

Chapter 14



Their escape tunnel cropped up in an obscure trinket shop close to the town's lake. Temperance had often passed it on her way to Haven without a second thought. It was so mundane, and the owner so briary, that hardly anyone ever went inside.

Halvard stormed straight out of the shop and onto the street. He didn't bother waiting for her to catch up. She was forced to race after him. He marched across the road, over to the lake. There was still snow on the ground but it was starting to melt. A small makeshift café had been set up by the shoreline with fold-up chairs and tables.

Temperance was familiar with the shack. It cropped up every Christmas. Students from her old school would visit it every day during December, often skipping classes to sit out in the cold, surrounded by fairy lights and festive songs.

Halvard ignored the outdoor seating, settling instead on a boulder overlooking the lake. He scanned the area with a frown. Beyond the still grey water, on the far shoreline, was the farthest edge of Carwick forest. A fine white mist rolled off the lake to fade into the shadowed undergrowth beneath the towering evergreen trees.

Temperance glanced back at the cabin. It was still closed and the place was deserted. They'd be safe enough for a while at least. She slumped, boneless onto a tree stump close by, feeling a little less on edge. She heaved a deep gulp of fresh air. No one had ever invited her to this place. She had gone on her own most of the time. She tried to remember if in those days there had been a time when she had wished for company. She bit her lip. A part of her had always wanted to find someone as lonely as she was. She glanced at Halvard. In a strange way, she felt like she finally had. She could have done without the magic and danger, but ultimately, being with both men was starting to feel like belonging somewhere.

"We need to wait in the woods, it has more cover," Halvard finally said, getting up. He ran a hand through his dark hair. A few stray strands brushed along his strong jaw line. Temperance found herself staring. The werewolf's eyes were fixed on her face too.

"The woods then," she said, clearing her throat.

Halvard nodded and stalked away.

The path curved around the lake in a gentle slope and disappeared deeper into the trees. The forest was quiet except for the crunch of the frosty grass under their feet. Temperance let him lead. She wondered what would happen when the wizards finished their search of the Devil's Staircase. They'd surely come up into Carwick looking for them. She hoped Alastair was on his way. And that Fenrir was all right. The Alpha had saved her life after all, even though she didn't know why. She stared at Halvard's strong back. It wasn't safe to ask him about Freya, but she wondered if he knew anything about her son.

"Have you ever met Fenrir before?"

He paused letting her draw level with him.

"Why are you asking about *him*?"

The length of his side brushed up against her. Temperance's cheeks flushed. "I think I misjudged him, he saved me earlier. I'm just wondering, maybe his mother..."

"No." The werewolf glared at her, his eyes hard. "She's a manipulative, jealous, spiteful bitch." He spat out each word.

Temperance swallowed. "Never mind."

His arm was warm against hers. "Hurry up," he muttered, walking away.

The part of the forest that surrounded the lake wasn't very thick, but the trees did a good job of providing them with cover. Halvard picked a spot sheltered by a large canopy.

"I'm going to try to get us something to eat," he said.

"I'll come with you," Temperance offered, taking a step forward.

"No, you stay here," he ordered, he glanced over his shoulder. "It's safer."

She watched him leave, wrapping her arms around herself to keep warm against the growing cold. He returned a while later with a paper bag. Her eyebrows rose in confusion.

"What, no rabbit?"

The werewolf narrowed his eyes and sat down opposite her. He handed her the bag.

"I can't turn into a wolf unless it's my time," he told her.

"I suppose my mind has been so caught up with werewolves and magic, I've lost all sense of what's normal." She lifted up the shop bought sandwich. "Where did you get the money anyway?"

He grinned back at her and reached into his pocket. He pulled out a familiar purple purse, wagging it between his fingers. Temperance snatched it back.

"Thief!"

He let her take it, with a muffled laugh. She slipped it into her pocket.

“I found it in the hostel after your fall. I didn’t want them knowing for definite you’d been there. Your name is on everything in it.” The last he remarked in a strange way. “People must know everything about everyone these days.”

Temperance bit into the sandwich and watched him. The world must seem a very different place compared to the last time he had lived in it. She wondered how old he was. When Sebastian had trapped him in the clock, had he prolonged his life or was he always meant to live this long? It made her curious about the faey blood in her veins, how drastically would it affect her in the future? She stared down at her feet.

“No one knows everything about everyone,” she said. He smiled at her. She swallowed and looked away.

The morning wore on as they waited for Alastair. The more time that passed the more worried Temperance became. She started pacing. She felt uneasy without her medication. Nothing was happening, but her body was conditioned to having it. She couldn’t help but feel agitated.

After another hour had passed, Halvard spoke again.

“There are people there now.” He was monitoring the wooden cabin and the outdoor seating on the opposite side of the lake. Couples were strolling along the pebbled shoreline, while children skimmed stones across the surface of the water. “Why?”

“It’s a popular café,” Temperance said.

She moved up beside him to look over but couldn’t see anyone. Improved eyesight wasn’t one of her faey gifts anyway. And her brief increase in speed had disappeared. Maybe it needed time to develop.

Halvard turned suddenly, his nostrils flaring. “Your legs are bleeding!” He dropped to his knees to examine her.

“Are they?” Temperance asked. She had almost forgotten about them. She swiped her fingers over the cuts; her hand came away smeared with blood. “But I was sure it had stopped.”

The werewolf jerked up her trouser leg.

Temperance gasped. “Stop it! They can’t close over because I keep moving, that’s all!”

She yelped in shock when he licked her. He stumbled backwards, spitting and wiping at his tongue.

“Silver!”

Temperance yanked the leg down again.

“Wait!” he shouted. He tugged at her trousers again. “It takes a long time for werewolves to heal wounds made by silver weapons. Maybe part of you...”

Temperance panicked and jerked away, not wanting to hear anymore. She slipped on a clump of grass and fell. In his enthusiasm to see her leg again, Halvard stumbled after her. He levered himself up over her, staring down. Temperance held her breath.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw something move. There was a blast of wind and the werewolf was sent flying off her. He smacked into a tree with a muffled groan.

“Get away from her!”

Temperance rolled to her side. Branches dug into her ribs; she jerked away from them and scrambled to her feet. Alastair was half bent with his arm wrapped around the trunk of a tree, using it to support himself. Soot marked his pale face. His dark hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat and grime, while his chest heaved with exertion.

There was a body sprawled at his feet. The pale figure’s long red hair fanned out around her head. It was Lilith, unconscious. Her feet and hands were bound tightly with frayed rope.

The wizard collapsed to his knees. His black eyes were still pinned on the werewolf. Halvard struggled up from the ground and glared back at him.

“Your timing is brilliant,” he muttered.

“It’s a pity you didn’t die in the fighting,” Alastair snapped back at him.

“That would have been *hilarious* for you,” the werewolf growled.

Temperance hurried over to Alastair. “Are you all right?”

She clasped his arm and pulled him to her. He yanked back with a flushed face. The sharp movement made him grimace; he slumped forward.

“He’s bleeding!” She struggled with his dead weight, stooping down onto the ground with him. “Halvard!”

In an unexpected show of concern, the werewolf was by her side, pulling Alastair away from her. His hands were surprisingly gentle. When he brushed against the wizard’s skin, Alastair bolted upright. They stared at each other. It was like something was passing between them. Alastair tried to struggle away.

“What happened to you?” Temperance gasped, seeing the blood that saturated his clothes.

Halvard glanced down. He made an unhappy noise in the back of his throat.

The wizard frowned. “I’ve been shot. You’ll have to get the bullet out.” His speech was a little slurred.

“Me! Halvard would be better...” She shook her head.

“It’s silver,” Alastair said through gritted teeth. “He can’t touch it.”

“A werewolf can’t even touch silver?” she said, looking down at where she thought Alastair’s wounds were.

“No, it’s a little more... than just silver,” the wizard explained in a weak voice. “The wizards have enhanced it. It’ll... burn right through a wolf.”

Halvard tilted his head to the side and took a deep breath. “I remember this. I can’t touch it.” He glanced down at her legs. “No. We have to find another way.”

“Why?” Alastair asked. He tried to shirk off his jacket. “Help me, please.”

He stared at Temperance and she found herself leaning into him. He tilted forward to rest his head on her shoulder as she helped him out of his jacket.

Halvard grabbed her wrist and growled at her. “Stop it.”

She shook him off. He glared at her. Alastair twisted his head and he started to unbutton his shirt. She turned away.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

Temperance glanced back at his toned torso. Old puckered scars marred his otherwise smooth skin. The new wound oozed from a hole just above his abdomen. Rivulets of blood outlined every lean contour.

“Absolutely nothing,” she muttered, avoiding Halvard’s angry look.

“Temperance,” the werewolf warned.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” she told him. “So don’t say anything.”

She didn’t want Alastair to hear it. She didn’t want him looking at her like everyone else did - like she was a freak. If he thought she was part werewolf he would never speak to her again.

She didn’t want his hatred.

“I’ll do it,” she said in a firm voice.

Alastair tugged the knife off of his belt and lay back on the grass. He fisted his hand around the blade. It burned red hot. The handle was cold to the touch when he gave it to her.

“Cut it out.”

Temperance felt sick, sweat collected along her brow. The old scars on his chest told her he was used to pain. With a steadying breath, she hunched closer, the weapon shook in her hand. Alastair grabbed her wrist.

“Your parents are fine,” he told her. He dropped his hold. “The Assembly altered their memories. They don’t realise you’re gone.”

She nodded. A massive weight she hadn’t realised was there lifted from her shoulders. They would be fine until she found a way out of this mess. She licked her lips wondering how to do that. Their problems just kept growing. She glanced back at Lilith.

“Could you guard her over there, Halvard?” she asked.

The werewolf narrowed his eyes at her. “I’d rather stay here with you for now.”

Alastair turned his head. "Be a good dog and do what you're told."

Halvard took a deep breath and got up. He stared down at the wizard. "If anything happens because of this, I swear, I don't care what happens to me, I'm going to kill you."

"That's nice," Alastair muttered rolling his eyes. He watched Halvard go. "Something happen while I was gone?"

"No," Temperance replied.

"It doesn't sound like it. Did you and he... did anything happen?" His question was deceptively neutral but she could detect an angry undercurrent. Ignoring him and focusing on her task, she traced the knife over the wound without warning him.

"Ah!"

"Sorry," she jerked back.

Alastair grabbed her free hand. He whispered something and a tingling feeling swept over her skin. It fizzled away, leaving her hand cool.

"Antiseptic, I almost forgot," the wizard said, closing his eyes. "Pick it out when you get close enough."

He didn't say anything after that. She wasn't very good and it seemed to take forever, but he stayed quiet. He didn't cry out and it made her feel better. But she could see his fists tighten over clumps of grass and his eyes flinch when she cut too deep. Eventually, she picked the offending bullet to the surface. It wasn't as big as she thought it would be. Without thinking she plucked it out.

Alastair was covered in sweat; he had lost consciousness but was breathing steadily. Temperance glanced over at Halvard. He was watching her with an intense look on his face, his foot pinning Lilith to the ground. The woman was still out cold.

Temperance wagged the bullet at him and tossed it aside. He shrugged, not caring that he'd been proven wrong. When she looked at her fingers there were red burn marks on her skin. Her heart sped up. Halvard was still watching her. She squeezed her hand shut to hide it from him. It started to really hurt.

"Something wrong?"

She glanced down at Alastair; his eyes were feverish. He couldn't focus on her properly.

"Are you all right?" she said, changing the subject.

"Perfect," he groaned.

"Why did the bullet hurt *you* though?"

"It's still a bullet, Temperance," he laughed, it quickly died away into a fit of coughing. He touched the wound. The skin started to knit back together. His hand dropped away.

"I'll be okay," he whispered.

He was drifting off. Temperance tried to wipe away the blood on his chest with part of her sleeve, but he shook her off.

“Don’t touch me like that,” he breathed in a hoarse whisper. Temperance pulled away to let him sleep. She tucked his jacket in around him.

“In a few hours...”

“What about it?” she asked.

“We’ll... go.”

When she got up, she noticed Halvard staring at Lilith. “Does she look familiar?”

The werewolf didn’t answer, instead he held out his hand. She folded her arms and waited for him to explain.

“Give me your money. I’m going to get more food,” he said.

With a sigh, she reached into her pocket and handed him the wallet.

“The bindings are enchanted,” Halvard said. “She can’t escape. But if she wakes up, don’t trust a word she says.” He started to leave, then stopped beside Alastair. He bent down for the wizard’s discarded knife and tossed it into the ground at Temperance’s feet. She leapt backwards.

“Keep that with you and stay here. If *anything* happens, wake up sleeping beauty. I’ll be back soon.”