

The cookies were almost gone when my phone rang. I jumped as I had been waiting for it and was on edge. I picked it up and saw someone was calling on FaceTime. I looked at Finlay. He smiled and took my free hand. I answered and my heart did a double take when I saw my mom and dad. They were in my dad's office, it looked just like it used to, back when I last had seen it. My mom was in my dad's lap and it made me happy to see they still acted like newly mated. They looked a little older. My mom had fine lines around her eyes and my dad had some grey strands in his hair.

"Armeria." It sounded like a breath that escaped from my mom.

"Hi mom. Hi dad," I said. I felt myself tear up, and Finlay squeezed my hand.

"Hi, pumpkin. You have grown up," my dad said. I smiled despite the tears in my eyes.

"I guess I have," I admitted.

"You look beautiful," my mom told me.

"Thank you mom. I guess I have good genes." My dad chuckled.

"That you do, pumpkin. Thank the goddess you got all from your mother," he said. My mom laughed and hit him jokingly on the chest. As I watched them, I could see some of the things I did to Finlay.

"Tell me everything," my mom said.

"Everything?" I asked.

"Everything that has happened since I last saw you," she clarified. I laughed.

"Mom, that was ten years ago," I objected.

"Well, then it's best if you start talking," she said. I started telling them about the last ten years in broad strokes. I skipped over most of the four years I lived in the human world, just mentioning it briefly. Then I got to Finlay and my pack and how I got my wolf. My mom had tears in her eyes when I told them that my wolf had come to me. "She is bright red," I told them.

"Oh goddess, I have never heard of a red wolf. Mine is more blond than red," my mother said.

"She is one of a kind. And she is big, almost as big as my Alpha's wolf, and that is the biggest one I have ever seen," I told them.

"I always knew you were special, pumpkin. I hear Alpha Finlay is a good Alpha," my dad told me. I smiled, I knew he had contacts throughout other packs. If he had heard Finlay was a good Alpha, that is what the grape wine was saying.

"He is. I was lucky he stopped at the diner I was working in and decided to recruit me. It's an amazing pack and the last six years have been some of the best in my life," I told them.

"I heard you are a Beta," my dad said. I could hear the pride in his voice and it warmed my heart.

"I am. We lost our former Beta in an attack almost a year ago. You rubbed off on me," I told him. He laughed and looked pleased.

"Your brother told us about... the new development with Alpha James," my mother said. I felt my smile falter.

"It was unexpected," I told her.

"Are you okay? Is there something we can do?" she asked.

"No, it's okay, mom. I have people here who support me and it's only for a couple of weeks. Then we can all leave this behind us once and for all," I told her. She looked at me with her mom gaze and then nodded. I felt Finlay stroke the back of my hand with his thumb. "What about you? How is retired life?" I asked. My dad made a face and I smiled again.

"We are doing fine. Your dad has his books and Elder still asks him for advice from time to time. I have my garden and my hobbies. And we take all the opportunities we can to babysit Armino. It works out great as Elder and Becky have their hands full with being the Beta couple," my mom said, I could see how much she enjoyed being a grandmother.

"I can't wrap my head around Elder being mated and having a kid. It sounds so grown up," I told them. They both laughed.

"Neither of you are pups anymore. How about you, pumpkin? Elder said you aren't mated, but do you have someone you fancy?" my dad asked. I felt myself blush and I shifted my gaze from my phone to Finlay who sat behind it and grinned at me. My mother elbowed my dad and gave him a look that said to not ask things like that. I understood she was worried it would make me uncomfortable with everything.

"There is someone. Nothing solid just yet. We have been circling each other for a while now. Well, it's complicated," I told them.

"I'm happy you have someone, life is too short to not have love in it," my dad said and gave my mother a kiss on her cheek. I saw her roll her eyes, but I also saw the smile and the slight blush on her face. I could hear Sam talking to Matilda in the cabin and I knew he would be heading to us.

"I'm really happy that you called. I have missed talking to you both. But I have some things I need to do," I said.

"Of course, it's the day before the games start," my dad agreed. He had been a participant in two games. "Are you participating or supporting?" he asked.

"I'm participating," I said. I could see the pride on both of my parent's faces.

"Of course she is. She is our daughter," my mother huffed. "We will let you get on with your day. But we will call you again, and I expect you to keep us updated on how things are. Don't you dare let it go another ten years," she then told me.

"I promise, mom. I love you both," I told them.

"We love you too, pumpkin. And we are so very proud of you," my dad said.

"Thank you." We hung up and I closed my eyes for a moment. I needed to collect myself as I felt how close my tears were. Finlay took my phone and placed it on the table and pulled me into his lap so he could put both his arms around

me. I put my head on his shoulder and relaxed.

"Sam," I half heartedly objected.

"I asked him to give us a moment. He won't come out here until I tell him to," Finlay said. I nodded and let myself take a deep breath of his scent. "They seem lovely," he said. I smiled.

"They are amazing. I didn't realise how much I missed them. When all of this is over, would you object to me going to see them?" I asked. It was nice to have got to see and talk to them. But I found myself craving my dad's hugs and my mom's scent.

"Not at all. I'm sure we can arrange something. And they are welcome to our pack anytime," he told me.

"Thank you," I said and sat up. "All better." I gave him a kiss on the cheek and he smiled. He didn't object as I sat back in my chair.

"I'll ask Same to come out here."

"We need to tell him what has happened. We need to tell everyone," I said.

"We don't need to do that if you don't want to," Finlay objected. I shook my head.

"No, they need to know. We don't know what will come of this," I said.

"Come out of what?" Sam asked as he came walking. He took a seat on the chair on the other side of the table. I took a deep breath.

"It has been an interesting morning," I said, and started to tell him everything.

"Fuck. Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'm good, well, mostly good," I told him. He frowned.

"And we are sure there is no other way around it? I don't like the idea of you being bonded to this idiot," he grumbled.

"It is what it is for now," I told him. He looked at Finlay.

"I know how you feel. I even offered her to sit this game out and just get it over with. But you know Amie, she insists it would be unfair to both packs," Finlay said.

"Well, then we just make sure he doesn't get close to you and we pretend this isn't happening. Then you can reject his ass and we will go home and celebrate our new top rank," Sam determined.

"Sounds like a plan," I agreed, loving his positive take on everything.

"Best way forward," Finlay said.