

DELETED SCENE (IN CHAPTER NINE) FREYA'S CHAT WITH AN OLD BUDDY, HALLIE'S FATHER.

It did Freya good to be in a simple environment and better to be around simplistic folk. There were no halls, no paperwork and no formalities in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Nothing but peace and quiet surrounded her for at least a couple of miles. Sitting next to Walter Leary, a muscular bear of a man with obvious Irish roots, Freya could see well the resemblance between him and his daughter Hallie.

While Rebecca and Dena had been relatively quick visits with well wishes and sizable checks, Freya's visit with Hallie's father ran longer. It was more personal.

"She wasn't too much trouble was she?"

Cracking open one of the beers that Walter had brought outside for them, Freya shook her head at her old teacher. "Not at all. She was the bell of the ball. I even think that you'll approve of her potential mate."

Walter nodded as if he was just as sure as Freya that his daughter would have a good mate. He took a long pull on his can before giving Freya a jovial wink. "I'm sure I will, Lass. I'm sure he'll be a fine cur. Those Sohons---. Well, they're some fancy folk..."

Some fine fancy paper-pushers is what they are, Freya thought to herself. "It's nothing like the good ole' days, that's for sure. It wasn't a true match until you're pinned." Thinking back on how Fenris had pinned her to the ground, Freya found memories of her mate, dueling with memories of her beta, Rayne for the right to haunt her thoughts. It was a close battle.

“Now Freya,” Walter huffed. “Hallie...My Hallie is delicate. She’s not like us wild dogs. They’ll be no curs pinning my little girl.”

Her mother and father would have never made such a comment. Freya knew that Walter was no less feral than her kin, but unlike her parents he looked upon it as his affliction not as a family trait. “You’re right. She is a special one, your first born in fact.” Nudging Walter with her elbow, Freya teased Walter. “She’s the one that made you into such a softie.”

Walter gave a long, thoughtful nod to the fact. “That she did...yeah. Little downy thing she was too... You know, I never knew that something so beautiful and gentle could come from my loins? Guess, I thought that any kid that I had would chew metal and shit mercury.”

Freya laughed as Walter drifted back into his older, cruder ways of speech. As soon as she reminded him of it they drifted into nearly an hour of reminiscing. Walter kidded her about how rough and unskilled she had been when she signed up with his gang of bounty hunters. Freya kidded him about the time he had taken on her mother and lost in hand-to-hand combat. She did not mention a word about Fenris and Rayne, nor did she utter a word about her near death at the claws of a Luna. Things were kept light and jovial and with the help of an additional six pack, it was easy to do until Walter pulled an envelope out of his pants pocket.

Freya held up her hand as the envelope was thrust towards her. They had already agreed that payment wouldn’t be necessary, yet it surely smelled like money in the envelopes folds

“Don’t fucking insult me, Walter. Put that away. We agreed-.”

“Hey! It ain’t much. Construction doesn’t pay as much as bounties but it’s some change.”

“But I told you when I came for Hallie that you didn’t have to give me anything and you agreed. I thought you were tight on cash?”

Walter pressed the envelope forward, into Freya’s arm. “I am but I found a few bucks. Besides, I have my pride and you have expenses. Now take this envelope girl!”

Pride was the only reason why Freya even considered the envelope. Pride was a close kin to honor as far as she was concerned and she had learned a lot about both in the past week. Taking the envelope from Walter was difficult, much more so than accepting money from Rebecca’s or Dena’s father, but she did. Managing a nervous smile, she chided her old friend. “They’re paid and I have more than enough dough to buy a few rounds and keep the bills paid.”

“There’s more to life than just that.”

“I know. I know... Mr. Domestic.” She didn’t need to be reminded. It was enough that a warrior as wild as Walter had succumbed to the comforts of home and cubs. He hadn’t been old or wounded when he decided to step away from hunting, just in love with a cub on the way. Freya hoped that it was the beer and not the weight of foreshadowing sitting heavily upon her shoulders. “You don’t have to start singing the praises of retirement again, retiree.”

Walter set his shoulders and growled back. “I want you to know that can still hunt with the best of em.”

Grinning at Walter’s show of bravado, Freya had no doubt that he would be a ferocious asset on any job. “Can I call you on that?”

Walter paused as if considering the offer. He looked around at his simple home and his beat up truck before replying solemnly. “No...no...” Pulling another beer out for himself, he popped the tab and drank nearly half of the can. When he met Freya’s glance anew it was almost with an apologetic look in his eyes. “It’s too... Well, let me say I’m glad you’re taking on milder work. I’ve got a family now. Hallie’s mother...my sons...they don’t know too much about the big, wide world. They know how to hide amid humans. I don’t want them having to hide from worse things. I don’t even want them to know that they even exist.”

Freya found humor in the idea of werewolves being ignorant of the other supernaturals. Surely there would come a time when they encountered someone that wasn’t a human, just as surely as they would encounter other werewolves. “You can’t keep them ignorant, Walt.”

“I can’t,” he admitted, “but I can keep them relatively safe. That’s thrilling enough for me these days. My cubs take after their mother. They’re gentle souls that would be crushed in any serious confrontation. My boys haven’t even shown the slightest, fucking capacity for fighting. They like books and science and stuff and while I didn’t like the idea at first, I came to encourage their interests over mine. An age ago, I had the bloodlust, that fiery need for battle that runs through your veins, like blood but well since I found Effie, Hallie’s mother, I’ve changed. She’s so gentle and well family changes you, you know?”

It wasn’t the first time that she had heard such a statement, but it was definitely the first time that she could honestly understand it. Even though her mates were an ocean away, Freya could feel Rayne and Fenris’s influence. She had their numbers but with

having the girls occupying her time, with her killing time with Walter, Freya hadn't had the trial of being alone. It was something she truly dreaded. Just the urge to call them was heavy enough. Once alone, the urge to be with them would be like hellfire on a snowflake. "Yeah, old man...I know," Freya replied before finishing off her beer.