

Chapter 8

2385 Words

Dinner and dessert are both done and now it's time to mingle. It's the thing I hate most. An Alpha from a neighboring pack walks up and begins talking to Seth and I take that as my chance to exit rapidly. As I'm walking off I see the young, future Alpha that I met this morning approaching me.

"Hello. Molly, right?" he asks me, stretching out his hand to me. I take it and shake.

"Yeah, it's Molly. Chris, yeah?" I ask.

"Yeah! You remember."

"I try," I say to him.

"It's you that's over the kitchen here, right? I've heard such good things," he asks.

"Oh, yeah, that's me. I've been over them for a few years now." I tell him, surprised that anyone outside our pack knows this about me.

"Your dad was telling us at the last Alpha conference about the gardens you'd put in. He said that they'd been increasingly successful each year?"

"Oh, yeah." I didn't know my dad was talking about these things at all, much less at the Alpha conference. "The first few years we broke even on them, but this year we really got some things right and we're in the green. I'm thankful my dad didn't pull the plug the first year and let me keep trying. We've been able to cut the pack grocery bill so much for the summer and we're hoping to expand next year so that we have extra to store for the winter months." I tell him.

"Wow, that's really amazing." He tells me and it's nice to have someone interested in my work. "I'd really love it if you have time to show me around. My father is looking at handing the pack over to me soon but our chances aren't the most stable at the moment. I'm hoping to be able to make the pack more sustainable to help cut the costs down." He tells me.

"I'll be honest with you," I tell him "It's a pretty large expense up front. Clearing the land can be costly and a lot of hard work. Maintaining things can have a high cost as well. Once you invest in the first year though, you'll have a lot of equipment that you can carry over for years and you can harvest your own seeds as well. If your kitchen staff will do it, you can compost scraps and that will help save on fertilizer and the costs there." I tell him. "I'd be happy to show you our setup though! When are you leaving the Falls?" I ask.

"Unfortunately, we have to leave in the morning. There's some business back in our pack that requires our attention," he tells me.

"It's pretty dark, but I'm happy to show you now, if you'd like." I tell him and he happily accepts my offer. "Awesome, the service stairs are just this way. It's easier to get to the kitchen this way." I tell him as I lead the way.

We're almost to the door when I feel an overwhelming anger wash over me and I know it's Seth. I turn to see what's happened to cause it but I find him walking directly towards me.

"Is everything OK, Seth." I ask him.

"Prince Seth." Chris interjects, emphasizing the Prince part. Chris bows and bares his neck to Seth in submission as he realizes he's the target of his anger.

"Prince Seth." I say. "What's wrong?"

"Where are you going with the young Alpha" he spits at me, his voice laced with venom.

"Oh, he was asking about the kitchen and garden program I started and run here. He has to leave in the morning, so I was taking him to see it before he leaves." and I realize that Seth is upset I was walking off with a male alone- with an unmated alpha. I didn't mean to upset him, but I realize too late that he was hurt by my actions. And by this time, half the room is staring at us.

I reach out and touch his tie as I bite my lower lip, unsure how to reassure him that it's absolutely nothing. "He just wanted to see how we run the garden." I tell him softly.

"I'd love to see that, too," he says, slightly more relaxed, but not much. "Perhaps I'll join you two." he says and places his hand over mine.

"I'd like that." I say him with a smile, and it's the truth. The kitchen and garden programs are something I've worked very hard on for a few years now. It's my contribution to the pack and while it's not the typical way other wolves contribute, it's the best I've got. I smile up at him and release his tie and head down the stairs with the two men following with only a moderate amount of tension between them.

I'm absolutely sure that Seth has no actual interest in the garden and is only interested in me not being alone with another wolf, but maybe he'll learn a thing or two.

"Ok, so the kitchen is this way. It was a little bit of a struggle at first, but we try to be as zero waste as possible. Obviously, it's nearly impossible to be zero waste in this age, but we do as much as we're able." We reach the walk-in freezer. "These buckets are our scraps. We boil them down when full to make broths- vegetable, beef and chicken." I say, indicating the different containers.

"Why do you make them instead of just buying it?" Seth asks me.

"Part of it is cost. I wanted to make it as self-sustaining as possible. But it's also healthier. When you boil the bones down it pulls out nutrients that are in the marrow and you just won't get from store bought. Plus, it tastes better." I tell him.

"Once they're made into broth, they come back to the freezer until they're used. They keep for 6 months to a year but we go through them pretty quickly here." I tell them pointing to the shelves in the corner with frozen containers of broth.

We walk out and reach the closet where I keep the sourdough starters. I reach for the knob but I hesitate.

"I've never actually shown anyone this. It's not like it's a secret, but no one really cares. This is the sourdough closet. I keep them all together and feed them daily. It's a lot of work, and yeast isn't expensive, but I just really enjoy it." I tell them and then open the closet. I keep about a dozen starters going at any time and with all the guests here at the moment, I've got a lot happening here. The shelves on the left are lined with jars while the shelves on the right have baskets with bread dough rising. "These are all for breakfast tomorrow. We don't normally keep this much on hand, but we do for everyone this weekend."

"Wow." Chris says as he takes it all in. "This is a lot of bread."

"Yeah, it is." I agree with him. "Making bread is one of the things I love most. Like I said though, there's not a real financial advantage to it, it just makes me happy. The sourdough takes an entire day to rise, so it's a pretty large commitment. It's probably not something you want to try starting out." I say, turning to Chris "But if you ever decide to just let me know and I'll give you some of the starter."

"Thanks." he tells me with a kind smile. "I really appreciate that."

I take the guys into the actual kitchen now and the entire staff is laughing, listening to music and just having a good time. "Hey Molly!" I hear Callie say and before I can respond, they all notice Seth and bow their heads and bare their necks.

"Don't let the party stop because of me. Molly is just showing us around." Seth tells them and puts them at ease.

"Callie, would you mind telling the future Alpha Chris about our composting program?" I ask her before turning to the guys. "She actually took this over late last year because it was just too much for one person and it's gone so well. She's done such an amazing job."

"Umm, yeah Molly. I can." she says, but she's very nervous.

"Hi,Caleigh. I'm Chris, future Alpha of the Crescent Moon Pack. Molly was just showing me how you all run such a sustainable program and I'd really love it if you could show me what you do here." Chris tells her after he realizes that she's nervous.

"Absolutely!" she tells him and she starts to tell him about the cans we have around, and how we know what goes into them. She really is the best at this and the pack is lucky to have her. Chris has stepped forward and is asking questions that she's responding to with so much excitement when I feel a large hand grasp mine. I look up to see Seth smiling down at me.

"You really do love this, don't you?" he asks me.

"Yeah. I wouldn't do it if I didn't." I tell him, confused.

"I remember Rob telling me before about how you would lock yourself in the kitchen to avoid your pack. He was worried about you." he tells me.

"He was probably right at first. I felt bad that I was always such a liability to the pack and just wanted to help. Cooking didn't require me to be able to shift, or to have wolf strength. I could just come in here and be on the same level as everyone else for once." I tell him and it's hard to open up like this, but I feel comfortable with him. I walk off to my oce and he follows and I grab a bottle of wine and open it, pouring into two glasses for us. He accepts one but doesn't say anything, waiting for me to continue as he closes the door

"I didn't have a lot of friends when I was a kid. The kids of the higher class wolves made fun of me for not being strong enough and the kids of the Omegas were afraid to play with the Alpha's kids for a long time. Once it became more and more clear that I didn't have a wolf at all and wouldn't shift it got really bad, and it was really lonely. Oliver's mom was amazing and would let us play at her house all the time and she taught me to cook. I really liked it, so when I was old enough and felt the most useless that I had ever felt, I decided to socially work here."

"I'm surprised your dad let you." he tells me with a chuckle.

"He wasn't very happy about it at first, but he really relaxed. I'm pretty sure that was all due to my mom, though. She knew I was struggling, but there wasn't really any way for them to help me." I tell him as I sit on the edge of my desk. Seth walks up in front of me and places his hand on my hip. "I learned a lot once everyone relaxed around me. They were pretty nervous to have the alpha's daughter around, broken wolf or not." I say to him and he takes my right hand, rubbing his fingers down the scar across my palm.

"Did you cut yourself cooking?" he asks

"No, it's from my adoption. Your dad approved a blood adoption, they're really rare." I say, looking at my hand.

"I forgot about the adoption." he tells me as his fingers gently trail along my scar, the scar that my entire family has. It's the only physical trait we all share "You know this will start to fade after I mark you, right?"

"Yeah." I tell him sadly. I truly love my scar. It connects me to my family. "But that's only if you mark me. You still have time to run. Time to find someone better." I tell him, looking at my hand and not daring to meet his eyes.

"Molly, I would have marked you the moment I saw you if I thought you were ready for that." He tells me and I'm stunned by the conviction I can feel in his words. "You're my mate. You were made for me." he says and he brings my hand up to kiss my scar. "I'm sorry that your scar will fade." he says and I don't know what to say, so I just lean into him for comfort.

Just then, Chris opens the door and walks into my oce. "Oh, umm.. I'm so sorry to interrupt. I'll leave you. Callie offered to show me around outside tomorrow morning when I leave when it's light and we can see." he says. "Good night, Molly. Prince Seth." he says quickly turning to exit.

"Chris." Seth calls after him. "What you've seen here, please keep it quiet. We're not quite ready for the whole kingdom to know."

"Of Course, Your Majesties," he says as he bows and leaves.

"I like how that sounds, Your Majesty", Seth says to me as he puts his finger under my chin and tilts it up as he leans down and kisses me gently.