

Chapter 20

Jared makes a call to Micco and puts the phone on speaker. "This is Alpha Micco Denton." He answers.

"Micco. I'm with Tess and her mate. We have quite the predicament." Jared tells him. I swear I can practically hear Micco sweat.

Tess shakes her head playfully at Jared. "Stop screwing with him. Hi, Daddy. We're all fine. Cody isn't in trouble or anything... well, not yet." Tess then explains the situation in detail, including Willow's shift.

Jared takes over speaking. "Micco. There's a part that Tess left out. When I was holding Cody down, he gave me an Alpha command to let him go, and I did. I've never seen that in a human."

Micco gets quiet as he thinks things over. "Cody. You need to decide two things. One are you staying in my pack? And two, if you are, are you willing to step up to be the Alpha as Tess and I planned from the beginning."

I never really thought about being in charge of anything. I'm not a leader, especially to a pack of werewolves. I know so little of their kind. Tess's thumb runs across my knuckles and I look at her. She's trying not to look at me, it's my decision to make and she doesn't want to influence me one way or the other, but I can still read her like a book. She was born to be a leader. I know how much she wants this, I can't take her pack from her. She has the utmost faith in me, If she thinks I can do it, I would be a fool not to try. "I love Tess and she was born to lead the pack. I'm willing to step up for her and my daughter."

"Alright, then this is what we'll do." Micco, Jared, and Tess make plans and I listen intently to every detail, putting in my two cents where warranted. By the time we end the call, it's close to midnight.

Naomi leads us to the guest bedroom beside Willow's. Tess and I shower together then lay down to sleep. I can see the worry on her face so I kiss her forehead and pull her tight against me. "It's going to work."

"Cody. Our entire world, minus a small handful, is against us. If one thing goes wrong, I could lose you forever and Willow could lose her father. This is serious and you need to be one hundred percent sure that this is what you want." "I am one hundred percent sure that you and my daughter are all that's important to me. I can do this, Tess."

She looks deep into my eyes. "I know you can. I've known it from the beginning."

Resting her head against my chest, I rub her back in long slow strokes. "Get some rest, my mate. We have a lot to do tomorrow."

She smiles up at me with love in her eyes. "Goodnight, big guy."

We begin my training bright and early with the standard run and calisthenics. Tess joins me and I'm not at all surprised by her stamina. After a quick match with Jared, he begins showing me how skilled he is with knives, although his is different form of combat style than I'm used to. Tess and I are both already trained in combat knives, but we listen attentively to what Jared says. "Fighting a wolf is an uneven match for you, because of tooth and claw, but a knife can even things out." He repeats Micco's theory from last night.

I watch as Jared and Tess begin their match, with knives. Jared takes the time to explain his moves as he's doing them. I ask any questions that come to mind, then Jared shifts and Tess shows me how to fight a wolf with and without knives. Seeing a man shift to wolf right before my eyes still has me reeling, but it's something I quickly need to become

accustomed to. I'm going to be fighting them soon. The goal in fighting a wolf is always either submission or death. As a soldier, I understand the implications of the situation. If it boils down to it, it's my life or theirs, and I can't lose.

Tess is an amazing fighter and Jared is panting by the time she gets him to submit still in her human form. Jared's wolf shakes out his fur and enters the house leaving me with Tess. Now, it's my turn to fight. When we first met, I didn't want to fight her because I was afraid I would hold back. Now, that thought is still in the back of my mind, but Tess is strong and I know she can take me. She's much faster, but patient while teaching me. I did use knives in the military, but never on a wolf. I'm glad for my previous training, or this whole plan would be a bust.

We break for lunch and I'm already pretty tired. Tess looks at me with concern. I squeeze her hand. "It'll be fine, Darlin'. I just need to get used to this."

"Mommy, are you going to teach Daddy how to throw your knives? I want to watch."

"You can watch, Sweetie, that would be fine. We're going to practice after we finish eating."

"Yippee!" She says while clapping her hands.

"Finish your lunch, Short stack," I tell her and she tears into her chicken nuggets.

True to her word, Tess shows us how amazing she is with her kunai. Even Jared is impressed after she hits every target in quick succession while running through obstacles. In the end, there are two targets left behind her. She glances over her shoulder then spins and throws hitting both targets.

Willow rushes to collect the blades, but I stop her. "These blades are dangerous, Sunshine, even for wolves."

"I'll teach you when you're older, remember, I told you I would. But Daddy is right, these blades can hurt even us." Tess reminds her and Willow nods then returns to sit beside her grandmother where she can watch.

Tess reminds me how to hold the knives correctly for both throwing and fighting. We only played around with them prior to my fight, but I was never serious. I focus and listen attentively to everything she says. After the first two bounce off the target, I finally get them to stick, but I'm nowhere near the bullseye. She corrects my stance and goes over how to aim properly and I'm able to get every throw to embed into the target. "I love that you're such a fast learner." She comments toward the end of the day.

"It makes sense. The way you are with kunai, I am with a handgun."

"I'll have to get you some ammo. We get it specifically made, jacketed and hollow point, but also embedded with wolf's bane." She holds up her hand. "Before you ask, silver bullets aren't going to do anything that a regular bullet can't do. That's Hollywood. Silver does nothing to werewolves. Although werewolves are more likely to survive a gunshot wound, it still hurts like hell and can kill if you aim right." She gives me a cheeky grin. "You were going to ask, weren't you?" I shrug my shoulder. "Guilty. Can you blame me? I just learned about your existence yesterday. You gotta give me a little credit for not freaking out entirely."

Tess reaches up on tiptoe to plant a kiss on my jaw. "You really are incredible, Cody."

I can't help but shake my head. "You are the incredible one. You never cease to amaze me. You're so smart, skilled, and sweet. The moon or whoever paired us together did me the biggest favor." "Ugh, would you two stop all the lovey-dovey crap. It's enough to drive us all crazy." Tess and I both startle at the sound of Holt's voice. Jared is standing beside

him just watching and listening. "What are you doing here?" I ask as I shake his hand.

"Tess told me about you two being mates, I came to show my support." Holt shrugs his shoulders like it's no big deal, then crosses his arms over his chest, waiting for me to say something. As if I would turn him away. Then it dawns on me. "You're a werewolf too, of course you are," Holt smirks with a wink. I could smack my head. He practically told me so in Vegas when he said his dad is the chief of his tribe, and the fact that he and Tess were acquainted because of that. Now I wonder just how many I've met in my lifetime.

"Does your dad know where you are?" Tess asks.

"He still runs the pack just fine. Besides, I'm making allies. It never hurts to have friends in other packs, especially Alpha and Luna friends.

"Great. You can spar with Cody. He tries not to but still holds back against me. We're working with knives." Tess throws three of her kunai at once. Each one barely misses him as they embed in the tree he's leaning against.

Holt flinches then looks over the daggers with a whistle. "Damn, Tess. I've heard stories, but I always thought they were a bit embellished. Guess they're not." Holt pulls each of the knives free then inspects the blades. "Wolf's bane. You don't fuck around."

"That's a bad word." Willow admonishes from her seat on the back porch.

Holt's eyes go large. "My bad. I didn't know there was a kid." He turns to see where Willow is sitting. She's far enough away that a human child most likely wouldn't have heard him. He tilts his head. "Huh. That's an interesting development." He waves to Willow. "Sorry kiddo, didn't see you there. Uncle Holt will try not to say bad words." Tess holds back a laugh. "Uncle?" I question.

He shrugs. "We were brothers in arms. Why not?"

That's the Holt I know and love. I pat his shoulder with a chuckle of my own and Tess swiftly gets us back on track. "Holt, can you shift so he can practice with your wolf, please."

"You got it, Sis." Tess rolls her eyes, but I can tell she likes Holt. He's always been pretty endearing. Holt shifts into a massive black and gray wolf. He's bigger than Jared. I remind myself that this wolf is Holt and let go of any apprehension and we get to work.

Holt, Tess, and Jared spend all their time working with me and by the end of day three, I'm confident that Micco's plan will actually work. Wednesday night, Jared and Holt help me load all of my stuff from my small house in Spokane into the back of Holt's and my trucks. We hug Jared and Naomi goodbye then set off for our new home in Tess's pack. We plan on staying at the cabin until Friday morning, just before the elders have their meeting.