

# Denied by Destiny: Trapped in the Shadows of the Mate Bond 321-330

-Josie~

I was due at the hospital for midday to start my shift, giving me the perfect opportunity to fit some training in this morning in the meadow. Stretching out in my cabin with my music blaring out...Lobo unbothered sitting by the door with his eyes half opened. Half way through my training, a small growl from Lobo informs me that a visitor is outside. It can't be much of a threat because he remains lying on the floor, blocking the doorway, even as Auntie Alora tries to enter.

She looks down at the door block, a chuckle escaping her as she wedges a gap just big enough to fit through.

"Lobo, move." I order at him with a click of my finger. He finally jumps up before circling the same area and laying back down.

"I see nothing changes."

""Nope, not around here." With her on the other hand...

"What are you doing all the way out here?" I move over to my speakers, turning the volume down.

"I wanted to explain last night." She steps in more into the cabin, her eyes scanning the room at the changes I have made since she last visited me here.

Gone were the home comfort accessories so that I could sit out the park runs as if I were in my bedroom...now it was about weights, large work out mirrors to hone in on my techniques...it now looked like a large dance studio.

I still had my comfort corner where Lobo and I could rest in the evenings but as soon as Dad made me head of weapons training, the first thing I did was change the cabin.

"You don't have to explain anything to me." I respond with a shrug of my shoulders.

"Yes I think I do. What you saw..."

"I didn't see anything." I wink at her, but it fails to land as playfully as I mean it. In fact, I'm surprised to see the glistening of tears in Auntie Alora's eyes.

"I don't know what to do.." She sighs out in frustration as her hands slam over her eyes. I pause, taking a moment to look at her. She certainly was Mum's twin, there was no

denying that but she looked weighed down by something, by this... How had I not noticed it before.

"What do you mean?"

"He wants us to announce it, to tell Kaia and Hector that we are a thing. That we have been for some time."

**"A thing? I don't blame him. If the shoe was on the other foot.." I start to say if it were him making her wait, we would all certainly have something to say about it, but**

**she cuts Denied by Destiny: Trapped in the Shadows of the Mate Bond**

"But he's not my mate." Her bottom lip becomes entrapped by her teeth, I hate seeing her like this...conflicted.

"So? Take it from someone who doesn't have a mate, life is too short. You found a man that cares for you, that wants to be with you...make you his. Who cares what the moon thinks. I hate to say it Auntie Alora but if you haven't found your mate at this time in your life...it's highly unlikely that you ever will." Or that he is dead...but nobody likes to think their destined mate has already been killed.

"You think I should let him mark me?"

"Hell yes. Ezra is perfect for you, we all adore him, Dad trusts him completely...what have you been waiting for. Is that why you were alone...are you worried what we would have all thought?" I mean he was Dad's original beta for goddess sake. He helped Dad set up this pack.

"No, not that...it's just...hang on, what do you meant...take it from someone who doesn't have a mate?" She gives me a pinned look, making me backtrack on what I just said, using her fingers to requote my own words.

"I have no wolf." My voice is slightly sarcastic, as I point out the obvious.

"So?"

"So, no wolf...no mate." I flippantly state with a shrug of my shoulders.

"You really believe that?"

"Of course I do."

"But I thought George?"

"No...George was a bit of fun." I struggle to hide the grimace on my face.

"Was?"

"Fun that wanted more, more than I could offer him." Want to offer him. I don't want to disrespect George in front of her, he is still a pack member of hers, of Mum's.

No matter what has happened between us he is still a good man, just not the man for me anymore.

I wipe her eyes, wishing I could calm her inner turmoil, to make her see just how lucky she is to have a male that wants to be with her, wants to be open about it...to the outside world. They would be the beta couple of the Clear Water pack.

"I would be denying the moon goddess." Her voice is shaky as I stroke some of her loose hair behind her ear.

Is this what I would be like in years to come, if Knox and I continue kissing in the shadows. Even if we continue after he leaves...which isn't the plan right now but I know me, I know that I am falling harder than I planned to with this arrangement of ours. I'm falling in love with him.

That saying goodbye to what we have will be more difficult now than I had led myself to believe.

I don't think I could spend the best years of my life hiding in the shadows, I was already too much in the darkness compared to my brothers, compared to my parents.

I don't want to settle, not like I was preparing to do with George. Turn a blind eye to arrogant behaviour because it meant I wouldn't be alone. I don't want to settle with Knox, I want to build a life with him, to kiss on the dance floor with everybody looking, not in the dark shadows of my front room. "Josie?" Auntie Alora's hand strokes my shoulder forcing me to be back in the moment with her, taking me out of my own thoughts.

"Auntie Alora, if you care for Ezra and he cares for you, nothing should stop you from pursuing that. Just don't do it in the shadows, do it in the open. He's waited for you for this long, I think he will move at a pace that you are comfortable with. But just don't keep him locked away, don't deny him the affection he deserves."

I can see her thinking on my words, a gentle nod and a sweet smile erupting on her lips.

"Since when did you learn to be so wise?" Her hand reaches up to cup the side of my face affectionately.

I lean into her hand giving a soft smile, I don't think it was about me being wise, I think her experience resonates with me to the point I am now realising I want to be with Knox.

But not just as a sex toy...I want to be with him full heartedly, out in the open, I want to share my life with him.

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- Josie -

Again my shift couldn't go quick enough, I was desperate to see Knox after work.

I had made up my mind, I wanted us to give this a go, for us to be open with everyone. Yes Jaxon in particular might hit the roof, Knox was his mentor and he might not be keen on the age gap...but I don't care.

I refuse to be Auntie Alora and spend years wasted in the shadows when in reality everyone around me would be supportive.

There was logistics involved. Yes, he would need to leave for training again soon but I can visit him, we can make this work. As long as he wants this as well.

Which why wouldn't he? Only last night he was calling me his, "mine" those words have been echoing in my ears all day. Threatening to bring me on to my knees with desire for him. "Josie, did you restock the supplies?"

"Yes, I did that when I first arrived. It's been slow today so it seemed like the perfect timing." Slow was being kind, today was like a graveyard shift. Beyond slow. There was still internal conflict amongst the management team, meaning the emergency department was going out of their way to not transfer patients over to us. Whatever Doctor Abel had said to the head of emergency clearly didn't work. But an emergency drill was planned in a few days, which means it will start to get busy again.

"Any plans tonight?" I check the clock as I finish tightening the bedding on one of the hospital beds as Doctor Abel looks up from over his charts as he sits on the edge of another bed. "You might say that." I beam out, my heart racing. A mixture of excitement and fear was bubbling within me.

"Care to elaborate?" He stands up, placing the charts down and walking over to me.

"Hopefully tomorrow I can, if tonight goes my way."

"I'm intrigued. You can knock off early if you want."

"You are sure?" I was due to finish until 9pm and I always finish my shift but I can't deny my excitement in seeing Knox just that little bit earlier than planned.

I had texted him earlier asking him to meet me at my cabin after I finish work.

"That's fine, we aren't exactly rushed off our feet."

"Okay great, I think I will. Thanks Doctor Abel."

"Have a good night Josie."

Entering the staff lounge I pick my bag out of my locker and pull my phone out, sending Knox a text to meet me that little bit earlier.

In an ideal world I would go home and change, get the hospital sterile smell off me and put something more seductive on.

But him being at home and us leaving at a similar time to go back out would look odd, it's just easier this way.

Bypassing the path that leads home, I continue to walk towards the meadow. The long-grassed field dark, now that the sun has set and the moon is growing in power.

I pull my phone out of my pocket and place my torch light on, I know these lands like the back of my hand. Yet in the dark, I do doubt myself.

He's already waiting for me. His back to me as he looks out towards the night sky towards the pack borders. I thought we were meeting inside. I pick up speed, pushing through the wilderness to get to him.

"Why aren't you inside the cabin?" He turns to me as I walk up behind him. My large wide steps hard to miss I'm sure by his heightened hearing.

"Because if we go in there I'll want to do things to you." His eyes are already fall off desire.

"I'm okay with that." I tiptoe up and place a lingering kiss on his lips, his hands pull out of his front pockets and lace around my lower back.

"Everything okay?" Gosh he was handsome, yet there was a small crease to his forehead. Had something been bothering him.

"Yeah, somethings going on with your Mum and Auntie."

"Like what?"

"I'm not sure, I thought you might know more?"

"Well that's actually why I wanted to meet with you. I wanted to discuss us." It sounds like Auntie Alora had told Mum, so now was my turn to be honest with Knox. "Us?"

"Yes I wanted to discuss us being more open, not keeping things hidden."

My truthful admission has the opposite effect to what I had expected. His hands drop from my lower back and fall by his side, coldness radiates through me not only from his loss of touch but by his non verbal response, his body language.

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"I wasn't expecting us to go public, I thought you wanted things to be in secret, just like me."

stealing kisses when others aren't looking..."

"I did, I do. Last night when you walked in you found me having just caught Ezra and Auntie Alora kissing. I thought it was a one time thing but they've been together for years, in secret. I can't, I don't want to be like that, I don't want to spend years in the dark corners, "Red, you're not making any sense." His fingers card through his dark luscious locks, his dreamy eyes holding a level of confusion within them.

"I know I said it would be just sex but.....I want more."

"More?" His voice can hardly hide his surprise. Maybe I should have given him a heads up rather than throw this on him right now. But why wait. "You said yourself last night, I was yours."

"When did I say that?" A small frown forms onto his face.

"Mine...you said, you are mine. Last night when we were together in my room." My voice is becoming slightly shaky, slightly hysteric.

"I got lost in the moment...lost in my desire.." A powerful tightness sweeps across my chest.

"Desire.."

"Fuck, did you see yourself last night Red. I mean every day you are drop dead gorgeous, but last night you were something else...and when others.." "Others?" Words and thoughts are not free flowing at the moment, all I can do is repeat his. I can't believe this, how could I have been so stupid.

"The alphas and betas were eyeing you up. My wolf snapped, he got jealous."

"Your wolf got jealous, that's good... it means he also wants me." I cling onto this new hope, if his wolf wants me then Knox would surely struggle to deny him.

"Of course he wants you, but I can't give you long term, I can't give you marriage and babies...I did say this to you at the beginning, you said you were okay with that, that you just wanted sex."

Yes I remember, I agreed because at the time I wanted him in anyway I could have him.

But speaking to my auntie has been a wake up call, what if he is fooling around with me for years and finds his mate or even worse just decides he doesn't want me anymore. I think I would find that more painful out of the two scenarios.

All those years, those memories...the waiting would have been for nothing.

"Well know I want more." I look up at him, holding his eyes with fierce determination.

"Fuck Red, you can't just thrust this on me. I need time to think about this..."

"To think about what?"

"This...us..."

I take a step back away from him, his words whether intentional or not, feel like a large knife stabbing itself into my heart. If he has to think about this, if being with me openly needs contemplation, then I already know his answer even before he does. "I think...if you need to think about it, then you already know your answer." Truth was a hard pill to swallow sometimes.

"I can't have someone in my life, not how you want it. There's too much at stake..." He takes a step towards me but my hand flings out, protecting me from him...my hand landing on his solid chest. Would being with me really make a difference with his status as the alpha trainer...would people really think less of him for dating an alpha's daughter. I'm not asking for marriage or babies...just to be out in the open. To no longer lie to my family about what we are.

"Red?" That husky masculine voice calls out to me.

"You should just go..."

"What I'm trying to say, you aren't hearing it the way I'm intending it. I have risks...risks in my line of work that would mean you would be put at risk and without a wolf..."

"What? How do you know I don't have a wolf?"

"Your father told me...that's what I'm trying to say, I wouldn't be able to keep you safe." His hand reaches out to swoop me in closer to him, I'm completely gobsmacked that he knew I didn't have a wolf that my body is void of fight, void of movement. It's like my brain is ticking but my muscles are unable to follow its command.

"I know...I've been completely unfair to him. He's been nothing but patient but I know, I know he won't wait forever." Her glistening eyes start to spill over into tears that she tries to fight.

I hadn't walked in on a drunken kiss, a spare of the moment thing...no, they had been hiding in the shadows for sometime... lying to us all. Denying their attraction to one another, and for what purpose.

"Auntie Alora?" I take a step closer to her, offering her comfort as I pull her into me. She has always been that shoulder for me to cry on, especially on my 18th birthday. She bought me the leather jacket telling me that even without a wolf I was still a bad ass. And on the days I forgot, that's what the leather jacket was for...to remind me.

She was strong, strong like Mum...so why is she acting like this. Why does she care what other people think.

"He wants to mark me, he's wanted to for years." Her raw eyes that are holding on to the hidden emotions of the past years are now at breaking point. I can tell she has not told anybody this and if I hadn't caught them last night, she wouldn't be here telling me. Maybe me discovering their secret was a good thing, it's going to force her to make a decision. To act upon it, no matter how difficult it may be.

"That sounds like something to celebrate..." I softly state because to me that would be worth celebrating. She has found someone that wants to love her, wants to mark her...knowing they aren't mates. Willing to go against the moon goddess's plans because he loves her that much. Not everyone gets a love like that.

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- Knox ~

She's recoiling from me, I can see the pain in her expression. My wolf is howling at me, thrashing at me internally to stop talking, to accept her, to take her as ours.

But I can't...how can I keep her safe, keep her away from the destruction that still follows me today.



She doesn't have a wolf, and I really don't care...it doesn't make her any less special to me.

She is perfection, except for the fact that she can't defend herself against the atrocities that I have witnessed with my own eyes.

If my father couldn't protect my own mother, who was a fierce warrior in her own right, what hope is there for me to protect Red.

Far better for her that she stays here, stays with her family...who will always keep her safe.

She has no risk here, no need to fight...no need for the external shifter community to know she is different.

As much as I fucking hate myself for thinking it, for even imagining another male touching her...judging by the queue of alphas and betas waiting to dance with her last night, it wouldn't take her long to replace me if she does want a future with somebody. Far better a beta, they could move here and join the pack. She wouldn't need to leave then.

"What are you doing? You fucking fool..." My wolf angrily growls at me as my hands lace around her, pulling her closer to me.

I don't want to do this, I don't want another touching her...she was mine, she is mine.

But I can't give her what she needs.

Far better to break her heart now than break it later on, and hurt her family at the same time when they would know about us.

"If you do this, I will never forgive you. She is mine." His demonic voice growls out to me from the darkness recesses of my mind.

"No, we can't be selfish...do you remember what happened to Mum, to Dad. To all of them. We can't put her through that."

"She's strong, besides that was almost 20 years ago. If you deny me her I'll make the rest of your life a living hell." He threatens. I could survive that, survive his daily torture...what I couldn't survive is something happening to her because of me. She only just escaped a fatal motorcycle accident...that was my fault. That was a warning I need to take on board.

Tears pool around her eyes as she fights hard to not show any signs of the hurt I am causing her. That I am inflicting on to her. But it isn't weakness to want to be with someone, just not me.

"Red?" I tighten my grip around her, inhaling her scent to momentarily calm my wolf. It doesn't work, he isn't so easily fooled.

"You should go..." Her body stiffens under my hold and I drop my arms again, her body rigid..her chin holding high.

"It's fine, I understand. You should go..."

"I can't leave you like this..."

"I'm fine...I will follow in shortly. We wouldn't want them to think we were outside together." She sharply replies as she angles her body away from me, looking out towards the night sky.

"Josephina.." My chest tightens to know I have caused her pain, that the excited bubbly red head that arrived in the meadows only a few minutes ago has retreated in on herself, has accepted my rejection so easily. But that is what I want isn't it, by far easier this way.

"It's fine, honestly. I get it...I don't have a wolf. I can't do anything about that...but I won't be made to feel any less deserving because of something I can't control. To say I can't defend myself just because I don't have a wolf is a pathetic excuse.

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I am the best shooter in the pack...and most likely amongst the shifter community. Not every fight needs to have a wolf. But, yes, you are right, I've broken my promise to you.

You entered an agreement of just sex, of no-strings-attached fun...and here I am trying to give you a rope to hang around your own neck."

Fuck, her words are like a million daggers pressing deep into my chest plate.

"Josie..." My wolf is urging me to calm her somehow, to ease her pain but what does he expect me to do exactly. I've fucking caused this.

"You should go. I've got an early start tomorrow...and I need to sort something out in the cabin. I'll be over soon."

It takes all my mental strength to leave her, to abandoned her in the early night..in the meadows whilst she is crushed.

I can hear her sobs as I walk away, it's the most painful sound of my life. I've broken her.

It is a battle to walk in a straight line back to the alpha house, my wolf continues to fight me to return...and he slips through the veil repeatedly. Forcing me to backstep only for my human side to regain full control. Hell punish me for this, like he promised. I'll have to ensure I'm on full alert from now on.

I make no attempts at conversation as I enter the alpha house...I feel like a cheat having broken her heart and then walking in on the walls she feels the safest.

I need to get out of here, to hit the road for a few days. Stay in a hotel, give her some space until I can come back and sort things out with Alpha Hector before leaving for good.

"Knox?" Alpha Kaia's forehead creases slightly as she finds me standing still in the hallway, my eyes staring at my keys on the sideboard. I'm not sure how long I have remained like this, my mind is spiralling but her sudden intrusion jolts me out of it.

"I need to go away for a few days..." I respond in a monotone fashion.

"Okay, is everything alright?" She steps in closer. She wouldn't be this nice to me if she knew where her daughter was right now.

"I just need to sort something out..." I refuse to look at her, I can't look Josie's mother in the eye knowing what I have just done. This is Josie's house and I shouldn't even be here.

"Could you let Alpha Hector and Alpha Jaxon know that when I get back, I'm ready to give them a full report and hand over before I leave." My wolf makes a final attempt to push through the veil but I'm in control now, full control. He won't be getting through that easily from

now on.

"So soon?"

"Yes, I need to get back to the training program before it restarts."

"Of course..." She takes a step towards me, concern continuing to be edged upon her forehead. A hand even reaches out and lands on my arm.

"...are you sure you are okay?"

"Yes, thank you for your hospitality...I'll be back in a few days to collect my things."

"I'll make sure they are ready for you."

"Thank you Alpha Kaia." I snatch my motorcycle keys off the sideboard before heading out of the door.

Placing my helmet on my head, I swallow down nausea that tries to rise up...a sick feeling of foreboding washing over me. This was for the best.

If I go back to check on her she'll think I've changed my mind...and one look at her and I think I will. She has the ability to floor me. Even I am not that strong.

I kick my motorcycle into life, its roaring noise doing little to calm my mind, like it used to.

This was for the best.

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~Josie~

I felt like that 16 year old girl again. The one that had her entire life ahead of her.

The vague hope of having a wolf appear when she reached 18, still alive like a bright candle flickering within my core, my very centre. The one that thought she knew so much, that believed even then she was already a woman.

Three years later and I'm back to the night he rejected me in the nightclub. It's as if the past three years never really happened. My inner growth, my soul searching...all evaporated, gone in a split of a second. I'm 16 years old again.

Not only had he given me my first kiss, I now know he would be my first love. Perhaps my only love.

I've never felt such a powerful connection to any other male than I do him.

Nobody leaves tingles, nobody gives me that undeniable gravitational pull to be with them. If I had a wolf, I would think...but I don't and I know it is my mind trying to trick me into thinking that.

Just for once I wanted what others had, a soul mate. My soul's recognition of its true partner...I don't know, maybe he has another. He just hadn't met her yet, but he knows I'm not enough.

Maybe I had been fooling myself, maybe like he said, it was one sided. He got lost in desire, he wasn't thinking straight when he said those words. He was acting on heated passion and build up jealousy.

Like George always said, who would actually want me. Well here I am, his point proven. Maybe I should just count my losses and go back with him. At least to the outside world I would look happy. I've worn a mask for so long now...I can wear it a little longer.

I'm frozen in the long grass...the coolness of the night air now stinging at my skin but I don't feel it. I don't feel my body trembling with ice coldness as the moon has taken full command of the night's sky.

I've been out here for a while, I must have been because when I hear a whistling in the background and Lobo's unmistakable panting, I turn to surprisingly find him not alone as I had expected. But with Dad.

They both run towards me at a steady pace before Lobo knocks into my legs, almost pushing me over. His warmth acting like an electric shock that travels directly to my heart, forcing me to wake up from my frozen zombie like state. Dad stops, his eyes locked on mine, his lips parting...I really must look a state.

"Josephina?" I've remained frozen more to stop myself crumbling, but as soon as Dad calls out to me, I break down. My knees falling beneath me. If I could make a sound right now I think I would wail, but the night's coldness has stolen my voice. He takes gentle steps towards me, the long grass nothing to this alpha male... it almost bends out of its way to make a path for him.

As I'm crouched down, Lobo takes the opportunity to lick my face, his snout nuzzling into my neck. He's never seen me like this, and when I am unable to respond to his touch he howls up to the moon...taking my pain on as his.

Th

"Come on Lobo, let's get her back inside." Dad's hands pat the top of my pup's head, Lobo leaning into his touch. Dad has a blanket in his hand which he wraps around me. It must be late, he must have noticed I hadn't returned home from work. That hurts, to think I put them through worry.

"Sorry." My teeth chatter as I mutter the apology. I didn't mean to worry him, I just couldn't face going back to the house and seeing Knox there. Which is absurd because it is my home. I just needed a few minutes to regather myself, but those minutes turned to hours. "Everyone is looking for you, Abel said you left early. What has happened?" His supportive hand rubs at my upper back, the blanket adding a layer of warmth.

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"He doesn't love me, he doesn't want me."

"Oh my darling.."

"You told him, why did you tell him?" My eyes look to him, why did he tell him.

"Because...if he was deserving of you it wouldn't have made a blind bit of difference." He cups my face within his hands.

"You scared him away." I yell at Dad, feeling anger and betrayal. Here I was thinking all along we were being discreet but Dad had already known. I would have told him at some point but it was too early, too soon. He picks me up, placing a solid arm around me to support my weight as we slowly head back to the house.

I don't take any notice of my feet walking through the meadow, all I can do is look up at the moon, her beaming glow...her ethereal beauty blessing most but denying me...as always.

What did I do wrong in a past life? I know my lineage has to be like this because I am the daughter of the white wolf but it doesn't make it hurt any less. Doesn't make another heartache like this any easier to brush aside. I'd feel this a thousand times to have Mum in my life, but right now in this moment, it still hurts like a bitch.

"Hector?" Ezra rushes towards us as the alpha home comes into view. Figures litter the front drive way including Jaxon, Mum and Auntie Alora...even to my surprise Doctor Abel.

"She's very cold." Dad growls out as Ezra joins us, my legs finally giving way again and Dad only just catches me before I hit the path head first.

"Oh thank the goddess." Mum gasps out as her hands cup at my face.

"Where was she?" I hear Jaxon but my eyes are starting to struggle to stay open, a call to sleep finally overwhelming me..and to forget, even for a little while. I want to give in. "In the meadow."

I'm carried inside where I am placed on one of the sofas in the front room, that blanket draped over me.

I feel Doctor Abel's hands touch my forehead before gripping at my wrist...he was checking my pulse point. I have lost all control of my body as it shakes, my spine aching as every muscle rattles against each nerve ending. "I'm not happy, I can take her in to avoid hypothermia."

"No, I'll remain with her all night, she just needs to sleep. No tests."

"Alpha I really must protest."

"I said no Doctor Abel." Dad's aura thrusts my eyes back awake and I see them all crowded around me, all but him.

"Very well, with your permission I would like to check on her in the morning?" Doctor Abel stands, his body stretching to his full height but he is a medical professional...not an alpha.

"That would be acceptable."

"I'll get a heater, what exactly has happened?" Mum presses. My eyes remain open long enough to see Dad look at me.

"What was she doing out in the meadows alone at this time of night?" Jaxon growls, a slight accusatory tone to his voice towards Dad. This goes back to the argument of him thinking I can't fight just because I haven't got a wolf. This had nothing to do with being in danger. This was my own stupidity.

My eyes glare into Dad's with a plea of him not saying the truth. Knox was still his mentor and I would never want to tarnish their relationship. Jaxon clearly needed him, to also help control his wolf as well, I can't devoid him of that.

"Let's give her some space to rest shall we." Dad gives me a gentle nod in acknowledgement of my silent request, his hand landing on Jaxon's shoulder.

"I'm sure with some rest she will be back to fighting fit."

Slowly and reluctantly the crowd around me disperses...concerned eyes backing away. I know they have questions but for now I just need to rest, to sleep. For now I just needed to forget.

## Denied by Destiny: Trapped in the Shadows of the Mate Bond

~Josie~

That feeling of complete forgetfulness when you open your eyes but your mind hasn't clicked in yet...that feeling is absolute heaven.

As I open my eyes, I find Dad sat next to me on the sofa, my legs on his lap as he flicks through the TV channels. It must be early morning, why were we here. Then, bang.

Like a bullet. It hits me right in my chest.

"Why did you tell him?" My voice stirs from under the blanket, the fan heater next to me now overheating me but my finger tips were still cold and I was too cosy to move. He turns to face me, placing the remote control down. The TV remains on in the background, Dad settling on some kind of gangster movie.

"He was asking questions around the pack." He sighs out, his head resting back as he angles it to look at me.

"He was.." Well this is a surprise.

"Hmm, he knew we were keeping something from him, from the outside shifter community. He actually voiced his opinion on you using silver bullets, I had quite the telling off."

"Really?" I remember when he realised the bullets I used during the border threat, how he wouldn't leave my side.

"Yes. Knox is a complicated fellow, there are things we do not know. Things that no matter how much dirt I've tried to dig up on his past, he has managed to keep them well hidden." Dad's tried to dig up dirt on Knox? I thought he was here as a guest...but an alpha is always security conscious...I get that.

"Such as?"

"Well what do you think?"

"I think he has alpha blood."

"You do?" He sits up more, the possibility clearly something he hadn't considered.

"Yes, Jaxon's injuries...he was lucky to survive. Only an alpha blood could heal those kind of wounds. You haven't told Jaxon have you?"

"No, you asked me not to. Why?"

"He needs Knox. I don't want to get in the way of them, to make things complicated. He is Jaxon's mentor, I don't want Jaxon to think any less of Knox now." As soon as I say the words sadness washes over me and I feel a tear build in the corner of my right eye. "I'm sure Knox will see the errors in his way and come back for you." Dad's hand reaches out to wipe away the single tear that was travelling down my cheek.

"Come back for me?" I shift uncomfortably at his words.

"He left last night. He's gone for a few days."

"Gone, gone where?"



"He didn't say. Mum said he was clearly upset about something and that when he returns he will give his report and leave." Leave...so final.

"But..."

"No Dad, he made it very clear from the beginning he can't do long term, he can't give commitment and I was fine with that."

""What changed?"

"I changed. I found something out."

"Ah, Alora and Ezra? Yes she said you spotted them and spoke to her about it."

"I just couldn't be like that, I couldn't keep to the shadows when I wanted to be in the open. I know we had only just started but at what point would things have changed. I'm sure that's what Ezra thought...now look...years later.." "Decades.."

"What?"

"I've suspected something for sometime."

"Then why would they continue to hide it." I shake my head in disbelief. If their secret hadn't been as secretive as they thought...why did Auntie Alora put herself through all that worry. All the torment.

"There are things from the past that are best left in the past. If he is your fated mate..."

"Fated mate? Oh come on Dad, you don't really believe that's in my future do you.." I can't hide the scoff that emits from me.

"Why not?" His eyes stare into mine, I don't think I could tell him that although his love is unconditional...other males wouldn't be like that for me. He was my Father, to him I was perfect.

## Denied by Destiny: Trapped in the Shadows of the Mate Bond

"Have you been up all night?"

"Yes and don't change the subject. I have faith in him."

Then at least one of us has. The fact that he has already gone speaks volumes to me and I actually get it. I don't think I would stay in a house where I had just dumped someone...I

barely hung around long enough for George even when we were dating. Dad's comments about not finding information about Knox returns to me.

"Why were you digging up dirt on Knox?"

"I like to know the people that influence my children's life decisions."

"And how's that panning out for you.." I can't help but laugh out loud, Jace missing in action and me a wreck on the sofa. Well, at least Jaxon will keep the family name going strong.

"I'm proud of all my children, in different ways. And just like Knox, Jace will return to us. When he is ready."

"Hhmm."

"He loves you Josie, I can see it for myself. Even though I hate the thought of another male being the main man in your life."

"You'll always be my main man...well except for Lobo." I poke a foot into his rib cage playfully.

...

Breakfast was very odd.

Auntie Alora and Ezra were touchy feeling which I was all for, but perhaps not so blatantly obvious. I was only just having a morning caffeine fix having fallen back asleep on the sofa for a few more hours.

Dad hadn't gone back to sleep, if he even had any sleep. He prepared breakfast..surprising Mum with a bouquet of wildflowers and a pile of pancakes.. the top pancake iced with the words...will you marry me?

It was a bit of a family joke now. A couple of times a year he would ask Mum to marry him, and yet she would say no.

So when she laughs and rolls her eyes, standing up and walking over to the kitchen island to placing a gentle kiss on his neck, on his mate mark... it comes as no surprise that she says no.

"Did you two want a ceremony?" Mum looks to Auntie Alora and Ezra as she walks back over to the table, Jaxon spitting out some of his orange juice from Mum's pushiness.

"Oh...we haven't really decided just yet." Auntie Alora becomes flustered, her cheeks reddening under Mum's interrogative stare...yet I see Ezra's hand move in the corner of

my eye and land supportively on my auntie's thigh. Her body completely changing with his support.

"We will give it some thought." Ezra calmly responds sipping on his cup of coffee.

Tucking into breakfast, a general flow of conversation fills the air, nobody asking me about last night which helps me to relax. However, I have that triplet feeling of curiosity washing over me as everytime I look up, I find Jaxon staring at me...until his phone rings and he exits the room...relief now hitting me from him.

After breakfast I decide to go upstairs and warm my body up even more with a hot shower. Heading towards my room, I hear Jaxon shout down the phone, his growl hard to miss. I backtrack towards his room, curiosity controlling my actions...turning me into an eavesdropping nosey spy.

"I called to see if you had heard from Josie, she didn't return from work....No we've found her. Dad found her in the meadows...I don't know...are you ever coming back?" Jaxon's voice is a mixture of tones. Hurt, anger...disbelief.

He pauses and I can't help but hold my breath, he was clearly on the phone to Jace. Most likely having phoned him to see if I had spoken to Jace last night when I did a disappearing act just like him.

A low threatening growl rumbles from Jaxon, his aura spilling out into his room. Even with the door only slightly ajar I can feel its intensity.

"You're a selfish prick do you know that? I might not be perfect but I wouldn't fucking run out on my family because what...what exactly has happened..."