

THE GREENLEAF PACK

TOME I
ORIGINS



M.N NERI

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ISBN numérique : 979-10-405-6133-0

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1.

Mia

There are things you instinctively know when you're a shapeshifter. We feel our animal side since an early age. We can transform by the time we reach ten. Our senses are finer than those of a human. For example, we can feel if a person is lying to us. The beating of their heart, the smell of fear and confusion that seems to seep under the skin. Our sense of smell is so accurate that one of my first rules is to avoid being near a locker room after a workout.

My animal counterpart is a wolf. And wolves live in packs. Mine is called the Greenleaf pack, mostly because of the oak that sits majestically among my clan's homes.

A wolf is not supposed to live alone, and clans protect their members. Well, normally they do. Today, however, is the second time I present myself in front of the council. The first time was because I attacked Lauren.

The council brings together the most influential people in our community: the elders, our shaman Marnie, and our alpha Jackson Cole. I'm going to stand in trial because I'm accused of using a spell against Jesse Logan Cole, the alpha's son, and Lauren's husband. The one who has made these accusations against me is Maya, Jesse's little sister... my best friend.

I feel everyone's disapproval, disappointment, and disgust with me. It's like being caught in a spider web, a very unpleasant sensation. But I actually don't care. Let's get over it. I don't really mind where this will end up. Although there is one person who doesn't have those negative feelings towards me. Yeah, Marnie is just sad. Because she knows. And for my sake, she will refrain from intervening. I made her promise not to defend me.

Jackson starts speaking, and the whole weight of his disgust hits me. I don't know if he is like that because he has known me since I was a kid, or if it's because when Marnie would die, I was supposed to replace her. Coz' yeah, not every pack has a shaman. Having Marnie is a significant asset. Me taking over would have somehow been the icing on the cake.

That's why I didn't pursue my studies after high school like the others. Most of the young people in my pack went to college to get an education. I stayed with Marnie to continue my learning. Sometimes I regretted it. Being here, immersed in old books, doing research on medicinal plants, while others were studying and partying... it wasn't always funny. But I had Marnie, who had been raising me

since I was eight years old after my parents died. So yeah, the well-being of the pack had always come first to me.

All of this, I was doing it to be useful to my pack who had always looked after me. And most of all, I was doing it for Jesse. One day, he would become the alpha, with me by his side to lead. Jesse... my most fervent protector. My soulmate. My throat hurts just thinking about him. I kick him out of my thoughts to focus on Jackson's words.

"...and so we decided that the most appropriate sanction would be isolation, because..."

"No."

Jackson looks at me without any indulgence. You don't interrupt your alpha, and certainly not when he pronounces a judgment. Yet, at this exact moment, I don't give a crap. He growls and everyone looks at me as if I have lost my mind. I can understand them. Anyone in my situation should be ashamed and fear for their life. That's not my case. I just don't give a damn. I let my empty eyes reach his.

"No, Mia? You dare challenge me? Do you dispute the harshness of your judgment?"

The tone in which he addresses me makes all members of the audience stay still. Isolation is hard, especially for a shaman. We live to be useful to others, to take care of them. Which makes my "crime" even more serious. Being isolated means that, during a period determined by the council, any contact with pack members is prohibited, as well as leaving our territory. You are confined to an area until the sanction is lifted. And to feed, well, you have to hunt.

Marnie gives me a worrying and almost begging look. But I have no intention of backing down. I've already made my decision. Furthermore, my wolf is a dominant and it is also part of my character traits. Though, under normal conditions, I try not to react and always remain calm. Because I'm a shaman. However, I know that today, had she been here, my wolf would have shown him fangs, not giving a crap about his alpha status. But she's locked in a cage, deep down within me. She can't get out. I can't access her anymore. Because of what I did.

"Yeah actually, I do challenge that judgment."

"Do you think that because you're Marnie's protégée, we're going to go easy on you?!!! AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO MY SON?!!!!!!!"

"Exile."

"What?!!!!!"

“I demand to be exiled”.

I think this is the first time I've seen my alpha speechless. He looks at me as if I were crazy. Maybe I am. An exile is the equivalent of a death penalty for a shapeshifter. We cut off the bond that connects us to the pack and especially to the alpha. Nobody knows if something's happening to you, if you have a problem, if you're in danger. It's like being blacklisted, but on a large scale. Living alone, without a pack, and without the possibility of being welcomed by another one. When one commits a serious fault, one can be—in an increasing order of harshness—isolated (which can be recovered if you make a public apology and show remorse), transferred (if another pack agrees to receive you), exiled, and finally, be simply executed.

“You've completely lost your mind...”

I look at him emotionless.

“All the more reasons to get rid of me.”

If he believes that I will have regrets and serve them as a shaman I'd rather die than stay and live every day next to my soulmate and his so fucking perfect wife!

I feel their hesitation to condemn me to such a fate. Looks like I have to give my best performance to convince them.

“If I stay, I will surely do worse.” Which is not true of course, as the worst has already been done.

“Damn it, Mia! I thought you loved Jesse! How could you do that to him?! Stop his impregnation with his wife! You've completely lost your mind!!! Don't you care about the pain you bestowed on him with the spell you've cast?!!!!”

I grind my teeth and hold back a biting replica. Jesse is in pain?! Just a few stomach contortions and yeah! His impregnation was momentarily stopped. But it won't last. Whereas I literally felt my soul tear off after performing the ritual. None of those present are aware of the herculean effort that it takes me not to collapse. But despite my fatigue, at least now I feel nothing. The connection has been severed.

I see the efforts Jackson is making so as not to go for my throat. Well, why not after all? I might as well get to the end of my alleged madness.

“Oh, he's in pain? And you all probably hope I'll cure him, huh? So, open your ears as wide as you can, people: I will never ever break the spell I cast!”

The alpha throws himself at me, probably to rip my throat out. But he is stopped in an instant, unable to move. I give an annoyed look at Marnie but she ignores me. Execution is not a problem for me, really. However, my adoptive

grandmother wants me to live. She intervened for the first time since the council met to decide my fate. Paralyzing her alpha like this could cost her a lot. Shamans have healing gifts, but some also develop other abilities. No one knows where it comes from. Nor why only women are shamans. I, for instance, have never managed to stop others by my sheer will.

Marnie had agreed not to intervene. She just pinched her lips as I suffered the flood of accusations and questions from the council members. "Was the spell cast forbidden?" "Yes," "Do you realize what you've done?" "Perfectly." "Can you remove this spell?" "Yes." "Will you do it?" "When hell will freeze." As for the various names they called me, I could see she was on the verge of turning them to ashes. But she remained perfectly calm. She knows that all this is not right, and seeing me treated like this literally tears her heart apart.

"Release me, Marnie!"

My alpha gives a seething look but then the gritty voice of our shaman rises, full of authority.

"She asked for exile, Jackson. You, who wants justice, should be satisfied. The accused has the right to make a demand. You were just about to kill her."

"Jesse..."

"He is fine, I told you. Accept her request! Accept it, all of you, or find yourselves another shaman!"

A stunned silence falls on the audience. Everyone expected her to defend me, not to send me to a much worse punishment. Yet Marnie is doing what's best for me. If were to stay, I would probably end my life. And maybe I will, who knows. I'm already dead inside. But I promised Marnie I'd try. My promise in exchange for hers.

She ends up letting go of her grip on Jackson who looks at us both, completely stunned. He doesn't understand. After swallowing, he speaks again.

"I will propose a transfer and..."

"No. I asked for exile."

Normally, a transfer would have been the best solution. In any case except for mine. There's no point in joining another pack when you're not a wolf yourself. And under no circumstances will I let my wolf surface again. She is in a cage, and in a cage she shall remain.

"The exile, Jackson."

Again, Marnie supports my request. The only person who ever loved me beyond anything. My Marnie. I feel my alpha's resolve wavering. Despite his obvious disgust towards me, he's hesitant to impose this sentence on me.

Because Jackson Cole is a good alpha. He takes care of his wolves. After a resigned sigh, he finally nods.

“Then in that case, we shall vote.”

Jackson goes back to his seat and so does Marnie. He lost a bit of his confidence, my proud alpha. Maybe he finally feels something is wrong. But it's a little too late to wonder. Actually, none of them asked me why. Not even Maya. She discovered me in the middle of a ritual when Jesse was starting to feel bad. Marnie managed to get her away before it got worse for me. But she figured out that I was responsible. End of the story.

They all assumed that my love for him made me lost my mind, especially when he returned with his wife, the beautiful and so impeccable Lauren. On the other hand, I suppose that the fact my wolf tried to tear her throat from the moment she saw them together has a lot to do with it. First incident in a long list where she became increasingly unhinged, unable to accept that her soulmate, the one supposed to be her partner in life, began to impregnate on another.

It is very difficult to feel, through the bond that connects us to our soulmate, all the love he feels... for another. While for you, he has "tenderness." These are the words Jesse used to calm me down. Jesse, who—despite all the incidents, the wickedness I showed towards his wife—kept trying to calm me down. I almost hated him for that. He started impregnating with another female, so why did he still care about me?

He did not understand that his wolf, even if united with another, confusingly felt the harm he was doing to the one who he was truly destined to be with. But Jesse rarely listened to his wolf. He always wanted total control over everything. Even on his own soul. A born alpha. Big, strong, so handsome. He smells of strong coffee - I love coffee - and sandalwood, mixed with a raw power that will no doubt make him a great leader. But for now, he's in some sort of coma. Until his wolf is completely free from our bond.

I tried to tell him, of course. To make him see that his need to call me regularly, his way of protecting me throughout our childhood, the fact that even married to someone else, he continued to need me by his side, to defend me despite my "spoiled child" attitude to put it in his own words -was proof of our bond. Damn it! I was ready to kill him. My wolf still preferred that rather than leaving him to Lauren.

So yeah, after days and days without sleep and my wolf on the verge of madness, I did the only possible and forbidden thing. I severed the bond, cut the connection. Marnie managed to hide me all the time 'till I could control myself. I

screamed, scratched my skin raw, while feeling my wolf disappear. The spell is much more terrible for the one who casts it. The pain that Jesse felt is nothing compared to the pain that I went through. At least, his wolf is still by his side. I, on the other hand, in a desperate attempt to no longer perceive his emotions for Lauren, knowingly made the only possible but painful choice to renounce my animal side. No longer a wolf, and merely human.

To recognize one's soulmate is both a blessing and a curse. It is also so rare that for some, it is considered as a utopia. Yeah, the equivalent of a fairy tale. Unlike a classic impregnation, where one chooses one's partner for the rest of their life, the bond is much more powerful. Divine. An alpha can feel the emotions of his pack members. But when you find your soulmate, it's as though thoughts and feeling are mixed. It is said that a couple is even capable of telepathy. And once united, this symbiosis is so great that when one dies, the other follows. Well, there is also the scenario where you recognize your other half but they...don't. Yeah. Lucky me. Then you spend your life alone. End of the story. There is no room for another companion once you have recognized your soulmate.

The day Jesse chose Lauren, he condemned me to a life of loneliness.

2.

Jesse

Damn it, it hurts! This is the first time I feel my wolf so intensely. It's like he's trying to make his way out of me. I hear voices around, but I can't open my eyes. Maya, Lauren... Restless whispers as my wife gently touches my hair. The smell of Lauren reaches me. A mixture of lemon, mint and liquor. That's what I immediately liked about her. That scent, her personality. She is strong willed, knows what she wants. With Lauren, we are equals. No devotion like with... Mia.

My wolf starts howling.

Shit. Mia. She's responsible for my being in this state. That's what Maya said, I think. I just don't understand. Mia has always been possessive of me. Always. But I tried to make her understand. Gently. To talk to her. Show her that I cared about her but not in the way she intended.

I feel Lauren's anger at my side. My wife immediately hated Mia. Hard to blame her when barely crossed the threshold, she was attacked by a raging wolf. I just had time to step in before she slit her throat.

Nobody understood. Mia is a dominant but she always put the interest of others before her own, unless faced with an injustice. Otherwise, she always tried to be as discreet and laidback as possible. My wolf keeps moaning. When the hell is he gonna stop?!! I'm an alpha. Not a mop! Pull yourself together, dude! Wait, did you just growl at me?!! I don't understand him anymore. Ever since we got back, he's been acting weird, pushing me to try to understand Mia, to talk to her. It just irritated Lauren more and more. And besides, when we see the result...

I love my partner. I want to please her. But I have a lot of affection for Mia. She's like a sister to me. I told her. And she growled at me. Damn it! I even saw her wolf eyes flashing, as if the beast intended to go for my throat too.

Mia. My wolf is howling again. I feel my connection to Lauren slowly building back. Finally. It all seems to calm down. Yet, I also feel a great void. I don't know where it comes from. There is just... emptiness. My Wolf stops fussing. He's almost lethargic now. After days of turmoil, I do not understand. He seems kind of resigned. He lost something. But what?

I growl as I finally get to open my eyes. I feel the sweat sticking to my temples. It's like I'm coming out of a long fever. I turn my head to see Lauren,