

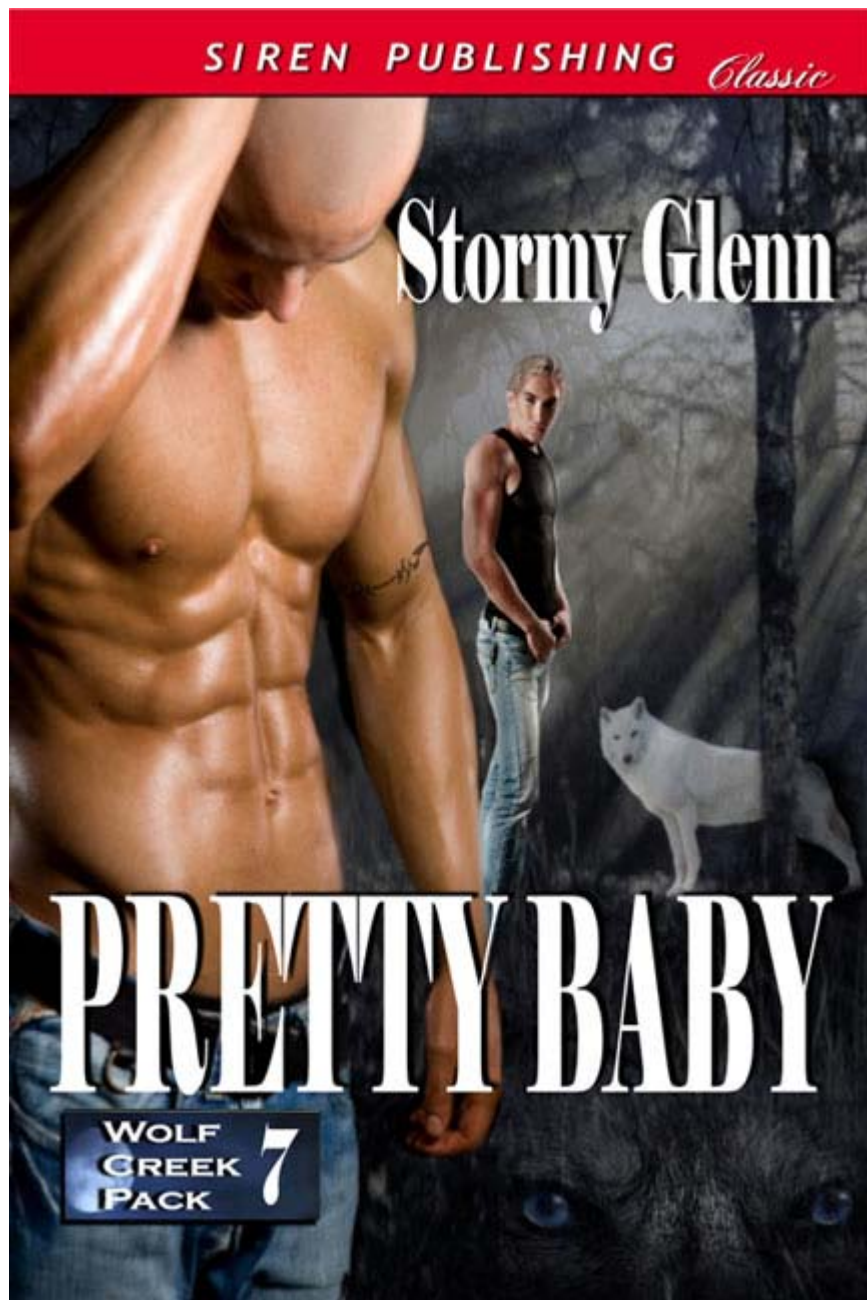
SIREN PUBLISHING *Classic*

Stormy Glenn

PRETTY BABY

WOLF
CREEK
PACK

7



Wolf Creek Pack 7

Pretty Baby

Elliot Spencer has spent his entire life trying to live up to his father's strict ideals and make him proud. When he meets a sexy man at a bar, he decides that for once in his life, he's going to live by his rules, and that includes going home with Tommy Nash. He just doesn't know until it's too late that going home with Tommy will mean changing the way he sees the world.

Tommy Nash is captivated by the chatty little man he meets at the bar where he works. Taking the man home for a night of wild sex is a no-brainer, especially when he recognizes that Elliot is his mate. What Tommy doesn't realize until it's too late, however, is that Elliot is a wolf-shifter like him, and Elliot doesn't know it. By the time Tommy is able to get Elliot calmed down, it's too late. He's attacked someone, and Tommy's family doesn't want him to become involved with Elliot.

Together, they have to fight his family, Elliot's family, and a few people in between who believe they shouldn't be together. Tommy's biggest obstacle is proving to Elliot that they belong together, and by the time he does, it may be too late. Someone is after Elliot, and Tommy doesn't know if he can save his mate, even with his pack's help.

Genre: Alternative (M/M or F/F), Paranormal,
Vampires/Werewolves

Length: 59,997 words

PRETTY BABY

Wolf Creek Pack 7

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EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

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PRETTY BABY

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Letter from Stormy Glenn

Regarding E-book Piracy

Dear Readers,

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With deep gratitude,

Stormy Glenn

PRETTY BABY

Wolf Creek Pack 7

STORMY GLENN

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Chapter 1

“Well, aren’t you just the cutest damn thing.”

Elliot Spencer turned to see the biggest, baldest, sexiest man he’d ever seen smiling down at him. He couldn’t believe a man so gorgeous was speaking to him, but Elliot wasn’t stupid. He thrust out a hip and gave one of his carefully practiced poses and he winked at the man.

“I can be very cute but you’ll have to make it worth my while. Can you make it worth my while? I can make it worth yours. I’m really good at that, you know, making it worth your while. I can do that.”

One dark eyebrow arched on the man’s forehead. Elliot felt his skin tingle when a large hand curled around his wrist and pulled him closer. He was suddenly pressed up against a hard wall of male muscles. Elliot’s toes curled, his cock hardened behind his zipper. He almost purred. He wanted to purr, but that would mean giving up the game before the chase even began.

Elliot trailed his finger down cotton covered abs. He looked up at the impressive man through the soft fall of his bangs. “How cute would you like me to be because I can be really cute when I need to be. I’ll bet I can be even cuter than you can imagine.” Elliot’s head

cocked to one side. “Although sexier is better than cute, don’t you think?”

He couldn’t stop his purr this time. It just slipped out of his lips, pulled by something beyond his control—lust, pure and simple lust. “Would you like to see me do sexy?” he asked as he pressed closer to the man. “I think I do sexy much better than cute, although I can still do cute if you really want me to. Cute is good. Cute is great, in fact.” Elliot frowned as he looked at the handsome man. He shook his head. “You couldn’t do cute. You just wouldn’t be able to pull it off. You’re too sexy. I’m cute, but you’re downright drool worthy. No, sexy is more your line. Maybe I should just stick to cute?”

The amount of hard body he pushed up against was impressive, but not as much as the hard shaft he could feel against his abdomen. The finger that pressed against his lips stopped Elliot from speaking, but just barely. Elliot was a talker. He knew that, especially when he was nervous.

“Do you ever stop talking?”

Elliot shook his head, his eyes wide. He hoped he hadn’t turned the man off by talking too much. It had happened before. Elliot always talked too much. He tried to stop, but then he opened his mouth and all bets were off.

“What if I gave you something else to do with your mouth?” He paused, gazing at Elliot speculatively. “Would you stop talking then?”

Elliot blinked. He nodded quickly then thought about it. Staying quiet just wasn’t something he could do, not without a gag in his mouth and he didn’t want to lie to the gorgeous man in front of him. Elliot’s lower lip slipped out into a pout when he shook his head.

The man chuckled deeply. His deep dark silver eyes twinkled as he rubbed the pad of his thumb across Elliot’s lower lip. “You have the fullest, plushiest lips I’ve ever seen on a man but I’ll bet you hear that a lot, don’t you?”

Elliot nodded. What else could he do? He did hear it a lot. He had full, sexy, plush lips and long, girly eyelashes. He was often referred

to as pretty, never handsome. The delicate bone structure and soft curves of his body didn't help. He looked like a girl. He even had what he heard referred to as a bubble butt.

The feeling of the man's thumb grazing his lips sent shots of electricity zinging through his body. Unable to stop himself, Elliot stuck his tongue out and licked the man's thumb tentatively. Hot, masculine flavor exploded across his tongue, drowning his senses.

Elliot groaned. Damn! He really wanted to taste the man. He wanted to stop thinking of him as the man. He wanted a name, a relationship status, and then he wanted a flat surface...maybe a wall.

Yeah, a wall would be good, Elliot thought. The big man could push him up against the wall and...a sharp grip on his chin had Elliot's eyes snapping up to meet the man's.

"Where'd ya go, pretty baby?"

Elliot dropped his eyes as his face heated up, both because he had been envisioning the man fucking him against the wall and Elliot didn't even know his name, and because the man called him pretty baby. Elliot liked that.

"Uh-uh." A hand under his chin made Elliot look back up. "I want to see those beautiful baby blue eyes," the man drawled. Elliot opened his mouth and gently bit down on the thumb pressing against his lips. He watched the man to see his reaction.

The man's eyes grew openly amused. "You're very oral, aren't you?"

Elliot flushed again but remained silent. It was almost killing him not to talk. He had so much he wanted to say, so much he wanted to ask, but the man seemed to want him to remain silent, and Elliot wasn't going to do anything to fuck this up.

It wasn't often that Elliot got the chance to be held up against a body of this man's caliber. Men like him didn't go for men like Elliot. He was too pretty, too feminine, too giggly. If it took him keeping his mouth shut to get the man to hold him a little longer, he'd staple his lips together.

“My name is Nash, Thomas Nash. Most people call me Tommy, but you can call me lover.” When Tommy tried to pull his thumb out of his mouth, Elliot protested, refusing to let go until the man arched an eyebrow at him again. Tommy chuckled. “What’s your name, pretty baby?”

Elliot opened his mouth to answer then stopped. He stared at Tommy until the man nodded and smiled. “My name is Elliot, Elliot Spencer, but I really like it when you call me pretty baby so if you just wanted to call me that, well...” Elliot shrugged. “I really like it and it would be okay with me, I mean, if that’s what you wanted to call me and all. Elliot is fine too, or Ell. Even Spencer, you could call me Spencer, but that sounds too much like a first name so that might not be right, but—”

Hard lips suddenly slammed over Elliot’s, stealing his words and any remaining air in his lungs. Elliot grabbed onto Tommy’s shirt and held on as his legs buckled beneath him. His insides jangled with excitement at the feel of Tommy’s mouth.

Tommy’s lips were hard, searching, his tongue delving deep to explore and clash with Elliot’s. The caress of Tommy’s lips along his, the feel of the man’s hand down the side of his body set Elliot aflame. He burned for Tommy’s touch, the feel of his masculine body, just for more.

When Tommy finally lifted his head, Elliot could only stare up at him, dazed. Tommy chuckled and brushed the back of his hand along Elliot’s swollen lips. “I do believe I’ve found a way to keep you quiet, pretty baby.”

* * * *

The little man held in his arms intrigued Tommy to no end. He meant it when he told Elliot he’d never seen anyone as cute as him. Elliot was adorable, especially the way he talked so much. Contrary to

what Elliot believed, Tommy kind of liked it. Elliot was a ball of energy. Tommy only hoped that energy transferred to the bedroom.

Despite what Elliot thought, the man was also sexy as hell. Every inch of Elliot's tanned skin needed to be naked and licked from one end to the other, and then the little man needed to be fucked until he was speechless. Tommy knew he was the man for the job.

Tommy picked Elliot up around the waist and lifted him up onto the bar stool behind him. He took one step closer and pushed his larger body between the man's thighs, spreading them wide.

Glancing down, Tommy could see a rather impressive bulge rising from behind Elliot's zipper. He reached down and dragged his fingernail lightly across the seam, smirking when the hard cock trapped behind the denim fabric jerked in response.

Tommy heard a small whimper and glanced at the man in his arms. Elliot had his lips pressed tightly together as if the moan had escaped despite him trying to remain quiet. Well, that just wouldn't do. Tommy leaned down and licked the skin just below Elliot's ear before murmuring to him.

"Uh-uh, pretty baby, that won't do," Tommy said. "That won't do at all. I want to hear every little sound you make when I touch you—every whimper, every moan, every cry of my name. I want it all, pretty baby."

Tommy reached around and gripped Elliot's ass cheeks in his hands and pulled the man so close that their groins mashed together. At the same time, Tommy bit down on the soft skin of Elliot's neck, making sure not to break the skin, then sucked up a hickey. He wanted everyone to see his mark, to know that this particular pretty baby had been claimed.

Elliot's head fell back. His hips thrust forward against Tommy's. The legs Tommy stood between suddenly wrapped around his waist. The hands gripping his shirt tightened. A stifled cry of his name echoed in Tommy's ear.

Tommy lifted his head and stared down at Elliot in complete shock. The man's baby blue eyes darkened, his long eyelashes fluttered. The pulse in his neck beat erratically. A quick glance down at the wet spot spreading across Elliot's groin told Tommy why the man seemed so dazed.

"Oh, hell, pretty baby, I'm going to enjoy you so much." Tommy rubbed his hand down the side of Elliot's flushed face then down his chest to the wet spot on his jeans.

Tommy picked Elliot up and turned around to sit down on the bar stool. He rested his boots on the metal rung half way up the stool, creating a lap type ledge for Elliot to sit on. The top of the man's head barely reached Tommy's chin.

Elliot just seemed to melt again Tommy's chest. Tommy could feel Elliot's heart beating rapidly against his chest. He gently stroked his hands down the man's back until his breathing returned to normal before lifting Elliot's face up to his.

"We've had us some fun tonight, pretty baby, don't you think?"

Elliot nodded but he didn't speak. He still seemed too dazed.

"We can have a lot more fun, you and I, but I would need something from you first."

"Anything," Elliot said. "I've never met someone like you before. I've seen men like you but I've never actually met one." Elliot shrugged. "Men like you don't usually give me the time of day. I mean, I know I'm not a bad looking guy, but I'm small and kind of girly looking and big guys like you don't seem to like that much. I just—"

Tommy solved Elliot's speaking problem by leaning in to kiss him. By the time he lifted his head several moments later, Elliot was speechless again. Tommy grinned. He liked this little game between them.

"Now, as I was saying," Tommy said, "if you and I are going to have any more fun together, then I expect to be the only person in your bed. I don't share, Elliot. Ever. Is that understood?"

Elliot nodded eagerly.

“Good, good,” Tommy replied. “Now, I’d like to take you home with me tonight. Do you have a problem with that?” Elliot opened his mouth to speak but Tommy stopped him. “Before you answer, you need to know that I intend to have my cock in your ass five minutes after we get through my doorway.”

Elliot frowned. “It will take you that long? I have lube and condoms in my back pocket. I could start getting ready before then, and then we wouldn’t have to wait five whole minutes because that’s a lot of minutes to wait, you know, and I’m not very good at waiting. I just don’t have a lot of patience and I really, really want to feel your cock in my ass and—”

Tommy burst out laughing and jumped to his feet, tossing Elliot over his shoulder as he started for the door. He adored the man, he really did. Elliot was perfect. Between his continuous chatter and his drop-dead sexy body, Elliot was Tommy’s idea of a walking wet dream. He couldn’t wait to get the man home and find out if he looked as gorgeous naked as he did in tight jeans and a shirt.

“Oh wait, Tommy,” Elliot said as they reached the door to the bar. “I came with friends and, while I don’t mind leaving with you, if I leave and I don’t let them know where I am they might get upset. And I wouldn’t want them to get upset, so it would just be easier if—”

“Elliot, where are they?” Tommy asked as he interrupted the man. Elliot pointed to a small group of people sitting in a booth near the door. Tommy took the steps between them and the door.

He slid Elliot down to his feet in front of him and covered the man’s mouth with his hand. He figured it would be quicker that way. “My name is Tommy Nash,” he began. “I work here in the bar. You can ask anyone about me. Elliot is going home with me and he wanted to let you know so that you don’t worry.”

“Ah, do you think you might let Elliot speak?” one of the men asked, eyeing Tommy.

“Seriously?” Tommy asked. “If I take my hand off his mouth I might never get him out the door.”

The man stood up. He wasn’t as tall as Tommy but he was certainly well filled out. “That’s kind of why I’d like to hear this from Elliot’s own lips.”

“Very well,” Tommy replied. Before he released Elliot’s mouth, he swung the man around. Elliot’s eyes were huge. Tommy smirked, another idea hitting him. He leaned in and quickly replaced his hand with his mouth, kissing Elliot until he felt the man melt against him.

Lifting his head a moment later, he turned Elliot around to face his friends. “Don’t you have something you want to say to your friends, pretty baby, something about going home with me?”

“Yeah,” Elliot groaned. He pointed to Tommy. “Him, home, fuuuck!” The last word was drawn out so Tommy didn’t think he meant it literally, although he was hoping. At least Elliot kept his words to a minimum.

“How in the hell did you do that?” the man asked. “We’ve never been able to keep Elliot from talking.”

“There’s nothing wrong with Elliot talking. Obviously when he does, he has something on his mind.” Tommy chuckled. “You just have to give him something else to think about.” His humor fled a moment later when the man looked Elliot up and down in a manner that told Tommy he wasn’t going to like the man or what he had to say.

“I’ve kissed Elliot before and I have to tell you, not only wasn’t it that good, but it never kept him quiet. Hell, if any of us knew that all it took was giving him something else to keep him busy, we would have—”

Tommy didn’t let the man finish his statement. He wasn’t about to let him talk about his pretty baby in that manner. Tommy picked Elliot up with one arm and punched the man right in the mouth with the other.

The man flew back and landed on another one of his friends. His mouth dropped open and he started to get up. Tommy stepped toward him and raised his fist again. "Do you really want to get up again? Because I'll break your jaw the next time."

"You can't hit me," the man said as he fell back against his friend again. "This is assault. I'll call the police on you."

"You do that," Tommy snickered. "The local sheriff's name is Joe Nash. He's my brother. He'll know right where to find me when you try to press charges." Tommy started to turn to leave when the man spoke again.

"Elliot, are you really going to leave with this redneck piece of shit?" he snapped. "He's nothing but muscle-bound white trash in a pretty package."

Tommy set Elliot on the floor. This time he didn't kiss him. He just nodded at Elliot. "Go ahead, pretty baby, answer the man. The decision is up to you. You can come home with me or you can stay here with your friends."

Elliot stared between the two of them. He seemed speechless without a kiss being involved for the first time since Tommy had first laid eyes on him. It took all of Tommy's control not to growl and demand that Elliot choose him.

That's when it hit Tommy, and so hard he almost staggered under the shock. The reason he was so intrigued by Elliot, the reason he felt an overwhelming need to fuck him, and the reason he wanted to tear the man stopping Elliot from leaving into tiny little pieces.

Elliot Spencer was Tommy's mate!

Chapter 2

Elliot stared from Tommy, the man of his every wet dream, to Carl, a friend, sort of. Elliot hung out with Carl because he kind of had to. Carl worked for Elliot's father and was often sent to keep an eye on Elliot. He did, but made Elliot feel like shit while he did it.

Tommy, on the other hand, made Elliot feel like the most special person on the face of the earth. And Tommy called him pretty baby. That decided things for Elliot. He could stay with Carl, who thought he was better than everyone else or he could go home with Tommy and get laid by the sexiest man he'd ever met.

His father was going to be pissed and Elliot knew it, but at least he'd have one night to remember after he left. Elliot stood to his full height, which was admittedly not much, and took a deep breath.

"I'm going home with Tommy." He pressed his lips together and dug his fingernails into the palms of his hand to keep himself from adding anything else to his sentence. More speech just wasn't needed, not this time.

Before Elliot could say another word, he was picked up and tossed over Tommy's shoulder again. He laughed and waved to Carl as they headed out the door. Carl did not look happy. Elliot, on the other hand, was tickled down to his toes.

He was going home with Tommy, the sexiest guy on the planet. Not only that, but Tommy seemed to find him cute. Elliot had no doubt he could do cute, as he told Tommy. He would have preferred that Tommy thought he was sexy, but beggars couldn't be choosers. Elliot would take what he could get.

Elliot yelped when he was suddenly swung down from Tommy's shoulder and set down in the front seat of a car. He raised his arms up in the air when Tommy leaned over him and buckled him in.

Just as Tommy started to move back, Elliot leaned in and inhaled deeply, purring. "You smell really good." Elliot felt like squirming under the sudden intense stare Tommy gave him. "What?" he asked.

"That's all you have to say?"

Elliot giggled. "No, I could tell you that not only do you smell wonderful but I want to roll in your scent until it covers my body from head to toe. If I could bottle the damn stuff I'm sure I'd make millions because that's like an orgasm in a bottle and everyone likes the smell of an orgasm. Well, maybe not everyone, but I do, but if I bottled it just for myself I wouldn't make millions and—"

Elliot heard Tommy's deep chuckle right before his lips were covered, Tommy's tongue sliding over his. Elliot liked kissing. He could sit for hours and just make out with someone, if he could find someone willing to kiss him that long.

Kissing Tommy took things to a whole new level. Elliot was a little embarrassed that he'd come in his pants inside the bar, but the longer Tommy kissed him, the closer he came to doing it again. He already teetered on the edge and they hadn't even left the parking lot yet.

When Tommy finally lifted his head to look down at him, Elliot just blinked, panting heavily. There wasn't anything to say after getting a kiss like that, there just wasn't. Well, maybe *please, can I have another?*

Tommy chuckled and stood up, closing Elliot's door. Elliot watched him walk around the car and climb into the driver's seat. The car rumbled as Tommy started it up. Elliot knew he was supposed to be impressed when Tommy glanced over at him but for the life of him, Elliot had no idea what kind of car it was. As far as he was concerned, it was a car, a red car. He just wanted to know how fast it could get them back to Tommy's house.

“How fast does this thing go?” Elliot asked. He dug into his pocket and pulled out the condom and bottle of lube he carried. “Because I want to know when I should open this bottle and start getting ready. You promised me you’d be in my ass five minutes after we got to your house and I’m holding you to that promise. And how are your walls? Are they strong cause I have this fantasy of you holding me up against the wall and—”

The car suddenly peeled out of the bar parking lot. Elliot yelled and grabbed the dashboard. Tommy hit the gas and the car sped down the road. Elliot sat back in his seat and looked out the window. He seriously doubted they were doing anything close to the speed limit.

Elliot glanced back at Tommy and watched for his reaction as he popped the top button on his jeans and slowly slid the zipper down. The car suddenly slowed down to a crawl, Tommy’s eyes riveted on Elliot’s sensual movements.

“I can’t wait until we get back to your place,” Elliot said as he pushed his hand inside of his jeans and pulled his cock out of his boxers. There was a small trace of cum from earlier. Elliot wiped some up on his fingers and held his hand out to Tommy. “See what you did to me? One little kiss and a quick feel and I came all over my pants. Can you imagine what I’m going to be like when you actually fuck me? I’m so close now I’m ready to come again and you haven’t even touched me yet.”

Elliot pulled his pants apart, baring his naked cock to Tommy’s smoky eyes. “Just look at me. I’m hard as a rock already.” He wiped a drop of pearly liquid off the head of his cock. “If you get me this aroused just by a kiss, I might pass out if you fuck me.”

The car suddenly pulled to the side of the road and turned off. Before Elliot could question Tommy, the man was out of his seat belt and moving toward Elliot’s side of the car. One hand gripped a handful of Elliot’s hair at the nape of his neck. The other hand wrapped around Elliot’s cock.

Hard lips pressed against Elliot's, claiming him roughly. Elliot gloried in the out-of-control grip Tommy had on his body. Elliot's flesh prickled at Tommy's touch. He felt the blood surge from his fingertips to his toes when Tommy moved from his lips to his neck.

His heart thudded noisily within him when Tommy bit down on the soft flesh of his neck. Elliot cried out loudly as Tommy's touch brought him to another blistering orgasm. His gaze grew hazy and his head fell back against the seat as he covered Tommy's hand with his release.

Elliot hovered in a blissful state, the touch of Tommy's lips on his throat oddly soft and caressing. He wrapped one hand around Tommy's head, holding him there and reached for the buttons of Tommy's pants with the other.

Tommy quickly grabbed Elliot's hand, stopping him. Elliot tilted his head back and stared at Tommy in confusion when the man just smiled at him and shook his head. Didn't Tommy want him to return the favor? Tommy brought him to orgasm twice. He'd had none.

"I'm not going to come until I'm buried balls deep in your ass, pretty baby," Tommy said as he pushed Elliot's hand away. He gave Elliot one more quick kiss, his silver grey eyes sliding to the bite on Elliot's neck before he scooted back to his side of the car.

An ache grew in Elliot's throat as he watched Tommy start the car and drive it back onto the road. Tommy treated him like he was something special, something precious. Elliot wanted to do the same for him. He just didn't know if he could.

In the experience department, Elliot wasn't a virgin but close enough. He'd been kissed plenty of times but usually only once or twice before his overactive mouth chased the men away. He'd been fucked exactly once, and it hadn't been that memorable.

Besides the physical act itself, Elliot's one main memory was the fact that the guy fucking him only wanted to fuck him to get to Elliot's father. It had been one of those make nice with the son to get to the father type of things. The moment it was over, the man pretty

much forgot that Elliot existed. Elliot's father never let him forget that he'd been used either.

"Tommy, have you ever heard of Spence Corp?" Elliot asked quietly, holding his breath as he waited for Tommy's response.

"No, should I have?"

"You've never invested money before?"

Tommy shook his head. "I bought a house a couple of years back but I went through the bank here in town for my home loan. Does that count?"

Elliot grinned. "Yes, that counts."

"Spence Corp," Tommy said, "as in Spencer Corporation? Any relation to Elliot Spencer?"

Damn! Elliot cringed. "My father's company."

"Cool, my father is the mayor of Wolf Creek." Tommy shrugged. "I think local government is kind of a family thing. My brother, Joe, is the local sheriff and my cousin Robby is a deputy."

"And you didn't go into the family business because...?" Elliot felt Tommy's chuckle as if the man was pressed against him. He shivered in response. The man was just too luscious for his own good, or Elliot's.

"My bad boy reputation didn't mix well with law enforcement."

"Yeah, I can see that." Elliot grinned as he looked over the large muscled man sitting next to him. The tribal tattoo around one thick arm and the bald head gave Tommy an air of danger. Add in the tight black cotton shirt, the tight jeans, and the black boots and the man was definitely a bad boy.

Elliot leaned over and licked the dark tribal tattoo on Tommy's right bicep. He giggled when he felt the car swerve just a bit. "I like bad boys, lover. They are very hot. They know all kinds of nasty things people can do together. Do you like nasty things, Tommy? Regular sex has its place but being pushed up against a wall while a bad boy has his di—"

Elliot's eyes widened when Tommy growled and slapped a hand over his mouth. He knew he'd been talking dirty and not everyone liked that, but he figured Tommy might if he was a self professed bad boy. Maybe Elliot was wrong.

"The only thing I want to hear come out of your mouth right now, pretty baby," Tommy said, "is the groans and moans you make while you get yourself ready for me. Is that understood?"

Elliot nodded, excitement filling him at the feral glare Tommy shot in his direction. Tommy wasn't mad, he was aroused, which was exactly where Elliot wanted him. Well, Elliot wanted the big man between his legs but he knew that was coming soon enough.

"You can hold on to the condom. I'll hold onto the lube because we're going to need both if you're going to fuck me against the wall, and I'm really looking forward to you fucking me against the wall. I don't think I've thought of anything else since you sat me in your lap at the bar."

Elliot grabbed the condom and bottle of lube he'd dropped on the seat earlier. He held the condom out to Tommy, waiting until the man took it and shoved it in his pocket, then opened the bottle of lube.

He pushed his boxers and pants down to his knees and spread his legs. As he started to scoot down in his seat, a sudden thought entered Elliot's head. He glanced over at Tommy, curiously.

"Do you want to watch because I know I like to watch? It's very arousing, don't you think? I could lean back against the door if you wanted or even turn over onto my hands and knees, whichever you prefer? I'm okay with either and—"

"Elliot!"

"What?" Elliot blinked at the barely controlled... well, he didn't think it was rage because he didn't think Tommy was angry, but...

"Stop talking about it and just do it!" Tommy snapped. Elliot's eyes widened when he heard Tommy's knuckles crack around the steering wheel. Maybe Tommy was angry. "You have about three

minutes to get yourself ready before we reach my house and I'm not waiting once we get there."

Elliot inhaled deeply as arousal suddenly swamped him. He shoved his pants the rest of the way down his legs, struggling madly when his legs became tangled in his boxers. He nearly cried out in desperation until Tommy reached over and ripped the offending boxers from his legs.

Freed, Elliot swung his legs around, draping one over the back of the seat and setting the other one on the floor as he leaned back against his door and scooted down until he could angle his ass up in the air.

As horny as he was, it didn't take Elliot more than a few moments to lube his fingers and shove two of them into his ass. He hissed, feeling the deep burn of not stretching himself before adding two fingers at the same time, but he was in a hurry.

As he worked his fingers in and out of his tight hole, Elliot could feel his muscles slowly start to loosen. Soon enough, the pain faded to be replaced by intense pleasure. Elliot added a third finger as quickly as he dared.

He glanced across the car interior to Tommy then sucked in his lower lip, biting down on it to prevent himself from talking when he saw Tommy watching him intensely. The fire of desire he could see burning in Tommy's eyes almost sent Elliot over the edge for a third time. Elliot quickly reached down and encircled the base of his cock, squeezing until his need to climax faded.

"How far is your house, Tommy?" He gasped as he slowly stroked his hand up his hard length. "I'm getting pretty worked up here knowing you're watching me and I don't know how much longer I can hold off. Just knowing that you're watching me is driving me crazy."

"Elliot," Tommy growled, "I said no talking."

"I can't help it." He couldn't. Elliot bit his lip again as he tried to keep his words locked behind his lips. He wanted to be quiet as

Tommy directed, but every time he looked at the man and saw his clenched jaw, Elliot needed. And part of that need came out verbally. “I’m trying, Tommy, I swear.”

Surprisingly, Tommy grinned. “I know you are, pretty baby. Come if you need to come. I have no doubt I can get you hard again.”

“Really? You don’t mind?” Elliot was shocked... and incredibly excited. “I’ve already come twice and you haven’t come at all and that doesn’t seem fair to me. It’s not, Tommy, and I want to be fair so if you would just let me—”

“Less talk, more action, pretty baby. I want to see you fuck yourself.”

Yeah, okay, Elliot could do that. Elliot was already doing that. His fingers, all three of them were pressed deep inside his ass. His hand was wrapped tightly around his cock. Having an orgasm at any moment was a very real possibility.

“You’re going to need another finger, Elliot.” Tommy chuckled. “I’m a lot bigger than what you have in your ass right now.”

Elliot’s eyes nearly rolled back in his head at Tommy’s boasting...well, he hoped it wasn’t boasting. He eagerly thrust another finger into his ass, wincing once again when he shoved all four as deep as he could get them.

Elliot’s head fell back against the door as he began thrusting his fingers into his ass, stroking his cock at the same time. “Oh, please tell me you’re not lying, Tommy, because I really need to feel—”

“Elliot! What did I say?”

“Coming!” Elliot shouted as he stiffened, explosions of pleasure igniting his entire body. He froze with his fingers buried deep in his ass and his hand holding his cock as ropes of pearly white seed shot out all over him.

Elliot didn’t really care that he covered his shirt with cum. He didn’t care that drops landed on the dashboard of Tommy’s fancy car. He didn’t even care when the car suddenly screeched to a stop until he felt the door give way behind him. Elliot yelped and pulled his fingers

free just in time to be dragged from the car by large hands wrapped around his torso.

Elliot looked up into Tommy's face just as he was lifted into the man's arms and carried toward the house. He swallowed past the sudden pensive lump in his throat when he got a good look at the way Tommy's jaw was clenched.

"To-Tommy?"

Elliot instantly clamped his mouth shut at the hard look in Tommy's dark silver grey eyes when he looked down. He was suddenly very apprehensive, wondering if he'd done something wrong.

Then Elliot realized he had, and his stomach clenched. He'd come three times like a selfish bastard and Tommy hadn't even come once. He wouldn't be surprised if Tommy dumped him on the ground and refused to ever speak to him again. Elliot buried his face against the soft cotton of Tommy's shirt and prayed the man would give him a chance to prove he wasn't a complete asshole.

Still, Elliot heaved a sigh of relief when Tommy pushed his front door open and carried him inside instead of leaving him outside, especially considering he was wearing no pants or boxers. The neighbors would surely love that.

The next few seconds flew by Elliot in a lust-filled haze. Tommy sandwiched Elliot between his body and the wall. Nothing existed outside the two of them, not breathing, not seeing, nothing except the hard lips that pressed against his and the even harder wall Tommy pressed Elliot into.

Elliot groaned in protest when Tommy's lips moved away from his to skim his jaw line. He really liked kissing Tommy. He groaned again when he felt Tommy start to nibble on his neck.

His head fell back against the wall with a small thud as he tried to give Tommy more access. Every bone in his body felt like it was melting. His skin tingled where Tommy bit into it, sending out a

shudder of need inside of Elliot that he was helpless to keep to himself.

“Tommy, please.”

“Wrap your legs around my waist, pretty baby.”

Elliot was all too eager to comply, especially when Tommy lifted him up with hands gripping his ass cheeks. Elliot felt his naked groin smash against the tight denim of Tommy’s jeans. His breath hitched in his throat when he looked up to find Tommy staring down at him, a strange, intense look in his eyes.

“You’re mine now, Elliot, always mine.”

Elliot nodded. He wasn’t sure exactly what he was agreeing to, but if it meant he got his dream and Tommy fucked him against the wall, Elliot would agree to anything. Elliot nodded again just to be sure Tommy understood.

Tommy’s grin was filled with such promise that Elliot almost forgot to breathe until he felt the man reached between them. Elliot inhaled deeply when he heard Tommy unzipping his pants, then held his breathing, anticipating the feel of Tommy’s cock thrusting into him.

Any moment now...

Chapter 3

“Tommy, its Joe.”

Tommy groaned and leaned his head against Elliot’s when he heard his brother’s voice and the harsh knocking at the door. His brother couldn’t have had worse timing. Elliot was primed and ready to go, again, and Tommy literally had his cock in his hand.

“Tommy, I know you’re in there,” the voice said louder. “Your car is in the driveway and the engine is still hot. Open the door.”

Joe sounded very official, not like a brother knocking on the door. Tommy suddenly knew that the punch he’d thrown back at the bar had come back to bite him in the ass. He slowly lowered Elliot’s legs to the floor, grinning happily when he heard Elliot cry out in protest.

“Sorry, pretty baby, but that’s my brother at the door.”

“Let him get his own date.”

Tommy chuckled and leaned down to plant a small kiss on Elliot’s plush lips. “He already has a date, but I doubt that is why he is here. Remember that little push I gave your friend back at the bar? I think my brother is here to arrest me.”

“But...” Elliot’s eyes widened until their baby blue depths dominated his delicate face.

“Not to worry, pretty baby, it wouldn’t be the first time Joe arrested me and I doubt it will be the last.” Tommy tapped his finger on the end of Elliot’s nose. “I’m the bad boy of the family, remember?”

“Tommy!” Joe shouted louder, pounding on the door this time.

“I’m coming!” Tommy shouted back. “Give me a minute.”

Tommy gave Elliot another kiss before letting go of the man. Elliot seemed to wobble for a moment as if he didn't have his equilibrium then steadied himself with a hand on the wall. Tommy took just a moment to take in how sexy Elliot looked standing there.

He was naked from the waist down, his cock standing out proudly from his body. His chest was bare, the edges of his shirt dangling around him. Everything Tommy looked at screamed pure sex to him and he wanted nothing more than to take the man up against the wall and make his fantasy come true.

But, it was the dazed lust burning in Elliot's eyes that Tommy found the hardest to turn away from. It was a look Tommy hoped to put on Elliot's face every day for the rest of their lives.

Still, his brother wouldn't wait forever. Tommy pointed his finger at Elliot. "You stay right here, pretty baby. I'm going to go get you something to wear and then we'll deal with my brother. After that—"

"You'll fuck me against the wall?" Elliot looked so hopeful that Tommy almost told his brother to go away and took Elliot back into his arms.

"Damn it, Tommy, I haven't got all night," Joe shouted through the door.

"Keep your fucking pantyhose on!"

Tommy turned away from Elliot's alluring body and hurried to his room. He doubted Elliot would fit into any of his jeans so he grabbed a pair of sweat pants and carried them back out to the man.

As Elliot reluctantly pulled the sweats up his legs, Tommy bemoaned the loss of all the man's beautiful naked skin. He hoped he could deal with Joe and get back to Elliot before the man changed his mind.

Tommy grimaced as he realized he still had a lot of things to explain to Elliot. He wasn't sure the man would understand that he had been claimed. The small nibbling bites he had given Elliot on his neck weren't the usual large mating bite a shifter gave to his mate, but they were enough to create the bond between them.

The only thing left to do was make the man his. Tommy shuddered when he thought of how Elliot's body would feel wrapped around his cock when his knot extended and took hold inside of the smaller man's body.

Tommy knew the experience would be mind blowing. He might not have experienced it yet because he hadn't met his mate until tonight, but he had heard enough stories to know there was nothing on the earth that felt better. He couldn't wait.

"Are you ready to meet my brother, pretty baby?"

"Do we have to? Can't you just say hello to him and send him away because I was having a really good time and you seemed to be having a really good time so if the both of us were having a really good time and your brother is here to ruin it, he should just go away."

Tommy blinked. He wasn't sure Elliot breathed through that entire sentence, but he loved Elliot's idea. However, he didn't think he would get away with just saying hello to Joe. The man was the sheriff after all.

"Come on, pretty baby," Tommy said as he wrapped an arm around Elliot's shoulders and led him toward the front door, "let's go see if we can chase my brother away."

"Yeah, I'd really like that because you were going to fuck me against the wall. I know you were. I could feel it and that would have been so great, you know?"

Tommy chuckled softly as Elliot nodded and continued talking. The more the man spoke, the more intrigued he became with him. Tommy couldn't wait to see how his brother dealt with Elliot's constant chatter.

"And I'm really sorry I came three times and you didn't get to come even once. That was really selfish of me and I promise it won't happen again. I'll make sure that you come too, I promise. Just don't get upset with me before I can prove it to you, okay? I never break a promise and—"

“Wait, Elliot,” Tommy said as he stopped and grabbed Elliot’s shoulders, turning the man towards him. “I’m not upset with you, pretty baby. I love the fact that you came so many times. It tells me that you enjoyed what we did together.”

“Yeah?” Elliot looked astonished. His eyes widened for a moment before a small grin started to stretch out his mouth. “Because I did enjoy what we’re doing, a lot. You’re really hot, I mean really hot. And—”

“If you feel the need to come when we’re together, then come. Don’t hold back from me.”

“I couldn’t help it, you know. You touch me and I just seem to go up in flames.” Elliot laughed nervously. “Hell, you look at me and I go up in flames. You’re just so gorgeous and I’ve never had someone that looks like you want to be with me, well, unless they want to get to my father but you don’t know my father and—”

“Damn it, Tommy,” Joe shouted from outside, “if you don’t open this fucking door I’m going to break the damn thing down.”

Elliot laughed when Tommy rolled his eyes. The happy little sound made Tommy smile. He planted one last kiss on Elliot’s lips then leaned over to open the door while the man was inhaling. He wanted Elliot to be quiet for just a moment while he dealt with Joe.

“What do you want, Joe?” Tommy asked as he turned to look at his brother, not in the least bit surprised to see Joe standing there in full uniform, a set of handcuffs in his hand. “Can’t you see that I’m busy?”

“I brought you some jewelry.” Joe arched an eyebrow and held up the handcuffs dangling from his fingers.

“Sorry, don’t need any. I was actually planning on staying in for the rest of the evening.”

Joe rolled his eyes. “Tommy, damn it, you can’t keep going around punching whoever you want. This guy has some clout behind him and he’s pressing charges. I can’t look the other way this time.”

Tommy opened his mouth to tell his brother where he could shove his handcuffs when Elliot stepped forward and started speaking.

“Now, just hold on. Carl had it coming. He was being very rude and Tommy was just trying to make him be quiet. I’m sure that Tommy didn’t mean to hurt Carl, but Carl can be a real asshole sometimes and he deserved exactly what he got.”

Tommy grinned when Joe just blinked in surprise.

“And this clout you’re talking about comes from my father. Carl is really just an errand boy for my father, sent to keep an eye on me, but I’m an adult and I don’t need a babysitter.” Elliot made a shooining gesture with his hand. “So, why don’t you just go back and tell Carl that he is out of luck. You’re not arresting Tommy, and Carl is not pressing charges. If Carl doesn’t like that then he can take it up with me because I’m not letting it happen.”

“Who are you?” Joe asked when Elliot seemed to finally run out of steam.

Elliot crossed his arms over his chest and glared up at Joe. “I’m pretty baby.”

Tommy felt like dancing around the room at Elliot’s words. He felt like dancing Elliot around the room. However, that would not do his bad boy reputation any good. Instead, Tommy stepped over to stand behind Elliot, pulling the man back against his body.

He rested his hands on Elliot’s shoulders and carefully stroked his fingers along the little bite marks on Elliot’s neck, purposely drawing Joe’s attention to the claiming mark. “This is Elliot, my pretty baby.”

“Ah, hell!” Joe exclaimed as his eyes widened. Joe shoved the handcuffs back into his pocket then rubbed his hand down his face. His lips pressed together as he stared at Elliot then Tommy then back to Elliot’s neck. “How long have you known?”

“About an hour,” Tommy replied. “But does it matter?”

“No, I suppose not, but you know Dad is going to shit kittens over this, Tommy, right?”

“Why?” Tommy snapped. “He didn’t get upset when you found Nate or when Jim found Donovan. Why should I be any different?”

Tommy knew he didn’t always fall into line like his family wanted. It had caused more than one argument with his father. He knew how he wanted his life to go and that didn’t include following his father’s footsteps. He had his own footsteps to make.

“I’m not saying it’s different exactly, Tommy, but—” Joe paused for a moment as if searching for his words then shook his head a little. “Do you actually know who this guy is? You said you only found him an hour ago and—”

“He’s mine!” Tommy growled.

“Now, Tommy,” Joe said as he held up both hands, “I’m not saying... look, I’m not sure if you understand who you’re dealing with here. His father could cause us a lot of problems. He’s not going to sit back and just let you have his son.”

“After what you went through with Nate, how can you even ask me that?” Tommy asked softly. He thought of any of his family members that Joe would understand the most. What he went through when claiming his mate, Nate, still gave Tommy the chills.

Joe almost lost his mate before he really had him due to a psychotic man they called the Teacher. He’d kidnapped Nate at a very early age and used the man’s unusual abilities to make a profit. When Nate escaped, the Teacher hunted him down. Nate barely escaped with his life. The Teacher wasn’t so lucky.

“Look, Joe. Go home to Nate and think about how you would feel if you weren’t allowed to keep him. Then you can come talk to me. Until then, either arrest me or don’t, but you don’t get to say who I have in my life.”

Tommy pulled Elliot back into the house and slammed the door. He dropped his arms from around Elliot’s shoulders and stalked across the room to the kitchen cabinets, jerking one open and grabbing the bottle there. He started to pour himself a stiff drink when he heard Elliot walk into the kitchen and turned to look at the man.

“Do you want me to leave because I will if that’s what you really want? I don’t want to cause you any problems and I know how my father can be, your brother is right about that. My father won’t like me getting involved with you. He’d much rather me get involved with someone he picked out and when he finds out I was with you, he’s going to get real mad and—”

Elliot was twisting his fingers together and leaning from foot to foot. His eyes darted around the room, settling on Tommy’s face for a moment then back around the room as if Elliot couldn’t quite look at Tommy directly.

“Sssh, pretty baby,” Tommy said as he leaned over and pressed his fingers against Elliot’s lips. “I’m not afraid of your father and I don’t want you to leave. You’re mine now, remember?”

Elliot blinked. He didn’t say a word, which kind of concerned Tommy as the man usually couldn’t shut up. He just gazed up at Tommy, looking slightly confused and totally stunned. There was even a small wrinkle in his forehead.

“Elliot?” Tommy stepped closer to Elliot and cupped the side of his face. “Is something wrong?”

“Do you mean that?” Elliot’s voice was so low that Tommy needed to lean closer to hear him. “Because I would understand if you just wanted me here for one night. Not many people want me around for long periods of time because I tend to talk too much sometimes and I can understand that because I do talk too much, but I just can’t seem to help myself. I just open my mouth and all of this stuff starts to come out.”

Tommy tilted Elliot’s head back and stared down into the man’s baby blue eyes. He could see the wonder in them, tinged with a bit of hesitancy. He stroked his thumb along the curve of Elliot’s cheekbone and marveled that his mate stood in his arms.

“I meant every word I said, pretty baby. I wouldn’t have said them if I didn’t.” Tommy smiled as he tapped his finger against Elliot’s plush lips. “And it just so happens, I like it when you chatter.”

Elliot's head reared back a little, his eyebrows shooting up. "Really? It doesn't bother you because I can stop if it does. It wouldn't be easy, but I think I'd do just about anything to keep you wanting me. I'd try anyway."

"I think I'll always want you," Tommy said, "no matter what."

"Now?" Elliot asked as he pressed himself against Tommy. "Do you want me now?"

Tommy grinned at the small hitch he heard in Elliot's voice. He could feel Elliot's hard length press against his leg as the man moved from side to side, then up and down, almost as if Elliot was rubbing off on him. Tommy liked that.

"Now is good, pretty baby."

Tommy wrapped his arms around Elliot's waist and lifted him onto the counter. He stepped between Elliot's legs and pushed their mutual hard cocks together. Tommy almost groaned when Elliot shuddered. He loved the responses he got from Elliot. He just needed to touch Elliot and the man was hot and horny. Tommy had never seen anything like it.

When Tommy slanted his mouth over Elliot's and thrust his tongue inside the man's mouth, Elliot just seemed to melt against him. Tommy felt Elliot's arms wrap around his neck, his smaller body press closer. Tommy thought Elliot might climb into his skin if he could.

Tommy slid his hands down Elliot's sides to the curve of his hips. He hooked the edge of the sweats with his fingers and started slowly working them down Elliot's body. Getting the man naked was foremost on his mind. Elliot was already on a flat surface, even if it wasn't the wall he dreamed of. It would still work.

When he couldn't push the sweat pants down any farther, Tommy wrapped one arm around Elliot's waist and lifted him up just enough so he could push the sweats down with his other hand. He dropped the sweats on the floor then reached up to push Elliot's shirt from his shoulders. Tommy wanted the gorgeous man naked from head to toe.

His lips never once broke contact with Elliot's mouth. He just continued to plunder the soft, plush lips until he heard Elliot whimper. Tommy reluctantly pulled his mouth away from Elliot's and stared down into his flushed face.

"Are you okay, pretty baby?"

"I need, Tommy, I need bad." Elliot swallowed so hard Tommy heard it. "But you haven't come yet and I've already come three times and...Tommy, if you'd just fuck me against the wall I know we'd both get off and that would be really great because it feels really good and—and, well, you could even fuck me right here on this counter. I wouldn't complain, I swear."

Tommy chuckled and leaned in to take Elliot's lips again. Elliot groaned and threw himself into the kiss again. Tommy was starting to get the idea that Elliot really liked kissing. He'd have to remember that. Not only did it shut the man up when he was talking too much but it seemed to turn Elliot on with the simple touch of Tommy's lips on his.

Tommy inhaled sharply, pulling quickly away from Elliot when he felt the man's hand fumble at the opening of his jeans. He arched an eyebrow when Elliot's face flushed red then leaned back to allow him easier access.

The sound of Tommy's zipper slowly lowering seemed to fill the room only to be overshadowed by the loud gasp that fell from Elliot's lips when he got his first real look at Tommy's hard cock.

"I told you that you would need to be stretched a little more than normal." Tommy shuddered and jerked when he felt Elliot's soft hands wrap around his cock and gently caress him. He needed almost as much as Elliot did. "Damn, pretty baby, that feels really good."

"It's going to feel even better when you're balls deep in my ass."

Tommy couldn't agree more. He also thought Elliot's words were some of the best the man had ever spoken. And those words needed to be rewarded for their rightfulness and their simplicity.

Tommy grabbed Elliot's hips and scooted his butt to the edge of the counter. He reached for his cock, chuckling when he encountered Elliot's hands still wrapped around him. "You need to give that to me if you want me to use it, pretty baby."

Tommy wasn't sure he'd ever been more surprised as he was when Elliot's lush bottom lip slid out and the man pouted as he released his tight grip. The picture Elliot made was one of the most adorable Tommy ever saw.

"Fine," Elliot grumbled, "but I don't have to like it."

"You can play with it later."

"Really?"

"Yep, all you want, but right now I want to play with you. Now lie back, pretty baby, and pull your legs up to your chest." Tommy almost laughed at the eagerness in which Elliot laid back on the countertop. He grabbed Elliot's legs and pushed them up to his chest then nearly swallowed his tongue at the picture Elliot presented.

"Beautiful," Tommy whispered as he looked down at the little, puckered, pink hole waiting for him. Elliot was just about perfect. Tommy held Elliot's leg with one hand and grabbed his cock with the other. He stepped closer, fitting the head of his cock against Elliot's tight entrance.

Just brushing the head against Elliot's hot skin was enough to make Tommy's knees weaken. He started to slowly push in when Elliot winced. Tommy could have slapped himself when he realized he'd forgotten to use lube. He glanced wildly around the room, feeling desperate.

"Where's the lube, Elliot?"

"With my pants."

"Where are your pants, pretty baby?"

"In the car."

"Fuck, are you kidding me?"

"No." Elliot sounded like he was going to cry.

Tommy closed his eyes for a moment, praying for strength as he gripped the base of his cock tightly with his hand. He wanted to come but he wanted to come inside of Elliot, not all over his stomach, which was a very real possibility considering how close to the edge Tommy was right now.

Okay, there had to be something in the kitchen that would double as lube. Tommy opened his eyes and looked around the kitchen. Not finding anything, he opened the cupboard doors above him.

Tommy heaved an excited sigh and reached into the cupboard for the bottle of olive oil he spotted sitting right behind the container of salt. It would be messy and both he and Elliot would need a shower afterwards but damn, it would work. Besides, they could always bathe together and Tommy knew he had a bottle of lube in the shower.

"This should work, pretty baby," Tommy said as he unscrewed the top and poured a liberal amount into the palm of his hand. His cock throbbed as he coated it with the oil. Tommy nearly slammed the bottle down on the counter top and reached for Elliot's legs again.

"You ready, pretty baby?"

"Oh, god, yes, I've been ready since I saw you in the bar. I've been ready since you first kissed me. I've been ready since you first touched me. I've been ready forever, Tommy. If I get any more ready I'm going to pass out."

Okay.

Tommy lined his cock back up with Elliot's tight entrance. He bit down on his lower lip when a growl threatened to break free. The sight of his cock pressing against Elliot's body nearly undid him.

He wondered at the beautiful sight even though he'd seen it only moments before. This was it. This was the moment he would claim his mate. Tommy started to push in, amazed by the way Elliot's body stretched to fit around him as if they were two halves of the same mold. It was breathtaking. It was exhilarating.

It was someone pounding on his front door!

“Oh, fuck me!” Tommy groaned as he let his head fall forward against the cupboard.

“No, fuck me!” Elliot gasped. “Please!”

“Someone’s at the door, Elliot.”

“I don’t care!”

“Elliot—”

“Thomas!” The pounding came again, rattling the front door.

Tommy cringed and closed his eyes when the shouting voice overrode his, even from outside the house. “And that someone would be my father.”

Chapter 4

Elliot clutched at Tommy's arms as the man pulled away from him. He couldn't believe they were being interrupted yet again. It just didn't seem possible. Every time they started to get hot and heavy, they were interrupted. It was like everything in the universe was working against them.

"Tommy, please, he can wait. We just need—"

"Elliot, you don't ask my father to wait," Tommy snorted as he grabbed Elliot's arm and pulled him into a sitting position. "Daniel Nash doesn't wait for anyone."

"But...but, we just need a few minutes. Five minutes even. That's it. He can wait that long. Better yet, tell him to come back or...or come in the morning." Elliot snapped his fingers as he hit upon an idea. "He can come for breakfast. I'll even cook and clean up afterwards. You don't have to do a thing. I promise."

"Elliot, I would love nothing more than to tell my father to come back in the morning and fuck you for the next several hours, but it's just not going to happen." Tommy held out his hand. "Now, come on, pretty baby, hop down and get dressed."

Elliot pressed his lips together as he ignored Tommy's hand and hopped off the counter. He grabbed the sweats off the floor and yanked them up his legs then reached for his shirt. His movements were jerky as he pulled his shirt on. He was angry.

He knew keeping his lips pressed together was the best possible thing he could do at the moment. If he opened it, he was likely to start blabbing about what he thought of Tommy's decision not to send his father away.

“I’m sorry, Elliot.”

Elliot sighed. This wasn’t Tommy’s fault. It wasn’t even Elliot’s fault, this time. For some reason, Tommy’s family felt the need to stick their noses into Tommy’s business. No wonder Tommy was the bad boy of the family. It was probably the only way he could get away from them.

“Just how many family members do you have because I’d like to know how many more times we’re going to be interrupted before we actually get to finish something. I’d like to be prepared, you know? Are we talking aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, what?”

Tommy chuckled and pulled Elliot into his arms. Elliot rested his hands on Tommy’s hips and rested his head against the man’s muscular chest. “Oh, Elliot, I have more family members than you really want to know about.”

Elliot groaned.

“However, after we speak with my father, I do believe we will not have any more problems. He is the final authority in my family. Well, except for maybe my mother, but if my father tells her to leave us alone until tomorrow, she will.”

“Yeah, you promise?”

“I promise, pretty baby.”

Elliot decided to let go of his disappointment when he felt Tommy plant several small kisses on the top of his head. Being prickly when meeting Tommy’s father for the first time wouldn’t be good. That was assuming he was actually meeting Tommy’s father. Elliot tilted his head back to look up into Tommy’s eyes.

“Am I meeting your father, or would you prefer me to wait in here?”

“You’re going to have to meet my father. I don’t plan on letting you out of my sight.”

Elliot grinned. He was okay with that. When Tommy reached down and took his hand, Elliot let the man lead him from the room.

He started to feel a little apprehensive when he heard Tommy's father pounding on the door. Exactly why was the guy even here?

He held tightly to Tommy's hand and stepped slightly behind him when Tommy opened the door to reveal a very tall, very intimidating, and very angry looking man. Elliot swallowed past the sudden lump that had taken hold in his throat and prayed he'd be able to keep his mouth shut.

They really shouldn't have opened the door.

"Dad," Tommy said as he stepped back and allowed his father into the house. "It's a little late and as you can see, I have company. What can I do for you?"

Daniel Nash stalked into the house. He turned to face Tommy and Elliot. His eyes raked over Elliot hard enough that Elliot wondered if he'd have bruises in the morning.

"Is this him?"

"Is this who, Dad?"

"Don't be flippant with me, Thomas. Your brother called me. You know exactly who I am talking about."

Talking about was right. Elliot bristled a little that he was being talked about like he wasn't even there. Besides, it was rude. Elliot gathered up his courage and stepped forward, holding his hand out to Tommy's father.

"Hi, Mr. Nash, my name is Elliot, Elliot Spencer. Tommy likes to call me pretty baby, but I'm not sure if that's appropriate for you to call me pretty baby because I don't want to have sex with you. I just want to have sex with your son. So, you probably should call me Elliot, although I suppose you could call me Ell or Spence like I told Tommy back in the bar. Either would fine with me."

Elliot wasn't sure it was a good thing when Tommy's father just blinked at him. He waited for the man to say something, but he just stared. Elliot started to get nervous. He knew he'd said more than he should have. He probably should have just kept his mouth shut. Now Tommy was going to be mad at him.

Elliot dropped his hand and stepped back, wishing that the floor would open him up and swallow him. He could feel his fantasy of having Tommy fuck him against the wall slipping away in the silence that filled the room.

“I made some phone calls, Thomas,” Daniel Nash finally said when he looked away from Elliot, much to Elliot’s relief. He felt exposed under the man’s tight gaze. “His father is Philip Spencer, CEO and founder of Spence Corp, one of the largest financial investment corporations in the country.”

“And?”

“This does not concern you?” the man shouted. “Do you not see the trouble this could bring down on us? Philip Spencer is a very powerful man with a lot of resources. He won’t stop until he knows everything.”

Elliot felt his heart start to crumble as he listened to father and son argue over him. He didn’t understand what he had done, but it was becoming more obvious with every word Tommy’s family spoke that they didn’t want him around.

“Is it because I’m a man? Is that why you don’t want me with your son?” Elliot cringed when Daniel’s silver grey eyes snapped over to him. Maybe he really should learn to think before he spoke.

“I have no issue with my son’s sexual preference.”

“Then it’s me you don’t like?” Elliot dropped Tommy’s hand to clench his fists at his sides. “Why? You’ve never even met me. How could you possibly know whether you like me or not based on who my father is? I don’t automatically dislike you. If Tommy is your son, even if he is supposed to be the black sheep of the family, I would think you had something to do with him being the man he is and that means I need to give you a chance before judging you. Why are you judging me before getting to know me?”

Daniel tilted his head slightly to one side and seemed to regard Elliot for several moments before speaking. “Do you always talk this much?”

“Yes,” Elliot said truthfully. It wasn’t like the man wouldn’t find out eventually. “I do talk a lot, but Tommy likes it so it doesn’t matter. He says that if I open my mouth and talk that obviously I have something to say and I do. I think you’re being very unfair.”

Elliot wasn’t sure if the eyebrow that arched up on Daniel’s forehead at his words was a good thing or not until Tommy started chuckling beside him. Elliot was relieved when he felt Tommy’s arm encircle his waist. It made him feel just a bit more comfortable.

“Isn’t he adorable, Dad?”

Now it was Elliot’s turn to blink. Tommy thought he was adorable? No one ever thought he was adorable before. Again, Elliot wished Tommy saw him as sexy but he would happily settle for being adorable. It was much better than annoying.

“Thomas, I understand your attraction, believe me, but you need to consider all of the ramifications if you choose to become involved with this young man.”

“What makes you think this is a choice?” Tommy snapped, surprising Elliot with the vehemence in his voice. “He’s mine, Dad.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

Elliot frowned, glancing between the two men. He felt like they were talking in a language he didn’t understand. Elliot had never been accused of being the brightest bulb in the pack, but even he could tell something was going on that he didn’t understand, especially when Daniel Nash cursed and rubbed his hand over his face.

“Very well, Thomas, I’ll inform your mother,” Daniel said before planting both hands on his hips and looking over at Elliot. “We’ll expect you and your mate at the house in the morning. We need to discuss the situation with Philip Spencer and make preventative plans.”

“What’s a mate?” Elliot whispered as he leaned towards Tommy. He wasn’t sure he’d ever actually heard that phrase used in the way Daniel said it.

“He doesn’t know?” Daniel snapped, letting Elliot know his words had not gone unheard. “You haven’t explained this to him?”

“I haven’t had time to, Dad,” Tommy replied as he looked pointedly at his father. “Everyone keeps interrupting us.”

“Don’t you think you’d better do that before this goes any further?”

“It’s too late for that.” Elliot was shocked when Tommy gripped his chin and tilted his head to one side. He tried to look at Daniel out of the corner of his eye when he heard the man inhale sharply, but Daniel had turned and walked away. He glanced up at Tommy instead, confused.

“Tommy?” he whispered softly.

“It’s okay, pretty baby, I’ll explain everything to you soon. I just need to talk with my father for a moment.” Tommy smiled as he let go of Elliot’s chin and slid his hand up to cradle the side of his face. “My bedroom is just down the hallway, first door on the left. Why don’t you go on in there and wait for me. I shouldn’t be long.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure, Elliot, just go on.”

Tommy might have been sure, but Elliot wasn’t. There was clearly something going on between the father and son that had nothing to do with Elliot, and then there was something that did. The tension between Tommy and his father was so thick it made Elliot’s skin crawl.

Elliot cast a quick glance at Daniel then hurried down the hallway to Tommy’s bedroom. He went inside and started to shut the door when the eerie silence coming from the living room caught his attention. Elliot paused, holding the door most of the way closed as he leaned his ear against the small crack he left. He didn’t have long to wait.

“I can’t believe you’ve done this, Thomas.”

“And I can’t believe you’re arguing about it,” Tommy said. “He’s my mate, Dad, and you know as well as I do that we don’t choose our

mates. Fate does. It doesn't matter who his father is. Elliot belongs to me."

"His father could destroy us."

"Do you want me to leave the pack, Dad, because I will if that's what I need to do to keep Elliot. Giving him up is not an option."

"Of course I don't want you to leave the pack," Daniel shouted, then quickly lowered his voice. "I just worry what this will mean to us. I did some investigating on Philip Spencer after your brother called me. He's not to be messed with."

"Dad, I don't care. I wouldn't care if he was the pope. Elliot is my mate. I will not give him up and you can't expect me to."

Elliot was elated by Tommy's words, but the rest of the conversation concerned him. Hell, it confused the shit out of him. Tommy and his father were talking about mates and packs and all sorts of stuff he didn't understand.

"Don't you think you'd better explain things to him before you start making decisions for him?" Daniel asked. "He might not want to stay after he discovers what he's getting himself into. Not all humans do."

Humans?

"He'll stay, Dad," Tommy replied. "He's special."

Elliot's heart thumped faster at Tommy's words. Joy filled him. That tall, gorgeous man thought he was special? Elliot Spencer? No one ever thought he was special, not in the way Tommy said it.

"He may be special but, until you're fully bonded and he agrees to stay, he's a liability."

"Elliot will not be a problem."

"Yes, he will. As long as his father is involved and a threat to our pack, Elliot is a problem."

Elliot shook his head. No, he wouldn't be a problem. Well, he hoped he wouldn't be a problem. He didn't plan on being a problem. He couldn't predict what his father would do, however. His father had

a cruel, unbending nature and his word was absolute law where Elliot came from. He wouldn't like being thwarted.

But maybe... Elliot stepped out of the bedroom and walked back into the living room. He tried to ignore the glowering look on Daniel's face and concentrated his gaze on Tommy, who was the only one that was important as far as Elliot was concerned.

Tommy thought Elliot was special.

"I don't know what my father will do if I defy him, but I swear I won't cause any problems, Tommy. I'll do whatever you tell me to do and I won't talk." Elliot shrugged nervously. "Well, I try not to talk much. I'll try really hard and you—"

"Elliot, have you been listening in on my conversation with my Dad?"

Elliot felt his face pale when Tommy crossed his arms over his chest and stared at him. He clenched his hands together in front of him and looked away, the stern glint in Tommy's silver grey eyes too much for him.

"No, I wouldn't—well, maybe." Elliot looked back at Tommy. "A little?"

"Eavesdropping is not polite, Elliot."

"I'm sorry, I just—I'm sorry."

"I suppose the damage has already been done," Tommy said as he held out his hand. Elliot quickly crossed the room and grabbed onto the lifeline Tommy held out to him, almost groaning when he was wrapped in Tommy's arms. "So, how much did you hear, pretty baby?"

Elliot frowned and tilted his head back to look up at Tommy. "What's a pack?"

"That's going to take some time to explain to you, Elliot."

"I'm not going anywhere." Elliot frowned. "Well, I hope I'm not going anywhere. But if you really wanted me to I would, but I don't want to. I just... I know what kind of man my father can be and I don't want to cause problems, but I really want to stay, Tommy."

"I want you to stay too, pretty baby, but you need to wait to decide if you want to stay until I tell you what I need to tell you."

Elliot couldn't think of anything Tommy could tell him that would make him want to leave. He really liked Tommy, even if he did have like a gazillion relatives, all of whom thought they needed to stick their noses in Tommy's sex life.

"So, what do you have to tell me then?"

"Why don't you sit down?"

Elliot frowned, feeling very confused and just a bit apprehensive about what Tommy needed to tell him, but he walked over to the couch like the man suggested and sat on the edge. He tried to hide his nervousness by sitting on the edges of his hands. He didn't think he was doing a very good job of hiding it when Tommy sat down on the coffee table facing him and drew in a deep breath.

"Do you ever watch the nature channel, Elliot?"

Elliot blinked and stared. "What?"

"You know, the nature channel on television where they have those shows about wolves and bears and stuff."

"Yeah, I guess."

Elliot cast a quick look at Tommy's father. The man stood by the front window, walking back and forth over a small patch of carpet as he watched. There was sternness to his posture that gave Elliot a chill. The somber look on Daniel's face and the way his arms crossed over his chest didn't help.

"Did you ever watch one of those animal specials on wolves?"

"Wolves?" Elliot asked as he looked back at Tommy. What in the hell did wolves have to do with this conversation? Was Tommy trying to calm him down or something by making casual conversation? "What about them?"

"What did you think of them?"

"They're okay. I never really thought about it." Elliot looked to Daniel for a moment when the man snorted, then back at Tommy. The

serious look on Tommy's face concerned Elliot almost as much as the noise his father made. "Why?"

"Did you know wolves mate for life?"

"I guess."

Elliot pulled his hands out from under his legs and started twisting his fingers together in his lap. This conversation was getting stranger by the minute. He liked Tommy, he really did, but maybe the man was just a little odd.

"Tommy, you said you had something you needed to talk to me about and now you want to discuss wolf mating habits? You're not making a lot of sense."

"Yes, I'm sure I sound very confusing, but this is rather hard to explain, pretty baby." Tommy chuckled and looked down at his hands for a moment. When Tommy looked back up, he also reached for Elliot's hands. "I just want you to listen to me, okay?"

Elliot nodded, feeling at a loss for words for the first time in his life. He didn't understand why, but knew whatever Tommy had to tell him was very important. He just wished Tommy would get to the telling part.

"Wolves mate for life, pretty baby. They find that one partner, the perfect mate for them, and they grab on and never let go. Wolves protect their mates, they provide for them, and they stay together until the day they die."

Elliot stared at Tommy, waiting for him to go on. This had to be one of the strangest conversations he could ever remember having. It wasn't that Elliot minded talking about wolves, he really didn't. He just didn't understand why Tommy was talking about them now.

"My family is much the same way, pretty baby. We find that one person, our mate, and we grab on and never let go. We mate for life." Tommy brought Elliot's hands up to his lips and kissed one then the other before staring intently at Elliot. "You're my mate, pretty baby."

Chapter 5

Tommy watched Elliot carefully as his words sank in. In the few hours that Tommy had known the guy, he'd been able to see Elliot's emotions on his face, every nuance. This time, Tommy couldn't and that worried him. Elliot just stared at him.

"Elliot?"

"Does that mean you like me?"

"Uh, yes, pretty baby." Tommy frowned, wondering if Elliot actually understood what he was talking about. "I like you very much."

"Does it mean he has to like me too?" Elliot asked, pointing past Tommy to where Daniel stood.

Tommy glanced over his shoulder just in time to see his father's eyebrow shoot up and a surprised expression cover his face. Tommy chuckled and shook his head as he looked back at Elliot.

"No, he doesn't have to like you, but he does have to accept you."

"Why?"

"He has to accept you because you're my mate. Mates are chosen by fate, not us. It's not something we get a choice in, pretty baby, it's just something that is. My father knows that and once he gets over the surprise, he will accept it, and you."

"That doesn't seem really fair to me. I mean, it's like you're saying he has to like me because you do and I'm just not sure that's fair to your father. I want him to like me, but it's not required that he like me, even if that would be the nice thing to do, and I think once he gets to know me he might like me, but—"

“Elliot, enough.” Tommy laughed. “My father is not required to like you, but he does have to accept you. That’s two different things, pretty baby.”

“Is it?” Elliot pulled his hands away and pushed himself back into the corner of the couch. He started chewing on one of his fingers and Tommy wondered if it was a nervous gesture. “Is it really different? I know in the grand scheme of things that it probably is, but is it really? Can you imagine what family functions would be like if your father merely accepted me instead of taking the time to get to know me and maybe like me?”

“Elliot—”

“And what about the rest of your family? I know your brother, the sheriff, doesn’t like me. He already made up his mind. I could see that when he came to arrest you. I haven’t met your mother, but if she’s anything like your brother or your father then I’m pretty much screwed here. How am I supposed to make friends with these people if they don’t like me?”

“Elliot!” Tommy snapped as he reached over and covered the man’s mouth with his hand. The conversation was going off in directions Tommy couldn’t control. They needed to stay on track, especially since Tommy hadn’t dropped his biggest bomb yet. “It doesn’t matter if my family likes you or not, pretty baby. It only matters that I do.”

“And you do?” Elliot asked as he pulled away.

“Very much so.” Tommy grinned.

“Finish it, Thomas.”

Tommy shot his father his vilest glare and turned back to Elliot. “There’s something else a little different about my family, Elliot.”

A loud snort filled the room. Tommy wished his father would leave or go into the other room so that he could tell Elliot his secret without comments from the man. His secret could lose him the most important person in his life, even if Elliot had been that person for only a few hours.

"I don't want you to be scared, Elliot," Tommy said softly as he stood to his feet then pushed the coffee table to one side of the room. He walked back over to stand in front of Elliot, praying the man didn't run screaming from the room. "I won't hurt you, okay?"

Elliot frowned. "Okay."

Tommy pulled his shirt off and dropped it on the floor then reached for the buttons of his jeans. He heard a small sharp inhale and looked at Elliot to find his eyes wide as he watched Tommy's every movement. His face flushed as he looked past Tommy to where Daniel stood, then back.

"Tommy, your father is here. Shouldn't we—"

"Just watch, Elliot." Tommy pushed his jeans down his legs and kicked them away, then let the change take him. His bones cracked, muscles stretching as his body shifted into the four legged form of his wolf.

Once the shift was complete, Tommy shook his head then lifted it to look at Elliot. The man didn't move a muscle, just stared. The look on his face wasn't one of horror, but it did hold shock and something else that Tommy couldn't quite define.

"This is our secret, Elliot." Tommy turned his head to watch his father walk over to stand next to him. As angry as he was at his father for his interference, Tommy couldn't help but lean into the hand Daniel used to scratch behind his ears. It felt really good. "Our entire family is like this, Elliot. Well, most of them, anyway."

Tommy turned back to see Elliot's reaction, but it hadn't changed. Elliot just continued to stare at him. It was starting to make Tommy nervous. Was his secret too much for Elliot? Tommy took a hesitant step toward his mate in the hope that he could bridge the sudden gap he could feel between them.

Elliot suddenly jumped up and ran into the kitchen. Tommy looked up at his father as he felt his heart start to break. Was Elliot rejecting him? He was born a wolf shifter. He'd been that way since

the minute he breathed air. He couldn't change it and he didn't want that to be what cost him his mate.

"Not everyone can accept the wolf, Thomas. You know that." Daniel's face held sadness and a hint of regret. "I'm sorry, son."

Tommy felt his heartache start to overcome him. Elliot was his mate. Without him, Tommy would live a very lonely existence. He would never find another mate, not unless Elliot died, and that was unacceptable.

Determined to fix things between him and Elliot, Tommy started to walk to the kitchen when Elliot came barreling around the corner. He had a bottle of liquor in one hand, three glasses and a bowl in the other.

Elliot stumbled to a stop when he saw Tommy, his face paling. Tommy dropped to the ground and whined softly, trying to show Elliot he wasn't a danger. Elliot didn't say anything for a minute, just stared some more then he slowly held up the items in his hand.

"I don't know about you, but I could really use a drink. I think my buzz wore off somewhere back when your brother tried to arrest you and I don't think I can deal with this shit sober, not right now. Maybe later, after I get used to the idea of you going furry, but right now, no, I need a drink."

Tommy's mouth would have dropped open in shock if he were in human form. Instead, his head cocked to one side, his ears perked. Elliot wasn't running. He was just getting a drink? Not sure what to think, Tommy followed Elliot back into the living room.

Elliot was sitting on the couch once again. He looked down at the bottle and glasses in his hand then slid down to sit on the floor, his back pressed against the couch. He set all three glasses on the floor along with the bowl and poured the amber liquid into each one.

Tommy sat down across from Elliot, not too close and not too far away. He didn't want to scare Elliot, but staying away from the man was almost more than Tommy could handle. Maybe he should shift back?

Elliot held out a glass to Daniel, who took it and sat in one of the chairs next to the couch, then placed another glass and the bowl in front of Tommy. Elliot picked up his own glass and shrugged when Tommy looked at him.

"I didn't know if you needed a glass or a bowl. I mean, if you were human then a glass, right? But you're not exactly human right now and so I guess a bowl would be best." Elliot frowned as he waved his hand at Tommy. "Can you drink the way you are right now? Or does that affect you badly? Maybe you shouldn't drink." Elliot shrugged again as he chuckled. "I guess one of us drunk is enough, huh?"

Tommy watched Elliot take a long swig of the liquid in his glass then glanced over at his father. Daniel held his glass with both hands, but he seemed to be watching Elliot rather than drinking.

"Elliot, if you don't mind my asking, why are you taking this so well?" Daniel asked. "In my experience, by now most people are running for their lives and yet you sit here drinking with us."

"Tommy said he wouldn't hurt me."

"And you believe him?"

"Shouldn't I? Was he lying?"

Tommy dropped to the floor and crawled closer to Elliot, whimpering a little. He wouldn't hurt Elliot for anything in the world. He wanted Elliot to know that.

"No, I don't believe Tommy will hurt you."

"But?" Elliot asked. "I can hear the but in your voice and there's always a but. So, what is it? What aren't you telling me? Because I think I need to know everything."

"Thomas was born a shifter just as I was, just as many in our pack were."

"Pack, there's that word again. What exactly does it mean?"

"We're just like any other wolf pack or large family with one small exception, we can shift."

“You call that a small exception?” Elliot scoffed. “You turn into wolves. I’d call that a pretty big exception. Maybe I’m wrong, but it seems like something pretty big to me. Granted, I’ve never run into someone that can shift before, but still, it seems really big to me.”

“Does our ability to shift bother you?”

Elliot’s mouth dropped open and he slowly lowered his glass to his lap. “Are you serious?”

“Perfectly.”

“You just told me that everyone in your family can shift into wolves and you’re wondering if it bothers me?” Elliot leaned back against the couch cushion as he rolled his eyes. “I think the word bother is just a little too non-descriptive for what I’m feeling right now. Surprised would cover it better, maybe even shocked, but if you want to use the word bother, who am I to argue with you?”

“Yes, but does it shock you enough to deny Thomas’s claim on you?”

Tommy held his breath as he waited for Elliot’s answer. The next words out of Elliot’s mouth could make or break him. Thomas tried to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. He couldn’t force Elliot to accept him, no matter how much he wanted it.

“I’m not sure I understand exactly what you mean by Tommy’s claim on me. I know he said wolves mate for life and I’m his mate. I get that. I just don’t understand exactly what you’re asking.”

“If Tommy mates you, it will be for life, yours and his.”

Elliot leaned forward to set his glass down on the floor then clasped his hands together between his knees. His forehead wrinkled as he frowned at Daniel. “Okay, look, I’m not stupid, but you seem to be doing everything to make me feel that way. I get it that you don’t like me and you don’t want me to be with your son. There’s nothing I can do to change that. So, if you want an honest answer from me then you need to give me more information to form an opinion and stop beating around the fucking bush.”

Tommy blinked in surprise. He couldn't remember ever hearing anyone talk to his father in that manner, not even his mother. He was also a little bit shocked by the vehemence he could hear in Elliot's voice. The man looked like he was starting to get pissed. Tommy just hoped his father didn't get too pissed by Elliot's words.

"If Thomas has sex with you and bites you at the same time, it will create a bond between the two of you that will only end when one of you is dead. Wolves do mate for life and so do we, which means that Thomas will never be with anyone except you. You will be his mate. However, you will be his human mate, which means in our pack, he is the dominant one between the two of you."

Much to Tommy's shock, Elliot started laughing. "Oh please, Tommy's the dominant one between us now. How is his being a wolf supposed to change that?"

"For one, I am the alpha of this pack," Daniel said. "That means I'm the top dog and what I say goes."

"Are you trying to tell me that you can say whether Tommy and I are together or not?"

"No, but if you ever speak to me the way you have while we're in front of other pack members, I will see it as a challenge to my position as alpha and fight you. And, Elliot, a challenge for leadership is always to the death."

Tommy expected Elliot to grow all scared and stuff. Any sane person would have. Instead, Elliot's head tilted to one side as if pondering Daniel's words. He didn't even drop his eyes from Daniel's, a move that could be seen as a challenge.

"So, you're basically saying that, as alpha, you have the right to treat me like shit, but since I'm a human, I can't say anything about it? And if I do, you're going to kill me?" Elliot reached down and grabbed his glass of the floor then the bottle of alcohol and stood to his feet. He tilted the glass towards Daniel in a small salute. "Congratulations, Daniel Nash, you are my father."

Tommy waited until Elliot walked out of the room before shifting back to his human form. He pressed his lips together and ignored his father as he jerked his jeans up his legs and buttoned the bottom two buttons.

He couldn't remember that last time he was this pissed off, and he had anger issues. Drawing in a deep breath, Tommy turned to glare at his father. "I think you need to leave."

"Thomas."

Tommy held his hand up to stop his father from saying whatever it was that the man felt he needed to say. Tommy didn't care. All that mattered to him was getting to Elliot and convincing the man he was not like either of their fathers.

"You've said more than enough, Dad."

"Thomas, you need to understand—"

"No, you need to understand," Tommy snapped as he took a step toward his father. "Elliot is my mate, mine. You do not have the right to come in here and scare him or threaten him. Right now, I would be perfectly within my right to challenge you for threatening my mate, and you know it."

"Thomas, if his father—"

"This is not about Elliot's father. This is about you. Elliot is right. You're acting just the way you keep saying his father would act." Tommy pushed his hand over his bald head as he let out a little laugh. "I don't know why I expected anything less from you. Ever since I refused to become a member of law enforcement like everyone else in the family, you've come down on every decision I've made."

"That's not true, Thomas."

"It is true." Tommy's hand waved wildly through the air. "Did you act this way when Joe found Nate and brought the Teacher into our valley, or when Jim found Donovan and suddenly announced that he was gay? No. You just accepted their decisions and their mates. You won't even give Elliot a chance."

"It's not about giving Elliot a chance, Thomas. I'm the alpha of this pack and it's my duty to protect it. Philip Spencer is a big threat to us. He could destroy this pack. Why won't you understand that?"

"And why won't you understand that this is not about Philip Spencer?" Tommy shouted. "This is about Elliot."

"Tommy, could you drive me back to my car?"

Tommy whipped around to see Elliot standing in the kitchen doorway. His heart sank when he saw Elliot wringing his hands together. His eyes were cast down at the floor as if he didn't have the courage to look him in the face. He looked...sad.

"Elliot."

"Please?"

"Elliot, baby, no, we can talk about this." Tommy hurried over to Elliot's side. The man looked so dejected and Tommy didn't know how to fix it. He lifted Elliot's chin, but the man kept his eyes downcast. "There's nothing we can't work out, pretty baby, as long as we stand together."

"I can't stay where I'm not wanted, Tommy," Elliot whispered. "I don't know what I've done that is so bad, but it's obvious your family can't accept me and I can't stay here if I know I'm causing a wedge between you and them."

Tommy drew in a quick breath. Elliot was going to leave him. He couldn't allow that to happen. The mating bond between them had already been started when he bit Elliot's neck. He couldn't lose the man now.

"Okay, pretty baby, just give me a moment to pack a bag and we can go."

"Wha—no." Elliot's eyes snapped up as he grabbed Tommy's arm. "Tommy, you have to stay here with your family. You need them as much as they need you."

Tommy cupped Elliot's face in his hands and tilted the man's head back. "I need you more, pretty baby."

“Tommy, I can’t—” Elliot shook his head. “I can’t come between you and your family.”

“Elliot, this isn’t a choice.” Tommy tried to find the words to explain to Elliot what the man meant to him. “And even if it were a choice, I’d still choose you.”

Elliot just looked confused, his forehead wrinkling and his eyebrows drawing together. “Why? I mean I know things got pretty hot and heavy between us, but you’re talking about a lifetime commitment here and we’ve barely known each other a few hours. How can you be so sure?”

Tommy grinned. That he knew how to explain. “Because everything in you calls to me, pretty baby, the way you smell, the way you taste, hell, even the way you sound when you chatter incessantly. Everything about you excites me. Just seeing you smile makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I could conquer the world.”

“Tommy,” Elliot whispered, his baby blue eyes huge and round on his pale face.

“I don’t want to be away from you even if you’re just in another room. I was attracted to you the minute I saw you, but when Carl started talking about you, I wanted to beat the shit out of him. And then I wanted to take you away and protect you from the world. I wasn’t going to let anyone talk about my pretty baby that way.”

Elliot’s breath seemed to hitch in his throat as he inhaled, almost as if he was trying not to break down. Tommy could still see tears coating the man’s long dark eyelashes as Elliot blinked up at him.

“Okay.”

“Okay? That’s it?” Tommy chuckled. “That’s all you have to say, pretty baby?”

Elliot nodded.

“And what about me shifting into a wolf?” Tommy’s heart pounded faster. “How do you feel about that?”

Elliot shrugged. “I guess I’ll invest in flea powder.”

Tommy gaped at Elliot for just a moment before he wrapped his arms around the man and hugged him tightly in his arms. He buried his face in Elliot's hair and inhaled his mate's welcoming scent.

"You won't regret this, Elliot," Tommy whispered. He closed his eyes when tears sprang up in them, his heart overwhelmed by Elliot's willingness to accept him in any form. "I promise, pretty baby. I'll do everything I can to make you happy."

Tommy held Elliot in his arms a moment longer then leaned back to look down at him, cupping the side of Elliot's face in his hand. "Just give me a minute to grab some clothes and stuff and we'll be on our way."

"Thomas, you can't leave."

Tommy turned around to glare at his father, making sure he stood between Daniel and Elliot. "I can leave and that's exactly what I plan on doing. You can't accept Elliot? Fine, that is your choice. But I also have a choice and I choose to be with Elliot."

"You need a pack, Thomas. You won't be able to survive without one."

"Elliot and I will make our own pack."

"Elliot is not a shifter."

"No, but he is my mate."

Daniel's hands fell to his sides, a strange look coming over his face. "You really mean it. You'd leave your pack, your family, to be with him."

"In a heartbeat."

Chapter 6

Elliot's heart beat so rapidly in his chest he could barely breathe. He felt like his lungs were constricted as he tried to keep from crying at Tommy's words. No one had ever wanted him enough to make a second date, let alone leave their family for him.

"Very well, Thomas."

Elliot pushed his face between Tommy's shoulder blades when he heard Daniel's words and felt their effect on Tommy. This wasn't how things were supposed to be between family members. Even with his limited experience with his own family, Elliot knew this.

"My mother died when I was just a baby. I never really knew her," Elliot whispered, feeling Tommy jerk as he talked. "And my father, my father is a man driven by greed. He never had any time for me or anyone else that didn't bring him some sort of advantage in the world. Don't let this come between you and your family, Tommy. You'll regret it and then you might start to hate me and...and I don't know if I could live with you hating me."

Tommy turned around and grabbed Elliot's arms. "Elliot, I could never hate you. You're my mate, the most important person in my world. I will never regret choosing you."

"Yeah, but—"

"No buts, pretty baby."

"If you mean to go through with this, Thomas, then we need to go speak with your brother and make some plans. I suspect we won't have long before we find Philip Spencer on our doorstep and we need to be prepared. Your mother is also going to want to meet your mate."

Elliot's heart stuttered when Tommy stiffened and slowly turned to look at his father. He knew Tommy was angry at the way his father was acting. Elliot was too, but to give up his family was not something Elliot could let him do, not if he could prevent it.

"Tommy," Elliot stood on his tiptoes so that he could whisper into Tommy's ears. "Listen to your father. Don't let this come between you. At least listen to what your father has to say. If we don't like it, we can leave afterwards, but give him a chance. He loves you and you don't know how rare that is."

"I do love my son, Elliot," Daniel said. "I'm glad you can recognize that."

Elliot shrugged, although he wasn't sure Daniel could see it with Tommy standing between them. "It's not hard to recognize. You just want what's best for Tommy. But you need to realize that what is best for Tommy in your opinion may not be what he thinks is best."

"If Thomas chooses to be with you, so be it, but we still need to discuss this situation with your father." Daniel pointed his finger at Elliot. "You know as well as I do that he is a threat to our world, especially knowing what you now know. If your father were to discover our ability to shift—"

"He'd use it to his advantage," Elliot finished for Daniel.

"Yes."

"I agree, and I will help in any way that I can."

"Against your own father? I have doubts about that after what you just said to Thomas about not coming between us."

"My father hates me. He always has. The only time he's ever spent any time with me was the summer I turned fifteen and that was just because I was sick and in the hospital. After that, except when he wants something from me, I never even hear from my father." Elliot drew in a deep breath when he realized he had used up all of the air in his lungs then continued. "If you love Tommy like you say you do, and I believe you do, then I want Tommy to have that."

Elliot felt Tommy's hand reach back and give his hands a little squeeze. He knew Tommy was trying to reassure him and felt grateful for the small gesture. Elliot squeezed back then looked at Daniel again.

"I'll do anything to keep Tommy safe."

* * * *

As much as he meant the words, Elliot didn't expect to have to put them to the test so soon. He'd no more said the words than Tommy and his father rushed him out of the house. They were on their way to Tommy's brother, the sheriff's house.

That in itself gave Elliot plenty to worry about. The last, and only time, he met the sheriff, the man had come to arrest Tommy. Elliot didn't want to see it happen again. Avoiding the man would have been his game plan, but now they were driving right to the man's house.

Now, Elliot not only had to worry about Daniel Nash but his wife and son too. He just knew someone was going to say something that convinced Tommy that Elliot wasn't worth the risk and then the man would leave him.

Elliot felt it deep in his soul. He was heading for his doom and there was nothing he could do to prevent it. Elliot felt like crying, but he knew that wouldn't do him any good. If Philip Spencer taught him anything, he taught Elliot that tears got him nowhere.

Elliot just bit his lip and turned his head toward the window, pretending to watch the night sky pass him by. He could feel the tenseness in Tommy's body as the man sat next to him and knew he dreaded the upcoming confrontation as much as Elliot did, just for different reasons.

"How are you doing there, pretty baby?"

Elliot plastered a smile on his face and turned to look at Tommy. "I'm okay. A little nervous I guess. It's natural to feel nervous, isn't it? I mean, it's not like this is a usual situation or anything, right?"

"It'll be fine, you'll see. Once you get to know them, my family is not a bad lot. They just don't tend to let a lot of outsiders into their circle for obvious reasons."

Elliot nodded, inwardly cringing at Tommy calling him an outsider.

"Once they get to know you, though, they will welcome you with open arms, especially my mother. I think she will adore you."

"Yeah?" Elliot asked, hoping he sounded somewhat normal, and if he didn't, that Tommy would assume it was nerves. "Tell me about her. What's she like?"

"She can be a little intense at times, but what mother isn't?" Tommy chuckled.

"I don't know. I never really knew my mother."

"You said that before. How did she die?"

"I don't know, really, I think she got sick or something. My father refuses to discuss her with me. Every time I ask, he gets really angry so after awhile I just stopped asking." Elliot shrugged. "It seemed easier that way."

"I'm sorry, Elliot."

"It happened a long time ago."

"That still doesn't make any easier for you."

"No, I guess not."

"Well, you just wait until my mother finds out. She'll adopt you. She's already adopted Nate and told my brother Joe if he ever breaks up with Nate, she's kicking his ass to the curb and keeping Nate."

"Wait, I thought you mated for life?"

Tommy chuckled and patted Elliot's leg. "We do, pretty baby. I think she was just letting Joe know where he stood. She really likes Nate."

“Just because she likes Nate doesn’t mean she’s going to like me, Tommy.”

“She will.”

“You can’t know that.”

“My mother is one of the sweetest, kindest women I know, Elliot. She’d do anything for anyone. She’s going to take one look at you and want to cuddle you all up.”

“If she’s so sweet, then how did she end up with your father? It would seem to me that he would eat her alive.”

“Oh, don’t let that sweetness fool you. My mother has a backbone of steel. I’ve seen alphas of other packs quake in their boots when she gets mad. I think even my father is afraid of her and he adores the woman.”

“She sounds like a formidable woman.”

“She is.”

“And you love her a lot, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do.”

Elliot nodded and went back to watching the night pass by. He knew now more than ever that he couldn’t come between Tommy and his family. Despite the disagreement Tommy was currently having with his father, he loved him, and the rest of his family.

Elliot couldn’t take Tommy away from that. Tommy would only regret it in the future, and Elliot didn’t know if he could survive having Tommy regret being with him. There had to be some sort of compromise that they could come to, something.

“Tommy, what if I was to get an apartment somewhere and you came to see me whenever you wanted to? Would that make your father happy? I could live there and my father would never need to know about you or your family.”

“What?”

“I’m just thinking. If I were to get an apartment somewhere, like in the next town over or something, away from your family. You

could come and see me as often as you wanted to and my father never has to know about you.”

“Elliot, are you ashamed of me?”

“God, no!” Elliot shouted then quickly pressed his lips together when he realized he had yelled at Tommy. He looked down at his hands, wringing them together in his lap. “No, of course not. I just don’t want to cause trouble for you or your family.”

“Elliot, there may be some problems with your father, but we’ll work them out. As soon as my family realizes that I am not going to give you up, they will come around. If they don’t, well then, we’ll find somewhere else to live.”

“You’re really going to keep me?” That stunned Elliot more than Tommy shifting into a wolf. Tommy really seemed to want him and Elliot didn’t understand that. No one had ever wanted to keep him, not for the long haul anyway.

“I’m keeping you, Elliot, and that’s a promise.”

Elliot couldn’t have prevented the smile that came over his face if his feet were on fire. A spark inside of Elliot ignited and started to burn brighter and brighter as Tommy smiled at him. Tommy was going to keep him. Elliot was elated.

“I’d like that,” Elliot said. “I’d like that a lot.”

“Yeah?” Tommy asked. “Me too, pretty baby, me too.”

“And the whole furry thing, it’s not a problem unless you shed on the furniture, but I guess I could just buy a really strong vacuum cleaner or maybe get leather furniture like you have.” Elliot snapped his fingers. “That’s why you have leather furniture, isn’t it? So you don’t shed all over the place. But what do you do in the bedroom? I mean, like do you get the sheets all dirty and stuff or—”

Tommy’s laughter shut Elliot’s words off. “You’re a hoot, Elliot. Yes, I shed, but I try not to shed in the house. I prefer to do the furry stuff outside as much as possible. And no, I don’t eat dog food. I eat regular food just like you do.”

Elliot felt his face flush. He had been going to ask exactly that. “I guess I won’t be needing the flea powder then, huh?”

“No, I prefer just a straight shower, thank you very much.”

“Need someone to scrub your back?” Elliot winked at Tommy. “And maybe your front?”

“Sweet mercy, you’re gonna kill me, Elliot,” Tommy groaned. Elliot’s eyes widened when Tommy reached down and thumped the bulge in his jeans a couple of times.

“Hey,” Elliot said loudly as he grabbed Tommy’s hand, “don’t do that. I plan on using that later.”

“Elliot, if I don’t do that, we’re going to have problems. We’re here and I don’t want to walk into my brother’s house with a hard on.”

Elliot looked out the front window and swallowed past the sudden lump in his throat as he watched Tommy pull into a driveway. “We’re here? Already?”

“Elliot, it will be okay.”

“You’re not the human walking into a pack of wolves that don’t really want you here. Speak for yourself.”

Tommy chuckled, much to Elliot’s dismay, but he did reach over and take his hand. “It will be fine, pretty baby. Just stay next to me and I promise to bite anyone that comes even close to you.”

“Yeah?” Tommy snapped his teeth together, which Elliot found absolutely hilarious. He started laughing, leaning his head against Tommy’s arm. His laughter started to fade when he felt Tommy kiss the top of his head.

“Let’s go in and deal with the pack, and this business with your father, and then I’ll take you home and fuck you into the wall like I said I would.”

“Promise?” Elliot raised his head to look at Tommy, pleading with his eyes. He so wanted to be fucked into the wall by Tommy. He’d been thinking of little else since he met the man, well, except this whole wolf shifting thing and the animosity with Tommy’s family.

Tommy smiled. "Promise, pretty baby."

Elliot nodded and climbed out of the car. He hurried around the front and grabbed the hand Tommy held out to him. As they started for the house, Elliot wrapped his free hand around his waist, which felt like it was doing loops, especially when he saw Daniel waiting for them on the front porch.

"Dad," Tommy simply said as he nodded.

"Thomas," Daniel replied, giving him a small nod. "Your mother will be here soon as well as your brother, James, and his mate. I also expect Ben and Reece will also be joining us at some point."

Tommy nodded again. Elliot was just confused. He didn't know who these people were and he didn't understand what they had to do with the current situation. He thought they were going to the sheriff's house to discuss his father.

Elliot followed Tommy and Daniel into the house, noting its welcoming feel the moment he stepped inside. Elliot shivered as a strange sensation ran up his spine. It wasn't a bad sensation, really, but Elliot couldn't quite understand what was causing it. He chalked it up to being in an unknown place in a truly strange situation and plastered a smile on his face when two strange men walked into the room.

"Elliot, you remember my brother, Joe?"

Elliot nodded.

"This is Nate, Joe's mate." Tommy gestured to the smaller of the two men. "Nate, this is Elliot, my mate."

"Oh, Tommy, you found your mate."

Elliot blinked. If he didn't know better, he would swear the man was bouncing in place. He looked excited, more so than Elliot, but at least the grin on his face seemed real and not a pleasantry.

"Hello," Elliot said, holding out his hand. He slowly let it drop back to his side and stepped closer to Tommy when Nate's smile faded and the man didn't reach for his hand.

“Elliot, Nate doesn’t shake people’s hands,” Tommy said. “He doesn’t like touching other people except for my brother, Joe.”

“Oh.” Elliot wondered if it was him or if Nate was that way with all people. It was probably him.

“I’m sorry, Elliot,” Nate said. “It’s just hard for me to touch other people.”

“No, that’s okay.” Elliot smiled for the man’s benefit. “I understand.”

He didn’t really, but Elliot wasn’t going to make waves. He’d made enough already. If he wanted Tommy’s family to accept him, Elliot knew he’d have to toe the line. That was something he learned very early on in life. People’s acceptance came at a price, and it usually meant he had to be who they wanted and act the way they expected. Elliot was a master at pretending.

“Why don’t we all sit down so we can talk,” Joe said. “Dad filled me in a little when he called and said you were coming over, but I’m sure you have more you can tell us.”

Elliot followed Tommy over to the couch and sat down as close to him as he could get while not actually sitting in the man’s lap. He felt a little better when Tommy’s arms settled around his shoulders.

“Elliot is my mate,” Tommy began as soon as every was seated. “I explained to him about the pack and even shifted for him. He’s accepted me and that should be the end of it. However, Dad feels that Elliot’s father could be a problem.”

“I believe he’s right, Tommy. I did a little research after meeting Elliot and his father is not one to be messed with.” Joe’s face was grim as he glanced over at Elliot. “I don’t know how much you know about your father’s business practices, but they are not always above board.”

“I don’t know anything about how my father conducts his business, but I do know he will do anything to get what he wants. Making the money is less important to him than how he makes it.” Elliot carefully looked at everyone sitting there, meeting the eyes of

each of them. “For my father, it’s all about the hunt. I’m sure you all can appreciate that.”

“Your father has his fingers in some pretty shady cookie jars.”

Elliot’s felt his eyebrows shoot up. “Excuse me?”

“Many of the businesses that your father is involved in are shady, so to speak. Some of my research led me to believe that he’s being investigated by the federal government because of some of these business deals.”

“Oh, well, that doesn’t surprise me.”

“It doesn’t surprise you?” Joe asked.

“Should it?”

“He is your father.”

Elliot grimaced and tried to figure out how to tell this close-knit family about his relationship with his father. “My mother died when I was a baby. I think my father resented me for that. I think he holds me responsible for her death. She may have been the only person he ever truly loved because I know he never loved me.”

“Elliot, you can’t know that,” Tommy insisted.

“I do know that, Tommy. I was very sick growing up. I had to see a lot of doctors and get a lot of tests. My father never went with me. I was always sent with one of his assistants and my nanny.”

“Are you still sick?” Tommy asked.

“No, I’m fine now, but I was sick for a long time. The only time my father ever showed any concern for me was the summer I turned fifteen. Whatever I had suddenly got worse and I was in the hospital for nearly a month. God, I was so sick I barely remember anything of the time. I just remember my father being there several times when I woke up. He looked so worried, so hopeful that the doctors would fix me.”

“But you’re better now?”

“Yeah, whatever the doctors did, I guess it cured me. After that month, I was all better. I still have to go see the doctor once a month

for blood tests and such, but there's been no reoccurrence of my symptoms in the last ten years."

"And what did your father do when you got better, pretty baby?"

Elliot inhales slowly as the remembered pain of his father's desertion flowed through him. He'd been a kid of fifteen years old. He wanted his father's attention so badly he had almost wished he was sick again so his father would spend more time with him. It hadn't happened.

"Once I was better, my father went back to his business as usual and I went to boarding school. We see each other once a year at Christmas. Other than that, and a few phone calls when I fuck up somehow, I don't see my father." Elliot sat forward a little to look at Daniel. "Which is why I don't think my father is going to be an issue. He hates me. He could care less what I do as long as I keep it out of the media and don't embarrass him."

"Elliot, I'm sure you believe that, but we still need to be prepared in case he does make problems," Daniel said. "I am the alpha of this pack, the leader. It is my duty to take care of the pack members. I have to prepare for anything that I see as a danger."

"I am not a danger!"

Elliot jumped to his feet and stalked over to the window, crossing his arms over his chest as he looked out into the darkness. Why didn't these people understand that he wasn't a danger to them? His father didn't care about him. He wouldn't be interested in where Elliot chose to live or with whom as long as Philip Spencer was not inconvenienced.

"Elliot?"

Not recognizing the voice speaking to him, Elliot turned to find Nate standing behind him. He gave Nate a weak smile and turned to look back out the window. He wasn't sure there was anything Nate could say that he really wanted to hear. No matter what he did, he couldn't win with these people. It kind of reminded him of his dealings with his father.

"I don't think anyone sees you as a danger, Elliot," Nate said softly. "But you have to admit, everyone here has a huge secret that needs to be kept. Being wary of anyone that isn't part of the pack is the only way they can do that."

"I thought mating with Tommy meant I would be accepted into the pack." Elliot's breath stuttered in his throat as he inhaled sharply and turned to look at Nate. "But I guess that was too much to hope for."

"Oh, Elliot, it's not—"

Elliot held up his hand, stopping Nate. He smiled despite the tears he could feel threatening to spill from his eyes. "It's okay, really it is. I understand. You're wolves. I'm human, and a stranger at that. I think it would be best if I just left and then there will be no more threat to the pack."

Elliot started to walk past Nate, intent on getting to the front door and away, when Nate reached out and grabbed his arm. Stunned that the man was touching him after everyone explained about him not touching anyone, Elliot tried to pull his arm away but Nate's grip was like steel.

"Nate, what..." Elliot's words trailed off when he looked up as saw Nate's face. It was pale white, as if totally drained of blood. His jaw was clenched, one lip slightly curled back. But Nate's eyes were the worst. They were white like they had rolled back into Nate's head. "Nate?"

Nate's body suddenly started shaking. Elliot reached out and caught Nate right before he would have hit the floor then slowly lowered him the rest of the way. Elliot had just a moment to stare down at Nate in horror before strong arms shoved him away, breaking the strong hold Nate had on his arm.

"Nate!" Joe shouted as he knelt on the floor next to his mate. "Nate, baby, what's wrong?"

Elliot backed away, his eyes widening when Nate lifted a hand and pointed at him through the trembles racking his body. “N—no—no t—t—touch—touching.”

Elliot cringed when every eye in the room turned to look at him. Sheer black fright swept through him. He backed up until he felt the wall behind him, shaking his head the entire time.

“What the fuck did you do to my mate?” Joe growled.

“I didn’t do anything,” Elliot replied in a small, frightened voice. “I swear.”

Elliot could feel the animosity aimed in his direction and knew he would find no understanding from anyone there. He sought out Tommy, spotting him standing just beyond where Joe knelt on the floor with his mate. A flicker of apprehension filled him when Tommy stared at him with something in his eyes that Elliot couldn’t identify.

“Tommy?” Elliot reached a hand out towards the man only to watch in horror as Tommy stepped back. Elliot’s hand slowly fell back to his side when Tommy refused to take it. Instead, the man that professed to want him always just stared at him like he had done something evil.

“I want him locked up until Ben and Reece get here and we can figure this out,” Joe snapped as he swept Nate up into his arms. The look Joe sent in Elliot’s direction was scathing and filled with more hatred than Elliot had ever seen in someone’s eyes, even his father’s. “Put him in the pantry for now.”

Elliot scooted back when Daniel and his son, James, stepped forward but they didn’t touch him. In desperation, Elliot tried to jump past them to get to Tommy. He just knew if he got to Tommy everything would be okay. Tommy promised.

But Tommy quickly stepped away from Elliot, avoiding his frantic grasp. Anguish unlike anything Elliot had ever felt filled every cell in his body. Swallowing the sob that rose in his throat, Elliot stared at Tommy.

“You made me believe...” Tears blinded his eyes and choked his voice. “But you lied.”

Tommy didn’t say anything, just stared at Elliot with wide eyes and a stunned expression, leaving Elliot with an inexplicable feeling of emptiness. He didn’t resist when Daniel and James led him out of the living room and into the kitchen.

Daniel opened a solid wood door on one side of the room and gestured for Elliot to enter. Elliot did, having no other choice and not caring if he did anyway. His sorrow was a huge, painful knot inside that weighed him down.

Elliot walked to the back wall and slid down to the floor, his trembling legs no longer able to hold him upright. He held himself upright until he heard the door shut behind him and the room plunged into darkness.

Elliot sank down onto the floor and wrapped his arms around himself, yielding to the anguished sobs that filled him. He knew Tommy was too good to be true but he’d wanted what the man promised so very much.

Once again, Elliot was shown that those he wanted love from would never really love him. He knew he shouldn’t have expected it. He should have been satisfied with just one night with Tommy. It would have given him a pleasant memory to visit on those lonely nights he spent without anyone to hold him.

He’d hoped for too much and now he would pay the price, again. Elliot curled further into himself as he tried to reason why he even tried. It was obvious he had some fatal flaw that made him undesirable, unwanted. Every time it was proved to him, Elliot ignored it and kept on trying, hoping.

But it wasn’t worth it. Nothing was worth the anguish he felt when Tommy turned away from him. Elliot’s sobs quieted to the occasional hiccup. He wiped his eyes and promised himself it would be the last time he cried over anyone.

Elliot closed his eyes and prayed for sleep as he buried everything he had, everything he felt, as deeply inside of his mind and body as he could go. He was never going to allow anyone to touch him again, not the real him, and certainly not his heart.

Chapter 7

Tommy felt numb as he watched Joe fuss over Nate. The little man hadn't moved since he collapsed in Joe's arms. Tommy didn't understand what was going on, but he knew Elliot couldn't be responsible.

Elliot was kind, gentle. He wouldn't hurt anyone. Tommy had just been so stunned by what happened that he didn't know what to do. Once his senses came back to him, Tommy knew the safest place for Elliot was locked in the pantry away from everyone.

Until they could figure out what happened, Tommy didn't know if he could keep Joe from attacking Elliot. But that didn't mean Tommy wouldn't defend his mate to the death if Joe went after Elliot. And he didn't want to fight his brother.

Tommy knew Joe had a right to be angry with Elliot because he didn't know the man like Tommy did. Joe didn't know Elliot wouldn't hurt a fly. Until Nate regained consciousness, Tommy wouldn't be able to prove that his mate was innocent of any wrongdoing.

Tommy was so intent on watching for any little move from Nate that he almost jumped out of his skin when he felt a hand come down on his shoulder. He turned to find his father standing beside him.

"Hey, Dad," he said softly.

"We need to talk, Thomas."

Tommy so didn't like the way that sounded. "Elliot didn't do this."

"You can't know that."

"I do know that. Elliot doesn't have it in him to hurt someone." Tommy waved his hand out and gestured to Nate. "He wouldn't do this."

"Thomas, I know you want to believe that, but what do you really know about the man? You just met Elliot a few hours ago."

"I just know, okay?"

"No, it's not okay, Thomas." Daniel pointed to Nate. "Look at him, Thomas. Look at your brother's mate. Something happened that caused that and Elliot is responsible."

"And what about my mate, Dad? He's locked in a pantry like a common criminal. You didn't even give him a chance. None of you did," Tommy snapped as he turned to take in the rest of the people on the room. "You just assumed he was guilty."

"Did you see what happened to Nate?" Joe shouted as he jumped to his feet. "That man did this and you expect me to feel sorry for him? What if Nate doesn't wake up? What then? Will you still expect me to feel sorry for him?"

"How many times do I have to tell you," Tommy snapped. "Elliot didn't do this!"

"He's right." The softly spoken words were louder than all of the yelling and shouting between Tommy and Joe. Tommy swung around to see Nate's eyes on him. "Elliot didn't hurt me."

"Nate, baby," Joe crooned as he raced over to kneel next to the couch, his hands running over Nate's body. "Are you sure you're okay? What happened? I was so scared when you passed out. I didn't know if you were going to wake up."

"I'm fine, sheriff," Nate said as he cupped the side of Joe's face. "I just had a little overload."

"Overload? What in the hell are you talking about? You told us not to touch Elliot and then you passed out. You were having seizures, Nate."

"I never told you not to touch Elliot." Nate frowned and glanced around then he sat up and looked some more. "Where is Elliot?"

“Your mate had him locked up in the pantry.” Tommy said with a distinct curtness. He crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Joe. He was getting really tired of people picking on his mate.

“Joseph!” Nate sat up and swung his legs over the side of the couch. “I can’t believe you locked Elliot up. How could you do that?”

“Nate, you passed out. You were having seizures. What did you expect me to do?”

“I expected you to treat him civilly until you knew exactly what was happening.” Nate shook his head. “What is wrong with you, Joe? You’ve never jumped to conclusions before without having hard evidence. This isn’t like you.”

“Nate—”

“Stop, please.” Tommy stepped forward and held up his hand to stop the argument he could see coming between Joe and Nate. “All that matters is that Nate is okay. Joe can rest easy now and I can get go get my mate. Agreed?”

Joe’s face flushed but he nodded. “Yes, go get Elliot and bring him back in here. Maybe between him and Nate we can figure out what in the hell happened.”

Tommy couldn’t run to the kitchen fast enough. He unlocked the pantry door and flung the door open, ready to take his mate into his arms. The hairs on Tommy’s arms stood up when he heard a low growl came from the darkness. Tommy froze.

“Elliot?” he whispered.

The growl sounded again.

Tommy reached over and flicked on the light switch, blinking for a moment when the room was suddenly lit up. When his vision cleared, the air in Tommy’s lungs rushed out as his body stiffened in shock.

Crouched on the floor in the far corner of the room was a pale white wolf where Elliot should have been. The wolf’s ears were flattened back against its head, his teeth bared as a low, threatening rumble filled the room.

“Elliot?” His hoarse whisper echoed around the room. Tommy started to take another step into the pantry but stopped when the wolf let out another low growl. “Elliot, is that you?”

The wolf suddenly jumped forward and snapped its teeth at Tommy, snarling and growling. Tommy jumped back and slammed the door closed. He could feel the wolf clawing and pushing at the door as he leaned back against it and reached back with his hand to throw the lock.

Tommy took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. He had no idea what the hell was going on but he knew it had something to do with what happened to Nate. He pushed away from the pantry door and walked back into the living room. Nate was sitting on the couch next to Joe, Daniel and James sitting a few feet away.

“I think we have a problem.”

“A problem?” Daniel asked. “What sort of problem?”

Tommy swallowed hard. “Either I’ve lost my mind or my very human mate just shifted into a wolf.”

Tommy expected the astonished stares he received from Joe, James, and his father. He didn’t expect Nate to roll his eyes, jump up, and stalk past him. Tommy spun around to run after Nate just as Joe shot past him. They both reached the kitchen just as Nate opened the pantry door.

“Nate, no!” Joe shouted but it was too late.

The white wolf crashed through the doorway, slamming into Nate. A loud yelp filled the air as Nate fell to the floor, the white wolf standing over the top of him. Nate looked stunned. His mouth was open, his hands clenched into fists at his chest as he stared up at the wolf standing over the top of him.

“Nate, don’t move a muscle,” Joe murmured barely above a whisper.

“Not planning on it.”

“Tommy, can’t you do anything?”

Tommy stepped closer to the wolf, keeping his movements slow and easy. He held his hands out in a submissive gesture, hoping his mate was somewhere inside of the angry wolf before him.

“Elliot, honey, you need to let Nate go.”

Tommy didn’t like the glint he could see in the wolf’s dark blue eyes. He didn’t think it would bode well for him. He was even more positive when another low rumble filled the room as the wolf growled again.

“Tommy,” Joe hissed, “do something!”

Tommy turned to glare at his brother. “I’m trying.”

“Well, try faster. He’s got my mate.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Tommy snapped. “Don’t forget that Elliot is my mate.”

“Well, your mate is pinning my mate to the floor.”

“Do you think the two of you could stop arguing long enough to get this wolf off of me before he fucking eats me?”

Tommy blinked and turned to stare back at Nate. Nate was glaring. The wolf was glaring. Tommy’s feigned calm snapped. “Elliot, get the hell off of Nate before you scare the shit out of him anymore than you already have.”

Tommy almost fell over in shock when the wolf did exactly what he said and walked over to sit on the floor next to him. His legs felt shaky and he wasn’t sure he would be able to stay standing. Tommy edged his way over to one of the kitchen chairs and sat down. The wolf followed.

Nate moved slowly, sitting up then scooting across the floor until he reached Joe’s arms. Joe wasted no time. He swept Nate up into his arms and carried him out of the room. Tommy looked down at the wolf sitting on the floor next to him and took a deep breath. He cautiously reached down and stroked his fingers over the wolf’s soft fur.

“What in the hell are we going to do now, pretty baby?”

* * * *

“Thomas.”

“Hey, Dad,” Tommy replied without lifting his head. He was pretty sure he knew what his father was going to say before he said it. He’d been sitting here for the last ten minutes trying to figure out what to do with Elliot now that the man had turned into a wolf. He didn’t want to hear his father’s opinion. He was pretty sure he wouldn’t like it.

“Your mother is here and she would like to meet Elliot.”

Tommy looked up at his father in surprise. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea, Dad. Elliot doesn’t seem to be in any big hurry to shift back into human form.” He gestured to the wolf curled at his feet.

“Will he listen to you?”

“I don’t know, Dad. He listened to me when I told him to get off of Nate, but beyond that...” Tommy shrugged. “I just don’t know.”

“Well, he hasn’t hurt anyone so I suppose that’s something.”

Daniel started to walk into the kitchen when the wolf suddenly lunged to his feet and bared his teeth, growling at him as he stepped in front of Tommy. Daniel quickly backed up until he once again stood in the doorway, shaking his head. The moment Daniel was back in the doorway, the wolf settled back down, sitting at Tommy’s feet.

“No, I’m thinking you might be right. Maybe now isn’t the time for your mother to meet Elliot.”

“How can he be a wolf, Dad?” Tommy looked up at his father, desperately wanting answers. “Shouldn’t I have smelled it on him?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Just because Elliot can shift doesn’t mean you would automatically scent the wolf in him, especially if it was suppressed.”

“Suppressed?”

“Most wolves shift when they hit puberty. If Elliot never shifted before then, his wolf could have been suppressed. It could be due to

that illness he had as a child, the drugs they gave him, or even because his wolf knew it wasn't safe to shift."

"So, why now? Why did Elliot shift now?"

"I can't answer that, Thomas. I wish I could."

"I think I can."

Tommy's eyes widened when he saw Nate standing just beyond his father. Joe hovered behind him, looking pissed off as all hell. "Nate? Do you know something?"

Nate squeezed into the doorway beside Daniel and frowned when he saw the wolf curled up at Tommy's feet. "He is a pretty wolf, isn't he? I don't think I've ever seen a pure white one before."

Tommy stared down at Elliot, the fact that he was a white wolf just now filtering into his confused brain. He reached down and brushed his fingers through the soft hair at the wolf's neck. "Yeah, he is a pretty wolf."

"When Elliot touched me in the living room earlier, I felt him." Nate's face took on a pained look, a muscle quivered in his tense jaw. "There was so much darkness. It was unlike anything I had ever felt before."

"Are you saying Elliot's evil?"

"Oh no, Elliot's spirit is pure. His soul shines brighter than any soul I have ever seen. But there's a horrible darkness that surrounds him." Nate inhaled sharply then smiled weakly. "But the darkness wasn't touching him."

"That's what you meant?" Daniel asked. "You kept saying no touching."

"No, I said it wasn't touching Elliot, the darkness wasn't touching him."

Daniel groaned and dragged his hand down his face. "Hell, Nate, we thought you were telling us not to touch Elliot."

"Now do you believe me?" Tommy snapped. "I've been telling you from the very beginning that Elliot wouldn't hurt anyone."

"He attacked Nate!" Joe snapped right back.

“He didn’t attack me, Joe. He was just trying to get out of the pantry that you had him locked up in. He never hurt me.”

“Well, it sure as shit looked like he wanted to,” Joe grumbled.

“Joe, I love you to death, but you really need to get over this thing with Elliot. He’s not going to hurt anyone.”

“How can you be so sure, Nate?” Joe asked. “He’s in wolf form, a wolf that very obviously doesn’t answer to Dad. That gives him lone wolf status in this valley.”

Tommy stiffened at his brother’s words then quickly continued to stroke his fingers over Elliot’s fur when the wolf let out a low snarl. The rumble stopped as soon as he started petting Elliot again.

Joe’s words terrified Tommy. A lone wolf in another pack’s territory could be hunted down and killed. He looked up at his father only to find the man watching him and Elliot with an intense stare.

“Dad?”

“As long as you can keep him under control, and until we figure out what is going on, I’ll hold off on denoting him as a lone wolf, but I expect you to keep him in line, Thomas. If he goes after anyone, I’m holding you responsible.”

Tommy nodded, relief flowing through him. For now, Elliot was safe. Assuming Tommy could keep him in line. Elliot didn’t seem to want to go after anyone as long as they stayed away. The moment someone stepped closer, Elliot’s body tensed and he gave a threatening growl.

“I think we’re safe as long as no one comes too close.”

“He’s protecting you,” Nate said as he leaned back in Joe’s arms. “You’re Elliot’s mate, even the wolf knows that. He sees everyone else as a threat to you and he’s letting us all know to stay away.”

“We haven’t even completed the mating yet,” Tommy said. “How can he know we’re mates?”

“How did you know?” Nate countered.

Tommy felt his face flush as he remembered the moment he knew Elliot was his mate. “Yeah, okay, I get what you’re saying.”

"If your face is anything to go by," Joe said, "I'd be interested in hearing how you knew Elliot was your mate."

Tommy groaned. "Carl was making remarks about Elliot and it made me want to pound him into the ground."

Joe grinned. "So, basically, you wanted to protect him."

"Yeah."

Joe chuckled as he hugged Nate closer to his chest. "Sounds about right to me."

Tommy opened his mouth to reply to his brother when he felt Elliot stiffen beneath his fingers. He cocked his head to one side, listening. Tommy heard a car stop, the engine going quiet and then a door slammed close. A moment later, there was a knock at the front door.

"That's probably Ben or Reece," Joe said as he nodded toward the living room. "I told you that they were on their way here."

"Daniel, the boys are here."

Tommy recognized his mother's voice and suddenly felt a pang of longing. Maryann Nash had always been able to make her children feel better with a simple look or gesture. Tommy suddenly felt the need for one of her special Mom hugs.

Elliot was his mate, whether in wolf form or human, but this situation was getting stranger by the minute. Tommy didn't know if his family would accept Elliot. He didn't know if his mate would ever turn back to human. And he didn't know if Elliot would leave if he did. He basically didn't know anything at this point beyond the fact that the entire situation was totally fucked up.

"Daniel, did you hear me?"

Tommy looked up when he heard his mother's voice much closer than it was moments ago. Maryann Nash was standing directly behind his father. Tommy sank his fingers into Elliot's fur, ready to pull the wolf back if he made a threatening move towards his mother.

"Thomas, is this him?" Maryann asked as she pointed to the wolf at Tommy's feet. "Is this your mate?"

“Hey, Mom.” Tommy couldn’t even voice the relief he felt at seeing his mother’s smiling face. She always made things better. But Tommy’s relief quickly dwindled away when Maryann started to walk past his father, reaching out for Elliot. “Mom, no, stay back.”

“Maryann!” Daniel snapped.

“Mom, stop,” Joe shouted, “we don’t know if Elliot’s dangerous or not.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Maryann waved her hand in a dismissive gesture as she walked across the room. “He’s Tommy’s mate. He wouldn’t hurt me.”

Tommy held his breath as he watched his mother walk over and squat down in front of Elliot. He tightened his hold on Elliot’s fur. Tommy just didn’t know if he was trying to defend his mother or his mate.

“Hello, Elliot,” she said softly. “I’m Maryann Nash, Tommy’s mother.”

Much to Tommy’s shock and surprise, and he guessed everyone else’s in the room from the way they all remained eerily silent, Elliot leaned up and sniffed Maryann then licked a long line across her cheek before rolling over onto his back, exposing his belly to Maryann.

Tommy inhaled softly and looked over at his father, incredulously. Rolling over and showing your underbelly was a sign of submission in the wolf world. Did Elliot’s wolf understand that or was he showing his submission to Maryann?

Maryann’s soft laughter filled the large kitchen, brightening it somehow. The tension that had filled the room for what seemed like forever started to lessen. Tommy could see smiles start to break out over the faces of those around him. His mother always had that effect on people. She made a perfect mate of an alpha wolf.

“Well, aren’t you just the sweetest thing,” Maryann said as she pet Elliot’s tummy. Everything seemed to be going fine, the relief in the room almost palatable, until Ben stepped into the kitchen.

Elliot stiffened and rolled over so fast that Tommy barely had time to reach over and catch his mother, preventing her from falling to the floor. Elliot's claws scraped across the floor as he rushed over to stand between Tommy and Maryann, and the new threat that came into the room.

"Elliot, no!" Tommy sank his fingers into Elliot's fur and tried to pull him back.

"Thomas, you'd better control him," Daniel snapped.

"What in the hell do you think I'm trying to do?" Tommy wrapped his arms around Elliot's neck and pulled until the wolf relented and stepped back into the apex of Tommy's thighs. He was still snarling, but it had lessened to a low rumble.

"Um, did I miss something?" Ben asked from his position across the room.

"This is Elliot, my mate."

"And he wants to tear my head off because?"

"He doesn't know you."

"That doesn't explain why he tries to go after everyone else, Thomas," Daniel added. "With the exception of your mother, and maybe Nate, Elliot has tried to attack everyone else in this room."

"Actually," Nate said, "that right there might explain it."

"Would you care to explain that statement, babe?" Joe asked. "None of us have made a single threatening move towards Elliot and yet he continues to growl at us if we step anywhere close to him or Tommy."

"And every single one of you that he goes after have accused Elliot of being trouble or a problem. You won't accept Elliot's right to be with Tommy."

Tommy felt his mouth drop open as he looked across the room at Nate. The man was absolutely correct. Elliot wasn't going after Nate or his mother because they accepted him as Tommy's mate. Joe and Daniel didn't.

“You won’t accept my mating of Elliot,” Tommy whispered in wonder. “That’s why he keeps trying to attack you. You’re threatening our bond.”

“I think it’s more than that, Tommy,” Nate said as he pushed away from Joe. “Elliot, in human form, didn’t fully accept the mating either. In wolf form, he’s attacking anyone he sees as a threat to you and him being together.”

“I just said that, Nate,” Tommy insisted.

Nate jerked away from Joe when the man tried to hold him back then walked across the room to kneel down in front of the white wolf. Elliot didn’t growl or snarl. He didn’t even bare his teeth, just cocked his head to one side, his ears perking up as if confused.

Nate moved slowly, reaching out to touch Elliot. “Hey, Elliot, I just want to feel you, okay? I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Nate,” Joe whispered harshly.

Tommy could understand his brother’s concern, considering Elliot’s actions to date, but he was pretty sure Elliot wasn’t going to make a move towards Nate when he just sat there. Nate ignored Joe and stroked his hands through Elliot’s fur, sinking them in deep as he closed his eyes.

Tommy tensed when Nate inhaled sharply. His eyes were filled with worry when he opened them. “What?”

Nate shook his head. “Elliot’s not here.”

“What do you mean he’s not here?” Tommy snapped.

“I can’t feel him. Elliot’s human side is gone.”

Chapter 8

Tommy felt heavy breathing on his face before he opened his eyes. Dark blue eyes stared back at him from a white-furred wolf face. The stare was intense, searching in a way, as if the wolf needed to know something. Tommy just didn't know what.

He reached over and sank his fingers into the fur around Elliot's neck and breathed deeply. "Hey, pretty baby, did you sleep okay?" Tommy asked the question even though he didn't expect an answer.

The wolf just continued to stare at him and Tommy's heart felt like it was going to tear in two. This was his mate, for better or worse. As happy as he was at finding Elliot, the thought of never being with the gorgeous little man again made Tommy want to rant at the world at large.

This wasn't the way a mating was supposed to go. They were supposed to have forever together, to build a life together, both in human form and wolf form. He wasn't supposed to spend the rest of his life with just the wolf.

"Even like this, I can't give you up," Tommy whispered as he stroked his fingers through Elliot's soft fur. His heart cried out for the human side of Elliot, but gloried in the fact that he still had the wolf side of his mate. "I just wish you'd come back to me."

The wolf whimpered. Tommy chuckled when Elliot leaned forward and swiped a long wet tongue across his cheek. He buried his face in Elliot's fur, inhaling the sweet scent that was unique to his mate no matter what form he was in.

"Where are you, Elliot? Where did you go?"

Tommy felt like crying. He squeezed his eyes shut to keep his tears at bay. Even after laying there staring at the wolf that was his mate for most of the night, Tommy was still reeling from Nate's announcement that Elliot was gone. Tommy just couldn't understand how that happened. It didn't make sense.

None of this made sense.

Elliot wasn't even supposed to be able to shift. He was human, and yet there he lay, white fur and teeth, just staring at Tommy with his deep blue eyes. Tommy just didn't understand how it could have happened or how he could have missed it. His mate was a wolf.

"Thomas?"

Tommy lifted his head and looked toward the bedroom door when he heard his mother's voice and a soft knock. Elliot growled. Tommy patted him gently and sat up. "It's just Mom, Elliot."

"Thomas?" his mother called again. "Are you awake?"

Tommy chuckled. It wouldn't have mattered if he had been awake or not. Once his mother knocked on the door, he was up. "I'm up, Mom," Tommy called out. He swung his legs over the side of the bed just as the door opened and his mother walked in.

"Good morning," Maryann said. Her eyes went from Tommy to Elliot then back. "How are you?"

Tommy shrugged.

Maryann clasped her hands together as she looked back over at Elliot. "And how is your mate today?"

"Missing." Tommy snorted.

"I'm not sure I believe that, Thomas."

"Meaning what?"

"Elliot couldn't have just left, Thomas." Maryann waved her hand at Elliot. "He has to be in there somewhere."

"Nate said he was gone."

"Nate could be wrong, you know." Maryann walked over and sat on the side of the bed next to Tommy. Elliot crawled over and butted

at her hand as if asking for a pet, making Maryann laugh. “No, he’s in here somewhere, Thomas. You just need to find him.”

“How, Mom?” Tommy grimaced. “I don’t even know where he’s gone.”

“Then it’s up to you to find him, isn’t it?”

Tommy gaped at his mother. His mind reeled with confusion. How was he supposed to find Elliot when he didn’t even know how to look for him? He knew, logically, that the wolf and the human sides coexisted with each other. But what happened when one side went away?

Tommy had heard stories when he was growing up of wolves that buried their human side when great tragedy struck. The loss of a mate, the death of a child, even the aftermath of a battle, all of these things could be attributed to the stories he’d heard. Tommy just didn’t understand how any of these events pertained to Elliot.

“Any suggestions, Mom?”

“Well, you could start by getting your mate some breakfast,” Maryann said as she stood to her feet and walked to the door. She paused and glanced over her shoulder, a smile on her face. “I imagine he’s pretty hungry right about now. You both missed dinner last night.”

Tommy nodded. His Mom was right. After hearing Nate’s news, Tommy just wanted to get away from everyone and think. Taking Elliot with him to the guest room seemed like the only thing to do under the circumstances. Leaving him with anyone else wasn’t an option.

For better or worse, human or wolf, Elliot was still Tommy’s mate, and he’d do anything to protect him. Tommy reached back and sank his fingers into Elliot’s fur again, needing the connection to his mate.

“We’ll be right down, Mom.”

“Breakfast should be on the table by the time you get there. Nate’s making French toast.”

Tommy waited until the door shut behind his mother before standing up and walking into the bathroom. He used the facilities then went to wash his face. Tommy was staring at himself in the mirror, noting the dark circles under his eyes when he heard click of claws on the floor. He looked down to see Elliot walking into the bathroom.

“Guess you need to go to, huh?”

Elliot’s ear perked as he tilted his head.

“Yeah, yeah, come on, I’ll take you outside.”

Much to Tommy’s surprise, Elliot let out a small yip and went to the bedroom door. He paused and looked over his shoulder as if to ask what was taking Tommy so long. Tommy grabbed his shirt and pulled it on as he walked to the door and opened it.

Tommy followed Elliot down the hallway, chuckling to himself every time Elliot stopped and waited for him to catch up. The wolf seemed to be in a hurry to get downstairs, but he wouldn’t leave Tommy behind.

Tommy followed Elliot down the stairs and through the kitchen to the backdoor, waving at the confused looks he passed along the way. He let Elliot outside into the backyard and walked out to lean against the side of the house while Elliot did his business.

As he watched his mate sniff around the bushes in the backyard, Tommy had to wonder if this was a picture of what his future would be like. Was he destined to walk his wolf every morning for the rest of his life, or would he be able to find his mate and bring him back from wherever he went?

Tommy tensed when Elliot suddenly growled and bounded across the yard. For a moment, he was afraid his father or brother had come out of the house and Elliot was going after them. Then he heard a car pull into the driveway.

Elliot was growling and snarling at the back gate, his claws digging into the dirt. The fur on his back stood straight up. Tommy ran over and grabbed at Elliot, pulling him away from the gate.

Once he pushed Elliot back, Tommy looked over the top of the wooden gate. He almost growled himself when he spotted Carl walking up the path from the side of the driveway to the front door. This was not someone he wanted to deal with at this particular moment, if ever.

When Elliot started growling again, pushing his way between Tommy and the gate, Tommy leaned down and wrapped his arms around the wolf's neck. "Elliot," he whispered, "you need to be quiet, pretty baby. We can't let Carl see you right now, not like this."

Elliot growled again, but it was lower this time, coming more from his chest than his throat. Tommy kept his hand clenched in Elliot's fur as he stood to his feet, tugging gently. "Come on, Elliot, let's get you into the house."

Tommy was surprised by the way that Elliot seemed to understand him, hurrying along beside him as they walked back into the house. They stepped inside and closed the door just as a knock could be heard coming from the front of the house.

"It's Carl, the guy who tried to have me arrested for accosting him at the bar last night when I met Elliot," Tommy stated when Joe frowned and stood to his feet. "He can't see Elliot, not like this."

"No, that wouldn't be a good idea. You all stay in here. I'll go see what he wants." Joe started for the kitchen doorway when Nate jumped up and hurried after him. Joe stopped and swung around, grabbing Nate's arms. "No, baby, you need to stay in here with Tommy where it's safe. I don't know what to expect from this guy."

"But, Joe—"

"No, Nate," Joe said. "Please, just stay in here where I know you'll be safe."

Nate grumbled and crossed his arms over his chest, glaring up at his mate. "I don't have to like it."

"No." Joe chuckled as he leaned over and kissed Nate's forehead. "You don't have to like it, but you do need to do it. This is one of those safety things that you just have to learn to deal with, baby."

“Fine!”

Tommy’s eyebrows shot up when Nate stomped over to sit back down at the dining table. He looked peeved. And Joe seemed to find it amusing, if the soft chuckle coming from the man was anything to go by. Nate just cocked an eyebrow and somehow, Tommy got the impression Joe might be sleeping on the couch tonight.

Tommy squatted down and looped an arm around Elliot’s neck. Even with his superior hearing, he could only make out the murmur of words coming from the living room. Not knowing what was being said was driving him nuts. He patted Elliot’s side then jumped to his feet.

“Stay here and guard Nate and Mom, Elliot, keep them safe. I’m going to make sure Carl isn’t causing any problems.” Elliot growled. His face looked menacing as if he didn’t like that idea. Tommy held up his hand. “I’ll be right back, promise.”

“Hey wait, you can’t leave me in here,” Nate snapped as he jumped to his feet.

“Elliot, keep them safe,” Tommy said as he backed out of the kitchen. Tommy turned and walked to the entrance to the living room. He pressed himself against the wall and listened for several moments before he figured out that Joe hadn’t let Carl into the house. They were out on the front porch.

Tommy kept to the left side of the room, the side away from the front windows, as he made his way toward the door. He could just make out the shadows of Joe and Carl through the tinted glass on the front door.

“Look, I’m telling you, he did something to Elliot.”

Tommy frowned. This wasn’t good.

“Mr. Douglas, I’m sure that Elliot is fine.”

“You’re just saying that because he’s your brother.”

“No, I’m not,” Joe replied. “I can promise you, as sure as I’m standing here, Tommy would never do anything to hurt Elliot.”

“Then why didn’t Elliot come back to the motel last night?”

"I believe Elliot and Tommy planned to spend the evening together."

"Elliot would have called if he planned to stay the night."

"Maybe, maybe not, but Elliot is a grown man. If he didn't check in with you, that is within his rights."

"Something has happened to him, I know it. It's not like Elliot not to stay in contact. I want to file a missing person's report. I want you to find Elliot."

"Look, Mr. Douglas, Elliot hasn't even been missing for twenty four hours, so by law, I can't file a report. But I will keep an eye for him. The moment I talk to him, I will have him call you. Will that be sufficient?"

"No, damn it!"

Tommy cringed. This wasn't good. Carl was going to cause problems they didn't need right now. If Elliot was in human form, Tommy would have had him just come out and talk to Carl. However, that wasn't an option right now.

"There's nothing more I can do until Elliot's been missing twenty four hours, Mr. Douglas."

"Philip Spencer is going to hear about this and when he does, you're going to wish you were directing traffic in Siberia!"

Tommy heard someone storm off. A moment later, a car started up and spun out of the driveway. When Joe opened the door and walked back, the frown he had on his face told Tommy they were in a lot of shit.

"That didn't go so well, did it?"

"Seriously, Tommy?" Joe snapped and pointed his finger at Tommy. "I told you this guy was going to be trouble. Dad is going to have a fit."

Tommy rolled his eyes and pushed himself away from the wall he'd been leaning back against. "You need to get over this bias you have against Elliot. He didn't do this. He didn't do any of this."

“Carl Douglas is probably on the phone with Elliot’s father as we speak. That man is going to come in here and do everything in his power to destroy our pack. Doesn’t that worry you? Are you so caught up in your little fling that you can’t see what’s happening here?”

Something inside of Tommy snapped. He swung around, grabbed his brother by his throat, and slammed the man into the wall. Leaning real close, Tommy bared his teeth as he glared at Joe.

“Don’t ever refer to my mate as some little fling,” Tommy growled. “Elliot is my mate, for better or for worse. He has as much right to be here as your Nate does, and it’s about damn time you accepted that.”

Tommy slammed Joe into the wall again then let him go, turning away without another word. He stormed back to the kitchen, skidding to a stop when he reached the entrance. He could only stand there and stare in shock. Nate lay on his stomach on the floor, his head resting on his hand as he glared over his shoulder at the wolf sitting on his back.

“Um, Joe, you might want to come see this.” Tommy scooted to one side of the kitchen entrance when he heard his brother come up behind him. He glanced over to see Joe’s mouth hanging open.

“Tommy, what is Elliot doing?”

“I’m going to go out on a limb here and say that Nate tried to leave the kitchen.” Tommy turned to look at Nate when he heard the man snort. “Am I right, Nate?”

Nate tapped his fingers on the floor. “Would you kindly get your mate off my fucking back?” Nate was yelling by the time he was done speaking.

Tommy grinned and squatted down, holding out his hands to his mate. “Come here, pretty baby.”

Elliot hopped up and walked across the floor to sit in front of Tommy. Nate sat up and shot glares of anger at Elliot. Tommy

chuckled and sat down, drawing Elliot into the crook of his legs. He pet Elliot's fur and planted little kisses along the top of his head.

"Is this true, Nate?" Joe asked as he helped Nate to his feet. "Did you try and leave the kitchen after I asked you to stay here?"

"Oh please, like you ever ask anything."

"You did!"

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay." Nate waved his hand, gesturing to Elliot. "And he had to go all wolfy on me."

"You mean he kept you here in the kitchen where you were safe," Tommy said more as a statement instead of a question, "where your mate told you to stay."

Tommy started laughing when Nate rolled his eyes. He stroked his hands through Elliot's fur. "You did good, pretty baby." Elliot huffed softly as if to say he knew he did well. Tommy grinned and continued to rub his hands through Elliot's fur.

"I agree."

Tommy looked up at his brother in stunned amazement. He never thought to hear those words out of his brother's mouth toward his mate. Joe hadn't tried in the least to hide his dislike of Elliot. It was surprising to hear the man give Elliot praise.

Tommy was even more shocked when Joe walked over and squatted down on the floor in front of Elliot, holding out his hand, palm side up. "Thank you, Elliot," Joe said. "Nate is my world, and despite what he likes to believe, there are times he needs to be protected. Thank you for keeping him safe for me."

Tommy froze, his heart in his throat as he waited to see what Elliot would do. Elliot had no reason to accept Joe's words, not after all of the hostility he'd received from Joe. Tommy wouldn't have blamed his mate in the least if Elliot growled or even snapped at Joe.

Still, he fell a little more in love with Elliot when he proved he was the better man by hunkering down on the floor and laying his head on his paws. He didn't exactly accept Joe's words, but he didn't lunge at the man either. That was something.

It was a start.

* * * *

Tommy hurried down the street toward work. He needed to check in at the bar before he lost his job and then maybe ask his boss for some time off. Luckily, the man was pack. Tommy just hoped the boss understood that Tommy needed time with his mate. Being separated right after mating was hard on every mate. Considering their strange situation, it seemed even harder on him and Elliot.

Even leaving Elliot behind at Joe's house was hard for Tommy, but he didn't think it would be a good idea for his mate to be roaming the streets of Wolf Creek until he had a little more control of himself. Or was human again.

Tommy was beginning to wonder if his mate would ever resume his human shape. Elliot seemed perfectly happy remaining in his wolf form. Tommy didn't know if that came from his belief that no one would accept him or because his human side was really gone like Nate said.

And he didn't know what he would do if Elliot decided to remain in wolf form. Tommy knew there had to be a way to bring Elliot's human side back. He felt it deep down in his soul. He and Elliot were meant to be together. Tommy just didn't know how to do it. Still, he refused to give up. He'd find a way to communicate with Elliot and bring him back if it was the last thing he did.

Feeling more determined, Tommy quickened his steps. He wanted to talk to his boss then get back to Elliot as fast as he could. He was almost jogging by the time he reached the bar and walked inside. The place was pretty empty, just a few customers here and there. Tommy knew it wouldn't start getting crowded until later in the evening.

He spotted his boss, Bishop Kane, standing behind the bar cleaning glasses. He stood talking with another man that Tommy

vaguely remembered as being one of Nate's friends. Bishop looked up and arched an eyebrow as Tommy walked up.

"Hey, Bishop, do you have a minute?"

"I do."

Tommy glanced at the man sitting at the bar when Bishop made no move to step away. "In private?" he asked as he looked back at his boss. "It's important."

"You're not quitting on me, are you?"

"No, no, not at all, I love working here. I just need a little time off, a few days, maybe a week."

"A few days, huh?"

Tommy couldn't keep his grin off his face. "I met someone and we...uh...need a little time together."

"You found your mate?"

Tommy's eyebrows shot up when the man on the barstool spoke. He looked over at him cautiously. "Uh, you could say that."

"Well, did you or didn't you?" Bishop snapped. "Make up your mind, Tommy."

"Bishop!"

Bishop rolled his eyes as he balled up the towel in his hand and tossed it down on the bar top. "Oh please, Levi is a friend of Nate's. He knows all about us. There's no reason you can't speak in front of him."

"You're Levi?"

When Tommy heard about the man that had helped Keeley and Reece when they were attacked by the vampire princess, Adrianna, somehow he expected the man to look more like Nate and Keeley, both of whom were smaller men. He hadn't expected Levi to be almost as large as him.

The man grinned and held out a hand. "I see my reputation precedes me."

"Keeley may have mentioned you," Tommy said as he shook the man's hand. "It's nice to finally put a face with the name."

“Same here,” Levi said. “Nate has told me a lot about you, too.”

“So, did you or didn’t you find your mate?”

Tommy glanced back at Bishop and nodded. “Yeah, I found him, but we’re having some issues and I need some time to work them all out.”

“Issues?” Bishop frowned. “He accepts you, doesn’t he?”

“Yes, he accepts me, well, at least his wolf does.”

“His wolf?”

“I thought Elliot was human, but it turns out I was wrong. He can shift like we can.”

“Lucky bastard.” Bishop grinned and reached over the bar top to slap Tommy on the arm. “I couldn’t be happier for you.”

“I’m pretty happy about it, too, except Elliot has shifted into his wolf form and refuses to shift back. Nate thinks that the wolf and human sides have separated and that Elliot is gone.”

“Gone?”

Tommy nodded. “I still think Elliot is in there somewhere and I refuse to give up on him. Something is keeping him from shifting back. I just have to figure out what it is and fix it.”

“Have you thought about dream walking with him?”

“Dream what?” Confusion filled Tommy as he turned to look at Levi.

“Dream walking.”

“What the hell is that?”

“If what you say is true, and you believe your Elliot is still inside the wolf, you can dream walk and try to contact him that way.” Levi waved his hand in a rolling gesture. “You know, walk through his dreams?”

“You can do that?”

“Well.” Levi shrugged. “Not me personally, but there are a few of us that can. My specialty lies in other areas.”

“Like teleportation or something, right?”

Levi chuckled. “Something like that.”

“So, who can help me dream walk with Elliot?”

“Your best bet would be Roane. There are a couple of others that can dream walk, but Roane’s the best.”

“Roane?” Tommy frowned. “I don’t believe I’ve met him yet.”

“Yeah, Roane is kind of a loner. He doesn’t like people very much. But if it’s important enough, I can probably track him down for you.”

“Please.” Tommy swallowed past the lump that formed in his throat at the thought that someone might be able to help him reach Elliot. “I would very much appreciate it. I know there has to be some way to reach Elliot and bring him back.”

“I’ll talk to Roane, see if he’s willing to help.”

“Do you think he might refuse?”

“You can never tell with Roane.” Levi shrugged. “Like I said, he doesn’t like people much. It comes from his time with the Teacher. It was pretty hard on him and he prefers to stay away from people as much as possible.”

“I don’t want to do anything that might upset the guy.”

Levi chuckled. “And that right there might get you the help you need.”

Tommy was confused but decided not to question Levi too much. He just needed someone that could help him get through to Elliot and give him back his mate. He wasn’t too particular how it happened.

“Okay, well, I’d really appreciate any help you or Roane could give me. We’re staying at Nate’s house at the moment so you can reach us there if you find your friend.”

“Sounds good.”

Tommy nodded, although he wasn’t sure he was agreeing to anything exactly. More like nodding because that seemed like the thing to do. He needed to get home, not only to see Elliot but to talk to Nate about his friend Roane. Tommy needed to make sure that the man was on the up and up. He needed to know that Nate trusted Roane.

“So, Bishop...”

Bishop rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, you can have the week off, but I expect to meet this mate of yours the minute you get things worked out.”

“It’s a promise.” Tommy grinned. “I need to go, need to get back to Elliot. In his present state he seems to only listen to me and I don’t want him hurting anyone.” He glanced at Levi again. “You know where you can find us.”

Levi nodded.

Tommy said his goodbyes and headed for the door. He tried to act casual as he hurried. He tried to not act like he was walking faster and faster, but the sudden need he felt to get back to Elliot was overwhelming.

Strange and disturbing thoughts began to race through Tommy’s mind. His head swirled with confusion as a cold sweat broke out over his skin. Tommy clenched his fists when he felt his claws trying to extend.

Something was seriously wrong and Tommy knew his mate was involved somehow. As they hadn’t completed the mating all of the way, Tommy didn’t know how he knew Elliot was in trouble, but he did.

Tommy pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and flipped it open, dialing Nate and Joe’s house. His heart pounded faster in his chest as he waited for someone, anyone, to pick up. He needed to know if Elliot was safe more than he needed his next breath.

If he wasn’t in the middle of town, he would have shifted and ran to Nate and Joe’s house as fast as he could. It just wasn’t possible. Most of the citizens of Wolf Creek knew of the pack, but there were some that did not. Secrecy was what kept them alive and safe.

“Nate?” Tommy asked the moment someone picked up and said hello.

“Tommy?”

“Is everything okay there?”

"Funny you should ask." Nate laughed nervously.

"Elliot?"

"Yeah, um, here, you better talk to your brother."

Tommy felt like his heart was going to jump right out of his chest as he waited for Joe to come on the line. Fear and anger at himself for leaving Elliot unprotected began to knot inside him. If something happened to Elliot while he was gone, Tommy would never forgive himself.

"Tommy?"

"Joe, what's wrong? What happened to Elliot?"

"He's gone, bro."

"Gone?" Tommy gasped, realizing a shiver of panic. "What do you mean gone?"

"He's not here. He was in the kitchen lying down and Nate went to the bathroom. When he came back, the backdoor was open and Elliot was gone."

"Did someone take him?"

"Well, that's always a possibility, but I don't think so."

Tommy frowned at the hesitation he could hear in Joe's voice. "What aren't you telling me?"

"The backdoor was smashed from the inside, Tommy. I think Elliot left on his own."

In his heart, Tommy had always been afraid that Elliot would leave. Finding a mate that was so perfectly matched for him just seemed too good to be true. Just thinking of Elliot leaving nearly shattered something inside of Tommy.

"Okay, I'll be back to the house as soon as I can."

"Tommy, he could have just needed to go out for a run. Being a wolf seems to be kind of new for Elliot."

Tommy swallowed with difficulty and found his voice. "Yeah, maybe. Look, I'll be home in a few minutes and we can figure this out."

“Tommy, don’t see this as more than it is. Elliot could have simply gone for a run or maybe he went searching for you. He doesn’t seem to want to be separated from you. It could be as simple as that.”

“That’s funny coming from you.” Tommy chuckled anxiously. “You haven’t wanted him here from the very beginning and now you’re telling me that I shouldn’t worry when he’s missing. That’s rich, Joe.”

“Look, Tommy, I may have been wrong about Elliot. I just—”

“May have been wrong?” Tommy snapped.

“Okay, I was wrong. Happy?”

“Not really. It would have been nice for you to accept my mate from the very beginning instead of treating him like the spawn of hell. Elliot has no control over who his father is, and he shouldn’t be judged by the things his father does. He should be judged by his own actions.”

“You’re right, Tommy.”

“Damn straight!”

Joe sighed deeply. “I promise to apologize to Elliot the moment we find him, but first we need to find him.”

“Yeah.” To Tommy’s dismay, his voice broke slightly when he spoke. He took a deep breath and tried to calm his raging emotions. “I’ll start looking this way as I head home. You start there and we can meet in the middle.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Okay.” Tommy flipped the phone closed and shoved it back into his pocket. A cold knot formed in his stomach as he thought of Elliot being out in the world all alone. It didn’t make sense because Elliot had been on his own for a number of years, but Tommy’s feelings for the man after two days didn’t make sense either.

Tommy clenched his hands as another wave of panic rolled through him. His skin prickled, a sure warning that someone was watching him and Tommy didn’t think it was Elliot. He didn’t get a

good vibe like he did when Elliot looked at him. This felt cold, creepy.

Tommy slowed his walking and tried to shut out everything around him. He honed in on the feeling he got, sniffing the air until he found the scent he was looking for. It smelled like rotten flesh, a sure sign of something bad, usually someone evil.

Tommy immediately thought of Carl. He knew he had a natural hatred of the man because of the way he treated Elliot but there was something more to Carl than just that. Carl seemed to have an unnatural fascination with Elliot that caused Tommy to be very concerned.

The second Tommy figured out where the scent of rotting flesh was coming from, he changed directions, heading toward it. It was a foolish move, Tommy knew that, but he wasn't going to let anyone harm his mate.

Tommy followed the nauseous scent to an alley between a general store and a café. He tried to look casual as he pulled out his cell phone and flipped it open. He didn't dial, just held the phone to his ear and paused in the entrance of the alleyway.

Tommy started talking as if there really were someone on the phone then nonchalantly glanced around him. His enhanced senses gave him better eyesight, better hearing, and a better sense of smell.

He was grateful for every one of his senses when he spotted Carl hiding behind a dumpster half way down the alley, and he wasn't alone. Tommy could sense two more men with him. He figured the odds were pretty much even.

Tommy snapped his phone closed and shoved it back into his pocket. He took a deep breath then turned and walked into the alley. Someone was going to walk out of this alley alive and someone wasn't. Tommy was betting it wasn't going to be Carl.

"Hello, Carl. I hear you may have been looking for me."

Chapter 9

The white wolf's mind was working overtime as he ran through the streets of Wolf Creek, dodging cars driving down the streets and people walking down the sidewalks. The fear gripping him was almost debilitating, and if his need to get to his mate wasn't so strong, the wolf would have collapsed right there in the middle of the street.

The need to reach his mate started out as a small trickle, almost a whisper across his mind. It grew stronger with each passing moment that the man was gone until the wolf couldn't ignore it anymore and he had to find his mate and protect him.

The wolf didn't know what was happening to his mate but he knew it wasn't good. The feelings flowing through him made his hackles stand up. They made him want to growl and howl and rip something apart with his bare teeth.

His paws flew across the pavement as he ran all out as fast as he could. He breathed in shallow, quick gasps as he ran. The need to reach his mate pounded in his head becoming stronger and stronger until he was almost mindless with panic.

He flew around the corner of a red brick building just in time to see a man hit his mate in the face. The wolf bellowed out his outrage as he watched his mate drop to one knee. Pure, blinding rage filled him until he saw nothing but the overwhelming need to kill.

The wolf charged the man hitting his mate, biting him in the arm. The momentum of his lunge tore the man away from his mate and took him to the ground. The wolf growled and ripped at the arm with his teeth, yanking and pulling. The bitter taste of coppery blood filled his mouth just as the man's agonizing screams filled his ears.

Something close to elation flowed over the wolf at the man's pain. The man attacked that which was most important in the world to the wolf, his mate. The man deserved to die as far as he was concerned.

The wolf wanted to keep on tearing at the man until he stopped breathing. Only by the thinnest of threads did he stop before the man died. Still, he bared his teeth until the man scooted back to lean against the brick wall, his injured arm held limply against his stomach. He didn't look like he would be going anywhere.

Knowing that one threat had been eliminated, the wolf turned to face the others. He spotted a familiar smelling man slinking off down the alley and thought about going after him for about two seconds. The sight of the other man slamming a fist into his mate's face seemed more important. He could get nasty smelling man later.

The wolf raced over to where his mate was fighting with the unknown man and sank his teeth into the man's leg. The man jerked his leg, trying to dislodge the wolf, but he refused to let go, just sinking his teeth in further.

He winced when he felt a blinding pain between his shoulder blades. The grip he had on the man's leg loosened just enough for the man to shake his teeth free. The wolf whimpered when another blinding flash of pain rocked through his side as the man kicked him in the ribs. He felt something snap as he fell to the ground.

He tried to raise his head to see where his mate was, the man's safety more important than the agony filling every nerve in his body. His mate was still fighting for everything he was worth. The wolf tried to regain his feet to help his mate, but the moment he did, his head began to swim and his vision went blurry.

The wolf snarled, not liking the feeling of being out of control. Rage still burned through him, but it was quickly being overcome by the pain racking his body. He could feel a cold, wet substance trickling down his sides from the aching pain between his shoulders and breathing took effort. Each breath was unbearable.

The wolf tried to push the pain to the back of his mind. He had more important things to worry about, like protecting his mate. He shook his head to get rid of the blurred vision then lunged and charged at the guy going after his mate. He wanted blood.

“Elliot! Stop, that’s enough!”

He heard the words, but they sounded far away, almost like someone shouted at him through water. The wolf sent his mate a hostile glare when the man pulled at his fur. He didn’t understand why his mate was trying to pull him away from the one bent on harming them.

“Elliot, stop, he’s done. He’s not going to hurt us anymore.”

The wolf stopped and stared down at the man on the ground. Blood covered most of his features. Deep gashes marred his arms and chest where he had been bitten. He wasn’t moving. He dropped the arm in his mouth and backed away, hunching down to see if the man was going to move again.

“Damn, Elliot, you’re bleeding all over the place.”

Despite the pain that was rocking back into his body, the wolf felt an overwhelming joy when his mate’s hands brushed over his fur. He rolled onto his side and started panting when simple breathing became too much. He wanted to feel more of his mate’s touch.

“Elliot? Baby?”

He could hear the current of panic creeping into his mate’s voice, but the pain in his body was starting to override even his need to protect his mate. It was starting to make his vision blur again and his stomach roll.

He whimpered and licked at the hand that moved along his muzzle, pushing into the gentle touch. He needed to tell his mate that he was okay, that he just needed to rest for awhile and then he’d be back on his feet again. He just needed to close his eyes for a few minutes...that was all...just a few...

* * * *

Tommy swallowed past the lump of fear that lodged in his throat when Elliot's dark blue eyes slowly fell closed. He rubbed his hand over Elliot's muzzle again. "Elliot? Come on, pretty baby, open your eyes. Come on, look at me, please, Elliot."

He could feel tears gathering in the corner of his eyes when Elliot didn't respond to his words. The wolf's chest rose and fell, so Tommy knew he was still alive, but his breathing seemed labored. Tommy remembered one of their attackers kicking Elliot in the side. Maybe more damage had been done than Tommy thought.

Tommy's heart sank when he spotted the knife sticking out from between Elliot's shoulder blades. His hand trembled as he reached over and pulled the knife out. Tommy dropped it on the ground then quickly pulled his shirt over his head and pressed against the bleeding wound, trying to stop the flow of blood.

With one hand holding his shirt on the wound, Tommy pulled the cell phone out of his pocket and dialed Joe. He needed help, and in a big way. Not only did he need to get Elliot somewhere safe where he could receive medical attention, there were two very injured men in the alley with them.

"Joe?" Tommy said the moment his brother answered the phone. "I'm in the alley two blocks from the bar, the one between Coffee Time Café and the bookstore. I need help. I was attacked and Elliot came and saved me, but now he's injured and there are two guys here that are also injured and—"

"Whoa, whoa, slow down, brother, and take a deep breath. I'm on my way."

Tommy's grip on the cell phone tightened as he drew in a large breath of air. His nose wrinkled when all he could smell was the coppery scent of blood. Still, it did make him feel better, calmer.

"Okay, I saw Carl and two guys hanging around in the alley. I went to talk to them and they attacked me."

"Wait, I thought you said there were only two guys."

“Carl got away.”

“Shit!”

“I’m telling you, Joe, he was waiting for me.”

“Yeah, I suspect as much. He’s positive you’ve done something to Elliot.”

Tommy looked down at the wolf lying on the ground in front of him. “Well...”

“Yeah, yeah, so, tell me what else happened. How did Elliot get hurt?”

“Carl and these two guys were beating the crap out of me, and Eliot came out of nowhere.” Tommy chuckled nervously. “You should have seen him, Joe. I’ve never seen a wolf move as fast as he did. He just tore right into these guys, no hesitation.”

“He was protecting his mate.”

Tommy found himself grinning as he rubbed his free hand over Elliot’s fur. “Yeah, I guess he was.”

“Okay, I’m right around the corner. I’ve already put in a call to Doc Jones. He’s going to meet us at the house. I called Ben to take these two guys up to the hospital. He can keep an eye on them until we can question them.”

Tommy glanced at the two injured men. He didn’t care that much about their injuries. They did attack him after all. But he did care about what this attack would mean to the pack. “Can you call Dad, too? I think some heavy shit is about to come down on us.”

Tommy cringed when he heard Joe sigh. His father and brother had been trying to tell him since he met Elliot that the man was a danger to the pack. Tommy still didn’t believe that. If everyone would just leave them alone, things would be fine. It was the people meddling in their lives that were a danger.

“Yeah, I’ll give Dad a call.”

“Elliot didn’t do this, Joe.”

“I know, Tommy, but you have to admit things are going to get dicey.”

“Yeah, and I’m sorry for that, but I refuse to give Elliot up.” Tommy looked back down at the wolf and swallowed hard when he felt overcome by the emotions swamping him. “He’s my mate, Joe.”

“I hear you, Tommy.”

“Do you?” Tommy wanted to scream, but he knew that wouldn’t help the situation at all. He just couldn’t understand why everyone was putting up so many road blocks to him being with Elliot. The coming together of mates was supposed to be a sacred thing, not so fucked up. “Do you really?”

“I do, Tommy,” Joe replied, his voice much quieter. “And I’ll do whatever I can to help you, but I need you to understand how much danger we’re in. I know Elliot is your mate, and I hope you have many happy years together. But you need to help me keep the pack safe.”

“I won’t give Elliot up, and if we have to, we’ll go somewhere else.”

“You’re safer here.”

“Are we? You and Dad have both already tried to make me give Elliot up. How is that safe?”

“We were wrong, Tommy, okay?” Joe shouted. “We fucked up and didn’t respect the bond that you have with Elliot. I fully admit that. But you have a part in this too, Tommy. You refuse to see how dangerous this situation is.”

Tommy glanced at the two bloody men lying on the ground several feet from him then back to his own mate. “No, I know how dangerous this is, Joe. My mate is lying here, bleeding all over the place, possibly dying. I don’t think it gets more dangerous than that.”

Joe didn’t answer, but Tommy heard a car screech to a stop. He looked to the entrance of the alleyway and saw Joe climb out of his SUV. Before he had even closed the door and walked around to the front of his vehicle, Daniel and Ben walked around the corner. All three men hurried down the alley.

Tommy watched his father squat down next to Elliot and run his hands over the wolf's bloody fur. His face was morose, the corner of his lips pulled down in a deep frown. Tommy could feel the vibes of anger coming off his father and swallowed.

"I'm sorry, Dad," he said quietly, his fingers clenching in Elliot's fur.

Daniel looked up, surprise making his eyebrows shoot up. "I know, son, but let's not worry about that right now. Our first priority needs to be Elliot. We'll deal with this other stuff after we know he's safe."

Tommy nodded. That pretty much summed up where his thoughts were. "If you can get the back hatch, I'm going to put him in Joe's SUV. That way I can climb in with him."

"Can you lift him on your own or do you need help?"

"I can get him." He didn't want anyone else touching his mate.

Tommy carefully slid his hands under Elliot and lifted the wolf into his arms. He grunted a little at his mate's weight when he stood to his feet, then carried Elliot toward the truck.

"Let me get a blanket spread out for him."

Tommy waited for his father to open the back hatch then spread out a blanket before gently lying Elliot down inside the vehicle. He quickly climbed in beside Elliot and lifted the wolf's head onto his lap.

Elliot still hadn't woken up and Tommy was beginning to become very concerned. He didn't know what he would do if Elliot was seriously injured. He'd be lost without Elliot now that he had found him and they hadn't even completed the mating yet.

"Dad, I—" Tommy pressed his lips together and shook his head. He just couldn't imagine life without Elliot, even if they had only known each other for a couple of days. He'd never have another connection with someone like he did Elliot.

"We'll figure this out, Thomas."

Tommy nodded, but he wasn't sure he believed the man. Everything in the world seemed to be conspiring to keep him and Elliot apart, and he just didn't understand that. Mates were supposed to be destined by fate. So, why was fate fucking with them?

Tommy leaned back against the side of the SUV and cradled Elliot's muzzle in his lap. He gently stroked the side of his face as he waited for them to arrive at Joe's house and the doctor. It couldn't happen fast enough for him. He heaved a sigh of relief when he spotted the doc's car sitting in the driveway as they drove up.

"Doc's here, Elliot. He'll make you all better." Tommy knew Elliot couldn't understand him, maybe didn't even hear him, but he had to try. There had to be some way to reach Elliot. Tommy refused to give up. Elliot was just too important.

The moment the hatch opened up, Tommy scooted to the edge and climbed out. He reached back inside and carefully lifted Elliot into his arms. Elliot's chest was still moving so Tommy knew he was alive, but he was worried that the man hadn't opened his eyes, well, the wolf anyway. He would deal with the whole man versus wolf thing after he knew Elliot would live.

The trip inside of the house was quick. Doc Jones was waiting in the kitchen with Nate and Maryann. The small kitchen table had been covered with a blanket and Tommy quickly laid Elliot down on that. He stepped to the side but refused to move away from Elliot even when the doctor arched an eyebrow at him.

"He's my mate. I'm not leaving."

"Just stand out of my way then."

Tommy nodded and stepped to the end of the table near Elliot's back paws. He gently stroked his hand over Elliot's hindquarter as he watched Doc Jones work on his mate. It seemed to take forever. There was so much blood.

By the time the doc had cleaned off the blood, Elliot's injuries became more visible. He had several long scratches down his torso and one deep stab wound between his shoulder blades. It was the

injuries Tommy couldn't see that concerned him. He distinctly remembered one of the men attacking them kicking Elliot in the side.

"Doc, one of the guys that attacked us kicked Elliot in the side several times."

Doc nodded as he felt along Elliot's side. "Yes, I believe he might have a few broken or fractured ribs, nothing that won't heal over time. It's this stab wound between his shoulders that concerns me the most. It's pretty deep."

Tommy winced when the doc probed at the wound with his fingers and a bunch of blood welled up from the injury and dripped down through Elliot's white fur. There was a part of him that was grateful that Elliot was unaware of what was happening right now. The thought of his little mate in pain was unacceptable to Tommy.

"Will he be okay, doc?"

"Well, that's hard to say, Tommy. It would be better if he just shifted. He would heal much faster that way."

"I don't know if he can shift back, doc." Tommy waved one hand at Nate, who stood near the sink. "Nate says Elliot's human side is gone."

Doc Jones frowned and paused to look over at Tommy. "Is that even possible?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure I know anything anymore. Nate says Elliot's human side is gone. If that's true, I..." Tommy shook his head. "I just don't think that's possible. You've never met Elliot, so you wouldn't be able to understand how special he is, how much life is in him. I just don't see him going away and leaving me like that."

"I've never heard of something like this happening, so I couldn't say one way or another." Doc Jones pointed to the gaping wound in Elliot's back. "I do know that if he doesn't shift, he might bleed to death. His wolf form is not strong enough to heal this injury. He needs to shift."

Tommy began to shake as fearful images of life without Elliot began to form in his mind. It just didn't seem possible to just find his

mate and then lose him, all in a matter of hours. He hadn't even been able to complete the mating. Between Joe trying to arrest him, his father interrupting them, and the trip to Joe's house to discuss Elliot's father, there had been too many interruptions and not enough time to complete the mating.

"No," Tommy said as he shook his head, "I refuse to give up on Elliot. I know he's in here somewhere." Tommy suddenly remembered Roane and the dream walking. He snapped his fingers. "And I think I know how to do it."

Tommy pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and dialed the bar where he worked. He tapped his fingers anxiously against the table as he waited for his boss to pick up the phone. "Bishop?"

"Yeah."

"It's Tommy, is Levi still there?"

"Yeah, sure, he's right here."

"I need to talk to him."

Tommy heard a small rustling sound then Levi's slow easy drawl. "Yo."

"Levi, I need your help. Elliot's been hurt and I need to reach him really fast. Doc says if he doesn't shift, he could die. Can you talk to your friend for me? I think I need to do that dream walking thing you told me about."

"Roane? Yes, I suppose I can do that."

"Thanks, that would be great. You can reach me at this number or at Nate's house." Tommy let out a sigh of relief. "And Levi, time is of the essence. Elliot is fading with every passing minute."

"Yeah, I hear you, man. I'll get in touch with Roane and get back to you as soon as I can."

"Thanks, Levi."

Tommy snapped his phone closed and shoved it back in his pocket. He leaned on the counter and tried to calm his racing heart. He hoped that this dream walking thing would help him reach his mate because Tommy was out of ideas.

He finally looked up at the faces watching him. “Levi and Nate have this friend, Roane, who knows how to dream walk. He thinks he might be able to lead me to Elliot’s human side.”

Nate smacked himself in the forehead. “Damn! I should have thought of Roane. That makes perfect sense. Does Levi know where Roane is hiding these days?”

“He says he has a few ideas, but his main concern is getting Roane to help us.”

Nate grimaced. “Yeah, that part might not be so easy.”

“How bad were things for Roane?”

“Worse than mine.”

Tommy’s mouth dropped open. He hadn’t thought it was possible for someone’s experience at the hands of the Teacher to be worse than Nate’s. The man had suffered unimaginable pain and mental torment. Only with Joe’s help, and an abundance of love, had Nate become the joyful man he was today.

“Roane was one of the Teacher’s special projects. He wasn’t even allowed to associate with the rest of us. The Teacher kept him locked up in solitary confinement for—” Nate made a quotation gesture in the air with his fingers— “his own protection.”

Tommy wasn’t surprised in the least when Joe walked up behind Nate and wrapped his arms around the smaller man. Joe was Nate’s rock, everyone knew that. He was also fiercely protective of his mate.

“I doubt I would have even known about him if he hadn’t started visiting me in my dreams.” Nate suddenly chuckled as he kind of looked off into empty space. “In dreamspace, as he calls it, Roane is actually quite the character. He has a wicked sense of humor.”

“Nate, if this is going to be too hard on Roane, we need to find another way. I want Elliot back but not at the expense of another person.” Tommy reached down to grip a small handful of Elliot’s soft fur. “Elliot would never forgive me.”

“I will help.”

Tommy glanced up at the softly spoken words to see a small, thin, brown-haired man standing in the kitchen doorway. Levi stood protectively behind the man, Tommy's mother just beyond Levi.

"Roane?" Tommy asked.

The young man nodded and stepped farther into the room. Nate let out a glad cry and raced over to hug Roane. Joe growled and hurried right after Nate. Tommy chuckled when Nate rolled his eyes and stepped back into Joe's embrace.

"Neanderthal," Nate said.

"And?" Joe chuckled.

"It's good to see you happy, Nate," Roane said.

"It's good to be happy."

"How can I help your friend?"

"Oh." Nate pulled away from Joe to walk over and stand next to Tommy. "This is my brother-in-law, Tommy, and his mate, Elliot."

Roane nodded and stepped closer, but not too close.

"Something happened and Elliot shifted into his wolf form. He won't shift back and the doc thinks he needs to shift to heal properly. We thought you might be able to help us reach Elliot."

"I might, but I can't promise anything."

"Roane, I have to be honest with you," Nate said, "I'm not sure Elliot is still in here."

Tommy's fingers tightened in Elliot's fur. "He's still here," he growled. He flushed when Roane paled and looked over at him. "Sorry, Roane, I didn't mean to sound angry. I'm just tired of people saying Elliot is gone. He's not. He's just having a problem coming home."

Roane seemed to watch him intently for several moments before finally nodding his head. "It's good that you believe that. You'll need that belief if you hope to reach your Elliot."

"Do you really think you can help me reach him?" Tommy had doubts. Hell, he had doubts about all of this psychic crap. If it wasn't for Nate, he would have believed it was all nonsense.

“I can only try.” Roane frowned, the corners of his lips turning down. “How long has he been like this?”

“Since yesterday.”

“Have his responses been usual wolf responses?”

“Uh.” Tommy glanced at Nate, then Joe. He had no idea what Roane meant by that.

“Has he been acting like you would if you were in wolf form?”

“Oh, yeah, for the most part,” Tommy replied. “He knows we’re mates and he’s very protective but he’s also protective of Nate and my mother.”

“Just the three of you? Is that normal?”

“There has been some, uh, issue with the rest of my family accepting our mating. Nate and my mother have readily accepted Elliot. The rest of my family has not. Elliot pretty much doesn’t want anything to do with anyone that hasn’t accepted him.”

“I think I can understand that.” Roane glanced around the room, looking slightly anxious when his gaze fell on the doctor. “I’m going to need a quiet place to work. Is it possible for Elliot to be moved to one of the bedrooms, or will that hurt him too much?”

“If we’re careful, I think he can be moved.”

Tommy wasted no time. He leaned down and scooped Elliot up into his arms and carried him out of the kitchen. He could hear the footsteps of others following behind him. Tommy didn’t care who joined him as long as one of them was Roane.

Tommy carried Elliot up the stairs and down the hallway to the guestroom he used when he stayed over, the same one he and Elliot slept on last night. The bed was still unmade, so Tommy waited while Nate quickly pulled the sheets up then gently laid Elliot on top of them.

“So, what now, Roane?” he asked as he looked at the little man. “How do we do this?”

“I need one person to stay in the room to keep an eye on us in case—”

"I'll stay," Levi said, stepping into the room. He crossed his arms over his chest as if daring anyone to disagree with him.

A small smile crossed Roane's lips before he nodded and turned back to Tommy. "You need to lie down on the bed next to Elliot and you need to be touching him somehow. That will help you reach him.

Tommy kicked off his boots then crawled up onto the bed to lie down next to his mate. He reached over and grabbed a handful of Elliot's fur, giving it a gentle squeeze, then rubbed his hand down Elliot's hip.

"Okay, now what?"

"Levi, can you move this chair closer to the bed?" Roane pointed to a tan wingback chair that sat near the window. "I need to be able to touch Tommy."

Levi didn't look happy about it, but he did as Roane asked. Roane immediately sat down then nodded toward the door. "I need everyone to leave except for Levi."

Tommy watched the room empty of people except for him, Roane, Levi, and Elliot. Once the door had shut, Roane turned to look at him, holding out his hand. Tommy took it, nervous about what was going to happen but willing to try anything to get his Elliot back.

"Close your eyes and we'll begin."

Chapter 10

Elliot hummed softly to himself as he picked at the edge of his shirt. He tried to keep his eyes on the soft fabric, but every once in awhile he glanced up and the horror of the abyss surrounding him filled him all over again.

The world around him was in shades of black and grey, piles of rubble, big granite rocks, and dark dirt. Even the sky above him was grey. The only color seemed to come from the occasional eruption of fire and lava.

He sat on a ledge overlooking a river of fiery red lava. Its source seemed to come from a distance away, a waterfall of lava falling down the side of a grey stone cliff. Elliot didn't know what was beyond that burning waterfall. He wasn't sure he wanted to know.

Elliot imagined this was what hell looked like.

He sat curled up against one particularly large boulder, his knees pressed against his chest. He had yet to try and explore the cavern behind him. It was dark and eerie with strange sounds coming from deep inside.

Elliot didn't know how long he had been sitting there. It seemed like forever. He didn't know how he had come to be in such a place either. He didn't remember ever doing anything so wrong that this nightmare would be his punishment.

He had just wanted all of his pain to end. He didn't realize that meant he would spend the rest of his life in a hell like this. Elliot clenched his fists until his nails dug into the palms of his hand. Was this hell any better or any worse than what he had been in before? Elliot just didn't know.

A sudden noise at the back of the dark cavern made Elliot's heart pound rapidly in his chest. He turned to look into the black nothingness. Elliot swallowed with difficulty and found his voice. "Hello? Is there someone there?"

Elliot scrambled back until he reached the edge of the cliff when a figure began to take shape out of the darkness. He pressed one hand against his chest, afraid that his thundering heart might jump right out of his chest.

"Please, who are you?" Elliot could hardly lift his voice above a whisper as fear filled him. "What do you want?"

"Elliot."

The voice was like an echo from an empty tomb, rough and hard. It scared Elliot as nothing else could. He glanced over his shoulder to the river of burning lava below him and wondered how much it would hurt if he just fell over the edge? How long did it take to die in lava? To burn alive?

"Elliot."

Elliot pressed himself back against the cavern wall as he turned to look at the shape walking out of the darkness. Disbelief filled him as the shape took form and slowly became the one person Elliot didn't want to see the most.

This was hell.

"Hello, pretty baby, I've been looking for you."

"Go away," Elliot whispered. He closed his eyes as tightly as he could and began wishing with everything in him. If wishing had gotten him here in the first place, maybe wishing would take him away again.

The soft caress of a hand against his cheek yanked Elliot out of his wishful chanting. He jerked away, the touch of Tommy's hand too much for him to handle. It was something he wanted too much and something he couldn't have.

"Please," Elliot pleaded as he opened his eyes to look at Tommy, taking in his tall form with hungry eyes.

“Ssh, pretty baby, it’s okay,” Tommy said. “I’m here to take you home.”

Elliot shook his head. He didn’t want to go home even if it meant staying here. Home meant pain and anguish and people that didn’t want him. It meant a mate that was afraid of him and betrayed everything he promised.

No, being here was better even if this place was dismal, Elliot thought to himself. Too many people in his life only offered their love and affection if he became who or what they wanted. No one wanted him unconditionally.

“Just leave me alone,” Elliot cried out desperately as he pushed at the hands Tommy held out to him.

“Oh, baby, I can’t do that,” Tommy replied as he tried again to reach for Elliot. “You’re going to die if you don’t go back.”

“Then let me die!”

“Elliot!”

Elliot couldn’t tell if Tommy was angry with him or saddened by his words, but the man definitely did not look happy. Elliot just wasn’t sure he cared. He had wanted just one night with Tommy, one night to savor in his memories.

Instead, Tommy had promised him the world until Elliot began to believe that it was possible to have someone in his life that truly wanted him. Elliot had let down all of his guards and allowed Tommy into his heart, a place he guarded from everyone.

Tommy’s betrayal, his treachery, had ripped Elliot’s heart into so many pieces he wasn’t sure it could ever be repaired. Elliot couldn’t go through that again. He couldn’t start to believe again only to have it ripped away once more.

Elliot watched Tommy carefully as he pushed himself away from the man and crept closer to the edge of the ledge. He could feel the heat from the flaming lava against the skin of his back. He shook his head slowly.

"I'm not going back." His voice was shakier than he would have liked, but he was terrified that Tommy would make him return. "You can't make me go back."

"Elliot." Tommy's voice was rough, almost unnatural in its tone. He took a step closer to Elliot, reaching out for him. "Wha—"

"Stay away from me!" Elliot shouted. "Don't touch me."

He watched Tommy's eyebrows gather into a deep frown as the man's hand slowly fell to his sides. Elliot couldn't prevent the twinge of guilt he felt at the confusion and dawning sadness on Tommy's face.

"You don't want to go back, Elliot?" Tommy asked in a whisper of a voice. "You'll die if you don't go back, pretty baby."

"I don't care."

"Elliot, how can you say that?"

"There's nothing back there for me."

"So this is where you choose to be?" Tommy's arms spread wide. "Elliot, this is no place for you."

"And back there is?" Elliot snorted. "Everyone hates me there."

"Elliot, no one hates you."

"I don't believe you." Elliot swallowed hard and squared his shoulders as he glares at Tommy. "I don't believe anything you say."

An agonized expression moved across Tommy's face. "Elliot, you don't mean that."

"I do mean it. You've done nothing but lie to me from the moment we met." Elliot took a deep breath as his chaotic emotions threatened to overcome him. "You made me believe, and you lied to me."

"Elliot—"

"You lied to me," Elliot murmured. He bit his lip to stifle a sob as tears filled his eyes. His misery was so acute that it was a physical pain. Elliot wrapped his arms around his waist and dropped down to his knees in the dirt.

Tommy fell to his knees right in front of Elliot, but he didn't try and touch him. "Elliot, I never lied to you, I swear."

"You did," Elliot insisted as the tears he'd been holding back broke free and started trailing down his cheeks. "You promised we would always be together, that everything would be okay, and you lied."

"But, baby, we will be together if you just come back with me." Tommy's shoulders moved as he gave something that resembled half a shrug and waved his hands around the dark cavern. "Or we can stay here if that's what you want. I'll go wherever you want, stay wherever you want."

"I don't believe you." Elliot's anger and resentment started to build up in him. Tommy was saying the same old words, but his actions said differently.

"Elliot, what can I do to convince you?"

"Nothing," he spat out. "You proved your loyalty when you let them lock me away like a common criminal. You believed them. You—" Elliot snapped his mouth closed and shook his head. There just didn't seem to be anything more to say. Tommy couldn't sweet talk himself out of this. His actions more than proved to Elliot how the man really felt.

"Elliot." Tommy rubbed the top of his bald head. Elliot noted that Tommy's hand was shaking and wondered what his game was now. "You don't understand, Elliot. I had to let them lock you away. It was the only way to keep you safe. Joe was ready to explode after Nate passed out. I thought it was best for you to be somewhere safe while I calmed him down."

"That doesn't explain why you wouldn't touch me." Elliot steeled himself against the need he felt to give in to Tommy's words. He knew it would only bring him more heartache. "I needed you and you turned away from me."

"Elliot, I never turned away from you."

“You did!” Elliot dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands so he wouldn’t try and pull at his hair. He felt frustrated, like he was talking to a brick wall. “I reached for you and you turned away from me.”

“Because Nate said not to touch you, Elliot.”

Elliot inhaled sharply as daggers of pain stabbed at his chest. “And you believed him.”

“I couldn’t take the chance that touching you would hurt you somehow.” Tommy suddenly sat back on his legs and rubbed both of his hands down his face before resting them on his thighs. “You don’t understand, Elliot. Nate has special abilities, abilities we don’t have even as wolves, and I’ve learned to trust those abilities.”

“More than you trust me.”

“No!”

“Then why?”

“I told you, baby, until I could talk to Nate and find out what he meant by not touching you, I didn’t know if it would harm you or not, and I’m not about to do anything that puts your life in jeopardy. You mean too much to me.”

Elliot leaned his head back against the rock wall. He concentrated on his breathing, in and out, in and out. Anything else was simply beyond him at the moment. Too much of Elliot wanted to believe Tommy, to grasp what he had felt before and never let go, and that could be more dangerous than anything.

“Elliot, please, you have to believe me. I swear on my life that I never meant to hurt you. I was just trying to protect you the only way I knew how. I never meant for you to think I didn’t want you.”

Elliot tilted his head so that he could look at Tommy. The man really didn’t look all that good. Tommy’s lips were pulled tight, his jaw clenched. The normal sparkle in his dark silver grey eyes that Elliot was used to had turned to a dull grey, almost like the color of everything around them. But mostly, Tommy looked heartbroken.

“What happens if I come back?” Elliot murmured. “How will it change anything? Everyone still hates me. They still think I’m going to destroy the pack. I can’t live somewhere where everyone hates me or thinks I’m a bad person, Tommy. I just can’t do it.”

“Then we’ll go somewhere else, Elliot. There are a lot of packs out there that would take us in, and even if they don’t, I know of a vampire coven we can join.”

Elliot blinked. “Vampires are real?”

Tommy chuckled. “Yeah, vampires are real. I have a good friend, Devlin, who is actually mated to Prince Zacarius Ivinovav, a vampire.”

“Prince?”

“He’s the leader of his coven. That makes him a prince or something like that.” Tommy shrugged. “I know we’d be welcome there if we asked.”

“How would being there be any different than with your pack? My father is still a threat no matter where we are.”

“Elliot, I don’t care who your father is. I’m not giving you up.”

“Tommy—”

“Just come home with me, Elliot.” Tommy held out a hand to him but didn’t try to force the issue. “I promise I will prove to you that we belong together and that you can trust me. I won’t let you down, pretty baby.”

Elliot stared at Tommy’s hand for the longest time, trying to weigh his options. He was currently in hell, but he was in hell alone. If he returned, he might still be in hell, but Tommy would be there, maybe.

Was that enough to make him go back? Could he trust in what Tommy was saying after everything that had happened? Elliot had trusted before and been disappointed every single time. Would this time be any different? Nothing in Elliot’s past said it would. He really had no reason to trust Tommy’s words beyond his desire to believe in them.

“Please, Elliot,” Tommy whispered.

Almost against his own control, Elliot saw himself reach out for the hand Tommy held out to him. He had just a moment to soak in the overriding joy he felt at touching Tommy again before agony unlike anything he had ever felt swept through his body.

Elliot’s eyes closed and his head fell back on his shoulders as his entire body seized, waves of pain filling every cell of his body. He opened his mouth to scream but no sound came out. He distantly heard Tommy shouting his name, but it was quickly drowned out by a loud rush of white noise.

Then suddenly, silence. The pain was gone and Elliot felt nothing. Once again, he wasn’t cold or hot. He wasn’t thirsty or hungry. He wasn’t anything. Elliot felt like he floated in a bubble, no sound, no feeling, no nothing.

Elliot opened his eyes slowly, frowning quickly when the world around him appeared in shades of grey still. He wasn’t in the cavern of hell anymore. Even he could tell that. He was in someone’s bedroom.

“Hey, pretty baby, how are you feeling?”

Elliot could feel Tommy’s hand stroking him, but it felt funny, like not quite real. He glanced down then whimpered. Dread filled him when all he could see was white fur under Tommy’s fingers. Elliot tried to back away. He felt more frightened than he had been when he found himself in the cave, but the fur just followed him.

“Elliot, baby, calm down,” Tommy said. “It’s okay.”

But it wasn’t okay. Elliot opened his mouth to tell Tommy that, but all that came out was a high pitched bark. Elliot scrambled away, pushing with his... with his... Elliot’s eyes widened when he realized he had paws where his feet and hands should be.

“Elliot, look at me.”

Elliot’s eyes riveted in on Tommy when the man grabbed his face and held it still. His heart thundered in his chest as he tried to figure out what in the hell was going on.

“It’s okay, pretty baby, you’re in your wolf form.”

Elliot started to shake his head, to tell Tommy he was nuts. He didn’t have a wolf form. He was human. And then, as he shook his head, his eyes caught the white-furred muzzle going back and forth as he shook his head.

Elliot froze. This wasn’t possible. He wasn’t a wolf.

“Elliot, look at me.” Elliot raised his eyes to meet Tommy’s, whimpering softly. “I want you to think about being in human form. Think about having legs and arms, smooth skin instead of fur. Come on, pretty baby, shift back for me. I promise as soon as you do, I’ll answer all of your questions.”

Elliot had to believe Tommy. The man was born a wolf. Surely he knew what he was talking about. Elliot closed his eyes and concentrated on being human again. He thought about what it felt like to walk and talk, to stretch his arms over his head and wiggle his toes.

He felt his muscle stretch and contract. Bones popped. But strangely enough, it didn’t hurt. It just felt really uncomfortable and incredibly weird. When Elliot opened his eyes again, the color was back, the room seeming almost too bright.

Elliot lifted his hand and held it out in front of his face, grateful to see each long finger. He flexed them, watching the knuckles bend and straighten. Next, Elliot felt over his face, finding the same old nose, high cheekbones, and plush lips.

“Hey, pretty baby, it’s good to see you back.”

Elliot turned toward the voice that spoke, finding Tommy smiling down at him. There was a suspicious glint in Tommy’s eyes. Elliot opened his mouth to speak but only a croak of a sound came out. He inhaled quickly, panic starting to set in again until Tommy’s hands stroked down over his arms.

“Sshhh, Elliot, it’s okay. Your voice might be a little hoarse for awhile. That can be a side effect of shifting sometimes.”

Elliot frowned and shook his head. He didn't understand what was going on. He was even more confused when Tommy took a deep breath and reached down to hold his hand.

"Listen to me, Elliot, this is very important. You're a shifter just like me. I don't know how it happened or why it happened. I don't even know how long you've been able to shift, but you are a wolf." Tommy grinned suddenly. "And one of the most beautiful wolves I have ever seen."

Elliot shook his head. He wasn't a wolf. Despite what had happened a few minutes ago when he had been covered in fur, Tommy had to be wrong.

"Come here, Elliot," Tommy said as he gestured for Elliot to come closer with his hand, "I want you to do something for me."

Elliot frowned and did as Tommy asked, sitting up and leaning closer to the man. He felt a small ache between his shoulder blades that made him wince a bit, but it wasn't too bad. Just kind of uncomfortable like he had slept wrong. And maybe that was the answer to all of this. Maybe he had been dreaming and none of this was real?

"Come closer, pretty baby, I want you to put your face in my neck and sniff me."

Elliot quickly leaned back and cocked an eyebrow at Tommy.

The man chuckled. "I know, it sounds odd, but please, just trust me. I know what I'm talking about."

Wary, Elliot leaned forward at the same time Tommy did, pressing his face into the man's neck. He paused for just a moment then inhaled deeply. The strong heady scent of man and earth and musk filled Elliot's senses, overwhelming him instantly.

Elliot whimpered and pressed closer, inhaling over and over again. He couldn't get enough of the masculine fragrance. He needed more. He needed to roll in the exquisite scent, rub it all over his body. He wanted to bathe in it, to never smell another thing. Nothing on earth could smell this good.

Elliot didn't realize he was growling and grabbing at Tommy's arms, trying to pull himself closer, until he heard Tommy's groan in his ear. "That's so fucking hot, pretty baby. I can hear you growling."

"Tommy," Elliot cried out. He dropped his head back, baring his neck when Tommy started sniffing at him. It was one of the most erotic things he had ever experienced in his life. It made him feel hot, achy.

Elliot could feel his cock filling. He wanted to rub himself against Tommy in the worst way. He was just afraid to. Tommy's family had interrupted them so many times Elliot didn't want to start something they couldn't finish. He just... he needed so badly.

"Tommy," he cried out again.

"Sssh, I told you I would take care of you, pretty baby," Tommy said as he pushed Elliot back against the pillows then leaned over him. "Everyone has left, the door is locked, and no one will disturb us. It's time for me to make you mine."

"Yours?"

"Yes, Elliot." Elliot leaned into the hand Tommy cupped against the side of his face, the man's skin warm against his. "You belong to me, remember? And I promised you we would always be together."

Elliot nodded even though he wasn't quite sure what exactly he was agreeing to. His mind felt like mush, unable to grab onto any one thought, and so many were floating around in his head.

He wanted to know more about this shifting thing and why it had happened to him, if indeed he wasn't dreaming. He had questions and he wanted answers. He just... Tommy's hands felt so good rubbing against his skin and...

"Tommy," Elliot groaned.

"I've got you, pretty baby," Tommy whispered close to his ear. "I won't let anything happen to you."

Elliot knew he should be protesting or at least waiting until he knew more about what was happening, but he needed so bad. His

body ached and the only thing that seemed to make it better was the feeling of Tommy touching him, kissing him.

Elliot cried out in protest when Tommy moved away from him. He clutched desperately at the man's arms, refusing to give up the euphoric feelings coursing through his body. He didn't want reality to return.

"I'm just getting undressed, Elliot," Tommy said as he pulled away and stood up.

Elliot's eyes devoured every bit of flesh that Tommy revealed as he stripped his clothes off. While they had been intimate a few times already, Elliot had never actually seen all of Tommy's naked body, and that was a damn shame. The man was breathtaking. Elliot couldn't tear his eyes away.

His breath hitched in his throat when Tommy grinned, and a very sensual grin at that, then climbed up onto the bed between Elliot's legs. Elliot felt like prey to Tommy's predatory nature. He couldn't understand why that sent a thrill of excitement racing through his body. Shouldn't he be scared?

The feeling of Tommy stroking over his naked skin made Elliot forget all about what he should or shouldn't be feeling. All he could think about was how wonderful the gentle caresses felt, and what he needed to do to get more.

"I love how soft your skin is, pretty baby."

Elliot lifted his head to look down his body to Tommy. His eyes widened in surprise. Tommy looked mesmerized as he stroked his fingers over Elliot's skin, his eyes intently following every caress of his fingers. Every few inches, Tommy would lean down and kiss the flesh he'd touched.

"Such beautiful skin," Tommy whispered, "just as beautiful as your white fur."

Elliot dropped his head back onto the pillow, unable to hold it up under the onslaught of Tommy's caresses. It just felt so damn good.

Elliot just laid there and wallowed in the overwhelming sensations, unable to do more.

When he felt a feathery light touch across the head of his engorged shaft, Elliot almost came off the bed. He cried out, arching into the air seeking more as his hands dug into the blankets.

“Tommy!”

“I’ve got you, pretty baby,” Tommy replied. “Gonna make you feel so good.”

Elliot had no doubt Tommy spoke the truth when the man continued to caress him, kiss him. Every touch was exquisite but Elliot quickly knew he needed more. He just wasn’t quite sure what that something was.

When two lubed fingers pushed into him, Elliot cried out and rode the feeling as far as it would go. When he canted his hips, needing more, Tommy was there to answer his silent plea, pushing in another finger.

“To–Tommy!”

“Mate,” Tommy crooned softly in Elliot’s ear.

Elliot gasped in delight when Tommy began a steady rhythm, pushing his fingers into Elliot’s tight entrance then pulling them out, slowly stretching Elliot. He might have had sex before, but he didn’t remember it feeling this good.

Between the fingers in his ass, the soft caresses, and the kisses Tommy placed against his hot skin, Elliot’s world narrowed down to the man loving on him. Nothing else existed outside of his little world. And Elliot never wanted to leave.

“My turn, pretty baby.”

Elliot blinked up at Tommy, having no idea what the man was talking about but about to protest the loss of the fingers in his ass when something bigger, warmer, replaced them. Elliot inhaled sharply, not from the slight burn he felt at Tommy’s entrance, but from the pleasure bursting through his body.

Sex had never been like this before, never.

“God, Elliot, I never thought we’d get to this point,” Tommy groaned when his cock finally rested all of the way inside of Elliot. He dropped his forehead down against Elliot’s, his face looking a little flushed and desperate. “Did you?”

“No,” Elliot readily admitted. He had dreamed about it, fantasized, but he never actually thought it would happen, not with all of the interruptions they had experienced.

“It’s going to be like this for us every time, pretty baby.”

Elliot’s eyes nearly rolled back in his head when Tommy started moving his hips. The intense pressure he felt every time Tommy pulled out then pushed back in was beyond anything he had ever felt. There was just no way to describe it, so Elliot didn’t even try. He just soaked in the pleasure.

“Okay, hold on to me, Elliot.”

Elliot frowned, Tommy’s words interrupting his pleasure, but he did what the man asked and wrapped his arms around Tommy’s neck. Elliot’s breath rushed from his lungs a moment later when Tommy lifted him up and moved to the side of the bed.

Elliot’s legs instinctively wrapped around Tommy’s waist when the man stood and walked across the room. The pressure of the wall against his back sent a tingle through Elliot’s body. He’d envisioned this, had begged for it, and it was wonderful.

Tommy pressed him tightly against the wall and began thrusting into him. Each snap of Tommy’s hips sent Elliot’s desire higher and higher. Elliot dug his fingers into Tommy’s neck as the pressure inside of him built. His legs tightened around Tommy’s waist.

Elliot cried out and arched against Tommy when the feelings building up inside of him erupted and he came all over the both of them. He tried to catch his breath, but Tommy was moving again, taking them back to the bed.

“To–Tommy!”

“Mate, pretty baby, call me mate.”

Elliot tried to form the words to tell Tommy what he wanted to hear, but that was hard to do when his brains were melting out of his ears. Elliot felt like his entire body was melting, one hard thrust at a time.

Tommy looped his arms under Elliot's legs and pulled them up to his chest. What started after that was what Elliot could only consider overwhelming. Tommy pounded into him, his thick cock filling Elliot's ass over and over again.

The muscles were pulled tight around Tommy's clenched jaw. His face looked strained. Elliot would have been worried if he hadn't seen the way Tommy's dark silver eyes shined in the soft bedroom light.

Tommy's grip on Elliot's legs was becoming tighter. His breathing was heavier. And the swift thrust of his hips was starting to become chaotic. Elliot could feel a slight swelling in the cock ramming into his ass. He knew Tommy was close.

"Mate," Elliot whispered. He had just enough time to see his mate's eyes widen as he leaned in and sank his teeth into the soft flesh of Tommy's chest, right over the man's heart. Hot, sweet blood filled Elliot's mouth, making his groan of ecstasy join Tommy's as both men found their release together.

Elliot could feel Tommy's body shaking as it fell against him. He extracted his teeth and licked the small bite mark closed then buried his neck in Tommy's shoulder as he wrapped his arms around the man.

"Mine now," Elliot whispered. He suddenly understood the connection that mates had. He got it. And that filled Elliot with different parts of joy and fear. He didn't know if he could ever live without Tommy now that he had the man. It might destroy him.

"I was supposed to do that." Tommy chuckled. He had a mischievous glint in his eyes when he leaned back to look down at Elliot. "I was supposed to claim you."

"So, claim me already." Elliot tilted his head to one side, anticipating Tommy's bite. His eyes drifted closed and a small shiver

worked its way through Elliot's body as Tommy's canines scraped along his collarbone.

Elliot's cock jerked and throbbed and tried to come back to life as Tommy's sharp teeth sank into the flesh between his shoulder and neck. His hips unconsciously humped into the air. Elliot groaned loudly when he felt Tommy's semi hard cock move inside of him as the man thrust forward a little.

"My mate."

Chapter 11

Tommy froze. Surely he hadn't heard what he had just heard. He pulled his teeth from Elliot's throat. He licked away the drops spilling out before they could trail down Elliot's throat, groaning at the intense taste of his mate.

Lifting his head, Tommy stared intently down at Elliot. "*Elliot?*" he whispered in his head, mentally crossing his fingers and praying harder than he ever had before.

Elliot didn't even open his eyes, just smiled. "Yes?" he asked out loud.

"You can hear me?"

This time Elliot's eyes did open and he stared up at Tommy with a confused frown on his face. "Of course I can hear you. You're talking to me."

"Elliot." Tommy's heart thundered in his chest as he spoke silently again. *"I'm not talking to you with my mouth."*

Elliot's eyes widened then fell down until Tommy knew his mate was looking at his lips. *"Watch my lips, pretty baby. I'm talking to you but my lips are not moving."*

Elliot swallowed hard and his eyes moved back up to meet Tommy's. "How—"

"I don't know, Elliot." Tommy grinned as he realized the gift they had been given. *"But I think it's pretty damn cool."*

"Can you hear me too?"

Tommy nodded. "I can hear every damn thing you say."

"Can you read my mind?"

Tommy thought about it for a moment then shook his head. “No,” he said out loud, “I can only hear what you say to me. I can’t hear a thing going on in your head.”

Tommy was a little confused and put off by the deep, relieved, sigh that came out of Elliot’s mouth. He started to open his mouth to say something, and most likely get himself in trouble, when Elliot smiled and placed a finger over his lips.

“No one wants all of their thoughts readable, Tommy, not even me. That doesn’t mean they are bad, just that they are private.”

Tommy frowned. He didn’t like the idea of Elliot trying to hide anything from him, but he supposed the man might be right. No one wanted every thought they had open for the whole world, or even a lover. Still, he needed to ask.

“So, why must you have private thoughts?” Tommy asked. “We’re mates, we should share everything.”

“I should really tell you everything I think? Because, believe me, if you think I talked before...” Elliot’s cocked eyebrow amused Tommy so much he couldn’t help but laugh.

“Okay, okay, I get it, you feel there are things you need to keep to yourself, but I don’t have to like it. I’d prefer that you share everything with me, but I understand there may be some things you don’t want to.”

“Tommy, it’s not that I don’t want to share things with you.” Elliot chuckled and shook his head. “But there are things I need to process in my own way. If you were to try and follow my thought process, your head would explode.”

Tommy burst out laughing at Elliot’s rationalization. He leaned down and kissed the tip of Elliot’s nose. “Okay, pretty baby, you keep your private thoughts private. Just don’t stop talking to me this way, okay? It’s pretty special. I don’t know of many people that can talk to each other in their heads.”

“Really? It’s not normal for mates?”

“No.” Tommy frowned. “What would make you think that?”

"I don't know." Elliot shrugged. "Nate and Joe, and even your parents, seem so close. I just thought it was kind of normal for you all."

"You all? Elliot, you're one of us." Elliot started to shake his head so Tommy grabbed him, holding it still and looking deep into his mate's eyes. "Elliot, you're a shifter just like I am. I don't know how and I don't know why, but I am thankful for it. I would have taken you any way I could have gotten you, pretty baby, but this way, there is so much more I can share with you."

"Li-like what?" Elliot asked in a broken whisper.

"We can run together for one. The full moon is a special time for us and now I can share that with you. For two, I think the bond between us is stronger what with both of us being wolves. Your wolf recognizes mine as its mate. Remember the scent when you sniffed my neck?"

Elliot nodded, looking wide eyed and stunned.

"Do you think it would have affected you the way it did if you hadn't been a wolf?"

"Do you really think our bond is stronger because I'm a... I'm a..."

"It's okay, Elliot, you can say it. You're a wolf shifter just like me."

Elliot's expressive face changed and became almost somber. "But how? I've never shifted before. I've never done anything wolf-like before. Wouldn't I have shown some sign of being a shifter?"

"Maybe you have and just don't know it," Tommy said. "You did say you were sick growing up, right? Maybe it was your wolf trying to get out and something was preventing it."

"Yeah, maybe but—" Elliot's eyes suddenly widened as he inhaled deeply and grabbed at Tommy's shoulders. "Tommy, what if my father is a shifter like I am? Won't that make a difference?"

Tommy wished more than almost anything on earth that he could tell Elliot it would, but he hadn't lied to the man yet, and he wasn't

about to start now. He shook his head sadly. “No, Elliot, I don’t think it will. If your father was a shifter, he wouldn’t make himself so well known in public. We try to keep ourselves secret, not broadcast it to the world.”

“Then my mother was a shifter?”

“That would be my bet. What do you remember about her?”

“Not much, really, I—” Tommy was caught off guard when Elliot suddenly stopped talking, wrinkled his nose and wiggled a little. “Can we get cleaned up before we talk about this? It’s kind of hard to concentrate with the smell of sex in the air.”

Tommy chuckled and gently pulled away from Elliot, rolling to the side of the bed. He reached back and held out his hand. “Let’s shower real quick, and then we can get dressed and talk. I think we could both use some food in our systems.”

“Oh god, a shower sounds wonderful,” Elliot said as he eagerly took Tommy’s hand and climbed from the bed. “I feel like I have a week’s worth of grunge on my skin.”

“I don’t know. I’d say your skin is just about perfect.” Tommy trailed a finger down Elliot’s chest, grinning when Elliot shivered. “In fact, I think I have said that.”

Elliot rolled his eyes. “I’m going to be spending a lot of time in your bed, aren’t I?”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“No.” Elliot snickered as he walked toward the bathroom. “I was just asking.”

“Mates have a need to be together, and often, Elliot, especially in the beginning of their mating.” Tommy felt hesitant. He didn’t know how much to tell Elliot about the bond they had. “Is that something that is going to be a problem for you?”

Elliot glanced back over his shoulder looking surprised. “No, should it?”

“I just wanted to make sure. I never want to force anything on you, Elliot. This has to be your choice.”

Elliot smiled and reached back to pat Tommy's cheek. "It is, lover."

Tommy couldn't keep the grin off his face as he followed Elliot into the shower. No matter how confusing things might be at the moment, Elliot seemed to be accepting their mating with an open mind.

Tommy could only hope that Elliot would also accept it with an open heart. He had every intention of theirs being a love match. Tommy was already obsessed with the gorgeous man, and that happened before they even became mated. He could only imagine how much that obsession would grow in the years to come.

* * * *

"I'd really prefer to just stay here, Tommy."

Tommy sighed as he buttoned up his jeans then glanced over to where Elliot was sitting on the edge of the bed. "I know, Elliot, but you're going to have to face my family at some point. Why not just get it over with? I promise you that things have changed."

"What if they try to lock me up again or—"

Tommy stepped over and squatted down in front of Elliot, holding the man's face between his hands. "Elliot, it's not going to happen. I won't let it. If things go bad, we'll just leave, but I don't think they will. A lot has happened while you were in wolf form."

"I remember what they were like." Elliot snorted as he pulled away from Tommy. "Not that much could have changed."

"I swear to you, Elliot, things are different now. My family will accept you. Please, just come downstairs with me and see."

Elliot's lower lip caught between his teeth. Tommy held his breath as he waited for Elliot to decide what he wanted to do. While he really wanted Elliot to come downstairs and see how much things had changed with his family, he would do whatever his mate wanted.

"You'll stay with me?"

Tommy grinned. "I won't leave your side."

Elliot hesitated for another moment then nodded slowly. He still didn't look like he was in favor of going downstairs, but Tommy had to admit to himself he was glad Elliot agreed. He needed his family's help to figure out what was going on with Elliot and keep him safe. He was pretty sure things were bigger than he could handle on his own.

Tommy stood and held out a hand to Elliot. "Come on, pretty baby, let's go get something to eat and see how things are going."

"Are they going to ask me a bunch of questions?"

Tommy tried to hide his grimace as he watched Elliot take his hand and get up, walking with him to the bedroom door. "I'm sure there will be lots of questions, and you need to be prepared for that. Just be honest and tell them everything they want to know. Everyone is just trying to help us."

"What if I don't want to answer?"

"Then tell them that. They may not like it, but they can't force it out of you. However, I think the more that we know, the better we can deal with this situation."

Elliot frowned. "Just what exactly is this situation?"

"Well." Tommy chuckled lightly. "I'd say the first is that you can shift. That's pretty big. The second situation is dealing with your father. Now that we know you can shift, that changes things a bit."

"Why?"

"You're a shifter, Elliot. You had to come from somewhere. Shifters don't just appear out of thin air. We're born. Granted, we don't have to have two shifter parents, only one needs to be a shifter, but which one of yours was the shifter? That could change things a bit."

"How?"

Tommy squeezed Elliot's hand when he heard the tremble in the man's voice. "Not how you are thinking, pretty baby. Nothing changes between us, ever. We're mates and that means forever."

“Then what do you mean?” Elliot asked, tilting his face up.

“Knowing that one of your parents was a shifter means that we have to go at this whole situation with your father in a different way. I would think he knows about you, which he knows about us. We have to be more cautious.”

“Oh, your family is sure to hate me now,” Elliot groaned.

“Oh no, Elliot, not at all, I promise.” Tommy paused at the bottom of the stairs to tilt Elliot’s head back. “No, pretty baby, they don’t hate you. In fact, they are thrilled for us. We just need to go about things differently now.”

Tommy’s heart went out to his little mate when he felt the man’s head fall against his chest. He couldn’t wait for a time when there wasn’t any drama in their lives. Elliot deserved to be happy, and Tommy hoped he could provide that for him.

“It’ll be okay, pretty baby,” Tommy whispered against the top of Elliot’s head. “I promise.”

“You’ve said that before, Tommy.” The small snuffle that came from Elliot stabbed at Tommy’s heart. “And you’ve been wrong. Everything is not okay.”

“Okay, everything may not be okay...at the moment. But that doesn’t mean it won’t be in the future.” Tommy grabbed Elliot’s head and tilted it back again. “And this time, we’re together. We’re not trying to do this alone, pretty baby. We have each other. That has to make a difference.”

“It does.” Elliot laughed nervously. His hand fisted and tapped against Tommy’s chest. “I just wish that we didn’t have to go through all this crap. I just want us to go away somewhere safe where no one can bother us.”

“I’ll start making plans right away.” Tommy chuckled. “Do you want sandy beaches or mountain streams?”

Elliot snorted and turned to walk toward the kitchen. “How about somewhere on a deserted island where no one can find us?”

“Done.” Although Tommy didn’t have a clue where to start looking for that deserted island. But if that’s what his baby wanted, he wouldn’t stop until he found one.

Just as they walked past the archway to the living room, Tommy heard the front door open. He glanced over to see his brother, Jim, walking in with his mate, Donovan. Right behind Donovan was his brother, Chase.

“Hey, Elliot, there’s a couple of people I’d like to introduce you to. Hold up a minute.”

Elliot stopped and glanced over his shoulder. Tommy could see the man’s anxiety in the paleness of his face, the tight pinch in his features. Still, Elliot turned and stepped closer, his body practically pushing into Tommy’s.

Tommy wrapped an arm around Elliot’s shoulder and pulled him into the living room. The people in the room turned as one wave and looked at the both of them. Tommy tightened his grip on Elliot when he felt the man cringe and press closer to him.

“Jim, Donovan, Chase, I’d like to introduce you to my mate, Elliot.”

Jim stepped forward, his hand held out to Elliot, a welcoming smile on his face. “Elliot, it’s nice to finally meet you. I didn’t think my brother would ever find anyone that could put up with him.”

Elliot shrank back, edging slightly behind Tommy. When Elliot’s hands gripped his shirt, Tommy thought the fabric might rip. Elliot was shaking. Tommy reached back and grabbed Elliot, smiling in apology to his brother at the confused frown on Jim’s face.

“Elliot, baby, Jim’s not going to hurt you,” Tommy said as he pulled his mate out from behind him. Elliot was still hesitant but he didn’t fight Tommy. “This is my brother, Jim. He’s okay for an older brother.”

“Hey!”

Tommy chuckled at Jim's pretend outrage. He felt the tension start to loosen from Elliot's body and pulled the man closer to his chest. "This is Donovan, Jim's mate, and his brother, Chase."

Jim smiled and stepped back as Donovan and Chase stepped forward. Donovan started to hold out his hand then paused, a quizzical expression coming over his face as he suddenly started sniffing the air.

"Chase, do you—" Donovan started only to be interrupted by a low menacing growl from Chase. Before Tommy could stop him, Chase reached over and grabbed Elliot. He swung around and pinned Elliot to the wall by his throat.

"Why do you smell like my mother?" Donovan snapped, his face inches from Elliot's. Elliot looked petrified, his eyes as huge as saucers. He grabbed at the hand around his throat, his face turning paler with each passing moment.

"Chase, what the hell do you think you're doing? Let go of my mate," Tommy shouted. He tried to jump at the man, pull him away from Elliot, but another set of strong arms held him back. Tommy turned, snarling at Donovan. "Let me go, damn it!"

"No!" Donovan shouted right back. "I want to know why your mate smells like my mother."

Tommy ignored the question and started to struggle against the hold Donovan had on him. He could see the panic in Elliot's eyes and knew they had just taken a step back in their progress together. He didn't know what was going on with Chase and Donovan, but he damn well wasn't about to answer any questions while Donovan had his mate pinned to the wall.

Tommy started growling, snapping at Donovan with his teeth. He felt a smack hit him in the side of the head and shook his head to clear the sudden stars that sparkled in his eyes. He turned to shout at Donovan when a sudden low growl filled the room. It was so ominous that it made the hairs on his arms stand on end.

Tommy turned just in time to see Elliot shift almost instantaneously and pull away from Chase right before he lunged at the man. Chase snarled and jumped back. He started to shift, his transformation slower than Elliot's. A loud shout from the side of the room stopped him.

"That's enough!"

Elliot was the only one in the room that didn't freeze in his spot at Daniel's loud words. He pulled away from Chase and ran over to snap and growl at Donovan, who quickly let go of Tommy and backed away to stand next to his mate.

Elliot growled low in his throat, standing between Tommy and everyone else in the room. The hairs on his back stood up, his tail bristling. Tommy was pretty sure that his white wolf would attack anyone that came near them.

"Thomas, restrain your mate," Daniel snapped.

Thomas dropped down to his knees and wrapped his arms around Elliot's neck. He could feel Elliot's chest moving with each heavy breath he took in. Elliot was terrified, angered. Tommy pulled back on him.

"Elliot, you have to calm down." Elliot whimpered, his muscles bunching. "Please, pretty baby, we'll figure this out, but you have to calm down and shift back."

Elliot's shift back to human was just as fast as his shift to wolf form, so fast that even Daniel blinked in surprise. "I'm not sure I've ever seen anyone shift that fast, Elliot."

Elliot turned his face away from those in the room and buried it in Tommy's chest as he pressed himself into Tommy's arms. Tommy thought he might have been embarrassed with the way he seemed to try and burrow in. He didn't care why though, as long as Elliot was turning to him for comfort.

"Would you like to tell me why you attacked my mate, Chase?" Tommy said as he looked up to glare at the man.

“I want to know why in the hell your mate smells like my mother,” Chase snapped. Donovan stood behind Chase, nodding his head in agreement.

“What are you talking about? Elliot smells like Elliot.”

“He smells like our mother!” Donovan shouted, taking a step forward. “Our mother has been dead for over twenty years.”

Chapter 12

Elliot turned in Tommy's arms to look over at the two men that had threatened his mate. He felt another snarl building up in his throat at the angered glares sent in his direction. He didn't know who these men were, but if they stepped toward his mate again, he'd go for their throats. No one threatened his mate.

"Who are you?" Elliot asked, not that he really cared all that much. He could have cared less what they wanted. He just wanted to know who threatened his mate. "By what right do you threaten my mate?"

"Elliot—"

Elliot was getting really tired of Tommy trying to placate him. It wasn't like he was the most dangerous person in the world. He couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag. He just refused to let anyone harm his mate.

Elliot turned back and leaned up to nuzzle the underside of Tommy's chin. "They shouldn't have attacked you."

"I know, pretty baby, and we'll figure out why they did in a moment but first we need to calm this situation down. It's not going to do anyone any good or get any of our questions answered if everyone is jumping at everyone else."

"I'm willing to discuss it if they stay away from you." Tommy's soft chuckle was a balm to Elliot's soul. He could listen to the man's amusement for the rest of his life. It was a beautiful sound.

"I think we all need to take a step back here," Tommy said as he looked across the room. "This is getting none of us anywhere. We're

never going to have any of our questions answered if we're at each other's throats. Agreed?"

Donovan and Chase seemed to grumble a bit, but both men nodded their heads and went to sit down on the couch, Jim standing directly behind Donovan. Tommy looked at his father to see his reaction to everything. He was surprised to find his father looking at Elliot with confusion instead of anger.

"Dad?"

Daniel blinked as if just coming back from a deep thought and turned his attention to his son. "Yes, Thomas, everyone needs to calm down so that we can discuss this like reasonable adults."

"What's reasonable about them attacking Tommy?"

"Elliot, Donovan didn't really attack me," Tommy said. "He was just trying to restrain me."

"He put his hands on you!" Elliot could feel his anger starting to surface again. He flexed his hands several times, his fingers starting to ache with his need to extend his claws. "No one has the right to put their hands on you except me."

"You're right, Elliot," Daniel said, surprising Elliot. He turned to look at the man, wondering what his game was. "No one has the right to touch your mate except you, and especially not to keep your mate from defending you."

Elliot growled.

"And Donovan and I will be discussing that when we're done here," Daniel continued as if no sound had come out of Elliot's mouth. But it had, and everyone heard it, Tommy's arms tightening around him as the others in the room tensed. "In the meantime, we do need to discuss what happened here."

"He threatened my mate!" Elliot didn't understand how everyone else couldn't see that.

"Elliot, please!" Tommy whispered into his mind.

Elliot turned his face back into Tommy's neck and drew in a deep breath of the man's unique fragrance. It was probably the only thing

on earth that could calm him down at the moment, and somehow he knew that.

“Elliot,” Daniel began after a moment of thick silence, “what can you tell me about your mother?”

“I told you before, I never really knew my mother. She died when I was a baby.”

“I know that, but is there anything you do remember?”

Elliot frowned and leaned back against Tommy’s chest. “I don’t remember much, and I really have no idea how old I was when she died. My father refuses to discuss her with me.”

“Elliot, you’ve already told us this. We need to know what you haven’t told us. Think hard, son. What did she look like? What did she smell like? Did she sing to you or have a special name for you?”

Elliot’s frown deepened. “She had brown hair, like a deep chestnut color, and it was really long. She always wore it in a braid down her back.”

“Good, Elliot,” Daniel said. “What else do you remember about her?”

Elliot couldn’t understand why Daniel was so interested in his mother unless it was because she might be his shifter parent. Tommy said it had to be one of them, and he didn’t think it was Elliot’s father.

“Please, Elliot, this is really important.”

Elliot sighed and leaned farther into Tommy’s arms as he glanced over to the window. He wanted to remember his mother, really he did. But his memories were just too fuzzy. It had been so long, he didn’t know what was real and what was a fantasy he built in his head.

“She smelled like summer rain,” Elliot whispered. “You know, the first one of the season when everything has time to settle and the ground soaks up the water. There’s a certain fragrance that it gives off. I can’t quite describe it but—”

“No, it’s okay, Elliot. We know what you’re talking about,” Daniel said. “What else?”

“She called me Bumba because I was always bumping into things.” Elliot’s forehead wrinkled as he frowned, turning to look at Daniel. “I think I was just trying to walk when she died.”

“Okay, what do you remember about when she died? Did she get sick or what?”

Elliot couldn’t remember. His memories were so distorted. “I remember white walls, a lot of white walls. I don’t know if she was sick, but I do remember she cried a lot.” Elliot sniffled a little. “And then one day she didn’t cry anymore.”

“What happened then, Elliot?”

“My father came fro—from—” Elliot frowned and sat up a little. “I don’t remember where my father was, but suddenly he was there. He smelled bad. I remember that he smelled bad, like old, musty, moldy books.” Elliot glanced back at Tommy when the man suddenly stiffened. “What?”

“Exactly how did he smell, Elliot? Describe the scent as much as you can.”

Elliot shrugged. “He smelled moldy.”

“Moldy?”

Elliot nodded. “Have you ever been in one of those old secondhand antique stores? Sometimes they have old books, but there’s this musty smell about them, like the pages are rotting. That’s what he smelled like. Why?”

“We’ll answer that in a moment, Elliot,” Daniel said, “but first we need to know a little more about your father.”

“Okay, what do you want to know?” Elliot was so confused.

“You said you were sick growing up, that you saw a lot of doctors and had a lot of tests. What do you remember about that time? Did you ever overhear any of the doctors talking or your father talking with the doctors?”

Elliot shook his head. “No, they always gave me something to put me to sleep before any of the tests. I thought it was because whatever tests they were running were painful.”

“Then how did you know they did tests on you?”

“I had bandaged spots where they took blood and stuff.”

“Do you know what kind of tests they were running?”

“No, but I know they drew blood and stuff. And one time they did some sort of surgery on my hip. It hurt a lot afterwards.”

“Did you hurt yourself?” Tommy asked quickly.

“No, they just said it was some sort of biopsy of something.” Elliot shrugged, not understanding why everyone was staring at him with horror on their faces. “I figured everything was okay with the tests when no one said anything to me.”

“You mentioned that you still have to go in for blood tests once a month,” Tommy said. “Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” Tommy snapped.

“I never asked.”

“Why the hell not?”

Elliot blinked. Tommy sounded pissed. “I’ve always had tests.”

“Okay, we’re getting off point here,” Daniel said.

“I think we’re very on point, Dad,” Tommy snapped. “Someone has been doing tests on Elliot, and he has no idea why. I want to know why not.”

“And yelling at him is going to get what you want?”

Elliot pressed his lips to keep from laughing when Tommy started to look like a little boy with his hand caught in the cookie jar. But, as much as he found it amusing, he couldn’t allow his mate to feel uncomfortable. Elliot reached back and stroked his hand down Tommy’s cheek.

“Thank you for being concerned, Tommy.”

“I just don’t like the idea of people doing things to you that you don’t know about. It’s wrong, Elliot.”

“You’re probably right.” Elliot shrugged. “I guess I just got so used to it that I never questioned it. It’s been going on my entire life.”

“And it kept your father off your back.”

“There was that.” Elliot giggled. “I remember once while I was in college. I went on holiday with some of my friends and missed my monthly appointment. You would have thought I missed the coronation or something. My father had a fit. He actually hired a helicopter to fly me to the house for my monthly exam. I wasn’t even allowed to go back to my friends. I had to stay home for the next week.”

“Elliot, if these doctor appointments are so important then why haven’t the doctors ever discussed your medical issues with you?” Daniel asked, gaining Elliot’s attention. “You’re a legal adult. I would think your medical history is your business, not your father’s.”

“The doctors work for my father.”

The hairs on Elliot’s arm began to stand up as silence filled the room. He looked around at all the faces in the room, not liking what he was seeing. Their faces had expressions ranging from horror to anger. And Elliot didn’t understand why.

“Why are you all looking at me like that?”

Elliot shrank back when Donovan suddenly sat forward. A small growl fell from his lips until Donovan held up his hand. “Please, I don’t want to fight. I just have a couple of questions for you.”

Elliot didn’t trust the man but he nodded.

“How well do you know your father?”

“Uh.” Elliot glanced between Daniel and Tommy. He really wasn’t sure how to answer that question. Neither man seemed to have an answer for him. “Not very well, I guess. He wasn’t around a lot when I was growing up.”

“Did you live in the same house?” Donovan asked.

“He was gone on business most of the time, but until I was fifteen we lived in the same house, then I was sent away to boarding school.”

“Elliot got very sick when he was fifteen,” Tommy said, his arms tightening around Elliot. “He almost died. It was after he recovered that he was sent to boarding school.”

“Fifteen?” Donovan asked, one eyebrow raised in query.

Tommy nodded.

“Puberty?”

The sudden silence in the room made Elliot wish he could crawl under the couch. It was frightening. “Something is going on here and I really wish that someone would tell me what in the hell it is.”

“Elliot, shifters hit puberty around that age,” Daniel said softly. “We don’t shift until we hit puberty. I suspect that is what made you so sick.”

“I don’t...” Elliot glanced at each man in confusion, finding the same angry expression on their faces. He didn’t understand what they were all so angry about. “I don’t understand.”

“You didn’t shift, Elliot. It’s natural for us to shift when we hit puberty. When you didn’t shift, you got sick. And I suspect that your father knew all about it.”

Elliot inhaled sharply. “Do you think he was trying to stop me from shifting?”

“No, Elliot, I think your father was waiting for you to shift and when you didn’t, he sent you away.”

“It’s the only explanation,” Donovan added.

“We’re going to have to call Devlin,” Chase said as he looked at Donovan. Something was going on between the two brothers but Elliot couldn’t quite pinpoint what it was. “I think he needs to be here.”

“Who’s Devlin?” Elliot asked, glancing between the two men.

“My twin brother,” Donovan said.

“You remember that friend of mine who I said was mated to a vampire prince?” Tommy asked.

Elliot nodded.

“That would be Devlin.”

“Dude!”

Tommy chuckled. “Maybe you’ll get to meet your first vampire.”

“Donovan, I also think we need to go get Flynn.” Chase grimaced as if he didn’t like the thought. “He has as much right to be here as the rest of us.”

“You know mother will be pissed,” Donovan said, shaking his head. “She doesn’t like him leaving home.”

Elliot only heard one word and confusion filled him. Mother? How in the hell were they talking about their mother getting pissed if she was already dead? Elliot pushed his confusion away as anger took its place. He suddenly felt like he was being played with and he was not happy about it.

“Wait just a damn minute. First your mother was dead, then I smelled like her, and now you’re talking about her getting pissed off?” Elliot jumped to his feet, glaring at the brothers. He clenched his fists and stomped his foot in frustration. “Does anyone besides me see the problem here?”

“Oh geez, Elliot!” Donovan pushed his hand through his collar-length brown hair. “Man, I’m sorry. I didn’t even think how this would sound to you. Our birth mother is dead. The woman we’re talking about is our stepmother. She’s the one that’s going to get pissed when we go get Flynn.”

“Who is Flynn?” Elliot’s confusion came back in a rush when Donovan shot Chase a slow look.

“Flynn is our younger brother,” Chase said. “He had a real bad experience several years ago, so our stepmother is very protective of him. She doesn’t like him leaving the house.”

“You mean she thinks Flynn is her last chance at grandchildren,” Donovan snorted.

“Excuse me?”

“Chase, Devlin, and I are all gay, and all mated to men. It drives our stepmother up a wall. She can’t stand the idea that we’re with men or that we mated men against her explicit direction not to. She wants grandchildren to carry on the family bloodline, and she doesn’t care how she gets them.”

“Or who she hurts to get them,” Chase added.

Donovan nodded in agreement.

“This woman sounds like a real piece of work,” Elliot said. “Why doesn’t your father do something about her?”

Donovan shrugged. “I don’t think our father ever got over our mother’s death. He’s pretty much lived out of a bottle since she died. Our stepmother runs things in the family. It’s one of the reasons the three of us went with Quilliam Reece when he became alpha of his own pack, so we could get away from her.”

“Another reason our stepmother hates us,” Chase added.

“So, you just left your brother there with her?” Elliot asked, shocked.

“We’ve been planning on going back for Flynn, but there hasn’t been time. When we arrived here in Wolf Creek Valley, we all kind of found our mates. Between that, and getting things set up for Flynn, it’s been kind of hard to get him.

“You have to understand, Elliot,” Chase added, “several years ago, someone kidnapped Flynn,” Chase replied. “They wanted to study him and learn how shifting worked. By the time we found him again, he had been so abused and tortured that he was never the same again. He doesn’t leave home, ever.”

“I think that’s when our father really went downhill. He married our stepmother right after that. Maybe he was trying to find us another mother or something, someone that could care for us because he couldn’t.” Donovan shrugged. “Maybe he just didn’t want the responsibility anymore. I don’t know. But that’s when things changed.”

Elliot thought he detected a hint of tears in Chase’s eyes when the man looked at him, but he couldn’t be sure. He didn’t know Chase, or Donovan, that well.

“Our mother was pregnant when she got kidnapped. I think that’s what really did it for our father. He lost not only our mother but his

child as well. When Flynn was kidnapped, it just kind of sent him over the edge.”

“Elliot, I’d like you to do something for me.”

Elliot looked at Chase, his words coming right out of the blue. Apprehension filled him when the large man stood up and walked toward him. He started to push back against Tommy, but shock froze him in place when Chase knelt down on the floor in front of him.

“I’m not making a pass at you or anything,” Chase said as he tilted his head to one side, baring his neck, “but I need you to sniff my neck.”

This couldn’t be happening, Elliot thought as he looked back at Tommy in confusion. He could see that Tommy didn’t like what Chase wanted him to do. The man’s lips were pressed tightly together, his eyebrows drawn together in a deep frown.

“Tommy?”

“Go ahead, pretty baby, just don’t sniff him very long. My wolf might take it wrong and attack Chase for making a pass at my mate.”

“I don’t have to—”

“No, you do. This is important, Elliot. You need to smell Chase’s neck.”

Elliot was more confused than he could ever remember being but he did as his mate said, leaning forward to sniff at Chase’s neck. Instantly, an alluring scent filled his nose. It was a combination of an outdoor woodsy scent and summer rain.

Elliot blinked as tears came to his eyes. “You smell like my mother.”

Chase nodded and scooted back to sit on the couch beside his brother. “I suspected as much.”

“Suspected what?” Elliot asked.

The look that passed between Chase and Donovan before they looked back over at him sent chills down Elliot’s back. He braced himself, not sure he was going to like what they had to say. He was

suddenly terrified what they would say would take Tommy from him and grabbed onto the man's arms to hold him close.

"We thought there was just the four of us brothers," Chase said slowly. "We may have been wrong."

"Huh?"

"Elliot, we believe you're our brother."

Chapter 13

“Tommy?”

Tommy glanced away from the window and over his shoulder to Elliot. He could see the apprehension in his mate, the soft tremble of his hands that he tried to hide by twisting them together.

The last few days had been pretty hard on Elliot, and Tommy knew that. Just the last two days since Donovan and Chase left to get their brother were wearing on Tommy’s nerves. The trip should have taken a day. It had turned into two. Hopefully, once Chase and Donovan got back with their brother things would even out a bit.

“What’s wrong, pretty baby?” Tommy asked as he fully turned to face Elliot.

“You’re not...” Elliot licked his lips. “Does this change things?”

“Between us?”

Elliot nodded, a small lock of blond hair falling against his forehead.

“No, Elliot, it doesn’t change things.” Tommy chuckled. “It makes them more interesting, I’ll grant you, but we’re mates, and that’s for life.”

The deep sigh that fell from Elliot’s lips made Tommy laugh. He gestured with his hand for Elliot to come closer, not in the least surprised when the man practically sprinted across the room. Tommy wrapped his arms around Elliot and buried his face in the man’s sweet smelling hair.

“Nothing will ever change how I feel about you, Elliot.”

“How do you feel about me?” Elliot asked as he tilted his head back.

"I think you're the best thing since the invention of sliced bread."

"Sliced bread?"

"Pre-canned beer?" Tommy countered, barely able to keep the grin off his face at Elliot's astonishment. "Individually wrapped cheese?"

"Tommy!"

"Sorry, pretty baby, but you're just too easy sometimes."

"I can be." Elliot's eyes started to sparkle. "Easy, I mean."

Tommy felt his eyebrows shoot up at the blatant invitation he could see in Elliot's face. He could immediately feel heat surround him, making it hard to breathe. Arousal spiraled through his body.

Tommy quickly glanced around the living room, trying to find a spot where they could be alone. He thought of the bedroom upstairs, but it seemed too far away. Then he remembered the pantry. It would do for his purposes, and he wouldn't need it very long. Tommy already felt like he was ready to blow just from Elliot's heated look.

Elliot's laughter filled the room as Tommy picked the man up and tossed him over his shoulder. Tommy could feel several sets of eyes on him as he carried Elliot out of the living room and made his way quickly to the pantry. He didn't care. He needed his mate and he needed him now. They would understand.

Tommy walked into the pantry and set Elliot down before reaching back to close the door behind him and turn on the light. When he reached for Elliot again, he was shocked to find him trembling. "Elliot?"

"Are you locking me up again?" Elliot voice wavered.

"Oh, god, no, baby." Tommy pulled Elliot's shaking body into his arms, mentally smacking himself for not remembering Elliot being locked in the same damn pantry. "No, I just wanted someplace where we could be alone."

"And you chose the pantry?"

“It seemed like a good idea at the time.” Tommy chuckled. He found Elliot’s snort amusing. “I’m sorry, pretty baby, I wasn’t thinking. I just wanted to be alone with you.”

“Yeah?” Elliot leaned back, one eyebrow arched. “Why?”

Tommy growled and went for the throat exposed when Elliot tilted his head back. He heard Elliot’s dim whimper then the man pressed against him, and he felt a whole lot more. Tommy groaned as he licked a line from the base of Elliot’s neck to his ear. His mate tasted so damn good.

“Lube, Tommy,” Elliot panted. “Did you remember the lube?”

“That’s why I thought of the pantry.” Tommy leaned away from Elliot’s neck and grinned, reaching for a small plastic bottle behind the man’s head. “The lube is all the way upstairs. The cooking oil isn’t.”

“Can you use cooking oil?”

“It wouldn’t be my first choice, but it will do in a pinch.” Tommy chuckled. “Now, drop your pants, gorgeous, and brace yourself. This is going to be fast and rough.”

Elliot giggled and went to work on his jeans. Tommy unbuttoned his own, which was hard to do, considering he kept getting interrupted by the sight of Elliot’s naked body. By the time he got them undone and pushed down his legs, Elliot stood in front of him with his arms crossed over his chest, lightly tapping his foot.

“Your fault.”

“What is my fault?”

“If you weren’t so damn gorgeous, I wouldn’t have problems getting my clothes off.”

“I would think me being gorgeous would mean you could get your clothes off faster.”

Tommy paused in the act of taking the lid off the oil to stare at Elliot in surprise. The little arch of Elliot’s eyebrow sent Tommy into a burst of laughter. He wondered if he would ever stop being surprised by his mate. He hoped not.

“Grab the shelves, pretty baby,” Tommy said as he dropped to his knees. He poured a generous amount of oil out on his fingers then set the bottle on the floor. Looking up at Elliot’s confused face, Tommy grinned. “Spread ‘em.”

Elliot grabbed the shelves on either side of him then slowly spread his legs. Tommy kept his eyes locked with Elliot’s as he reached between the man’s legs and pressed his fingers against his tight entrance.

Elliot’s response was quick and arousing. The man’s head fell back on his shoulders and he groaned, his legs shaking. Tommy grinned and pressed one oiled finger into Elliot’s ass. “You like that, pretty baby?”

Elliot glanced down, his eyes dazed, and nodded his head.

“Then you’re gonna love this.” Tommy leaned forward and swallowed Elliot’s cock to the root. At the same time, he pressed another finger into his mate.

Elliot’s reaction was instantaneous. He cried out, filling Tommy’s mouth with his release. Tommy gloried in the satisfaction he derived from giving his mate so much pleasure even as he swallowed down all Elliot had to give him.

Tommy grabbed the oil off the floor and poured some more into the palm of his hand. He set the bottle back down then wrapped his hand around his hard shaft. He groaned at the ache that filled him as he covered himself with oil. He wasn’t going to last long, not long at all.

“Ready for me, pretty baby?” Tommy asked as he stood and reached for the man. He lifted Elliot into his arms, pressing the man back against the wall behind him. He grinned when Elliot’s legs wrapped around his waist. “I guess you are.”

“Kisses,” Elliot panted. “Need kisses.”

Tommy was all too happy to oblige. He pressed his lips against Elliot’s, feeling the man’s mouth open to allow him in. Intense desire

burned through his lips, igniting every nerve in his body. Kissing Elliot was a joy unto itself.

Tommy reached behind Elliot and slid his fingers back down the crease of his ass. Two of his fingers slid right into the man. The third finger took a little moving, a little pushing in and pulling out before it slid in the rest of the way. Tommy would never do anything that hurt Elliot, no matter how much he wanted the man.

"I love how damn responsive you are, pretty baby," Tommy groaned at the soft pressure of Elliot's cock pushing against his stomach. The man's recovery time was astronomical.

Tommy pulled his fingers from Elliot then gripped the man's ass cheeks, pulling them apart. He pushed forward until he felt the head of his cock slid against Elliot. Pushing forward even more, Tommy started to slide in.

Elliot's moan filled the small room. Tommy glanced down at the man, grinning when he found Elliot staring back up at him, his mouth hanging open as if he couldn't keep his groans of pleasure behind his lips.

Tommy gripped Elliot's ass tighter and slowly pulled out. He could see Elliot's response to his movements in the man's glazed eyes. He thrust forward suddenly and all the air blew out of Elliot's mouth.

"Like that, pretty baby?" Tommy asked as he did it again.

Elliot nodded, his mouth still hanging open.

"Or like this?" Tommy rammed up into Elliot several times, quick short motions. Elliot's head dropped back. His hands tightened on Tommy's shoulders.

"I...I have to choose?"

"Guess not." Tommy chuckled. He started thrusting again, alternating between fast and short, to slow and long. Each movement brought a different sound from Elliot's mouth, a groan, a moan, a deep cry. Tommy was fascinated. He couldn't look away from Elliot. Everything the man felt was written across his flushed face.

Tommy was so caught up in watching Elliot's pleasure play across his handsome features that his orgasm took him by surprise. One second he was thrusting into Elliot, the next, his knees buckled as the most intense orgasm of his life swept over him.

Tommy roared, his vision blurring as he felt the knot at the end of his cock extend to take hold inside of his mate. More pleasure exploded through Tommy when he heard Elliot cry out, the space between them filling with the man's release.

He sat back on his legs and cradled Elliot to him, smiling into the man's hair when Elliot nuzzled into his chest. His hands gently stroked up and down Elliot's back as he waited for the knot to recede, but glad he had these few minutes connected to his mate.

"You never did tell me what that thing is," Elliot mumbled against Tommy's throat.

"Tell you what that thing is, pretty baby?"

Elliot wiggled his hips, drawing another groan from Tommy. "That thing inside of me."

"My cock?" Elliot's head snapped back. Tommy chuckled at the fierce little glare in Elliot's baby blue eyes. "It's called a knot, Elliot. Every shifter has one, but it only comes out when we have sex with our mates."

"Really?" Elliot's eyebrows shot up.

"Really."

"So, before me, you've never experienced it?"

"Nope, you're the first one I've ever knotted."

Elliot's grin was beautiful and lit up his entire face. "I like that."

"Me too, pretty baby." Tommy leaned in and planted a slow, gentle kiss on Elliot's lips. He grinned when he pulled away, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively. "Sometime later I'll tell you what happens on the full moon. You'll like it, I promise."

Tommy felt the knot finally start to recede and chuckled at the low groan or protest that came from his mate. He didn't want to leave

Elliot either but knew it was not something he could prevent at the moment. But maybe later they could try again.

“Come on, pretty baby, let’s get dressed. I’m sure everyone is wondering where we are.”

Elliot snorted. “I’m pretty sure they know exactly where we are. You’re very loud.”

“Says the man who just screamed in ecstasy,” Tommy snickered. He had no doubt that everyone had heard the both of them. He didn’t care. In fact, he was in favor of it. The more the others knew that Tommy and Elliot were mated, the better. He wanted everyone to know Elliot was here to stay.

Tommy cleaned up with some paper towels from the pantry shelf then got dressed. He couldn’t help but chuckle at the small grimace on Elliot’s face as the man cleaned himself up. Cooking oil might do when you were in a hurry, but it sure left a mess behind.

As Elliot moved toward the door, something intense suddenly flared through Tommy. Somehow, this small, neurotic, chatty man had unlocked his heart and soul, and Elliot was laying claim to it a piece at a time.

“Elliot,” Tommy called out just as Elliot reached for the doorknob.

“Yeah?”

Tommy couldn’t miss the intensity in Elliot’s eyes as they traveled over his face. He felt it all the way down to his toes. He was powerless to resist the emotion he could see burning in Elliot’s eyes. And he didn’t want to.

Tommy walked over to stand next to Elliot, cupping his hand around the man’s beautiful cheek. He swallowed hard, the sudden lump in his throat making it hard to talk. “I...you’re mine, you know?” he whispered.

Elliot’s expression stilled then grew serious. The beginning of a smile tipped the corners of his lips. “I love you, too, Tommy.”

Tommy blinked. He wasn't sure that was exactly what he wanted to say. He wasn't even sure how he really felt about Elliot. Shouldn't they need more than a few days to know if they loved each other? Maybe years?

But the more he thought about the joy that filled him at Elliot's words, the more Tommy began to suspect his mate had phrased their feeling for each other perfectly. Tommy smiled and stroked his thumb over Elliot's high cheekbone.

"Yeah."

Tommy started to lean in and kiss Elliot when a sudden knocking on the door made them both jump. "Chase and Donovan are back," Nate called through the door. "You want to come out of my pantry or should we all just join you in there?"

Elliot giggled.

Tommy rolled his eyes. "We'll be out in just a moment, Nate."

"We'll be in the living room."

Tommy leaned his forehead against Elliot's, chuckling lightly. "I guess we have to go, huh, pretty baby?"

Elliot's baby blue eyes blinked up at him as he leaned into Tommy, tilting his face upward. "We could always pretend that we didn't hear them."

"Somehow, I believe Nate when he says they would all just join us in here."

Elliot's giggle filled the small room. "You're probably right."

Despite his words, Tommy was disappointed when Elliot turned and opened the pantry door. He blinked several times as the light in the kitchen blinded him for a moment. He hadn't realized how dark the pantry was until now. When his vision cleared, Tommy stepped out of the pantry after Elliot and grabbed his hand.

"Come on, pretty baby, let's go see what all the uproar is about."

Tommy was glad Elliot had a smile on his face when they left the kitchen and rounded the corner of the living room. Several people

filled the room, two that Tommy had never seen before. He paused at the threshold, pulling Elliot close to him.

“Chase, Donovan.” Tommy nodded at the two men. “I take it your trip was successful?”

“In a manner of speaking.” Chase snorted, crossing his arms over his chest. “I’d like you to meet our father, Andre Morgan.”

“Your father?” Tommy glanced at the older man, noting the way his eyes seemed to be glued to Elliot. He took a step over to place himself between Elliot and Andre. He didn’t care who the man was. He didn’t like the intense way Andre eyed his mate.

“This is our brother, Flynn.”

“I know you,” Elliot whispered. He inhaled suddenly “You were in the bed next to me when I was sick.”

Tommy heard a low growl come from his left. He turned to see Chase bearing down on him and Elliot. Much to his surprise, Elliot stepped back and pointed his finger at Chase. “Touch me and I will bite your balls off!”

Chase stopped, his eyebrows shooting up to his hairline. Slowly, a grin started to move across the man’s face followed by rich laughter. “I’d prefer to keep them, thank you very much. I have a couple of guys to keep satisfied.”

“How did you end up in the bed next to me when I was sick?” Elliot asked as he looked back at Flynn.

Tommy followed Elliot’s gaze to a man that stood silently next to Donovan. He looked scared to death, his small frame nearly vibrating with fear. His eyes darted frantically around the room until they finally settled on Elliot as he stepped out from behind Tommy.

Flynn frowned, his brow furrowing as if he was trying to figure something out in his head. His hand shook as he pointed at Elliot. “Yo-you were there.”

Elliot nodded and stepped farther into the room. Tommy saw everyone step back as they watched the two men walk up to each other. Elliot looked Flynn up and down then glanced over at Tommy.

“Flynn was there?” Tommy asked.

Elliot nodded and turned back to Flynn. “He—the things they did to him...” Elliot shook his head. His face had paled. He looked agonized. “He screamed so much. I thought they were killing him but my father said—”

“That man is not your father!”

Tommy growled deep in his chest as he quickly crossed over to stand by Elliot. He didn’t care who Andre Morgan was. No one snapped at his pretty baby like that. “Watch your tone, Morgan.”

“Philip Spencer is not his father.”

“How do you know who Philip Spencer is?” Tommy asked as he slowly placed himself in front of Elliot once again. He could feel both the animosity coming off of Andre and the fear from Elliot. The others in the room, with the exception of Flynn, who was shaking, were tense but still.

“I’m more curious as to how he knows Philip Spencer isn’t Elliot’s father,” Joe said.

Tommy looked over to see Joe standing partially in front of Nate, just as he stood in front of Elliot. A glance around the room found Daniel doing the same with his wife, and Donovan and Jim vying for the protective position. All of them were doing the best to shield their mates from any and all perceived threats.

Tommy let out a deep sigh. “Okay, look, this isn’t getting us anywhere. We’re all too busy trying to protect our mates to even talk about this reasonably. I think we all need to step back and calm down. I’m sure that Andre will explain things if we let him. Right, Andre?”

Tommy grabbed Elliot and walked him over to a tan-colored overstuffed chair by the fireplace. He sat down and pulled Elliot onto his lap. Joe did the same with the other chair and Nate, the rest of the people in the room finding places around the living room.

Chase stood by the fireplace, alone. Tommy knew the man had met his mates, Justin and Taylor, recently, but they were still working out the dynamics of their relationship. Tommy hoped they worked it

out soon. No one should be without their mate, especially in times like these.

“Andre,” Tommy said as he looked over at the man, “how do you know that Philip Spencer isn’t Elliot’s father?”

Andre’s eyes flickered to Elliot then to his sons, one at a time before coming back to rest on Elliot. “I should probably start at the beginning.”

Tommy barely suppressed his snort by pressing his lips together. The beginning would be nice, but so would the entire conversation. “Please, start where ever you need to.”

“My wife, Summer, was pregnant with our fifth child when she disappeared. Flynn was barely three years old, Chase, Devlin, and Donovan a few years older.” Andre’s lips curved up in a sad little smile. “She was so excited. She was just positive that this time it would be a girl. She’d already given birth to four boys and she wanted her girl. I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much pink in my life.”

The smile slowly slid off Andre’s lips and his eyes began to sparkle with unshed tears. “And then one day she was gone, just gone.” He shook his head, staring down at the floor. “I don’t know what happened to her. I couldn’t find her for the longest time.”

“Wait, you couldn’t find her for the longest time?” Chase whispered. “You mean you did find her? You found our mother?”

“I didn’t find her, but the people who have her found me.”

“Have?” Donovan shouted as he pushed away from Jim and jumped to his feet. “You said have. Is our mother still alive?”

Tears started trailing down Andre’s pale cheeks as he nodded. “Yes, your mother is still alive.”

“And you never told us?” Chase shouted.

“Son, you have to understand, I couldn’t tell you.” Andre wiped the tears off his face as he looked up at his sons. “I couldn’t. They said they would kill her if I told anyone.

“She’s our mother!”

“And she’s my mate!” Andre countered loudly. He waved his hand at Flynn. “Look what they did to your brother. If you know they can do that, what do you think they could do to your mother? I did what I had to do to keep her alive.”

“What?”

Andre leaned back on the couch and rubbed his hands over his face then dropped them into his lap. “After your mother was taken, I searched for her. Other packs searched for her. We never had a hint of where she was. Then one day, a little more than ten years ago, I received a phone call from someone that said they had her. I didn’t want to believe it at first, but then they kidnapped Flynn.”

“How did you know it was them?” Tommy asked.

“They let me speak to my mate.”

“You spoke with Mom?” Donovan whispered. “How was she? Was she okay? Did they hurt her like they hurt Flynn?”

“Do you remember several years ago when I was injured?” Andre asked, looking up at Donovan and Chase. “I told you I had been injured in a car accident. I spent almost two weeks in bed recovering.”

Chase and Donovan nodded.

“I tried to free her. It was after my failed rescue mission that they took Flynn. It was their way of proving that they could get to any of you any time that they wanted. They had total control, and I couldn’t keep any of you safe from them.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Chase asked as he walked over to kneel at his father’s feet. “We would have helped you. The other packs would have helped. We could have saved them both.”

Tommy tensed when Andre’s eyes went to the man curled up on his lap. “They had Elliot,” Andre said softly.

“Elliot?”

“He was the child your mother was carrying when she was kidnapped.”

Chapter 14

“You’re my father?”

Andre nodded. “My wife was pregnant with you when she was kidnapped.”

“But, I thought...” Elliot frowned. “Philip Spencer isn’t my father?”

“No.” Andre shook his head. “If they had kept you all in the same place, I would have asked the other packs to help me rescue you, but Philip Spencer was raising you as his own son. I knew where they were keeping Summer and Flynn, but Spencer kept moving you around. I could never get a lead on exactly where you were.”

“What about our stepmother?” Donovan growled. “How did she come into the picture?”

“She’s not your stepmother!” Andre snapped. “I would never betray your mother like that. Sophia works for Philip Spencer. She was sent in to keep me in line. As long as I agreed to have her there and do as she said, they would let me see your mother once a month.”

Donovan’s mouth dropped open. “They let you see her?”

“Every month on the full moon, I’m allowed three days with your mother.”

“That’s where you go every month,” Chase whispered. “We thought you—”

“I know what you thought,” Andre snapped. “You thought I was a drunk that didn’t care about his family.”

“Dad, we—”

Andre waved a dismissive hand at his sons. “I know, I gave you that impression, and I’m sorry. It was the only way. If I did what they

said, they promised not to take any more of my children. They let me see your mother.” Andre swallowed hard, his eyes watering again. “They let your mother keep Tereza.”

“Tereza?”

“Your sister.”

“We have a sister?” Chase asked.

“She was conceived at their facility on one of my visits. She just celebrated her tenth birthday. They promised they would let your mother keep her and not experiment on her, but I suspect they are just waiting for her to hit puberty and shift.”

“I didn’t shift until a few days ago,” Elliot said. “Maybe she will be like me and not shift.”

“She’s already showing signs of shifting, Elliot. I figure we have a few more months, tops, before she hits puberty, and then all bets are off. Once they have an unmated female shifter in their hands there is no telling what they will do to her.”

“Why are they doing this?” Elliot asked. “Why do they need an unmated female shifter? Wasn’t your wife enough?”

“Summer is mated to me, which means she can’t mate with anyone else. Tereza doesn’t have a mate. Her genetic makeup is different than a mated female’s.”

“To what purpose?”

“They want to create the perfect combination of genetics and mind power with the aim to create a killing machine controlled totally by them. They could sell his services to the highest bidder, the government, other governments, private businesses, millionaires, etc. They would make millions.”

“Sell his services?” Nate snorted. “They sound like the Teacher.”

“The teacher?” Andre looked confused.

“The Teacher was made my guardian after my mother died. He used people like me to make him money, lots of money. I have certain abilities that make me very popular among the Teacher’s clients. The Teacher sold my services to the highest bidder, government agencies,

businessmen, drug dealers, you name it, and he sold our services to them. That's how he's gained so much power."

"And he made money off of this?"

Nate nodded. "He made a lot of money. I personally brought in a lot of money for him, some of it was supposed to be mine. He said he was investing my percentage for me, but I think he just kept lining his pockets with it. I know I never saw any of it."

Elliot frowned at the eyebrow Tommy cocked. "What?"

"Does anyone besides me see a connection here?"

"What connection?"

"The Teacher made millions selling the services of Nate and his friends. He invested a lot of that money, money that was supposed to go to them. Philip Spencer owns one of the biggest investment firms in the area, hell, maybe the entire country. And we know for a fact that Spencer has a lot of shady deals going on. Could the Teacher and Philip Spencer have been working together?"

Elliot realized he hadn't been around during the time everyone dealt with the Teacher, but the silence that filled the room at Tommy's words sent chills running up and down his spine. He didn't want to believe the man he thought was his father could be so evil, but it was beginning to look like he didn't have a choice.

Philip Spencer was involved in some pretty shady stuff, but even Elliot wasn't sure they had reached the bottom of the shithole the man was involved in. Elliot just knew he suddenly didn't want to be connected to Philip Spencer in any way, shape, or form.

"Tommy?"

"Yeah, pretty baby?"

"This mate thing, it's for life, right?"

"Of course, I thought you understood that." Elliot pressed his head against Tommy's shoulder when the man's arms tightened around him. "This is for eternity, Elliot."

"Then can I take your last name? I don't want to be a Spencer anymore."

Tommy stilled. "You want to take my last name?"

Elliot shrugged, suddenly afraid that Tommy would tell him no. They might be mated, but it wasn't like they were married or anything. Elliot just didn't know how this thing worked. Maybe Tommy didn't want that kind of commitment.

"You wouldn't rather change your name to Morgan?"

"I'd rather have your name."

Tommy's arms tightened even more, until Elliot could barely breathe. "Tommy," he gasped. "Can't breathe."

"My father is the town mayor. I'll bet he can rush the papers through for us." Tommy said as he loosened his arms a bit then placed a small kiss on the top of Elliot's head. "Elliot Nash has a nice ring to it."

"Thank you, Tommy," Elliot whispered silently, nuzzling his head against Tommy's shoulder.

"Thank you, pretty baby."

"Damn!" Joe exclaimed, bringing Elliot's attention back to the conversation. "Do you know what you're saying, Tommy?"

"It's just a thought. I figured with Philip Spencer being knee-deep in this, and owning an investment company, that maybe he knew or was involved with the Teacher. It just kind of made sense to me."

"That means Nate and all the other students that the Teacher had aren't safe. Philip Spencer might know exactly where each of them are located." Joe's face paled. "And if he does—"

"Then he can try to take them back," Tommy finished for his brother.

"Fuck, we have to call Reece and let him know," Donovan said.

"I need to call Taylor and Justin, make sure they stay safe."

"Send them to Devlin," Donovan said. "If anyone can keep them safe while we deal with this situation, it's that damn vampire coven of his."

Chase nodded as he jumped to his feet. He was already dialing his cell phone as he walked into the kitchen. Elliot glanced around the

room, trying to figure out what in the hell was going on because he didn't have a clue.

"Tommy, what—"

"When Nate came to us, we rescued him and a bunch of other guys from this man they called the Teacher," Tommy explained. "He was keeping them held captive, forcing him to do what he wanted. He'd had them for years. Joe killed the Teacher when the man came back for Nate."

"And if Philip Spencer was involved with the Teacher," Donovan went on, "then all of the men we rescued could be in danger."

"So, why don't we just go stop him?" Elliot asked.

"It's not that simple, Elliot," Andre said. "They have Summer and our daughter. Sophia is still back at the house waiting for us to return. If I hadn't seen the boys leaving with Flynn and hidden away in their car, I never would have been able to leave. As it is, Sophia is going to be pissed when she discovers Flynn is gone. She thinks he is her last chance."

"Last chance at what?" Elliot was getting more confused by the minute.

"Chase, Devlin, and Donovan have all found their mates, male mates. Flynn is unmated. There's a fifty percent chance that his mate will be female, therefore, he can produce more subjects for her bosses. It's the same reason they want to keep Summer and Tereza in their clutches."

"I don't understand," Elliot said. "I just found Tommy a few days ago. If I'm a shifter, then why didn't they keep me locked up like everyone else?"

"Because you never shifted, Elliot."

Elliot looked up at Tommy. "I was defective?"

"You, pretty baby," Tommy said as he tapped his finger on the tip of Elliot's nose, "are perfect."

Elliot felt his face flush with pleasure at Tommy's words and buried it in the man's shirt. He could hear the soft laughter of those

around him and figured his embarrassment had been worth it if it lessened the tension in the room.

“Remember, we talked about this, Elliot. I think your wolf knew something was wrong and refused to allow the shift. It was the wolf’s way of protecting you both. That’s why you got so sick when you were fifteen years old.”

“You were sick?” Andre asked. “I never learned of this.”

“How would you?” Elliot asked.

“Your mother was kept appraised of your development.” Andre grimaced. “When they would bring you in for your monthly checkups, they would put you to sleep, allowing your mother and sister to see you for a few minutes. Your mother lives for those times.”

“They told me she was dead.”

Andre shook his head. “No, she wasn’t dead. She is just kept under close guard. They move her and Tereza around a lot, from facility to facility. I never know exactly where they are going to be until Sophia tells me.”

“But they are brought in to see me when I have my monthly exams?”

Andre nodded. “Yes.”

“Then I know exactly where they are going to be next week.”

“How?”

Andre, and everyone else, looked so interested that Elliot couldn’t help but smile. “Because I know where I will be.”

* * * *

“Elliot, I’m not sure I like this idea.”

Elliot glanced over his shoulder at his mate as he rinsed off the last of the dinner dishes. He wasn’t in the least surprised to see Tommy’s arms crossed over his chest or the little glare in the man’s eyes. Elliot sighed deeply as he walked over to lean against Tommy.

“I don’t like it either, but can you see any other way to do this?”

“Does it have to be you?”

“Yes.” Elliot chuckled. “I don’t think we could get away with sneaking someone else in. The doctors know my face.”

“I still don’t like it,” Tommy grumbled. “It’s like sending you right back into the lion’s den.”

“Tommy—”

“Elliot, what if something goes wrong?”

“Nothing is going to go wrong.”

“You can’t know that!” Tommy snapped. “Anything could happen, and if Philip Spencer gets his hands on you again, there’s no telling what he could do. I might never see you again.”

“Tommy.” Elliot gripped a handful of Tommy’s shirt and gave his mate a little shake. “You’ve got to stop this. I need you on my side right now. I’m scared enough for the both of us.”

Tommy’s head fell back. Elliot didn’t know if his eyes were closed or if he was counting the ceiling tiles, but he could feel the tension in the hard body pressed against him. Elliot leaned forward and rested his head against Tommy’s chest.

“I have to do this, Tommy, please understand.”

“I do understand, Elliot,” Tommy said as his arms wrapped around Elliot. “I just don’t like it. If I were to lose you...”

“That will never happen,” Elliot whispered, “no matter what happens. I will always belong to you.”

“I know, pretty baby. I just don’t like this plan. It puts you into too much danger.”

“He’s right, Elliot.”

Elliot turned to see Daniel Nash standing in the doorway of the kitchen. “Do you have a better plan? Because if you do, I’d like to hear it.”

“Let us go in and get your mother and sister out.”

“It’s not enough.” Elliot turned in Tommy’s arms and leaned back against his mate. “We can’t just rescue my mother and sister. We

have to destroy anything that says shifters even exist. We can't let him continue to be a threat to us."

"I agree, but how do you plan to do that?" Daniel asked. "There has to be more than one place that this information is kept. Spence Corp has a lot of different research facilities. How can we destroy it all?"

"We have enough people," Tommy said. "If Elliot could give us each of the locations then we could plan simultaneous strikes. Destroy everything all at once."

"We'd have to hit Philip's office at the same time, and maybe his home office." Elliot liked this idea much better than the one they had before. "He keeps a lot of things on his computers at work and there's a vault of disks in his home office. That's where I usually go for my exams."

"It would have to be quick and very coordinated." Daniel rubbed his chin. "But it might be possible. Chase has some very interesting friends, and we have more than one person in our pack and Zacarius' coven that might be able to get in where others couldn't."

"Anything is better than letting Elliot go to his usual monthly appointment by himself, even if we put a tracking device on him. No matter how closely we follow behind him there's always a chance that they will discover the tracking device and take Elliot."

"So," Elliot said, "put a plan together and call these guys. We have five days until my next appointment. That should give you plenty of time to come up with something, shouldn't it?"

"It will be tight, but I think it can be done." Daniel grinned. "I'll start making phone calls. You two go talk to Chase."

"Wait!"

"You have something to add, Elliot?" Daniel asked.

"There's a doctor, his name is Dr. Carter Banning, I don't know which facility he will be at, but he's the lead doctor on my case. He's kind of my—" Elliot grimaced. "He's the right hand man to Philip

Spencer. He knows everything that is going on. You might want to find out what he knows.”

“We’ll keep an eye out for him then.”

Elliot nodded at Daniel, thankful that the alpha was listening to him and accepting his words as fact. Elliot’s father, scratch that... Elliot’s captor had never done that. Philip Spencer’s word was law, and anyone that didn’t accept his word paid the price, usually in a very painful and humiliating way.

Elliot was still trying to process that fact that the man he thought was his father all of his life was in fact the one keeping him from his true family. While he didn’t like Philip Spencer all that much, there was a part of him that felt affection for the man he thought was his father. And he didn’t know how to resign himself to the fact that it had all been a lie.

“Tommy?” Elliot asked as they left the kitchen.

“Yeah, Elliot?”

“Do you think I’m gullible?”

“Gullible?” Tommy stopped walking to turn and stare down at Elliot.

“Yeah, you know, gullible, easily led, accepting of everything?” Elliot couldn’t think of any other way to define what he was trying to say.

“No, pretty baby, you’re not gullible. You just try to see the good in everyone, and that’s not a bad thing. Who wants to go around their entire life waiting for people to take advantage of them? I think that would be a sucky way to live.”

“But if I had questioned things a little more, maybe—”

“Elliot, listen to me.” Elliot couldn’t miss the intensity in Tommy’s eyes as the man looked down at him. “Philip Spencer fooled the entire world, not just you. He told you from a very young age that he was your father. Why would you have believed anything else? You had no reason to question him.”

“But—”

“Elliot, this is not your fault. This whole thing rests squarely on the shoulders of Philip Spencer. He did this, not you.”

“Yeah, but—”

“Elliot!”

Elliot couldn’t help but giggle at the exasperation in Tommy’s voice. “So, I shouldn’t feel bad that I’m so happy Philip Spencer is not my father?”

“I’m thrilled.” Tommy’s grin was enchanting, making Elliot’s heart pound a little faster. “Hell, I may even throw you a party to celebrate.”

Elliot stroked his finger of the tribal tattoo around Tommy’s right bicep. “Would you let me get a tattoo like yours?”

“Elliot, you don’t need my permission to get a tattoo. You’re an adult. You get to make your decisions. If you want a tattoo, get a tattoo.”

“Yeah, but how would you feel about it?”

“I think it would be sexy as hell, pretty baby.” Tommy’s chuckle was low and sexy, making his chest rumble and curling Elliot’s toes. “Maybe I’ll get another one as well, one that says Pretty Baby right over my heart, so everyone knows you’re mine.”

Elliot frowned. “If you wanted everyone to know I was yours, wouldn’t it make more sense to get your name tattooed on me?”

Elliot’s breath caught in his throat when the corners of Tommy’s lips began to tilt up. Tommy looked like Elliot had just offered him the crown jewels. He nipped at the finger Tommy rubbed across his lips, arching an eyebrow when Tommy inhaled sharply.

“You’d do that for me?” Tommy whispered.

“I’d do anything for you.” Elliot smiled. “You’re my mate.”

Chapter 15

Tommy held Elliot close to his side as he watched his father lay out the plan to raid Philip Spencer's different facilities and home. He could feel the tension in the air crawling over his skin like a million tiny ants. Everyone was as apprehensive as he felt.

The idea Daniel Nash came up with was one that had to have perfect timing in order for it to be successful. Tommy personally felt that there were too many possibilities of something going wrong and everything blowing up in their faces, thus, putting Elliot in danger. But he couldn't seem to talk anyone out of it, not even Elliot.

"So, does everyone understand what they are supposed to do?"

Tommy looked up to find his father's eyes pinned on him. He could see the question in Daniel's eyes, wondering if Tommy would go along with the plan. Against his better judgment, Tommy nodded his head.

He hated the plan!

"Just so we're clear, Elliot is our first priority. If this thing starts to go south, I want everyone to converge on Elliot's location." Daniel pointed to the small, thin, black devices the leader of each team held in their hands. "The tracking device on Elliot is dialed in to each of your GPS trackers. If Elliot feels he's in danger, he will hit his panic button. A red light will flash indicating that you should follow the tracker and save him. Understood?"

Tommy looked around the room, grateful to see everyone nodding as if they had no problem putting Elliot's safety above the mission objectives. As far as he was concerned, there was no mission other than keeping Elliot safe.

“Okay, we have five targets in all,” Daniel continued. “Three private medical research facilities, one business complex, and Philip Spencer’s personal residence. Each team is to go in at the agreed upon time, retrieve whatever information they can, and destroy what they can’t. Stealth is the strategy here, people.”

“This isn’t exactly a government sanctioned mission,” Chase snorted. “We get caught, our goose is cooked.”

“Exactly,” Daniel said. “Capture isn’t an option, killing of civilian personnel even less so. Almost all of us have abilities that make it easier for us to stay clear of humans. Use it. The less casualties, the better.”

“And if we do come face-to-face with humans?”

Tommy glanced over at Bishop Kane, his boss. He’d been surprised that the man had been invited along for this mission, but his father insisted that the man had hidden skills that would be of great use to them.

“Try and incapacitate them if you can.”

“And if we can’t?”

“Do what you must to evade capture and detection.” Daniel tossed his pencil down onto the table they all stood around then thrust his fingers into his hair. “Look, people, this mission is real simple. We need to hit all these targets at the same time so that they won’t know what hit them. Retrieval of data is important because we need to know what they know about shifters.”

“Freeing Summer and Tereza should also be a high priority,” Andre added.

“It is, Andre. Chase is taking on that mission himself. If there’s a way to free your wife and daughter, Chase will see that it’s done. But you have to understand, we need to know how much they know about us. Having this information out there doesn’t just endanger a few of us. It could potentially endanger all of us, shifter, vampire, psychic, everyone. These people have to be stopped.”

“I understand. I do. I just want my wife and daughter back.”

“We all do, Andre,” Tommy said before his father could say anything else. “No one should have to go through what you’ve been through. I couldn’t imagine being separated from Elliot, knowing he was out there and that there wasn’t anything I could do to save him. I think I would have lost my mind if I were in your shoes.”

“Pray that you never are.” Andre drew in a long breath as if it were the first one he had taken in years, then slowly let it out. “Never take for granted what you have been given. You never know when you might not have it anymore.”

“I wish things could have been different,” Elliot said, the softness of his voice surprising Tommy. His mate had yet to really talk to Andre, and Tommy thought he might be having problems adjusting to someone besides Philip Spencer being his father. “But at least you knew she was alive.”

“Sometimes I wondered if it would have been better knowing she was dead, Elliot.”

“How can you say that?” Elliot cried out. “You have no idea what it was like thinking my mother was dead all these years and knowing my father hated me. I had no one, no family, no friends, nothing until Tommy came into my life. How could that be any worse?”

“I knew Summer was out there. I knew she was alive. I didn’t have the luxury of grieving for her as you did, as Chase, Devlin, and Donovan did. I had to pretend that she was dead, pretend that Sophia was my wife, all the while knowing that at any moment, they could kill Summer and Tereza. Each time I left them, I never knew if I was going to see them again.”

“I’m sorry,” Elliot whispered. “I guess we each have gone through our own ideas of hell.”

“Well,” Tommy said, “hopefully not much longer. If this plan of my father’s works, everyone will be reunited and Philip Spencer will be out of business.”

Tommy glanced down at his mate in concern when Elliot stepped closer to the table. “I have a quick question. I understand that we’re

going to raid these places and all, rescue Summer and Tereza, and get back as much information as possible. We're even going to destroy whatever we can't get back. What I don't understand is how we're going to explain this to everyone."

"What do you mean, Elliot?" Daniel asked.

"We're talking about blowing up buildings here. Won't there be an investigation or something? Won't the police and maybe the federal government get involved?"

Daniel grinned. "That's the best part. One of Chase's friends did a little research into Spence Corp. It seems that they use animals in their medical research, and they have received several threats from animal rights organizations, specifically, ones on the fringe of organized protesters."

"I don't get it."

"Several of these fringe groups have been linked with terrorism throughout the world." Daniel reached under the table and came up with a can of red spray paint. "A few slogans painted on the walls and no one will know the difference."

"And a few well placed emails by an anonymous, but reliable, source to certain government agencies," Chase said, "and the federal government will be so busy looking into Philip Spencer's financial dealings that they will forget all about who did what to what building."

"Philip Spencer has not made a lot of friends over the years, Elliot," Daniel explained. "His greed and bid for power have made him quite a few enemies, some of them in very high places. I don't think they will care who takes him down, as long as he goes down."

"God, you make him sound like an evil monster."

"He is an evil monster, Elliot," Chase snapped. "Look what he's done to our family."

"I just...I never saw him that way. Sure, he was mean and cruel at times, but until a couple of days ago, he was my family. It's hard to think otherwise."

“You have a real family now, Elliot, your family.” Tommy smiled at the small shudder that racked Elliot’s body at his words. He wondered if Elliot would ever get used to having a real family. “You have your father, mother, sister, and brothers and the entire Wolf Creek Pack. That’s got to be better than Philip Spencer.”

“Damn, my Christmas list just got a whole hell of a lot longer.”

* * * *

Tommy was so nervous he felt like his stomach was doing loop-d-loops. He was supposed to act casual as he followed Elliot’s progress into Philip Spencer’s house from his vantage point in the trees surrounding the Spencer estate.

Elliot was going to pretend to be coming home for his normal monthly medical exam. If things got bad, he would signal Tommy through their mental bond and the troops would come running in to save him.

Tommy still didn’t like the plan. There were too many things that could go wrong, too many things that could put Elliot’s life in danger. Every protective instinct Tommy had was screaming at him not to let his mate go.

Besides the fact that Elliot was basically walking right into the heart of danger, no one had been able to find Carl Douglas since he had attacked Tommy in the alley. If he were inside the house, there was no telling what kind of damage the man could do to Elliot before Tommy could reach him.

Tommy glanced down at his watch, tensing when he saw that ten minutes had gone by since Elliot entered the house. It felt like ten years. He looked over at Bishop and nodded his head toward the building. Bishop just shook his head and held up five fingers.

Great, five more minutes. Tommy rolled his eyes. He didn’t want to wait five more minutes. He wanted to go in now.

“Chill, dude,” Bishop whispered. “He’ll let you know when we need to come in. Give him a chance to handle this on his own. I think Elliot needs to confront Philip Spencer and gain back a little of what that man has taken from him.”

“I don’t like it. He’s been in there way too long.”

Bishop rolled his eyes. “So, contact him. You said you could.”

If Tommy had a gun in his hand, he probably would have shot himself in the foot. He couldn’t believe he had been sitting there agonizing while he waited for Elliot to contact him when he could have contacted Elliot. The mating bond mental thing they had going on between them was so unusual, Tommy sometimes forgot that it went both ways.

“Elliot, is everything going okay?”

Elliot’s response was almost instantaneous, bringing Tommy’s level of tension down several notches. *“Yes, everything is fine. Philip is just chewing me out over that whole mess with you and Carl.”*

“Carl?” Tommy’s anxiety went right back up. *“Is Carl there?”*

“Yep. He’s sitting in the corner smirking as we speak.”

“Shit, Elliot, I think Carl knows that you can shift.”

“Tommy, if Carl knows I can shift, then—”

“Philip knows as well.” Tommy nudged Bishop with his foot then nodded toward the house when the man glanced over at him. *“We’re on our way in, pretty baby. Just keep them busy until we get past the guards.”*

“Easier said than done.”

“Just be careful, Elliot. We’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“You be careful,” Elliot snorted silently. *“I’m sitting in a nice, comfy chair inside the house. You’re the one that has to sneak past the guards.”*

“We’re on our way, pretty baby,” Tommy said mentally as he followed Bishop and Prince Zacarius out of the tree they had been sitting in.

It had been decided that the prince would accompany Tommy and Bishop because of his vampiric abilities. Except for his mate, Devlin, he could control someone's mind with just a bite. That knowledge kind of gave Tommy a creepy feeling. He didn't want anyone but Elliot biting anything on him.

Elliot could bite whatever he wanted.

Tommy had a hard time staying behind Bishop while they snuck their way into the Spencer Estate and past the guards. He wanted to run, to reach his mate as fast as possible. He didn't want to creep through the underbrush.

It took more than the few minutes Tommy promised Elliot for them to reach the side of the large mansion that belonged to Philip Spencer. Between the lack of adequate hiding places in the massive landscape and the armed guards that patrolled the area, moving quickly just wasn't possible.

Tommy flattened himself up against the side of the building and let out a silent breath. The need to get to Elliot was growing stronger, and it made Tommy feel edgy. His wolf was just under the surface, wanting out. He could barely keep himself from shifting.

"Elliot, is everything okay?" Tommy waited several moments for Elliot's response. When none came, he began to grow even more anxious. *"Elliot! Answer me, damn it. I'm going out of my mind here."*

There was still no answer. Tommy nudged Bishop and gestured to his head, shaking it to let the man know he couldn't contact Elliot. Bishop nodded and hurried along the edge of the house to a set of floor to ceiling windows and double doors at the back of the building.

When Tommy peeked around the corner of the window and peered inside, his blood ran cold. Elliot was still inside the large study with Philip and Carl, only another man had joined them. He was carefully withdrawing blood from Elliot's arm, a very unconscious Elliot.

Tommy started to growl then pressed his lips tightly together so he wouldn't be heard by those in the room. The muscles in his arms went rigid with his need to tear into something, or someone. His mate was being threatened. Tommy never felt such an overwhelming rage before. Having a mate put a whole new spin on his ability to control himself.

Tommy almost snapped at Bishop when the man grabbed his arm and pulled him away from the window. He would have, too, if Bishop hadn't started gesturing with his hands, a new plan forming as they stood there.

If Tommy understood things right, Bishop wanted him to stay and keep watch through the windows while he and Zacarius went around through another entrance then came into the study from inside the house. They would be effectively coming at the enemy from two sides.

Tommy nodded that he understood then turned his attention back to the window. He could see Philip walking around the room as he talked to the doctor. Carl sat unmoving in a chair by the fireplace.

Tommy frowned when he got a closer look at Carl. For some reason, Carl's hands and feet were bound to the chair he sat in. He looked terrified, his face pale and pinched. It was not an emotion Tommy would have equated with Carl Douglas.

He forgot all about his confusion over Carl when the study door opened. Tommy expected Bishop and Zacarius to walk in, not two armed guards, an older woman with dark hair, and a young child. Tommy suddenly knew that he was looking at Summer and Tereza Morgan.

He also knew their plans had just gone to shit! The two females were supposed to be at another facility. Granted, they were brought in when Elliot came for his monthly exam, but one of the other rescue teams was supposed to get to the two women before now. The plan had been for their transport vehicle to be intercepted before it even reached the Spencer Estate.

Summer Morgan rushed over to where Elliot was sitting, slouched in his chair. Tereza started to run after her mother, but a quick hand of one of the guards landing on her shoulder kept her where she was.

Tommy could see the sudden panic in Summer's face when her daughter wasn't allowed to join her and knew something was up. There was something different about this visit. Tommy just couldn't put his finger on what was going on until Philip Spencer walked over to the patio doors and opened them.

The man looked right at him.

"Would you care to join us, Mr. Nash?"

Tommy tried to hide his sudden fear by clenching his fists and drawing in a deep lungful of air. He didn't know how Philip Spencer even knew about him much less that he was standing right outside the man's home.

Tommy pushed himself away from the wall and followed Philip into the house. He could see the questions brewing in Summer's eyes and gave her a slight shake of his head. She didn't respond other than to turn her attention back to Elliot.

"Baby, if there were any time for you to wake up and shift, this would be it!" Tommy shouted silently to Elliot.

Carl suddenly began to struggle, his face paling even more as the man grimaced in pain. Tommy glanced over at Philip when the man started making a *tsking* noise as he poured himself a drink.

"Tsk, ts, Mr. Nash. If you have something to say, please say it to the entire room."

Tommy felt his eyebrows shoot up to his hairline. Philip knew he was trying to speak to Elliot? How?

"Would you like a drink, Mr. Nash?" Philip asked. "I am told this scotch is a very good year."

"No, thank you."

"So polite." Philip walked over to sit behind his desk.

"How do you know who I am?"

"I know about everyone in your little valley, Mr. Nash." The man's chuckle made Tommy tense even more. "Surely you didn't think the Teacher would go into your valley to retrieve his little pet without having the place investigated first. I have files on every member of your little wolf pack, including my dear son, Elliot."

"Elliot is not your son!" Summer screamed.

"Ah, but he doesn't know that, now does he, my dear. And you're not going to tell him or you know what will happen." Philip took a small sip of his drink then set it back on the desk. He folded his hands together. "Elliot has just now reached his potential, and you will not mess that up for me, or you will not be allowed to see him."

"His potential?" Tommy asked. He knew by the small smirk that crossed Philip's face that he wasn't going to like the answer.

"You didn't think that Elliot showed up in your little valley by accident, did you?"

"It was planned?"

"Of course it was." Philip seemed so proud of himself as he related his news. "I knew the likelihood of Elliot mating with a female wolf was near to nothing. The poor boy is gay, you know. I had hoped by sending him to Wolf Creek Valley Elliot would meet up with one of you and I was right. He met you, Mr. Nash."

"You couldn't have known we would be mates."

"No, that's true, but I knew the possibility was there. If he hadn't found his mate in Wolf Creek, I would have simply sent Elliot to another wolf pack until he did meet his mate."

While Tommy was getting a lot of answers, Philip's words were creating just as many questions. "Why do you need Elliot to be mated?"

"My doctor," Philip said as he gestured to the man standing by Elliot, "assured me that Elliot would be able to shift once he met and bonded with his mate. I was very disappointed when Elliot didn't shift when he hit puberty. Dr. Banning said that it may have just been

Elliot's need to be mated first. Apparently, that trait isn't uncommon with your kind."

Tommy tried to keep his frown off his face as he glanced over at the doctor. He was born a shifter, and even he never heard of anyone not shifting when they hit puberty. He wondered if the Philip and the good doctor knew exactly what they were talking about.

"So, we've mated. So what?"

"Elliot doesn't have the constitution to be a good little wolf like I need him to be. He's too softhearted. You, on the other hand, I have no doubt can be the perfect specimen for my needs."

"Me?" Tommy laughed. "And what makes you think I will do anything that you say?"

Philip very casually opened his desk drawer and pulled out the strangest looking gun Tommy had ever seen. It might not have even been a gun. Instead of a clip or cylinder, the object held several small darts with vials of blue liquid attached to them. Philip pointed the gun at Elliot.

"Because, my dear boy, these little vials are filled with a special serum developed by Dr. Banning. I've seen the effects that this liquid does to a wolf shifter like yourself, and it's not pretty. I wouldn't want to have to use it on Elliot."

Tommy was caught and he knew it. Either he agreed to do as Philip wanted, or the man would kill his mate. There really wasn't any other choice. Tommy growled low in his throat and lunged across the desk at Philip, trying to place himself between the darts and Elliot.

Logically, he knew that he might be placing his mate's life in danger. Hopefully, Bishop and Zacarius would reach Elliot before Philip could do the man any harm. Illogically, Tommy had a deep need to kill the man responsible for putting his mate in danger.

Tommy heard the gun go off just as he reached Philip, shifting into his seven-foot-tall werewolf form, one that had only come out on a handful of occasions in his entire life, usually when he was being threatened in some way.

He clamped his large canine teeth around the arm with the gun in it and ripped with all his might. He distantly heard screaming and tasted the coppery flavor of blood in his mouth. Bone crunched, much to Tommy's satisfaction, and flesh tore.

"Tommy!"

Tommy ignored the voice screaming at him and continued to tear into Philip. He ignored the blows of pain he felt in his side and back as Philip tried to fight back. He ignored everything but the overwhelming urge he had to avenge his mate.

The screaming slowly faded. The buzz of noise in Tommy's head began to grow until it became the scream. "*Tommy!*"

Tommy dropped the bloody crushed arm from his mouth and turned to see who was screaming at him. He expected to find Summer or maybe even Bishop. He didn't expect to see Elliot standing behind him on all fours, having shifted into his wolf form.

"*Elliot?*"

"*Let him go,*" Elliot said into his head. "*He can't harm us anymore.*"

Tommy turned back to look at Philip, shocked by what he saw. Philip Spencer was still alive but just barely. His body was covered in blood, his arm lying at an odd angle. Tommy knew it was broken. He didn't feel any sympathy for the man.

Bishop was kneeling on the ground by where Philip had dropped, trying to stench the flow of blood. Tommy was a little confused as to how Dr. Jones was sitting on the other side of him, treating Philip's wounds, until he noticed several other men standing in the room.

Tommy hopped down off of Philip's desk and jumped over to Elliot, squatting down on the floor as his body slowly shifted back to his human form. He stroked his hands up and down Elliot's white fur, looking for any sign of injury.

"*You are okay?*" Tommy asked. "*The dart didn't hit you?*"

Elliot shifted in the blink of an eye then shook his head as he reached for Tommy. “No, I’m fine. Dr. Banning stepped between me and the dart.”

“Dr. Banning?” Tommy said out loud as he gathered Elliot up in his arms and turned to look at the fallen doctor. He was being treated by Zacarius and Devlin. He seemed to be alive, but in a lot of pain.

“What’s going on?”

“Well, it would seem that there is more to the good doctor than meets the eye.” Zacarous pointed to Carl, who was growling and struggling wildly in his chair. “I believe that Dr. Banning and Elliot’s friend, Carl, are mated somehow.”

“What?”

“It’s true,” Dr. Banning wheezed. “Carl is mine.”

“Carl? Attack us in the alley Carl?”

“He had no choice,” Dr. Banning whispered. “Philip threatened to kill me if Carl didn’t bring Elliot home. Why do you think he had Carl tied up before Elliot arrived? He was afraid that Carl would attack him.”

“I can understand that,” Tommy snorted.

“Please, let him...”

Tommy watched the doctor for a moment, seeing the pleading in the man’s eyes, then turned to walk over and release Carl. Before he did, he leaned in real close to Carl so the man didn’t miss a word he said.

“Touch Elliot in any way and I won’t care what you were forced to do. I will kill you faster than you can blink. Do I make myself clear?”

Carl nodded. Tommy snapped the ropes tying Carl down. He almost fell back on his butt when Carl pushed past him, racing across the room to kneel next to his mate, taking the man into his arms.

“Guess they are mates.” Tommy chuckled as he climbed to his feet. “And as happy as I am for you two, I still have questions and I want answers.”

“Can’t that wait?” Carl shouted, a tear falling down his cheek. “Can’t you see he’s in pain? He could be dying.”

“No, darling,” the doctor said, patting Carl’s arm. “It’s okay. This isn’t the lethal stuff. I destroyed all of that. This serum will just make me very uncomfortable for awhile. The effects should wear off in a couple of hours.”

“Just how many serums do you have?” Tommy asked.

The doctor chuckled lightly then started to cough. It was several moments before he could talk again. In the meantime, Tommy watched Bishop and Dr. Jones carry Philip out of the study followed by the two guards, now bound, and a few shifted wolves.

“I developed two serums, one that was lethal to shifters and this one that Philip shot me with. When I learned what shifters were, what they really were, I destroyed the first serum and created this one.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t know what shifters were at first. All I saw was this philanthropist who was willing to fund my research for years if I worked for his company. It seemed like a dream come true.”

“What research?”

“Genetics, mostly. I thought I could create some sort of miracle cure for people with paralysis, give them back the life they had once before. When Philip gave me data, wolf data, I began to really see the possibilities. His scientist had some impressive stuff over the years.”

“So you looked the other way when he tortured people?”

“No, I didn’t look the other way. For a long time, I didn’t know where he was getting his data. It’s only been the last ten years that I even knew about shifters. Before that, he just gave me DNA samples and said they came from anonymous donors with genetic anomalies.”

“And you believed him?” Tommy snorted.

“I had no reason not to. All of my research was funded by a private company. I didn’t have the usual restrictions placed on those that worked in public companies. I was allowed to do what I wanted,

and I didn't have some committee breathing down my neck, demanding answers."

"Sounds perfect, so what happened to change your mind?"

"Carl happened."

"Carl?" Tommy glanced down at the man that held the doctor in his arms. "What exactly does Carl have to do with all of this?"

"Carl came to work for Philip. At first, he was just an assistant but after a couple of years, Philip made him the liaison between us. Carl would bring me whatever new information Philip had discovered and I would give my data to Carl."

"So, how did things change?"

"I changed." Dr. Banning's smile was odd considering the situation. "There was an accident in the lab and I was infected with the wolf virus."

"Dr. Banning," Zacarius said, "there is no wolf virus. Either you're born a wolf, or you're not."

"There is no wolf virus the way you think of it, but mixed with the vampire virus and genetically manipulated, there is one."

"Fuck me," Tommy whispered, "you created a werewolf virus."

"Not to worry, all of my notes and the lab samples have been destroyed. After this last visit with Elliot, Carl and I were supposed to escape and hide. I couldn't keep doing what I was doing after I found out how Philip gathered my data. It just wasn't right."

"Great." Tommy waved his hand around in the air. "So, your work has been destroyed. What about all the other facilities that have your data, because you know that Philip Spencer would never put all of his eggs in one basket."

"I've taken care of that," Carl said softly. "I developed a computer virus and sent it to all of the other labs. Any data kept on them will be erased and unrecoverable."

"And the data kept on disk?"

Carl grinned. "The minute they are placed in a computer or someone tries to duplicate the disk, copy it, or in any other way make another one, the disk will be destroyed."

"How?" Tommy frowned. "I thought once something was burned to a disk that it was for life."

"Technically, that is true, but the virus I installed will rewrite over the disk, destroying any of the previous data. It's a nice little program that downloads every dirty little thing that Philip Spencer ever did."

Tommy blinked. "Your virus downloads a program that outs Philip Spencer?"

"Yep." Carl grinned again, sounding pretty satisfied with himself. "Appropriate, don't you think? I also included a small tidbit about his partners in crime and Philip Spencer's medical records, mainly his psych evaluation. If he says anything to anyone about werewolves, they will think he's nuts."

Tommy had to admit he was elated at Carl's words. It solved a lot of their problems. He just had a hard time coming to terms with that fact that those words came from Carl, a man he punched square in the face the minute he met him.

"Why are you doing all of this?" Tommy asked. "You have to know that this information could make you millions."

"It could also put the life of my mate in danger," Carl said, "and there is nothing in this world worth that."

Tommy couldn't agree more.

Chapter 16

“So, you’re saying that this full moon dealy happens every month?” Elliot asked.

“Yep,” Nate replied. “And it’s great.”

“Let me see if I understand this. Once a month on the full moon, Tommy and I will shift and become werewolves instead of four legged wolves. We’ll track each other through the woods then fuck like there’s no tomorrow, or at least until we can’t walk properly. Do I have it right?”

“Pretty much,” Nate snickered. “You might want to invest in a butt plug like I did, get yourself ready to be claimed. They can’t like, come or something until we do, and they make sure we do, several times.”

“Now wait a minute, I have a question. Joe shifts into this third form and chases you down, right?”

“Yep.”

“But you’re human, right, and you stay human.”

“And that’s the reason for the butt plug, hon. Shifters grow to be pretty big and they are definitely proportionate body wise.” Tommy heard a small giggle. “Joe’s hung like a horse.”

“Eeeww, too much information.” Elliot giggled right along with Nate. “Seriously, though. If Tommy and I are both shifters, how does that work? I mean, do we take turns chasing each other down or what? Does he just chase me, or do I chase him too? Do you think Tommy will be upset if I don’t chase him? I don’t know anything about this mating business. I’m kind of flying blind here, man.”

Tommy leaned back against the wall outside of the kitchen and listened to Nate and Elliot talking. It was the first time since everything came to an end two weeks ago that he had heard Elliot chatter. It was a wonderful sound.

Ever since Elliot returned to human form from wolf, he hadn't chattered. Oh sure, he had talked, but nothing like his usual nonstop questions. Tommy hadn't realized until he heard it that it had been missing. He also hadn't realized how much he missed it.

He couldn't blame Elliot, though. The changes they had been through in just the last two weeks were enough to drag anyone down. The rescue mission had gone better than Tommy expected, but it was still a rescue mission.

Summer and Tereza were back with Andre and trying to get used to having their freedom. Tommy wasn't sure what Daniel and Zacarius had done to Sophia, but the woman hadn't even taken time to pack her stuff before leaving. Tommy doubted they would ever hear from her again.

Devlin, Donovan, and Chase seemed to be thrilled to have their mother back and a new sister to spoil. Elliot was a little more hesitant. He wasn't used to having a large family. Between the Morgan and the Nash families, he was getting a full dose.

There was also the added worry about Carl and his mate, Dr. Banning. The doctor wasn't a born wolf like the rest of them. No one knew what to expect from the man. Daniel and the alphas of several wolf packs were talking with the good doctor, trying to learn what he knew and how he knew it.

They also wanted to know if there were other wolves being held in captivity. The thought of anyone else being held against their will and experimented on seemed to be of great concern to Elliot. He had talked about it nearly every night before they went to bed. Tommy just hoped that Elliot would have his answers soon. Only time would tell, and maybe the good doctor.

"What are you doing?"

Tommy glanced over to see his brother, Joe, walking up to him. He quickly held his finger up to his lips then gestured toward the kitchen, grinning. Joe cocked his head to one side, listening. A slow smile came over his lips, and the man leaned back against the wall opposite Tommy.

“God, I never thought of that,” Nate said. “Maybe we should call Jim and Donovan. I’m sure they would know.”

“Oh, I’m not sure I want to involve anyone else in this,” Elliot said quickly. “Our business has been paraded in front of everyone enough. I’m sure Tommy would be horribly embarrassed if we called his brother to find out the mating habits of two wolves during the full moon. God, can you imagine? Jim would probably laugh himself silly.”

“Don’t be so sure, Elliot. Jim and Donovan didn’t know squat about sex when they got mated. Hell, Donovan wasn’t even gay and Jim was still in the closet. They both had a lot of questions when they started out.”

“Donovan wasn’t gay?” Elliot whispered.

Tommy slapped his hand over his mouth to keep from laughing. He glanced over at Joe to find him having much the same reaction. Tommy couldn’t wait to see his brother and Donovan. After the flack they had given him, it would be fun to give some back.

“Well, he says he wasn’t gay, but I don’t know if you can suddenly turn gay, mate or not. There had to be some predisposition for it, right? I mean, you don’t just wake up one day and decide that you like men, right?”

“Hell, how would I know? I’ve been gay all of my life. I never even seen a woman naked and I wouldn’t want to. I definitely prefer men. I always have and I always will. Thankfully, I don’t have to go through what Jim and Donovan did. My mate is gay and so am I.”

Tommy couldn’t stand it anymore. He pushed away from the wall and walked into the kitchen, Joe right on his heels. Elliot and Nate

were turned away from them, both men gesturing wildly with their hands while they talked and washed the dishes.

Tommy snuck up behind Elliot and grabbed him around the waist, swinging him wildly in a circle. Elliot screamed. Nate screamed. Tommy and Joe laughed. “Are you sure you’re gay, pretty baby? Maybe we should test that theory before you decide.”

Elliot frowned. “What, you want me to have sex with a woman?”

“Hell no!” This conversation wasn’t going quite the way Tommy wanted it to go. He was supposed to sweep Elliot off his feet and, hopefully, into a bed. “I don’t even want you to think of anyone else in sexual terms. Just me.”

“Just you?” Elliot’s eyes started to twinkle.

“Yep.” Tommy grinned. “Just me, pretty baby.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two or three men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul Mates, true love, and happy endings.

Stormy lives in the great Northwest region of the USA, with her gorgeous husband and soul Mate, six very active teenagers, two boxer/collie puppies, one old biddy cat, and one fish.

You can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand and a puppy in her lap, or on her laptop, creating the next sexy man for one of her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com

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