

The Wolves of Fellwood – Part 5

By TheSpiralledEye

Arriving in Vularen was supposed to be the happiest day of her life; it was supposed to be her wedding day. Yet as they'd entered Simon's estate Elowen could think of nothing but the heavy iron gate slamming closed behind them, cutting her off from the rest of the world. Once upon a time high stone walls had meant safety, now they just made her feel trapped. She had expected the estate to become home to her over time but after two weeks she still felt like a bird in a cage, more so than she ever had in the Fellwood.

The fine dresses that had once been like a second skin to her now caused her nothing but irritation; the fabric itched and she was constantly too hot and sweating, no matter how little she managed to get away with wearing. Inside she felt claustrophobic; her heightened senses were constantly barraged by smells and sounds that drove her insane. Simon excused her unsociable behaviour, stating it was the trauma of being kept prisoner by monsters for so long. He was doing his best to be kind and patient with her, but Elowen could smell the frustration on his skin. He wanted a wedding and a wife but the thought of such a big event, with so many people, it was too much for her. Eventually, he had relented when she begged for more time but Elowen knew his patience was wearing thin.

How was she going to do this? Everyday her inner wolf yearned to be let loose. She desperately wanted to run, to spar and hunt; to find freedom among the trees or even let her hair down, literally. A few months as a werewolf put into perspective how small her life had been before; her station, high as it was, restricted her to the point of drowning.

That wasn't the only problem though; it had now been six weeks since her heat and the signs were all there. The slight roundness to her stomach, the increased appetite and extra tiredness. It would take another month or two to be entirely sure but Elowen could see the writing on the wall.

She was pregnant.

The child was certainly Azir or Raul's, there was no way she could pass this off as Simon's baby even if they did get married right here and now. She had no idea what the baby would even look like when it was born, would it be in hybrid form? What if she started to shift during the birth? There was no way, no matter how much she demanded, that the midwives and ladies of the court would let her give birth alone. It was only a matter of time before she was found out.

Elowen sighed. The gardens at least, bought her some peace. She closed her eyes, taking in the smell of the flowering roses surrounding her and resisting the urge to strip off and lay down in the grass. The high collar of her dress was damp with sweat already and she knew she'd have to face the barely concerned scowls from her maids tonight when they helped her undress. Simon's scent wafted toward her but she stayed still, pretending she couldn't hear the approaching footsteps.

“How are you feeling?” His voice was awkward as usual, but there was genuine concern.

“I am fine.” She opened her eyes to look at him, the scars had taken much of his good looks away but none of the charm. At least from a human perspective, werewolves as it turned out found scars quite attractive.

“Can I sit with you? I think we should talk.”

Elowen nodded, trying not to show any of the panic slowly rising up inside her. Was she found out?

“Elowen, do you not want to marry me anymore?”

“I...it’s complicated.”

“It’s because I look like this, isn’t it?” His voice was bitter, “You never would have agreed to the engagement if I’d looked like this from the beginning.”

“No, Simon it’s not that.” Guilt suddenly flooded her, of course that’s what he would think. “I’m not one of those shallow women who only look at a man for his wealth and looks.”

“Then why?” His laid a hand over hers, “I saved you from those creatures, yet you seem to want to avoid me at every turn. Have I not treated you well? What more can you possibly want?”

Freedom.

That’s what she wanted to say.

Simon was right through, from his point of view, he’d been nothing but chivalrous. He was a good man; he deserved the truth.

“I’m...I think I am pregnant.” She whispered finally, tears burned the back of her eyes, “I’m sorry.”

It was one thing to admit you were a ruined woman. It was another to admit it to your fiancée and to imply the babies father was a werewolf well...Elowen wouldn't have been surprised if Simon was shocked, maybe even angry. What she didn't expect was the gentle squeeze of her palm and a soft had at her cheek.

"Elowen...I'm so sorry." He sounded heartbroken, "It's not your fault, you couldn't have fought those monsters off."

Elowen bit her tongue, she'd done quite the opposite.

"We'll make up some excuse, an illness." He offered, "Then when the creature is born, I will dispose of it."

"Dispose of it?" She balked, "It's just a baby."

"I know that's how you probably feel." His voice took on an air of pity, "But it's not, darling. Werewolves are monsters, it would be a danger to all if we let it live."

The condescension in his voice left a bitter taste in her mouth and Elowen pulled away.

"They are people, with good and bad in them just like humans." She argued, "You cannot possibly think killing an innocent child just because it's a werewolf would be anything but evil."

"Elowen, look at what they did to me, to you!" Simon cried, "They locked you up in a cave for months, they took advantage of you!"

"I know but you still can't just kill my child!"

"You'll have more in the future."

"What sort of logic is that?" She took a few steps back, hand over her stomach protectively, "One child cannot simply take the place of another!"

"It's not a child! It's a beast!"

“Take that back!”

A growl ripped through her throat as Elowen clenched her teeth together, her blood felt like it was boiling in her veins. How dare he act as though he had final say on her decisions? How dare he threaten her pup!

“I’m so sorry.”

The apology caught her off guard; Simons’ face was so sad all of a sudden, he’d gone from furious to distraught in a matter of seconds. She was about to say something when she realised his hand was at his hip, gripping the hilt of his sword, his *silver* sword. Instinctively her tongue flicked behind her teeth, feeling the elongated canines, she could feel the sharpened nails tearing through the fabric in front of her dress; there was no way for her to see but she was sure her eyes had turned slitted as well.

“They did bite you.” Simon sighed, “No wonder you’re so confused. It’s alright Elowen, I’m going to make this right.”

He moved suddenly, were it not for her canine reflexes she’d have been run through instead of tripping backwards. She screamed, rolling out of the way as he lunged for her again.

“What are you doing?” She cried, back up into the rosebushes, she could feel their thorns pricking her skin.

“You need to be put down.” There were tears in his eyes, he had the gall to feel as though this were painful for him?

“I’m still me.” Elowen growled, “You’re the one trying to kill me and my pup.”

“Pup.” He shook his head, “Listen to yourself. This is my fault; I should have found you and finished you off before they had the chance to brainwash you.”

He was talking about her like she was a rapid dog, when he was the one trying to kill her!

“How often do you hunt them, in the Fellwood?” She hissed, “That’s why Raul attacked you isn’t it? Why he turned me, you’ve been hunting the pack for months!”

It all made sense. The constant patrols, Raul’s over protectiveness, his habit of turning females in particular to help expand the packs numbers.

“That pack has been a blight on our land for decades, just look at what they did to you.”

Living in the Fellwood as a werewolf wasn’t the life she had wanted; she wasn’t even sure if it was what she wanted now. But she had no choice, it was that, or die and her child along with her. A guttural growl ripped from her throat as she leapt forward, skin burning and dress tearing as she shifted and knocked Simon to the ground. His eyes were wide with fear as one of her great paws pinned his sword arm to the ground. It was difficult, to move her mouth to make human words in this form; they came out deep and animalistic but clear.

“Never come near my pack again.”

The smart move was to kill him; it’s what Raul would have done. But even so, Elowen couldn’t bring herself to do it. Simon was, in a strange way, still a good man. Instead, she lowered her muzzle, an inch from his neck, a clear threat if ever there was one.

“Let us live in peace and you will never see us again.”

Then she was bouncing, paws on the grass for the first time in almost a month, running fast as a horse she jumped over the roses and made a mad dash for the wall. She was going to have to climb. It was going to be hard, luckily, she was still early on in her pregnancy or it would be impossible. She jumped, claws digging into the hard stone and for a moment she thought she would fall. There were cries going up in the courtyard and an arrow embedded itself next to her head, the smell of silver wafted into her nose and made it water. She kept climbing, even when she felt the sting of another arrow graze her hind leg.

She crested the wall, sparing a single second to look back and lock eyes with Simon. He was standing with his guard, crossbow levelled in her direction; eyes devoid of any warmth or love. He was as good as dead to her. She jumped, landing heavily and rolling on the street below, people screamed, she ignored them and struggled to her feet. Her knees burned from the impact but she ran, weaving through the streets, following the scent of trees and dirt until the buildings began to thin and she could see it. The Fellwood.

Without slowing she lifted her head and howled; a sound of freedom. She could smell horses behind her, hear their heavy hoofbeats on the ground. Simon wasn’t going to give up so easily and it was at least a days travel to the den. She had to lose them without giving away the packs hiding place. Were her wolf muzzle capable she would have smirked; this was her forest now. Azir and

Raul's training had prepared her well. She knew how to duck between the trees and logs with ease, her sharp nose and ears told her where each river and brook was far earlier than her eyes. She dove into the water, disguising her scent before climbing up and over ridges their horses had no chance of climbing. It was a hard run, but one she couldn't lose.

After an hour, her muscles were burning, she stopped atop a high ridge, looking down into the forest below as Simon and his men. In order to reach her, they would have to go around the boulders at the base, a five minute journey by which point she would be long gone. She gave one final howl, a farewell to both Simon and her old life and then turned and dove into the gloom of the deep wood.

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Evading Simon may not have been difficult on a technical level but it had been an endurance test unlike any she had ever faced. Even now, hours later she dare not stop moving, lest they catch up. Deep down, she knew Simon would never give up the chase, he was relentless; killing him would have been the safer option but even that came with the risk of retribution from the rest of his noble house.

It was only when the sun finally dipped behind the horizon that she stopped to rest; collapsing against the river bank and submerging her muzzle to drink as deeply as she could. Her legs ached and trembled with the exertion of the chase but it had been worth it. She was free and her child was safe, at least for now. She was still miles from the den, having taken the most circuitous route possible in case Simon's men were able to track her. She didn't mean to fall asleep, only rest her eyes for a moment but when they snapped open to the sound of a breaking branch the sun had set fully and darkness blanketed the forest.

There was a moment of panic, then elation as her nose caught a scent; werewolf, not human. A white wolf appeared from the tree line, head low in a hunter's stance.

Aster.

"You're back." Her voice was flat, unreadable. Elowen watched as her nostrils flared. "And pregnant."

Aster may have been part of her pack but Elowen got the very real impression she was not safe. She stood, drawing herself up to her full height, trying to imitate the confident, imposing stance Raul took when he addressed his hunters.

"I am coming home." She responded, she wanted to add 'don't get in my way' but thought better of it.

"To Raul?" Aster began to circle her, slowly.

“To...my pack.”

Aster scoffed.

“You’ve been with us less than a full season, you’re no wolf. Azir told us all what happened, you *chose* to leave.”

Elowen’s heart thumped in her chest; Azir had survived!

“I chose wrong.” Elowen admitted, “and I did it in part to save his life. The hunters would have killed him, we were outnumbered.”

“They did a number on him anyway. Do you really think the pack even wants you after your betrayal? That Raul will welcome you back?”

A pang struck her heart at the thought of Raul rejecting her. To be pushed away by her alpha was...unthinkable. So unthinkable she had not even considered it as an option. The tremble in her legs became more pronounced and she watched with dread as Aster’s eyes dipped to them, sensing the weakness there.

“At least let me speak to the pack myself.” Elowen tried, “Let me stay and have my pup, they didn’t choose to have me as a mother. Don’t punish them for my sins.”

“As Raul’s mate,” Aster’s voice filled with pride at the last word, “I have the authority to kill you, right here, right now. No questions asked.”

Elowen couldn’t describe the emotion that swirled inside her, knowing Raul had finally made Aster his full mate. She had not yet figured out her feelings toward her alpha but she couldn’t deny the jealousy that raged realising she had been passed over for another. Yet there was also elation, knowing the bond must surely have weakened with his choosing another.

“What if my pup is his?” Elowen asked, staring right into Aster’s cold, red eyes.

“What if it’s not?”

“The pack needs all the members it can get, born wolves are what Raul wanted, and you want to make him happy don’t you?”

It was an obvious manipulation; Elowen could tell Aster saw right through it. That didn’t change the fact that she was right. The white wolf finally raised her head, ears flicking forward in a reluctant sign of peace.

“You will follow. You will have your pup and then...the pack can decide whether or not to exile or kill you.”

Elowen nodded; it was the best outcome she could hope for right now. Aster gave a haughty sniff, indicating for her to follow and Elowen obeyed. She may be walking to her eventual death but at least this way her child would be safe.