

The Warrior's Broken Mate Chapter 27

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We would've loved to just stay in bed all day, doing absolutely nothing. After everything we'd been through recently, a lazy day sounded perfect—and honestly, I didn't feel like moving at all. But we both knew that wasn't an option. There was still an entire pack relying on us, and they'd gone without their Alpha for several days now.

Elias trusted his pack deeply, and he believed they'd managed fine in our absence. But even so, they still needed someone to lead them. Especially now, with everything my father had been throwing our way—on top of the fact that he had a dark witch backing him.

Most witches weren't dangerous, not inherently. But if you searched hard enough, you could find the ones who had strayed into dark magic. And unfortunately, that was exactly the type my father had aligned himself with.

When we finally pulled ourselves out of bed, Elias brewed some coffee while I went out to sit on the front porch. I watched as pack members moved about the area, busy with their routines. Each time someone passed, they dipped their heads respectfully toward me. It made me a little uneasy. I didn't want to be treated like I was above them. I'd already told them to call me Lyra—not Luna, not “your majesty,” nothing formal like that.

A few minutes later, Elias stepped outside and joined me, settling into the chair beside mine and resting his arm along the back.

“How does it get this hot here?” I asked, wiping at my forehead.

“It's because the pack's territory sits in a gully,” he replied. “The wind doesn't reach us very well. It's not exactly comfortable, but it's secure.”

“You don't need to justify it. I was just curious,” I replied. Just then, Beta Luke appeared, making his way toward us. He looked slightly uncertain, but we let him know it was okay to approach.

“I'm sorry to intrude,” he said, handing Elias a stack of messages, “but these came in while you were gone.”

Elias let out a long sigh as he glanced through the stack.

“Well, Lyra and I are staying with the pack for the foreseeable future,” Elias said, his tone firm, “It's the safest place for her right now. We still don't know what her father is planning next. So she stays here, and I stay with her. As for the messages—send some of our warriors to

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the packs requesting training help. And for the ones asking for backup, dispatch a few to scout the situation.”

“Yes, Alpha,” Luke said with a smile before heading off to carry out the orders.

After that, Elias gathered the warriors and explained what was going on. I watched, impressed as he issued each task and the warriors stepped forward on their own to volunteer. He didn’t have to pick anyone—they wanted to be part of the effort. It was honestly inspiring to witness.

“So,” I said, turning to him, “what’s your plan? Are you seriously going to stay here and babysit me the whole time?”

“No,” he replied, a grin tugging at his lips. “I was thinking we’d start your training today. Just

you and me—one-on-one.”

The idea made me smile. I really loved that suggestion. I wanted to start training. I wanted to finally learn how to defend myself—how to take care of myself. It was something I’d never really had the opportunity to do before. But even now, I could feel it: I was already stronger than I had been just a week ago.

I got my power when I turned sixteen, and I already felt a lot stronger than I ever had when I

win in a was still living with my father. But that didn’t necessarily mean I would be able to fight. I remembered going after that ogre, but I hadn’t done that on my own. The entire pack had attacked it together.

Once I got changed, Elias took me to the back of the cabin and we walked a little way until we reached a clearing, and that’s where he was going to begin training me. He had already told the pack and all the warriors to keep their distance from that clearing. From now on, it was our private place for training. The others still had different training areas around the territory, and they were fine using those.

We began with Elias showing me a few defensive techniques. These were meant to block attacks. We went through the movements side by side at first, and after that, we took our positions and Elias would pretend to attack me, and I had to stop him.

I was obviously terrible at the start, and the heat was brutal, which made everything feel harder. But I refused to give in. We kept practicing through the entire day, and Elias agreed to keep going as long as I made sure to drink water and stay hydrated.

When the sun was finally setting, we stopped for the day and headed back to the cabin.
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went straight into the bathroom and took a hot shower, letting the water run over every sore muscle. My body ached all over from the training. Then I came to the kitchen where dinner was already ready, and we sat down and ate. The food was amazing.

After dinner, I picked up the royal family history book and went out to the veranda since it was cooler than being inside. I opened it and continued reading.

So far, I'd only looked at the first family tree. The original royal parents had ten children. I wanted to read beyond that part because I needed to find out how a family that large ended up with just me. Something must have happened to all the others over time. I still hoped there might be cousins out there, but I doubted any of them were meant to lead. I believed I

was next in line because I was the one who got the power when I turned sixteen.

"Anything new?" Elias asked as he came to sit beside me.

"Well, I've learned that in the 1300s, the royal parents had ten kids. Now I'm starting to read about what happened to those ten. Especially the oldest one, since that would be the

ancestor I come from," I told him.

"Yeah. If you're meant to take the throne, then your line would come from the oldest of the oldest. If that makes sense," he said.

"It does to me," I replied.

I couldn't pronounce any of the names that the children had, so instead, I just referred to them using numbers. According to what I read, child number one ended up getting married and had seven children, child number two also got married and had eight children, child number three passed away at just four years old, child number four brought shame to the family and was banished, child number five got married and went

on to have ten kids, child number six also married and had four children, child number seven married but didn't have any kids, child number eight died when they were seven, child number nine died when they were twelve, and child number ten got married and ended up having twelve children of their

own.

"That's an insane number of descendants to go searching for," I said.

"Forty-one descendants coming from those ten royal children," Elias added, glancing over the figures. I tilted my head back and rested it on the backrest of the chair, already feeling overwhelmed by how massive of a task this was going to be.

I stayed in that position, lost in my thoughts about figuring out what really happened to my

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family, but my eyes began to grow heavy, and I could feel myself slowly drifting off to sleep. Elias must have noticed, because he gently picked me up and carried me back inside. I was still awake at that point, and I tucked myself in closer to his chest, but when I realized he was heading for my bedroom, I shook my head to stop him. I couldn't sleep in that room—there were just too many painful memories tied to it.

I felt his chest move and heard the sound of a quiet chuckle as he adjusted direction and

brought me into his room instead. He laid me down on his bed and left to take a shower, then

returned and got into bed beside me.

I really wanted to have a calm, dreamless sleep that night, but instead, I was jolted awake in a panic by Elias. He was already out of bed and standing above me, his eyes distant and glassy as he mind-linked with his warriors. His expression was tense, and it started to make

me anxious too.

"Take whatever you can and shove it in this bag. They've found us. We have to leave right now," Elias told me, handing over a bag. I jumped up immediately and threw together whatever clothes I could grab for both Elias and myself, but I also made sure

not to leave behind the two books I needed—they were vital to learning about my lineage.

When I stepped into the living room, I saw chaos unfolding outside the front the cabin in the middle of the village. Elias gave me a push in the opposite direction.

“Head into the forest and stay hidden. Wait for me there,” he instructed. So I ran through the back door and made straight for the edge of the woods.

Once I reached the trees, I leaned against one of them and turned to look back toward the village. I could see fires breaking out all over, flames consuming parts of the village, and I felt this urgent, almost painful desire to rush in and help. But I still hadn’t mastered fighting, nor had I figured out how to control my royal powers. If I went running in, I wouldn’t know what I was doing—and they’d likely get hurt trying to protect me. I couldn’t risk that. I wouldn’t let them sacrifice themselves for my sake.

“Hello, Lyra,” a voice said behind me, and I immediately froze where I stood.

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I slowly turned myself around, only to find the black witch standing right in front of me. She

was staring directly at me with a sinister grin playing on her lips, and I was doing my best not to tremble under her gaze. But the truth was, I was absolutely terrified. I was completely by myself, and Elias had no idea I was in danger—he believed I was safe while he focused on defending his pack. He didn’t realize that I wasn’t alone out here.

I had no idea what to say to this woman. I was fully aware of the kind of power she possessed, and I knew without a doubt that I couldn’t possibly win in a fight against her. She’d had years—maybe decades—to grow her abilities, and all I’d done with mine so far was protect Elias back at the cave that one time. I’d managed to throw up a shield around him, but I knew that alone wasn’t going to be enough to go against a witch like her.

She lifted her hand just a little, still wearing that same threatening smile, and I suddenly felt my throat tighten. Something invisible was wrapping around it, choking me, lifting me off the ground. I couldn’t breathe, and then, just as suddenly, she flung me backward with force. I slammed into a tree a few feet away before crashing down to the ground.

Gasping for air, I struggled to push myself up, but she made a slight motion with her hand, silently commanding me to stay down. I couldn’t move. My body wouldn’t

respond. I just lay there, looking up at her as she walked closer, examining me with a sideways glance.

“So, what exactly makes you so important? Why would your father go to such lengths to get you back?” she asked.

“You don’t know?” I rasped out, my voice hoarse. She tilted her head slightly, clearly intrigued. “Please. Enlighten me,” she said. But inside my head, thoughts were racing. Looking back on it, I wasn’t even shocked that my father hadn’t told her the truth. He’d only hired her to capture me—he didn’t care about the method, only the result. And of course, it made perfect sense that he’d kept my identity a secret; he wouldn’t want her trying to claim me for herself.

When I didn’t reply, she started to grow visibly frustrated. She lifted her hand again, and this time I saw a glowing red orb forming in her palm. In a panic, I instinctively raised my arms to defend myself. But the expected impact never came.

Instead, I heard her gasp in surprise, and when I opened my eyes, I saw a glowing blue shield had formed around me. It was covering my entire body. The witch actually took a step back, startled. She must not have known I had any powers either. Clearly, Thorne hadn’t told her a

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thing about me. And then, behind her, I heard a low growl. She turned quickly to find a massive black wolf standing there.

She glanced back at me for one final moment before she twisted away and vanished into a thick swirl of smoke. I let the shield drop, and Elias ran toward me in his wolf form. He lowered himself beside me, licking at my wounds, and within moments I could feel them

healing.

He shifted back into human form and slipped on a pair of shorts before helping me to my feet and pulling me into a hug. His eyes scanned over me, carefully checking to make sure I

wasn’t hurt.

“The pack is relocating to one of our other safe spots. We’ll catch up with them as soon as we can,” Elias told me. I gave a small nod in response. I was still frozen in shock, barely able to move or speak. Elias simply held onto me, not letting go.

We both knew we couldn’t stay here long in case the witch came back. Elias grabbed the bag I’d brought with me, and we began moving, heading into the woods and away from the burning village behind us.

I had no idea where this other safe location was. I didn’t know which direction we were going, or how long the journey would be.

We continued walking through the forest all through the night, and eventually, when daylight broke, a town came into view nearby. I was feeling more and more exhausted, but Elias never

let go

of

my hand. He stayed beside me the whole way, patient and calm.

As soon as we reached the edge of town, Elias spotted a motel and went inside to book a room for us to get some proper rest.

He brought me into the room, and after setting things down, said he was going to grab some food. But I quickly reached out and held his arm. I didn’t want to be left alone.

“Hey, it’s alright. I won’t be gone long. You’ll be safe here. No one knows our location,” Elias assured me. I gave him a small nod, then leaned forward and gave him a quick kiss. That made him smile before he walked out the door.

I stood there for a few seconds, scanning the room quietly, then went over to the bag and took out a change of clothes before heading to the bathroom.

I showered, scrubbed my hair clean, and got dressed in fresh clothes before sitting down on the bed and turning on the TV. I flipped through channel after channel, growing more anxious

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by the minute. I hated being there by myself. I kept wondering if the black witch would come after me again. I didn’t even know if she could already track me down.

I kept glancing out the window, over and over, until Elias finally returned with some food for the two of us. He laid everything out on the small table, and then pulled out two burner phones, handing one to me.

"What's this for?" I asked him.

"We both need a way to communicate, in case we ever get separated. It's just a precaution,"

he said.

"I've never owned a phone before," I admitted. So Elias started setting up his phone first, then did the same with mine. He saved his number in it, and also added Luke's number, just in

case I needed to contact either of them at any time.

Luke already had his own burner phone, but Elias hadn't gotten one until now. That had been his mistake during our last disappearance in the woods. He wasn't planning to repeat it. Though I reminded him that we wouldn't have had any signal out in the forest anyway.

He was surprised that I knew what cell phones were even though I had never owned one before. I reminded him that I was isolated, not ignorant. He laughed at that.

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austed. After we ate, Elias went to take a shower while I laid down on the bed, feeling When he came out, he climbed into bed beside me and wrapped his arms around me. He pulled me as close as he could, and I didn't resist. It didn't take long before I fell asleep. I didn't know how long we had been asleep, but when I woke up, I looked out the window and could tell it was late in the afternoon. I lay there for a while just staring outside before I finally rolled over and looked at Elias, who was still asleep.

He stirred slightly before opening his eyes and seeing me watching him. He gave me a smile.

"I could get used to this," he said. I smiled back, but my mind was spinning. I kept thinking about how many times Elias had saved me. How I knew he wouldn't abandon me, and how he'd left his pack to keep me safe, since a large group would have been too easy to spot. "You're the Alpha of an entire pack. Why did you leave them to come after me?" I asked.

"Because you're my mate. That's what we do. My warriors can take care of each other. You need me right now. They know what they're doing and where they're going," he replied.

“Alright,” I said.

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“Don’t feel bad that I left my pack for you. Any of them would have done the same if it was

their mate,” he added.

“I know I don’t understand everything. I’m clueless when it comes to mate bonds and all that,”

I said.

“But you’ve just turned 16. You can feel it now, right?” he asked.

“Yeah. I know we’re meant for each other,” I replied.

“Exactly. And that bond will only get stronger,” he said.

“Elias, I really want to learn how to fight. There are things I need to do, and I can’t do them by myself,” I said.

“And what is it that you need to do?” he asked, his eyes curious. I felt nervous about telling him, worried he’d say no. But I hoped he wouldn’t, because this meant a lot to me.

“I need to go back to my old pack. I have to find out what happened to my mother,” I said.

“You want to return there?” he asked, clearly surprised.

“Well, I don’t want them to know I’m there,” I clarified. He gave a nod, understanding what I

meant.

“You want to sneak back into your old pack to find out what happened to your mother,” he

said.

“Yeah. I know she didn’t die giving birth to me. My father killed her. I have to find out why and how, without anyone knowing I was there,” I said.

“Alright. First things first. You do need to become a warrior. If you’re a Vanguard, you’re a warrior. I was just waiting until you were ready. But I’m not going to train you with the others. I’ll train you myself,” he said.

“I don’t want to be treated differently by the other warriors,” I said.

“You already are. You’re their Luna. They already see you as their princess. Maybe even as their Queen. That part’s still unclear,” he said.

“Okay. When can we start training again?” I asked.

“As soon as we get to the next location. We’ll begin right away,” he said.

“Thank you,” I told him. He leaned over and kissed me. I didn’t pull away, and he soon rolled on top of me as he continued kissing me, his hand gliding down my waist.

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Elias and I were lying together in bed. I could feel his hands moving softly over me, and although he was being very gentle, I could also sense how excited he was becoming. That made me feel nervous and a little scared, so I stopped him from going any further.

I quickly sat up and couldn’t bring myself to look at him. I kept saying sorry again and again. I just wasn’t

ready for things to go that far between us. But he sat up behind me, rested his chin on my shoulder, and

told me not to apologize.

He told me there was nothing for me to feel sorry about. He admitted that he shouldn’t have assumed I was ready. He said he wouldn’t assume again and would let me decide when I was ready to take that step. I just nodded.

We stayed in the motel for the rest of that night, but the next morning, we checked out and headed to a

diner in town for some breakfast.

We chose a booth by the front window, and after we sat down, Elias went to use the bathroom. I was

reading the menu when I noticed two guys around my age with a rough look come in and sit at the booth

behind me.

"Hi there," one of them said to me.

"Hello," I replied over my shoulder, then quickly turned back to the menu.

"We haven't seen you around before. Are you new around here?" he asked.

"Just passing through," I answered.

"That's a shame. There's a party tonight. We'd love for you to come," he said.

"Sorry. We're leaving right after breakfast," I told him.

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"And who's we?" the other guy asked.

"My boyfriend and I," I said. I was a bit surprised at how naturally the word boyfriend came out. I mean, he

basically was my boyfriend, but I'd never said it out loud before. It felt a little strange to use the title.

"Well, maybe he'll want to stick around too," the second guy added.

"He doesn't," Elias said from in front of me. The two guys looked up at him, taking in his size and the

strong muscles that marked him as a werewolf warrior. And with the glare he gave them, they backed off immediately. They could tell he was ready to take them down just for speaking to me. So they said nothing else to me, turned around in their booth, and started talking to each other instead. Elias slid back into the

seat next to me.

I just smiled at him, and when the waitress came over, we gave our breakfast order. As we waited, I looked outside to see what was happening on the street.

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“How far is it to where we’re going?” I asked.

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“It’s still a bit of a hike. Sorry about that. We had to keep the locations pretty far apart to make sure no one

could track them,” he explained. I nodded, understanding.

After we finished our breakfast, Elias paid the bill and we left the diner, walking through the rest of the

town. People were staring at us a lot, which made me feel a little uncomfortable. But Elias told me it was

just because we were strangers in a small town where everyone knows each other. They didn’t recognize

us, and Elias’s size probably didn’t help. It was hard for him to blend in.

Once we got out to the highway, we headed straight into the woods again so we wouldn’t be easily

spotted from the road. And if we got attacked, we’d have the upper hand. I was feeling more rested now

and had no trouble keeping up with Elias, though I didn’t know how long that would last.

I started to think of this as the start of my training. These long hikes through the forest. And when I told

Elias that, he actually thought it was a great idea. It was a form of training, and at the same time, we were

making our way to where we needed to go. I was getting a bit of physical activity, which I’d need for

training anyway.

Elias made sure to keep holding my hand the whole time. He didn’t want to let go in case we got

separated. And in these woods, that could happen easily—they were dense and tough to navigate.

We had been walking for close to three hours when I began to hear something in the distance. I came to a

stop, and Elias halted beside me. It felt strange to me, because I hadn't had any werewolf abilities until I

turned sixteen—just a few days ago. But now, I was hearing everything. I had the enhanced senses, like

sharper hearing and better vision. I could tell I was stronger than I used to be, though still nowhere near as

powerful as Elias or the rest of his pack.

So when I suddenly stopped in the middle of the forest, Elias grew worried.

"I hear something," I said.

"Crap," he muttered under his breath.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I've been hearing it too, for a little while now. I was hoping you hadn't noticed," he admitted.

"Someone's following us, aren't they?" I asked him.

"Yeah. But I have no idea who it is," he replied. I stood there, staring toward the source of the sound, but

Elias kept nudging me to keep moving. He didn't want us to stay in one place and make ourselves easy

targets.

"Elias, if we keep going like this, we'll end up leading them straight to the new location. We have to draw them away," I said. He looked at me like what I'd said had just registered. He realized that I was right—it meant taking a different path and extending our trip, but we couldn't risk bringing the followers to the safe

spot.

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“Alright,” he said. Then he turned and began heading back toward the highway, and once we reached the road, we stayed on it for about thirty minutes before we found a dirt road and followed it instead.

We eventually came across a farmhouse and looked around to see if anyone was nearby, but it seemed

abandoned. I walked over to a faucet near the house and got a drink from it. I was incredibly thirsty, and

we didn’t have any supplies with us.

We were far from the forest now. Instead, we were surrounded by open farmland, which meant there

weren’t any good hiding spots for whoever might be tailing us. It made it harder for them to sneak up on

us, though it also left us exposed. They could spot us more easily—but at least we’d be able to see them

coming too.

As we kept going along the dirt path, I started to hear the sound of heavy paws hitting the ground. I wasn’t

the only one—Elias kept glancing behind and around us. The steps sounded heavy, like they belonged to

something huge, but we couldn’t see anything. We could hear it, but even in this open space, nothing was

visible. Elias held my hand tighter and we quickened our pace. He wanted to put more space between us

and whatever was behind us. But no matter how fast we walked, it didn’t help. So we broke into a run

down the dirt road.

We had already passed the farmhouse, and there weren’t any other buildings in sight where we could take

cover. Not that Elias would’ve gone into one anyway. He wouldn’t risk humans getting caught in a

werewolf conflict. One of the most important rules among werewolves was that humans were never to

find out about them. And we definitely weren't allowed to involve them in anything unless a werewolf was

mated to a human, which was extremely rare.

Whatever was following us was getting closer—we could both tell. It was directly ahead, on the path. But

we still couldn't see it. Elias turned to look at me, confusion and concern written all over his face. He was

scared I'd get hurt. He moved to shield me, pushing me behind him, though I could still see around his

body.

Then, all of a sudden, a witch's cloak was pulled back—and we finally saw the creature charging at us. It

was only about ten feet away now, and it wasn't a werewolf. It was bigger. A lot bigger. And far more

terrifying. Something I'd only ever read about in books. With one big difference—it was a shifter, just like

us, but definitely not a werewolf.

It was a freaking werebear.

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I was standing behind Elias, and when I saw the werebear charging at us, my eyes nearly bulged out of my

skull.

Elias shoved me back and stepped forward toward the beast so he could shift—and once he had, it was

clear he was only about half the size of the bear. But that didn't stop him. He was ready to fight with every

ounce of strength he had.

I was terrified for him. I truly believed that thing might kill him. I had no idea how Elias was going to

survive. But still, he rushed straight at the bear, and the bear let out a huge roar in anticipation, like it had

been waiting for this moment—like it wanted it.

The two of them collided with a bone-shaking crash, and they instantly began tearing at each other—

clawing, biting, trying to land a fatal hit. The bear managed to rake Elias across his side with one of its

massive claws, and Elias collapsed with a pained whimper.

Then the bear turned its gaze directly on me. Elias struggled to rise—doing everything he could to keep the

monster away from me—but he was too wounded to do anything effective.

I started inhaling slow, deep breaths, trying to calm myself down. I had to lower my heart rate, to focus on

what I needed to do. I was lucky the bear was stalking toward me and not outright charging, because if it

had been, I'd already be dead. I was still figuring out how to do this, and the panic wasn't helping.

But then I felt the crack and shift of my bones, fast and fierce, and in the next heartbeat, I was standing firmly on the ground in my wolf form—my pure white fur gleaming as I stood face to face with the bear.

The bear hesitated when it saw me. It stared, almost like it was surprised by what it saw.

I didn't know what went through its head, but something about seeing me gave it pause. And in that

moment, the only real difference between us was our size. I could see Elias out of the corner of my eye, still struggling to get to his feet, blood pouring from his wounds.

My eyes locked on the bear, and rage surged through me. Pure, unfiltered hate for what it had done to Elias—trying to kill him just to get to me. And then something strange started happening. I felt myself

rising, like I was lifting off the ground. It was weird.

But when I looked down, I realized I wasn't floating—my feet were still touching the earth. Only now, they

were much larger than before.

I looked ahead again, and I was nearly face to face with the bear. I was almost its size now. I didn't know

what had just happened, but I was grateful for it. Maybe now, I actually stood a chance.

I wasn't a trained fighter—I knew that. Which meant I had to use every dirty trick I could think of. While the bear was still stunned by my transformation, I struck first—slashing it across the chest just beneath the neck. Blood spurted out instantly.

The bear let out a furious roar and took a swing at me, but I managed to dodge aside. I circled to its flank,

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leapt up, and climbed onto its back. It started bucking wildly, thrashing and shaking to get me off, but I dug my claws deep into its shoulders, causing it more pain—and I wasn't about to let go.

Elias finally got back to his feet. While I kept the bear distracted, he seized the opportunity and lunged for its throat. He clamped down hard and didn't stop until he tore out a massive chunk—blood gushing

everywhere.

It took a few moments, but at last, the bear collapsed. Once it was dead, its body shifted back into its

human form.

I walked over and stood beside Elias, and he looked up at me—since I was now nearly twice his height—

and I had no clue what to say or how to explain any of it. I didn't know what had happened to me, or why I was suddenly the size of a damn bear.

We shifted back and quickly got dressed right where we were.

"What do we do with him?" I asked, glancing at the dead, naked man lying there in the middle of the dirt

road.

"Nothing. We leave him. There's nothing else we can do," Elias said.

"But if humans find him, DNA tests will prove he's not human," I pointed out.

"That's what the werewolf council is for. They'll take care of that when the time comes. They're always on

top of that stuff," Elias replied. Then he took my hand, and we ran up to the next farmhouse and used their

hose to wash all the blood off us. We made sure to get out before the owners noticed—we really didn't

want to have to explain the blood. They'd probably think we were killers or something.

But once I shifted back into human form, I was the same size as before. I didn't understand how any of

this worked.

As we started walking again, I noticed Elias was unusually quiet, clearly deep in thought about what he'd

just witnessed. I assumed he might be upset with me over everything that happened.

I thought maybe he was angry—like he didn't want to be around me anymore. He wasn't acting like himself,

and I hadn't done anything wrong. I just started to get scared he might blow up at me.

I didn't have the courage to bring it up myself, so I waited for him to say something first.

When he finally did speak, I flinched—it was so sudden that it startled me. He looked concerned when he

noticed me flinch as he began talking.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” he asked.

“You’re mad at me. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for that to happen. I don’t even know how it happened...” I began to explain. But he placed his hands gently on my arms and looked into my face—even though I had turned it away from him.

“Hey, I’m not mad at you. I could never be mad at you for that. I’m just confused. I was going to ask how you did it, but you already said you don’t know—and that’s okay,” he said softly.

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“You’re not mad that I helped kill the bear?” I asked.

“Of course not. Why would I be mad about that?” he replied.

“Girls aren’t supposed to be fighters,” I said quietly.

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“That was how things worked in your old pack. Not in mine. Every girl in my pack is a fighter. And you will be too. I’m proud of what you did. You didn’t even hesitate when you went after that thing,” he said.

“I was scared. But it was going to kill you,” I said.

“You did that—to save me?” he asked, stunned.

“Yeah. I didn’t want it to hurt you,” I said. And he pulled me into a hug.

“Your father really messed you up. And I will kill him for that. But everything else—you never need to worry about making me mad. If we’re under attack and you feel like you need to fight to survive, then you fight

with everything you’ve got. Got it?” he asked. I nodded in response.

“Alright. We should get moving. Before someone finds that guy and starts asking questions,” he said.

“Okay,” I answered.

So he took my hand again, and we began cutting through the field, trying to get ourselves back on track toward where we were supposed to be heading. Elias seemed quite different now. I could tell he wasn't angry with me anymore, and that alone made me feel relieved.

We still had to find our way back to the correct path that would lead us to the new location, and Elias was wounded from the fight with the bear. He kept insisting that we continue walking, but I wanted to stop and make sure he was okay. I wanted to be sure his injury wasn't too serious.

Eventually, I convinced him to rest, and I lifted up his shirt to inspect his back shoulder. Some skin was hanging loose, though the bleeding had stopped, which was a good sign. I gathered some leaves that had a bit of mud on them and pressed them over the wound.

I only did that to help keep the skin in place so that it could heal better. If the skin is left flapping like that,

it'll take much longer to recover.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Elias asked.

"Well, the leaves and mud are basically all we've got around here. I'm just hoping you don't get an infection

from it. But otherwise, I know we need to keep the skin held together—that's something I picked up from

some medical books I've read," I said.

"You've read medical books?" he asked.

"I've read a lot of different books," I replied.

"Wow. That's impressive," he said.

Once we got up and started walking again, we eventually made our way back to the road. We followed it

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until we reached the next town, where we were able to stop and pick up a few supplies. Then we sat in the

park and had something to eat.

Luke finally called Elias to ask where we were, and Elias had to explain that we were traveling on foot and

had run into a few issues. But we'd get there as soon as we could. Luke had to keep an eye on the pack

until we arrived, and he agreed to do that.

"Are we staying here for the night, or are we still going to keep going after this?" I asked.

"I think it's best if we keep moving. We need to put more distance between us and that bear. I don't know

how many others might be in the area," he said.

"You told me that bears aren't common around here," I said.

"Yeah, regular bears aren't. But that was a werebear. They have their own packs. And if one of them was

nearby, then the whole pack might be. They usually stay to themselves—I don't know why that one

attacked. They're typically peaceful toward werewolves, but something about that one wasn't right. So we

need to keep going just in case more like him are around," he said.

"Alright. But people are going to drive down that road and see a dead man lying in the middle of the dirt

road," I said.

"I know. I wish they didn't have to witness that. But there's nothing we can do about it now. Besides, when

they see the body, they'll think he was killed by wild animals. That'll only confuse them and make them

start searching for animals, not for us," he said.

We sat there eating for a while, and I noticed Elias scanning the area, looking around like he was starting

to feel uneasy again. Then he quickly packed up the food, saved the rest for later, and we got up and continued on our way.

He didn't say what was bothering him. But I had a strong feeling we were being watched.