

## Chapter 40-1

Seth and Mom left soon after our conversation. When we had gone back inside, everyone else was up and Benjamin was making coffee on their wood burning stove. Lily made breakfast- some kind of oatmeal, and served it to the 4 of us who remained.

“Benjamin,” I start and he looks at me with his full attention. “If you’d like, do you think you could take me on a walk through the woods in a bit? It’s OK if not, though.” I quickly add, feeling slightly awkward asking my father to help me look for a place for my mate to mark me.

“I’d love to,” he tells me with a smile. “As long as you’re OK moving slowly. I’m not what I used to be.”

“Of course!” I tell him, brightly.

“What did happen?” my dad asks him, but Benjamin remains silent, continuing to eat his breakfast.

“It was the adoption,” Lily whispers to him, even though we can all hear her clearly. “It severed the bond that was still there, even though it was blocked, mostly. Doing so weakened him, similar to when a wolf loses their mate.”

“I’m sorry, old friend,” my dad says, looking astonished. “We looked everywhere for any hints of her parents. We truly thought her biological parents were dead. If I had known, and that it would do this to you, I never would have.”

“I knew it would happen, and we knew you were adopting her,” he says. “We thought it was still the safest option for her.”

I place my hand over Benjamin's on the table and squeeze it. He gave up so much for me and it’s a little overwhelming to think about at times. “Do you think it can reverse the effects when Seth marks me?”

“I’d be lying if I said that the thought hadn’t crossed my mind,” he says to me, a sad look upon his face. “A parental bond and a mate bond are different, but it’s mostly for protection- which serves the same purpose for both. I’m doubtful, though.”

We finish eating breakfast and I help Lily clear the dishes, though she won’t let me help much. “Don’t make your finger worse, dear,” she tells me as she takes the bowl I was about to pick up.

“Would it be possible to take a shower or something when I get back?” I ask her quietly.

“Of course, dear,” she tells me with a smile. “There’s no hot water but we can heat some for a bath. I can help you wash your hair if you need.”

“Thank you,” I tell her, a bit embarrassed.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she says with a smile. She leans in close, right next to my ear and whispers “I’ll have you in tip-top shape for your mate. Don’t you worry.”

I walk to the living room, sitting on the couch next to Benjamin who is reading a book with my dad sitting in a chair across the room, looking through a book I assume he’d picked up there.

“Would you like to go for that walk soon?” he asks me and I nod. “Good. You just let me know when you’re ready.”

“I’m good to go! I just need someone to help me get my shoes on. I still can’t tie them,” I say, holding up my injured hand. I grab my shoes and socks from beside the couch and get them all on myself. I look up and see my dad looking at Benjamin and he nods slightly.

Benjamin stands up and sits on the coffee table just in front of me, pulling a foot into his lap and starts to tighten the laces and tie. “I haven’t done this since you were probably 4 years old,” he says with a smile, but I stop.

“How… how old am I?” I ask quietly, trying not to cry.

“Oh, Molly,” Benjamin says softly, finishing the first shoe and releasing my foot. He takes both my hands in his. “I’m so sorry that you don’t know. Did you ever get to celebrate any kind of birthday?” I’m so overcome with emotion that I can’t respond. I just cross my feet and stare down at them.

“We didn’t know how old she was, but the doctors estimated she was 6 when I found her,” my dad speaks up. “We always celebrated her birthday on the day we found her- May 8th”.

“You were close, but not quite,” Benjamin tells my dad. He looks back at me and gently squeezes my uninjured hand. “Molly, you’re 21. You were born on November 13th, in this living room on a full moon. You didn’t cry when you were born, you just looked around at everything, so curious from the very start. The next morning, you wrapped your hand around my finger and I wasn’t sure I’d ever be able to let go. There has always been something so special about you.”

“I can agree with that,” my dad says. “I knew from the second I saw her that she was something special.”

Benjamin releases my hands and taps my other leg for me to let him tie the boot for me. When he’s done he helps guide my foot back to the floor and stands, offering his hand to me and helps me stand. We head to the door and he reaches my jacket, holding it out to help me put it on. I have my back to him when I hear my dad link me.

I know you need this time with him, but he’s also very weak. If anything happens, just link me and I’ll be right there. As long as we’re in the same territory, you should be able to.

Thank you.