Chapter Four

Naheta did not even remember going to her bed once they arrived home from their hike, but there she was when the smell of breakfast meats entered her nose and awoke her. She pushed herself off of her belly and let out a groan, the last thing she wanted to do was get up early on a day off from school. But there were chores that needed to be done and, more importantly, questions that needed to be answered. The fox hoped that Alexia was still home, but those hopes were dashed when she entered the dining room and noticed only two wooden plates were at the table with her mother sitting in front of one of them.

“The food should be ready soon,” spoke Natasha. Her head was down as she was reading one of Naheta’s text books. “I have been cooking for myself the past year, so forgive me if it isn’t to your liking.” Her eyes scanned across a few more pages of the book before she let out a sigh and closed it up. “Is this what they are teaching you in school now?” she looked up at Naheta with a look of disappointment.

“I am barely passing if it makes you feel better,” Naheta replied. She noticed that the two of them were still wearing the same article of clothing from last night. “It looks like neither of us were able to do anything more than sleep, last night.”

“Hmm, so it would seem.” The wolfess took a quick look towards the food being cooked over the fire before continuing, “Your sister has already left. Gone off to prepare for that graduation of hers.” The look of disapproval on her face made Naheta think about some of the questions she had from last night.

“Mother?”

The simple inquiry took Natasha out of her train of thought and made her smile, it had been a while since she was referred to like that and she was wondering if she would ever hear her be called that by either of her daughters. “Yes?”

Naheata walked over to the table and sat to her mother’s left. “I wanted to ask some questions about last night. Alexia refused to even allow me to ask, let alone answer any. I was hoping you would.”

The mage’s smile faded and she nodded. “I expected that you would want to know more.” She rose to her feet and walked over to the kettle that was beginning to boil over. “Ahh, the oatmeal stew is ready.”

“Oatmeal…what?” Naheta cringed with disgust at the sound of what could not be something that would be listed as edible. Her mother turned towards her with the same smile across her muzzle that appeared when Naheta called her mother.

“Stew,” she said simply. “You know I am not one to waste food, Naheta. So I took what I could save from last night’s dinner and mixed it with some oatmeal and lard.”

“You used the stew from last night?” Naheta was looking at her mother in disbelief, “The stew that was all but fire and ash? And you used lard?”

“You are being over dramatic,” Natasha said dismissively. “There was quite a bit of stew that was good. What I added just made it more filling.”

“Mother, that sounds horrid. A scavenger roach would not even touch that…collection.”

Natasha looked slightly hurt and gave her daughter a pouty face. “If you want me to answer your questions, you will eat a serving of it.”

Naheta was almost ready to reconsider asking her questions about the story from last night. What is knowledge of a life changing event from your family’s past compared to having your insides tortured with that witches poison her mother called “breakfast?” The fox girl was really beginning to change her mind when Natasha placed a wooden bowl of the concoction onto her plate.

“Mother, its black and gray,” she took her wooden spoon and poked at it. The stew did not relinquish the utensil. “And I believe it is alive.”

“You are being over dramatic again,” the wolfess said with a sigh. “If you can eat three spoonfuls, I will answer any questions you have about anything. Be it story-related or otherwise.”

That was certainly a tempting offer to the fox’s ears. There were plenty of questions that neither Alexia nor her mother would answer her in her life. And all she had to do to get them answered was eat three spoonfuls of the possessed porridge. She tried again to pick up the spoon and she could have sworn that it growled at her. “How about you answer my questions first, then I eat the three spoonfuls?”

Natasha quirked an eyebrow, “It tastes pretty bad when it is cold, are you sure?”

*“I doubt it can taste any worse,”* Naheta thought to herself before saying out loud, “I am sure.” She grinned at her mother who shrugged and took her place back at the table, her own bowl in her paws.

“Very well, but I will hold you to that promise.” Natasha gave a threatening tooth filled smile that sent a small shiver up the fox’s spine. “Now then, what is your first question?”

“Ohhh right,” Naheta took a moment to get over the look her mother gave her and began. “What were you going to do if you found the demon?”

“I was going to kill him, simple as that.”

“He killed all of your family; family who sounded experienced and powerful in magic much like you are now. How did you expect to accomplish alone what they couldn’t as a group?”

Natasha folded her arms, took a deep breath, and exhaled. It was a very good question from the young fox. “True, the Ravenbloods were powerful mages. However, they didn’t know what they were dealing with, nor were they expecting to have to fight whatever demon they were trying to summon. But I am prepared to fight. I know what kind of demon he is and what he is capable of. I have practiced and practiced all the spells that was taught to me by my family and I have learned new spells as well,” at this she leaned forward a bit and smirked, “Do not forget that despite the demon blood in your sister’s veins and her natural ability in the arcane arts, she still has not been able to defeat me in a duel.”

Naheta could not help but note the hint of pride in her wolf mother’s voice. Over the years, she has seen Alexia and Natasha spar with each other in magic duels, and while Alexia has come close every time she has never beaten the elder wolfess. In fact, as she thought about it, she remembers a few times when Alexia had caught her mother by surprise with a “spell” that the wolfess had not seen before.

“That did not tell me exactly how you were going to kill the demon, mother. But it made me think of another question.”

Natasha chuckled and shook her head. Naheta never could stay on topic long and she knew the next question would be related to something she had said that wasn’t about the demon itself but about her duels with Alexia. “Speak your mind, daughter. There will be no secrets between us this morning.”

“Well, I was wondering what kind of powers does Alexia possess? Demon powers, I mean.”

Natasha kept her smile as she tilted her head. “I was expecting this type of question to arise after the more serious ones have been asked.”

It was then Naheta’s turn to give a pouty face. “This is a serious question. I need to know what to expect should she lose her temper and accidently use them on me.”

“I doubt Alexia would accidently use her demonic powers on you, Naheta,” the wolfess’ expression became a bit more serious as she said that. “But it would be important to know, I suppose.” She took a spoonful of her stew (which forced Naheta to stifle a gag) before continuing. “An obvious…gift of hers is her health.”

Naheta’s right ear went flat as she became a little confused. “Her health?”

“That’s right,” she took another gulp of food and nodded. “This is much better than when I had to make it without the meat in it. Tell me, Naheta, when was the last time Alexia was ever ill?”

Naheta was about to answer that question, when she had to stop herself and think. She couldn’t recall a time when Alexia was ill. There have been times when she pretended to be sick, but as far as being truly sick…”I honestly do not know, mother.”

Natasha nodded and spoke, “That is because she cannot get sick. Not by regular means, anyway. I am sure there might be some sort of spell that can make her feel ill in some way, but regular diseases just do not have an effect on her. Also, I am sure you notice how hard it is for her to get tired. Her endurance is above that of an average wolfen. She is physically stronger too. Something I am sure her commanders will love.” She nearly spat at that last sentence.

Natasha had always made it clear her dislike for the militaristic views of the Empire and was against Alexia joining the academy from the start. Naheta still remembers the destruction the fight caused to the cottage. Having to always clean and repair the house certainly helped make the fox more mature and responsible than most in her age group. Being the negotiator between the two wolves, when they would have their long bouts of silence, was also a part of her maturity. The two of them acted more like siblings then mother and daughter. Considering the relatively small age difference between the two, it was understandable.

“What else does she have?” Naheta asked, wanting to move along before Natasha would go off on a rant about the military.

“Hmm, she heals faster than regular wolfen. You have witnessed that when we would have our disagreements.” Naheta nodded affirmatively. “Other than what I have listed, she has a better connection with magical energies than other mages. Even when you compare her to me, she is better. If she would apply herself to it, her magical prowess would surpass any Ravenblood. Past or present.”

Naheta looked away for a moment then turned back to her mother. “She would not want you to know about this, but at night while you were gone she has been practicing with her spells.”

“Ohhh?”

“Yes, she might have even stumbled on something new, but what that is I do not know. You know her and her secrets. Only reason I believe it is something different is because it seems to be in another language.”

“Another language, you say? Now I am curious,” Natasha pondered what it was her older daughter might have been doing. She would have to pursue it later, maybe do some cleaning in Alexia’s room.

“Another question, mother,” Naheta’s voice brought the wolfess’ mind back to the present and she awaited the fox’s next question. “Why aren’t we being hunted by the Empire right now? Don’t they know it was the Ravenblood clan that was behind all the disruptions to their plans back then?”

“Another good question, Naheta,” Natasha replied a look of trouble growing on her muzzle. “Unfortunately, I do not know the answer to that one and it has always troubled me. Maybe they do not see the three of us a threat and think we aren’t worth the trouble. Maybe they have a plan to use us in the future. But I do know that they know. We have not exactly been hiding our family name, and one look at me would tell anyone that I am with Tellah’s pack. And on top of that, we are harboring a potential traitor under our roof.” Naheta gritted her teeth at that last statement. She knew full well the type of prejudice her kind has received over the past few years. And she has been in more than her fair share of schoolyard fights for being a fox. If she was part of a normal fox family she would not have the life she has now. It would have been worse. A fox family…

“I assume that you want to ask about your past next?” Natasha wondered aloud, she knew Naheta was in the process of making another obscure connection from the topic to the next and it has been something that she has been keeping from the fox for a while now.

“It would be nice,” Naheta said quietly. “I had to have come from somewhere, right?”

“You always said that. And I would always say that…”

“It doesn’t matter where you came from so long as you are here now. Focus on the present, not the past, or else you will never gain sight of the future,” the fox finished. *“Whatever that means,”* she thought to herself.

The wolfess couldn’t help but laugh. “Oh my, am I really so repetitive?” She reached up and brushed some red hair away from her face and relaxed. “I did not think I would have said something like that enough times for **you** to memorize it.”

Naheta huffed and turned away, *“I am not that bad with remembering things…am I?”*

“What do you want to know about yourself?”

“EVERYTHING!”

Natasha sighed and crossed her arms again. “You may be disappointed.” Naheta nodded and leaned forward into her chair with anticipation. “We didn’t officially adopt you from an orphanage. We found you. Or to be specific, Alexia found you.”

Naheta blinked in surprise, “Found me? You mean like I would find a lost coin at school?”

“You can say that,” Natasha answered. “She found you up in the hills past the forest. I told her not to go up there, but she seemed drawn to them that day. I guess you were the reason why.”

“She was drawn to me?” Naheta was becoming more confused, but more curious with each second.

“To this day, neither of us can explain it. She just knew there was a reason to go to the hills and there you were inside a cave in the western part of the hills. No note, no sign of anyone else being there, you were not even wrapped in anything warm, nor was there a basket. Just, a naked baby fox inside a dark cave.”

Naheta was stunned, she was found in such a bizarre way and in such a bizarre state. “…Is that all?”

“I told you, you would be disappointed. And before you ask, yes I did try to find clues about you while I was away. There was nothing to find.”

“Oh…” Naheta was staring at now cold, and solid, oatmeal stew in front of her. As if looking into it would give her answers to her past.

“I am sorry, Naheta…Well, not really,” Natasha said with a smirk.

Naheta looked up at her mother and was slightly hurt. “Why?”

“Because as far as I am concerned we, your sister and I, are your true family. Always have been and always will. And I feared that if you ever did find out where you came from, you would leave us.” The wolf mage’s smirk became serious as she reached her paw over to Naheta’s and gripped it tight. “I love you, my daughter.”

Naheta squeezed her paw back. “I love you too mom. And I would never consider anyone else as family. It just feels like I am incomplete, and knowing who I am and where I came from will help fill that void.”

“I understand…” Natasha began, only to stop to think for a moment. “I hope you did not mean it when you said you would not consider anyone else as family. I want a grandchild or two. And I believe your sister may have…a different set of interests when it comes to that sort of thing.”

“What do you mean by that?” Naheta inquired. It seemed the fox was still naïve on some things after all.

“Never you mind,” Natasha responded quickly, “Now, if there are no more questions, dig in.”

Naheta’s mind was somewhat confused by what her mother had said and she didn’t have any more questions, save one.

“Do I have to?”