

Chapter 15



Temperance huddled down into the base of one of the trees facing Lilith. The gnarled tree roots stretched out either side and framed her, so that she sat in the middle of a hollow that provided her some shelter. She clutched the knife tight in her hands. The ridges on the handle dug into her palm. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Alastair twist in his sleep. She yawned, her eyelids feeling heavy. It could only be lunchtime but she was exhausted. She realised she hadn't slept since the university.

Her head bobbed.

"Don't you want to know why I didn't kill you?"

Her eyes shot open. Instinctively, she jerked back into the tree, thumping her head against the wood. A tittering laugh drew her eyes to Lilith. She was wide awake. Temperance fumbled with the knife, pointing it at her. Lilith was kneeling on the ground; the rope still bound her wrists and ankles in tight bulky knots. She jutted her chin out with a smirk.

"I'm Lady Knox's envoy. She's a member of the Bifrost Assembly. It's the ruling body of the faey world."

"I know," Temperance whispered. She didn't know what to do. Her fingers tightened around the knife handle until they ached.

"He told you something at least. He doesn't usually do that; he must like you. If only you had seen his face when he discovered I hurt you! Temperance, did you bewitch the little wizard? Women truly are the fiercer sex, don't you think?" Her blue eyes were sparkling as she looked over at Alastair. "Would it surprise you to know he has never shown any interest in anyone up until now? Even me?"

Temperance stared at her.

"Men are only for play or stud though," she said. "They aren't worth the same as women. They're weak. Wizards might be the exception though. My grandfather was one, you know, like yours. We're quite similar really. We even have the same taste in men."

"I don't..." Temperance muttered with a blush.

“What, you want the wolf instead?” Lilith said, with a bark of laughter. “Now that would be very funny, Halvard would love that.”

Temperance stood up away from her. “I’m not going to listen to you anymore. You tried to kill us *twice* for the Assembly.”

Lilith snorted. “I was sent by Lady Knox, not the Assembly.”

Her tone was serious. “The Assembly is only working with the wizards because of Cyprian’s death. It’s forbidden to kill a Seat holder. They think that Halvard murdered him, while Alastair killed that lupa. And the poor werewolves are caught up in the whole dangerous business; not wise when you’re an endangered species.”

Her eyes were shining.

“You should let the wolf mate with a lupa, you know. They wouldn’t want you with him.”

Temperance frowned; she didn’t know what to say.

“The –” Lilith grunted and slumped forward, unconscious.

Alastair was sitting up, his hand was outstretched and sweat was dripping down his face. His jacket had slipped open to reveal his chest. The bullet wound was a pinkish scar now. His black eyes were wild, he looked livid.

“Where is the wolf?” he said, twisting around.

“He went to get food,” she said, coming over to sit across from him.

“He shouldn’t have left you alone,” the wizard mumbled. He leaned up to button his shirt, his fingers shaking. Growling in frustration, he collapsed back onto the ground. “I’m not fit for a fight yet. He should have stayed.”

Temperance waved the knife. “I have this.”

He raised his eyebrow and snorted. “Just stay close by me.” He was drifting away again, the corners of his mouth relaxing.

“Halvard knew Freya,” she blurted out.

But he was already asleep. She took a deep breath and buttoned up his shirt for him. Her fingers brushed against his skin. The wizard made a rumbling noise in the back of his throat. Temperance tucked his jacket in around him and sat back on her heels.

Staring down at him, she hoped she could go home soon. The chill in the air and the thin covering of snow were constant reminders that tomorrow was Christmas Eve. Temperance didn’t consider herself a very jolly person, but it was a time to be with your family. She needed to be at home.

A branch cracking underfoot announced Halvard’s return. His

amber eyes were trained on her as he came closer. Holding up another large paper bag with a grin, he unbuttoned his long velvet jacket and settled on a stone beside Alastair.

With him back, Temperance had a chance to use the bathroom. She slumped off into the distance, feeling the wolf's eyes on her. When she was finished, she thought she heard something snapping in the dense undergrowth. She bolted back to their camp.

Gasping, she stopped in front of Halvard. He lifted a bottle of orange up to the light. His eyes were transfixed by the carbonated bubbles racing to the surface of the drink.

"It burns," he said. He held the bottle out to her. "Is this normal?"

Temperance took a sip.

"Fizzy orange," she said. "Listen, I heard something out there..."

"Fizzy," Halvard repeated, taking it back. He took another swig and smiled. "I like it."

"The noise," Temperance reminded him.

"There's nothing out there," he snorted, waving her off. "Well, nothing to be worried about."

"That means there is something out there," she said, putting her hands on her hips.

He sniffed at the air. "There was an injured wolf, a young male; you met him in the Devil's Staircase."

He looked up at her with a slow smile and leaned in. "He was hurt in the wizards' raid. No one was with him. He was just interested in the smell."

"What smell?" Temperance asked. Then her eyes narrowed on him, "You? But, he was afraid of you in the safe house."

"He wouldn't dare come any closer *because* of me. It's you he couldn't help wanting to smell, though he was petrified."

"He liked my smell?" She swallowed. She didn't know whether to feel a little flattered by it or very uncomfortable.

"It's very alluring for a male wolf," Halvard muttered.

"But Fenrir said he couldn't smell anything when..."

Halvard's face twisted, lips curled into a snarl. "He covers his scent well. I didn't smell him on you at all. He's changed. I suppose I should feel proud."

Temperance thumped her hand into her palm, then pointed at him in satisfaction. "So you do know him!"

"You were right. I'm starting to remember more."

Alastair began to snore. Halvard nudged him with the toe of his boot. The wizard grumbled and rolled over.

“You don’t need to hear that, Temperance. If you were with me, you never would, because we’d never be sleeping,” he said in a sultry tone.

She sat down in front of him. “Changing the subject?”

She pulled her jacket around her, grateful that she’d still been wearing it when the attack started. She shivered, feeling the wind biting into her. It was still freezing. Halvard tossed something into her lap; she looked up.

“Aren’t you cold?” she asked, holding up his coat.

The werewolf leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. The long, wine-coloured woollen shirt he wore looked warm, but not against the winter weather.

“I’m very hot-blooded,” he said with a chuckle.

Temperance slipped on his jacket and took the food he offered. They ate in silence. Time ticked past and soon it was dark again.

Halvard made a small fire for them. The heat started to melt some of the snow. He dragged Lilith over and sat with her, opposite Temperance. Alastair was still asleep.

“What are we going to do? Konrad Rosier can’t help us anymore, so what next?”

Halvard lay down beside the fire. He stared up at the branches above them. “Go to sleep, I’ll think of something.”

Shivering, Temperance huddled down beside Alastair. “I hope we fix this before Christmas.”

She really wanted to go home.

“Goodnight Temperance.”