

## Chapter 8



Temperance woke up with her teeth chattering. Alastair was snoring softly beside her. She leaned over and gave him a gentle nudge. He didn't stir.

"Some protection you are," she huffed, then dropped her hands with a guilty sigh.

He had been awake for nearly twenty-four hours now. Whatever tiny piece of energy he had been running on over the last few hours had finally worn out.

He made a soft noise, his eyes moving under his lids. His brow furrowed and he whispered something. Temperance leaned closer to his lips, feeling brave. She tilted her head to listen.

*"Weapon..."*

Fighting, she grimaced. Even in his sleep, it was all he could think about.

She glanced out the window. Beyond the frayed net curtain, the snow was still falling. It was a beautiful sight, but the harsh weather had turned the room into an icebox.

Temperance stretched over Alastair to feel the radiator. It was freezing. The timer on the power must have switched off. Taking care not to wake him, she manoeuvred herself over his body. His feet dangled off the end of the bed. It didn't look comfortable, but he was still dead to the world.

Temperance struggled to find her discarded bag. She pulled out her jacket and tiptoed downstairs to the entrance. Slipping outside, she stomped her feet, checking to see if she was alone in the courtyard. It was hard to be sure; she could barely make out anything in the snowstorm.

Forcing her way over to the power box, she pulled it open.

Inside the plastic covering something sparked at her making her jerk back. She leaned forward to examine the wires and switches. They buzzed and spluttered, little jolts of electricity sizzling back at her. Worrying tendrils of smoke drifted off of them. She lurched back, letting the little door swing closed. It looked like someone had slashed the wires recently. They hadn't been like that earlier.

Taking a deep breath, she turned.

Someone grabbed her from behind, clamping a freezing hand over her mouth to muffle her screams. They spun her around. Her panicked eyes locked on a familiar face.

"Shush now, Temperance," Lilith warned.

Her grip was pinching. There was incredible strength in her agile body; she was able to fix Temperance in place with only one arm. Her blue eyes were shining in the dark. Temperance had never noticed before how pale and clear they were. Her skin was luminescent; her arms were bare against the cold. She was only wearing a tank-top and jeans. The snow had soaked up her legs but she didn't seem to care.

The dark tattoo at her neck and her fiery hair were a stark contrast to her pale skin. Lilith tightened her hold and made a clucking noise in the back of her throat.

"Be a good girl now until he shows his face," she whispered.

A jolt of pure uncontrolled panic raced through Temperance's veins. She tried to shake off her hold, then noticed the long, thin sword in her other hand. She froze, her eyes widening as she stared at it. Blue symbols flashed across the weapons narrow silver blade as Lilith touched it to the ground. A shock of energy spat out around them. It blew the snow up into the air in a massive cackle of blue sparks that fizzled from flake to flake, spinning them into a maelstrom.

"There you are dog," Lilith said.

Her eyes were fixed on some point beyond the storm. Temperance was so close to her, she could feel the girl's breath on her face. It was like ice.

Something shot out of the gale towards them. Lilith spun Temperance out into the snow. She struck the ground as the shop girl skidded a few feet away into the drifts. Her feet were bare and exposed. When her momentum slowed, she snapped into a fighting stance.

A figure in front of her crouched like an animal preparing to strike. Even at a good distance away from her, Temperance could see Lilith's glowing eyes. Her red hair leapt around her like a flame on a white candle. Staring at the figure in front of her, Lilith dropped the tip of her sword to the ground. She reached out a free hand and the snowflakes billowed up around her like a white shell. With a loud whooshing sound, it broke apart and she was gone.

The snow that had been blown out in Lilith's wake swept over them. Temperance lurched to her feet, unable to make sense of what had happened.

Suddenly the stranger was in front of her. She screamed as she was yanked back into the dormitory. The cold air swept inside with them. When the door slammed shut, Temperance gasped.

A man, far taller than her, stared at her with wide, golden eyes. There was a horrific acidic stench wafting from him. She gulped and coughed on her first deep breath. She struggled back, dry heaving. Sharp nails squeezed into her upper arms.

"Please let me go," she choked.

His tangled beard swept against her.

Temperance's eyes widened. There was grease and grim all over him. His hair was stuck together with dried blood. Now that she was close enough, she could see the full extent of his malnutrition. The bones of his cheeks jutted out, his skin pulled tight over them. She glanced down at his hands. They were almost blue. His frayed and tattered clothes hung limp on his bony shoulders. He looked beyond frail. She should've been able to break his hold with one shrug, but his grip was fierce.

He made a soft keening noise. Temperance froze when he leaned into her and brushed his cold nose against the warm skin at her neck. She strained away from him, feeling bile rising up the back her throat. Her pulse drummed at her temples. She felt light-headed.

The tenseness in his body eased and he made several purring sounds. She stopped struggling and felt his hold relax in response. But when he took a deep breath, she started to feel uncomfortable again. As she felt his tongue at her neck, his moist sour breath washed over her.

"Get off me!" she screamed.

She struggled to breathe through her mouth and tried to shove him away. She then heard someone barrelling down the stairs behind them. The steps creaked and groaned under the thunderous force. The man didn't seem to notice, he was sniffing at her hair while rubbing his thin frame up against her.

Alastair skidded down the last few steps and leapt forward. He used the force to grab the stranger and hurl him away from Temperance. The man clattered to the ground. His head smacked back. She winced when she heard his exposed bones crack against the floor.

"Don't touch her," Alastair hissed. Temperance leaned back against the wall, taking in deep breaths.

"Wait!" she shouted, as the man tried to stand.

He stumbled back like a lead weight. She knew Alastair had the strength to do a lot of damage even to a man who seemed stronger than he looked. When the wizard snapped around to face her, she jerked back. His black eyes narrowed and lips were drawn back in a menacing snarl.

"Do you not know what that thing is?" he spat. "How dare you let it touch you?"

Without letting her reply, he pulled out his knife. Temperance froze when he tipped it to the man on the floor.

"What are you doing?" she screamed.

He collided with the stranger, grappling for purchase. The man beneath him was smiling. His teeth were chipped and yellow. It made him look as disturbed as Alastair. One of the wizard's hands was fisted

into the man's tattered clothes; the other held the knife to his throat.

"I'll kill each and every last one of you werewolves, I swear it!" Alastair shouted.

Temperance swallowed over the dry lump in her throat. Without thinking, she darted forward to try and break them apart.

She pressed her hands against their chests, trying to force them back. She didn't manage to move either of them. She wasn't sure what happened next, only that she was sent reeling backwards to the floor.

Winded and struggling to regain her breath, she watched stars swimming across the ceiling. She pressed her throbbing, injured hand flat against the floor to try and stop the room from spinning.

She heard Alastair swear. His heavy footsteps approached her and he knelt down. She felt his hand sweep over her cheek.

"Are you okay?" he whispered.

He was biting his lip, a flash of white teeth against his skin. She blinked and slid back on her elbows away from him. The look on his face changed; it became petulant.

"He's a werewolf," he spat.

"He saved me," she said, crawling to her feet. The werewolf was crouched on the ground like a beaten dog. He stared up at her. "If he wanted to hurt me he would have done it already."

"Who did he save you from?" Alastair glared at the man. After a moment of indecision, he slipped his knife back onto his belt.

"The shop girl," Temperance said. It was almost like she'd dreamed the strange encounter, it had happened so fast. "The man who works with her called her Lilith."

"Is she a redhead with a tattoo on her neck?"

Temperance looked up at him with round eyes, "How did you..."

"I bet she took advantage of the weather. So, she's after me now as well?"

Temperance frowned, "And me!"

The werewolf scrambled up. He attempted to step closer to Alastair, but the wizard held out his hand. A film of fire sprang up on his skin, it licked along his fingers.

"Try it," he whispered. The flames died away and he pointed to the far wall. "Stand over there."

Temperance scowled.

"Who is she?"

"Lilith Adams," he explained, his eyes fixed on the werewolf, who slunk back against the wall. "She's an acolyte of Lady Knox; a member of the Assembly. Her people have a minor ability to manipulate the weather."

"*Minor?*" Temperance echoed in disbelief.

"It means the Assembly is after us now too. This makes things difficult," he sighed.

"All three of us need to stick together."

"What?" Alastair spluttered.

"He helped me and she left because of him. Maybe he's involved in this somehow. We can help each other."

Alastair fisted his hands.

The werewolf stared at Temperance; his golden eyes were brighter for some reason. He turned to Alastair and gave a yellow smile. It looked smug.

"Fine, until we find out what's going on, he can stay with us,"

Alastair said, through gritted teeth.

"What's your name?" Temperance asked the wolf. He stared at her, tilting his head to the side.

"He can't talk." Alastair leaned in to look into his eyes. He pulled back with a frown. "His mind is caught up in the transformation."

"But he can understand us," Temperance said. "I think."

Alastair grabbed the man's chin, jerking him upright. They were about the same height, with similar black hair. Alastair tilted his head from side-to-side; the werewolf mirrored the movements. The wizard dropped his hold with a sudden sigh.

"He understands. But he's confused; mostly a wolf inside his head. I've seen it before."

"What will we do Alastair?" Temperance asked.

"Tomorrow I have some people I need to talk to," he stated. Jerking a thumb at the werewolf, he added, "and we'll need someone to do something about that smell. He can sleep *outside* the room."

Temperance turned toward the entrance and locked the glass door. Alastair pulled her back up the wooden stairs. The werewolf slunk after them. He crouched down outside the room, preparing to rest.

Yesterday, he had seemed more animalistic, now he was much calmer. Though, he was still making noises no human should be able to make.

Temperance tossed out a blanket to him before closing the door. Alastair fell into the bed. He put one arm behind his head and stared at her.

"Why don't you sleep outside with your new friend?" he asked in a snide tone.

"Jealous, are you?"

He snorted and turned to face the wall.

Taking a deep breath, Temperance reached for her bag and removed her pills. Swallowing them, she crawled into bed and tried to sleep for the third time that night.