

## *Chapter 12*



Alastair led the way to the bottom of the building and brought them to an empty room tucked away down a narrow corridor. Temperance clambered into the top of the bunk bed furthest from the entrance. Setting her bag down beside her, she watched Halvard stake his claim on the bed beneath hers.

Alastair stepped forward to do the same. Pulling up, he glowered down at the werewolf then settled for the single bed opposite the bunk. Temperance stared down at him.

“Alastair, can’t you contact the Assembly yourself? We’re wasting time here.”

“They’d probably kill me first, if Sebastian could have his way. If Konrad asks they’re more likely to give me a chance to speak. They respect him,” the wizard muttered.

The implication of Cyprian’s betrayal had left him in a foul mood. It was understandable, Temperance couldn’t believe it either. She twisted her fingers around the strap of her bag. She had been right not to trust Cyprian all these years.

“So...are we going to think of a plan of what to do next?”

Alastair wrapped a blanket around his body and turned to face away from her.

“No then,” Temperance sighed.

As she sat on the bed she could feel herself nodding off. She shook her head. She didn’t want to fall asleep yet.

She slipped down off the bunk, stopping when she heard a long, drawn out creak. Alastair didn’t move, but Halvard was watching her.

“Stay,” she mouthed to him, slipping out before he could respond. She shuffled no more than a few steps down the hallway before he had grabbed her arm. He glared at her, then down the length of the corridor.

“I’m no dog,” he muttered. “Where are you going?”

“To the bathroom, I think there’s one down there.” She pointed at a door ajar at the end of the corridor; inside there were white tiles and a row of sinks.

Halvard released her with a short nod. She was impressed by how far he'd progressed in so short a space of time. He had gone from being almost completely animalistic to coherent in a matter of hours. She felt him watching her as she slipped into the bathroom. She took her time washing up.

When she came out, he was gone. An enticing smell of food wafted down the corridor. Her stomach started growling, her last decent meal had been in Cyprian's house. She bit her lip. She would just be a few minutes. Halvard wouldn't miss her if she was quick.

She darted down the hall following the scent. Turning the corner she stumbled across a small kitchen. There was a man with shaggy, shoulder length hair inside scraping the burnt surface off a piece of toast. Once he had finished, he spread a dollop of butter over it. Temperance's mouth salivated at the sight. However, she hesitated to go in. Even though she could only see the man's back, he looked intimidating. She tried to sneak away.

The man paused; his head rose.

Temperance froze in fear and berated herself for her stupidity. Alastair had warned her that the place could be full of werewolves. She felt the air leave her lungs when he turned around. It was the one from the forest, the man that Alastair had stabbed; Fenrir.

He was fully clothed this time, in faded jeans and a thin blue cotton jumper, stretched tight over his muscles. A lock of black hair fell into his intense brown eyes. Temperance went bright red at the memory of seeing him naked. She didn't know what to do now that he'd seen her.

Her legs twitched ready to bolt, wanting to make the decision for her. She worried that the animal side of him might interpret it as a chase. The magic in the building should protect her if she ran but she didn't want to put it to the test.

She teetered indecisively on the threshold.

Fenrir leaned back against the counter. He bit into his toast and watched her in what she thought was wry amusement. Her stomach grumbled. He reached up in a slow gesture, opening the press behind him. Temperance's eyes dropped as his jumper slid up to show his stomach and a pink, newly healed scar. She was unable to look away. She blushed seeing him smirk at her.

"You didn't get enough of a view the last time?" he questioned around his toast.

Temperance knew her face was getting redder. The werewolf tugged out a full loaf of bread from the cupboard and tossed it onto the table between them.

"Have a few slices, it sounds like you're hungry. Your mother fed me enough over the years. I'd like to return the favour."

"My mother?" Temperance croaked.

“Thought I was a stray dog,” Fenrir nodded. “I knew I recognised you. You’re the girl who lives in the converted church on the west side of the forest. You’re keeping bad company these days.”

He jerked his head, indicating he knew the wizard was with her. She licked her lips, wanting to dash back to their room and warn him. But then, Fenrir knew he was there already and hadn’t done anything.

She took a deep breath and stepped into the kitchen. She dragged out a chair and sat on the edge of it. Fenrir grunted in satisfaction. He grabbed the butter and knife, and slid them halfway across the table. Temperance’s hands shook as she pulled out a slice of bread. She fought to keep them steady as she buttered it.

Fenrir studied her. He frowned as if there was something amiss.

“You let the wizard put a spell on you?” He glanced away, running his tongue over his teeth. Temperance stared up at him. “I can see you’re afraid, but I can’t smell it.”

“He didn’t do anything.”

She frowned and Konrad’s smile flashed across her eyes. Did it have something to do with the faey experiment? Her palms were sweaty; she wished she could talk to her brother and ask him the truth.

Fenrir studied her with renewed interest. She put down the knife.

“He didn’t kill that female werewolf, you know.”

“So he tells you,” the Alpha sneered. “That man has killed more of my kind than most of the best hunters combined. Forgive me if I don’t take your word for it.”

He stalked over to the door, ending their strange, tense conversation. He stopped when he was parallel to her. He inhaled. She saw his head turn.

“You do smell faintly of werewolf though.” His teeth flashed at her as he spoke. His canines were pointed. She swallowed over the lump in her throat, imagining them in a wolf’s mouth, snapping into her.

He grasped the back of her chair and ducked close to her ear. He took a long deep breath that had her heart racing. “It’s familiar but I don’t recognise it. Tell me, did the wizard capture one of us?”

“No,” Temperance choked. She felt lightheaded, her hands tingled and she struggled to relax. He couldn’t smell her; she could get through this. Even if he knew Halvard was with them, it didn’t matter.

“No,” she repeated in a more confident tone.

She leaned away from him. Her fingers inched towards the knife but before she could reach it, he slammed his palm down in front of hers. She stared at his strong hand. He could crush her if he wanted to. They were strong even without changing.

“He’s with us voluntarily. He saved my life.”

“A traitor then,” Fenrir spat, dragging his hand off the table. “It would have been better if you had said yes.” He shoved at the chair. For him it seemed like a light movement, yet it still managed to crack the wooden back.

She started when she heard it snap. It buckled inward, pressing up against her spine.

“You must have bewitched the little wizard. With you at his side, he’s happily wandering around with a wolf at his back. I’ll have to keep my eye on you.”

He stormed out, leaving Temperance struggling to breathe properly again. The tension had almost crushed her. She slumped forward. When she felt she could move again, she hurried out of the kitchen back to their room.

When she reached the door, she heard both men arguing.

“Why are you watching me sleep?” Alastair demanded.

“You were dreaming about her...” Halvard replied. His voice was low, still hoarse but getting clearer. “I heard you call out her name. Freya.”

Halvard pressed him. “What did you see?”

“She was snarling and snapping at me, calling me Alric and a weapon.”

The wizard gave a strangled laugh of disbelief. Temperance heard the springs of the bed twang as if he was sitting up. “It seemed so real.”

“A weapon... that’s true enough,” Halvard said.

Alastair snapped at him. “You’re putting these thoughts into my head! And if you don’t stop, I’m going to kill you. Temperance won’t be around forever to stop me, you know!”

“So, she’s the one who’s stopping you? How sweet,” the wolf laughed.

There was a loud thump. The door was wrenched open in front of her. She froze. As if he didn’t even see her, Alastair elbowed past and disappeared down the hall. His unusual forest scent lingered after him. She took a deep steadying breath, wondering what was going on.

Halvard was sitting on her bed, his legs dangling over the edge. She hurried over to grab her bag, keeping her back to him so he wouldn’t see her swallowing her tablets. She tugged them out from a side pocket and rattled the pills, staring down at her name on the label.

For the first time in her life, she contemplated not taking them. She’d be foolish to listen to the vampire, but part of her wanted to. What would happen? What would her life be like if she wasn’t tied to them?

She'd taken them to stop the hallucinations, now she wondered if they'd just been glimpses of this other world. But nightmares of being committed to the Candlewick Mill asylum plagued her thoughts. She pushed the pillbox back into her bag and tried to decide what to do.

Strong arms enveloped her from behind. Her bag dropped onto the mattress. She hadn't seen him move but Halvard was no longer sitting on the bed.

A cough drew their attention.

Temperance twisted out of his embrace to face Alastair. The wizard glowered at her from the doorway. There was a mixture of disgust and anger on his face, which he struggled to hide. She felt like she'd done something wrong.

"I didn't mean to ruin your tender moment together," he sneered.

"You didn't," Halvard said.

Temperance stepped away from him, which seemed to please Alastair. She stood in the middle of the room, equal distance from both of them.

"I was going to offer to visit your parents, ensure they were safe, Temperance," Alastair stated. He looked away and muttered roughly, "I know you're worried about them and it'll be a while before Konrad can contact the Assembly."

"Really?" Temperance managed a smile. "Could I go with you then?"

"No," he snapped. He glanced back at her. "It's not safe. I'll be quicker alone."

"She can stay here. I'll protect her," Halvard said.

Alastair hesitated for a moment. He narrowed his eyes at the werewolf. "I'll go then."

Temperance stretched forward and gave him a brief hug. In her relief, she couldn't stop herself. "Thank you."

He gave a stilted pat on her back and cleared his throat. She heard a bark of laughter from the man behind her. She felt the wizard tense. He drew back and nodded at her, before slipping out the door. She was certain his cheeks had been flushed.

"Why do you have to tease and laugh at him like that?" Temperance snapped, rubbing her temples. The tension between the two of them was giving her a headache.

"I find it amusing that he's so awkward around you," the werewolf grinned, his voice settling into a normal tone.

"And you're an expert, are you? Drooling over someone you've just met?"

Halvard stalked over to her, invading her personal space. She gasped and bumped back up against the wall away from him. His handsome face drew level with hers. He was growling.

He brushed a fingertip over her cheek, drawing back a strand of her hair. His striking amber eyes bored into hers.

"I'm not an adolescent pup. I don't show just any female affection. All you need to do is tell me to stop..." Temperance held her breath, almost mesmerised by the gleam in his eyes. "And I will," he finished, withdrawing and placing a few feet between them.

He watched her step away from the wall. His expression was serious as he gauged her reaction. She brushed her hands down her top. It took a moment before she could lift her head to face him. When she did, he turned away with hunched shoulders.

"I'll be down at the hot springs in the basement," he muttered.

He snatched up a towel from a shelf and left. She rubbed her face. She shouldn't have said anything.

Unable to face being alone with just her confused thoughts, she wandered back down to the billiards room to clear her head. The women were gone but the man with the ponytail was still there. He'd managed to improve some of the television reception. Another person sat beside him on the cracked old leather couch, his head buried in a large text book. There was a laptop at his elbow and he was tapping at the keys.

Temperance perched on a worn green armchair. It groaned underneath her. The man typing glanced up. She almost choked when she recognised the round glasses and balding head. It was her absent-minded lecturer, Professor Afton.

When he saw her, he launched into a coughing fit and started gathering up his books, cramming numerous loose sheets into them. He abandoned his computer and darted out of the room.

Temperance scooped up two fallen books and sprinted after him. He was scurrying down the main corridor. When he glanced back and saw her, he panicked. He tossed all of his notes to the ground and jumped into the open room beside him. The door slammed closed.

Temperance slowed to a walk, gathering up the sheets. She shook her head. He always managed to drop everything.

She skimmed over his book titles. It looked like he was carrying out a lot of research into the genetics of different species. She read through the titles.

Her lips twitched into an annoyed smile. "Decoding the werewolf genome."

She hefted the heavy bundle into her arms and stepped into the dark room. It was chilly. She flicked on the light switch to her left. A large sleek chrome lantern lit up a long boardroom with a giant table. There was an expensive projector at one end and her lecturer was hunched over in a leather chair at the other.

He had his face in his hands.

The wooden floor creaked underneath her as she approached. Temperance let his books tumble onto the gleaming surface of the table; his papers slid free and fanned out across it. She swivelled his chair around.

“Why did you run?”

“I’m a horrible person. I’ve been...” She couldn’t understand what else he was saying. He was muttering through his fingers.

“You’ve been what?”

There was a pause.

He dropped his hands then stared down at his lap. He tugged at the edge of his waistcoat. Temperance waited for him to say more. She glanced down. A small piece of notepaper was hanging off the edge of the table. At the top of the sheet was a very accurate schematic of her house. She slid it closer and skimmed over the paragraphs below the picture. She flicked through the rest of the bundle. Every page had numerous notations about her family, with dates and times. The most recent made her skin crawl.

‘December 21st: Temperance Levinthal sees through protective charms: Decoding the werewolf genome. Incident: Minor.’

She lifted her head to look at Professor Afton. His wide eyes were fixed on his notes, his chin began to quiver.

“What is this? Have you been stalking my family?”

“No, it’s not like that. He asked me to make sure you were all safe.” He held up his hands. “That you were all stable!”

“Who asked you?”

All fond feelings she’d ever had for her scatter-brained lecturer dissolved.

Professor Afton swallowed thickly. “I can’t.”

“Tell me!” Temperance slammed her palm down on the table.

“Sebastian! Sebastian Bloodworth!” he blurted out. He pressed his fists to his cheeks. “He’ll kill me when he finds out I told you.”

“Is this about the experiment?” she asked.

He gaped at her and reached out to touch her arm but stopped.

“It doesn’t exist anymore, Temperance, not really,” he insisted. “Sebastian just asked me to keep an eye on you. Like the doctors do. The whole thing was supposed to be over. It was abandoned hundreds of years ago, all the information destroyed or buried. It wasn’t going anywhere, it never had. But, Sebastian wanted to continue it a little longer, he was sure something would happen in a few generations.”

“How did he keep it going if it was supposed to be over?”

“He found people to partake; different faey species, rare ones, common ones, whoever was worthwhile. It was all done in secret. I didn’t even know it was still going on until he asked me to monitor you. He’s been working on it the whole time. Then, he stepped in himself, for the final push.” He squirmed in his chair.

“What do you mean stepped in?” she swallowed.

“As a donor, the last truly powerful one. No one else would do it,” he grimaced. His eyes darted around the room as if expecting someone to be eavesdropping.

“A what?”

Her blood drummed at her temples. For just a minute she felt like she could really hurt him if she wanted to. The feeling faded leaving her heart hammering and her mouth dry.

“He’s your grandfather,” Professor Afton said.

She stumbled away from him. “No, no he isn’t, you’re lying!”

There was a bitter taste in her mouth.

“It’s true.” Professor Afton leaned forward and rummaged through his notes until he found a stained yellowed piece of a paper. He handed it to Temperance. It was from Carwick General Hospital. Pratchett’s birth certificate. Sebastian Bloodworth’s name was listed as his father.

“Oh god.” Temperance put a hand over mouth. She collapsed into the chair beside him. Her lecturer scrambled to take the sheet back and folded it away.

Temperance stared at her feet, still unable to believe she was related to the mayor. It did explain, however, why he stopped the wizards from harming her during their escape.

The professor tried to rise from the table. She caught his sleeve.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“Please I need to go, if he finds out...”

“No. Why are you here?” She tugged him back down into his seat. She pointed at his notes. “Did you follow me?”

“No! I had no idea you would be here and I don’t want to know why you are. Don’t say a word. And please, don’t let him know I talked to you.” He turned aside and rubbed his eyes. “Some of us are as rare and trapped as you are, you know. You should be careful Temperance. It’s not a good thing to be unique in this world.”

His words made her pause. She dropped her hold on him, feeling a little ashamed. Then she remembered what he had been doing and it renewed her anger.

“Why are you here?”



"I'm here to show my research to the owner of the Staircase in the hopes that he'll let me see his old files. There's no one other than him alive now that knows what's in them."

"The original experiment documents," she frowned in revulsion.

Professor Afton leaned forward. "Did you see them?"

"No."

"Oh," he whispered and slumped back.

"Just take your stuff and go," Temperance said, clutching her forehead.

Professor Afton grabbed his things. He whispered an apology and slipped out.

It was a slow walk back to the room for Temperance; her legs felt heavy, the exhaustion setting in. Her bed was calling to her. She just wanted to lay her head on a pillow and block everything out. She pushed the door in, yawning. It took a few seconds for her to notice there was already someone in the room.

Halvard was bent over. She caught a glimpse of his long slender back. The muscles in his shoulder flexed as he looked over at her. He was only half-dressed. She spluttered wondering what would have happened if she had of walked in sooner. A deep blush crept across her face.

She turned away and tried not to look at him. "I'm sorry. I didn't realise... I should've knocked."

"It's fine," Halvard said in a rough voice. He tossed on his wine-coloured shirt and velvet jacket, buttoning them up. "It just means I'll have to even the score another day."

It took a moment for her to understand his meaning.

"What?" she gasped, the blush racing down her neck. "You wouldn't!"

"Hard to tell." He gave a wicked smile. "Would you like me to?"

Temperance didn't know what to say. His laughter dwindled away. A sudden flash of excitement rippled over his face, lighting up his honey-coloured eyes.

"You are really quite pretty," he rumbled low in his throat. "I don't think I've ever met a woman quite like you before."

"You've been locked up in a clock for a long time," she spluttered. Her cheeks were on fire.

He stepped towards her. He rubbed his hair with a towel, then tossed it aside; leaving the dark strands still damp. Temperance lifted her chin to look up at him.

He continued to stare at her. "Don't you like compliments?"

He reached out to touch her face and paused inches away. He studied her expression.

Her heart sped up. She couldn't step away; what worried her more was that she didn't want to. When she didn't avoid his hand, he brushed his thumb across her lips. She held her breath as he leaned down.

Just as he was about to kiss her, the room exploded around them in a massive shuddering quake