

Chapter 7



“Will you *become* a werewolf now?”

Alastair straightened up, a wry expression on his face. “Why would you think that?”

She pointed at the rips and tears in his jacket. The bloodstains worried her. Had he been bitten? Behind the net curtain, she could just about make out the moon. She didn’t have much time if it was true.

“If they bite you, you become one of them, right?” she mumbled. “Were you bitten?” Her heart sped up; she tried to plan the fastest escape route out of the dorms.

Alastair watched her, his eyes roving over her intense expression. She scrunched up her lips, deep in thought. He grinned, struggling to contain his laughter. Temperance paused, her mouth dropping open. It made him look years younger. She blushed, it was a nice smile.

“I wasn’t. But it doesn’t happen that way,” he told her, pulling back the tear to show his unmarked skin. Her eyes widened at seeing his bare stomach. He wasn’t injured at all after his encounter with the wolf.

“You’re born a werewolf; you can’t become one. Their bites can cause serious infections though. They can make people seem wild and animalistic; it gave rise to the myth.”

“What about the silver part?”

“They’re allergic to it. It can prevent them from healing as quickly as they would if they were injured with other weapons,” he explained.

“But, you could have been infected then, if you weren’t careful.”

He waved off her concern, slumping back in the chair. “I’m immune. Some people just naturally are.”

Temperance stared down at her hands. Part of her wondered if she was too; the other part didn’t want to find out. A heavy silence fell over them.

“Do you want a cup of tea?” she asked, after a few minutes.

Alastair glanced out the window. The smile had disappeared from his face and he looked serious again. There were snowflakes brushing against the glass. She felt a chill settle over her. A

storm was all they needed, stuck in the old dorms, but on the other hand it might delay any search parties.

“Okay,” Alastair murmured, his attention fixed on the snow.

Temperance slid off the bed. She tripped across the floor in the dark, cursing when she stubbed her toe. Without thinking, she reached for the desk lamp, tugging the plastic beaded string to switch it on.

The wizard glared at her.

“That’s better, isn’t it?” She gestured to the door. “I’m just going to go to the communal kitchen.”

Alastair was out of his chair and next to her in one fluid movement. He darted a pointed look at the window then yanked her hand down, turning off the light.

“*No one* should know we are here, especially not the students. Do you have any idea how much danger we’re putting them in?”

Temperance fought the urge to grimace when his fingers tightened around her hand. She raised her free arm. He flinched when she pinched him as hard as she could.

“Let go, please,” she said in a calm voice. He dropped his hold.

His strength was immense; unnatural. She peeled the beaded string away from her skin. Any tighter and he might have crushed her bones. Alastair glanced down at her as she turned her palm over.

“I’m sorry, Temperance,” he whispered, reaching out to have a look at it. “I can...”

She fisted her hand.

His eyes widened, he looked unsure. “Sorry,” he mumbled, slinking back to his chair like a disobedient child.

Temperance shook out her hand and left the room. Once behind the door, she stared at her injury. It was bleeding. Her heart flew against her ribcage. He had squeezed it so hard that the beads had actually pierced her skin.

Frowning, she slipped into the adjacent kitchen and flicked on the kettle. She had closed her hand to hide the damage from him. If he’d seen it, he would have felt even worse.

She didn’t want that.

Taking a deep breath, she brushed her hand through her hair, wondering why she cared how he felt.

She pulled a battered first-aid kit out of one of the kitchen cabinets. As the kettle started to boil, Temperance dressed her cuts. When she finished she made the tea with milk that was just about to go

out of date.

She stole back to the room. Fumbling with the cups, she gave the door a gentle kick. "It's me!"

She waited for Alastair to let her in. The door clicked open. Instead of being behind it, like he should have been, the wizard was sitting by the window.

She scowled at him. "Don't do that."

He shrugged at her. With a glare, Temperance thrust the cup into his hands. Some of the tea sloshed onto his skin. He gave her a disapproving look. Temperance ignored him and sat down on the bed. They drank their tea in silence. She let it go on for a while, but finally it became too much, even for her.

"It must be nice to be a werewolf," she remarked, trying to draw him back to their conversation. He stared at her, his dark eyebrows drawn over his eyes. "You'd have no worries as an animal. It would be absolute freedom."

Alastair scoffed. "Freedom?"

"It must be painful though," she said, ignoring his dismissive grunt. She placed her tea on the desk and stretched out her other arm at an awkward angle, jerking it this way and that. She made several sharp snapping noises. Alastair's eyes were fixed on her face.

"No?" she said. "Not feeling talkative anymore?"

"Drugs," he said, after a brief pause. "They take certain magical drugs that accelerate the transformation and make it painless."

"And you have some power over their change?" Temperance asked, taking up her cup again.

"Yes. I inherited the ability from my mother; it's unique to the Rothwell family. If the wolves hadn't been high on painkillers it would have been agonising." He mirrored her by holding out his arm. "With their bones snapping and reshaping like that."

Temperance swallowed.

"How can they survive that kind of experience in the wild?" she whispered, huddling over her drink for warmth.

"The natural change is very gradual, over a few months. The final transformation coincides with the mating season. Afterwards they return to their normal lives as upstanding members of *human* society. They aren't supposed to have the ability to change on demand."

"Then why do they?"

"They are incredibly strong and fast when they transform, in case you didn't notice. That's a power I think anyone would like to have. They'd barely have to move to kill a human."

Temperance bit her lip. "I feel like I should tell my parents to move house."

"They'd never attack you," Alastair told her in a firm voice.

“Why not?”

“If they are mating, then that’s all they’re interested in,” he flushed in embarrassment.

Temperance balked, wondering if he’d seen the display. Shuffling back on the bed, she refused to voice the question. Alastair cleared his throat, taking in her discomfort and turning a darker shade of red.

“Just don’t bother them,” he continued after a short pause, his cheeks less flushed now. Temperance could see he still looked uncomfortable though. “And if they’ve taken drugs, they’ll have full control of their human minds; so they won’t be wasting their time on you. They’ll be hunting wizards, like me.”

She drained her cup and put it down. “Why are you so special?”

“I’m a werewolf hunter.” Alastair folded his arms. “We both were.”

There was an awkward silence.

Her stomach growled, reverberating around the room. She flushed, wrapping her arms around her waist trying to silence it. Alastair’s lips quirked; Temperance stretched down for her bag.

“I’m going to go to the shop, do you want anything? Or can you,” she waved her arms for emphasis, “magic-up something for us?”

“No,” he said, staring back at her.

She heaved a sigh, turning to face the door. “What use is magic if you can’t eat it?”

She yelped when she felt his hand close around her arm.

“No, I mean, you can’t go out there,” Alastair said, towering over her.

Temperance blinked. “I think I can.”

“What will you do if you come across any wolves or Sebastian’s men?”

Temperance levelled her eyes at him. “No one will see me. I’m good at slipping around unnoticed.”

“I’ll go,” he snapped. “Just sit down, will you?”

“I think you’re more noticeable,” she said, scrutinising him.

Alastair dropped her arm. His dark eyebrows knitted together. “What do you mean?”

“Have you ever looked in a mirror? You’ll cause a scene if there are any girls in the shop!”

“Why?” he shot back, looking offended.

He glanced down at his scuffed boots and jeans. His head tilted to check his reflection in the mirror. Running a hand over the stubble along his strong jaw, he made a face. The weapons belt at his waist twisted and the handle of his dagger swivelled into view.

“Never mind,” Temperance muttered.

“Wait,” he called just before she opened the door. Temperance glanced back to see him shirking off his jacket. He held it out to her, his eyes fixed on her face.

“It’s cold,” he explained in an offhand manner.

His expression was indifferent but there was an air of uncertainty around him, as if he wasn’t sure it was appropriate or that she’d even want it.

Temperance took the coat with a grateful nod. Once outside her cousin’s room, she slid it on and was swallowed up by the warm fabric. She took a moment to breathe in his odd forest scent mixed with the smell of old leather, then carefully made her way down the stairs.

“Very chivalrous,” she said to herself, nestling into the wide collar. Her cheeks felt hot. She shook her head - now wasn’t the time to feel flattered by a handsome man’s kindness.

The cold air smacked into her when she opened the main door. It whistled into the hall, leaving her almost winded. It had been frigid for weeks, but she had never expected it to snow like it was now. Even the rain on the ground from earlier wasn’t able to prevent it from sticking.

The trip to the twenty-four-hour shop was difficult. Her shoes sank into the snowdrifts, each step soaking her trousers. Alastair’s coat was doing a great job of keeping her top half warm though. She didn’t

want to have to give it back. She plodded through the snowflakes, watching with childlike glee as they settled on her nose. She stood in a daze just beyond the glow of the shop, mesmerised, until two girls brushed past her.

“Isn’t she that crazy girl?” one of them asked in a loud voice. The other girl glanced at Temperance.

Somewhere between their arrival and her getting dazzled by the snow, she had spread out her arms as if she was about to twirl around. She dropped her hands and sank deeper into the jacket.

“Oh yeah,” the girl remarked with a drunken hiccup.

Temperance watched them go, then hurried into the shop.

“Weird weather,” the man at the coffee machine muttered. “I remember when it never snowed in Carwick.”

The girl at the counter glanced up from her magazine and peered out through the window.

“Weird day.”

“Anyway, I thought you were leaving? Didn’t you get a call from your mother earlier? I said you could go,” the man said as Temperance drew away down the aisles. She gathered a few snacks, then went to pay.

The girl flicked her red hair over her shoulder and studied Temperance. There was a moment of silence before her face lit-up in recognition.

“Temperance,” she said in a bright voice. She indicated to Alastair’s coat. “I didn’t recognise you in that. What are you doing here so late? It’s three in the morning.” She started scanning the snacks. “That’s a lot of food for one person.”

“I’m with some friends. The two girls, who passed the shop a minute ago, you might have seen them? We were at a Christmas party,” she beamed. She nodded at the girl, whose smile was equally luminescent.

“Yes, I saw them,” she said, sticking the snacks into a bag. “Here you go, don’t slip on the way back. Happy Christmas, Temperance.”

Temperance felt her eyes boring into her back. As the door swung closed behind her, she heard the old man say, “Lilith, you can go now, if you like.”

“I think I might.”

The plastic bag in Temperance’s hand crackled as she pulled it closer. If Lilith came out now, she’d be stuck talking to her. Something she wanted to avoid in case Alastair came looking for her.

The snow was still falling around her, dropping into her face. It was hard to see anything. Taking a deep gulp of cold air, she wondered what her parents would do in the morning when they found her missing and Cyprian dead.

They needed to do something before then.

She gritted her teeth and raced back through the snow. As she drew closer she noticed something bouncing off the wall at the entrance to the dormitory. It was the door to the power box. Reaching out, she smacked it closed on her way inside.

When she got back to the room, she kicked the door open.

“Hey, turn on the radiator. I forgot it was electric.”

Her words were cut off in a muffled cry when Alastair spun her into the room. He leaned out to examine the corridor before locking them inside.

“You’re far too loud,” he said, stalking back to the window. “I heard you coming two floors down.”

Temperance shrugged off his jacket and tossed it back to him. She was sorry to see it go.

“Thanks for that,” she muttered, upending the bag onto the bed. “Here’s the food, take what you want.”

Alastair picked up a chocolate bar. Temperance watched him eat it, captivated when he licked the corners of his mouth.

“My parents,” she swallowed, looking away from him. “They’ll be worried.”

“No,” Alastair stated. “They won’t.” He scrunched up the wrapper and tossed it onto the desk. “The Assembly will cover up everything. They’ll change people’s memories, until they figure out what happened.”

“What about the damage the wizards made chasing after us? How will they explain that away? People will see it.”

“It’ll be fixed by morning, as if it never happened. And everyone, who saw or heard anything, won’t remember,” he said.

“Have things like this happened before?” She cringed at the thought of someone poking around inside her head.

He rolled his shoulders. “Maybe, but generally things on that scale don’t happen in plain sight.”

He stood up and flicked on the radiator, then started prowling around the room, picking things up, then setting them down again. He was like a caged animal. Temperance chewed on a handful of popcorn, watching him twisting around the room. It was exhausting.

“Tomorrow,” he said, after a moment. “I’ll fix everything tomorrow. I know who to ask. He’ll know what’s happening. The others said that I killed that lupa, Freya... I have a certain signature weapon, but I didn’t use it yesterday.”

Temperance eyed the dagger at his waist. He brushed a hand over the shadowy stubble on his cheeks.

“What kind of weapon is it?”

His head jerked back, forcing him out of his thoughts. His impossibly dark eyes narrowed.

“Never mind,” Temperance said, rolling onto her side and pulling up the covers. “Tomorrow then.”

She turned in the bed when he placed his jacket over her. He caught her eyes and looked away, sitting down in the chair by the window.

“Goodnight,” he said, looking at the snow.

Despite his bravado, she could see he was shivering. Something tugged at her heart. She wanted to offer him a share of the bed, but she knew he wouldn’t take it. She tried to come up with a way to persuade him but she couldn’t think of anything.

In the silence and relative peace of the room, her mind started to drift. The unwanted image of Cyprian’s bloody body flashed before her eyes. She remembered Alastair’s shouts and the wolves howling. It echoed in her ears.

Now that she knew they were real, not a figment of her imagination, she feared their fury. What if they reappeared?

Her heart sped up. Everything was even worse now that it was dark and she had to sleep.

“Alastair,” she whispered.

Her voice was small, childlike. She hated it, but couldn’t stop the shaking that quivered the last of his name on her lips. She reached out a hand to him.

Slipping it into the cold, she muffled a hiss of shock when the chilly air rushed in at her. “Could the wolves find us here?”

He turned away from the window; the moonlight gave him a soft glow.

He walked over to the bed. The mattress dipped when he sat down and Temperance rolled against him. He lay back, staring up at the ceiling.

“Go to sleep, I’ll protect you.”