

Chapter 2: Mate

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Warren

I can't believe that Arric and I got caught in this bear trap. Fucking Brady! I know he's the one who set this trap. He knew that he and his pack would retreat this way. I raced around, attempting to cut off their escape route, but I'd ended up caught in the trap.

I know my pack will come back for me, but they're in a battle and I've been waiting for them to find me for hours. When I wasn't able to cut Brady off, they continued following his pack, hunting them down like the fucking dogs they are.

I knew immediately that I couldn't shift. While I could use my hands to spring the trap, it was too risky. I wasn't willing to lose my leg and therefore my rank as Alpha. While the pain is significant, Arric and I are strong Alphas, and I know it's only a matter of time before the pack finds me and gets me out of here.

We'd been struggling with a way to get the damn trap off when we'd smelled her. I've been looking for my mate for over ten years and now, here, in the middle of the forest, in the middle of an area covered in blood from a recent battle, I find her. Her cinnamon and nutmeg scent instantly calms Arric.

Her wolf is a beautiful reddish-brown color and she's obviously a skittish little thing. Through all of her conversation with Arric, she never once gave us her name. So, as soon as she releases the trap, I step back and begin to shift so I can talk to her.

The shift hurts like a fucking bitch, my bones trying to reshape but unable to in my leg because they're in pieces. I watch her eyes go wide and she scoots back, farther away from me.

"Easy there. You just got me out of a trap. I may be a vicious Alpha when I'm hunting my pack's attackers, but I'm not the kind of man who kills someone who just helped me," I say. Because she didn't give me her name, I'm resistant to giving her mine until I know what pack she's from.

"You said you're a doctor?"

"I'm studying to be one," she says, watching me carefully.

"For humans and wolves?" I ask her. It's unusual and I'm in desperate need of a good doctor in my pack. My doctor needs to retire. I need someone young, someone intelligent, someone like my little mate here, to take over my pack hospital.

"What pack are you from?" I ask, not sure I care. I'm at war with so many packs that the odds of her being from one of them are highly likely. Of course, she's out here on her own, not fighting with a pack, which is also unusual.

"I'm not from a pack. I'm a lone wolf. Did you want me to look at your leg?" I notice that she changes the subject away from her. Interesting. Or maybe not, lone wolves are alone for a reason. It makes me wonder what happened to make my mate a lone wolf.

"Yes. I would appreciate your medical assessment," I say, wanting her closer to me. I know her touch will help with the pain.

She moves closer and her intoxicating scent fills my nose as I take in her beautiful body. She had looked shy but determined when she'd shifted. Her lean body isn't as muscular as the wolves in my pack, which makes me think she hasn't been part of the pack wars for a while. However, the softness of her only adds to the allure. My finger twitch with my desire to touch her.

"What's a lone wolf doing out here all by herself?" I ask.

"Letting my wolf out. It's not easy when you go to a human university," she says, not looking up at me. I, on the other hand, can't look away from her. She's beautiful. The reddish-brown fur of her wolf is now long reddish-brown hair on the woman. It falls over her shoulder as she looks at my leg and I watch as she distractedly flicks it back over her shoulder and out of her way, as if this is a common occurrence in her daily life.

"You know there are pack wars going on around here," I say. She may not be mine yet, but I want her safe.

"There are pack wars going on everywhere. If I tried to find someplace where war isn't happening, I'd have to run in the human areas and risk hunters shooting Annika. You're going to need surgery on this leg. You have multiple fractures, several being compound fractures," she says, once again diverting the conversation from herself.

I already knew I was going to need surgery. I could see Arric's bones sticking out of his leg when we were in the trap.

"Annika? Your wolf's name means merciful? How appropriate for a doctor," I say, still studying her. Her fingers on my leg are gentle. She seems to inherently know where to touch so that it only causes minor discomfort.

"Gracious or merciful, yes. And Annika is a wonderful wolf," she says proudly, still not looking up at me.

I'm about to tell her that Arric agrees when I hear my Beta's howl.

My mate's head snaps up and I smell the scent of her fear as her heart rate spikes. However, she doesn't run. She looks like she's about to take a protective stance in front of me. A perfect Luna, pushing her own fear aside to help someone in need. I smile. She's perfect for me.

"Relax, it's my pack coming back for me," I tell her.

"Oh, well then, that's good, you need to get someplace safe. Hopefully, they won't attack me for helping you."

"I'll protect you," I say, smiling at her discomfort.

My warriors come rushing up, surrounding us as my Beta, Charlie, shifts and snarls at my mate. "Who are you?"

I snarl at him, startling both of them. "She's the one who got me out of the bear trap I was in. Stand down!" I command. I won't allow anyone to disrespect my mate.

He looks at her, then turns back to me frowning before crouching to look at my leg.

"How bad is it?"

"Bad."

"Okay, let's get you back to the pack," he says, getting a couple of warriors to help me up. I wrap my arms around their shoulders and lift my bad leg, gritting my teeth against the pain.

"Ready, Alpha?" Charlie asks.

"Yeah, let's go."

Charlie shifts, taking point as guard, and the warriors holding me start to move fast.

"Wait!" I say, and everyone stops. "Bring the doctor."

"The doctor?" one of my warriors asks.

"The girl! Bring the girl," I bark, turning to look at her. I can see that she was ready to slink away. I watch her turn and look behind her as if judging whether or not she can make a run for it.

"Don't even think about it," I say to her. Charlie's wolf, Gregor, moves swiftly to her side, nudging her forward with his head. I don't like how close he is to my naked mate and Arric growls softly.

Her eyes flash up to mine. "I should go," she says. "Like you said, there are a lot of pack wars going on around here. I probably should get home."

"Home?" I ask. I know I sound arrogant. The woman is a lone wolf going to school. Where exactly is home for her? I'm not letting her go back to wherever she wants to go. I'll never see her again. I know from the little I've learned about her that she'll never let her wolf run in these woods again. And, by the time I healed and went to find her at the university, I'm sure she'd have transferred. She's too skittish to stay where she might get caught.

"School," she says, clarifying her intended destination.

"Hmm, well, as you just reiterated, it's not safe out here, especially for a lone wolf. What kind of Alpha would I be if I left you to fend for yourself? No, I think you should come with us," I say and my voice holds no room for argument.

She presses her lips together and stands, nodding, and reluctantly following behind me.