

Chapter 25

Cody

I'm fucking nervous. Tess squeezes my hand, picking up on my emotions. I love having her as a mate. The bond makes things a thousand times better. I can feel her. The more I think of her, the more I feel, and I'm getting pretty good at the mind-link thing. Micco linked the both of us to let us know the elders wanted to meet me. Tess only agreed as long as she could be with me. She's just as nervous as I am.

The building is the size of a regular house with three steps leading up to a porch. The corners are covered in stones, while the rest of the building is white. There's a bronze circle with a symbol I don't recognize just above the door. The building could pass for a bank or maybe a city hall would be a closer comparison.

"Cody. Don't pay any attention to the beady-eyed bastard. He just wants his grandson to be the next Alpha." Micco tells me as Tess opens the door. I should really call him Alpha, but he introduced himself as Micco and he is my father-in-law. This is a formal meeting, so titles are probably used. I enter the room and look over the twelve men. Some are curious, some are apprehensive, and one looks downright pissed. I quickly realize which one is the beady-eyed bastard Micco is talking about.

Micco stands beside me. "Elders, may I present Cody Johnson and you all know Tess." Micco turns to me. "Cody. These gentlemen have some questions for you. Please answer truthfully and as accurately as possible." "Yes, Alpha," I answer then turn to face the men.

"What makes you think you should be our Alpha?" The bastard asks.

"I'm sorry, I don't know anyone in this room. May I have your name, sir?"

Micco steps forward. "My apologies, Cody." One by one Micco goes around the room making the introduction ending on his father, Tess's Grandpappy Marco. I nod to each in turn.

"To answer your question, Elder Bram, I don't think I should be your Alpha. I think Tess should be your Luna. Because she is my mate, I'm prepared to help her in that regard." "How is a human mated to a Were?" I believe that is Elder Hanley that asked.

I shake my head. "I'm not sure of that, sir. All I know is that when I met Tess, I was drawn to her more than any woman I've ever met, including my late wife. You don't know me, so you can't understand my meaning. I thought my wife was my soulmate. We had an instant attraction and I fell for her quickly. With Tess..." I look at her and she nibbles her lip and I feel her love fill me up. "With Tess, it was like there was no one else in the world. Her touch set me on fire, her scent, her voice, her eyes. Everything about her was like a call straight to my soul." I look around the room and some of the faces soften as if they're thinking of their mates.

"Tell us about your daughter." One of the elders says. I can't remember his name, but he's next to the Beta and they look like father and son. At first, I'm concerned, but then Tess smiles and I understand the elder means no offense. "My daughter is a werewolf, like you all. I only just found out Sunday evening when she shifted for the first time." I slowly shake my head remembering that whole ordeal. I'm so glad Tess was there to help her. "Willow's mother, I found out after, was a runt. Her parents raised her as a human. If she had any knowledge of your kind, I was unaware."

"It wouldn't matter, runts are still werewolves. She would've been in no danger from the council." Tess's Grandpappy says. I remember his name is Marco. "Did your wife mark you?"

I shake my head. "No, sir. We had a regular human marriage. She died while giving birth to my daughter. I'm a widower, well, I was." I look at Tess and she smiles.

"I don't care about some sob story. He said it himself, he doesn't want to be Alpha, so why are we even discussing this?" Ah, bastard, got it.

"Excuse me, Elder Bram. Please don't twist my words. I said that Tess should run this pack and I would support her in any way I can. If that requires me to become the Alpha, then that is what I will do. I will take on anyone that poses a challenge. I have to consider the safety of my mate and my daughter. I want them to have the best life possible. They both need a pack and I need them."

"What happens if you lose a challenge?" Elder Nunez asks.

"Then I lose a challenge. The Alpha should be the strongest, most powerful male in the pack, if I'm not mistaken."

"And you think that's you?" The bastard won't shut up.

"I'm Alpha Micco's son-in-law, Tess's mate. But more relevant, Tess is his choice and therefore so am I." I look to Micco and he nods in approval.

"You were a soldier, Alpha Micco tells us." The one that asked about my daughter, I think he's Elder Morris, comments.

I nod. "Yes, sir. I joined the Marines the day I turned 18. I was a soldier for 6 years until I lost my wife and I was discharged to take care of my daughter." I leave out the drunken mess part of my story.

"I refuse to support a human as my Alpha." Bastard Bram grunts.

"Then leave. No one says you have to stay here." Elder Nunez responds and I think I like that guy. Elder Bram growls. "In fact, I'll help you pack for your trip. Don't worry, I'll take care of that pretty mate of yours." Nunez continues, setting Bram off.

Bram bursts from his seat to attack Nunez. I pull Tess behind me out of the way as Nunez goes blow for blow with Bram. "Cody, watch how they fight," Micco tells me.

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"You're not going to stop them?" I ask as I watch carefully every move they make. Nunez is clearly the better fighter, but Bram is more vicious.

Micco shrugs his shoulder. "I wasn't planning on it. Those two have history and I love it when Stone gets his ass kicked, it doesn't happen often. His grandson fights in a similar style. If you have any challengers, it would be him. But, if you want to stop them, be my guest."

I decide to stay back until Nunez shoves Bram into me and my elbow into Tess. A growl escapes my chest. "CUT IT OUT!" I yell, then turn to Tess to make sure she's alright. "Darlin', I'm so sorry. Are you okay?" She's rubbing her left side, just under her breast. "Yeah, big guy, I'll be fine. It wasn't your fault."

I comb a stray hair over her ear and kiss her forehead as I pull her into me. I reach under her t-shirt to caress where she was rubbing, until she softly smiles at me then kisses my jaw. It's then that I notice the room is silent. I look over my shoulder to see what's going on, only to find everyone staring at me with open mouths, except for Elder Bram whose jaw is clenched and eyes are squinting, and Micco whose arms are across his chest and he's looking at me with pride. "Guess that answers that question." Elder Morris says. He looks around the room. "I'd say this was a pretty productive meeting. Shall we adjourn until next time?"

"Agreed," Micco responds. "Meeting adjourned. We will meet again in three weeks following the visit from the Council." He opens the door and offers for Tess to exit first. She takes my hand and pulls me along. "What happened?" I ask no one in general.

"You proved that you're the next Alpha," Marco answers from behind us. Tess stops so he can catch up. "Come here kiddo. I haven't seen you in ages."

She giggles then throws her arms around him. "Hi, Grandpappy."

"You've been busy, haven't you?" He comments as he muses her hair.

"You're not kidding." She tells him as she pulls her hair free from the usual messy bun. "Did Daddy fill you in or was it, Jared?"

"Both, actually. Jared gave your mate here a pretty good character reference." He holds his hand out. "Marco Denton."

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I accept his handshake. "Cody Johnson. I'm glad to meet you."

"Well, kiddo, Cody. Should we get some lunch? I'm starving." He suggests and we all head over to Micco's place. I guess it's our place now too.

Willow greets us by jumping into my arms as soon as we open the door.

"Daddy! Are you in trouble for not being like us?"

I pick her up. "No, sunshine. I'm not in trouble."

She looks at Marco. "Are you Grandpappy?"

Marco smiles. "That's right, little one."

Willow leans into his arms so he catches her. "My family keeps getting bigger. It was just me and Daddy, and sometimes my grandpa and

grandma. Now I have a mommy, a grampy, an uncle and now you. Next, do I get a brother?" Micco laughs out loud and Marco looks between me and Tess. Tess's eyes go large and I pull my lips between my teeth. Tess kind of giggles and I pull her into my chest and kiss her hair kind of liking the idea of her carrying my child. We all join Holt and Val in the kitchen where Val has already started making lunch. Tess introduces Holt to Marco and we all take turns playing with Willow.

After lunch, we all go outside for training while Willow is inside with Val. Behind the Alpha's house is a grass clearing with a fence, kind of like a horse corral, but not as high. Holt, Tess, and I go for our five miles then our exercises. Holt then volunteers to spar with me in his wolf while I have my knife and Tess's kunai, which I still need more practice using. Micco, Marco, and Tess all watch our every move and comment whenever warranted. They give pointers to Holt as well. Overall, I'm gaining more confidence in my abilities, that is until Marco steps into the corral while removing his shirt. I have no clue how old he is, but he's in great shape. He removes his slacks so he's in his fighting shorts. "Cody you're impressive, but I can see you're used to sparring with Holt. Holt, go ahead and shift back. I'm going to spar for a little while." Marco cracks his neck and shoulders. He takes his stance and we're sparring in human form.

Sparring against Marco is tough, but I can tell he's not holding back with me. After a while, he begins shifting back and forth from human to wolf. Micco explains what to do as he's shifting so that I can trap him into submission before he can even pounce. It's hard because shifting is so fast so there is only a small window. Every time Marco shifts and I'm not able to get him to submit, he gets more difficult to spar with. I'm getting tired and a misstep gives Marco the opportunity to tackle me to the ground with my throat in his mouth. I freeze. I've never felt anything like this. His teeth slowly pierce my neck and I can't do anything to stop him.

"Where are your knives, Cody?" Tess calls out and I'm reminded that this isn't some wild beast that has my throat. I'm able to break out of my stupor. My knives are in my hands and my hand is under his thick, heavy body. I flick my wrist so the blade in my left hand would pierce his belly. Marco releases me and I relax on the ground.

Marco is sitting on his haunches watching me as I turn my head in his direction. "I thought you were going to kill me for a minute there."

"Don't stop fighting until you know for sure you're done. Submit if you can, but be aware that you might not get a chance to. Depending on who you're fighting, you may not get the chance." Micco tells me. He offers me his hand and pulls me to my feet. I get their meaning completely and for the first time, I realize this shit is for real.