
Chapter 11

"Rory?"

The question echoed in my mind, pulling me from a restless sleep. I was back in the woods, searching for something, but I didn't know what.

Mysteries in the darkness.

Rhea nudged at me from within.

"Hey. You're having a rough time, aren't you?"

I sighed. *"You can say that again."*

Rubbing my eyes, I focused on the worried face in front of me. Wolfgang was looking at me like I was a fragile ornament on the verge of breaking.

"What's up?" I asked him. "Can I get some coffee first?"

He smiled at that. A few minutes later, I was cradling a cup of hot, frothy cappuccino. Much better.

"I'm heading out of the castle for a bit. I don't know when I'll be back. There's been talk of witch sightings near the southern edge of the White Mountain."

My heart froze. If witches were near our territory again, it meant Wendell was probably close by.

"You're not going there alone." I took a sip of my coffee, watching him closely.

He frowned at me. "I thought you'd argue. It's not safe, Rory."

"No safer for you than for me," I shot back. "The southern edge is just a few miles from Fairbank. We both know that's their hideout. We won't find answers sitting here, Wolfgang."

And I wasn't about to stay behind while he went out there, finding answers to my questions.

That wasn't the kind of luna I wanted to be.

He studied my face for a long moment before finally sighing.

"You're impossible to argue with. Fine. We leave in thirty minutes. Dress warm, and eat a big breakfast first."

At nine o'clock, Wolfgang and I headed to the southern part of the White Mountains. Unlike the northern half, this area was filled with forests and bathed in soft sunlight.

It didn't seem dangerous at all.

Which was probably why it was so scary.

By the time we reached the heart of the Sacred Grove forest, it was past noon. The witches were hiding somewhere here.

The trees seemed to close in around me, their branches twisting like gnarled hands.

The air was heavy with the smell of wet earth and rotting leaves.

A fog hung low, making it hard to see the winding path ahead. It felt like the forest was alive, watching me, waiting for me to let my guard down.

A strange energy hummed in the air. It was barely audible, but impossible to ignore.

Sometimes, the fog would clear, revealing glimpses of odd, twisted trees that looked like they had been shaped by ancient magic.

Whispers floated on the wind, voices that seemed to be calling my name.

It felt like I had stumbled into a hidden world, a place where the line between the living and the dead was thin and blurry.

As the sun began to set, long shadows stretched across the forest floor.

"We should set up camp here," Wolfgang whispered, sounding uneasy. "It's not smart to go hunting witches in the middle of the night."

I nodded, sprinkling the grass around us with the potion I'd gotten from Eleanor. It would make us invisible to everything around us, but we'd still be able to see.

Our scents would still be there, though, so we had to be careful.

I turned the stove to medium and waited for the pan to heat up before adding two sausage links and slices of thick toast.

Dinner was simple, but the bread was warm and the meat was tasty.

"This is what I used to eat when my parents and I went camping." I smiled at the memory, watching Rory cut into her sausage link.

She looked at me with wide eyes, surprised that I'd shared something so personal. I realized I hadn't talked much about my mom since she died.

I took a gulp from the coffee in the tumbler between us. "My mom loved the outdoors. Whenever she



I took a gulp from the coffee in the tumbler between us. "My mom loved the outdoors. Whenever she started to feel cooped up, my dad would take us on an adventure."

She smiled at that. "That sounds like something I'd do too."

I nodded. "She was a lot like you. Sometimes—I see more of her now because I see her in you."

My voice wavered, and I put my plate down. "Rory, I'll keep apologizing until the day I die. If that's what it takes for you to forgive me."

She finished her bread and moved closer to me. "I'm sorry I've been so distant lately. I just—sometimes I feel like I'm back in those damn dungeons, and everything is closing in on me."

A lump formed in my throat.

"He got to you because of me. I should have been there. I should have done so many things differently. If I could go back and change it, I'd undo everything. I'd go through hell to undo it all, Rory."

She ran her fingers through my messy hair.

"I know you would," she whispered. "I do love you. I just wish I could forgive you. I'm getting there. I promise."

The air between us felt soft and gentle. I leaned into her touch, sighing as she whispered comforting words.

My phone buzzed with a message. Max.

Enemy at the gates. We're at war.

Shit.

That's when we heard the voices.

"Do you smell that?"

"Smells like nasty little cubs!"

Double shit.

The unmistakable sound of cackling.

Witches.

