

Chapter 17

Willow's whimpers wake me. Cody has left the room so it's just the two of us. I press the damp cloth to her head. "It's alright, sweetie. I'm here, you don't need to be scared." She slowly opens her eyes to look at me. "I don't feel good." I move her sweaty hair out of her face. Her fever feels like it has subsided. "Is your body tired?" She slowly nods. "Are you thirsty?" Again she nods. "Okay, sweetie." I raise my voice only a little, I know Naomi will hear me. "Naomi? Willow's fever broke. She needs something to drink, please."

"Daddy doesn't know about us. Is he going to be scared? Will he hate me?"

I stroke her puffy little cheek. "No sweetie. He could never hate you. He might not understand at first. He'll be surprised for sure, but he'll never ever hate you. How do you feel, do you think it will be soon?"

"I don't know. My body is tired, but I want to go outside to run."

I nod in understanding. "We're going to need to feed you. You'll need all of your energy. I think tonight is your night. It's a full moon tonight, you know." Willow's eyes go large and her lips tick up into a smile similar to Cody's. I hear someone walking up the stairs so I put my finger to my lips. Willow nods and we wait.

The bedroom door opens and Cody walks in carrying a glass of juice of some kind. "Hey, Sunshine. Grandma said you might be thirsty." I help sit Willow up so she can get a drink.

After a few sips, she pushes the glass away and Cody holds her in his lap. "Where did you go, Daddy?"

"Just downstairs to talk to your grandpa for a minute. Your bed is a little small for all three of us to fit." He answers easily.

"Yeah. You're a giant." She touches his face paying particular attention to his eye. "You got hurt again." Cody leans down and Willow kisses his purple eye. "All better?"

"Thanks, short stack. All better. How are you feeling?" He runs his hand over her forehead. "Your fever is gone. Do you want to go home now?"

Willow looks to me then back to Cody. "I still feel yucky."

"Maybe we should give her one more day before we leave," I suggest. I know this is the best place to be right now.

"I don't want to intrude on Jared and Naomi's hospitality. We live less than an hour away." I can see Cody's determination.

"Try to get him to stay, Tess. They live in the city, she needs to be out here." I hear Jared tell me from downstairs.

I scratch Willow's back, knowing she heard him also. "What do you think, kiddo, do you want to go home right now?" Willow shakes her head no. "Her fever just broke, it could come back. Jared and Naomi are her grandparents, I highly doubt they would run us out. You told me before that they rarely get to see her."

Cody lets out a frustrated breath. "I guess my girls are teaming up on me. Alright, we'll stay if it's alright with Jared and Naomi."

I kiss Cody's cheek, then Willow's. "Are you hungry, little one?"

"Oh, yes. I'm really hungry. I could eat a whole grizzly bear." I giggle with my nose scrunched.

"Cody, would you mind asking Naomi for something to eat? I'll get Willow cleaned up and dressed."

"Alright. I need to ask if we can stay anyway. Don't be too long, you two." He kisses both then leaves the room.

After a quick bath and brushing through her beautiful hair, we head downstairs to the kitchen where Naomi has a nice spread ready for a late lunch. Willow holds my hand, guiding me to sit with her. Cody and Naomi switch seats so he's sitting beside me. "Jared and Naomi are allowing us to stay," Cody tells me as I scoop high protein-filled foods onto Willow's plate.

I look to our hosts. "Thank you so much for your hospitality."

"Of course, Tess. You're most welcome any time." Jared tells me. I see the sincerity in his eyes and I smile in thanks. "Willow seems to like you."

I smile down at her. She leans closer to my side while chewing her food. "I like her," I say with a wink. Cody's arm goes around my shoulders and we enjoy our lunch with the conversation about Cody's training and fight.

"Tess's dad, Micco is the toughest guy I've met, that includes the championship fighters. I think he could take them easily." Cody tells Jared.

Naomi and I work to clear the dishes and clean up lunch, then we move to their family room that is situated at the back of the house. The room has panoramic accordion doors that look over the creek I heard trickling earlier. Jared opens the doors while Naomi offers me a seat on a plush sofa. I like her a lot, she's very kind, but she tends to let Jared do the talking. Submissive wolves are usually like that with their mates.

"Micco is known across the country and into Canada. He's skilled in weaponry as well." Jared continues our conversation. Cody takes up the space beside me and I lean into him. Willow sits in my lap and I check

her head for any fever, though I know she's through that stage. Willow has Cody's phone and she's playing a game, keeping her occupied.

Yeah, I've heard his nickname is Alpha." Jared and Willow both give me brief looks, but if Cody catches on, he doesn't say anything. "Tess is pretty skilled in throwing knives. She's promised to teach me."

Jared looks pointedly at me. "I think that would be wise, especially with the other suitors trying to claim her position. You'll need all the skills you can get under your belt." Cody and I both growl. "Will you teach me?" Willow asks, cutting the tension.

I look to Cody in question, she is after all his daughter. "Maybe when you're older, Sunshine." He answers. I nod in agreement. I started learning when I was nine, just after my mom died. My dad was just like Cody after her death; empty. Training overtook his existence. Luck for me, I was old enough to join him and learn the skills I have now. We bonded through training.

"Marco has told me how skilled you are after watching you train. He says he's never seen anything like it." Jared comments and I fill with pride. My grandpappy doesn't give compliments easily, so for him to say something lets me know that he is proud of me.

"Who is Marco?" Willow asks.

"Marco is my Grandpappy. He and your grandpa are friends." I explain.

Just then, Willows gets to her feet and begins pacing. Her animalistic side is creeping in. This is it, there's no keeping our secret now. Jared looks at me and I give him a nod. "Cody, would you like to take a quick walk with me? There's something we need to discuss." He looks at me in question but gets to his feet and pulls me along with him. I squeeze his hand as we follow the creek away from the house until we are completely alone. "Everything alright, Tess?" He asks as we stop near a large bend in the creek.

"No." I answer. I take a few deep breaths then turn to face him. "My secret. I have to tell you. Now. Before the day is over and the moon begins to rise." Cody takes both of my hands to kiss in reassurance. "I don't know where to begin, so I'm just going to try to explain it the best I can." My heart is beating rampantly and my mouth has gone dry. I lick my lips then take a steadying breath before looking up to meet Cody's beautiful eyes. "I love you, Cody and that's never going to change." He smiles so I continue. "It's never going to change because we were meant to be together. You're my mate."

"Yeah, you said that earlier to Naomi. I thought it was an odd word choice." He tells me, clearly waiting for more information.

"Yeah, it's a weird word choice if you're human."

Cody kind of chuckles. "Are you saying you're not human?"

I bite my lip and slowly nod. "That's exactly what I'm saying. My tribe is actually a pack, my father is the Alpha, and I'm a werewolf. As are Jared and Naomi."

I wait for Cody to say something. His mouth is slightly parted and his brows knit as he thinks over my words. "Um..." He closes his eyes then runs his hand over his face. He opens his eyes and looks at me dubiously. "Tess, I'm... not sure where you're going with this. I've got to say it's one of the weirdest conversations we've ever had. Why are you saying things like that, it's not like you." My shoulders slouch, he doesn't believe me. With my eyes closed I shake my head, trying to figure out what to do. He runs my arm and shoulder. "Tess?"

I open my eyes to look at him. "I know you don't believe me, but it's the truth. I'm not making it up. Werewolves are real and I am one."

In the South they would say, "well bless your heart." That's the look Cody is giving me right this moment as if I'm a simpleton and my

elevator doesn't quite go to the top. "A werewolf. Alright, well, I'm going to go back and check on Willow. She seemed a little agitated."

"She's a werewolf too." I blurt out, but end up biting my lips when he cocks a brow at me while clenching his jaw. Oh, fuck, I just touched a no-no button.

"Tess. Don't say such ridiculous things about my daughter." He warns, but he needs to know what to expect.

"She's getting her wolf tonight. That's why she had the fever and now she's acting the way she is."

Cody practically growls. We're passed that no-no button and landed right into the rip your arms off and beat you with them stage. I lift my chin, not willing to submit. "You don't know anything about my daughter. Whatever this little werewolf world is, needs to stay the fuck away from her. In fact, I think you should take your time before returning to the house." He glares at me as he does an about-face and stalks off back to the house.

I drop my head into my hands and squat down in frustration. That could've gone better, but we're not exactly trained on how to tell humans about us. I wipe my eyes and look toward the darkening sky. Shit