Chapter 3

We set out towards home, fresh and ready to go. As we ran I seized the opportunity to observe the forest. The snow capped trees whizzed by, looming over us like tall furry people with too many arms. Misty darkness stretched between the trunks creating a mysterious aura about it. It looked so peaceful and foreign. The view was amazing. Suddenly, a black figure stepped out of the cover of the woods. The black and white wolf appeared strong and dignified with the majestic scenery to back it. And it was staring straight at us. A jolt of panic rushed through me and my first instinct was to contact Eya. "There's another wolf over there!" I barked to her, unnecessarily frantic. "Where?" She asked, calm but interested. "Over-" I stopped. The wolf was gone. I continued on, but couldn't help but glance over every few minutes, wondering who the wolf was and why he was watching us. Maybe he was just curious? I was overreacting, I needed to calm down. But I had never seen another wolf before.

That morning we woke up to a fresh layer of new snow twice as deep as the first. Savoy shook the frost off of his coat and hopped out the open gate and into the white field, burying his nose into the snow. He jerked back abruptly, yelping, "Cold! Cold! Cold!" at the top of his lungs as he danced about. Eya made a face. Suddenly overjoyed, I leaped out into the open. It was as cold as ever but my fur protected me from turning into an ice cube. "What are you waiting for?" I yipped. Dokami and Kili came out together after Sage, followed by Moon and Silver. Eya hung back. "You're not going to on all the fun are you?" I said excitedly. She opened her mouth to argue, but thought the better of it. "I can't argue with you Mayda." she sighed. "I detest cold, wet things." I laughed and scampered further out into the meadow. Everyone was wrestling and playing and rolling around in the snow. Even Eya seemed to be enjoying herself.

Eya stopped trudging through the snow and snapped her head up. I followed her eyes as she scanned the bushes for whatever she had heard. Without warning, she pounced into the thicket clamped her jaws on its fur, throwing the wolf from his hiding place. It was the wolf I had seen in the forest. He looked surprised and utterly frightened. Eya's expression was livid. She snapped down on his scruff and threw him up and over, slamming him hard onto the snowy ground. I seized my chance to jump on top of him before he could run away. I wanted to question this guy a bit, like ask him why he was spying on us, maybe? I snarled, close to his stricken face. "Please don't kill me, Mayda." He pleaded. How did he know my name? Who is this wolf? Do I know him? A flurry of questions raced through my mind. I searched him closer. Something was familiar about those blue eyes......"Griffen?" I said half to myself. He answered, "The one and only?"

He still looked nervous as I gaped at him. It took me a few seconds for it to finally dawn on me. "Griffen!" I shouted louder, scrambling off of him. All the others at this point were watching curiously, and Eya's mouth hung open with disbelief. "I can't believe it! How?... What?..." I was at a loss for words. Griffen was equally bamboozled. "Mayda! Eya! It's so good to see you! Where have you been? Have you been living with a pack?" He asked, peering at my team mates, eyes wide. "Technically no. But if that's what you want to call it." I corrected. Griffen looked confused. "We belong to Master Todd." I motioned to the house. His eyes widened even more. "You mean like a house pet?" I nodded. Embarrassed, I changed the subject.

"These are my friends, Silver, Kili, Dokami, Moon, Savoy, Sage, and of course you know Eya. Everyone, this is Griffen." I said, "He was a childhood friend of ours." They all nodded and said hello in turn, still looking wary. "Hey mister, do you live in the forest?" Sage inquired boldly. "Is it wild?" Griffen chuckled. "The wildest. There are great grizzly bears with dripping fangs and moose with lethal antlers that could trample a full grown wolf to pieces. Of course, I can handle any old beast on my own. With a flick of the claw and a flash of my teeth they flee like frightened mice." He teased. Sage's eyes grew wide. "Wow! Can you show me some fighting moves so I can do that too?" "Sure kid." He said charmingly. "Do you have a pack of your own?" Savoy asked, inspecting Griffen like he was a horse to buy. "No. I'm a loner in the backwoods." "Backwoods?" Dokami repeated skeptically. He obvious did not like how this stranger knew more than him. "The backwoods, the outer edge of the forest. No wolf pack wants to get too close to the edge in fear of man. I hang around there." Griffen clarified. "Are there any nearby packs?" Eya cut in. He nodded. "Yes, the River pack. They mostly hunt on the other side of the river. And the Razor pack. They live past the swamp. A nasty pack they are, I've had a little more than a scuffle with a few of those brutes."

I couldn't believe how much I had never known about the forest. Griffen recited tales of his experiences in the forest and told us of the way things work. "There is a code that states the law of the forest. It tells of things like, 'You must not cross the borders of another's territory unless you have permission to do so. You must hunt what you need but never for the pleasure or sport, or there will be none left for the next season. Never attack unless provoked. Fights and disputes must be solved fairly....' and so much more!" There was so much that I remember my mother telling me. Advice that I always took for granted. All the talk of the woods brought me back to the days when we were pups.

I remembered the time when mother took us on a tour of the forest, explaining to us the ways of the jungle, and to be polite to everyone because it is not good to have enemies in the forest. Even the smallest animal can do you no good. I remembered how the birds sang and the shy eyes that peered out at night. I recalled the time when the thunder crashed and the sky was dark. Griffen was there to keep me warm as we found our way home.

"It's so good to see you." I said shyly. "And you." He replied, eyes shining. His fur was rugged and wild. He had a scar on his ear and wore a sheepish grin. He looked young and sturdy, muscles rippled through his pelt. I was amazed at the strength of many battles that he kept beneath his black and white fur. "Have you lived alone all this time?" I asked. "Mostly. Occasionally I hunt with another loner, but we go our separate ways. Stone has offered me a home in River Pack, but I don't think the other wolves liked strangers. Of course, Being a loner I know all about stranger danger." he said casually. "Although sometimes I get a little lonely." he added, staring at me. Suddenly, his ears pricked and he glanced at the cabin. "Master Todd is coming out, you'd better go." Eya warned. "Run off, lover boy." Dokami sneered. "Your right," he mumbled, it was his turn to be embarrassed, "I'd better go." "Do you have to?" Sage whined. "Yes." Silver soothed. "See you soon?" Griffen asked, confirming he was allowed back. "Of course. Your welcome anytime." Kili responded as polite as ever. "We could use a little company other than ourselves." Moon reasoned, ignoring the look of disbelief on Dokami's face. Savoy looked excited and yet indecisive.

"Goodbye." I whispered, wishing he could stay and tell me more about the forest, wishing I could spend more time with him. I couldn't blame him for being wary of humans. The only ones they ever see are the ones that try to kill them. "Bye." he responded. Everyone bid farewell, and he disappeared into the forest.