

Trio of Mates Chapter 41 - Chapter 40

Chapter 41: Chapter 40 - Brandon

I make the "walk of shame" back to my room to shower and dress before meeting Zak and Charlie in the dining hall for breakfast. Before grabbing a seat at the head table, I head to the kitchen and ask one of the omegas to add an envelope with a print out of all of the information Charlie and I found out yesterday to the meal that they send to Xander and Devin. I really don't want to interrupt them again, but they need to be aware of what is going on so far.

When I arrive at the high table, I find that a seat has been saved for me between Zak and my father. When I sit, greeting all at the table, Zak immediately moves his hand to my thigh, giving me a light squeeze. Nothing sexual, just intimate. I can't help but smile at him.

"As I was saying," Charlie continues, "we would like to meet with all of the former leadership after breakfast to debrief on what we found yesterday and to begin making plans. I know that mates are busy with the ceremonies of the next two days, but it would be good if you ladies were there as well. We're going to need all the help we can get."

"What have you been up to, son?" Former-Alpha Jared asks, a smile on his face.

"Just trying to shore up alliances and know all that we can about the surrounding packs, as well as Mathias's pack, before we meet with them in two days," Zak says, taking a bite of bacon. "I know that they are fast approaching and our future beta here," at this he slaps a hand on my shoulder, "is likely to be busy with his new mate tomorrow. So we need to get a little bit of a head start."

I grimace at the mention of my mate, trying to hide it behind my napkin as I wipe my mouth. Unfortunately, my father notices.

"Aren't you excited about finding your mate, Brandon?" father asks, concern on his face.

"Of course," I say, busying myself with my food. "I just don't want to bring my mate into this mess on the first day that we are together. That would kinda suck for them, you know?"

My father hums his assent, but doesn't look convinced.

The former leadership, mates included, agree to meet after the meal and the rest of breakfast is uneventful.

All of us settle into Zak's office. I'm sitting on the couch with Charlie and Zak, as well as Zak's parents. On the opposite couch sits Devin's parents, my father, and Charlie's

parents. Some of the omegas attempted to follow us with coffee, water, and tea, but Charlie assured them that we were fine and insisted that they go downstairs to have their breakfast.

Charlie and I present our findings first. Of the 25 other packs on the East Coast, we had alliances with 13 of them. Mathias had alliances with 15 packs, five of them overlapping with ours. We were allies with some of the biggest packs and all of the packs that surrounded us. In the eight packs that were solely our allies, there are a total of 805 wolves and 365 warriors. Mathias's 10 allies contained 1,285 wolves and 670 warriors. The Eclipse pack contained 100 warriors and 50 more wolves. They would definitely not be helping Blue Crescent Pack and we could probably very easily persuade them to our side.

"What is the likelihood that we will keep all of our allies on our side?" Former-Luna Clara asks. Her eyes scan the printouts of the information that we have gathered and passed out.

"I have contacted all of the alphas of the packs that we have alliances with. They are well aware of Devin and Xander's mating and Mathias's personality. They know what is coming," Zak says. He points to the packs on the list, ticking them off. "Six out of the eight packs that are strictly our allies have vowed to help us. They believe that the Goddess has made this mating and that no one can oppose it. The other two, New Moon and Shadow packs, refuse to support us, but vow to remain neutral in the war to come."

"And what of the packs that we share?" Former-Alpha Jared asks.

"Of those five, we will only maintain two," Zak grimly states.

Muttered curses and gasps fill the room.

"Which two?" Dad asks.

"Blood Moon and Tranquility packs," Zak answers.

"Those are the two smallest packs of the five!" Former-Gamma Richard exclaims.

"How many warriors does that bring us to?" his wife, Lauren, asks.

"430," Charlie answers. "That isn't including the Eclipse packs warriors."

"He still would have more warriors than us. More resources, too," Dad says.

We lapse into silence, brooding over our predicament.

"I think we might be able to turn a few of his allies to our side, or at least get them not to participate," I say. "Look at some of the information that we have on the Earthshine, Dark Side, and Apogee packs. Earthshine's Luna's mother chose a female mate after her first mate, a male, died. They might be sympathetic. And Dark Side and Apogee have the highest percentage of homosexual couples out of all of the packs on the coast. Plus, Apogee is extremely religious. They would never go against a mate bound set down by the Goddess."

"Even if we got all three of those packs to our side of the war, it still wouldn't be enough," Charlie's mom, Danielle, says. "We would still be outnumbered."

"We have to talk to the Diana pack," Former-Delta Alistar says, quietly.

"Alistar, that's crazy," my father says. "You know that their entire pack is nuts. They refuse to interact with anyone from outside of their own. We don't even know how many wolves they have, let alone the number of warriors. Charlie and Brandon weren't even able to find out their Luna's name because they are so secretive."

"You forget that my uncle went to live up there with his mate, Carl," the former-delta says. "I have an in. I think that I can get us an audience with their Alpha. And, based on what my uncle has told me, I think we stand a good chance to get them on our side."

"What has your uncle told you?" Zak asks, leaning forward in his chair. He and Charlie share a look, but she just shakes her head. She doesn't know either.

"Look, Xavier swore me to secrecy years ago about our communication. We can only talk through letters, which he can only send out when he goes into town on errands for the pack. He has a post office box there, so no one knows when letters go back and forth. His alpha doesn't want others to know what goes on up there," Charlie's dad says, his look intense. "I haven't even told Dani everything that Xavier has told me." Charlie's dad looks to her mom, a slight look of pain crossing his face. Keeping secrets from your mate is no joke. Our link is deeper than any other. They are literally the other half of your soul. How can you not tell your soul something?

"So, he could get hurt from us attempting to contact his alpha using him," I say.

Former-Delta Alistar nods his head, his face plainly showing the struggle of worry for his uncle and that of his pack's safety. "But I think that he would do it." Giving his head a firm shake, Alistar continues, "The reason that Charlie and Brandon weren't able to find the Luna's name is because the pack doesn't have a she-wolf luna. Their alpha is mated to a male."

Shocked silence reigns in the room. I don't even know if anyone breathes, it is so quiet. An alpha willingly taking a male mate is unheard of.

After a beat, the former-delta continues, "According to my uncle, the alpha of this pack believes in something called a "mate trio." Three wolves are mated to each other, either two males and a she-wolf or two she-wolves and a male. Their oracle backs it up. The alpha believes that he and his mate have a third mate, a she-wolf, out there. Once the alpha found out about his male mate, he allowed all those who wished to leave to go, then shut down all of his borders. He knew that he would be attacked, as some would think this was blasphemy."

No one speaks. No one moves. It is as if we are all under a spell, unable to compute the words that the former-delta just said.

"The man is fucking nuts - " Former-Alpha Jared begins, but Zak cuts him off with a hand gesture.

"Stop," Zak says, firmly. "Stop right there. We've already had one unprecedented mating in our pack. Is it so hard to believe in this?"

The former-alpha begins to speak, but Zak's look cuts him off. "We will speak of this with Lucille. Charlie, link her and see if she can meet with us this afternoon. In the meantime, Alistar, I want you to write a letter to your uncle saying that we want to meet his alpha. How often does he go into town to retrieve your letters?"

"Weekly. The day changes, but he always goes in once every week," Charlie's dad replies.

"Good. I'll send a letter to the alpha in yours as a way of introducing myself and our situation. I'll have it to you by lunch," Zak says.

"Lucille will meet with us today at 1," Charlie says.

Zak nods. "Ok, then we'll reconvene then." Looking around at the group, Zak face is full of trepidation, command, and...hope? "I don't think I have to tell anyone in this room not to discuss what was said here with anyone else."

"No, Alpha," we all say in unison.

"Richard, get in touch with Devin and Xander and fill them in on everything that has happened. We're going to need them here this afternoon."

"Yes, Alpha," the former-gamma says, though his face pales a bit.

With that, the former pack leaders leave the room. But my father hangs back, pulling me to the side. "Son, I know that you probably want to be with your friends tonight, since it is likely your last night as an unmated non-leader, but could we have dinner tonight? There are...things I want to discuss with you." His voice is tense and his eyes are almost pleading.

I look toward Zak and Charlie, still pouring over the print out of packs. I had wanted to spend my last night before my birthday with them. Come tomorrow, whatever we have together would likely be done. I want just one last night with the two of them.

But my dad and I rarely spend time alone. He's never said it, but I know that he blames me for my mother and sister's deaths. He doesn't want to, but if Mom hadn't been so upset about finding out that I was gay...and the way they found out, she would have been more in control of the car. They wouldn't have slipped on the wet road and crashed into that tree. They'd still be here. If he says that he needs to talk to me, then I need to be there. I can always go back to Charlie and Zak afterwards.

"Sure thing, Dad," I say, plastering a small smile on my face.

He nods and leaves, closing the door behind him.

Trio of Mates Chapter 42 - Chapter 41

Chapter 42: Chapter 41 - Charlie

Naughty Alpha, I mindlink to Zak. How could you send Devin's father to interrupt their fun? I have been silently cackling about that in my head ever since Zak said that.

He deserves it for the way he spoke to Dev on his birthday, Zak replies, shrugging his shoulders.

Not gonna disagree, but what about Dev and Xander? How are they going to feel?

I think they'll find it hilarious. Zak smiles at me, laughing his ass off in his head.

I can't help it. I join in his laughter, just thinking about Richard having to deal with his horny son and his son's mate.

Just then, Brandon sits down beside us, snuggling into my side and nuzzling my neck. Each day that we get closer to his birthday, the sparks become more and more intense. I bite back a moan at the pleasure that shoots through me.

"Hey, Big Bad. What's up?" I ask, voice a little breathy.

Zak notices, his eyes going to my already hardening nipples. But Brandon doesn't seem to as he leans back on the couch, pulling me with him.

"Dad wants me to have dinner with him tonight," he says into my neck. "He says that there are things that he wants to talk about before I become Beta tomorrow."

Instantly the atmosphere changes. Gone are the lusty thoughts and my body's reactions. Our mate is upset and we want to comfort him.

Zak walks around to Brandon's other side and puts an arm around his shoulders. I shift so that my arms wrap around his waist, my head lays on his chest. Brandon's body seems to relax with both of us touching him.

"Are you going to go?" Zak asks, tracing soothing patterns on Brandon's arm.

"I said I would," Brandon says. He releases a heavy sigh. "I wanted to spend my last night without a mate with you guys, but I guess that will have to wait for after dinner."

"Don't worry about us, Brandon," I say, cupping his cheek so that he looks into my eyes. "We will always be here for you, in whatever capacity that you want. You need to be with your father. Hopefully this can start to mend some fences."

Zak leans in and places a kiss on Brandon's temple. I peck his lips. We stay like that, cuddled together on the couch for a few minutes before Zak's cell phone rings.

Sighing, he grabs it, checking the caller ID. He sighs, "Duty calls." Answering the phone and walking over to his desk he answers, "Alpha Isaac, thank you for calling me back..."

"I guess that's our cue to get back to work," Brandon says. He starts to get up, but I stop him with a hand to his chest.

"You ok?" I ask.

His smile is warm as he looks down at me. "Yes, Red. Thanks to you and Zak, I'm feeling a lot better. Thank you." He gives me a quick kiss and I can't help but melt a little.

"I love you," I say.

"I love you."

Trio of Mates Chapter 43 - Chapter 42

Chapter 43: Chapter 42 - Devin

For some reason, the warriors think that it is hilarious to keep mindlinking us throughout the day, asking the most asinine questions. Where are the mat wipes? What is the record on the obstacle course? We're taking bets between Jake and Cole. Who would win in a fight? I hate them all right now, and they will regret this as soon as I get back to training. I will make them wish that they had never set foot in the warrior training arena.

Xander and I completely shut down our mindlink. We were busy and didn't welcome any interruptions. We had already been interrupted once for the meeting yesterday and we would be interrupted several times over the next few days for the Beta ceremony and Blue Crescent Pack's visit. I would personally kick the ass of the next person who interrupts us.

Xander is a bit more adventurous in bed than I had anticipated. He likes to play on the edge of pain and pleasure. And he loves using restraints. I am currently tied to the bed, legs spread eagled and arms above my head. The gag in my mouth muffles my moans as Xander works my dick with his mouth. I literally can't move my arms, legs, or hips from the tautness of the ropes. The only thing that I can do is wrap my fingers around the rope leading from my wrists to the headboard.

Xander pulls his mouth from my dick, the fingers of one hand fingering my ass and the other hand fondling my balls. My eyes are squeezed tight, the pleasure overwhelming.

"Look at how much you're leaking, Gamma. You like this that much?" Xander teases, his lips pressed against my cockhead as he speaks.

"Mmmmm," I hum around the gag in my mouth. I furiously nod my head as much as possible.

Xander chuckles just before he swallows my entire dick in his mouth, his hands coming to my hips as he braces himself. I scream into the gag.

I can barely move my head enough to see him, but the feeling of suction on me tells me that his cheeks have hollowed around my entire cock. After a few moments of exquisite torture, he begins to move his head slowly up and down the length of my dick. I continue to moan, tonguing his name against the gag. His pace picks up and I feel my orgasm building. Building. Nearly there.

Just then there is a knock at the door.

I let out a frustrated moan as Xander pulls off my dick. "Somebody better be fucking dying or whoever is at that door is about to have their ass handed to them," he growls out.

"It's Richard...Devin's dad."

Xander quickly wraps a sheet around his hips and walks to the door, pulling it open a crack. "As much as I want you to like me, sir, the statement still stands. This had better be important."

I hear Dad clear his throat, obviously uncomfortable. "Um, Alpha Zak sent me to give you two a message."

Xander opens the door so that dad can see his whole body, covered in sweat with a sheet loosely draped around his waist. Based on dad's quick glance down and blush as he attempts to look anywhere but down, I can tell that he has seen Xander's erection tenting the sheet. I fight back the fit of giggles that threaten to overtake me.

"Um, is Devin able to talk?" Dad clears his voice and fidgets with the hem of his shirt.

"He's a bit tied up at the moment," Xander says, no sense of irony in his voice at all. "But he can hear everything that you say."

"There have been more developments in the matter with the Blue Crescent Pack. We are prepping battle plans and it appears that we will have to seek the Diana pack's aid. Zak wants both of you at a meeting today at 1:00." As my father finishes, he happens to look over Xander's shoulder, seeing me tied to the bed. I give him a little finger wave.

Dad's face blushes from his neck to the roots of his hair and he begins stammering, "I...I'll - I'll s-see you b-both there." With that, he turns on his heel and practically runs from the room.

I can't help it. I let out a guffaw of laughter through the gag. Xander doesn't fare much better as he closes the door. He is nearly bent double, his hands clutching his stomach. When he stands up, tears are in his eyes from his laughter. Xander comes to sit on the bed, still chuckling. We share a look of amusement before his eyes darken with lust again.

"Now, where were we?"

Trio of Mates Chapter 44 - Chapter 43

Chapter 44: Chapter 43 - Zak

Charlie, Brandon, and I continue our work from the day before, contacting and researching other packs. We don't even stop for lunch, but instead have the omegas bring something up to us.

Just prior to 1:00, we make our way to the conference hall on the first floor. Though my office is much more comfortable, it would also be difficult for Lucille to climb the three flights of stairs to the top floor. When we arrive, the smell of coffee and sweets fill the air as omegas bustle around, setting up the room. They bow their necks to us, then quickly finish their tasks and leave.

Shortly after, our parents begin filing in and taking seats around the table. They sit on the far side of the table, with the new pack leaders sitting closer to the door. Lucille and Meredith come in exactly at 1:00, sharing large smiles and greetings all around the room.

Dev, dude. Where are you guys? We're waiting on you. I link quickly.

Sorry, sorry. Walking into the packhouse now.

I inform everyone that Dev and Xander are on their way and to grab some food while we wait.

A few minutes later, everyone is seated and ready.

"Thank you all for coming," I start. "We have asked Lucille here to help explain some information that we gathered about the Diana pack. Lucille, I believe Charlie told you what this is about?"

Lucille nods. I will only speak about trios in general, Zak. I cannot talk about your trio or that of our Delta and Gamma.

I understand, Lucille. But they will need some background. I think it may help with what will happen in the coming days.

Lucille nods again, before turning to look at the old leadership. "How much was passed down from generation to generation of leadership about Selene's mates? I know that Charlie, Zak, Xander, and Devin did not know of this, but once an entirely new leadership is inducted, what was told to them?"

My father looks at Lucille as if she has three heads. "You mean the lore about her mating not only Pan, but a human?" He looks to his friends and confidants, an expression of confusion written on his face. "I mean, we were told the story, but...it's just a tale. It's not real."

Lucille just stares at him, not saying a word.

"It can't be real," Devn's mom speaks up. "That would mean that mate trios are..." She doesn't finish her thought. But a look passes not only between her and her mate, but the two of them and Brandon's dad. I don't know that anyone else caught it, as they were all stunned and looking at everyone else for back up. But I saw the look. A mixture of longing, pain, and...hope?

"Mate trios are real," Lucille confirms. "And they have started to come back, if what the alpha of the Diana pack says is to be believed."

"Wait," Brandon interrupts. "Back up a step. You're going to have to explain this all to me."

So, Lucille recounts the story she had said to Charlie and I in her cabin. She explained that Selene had two mates, that she continued to bless certain wolves with a trio, and that when a pack alpha was part of the trio, the pack flourished, causing jealousy to

single-mated wolves. That this caused war and a type of genocide in our species, fully eradicating our race of the mate trios. How the Moon Goddess had erased the mate trios from the wolf race for several generations before returning them. And now it appeared that the trios were back.

Brandon sits in silence for a while before turning to Charlie and me. I can literally see the gears turning in his head and know when he understands what this means for us by the look on his face. It's full of wonder and awe. But, there is a fleeting darker expression that I can't make out before he turns away.

He knows. Charlie links me.

I know. But we can't confirm anything. Not until tomorrow.

I feel her yearning through the mindlink. It is only matched by mine. We both want our mate so badly. To have him recognize that he is ours and erase the torment and trepidation that he has been feeling leading up to his birthday.

I try to link him, just to see if he's ok, but he blocks me out. I see him shake his head and know that he wants to think on his own.

I see Charlie reach her hand to touch his thigh under the table. He gives her a brief smile, but then pulls away. The look of hurt that flashes across her face mirrors my own pain at this little rejection. I reach across the table and grab her hand. She gives me a small, sad smile and squeezes my hand.

During our whole exchange, the others have been asking Lucille questions, but I haven't been paying attention. I finally tune back in when Devin's father asks a question.

"Can this mate bond be broken? Can a trio be...undone?" Former-Gamma Richard asks. His voice is small, his face full of so many different emotions that I can't begin to sort through them.

Lucille smiles knowingly at him. "A mate trio is sacred to our Mother above. It is one of the strongest ties in the wolf community. It will weather many trials, even a choice mating. If it is between lesser mates, it can disappear to become just a strong friendship. But not so with ranked pack members. Unless all of the members of the trio agree to the rejection, the bond will always remain. Always pull the three together."

Brandon's father grips the table so hard that I hear the wood groan. We all turn to him. He appears embarrassed by his reaction. "I'm sorry, Alpha, Luna. I need to grab some air." Without waiting for my response, Beta Carl stands and hurries from the room.

I see Devin's mom go to stand, her eyes intent on Carl as he leaves. But Former-Gamma Richard puts his hand on her shoulder, keeping her in her seat. It is obvious that they are mindlinking each other with their intense eye contact and facial

expressions. Lauren finally leans back in her chair, one arm crossed over her stomach, her other hand to her mouth, chewing on her thumbnail. Her eyes never leave the door of the conference room.

They must be the ones that Selene spoke about! Dev links me, Charlie, and Xander. His eyes are wide, his expression filled with shock. Brandon's dad and my parents are a trio!

Holy shit! He has to be right. They are the ones that Selene said would have a vested interest in us accepting our trio. The four of us look at each other in complete surprise.

Brandon follows his father to the door, his expression distant. He must be linking his father. He reaches for the door handle, but his hand stops. After a few seconds, he turns back to the table. "Father said he will be back in a few minutes."

Lauren walks to the bank of windows on the far side of the room, her arms crossed on her stomach. Richard sits at the table, his head in his hands, a long, low sigh escaping from him.

Unsure what to make of the reactions in the last few minutes, Dad turns to Lucille. "So what this alpha is saying is true? He has a male mate and they are looking for the third to their trio?"

"Yes," Lucille answers simply.

"And this is the will of Selene?" Mom asks.

"Yes." Again, the answer is so simple, but the consequences of it are so far-reaching.

"Ok," Dad says, astonishment still clear on his face. "Ok." Dad looks to me. "What do we do now?"

"First, Former-Delta Alistar, do you have the letter for your uncle ready?" I inquire.

"Yes, Alpha. Right here." Alistar holds up an unsealed envelope.

"Great. Please add this to the letter and get it out today." I pass the envelope over to Alistar. He nods, taking the letter from me. He quickly adds it to the envelope and seals it.

"I'll take it to the post office now so that it can go out with today's mail," Charlie's father says.

I nod as the former-gamma leaves. "We need to hear back from Alistar's uncle before we can make any plans regarding the Diana pack. Lucille, I need you to get in touch

with your fellow oracles. We need to know if any other packs have trios in them, even if they are not marked and mated."

"Yes, Alpha," Lucille responds. "Meredith and I will work on that once we return to my cabin."

"Thank you, Lucille, Meredith. You are dismissed."

They quickly stand, their faces set in determination at the task ahead.

"Oh, Lucille?" Charlie calls the old woman.

"Yes, Charlie?" The Oracle smiles warmly at my mate.

"When this is all over, we need to talk to you about reworking the academic curriculum. We have some things to fix in our pups' education about the Moon Goddess's mating," Charlie says.

"Yes, my Luna. I would be happy to work on that. We will see you all at the ceremony tomorrow evening," Lucille nods and leaves with Meredith following close behind.

Just then, Carl returns. His eyes are red-rimmed and his breathing is ragged. He glances at Lauren and Richard, but then resolutely turns his face to me. He sits next to Xander, on the opposite side of where he was sitting before.

Turning back to our parents, I continue my list, "Dad, Mom, I will need you to prepare to meet with our allied packs after the Blue Crescent meeting. We need to start working on a defense and a plan of attack. Carl, please help my parents call and schedule their journey. You will help to run and protect the pack with Xander and Devin when they leave."

"Where will you be?" Brandon asks, his face confused.

"You, Charlie, and I will be on our way to Maine to meet with the Diana pack," I say.

"What if he refuses to see us?" Charlie asks.

"He won't. Not after he reads my letter," I say. "Devin, Xander, you will work with Charlie's and Devin's parents in training our pack for war. This will be very different from preparing to fight rogues. Rogues are undisciplined and not usually trained in war tactics. We will be fighting against other packs. We will need to prepare as much as possible. All wolves above the age of 15 and under the age of 60 should be prepared to fight. The young, pregnant, and old will need to be trained on self-protection and evasion skills. I will leave it up to you as to how to divide up the work."

"Yes, Alpha," resounds throughout the room.

"Brandon, Charlie, and I will begin working with our nearest allies with confirming housing, bases, supplies, and medics in the surrounding territories. I want the start of all of these plans to be ready by the time that Blue Crescent arrives on Saturday."

"Yes, Alpha."

"Dismissed."

Trio of Mates Chapter 45 - Chapter 44

Chapter 45: Chapter 44 - Brandon

The afternoon is busy, full of phone calls and meetings with other pack matters. I was placed in charge of identifying medics and locating the required medical equipment and supplies. I spent the majority of the afternoon meeting with the pack doctor.

At 6:00, I'm standing in front of my father's suite, which is soon to be mine. I'm holding a bottle of whiskey in one hand as I raise the other to knock. I would normally bring wine, but I have a feeling that I'm going to need the hard stuff by the end of the night.

Father answers the door, his face troubled and pale. A small smile alights on his face when he opens the door and sees that it's me. "Come in, son."

"Father, are you ok?" We aren't very close, haven't been since the deaths of my mother and sister. But I dare you to see your father upset and not worry.

"Yeah." He runs a hand through his hair, looking anything but ok. "That was just a lot of information today."

"You can say that again." I give a little forced laugh, walking past him. I hand him the bottle of whiskey. "I thought that after today, we could use something to help us forget a bit."

"Thanks, Brandon. Definitely needed." Father leads me into the dining room. Like I said, I don't spend much time with him. After Mom and Candy died, I moved out. At first, I stayed in the barracks with the other warriors-in-training. When Charlie and Zak mated, I took over her old Delta suite. I haven't stepped across the threshold of my old home since moving out. Father has changed everything about the old suite. The rooms, which used to be full of floral prints, brightly colored paint, and feminine touches, are now covered in hardwood floors, shades of gray and white, and pictures everywhere. Pictures of my Mom and sister, Father's friends, landscapes of places Father has visited, and...me. Almost an entire wall is filled with pictures of me as a baby, a small child, and through high school. My awards, from perfect attendance to track medals, are on shelves and in frames.

I stop and stare at the wall. Various emotions swirl through me: pride, grief, confusion, astonishment, and, above all, pain. Why had Father done this?

He walks over to me and hands me a glass of whiskey. Some of what I'm feeling must be showing on my face. He turns to the wall, smiling softly. "I've always been proud of you, Son. I've always loved you. So much. After your mother and sister died, I just didn't know how...how to bridge the gap."

I drink my whiskey in one shot, using the action of my hand coming to my mouth as an excuse to surreptitiously wipe my eyes. I wince as the fiery taste of the liquor rolls down my throat.

I turn, not looking at my father, heading to the dining table and pouring myself another whiskey. "It's alright, Father. I know that you blame me for their deaths. And honestly, I blame myself, too. There's really no way to cross the bridge after that." I gulp down the whiskey, the taste a little smoother this time.

"Brandon!" He grabs my shoulder and turns me to look at him. "Is that really what you think? You think that you caused their deaths? That I blame you?" Father sets his glass on the table, whiskey untouched. Tears blur my vision of him, but I can see the sincerity in his eyes. He puts his hands on my shoulders, making sure to look me in the eyes. "Brandon, I have never blamed you! Ever! The guy in the semi was drunk off his ass. There was nothing anyone could have done to save them."

The tears that I had been holding back fall. "She wouldn't have been out there at that time, if it wasn't for me. She might have had quicker reflexes, might have paid better attention, if she hadn't been so upset because of me."

Father pulls me into a hug. "No! No, Son! Witnesses literally said that the semi came out of nowhere. He was going nearly twice the speed limit around a blind curve. That's why the stop light was there in the first place. She couldn't have done anything. It wasn't your fault. It was never your fault."

I cling to my father, sobbing while he reassures me that it wasn't my fault. We finally pull away when there is a knock at the door. I pull away, wiping my eyes with the backs of my hands.

"Just a second," my father calls towards the door. He turns back to me, grabbing my face in both his hands. "I love you, Son. Anything that I did to make you feel that I didn't or that you were responsible for their deaths...I'm sorry. I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you" He leans in and kisses my forehead before hurrying to the door.

He quickly returns with two trays of food, obviously delivered from the kitchen. The smells of grilled steak and veggies, baked potatoes, and freshly baked bread fill the room. I grab one from him and we both set them on the table.

Before sitting down, Father turns back to me. His eyes search my face, which I know is red from my crying. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah. Thanks. I'm just going to go wash my face real quick." I turn towards the small guest bathroom down the hall. In the bathroom, I quickly turn the water on, filling my palms and splashing it on my face several times until I feel calm. I use the hand towel to dry off my face. When I look up, I see a picture of the four of us framed on the wall. It was taken the Christmas before my mom and sister died. We all looked so happy.

Normally, seeing pictures of my lost family makes me feel unrelenting waves of grief and guilt. But this time, I feel my father's arms around me, his voice in my ear whispering that he loves me. That this isn't my fault. It feels as if an invisible weight has been lifted from my heart.

I walk back to the dining room to see that Father has set out the plates with silverware and is pouring water into glasses at our places. We sit down and eat in companionable silence. Occasionally, we break the silence to remark on the food or to talk about my birthday tomorrow, but we mostly remain in our own thoughts.

Towards the end of the meal, another knock comes at the door. I answer for Father, who had just gone to the bathroom. An omega male is at the door, covered dessert plates in his hands.

"Come on in. We were just clearing up the dinner plates," I say, grabbing the dessert plates from him.

"Thank you, future-beta." He walks in, a smile crossing his face.

I lead him to the dining room. I smell the plates in my hands. "Omega Maisie's peach cobbler? Damn! She has always had the knack for picking the best peaches. I'd love to know her secret."

"The peaches are super firm," the omega says and something in his voice makes me look back at him. He has his gaze firmly glued to my ass, his lower lip between his teeth.

I chuckle to myself and he looks up, his face flooding red with embarrassment. "Thanks, man," I say, giving him a smile to show that I'm not offended. "I work hard for those peaches."

The omega coughs out a laugh and hurriedly grabs the trays of dirty plates. He scurries back to the front door. I follow him to open the door. I try to think of something to ease his embarrassment, but in the end decide to just let it go. I'd probably end up just making him feel more self-conscious.

When I return to the dining room, Father has a can of whipped cream in his hands, squirting dollops onto the cobbler. "I can't believe Maisie sent these up without whip cream. What was she thinking?"

I laugh at him before grabbing a fork and digging in. Again, we eat in silence. We take the dishes to the kitchen, putting them in the dishwasher. Father had linked down earlier that he'd wash them and bring them down in the morning.

We settle in the living room with another glass of whiskey.

"So, Father, I'm glad that we talked earlier about everything with Mom and Candy, but...I don't think that's what you wanted to talk to me about."

Father's face instantly turns apprehensive. His hand runs through his hair and he doesn't look at me. "You're right. I called you here to talk about...about your mate."

My posture instantly straightens, my breath coming out quicker. What did he mean? Had he figured out what I figured out during our meeting this afternoon? Did he know that Zak and Charlie thought that I was their mate, a part of their trio?

I don't say anything, just wait for him to go on.

"Son, I know that you are gay. I know that...I freaked out on the night that we found you. I...I obviously handled it really badly and probably made it really hard on you." His eyes finally look to me. "I'm so sorry. I feel like all I've done tonight is apologize to you tonight for being a shitty father - "

"Father, no. I get it. It must have been shocking. And knowing that if I'm gay, I won't be able to carry on our bloodline. I should have told you and Mom. I should have - "

"My first mate was a male," Father blurts out.

There are several beats of silence after his statement. I must look like a fish the way I am opening and closing my mouth in search of something to say.

Finally, I respond, though it's more shrill than I had intended. "What?"

"My first mate was a male. It was...I was mated to Richard."

"You're gay?" I can't seem to get the shrillness out of my tone.

"Bisexual."

"What...what happened?"

"You know that Richard and my birthdays are on the same day. We have always been best friends. The night before our birthday, we decided to go camping. Alistar had just found his mate and was busy and Jared was away on pack business. He wouldn't return until the next morning. So, Richard and I went out alone. We woke in the morning and figured it out." Father's voice becomes more and more choked, as if he is holding in a lifetime's worth of tears. "We were together that morning, but we stopped short of marking each other. We knew that we couldn't. You know how it is in the pack hierarchy. We have to continue the bloodline. We wouldn't have had such a big blow up about Xander and Devin if it wasn't for that." Almost to himself, Father adds, "I think that's why Richard freaked out with Xander and Devin's marking and mating. His son acting on something that he gave up."

Father took a breath, continuing his story. "We decided that it was for the best for the pack that we reject each other. So, we did. The pain was excruciating for both of us. We both fell to the ground and couldn't get up for several minutes. It felt like I had literally had my soul ripped from my body. And the bond did get weaker, but it never went away."

Tears begin to leak down my father's face, though he doesn't seem to notice. "We told everyone that we hadn't found our mates and then we were inducted as Beta and Gamma of the pack. We worked with each other everyday. Can you imagine having your mate right there, right next to you everyday, and not be able to do anything about it? Every touch sent the mated sparks through our bodies. Every look was so filled with longing that it had to be plain to anyone watching that we were meant to be. We weren't able to fight it all the time. We met in secret many times, needing to be together. Needing to share our love. We couldn't understand why the bond didn't stop. Why we were still drawn to each other.

"Then, Richard went on a visit to the Lone Wolf Pack. Their Delta had just died in a rogue attack and his daughter was too young to take over the position. Richard went to help out until she was ready. When he returned, he had Lauren with him. She was mated and marked by him. He had called me to introduce her to me away from prying eyes. He had told her about us and he wanted to help me get over the shock before he introduced her to the pack. Imagine our surprise when we found out that Lauren and I were mates as well."

"A trio..." I sigh out.

"Yes." Father runs his hand down his face. "We're a trio. But we didn't know that they were possible at the time. And, of course, the urge to mate and mark was so strong that we ended up, well you know."

I know and I definitely didn't want to hear exactly what happened. I mean, Zak, Charlie, and I had been together enough that I could fill in the blanks.

"After, I tried to get Lauren to reject me. I rejected her, which nearly killed me. It even seemed to affect Richard. But Lauren refused. To this day, she hasn't rejected me. Based on what Lucille said today, that is why we still feel the pull to each other."

"Wait, so was Mom your second chance mate?"

"No." He faces the floor, lost in thought. "She was my chosen mate. For three years, I looked for my second chance mate. But I knew that I'd never find her. Lauren hadn't rejected me. When your mother moved to our pack after hers disbanded, we became good friends. She was a year older than me and had never found her mate. She knew everything about Lauren, Richard, and me and was ok with it. We decided to become mates. She was such a good woman, such a wonderful mate to me for 17 years. But I never loved her the way a mate should. And the pull to Richard and Lauren never went away. I don't think that it ever will."

We sat in silence for a long time before Father spoke again. "I freaked out on you because I was scared for you. I didn't want you to go through what I've gone through all these years. Of course, I didn't know it was because of the trio thing. I thought it was the Goddess torturing me because of my sexual orientation. I should have known better. She would never do something like that. I'm sorry, Brandon. I'm sorry that my reaction pushed us away from each other. I love you so much. I just never knew how to fix it."

I walk to him, pulling him up and into a hug. We stand like that for several minutes before I whisper to him, "I love you, too, Father."

"Please, Brandon. Please call me Dad like you used to."

"I love you, Dad."

The tears drip from his eyes and onto my shoulder. But it doesn't matter. All that matters is that I have my dad back.

"Four years. Four long years we've wasted. I've missed you so much, Son."

"I've missed you, too, Dad."

After a few minutes, we move back to our seats. "The reason that I called you here tonight was to let you know that I want you to be happy. I know that since you're gay, your mate is going to be a male. I want you to know that I'm fine with that. I honestly just want you to be happy. Don't throw away your love like I did."

"But what about our bloodline?"

"I don't care about that - "

"But our family has been betas in this pack for generations. What will happen?"

"Charlie and Zak's second born will take the position. Or someone else will be elevated. It's fine, Brandon- "

"But, how can it be?" I was standing by this point, my hands clenched into fists. I don't really understand why I was fighting my Dad on this. This is what I'd always wanted, right? To be allowed to be who I was, to have a mate that truly fit with me. But I had resigned myself to the fact that I would never get that. I had already made up my mind that my mate would be female. My guilt and self-hatred had pushed me to accept that. How could I suddenly change that?

"It isn't fine! I've grown up my whole life knowing that I would have to provide an heir. And now, especially since Candy is gone, it is solely up to me. I can't have a male mate!"

"Brandon!" Dad grabs me by the shoulders and gives me a little shake. "I'm telling you it's fine. I don't care about that. And based on the fact that Xander and Devin are still Gamma and Delta, you'll still be able to keep your title. You could take your position. Hell, you could even adopt. Then at least our name will continue, if not our blood." I begin to relax in his hold, but my mind is still racing when he continues. "And I hope that you understand that I'm going to be with Richard and Lauren, if they'll have me."

I can feel the blood drain from my face. "You know what that'll do to us in the war? How many allies we stand to lose?"

"Brandon, I have loved Lauren and Richard for 20 years and haven't been able to be with them. I won't wait any longer. Now that I know that our union is blessed by Selene herself, I won't stay away from them, unless they reject me. I'm prepared to become a rogue"

I pull away from him, stumbling backward and falling back into my seat.

"I would never do anything to endanger you or this pack. If Lauren and Richard accept me, we will stay to help you prepare and then leave. I have the feeling that the Diana pack would take us."

"You just got done saying that you missed me for these past four years." My voice starts as a whisper, but grows in volume as I speak. "You said that you wanted to fix us! That you love me! And now, you're saying that you're going to leave me! For something you aren't even sure if it is going to happen!" I'm screaming by this point, but I can't stop it. He has to see that this can't happen.

But Dad is calm in the face of my anger. "I'm saying that I love you and that I want a relationship with you. But I'm allowed to be happy, too. And Lauren and Richard will make me happy."

That deflates me a little. He's right. He does have a right to be happy. But I can't think about that for myself. I was raised to do what was best for the pack. And what was best for the pack wasn't necessarily what was going to make me happy. War was already coming to our pack. I didn't need to make it worse with adding another homosexual mating to our ranks. It was my duty to carry on our bloodline.

"Dad, I'm happy for you. And I hope that it works out for you, that you find your happiness. You've done your duty to the pack. But now it's my turn to do my duty."

Dad tries to interrupt, concern and pain warring on his face. But I hold my hand up. "I respect your decision. I hope that you can respect mine."

Dad sighs, his concern evident in the way that he continues to rub his hands through his hair. "Son, I'll do whatever you want. But I hope that you'll reconsider."

I give him one last hug. "I know, Dad. I love you."

As I'm walking away, Dad calls my name. I turn to him.

"It's midnight. Happy Birthday, Brandon."