

Chapter 6

Tess

I set his phone on the coffee table and link my dad instead. "Dad?"

"That's pretty fast for mating. I didn't expect to hear from you for a few days."

I internally cringe. Of course, he expected us to claim each other right away. That's what most wolves do. I have to fill him in of the situation. "Actually. My mate isn't what we expected."

"What, is your mate a woman and you've just been in the closet all this time? I would still love you either way." I roll my eyes.

"Stop it, Dad. I'm serious. My mate is... well, he's... human." Silence. I wait for him to say something, anything, but it's quiet on his end.

"Daddy, listen. It could still work. He's kind, dominant, and protective. He's also ex-military and fights MMA. He was married but lost his wife. He has a daughter. I think he's perfect for me. I'm not going to reject him."

"Tess, he's human. Bare hands do not stand up against teeth and claws, not to mention his slow healing. And a kid! What the hell are you going to do with a kid? She can't be brought up in a pack... she's human!"

"I know. I haven't met her yet... but, Daddy, you've defeated guys without shifting before... and Justin would know how to heal him if he gets hurt, right?" I know Dad is right, but I'm desperate here. "Come meet him. He's training for his upcoming fight."

"Tess, those were sparring matches. How are you going to convince the elders to let a human become the next Alpha? He knows nothing of our kind... I assume you're at the hunter's cabin."

"Um. yeah, I am... He has to convince you first, which I think he can. Come here and test him. I'm sure he can hold his own. He's bigger than you."

"What? Tess, I'm huge. No male in our pack is as big as me."

"I'm aware, Daddy. Please? I'm not rejecting him. He's my mate and I refuse to give him up. I've been waiting for him my whole life and he's finally here. The Goddess paired us for a reason. He's mine. I don't care what the elders say. They're all old misogynists anyway. Keep it a secret for now if you want, I don't care. But I've made my choice. If I have to leave the pack for my mate, I will, but I know he's meant to be the next Alpha." "Tess, please. You can't leave me."

"Then don't make me."

Dad huffs through the link, but eventually gives in, knowing my stubborn nature, and I'm not budging on this one. "Alright, I'll meet him. I'll be there first thing tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, Daddy. I knew you'd see it my way." Dad growls in response. I let out my held breath and relax now that that part is over. I comb my hair out of my face. Goddess, I would kill for a hairbrush.

"Daddy. Can you bring my gym bag when you come? It's in the back seat of my truck."

"Sure thing. Do you need anything else?"

"Have Indy pick out an outfit to wear to his fight next week. It's in Vegas."

"Fine, fine. I don't like this Tess, but I'd rather have you in my life. Bright and early tomorrow. Love ya, kid."

"Love you too, Daddy." That's over. Now I get to worry about them meeting. I haven't seen Cody fight yet, did I just royally screw myself over? Who cares. Dad won't kill him and I choose Cody either way, win or lose. Who am I kidding? My dad has never lost a fight. Hopefully, they don't fight and just spar. I trust my dad, he'll do the right thing. He loves me too much to mess this up for me.

Goddess, I'm tired of sitting around. I peek under my bandage to see my wound healing like it normally would, which is way too fast for a human. Shit, what am I going to do? He said he would change my bandage before bed. I know it's crazy, but I really don't have a better idea. I extend a claw and scream into a pillow as I trace the jagged scabbed-over marks, reopening the wounds. I'm huffing and in throbbing pain by the time I'm finished. I try to get the blood off my claw as much as possible by wiping it on the inside of the bandage then redressing everything as much as possible.

That is not pleasant and I really don't want to do it again. I wonder how long a wound like this would take a human to heal. I could just ask Cody.

The door bursts open making me nearly jump out of my skin. In walks Cody carrying a pile of split logs. He sets them down then stops when he glances at me. "You're sweating." He wipes his hands on his pants then checks my forehead again. "Are you alright?"

"It's my leg. It's throbbing. How long is it going to take to heal?"

He gets a sympathetic look as he checks the bandages. "Did you mess with it?"

I bite my lip having been caught. "It was too tight."

His eyes soften. "It's probably swollen. I'm sorry I didn't think to ice it or give you more painkillers." He lifts the bandage. "Shit. You're bleeding again." He gently lifts me and I grip his shoulders as he carries me back

to the counter. He gives me painkillers first, which I graciously accept, then he removes the bandages to start caring for my wounds. "It'll take anywhere from three to four weeks for it to be completely healed."

Three to four weeks? Shit. I have no idea how to keep this up... hmm. Cody pulls out his knife again and an idea hits me. "Dad. I need my kunai."

"Are you planning on teaching him?"

That's not a bad idea... he said he has weapons training. He might already know how to use them, but that's not why I need them. Kunai are throwing knives, but mine specifically can be deadly for werewolves. They have wolfsbane impregnated into the Damascus metal. Part of the cooling process requires a dip into oil, but the oil has wolfsbane. Wolfsbane would slow the healing process. "Bare hands can't stand up against tooth and claw, remember?" "Alright, Tessie. Sounds like a good idea, but you still have the kid to worry about."

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. She's in Washington with her grandparents right now."

"Indy packed your bag. I told her you're taking time for yourself so she insisted."

"Perfect. Thanks, Daddy. Love you"

"Where did you go?" Cody's voice cuts off my mind link. I look at him in question. "You were kind of dazed for a minute there."

I see that my leg is bandaged and he's cleaning up. "You're really good at that."

He hums. "Lots of experience." He scoops me up as if I weigh nothing and I love the feeling of being in his arms.

He starts walking toward the couch. "Please. I can't keep sitting around. I need something to do."

His lips tick up on the side. "Do you want to help make dinner?" I immediately nod with a smile. He sets me on top of the island then he pulls an ice pack from the freezer and steadies it on my leg that is resting on a bar stool. He then begins pulling out ingredients and tools. "I'll grill up the steak. What do you want for the side?" He mixes a marinade and places the meat into the bowl.

"I make a mean potato salad," I suggest.

"Sounds great. What do you need?" I tell him and he starts getting everything set up. We talk about random mundane things like music, entertainment, likes dislikes. He laughs when I tell him about knocking out the two humans at the bar. Of course, I left the human part out, but oh Goddess, his laugh sends shivers all over my body.

Talking with Cody feels as easy as breathing. I ask him about Willow and the look of pride on his face touches my heart. "She's my everything. I would kill for her. She's a ball of pure joy and sunshine. She's a princess, but she's tough and sassy." He laughs to himself thinking about her. "She has a love of dogs and an aversion to cats. Do you know how most little girls love kittens? Not Willow. If she sees a cat, she'll growl at it and do anything to scare it away. You give her a puppy and she's a puddle of rainbows and giggles."

I smile. "I was the same way as a little girl. Maybe it's the male influence."

"Maybe. Our neighbors had a calico cat that would scare away the birds. Willow has a birdhouse in our backyard. One day Willow dug a shallow trench around the birdhouse and filled it up with water to try to keep the cat away. She had the water still running when the cat came over the fence. That thing was soaked before it even knew what happened." We crack up laughing. I could totally picture the whole scene. "What does she look like?" I'm genuinely curious. She will be my stepdaughter after all.

He pulls out his phone. "I have a ton of pictures." He opens his gallery and allows me to scroll through them.

Willow is a beautiful little girl with thick dark brown hair and eyes. The pictures are pretty animated. In one picture she's making a face as she's covered in mud. In another, she's holding a giant turkey leg that looks about as big as she is. In another, she's sprawled out in her bed with her hair covering half of her face while she sleeps. I feel an instant attachment to her. It's weird, I don't usually like other people's kids unless I'm training them, but she belongs to me just as much as Cody does.

I continue scrolling through the pictures until I land on one of Cody lying on his stomach in bed, hugging a pillow. His back is bare as he looks at the camera. My mouth waters and my breath hitches. I scroll to the next picture and lustfully gasp. The picture is of Cody posing while weight training. His muscles are bulging and his skin is glistening. I scroll to the next and there is Cody in only jeans with a watch and his ring resting against his chest. He's looking down but the lighting makes him look so vulnerable yet sexy. Oh, sweet goddess above! I huff out a breath having lost all control of my senses. My body is on fire and I am oozing desire for my mate.

Cody's chest settles in behind me as he looks over my shoulder. "Those were a photo shoot I did for a fight promotion. They didn't use this one." "Then they're fucking morons. Holy shit, you're hot!" It slipped out and I bite my lip.

I hear him laugh in a breath. I look over my shoulder and his eyes are smoldering. "You're hot, Tess."

I inhale a laugh, but he's dead serious. I take a chance and lean in. My lips press against his and I kiss my mate for the first time.