

CH 6

It was a long journey on that winding path up into the mountains, and they did not rest until after dark that night, where there was snow falling quite heavily around them, and she had to admit she was a bit on the cold side. Varn had told her it would be cold, and he'd not been wrong. Ryder had pulled that cloak around her to help keep her warm.

Both Varn and Tony had stopped to pull out a coat each from their own packs, pulled on heavy-looking winter coats, just as the sun had started to go down, and the snow had hurried about them gently. Tony had looked up at the sky and murmured 'Best rug up now before that really starts.' And they had done so.

There were more rogues to deal with on their way to a small, cleared area that they used for a camp site, and every time they came across rogues, she was told the same thing: stay there and don't move. She did as she was told, sometimes it was more than two, and they always kept her between them.

Ryder could see as she looked around the campsite that this place was obviously their regular campground for this trip to the portal and back. There was a small rustic set up here, a re pit already built out of big rocks, and a stack of wood and kindling already chopped up and sitting inside a small wooden lean to shelter, which she supposed was built to help protect them from the winds and falling snow during the winter trips.

She helped to start the re and clear the snow from the ground inside the lean to, though they had showed her how to push it all to the side, pack it hard to form a windbreaker from the weather, leaving open only a small area where the re was situated so that some of the heat could be felt from it inside the lean-to, she supposed.

She'd been told there would be no wandering off at all, it was too dangerous, and then Varn had shifted into his wolf and headed off into the forest, to scout the area she supposed. It was hard to fall asleep out there, and they were not wrong. It was bloody cold, near on freezing, even with the re going, because when that wind whipped through the valley, it had a chill factor of below zero and took the heat of the re with it.

Winter was in full swing up here in the mountains. Even though it wasn't down in the pack, it had been cold down there during the days, and they'd gotten the light urries of snow to indicate winter was almost upon them a week or so away, she'd thought. This what they were experiencing now, would see full winter snow falling up the pack. It would be completely white by morning.

That re they'd built provided only a little heat with the freezing temperatures and falling snow, but that windbreaker made from a snow drift did help once it was high enough. When she did nally manage to fall asleep, she was woken by the sounds of more ghting. It was pitch dark and the snowfall had stopped, but the cold was bracing, and she pulled that cloak around her. She hadn't realised, as a wolf, she could get this cold. It came from a life of living inside a proper home, she guessed.

She was listening to that ght out there, it appeared to be far away. She thought back down the trail that had led to this campsite. She noted that Varn was back and standing at the ready. It was Tony that was off in the battle, it seems. Varn was standing right at the beginning of the trail they'd used to get here, a trail that only came here to this campsite, and went nowhere else.

She hated this, Ryder realised, as she huddled there in her cloak, waiting for the outcome of that battle going on out there in the woods, unseen to her, but heard with her wolfen hearing. Though to her, it seemed like there was more than one wolf out there ghting. "Is he alright on his own? Shouldn't you go and help him?" she asked Varn. Wondering why he was not going off to help, it kind of sounded like there was a pack of rogues down there.

"Do you want me to leave you alone and unprotected back here?" came the reply, though he did not look at her, keeping his eyes on the trail as he spoke.

Ryder didn't know the answer to that question. "I have been training as a warrior." She commented a little quietly.

"Good, you'll need it in the military. Shush now," he stated, and she fell quiet.

It was a long while before the ghting stopped, and she saw Tony return. He nodded, "All is well, young Lauchlan and his unit turned up. Heard the ghting on their way home to the pack, and stepped in to help out. Are now off hunting those that got away for us to stay here safely."

"Are we expecting him and his unit to come here to the camp?" Varn asked.

"No, they will move on. We are Elite. I thanked him for the assist and told them to head on back to the pack."

"Did you speak of?" Varn asked a little on the harshly side, she thought.

"No, I know the rules." Tony muttered. "I'm not stupid."

"Good," Varn replied.

They'd both looked at her after that, and she'd stared up at them. "What?"

"Nothing, go back to sleep, we've still got a long walk ahead of us in the morning." She was told.

Ryder just nodded as she watched Varn wave Tony towards the re and tell him to warm up. He stood out there and stared off into the woods. She pulled her coat around her tighter and wondered what that comment had been all about. Though the heir to the pack and his unit had stepped in and helped Tony out.

They'd also not come here to sleep for the rest of the night, or see who they'd defended even, she wondered if Lauchlan would be a better Alpha than his own father was. She could only hope so, for those that still remained within the pack.

Though she knew he wasn't due to take over when he got back, he still had to attend university and get whatever degrees needed to run the human world business, likely get an introduction to the allied packs and learn the ropes. He'd been gone a while. Wasn't old enough. She didn't think to take over yet either. There was a minimum age for that in the packs laws.

But he and his unit were home safe from the kingdom. She could only use that thought to remind herself that the savagery of the wars raging weren't as bad as they were told. That she would be ne, get good training and be able to protect herself and the kingdom as was required of her.

She was woken at the c**k of dawn and yawned, still tired from the long, cold, half-sleepless night she'd gotten. Both Varn and Tony were quiet at breakfast, or with her, she'd seen them hold a mind-link conversation. She didn't ask what it was about likely planning the day ahead of them was all.

She was given a simple meal for breakfast from Varn's pack. It had been the same as dinner that night, a bowl of pre-roasted meat and vegetables, though it was cold, but lling at least.

The day snowed on and off, and she trudged on along between them as was expected of her, until they came to nothing. The trail ended, and she looked about the area curiously.

"We'll rest here. The portal is only a few minutes away in the woods. On the other side of the portal Ryder is a mountain trail that will be steep. Though it will also be safer on the other side of the portal. Where we come out is just north of Nightingale, we'll go round it to the enlistment camp on the western side."

"Alright." She nodded. "Why rest now?" she asked.

"It's afternoon for us, but in the kingdom it's morning there, you'll need to rest. They'll not consider the time difference between realms. This is our way of letting you get a nap in, or you're going to be awake for well over 24 hours, I imagine." Varn told her "Curl up and get some sleep. We'll wake you in three hours."

Ryder did not argue, she was actually tired. They'd left at sun up and not stopped once, just like the day they'd collected her. There was no rest, just continuous walking. She pulled her cloak around her and sat down on the ground and tried to get some sleep.