

Chapter 13



The whole room lurched. Temperance grappled with the wall and struggled to maintain her balance. Halvard adapted faster. When the next shuddering roll hit the floor beneath them, he moved with it. Temperance fell forward, struggling over to the bed. Halvard caught her.

“What the hell was that?”

It struck a third time. Loud crashes resounded above and below them. People were screaming.

“We have to get out! The safe house is under attack!” the werewolf growled, pulling her towards the door.

Temperance jerked out of his hold and darted back for her bag. Halvard shouted at her. The floor groaned again. She could feel a ripple of movement beneath her feet. There was a sharp crack. She turned to Halvard, her eyes wide.

“Did you hear that?”

The werewolf barrelled into her, slamming them both to the floor. Temperance scrambled backwards. The bed where her bag had been was gone. Wooden planks from the ceiling above harpooned through it, dragging it and her bag down through the centre of the Devil’s Staircase.

She clapped her hand to her chest. “I thought *this* floor was going to collapse.”

She smiled over at Halvard but he jerked his head up. Something plummeted down from the room above them. It splintered through the floorboards behind them. Everything seemed to pause for a second. In slow motion, he lunged at her. Temperance felt herself slipping backwards, everything sliding away beneath her. A scream stuck in her throat. She was suddenly looking up at him.

Time sped up again; noise and colours flashed past her.

She was falling; fast.

“Temperance!” Halvard shouted.

She plummeted through the ruined floors. Broken beds and furniture fell alongside her. Unstable wooden planks clattered and broke apart underneath them. Temperance threw her arms around her head and squeezed her eyes shut.

She found her voice and screamed. But it was lost amidst the shouting and explosions.

A whoosh of cold air hit her face and she was forced to open her eyes. She flailed out her arms. She was soaring through the air, out of the building, high above the courtyard. She screamed as gravity pulled her down towards the stone fountain.

She sucked in a breath just as the deep pool enveloped her.

The force of the impact pulled her down into the darkness. The wind was knocked out of her lungs, a flood of bubbles shot up to the surface, her vision blacked out for a second. Panic shot through her.

Her arms floundered at her sides; she kicked out and fought to reach the surface again. The light above seemed to drift further away no matter how hard she struggled to reach it.

Someone gripped her arms and dragged her out of the fountain. A surge of water followed her. Gasping and shaking, she looked up.

“Are you all right?” Fenrir asked.

Temperance’s teeth chattered as she nodded. The wolf grinned at her. At first she thought it was on purpose, then she realised he was changing and his lips had just been pulled back into a smile. His teeth were elongating, cutting into his skin. Blood dripped down his chin. Tufts of thick hair erupted along his neck. The seams along his jumper started to split apart. It fell in strips to the ground to reveal the convulsing muscles of his chest and stomach.

He pushed her aside.

“You need to run now.”

A chaotic scene had erupted around them. Hundreds of people were struggling to escape the Devil’s Staircase. Fierce fires exploded out of the building. The cavern groaned overhead, the shuddering force of the blasts knocking free several stalactites that crashed to the ground, gouging giant gaping holes in the cavern floor. Several fleeing faey plummeted into them, their screams swallowed up by the thunderous sound of the Staircase’s front walls collapsing.

Frantic people started trying to run out into the streets beyond the destroyed courtyard, but they were hemmed in by a strange group of figures standing in a long line.

“Wizards,” Fenrir growled in a guttural tone.

They were engaged in a vicious confrontation with the other faey.

In unison, the wizards threw up their arms and a terrible pressure started to build. When it broke, what remained of the hostel blew apart in a shower of debris. The force of the explosion blasted people into the air. There was a chorus of sickening thuds as they smacked back to the ground.

Some of the other faey started to retaliate with strange powers. They reached out to the fires that burned in the building around them. The flames enveloped them. They threw out their arms and it lanced towards the wizards.

The full force of the attack caught one man. He started to shriek, his skin blistering, and a stench of charred flesh filled the air. A female wizard nearby gestured towards the fountain beside Temperance. It shuddered and the water drained away from the edges, weaving up into a massive column. It collapsed onto the burning wizard then surged out to attack the other faey.

Someone screamed, "No, you fool! Their powers are elemental!"

The waters force ebbed away.

The other faey stood unaffected, ankle deep in lapping water. It started to collect around them, swirling up their legs. They forced it into a flat wall and flung it forward. The female wizard threw up her arms but it was too late, she was catapulted off her feet.

Temperance heard gunshots echo around the cavern. She ducked down. Bone-chilling howls filled the air.

The werewolves had joined the attack.

They launched themselves at the wizards.

Fenrir dropped to his knees in front of her. His spine twisted, the snapping of his bones made Temperance cringe. He splayed his hands on the ground as his jaw lengthened. His jeans burst apart with the force. Temperance turned away unable to watch it any more. She looked back when she heard a wolf growl. He struggled free from the shreds of his clothes and leapt into the fight.

"Where's Alastair Byron?" a wizard shouted.

Temperance crouched behind the fountain. She felt nauseous; her body was aching after her fall. She patted her pockets for her pills. The experiment be damned, she needed to feel normal again. Her pockets were empty. She'd forgotten why she'd gone back for her bag in the first place; she'd stashed her medication in it. Now it was lost in the ruins. The decision to stop taking them had been made for her.

"Yes Temperance, well done." She rolled her eyes. "Don't take them. See what happens."

She felt delusional already. It was like she was behind a pane of glass, immune to the disarray around her. She saw one lone man lifting a massive boulder and tossing it at a crowd of wizards. There was also a woman with a sword standing in the middle of the chaos, completely untouched; her blue eyes shining and her red hair whipping around her like a fiery inferno.

Temperance paused, gripping the edge of the fountain with her cracked fingernails.

"Lilith!"

She scrambled to her feet and raced away from the fountain. Something struck the back of her knees. A sharp jolt of pain lanced up her body. She crumpled to the ground and clutched at her leg. When she pulled her hand away, it was covered in blood. Lilith was advancing towards her, her bloody sword trailing along the ground. Her eyes were narrowed on Temperance and her jaw was set as she thrust other fighters out of her way.

The red-haired woman jerked her sword up, splattering blood across the stones. She grabbed the hem of her top and dragged the blade through it. It left a streak of red staining her clothes, but the silver metal was gleaming again. When she reached Temperance, she held the sword above her head and looked down at her.

Temperance's mind went blank; she stared at the weapon. Everything around her seemed to slow down and fade away. She could hear her breathing, loud in her ears, the thump of her heartbeat. She was going to die. Clenching her teeth, she stared into Lilith's eyes. The other woman cocked her head. She opened her mouth to say something but was suddenly tackled from the side. She shrieked in anger. Temperance didn't wait to see who had saved her.

She scrambled to her feet and bolted down the cobblestone path away from the ruined safe house. The sound of the fighting grew fainter. A prickling, icy sweat broke out all over her skin. The buildings around her blurred together, warning sirens alerted the rest of the underground city that something had happened.

Temperance sped up.

She was running faster than she ever had in her life. And it felt easy. Her breathing wasn't laboured, it was slow and steady. As she bolted past confused shoppers, they clustered together in a daze staring up at the ruined safe house. She didn't know how the wizards had broken the protection on the building, but they'd done it to capture her and Alastair.

When she was far enough away, she skidded to a halt in front of a group of school children. They stumbled backwards; one girl dropped her bag with a loud shriek. Temperance sidestepped into an alleyway with a quick apology. Someone grabbed her and pressed her up against a wall. A hand was clamped over her mouth to stop her from screaming.

Halvard stared into her eyes. He was breathing heavily.

It was like he had been running for miles. A layer of sweat covered his pale face. Temperance could tell by looking at him that even with his werewolf stamina, he was exhausted.

"You...are very fast," he said, collapsing back away from her. He hit the opposite wall and slumped to the ground.

The adrenaline coursing through her disappeared. The pain behind her knees returned and she lurched forward with a hiss.

“Is it part of your power?” Halvard asked, taking deep breaths. “That speed! You kept that pace for at least two miles, Temperance.”

“I lost my pills,” she said, as if this would explain everything.

Pulling her hands back, she saw the bleeding had stopped a little. The wound seemed superficial.

Halvard rested his arms on his knees, staring up at her. “Alastair will have to find us top side. It’s not safe here anymore.”

“But what if he goes back to the Devil’s Staircase looking for us?”

The werewolf frowned. “He was there already! Didn’t you see him? Temperance you are very ungrateful.”

She shook her head in confusion. “Ungrateful?”

“Poor boy, you’ll hurt him, you know,” the wolf said, a lazy smile spreading across his lips. When she still didn’t respond, he lost his grin and stopped teasing her. He rubbed his fingers over his eyes and sighed, “He pulled Lilith away from you.”

“What?” She stepped back in the direction of the hostel. “We have to go back and help him!” He was all alone.

“No,” Halvard snapped, turning very serious. He let his hands fall. “It’s too dangerous. We’ll go back up to Carwick and wait for him there. He’s a big boy. He can look after himself.”

Temperance shook her head.

“He isn’t worth your time. He’s only a weapon. Not a person, just a thing.” Halvard’s eyes hardened. Temperance swallowed over a lump in her throat.

“That’s a disgusting thing to say.” Her hands fisted at her sides. “Alastair is a good person. Don’t say things like that about him! You don’t know him.”

The werewolf glanced aside with a bitter look on his face. His smile returned, but it was spiteful. “No, you’re the one who doesn’t know. Pure things like you have no place with filth like him.”

“Why are you talking like this?” Temperance demanded, glaring down at him.

He was up in a flash, towering over her. Something had happened to his eyes and he was growling. He shoved her up against the wall.

“You don’t know anything.”

She had no idea what was happening. He pressed up against her. She shoved him back. His eyes were luminescent gold, completely rimmed in black. The whites were almost gone. The wolf was taking control. He bent his face into her hair, his teeth nipped at her neck. She pushed and struggled against him, but it did no good. He spoke to her in a deep guttural tone.

"Father hated me. And Freya... what happened to Freya? *Cyprian!*"

Hearing those names, her heart sped up. She grabbed his face and turned him to look at her.

"How do you know Freya?" she demanded.

He growled, no longer interested in talking. Temperance tightened her hold. She saw her own eyes shining back at her, reflected in his.

"Snap out of it!" she hissed.

The glow from her eyes intensified. His started to change, the white bleeding back and the luminescence in the gold fading away. He lurched back, taking deep ragged breaths. He stumbled and fell boneless to his knees in front of her.

"I'm sorry," he gasped. "I need Alastair's... power to suppress... my instincts."

"And just what the hell were you about to do?" Temperance asked, crossing her arms.

Halvard stared at her as if it was a stupid question. She coughed and looked aside.

"You mentioned Freya," she told him. His eyes narrowed and his face turned into a twisted mask of disgust. "What do you know about her? This could be important."

His lips curled into a fierce snarl. He stood up. For a split second Temperance thought the animal part of him was surging back to take control, but Halvard just spat, "I don't want to talk about it. Don't mention her name again!"

Temperance hung back, not knowing what to do. Halvard snapped his fingers at her, pointing to a door at the end of the alleyway. It was a thick steel slab, twice his height, embedded into the cavern wall.

"A way out," he bit at her, still livid. He jerked it open. There was a familiar ladder on the other side.

"Climb up," Halvard told her in a curt voice, stepping onto the first rung. "It'll pull you up after a few steps. We'll go somewhere safe in Carwick and wait for Alastair. He can track me."

Temperance watched him go. Taking a deep breath, she followed after him.

As if her day hadn't been bad enough, now she was stuck with a moody werewolf.