

## Chapter 3: Mate Gathering

May

“May, come on! You know this is THE most important event of the year! And it’s our first one!” my best friend Julia says to me.

She’s right, the mate gathering event every year is huge. Every eligible male and female from all the local packs and even some from farther away come here in the hopes of finding their mates. Not everyone does and those individuals are usually disappointed but come back again the next year and the next until they find their mates. The older they get, the more likely they are to start attending other mate gatherings, which is why we get some pack members from other parts of the country.

I’ve just finished putting my bright red hair into a tight bun, forcing my wayward curls into a smooth look before putting on a dark blue dress that matches the color of my eyes. I finish it off with silver heels and walk out of my room to see Julia.

“Finally, let’s go!” she says, grabbing my hand and pulling me down the hallway.

She opts to drive and knowing that she’ll complain about how slow I’m driving the entire way, I don’t argue.

“Do you think he’ll be there?” she asks me.

Him. Alpha Weston. Only the most eligible bachelor in our part of the country. He turned twenty-two this year. If he comes, it will be the third mate gathering he’s attended. He didn’t come to it last year, but I understand it’s because he’s been focused on trying to pull his pack out of financial distress. I admire him for his focus and his ability to put his pack before himself, but like Julia, I’m hoping to see the hot Alpha tonight.

“I’m not sure, I know that there are openings at Brownstone Construction, so maybe he’s working on some new projects,” I say.

Julia gives me a side-eye. “And how would you know that Brownstone Construction is hiring?”

“I may have applied for a couple of the different

positions. They aren't available yet, but now that we've graduated, I need to find a job and what better company to work for than our local construction company," I say.

"Except they aren't the ONLY construction company in our area, are they?" she asks. "Did you apply to any of the other companies?"

"I don't remember," I say, and she snorts. In truth, I want to work for someone that is struggling to make a better life for his pack members, someone who is putting others ahead of himself. A man like that would be a good boss, and a good mate.

"Sure you don't. Well, I'm sure Alpha Theodore would be happy to give you a job," she says, smirking at me.

"Eww, I don't care that he's an Alpha. He's an arrogant prick."

"That is true. Goddess, I hope he's not my mate," she says as we pull up to the party that is already in full swing.

"I heard he rejected his mate. She wasn't pretty

enough, or ranked enough, or whatever enough. She may not realize it, but she dodged that bullet.”

When Julia parks, I get out of the car and straighten my dress. We fall into step together as we head toward the party.

“Okay, the rules. If we don’t find our mates, we don’t leave alone. If one or both of us finds are mates, all bets are off and we find a place to mark and mate them.”

“Maybe get to know them first,” I say laughing at her. “I’m mean, it’s important to know your mate’s name so you can call it out during the mating process, so you don’t have to say, ‘Oh yeah, right there....you’.”

She and I burst into nervous giggles as we walk into the party. The idea that we would not only find our mate tonight, but also participate in the mating process, having a fresh mark on our necks in the morning has my stomach in knots.

As we walk in, we lift our noses and take a deep breath.

“Anything?” she asks me.

"No," I say, disappointed.

"Well, come on, let's do a loop around, maybe our mates haven't arrived yet," Julia says, pulling me into the room.

We head to the bar, Julia pushing in between two groups of males who look us both over then turn back to the room.

She's just handing me a glass of something fruity when we hear the low growl, and the room goes silent.

"Mate," a deep, snarly voice says.

As I watch, the people in the center of the floor separate and a large man stalks toward a tall, slender woman whose eyes have gone wide. "Mate," she says softly.

His growl of warning becomes one of possession as he walks to her, pulling her to him and kissing her in a way that has me looking away.

"Is this your first mate gathering?" one of the men standing beside me asks.

I turn to look at him. "Yes."

He lifts his drink to the couple that are now making their way out of the room, her arms and legs wrapped around him as he takes them to wherever mates go when they find each other.

"It'll be like that all night. Well, hopefully it will. That's the point of this gathering after all."

I've heard of the mate bond, we all have, but it's a completely different experience to hear about it than to witness it first-hand.

However, I soon realize that the man is right. Over the next couple of hours, Julia and I watch as mate after mate find each other. It's thrilling and disappointing each time someone calls out mate, or you hear the warning growl and realize that it's not for you.

Julia and I are talking, debating how late we want to stay at the party and hope that our mates show up when the room begins to buzz. We turn, tuning into what is being said. Julia grabs my arm.

"Alpha Weston is here."

She's just said it when I smell the most delicious scent I've ever smelled in my life, salted caramel. I lift my nose in the air, taking a deep breath as the room around me reverberates with a warning growl that has my body humming in anticipation.

I open my eyes and look at the man across the room who is staring right at me.

"Mate," he says and it's like he's calling me to him, a call I have no choice but to answer, like I've been waiting my entire life to answer this call.

I barely register Julia's head snap in my direction as I answer Alpha Weston.

"Mate," I confirm.

His answering growl is full of possession, full of promise. He's across the room and pulling me into his arms, taking my mouth in a passionate kiss. His tongue swipes into my mouth, and I can only whimper and hold on as he dominates me and claims me in front of this room full of shifters. His taste is unlike anything I've ever tasted before.

I completely lose track of time and space, forgetting

that we're in the middle of a room full of people.

When he finally pulls back, I realize he's somehow moved us out of the main room. He has me against a wall, his strong body pressed against mine, my legs wrapped around his waist. I hadn't even realized I'd done that, much less that he'd moved us out of the main room.

"Mine," he says softly, caressing my cheek.

"Mine," I say, running my fingers through his short, black hair. His body shivers at my touch, making me smile.

"I'm Weston," he says.

That makes me smile. Everyone knows who Alpha Weston is.

"I know who you are, Alpha. My name is May."

"May," he says, my name rolling around on his tongue as if he's savoring it. "You're my mate, my Luna. Call me Weston."

"Weston," I say, and receive an answering purr that flows into my body, making me arch against him.



"I'm taking you away from here. I don't want to mark you here where there are others that can hear us. No one gets to hear you, but me," he says, stepping back from the wall. Because my legs are wrapped around him, I move with him.

I start to put my feet back down on the floor, but he grabs the back of my thighs.

"No, stay here. I'll carry you."

He takes us out a side door. As he walks, I lean in, rubbing my nose against his throat, not able to get enough of his scent. It's mouthwatering.

Without thinking, I lick his throat and his growl is instant. "Soon, my little May-flower," he says.

I hear a car alarm beep just before he crawls into the driver's side, keeping me in his lap. He adjusts my legs in the seat as best he can before taking my mouth in another scorching kiss. I feel his hips press up against me, nothing but his pants and my thin panties between the hard bulge pressing against my heat.

He gently pulls my face back, looking at me.

"Before we get to where I'm taking you, are you a

virgin? It won't change my mind about you being my mate, but I want to know how gentle I need to be tonight," he says, making me blush.

I nod. "I am."

His smile lets me know that it may not have kept him from accepting me as his mate, but he is very happy that I've never been with another man before.

"We'll take our time. I'll be as gentle as I can. I want tonight to be one of many perfect memories that we make together."