

The Last Spirit Wolf

by Elena Norwood

Chapter 52

Vera

The corridors, or rather tunnels, that Elden sent me on are endless. I'm sure they cover the entirety of the castle, just like back at the Pack House. It's unsurprising considering how many wars were fought, and lost, back in the age of witches. Tunnels like these were the difference between the life or death of an entire clan.

I think maybe 30 minutes have passed since I entered these tunnels and there is no sign of them ending. I'm beginning to think maybe Elden sent me through the wrong one, or purposefully deceived me.

No...it can't be. He showed as much disdain for King Alistair before, there is no reason for him to help him now.

Unless, he's using me as a bargaining chip to get something he wants, and right now he's using this time to negotiate.

I shake my head.

It's not normal for me to be paranoid, and right now all it's doing is messing with my head.

After walking some more, I smell something. It's the light scent of citrus that usually accompanies Elden's teas. I follow that scent, picking up my pace.

Suddenly, I'm at a wider portion of the tunnels, the scent of lemon intensifying.

I reach what appears to be a wall, keeping me from advancing further. I step closer, feeling the stone and realize it's the same material that I entered through; it's a fake wall.

Carefully, I push and pull on it, mimicking the motion Elden had done earlier to open the painting that revealed the tunnels. After fumbling around a bit. I hear the 'click' from before and carefully peek through; cold air hitting my face.

There seems to be no one around and I venture outside, carefully closing the door behind me. In this case, the door isn't a painting, but rather a portion of the castle's wall of stone that appears to have been hollowed out to make way for the tunnels.

The smell of lemon and other herbs hits me. I turn around to look at where that's coming from and realize it's a small greenhouse. Upon further inspection, this is certainly the back end of the castle. I can see the huge stone walls behind me, and no clear entrance.

I step closer to the greenhouse. It has been carefully tended to. There is everything from lemon grasses, to rosemary, to lemon trees and even a bee hive. It's a very complete garden and I have no doubt this is Elden's doing. This is where he gets everything he needs for his teas.

I decide to make myself a small herbal emergency kit. It might come in handy if I encounter any guards in the woods. If I get injured, I'll have to rely solely on myself to heal, and I won't have the benefits of modern medicine where I'm going.

Once I have everything I need. I take one last look around to make sure I'm here alone. I'm so far away from the main areas of the castle that I can't hear anything in the form of commotion, or people for that matter. There is an

eerie silence in this part of the castle. It's almost as if no one is looking for me, but I know better.

I take a quilt that I find on one of the ends of the greenhouse. The air is starting to get colder as nightfall approaches. The sun is barely providing any light at this point. I have to get going.

Putting the quilt over my head to disguise myself, I venture towards the forest, reaching the edge in about 20 minutes.

Up ahead, I can see the snow covered mountains looming in the horizon. I had already sensed that there was something off putting about this forest even from far way, but now that I am up close, the feeling is unmistakable. It's almost as if by looking at it, someone or something is looking back at me.

I turn back to look at the castle. There is indeed no one looking for me out here, for row. They have no reason to believe I have escaped, they're probably looking for me within the castle walls. Judging by how enormous the castle is, it'll take them all night to decipher that I'm not in it.

Taking a step forward into the woods, I have a sudden vision. It stops me in my tracks, but I can't make anything of it; they are all hazy, unfocused images, I take a few steps further in, my vision blurry due to the images in my head, but as I walk deeper into the forest, the vision gets clearer.

It's King Alistair and a woman in this exact forest. But something is different, King Alistair looks... younger? He even looks more muscular, much more like a warrior, than he does now. He had a long beard and deep black hair, he's smiling warmly at the woman.

I walk even further into the forest, chasing the vision. I focus on what they're saying, trying to read their lips, but it's impossible.

The woman is lean, with hair reaching all the way down her back. She has long, claw like nails, and is bare feet. They're talking very close to one another, almost as if I am witnessing something intimate between them. King

Alistair puts a hand on her arm and gently kisses her forehead; then, the woman disappears within the woods and King Alistair makes his way back to the castle.

Then, just as sudden, the vision is gone. My eyesight is back and I blink to adjust to the lack of light. The sun has now fully set and there is a full moon up in the sky. Judging from the position of the moon, I would say a couple of hours passed between my entering the forest and now.

I look around, thankfully the moon provides enough light for me to see clearly.

I'm lost.

I had kept walking through my vision, trying to get closer to the King and that woman, but all I managed to do is get lost. I have no notion of where I am, I don't even know where I am relative to the castle.

I crouch down, I'm hesitant to connect to this forest given the awful feeling it gives me, but I really have no other option now that I'm lost.

Without giving the unpleasant feeling much thought, I bury my hand deep into the soil. It feels rugged, dry, and unfertile. I concentrate on the trees, the wind, anything and everything I can gather. It takes me several minutes of this to finally get a sense of where I am; back home, the forest is so alive that it doesn't take me long, but here, everything just seems dead.

Finally, I envision the cabin and where I should go.

I begin walking, wrapping the quilt tightly around me. I'm getting closer to the snowy mountains, and the air carries the eminent chill of the snow.

It's not worse than the chill I feel in my heart as my mind inevitably starts thinking of Noah