

## Chapter 42-2

He deepens the kiss and pulls me impossibly close to him so that my entire body is against him. He slips his tongue into my mouth and gently walks me backwards until I'm up against a tree and he continues to kiss me. After a moment, he pulls his lips away and rests his forehead on mine, breathless.

"We need to keep going before I mark you here, and the moon isn't even up yet." he says, and all I can bring myself to do is nod. If he marked me here and now, I wouldn't be mad. He releases me and takes my hand, waiting for me to lead us on. We continue to walk when we come upon the clearing and I squeeze his hand, stopping as we reach the meadow.

I thought this was the most beautiful place ever this morning when the sky was blue and the sun was shining, but I was wrong. The sun is setting and the sky is painted with pinks and oranges. THIS is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

"Molly, this is amazing." Seth says, placing his arm across my shoulders and pulling me to his side. "It's almost as beautiful as you."

His comment makes me blush furiously and I'm sure I'm the same color as the sky. I look up at him and he's looking at the sunset in awe. "This... this is the meadow from my dreams," I tell him, unsure if he'll be bothered by that fact.

"Really?!" he asks me, almost in disbelief.

"Yeah," I begin. "When we got here this morning I realized. It's exactly the same, except for the boulder." I tell him and begin walking towards it. He follows me, not saying anything.

He bends down to look at the faded paint on it and smiles as he runs across the part with my name painted on. "Andrew. Your brother?"

"Yeah, Benjamin said we used to come here all the time and play. They actually buried him here, at the boulder. He said he wanted him to be somewhere that made him happy," I tell him, my voice barely a whisper.

He looks up at me, his eyes glistening. "Thank you for bringing me here, for sharing this place with me," he says as stands up and kisses my forehead.

"Benjamin said he thought my wolf had been trying to tell me things. Like about how Altair licking my finger would fix it," I tell him and he nods. "I think she wants us to be on the other side of the creek, that's where she was stuck. And I was always barefoot, which makes sense now, knowing I'm supposed to be touching the ground."

"Is there anything else?" he asks me and I shake my head at him.

"I spent most of today thinking about it. I couldn't think of anything else that could be a clue," I tell him, but look down at the ground. "I'm worried I missed something."

"If you did, you did," he says and takes my hands in his. "You're going to officially be mine, and the rest will just be a bonus." he tells me and I just nod in response. Seth takes me by the hand and guides me to sit on the rock with him.

"If this works, the moment I mark you, you become a royal," he begins to tell me and I chew on my lip from being nervous. "Every wolf in the kingdom will feel it and be able to mind link you. I'm worried about how overwhelming it will be for you because you've only ever been able to link with your dad, and more recently, your brother. You've never needed to block any of them."

"I didn't realize," I tell him, becoming more and more scared of becoming royal.

"I know. We haven't really talked about it much, but I need you to be prepared for it so it doesn't overwhelm you. You know how it feels when your dad links you?" he asks and I nod. "Go ahead and tell him hi. He's expecting it."

Hi

Hey, Kiddo. Seth teaching you about mind links?

Yeah. Did he talk to you?

He did. I'm just going to read you a story until he teaches you to block me out. I love you.

I love you.

With that, my dad started reading something from a book about war strategy- possibly the dullest thing ever. Seth moves to stand behind me and places his hands on my shoulders.

"Do you hear him?" he asks and I nod. "Good. Close your eyes and focus on where it's coming from. Do you feel the thread to him?"

I reach in my mind and don't really feel anything at first. I just hear my dad like always. But I think about how he said it- focus on where. I try again and then I can feel it, like it's in a section. I get what he's saying now and I nod.

"Good. Now, imagine bending the thread so it can't reach you." he says.

"It's not really a thread. It's like he's in a box." I tell him, confused about what to do.

Seth gently squeezes my shoulders. "That's fine, Love. Just close it."

I keep my eyes closed and focus on my dad's voice reading the most boring thing ever. I imagine flipping the box but that doesn't do anything. I try imagining closing the box with a lid and suddenly, it's quiet. I smile, proud of my accomplishment. "I did it!"

"Good, Love." he says, kissing my head and releasing me, walking around to stand in front of me. "My mom told me that was the worst part of being marked because she wasn't prepared. I don't want that for you. When it happens, just close them, just like you did him. Shut everyone out, everyone. Eventually, you'll be able to keep a line to certain people open but for tonight, don't let anyone in."

"Thank you," I tell him. "Your mom's right. That sounds like it would be absolutely terrible."

"Do you have any questions? About becoming a royal, or just anything you want to know before I mark you?" he asks.

I chew my lip nervously. "Will it hurt?" I whisper to him.

"I'll do everything I can to make sure it doesn't. I don't want you in any pain," he says and I nod.

"Alright," he tells me with a wicked grin on his face. "The sun is almost completely gone. Time to get you across the creek" he says, picking me up and throwing me over his shoulder with a laugh.