



# COMING MOON

MATED WOLVES FIVE

CLOVER COY

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# CHAPTER 1

He watched her, wondering if this was the best time to approach. It was possible he should wait until she was surrounded by her family; make more of an impact. However, his instincts told him that he would get further with her if he told her his secret while they were alone. He still didn't feel right about this, but it was what he had to do. There was no other choice.

Taking a deep breath and waiting until she was walking alone down the street, he made his way over to her, hoping that she would remember him.

"Ilysa?" She jumped when she heard his voice and turned toward him. A look of shock was written all over her face.

"What are you doing here?" She pushed the strap of her backpack up on her shoulder.

"I came for you." The words felt wrong, but he had to tell her. Clearing his throat, he started again. "I came for you, my mate."

He reached for her, but she backed away, narrowing her eyes at him. "What did you call me?"

"My mate." Each syllable lodged in his throat, but he made himself say the words.

"Bullshit." She spat at him. "Look, Cana, I don't know what you are playing at, but I am not your mate."

"I didn't want to believe it at first either." He had known it was going to be hard convincing her. "When you and your parents left, I thought that what I was feeling would disappear. You were traitors and there was no way that I could ever do what you did to my pack."

"But the feelings didn't go away." He worked to stay as close to the truth as possible. They were traitors, and he felt that as strongly today as he had when they left. "I stayed away, willing things to be different, but when I realized that nothing

was going to change—when that hit me, then I knew I had to come for you.”

There was a blank stare on her face. Not that she looked ready to take him at his word, but it was a start. He only had to keep this up long enough for the rest of the plan to fall into place.

“This can’t be real.” She shook her head.

“It is.” He reached for her hand, taking it while she was still in shock. “We can be together just as we should.”

“What?” She pulled her hand from his.

“I petitioned Johain,” he told her. “He is still really upset with your brother and your parents, but he understands that you had no say in what your family did. I am a respected member of the pack and as my mate, then you are my responsibility. He has agreed that once you accept me, then you can return without consequence. We can be joined as we should have been and live our lives together.”

Her look stayed the same, and he wondered if he was getting through to her. He was about to add more when she doubled over laughing. Her bag slipped once more from her shoulder.

“Ilysa?” She kept laughing. It was so loud that a few of the students that were walking past looked over to see what was going on. He took hold of her elbow and led her a little further up the path. When they weren’t in everyone’s sight, he let her go. “What is wrong with you?”

“If I didn’t think you were lying before, I know it now,” she said through tears as she continued to cackle, although not as loudly now.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Only an idiot would think that I would ever want to go back and be part of Johain’s pack again.” She was calming down. “I can’t stand him and if you were my true mate, then you would know that. You would feel my absolute and utter disdain for the man. In fact, I would rather mate this tree than

someone that would try to take me back to that asshole.” She leaned against the tree that was beside her.

Shock hit him and he did his best to school his features. He hadn’t known that her feelings were so strong toward Johain. The way that his alpha had made it sound, he had thought this would be easy. Johain had talked about her as if she was stupid and had no mind of her own. Apparently, he had either never gotten to know her, or she had fooled him into believing what she wanted him to.

“I don’t understand.” He acted as if her words made no sense to him.

“It’s simple, really. There is no way that I would ever set foot in that village again as long as Johain is alpha.” She straightened up. “I have no idea what you are doing here or why you are telling me this ridiculous story about being my mate, but if I were you, I would knock it off. Not that I need defending. Trust me, I could kick your ass five ways to Sunday myself, but you gotta know that between my father and my brother, you are taking your life in your hands with this crap.”

“So whatever you are up to, give it up.” She shook her head and gave him a smirk. “I’m not buying it, and neither would anyone else.” She stepped closer to him, and her smile grew. “You come near me again with this dumb ass story and I will rip into you so far you won’t have to head home with your tail between your legs. You won’t be able to find it. Got me?”

She didn’t wait for an answer. Without a second glance back, she took off. Cana stood there watching. This was going to take more planning and a better idea of how to get her to believe him.

He thought about contacting Johain, but it only took a second to realize what an idiotic move that would be. With nothing else to do, he followed behind her, keeping his distance. The last thing he needed was for her to take note. Not that he really believed she could hurt him, but he would never convince her if they got into a fight.

Ilysa slammed the door, still angry that Cana had tried to convince her of something she knew was a lie. She had no idea what he was doing here, but she would be sure to tell Jes when she came for dinner tonight. If he was up to something, then her sister needed to know.

“Is that you, Ilysa?” She held back the roll of her eyes. Every day, she came home from school to the same greeting. Like her mother didn’t know that it was her.

“Yes, Mom,” she called back, going into the kitchen. She placed a light kiss on her mother’s cheek and watched as she stirred the pot simmering on the stove. “Smells good.” Ilysa grabbed a soda from the fridge and a handful of pretzels.

“Don’t ruin your appetite,” her mother scolded.

“I won’t.” They had almost the same conversation every day.

“How was school?”

“Okay.” If you didn’t count the few moments on the way home, Ilysa thought.

Her mother hummed her approval and Ilysa knew it was her chance to get away. Taking her snack, she headed into her room and closed the door.

She took out her books and spread them on the floor so she could do her homework, but they didn’t draw her attention. She was too wired from her talk with Cana. It was times like this that she wished she were older. If she lived alone or with some of the other girls in the pack, she could take off and run without anyone saying a word. It was also something she could do if she actually had a mate.

The ocean blue eyes of Cillian danced in her mind. His smile and the easy way that he had about himself made her sigh. She couldn’t wait until her birthday next month to find out if he really was her mate. Why did you have to be eighteen in order to mate?

It was a stupid theory as far as she was concerned. She had known that she was connected to Cillian since she was a little girl. Every time she saw him, he made her pulse race. When he



entered a room, she didn't have to look to know it was him. He had been the one thing that had almost held her back from leaving with her parents when they fled from Johain. She hadn't wanted to leave him behind.

Soon it wouldn't matter. She was convinced that the moment she turned eighteen she would know for sure, and she would fly into his arms, and he would claim her as she knew he wanted to.

The looks that he always gave her did not go unnoticed. The way that he found ways to be close to her. Drew her into conversations. There had even been a couple of times she could swear she saw him outside her bedroom window. Subtle he was not, but she didn't need him to be or want him to be. It wasn't like that was her forte either. No, when the time came, she would be about as subtle as a rock to the head.

She pulled the curtains back, scanning the area hoping to see him, but there was no one. Letting them drop, she turned back to her books.

Maybe he was the first person she should tell about Cana. If he was her mate, it would be his responsibility to handle the guy. She smiled to herself. It would be the first step to their joining.

"Mom, I'm going to run out for a moment," she yelled toward the kitchen from the front door.

"Where are you going?"

"Just out for a walk." It was a half-truth, but she wasn't ready to tell her parents how she felt.

"Alright, but be back before your brother and Jes get here."

"I will," she assured her and then headed out the door.

Looking around to make sure no one was paying attention, she took off at a brisk jog, glad that no one in the pack lived all that far from each other. It would take her maybe ten minutes to get to him. Less if she could run as fast as she was able, but there would be no way to explain that to the neighbors.

When the house he was renting with the guys came into view, she worried for the first time that he might not be home. Well, if he wasn't there, she could always hang out with Tao until he came home.

She needn't have worried. As if he sensed her coming, he opened the door when she was a house away. Her feet froze as she saw a woman stepping out of the house. Mouth open, she stayed still wondering what the hell was going on. Why was there some chick that she didn't know coming out of his house? Anger coursed through her, and she was close to running up on them and tearing the beautiful hair out of her head. The woman turned back to say something to Cillian, and Ilysa's eyes popped out. It was Brenna. What the hell was Johain's mate doing here and why was she talking to Cillian?

Sneaking up closer to the house, she listened closely, wanting answers. When she was close enough to hear them, she stepped to the side of the building and waited.

"Just give me some more time." There was a pleading note to his voice.

"I would if I could, but I don't think he is going to wait," Brenna was saying.

"She won't believe him," he told her. "I know her, and she would never believe any of this."

"Does she know about you?"

"I have been biding my time," he answered.

"You are going to have to tell her," she said. "I can give you tonight, maybe even another day, but then I am going to have to get word to Jesenca. She needs to know, and it would be better coming from you."

He took in a breath. "She is going to put me down. I know it."

A growl started in her throat, but she held it back. No one was going to touch him. Although she might take a stick to his hide herself.

“I don’t think so,” Brenna replied. “If she didn’t attack Johain, I think you can get her to understand.” There was a quick puff of laughter. “I would worry more about your mate if I were you. That one is who might put you down.”

Daggers pierced her as fears she didn’t know she had tore at her heart. She didn’t want to believe he had mated. He was supposed to be hers.

“I know.” He sounded so sad. “She is going to hate me, but I have to hope that she will at least hear me out.”

“You are going to have to talk fast,” Brenna said. “She isn’t known for being even tempered.”

“Ilysa will be fine.” Her breath caught when she heard her name. “I will make sure of it. I just need some time. It’s not like I can say anything until her birthday.”

She had been right. He was her mate. With no other thought, she rushed from the side of the house. Racing past Brenna and not caring anymore why she was here, she wrapped herself around her mate and planted her lips on his.

It took him no time to catch on. His arms came around her and held her steady as he devoured her mouth. His tongue mated with hers, one of his hands finding its way into her hair.

“Mine.” She didn’t bother taking her mouth from his as she whispered the word. He growled and lifted her higher into his arms.

Ilysa was sure they would have continued if it wasn’t for a throat clearing behind them.

“Leave,” Cillian ordered. “I will talk with Jesenca soon, but for now I need my mate.”

Brenna laughed. “I would at the very least suggest going inside,” she warned. “I would hate for the wrong person to see the two of you.”

“Noted.” Cillian looked over. “Be careful. He is looking for you and if someone tells him...”

“I know.” She nodded and then headed to her car to take off.

Jumping down, Ilysa stayed glued to Cillian's side as she watched the car leave. "What was she doing here and what were you two talking about?"

"I have much to tell you." He bent his head to kiss her again. "Let's go inside before we are seen. I would hate for someone to tell your parents before I can officially claim you." He smiled, picking her up and carrying her inside.

## CHAPTER 2

As soon as the door closed, Cillian had her back against it and was kissing his mate like he had been dying to since the first day he realized who she was to him. There had been so many times he had questioned if she would feel the same when she came of age and to have her initiate things spoke volumes to his heart.

He was also aware that this was new for her, for them, and he had to maintain some sort of control because if it was up to his body, then she would be under him and naked right now.

“Mate, we have to slow down.” His words said one thing, but his hands weren’t listening. They had moved to lift her so that they were perfectly lined. He was seconds from grinding into her and he had to do something to get a hold of himself.

With reluctant force, he pulled himself away. They both were panting hard, and he could do nothing but stare into her face. “My mate.” He would never get tired of calling her that. Of knowing that she was his. The smile that took over his face had to be a mile wide.

She returned it and he stepped closer. Cradling her face in his hands, he lowered his mouth to hers and kissed her softly, reverently, and with the depth of feeling he had been holding in for the past two years. When he lifted his head, her eyes remained closed, but her smile rivaled his.

Blinking, she looked back at him. “How long have you known?” she asked.

“Since I came of age,” he answered her. “You?”

“Forever.” She giggled. “At least as long as I have known what a mate was.” She lifted her hand to rest on his cheek and he leaned into it.

“I will speak to your father as soon as I can,” he told her. “I don’t want any chance of losing you.”

A shadow darkened her look, and she dropped her hand and walked further into the room.

“That was why I came here.” She looked back at him. “Cana stopped me after school.” Cillian remembered the other boy. They had been close in age, with Cillian only being a year older. As far as he knew, Cana was still part of Johain’s pack.

“He is here?” he asked with suspicion in his voice.

“Yes, and apparently he thinks that I am his mate.” The growl that erupted out of him was primal. He grabbed for her and hauled her into his arms, slamming his mouth down on hers. No one would take her from him now that he knew she felt for him the same as he did her.

She didn’t resist, but wrapped her arms around his. Standing on her toes, she pushed her body into his and he almost melted at the feel of her. It was becoming too much, and he wrenched himself away, scurrying to the other side of the room.

He let his brain calm and worked hard to keep his desires and instincts down. His cock was begging for her, and he knew that this wasn’t the time. He had not formally stated his intentions. There could be no joining until he had spoken with her family. Even with that, he was sure that they would demand that he wait until she was done with school. It would be difficult, but she was his and he would do anything for her.

It took a moment, but he could finally think straight. “I thought he had already mated to someone in Johain’s pack,” he told her. “Why would he come here and say such a thing?” As he said it, he already knew the answer. This was what Brenna had been warning him about. He had thought he had more time, but apparently Johain was in a hurry to enact his plan.

“Has he talked to your family yet?” he asked, not giving her time to respond to his previous question as he walked back over to take her hand in his.

“I don’t believe so,” she told him. “I was only a street or two away from school when he stopped me, and he hadn’t shown up when I left to come here.”

“Alright, then I will go back with you, and I will talk to your father tonight.” His decision was firm. “As long as we have told them the truth before he has a chance to petition for

you, then he has no claim.” Although it didn’t matter to Cillian if he tried to claim Ilysa or not. He would fight and kill for his mate before he would let anyone else have her.

“We should leave right now.” He took her hand and headed for the door, but she stopped him.

“First, I need you to answer something.”

“Anything.”

“Why was Brenna here?” she asked. “What was she warning you about?”

He didn’t want to lie to her, but he didn’t want to tell her the truth either. She would be angry without question, but more importantly, he could not be sure it wouldn’t be enough to break their bond. It was so new and there was no telling how forgiving she would be.

“Please tell me.” Her hand was touching his chest right above his heart, and he knew that he could keep nothing from her.

“We should sit.” He walked them over to the couch and took a seat next to her. Turning so that he could give her the respect of looking her in the eye, he started.

“My mate, all I ask is that you hear me out completely before you pass judgment on what I have done.”

“Okay.” He wished he could soothe the worry that was shining back at him, but he knew he couldn’t.

“I have been spying for Johain since I came here.” Her eyes widened, and she started to pull her hands away from him, but he held tight. “Please let me explain.”

She didn’t say anything,, but she stopped pulling against him and he took that as his chance. “After you and your family left, I wanted to follow. I would have run here if that was my only way of getting to you, but my parents forbid it. You know how loyal they are to the pack. They would not hear of my leaving. They believed every word that Johain said about Jesenca and for a while I did too,” he told her. “I tried to explain to them that you were my mate, and that you had no

choice in leaving, but they would not hear of it. They told me that I was wrong and that there was no way of knowing if you were my bonded mate until you came of age. I didn't believe them, but I had resigned myself to waiting until you were eighteen. I figured either you would come back for me, or I could sneak away and come for you.

"It was by accident that I learned Johain was thinking of sending someone to spy on Jesenca," he continued. "I was dropping off something to Brenna for my mother and I heard Johain talking with his inner circle. It was a split-second decision, but I volunteered. I knew it would be the only way that my parents would let me come here. The only way that I could be near you.

"I'm not sure why Johain agreed, but he did, and I left as soon as I could," he said. "I figured all I would have to do was tell him a few things that he could find out from anyone, and at first that was it. Then he started asking more questions and giving me orders that didn't sit right with me. I also got to know Jesenca and see how different of a leader she was. How much she cares about all of us. I wanted to come clean. To tell her everything, but I couldn't take the chance that Kalen would keep you from me.

"I figured if I could hold Johain off until you turned eighteen, then I could speak with your family and our mating would be blessed. Then I could tell you everything and we could figure out what to do." He shrugged. "It wasn't the best plan, but I didn't want to lose you.

"Everything was going as well as could be expected until Brenna left Johain. He called, worried and upset that she might be here. He told me that if I were to see her, I was to put her down." Ilysa let out a breath. "It was crossing a line I refused to do, and I told him so. He yelled, he threatened, but I would not agree. I hung up on him and I hoped it was done." He shook his head. "I should have known better. When Brenna showed up, she warned me that Johain was going to use you to get to Kalen and thus Jesenca, but I didn't know he would work so fast. I didn't know he would send Cana. She hadn't



heard who he had been talking to, only that he was coming for you.

“I have been watching you every night, so I thought I would be able to stop him before he got anywhere near you, but I didn’t think he would approach you at school. I didn’t think he would be that bold, and I’m sorry.” He fell to his knees. “I’m so sorry, mate. I know what I did was wrong, but I couldn’t be away from you. I just couldn’t.”

He had dropped his head into her lap as tears cascaded down his face. She was sitting completely still, and he feared that he had lost her before they had a chance. As the moments ticked by, he waited, letting despair fill him.

Just as he was about to give up, he felt her hand smooth his hair back. He raised his head to look into her beautiful eyes. “I understand,” she said softly. “I’m still pissed and part of me wants to smack the hell out of you, but I get it. I would do anything to be with you, too.”

“Thank you.” He reached for her, but she pulled back.

“Still pissed,” she repeated as she stood and jerked him to his feet. “We need to head home before that other jackass shows up and talks to my family and you need to tell Jesenca the truth.” She was walking to the door, but stopped before she opened it. “I will do all I can to support you, but you should have said something once you got here. If not to Jesenca, then to me.

“You put my family in danger,” she told him. “Not just my family, but the whole pack family. You swore your allegiance to my sister with deception in your heart. That doesn’t sit well with me.”

“I’m sorry,” he repeated.

“I believe you, but I’m not the only one you owe an apology.” She didn’t say anything else as she led him out the door and to the only people that could take her from him.

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Ilysa held onto her mate’s hand as they walked back to her house. It was the best thing she could think of; walk in with a

unified front. That didn't mean that she wasn't angry as hell.

How could he have betrayed their pack and her like this? Did she not know him at all?

Yes, she understood and had told him as much, but what she didn't understand was how she, as his mate, had not been able to tell. Shouldn't she have been able to feel the deception, or at the very least, his emotions about what he was doing? Kalen was always speaking about how he knew what Jesenca felt. Her parents as well. If Cillian was her bonded, and she knew that he was, then why were they different?

Maybe it had something to do with her age. It was possible that once she turned eighteen everything would click, but she didn't want to wait. They had claimed each other. Shouldn't their connection have fallen into place when it felt as if it had?

When her house came into view, she slowed her steps. Cillian beside her, she all of a sudden felt nervous. What if her family didn't accept his apology? They could deny their mating. Jesenca could send him away, or worse.

She didn't think that she could handle his not being here. The loss of him. Giving herself a pep talk, she knew that she was going to have to do whatever she had to. There was no way that she was letting them stand between her and her mate.

The door swung open before she stepped onto the porch. Jesenca rushed out, taking her hand away from Cillian's.

"Is there something you haven't told me, sister?" She was looking her in the eye and while she wasn't using her alpha power, Ilysa still felt compelled to answer.

"I...I..." She wasn't sure what to do. Her eyes moved from her mate to her sister, not wanting to say the wrong thing.

It didn't matter. Kalen stepped out behind her and the look on his face actually scared her a little. She didn't think she had ever been scared of her big brother, but right now she wanted to step back and possibly run and hide.

"Where have you been?"

“I needed to see Cillian,” she answered swiftly as Cillian stepped slightly in front of her.

“You needed to be here.” He advanced toward her, but Jesenca stepped in between.

“Love, let me speak with your sister,” she soothed. With a nod, he stepped back, but crossed his arms and stared down at her with a hard glance.

Jesenca turned back and took a breath. “You should have told us.”

How had she figured it out? Ilysa looked over at Cillian and he gave her hand a squeeze, then knelt in front of Jesenca.

“She did not know,” he told them. “The blame lies solely with me.”

Jesenca looked between the two of them, confusion clear on her face. Kalen’s stance relaxed some as he, too, looked unsure of what was going on.

“Cillian, what are you talking about?” Jesenca asked. “How are you to blame for Ilysa mating?”

She had been worried for Cillian, but the shock she felt at her alpha’s words completely swamped those feelings. “How did you figure it out?”

Kalen and Jesenca shared a look, and then they both looked back at her. “It’s easy to figure out when the mate shows up looking for you and you are gone,” Kalen informed her.

“What?” Both Ilysa and Cillian said together, Cillian standing and pulling her closer to him.

“Cana,” Jesenca told them. “He is inside speaking with your parents about your mating.”

Cillian growled once and then disappeared through the door. Ilysa was on his heels and ignoring Kalen’s yell as he asked what was going on.

“She is mine.” Cillian had Cana pinned on the floor. Her parents were standing off to the side in shock. Kalen and

Jesenca entered behind her, but she was too focused on the men fighting to say anything.

“You have not claimed her,” Cana yelled back as he pushed against her mate. The two of them roared and clashed again.

“Do something,” Ilysa ordered her brother. “He is going to hurt my mate.”

“Which one?” Kalen asked as he went over to separate the two fighting boys.

Her father moved also, and between the two of them, they had both guys on opposite sides of the room. “Would someone like to explain to me what is going on?” her father yelled over their snarls.

“I have come for my mate,” Cana said just as Cillian yelled, “She is my mate.”

“Oh crap.” She took a step toward Cillian, but Jesenca’s hand held her in place.

“Did you know about any of this?” her alpha asked; this time she was using her power. Ilysa looked around as every eye in the room was focused on her. “Well?”

“Yes.” She hung her head.

“Ilysa,” her mother scolded. “Why did you not say anything?”

“He only showed up today.” She flung her hand toward Cana. “He cornered me after school and started telling me that nonsense about being my mate.” Cillian wasn’t the only one that growled at that.

“You approached my underage daughter without consulting me first.” Her father left Cillian and advanced on Cana. Kalen had been simply holding him around the middle, but his hand went to the man’s neck and lifted him up off the ground with a snarl.

“You dared mate my sister?”

This was getting out of hand. Ilysa ran over to stop her father and brother from hurting Cana. He wasn’t her mate but

there was no need for him to get beat up for it.

“Both of you stop.” She was pulling at Kalen’s arm. “Let him down.” The poor guy looked like he would be blue any moment. “Jesenca, please.” She begged her sister for help.

“Kalen.” She sounded reluctant, but she came over and touched his arm. He looked back and whatever passed between them was enough. He dropped Cana to the ground, and he doubled over coughing as he tried to catch his breath.

She reached to help him up and Cillian, who no one had been holding, grabbed her, and pulled her behind him. Rolling her eyes, she stepped to the side, but he followed, keeping her away from everyone in the room.

“What is Cillian’s role in this?” Jesenca asked, giving Cana a hand when it became obvious that the man in front of her wasn’t going to let Ilysa help.

“He is my real mate,” she said proudly. He might have made a lot of mistakes, but he was hers and she would stand by him no matter what.

“Excuse me?” Her father now turned on Cillian.

“It is true, sir.” He bent his head and bared his neck in a show of respect. “I have known since I came of age, but I did not say anything about my feelings until today. I was waiting until it would be proper for me to petition for her.”

There was a bit of a smirk on his face as he looked over at Cana. “I would never have spoken with her of our mating without your approval if she had not come to me when Cana arrived.”

“Why did you not say anything about this when you came home from school?” her mother questioned.

“I told him that we weren’t mates and if he didn’t want to get his ass kicked, then he should go back to Johain,” Ilysa answered. “I thought he would leave.”

“Why didn’t you?” Jesenca asked.

“Because she is mated to me,” he answered with a look toward Ilysa.

“I told you then and I’ll tell you now, I am not your mate.” She advanced fully ready to kick his ass herself, but Cillian held her back. “This is my mate.” She wrapped her hand around his arm and held tightly.

“How do you know?” Jesenca looked between the two men. “You have not come of age yet. It is possible that it could be one of these here but being underage it is possible that your feelings could change.”

“They won’t.” Ilysa stood taller. “I have known that Cillian was mine from as long as I can remember. There is no way that it could be Cana. Besides...” She cut herself off before she told them the truth about Cillian and Cana and Johain’s hand in this.

“Besides what?” Jesenca prompted.

Ilysa pursed her lips trying not to answer. Her mate must have sensed her distress because he went to their alpha and again bowed his head.

“My mate is protecting me, alpha,” he said. “She knows that Cana isn’t her mate because he was sent by Johain as punishment. For you, for me, for all of us.”

There was nothing but silence. “How do you know this?” The anger and power that flowed from Jesenca had everyone bowing their heads in submission and Cillian on his knees. She loomed over him as he let out a whine. “Answer me.”

“I have been spying for Johain.” He barely got it out before all hell erupted.

## CHAPTER 3

Asher was watching television when the knock at the door came. It was something he rarely got to do, especially now that he had started his new job. Today was an off day since he hadn't been feeling well and he was looking forward to doing nothing but lying on the couch and vegging until he couldn't keep his eyes open.

Standing, he went to the door wondering who might be stopping by. It could be Griffin since his cousin liked to hang out at his house. He had asked him about moving in, but Griff wanted to room with Braxton, and truthfully he liked having a house to himself.

The door swung open, and Asher's breath caught. He hadn't thought that he would see her again. She was part of the reason he had left Johain's pack. It wasn't a good idea to be lusting after your alpha's mate. Especially when you saw how he treated her. There were a number of times he came close to challenging the man, but he reminded himself that she didn't belong to him. No matter how strongly he felt otherwise.

"Can I come in?" They had been standing there staring at each other for a minute at least.

"Of course." He found not only his manners but his tongue and moved aside so she could enter his house.

The minute she did the whole place felt to him like it came alive. It was as if a breeze whispered through, and light bounced off the walls illuminating the space and giving it a warm and inviting feel.

"What are you doing here?" He didn't want to sound rude or make her think she wasn't wanted but he also didn't think it was a good idea for him to be alone with her either.

"I was hoping we could talk," she told him as she looked around the room.

He nodded and motioned for her to take a seat. She went over to the couch since it was the only place in the room to sit.

Asher sat as well, but he tried to position himself as far from her as possible. It wasn't that he didn't want to be next to her; it was that he wanted it too much. He wanted to wrap his arms around her, kiss the hell out of her, and then carry her into his bedroom and join with her until the sun rose and neither of them could breathe.

They sat there saying nothing. He didn't know why she wasn't speaking, but for him it was a matter of not having any idea what to say.

"Your home is nice," she finally broke the silence.

"It's fine for now." He shrugged. "I want to do more to it, but I'm not exactly sure what to do."

She gave it another glance. "You could add some paintings. Maybe a rug or possibly put a stand over in the corner with some books."

"That would be nice." He smiled at her thinking that he would do whatever she asked. "Are you a big reader?"

"I used to be." A shadow crossed her face and with no thought he moved to take her hand in one of his and put his other arm around her. She looked up at him and he swore that his devotion was written all over his face. His or not, she was everything he could ever want in a mate.

"I left him," she whispered up to him.

"What?" There was no way that he heard her correctly. No way that she had voiced his deepest desire.

"I left Johain." She said it more plainly.

"What?" This time his voice raised, and he stood. Was it possible to break a mating? Had she come here for him?

"I left Johain," she repeated. "He has been using a member of this pack to spy and report back to him." Asher couldn't help the growl that ripped from him. "It's alright." She rushed to his side, placing her hand on his chest to sooth him. "He isn't spying anymore, but I overheard another of Johain's plans. As he was speaking he said some awful things about me. About our mating and how easily it would be for him to



put me aside. I left right after. I mean if he can disregard our mating then shouldn't I be able to do the same?"

"I don't know." He wanted to believe that she could. Her hand against him felt perfect.

"He figured out that I've left, and he wants me dead."

The word wasn't out of her mouth before he had her in his arms. "I will never let him touch you." The words were more animal than man.

"I know." She raised herself up and pressed her lips to his.

It was a soft kiss, timid even, but it didn't matter. As soon as her mouth touched his Asher lost control. The desire that he had been holding in ever since he first saw her came rushing forward and he pulled her closer. His hands roamed over her body as his shuddered with the excitement of finally holding her.

"We shouldn't be doing this." He tried one last time to stop what he wanted so desperately.

"Yes, we should," she said, her arms going around his neck and pulling herself up so that she was flush to him.

He was rock hard and leaking but he had to give her one more chance. "If I take you, then you are mine." He lifted his head so that he could look into her eyes. "I don't care about Johain or your mating. For me that will cease to exist," he told her. "If he comes for you, I will kill him before I give you up."

"Good." There was no hesitation in her voice. "I have wanted you for so long," she admitted. "I hated myself for it but every time you were near all I wanted was to rush to you. As far as I am concerned you have always been my true mate, my real mate, my bonded mate."

Her words touched deep inside him and gave him the strength he needed not to rip every stitch of clothing from her body and fuck the life out of her.

He lowered his head again, kissing her this time with tenderness. He knew that Johain was not a gentle man, and he did not want her comparing their joining to anyone else. He

lifted her in his arms forgetting that he hadn't been feeling well and carried her into the bedroom.

Slowly he lowered her to her feet and began removing her clothes, never breaking the kiss. Her hands were doing the same to him. She ripped the t-shirt that he had been wearing when he refused to stop kissing her long enough to remove it which fueled his desire just a little bit more.

When there was nothing between them he brought her back to him. A moan fell from each of them as their bodies connected. "Mate." The gravel of his voice shook Asher as he placed her on the bed and dropped to his knees, the need to taste her clouding every other thought.

Spreading her open, he was sure that he had never seen anything as beautiful. The first swipe of his tongue sent her favor exploding over him. With a grunt he dug in, spreading her wider and devouring every inch of her core. He lifted one of her legs into the air as he licked and kissed and sucked all of her.

Brenna was crying out for him. Her pleas of more encouraged him to drive his tongue deeper inside her. Bringing his other hand up to her clit he began to rub the swollen nub until she was bowed on the bed and shaking under him.

Not stopping, he continued to move his tongue against her. Slower this time so that she could come down from her high. When she sat up on her elbows and looked down at him, he finally moved away.

"So good," he told her as he moved up her body.

"Let me taste." She reached for his face and kissed him, tasting herself on his tongue. Her hand reached for his cock and pumped the hardened shaft until he thought he was going to come without getting inside her.

"Mate, let me love you." He reluctantly pulled back. "I need to be inside."

Wrapping her legs around him, he slid into her, throwing his head back and releasing a loud howl. She felt so perfect that he

didn't think he could move. Her heat warmed every part of him, especially his heart.

She reached up to pull him back to her and went in for another kiss. He started moving slowly at first but soon he was pounding into her, and she was meeting him thrust for thrust.

They moved together pushing each other as close to the edge as they could go without falling over, her breast in his mouth and her hands cupping his stones. Muffled moans filled the air and tightness coiled low in his stomach.

"Now, mate." He pulled his mouth away and used his hand to get her to fall apart following close behind.

They collapsed together with hard breaths and shaking limbs. Asher wrapping his new mate in his warmth and dropping kisses on the top of her head as she rested on his chest.

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Voices were yelling all around him. He still felt the hold that Jesenca had on him, and he wanted to move but he couldn't. Ilysa was trying to defend him, while Kalen was threatening to put him down. Cana had tried to leave only to be forced into a seat by Mr. Gray.

"He did it for me," she was yelling. "Please, you have to let him explain."

"There is no explanation." Kalen was speaking to her. "He betrayed us, and he has to be punished for that."

"That isn't your decision to make," she told him. "Jesenca is the only one that can decide whether to put him down or not and I'm hoping that she doesn't do it." He couldn't see her, but he heard the catch in her voice. "Please sister, I love him."

Cillian whined from the ground which earned him a kick in the gut from Kalen. "Shut the hell up."

"Kalen," Jesenca scolded.

Kneeling down she raised his head. "Explain," she ordered.

He tried to sit up but couldn't, so he told them the same thing that he had shared with Ilysa. Cillian wasn't sure that they would be as understanding as his mate but there was nothing he could do now.

Ilysa had been right. He should have said something as soon as he got here or as soon as he told Johain to kiss his ass. There might have been a chance that they would have kept Ilysa away but now he felt as if she was slipping through his fingers with every word out of his mouth.

"Why didn't you say something?" her mother questioned as if reading his mind.

"I didn't want to lose Ilysa," he answered honestly. "I knew what I was doing was wrong, but it was the only way."

"No it wasn't," Kalen told him. "You could have told us. You could have waited until she came of age. You could have given Johain false information. There are any number of ways that you could have handled this better."

"Was this why you were so interested in what class I was taking?" Jesenca was putting things together. "Why did you not offer to drive me when I went to campus?"

"Draden spoke up first," he told her.

"And the video at Evie's art exhibit," she wondered. "Was that for her or for Johain?"

"Both," he admitted.

"Son of a bitch," Kalen shouted. "Is there anything you haven't told him? Are you the reason Paquinn showed up at my mate's job to claim her?"

"No." He shook his head. "I had nothing to do with that, but I did know that Johain was sending something for her. I had no idea it was a person. I thought it was a package or something."

"You still should have warned us," Kalen said.

"I know." Cillian would take whatever shouts or punishment that they dealt out as long as they didn't keep his mate from him. He would even sacrifice himself if that was what it took to make sure that she was safe.

“What is he planning now?” Jesenca asked.

“I don’t know,” he told her. “I told him that I quit when he ordered me to put Brenna down.”

“Put Brenna down?” she questioned. “Why would he order you to do that? Isn’t Brenna with him?”

“No, she left him after she heard that he was sending someone to pretend to mate with Ilysa,” he explained. “She came to warn me.”

“Where is she now?”

“I don’t know,” he told her. “She left when Ilysa showed up at my house.”

“She didn’t tell you where she was going?” Mr. Gray asked.

“No, I assume she is leaving or hiding somewhere.”

“Why should we believe him?” Kalen asked the room. “All he has ever done was lie to us.”

“He didn’t lie to me.” Ilysa was kneeling beside him, and she reached for his hand. “He might have fudged the truth, but no one ever came out and asked if he was a spy either.”

“That is semantics, and you know it,” Kalen retorted.

“That may be, but if Jesenca was sent away from you what would you do?” she asked. “You volunteered to bring her back to be mated with someone else and you didn’t know she was your mate at the time. You just thought it would be better coming from you than that asshole Tomas.”

“You’re right,” Kalen agreed. “There is nothing I would not do for my mate and yours has put her in danger. Why shouldn’t I end him right here?”

“Because I will stop you.” She stood toe to toe with her brother. “You try to harm him, and I will fight you.”

“Ilysa,” her mother breathed out.

“I mean it,” she continued. “I know what he did was wrong, but he did it for me. I won’t let him stand here and take this all

on himself. He is mine and I will protect him as surely as you would all protect your mates.”

“Please.” He reached for her, touching her leg which was the only part near. He didn’t want her fighting her brother over him. The two of them were so close and he would hate to be the one to destroy that. “Please don’t.”

He felt her eyes on him and he turned his head so that he could meet them, plead with her to not do this for him. She let out a deep breath and turned to face everyone else.

“I don’t want to fight you any more than Jesenca wants to fight Johain, but he is my mate, Kalen.” There were tears in her voice. “Everything good that I remember from being in Johain’s pack is tied to him or our family. There has never been a time that I didn’t know that he cared for me. That I didn’t know that I could trust him. That I didn’t want to be his.”

“If it makes you feel better, I’m pissed at him too,” she went on. “I agree that he could have handled the whole situation better, that he could have made different choices, but should I have to lose my mate because he made the wrong decision for a chance to be with me? How does that make anything better?”

No one said anything, and he used the hand touching her leg to try to comfort her. His whine came from deep down as he felt her sadness and wanted to put his arms around her and promise to never hurt her again.

“Stand up,” Jesenca ordered.

The weight that was holding him released, and he was able to get to his feet. He made a move to connect with Ilysa, but her father stopped him.

“We aren’t there yet.” The steel of his eyes stopped Cillian from trying harder.

“Sit down.” He followed every order that his alpha gave.

Once he was seated, she turned from him to Cana. “Why did my brother send you?”

“I don’t have to answer your questions, traitor.” He spat at her. Kalen bent at the waist ready to pounce but Jesenca held up her hand to stop him.

She went over to where Cana was sitting and leaned over him. Getting up close to his face.

“You will answer me.” Her power centered on the man before her until he bowed his head. “Now tell me what my brother is planning.”

“He wants to destroy you,” Cana answered reluctantly. “He has multiple plans to make you pay for stealing his people.”

“I didn’t steal anyone,” Jesenca told him. “What was your part in this plan?”

“I was meant to mate with Ilysa and take her away so that Kalen would be distracted when Johain’s ultimate plan started.”

“What is his ultimate plan?” She growled at him.

“I do not know,” Cana shared. “That was not my part.”

“Does Brenna know what his plan entails?”

“I don’t know, but maybe.”

“Were you ordered to put her down also?”

“No, I have not been in contact with Johain since he sent me.”

“Then we need to find Brenna,” Jesenca said. “Do you think she would have gone to Whitley?”

“I doubt it,” Kalen answered. “They might be sisters, but they have never really gotten along.”

“Who else would she trust then?” Jesenca questioned.

“Asher,” Mr. Gray spoke up. “I’ve always wondered if they were not connected in some way. I know she is mated to Johain but the way that they looked at each other made me question that mating.”

“Then we need to go speak with him,” she said then turned to Cillian. “As for you, what you did not only put me in danger

but the others as well. Your fate will be put to the pack, and you will accept whatever they decree.”

“Jesenca—” Ilysa started to speak but Jesenca held up her hand.

“I will ask that being put down is not part of the discussion but that is as far as I am willing to go,” she told her. “I am sorry, Ilysa, but I cannot turn a blind eye to what he did. There must be consequences that he has to pay. It is possible that the others will understand and not ask that he be stripped from the pack, but I will abide by what is decided.”

His mate hung her head, but she didn’t say more. He could not blame her. Being stripped of the pack would be difficult but at least if he was not put down then he could continue to watch over her.

Cillian didn’t delude himself into thinking that Kalen would ever trust him again but maybe her parents might accept his petition when she came of age. If he could still have a chance at Ilysa, then nothing else mattered. He would do whatever he had to do to prove to his mate that despite his deceit he was worthy of her.



## CHAPTER 4

Brenna turned slightly to look over at the man lying next to her. Never had she felt so secure in someone's arms. The way that he held her, caressed her, made her feel as if she mattered was nothing like Johain. Still she couldn't shake the worry that Johain would somehow get to her.

His arms tightened around her, and she did her best to relax but she couldn't do it. Sitting up she swung her legs over the side of the bed.

"What's wrong, starlight?" Asher's hand smoothed down her spine causing tingles to blossom over her body and dampness to settle at her core.

"Nothing." She laid back down and put on her best smile. The one that had fooled Johain for years.

Asher pushed the hair from her face as his eyes narrowed and he looked deeply into her eyes. "Are you regretting what we did?"

"No, of course not," she assured him.

"Then what is it because I know something is wrong." He pulled her closer until they were skin to skin. "Whatever it is, you can tell me."

"It's nothing to worry about."

"Brenna." He sat up slightly and looked down into her face. "I meant what I said earlier. I will keep you safe. Whatever it takes. If we need to leave, if I have to fight, whatever it is; I will do it."

"You would leave with me?" she asked.

"I would go anywhere with you," he told her. "You are mine now. If leaving is the only way to protect you, then that is what I would do."

She reached up and pulled his face down to hers, their lips coming together in soft kisses and sliding tongues. Lifting her leg she wrapped it around him putting his cock right at her entrance.

“Easy.” He held her in place as she started to join them. “Can you take me again?”

“Yes.” She wasted no time proving it, flipping so that she was astride him and lowering her body to his.

They were lying there face to face, him embedded inside her and their hands entwined together. She leaned forward kissing him with a passion she had never known she possessed, his hand squeezing hers as she began to move against him.

She sat up so she could ride him with more ease. His hand let go of hers and grasped at her breast, pulling her nipples until they stood at peaks jutting out from her. She let her head fall back. Her long, dark hair pooled on his thighs as she used her hands to give her leverage.

They bucked together, him lifting her until they were both coming off the bed with each upward thrust. Falling forward she moved her hands to his chest, connecting their mouths once more and moaning into him as she continued to move up and down his shaft.

“I want to go deeper,” he told her. “I want to touch your soul.” She nodded, and he lifted her off of him so that he could turn her around.

Kneeling behind her, he let his fingers play with her clit until she was writhing in his arms and begging for him. Just as Brenna thought he was going to make her come without him, he slammed into her pushing her over the edge as she screamed out her orgasm.

Without stopping, he continued to touch her as his cock slid against her. Before she could come down, she started to climb to the peak again. This time he was pushing into her at a relentless pace, the two of them releasing sounds that filled the small house. He pulled her up so that her back was against him. One hand fondled her breast while the other touched her swollen nub until she thought her whole body was going to explode.

“Now, mate. It has to be now.” He bit down on her shoulder, and she fell apart.

It only took one more thrust for him to be with her. They called to each other with wild abandon as he held her firm, shooting inside her and warming every part of her heart.

Together they fell back on the bed panting and shaking from the strength of their climax. His lips teasing her skin, his body still inside hers.

Before they could fully come down, there was a knock at the door. Fear overtook the ecstasy that she had just experienced as she wondered if Johain had sent someone else for her.

“Don’t worry.” He kissed her shoulder where his teeth had bit into her and got up. Quickly he threw on his clothes that were scattered over the floor. “Stay here and don’t say anything. Alright?” She nodded, and he closed the door as he went to see who was interrupting them.

Brenna jumped up as soon as he left and found her own clothes. She was glad that she had parked her car two blocks over but if anyone knew that she was here then that wouldn’t be enough to fool them. She listened as Asher opened the door.

“Alpha,” he said respectfully. “Kalen. What are you two doing here?”

“We are looking for Brenna and someone mentioned she might be here.” Jesenca’s voice wafted through the door hiding her.

“Why would someone suggest that?” Asher answered, being sure not to lie. If Jesenca was like her brother, then she would be able to tell right away.

“Because apparently she has left my brother, and she came to warn one of our pack members that Johain might be sending someone for his mate,” Jesenca replied.

“Are you sure she wouldn’t go see Whitley?” Asher asked.

“Everyone knows that they don’t get along,” Jesenca said. There was silence. “She is here, isn’t she?”

Asher said nothing, but she knew it was only a matter of time before he would be compelled to speak. Opening the door

she walked out. Asher was at her side as soon as she stopped. Jesenca and Kalen shared a look, but neither seemed to want to say anything.

“Brenna.”

“Jesenca.” The two women greeted each other, Brenna looking her in the eye. Alpha or not she felt no need to bow to someone she had known since she was a girl. Who she had been considered ahead of when she had been with Johain.

“Who suggested I would be here?” she asked. “Was it Cillian? Whitley?”

“My father, actually.” Kalen stepped closer to his mate. “It seems he noticed a few things that everyone else missed back when we were all under your mate.”

“Johain is not her mate. Not anymore if he ever really was.” Asher stepped so that she was slightly behind him. “She is my mate now.”

Another look between the couple across from them but again they said nothing.

“Can you tell me what my brother is planning?” Jesenca asked instead.

“He wants to destroy you,” Brenna told her sliding beside Asher. “He has some sort of plan that he thinks will give him power enough to rule not only his pack but any pack he chooses. Some sort of power that even alphas can’t stand against.”

“How does he think he can get this power?” Kalen questioned.

“He has not said,” she answered. “Or at least he has not said anything when I could hear,” she clarified. “I do know that part of the reason he sent someone for your sister was not only to hurt you but to distract you. If I had to guess, he was planning to somehow come after Jesenca or send someone after her while you were busy trying to figure things out.”

Kalen let out a low hiss and reached for Jesenca. She took his hand but held her place. “Who did he think would be able

to get to me?" she asked. "Cillian?"

Brenna laughed. "No," she said. "He views Cillian as weak. The only reason he used him to spy on you was because he knew that he could control him. I'm not sure if he knew about Ilysa, but it wouldn't have mattered if he did. Johain doesn't believe in mating." She lowered her eyes to hide the pain those words caused. "At least not a bonded one."

"I'm sorry," Jesenca said softly.

"It's alright." Brenna lifted her head back up. "I knew this when he petitioned for me. I thought that it wouldn't matter. That all mating was the same and that once we were joined and spending our lives together things would change." She looked back over at Asher. "I know different now."

"Then you two are..." Kalen let the rest of the sentence hang.

"Bonded mates, yes." She smiled at Asher as he lifted her hand to his lips.

"It has always been, but I would never have disrespected her or my alpha by trying to claim her," Asher told them. "It was only when she showed up and told me that her link to Johain had been broken that I acted on what I have always known."

The four of them stood there letting Asher's words settle in. Brenna went to him, wrapping her arms around his waist and leaning her head against his chest.

"I plan to call a pack meeting tomorrow to discuss Cillian and Johain," Jesenca told them. "Will you join us to tell everyone what you know?"

"No," Brenna answered.

"Excuse me?"

"I said no," Brenna told her. "Your brother wants me dead and the last thing I plan on doing is walking around with a target on my back."

"You don't trust us to protect you?" Kalen asked.

“I don’t trust anyone to protect me.” Asher growled at that. “I’m sorry but it’s true,” she told him. “I believe that you would do everything that you can to protect me, but I know Johain. He doesn’t come at you straight forward and he doesn’t do it when you are expecting it. If he wants to get to me, then he will.”

“I will not let anyone touch you.” Asher had her in his arms. The determination she felt from him was strong.

“And I worry that you will die trying.” She leaned into him. “We have only just begun. I would rather we go someplace far away and let Johain do whatever he will without our interference.”

“What if I challenge him?” Jesenca spoke up. “Do you not believe I could put him down?”

“No.” She shook her head. “You care too much, and he will use that against you.” She turned to Kalen. “If you love her, then you will not let her do this.”

“I trust my mate,” Kalen said moving closer to Jesenca. “I do not want her to challenge Johain but if she has to then I trust that she will come back to me.”

“I hope it doesn’t come to that but if it does, then I hope that you are correct,” she told them.

“You could fight with us,” Jesenca said.

“I could but I won’t.” She shook her head. “I’m a wild card in a fight. Johain was my mate for more than ten years, ever since I came of age. I don’t think there is a lot that he does not know about me. That includes how to hurt me and how to distract me. In a fight there is no telling what he would use, and I will not put you and yours in danger just to see him sent to the hell he deserves. Better that I should stay back and find out after the deed is done one way or the other.”

“I am sorry you feel that way, but I understand,” Jesenca told her then turned to Asher. “I presume you will be with her.”

“I will not leave my mate,” he said simply.

Jesenca and Kalen nodded and headed for the door. “I wish you well, Brenna,” Jesenca turned to tell her. “No matter what happened with Johain, I always considered you a sister and I hope you find the happiness you deserve.”

“Thank you.” She went to the woman and gave her a quick hug. “I hope that you win this. He may be your brother but if you don’t put him down, then I fear no one will be able to.”

“I understand.” With that they left.

Asher came up behind her and pulled her against him. “Should we prepare to go?”

She nodded her head unsure of where they would be safe, but she would flee with him now and worry about where they landed tomorrow.

~CM~

The door opened and Ilysa crept in. They had put Cillian in the guest room for the night so that the Gray’s could watch him and make sure that he didn’t go anywhere before tomorrow’s pack meeting. That didn’t sit well with Ilysa and if she had her way, then she was going to make sure that he wasn’t here when the meeting started.

She moved along on the balls of her feet, doing her best not to make any noise until she reached the bed that he was lying on. He was completely still and peaceful. A smile came to her face as she reached out and ran her hand through his hair. It was such a simple gesture, but it was one that she had wanted to do for so long but worried she wouldn’t get the chance. Now she worried this would be the only one that she would ever have.

“Relax, my mate.” His hand reached up to take hers and he held it to his chest.

“I can’t.” She sat on the side of the bed facing him keeping her voice down. “How am I supposed to relax knowing what could come tomorrow?”

He sat up so that they were facing each other. “Because we have to believe that there is a chance.” He placed his hand on

the side of her face. "I have to have faith that I won't lose you."

"You won't." She turned her head so that she could kiss his palm. "That is why you need to leave tonight."

"What?"

"You have to run," she told him. "Get out before the meeting tomorrow."

"I can't do that." He was shaking his head.

"Why not?" She didn't understand why he wouldn't do this. "I can let you out through my window and you can escape. Run into the mountains. Go to another pack. Anything that will get you far from here and keep you safe."

"And leave you?" he questioned. "The whole reason that I am in this is because I couldn't be away from you." He cupped her face. "I would do anything, face anything, as long as I have you near."

"But what if they decide that you should be put down?" she asked. "How am I supposed to be alright with that?"

"If that is my fate then I have to believe that somehow you will be alright," he told her. "I can't imagine someone else being your mate, but I do hope that you will not spend your life missing me. Find what happiness that you can."

"Not without you." She leaned into him. "I don't want happiness without you."

He wrapped his arms around her, kissing the top of her head. "I would not want it without you either. That is why I cannot leave," he told her. "If I run now, then I can never come back. I can never claim you as mine."

"I am yours."

"I know but I would have everyone know this." He pulled back and looked deep in her eyes. "If given the chance, I would stand by you proudly. Be the mate that you deserve."

"What if I went with you?"



“We can’t do that, Ilysa,” he told her. “I can’t take you from your family. It’s bad enough that you fought with Kalen over me. Promise that whatever happens tomorrow you will work things out with your brother. The two of you are so close and I would hate to come between that.”

“So I’m just supposed to stand there and watch while the pack decides if I get to keep my mate or watch him die? Then should they banish you or kill you, you want me to find happiness, make up with my brother, and somehow move on from you. Is that all?” She stood from the bed, her voice rising slightly. “Maybe you want to tell me how many children I should have, or where I should live as well. Do you have a preference for who fucks me after you’re gone or killed, or do I get to make that decision on my own?”

“Don’t.” He stood grabbing her and pulling her to him. “Don’t say things like that.”

“Why not? You’re making all the decisions here. You’ve decided to stay. You’ve decided that whatever your fate I’ll be alright. You are making all the decisions and you’re leaving me with nothing,” she cried. “Don’t you see? If something happens to you, that is what I will have; nothing.”

“That isn’t true,” he told her. “You will have your family and you will have the pack.”

“What makes you think I will forgive them for taking you from me?” She shook him off and crossed her arms. “Whether they banish you or worse, it will be their decision that pulled us apart. I would rather they banish us both or put us both down then have to go on without you.”

“Don’t say that. I could not handle something happening to you.”

“That is how I feel about you.” She reached for him. “Please, will you run? For me, will you give us a chance? I may not be able to go with you right now, but I will find you. When I come of age, I will find you.”

Cillian leaned his head against hers. She closed her eyes enjoying the closeness that she felt now that she knew for sure

he was her mate.

“Do you promise that you will come to me?” he asked. “That we will be together?”

“As soon as I can,” she pledged.

“Alright.” He bent his head and took her mouth under his.

She wrapped her arms around him wanting to lose herself in the kiss, but she knew how light her parents slept. It was a wonder that they had not woken up already. With one last kiss she stepped back and took his hand ready to help him escape.

They went to the door, but it opened as she reached for it. Her father stood there with a stern look as his eyes moved between the two.

“You really thought that you could get him out of this house without your mother and I knowing?” His hardened stare bore down on her.

“I had to try,” she admitted hanging her head. Not in shame but in response to her father’s anger. She would do anything to save her mate.

To her surprise her father let out a breath and gave a small chuckle. “Your mother said you would do something like this.” She looked up to see a glimmer of a smile on his face. “She said it was something she would have thought of doing if it were me and if she would think of it, then you definitely would do it.”

Again surprised that her proper mother would even contemplate breaking a rule, Ilysa had no idea what to say.

“And you were going to let her do this?” He was looking over her head at Cillian.

“Not at first, sir, but when she pleaded with me; when she asked me to do it for her,” he answered honestly, “how could I refuse? There is nothing I would not do for your daughter.”

Ilysa watched as her father looked between the two of them. “I cannot change Jesenca’s mind. She is alpha and there are certain responsibilities that come with that,” he told them. “I will, however, speak on your behalf.”

“Sir?” Cillian tilted his head in confusion.

“I do not believe you are a bad man, nor do I believe that you set out to hurt this pack. I do believe that you were caught in a tough spot, and you made a piss poor decision.” The stern look was back. “No matter what, do not betray your pack. That is one thing every cub learns straight away.

“That being said, I will not lose my daughter to your decisions,” he told them. “She is nothing if not stubborn and if you were to be banished, there would be nothing any of us could say to keep her from finding you. If it were to go the other way, well I would never want to witness the pain she would endure. So I will speak for you.”

“Thank you sir.” Cillian bowed his head in respect.

“That isn’t to say that I’m willing to turn my daughter over to you right now either,” he told him. “You will wait until she comes of age, and you will formally petition my mate and I for her hand. Should she still feel the same, we will revisit this matter but until then you are to treat her as you would any other member of this pack. If you do not think you can do that, then you best tell me now, boy. Because if I find out otherwise you will wish the pack had put you down.” He stepped closer, his hand at the scruff of Cillian’s neck. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Daddy, please.”

“Stay out of this, Ilysa,” he warned her. “This is between your father and the man who thinks to one day stand in my stead. I will know that he can respect you and our family. That he can keep his word. That he can court you with honor. Because right now he has not proven anything of the sort.”

Cillian did not try to raise his head but nodded. “I understand, sir,” he responded. “I will stand by what you have asked. The only thing that I would hope is that you might allow me to visit your home from time to time. Not to press my hand but so that you can see that I care for your daughter. That I will treat her as you would want her treated. That I respect not only her but both you and her mother. That I can

prove myself to your whole family so that when the time comes, you will have no qualms at all.”

Ilysa waited not knowing what her father might do or say. He looked at her and she willed him to see how much his acceptance of Cillian’s request meant to her. How desperately she wanted them to have a chance.

With another breath released, he let go of Cillian. “Should tomorrow turn in your favor I will consider your words.” Ilysa figured that was the best they could hope for that night. “Now both of you return to bed and should you have any other thoughts of sneaking in here young lady, know that I will be stationed at the door.”

“Yes, Daddy.” She stood on her toes and kissed his cheek. She looked over at her mate longing to kiss him as well but not wanting to push her father. With a small smile she left the room hovering outside in hopes of hearing what else was said.

“Thank you again, sir.” Cillian was speaking. “I know what I did was wrong, and I can only apologize and explain to everyone why I made the choices I did.”

“I know but that might not be enough.”

“I know that as well.” It was quiet. “Should I be put down, please don’t let her waste away mourning me. She is so strong and full of life. Let her know that I would do all of it again if it meant that I could be near her. That the only thing I would change would be speaking up sooner. That I love her. That it started the moment I knew she was my mate and has not wavered once since.”

“I will,” her father said as tears streamed down her cheek. Broken, she walked back to her room praying that she wouldn’t lose her mate and her heart all in one day.

## CHAPTER 5

“Absolutely not!” Kalen was pacing through the bedroom shooting spare glances at his mate.

“I have to,” she replied.

“There is no way that I am going to stand by while you challenge Johain,” he told her. “I barely trusted the man when I thought he was my friend. Now I know better and the idea of watching my mate fight him when I can do nothing...” He trailed off before stopping and turning to face her. “I will challenge him.”

“You can’t and you know it.” Jesenca was sitting calmly in the middle of the bed but rose to walk over to Kalen and placed her hands on his bare chest. “This is my fight remember.” She told him. “Besides, I thought that you trusted your mate.”

“I do.” He wrapped himself around her. “I trust you with my life but it’s your brother I don’t trust,” he answered. “If I thought for one second that he would act honorably during the challenge that would be one thing, but he has shown that doing such is not who he is.

“An honorable man would not have sent someone to interfere with our mating,” he said. “He would not have asked my sister’s mate to spy on us. He would not have ordered anyone to put his mate down, bonded or otherwise.

“We both know he has never cared for you as a brother should and if you challenge him, then he will only see you as an enemy.”

“That is all he sees me as now,” she said, “That is all he has ever seen me as. Whether I do this now or we wait, it will change nothing. He will continue to come at us until he thinks he can defeat me, and I will not have another member of my pack hurt the way that Ilysa and Cillian are hurting.”

“Sweetness.”

“No.” She left his arms to walk across the room. “He used Cillian and I don’t doubt for a moment that he knew Ilysa was his mate. That he didn’t orchestrate speaking of sending a spy in front of the boy just to get him to do his dirty work.

“Don’t you see? This is the kind of man my brother is.” She turned back to him. “He uses what you care about the most to hurt you.”

“I know that. Which is why you cannot challenge him.” He went to her, placing his hands on her folded arms. “You care so much about pack, his and ours. About me, about family, about everyone. He will use that to destroy you and I would not be able to stand it if something happened to you.” He pulled her closer. “You are alpha, but you are my mate first and foremost and it is my job to protect you.”

“I can take care of myself.” She squirmed to get away, but he held tight.

“I know that also, but it changes nothing.” He bent his knees slightly, so that they were at eye level. “You are the strongest woman I know. The strongest alpha but that means nothing when I hold you in my arms. When your body is pressed up against mine. When I’m inside you and we are one. When I say I love you.

“You are not alpha then.” His voice softened. “You are simply my mate. My heart. My love. My world. I cannot make that part of me take a chance with your safety. I cannot stand aside and watch someone raise a hand to you.”

“I know.” She placed her hand to his heart. “That is why you need to stay here.”

“The hell you say.” He let go of her and took a step back.

“Kalen, I have to do this,” she told him. “There is no one else that can, but if something should happen and I lose, then Johain is going to come for everyone here. He is going to declare war and there is no one I trust more to protect the people of this pack than you. I need to know that you are standing in his way.”

“So now you ask that I not only let you challenge a man hell bent on killing you but that I stay away for the sake of everyone else?”

“Not just everyone else but for my sake as well.” She went to him. “You said it perfectly. Johain knows that I care for you, for the pack. If you are there he is going to use that against me. He is going to use you to hurt me, to distract me. I stand a better chance challenging him alone.”

“You cannot ask this of me.” He was shaking his head.

“I need this.” She moved so that she could rest her head against his chest. “Please, mate, I need you to protect that which is mine if I cannot.”

“But you are mine to protect.”

“And you will be protecting me.” She looked up, putting her hand around his neck. “You will be keeping me safe.” She raised herself so that she could place her lips against his.

With a low groan, he swept her into his arms tearing at her clothing, desperate to feel her. Jesenca did the same. Naked he lifted her, and she wrapped her legs around him grinding her core into his cock and moaning. Kalen all but threw her on the bed, flipping her so that she was face down and descending on top of her. He pulled at her waist until she was on all fours and used his hand to spread her open before driving his fingers inside her.

“Yes,” she yelled as he rubbed her roughly and she slammed her eyes shut.

Kalen leaned forward to drop kisses down her spine as he worked her into a frenzy. His other hand grabbed at her breast and pulled until she was panting.

“My mate,” he grunted.

“Yes.”

He moved his hand faster and Jesenca came apart with a shout dropping her body toward the bed, but he held her up and slammed his cock into her with a growl.

She rocked her body back, taking him deeper. Lifting herself back up so that she could wrap her arms around his neck she ordered, “My breasts. Play with my breasts.”

He did just as she commanded, taking one in each hand and fondling them until they were both groaning and writhing against each other, all the while keeping up a steady rhythm of plunging into her. With no warning he pulled her arms from around him and put them back on the bed.

“I want to watch,” he told her. “I want to see myself going in and out of you, mate.”

“Do it.” She moved with him. Crying for more but allowing him his pleasure.

“I won’t lose you.” He grabbed at her waist holding her steady as he pushed further in. “I will have you for a lifetime.”

“Yes.”

“Touch yourself,” he told her. “Let me see.”

She lifted her hand and brought it to her clit. Slowly she began to rub the tight nub until she was keening with desire and her stomach started to pulse.

“Close,” she shared. “I’m so close.”

Kalen covered her hand with his adding pressure with each swipe. “Come for me, mate,” he ordered as he continued to push into her. “Come hard for me.”

It only took a couple more thrusts for Jesenca to spasm and scream out his name. Repeatedly she called to him to come as she shook and with one more stroke he did.

They collapsed together. Kalen turned her so that they were facing each other as he wrapped her leg around his waist and drove his cock into her once more.

“Look at me,” he told her, and she opened her eyes as he moved slowly in and out.

“I love you,” he said with a kiss. “You are mine. We will have children, grandchildren, grow old together. We will have a life together.” He kissed her again as she felt her body



climbing. “I will let nothing challenge that—nothing change that.”

Jesenca’s eyes wanted to close as pleasure covered her dampened body once more but the look in her mate’s eyes held her captive.

He moved them slowly. Kissed her lightly. Touched her reverently. All the while continuing to lay out the life they would have.

“Kalen.” She didn’t think she could take much more. The tremors that shook her were strengthening, and she knew it was only a matter of time before she fell apart.

“Not yet, sweetness.” He stilled inside her. “Tell me that I will not lose you.”

“You could never lose me.” She placed her hands on the sides of his face. “I’m completely yours. What I do, I do not just for this pack, but completely for you; for us. I will have us protected and I would never let anything come between our mating.” Her eyes were shifting, and she knew that her wolf was looking out at its mate.

Kalen growled in response and hovered above her. His movements quickened as they reached for each other. Moving as one they pushed each other to the brink of ecstasy. Just when Jesenca balanced on the crest Kalen stopped.

“I want my child growing inside you,” he told her, placing his hand on her stomach. “I want to watch you grow round from the proof of our love. I need you, Jesenca, my mate. I need you with me. Either we do this together or not at all. I will not sacrifice you, our future, our child, for anything. Not even this pack.”

“If you are to challenge Johain, then I will be with you.” He looked further into her eyes. “We will all be with you. Together we are stronger; together he cannot stand.”

“Kalen.”

He took her hand in his and placed it at his heart. “Together or not at all.”

She hesitated for a moment but when a sense of calm pressed into her, she nodded. “Yes.”

A small look of relief covered his face before he leaned forward and took her mouth. His body picked up speed and moments later the two of them came together still holding onto each other.

~CM~

The field before her didn't look familiar but the peace of it made her relax as she strolled around. The lush grass crunched under her feet with each step. A smile ghosted across her face as she took in a strong breath of the floral scent surrounding her.

“Beautiful, is it not?” The soft bass of her father spoke behind her.

“Yes.” She turned, looking at the man that she so closely resembled. “Is that why you have called me here? To share the beauty?”

“In part.” He walked closer to her. “In part to prepare you.”

“Prepare me?”

“Your time is short, my daughter, and the road you walk a treacherous one,” he warned.

“This is about Johain,” she stated.

“Yes.” He nodded. “My son has planted that which he must now sow. Unfortunately, you must be the reaper.”

“There is no other choice?” she questioned.

“I wish that there was.” He gave her a sad smile. “I wish that he had heeded the lessons I tried to impart so many moons ago, but his heart is as it has always been. Would that I had known when I could have changed things, but that was not mine to see. Now you must walk the path that is set. That has, in a way, always been set.”

“Will I have to kill him?” The pain that thought caused resonated through the wind flowing between them.

“That end is not yet set,” her father told. “But your fate has been written since long before.”

“Should I be scared?”

“You know who you are. What you are capable of.” He tilted his head. “Why would there be a need for fear?”

“I do not know what the future holds,” she explained. “What my fate is.”

“None of us know.” He smiled bigger. “That is the excitement and the hardship of life, but that does not mean that you should fear. Trust and have faith; the rest will be as it should.”

“That is quite often hard to do.”

“Words of truth you speak, my child, but they change nothing.” He was closer to her now. “These are the things that you must do to have the future that you seek.”

“Will I have a future?”

The smile that brightened his face was overshadowed by the worry that covered his brow. “One road is set and the other cloudy. One of happiness and one of sorrow. It is up to you and you alone which will become you.”

“How do I decide?”

“Trust and faith, my daughter,” he repeated.

“It would be easier if you could just tell me.” She smiled over at him using the same look she had perfected when she was a little girl to bribe extra sweets from him.

His soft laughter warmed her. “Yes that would be easier,” he agreed. “There are limits to what is known and more to what can be said,” he shared. “The answers you seek have already been given. Your mating is a good one, blessed by the ancestors.” He raised an eyebrow and looked down at her.

“Is that your way of saying I should listen to Kalen, or I should protect him?”

“Why do you assume they are not one and the same?”

“Father,” she huffed out.

“Know that your mate is who you need by your side just as your mother was for me,” he told her. “When a mating has been blessed, there is nothing that can stand against it. The same goes for blood. Some blood bonds are stronger than either know and contain power that can change the unchangeable.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“When you need to then you will know what you must.” His brow creased more as he raised his head toward the darkening sky. “You must return now. Fate is at your door and there is nothing to do but surrender and walk the path it has chosen.”

“Father, please tell me what I should do?”

He moved his hand and placed it against her stomach with a smile. “Trust and faith and love. Those are greater than any other force there is.” He winked at her. “You will know when the time is right.” The field darkened and her father’s hand floated away in the mist that surrounded her.

Unlike the dreams that she had with her father before, this one did not end. The world spun, and she saw the woman lying in the grass, her eyes wide and the silent scream echoing on her face. Jesenca tried to go to her, but she was grounded in place. She looked for anyone that might be able to help. The eyes and sneer that greeted her caused her body to jolt up in bed, her breath caught between one cry and the next.

Kalen had his arm around her and was rubbing her back as her mind locked back into place. The second it did she was out of bed and racing for her phone.

“What’s wrong?” Kalen was steps behind her.

“I know what he is planning to do,” she told him as she searched her contacts for the right one.

One ring later the voice answered. “Hello.”

“Is she with you?” Jesenca didn’t worry about pleasantries now.

“No, she went shopping with Jayde.” He didn’t need to ask for clarification as to who Jesenca was referencing.

“Call her,” she ordered. “Call her now.”

“Yes, alpha.” The line went dead, and she rushed back into their bedroom reaching for clothes as she waited for confirmation of what she already knew.

“Jes, what is going on?” Kalen was putting his own clothes on.

“He’s taken her,” she told him. “Cillian wasn’t the only spy in the pack.”

“What?”

The phone rang, cutting him off. “Yes,” she answered.

“She isn’t answering.” There was a growl to the tone that reached across the phone to her.

“Get Arman and Mila and get here fast.” She hung up and tossed a look to her mate. “Call the rest of the pack. We need them here now and get your parents to bring both Cillian and Cana. I think one of them knows more than what they said.”

Kalen did as she asked while she searched for another number.

“Hello,” the soft, sleepy voice answered.

“Emily, I’m sorry to wake you but I need to talk to him.” Their relationship had not gone back to where it was before, but Jesenca didn’t have time to worry about that now.

“Why?”

“Emily, please,” she begged. “I’m trying to save everyone including you and your mate.”

She heard him reassure her before his voice came on the phone. “What has happened?”

“My brother has taken one of my pack, and I need your help,” she said plainly.

“I will be there shortly,” he responded before hanging up.

Tossing the phone on the bed, she sat beside it and hung her head.

There was nothing to do now but prepare. Johain had made the first move of aggression. It was either challenge or die. She remembered her father's words. One leads to happiness, the other to sorrow. Placing her hand on her stomach she closed her eyes and breathed deep. "Alright father, I will walk the path set before me."

With that she stood and walked into the other room praying that trust and faith would guide her through what lay ahead.

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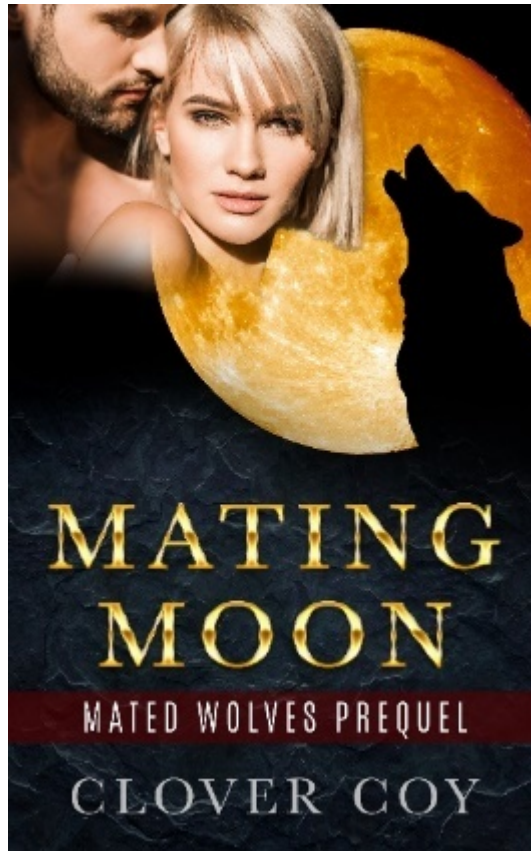
# About the Author

I'm fascinated by what is in the shadows.

I love sculpting extraordinary worlds that are hidden in the plain sight of normal life.

My male characters are powerful and driven. Women are always more kick ass than they ever thought they could be. Of course, there is always a happy ending.

## Free Gift



Children of the Alpha, Johain and Jesenca, grew up watching their father rule the pack. Being the male, Johain became Alpha with their father's death. Jesenca left with no desire ever to return. She built a new life for herself that she enjoyed and held no resemblance to the one she left behind.

Kalen, Johain's trusted lieutenant, is sent on a mission to bring back Jesenca so she can marry the mate Johain chose for her. When Kalen finds her alone, he is surprised by the attraction that she sparks in him.

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