



Riding With The Wolf

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Category: LGBT+

Description: He'll be her knight in shining armor and anything else that she needs.

Astrid

I'm back in Broken Arrow and trying to get my life together.

Things seem to be going according to plan.

I have a new job and it's been great being around my best friend, Nara, again.

There's just one thing missing.

A partner.

I've never dated before, but I've imagined my Prince Charming coming for me ever since I was a kid.

He was always tall and charming, a true gentleman.

Basically, everything that Caden Michaels isn't.

So, why can't I stop thinking about the growly biker?

Caden

I've finally found my fated mate and I'm never letting her go.

Or, I won't once I get my hands on her again.

She somehow manages to keep giving me the slip, but my wolf and I aren't worried.

We'll win her over and make her ours soon enough.

As a former Navy SEAL, I'm used to succeeding at missions and this is one that I know I'm going to win.

I just need to prove to Astrid that we're meant to be.

The shifters of Devil's Pack MC are rough, rugged, and ruthless, but

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:14 am

Caden

“Where are we going, Pres?” I ask Jude as he stomps past me.

“The Broken Bottle Bar,” he growls, and I groan internally.

“Are the Midnight Rebels starting trouble again?” I guess, and he nods once.

He hops onto his bike, and I hurry over to my Harley and climb on. He’s already roaring off down the street, and I roll my eyes as I race to catch up to him.

That’s Jude for you. He’s always running off to the action. I suppose that’s what makes him a good president for our MC, the Devil’s Pack MC. He’s a good leader too. It’s why when we both got out of the military, I decided to join him here in this small town in Montana. The dude is the closest thing I have to a best friend.

There’s a pang in my chest as I think about all of the friends that I lost overseas. That was why I decided to get out of the military. I just couldn’t stand to bury another one of my friends. I couldn’t watch them get shot at or blown up. It was killing me.

I came to Broken Bow because Jude promised me that it was a small town, and I was looking forward to being alone and adjusting to civilian life. Somehow, that never quite happened, though, because he talked me into joining the MC, and now it feels like there’s always someone around. It’s also the only place that I feel like I can truly be myself since the MC is also the shifter pack in town. Everyone else is human.

I joined the MC four years ago and over those years, I’ve managed to climb up the

ranks and become the Vice President of the club. That's also what made Jude and I so close. I'm his second in command, and helping him deal with the rival MC in town has meant quite a few fights and late nights for the both of us.

We should just kill them all, my wolf growls.

Part of me agrees. The Midnight Rebels aren't a good group. There are rumors that they have their fingers in almost everything from drugs to running guns. They make this sleepy little town dangerous, and I know that if they left, it would probably make a lot of people's lives a hell of a lot easier.

Right, so kill them, my wolf says, and I sigh.

Jude won't like that. I'm sure he has a plan to get rid of them. Probably one that doesn't include the law after all of us.

My wolf rolls his eyes at me, and I ignore him as we ride into town. The only place in town that's really busy is the bar, and we stop outside. I park next to Jude and a few other guys from the MC, and we head inside.

I follow Jude through the mass of people, scanning the crowd for any threats or signs of our guys.

"Over there!" Kade, our Sergeant of Arms, calls, and I follow his finger to where a group of Midnight Rebels members are cornering our guys.

We push through the crowd, and I grab one of the guys, dragging him by his vest towards the door. I can tell that we're seconds away from a full-on fight breaking out, and it would be better if we were outside for that.

Too late, my wolf says a second before I hear glass break behind me.

I growl as I turn on the man holding the broken beer bottle towards me, and he glares at me.

“Outside!” Jude orders, and I back away from the man with the bottle, dragging his friend with me out the door.

I push him away from me as soon as we’re outside and he goes tumbling into the dirt. His friend rushes me, and I grab his arm that’s holding the broken beer bottle and twist until I hear his shoulder dislocate. He screams in pain, and I shove him away from me.

“Where are the others?” I yell at Jude as he knocks out the guy he was fighting.

“I think they might still be inside. Or they used the other door.”

We share a grim look, and I follow him around the building to scout out another way inside.

“Get things in there under control,” Jude orders me, and I nod, taking some of our guys with me as I head back into the bar.

It’s chaos inside, and I duck as someone swings at me.

“We need to get the fight outside!” I yell to the other guys, and they nod.

I can see some of the innocent townspeople rushing towards the door, and I do my best to help them get out. Then, I start kicking members of the Midnight Rebels outside. Someone punches me in the face, and another scratches me with a beer bottle across my arm, but I get out relatively unscathed. Some of the other guys are a lot more bruised or bloody.

I find Jude as he shoves some guy into a car and he shakes his head in disgust at the man. Most of the Midnight Rebels are sprinting for their bikes, and I watch them go for a moment.

We both freeze at the same time, and I grow tense.

What is that smell? I wonder, and my wolf goes on high alert inside of me.

Mate! He yells, and I blink.

Mate? As in, our mate? I ask him, and he snarls at me.

Yes, dummy. Go get her. Now!

I take a step at the same time Jude does, and he turns, glaring at me. I match his dark look, and he frowns.

“Mine,” he growls, and I bare my teeth.

“Mate,” I tell him.

We glance back at the restaurant across the street, and it’s then that I realize there are two women there.

“The other is mine,” I tell him, but Jude is already headed their way.

I hurry to catch up.

I thought I would find my mate when I turned eighteen, and when that didn’t happen, I figured it would come in the next year or two, especially with how much I was traveling. I spent the first few years in the military actively looking for her, and then

just hoping that with time, she would find me. Then never happened though and I had kind of given up on ever finding her when I turned twenty-four and now she's here, right in front of me.

My wolf is jumping around inside of me, happy to finally have our fated mate. He's wanted to find her even more than I did, which is saying a lot.

She's here and she's so pretty, he says as we stare at her.

She's perfect, I agree and smile as I head across the street to finally claim her.

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Astrid

“How was your graduation?” Nara asks as she sips her margarita.

“Good, I guess. My parents couldn’t make it,” I say, and she rolls her eyes.

“Mine didn’t bother to show up either,” she admits, and we share a sad kind of smile.

Nara and I have been best friends since we were kids. We grew up here in town together, bonding over our shitty home lives and families. She knows all about my problems with my parents, and I know all about her family issues too.

We split up when we went to different universities, but now we’ve both graduated and are back in town. Tonight was supposed to be us celebrating being back together, but as I watch the bikers drive past the restaurant, I can feel her mood take a swift dive.

“Maybe they’re just passing by,” I suggest, but we both know that’s not likely.

The Broken Bottle Bar is right across the street and is a hot spot for the bikers in town. Chances are that they’re headed there.

She sighs, and I smile, eating one last tortilla before I reach for my wallet.

“Want to get out of here?” I ask, and she nods.

“Yeah, I have a busy day of job searching tomorrow,” she says glumly.

Nara went to college to become a teacher, something that I know she'll be awesome at once she finds a school to hire her. Meanwhile, I went into marketing. I was lucky enough to get a job offer from one of the companies that I interned at last year and now I get to work from home. The only downside is that I'm working from home here in Broken Bow.

I know that Nara sometimes feels jealous that I already have a job and it looks like I have my life together, but I don't. I'm broke and stuck living at home. I desperately want to move out, but I know that if I do, the only thing I'll be able to afford is a crappy apartment on the bad side of town, and I'll probably still need at least two roommates just to be able to make ends meet.

I push thoughts of my financial situation away as Nara and I pay our bills and stand, heading for the door.

"I can help you look for jobs tomorrow," I offer as we head outside.

"See, this is why I love you," she says with a smile.

"Free labor?" I guess, and she laughs as we both head out to the street.

I drove us, and she follows me as we head around to my car. We pause when a group of bikers race past us to the bar across the street, and Nara sighs again.

"Ignore them," I tell her, and she nods.

That's probably easier said than done, considering that her dad and brother run the Midnight Rebels MC.

"We should leave," Nara warns me. "Now."

“Yep,” I agree when I see her dad and brother stomping towards the bar.

We both take off at a brisk pace, but we have to pass by the bar to get to my car since I parked in a parking lot around the back.

I shouldn’t have parked there. I should have tried to find something down the other side of the street, even if we had to walk further.

“Let’s go around back,” I call over my shoulder when a few bikers stumble, bleeding from the bar.

“Good call.”

We turn the corner, but suddenly, the side door of the bar bursts open, and a group of guys separates Nara and me.

“Nara!” I scream, but she’s already been swallowed up by the crowd.

Shit. Now what?

I could try to find her, but I have no idea where to even start.

I should get to the car. She’ll know to meet there. If she isn’t there in five minutes, then I’ll come back and look for her.

I start to push and shove my way towards the parking lot, but I’m not making a ton of progress. All the guys around me are bigger and stronger, and they don’t seem to notice or care that I’m not a biker like them and am just trying to get out.

“I’ve got you,” someone says a second before a pair of arms wrap around my waist and I’m lifted off of my feet.

I kick out instinctively, hitting a few people who then turn to glare at us.

“Easy, little one. You’re going to start another brawl,” the man warns me.

“Put me down!” I snap.

“No way. You see this mess. I’m getting you out.”

He starts to move, and I hate to admit it, but he gets further through the crowd in seconds then I did in minutes.

“My friend is in there,” I tell him once we break free from the crowd.

“Jude has her.”

“Who the hell is Jude?” I ask as he finally sets me on my feet.

I whirl on him, and he grins down at me.

“Hey,” he says easily, and I glare up at him.

“Who is Jude? Where is Nara?” I ask him.

“My friend. She’s with him, and I know he’ll keep her safe.”

“I want to see her. I need to get to her.”

“I’ll text him.”

He reaches into his pocket for his phone, and I study him. I don’t remember him from when I was younger, so I know he must be new. He must have moved to town in the

last four years.

The guy is huge, towering at least a foot over me, so I know he must be at least 6'4". He's toned, with muscles on top of muscles, and my body starts to react.

He picked me up like I weighed nothing, I think. I look down at my curvy body and then shake my head.

Focus on Nara.

"I'm Caden, by the way. What's your name, beautiful?"

His blue eyes twinkle down at me and I bite my bottom lip, debating if I should tell him my name.

I mean, he did just save me...

"Astrid," I finally say.

"You got a man, Astrid?" He asks, and my mouth drops open.

"Excuse me?"

"A boyfriend. Are you seeing anyone?"

"What does that matter?" I shout, and he grins down at me.

"Just making sure."

"Oh my gosh," I growl, and his smile widens.

“Glad that I don’t have to scare anyone off.”

“Who says that you don’t?” I spit, and his smile drops.

“Do I? What’s his name?” He growls, his blue eyes darkening.

What the heck am I doing? I’m arguing with a guy about a non-existent boyfriend when I should be looking for Nara.

I need to get out of here.

“Name, little one,” he growls again, and I glare at him.

“None ya.”

“Astrid,” he says in warning.

A few guys get shoved towards us, and Caden turns to fight them back. I know this is my chance, and I use that moment to escape.

I take off, running as fast as I can down the street and around the corner. I see my car up ahead, and I sprint towards it. My legs and lungs protest, and I wonder if I should try to do more cardio.

“Astrid!” Caden shouts, but I don’t slow down.

I see Nara round the corner, running towards my car, and I’m relieved. She’s alright.

We both reach my car at the same time, and I can see that she looks just as bewildered and confused as I feel.

Nara starts to laugh as we climb into the car, and I frown at her.

“Men,” she says, and it’s so out of left field that I giggle.

“Let’s get out of here.”

I start the car and peel out, peeking in my rearview mirror as I leave. When I see Caden rush out into the street after me, my heart lodges in my throat. I can see him cursing, and he reaches up, tugging at his hair as I leave him in my dust.

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Caden

How did you lose her?My wolf snaps at me as I get dressed a few days later.

He's been asking some variation of that question ever since Astrid slipped through our fingers the other night, and I sigh, ignoring him.

How?He demands to know, and I grit my teeth.

You were there! You know how.

You should have let me out. I could have run after the car, and then we wouldn't be in this situation.

Yeah, you're right. We'd probably be dead instead because I can guarantee that someone would have shot a giant wolf that was running down Main Street.

I could have taken them.

"Oh my God," I groan as I lace up my boots.

I could have,he insists.

You also would have freaked her the fuck out,I point out, and he snorts.

Maybe, maybe not.

No, you definitely would. She's human, and having a wolf after her and then seeing me shift in front of her is only going to scare her and make us claiming her even harder.

He knows that I'm right. We have to ease into things with our mate.

We need to claim her.

We will. Soon.

We have to find her first.

It's been two days since we lost Astrid, and I've been all over town but haven't seen her yet. I'm determined to find her, though. My wolf and I have both gone a little mad in the last forty-eight hours, and I know I need to find my fated mate sooner rather than later before I snap.

What if she was a tourist? My wolf asks, and I tense.

We'll find her, I promise him. If we can't find her in town today, then we'll go out looking for her. We'll track her down.

I grab my keys and head out to my bike. I need to get to the clubhouse at some point today, but I decide to drive around town and look for my mate first.

I cruise down the backroads towards town, scanning for a curvy woman with pale blonde hair and crystal blue eyes. There's no sign of her though.

I drive around town twice, but there's no sign of my mate. I pull into the parking lot of the Broken Bow Market and climb off my bike. I'm about to run into the store to grab a few things when I spot Astrid headed my way.

My wolf goes on high alert, and I try to calm my racing heart as I watch her head my way. She's looking down and doesn't notice me right away. That's probably for the best. I have a feeling that she might turn and run in the other direction if she saw me.

As if she can feel my gaze on her, she looks up and we lock eyes. Just like I thought, she turns on her heel and starts to walk back the way she came. I huff out a laugh at her feistiness and then go after her.

"Hey there."

She sighs and stops, turning to face me.

"Caden."

"Astrid," I say, grinning down at her. "You got a minute?"

"For you?" She asks with a sweet smile, and I smirk. "Nope."

My smile drops, and I see the spark of amusement in her eyes at my reaction.

"We need to talk," I tell her.

"No, we don't."

"We do," I insist. "Can we go somewhere?"

"No."

"I promise you that we do. I have something that I need to tell you."

"Do it now."

“It should be done in private.”

“That is the worst pickup line,” she groans, and I can’t help but laugh.

“It’s not a line. I really do need to talk to you and it really should be done in private.”

She shakes her head.

“I’m busy today.”

“Let me buy you a cup of coffee,” I try, and she sighs long and hard.

“You’re not going to give up, are you?” She asks, sounding resigned.

“Nope.”

She eyes me for a minute, and I try to look like an upstanding guy, someone she can trust and grow old with. I’m not sure she sees me that way, but eventually, she nods.

“Fine.”

“Great. The coffee shop is just a block down.”

“I know. I grew up here,” she tells me.

I file that information away, desperate to learn more about her.

“Really? Where?”

She side-eyes me as we fall into step together, and I smile at her.

“A few streets over,” she says vaguely.

“Did you like it here?”

“No.”

“Then why come back here?” I ask.

“How do you know that I left?”

“Because I’ve been here for almost four years now, and I haven’t seen you around. This town isn’t big, so that seems unlikely.”

We start to cross the street when the roar of motorcycles cuts through the quiet, and I groan when I realize it’s not members of the Devil’s Pack MC. It’s some members from the Midnight Rebels MC.

“Astrid,” I start, but she’s already backing up the way that she came.

I hate to let her go, and my wolf is screaming at me not to, but I have to. She needs to be safe. I don’t know what these guys want, but I know what they’re capable of, and I don’t want my mate anywhere near them.

I watch Astrid until she turns the corner and disappears, and then with a growl, I turn back to deal with the assholes from the Midnight Rebels.

“You ruined my date,” I snarl at them as they rush towards me.

It feels so satisfying when I lay the first one out and even better with the second. By the time they’re all crawling or limping away from me, the frustration and anger have been burned off.

I watch them go before I head back to my own bike.

Our mate, my wolf whines, pawing at me.

She lives here. We'll find her again, I promise him.

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Astrid

It takes me almost twenty-four hours to realize that I never actually grabbed groceries when I went to the market yesterday. Work is pretty slow this week so I lace up my shoes and head off towards downtown. I can't help but think about Caden as I start to walk down the street.

I wonder if I'll see him again today.

Wait. Do I want to?

I thought I didn't, but I can't deny that a certain thrill goes through me when I think of the handsome biker. Normally, I wouldn't be attracted to someone in a motorcycle club, until I met Caden.

What is it about him?

I can't quite put my finger on it. Maybe if I had dated when I was younger or if Nara and I were like other teenage girls and went ga-ga over boy bands or movie stars, if we had crushes on other guys our age, maybe then I would have more experience with these new emotions.

I turn the corner, and the Broken Bow Market comes into view. I'm almost to the parking lot when the now familiar sound of Caden's motorcycle comes up behind me.

I sigh, stopping and turning to face him as he parks and climbs off.

“We meet again,” he says with a wide smile.

“Unfortunately,” I grumble.

“How about we go get the cup of coffee now?” He asks me, and I shake my head.

“I need to get some groceries and get home,” I tell him.

I don’t know why I’m still standing here. I doubt that I want to hear anything he has to say. I’m attracted to Caden, but he’s a biker and I don’t want to date one, so I steel myself as I look up at his handsome face.

“You have two minutes,” I tell him, and he shakes his head.

“It’s going to take longer than that. You’re going to have questions, and I’m sure that I’m going to need to prove it to you,” he says, and my curiosity is piqued.

“Prove what to me?” I ask, and he pauses.

For a split second, he looks worried. Now I’m even more curious about what could be going on.

“Just... come with me. Please.”

I hesitate, and he shifts closer to me.

“I just need a few minutes of your time, Astrid.”

“Listen, I would, but I don’t really want to head anywhere in town with you. The Midnight Rebels seem to have some kind of tracker on you or something, and I really don’t want to have to run home and then come back downtown tomorrow to grab

groceries. Again.”

“So, let me take you out of town somewhere. I know a place that’s quiet.”

“Okay, first off, creepy,” I say, and he laughs.

“It’s a public place, but the Midnight Rebels won’t be there. I promise.”

I chew on my bottom lip and weigh my options. Part of me thinks that I should just get this over with. I can talk to him for a few minutes and then maybe he’ll leave me alone, or maybe I’ll finally be able to figure out what it is about Caden that fascinates me so much.

“Fine, let’s go,” I finally say, and he lets out a big breath before holding his hand out to me.

I cross my arms over my chest and step past him towards his bike.

“Do you trust me?” Caden asks, and I snort.

“Nope.”

“Give me a chance and let me change that then.”

I sigh, grabbing his helmet from his hands and slipping it onto my head. I pull the strap tight and then climb onto the back of his bike.

“Hold on,” Caden instructs, and a secret thrill races through me as I wrap my arms around his waist.

He pulls out of the market parking lot and we take off. I expect him to head east since

that's the nearest town, but he surprises me by going north, towards the forests that border our small little town.

We ride for a few minutes, and then he turns off of the main road, and I cling to him tighter as we wind our way down the backroads and towards some popular hiking trails on the outskirts of town. I used to go hiking here with Nara whenever we both wanted to get out of our houses and away from our families, but I haven't been in years.

He pulls into a gravel parking lot and parks. I hurry to climb off the back of the bike and take the helmet off.

"Okay, this is your public site?" I ask him as he climbs off his bike.

"It's public," he argues.

"Barely," I grouch.

"It's perfect. Besides, I'll need space to show you."

He starts to hike down a less popular trail and I follow behind him. The trail isn't long and it dead ends at a field. Caden looks around and then turns to face me.

"Are you going to kill me now?" I ask, and he lets out a rusty-sounding laugh.

"Yeah, I realize now how creepy this must look," he admits, and I bite back a smile.

"Uh-huh," I agree.

"I guess you must trust me a little bit because you haven't run away screaming yet."

I don't answer that, and he clears his throat.

"So, I wanted to tell you about myself."

I wave for him to go on, and he takes a deep breath.

"Astrid, we're meant to be together. Literally. We're literally fated to be together."

I roll my eyes and he steps forward, looking ready to stop me in case I turn and make a run for it. There's a certain desperation in him now, like this conversation and getting me to understand is the most important thing he's ever done.

"I'm a shifter, a wolf shifter, and shifters have fated mates. They have one person who is the only one that they'll ever love. You're mine."

My head is spinning, and I blink, holding up my hand before he can go on.

"You're a what?"

"A wolf shifter. I can change between human to wolf form at will. I knew you were my fated mate the second I smelled you."

"Smelled?!?" I stress, and he nods.

"That's how shifters know they've found their fated mate."

Oh my god, he's crazy.

That has to be it, right? What other possible reason could there be for a grown man to think that he can be a wolf and that he knows I'm the one because of the way that I smell?

“Ohh, okay,” I say, backing up a step.

“You don’t believe me.”

“No, of course not. You sound insane.”

“I knew that you wouldn’t believe me.”

“Uh-huh,” I say, backing up another step.

“That’s why I brought you here. I knew I would need to show you to prove it to you.”

I nod, trying to play along with the crazy man as I come up with a plan for how to get out of here. If I make a run for it, I could maybe find a hiker on one of the other trails. Or maybe I could make it to the parking lot, hide, and then call Nara to come and get me.

I’m so busy looking over my shoulder at the trail that I don’t notice Caden stripping a few feet away. I glance back at Caden, and my eyes almost pop out of my head when I see him standing there naked.

“Ready?”

“For what?” I shout, backing up another step. “Why are you naked?”

I slap my hands over my eyes, and he chuckles.

“I don’t want to rip my clothes,” he explains.

“Why would that even be a possibility?!”

“When I shift,” he says, and I groan.

“Okay, let’s get this over with,” I say, dropping my hands and keeping my eyes locked on his face.

“Ready?”

“Yep.”

He nods and then, right before my eyes, he does change. It happens fast, but I still see it. The way that his nails and hair grow, the shifting of his bones and the way that he lands on his paws a moment later.

“Holy. Shit.”

I stare in shock at the giant wolf in front of me. He’s so much bigger than I thought he would be. I guess I’ve only ever seen a wolf at the zoo and they seemed smaller then.

The wolf steps towards me and I tense. He pauses and we eye each other for a moment.

That wolf could kill me, but I don’t think that he will. I mean, this would be a pretty elaborate way for him to convince me to come out here so he could kill me.

The wolf steps forward again, and this time, I raise my hand, and he pushes his head into my palm.

“Oh my gosh,” I whisper.

He moves his head, and I start to run my fingers through his fur. It’s soft and longer

than it looks. I pet his wolf for a few minutes, growing more comfortable around him.

He steps back, and I watch as he shifts back to his human form and starts to pull on his clothes.

My head is spinning as I watch him and try to sort through my thoughts.

“Do you believe me now?” He asks as he slips his shirt over his head.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean I want to ride off into the sunset with you or whatever.”

“Of course not. We’re meant to be together, but I know you won’t trust that just yet.”

I shift on my feet, wondering what to do now, and he smiles easily.

“We’ll start with a date first,” he says, and my mouth drops open.

He’s so presumptuous, but I can’t deny that I’m interested. If he wasn’t lying about being a wolf shifter, then could he really be telling the truth about being fated to be together?

“What do you say, Astrid? Will you go out with me? Tomorrow?” He asks, and before I can think it through, I nod.

“Alright. Tomorrow.”

He grins at me, and I turn and head back to his bike before I can say or do something stupid, like throw myself at him.

I feel so turned around. I don’t know if I should be running towards him or away from him. I need to figure that out, and I have a feeling I’ll need to figure it out fast.

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Caden

We need to bite and claim her, my wolf says as we get ready for our date.

Not tonight. We need to get her used to us. She knows about shifters now, but she still needs time to get used to all of this.

Fine. We bite her at the end of the date.

No, no biting today at all. She barely trusts us. You saw her with us yesterday. She barely left the market with us.

He growls and starts to pace inside of me. I ignore him as I tie my shoes and head for the door. It's close to six, and I'm supposed to be meeting Astrid at the steakhouse in town in fifteen minutes. I had offered to pick her up, but she turned me down.

My wolf picks up the pace as I head out to my bike and climb on. I head towards town, trying to take the backroads to the steakhouse. I don't want anything to go wrong tonight, and I have a feeling that if the Midnight Rebels spot me before I get to my date, they'll try to start something.

We can't be late, my wolf says, and I roll my eyes.

I know. We won't be, I promise him.

I pull into the steakhouse parking lot and drive around to the side. I try to park out of the way, hoping that no one will notice my Harley parked in the back. I scan the

parking lot as I head for the front door, but I don't see any sign of my mate.

She could be inside, waiting for us. We should have got here earlier, my wolf admonishes me.

We're ten minutes early already, I point out.

I head inside, looking around for Astrid, but she's not here yet.

"For one?" The hostess asks, and I shake my head.

"Two, but my date isn't here yet."

"I can seat you," she offers.

"I'll wait."

She nods and goes back to checking in the next couple. I step to the side and look out the front door.

What if she doesn't show up? My wolf asks me.

She will.

An older car pulls into the lot, and my wolf and I perk up. When Astrid steps out, we both smile, and I head out to greet her.

"You look gorgeous," I tell her when I get to her side.

She does too. Her pale blonde hair is hanging in soft waves around her face and shoulders, and she's wearing a pretty navy blue sundress that ends just above her

knees. My wolf licks his lips as we eye her bare legs, and I try to rein him in.

She wants us. I can smell it, he growls, and I grit my teeth.

I know. I can smell it too. She's not ready for that, though, and I'm not scaring her off.

I push my wolf to the back of my mind as I hold out my hand to Astrid.

"Worried that I won't be able to make it across the street by myself?" She asks me sarcastically, and I grin.

"Nah, I just like touching you."

She seems surprised by my honesty, and I grin, squeezing her hand as I lead her over to the restaurant.

"For two?" The hostess asks when I walk back inside.

"Yes."

Astrid looks around, and I watch her as the hostess gathers our menus.

"Have you been here before?" I ask as we head over to our table.

"No, I thought it was always for special occasions, and I never really had many of them."

I frown, and my wolf snarls in my head.

"What about your birthdays? Your graduations?" I ask as I pull out her chair.

“No, I never really had any money to go,” she admits, looking down at the linen tablecloth.

I take my seat and vow then and there to spoil the shit out of my mate from this day forward.

“What about you? Do you bring all of your dates here?” She asks, obviously trying to change the subject.

“I don’t date,” I tell her.

She looks skeptical, and I lean closer to her across the table.

“Shifter, remember?” I ask, lowering my voice.

“Ah. Right.”

“We don’t ever really date. Not until we find our fated mate.”

“So, what happens now?” She asks, and I lean back.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you’ve found me. So, now what?”

“Well, if you were a shifter too, we would have already marked each other and fucked each other’s brains out.”

Her eyes widen and she clears her throat.

“But because I’m not?” She asks hoarsely.

“Now, I have to woo you and try to show you that we’re meant to be so that I can mark you, and then we can fuck each other’s brains out.”

She stares at me wide-eyed, and I grin at her. The waiter comes over then, breaking the spell between us and I lean all of the way back in my chair.

“Can I get you two started with something to drink?” He asks.

“Water,” Astrid blurts, and I smirk.

“Water for me too,” I order.

He nods and heads off, leaving me and Astrid alone.

“What did you do today?” I ask my mate.

“Work.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m a junior marketing exec for a company called Clutch Marketing. They’re a pretty big company with offices all over, but a lot of us get to work from home. I’m one of them.”

“And what does a junior marketing exec do all day?” I ask her.

“Well, I spent all day today working on a new client’s file. So, it was a long phone call where we discussed what they were looking for help with and expectations.”

“Sounds cool.”

“I like it. It’s fun trying to come up with ways to help companies grow. I like being creative,” she says with a small smile.

The waiter comes back with our waters, and I hurry to pick up my menu and find something to order. Astrid does the same thing, and I wait until she looks up before I motion for her to order first. We both get the sirloin, medium, with a house salad and baked potato.

“I’ll have that out for you shortly,” the waiter says as he turns to leave.

“What about you?” She asks me once he’s gone. “What did you do today?”

“Club stuff. I had a meeting with Jude and then went home and did some work.”

“What do you do?”

“Believe it or not, I’m actually damn good at investments. I have a small company that I run where I invest for other military and ex-military members.”

“Is this all a way for you to try to get my money?” She asks, and I grin.

“Nope. You’re not military, though, I would make an exception for you, of course.”

“Uh-huh,” she says, eyeing me suspiciously.

“I would, or hell, we’ll be married soon, so what’s mine will be yours.”

“We’re not getting married,” she rushes to say, and I smile.

“Not tonight.”

She looks like she wants to argue, but the waiter comes back with our salads. He sets the plates down and Astrid and I dig in.

“What about your family?” I ask, and her head snaps up.

“What about them?”

“Are you an only child? Are your parents still together? Are they still living in town?” I ask, rattling off questions.

I want to know everything about my mate. I also think that if she opens up to me, maybe that will mean she trusts me too.

“Yes, unfortunately, and yes.”

“Why, unfortunately?”

“Because they hate each other. I don’t know why they didn’t just get a divorce years ago.”

“I’m sorry.”

She nods, pushing some lettuce around on her plate.

“It sucked,” she whispers. “Growing up like that. I was always walking on eggshells, always checking to see what kind of mood they were in. The summers were the worst. I had nowhere to go until I was older, and being stuck in that house was like torture,” she admits.

She looks up at me and blinks, looking shocked that she had just admitted all of that to me.

“I’m sorry, Astrid. At least you got away from them.”

“For a bit,” she says, “but now that college is over, I’m back there with them.”

“Move out,” I encourage her, and she gives me a sad smile.

“I wish I could, but college was expensive, and between student loans and other bills, I can’t afford it.”

“You can move in with me,” I offer, and she looks tempted for a moment before it fades.

The waiter comes back with our food, and I change the subject.

“I grew up in the south. I was happy to get away from the heat... until I was deployed and realized that I might have been sent somewhere even hotter,” I joke, and she laughs.

“Where were you stationed?” She asks as we each cut into our steaks.

“Virginia, mostly.”

“Did you like it?”

“At first. Training, pushing myself to the brink, I liked that. I like a challenge,” I say and she gives me a look that has me grinning.

“What did you not like?”

“Watching my friends get hurt or die.”

She freezes and her eyes soften.

“That had to be... shit, Caden. I’m so sorry.”

I nod, and we eat in silence for a bit.

This is really romantic. Good job, my wolf snaps at me, and I clear my throat.

“What do you have planned for the rest of this week?” I ask her as we finish up our food.

“Just more work.”

“So, you’ll have time to go out with me again then?” I ask, and she bites back a smile.

“I guess.”

“Good.”

We share a small smile, and when the waiter comes back over, I ask for the check.

Then, I start to plan our second date.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:14 am

Astrid

I'm going out with Caden again.

If you had told me even a few days ago that I would be going on a date with a biker, I would have laughed or called you crazy. If you had told me I would be looking forward to it, I wouldn't have believed you, but that's exactly what's happening.

I can't deny that I can feel the bond he was telling me about. I opened up to Caden so much yesterday and told him things I hate talking about with anyone, even Nara. I told him though, and I'm still not sure why, other than I felt comfortable with him.

Caden is picking me up tonight, and I've dressed appropriately for our date. I have a pair of jeans and a pale pink long-sleeve shirt on. I slip a jean jacket over my shirt and head down the hall.

My childhood house is decorated the same as it's been my whole life. There's one picture on the wall in the hallway, a gift from my grandma before she passed. It's of my mom and dad on their wedding day, my mom's belly swollen with me. Neither of my parents are really smiling, and I glance at it briefly as I pass by.

My mom is in the kitchen, cutting up some vegetables. The knife slams down on the cutting board with way too much force, and I know that she's pissed. My dad is passed out in his recliner in the living room; a few empty beer cans litter the floor around him.

The scene is all too familiar. It happened almost daily when I was growing up. My

mom getting mad about whatever, and my dad drowning himself in beer until he passed out and didn't have to deal with her anymore.

It's no secret that they didn't really want to get married. Theirs was a shotgun wedding. They had been a drunken one-night stand, and when my mom learned she was pregnant with me, they were forced to get married. I know that both of my parents blame me for their miserable lives. I used to too, until I heard that some kid's parents at school were getting divorced. At one point, I even begged my parents to separate, but they never did.

"Where are you going?" My mom snaps as I head for the front door.

"Out," I say a second before I walk out the door.

Caden pulls up a second later, and he smiles as I hurry his way. He passes me a helmet and I slide it onto my head. I'm glad I left my hair down as I secure the strap and climb onto the motorcycle behind him.

"Where are we going tonight?" I ask as I wrap my arms around his waist.

"There's a band playing in the next town over. I thought we could check them out. It's supposed to be like a festival with a bunch of food trucks and stuff."

"Sounds fun."

"It will be," he promises a second before he takes off.

I hold onto him tightly and enjoy the ride as we weave down the streets and head towards Acorn Bend. It's not that long of a ride, and I try to enjoy the scenery, but it's hard. It's hard because my mind keeps straying to the gutter.

Dirty thoughts of Caden between my legs flow through my mind, and I shift on the bike but can't get any relief. The vibrations from the bike roll through me and I try to squeeze my thighs together, but all I can do is press harder against Caden.

It sounds like he growls, but it's probably just the bike. My nipples pebble in my bra, and I try to shift back away from Caden's big, strong body. There's nowhere to go though.

Caden speeds up, and I wonder if he's getting turned on too. An image of him above me, moving inside me, pops into my head, and I let out a moan.

All of a sudden, Caden veers off onto the shoulder, and I gasp.

"What are we doing?" I ask him as he turns off the bike and climbs off.

"I just need a minute," he says through gritted teeth.

I watch as he stomps off into the woods, and I frown after him. I wonder what could have gotten into him.

He comes back a minute later, right when I was about to go looking for him. He doesn't look happy and I notice he's walking kind of stiffly.

"Are you alright?" I ask him as he walks right up to me.

"I can smell you," he growls.

"What?" I ask, blinking in surprise. "Yeah, you told me that when we talked about shifters."

I'm so confused about what's going on.

“I can smell your arousal,” he grits out, and my jaw drops.

I can feel my cheeks heating with a blush.

“I... I,” I open my mouth, but I have no words.

“Goddamn it, Astrid. The way you smell,” he groans as he runs his nose up my neck.

I shiver at the touch, and I hear him snarl.

“I... Caden,” I babble, and he kisses the base of my neck.

I tilt my head, giving him better access, and he takes advantage, licking and kissing a path up my neck. He licks my earlobe, and I arch against him. Having the bike between my legs is kind of perfect. I grind against the seat of his Harley and moan as he makes his way towards my lips.

“Caden,” I moan, and he groans as he claims my mouth.

His lips mold against mine and his hands cradle my face. Mine land on his chest and I can feel his heart racing out of control against my palms. I’m sure that mine is beating just as hard and fast.

His tongue brushes against the seam of my lips and I open for him. He slips his tongue into my mouth and I melt against him as his tongue tangles with mine.

A car speeds past, honking at us as it goes, and I jerk back. I’m sure that we make quite the spectacle out here on the side of the road.

Caden glares at the car as they drive off, and I lick my lips. I can still taste him there and it only turns me on more.

“We should go,” I say, and he nods, then swallows hard as he stares down at his bike.

“We’re going to take my truck until we’re mated,” he mumbles as he climbs on, and I bite back a smile as we take off once again.

My body is still buzzing and I try to get myself under control as we make our way to Acorn Bend. Caden pulls into a busy parking lot and I see string lights strung up between the trees and a bunch of food trucks parked all around.

Caden parks, and we climb off, but when I look over at him, all of those feelings from the bike come racing back.

“Let’s go and take a look around,” he says, and I lick my lips.

He snaps, his hands lying flat on the bike seat in between us and he hangs his head.

“You’re going to kill me,” he growls, and I take a tiny step towards him.

He holds up a hand to stop me and I freeze.

“I want you. Badly,” he says as he looks into my eyes. “But it’s not the right time. You need to be sure about us before we’re together, because once we are, there’s no going back. There’s no breaking up for us. Once we’re together, we’re together.”

I nod, and he takes a deep breath and stands up.

“Let’s go have some fun,” he says, holding out his hand to me after a moment.

I pause for a second before I slide my hand into his and we head off to look around.

I don’t tell him as we listen to the band, or when we eat, but the truth is that I think I

am ready. I like Caden. I trust him. Plus, he's the only man that I've ever been interested in. He says that we're meant to be, and I believe him.

Now I just need to work up the courage to admit that to him.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:14 am

Caden

My wolf wakes me up with the sun the next day. Tonight is the night of the full moon and already I can feel the mating heat starting.

I already have plans with Astrid for tonight. She's going to come over here so that we don't get interrupted by any MC nonsense, and I'm going to cook for her. I need to go to the grocery store this morning to grab some ingredients and then come back here to clean this place up a bit.

My wolf and I want our mate to like it here. We'd move of course, if it made her happy, but I like it here in Broken Bow, and I know that Astrid has friends here too that she would hate to leave as well.

I take a shower, using those moments to get my wolf under control and give both of us a little pep talk.

We have our fated mate, but she might not be ready to be ours tonight, I remind my wolf and myself.

We can wait. We waited years just to find her, my wolf says, but I can tell that he doesn't really want to wait.

Right. At least we have our fated mate with us. That's enough for right now.

I rinse off and grab my towel, wrapping it around my waist as I step out of the shower. My body should be relaxed, but my wolf and I are both on edge. He's pacing

back and forth inside of me like the caged animal that he is right now.

I get dressed and decide to go for a quick ride before I head to the grocery store. It's still early so it's not like anything in town is open just yet.

I take off down my driveway and turn, heading west towards the mountains. I cruise down the backroads, letting the hum of my Harley calm me and my wolf.

It's always been like that. When I got back from my first deployment, I was looking for a new car, but at the last second, I decided on this old Harley Davidson. I had to take a class and get my motorcycle license, but the rest was history. I fell in love with riding and motorcycles. Every time I got back from a deployment, I would hop on my bike and go for a nice long ride. It always helped me to clear my head.

It's the same now, though thoughts of my mate keep filtering through my mind. I drive through the forest and take a winding path further up the mountain. I ride until the sun starts to come up over the trees before I head back to Broken Bow.

I make my way to the Broken Bow Market and head inside right when they open. The store is pretty empty and it doesn't take me long to grab everything I need for our dinner tonight and check out.

I stuff all of the groceries in the saddle bags of my bike and then cruise through town back to my house. My wolf is so antsy inside of me and I know that I'm going to need to let him out for a run if I'm going to have any hope of controlling him tonight.

I stuff all of the groceries in the fridge, promising to deal with that later and then I strip and shift as I jump off my back porch. My wolf takes off heading deep into the woods.

We run until we're exhausted and then he turns and starts to walk back to the house.

The sun is higher and I briefly wonder just how long I've been running for as I pass by a group of deer and then some rabbits. They scurry off when they see me and I let them go.

By the time I make it back to my house, I'm in need of another shower. It's also after four p.m. and I realize that I was out in the woods for close to five hours. My wolf is tired, but just the thought of Astrid has him perking up again.

I walk through my house naked and head into the shower. I'm supposed to go pick up Astrid from her parents' house in two hours, and I still need to clean up around here.

I rinse off and then get to work on scrubbing this house until the place shines. I don't have much, just the basics. It never bothered me, a couch, TV, and bed were really all that I needed, but now I'm looking at the house with new eyes.

Will Astrid like it? Will she be happy here?

We'll buy new things, my wolf growls. Clean what we have.

I clean like a madman for the next hour and a half and then it's time for me to head out to pick up my girl for our dinner date.

My wolf and I get nervous the closer we get to her house. When we pull up out front, Astrid is sitting on the front porch steps. I can hear the sound of people screaming at each other, and I know that it's her parents. Astrid looks miserable, with this sad, lonely look on her face, and I hate it.

Make her feel better, my wolf snaps at me and I grit my teeth.

Working on it.

I hop off my bike, but she's already headed my way.

"Hey, you look great," I tell her as I take in her black jeans and dark blue shirt.

"Thanks. Ready to go?"

It's obvious that she wants to flee from this place, and I nod, passing her the helmet. We both climb on my bike and then we're off, driving down the quiet roads towards my place.

I park and she looks around, taking in my house.

"I like it," she says. "It seems so peaceful here."

"It is," I tell her as I take her hand and lead her inside.

That's what she wants most. It's obvious. She wants a home where there's no one screaming, where there's no fighting or drama. She wants a quiet, peaceful life.

We can give her that.

"Are you hungry?" I ask as we head inside. "I can start dinner and then give you the grand tour."

"Sounds good. Can I help with anything?"

"No, I've got it. You just relax. You can tell me about your day. What did you do?" I ask as I lead her into the kitchen.

"Worked. I met up with Nara for breakfast. She might have a lead on a teaching job in town so that's good."

I nod, and she tells me more about her work. She doesn't mention her parents or what they were fighting about, and I don't pry. I don't want to talk about any of that tonight.

"What did you do today?" She asks as I flip the chicken over in the pan.

"I went for a ride, went grocery shopping, and cleaned up around here. Oh, and I let my wolf out for a long run."

"Do you do that often?" She asks, smiling as I pass her a glass of water.

"I try to go for at least a short run a few times a week. We needed a longer run today," I explain.

"Why?"

"Because of the full moon. I'm not sure if you can feel it too or not."

"Feel what?"

"The mating heat. Or some people call it the mating pull."

She frowns and I try to figure out how to describe it.

"It's this thing that happens every month on the night of the full moon. Shifters can feel it, it's this deep desire for their mate. It's lust but on a whole different level, the most extreme level."

"Yeah, I can feel it," she says softly. "I felt it as soon as I woke up this morning, but it's gotten a lot stronger since then."

“It will continue until the full moon rises.”

She nods, her eyes locked on me, and my wolf freezes in his tracks inside of me as we both smell it.

Her arousal.

She wants us, my wolf howls and I try to bite back my grin.

“Astrid, I want you to know that we don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. I’m all in, but I know that all of this is new to you and you might need more time.”

She eyes me for a moment and then she nods.

“Thanks.”

I go back to making dinner, my wolf and I trying not to be disappointed that our mate didn’t throw herself at us.

We still have tonight, I tell him, and he nods.

I finish dinner and plate up our food, then carry everything over to the kitchen counter and set one plate down in front of her. I set the other plate down in front of my chair and sit down next to her.

We dig in and I try to ignore my feelings for her and how good she smells right now. I mean, she always smells good, but tonight, it’s a whole other level. That mixed with her arousal and it’s a heady scent that has me feeling lightheaded with lust.

We make small talk as we eat, but I know that we can both feel the sexual tension growing between us with each passing minute.

“Thanks for dinner,” she says as we carry our dishes over to the sink. “It was delicious.”

“Anytime,” I tell her quietly.

She smiles at me softly and I see her eyes drop to my lips.

“Astrid,” I whisper, and she swallows hard.

“I want you. I can’t resist anymore,” she tells me, and my heart leaps in my chest.

“Are you sure, mate?”

“Yes. Claim me, Caden.”

That’s all that I need to hear.

We reach for each other at the same time, and I lift her up until she can wrap her legs around my waist. Then my lips land on hers.

Her lips are so soft against mine. They mold perfectly with my lips as my mouth claims hers. My tongue licks at the seam of her mouth and then she’s opening for me.

She tastes like heaven, and I groan as my tongue tangles with hers. I reach up, tugging on the ends of her hair until she tilts her head back, giving me better access to her.

“Mate,” I moan against her mouth, and she pants, grinding against me.

I’m not sure if I should keep kissing her here, or if I should take her upstairs and strip her naked.

Naked! My wolf growls, and I nod.

My hands find her ass and I grip her there as I carry her upstairs.

“Where are we going?” She asks, her lips trailing a line of kisses down my neck.

“I owe you a tour, right?”

She half laughs, half sighs as I carry her down the hallway towards my bedroom.

“This is the guest room... and a... a bathroom,” I say as her lips start to suck on my heated skin.

“Looks nice,” she mumbles against my neck, and I laugh.

“Yeah? It didn’t seem like you were paying attention.”

“I love it.”

“This is my room, or our room now,” I say as I stride into the master bedroom.

“I like the bed. Is it comfortable?”

“Why don’t we find out?” I ask as we both collapse onto the mattress.

Her lips crash against mine, and we get tangled up together, but it’s not enough. I need her naked. I need to be inside of her. Now.

“More,” Astrid moans, and I love that we’re on the same page.

“I need to get you naked,” I tell her, and she nods.

“You too.”

We’re a clumsy pair as we try to pull each other’s clothes off. We’re both breathing hard, but in a mad rush to get each other naked as fast as possible.

I win, and as soon as I toss her panties aside, I’m on her.

“I’m not done!” She protests, and I growl, ripping off the rest of my clothes and kicking them aside.

“I need to taste you.”

That’s all the warning I give her before I spread her legs and bury my face in her sweet pussy.

We both groan as I take my first lick of her. Instantly I’m addicted. She tastes like cherries and vanilla and it’s my new favorite taste.

“So good,” I moan, and she cries out my name.

“Caden!”

My tongue licks up all of her juices and I find her clit, sucking that little pearl into my mouth. With the first flick of my tongue, her hips jerk up off the bed and I reach up, pulling her back down. I grip her thighs, holding her in place as I continue to lick her up.

“Caden! Oh gosh, I’m so close,” she pants.

I suck on her clit, rolling my tongue over that bundle of nerves until she goes off. Her thighs clamp down around my head and I grin as I listen to her screaming my name.

When she collapses back against the bed, I give her one last lick and then crawl up her body. My cock is rock-hard and it rubs through her wetness, driving us both wild.

“Caden. Please,” she begs, sounding breathless.

“What do you need?” I ask her, my hips rocking back and forth as I rub the underside of my cock up and down her slit.

“I need you to bite me,” she says, her voice raspy and filled with heat.

I know she has no idea why she’s asking me to do that; she just knows that her body wants it.

I nod, licking the base of her neck, and then I position my cock at her opening. I start to push inside slowly as I sink my teeth into her neck.

“Oh!” She shouts, and I thrust forward, burying all of my cock inside of her snug hole.

I lick over the bite mark, sealing the wound, and she shivers in my hold. I barely give her time to adjust before I draw my hips back and slam back into her. I can’t seem to control myself. I have to have her.

I fuck my mate hard as I lick my bite mark again. It’s sensitive, and she comes every time I brush over it. I’ve lost track of how many orgasms she’s had, but I promise myself that I’ll keep track in the future. My wolf howls in my head, delighted that we can give our mate so much pleasure.

She’s so wet and tight, wrapped around my dick so perfectly that I can’t imagine ever pulling out of her.

Then don't, my wolf suggests.

The base of my spine starts to tingle, and my balls draw up tight. I know that I'm about to come too, and I want us to go off together, so I grip one of her thighs, hoisting it higher up on my hip as I rut into her like the beast that I am.

I make sure to hit her clit with every stroke, and I can feel her start to spasm around my pulsing length. I groan when I feel her start to come again. I lean down and brush against my mark as I find my own release, coming deep inside her.

"Caden! Oh my! Caden!" She cries, and hearing her like that is heaven.

We did that. We made our mate feel that good.

"Whoa," Astrid pants as I roll us onto our sides and pull her into my arms.

"Uh-huh," I agree.

We grin at each other as we try to catch our breaths, and I run my hands over her, loving the feeling of her against me.

"What now?" She asks, pressing her body against mine.

"Now we do that all over again... and again... and again," I say as I trail kisses over her body.

She moans, rolling over onto her back and letting me claim her all over again.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:14 am

Astrid

I wake up with Caden wrapped around me. He's so hot, and I kick the comforter off, trying to cool off a bit.

"Mhm," he grunts, shifting closer to me, and I stifle a laugh.

It's like he can't get close enough to me, even in his sleep. I love how obsessed he is with me. I've never had that before, being someone's whole world, and now that I do, it's kind of addictive.

"Morning," I whisper, and he nuzzles his face in my neck.

"Morning, mate," he says, his voice raspy with sleep.

"What time is it?" I ask him, and he rolls over to look at his clock.

"A little after eight."

"Ugh, I should get going. I need to get home and start work," I tell him, and his grip on me tightens.

"Stay. Call in sick. Spend the day with me," he pleads, and I'm so tempted.

I do have sick days that I could use...

"If I stay, what will we do?" I ask, turning over in his arms so that I'm facing him.

“Whatever you want. We could go into town, or go hiking and for a picnic. I just want to be with you,” he says, dropping a kiss on my lips.

“Alright,” I agree softly.

“Alright?” He asks excitedly, and I laugh.

“Yeah, I’ll stay. I’ll spend the day with you.”

He grins, kissing me harder. I wrap my arms around his neck and press my body against his in invitation.

“We should take a shower and get ready,” he says, and I nod.

I gasp when he rolls us over and then lifts me up and carries me into his bathroom.

“I don’t have any clothes here,” I remind him as he starts the shower.

“We can stop by your parents’ house and grab all of your things.”

“All?”

“Well, you’re moving in here, right?”

“We didn’t talk about that,” I point out.

“We will. On our hike.”

I just shake my head as he carries me into the shower. I can feel his dick rubbing against my pussy, and I shift my hips, my thighs restless around his waist.

“Caden,” I beg, and he nods, slowly lowering me onto his thick length.

“So good,” he groans, his lips brushing over the bite mark he left on me last night.

“So big,” I correct, and he grins.

“You love it.”

I don’t have time to respond before his lips are on mine, and he starts to move inside of me. I’m trapped between his hot body and the cold shower walls, and tingles race through me, but I’m not sure what sensation they’re from.

“Fuck, Caden! Harder,” I pant, and he does as I ask.

I can already feel him swelling inside of me. Part of me is surprised that we can still have sex. We did it so many times last night that I thought we would be exhausted, but it’s like every time he touches me, I want him more.

“Right there!” I shout, my head falling back as he hits some magical spot deep inside me.

“Fuck, you’re so tight. So hot. So perfect,” he says, his hips thrusting against mine with each word.

“Caden,” I sob, my body coiling tight.

My release is so close, and I know that it’s not going to take much more than one more stroke to have me coming.

I blink my eyes open, wanting to see him when we both go over the edge. His eyes lock with mine, and I’ve never felt so connected to someone before.

I love you is on the tip of my tongue, but I swallow the words down.

I come a second later, and I scream his name as I come all over his cock.

“Astrid. Mate,” he groans as he comes with me, and I lean my forehead against his, trying to calm my racing heart.

“Mine,” he whispers, and I smile.

I kiss him softly, and he pulls out of me, reluctantly letting me slide to my feet.

“Alright, we can go get my things,” I agree as he starts to wash me.

“We will. Right after I’m done here.”

His hands start to trail over my breasts, and he gives me a heated look.

It’s a long time before he’s done with me. Not that I’m complaining.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:14 am

Caden

I'm getting dressed and looking forward to spending the day with my mate when my phone rings. I'm about to hit ignore and just call whoever it is back later when I see that Jude is calling me. He never calls me and my gut tells me that it's important.

"Hey, man. Now isn't the best time," I answer, and he sighs.

"I know, but it's urgent."

"What's going on?"

"It's the Midnight Rebels," he grits out, and I can hear what sounds like an ambulance siren in the background.

"What did they do now?"

"They took a few shots at some of our recruits."

"Is anyone hurt?"

"One," he says solemnly, and I swallow hard.

"Bad?"

"Not sure," he says grimly. "I've heard that he was shot and that the bullet just grazed him."

All at once, I'm back overseas on my last deployment. I can almost smell the blood, sand, and gunpowder in the air.

I blink, trying to pull back from those memories and focus on what Jude is saying.

"Can you get to the hospital? I'm headed to the clubhouse to debrief everyone there. Then I'll meet you at the hospital in a few minutes."

"Sure," I agree. "I'll head there now."

I don't need to ask which hospital since there's only one nearby. My wolf paws at me, reminding me of my plans with my mate, and I close my eyes.

She'll understand. We'll make it up to her.

He growls at me, and I try to ignore him and the nagging feeling that something is wrong as I finish the call with Jude.

"Be careful, Caden. I'm not sure where the rest of the Midnight Rebels are."

"Did it seem like a planned attack or just another fight that broke out when they saw us?"

"I'm not sure. I only saw the aftermath. Just be safe."

"Will do. I'll keep an eye out for them," I promise.

"Good. I'll see you soon."

We hang up, and I turn to see Astrid coming out of the bathroom. Her hair is still a little damp from our shower together this morning and her skin has been scrubbed

clean. She looks like she's glowing, and I hate the idea of leaving her, especially so soon after we've been mated.

"I have to go," I tell her as I pull on my boots.

"Go? Go where? I thought we were hanging out today?"

"We were, but something has come up. It's MC stuff," I tell her as I lace up my shoes and push to my feet.

"MC stuff? Right now? We just made all those plans for today, and I thought..." she says, trailing off, and I can see the hurt shining in her pretty eyes.

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry, Astrid. One of our members was hurt; shot by the Midnight Rebels. I need to go check on them. You shouldn't leave here. I'm not sure what's going on with the Midnight Rebels MC, and it's not safe out there."

"I'm not a biker or part of the Devil's Pack MC," she says, crossing her arms over her chest.

"They know that you're with me, and I wouldn't put it past them to use you to get to me," I explain. "Please, just stay here where I know you'll be safe."

"So, I'm stuck here? Until when?" She demands to know.

"Until I get back. Until I'm sure that it's safe."

I lean over to her, kissing her quickly.

"I'll make it up to you. I'll call you later," I promise her, and then I rush out the door.

I'm anxious to check on the injured men. Ghosts are chasing me right now, and I know I won't be able to relax or think straight until I see the MC recruits with my own eyes.

A lot of the recruits are new, but I've still grown fond of them over the last few weeks. They all seem like good guys, and more than half of them are like me and are ex-military.

My wolf is pawing at me, trying to get me to go back to Astrid, but I ignore him. We need to deal with the Midnight Rebels, or she'll never be safe leaving the house.

So?My wolf asks, and I roll my eyes.

She'll want to leave the house,I point out to him, and now it's his turn to roll his eyes.

We could change her mind.

We're not going to keep her hostage.

We could make her like it,he argues, and I go back to ignoring him.

We're making a mistake,he tells me, and I grit my teeth, praying that he's wrong.

I don't see any of the Midnight Rebel MC as I head to the hospital and pull into the parking lot. There are already a few motorcycles lined up out front and I park next to them and hurry inside.

As soon as I do, I spot Marshall, one of the MC's oldest members, and I jog his way.

"Any updates?" I ask him, and he looks grim.

“Not yet. I just got here.”

“Who was it?”

“Kincaid from our MC and I heard that he tore one of the Midnight Rebels up pretty good. Nurses said it looked like a bear attack,” he says, giving me a look.

“Good,” I whisper and Marshall grins.

“I know. I figure that Kincaid can’t be that hurt if he was able to do all of that, but we still probably won’t hear anything for a little bit,” he tells me, and I give a tight nod.

“I need to call Jude.”

We both head over to some chairs in the surgery waiting room. I know that in a little bit, this place is going to be filled with bikers. Luckily for us, it just seems to be members from our MC right now.

I call Jude but get his voicemail. I’m guessing that he’s on his way here, so I sit back and wait, trying to be patient.

Inside, I’m fighting with my ghosts and worried for the men who are back in surgery. As I sit there and wait, there’s also a tiny part of me that is worried about Astrid. I hate being away from her and I just hope that she’s safe while I wait for any news.

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Astrid

“Hey, are you on home arrest too?” Nara asks when I answer the call, and I sigh.

“Yep.”

“Are you at Caden’s house?”

“Yeah. It’s nice. Better than being stuck with my parents,” I say with a bitter laugh.

“I bet. So... you and Caden?” She says, and I know what she’s hinting at.

“You and Jude,” I counter.

“It’s kind of wild, isn’t it? I mean, a few days ago, I was certain that I would never settle down and my biggest problem was finding a job,” she muses.

“And now?”

“And now I have a fated mate, someone that I didn’t even realize was a thing before like a week ago,” she says with a laugh. “I still need to find a job, though.”

“It’s been a bit hard to wrap my brain around everything,” I admit. “I mean, shifters are real and apparently, I’m fated to be with this guy that I barely know. I can’t deny my feelings, though. I mean, the pull between us is unlike anything that I’ve ever experienced.”

“Same,” she agrees.

There’s a definitive difference between the way Nara talks about Jude and the way I’m talking about Caden. I think she can notice it too, judging by the pause in our conversation.

“How are things going between you two? We haven’t really had a chance to talk much in the last couple of days,” she says, trying to ease into things.

I know that we’re both thinking about the full moon and the mating heat last night. Caden told me about Jude being a bear shifter and that he realized that Nara was his mate on the same night and time that he realized that I was his fated mate.

“Things were good.”

“Were?” She asks, and I sigh.

“He left me this morning.”

“Yeah, Jude called him after the shooting,” she says, and I nod even though she can’t see me.

“I know, but the way that he left...” I trail off, trying to put my thoughts and feelings into a coherent sentence. “He was so... cold. So distant and just completely unlike how he normally is. I guess it just threw me off.”

“And reminded you of your parents,” she guesses.

“That’s it exactly. I’ve spent years watching my parents go from calm to agitated or pissed or cold. I’ve grown used to seeing the signs before that switch flipped inside them, but I didn’t see any of the signs with Caden.”

It feels good to say it out loud to someone, to speak my greatest fear into the world.

“What if he’s just like them?” I whisper.

“Oh, Astrid,” Nara says sympathetically. “He’s not. You wouldn’t have fallen for him if he was.”

“I barely know him, Nara. I mean, we met these guys less than a week ago.”

“But it’s real. I know that it is, and you do too.”

“Maybe,” I waver, “but I’m not sure I want to deal with all of this. Even if Caden is my other half, I’m not sure I want to deal with all of the drama that seems to come with the MCs in this town.”

“I know,” she whispers, and I feel like a dick talking about her family like that.

“I’m sorry, Nara.”

“No, no offense. We both know how terrible they are, and truth be told, I hope that Jude throws out or kills all of the Midnight Rebels.”

I’m kind of shocked by her words. I mean, I know that there’s no love lost between her and her family, but I didn’t think that she wished them dead.

“You don’t really mean that,” I insist, but she scoffs.

“I do. I mean, they’re out here starting trouble all of the time. They’re trying to kill people now, and they’re ruining this town. No one is safe while they’re still around, and you know it.”

She's probably right. I mean, they've really ramped things up a lot in the last few weeks, and now, with the shooting, it's clear that they're escalating with no plan of stopping.

"When do you think that the guys will be back?" I ask.

"Not sure. It sounded pretty bad from what Jude told me."

My stomach cramps, and I wonder why Caden couldn't have told me any of this. He didn't give me any information about what was really going on, how long he would be, or anything. We made plans, and then he ditched me without warning. Am I always going to be second fiddle to the MC? Can I really live like that? Do I even want to?

We're silent for a few moments, and then she speaks.

"What if Caden or Jude are the next ones to be hurt?" I whisper, my stomach cramping at the thought.

"I don't know. I'll talk to Jude. He'll figure out something to get rid of the Midnight Rebels."

Maybe, but what if he can't. What if our men get hurt trying to get rid of them?

All of this just feels like so much. I was on cloud nine up until this morning and now it feels like the curtain has been pulled back and I'm left with so many doubts.

Part of me knows that this isn't the time to talk to him about any of this and I try to swallow down all of my mixed up feelings. I need to be supportive and compassionate right now.

I straighten my shoulders, forcing my doubts aside.

“What are you going to do about Caden?”

“I don’t know. I need to figure out if I want to stay with him or get out now before my feelings grow stronger.”

“Being with him will be worth it,” she promises, and I swallow hard.

“I guess I’m just not as trusting as you are. I don’t know. Maybe I just need time to process all of this. It’s a lot.”

“It will get better. He’ll get back soon and you guys can just talk it out.”

She sounds so sure, and I want to be that confident, but I can’t. I’m scared and unsure.

“Oh! Jude is calling me. I’ll call you back in a minute,” Nara says, and I swallow my disappointment and hang up.

Maybe Caden will call me soon and give me an update. I try to hold onto that hope, but as the time ticks on and my phone remains silent, that hope dies.

I try to call him the first time around noon, but he doesn’t answer or call back. I try again an hour later and then an hour after that with the same luck.

What if he’s hurt? What if he went after the Midnight Rebels MC and was shot too?

I pace around his place growing more panicked by the second. Should I leave and try to find him? I try to call Nara to ask about him, but she hasn’t heard from him the first time and when I call around eight, she tells me that Jude is home and has been

for hours.

Where is Caden?

She promises to call me if she hears anything and I hang up, curling up on the couch and staring out the front window, praying that I'll see the headlight of his motorcycle soon. With each passing minute, I get more stressed out and anxious.

Is this what my life is going to be like with him? Will I always be waiting for a call or him to come home? What if he doesn't? I'm not sure that I could survive that.

Now I need to make a decision.

What do I want more?

A quiet life or Caden?

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Caden

By the time that I make it home, it's well after ten and I take a deep breath as I park my bike outside and head up the front porch steps.

The front door swings open and I blink in surprise as Astrid flies out the door and throws herself at me. She's sobbing so hard and clinging to me. I look around, trying to find the threat and my wolf is on high alert inside of me.

"Are they inside?" I ask her and she just cries harder.

I hold her tighter, peering into the dark house.

"Astrid, honey. Who hurt you?" I ask, pulling her back so that I can scan her face.

She swipes at her tears and the sad look slowly starts to turn to fury.

"Where were you? Are you alright? Why didn't you call me back?" She asks, firing the questions at me.

"I was at the hospital. I'm fine, why are you crying?"

"I thought that you were dead!" She shouts at me, the sadness gone and completely taken over by anger. "I called you like ten times and you never responded. Jude has been home for hours! No one knew where you were or what had happened to you. Do you have any idea what the last twelve hours have been like for me?"

My wolf snaps at me and I wince.

See? I told you that we never should have even left this morning, he snarls.

“Astrid, I’m so sorry. Come inside so we can talk.”

It’s clear that she wants to argue with me, but she turns and storms into the house.

“Is everyone okay?” She asks before she takes a seat on the couch.

There’s a pillow and blanket there and it’s obvious that she’s been camped out on the couch all day, waiting to hear from me.

You’re an idiot, my wolf growls.

“Our guy is fine. He was shot in the shoulder, so the bullet missed all internal organs. He’ll be sore for a while, but he’ll be okay.”

She nods tersely and I swallow hard.

“I was at the hospital until he was out of surgery and I talked to him. Then I went for a drive.”

“A drive,” she says, her voice flat.

“Yeah, I needed to clear my head. My phone died pretty early in the day. I forgot to charge it last night,” I tell her and her cheeks turn a light shade of pink as she remembers what distracted me from plugging my phone in.

She looks away and I scoot closer to her on the couch.

“I wanted to call you, but I didn’t have your phone number memorized. I sent one of the recruits out for a phone charger, but he never came back. I found out when I was leaving the hospital that his mom had a heart attack and he was a few floors down in the same hospital.”

“Is she okay?”

“Yeah, I checked in on him before I left. I’m still sorry. I should have come straight home, I just thought that you would already be asleep and I needed to clear my head. That still doesn’t excuse me not reaching out.”

“I was so worried,” she whispers and I swallow hard.

“I’m sorry, Astrid. I swear, it will never happen again.”

She still looks so upset and I can see her turning some big thought over in her mind.

“I don’t think I can do this,” she whispers and my wolf and I both freeze.

“What? Do what?” I ask, desperation and panic bleeding into my words.

“This,” she says, motioning between us. “I think I got swept up in you and the shifter thing, but then yesterday, it just really opened my eyes.”

“What did?”

“You just ditched me. You left and never bothered to call or check-in. I was worried about you and you were so cold. I mean, I went from the best night of my life to being scared and alone, and you didn’t even bat an eye. I can’t do this again. What happens the next time that the MIDnight Rebels start something? What if you’re the one they hurt next?” She asks, her voice breaking.

Tell her everything, my wolf orders me and I swallow.

We're losing her.

If you fuck this up, I will kill you, my wolf snarls at me.

"It won't happen again," I promise her and she just shakes her head, tears falling onto her cheeks.

"Astrid, I wasn't thinking clearly," I start, getting up and kneeling in front of her so we're eye to eye. "When I heard about the shooting, I freaked out. As soon as Jude told me, I was back overseas, finding out that another friend of mine had died. It just took me back to a dark place, and I'm sorry for that. That's why I went for a drive. I didn't want to burden you with all of that. I know that the last few days have been a whirlwind for you and I didn't want to add anything else to the mix until you were settled."

"It's not a burden. I want to be there for you. We're supposed to be mates, right? We're supposed to be close."

"We are. I'm sorry, Astrid. I'm an idiot, but I promise that it won't ever happen again."

She studies me for a moment and I reach up, wiping the tears away.

"How are you feeling now?" She asks me quietly.

"Alright," I tell her honestly. "It took me a while to stop seeing my friends every time I looked at Kincaid in his hospital bed. I think... I think that I should talk to someone. I thought that I was over things, but today proved that I'm not," I admit to her.

“I can help find a therapist,” she offers, her hands coming up and cradling my face in her palms.

“There’s a VA close by. I’ll look into attending some group therapy and other services there.”

She nods and I turn my head, kissing her palm.

“I love you, Astrid. More than anything. You have me wrapped around your finger.”

Tears form in her eyes and she swallows.

“I love you too. I was just so scared today. I can’t lose you.”

“You won’t,” I promise her.

She gives me a small smile, and I give her a relieved smile in return.

“I love you, mate.”

“I love you too.”

“Let’s go upstairs,” I whisper.

“For what?”

“We need to talk and make some plans.”

We head upstairs, and I pull her down onto the bed with me.

“Now, when do you want to get married, and how many kids should we have?” I ask

her as I get her settled next to me.

She laughs and I grin; my wolf finally relaxing inside of me as my mate and I plan out our life.

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Astrid

Five Years Later...

“When will I get a bike?” My oldest son, Malik, asks as we watch Caden climb off of his and head our way.

“Not until you’re older. A lot older,” I tell him, and he frowns at me.

“Why not now?” He pouts.

“You don’t even have a license yet,” I say with a laugh.

“What’s going on?” Caden asks.

“I want a motorcycle,” Malik says, but it sounds more like mow-ter-cyle.

“Maybe once you’re older,” Caden says, scooping our son up.

“How’s everyone doing at the clubhouse?” I ask my husband as I push to my feet and head inside after him.

“Good. We welcomed a few new recruits today,” he says, and I smile. “Where’s Arlo at? Napping?”

“Yeah, he just went down twenty minutes ago.”

“Oh, Jude says hi. He said that Nara wanted to get together for dinner soon.”

“Yeah, we talked about it at our play date today. She’s going back to work soon, so it will have to be on the weekend,” I tell him.

“Sounds like you two have it all figured out,” he says with a grin.

“We always do,” I tease him, and he laughs.

“Isn’t that the truth?” He asks Malik.

Our son isn’t paying us much attention, but he still agrees with his daddy.

“What should we do while Arlo sleeps?” I ask Malik.

“Blocks!” Malik says right away.

I knew that he would. We spent most of this morning building towers and whatever else he wanted. That’s been his latest obsession for the last few months. Before that, it was toy cars and before that, trains.

Arlo is only eight months, so his interests are pretty much bananas and this giraffe teething toy. He’s getting his first tooth now and it’s been kind of rough. I hate seeing him in pain, but I know that there’s not much I can do for him besides the teething toys and some numbing gel.

“How is Arlo’s tooth?” Caden asks as we head into the playroom.

I set the baby monitor down on the table as Caden helps Malik get the blocks out.

“It seems to be a little better today. He wasn’t quite as fussy this morning.”

“Good.”

“Here, Daddy!” Malik says as he passes each of us a few blocks.

We start to put the blocks together and I smile as I spend some quiet time with my family. It’s been five years since Caden and I met and became mates.

True to his word, the Midnight Rebels left town a week after the shooting. From what I heard, they had the FBI and a bunch of other law enforcement agencies after them for some various crimes and the whole lot of them fled. I was just glad to see them go.

Caden started visiting the VA once a week and going to meetings there to work through everything that happened on his deployments. He worked hard to move past the guilt of surviving and the grief of losing so many of his friends.

Seeing him work so hard at improving himself just made me fall in love with him even more. He swore that he would be the best mate and partner to me and he kept his word.

We got married in a small ceremony here in town just a few weeks later and we’ve been together ever since.

I moved out of my parents’ house and in with him then and it’s been years since I’ve seen them. Not that I miss them. I had all of the family that I needed with Caden.

We found out that we were pregnant with Malik just a week after our one-year anniversary. We wanted to enjoy being a family of three for a bit, so we waited before we got pregnant again. Now that Arlo is here, I think we’re done having kids. Two boys is enough for me, and I know that Caden is happy with our family of four too.

Caden is still vice president of the Devil's Pack MC and the club has grown in the last few years. I'm still working as a marketing exec too, though I'm no longer a junior one. I've worked my way up to senior in the last five years, and now I have my own small team working under me.

Arlo starts to fuss and Caden leaps to his feet and heads to go get him. I finish building my hotel and show it to Malik.

"That's good, Mom," he says, and I grin at him.

"What are you working on, honey?"

"A cabin," he says."

It looks like a big square, but I don't tell him that.

Caden comes into the room with Arlo and I smile at them. This is it, the family I never had, but always wanted. I'm so glad I get to set a better example for my kids than my parents did for me.

I eye my husband as he sits down with our two sons. He's so good with them, so patient and sweet. It's so... sexy.

My body starts to heat, and Caden looks over at me, giving me a lustful look.

"Mate," Caden growls in my ear, and I shiver.

"Tonight," I whisper back, and he grins.

I smirk back at him and he leans over, kissing me quickly before we go back to playing with our sons.