

## Chapter Fifteen

‘What the hell am I *doing* here?’ Will asked himself, not for the first time since the Spring Gala started, and most likely not the last time before the night would be through. He wasn’t entirely surprised to see most of the people sitting at tables in tribal lines, although it wasn’t as widespread as he thought it might have been. It seemed like many of the tribes highly enjoyed comingling, and the groups seemed to almost form local circles or groups that were getting reacquainted because they weren’t local to one another but had formed some friendships earlier in life.

Was there a summer camp for supernaturals he’d missed growing up?

The shades hadn’t made much of a point of talking for long with most of the gathered crowd, although a few of them had congregated over by Grand Captain Feng, and they seemed to be wrapped up in a rather intense conversation, although Will couldn’t make out the details, even with his improved hearing. The word ‘crossroads’ seemed to be the only thing Will could pick out of it, but that word didn’t mean a whole lot to him out of context, so he decided to let his eyes take note of what other nonverbal cues he could pick up from around the room.

There weren’t a large number of werewolves present, but Will had been told to expect that, as this particular Gala conflicted with some intercontinental training that had been happening between a number of the various werewolf houses from around the world. As such, the presence the werewolves seemed to bring to Gala was much less than, say, the vampires, who seemed to be in such abundance that Will expected them to start spiking the punch bowl any time soon.

Glancing over at Trish specifically, he noticed that she too seemed to be involved in a rather tense conversation. He couldn’t remember ever seeing the giant redhead scowling before now, but the look currently on her face seemed like it could kill a thousand puppies just by glowering at them. Whatever it was she and Grand Captain Keene were discussing, Trish looked like she wanted to strangle her superior and was just barely doing her absolute best to keep her temperament in check. Trish was waving her arms around, but kept her voice low, even if her ruffled brow made it abundantly clear the argument wasn’t going her way. He did notice that Captain Keene made at least one gesture over at Silversmith, and the Captain’s expression was as cryptic as could be, since he knew next to nothing about the head of the Green Werewolf House. The Grand Captain was also their top pack leader, he would guess, but the specifics of the politics still felt complicated. Whatever they were talking about, he felt like it most likely involved Jonas and neither werewolf looked particularly happy about it.

“To be a fly on the wall over at that table, hm?” Will joked to Silversmith, who turned and offered him a rather cryptic smile in return.

“Don’t worry, William,” Jonas replied. “You’ll certainly know soon enough what they’re discussing, and when you do, you may find yourself wishing that you didn’t.”

“What’s the point of these Galas anyway?”

“A bit of social, a bit of business, a bit of introducing new faces to the field, a bit of hearing who’s died since last we all met... there’s lots of reasons for it,” Silversmith said, sipping from a martini that Kelly had brought him. “Another good part of it is cross-tribe business. Sometimes people feel like they’re getting cornered or outnumbered if they have a problem that extends between multiple tribes, so we use the Gala to cover business like that. It’s also just a nice excuse for us to mingle and see each other in a low-pressure environment, where nobody’s worried about putting on a strong show of force for anyone else. Sometimes it’s okay to have nice things and get together where nobody’s at each other’s throats.”

“I’m just not used to seeing Trish look rattled.”

“I think she might fancy you a little, you know,” Silversmith said to him.

“She certainly doesn’t *act* like anyone who fancies me,” Will grumbled.

“She’s immune to the natural feral charms of a werewolf, being that she’s also of your kind, Will,” the old mage told him. “The women in your orbit have been drawn to the raw animal magnetism but Trish? She’s grown up her whole life surrounded by werewolves, and so that kind of pull? It’s easy for her to ignore. But I think you intrigue her, not falling within normal boundaries, not acting the way she’s used to seeing werewolves act. And I know my presence puts her off slightly.”

“Nah, I think she likes you, Jonas.”

“Oh, she *likes* me just fine, but the level of power I have at my fingertips makes her nervous. I’m not just a mage, Will. I’m a member of The Deck. That means in the history of magic, there have only been a few hundred people who *might* have ever been better at magic than me. That gives her pause, and rightfully so. She doesn’t really understand the history between your family and mine. Or at least, she didn’t *before* she was talking to Captain Keene. Now? Now who the hells knows what she’s thinking...”

“It cool if I ask you who a few people are?”

“Of course, Will,” Silversmith said. “That’s one of the reasons I’m here.”

“One of?” Will picked up on that and decided to get clarity on that specific point first.

“What’s the *main* reason you’re here?”

“To introduce you as the proprietor of the newest crossroads, and to establish clearly that it’s under my protection, and also give you a bit of an appearance boost by traveling with you for this particular Gala,” Silversmith remarked quietly. “Most of our kind, they have been coming to these Galas for decades, and they’re used to these kinds of events. You haven’t, and it’s all going to feel a bit overwhelming, all the various factions arguing about things, terms and places you aren’t familiar with being bandied about. It can be disorienting.” He paused, glancing around the room with a slight chuckle. “Besides, I like keeping them all on their toes, and knowing I’ve gifted the honor of a Sanctuary to you? That’s going to have all of them more than a little curious what’s going on. There’s quite a remarkable level of power in that.”

“I get the feeling there’s more you’re not telling me about all of that,” Will said cautiously. He didn’t want to offend his companion any, but there was a very definite sense that Silversmith had thoughts regarding their situation that he wasn’t sharing with Will.

Silversmith let out a deep, heavy sigh and then turned to look over at Kelly. “Give us a minute, would you, dear?” The succubus frowned and then nodded, getting to her feet, heading over towards the bar, walking out of earshot range. “When I was... detained, I missed out on witnessing a few things that I should not have. One of which included your conception, birth and disappearance from your pack. Your father and I have... done business together in the past. I would not call us friends, not by any stretch, but we had helped each other out on enough occasions to be called acquaintances. During the time I was... imprisoned... I missed out on a great many things. Your father’s entire relationship with your mother – their meeting, courting, her getting pregnant and him choosing to hide your existence from almost all your people – I was completely in the dark about all of that, your very existence concealed from me until just last year. I haven’t seen nor spoken with your father since my return from exile – he seems to be constantly on the move and difficult to reach. I’m not entirely sure he even knows of your mother’s passing or how you have reunited with the tribe.”

“I think he does,” Will replied, “although I suppose I’m just based on that what my Uncle

Pavel said the one time we met.”

“I would trust your Uncle Pavel about as far as you can throw him,” Silversmith sighed. “He isn’t exactly what one would call reliable information. He’s notorious for inferring things incorrectly, jumping to the wrong conclusions and only half-remembering what he *thinks* he saw when he was drunk, which is often. He’s not even *exactly* your Uncle, although I suppose it’s close enough in terms of werewolf society. Consider yourself lucky to have Clayton Colt and his sister Trish on your side. The Colt Pack has a long and storied lineage, having been part of the North American werewolf society for nearly as long as there have been western colonizers here.”

“The Native Americans don’t have werewolves?”

“They do, but they are of a different variety than the majority in the Green Werewolf House, and they have mostly intermingled with the western werewolves now,” Silversmith said. “That may even be where you get some of your darker features from – I often suspected your father was part Cherokee, although I was polite enough not to ask or pry. I do know there’s a strong stripe of Italian in his bloodline, though, which should be obvious, I suppose.”

“But the Colts aren’t from here?”

“Descendants of Samuel Colt himself, if the legend’s to be believed, not that you should always give credence to such things,” Silversmith said. “But they’re a powerful family, a strong and capable pack, incredible allies to have in your corner.”

“I suppose I should ask – what comes along with maintaining a sanctuary?”

“It’s not all that difficult. You’ll just have a table that’ll feel *very* tense every so often, but considering the safety is guaranteed, you should just be responsible for keeping the temperature lowered and encourage them to discuss their problems like rational adults, even if they aren’t acting that way.”

“And if a fight does break out?”

“At the counter, along the underside, by the register, there’s a large button under a flip-top plastic covering, just for safety. The moment you think things are getting out of hand, you push that button, and I will be there within a minute,” Silversmith assured him. “I will also make sure I establish a backup person, just on the very remote chance that I am overly busy, so if I have not responded to your call in one minute’s time, the backup person will step in.”

“How often do things get out of hand at Sanctuaries?”

“It’s hard to say – you tend to gauge them on a case-by-case basis, but you’ve always struck me as highly capable, Will, so you should be able to talk down most of the squabbles back into being conversations with just a little polite encouragement, and when that doesn’t work, I can always bring in the stick.”

“Do I even want to know how big a stick it is?”

“The first infraction for violating a sanctuary’s sanctity is usually the loss of a limb, and the second infraction, the penalty is death.”

“Not fucking around, are you?”

“Can’t afford to be,” Silversmith said. “Penalties have to hurt, otherwise if you’re just handing out fines, that’s a *cost*, not a penalty. We couldn’t afford to have someone flouting the sanctuaries as the cost of doing business. We had some people try that, and we made examples out of them.”

“How recently?”

“It’s been a couple hundred years or so...”

“Which means I should expect someone to try and test the rules early on,” Will sighed. “Got it. Just making sure I know what I’m signing myself up for.”

“You’ll manage just fine, Will, never you worry. Now we should probably quiet down, as it looks like they’re about to get to the business part of the evening.”

Grand Captain Feng stood up as the room fell silent and thanked everyone for coming to the gala, and took the time to introduce new faces, Will included, along with some new shades, vampires and a couple of mages. They also took time to walk through the updates, announcing which Captains had died and who their replacements were. There was also some talk about how something called Captains’ Days had gone, with those participating simply being asked if it was a successful hunt or not, something Will wrote down to ask Silversmith about later. Nearly all the Captains reported unsuccessful hunts, although Tommy, the wizard Will had been talking to earlier, reported with a grin on his face that his hunt day had been successful, something that seemed to cause quite a bit of gossip around the room before Feng brought his gavel down on the podium with a loud clack, silencing the crowd once more.

The next hour or so was dedicated to each tribe presenting any old business they had that needed revisiting, any new business that needed addressing and any cross-tribe problems that needed to be dealt with. Will was astonished at how much minutiae there was in keeping the whole system running, how many fine points there were about dealing with hunting limits, blood delivery, dueling accords, and a dozen other weird things that Will didn’t entirely understand.

But then they got to the matter of the hunters who’d attacked Will, and his attention was suddenly center stage. “We had an unauthorized set of human hunters attacking a werewolf who hadn’t been folded into his pack yet,” Grand Captain Feng said with a sigh. “The hunters in question have been given a warning, and in fact, they’ve surrendered a member of their squad to become a member of the young werewolf’s pack. I’ve sent a missive to the Huntmistress and made it clear to her that we aren’t going to tolerate unauthorized hunts like this, especially for unregistered members of the Veil. That, however, comes with another kind of warning I need to issue – we are not supposed to *lose* members of the Veil, and while I recognize Will’s father is no longer part of the Green Werewolf House, and his late mother was once a hunter, and she should’ve had known that Will’s nature meant he needed to be added to the register, even if she wanted to raise him away from the world we all live in. So I want everyone to reiterate to everyone in their houses that all births of *anyone* with a bloodline that could fall behind the Veil *must* be registered, even if that spark isn’t detected at birth.”

“I heard the hunters weren’t all that capable, Will, so maybe you got lucky,” Captain Tommy, the wizard Will had talked to earlier, said with a laugh. “The word on the street is they thought you were a vampire for a while.”

Will couldn’t help but laugh as he thought about all the various things the hunters had tried on him and how none of them conveyed even the slightest understanding of what they were doing. “Tell the street that they didn’t have a fucking clue what they were doing. They thought wolfsbane couldn’t be touched by werewolves.” That made much of the room laugh. “And they were convinced it was toxic to werewolves.”

“It’s toxic to everyone, those gits!” one of the vampires cackled. “It’s like how they think chopping a vampire’s head is unique to us! If you cut off *anyone’s* head, they’re gonna die! I think even if you cut a *dragon’s* head off, they’re gonna die.”

“I urge you to give it a go and see how far it gets you,” Ezekiel said with a laugh. The dragon’s confidence seemed to imply more than a few people had taken a crack at it before.

“Will’s not being entered into our databases was a definite failing on several steps, including his father, but also on the Red Joker, who is supposed to be one of our watchdogs during such things,” Grand Captain Feng said calmly. “But we understand that Jonas had…”

extenuating circumstances, and as such, we felt a gesture of goodwill was necessary, to compensate Mr. Bowland for the personal distress he was put through. As such, Jonas has established a new Sanctuary in Colorado at Will's Diner, and the location will function as all other Sanctuaries do – no violence is allowed within them, and they are places for us to go and hash out our differences. This rule is always in effect, even if Will is not present there. The Sanctuary is guaranteed and backed by the protection of Jonas Silversmith, and secondarily backed by the Green Wizard's House. It'll be nice to have another Sanctuary in North America. How do you feel about it, Will?"

"It's nice to know that the one thing I own in this world now is protected and functions as a safe zone," Will said. "So if people come hunting for me or my pack again, I bring them to the sanctuary, and I'm protected by the strongest wizards I know."

"How many wizards do you know, Will?" Tommy joked.

"I dunno, you and Silversmith seem like a fairly strong pair, like a pair of gents I wouldn't want to fuck with."

"Fair enough."

Will could see Trish looking over at him with an expression he didn't quite know what to make of. The woman had something between frustration and a scowl, but it also didn't seem directed fully at him. Partially maybe? What the hell had he done that he wasn't aware of? Or was it more directed at Silversmith? Will had noticed how the werewolves all seemed to keep their distance a bit from him, as if Silversmith made them nervous. He wondered if it was all the raw power Silversmith seemed to have at his fingertips. While the magicians of the Green Wizards' House didn't seem to put the werewolves on edge, Silversmith was a member of The Deck, and those wizards had serious firepower.

For whatever reason, Silversmith had taken a liking to Will and they'd formed a sort of familial bond, like the mage was as much his uncle as Uncle Pavel was. It had been nice, as had the way the pack had treated him. But for whatever reason, he still felt like something of an outsider.

"Any other business we have to attend to before we're done for the night and can go back to enjoying the party?" Grand Captain Feng said, looking out across the room.

"There is one more bit of business we need to discuss," Grand Captain Keene said, with a sly smile on her face.

Will took the moment to look over the head of the North American Werewolves. She looked to be a woman around her fifties, a face worn with lines of experience and age, her dark brown hair swept back and held in place by a simple hair beret, her skin a dark leathery brown although he suspected if she wasn't spending so much time outdoors it would be a lot paler. She had a wide nose, but it complimented her roundish face well, giving her a sturdy, authoritative face, like a mother. She reminded him a lot of the sort of den mothers he'd seen in skiing towns during the summers, protective of the land and the Earth, somewhere between a hippie and a radical environmentalist. Her clothes were all practical and functional over fashionable. He also suspected they concealed a rather ripped musculature beneath them, as Grand Captain Keene carried herself with a sort of confidence that came with being able to defend oneself. Both Trish and her brother moved that way, and he hoped he might too, one day, after oodles of training.

"As many of you know, Will Bowland here was recently discovered, with his existence having gone unrecorded. However, when Jonas Silversmith came to me just a short while ago and told me that he had a new werewolf to be placed amongst our ranks, I had many questions, not the least of which was where I was to file this new young man," Grand Captain Keen

continued. “Bowland is not the family name for any werewolf bloodline in our records. Thankfully, the Red Joker knew of the young man’s pedigree, and in doing so, is bringing to light an accord written long ago, some thirty years ago, as a matter of fact, back when there were a number of warring factions within the Green Werewolf Pack. Will Bowland is, in fact, Will Bowland Capparelli, son of Giovanni Capparelli, former Green Werewolf Pack leader and Grand Captain.”

‘So I guess I really am half-Italian werewolf,’ Will thought to himself with a little bit of amusement. And he now knew his father’s name – Giovanni. It certainly conjured the image of a dashy, swarthy rogue to mind, and he wondered if Pavel came from an even further offshoot of the family, or if his name was picked by a different wife. Polygamy, Will had been informed, was not only commonplace among werewolves, but it was also practically mandatory. Therefore, it was likely that Pavel and Giovanni were only half-brothers, making their relationship a bit more complicated, but before Will could give it too much thought, he was snapped back into the present as the Grand Captain continued.

“Giovanni Capparelli was a reasonably good Grand Captain, but he made several tactical mistakes when it came to dealing with the conflict at the time between the wolves and elves of North America, and the argument became so untenable, both sides, the wolves and elves together, ousted their collective leadership equally. When Will’s father agreed to step down from his position, an accord was made amongst the other werewolves, a pact, in which the two major warring bloodlines of the time, the Capparellis and the Colts, pledged that their first eligible offspring from the Alphas of those bloodlines – that being Giovanni from the Capparellis and Jeremiah from the Colts – those offspring would wed in holy matrimony, in an attempt to quash the warring and unite the bloodlines. When Giovanni relocated to the Orange Werewolf Pack, the pact was put aside, and during the last few handoffs, it had all been but forgotten. However, when I went to enter Will into the books, I stumbled across a footnote, reminding me of the pact’s existence, and its continued impact upon our Pack.”

Will couldn’t believe what he was hearing, but couldn’t find any way to voice his opinion, as every time he wanted to speak, he could feel the words dying in his throat.

“So, as the first eligible members of the Capparelli and Colt family, I’m pleased to announce the engagement of William Bowland Capparelli and Patricia Highsmith Colt, with the wedding to be planned for in the coming year,” Grand Captain Keene said to a roomful of applause, including Silversmith, who might’ve been clapping louder than all of them. “Obviously there will need to be some time for the two betrothed to get to know one another, so we mustn’t rush headfirst into these things. Will still has a lot of our traditions to learn about, and I know this came as a rather large shock to Trish, but she understands what’s expected of her, and she will do her best to work with Will, to become part of his Pack, for the good of all werewolves.”

Silversmith stood up, seeking to speak for a moment, as he was granted the spotlight. “I have found Will to be level-headed, honorable and respectful in a way that many of his kind have to work for. He had begun building his pack on his own, and in doing so, still managed to respect the accords without even knowing what they *were*. So I’m looking forward to the Green Werewolves maybe skipping a generation in terms of their ten year imbalances, and I wish the happy couple both the best.”

As Silversmith sat down, Will leaned over and scowled a little bit. “You knew about this in advance, didn’t you?”

“Found out yesterday.”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

“And miss the fun of seeing the expression on your face as it dawned on you?”

“What if I say no? What if *she* does?”

“Oh, the two of you will have plenty of time to talk it out over the coming months, and if it turns out it’s entirely out of the question, well, I’m sure you two can talk it over and negotiate an easy way out of the situation,” Silversmith said, patting Will’s shoulder. “Everything should be fine, as long as nobody loses their cool.”

“Will Capparelli!” a werewolf from the table just a few seats down from Trish shouted, standing up, banging his fists on the table. Will wasn’t familiar with the young man, but he looked about Will’s age, a scruffy patchy red beard on his face. He didn’t look that much more muscular or strong than Will, but Will had learned not to underestimate people by how they looked. “I deem you unworthy! You are no Alpha! Shit, you’re barely even a werewolf! You’re a pup in need of a good ol’ fashioned ass whooping! I, Nathan Wilcox, hereby challenge you to a duel for Trish Colt’s hand in marriage!”

Silversmith sighed, shaking his head. “Too late...”