

1.Chosen Mates

"Alright everyone, good work, that's it for today. Hit the showers!" I commanded my junior squad. I had put them through the ringer today. We were determined not to lose this interstate pack competition, having won for two consecutive years.

Lifting the lid on my water bottle, I chugged on it, rehydrating because it was seriously hot out today. The summer months could get pretty unbearable out here, notwithstanding that we wolves ran hot. Wiping the sweat from my forehead, I started checking my phone. Hmmm, that's strange. I have had no messages from Jake. Usually, Jake would have inundated my phone screen with messages by now.

Jake and I had been together for as long as I could recall. We were inseparable since childhood. He's a few years older than me, but that never mattered. Jake never found his fated mate, and I hadn't either, so we had agreed to become chosen mates if we hadn't met our mates by twenty-ve. Jake's birthday came and went and I had just turned twenty-ve, so we were about to make it ocial.

Our pack generally discouraged chosen mates. But everyone knew how close Jake and I were, so over time, we had gained the pack's blessing. The proviso was that Jake and I had attempted to nd our fated mates. Of which we had. Our Alpha, Rick, had sent us out on trips interstate and even inter-continentially. Neither one of us had met our fated mates, which hadn't bothered us because we enjoyed each other's company so much.

Today was our big day. We were nally making it ocial. We had scheduled our marking ceremony for tonight. Now that I had nished training, I was off to help Max, and the others set up for the party tonight.

Max, the Alpha's sister, differed from typical alpha females - she actively took part and was not like the princesses I had encountered before. She was the same age as me. We had been friends since birth, being that my mom was the Gamma female of the pack, she and Max's mom were always close.

My older brother Dom was the current gamma of our pack. I was female, so I could not serve as gamma, but I had gamma blood running through me, so I made the warrior squad early on.

The pack house was a buzz in a mad rush to ensure everything was perfect. A few hours later, the grand hall was looking t for royalty. Not that royalty was attending tonight, but it was t for purpose.

"Thanks for all of your help, girl! You better head to the showers. I didn't wanna say anything before, but you stink," Max declared dramatically, holding her hand over her nose. I laughed at her theatrics.

"Message received," I replied. "The place looks great! Everything will be brilliant tonight. I'll see you a little later!" I called out, grabbing my training bag and walking through the hallway. Catching a whiff of myself, I chuckled. Max was being polite because I reeked. Chucking my hoody over my head, I made my way back to my room. My proximity to home was convenient due to living in the pack house with the ranking members.

"Katya! You are a mess! It's almost time to leave!" My mother shrieked in dissatisfaction.

"Yeah, I'm gonna be a little later, I'll see you there!" I called out, shrugging my shoulders, and walking past her toward my room.

"Katya! It is your big night! You should know that it reects poorly on us when you are late!" She called out, following me into my room.

I sighed out loud. "Sorry, Mom. I won't be too late. Send my apologies to Alpha Rick! I won't be long!" I called out apologetically as I slammed the door shut behind me. After throwing my training bag on my bed. I started stripping my clothes off. Observing my messy room, I sighed and headed to the bathroom. I turned on the shower and the room lled with steam as I entered my sanctuary.

Realizing that I may have lingered in the shower, I stepped out of the steam-lled shower. Walking into my bedroom, I grabbed the dress that I had bought earlier this week when I was at the mall with Max. Jake is gonna lose it when he sees me in this dress, I thought to myself. It was stunning.

It was a black, gure-hugging halter-neck dress, and it was backless, sitting just above my knees. Mom would probably not approve of this, but Max assured me I needed to wear it. And I trusted her judgment. I slipped on some strappy stilettos. I went with black, which was the color theme of my entire wardrobe.

Looking at my wall clock, I realized I was running very late now, so I settled for blow-drying my hair and straightening it. It was time to go!

When I arrived, I saw that the festivities were in full swing. The place looked amazing. Everyone appeared to be dressed to the nines. Now I just needed to nd Jake. He hasn't reached out to me all day, even though we usually meet up before going together. Anyway, it was no big deal. I was fully capable of walking to the other side of the pack house alone.

Approaching the bar, I was greeted with, "What can I get you Miss" by the sophisticated bartender.

"I'm gonna keep it classy tonight. I'll have a pina colada, thanks," I replied, turning my attention around the room to nd my friends and, hopefully, my mate.

"Here you go, Miss," the bartender remarked, to get my attention.

"Thanks," I replied, ashing him a polite smile. I walk around the room and pick up Max's voice in the distance. It looked like she had started a little early this evening. I chuckled quietly to myself. She sounded tipsy already.

"Ah, Kat! There you are!" Max called out excitedly, running toward me and encapsulating me in a big hug.

After exchanging pleasantries with everyone, I turned to Max.

"Hey, have you seen Jake?" I asked her, perplexed that I hadn't seen him already.

"No, I can't say I have. He's probably greeting the visiting alphas and betas," she replied casually.

"Shouldn't you be doing that, too?" I asked my friend.

"Ah, I might have started a little earlier than planned. Rick thought it was best I steered clear for now," she replied, laughing out loud.

"Fair call," I replied.

The sudden sound of a spoon tapping on glass directed everyone's attention to the front of the hall. Alpha Rick welcomed everyone to the event. As he looked at me, he said, "Tonight is a special night for our pack. We will witness the ocial marking of our Beta Male Jake and soon-to-be Beta Female Katya," he said with excitement.

"Jake and Katya, please join me on stage," Alpha Rick commanded.

I placed my cocktail down on the seat nearest me and made my way to the stage. As I did so, I saw Jake walking across the other side of the stage. He had a proud expression on his face that warmed my heart. We walked toward Alpha Rick, then stopped a few feet away from one another.

Alpha Rick performed the ceremony, reading us the rites, we took our vows and pledged ourselves to one another, and soon it was time to mark one another in an ocial manner. Jake went rst. He sunk his canines into the spot between my shoulder and neck. It was a little painful, but it was replaced with pleasure as he licked the wound clean, sealing it with his saliva. Indigo, my wolf, growled in the background. She cared deeply for Jake's wolf, Brute, but she wanted us to keep waiting for our fated mate.

It was now my turn to mark Jake. I kissed his lips tenderly, then my canines moved forward, and I pierced his neck to mark him. Jake barely inched. I licked his wound clean, sealing it with my saliva, and I instantly felt so much closer to him.

The pack roared in applause and approval. Alpha Rick declared us as the Beta Male and Female of the pack, pending our mating. Which would take place in private, not on stage in front of the pack, thankfully.

The festivities continued on, and after congratulatory hugs and best wishes from the other ranking members of the pack, I turned to Jake. He had a distracted look on his face. His eyes swirling, Brute was present.

"Is everything ok, babe?" I asked him, concern lacing my features.

"What?" He asked me, looking distracted from his private conversation with his wolf.

"You look worried. Is something wrong?" I asked him.

"I'm good. I'm going to get a drink. You want one?" He snapped.

"Yes please, a pina colada would be great!" I replied cheerily.

"Be back soon," he declared as he walked off.

What on earth was that about? I asked Indigo.

I'm not sure. Brute seems to have a block-up. She answered.

I shook it off and went back to chatting with the others while I waited for Jake to arrive with my drink.

Some time had passed, and Jake hadn't arrived back with my drink. I had a strange feeling overwhelming me. Something felt wrong. I politely excused myself from the conversation and made my way towards the bar, as it was the last direction Jake had been heading in.

As I approached the bar, I realized that Jake was nowhere in sight. I tried to mind-link him, but there was no reply. Perhaps he was busy with pack business, I tried to reassure myself. I was trying to calm myself down as I felt a state of panic run through me. It wasn't how I had expected things to go after marking my mate, but perhaps I was overdramatizing.

"Can I get you another pina colada, Miss?" the bartender asked, disrupting me from my thoughts.

"Yes, that would be lovely, thank you," I replied, plastering a smile on my face.

Before long, I had my cocktail in my hands and began making my way back to the stage area, hoping Jake would have arrived back by now. I was only a few yards away when I locked eyes with Jake. Relief washed over me. I went to call out to him when I saw him stiffen uncomfortably; I watched as Brute took over and an almighty growl went through the hall. His eyes focused on someone next to me, so I turned to see a stunning blonde woman in a red dress.

"Mate!" He growled possessively, stalking towards her.