

Fellwood Wolves

Prologue

Elowen leaned against the side of the carriage, staring out into the forest as it slowly passed her by. She had never travelled through the Fellwood before but she felt the name was apt, it was a dark and dreary place. The shadows between the trees seemed to move in a way that unsettled her.

A gentle touch on her hand.

“Don’t worry.”

She turned to face her companion, soon to be husband. Lord Simon Astor was a catch, according to her father, a handsome man who was known to be kind and most importantly wealthy. Elowen had to admit, he’d made a good first impression when he had arrived at her family’s estate three days ago; he’d been charming, warm and surprisingly easy to talk to. She didn’t believe in love at first sight but she certainly could see herself loving this man soon enough.

“Another few hours and we’ll be at the inn, then tomorrow home.” He continued with a warm smile.

Elowen returned the smile and nodded. She didn’t mind the long journey, creepy forest notwithstanding. She liked Simon, she really did but they were to be married the day after they arrived in Vularen, his home city. That would mean performing certain wifely duties. She was no child; her mother had explained what would be expected of her on her wedding night many times since she was old enough to know of such things. But the most intimate thing she had ever done was allow Simon to kiss her, chastely, as they set off together this morning. She knew nothing about how to please a man.

Suddenly, the carriage jolted as the horses came to a sudden stop. Elowen would have been flung to the floor had Simon not caught her. The carriage was still now but she could hear the horses snorting and stamping their feet as the coachman tried to get them moving again.

“Stay here.” Simon whispered, stepping outside and asking what the holdup was.

She stuck her head out to listen but a glint in the forest line caught her eye. A shiver of fear worked down her spine, a weapon? Were there bandits in the Fellwood? Instantly she became hyper aware of the finery she was wearing, if she gave them all her jewellery would they leave

her and her finance alone? The coachman yelled out and her eyes whipped forward in time to see a huge beast stalking out in front of the carriage.

Dark grey fur, sharp white teeth and yellow eyes stared into her.

A wolf.

A *massive* wolf.

The creature stood almost as tall as the horses, its hackles raised and a deep growl was echoing from its throat. That growl was then joined by others at its side, brown, white and grey, more giant wolves were encircling their carriage. Elowen's trembling worsened, were there any weapons in the carriage? She'd never used a sword before but she couldn't just stand here and let these things tear her apart!

"Werewolves! Elowen, get back inside!" Simon yelled, unsheathing the rapier at his side.

Ice filled her veins. She'd heard that Werewolves existed in the Fellwood once but heroes had wiped them out years ago, or so everybody thought. The grey wolf, the largest among them snapped its jaws and made for them and Elowen shrieked. The coachman attempted to flee only for the brown wolf to dive for him, great jaws closing around his neck. There was a spray of blood and a horrid snapping sound before the beast dropped a limp body from its jaws.

He was dead and it had only taken *seconds*.

Simon had placed himself between the grey wolf and the carriage in an attempt to shield her but he couldn't possibly fight all three. She didn't want this man to die for her. The White wolf, smaller and sleeker than the others darted forward, Simon's rapier slicing across its face as he turned to try and stop it. It did nothing to stop the monster as it dove for her and lacking any better idea Elowen raised her arms to try and protect herself.

Agony exploded as the creatures' teeth sunk into her, its great jaws encircling her entire forearm. Desperately she kicked and struggled but that only seemed to dig the fangs closer to bone. Suddenly, there was a pained yelp and the pressure released.

"Run, Elowen!"

Simon's blade was buried in the white wolf's side but its packmates were fast approaching. Hugging her injured arm to her chest she shakily got to her feet and began to stumble into the tree line. The sound of growls and pained cries echoed after her and she felt tears burning in her eyes. This wasn't how her life was supposed to end.

Elowen could feel her dress getting caught on brambles and sticks as she fled but she didn't stop. Her shoes came lose in the wet earth and soon she was running barefoot, doing her best to ignore the pain as rocks and sticks cut into her feet. The wolves were behind her, she could tell. With tears burning in her eyes, she realised she was being toyed with, there was no way a sheltered noble lady could be faster than those powerful beasts but even that thought didn't stop her. She had to find a way to live, something clever...

Bursting through the trees she had just enough time to skid to a stop before she went tumbling into the water of a raging river. The white water crashed against sharp rocks; she hadn't heard it coming over the blood rushing in her ears. Lungs burning with exertion she turned to see the grey wolf looking at her, she could have sworn she could see glee in its eyes.

Holding her injured arm against her she stood. Trapped. She could feel the warm blood seeping into her dress and still the wolf watched, it took her a second for her to realise it was waiting. Waiting for her to choose her death; by its jaws or the river?

Steeling herself Elowen stood tall. She was nobility, this werewolf may take her life but it would never take her dignity.

She stepped backwards.

The water was like ice, it took only seconds for her body to become numb, even the burning ache of the bite on her arm dissipated as she found herself tossed end over end in the water. A rock slammed into her back, forcing the air from her lungs and making her see stars. She floundered, trying to find the surface in the wild waters, breaking the surface long enough get a gasp of air before being forced back down. Black spots danced across her blurry vision and she could feel her consciousness fading.

She didn't want to die like this! She didn't want to die at all.

She opened her mouth to scream and the water flowed in.

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With a painful cough Elowen came to. She was soaked to the bone, shivering violently in the cold mud of the riverbank. She blinked, the cloudy night sky coming into focus above her, she was alive. Trembling she tried to get up only to cry out in pain as she tried to put pressure on her arm. The wound was bleeding sluggishly, still raw and open to the elements.

How had she not bled to death yet?

She quickly slapped the hand on her good arm across her mouth and listened for any sign she'd been heard. Who knew how close she was to that pack of beasts, she couldn't get caught now.

Light broke through the clouds above her and Elowen felt a jolt run through her. Looking up she saw the moon emerge as the sky cleared and her heart began to race. Thundering in her chest she began to gasp for air, a panic attack? No, no this was worse. A burning pain began to spread through her and she cried out, writhing on the ground unable to stand. It felt like her limbs were stretching, it felt like a thousand tiny needles were pushing up through her skin; with horror she watched as her nails began to grow, her fingers shorten and fur burst forth along her limbs.

What remained of her clothes were tearing as her body grew and changed, leaving nothing but shredded fabric. Her cry began to change, becoming something deep, animalic, *bestial*. There was a pressure on the small of her back as her spine elongated to form a tail her ears burned as they moved from the side of her head to the top.

After what felt like an age the pain receded and Elowen blinked her vision clear. Her arm no longer hurt but when she looked down at it to check it was a leg that greeted her, coated in black fur, with a paw at the end. Trembling for an entirely new reason she stumbled, falling twice in an effort to get back to the river. Heart pounding in her ears she looked down at her reflection and a wolf stared back.

She screamed, or at least she tried to, what came out of her was a yelp.

The sound bounced off the trees and echoed out into the forest, Elowen wanted to weep but she couldn't. Wolf eyes couldn't cry, so lacking anything else she curled up on the ground, placing her paws over her muzzle and whimpering.

This couldn't be happening.

Her ears perked up at the sound of twigs snapping underfoot and a smell reached her now powerful nose. Another wolf. Another werewolf was coming toward her, no doubt it had her scent. What would it do when it arrived, try to kill her, fight her? A strange anger seemed to fill her; if this wolf wanted to hurt her it would have to catch her first. Feeling her conscious mind

slip away Elowen raised her head to the sky and howled, a sound full of defiance and rage. Then, following her new instincts she dove into the forest. Trees flying past so quickly they were blurs as she moved, the wolf took over, the noble lady falling to the back as she ran. She could hear footfalls behind her, the grey wolf appearing at her side, instinct took over and she snapped her jaws at them before darting lower, sinking her teeth into their leg.

Eye for an eye.

Then they were rolling, wrestling, rending flash and they fought and with speed that surprised even her, she kicked her hunter off her. Slamming them down a ditch, giving her the time to escape. Now injured, the grey wolf had no chance of catching her.

Things became fuzzy. She was moving through the forest, daring her hunters to find her. Elowen's memory seemed to fracture, she remembered the feeling on her paws on the ground, teeth sinking down into some poor rabbit that crossed her path, howling to the moon. She wasn't sure how much time was passing. Then, slowly, she came back to herself.

Pink tinged the sky and she felt her strength beginning to fade. Exhausted, she collapsed on the ground. There was blood in her teeth. The last few hours were a swirl of fear but also exhilaration. That same burn passed through her, less painful this time but no less unsettling as her limbs shrunk and her body returned to that of a woman. She shivered, her clothing was miles away in shreds and without her fur she was exposed to the elements, exhausted and alone.

Another snap of twig and she turned, growling as the scent of wolf seeped through the forest floor toward her. And despite all the horror and fear, Elowen felt herself calm slightly, something about the wolf now seemed to unnaturally draw her in.

"Easy darling."

A voice in her head. The grey wolf stepped out from the undergrowth; she wasn't sure how but she could smell a sense of victory wafting of him. And she was sure it was a him now, though she wasn't sure how she knew. It was as if she could feel an invisible connection between them, like a threat pulling her to him.

"I'm here to bring you home."