

## Chapter 4

\*Calvin\*

I knock on the door, frustrated and embarrassed to even be there asking.

"Everything alright?" Peter asks me, hair wet and a towel around his waist.

"I don't know what to wear?" I admit, looking down at the ground. "Your wife sent so much."

He laughs, and I feel ridiculous, but I realize he's not laughing at me. "She's always been an over-packer. Give me a moment. I'll come look at what she for sent you."

I return to my room, leaving the door open for him. There are so many things here. Dinner is not formal, I tell myself, trying to remember what she told me. I think this is when I am supposed to wear a suit but not a tuxedo.

Peter enters, now wearing a pair of shorts, and I can see his eyes bulge a bit when he sees everything she sent for me. "She certainly spared no expense," he says with a light laugh. "Ahh, patterns. Audrey loves a pattern, but it makes things difficult to match. Stick to solids until you're more comfortable with it all."

He grabs a black suit I had already pulled out and a white shirt. "There. That will do."

"But which tie?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "No tie. I know what Audrey said, but she's not here. You're not royal, and you're not old. You don't have to wear one."

Relief floods me at his words. A jacket but no tie. I can handle this.

"Are you good on shoes?" he asks.

I shrug. "It doesn't matter. They all hurt."

"You'll get used to them after a while," he says, patting my shoulder. "I told them no ball and nothing too fancy. Just dinner and absolutely no dancing."

"Thank you," I tell him. "Mrs. Audrey made it seem like everything would be very fancy."

He smiles. "Because that's what she likes. It's beyond her that some of us just don't enjoy it. I'll dance for hours with her because it makes her happy, but if she's not with me, I've always told the Alpha not to do anything special."

"You'll tell all the Alphas?" I ask him, feeling a glimmer of hope.

He shakes his head. "Not a chance. Balls are the easiest way to find your mate because most of the pack will show up. Even the Omegas are there, though they're working."

"It's just so many people," I say softly.

"I know, but one night full of people is better than a constant stream of them over a few days, right?"

I sigh. I don't honestly even know.

"I'll tell you what. I'll have Alpha Chris get some camping supplies for us. We go to a pack and then camp a night on our way to the next pack. That should give you some quiet before the next."

"That would be nice."

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I walk out of the room and am greeted by Peter. "That looks good," he tells me.

"How the f\*\*k do you walk in shoes like this?" I grumble as I curl my toes. The toes of the shoes are pointy, and the bottoms are slick.

"Carefully," he says. "You'll get used to them soon, I promise. Be careful on the stairs."

We walk down to the main door, and Peter leads us to the dining room. I am shocked at the number of people inside once he opens the doors. If I could run in these shoes, I likely would turn around and go straight back upstairs.

One night of people and we'll disappear into the woods for a day.

I nod at his reminder and follow him in and up to the head table. I hate the head table. Molly made me sit with her, and now, as guests of the Alpha, we have to sit at the head here, too.

"Welcome," Alpha Chris says as we approach, and Peter points out a seat for me- at the end of the table. "How are your rooms?"

"Very nice, thank you," Peter tells him curtly as he sits between us, blocking me from having to talk to him. Or at least that's how it seemed, but Alpha Chris leans forward to speak to me.

"Your sister showed me the kitchen and garden at Lunar Falls once," he says. "It was a really nice setup she had. She helped me institute something similar here to pull the pack back to right after my father passed."

I nod. "I was separated from Molly until earlier this year. I didn't get to see that."

Peter nods and gives me a sad smile. "Yes," he says, clearing his throat a bit. "Lunar Falls lost many members of its kitchen as Queen Molly left. The next chef took a mate, and the Luna there had also worked in the Kitchen. Unfortunately, the program was scaled back due to the lack of help. Queen Molly did well, though, and has helped many packs in this manner."

I look down at the table. People are going to ask me all kinds of questions, and I don't want to answer any of them. I didn't think this through.

"Perhaps tomorrow morning I can walk you around the pack and see if you catch the scent of your mate," Alpha Chris offers. "You have the Alpha gene, so I'll introduce you to the higher-ups first."

I can't handle this. Wordlessly, I stand and begin to walk around the dining room, snifing as I go. I'm distracted as a pretty young shewolf carries a tray of food inside. There are so many here to eat that they must have a ton of people cooking. I follow her down some stairs and walk right into the kitchen.

An older woman turns to me, anger on her face, but it's so familiar. "Just what do you think you're doing in here?"

"I'm hunting my mate," I say with a sniff.

She looks at me with a furrowed brow. "You have the Alpha gene. She won't be down here."

Can she feel that? "I'm not what you think I am," I tell her softly. "I won't leave anywhere out just because of some class status."

She smiles, and it's a kind smile that confuses me. "Where did you catch her scent?"

"I didn't," I explain.

"You're Benjamin's son," she tells me. "I'd know those eyes anywhere. You don't remember me, but I was in your pack long ago. Have you eaten?"

I shake my head. She knew me? I stare at her, her kind brown eyes... "You were the cook."

"I just worked in the kitchen," she says.

"You used to sneak cookies for me," I say with a small smile. "Mrs. Carol. You were friends with my mom."

"I did, and I was," she confirms and comes over, wrapping her arms around me. I return her hug, letting it warm me. "It's so good to see you. We... we thought you were dead."

"I was safe," I tell her. She releases me and sets a plate for me, bringing it to a small table.

"Tell me all about it," she says as I sit, and for the first time, I feel like I want to. I eat and tell her everything, and it feels- good. She listens, and she doesn't judge me or act like I'm awkward as f\*\*k, she just smiles.

"I'm so glad you were somewhere safe," she says, patting my hand. "You were always such a sweet boy. Come with me, and I'll take you to all the Omegas."

Calvin, you disappeared. Did you find her? Peter asks through the link.

No, but I met someone from Dad's pack. She's friends with my mom. She's taking me to meet the Omegas.

Good. Just link me if you need anything.

I'm glad he's not angry that I left, and I follow her out. She leads me out of the packhouse and down a path to an entire village of houses.

"This is where the Omega's live here," she tells me with a smile, leading me into a noisy building. "Come on."

She opens the door, and noise pours out. It's loud and crowded, and I want to go the other direction, but I stop myself. What if my mate is in there? I take a slow breath and then another before slapping my shoulders and following her in.

Heads turn to look at me. I am so overdressed here, and I suddenly feel so nervous. Carol takes my arm, though, and leads me to a table full of people. "This is Calvin," she tells them brightly. "He was my former Alpha's son at the old pack."

Relief. She didn't say I am the Alpha's guest. She didn't tell them I'm the Queen's brother. No. I'm Calvin and just Calvin. No expectations and no formalities. For the first time in, well... ever... I feel like I belong here. No one expects anything of me. It just feels right.