day that she was destined to die, then she would do so on her own terms, and not by running away.

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