

# The Last Spirit Wolf

by Elena Norwood

## Chapter 25

-Vera-

The ceremony is set up with a pyre in the middle of a huge, open field, surrounded by trees. The moon today is especially bright and there are no clouds to dim her. The bodies of our fallen warriors are carefully wrapped in linens and placed in the pyre. There are far too many and my heart gets heavier and heavier as we approach.

Noah and I reach the Ceremony and most wolves already seem to be here. Notably, I cannot see Eli or Lucas amongst the crowd. I turn to Noah to ask but he seems to already know what I'm thinking.

"They'll be here. They just didn't know if our presence would be welcomed after everything that's happened."

Content with the answer, we deepen ourselves into the crowd, but same thing as before, everyone seems to make way for Noah and I.

We make it to one of the empty blankets on the grass and sit.

"This is interesting, observing wolves from up close." Noah breaks into my train of thought.

"How so?" I ask, genuinely curious. I hadn't thought about this before, but just as wolves are taught all sorts of horrible things about Lycans, it makes sense that they are taught the same of wolves.

"Well, first of all, the wolves I grew up reading about would've killed us first and asked questions later."

"Well, aren't you glad we aren't all monsters." I chime in, albeit sarcastically.

“Yes, yes I am.” He smiles at me and kisses the back of my hand. My stomach does a flip and I’m certain, If I was in healthier conditions, I’d be blushing. I swallow nervously but he doesn’t seem to catch it, he’s lost in his thoughts.

“Tell me what else isn’t like your books.” I ask.

He turns to look at me.

\*You know, Lycan society isn’t like this, at all. What wolves have... that camaraderie... that kinship... is what Lycans pretend to have, and they will claim you guys are the barbaric, back stabbing beasts. In reality, that’s most of the Lycans I know, specially the higher you go on the political food chain.”

“How does that work? Do you guys have an Alpha, or...?”

“We have a King that presides over a Council. Although “king” is a hefty title for that jackass,” he looks at me with a sly smile, “this stays between us, of course.”

“Of course.” I declare. It doesn’t go unnoticed how good it feels to be actually connecting to Noah, mate bond aside.

“King Alistair appointment himself after overthrowing the previous King. We are like wolves in that regard, we respect and follow power. But from what I heard; it wasn’t a clean fight. The previous king, King Alexander, was an elite fighter, an apex predator. There’s no way Alistair... King Alistair... could have won cleanly. So, in the end, he had to take over despite peoples’ protests.”

“What about the Council? Shouldn’t they have stepped in and removed him?”

“Should have, yes. But they were too vested politically. I’m not sure what it was, but King Alexander had done something unforgivable, apparently, Even the Council supported the coup.”

We stay silent for a minute, Noah consumed in his thoughts.

“You know what else is interesting?” He starts again, “we are sold this idea that everyone outside Lycan society is living out in the woods like actual animals. That everyone but Lycans are poor. But,” he extends his arm and motions towards the pack house, “this, all of this, is more advanced than anything we have back home.”

This confuses me because to my knowledge, we aren’t even the most technologically advanced pack in the region. “What do you mean with ‘advanced’ exactly?”

“The clinic for instance. It has advanced machines and decent medicine...”

I jab him in the ribs and he laughs.

“Say ‘decent’ referring to my clinic one more time and I’ll use you to start the pyre.” I glare at him just to land my point home. He’s cradling his ribs with one hand, still laughing.

“In all seriousness,” he continues, “all, absolutely all, of what we are sold about werewolves is a lie. I’m just wondering why that is.”

Again, we stay silent, both lost in our own thoughts.

The second horn blows, signaling it is time to light the pyre. It is fallen on a vast, green carpet of grass.

most solemn moment of the night. All wolves gather around tightly. We all look like red flowers

Sofia steps closer to the northern end of the pyre, a symbolic point for the warriors’ journey ahead; this is where the fire must begin. She’s wearing a magnificent red, long sleeve, off shoulder wrap dress, with a beautiful tail dragging behind her. The dress is as grand as her position entails.

As the prayer begins, we all lower our heads and Sofia utters the ancient chant in our minds. Once finished, she lowers the torch onto the pyre. It spreads quickly, making smoke rise up to the moon who watches us intently. There is no doubt in my mind that the Moon Mother is witness to our grief.

Everyone moves on about, talking to each other and remembering the fallen warriors. Kids are now allowed to come out and are running around back and forth, chasing each other and playing. To them, who don’t know any better, this is just a bonfire ceremony that allows them to stay up past their bedtime.

Noah and I have once again found ourselves on an empty blanket on the ground, only now I can spot Eli and Lucas making their way towards us.

When they reach us, they greet us and sit. I’m about to tease Eli about how his arm hasn’t fully healed yet, when I notice a warrior come up to us, kneel, and put a canine in front of me.

Then another warrior approaches and does the same thing, and then another, and then another. Soon, there is a line of wolves, warriors and non-warriors, waiting to do the same.

The three Lycans are eyeing me confused, but I'm too stunned to turn away.

This isn't part of this ceremony, but it is part of a ceremony, and it is the biggest honor in any pack. An honor only awarded to very few wolves, and all alphas at that.

I am being recognized as the pack's strongest warrior.