

## Chapter Two

'Where do you want these?' comes the voice of my best friend as I glance up from my desk that is sprawled with drawings for the packs latest building, my gaze falling on the tall brunette waving a handful of les at me.

'Just nd a space' I sigh, rubbing my eyes with my thumb and forenger waving my other hand distractedly at the bomb site that is my oce.

'That bad huh?' Ashleigh comments as she shifts a pile of folders from the visitor's chair and takes a seat. Peering at the upside down designs, she wrinkles her nose, 'so what state are we destroying natural resources in with our Alpha's unyielding thirst for money, this time?' she asked.

I roll my eyes at her, 'Denver' I reply tiredly, 'why do you work here when you don't approve of the fact we build structures?' I mutter under my breath, my friend is an environmentalist and has a deep loathing of concreting over the beauty of the natural landscape. I have no idea why she insists on working here at the architects' oces but she refuses to quit. The Alpha ended up making her my assistant as no one else could deal with her.

Ashleigh stretches her arms above her head before leaning back in the chair and placing her feet on the desk, ignoring my scowl of annoyance. 'Because you work here silly' she retorted, 'I'd be bored stupid at home and I'd rather bring you a coffee than anyone else, at least we can have a chat! Imagine being Grumpy Gamma's assistant, I don't know how Tessa puts up with him.'

I giggle despite myself as I shake my head, 'she's his mate, of course she can put up with him' I reply.

'I don't understand why the Alpha feels the need to concrete over half the country, where is he going to hit next? I'm pretty sure there isn't a Silver Star pack structure marring the sss Rainforest yet maybe Gamma Robert could suggest there next' she growls, glaring at the open door as though she could personally let the Gamma feel her anger from here.

Beside me, the phone buzzes, and pressing the speaker phone, I shoot my friend a warning look as I put on my most professional voice. 'Jamie-Lee Sparks speaking, how can I help you?'

The curt voice of our Gamma ows out of the speaker, 'Lee, are you done with the Denver project yet? The Alpha wants a brieng in an hour and I haven't even seen it to sign it off' he snaps in annoyance.

Forcing down a laugh as my friend pulls faces, ipping her middle nger at the phone before grinning up at me wickedly, I try to keep my tone professional. 'I've just nished giving them a nal check so I can bring them up to you now.'

'Good, I don't need the Alpha on my ass because there's a delay with his precious new building' he grumbles.

Hanging up the phone, I grab the papers, rolling them carefully before securing them with a rubber band and walking toward the door, knocking my friend's feet to the ground as I pass.

'Hey!' the brunette huffs at my retreating back earning herself a smirk from me as I sweep from the room and head up the hall to the Gamma's oce.

Greeting Tessa, who smiles up at me as I approach, I pull a worried face, 'how's Mr Grumpy today?' I whisper as the she wolf laughs and shakes her head.

'He moaned that there was too much sugar in his coffee this morning' she replies with an exaggerated roll of her eyes, 'does that answer your question?'

I giggle, giving her a sympathetic look, Tessa and I have been friends since she started here despite her being twenty years older than me and we have a private joke about her mate's constant bad mood.

Moving around her, I knock on the door, waiting to be told to enter before opening the door and sliding inside.

'Gamma' I say respectfully as I stride to his desk and hold out the sheets of drawings to the Gamma who takes them with a nod before dismissing me.

Returning to my oce I nd Ashleigh still sprawled in my visitor's chair, ipping idly through a fashion magazine.

'Do you not have any work to do?' I grumble, moving around my desk and dropping into my chair as I hold out my hand to my friend so she can hand me one of the les she brought in with her.

'Probably' Ashleigh replied with a shrug, ipping the page carelessly.

'As much as I love you Ash, why are you here?' I ask again as I stand up and grab the top le as my friend seems to have no intention of handing it to me.

'I'm just team building' Ashleigh replied innocently, peeking over the top of the magazine, 'you know how the Alpha insists we keep our business relationships strong by attending frequent bonding sessions, well this is ours.'

'We've been best friends since you forced your way through the fence into my back yard at three years old and hid in my brother's tree house whilst your mum screamed blue murder thinking you'd been kidnapped' I muttered absentmindedly as I skim read through the rst page of the le. 'We don't need to strengthen any bonds, I'm pretty sure that you are bonded stronger to me than you are to Dexter.'

The brunette perks up at the mention of her mate, she had turned twenty one three months earlier and the warrior had appeared seconds later, claiming her there and then. She'd gone home with him that night and they'd been in love ever since. Just as quickly as the happiness lit in her eyes, it washed away, drawing my attention as I look at her in concern.

'What's up buttercup?' I ask softly, immediately dropping the le onto my desk and giving my friend my undivided attention.

Ashleigh twists her hair around her nger, her gaze rmly on the magazine though her stationary eyes gave away that she isn't reading a word.

'Nothing, nothing, you know me, always a face like a slapped ass' my friend replied quickly with a forced laugh.

Leaning forward, I place my hand on the top of the magazine, lowering it so I can look into her friend's deep brown eyes.

'Ash' I say softly, making her meet my gaze.

'Fine!' the other woman wails, throwing her hands up theatrically, 'Dexter wants me to have pups.'

'ummm OK? That's a good thing right?' I offer uncertainly, in all our conversations at sleepovers I don't remember my best friend ever mentioning she didn't want to be a mum.

Ashleigh blew a strand of her curly hair out of her eyes in exasperation, 'he wants them now Lee, as in right now! He wants me to give up working here, stay home and pop out like ve kids.' She groans, burying her head into the magazine in despair.

'You don't want kids?' I prod carefully, s\*\*t have I missed the ball here or something?

'It's not that' my friend sighs, glancing up again, 'I just don't think I'm ready yet, you know? I'm twenty one, I knew my chances of nding my mate were high, I mean so many of the werewolves that are over twenty one in this pack are still waiting for the call, but I thought I'd have more time before I had to raise a family.'

Standing up, I walk around the desk, shutting the door before pulling my chair out from behind my desk, scooting it around and in front of my friend, so I can grip her hand tightly in my own.

'Have you told Dexter how you feel?' I ask worriedly.

Ashleigh nods, 'I told him I didn't feel ready yet, and he was great about it, said all the right things, like we have lots of time and he is happy to keep me to himself for a while, but his eyes told me that he was disappointed.' She heaved a shuddering breath, 'I hate it, I hurt him because I'm not on the same page as him, maybe I should just give in and pop out a pup and have done with it.'

'OK woah' I start immediately, holding my free hand up to stop her from speaking. 'Firstly, Dexter wants to have a pup with you because he loves you, he's just disappointed that he can't share that experience with you yet, but that doesn't mean he's disappointed in you. Secondly, having a pup is a huge commitment, like a lifetime! You and I are twenty one and we still go to your mum or mine if we have the slightest issue, you can't have a pup just to make your mate happy.'

Ashleigh lifted her head, sning as she nods, blinking for a few seconds. 'Well technically, you won't be twenty one until Friday' she points out, making me groan.

'Don't remind me' I mutter, 'tomorrow night I get to sit in a damn forest clearing in the dark while my wolf does whatever the hell she does to call a guy to her.'

Ashleigh laughs, and I'm happy to see her usual sunny personality peeking out again. 'She's going to call out to her mate Lee, he's going to run through the forest, see you and you'll fall madly in love!'

I groaned louder, 'great' I pout, 'this sounds like a romance novel in the making, girl falls in love with a random wolf because she was told to! I can't wait to tell my grandkids' I add bitterly.

Glancing up at her, I give her a small smile, 'if I ran away would you help me?' I ask hopefully, only semi teasing right now. 'Just cause a distraction near the border or something so I can slip through unnoticed. Maybe strip off and dance naked for the border patrol, the resulting ght from your mate nding out will be great to keep eyes off me.'

Ashleigh tilts her head to study me, a smile playing around her lips but she doesn't laugh like I thought she would.

'You still not happy about the whole fated mate thing are you' she says sadly. 'I really thought the closer we got to your birthday the more chance there was with you coming around.'

I shrug my shoulders, reaching up to tighten the band in my ponytail, 'I don't have a problem per see with fated mates, but why is it so wrong to want to be wooed? Why do I have to be claimed in the damn woods like some sort of property? Is it really that terrible that I want someone to see me and not the stupid mate bond?'

The brunette smiles sadly, patting my hand soothingly, 'it's going to be ne Lee' she replies rmly. 'I know this isn't what you want but when you nally feel those sparks? You'll wonder why any of this other stuff mattered to you, I promise.'

Nodding, I stand up, moving my chair back to its original spot, whilst waving my hand dismissively to my best friend. 'Go do some work, or at least pretend to so no-one comes in here to moan at me that they caught you watching those human soaps on your phone again' I order.

Jumping up Ashleigh gives me a mocking salute, 'yes sir, right away sir, no soap watching on your shift oh tyrannical boss. I shall go and earn my stale crusts, can I spit polish your shoes while I'm at it?'

I just roll my eyes, pointing at the door again, 'go' I repeat, laughing as my friend skips from the room, turning in the doorway to blow me a kiss before disappearing around the frame and back to her desk.