

## Chapter 3

Birds chirping and a bee buzzing near my ear wake me up. My head is pounding. I might have been a little more than tipsy. I don't even remember shifting back. How many shots did I take? I sit up and groan, the pounding getting worse. I can barely keep my eyes open, the light hurts too much. I crawl my ass to the stream to splash water on my face. My hair is in my face so I finger comb it then pull it back into a very messy bun. I painfully dress then stand on wobbly legs. I know I'm a long way from our territory because of the stream, but I'm in desperate need of some painkillers. Wolves heal quickly, but hangovers still hurt like a bitch. I squint toward the direction of the hunter's cabin, maybe he left some behind. I'm in human form so I'm not exactly a target right now. With my plan for pain relief set, I start stumbling toward my destination.

The cabin isn't far away, maybe a 30-minute walk from here, but since I can barely see or stand up straight, I'm sure it's going to take a bit longer. Ah, man. Dad is going to be pissed if I'm not back in time for training. Goddess, I hope I'm sober by then. I've trained with a hangover before, but it's not very Alpha-like behavior.

As I near the cabin, the breeze kicks up and blows the warm air into my face. It's refreshing and I take a moment to inhale the forest air. I stop in my tracks. What the hell is that smell? I sniff again. Oh goddess, it smells so good; like the perfect combination of sunshine and linen, but something more, maybe

sweat? Not the stinky kind, but the subtle sexy kind that glistens on a male's chest after a hot steamy shower. I inhale again and let the scent lead me forward.

"Tess, where are you?" My dad's voice calls through the mind link. "I went to wake you and you're not here. I had to make my own coffee, and it tastes like shit."

I laugh imagining my dad choking down his crap coffee. "I got a bit wasted last night. I'm in the woods."

"I hope you won't be too long. You still have tots to train." I grunt at the reminder. I really want to skip it, but a hangover isn't a good enough reason.

The breeze picks up again and that scent caresses my senses like silk sheets. I gasp suddenly aware of what it is exactly I'm smelling.

"Daddy, I smell him! I smell my mate! Do I have permission to find him... off territory?" I bite my lip in anticipation. Please, oh Goddess, please!

"Off territory, huh? Tess... you know better." He scolds me through the mid-link, knowing exactly where I am. "Permission granted." He allows with an annoyed huff. "Good luck and be careful. I'll have Griffin fill in for you today. You know how much he loves working with the tots."

I laugh at my dad's sarcasm, then close my eyes and inhale the deepest breath. Goddess, he smells better than I ever could imagine. I let his scent guide me closer to the hunter's cabin. What the hell? Why is my mate out here? I'm so confused,

there's not another pack territory for miles. It can't be the Hunter, the guy was old as shit. Yuck. I shake my head and get closer to the cabin. Soon I hear a sharp thud then a clamor. The sound repeats at an almost steady pace. What is going on? There's definitely someone here. It has to be my mate.

I'm not paying attention to my surroundings and I end up getting screwed. Rusted metal grinding alerts me just before the sharp jaws clamp through the skin of my left leg. I scream and drop to the ground. Holy mother of the Goddess! I sober instantly and actually look at the damage. I'm stuck in a fucking bear trap! The sharp teeth are buried deep into my skin and blood is flowing steadily down my leg. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!" My bones feel like they're intact, thank the Goddess, but it hurts like a mother fucker!

I can hear someone tromping through the woods toward my direction. The sound gets closer just before a bulky male bursts through the trees. His body is incredibly fit and tanned. His scent is what I've been chasing. Mate plays on repeat in my head. He's my mate! He's fucking hot and oh, Goddess... human. "Oh shit! Hang on, don't move." He kneels beside me to look over my leg. I bite my bottom lip as his voice sends shivers through my body, this is not the time to be getting freaky. My leg is locked in a fucking torture device and I'm bleeding everywhere.

He analyzes the contraption. "I'm going to pry the jaws apart. Do you think you can move your leg out?" He crouches closer to me and his scent is like a drug and I'm itching for a fix. I'm clenching my jaw in pain, so I nod a reply. "Alright, ready?" I

whimper out and nod. "1, 2, 3," I scream as the blades slice more of my skin as they're pried out of my leg. The pain is excruciating, I have the need to bite down on something, anything. His shoulder is the closest thing and I automatically sink my teeth in.

He grunts but doesn't say anything about it. "Okay, I need you to move your leg." I focus on his instructions and let go of my grip on his shoulder to pull my foot back. The contraption snaps closed with that same sickening metallic sound. My mate pulls his black t-shirt over his head then wraps it around my leg. "The nearest hospital is pretty far away, but I have a med kit, I can take care of you, alright?" I nod and he scoops me up. My arms naturally hold around his neck and shoulders, my head resting on his firm chest. I feel safe and content in his powerful arms.

Inside the cabin, he carries me to the sink and sets me down on the counter. He ever so carefully removes my shoe then turns on the water. He removes the now blood-soaked shirt and the pain shoots through me again. I bite down on his shoulder again. He moves my leg under the water and I let go of his shoulder to look at my leg. "Let the water rinse it out. I'll be right back." I nod and he disappears through a doorway.

I watch as the water rinses my blood down the drain. I've never really been squeamish, but my leg is throbbing and I'm starting to feel sick. My mate returns quickly so I focus on his gorgeously sculpted chest and the gentleness of his touch. He has a firm chest covered in light brown hair. It's very attractive to where he's not too fuzzy, but just enough for the hair to be soft. He's wearing a black cord around his neck with a titanium

band dangling in the center. It catches my attention and I'm able to speak for the first time. "Why is your ring around your neck?" I ask as he surveys my injury.

I feel his eyes on me so I look up to meet his gaze. His brown eyes are soft. "It's my wedding band." He answers as he begins to dry my leg. I drop my gaze. My heart is crushed more than my leg. I finally find my mate but he's already taken. I'm absolutely devastated. I swallow down the hurt and watch his hands move with practiced skill because it hurts too much to look at him.

He clearly knows what he's doing. How could my mate be married? How could my mate be human? I honestly don't care that he's human, but he doesn't recognize me. I'm a Luna and this human is meant to be my Alpha? How? What did I do to piss off the Goddess?

I can't resist the pull I feel for him as my eyes trace over his chest. I then let my eyes wander up to his. His eyes glance at mine as if he senses me looking at him. "She passed away, so I wear it around my neck instead of on my finger." He tells me in a soft, respectful tone.

Hallelujah! Thank the Goddess! Woo! Hope returns instantly. I gasp in a breath but quickly gain control. I bite my lip to keep my smile from my face. Damn, I'm a heartless bitch. My mate was married and here I am celebrating that the woman is dead. After seeing my dad go through the loss of his mate, I do feel sympathy for the guy. I clear my throat. "I'm sorry for your loss."

I hear a soft hum in his throat. "Thank you." He clears his throat then continues to speak. "It's been a while. Audrey died during childbirth. At least I got my daughter, though."

He pulls bandages from his kit and begins wrapping them around gauze pads he placed on my wounds. "You seem to know what you're doing."

"I was a field medic. I don't think you need stitches. You should be able to stand on it in a day or so."

"You have a daughter," I state the obvious, not quite knowing what to say. His lips tick up into a pleasant smile, but he still concentrates on what he's doing. I hiss as the bandage gets tighter. He loosens it just a touch, then continues. I remember that I bit him, twice, leaving behind two imprints. "I'm sorry about your shoulder," I tell him with warm cheeks.

His eyes glance to mine and his lips tick up again. "It's fine. I know you were in pain." I feel my cheeks heat up even more. He opens a cupboard then fills a glass with water. He opens another cupboard then places some pain relievers in my hand. I swallow them down. He takes the glass from my hand and sets it in the sink. He scoops me up then gently lays me on the sofa. "I'm Cody. Cody Johnson." He tells me as he sits on the coffee table in front of me. "Tessalee Denton. I go by Tess."

He slightly nods. "What were you doing out here by yourself?"

"Walking off a hangover. My home isn't too far from here, maybe an hour run. I was at the bar last night trying to keep my mind off of my crazy life." He hums.

"You live out here in the woods?" His brows knit together. "My uncle told me there's a tribe not far away."

Tribe, huh? I guess that works. Most packs are known as Native tribes to the humans. "Your uncle?" I question.

He nods and his eyes look around the room. "Yeah. He used to own this cabin. I bought it from him so he could retire a few years ago. This is my first time out here." "You've done a lot with this place. Last time I was here it was dusty and looked pretty rundown."

He tilts his head slightly. "You come here often?"

I shake my head. "No, not really. This place is actually off-limits to my pa-uh-tribe. Because of the hunter."

"My uncle. He mostly hunted deer or elk, but he said there are a lot of wolves up here." I just look straight into his soft brown eyes. Cody softly chuckles to himself at a personal joke. He catches my questioning look. "My uncle Charlie was a little odd. He said the wolves turn into people. That's why he stopped hunting." I giggle awkwardly, not because it's funny, but because his uncle knows the truth. "Either way, I'm not a fan of hunting. I thought I got all of the traps. I'm sorry I missed that one. I'm going to have to go look again, and see if there are any more that I missed. You're welcome to stay until you heal. Do you need me to call anyone?"

"No, I'll be alright. Thank you, Cody." He gives me a nod then leaves me on the couch. With nothing better to do, I sink down lower into the cushions and take a much-needed rest.

