

The Last Spirit Wolf

by Elena Norwood

Chapter 24

I open the door and Noah is laying on my bed, facing the ceiling and fast asleep. He's breathing softly, carelessly. My heart warms at the sight. He's wearing new clothes, no doubt procured by the warriors who probably have his same build; dark blue jeans and a simple black t-shirt. I had to admit, no one ever made simple look so good.

Not wanting to wake him, I tip toe to my bathroom and notice it's been used. He probably used my shower and changed right here, waiting for me.

I get the tub ready; a nice, hot bath with some healing herbs might be enough to ease the pain in my muscles. I don't heal as fast as the rest of the pack because I haven't connected to my wolf yet, so I've always had to be extra careful. That's what turned me into a good fighter; while others were careless about their injuries knowing they'd heal in a day's time, I had to be smarter and faster because I didn't have that same luxury. In fact, so many in training had been wounded to a point where it would be fatal to me. Training to them was just that, but to me, it was sometimes life and death.

Starting the shower, I take a good bath first, scrubbing every inch of my body, ridding it of all the filth and dried blood that I have accumulated through the day. I had plasters of blood, dirt, and goddess knows what else smeared all over me; my nose crinkling every time I had to be aggressive with the scrub to get rid of them.

When I'm done, I enter the bath and submerge. I sigh in contentment; this is exactly what I needed. I submerge everything but my face, being mindful of the stitches I have in my forehead.

I take this time to meditate as usual, only this time I'm trying to focus on the visions or... dreams... I had. They're more like a foggy memory now, and I can feel myself losing the memories of them as more time goes by. Maybe meditating on them, trying to recall them, will keep them fresh in my memory.

After about 20 minutes of my breathing exercises, it is clear that my mind is too tired for this right now. I can't remember anything significant, only snippets of what I

maybe saw. I know there is some great significance to this, but I can't bring the memories forward despite my best attempt.

Letting about 10 more minutes go by, I get out of the tub, towel myself dry, and get dressed in a red dress, traditional for wolf funeral ceremonies. It's a simple satin wrap dress with short sleeves, that reaches just below my mid-calf. I pause to look myself in the mirror, my fingertips going to my face.

I look pretty banged up. The still swollen stitches on my forehead do very little for my complexion, as I look like a sick mid-century orphan. My dark circles are more prominent than before, even if I did just wake up from a very long sleep. How long was I asleep for, anyway?

I quickly fix my hair, brushing through all the knots and tangled mess. It looks half decent when I'm done, at least its back to being straight.

I contemplate putting on makeup to disguise how bad I feel on the inside, but choose not to. This isn't a time to pretend to not feel like shit. All of the pack feels like shit too, just like me.

When I open the bathroom door, Noah is still asleep and I consider leaving him here for the entire ceremony. He's been through a lot already just these past few weeks, I'm sure he needs the rest.

As I'm looking at him and weighing my options, the ceremonial horn blows off in the distance, signaling that the Pyre Ceremony has begun.

Noah jolts up from the bed and is quick on his feet, his eyes are a tired red.

"Wha-what's that?" He's frantically trying to put his shoes on, "Another attack? Vera, where his eyes land on me.

We stay like this for a while, him staring at me. I can see the veins on his neck rapidly pumping blood; his jaw drops to the floor.

"Wow..." He finally manages when he composes himself.

I smile gently enjoying the overt compliment, but then again, he's my mate, he's not the best judge on how I actually look.

Taking a few steps, I reach the middle of the room and extend my hand towards him.

"Come on, we have a ceremony to get to. Don't bother with the shoes, you won't need them." Indeed, all of our ceremonies are done without any shoes on, connecting directly to the ground.

He takes my hand and pulls me towards him, embracing me gently but securely. I take a deep breathe, inhaling his scent and committing this feeling to memory. He smells like the forest, which doesn't make sense; no one should smell like the forest itself.

"I'm so sorry, Vera. For everything. If we hadn't come here, this would have never happened."

I hug him a little tighter.

"None of this is your fault, Noah. Not yours, not Eli's, not Lucas's. Those wolves died with honor, defending their own. That is what this ceremony is about, not placing blame."

I meant every word. None of the other wolves in the pack thought any different. The fact was, if that thing was out there was no guarantee that it wouldn't eventually come for us, too.

We stay like this for a while, both of us drawing comfort from each other and then, hand in hand, we walk out of the pack house, into the open field towards the pyre.