

Prologue

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, but still some time, on a different timeline where werewolves roamed the world...

Beautiful she-wolves in fairytales are as common as sand on the beach. Fair skinned milkmaids rub shoulders with starry-eyed princesses and, in fact, counting two eyes in each bright-eyed she-wolf would result in a whole galaxy of twinkling stars.

That sparkle makes it all the more sad that real life she-wolves rarely live up to their fictional counterparts. They have yellowing teeth, or spotty skin. They have the shadow of a mustache, or a nose so big that a mouse could ski down it.

Of course there are pretty ones, loads of them. But even they are prone to all the awws that it is normal to have.

In short, it's a rare she-wolf who actually outshines the moon. Let alone all that business about pearly teeth, the voice of a lark, and a face so beautifully shaped that angels would weep with envy.

Mirabelle Fennelcroft had all of the above, except perhaps the claim to lark-like melody. Still, her voice was perfectly agreeable, and she had been told that her laughter was like the chiming of golden bells and she had been praised on several occasions for her singing voice too.

Without even glancing at the mirror, she knew that her hair was shining, her eyes were shining, and her teeth... well, not exactly shining, but they were quite white and perfectly straight.

She was just the sort who could drive a stable boy to heroic feats, or a prince to less intrepid acts such as whacking through a bramble patch merely to give her a kiss. None of which changed a basic fact:

As of yesterday, she was unmarriageable, unwanted... no longer desirable as a mate.

The problem had to do with the nature of kisses, and what kisses are thought to lead to. Though perhaps it's more accurate to point to the nature of princes. The prince in question was Prince Frederick Fenwick-Talon.

He had kissed Mirabelle more than once; in fact, he had kissed her many times by now. And he had again and again declared his love for her, not to mention thrown strawberries at her bedchamber window late one night... which had made an awful mess and made the gardener rather furious when he discovered.

The only thing he hadn't done was offer his hand in marriage... he had not made her his princess.

"It's a shame I can't marry you," he had said apologetically, when the scandal broke the evening before. "We lycan royalty, you know... can't do everything we would like. My father is slightly deranged on the subject. Really, it's most unfortunate. You must have heard about my first marriage; that one was annulled because my Papa decided Augusta wasn't good enough, and she was the daughter of a high Alpha."

Mirabelle was not the daughter of a high Alpha; her father was an Alpha, but not a very well-connected one. Not that she had heard of the prince's first marriage. Everyone who had watched her flirting with him in the last few months had unaccountably forgotten to tell her that he was apparently prone to courting those he couldn't... or shouldn't... marry.

The prince had bowed sharply, turned, and abruptly left the ballroom, withdrawing to his father's Castle... or wherever it was that rats went when the ship sank.

This had left Mirabelle alone but for her angry chaperone and a ballroom of people, a circumstance that led her to quickly realize that a great many she-wolves... maidens and matrons in London were eagerly... if not gleefully... certain that she was a hussy of the first degree.

Within moments of the prince's retreat, not a soul would meet her eyes; she was faced with a sea of turned backs. The sound of upper-lip tittering spread all around her like the hissing of a gaggle of geese preparing to fly north. Though, of course, it was she who had to fly... north, south, it didn't matter as long as she fled the scene of her disgrace.

The unfair thing was that she wasn't a hussy. Well, not more than any she-wolf bowled over by a prince.

She had enjoyed snaring the greatest prize of them all, the blond and handsome lycan prince. But she hadn't had any real hope that he would marry her. And she certainly would not have given her virginity to a prince without having a ring on her finger and the approval of the king.

Still, she had considered Frederick a friend, which made it all the more painful when he didn't pay her a call the morning following her humiliation.

Frederick wasn't the only one. In fact, Mirabelle found herself staring out of a front window of her townhouse, the better to convince herself that no one was coming to call. No one. Not a soul.

Ever since she had debuted a few months earlier, her front door had been the portal to a true fairytale, meaning her dowered, delectable self. Young men pranced and trotted and strolled up that path, leaving cards and flowers and gifts of all kinds. Even the prince had lowered himself to make four morning calls, an unheard-of compliment.

But now... that path was nothing more than a row of flagstones shining in the sunlight.