



# ONE

## W O L F I E

Sabine, a petite ten-year-old girl with bright red hair in a long single braid down her back, rode on a coal black horse beside her grandfather, General Burchard Wolfensberger, known to many as the Wolf. She smiled warmly at him, and he smiled back. She knew many feared her famous grandfather, but as she gazed at him, all she could see was her Wolfie. A tall and slender older man with white hair hanging loosely around his shoulders, a white beard, and a black eyepatch over his right eye, who rode his horse as though it were part of him.

As the sun rose over the tops of the trees, birds of all kinds took flight, filling the air with sweet chirps.

“I am glad I am able to escort you to Onaxx Academy School for Mages, my dear. Just like I escorted your brothers to Trinity Page and Squire School,” the Wolf said quietly.

Sabine reached over and patted his hand, knowing how fortunate she was to have a loving grandfather. “I appreciate your escort. I just wish Father had been able to tell me more about what Onaxx Academy would be like. He was very vague.”

The Wolf chuckled. “Probably because he got into some trouble during his time there and would prefer not to be reminded about it.”

Sabine gasped. “Father in trouble?”

The Wolf grinned. “Yes, I even had to go to a meeting with the school’s council about it.” Sabine’s eyes widened in shock; her father never seemed like the sort to break any rules. “I would advise you to do the best you can to not break the rules.”

“Do you know what they are?” she asked, still wondering what sort of rules her father had broken.

The Wolf shrugged. “No idea. It’s a school for mages, and I’m no mage. I’m sure you’ll find out what the rules are once you get there.”

Sabine yawned as her thoughts drifted back to the day she discovered she was a shapeshifter, three years ago.

*“Momma, Momma!” Sabine raced into Wolfensberger Castle, cradling her arm, her long red hair streaming behind her.*

*“In here, Sabine!” her mother, Diana, called from the kitchen.*

*Sabine headed into the kitchen and was momentarily distracted by the delicious smell of fresh bread baking—until she glanced down at her arm and the events of the past hour came crashing back to her.*

*“Look, Momma!” Sabine said and held up her arm. At the sight of it—the forearm covered in long black and brown fur and Sabine’s fingernails looking more like sharp black claws—Diana gasped, dropping a pot of soup. The pot clattered to the red brick floor, splashing its steaming contents everywhere. Sabine had to jump backward to avoid being scalded.*

*“Kenric!” Diana screamed as she stepped over the mess, gently picked up Sabine, and dashed toward the library.*

*During the afternoons, Sabine’s father, Kenric Wolfensberger, usually worked on the day-to-day tasks of managing Wolfensberger Castle and the surrounding villages and didn’t like to be disturbed. Sabine knew with the way her mother was panicking that he would make an exception. He appeared in the hallway,*

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*slightly tousled with black spots of ink covering his tunic, quill still in his hand.*

*Sabine giggled at her father's appearance before she realized that her arm was still stuck with fur and claws. A whimper escaped her lips.*

*Frowning, Kenric took a step toward his wife and daughter. "What's wrong?"*

*Sabine shivered in fear as she considered the possibility that her father might not know how to fix her arm. He's a plant mage ... he can't heal. Tears trickled down her cheeks as her mother carried her into the library and set her down on the couch.*

*As her father inspected her arm, gently probing the skin with his fingers, he remained silent. Sabine shook in fear, terrified that whatever had happened was not fixable. That she would be stuck with strange fur and claws forever. Her friends at the castle would think she was a monster.*

*Giving her a gentle squeeze, her father tried to capture her attention. "Sabine, how did this happen?"*

*Sabine could tell he was trying to keep his voice calm. She took a deep breath and tried to regain control of her emotions and answer her father so he could help her. "I was ... I was ... playing with the huntsman's dogs ... and ..."* The tears fell anew.

*Her mother ran her hand through Sabine's hair, something she had done for as long as Sabine could remember to help calm her down. "And?" prompted Diana.*

*Sabine wiped her face and gave her parents a watery half-smile. "And I thought it would be fun to run and play with them as a dog ... and then ..."* Sabine heard her father gasp as he took both of her hands in his.

*He nodded gently, finishing her sentence for her. "And then your arm changed?" he asked.*

*How did he know what to say? she wondered and watched as he shared a look with Diana—the kind of look that meant*

her parents just had a full conversation without saying a single word.

“Sabine,” her father said, turning back to her, “I want you to look at your hand and arm that are not furry and concentrate hard. Remember what your other arm feels like when it is yours.”

Sabine focused her gaze on her normal hand and arm. Keeping their image in her mind, she took a deep breath and squeezed her eyes shut tight.

She concentrated on the image of her normal hand, how it felt to flex her fingers, a cool breeze on her skin. Slowly she could feel the long black fur on her arm changing into pale human skin. Sharp claws turned back into fingernails. Sabine opened one eye, hoping she was no longer furry. She shrieked in excitement seeing her arm and hand were back to normal.

Giddy with relief that she hadn't permanently harmed herself, Sabine turned eagerly to her father. “What happened to me?”

Her father picked her up and settled her in his lap. “You're a shapeshifter, Sabine,” he said quietly.

Sabine stared at him blankly. “What is a shapeshifter?”

Her father sighed. “I shouldn't be surprised that you don't know what a shapeshifter is ... sometimes I forget that you are only seven and not a grownup.”

Sabine laughed uncertainly. “I'm not ready to be a grownup. Is a shapeshifter a mage?”

“Yes, a shapeshifter is a type of mage. However, it is different than my plant magic, or your brother Jules's weather magic—types of magic that can create new things. Shapeshifting modifies the wielder. For example, you were thinking of being a dog and subconsciously changed your arm to be like one,” explained her father patiently.

Sabine ran her hand over her arm to make sure the fur was staying away. “Can I create a dog?”

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*Kenric shook his head. “No, shapeshifters cannot make new objects. But they can turn into animals or alter their own appearance—such as changing height or hair color, depending on their skill level.”*

*Sabine listened quietly, considering her father’s words, and another question formed in her mind. “Is shapeshifting common?” She wondered if her lack of knowledge of shapeshifting was because she was only seven and had only been around two mages besides her father—her brother Jules and his magic instructor, Master Brixx.*

*“Unfortunately, it is not. In Etria, shapeshifting is as rare as weather magic. In some countries, such as Wanonia, it doesn’t exist at all. Weather magic is still based on the elements. Being the wielder of a rare type of magic will have many challenges. I know that you are up to the task. We will be here to support you in any way we can. Your brothers too,” her father said reassuringly.*

*Sabine nodded. She knew that the Wolfensbergers had always been loyal to each other. Her brothers were no exception, even though they were focused on their own journeys to become knights.*

*“Your brothers are busy, but your grandfather will always make time for you. We know you are extremely close.”*

*Sabine gave a slight smile in agreement. “I will write to Wolfie.”*