

## Chapter 23

Leslie and Beta Morris invited me and Holt to dinner at their house. Me as a welcome back, and Holt as a way to get to know him. I was hoping Holt's mate would be human, but I'm more than happy for Val. She's a great girl, and I love her like a sister really. It's just that I can't be the only one to have a human mate. I close my eyes and concentrate on Cody. He's content, but I can feel the slightest bit of worry as well. "I love you, Cody. Holt found his mate." I tell him. I feel his love wrap around me, filling me up. "I love you too, Darlin'. I miss you already. Does he have a good match?"

"I think so. Val is very sweet and calm. She's the Beta's youngest daughter. I think she'll even him out perfectly. Val has always been the quiet but observant type."

"Then I'm happy for him. What is a Beta, though?"

"I am too. The Beta is the second in command. You'll meet Donnie later on. He'll be your Beta once you take over the pack. Holt and I are going to the Beta's house for dinner. Give my sweet girl a kiss for me when you put her to bed. Link me if you need anything. I miss you too, but it's just for tonight, hopefully." I finish my conversation with Cody then link my dad to let him know where I'll be. He only answers with a generic "K." I roll my eyes and Holt and I pull up to the Morris's house only to see Dad's truck here too.

Leslie gives me a hug. "We've missed you. Your dad has been here every night for dinner so he's been well taken care of." She tells me and I introduce her to Holt. "Everyone is out back. You know the way."

I lead Holt to the backyard and everyone gets quiet as soon as they see him. Val wastes no time in making sure everyone knows he belongs to

her by jumping into his arms and nibbling his neck, receiving a laugh from Holt. Val may be reclusive, but her wolf is dominant. I leave the lovebirds where they are and join my dad.

"Well, there goes that part of my plan." He grunts.

I shake my head. "He smells nothing like Cody."

Dad shrugs his shoulder. "First appearances. It's all good though, our plan is still in place."

Indy plops in the bunch on the opposite side of the table. "So, are you going to tell me, cunt?"

I roll my eyes but proudly tell her. "His name is Cody. He and his daughter will be here in the morning."

Her mouth drops open. "His daughter? He was sleeping around before he met you? The nerve!"

"No." I reach out and grab her hand. "He was married before meeting me. She died giving birth."

Indy gets an odd look on her face. "Married?" Oops. "That's a human thing... Oh, my Goddess, your mate screwed a human... ewe."

"Leave her alone, would ya? Goddess, it's amazing Tess puts up with your shit." I stand up and hug Donnie. "Your dad filled me in. I know all about your mate. I'm on your side, Tess." He whispers into my ear and I relax letting out a held breath. "Thanks, Donnie. How is Trish?"

"Any day now. I'm only here because of Val's mate and to let you know I'm still your Beta no matter what. There's no one else I would trust this pack to. I'll be around tomorrow morning."

"Thank you so much. I'm so glad to have your support." Donnie gives me a nod then heads over to congratulate Val.

Indy huffs and crosses her arms. "Fine, ignore your best friend."

"Indy. Tess's mate will be here tomorrow. You can hound him all you want then. Leave Tess alone. She's under Alpha's orders not to discuss her mate any more than his name and he has a daughter. Leave it." My dad tells her. She knows better than to go against the Alpha, so she reluctantly drops the subject and I can see how bad it's killing her.

"Fine. At least tell me about Vegas. I'm still pissed that you didn't take me by the way." That's my Indy. I chuckle and tell her everything I can without mentioning Cody. Holt and Val join us as we all eat dinner.

Jerry sits beside me. "I'm on your side, Tess." He says as he sits down. "No one else knows anything yet, other than Marco. The rest will have to wait until tomorrow." He chuckles. "I can't wait to see the bastard's face when he finds out." "Which bastard exactly?"

"Stone. I've been having fun fucking with him." He says with a wink.

"Exactly how have you been fucking with him?"

Jerry looks to my dad then back to me. "I signed off on Griffin's stint in the dungeon. He got 30 days for what he did to Cody. Stone thinks he's above the rules. Honestly, I think he should be banished for his behavior to our Alpha, but your dad is too much of a nice guy." Dad grunts a laugh.

"So, it is true. Griffin is in the dungeon?" Indy asks having heard everything. "And what did he do to Cody?" Jerry runs a 'zipper' across his lips and Indy sinks down in her seat. "Granddad, come on!"

"Alpha's orders I'm afraid, my dear. Just you relax, you'll get your gossip soon." He winks at her knowing dang well how much she's dying to know everything.

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Jerry and everyone at our table looks up as Donnie howls and bounces in excitement. "Trish is in labor!" He kisses his mom then takes off and I can't help but smile.

Ben offers everyone a round of shots and everyone takes one, except Indy. I eye her suspiciously. She bites her lip and looks away saying nothing. "Now who's being a cunt? You're pregnant! You fucking whore, you didn't even tell me!" Her face turns red and everyone stares at her. " Surprise." Everyone cheers and takes another shot.

"You know, you two are going to have to clean up those mouths with all these tots running around." Jerry chides and Indy and I look at each other. We both smirk and bust out laughing knowing dang well we aren't going to change. We only talk like this to each other anyway.

Maybe Cody will have to get after me... Maybe a punishment here or there isn't such a bad idea. My cheeks color and I squeeze my legs together. I have to get some self-control before my scent changes. I clear my throat and I can feel Cody all over my emotions. "I'm going to excuse myself. I have to be up early for my mate." I say my goodbyes and dad join me.

"I'll be over later if that's alright?" Holt asks.

"Of course. Take care of Val." I say with a wink and we head out.

Holt never makes it back to the house. I wake up early and make breakfast and coffee. I'm bouncing in anticipation of Cody and Willow's arrival. Dad walks into the kitchen and heads straight for the coffee. "I have your house set up. I figured since you have a family now, you would want a place of your own."

I'm a daddy's girl through and through. The idea of ever leaving him breaks my heart. I haven't discussed anything with Cody, but I don't want my dad to live alone. This house is large enough for all of us plus a

few guests. "I don't want to move out. I haven't talked to Cody about it, but I can't leave you. You would starve."

"Talk to your mate first. Let me know what you decide. I'm happy to have you here." He kisses my cheek then grabs his keys. "Holt's truck just pulled through the gate. I had Parker let him in. I don't think he suspected anything." I nod and Dad kisses my head and we wait outside for Holt to pull up.

Willow is the first one out the door when they pull up. "Grampy!" She says and runs up to him. He chuckles and picks her up to hug her. I hold my hands up like wtf? I cock my brow at him and he smirks at me, loving the attention. "Hi, munchkin." He kisses her cheek then sets her down. I squat down to get a hug from her next. "Mommy. Is this our new home?"

I bite my lip and look at Cody. His eyes are piercing as he stalks forward in a black tank top and dark jeans. My mouth waters. He cocks his brow at me and I'm done. I rush forward and practically jump into his arms. He holds me tight and inhales my scent. He holds my cheek and kisses me deeply.

"You're staying here for now, munchkin. Go on in and pick a room." Dad tells Willow and she rushes off. "Cody, I need your arm," Dad tells him.

Cody stops kissing me but doesn't let me go. "My arm?"

"Yeah, I need to mark you as one of us. You and Willow both became part of the pack once you mated Tess. It's just a formality. All males get marked once they're of age." Cody holds out his arm and Dad slices his bicep with his claws. Cody only grunts as four scratch marks begin to bleed profusely. I get Cody to set me down then lick his arm. The scratches begin to heal until they're scabbed over. "Huh. That's interesting." My dad comments.

"I had to do it to his mate mark too. I was so scared; I thought he was going to die." I inform him.

Dad thinks about it then nods. "You two get inside. I have to get to that meeting." He kisses my head then pats Cody's arm and heads out.

"My dad has a house for us, but I would rather stay here. I don't want to leave my dad. He'll be so alone. My room is on the opposite side of the house anyway. There's plenty of room." I tell him as I pull him inside. Holt is already in the kitchen with a cup of coffee and a fresh mate mark. Willow is upstairs, I can hear her playing with some toys. "It's up to you, of course. I just want you to be comfortable."

Cody kisses my hair. "I'll be comfortable wherever you are. If your dad is fine with having all of us in his home, then we'll stay."

"Really?" I ask hopeful.

Cody chuckles. "Really. And if we ever need alone time, we have the cabin and the waterfall." He says with a wink.

I love him more and more every day. After showing him to our room, we join Holt and Willow for breakfast. "So, what are your plans now, Holt?" Cody asks between bites.

"I'm staying here the weekend then I'm taking Val home with me," Holt says as he pours himself more coffee.

This is such a mundane conversation compared to the elder's meeting. I'm dying to know what's going on. I'm so nervous. Cody catches my shift in mood and takes my hand to give me comfort. "The meeting?"

I nod. "Yeah. I'm just worried."

"I know it, Darlin'. No matter what happens, we're in this together. I'm not leaving you. No matter what."