



Series

The Millennium Wolves



Book 7 - Chapter 12

AIDEN

Before we attempted to remove Jeremy's trapped spirit from Jocelyn's body, Sienna and I asked to speak to the people of Home Hearth.

"If Lily says this could be dangerous, we have to inform everyone. And ultimately, it's not our decision to make. This isn't our home, Aiden, remember?" Sienna had reminded me.



Sometimes I actually did have trouble remembering that these people were not our Pack. Everything in this quiet, isolated forest called to me, making me feel strong and at peace.

The fifty or so inhabitants of Home Hearth gathered in the long guest lodge. I was struck again by the vast array of people who called this place their home.



Chapters



Display



Unmute



Comment



React



People from all walks of life, of every size and color and ethnicity, had built this place into a community that they could be proud of; where no one would bring danger into their lives.

Until now.

Until my family had shown up and brought our troubles with us.

When we were lost and desperate, Home Hearth had taken my family in.

The weight of debt was already heavy on my shoulders. I vowed to repay these people for their kindness.



First, I had one more thing to ask of them.

Lily Lowell was not a tall woman, but all heads turned when she walked into the guest lodge and came to stand beside me.

The gathered crowd waited expectantly for her to speak, but she turned to me instead.

I stood. My leg was still wrapped in bandages, and I balanced on a homemade

bandages, and I balanced on a homemade crutch that Tena had grown for me out of twisted roots.

“Thank you all for coming,” I began. Years of being Alpha had left me able to address large crowds without fear.

“My name is Aiden Norwood. Before I came here, I was the Alpha of the East Coast Pack.”

A rippling murmur ran through the group. Most of them already knew this, but it was another thing to hear it said out loud.

I squared my shoulders. “If you have a problem with my former status, I understand. But before anything else, I have to ask for your help.”



I told them about my relationship with Jocelyn and Jeremy. I talked about Selene’s death, and my unthinking plea to Jocelyn to break the mating bond and save my friend’s life.

At this there was another rush of whispering and angry head-shaking. I tried to explain.



“This—what’s happened to Jocelyn—it’s all my fault. She was trying to help because that’s all she knows how to do.

“She pushed herself too far and I was too blind to see that she was losing control—”

My breath came in short gaps as my heart began hammering in my chest.

I couldn’t lose Jocelyn too.

Lily stepped forward, her gray hair a wiry nest around her head. All eyes immediately turned to their unofficial healer.



“These are the facts as we know them,” she began. “The spirit of the poor man Jocelyn was trying to save has latched itself onto her body.”

A ripple of discomfort ran through the crowd. I saw more than one person flinch in pain at the thought.

She put her hands on her hips and continued, “When I was with the Texas Pack, I saw a desert Healer perform a ritual on a colleague

who had a similar situation.”

“Was it successful?” Sienna asked, loud enough for all to hear.

Lily pondered her words. “Yes, ultimately the ritual was successful. However, the procedure itself was quite...harrowing.”

The room was silent.

“Is there any danger to the people here?” Sienna asked Lily.



She hesitated again, then shook her head. “The biggest danger is to Jocelyn herself. Particularly if she loses control and shifts into her wolf form.

“I doubt she’d be able to hold him for long if the wolf took over. Her spirit could be lost forever.”

The people of Home Hearth were quiet for a long time, considering her answer.

The barrel-chested Ivan stepped forward. “Yesterday, you had to ask us whether or not we were prepared to help someone who

not we were prepared to help someone who needed us,” he said to Lily.

“That I did, Ivan Laska,” she said, craning her neck to stare him dead in the eye.

“Well you don’t have to ask twice,” he said with a sheepish smile. He turned to the standing crowd. “That girl needs our help, I say we give it.”

A sea of nods sent a surge of relief straight to my heart. The blanket of debt on my shoulders became a little heavier, but I was happy to bear it.



ROWAN

No one told me why Uncle Jeremy was so angry, or why he had hurt Aunt Jocelyn when my wolf jumped out and bit him.

My wolf had never done that before and could feel in my head that he was really, really sleepy.

I wanted to talk to Aunt Jocelyn, but I didn’t know how.



My wolf had hurt her. Just like Nicholas when I broke his arm in the park.

I wanted to tell her I was sorry.

I sat up in bed and walked to the window. It was really dark outside with only the light from all the fires.

Outside the door of the wooden cabin where all the grownups were talking, there was a lady holding a long, shiny gun.

I couldn't get outside without her seeing me.

But my wolf could.



It always tickled like crazy when he came out.

I shut my people-eyes in the little cabin and my wolf-eyes opened outside in the forest.

My paws didn't crunch on the leaves; I ran quiet like a mouse through the trees.

The brown-haired lady with the gun didn't see me at all as I went right past her and through the wall of Aunt Jacob's cabin.

through the wall of Aunt Jocelyn's cabin.

She was lying on the floor. Her legs were still all wrapped in vines.

Uncle Jeremy's ghost was there too. He didn't look angry anymore. Just sad.

When my wolf jumped out before, it had hit Uncle Jeremy even though Tena said he was just a ghost.

Maybe I could talk to him?

Rowan
Uncle Jeremy?

Jeremy
Alone...



Rowan
Uncle Jeremy can you hear me?

His voice sounded really scratchy and far away, like when the purple-faced man tried to talk to me. He sounded like he was crying.

Jeremy

Jeremy
They're all alone.

Jeremy
My girls...

Rowan
I'm sorry Uncle Jeremy.

Rowan
And Aunt Jocelyn.

I couldn't hear Aunt Jocelyn at all. It was like she was hiding.

Jeremy
It's his fault...

Jeremy
Aiden's fault...



Rowan
NO! It wasn't my Daddy!

Jeremy
His fault...

Rowan

Rowan

It was Josh! Josh killed Aunt Sellie!

Jeremy

Josh...

The air around me started getting dark and thick. I was scared and I didn't know what to do.

Then a quiet voice whispered in my ear.

Jocelyn

Rowan, RUN!

The angry cloud got darker and darker and I ran back out of the trees and into the little cabin.

I opened my eyes. I was back in my people-body, lying on the floor. As fast as I could, I climbed back into bed.

I pulled my knees up and hugged them and tried not to cry.



SIENNA

Lily was rummaging through the racks and jars of herbs that lined the shelves of the healing cabin.

She pulled an intricately beaded, woven bag from a dusty corner. “Nina wouldn’t want us to wait for her, Sienna.”

We’d spent the last twenty minutes arguing this, but Lily remained firm.

“Jocelyn can’t last much longer,” she went on, “and that poor young man trapped in there with her is half out of his mind with grief.”



From the bag, she withdrew three dried lumps that looked like spongy pieces of coal. Each one was about the size of an olive and gave off a pungent smell.

“The healer I knew at the Texas Pack gave me these after the ritual we observed in New Mexico,” Lily explained.

She put three lumps in a wide shallow basin

and set it on her hip. “They help to widen the bridge between the physical world and the spiritual world. Let’s go.”

We followed Lily out of the healing cabin and around the lake to the building where Jocelyn was being kept.

“Where’s Tena?” I asked, not seeing his horned head among the people gathered.

“Tena can’t help us tonight, dear. It would not be appropriate for him to assist in this matter.”

Not appropriate?



“But he shot those vines out of his fingers last night to help subdue Jocelyn!” I said in confusion.

Lily nodded. “And he would never regret that for a moment, dear. But Tena usually does not use his abilities to interfere in our affairs. There are those in the world who do not tolerate such things.”

I did, though I was still disheartened that Tena wouldn’t be there to assist with



Jocelyn's ritual tonight.

In a short time, the green-skinned man had come to seem like an old friend.

We reached the door to the cabin where Jocelyn was being held. The crowd drew back: only Aiden, Lily, and I advanced up the steps to the wooden porch.

We had insisted my mother stay with the children. It was just the three of us.



There was an odd tension to the air around the cabin. A dark, thunderous cloud of energy that roiled around the atmosphere.

I wasn't the only one who could sense it. Aiden was on full alert, and Lily's already frizzy hair was practically standing on end.

Fear of what awaited us inside that room made my knees begin to shake.

In life, Jeremy Gibbs had been a mild-mannered lawyer who enjoyed playing golf and drinking beer on a Sunday afternoon.



In spirit-form, he was on the brink of insanity: torn wildly between this world and the next.

We had to help him. But every instinct I had, both wolf and human, told me not to enter that room.

Aiden turned the knob and used his wooden crutch to ease the door to the cabin open. It creaked ominously as it swung wide.

Compared to the nerve-wracking anticipation, the scene inside was practically tranquil.



A fire burned in one corner, giving both light and heat to the small space.

Jocelyn lay in the center of the room on a dusty woven rug. She could have been peacefully asleep except for the strong vines that were still wrapped around her legs.

Aiden and I both looked to Lily, who walked calmly into the room and shut the door behind her.

She sat cross-legged on the floor at Jocelyn's



She sat cross-legged on the floor at Jocelyn's head and laid a hand across her brow.

"Jocelyn?" Lily said in a low, soothing voice, "we're here to help. Jeremy, if you can hear me, we're here to help you as well."

She waved with her other hand, indicating that we should come to sit beside her. I took Jocelyn's hand in my own, noticing with alarm how thin the skin was stretched over her bones.



Aiden sat down slowly on the other side with a stifled groan.

Maybe she would respond to someone she knew. "Jocelyn? It's Sienna. We're right here with you. We're going to help."

Jocelyn's eyes flickered under her translucent lids.

I looked to Lily. She withdrew one of the small spongy lumps from the basin on her lap and used a fingernail to break it in two.

A thick purplish liquid oozed from the center

center.

“It’s best to start with a very weak dosage,” she said, “She’s just a thin slip of a thing; we don’t want to overwhelm her system.”

As she spoke, she rubbed the tar-like goo around on her fingers, then spread a thin smear on Jocelyn’s lips.

Aiden and I waited, not sure what to expect. Our job, Lily had told us, was to comfort Jocelyn and keep her calm as Lily tried to convince Jeremy’s spirit to leave her body.

She began chanting under her breath: a harsh, guttural sound that bore no resemblance to the lyrical prayers that she had said over Aiden.



Almost immediately, Jocelyn went completely rigid. Her fingers stiffened until they resembled talons, and her back arched from the floor.

Aiden put his muscular arms on Jocelyn’s shoulders, attempting to ease her back down, but she twisted and bucked beneath his grasp.



grasp.

I looked to Lily, who was still chanting in a rising voice. She nodded without speaking, her eyes fixed on Jocelyn, whose body was clenched as though she were being electrocuted.

“Jocelyn, you are our friend. You need to stay with us!” I begged her, not knowing if she could even hear me.

“Jeremy, you are our friend. But you need to let go. If you go, you can be with Selene!” I continued, pleading with him as well.

Aiden stopped trying to wrestle Jocelyn back to the ground. He sank back, panting. “If I use any more force, I’ll break bones,” he said.

It was the first time he had spoken. At his words, Jocelyn’s eyes snapped open.

They met his green ones with a look of utter despair.

“Jeremy knows...” she managed to choke out. “Knows about Jack...”



out. “Knows about Josh—”

Jocelyn cut off with a scream of pain. Near her head, Lily spoke, and for the first time her voice sounded uncertain.

“It’s not working. Something’s wrong!” she said, her voice high with rising panic.

Jocelyn sagged suddenly and collapsed back onto the rug. Her chest heaved as she struggled to bring air into her lungs.

“He’s too...strong. Wants...Josh...” she said in a tight voice. “Can’t...hold—”

With tremendous force Jocelyn threw her arms out, knocking Aiden and I onto our backs.

Lily retreated in horror to the far wall of the cabin.

I watched in horror as her skin began rippling over her flesh. Chestnut brown fur began sprouting from her shoulders.

“Jocelyn, NO!” Aiden roared. He began shifting as well but Jocelyn, or more likely it



shifting as well but Jocelyn, or more likely it was Jeremy in control now, was faster.

As Jocelyn's wolf emerged, the muscular legs snapped the vines that had held her legs together. With a snarl, the wolf jumped towards Lily.

The wolf seized Lily around the waist as if she were no more than a ragdoll and threw her across the room. She hit the wall and fell motionless to the floor.

Aiden was almost fully shifted into his black wolf form when the chestnut-brown wolf coiled its powerful muscles and threw its weight against the wall of the cabin.



Beams of wood crashed open and the wolf landed in the surrounding forest in a shower of splinters.

Aiden couldn't make that jump, not on his injured leg. I shifted into my wolf and tensed to spring after Jocelyn, but Aiden blocked my path.

I shifted back, dizzy from the sudden transformations. "What the hell are you



transformations. “What the hell are you doing! We have to go after her!”

“And do what!? That was a complete failure!” He shouted, having shifted back to his own human form. Naked, shivering with cold, he limped toward me.

I could see the jaggedly stitched wound on his leg.

“So, we’ll try again! Aiden, she’ll die out there!” I went to my mate and wrapped my arms around him.

“No, she won’t. Jocelyn said it herself. Jeremy found out about Josh, just like we did. He’ll head back to the Pack House.”



“Exactly! Jeremy is going to try to kill Josh! Aiden, we can’t let our friend become a murderer. Either of them!” I was frantic, but he hugged me hard and refused to let go.

“We won’t let that happen,” he whispered in my ear. “We’ll bring Josh down first.”

How? I wanted to ask.



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I looked off into the forest, but the brown wolf was utterly lost among the dark and tangled rows of pine.

Next Chapter

