

## Chapter 22

I know we've been gone a long time, but I'm enjoying the one-on-one, we haven't had it in a while. After round two, Cody and I decided to cool off in the pool before we stumbled into round three... which occurred in the water. My body is satiated as I lay with my head on his chest while he plays with my still-wet hair. "We should probably get back soon."

Cody hums, but continues to lazily curl my hair around one of his fingers. "So, what happened? How did you heal my neck?"

I peek up to my mark. I love seeing it on him. Cody is mine for all werewolf-kind to see. "I actually don't know. I just had the sudden urge to lick your mark and it seemed to work."

"When it happened, I swear I could feel your fear. You began to panic and it almost overwhelmed me." His arm is behind his head and he bends one of his knees up comfortably.

"That's normal," I tell him. Then I remember just how little he knows so I begin explaining. "Once we mated, our souls were united. Our scents have mixed so everyone will know we're mated. We can feel each other's presence more acutely. We'll know if each other is hurt. Also, we should have a mental link, but I'm not sure how much of that will be true for us."

"Because I'm human." I feel Cody's apprehension. "Are you disappointed? That I'm not a wolf?"

I sit up and turn so I'm leaning over him. I want him to see in my face the truth of my words. "Not at all. Not even when I first met you. I questioned how it could be possible, but not once did I ever think about rejecting you. You are my match. You're mine. Besides, you're very

much an Alpha, we just have to figure out how to get it to come out of you."

Cody smirks lovingly at me. He reaches up to stroke my cheek. I press my face into his palm. "I love you, Tessalee Denton."

I shake my head. "It's Johnson now." Cody's smile widens. "I love you, James Cody." He sits up to kiss me again.

"You are seriously the most beautiful woman." I can almost guarantee that was accidental, but the fact that he linked me surprises and excites me.

"You're pretty hot yourself, big guy." I feel his surprise as well as see it on his face. "You linked me. You're actually able to link me. I didn't think that would be a possibility."

His mouth opens and closes. "I don't even know what I did."

"You projected your thoughts to me. Sometimes if you project enough, you can also send visual thoughts. Don't worry, I can't read your mind or anything, I will only receive what you send to me. If you don't want me to know your thoughts, just don't project it." He subtly shakes his head, not quite following me. "Basically, you have a link with anyone you have a connection with. For example, I have a link with my dad because we're family, but he has a link with everyone because he's the Alpha of the pack. I'm sure you'll figure it out."

"So, should I have a link to Willow?"

I shrug my shoulder. "I don't know. Normally I would say yes, but..." I close my eyes and feel for her. It feels like she's there, but just out of reach. It feels kind of like when you have words on the tip of your tongue. You know what you want to say, but you just can't quite make the connection. "I feel her, but I can't quite grasp her. Huh. I think I'll have to ask my dad about it when we get back, it's all so new to me. Speaking of... we really should be getting back." Cody huffs, but nods.

He grabs our pile of clothes then pulls us to our feet. He holds our clothes in one hand while holding me against him. "You know, I've never seen your wolf." He comments out of the blue. "Would you like to see her?" I offer.

His eyes smolder as he nods. "Very much." I step back and shift before him. Cody doesn't flinch. I slowly move closer to him in my wolf. He reaches out to run his hand through the fur of my thick mane. His fingers curl and he squats down so we're at eye level. "You're beautiful, Tess. Your fur is so soft and thick."

"Thank you. My body is built for speed. I'm the fastest wolf in our pack."

"I can see that; your dad's wolf was bigger if I'm not mistaken." He answers aloud.

"That's correct, he's built for strength and speed. There are a few guards that are thicker than him, but they're also slow."

"How fast can you run?"

"Well, the fastest I've hit was about 47 miles per hour, but that's short distances. Endurance-wise, we can outlast a normal wolf. Cody, do you think you could recognize me in a group from a distance?"

Cody stands tall and looks me over. "I think I could. It's interesting, your coloring and Willows are pretty similar."

I lick his hand happy that he sees the similarity. "I noticed. But she has whiter on her tail and my face has more silver. Her colors won't change much as she grows."

Realization strikes his face. "You like that she calls you mommy, don't you?"

"I do. Does that bother you?"

Cody squats back down and holds my face. "Not at all. I'm actually relieved that you two have a good relationship so quickly." I grumble from him stroking my neck, it feels so good. He softly chuckles. "You like that, huh?"

"It feels amazing. You're stroking my mark." I tilt my head and turn my muzzle away so he can see it. His finger traces the outline. I quickly turn back and lick his mark before he has time to react.

A deep, sexy growl emanates from within him. It turns me on so much I tackle him to the ground then quickly shift back, lying naked on top of him. "That sound has a pretty profound effect on me."

I feel his erection growing firm against my thigh. "You surprised me, Darlin'. I didn't think you would change back so soon, but now that you're on top of me..." I cut off his words, pressing my mouth to his.

"Hey, kiddo. I have an issue to deal with. Holt will stay with the tyke. I'm sorry, but I really need to get back." My dad links me and I grunt.

"You have awesome timing..." I deadpan. Daddy doesn't respond. I push up off of Cody and grab my clothes. Instantly I feel his disappointment. "I'm sorry, but we really need to get back. My dad had to leave. He left Willow with Holt." "I'm not sure if I should be worried, but honestly I'm not. I guess our runtime is over." Cody grabs his clothes and pulls them back on. He then offers me his hand.

"Only for now. I'm already addicted to your body."

Cody smirks then pulls me in for a quick kiss. "Right back at ya, Darlin'." I lead the way back to the cabin. "Tess, what's the plan for your big return? Are you going back tonight or are we showing up as a family in the morning?" "My dad wants me back tonight. I think I'll bring Holt with me to get him set up in the guestroom."

"With your mark, people will think he's your mate." Cody bitterly responds.

I see his point and I understand his concern. If I show up marked and alone it would be suspicious and everyone would question me. If I don't show up tonight, the elders won't know that I've found my mate. It's not like they can do anything to me anyway, but they can hurt Cody. "I think that's his plan as a way to protect you."

"I don't like it, but I'm not going to go against your dad. I respect him and trust that he knows his pack." I'm relieved that Cody is on board, but I wonder what my dad is up to. Why would he rush away?

Holt and Willow are sitting in the rocking chairs when we return. Holt nods when he sees us. Willow jumps to her feet and rushes toward us. "Daddy. Mommy. Uncle Holt and Grampy said bad words because I won playing goldfish." Cody picks her up.

Holt's face goes red and he scratches the back of his head awkwardly. Cody cocks his brow. Holt shrugs then gets to his feet. "I have food on the stove. I figured you guys would be hungry from your vigorous activities. Willow and I already ate." He winks then goes into the cabin. We all follow behind him.

"Did my dad say why he had to rush away?" I ask Holt while eating grilled cheese and tomato soup.

"Something about a stone causing trouble... I dunno." Holt answers.

"Oh shit." I close my eyes and sink into my chair. Cody takes my hand and I look at his questioning face. "Stone is Griffin's grandfather."

"Griffin is the wolf that chased me, right."

"That's right. Stone is my dad's biggest critic. He fights him at every turn." I look back to Holt. "You ready to pay a visit to my pack?" Cody squeezes my hand. "So soon?"

"We'll go when you're finished," Holt answers.

I drop my spoon. "I'm sorry, big guy. If Stone is causing trouble, I should really be there. It's one night. I'll send Holt for you both in the morning.

Okay?" Cody nods and I bend down to kiss his lips. "I love you." I kiss Willow's hair. "Be good, sweetie. I'll see you in the morning."

"Bye, Mommy."

I kiss Cody one more time then grab my bag. Holt is already in his truck waiting for me. "She's a sweet kid."

"Yeah, she is. I already love her like she's my own." I admit and buckle in.

"Well, shall we?" Holt starts his truck and drives off.

Silas and Parker are guarding the gate when we arrive. Silas approaches my window with a smile on his face. "Tess. How was Vegas?" His smile drops as soon as he catches my scent. "I guess it was pretty eventful."

"You could say that. It's good to be back though." I answer with a smile. Silas nods and steps back allowing us through.

I'm getting Holt set up in a guest room when my front door bursts open.

"You fucking whore! You ran off to Vegas and mated some guy?" Indy walks in with her sister Val. "Silas told us as soon as we got back on territory from our shopping trip, so don't fucking deny it."

I roll my eyes and walk out of the guest room to greet her. "Don't be a stupid twat. I didn't just mate anyone, I found my true mate. But we'll talk about that later. What's been going on here? Fill me in."

Indy plops on the couch and kicks her feet up. Val takes up the armchair.

"Well, for starters a few days after you took off, Griffin went missing. Elder Bram has been beside himself and claims that Alpha is behind it."

"Missing?" I look between the two.

Indy continues. "Yeah, it's pretty weird, but the rumor mill says he's been locked up in the dungeon."

"Tess, do you have towels?" Holt asks but stops short as soon as he enters the room.

Indy looks him over with approval. Val's eyes are locked on his and her cheeks are rosy. Indy smirks at me. "Wow, Tess. He's..."

"Mine!" Val cuts her sister off and slowly gets to her feet.

"Val. This is my friend Holt Lancaster, the next Alpha of the Rocky Mountain Ridge pack in Colorado. Holt this is Valarie Morris, the Beta's daughter." I introduce and Holt gives her his charming smile. Indy is looking between the three of us. "Okay, what the fuck? If he's Val's mate, where the fuck is yours, Tess?"