

Chapter 15

Holt's opponent lands a few blows, but Holt returns them. The entire first round Holt was in control, but I could see he was toying with the guy. He gets hold of the guy's arm and hits his face then ribs. Holt is fast, faster than he showed while working with me and Cody. The asshole, he was holding back. I cock my brow at him. He sees me out of the corner of his eye and gives me a smirk. "You son of a bitch." I whisper, knowing he can hear me, even over the noise. Holt gets the guy into a submission hold and presses his knee into the guy's leg. The opponent tries to get free, but he's not going anywhere. Once the guy finally realizes he's been beaten, he taps out. Holt gets to his feet to stand next to the referee. After a moment, Holt is declared the winner.

I cross my arms and shake my head at him as he steps out of the ring. "What's wrong, sweetheart? I won didn't I."

"You played me and Cody. Some friend you are."

"I'm a great friend. In all fairness, I only faked a little. James is strong and you are still impressive. Our match was real."

"So we're evenly matched?" I ask as we move back up the ramp and into the locker room.

"Unless you take into account my size."

I roll my eyes and start cutting away the tape. "I don't. Remember I train with guys your size on a daily basis."

Just then Cody slips his arm around my waist and shakes hands with Holt. "Nice job, Holt."

"Don't think too much of his match. The asshole was holding back on us the whole time. He's faster and stronger than he let on."

Cody looks between me and Holt. "Is that right?" Holt just shrugs his shoulder. "Well, you've always been a beast. I need to steal Tess away, I actually do need her ringside."

Cody never ceases to amaze me, he's so kind and laid back that nothing ever seems to bother him. I'm in absolute awe. Holt's little stunt really pisses me off, but Cody isn't even fazed. "What are you thinking so deeply about?" Cody grabs my attention as I tape up his hands.

"You," I answer then meet his eyes. "You're so perfect. There isn't a damn thing I don't like about you."

Cody chuckles and shakes his head. "I'm far from it. You, Darlin'. You are perfect."

"I hold grudges, I hate being wrong, and I don't like misogyny. I can't cook pork without it drying out. I curse like a sailor and I have an attitude, especially around males that fuck around when it's time to be serious." I tell him bluntly.

"Leave the pork to me. I love your attitude and it's usually deserved. Misogyny is out of date and pig-headed. No one likes being wrong as long as they're not too proud to admit it when they are. There's a distinction between time to play and time for sobriety. I don't mind your mouth as long as you keep it PG in front of Willow and you let me kiss it as often as possible."

"Okay, fucking swoon. This is exactly what I mean. You're perfect." I grab his gloves and help him get them on.

"I've made a decision that you might not like." I look up to await what he has to say. "This is my last fight. I'm not renewing any contracts and I'm not signing with any sponsors."

I don't know what to say. We've bonded over training and I need a strong mate, alpha or not. "Why?"

"I never told you this, but the only reason I started fighting was because of my wife. The first two months after she died I was empty inside, I felt nothing. I had Willow, and I love her, but I was just going through the motions. I would leave her with her grandparents over the weekends. I used that time to wallow. I got into a lot of drunken bar fights and I realized that was the only time I felt anything; pain. One weekend they went out of town and I didn't get the chance to get hit, instead I sat around and watched the fights." I say nothing as I mull everything over. "Are you upset with me, Tess?"

I shake my head as I grab the Vaseline to spread on his face. "It's your choice. I'll be supportive of whatever you decide, but training is important to me. It's been the center of our relationship since the beginning."

"Our relationship is far more than training, Tess. I have you now, I no longer need the pain. Just because I don't want to be a fighter anymore doesn't mean I'm immediately going to stop training. You still have a lot to teach me, and I still want to learn to throw those knives of yours. Maybe one day I can take on Micco." He says that last part with a bit of jest in his voice.

I can't help but smile up at him. "I love you, Cody," I say with all sincerity.

His eyes smolder as he stares deep into my soul. "I love you too, Tess." I step into his arms and he kisses me with pure honest love. He pulls back and I spread the Vaseline just as the announcer calls his name. "Let's do this, babe." I nod and he pulls me along by my waist, not letting any space between us.

Cody gets into the ring and he looks straight at me. "You can do this, Cody. I know you can." His eyes penetrate and I know he's ready. He gives me a serious nod then turns to face his opponent, "The Piston."

The Piston studies Cody with a deep intensity. The men move to the center of the ring and the referee starts the match. Cody dodges a few swings then lands a three-hit combo to the Piston's abdomen before quickly backing up to dodge a swing. The two circle each other Cody swings landing blows to his face. The Piston throws an elbow catching Cody in the chin. I hiss as I watch my mate take two more blows, one to the eye. It's not split, thank the Goddess, but he stiffens up and takes another blow to the face.

"Focus, Cody. Stay loose and light on your feet." I yell out, hoping he can hear me over the cheering crowd. Cody adjusts his stance just in time to dodge a blow and land three body shots of his own.

The men continue on through the first round. "How am I doing?" He asks as I check his face and gloves.

"You're stiffening up. Stay relaxed and trust in yourself. Your body knows what to do, It's what we've been working on. Stay on your toes, remember. Stay light on your feet."

Cody listens and begins to have the upper hand, much to the Piston's irritation. His frustration shows and he begins to make more mistakes. Cody lands a hard blow on the guy's kidney. The Piston pulls away and kicks at Cody, but Cody catches his leg and maneuvers him to the ground keeping hold of his leg. "Yes! Figure four." Cody moves fast and gets the Piston's leg into a figure-four leg lock. The Piston tries to hold off, but Cody adds more pressure and the Piston taps out. "Yeah, Babe! Woo!"

I'm jumping up and down as the referee declares Cody the winner. As soon as the gate is open I jump into his arms and wrap my legs around him. "I'm all sweaty, babe." He laughs into my ear.

"I don't care." Cody laughs again. He practically carries me up the ramp to the locker room. He gives me a quick kiss then I help him out of his gloves and tape. Cody showers, signs paperwork then grabs my hand to head to the truck. Everything was loaded first thing this morning and we had an early checkout. We stop for gas and burgers then I drive us the hell out of Vegas.

Cody's adrenaline is still pumping, but I know he's going to crash, hard. "Why don't you give Willow a call and let her know you're on your way? Then you can kick back and sleep."

"You're brilliant." He tells me then kisses my cheek. I turn down the air for better hearing as Cody calls Willow. "Hey, Naomi. Yeah, we just got on the road, we should be there around eleven tomorrow morning. Is she awake? No, don't wake her. I'm going to sleep while my girlfriend drives, but I'll call when I wake up if it's not too early. No, no, that's fine. Alright, thanks a lot. Yeah, you too." Cody hangs up then lets out a breath.

"She's asleep?" I ask, but of course, I heard everything Naomi said.

"Yeah. Her fever is still going. If it doesn't break by the time we get there, I'm going to take her to the hospital."

"Poor thing. I hope it breaks. Are they doing anything to make her more comfortable?"

"Yeah, Naomi has been using cool compresses and fever meds. She really doesn't want to eat or drink anything so they're giving her Pedialyte just to keep her hydrated. She's not throwing up or anything, so that's good." "That is good." I agree.

I think the excitement is starting to wear off. Cody is fed, his daughter knows we're on our way so he's not so stressed out, and it's quiet, the perfect recipe for a long nap. Cody settles into his seat and tilts it back. "Wake me up if you get tired. We should top off in Ely, then one more

time before we leave Nevada. We should make it to Twin Falls before filling up again. That's about the halfway mark."

"Sounds good. Leave it to me. You get some sleep." Cody sits up to kiss my cheek then settles back in. After a few minutes, his hand finds my leg and his breathing evens out. "Sweet dreams, my mate," I whisper then push the pedal harder. I remember my mate is human so I ease off the accelerator a little, but still drive faster than humans would.

I stop in Ely around 9 pm to top off and grab a coffee. When I get back to the truck, Cody is still asleep, but his hand is searching for me. I slide in the cab and rest his hand on my thigh. He visibly relaxes and I start the truck for the next stretch of the drive.

I don't mind staying awake to drive, it's not the first time I've had to stay up all night. Usually, it's for a guard shift. Driving is a bit more tiring, but I'm handling it. Cody's truck gets excellent highway mileage so just before midnight, I stop to fill up in a small town south of the Nevada/Idaho border named Jackpot. I adjust Cody's blanket, tucking him in then stretch before grabbing food, water, and another coffee. Again I hold Cody's hand on my thigh and he relaxes deeper into his slumber.

An hour later I hit Twin Falls and follow my GPS toward Boise. Judging by the mileage, I can make it without stopping, so I push through making it in two and a half hours. Cody looks so peaceful so I don't bother waking him, instead just keep going. Once he wakes, I'll let him take over the rest of the drive.

By sun up, we've made it to Cottonwood and I pull into a gas station/McDonald's to fill up again. Once the truck turns off, Cody stretches and looks around. "Where are we? What time is it?"

"Cottonwood. It's almost 6." I tell him.

"Damn, you made good time." We both get out of the truck and stretch.
"Grab some food and I'll fill up." He suggests.

"Let's go in and eat. I need a break from the truck, my ass is sore." Cody laughs but agrees.

I order food while he fills up then moves the truck into a parking space. We both hit the bathroom then sit down for breakfast in the uncomfortable booth. Cody's arm is wrapped around me and he kisses my head. "I'll drive from here. You get some sleep."

"Agreed. How much farther do we have to go?" I ask between bites of an Egg McMuffin.

"We're actually going to Coeur d'Alene. Willow's grandparents have a vacation home there. It's about 3 more hours, Then we'll go home to Spokane which is about another hour." I just nod. I'll be sleeping through the drive anyway. "Thank you, Tess. This drive usually takes me almost a day because I have to stop to sleep."

"It's no trouble at all. I just want Willow to have her daddy."

He beams down at me then kisses my head. "I love you."

I smile then lean more into his body. "I love you."