

Chapter 74

I fell asleep lying on the chest of my mate, breathing the fresh air to the lullaby of an owl hooting. I'm not sure I've ever slept more peacefully. I wake to the sun beginning to rise outside. It's pretty chilly, so I throw on a pair of jeans, long sleeved shirt, jacket and top my absolutely messy curls with a knit hat. I put on my hiking boots and head to the outhouse behind the house before heading over to the outdoor kitchen where I'm greeted by a smiling Della and, to my surprise, Lily.

"Good morning," I say, walking over as she pulls me into a hug. "I didn't think you'd be here this early."

"And miss a chance at teaching my daughter, who is an actual chef, how to cook something?" she tells me with a beaming smile. "Molly, I wouldn't miss this for the world!"

They pull me into the kitchen, showing me how to start the perfect-sized fire and how to set up the bricks to put a washtub on it to make the oven.

"This is amazing," I say, completely astonished at how they manage to do it.

Lily links her arm through mine and smiles brightly. "Just wait. We're about to make butter, the rogue way."

Lily leads me back over to their makeshift counter and pulls out a glass jar with a crank on it, and a jar of cream. She pours it into the jar with the crank and starts to rotate it.

Before she even has a chance to explain the crank to me, I can't contain my questions. "Where do you get the milk from?"

"The Millers have a few cows and milk them every morning, very early. I stopped on my way here." Lily tells me as she stops cranking and passes it to me. "Just keep rotating that until the fat separates"

"I've made butter before, but never by hand," I tell her, looking at the hand churn. "I'm guessing it's the same theory, just more involved."

"I'm not sure," Della chimes in. "I've never made it with electricity."

I continue with my work, my arm becoming tired, but I'm too nervous to tell these tough rogue ladies that. Finally, it separates and the butter forms. Lily shows me how to pour the buttermilk out and back into it's original jar and shows me how to wash the butter.

"That part is the same," I tell her with a smile and she returns it.

"Molly, Dear," she says, looking at me with tears in her eyes. "There was a time after you first left that I never thought this moment here would exist. But I'm so glad that it does."

It truly has been a nice morning, and being in a kitchen, albeit a very different kind than I'm used to, has made me feel much more comfortable with her. "I'm glad, too", I tell her with a smile. "I'm sorry that I've been struggling so much. It's been... well, it's been a lot to take in. I think being somewhere neutral today is helping."

She doesn't say anything, she just smiles and gently squeezes my arm before moving to measure out the flour she needs for the biscuits. She takes the butter and milk from me and continues to work. I note that I make biscuits almost the same way that she is, and it really warms my heart to feel that connection that I didn't know we had.

They move to the first fire and lift the washtub, placing the skillet full of biscuits under and replacing it, in an attempt to trap the heat to cook them. Della makes her way to the other fire where she's set up a cooking grate over top and places a giant cast iron skillet on top, putting some sausage on top and begins to cook it.

"Where do you keep meat cool?" I ask her, thoroughly confused.

"We have an ice chest," she tells me, pointing off to the side, but I'm not really sure where. "During the summer we don't have much meat. It's just too hard. Now that it's a bit cooler, it's easier to keep things chilled like we need."

I continue to look for where she was indicating, but I truly don't see anything other than some plywood on the ground and a bunch of leaves. Lily comes up behind me and whispers in my ear, "It's underground".

Ohh. That makes sense, but it's definitely a new concept for me. I continue to watch Della as she cooks the sausage, then looks up to me.

"Come on, Princess. You can handle this part," she says with a smile, waving me over to her. "I'm told it's just like cooking on the stove top for this."

I lean down and take over for her, stirring the sausage around. "It's definitely similar, but the temperature is more unstable. What do you do when you need to cool it?"

"Just pull it off the fire, or to the side if you need it to still be warm. The fire is hotter in the middle," she says, standing close by and watching me carefully.

Once the sausage is cooked she comes back over and helps me to adjust the heat and make the gravy. It's honestly amazing that they do this every day, for every meal. It's hard work, and it's hot being right next to the fire, but I feel so connected to the earth.

I smell him and look up to find my mate walking towards us, a smile on his beautiful face. He doesn't say anything, just sits down at the table and watches me. Lily walks over and hands him a mug of coffee and he offers his thanks. She comes back and stands by the prep area and I join her after Della takes over to finish, probably worried that I'll burn everything and ruin breakfast.

"Can I ask you something uncomfortable?" I ask her.

Lily nods to me. "Of course, Molly. Anything."

"I remember the second spell you placed on me, at the pack house," I begin and she nods, a look of sadness on her face. "I remember what you said there. Did you know that Benjamin would be weakened if they did a blood adoption?"

"Yes," she says plainly and looks me in the eyes. "I was very angry with him for making me send you away. I hadn't accepted that I couldn't keep you safe on my own."

"How did he not know?" I ask, still confused about everything.

She sighs and looks out at the forest. "He was upset when I told him they would be adopting you. He knew it would make him weak, and I thought he would go get you. But he didn't. It would have been even more unsafe for you."

"He knew he would lose his strength, but still let it happen?" I ask, astonished. Maybe I miscalculated how he really feels about me.

"Your father has difficulty expressing his feelings. Well, anything but anger," she tells me. "He truly did and still does love you, he's just not good at saying it. He would have done anything to keep you safe."

"He told me he thought I may be Seth's mate," I whisper, staring down at my feet. "With that, and then asking for a pardon and his pack back, it made me feel like he only wanted to keep me safe so he could eventually have a connection with the royal family. I think I may have been a little too harsh in the moment."

"Oh, Molly," she says and puts her arm around my shoulders, pulling me towards her. "Your father is an i***t, but he really does love you. He's an Alpha who was stripped of his pack, watched the king murder his kids and handed his daughter over to be raised by other people. It's been hard for him. I think maybe he got ahead of himself, but I also know he feels entitled a bit because of everything he went through."

"I can't give him the pack back," I tell her, sadly. "I just can't. Everything that happened doesn't negate the original reason he was stripped of his Alpha title to begin with."

"I know, Molly. It was destined to happen, just like it was destined for you to be hidden in the Lunar Falls pack," she tells me confidently.

"You really think it was destiny?" I ask her and she nods to me.

"Of course! Your father never would have found me out here in the woods if he hadn't been sent out here as punishment. And you never would have met your mate if you had remained out here as well. It was terrible, everything that happened, but it was destined to happen."

"I hadn't thought about you two meeting," I tell her with a small smile. "But I knew I wouldn't have met Seth if you hadn't sent me away."

"Let's go clean up. Your father should be on his way and Della's parents will be back any minute now."