



HINTER LANDS

THE WHITE WOLF TRILOGY, BOOK ONE.

FROM BEST SELLING AUTHOR

CHRIS J. DAVIS

PREVIEW

Chapter 9

“Áine, we need to talk.” Séamus began as he worked to match pace with her, the injuries from his fight with the Master making it harder for him to move.

“Can it wait until we reach the outpost?” We had only been on the move for a handful of minutes and her body was still ringing from the heat of battle, not to mention that odd moment with the boy still replaying itself in her mind.

“I wish I could love, but I am afraid we do not have the luxury of time anymore. We will share this with your packmates once we reach the outpost and the boy is stabilized.” He paused, considering his next words.

“But this affects you more than anyone else, and I want time with just us to discuss it.”

The seriousness in his voice took her aback. It was rare to see Séamus stern, let alone this sober, this serious.

“Okay móraí, what it is?” Áine hadn’t called him that since she was very young, she wasn’t sure why she chose to again at this moment, it just felt right.

A smile played across his lips. “You are the only joy I have had for many years, you know that don’t you? Raising you, seeing you excel and grow into who you are, has been the greatest privilege of my life.”

Áine had never heard him talk like this, it was making her incredibly uncomfortable.

“I am not the most sentimental person, you know that, but today's events have forced me to think about the past, and more importantly, the future. Your future.”

“I don't have a future grandfather, you know that.” She said, not attempting to keep the bitterness from her voice.

“Oh but you do love, no matter what, you will have the future you deserve. The one you choose. Always remember that.”

After a moment he continued. “Today I learned something Áine. Something wonderful, terrible and impossible. I learned of someone impossible.”

“You mean the boy we rescued?” She said. An unidentified sense of dread working its way into her bones.

“Aye. His name is Michael. Michael Tierney Felan to be precise. You have felt something, a connection to the boy.” He said it as a statement of fact.

“... Yes. I don't understand what it is or why it's there, but I was drawn to the clearing when he was being attacked. I thought I was tracking you since it felt like our family bond.”

“Yes, I imagine it did feel very much like our bond. Why do you think that is?” He asked. This was Séamus' preferred way of teaching. Prodding you along as you work out the answers yourself.

It was irritating. But Áine had learned long ago that fighting it was a waste of time.

“I have been thinking about that. The only thing I can come up with is that he is a distant cousin to our family. He's obviously not a were, but could be descended from one of your cousins or my fathers. Those who didn't go through the change.”

He shook his head in approval.

“Aye, that is solid reasoning. Unfortunately that is not the case. Even if having a link between were’s and non were’s were possible, which it is not, family or no, I was the only child in my family, as was your father.”

“No, the answer lies in who you are Áine. Think.”

That didn’t make any sense. She was Áine. Hunter, tracker, granddaughter, outcast. She hid no secret, no destiny. There was just her and the unfairness of her birth.

Áine’s breath caught in her throat as what Séamus was hinting at came into focus. It was absurd. Unbelievable. Idiotic. Unacceptable.

“You can’t be serious Séamus.”

“Calm down child. Use that magnificent mind you have been blessed with. Think it through. Why is he not dead? You saw the bite marks. Why is he not dead?”

“I don’t know, maybe he carries a genetic mutation that allows him to combat the poison in the bites?” She said, already grasping at straws.

“No amount of mutations or genetics can combat magic Áine, you know that.”

“It doesn’t mean that he is...” She began, but Séamus cut her off. “You know the answer. The only way he could have survived the attack, is if he was a were, or descended from someone who was supposed to be a were.”

“His family has carried the Mark of Aibreann since the day the High King gave his blood oath. Passed down parent to child through the centuries until today, where it manifested itself as resistance to their poison.”

“There is no other explanation.” He paused for a moment, letting her absorb the information.

“Also, I know it is him, love. I recognize the King in his face. It is him.” He paused gathering his thoughts.

“The Fates have conspired to bring us all together in this moment. You and I, the boy and Richard, our lives have become intertwined, and I sense only death will uncouple them.”

The enormity of what Séamus was saying hit her like a ton of bricks. The last heir of the High King of Ireland, rightful leader of the Packs of Ireland, and the man destined to become her husband. Áine had spent her whole life coming to terms with the fact that no matter what she did, how many enemies she killed, how many people she saved, she would forever be burdened with the stigma of her family history.

For too long she allowed it to define her life. It was only recently that Áine has stepped out of its shadow to begin discovering who she really was, and now this idiot boy had showed up, threatening to tear down all the work she had done.

“No, I will not be defined by anyone or anything else ever again.” She said, not realizing she was speaking out loud.

“I don't believe you will love” Séamus said with a chuckle.

“You will be defined by your actions, your courage and your heart, as you always have. When the time comes to choose your path, I know you will choose the correct one, as you always have.”

“Regardless, for the moment we have more pressing matters, and that is to see that Michael lives to be the target of your scorn.” he said, becoming the leader once more.

“How much farther to the outpost?”

“If we keep this pace, we’ll be there in 20 minutes.” She said, pushing all thoughts of Michael, the Wolf King and destiny to the back of her mind.

Séamus was right, at this moment the saving of a life was the most important thing and that meant getting to the outpost quickly and safely.

Áine made a quick call through the pack link to Paddy and Thomas to check on their progress.

—How are things back there?—
The response was immediate.

—Hard going, but fine. The lad is heavier than he looks. We’re about 10 minutes behind you.—

Finally some good news. I was just beginning to settle into a rhythm of movement when the world turned to fire.