

12 - Agreements

(Willa)

"It's a little under an hour away, call if you need anything and we will be here." My mom bit her wobbly lip.

"It's actually over an hour," My dad looked at her confused.

"I didn't want to worry her, Vincent." My mom only used his full name when she was upset and his eyes widened.

"We will be here in under an hour if you need anything," My dad promised.

"Thank you. No, that doesn't even cover enough of what you did for me, for us. I don't know how to thank you or ever begin to repay you," I couldn't help the prick of hot tears. I was oodled with gratitude and love and outright admiration for my parents.

"Honey, we wanted to." My mom pulled me in and my dad wrapped his arms around us both.

"We loved every moment of it," My dad kissed the top of my head and I believed them.

I wiped my tears with the back of my hand when I heard Emmett's feet behind us.

"Here," He waved a piece of paper with a picture he drew of all of us by the cabin.

My mom kneeled down to take it from him.

"You drew this?" She gushed, and he nodded proudly, "I can't wait to frame it, we're going to hang it up at home."

"Don't forget," Emmett whispered.

"Never," My mom promised lifting him up as my dad patted his head.

"Thank you for letting us live with you, and we can't wait to come back and visit." My dad said to him.

"Soon," My mom added.

"Can I come visit you too?" Emmett asked and my stomach tightened.

The fact that he couldn't go back to visit the pack that he was supposed to one day lead made my stomach churn. I clenched my st against the swirling hurt and rage. I was mad for Emmett, for what was denied to him.

"Maybe someday." My mom said after a moment, I knew she was looking at me but I couldn't face her gaze.

"Now," Her voice broke as she looked down at her grandson. "We have to get going but we promise we will be back soon."

Emmett frowned but wrapped his arms around her neck.

I hoped for the millionth time that I knew what I was doing, that what I was doing was right for him. Even if it wasn't perfect now, I prayed I was working towards something to give him the best life I possibly could.

"We are so incredibly proud of you," My dad pulled me in again and I took a deep breath.

Remembering this moment. Even though it was underlaid with sadness, the warmth, love, and pride I felt from them was something I never wanted to forget.

"You okay?" Cali asked after we walked mostly in silence toward the restaurant.

I nodded, and then thought better of it and shrugged.

"It's a lot," Cali said, "If you need anything or get lonely you know where I am. Also, I am always down for a sleepover," She nudged me.

"I will take you up on that," My voice didn't sound like mine.

I felt afraid.

I wasn't used to being on my own ever. I knew I had Emmett but it was different having other adults around. I went from my parent's house to the Blue Ridge Packhouse, then the cabin. I never lived alone and I never took care of Emmett by myself completely.

I swallowed against the lump in my throat.

Cali wrapped an arm around me pulling me to a stop when we were a block away from work. She sighed before pulling me into a hug and I let her.

"The rst time I moved out I think I cried myself to sleep for a week," I wasn't expecting that, she didn't seem like the person that would ever cry, "I felt so scared and so angry that I was the one shouldering the burden even though it takes two, to, well you know," She chuckled into my ear before pulling back.

"It's terrifying, but you get used to it faster than you think. Then one day," She shrugged, "It actually gets good." I mean there is a lot about my life that isn't perfect, but the small things, especially when you see your kid enjoying the life that you worked so hard for, then it's all worth it."

"Thanks," I smiled at her but I knew it looked weak.

I wanted to believe her. I did believe her actually. Her words helped but they didn't erase the tinge of dread that still clung to me.

I settled into work, hoping the rush would come early so my mind would be filled with menial tasks and memorizing orders.

I felt the need for him more so than most days. I knew that when he got here I would have at least a few minutes of distraction. I found myself wanting to tell him what I was feeling and talk to him about it.

I wanted to go past the iring today. I wanted to see what he would say and how he would handle a situation like this.

I didn't really know what I needed from him. Comfort? A pep talk?

Nolan used to tell me it would be okay and then hug or kiss me. But I don't know if that ever really helped. It felt like more of a dismissal than anything now that I looked back on it.

The diner started to pick up, it was what I wanted but usually, this happened much later, after Caspien came.

I checked the clock and it was already lunchtime.

A feeling, slightly different than the fear and dread that lingered today settled in.

He didn't come at all that day.

Emmett and I sat alone at the dinner table and I tried not to glance at where my parents sat every day for over ve years. I tried even harder not to let him see how much their absence affected me because I knew he felt it too.

The place felt heavier, it seemed darker too, and denitely empty.

The sadness that I felt was palpable, the room was heavy with it and I knew it wasn't just my own.

I reached for Emmett's hand and squeezed it, he looked at me giving me a small smile.

"Ready for a bath?" I asked xing my face with a bright smile.

"No," He shook his head his brown locks falling on his face, "We just did that."

"Yes," I agreed, "But you got stinky again."

He tried to smell himself ruling his nose, "No."

"Yes," I argued, "Quick bath and then books and snuggles," I promised and he crossed his arms but didn't ght it anymore.

After he was tucked in, twice, and we read books and I assured him I would come back and check in on him again, I was able to clear the table.

Putting the dishes in the dishwasher and rinsing the pots felt heavy. The sadness lingered and it wasn't attached to any thoughts, I was worried that this was just something I would have to get used to.

I couldn't imagine living like this, but Cali's words came back to me. It wouldn't always be like this and I had to trust her that it would get better. I hoped tomorrow would be easier.

(Caspien)

"And they want to meet now because?" My Beta, Grin, was pacing my ace.

"Because they want to pretend that they have any control, that they make the rules," I sighed. We were after a meeting with Black Stone for months.

They weren't part of our pack or territory but closely bordered it, I wouldn't say we were allies but we, well I, tried to keep the peace as much as possible.

We've been trying to arrange a meeting with Alpha Jasper for months regarding slipping patrols on our borders. Rogues have been infiltrating the city and most of this city was human. It was something that didn't affect Black Stone but could seriously cause problems for me, and the humans that lived here.

Most of our pack lived in a building in town that to everyone else seemed like apartments but our territory expanded through most of the city and to some of the forest beyond, where the original packhouse was and some members still lived with my parents acting as a proxy. It was just recently that most of the pack moved to the city and I wanted to make sure that no matter where my pack members chose to live they would have full resources and protection.

Black Stone did things differently. They were recently established, Alpha Jackson took over from the previous Hendrick and ended his long line in a challenge. Even though the pack was old the leadership was new and it lead to a lot of unpredictability.

We accepted it because it was law, the challenge was witnessed and fought fairly. Cresent Moon was already in hot water with them when my dad offered any of their pack members asylum within our pack when he was Alpha.

Many of Black Stone's members took him up on that leaving when Alpha Jasper took over, leaving him with not many more members than he came with.

He never forgot it and thought we somehow cheated him from a pack. Even after I took over as Alpha he has been a pain in my a.ss ever since.

"He's an Alpha, I get that there are politics to this but he can't let a rogue problem persist just because he's a bit butt hurt about past events, and I can tell you're begging to let me know them all, but if one part of your pack is failing you are failing. We aren't allies so we will meet on neutral grounds. My Beta laid out where, and it was a place you chose last time. Your pack is at risk, skip this aggressive bullsh!t, we all know who will win if it came down to it."

"I know," I wouldn't put it off out of spite either but it did leave a bad taste in my mouth. I didn't like not having control over the situation, it was a feeling that I rarely felt.

"We have to go now," Holden continued gently looking towards Griffen who snapped his head up.

"Now?" Griffen repeated.

He found his mate, Nora, a year ago and she was pregnant with their rst pup. Griffen has been anxious since he found out and didn't like being away from her even during our meetings.

"Yes," Holden turned back to me.

"Where do they want to meet?"

"Their pack,"

"No f.cking way," Griffen cut in.

"I agree," I said, "That's not happening. We're meeting on neutral grounds as always," I scrubbed my face with my hands, this was the last thing I wanted to deal with.

"Make the call," I nodded to Griffen, "Where we met last time, no other options."

I hoped that would work. I hated playing politics. My pack's safety came rst but I wasn't going to cater to him.

"Increase border controls until we get back," I commanded Holden. Griffen is in charge of pack security but with his mind elsewhere Holden filled in the gaps since he found out his mate was pregnant.

"Done, there won't be any rogues that slip through," He turned to make a few calls.

"They said no," Griffen came back frowning.

I opened my phone and dialed Alpha Jasper immediately.

"I know you're new to being an Alpha since you don't come from a long line of Alpha blood as I do. So let me inform you how this works. You are a small pack, barely a pack really. However, you are still in charge of your borders and have to be respectful of those packs around you."

"Alpha,"

"I'm not nished," My voice turned to ice, it left no room for question.

"Your incompetence isn't my problem, but it has become mine for you warriors are sloppy. Let me rephrase that, you are sloppy. Another little tip for you, everything in the pack falls on you. I don't care what your excuses are, and I can tell you're begging to let me know them all, but if one part of your pack is failing you are failing. We aren't allies so we will meet on neutral grounds. My Beta laid out where, and it was a place you chose last time. Your pack is at risk, skip this aggressive bullsh!t, we all know who will win if it came down to it."

The line was blank.

"You may speak," I commanded.

"Alpha Caspien," He chided.

"Alpha Dracos," I corrected, "I'm royalty, you call me by my last name. Common Alphas are addressed by their rst, Alpha Jasper," I hoped he could hear the smile in my voice.

"We will meet you on neutral grounds," He responded after a moment, "But I'll tell you where."

I laughed, "Whatever makes you feel in control. You have an hour to send the location, I have other things to attend to."

Dread settled in and it didn't make sense, my wolf started to pace around in my mind as I dread Griffen dismissing him to say his goodbyes.

Then I realized, it was almost lunchtime and we hadn't seen Willa today. I checked my watch, I wouldn't have time to make it there and back and I had too much to do here.

I debated texting her, I could nd her number on her le even if she didn't give it to me personally. But would she even want to hear from me? She made it clear she wasn't ready and if I sounded too eager or desperate would that scare her away?

I almost laughed, I had never once been worried about sounding desperate before. Hell, I don't think I ever was desperate. I was more eager to see Willa for ten minutes a day than I had ever been to undress a woman.

"What?" Holden leaned back against the wall studying me.

"What?"

"You look far away, in dreamland or something."

"I was just," I shrugged.

"Thinking of your mate?" He gave me his signature half smile that showed his one dimple running of his hands through his shaggy mostly blonde hair.

"I mean, yes," I replied honestly, "I don't want to disappear on her."

"Text her," Holden shrugged.

"She never gave me her number."

"Ouch," Griffen walked back in, "Then don't."

My eyes shot to his dark gray ones, they looked almost black even when his wolf wasn't pushing forward, "Why not?"

"If she didn't give you her number then she doesn't want you to text her," He shrugged, "Plus it would be creepy."

"But she's his mate," Holden countered, "What would you do if that was Nora?"

"That was different," He shook his head, "Caspien's doesn't want a mate apparently."

"She has a name," I growled shocked by my own response.

"Willa, sorry. Willa isn't ready for a mate," He corrected.

"Did you ever gure out what happened?" Holden turned to me.

"No," I shook my head thinking, "It doesn't add up. Willa hasn't even mentioned him, she told me she was her second chance but we haven't dug up our histories."

"Better to keep it that way," Holden commented.

"You're going to be singing a different song when you nd your mate," Griffen leaned next to Holden.

They looked so different, with Holden's shaggy blonde hair and brown eyes, he was taller and lankier than Griffen, but still held a lot of muscle.

Griffen was bulkier, and with his dark brown hair and dark gray eyes he was a stark contrast to the beach boy leaning next to him. He was the no-nonsense one, it wasn't until he found Nora that he seemed to settle into himself, and let himself loosen up it even a bit.

Their outer appearances denitely imitated their personalities, they were almost opposites.

I've known them both my entire life, most of it at least. Holden was the son of my dad's Gamma so we were raised together since birth.

My dad's Beta didn't have any kids and Griffen was the son of one of our head warriors. He was always around and became my closest friend, we three fell into a friendship that turned more like a brotherhood.

I feel that, no, I knew, that since Griffen didn't have Beta blood he felt like he had to prove himself. He had worked harder than anyone did for him not to show up my body still tensed and one said anything about it, not to my face at least, I got the sense that he never felt fully comfortable in the role. Even though he accepted it and was far more suited to it than any Beta I had known, he still didn't feel as if he was qualified.

My parents advised me at rst to take someone else or make Holden my Beta and choose another Gamma, but I wouldn't budge. It wasn't just because he was my best friend, a brother, it was because he was the best choice and the pack saw that.

Holden was meant to be a Gamma, he never wanted the responsibilities of being a Beta and he wasn't raised for it.

We had a few challenges starting out, but we got into a rhythm quickly. We worked well together and we helped balance each other. No matter that people thought I ran this place like a d.amn dictator, and sometimes I did, I took their advice into consideration.

"So you think I should just leave for a few days without telling her?" I asked both of them.

They both shrugged.

"You know her better than we do, do you think it would be worse to leave without saying anything or to admit to her that you have access to her number on the rental application because you own her building?" Grin raised a dark eyebrow.

F.uck, he was right.

She didn't know that I was looking for her, that I had her agged in all of the company's systems, and many others. She didn't know who I was, or she never alluded to it, and I doubt it was something that she would have kept to herself.

"Okay, I'll leave it then, I just want it to be noted that I don't feel good about it."

"Noted, sir," Holden mock saluted me and Griffen nodded.

"She will come around, man," Grin assured me.

Easy for him to say, he met his mate at an allied pack event he attended on my behalf. He mated and marked her that same night.

Thinking of having Willa under me, letting me touch her, claim her, and show her just how incredible she was sent an involuntary shiver down my spine.

"Come on," Griffen groaned pushing off the wall looking at his phone, "We have a new meeting place, and it's even further away."

I sighed, my pack and the humans in this city were more important than some wannabe Alpha's quest for dominance. I tried to remember that.

(Willa)

The next day that he didn't show up made it harder. Even though I tried to convince myself that it was for the best and prepared myself for him not to show up my body still tensed and I felt a urry of nerves whenever the time neared that he used to come in.

"What happened to prince charming's dark twin?" Cali asked after the third day he didn't show.

I gave her a smile or tried to, to show just how unbothered I was, and shrugged.

"Your guess is as good as mine."

She crossed her arms studying me, I looked away, I didn't know what she was looking for but she was more perceptive than me I realized.

I hated that I was mad at him. I hated that I was already starting to lean on him. I needed to gure out how to do all this by myself without relying on anyone to be there for me. Or maybe that's what friends were for.

I relied on Cali, and I didn't see that as a negative thing. It was too much to sort through and I didn't know why I felt the way I did.

I felt anger, I felt the hollow burning ache of rejection, even if it was a shadow of what I felt with Nolan. It was a feeling I knew all too well in any capacity.

I was mad at him, for leading me on. Or maybe I did by not accepting his date. But did I want someone who would disappear after a week of me not accepting him?

It was my fault.

He was too good for me, I'm sure he realized that now that the initial shock of the mate bond wore off. He's probably back in his polished penthouse apartment and forgot I even existed. A single mother who could barely pay her bills and had no pack to call home.

F.uck I was feeling it all.

(Caspien)

"Alpha Dracos," Alpha Jasper drawled, he was sitting across a table with his Beta and Gamma standing behind him.

He looks like a d.amn villain - Holden linked me, and I couldn't disagree.

These lesser Alphas clung to power so much that it consumed them. Anyone that felt that they didn't have full control got desperate and it lead to unpredictability.

I didn't like that.

My power didn't come from my aura or bloodline, I ran a tight pack, yes, but I ran in fairy. My members had everything they needed and more, no problem was too small and I took into consideration their ideas and needs.

That is what made Cresent Moon so strong, it wasn't my power and position it was what I chose to do with it.

"Alpha Jasper, so nice of you to meet us," I took the chair across from him and Griffen and Holden to the chairs to either side of us.

I leaned back as his Beta and Gamma still stood.

"You know why we are here, I don't see the need to drag this out. This is a problem for both of our packs, and it makes us look weak. I don't do weak," I went on leaning back studying him. His jaw twitched and I almost smiled but held back.

"I don't either that's why I called this meeting."

"Agreed to this meeting," Griffen corrected him.

"You let your Beta speak like that?" Alpha Jasper snorted, "To another Alpha?"

"He may speak however he chooses whenever he chooses. I made him my Beta for his opinions and his expertise, not to pretend to be security," I felt Griffen loosen up next to me.

"I don't think this needs to drag. We need to gure out the problem, whether it is on your end, my end, or both," I gave him that much, I knew it was his fault.

"Rogues cannot slip into the city, they shouldn't slip into any pack territory, but a city poses a threat to more than the pack members themselves. Rogues are unpredictable, and cannot be trusted around humans. My pack members that live in the city live in peace with them, I will not have them be discovered."

"Living in fear, that doesn't seem like a very powerful move," Alpha Jasper stroked his slick beard, "Have you thought of just exterminating them?"

"The humans?" I asked, I couldn't fully mask my surprise.

"Hm," Alpha Jasper nodded.

"No," I answered immediately, "There is no need."

"You said you had to hide,"

"I said no such thing," I countered, "Let's get back to the point. There are rogues slipping between our borders that need to be dealt with."

Alpha Jasper sighed and motioned to one of his men to pour him a drink.

"What is your plan?"

What was my plan? This was his problem. His negligence made it a problem for us.

"Here is what I propose, we can work out details tomorrow," I nodded to Holden who produced a folder and slid it over to Alpha Jasper, "Review this plan and contract. Since we aren't allies I want to make sure that we have some legal recourse if even of us back out of this."

Alpha Jaspers' eyes widened for a second, "Of course, we wouldn't want that."

He stood and his men left.

This short interaction was draining. Anything that took longer than it should because of other people's egos got to me.

"This is going to be a long agreement," Holden sighed.

Griffen groaned and grabbed his phone to probably text Nora.

I instantly thought of Willa, I hoped she was safe. I wished I could talk to her even for a moment but I knew that she probably didn't even notice my absence.

(Willa)

I've come to terms, slightly, that he wasn't coming back.

A small part of me was happy that he didn't reject me because I don't think we could have handled that. Irish whimpered in my mind at even the thought of rejection.

When Nolan rejected us it was harder for her than it was for me.

Our wolf's needed their counterparts on a deeper and more primal level than our human part did. We needed our mates, as well, but it was different. Our wolf's didn't feel complete without them and as much as it hurt me Irs took even longer to recover, part of me wondered if she ever would.

My body didn't ll with adrenaline when it neared the time he used to come and that was a good sign. I could breathe for the rst time in a while knowing that my body caught up to what my mind already knew.

We could get past this, we've done it before in a much worse situation. Every day would only get easier from here. I felt lighter at that realization.

"Why are you so, I don't know," She tilted her head, "Smiley?"

"First off, I don't think that's a word. Secondly, I just feel good I guess. I feel optimistic," I shrugged.

"That's what I like to hear," She gave me a rare genuine smile, "Break in teen okay?"

I nodded, and turned back to nish cleaning my section, thinking of what I wanted to eat today.

The bells at the door rang and everyone froze, this time myself included.

His scent hit me harder than it did the rst time. It was sweet but woody. It made me feel like I was walking through the forest after the rst rain of spring when the owens would start to open.

It felt calming, I felt calm.

My wolf howled with joy as his churning blue eyes settled on mine.