



Alpha Wolf Finds His Coyote (West Coast Coyotes #3)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Alpha Wolf Theodore has been under his father's paw since the day he was born. He's the second alpha son, born from a mistress and has no other purpose to his father other than to be a spare. Theodore isn't interested in the family business. He wants to find an omega and have his own family, but he's been driving the getaway cars since he could reach the pedals and done things that could put him away for several lifetimes.

He's ashamed of it, but it's the only life he's ever known. As far as he knows, the coyotes are awful and vicious, but he's drawn to the West Coast Coyotes and can't help circling the pack.

Omega Ryker started working for Esteban when he was a teen, hawking pawflower after school to pay for his mom's vices. He worked his way up to part of the household staff and now has a coveted position they call banker. He counts money as it comes in and packages it up for disbursement. Since Waylan's pawflower farm produces so well, they have huge business from the humans, and he's been socking away his own stash of cash, just in case he ever needs to run.

But when a wolf starts circling, hes no longer sure if he might need to run away from his past or to his future.

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THEODORE

It was almost two in the morning when I finally decided to do it. From my perch in the tree line, I watched the house for twenty minutes to make sure no one was moving around. Paranoia was basically a family religion that wasn't leaving me just because I was leaving the family.

The Eyolf house wasn't the pack's main house, but that didn't mean it wasn't bugged, alarmed, and wired with the kind of surveillance the feds would admire. The Lockwood Pack operated on their own laws, and my father didn't trust anyone to get near him and his money.

That should have made him more protective of his family, but that wasn't the case. He believed in leverage over loyalty, and I didn't offer enough of either. So it was time for me to forge my own path. I needed to find a purpose that didn't involve stealing and hurting and feeding my father's ego.

I waited for the wind to kick up, giving me just enough cover to make the last fifty feet to the barn that was only used for the occasional interrogation or dismemberment when Dad was really pissed off.

Inside the last stall, I grabbed the backpack I'd packed days ago that held a few t-shirts, some jeans, and a set of running clothes.

There was also a baggie full of protein bars and painkillers to hold me over, and some cash in the lining.

I'd been stashing as much as I could for the past year, but Dad kept tight records, and it wasn't easy to skim without being noticed.

Not to mention, he could literally sniff out cash from any corner of the house.

I had to bury my savings in a dry bag in the river just to keep it from being found during one of his raids.

My phone buzzed with a text from Jameson.

He was probably in his room, and part of me wanted to run up there and say goodbye, but that just put us both at risk.

He needed to be genuinely surprised when he found out I was gone or Dad might hold him accountable as an accomplice.

I turned off my phone, tucked it under the stall gate, and headed out.

If I was getting out of here alive, I needed to leave before I could get sentimental or someone caught my scent.

Without dragging out this moment any longer, I shifted into my fur and ran.

The woods beyond the pack land were thick this close to the Nevada border.

I kept to the animal trails, moving quickly while ducking into the brush every time I caught a whiff of something.

There were many predators in the forest but none as dangerous as my own kind.

I kept imagining the snap of twigs behind me, but that didn't slow me down.

By dawn, I'd made it over the border and felt sure no one was following me.

I stayed close to the Truckee River, putting as many miles behind me as possible before taking a break.

In a picnic area that had so many scents that mine would easily be masked, I took a drink of the cold water and let it clear my mind.

For the first time in years, I felt free.

Not safe yet, but at least there was the possibility of safety in my future. I loped down the river until my lungs burned, then cut west toward the highway. The smell of cars and asphalt hit me before I saw the road, but it was the fastest way to get where I needed to go.

When the woods thinned out and it was harder for me to keep going as a wolf in the city, I shifted into my skin, dressed, and walked to the bus station.

I'd already mapped out several options, and this was the most anonymous method of transportation.

There was a single, unoccupied bench under a flickering bulb, so I sat down and tried not to look suspicious with a beanie pulled low over my forehead.

I was just glad I'd been able to get a ticket to Twin Lakes. The guy at the ticket counter took one look at me and seemed to be contemplating calling security. But when I pulled out cash, he let go of his concerns and handed me a ticket. "Restroom's to the right, if you need to, uh, clean up."

I ran my hands through my hair to get it under control and tried not to be alarmed by what I saw in the mirror. My face was hollow, and my eyes were ringed with

exhaustion. Was that what freedom looked like?

I didn't know what I was doing, but I was compelled to keep on my path. For better or worse, I was heading south to Twin Lakes, California.

The bus left an hour later, and I sank into a seat in the back, finally relaxing.

It smelled bad, and there was a constant buzz of conversation around me, but that provided a comfort that lulled me to sleep.

I was around strangers—humans—and that gave me a layer of detachment from my family and the pack that I'd been searching for.

This was what freedom looked like.

At some point, I opened my eyes and watched an older woman sitting across the aisle. She was wearing a church coat, clutching a worn bible, and humming to herself. I'd never felt more anonymous in my life.

As the landscape changed from city to country and eventually to dry desert, I thought about what I would do when I got to Twin Lakes.

I'd heard stories about the sanctuary town that was home to many shifters who were on the run or transitioning from one life to another.

None of the crime families had a stronghold, so everyone was welcome.

It was probably the first place my father would send trackers, but I hoped he didn't care enough to bother.

I was a liability to him, and getting rid of me so he could focus his attention on

turning Jameson into a younger version of himself might be a relief to him.

At least I hoped so. And if he did send someone to bring me home, I'd have the protection of the Twin Lakes council.

It wasn't a great plan for the long term, but I didn't need a long-term plan.

I just needed to get through the next few days.

Something was pulling me south, and I didn't think I'd need more than a few days to figure out what it was.

After a million stops across the whole damn state, we pulled into the Twin Lakes station just before midnight.

The town was smaller than I expected from the map.

Outside of the station, I couldn't see more than a huddle of streetlights and a twenty-four-hour gas station.

As soon as I was on the street, I stretched my back and took a look around.

There was a dirt road and a faded sign that welcomed me to town. I didn't feel particularly welcomed, but I didn't need a parade. I just needed sanctuary from my family.

The address I had for the coyote safehouse was a P.O. box, but after shifting into my fur, I easily found the building I was looking for. There was a small trailer set behind a rusty fence that reeked of various animals.

This was it.

The lights were out and there was no sign of movement inside, so I stood outside for a long time before I raised my hand to knock on the dented door.

I didn't rush that first hit of my knuckles, but as soon as I did, I was fully committed.

Whatever was about to happen was in motion, and there was no turning back now.

Over the next two days, I rested and met a motley crew of shifters who used Twin Lakes as their "in-between" place. Some were just passing through and hadn't found the will to leave yet, and others were like me, searching for a soft landing and only staying for a few days.

I was given a place to sleep and enough food to replace all the calories I'd lost on my run, but that urge to keep moving was still inside me. When I looked at the council's map of friendly and unfriendly packs, my finger and my wolf were immediately drawn to the West Coast Coyotes.

That was my next stop. It had to be. I didn't know if it would be my last, but I needed to continue my journey to find out why the pull south was still so strong.

Why did I need to get there now, and what would happen when I arrived?

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RYKER

Counting cash is supposed to be meditative, but every rubber band that snapped across my knuckles just ratcheted up my blood pressure.

The warehouse was already sweltering, and the air reeked of dust, sweat, and bloody money.

Literally. There were three stacks of blood-soaked bills that I'd put aside to deal with later.

Occasionally sorting through bodily fluids was one of the downsides of my job.

I sat at a folding table in an otherwise empty office that we referred to as "the counting room." My neat rows of bills were scattered when a brown grocery sack was dropped down in front of me.

"Thanks." I didn't bother to look up. Money was delivered all day, every day. I didn't ask questions from the messenger. The note inside would tell me everything I needed to know. Who it was from, how much was collected, and if any debtors didn't make their payments.

It wasn't an advanced system, but it kept my family and the broader pack out of prison. At least for tax evasion and laundering reasons. If they ended up in prison for other reasons, that wasn't my problem.

Peeling through the stack, I separated the twenties, fifties, and hundreds before

dropping them into the counting machine. The note inside the bag was transferred into my ledger, then I put that pile into a bank deposit bag.

A shadow lingered by my elbow for a moment before he took off, leaving me to my numbers.

The day dragged on with a tension in the air that I'd come to expect after a weekend of territory drama. Apparently, some bears had been sniffing around the compound, and Estaban, our pack Alpha, had the security teams working double shifts.

But I kept my head down and out of the drama.

I didn't have time to pay attention to every rumor about someone skimming, snitching, or sleeping with someone they shouldn't.

And for the most part, everyone respected my role and gave me space.

They called me a human calculator as a joke, but as the person who made sure they got their cut of the pot every week, I was everyone's best friend.

After too many hours hunched over the table, I stood up and stretched out my back, feeling the muscles pull and release as I glanced out the warehouse window.

Somewhere past the fence line, a coyote howled, and everyone went on instant alert.

It wasn't a playful kind of howl that we all echoed during pack gatherings, but the deep, urgent alarm of bad news.

Despite the work waiting for me, I was curious to see what the commotion was about.

There were whistles and yells and coyotes running all over the place, as I watched

from the safety of the window. But after a moment, the cause of the ruckus became clear.

There was a wolf in the compound.

“Stay back, kid.” Arthur was one of the older alphas in the warehouse. He could have retired years ago, but he loved supervising the shipping department and would probably never leave. “A rogue wolf from up north.”

The main doors opened and several people piled inside.

Even at a distance, I could tell the enforcers had really done a number on the intruder.

They dragged a man by the armpits, and I wasn’t entirely sure if he was conscious or not.

He was wearing boxer briefs but clearly hadn’t had a chance to change into anything else before being apprehended because he was naked otherwise.

His face was smeared with blood and his dark hair matted with sweat and dirt.

And he was big. Even hunched over, he looked like he could bench-press my entire body with the stacks of muscles and tight flesh.

Scooting away from Arthur, I went back to my room and locked it up, making sure to set the security system before stepping back toward the main floor. As the keeper of the money, my first responsibility was to protect pack funds with my life.

If someone ever stole from us because of my negligence, it really would be my life on the line. And with so many coyotes in the building, I couldn’t take any risks.

The enforcers tossed the guy into the center of the room, scattering a table of pills in every direction. The wolf didn't resist even though he was obviously an alpha. "Ry, you should probably take a break while we deal with this."

"Deal with what? What did he do?" I crossed my arms over my chest, surprised by how steady my voice was.

"Spying on us. Won't say what his business is but that he just needed to come here." Carmine spat at the ground and kicked the man in the side. "Says his name's Theodore Eyolf."

I looked down at the man who glared back at me with a swollen, bloodshot eye. There was something about his defiant expression that made me want to help him. "Doesn't look like he's here to hurt us." I took another step closer. "Where's Esteban?"

"He's heading back from the farm." Carmine grinned, displaying a set of canines that were deadly even in his human form. "Said we should get him to talk or else he would."

I shook my head and sighed. "Take him to the supply room. I'll handle it."

Arthur's jaw dropped, and he came to my side. "You're not serious, Ryker. He's an alpha."

"He's not armed and he's barely conscious. Just let me see what I can get out of him before you guys do any more damage."

The enforcers exchanged looks, clearly disappointed they wouldn't get to rough him up any further. But I outranked them, at least on paper. "Whatever you say, kid."

They grabbed the wolf's arms again and moved him into the supply room.

There was a support column in the corner, so Arther secured the man's wrists in front of him around the pole and then stepped out of the room.

He leaned close to me before he left, whispering so only I would hear him.

"Esteban's gonna have your ass if this backfires. "

"I'll be fine." I nodded, already questioning my own sanity to send the enforcers away. "Esteban trusts my judgment."

"He trusts your numbers. Not your rescue missions."

I shrugged, pretending not to hear the second part. "Somebody's gotta be the grown-up."

As soon as we were alone, I pulled up a step stool and took a seat just out of arm's reach of the stranger. "I'm Ryker Lopez. You're Theodore, right?"

The wolf grunted and adjusted his arms to be more comfortable. "Yeah, but people call me Teddy." He looked at me, and I caught a flicker of recognition when he deeply inhaled. His expression changed as he sized me up, really taking notice of me.

I didn't hate it.

"I can get you some water and something to eat." I didn't want to leave, but he looked thirsty and exhausted. "It'll just be a minute."

He nodded after a minute and sighed. "Thank you, Ryker."

I went to the kitchen and grabbed a few water bottles and my lunch from the fridge. It was just a roast beef sandwich and a pudding cup, but my stomach did a weird fluttery thing when I thought about the mysterious alpha eating the lunch I'd prepared.

Teddy accepted my offering and immediately drank half a bottle of water in one gulp.

For a second, I let myself just stare at his throat, the way it worked when he swallowed and the hint of stubble along his chin. "You here to spy on us or just get yourself killed?" I kept my tone light but carefully watched his face for any hint of deception.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and sighed. "Neither. I left my pack up north and felt compelled to come here. I'm not entirely sure why."

Leaning against the door jamb, I crossed my arms and studied him. "Why did you leave your pack?"

His gaze locked with mine for the first time, and my breath shuddered. "I didn't want to be a part of what they were doing. Too much blood on their hands, and it was starting to stain mine."

I cocked my head, not buying that was the real reason.

"Lockwood, right?" I'd heard about Toren Eyolf.

He led one of the more violent wolf packs.

We didn't do business with them for a variety of reasons, not least of which was that they hated coyotes.

The feeling was mutual. “What made you think things would be different here?”

He scoffed and tugged on the cables restraining him to the pole. “Obviously, they aren’t.”

“Your pack and ours aren’t exactly allies. Coming here means you’re either incredibly stupid or incredibly brave.” I chuckled and ran my hand through my hair, slightly restless around the handsome alpha.

“Probably both.” He shrugged and caught my gaze again. “But once I started running, my wolf led me here. Not sure why.”

We sat in a comfortable silence for a few minutes while he ate half the sandwich and then offered me the other half. I wasn’t hungry, but the olive branch felt like an important gesture, so I took the sandwich and sat closer to him.

“You smell like cotton and humans,” Teddy said around a mouthful of food. “Like money.”

I grinned and glanced down at my hands to take a whiff. “Yeah? I guess that tracks.”

“Does it?” He smiled for the first time. A brilliant white that softened the sharp edges of his bruised jaw and swelling eyes. “You the owner of the building or something?”

A flush started behind my ears and began a slow creep down my neck. I covered it by opening a fresh water bottle and handing it to him. He accepted it, brushing my fingers with his as he stared right at me. “No, just the money guy around here.”

“The money guy. Must be nice.” His smirk was intoxicating.

Why did it make me want to crawl right into his lap? “Yeah, well, it usually is. But

now that I've basically taken responsibility for you, I'm not really sure what to do next."

He nodded, then glanced at the door. "You trust your people?"

"Enough to know they'll do what Esteban says, not what I say."

We sat in silence as the adrenaline from earlier faded and was replaced with a heavy calm.

I watched the way his chest moved when he breathed, the way his hands curled around the water bottle.

There was nothing threatening about him, but something in his scent made my heart race.

It wasn't the usual alpha stench of thick cologne and sweat.

It was something else. Something I liked a little too much.

Eventually, Teddy asked the question I couldn't answer. "What are you gonna tell your boss?"

"I don't know," I said quietly. "What should I tell him?"

Teddy looked up, his eyes unexpectedly soft. "That I'm a good guy and... maybe you want to get to know me better."

"Maybe I do." I didn't totally understand why he said that or why I did, but I knew it was true. I nodded, my throat too tight for words. "I'll go call Esteban. Don't try to run. You'll just piss off the enforcers again."

“Don’t worry.” He softly chuckled and raised his hands to remind me that he wasn’t able to move. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Oh, right.” I released the ties that bound him, and as I leaned close, I caught a whiff of his scent. A warm and earthy aroma that wasn’t quite like any alpha scent I’d encountered before. It lingered in my lungs and made me want to pull in even more of him. “I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

As I walked out of the room to call the boss, I told myself the lightheadedness I was feeling was just adrenaline, but I knew the truth.

It was him. The wolf. My wolf.

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TEDDY

I could smell Ryker's nerves as much as see them by the way he kept glancing at the door. He was clearly anxious, but I wasn't sure why. Then again, I couldn't explain my own discontent either.

No longer tied up, I sat slouched in a folding chair with my arms crossed and my gaze locked on Ryker as we both waited for whatever wrath the Alpha of the West Coast Coyotes had planned for me.

I wasn't too worried because if they wanted me dead, they would have already done it.

Ryker's eyes flicked toward me every thirty seconds, but he didn't say much. He seemed to be contemplating his life choices while we waited for his boss to get back.

It was actually cute the way the omega tried to ignore me. I respected the effort, but he couldn't hide his curiosity if he wanted to. "You shouldn't have come here."

"No?" I crossed my ankles and leaned back in my chair. "You wish I'd never come?"

He licked his lips and chewed the inside of his cheek. "All I'm saying is most wolves aren't exactly welcomed here."

I shrugged. "I'm not most wolves."

"That's what they all say." Ryker rolled his shoulders and stretched his back like he'd

been hunched over for too long.

I didn't bother to respond because I was too busy sucking in his scent while he was looking away.

The more I tried to ignore it, the more it nagged at me.

It was like a strange hunger that had crawled under my skin and took hold.

My wolf was less confused. He seemed to be perfectly content to just sit in Ryker's territory like we belonged.

Ryker turned back to me and sighed. "They say you're an enforcer in your pack."

"Not exactly." I scoffed. That was a stretch. "More like...the scapegoat. My dad was always trying to keep me out of his way, so I got shuffled around whenever someone was looking for a getaway driver or bait for someone we needed to pick up."

"Pick up?" He swallowed hard and gave me a side glance. "Like, kidnap?"

I couldn't lie to him. Well, I could, but I didn't want to. "Sometimes. Usually we just needed to scare someone into complying with whatever my father decreed. Sometimes it was more...lethal than that."

He looked at the doorway as if checking to see if anyone was coming. "Yeah, it's the same here. I don't get involved in that stuff, but I count enough cash covered in guts that I know it's not all rainbows and butterflies out there."

The urge to get closer to him was strong, but I couldn't risk it. Not yet. Not when his murderous Alpha was on his way to meet me.

Ryker was fidgeting again, rubbing his palms on his shaky knees like he'd mainlined a dozen espresso shots. "Are you afraid of what will happen when Esteban gets here?"

"Not really." I shook my head and stared at him. "I'm an intruder in his home. I deserve what I get."

His eyes narrowed in confusion. "You don't strike me as having a death wish."

"I don't." I wished for something...but not death. "I'm just a realist. He'll do what he needs to do. After that, I'll figure it out."

Esteban had a reputation outside of the West Coast Coyotes territory as being ruthless but fair.

It was rumored he could tear out a man's throat without shifting, but he obviously took care of the omegas in his pack.

Omegas like Ryker who was given a position of power and respect, despite his vulnerability from being unmated.

The scent that wafted off him got stronger the longer we sat. I tried breathing through my nose to dampen it, but my wolf was insistent that we lean in. Soak up more of the man who stayed with us despite having no real reason to.

Frustrated by the situation, I gritted my teeth and physically turned away from him.

"What's wrong?" Ryder didn't move, but the muscles in his legs tensed like he was about to get up.

I didn't have an answer. Nothing made sense, so I went with that. "Nothing."

A minute later, Esteban and four other alphas entered the room. It was easy to identify the Alpha by his commanding presence alone. He walked right up to me, staring me down like he was trying to intimidate me. “Wolf.”

I cleared my throat and stood up with my hand extended.

“Alpha. I’m sorry for showing up on your land without warning, but...

” I glanced at Ryker and then back to Esteban, hoping he could read between the lines without me having to spell out the situation that was becoming more and more evident.

“Well, I left my pack and was, um, drawn here. I mean no harm. Just looking for refuge.”

“I have to admit, we don’t get a lot of refugees out here.” He chuckled and side-eyed Ryker before folding his hands behind his back. “You’ve caused quite a bit of excitement today.”

I nodded, doing my best to keep my movements slow and controlled. “Again, I’m sorry about that. I just ended up here and wasn’t sure why.” I shrugged and slipped my hands into my pockets. “Maybe you can understand that pull?”

“Maybe.” Esteban took a few steps back, giving me space. When he did, two of his men spread out, inching closer to Ryker.

My wolf pulled forward, forcing a growl out of me as I took a step closer to them, trying to put myself between the unknown alphas and my omega. My omega? What the hell?

“Back off, guys.” Esteban’s smile grew as he waved his men away from Ryker.

“There seems to be something brewing here that we need to respect.” He gestured to Ryker, who looked ready to vanish into the floor. “What about you?”

“I believe him.” He bit his lip and nodded. “I’m willing to take responsibility for him while he’s here.”

Esteban rolled his eyes and whispered under his breath.

“I bet you would.” Then he turned to me.

“I’ll allow you to stay for a few days under Ryker’s supervision.

You’re welcome to leave at any time, but if you want to come back on the property, he’ll need to escort you.

And once you figure out your plan, let me know.

We’re not a refuge. We’re a working family.

If you’re gonna stay, you need to work. And if you plan to work, we’ll need to fully understand your intentions. ”

“Understood.” I fully exhaled, relieved I didn’t have to leave. Or worse, beg. “I’ll be a perfect guest.”

He moved toward Ryker with his arms crossed. “I want daily reports. You can work from home for the next few days, but this is temporary.” He seemed to be having a whole other conversation with just his stern expression. “Figure things out, then come see me.”

“Yes, sir.” He dipped his chin in deference to his alpha. Pack Alpha , my wolf

reminded me. “I’ll stay in touch.”

Esteban stared at Ryker for another moment before looking back at me. “If you hurt him, I’ll peel your skin off, wolf.”

I met his gaze and nodded. “Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Go on, then.” Esteban waved us away as if we were lingering in his space. “We have work to do here, and you’re a distraction.” I didn’t get two feet before he cleared his throat to get my attention again. “Don’t forget, wolf. I’ll be watching.”

Ryker led me outside and around the back of the building to a gravel road. In the distance, there were several homes of varying sizes. “My place is two blocks down.”

“These are blocks?” There were roads that went far into the distance on some kind of grid, but without buildings and coffee shops and sidewalks, it was hard to recognize the infrastructure that had been built within the compound. “Cool.”

The land I came from was a bit more suburban. We were remote but developed, even though I’d never realized how developed until coming here.

Ryker opened the door to his little house and flipped on the light.

With the blinds closed, it was dark inside.

In anyone else’s home, it might have felt dreary or depressing.

But with Ryker, it felt intimate and private.

Exactly what I needed. He hovered in the middle of the front room, wringing his hands together.

“It’s not much, but at least it’s a two-bedroom.

They give omegas bigger places.” He shrugged and turned away so I couldn’t see his face. “You know... Just in case.”

“It’s great. Much nicer than I have...” When he looked at me with big eyes, I grinned. “Which is nothing. So, thank you for having me.”

“You can sit.” He nodded toward the sofa with a soft voice. “Or stand. Or whatever.”

“Thanks.” I sat down as the tension in my chest eased a little. “So, this is weird, right?”

Ryker paced in front of me before dropping onto the other end of the sofa. “Yeah.” He bent his knees up and wrapped his arms around them.

I cleared my throat and decided to try to make sense of what my wolf was saying and my body was experiencing. “Do you understand what’s happening?”

Ryker looked up, startled by the question. “You feel it too?”

“I do.” I couldn’t remember the last time I felt so vulnerable. “My wolf has ideas.”

He looked like he was trying to work out a math problem. “I think my coyote might be right.”

The mate bond hummed under my skin like a beacon to get my attention. It wasn’t quite a pain that worked through me, but it wasn’t comfortable, either.

Ryker picked at a thread on his jeans. “You probably want to get cleaned up.”

I'd forgotten about the crusted blood on my skin and dirt covering my clothes from when I was captured. "Yeah, sorry." I hopped up from the couch and brushed off the cushion to make sure I didn't leave any dust behind.

He shook his head and stood too. "I'll show you where the towels are."

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RYKER

I was trying to dice onions with the calm precision of a celebrity chef, but my hands were shaking like it was negative fifty degrees in my kitchen.

It didn't help that my coyote had been pacing a mental trench through my skull all afternoon with his little chant that couldn't be ignored. Mine. Mine. Mine.

He'd never been so insistent about anything before, and I knew why. Teddy was mine. Ours. Our mate.

As I hustled in the kitchen like a man about to make his last supper, I grinned despite all the conflicted feelings in my mind. We had a mate. And he was currently naked in my shower.

My dick plumped up even thicker as I slid the onions into the pan and blinked away a stray tear.

The diced tenderloin that I had marinating in my fridge went into the pan next, and then I dropped the fettuccine into the pot of boiling water to round out the meal.

It wasn't fancy or particularly healthy, but it was hearty and filling, which my coyote wanted, and I guessed his wolf would appreciate it as well.

And if Teddy preferred to eat raw, we could go hunting later.

As long as we stayed together, Esteban had assured me that Teddy wouldn't run into

any issues with the pack.

Did he know? Could he sense the mate bond between me and Teddy?

It made sense that he did as my Alpha, but damn, that was embarrassing.

As I stirred the sizzling meat, the bathroom door opened, and Teddy appeared with a towel around his hips. His scent hit me first, fresh and so thoroughly warm that it made my breath catch in my lungs. He inhaled deeply and then closed his eyes. “Smells good in here.”

I licked my lips as he walked to the front door to grab his bag. He was even more gorgeous with drops of water glistening from his broad muscles and the curled edges of his hair.

Teddy was only out of view for a few seconds before he was back in the kitchen in a pair of gray sweatpants that hung low on his hips. His gaze stopped on me, and he stared for longer than most would consider to be polite. Good thing I wasn’t most and I just considered it sexy as fuck.

“Need any help?” His voice was deep and firm...exactly how I wanted his dick in my ass.

“Nah, I’m good.” I cleared my throat and brought the register of my voice down a few octaves. “It’ll be done in a few minutes. Do you want a beer?”

“Sure.” His eyes strayed to the pan of stir-fried vegetables and steak before he opened the fridge and grabbed a bottle. “You’re cute, kind, and can cook. How did I get so lucky?”

It was my best chance to address the tension in the air, so I smirked and went for

flirty instead of terrified. “I think it’s more fate than luck.”

He twisted off the cap with two fingers, keeping his eyes on me. “Do you like to cook?”

I shrugged and picked up a snap pea then held it out for Teddy to taste. “I guess so. Cooking’s a good distraction, and I like...” I smiled through my self-consciousness as he leaned forward and bit it from my fingers. “Well, I like taking care of people.”

Teddy grinned and then leaned back against the fridge, all deliberate calm. “You continue to surprise me, omega.”

“Ditto.” My coyote was getting anxious, hackles up and begging to come out and play. Not yet. We’ve got to feed the man first. And then...

I had no idea what would happen after dinner, but for now, it was time to eat.

The timer on the pasta buzzed, so I turned off the heat to everything and nodded toward the table. “You wanna set the table?”

“Sure.” He grinned as if amused, flashing those bright white teeth. “Where do you keep the plates?”

We fell into a rhythm of him moving slow and purposefully while I darted around to make everything perfect. Every time our hands brushed, sparks arced under my skin. I could feel my pheromones wafting out of me in an embarrassing way as my scent permeated in the air surrounding us.

We sat at the table, and I got comfortable across from him, hoping he was too distracted by the stirfry and noodles he was wolfing down to pay any attention to me.

I took a small bite, but I didn't have much of an appetite anymore.

My body was hot and sweaty as I pretended to eat while I stared at the alpha's throat every time he swallowed.

My coyote was nudging me, whispering for me to just ask him. We needed to know.

A low and persistent throb was building behind my eyes. And in my balls. But mostly, my head ached and my body felt...wrong. At first, I ignored it. Teddy was hungry and needed to fill his belly before we got into anything too deep.

I twirled some pasta around my fork and inhaled the wolfy musk that made my body sing with desire.

"You're not hungry?" Teddy had been watching me closer than I realized. "It's really good."

"I'm glad you like it." I raised my fork as if I were about to eat it. "Still processing everything that happened today. It was a lot."

"I get it." He chomped on another bite, then lowered his fork. "Listen, I don't wanna make you uncomfortable, but—" He paused and seemed to be considering the next words he uttered. "Are you, uh, feeling anything weird?"

My eyes were wide with fear and relief. "Weird how?"

Teddy shrugged. "I dunno. My wolf's been acting—" He scrubbed a hand over his jaw and leaned back.

"Look, when we were around all those other alphas, I thought maybe I was going crazy, but when I got here, my wolf made it very clear that you're ours."

Our omega.” His gaze penetrated through me. “You’re my mate, Ryker. I think.”

Seeing the vulnerability in his eyes made mine tear up, and my coyote went still. “I think so too.”

“Yeah?”

I nodded, feeling silly and shy and naked despite being fully dressed. “My coyote’s been pacing holes in my brain since you walked in.”

He grinned and then took a deep breath. “It’s probably why you smell so fucking good.”

I didn’t know how to respond to that, so I just soaked in the compliment and took a drink of my water.

For several minutes, we sat in silence, but the heat under my skin was building again, creeping up my neck in embarrassing flushes. My hands started to shake, and I had to push back and lower my head between my knees to keep from passing out.

“Whoa.” Teddy got up and was immediately kneeling beside me. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, just...” The word died on my tongue as a wave of lightheadedness crashed over me. My coyote was frantic, desperate for relief as our alpha pulled me into his arms.

The air thickened and my vision blurred. “Teddy...”

“Ryker.” Teddy inhaled deeply, and his grip on me tightened. “Shit. You’re in heat.”

All the confusion in my mind was gone, and everything made perfect sense.

The fever, the ache, the sudden urge to bury myself under every heavy thing in the house.

How could this be happening so fast? I'd never been in a full heat before, but when I'd experienced light symptoms in the past, they were slow and lingering for a few days before passing.

This was instant. Sharp. Happening. It was definitely happening.

Teddy started walking me toward my bedroom. "If you want me to stay outside, I can?—"

"No." I grabbed his hand so hard my nails dug into his skin. "Please, don't."

He gently lowered me onto my bed and took a step back. "Ryker, I won't push you into anything. If you're scared?—"

I shook my head, desperate for him to make me feel better. "Not scared. Just... Fuck, I don't know. I can't think straight right now."

He stood there for a long moment as I squirmed in discomfort on the bed. "Do you want my knot, omega?" I could hear the tremor in his voice as he asked for permission.

"Yes, alpha." I meant to whisper, but it was more of a gaspy shout. "More than anything."

A few seconds later, Teddy was pulling off my clothes, and his sweats just disappeared.

My hands clawed at his skin, pulling him closer even though he was radiating heat

like an oven and I was sweating from my heat.

My coyote was howling in approval when my alpha finally kissed me. His lips barely brushed over mine at first, but he was back quickly. Seeking out my tongue. Searching for warmth and moisture.

Teddy covered my body with his as he scented my neck, licking my salty skin until he was nipping at my earlobe. "I've got you, Ryker. I'll take care of you."

I could barely hear my own pleas for his knot over the sound of our wet lips and tongues connecting in a dirty dance that almost made me come just from his taste. Everything about Teddy was hot, but I had to rank kissing as his best skill.

His lips molded perfectly to mine, moving with me and against me in a perfect rhythm that only fueled my need for more.

"Please, alpha."

Teddy chuckled and pulled away so he could kiss down my chest. It took ages for him to finally get to my cock, but I couldn't fully appreciate his wet heat on my dick because his thick finger was working my ass, sliding through my slick channel easily like we'd already gone a round.

"I'm ready." I rolled my hips so he could go deeper and my dick could slide across his abs. "So damn ready."

"Me too, sweetheart." He pulled his fingers out and pushed his body between my thighs so he was in the perfect position to enter me. "Tell me if you need me to slow down."

I nodded and then he slowly pushed into me. "Yes, alpha." I dug my heels into his ass

and pulled him closer so he was fully seated inside me. “Like that.”

For the next several minutes, Teddy made love to me, kissing my neck and ears and face as if being balls deep in me just wasn’t enough. He needed to be closer. He needed to be my whole world.

And he was.

As the completely illogical thought entered my mind, I wanted it to be true. For now. Forever.

Teddy licked my neck, his tongue tracing a figure eight on my skin as he continued to pull out and push inside my ass. Everything was tight in my body, and nerves I didn’t know I had were on fire as he drove me closer to release. “You almost ready to come for me?”

I nodded. “Please. I need it.”

He didn’t make me beg any more. Teddy moved faster in my ass at the same time that his fist closed on my dick and he started stroking me.

“Yes, alpha.” I rode him faster then pulled his mouth to my neck. I wanted his mark. I needed it. He held me, and I clung to him with my nails embedded in his back.

“Come for me, Ryker.”

I exhaled deeply, and with the burst of air and tension and coiled nerves came a flood from my balls. I unloaded splashes of come, and Teddy wasn’t mad at all. He just lifted his hand to his mouth and licked the majority of the jizz between his fingers while he continued to stroke me. “Yeeessssss...”

In the heat of the moment, I barely noticed that two things were happening while I was floating in the clouds. Teddy's mouth sealed against my neck, and then he bit down, claiming me for eternity with a fated-mate bond bite.

And then he knotted me.

The dick that was already impressively large and in charge got even bigger as it locked inside me. He grunted and held still, filling me with his seed and keeping it in place until his body was convinced mine had taken the hint. I almost cried from the sudden fullness as I clamped down.

"I've got you, omega." Teddy held me through the spasms, whispering nonsense into my ear. I felt him empty into me, heat meeting heat, and more waves of my own orgasm crashed through me with an intensity I'd never felt before. "Always."

After we both caught our breath, we just lay there, tangled on the bed. My body was wrecked and every inch of me was aching, but the fear and uncertainty was gone.

I was safe now.

Teddy's arms closed around me, and his mouth was near my mark, keeping it warm while we waited for his knot to lessen.

My eyes stayed shut, and I didn't move or think about what came next with my alpha.

He stroked my shoulder, dragging his fingertip over the mark. "You okay?"

I nodded, too wrung out to speak. "Mm."

He laughed softly. "Yeah, me too."

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TEDDY

Ryker didn't sleep so much as collapse on top of me. His body was still quaking through the last tremors of his heat as it finally released him from its hold. The bone-deep exhaustion that slacked every muscle in his body molded around me in a way that I'd never experienced before.

I liked the weight of him on top of me and could have stayed in that position forever. It was comforting to have my arms circled around his waist as I just stared down at him, still trying to grasp that he was mine.

His face was slack in sleep, making him look so young and innocent. That messy hair only added to the unfamiliar feelings inside me that I needed to protect him with my life. Ryker's neck was marked now with a bond between us that couldn't be broken. He was mine and I was his.

As if he knew what I was thinking even in his sleep, his fingers curled into my chest, holding tightly. That wasn't necessary. I had nowhere else in the world to be and was holding on just as tight.

Before I knew it, the sun was coming up.

I hadn't slept at all but I was too excited to sleep. I'd slept too much in my life. Now that I had Ryker, I just wanted to be awake and present and not miss a single moment. The light pierced through the drapes, slicing the darkness with sunbeams until Ryker started to squirm.

As his hard cock brushed my thigh, an urge to take him began to intensify.

Our bond was new and raw in an almost overwhelming way.

We'd spent hours exploring each other last night and my knot had fully molded to his tight body after all the time it spent inside him, but that still wasn't enough. I wanted more. I'd always want more.

Part of me was desperate to wake him up so I could see those wanting eyes look at me like I'd hung the moon. But I also wanted to just hold him a while longer.

The smile that spread on his face in his sleep made me wonder what he was thinking about. And when his hips started to rut against mine and he moaned softly, I knew he was thinking of me. My omega.

The mark on his neck almost glowed, throbbing as if it were a living being. I'd been careful, but a bite was a bite. And it wasn't meant to be hidden. It was meant to be noticed and revered. Respected.

Ryker opened his eyes and fingered the bruise on his neck as he sighed. "You're not a dream."

I laughed. "Or a nightmare, I hope."

He crawled up me and kissed my lips. "More like a fantasy. Good morning, alpha."

It certainly was. The best kind of morning.

Ryker traced a finger along my collarbone, then let it drift down to my chest. He explored the hard planes and edges like he was trying to memorize it. Finally, he let his hand rest just above my heart.

“Will it always be like this?” He looked at me as if I had all the answers.

“Like what?” I pulled him tight and licked along his jawline. Every part of him was delicious.

“The bond.” Ryker shrugged and looked down, studying their hair around my nipples. “I thought it’d be... I dunno. Like a leash. But it feels good. Like you’re in my head but not in a creepy way.”

I chuckled. “I think it’s always really intense at first.” I watched his face, trying to read what he wanted to hear. “Hopefully it doesn’t get creepier as time passes.”

Ryker snorted. “No, I know it won’t be bad. I’m just surprised how badly I want you.”

I grinned, slowly feeling my dick plump up again. “Me too.”

He bit his lips and looked up. “Yeah?”

“Oh yeah.”

Before we knew it, I was buried in his ass once again. I already knew what he liked so getting him to climax was easy and I immediately followed, filling his tight channel with my seed before locking it in to do what nature intended.

“What if I’m already pregnant?” He pressed his forehead into the nook of my neck as he rested on my chest.

“That would be amazing.” I lifted his head up so I could look into his eyes. “How would you feel about that?”

“Excited.” He ducked his head, but I caught the shy smile before it vanished. “And happy.”

I pulled him to me until my knot released and slipped out of him. “You hungry?”

“Definitely.” He pushed up and stretched. “I guess I’m supposed to, like, cook you eggs or something?”

I raised an eyebrow. “Is that an offer or a question?”

Ryker sighed. “Both, I guess. I need to get ready for work so I can go talk to Esteban.”

The alpha. My wolf was immediately on alert, hackles up as we thought about seeing the alpha. “Will he be mad?”

“No, not at all.” Ryker stepped into a pair of boxers and walked into the kitchen.

Unwilling to be away from him, I followed.

We left Ryker’s place and headed straight to the alpha’s compound. Being part of a pack meant certainly life decisions couldn’t be made in a vacuum. And bringing an alpha from another pack and another species was a big ask.

I had no idea how it was going to go but I was prepared to leave with Ryker if that’s what we had to do.

The West Coast Coyotes weren’t all bad but they weren’t angels either. They ran drugs and weapons up the west coast, but also delivered groceries to little old women in their community.

Having received a text from Ryker to let him know we were coming, Esteban was waiting at a long table. His phone was in one hand and a half-eaten concha in the other. He didn't look up when we came in, but his ears twitched just enough for me to notice.

Ryker was the one who broke the awkward tension after we stood there in silence for a long moment. "Hey, jefe. Sorry we're late. I—uh?—"

Esteban put his phone down then fixed me with a look. It wasn't hostile or even suspicious. It was just measuring, like he was checking to see if I measured up. "You did it?"

I pulled Ryker to my side and made sure his mate mark was visible. "We did. We're mated now. Permanently."

"Good." He looked at Ryker, then back to me. "I'm glad you didn't waste time trying to avoid it."

Ryker turned bright red, but didn't say anything.

I just nodded, agreeing with the sentiment.

Esteban waved at the empty chairs across from him. "Sit. Both of you."

We obeyed. I took the seat next to Ryker, angling my body so I could see both of them without turning my back. Old habits.

Esteban broke off a piece of his pastry and flicked the crumbs to the floor as he eyed Ryker. "You okay?"

Ryker smiled and then glanced at me as he leaned closer. "Yeah. I'm great." His hand

went to his belly as if he already knew there was a pup growing inside him.

Esteban looked at me next. “You look like shit.”

I chuckled and finally relaxed. “It was a long night.”

Esteban laughed and kept his attention on me. “You know how this works or do you need a manual?”

I shrugged. “I think I’ve got it figured out.”

Esteban picked up his phone and sent a quick message out. Then he tossed it onto the table and sat back. “You’ll work in the warehouse. Night shift, at first, but close to Ryker. We’ve got vans coming in from the border. You can help pack and keep the runners in line.”

Ryker squeezed my hand. “Thank you, Esteban.”

He didn’t take praise well because he ignored Ryker’s words. “Things will settle down in a while, but for now, Teddy, just keep your omega on a leash now that he’s in a delicate way.”

It was meant as a joke, but I saw the flicker in Ryker’s eyes. A challenge. I squeezed his hand under the table. “I won’t let him out of my sight.”

Esteban finished his pastry, licking the sugar from his thumb. “Any questions?”

Ryker piped up. “You’re really okay with all this...change?”

Esteban’s face softened just a bit. “Of course, I am, chiquito. You found your mate. I’m not gonna stomp on that. Even if he’s a scary bastard.” He winked at me.

“Besides, you’ve been a ghost for years. You needed someone to knock you out of your hidey hole.”

Ryker ducked his head, suddenly fascinated by a crack in the tabletop.

Esteban rose and stretched his shoulders until the joints popped. “Night shift starts tonight. Teddy, Ryker can show you around. You’ll get a set of keys from the foreman. Ryker, you take the day off. Go do omega shit, I don’t care.”

We stood up to leave and Ryker looked like he wanted to hug Esteban but thought better of it. I kept my distance, but not out of fear. I respected the guy. He ran the pack like a family, not a fiefdom. That was more than I could say for how my own family did things.

Ryker chewed his lip, then swallowed. “You sure you’re okay working here?”

“Wherever you are, I’m gonna be.” I pulled him to my chest and kissed his nose.

Ryker looked away, but his ears went red. “You’re such a sap.”

“Sap?” I shrugged and started walking again. “Stud. Same thing.”

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RYKER

There was a time I used to enjoy the fact that most people ignored me. It's an omega thing. Nature's cloaking device. Growing up, I learned early to keep my head down, not just metaphorically, but in that literal, hunched, skulking way you see nerdy types like myself.

Then Teddy came into my life and all that changed. Well, more like into me, literally and repeatedly, against every available surface. Then, suddenly, I was being noticed for all the wrong reasons.

Or the right ones, depending on your perspective.

The first time I realized something was off, I was scooping up scrambled eggs with a tortilla. I was about to go for another scoop, but a sudden queasy wave shuddered through me.

"Dude." Teddy eyed me with half a grin and half something sharper. "You okay?"

I nodded but he knew it was a lie. We both did but we hadn't bothered going to see a doctor. After living together for almost a month now, we both knew I was pregnant without any medical confirmation.

Besides, we got plenty of confirmation from the busy bodies in the pack. Everyone was happy for us and had some advice or opinions on our situation. It was sweet but also kinda annoying.

After a particularly embarrassing puke session in the bakery, I finally decided to just put it out there. “I think I’m pregnant.”

Teddy put down the remote and turned to me. “Yeah, you definitely are.”

“I am?” I didn’t expect that answer. I didn’t know what I expected but not that. “You think?”

“Definitely.” He pulled me onto his lap and kissed my shoulder. “I can smell the pup in you.”

“So...this is really real?” I put my hand over my stomach and tried to feel the growing life beneath it. “We’re gonna have a family and be together forever?”

“As real as you and me right here”

I kissed my alpha and stared into his eyes, grateful for whatever magical pull brought him to me. “I love you, Teddy.”

He pulled me up so he could thoroughly kiss me. “I love you, Ryker. You and our pup...and all the pups that come after.” His big palm rubbed my tummy and he signed. “You’re everything to me, omega. Now and always.”