

“Finding Home amongst shadows”

In the heart of the sprawling futuristic city, where towering steel buildings met the sky and neon lights painted the streets in vibrant hues, Sage Livingston stood at the edge of her territory. Her wolf faction's emblem—a stylized wolf howling at a crescent moon—was etched into the concrete, a reminder of both their strength and the burden of leadership she carried. At eighteen, she was the proud leader of a group forged from the ashes of their difficult past, a painful legacy that lingered like a shadow. Sage was no stranger to loss. Her childhood had been stolen from her, wiped clean by grief and hardship. But what she lacked in traditional formative experiences, she made up for with determination and grit. Sage had a fierce spirit, embodied in her wild black and lavender hair and the confident sparkle in her lavender eyes. But on the inside, she struggled like any teenager, yearning for connection and a sense of belonging.

Her heart raced as she surveyed their small, makeshift camp nestled within the remnants of an abandoned subway station. Tonight was imperative; the faction had gathered to prepare for their upcoming raid on a rival group threatening their territory. While the others discussed logistics, Sage's gaze drifted outside, momentarily distracted by the vibrant moon illuminating the city. The howls of her fellow warriors echoed in the back of her mind, a reminder of their camaraderie and the responsibilities she held. “Sage!” The call brought her back to the moment. Belle, her younger sister, wove through the crowd, her small figure illuminated by the fluorescent light above. At only 15, Belle was curious, bright-eyed, and fiercely loyal. She had been through so much at such a young age; her innocence had been chipped away by the hardships they faced. “Are you okay?” Sage knelt, forcing her attention fully onto her sister. “I thought you were helping with the supplies?” Belle shrugged, shuffling her feet. “I wanted to see you. You've been so serious lately.” Sage's heart ached. She didn't want to be just a leader; she

wanted to be a sister. "I'm sorry, Belle. There's a lot on my mind. But I promise, once this is over, we can have a sister day. Just us." Belle smiled, the light returning to her eyes. "You mean it?" "Absolutely," Sage replied, filled with warmth at the thought of spending time together, away from the chaos.

Just then, Hugo emerged from the shadows, his presence a comforting anchor amidst the emotional storm. Tall and lean, with tousled blonde hair with a brown-ish blonde undercut on the side and a charming grin, he had become Sage's confidant and a source of strength. They had weathered many storms together, both figuratively and literally. "Hey, Sage. We need to finalize the plan," he said softly, glancing at Belle. "You all right?" "Yeah, I'm good," she replied, her voice firmer as hope flickered in her chest. "Just taking a moment." As they convened, Sage felt weight settle on her shoulders. Each decision she made affected not just her, but her entire faction—her family. They were not just warriors; they were survivors, bound together by shared scars and a desire for a better life. The meeting buzzed with urgency as they laid out their strategy. Each member was confident, united in their purpose. Yet, as she detailed their course of action, Sage could sense a shadow of doubt creeping in, a familiar sensation reminding her of the fragility of their situation. "Each of us knows the risks," Sage emphasized, looking around at their determined faces. "But if we stand together, we can protect what we've built. We fight for our home, for each other."

The room erupted in affirmations. Despite the heaviness of the moment, Sage felt a spark of pride ignite within her, a reminder that this was where she belonged. She built more than a faction; she forged a family. Later that night, when the group dispersed, Sage and Hugo lingered behind. The moon had climbed higher, casting an ethereal glow. "Are you okay?" Hugo asked, concern clouding his features. Sage sighed, her heart heavy. "I'm just trying to figure out if I'm

enough—a good leader, a good sister...sometimes it feels like I'm failing." Hugo stepped closer, his hand finding hers. "You're doing more than enough. You're brave, you're strong, and everyone sees that. You can't hold the weight of the world alone." "But it's so hard," she admitted, her voice cracking slightly. "I just want us to be safe, to find a sense of home." Hugo squeezed her hand, drawing her gaze. "Home isn't just a place. It's the people you share it with. You've created that here." Affection flowed between them, a steady current of support. In that moment, Sage understood; home was found in shared laughter, in whispered secrets and moments of vulnerability.

Just then, they heard a soft voice approach. "Sage?" Belle had returned, her face scrunched in determination, hand on her hip. "Can I be a good leader too? I want to help!" Sage chuckled, her heart lifting at Belle's unwavering spirit. "Of course! You're already a leader in my eyes. Why don't we plan our sister day right now?" "Really?" Belle's purple eyes sparkled with excitement. "Yes! Let's dream it up! We can build our perfect home!" As they brainstormed together, Hugo looked on, a smile playing on his lips. Sage's heart swelled with love, a warmth spreading through her that whispered she was, indeed, where she belonged.

With the days ticking by like the rhythmic heartbeat of the city, the night of the raid arrived. Sage stood at the front of her faction, a palpable energy surrounding them, as they prepared to defend what they had fought for relentlessly. They moved as one, a symphony of action weaving through the streets, each person a note in a powerful melody of resilience. When the conflict unfolded, Sage's heart pulsed with adrenaline—but also with a deep-seated belief in her team. They fought hard, each member yielding their strength for one another, echoing the promise Sage had made. In the aftermath, as the dust settled and the moon hung high, Sage felt a surge of hope rising in her chest. They stood victorious but also battered—a true reflection of

their journey. Later, as they regrouped under the stars, Sage paused. She looked at the faces of her faction, her family. Each of them had a story, a struggle that mirrored her own, yet together they formed a tapestry of hope that filled her heart with warmth. "Tonight, we proved that together, we can find our way home," Sage declared, her voice strong. "This is just the beginning. We fight for one another, and we will continue to grow."

A cheer rose in her faction, voices intertwining in the night air. Hope blossomed in their chests, igniting dreams of a brighter future. Surrounded by her sister and her boyfriend, Sage felt the warmth of connection wrap around her like a comforting blanket. In that moment, amidst the remnants of battle, Sage knew they had not only survived but thrived. The path had been fraught with challenges, yet they had fought and forged a place to call home—not defined by walls or comforts, but by love, loyalty, and the bonds they created through shared struggles. And as they stood together, heart to heart, beneath the vast expanse of a starlit sky, Sage felt a fullness in her heart that echoed the strength of her spirit, resilient and fierce, ready to embrace whatever came next.