



TRUSTING
in FATE

SKYLER SNOW

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NEBRASKA FATED MATES BOOK 1

SKYLER SNOW



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JASPER

I LUGGED my toolbox to the truck and dropped it into the back while Tuesday talked my ear off. I loved my little brother, but when he started lecturing, he didn't stop.

"Are you even listening, Jasper?"

I waved a hand. "Something, something, spending. Something budget. Something, something, I did something wrong."

Tuesday scowled at me. "You're too old to be the class clown, you know."

I grinned. "I'm only thirty-five. Why do you act like I'm a grandpa?"

"You are," he huffed as he scrolled through his tablet and entered more info at lightning speed. "Are you going to go over to Kreslin Middle School today? They were expecting you yesterday, but you didn't go."

"I told you I had to do some work at our dad's pack, remember?"

Tuesday sighed. "I understand that—and it's important—but come on. This could be a big contract, and we need the money."

"It's too early in the morning for you guys to be arguing." Nikhil, our middle brother, carried out his toolbox too. "What's the problem now?"

"Tell Jasper to go to the school today and talk to the principal. She has some work for him to do."

Nikhil sighed. "Jasper, go to the school. I'm doing repairs at the Patterson's, so you can take care of Kreslin."

I groaned. "I hate going to schools. There's always a bunch of people to talk to, little kids bumping into me and shit."

Tuesday rolled his eyes. "Oh yes, the perpetual bachelor. Get over yourself." He shoved his palms into my back. "Go to work and make more money. Some of us want to settle down and have pups, you know!"

Of course. I wasn't into having kids or settling down. Nikhil was more into his books than meeting mates right now. But Tuesday? He loved the idea of putting down roots, having pups, starting a real pack and expanding it. That was why he was so great at

organizing our business. Nikhil was absent-minded, and I found it boring. Just point me at something, let me go, and I could fix it. Talking to people? Negotiating prices? It wasn't what I wanted to do, so I happily let Tuesday have all the control he wanted.

"We're going. We're going!" I grunted as I climbed into the old blue Ford and slammed the door. "Do you want me to pick up dinner on the way home?"

Tuesday looked at me like I had kicked him. I grinned, pulling out of the driveway before he could curse me out. "Beside me," Nik sighed.

"Why do you rile him up? We both know he loves cooking for us."

"I know, I know. He gets under my skin so much that I can't help but to poke at him sometimes. Besides, he started it."

"Very mature." Nik turned the page of a thick book in his hands and continued reading. "Don't forget to pick me up from the library. I'm stopping there after the Patterson's."

I raised a brow. "That book isn't even halfway read yet and you're already going back for more?"

"I'll finish it in a few hours."

Yeah, I didn't doubt him. Nikhil had the ability to read anything in a short amount of time. I didn't understand him at all. Most alphas loved all things physical, but Nik only cared about his books.

"Well, at least try to pay attention to where you're walking with that thing!" I called out after he hopped from the truck. "Seriously, Nik. Last time, you almost got hit by a car."

"Almost." He looked up from the book and tilted his head at me. "I was at a really good part. I couldn't just put it down."

Groaning, I laid my head on the steering wheel. Yep, that was my brother. Everyone knew him around town as the bookworm he was and kind of looked out for him, but I worried he would end up hurting his damn self one day.

"Don't forget. The library," Nikhil said as he stood beside the window with his tool bag in hand. "I don't want to have to find my own way home again. It's annoying."

I waved a hand. "I'll be there. I forget you one little time, and you're all over my ass about it."

Nikhil narrowed his eyes. "Library."

"Yeah, yeah!" I shouted.

He finally turned away and walked up the drive to the Patterson's. I huffed. Why do I have two pains in the ass for brothers? Nikhil was a silent, brooding alpha, and Tuesday was a lecturing, drive-me-nuts omega. I'd lucked out in the genetics department as the only normal brother in the house.

I headed to the school after stopping off and grabbing a cup of coffee from Sal's diner. By the time I parked and walked inside, the school was quiet. Kids were sitting behind desks, listening to their teachers drone on. I didn't miss those days. Nikhil was the learner, Tuesday was the organizer, and I was the doer. If I wasn't keeping busy with my hands, I wasn't living, and in a school setting, that usually meant I was getting in trouble.

I followed the signs throughout the halls for the principal's office. When I stepped into the tiny space of the lobby, a man with serious eyes and huge glasses peered at me.

"Can I help you?"

"Uh yeah. Is Mrs. Hill in?"

"Is she expecting you?"

I raised a brow. He did know this was a tiny town in the middle of Nebraska and not a high rise office in New York, right? I nodded, and he sighed, picking up the phone while continuing to stare at me as he spoke into the receiver. When he put it down, he looked me over.

"She'll see you now. Right back there."

"Thanks." I grinned. "Glad to know I'm good enough to go to my meeting."

The man scowled, but I chuckled. Maybe I liked ruffling folks' feathers a little, but I couldn't help it. Some people were too much to handle. I walked back to let myself into Amber's office. She smiled and waved me inside.

"Hey, Jasper. I was wondering when you would be by."

"Sorry it took so long. I had to go by my parents' place and do some repairs there first." I pushed my fingers through my hair. "But I'm here now! Ready to get to work. Where do you need me?"

Amber sighed. "All over." She groaned and stood up from her desk. "Let me show you what places need the most love."

I nodded and followed her out of the office. I'd gone to Kreslin myself when I was a pup. Our pack was one of the few that encouraged early integration with human schools and experiences. They thought it made us more adaptable and less suspicious as we got older. Alphas, omegas, and betas might be the status quo of the world, but... we weren't just our secondary genders.

We were wolves.

There were other shifters in the world, but as wolves, we usually tried to keep to ourselves. Not my pack. We were supposed to go out into the world and learn how to live, so we had experiences that other sheltered wolves didn't. I was kind of grateful for growing up that way. I felt more at peace now in my small town. People knew us, and we knew them.

"How have you been?" Amber asked.

I smiled at her. Amber had been the principal for a few years, and, of course, I had run into her a few times. I'd even installed the new deck on the back of her house.

"I've been good, Amber."

"I'm glad." She patted my arm before we stopped at our destination. "Alright, this is the boy's bathroom. The stalls need to be repaired. Then I have some lockers in the halls and in both of the gym's locker rooms that need fixing as well." She pointed down the hall. "Three fountains aren't working, and a few classrooms still have minor damage from the last storm we had. I told Tuesday I might need some work done on the roof too, but I would love it if you and Nikhil could do that together. It might be a lot to do for one person."

I assessed everything as she spoke. Most of the work was pretty minor, things that I could take care of in a few hours.

"I'll have to look at the roof, but I'm almost positive I'll need some supplies first for major repairs." I glanced around the hall. "Can you give me a list of classrooms that need to be fixed? And do you want me to work on them before school starts or after?"

Amber waved a hand. "Whichever you're most comfortable with will be fine with me. I'll give you a key, so you can get in whenever you need. But I also don't think the teachers will mind too much if you run in, fix things, and let them get back to work."

I grinned. "That's not the way I remember the teachers at this school. I remember getting in tons of trouble for interrupting classes."

Amber laughed. "Yeah, I heard about that. Apparently you were something of a handful back then."

I shrugged as we strolled down the hall. "I was acting out. I had a lot on my shoulders."

"Like what?"

I mumbled something about taking care of my younger siblings. Yeah, I had to look after them, but being a wolf shifter, there was much more responsibility involved than that. It was in middle school that I learned all the duties I would have if I turned out to be an alpha or omega. If an alpha, I would have to mate and start a family, maybe even a pack. If I was an omega, I would have to pump out babies and obligations to fulfill around the house. It had all been so... overwhelming. Sure, I'd seen it around forever in the way my parents and neighbors acted, but... it was another thing to realize that image would be my life someday. And maybe, I wouldn't even have a say in it.

Jokes on them. I'm thirty-five and still going strong. No mate, no kids. Just freedom.

"You can start in this room." Amber gripped the knob and paused, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth.

I raised a brow. "Uh, is something wrong?"

"No, no not wrong." She said quickly, and her nervous laughter made my brow shoot up further. "Grim can be a bit... persnickety."

"Persnickety," I repeated. "You mean he's a pain in the ass?"

Amber chuckled. "You could say that. Grim is harmless and a great teacher, but he's very serious about his job."

"Grim." I snorted. "What kind of name is that?"

She waved a hand. "Oh, the students started calling him that, and the name stuck. Grimaldo Harris is his real name, but when they all called him Grim, he just went along with it. I think it suits him sometimes." She sighed and looked as if her thoughts were far away before she straightened up and nodded her head toward the classroom. "Let's go in, shall we?"

Amber opened the door and I followed her inside. The classroom was decorated so minimally that it was like walking into a sterile hospital room. I glanced around at the kids who looked back at me as if I had two heads. I waved awkwardly before I turned and sucked in a sharp breath at the man standing in front of me.

"Is there a reason for this interruption?" The blond omega raised a brow at us, and I was lost in those cold, blue eyes that looked as if they could freeze with a glance. "I'm busy."

"Grim, this is Jasper King. He's going to be doing the repairs on your room and some of the facilities around school." Amber smiled at me, but my eyes only focused on Grim's as they narrowed. "He won't be in the way for long. I just want to double check what you need fixed around here."

The omega sighed, and my gaze flickered down to his pouty, pink lips. I was gripped by the sudden urge to trace his mouth with my tongue and taste him until he was completely unraveled on my cock. Desire damn near choked me as I tried to force myself to be normal.

"What are you staring at?" Grim snapped.

"Nothing!" I cleared my throat, and my cheeks burned at the squeak that had left my lips when I shouted. The classroom burst into laughter, and I wanted to sink into the floorboards. It was middle school all over again.

I couldn't take my eyes off of the omega with his stern eyes and tantalizing lips. And he was tall—damn near my height—and imposing from a single glance. I wanted to reach out and touch him, feel him beneath my fingertips and know what it was like to keep him. What it would be like for him to be mine.

What the hell was happening to me?

GRIM

WHO THE FUCK is this idiot?

I stared at the alpha in front of me in the jeans that hugged him way too tightly—ditto on the black shirt—and the ample muscles those short sleeves showed off. He gave me a lopsided grin, and I narrowed my eyes more.

"Can't this wait until later?" I asked, turning to Amber. "I'm in class."

"It's almost lunch time." She patted me on the back. "I think you can manage."

I held back a groan and gave her a look of dissatisfaction. Amber smiled and walked away, leaving me on my own with the wall of brick that was supposed to be a man. Amber and I were going to have a very long talk later. We had become close since I started working at Kreslin, and I wanted to tell her not to leave lugheads in my room.

"So," the man's deep voice cut into my thoughts, and I started. "Where do you need me to start?"

I folded my arms over my chest. "I'm not done teaching my class. Why don't you come back in twenty minutes? I'm sure something else could use fixing around here."

He grinned at me. "I'll wait."

"I don't think so. You're going to be a distraction to my students if you just stand around. We're trying to learn history."

"Oh? Well, I'll get out of your way."

Thank God.

I didn't need some bulky alpha standing over me. And worse than that, he smelled... off. What the hell was it? Why was the alpha so... strange? Whatever, at least he was leaving my classroom and letting me return to teaching.

"Quiet!" I called to the kids, and they immediately hushed. I turned toward the board and started writing. "Who can tell me who invented the—" I stopped as someone giggled and then the rest of the class joined in. "What is so funny?" I asked as I turned on my heels.

Sitting front and center, crammed into a desk way too small for his vast frame was

Jasper. He'd folded his hands in front of him and looked studious. I wasn't sure who he'd snagged a textbook and notebook from in such a short amount of time, but he had a pencil in hand and scribbled away, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth.

My face heated. "W-what are you doing!" I snapped.

Jasper looked up at me and scratched his head. "Studying. I didn't want to be a distraction so I thought I would sit and learn." He beamed at me and my heart skipped a beat. "I'm ready to be taught, Mr. Grim!"

Giggles filled the room again. I wanted to kick his ass, but I also had to press my lips together to keep from laughing. What was wrong with him? The desk was way too small for his bulky frame, and he'd be lucky if I didn't have to call the fire department to cut him out of the thing. He blinked up at me, batting his lashes innocently.

He's an idiot. I am not going to be distracted by him.

Alphas were always making asses out of themselves because they could. People like me? I had to work harder because I was an omega. Every promotion, every raise, every point in my life was dictated by what I was. While the alphas could be goofball morons, they would still be loved. It wiped the smile from my face and I glared at him instead.

"Mr. King."

"You can call me Jasper." His grin widened. "I'm a student after all."

"Jasper." I gave an exasperated sigh as I pinched the bridge of my nose. "I don't think this qualifies as not distracting my class."

"Are you denying me an education?" Jasper frowned. "That's not setting a good example."

Yep, I was going to kill him. As soon as that bell rang, I would drag him out of his damn chair by his ear and strangle him in a closet for being such a huge pain. I almost doubled down and told him to get up and leave, but I had to stop myself. No, let him sit. A few more minutes in that tiny chair, and he'd be begging to get out of my room.

"Everyone, turn to page one hundred and fifteen," I said ignoring him altogether. "We'll start from there."

Jasper eagerly flipped through the text book and buried his nose in it. If he wasn't so fucking annoying, he would be cute. But no, I wasn't going to let myself think that about him. The man was being a jerk on purpose, and I wanted to shake him for that. Instead, I would ignore his antics so I could focus on my students.

I continued to teach, expecting him to get up and leave at some point. That didn't happen. He even raised his hand to give "ooh ooh's" as he tried to answer the questions I directed at my students. Finally, the bell rang and I sighed.

"Don't forget to study for your test next week! We're covering the Civil War, and some of you are not turning in your homework. Do it!" I called after them.

My students scurried out of the room, happy to get away from me as soon as possible. The only one left behind was Jasper King. He shifted out of his seat, grunting and wiggling before he finally popped free with a sigh of relief, robbing me of the chance of seeing him cut out by firefighters. Too bad. I would have paid good money to watch that.

"Alright!" Jasper exclaimed. "Now, what do you need me to fix?"

I crossed my arms and glared. "Mr. King, in the future I'll ask that you not disturb my class. What you did was completely unprofessional and I don't appreciate it."

"You don't appreciate rugged good looks and a big, bright smile?"

I groaned. "You are the fucking worst."

Jasper's jaw dropped, and his eyes widened. "What? You curse? Now, that's a revelation." He chuckled and walked toward me. On instinct, I moved backward and bumped against my desk. Jasper smirked. "Do I make you uncomfortable?"

"Yes," I snapped. "Morons with power tools often do."

He gripped his shirt tightly. "Ouch, my heart!"

I rolled my eyes and turned before I moved over to the windows. "You can do your job and stop harassing me. Two of these windows are broken and don't close properly. The other two don't open." I moved to the back of the room and kicked the useless radiator. "No heat, no air conditioning. It's uncomfortable, and I'd like to have it back in use."

Jasper nodded when I glanced at him. "Anything else?"

"I think that's most of it. You can take a look around and see if anything else needs to be fixed." I dismissed him with a wave of my hand. "I have work to do, so try to keep it down."

Jasper whistled. "You're a grumpy man. Do you need coffee? Did you skip breakfast?"

I glared, my cheeks going hot at his intense gaze. "None of the above. Stop it!"

He chuckled. "Alright, alright. I won't annoy you."

I highly doubted that. As soon as he turned around, I walked behind my desk and sat down, taking out a stack of papers to grade. Focusing on my work was always a way to center myself. So I focused on that until I heard whistling.

When I glanced up, Jasper was bent over, inspecting the radiator. He had an ass that looked good enough to bite. Even if he was a complete dumbass, I couldn't deny that he was... mildly attractive. My body instantly betrayed me, and my hole slicked as heat licked at my thighs and spread over every inch of my skin.

No, not now. Don't do that. Fuck.

I squirmed in my seat. No, it shouldn't be possible that I was getting wet. The heat suppressants I took dulled the scents of alphas, and I hadn't gotten randomly slick in a long time. Maybe they weren't as effective anymore. I would have to talk to my doctor figure out what—

"Uh, hello?"

I jumped and nearly tipped myself out of my chair. When the hell had Jasper gotten right in front of me? He stood with a hammer in his hand and he grinned a little. The scent that I'd tried to convince myself didn't exist flooded my nose and I almost choked on it. Heady, strong, alpha. It invaded my body, and I clenched my thighs together as the slick grew worse.

"W-what can I do for you?" I asked.

"Well, your radiator won't be able to be repaired today, so I'll probably come back tomorrow to do that for you. I'll need some parts that are not on me right now." He put his hammer away and glanced around my room. "There's not a ton of damage in here, so it shouldn't take me too long to take care of it."

I nodded, but I hadn't heard most of what he said. Even as he continued to talk, my eyes were drawn to his lips. I thought about how good it would feel to have his tongue buried in my hole while I clenched around him, desperate to cum. And his strong hands would hold onto me, exploring my body and making me weak. Those hands were probably calloused and rough, used to hard work.

Fuck. Things weren't going the way I wanted them to go. It had been a long time since I'd slept with anyone, but I was okay with that. Sex was distracting. All I wanted to do was teach, be left alone, and have some peace and quiet. So why couldn't I stop drooling over Jasper King? Why couldn't I stop imagining him balls deep inside of me, his hands on my hips, his teeth at my throat marking me, taking me, claiming me—

I shot up out of my chair, and Jasper raised a brow. He'd been in the middle of explaining something, but I hadn't heard a word. I rounded my desk and pushed a hand against his muscular chest.

"Can you come back and work on this some other time? My class won't be at lunch forever, and I need to get work done. You're distracting me."

"How am I distracting you?" he asked, letting me push him because there was no way in hell I would have been able to do it on my own if he really didn't want to move. "Are you trying to get rid of me?" He grinned. "Is it because you find me hot?"

My cheeks burned. I would never in a million years find someone like him hot. I'd always wanted a mate that was serious, intelligent, studious. Jasper King was a clown.

"Get out!" I snapped. "Why don't you go fix something else around here?"

We made it to the door before Jasper stopped moving and grabbed my wrist. If he was any other man, I would have punched him for touching me like that, but his grip tightened. His body pressed forward, drawing a gasp from my lips. He was so close to me that I swallowed hard, trying to remember how to breathe.

"What are you doing?" I whispered.

"You feel it too, right?" Those intense, dark brown eyes stared straight into my soul, and my mouth no longer wanted to form words. "What is this? I've never met someone that I wanted to drag home and mark right this moment like I want to do with you."

If it was possible my cheeks burned more. I was pretty sure that at any minute, I would burst into flames from all of the heat building inside of my body. But he'd put it into words. The need, the desire to find somewhere private and fuck until I was stretched on his knot, his teeth tearing into my flesh to make me his. It was too much. I stared up at him, and he frowned, seriousness clouding his features before he stepped back.

"I'm sure it's nothing." Jasper laughed and waved it off as if it really wasn't anything to be worried about. "It'll pass." The words sounded more like he was trying to convince himself. "I should go."

Right, the man was an idiot and I needed to remember that. I scowled, and he finally released me. Quickly, I stepped away from him even as everything in me begged to remain close to him.

"Don't you have work to do?" I snapped.

Jasper's stupid little smirk came back. "Yeah, I do. Unless you want me to stick around..."

"Out!" I yelled. "Get out!"

He held his hands up. "Okay, alright. I'm going. No need to lose your mind over it." His eyes swept over my body one last time, and I felt exposed under his exploring gaze. When his eyes met mine again, he licked his lips. "I'll see you later."

"No, you won't."

"Sure. Whatever you need to tell yourself, Mr. Grumpy." He walked out of the room and closed the door behind him.

I yanked it open. "It's Grim!" I shouted.

Jasper continued walking away and simply waved. "Whatever you say."

I slammed my classroom door and winced when the glass shook in its frame. How had he revealed such a childish side of me? I was always in control, composed, meticulous. Why the fuck did Jasper King make me feel like I was out of control?

He's our mate.

My deer insisted it was true, even as I tried to ignore it. That scent, I knew it well. He wasn't human, but he smelled familiar; like the woods after a rain, fresh and alive and strong.

Jasper King smelled like home.

This was going to be a problem for me.

JASPER

AS SOON AS I was away from Grim, I hid in the boy's bathroom. It was easier to fix the problems in there when I couldn't see, hear, or smell the omega. Grim, who smelled like nature and softness. I wanted him so bad that my cock was still hard as hell. Apparently, the feeling was mutual because all I could remember was the scent of his slick and imagine myself lapping at it.

Damn. I couldn't even focus on work. Not now. I had to get the hell out of the school and get my brain functioning. I packed up my stuff and walked down the hall to Amber's office. When I passed by Grim's door, I hesitated.

I hadn't met someone who I was completely enraptured by in a long time. Joking around was my default, but I always went back to being on my own. Except this time, the feeling wouldn't pass. I wanted to go back into his room, poke fun at him, watch his cheeks burn red and see his body's reaction to me.

Mate.

My wolf stalked around, anxious as I was. Behind that door was Grim, our mate. I couldn't believe it, but my body wouldn't lie. Neither would my wolf. It was taking everything in me not to barge back into the room, grab the omega, and drag him home with me. I'd actually met my mate. And he didn't smell remotely like a wolf. No, he smelled like... prey. Delicious, hot as hell prey that I wanted to protect and devour almost equally.

Do it. We should do it. He wanted us too.

I could tell that much. As brash and annoyed as he was, it was undeniable that Grim was as attracted to me as I was to him. What the hell did that mean for us? Should I try to go in and talk to him? Figure out what came next? This was uncharted territory for me. Some wolves found their fated mates, some didn't. I never expected to find mine at Kreslin Middle School in the stern and angry little omega that looked like he wanted to hit me as much as he wanted to sleep with me.

The bell rang and students began flooding the halls. Damn it, I'd waited too long.

Grim would be busy trying to collect himself and teach. I'd already gotten yelled at once for interfering with his work.

I need to go talk to Amber. Everything else I can figure out later.

I forced my feet to move. The further away I got from Grim, the more I wanted to run back to him. What if something happened to the omega while I was gone?

I'm right down the damn hallway. I need to calm down.

"Jasper." Amber smiled as I walked into the office and she stood at the front desk.

"Done already?"

I shook my head, willing my voice to work. "Not yet, but I need to get some supplies that I don't have with me today. And it would be easier to work when the school is empty. Can I get that key?"

"Oh sure!" Amber popped into her office and came back with a few keys on a springy wrist band. "Here, I had these made for you. When you're done, I expect all of them back. Not that I don't trust you. These go to the outside doors and these are for the classrooms. That should do it!"

Everyone trusted everyone else in our town. Haven was tiny, just outside of Omaha, and the population was next to nothing. Being so close to people was a blessing and a curse for wolves. On the one hand, people came to know us as friends and trusted us. On the other hand, it wasn't easy to hide who and what we were sometimes.

"I'll make sure to return all of them as soon as I'm done."

"Good." She smiled at me. "Do you want me to pay you now or at the end of the project? Tuesday said since I've used you guys before it was fine either way."

Of course he did. Tuesday had a way of charming everyone around him. They liked his attitude, his smile, and that meant we got more business. And if anyone was stupid enough to think they could screw us over because our brother was soft and sweet, Nikhil and I took care of reminding them that he wasn't alone. We might all be different, but we worked well together. When we weren't at each other's throats.

"Yeah, you can choose. It shouldn't take more than a week to finish everything up, and most of the parts I need are already at home." I nodded, my mind temporarily distracted by Grim. "How long has that teacher been working here?"

Amber frowned. "Who? Oh, Grim?"

"Yeah, that's the one."

"Grimaldo's been here for a good year now. He came right after Nikhil finished the last repairs and hasn't left yet. I thought he'd be moving on by now."

I frowned. "Why would he be moving on?"

Amber sighed. "He's getting to that age when omegas usually start going a little crazy when they're not married. I heard something about him having a partner or getting one

soon, but he hasn't said very much about it."

My wolf snarled and my heart sank. He was with someone? No, that couldn't happen. I wasn't going to allow my mate to be with anyone but me. I clenched my fists and had to stop myself from turning and going back to Grim, holding him against me, and demanding that he tell me everything right now about this partner of his.

"Are you okay?" Amber's voice broke into my thoughts, and I glanced up quickly before I tried to smile at her. "You look like you're about to explode."

"I think it's the heat," I lied. "I'll let you know how the repairs are going soon."

"Alright, let me know if you need anything. Thanks, Jasper!"

I gave her a pleasant wave and made a beeline for the doors. As soon as I was in the truck, all I could think about was Grim, and my heart squeezed. That blond hair, those narrowed blue eyes, they drew me in and called to me. The only problem was that I didn't have his number, email address, nothing. I stared at the school for a minute longer before forcing myself to climb inside of my truck and drive home.

When I stepped into the kitchen, Tuesday was on the phone. He glanced up at me as I passed by, my body still hot while my brain conjured up images of Grim. "Yes, I can have Nikhil take a look at it for you. Of course. I'll let you know as soon as I get in touch with him." As soon as Tuesday hung up, he frowned. "What's going on with you? Why are you home so early?"

I shook myself. "I need to go for a run."

"Now? In the middle of the day?" Tuesday continued frowning. "Are you sure?"

Yeah, I knew the risks. An eager hunter with a gun could be a real problem, but the woods around our home were private. Of course, we got our fair share of people trespassing, but it wasn't so common that I was worried about it, especially in the middle of the day. Hunters loved early mornings the best. Besides, my body ached and my wolf paced. That tight, itchy feeling in my skin only grew. I felt too confined, my thoughts racing.

"I need it." I kicked away my shoes and ripped off my shirt before I tossed it aside. "If I don't run right now..."

Tuesday's frown deepened. "What happened?"

"I-I think I met my mate today."

My brother's eyes widened to the size of saucers. "Are you kidding me? No, no. You're screwing with me, right? That's what you do. You get me all riled up and crazy and then laugh." He paused when I didn't move. "You're not joking, are you?"

"No." I shook my head and for once, I wasn't messing with my brother. "Not even a little." I pushed my fingers through my hair. "I'm going back to the school tonight to get some of the repairs done. I won't throw off the schedule."

Tuesday blinked at me. "Are you seriously my brother?" He whispered, "Or were you kidnapped and replaced with a sane person who doesn't give me heartburn everyday?"

I rolled my eyes at him. "Shut up. I'm going for a damn run."

Tuesday nodded, being serious again. "Alright, be careful. How about I make you a caramel-apple pecan pie?"

I calmed down a little. "With ice cream?"

"With ice cream." He smiled and ran over, wrapping me in a tight hug before he stepped back. "It's going to be okay, Jasper. I know you must be scared about all of this, but think how much of a blessing it is. I know the uncertainty will be worth it in the end."

Tuesday had hit the nail on the head. I was terrified. Grim being fated to me? It was every bit of the responsibility that I shied away from over the years. It was hard enough making sure my brothers and I were taken care of, that our dads had everything they could need, that life kept going in the right direction. Now? I had no idea what I was going to do. Even as I stood hugging Tuesday, my heart raced and all I could think about was Grim.

"Run." I grumbled out, suddenly pushing him away as my wolf stirred.

Tuesday jogged to the backdoor and opened it as I tugged off my clothes. The shift came on suddenly, every bone snapping and reshaping in record time as black fur burst across my skin. I felt my tail swinging behind me as my nails dug into the wood of the floor. Tuesday would kill me for scratching it up again later. But now, he just whistled and pointed to the door, directing my wolf to get the hell outside.

I shot out the back door and howled when I hit the grass and dirt. My wolf needed the run as badly as I did. All I could think about was Grim. He was mine. I was his. But I wasn't with him. And he was out there, walking around, unmarked, and possibly dating someone else. Who? I wanted to find out who it was and sink my fangs into their throat.

Run. Focus on that.

My muscles tightened as I launched myself forward and focused ahead on the trees. As soon as I broke past the trees, I felt freedom wash over me. Every thought was shoved out of my head as my wolf took over and just moved. The faster I ran, the more my muscles screamed, but the more I was able to stop thinking about everything that was happening around me.

I was going to have to talk to Grim eventually, though. Not being around him was making me crazy. Tomorrow. I would go by the school when he was done with classes and talk to him about what was going on with us because I knew he had to be feeling what I was.

The woods swallowed me up, and I gave into my wolf and let him run until I was exhausted. I stopped by the stream and drank until my belly was full and I couldn't

possibly take another sip.

As soon as I lifted my head, the thoughts I had suppressed came rushing back and hit me like a brick wall. Fated. I was fated to someone. The thought kept playing in my head on a loop. What the hell was I going to do?

I stayed out in the woods until the sun started to go down before I returned home. The back door was still wide open and the smell of dinner and dessert filled the air. I shifted and washed off with the hose—the cool water making my muscles contract and a shiver run down my spine—before I changed into the t-shirt and shorts that had been left on the back porch for me.

Nikhil glanced up from his book when I walked into the kitchen. "Library," he growled.

"Goddamnit!" I smacked my forehead with the heel of my hand. "I'm sorry, Nik. Did you walk all the way home?"

"Yes." He put a bookmark between the pages of another thick as hell book and glared at me. "Where were you?"

"Didn't Tuesday tell you what happened?" I asked.

Tuesday walked into the kitchen, his usual blue apron tied around his waist before he stirred a pot. "I didn't think it was my place. Besides, we should all talk about it."

"Talk about what?" Nik asked, his brow furrowing in concern as he looked up at me. "You okay?"

I swallowed thickly. I wasn't sure. Finding a fated mate was a cause for celebration and enjoyment. But even after my run, I was unnerved. Someone was going to have to rely on me. And we would have pups and that meant more people would depend on me. The thought alone made me choke.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully, and Nikhil stood up. I held my hands up. "I found my fated mate."

Nik frowned. If anyone knew how against a family I was, it was him. I didn't talk to Tuesday about it as much because he was into it. A family, a mate, babies, the whole nine yards. He didn't need me shitting all over his dreams because I had issues with it. But this was a huge change for me. Finding my mate and being the oldest alpha? It meant...

"You'll be pack alpha," Nikhil said as he stared at me almost in awe. "I never really thought I would see that."

"You and me both." I ran a hand over my face. "I don't want to be pack alpha. I'm you guys' brother. I don't want to command shit."

Tuesday frowned. "That's your job, Jasper. You don't give yourself enough credit. If we didn't think you could lead a new pack, then we wouldn't be here."

Nikhil nodded softly. "He's right. You're a good man and a strong wolf. Pack alpha will

come naturally to you."

I didn't believe a word of what they were saying. My stomach reeled at the thought of leading anyone. Of losing my freedom. My wolf growled at me, and I wanted to growl right back.

There had to be a mistake. I couldn't be the one to turn our little home into a real pack. That was my father.

I wasn't ready.

GRIM

MY BODY WAS BETRAYING ME.

I sat behind my desk, trying to grade the stack of papers in front of me as my hands trembled. I could feel my slick still gathering, trying to slide down my legs even though I'd only cleaned up a few minutes ago. Ever since I ran into that jerk, Jasper, my body wouldn't stop. Heat licked between my thighs, and I swore I felt his tongue. A shiver went down my spine, and I imagined it was his rough fingertips gliding all over my body while I moaned for him. My cock stirred, and all I wanted was to look into those dark eyes and be consumed by him as he licked and sucked my cock.

Fuck!

No matter how many times I lectured myself to calm down, it wasn't happening. I didn't understand. Whitetails didn't mate for life, it wasn't part of the plan. You found an alpha, bred, and then the omega took care of the babies. That was how it had always been. Since I'd avoided that life for so long, my herd was now demanding I turn myself over to it. Give in. Mate. Breed. Be the deer I was born to be and increase the size of the herd.

I shivered. It had never been my dream to be bred and passed around the herd, handed over to the next alpha who was ready to have babies. An omega birthing factory. I snorted derisively at the idea. But that was what our alpha wanted. The head of the pack, the man that arranged it all. Kyrian. My father. I didn't have a choice if I wanted to continue to stay within the herd, and I didn't want to leave my mother or siblings. I wasn't ready for that.

"Ah, fuck!" I groaned as my balls tightened and threatened to explode just from brushing my fingers over them as I tried to adjust my erect cock in my slacks. "This is getting out of hand!"

My mind instantly wandered to Jasper again. The more my body heated, the more I craved him. I knew what was happening. My heat was fast approaching, and there was nothing I could do to stop it now. Even if I jerked off a hundred times, it would barely

sate me. That was the only upside of alphas in the herd. If I was in heat, I could go to one of them and they would help calm the fire that raged inside, threatening to consume me.

"I should call one of them." I picked up my phone and opened it, panting slightly in the dead silence of the room. "I don't think I can even walk anymore."

I'd waited way too long to acknowledge the truth that, despite all of my meds, I was still in heat. Now, it was too late. I scrolled through my contacts and tried to find one that I approved of. The man I was supposed to breed with, Dorian, would definitely pick me up. And I'd be stuck in his bed the next few days taking load after load until my belly was swollen.

The thought made me want to vomit. I didn't want him. None of the deer alphas would do. No, I needed Jasper. He would put out my heat, and I wouldn't feel like my skin was prickly and sharp from every touch of fabric and, hell, even the air.

"Focus!" I lectured myself. "No, I can't go to him even if I want to. It's not like I have his number." I shook my head, trying to clear it. "I need to call someone from the herd."

I found Dorian's number and tapped his name. As the phone started ringing, my heart dropped into my stomach and nausea crashed over me in waves. I closed my eyes.

"Grim?"

My eyes shot right back open, and I stared at the open doorway. Jasper stood there in a t-shirt and a pair of shorts illuminated by the cool lights in the hallway. I had shut my own lights off, the glare too much for my sensitive eyes. Jasper had his toolbox in one hand and he looked shocked that I was sitting there.

"W-what are you doing here?" I managed to get out on a shaky breath.

He held up his tool bag, looking as confused as I felt. "I came back to fix up your room while you weren't here. But... you're here."

"Grim? Grim?" The voice against my ear ended in a growl. "Grim, why did you call me? Are you okay?"

Jasper's eyes narrowed. "Who the hell is that?"

I quickly ended the call and put my phone down. He definitely wasn't human, that was for sure. How else had he been able to hear Dorian from across the room? And he looked like he was ready to explode, his face red as he growled at me.

"Nobody," I said quickly.

"Nobody?" He dropped his tool bag and stalked over to me so quickly I yelped. "Don't you ever lie to me again. Who was it?"

My deer and I whimpered, and I quickly straightened up. When the hell had I ever made that sound? Normally, I would laugh if anyone even suggested that my omega side would slip out so easily, but the alpha in front of me was imposing, scary in a way that

made my slick increase and my body shoot up twenty degrees. I wanted his hand wrapped around my throat while I clung to him. But I fought myself.

"Who are you to ask me who I speak to?" I spat, trying to grasp onto the last straws of my independence that I felt slipping away. "Why don't you fuck off?"

Jasper was on me before I could blink. He yanked me out of my chair and slammed me onto the desk, making me squirm. He gripped my slacks, and I watched as sharp claws appeared and sliced through my trousers, tearing them to shreds, but never once scratching me. His fingers touched my skin, and I was slammed with sweet relief from the spot on my thigh that he caressed. Yes, he was the one I needed to touch me.

"What are you?" I moaned. "You're not human."

"Neither are you." He leaned over me, his lips grazing my throat before he nipped along my jaw.

"I'm a deer," I whispered, spilling more about myself than I usually did to people. "Whitetail deer."

"Wolf." He growled, making me shudder. "You smell delicious."

A wolf. Fuck. The man was a predator, someone that, on any other day might, hunt me down and eat me. But he was salivating over my body in an entirely different way, and clearly there was a different hunger that needed sating in him.

"Who were you talking to?" He asked as he gripped my cheeks and refused to let me go.

"A-an alpha," I mumbled, my face burning in shame even though I knew I hadn't done anything wrong. It still felt like it when his dark gaze held me. "One from my herd. I was going to ask him to pick me up because I'm... I'm... "

"In heat." Jasper sniffed the air before he looked at me, his eyes boring into mine. He licked his lips, and I watched as they glistened. My phone started to ring, and he grabbed it to growl, "Are you mated to this alpha?" He checked me over for marks, turning my head this way and that in his inspection.

"No," I shook my head and swallowed hard. "I'm not mated to him."

Jasper paused. "Do you want to be?"

I shook my head harder and couldn't stop the tears that stung my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. "No, I don't. Most of us don't mate. I would just get pregnant with his fawns and that's it. That's all he wants from me."

The wolf snarled, his sharp fangs revealing in a show of primal fury. "What the hell is that," he snapped. "No one will touch what's mine!"

I cried out as he turned me over and shoved me over my desk. Jasper's strong hands gripped my hips, and he yanked them into the air. And then I felt it. His cock slipped and slid over my wetness and I moaned, holding onto the desk as I shoved my hips back,

needing more.

"Please," I panted. "Please don't let another alpha touch me."

Jasper slammed his cock inside of me, and I screamed. Stars burst behind my lids and I couldn't breathe for a minute as his thick cock throbbed and pulsed inside of me. Every bit of thought I had before went right out of my head. My omega side, my deer, they were taking over. All I could do was be bred and fucked and marked. Normally, that was a fucking insult, but I wanted it. No, I needed it. I needed my mate.

"More." I panted out and gripped the desk harder. "H-help me, Jasper. Calm this fucking heat!"

A groan left his lips, and he bucked into me wildly. It felt like the first time I'd ever had sex, desperate and urgent, like if you didn't get that person right now, you would die. I tugged at my jacket, ripping it and my button-up shirt off. At some point, I was going to have to figure out how to get home without clothes and how to explain that to my herd. But I didn't care when Jasper moaned and licked the shell of my ear with his warm, wet tongue.

"Jasper." I groaned out as I laid on the desk again and threw my hips back, meeting his frantic thrusts. "So hard. So big." My eyes rolled up, and I felt my slick dripping down my thighs, coating his cock. "Harder. Please!"

My mind was a blur, and I was exactly what I never liked about myself. An omega in heat wasn't in control of a damn thing, and I wasn't. Mate. That was all I could think about as Jasper's hips slammed against my body and the sharp sound of our fucking filled the classroom.

It was paradise. Jasper's enormous body on top of mine was intimidating and comforting in all the right ways. He was what any omega would want. That strength and heat, that possessive growl that echoed against my ear, the soft kisses he left behind on my body right after nipping me and making me cry out. Jasper was intoxicating.

"Mine!" I shouted as my nails dug into the wood of my desk and my balls tightened. "You're mine, Jasper King." I couldn't allow another omega to touch him, not after this. He belonged to me. Everything in me screamed it was right, that we belonged together.

Jasper turned my head and leaned down. His lips crashed against mine and my body exploded with untethered pleasure. My cock jerked, and I felt the cum splattering onto my desk, but I wasn't done. I drowned in my alpha's lips until I couldn't breathe and came up panting for air.

"You're mine," he growled against my ear, his hand wrapping around my throat before he squeezed. "Do you understand, Grim? You belong to me, omega."

Fuck. I could cry from his words as a sea of emotions swirled inside of me. I hated being called omega, but on his lips it was a precious gift and not a way to talk down

about my gender. He would cherish me, keep me safe. Or at least that's what my deer reassured me. I let go of all the walls I'd thrown up around myself, and I nodded hard at his words.

"Yes, yes, alpha," I choked out. "I'm yours. Only yours."

"That's what I want to hear." He growled before his teeth plunged into my flesh and he groaned.

My eyes shot open, and I screamed as he marked me. Pleasure ripped through me and my stomach tightened before I came again, bucking and yelling his name as he held on tightly. And then I felt it. Jasper's knot hammered against my hole before he slammed inside and knotted me. It grew bigger and bigger by the second until I was so full my brain completely ceased to function. Something snapped in my brain, a feeling of connection, like I could feel him in ways I never had felt anyone else before. I came again when I felt his heat, his seed, filling my ass and making my belly slosh with his cum.

"Fuck." I moaned as I laid on the desk and stared out, not really seeing anything as I shivered and felt the pool of saliva that had collected on my desk. "Jasper."

The alpha's tongue slid over my mark, and I moaned. "I'm right here," he whispered against my ear. "Are you okay?"

I nodded slowly. "Again? Please?"

Jasper chuckled. "Already?" He pushed a hand between my thighs and jerked my cock back to life.

"Heat is still there." I mumbled, throwing my hips back a little. "Still there."

It had calmed by a hell of a lot, but the intensity was still there, trying to take me apart. I rocked myself against him, desperate to feel his cock unravel me once more. And Jasper didn't disappoint. He started slowly before he stroked me into a frenzy, and I bucked and screamed, still filled with his knot.

"I won't be able to walk," I slurred after another intense orgasm left me weak, lying on the desk as my legs trembled. The only reason I still stood upright without sliding to the floor was because of Jasper's big, powerful arm wrapped around my stomach.

Jasper chuckled. "You don't need to walk, Grim. I'll carry you."

I wanted to ask him how he would do that when he didn't even know where I lived. Right, I needed to tell him where to leave me after this. I reached up and my fingertips brushed over the mating mark. My mating mark.

Fuck. There's no going home after this, is there?

JASPER

I WOKE up and peered at Grim like he was a figment of my dreams and would vanish if I looked away. He snored softly, the blanket completely wrapped around him. His lips were parted, and he scrunched up his nose, wiggling it in his sleep and making me laugh quietly.

Was he really my fated? It felt surreal, but... my mark was in the junction of his neck and shoulder, still bright red and probably throbbing. It would be that way for some time until it scabbed over, but the mark would forever remain. He was mine. I'd taken him, marked him, and even though I thought my wolf was insane for jumping on him, it was what we'd both needed and wanted. My mate had begged for me, and I thanked the Goddess I had been there to get to him in time.

Reluctantly, I rolled out of bed when my bladder wouldn't allow me to wait anymore. After I left a kiss on Grim's stubbled jaw, I walked out of the bedroom and across the hall. I took a quick shower as I thought about the night before, reliving Grim in the throes of passion, moaning my name. Finally, I shut off the water before I walked downstairs to the smell of bacon, eggs, sausage, and hashbrowns that were ready to be devoured.

When I stepped into the kitchen, Tuesday turned from the stove and stared at me. His eyes swept up and down my body. I was only wearing dark red boxers, and there were scratch marks on my back from when Grim and I had gotten back to the house in the early hours of the morning. They were healing, but the redness remained in the shape of his sharp nails. He'd woken up just long enough to fuck me before he passed out again. The deer shifter was insatiable.

"You brought him home last night," Tuesday said matter-of-factly as he poured me a cup of coffee, adding some Irish creamer.

"Yeah." There was no reason to lie to him. My brothers had definitely heard me and my loud as hell mate the night before. Nikhil was already at the table with a cup of coffee in his hands, and he inspected me as well. "What? Will you two stop staring at me?"

"Hard to do with the sounds I heard last night," Nik muttered. "You never bring

anyone home."

"No one," Tuesday stressed. "You've been sleeping with men outside of this house since the day we moved in, but last night?" He shook his head. "First of all, I heard things from your man's mouth that I never want to hear again. I am disturbed."

My cheeks heated. "Shut up, you two! It's not like I wanted to bring him here or disturb you two but..."

"But what?" Nik asked.

I sighed. "I shredded his clothes at the school, okay? It was bad enough having to clean up the mess we made, I wasn't about to come here, find clothes, and then look for a motel." I shook my head. "That's a lot of work."

Tuesday walked over and sat a plate in front of me. "Was it a lot of work or did you want your mate in your bed?" He smirked when I glared at him. "So, that's your mate, huh?"

"Yeah," I said quietly as I picked up my mug and drank deeply, ignoring the way the coffee burned the hell out of my tongue and lips. "And I marked him," I mumbled into my mug.

"What!" Tuesday dropped the pan, and eggs went flying everywhere. "So soon?"

I groaned. "Yeah, I couldn't help myself," I said more loudly as I put my mug down. "But that's not the craziest part."

Tuesday propped a hand on his hip. "What? What could possibly be the craziest part of this story?"

I bit my lip. "He's not a wolf. Grim is a whitetail deer."

Both of my brothers stared at me like I'd just spoken a language they couldn't decipher. Most shifters stayed with their home packs, or herds in Grim's case. Deer with deer, wolves with wolves, bears with bears. But I'd mated with a deer, and I couldn't think of a single person in my pack who had done anything like that.

"It's fine." Nikhil said, and I glanced up at him. "He's your mate. We'll accept him no matter who or what he is. He's part of the pack now."

Tuesday nodded in agreement before he started sweeping up the eggs from the hardwood floor. "Yeah, I mean, of course we'll accept him happily. That's what family is about."

I smiled at the two of them. My brothers were just as supportive as our parents. I was grateful for that.

"Hey." Nik grabbed my attention, and I glanced at him. "So, now that you're mated, you know what you have to do, right?"

Damn it. Yeah. I frowned as I thought about what came next. I had to present my mate to not only our pack, but the ones in our region. And then I had to take my place as

pack alpha. Anytime there was a meeting between the packs, I would be there. And there would be a ceremony, a whole thing where everyone had to acknowledge what I was. I wanted to say no thank you, but that wasn't the way things worked. I had been chosen to start the next pack, and I needed to follow through with it.

"When do you think that will happen?" Tuesday asked.

Nik shrugged. "As soon he calls home and tells our dads."

Goddess, I wasn't ready for that. They would be happy because I'd found my fated, but they would both chew my ear off and never stop with the lectures about what I needed to do next. They would drive me crazy, and there was nothing I could do about it.

All three of us looked up at the sound of footsteps upstairs before the shower came on. I almost hopped out of my seat and ran up to check on Grim, but he clearly was used to being independent and didn't exactly need my help. I would let him come to me and ignore my ridiculous wolf that insisted I hover over him.

"Do you know much about him?" Tuesday whispered.

I shook my head slowly. "No. All I know is that I went to the school, and he was there and... things kind of spiraled out of control."

Honestly, I knew nothing about him at all. I'd marked a complete stranger. The panic rose in my throat, and I swallowed hard. What if we didn't get along? Grim was more severe than I was. And I was too goofy for him. Would we even work?

Eventually, Grim walked into the kitchen and stood, clasping his hands together tightly in the entryway. He was dressed in one of my t-shirts that was only a little big on him, considering he was pretty tall himself. He'd also pulled on a pair of my gray sweats as well. My brothers stared, and I did too, taken in by how good he looked and how intoxicating he smelled, especially when he was covered in my scent.

"Good morning!" Tuesday said a little too loudly and cringed before he smiled and waved at the stove. "Are you hungry?"

Grim nodded, but he still hadn't looked at me. "I could eat. Is there coffee?"

"Sure is!" Tuesday poured a cup for him. "Do you like cream? Sugar?"

"Cream and sugar, please. I like mine a little sweet."

"Coming right up!" Tuesday smiled and turned toward the counter, preparing his coffee happily.

"Morning," Nikhil called. "I'm Nikhil, and that's Tuesday."

Grim nodded. "Grimaldo H—" He frowned. "Well, I guess my last name is the same as yours now." He scratched his cheek. "Bizarre."

I looked up at him. "Is it that crazy to think about, Grim?"

The omega finally looked at me and narrowed his eyes. "Yes, are you serious? I was on my own for years and now I have a mate." He crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't

know how to handle this."

My frown deepened. Was he not happy? My stomach twisted, and I glanced away, unsure of how to react to the irritated omega. Anxiously, my wolf whined. I wasn't making my mate happy. How was it possible that I was screwing up already?

"Sit, sit!" Tuesday waved toward a seat at the table. "I'll get you some food. Do you eat anything in particular?"

"I'm vegan," Grim said as he stared at the table. "Toast is fine, if you don't have anything else."

"I have hash browns too! I cooked them in a little olive oil, so you could eat that, right?"

Grim smiled at my worrying brother, and it made my heart speed up. "That sounds great. Thank you."

"Coming right up." Tuesday's shoulders dropped as the tension fell away, and he smiled before turning around again.

The kitchen was eerily quiet. Besides Tuesday gathering up food, you could hear a pin drop. Nikhil was staring at his book, but I knew he wasn't reading it because every few seconds his eyes flickered up and he looked between me and Grim.

As for my mate, he was doing his best to pretend that I didn't exist. My wolf growled and before I could stop myself, I mimicked that sound. Grim's head shot up then, and he pressed a hand against his chest in surprise.

"Sorry," I grumbled as I stood up. "I'll get the truck ready for today."

"I'll take care of repairs," Nikhil volunteered. "You're busy."

I wasn't busy. I didn't want to be busy. My mate wouldn't look at me or give me the time of day until I growled. There was no way in hell he wanted to be around me. I could work, and he could...

"Do you want me to take you home before work, Grim?" I asked, ignoring my brother.

Grim glanced away from me. "No."

"No?"

"No," he repeated, but he didn't offer any other explanation.

I frowned. "Well, what the hell do you want to do?"

"Jasper," Tuesday hissed and shook his head at me. "Grim, do you want to stay with me today? I work from home and can show you around the house and land since you'll be staying."

Grim glanced up at him and nodded. "Thank you."

Clearly, I wasn't needed. I stood up and drained the rest of my coffee before I sat my mug in the sink a little too hard, the handle popping off before I tossed it to the side. I hadn't touched one bite of my food, and now I couldn't. My chest tightened and I wouldn't

tell them, but... my feelings were hurt. Why did he feel so at ease talking to my brothers, but not me?

"Jasper." Nikhil called as I headed for the stairs. "Jasper!"

I ignored him and went up to my room. I put on my jeans, t-shirt, and the heavy boots I wore when I worked. Right now, I needed to be using my hands more than anything else. Fixing things, making them work. It was what I was good at. Maintaining any kind of relationship? Not so much.

"Nik, if you're not ready in five minutes, I'm leaving without you!" I called from the front door. "Get a move on."

I went out to the truck and put my tools in the back. A few minutes later, Nikhil walked out with his supplies, and we both climbed inside. There was no Tuesday on our asses for once, but I figured he was inside comforting Grim from having to deal with the big, bad wolf.

"You okay?" Nikhil asked as we pulled away from the house.

I turned on the radio, and country music ate up the silence. And any possible conversation. Was I okay? I had no damn idea if I was. Maybe if I gave Grim some space, he would feel better later. I hoped. And that was all I had.

Hope.

GRIM

I STARED after Jasper when he walked away and my stomach turned. He'd looked so disappointed and hurt. Part of me had wanted to say something, but what? I followed the youngest brother around and tried not to think about the growl that had fallen from Jasper's lips, directed at me.

Tuesday rooted around in his office drawer. "I know I have one in here somewhere," he mumbled before he moved onto the next. "Normally, I'm pretty organized, but my brothers always come in here and rifle through my things. Ah! Here you go." He held out a charger to me. "This one should fit your phone."

I stared at his hand, almost too afraid to take it. When I charged up my phone, I would see all the waiting messages wanting to know where the hell I had gone and when I would be back to the herd. How was I supposed to tell them I wasn't coming back? I was mated to a wolf so I could never go home.

Not that I even wanted to. At this point, I wasn't sure what I wanted.

"Do you... want it?" Tuesday asked.

"Fuck." I took the charger and shoved it into my phone. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

"You just swore a lot." Tuesday stared at me wide eyed.

"Sorry."

I shoved my charger into the wall and stared at Tuesday. An omega. Clearly, that's what he was. And on top of that, he was the perfect omega. Sweet, giving, caring. A homemaker. I was none of those things. Why the fuck had Jasper marked me? I had nothing to offer him. My only good qualities were the fact that I could teach and take disappointment. Those traits didn't seem like they'd be winning anyone over anytime soon.

My phone came on and message after message rolled in. I already knew my mother would blow my phone up, wondering what the hell had happened to me and why I didn't come home. Then there was my father and Dorian. Especially Dorian. I was supposed to give myself to him, to have his fawns, but that wasn't going to happen now. I was mated.

Taken. For the rest of my life.

I'd begged for Jasper, and in the end, I really couldn't complain. Jasper bit me because I wanted it. I felt like he was the alpha that should touch me, the one that should hold and keep me safe through all the bullshit. Now, I would have to face the consequences of my own actions. My deer had been sure he was the one, but I was still confused.

"Are you okay?" Tuesday asked softly. "What's going on?"

I glanced up at him, but I didn't have the words to explain. Besides, he would tell Jasper, and I didn't want the alpha to feel even worse about what was going on with me. Instead, I fidgeted with the cord of the charger.

"My family won't exactly understand what's happening with me," I said truthfully. "I was supposed to be bred by an alpha of my herd to grow our numbers, but now that's not possible. I don't want my mother to be upset or for my herd to turn their backs on me. They're all I've ever known."

Tuesday frowned. "And they won't understand that you've mated with a wolf."

I glanced up at him once more and nodded. "Yeah. That."

There was something comforting about Tuesday. He reminded me of my mother, soft and sweet, always there to give me love and support. My chest tightened, and I swallowed thickly as I tried to make my brain work again.

Reaching out, Tuesday took my hand and gave it a squeeze. "I'm so sorry you're going through this. But if the Goddess wants you two together, then they'll have to understand, right?"

I sighed and squeezed his hand right back, needing some strength. "I'm not so sure about that. Deer don't really believe in fated mates. It's something that happens so rarely that I've heard most of my elders saying it doesn't exist. That it's a silly fantasy that never happened." I laughed lightly and shook my head. "I'm a history teacher, and there's so much about my own family's past that I don't know."

Tuesday was out of his seat and wrapping his arms around me before I could blink. He hugged me tightly, and I slowly reached up and hugged him back. There weren't many deer omegas in our herd; I was only one of five. Affection wasn't something that we were good at. We didn't want to be viewed as weak just because we were omegas. Looked at as if we weren't men. And most omegas had no time for softness to anyone besides our fawns.

But there was comfort in Tuesday's arms, even if he wasn't who I really needed. And that person was Jasper. My mate. I needed him to be there with his arms around me, his body pressed against mine to make me feel I would be okay. That everything would work out in the end. Too bad I had rejected him and sent him out into the world thinking that I

didn't care.

"Okay, we will not sit around feeling sorry for ourselves now, will we?" Tuesday stood back and smiled at me. "Is there anything you like to do when you're feeling a little stressed out?"

I chewed my lip. "I like to run."

Tuesday's smile widened. "Just like Jasper."

I tilted my head. "Really?"

"Oh yeah, he's always taking off to go for a run when he's upset or needs to think. It's how he puts up with stress. That and cracking too many horrible jokes." He shook his head. "Or he picks on me, but he only does it to mask how he's really feeling."

There was more to the alpha than the idiocy that he displayed? I'd taken one look at him before and figured he was simply a ridiculous man. But maybe that wasn't true. Did Jasper King have depth?

"We could go for a run," Tuesday suggested as he walked out of his office and I followed him.

A run would be nice, but I didn't know the area. Herd lands were safe, protected, and I didn't want to take my first run with Tuesday. Not that he wasn't nice, but my deer wanted to run with Jasper first, and the thought of doing otherwise didn't sit well with me.

"Maybe we could do something else..." I trailed off as I followed him into the kitchen.

"Do you like to cook or bake?" Tuesday asked. "Baking always calms me down."

I shuddered. "I don't bake. And the only thing I can cook is pasta and tomato sauce. From a can."

Tuesday looked at me with wide eyes. "From a can? Why would you ever do that to your body?"

I shrugged. "My mother and sisters always do the cooking. They enjoy it. Or at least, that's what I've always thought, but maybe I was wrong."

I was starting to realize I was probably wrong about a lot. Was I no better than the alphas in my herd? I assumed the women liked to do all of that home making stuff, but I'd never actually asked. I was too busy focusing on myself and how people perceived me.

Tuesday moved around the kitchen like he had been in it forever. "Then maybe you should ask them, but in the meantime we don't have to do any of that either. How about we go grocery shopping so I can stock the house with the foods you enjoy? Besides, I need to cook a pretty amazing meal for Jasper."

"For what?"

Tuesday turned and smiled at me. "Jasper is going to be head of our pack. We do a

ceremony on the full moon where we swear our loyalty to him, and he's accepted as our leader. It's something we do every time there's a new pack alpha."

"Wow," I blinked. "I didn't think he was so..."

"Serious?" Tuesday chuckled. "He tries not to be, but mating you means he needs to step into his role. Jasper has a family to protect now, one that will definitely grow sometime soon."

I touched my belly. Right. The thought hadn't even entered my mind that I could end up pregnant pretty soon. I'd been consumed with Jasper the night before to where I could barely remember anything but how good he felt and how quickly he'd soothed my raging heat. Now, it was right in the forefront of my mind.

"It won't be that fast, right?" I asked, after plugging in my phone again. "I'm still on birth control and suppressants. Well, I was. I didn't take them this morning."

"Kings are extremely fertile," Tuesday said with a shrug. "We always have been. If you're not pregnant now, it'll only be a matter of time."

A matter of time. I wrapped my arms around my belly and stared down at it. Deep down, I'd resigned myself to getting pregnant at some point and having to care for the fawn. Or at least I told myself I had. Omegas took care of the babies. That was how it went. I'd always expected to give up my teaching job and go back to herd lands to fill this role, this expectation. Now, I would still do the same, but in a completely new place. A place filled with strangers. Even if Jasper was my mate, I still didn't know him.

"You've got a lot on your mind," Tuesday said.

"Yeah." Like how I was thirty years old and about to start a completely new life. "I need to call my boss, and then we can go to the grocery store."

Tuesday nodded. "Alright, I'll get ready and wait for you in the car."

I gave him a small smile. "Thank you, Tuesday. For everything."

"We're brothers now. We have to have each other's backs."

My throat tightened at his words. Tuesday saw us as brothers? I felt pride swelling in my chest as I took my phone upstairs and sat on Jasper's bed. His scent clung to everything, and I sighed as a wave of comfort washed over me. I'd pissed him off. He'd charged out of the house like his heels were on fire because of me.

Jasper had helped when I was burning, and I had found someone to care for me and only me. I should celebrate him and our mating. Then why couldn't I shake the sadness that hung over me like a cloud?

As my phone turned on again, I rolled over and buried my face against his pillow. There was that potent scent again. Jasper. It felt like I was right up against him like before. Even more, the smell of sweat and sex lingered and made my body hot all over again. It wasn't my heat this time, just pure attraction. I wanted to feel him all over

me, and I squeezed his pillow, keeping my nose buried into it until my phone went off.

Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding!

Every notification felt louder than the last. Right, I had to come back to reality. My mother was probably worried sick. It was rare that I didn't return home in the evenings. I picked up my phone and saw a dozen missed calls.

I tapped Amber's number first and pressed the phone against my ear. "Grim, I am going to murder you! Where the hell are you?"

Groaning, I pushed myself up and tried to think clearly once Jasper's scent was no longer enveloping me. How was I supposed to explain to her what happened?

"Sorry I wasn't at school today. I wasn't feeling well and my phone died." Well, that was partly true. "I'll try to be in... soon."

Would my alpha even allow that? I wanted to scoff at that thinking. Since when did I give a fuck about what someone wanted from me? Especially an alpha. It made me want to slap myself, but he did have a say. This was his pack, and I was now part of it. I blew out a deep breath and shook my head as Amber called me again and again.

"Are you listening, Grim?"

"No, sorry." I muttered. "What did you say?"

"I said if you're not feeling well you should go to the doctor. Don't worry about coming back in. I'm sure we can get a substitute for your class. Hell, I'll teach them if I have to."

I sighed. "Thanks, Amber." I chewed my lip before I finally dug up the courage to ask. "Is Jasper at the school today?"

"Jasper? Yeah, he came in a little while ago and went to work on your room." She paused. "Why?"

"No reason. Thanks, Amber."

"We're going to talk about what's really going on with you soon, right?"

I swallowed thickly and sighed. "Yeah. Soon, Amber."

"Alright. Be safe, Grim."

I hung up and stared at my phone. Leave it to Amber to call me out and know when I wasn't being completely truthful. I would have a talk with her soon. In the meantime, I picked up Jasper's pillow and buried my nose against it. I wasn't sure how long I laid there before I blew out a breath and forced myself to stand up and move.

I couldn't sit around moping and worrying. Jasper was my mate, and as much as he drove me up a wall, I wanted him to be happy.

No, I needed both of us to be happy, but I wasn't there yet. As my stomach churned, all I could feel was fear and resentment at my new lot in life.

How was I ever going to get over that feeling?

JASPER

WHAT ELSE COULD I FIX? I looked down at the list that Amber had given me when I'd walked in that morning. Everything that I could take care of without extra parts and special tools, I'd taken care of. I glanced at my phone and groaned.

It had only been a few hours. I didn't want to go home just yet to the grumpy man that I'd mated with the night before. He clearly didn't want me there. Grim didn't even want to look at me. I'd wanted to shake him a few hours ago, but now my wolf was sulking. Like a fucking child.

Okay, I was sulking too. After all that time never wanting to get mated, it had finally happened, and I wasn't so sure Grim even liked me. He'd needed me the night before. Need and want though? Those were two entirely different things.

I picked up my phone and pressed it to my ear when it rang. "Yo."

"I'm done at the Patterson's so I'm heading over to the school." Nikhil grunted, and I knew he was picking up his tools. He exchanged pleasantries with the Patterson's in the background before he was back talking to me. "It's not too far, so I should be there in thirty minutes."

"That's fine." I glanced around me. "I might be up on the roof when you get here."

"Wait for me. Just focus on something else for now until I get there."

I shuffled from foot to foot. "No, I don't want to stand still." I couldn't. When I stopped moving, when I stopped working, my mind started going again and I questioned everything. "I've been up on plenty of rooftops before. When you get here, come up and help me out. I want to see how bad the damage is before that."

Nikhil sighed. "Stubborn ass. I'll be there shortly."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know."

We hung up and I shoved my phone back into my pocket. I grabbed my bag and found the roof access. When I reached it, I set my bag down and looked around. The roof didn't seem too horrible. Parts of it would need to be completely removed or patched because of water damage, but it wasn't unfixable. I walked around, taking pictures of every inch

and scribbling down notes so I would remember what I needed later along with the measurements.

I stopped and sat down for a minute, screwing the top off of a bottle of water as I looked out over the school grounds. As soon as I took a drink, thoughts of Grim filled my head. Maybe he was right to be pissed off at me. I hadn't been thinking the night before. My wolf had taken over, and I gave into instinct. The minute he begged for me, needed me, I had given in, but he had been in heat too. Maybe I shouldn't have worked so quickly, but... he was my mate. I knew it. He knew it. That didn't mean he was any less upset though, and I was lost in a sea of confusion, unsure of what to do next.

"Jasper!"

I turned and looked at the ground below. Nikhil waved as he walked up, and I returned the gesture. When he disappeared into the school, I finally pushed myself up. I needed to stop overthinking. That was a flaw that I'd tried to avoid all of my life, but it always crept right back. I glanced up at the sky and sighed.

I just want my mate. Damn it. I never thought I'd want one and now all I want is him in my arms right now.

Standing around, thinking about Grim wouldn't improve my day. I had to get going. I tossed my water bottle back into my tool bag and grabbed it before I walked back to the door. Nikhil stepped out, and I nodded at him before the world shifted and I was falling.

I didn't even have time to make a sound as I crashed through the roof and down to the floor below.

Crack!

The sound of bone breaking registered in my brain before the pain hit me. Red, hot fire shot up my leg, and I ground my teeth before crying out. The sensation took my breath away, and I forced myself not to panic as blood ran down my leg. Being a wolf had its advantages, but immunity to pain wasn't one of them.

"Jasper!" Nikhil ran up to me and grabbed hold, his hands going all over as people shifted around me, yelling and talking to each other. But all of it just sounded like noise and chaos to my ringing ears. "Hey, breathe. Jasper, breathe!"

I sucked in a sharp breath and grunted. When I tried to move, Nik pushed a hand into my chest and forced me back down.

"You're going to need to take a deep breath," he whispered. "An ambulance is coming."

We exchanged looks and both of us knew that wasn't going to work. I didn't need a doctor looking into my vitals and why they were so off. No, we had to get out of there. But how, when there was a crowded hall full of kids and Amber was bearing down on me?

Shit. I had to get up. I had to walk on my broken leg. I sucked in a deep breath and

forced myself to move as Nikhil supported my body, pushing his shoulder under my pit. We waited before he moved and I tried not to scream as he hauled me to my feet. Thankfully, it was only a break and no bone was showing. I could play it off, pretend that nothing was happening for a short while, but I needed to get away.

"Jasper, are you okay?" Amber asked as she reached for me. "Don't pick him up! The ambulance is coming. Just wait."

I shook my head. "No need for all of that, Amber." I glanced up at the roof and frowned. "I hope you don't mind if I fix that later. I think I twisted my ankle."

She blinked at me. "Twisted your ankle? You'll be lucky if you haven't broken something from that height!" Amber shook her head. "You need to go to the hospital."

No way in hell. That would cause too many questions and I wouldn't be able to escape them. Nikhil tightened his grip around me, and I let him lead me toward the door while Amber continued to try to convince me to go to the hospital.

"I'm fine, Amber. Nikhil will drive me so we don't have to pay for an ambulance." Nik opened the door for me, and I grunted as I slid into the passenger seat of my truck with his help. He reached over me and buckled me in before closing the door. Once he rolled the window down I gave Amber a grin. "Don't worry. I fall off of something like every week."

"That's true," Nik sighed.

"Shut it," I grumbled. "I'll have Nikhil fix the roof for you while I'm healing up. I should have paid attention to where I was going."

Amber nodded. "Okay, well, feel better. Jasper, I'm worried—"

"No reason to worry!" I said a little too sharply, but the pain was starting to take over and I needed to lie down. "We need to go."

Nikhil peeled out of the parking lot. The ambulance shot past us as we drove in the opposite direction. I let out the breath that I'd been holding, and a groan was at the end of it. I'd just walked on a broken leg. If it wasn't to protect my family, my pack, I never could have done it. But the adrenaline had helped. Slowly, that was starting to wear off, and my leg throbbed.

"Shit." I gripped my seat and shook my head. "I don't know how much more of this I can take."

"I'll call the pack and see if Cassie can come over. She should be able to set the bone."

I ground my teeth. "If she doesn't get there in time, she's just going to break it again to get it to set right."

Nikhil didn't answer because he knew it was true. That was a downside of being a wolf. We healed, but sometimes it was too fast. A broken bone set wrong was worse than

breaking it in the first place. We reached the house, and Nikhil helped me down, holding onto me tightly as my vision wavered and nausea washed over me. Dark spots collected at the corner of my eyes, and my head spun as I tried to keep myself awake.

Tuesday's little blue Honda pulled up beside us, but I couldn't even register when he got out. Someone shouted, but my head was spinning too much to focus. Pretty soon I was going to pass out, and it would be a relief.

"Jasper? Jasper!" Terror in that familiar voice made me loll my head to the other side where Grim stood, worry furrowing his brow. "What happened to him!" he demanded as he ran up to me and grabbed my shirt. "What's wrong, Jasper?"

"I'm fine," I managed to croak out, but even my words didn't sound convincing. They sounded slurred and heavy, the way my head felt.

My knees buckled, and the world twisted into darkness. I could still hear Grim's terrified voice calling to me. It gave me comfort.

* * *

I WOKE up with warmth tangled around me. There was still pain, but it had subsided a bit. I finally peeled my eyes open and glanced down at the body that was practically on top of mine.

Grim.

He was fast asleep, clinging to me as if he was going to lose me. I shifted, and he tensed, a whimper leaving his lips. I smiled. Who would have thought that Grim could ever make such a small and vulnerable sound? I wrapped my arm around him and stroked his back gently, trying to give my mate the comfort that he had given me. Grim relaxed and sank against me once more, falling into a deeper sleep.

My mate.

Grim being so close made my heart speed up and my worries disappear. I wanted to hold him in my arms forever and lie there until all the pain was gone. A face appeared over me, however, and I jumped and growled, making Grim shoot up.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he asked as his head whipped back and forth in confusion, his blond locks sticking up all over his head.

"Nothing." I tried to quiet him and tugged the omega back against my chest, which he didn't resist. "Cassie, you scared the shit out of me!"

"Sorry," she smiled. "I was trying to check on you." Cassie picked up her tablet and plopped down into a chair beside my bed. "You broke your left leg, and I had to reset it."

Reset. She said it so casually. Cassie meant that she'd had to break it again and then fix it. Great. That would take a little longer to recover from, and it was going to hurt like

a bitch. I glanced down at my leg and saw the thick white cast on it.

"Don't even think about moving," she lectured as she smiled, just as upbeat as always. "You'll need to stay off of your feet for the foreseeable future. Okay? And I checked with the pack. My mother's still helping with the medical needs there, so she said she could loan me out for a while." She paused and tilted her head at me. "But you're finally starting a pack of your own out here, right?"

I nodded. "Yeah, that's what I was planning. Why?"

Cassie lit up. "I want to join! My mom has great standing in our pack, and she's already training my younger sisters and brothers to be doctors before they'll go to medical school. But I want to do this. I want to prove myself on my own, in my own pack."

That was a lot to think about. Cassie had always been good to us. She was younger than I was, twenty-nine with a huge list of goals that she wanted to accomplish. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that Cassie had assisted on numerous births and we needed a doctor in our pack.

"Fine," I said, and she jumped up, clapping like her happy-go-lucky self. "I still haven't told my dads about this, and I'm not sure if this is permanent."

Cassie nodded. "I'll let you tell them first before I say anything."

I nodded and stroked my fingers over Grim's back. "Why do I feel normal right now?"

She smiled. "That's easy! A mix of the drugs I administered before I reset your leg and your mate." Cassie turned her smiling gaze on Grim. "He was right by your side as I broke the bone again. You have an amazingly strong mate."

I did? Grim had actually stood and watched as my bone was rebroken? Grim stirred and I lifted his head before he tried to gaze away. But I wouldn't let him. Grim cared about me.

"You didn't have to do that."

Grim glanced at me, those blue eyes filled with concern as they watered. "I wanted to be there for you, Jasper. You helped me and I wanted to help you too."

I leaned up and captured his lips in a bruising kiss. Grim held onto me, clinging to my shirt as our kiss deepened, and he moaned against my mouth.

No matter what problems we had, this was my mate. I couldn't have asked for a better one. Even if I had selected someone myself, they wouldn't have fit me as perfectly as Grim did. Fate had dealt me a kind hand, and my heart swelled.

I was falling in love with my mate.

GRIM

I LOOKED at the time again and frowned. Soon, I would have to wake Jasper up and give him his medication. Cassie said that he needed to take it regularly for the pain, along with an antibiotic to make sure he didn't get an infection. The more he could rest, the faster he would heal. But until then, I was left sitting beside him on the bed and staring at him, making sure he was okay.

"Come on, wake up, you idiot. I'm not done yelling at you for bringing chaos into my life." I poked him gently, but he only slightly stirred and went right back to snoring. I caught myself laughing and swallowed it down. "Jasper, you need to take your medicine. Come on, wake up."

He peeled one eye open. "I thought you were mad at me," he said groggily before he tried to push himself up and hissed.

I pressed a hand into his chest and forced him to lie down again. "Yeah well, one of us went and fell through a roof." Frowning, I slapped his arm. "What were you thinking!"

Jasper gave me a goofy grin. "You're worried about me."

I huffed. "I'm not."

"Yeah, you are." That stupid grin on his face grew, and he chuckled as he reached out and yanked me forward until I tumbled down onto his chest. "You were worried about me."

I nuzzled against him and tried to huff out a smart answer, but his chest was warm and he smelled amazing. The only thing that slipped from my lips was a soft whimper. Every moment that he'd spent sleeping I had thought about what would have happened if his fall was worse. What would happen if he...

No, I couldn't think about that. The bond was already in place, and while we hadn't known each other long, it felt like I'd known the annoying, ridiculous alpha my entire life.

I clung to him and buried my face against his neck. Jasper stroked his fingers through my hair and over my back, even though I heard his breath hitching. He was in pain, but he was still trying to comfort me. I'd met so many pushy alphas that only seemed to care

about their own selfish needs, but maybe Jasper wasn't so bad after all.

"I'm supposed to be taking care of you," I whispered. "Your brothers will think I'm torturing you up here."

Jasper chuckled softly. "Tortured? When I'm surrounded by your scent and have your warm body pressed against mine? No, that's impossible." He sighed softly, and my heart sped up as his breath ghosted over my skin. "Can I have a kiss? It'll make me feel better."

I lifted my head. "Will it?"

"Of course." He gave me that goofy grin again, the seriousness gone as soon as it had appeared. "How can you have an alpha this hot and in this much pain right here in front of you and not kiss him a thousand times?" He clicked tongue. "Do better."

I growled. "You can take care of yourself, you asshole."

"No, wait!" He laughed as I tried to sit up and pulled me back until I was resting on his chest once more and he was looking into my eyes, making my heart pound. "I'm glad you're here. I kept dreaming about you." He smiled at me. "Can I have that kiss now?"

"Me?" I asked, blinking at him. "Why? What were you dreaming about?"

Jasper tilted his head. "Everything. I kept getting snippets of you taking care of me, but there was more too. Us growing this pack, having a family, my brothers having theirs." His grip tightened. "I never wanted the responsibility of being pack alpha, raising a family, or getting mated. Now that it's happening? I just want to do a good job." He shook my shoulder. "Kiss?"

I couldn't stop the laugh that tumbled from my mouth. Leaning up, I pressed my lips against Jasper's, and he sighed as our lips sealed. His tongue swiped my mouth, and I opened up, letting him inside. By the time we pulled apart, my cheeks were hot, and I wanted to hide. But I had questions to ask first.

"Why do you think you wouldn't do a good job?" I asked, tracing circles over his bare chest. "From what I've seen so far, you're not nearly as bad as the asshole that sat in my classroom."

Jasper laughed. "Tell me that didn't make you laugh even a little."

I glanced away, tugging my lip between my teeth. "Okay, maybe it was a little funny. Your big body in that tiny chair? Come on!"

"Exactly." His chest rose and fell underneath me as he chuckled. "You looked so grouchy and unhappy. As soon as I saw you, I just wanted to see you smile."

My heart did flip flops. No one cared about me like that. Sure, my mother loved and cared about me, but even she wondered why I couldn't accept my lot in life. Why I wanted to work and live and not just be someone's mate or father.

"What's wrong?" Jasper whispered. He reached out and ran his thumb over my bottom

lip. "You look sad."

"I was thinking about my family," I admitted, but then I saw the way his face pulled in pain, and I quickly shot up. "Medicine. You need to take your pills. Are you hungry? I haven't been able to get you to take more than a few sips of broth and a little bread when you're lucid enough these past few days."

"Those drugs are a monster." He grunted and nodded. "I could eat." Jasper was quiet as I shook a pill out into my palm. When I turned to him, he grabbed my hand. "We're going to talk about whatever you're hiding from me, Grim. And I have a lot of questions."

I swallowed thickly. "You're not going to let it go are you?"

"Nope." Jasper smiled. "Not at all. I'll remember even after you drug me again."

I rolled my eyes. "You're the most dramatic man I have ever met." I handed him the pill and uncapped a bottle of water. "Will you be okay sitting here while I run down and get food?"

"Yeah." He nodded. "Can I have my phone? I want to check my messages and stuff until you get back."

"Sure."

I took his phone off of the charger and handed it to him. Jasper took the opportunity to grab my arm and drag me down into another kiss. His lips captured mine, and he moaned against my mouth, making my heart pound so hard I went dizzy.

"Don't take too long," he said, his lips moving against mine and making me crave more of him. "Or I'll get up and hunt you down."

Fuck. I didn't like possessive alphas. Right? But Jasper, when he slipped into that mode and growled and demanded, there was something so hot about it that my toes curled. Maybe it was how funny and laid back he was at every other minute until we were alone and then he was growling and bossy.

"I'll be right back," I whispered. "Promise."

"Alright." Jasper let me go but not before he pressed a kiss on my hand. "I'll be waiting."

I nodded and spun on my heels. Never in my life did I think I'd be waiting on an alpha. Fate had a funny way of bitch slapping me repeatedly as of late.

"Jasper's up?" Tuesday popped his head out of the fridge, and I stopped, staring at the chaos in the kitchen. Cakes, pies, and food covered every counter. When I raised a brow at him, Tuesday groaned. "Don't ask. Some people need a run, some people need a drink, I binge bake and cook when I'm worried." He tossed a white towel over his shoulder. "Is he awake?"

"Yes, for now. I just gave him his pill, and he's hungry."

Tuesday lit up. "Oh, oh, I have an assortment of things that he'd like um...let me

just." He started going through the food and building Jasper a plate. "I'll get him a little bit of everything so he can eat what he likes."

"How do you do it?" I blurted.

"Do what?" Tuesday asked as he spooned mashed potatoes onto a plate.

I frowned. "You love cooking, cleaning, and home making. Isn't it... a little condescending to just want those things? Like that's all you are? As if you're not good enough to be anything but those things?"

Tuesday turned and narrowed his eyes at me. "What? You think I should be ashamed because I like to take care of people? Or is it because I'm an omega and I have to be worldly and cool and independent instead of baking and cooking and cleaning? Do you think you're better than me because you have a job outside of the house?"

I threw my hands up, taking a step back as his voice raised. "Whoa, whoa! I didn't say any of that, Tuesday. I was just wondering."

He turned back toward the plate he was making, his movements a hell of a lot more aggressive than before. "I think the most amazing thing about this day and age is that an omega can be anything. You like being a successful teacher, and that's great for you. I like taking care of house and home, and that's okay too!"

"I never said it wasn't," I said softly, trying to soothe the situation. I didn't want Tuesday angry at me. He had been nothing but accepting and I'd put my stupid foot in my mouth. "I'm sorry I insulted you." The kitchen was quiet for a minute except the sound of silverware dinging against the plate as he added more food. "It's just different for me, that's all. I wanted to know what was so fulfilling about it."

Tuesday sighed. "What's fulfilling is that at the end of a long day, when my family sits together and eats, I know it's me that brought them together. When they're upset and need reassurance, I know the perfect food or dessert that will make them happy. Family means everything to me. My papa was always the kind to give and care for everyone, and I want to be that kind of man too."

I nodded, understanding where he came from. "My mom is like that. She takes care of all of us, even if that means she has to smother us sometimes." I smiled softly before I shook my head. "Not that I'm trying to say you have to be a woman to do that or anything."

Tuesday looked at me and burst out laughing. "Do you think I'll be insulted if someone feels like I'm a woman because I'm a homemaker? If they do, fuck them."

My mouth dropped open. "I've never heard you curse before."

"I rarely do," he said with a shrug. "But I think it's warranted every once in a while." He popped the plate into the microwave and turned to me. "Look, basically I do what I want to be happy. If anyone has a problem with who I am? Screw them. I know my

family appreciates me, and one day, so will a future mate."

"I just..." I sighed and rubbed the back of my neck for a second. "I guess I'm struggling between what I've always been taught and how much I've rejected that over the years." Shrugging, I looked up at Tuesday. "I want to take care of him, and it makes me feel guilty, like I'm falling into some omega stereotype."

Tuesday walked closer and laid a hand on my arm. "You're overthinking this. If you want to be a strong, independent omega, that's great! And you can still love Jasper, Grim. You can still want to take care of him and keep him safe. There's no rule that says you have to choose."

Now, that gave me a lot to think about. I was thirty years old and just starting to understand why other omegas were the way that they were since I'd started staying around the Kings. They were turning my world on its head, and as terrifying as it was, I smiled. There was freedom in Tuesday's words. New worlds and possibilities that I had never considered. I didn't need to be put in a box, especially when I was doing it to myself.

"Grim!" Jasper bellowed. "I'm getting lonely up here. Are you coming? Should I come down?"

I ran to the stairs. "Don't you fucking dare! I will kick your ass, Jasper!"

He huffed. "But I'm bored. Come up already."

"I'm getting your food out of the microwave now, okay? Can you wait three more minutes?"

"Just three!" He called back.

I shook my head and walked back into the kitchen. Tuesday grinned at me.

"Don't." I warned as I opened the microwave and checked the food. "If I don't take this plate up, he's going to try to limp his ridiculous self down the stairs."

"For someone who insults him so much," Tuesday pointed out, grabbing another plate and putting some desserts on it. "You sure do smile when he misses you."

My chest tightened. Damn, was I that transparent? I wanted to run right back up to Jasper and hold onto him. Thinking about losing him had made me reconsider a lot of things. Like being angry at him. I had to figure out what it really meant to be his mate. I wanted to be by his side.

"Grim!" he called again, almost whining. "I'm getting sleepy."

"Those drugs always screw him up," Tuesday said as he shook his head. "He's a giant baby on them."

I smiled. "I don't really mind." Jasper was a pain, but he was sweet in his current state. "Thank you, Tuesday. For everything."

"Anytime." He waved me off. "Now, go feed my brother before he really does try to

walk down here. He's an idiot sometimes."

I burst out laughing. "So, you feel my pain?"

"Every single day." He grimaced.

I turned, laughing as I walked to the stairs. At least I wasn't alone in thinking that my mate was a handful and a half. But I also knew he was a good man and I knew he would be an amazing pack alpha.

I was falling in love with the crazy wolf.

JASPER

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING!" Grim snapped as soon as he walked into the bedroom. "You're not supposed to be up!"

I groaned. It had been like this for the past few days. "I'm fine."

"We don't know that until Cassie says you're fine." He shook his head at me. "She's coming to get that cast off of you today, so sit down, be quiet, and behave."

"So bossy," I muttered as I sat down and sighed. "What am I supposed to do until she gets here?"

"It won't be that long." He set a basket of laundry down onto the chair in my room before he turned around to wag a finger at me. "You're going to rest until she takes that thing off."

There was no point in arguing with Grim. When he said something, the only thing I could do was listen. Otherwise, he'd lecture me to death like Tuesday. I was ready to get the cast off, so I could roll on top of my mate and give him what he needed. My knot.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Grim asked.

"I was just thinking how you could use a healthy dose of my dick to you calm down."

Grim's cheeks turned bright red. "W-what? I don't... Why are you?"

The more he nervously stumbled over his words, the bigger I grinned. Grim was a grumpy little bastard sometimes, but he was also ridiculously cute. Whenever I complimented him, he blushed all over like a ripe tomato.

I grinned. "Come here."

He stood where he was. "Ask me more nicely than that."

Raising a brow, I growled. "Come to me, mate."

Grim practically flew into my arms. I laughed and pulled my omega into my lap. My fingers ran over his skin while he sighed and relaxed in my hold. No matter how grumpy Grim seemed, he was a sweetheart underneath. Even if he didn't want to show that to the rest of the world.

"We need to talk."

He shuddered. "Why?" He refused to look at me. "Those words have never ended in an uplifting conversation."

"They will this time." I buried my nose against his neck before I lapped at his mating mark, and Grim shuddered in my embrace. "I need you to tell me what's going on with your family. You haven't told me anything, and they've been blowing your phone up for the past few days."

Grim scoffed. "How would you know? You've been asleep this whole time."

I raised a brow. "I'm a wolf, remember? My hearing is amazing, and you're not the quietest person on the phone when you think I'm asleep."

"Shit." Grim frowned and reached up, tugging on his bottom lip. "It's not something I like to talk about."

"I can see that," I said as I gently removed his fingers from his lips. "But I need to know what's going on."

Grim glanced at me and sighed. "Alright. You know the night you marked me? I told you I was supposed to be with an alpha from my herd?"

I swallowed hard and took a deep breath to control the growl that threatened to tear from my throat. Even Grim talking about another alpha like that made me want to snap. He had been so close to someone else having him, and I would have missed out on the love of my life.

"Yes, I remember," I managed to get out through clenched teeth. "What about it?"

"My family wanted us to be together so I could have a fawn. Our numbers are dwindling in the herd, and I've avoided tradition for a long time. But it was time for me to contribute. Now that I'm mated..." He looked off, a dark look coming over his features. "I don't know how they're going to react. Kyrian might decide to keep me from my family. Not to mention Dorian, the one I was arranged to mate with, is going to be pissed off too. I can't go back and face them. I'm not ready."

I frowned. "I understand your worries." I pulled Grim closer to me. "But we have to tell them. They deserve to know."

"We?" Grim looked at me wearily. "We're going to tell them together?"

"Did you think I would leave you to do it on your own? No way in hell." I held him tightly, refusing to let him go. "We'll face them together, baby. You never have to do anything on your own again."

Grim sagged against me, and I heard the tension leave his lips on an exhale. He clung to me tightly, and my heart sped up. This was my mate. Every time I had the realization, I was in awe once more. I held him and pushed my fingers into his soft hair.

"When are we going to tell them?" Grim whispered.

"As soon as Cassie gets this damned cast off of my leg," I said as he sat up and gazed

at me. I reached up to wipe at the wet spots on his cheeks. "Don't cry. Everything is going to be fine. I'll make sure they see how beneficial it can be to have wolves in the family."

"I sure hope so." Grim traced his finger over my chest. "My mother and siblings mean the world to me. I can't live without them. If Kyrian decides that I've betrayed them—" He shook his head. "I'll never be able to go back."

Growling, I shook my head. "I won't let that happen. Ever."

Slowly, Grim smiled at me. "Jasper, you make me feel things I never thought I'd feel before." He leaned down and brushed his lips over mine. "Thank you. For putting up with me and my bad attitude, for supporting me in this, for everything."

I swallowed hard, trying to speak around the lump in my throat. "No, thank you for taking care of me. And being here. I... I never thought I would need anyone, but I don't mind needing you."

Grim's eyes watered again, and our lips met once more. I slid my tongue across the seam of his mouth, prodding it open before I slipped inside. Grim moaned, his hips rocking and grinding on mine as he panted against my mouth. My cock hardened, and I could smell the aroma of his slick as it filled the room.

"How long until Cassie gets here?" I groaned against his lips as my fingers explored his clothed body.

"She said an hour or so when I spoke to her. We have time." He nipped my bottom lip, and I groaned as he sat up and removed his shirt. "What about your leg?"

I glanced down and groaned. Right. My leg was still entombed in the damn cast. While it didn't hurt much anymore, the big, bulky cast was going to be in my way.

"Afraid I can't move much." I frowned at my mate. "Should we wait?"

"No way," Grim said quickly. "I can't. I'm so turned on, Jasper. I need you."

My chest tightened, and heat swept through my body. Grim flipped my switch and turned on the lust instantly. His hands fumbled with my shorts, and he pulled them off with my boxers. I freed myself from my shirt and reached out, gripping Grim's nipples as he squirmed and moaned from my touch.

"I love your body," I growled out as I touched him, and he stared down at me. "You're so soft and hot, and I love it when you're needy."

Grim's cheeks tinted. "I get that way for you and only you."

"Even better. I never want anyone to have these parts of you, but me." I rolled his nipples between my fingertips, and he gasped, his eyes going hazy as he gazed at me. "Take off the rest of your clothes and climb up here."

My mate wasted no time tossing his clothes off and over the side of the bed. While he crawled up, I scooted down and laid flat. Grim straddled my face, and I parted his cheeks,

examining his hole as it fluttered. I leaned up and lapped at his slick, a moan leaving my lips as I tasted him.

"So good. You taste so fucking good."

Grim rolled his hips on my face. "More, Jasper," he whispered. "Don't tease me, please."

I wrapped my arms around his thighs and pulled him down. Grim cried out as I shoved my tongue into his hole, and his slick decorated my face. I lapped at him, twisting and pushing my tongue in deeper as he rode me without mercy. It was a turn on, seeing my mate need me so much that he couldn't hold still or keep quiet.

"Yes!" Grim cried out as his thighs shook in my hands. "Jasper! God, you feel good!"

All I could do was moan as I pushed my tongue in as far as it could go. Having Grim above me, his legs shaking and his breath panting made me so hard I was desperate to be touched. But not until I had made my mate cum. I kept him locked against my face, rimming his tight hole until he cried out, and all his trembling culminated in him cumming hard, his hole squeezing around my tongue.

"Fuckkkk." Grim panted as he slowly moved off of my face and shimmied down. "Are you okay?" he asked. "How can you do that and still breathe?"

"It would be worth it to pass out if I could keep tasting you." I grinned and wiped the cum from my face with my hand. Grim took it and licked my hand clean, his eyes trained on mine before he moaned.

I couldn't take it anymore. I gripped his hip and my cock before I lined myself up. Grim shuddered as I drove my length inside of him and his back arched. He threw his head back, and I watched his blond hair spill over his shoulder as he rocked his hips, rising and lowering them on my cock as his hands planted on my chest. His length slowly hardened against, slapping against his lower belly as he rode me hard.

Glancing up at him, my heart squeezed. My mate was more complex than most, but I liked him for who he was. I would rather have a complicated partner than someone who didn't interest me. With Grim, there was no way in hell I would ever get bored.

"I love you." I let the words slip free, and I didn't regret when they were out. Grim's eyes widened, and I nodded at him. "I really love you, Grim."

Fate had put us together for a reason and while we were still trying to figure things out, there had to be a reason for that. I would not argue with the Goddess. She had put my perfect counterpart in my path.

"Jasper," Grim whispered, slowing down as he stared at me. "I-I..."

"No," I shook my head. "No, thinking right now. You can have all the time you want to figure out if you love me too, but I had to tell you." I grabbed his hips and thrust up inside of him, forcing a gasp from Grim's pink lips. "Keep riding me, baby. I'm so close."

Grim nodded and focused on working his hips as I thrust up and helped him. My cock twitched and heat enveloped me as my stomach tightened. I could feel the pleasure building in the pit of my belly. My knot grew, and I stuffed it inside of my mate, making him cry out. I threw my head back and came hard, filling Grim with my cum as I howled.

"Shit!" Grim bellowed as his head tipped back once more and he came, lacing my chest with more cum before he shivered and his head tilted down. "God, that was..."

"Amazing?" I asked with a grin. "Fantastic? Best you ever had?"

Grim shrugged. "It was alright."

"It was what?" I growled.

He laughed as I grabbed him and rolled us onto our sides. One tug of my knot and he cried out, shuddering. He waved his hand at me.

"No more, no more!" He laughed. "I was messing with you."

"Better be." I nipped his mating mark, and he groaned softly. "If that was the case, then I would have to take my dick away from you and give it to someone more appreciative. Ow!"

Grim slapped my arm again and glared. "Don't even joke about that!"

I smiled. "Did you get jealous, baby?"

"Maybe." He pouted. "A little, okay?"

I hugged him tightly. "I like when you're jealous," I admitted. "It makes me feel like I'm not totally crazy when I get all possessive over you." I leaned forward and pressed a kiss to his forehead.

"You're definitely crazy, but no, I get it." Grim traced my cheek with a finger and grinned. "And it's kind of hot when you get jealous."

"I knew it. You secretly live for drama, don't you?"

While we argued, there was a brief knock on our door before it was flung open. Both of us whipped our heads in the direction of the door.

"I'm here to take you cast offfff... oh, Goddess, you're fucking."

Grim's jaw dropped, and I burst out laughing. Cassie slapped her hands over her eyes and tried to back out of the room. Instead, she slammed into the door jam and hissed in pain.

"Sorry, sorry. I'm sorry!" she cried.

The door slammed. Grim and I looked at each other and then burst out laughing. Tears ran down my cheeks, and I couldn't speak as I wrapped my mate up in my arms and shook my head at the whole situation.

My life had taken a crazy turn, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Now, if we could get Grim's family on board, I would be the happiest man alive.

GRIM

MY HAND RESTED INSIDE of Jasper's, but I was still nervous as hell. Soon enough, we would pull up to Red Maple herd land, and I would find out my fate. I didn't want to be a disappointment to my family, to my people, but I couldn't leave my mate either. Even if I still couldn't bring myself to say the L word back to him. Every time I tried, it stuck to the roof of my mouth like peanut butter.

"If you squeeze my hand any tighter, it's going to fall off because of a lack of circulation," Jasper said as he glanced over at me and raised a brow. "Are you sure you're okay?"

My stomach pitched, and I gripped it tightly. "No," I answered honestly. "I feel like I'm going to throw up though. Is that fucking better?"

"Okay, Mr. Grumpy." He picked up my hand and held it to his lips as he drove, his eyes never leaving the road. "It'll be fine."

"You say that, but you don't know Kyrian. He's not just the herd leader, he's my father."

Jasper stared at me. "He's your what?"

"I know." I grimaced. "I should have said something sooner and I tried. I really tried to tell you the other day, Jasper, but Cassie came over. And then your cast came off." I sucked in a deep breath. "And I didn't want you to run."

"Why the hell would I run?" He scoffed. "I'm not thrilled you didn't tell me—"

"I'm sorry," I muttered.

"But I'm not going anywhere." He squeezed my hand firmly. "We're mated, remember? It's too late to get away from me."

I let out a laugh. "I don't think I ever said I wanted that."

"You definitely acted like it at first." He glanced at me, a smirk on his lips. "How are you going to make up for hurting my feelings?"

I rolled my eyes at the insane alpha. Jasper loved to screw with me. Yeah, we had been a bit all over the place in the beginning, but I couldn't be away from him now.

Jasper would probably always make me crazy, but he was good to me.

"I'll make up for it tonight." I chuckled, my mind taken off of my anxiety for a moment. "If that's what you really need."

"Yes, yes, it is," Jasper said proudly. "And don't slip back into cranky mode. We're going to see your family, tell them what's going on, and everything will be okay."

I squeezed his hand again before I closed my eyes and inhaled his scent. That masculine, breath-taking aroma that only belonged to my mate filled my senses and calmed me. Everything subsided just a little when I was beside him.

The closer we drew to Red Maple herd lands, the more my stomach twisted. I closed my eyes, trying to ignore the sickness I felt in my belly. When I saw the familiar wrought-iron gates of home, I couldn't hold it anymore.

"Pull over," I choked out.

"What?" Jasper glanced at me, his eyebrows drawn in concern. "Are you okay?"

"Pull over!"

The car came to a screeching halt, and I threw myself out of the door. My knees collided with the ground as I heaved up my breakfast onto the side of the road. I felt a hand on my back, and my mate's comforting scent surrounded me. Even then it was hard to breathe. My eyes watered, and I coughed until I finally sat up.

"Here." Jasper handed me a napkin, and I wiped the bile from my mouth. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm alright." I nodded. "Nerves. Is there any water?"

Jasper handed me a water bottle, and I chugged half the contents of it before I lowered it, panting. The nausea hadn't completely subsided, but since I didn't feel like I had to get sick again, I let Jasper help me to my feet.

"Better?"

"No," I laughed. "But I don't think I'm going to feel better until I talk to my family." I scratched the back of my head. "I feel gross now, so that's fun."

"Gum." Jasper handed me a stick and rubbed my hair gently. "You look amazing. Let's go get this done."

Only Jasper would think I looked good after I had just finished puking up my guts. Jasper comforted me in a way that I had only ever experienced with my family. We climbed back into the car, and I gave into that feeling. Whatever was going to happen next, I had to face it. At least my mate was by my side.

The gates opened once I keyed in the code, and we rolled through them. The sound of laughter reached our ears, and I knew the fawns were out back playing behind the large estate house. On the front porch, my father sat in his favorite chair before he stood up with his eyes on us. My stomach twisted all over again.

"That's my father," I whispered to Jasper. "The one that looks like he hasn't smiled in about ten years."

"Is that where you got it from?"

I elbowed my mate. "Not the time."

"Sorry," he chuckled. "Going into serious mode."

I constantly questioned if he had one of those, even after seeing it a few times. The closer we drew to the porch, the more I wanted to turn tail and run. Maybe I should disappear and send a letter instead.

Stop being ridiculous. This has to happen.

"Grimaldo," my father greeted and looked me over before his big, judgemental eyes darted to my mate. "You're home and you've brought... company." He sniffed the air and startled before he glared at me. "Who is this?"

I knew that wasn't what he really wanted to ask. More like, what was Jasper. His scent hadn't been familiar to me when we met, but my father had actually dealt with wolves and must have picked it out immediately.

"Father," I cleared my throat when it tried to close. "This is Jasper. He's my mate."

"Your what?" he asked, his eyes burning holes through me.

"I... uh... my..."

Why was it that my father could strike fear right into my heart when he was barely trying? I grabbed onto Jasper and clung to him. Fuck omega stereotypes. I wanted my mate to look after and protect me. If that made me weak, so be it.

"I'm his mate," Jasper said, suddenly seeming taller than before. "My name is Jasper King." The goofy alpha was gone, and I stared in awe at the man beside me. He looked serious, stern, as if he wouldn't back down for a second no matter who was in front of him. "I love your son, and he's part of my pack now."

"Your pack?" My father snapped. "How old are you, boy?"

"Thirty-five."

My father scoffed. "You're not old enough to lead anything," he said as he walked down the stairs toward us and heads peeked out of the windows and around the side of the house, curious about the confrontation. "You can't go sinking your mutt fangs into anything that moves. Grimaldo is spoken for as one of the herd."

"You mean, he's supposed to be bred and live his life as nothing more than livestock?"

"Excuse me?"

"Am I wrong?" Jasper asked as his arm wrapped around my shoulders to pull me closer. "That's what you expect of him, right? To breed and grow the herd?"

"What do you know about it?" My father growled. "You're a wolf and you have no business being on our land. I won't turn Grimaldo over to you."

Jasper moved forward again, and I wanted to pull him back. They were getting dangerously close to fighting, and I didn't want either of them to get hurt.

"Jasper, don't," I muttered.

"It's fine, Grim." He glanced down at me and caressed my cheek. "You're not leaving my side."

"Grimaldo?" I glanced up as my mother ran off the porch, lifting the soft white dress she wore so it wouldn't drag in the dirt. "What's going on?"

I cleared my throat, trying to make myself talk. "This is Jasper, mom. My mate."

She stopped short and glanced between me and my father. I understood the concern in her eyes. My father was as stubborn as Jasper, and their head butting would not end nicely if things continued to escalate.

"As I said," my father cut in. "Grimaldo is spoken for."

"We're fated," I blurted out. "I can't leave him." My grip tightened on Jasper's arm, and I swallowed thickly, forcing down the lump in my throat. "Please, you have to understand this is what the universe wanted. There's no going back."

"Fate," my father laughed. "If that's true, and I know it's not, why don't you prove you deserve my son? Omegas are precious in our herd, and I won't give him over to just anyone." He folded his arms across his barrel-like chest. "There's an order here. Dorian was to be with him, so you will have to take it up with him."

I glanced over to the side and frowned. Stalking toward us was Dorian. The man was tall, towering over my father and Jasper alike. If my father was big, he was huge, the second strongest in our herd. He was supposed to take over after my father, and he'd had his eye on me for some time. As soon as I saw him, I glanced away. We had an arrangement, and I was the one breaking it. Not him. I didn't want them to fight, but I knew it was coming.

"I'll do anything to be with Grim." Jasper's powerful, booming voice made me gasp as I turned and looked at him. "He is mine." Jasper looked down at me, and my heart fluttered. "And I am his."

I couldn't be more proud of my mate than at that moment. He really loved and cared about me. And not only that, Jasper respected me.

"Then prove it." My father cut in and drew both of our attention back to him. "Dorian?"

The alpha in question tugged the cotton shirt from over his head and tossed it aside. When he shoved down his pants, I knew what was about to happen. My mother quickly grabbed me and started dragging me away.

"Mom, no." I dug in my heels and tried to stay back, but she was strong and persistent.

"Let them work it out," she said as she got me to the porch and held onto me. "You

know how alphas are. If you get in the way of your mate fighting for you, it will make him look weak." She placed a kiss on my cheek, and I sagged a little before her lips brushed against my ear. "Congratulations on your mate, son. He looks strong. Have faith in him."

When she pulled back, my eyes watered, and I nodded softly. She was right. My father wanted Jasper to prove that he deserved me. I had never heard him speak so highly of omegas before, and it was... breathtaking. Had he really thought that of us all this time? I watched as Jasper shed his clothes, exposing his muscular sun-kissed body before I glanced at my mother.

"Does he really think that way?" I whispered. "That omegas are precious?"

My mother smiled. "Of course he does. We might not mate for life normally, but that doesn't mean omegas are not special to us." She cradled my cheek. "Did we make you think otherwise?"

I pursed my lips. "Maybe not directly, at times." I played with my fingers, unable to look at her. "But sometimes it feels like all that matters are the alphas."

"Oh, honey." My mom wrapped her arms around me. "Where would they be without us? I've always tried to tell you that being an omega doesn't make you less of a man. Never let anyone make you think differently."

I leaned into her hug. Maybe I had been projecting a bit. Growing up around a bunch of alphas who loved taunting and teasing me hadn't helped, but we were younger then. Now? They all looked on edge as they stood by the side waiting for my mate and Dorian to shift and fight.

Jasper's naked body slowly covered with fur before he went down onto his hands and knees. My mate threw his head back, howled, and shook his head as his snout elongated and his fangs grew. As his bones cracked and reshaped, he stood in front of us, a big black wolf. His tail whipped behind him back and forth, and he focused on Dorian as he barked so loudly I could feel it.

That's my mate.

Pride swelled in my belly, and I gripped my shirt as he glanced at me. Maybe he was a goofy pain in my ass, but Jasper was so much more than that. He was the best mate I could have asked for. I wanted to go to him, run my fingers through his fur, and tell him I loved him too. Even if we still had to get to know each other, we were meant to be, and I didn't need to be afraid. Not with Jasper King.

I jumped when Dorian collided into Jasper. His big horns were on display, and he moved back, going on the defense. My mate turned and growled at him. I held onto my mother as my heart sped up and I worried I would pass out or get sick again with having to see the two of them fight.

"Come on, Jasper. Come on," I whispered as I felt a hand on my shoulder. My sister

stood beside me and squeezed.

"Your mate will be able to do it."

"Thank you, Claudia." When she hugged me, I returned the gesture, softening at their comfort and support. "Go, Jasper!" I yelled.

My mate lunged for Dorian and nipped at him with razor-sharp teeth. Even though my stomach pitched and bile sat in my throat, I continued to cheer. They took turns at each other, biting, fighting, butting heads. The power shifted from one person to the other. Every time one of them fell, my heart stopped. Only once they got back up on their feet and kept going was I able to breathe again.

He can do it. I know he can do it.

Dorian knocked Jasper away with his antlers, and my alpha cried out, the sound more of a whimper as he rolled into a bush. I jumped down a stair, ready to help him. However, my mom and sister pulled me back.

"Don't interfere," my mother said with a shake of her head, her blond curls bouncing around her face. "Let him do this on his own."

I glanced at her and then looked at the fight again. What if he couldn't do it on his own? What if he needed me? My chest tightened, and I wanted to go out there and grab him. I couldn't lose Jasper. Not when I was finally seeing all the good in him.

Jasper charged out of the bushes and leapt onto Dorian's back as my mind reeled out of control. I held onto my mother and sister as Jasper was flung off of Dorian's back, and the alpha deer tried to stomp on him. For every move one made, the other countered it, and my mate rolled away, barking and growling.

"Come on, Jasper!" I yelled.

I didn't want to stay with my herd. Yes, I loved them more than life, but they weren't my only family anymore. Jasper was taking hit after hit for me, and he kept going just so that he could keep me beside him. My heart pounded, and I thanked everything that I had met the biggest pain in the ass of my life.

Dorian shoved an antler into Jasper's shoulder, and I heard a scream. As my mate fell, I realized the sound came from me. No one could hold me back as I ran off the porch and raced to my mate's side. I touched the bloody hole on his shoulder as he laid in the dirt, panting and whimpering, but still trying to move.

"No more," I said softly as crimson stained my palm. "That's enough, no more!." My eyes watered, and I clung to his fur before I buried my face in his neck. "Don't get up. Rest, okay? I love you so much. Please, Jasper. I love you!"

I didn't want him to move anymore. No matter if they thought he was weak or not, I didn't give a fuck. I loved my mate, and I would not leave his side.

Jasper shifted out of my hold, and I moved as he got to his paws. He lunged for

Dorian, and I watched, stunned, as he took the alpha down and snapped his fangs at his throat. Dorian laid there before he shifted back and held up his hands, yielding.

"Is this what you want, Grimaldo?" Dorian asked as my mate snarled on top of him, daring the alpha to move.

I nodded at Dorian. "Yes, I love him."

Dorian looked me over before he was let up and he shifted to his knees making Jasper back off. "Then I forfeit, alpha. He is yours."

I wanted to run to Dorian and throw my arms around him. He looked up at me and smiled, and I was never more thankful to the huge lug than I was at that moment. Jasper shifted, bloody and limping, before he grabbed my throat and dragged me into a kiss so powerful my knees buckled.

Yes, I had found my perfect mate. And I would never let him go.

JASPER

"Ow, ow!" I growled as my mate slapped me with a towel. "I thought you were supposed to be taking care of me, not beating me!"

Grim huffed. "You don't think! Dumbass," he hissed. "What if you had been killed? I told you not to get up!"

I grabbed his wrist when he aimed the towel at me again and yanked him forward. Grim was forced to sit on my lap as I grabbed a hold of him and balanced us both on the edge of the tub. His family was downstairs, waiting for us, but he was cleaning me up first. Or he would be if he would stop kicking my ass.

I grinned at him. "I'm sorry I worried you."

Grim's eyes watered and he glanced away, his lips pressed in a straight line. I reached out and took his chin, turning his head until he couldn't avoid my gaze anymore. The smile was wiped off of my lips seeing him so upset.

"You're a jerk," he mumbled.

"I know." I leaned up and kissed his lips softly, and he kissed me back. When we pulled apart a bit, I caressed his cheek, his neck, his back. I couldn't get enough of touching my mate. "Forgive me?"

Grim scoffed. "No."

I chuckled. "I can't help that I charge into things when it comes to you, Grim. Protecting you means everything to me. Why would you want to be with an alpha who couldn't protect you? I don't want to be that man."

He tilted his head at me and nodded slowly. "I just don't like the thought of something happening to you, that's all."

"You care about me."

Grim shoved a finger against a cut on my shoulder, and I yelped before I laughed. Damn, he could be a mean thing when he wanted to be. But I loved the man more than I knew how to say it. So, I would show him how much I cared every single day. After all, he'd said that he loved me. Those words had given me the strength that I needed to win

for him. For us.

"Hold still," Grim said more softly as he started cleaning me up again. His face was serious as he wiped away blood and dirt. When he glanced up at me, his eyes held untold emotions that I wanted to explore and dissect so I could understand him better. "Thank you."

"For?" I asked quietly.

"Fighting for me." A smile tugged at his lips. "And keeping me safe."

My chest tightened and I gripped Grim harder. Heat shot through my body and I wanted to lay Grim on the floor and fuck him until I could think straight again. As I picked him up, Grim laughed and wrapped his legs around my waist.

"What are you doing?"

"Showing my mate how much I want him." I sat him on the counter and attacked his neck, licking and biting it as he moaned and shifted with me. Grim rubbed himself against my body. "You want me too?" I whispered against his ear, needing to hear it.

Grim nodded hard. "Y-yes, Jasper. I need you."

My cock twitched and I tugged at his pants, eager to get them off even if I had to rip them to shreds. They slid down his thighs and I practically panted with need at the sight of his body coming into view bit by tortuous bit. Someone knocked on the door, and we both stopped and stared at it.

"Shit." I muttered. "Raincheck?"

Grim groaned. "Goddamn fucking raincheck," he muttered. "I'm so horny now." He glared at the door. "Coming!"

I laughed as he hopped from the counter and shimmied back into his pants. My mate was a feisty man, and I loved it. Grim finished putting on the bandages he had gotten out before he passed me my shirt and pants.

"Don't want me to answer the door naked?" I teased as I dressed myself.

"If anyone sees you naked outside of shifting but me? I'll kick your ass."

"Possessive," I purred. "I like it."

Grim laughed and shook his head. "You're an idiot. Fuck, I love you."

I stared at him. "You love me."

"Huh?" Grim blinked at me.

"You just said that you love me. Again."

"N-no I didn't!"

"You did!" I grabbed my mate and wrapped him in my arms before leaving a plethora of kisses all over his face. "You love me, Grim."

"Get off of me, goddamnit." Grim huffed and tried to wiggle away, but he couldn't break free of my embrace.

"Say it again." I mumbled my words as I buried my face in his neck. "Say you love me one more time."

"I love you, okay! Jeez, you're ridiculous." He sounded irritated, but he had reached up and laid his hands on me. "I love you, Jasper."

That was it. I couldn't be any happier than I was at that moment. Grim loved me. We stayed pressed together until the knocking came back, and I realized someone was still waiting. We finally untangled ourselves, and Grim opened the door to let in a woman that looked just like him with blonde hair and bright blue eyes.

"Are you two okay?" she asked as she glanced from Grim to me. "How are you feeling?"

"Much better, ma'am," I said right away. Whatever damage I had would heal. "I'm Jasper."

"I know," she smiled and held out a hand. "Warda. The herd would like to meet you formally downstairs."

I had to go back into business mode. It wasn't the easiest thing for me to do, but I needed Grim's family to take me seriously. Grim took my hand, and we followed Warda down to the first floor into a great room. All the herd turned and stared at us. I had to force myself not to squirm under their scrutinizing gazes.

"Jasper." The deep, gruff voice that called me belonged to Kyrian. He wrapped an arm around Warda's shoulders and looked from me to Grim and back again. "I know that you'll take good care of my son."

I nodded. "Of course, sir." I shook the hand he extended and smiled. "He means the world to me."

"He better."

"I have to agree." Dorian walked up, his arms crossed over his chest. "Grim is one of my best friends, so I'll be looking out to make sure that he's happy."

Grim blinked. "Wait... I'm your best friend?"

Dorian raised a brow. "Well... yeah. Why do you think I volunteered to be the one to have fawns with you? I thought you would feel more comfortable with me."

"I-I didn't know that." Grim tilted his head. "You always made fun of me growing up."

The big alpha barked out a laugh. "That's what boys with crushes do. Stupid shit." He smiled at us before he held out a hand to me. "But I think you have the right person for you." Dorian nodded at me. "Grimaldo deserves someone who will constantly be by his side. And you're strong. I like that." He stuck out his hand. "I hope you take good care of him."

I shook his hand. "I'll never leave him alone."

"That's good to hear." Dorian smiled and then rubbed the back of his head. "I know

we don't normally mate and all, but if you find a cute wolf out there, I wouldn't be opposed to meeting someone new."

I laughed right along with Grim. Dorian's cheeks turned red, and my mate comforted him, telling him that we would be on the lookout. Once the alpha walked off, we were introduced to a myriad of other deer. Some of them were Grim's siblings; Claudia, Allara, Jean, Samantha, Katie, and his one and only brother, Milo, another omega. By the time we were done, my head was spinning, but everyone was nice which made me feel more at ease when we were done.

"What do you think?" Grim asked when we were alone.

"They all seem great. What were you so scared about?"

Grim glanced around at his family and friends. "That they wouldn't accept me for who I was. I never knew they thought so highly of me." He smiled softly, but there was sadness in his eyes. "I feel like I screwed myself over all this time because I didn't see how important I was to them."

"Now you know," I said quietly as I took his hand in mine, brought it to my lips, and kissed it. "Sometimes we have to see it to believe it."

"You're right." Grim smiled up at me. "God, I love this. The way you make me feel, Jasper." He clutched his shirt as he gazed at me. "I've never felt like this before."

I pulled him close. "I haven't either. You're the first and only man I've met that affects me like this." Leaning down, I kissed his forehead. "Now we have to meet my family."

Grim shivered. "Great, I'm nervous again."

"It'll be fine, I promise."

Or at least I hoped it would. We went back to talking to Grim's family, but I was nervous as well. I had to tell my dads I was mated, about to start a pack, and one day I would start a family. But when I thought about Grim, I wasn't nervous at all. I was ready to start my future with the man I loved.

GRIM

I STARED at myself in the mirror and turned back and forth, trying to figure out if what I was wearing was appropriate. Lately, I had been sticking to casual clothes, but I wanted to look good for Jasper's family. Slacks, a white button up, and a nice pair of loafers were what I had settled on, but I couldn't decide if I was trying too hard.

"Baby, what are you doing?"

I glanced over my shoulder at a very naked Jasper who had appeared behind me. He was fresh out of the shower, water running down his body and dripping onto the hardwood floor below. I focused on a single bead of water and wondered what it would be like to follow it from start to finish as it rolled down his chest, stomach, and finally over part of his semi-hard cock before it dripped to the floor. When he raised a brow at me, I cleared my throat and tried to pretend I wasn't staring him down.

"I wanted to look nice for meeting your dads." I waved a hand down the length of my body nervously. "What do you think?"

Jasper grinned. "I think you are the hottest man I've ever seen in my life." He closed the space between us after he dried off and pressed his lips against mine before his arms wrapped around me. "And try not to be so nervous. Everything will be fine."

"Will it?" My stomach tightened, and I laid a hand on it, trying to force back the nauseated feeling. "It feels like I'm going to throw up again, just like when we met my parents. I still need to call Amber and check on my class. I—" I paused and blinked at my mate. "Am I still going to be allowed to teach?"

"What?" Jasper tilted his head. "What do you mean?"

I bit my lip. "I don't know. I figured you're about to be pack alpha and you're technically my alpha..."

"Technically?" Jasper raised a brow.

"Okay, you are. Shut up." He chuckled as I plowed ahead, feeling crazy. "I figured if you wanted me to stop, I would have to."

Jasper took my hands. "Baby, you don't have to worry about that with me or with this

pack. I wish I could say that's how every pack works, but I know it's not. I've seen it." He sighed and ran a hand over my cheek. "But omegas will be treated the same as everyone else here. If you want to work, keep working. If you don't want to, that's fine too. Whatever you want to do, I'll respect it."

My heart squeezed looking at my mate. The universe had gotten it right. After all of my fears and worries and stubbornness, it had given me Jasper. He was a good man, a strong wolf, and I loved every bit of him.

"You're going to be an amazing pack leader," I said quietly as I reached out and laid a hand on his chest. "I just know it."

"Yeah?" Jasper's wide grin made my heart melt. "Are you saying you love me and believe in me or something?"

I rolled my eyes. "You ruined the moment."

Jasper chuckled as I turned around, and he pulled me against his body. He looked at me in the mirror, his chin on my shoulder and his breath against my ear. My body was in overdrive. A little touch, a little heat, and I was ready to bend over for my mate and take his knot.

"I love you, Grim." Jasper's lips brushed against my neck and his tongue followed, lapping at my skin. "I want you to be happy."

I softened at the brief concern that crossed my mate's face. "I am happy with you and your family." I reached up and caressed his cheek. "This... feels like home."

Jasper's arms wrapped around my waist, and he released a sigh of relief. "That's all I've wanted to hear."

"And I love you too." I smiled at how sweet he was when he held onto me like this. "Even if you're a dumbass."

Jasper laughed. "All I heard was that you love me."

"What are you doing? Jasper, put me down!"

My mate ignored my remarks and pulled me into his arms. He carried me over to the bed and dropped me onto it before climbing on top of me. His dark hair fell over his forehead, and his eyes sparkled as he smiled down at me. My heart sped up as I wrapped my legs around his waist before our lips crashed. My breathing quickened, and our hands pushed and shoved at each other's clothes. Jasper needed me as much as I needed him. I could feel it.

"Jasper? Grim?" The knock and Tuesdays' voice cut through the sexual tension like a knife. "Our dads are here!"

"Why?" Jasper groaned. "Why are our parents cock blocks?"

I laughed and patted him on the back as he buried his face in my neck. "It's because we have sex all the time, Jasper." I chuckled and turned toward the door. "We're coming,

Tuesday!"

"No, we're not," Jasper mumbled against my skin. "If we were cumming, I would be a lot happier."

"Stop it," I slapped his shoulder.

"Disgusting," Tuesday sang before he laughed. "Hurry up!"

I pushed myself up and had to fight Jasper to actually move. "Come on. We shouldn't keep them waiting."

"Do we have to go?" Jasper whined. "Let's pretend we're not home."

"Pretty sure it's too late for that." I climbed out of bed, bent over, and kissed his forehead. "Get dressed, mate. Or we won't be able to finish what we started later. And I want you." I ran my hand down his body and cupped his balls, making him moan. "I really want to finish this."

"Shit." Jasper shivered and rolled out of bed. "Coming, baby."

I grinned as he moved around the room, quickly gathering clothes. Knowing I could turn him on made my confidence soar. I wanted to watch him turn into a beast and wreck me every single night just because I could. And because we would both love it.

"Alright, I'm ready."

I turned, and my jaw dropped. My mate stood there, pushing his fingers through his hair before he adjusted his button-up shirt. It hugged his broad chest and the black slacks that he'd put on displayed his muscular thighs. I wanted to bury my head against his chest and between his legs and simply melt.

"What?" Jasper asked as he raised a brow at me. "Too much?"

"No! No," I chuckled softly before I shook my head. "It's uh... why did you dress up too?"

"If my mate wants to look nice, then I will too." Jasper held out his hand to me. "Let's go meet my parents."

I swallowed thickly and tried to calm down. I was about to meet the fathers of my mate. That was a huge deal, and I worried about what they would think of me. I was the odd one out, the different one, and I wanted them to accept me. My stomach twisted and I closed my eyes forcing down the panic that tried to crawl up my throat.

"Are you okay?" Jasper asked softly.

I opened my eyes to his concerned face. "Y...yeah, I'm fine." I smiled at my mate and squeezed his hand. "Let's go meet them."

* * *

MAYBE I HAD OVERREACTED, because Tobias and Myles loved me. Tobias reminded me

more of Tuesday with his soft features and fussing care. Myles definitely looked and acted more like his alpha sons. Dark hair, dark eyes, and a commanding presence when he wasn't joking around.

"So, my son managed to find a mate." Myles smiled at both of us as we sat on the couch snacking on hor d'oeuvres that Tuesday had prepared. "And you seem way too good for him."

"Father," Jasper groaned. "Don't tell him that! I'm trying to make him think he got a good catch."

Myles raised a brow. "I think he's smart enough to know that you are the lucky one." He grinned as he took a sip of iced tea, his black hair streaked through with gray.

"Leave my baby alone," Tobias lectured, shaking his head at his mate before he turned to me. "Ignore him. Jasper is a sweetheart. He can be a bit much..."

"Dad," Jasper hissed.

"But he's fun!" Tobias added with a chuckle before he gave Jasper an apologetic look. "Sorry." He turned his radiant smile on me. "We'll get to meet your family soon, right? I haven't met many other shifters besides wolves, and I would love a little diversity."

I smiled right back at him. "I'm sure my family would be happy to meet you."

"Good!" Tobias clapped his hands together. "Well, since you two are already mated, I can't wait to plan the ceremony. Our Jasper being pack alpha was always the dream." He smiled. "And now he's fulfilling it."

Jasper appeared sheepish at his dad's praise, and it made me smile. I reached over and took his hand. My mate was cute. As I glanced around the living room, a feeling of calmness filled me. This was where I belonged. Nikhil, Tuesday, their parents, they were my family.

I smiled before I stopped and swallowed thickly. Once again, a wave of nausea washed over me. Frowning, I laid a hand on my stomach. I didn't think I was nervous anymore. What's wrong now?

"Are you okay, Grim?" Jasper asked, his eyes concerned as he searched my face. "You look pale."

"I don't feel good." My mouth watered, and I released Jasper's hand as I shot to my feet. "Excuse me!"

I ran out of the room with Jasper calling after me, but I couldn't stop. The door of the first floor bathroom barely slammed behind me before I threw up every ounce of food that I had just devoured minutes before. I stayed hovering over the toilet until I heaved and nothing else came. Slowly, I stood on shaky legs and flushed the toilet before I washed my hands and rinsed my mouth. I splashed a little water on my face, loving how cool it was against my hot skin.

"Baby?" Jasper's gentle knock on the door grabbed my attention. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." I opened the bathroom door and he stood there looking disheveled and nervous. "Are you?",

"Here." Jasper handed me my toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste. "I ran up to get this for you."

I raised a brow. "You didn't answer my question." I took the toothbrush and started brushing my teeth as I stared at him in the mirror. "What's wrong?"

"Are you pregnant?" Jasper blurted out.

I stared at him, my mouth falling open. "What?"

"Are you pregnant?" He repeated. "You've been getting sick lately, sleeping a lot, eating everything in sight."

"Hey!" I spat out the toothpaste and wiped my mouth before I turned and looked at him. "Did you just call me fat?"

"Grim," Jasper growled. "Are you pregnant?"

"I don't know!" I countered, my heart speeding up at the thought that I might be.

"We don't mean to interrupt," Tobias said as Jasper moved out of the way. "But I think maybe you are pregnant. I had Myles run to the store." He passed me the test and smiled. "If you are, then I think we need to talk about moving up the ceremony, don't you?" he asked, directing the question to his son.

Jasper nodded. "Yes. And we'll need to make some preparations and... I'll call Cassie."

I was sure they were making a big deal out of things for no reason, but I let them do what they wanted to do. I was too sick to deal with it. Jasper brushed a kiss on my forehead before he walked away, his dad in tow and phone in his hand. Sighing, I closed the door and unboxed the test.

"Here goes nothing."

Waiting felt like torture. Jasper returned to the bathroom soon and wrapped his arms around me. My mate being so close calmed me down a bit, and I leaned against him, taking in his scent and his warmth.

"We have to check it," I said finally, staring at the little stick.

"Want me to do it?"

"Yeah." My heart was in my throat, and it was hard to breathe. "Please."

"Alright." Jasper pressed a kiss to my temple before he picked up the test. He stared at it for a while and smiled. "You're pregnant."

"Really?" I took the test from him and blinked at the window that said pregnant. "Wow, I really am." I laid a hand on my stomach.

"Is that... okay? Is that what you want, Grim?"

I glanced up at Jasper and saw the worry on his face. "If it's with you, yes. That's

what I want." I smiled up at him. "We're going to have a baby."

Jasper's megawatt smile widened. "We're going to have a baby!"

I turned, and Jasper pulled me into his arms. My stomach did flips, but I didn't feel sick anymore. Instead, excitement swept through me. I always looked at having babies with a sense of dread before, when I was about to do it out of duty, but I loved Jasper. I loved my pack. And I would love our children just as much.

"What now?" I asked.

Jasper straightened up. "Time for me to become pack alpha." He shivered. "Never thought I would say those words"

"You'll be amazing at it." I kissed him, and he relaxed a little. "So, when is this ceremony?"

"Tomorrow night." Jasper scratched the back of his head. "My dad is already on the phone organizing the whole thing."

"Tobias?"

"Yep," Jasper laughed and shook his head. "And my father is going to let it happen. I don't mind. I know he's going to throw something huge and unnecessary, but it'll make him happy."

I tilted my head at him. "You care a lot about making people happy, don't you?"

Jasper smiled. "I do. As long as my family is happy, that's all I care about."

"You're a good man." I caressed his cheek. "And an amazing alpha. I know you're going to make a wonderful father."

"Do you think so?" he asked softly.

"I know it."

I melted into my mate's arms and nuzzled against his chest. My life had definitely taken a turn, but I was happy about where it was going. Finally, I felt like I belonged.

JASPER

I WAS NERVOUS. Downstairs, gathering in our backyard was an array of shifters both from our own pack and the local ones. Grim's family was there as well, waiting to see me become the leader I was born to be. My heart beat in my throat, and I swallowed thickly, trying to calm down.

There was a knock on the door, and Cassie opened it, poking her head inside. "You wanted me?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I realized I never gave you an answer about wanting to join our pack."

Cassie lit up and stepped inside of my room before closing the door behind her. "Did you have time to think about it?"

"I did, and I want you to stay, Cassie. You're a good doctor, and I want you taking care of things when Grim gives birth. I know he'll be in excellent hands."

She threw her arms around me. "Thank you! I can't wait to move in and get started." Quickly, Cassie stepped back. "Right, you're about to be pack alpha. I guess I need to calm down on that."

"Before my crazy mate bites you? Yes," I snorted. "But it's okay." Cassie and I had known each other all of our lives. She was a little younger than me, but smart and capable. I was happy to have her beside me. "Do you need anything from me?"

"Yes." She nodded and started ticking off fingers. "We'll need a proper medical space, and I will need supplies. Trust me, we can figure out everything that needs to be done after this. For now, focus on your big day."

"Thank you, Cassie."

"No, thank you!" She smiled.

Grim walked into the room and Cassie waved at him on the way out. "She's staying with us then?"

"Yeah," I smiled. "I think it's the right choice to make."

"Me too." He laid a hand on my chest. "I like her."

"Good, because she'll be delivering our pups." I leaned down and kissed my mate. "How's everything going down there?"

"Tuesday is cooking up a storm, Nikhil is trying to escape your family's chatting, and your parents are talking to everyone. It should be a fun party." When I nodded, he frowned at me. "Why are you making that face? Are you having second thoughts?"

I shook my head. That wasn't possible. My mate was pregnant, and I needed to form an official pack. Once we were recognized by the other local packs, the status would give us certain protections should anything happen. We would be part of a family that would have our backs. If our house burned down, if one of us grew really ill, if we had a dispute with another pack, being official meant that we would have assistance if we needed it.

"No, nothing like that. I'm a little nervous, I think." I frowned. "Goddess, I'm not used to being anxious like this."

Grim touched my cheek. "You look all serious. I don't like it." He lifted my hand and kissed it. "Do you want me to calm your nerves?"

The smirk that formed on his lips made my cock stir. "I don't think we have time for that," I muttered as he reached down and unbuttoned my pants. "The ceremony..." I moaned as he shoved his hand down my boxers and worked my cock free. "We're going to be late."

"Then we'll be a little late," Grim purred as he slowly sank to his knees. He looked up at me with his big, blue eyes and I swallowed thickly, making him chuckle before he lapped at my cock. "I'll make it quick."

I couldn't say a word as his mouth engulfed my cock, and he slid down until his nose rested in the dark mass of curls that surrounded my shaft. He groaned as he pulled back and released my dick. Drool dripped to the floor below when he came free before he swirled his tongue around the head of my cock and started his journey down again.

Every inch that sank into Grim's hot, tight, wet, mouth he took eagerly until I was nestled in his throat. I pushed my hand into his soft, blond hair and tightened my grip. My nails scraped against his scalp, and Grim's delicious groans made my toes curl.

"Shit, baby." I thrust forward on instinct needing to feel even more of him. "That's so good."

I moaned and dropped my head back, all of my focus on my mate and his ridiculously amazing mouth. His tongue slid over my length, and I tilted my head up to watch him. Grim's eyes, watery and all, stayed on me as he lapped at the head of my cock and started stroking what wouldn't fit in his mouth as he teased and pleased me.

Goddess, he was going to make me see stars. I jutted my hips forward once more and my mate matched my speed. He moaned as he moved back and forth on my length, and my cock twitched in his mouth. Fingers stroked over my balls, squeezing them lightly

before he moaned.

That was enough for me. I gripped his hair and shoved my cock down his throat, fucking his face vigorously while I panted and moaned his name. My balls drew up, and I growled as I came, stuffing Grim's mouth with my cum. Panting, I slowly pulled myself free, and he hummed, wiping a few droplets of escaped cum back into his mouth.

"Damn," I groaned. "Now I really don't want to go down there."

Grim slapped my thigh before I helped him to his feet. "We have to," he chuckled. "But afterwards, it'll just be us." He reached up and pinched my cheek. "And I expect to be fucked properly."

I shivered. "You are bossy as hell. You know that?"

The alpha looked me up and down. "You knew that before you mated with me," he pointed out before taking my hand and squeezing it. "Come on, we shouldn't keep them waiting anymore. I'm sure everyone is getting anxious."

I sighed. "If that wasn't the best blow job ever, I would be walking away right now," I said as I opened the door and stopped short. My father, Myles, stood in the doorway with his arms folded over his wide chest making me jump. "Shit, dad! What are you doing up here?"

"We're all waiting." He raised a brow and then glanced at Grim who was hiding behind me. "Do you think you two could calm down long enough to come do this?"

My cheeks burned. When I glanced at Grim he muttered "oh god" and buried his face against me harder. I shook my head.

"We're coming! Will you go and sit down with dad already?"

My father chuckled. "I'll see the two of you downstairs."

"I'm gonna die," Grim wailed as soon as the door closed. "God, how much of that do you think he heard?"

I grinned. "We're wolves so... a lot."

"God!" Grim groaned.

"It's fine." I laughed and pulled him against my chest. "He thinks it's funny to screw with us, but wolves are pretty open. No one's judging you." I grabbed his hand. "Let's do this."

"Are you ready?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yeah, I'm ready."

And I was. For once it felt as if this was what I was supposed to be doing with my life. When Grim was by my side, it didn't feel as if I was doing something terrifying. I was confident, sure that I was supposed to be here, with him, living this life.

We walked out to the backyard and everyone immediately swarmed us. My parents, aunts and uncles and cousins that I hadn't seen in a few weeks, friends, other packs.

Grim went stoic as he always did, but he held my hand tightly, clinging to me and refusing to be pulled away. My mate was nervous. I kissed his neck and he calmed a little before my father's voice boomed over the crowd.

"Alright, there will be plenty of time to chat afterward! Everyone make space." The crowd parted quickly and quietly, waiting for him to continue. "Jasper, pack leaders, come to the front."

I walked Grim to his parents and stopped. "I'll be back in a minute. I promise."

"Am I that obvious?" he whispered. "I was trying not to show how nervous I am."

"Yes, but who cares?" I kissed him, and he smiled at me. "It's okay to be nervous. I love you."

"I love you too. And I'm proud of you, Jasper."

My heart did flip flops in my chest. Grim was proud of me. His words meant more than anyone else's. I walked by my brothers, and Tuesday grinned while Nik nodded toward me. My brothers approved, and that meant the world to me too.

When I stopped in front of my father and the other pack leaders, I swallowed hard. This was my future. Whenever there was a problem, I would come to them. If they needed my help, they would come to me. Together, we would decide the future of our packs, our lands, our people and everyone that joined us. I was no longer the class clown with no responsibility. And I didn't mind that. It was time to grow up.

"Jasper, you stand before us, willing and ready to accept the responsibility of pack alpha. Will you lead with strength, honor, courage, and integrity?"

I stood up straighter. "Yes."

"And will you defend, protect, and counsel all those in your pack?"

"Yes!"

My father smiled the smallest bit, and my heart squeezed. "What do you name your pack?"

"Silver Ridge."

The decision was easy. My favorite spot in the woods was Silver Point Creek, and it fit who we were. Who I wanted us to be. Eternal, peaceful, safe. Silver Ridge would be home for all that needed it.

"Then I hereby name you alpha of the Silver Ridge pack." He clapped a hand on my shoulder. "Do you all agree?"

The resounding yes that rose damn near made me cry. Not only did my family have faith in me, not just my mate, but everyone around us. They all thought I could handle it, and I would continue to make them proud.

My father gripped my forearm and I his. "Continue to excel, son. Welcome."

I threw back my head and howled. The sound of my counterpart's howling filled the

air as well. We shed our clothes, every pack alpha, and shifted. As soon as my paws hit the dirt I took off into the line of trees. Wind rushed through my fur, and as we howled, the voices of every pack member behind joined us. I glanced to my left, and Kyrian was a huge buck, his antlers reaching for the sky as he raced through the woods. We were a family now.

Thank you, Goddess.

GRIM

I DRAGGED myself out of the bed, groaning as I went. If I had to pee one more time, I was going to eat someone. Shuffling across the hall to the bathroom, I heard Cassie in the room she was in the middle of turning into the birthing suite. We were building her another place on the property, but that would take some time and I was already too pregnant for that. Six and a half months after discovering I was pregnant and I was ready to pop.

Sitting down was a hassle, but as soon as I could pee, I groaned with relief. Everything hurt, and I was swollen all over. Big ankles, big belly, big fucking appetite that wouldn't calm down. It's like the little monsters inside of me decided that they wanted to eat any and everything.

I wobbled my way down the stairs and into the kitchen. Breakfast was already going, but Tuesday was nowhere in sight. Sighing, I took the bacon off of the fire and turned down the pot of oatmeal he had going.

"Jasper, I mean it. You have to go to the Lane's and do those repairs!"

My mate groaned. "I'm doing a thousand things at once. Get Nikhil to do it."

"No." Nikhil called from the kitchen table, his head still buried in a book. "I'm busy."

I shook my head. "Are you three really arguing this early in the morning?" I rubbed my belly. "What is wrong with you guys?"

"Baby!" Jasper walked over and wrapped his arms around me. "Tuesday is being a pain in the ass."

"I am?" Tuesday yelled. He turned to me. "Get your damn mate before I hit him with a cast iron pan!"

"See? He's scary." Jasper kissed my cheek, chuckling against my ear.

I shook my head. Yeah, that was my mate. I had wondered, briefly, if he would lose his childish ways and turn into a serious alpha all of the time, but that didn't happen. I was happy that he hadn't changed. I didn't want Jasper to be anyone other than himself.

"Stop bothering Tuesday," I growled at my mate. "He's the one that feeds us around

here, and I'm trying to stuff my face for three."

Tuesday beamed when I took his side. "Thank you, Grim." He bounced back over to the stove. "I can't believe you two are having twins. There are going to be two pups stumbling around here soon."

I smiled. "Yeah, there are. I'm still scared."

"Oh, don't be!" Tuesday smiled as he turned with a plate in his hands for me. "We'll be right here to help you raise the babies and make sure you're alright."

"Yeah and at least with us, your baby will be smart," Nikhil interjected. "I'll show them all of the best books. Jasper would show them... rocks."

"Hey!" My mate untangled himself from me and stalked over to his brother. "Is that any way to speak to your pack alpha?"

Nik rolled his eyes. "Yes."

"Listen here you little—"

As Nikhil tortured my mate, I laughed. They respected Jasper when he was serious, but in moments like this they were as goofy as always. I rubbed my belly as I sat down to eat. Sharing a meal with them was always relaxing. No matter what else happened during the day we could sit down, eat, and talk about our days. Eating my meal with the brothers arguing and my babies kicking away inside of my stomach felt natural. I really had found home.

Pain shot through my stomach and I doubled over, dropping my fork. "Ah, shit." I hissed and sat up, frowning as the room became silent, all eyes trained on me. "It's fine," I waved a hand at them. "Just Braxton-Hicks contractions again. It'll pass."

Jasper nodded. "Well, eat your breakfast. I'll join you for a bit, and then I have some work that needs to get done. Will you be okay if left alone with these jerks?"

"Guess who doesn't get food?" Tuesday said with a glare.

"Awww, come on. I'm starving!" He pouted. "Grim."

I threw up my hands. "Don't look at me! I still can't cook much." I rubbed my belly and nodded toward Tuesday. "Be nice and he will—Ah!"

Jasper jumped up from his chair. "Nope, that's not normal. It can't be." He walked over and laid a hand on my back. "Where's Cassie?" he asked his brothers.

"Upstairs," I managed to get out as pain gripped my stomach and squeezed.

"Nikhil."

"I'm on it." Nikhil slammed his book down and took off for the stairs.

Tuesday walked over and laid a hand on my shoulder. "Calm down, Grim. Breathe with me."

I looked at him and nodded, breathing slowly. "I-it hurts like a bitch."

"You can do this." Tuesday said and gave me a firm squeeze. "We're right here."

Jasper growled long and low, his canines sticking out of his lips. "Let go of him. Now."

Tuesday threw his hands up. "Right! I forgot about alphas during birth." He frowned and walked around me. "We'll get him to stay down here with us while Cassie takes care of you."

"Actually," Cassie walked into the kitchen and looked between us. "I'm going to need you to join us, Tuesday. Trust me, if I ask Nikhil, another alpha, your mate will really lose it, Grim. So, let's go with this."

I nodded, and Jasper helped me to my feet. "Do you really think it's time?" I asked Cassie nervously, rubbing my belly faster. "I don't know if I'm ready."

Cassie smiled. "I've never met anyone who felt they were, but you can do it." She looked at Jasper. "Nikhil will keep you company down here, but you're not allowed upstairs. As soon as the babies are born you can come up."

Jasper frowned. "I want to be there."

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"I said I'm going!" Jasper growled.

"Jasper, it's okay," I said quietly. "Let Cassie do her job."

"I am not about to let my mate suffer on his own!"

"Listen here," Cassie snapped at Jasper, making both of us stare at her. "You might be pack alpha, but I'm in charge of making sure these pups are delivered safely and your mate is comfortable and calm. Can you control yourself if you go upstairs and see him in more pain? Can you?" she demanded.

"I...I don't—"

"Exactly! You can help by staying here, keeping out of the way, and letting him do what his body needs right now which is to deliver your babies. Now, give him a kiss and we're going."

I blinked at Cassie. She was a thousand times more strict than I ever thought she would be, but it had reined Jasper in. Every contraction that rocked through my body, stealing my senses and making me groan in pain was intense, and I was ready to move forward.

"Are you okay with this?" Jasper asked, pushing his palm against my cheek.

I nodded. "Right now, the only thing I want is to get these babies out of me." I reached for him, and Jasper pulled me against his chest. He tilted my head back, his lips pressing against mine. "I'll be fine," I promised when I finally pulled away with some reluctance. "We'll see you soon."

"I love you." Jasper held onto me a little more tightly as another contraction crashed into my body and made me falter.

"Time to go." Cassie quickly took my elbow and steered me toward the stairs. "Let's

go have your babies. Come on, Tuesday."

"Coming! Hang tight, Jasper. Everything is going to be fine."

Tuesday came with us and we made our way upstairs. I walked into the room for the first time and saw how nicely it was set up. There was a big, comfortable bed, a ball to sit on that Cassie had shown me before, monitors, a radio, and soft lights. The fluffy blankets on the bed when I laid on them made my eyes widen.

"Wait... these are mine and Jaspers blankets!"

"Exactly." She smiled. "I grabbed a few with your scents on them. It should mimic your own space and give you some comfort." Cassie walked over and started taking my vitals. "Tuesday, can you grab me some gloves? I need to check how far along our patient is."

"I'm on it."

I laid back and tried to relax as Cassie went through checking me and making sure I was alright. My stomach was in knots, twisting and threatening to make me sick. She listened to the babies heartbeats and finally smiled at me.

"We're all good to go. In a little while, you'll be ready to push."

"So quickly?" I asked as another contraction hit me, and I groaned.

"Babies decide on their own when they're ready to come, and these two are ready." Cassie changed out her gloves and gave my bare leg a squeeze. "Did you two come up with names yet?"

"A few." I smiled, thinking about the late-night arguments I had with Jasper as he suggested ridiculous names and I threatened to make him sleep on his own. "We'll know for sure when they're here."

Cassie smiled at me. "We'll know what you'll be having soon."

I nodded and laid back as Cassie turned on soft music. Jasper and I had decided we wanted to be surprised about the sex of our babies. Whatever they were, we would be happy as long as they were healthy.

Cassie and Tuesday moved around the room, but I closed my eyes and tried to rest. Cassie had always said it was better to conserve as much energy as possible before the pushing began and that's what I did. My phone buzzed, and I picked it up, peeling open one eye before I laughed.

Jasper: Show those babies who's boss!Also I miss you.

My heart squeezed. This was my mate. I couldn't ask for a better partner if I'd tried. Jasper spammed me with a bunch of gifs, and I grinned before responding to every last one. Surprisingly, I wasn't cranky like I usually was. I was excited and ready to make my

mate proud and welcome the new additions to our family.

"Alright, Grim. It's time to push." Cassie patted my leg, and Tuesday took my hand. "Ready?"

I glanced up at Tuesday. "Hold on tight, okay? Don't let go."

"I won't," Tuesday reassured me. "I'm right here."

I can do this.

I sucked in a deep breath and pushed. Heat swept up my body, sweat collecting on my brow and running down my cheek as I kept going. I only stopped long enough to take a breath before I started again, pushing and squeezing Tuesday's hand. It felt like forever, but I soon heard a cry and a sob slipped from my lips in triumph. Finally.

"It's a girl!" Cassie laughed. She laid the baby on my chest and quickly moved onto the next. "Alright baby two is crowning. Come on, Grim. You're almost done!"

Tuesday took the baby, and I ground my teeth as I focused on the second baby. Time ticked by until finally they came as another cry filled the air. Cassie checked them before she smiled.

"Girl number two. Congrats, Grim. They're both gorgeous."

I took both of my daughters and cradled them against my chest while Cassie looked them over. The door burst open, and there was my mate. He looked like he was ready to explode before his eyes landed on our daughters, and he calmed.

"How are they?"

"They're perfect," I cooed, pressing the two of them against my chest. "Look at how beautiful they are."

Both of them had dark hair and big, blue eyes. One of the girls had quieted, but the other one cried at the top of her lungs until she latched onto my chest and began to drink. Jasper gazed at them and for the first time ever, I watched tears roll down his cheeks and drip to the bed.

"They're beautiful," Jasper whispered. "Just like you."

"Do you want to cut the cords?" Cassie asked.

Jasper nodded, still trying to wipe tears away with the back of his hand, clearing his throat so he could speak. He cut their cords and caressed their cheeks and hair while Cassie went back to work.

"So, we know what we're going to name them, right?" I asked, a small smile on my lips.

My mate smiled right back. "Tiegan and Thalia." He beamed down at our daughters. "Welcome to the world."

Looking at my mate as he cried over our children made my heart swell. The universe had gotten things right when it put us together. Jasper leaned down and pressed his lips

against mine. I gave into our kiss, melting, before I chuckled against his mouth.

My little family was perfect. I couldn't ask for anything more.

EPILOGUE - JASPER

GRIM WAS STILL CURLED up in bed, his soft breathing against my ear as I stared at him. My mate. Was it possible that he looked even more amazing now? I reached out and tucked some blond hair behind his ear. Grim pursed his lips and I smiled before I kissed them.

"Get some rest."

Having twins was way more exhausting than either of us had realized. We were both up at odd hours and had to work afterward. Since it was Friday, Grim had school, and I wanted to make sure he was rested up for it. I only had to work on a neighbor's kitchen so I would be okay with caffeine. My mate deserved all the sleep after giving birth to our beautiful pups.

I heard their cries and rolled out of bed. Right next door to us was the nursery that I had set up. Thalia fussed until I picked her up and cradled her against my chest. Tiegan on the other hand was fascinated by her fist and shoved it into her mouth as she gargled.

"Good morning, you two." I bounced Thalia before I picked up Tiegan too. "Are you two excited to spend time with Uncle Tuesday today?"

"And Uncle Nikhil." My brother stepped into the room and took Tiegan from me. "I don't have anything to do but visit the library, so I might take them with me. I need new books."

"Of course you do," I chuckled. "Well, I'm sure they'll be grateful for the outing. Thank you, Nik."

"No problem." Nik made a face at Tiegan and covered her cheek in little pecks. "What should we read today, Tiegan? Hmm? Pirates? Ghosts? Fairytales?"

I smiled at my brother. He was having a full blown conversation with his niece, and the grin on his lips made my heart squeeze. My brother looked sweet holding a baby, but there was a strange look in his eyes when he went back to cradling her in his arms, and I frowned a little.

Is Nik lonely?

I wanted to ask, but I knew my brother. The only answer I would get was a grunt and

him telling me to mind my own business. If he wanted or needed to talk to me about something, then he would. And I would be there for him.

"What are you two doing up so early?" Grim yawned and tugged his robe around his body more tightly.

"You're supposed to be asleep." I kissed Grim's forehead, and he smiled as he leaned against me. "Go back and rest. We'll take care of the babies."

Grim shook his head. "No, I'm up now. I want them." Grim held out his arms, but I hugged Thalia closer to my chest. "What are you doing?"

"No! She wants to stay with Daddy."

Grim sighed and looked at Nik. "Can I have Tiegan?"

Nikhil slowly turned around. "Sorry, I want to show her what books we're going to get at the library today."

My mate's mouth dropped open. "Nikhil King, are you kidnapping my baby?"

"We can't hear you. Books," he chuckled as he closed the door, and his coos came through when he was on the other side. "Yes, we escaped. Yes, we did. Books and milk? I'm into that."

Grim turned and glared at me. "Why is it that you and your brothers are constantly stealing my babies?"

"Our babies." I grinned. "They're too cute to put down." I nuzzled my nose into Thalia's belly and she giggled. "See? So adorable. I just want to hug you forever little Tally. You're cute, and sweet, and—" I sniffed and quickly pulled my head away before I held out Thalia. "Here you go, baby."

Grim folded his arms over his chest. "She pooped, didn't she?"

I scoffed. "No! Why would I try to pawn off our daughter just because of a little diaper accident? She needs her papa to feed and love her."

"She pooped." Grim patted me on the chest. "Good luck with that. I'm going to take a shower."

"I thought you wanted the babies!" I called.

"As soon as you change her I'll be there to feed her." He chuckled before he reached the door and grinned at me. "I love you."

"Pack alpha. I'm pack alpha, and I still get zero respect around here."

"We both know that's not true." Grim chuckled.

I sighed. "They don't treat me right," I told Thalia as I turned her around and shook my head. "I love you too, my mean mate."

Grim blew me a kiss and I watched him go before I shook my head. One disgusting diaper later, I had changed Thalia, and Nikhil had returned and changed Tiegan. We took them down together and sat them in their high seats.

"What's cooking, Tuesday?"

"A full breakfast." He smiled and turned to the twins, happily fawning over them. "Eggs, toast, bacon, oatmeal. All the good things, right girls? We're going to have so much fun today!"

"No, I'm taking them," Nikhil said.

Tuesday blinked at me, and I quickly shrugged, trying to save myself from his wrath. "What do you mean you're taking them, Nik? It's my turn."

"No, it's not. You have them everyday."

"Jasper, tell him I'm taking the twins today!"

"No way in hell," Nik growled.

I sighed. "As much as I love how much you adore my kids, can the two of you go out and get mates already? Goddess." I sipped my mug of coffee. "You two need a life."

"Not all of us are as lucky as you," Nik muttered.

Grim smiled. "Aww, Nikhil. You're so sweet."

My brother's face turned beet red, and he quickly buried it behind the thick book in his hands. Whoever he ends up with is going to have a hell of a time breaking through that shell. My brother was only twenty-eight, but he reminded me of a cranky old man sometimes.

"What?" Grim smiled at me and tilted his head. "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing." I leaned over and kissed him. "Just thinking about how much I love you."

"I know you do." Grim's hand lingered on my cheek. "Let's go for a run tomorrow. We'll see how the girls are coming along."

Running with my mate was the brightest part of my day. Pretty soon our twins would be able to shift too. For the first time, we would get to see their animals, and I couldn't wait. I nodded eagerly at Grim.

"Sounds like a plan."

"Maybe those two can join us. If they ever stop arguing," he whispered as he nodded his head at my brothers who were still at each other's throats.

I chuckled. "We need to get them laid."

"We can hear you!" Tuesday huffed.

"That's my cue." I kissed Grim once more before I planted kisses on my girls' heads. "I gotta get to work. See you guys later!"

"Jasper, what about breakfast!" Tuesday called.

I slipped out of the door. Breakfast could wait. I wasn't about to stick around and get another famous Tuesday lecture. Instead, I jogged to my truck and grinned. My family was insane, but, damn, did I love each and every one of them.

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