



66 66- Jai Was Waiting

Phoenix 1

It had been one week, and I was still crashing in this tiny hut with Kiki. She was a lively woman, super fun to be around.

I stepped outside, squinting against the sun. Kiki must be in the little garden that was right behind the hut.

I walked around the hut and found her crouched low with her sleeves rolled up, digging around a patch of tiny green plants.

Her hands were covered in dirt, and a little smudge was there on her cheek, too.

Cute!

"Hey," I called out softly, walking over.

She looked up, and a smile broke on her lips when she saw me, "Hey, sleeping beauty. I was just getting some wild mint. Wanna help?"

With a small smile, I sat on a flat rock nearby, "Nah, I'd prefer watching you doing it."

"Brat!" She threw some mud at me and got busy with her work.

This was such a good place. I was almost considering living here.

Different thoughts were cooking in my mind. I wanted to ask Kiki if she could keep me as her employee in her bakery, which was in a nearby human town.

Or I could take care of her hut in her absence. I didn't want anything in return. Just a roof over my head and some food.

Kiki kept talking to me about her love for plants and baking, "It's therapeutic," she straightened up a little to look at me, "What do you do when you're upset?" The question caught me off guard.

I chuckled nervously and shook my head, "Nothing special," and then I decided to be brave. I needed to tell her that I wanted her help.

But her next words made me freeze, "When are you going back to your pack?"

I blinked as I felt my chest tightening. For a second, I forgot how to breathe.

"I ... I..." I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. I wasn't ready for this question. How did she know that I was a werewolf?

She finally turned to look at me. There was this usual calmness on her face. She scanned my face, and I could tell what she might be seeing there.

Paleness. Fear.

"Phoenix..." she kept her voice gentle, "Someone is waiting for you there. Anxiously!"

Uh huh. She must be talking about Jai.

"You knew?" I whispered, "H...how do you know that I'm a werewolf?"

Kiki tilted her head and chuckled softly. The corners of her mouth lifting ever so slightly, "Wrong question, Phoenix," she stood up, brushing her knees, "I might be a human, but I knew who you were the moment I found you. And then..." she shrugged, "The first thing you asked after getting consciousness was if I was a Moon Goddess. That confirmed it for me."

I didn't know where the tears came from. One second, I was holding it together, and the next, my face was wet.

"I ... I can't go back... Th...they don't need me, Kiki," I muttered more to myself and then looked into her eyes, "Why can't I stay here... with you? Without a wolf, I'm almost a human."

Goddess. She was already shaking her head.

"Please, Kiki," I could feel my voice cracking, "I already became dead for a Lycan pack. Maybe the only way to survive is by staying dead to the werewolves, too."

I was terrified. What if she pushed me away, too?



After her rejection, I'd be nothing.

She didn't even flinch and walked right up to me, holding my shoulders, "I'm staying here because of you. My husband is waiting for me back in town. I have to go."

I tried to speak, but she raised her index finger to stop me, "No," she said quietly, but with steel in her voice, "You're not coming with me. And you know why."

My lips trembled a little. Wasn't it too soon?
Didn't I deserve some more happiness in life? 1

"Kiki!" I quickly wiped my cheeks, "I ... I have been dying and running away to look for one thing. Acceptance."

She held my gaze and clicked her tongue inside her mouth. Disappointment was evident on her face, "You don't need to *die* to feel seen, Phoenix!"

Holding my hand, she brought me inside the hut and offered me some water. After I took the first sip, she sat across from me at the small wooden table, "I've seen you, girl," she stated gently, "The way you train in the mornings ... those aren't some mere stretches, girl. Those are fighter moves. I can see that spark in you."

My eyes snapped up in shock. Stretches? I was a warrior who was about to become the head

warrior of her pack.

"There is someone who needs you there. In the packhouse. He's waiting for you. All those who failed you. Why not go back and fight them? Why give them an easy victory? After making sure that you're dead, they might be celebrating right now."

Kiki left her seat and quietly crouched down in front of me, "Phoenix. You are not a common girl. Don't you understand that all those who were trying to get rid of you ... they were scared of you. You lost your beauty," she pointed towards my scarred face, "Still they seem intimidated by you. You are much more than those ashes, Phoenix. If you want, you can come and visit my bakery. But please..." she squeezed my hands, "Come to me as a conqueror. Not as someone who only wants shelter in life. Life is much more than a roof and a piece of bread."

I closed my eyes and waited for those last tear drops to fall out of my eyes.

Surprise! There was none.

Maybe Kiki was right. It was high time that I stopped running from my problems and started facing them. As a warrior, I might have learned how to fight, but I still had to learn how to take a stand for myself.

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If I were a warrior, I wouldn't need anyone's protection or my pack's approval.

All I needed was some confidence.

Because somewhere out there, Jai was waiting for me.

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