

Spark and The Pack's Embers



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Chapter One:

Spark wove through the market - an ash-swamped, dusty, old market on the Mainland.

She raised a hand to Mrs Weaver, who was packing up her stone, only for the Guards - a squadron of men and women, trained to obey the Mayor at whatever cost - to snatch it away.

Spark hurriedly turned the corner, hiding behind an ash-dusted stone building. The Guards. They were confiscating all stone or metal - because of the relocating. Everyone in the town was moving to the Greater Island, disease-free, where they could live in peace.

But that would mean no more going to the Lesser Island - where, unbeknownst to the adults, the children had been going to in secret, to hone their survival skills.

A lean form bobbed through the crowd and grabbed her arm.

“Come on!” Annabel, or ‘Bell’, as her nickname was, one of Spark’s two best friends, began dragging her.

“W- what?” Spark shook the dust out of her golden-streaked hair.

“Me, you and Willow. We’re having a meeting about what to do! It’s going to be *great!* And...”

Spark let Bell drag her to the clearing - dry, cracked ground that had spindly, dying trees on it. The Elders had said that before the disease, the clearing had lush green grass and huge oaks with velvety, big leaves.

There, Willow was waiting, her vibrant ginger hair dulled by the smoke-grey ash and dust coating it.

“We need to talk,” Willow called. “Now.”

Spark paced around Willow and Bell, circling the other children of the town - altogether, a meagre eight children.

“They’re going to do *what?*” Spark asked, blue eyes furious, like stormy circles of sky - something the children had only seen on the Islands.

“They can’t just trap us on the Lesser Island until they’re finished building houses! That’s ridiculous!” Atlas, an 11-winters-old boy, fumed. “I say we invade the Greater Island!”

“Why would we invade our own parents?” Willow pointed out. “Besides, there are only five of us, and a whole lot more of them.”

“They’re going to keep us on the Lesser Island for *ages!* This is because we told them we know how to survive on our own,” Flo, an eight-winters-old girl, fretted.

“But we *do* know how to survive on our own,” Oscar, her brother, pointed out. Jack and Charlie, Spark’s annoying brothers, pointed.

“The adults are coming!” Jack yelled, yelled way too loudly, his short stature and spiky black hair adding to the comicalness of his ability to yell so loudly.

“Shhh!” Charlie, a head taller than Jack and just slightly shorter than Spark, with the same spiky hair as Jack in a golden-brown, warned.

But it was too late. The adults were marching over with stern faces.

“Come on.” Atlas’s mother, Mrs Night, motioned for the adults to surround them. Children weren’t treated very well in town - their parents treated them well, sure, but no other adult.

Spark’s Mum and Dad had desolate expressions, but they knew they couldn’t go against the Mayor - not without being left behind forever on the Mainland.

Their family dog, a lean black whippet called Stanley, was being led by her dad.

Spark moved to stroke him but was pulled back in line by Willow. The portal for the Lesser Island had come into view - a blue-and-green swirl, like a horizontal whirlpool.

“When we’re done with building the houses, we’ll create a portal so you can come to the Greater Island. Then the Lesser Island will be sealed off forever!”

Spark grabbed Willow and Bell as the children were shoved unceremoniously into the portal.

Spark stumbled onto the grass, coughing. It was only when she heard a gasp that realised they had appeared on the Lesser Island.

On her right rose a moor side like a green ocean, purple heather lining it like purple froth. To her left, a forest rose from the lush grass, making a home where birds sung and swooped, dappled sunlight making them look like fish swimming under a sea.

“Woah,” Flo breathed. “This place never gets old.”

“What should we do?” Oscar asked quietly.

“Get a shelter, first. The river that comes from underneath the moor is freshwater - that’s our water source for hydration.” Willow looked around.

“For food, I know loads of edible plants - and we can hunt if necessary.” Spark plucked a leaf from a nearby hawthorn bush and ate it.

Bell peered at the trees. “I don’t think we should go under the trees. There’re loads of foxes and badgers. Besides, the moor has big sandy hollows. Last time we were here we put moss in some of the gaps under the bushes to sleep in.”

“I think we should go into the forest,” Spark argued. “More shelter from the rain, and we made the same sort of mossy nests under the bushes there.”

Willow, always the peacemaker, spoke up. “How about whoever wants to go in the forest goes in the forest, and whoever wants to go on the moor goes on the moor?”

“Ok, so whoever’s going in the forest, come here,” Spark called.

Jack, Flo and Oscar gathered round.

“Ok, so, Flo and Jack, you can find the circle of shelters and repair them, and me and Oscar can gather food so-”

“Look!” Atlas cried.

They all looked to where he was pointing.

“What on earth...?” Spark stepped closer.

The edge of the island was turning grey as dust.

The same thing that was making the Mainland unliveable.

“The Greyfur disease,” Willow whispered.

Chapter 2:

The Elders had said it was relentless, like a storm. That it swept over the Mainland, coating everything in ash, killing all the wildlife, all the animals except the pets.

Only the pets and the humans, out of everything, survived it.

Then, after a year, as the rations were being used up, the townspeople discovered a way to make portals.

The first was a different island. The town called it the Sun Island - because it was the first time the people had seen the sun.

They killed all the animals for food, cut down all the trees for firewood, covered every inch in farmland.

Until the Greyfur disease, like a swooping hawk, snatched the Sun Island in its talons...

Until the Sun Island was a patch of ash dissolving into the sea, a distant memory to the townspeople that had destroyed it.

Spark ran those words through her head over and over again.

It had only been three days and the Greyfur disease - named that because it turned everything grey like a wolf's fur - had taken a quarter of the island.

The younger children were panicking. The disease was taking the moor first so the children - oldest of them 12 - which was her, Willow, Bell, Charlie and Jack - had moved into the forest. A movement caught her eye. Spark knocked an arrow in her bow - roughly made but it would do. She caught a glimpse of a white tipped tail - a fox maybe? Food, at least.

Spark moved forward slowly...She pulled back the arrow ready to fire...

And stepped on a stick.

Instead of fleeing, the animal moved forward out of the bushes. It was a wolf, a white wolf with an pure white tail.

Her pack emerged - silvers, browns, reds and blacks.

But no greys.

Spark froze. The Elders had told them stories about wolves, but Spark had always thought they were mythical creatures. Like dragons or phoenixes. Not *real*.

But there they were.

"If you ever see a wolf," The Elders had said, "you walk away slowly, calmly."

So Spark did so.

Then the white wolf spoke, in clear crisp vowels.

But it wasn't the speaking that shocked Spark the most, as much as the wolf's next words.

"We need your help."

Spark couldn't believe her ears. A *wolf*, speaking English?

"You can speak *English*?"

"How do *you* know you aren't speaking wolf? "Another wolf this time, as silver as the moon, stepped forward. "Alpha, please. We're starving and this one would be an ample meal."

"No, Moon." The white wolf - but, no, this must be the Alpha - peered at Spark with intelligent, wise, amber eyes. "Human, we need your help. We must get off this island or be consumed by the hungry jaws of the Grey Infection."

"Y - you mean the Greyfur disease?"

Sparks swallowed nervously - wolves were dangerous, the Elders had emphasised, *very* dangerous.

"Yes, that. My great great grandparents did not escape this disease just for it to consume their descendents!"

Spark stepped backwards. "Ummm...."

"Look! A silver fox!"

Oscar and Flo ran forwards straight for Moon. The silver she-wolf, snarled, but at a warning from Alpha stayed still and imperious as the small children patted her.

Bell peered at the wolves. "Spark, are these *wolves*?"

"Obviously they're *wolves*." Charlie frowned. "They can have Spark."

"Hey!" Jack huffed at Charlie. "*I'm* the oldest - "

"By five *minutes*!" At an enquiring look from Atlas, Charlie huffed. "Well, ok, maybe less than that, but still!"

The two bickered back and forth until Alpha huffed, silencing everyone.

"If this is the best help we have, we're already doomed." Alpha gazed at the brothers.

"Ok, Spark. You have some explaining to do." Willow stared at her.

By the time Spark had clarified everything, they were sitting around the children's fire, the wolves spaced out between them.

"We need your help," Alpha growled. "The Grey Infection - or the Greyfur disease, as you call it - is fatal to wolves. We need to go to a different island - one without the Infection."

Willow, Bell and Spark had already decided to trust them. Besides, even if they were tricking the children, the adults on the Greater Island would kill the wolves if they harmed anyone.

"What do we do?" Flo stroked Moon. The silver wolf had a warm heart and had taken to Flo so much she had even let the small girl ride on her back, much to Flo's delight.

Similarly, the other children had formed a bond with a wolf of their own - Oscar with a large brown wolf with lighter stripes called Bark, Charlie with a reddish wolf called Flame, Jack with a black wolf called Spike, named so because of his fluffy

tail, Willow had stuck with a pale brown, black-striped wolf called Tiger, and Bell sat next to a pale grey and white fluffy wolf called Jess-Rose.

Spark gazed around. "What do we do?"

"That portal to the Greater Island appeared a few minutes ago," Jack called. "We could bring the wolves."

"No, the adults would shoot them," Atlas dismissed. He was next to a pale reddish-brown wolf called Blaze.

"Maybe the mayor would accept them—" Spark tried.

"The mayor *hates* wild animals. That bear-fur cloak he wears shows that." Bell shuddered.

"We have an idea," a tiny voice piped up.

Spark looked at Flo and Oscar, surprised.

"What if some of you go to the adults and tell them about the wolves?" Oscar's voice was strong as he stroked Bear. "The olders can go."

"All of them would be good, I guess," Flo added. "Me and Oscar can stay with the pack. If you aren't back in a day, we'll *all* come."

"Sounds like a plan!" Charlie rubbed his hands. "Tomorrow, at dawn, then."

Alpha grinned a wolfish grin. "Perfect. Our pack will survive - alongside humans," she added, looking at the children and wolves together.

Spark nodded. "This is for everyone."

Chapter Three:

Spark stumbled onto thick grass, the sun illuminating the scene in front of her. There was a lake - a huge, shimmering lake with three rivers flowing into it, slicing the land down the middle into three sections. There was a huge, floating island made of reeds on the lake, the artificial island dancing across the lake with the wind. On the right, the moor, again was like a green ocean with purple froth, but there were canopies above the huge sandy hollows, shielding it from the rain and forming house-like structures. On the left, the forest, treehouses blending into the shadows. And in front of them, the townspeople, staring at the children.

"You finally came through the portal!" Bell's mum pulled her into a hug.

"No time!" The curly-haired girl, Spark, looked pleadingly back at them. "There's a wolf pack - through the portal!"

Mrs Night chuckled. "You all have been playing a fun little game, but you're back through the portal now. Time to come back to the real world!"

Flo and Oscar's mum looked desperately at them. "Where are my twins?"

"Back through the portal - with the wolves! Please, you *have* to help!" Willow grasped her mum's arm.

"We want to believe you, but no one's seen wolves in twenty years!" Spark, Charlie and Jack's mum looked conflicted.

An ice-cold yet slimy voice oozed through the hubbub, silencing everyone.

The mayor swept to the front of the crowd, bloodshot pale blue eyes staring down from a fat, piggish face, his round bulk swallowed by an over-the-top, extravagant bear-skin cloak. He looked, for all the world, like an evil pig who had managed to stand on its hind legs, especially with his pink, sunburnt skin.

"I don't think so," The mayor sighed, mock-sad. "You all are interrupting progress! Guards, seize them!"

Spark was grabbed from behind by an armoured guard, her friends, one by one, being subdued by the trained guards.

"Lock them in the prison cells," the mayor ordered.

The guards put blindfolds on the children's heads, the cries of the parents being muffled. The blindfold was ripped off her head as she was shoved roughly into a stark stone room, bars over the few windows, the door made from iron bars. Spark slumped to the floor. They were doomed.

Spark's friends had long since given up their banging and yelling when the mayor came.

"You *villain*," Bell snarled, trying to grab his neck through the bars to strangle him to no avail.

"That hurts!" The hurt from the mayor's voice was replaced with triumph. "I know about the wolves - how could I not? I am very observant. But they need to die. Like the rest of that group - I killed them. Made it look like an accident." He waved his hand dismissively. "But the wolves need to die. They are wild animals. The Elders tell stories about them! They watched me kill my group! They are the last obstacle to my reign. Until you lot found them. I suppose I can trap you all and the wolves in the Lesser Island while it slowly turns to ash and dissolves."

Now all of them were yelling, trying to grab the mayor, to strangle him, to make him face the consequences of what he'd done -

A guard aimed a knife at the while the mayor stood and another guard pulled the chair from the floor. As the three of them slunk away, the mayor threw back one last triumphant grin, until he and his guards vanished into the night.

"Ugh! This is hopeless. We're stuck, and no - one's coming to save us." Charlie slumped onto the floor.

Spark had a nagging feeling they were forgetting something - something important...

"I think we're forgetting something." Atlas sat, unconsciously echoing what Spark had just thought.

"Like this?"

The door unlocked, and there were Flo and Oscar.

"Yes!" Jack danced around the room. "Come on - let's go!"

But he had missed something. Flo and Oscar's face was full of fear and dread.

"What is it?" Spark asked.

"The wolves. They're ill."

Spark thought back to those last words Flo had uttered while she, Willow and Bell snuck into the mayor's ridiculously large stone house. Flo and Oscar had taken charge - sending a small team to the mayor's house to find a cure that Alpha had told them of, one that the mayor had stolen, and another to the mayor's office, in a different location (because he just *loved* to walk) in a separate building to look for proof of how evil the mayor really was to show the town.

Spark snuck through the freezing corridor with Willow and Bell, looking in rooms until they found a small one with scribbled notes, like, '*cure - useful?*' and '*wolves have cure - how?*'

There, they looked silently through drawers until Willow and Bell found a vial of white, glowing liquid.

"The cure - it must be!" Willow gazed at it reverently.

"Go. Both of you, go, and get that to the wolves. I'm staying - to see if I can get any more proof of how evil the mayor is." Spark peered outside. "Go!"

They hesitated, but at a forceful nod from Spark, left.

Spark peered into rooms, finding gems, books and treasures.

She had just left a room of stuffed animal heads, gagging slightly at the sight, when the clunk of boots clattered from down the hall. Guards. She panicked, darting into the nearest room - a closet-sized thing. She closed the door just as the guards rounded the corner. A glow suddenly shone from a shelf, flooding the room with light and illuminating the corridor outside through the cracks of the door. "No!" Spark grabbed it - an amulet - but it was too late. The door was flung open, a blinding pain hit her head and Spark fell into darkness.

Spark blinked her eyes open, groggy and disorientated. When her vision returned, she gasped in horror. Spark was strapped to a stake, standing on a pile of wood. The mayor stood before her, the townspeople being held back by Guards with knives. The mayor grinned hideously. "Spark, you are hereby to be burnt alive for breaking into my house, breaking out of prison, and lighting up an amulet. This is a sure sign of witchcraft!" Spark tried to speak, but a gag was wrapped around her mouth, muffling her protest. As the mayor stepped towards her, holding a burning stick, her last thought was how pretty the wolves are against the portal - Wait. Wolves? The wolf pack leapt into the mass of guards, the children riding on their backs. Willow riding Tiger, Bell riding Jess-Rose, accompanied by Jack on Spike, Atlas on Blaze and Charlie on Flame. They began knocking the guards unconscious, while Flo, Moon, Oscar and Bear freed the townspeople. Alpha leapt for the mayor, knocking him to the floor and swiped a paw across the mayor's bearskin cloak, ripping it to shreds.

Spark noticed tinges of grey among all of the wolves' fur, but then Alpha was leaping up the wood pile and severing her ties and gag. Alpha crouched. Spark's jaw dropped open. "Really? Awesome!" Spark hopped onto Alpha's back and, cheering, leapt into battle

Epilogue (A year later):

Spark sat on a tree branch, gazing out at the town. They had decided to keep the three different sort of village things: she, Charlie, Jack and their parents lived in the forest area; Bell and her family - along with their dog Bruno, who was a pale grey and white miniature schnauzer lived on the lake; and Willow, her family and their dog - a brindled greyhound called Timmy - lived on the moor.

After the battle, there had been chaos. But now, a year later, everything had fallen into a new rhythm. The Elders had become a Council, ruling fairly over the town.

The wolf pack had grown in numbers, though the children had kept their special bond with their wolf and the pack. In fact, a new tradition had been set out.

Throughout their lives (though the younger wolves tended to seek out the younger people, and the same with the older wolves) the wolves chose a person to befriend and accompany throughout both of their lives, though the wolves always did stay in the pack.

As for the mayor and his guards, well... those of the guards who had chosen to live a new peaceful life had been allowed to stay, but the mayor and those loyal to him were enjoying staying on the Lesser Island with every portal closed.

Spark grinned and leapt down from the tree, landing lightly. Alpha - who had informed Spark to call her Snow when it was just them - grinned, standing from where she had been sitting by the base of the tree, gnawing on a bone.

Spark hopped onto Snow's back and they walked into the sunset.

And the thing was?

Alpha had told her their pack was called the Ember Pack.

The End

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Spark had lived a relatively sheltered life. Not threatened by an ancient disease, like her ancestor's lives had.

But when the apparently extinct disease threatens the island Spark and her friends were staying on, they discover there is much more at risk than an island...

Can Spark and her friends stop wolves going extinct... forever?

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