

The Lost Lycan Princess

Chapter 5 The Council's Shadow

The return to the pack was nothing like their journey out.

Leaving the ruins, Kael kept himself half a step ahead of Lina—as if shielding her from every shadow, every shifting branch. Riven walked behind them, blade in hand, scanning the trees with a suspicion that bordered on fear.

No one spoke.

Not about the witch.

Not about the rune.

Not about what the witch had implied about Kael and Lina's wolves.

Lina's mind churned the entire way back, tangled with too many truths that refused to settle.

Her father had made a pact.

She had been used to anchor a curse.

The Council feared her.

And someone—someone—had left a message for her beneath the ruins.

Her lycan paced, restless and uneasy, every instinct sharpened by the witch's last warning.

Find the truth buried in your own house...

Her house was gone. Burned. Buried.

Unless—

Unless the witch had meant something else. Something she hadn't seen yet.

The fortress walls rose in the distance, tall and imposing, the Arden crest carved deep into the stone above the gate. Wolves patrolled the ramparts, their eyes sharp as Kael approached.

At the sight of their Alpha returning followed by Lina, every guard stiffened. Whispers broke out along the wall, quick and sharp.

Riven muttered, “Great. The whole place is going to be buzzing.”

“They already were,” Kael replied curtly. “They’ll get over it.”

But Lina could feel it—the weight of a hundred eyes on her, confusion blending with wariness, curiosity with unease. She had expected it. Wolves were creatures of order. Routine. Boundaries. A girl walking out of a cursed forest shattered all three.

The gates opened, metal grinding echoing through the courtyard.

Kael walked straight ahead, expression carved from ice, ignoring the stares. Lina followed, her back straight, refusing to let fear or anger show. Her lycan watched everyone, assessing threats, sorting scents.

Young males paused in their training to stare. A group of older warriors whispered behind their hands. Servants scurried out of the way, some bowing their heads instinctively—whether in respect or fear, Lina couldn’t tell.

And then—

A voice cut across the courtyard, sharp as broken glass.

“Alpha.”

Kael’s shoulders stiffened.

Lina’s pulse skipped.

Striding toward them was a man dressed in charcoal robes embroidered with silver thread. His hair was white—not with age, but with cold precision—and his eyes were a pale, icy blue.

The moment those eyes landed on Lina, her wolf recoiled.

Council.

He stopped in front of Kael, offering a shallow bow that held no real respect.

“Alpha Arden,” he said smoothly. “You’ve returned earlier than expected.”

Kael didn’t bow. “Councilor Theron.”

The man's gaze flicked over Lina again, lingering on her bare feet, her wild hair, the faint glow in her eyes.

"And this," Theron said, voice dripping disdain, "is what you chose to bring into the heart of our territory?"

Kael's jaw flexed. "She is under my protection."

Theron's brows lifted, surprise flickering in those cold eyes. "Your protection? Interesting choice of words."

Riven stiffened behind Lina but remained silent.

Theron turned his attention fully to her now. He studied her like one might study an unfamiliar animal—curious, cautious, and prepared to kill it if necessary.

"What is your name, girl?" he asked.

Lina held his gaze. "Lina."

"That is all?"

"It's enough," she said.

A thin smile curved his lips. "We shall see."

Kael stepped forward, subtly placing himself between Theron and Lina. "The Council doesn't need her name right now."

Theron's brows arched. "Does the Council not? Or does the Alpha not?"

Lina felt the ripple of Kael's irritation like heat in the air.

"What happened at the ruins?" Theron pressed. "Our scouts reported... unusual magical signatures."

"We will discuss it soon," Kael said tightly. "Privately."

Theron's gaze flicked between them, suspicion sharpening. "Very well. I will convene the Council at twilight."

He turned to leave—but paused one last time, eyes settling on Lina. "Let me offer you a word of advice," he said softly. "Strangers who enter this fortress under mysterious circumstances rarely remain long."

Lina's lycan rose like a storm behind her ribs.

Threat.

Warning.

Eliminate.

But she only tilted her head and answered just as softly:

“Then I suppose it’s fortunate I don’t plan to remain a stranger.”

Theron’s smile vanished.

He turned sharply and strode across the courtyard, his robes billowing behind him like a shadow that refused to dissolve.

Riven exhaled hard. “I hate that man.”

“You hate everyone,” Kael muttered.

“Fair,” Riven admitted.

Kael turned to Lina. “Come with me.”

He led her inside, through hallways lined with stone wolves carved into the walls, their eyes glinting like living creatures. The fortress felt different now—less imposing, more like a maze built from secrets and watching eyes.

“Who was that?” Lina asked quietly.

“Theron,” Kael said. “High Councilor.”

“And he hates me.”

“He hates anything he can’t control.”

Lina’s mouth curved. “Then he must love you.”

Kael shot her a look—but there was a flicker of humor, brief and fleeting, in his gaze.

They reached a door with iron hinges and a carved wolf crest. Kael opened it, revealing a large chamber with high windows and shelves of old books. A map of the Lycan Dominion hung on the wall, marked with red pins and charcoal notes.

“This is my strategy room,” he said. “We won’t be overheard here.”

Riven stepped inside behind them, closing the door firmly. The moment it clicked shut, Kael turned on Lina.

“What exactly did the witch mean when they said your father held the border together?”

Lina wrapped her arms around herself, feeling suddenly cold.

“My father,” she said slowly, “made a pact with magic older than our tribe. Older than the Dominion. It was... protection magic. A shield. The forest border was the anchor.”

Kael’s gaze sharpened. “Protection from what?”

Lina swallowed. “Things that move between worlds. Things that hunt beyond the Veil. My father guarded the boundary to keep them out.”

Riven rubbed a hand over his face. “So you’re saying... the forest wasn’t cursed to trap you. It was holding something back.”

“Yes.”

“And when you left,” Kael said, connecting the pieces, “the border collapsed.”

Lina nodded.

Silence wrapped around them.

Kael paced slowly across the room, his steps heavy with thought. “If the Council learns any of this, they’ll want to imprison you. Control you. Or kill you outright.”

Riven added grimly, “Probably all three. In that order.”

Lina’s stomach twisted.

“I won’t let that happen,” Kael said.

The words were quiet, but they hit her like a physical impact.

“You don’t even know what I am,” she whispered.

Kael stopped pacing. “I know enough.”

“What do you know?” Her voice was soft, trembling despite her will.

He met her gaze, wolf rising behind his eyes. “That you didn’t ask for any of this. That you are the last Valerius royalty. That the border fell because destiny finally let you free. And that...” His breath hitched almost imperceptibly. “My wolf recognizes you.”

Lina's heartbeat stumbled.

Riven's eyes widened. "Alpha—"

Kael shot him a sharp look, silencing whatever protest he was about to voice.

Lina felt her lycan press against her skin, restless and wild, responding to Kael's presence with an undeniable pull.

She swallowed hard. "Mine does too," she admitted.

The air shifted between them. Heavy. Electric.

Kael took one step closer, stopping just a breath away. His scent wrapped around her—pine, steel, heat. Her lycan leaned forward instinctively and just like that she opened up. Her lycan met his wolf.. and the magic that happened was just as strong as the one in the ruins..

Riven cleared his throat loudly. "If you two are done staring into each other's souls, we need to talk strategy before Theron manipulates the entire Council against us."

Kael didn't move.

Lina forced herself to blink, to step back a fraction. The air cooled, though her pulse didn't.

"Riven's right," she said quietly. "Theron already knows I'm dangerous to him. If he learns what I am—what my bloodline can do—he'll attack before I can defend myself."

Kael nodded slowly. "Then we give him nothing."

"And if he pushes?" Riven asked.

Kael's expression hardened. "Then he learns what happens when he pushes an Alpha."

And for the first time since stepping out of the forest, Lina felt something she hadn't felt in three hundred years.

Not fear.

Not anger.

Safety.

A fragile, shaky thing—but real.

Kael turned back to her. “Until we understand exactly what the curse was holding back, and why the witch warned us—”

He paused.

“You will stay close to me.”

Lina raised a brow. “Close... how close?”

“Close enough,” he said, a hint of heat flickering in his eyes, “that if the Council tries something, I can stop it.”

Her lycan purred.

Riven groaned. “The moon help us.”

Kael ignored him.

“Lina,” he said quietly, “you’re not a prisoner anymore. But you’re not safe either. So until we figure out what you truly are to this kingdom—”

He held out his hand.

“—you stay with me.”

Lina stared at his hand.

Strong. Steady. Marked with scars that told stories she didn’t know yet.

Her lycan whispered one word.

Ours.

She placed her hand in his.

Kael’s fingers closed around hers with a certainty that sent a shiver through her entire body.

Riven muttered, “And this is exactly the kind of disaster the Council specializes in.”

Kael didn’t let go.

“Let them try,” he said.

And Lina realized—

For the first time since walking out of the cursed forest—
she wasn't walking alone.