

Chapter 16

"Tess, wake up. We're here." Cody rubs my arms then kisses my cheek. I grunt then sit up and look around to see we're surrounded by woods. This is not what I expected at all. I thought Willow's grandparents lived in a rich suburb, not in the middle of nowhere that's more reminiscent of my pack. The house is spacious with woods on every side, but I can hear a creek close by. The house is two stories with more windows than walls. I absolutely love it.

I wipe my eyes and pull my hair free from its bun. After checking my face in the mirror and pulling my hair back out of my face, I join Cody as he opens my door for me. "You look beautiful. Come on." I roll my eyes but follow behind as he pulls me along to the door to knock.

A woman who looks to be in her early 40's opens the door wearing jeans and a button-down flannel shirt. "Oh, Cody. You made it here early. Come in. Willow is upstairs, first door at the top of the stairs." She seems pleasant enough, but she's no woman, she's a werewolf. Cody moves into the house and she locks eyes with me. She and I both look at Cody in confusion.

"Naomi, this is Tess." He makes the introduction.

"I'm his mate." I offer, no longer holding back my relationship. Cody looks at me for a quick moment of confusion, completely missing that Naomi's brows go to her hairline and her mouth opens in shock. She quickly gets her emotions in check then glances between the two of us. He shakes it off. "I'm going to go see Willow."

"Tess, would you like some coffee?" Naomi offers. I accept and Cody nods before taking the stairs two at a time. "His mate?" Naomi softly says.

I nod then follow her to her beautiful kitchen. "I guess Cody has no clue what you are?"

"No. We've never mentioned it to him." She sets a mug and a carafe in front of me with sugar and cream. I fix it to my liking then take a sip.

Just then I feel a powerful wolf enter the kitchen behind me. I automatically get to my feet to greet him. Once I see him, I blast out a sardonic laugh. "Councilman Hudson." I nod in respect.

"Tessalee. What brings you to our home?" I've known Jared Hudson my whole life. He is one of the few that actually recognizes my status. He and my grandpappy are the best of friends, although, I never knew he had a daughter. "Naomi, this is Marco's granddaughter, Tess." He introduces.

"Oh. I've heard so much about you. Jared, Tess was just telling me that she and Cody are mates." Naomi supplies.

Jared's reaction is the same as his mate's. He recovers his shock quickly and looks between the two of us. "Um... Wow. Your mate is human... How...?"

"I have no idea. So Cody was married to your daughter? I never knew you had a daughter."

Jared sits beside his wife and pours a cup of coffee for himself. "Our daughter Audrey was born a runt. She didn't have a wolf. When she met Cody, we weren't surprised to learn he was human. When she said he was her mate, we never thought anything of it."

"Were they really mates if neither of them had a wolf? I assumed he's human, he's clearly not a runt, he's huge." I vocalize my thoughts.

Naomi answers me. "We were never sure, they never bore each other's marks. She was certain, but without a wolf, how can there be mates? Cody knows nothing of our kind."

"True, but I'm positive he's my mate. No offense to your daughter, of course."

"Of course." Jared agrees.

"That's why you gave up being the Alpha? Because your daughter didn't have a wolf?" I ask, trying to be respectful, but needing answers.

"That's correct. Having a daughter that was without a wolf called my power and authority into question. I left the pack to my beta and we moved out here. Your Grandpa Marco knew about our situation. He pressed for me to be on the council so no one would question my leaving. Does Marco know about your mate being...?"

I answer before he can get his question out. "My dad and Holt Lancaster are the only wolves that know. Holt served with him in the military and we ran into him at the fights in Vegas. They're friends and he supports Cody. Jared, the elders in my pack are pushing for me to take a chosen mate out of the few single males in my pack. It's not supposed to be known yet, but I found out just before meeting Cody. They're voting on it at the next elders meeting later this week. My dad and I agree that Cody could be the Alpha."

"You're a Luna. That puts you in a precarious situation." I nod as Jared mulls that over. "A human has never been included in a pack, let alone be named Alpha. Cody is a strong, genuine guy. I'm not sure how it's going to work. Have you told Cody about Weres?" Jared asks.

I shake my head. "Not yet. He doesn't even know we're mates, except just now when I told Naomi. I'm sure the word has no meaning for him. I was waiting for the timing to be right, but... We haven't mated yet. He wants Willow's approval first."

"Well, I think you need to meet Willow, then. She'll be able to help you out." Jared offers. Now it's my turn to be confused. "Come on. She's your daughter now, or will be soon." He watches me as I stand. "I'm glad

it's you, Tess. If it were anyone else..." He shakes his head. I smile then follow behind him. "When Cody mentioned he met someone. I was pretty upset that he would betray my daughter's memory, but this is different, isn't it."

"I think so. He told me about Audrey. He has nothing but love and respect for her. He even wears his ring on a cord around his neck." I inform him as we make our way up the stairs.

That seems to placate Jared. "That doesn't bother you?"

"No, of course not. I don't think he would be the same person without her. Plus she gave him Willow."

Jared softly knocks then opens the door. "Cody." He greets quietly.

Cody looks up at us, Willow in his lap hugging him around his neck. He softly smiles at me then whispers to Willow. "Sunshine, there's someone I want you to meet."

Willow turns her head to look. She softly gasps. "You're like me."

I look at Jared revealing my shock. I quickly gain control and put a smile on my face then turn back to the little girl. Slowly, I step forward to kneel beside the bed. "I am. My name is Tess."

"Are you Daddy's?" She asks curiously.

I can't help but genuinely smile at her question. "Yes, sweetie, I am." Willow reaches out to me so I stand to take her in my arms and she rests her scorching head on my shoulder. Cody smiles up at me then slides over so I can sit beside him on the bed. "How are you feeling?" I ask as I run my fingers through her sweat-soaked hair.

"I don't feel good." She squeezes me tighter.

I place a kiss on her head. "I know sweetie. I know. We got here as fast as we could. Your fever shouldn't be too much longer."

"You'll stay with me?" She tilts her head so her huge, innocent eyes meet mine.

"Yes, of course." Willow yawns, her hand covering her mouth. "Would you like to lay down or do you want me to hold you?"

She reaches her hand out to Cody. He instantly takes it. "Will you both lay with me?"

"Of course, shortcake. I think that's a great idea. Tess drove all night so she needs a nap too." Cody moves the covers back while I kick off my sandals and slip down into the bed, still holding Willow to me. I rub her arms the same way my mom rubbed mine. Her eyes close and her breathing evens out.

Naomi hands Cody a damp cloth to pat her forehead and neck. Willow shudders but stays asleep. "Looks like we're staying here for a while. I hope you don't mind?" Cody asks of Naomi.

Jared answers. "Of course not. You and Tess are welcome to stay as long as it takes." He gives me a pointed look. "Tess?" I look up at Jared. "You'll know what to do?" I nod. Jared nods then he and Naomi leave, closing the door behind them. "I'm surprised everyone has taken to you so easily. When I told Jared that I was bringing you, I thought he was going to explode." Cody says as he slips into the tiny bed, sandwiching Willow. I scoot as far back against the wall as possible to give him just a little more room.

"I've actually known Jared my whole life." Now it's Cody's turn to be shocked. "He and my grandpappy are friends," I explain. "This little one, though." I kiss her head again. "She's just a bowl of sugar, isn't she?"

Cody looks proudly over his daughter with that smile he has only for her. "Yeah, she is. I'm glad she's taken to you so well. She usually doesn't like strangers."

"She's smart." Lying here with my mate and Willow, I feel so content, so complete. I wouldn't trade them for anything. I speak softly to get his attention. "Cody." He looks into my eyes waiting for me to speak. "Would it bother you if I said I love her already?"

Cody sits up so he can reach me over Willow. "Nothing would make me happier." He whispers then kisses me gently. I let out a breath then lay my head on the pillow. Willow squeezes me tighter and I let my eyes close