

Chapter 1 - Design of Fate

JACKSON

I was ripped away from sleep when someone jumped on my bed, shaking it like crazy. Was it too much trouble for people to leave me to what little bit of sleep I could get? Like the fuck!

“C’mon, Jacksy! It’s time to get up and pack a bag because we’re going on a quick road trip,” Brynn chirped.

I loved my sister-in-law, I truly did, but part of me wanted to kill her right now. Perhaps, I could blame her death on the fact that I just got in from an unscheduled patrol shift a couple of hours ago. The warrior’s mate went into labor, so I took his spot instead of asking anyone else to come in on their time off.

“Can’t we go another day? Where are we going anyways?” I asked, scrubbing the sleep from my eyes.

All thoughts of killing her vanished when she handed me a cup of coffee. She knew that it was my love language after all. The only sibling that shared the love language was Theo. Everyone knew not to get in between him and coffee.

I looked over at her and immediately noticed the dark circles underneath her eyes. There was something weighing on her, but I knew that she would open up in her own time. She knew that I would be here if she ever wanted to talk.

“No. It’s urgent that we head out as soon as possible though. And, before you ask me, I can’t tell you where we’re going. Theo doesn’t even know, so don’t try to leverage him for information. I just promise you that you will never regret going. So, get up, pack a couple changes of clothes, and meet us downstairs.”

I watched her walk away and tried to figure out what could possibly be so important. It could be anything, knowing how her visions worked. I never once envied her gifts, but she mastered them like the badass that she was.

Brynn was not only a powerful she-wolf from a long line of powerful she-wolves, but she was also the best Luna this pack ever had. That was not only my opinion though. My mother had said the same exact thing. There had been nothing but pride from my parents at the Goddess’ choice to make Brynn and Theo mates.

When my brother took over as Alpha, he appointed me as his Beta. I was honored to be this pack’s Beta and did everything I could to help it flourish. I was absolutely proud of the Dark Moon pack and loved how it had evolved underneath Theo and Brynn’s leadership.

‘Any chance that Moira let slip where we’re going?’ I asked my wolf Zeus.

‘You should know better than that. Moira has just as much restraint as Brynn does.’ He scoffed. ‘She just said that nosey wolves look to be her chew toys at practice.’

I chuckled at that and hurried through my shower since time apparently was of the essence.

Moira definitely enjoyed fighting just as much as Brynn did. Wolf or human did not matter because they were both beasts. What did you expect, knowing that they were raised by the toughest warrior and trainer in this pack?

‘Luckily for you, there will be a little bit of time to figure out what you want put on your tombstone since she can’t shift while she’s pregnant,’ I pointed out with a smirk.

‘How about this: My human is a fucking unsupportive asshole. Thankfully, he died alongside me,’ Zeus deadpanned.

‘Ride or die, Zeus. Where you go I go, and I’d have it no other way.’

The two of us had a very good bond. He was the best wolf I could have ever been paired with. He was a bit of a bastard at times, but so was I. Likeminded and whatnot.

Could you imagine being paired with a wolf that you could not stand? It did happen at times, and it made both counterparts miserable. Theo and I were friends with an Alpha heir at one point who was a man-whore, and his wolf detested it. He felt that it was betraying the bond of his future mate. The human did not side with him at all and felt that he should be allowed to have fun with whomever he wanted until that time came.

You might be asking yourself what happened when he did find his mate. She was the daughter of his father’s Beta. The night of her eighteenth birthday party, she accidentally walked in on him in the middle of screwing someone. You can imagine that did not go over well. Not only did she know of his reputation, but to see it firsthand was like taking a silver dagger to her heart. It took a long time for him to gain her trust. His actions nearly cost them their mate-bond.

Zeus and I were very much like his wolf. There was no shortage of she-wolves throwing themselves at ranked wolves. However, we never once entertained the idea or encouraged their behavior because we wanted our mate to be the only one to ever have all of us. We did not care if our mate had saved herself for us or not. Her choice would be a personal one just like ours was.

I threw my bag over my shoulder and locked my door, shaking off thoughts of the mate I still had not found. It would happen whenever it did, and I could be patient. Not to say that I was not jealous of the solid relationships that I saw all around me. One day, Zeus and I would have that too.

Mira was bouncing on her heels as she talked to Brynn’s stomach. Unless someone knew that Mira was adopted, they would never guess it. That girl was a mini-Brynn all of the way.

“Uncle Jacks!” she called out, running over to me, and jumping into my waiting arms.

She had once told me that I was her favorite uncle, but I could not tell anyone else. That was a pinky promise that I would take to the grave.

“Hello, Princess Mira,” I cooed, making her give me that bright smile of hers.

She had been through so much in her young life. From being the biological daughter of a sadistic Alpha and Luna who marketed in the slave trade, drug trade, and such to being sold by them to another Alpha who auctioned off slaves. Luckily, Brynn and Theo had gone undercover to that auction and saved all of the ones up for auction, including our Aunt Des and cousin Haley.

“I just wanted to say goodbye, have a safe trip, and I want all of the details when you return,” she said, sticking me with a look that clearly showed I had no option but to obey.

Goddess, this girl was a firecracker. She definitely made my life happier, and I knew the pack adored her. She was Dark Moon’s Princess after all.

“Thank you. Any chance you’ll clue me in?” I whispered.

She just flashed me the ‘nice try but no’ look and patted my cheek.

I was just striking out left and right. There was no other option than to just go with the damn flow and see what the devious Brynn had up her sleeve.

Mira was swinging from side to side in my arms as we walked over to her parents. Her little giggles had everyone smiling. It was a good start to what would inevitably be a long day.

A group of people had their own bags packed, making me even more curious about what was going on.

We had Maya and Sebastian, both Lamias which was a rank started by the Nightshade pack and then ours adopted it too. The Goddess blessed the rank with different abilities of weeding out deceit. We had our own share of traitors in the past, so this was the best move to protect our pack going forward.

Then there was our Gamma Dustin. He had been a badass warrior before he was named Gamma, which certainly helped his role.

Finally, there were four other warriors. Two of them were elite warriors, the most specialized warriors in our pack.

We were going with ten highly trained fighters. I was not certain if Brynn knew it was necessary to have everyone or was just a precaution, but it definitely set me on edge.

“We have Theo’s parents filling in for us until we return. Nightshade is on standby just in case they’re needed here. However, I highly doubt that they will be. I wish that I could tell you all

what this mission is about, but it could potentially change the outcome into one that'll ruin everything. We'll have about a seven-hour drive ahead of us," Brynn laid out.

Mira gave everyone a high-five before she ran off to find my mother if I had to venture a guess. She would be Little Alpha for the day. We might either come home to a glitter bomb exploding in the dining room or an army of pups preparing for war. Neither option would surprise me with her.

Theo threw his arm over my shoulders as we made our way outside and to Brynn's beautiful Corvette.

I had never replaced my car after it had been totaled when Brynn and I were kidnapped and tortured. I had loved my car as if it was my own baby. Perhaps it was about time that I laid it officially to rest and found a new ride. If it was half as sexy as her car then I would be instantly in love.

There was a long drive ahead of us, so I closed my eyes, hoping to get a little more rest. There was no telling what we were heading into, so it was best to be on the top of our game.

I was able to get two hours of sleep and woke up with an odd sense of peace. I did not remember my dream at all, but I did remember seeing the most mesmerizing pair of hazel eyes. They looked like they could see right into my soul.

"We're going to stop for some food and a bathroom break right quick. Is diner food good with you?" Brynn asked me.

That was when I realized how fucking hungry I was, so I nodded because anything would taste good right about now.

'Everything tastes good to you. Never seen you turn food down except from Sonny.' He snorted at me.

A shiver of disgust went through me at the memory. Sonny was one of those she-wolves who threw herself at me despite me turning her down multiple times. She apparently did not understand the words 'no' 'never' and 'restraining order' because I dragged myself into my suite after a long ass day just to find her leaning against my kitchen counter in nothing but an apron. Literally, nothing but the apron.

'You have to admit that Mom made a great teaching moment of it,' Zeus said, chuckling at the memory.

Sonny was put to work in the kitchen for two months. She was required to help prepare each meal.

When Sonny complained about it, my mother simply said that she seemed to have loved breaking into someone's residence without their permission and cooking for them. So, this was her way of sharing that love with the pack.

It was safe to say that Sonny stayed the fuck away from me after that. I was very thankful for that. It also helped deter some of the other crazies that aimed their attention at me.

Fun times.

Our group walked into a place called Pop's Diner. The scents wafting this way from the kitchen had my mouth watering.

Everything on the menu looked delicious. It was a damn good thing that shifters had fast metabolisms. Our bodies require more calories and nutrients to house a wolf spirit inside of us and to shift. Then you could add the fact that our healing was advanced, and that required additional energy. Thus, we got to dine on enough food that would surprise humans.

"And what can I get for you, handsome?" the waitress asked me with a seductive smile, eyeing me like I was her next meal.

"I'll take a triple bacon burger with all the fixings, an order of onion rings, and a coke no ice, please."

Her smile faded when she saw that I was not going to respond to her flirting. It was nothing against her, but I was not the flirty type. Once I met my mate then I would definitely flirt with her, but that would be reserved for her and her alone.

We chatted while waiting for our food to arrive. A big bonfire party was scheduled for our pack next week. Everyone had been working their asses off, especially with expanding the pack because we took in roughly two hundred new pack members over the past six months between the innocents that were saved from Mira's parents' pack and random ones in need of sanctuary.

My eyes wandered over to this older gentleman who looked like he was having a hard time cutting his food. He accidentally spilled his coffee because of it, and the waitress was being rude about cleaning up the mess. She was acting like he did that on purpose.

I really fucking hated rudeness with a damn passion. I bit my cheek to remain calm as I went over to help.

"I've got this. Could you please bring a refill for this gentleman?" I asked, trying very hard not to snap at her.

Her nostrils flared as she handed me the towel, took his coffee cup, and walked away.

The gentleman was obviously embarrassed if his rosy cheeks were any indication. He had nothing to be embarrassed about. If anyone should be that then it should be the waitress for how she responded to a customer.

“I’m Jackson, sir. What’s your name?” I asked him while I wiped up the coffee.

“Nice to meet you, Jackson. I’m Blaine. Thanks for...thanks for intervening,” he told me, clearing his throat.

He was a shifter with a strong aura and looked to be in his fifties or so. It was sometimes difficult to tell a shifter’s age because we typically aged slowly compared to humans. My father was in his forties but looked like he could pass for his thirties.

“No need to thank me. There was no reason for her to act the way she was. Sometimes people forget that everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Can I help with your steak?” I asked him, gesturing to his plate.

Blaine nodded and passed the plate over to me. The waitress came and set the coffee down before walking away with a huff.

Goddess, please give me patience to bite my tongue.

“Are you from around here?” I asked him, passing his plate back.

He shook his head and lowered his eyes for a moment. His eyes had dulled some when he returned my gaze.

“My pack had been attacked a year ago. Our Alpha commanded all of us to flee because there was no way that we would be able to defeat them and wanted to give us the chance to live. The pack that attacked us was known to be very sadistic. I’ve just been journeying around since then,” he said with a shrug.

The only way for an outside Alpha to absorb the pack was to kill the current Alpha. Many times, the new Alpha would end up killing anyone within the previous leadership as well as anyone who would oppose them.

His story tugged at me because it was a common theme. Plus, many sadistic Alphas believed in nothing but causing chaos. This was one reason why Coverstone Council was created. Five packs converged into one, Coverstone, and held Alphas and packs accountable for what they did. There were limitations to their involvement, but nothing held them back when they got the green light.

I reached into my wallet and pulled out our pack’s business card, sliding it over to him.

“I’m the Beta of the Dark Moon pack. Our borders are open to those who need a place to call home as long as they vow to never go against our pack. We’re a very inclusive pack that believes in the strength of each individual member.”

His brows furrowed as he looked at the card, touching it reverently. I could not imagine what his life had been like for this past year. He deserved a second chance at peace and a life surrounded by those who wanted him to find his happiness.

Blaine opened his mouth but closed it right back. He cleared his throat and tried again.

“I can’t explain to you what even the thought of this means to me. Do you...do you think that your Alpha would seriously be willing to at least meet with me to see if he’d allow me in?” he asked, his voice thick with emotion.

I linked Theo and Brynn to come over. They had heard our conversation and had smiles on their faces.

Brynn sat on the seat next to Blaine. Theo leaned against the counter behind her, placing his hand on her stomach. It was really sweet to see how he always did that. He always seemed to have his hand there when he was near her.

“Blaine, this is my brother Theo and his mate Brynn. They’re the Alpha and Luna of our pack,” I introduced.

His eyes widened a little with that, clearly not expecting the Alpha and Luna to be right here before he respectfully bowed his head to them.

From the look in Brynn’s eyes, it would seem that she chose to stop here for this exact reason.

“We support everything my brother said,” Theo said with a smile. “We would be honored to have you. A wise woman once told me that the Goddess puts people in our paths when they’re needed the most. I would like to think that this is one of those times.”

A soft smile found its way to Blaine’s lips. It was easy to see that he also believed that too.

Brynn placed her hand on the top of Blaine’s hand, giving it a comforting squeeze.

“Would you like to come to Dark Moon?” she asked him.

He gave a small nod, clearly still trying to wrap his head around this turn of events. I tried to put myself in his place and could definitely understand what he must have been feeling.

“Fantastic! Let’s think about logistics. We can have someone come pick you and your things up if you don’t have transportation. And, no, it’s not an imposition, I swear. Is that something that you need?” Brynn asked.

She always had a calming presence about her unless the person deserved her wrath. Other than that, she was one of the kindest and sweetest people you would ever meet.

Blaine nodded, another round of blush tinting his cheeks.

“Okay, perfect. I’ll send word to the pack, and someone will be sent out right away. Just give me the address of where you’re staying. It’s only like a two-hour drive, so they will be here this afternoon and will bring you back to the pack. We won’t be back right away, but Theo and Jackson’s parents will have everything ready when you get there,” Brynn told him.

I did not need to be an empath to sense his gratitude.

This was one thing I loved about being part of our pack’s leadership, being able to help give people like him a second chance at beginning anew.