

## Chapter 40

Seth and Mom left soon after our conversation. When we had gone back inside, everyone else was up and Benjamin was making coffee on their wood burning stove. Lily made breakfast- some kind of oatmeal, and served it to the 4 of us who remained.

“Benjamin,” I start and he looks at me with his full attention. “If you’d like, do you think you could take me on a walk through the woods in a bit? It’s OK if not, though.” I quickly add, feeling slightly awkward asking my father to help me look for a place for my mate to mark me.

“I’d love to,” he tells me with a smile. “As long as you’re OK moving slowly. I’m not what I used to be.”

“Of course!” I tell him, brightly.

“What did happen?” my dad asks him, but Benjamin remains silent, continuing to eat his breakfast.

“It was the adoption,” Lily whispers to him, even though we can all hear her clearly. “It severed the bond that was still there, even though it was blocked, mostly. Doing so weakened him, similar to when a wolf loses their mate.”

“I’m sorry, old friend,” my dad says, looking astonished. “We looked everywhere for any hints of her parents. We truly thought her biological parents were dead. If I had known, and that it would do this to you, I never would have.”

“I knew it would happen, and we knew you were adopting her,” he says. “We thought it was still the safest option for her.”

I place my hand over Benjamin’s on the table and squeeze it. He gave up so much for me and it’s a little overwhelming to think about at times. “Do you think it can reverse the effects when Seth marks me?”

“I’d be lying if I said that the thought hadn’t crossed my mind,” he says to me, a sad look upon his face. “A parental bond and a mate bond are different, but it’s mostly for protection- which serves the same purpose for both. I’m doubtful, though.”

We finish eating breakfast and I help Lily clear the dishes, though she won’t let me help much. “Don’t make your finger worse, dear,” she tells me as she takes the bowl I was about to pick up.

“Would it be possible to take a shower or something when I get back?” I ask her quietly.

“Of course, dear,” she tells me with a smile. “There’s no hot water but we can heat some for a bath. I can help you wash your hair if you need.”

“Thank you,” I tell her, a bit embarrassed.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she says with a smile. She leans in close, right next to my ear and whispers “I’ll have you in tip-top shape for your mate. Don’t you worry.”

I walk to the living room, sitting on the couch next to Benjamin who is reading a book with my dad sitting in a chair across the room, looking through a book I assume he’d picked up there.

“Would you like to go for that walk soon?” he asks me and I nod. “Good. You just let me know when you’re ready.”

“I’m good to go! I just need someone to help me get my shoes on. I still can’t tie them,” I say, holding up my injured hand. I grab my shoes and socks from beside the couch and get them all on myself. I look up and see my dad looking at Benjamin and he nods slightly.

Benjamin stands up and sits on the coffee table just in front of me, pulling a foot into his lap and starts to tighten the laces and tie. “I haven’t done this since you were probably 4 years old,” he says with a smile, but I stop.

“How… how old am I?” I ask quietly, trying not to cry.

“Oh, Molly,” Benjamin says softly, finishing the first shoe and releasing my foot. He takes both my hands in his. “I’m so sorry that you don’t know. Did you ever get to celebrate any kind of birthday?” I’m so overcome with emotion that I can’t respond. I just cross my feet and stare down at them.

“We didn’t know how old she was, but the doctors estimated she was 6 when I found her,” my dad speaks up. “We always celebrated her birthday on the day we found her- May 8th”.

“You were close, but not quite,” Benjamin tells my dad. He looks back at me and gently squeezes my uninjured hand. “Molly, you’re 21. You were born on November 13th, in this living room on a full moon. You didn’t cry when you were born, you just looked around at everything, so curious from the very start. The next morning, you wrapped your hand around my finger and I wasn’t sure I’d ever be able to let go. There has always been something so special about you.”

“I can agree with that,” my dad says. “I knew from the second I saw her that she was something special.”

Benjamin releases my hands and taps my other leg for me to let him tie the boot for me. When he’s done he helps guide my foot back to the floor and stands, offering his hand to me and helps me stand. We head to the door and he reaches my jacket, holding it out to help me put it on. I have my back to him when I hear my dad link me.

I know you need this time with him, but he’s also very weak. If anything happens, just link me and I’ll be right there. As long as we’re in the same territory, you should be able to.

Thank you.

I turn around, zipping my jacket, and he takes my hat from my hand, placing it on my head in a way that reminds me of Seth doing the same last night. He offers me his arm and I happily take it as we head out. I follow him, letting him show me whatever he would like to. He leads me through the area where their cabin is located that is full of pine trees, telling me about all the different kinds. A bit further past there there are fewer pine trees and a greater variety of trees- even some sugar maple trees!

“Do you make syrup?!” I ask excitedly, already planning to research the how to’s of syrup making.

“I used to, long ago. I haven’t for quite some time, but there are some wolves around that do,” he tells me with a chuckle at my excitement. “I’m sure they’d be happy to teach you.”

We continue to walk, not as quickly as I normally would, but it’s a perfect pace to look around and spend time together.

“I assume you wanted to look around to find a spot for the marking, tonight,” he says and I nod slowly.

“She said under the moonlight. I’m not sure exactly what that means, but there are trees everywhere and I don’t think that’s it.” I tell him, worried.

“There’s a field up ahead that you used to love when you were little. You’d sneak off and run in the grass for hours, usually coming home soaking wet and muddy from jumping into the creek,” he says with a wistful smile at remembering such precious memories. “I think it’s perfect for you.”

The grass on the ground gets thicker as we walk and there are far fewer leaves on the ground now. I can see the bright sun ahead of us and as we step through the last of the trees, I see the most beautiful meadow. I take a few steps out into it and turn to say something to Benjamin when I realize that this MY meadow- the one from my dreams, with the little wolf. I go to the spot where I usually wake up and there’s a large rock there in real life that isn’t in my dreams that has some old faded painting on it. “Molly” and “Andrew” and on there in purple and green paint, faded and chipped away, but still there.

“We buried Andrew here,” he begins to tell me. “The two of you would play out here for hours. We wanted his body to rest at the place he was happiest,” he says, sitting on the rock that is now a headstone for a brother I don’t remember.

I try so hard, but I can’t contain the tears forming in my eyes as I sit next to him. I’ve been careful about what I tell people about my wolf and the dreams, but I know that Benjamin only wants to protect me, even if I don’t know him well.

“I have dreams about this place,” I whisper. “Mom says they’re not dreams, but my subconscious.”

“She’s correct, we have a place in our minds where our wolf lives. You said you’d seen a wolf?” he asks and I nod. “That’s probably her trying to reach you. I’d suggest having your mate mark you here. It may be important.”

I nod to him in agreement. I always wake up in this exact spot, but this rock isn’t here,” I say quietly and he just continues to sit there with me, listening. “The first time was after I got hurt. The wolf was there, licking my finger. I think she was trying to help ease the pain. After that though, she was on the other side of the creek and couldn’t cross. Altair was heart broken last night when he couldn’t get to her.”

“Who is Altair?” he asks me, a quizzical look on his face.

“Oh, it’s Seth’s wolf.” I tell him and quickly realize from his face that it’s not normal for him to be able to be there.

He just looks at me for a moment, inspecting my face closely. “Seth’s wolf can be with you in your dreams?” he asks and I nod. “That is peculiar, but perhaps it is the magic. It’s unusual for someone to have a wolf and magical abilities, so there’s just not much information about everything.”

“I keep forgetting about the magic,” I say quietly, unsure if he’ll be offended.

“Of course you do, you can’t access it, yet,” he says, yet again comforting fears I’ve not spoken. “When I first met your mother I tried to deny the mate bond. I couldn’t believe I was mated to someone who wasn’t a wolf. Then, I tried to use her powers for myself, in an attempt to regain my pack and leave the rogue land. It’s honestly amazing she never left me in the beginning- it took me quite some time to accept her for who she is and not just for her magic.

You’re lucky that you know your mate wants you for you, and not the strength of your wolf or your magic. That man is clearly very smitten with you though. I may have my issues with his father, but I have no doubt that he’ll care for you and protect you.”

This morning is turning out to be substantially more emotional than I thought it would be. I’m trying to control my emotions as much as I can, but it’s terribly hard. “He didn’t want me at first. He tried to find someone who would be a better queen than I would with a broken wolf.”

“It seems he’s come around now, though,” he says and I nod in agreement.

“We had a few issues, but when I hurt my finger he came running as soon as he felt it. We talked a lot, and he’s been the one taking care of me and helping me with everything.” I tell him and he just nods, not saying anything and seeming to understand my feelings without me having to tell him. “Since my wolf was always stuck on the other side of the creek, do you think that’s where we should go tonight? I don’t want to mess up my one shot at fixing my finger.”

“I think it couldn’t hurt, but I think your wolf was trying to help you all this time,” he says, taking my injured hand in his and looking it over. “Some mates have a bond so unusually strong that they’re able to do things other wolves can’t imagine.”

“How do they know if their bond is that strong?” I ask, curious as to where he’s going with this.

“Molly, we made difficult choices when we hid you, and one of the hardest was to change your scent. I truly thought you’d never find your mate. We’re fated at birth, but we don’t find them until we’re older,” he tells me and I listen to him intently. “Seth found you, somehow. And he knew you were his mate, even though the scent on you now is not your true scent. He still knew. I have suspicions.”

I gulp. He’s right, and he doesn’t even know the entire story. “Seth had actually found me sooner, kind of. He and my brother were roommates at Alpha training four years ago. He smelled me on some cookies I made my brother and figured it out then,” I tell him and he seems confused. “It goes back to the part where I told you he tried to find someone better. We hadn’t met, and no one else knew.”

“Molly, will you do something for me tonight?” he asks me and it seems an odd time to make requests from your daughter.

“What do you need?” I ask him, unsure where he’s going with this.

“It’s not for me, but for you,” he tells me and I’m confused, but I nod and continue to listen. “Tonight, before he marks you, have him shift into his wolf and lick the injured finger. I know, it sounds weird, but there has to be a reason that your wolf was doing that. It may be nothing, but if he can heal you, that will help to take off some of the pressure on him marking you.”

“I’ll try it,” I tell him. “It would be nice to take healing me off the list of things riding on this and only leave fixing my wolf, unlocking magical abilities and returning 5 years of memories. No pressure.” I tell him with a sarcastic tone and a giggle.

He chuckles at me, and puts his arm around me. “I know, there’s been so much happening in your life and so quickly. If you want to wait a moon cycle, or even two, just know you’re welcome to stay with us as long as you’d like. Most of the rogue wolves would be honored to help protect you while you’re here.”

His offer is generous, and he’s right. It’s only been a few weeks and I’ve found my mate, my biological parents, and a whole new life I never knew of. I’ve got two families, my soon to be father-in-law murdered my brothers that I didn’t even know I had, and I’m fulfilling a prophecy. It really wouldn’t hurt to take some time to think things through before rushing into this just because it’s the new moon. He’s given me quite a bit to think about today.