



## Chapter 7 - Brandon

Severn and I don't really talk much after I give him my advice. He seems lost in thought. Not pissed at me, like I'd thought he would be. More pensive and worried.

He knows I'm right, I can see it in his eyes. He's had to have felt it in his interactions with his mates, thought it after one of Corinda's blow ups.

Casen comes back about an hour after we finish eating. We're standing at the sink, washing the dishes when Severn turns around, an indecipherable look on his face. He opens the barrier and Casen walks in.

Severn smiles, relief plastered all over his face. But it flickers out when Corinda doesn't follow behind Casen. "Where's Rin?" Severn asks, looking at the open entryway.

I take a deep breath and try to look out the doorway, attempting to find any clue as to where I am. I immediately start linking Zak and Charlie to tell them what I smell, see, and hear. I smell hemlock, mulberry, sweet gum. There's a fox den nearby and I smell muskrat. It's damp, swampy. There's water about a mile away, I think. It's hard to tell because of the echoes from all the caves around. I can't really see much, just forest.

Good job, Sweetcheeks! Zak's voice is excited in my head. Any snow? Or do you smell any humans nearby?

No snow. It's quite warm. I doubt a human would even need a jacket. I respond.

That keeps you in southern states, somewhere east of Texas. Charlie says.



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Charlie says.

That's a lot of territory to cover. I respond.

Yeah, but you gave us something to work with. A swampy area with a network of caves. You've given us a variety of trees and animals to look for. We're going to find you. Zak's tone is determined.

I think I'm safe...at least until I see you. Severn is holding his mates back. He's keeping them on a leash. Corinda would burn the world to the ground and piss on the ashes. Casen...he's in between the two. He's still pissed, revenge feels good. But he wouldn't do anything drastic without Corinda pushing. Beyond the three day point...I just need to get home. I'm keeping my eyes and ears open for anything else that can help me pinpoint where I am, but Severn closes the barrier.

"Rin's burning off some steam," Casen says, then chuckles at his own unintentional pun. "Literally."

"Fuck! When will it ever be enough? They're all dead! We killed them! Can't we just move on now?" Severn's voice is loud and he kicks a chair, sending it flying into the cabinets.

"Sev!" Casen's voice is worried. He rushes to Severn's side.

Severn's shoulders start to shake, his hands cover his face, and his breathing becomes heavy and uneven. Casen wraps his arms around Severn, pulling Severn's head into his chest. I look away. I feel dirty, like I'm trespassing in this private moment.

"Why can't it be over?" Severn whispers into Casen's chest.

"Um...it seems like this is a private conversation. Maybe I should step outside?" I say, pointing to the barrier.

Casen glares at me, but Severn laughs. A loud bark of laughter in the midst of his sobs. He pulls away from Casen, wiping his eyes free of his tears. "Yeah, sure. Just take a little stroll while we figure this out."

Well, I accomplished part of what I wanted to. I genuinely do like Severn. Getting him to laugh is a plus. But I was really hoping that he'd be so upset that he'd let me out.

Casen looks between Severn and I, a scowl playing across his face. He's jealous. I can tell. Shit. That's not good. This will make my stay here a lot harder.

Casen moves in front of Severn, a snarl rumbling through his chest, his fists clenching by his sides.

"Look, Casen. I'm not trying to get between you and your mate. There is nothing between us, you don't need to be jealous." I stand my ground, but I put my hands up, showing that I didn't want to fight. "But Severn is hurting. He's hurting from what you and Corinda have made him do and he's told me about it."

Please can I tell them about Arya and Devin? I link to my mates.

I...I understand why you want to tell them, Charlie says. But...I don't think that you should yet.

We have a bad feeling that if you tell them...something's going to happen. Something bad, Zak says.

I get it. I have that same feeling. I know that Devin and Arya could help them. I know it deep in my soul. But I also know that they need to be ready. And right now? They're not ready.

"I just want to help you, that's all." I finish lamely.

"Really?" Casen says, his eyebrows quirked in a disbelieving squint.

"Well, that and to get back home to my mates. Charlie promised to fuck my brains out the next time she sees me." I shrug.

Casen tries valiantly not to laugh. But it doesn't work. Both he and Severn laugh so hard that they start to cry. I chuckle at them, happy that I could give them some relief.

Sweetcheeks, you're amazing. Zak links and I feel the love from both of my mates through the bond.

Casen and Severn straighten, wiping the tears from their cheeks.

"Shit, I needed that," Casen says on a sigh.

"Well, since you turned down my request for some fresh air, why don't you guys head out?" I suggest. "My mates said something about some link sex. You know, kind of like phone sex, but better."

Casen barks out in laughter again. "Yeah, man. We obviously have some things to hash out. What do you think? Thirty minutes?"

Forty-five. Charlie links.

I chuckle. "Charlie's asking for forty-five."

Severn grins. "I like her. I can't wait to meet her."



Yeah, they could have gone about it in a better way. Charlie's tone in my mind is sardonic and I can almost see the facial expression that she's using. She uses her sarcastic face often enough with me.

"We'll give you plenty of time. I can only imagine the pain of being away from your mates," Casen says, looking ashamed of himself.



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