

Trio of Mates Chapter 26

Chapter 26: Chapter 25: Devin

This is torture. Pure, agonizing, prolonged, and exquisite torture. Xander and I are seated next to each other at the high table, in the place of honor on the left of the Alpha. The meal before us is sumptuous and unending. We are offered the choicest selections, after the alpha and luna, by gracious omegas. Both men and women shoot us seductive and flirtatious glances and smiles as they place plate upon plate in front of us. They know that Xander and I are unmated and they are hoping that they will fit the bill or at least be able to warm our beds for a time.

Meanwhile, my mate is right beside me. He speaks amicably with Charlie's father, whose position he will be taking tonight. Though Xander was not trained to become a Delta, he is a fierce and skilled warrior. He will make an excellent Delta. Charlie's father will help to train him on the finer points of being a Delta for a few months, but it won't be arduous. This will undoubtedly help ease Charlie and my burdens, as we won't be doing a job and a half each.

Xander appears not to notice the appraising glances of the she-wolves or the outright lascivious leers of the males directed towards him. But I notice every single one. I am holding my wolf at bay by a fraying thread. He wants to claim Xander in front of all of them so that those who would try to turn Xander's head will BACK THE FUCK OFF!

A growl rumbles through my chest as one persistent male omega "accidentally" drops a few biscuits into Xander's lap. He picks them up, running his hand too high on Xander's thigh for my liking.

At the sound, the omega looks up at my face. Whatever he sees makes his face pale significantly. He mutters an apology and rushes away from the table.

Zak tries to cover a laugh with a cough from my right side. I look at him sharply, about to make a smart-ass comment when I feel Xander's hand grab my thigh. Immediately, my hand goes to his under the table. The rush of sparks is euphoric and I feel myself instantly calm.

Xander leans over and whispers in my ear, "I like that you are so possessive of me, but you can't go around threatening every member of the pack."

"He touched you," I whisper back through gritted teeth. "You are MINE!"

"And you are mine, but you don't see me freaking out because an omega gave you extra roast or brushed up against you as she walked by, do you?" he says sweetly.

"If it happened, you would have every right," I say, looking into his eyes.

"Then I'll go take care of the omegas that served the second course," he says, acting as if to get up.

"Wait, what?" I'm so confused. What the hell is he talking about?

"Both of those things happened during this meal. Not to mention the times that they have happened since I got here a few days ago."

My face is filled with utter shock.

Xander leans in again, cupping my face, though acting as if he is wiping something from under my eye. "You see, my love. Just as you don't notice, neither do I. I only have eyes for you."

Not caring who sees, I quickly turn my head and kiss his palm before he pulls away. His face flushes in happiness, but he says, "Now, now. None of that...yet." Xander smiles at me before turning back to his meal.

After what feels like hours, the meal is finally over and it is time for the ceremony. At this point, the moon had long since risen and nearing the highest point of her nightly climb into the sky. The moon is nearly full and would be by Brandon's birthday for his ceremony. Through the large skylights in the ceiling of the dining hall, the Silver Lady's light shone onto the dias as Zak, Charlie, Beta Carl, my father, Xander, and I stand around the pedestal. Lucille stands at the bottom of the steps to the dias, facing the rest of the pack.

Spreading her hands wide, Lucille begins the ceremony. An ethereal glow halos her, the moonlight filtering through her white hair. It is like the Goddess is inside of her again. At least, that's what it looks like from the back. I'm sure that if her eyes were completely black again, the pack would be shitting themselves now. Regardless, the Silver Lady's presence is with us. I could feel the warmth spread through me again, just like it did from her kiss.

"My dearly beloved pack, today we are here to usher in the dawning of a new era in our pack: the ascendance of a new Gamma and the start of a new Delta bloodline."

The pack breaks into cheers. Loud wolf whistles, howls, and stomping feet fill the air.

Once they have quieted down, Lucille continues. "Since the dawn of our kind, our benevolent Goddess has deemed that a pack would be led by a set of mates, born and bred to be excellent leaders. They would be chosen not only for each other, but also for the pack. Three months ago, our Alpha, Zakary Loup, ascended to his position with his Luna, Charlotte..."

At the use of her real name, Charlie groans.

"Loup," Lucille chuckles as she speaks. "Though we have the best Alpha and Luna we could for our pack, our Mother knew that the burden was too much for just two wolves to handle. Because of that, she created three advisors for the Alpha pair: the Beta, to help shoulder the burden of running the pack, the Gamma, to help with enforcement of pack law, and the Delta, to defend and train the pack. Today, Gamma Richard relinquishes his title after years of admirable and diligent servitude to their pack."

Again, the pack breaks into applause. There are shouts of "Here, here!" and whoops and cheers.

Lucille walks to the pedestal. Taking the knife in one hand, she holds out the other to Gamma Richard. He places his hand in hers. Bringing the knife to his palm, Lucille says, "The Goddess has blessed you as part of our pack and has blessed us in return. Thank you, Gamma Richard, for all that you have done for us." Lucille slices Former-Gamma Richard's palm. He closes his hand into a fist and allows three drops of blood to fall into the chalice on the pedestal.

"Your service is ended." Lucille says. Former-Gamma Richard bows and returns to his seat to more loud applause from the pack.

Lucille turns to Zak and Charlie, holding out her hand. Zak places his hand in hers. "Alpha, Luna, you have lost two of your core. One has finished his service and is ready for rest. The other was our own Luna who has been sharing the load of two jobs with our Former Gamma. Though she has held both positions with grace, it is not something that she was destined to do. Those two roles will be filled tonight. We will welcome them into your core and our leadership with our hearts, our wolves, and your blood." Lucille slices Zak's palm, then Charlie's. Together, they fist their hands and allow three drops of blood to drip into the chalice. They step back.

Lucille turns to Beta Carl, holding out her hand. He places his hand in hers and she places the blade to his palm. "Beta, your brothers have left. Their service is done. You have two new brothers to join you in your service to the pack. We will welcome them into your brotherhood and our leadership with our hearts, our wolves, and your blood." She slices Beta Carl's hand and he allows three drops of blood to fall into the chalice.

Lucille holds her hand out to Xander and he places his hand in hers. "Xander Hawthorne, you are a new and wonderful addition to our pack. We are truly blessed by the Goddess to have you among us. Your talents and Goddess given gifts have been recognized by our Alpha and Luna as worthy of part of this brotherhood. Do you accept the responsibility, honor, and role of Delta of the Artemis Pack?"

"I do," Xander says, his voice ringing out clear in the hall.

"We accept you as our Delta, our protector and trainer, given to us by the Goddess Selene," Lucille says.

"We accept you as our Delta," the pack responds.

Lucille slices Xander's palm and he drips three drops of blood into the chalice.

She holds her hand out to me. I step forward and give her my palm. "Devin Laoch, you were born into this pack and bred to this position. We are truly blessed by the Goddess to have you among us. Your talents and Goddess given gifts have been recognized by our Alpha and Luna as a worthy of part of this brotherhood. Do you accept the responsibility, honor, and role of Gamma of the Artemis Pack?"

"I do," I say.

"We accept you as our Gamma, our enforcer and champion, given to us by the Goddess Selene," Lucille says.

"We accept you as our Gamma," the pack responds.

Lucille slices my palm and I allow three drops of blood to flow into the chalice.

Taking the chalice into her hands, Lucille swirls the blood within. Turning to Zak, she says, "Through the intermingling of the old guard and the new, the Alpha, Luna, Beta, Gamma, and Delta, our pack will be strengthened. Take from this chalice the blood of your core, your brotherhood. Know that they will make and keep you strong."

Zak takes a sip from the chalice and passes it to Charlie. The chalice goes from Charlie, to Carl, to Xander, and then to me, each of us taking a sip of its contents.

Instantly, I feel a rush of power sear through my body. I feel a deep and instantaneous connection to all four of the people who drank from the cup with me. We are bonded, deeper than mere friends, packmates, or even family. The only bond deeper is that of a mate or a parent and child. We five are connected, a bond which will only be broken through death, even after we have given over our titles.

Lucille turns around to the pack. "I give you Gamma Devin Laoch and Delta Xander Hawthorne."

The pack erupts in applause, the pack all standing and cheering.

It is among all of this noise that I pull Xander to me. "MATE!" I yell. I pull his shirt collar aside and mark him as mine.

Trio of Mates Chapter 27

Chapter 27: Chapter 26: Brandon

The Oracle turns to the pack and says, "I give you Gamma Devin Laoch and Delta Xander Hawthorne."

The pack stands and cheers. The feelings of acceptance and love flow from all of us to our new leadership group. In a few days, we will do this again for me. I can't wait to be standing there, to complete what I have been trained for, what I've strived towards my whole life. A feeling of longing sweeps through me, knowing of the bond that those five now share.

Suddenly, above all the noise, I hear Devin yell, "MATE!" I am pulled out of my thoughts just in time to see him grab Xander. He yanks the right side of Xander's collar aside, ripping the shirt nearly in half in the process. He bites into Xander's neck, marking him as his mate.

I freeze and so does the pack as Xander's surprised shout turns into a hiss of pain, then a groan that is better heard in the bedroom. Devin pulls back, his fangs retracting as he laps the wounds at Xander's neck, sealing them. Xander quivers in his hold, a strangled moan leaving his throat.

"Shit, Devin," Xander says quietly. But with the room so silent and our wolf hearing, I know everyone can hear him. "I thought you could at least wait until most of the pack had left."

Devin chuckles, nuzzling his mate's neck. "You should know that I'm not that patient."

Xander kisses Devin's cheek. "No, you're not," he replies, laughter edging his words. "What's done is done. My turn now." More gently than Devin did, only in the sense that he lets Devin's shirt remain whole, Xander pulls his mate's collar aside and marks him as well.

Devin, who has always been a fan of pain and pleasure mixed, voices his pleasure loudly throughout the hall. There is a reason that we usually mark each other in private. It usually leads to...other things.

When Xander is done with his ministrations to Devin's neck, the two turn to the pack. It is at this point that I finally pull my gaze from the two of them. Like me, my father is stunned. The shock is clearly written all over his face, as well as the faces around me at the high table. And everyone in the hall. Except for the three faces that I expect it from the most.

Zak stares at Devin, a look of resignation on his face. He rubs his hand down his face and softly says, "You couldn't have waited 10 more minutes?"

Charlie looks elated, almost defiant to those who aren't as happy as she is for the newly mated pair.

The Oracle, still wrapped in the glow of the moon's rays and the power of our Goddess, smiles indulgently at Xander and Devin. "Oh, Alpha. They have waited all day. Cut them a little slack."

Former-Alpha Jared suddenly stands. He has always been an imposing figure, even standing at 5 and a half feet tall. What he lacks in height, he makes up for in muscle and brute strength. I would call him the stereotypical meathead if I wasn't afraid of him beating me into the ground. His face is so like Zak's, though his coloring is different. Where Zak is a study in browns and golden hues, Former-Alpha Jared is pale. His hair is lighter, reds shooting through it when it catches the light just right. His normally placid face is contorted in rage as he stares at Xander and Devin. "What the FUCK is going on?!?!" he demands.

Minutes later, we are standing in Zak's study. Extra chairs had to be brought in to fit all of the elders in the pack, which is composed of all the previous leadership. Meaning our parents, grandparents, and, in Charlie's case, a great-grandparent. The pack had been dismissed and orders were given not to disturb us.

Zak and Charlie sit in two large chairs in between the two couches in the room. I stand behind them, too keyed up at this point to sit. I don't really understand what is going on and I think that it's probably a good idea to shut-up and listen. I'm not sure what I feel or think at this point. This is just...I don't even know. How is this even fucking possible?

Xander and Devin sit to their left, hands and fingers entwined. The Oracle sits next to them. Everyone else, three sets of parents, Xander's mother, my father, eight sets of grandparents, and Charlie's great-grandmother have taken seats wherever they could find. Except Zak's father, who paces the floor by the window wall.

Zak, Charlie, Xander, Devin, and The Oracle seem entirely too calm for all that this situation entails. Devin and Xander will have to break the mate bond, which will likely kill one, if not both, of them. Either that or they will both have to relinquish their positions. Frankly, both options fucking suck.

"WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING?" Devin's father screams at him. The former-gamma's face is red with rage, his body visibly shaking with his effort to control his wolf. "Not only did you mark a male as your mate, but you had to do it in front of the ENTIRE FUCKING PACK?!?!"

"Richard, sit down before you have an aneurysm," Lauren, Richard's mate and Devin's mother, interjects. Her tone is tired, slightly put out. Lauren never seems phased by anything. She lives by the philosophy of live and let live. "We've known Devin is gay for years. If the Goddess truly matches people based on who is best for them, this only makes sense." She stands and walks to Xander. Putting out her arms, she embraces him while he is sitting, leaving him little choice in the matter.

Turning to her son, she says, "I just want you to be happy, Dev. Even if that means that you are no longer the Gamma of our pack. If Xander makes you happy, then I am happy for you." She kisses Devin on the cheek and hugs him to her chest.

"Actually, he is still the Gamma," The Oracle says, taking a sip of the tea she had been given before all of the omegas were shooed from the room.

"Yes, technically, he's the Gamma," my father says, annoyance lacing through his voice. "But obviously this can't stand. They can't produce an heir."

"And what will you do, Beta? Challenge Gamma Devin and Delta Xander for their titles?" The Oracle's face is peaceful, her tone matter-of-fact. "They were both inducted into their roles, accepted by the pack, and blessed by the Mother. Unless they step down or are defeated in a challenge, they have their titles. Unless you mean to speak with Lady Selene about her choice of mating them? That should be entertaining."

Holy shit, she's right. There's nothing that can be done. Zak and Charlie just sit there listening. They don't seem tense or worried, almost as if they...no. No fucking way. They knew! They knew and they didn't say anything to me. We've spent almost every minute together for the past two days and they didn't tell me.

"So, what? This is the end of the Laoch bloodline? They have been the Gamma of this pack since its inception," Former-Alpha Jared asks, his pacing slowing, but not stopping.

"That is not what I said," The Oracle said.

"What the fuck does that even mean?" Former-Gamma Richard screams, standing and literally pulling his hair with both of his hands. He is seeing his entire life's work and family legacy going down the drain. I feel for the man, but he really needs to calm his ass down.

"That's enough, Richard!" Zak firmly states from his seat. He is not quite using his Alpha tone, but it's close.

Former-Gamma Richard immediately sits down, smoothing his hair and running his hands over his face. "I'm sorry, Alpha."

"It is not me you should be apologizing to. You just screamed and cursed at the holiest person in our pack, the literal mouthpiece of our Goddess. I get that you are angry and confused, but that is unacceptable," Zak continues, reprimanding a man who is twice his age. "This is your one warning. Do it again, and there will be consequences." His tone never wavers, nor does his gaze, but there is something in his aura. Something powerful and strong. It demands submission. It is the power of an Alpha. Zak rarely, if ever, uses his Alpha power. He doesn't need to, not with his skills in negotiation and the respect that the pack has for him. The use of his aura shows that he is truly upset.

Former-Gamma Richard lowers his gaze and bares his neck in submission. "I am sorry, Oracle. I meant no disrespect."

"I understand, Former-Gamma. You are looking for answers. Unfortunately, I cannot give you all of your answers yet. There are other...events that must occur before full answers can be given. But, what I can say is that the Goddess wished for this to happen. She specifically came to Devin to tell him that this was preordained and blessed," the Oracle says.

My jaw drops, as does everyone else's in the room.

The former-alpha finally stops pacing. He faces the Oracle, his face somewhat slack. "The Goddess made an appearance?" he whispers. "When? Why?"

Looking to Devin, the Oracle nods her head.

Taking a deep breath, Devin begins. "The night that Xander and I met, two nights ago, I felt a pull to the training grounds. The Goddess was there, waiting for me in Lucille's body. She had...many important things to say. Like Lucille said, I can't say everything that Mother Selene told me. Everything that Lucille heard her say. Not yet. But soon, we can tell you. Just trust that the Goddess wants this. She knows what she is doing. She wouldn't have mated us if there wasn't a reason."

"And we are supposed to just trust you?" my father says, doubt clear in his tone.

"No," the Oracle says. "You are supposed to trust the Goddess."

Trio of Mates Chapter 28 - Chapter 27

Chapter 28: Chapter 27 - Charlie

Can't we just tell them? I plead with Zak via the mindlink. It would make all of this so much easier.

Babe, you know we can't, he responds. For one thing, the Goddess said not to. For another, I won't risk losing Brandon. We just got him back in our lives and got him into our bed. I refuse to jeopardize that.

He cuts the link and I make an irritated noise in the back of my throat. Damnit. I know he's right, but this shit is a pain in the ass.

Most of the others have left, but Zak's office still contains the current pack leadership, the former leadership, Xander's mom, and Brandon.

"Why can't you just tell us what the Goddess said?" Former-Gamma Richard says for the fifteenth time.

"Look, Dad. I know that it isn't the answer you want, but I have no other answer to give," Devin says, his voice tired and his hands cover his eyes. "The Goddess said that certain things that she wants to come to pass - things that need to come to pass - will not happen if we talk about them too early. I'm not sure how else to say it. We can't tell you."

Xander places his arm around Devin's shoulder and pulls him into his chest. Devin's frustration and irritation seem to melt under his mate's touch. I am so proud of him. He is managing to keep his cool under a lot of intense scrutiny. Maybe this is his Goddess given gift coming to light? An exceedingly cool head under pressure. That will be helpful as a Gamma. And in the wars that Lady Selene foresaw.

"I get that," my father says, his voice just as tired as Devin's. "Hell, I don't care who your mate is, as long as they treat you right and take their position in the pack seriously. But did the marking have to be done so publicly?"

"Dad, didn't you tell me that you almost stripped Mom naked in front of the entire pack trying to mark her when you realized she was your mate?" I ask.

"That's besides the point," my dad says, his cheeks coloring slightly at the memory.

"But it isn't, Alistar," Zak says, dropping the titles. "None of us can hold back from claiming what the Goddess gave us. The fact that Devin held out all day until he and Xander received their titles as the Goddess directed is nothing short of a miracle. In all that Devin did today, he followed the Goddess's will."

The room is silent as we all absorb what has transpired today.

Glancing at the clock, Former-Alpha Jared stands up. "Well, what's done is done. If you say that Selene told you this and the Oracle backs you up, there is nothing we can do. It would have become public regardless, so I guess it doesn't matter in the end. It's late. We should all go to bed."

Our parents leave the room, bidding us good night. The rest of us stand to follow, Brandon the first one to the door. To our surprise, he closes the door behind his father and locks it.

Turning to face us, I see the rage that has spread across his features warring with heavy sadness in his eyes. "When the FUCK were you guys going to tell me?"

"Brandon -" Devin says, his face filled with shock. I'm pretty sure that the rest of our expressions match his. None of us expected this reaction.

"Don't even try to placate me, Devin! We're all supposed to be best friends! We've been through everything together! We've even fucked-" Brandon cuts off at a snarl from Xander.

"Yeah, I've fucked your boy toy!" Brandon screams in Xander's face. "What? He didn't tell you about it? Join the fucking club man. He obviously doesn't tell the people he fucks that kind of information. Or maybe he just fucked so many people, I didn't even matter." He says the last glaring into Devin's face, obviously hoping to hurt him. Looks like the rage won out.

Immediately, Xander lunges towards Brandon, his fangs and claws extended. Devin pulls Xander back by the shoulders as Zak pushes Brandon out of Xander's reach. I stand between the two of them in case things go further south than they already have.

"I'll fucking kill you! How dare you say that about my mate!" Xander screams, his beast claiming his eyes and beginning to shift under his skin. He is actively fighting against Devin to get to Brandon.

"Don't worry about it, Xander. All I am is a fuck boy to him," Xander thunders. He pushes away from Zak, glaring into his eyes. "To all of them. I'm only any good to them in bed."

Zak's face is stricken, his hands stopping in mid-air as they reach for Brandon. Devin turns, his face a mixture of shock, sadness, and pure anger. Xander stops struggling against Devin, his face contorted in a monstrous mix of human and wolf. At least he has stopped trying to get to kill Brandon.

"Brandon," I breathe out, reaching for him. "You know that isn't true. We love you."

He steps back, putting his hands in the air. I stop moving toward him, the rejection searing my soul. "If you loved me, you would trust me. You would have fucking told me."

"We couldn't. You heard what we told the elders. The Goddess forbade it," Devin says, his voice tight with emotion.

"I am your brother. We have lived our entire lives together." Brandon's voice is strained and tears fill his eyes as anger and grief war on his face.

I can't see Zak's face, but I hear the tears in his voice. "Brandon, please," he pleads, slowly moving towards Brandon. "My love, the Mother said we couldn't tell."

It looks like Brandon is calming, as if he will allow Zak to comfort him. His face smooths, the tears that are standing in his eyes spill onto his cheeks. Brandon leans towards Zak and I breathe a sigh of relief...prematurely.

Brandon suddenly seems to remember his anger and backs away towards the door. "You would have told me if you trusted me. If you cared enough about my feelings. If you cared about me."

He turns towards the door, opening it. Devin, Zak, and I all step toward the door, calling out to Brandon.

Brandon turns back to us, glaring through the tears in his eyes. His voice is low as he says, "Don't follow me." He slams the door behind him and we hear his footsteps running down the hall.

Trio of Mates Chapter 29 - Chapter 28

Chapter 29: Chapter 28 - Zak

"FUCK!" I scream, slamming my fist into the wall, punching a hole in it. I don't even realize that my hand is bleeding until Charlie wraps a towel around it. I try to shake her off. "Leave it. It'll heal in a few minutes."

"Yeah, but we don't need to get blood in the carpet," she mutters.

"Well, that was a fucking shit show," Devin exhales a loud sigh. His hands are fisted at his temples and his shoulders are slumped.

Xander, looking much more human at this point, puts his hand on Devin's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Babe. I didn't mean to lose it like that. If I hadn't - "

"He would have kept going," I say, falling heavily onto one of the couches. "He was angry and he just chose you to vent on."

"I know, but I feel like I made it worse. I already knew about Dev and Brandon. I just couldn't handle hearing him say those awful things about Dev."

Devin turns into Xander's body, wrapping his arms around his mate. Xander immediately engulfs Devin in a hug and kisses his cheek. "Thank you for defending me," Devin says.

"Always," Xander says, placing a sweet kiss on Devin's lips. I can't help but feel jealous at how close they are as mates, compared to what just happened with ours.

Charlie comes over and sits on my lap. I pull her close and bury my face in her neck. She melts into my arms, her head leaning on mine. We are both mourning the pain that our mate feels and the words that he said. I can only hope that he said those words in anger and doesn't truly believe him.

"We really should have anticipated this reaction," Charlie says, her lips moving across my temples. "You know how he feels about secrets after all that went down with his parents and his coming out."

Xander looks at us quizzically. "What do you mean?"

"When Brandon was about 17, he had a boyfriend in his house. His parents were supposed to be away with his little sister," Devin begins, his voice a flat monotone. "Brandon hadn't told his family that he was gay..."

Staring off into space and speaking into Charlie's hair, I continue where he left off. "They were going to drop his sister off at camp, but she had forgotten her sleeping bag. They walked in and found them together in the living room. It was...bad. Brandon's dad flew off the handle about how 'no son of his was going to allow another male to fuck him up the ass' and that 'he better get this out of his system before he settles down for his mate so they could give the pack an heir.' His mother just cried hysterically, asking how he was able to keep something like that a secret. She just kept harping on how he could keep such a secret."

"Well, that sounds like a fairly traumatic coming out. I see why he hates secrets," Xander says, his eyebrows up to his hairline in his shock.

"The worst part is, that was his last interaction with his mother and his sister. They died in a car crash on the way to the camp. Apparently, a semi ran a red light and hit them. They died instantly," Charlie finishes the sordid tale.

"Fuck..." Xander sighs out. "Yeah, this is just a shitty situation all around."

"Yup," Charlie says, popping the "p."

"I think we need to go to bed," Devin sighs. "We aren't going to fix this tonight. He needs to blow off some steam, then we should be able to reason with him."

"If nothing else, we know that he will understand soon enough," I say. "We just have to get through the next three days."

Everyone nods and heads towards the door.

Out in the hall, I stop Devin and Xander. "Hey guys."

They turn, fatigue etched across their faces.

"Congratulations on your new titles and on finding your mate. You are going to make us proud."

Xander's face breaks out in a smile and Devin pulls me into a hug. "Thanks, man," Devin says. Before letting me go, he says, "He'll come around, Zak. You guys will have your second mate soon."

"I hope you're right, Dev," I say. I pat his back before turning and grabbing Charlie's hand. She curls herself into my arm and we walk slowly to our room.

Trio of Mates Chapter 30 - Chapter 29

Chapter 30: Chapter 29 - Brandon

The second I left Zak's office, I ran out of the pack house. I quickly undressed and shifted, racing into the darkness of the night.

I've been running all night, trying to outrace my feelings of betrayal and loss. How could they not tell me? They all knew and hadn't said a word. It's not like Devin and I were in love, we both knew that the other would find their mate soon. But a heads up would have been nice. I was happy for him. He was one of my best friends.

Of course, I hadn't told him about Charlie and Zak asking me into their bed, either. But that's beside the point. I was mad at them.

Or was I? Honestly, I think I just felt left behind and left out. They had all found their mates. Yeah, Charlie, Zak, and I were fucking, but they were mates. They were the ones that were there for each other. When they grew tired of this little experiment, where would that leave me? Alone, while they continued their happy life together. And now Devin was gone, too. Don't get me wrong, Xander seems like a great guy. But now I have no one to understand what I am going through.

No, I wasn't really upset about the Goddess's secret. It kind of gave me hope that whoever my mate was, at least I had the chance that they would be someone I could care about normally and not just forced to love because of the mate bond. I was happy for Devin and Xander. Even with my own issues with secret keeping, I know that if the Goddess had said it, it was law. They had to follow it. I wasn't that unreasonable.

What really upset me was the loss of that connection with my best friends. And the reminder that what was happening with Charlie, Zak, and me has an expiration date. It made me feel unbearably sad and lonely. And the guilt that has been plaguing me since Charlie and Zak mated, since I realized I still wanted them, clawed its way up and around my throat.

I ran through our territory, not even knowing where I was going. I just needed to move. Needed to not think beyond where the next obstacle was in my path. But, eventually, even a wolf has to stop. As the sun crests the horizon, I found a patch of heavy brush in

a densely packed part of the forest. I wiggle my way in and curl myself so that my tail covers my nose. I drift into an uneasy, restless sleep.