

Leon Thornell, the Alpha of the Crescent Stone Pack, stood tall, broad-shouldered with a dened bone structure.

Because, of course, he would!

I had to continuously ght the urge to roll my eyes at his usually impeccable physique.

Which was hard. Even the contrast between his light brown hair and full dark brown beard highlighted his attractive face as he stood, just existing at the podium.

Gathering the papers in his hands, he looked up and cleared his throat before speaking.

I remained slumped in my chair as everyone else sat up a little taller.

The piercing gaze from his hazel green eyes cut through to my soul despite the curtain of brown hair shadowing his expression.

I stared back unamused and noticed a tiny smirk on his lips.

The weekly pack meeting lasted about an hour of daily reports and training at certain times.

I never liked coming to these types of events, they were boring, and since blowing my brains out was morally unethical, I was forced to be there with the rest of our small town.

So here I am, just like all the other twenty-year-olds who were forced to attend the annual Job Selection meeting that would determine our futures.

My eyelids felt heavy, and as they were about to shut, Leon's voice became sharper when he uttered the words "Job Selection."

I sat up straight in my chair while Leon continued, "So, as with the previous years, we will have this year's Job Selection here in the main hall. Anyone who does not make it on time - " He shot a look in my direction --will have to try their luck next year. It'll take place at noon on October 11th. That is all for today's meeting; we will be back here next Friday at the same time."

The words he said, though seemingly ordinary, made me tense and uneasy.

It was clear he was talking about me since I was always late, -- and it only made me angrier.

I let out a sigh and grabbed my bag, squeezing past those who were still lingering to talk to their neighbors or to Leon.

I could feel his eyes on me as I left the room, trying to ignore the weight of his gaze.

It always left me feeling anxious, especially knowing we both obviously disliked one another.

I just wish our paths never had to cross, but what are small towns for if not to make your life unnecessarily complicated?

"Cora!" Leon's deep voice rumbled through the crowd.

I caught sight of auburn hair and Gabby leaning against Leon's left arm while gripping his bicep. Her expression towards me was twisted in disdain.

Gabby had been trying to be the center of Leon's attention for years, and she never liked it when he called on me for anything.

My muscles involuntarily tensed when I heard my name, but I quickly recovered and continued walking until I reached the exit.

Finally, after nding my way outside, I was met with the crisp night air and the path to my house that was slightly wet from the earlier rainfall.

My eyes were set on my shoes while I tried sorting my thoughts out.

I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life regarding career choices.

I was too chubby, and my condition wasn't good to be a warrior. Also, I would never cut my hair or give up spaghetti.

I didn't want to work in our local hospital because I couldn't do bowel movements, and even though my bedside manner wasn't bad, it wasn't great either.

"Cora! Wait!" A voice roared, cutting through my thoughts, familiar and unwelcomed.

I kept going, trying to ignore it and hoping that I'd reach my house quickly.

I could feel Leon's presence behind me, as if he were disturbing the air around me. "Cora, I said wait," his voice was mmer this time, but I really couldn't be bothered.

"As your Alpha, I command you to stop!" My feet froze in place, and something tightened in my lower stomach.

As much as I wished I could resist his words, my inner wolf whimpered, realizing she couldn't disobey her Alpha.

I sighed heavily and mockingly said, "Yes, Alpha Leon? How may I help you, oh great king?"

With a roll of his eyes, he advanced closer to me. "Cut the sh't Cora, you heard me calling for you, and you still chose to ignore me."

He was getting nearer, and I stepped away. I could sense the wolf inside me cowering as he continued to approach.

"Well, it's not like you're gonna tell me anything new. I know it's about the job offer. But even so, I can tell you that my mind hasn't changed - I'm still content with what I'm doing at the cafe."

He looked annoyed and sighed through his nose. "You know I could use you on my team as an--"

"Eht! Eht!" I raised a nger to stop him. "I'm not gonna be your damn secretary--"

"Aide," he interrupted.

I bit my lip to stie a scornful laugh.

"You know, it kind of sucks that you keep pushing me into a corner like this," I told him.

"Cora, you know that your condition isn't the best, and I'm only trying to help you."

My eyebrow instantly shot up.

"Why the hell do you even want to help me?" My voice had an edge to it that I hadn't intended, but I wasn't trying to sugarcoat my words either.

His gaze lingered on me for a moment before his eyes hardened with anger.

"Just--" he said in a low voice, then he spoke through tight lips.

His feet shifted slightly forward as though to move towards me, but he quickly caught himself, causing my heart to race a bit too quickly.

But before he could see the color rising in my face, he turned and walked off, his shoulders heavy with frustration.

The fact that he had this much of an effect on me felt strange after all our years of rivalry.

Even so, I watched as his frame faded from view, but this time Gabby's blur of auburn hair was now bouncing to keep up with him—poor girl.

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I was jolted awake by something or someone poking my face. Of course, since I live alone, it begs the question...Who the f*ck was touching me?

My eyes opened to nd Ava's goofy smile xed on me.

I attempted to kick her off my bed, but she gracefully rolled off, planting her feet on the ground before turning to me and saying, "I made coffee, so get your ass up, or I'm gonna pour the rest down the drain."

I groaned a response and shued towards the shower.

Ava is my cousin on my mother's side. Our mothers are sisters, so we were practically siblings growing up.

Creating a strong bond between us like sisters would.

As I walked into the kitchen, Ava was lounging on my counter.

She sat up as I passed by, her hand outstretched with a steaming cup of coffee waiting for me.

"Thanks," I answered softly into my cup. "What brings you here so early? Not that I'm complaining, of course." I added.

She tilted her head and said teasingly, "I heard Leon chased after you when the meeting ended last night. Care to share your side of the story?"

Her lips were pursed in a sly smile.

I rolled my eyes and elaborated. "It wasn't anything new, just reminding me to rethink his offer of becoming his aide." I sighed, frustrated. "I swear the man can be relentless when he wants something to go his way, but I'll be damned if I get stuck being his little lackey."

Ava scrunched up her face in thought. "Don't you think it's strange that he asked you and not Gabby," she remarked, "considering she seems to be following him everywhere she can. We all know o'I girl can't do much with her lack of skills, so she would be perfect for that job."

Ava had a point. Why hadn't Leon asked Gabby to be his aide instead of me?

Gabby had already acted as his shadow, helping him with whatever he needed. It was almost as if she had already become his personal assistant.

I grabbed a breakfast bar from the top cabinet, tore off a piece, and chewed it thoughtfully.

"When he rst offered me the job, I was confused," I said, my mouth still full. "I mean, who has ever heard of an Alpha needing an aide, right? But I don't know; maybe Gabby could do it. I'll suggest her to him when I see him next time. It'll be two birds with one stone if I can get them together and off my damn back."

Ava chuckled, well aware of Gabby's blatant dislike of me.

I can't remember the exact moment it began.

Everything had been normal between Gabby and me for the most part, but then one day, I noticed her following Leon everywhere, and she seemed to develop a deep hatred of me out of the blue.

I laughed to myself at how stupid this whole situation was.

I simply ignored her and still somehow managed to get on her nerves.

Ava tucked her short, unevenly cut black hair behind her ears, glancing up at me with a questioning expression.

"I bet she'd be a lot nicer if Leon would stop making it so obvious that he likes you," she said, eyeing me cautiously.

I furrowed my brows at her, trying to swallow a mouthful of this dry breakfast bar.

"He doesn't show any- "cough" -"

I coughed again, dabbing my lips before continuing, "-he doesn't show any interest in me more than the standard Pack leader stuff. In fact, I'm pretty sure his level of interest in me is no different from anyone else's."

She chuckled, handing my cup back to me.

"Don't hurt yourself trying to do two things at once," she patted my head and continued. "Besides, it doesn't help that you're an omega, which is like serving you up on a nice silver platter for an Alpha to devour."

Ugh, Ava had a real knack for destroying a good time.

The idea of being sought after by Alpha werewolves simply because I was born an omega, born to be a suitable vessel for birthing more Alphas, didn't sit well with me.

Ava was a beta, so she never had to deal with annoying things such as going into heat once a month or having Alphas creepily hit on you, hiding perverted desires behind white lies.

She sometimes felt bad for me in public because she knows how omegas are usually treated. I'm just glad she treated me like an average person.

I made a face at her and ate the last of my food. "We should get going."

"But I haven't nished my coffee yet," she complained.

"Okay, well then, just make sure to lock up when you head out."

I was about to leave the house when she suddenly appeared around the corner with such speed that it scared me.

"Eh?? I thought you were off today. I wanted to bum it with you on your couch."

It was my day off, but I didn't want to be cooped up in my house, wondering if Leon would stop by and bug me again.

I thought about going to the cafe since it was full of people, and he typically didn't like going to crowded places.

It had something to do with his paranoia that bad situations could happen with too many people in one place and not enough exits.

As if anything crazy has ever happened at a café.

Like seriously? Calm down, John W*ck.

"It is, but I'm feeling a bit restless and wanted to spend my day there drinking tea and bugging Lee." Hmm... that rhymed.

"Hey, that rhymed," Ava said, smiling, causing me to chuckle at how alike we were.

She stared at me curiously but continued, "Do you want me to come with?"

No. I desperately wanted to be alone, but what I said was mild.

"Mmmm, Nah, just please lock up when you're done, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I am fully aware of what needs to be done when someone leaves the house. Stop reminding me already. Damn, you sound just like my mom."

"Hmph, I wouldn't have to remind you if you didn't have a sucky memory."

"Yeah? Well, you suck...d*ck. Ha!"

I arched a brow at her immature response. I couldn't believe she really used all her brain juice for that.

"Sure, but not nearly as much as you still suck at comebacks." I snorted.

Before she could reply, I closed the door and headed to the cafe.

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The walk to the cafe from my house was neither too short nor too long, so it gave me plenty of time to take in the warm morning air and think about a more denitive response to Leon.

I was so lost in thought that I didn't even notice the gure standing in the shadows of the building I was passing by.

That is, until a hand grasped my wrist and yanked me inside.

Suddenly, I felt a hand over my mouth, muing my gasp.

Leon stood before me, his gaze intent and locked onto mine as he brought his face down nearer to my own.

"It's only me, Cora," he said soothingly, "shh."

I shoved his hand away from my mouth. "Why the f*ck are you hiding in the alley like some creep? I knew you were into some weird s**t, but I would never have guessed this."

He lifted one of his eyebrows as he darted his gaze around before saying, "Gabriella has been on my ass all f*cken day, so I was hiding out from her when I happened to see you walking by." He said with a shrug like it was no big deal. "Before I knew it, my body just sort of reacted, and I grabbed you."

I glared at him. "Next time, give a girl a warning. I swear I thought my heart would fall out my ass."

I was all too aware that I had a can of pepper spray and a butterfly knife in my bag, yet the moment a hand reached out for me, my mind went blank, and I was about to s**t myself.

He laughed at my comment, which was low and vibrating as he towered over me.

I tried to put some space between us by pushing him away, but he didn't budge.

I scowled at him, and he just smiled.

Out of nowhere, I felt an intense wave of his pheromones ll up the small alleyway.

The scent of rosewood and honey hung in the air.

I felt my body buzz with a strange energy as his scent wafted through the air and blanketed me like a warm hug. It was cool in temperature but hot on my body.

The sound of a stranger talking loudly on his phone passed us by, and Leon leaned into me, pushing his hips against mine in a gesture to keep us hidden.

A tingling heat spread from my belly to my inner thighs as his hips pressed against mine.

This was bad; all he did was inch closer, and I was acting like I'd never been touched before.

The saliva in my mouth thickened, and I unconsciously gulped with a raw, audible sound.

Leon peered down at me, concern ooding his face, but there was a hint of something else, something more private.

"Are you okay?" His words were soft, as if they were a gentle brush over my skin.

He took a step back to get a better look at me.

"Uh yeah, I'm-I'm ne. He just surprised me." I said, referring to the man on the phone, and quickly adjusted my black t-shirt.

The soft fabric pressed against my body, and I noticed my n****s tightening beneath my bra.

Leon breathed in deeply, shivering as the scent reached him.

His eyes shone gold with excitement as he recognized what it meant.

He stepped closer to me, his voice low and gruff. "Cora..." he murmured.

"You're turned on?" He growled.

The warmth of his breath on my skin made it dicult to stand still.

Without thinking twice, I lunged forward and kicked him in the shin before sprinting away from the alleyway and into a cafe without looking back.