
Chapter 8

The annual fair in Iliamna was in full swing. I walked through the crowd, my heart heavy from my last meeting with Aurora. The smell of fried dough and caramel popcorn filled the air, making my stomach growl.

Booths were set up all along the streets, selling everything from handmade jewelry to local artwork. I wished Aurora was here with me, but when I asked her this morning, she said she had urgent business with Eleanor. Eleanor, who was quickly becoming a pain in my ass.

Not wanting to argue, I decided to go alone. As I walked around, taking in the sights and sounds of the fair, I spotted a familiar face.

"Ryan?" I called out, surprised.

He turned around, looking just as surprised. "Wolfgang, I can't believe it's you! What are you doing in Iliamna?"

"Just passing through," he replied, pointing to his backpack. "I'm on a road trip to Alaska."

We spent some time catching up, talking about our school days and what we'd been doing since then. As we chatted, I noticed a booth selling hand-carved wooden figurines. One in particular caught my eye: a beautifully detailed wolf.

"I need to get that for Aurora," I said, pointing to the figurine.

"Aurora? Wait—I know that name—is she the girl Wendell is after?" Ryan asked.

I frowned. "How do you know about that, Ryan?"

"Who is she?"

"She's my mate," I replied, pulling out my wallet. "Leave it to you to come to Blood Moon pack and not know who the luna is, you idiot!"

He grinned at me. "Wow, you found a mate! I thought you'd be searching for another ten years."

I sighed. "I almost did."

Ryan's face turned serious.

"Wolfgang, I heard some disturbing news while I was traveling. There are rogue wolves teaming up with witches and human hunters. They're planning to start a war."

My heart dropped. "I've known about this for a while. What else have you heard?"



"The rogues are tired of answering to an alpha," Ryan explained.

"They want their own territory. And Wendell, the wolf hunter who's after Aurora, has promised to help them if they can get him her blood."

I clenched my fists. "The more I try to protect her, the more danger seems to find us."

The fair, which had been full of joy and excitement, now felt dark and threatening.

I held the wolf figurine tightly, hoping that Aurora would understand the meaning behind it and that we could find a way to keep her safe.

When I got home that evening, Aurora wasn't in our room. I checked the clocktower, the rose gardens, and finally, the kitchen. Kala was already baking fresh sourdough for dinner.

"Kala," I said, playing with the figurine. "Have you seen Aurora?"

"Yes, she was here earlier. She said she wouldn't be home for dinner because she'd be late."

I frowned. This sounded like Eleanor's doing. What was she up to, keeping my mate away from her meals?

"Did she say where she was going?"

"She mentioned something about training in the woods," Kala sighed and went back to her baking. "I keep telling her that place is dangerous, but..."

I didn't wait for her to finish.

Eleanor and I stood by the edge of the lake in a secluded part of Briarwick Forest.

The full moon was high in the sky, casting a soft glow over the trees and the still waters of the lake.

The air was cool and fresh, and the peaceful sound of crickets filled the silence.

"Take your time," Eleanor said softly.

The forest was stunning under the moonlight, with the tall trees casting long shadows and the leaves rustling gently in the breeze.

The lake was a deep blue, reflecting the moonlight and shimmering in the darkness.

Suddenly, I heard a rustling nearby. I turned to see a deer stepping out from the trees, its eyes reflecting the moonlight.

For a moment, it felt as though the deer was speaking to me, telling me to be brave and face my fears.

I took a deep breath, feeling a surge of courage. I stepped forward, reaching out to touch the deer's soft fur.

It stood still, its gaze fixed on me as if it understood what I was thinking.

I turned to Eleanor, my eyes full of hope, and whispered, "I am ready."

Eleanor nodded, her eyes misty. "Remember what I told you, Aurora. Go with love and hope, and you will return safe. Don't let death be the last chapter."

I nodded.

Go with hope.

The lake looked calm and deep. Eleanor had cast a spell on it, so when I stepped into the water, it didn't feel cold.

It felt like walking through air, like I was going home.

The water rose around me, first reaching my ankles, then my knees, then my waist.

Suddenly, I felt scared. What if this was a point of no return?

"Believe in yourself," Eleanor called out, her voice echoing through the forest. "You have what it takes, Aurora."

I closed my eyes and took another step forward.

The water reached my shoulders. Taking a deep breath, I plunged in.

I felt her presence before I saw her. She was like a long, peaceful sleep.

She told me everything would be okay, and I believed her. I let go and took a breath of the cold water.

It felt like I had entered a different world.

The world was awash in a golden glow, and there, at the end of what seemed like an endless meadow, stood my mother and Selene, their hands intertwined.

I approached them, my heart brimming with awe.

"You did well," My mother's smile was warm.

"We knew you had it in you," Selene clapped her hands together. "And now, because you believed, you've unlocked the most precious gift of all."

My eyes sparkled as she handed me a ring adorned with a single moonstone.



"When times get tough, sweet child, press your lips to this stone," she whispered, slipping the ring onto my index finger. It will link your heart to mine with a silver thread.

I was momentarily dazzled by the ring's shine, then my mother tenderly kissed my forehead. In this realm, she was as real as could be.

"It's time for you to leave."

I gazed at her, memorizing every minute detail. I needed to etch her into my memory, to cling to each tiny fragment of beauty that her form possessed.

"I wish I could bring you with me." This was the child in me, voicing thoughts that mirrored the naive sincerity of the heart.

But she placed a firm hand on my chest. "But you are taking me with you, Rory. No matter where you go, I will always be a part of who you are."

She pulled me into a hug. I inhaled her scent, a heavenly blend of sweet lemon verbena and jasmine.

"In death, we only lose our physical forms. Our souls linger, guarding those we leave behind. So, it is that I am bound to you, in this life, the next, and the next."

I looked up at her, tears welling in my eyes. I knew it was late, and Eleanor would be frantic with worry. "I love you."

"In this lifetime and beyond," she replied, her gaze gentle.

"What do I do next?" I asked Selene.

"Things will unfold as they should. You are up against destruction at the hands of a man who is pure evil, but now you have me on your side," Selene said, her face resolute.

"Will I be able to do it?" I asked, a hint of doubt creeping into my voice.

"You can do anything you set your heart and mind to, my child," Selene touched my forehead. "You have my blessings. And you have love."

Love.

When the time came, perhaps that would be the salvation for me and my people, time and time again.

I nodded. Selene and my mother stepped aside, revealing a narrow silver door in front of me.

"Walk through."

I took a deep breath and reached for the knob but paused to look at my mother one last time.

I took a deep breath and reached for the knob but paused to look at my mother one last time.

She smiled at me. "Be brave."

I turned the knob and stepped through.

Coughing and gasping for air, I surfaced from the water, struggling to swim to shore.

As my vision cleared, I saw something I hadn't anticipated.

Wolfgang, his arms wrapped around Eleanor's neck, choking the life out of her.

