



Excerpt from “The Wolf”

When the sun had dried her fur, the young woman finally transformed, stumbled wearily to her feet, and brushed off the last bits of sand. Transforming while still wet only got one’s clothing wet, she had learned in the trial-and-error of her hidden, mostly self-taught lessons. But by transforming when one was dry, not even the brine-salt lingered behind, save as an easily shaken-off dust.

While she was still shaking off her cloak and skirts, she heard a noise. A growl. Whirling with a gasp, Alys confronted the sound, afraid she might have to fight some wild beast, ready to transform and take flight if necessary, though she was very tired and hungry, and flying took a lot of energy.

A large wolf—not pookrah sized, but still very large—crouched on the sand before her, his brownish fur fluffed menacingly around his ruff, his teeth bared intimidatingly, his golden-tawny eyes narrowed in a fierce glare.

Golden eyes. Brown fur. On Nightfall Isle...?

“—Wolfer!” Alys scolded, her fear vanishing in a puff of irritation the instant she made the identifying connection. “You *scared* me!”

The wolf blinked, whined as he stared at her, then backed up in uncertainty. But it was him; now that her fright wasn’t clouding her senses, she could sense the shapeshifted magic surrounding him.

“Wolfer, it’s me! Alys—remember?”

...

Wolfer blinked again. The breeze was the wrong direction for him to scent her...but she sort of *looked* like Alys. She had more curves than he could recall, based on what he glimpsed through the folds of that scruffy wool cloak, and her hair was braided, not hanging free...but it was made of the same dark gold, escape-artist curls. The same curls that had been woven into the braid forever knotted around his human wrist.

The woman also had the same soft grey eyes, so different from his twin's steel, set in a delicate, oval face. One that had matured a little more since he had seen her last, but not by that much more. The wind shifted a little, curling her distinctive, feminine scent towards him. He could imagine how he could remember it so clearly after three years of exile...but he knew it the moment he sniffed the wind.

It *was* her.

A shrug and he transformed back to his human self. He had gone down to the beach to stare at the ocean, too restless to sleep, and had seen a shapeshifter changing shape on the beach. The woman studied him eagerly, drinking in the sight of his brown trousers, his grey tunic, and the untamable chest-length mane of mostly straight but thick, flyaway brown hair he had to deal with. Just as she had to deal with her own riot of old-gold curls.

Wolfer blinked, assimilating her presence on the Isle. "...Alys?"

Smiling, she stepped forward. So did he, as she nodded and spoke. "—Yes, it's me!"

"Alys!" Wolfer broke into a grin. Charging forward, he caught her up in a bear hug, lifting her up off the ground and twirling his old playmate around.

"Alys! Alys!"

She shrieked and laughed, squirmed for enough room in his arms to breathe, then hugged him back. "Wolfer, oh Wolfer—I've missed you!"

"I've missed you, too!" He cradled her body tightly to his, burying his face in her hair.