

‘So what happened?’

We had left the zoo the same way we had gotten in. Ray had driven home and I had spent the drive back to the hotel worrying about him. A long shower had helped to soothe my stomach. I sat on the bed next to Bane, towelling my hair dry.

‘I don’t know. One minute I was there, you were behind me, everything was ok. Next thing, I’m outside and everything’s in the wrong place,’ Bane muttered. He was studying the screen of my laptop.

‘And it was the 1950s?’

‘1956. So the papers said.’

I leaned over and peered at the screen.

‘Anything?’

‘You’re right. It’s a kitsune. Comes from Japanese folklore.’

I tried not to feel ruffled by his tone but dammit, he always did this to me.

‘You thought I might be wrong?’

Bane looked up and smiled kindly.

‘Course not, sweetheart. Just wanted to read it for myself.’ He turned back to the screen.

‘Because I can’t be trusted?’

‘Emy, you’re taking it the wrong way,’ Bane said without looking up. I sat back on the bed and pulled my knees up to the chest, hugging them close. My long wet hair clung to my shoulders and back, the cold refreshing after such a day.

‘A fox from folklore, the kitsune can transform into humans, usually women or elderly men for some reason. They have lots of powers and some can bend space and time, which I’m guessing is what Silver’s doing,’ I recited, my voice muffled through my knees. Bane spared me a glance.

‘And how do we kill them?’

I lowered my knees slowly.

‘We don’t.’

‘What? Emy, it’s a monster.’

‘Bane.’ I waited until he turned to face me. ‘She’s not a monster.’ Bane opened his mouth to protest but closed it before any words escaped. ‘She’s not killed anyone.’

‘As far as we know.’

‘There’s no evidence to suggest kitsune are killers. Everything I’ve read suggests that they marry in their human form, they have families, they don’t kill.’

‘I’ve read that some can be malicious. Sounds like they have quick tempers.’

'Come on. Silver isn't a monster. There has to be an explanation as to why she's opening up a hole in time.'

'She must be pretty old. Apparently only the most powerful can bend time. She could be very dangerous, Emy. We should find out how to kill her. Just in case.'

With a heavy sigh, I lay back on the bed, feeling my damp hair pushed against my bare skin.

'Fine, you do that. But we won't need to. You're not going to kill her just because. You know how I feel about that. We're the killers here, Bane. Not her. We're the monsters. You shouldn't forget that.'

'We kill monsters to save lives.'

'We kill living creatures. That's all there is to it. And unless you can show me the pile of bodies that Silver has created, you won't be killing her.' I stared up at the ceiling but felt Bane's eyes on me.

'How long were you there for?' I asked.

'A few days. How long was I missing?'

'About that. And you didn't see a little girl on her own?'

'No.'

'She must be so scared,' I murmured.

Bane lay next to me and ran a hand down my towelled body. I turned to look him in the eye.

'I thought I'd lost you.'

'Never.' He moved closer and kissed me. I took great comfort in the warmth from his lips and hands as they drifted up my body and into my hair. As the kiss broke I curled, my head fitting under his chin and he held me close. I wondered if he expected an answer about our future at that moment but if I did, he kept quiet.

'We need to go back and talk to her,' I said into Bane's t-shirt. He released me and sat up, pulling the laptop back towards him. He clicked a few buttons.

'Ok. But we need to be prepared.'

'You get prepared then but when I'm dressed, we're going.' I pulled myself off the bed and moved to find some clean clothes that I hadn't recently thrown up in.

'What about that guy you were with?'

'Ray? What about him?' I pulled a clean top over my head.

'You going to tell him what we're doing? Seeing as how you involved him?'

I glared at Bane.

'You're going to have a go about that now?'

'Yes, Emy. He had no right being there. You are more than capable of doing something like that on your own.'

I quickly decided to take that as a compliment. As I slipped my shoes on, I thought about all of the doubt that had plagued me as Ray broke into the zoo with me. At the worry for his safety, at how enraged he had become.

'You're right,' I said slowly. I couldn't involve Ray any more. To travel back in time is one thing, to then find out that some mythical creatures are real? I hated to think what he would dream, if he slept at all.

We made our way through the hotel and down into the lobby. Bane strode ahead, realised I wasn't with him and turned. Two men were approaching me.

'Emily,' Ray said without a smile.

'Is everything ok?'

'I told Craig everything. We need to go back to the zoo.'

'What for?' Bane asked from behind them.

'We need to tell the zoo what's going on.'

Craig was staring at Bane.

'Is this who you lost?' He asked me.

'Yes, and we're going back now to find your daughter and your sister, Ray.'

'We'll tell you when we have them back,' Bane said gruffly, crossing his muscled arms across his chest.

'No. I'll come with you.'

Ray and I stared at one another but he wouldn't back down. I turned to Craig.

'And you?'

He nodded.

'Emy, they can't come,' Bane warned.

'You won't speak to any zoo staff. I found Bane, I will find your daughter and sister. You must trust us. Understand?'

Both men nodded, although Craig didn't seem sure.

'Good. Off we go then.'