

Chapter 13

Cody

262 pounds is my official weigh-in. I was curious to see if I cut enough weight. The last time I weighed myself I was 268. Dropping two pounds in a few hours isn't the greatest feeling, but it is doable. Working with Micco and Tess really helped in more than just my fighting. I didn't even have to limit my food intake. I lost 6 pounds in a week even with the traveling, alcohol, and Tess's amazing cooking. Not bad. Now I'm ready for an ass-kicking from my lovely trainer, Tess. "Let's get busy." She says as she tosses a crumpled paper at Holt's back. Holt looks over his shoulder and Tess tilts her head toward the door. Holt nods then follows us out of the room.

I have no idea what that's all about, but I quickly catch on that she's having Holt work with me. Even though he minutely struggles, he still keeps up. Holt is in the heavyweight division, but we're not fighting. I'm fighting Preston "the Piston" Miley. I don't know where the nickname came from, but It doesn't matter. My focus is on my training with Tess and Holt.

Holt gets tired right at the 80th pull-up but gets through it. "Damn, Denton. You are a mad woman. No wonder Alpha Micco is so well known." Tess makes a face at Holt, I guess she doesn't like being called a mad woman. "Alpha is a weird nickname," I comment. "How did Micco get it?" I ask after wiping the sweat from my face.

"My dad is the chief, but he's the strongest and best leader around." Tess boasts.

"My dad is the chief of our tribe too. She's not wrong he's pretty well known. I think he's even stronger than my dad. He has a pretty large tribe too." Holt adds on. Tess lifts her chin in pride.

"Push-ups boys. Let's focus on your training. After the warm up we're doing footwork. You're still a little slow, big guy." She pats my chest. I grunt, but we get focused back on the task at hand; getting my ass kicked by her training. After ladders and lines, Tess has Holt don the curved focus mitts since she knows I would hold back with her. Once I'm finished, she puts on a pair to work Holt. I barely hold myself back when I learn her plan, but she doesn't budge when he starts throwing solid punches. She's also quick and guides his punches.

"So, now you're training the both of us?" I ask while using the jump rope to speed up my footwork.

Holt grunts as he gets a hit to his forehead from not ducking low enough. "Only for now. He asked yesterday since he's new and doesn't have one. It works great because I can work with you both without you stressing about hurting me." She answers without missing a beat. "Holt you better start ducking or I'm going to take off your head." She kicks at his legs and he ends up on the ground. "Come on. You should've seen that one coming, I totally telegraphed that." Holt gets to his feet then Tess waves me in. We then move on to forms. We're not allowed to spar prior to the fight, but Holt and I are planning on sparring in the future. We're all sweaty and tired after Tess has worked us. We hit the showers then meet up for a big lunch then a nap.

"No more training for tonight. I want you both well rested. Eat foods that are light, but full of protein and vitamins. Stay hydrated. I know you get ring time tonight, but I want you to just lay on the mat. Jump around a bit and get used to the feel of it. I'll have you do a few exercises in the ring, but otherwise I want you relaxed." Tess's technique is far different than anything I've seen, but I'm not about to question her wisdom. She

told me of the training she does for her tribe, so I know she knows her stuff.

Holt's fight is two before mine at 2:45. I promised I would be there to watch him since Tess gets to be in his corner. Holt registered her as his trainer. He's such an odd character. I've always liked that about him, once he sets his mind on something, he sticks with his decision and works to make it happen.

Ring time proves to be a learning experience. Normally I would spar with my trainer, but Tess has us do a few lines with different footing and what she calls tuck jumps. "Alright guys, army crawl across the mat." "High crawls." Holt and I both politely correct her.

She rolls her eyes. "Whatever, you know what I'm talking about." She points out corners of the octagon, like when tightening bolts on a tire in the star pattern. She then has us handstand walk across the ring in the same pattern. Holt and I both fall several times. "Oh come on. You guys are kidding me. You should both be way more coordinated than this."

"Can you do it, Denton?" Holt asks as he falls again.

She crosses her arms and juts out her hip. "Tess. My name is Tess. Of course I can. I'm not going to make you guys do things I can't." Holt waves his hand clearly saying 'Be my guest.' Tess ties her hair into a bun then effortlessly upends into a perfect handstand. "Come on boys." She says then starts moving across the octagon with ease. Holt and I have our brows in our hairlines. I follow behind Tess, just at a slower pace. Holt follows just behind me. Although Tess said no more training for the night, I'm sweating by the time we're finished with our combined thirty minutes of ring time.

"I'm curious what else you can do, Tess. You never cease to amaze me." I comment as we ride up the elevator.

"I'm right there with you. I don't think anyone at my tribe can do this shit. Is Alpha Micco as lithe as you?"

Tess thinks for a moment. "Not as lithe, but he can do everything I can. Because of my size and shape, my form looks a little better, but he's the one that taught me. You should really see my dad do a corkscrew. His stall gainer is fun to watch too especially when he does it off a cliff." "Off a cliff?" I question.

"Yeah. There's water below. Just don't be on the receiving end in a fight. He knows better than to showboat, but if he's pulling out flips it's usually to surprise his opponent. You're not going to pull off a backflip if someone is barreling at you." I'm at a loss. I know some moves, but I never really trained them. "Will you be teaching us those things?"

"I think it's a good idea. Moves like those help with flexibility, coordination, and how to be light on your feet. Obviously we'll work on them after your fights. Holt, you can always drop by my tribe. Though I might not be there... Our plans are a little up in the air right now since we both have lives in different states." She looks up to me with concern in her eyes.

Our plans as to what we're going to do are still not in place. I'm actually thinking I could live with her in her tribe. I really don't have family tying me down. I can be a PE teacher anywhere. Willow hasn't started school yet, so she's not leaving friends behind. Tess and Willow are all I need. We could move to Antarctica and I wouldn't care as long as I have my girls. I hold her hand tighter.

Holt gets off at his floor leaving us alone in the elevator. "You're pretty quiet." She comments.

I pull her to me with an arm around her shoulders to kiss her hair. "I'm just thinking. We're pretty serious and it's been such a short time. Are we moving too fast?"

She shakes her head. "No. I think when you find your person, you just know. I trust my gut, so why question it? Are you worried that I'm going to back out? I won't. I'm completely, one hundred percent yours." The elevator opens and we walk to our room hand in hand.

I don't worry about her backing out. I feel the same way; I just know. "Tess, I'm not worried about you. I just want to be sure. I know I feel things with you that I've never felt before, even with Audrey." I hold Tess's cheek. "There's just something about you I can't put my finger on, but I know you're mine."

"I am yours, Cody. We were meant for each other." Her eyes are telling me there's more she wants to say, but I can feel her holding back.

"Tell me, Tess. I know you want to say something." I look back and forth between her eyes.

Her lip goes between her teeth as she begins to nibble. She lets out a soft breath. "Not yet. I want to tell you, Cody, but not now. Soon, I promise."

Her eyes have me mesmerized, they're so clear and bright. I give in with a slight nod. My phone rings startling me out of my trance I gently kiss her nose before answering. "Hello?" I ask without checking to see who is calling. "Cody. I just called to let you know that Willow has a fever. She's fine, but she's in bed resting." Jared sounds calm but concerned. Tess bites her lips and she has a look of worry.

"How bad is it?" Willow never gets sick, even as a baby. I have no idea what to do so I begin pacing.

"It's not so bad. Like I said, she's resting, but we'll keep checking on her. I know you have a fight tomorrow and I didn't want to worry you, but I would want to know if it were my child that was sick. I'll call you in the morning or if there are any changes." Jared only slightly calms my concern.

"Thanks for letting me know. I'm leaving as soon as my fight is over. We should be there Sunday morning."

"We?" Jared asks and Tess inhales a breath of surprise.

"Yeah. I met someone and I'll be bringing her with me to meet Willow."

"I don't think it's a good time to be bringing strange women around." I can hear the bitterness in his voice and it pisses me off.

I get that his daughter was my wife, but it's been five years. I need to move on. I don't give a damn what he thinks. Tess belongs with me, she's going to be Willow's mom. "I'll decide what's right for my daughter, and who I bring around her, Jared. You just make sure my baby girl is safe and healthy until I can be there to get her."

I can hear Jared practically growling when Naomi takes the phone.

"Cody." Her voice is gentle and soft. "Don't worry about Willow. We're taking excellent care of her. She's such an Angel. Just like you, we only want what's best for her. Please drive safely and we wish you well on your fight."

"Thank you, Naomi. Give Willow kisses and hugs for me. Please, let me know if anything changes."

"We will, Cody. Goodbye." She hangs up and Tess's arms are wrapped around me.

I take comfort in the feel of her as I rest my cheek against her hair and hold her tight. "I don't know what to do. This is the first time she's ever been sick, and I'm not even there to be with her."

"She'll be alright, Cody. It sounds like she's in capable hands. We'll leave right after your fight. In fact, let me drive. That way you can rest up so you won't be too tired to be with her when we get there. Okay?"

I like that plan. I don't want to be too tired to be with her. "Thank you, Tess." I wipe a hand down my face. "I just hope tomorrow goes by fast."