**Fox Verse: Spectrum**

**Summary**

Daisy is taunted by Devon who has overheard some truths about Daisy's real father. Hurt and confused she runs away from Padalecki Lake, leaving Sebastian distraught by her disappearance.

Bradley is nearing his due date but the pregnancy has been hard on him and Doctor Matt is worried that the complications will mean a difficult delivery.

Jared can't understand why Jensen is continuing to refuse to give him more kits.

In the midst of their traumas the pack is visited by Beta-Adrian from Eccleston Caves who has undertaken a sacred quest.

**Notes**

Not real. Not mine (except my dear Oscar and the kit characters).

These wonderful actors are not were-animals and are not in relationships with each other. No
offense is meant to any real person.

Thank you to my sister for allowing me to bounce ideas off her and pepper her with questions about herbal remedies.

This is it. The finale. Title is taken from Florence and The Machine’s song.

Enjoy.
Chapter One

Devon struck a stalking pose between two slender tree trunks. He eyed the ant hill. Inching forward he sniffed the mound with his wet black nose. An ant climbed out, a soldier. Devon knew there would be lots, hundreds, of ants swarming out in moments. He shifted; real quick for a kit, faster than any of his brothers and sisters could, into a green eyed shaggy brown haired five year old boy quivering with excitement. Then leaping into the air he landed on the mound. He jumped up and down on the hill, kicking the dirt and ants with his toes.

“Take that! Urban Ant Invaders! Teach you to come on to Padalecki land! Ha! You didn’t know Mighty Alpha Devon would foil your evil attack.”

There was the sound of high pitched mocking laughter behind him and Devon swung around to see Daisy. She was fully dressed in denim shorts and a sparkly purple tee, so hadn’t been in her fox form. She was leaning against a tree laughing at him, her blonde pony tail swinging as she guffawed.

“I’m telling your Papa that you wrecked those ants’ home.” She taunted.

“Go ahead, Daisy Donkey, I’ll tell my Dad that I saved all the littler kits from ant bites.” Devon shouted.

“You are such a baby, Devon. You are jealous cos I am taller than you. You know you are not allowed to destroy ant hills and squirrel caches and birds’ nests.” Daisy pouted at him and put her hand on her hip.

“I didn’t. You can’t say I did. Alan knocked the bird’s nest out of the bushes. Olly took the nuts and she and Jenny ate them.” Devon steamed back at the older kit.

“Bet your Daddy doesn’t know that. Bet if I tell your Papa it was you that you won’t tell on Alan and Olivia and when your Daddy smacks your baby bottom you’ll cry like an omega.” Daisy wrinkled her nose up and stuck her tongue out.

“Well at least I have a Daddy and he is a hero. I heard my Papa and Daddy talking and your Daddy was a bad man.” Devon jutted his chin out.

“He was not! You are lying! Liar Liar!” Daisy glared at the mop haired kit.

“’M not.” Devon pulled himself up straight, like his Daddy said an alpha stood when facing an enemy.

“You are. My Papa says my Daddy was a really strong alpha and he loved him very much.” Daisy protested, but a little seed of doubt caught hold of her heart, because her Papa didn’t talk much about her real Daddy at all, but that was because talking about her real Daddy made Papa very sad.

“He was a bad bad man an’ Grandpa and Uncle Ian ate him into pieces.” Devon shouted at his pack mate.

“You’re lying.” Daisy cried, tears forcing themselves out her eyes. Alphas didn’t cry, only weepy clingy omegas cried. Daisy was not crying in front of stupid Devon. She turned tail and ran into the trees.

Branches whipped her face and she stumbled blindly, stubbing the toes peeping from her sandals against a rotting fallen tree trunk and stray rocks. She could run faster and further as a fox. She
shifted by the old secret kit den on the other side of the hill from the home den. Daisy was a black fox and if she could get somewhere safe by dark, she knew they wouldn’t find her. She ran and ran until she saw Farmer Dewberry’s old barn. She got in under a broken slat and shifted back briefly to lower the ladder on its rails and climb up to the hay loft. Once she had pulled up the ladder, she shifted back to fox and buried herself in the hay.

Knowing she was far from any of the pack and that the beta farmer and his beta wife were half deaf elderly jackals, Daisy indulged herself in a long hard cry.

She wanted Papa.

She wanted Papa all the time, all to herself, but Papa had let himself belong to all the kits, even the Pack Alpha’s kits.

Her Papa had his dark haired Eccleston kits, who loved him and their Dada and Mama. Sometimes Daisy sat on her small bed in the kit room of the den looking at all of them in their baskets; Basil, Lavender, Sage, and Poppy. All of them were little Christopher clones with only the faintest look of Papa. Daisy didn’t look like her Papa. She looked more like Alexander and Elise. When Alpha Jim from the Beaver pack had come with his omega nephew Eddie, to introduce him to Felix, the Pack Alpha had said, “Well there is a Star fox if ever I saw one” when he had spotted Daisy. Jared had shushed him, but Daisy heard it.

Daisy stopped crying as she thought really hard about what she knew about her real Dada.

She knew that when she was a very small baby kit, tinier than even the new Eccleston kits that her Alpha father had died. She knew that was when Papa had gotten all hurt so that other foxes had to always suckle his kits or they had to be fed with bottles. Rosie, who she was meant to call Mama, said that Papa had nearly died because her real father was Papa’s true mate and Alpha-Jared had saved his life by giving Papa to her and Christopher. Rosie wanted more kits and she took Daisy too. Rosie had called her Daisy, but one night when Papa was very sad and Daisy was moaning about all the Ecclestons having stupid plant names, Papa had told her that she had another name before Daisy.

Papa had been very sick when he had given birth to Daisy and two other kits. Alpha-Matt had been there and made it so that Papa could get better. When her real father came into the den to meet his new kits, Papa said he had picked her up, plucking her off his teat and cradled her in his arms. Daisy tried to imagine a big blond alpha with a tiny new black fox in his hand. Papa said that her real father was a black fox too, and because of that he had named her Marcia after himself. Daisy knew she had two younger litter siblings, but normally Papa didn’t talk about them or his true mate, so Daisy was nervous when she asked if he had named them too. Papa said that her brother had been named Jared and her sister was Eliza. It made them seem more real, that she really had shared the inside of Papa’s belly with a brother and sister. Papa had said that her real father had kissed her on the head between her ears and promised her the world. That made her cry and then Papa got sad too.

The next day, Papa asked her to forget what he had said, but she couldn’t, and that day Papa’s sad eyes were back. He was distracted and distant, and when he forgot to change the blankets in the den, Christopher had shouted at him. When she grew up and if she was an alpha with her own omega-mate she would never shout or hurt her mate like that. She was sure her real father wouldn’t have made her Papa cry. Daisy always tried really hard to make her Momma live, calling him Papa as he liked and trying to keep him busy.

Could Devon be telling the truth? Did old Gerard and Ian Fell really tear her father to pieces? Why? When they killed him, they nearly killed her and Papa too. They nearly broke her Papa, and Daisy had to try really hard to fix him.
Daisy hated that her Papa kept so many kits around him. Why was she not enough for him?

She knew that Papa was an omega and they want to be mommas and have kits. It wasn’t fair on Papa, though the way Christopher kept breeding him. Papa was old to be having kits. He should be in the Omega den and raising the kits he had, not making more flowery named Ecclestons.

Papa told lots of stories about growing up in Europe and his Maman, Daisy’s grandmother, but he didn’t tell stories about his true mate. One day Elise asked him how come he came to Padalecki Lake, but he would only say that the fox mating service had matched him up. Daisy was sure that the younger kits thought he was matched with Christopher and Rosie.

Daisy tried to think of reasons why a pack would kill one of their own. She had been at lessons under the canopy when Alpha-Jared had talked about Pack Law, but she could only think of when a fox killed another fox, or attacked a kit or an omega who couldn’t defend themselves. Her real father couldn’t have murdered another fox, or attacked kits and omegas, someone would have told her that or she would have heard it. There was another time, when an Alpha challenged for the pack, there would be a fight to the death, like there was at the Star Pack before Alexander came back to Padalecki Lake. But if her father had challenged for the pack, then why would Ian have been involved in his death, and why was Jared their Pack Alpha, not his father?

It was too confusing and Daisy curled tighter around herself and tried to sleep.

She woke in the dead of night. She could hear distant wolves howling at the April full moon. Dumb wolves thought they were better than all the other were, but they weren’t really.

Climbing down from her perch, Daisy searched the barn. She found some of last fall’s apples dried on strings behind a tarp in the corner and helped herself to a few. Munching away, she emerged into the grey lit world. She wasn’t ready to go back. If she stayed where she was they would find her, maybe as early as dawn, when the patrol would call to the farms.

If she headed to the town, then she could hide in Valerie’s bedroom a while.

Dawn was breaking when she met the road into the village. She was thirsty, used to living by a water source, she had taken streams for granted.

She was a couple of miles closer to Lakeside when a pickup pulled up alongside her and a lady stuck her head out calling in English, “Hey, little fox? You ok there? Mighty early to be wandering alone?”

Daisy stopped. Maybe the lady would have some water, she shifted to ask her.

“Well aren’t you a sweetie pie? How cute is she Ryan? Look at those long limbs and her hair, Ryan, it is like the sun on a July day? What is your name honey?”

“Marcia” Daisy didn’t know why she said it. These were strangers, coyotes from the scent of them. She just wanted someone to know her by her real name.

“Well Marcia. I’m Deborah Ann and this is my loving hubby Ryan. We are from the coast. We are staying at the Holiday Campsite down at McCormick. Have you ever been to the sea, darling?” Deborah smiled with dazzling white teeth and her fuchsia pinked lips.

Daisy came up to the door to talk to her. “No Ma’am.” She said in her best English words, “I live in the pack with all my family. Do you have some water, please?”

“Are you feral?” The man, Ryan, asked her.
Daisy knew that was a rude word and she crinkled her nose. She thought about diving into the trees but Deborah held out a bottle of soda to her. Daisy took it and gulped it down, not realizing how thirsty she had been.

“What Ryan means is, do you live in the village or in the wild?” Deborah asked kindly.

“Oh, in the forest at the den,” Daisy replied between sips.

“Have you ever been in a caravan? Would you like to come see our holiday trailer?” the lady asked her.

“Yes, I mean, yes I’ve seen my friend Valerie’s house in the village and the house where the alpha stayed beside the clinic when he was hurt. I am on my way to Valerie but she doesn’t know I’m coming cos I kinda ran away.” Daisy bit her lip. She thought she might have said too much.

Deborah looked over at her husband and then she opened the door of the truck and swung her legs out. She was a tall lady. She had really wavy deep red hair, like on one of Valerie’s dollies. Daisy had never seen real hair like that before. Now that she was out, Daisy could see her husband was older than her. He had messy blond locks and a kind face.

“Marcia, why did you run away? Do you want me to take you home? Your Dad and Mama must be very worried about you.” Deborah leaned against the door next to the kit.

“They are not. I’m not even their kit. I was given to them. They have seven other kits to be worrying about.” Daisy pouted thinking about all the rest of them in the den, with their dark hair and crooked smiles.

The lady looked shocked. “We don’t know how things work in the wild, Marcia pet, but in towns people don’t just give kits away.”

Daisy wondered if she should explain about her Papa, but the lady came real close and then kissed her forehead. Daisy was so surprised she missed the start of Deborah asking her if she would like to come visit with them for a while, until she decided if she really wanted to run away.

And so Marcia Star, aka Daisy Eccleston, ended up sandwiched between betas Deborah and Ryan Kwanten, who wondered what to do with the skinny tall feral fox kit they had found slinking along a mountain roadway on a clear spring morning.

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Writhing in his blankets, breath quickening, stomach churning, paws curling, creeping fire in his veins, Jensen heat was early. He had cried off the morning ritual of taking care of Jared with stomach ache. He should have realized it was the precursor. He had been in pre-heat since the day before but normally it took days for his heat to build.

Jared had taken the kits to Oliver and Katie the night before. When they had woken he had gone to check on them and have a morning swim. He had been back to dress and see if Jensen was feeling better. Jensen had been sentient enough then to ask for a lazy morning and for Jared to return later with some sweet tea and one of Amber’s sticky buns.

Jensen curled into a ball and whined into the blankets. He rubbed his nose against the fibers, breathing in the lingering scent of his mate. He needed his alpha. He needed to be filled and taken. His fur was wet with slick and sweat. Summoning enough presence of mind to shift into his human
form, Jensen kicked the nesting blankets away, but the den was too hot in the early heat wave weather. Panting through another wave of heat, he wished he was in the cool deep side room of the omega den. He closed his eyes as the heat lessened and took some deep breaths. His body was momentarily calm. Spring and summer heats were a bitch. Way back when he could stock his freezer full of bags of ice. In the wild it was only the midwinter heats that had the luxury of snow to cool down. A wave of cramping hit as the oestrus took hold. Jensen turned over, planting his face into a cushion.

There was the sloshing sound and bumping noise of a mug of tea being dropped and the scent of alpha-mate-knot-mine filled the nest.

Jared was on top of him, pressing his stomach into the rumpled blankets. His alpha ripped his own shirt from his chest. Trying to extract his lower body from his trousers, he growled “Gonna breed you Jen, fill you up with my kits, make you huge and round for me.”

Jensen groaned into the blankets, “No Jay.”

They had talked about this. Jared knew he didn’t want to get pregnant. He hoped Jared hadn’t gone all alpha-babymaker on him.

Kneading his hands into Jensen’s back, Jared kneeled between his spread legs and leaned over to speak into directly into his ear, “I want to feel my kits moving inside you, want to see your teats emerge on your human body and swell up with milk, want to change your scent so every other fox knows you are bearing my children.”

“No please, please Jay, take me to the omega den.” Jensen pleaded and tried to stop his body from presenting itself for knotting. He forced his hips not to arch and bit through the skin of his lip to stop himself from begging to be bred.

The hot breath of his alpha on his claiming mark was threatening to send him over the edge, to the place where he wouldn’t care what happened to him as long as Jared spent the next three days and nights knotting him. Jared’s hair fell around his face and it tickled the back of Jensen’s neck. His eyelids fluttered and his pupils rolled back as he was in danger of losing himself to the seethe.

“Want to hold onto your body with my knot,” Jared hissed through gritted teeth as Jensen released another wave of slick and his traitorous body arched up for his mate, “Want to see you filling up with my seed, want to take you now and close our den for mating, want to send the kits to Sebastian and give the pack to Alexander until I break your heat with new kits.”

A rolling growl seemed to pass from Alpha to Omega and Jensen whispered his denial, pleading again to be left alone. The heat fever was rolling through him with his alpha’s body pressed down on top of him. He needed to ask his mate to take him to the omega den, but he couldn’t form words.

Jared stroked Jensen’s thighs, “Please Jen Babe. Be my omega momma again.”

“Listen please alpha,” Jensen managed to plead. He twisted his body so he could face his mate, while ignoring his fox who wanted him to use his hands to spread his cheeks for his alpha, “I can’t. I just can’t do it. Not now. Please let’s talk about it after my heat. Please please, love you Jay, but please don’t breed me.” That was it, it was all too much. Jensen broke into sobs and unintelligible pleas, unsure if he was pleading to be knotted or pleading to be left to deal with his heat alone.

Jared moved from his position and wrenched his trousers up to cover his rigid arching cock, knot already swelling from the scent of the heat and his proximity to his mate. “Hate to see you cry, babe.” He crouched down and swept his omega into his arms, lifting his limp body up. Jensen slung
his arms around Jared’s neck and relaxed into the scent of his strong powerful alpha. Marching up to the omega den, Jared called out for Bradley, Colin or Sebastian. Colin stuck his dark head out of the den and seeing the Pack Alpha and Vixen, he said, “Can you carry him in Alpha? He is too far gone to make his way to the nesting room. It is just me and Bradley at the moment, but I’ll watch over Jensen.”

By noon, Jared had brought more tea and buns, which Colin had managed to give to Jensen. Bradley was dozing in the main room of the den. Eight months gone, Colin worried that his mate was over sleeping, but Matt had said that it was normal with the complication. The boundless energy that Bradley had exhibited during Elise’s confinement was more unusual. Colin rubbed his own still barely showing stomach and wondered how he would be at the same stage in four months time.

Colin mopped Jensen’s brow with a cold cloth as another wave of fever broke. He wondered why Jensen had come to the den again. Hunter and Hillie were three years old. He had presumed that sooner or later the pack leaders would want more kits. He wondered should he talk to Misha about it, but the memory of the sad smile Misha had given him in the clinic earlier that week when Colin had come in with a sick Elise and for his check up, made him dismiss the idea.

Finally Jensen shifted to fox and fell into a fitful sleep and Colin joined his mate in the main room. Moving Misha’s pile of WOT pamphlets off the soft chair, Colin sank down.

“Do you want me to get you anything Bradley-mate, any heartburn?” Colin asked holding up a hand in gesture.

“Naw, pet, you are wiped out from dealing with the vixen. Did Elise sleep at all last night?” Bradley asked as he lazed in the nesting blankets.

“She kept me and her Daddy awake for some of the night, but her cough is nearly gone. That herbal syrup, that Misha passed me behind Matt’s back, really did wonders. She misses you but we explained how we don’t want you getting sick with the baby coming so soon.” Colin poured the last cup of tea from the pot and passed it to his mate.

“Thanks Colin. We should have let Alex take care of her by himself. You shouldn’t risk getting sick either.” Bradley thought aloud as he took a sip of the warm tea. “I wish I could be of more help. I just wish the little vixen inside me would co-operate.” Bradley hung his head and sadly added, “or communicate.”

Colin leaned over and squeezed Bradley’s hand. He couldn’t imagine not being able to shift to fox, but their new daughter was fixed in human form. Matt explained that it could happen, that the unborn kit could spend weeks without shifting, although it was more usual for it to be in fox form. He had done ultrasounds at the clinic and there were no signs of any other issues, the little kit was just determined to remain a human baby for the moment, meaning Bradley could not adopt his fox form. Elise had been quite the communicator in the later stages of Bradley’s first pregnancy, sending emotions and wants to her omega mother through their bond and fox mind, but this little one remained silent.

“Is our Momma in here?” came two girls voices down the entrance way. Colin looked up to see the remarkably similar grinning faces of Jenny and Cissy.

“Cousin Colin, is Papa here?” Cissy asked again her hazel eyes looking concerned as she lifted her nose to scent the air.

“Sure he is darling, it is just his heat. We all go through it, well all us amazing omegas anyhow.” Colin winked at the girls. “You want to sit with us a while? We will leave your Papa in the quieter
small room to get some rest, but there are some coloring books in the corner if you want to stay.”

“Are you having a baby?” Jenny asked, “Cos Devon said that he is going to have more kits to be the alpha of, and I said he was not allowed to play being alpha, and he said he was gonna anyway, and Cissy called him beta-boy, and he got real mad, didn’t he Cissy?”

Cissy nodded and chewed the knuckle of her thumb, a baby-kit habit she still sometimes did without thinking.

Her sister continued “... and then Devon said that he had to be alpha cos none of the rest of us were gonna be, and we would all have to do what Daisy said, if he wasn’t, and I said he was dumb cos Daddy is Alpha and Devon didn’t know what he was talking about,” Jenny continued on without taking a breath, “and he said he did cos he knew that Alpha Alexander was going to be a new Daddy twice times. So are you having kits, Cousin Colin?”

Colin smiled and laughed gently, “That must be the longest way I have been asked that question. Yes girls, I am having kits, but I won’t know for sure how many until my first scan next week.”

“Awh, do you want lots of kits? Cos Papa had us five and then our two brothers?” Cissy asked.

“Well, I think I am having two kits and I am very happy. Bradley just had Elise the first time, you know.” Colin replied.

“Halloo,” Sebastian called from the entrance. “I scent a sticky stinky one in the den?”

“Shush, Sebastian,” Bradley said, “You’ll wake Jen. He is in the quiet chamber.”

“Oh” Sebastian edged quietly into the main room, “no pack alpha kits again this time? You and Colin will have caught up with them, if they don’t breed again soon.”

“More likely you’ll do it on your own.” Colin quipped back.

“Hmmm,” Sebastian hummed thoughtfully, “I am looking for one of mine, have you seen Daisy?”

“Not all day,” Bradley spoke up, “Girls, have you seen Daisy?”

“No Bradley,” Jenny said.

“Devon went upstream early this morning,” Cissy volunteered, “He said he was going hunting, wanted Alan and Hillie to go with him, but they came to Jade and Justine’s with us. Maybe Daisy is with them.”

“Maybe Daisy ended up with Oliver’s kits too?” Colin suggested.

“I’m getting a little worried about her. I can sense she is OK, but not where she is. She likes to check in with me during the day. I had Basil and Hunter with me all morning, and the little ones. I’ll try the other dens.” Sebastian got up to go.

“Wait,” Bradley said, “I think you should tell Christopher and Rosie she is missing and get them to help you look, and if you don’t find her in a den, tell Jared.”

“She might be in the secret den us adults don’t know about.” Sebastian winked at Cissy and Jenny.

“Where?” Colin and Bradley asked in unison.

“Oh nowhere special, just the hidden kit den I have heard a rumor of.” Sebastian’s eyes crinkled in
amusement at the zip it gestures the two girls were making behind the other omegas’ backs.

Colin laughed, “It is alright kits. You forget that Bradley and I grew up here. We know about the old den on the other side of the hill. I seem to remember somebody playing house with stuffed plush kittens there on rainy days.”

“Well I remember someone else arguing about who got to give birth to said toys.” Bradley countered.

“Eeeewww stop,” Cissy squealed. “Come on Jennifer, we’ll help Uncle Sebastian find silly Daisy, before they start yucky kissing each other again.”
Jared sat on the packed earth area outside the omega den, resting his back against the side wall of the den entrance. He should have been checking in with Alexander and Felix after their morning patrol, wandering towards the eating table so that pack members could approach him informally, finding Stephen to discuss whether they should accept using Farmer Nugent’s billy goat as a stud to count as the farmer’s annual tribute. Instead he was brooding over Jen’s refusal to let him knot him. Hunter and Hillary were old enough to join in the other kits’ activities. Jared would be around to support Jen through the pregnancy and be there to help with their new kits. He fantasized Jen bearing lots of kits, maybe carrying six this time, one for each teat. Jared sighed at the image of Jen in fox form with six little kits sucking at his teats. He closed his eyes and pictured his mate in his second trimester, rounded with babies but still flexible enough to wrap his legs around Jared’s waist and let his alpha take him completely.

“Alpha!”

Jared looked up. Christopher was coming up the steep path with his hand linked into Sebastian’s. He could see the alpha’s tendons flexing, squeezing and holding on. The distress was clear on the Sebastian’s face. Jared pushed his glasses up to the bridge of his nose and stood to greet them.

“How long since you saw her Sebastian?” As Jared asked the question he became aware of tension crawling under his skin, reaching out to the pack he could sense the anxiety of those who knew the kit was missing. He had been so focused on his mate’s heat; he hadn’t detected the wrongness in the pack energy.

“She was at den with Rosie and me after the evening meal. Rosie helped her change into her favorite purple top. Basil saw her go upstream when she left the den.” Sebastian choked on the words, “no-one has since her since...” his voice broke and Christopher pulled him in closer, putting an arm around his waist, “I thought she was sleeping over with your kits, but Katie said they had yours last night and Daisy wasn’t with them.”

“I will call everyone to come for midday meal and we will check all the dens,” Jared said calmly, “I am sure she is with somebody.”

“We have checked the dens, Jared,” Christopher pursed his lips with worry, “Cissy, Jenny and Elise went to the so-called secret kit play den and came back with Daisy’s clothes and sandals. It looks like she shifted there.”

Unable to continue Sebastian buried his head against Christopher’s chest and his mate cupped his neck above his collar.

Sebastian faced forward to look at his pack alpha, “Jared, she is my baby, my first baby, the only good thing I have...”

Jared wondered how that sentence would have ended. The only good thing Sebastian had left from his first mating? From when he survived the death of his true mate and other kits? From Mark?

“Sebastian, would you stay here with Bradley and Jen?” Jared asked softly approaching to rub the
omega’s shoulder, “I could use Colin to help look for Daisy, if you would watch my mate during his heat.”

“I should be looking for my Daisy,” Sebastian muttered.

Christopher pulled him back a little from his chest, he spoke firmly but kindly “Sebastian, we are all going to search the packlands for her. If she wanders back on her own, shamefaced for staying out all night, she is going to look for you and come to the O den.”

Sebastian nodded mutely and ducked his head to enter the den.

Jared turned to the other alpha. “Tell me where you have looked. Did you notice anything on dawn patrol? Any signs of intruders on our territory?”

“No Alpha, everything was normal. Alexander and Felix have just returned from morning duty. Oliver and Tony have yet to head out. We have no reports of incursions or problems. Stephen is down south at Nugent’s farm. He should be back soon, so we can ask if he noticed anything.”

“Good.” Jared nodded. “Let’s go mobilize the pack and find Daisy.”

Jared munched on the bowl of early strawberries that Allyson had brought to the canopy for his breakfast. He moved the rock paperweights he was using on the sheet maps. He had divided the maps into grids and was currently discussing with Alexander and Oliver how best to divide their search teams.

It was over 36 hours since Daisy had been seen. Jared had a dreadful feeling in his gut. He rubbed his forehead over his eyebrow. He couldn’t believe that he had lost one of his pack. He berated himself for not paying closer attention to his charges. Jensen had told him repeatedly that Christopher was hard on Sebastian. He had never considered how Daisy would feel about it. Had the young headstrong kit had enough? She knew Christopher and Rosie were not her birth parents, but Jared had hoped being raised with them since she was only days old would have forged a family bond. The little fox was devoted to her momma, and he was terribly concerned that she had stayed away from him for so long. He growled under his breath at the intrusive thought that someone could be preventing her from returning to her omega mother.

Last night had been torture. Every fox’s thoughts were of Daisy, out there somewhere alone, and Sebastian, inconsolable in the omega den.

The pack knew every square inch of the home den and surrounding hills with such familiarity that a twig out of place or the defecation of a strange rabbit would have been noticed. They had scrutinized every hollow, stream crossing, tree, valley floor and outcrop the previous afternoon. Felix and Emma thought they had caught a vague scent of Daisy on the north-most hill, but it was too faint to be certain.

The evening meal was subdued, even the other kits were quiet. Jensen and Sebastian were missed, secluded in the omega den. Tony had gone to retrieve the maps from their notary’s office and to tell Matt what was going on. Gerard had surprised Jared by asking the pack to say a prayer for Daisy’s safe return.

After the meal, Jared called the alphas with James and just returned Tony to the new cabin. He was walking over with Oliver when he felt a tugging on his sleeve. He looked down to see a red-faced Devon looking up at him.
“Yes son?” Jared paused to ask.

“Dad I saw Daisy after evening meal,” Devon said very slowly as if admitting something naughty.

“Where Devon? You should have said this earlier, it could have helped narrow our search.” Jared spat out urgently and then bit his lip at his own alpha bark, when he saw his little boy’s eyes fill with tears.

“Up on the north hill... and we had a fight.” Devon said quickly and looked at his father as if he was afraid of what Jared would do or say.

Jared stayed calm and still, not wanting to frighten his son and also wanting to get the full story.

“OK, what sort of fight? Did you hit, bite or kick each other?”

“No Dad, it was a fight with words, I said things.” Devon looked at the ground and kicked the dirt with his feet.

“What things?” Jared asked patiently.

“I told Daisy her real daddy was a bad man and grandpa ate him, cos I heard that, but I know I wasn’t meant to say but she was being really mean and I’m sorry.” Devon stumbled out and grasped his hands together as he waited for his father to speak.

“I am disappointed in you, Devon. Those were very cruel things to say. I know you are a young kit but you are the alpha and vixen’s son and you should be kind to your pack mates. What did Daisy do when you said that?”

“She called me a big liar but her face got really red and she ran away.”

“This is very important, son. What way did she run?”

“Away. Away from the den.”

“OK. You did the right thing telling me what happened. Why don’t you find your brothers and sisters and take them to Oliver and Katie’s den for me?” Jared patted his son on his shoulder and was tempted to pull him in for a hug, but he restrained himself from the temptation needing to teach Devon a lesson.

“Yes Dad.” Devon hung his head and slouched away.

Knowing that north was the direction to search, Jared had let Gerard lead a team for the evening patrol, giving that part of their packlands a second look, and calling to the farms along the border. They had returned late with no news.

The dawn patrol of James and Pasha had come back with three of their tenant farmers, followed by Matt, Misha, Matt’s nurse Cindy, and Mrs. Woods, the wolf-beta who worked in the general store. Jared sent the volunteers out paired up with a pack member to search a grid area each. By the time he had assigned areas, he had also gained Mark Sheppard, local mechanic Alpha-jackal Todd, and Lakeside diner waitress beta-fox Carrie on his search teams.

The last strawberry popped in his mouth and thinking of braving the omega den to ask Misha how Sebastian and Jensen were faring, Jared scented the approach of an alpha coyote. He looked up to see Sherriff Macken from Lakeside coming towards the canopy with Matt. The tall middle-aged alpha policeman was in uniform complete with Sherriff’s hat resting on his longer than regulation brown hair.
“Alpha Padalecki. Can the Sherriff’s department be of assistance?” Macken asked, bowing his head ever so slightly to acknowledge Jared’s status.

“Jared. It is possible that Daisy was heading for town.” Matt pointed out.

“You think she was trying to get to Valerie?” Jared asked.

“It is possible. They are keeping an eye out for her at the clinic.” Matt informed his alpha.

“I would prefer if my pack continued the search of our lands and the surrounding countryside and forest. However, I would appreciate your help in searching around Lakeside.” Jared said to the Sherriff.

“Can I ask a few questions, to help with the search?” Macken requested, rubbing his tight beard.

“Shoot.” Jared said, wincing inwardly at his unintentional pun as he glanced at the cop’s gun belt.

“Do you have a recent photograph of the missing pup?”

Jared was stumped. A photograph? Why would he have photographs?

Matt helped him out, “I think we may have one from Valerie’s fifth birthday when Misha brought his camera to the den but Daisy has grown a lot in the last year. I will find it for you when I get home later.”

“Thank you, Doc. In lieu of a photograph can you describe Daisy?” Macken asked the two other alphas.

“She is tall for a six year old. Long blonde hair. Fair blonde. Blue eyes. She has well defined cheek bones. Long legs. She is slender but strong and wiry.” Jared grinned a little when he thought of Daisy wrestling with Devon over who got to play alpha.

“What was she wearing when she left the pack?”

“She left as fox.” Jared replied.

“In that case, can you describe her markings?” Macken flipped the page on the small notebook he was using.

“Black.” Jared answered. “No markings. She is a black fox.”

“Spit of her father so? I was unlucky enough to run into Mark Star on a drunken teenage dare to violate your pack land borders. He scared the living daylights out of us. Worked though, creeping into Padalecki Lake was off the table for drinking games after that.” Macken huffed a chuckle at the memory but then rubbed his once-broken nose and refocused, “Is there anyone or anywhere else Daisy would aim for, besides Doctor Cohen’s home?”

“I don’t believe so. Unless she was intending on aiming for Fell Creek. She always got on well with Candice, the Fell Vixen.” Jared pondered, “But I would think there is more chance of her hiding out somewhere.”

“Do you have any pack sense of her whereabouts?” Macken asked.

“No. I can sense she is unhurt and not a vast distance away, but she is beyond the borders of the pack.” Jared admitted.
“What about her omega mother? Can I speak to him?” The sheriff enquired.

“No” Jared said firmly, “I do not want Sebastian questioned.”

“He may have a sense of her whereabouts through their bond. If he is her only close relative, perhaps a shaman from the Lakeside Temple could use the draw ritual.” Macken suggested.

“I am surprised that a lawman would suggest a religious solution,” Jared said.

“It wouldn’t work anyway.” Alexander chipped in from the other side of the canopy where he and Oliver were listening.

“I know the mystical can be unreliable but the priestess at Lakeside has a very good reputation.” Macken tried to argue.

“I am sure she is excellent,” Alexander said with a touch of sarcasm, “however Daisy has a close blood Alpha relative which would negate the efforts of the priestess to draw Daisy to her kin.”

“Surely it is still worth a try,” Macken asked, and Jared wondered if he was dealing with a religious nutcase.

“Not unless you want the child heading off to find her Uncle Jacob in Star Valley California.” Alexander huffed in annoyance.

“Oh. I see.” The Sheriff blurted in understanding, “Alpha-Jared, I will send my deputies out to the surrounding rural homesteads and put out a bulletin on county law enforcement. Do you want me to alert the state police? Would you like to make an appeal in the local media?”

“Thank you, Alpha-Eoin. I would hope if she is hiding out that she would make herself known before she spends a third night away. I will reconsider more urban authority involvement if we are still looking for her tomorrow. There is a local radio station, yes? I heard it when I spent the weeks in Lakeside.”

“Yes Alpha”

“Would you ask the local station to appeal for her? Perhaps she is with a local family who do not know she is being searched for, Matt, would you contact Ian and Jim and I suppose under pack customs Jacob should be informed as her closest blood alpha?”

Both alphas gave their agreement.

“Oliver?” Jared asked.

His cousin came over to stand next to him.

“Emma and Lilly are always asking about being envoys. Do you think they are ready to head to Two Moons via Arthur Accola’s village? The more of our surrounding packs who know the better.”

“I think you should send them via Fell Creek and ask if Envoy Zach would accompany them as it will be their first run. Also if Matt could ask Jim Beaver to send Envoy Andrew to Five Rivers, Audley Accola’s farms and Castleton Coyote settlement, then you will have a complete circle of surrounding packs on alert.” Oliver pointed out the destinations on one of the maps.

“Good. I knew I kept the two of you around for some reason,” Jared smiled at his second and third, “Oliver, could you round up Daisy’s older sisters and set them up for travel. Alexander, can you ask
Colin to bring some food and drink to Jen and update Sebastian on what we are doing?”

The four alphas left to follow Jared’s instructions. The Sherriff wrote his private cell number on the corner of one of the maps before he left.

Alone with the noise of the breeze moving through the maps, Jared sat on one of the stools and removed his glasses. He carded his hand through his hair and then plopped his elbow on the table, using his hand to rest his forehead. He took a deep breath through his nose and offered a silent prayer for Daisy’s safety. Opening his fox awareness, he was too distracted by his mate’s heat to focus on the young kit. His groin itched for his omega. He couldn’t scent Jensen from the canopy but their mating bond hummed with need. He desired nothing more than burying himself in his mate, knot deep, nose in the short hairs at the nape of Jen’s neck, tonguing his claiming mark, gripping his mate’s hip so fiercely that his finger marks would take days to fade away. Jared sighed with his dissatisfaction. Jensen had been clear in his rejection of Jared’s knot. Logically Jared knew they needed to discuss Jensen’s reluctance to bear more kits, but the instinctive fox alpha part of Jared’s brain felt pained at Jensen’s refusal of him combined with resentment at his omega’s disobedience. Jared wanted more kids. Jensen should be happy, privileged to give them to him. He knew Jensen discussed his problems with his omega friends. Jared briefly considered asking for advice. However he was an alpha and he did not discuss mating problems. Who could he ask? He couldn’t think of anyone in a similar situation. Ian and Candice wanted but had yet to have kits. Oliver and Katie and their twins but would like more. He wouldn’t dream of wounding David by discussing it with him. Alexander and Christopher were popping out kits like it was going out of fashion. He might talk to Matt about it. He was a doctor, an omega specialist, even if kits were a sore personal subject due to Misha’s internal scarring.

Maybe Jen would change his mind, Jared thought more hopefully.

“Dada?”

Jared looked down to see Hunter and Basil skittering to a stop in their fox forms by his feet. He bent down to pick up the two young kits and sit them on his lap.

“We is sad, cos Baz feels Daisy is far away, and I is sad cos you are sad.” Hunter thought at his father.

“It will be alright, Hunter baby, don’t worry,” Jared said aloud as his used one hand to stroke both little kits. Hunter was the most emotionally perceptive of his kits. He had been displeased to overhear the alpha/beta/omega debates that the pack indulged in when they thought he couldn’t hear them. It was only natural. Every adult in a pack and for all Jared knew every urban adult, indulged in speculation about their young ones. Jared had his own issues with the presumptions made. Deep down he knew he would be stunned in the future if Devon failed to pop a knot and Basil and Hunter failed to go into heat.

“OK guys,” Jared said loudly to the two sleepy three year olds who were nuzzling down for a nap. “Wake up baby kits. You want to go to the omega den and find your Mommas and Bradley?” Jared signaled at Colin who was emerging from the new cabin, to take the kits.

Colin came over, “I was just picking up some lunch for us at the omega den, but I guess I can bring these guys over first.” Colin grinned as he settled the two dozy kits in his arms. “It might do Sebastian good to hold his little fellow.”

“How is he bearing up?” Jared asked.

“As well as can be expected. Trying to keep Jensen’s heat fever down is distracting him. You want I
can bring you some bread rolls too?” Colin offered.

“No thanks, you have enough with a full den.” Jared replied as Colin moved off with Basil and Hunter. Jared privately fumed that he would have been able to take the heat fever down altogether if Jensen had only seen reason.
Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

I know this is very short. But I got it just right, IMHO, and I wanted to put it up tonight.
Two chapters in one evening. Chapter four will be longer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Can I come in?”

Rosie’s nervous question was initially greeted with silence. Bradley looked up from the nesting blankets, over to where Sebastian was cradling Basil-fox in his arms. Jensen and Hunter were asleep in fox form in the other room.

“Up to you Sebastian.” Bradley said. “If you don’t want her here I’ll refuse.”

The other omega sucked in his lips, then swallowed hard, “She probably wants to take Basil away from me. She can hardly trust me with any of the kits. Let her in.”

“Come on in Rosie” Bradley called but frowned in concern at Sebastian’s statement.

The grey-blonde haired little beta cautiously entered the den. “Sebastian.” She said simply and tears started to pour down her face. “The search teams are back and there is still no sign of her.”

Sebastian put his free hand out and Rosie caught hold of it. “My girls are gone to Fell Creek. They so wanted to be envoys but they left with such heavy hearts. Lilly wanted to stay and help search but Christie explained to them how important it is that every surrounding pack is on the lookout for Daze. What are we going to do?”

“Je ne sais pas. Je ne peux pas penser… J’ai pas sommeil… I can’t eat, breathe, I don’t know what to do. Ma fleur, my Daisy, my daughter.” Sebastian passed Basil to Rosie and curled in on himself.

“Give him to me.” Bradley lifted his arms up to Rosie and she passed the little fox over. Rosie caught Sebastian in her arms and pulled their upper bodies together.

“Shush mate. We will find her. Jared will tear the country apart to find her. There are packs on the lookout for her. The Sheriff is looking for her. It is on the urban radio. Misha is making copies of Daisy’s photo for Valerie to bring to school. Christie hasn’t slept since she left. He blames himself.” Rosie sniffed back her sobs, “He thinks she ran away because he is so short tempered with you. He walked the riverbank last night all the way to the highway. Mark Sheppard brought him back this morning. Does she not know how much we love her?”

Sebastian made tsking noises. “I love her Rosie. I love her so much. She was the only light in my life until Baz was born. Oh Gods, the babies. I need to feed them and they have had no momma.”

Rosie rubbed her forehead against his, “Shush, don’t worry. My slothful teenage son Pasha is getting a lesson in family responsibilities. Lavender pissed on his new trousers and Poppy bit him. He tried to bargain for only taking care of Sage, saying he only wanted brothers in future. I gave them a bottle
before I came. Amber is keeping a beady eye out for any sign of Pasha-freak-out.”

Sebastian gave a little smile at the thought of lovable but lazy Pasha with three newborns under his wing. His thoughts immediately turned to Daisy, newborn struggling to hold onto life, and letting him hold on to her vitality. He wondered if he had been strong enough to survive without a second mating, would he and Daisy have lived happily here in the omega den, or maybe in their own den higher on the hill. It was pointless musing. It wouldn’t change the way things were now.

Daisy was alive. More than that Daisy was unhurt. Sebastian knew it. He could sense her distant spirit. He held on to that. Held it close to his heart.

“I brought something with me.” Rosie said. She picked up a blanket she had dropped when she had taken Sebastian into her arms. “It is from Daisy’s bed. I thought you might want to... you know.”

Sebastian croaked his thanks and took the blanket. He held it to his nose and inhaled deeply. He could smell her, his little girl. “Rosie-mate, will you take Baz back with you?”

She smiled in understanding and nodded.

Sebastian shifted to fox. He curled himself around the blanket, wrapping his body up in it, letting his nose find the strongest scent of his kit, and finally after two long days let sleep claim him, dreaming of Daisy being back home, hugging her momma, promising to stay with him.

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Chapter End Notes

Je ne sais pas. Je ne peux pas penser... J’ai pas sommeil...
I don't know. I can't think. I have no sleep.
Daisy/Marcia had really enjoyed her time at McCormick Campsite. When they arrived Daisy had stayed in the pickup with Ryan while Debbie had bought her a pair of denim shorts and a khaki Tee that said ‘Camper Chick’ on it at the tourist shop, saying she shouldn’t shift to her fox form in public. Urban ways were weird. The beta coyote had taken Daisy to the shop later that day and allowed her to pick another tee, Daisy got a purple one with tiny pink flowers and some special pants for swimming. Debbie paid for the clothes with money and had laughed when Daisy asked if she could see the pictures on the paper bills.

The vacation trailer was smaller than her family den but about the same size as some of the smaller dens in the pack but it was full of urban stuff, like microwaves and showers and flushing toilets. It had real beds but Ryan told her that they were smaller than in a normal house. Daisy thought an alpha would much prefer to sleep in nesting blankets than those slim bunks. She wondered if alphas rented bigger trailers.

The campsite was busy that weekend. There were a lot of visitors with their children. There was even a family of wolves with a normal boy. The only non-fox children Daisy had ever seen up close before were Scott and Trent’s baby raccoon dogs Skye and Libby and Valerie’s friend who was a wolf. At the campsite there were all sorts of children; wolves, jackals, coyotes and raccoon dogs, all urban and all mixing together. There was a young urban fox couple but they had no kits.

The camp had a pool and Daisy spent hours splashing into it and showing off her lake developed swimming skills to the urban children. The only one who matched her skill was a skinny coyote boy from Roanoke Island who normally swam in the Atlantic. Time flew by in the pool, the sun moved across the sky as Daisy played with her new friends, lost in a new world, putting aside every worry and hurt.

Daisy learned what hot dogs tasted like at lunchtime and to play softball when the evening cooled. She had something called a bucket of chicken for evening meal with the Kwantens and passed out on their pull down child-bunk in the trailer.

Ryan asked her the next morning if she wanted him to run her back to Lakeside in his pickup. She knew she should go, and she wanted to get to Valerie and tell her everything that had happened. It was early and Daisy wondered if they would let her stay until the evening. Valerie would be in the village school today.

Many of the tourists had headed home the previous evening but there were still a few families at the campsite. The morning was bright and warm. Daisy lazed around the pool with the normal boy Linden and his older sister Sally Strauss. They asked her questions about her family but she avoided them. It clouded over in the afternoon and they moved to the common room to watch cartoons on a large screen TV, which fascinated Daisy. Her wonder must have shown on her face, because Sally said you would think she had never watched a TV before. Daisy had, in Valerie’s house, but never such a big screen and never cartoons, as Valerie’s Papa had ideas about what kits should be allowed to watch.

The remaining vacationing families clubbed together to have an early evening BBQ. Daisy shared her sausages on sticks with Linden and Sally. She was kind of sleepy after the day and asked Debbie...
if she could go into the trailer to rest. Ryan scooped her up and tickled her as he carried her in. He used a blanket and the cushions to make up a little nest on the narrow padded bench under the window. Daisy drifted off into a light doze. On the edge of her sleepy awareness she thought she could hear her Papa calling out for her in a dream imagining she had come home, she tried to send him thoughts that she was fine, but the cotton wool of sleep took over and she slipped into a nap.

When Daisy slowly woke it was half-light outside and there were sounds of laughter and clinking glasses. She pulled herself upright on the seat and peeked out through the thin cotton curtains. The window was open a crack and she could see and hear the adults enjoying themselves outside. There were no kits around, all having been sent to bed. Someone was still at the grill but there was a smell of overcooked beef mixing in with spilled beer. Linden and Sally’s mother Gretchen gave a loud shriek of laughter and Daisy wondered if that was what had woken her moments before. As she watched the urban wolf staggered and fell forward, only being saved from a face plant by the campsite manager’s quick reaction. It was kind of fascinating to watch a group of adults be so full of alcohol and acting so strange. Out of the corner of her eye Daisy could see Ryan and Debbie making out, like Christopher and Rosie sometimes did.

Daisy thought she would ask Ryan to bring her to Valerie’s in the morning. She was feeling rather sheepish and guilty. Nerves trilled inside her at the thought of facing the pack, as she was sure they must have been looking for her. She bit her lip hard as she pictured Christopher’s angry face directed at her. The pack alpha would be angry too. She wished she knew more pack law. Was there a punishment for kits who ran away? What would Jared do? She was in so much trouble. She missed her Papa and figured she had been gone long enough. She could be a brave alpha and face her pack. She would stand tall and not let Devon mock her. She would take her punishment as long as Papa was alright.

She heard Ryan’s voice from under the window; he was asking someone about the local wild fox pack. Daisy crouched back down on the seat and cocked an ear to listen.

“Yes sir, we have a wild pack in the area,” the beta-wolf camp manager replied, “The Padalecki Pack. Campsite here pays them tribute once a year, although we are at the outer edge of their influence.”

“Tribute?” Ryan asked interestedly.

“Yes, hum, it is like a tax, given to the Pack Alpha. Ancient tradition, keeps the peace around these parts.”

Daisy could almost see the manager removing his cap and wiping his sweaty brow, in a gesture he repeated many times during the day.

“We pay our tribute to Two Moons,” Linden and Sally’s Dad said, “We had Ty Olsson himself run off some cattle rustlers a couple of years back. Howled them off our land, didn’t he Gretchen?”

“Well, we’ve never had cause to call on the Padalecki clan’s help here. But it is good to know there are fierce alphas willing to stand with you, hey?” The manager said.

“You say they keep the peace, yet they sound violent?” Debbie asked her voice full of concern.

“Naw, ma’am, keeps to themselves those foxes. Only violent with each other as far as I know. No need to worry about them. You are perfectly safe here.” The manager tried to reassure her.

“What do you mean violent with each other? What kind of place is that for their pups? Do they raise their children exposed to feral violence?” Ryan asked.
Daisy sucked a breath, wondering what the outsiders thought of her pack.

“No sir, you take me up all wrong.” The wolf replied, “Have their own set of laws up there at Padalecki Lake. Ripped one of their own apart some years back, one of their alphas, name of Mark Star, but by all accounts it was for violence against a kit.”

The world went black. Daisy felt it narrow down to a pin prick of light. There was only the sound of her blood rushing through her ears. She couldn’t hear any more of what was being said outside. She had her answer and now she didn’t want it and didn’t know what to do with it. Her real daddy had hurt a kit? Hurt a kit so bad that they had killed him? She whimpered quietly for her momma, wanting desperately to ask him the truth or have him deny the whole thing.

Voices started to come back to her ears. She heard one of the other campers asking the Kwantens “Isn’t your kid a fox?”

“Oh she is not our girl,” Debbie answered, “we found her wandering on the road.”

“We are giving her a break until she decides where she wants to go,” Ryan added casually.

“Oh Gods, Oh holy and divine Gods,” The camp manager burst out.

“What? What is the problem?” another voice asked.

“Oh may the Gods protect me from the wrath of my King and Jared Padalecki,” The camp manager cried, “Please the Gods for mercy. I have to get back to the cabin. The Padalecki Pack is missing a kit, it was on the radio. They have been searching for her. I have to alert the Sherriff.”

Daisy heard the door of the trailer open but pretended to be asleep. She could hear Ryan and Debbie talking. They were wondering what would happen next, but their words were slurred and they seemed not to be stressing out.

Daisy knew how to stay still and feign sleep. She did it many nights in the den so that she could keep a check on Papa, until he fell asleep. Ryan made coffee and the beta couple drank in silence while Daisy tried not to think about what the camp manager had said about her real father.

After a short time, maybe an hour, there was the sound of a vehicle pulling into the campsite and the flashing lights of the Sherriff’s patrol car.

Ryan and Debbie left their van. Daisy rose from the makeshift bed and slipped on her new clothes. She moved cautiously to the doorway and cracked it open a slither to see what was going on.

Many of the guests were arranged in a semi-circle around the picnic tables. The camp manager stepped forward and Daisy saw a man in uniform getting out of the patrol car. Before she could blink the cop opened the back door and the passenger side door swung back wildly. Daisy cringed as Christopher came out from the back of the car and her mouth dropped open as Alpha-Alexander stood at the opposite side of the vehicle looking like a storm cloud was resting over his head. Alexander and Christopher stormed up the path to where the manager and the Kwantens were standing.

Sherriff Macken ran to intercept them in their march toward the urban weres.

“Where is she?” Alexander bellowed.

Daisy was sure the earth shook and she slunk in behind the door, hiding her body.
“I’m sorry dude,” Ryan said to Alexander with his palms up in a calming sign, “We didn’t know she was your daughter.”

“She is not his kit. She is my daughter,” Christopher growled to correct them and stepped up next to Alexander.

Debbie took an involuntary step back in the face of the two enraged alphas.

“I want them arrested for kidnap, Macken, Now!” Alexander ordered.

The lawman moved to stand directly between Alexander and Ryan.

“Kidnap? Don’t take me for a yokel. You wild alphas might think you can intimidate us but we found Marcia wandering alone by the side of the road. A six year old feral kit found alone without an adult. We were fully entitled under the law to take her home with us.” Ryan countered.

Alexander swung his fist back and smacked it straight into Ryan’s nose, releasing an impressive spray of blood and downing the beta coyote.

Christopher caught the enraged alpha by one shoulder and Macken took Alexander by the other as they tried to prevent him from following up on the first punch. The manager and Debbie were kneeling on the ground checking on Ryan.

“Alpha-Star, I’m sorry but the coyote is correct they can’t be prosecuted as under the law they did the correct thing, socializing a lost feral kit. But I can reprimand them for not informing the local alpha.” Macken offered.

“Reprimand?” Alexander repeated sarcastically as he still strained against their hold.

Daisy couldn’t let her new friends, the kind Debbie and Ryan be punished for her mistake. She straightened her top and sucking in her top lip she emerged slowly from the trailer. Weaving between the tourists she reached the picnic table behind Kwantens.

“I’m sorry.” She said from behind the adults.

Christopher turned around and gave one of his half-smiles when he saw her. He left his hold on Alexander go and took one large step to pick Daisy up and hold her on his hip.

“Daisy, you had everyone so worried. Are you hurt baby?” Christopher asked her.

“No, ‘M not hurt,” Daisy said into Christopher’s jacket, “Wanna Papa.” Suddenly it was all too much for her six year old brain, and all she wanted was her Papa. Hot tears began to pool down her cheeks and wet Christopher’s shoulder.

“Her Papa? Her Momma?” Debbie said in shock. “We would never, never have taken her with us if we knew she had an omega mother. If we had known we would have found a way to get her back to her Papa. Why are you calling her Daisy?”

“Looks like Daisy was playing a very dangerous game of make believe.” Alexander said loudly and clearly enough that Daisy could hear him, “You coyotes, didn’t try and find out the truth did you?”

“No sir,” Ryan mumbled through his broken nose.

“Daisy, you are a foolish infant,” Alexander said to her.

Christopher tried to hush him, but Alexander turned Daisy’s head with his hand until she was facing
him. Daisy gulped but didn’t try and pull away from the tall alpha’s hold on her chin.

“You have no idea of the trouble you have caused, of where you could have ended up, never seeing the wild again, prevented from returning home, as such you are a very lucky kit. You have stuck a knife in your momma’s heart, child.” Alexander said without anger but in a firm voice keeping eye contact for every word. Daisy started to weep profoundly at that.

Christopher admonished him “Alexander, please she is only six.”

“Six is old enough to learn a lesson,” Alexander said ruefully. ”Daisy, I am truly happy you are safe. I want you to understand how dangerous what you did was.”

Daisy nodded sheepishly. She remembered Elise telling her that her Dad had been stolen from his pack when he was a kit.

Christopher carried Daisy back to the patrol car and sat in the back with her. She started to apologize again, but Christopher stroked her hair and told her it was okay.

The Sherriff told the Kwantens not to leave the campsite that a deputy would be with them in the morning to take their statements. Then Macken drove the foxes straight to the parking barn at the rear of the home den.

Alexander said nothing during the journey, but Daisy could feel he was still angry with her. She kept her head under Christopher’s arm.

“Can’t,” Daisy murmured when Christopher tried to pull her out of the car.

“Come on now Daisy, you have to come home,” anger sounded in Christopher’s tone for the first time since they had found her.

“Scared,” Daisy said and looked down at the upholstery of the car seat.

“What are you scared of? Everyone is going to be so happy you are home. Basil has been so sad without you, and your Papa is waiting for you.” Christopher tried to coax her out.

Daisy reluctantly shuffled along the seat and out. Christopher picked her up again and she was glad because part of her wanted to run away again. She was trembling with fear of facing Alpha-Jared.

Alexander thanked the policeman and offered the pack’s gratitude. Then he stalked up the hill in front of Christopher, his lingering rage evident in his movement. Daisy hid her face once more in Christopher’s shoulder.

When they reached the home den there was a few joyful cries welcoming her back and peeking over Christopher shoulder, Daisy could see Hunter, Hillie and Basil trailing them in their fox forms.

Christopher lifted her off his hip and planted her feet first in front of Jared at the eating table.

Daisy trembled with nerves and more tears slid down her cheeks as she waited for the Pack Alpha to speak.

Then a huge hand was wiping a tear from her jaw, “Go to the Omega Den, Daisy. Your papa is waiting for you.” That was all Jared had to say to her.

Daisy didn’t wait for any more, she took off as fast as her human legs could carry her, ignoring all the other foxes, and diving down the entrance tunnel of the O den.
Sebastian caught her as soon as she tumbled into the main room. She wrapped her arms around him and wept her apologies.


“No Momma, I’m sorry, I missed you, sorry momma.” Daisy repeated.

“You are safe now, baby, Papa will take care of you,” Sebastian cooed, “What made you leave me?”

“No Papa, papa, I didn’t. I don’t know. I was going to Val’s. I was angry and sad and I wanted to be away, but I’m sorry.”

“Shush, baby-girl. It is OK now, you are not going to run away again?”

“No not even if Devon says bad stuff. I won’t Papa.” Daisy promised.

“What did Devon say?” Bradley asked. Daisy looked up to see Bradley seated against the wall cradling his large stomach in the middle of the nesting blankets.

“He... uh... he said that my real Dad was eaten by Alpha-Gerald and Ian, and I said he was a liar and he said it was true, and I ran away, but then at the campsite, where the nice coyotes took me, the wolf guy he said it too, he said my Dad was killed cos he attacked a kit, but Momma, that isn’t true is it?” Daisy bit the inside of her cheek and waited for an answer.

Sebastian went very still. He held onto Daisy as an anchor. Bradley’s face paled in the lamplight.

Daisy felt time had gone syrupy, because no matter what stupid dumb Devon said, or some urban wolf, she knew that what her Papa said would be true.

“Your father, my mate, he loved the wrong person in the wrong way.” Sebastian said in a bland controlled tone. “He loved them in a very bad way that hurt them when they were a little kit. Gerald was the pack alpha and he decreed that Mark’s life was forfeit. Baby, I don’t remember much more, I was very ill. I nearly lost you then and now.” Sebastian’s voice trailed off and he hugged Daisy close.

Daisy let her Papa hold her and shifted to fox to snuggle in close. Sebastian shifted too. As she pressed into his side she knew that Devon and the campsite manager had not lied. Her papa had told her. Her real father had hurt a kit, and had been killed for it. He must have hurt them very badly, but it was still real confusing because Papa said that he had loved the kit. Daisy couldn’t understand why someone would be killed for love
This was what Jared gave up the Council Seat and representing his pack on the Fox council for. Lying in his nest, pretending to be asleep with seven little balls of fuzz curling around his human form. His decision to let Alexander take the public Pack Alpha duties had nothing to do with a sense of inadequacy because of his poor eyesight, no matter what Seth Green and Edward Collins said behind his back. The blurring of his distance sight meant he was unable even to take a patrol shift for his pack, but he really didn’t care. Not when it meant he could lie here with his sons and daughters listening into their childish chatter.

This was what he wanted, family and kits. It was what he thought his mate wanted too.

His guts twisted as he thought about what Jensen had said at the beginning of his pre-heat. He didn’t want more kits. He wanted to campaign on omega rights with Christian Kane. Omega Equality Now was finalizing their teenage omega rights program. The government education department and the OS had given tentative approval to including the unit in the Omega Home Education syllabus. Christian wanted an omega fully educated on the home schooling system to validate their material and oversee its introduction. He had asked Jensen who was extremely enthusiastic having taken all the units of the Omega Home Schooling as a teenager and having spent much of his years with the pack teaching the young kits in his canopy school. Misha was also demanding more of Jensen’s time as their WOT outreach website had been a greater success than expected. Urban omegas were now using their confidential advice service in addition to the wild and semi-wild weres. Matt had confided in his pack alpha that it was unlikely that Misha would bear kits again, and he was loathe to discourage his mate from throwing himself into WOT’s activities. Jared could honestly say that he would prefer it if Jensen let Misha bring some of the other WOT omegas in to help him and let Jensen take a back seat.

“Shush Hunter!” Hillary tried unsuccessfully to say quietly in the fox mind, “You’ll wake Daddy.” Jared was pulled back from his musing with the pleasant warm feeling of family.

“Hillie, won’t, Dada is sad, he wants Momma, I wants Momma.” Hunter poked his cold nose into his father’s hip leading Jared to wonder if Hunter knew he was faking sleep.

“Hunter shuddup, Papa is doing his omega thingy in their den. Daddy can’t go to him. Be a good baby and shuddup about it.” Alan growled at his younger brother.

“’M not a baby. I know things. Me and Basil knows lots of things you don’t, so there.” Hunter hissed back. Jared swallowed a laugh and wondered what Hunter thought he knew.

“Boys, be quiet. You woke Daddy.” Jennifer scolded and then knocked her forehead off Jared’s shoulder, “Daddy? Can me and Olly wash you like Papa, cos we’ve seen him doing it and we could do it, couldn’t we Olly? And I promise not to cut you with the sharp hair knife.” Jared made a mental note to ask James for a polished and varnished slice of the felled ash tree, so he could put up an extra high kit-proof shelf for his grooming equipment.

Jared opened his eyes, “Morning kits. How are my best kits today?” He was greeted by a chorus of morning greetings and snuggling kits.

“Girls, I am going to have a swim, so no need to wash me. Who wants to swim with me?”
Jared stood up and walked out of the nest. He stretched by the fire pit and grinned down at his seven babies who had followed him out like a line of ducks, coming to swim with their Daddy.

This was perfection.

The only possible improvement would be Jensen with his belly swollen with new kits.

Jared sighed. He took a quick dip in the lake, keeping some of his focus on his rollicking kits who were having some sort of tail splashing contest.

Jensen normally endured his heats in fox form, so this should be the final day. The last day that Jared could try and breed his mate until later in the year. His alpha fox wanted to charge into the omega den and drag his mate out by the tail and knot him at the omega den entrance, but the reasonable part of Jared’s mind was considering a plea to his mate.

It was a sundrenched morning. Most of the pack was at the eating table for breakfast, taking the air rather than eating in dens. The kits headed to the end of the table where Allyson and Katie were buttering raisin rolls and handing them out. Sebastian was beside Christopher with Daisy plastered to his side. Jared grabbed an apple and ducked into the new cabin before anyone could engage him in conversation. He found a pen and some thick art paper.

*Jensen-mate, please come out. My love, you know I want to have kits with you. Let me.*

Jared folded the paper and walked up to the omega den entrance. He heard someone following him up the path and turned to see Colin bearing a jug and a plate of rolls.

“Good Morning Alpha.” Colin nodded.

“Good morning Colin. How are you?” Jared asked.

“Well today, thank you. Still a little sick in the mornings, the rolls are for Brad and Jensen. Bradley’s lower back ache kept him awake. The little terror is pressing on his spine. I am hoping he will get a nap if I stay with Jensen.” Colin explained as he drew level with Jared.

“Would you pass this to Jensen?” Jared handed over the note and settled down against the side of the den to wait.

Jared could feel Jensen’s heat through their mating bond. It had rolled and called to him for the last few days. Jared had pushed it down with vehemence during the search for Daisy. He had ignored it as much as he could but sitting there waiting he let his hand rise to wipe his brow. Why couldn’t Jensen comply with his wishes?

Jared heard a throat being cleared and turned to see Colin sticking his head out of the den.

“Ahem, Jared, would you ask Alexander to come up to us when he gets back from patrol? And ahem... Jensen... Jensenwillbeout tomorrow.” Colin reeled off quickly and ducked back inside the den.

Jared kicked dirt over the fire pit. He huffed in frustration and stalked away from the den.

Back at the new cabin he was approached by Katie and Rosie, who wanted to send small gifts of gratitude to those who assisted in the search for Daisy. Jared approved and suggested Daisy be involved to help her realize the disruption her disappearance had caused. Approving the betas’ well thought out and considered choices for the volunteers, Jared noticed Alexander pouring a tall mug of
coffee and taking it to the easy chair by the cooking range. He excused himself and getting his own mug he flopped down on the chair beside his second.

“I’m meant to tell you that your mates are looking for you.” Jared said lifting his mug in a toast-like gesture.

“I know. I felt them. Once I have caffeinated up, I’ll investigate. Bradley probably wants his back rubbed.” Alexander sighed.

“Come on, you love it. Two needy pregnant mates to keep you on your toes?” Jared teased trying to keep any sign of his envy hidden.

“Yeah,” Alexander sighed and drained his mug, “No rest for the wicked alpha. You want me to ask my boys how the vixen is doing?”

“Don’t bother, it is fine. He will be out tomorrow. Back to normal.” Jared couldn’t keep the bitterness from his tone.

Alexander stood and squeezed his alpha’s shoulder, narrowing his eyes. “It’s not my place to ask, but is everything alright?”

“Fine” Jared said tight lipped.

“OK. If you change your mind about that, you know where I am.” Alexander offered before heading out.

The rest of the day kept Jared busy. Farmer Nugent and his son arrived to finalize the arrangements regarding the goats. Sherriff Macken turned up during midday meal to dot i’s and cross t’s on his report, which involved interviewing Sebastian and Daisy in Jared and Christopher’s presence. The sheriff kept it brief. Daisy confirmed that Debbie and Ryan had not harmed her. The sheriff gave her a few choice words he had used with urban kits who had done disappearing acts. Sebastian and Daisy both shifted to fox and took off into the woods afterwards.

No sooner was the Sherriff gone when Felix wanted to know if Jared had thought any more about his request to visit his Accola cousins, and incidentally search for a mate. Jared hadn’t made any decision and pleaded wanting to discuss it with his vixen. He knew the teenager was frustrated. He had gone to the summer mating/introduction camps the previous two years and come back unsatisfied and frustrated. Perhaps it would be good for him to spend this summer at an Accola village.

Amber turned up complaining that her daughter Faith had been feeling excluded by Jade and Justine. By then Jared’s patience was wearing thin and he had to apologize for snapping at Amber for bringing this to him rather than his mate. Amber pointed out that Jensen was in heat, Bradley was about to pop, Colin was puking his guts out and trying to care for the other two omegas, and the pack third-mate Katie was Jade and Justine’s mother. Jared promised speak to Oliver, offering a second apology in the face of Amber’s wrath.

Pleading silently for a moment’s peace, Jared pinched the bridge of his nose under his glasses when he saw his mother coming.

“The audacity! The gall! The impudence! You couldn’t even ask me yourself.” Sherry spat at him.

“Calm down Mother.” Jared said wearily, “Who has offended you now?”

“That urban doctor you allowed to become pack. Trying to rub my nose in my shame.”
“What did Matt say to you?” Jared asked in a defeated tone, because he knew his mother was going to tell him no matter what he said.

“He wants me present when Bradley gives birth.”

“What?” Jared asked in surprise.

“You didn’t know?” Sherry raised her eyebrows in disbelief.

“Why?” Jared demanded, “What does he want you there for?”

“Bradley’s kit hasn’t shifted to fox. Her head is engaged and her body in position but she is in human form. Seems I’m the only fox he knows who gave birth to a human baby.” Sherry had an expression on her face as if she had stepped in a pile of goat crap.

“Matt did ask Alexander if he would bring Bradley down to the clinic when his contractions started. He said the baby was large and he wanted to be sure of a safe delivery.” Jared informed his mother.

“Well, large is one way to describe it. The kit could still shift.” Sherry shrugged her shoulders.

“Are you going to refuse Mother?” Jared asked in an icy tone.

“No Jared. I know you might not hold a high opinion of me, but I would never deny aid to a fellow packmate. The doctor claims he birthed a normal during his training and he assisted that normal in the village after she had birthed her son last year.” Sherry sat beside her son on the ground tucking her hands under her knees and looked into the trees.

“Neither of those were omega mothers were they?” Jared asked.

“No.” Sherry said quietly.

“Will the baby rip him apart?” Jared whispered.

“No Jay. That won’t happen. But there could be complications for Bradley and the kit. You saw how Sebastian was after his first litter. The second and third kits came together. It was an uncommon complication and Sebastian lost a lot of blood, but Matt was able for the situation. It will be better if Bradley goes to the clinic, especially if the doctor’s idea doesn’t work.”

“What idea?” Jared asked his mother who seemed willing to be reasonable.

“For Alexander to command the baby to shift. It has to be timed for before the child is stressed by the delivery but late enough for a shift back to human form to be unlikely.” Sherry glanced up at Jared, “Your father was busy, you know, with some envoy from Beaver. By the time he arrived to try and command you to shift my contractions were only minutes apart.”

Jared caught his mother’s fingers and gave them a squeeze. He might never be able to forgive her but he acknowledged that things were not easy for her.

Then she had to go and spoil the moment.

“There is talk in the pack. You sent the vixen to the O den for his heat. Any fox would think you didn’t want to breed him anymore.” Sherry poked his emotions with a stick.

“Mother!” Jared exclaimed exasperated

“Just saying, if there is an issue, a nice pretty beta could still give you another couple of young ones.”
“Mother, honestly, you are flogging a dead horse. Leave it.” Jared growled and Sherry moved away.

He would never take a beta mate. Their current difficulties hadn’t changed his opinion. If seven kits was all he would ever have, Jared would not be content, but Jensen was his only mate, his true mate. Perhaps if he let Jensen spend the summer working with Kane on the Omega stuff, and helping Misha, then he could convince him to let him knot him during his late summer heat. He wouldn’t begin to show until late fall and by then all the omega stuff could be handed over to other campaigners. The alpha-fox inside him rebelled at the notion of waiting, while the heat was still scorching their bond. Jared found himself leaving his sunny spot and sitting outside the omega den again, without remembering how he got there.

Feeling more himself, but with a lolling dry tongue and a sticky ass and hind legs, Jensen woke from his heat the following morning.

He sighed with relief and shifted to human. Stretching his tight muscles, he saw the dish of water and flannels that Colin had left for him the previous evening, before heading home to his alpha-mate and Elise. Making a quick job of cleaning himself, Jensen slipped on one of the spare omega pants and plain shift tops. He gave a quirky smile thinking of finding Jared and planting a kiss on one of his alpha’s dimples.

Bradley was half awake in the main room. Jensen stopped to check on him. The other omega said he was going to sleep on for a while longer. Jensen looked at his straining bump, and wondered how long more Bradley could carry the kit.

Taking deep gulps of the fresh air, Jensen smelled the rare breakfast treat of frying bacon. He salivated in anticipation of warm bacon and butter rolls and a big mug of fresh coffee.

He took a moment to sense check on his kits, who he discovered were all still sleeping except Cissy who was outside Tony’s den involved in some sort of play-pack game with Basil, Jade and Wesley. Jared was near or under the canopy, so Jensen headed in that direction, looking forward to seeing his mate and matching taste to the divine bacon smells.
Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a longer one after the last few short pieces. It also could be considered upsetting.... just saying....

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jared began to walk the short distance from his den to the eating table. It was another glorious late spring morning and he was sure the pack would want to eat outdoors.

He was surprised to see Matt walking towards him.

“Hello Matt. It is early to see you.”

“Good Morning Alpha. I came to check on Bradley before my shift at the clinic. I wanted to have a word with you about the situation.”

“My mother approached me yesterday.” Jared said unable to completely disguise his displeasure at his mother’s attitude and that Matt had not informed him first. “I would have preferred if you came to me first. I understand you have never lived in a pack but you need to bring these matters to me. I presume that you have kept Bradley’s alpha fully informed.”

“I apologize Jared. I should have known. Alexander is fully up to speed. I asked Sherry to come with the Stars to the clinic. The kit is still in human form.” Matt rubbed his jaw and continued, “Alpha I want to ask you to exclude Alexander from his patrol duties. I am convinced he can command his kit to shift, but he will need to do it at the perfect moment.”

“Is it possible that the kit is a normal?” Jared asked. He was not of the opinion that a normal would shame or disgrace his pack, but he knew others still held the old views.

“No, Jared. Normals are a beta complication. An omega’s body will spontaneously miscarry a normal. It is nature’s way of preserving the omega mother’s life. Betas can deliver a normal at home but an omega wouldn’t survive without intervention. The kit is stubborn, more likely she is an alpha, although she could just be comfortable in her human form. There are some rare disorders which can cause pre-natal form fixing, but I am hopeful her father’s command will work. When Alexander returns from patrol, would you pass on that he needs to start thinking of names for his new daughter. It will help if he uses the child’s name when he talks to her.”

Jared agreed and asked Matt if he would stay for breakfast.

Matt refused saying he was already running late for his first appointment. The doctor faced Jared before he turned back towards the goat field, “Misha is really pleased that Jensen will represent WOT with him at the Regional Omega Meeting in Charlotte.”

Jared nodded dumbly. What in the world? Jensen was planning on going to the Urban/Wild meeting? He had already committed to going? He ground his teeth together as he began to be seriously pissed off with Jensen’s life outside the pack. He felt excluded, that his mate was keeping
secrets from him. A headache began from the back of his skull.

He would feel better if he shaved and looked presentable for his pack. He retrieved the water dish and filled it at the lake, then went back to the den. He had presumed the kits had headed off to Oliver and Katie’s den, but when he got back he saw six of them bundled in his blankets. They were curled into each other, with no Momma or Dada in the den with them. He felt a wistful sense of guilt at his babies being alone. His mood was souring by the second.

He shaved in the smaller room, not to disturb the kits. Giving a final look at the pile of sleeping foxes, he left to find some breakfast.

His mood blackened further when he saw Jensen, looking great, well, vibrant and healthy with his post heat glow. His mate was under the canopy laughing, fucking laughing with Colin. He felt irrationally rejected and that they were laughing at his expense, when Colin unconsciously rested his hand on his belly at some remark of Jensen’s.

Jared turned on his heel and headed to find his mother and tell her he had approved her going to the clinic when Bradley’s labor began.

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Jensen felt good, relaxing into his calm post-heat body.

Colin was worried about Bradley but they shared a laugh at some of Elise’s latest ideas on how she was going to help with the new babies. Sebastian and Daisy were at the omega den with Bradley. Jensen was happy and relieved that the pair were taking comfort in each other. Colin told him that he overheard Sebastian telling Daisy that one day she would not be permitted to come into the den any longer. Colin raised an eyebrow in the unsaid presumption of Daisy being alpha. Daisy had come out with simple childish logic telling her omega mother that he would have to come out to her then. Jensen and Colin shared another burst of laughter at the simplification of alpha/omega dynamics.

Jensen thought he had sensed Jared approaching but when he finally looked around his alpha was not close by. He wished his heat had not come on him so suddenly, that he would have had time to thrash out waiting for more kits with Jared before the full force of it had hit him. He had wanted to explain why he was so invested in the omega rights campaign and what good work they were doing, he was also sorry that he had not been there to support his mate over the past few days.

Some of the pack began seating themselves at the eating table as Rosie, Allyson and Amber brought the breakfast rolls out of the cabin. Jensen rose and made his way to his customary place beside the top Pack Alpha seat. He settled down. Relaxing, he wondered if his kits would make an appearance or if he should bring some food to the den after he had eaten. His mouth watered at the smell of the bacon and warm bread.

Katie called a welcome back greeting to him as she approached with jugs of water and apple juice.

Christopher took his place with Pasha carrying the three baby kits. Jensen resolved to go over to them after the meal and check how they were doing after Daisy’s stunt.

His chest tightened in anticipation as he felt Jared get closer. There was a swirling tumult of troubled emotions coming from his mate.

Then Jared took his seat without a word or a gesture that he knew his mate was waiting for him.

Jensen grinned and looked up but Jared’s face was turned away speaking to someone else. Jensen raised his palm to rest it on his alpha’s knee. His smile died as Jared still did not acknowledge him.
Within seconds Jensen’s head was spinning. Jared had taken a bacon roll and put it on Jensen’s side of their place setting. Jensen wondered if his alpha had gotten some bad news or had a stressful morning and he could vaguely sense his mate had a headache. Jared seemed coiled with anger, which confused Jensen’s senses and introduced rawness to the pit of his stomach, a raw disappointment as his hopes of a warm welcome back and the lack of his expected body encompassing embrace. Jared halved the bacon roll with his knife. Jensen waited for Jared to tear off bite sized pieces, but instead using one hand to pick up both halves Jared dumped them onto Jensen’s lap.

Feelings of rejection and pain warred inside him. He blinked down at the gaping roll and the slithers of bacon that had spilled onto his canvas trousers. When he looked up, Jared was disappearing down the path to the lake with a roll in his hand and the rest of the pack was staring at him. Jensen bent his head and did Colin’s old favorite trick and retreated under the table.

What had just happened?

He picked a fragment of bacon rasher out of the roll and chewed on it. He was hungry despite the situation. He had barely eaten for days. He nibbled on the bread and tried to work out what had just happened.

Jared wasn’t stressed, or ill. Jared was enraged. He had just shamed Jensen, treating him without respect in front of his pack.

Emotions bubbled up inside. The pain of rejection stabbed his chest.

Was Jared truly angry with him for refusing him during his heat?

If he was, then why wouldn’t he talk to him about it?

When he had finally eaten the last morsel, Jensen eased himself out from under the wooden slats and stood up. Only James and Tony were still seated, finishing mugs of coffee. Jensen approached the older beta and asked if he was due to go on a supply run soon.

Tony didn’t meet his eyes but responded, “As soon as we have eaten, James and I are heading to Lakeside. We are waiting for Rosie to give us her family requests.”

“Have you room for one more?” Jensen failed to keep the shake from his voice. His bottom lip trembled betraying his distress.

“Of course, Vixen. I thought you might want to relax today?”

“I have been laying down for days,” Jensen attempted to quip but his heart wasn’t in it.

Tony looked embarrassed and excused himself to seek Rosie.

Jensen headed for his den. He bit his lip at the entrance and steeled himself.

Jared was standing in their nest, folding the nesting blankets. “I sent the kits up to the Eccleston den.”

“Jay? What is going on?” Jensen whispered.

“What do you want to do with the nursing chair and the baby baskets? Do you think Alexander needs them?” Jared asked stonily focusing his eyes on the wall behind Jensen.

Jensen reached his arm out towards his mate, “Jay? Darling....”
“Do Not Jay-darling me, Jensen-mate. You think you have me twisted around your finger.” Jared raised his voice and Jensen cringed inside at the words and the volume. “Am I less of an alpha because of your sneaky scheming? Matt tells me you are going to Charlotte with Misha. Matt told me. Matt. Jensen?”

“What? I promised Misha I would ask you, but I knew you would say yes, Oscar and Daniel will be there and it is important...” Jensen stumbled to explain, wanting to tell Jared that he planned to talk to him about this before his heat hit.

“Knew I would say yes? Did you? I see.” Jared took a step towards him, the air was filled with the scent of an enraged alpha and Jensen took an involuntary step back towards the wall. Jared stood directly in his space and balled his canvas top in his fist pushing him against the wall. Jensen’s eyes widened in shock and disbelief. “Have I been too gentle with you Jen? Cherished you too much? That you can fucking defy me. Defy me in public, in our bed. Deny me my right to breed you as I wish.” Jared increased the pressure on Jensen’s sternum as the stretched cloth dug into his armpits.

“Please, please stop Jay.” Jensen begged, “I don’t know what to say, I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? What are you sorry for?” Jared pulled his hand back and waited for an answer.

“I’m sorry we didn’t talk about more kits, and that I didn’t tell you about the meeting.” Jensen said quickly.

Then Jared pushed him away forcefully with the heel of his hand. Jensen staggered and his face bashed into the corner of their shelves. His head jerked back against the force of smacking into the wood and hit the wall behind him. His cheek stung and burned. His eyes watered and he tasted the blood from where he had bitten down on his tongue. Something instinctive made him drop to his knees. He hung his head and waited, trying to remember to inhale and exhale.

“Wrong answer, Jensen-mate, wrong fucking answer.” Jared growled, “I should beat the right answer into you, and I am sorely tempted, but I can’t do it because every hit would be like laying into myself. Take a fucking time out. You can stay there until my alpha rage has gone down.”

Jared stalked out of the den.

Jensen was reeling. What had he done to upset Jared so much? He didn’t discuss every part of his omega rights work with Jared. Should he have? Would he have been interested? They hadn’t knotted on his heat since Hunter and Hillary were born, what made this heat so different? Jared had wanted him during his late January heat too, but had been reasonable when blocked.

Jared had pushed him. He had hurt him. Ice and fire, heartbroken and confused, Jensen rose and made his way over to their personal items. He had ordered him to take a time out. Jensen realized that he was disobeying and his gut twisted at the wrongness of not submitting to his alpha. He found his old canvas bag tucked in the corner and threw in a change of clothes and necessities.

Glad there was no sign of Jared or any of his kits when he emerged, Jensen made his way to the old barn and waited for James and Tony by the car.

“So Jensen, where do you need us to bring you?” James asked as they came to meet him. The beta’s eyes widened at Jensen’s marked face but he ducked his head to avoid the sight.

“The clinic.” Jensen replied as he threw his bag into the backseat and shuffled in next to it. James joined him in the back as Felix ran breathless down the hill.

“Needed an alpha with us as you are coming.” James explained, “Don’t mind Felix, do you?”
“No not at all James.” Jensen was relieved it was the teenager and not one of the mated alphas who might question his reasons for going into the town.

Felix took the seat next to Tony and spent the short journey asking if he could drive on the way back and planning what to buy his brother Bradley as a baby gift, which was his reason for joining the other foxes on the trip.

At the clinic, Tony asked if Jensen wanted them to wait for him, but Jensen said he would get Matt to drop him back later.

Carole, the receptionist, took a look at his red puffy cheek and asked him if he wanted to see the doctor, but Jensen told her he was fine and asked if Misha was in his home behind the clinic. Carole told him that Misha was on the net in the office at the back of the building.

Jensen hefted his bag over his shoulder and entered the office without knocking.

Misha was on Skype with Trent. He looked up and saw Jensen, then the marked cheek. He closed the window on the computer and leapt up. Pulling Jensen into the hug he had been waiting for all day, Misha rubbed his back, and asked what had happened.

“Jay…” Jensen began, “I don’t know, Mish, I don’t know what happened. I came out of our omega den this morning and he was... he was so angry, ferociously angry... at me.”

Misha pulled him down onto the other swivel chair and threw an arm around his shoulders. “Did he do this to you?” Misha asked as he tipped his finger against Jensen’s cheek with a feather-light touch.

Jensen gulped and nodded. “Don’t know, Mish, I don’t know. Why?”

Except, Jensen thought he did know. He had refused his alpha’s seed, which was a universal insult and as such had not been there to support him over the last few days. He had made plans without his permission. He had spent more time on omega issues, taking advantage of Jared’s presence at the den, to leave the kits for longer periods. It wasn’t that he never wanted kits again. Sebastian was in his late forties and still having kits. Jensen was only 32, there was plenty of time.

Misha continued to hold him. Jensen tried to calm himself. One of the nurses popped her head in and Misha asked her to fetch an ice pack, which he held to Jensen’s cheek until he was able to hold it there himself.

“So Jen?” Misha asked,

“Can I stay here tonight?” Jensen asked the floor.

“Yes.” Misha said simply and Jensen was happy not to be subjected to further questioning.

Misha pulled Jensen’s chair over next to his own and left a hand resting on his friend’s knee as he answered some e-mails and message board queries by typing with one hand. After a while Jensen began to read the messages and offer his own suggestions on replies.

There was an omega with three pups who had fled to his birth pack from a violent mate, and was seeking advice on how to plead their case with his old pack alpha. There was a teenage jackal in Chicago who was being worn down by his older alpha brothers to service them. Misha and Jensen decided to pass that one on to Rob at the Anubis’s pack. The last plea was a new one from Arizona where a middle aged omega who had survived his true mate’s passing was effectively homeless with his beta and alpha children wanting to put him in an OS home. Jensen e-mailed his details to Milo from Omega Equality Now and asked if they had any contacts in Arizona. He messaged the
widower back, asking if he had any means to be registered as independent or any extended family to take him in.

Valerie turned up after three, making them realize they had missed lunch having been so absorbed in with the help site.

Valerie did some of her ballet twirls for Jensen, flicking her brunette braids across her eyes and bringing a grin to their faces. Then she dragged Jensen by his hand to the house, with Misha trailing along behind.

They were regaled with an account of Valerie’s school day and her celebrity status as Daisy’s friend, while Misha heated up a pot of tomato soup.

“Have you homework?” Misha asked his daughter as they finished the soup.

“Little bit, Papa, but can I have the computer because Cousin Denise from Collins Farm and Arielle Accola are going to be online and I said I would chat with them if you said it was ok? Pretty Please.” Valerie overdid the batting eyelashes but Misha and Jensen found they were chuckling at her.

“Go on, Valerie pet, but only for an hour. Then I want you back here to begin your school work, so that it is all done by the time Daddy is finished in the clinic.”

Valerie skipped out of the room singing her thanks.

“Easily pleased,” Misha smiled. “If only things were so simple when you grow up. Hey Jen?”

Jensen nodded, still not ready to talk. He helped Misha clean up, enviously stacking their bowls into the dishwasher.

Misha made an interesting but rather vile cup of herbal tea for his friend, claiming it would soothe his nerves and help any bruising on his face.

“Tired.” Jensen managed to say when Misha flopped down next to him on the sofa.

“You want to nap before Matt comes home for dinner? I am making falafel so you can have some quiet time if you want?” Misha offered.

Jensen followed him to their spare room. His eyes watered at little as he took in that the room was decorated for a child. He grabbed Misha’s hand and squeezed.

“Might be a little dusty in here, I haven’t been able to think of re-decorating. Not yet anyway.” Misha said sadly but then shook himself like as if he was in fox form and had emerged from a swim, “Blankets and sheets in the cupboard, you can have Val’s old fairy pattern or the new teddy bear ones. You okay Jen love?”

“Yeah, Mish. Thanks. Thank you for...” Jensen huffed and gave a half smile as Misha retreated, nodding his understanding.

Jensen made up the bed with the soft old fairy set, feeling superstitious about using the new ones bought for much wanted future kits.

He lay on the bed for a while, letting his mind drift, he tried not to worry about his pack members, about Bradley and Sebastian. He deliberately blocked sensing Jared, not wanted to feel negative energy in their mating bond.
He was woken by soft knocking on the door. “Papa says if you don’t come now, you will have missed the best fallfallfall this side of the Atlantic Ocean.”

Jensen grinned at the kit and pulled himself up. He looked in the mirror above the dressing table and saw he had a scruffy red-blond beard starting. He took the few minutes to shave, wincing as he dragged the blade over his sore left cheek.

He felt he looked presentable when he appeared in the Cohen’s kitchen, but apparently not, as Matt pounced on him and subjected him to an examination of his cheekbone and the bump on the back of his head where it had smacked back into the wall. Seemingly having a nap was not the best thing to do with his minor head injury and Misha looked sheepish as Matt reminded him about the rules with suspected concussion. Jensen tried to reassure them that he was fine. The way he demolished three filled pitta breads taking bittersweet pleasure in fixing them himself the way he liked, seemed to placate Matt’s medical concern.

“I’m going up to the pack.” Matt announced, grabbing his keys from the coffee table.

Both omegas stared at him waiting for more information.

“Vixen, you are welcome to stay, but I need to tell Jared you are here. You understand?”

Jensen nodded.

“Also I am concerned about Bradley’s lower back ache, if it hasn’t eased I suspect he may be in slow labor. I reckon you would like some alone time with Misha-mate?”

“Thanks alpha,” Misha stood up to give Matt a peck on the cheek.

No sooner was Matt out the door when the phone rang. It was Trent, wondering why he had been cut off earlier in the day. Misha took the call, making excuses, while Jensen put on a pot of coffee.

Curling up on the sofa, Jensen and Misha reminisced about how they had met online ten years earlier. They talked about some of the other omegas they had chatted to on the message boards back then, some of whom they had lost touch with and others were now involved in omega campaigns.

Misha put on some background music and refused Valerie’s request for television, telling her to pick a book for him to read to her.

While Misha was putting Valerie to bed, the phone rang again. Jensen almost left it ring out, but remembering he was in a doctor’s home, he thought better and answered on Misha and Matt’s behalf.

“Jensen? Trent told me you were there. What is going on?” Christian demanded down the line.

“Hi Christian. I’m spending the night with my friend.” Jensen replied calmly.

“Bull. Shit.” Christian replied. “One; when did your alpha ever let you have a sleepover with Misha, and two; Trent said he could see your slap mark on the webcam this morning.”

“Look, Christian,” Jensen stared reasonably, “Jared and I had a fight. I’m good, just taking a night away from the pack.”


“I...” Jensen was tempted to lie or tell his pushy friend to mind his own business, “I don’t know.
Gods, Chris, I don’t know. I don’t know how to fix this, where I failed, what I did wrong.” Jensen sobbed quietly down the phone, while Christian apologized for upsetting him and Misha pulled the phone from his hand and took it into the hall to talk to the other omega.

Jensen found Misha’s box of tissues and cleaned himself up. He had pulled off his shoes and socks and curled up on the sofa when Misha came back in.

“Managed to persuade him not to drive that muscle car of his across the country to face off with your alpha.” Misha tossed the phone onto the side table and flopped down next to Jensen.

“Misha,” Jensen said deflated, “He hurt me.”

Misha scooted closer and took his friend’s hand in his, “Has he never disciplined you before, Jen?”

“Not like this, he has never attacked me, and the anger,” Jensen rubbed at his raw cheek, “Where is my Jared gone? The fox I curl up with at night. Do you know Mish that our pulses synchronize in the nest at night, our hearts beat together?” Tears welled up again.

“You know, Jen, that there are Alpha Omega matings, we have talked to some of them, where the omega mates live with daily beatings... “Misha began.

Jensen interrupted him, “We are trying to stop that. Has Matt ever?”

“Jen, you know what happens between mates is sacrosanct.”

“He hasn’t has he? Because you love each other,” Jensen bit his lip and continued, “I know Bradley and Colin have never been assaulted by Alexander. It is a myth that every Alpha/Omega mating has that dimension.”

“We are the exceptions,” Misha argued back calmly and logically. He shifted in the seat so that he was in lotus position facing Jensen’s curled up pose, “You know my Papa was subject to my Father’s discipline, that Percy left Rob unable to sit comfortably when he was here, you can’t tell me that you don’t suspect that Christopher uses his rights with Sebastian, and what about the bruises you told me that Oscar sported when you first met him?”

“Kenneth never hit Oscar.” Jensen shook his head.

Misha quirked an eyebrow of disbelief.

“Jay is entitled to hit me but he has never.... never...” Jensen closed his eyes.

Misha moved over and wrapped his arms around his best friend. “You want me to sing to you? In olden days, across the land, Under a moon, the foxes stand, In one dark...”

“Stop it,” Jensen laughed, “Stop that is cruel...”

The phone rang again.

It was Christian again. He said he was calling to say that Milo’s alpha Gianni would come with them to the meeting so that they could all go in Christian’s car. Jensen suspected he called to check on him but Misha didn’t pass the phone over only promising to inform Jensen of the development.

The CD of Misha’s weird world music finished but they stayed on the sofa in the silent room. Jensen
rested his head on Misha’s shoulder and his friend wrapped him up in his arms. After a while Jensen drifted off to sleep and Misha slipped out from under him. He got the fairy duvet and draped it around his sleeping form. When Matt arrived back, Misha put his fingers to his lips to warn him not to wake the pack vixen. Matt carefully gathered up the duvet and Jensen. With Misha holding the doors open they got him to bed. Misha put on the child lamp in the room and silently shut the door.

Matt poured two shots of rum from their seldom used alcohol store. He handed one to Misha and downed his own. “Jared is in fox form. Won’t talk to anyone. I told Oliver and Alexander where Jensen is.”

“How are things up there?” Misha asked taking a measured sip of the dark liquid.

“Tense, but everyone is going about their business. I spoke with Gerard before he went on patrol, he said Alexander and Colin sat at the top of the table for evening meal and glared at anyone who tried to mention the pack alpha and vixen. He seemed to give them his amused approval.”

“Bradley?”

“Humph. I’m worried Mish. I think I’m going to talk to Dr Jenkins in Lexington.”

“The Obgyn surgeon?” Misha gasped.

“The very man. He sees all types of emergency births. He could advise me, refresh my memory, and if I can’t cope... or haven’t the facility at the clinic... then Lexington will be prepared.” Matt poured another shot of rum for himself and tilted the bottle at his mate.

Misha shook his head in refusal, “But it is over an hour by road to Lexington.”

“We can air vac if necessary, but don’t stress out, I can feel your panic rising,” Matt moved over and placed a hand over Misha’s one that was resting on the kitchen counter. “These are contingency, worst case scenario plans.”

“I’m worried about having Alexander in the delivery room too, Matt. There is a reason we keep alpha mates out of the clinic, or why the omega den or a birthing den is used. Sorry,” Misha sighed and gave his mate a half smile, “preaching to the converted. I’m just worried.”

“My plan is that Sherry will be there, Colin, and you. I hope to offset the alpha pheromones. Colin can use the mating bond to try and keep him calm, and as soon as Stella shifts to fox, we will hustle Alexander out of there.”

“Stella? He named the kit after his omega mother?” Misha smiled softly thinking of the joy that news would bring to Stellan.

“Hey Misha, you are going dewy eyed on me.” Matt laughed gently and waved a hand in front of his mate’s face.

Misha batted his hand down. “What if Jen wants to stay another night?”

Misha bit his lip while he waited for Matt to answer.

“Jared knows where he is. I have no objection, pet. If Jensen wants to stay that is fine.” Matt bent down to caress Misha’s forehead with his lips.

“Thanks. He is important to me.”
“You think I don’t remember when he was missing? When you had me dragged around the state and trawling Rock Hill and questioning OS officials.”

Misha grinned impishly, “Maybe I should show you how grateful I am.”

“Ooh, I like the sound of that.” Matt dropped his almost empty glass into the sink and took his omega’s hand pulling him towards their bedroom. “What did you have planned?”

“Maybe cracking open that cinnamon spiced oil we ordered and once I have distributed it evenly over your fine alpha body I could remove it with my tongue.” Misha teased as they entered their own room and Matt shut the door softly behind them.

“Only if I get to reciprocate. Oil up your omega cock and suck it until you feed me your come, Mish, and then I’m gonna eat out your slick and rim you until you make the prettiest moans just for me.” Matt pulled his mate towards their bed.

Chapter End Notes

A/N I really hope that this chapter doesn't make anyone hate Jared. He isn't in a good place and has lashed out at the person closest to him. A plea not to condemn him until you have read more. (meanwhile author wants to cuddle Jensen-fox).
Chapter Seven

Oliver leaned around the tree and poked Alexander in the ribs, “Off you go Second.”

“He is your cousin and oldest friend, you should go Ollie.” The blond alpha tried again.

“Nope. Me pack third, You pack second, and it is your job to knock some sense into his thick skull.” Oliver pointed at his own chest and then at Alexander.

“Maybe we should seek reinforcements, somebody he would listen to?” Alexander took a slight step back but Oliver pushed him forward.

“What? You want to send an envoy to Fell for their Pack Alpha to come and intervene in a mating matter?”

“When you say it that way it sounds ridiculous.” Alexander put his shoulders back and prepared to approach his pack alpha who had been sitting upright in fox form on the flat rock by the lake for several hours. There was a ‘no approach’ zone around him and Alexander had to dig deep into his own innate pack alpha potential to breach it.

Alexander kept his focus on Jared-fox as he stepped over Devon-fox and Hillary-fox, who were gazing at their father from the grass six feet away.

“Jared” Alexander called to announce his approach.

Jared slowly turned his head so that Alexander could see the black marking on the side of his muzzle. Alexander shifted to his own fox form and sat next to his pack alpha, keeping his head slightly lower as a mark of their statuses.

“I hurt him” Jared thought to his Second. “Jensen. I was violent with him.”

“It is your right” Alexander thought back in a neutral frame of mind.

“Yes it is.”

They were silent for a while. Jared kept staring at the darkening lake. Alexander was aware of four more of the alpha’s kits joining their brothers and his heart ached for them.

“Jared” he tried again.

“Yes Alexander?”

“Are you going to stay here all night?”

Jared glared at him in the gloom.

“Only, should I send your kits away?” Alexander motioned with his head over to the line of little foxes.
Jared stretched his back and front paws. He touched Alexander’s head with his nose, “Good” he thought and Alexander presumed that meant thank you. The pack alpha jumped from the rock and walked to his kits.

“Where is Hunter?” he asked Devon.

“He is in the omega nest with Bradley. Daddy, he was very... lots... kept crying for Papa.” Devon answered.

Jared nodded, “Hillary, you go in and see if your twin will come out or if he wants to stay there tonight. Come on then, kits, you can sleep with me,” and he headed for his own den and the omega den above it, letting the kits follow him.

Alexander re-joined Oliver who was sitting on top of the eating table dangling his feet over the end. Stephen was at the table.

“Well done, son.” Stephen handed him a drink. “You got him off that frigging rock.”

“Yes, Father-in-law, but I don’t think I impacted his mood.”

“He has all his kits to work on him during the night.” Oliver offered optimistically. “He is a sucker for his children. Wait until we see what tomorrow brings. Maybe Jensen will come up with Matt in the morning.”

Alexander didn’t comment, but he doubted it. He left the other foxes once he had finished his cup of lethal grog. He collected Elise from Tony and Amber’s den and sent her into Bradley and Hunter with a clean jug of water and some sweet fruit crackers in case they wanted supper. When they got back to the den, Colin was asleep in fox form, and Alexander hadn’t the heart to wake him to shift. He stretched out on the blankets letting Elise-fox nuzzle at his hip. Although his fears for Bradley and Stella filled his mind, he spared a thought for Jared and wondered if there was anything he could do to help.

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The red lights of the radio alarm gleamed 2:00 am. Misha wondered what had woken him. He felt outwards, checking if Valerie was having a nightmare but his kit was sleeping peacefully.

“You awake Mish?” Matt was lying on his back with his hands under his head on his side of the bed.

“Yep, you too?” Misha turned on his other side to face him.

“I wonder if I should ask Doc Morrissey to hang around the clinic.” Matt pondered turning his head to look at his mate.

The old coyote had started Lakeside Medical Clinic as his private general practice and he still lived in the village, but was more likely to be found at his fishing cabin these days. In the early years of his retirement he had regularly checked in on Matt and his beta-wolf partners Drs Ben Kurtz and Linda Goldman, but finally deeming his former patients to be in good hands, he had taken to his retirement with renewed gusto.

“Won’t Ben or Linda be here?”

“Yes. They will but they have only assisted me in kit and pup births to beta mothers. None of them
have been at an omega birth. Doc Morrissey helped me sew up Sebastian when Daisy was born and he went up to the pack to aid Sherry the day after Jared was born. I think he will stick around the village for the next few days if I ask him.”

“Will it be that soon?” Misha poked a fingernail into the Velcro of his collar.

“I’m thinking that it will have to be. I need someone who can assist if it all goes...” Matt sighed and rubbed the back of his hand down his mate’s chest.

“Matt-mate you are preparing as much as you can. You make me fill with pride.”

Ignoring the praise the alpha continued “I could ask Jared and Alexander to send Bradley to Lexington Maternity Hospital for the end of his gestation, you know, he would be in the best place if there is a problem.”

“mmm hum.” Misha waited for Matt to explain why he hadn’t done that.

“I’ve been thinking too, that we could make an appointment to see Dr Jenkins. I’d like you to be under his care for when we try again…”

Misha made a gasping noise, “Don’t please, not tonight, I’m too raw emotionally... I can’t.”

Matt rubbed Misha’s cheek with his thumb pad, as if he was drying tears that had not fallen. “I’m sorry Mish. I just want you to know that if we are blessed again with kits or a kit, I will take you to Lexington. Jenkins wrote the book on Omega caesarians and I know he would take care of you.”

“But you are reluctant to send Bradley?” Misha asked changing the focus away from his own heartache.

“Yeah, there is a lot to be said for having your kit surrounded by your pack and with your mate, or mates in Bradley’s case, close by. Sending him to strangers in a clinical urban hospital could be more stressful.”

“And his mother and Felix’s mother died in maternity hospitals.” Misha added.

“Gosh, I had forgotten.” Matt gave a slight head shake at his own poor memory, “that decides it. Lexington is a last resort, and I had better let Felix and Stephen come to the clinic too. Thanks, Mish, I always am able to think more clearly when we talk things through.”

“My powers are still awesome at Ass O’clock in the morning, hey?”

“You know they are.” Matt turned to take a deep lingering kiss.

“If only all mates talked rather than relying on their bond to do their communicating.”

“Huh? Are you talking about the alpha and vixen? Do you think that is their problem?” Matt asked interested and more awake at this new insight.

“Ahem, yeah, kind of. You know Colin and I have been talking a lot since... since Fell Creek,” Misha’s voice faltered a bit and Matt moved his arm so he could gently tease the back of his mate’s neck with his finger tips, “so Colin was sort of excluded by Bradley and Alexander’s true mate bond, not that they meant to do that, but you know the way it works, they way we can sense each other’s emotions, fears, pain, joy... but things have changed now and they all talk about what is going on with each other and it is working for them.”
“Mmm, but Jared and Jensen are true mates?”

“Yes,” Misha propped himself up on one elbow to expound his theory more clearly, “You see, I think and Colin too, though we haven’t talked much about Jen and Jared, that they totally feel each other’s concern. They communicate through the mating bond like we do, and offer comfort, solace and support to each other when they sense it is needed, like we do, but they don’t talk to one another anymore.”

“You can’t know that Mish, you don’t know what goes on in their den.”

“I can suspect.” Misha countered, “Even at the start, you know years ago Jen felt isolated because Jared talked things over with Oliver and then with Ian. That was the time when Jen was still learning the pack ways and could barely speak the old language, but they didn’t share everything verbally like most new mates do. It changed later and I think they used to tell each other all their worries, but since Fell Creek, maybe before it, they are keeping shit to themselves, probably in a twisted attempt not to worry each other.” Misha sighed.

“And Jared is jealous of your bond with his mate.” Matt added.

“What!” Misha exclaimed.

“Come on, darling, you should have understood that with your amazing and awesome powers.” Matt teased keeping it light.

“Are you jealous?” Misha whispered and bit his lip.

“Sometimes. I know it is Jensen you sing about with all those green-eye lyrics, but it is my bed you warm and it is ok to have someone else as your best friend. I can be your second best friend and only mate.” Matt spoke lightly but Misha could sense the deep buried ache that his alpha knew that some proportion of his well of love and devotion went to Jensen, rather than to Matt or Valerie. He leaned over and nipped at Matt’s lips, ghosting the word thank you into his mate’s mouth.

“It took me some time to come to terms with, babe, watching you spend hours online with him, while I was trying to establish our life here. But as I mentioned earlier, when you lost your mind when he was missing, I knew I couldn’t be petty about it. Love comes in many forms as my omega Granny used to say.” Matt paused and let Misha press in against his side. “You know, I guess now that we are thinking about it, that over time Jared has simply presumed that Jensen would not want to burdened with petty pack concerns or some of the larger political decisions he was involved in. He probably only brings to his attention the pack business that needs the vixen input.”

“Yeah,” Misha huffed at a memory, “Jensen showed me one of Oscar’s letters once before Kenneth passed on. Normally he didn’t but I think he wanted to share how different O’s life was to the ones people imagined him living. It was a short one all about how he had spent all the previous night in Kenneth’s nest talking about the new publishing house that was taking their paper and discussing recruitment at the mill. He finished the letter saying that an alpha was taking him to the city to go shopping. You know, I think Jensen wasn’t giving me the letter so I would be surprised at Oscar speaking or that he was allowed to go shopping. Now I think that Jensen was shocked that Oscar and Kenneth had discussed the mill business together and that Oscar was allowed to leave the pack without his mate.”

“Yeah, you could be right. We discuss clinic business all the time.”

“Remind me in the morning to tell you about the new anti-bac soap dispensers... Even if we can see these things, how do we get Jen and Jared to see it? It is not all Jared either,” Misha was pained to
admit, “I have noticed since we really got deep into the campaign, Jen has made the presumption that as an alpha, Jared would be disinterested in omega problems and be dismissive of them, except for the broad scale WOT issues. Hold on back up, I have said that too strongly. More that Jared was swamped with all the council business, and pack concerns, and that led to Jensen not discussing the details of our campaign with him. It wouldn’t even occur to him to tell Jared about the three omegas we helped today, but if Jensen had returned home this afternoon distressed by dealing with those in need, Jared would have been there to hold him and comfort him.”

“Pretty heavy talk for Ass O’clock, hey? What do we do? Maybe I can talk to Ian or Oliver or Alexander. Jared listens to them.”

“I suppose Jen listens to me and Bradley, Colin and to a lesser extent Sebastian and Christian. He’d listen to Daniel or Oscar. But what would we say?”

“I don’t know Mish. Communication is the foundation of a strong healthy mating bond. If they are not communicating, it is difficult to fix anything.”

Misha sighed and rubbed his collar.

“Hey pet? Let’s go to sleep. There will be enough time in the morning for that day’s problems.” Matt curved his arms around his true mate and pulled him closer, letting comfort flow through their bond and burying his own concerns and worries for a while.

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Morning brought its own problems in the shape of a determined pack alpha banging on the French windows of the Cohens’ living room.

“Jensen. Jensen come out here I want to talk to you.” Jared commanded from outside the glass, stretching back his shoulders from the stiffness having run from the den in fox form.

Jensen emerged from the spare bedroom, bleary eyed and with a pair of Misha’s old yoga pants slung low on his hips. He looked up at his naked mate and numbly made his way over to let him in. Matt with a towel wrapped around his waist and dripping from his interrupted shower dodged in front of him and opened the door.

“Alpha,” the doctor acknowledged, bowing his head, “I ask for your consideration of my mate and my kit’s presence. Please come in. If you want me to drive you home soon, I will be going up to Bradley once I have breakfasted.”

“Matt.” Jared said simply and stepped inside. He glared at Jensen, who did the only thing he could think of and sank to his knees bending his head to the ground.

“Right. I will get dressed. Give you two a moment.” Matt backed out of the room, needing to keep Valerie and Misha out of their living room.

Jared took three long strides and stood over his mate. After a second he tapped him on the shoulder and Jensen looked up, his face a mess of emotions.

“Are you coming home Jensen-mate?”

Jensen shook his head.
Jared punched his fist into the arm of the sofa. Jensen flinched.

“Rejecting me again.” There was bitterness in Jared’s tone.

“I don’t know if I can trust you at the moment.” Jensen forced the words out fearful of enraging his alpha.

“I am not the one who was keeping secrets.”

“I didn’t mean to. I was going to talk to you, but everything got in the way, and I am sorry, Jay, I am. Can’t we try?”

“Jensen.” Jared sounded frustrated rather than angry and he sat on the arm of the sofa he had punched so that his toes tipped the knees of his kneeling omega, “Would it be easier if I was the sort of alpha who would slap you and confine you to the den?”

Jensen looked horrified.

“I don’t want to do that to you, Jen. That is why I am so… freaking angry that others knew your plans before me and you didn’t explain to me why you won’t take my seed.” Jared pushed his hair back with one hand.

“Would telling you why don’t want to be pregnant make a difference?” Jensen asked keeping his tone even.

“No.” Jared shook his head. “No, Jensen, I want more kits but we have more to our mating than my wants over-riding yours.”

“So come July, will you still want to breed me, even if I want to go to the omega den again?” Jensen bit his bottom lip waiting for the answer.

“Yes. But Jensen-mate, I am not an animal. Make me understand why I shouldn’t want it. Convince me.” Jared pleaded in a conciliatory tone.

“I shouldn’t have to convince you Jay! It is my body, my life!” Jensen snapped.

“No Jen. It isn’t. You are mine.” Jared let a growl escape.

“What?” Jensen’s mouth remained open. “Gods and Ancestors be damned, Jared!”

“Mine. I let you be involved in WOT. I let you join the omega campaigns. I let you teach. I let you defy me during your heat. You are my omega.” Jared had stood up towering over his kneeling mate.

“Fuck you.” Jensen spat up at him. “Fuck off Jared. If this was an effort to make me come home, you have gone about it in the worse possible way. Have a think Jay. Who am I to you? Am I your possession or your mate? Because it is only as your mate I will be coming back with you.”

“Jen?”

“Don’t. Don’t Jen me. I am going to get dressed. Don’t be here when I come back out.” Jensen stood on his trembling legs and made his way to the bedroom. He could feel Jared’s glare on his back as he moved. He was grateful that Misha was there to catch him when he collapsed behind the spare bedroom door.

A moment later there was a knock on the door. “I can’t talk to him.” Jensen muttered into Misha’s neck. He could sense that Jared hadn’t left yet.
“It is Matt. Please open the door.”

“I'll see what he wants.” Misha offered and lowered his friend to sit on the bed.

Misha cracked the door open.

“He hasn’t eaten or slept since yesterday morning. I checked him, he doesn’t have a fever. None of the other foxes can console him.”

Jensen looked up. Misha was coming back with a quivering whimpering ball of fur.

“Oh Gods!” Jensen wept, “Hunter baby. Come on.” He took his son out of Misha’s hands. The kit was chilled and shaking as if he had been refrigerated. “Momma’s here now, baby, come on my little kit.” Jensen cradled his baby kit against his chest sobbing into his fur.

“Momma? 'm cold. You were gone away.”

“It’s alright my Hunter. You are so brave. Did Dada bring you with him?” Jensen rubbed his hands through the little kit’s coat warming him up and trying to comfort him.

“In his mouth, but he was all wrong like the blue stuff on old bread. Momma, don’t cry, it will be alright,” Hunter moved up his body and dug his nose under Jensen’s chin, the cold wetness dripping onto the edge of the green collar. Jensen stroked the kit’s flank but couldn’t find the words to agree with him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all your comments. Some are angry with Jared, some are blaming Jensen, but they are both hurting.

So cuddles for both of them (and Misha and Hunter).
Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in twelve hours! I did sleep between postings. This was ready to go, so before I head out the door to RL work, I'm putting it up.

Warning: Medical Trauma. Birth Scene.

More hugs needed by the end of this one...

Jensen and Hunter spent the sun-kissed morning in Misha’s small garden in their fox forms. Jensen had to nudge his kit away from relieving himself in Misha’s spinach and salad leaves. He was amused as Hunter smelled every flower and herb coming back to proclaim that the lavender didn’t smell like Lavender fox and that the lilies were not like Lilly and Daisy didn’t look like a daisy.

“Does Unca Mish grow Basil?” Hunter asked as they lazed under the kitchen window.

Jensen licked the inside of his son’s ears, giving them a good clean. “No baby, but there is some in the kitchen, dried leaves.”

“Can I smell it? Wanna see if it is like Baz.”

“Yes you can, but it won’t smell like your friend.”

Hunter did his best pout face in fox form and Jensen felt the tightness in his chest relieve slightly.

“Jensen!” Misha burst out into the garden.

Jensen carefully dislodged Hunter and stood on all four paws.

“Matt called. He is on his way back with Bradley and his mates! Come with me. We need to... I don’t really know... we need to be in the delivery room.”

Jensen shifted. He could feel the sudden rush of adrenalin and he linked into the pack’s anxiety. Leaving Hunter in a nest basket at reception with Carole, Misha showed Jensen how to scrub up. Then they stood inside the glass doors of the clinic.

Doc Morrissey burst in looking weather-beaten with his windswept shock of white hair, crumpled tweet suit and battered leather medical case. Before Nurse Cindy and Misha had finished greeting him, two cars screeched into the parking lot. Felix, Sherry, Elise and Stephen emerged from the pack car. Matt jumped out of his car and went around to the other side to give assistance to Colin and Alexander in getting Bradley out as comfortable as possible. Cindy dashed out with a wheelchair and they helped Bradley seat himself.

When they got into reception Doc Morrissey bent over the pregnant omega, “Bradley and Colin, the last time I saw you two jokers was when your Dads brought you down to me after your first heats for a checkup. Here you are still causing trouble.” The old coyote patted Colin on the shoulder and smiled down at Bradley.
“Hi Doc,” Colin said shyly, “This is our alpha, Alexander Star.”

The doctor stood straight to shake Alexander’s hand. “A brave alpha to take both of them on.”

“I wouldn’t trade them for the world.” Alexander said with a challenge in his voice to the way the old man had been so presumptuous with his omegas.

“I am sure you would not. Now how far along is mother?”

“Twenty minutes between contractions, water hasn’t broken, kit is still human.” Matt announced as he came in and took the handles of the wheelchair moving down the corridor. He stopped outside the delivery room. “Rules. Attention people. No one in here who is not scrubbed up. Cindy will show you next door. Alpha only until you have done your mojo, then out! Elise, we need you to take care of Hunter and tell Valerie what is happening when she gets home.”

“I want to come in with Papa.” Elise objected.

“Now baby, you know that it is real important that someone stay with Hunter, and that someone from the pack is outside the room, and Daddy will be kicked out soon and you will need to take care of him.” Colin reasoned with her.

She smiled and reached for Alexander who bent down to her. She planted a kiss on his cheek and told him she would be waiting for him.

“Hey sweetheart, don’t I get a kiss too?” Bradley teased.

“Papa.” Elise said simply as she ran over to the door and gave Bradley a kiss on the cheek.

Matt had Misha and Jensen help him get Bradley into a gown and up onto the hospital bed. The doctor got a fetal heart monitor on him and set up an IV.

“Hah! This is not like the last time.” Bradley huffed, “In the omega den with Sebastian muttering curses in French and the two of you reminding me to breathe as Elise swam out after a few good long pushes.”

Once Bradley was as comfortable as he could be, Colin and Alexander appeared with the others. Bradley gritted his teeth and winced through a new contraction.

“Now son, Matt and I are going to have a look at how dilated you are. If we are having a human baby you’ll need an extra few centimeters.” Doc Morrissey said calmly.

“Two and a half centimeters.” Matt announced, “Doing good Bradley. We are only at the beginning.”

As the day progressed Bradley slowly moved to four centimeters. Misha ducked back into his house and returned with an aromatherapy oil burner. Matt rolled his eyes but didn’t object to the fragrances of lavender and frankincense.

Bradley complained of boredom between his pains. Cindy asked if he would like to change positions, which led to a time of kneeling on the bed and then copying Misha’s yoga position and sitting on the floor leaning against the wall.

Apologizing for being grouchy, Bradley complained that he had too big an audience.

Felix and Stephen went for lunch. Jensen fed Hunter his lunch. Hunter shifted to human and Misha
dug out an old soft pants and a green t-shirt of Valerie’s for him. Misha took Valerie and Elise to the diner for milkshakes. They tried to bring lunch in to the Stars but in the end only Bradley nibbled at the soft egg and cheese sandwiches and sipped a little of the iced tea that Alexander passed him silently with worry etched on his face.

Felix and Stephen came back and checked in, then took Matt up on his offer of using his coffee machine back in the kitchen. Sherry spent much of the day at reception talking to the waiting patients. Matt was called out a few times to tend to other clients. Only Colin, Alexander and Doc Morrissey never left the room.

By mid afternoon Alexander was called upon to give his tiring mate a back massage. Cindy provided a bottle of vitamin E oil and Bradley sat astride a chair facing over the back. His eyes dropped and he dozed for moments before opening his heavy lids and saying he thought he should get back on the bed. It was just gone 4pm, and as Alexander and Colin helped him to stand Bradley’s waters broke.

Doc Morrissey called for Matt.

Matt burst through the door and sprang into action, prompting the other doctor to assist him.

They propped Bradley up on pillows. Colin took his hand and squeezed. Jensen took over from Misha with cold cloths for Bradley’s forehead.

Matt called Alexander over and positioned him so that he was speaking directly over the lower region of the bump. Matt nodded.

“Stella.” Alexander started and paused as if overwhelmed.

“Alex come on do it.” Bradley urged with gritted teeth.

“You can do it, Alex-mate.” Colin said simultaneously.

“Stella. Shift to fox.” Alexander commanded.

They waited a second. “Anything?” Colin asked Bradley.

“No, feels the same.” Bradley grimaced as a new contraction started.

“Stella, daughter, you need to change to fox for your Momma.” Alexander tried again. “Come on Stella-baby, shift to fox. Please shift.”

Everyone held their breath.

Matt examined Bradley’s stomach as Doc Morrissey went to the door.

Matt shook his head.

Doc Morrissey called the others in.

Alexander pleaded again with his unborn daughter.

“Alexander, It didn’t work.” Matt said calmly.

“I can try again.” Alexander pleaded his pupils dilated with disbelief.

“It is too late, son.” Stephen said gravely from behind him.
Matt pushed between Alexander and Bradley to check on his patient. Stephen and Doc Morrissey started to pull Alexander away.

“Wait!” Jensen stood from where he had been leaning against the wall, “What if Alexander touched Bradley? Would that help... and what if all three mates ask her to shift?”

“Try please, please.” Bradley sobbed. Colin grabbed Alexander’s arm and they both moved closer.

Alexander put the palms of his hands on Bradley’s stomach as Colin put his other hand on Bradley’s bicep. “Together?” Alexander took a deep breath.

“Stella, shift,” all three said in unison.

Bradley’s stomach quivered and he let out a hissing sound.

Matt pushed Colin and Alexander out of the way and beamed at Bradley. “It is working. Look at your belly, Bradley, she is moving. Thank the Gods.”

Bradley hissed again in pain this time.

Alexander growled and tried to push back in. Then Doc Morrissey, Felix and Stephen were dragging him out of the room. A weird high pitched keening noise came from his throat and his eyes turned fox amber. Jensen had never seen a fox in partial shift but the claws at the end of Alexander’s fingers as they gouged the plaster on the walls proved it was not a myth.

As soon as Alexander was outside and banging on the door to be let back in, Matt rang the reception desk and asked for help to get him down to the waiting room.

A few moments later the banging stopped. Jensen looked at Bradley’s flushed countenance.

“Jen, I don’t think I can do this.” He cried.

“You can Bradley. We are all here for you.” Jensen rested his hand on Bradley’s hair. “You ready to shift?”

“Sorry Vixen,” Doc Morrissey, “It is too late in the game for Omega Star to shift. We are doing this with mother in human form. Listen Bradley, I’ve done this before. Lots of betas give birth in human form, and now that your kit has shifted it should be smooth sailing.”

“You just squeeze my hand when you need.” Colin’s voice was full of new hope that their baby daughter would be with them soon.

Sherry moved up to the other side of the bed. Jensen hadn’t noticed her coming in.

“I am so happy it worked for you. Remember to breathe through your contractions.” Sherry advised calmly.

“OK Bradley. We are now in active labor, so things are going to hot up.” Matt smiled up from the end of the bed.

Matt was correct as Bradley’s contractions got more frequent and more powerful. Jensen’s knees gave way at one point as Bradley screamed through a particularly bad one, he didn’t remember any other births being like this, but as Misha pulled him back and sat him on a chair against the far wall he explained that despite what the old coyote said to Bradley, Stella’s late shift still meant things weren’t as straightforward as normal. Jensen put his head between his knees to gather himself
together, to be strong for Bradley. He pulled the older doctor aside and asked if there was any pain medication they could give the other omega. The coyote explained that omega births are normally so clear cut that there was no approved pain meds for this situation, however they would give Bradley oxygen if he became distressed. Jensen wondered what constituted a distressed state.

“Good Boy, Bradley, coming along nicely, a few good pushes and Stella will be with us.” Matt encouraged.

Tears mingled with perspiration were pouring down Bradley’s face and he began growling that he was going to cut Alexander’s knot off. Colin tried to soothe him but got told he hadn’t a clue what he was talking about. Misha got his shoulder slapped when he tried to tell him to calm down. As another wave of contractions rolled over the omega, Colin broke away stumbling over to Jensen who grabbed him in a hug.

“I just need a minute.” Colin sobbed, “Thought it would be easy from the shift.”

“I know,” Jensen comforted rubbing circles into the smaller fox’s back.

They turned back to see Bradley twitch his lips as if to smile at them.

The answering smile died on Jensen’s lips as Bradley’s eyelids fluttered and his eyes rolled back in his head. Then Bradley’s body went rigid.

Matt leaped up from where he had been kneeling between Bradley’s legs.

“Eclampsic seizure.” Doc Morrissey barked, and moved deceptively fast for an old guy to slam his hand into a panic button on the wall.

Cindy and Doctor Goldman appeared in the room as Bradley’s body was racked with convulsions. Misha was at his head and tilted it back so that Bradley wouldn’t bite or swallow his tongue.

“Where is Ben?” Matt asked as he took a vial from the medical cabinet and filled a syringe.

“Outside, his alpha is seizing.” Cindy informed them as she rolled oxygen over to the bed.

Jensen was frozen as he watched the team work. Misha was pushed aside and came to link his arm.

The convulsions stopped as Matt injected the solution into Bradley’s arm. Bradley’s head lolled to the side. Cindy opened his mouth to check for injury then she strapped the oxygen mask around his head.

Doc Morrissey pulled back Bradley’s eyelids and shone a light into his eyes, “Loss of consciousness. You use magnesium sulphate to stop the seizures?” He asked Matt.

“Yes. We need to get the kit out now.”

Colin had gone to his knees. Sherry hustled over and lifted him up, “You OK?”

Matt stood up. He looked at Colin. “Go out to your Alpha, Colin. He needs you and we need to work here.”

Colin looked torn. He looked at the door and back at Bradley.

“Sherry, please take Colin to his alpha.” Matt asked.

“No, please Matt, please I need to stay with Bradley.” Colin pleaded.
“Out Colin, you will be of more help to me if you can aid Alexander now.”

“What are you going to do?” Colin’s voice trembled.

“We are going to get Stella into the world. She needs to be born as soon as possible, to prevent further seizures. Bradley is in eclampsic coma. We have to deliver with him unconscious, so he can’t aid us by pushing. If Alexander is well, you can both send your strength to Bradley down your bond. Okay?” Matt reasoned.

“They will be alright won’t they?” Colin whispered.

“We will do our best.” Doc Morrissey promised.

“Jensen, Misha, please go with Colin, and ask Carole to get a monitor for Colin, I don’t want any more surprises today.” Matt sighed and turned back to his patient.

Jensen, Sherry and Misha managed to get Colin out of the delivery room. Jensen regretted looking over his shoulder when he saw Cindy pulling over the tray of surgical implements.

Outside was another nightmare. Alexander was prone on the green reception carpet. There was foam drying on his lips. Dr Kurtz was administering an injection. Elise was absolutely distraught, clawing with her fingers at her father’s navy t-shirt, with Valerie trying to rub her back. Hunter’s blond head was bent over as he rubbed the back of Alexander’s hand with his small one. Felix was white as a sheet and leaning against the far wall. Stephen was seated on a waiting chair staring straight ahead as if his mind had travelled back to when he had lost his both his dear mates in delivery rooms.

Felix jumped forward and stood in Colin’s personal space, “What went wrong?”

The question had the full force of alpha obey.

Colin blinked at him, but Misha answered, “Bradley seized. They are treating him. We were sent out.”

Colin broke out of their hold and hurried to kneel at Alexander’s head. He gently lifted his alpha’s head onto his lap and started talking into his ear, asking him to come back, telling him they needed him.

Jensen looked down at Hunter who had two arms out to be picked up. He hefted his boy onto his hip and made his way over to sit beside Stephen. Misha went to Valerie and Elise, doing his best to calm the girls. Sherry took Elise and let her cry while she held her close.

Alexander stirred and looked up at Colin.

“You are back, Thank the gods,” Colin sighed and bent double to kiss Alexander’s forehead.


Dr Kurtz answered, “Your mate seized during delivery. Your bond sent the convulsions to you. I presume you are true mates?”

Alexander gave the barest nod and repeated, “Bradley?”

“They are working on him. Matt is an expert on omega delivery and Linda is in there too now.” The doctor stood up, “You can’t be comfortable down there alpha, won’t you let me and your other mate help you up. I’d like to get you in to the room next to your mate.”
“I’m not going anywhere.” Alexander argued.

“If you seize again, I’d prefer if you were lying down.” Dr Kurtz tried to argue logically.

“Please Alex.” Colin tugged on his arm.

Alexander took their assistance to get up and let them lead him into the adjoining room to Bradley’s one. Sherry produced a chair for Colin to sit next to him. Then Carole came with the strap on monitor for Colin.

“What is that?” Alexander asked.

Colin put a hand out to stop the receptionist, “I want to go back in to Bradley.”

“We want to make sure that Colin’s kits are not under stress.” Carole explained.

“You cannot re-enter the delivery room, Omega Star.” Dr Kurtz frowned and took the monitor.

“Listen to the doctors, please Colin, I can’t have you going down on me too,” Alexander smiled wanly.

“OK Alpha.” Colin conceded and let them lift up his canvas top and place the monitor over his slightly swollen belly.

Alexander took his hand and they prepared to wait for news.

Dr Kurtz appeared with a blood pressure monitor for Alexander, who almost copied Colin’s protest but let them treat him.

In reception Stephen began pacing until Sherry caught him by the arm and suggested a diner run for coffees for everyone.

Misha and Jensen sat in the waiting area with the kits and Felix.

“Where are all the patients?” Jensen asked.

“Day’s over, Jen.” Misha replied.

Jensen hadn’t realized so much time had passed. Valerie’s stomach rumbled.

“Looks like we will be sending Stephen and Sherry out for burgers when they come back with the coffees.” Misha commented.

“I could eat a few burgers.” Felix groaned from his favorite spot against the wall.

Doc Morrissey came out of Bradley’s room. He spotted Misha. “Omega Cohen, your alpha would like you to make up some newborn formula. The kit is out.”

“Bradley?” Jensen asked.

The doctor shook his head “Still unconscious, we are stabilizing him now.”

Misha ran to the dispensing room, while the doctor went towards the other room to tell Alexander.

“Morrissey!” A shout came from the delivery room.

The doctor turned and dived back in to Bradley.
Jensen felt Hunter slip from his lap. His chest was squeezed and his vision almost went back. He could hear Alexander roaring from his room. Then everything cleared and was quiet.

“Papa, papa, what happened?” Hunter pulled at Jensen’s top. Elise was clung onto Valerie.

“Don’t know. Something...” He grabbed his son and held him close as they waited for news.

Cindy dashed out of Bradley’s room and into Alexander’s. Then back again.

Felix swore, “Fuck this. I’ve had enough waiting. What the fuck are they doing to my brother?”

He marched up to the door and knocked. Cindy stuck her head out. “What is going on?” he demanded.

“Give us a moment, alpha, I’ll send one of the doctors out,” she pleaded.

The teenager growled deep in his throat but retreated.

Stephen and Sherry knocked at the locked glass entrance doors and Valerie let them in.

“What happened?” Stephen asked as his face paled at the tense atmosphere.

Felix spoke up, “Dad, they haven’t said but Jensen nearly fainted and the noises Alexander made...”

Matt appeared just as Misha came back with a small bottle of formula. Matt threw an arm around his mate’s shoulders and thanked him.

“OK.” Matt let out a long sigh, “Stella is fine. Perfect. She is the spitting image of Elise-fox.”

Elise clapped her hands and smiled at Valerie.

Matt continued, “We had to help her out as Bradley couldn’t assist us. Immediately after she was delivered, Bradley seized again, and his heart stopped. He flat-lined. We shocked him and got him back with us. He is still comatose. We have consulted and decided to monitor him, but not attempt to bring him out of the coma. He is stable and we are happy with his vitals. Alexander is unconscious, but his vitals are good.”

“Will he pull through, Matt?” Stephen asked his voice so low it was barely audible.

“The next 24 hours will tell us a lot but I am hopeful.” Matt said directly to Bradley’s father.

“Can we see him?” Jensen asked.

“Not now Vixen. I need Misha to come in and feed Stella, but perhaps some of you would like to go in and support Colin with Alexander.” Matt suggested.
The night passed in sections of sleep and waiting.

Stephen took Elise, Sherry and Felix back to the pack before returning alone.

Misha, Jensen and Stephen took turns sitting with Colin who wouldn’t leave Alexander’s side.

After midnight Jensen slipped out of the room and took a few minutes alone in Misha’s garden. The night was cool but not chilly. The sky was clear and the path of The Milky Way glowed above him. He inhaled deeply. If he was a believer he would offer a multitude of prayers for Bradley, Alexander and Colin. He wished he had the rest of his kits with him. He closed his eyes to sense for them. All cozy and warm in blissful sleep with their Daddy. He was both relieved that they were alright and aching with being apart from them. He could feel their love for Jared, and it made his own confused emotions bubble up; hurt, rejection, sorrow, anger and a seedling of worry about his mate. He shook his head from side to side to clear his thoughts and dug his nails into his palms to ground himself. He needed to be strong here, to put aside his own issues, and stand by Colin and Bradley. With a final glance at the beauty of the night sky he ducked back inside. He found a couple of bottles of mineral water in Misha’s fridge. He tiptoed through reception not to wake Doc Morrissey who was making snuffling snoring noises from his position on Carole’s office chair. He put the water bottles on the table in Alexander’s room. Everyone in their room was still asleep, but he knew Matt was awake in Bradley’s room. He shifted and wound himself around Hunter, catching another nap.

Sometime in the early hours, Matt brought Stella to her father’s room and Colin took over her feeds and let her sleep against his skin under his top.

Carole came to work with breakfast muffins for everyone. Doc Morrissey finally went home when Doctors Ben and Linda came in to start their day.

Jensen was pulled back into Misha’s house by his three year old stubborn kit about 10am. They curled up in fox form and slept for an hour on the sofa.

“Lazy sot!”

Jensen blinked. He shifted and pulled himself up at the shouted insult. Hunter followed.

“Hey Freckles, any chance of a coffee?”

“Christian?”

“The one and only.”

“But aren’t you in California?”
“What you love my bod so much you think you are hallucinating me?”

“Seriously?” Jensen grinned.

“I was at Accola Pines, outside Pine Bluff Arkansas. Andy Accola wants in on the campaign and I was there to convince Archie, his alpha, that I wouldn’t get him killed or something,” Christian shrugged and pulled off his red bandana, shaking out his hair.

“But that must be at least 12 hours drive?” Jensen gasped.

“Meh,” was all the response to that observation. “It’s good to see you man. Now, Freckles, where is my coffee?”

Jensen slipped on his clothes and helped Hunter with his. Then he got Misha’s coffee maker going. He turned round to find some mugs only to find himself gripped in a tight hug and then Christian made a disapproving face as he stroked the bruise on Jensen’s cheek.

“What are we going to do about that?” Christian asked.

Jensen didn’t have an answer. He pulled back and beckoned Hunter over.

“Hunter, this is my friend Christian. Chris, this is my baby, Hunter.” Jensen smiled at them both.

Hunter beamed up at the new omega and held out his hand.

Christian bent down and kissed the back of it, making Hunter giggle and hide behind Jensen’s legs.

“Momma, he’s silly,” Hunter squeaked.

“There you go, Chris, you are silly. Silly to drive across states for nothing.”

“I don’t think so Jen.” Christian patted his friend on the shoulder. “So you think Matt will let me stay or do I need to brave that horror of a normal wolf’s lodgings?”

“I’m sure he will, even if you have to sleep with foxy me and Hunter.”

Christian winked down at the kit. “You ever see a coyote Hunter?”

Hunter’s hazel eyes widened and he shook his head in big sweeps.

Christian pulled off his leather jacket and made quick work of his clothes before shifting.

“Wow. Momma momma, you friend is not fox, ooooh Momma.” Hunter was enthralled and let Christian lead him in a walk around the living room furniture. Hunter stroked Christian’s head and was fascinated with his tail.

“You wanna see me?” He asked shyly.

Christian-coyote nodded and let his tongue loll out.

Hunter shifted and ducked under Christian’s chin to sit proudly between his front paws.

Jensen laughed at their antics, struck with amazement that such moments of joy were possible now.

The coffee maker clicked and Jensen called both of them to shift back. He frothed some milk and gave Hunter a hot chocolate, before making two short white coffees.
They sat on the sofa with Hunter between them. Jensen found a dishcloth for Hunter to use as a bib when he spilled a trail of his drink down the front of Valerie’s old tee and onto the sofa.

“So ready to talk yet?” Christian asked.

“Bradley is still...”

“I know. I spoke to Misha on my way back here. I’m sorry. I hope he pulls through. Colin looks dreadful by the way. Can’t you command him to sleep as his vixen?”

“No Christian. It doesn’t work that way. I’ll talk with him later.” Jensen scrubbed his jaw with his free hand.

“Does your cheek hurt?” Christian asked again.

“Not really.” Jensen muttered.

“It does.” Hunter spoke up, “Dada hurt him.” The kit looked up at Christian wide eyed waiting to see what he would say.

“Your Dada was wrong to injure his mate.” Christian growled.

“I knew it. Me and Baz we knows things and I knew that Momma not... that Dada was bad to Momma and I don’t care what they said cos I knew and Baz he said that his Dada is not nice to his Momma sometimes and Baz comes to me then but I said to Baz that my Dada doesn’t hurt my Momma but now it all not right and I...” Hunter meeped a little cry as he ran out of breath.

Jensen and Christian exchanged looks and Jensen gathered Hunter up onto his lap.

“Who is Baz?” Christian mouthed over the kit’s head.

“Sebastian’s” Jensen mouthed back.

Christian nodded.

“What did they say about your Momma?” Christian asked Hunter picking up on that part of the little fox’s speech.

“Oh, Alan said that Papa must have disobbed... disobeyed Dada, but I know that’s not and I ran up to the Momma den and found Bradley. Bradley is sick you know?”

“Yes, pet. I know but Doctor Matt is working to make him better.” Christian stroked Hunter’s hair.

“Can we go see him?” Hunter asked.

“I don’t know if they will let us. But would you like to see Colin and Stella?” Jensen asked.

“Yes Momma, please.” Hunter jumped down and walked in front of the two adults towards the clinic.

“He still calls you Momma?” Christian commented.

“He is the last one. Nearly had him using Papa until the last few days.”

“Omega?”
“Probably. Basil too. They are very close. It is like they feed off each other. Stephen said Bradley and Colin were like that as kits, although they were older when they met.”

“Are Basil and Hunter the same age?”

“I wet nursed Basil with Hunter and Hillie.” Jensen sighed thinking of his nursing chair was not good as his mind went to Jared and the guilt and heartache built up again.

“Earth to Freckles.”

“Sorry.”

Christian was such a tough omega with his hard boiled front, that Jensen was taken aback to see him cooing over little Stella and resisting handing her back to Colin. Jensen could see him stealing nervous glances to Alexander’s still form on the bed, but he stayed in the room asking if he could feed her. Jensen wondered if Christian ever wanted pups of his own. They hadn’t talked about it beyond that first time when Christian had told him about the pregnancy he had ended. Did everything have to come back to kits and pups? Weren’t omegas more than baby making machines? Jensen snorted with frustration and left the room to find Misha, not wanting to stay there with his negative emotions.
When Sherry, Elise and Felix came down the hill to the central area of the den, everyone paused what they were doing. It couldn’t be good that they were alone. Jared had felt the almost death earlier but had kept it to himself, hoping for good news from Lakeside as he had also sensed the new kit entering the world.

Sherry walked in front while Felix trailed behind holding a sleeping Elise-fox in his arms.

“Mother”, Jared rose from his seat at the empty table where he had been waiting for James to bring some of the slices of ash trunk for him to choose his new shelf.

Sherry looked up at her son and gave him a weak smile.

“Did it not work?” Jared asked sadly.

“It worked, Jared. It was touch and go.” His mother replied tersely.

“It wasn’t working but Jensen got them to try again with the three mates in contact with each other and it worked.” Felix interrupted knowing Sherry wouldn’t give the pack vixen the credit he was due.

“Hmmm” Jared was impressed and his chest puffed a little with pride in his Jen. A smile broke across his face.

“The hours of being in labor with the kit in human form and the late shift caused complications.” Sherry added.

“Oh Gods,” Katie hissed and bit her lip. She and some of the other foxes had gathered around to hear the news.

“Are they alright?” Rosie asked urgently.

“Is Bradley OK?” Pasha asked before his mother had finished her question.

“I don’t fully understand the medical speak. My English isn’t good enough when they get all technical.” Sherry snapped.

“What happened Mother?” Jared said in a calm patient tone and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Bradley had these fits and in the waiting area Alexander had them too. Then after they delivered the kit, he had more fits and they almost lost him.”
“And now?” Jared asked.

“They say they are stable, whatever that means. Bradley and Alexander are both unconscious. Little Stella is fine. Perfect. Another Star clone, by the look of her. Colin and Misha have been tending to her.” Sherry sighed wearily.

Jared appreciated how tired his mother must be. She was no longer a young fox. His father was on evening patrol but he looked around and asked Katie to bring his mother to the cabin and get her a late meal. He sent Pasha to find Gerard and take over the run from him. Allyson and James had joined them and he asked Allyson if she would take Elise up her den to sleep with Jack and Ashley. Then he linked Felix’s arm and brought the young alpha to the table with him.

“How are you holding up?” Jared asked him.

“Good Alpha.” Felix lied. Jared could see the tightness in his eyes and the tension in his jaw.

“Hum. Why do I get the impression that you are far from good?” Jared turned to James, “James, would you mind leaving the ash samples here and going to Gerard’s den? I am sure that Stephen has a bottle of his late mother’s grog hidden somewhere.”

“It is in the carved log box in the reception chamber.” Felix called after the blond beta.

“I think we could do with a drink.” Jared smiled and put a positive spin on it, “we have to toast your new niece after all.”

“There was nothing I could do, alpha. I could only stand in the waiting area feeling useless while my big brother nearly died.” Felix pulled at tufts of his short dark hair.

“I know, Felix.” Jared said quietly.

“I wanted an enemy, someone to rip to pieces, someone to blame, but Alexander was in the same condition and the doctors were only trying to help. I was about to shift, you know and run back here, try and break a paw in the forest or something ridiculous, but Hunter and Elise came over and wrapped themselves around my legs. We were still there on the floor when Dad asked if I would come back with Sherry and Elise.” The teenager’s voice cracked and he felt a hand patting him on the shoulder. He looked up to see Oliver seating himself on the bench next to him.

“Did you drive back?” Jared asked.

“Dad drove. He dropped us at the barn and headed back to Bradley.”

James arrived with the bottle and Christopher and Tony who had seen him retrieve it.

They toasted Stella. Then all raised their cups to Bradley and Alexander.

Jared stayed long enough to pick out his favorite piece of wood with James and offer some words of encouragement. He left his pack mates work on getting Felix drunk.

It took longer than he expected to make his way around the dens picking up his kits as he stopped to have a few words with the adults about Bradley. Once he had all six he got them back to his own den for the night. He knew he was indulging himself by letting them sleep with him in the nesting blankets instead of in their own basket but he didn’t particularly care as he shifted to fox and let himself be buried under his children.

The morning dawn brought light drizzle and the unseasonably warm spell seemed to be at an end.
Jared let Jennifer and Cissy carry up one bowl of water from the lake, while Alan and Olivia brought another. He got the kits to have a wash, doing Hillary himself. Devon wanted to shift so he got him dressed in jeans and a warm hoodie. Once the kits were ready he sent them ahead to the cabin before dealing with his own morning routine. He copied Devon picking jeans and a hoodie but added a plain button down to his ensemble. Cursing the need to be fully dressed to go to Lakeside, he finally found his left boot under a pile of dirty blankets in the corner. He was almost at the cabin when Tony-fox ran up to alert him of an intruder at the border. Sighing Jared ducked into the cabin and inhaled a quart of apple juice before heading to the meeting stone.

Oliver was already in the field attempting to aid Pasha with the goats in the absence of Stephen, Emma and Lilly. Pasha had the air of a put upon sulky teenager but he was trying to show Oliver how to corral the animals for milking.

As if thinking of them had conjured their appearance Jared saw the two Eccleston girls breaching the tree line with a tall to middling height dark haired beta fox. The three made their way to the marker. Jared refrained from asking who dared breach his borders, instead he welcomed the young betas back and thanked them for undertaking their first envoy trip. He told them that Daisy was well but stopped himself from mentioning Stella, Bradley and Alexander in front of the stranger.

“Alpha-Jared,” Emma began, “Please let me introduce Envoy Aedry McMorran.”

“Alpha Padalecki, I, Adrian Glynn McMorran, son of Lothar, Envoy of Eccleston Caves, am charged with seeking out an alpha descendant of Allegra Accola to fulfill our pack vow.”

Jared raised an eyebrow. He knew the significance of this but put aside his curiosity and an impish satisfaction at high and mighty William Eccleston getting taken down a peg or two. On the other hand a weak Eccleston pack alpha might give more power to Jacob Star at the fox council. He hoped he would be able to talk to Alexander about this soon. He focused his attention on the envoy, not missing the light grazing of Lilly’s fingers against the beta’s hand.

“How may this pack assist you in your quest?” Jared asked.

“I am journeying from one Accola Collective to the next. Your envoys kindly informed me of your central location and that you have some Accola descendants amongst your foxes.” Aedry schooled his expression to envoy professionalism, but Jared could see the quest and perhaps the envoy role was still new to him, as a thrill of anticipation hummed from the young man.

“I am happy to offer any envoy sustenance and slumber with us.” Jared smiled at Lilly’s beaming face and was sorry he was about to break the mood, “however one of those Accola descendants is gravely ill and I do not think it is an appropriate time to be delving into Stephen or Katie’s family trees.”

Emma and Lilly’s faces fell.

“Who?” Emma gasped.

“Not at the greeting stone Emma,” Jared gently admonished.

“My quest takes me north from here to Beaver Mountain, before the packs of Collins and Lincoln and the Accola settlements between. I could return before I head down to the final Accola town in Florida.” The envoy offered.

“That would be acceptable. Now come, I have yet to eat this day and you must be hungry. Betas, you must be dying to see Daisy. I recommend finding Sebastian as they’ve been pretty inseparable
since we got her back.” Jared began to move towards the lake with the others following.

On the way he filled the girls in on the situation with Bradley. Once they got to the cabin, he asked Katie to make up a bed in the old cabin for the envoy.

The news of the new arrival had spread and by the time everyone had a bowl of hot oatmeal and a mug of coffee or pear juice curiosity was overtaking politeness.

“Are you on a mating quest like our pack alpha was?” Jade asked with her mouth full getting an elbow from her twin and a glare from her father.

“He is on the quest of the Eccleston curse.” Pasha asserted, his voice laden with doom as if telling a ghost story.

“Pasha,” Christopher chided, “It is not a curse. Aedry your father is Lothar? Who married Marigold Eccleston?”

The envoy nodded as his mouth was full.

“Marigold is my second cousin. Her grandfather Simon and my grandfather John were brothers.” Christopher supplied.

“Far enough apart to mate without problems,” Emma teased causing a bright red flush to appear on Lilly and Aedry’s faces.

Christopher caught on and examined the envoy with new found interest. Rosie got all bright eyed and mumbled something about finding Sebastian before disappearing out of the cabin with Amber hot on her heels to support her friend.

Jared leaned back on his chair and surveyed the scene with amusement. He wondered if Lilly and Aedry was just a mutual crush or might he be losing a pack member to Eccleston Caves. If he was then maybe he should give more thought to the quest.

“So, Envoy,” Jared pulled Aedry’s attention away from Lilly’s lips and hair. “Care to regale us in the fashion of envoys with your quest.”

There was a general shuffling of seats and refilling of cups while Aedry waited for silence.

“Draw near dear foxes for the story I will tell is one of courage and loss, of wars and settlements, of pacts and undertakings and a commitment given in olden times.” Aedry paused after his traditional introduction to sip his coffee as some of the kits clapped in glee at the treat of hearing the story. While he had begun Sebastian had turned up with his kits and Rosie and Amber returned. There was a brief interruption while Lilly and Emma insisted that Daisy sit between them but then envoy was able to continue.

“In the darkest of days at the end of the Civil War, Martin Eccleston despaired. His pack was decimated, victorious yet in danger. Our lands had been salted and burned by Jed Ackles’ forces. His older sons viciously killed while prisoners of Fester’s Normal Gang. He attended the peace talks unsure that his next generation would be able to remain as one pack or have to scatter amongst family ties as did the Marsters and Speight packs in ancient times.”

Christopher, Jared and some of the older foxes knew this story well but it was new for the kits and youngsters.

“The Ackles territory was vast. Much of it was desert and scrub but there was their home base of the
caves on the New Mexico/Arizona border, and the lush valleys of their western fringes. In the end as you all know, the caves came to us and the Star foxes got the valleys, leaving the Ackles with the desert between. Within ten years it was the Ackles pack that had disbanded and left for an urban future.”

A few of the pack glanced at Jared but he remained blank faced during the retelling of their pack vixen’s ancestry.

“Our ancestral burial place and the stones of our Gods remained at the heart of our original land overlooking the west side of the river. That river was still bountiful and once the sabotaged land would recover we would have fertile fields there again. Between Eccleston Parklands and Ackles Caves lay the small settlement of Accola Glade. Arnie Accola had stood up to Jed Ackles in the first winter of the war and had lost his life for his troubles. His widow Allegra had led her small band of families through those harsh years and was held in high regard by all foxes... all people they dare to say. The new treaty made the Glade an island in Eccleston territory. Martin and his son Terry sat down at a bargaining table with Allegra and her twelve year old alpha son Adam. Such respect was between them and for them that your ancestor Gerran Padalecki, Cyrus Green and The Michael Wolf oversaw the deal.”

Jared raised his eyebrow at that. He hadn’t known about his family or the wolf king’s roles.

“Allegra and Adam didn’t want to move from a place they had fought so hard to keep. Martin and Terry wanted a strong integral packland. Finally Allegra agreed to move to the East riverbank and use the old Eccleston den to found the town of Accola River. Martin and Terry agreed to cede the lands in exchange for the Glade and to aid the Accola foxes’ move. The Michael Wolf agreed to fund the building of Allegra Bridge across the river out of the war funds. Finally Allegra wanted a vow for the future.”

Aedry paused here for another sip of his coffee and for dramatic effect. Some of the kits had edged closer. Alan was practically sitting on his foot.

“Even back then over a century and a half ago, it was known that Eccleston omegas are rare and Accolas so rarely had an alpha, that when it happened that fox was almost certain to be the alpha of their settlement. Allegra insisted that when the Pack Alpha of the Eccleston Pack had a first born who was an omega that they would mate with an alpha descendant of hers and that Alpha would become Eccleston Pack Alpha. Martin tried to argue but Allegra was firm in her conviction. Terry laid down the conditions that the alpha would have to be unmated, as their future omega was not to be a second mate, the Accola alpha would have to give up being pack alpha of their old settlement and finally that their children have Eccleston included in their family name to preserve the pack title and heritage.”

Just then Felix and James stumbled into the cabin looking disheveled, unshaven and clutching their hung over heads.

“Whadid I miss?” Felix slurred at the gathering.

There was a round of tittering laughter.

“Way to make a good first impression, alpha,” Pasha teased.

“Sit down, Felix.” Jared ordered, “Continue envoy.”

“Last month, Tyler, the only son of William went into heat. It was not completely unexpected. Tyler is a gentle softly spoken boy who his father hoped would be beta, leaving the possibility that one of
his younger sisters might be alpha, or that one of William’s nephews would be a strong enough alpha for the pack.”

“What age is Tyler?” Oliver asked.

“He is fourteen. I was sent for by my Pack Alpha and asked to undertake the quest for Allegra’s descendant, if there even is one. I have a photograph” Aedry dug into his backpack. “I don’t whip this out at every stop, but you have Accola and Eccleston blood here, you might like to see Tyler.”

Aedry passed the plastic wrapped picture to Jared, who saw a pale slender boy with bangs hanging into his wide eyes, too young to have such a curse on his shoulders.

“So I began my quest to find Tyler’s mate and our new Pack Alpha.” Aedry took the photo and passed it to Katie.

“Will it be difficult to find Allegra’s heir?” Amber asked, “Surely after so long there must be hundreds of her great-great-great etc. grand-kits by now?”

“No. Adam was Allegra’s only child. Adam mated a beta and they had only two sons. By sixty years after the war there were only approximately twenty descendants. Then the influenza hit. By sixty years ago, there were still only thirty plus descendants. This is where it gets trickier for my quest. Accola River had been keeping tabs on them, a family tree if you wish. But after so many generations with few alphas on their part and only rare younger sibling omegas on the Eccleston Pack Alpha line, they let their record keeping lapse. I am chasing the descendants of foxes who lived fifty years ago. I have found three alphas.”

“You have? Are they going to mate with Pretty Tyler?” Ashley asked fascinated as she reluctantly passed the photograph along to her brother Jack.

“No, young lady,” Aedry smiled making Ashley blush, “One is an old man, the retired village alpha of Accola Bay in California. The next was Jonathon Accola, the fox council representative, who is happily mated to Fabrice.”

Jared huffed, unsurprised that Jonathon would have such a lineage.

“Adelaide Accola married Victor Wesley, and her sister Aria married Justin Cassidy. Paul Wesley, the Fell pack second is Adelaide’s son, and your Katie Padalecki is Aria’s daughter.”

“I have two daughters.” Katie informed the envoy, “No sons, yet.” She looked at Oliver as she said yet.

“Alpha Wesley is mated. As a pack second, I feel he would have been a good choice for our pack and for Tyler, but it is not to be, and he has yet to have children to consider.” Aedry sighed.

“What about me?” Felix asked, having been caught up on the story.

His question was greeted by silence as he had laid out what everyone had been thinking. Some looked at Jared, some at Felix.

“Who are you?” Aedry asked.

“I am Felix Padalecki, I’m pack fifth, my mother was Anna Accola. Please excuse my appearance. I had a rough night.”

“Felix’s brother is ill. We will discuss more about this on your return trip. I think Felix would like to
come to Lakeside with me?” Jared asked and he stood up effectively ending the discussion. Now was not the time to find out if his eighteen year old horny alpha was destined to leave the pack.

Felix sobered up quickly and put aside his imaginings of his own beautiful lithe omega called Tyler and his own pack. He nodded to Jared and looked for Elise to tell her he was leaving.

“Please take your rest with us,” Jared said to Aedry on the way out, “I am sure your cousin Christopher will look out for you, and maybe Emma and Lilly would like to show you our packlands.”

Jared quirked a half smile at Lilly, giving her tacit approval for her flirting, as he left with Felix.

Felix drove while Jared wondered if he was sitting next to the fabled heir of Allegra. Even though there had been lots of changes over the years in his pack, he preferred stability. Losing Felix and maybe Lilly to Eccleston Caves would be a blow. Traditionally alphas didn’t go to omegas’ packs. Felix would have been expected to bring his beta or omega mate to Padalecki Lake and raise his family there.

Jared’s thoughts darkened as he contemplated Bradley’s condition. He didn’t like to think that the young omega might not pull through. What if he didn’t? Would Alexander survive it? Some alpha true mates didn’t. Jared was concerned because they were showing the same symptoms, perhaps a sign that they were so tightly bonded that death would take them both. What would he do with Colin, Elise, Stella and Colin’s kits then? Would Colin be strong enough to raise all the kits on his own? Would he be wrong to call in the fox mating service and find out if Colin had a true mate? What was the precedent? He wished he had waited to go to Lakeside and perhaps talked to his father about this. There was that wolf elder in Four Valleys who had survived the death of his alpha and first mate. What ages had their pups been? Jared decided to phone Joseph, if the situation looked grave, and get some advice. He remembered that wolf was Daniel’s grandparent, so Joseph would certainly know what had happened.

“Are you bringing Jensen and Hunter back with us?” Felix asked breaking Jared’s train of thought.

“I don’t know.” Jared said honestly looking out the window at the first houses of the town.

“Would he go back for the kits?” Felix probed, knowing something was wrong between the mates but not wanting to overstep.

“Good idea.” Jared said as they pulled in to a space in the clinic’s lot.

Carole stood up when she saw Alpha Padalecki coming in. A couple of the waiting patients bowed their heads.

“Can I see them?” Jared asked before the receptionist could indulge in some tiresome greeting and questions about his eyesight.

“Alpha Star and his second mate are in the third room down the hall. I will call Matt for you regarding Omega Star.”

Felix mumbled a good morning as he followed Jared into Alexander’s room.

Colin was giving Stella a bottle as he paced beside the bed, his eyes flicking anxiously over to his mate every few moments. He looked up at the two alphas and smiled wanly.

Jared came across and held out his arms for the infant. Colin passed her over with the bottle and blanket.
Expertly teasing the teat into the tiny fox’s mouth, Jared cooed at the little girl, “Welcome to the pack Stella Star, a troublemaker already. Gave your Momma a terrible time. What are we going to do with you, hey?” He rocked her gently until she clearly didn’t want any more formula. Then he turned her over and rubbed her belly with two fingers. He could have sworn the little kit looked pleased. She really was adorable and a sweet sadness settled inside his heart, for her Dada and Momma, and for himself.

“Any changes?” Felix asked with trepidation.

Colin had resumed his position next to Alexander and was holding his hand. “No Felix. They say they are stable. They will only let me in with Bradley for a few moments. They say I am more helpful here.”

Jared knew that if Bradley died that having Colin with Alexander might keep the alpha alive, but if Colin hadn’t figured that out, Jared was not going to be the one to say it to him.

Matt came in looking haggard. “Good morning Alpha, Felix. We passed a good night.”

Felix sighed with relief.

“The longer it goes without further seizures, the better things are.” Matt comforted the young alpha with a pat on his arm.

“How long until you are sure there won’t be any more?” Jared asked.

“Officially three days, but if Bradley wakes and his vitals are good, then maybe sooner. Would you like to see him?” Matt asked.

Felix nodded.

“You go first Felix,” Jared said, “I’ll sit with Alexander for a spell.” He turned to Colin, “Have you breakfasted, slept, showered?”

“Misha brought me breakfast. I dozed during the night as others sat with us.” Colin admitted.

“Would you like a shower?” Matt asked. “You can use our house, rather than the clinic one, our towels are fluffier. Please, Misha would insist. We will get you the moment there is any change.”

Colin nodded and rose stiffly. He planted a kiss on Alexander’s head and followed Matt out of the room.

Alone with Alexander and Stella, Jared checked the kit had drifted off to sleep in her incubator. He took Colin’s seat and Alexander’s hand. “Silly boy, don’t you go leaving my cousin with a bunch of kits and no mates.” He ordered his comatose second.

When Colin came back looking refreshed and wearing some of Misha’s clean clothes, Jared was bouncing Stella against his chest and humming a lullaby. Colin grinned at him, “You big softy.”

“Hey, Colin, I told her off, now she deserves a little comfort.” Jared grinned back at him.

Colin rested a hand over his stomach, “I’m glad you came down. I can hardly think straight with worry for them. I love them both so much. I don’t know what I would do…”

“Hey, now, don’t worry about that.” Jared stood up and stepped over to the tense omega. He towered over him but gently he placed his free hand around the back of Colin’s neck, covering
Alexander’s claiming mark. “I’ll always be here for you, cousin. As your Pack Alpha, you’ll always have my support. It is not going to come to that, OK?”

“Yes alpha,” Colin ducked his head, but Jared could hear that he had accepted the small comfort. “Jared?”

“Uh-huh.” Jared responded as he seated himself back down to cradle the newborn more easily.

“Are you OK? I mean I got this sense when you cupped my mark, is everything alright?”

“I am fine. Don’t you go including me on your worry-list. There has been a lot of crap happening, but we will get through it.” Jared planted on a reassuring grave face. He looked over at Alexander, “He seems like he is in a peaceful sleep.”

“Yeah, Bradley looks like that too. Doc Morrissey says it is a good thing.”

Jared growled. Doc Morrissey? Why was that bastard involved? He stood up and passed Stella to Colin. “Where is he?”

“Doctor Morrissey?” Colin asked confused.

“I don’t want him touching... touching any of my pack.” Jared sounded completely irrational. He had gone from soothing Colin’s worries to full on alpha freak out in the blink of an eye. The doctor had saved his mates’ lives as far as Colin was concerned. Colin moved between Jared and the door afraid his pack alpha was about to cause some sort of scene.

“What Jared? He worked on all of us yesterday. He stayed all night. Didn’t go home until Matt’s partners arrived this morning.”

“Did he touch Jensen?” Jared’s nostrils flared and his eyes were wide.

“What?” Colin was confused, “Jared, please what is wrong. Jensen wasn’t sick. I don’t know if the old doctor touched him. What is wrong with him?”

Jared seemed to collapse in on himself. He hunched his shoulders and if Colin didn’t know him, he wouldn’t take him for an alpha. “I bled out.” Jared said his voice small.

Colin moved closer until his body was leaning against his cousin’s arm.

“I was sixteen. Mark was angry with me, he was rougher, teaching me a lesson. He tore me so bad with his knot that he bundled me into the old pack station wagon and down to Doc Morrissey. I needed stitches.” Jared had turned his face to the wall, but now he swung back, “I don’t want him touching any of my pack. If I see the old bastard I will smash his face in.”

Colin was shocked. He tried to reconcile the doctor of the previous day and night with the one Jared remembered. He wondered what Mark had told the doctor when he brought Jared in, but thought better of suggesting that to his volatile alpha. Instead he said, “Perhaps you had better discuss that with Matt?”

Jared left the room like a whirlwind and went looking for Matt who was finishing with an elderly patient. Jared ducked into his office when the old gentleman came out.

“Alpha has something happened to Alexander?” Matt jumped up concerned at Jared’s expression.

“I do not want Morrissey treating my pack.” Jared pronounced, leaning forward and placing his two
“What? Why? He was a rock last night.” Matt argued.

“I do not want that piece of goat crap near my pack.” Jared growled through gritted teeth.

“Jared, I respect your decision, but give me a bit more to go on here. The man is due back later to check on Bradley and he helps me out on rare occasions at the clinic.”

“He covered up for Mark.” Jared said and clamed up.

“Excuse me?” Matt enquired.

Jared snapped, “Mark brutalized me. I bled all over his den, all over the pack car, all the way into the doctor’s office. Doctor Morrissey stitched me up and sent me home. The next time he patched me up, he gave me a lecture on safe sex and my own bottle of painkillers, then thanked Mark for bringing me down to his surgery.”

“Did you tell the doctor what had happened?” Matt asked.

“With Mark standing right there squeezing my hand and licking his filthy tongue into my ear when the doctor’s back was turned?” Jared glared at the other alpha. “I did not.”

“Maybe Mark told him a tale?” Matt suggested.

“Do. Not. Defend. Him. No matter what Mark told him, it was obvious I was being raped. He never told my father or my Uncle William or Uncle Devon if he didn’t want to tell the pack alpha. He never offered me help. He was another urban shit. Did he touch Jensen?”

“What do you mean?” Matt asked.

“Pretty obvious. Did he touch Jensen? My mate, who left the den without his red tag, did that piece of crap touch him?” Jared’s eyes were wide with contained fury.

“I guess they could have shaken hands, and we passed Stella around, and Jensen was with Bradley for a time while Doc Morrissey was there.”

“Where is Jensen now?” Jared demanded.


“Calm down? Calm the fuck down. I am calm.” Jared spat.

“Hang on. We asked the Priestess to come this morning. Colin wanted the three of them blessed, in case things took a turn for the worse.”

Jared was vibrating with need to get to Jensen but he listened. He could understand Colin’s motivation.

“She suggested that having a few omegas in the room with Bradley might make an atmosphere like the pack omega den and help him to heal. Quentin Woodsman, farmer Woodsman’s mate came over and we have made sure that at least three omegas have been with Bradley all morning. Until Felix arrived, only Linda and Cindy had gone in to check on Bradley. Todd, the mechanic, is sending his unmated son Julian over once he has finished his homeschooling units.”

“So who is in there now?” Jared asked trying to take calming breaths.
“Misha, Hunter, Jensen, Quentin and Ch..in” Matt replied.

“Who? I didn’t catch the last name?” Jared eyed the doctor suspiciously.

“Christian.” Matt sighed.

“Kane?” Jared was up and gone before Matt could stop him but he followed him out, relieved to see Jared knock on Bradley’s door rather than burst into the “Omega” room.

Cindy opened the door. Jared could see the bed was gone and all the omegas, including Bradley still hooked up to an IV and a monitor, were lying in a huddle on the floor.

“Jensen.” Jared growled.

Jensen blinked at him but stayed where he was.

“Jen, I need you.” Jared pointed to outside the door by his feet.

The others looked shocked. Christian looked outraged but Jensen obeyed the alpha command.

Once Jensen was kneeling beside him Jared took the red tag out of his pocket and clipped it onto his mate’s collar. Jensen kept his head down but his shoulders slumped.

Christian was moving between the other omegas towards the door. Misha was still half sitting next to Bradley, but starting to come over.

“Kane, if you touch him I will have you arrested.” Jared threatened, “and Misha I’ll have you exiled, do you understand me?” He didn’t wait for an answer, “Hunter, come on, we are going home.”

Once Hunter was outside with them Jared closed the door. He lifted his son onto his shoulders and spoke down to his omega, “Jensen we are going home. I can’t have you here. I need you at home.”

“Jared,” Jensen pleaded, “Bradley?”

Jared bit his bottom lip and his brow tightened in distress. He sighed and his shoulders slumped. “I know you want to stay with Bradley, but there are plenty of people here for him and I can’t have you stay. Will you come home my omega?”

“Can I come back?” Jensen asked looking up and meeting Hunter’s eyes which were wide as saucers.

“We will both come back, but now. I can’t Jen. I am sorry, but I need you with me. I can’t do this without you.”

Jensen slotted himself under his mate’s arm, wondering what had happened to cause such a reaction in Jared, and he hated leaving Bradley, and prayed that his alpha had good reason to insist that he come home.

“I’m sorry Jen. I am sorry you got hurt. That I hurt you, my mate.” Jared spoke into the hair on the top of Jensen’s head.

Jensen lifted his hand to cover Jared’s heart, “No no, Jay, you were hurting too, it is OK, babe.”

Jensen’s body trembled from the shock and emotion. Jared wanted him home as his mate, needed him to be his mate, but it was so sudden and he could feel a deep hurt in his mate through their bond. He took deep breaths and he kept his head bowed as he followed Jared to the reception desk. He
didn’t want to speak to anyone and looked at the floor while Carole organized someone to drive them back to the pack and return the car for Felix.

There were waves of distress coming off his alpha, even his scent had changed. Jensen could barely think with his mate’s suffering choking down their bond. He marveled that Jared could manage to hold himself together enough to suggest to Matt that perhaps Alexander, Bradley and Colin should be in the same room. He stayed silent as Matt promised to bar Doctor Morrissey from the clinic until all pack members were discharged. He didn’t react when Hunter petted his hair from his place on his father’s shoulders. Jared pulled him by the wrist to the car and sat in the back with him. Jensen pressed his body into his mate’s and hoped that Jared would explain what was going on in his mind when they got home.

Arriving back at the pack entailed a multitude of questions about Bradley, Alexander and Stella. A rush of children greeted their Papa.

It wasn’t until very late when all the kits were supposedly asleep, but actually they were hanging on every word Hunter was whispering to them in their room, that Jared and Jensen finally had a moment of privacy.

Jensen gently helped his alpha undress. He knew Jared was tender, raw, with emotions close to the surface. “Jay?” He whispered not to disturb the kits or his alpha’s spirit.

“I can’t talk about it.” Jared said to the ceiling.

“Even to me?” Jensen rubbed Jared’s hand with his fingertips.

Jared reached his arms around his mate’s body and pulled him so tight Jensen feared a fractured rib. Jared eased back and hung his head, “No I just can’t.”

“It’s alright Jay, I’m here.” Jensen felt his emotions rise with watery eyes, the mating bond was straining with distress. Jared needed him, but he wasn’t letting him in.

“Will you stay with me, please Jen, stay with me?”

“Gods, Jared-mate. I’m not going anywhere. You know I will stay with you, always!”

“I thought…” Jared made a hiccupping noise and dropped his voice again so their kits couldn’t hear, “I thought that you didn’t want me anymore. You didn’t want my knot, my kits.”

“No no babe,” Jensen soothed and put a hand around to rub Jared’s back. “I’ll want you forever.” He planted kisses along his alpha’s collar bone.

Jared bent his head so that their foreheads were touching.

“I won’t go to the meeting,” Jensen decided, “I’ll stay with you.”

“You’ll stay with me?” Jared repeated back, “in our den?”

“Yes in our den. There will be other omega meetings. You are more important.”

“More important than Misha and Kane?”

“Honestly? How can you not know that?”
“Thank you.” Jared clung onto Jensen as if he was a drowning man clinging to a life-preserver.

Jensen let him hold on until they were both too tired to remain standing and they sank still in human form onto their blankets for the night.
Chapter Eleven

Jensen woke spooned in his alpha’s hold. He was still in human form, just as they had both collapsed onto their nesting blankets. Jared’s arm was squeezing around his middle, too tight, uncomfortable.

He moved his own hands to pry it off. His fingers touched Jared’s forearm. His mate was on fire. Twisting under the grip, Jensen turned his body to see a sheen of sweat on his alpha’s skin and his hair dampened around his face.

“Jay?” He whispered so not to wake the kits in the other room.

“M not.” Jared muttered.

Jensen frowned in concern. Jared was still sleeping, but twitching and then he pushed his lower hand palm against Jensen’s shoulder. He was still asleep.

“I can’t…It is too big…please.” Jared’s voice changed, pleading and younger, “It hurts me…”

Jensen stroked his mate’s shoulders, “Wake up. Wake up, Jay. You are having a nightmare.”

Heart thumping against his chest wall, Jensen waited.

“Jen?” Jared’s eyes flickered open.

“I’m here.”

“You stayed.” Jared smiled sleepily.

“Of course I stayed. Are you OK now?”

“What?” Jared asked confused, “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You were stuck in a nightmare.” Jensen reached over to rub Jared’s bicep.

“Was I?” Jared asked blearily and moved his body to close the small space between them, “I want to rest my head against your belly like I do when you are having kits.”

Jensen tensed up at the request but made his body relax. Jared needed this. He moved around disturbing the blankets until his back was leaning against the den wall and Jared could lay his head on his lap. He began to absentmindedly stroke Jared’s hair.

“I missed you,” Jared whispered, “Love you.”

“I love you too, so much it aches.” Jensen confessed.

…and burns?” Jared asked.

“Scorching.” Jensen chuffed and ran his hand over Jared’s forehead checking if his fever-like state was calming. After a few minutes of silence Jensen asked, “You still awake Jared?”

There was an answering mumble and Jared squeezed his omega’s knee.

“I stood in Alexander’s room this morning, Jay, and I watched Christian doting on the new kit.”

“Christian?” Jared asked surprised.
“Yeah, it was freaking heartbreaking. He held her perfectly without anyone instructing him. She took the feed from him without a peep of complaint. Stella only squirmed and acted up when he passed her on to Nurse Cindy. He was a complete natural. I couldn’t stay and watch.”

“Why not?” Jared pulled himself up to sit next to Jensen and intertwined their fingers.

“He’ll never have pups, Jay. He’ll never know how it feels to carry those little lives inside you, how glorious it is when you meet them for the first time, or what miracles every one of them are.” Jensen gulped hard thinking of his friend.

“Our little miracles.” Jared repeated smiling to himself.

“Yet, Bradley could die,” Jensen’s voice broke. “He is young, fit, already a Papa, and he is down there fighting for his life. It makes no sense.”

“I know babe.” Jared let go of Jensen’s hand and used his arm to pull his mate in by his shoulders and let Jensen rest his head against his chest.

“I know it is easily twenty times safer for omegas than for betas but Jared-mate what if something happened to me?”

“Gods, Jensen, I wouldn’t let it. I’d take you to an urban hospital. I’d bargain with the Gods. I just wouldn’t…”

“I know. I know you wouldn’t.” Jensen pressed a kiss up to Jared’s jaw.

“Is that why you don’t want more kits? Are you frightened?” Jared caught his lower lip in his teeth as he waited.

“No.” Jensen replied. “My mother is only a vague shadow in my memories. She died with my stillborn sister. I have always known the risks. Bradley has too. No, Jay, I want more kits with you darling. I just want some time. A few years.”

“Years?” Jared gulped.

Jensen twisted his neck to look his alpha in the eyes, “Yes my love, a few years to let our seven kits grow without younger siblings, to help Christian and Misha with the omega campaign.” Jensen could feel a rumbling growl building in Jared’s chest, “and to spend more time with you.”

“The campaign. Jensen, I don’t know about it. It will take you away from the den, away from me.”

Jensen felt his own hurt and frustration rising, a feeling of being trapped, but he heard the sincerity in Jared’s voice, and tamped down on his urge to snap at his mate. “Could we try and work something out Jared-mate? Maybe I could work on the education syllabus in Misha’s house, and we could set agreed days and time limits to do it. Maybe if I need to travel somewhere, I’ll only do it with you accompanying me?”

“Hum?” Jared offered and Jensen cheered inside that he had not been met with a flat refusal.

“If you could hear some of the stories Misha and I have heard, you’d know how important this is.”

“Tell me.”

“What?”

“You say if I could hear. Why can’t I? Do you not trust me to keep those omegas’ pleas to myself?
Do you think I’m going to track down their alphas and expose their secrets?”

“No! No!” Jensen was stunned, “No… It never entered my head… I thought you wouldn’t be interested, that their stories would bore you, and that you might find their vulnerability and lack of strength distasteful.”

“What? How could you think that of me?” Jared sounded hurt.

“You don’t want to hear about Christopher and Sebastian.”

Jared rubbed his eye socket with his fist. “I know all about Christopher. The blame for that situation rests on my shoulders. I forced two happily mated mature foxes to accept a virtual stranger as their mate. The consequences are my burden.”

“Then do something about it.” Jensen barked. He lifted his head hearing movement from the next room, but it stopped, and it seemed he had not woken the sleeping kits.

“Jen, it is a mating matter. I am not ignoring it. I hope their new found peace since Daisy returned is a sign of things improving. Are the stories you are hearing like Sebastian’s situation?”

“You have no idea.” Jensen sighed.

“How could I? You haven’t told me.” Jared rebuked but his tone held no anger or reproach.

“There is a jackal called Florien in North Bay, who hasn’t been outside his house in years and his alpha and beta mates will not let him care for his pups…” Jensen began.

His voice hoarse and both their faces marked with drying tear tracks, Jensen finished with a frank account of Oscar’s life in Korea and what he endured at Three Mountains.

As dawn broke and the pack stirred to life, Jared held his mate close, dried his tears, and promised they would work something out.

Three perfect little angels, growing like weeds, taking to shifting forms so often their cute onesies had been temporarily put aside, this morning they were lying on top of their momma’s bed and gurgling baby noises at each other. Seven months old this week, Oscar had sat them down for a portrait with the Royal Photographer. In the end the best shot was one of Jet as a red haired scamp reaching over to pull black haired Opal’s dress hem, while Kendra sat upright with shaky wolf paws on top of her pile of clothes. He checked that Molly’s copy of the picture was in the envelope before sealing the flap and putting it on the silver tray by the entrance to his quarters for the mail collection.

Aldis and Beth had sent him a luxurious photograph album made from their superior acid-free heavy weight paper. Oscar had placed the new picture in the cover’s frame. He looked over at it now, propped up on his still only half-filled shelves.

The closet contained all his beautifully pressed clothes. He had yet to dress having suckled the little pups on the bed. He selected the deep navy pants and one of his long cream tunics bearing the royal crest. He chose a navy ribbon for his hair tie and the navy ribbon collar. Daniel told him he could stop wearing a collar if he preferred, but he was proud that he had been Kenneth’s mate and she-wolf of Three Mountains, and would not dishonor his alpha’s memory by going collarless now.

Oscar gazed lovingly down on his young ones. “Mamamamama” Opal made grabby hands to be picked up. He sat on the edge of the mattress and let her little hand hold on to a few of his fingers.
“Who is a good girl for her momma?” Oscar grinned down at her, “Who is my little pet?”

Kendra pushed herself closer.

“You too Kennie, my good girls, and my precious son.” Oscar touched each of their faces in turn, marveling that at least a half hour had gone by without a scream, a cry, or a projectile vomit.

There was a knock at the bedroom door.

“Come.” Oscar called.

Callista, the new young mail messenger, came into his private room, nervously pulling down on the hem of her heavy brocade uniform jacket. “Chamberlain, apologies for coming into your personal living space. The Queen will be ready to leave for New York City before midday. He requests that you breakfast with him in the royal nursery.” The teen was breathless and nervous.

“That will be fine, Callie, thank you,” Oscar smiled trying to put the overwhelmed young girl at her ease. At least she had got through her message without a stutter. She could barely open her mouth in Joseph’s presence.

“I have left your messages and letters in your tray and will take your new one with me. I have a private letter for you today, sir.” She held out a long thin manila envelope.

Oscar stood and took it. “Thank you again. Will you be returning via Daniel’s rooms?”

She nodded.

“Please tell him I will be with him presently.”

“I will,” the skittish beta backed out of the rooms letting Oscar examine the slim letter. It was Jensen’s handwriting. A beaming grin broke out over the wolf’s face. A nugget of apprehension that the letter was so light in comparison to the multiple pages they usually exchanged, was balanced by the benefit of being able to read a short letter without delaying His Majesty.

Oscar coaxed his pups into their three-way stroller with promised juice filled dinky soothers, and attempted bribery by promising mashed bananas and cream for breakfast treats if they stayed in their seats and in human form. Contented sucking noises gave their momma the moments he needed.

He slid a fingernail under the envelope flap, forgetting again the jeweled letter opener that The David Wolf had given him as a welcome-to-the-pack gift.

He was correct about the author and the shortness of the letter, as he held a single A4 sheet in Jensen’s tight script.

Dearest Oscar,

I hope this letter finds you well and more settled in your new home. Misha and I nearly choked with laughter at your description of poor Michael Welling skidding on the newly polished throne room tiles and landing his head on Joseph’s feet. Would you believe I worked with Tom? That is a story for another day. Your next letter may have the promised copy of your litter’s photograph. I wait impatiently to see them. I am sure they are as beautiful as their wonderful Papa.

Forgive me, my friend, I do not have happy news to impart. Perhaps faster methods of communication will have made you aware of Bradley’s condition. As I write he and his alpha remain in a fight for their lives. Their new kit Stella is simply adorable and I am sure it is only her presence and the lives he is carrying that grants Colin the strength to hold it together. Stella stayed in human form until it was almost too late, maybe it has been too late for her
Momma and Dada. I hope not. By the time you receive this hopefully better news will have reached your ears.

Oscar paused and made a mental note to check Daniel’s e-mails before they left for the city. Misha, Christian, Trent and Chad had all sent news of Bradley’s horrific labor.

I won’t be at the Urban/Wild omega meeting

Oscar dropped the letter to the floor. Jet pulled out his dinky and giggled as the sheet fluttered in front of his face. Oscar swallowed his disappointment. He so wanted to see Jensen, to be able to speak face to face with him for the first time. He picked the letter up from the carpet and read more.

Jared is not well. He doesn’t know he is not well, but there is something very wrong with him. I can feel it. I wish I could explain this in person.

Oscar turned the sheet to read the reverse.

He is not coping. Maybe his ability to deal is like a long braided skein of rope and he has reached the end of it. He was violent with me when I came out of my heat.

Oscar threw the letter away from him. As it landed on the bed he left out a half-growl half-keen. How dare he? How dare that jerk harm his wonderful omega? He was almost trembling with fear of what he would read next, but there was not many more lines left on the page.

I am not injured, Oscar, don’t worry, but I am very ashamed to confess that I ran away to Misha, rather than stay and support my alpha. You must think me a selfish child as I know you would never have deserted your alpha.

“Gods, Jensen,” Oscar blurted aloud to the letter, “You stay the fuck away from him if he is going to beat you. I’ll…I’ll…I don’t know…I’ll take you in…” He hung his head, knowing Jensen wouldn’t come, not when he would have to leave his kits behind, and knowing that Jensen did love his alpha.

Jared needs me here with him. We are back in our own den. The kits are napping (except Devon who is verbalizing his plans for world domination on the edge of my hearing). I am so sorry that I will not see you, and Daniel too, but I know you understand that family comes first. We will meet, my friend. Jared has agreed to accompany me to future omega meetings. Stephen is bringing Élise down to her parents soon and I will give him this to mail. Sorry it is short and so full of woe.

Your friend always,

Jen

Oscar crumpled the paper into a ball and flung it against the wall. There was no way that letter was making it into his silver box of treasured memories.

Checking he had everything for the day, he caught the handles of the stroller and left his quarters. Marching through the corridors, servants scattered at his thunderous expression. Oscar resolved to persuade Daniel that some excuse needed to be invented for a Royal Visit to Padalecki Lake.
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Colin packed the last of Stella’s gifts into the vegetable crates that Beta Woods had dropped off. They were going home. Finally back to their home den.

Stella was one month old and she would go home to their den in time for summer. Colin felt he was glowing with a happiness that must be visible to others.

He had found his stay in Lakeside to be a fascinating experience, once that first dark week was over.

Bradley’s discovery of colored post-it notes, and the way they could be used to communicate where he had been around their rental apartment, was a source of endless amusement. Alexander had claimed that growing up in a foster dorm and a state transition house meant he was as clueless as they were about apartment living, but it turned out that Alexander knew magical things, like how to produce salty buttery popcorn from the box shaped microwave, how to read a Chinese takeout menu, where to rent movies for their television and how to change a fuse when their electricity had blown. Misha had given Colin basic cookery and oven usage lessons but Alexander ended up cooking more than he did.

The Lakeside people had been welcoming. Stella was coo-ed and ahh-ed over every time they stepped outside the door. Elise had gone to school with Valerie for the few weeks and had gotten herself a “boyfriend” called Timmy, much to Alexander’s horror. Quentin and Julian’s families had adopted them, making them come to their houses for roast dinners and including them in family events. Colin had returned to the clinic the first time after his mates’ releases to have his delayed sonogram. One hand held by each mate they had seen their new son and daughter for the first time. Alexander wanted to call her Candice. Colin and Bradley nodded their agreement. Before their alpha could name their little boy, Colin suggested they call him Alexander. It was comical the way Alex’s jaw dropped. Colin explained that it was important to him, that he wanted his son to have his alpha’s name. He didn’t voice how it would show the love between the three mates but he knew he didn’t have to say that aloud when tears fell from his alpha and Alexander mutely nodded his agreement.

That had been the second joyful departure from the clinic. Alexander and Stella had been released two days before Bradley which permitted time for them to get their rental apartment ready. When Bradley had followed they had thrown an impromptu party in their new lodgings. Some of the pack came as well as their new urban friends. Jensen said Jared wasn’t feeling too good and the pack alpha couple had made only a brief appearance.

Twice daily checkups at the clinic for Bradley became daily and finally eight days ago, Matt had said they could go back to the den and call in weekly. Alexander was cautious and drew on pack funds for an extra week rental.

Colin’s mind drifted back to the day his mates came back to him.

*Everyone was still reeling from the Pack Alpha’s abrupt treatment of Jensen when he had effectively ordered him back to the den. Misha was too upset to stay in Bradley’s room and Christian had torn*
off in his car saying his mood was not conducive to healing anyone. So Misha was with him when Alexander’s eyes opened and he asked “Stella?”

Misha went to the incubator and lifted the kit out, placing her on her father’s chest.

“Thank the gods,” Misha smiled, “We nearly lost you.”

“Bradley?” Alexander whispered as he lifted a hand to stroke his kit.

“Next door Alex-mate,” Colin whispered back.

“Now that you are awake, I hope Bradley will follow.” Misha grinned at them and left them to tell Matt that the alpha was aware.

There was a flurry of tests and activity, all the while with Alexander seeking answers about his true mate. Finally he had enough and Colin smirked as Alexander tore off the wires and monitors, pulled out his IV and tilted his head for Colin to follow him into Bradley’s room.

Quentin and Julian were stunned to see the tall alpha with blood dripping down his hand from where he had pulled the line. Colin and Misha made introductions and everyone sat waiting for Bradley to come around. Cindy managed to bandage Alexander’s hand. Quentin’s mate and teenage daughters arrived with thermos after thermos of soup. Alexander needed something meatier so Misha rustled up a stew with Julian’s mother and Quentin’s older daughter.

It was late. Colin was unsure of the hour. Finally Bradley’s eyelids fluttered open.

“Stella? Alex?” He asked as he focused on Colin’s face.

“We are fine, my love.” Alexander bent down and cradled Bradley’s head in his hands. He copied what Misha did for him earlier and took Stella from Colin, laying her on Bradley’s chest.

“Why am I on the floor?” Bradley asked confused and everyone laughed.

“Let’s just say we have been trying everything to get you back to us.” Matt supplied.

“Was it bad?” Bradley asked.

“We nearly lost you and Alexander’s body shut down in response.” Matt answered.

Bradley reached a hand out for Alexander to hold.

“We have been taking turns sitting with you.” Julian grinned.

“Hi. Nice to meet you,” Bradley grinned back at the young omega, “Who?”

“Me, Misha, Jen, Hunter, Quentin and Julian here, your brother, your father, Kane, the staff, all and sundry really.” Colin laughed at the wide-eyed look on Bradley’s face.

“How long?”

“Days.” Colin closed his eyes as he said the word.

“Where is Jensen?”

“Jared took him back to the den.” Misha said sadly.
Bradley opened his mouth as if to ask more but Cindy and Dr Goldman came in and the medical personnel cleared everyone except the mates out to check Bradley over.

Colin leaned over before he was pushed aside and planted a kiss on his mate’s brow, “My Bradley, you scared us bad, my mate.”

“Sorry.” Bradley said sheepishly but leaned up to kiss Colin on the lips before the doctors bustled around him.

Folding the final baby blanket that Alpha Goldman, Linda’s mother, had sent from New York, Colin sealed the top of the crate with some card and packing tape.

Alexander appeared in the door way. His hair was sweaty from all the moving and Colin felt a twitch of desire to lick off the beads of perspiration from the side of his face.

Alexander laughed, “OMG, Colin, reign it in will you. Your pheromones are going straight to my knot.”

“Sorry” Colin muttered.

“Don’t be, we can take a rain check. Put stinking out the den with sex on this evening’s agenda.”

Colin laughed but felt Alexander was possibly serious and had a mental agenda he was ticking off. Maybe he would rob one of the post-its Bradley had packed and stick a reminder over their nesting blankets. He sniggered to himself at the prank and vowed to do it if he got a chance.

“Is that the final one?” Alexander pointed at the crate.

“Yes. Last thing. I must just drop the keys into Beta-Macken while you are loading it.”

Keys dropped off, in exchange for gigantic strawberry shortcake, Colin realized the sheriff’s mate didn’t understand that they wouldn’t have to cook for themselves when they got home. However the dessert would be appreciated by everyone in the pack.

Felix opened the door for him when he got to the car. He squeezed into the back seat with Bradley, Stella and Elise. He was uncomfortable with his baby bump but the journey was short.

The pack greeted them as if they had returned from Star Valley again, not from a few miles away. It was nice. It made Colin realize once more that he loved his pack family. He always had, growing up with his sisters, Papa and Dad, later on his own in the omega den, and now with his own family. It was the happiest place in the world.

Elise had disappeared with a gang of kits. Alexander was passing Stella around the alpha and beta males like a prize trophy while they all turned into mush at holding the little kit for the first time. Bradley jerked his head towards the omega den and they took the opportunity to slip away.

Sebastian was in the den giving it a sweep out while Basil and Hunter guarded the basket with his three infant kits. There were whoops of welcome, a stream of French, English and Old Language from Sebastian.

“You horrid darlings, you left me to have my heat all by myself.” Sebastian complained dramatically placing the back of his hand on his forehead and pretending to swoon.
“Where was Jen?” Bradley asked.

“Oh, developments. He checked in on me but he is ‘focused’ on his mate.” Sebastian pursed his lips in disapproval.

“He didn’t stay with you?” Colin and Bradley exclaimed in shock.

“I don’t know if Jared wouldn’t let him come or if he decided himself. Rosie and Daisy got me through it.”

“That is crazy.” Colin felt tears welling up in his eyes.

“Oh Sebastian.” Bradley sighed and pulled the older omega in to a hug.

“Ce n’était rien” Sebastian said casually while he bounced Lavender on his knee. “We have missed you all, including your alpha. Oliver has taken his place at the fox council meeting. That made Christopher second, while he is gone.” Sebastian chuckled. “You should see him going around the den saying he never signed up for pack alpha crap.”

“What is going on?” Colin asked, taking squirming Poppy from the basket and passing Sage to Bradley.

“We were worried when Jen never visited us again after the party in Lakeside.” Bradley admitted.

“I don’t know what goes on between them.” Sebastian rolled his eyes, “But it is like something fell apart and Jared is clinging onto Jensen so tight he doesn’t know what it might do to him. Hell, I don’t know what it might do to them both. Jared is in fox form more often than not. Felix has taken over the patrol roster. Christopher organizing the supply runs. Gerard is finalizing the tribute negotiations.”

“Is Jared refusing his pack alpha responsibilities?” Bradley asked, while Colin followed with a quick rejoinder of “He wouldn’t.”

“Colin, mon ami, you are correct. Everyone is bringing their decisions to Jared for final approval. Nobody has been instructed by Jared to do these things, they have taken them on themselves to help.”

“It sounds chaotic.” Bradley said.

“No no. I have given you the wrong impression. The pack is solid, just très inquiets pour Jared. We are all worried for him. Jensen says they just need some time and space together, and all the foxes have been trying to give that to them.”

Talk turned to Stella and living in Lakeside, to Misha and Christian’s trip to Charlotte, to speculation about the Allerga Accola heir, and to Lilly’s long distance romance with Envoy McMorran.

At evening meal the whole pack turned out to welcome the Stars home.

Jensen-fox and Jared-fox came out of their den to join in the celebrations. Jensen shifted first and caught his fellow omegas in crushing hugs. Colin tried to impart his support to the pack vixen by holding on tight. Jensen pulled back and Colin was swamped by Jared. Colin was shocked by Jared’s gaunt appearance and eyes that told a story of lack of sleep.

Gerard interrupted with his own handshakes, having delayed his patrol to wish them well. Christopher and Tony had cut the afternoon circuit short to be home in time. Alexander made a little
rehearsed speech, which Colin knew painfully by heart, about family, pack and the goodness of the Lakeside people. While everyone was focused on his alpha, Colin saw Jensen was half hidden by the table. There was a huge variety of foods for the special occasion and Beta Macken’s Strawberry Shortcake was given centre placement. Colin would have expected Jensen to be assessing the spread but he kept his gaze lowered, not even looking at Alexander while he delivered his speech.

Selecting what he wanted to eat versus what would give him heartburn or disagree with his still sensitive stomach, took Colin’s mind off the pack vixen for a time. Alexander passed their plates to Bradley and Bradley passed Colin his own, like they normally did when not in public. Slinking down further under the table, Colin chanced a few looks towards the top couple. Jared seemed to be absentmindedly feeding Jensen small pieces from his own plate but consumed little himself. If Colin was not a guest of honor he would have crawled under the table to chat with Jensen.

A mousse was brought out and served with the dessert. Bradley put a little of the mousse on his finger and let Stella suck it off. There were a few cheers at that. Colin’s heart melted all over again at his mates and new kit. He glanced down. Jared was placing his whole bowl of mousse and spoon down to Jensen wordlessly.

There was a toast. As soon as their cups were drained, the pack crowded around to see Stella. Colin pulled back and looked for Jensen but he was gone.

Jared stayed for a short while and their kits were all around. As the evening darkened, Bradley stifled a yawn and Alexander announced that it was time to retire. The rest of the pack broke up. Colin peered through the gloom as Jared walked to the lake in fox form with some of his kits.

The following morning Elise pulled him reluctantly from his blankets. Alexander and Bradley were already up. Colin figured being five months pregnant got him a pass on early rising. That and the ache in his butt from Alexander’s enthusiastic knotting the night before. He grinned to himself.

“Wanna go to school, Papa Colin, where’s my stuff?”

“OK Elise, give me a minute.” He eased himself out of the blankets gingerly. He figured boyfriend Timmy must have been a good influence, as Elise had never bothered too much about school before her weeks in the urban classroom.

They found her notepad and pencils, and Colin took her hand as they walked to the new cabin. They were late for breakfast but there were still some currant buns and warm sweet tea.

Colin went to the canopy with Elise. Nearly all the kits were already there, but you couldn’t have told that from afar as they were so quiet and well behaved.

“Hey kits. What’s up?” He asked smiling while Elise squeezed between Daisy and Olivia.

There was some shuffling on the benches but no one answered. Daisy and the alpha’s kits looked miserable.

“We are happy you are back.” Justine called from the back row and wrapped her arm around Jennifer who was next to her.

“O. K.” Colin sounded unconvinced, “We don’t look happy. Daisy?”

“Yes Colin.” Daisy asked.

“What is going on?”
Daisy’s chest puffed out with pride at being the one chosen to answer. “No-one is happy anymore. We all love that you are all back with your new baby.”

“Why are you not happy?”

“Oh it is not me, I’m not happy very much anyway and I had a fight with my Papa this morning, but it is the alpha and vixen.”

Colin looked at the front row where Alan was clinging into Devon who had a hand on Cissy’s lap with Hillie behind them. There was one missing, “Where is Hunter?”

“With Momma,” Hillary croaked, “He won’t leave Momma.”

Colin nodded. This had gone on long enough. As he left the canopy he saw Katie coming down the hill with a pile of books. He ducked around to avoid her and headed for the pack alpha’s den.

Refusing to knock or give warning, Colin marched down into the heart of the den. Jensen was in the side room, sitting in the nursing chair in a state of undress with Hunter and Basil on his lap in their fox forms.

“Hi.” Colin tried as an opener.

“Hi Colin, did Jared say you could call?” Jensen asked.

“I didn’t ask him.” Colin responded and saw Jensen’s eyes flick towards the entrance.

“You need to go,” Jensen said looking into the middle distance.

“No fucking way. What is going on?”

“It is too complicated. He doesn’t sleep. Not properly. There are these terrible nightmares. He doesn’t remember them when he wakes, but I listen to him pleading and crying not to be touched. Our morning routine is cancelled. I have to convince him to shift to human for midday meal. He sits on the rock by the lake in fox form, and will help any fox who comes to him, but he is silent for much of the day. He keeps apologizing for worrying me…” Jensen bit his lip and his eyes filled with water.

Colin skidded on a loose blanket almost falling in his urgency to grab Jensen into an upper body hug. “Impossible.” He declared. At Jensen tensing of his body, Colin continued, “I mean it is impossible for you to take this on yourself. We need to get help.”

“I would have but I don’t know where to turn. I can’t betray his privacy. The sanctity of what happens between mates is important to him. I have thought of Ian. They were years together in the ST house, and when Ian lived here with us he would sometimes tell stories, do you remember? Or was that when you were in Star Valley?” Jensen left out a deep sigh. “Ian said Jared would spend days in fox form. I think if he wasn’t pack alpha he would retreat to fox. I’m trying to give him all my energy and positivity through our bond, but Colin it is killing me.”

Colin didn’t know what to say. This was beyond him. He moved forward to hug his friend again, but Jensen pushed him gently away and stroked Hunter-fox and Basil-fox.

“Jensen, I’m not going to hurt you.” Colin pleaded through tears that were falling freely.

“I’m worried about when I am due to start work on the Omega Equality project. Jared says he still will allow me to go to Misha’s and work on it, but I don’t want to leave him even for a few hours.”
Colin edged closed not hugging Jensen but stroking his cheek with the back of his fingers. Jensen leaned into the touch. Colin wondered if Jared was even intimate with his mate, but glancing down at the finger shaped bruises on his friend’s hips, he figured that sex hadn’t been ruled off the menu.

“Go, please.” Jensen asked.

“I can stay a while.”

“No Colin, Jared will be around to find out why Hunter didn’t appear this morning. I don’t want him to think I am talking behind his back. Will you take him and Basil to class?”

Colin agreed reluctantly. “Do you want me to bring you anything Jen?”

“I’d like to see Stella.”

“I’ll bring her and Bradley up to you.” Colin promised and took the two three year olds with him.

Once the little ones had been passed over to Katie, Colin searched out his mates. They were down at the lake in fox form introducing tiny Stella-fox to the joy of swimming.

Colin sat on one of the flat rocks watching them play. The day was warm and the sunlight was refracted on the ripples in the lake. Intent on the tender way his mates were licking the baby clean on the grassy bankside, he didn’t notice Jared-fox taking the other rock until the pack alpha had settled down.

“Jared?” Colin tried gingerly.

Jared remained fox, and Colin got the fox mind message that he wanted to be left alone unless he had a problem to bring to his attention.

Soon after Colin followed his mates back to their den. Bradley and Alexander shifted and got dressed. Alexander suggested an early lunch, knowing the cabin was full of leftovers from the previous night’s feast.

“Wait a moment, please.” Colin asked from where he was resting against the wall. “I want to talk about Jensen and Jared.”

Alexander stiffened and began to make his excuses.

“Stay please Alex-mate.” Colin requested.

“It is mate business or omega business I have no place.” Alexander argued.

“It is pack business.” Colin affirmed. He outlined everything that had happened, divulging things he knew from Lakeside, from times he talked to Misha, to the subdued kits and what happened in the pack alpha den.

Bradley held him as he finished with what Jared had communicated at the lake. Alexander threw his hands up, “What can I do? It is a mating matter. Jared hasn’t done anything out of order. The pack is healthy. And you Colin should have listened to Jensen and respected their privacy.”

Colin gave a strangled scream and pulled on his own hair. “I can’t. We can’t do nothing. You didn’t see him. He is lost. If the vixen is lost the pack is lost. Jensen is lost because Jared is barely functioning. It is a pack matter.”

“I can talk with Oliver and James, see what they think. I can try and talk to Jared” Alexander offered
and went to find the other foxes.

Colin huffed. It wasn’t enough. He wasn’t really angry with Alexander. It wasn’t his fault his hands were tied. If he challenged Jared openly on his behavior it could be seen as a challenge for the pack. That was no solution. Either Alexander or Jared ended up dead or exiled. Yet they couldn’t just sit there and let them suffer.

He was aware of Bradley pulling him in close and stroking his hair. He grabbed Bradley’s hand and brought it to his mouth to give him a kiss on the palm. Bradley moved round to take Colin’s lip with his teeth. The kisses of comfort were developing into something hotter and more delicious when Stella let out a fearsome squeal of hunger. Both omegas pulled apart with lingering tender touches. Bradley shifted to let Stella suckle while Colin returned to wracking his brains for ways to help Jensen and his cousin.

Chapter End Notes

Ce n'était rien - It was nothing/didn't matter.

très inquiets pour Jared - very worried for Jared
Chapter Thirteen

After evening meal Alexander arrived a few minutes earlier than the other foxes at the old cabin for the meeting. He could see what Colin meant. The far corner looked less like a guest area and more like someone’s nest. Jared-fox was already curled up in his newly designated resting spot.

The alphas’ (with betas Stephen, Tony and James) meetings weren’t the formal or the alpha headbanging meetings that the rest of the pack presumed. They were casual even social meetings where pack business and updates were discussed. Alexander deliberately sat in the old red armchair with the rip exposing the horsehair stuffing. Jared normally preferred that chair. The others began to arrive and his choice of seat raised a few eyebrows but Alexander said nothing, except to respond to his pack mates’ enquiries about Bradley and Stella. Gerard looked like he was about to comment but he was followed in by Oliver and Tony. Oliver was loudly complaining that he was never representing the pack at a Fox Council meeting again, that Lincoln Fields was the most boring pack in the country and that the meeting had been some kind of ten round boxing match between Ian and Jacob that ended with no winner and everyone feeling like they had taken a punch.

“I am sure it wasn’t that bad, Ollie.” Jared said finally shifting to his human form and pulling on his clothes.

“You have no idea, Jay. Between Jacob sneering that it would be William Eccleston’s last meeting before his enforced retirement and Ian trying to get consensus for a wild fox position on the new government land deed laws, and being called Little Oliver Padalecki by Seth and Edward, it was a nightmare. I am three weeks older than you Jay.”

Jared smiled wistfully, “Those three weeks were always important. So you are not volunteering for the Pack Alpha meeting at The Anubis’s pack?”

“Gods no way. Alexander, you can take the mantle back.” Oliver groaned and plonked himself down on the sofa laying three packages across his lap. “On top of everything they are a whole skulk of gossip hounds. They talked of nothing else on our meal breaks except who was related to an Accola and how many Accola descendants they had in their packs. William blew out of there as soon as Ian declared the meeting over. Seth actually asked Jonathon if he could set Fabrice aside to claim the Eccleston pack.”

“Any news of Envoy McMorran’s quest?” Christopher asked, “Lilly has Rosie driven to distraction asking if there is any news of when he is coming back our way.”

“Tooley Da Vinci, a half Italian baker in Fargo, has an eleven year old son who is still a kit and has an Accola mother of Allegra’s line. Larry Spencer, a beta in The Green Forest had a grandmother who was also of the line, but Larry’s son is only eight. They told me I should try harder to pop a son out of Katie, the snarky fuckers. I heard that Aedry was headed to Kansas next to visit the two Accola villages there, so he is headed back this way.” Oliver winked at Christopher, “Anyone would think you were trying to get one of your brood mated off?”

“Not me. I’d like to keep all my family together, but Lilly has plans.” Christopher winked.

“Whooo whooo Lilly and Aedry!” Felix air punched from the corner.

“Get off my blankets, kit!” Jared called over to him.

Felix didn’t look particularly sorry as he took the arm of the sofa instead.
“I have an announcement.” James chuckled at Felix as he straightened from where he had been slouching against the fire surround. “Allyson is with kit.”

A round of congratulations and back slapping ensued augmented by praise for James’s virility and some concern that this time Allyson would hold on to the baby.

Alexander thought Jared did a pretty good job dredging up a happy persona for the occasion. Only when it seemed no one was looking did a fleeting expression of pure desperation glance across his face.

Alexander bit his lip. He had planned to raise his concerns diplomatically at the meeting but he now felt that he had to bite his tongue. That look Jared had, it made him reconsider and tend towards talking one to one with his alpha before blindsiding him in front of others.

Jared, presuming correctly that some of the kits would be trying to eavesdrop outside, stuck his head out the window and asked Wesley and Devon to get a bottle of Elderflower wine.

A few minutes later there was a tentative knock on the door and a kit deputation of Devon, Alan and Wesley stood outside with the wine.

“Daddy, can we know what you are celebrating?” Devon asked bravely as Alan handed over the bottle and Wesley a column of cups.

“Shall we tell them foxes?” Jared called back into the room.

“I don’t know. They were listening outside.” James teased.

“Awh but Dad, we didn’t hear anything.” Alan protested.

“Please Dad, can we tell the other kits?” Wesley asked Tony.

James looked at Jared who nodded. “Allyson is having more kits.”

“But she hasn’t had babies forever.” Wesley blurted. “Sorry, I mean, that is brilliant.”

James was not offended, the good news temporarily casting a veil over the miscarriages and stillbirths that the couple had suffered. He laughed loud enough that it wasn’t obvious that some of the others were not joining in.

“Okay boys, why don’t you find your sisters and fill them in on the news?” Jared asked.

“Okay Daddy, we won’t listen.” Devon promised as the three kits left.

“James, do the honors,” Jared passed him the bottle, “So what are the mysterious parcels, Ollie?”

“Number one is our pack’s copy of the land registration legislation. Ian said the Wild Were Council has recommended that packs get their legal representatives to work through it with them. I took the initiative and made an appointment for you, me and Alexander with our notaries on Thursday.”

“Fine.” Jared approved.

“Package two is a personal one. Jonathon brought it. It is for Lilly from Aedry.” Oliver grinned as Christopher choked on his wine. Oliver handed to parcel over and Christopher opened it. It was a long wide teal scarf with the Eccleston violets embroidered along the end. It was fine and expensive. Aedry must have had to trade a lot to find such fine craftsmanship. It was a suitable mating gift. There was an enclosed letter, but Christopher respected Lilly’s privacy and did not break the seal.
“Package three, the big one, needs to be opened by you too Christopher.” Oliver’s tone was tense and he shot a look at Jared. “It is for Daisy from Jacob.”

Christopher placed Lilly’s scarf carefully on the table before ripping into the brown paper wrapping on Daisy’s package. An undyed supple pale leather jerkin with stars in stud work fell onto the floor with three letters.

Alexander felt the blood drain from his face, “Is that what I think it is?”

“What is it?” Felix asked bending down to pick up the waistcoat and shake it out.

“It is the formal wear for the Star Pack Second. Adapted for the shape of a female alpha, by the look of the cut.” Alexander commented and pushed out a whistle at Jacob’s daring.

“She is not even seven years old.” Christopher gasped trying to recover his composure. “Can he do this? Send a little kit such a so called gift?”

“Christopher, he is her closest blood alpha, he can ask for her to live with him if he wants, but don’t worry I would refuse that.” Jared reassured him quickly seeing the look of horror on the older alpha’s face.

“The point here is that Daisy is Jacob’s only blood relative beyond Stars like me, Fagan and Liam, who are distant cousins. If she is alpha she is entitled to inherit or at least challenge for Star Valley.” Alexander pointed out.

Christopher had opened his letter and thrown the note on the table in disgust. He picked it back up and read it out, “Alpha Eccleston, I trust your integrity that you will pass this symbol of my pack’s affinity with Daisy Star to my niece. I understand she was unhappy enough in your care to run away. I presume you are making amends. Regards, Star.”

“Fucker.” Tony growled.

“Bastard,” Oliver joined in.

“Unbelievable,” James snarled.

“Oh I believe it. He is unique.” Alexander added, “Are you going to read yours, Jared?”

Jared shrugged and said “Why not?” He pressed his glasses against the bridge of his nose and ripped open the envelope clearing his throat to read aloud,

“Padalecki,

I intend to declare my niece as my successor as soon as her alpha rage manifests. Consider this my initial submission to be my niece’s alpha trainer. I will grant her Second on her sixteenth birthday. If she is beta, I will offer her my approved successor as her mate, and she will be pack vixen, with her alpha son inheriting the pack.

The Winter Fox Council meeting is at Star Valley.

My pack omega, Stellan, wants to extend invitation to your second and his family. I would like you to consider adding Daisy to the travelling party.

May your pack prosper.

Star.”

“The gall.” Gerard growled from his chair by the fire, “He has some cheek. I remember him as a snotty nosed alpha teenager.”
“He has an argument.” James said.

“What argument? Daisy is my daughter in all but blood. She is my family. I am not sending her to California to some megalomaniac pack alpha.” Christopher fumed.

“If Daisy is alpha, and excuse me for voicing this in your presence Jared, but we all think she is, and Devon is also alpha. Who knows perhaps Jack, Wesley, Alan, Hillary, Sage, or even another of the girls could be alpha too? We have Felix only ten or more years older than them, and excuse me Alexander, but you are only four years older than Felix. That is too many alphas in one pack.” James expounded.

“Who made any rules about how many alphas should be in a pack?” Christopher argued back, “and just because some of them may be alpha that doesn’t mean they will have the drive to be pack alphas, look at me and Oliver.”

“But you can’t honestly say that Devon and Daisy aren’t already playing out their fight to be pack alpha.” Stephen chipped in.

“This is all speculation.” Jared interrupted, “and Alexander is a pack alpha but here as my second.”

“But alpha, it is like you are our Pack Alpha, but Alexander gets to be Pack Alpha in public.” Felix reasoned.

Jared looked thoughtful and Alexander felt the truth in Felix’s point. He had felt more satisfied in his position in the pack since he had taken the role of pack representative alpha.

“I will consider it.” Jared announced. “You may pass the jerkin to Daisy.”

The subject was closed.

Everything was quiet on the pack borders. Their tenants had no issues. Alexander broached Elise and Valerie’s idea of allowing some of the town school children to visit the den, after their summer break. Jared said he would consider that also.

Finally Jared asked if Alexander would like to formally present Stella to the pack the following day after midday meal.

Alexander noticed the strain across Jared’s eyes as he made the suggestion. “We would be honored. Bradley has been looking forward to Stella’s formal naming and acceptance into the pack.”

“Of course” Jared replied, “Come on everyone I believe there are still some of those wheat crackers and Stephen, you might unwrap a new cheese. We will have some treats with our celebratory wine.”

Alexander walked to the new cabin behind James and Tony. He grinned at the backslapping and relaxed gaits of his packmates. A little good news did everyone good. From the corner of his eye he watched the pack alpha. Jared trailed behind the others staring into the middle distance. With the other foxes’ focus elsewhere Alexander saw Jared drop his façade and his own brow furled in concern at the other alpha’s expression. On Thursday in Lakeside he would take an opportunity to speak with Matt, and try and get through to Ian on the phone.

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Daisy held the letter in her hand and looked up at the formal jacket which she had hung carefully over her bed. It had been a long night. Firstly Lilly had received the mating gift and a letter from Aedry, which announced he would be with them on Friday and would be seeking her father’s and
pack alpha’s permission to mate.

The young beta had danced around the den, accepting compliments on how the blue-green of the scarf emphasized the blackness of her hair. It had been joyful and Daisy had sat with baby-Sage on her lap, enthralled by the celebrations.

Later Christopher had taken her to the reception chamber, barring Lilly from interrupting. Sebastian was there with the jacket and a letter for Daisy from the Star Pack Alpha. She was wowed by the jacket, so soft, smelling of newly worked leather, star studs shining and made especially for her. It was too big. Papa had told her she was not obliged to accept it.

Wide-eyed and nervous she had asked her Papa to read the letter. There were long words and she would have had to come to him for help with it.

Papa’s voice filled her mind, with her Uncle Jacob’s words. Sometimes Papa had broken off to contain his emotions but he read until the end.

My dear Daisy,

It is a burden and privilege to be the eldest. My big brother Mark told me that.
We were inseparable as kits. He was two years older than me and I worshipped him. Our alpha father was a hard man. He was the pack second to his cousin Robert. Mark adored our omega mother telling me he was shy and humble, although I only saw the weakness that left us at our father’s mercy.

When Mark popped his knot our father changed towards him. He was suddenly the golden boy.
When I popped mine the following summer, Father dubbed us his alpha twins. We were called the Star twins during the mating camps.

I was shocked when Mark announced he was mating Eliza Padalecki and that he wasn’t bringing her to us, rather he was going to live in South Carolina.
I didn’t speak to my brother again until I travelled to Padalecki Lake with the pack’s condolences on the loss of Eliza and their kit. Years later I got to know my brother again when Mark spent time with us trying to help the pack recover from the terrible raids and the loss of a generation of kits.
The last time I saw my brother was when the Fox Council held their meeting here eight years ago. Gerard didn’t want to travel all the way to California and he sent Mark, who was pack second.
Mark was so full of life and hope, for the first time in many years. He had heard that the fox mating service had found his true mate in England. He was buzzing with the idea of meeting your mother for the first time.

I can’t explain to you, my niece, what I felt when your father died.
I never mated. I am too old now. My true mate never came along or perhaps was lost during those years of terror.
You, Daisy, are my family. My blood.
I hear, dear kit, that you have the traits of an alpha.
I want you to accept the jerkin of the Star Second, and come to me when you are alpha to begin your new life.
I will sit you beside me and show you how to be pack alpha. We will walk the pack borders and you will sit next to me as I aid our pack mates. You will sit in the place of my Second at mealtime. Fagan will show you our river. Liam will teach you to drive. Nicki will take you to the city. In the evening I will teach you Star history and you will have your own nest room at the pack alpha den.
If you are not alpha, Daisy, I still would like you to come here, mate with a Star alpha and make this your home.
I know my brother dearly loved your Papa. He will always be welcome here too. Please try not to be angry with your Papa. Blame does not fall on him for the actions of others.
If you ever want to run again, please stop and send word to me. I will come and get you.

Tender wishes,
Daisy thought of all the letter contained. Her heart ached for a gentle omega grand-papa who she never knew. She thought of how her life and family story slotted in with pack history and fox history. She wondered about the future and about her mysterious uncle who seemed to want to give her his pack. Her eyes closed thinking of sun kissed Californian foxes and an older version of herself wearing her jacket and facing a setting sun.
Cradling Stella in his arms, Jensen beamed down at their newest pack member. She was a beautiful kit. Jensen had been touched during the ceremony to see the tender way that Alexander held Bradley but still let the fingers of his other hand touch Colin’s arm.

Once the official naming and acceptance into the pack was complete Bradley had taken him aside and whispered that they were trying to help.

What could anyone do?

He thought Bradley was about to ask him something but James came over and asked if he had heard their news, that Allyson was pregnant. He managed to congratulate him. A coil of guilt squeezed his stomach and he wondered if he was going to be sick. This could be he and Jared now. The pack congratulating them on new kits, and Jared happy and flashing his dimples with joy.

Slipping away early before Colin or Bradley could corner him to talk about his mate, Jensen dragged his feet up the slope. When had everything gone so wrong?

Jensen knew loneliness. The year between his father passing and his mating had been one of isolation. He went to work but he was alone there. He had no family and his little house was both a haven and a solitary place. His days were brightened by Misha and his other online friends but it had been a lonely existence. That year paled against this. That had been loneliness. This was desolation. He was surrounded by his pack but they were apart. He had his kits but they brought him little comfort. There were no compensating hugs from his alpha. Jared was too tense, stressed, wound tight. Jensen feared he would explode or collapse. He couldn’t reach him. He tried to be there for Jared, to be his support, his rock. He didn’t know if it was doing any good as he watching his mate fading before his eyes.

Jensen lay on his nesting blankets in the dark. He hadn’t bothered to light a lamp. He didn’t shift. His fox was too small and vulnerable compared to his giant alpha. He didn’t feel safe as fox and he felt awful about that. Jared was too volatile. He had not hurt him, not intentionally. There were bruises from desperate needy lovemaking which ended with Jared clinging on to him, pressing fingers into Jensen’s skin as if he would somehow vanish during the night.

Jensen released his vice like hold on the mating bond. It took concentrated effort to block the bond and he was too tired.

Jared’s anger and grief, his jealousy and rejection, mingled with his fears, nightmares and insecurities poured down the bond knocking the wind from Jensen. He didn’t know what to do with his mate’s turmoil. He wasn’t in a fit state to send back feelings of comfort. Jensen grappled with his own focus to try and close off their link again. Jared was spinning out of control, fearful of losing his connection to his mate, but Jensen couldn’t leave it open. He was bathed in sweat by the time he had virtually shut it down. He was still aware of Jared, as always, but that terrifying glimpse into his alpha’s emotions left him reeling. Maybe there was something medically wrong with Jared? But if there was why wouldn’t he open up to him about it? Did he not know he was in such trouble?
Jensen turned his head to the wall and tried to build up his strength so that when Jared joined him, he would be strong enough to hold him, stay awake for him, dry his night terror tears and give him the support he needed for a new day.

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Alexander was seriously considering suggesting a larger pack car. Surely some funds could be released for a second hand SUV. If Todd gave them a good deal on one, it could count as his tribute to the pack. He mentally put legroom at the top of his priorities for the next pack vehicle.

Felix was driving with Jared beside him, leaving Colin and Oliver to share the back seat with Alexander. They were going to the notary's office while Colin had his six month check up at the clinic. Alexander had wanted to be at the appointment but Colin assured him that it was routine and he would be fine. Alexander tried not to growl at the thought of the medical staff touching his pregnant mate while he was across the town at their meeting.

Going through the proposed land registry legislation proved as mind numbing as Alexander had expected. Padalecki Lake would not be disadvantaged but other packs like The Green Forest might have different results. The government wanted to map the land that the wild packs claimed. Due to the Civil War settlement Star Valley and Eccleston Caves were already bound by treaties. Padalecki Lake had no disputed territories and as far as he knew Collins Farm was pretty secure too. However The Green Forest was called a National Park by the urban government. There were other species with issues too. The wolf pack Ten Islands only lived on six of their islands and the residents on the other four disputed who owned the land. One Blood seemed to be claiming large tracts up to the suburbs of Albany, areas that didn’t even pay tribute to Joseph. Eight Gullies was in constant wrangling about their border with the Californian state. On one hand it could be positive to have all territories clearly marked on the other hand it could cause new and old conflicts to surface.

Finally freed of legal-speak and having come to the consensus that their pack would support the legislation, the alphas met Felix in front of the diner and headed over to collect Colin. Jared came in with Alexander to ask Matt to attend the evening alpha meeting, where he would announce their decision on the legislation and ask for any final opinions.

Matt was in the house behind the clinic on a break. Jared went to find him. Colin was resting his arms on the high reception desk leaning over having a word with Carole. Coming from behind Alexander pulled him into a shoulder hug.

“How did it go?” He asked surprising himself at the amount of concern in his voice.

“Awesome” Colin grinned, “Misha came in to have a look at the little tykes on the screen. They put on quite a show for us. They are gaining weight and still have all their paws and fine tails.”

“I should hope so.” Alexander chuffed back.

“Cindy is just getting me some vitamins. You’ll need to choose more fruit from the eating table for me.”

“Is there a problem?” Alexander’s hand gripped Colin’s arm.

“No. Not at all,” Cindy reassured with a smile as she appeared from the dispensary, “Matt would like your mate to take a course of pre-natal vitamins as a precaution.”

Alexander sighed with relief. He heard the clinic door open as he bend over to peck Colin’s cheek.
“Well. How good it is to see you both looking so well.” Doc Morrissey’s voice boomed as he came over to them. “How are those kits, Colin? Not kicking you about too much? I hope?” The old coyote’s white shaggy eyebrows shot up and he winked.

Before Alexander could begin to be annoyed that the old doctor had once more ignored greeting protocols, the beta clapped Colin on the shoulder and asked about Bradley.

Although Alexander was focused on Colin’s lips as they opened to give his answer, his instinctive brain was pulled toward his peripheral vision as a dark blur sped from behind and tackled the old man to the floor.

Jared had three fist plants landed with crunching accuracy to the doctor’s face and was crouched across his body squeezing his neck before anyone else could react. His eyes turned amber fox and his face was flushed red with fury.

Matt and Alexander dropped beside him and took an arm each trying to pry their pack alpha off.

“Jared, Jay, Stop you’ll kill him.” Oliver shouted from the door as he and Felix burst in.

Jared was focused on his prey. He spat out random words; don’t touch my pack, not a doctor, fucker, hands off my omegas, you’ll pay, touched my Jen, didn’t forget.

Oliver tried to separate Jared’s fingers from the coyote’s throat but the pack alpha growled from deep in his throat and made to bite his cousin in his frenzy. Oliver only escaped Jared’s dropped fox canines by jerking his body back.

Even with four alphas straining to get him to release the doctor, there was no budging. Jared’s weight bore down. The coyote’s eyes bulged and his lips drained of color.

Alexander let go and stood up.

He looked around at the shocked audience. He had seen this before. He had seen uncontrolled alpha rage and he knew what the ST guards did about it. He shouted at Cindy and Linda gaining their attention. “Sedatives?”

“What?” Cindy blinked.

“Get enough sedatives to knock out at least two full grown alphas, NOW.”

The nurse ran for the dispensary. Dodging between waiting patients and almost falling over her own feet in the pandemonium.

She returned within seconds but Alexander wondered if it would be too late as the doctor stopped clawing Jared’s arms. Alexander barreled sideways into Jared who didn’t let his vice like grip ease, but that hadn’t been the target. Alexander lifted up Jared’s tee giving Linda a clear area of skin to stab the enraged alpha with the syringe.

It still took all four pack mates to get Jared off as he succumbed to the drug.

Alexander laid a hand over Jared’s panicked heartbeat. He closed his eyes, found the pack mind, visualized his own hands wrapping around it and pulled.

The doctors dragged Doc Morrissey a few feet away and gave him oxygen. Alexander ordered the waiting urban patients out. He told Carole to lock up the clinic.
Once conscious the old coyote demanded the sheriff. He was pressing charges. He had almost been murdered in his old practice.

“I don’t think you should call the sherriff.” Oliver said, “You might not like what happens.”

“Don’t you threaten me you little shit.” The doctor croaked, “I want Macken up here.”

“Call the sherriff, if that is what the doctor wants.” Alexander said calmly.

“But Alexander?” Oliver started.

“Macken can be trusted, Ollie. If the doctor wants to know why Jared is entitled to kill him, then bring it on.” Alexander leaned back against the high reception desk and gave the injured coyote a predatory smirk.

The doctor had the sense to look worried but he said, “I’m the victim here. I insist on my rights. I want Alpha Padalecki arrested.”

Alexander looked down at Jared. “Colin can you ask Misha for a pillow or something for Jared? Carole, ring the Sherriff but ask him to come alone. Felix call Fell Creek for me and tell them we need Ian to get over here. Matt is there a room that we and use when the law gets here? Linda, can you get Jared his own room? I want him sedated until we go back to the den.”

“Who are you to be giving all these orders?” Morrissey asked as he pulled himself up to a sitting position.

Oliver laughed grimly and Morrissey glared at him, “He is Pack Alpha, you old fool.”

Morrissey blinked and looked back at Alexander, “I apologize, alpha; I don’t understand fox or pack dynamics.”

“Accepted. Now, everyone move.” Alexander ground his teeth. He hadn’t planned on taking control of the pack, but gods be damned he wasn’t handing it back when Jared woke up. Jared was not getting the pack back unless and until recovered and until he could prove to Alexander that he could cope with it.

Chapter End Notes

Holding hands up at the brievity of the chapter (as in don’t shoot the writer ;p) and where i have left it.

I have a long shift at RL work tomorrow, but will post later that evening.

Thanks again for all your comments and kudos, I am really grateful for them.

We are on the run to the end now...
Chapter Fifteen

The Padalecki Pack members sat in uncomfortable tension in the waiting room. Oliver’s foot tapped nervously in time with the piped muszak. Alexander took Colin’s hand in an effort to stop himself from snapping at Oliver to stop.

Misha came in with mini bottles of mineral water and asked if anyone was thirsty. The old doctor took a bottle.

The tension was palpable by the time Matt brought Sherriff Macken to them.

Everyone was on a chair, except for Alexander and Colin who were perched on the wide windowsill. The magazines that normally rested there had been swept onto the floor.

Macken removed his wide brimmed hat. “What is the story? This place is humming with alpha rage.”

“Doctor Morrissey wants Jared Padalecki arrested for attempting to kill him.” Alexander offered.

“I can speak for myself,” the old coyote’s voice was still hoarse. He took another sip of water. “I was greeting Omega-Colin when Alpha-Jared tackled me without provocation and attempted to strangle me. He would have succeeded and perhaps attacked others, only for Alpha-Alexander’s intervention.”

“Does anyone dispute this?” Macken asked. When nobody did he added, “You all witnessed the attack?” There was nodding. “Where is Alpha-Padalecki?”

“Jared is under sedation. He is in treatment room two.” Matt replied.

“When can I question him?” Macken asked.

“Never.” Alexander supplied.

“Excuse me. This is a legal matter. I am asking Dr Cohen when I can question the suspect.” The sheriff drew himself up to full height and let his alpha show.

In response Alexander stood up and used his height advantage to look down on the cop, “Under the Solidarity Treaty, as Padalecki Pack Alpha, I am invoking Pack Law. Jared is entitled to demand Doctor Morrissey’s execution; however I am disposed to rule otherwise.”

A car’s screeching brakes outside broke the stillness that followed Alexander’s proclamation.

“My execution for what offense? All I did was aid you and your mate. Bradley survived. Your kit is well. This is outrageous.” Morrissey choked out and stumbled to his feet.

“Think back.” Oliver snarled and Alexander realized that the other alpha was barely containing his own rage.

“I have nothing to say to you.” Morrissey turned away from Oliver and back to the sheriff who was looking out of his depth, “Are you going to let them get away with this? He was uncontrolled, completely lost in the rage, he could have killed us all.”

Macken ran a hand through his greasy hair. “I have not got the authority to make such a decision. Alpha Star, if you tell me your grounds for invoking the treaty I will put them to my superiors. Doc, I will follow our laws until told to do otherwise.”
Neither side looked satisfied.

“A death sentence is only pronounced when a fox is murdered, or a kit or an omega is attacked.” Alexander quoted pack law, “Dr Morrissey was complicit, enabled, abetted, assisted but he was not the main culprit. Therefore I am inclined to spare him.”

“I did no such thing.” The doctor protested.

“Jared came to me when Bradley was still in a coma. He told me, Doc. He asked me…ordered me, not to have you treat his pack.” Matt said.

“So that is why you asked me to stop coming in? But Cohen, I don’t know what he told you.” The coyote said in frustration.

“Can we enlighten Dr Morrissey and me, please about what the pack alleges his offences are?” Sherriff Macken urged.

No one spoke.

Alexander didn’t know the minute details. He tried to catch Matt’s eye to get him to speak.

Colin stood up, “When I was a kit, you were our pack doctor?”

“Yes, Colin, you know I was.” The doctor smiled kindly at the pregnant omega.

“Jared was brought to you with injuries... of a... sexual nature.” Colin blushed.

“Such things should remain private. I don’t approve of bringing such things to light. But yes, the pack second brought young Jared to the clinic on more than one occasion. It was obvious that some other alpha was treating him badly.”

Oliver growled and clenched his hands into fists, as Alexander wondered if he was too volatile to stay in the room. He tried to summon some calm to send it to Oliver, but the tension in the room and in his own mind was too powerful.

The old doctor continued with vitriol, “You growl now, Oliver, but Mark told me about your aberrant alpha-alpha relationship with your cousin, about how you treated him, and how Jared wouldn’t end it with you.”

Oliver leaped from his seat and charged towards the retired doctor, only stopping inches from his aghast face, “You stupid beta, you thick ass, I wasn’t fucking Jared. You imbecile. How could I injure or overpower Jared, he was always bigger than me? He was always more alpha than me. It was Mark, you dickwad. Mark. And you did nothing. You sat here in your plush clinic having stitched up a rape victim and didn’t tell his father or any of the pack.”

“But Mark brought him for treatment. Jared never said. I didn’t tell the pack because Mark said they knew about your relationship. I thought Jared was afraid of Mark, but I presumed it was shame or fear of his wrath.” The doctor’s face collapsed in shame, “I should have done something more. Is this why he was killed? Was it revealed that he had abused Jared that winter?”

“That winter?” Oliver just threw his hands up and stalked to the opposite end of the waiting room.

“From when he was nine years old, Doc,” Colin whispered, “It was revealed because Mark tried again when Jared returned home six years ago.”
Dr Morrissey was reeling, his stunned expression obvious.

“Also, ahem, Jared thought Mark was overly familiar with me.” Felix added and blew out the breath he had been holding.

“I’m dropping charges,” Doctor Morrissey said quickly and resolutely. He looked guiltily at Felix, “I am sorry, young alpha. I should have done something. If I had thought about it, I should have known his injuries were not consensual.”

“I will drop the pack’s charge.” Alexander declared suddenly in response to the doctor’s statement.

“Alex, what if Jared wants to...” Oliver began to ask.

“Jared is in no fit state to know what he wants. I am alpha and the pack is not going to persue Dr Morrissey. Macken do you need us any longer?”

The sheriff muttered something grumpy about wasting police time.

Doctor Morrissey stood slowly, carefully of his aches from being thrown to the floor. He nodded at Alexander and followed the sheriff to the door of the waiting room.

Alexander stood up again, “Felix, bring Colin home for me. Then come back here with Christopher or Gerard. Matt I want Jared ready to go when they get back.”

“Can I suggest that Jared stay here under sedation until we can assess him?” Matt asked.

“No” Alexander responded, “I want him home.”

“Then can we all go to the den? Felix could take Colin and Misha? I can drive in my car if you and Oliver take the back with Jared?” Matt offered.

“Acceptable.” Alexander caught up with the sheriff. He walked Macken out of the building, asking about his beta-mate and thanking him for his common sense.

Both cars arrived back together. Matt’s suggestion had worked. The doctor had a vial of sedative on the passenger seat but Jared remained under while being propped up between Alexander and Oliver in the back.

Alexander left them all at the barn and went to get help to carry Jared back to his den. Many of the foxes were gathered around the remains of lunch.

“Vixen.” Alexander called.

Bradley stood up looking worse for wear. Alexander could feel he was shocky and unsteady, having been caught in the pack changes without knowledge of what had occurred. His alpha caught him and hugged him close, whispering in his ear that he needed him to be strong and he would explain everything later.

“Christopher on patrol?” He asked aloud for everyone’s ears.

Someone answered that he had gone out with Tony.

“I need James and Gerard to help us carry Jared to his den.”

There were gasps.
Alexander pushed his shoulders back and met individual eyes as he spoke, “Jack, Wesley, go to the old cabin now before we return and move all Jared’s spare blankets back to his own den. Allyson, can you gather Jared’s kits and take them to your den? Devon, get your Papa out of the den and take him up to the O den. Actually Bradley, go with Devon will you and stay with Jensen and Sebastian until I call you out later. I need someone to make up a new bed in the old cabin for Ian Fell and one for when Envoy McMorran arrives tomorrow. Stephen I want a goat slaughtered for the mating feast. Can someone make sure Lilly isn’t forgotten in all of this? Amber and Katie can you bring clean water to Jared’s den and check his fire pit. OK, get to it.” Alexander commanded and stalked over to James. He followed the beta to the old cabin and got the old back board from behind the sofa. Gerard joined them on their way back to the cars.

“The rage took him.” Alexander told the old fox.

Gerard nodded and said with sadness, “I saw it coming. I could see he was finding it more difficult to maintain control. I didn’t know how to approach him when it all seemed to me to do with his mating bond.”

“We will get him through it.” Alexander affirmed as they crested the hill. He had seen both outcomes. Alphas taken by their rage in the ST house. Lost in anger. A wolf who killed before they could sedate him, shot dead by the guards. A jackal who had been in the next cell, lashing himself bloody against the walls when the sedation wore off. They had moved ‘baby alpha’ in a rare act of consideration for the fourteen year old’s terror. Alexander got his cell back when the jackal was taken away by mental health services. Alexander preferred to recall Cashel Donnery. The following year, that wolf had beaten another alpha into the ground and couldn’t regain control. He had raged when the drugs wore off. Finally in desperation the warden had let his two closest inmates try and bring him back. Alexander had watched from his own infirmary bed, his broken hand healing from where he had used it to put a halt to Frank Asher’s advances. The two alphas had talked Cashel down. Through the night, they reasoned with and cajoled him. Finally as dawn broke the wolf stopped fighting his restraints, muttered an intelligible thanks to his friends and fell asleep. When Alexander next saw Cashel, he was back to being rec room poker champion.

Felix, Matt and Oliver had Jared out of the car, so they only had to roll him onto the board. Alexander sent Colin and Misha ahead to their omega den.

He was surprised to see Jensen alone on the path back down the other side of the hill. Alexander let the other foxes move ahead with Jared. Jensen was as pale as his omega clothes, grasping and releasing the fingers of his left hand with his right fist. Jensen looked stunned, but Alexander didn’t allow him to protest, as he pulled him close and rubbed circles into his back. The omega didn’t cry but Alexander could feel the tremble. “Off to the omega den with you Jensen. We’ll get Jared settled. When we need you, Bradley and Misha can come with you, alright pet?”

Jensen swallowed hard and moved off to follow the instructions.

At the den, Felix removed a screaming Devon, who didn’t want to leave. Olivia tried to sneak in behind them but left when Oliver asked her to make sure Hunter and Hillary were with Allyson. Finally Jared was in his own nest. “Should I command him to shift, would it help?” Alexander asked Matt. Shifting had been frowned upon in urban situations, so Alexander was unsure if it would have benefitted in the previous cases.

“No alpha,” Matt replied, “It won’t make any difference and I have the sedative calculated for his human form.”

“Do you really think he is lost to it?” Oliver asked.
“We will only know for sure when we wake him, but we all felt it, didn’t we?” Alexander answered.

“I’ve never seen it in an adult before, but it seems so.” Matt added.

“Samantha was lost to her first rage. The pack went from surprised joy at a female alpha to such worry for her. Three days. Finally my father and hers lay either side of her all night. In the morning she asked for a bowl of oatmeal. When I popped my knot not long afterwards, it was sort of anti-climatic.” Gerard remembered.

“It is not so rare amongst untrained teenage alphas. The emotional control is not there yet. How are we going to work this? He can’t be left alone and we need to keep talking to him, grounding him here, even under the sedation.” Matt asked.

“I’ll sit a while. Perhaps Gerard would to?” Alexander asked Jared’s father who nodded, “Oliver and Felix, take a break. Gerard and I can work out a rota. I’d like to get Jensen in, as soon as you think it is feasible.”

“I think it might be good if Jensen came now. Just to let Jared or Jared-fox via their bond, know that he is there. He doesn’t have to stay yet. I’d prefer if we can have his mate with him later when we lower the sedation.”

“I’ll get him.” Alexander followed Felix and Oliver out and headed to the omega den.

At the entrance Alexander shouted a halloo down. Bradley ran out to meet him and grabbed him around the waist.

“How come I have to do all this pack vixen crap again?” Bradley groused into his neck.

Alexander knew Bradley was partly teasing to try and relieve the tension. “The Vixen is the Heart of the Pack. Our old vixen’s heart was broken, and we needed a new strong heart.”

Bradley smacked his arm, “Oh I am sure this was all about the vixen point of view.”

“I need Jensen.” Alexander said gravely.

“What if I won’t give you Jensen?” Bradley straightened up. “He is in no fit state to go anywhere near Jared. He can barely stand up. He tore Misha’s shirt he was clinging on to him so hard.”

“Brad, please, can you send Jensen out? Matt thinks it is important that Jared knows, that he senses that Jensen is alright.”

“But he is not alright, Alex-mate. He is my responsibility and I won’t expose him to what Colin described happening in the clinic.”

“Darling, Jared is sedated. He isn’t going to try and kill Jensen. He wouldn’t ever. Jared couldn’t realize that he was hurting his mate too through the bond.” Alexander steepled his hands together in an effort to stay calm. He did not want to argue with his mate or order him to send Jensen out.

“Misha can come with him. You can come. Hell, you can all come if you want, and bring the kits too.”

Bradley dry laughed. “Can you imagine it? I’ll go in and ask.”

Alexander waited. He tried to listen. He could hear Misha arguing but not the words. Then there was a stream of French curses, followed by Jensen emerging from the den with Sebastian.
“Voilà. Deux omegas a votre service.” Sebastian quirked an eyebrow at Alexander, challenging him to comment.

“You don’t have to stay long, Jensen.” Alexander promised. “Matt just wants Jared to be aware that you are safe.”

“Bradley explained.” Jensen said to the ground. Sebastian grasped him by the elbow and they walked in front the short distance to the den.

Inside Jensen stood slightly behind Sebastian at his mate’s feet. He looked at Gerard and Matt, then down to the long body of his mate. “Oh Gods, Jared. My poor mate. My love. Can I touch him?”

Matt nodded. Jensen knelt down beside his alpha and ran his hand through Jared’s hair. He laid butterfly kisses on his forehead and whispered in his ear how much he meant to him, asking him to come back for his kits and for his mate. “What am I meant to do?” He looked up to the doctor and Jared’s father.

Matt smiled and kneeled on Jared’s other side to check his pulse, “Just open your bond and let him know you are here.”

“Can’t” Jensen shook his head and straightened up. He rocked back and forth.

“You can. It is fine. It won’t hurt him.” Matt tried.

“No. I can’t. I can’t touch our bond. It burns, it burns with hate, fear and pain and I can’t do it. I’m sorry.” Jensen jumped up.

“It is okay Jensen,” Matt said soothingly, “How long have you been dealing with these emotions from Jared?”

“A while, I don’t know. Some of them were always there, just buried way down. Since Fell Creek there was more turmoil in Jared’s mind, but…” Jensen crumbled and Sebastian caught him preventing him from falling, “It is my fault, isn’t it? I refused him. I denied him more kits. I did this.”

“Divine mercy, no Jensen. You did not do this to your mate.” Matt emphasized his words with the concern in his eyes, “Jared is ill. He is suffering a type of delayed trauma and has fallen into Alpha Rage. You are not to blame for any of this. None of it. Jensen, would you like to go up to Misha in the omega den? You have helped here by coming to Jared. Later when he is conscious, he will need you again, but for now, I am telling you as the pack doctor to get your own strength up. Okay?”

Jensen nodded and bit back his sobs. He grabbed Sebastian’s arm for support.

“I love you Jay.” He wept down at his unconscious alpha-mate. He turned to go. Sebastian planted a hard kick into Jared’s left calf muscle and followed, leaving three stunned alphas behind.

“I didn’t realize it was that bad.” Gerard sighed dejectedly.

“When is Ian due?” Matt asked.

“He told Felix he would come immediately. Late tonight or in the morning I guess.” Alexander answered.

“You want to keep this fox only? Or will you ask for David? We might need all the help we can get.” Matt tentatively suggested.
“Maybe I should ask for Joseph. We don’t like to acknowledge it but he is the uber alpha of us all. He likes Jared.”

“More than that, if you ask for David, Daniel will find out, and you will end up with Joseph and Daniel too, I reckon.” Matt added.

“Will you call One Blood, when you go back to the clinic? If they cannot come, then so be it, but at least I will have tried.” Alexander wiped his face wearily. He still had a mating ceremony to deal with in the morning. Honestly who in their right mind would want to be a pack alpha?
Chapter Sixteen

Tyler Eccleston was nervous. He felt stupid tears prickle his eyes. He was wearing the dumb omega clothes his father had insisted on since his heat. The plain cream trousers made his stomach flip and he clawed a fist into the loose material at his thigh. Beta Aedry tapped him on the arm and gave him a sympathetic smile. The countryside slipped passed their window and he wished he was at home, hiding in his new found retreat, the small cubby hole at the back of the omega cave.

Today was the day.

He looked at his slender limbs and fingers, wondering why he had been born omega. All he wanted was a quiet calm life. If he had been beta, he would have been passed over in the pack hierarchy, could have found a kind yet dominant alpha to mate with. Even a female alpha, although he preferred male foxes. He hated all the attention and gossip about him. He wanted to hide in his nest. Not that he had his own nest, sharing with younger sisters. Sisters who said cruel things about stinky loose omegas and how he was the curse of the pack.

He wondered what Felix Padalecki looked like.

Aedry said he was handsome, but he was bound to say that. There were no photographs. He had seen a picture of Angelo Da Vinci, who was only eleven and still a kit. Tyler thought the baker was deluding himself if he thought his fine featured tiny son was an alpha. But there was no picture of Felix.

“Felix-mate.” Tyler mouthed out the word silently for the feel in his mouth.

Felix was eighteen. He was the son of Stephen Padalecki and Anna Accola, who was the daughter of Austin Accola, and granddaughter of Arthur, who was a grandson of Adam, Allegra’s son.

Tyler looked over at his father, who was rigid in the shotgun seat of the SUV. He wondered what his stern authoritative Dad would do when he had to follow Felix’s orders. He felt another moment of panic at the thought of being pack vixen and telling his beta-mother what to do.

Aedry smiled at him again. Of course he did. Aedry thought it was all wonderful. He was going to ask for Lilly Eccleston to mate with him. His mating gift had been accepted. The beta probably had her belongings packed up waiting to be collected. Tyler hadn’t even a nesting blanket collected to offer his mate. If he was a normal omega he could have time to get used to the idea, to build up his nesting items, to look forward to mating. Unless he happened across his true mate in the next four years, he would be Felix’s age before he was expected to entertain suitors. Stupid Martin Eccleston, stupid Allegra Accola, stupid Civil War, stupid Dad for his alpha integrity and honor.

“The other car has fallen behind.” Lothar said from the driver’s seat.

“There is a gas station ahead, pull in and wait for them. Do you want anything son? Aedry?” William asked.

Aedry wanted a soda. Tyler decided he could try one of those, while they waited for the witnesses to catch up.
Gerran Padalecki, Cyrus Green and the Wolf King were the original witnesses to the pact. They were headed for Padalecki Lake. Seth Green was driving the following SUV, carrying The Joseph Wolf and his mate. Tyler didn’t understand why The David Wolf and the Queen’s Chamberlain were with them, but Joseph had insisted. The newly introduced omegas had hugged him at Eccleston Caves but there had been no time to get to know them before they set off on their journey. Part of him wished he had been able to share a car with them. He was shy with them. They were omega but they were wolves too, maybe things were different for them.

The other car pulled up behind them. Tyler saw the Wolf King get out and lounge against the side of the SUV. Tyler’s father joined him and they spoke briefly before everyone piled back into their vehicles and they set off again.

“Not much further, Tyler.” Lothar called back.

Tyler made a noise in response. His heart beat against his ribs and he wondered if he was this nervous now, how bad would he be when they reached their destination?

The road rose and narrowed. Trees overhung the single lane passes. They drove through a small town called Lakeside without stopping.

“Turn left for the way to the parking barn, or you can continue up to the end of this track and we can walk through the trees.” Aedry directed.

“Which way is more formal?” William asked back.

“Through the trees.”

“Onwards so Lothar.” The pack alpha instructed.

The track petered out into scrubby overgrowth. There was a narrow path cleared through the brush ahead.

Aedry and Lothar took their shoulder bags. Tyler looked back to see Seth and the four wolves joining them. William came over and Tyler thought his Dad was about to pull him in for a rare hug but the alpha tugged his top down from where it had hitched up during the car ride and admonished him for not looking presentable. Tyler swung his head away and pleaded with the gods for strength.

The Asian omega from the royal court came over and squeezed his hand before they set off on their hike to the den.

Lamb to the slaughter. Tyler imagined himself trussed up like a piece of meat being carried on a pole through the trees, and managed to make himself feel better that he was walking on his own feet. He heard rustling ahead of them. He guessed their arrival had been noted, but no fox stepped forward and challenged them, rather it sounded as if the unknown fox raced ahead of them.

Aedry had been leading the way but as the trees parted revealing a sloping field of goats with a lake glistening in the sun below, the envoy stepped back and let William and Joseph walk in front.

Crossing the grass with leaden feet, Tyler noticed some of the Padalecki pack gathering at the other side of what had to be their greeting marker.

“There is Lilly.” Aedry whispered excitedly pointing to a young black haired beta who was crossing the stream above the lake. Her shoulders were draped with the beautiful mating gift that Aedry’s mother had embroidered with the pack flowers. Tyler thought she was pretty and could see the fox was seeking Aedry.
“I didn’t know Alpha Padalecki had two mates,” Tyler whispered back as he assessed the tall pack alpha and his omegas standing at the stone.

“That is not Jared.” Aedry gasped in shock.

Tyler wanted to ask which fox was Felix but they were lining up behind his father and the Wolf King.

The formal question was asked, “Who dares cross the Padalecki Border?”

The uber alpha stepped closer to the stone, “I, Joseph, Wolf and King.”

The pack alpha spoke firmly, “I, Alexander Star, Pack Alpha of Padalecki, son of the Star Pack, do formally welcome the King of the Wolves. Who else travels with you and what is their purpose?”

“Daniel, She-wolf.” Joseph began simply, giving Alexander a scrutinizing stare, as if he was trying to intuit what was going on at the Padalecki Pack, “My brother, The David Wolf, and Queen Chamberlain Oscar Branagh. Here to witness and in response to invitation. The foxes can introduce themselves.”

Tyler could see his father’s hand clenched in a fist as he took a step forward. Seth spoke before him.

“I, Seth Green, Pack Alpha of the Green Forest, son of Andrew, here to witness,” the fox narrowed his eyes and added in a querying tone, “Pack Alpha-Alexander?”

“I, William Eccleston, Pack Alpha of Eccleston Caves, son of William, supplicant seeking a mate for our pack.”

Tyler thought that his father sounded strong and he was proud of his strength. He noticed the blond pack vixen tilting his body back and strained to hear him as he asked with urgency for a kit called Faith to find his brother. The kit ducked between the gathered Padalecki foxes and ran back across the stream. Meanwhile Lothar had introduced himself. Aedry grabbed his wrist and it was their turn to step forward.

“I, Adrian Glynn McMorrann, son of Lothar, Envoy of Eccleston Caves, charged with the quest for the heir of Allegra Accola, do come here to ask you Alpha-Alexander for permission to seek Lilly Eccleston as my mate, and to bring you, Tyler, son of William Eccleston, and ask that Felix Padalecki be joined with him as his mate fulfilling the vow made by our ancestors.”

“Welcome.” Alexander said infusing warmth into the word, now that the formal greeting was complete, “This is my Pack Vixen, Bradley, and my second mate Colin. You all know Ian Fell.” The alpha gestured at a handsome black haired alpha who was picking at his nails behind them. “Oliver Padalecki, my second and his mate Katie beside the Fell Alpha. We can save other introductions until later. Perhaps you can follow us to our canopy area. Stephen and Christopher might bring our potential mates with them.”

“Alexander,” Joseph spoke with authority, “Where is Jared?”

“Indisposed.”

Tyler saw the King’s consort touch his back, and Joseph added, “And Jensen?”

“The omega den. Would Daniel, Oscar and Tyler prefer to rest there? Colin can organize refreshments for them.” Alexander offered.
Daniel and Oscar nodded. Tyler didn’t know if he should go there. He would much prefer the company of strange omegas to hearing the alphas discuss him as if he was a piece of meat. He missed some of what was said and found his arm being linked by Daniel as they broke off from the rest of the group. The dark haired second mate of the Padalecki pack alpha took a step back and pulled the blond first mate into a deep kiss. It was rather shocking. Tyler found his hand covering his mouth in surprise.

“I’m sorry you can’t come with us,” the dark haired omega said as he pulled back from the kiss.

“Vixen duty,” the other sighed, “I’ll escape when I can and give a blow by blow account. Could you do with a couple of bottles of elderflower wine in the den?”

“Thanks Bradley-mate. That would be welcome. Some juice for me.”

“I’ll send it up,” the pack vixen promised as he caught up with the alphas.

Tyler found the second mate next to him, “Colin Star, nice to meet you Tyler.” Expecting a handshake, Tyler was taken aback to be kissed on both cheeks.

“Thanks, I guess,” he replied shyly.

“Oh Gods, if two little kisses produce such a blush, prepare yourself for Sebastian and Misha.” Colin warned with a grin and the two wolves laughed.

Wondering who Sebastian and Misha were Tyler followed Colin into the den. He was more used to caves but the Eccleston pack was large and many families had traditional dens. They bypassed the reception chamber and went straight to the main nest. Two small male kits wrapped around each other had to be stepped over at the entrance. There was an older blond omega with a crinkled but kind face leaning against a table. Another fox with messy black hair and piercing blue eyes sat half turned away looking at the nesting blankets. Tyler followed that fox’s gaze to the most stunning omega he had seen. The fox was pale, ill perhaps, and he must have been at least double Tyler’s age, but he was beautiful. He made Tyler feel ugly and inferior, made him feel sorry for Felix, who would have to settle for having such a poor omega as his mate. He was busted aside as Daniel and Oscar rushed over to the pretty fox. Oscar lifted him up and slotted underneath him so that the omega could lean back against his chest. Daniel planted kisses on his forehead and stroked his hair. Tyler edged back against the wall, uncertain and out of his depth at what was occurring. The dark haired blue eyed omega had his head cradled in his hand as he sat on the chair. Tyler sank down the wall and pulled his knees up, not wanting to intrude. He felt less burdened as his weighty destiny was forgotten in the wake of another’s need.

He felt a tug on his sleeve. The two young foxes in the door way had shifted and now a blond and a brunet boy stood next to him. “Who are you?” the brown haired kit asked.

“Tyler.” He answered.

“I’m Basil. You can call me Baz. This is Hunter, you can call him Hunter. My Papa is Sebastian.”

The young kit pointed towards the older omega, then whispered pointing at the blankets, “Hunter’s Papa is Jensen.”

“Tyler, as in Tyler Eccleston of the magical pack-gifting knot-hole in our den?” Sebastian moved over and pulled Tyler to his feet. The playful tone of voice meant he couldn’t be offended by the coarse language. Embraced and subjected to three kisses on the cheek, Tyler told the older fox he was pleased to meet him.
“Merci, darling, what an adorable boy. I remember being fourteen. So long ago now. Dripping with slick over my cousin Jude, following him around like a puppy and dramatically pretending to kill myself when he mated.”

“Sebastian, you have the most outrageous stories!” the seated omega had collected his emotions and stood up offering his hand to Tyler, “I’m Misha.”


“The one and only.” Misha grinned, “Were you researching us?”

“No. I was...well...I was reading the stories and advice of other omegas forced to mate.” Tyler said quietly, “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to slur your pack mate.”

Misha and Sebastian pulled him into a huddle and shushed him and it was like a dam breaking, all the fear and tension came out. He was in an omega den, no alpha father to judge him, no sisters to mock him, no pack to scrutinize his behavior. He heaved and shook. Aware of more omegas pulling him gently he was lowered to the blankets and left cry out all his anxiety.

“You poor boy, come here,” a soft deep voice soothed him and he tucked his head under the chin of the speaker. A hand rubbed his back, another from behind applied steady grounding pressure on his hip. Someone else steadily rubbed his shoulder.

Finally the outburst passed leaving him drained but calm. He opened his eyes and discovered he was tucked into the body of the perfect handsome omega. He sucked in his lips trying not to let his weak selfish emotions take advantage of this generous fox who offered him comfort while obviously suffering and incapacitated.

The other foxes drew back as they sensed Tyler’s returning equilibrium.

“Papa! Papa! Bradley sent us up with drinks.” A girlish voice came down the passage.

Three female young kits came in bearing bottles, a jug and cups. The slightly older tall kit placed the two bottles on the table and told the others where to put the rest of their items.

“Thank you, Daisy petal, Elise, and Jenny.” Sebastian beamed. The lead kit skipped over and planted a kiss on his cheek.

Jennifer bent down and kissed her Papa. Jensen lifted the arm he had been cradling Tyler with and offered his hand to her. They squeezed palms, “You OK my darling Jennifer?”

“Uh-huh Papa” Jennifer nodded with watery eyes. “We are all ok, Papa.”

“My brave girl,” Jensen smiled at her.

“It is very exciting outside.” Daisy said hopping from one foot to the other.

“Uncle Felix looks green.” Elise laughed, “Grandpa had to give him a cup of that bitter smelling stuff the alphas drink at night.”

“Uncle Oliver caught Lilly and Aedry trying to sneak into the new cabin together and Christopher and Rosie have her sitting between them now.” Jenny added her mood brightening with the other girls’ high spirits.
“Christopher wants Basil to come out. He says you can too Papa if you want.” Daisy looked at Sebastian.

“Hmmm, I think I’ll stay until we are called for. Where are the triplets?” he responded. Tyler knew his mouth dropped. How many kits did this omega have?

“Oh, Pasha and Emma have them,” Daisy sounded flippant about her siblings’ whereabouts, “Come Basil, your father wants you.”

“Not going without Hunter, you can’t make me Daze.” The three year old straightened his posture to face off with his sister.

“Hunter will come with me, won’t you good boy?” Jenny soothed, and made baby grabby hands to her brother.

“I am not a baby, Jennifer. Baz, come on, we can go ourselves.” Hunter stuck his tongue out ruining his grown up role play.

The two boys held hands and walked out ahead of Jenny and Elise.

Daisy stopped and looked around her, then back at her Papa, “It is very crowded in here, when I am Star Pack Alpha, I will build the best omega den in the world and you can live in it.”

“When she is what?” Daniel said raising his eyebrows at Sebastian who was watching his daughter march out of the room.

“Oh, Jacob made her his heir.” Misha laughed, “It seems to have gone to her six year old head. Everything is when I am Star Pack Alpha this, Star Pack Alpha that, she will either grow out of it or I wager Devon will throttle it out of her.”

Oscar frowned “She is only a little pup. How is she meant to be a child?”

“Yeah, she is far too young, but maybe it is better than having it thrown on her as a teenager.” Colin mused and rubbed his belly where one of the twins was having a kicking session.

“I always knew what would happen if I was omega, but all this was still a shock.” Tyler said.

“I was arranged.” Daniel divulged but laughed, “The mighty Gillies family intoxicated with glee at having one of their own chosen to mate the Wolf Prince. I was a wreck. I had seen Joseph from afar as a kit but never been introduced to him. I was quaking like a leaf as my Alpha father marched me up to the One Blood greeting place. Then I smelled him coming and he was all power and storms, lightening and crushed pine needles. He hewed our true mating when he scented me and claimed me in front of the royal pack, like a medieval monarch with his omega.” Daniel sighed.

Misha pinched his own nose dramatically “Oy Wolf Queen, less of the stinky wolf slick in our den.”

Everyone laughed. The mood rose and Tyler felt comfortable amongst them. “Are the rest of you true mates?”

“No.” Colin answered. “Bradley and Alexander are true mates. Alex claimed him in front of the whole pack the evening he arrived, and they would have mated in front of everyone if they hadn’t been hustled into the old cabin. I chose them as my mates and was blessed that they agreed.” He cupped his belly, “Our road hasn’t always been easy. Triangle omega matings are rare and we have had our problems but we have each other and our kits.”
“How many kits have you?” Tyler asked kicking himself for being dense and not recognizing Colin as one half of the infamous omega mates who had been pictured collarless and kissing. He had been forced to listen to his father expound on all the different punishments he would dole out to the Star omegas and berating Robert Star for his leniency. Yet here was Colin Star in front of him and he didn’t seem like a freak or a monster, although he had rocked Tyler’s perceptions when he had embraced Bradley before.

“These are my first litter,” Colin placed a hand on his belly, “Bradley has had our two daughters Elise and Stella.”

“How are they doing now?” Daniel asked.

“Perfect. Fine. No lingering problems. It all seems like a bad dream now.” Colin shrugged his shoulders. “Misha and Matt are true mates, to return to your query. Sebastian is mated to Christopher Eccleston, your cousin and Lilly’s father.”

“Lilly isn’t mine,” Sebastian jumped in to prevent any misunderstanding. “I had a true mate, Daisy’s father. After he passed, I was given to Christopher, who already had Emma, Lilly and Pasha, with his first mate Rosie. Basil, Lavender, Poppy, and Sage are Christopher’s kits.”

“You should be on suppressants at your age,” Daniel said baldly. The other omegas looked stunned at the blunt statement.

“Jared didn’t allow them.” Sebastian snapped back.

Jensen stiffened in the bed at Jared’s name.

“Well what is Alexander’s opinion?” Daniel continued regardless, focusing on Colin with Oscar glaring over as well.

“I don’t know,” Colin squeaked under their piercing glares. “I promise. I’ll ask him.”

“I don’t think he is opposed.” Misha interrupted, “He knows I used to be on them and that Matt prescribes them, and he never told Jared.”

“Fucking Jared and his ancient views of omegas. Thank the Gods, Joseph is open minded enough so that I’m not popping out cubs every year. Nathaniel and his siblings and Joseph’s brother David are enough heirs for him.”

“You are on suppressants?” Jensen asked awestruck.

“You hardly think that Joseph and I go celibate? I can’t keep my hands and tongue off his knot even when I am not in heat.” Daniel moaned.

“TMI,” Misha laughed, “I don’t use them anymore. They fuck up your cycle when you come off them and they aren’t good for your body long term.”

“Can I ask the question?” Daniel sounded less sure of himself for once.

There was an intake of breath, but Oscar beat him to it. “Where is Jared?”

No one moved or spoke. Tyler was sure it was so still that he could hear the air from outside moving into the room and out the ventilation slot.

Misha finally spoke, “He is in his own den, under sedation.” The fox closed his eyes for a moment,
“Matt is with him, and Jared’s father.”

“What happened?” Tyler asked, unsure if it was his place to question amongst these friends.

“He is lost in the rage.” Jensen muttered.

The wolves paled. “Your mate?” Tyler asked aghast.

Jensen nodded. Tyler couldn’t imagine it. Mated to an alpha in that state. How was Jensen even capable of sitting here speaking with them? As if he had voiced his question out loud, Jensen said, “It is so difficult to keep the chaos from coming across our bond. If I hadn’t closed our link off already before the alpha rage hit him, I don’t know if I could have taken it.”

“Do you think it was building up? That it was affecting him before? Oscar showed us your last letters. That is why Joseph listened to my insistence that we come.” Daniel asked.

Oscar looked apologetic at his breach of confidence.

Jensen held a hand out and Oscar took it.

“I don’t know, Dan. I mean he was always angry and possessive. I know you all thought he was too jealous and protective of me. But you don’t know what he went through and how kind hearted he is.”

Misha growled.

“No Mish. He is. I won’t deny it. He is kind and thoughtful. He made me so happy. He loved me so much I couldn’t breathe sometimes. I would drown in his hugs, get lost in him. We adored each other.”

“You speak as if it is in the past, Mon chere,” Sebastian commented.

“He changed after Fell Creek. When he lost his eyesight. He held on hard. Was less willing to give me slack. The red tag which had gathered dust was back at times. He was jealous of Kane, of my letters to you both. He was grumpy when I spent time here and surly after I would visit Misha. Having him home all the time, with Alexander representing the pack to the outside world, was meant to give us more time as mates, but the pack still demanded his attention, and he... I don’t know. I think he thought that our lives should only focus on each other and our kits. I used his healing eyes as an excuse not to have kits last year. With each heat he became more insistent.”

“And you don’t want any more?” Colin asked.

“No. I do. I would have wanted more, but not yet. Hunter and Hillary are big enough not to need me every minute. I wanted a break, to work with Misha and Christian. To enjoy our pack, maybe develop the canopy school more. I know I didn’t express my wishes well. I didn’t show Jay my point of view, but I thought I didn’t have to. I was naive.” Jensen turned his head away, “After we returned from Stella’s birth, we talked. It was good. We aired our concerns. Jared was so supportive of the omega cause, but every day it got harder. At night he is wracked with nightmares. By day he is trying to function with terrible pain inside. With all my heart I love him but I don’t know how to help him. I fear I have lost my Jared.”

“How do you know?” Misha asked.

“I can feel it,” Jensen screamed at him with tears of rage, “down our bond Mish, rejection, pain, fear, clinging suffocation, and anger. Is my gentle alpha is gone?”
“It sounds to me as if you are describing his madness.” Daniel suggested.

“But this was there before he tried to kill Dr Morrissey.” Jensen pointed out.

Tyler exchanged a look of horror with Oscar. Jensen’s alpha had tried to kill someone?

“Was Jared behaving rationally before the incident?” Oscar asked.

“Not around Jensen. He was under strain with Daisy running away and then Stella’s dramatic entry to the world. He freaked out when he discovered Doc Morrissey had been treating us.” Colin told the others.

“Who was this Doc?” Daniel asked.

“He is retired now, an urban beta coyote,” Misha answered, “We didn’t know it, but he helped Mark Star cover up the abuse.”

Tyler didn’t know what that referred to, but it didn’t sound good. Daniel and Oscar nodded their understanding.

“Now, Jen. I am not taking sides, and if I was, it wouldn’t be your alpha’s side.” Daniel spoke evenly, *But it sounds to me as if your mate was under tremendous strain, starting from when a part of him must have felt weakened and less than alpha, after Fell Creek. I am not condoning his actions for one minute. I know you foxes don’t interfere with mating matters, but if Jared as a wolf alpha did half the things you wrote to Oscar, Joseph would have had words or more with him. But Jen darling, he is sick.”

Jensen looked up at the wolf, who continued and began to stroke the fox’s arm, “He is. Your mate is very ill. It is rare, and I don’t want to scare you, but alphas lost in their rage have been known to die.”

“Matt never said that,” Misha shouted and stood in a daze.

“Calm down, Misha.” Sebastian pushed him back into the seat, and sat on the arm of it.

“They don’t die from the rage,” Daniel continued, “They die from dehydration as they linger in the fugue, or they end themselves.”

“Jared wouldn’t,” Colin blurted, “He knows it would kill Jen.”

“Colin, Jared is not in his right mind. You must realize that. Tell me, is your alpha going to hand the pack over once Jared wakes up?”

“No,” Colin admitted, “Bradley says that Alexander won’t hand the pack back until he is sure of Jared. Bradley said he thinks Alexander won’t hand it back until Jared proves himself worthy, if ever. Bradley told me that he thinks he could be vixen long term. Sorry Jen.”

“I don’t care. I’m sorry Colin, but I don’t have it in me to care. The most I can muster up is to wonder where my kits are. Bradley will be a fine Vixen, better than I ever was.”

“Don’t say that,” Sebastian admonished.

Jensen huffed, “Thank you, dear friend. You should be aggrieved with me. I never even considered asking Jared if he could allow you suppressants, even though I grew up in a society where they were common place. I turned my back on you and Bradley, Colin, when you left for Star Valley. Jared
may have had a point about the amount of time I was putting into omega issues, I was meant to be pack vixen, but I can’t recall the last time one of the betas brought me a problem. I’m better here, stealing your old home, Colin.”

“Temporarily,” Colin added.

“We’ll see,” was the response.

“Colin?” Bradley’s voice came from the passageway before he appeared in the room. “Gods it is crowded in here. Daisy shared her Star Valley redevelopment plans with us when she came back. Can you all come out now? We are ready for the formal bit.”

Tyler couldn’t stand up. He just needed a moment. Misha gathered him into his body, “You good, Tyler?”

Tyler blinked and looked into the blue sincere eyes, Misha added, “Felix is a good alpha. He is young and headstrong, but he has a kind heart. He is Bradley’s brother.”

“He is as nervous as you are,” Bradley added, “He’ll try not to show it, being all alpha and that, but he is. He’ll do his best for you and the pack. If he doesn’t you can kick his ass for me.”

Tyler couldn’t imagine kicking anyone’s ass but he smiled and let Misha take his weight as they left the den.

“You too!” Bradley called back.

“Not coming,” Jensen barked.

“Yes you are,” Bradley bit his lip.

“Go without me.”

“OK. You want me to be honest? Or do you just want to suck it up and come out and sit with your kits for a few minutes until you can disappear again?”

“There have been enough secrets.” Jensen stood up. He was naked from the waist down and Tyler blushed again at the other omega’s finely toned legs and firm buttocks. He rooted around for something to wear until Sebastian tsked with annoyance and pulled a pair of plain trousers from a shelf mocking the omega as hopeless.

“You presence was requested.” Bradley made a painful smile as if he didn’t particularly want to continue.

“By who?”

“Seth and William mainly but they got Joseph to agree, and then Oliver agreed too.”

“What does it matter if Oliver wants me out there or the others?” Jensen said stubbornly and planted his feet back on the blankets.

“Weeeell, you see, ahem...” Bradley grimaced.

“Go on.” Colin urged. Everyone was paused to hear what the pack vixen had to say.

“Tyler is the final link to Martin Eccleston, as is his father is William. Felix is the link to Allegra. Joseph links back to Michael Wolf, Seth to Cyrus Green,” a few of the others started to look
horrified, “Oliver in Gerard and Jared’s absence to Gerran Padalecki, and Seth and William want you to witness the mating cause you are Jed Ackles’ link.” Bradley spat out the final words and closed his eyes.

“Fine.” Jensen shrugged.

“Fine?” Misha asked, “Are you sure?”

“I don’t get what the big deal is. So what if my great by a million grandfather was some civil war figure.”

Tyler couldn’t believe it. Jensen was the Butcher Ackles’ descendant. He felt he ought to be disgusted but he wasn’t. Maybe if he had been introduced to him as such, he might have refused to shake his hand, but Jensen was an omega like him, and one in a terrible situation.

“They are doing it to shame you. To be disrespectful.” Tyler said.

“Look, Tyler, I really don’t care. I won’t be shamed. I don’t care what Jed freaking Ackles did. It was a war. I am sure Martin Eccleston killed plenty of Ackles foxes too. It was generations ago. I am only sorry that you are still dealing with the consequences, but I am sure you will make a fine Pack Vixen and you will have Felix by your side. So come on let’s face the music.” Jensen linked Tyler’s other arm.

Flanked by Jensen and Misha, the young Eccleston omega made his way to the gathered foxes.
Chapter Seventeen

The omega party stopped before the standing pack alphas. The Wolf King stood slightly in front of the others under the canopy. The pack and other witnesses were spread out either side of the open space between the canopy, new cabin and eating table. Some of the kits were standing on the table to get a better view.

“We are here today to see the fulfillment of a long given promise. We witness the mating of Omega Tyler Eccleston, descendant of Martin, to Alpha Felix Padalecki, descendant of Allegra Accola.” Joseph projected his voice so that even the kits at the back could hear him. “Descendants of all the witnesses are present. In additional affirmation of this fated union, we have descendants of many Civil War Pack Alphas, Ian of Anthony Fell, Daniel of Florien Gillies, Sherry of Jason Lincoln, Daisy-kit of Drake Star, Rosie of Pace Beaver and Jensen of Jed Ackles.”

“In giving my approval to the matings of Felix and Lilly, our pack loses two of its finest foxes.” Alexander began and Rosie let out an audible sob, “and Eccleston Caves gains a wonderful beta and a worthy pack alpha. Can Felix and Adrian please step forward?”

Aedry came out of the throng with a tall wiry but strong dark haired fox.

Tyler was fascinated by his first glimpse of his mate. He wasn’t as tall as Alpha Star but he had an inch or two on Aedry. He was dressed in black jeans and a black button down. He was fine featured for an alpha, not swarthy and butch like many. He was pale and Tyler thought about what Bradley-vixen had said about his new mate being as nervous as he was.

“Can the fathers please join them?” Alexander asked.

Tyler realized that Felix looked very like his Dad, and that his new father in law was a beta, which surprised him, although he hadn’t thought about it before.

“Lothar, who is your witness?” the Padalecki pack alpha asked and Tyler saw a very young slightly overweight beta fox come up.

“Pasha Eccleston.” Lothar acknowledged.

Tyler wondered if half this pack was Ecclestons and if by mating Felix would he be related to the whole pack.

“Stephen, who is your witness?” Came the expected question.

“James Marsters,” another surprise, one of the scattered Marsters, and another beta.

“Can Lilly and Tyler approach?” Bradley stepped up to stand at Alexander’s side.

Tyler felt Misha and Jensen let him go. He held his head high and walked up to stand beside Lilly. She offered him a smile and he tried to give one back. Lilly was to his left, then his new father in law Stephen, the Marsters fox and Felix, before the far McMorran party.

“Can their fathers stand with Tyler and Lilly, please?” Bradley asked humbly as he requested the two alphas’ presence.

Tyler felt his father stand in the space behind him. He sneaked a glance at Lilly’s tall ruggedly handsome Dad, Sebastian’s mate he reminded himself. He thought the lithe fox must take after her
“Christopher who is your witness?” Bradley asked.

“Emma Eccleston.” The alpha sounded a little choked up and Tyler felt there might be a soft core to the hard looking fox.

“William, who is your witness?” Bradley asked.

“Ian Fell.” That was a surprise. Tyler betted that Seth Green had the smile wiped off his smarmy face. He knew his Dad didn’t like Seth, but had to bring him because of the curse. Blessings of the Gods that the Wild Were Council Fox member was there, he outranked Seth, so the Green Forest Alpha couldn’t complain that William had chosen Ian over him.

Tyler’s bicep was gripped in support and he turned to see the stunning alpha close up. How inappropriate to drool and release over another alpha during his mating, but seriously, Ian was amazing. Tyler did a microsecond fantasy of being Fell Pack Vixen with Jensen Padalecki as his triangle omega mate, before blinking back to reality and trying to get his teenage hormones under control.

He thought he heard Ian snigger softly behind him, but couldn’t be annoyed at the alpha’s reaction to his own very physical one.

“In a moment I will ask Felix and Adrian to take their new mates.” Alexander’s words led to a round of cheering, whooping and whistling, “Aedry and Lilly McMorran will take the old cabin. Felix and Tyler Padalecki will go to Felix’s old den. Tonight we feast in their honor, at dawn we bid farewell to our pack mates. On arrival at Eccleston Caves, Felix will receive the pack. We offer prayers of blessing, support and strength for their new Pack Alpha and Vixen.”

Tyler felt ill again. He had hoped he would have time to talk to Bradley and Jensen about the pack vixen thing. His mother had been less than helpful, bitter at having to relinquish her pack.

“Fathers please leave your kits.” Alexander said with a smile.

Tyler stood still while the four fathers moved back. The witnesses stayed, as Aedry moved toward Lilly and Felix came over to him.

Tyler had been told that the alpha would take him by the hand and lead him to where they would mate. He wasn’t expecting the alpha to bend ever so and scent all along his neck. He tilted his head back to give the alpha more space, and as he made the submissive move, his body responded with a release of slick. Felix smelled good. Tyler buried his nose in that dark hair, scenting apples and fresh grass. There was the barest hint of orange which was known as an Accola scent. Felix growled low in his chest and Tyler wrapped his arms around the other fox’s middle. His hole twitched once and again. He was pleased, happy that his body was responding to his arranged mate. Felix pushed a hand down inside Tyler’s loose pants and clenched his buttock. Tyler moaned which Felix took as a signal and bit down on his collar bone. Tyler gasped and found himself picked up with one hand under his knees and another at his back. He held on to his alpha’s shoulder and neck as Felix growled, “Mine.”

They moved far up the hill as the alpha repeated his claim. Something stirred inside Tyler. This is what he wanted, to be held, owned, taken by his alpha. “Yours” he responded as Felix grinned at him and took him inside the den.

+++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++
“Jared”

“Joseph”

“How are you?”

“They gave me something,” Jared licked his lips. “My thoughts are scattered...loose...” His voice trailed away.

Joseph pulled over the stool that Matt had vacated and sat next to where Jared half lay half sat on his nesting blankets. Oliver stayed seated at the far side of the nest, where he had pulled in Jensen’s nursing chair. He kept his word to the wolf king and tried to stay quiet during Joseph’s time with Jared.

After another short time Jared spoke again, “Why are you...I can’t feel my pack. Where is Jen?” Jared’s pitch rose.

“Shush now, Jensen is in the omega den. Daniel is with him.” Joseph offered quickly.

“Good good. My Jen...Is he OK?”

“He is just fine.”

“Joseph. Did I kill him?” Jared asked, his eyes gaining more focus and his words determined.

“What?”

“The Doctor in...Did I kill him? My memory is all scrambled. Is that why I am kept here? Why they were drugging me?” Jared looked at the ceiling. “Ian was here. Does the council get to pronounce sentence on me?”

“No. Jared. You didn’t kill anyone. Have they not told you what happened?”

“I don’t know. There was talking. Lots of talking. My father apologizing, whining until I wanted to claw him. Ian telling me stories from long ago. Felix was here thrumming with excitement. Oliver held me.” Jared blushed with embarrassment at his need for comfort from another alpha, “Matt came and now you are here. If they told me I can’t think now. I wasn’t myself. I truly did not kill him?”


“I lost it, my friend. I was so gone. I was consumed by wanting to kill that son of a bitch.” Jared confessed.

Jared pulled himself up so he was sitting with his back against the wall. He found his glasses and a cup of water on the wooden block by the sleeping place.

“I have David.” Joseph said breaking the silence.

“Hmm?”

“He is coming, on his way now. He can help you more than I. He was lost in his grief after Vincent, may the Gods bless him, was taken from us.”

“I am not grieving,” Jared said confused.
“No but to tell you bluntly, you lost control.”

“I lost control.” Jared sounded out the words and then repeated them again, “I lost control. Did I Ollie?”

Oliver nodded.

“No control,” Jared narrowed his eyes trying to remember and figure out what had happened, “Just a red mist, blood and vengeance filling my mind, I remember. But I didn’t kill him?”

“He called Sherriff Macken, wanted you prosecuted.” Oliver told his cousin, whose face showed how staggered he was at the thought. “Alexander invoked Pack Law to stop him and then we all told the good doctor some home truths.”

“About Mark?” Jared swallowed hard.

“About Mark. Morrissey said that he thought that I was the one who hurt you. Mark had told him that we were in an alpha/alpha thing and the pack knew about it.” Oliver said grimly.

“Oh Ollie, I’m sorry.” Jared gave a downturned smile.

“These are personal secrets. I will go.” Joseph stood.

“No, please, stay.” Jared said, “It is no longer secret. Mark’s lies are exposed. So...Am I being charged by the urban sheriff?”

“No. Morrissey dropped all charges. Jay, you might not like this, but Alexander dropped our grievance against the doctor.”

“He covered it up.” Jared sounded sixteen again and Oliver’s heart lurched as his cousin looked him in the eye.

“I know Jay, but he didn’t know what he was covering up. He should have tried to find out what was happening to you. Even if he thought it was me, he should have tried to stop it. But, he has been shamed in front of witnesses, and you know, you marked him up good.”

“I did?”

“Yeah, just let’s say he will be wearing a scarf like a wide omega collar for a long time, and you realigned his nose for him.”

Jared laughed. The others exchanged a smile at the sound.

“Joseph, did you come for me? How did you find out?”

“I would have come or sent David, but I am here on other business.” Joseph turned back to face Jared. “Dan burst into my conference hall last week interrupting a session with my tenants, waving letters from Jensen under my nose, and cursing you out for upsetting Oscar. Calm down, Jared, I can see you getting offended. Mating matters are still sacrosanct between wolves but the monarch can intervene if necessary.”

“You are not my king.” Jared growled.

“Calm please. I didn’t say I was.” Joseph turned his palms up in a gesture of peace, “Envoy Welling had arrived that morning with the news that Envoy McMorran had seen Anna Accola’s family tree and completed his quest and my presence was requested. My mate and brother were most
insubordinate in demanding that they accompany me on my journey.”

“They are all here? On my packlands? I have to get up. I need clothes. Oliver why didn’t you tell me there were other pack alphas here?” Jared started to extract himself from the blankets.

“No, no Jay,” Oliver protested, “you need to rest. David, Seth and Ian are having a late breakfast and being entertained in the new cabin.”

“But what will they think?” Jared asked as he freed his long legs and began looking around for his clothes.

“That you are not well.” Joseph stated and placed his hand on Jared’s shoulder to stop him.

“Maybe...yeah,” Jared let himself be pushed back down.

“Joseph?” Jared asked, “What was the duty you had to perform?” only picking up on that information now.

“I am unsure that it is my place to tell you.” Joseph replied with a soft smile.

“Fuck protocol, wolf. Don’t get coy on me now!” Jared rumbled, but Joseph laughed in response.

“That’s more like you!” The wolf king chuffed.

“I’m ready. Hit me. What is the duty? Why did you come? What letters?”

“You won’t freak out on me Padalecki?”

“Listen, wolf boy, I’m so doped up that if one of you bit me, I’d probably say I was good.”

“That is wolf King to you, foxy.” Joseph teased back.

“Someone sounds more compos mentis.” Ian called as he appeared leaning against the chamber opening support.

“I am trying to get information out of the wolf...King...here. He is being unforthcoming.”

“Hey, give a wolf a chance. I believe I have been exceedingly forthcoming.”

“What’d you want to know, Jay?” Ian asked.

“Is Jensen alright?” Jared breathed.

“He is coping.” Ian said and gave a tight smile.

“That is not an answer. Why can’t I sense him?” Jared demanded.

“You should talk to Matt,” Oliver interrupted, “but I think Jensen had to shut off your bond due to the rage. I don’t understand. My bond with Katie doesn’t work like that.”

Jared rubbed a hand over his jaw. He sighed and tried again, “The pack feels less, smaller?”

“My duty was to witness the fulfillment of the Eccleston Vow.” Joseph announced.

“Oh Gods. Felix?”

“Yes.” Oliver nodded.
“Where is he? Can I see him? He must be so overwhelmed.” Jared asked frantically.

Ian threw himself down on the end of the blankets and curved his legs sideways, “The new Eccleston Caves Pack Alpha and his vixen left at dawn for their den.”

“I missed it. I wasn’t there for him.” Jared was visibly upset, and the other alphas realized how close to the surface his emotions were, “when I brought Jen home, Felix broke the greeting line to meet us. He was still a kit. I couldn’t be there for his mating.”

“He knew you would have been if you could.” Oliver consoled.

“It doesn’t change that I was absent.” Jared banged a fist into the earthen floor. He hissed a breath to gather himself. “What is Tyler like?”


“Felix is a good fox. He will take care of his mate. I just wish I’d been aware, awake, whatever.” Jared’s voice trailed off.

“Don’t worry, Jay,” Ian poked him in the leg to get him to look up, “I stood up there with them. I was proud to. He was my first alpha trainee, and you are right he is a good fox. He always asked me about omega mates. I think he wanted an omega of his own. Tyler and he looked good, looked right together, as if they fitted.”

“The mating was moving, even for us hardened alphas. Doubly so, as Aedry took Lilly. It was touching to see Bradley and his brother. Joseph, Alex and Bradley performed the ceremony flawlessly.” Oliver recalled.

“Why thank you kind alpha,” Joseph fluttered his eyelids in his best omega impression, and the others all grinned. “We are leaving after midday meal. I will come in to say farewell. I must find Daniel and convince Seth to stop sulking so he can drive us to Five Rivers.”

Joseph stood to leave and Oliver joined him saying he would bring some food to Jared.

Left alone with Ian, Jared found his eyes watering, “Ian. What happened to me? All our time in the ST house and I never lost a grip on my control. In that bleak white box I could centre myself, yet here amongst my pack, my family, I let it all get away from me. I have driven my dear mate away. How could I lose it, everything?”

Ian didn’t reply but he took Joseph’s seat and remained there while Jared regained a grip on himself.

“Ian?”

“Yes, Jay?”

“Do you think you could ask Matt not to give me more drugs?”

“Why?”

“I can hold myself together. I don’t need them.”

“Maybe, we can talk to him. He will be back later.”

“Is everyone talking about me? About what I did? Why I did it?” Jared pressed his lips between his teeth.
“No. They are concerned for you. The guests were told you are ill, only Joseph and David know.”

“Good. Good. Because Daisy cannot hear this.” Jared gripped Ian’s arm tight, “I will not have her innocence ripped from her. Promise me that they are not whispering such things in her hearing.”

“Nobody is. They all know not to do that. Don’t worry. Daisy won’t hear anything she shouldn’t.” Ian rubbed the back of Jared’s hand where it was digging into his lower arm muscles. Jared became aware of his tight grip and pulled his hand back.

“When can I go out and join everyone?”

“Matt thinks you should rest. Jensen will be in soon.”

“I need to get out of here. I need to show the pack I am well and take back pack alpha.” Jared affirmed.

“No.” Ian surprised his friend by disagreeing with him.

“No?”

“Alexander isn’t giving you back the pack.” Ian stated bluntly.

“I don’t think I heard you.”

“Alexander will not hand you back the pack like he did when you recovered from your injuries last year. He won’t step down unless he feels you are capable of the role.”

“He might never feel that.” Jared clenched his fists at his rising outrage.

“That is very true.” Ian said carefully, “You have a lot to think about, Jared. Challenging for pack alpha should not be the foremost on your list.”

Ian’s advice was met with silence as Jared took to heart everything he had learned. He closed his eyes thinking of how Jensen must be in such a state because of his condition, and the kits must be too. He tried to sense them out in the pack, but his mind was too jumbled and he made himself try to find some calm to be ready for when his mate would come.
Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Notes

We are nearing the end.... I am already feeling fox withdrawal symptoms.

+-----------------------------------------------+

“Joseph-mate.” Daniel called as he approached the Padalecki dining table.

“My love,” Joseph tilted his head and smiled at his mate. Daniel had swept his hair back off his face today, the way Joseph found handsome. Although when Daniel’s side bangs hung over his deep brown eyes, Joseph found that softer look attractive too. He realized Daniel was waiting to speak with him and blinked, “Yes?”

“Oscar wants to stay.”

“Hum? What do you mean? Do you want to allow it?” Joseph rested elbow on the table and his chin on his upturned hand.

“He wants to stay with Jensen. He says he will reside in the omega den. Not for long, Joseph. He is missing his pups already, but he wants to stay while we visit Five Rivers and Two Moons.” Daniel sat on the bench next to his mate.

“I can’t leave an unaccompanied omega here on his own, Dan. You know that.” Joseph huffed but knowing his omega-mate, he would have come up with a reasonable solution or compromise.

“David said he will stay with him.” Daniel said hopefully.

“For Jared?” Joseph knew his brother had wanted to stay but needed to accompany Oscar home when they parted ways.

Daniel nodded.

“We will be several days with Danai and her pack, and we promised Ty to see the Summer Solstice with him. It will be at least three weeks before we return. I thought Oscar and David were heading back to One Blood before we moved on to Two Moons. David was to hold a court council as part of Nathaniel’s royal-duty training. Can Oscar contemplate going so long without the pups? His duties have not yet taken him away from them for more than a few days?” Joseph worried. He pursed his lips and held them between the thumb and pointer finger of his left hand, making up his mind about the advisability of this plan.

“He has thought long about it. He knows they are safe and well in the Royal Nursery. He wants to do this for Jensen, and I am inclined not to forbid it, if you can spare David?” Daniel bowed his head a touch, awaiting Joseph’s decree.

Joseph made his decision and grinned, “If we cannot help our friends, what use is there in our positions of power.”

“Thank you, mate, your wisdom abounds.” Daniel smiled.
“Yeah, wisdom when I agree with you and it is meanness if I don’t.” The king laughed and slapped the back of Daniel’s hand playfully.

Jensen knew Jared was awake. Bradley had told him as he sipped his overly hot morning coffee.

Ian, David and Oliver were with him this afternoon. The various alphas had been there all night and weren’t going to leave him now. Jensen supposed he should be grateful that his mate had such friends but he was numb and weary. Ian had said he would stay as long as needed sending a message to Paul at Fell Creek that he would be some time. The other visitors had gone after midday lunch, although the Wolf King and Queen had only gone as far as Five Rivers and had promised to call again on their return journey.

The mild day had given Jensen a need for space and air so he had hiked up to the source of the stream. It was a hard climb in human form but the exercise made his blood flow and the sun warmed his skin. It was quiet up there, small wildflowers bloomed and an occasional butterfly landed on the purple flowered bushes behind him. A chickadee called from somewhere to his left.

The pack had been subdued since Lilly and Felix’s departure early that morning. It was like they were coming down from the excitement of the mating. It was sinking in that they were two packmates short. The omega den was quiet too, just Oscar now that Daniel had departed. Sebastian had gone back to his alpha’s den, saying he wanted to be there for them as they coped with Lilly’s departure. The omega nest felt more like his own personal den, and Jensen was full of contradictory feelings about that. He was part glad and relieved to have somewhere safe and calm, part guilty that he wasn’t with his alpha, part conflicted that his alpha had put him in that position. Not that he blamed Jared, but he was affected by his mate’s illness. His kits had slept in the blankets with him, except for Olivia, who had gone to Oliver and Katie’s den.

Matt came to check on Jared saying he would bring Misha back when he called later in the day. As if thinking of him invoked the omega, Jensen saw Misha’s tan coat and beige tail coming through the long grasses by the stream.

“Up here Mish.” He called and Misha increased his speed to reach the bubbling spring.

Misha shifted and quite hilariously tried to hide his erection with his hands. Jensen leaned over and kissed his temple.

“Not helping,” Misha groused.

“You make me laugh. Gods Mish, I’m glad you are here.”

“Even with my inappropriate reaction to your awesomeness.” Misha chuckled and turned his body sideways to hide the problem.

“I thought you were the awesome one. Can’t help biology, hey?” Jensen poked his friend in the arm. He almost thought Misha flinched at his comment but the other fox laughed and asked what he was doing up here.

“Just needed some air. You OK?”

“Dandy. Julian came with, you should come down and meet him.”

“Bradley and Colin’s friend, Todd’s son?” Jensen checked.
“Yeah, he is so sweet. Honestly, it is not just because he is new omega. He is just a darling.”

“Oh gods, you haven’t got another omega crush, have you?”

“Hey, excuse me. I am a mated Papa, I don’t get crushes, and I am no perv. The baby is only twelve.” Misha swatted at Jensen’s arm. “Jared is awake.” Misha added serious faced.

“I know.”

“You see him yet?”

“Uh no.” Jensen tightened his lips into a thin line.

“You going to?”

“How awake is he, Mish? Awake and my Jared or awake and feral?”

“I don’t know, why don’t we go down and discover?” Misha held a hand out and Jensen took it.

“I’m coming to meet Julian.”

“If you say so.” Misha agreed lightly.

Going down was easier than the climb up. Jensen headed for the canopy where some of the kits were sitting with Colin and Sebastian and a slim pale little jackal omega with shoulder length straight auburn hair.

“Jensen, this is Julian, Julian, Jensen.” Colin announced.

Jensen laughed, “I love omega introductions, none of that hereditary or status crap alphas piss about with. Nice to meet you Julian.”

“Jules.” The other omega smiled shyly and offered his nickname.

“Jules.” Jensen grinned, “So I hear you were on the Stella/Bradley rescue team. I am sorry I didn’t meet you then.”

“It was a privilege and no trouble.” Julian said sincerely, “I love your den. I had never seen a wild pack den before. My dad’s grandfather was pack from the Missouri Jackal area.”

“Did he move to Lakeside?” Misha asked with interest as he snagged a sweet from the bowl that Ashley had arrived with.

“No. I understand he left with his brothers over a family dispute and they made a proto-pack in Chicago. Some of them and their cubs returned to wild packs later but my Dad’s dad joined the army and Dad grew up an army brat before mating with my Mom whose family owned the Lakeside garage.”

“You got any brothers and sisters,” Wesley asked him.

“No. Just me. Mom is beta. She calls me her little miracle.” Julian dropped his eyes at the personal revelation.

“Hey lots of us here had and have beta mothers, we understand,” Sebastian tapped the youngster on the knee, “I was Maman’s special treasure. I think that is why she repelled all mating offers for me, until my Father despaired of her.”
“Papa, how come she let you come all the way here so?” Daisy asked as she sucked on a hard sweet.

“Ah, my little curious kit, even Maman could not refuse a true mating.”

“Do you wish she did?” Daisy asked very softly.

“Not on your life, my Daisy. I would never have had you. Never have had Baz or the triplets. I would be some dried up bitter sour unmated omega living in his mother’s den.”

“You wouldn’t, Papa.” Daisy gapped with horror at the thought, “When I am Star Alpha, I won’t stop omegas from...” She looked up at everyone except Julian collapsing into a fit of giggles.

“What?” She squealed in protest.

“Daisy, you can’t keep referring to when you are Star Pack Alpha.” Sebastian said through another round of hysterical laughter as each person looked to another and the infectious giggling continued.

“Why? I’m just making plans. I’m going to get a hard notebook like Valerie has for school and write down all my plans.”

“Oh stop, please,” Misha gasped holding his side from the stitch in his muscles, “She is like old Prince Alfred who planned every detail of his reign in his missives and was outlived by his father Darius Wolf, the Ancient.”

“I don’t know those wolves,” Daisy stamped her foot. “They sound stupid. Come on Baz, you can help me pick some flowers to dry, then I can swap them for one of Val’s books.”

Basil scooted up to follow his big sister, “Can Hunter come?”

“Only if you help me and don’t run off together,” Daisy called back as the two boys followed her dignified exit.

Jensen was still wiping the tears from his eyes when Devon planted himself on his lap.

“Hey Papa. I like it when you are smiling.”

“Me too, Devon. Wow you are getting big. Such a big fox.” Jensen adjusted his son so that he was seated more comfortably across his thighs.

Devon preened himself and snuck an arm around Jensen’s back. “I’ll take care of you Papa.”

“Huh?” Jensen jerked.

“I’ll take care of you. You know if Daddy doesn’t get better.” Devon said gravely.

“Oh Devon, baby, you don’t need to take care of me. I’ll take care of you and your brothers and sisters.”

“But who will take care of you?” Devon persisted.

“The pack will. That is what it means to be part of a pack family, and your Dada is going to get better. Doctor Matt is with him, and your granddad, and Ian, David and Oliver.”

Devon made an unconvinced grunt and Jensen pulled him closer to his chest. He vowed to spend less time wallowing in the omega den and more time with his babies.

“Colin where is Oscar? Don’t tell me he is in the omega den too shy to come out?” Jensen asked
looking around.

Colin laughed, “Not at all. He is down in our den with Bradley and Stella. He seemingly has some magical technique to impart to stop Stella from screaming so much when Bradley puts her down for a sleep.”

“If that is true I think we will all be requesting that tactic. I think Poppy has damaged my eardrums.” Sebastian joked.

There was movement behind and Jensen saw Matt beckoning him and Misha over to the eating table.

“Jensen, would you go and visit with Jared?” Matt asked.

Jensen bit his bottom lip, “I’m nervous.” He said honestly.

Misha grabbed his hand and interlaced their fingers, “I’ll come with you.”

Jensen nodded and as Matt smiled his approval, Misha led the way to Jensen’s home den. Inside the entrance they paused in the passageway for Jensen to steady his nerves. They could hear David’s voice telling Jared that he would be staying a few weeks.

Jensen moved forward and peered around the opening of their nest room.

Jared was up. Sitting in the nursing chair with a couple of blankets across his knees. David’s back was to Jensen as he perched on the stool. Jared’s eyes found his mate.

“J…Jen.” Jared’s voice broke. “I’m so sorry, Jen. I don’t know what happened to me.”

Jensen ran as fast as he could across the short space and seated himself across Jared’s lap, letting his alpha hold him in his arms, while his own hands carded through Jared’s hair and rubbed his back. Jared’s tears wet Jensen’s cheek. His alpha moved his right hand to find Jensen’s collar and teasingly draw backwards to offer comfort and seek forgiveness by massaging the claiming mark.

Jensen made breathy noises of sorrow and joy. “You are yourself. You are not lost to the rage. I… I was so afraid. My Jay.”

“I’m not myself. I have all these feelings stewing and erupting in my brain. I don’t know what to do with them.”

“I could feel them.” Jensen pushed his head back a fraction to look into his mate’s emotional hazel eyes.

“You are so strong, my Jen. I don’t know how you coped with that. That pain was my fault.”

“I’m not strong.” Jensen wept, “I closed down the bond. I didn’t lend you my support. I couldn’t. I was weak, too weak. You could have died…”

“Omega Jensen.” David interrupted. “Excuse me, but you did what you had to do to survive. You are a Papa of seven kits and your love for my friend Jared is not in question. It is neither mate’s fault. Jared I will tell you again that you are ill. Jensen, I will tell you that your love flowed through that bond. Gerard said that when Jared was coming around, only half aware with the sedation, he thought you were here with him. Because you were. You cannot shut down the love that flows through your bond.”

“Thank you.” Jensen said quietly as his hands sought the broad expanse of Jared’s back.
“You are welcome. Now good foxes, I must fulfill the obligation that my King has gifted upon me, and seek out Oscar Branagh. Joseph made me vow not to let more than a few spare hours pass between ensuring his wellbeing.” David stood and gave a royal bow to Jared. “I will return later.”

Left on their own, Jared moved them to the blankets. Chaste kisses and pressing their bodies close with skin touching skin. The contact allowed Jensen release his side of the bond. Jared gasped as Jensen’s worries, stress and fears hit him, but he responded by pulling Jensen even closer and sucking a mark with slow licks and suction onto his mate’s chest. Jensen had trembled as Jared’s emotions came back to his fox-mind, but he was relieved and heartened to find the worst tempest departed. He lay prone as Jared sucked a new mark on his skin, feeling wanted and needed in an essential way as their frayed bond knitted back together.

When the kits came to find their Papa for evening meal, they found their parents napping wrapped together. Hillary ran out to find Hunter and Cissy who had not been a part of the deputation. When they returned, all seven kits shifted to fox and found spots, nooks and warm crooks to curl into and shelter their Papa and Dada in their own fox-kit-blanket.
Chapter Nineteen

On Sunday morning Jensen-fox rose from between his kits. He shifted and dressed quietly. He whispered to a sleepy Oscar to stay in the blankets a while and he would collect him for breakfast.

He walked to the lake, waving a good morning to Sebastian and Emma who were returning to their den arms full of breakfast items.

The largest spare water collection bowl was under the bush. He rinsed it under the waterfall collection point and filled it to the brim. Back in front of his own den, he found the fire pit out, not even an ember to blow on.

Little eyes were spying on him in the bushes.

“Hunter baby, can you pop over to Basil’s den? They are awake. Ask Uncle Sebastian or one of the adults to bring an ember from their pit.”

Hunter didn’t reveal himself, but Jensen didn’t have long to wait until Emma appeared with a galvanized bucket of glowing embers.

“Hunter said you need a firestart.” Emma set the bucket down. “I’m on my way to join up with Stephen at the field.”

“Thank you kindly.”

“It is no trouble. Anything you need. I mean it. We all do. We want to help.” The teenager blurted.

“Thanks, Emma. Your support means a lot to both of us.”

As the beta exited the opposite side of the den clearing, Hunter-fox skidded to a stop within inches of the water bowl. He shifted and ran his fingers across the top of the clear liquid.

“Can I drink some Papa?”

Jensen nodded and as he got the fire going. Hunter scooped up a few palmfuls of the spring water and slurped them down.

“Is this for Dada?”

“Yes pet. I’m going to get rid of that bristly beard growth and wash his hair. Then I’m going to get him dressed in that navy hoodie he likes when he is chilling out, and bring him to the cabin to breakfast with David and Oscar.”

“Can I help?” Hunter contorted himself to stick his big toe in his mouth, as if he was still in fox form and wanted to lick between his hind claws.

“I’m going to need more water, so when we wake Daddy up, you can fill some of our bowls for me? Do you think you can carry them up the slope one by one? Some of the smaller ones?”

“Uh-huh Papa.” Hunter nodded, he rubbed his nose. “You know how the big wolf alpha is Dada’s
friend?”

Jensen nodded again as he set the bowl over the trivet.

“…and the quiet omega wolf is your friend?”

“Yes pet”, Jensen wondered where this was going.

“We, me and Baz, we hear things.”

Jensen stopped himself from saying ‘Oh No’ aloud. His youngest and his companion had this uncanny ability to go unseen and silent when adults were talking.

“’cause Papa, when James and Ally thought we was all napping, only Baz and me, we were awake and very very quiet like small mice that stay very very quiet.”

“OK, I got it. You and Basil were quiet as mice.” Jensen couldn’t prevent a smile as he checked the water was starting to take on heat with his elbow.

“Ally said that Oscar didn’t used to have a name and that he never spoke anything for years.” Hunter ducked his head, “because Oscar had a base turd as an alpha.”

“Hunter, you know about bad words. Bastard is a bad word. I don’t want to hear you say it again.”

“No Momma, I won’t. I promise, but me and Baz we thought it was two bad words, cos that is really rotten what his alpha did to Oscar, and did he steal his name?”

Jensen ran a hand through his hair, and tried to come up with an explanation that would make sense but not scare his precocious son. “Come here, pet.”

Hunter moved over and sat leaning against his Papa.

“You know about tags?”

“Yes Papa. Baz’s Papa has an orange one cos he is the extra mate, and Colin has a yellow one cos he was after Bradley in loving Alexander, and you have a red one so no-one but Daddy can touch you when you are away.” Hunter looked proud at his rendition of his knowledge.

“Very good. Orange doesn’t mean Sebastian is extra, it means he has two mates who are an alpha and a beta. There are two other colors, blue and green.” Jensen looked skyward for inspiration on how to explain a green tag and decided to gloss over it. “Blue means no talk. It means that you can only talk with your alpha. Oscar’s alpha wanted to be the only one that his omega could talk to, that meant that Oscar couldn’t tell anyone his name.”

“That was mean of him.” Hunter pronounced. “If my alpha tried to put one on me I would throw it away.”

Jensen laughed. “That’s what Christian did. He had a big fight with his alpha and he never got the blue tag.” He moved the warmed water from the fire. “Come on follow me.”

When they moved stealthily into the nest room, Jared was asleep in human form. It was Tony’s turn to sit with him. The beta gave them a quirked smile and a nod and took his leave.

“Daddy, daddy wake up, momma’s gonna wash your hair.” Hunter danced on his toes.

Jared woke with a wide yawn and a stretch. “What a vision, my Jen and his mini-self. Good morning
“Darlings.”

“How are you?” Jensen asked his voice laden with concern as he gathered the shaving kit and towels.

“Not so bad. Tony was here when I woke in the night.”

“Nightmares, Jay?”

“I don’t think so, Jen. Those pills Matt gave me for sleeping are good. I see my blessed razor. Are you going to get rid of this itchy scruff for me?”

Jensen found the three smaller bowls. He told Hunter not to fill them to the brim and to bring them straight to the nest. He didn’t need them heated as they were for cold rinsing.

When the little fox had gone, all important and solemn with his cherished task, Jensen knelt in front of Jared and waited.

Jared tapped him on the shoulder and when Jensen looked up he could see Jared’s gaze held the question of why he was acting so formal.

“Jay,” He began, “I would like it if you would come out for breakfast when our morning ritual is done. I would like to eat from your hand, and have the kits join us.”

“I’d like that too.”

“Oscar could join us, and David?” Jensen made it a question.

“I mentioned to David that we have a hidden remaining jar of wild honey. If you could find it in the supply cupboards, I would like to have him taste it on our fresh morning bread.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Jensen grinned.

“I like that too, your smile Jen, I missed it.”

“And I yours, my alpha.” Jensen smiled wider as Jared’s dimples dipped in his scruffy cheeks. Give him a few minutes and that small flaw would be rectified, so that Jensen could enjoy his alpha’s features in all their glory.

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Three days later there was a sky so blanketed in blue that clouds seemed like a memory. Foxes lounged outside their dens panting in animal form. The kits had taken to the lake in the record June temperatures. Jared emerged from his den to find David who had expressed a desire for a run through the cooler tree covered hills. He looked over at the omega mates with Amber and Allyson who were either lazing at the edge or immersed in the lake with the kits. Jensen’s white spotted muzzle was easily picked out by Jared and he waved his human hand in salutation.

David was under the shade of the canopy talking with Alexander.

“Jared, we are comparing notes on the land legislation.” Alexander said as Jared took a seat.

“Anything new?”

“No. David has been explaining about some of the old deeds that Joseph holds on land now considered urban territory. Did this pack ever record their tenancies in such a manner?”
“I don’t honestly know Alex.” Jared didn’t want to appear to be unhelpful to his new pack alpha, but his gut felt their positions should be reversed. Not that Jared had a position currently, his stomach churned, he wasn’t even filling Felix’s vacant fifth. He thought he might need one of the pills Matt had told him to take if he felt his anxiety rising.

He felt the other two alphas’ eyes on him. Licking his lips he met David’s concerned eyes, “You mentioned a run?”

“You will have to be my guide Jared.”

“No problem, come on, will you excuse us Alexander?”

“Of course, enjoy.”

Jared followed David to the old cabin where he was staying and waited for his friend to strip out of his light shirt and jeans. Temporarily distracted by Wesley chasing squeaking Faith up the hill with a flopping lake fish, he turned around to see David-wolf in his large grey animal form.

Jared shifted to fox and sprinted into the trees above Oliver’s den. He didn’t look back but heard David-wolf crashing through the brush keeping pace.

At the edge of Farmer Woodsman’s fields, Jared brought them to a halt. His muscles were burning with spent energy after days of little exercise and his days lying in his nest prior to that. He moved his tail out of the way to let David pass him. As the wolf lapped from a rivulet stream Jared admired the three chestnut horses and colt in the far paddock and assessed the healthy flock of sheep in the closer field weighing the Farmer’s prosperity against the tribute due to the pack. He stopped his mental arithmetic reminding himself that Alexander and Oliver would be receiving the tributes this time.

Shifting forms Jared reclined against a tree trunk above the farmer’s boundary fence. David followed and took the nearest sturdy trunk. They were on the far side of their chosen trees, to prevent any farmhands or family members from seeing them.

“It is a good spot.”

Jared agreed, “Faces south-east here. It is a perfect late morning resting place.”

The leaf canopy provided partial shade but they were warmed by the dappled light and summer breeze.

“You look better without the three day beard.”

“Jensen has come each morning. He wakes me and tends to me, helps me dress, like we have always done. It has been our morning ritual.” Jared’s tongue sucked in his top lip, “I miss him in my nest at night.”

“Have you asked him to move back?” David itched a spot on his back thigh, hoping he hadn’t picked up a tick.

“No. I haven’t.”

“Maybe he thinks you want some space?”

“I want Jensen.”
“Tell him.”

“Sir, Yes Sir.” Jared saluted like the ST guards would do during the warden’s inspections.

David just shook his head.

After some time passed with both alphas relaxing in easy friendship, David spoke clearly, “Jared. If your family would like to stay with me for a time, I would be honored to have you all as my guests.”

Jared’s eyes shot open.

“I guess you have never considered an urban-style vacation. If you fancy a break or a change of scenery, I have a rambling house with more rooms and servants than I can trip over. It is on the palace grounds so you could leave the kits in the Royal Nursery if you and Jensen wanted to be tourists and go out for a meal, or a day trip?”

“It sounds like you are speaking another language.”

“Have you ever taken a vacation? Since you took the pack?”

“I never even conceived of something like that. I have travelled for council meetings. I used to be an envoy. I have seen a lot of the country.”

David rolled his eyes. “That is not the point of a vacation. Well not the most important part. It is a break away. Will you consider it?”

“I shouldn’t disappear from the pack. I need to prove myself. I need to be seen to be able to take back my pack.”

“There is no easy way to say this to you Jared. So I am going to be blunt. Forget about it.”

Jared produced a fox bark from his human throat.

“Alexander will not let anything untoward happen, Jared. Your mate would benefit from a break from the stress of being pack she-wolf and you my dear friend are not yet strong enough in your mind to resume your role.”

“Alexander… I feel like he has stolen the pack from me.”

David opened his mouth to speak but Jared halted him with a raised hand. “…He didn’t. I know he didn’t, that he had to take it. He was my second and I had declared him my chosen successor. He did the right thing, but I want it back.”

“Do you? Do you really? Think about it. Why do you want to be pack alpha? Do you believe that Alexander will be less of a pack alpha than you? Or is it that you are trying to prove how alpha you are?”

Jared starred at the wolf. He had never told David how hard he’d had to work to prove that he was a true alpha, how difficult it was, the strain of trying to be perfect, to meet perceived expectations, yet his friend had hit the nail on the head. He did feel lessened and feared that his pack mates would judge him as weak and unworthy. The logical part of his brain told him it wasn’t so, but there was a small voice in his mind that contradicted all reasonable thinking regarding his alphaness.

The sun caught Alexander’s hair as he bent over to inspect a posy of dandelions that Ashley was
holding under his nose.

Bradley approached and wrapped his right arm around his alpha’s back, adjusting Stella in her sling with his left. He teased “Should I be jealous?”

“Oh no Vixen,” Ashley blushed. “They are for Mom. She was sick all over Dad this morning. The baby-kit is really naughty, making Mom feel so green. I got these for her. They are yellow like the sun.”

Bradley and Alexander couldn’t contain their amusement at the image of Allyson puking all over the normal neat and pristine James.

“I am sure she will love them. Why don’t you go to the cabin and find a mug to put them in water.” Bradley suggested as the stems were wilting in the heat.

Ashley skipped ahead of them. Alexander let her gain a lead on them as he held Bradley’s hand.

“It is amazing how peaceful she is when you have her in the sling, Bradley-mate.”

“You mean to say that it is unbelievable how much power she has in her lungs when she is awake and wants our attention.”

“Our little angel,” Alexander took a half pace in front of his mate and tilted his head to see into the sling. “Are Jared’s girls still in the den with Elise?”

“They are the poor little mites. Daisy has arrived to bring some order to play time.”

“Oh Gods.” Alexander laughed and added, “Is Jensen there?”

“Yes, he brought them in when the sun got too powerful. Colin isn’t feeling very energetic today. I wouldn’t be surprised if he retreated to the omega den for a nap later.”

“Jared and David are gone for a run. Having the wolf prince here has been good for Jared.”

“And Oscar too, Alex. His presence in the omega den… It is difficult to put into words.” Bradley sent a feeling of calm supportive affection down their mating bond.

Bradley was about to ask how his alpha had perceived the feelings, but he heard a voice raised in anger from behind the old cabin. He tugged Alexander’s hand as they rounded the last of the high brush at the end of the path.

“Can you not remember to do a simple task?” Christopher shouted at Sebastian, who had dropped to his knees in front of his alpha.

Bradley felt Alexander detach their hands. His mouth dropped as he watched Christopher raise his arm in the air to strike Sebastian. Then as if from nowhere Alexander grabbed the other alpha’s arm before the slap was landed.

“NOT in my pack!”

“What?” Christopher took a step backwards, literally taken aback.

“You will not beat your omega in this pack. Do you understand Alpha-Eccleston?” Alexander was fuming, Bradley felt the outrage thrumming.

Bradley stepped up to take Sebastian’s arm and help him rise to his feet. Sebastian seemed numbed
in shock.

A growl from the older alpha, “This is between mates.”

“Listen to me very carefully Christopher. I am going to say this slowly and clearly. I will not tolerate anyone abusing any mate. You will not strike your mate again and remain at Padalecki Lake.”

Under Alexander’s full power glare, Christopher nodded slowly.

“Good. If you have an issue with Sebastian’s conduct you will talk about it like a mature alpha or bring it to Bradley for his attention. Do you understand?”

“Yes, alpha.”

“Very well. Now I think that Sebastian could benefit from a break in the omega den. Perhaps, Sebastian, you might see if Oscar would like some company, and I believe Colin is intending on spending some time there today.”

Sebastian touched Bradley’s shoulder lightly as he moved away.

“I am serious Christie.” Alexander continued once Sebastian was out of earshot.

“I know you are. It is difficult to control my temper around him sometimes. He is so absentminded. It drives me insane. But I promise, alpha, I will try to be more understanding.”

“A little consideration and talking go a long way. If you don’t want to bring something to Bradley, why not ask Rosie? I have said all I have to say on the matter. We will see you later at table.”

Bradley whispered up to his alpha’s ear, “I love you my growly Viking. So proud of you for standing up for Sebby.”

Alexander wrapped his arm around his shoulders, “Bradley-mate, you have no idea how long I have wanted to intervene.”
Chapter Twenty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Oscar hummed to himself. The weather had changed overnight from the two glorious days which had been spent surrounded by friends swimming in the fox pack’s lake, and balmy evenings of relaxed chat outside the omega den. He could hear the beat of the summer showers outside as he tidied around his guest accommodation of the side room. It used to be Colin’s personal den and this was his nest, Oscar mused. He remembered his treehouse at Three Mountains fondly. Thinking of his special place made him think of Kenneth and his heart lurched at what he had lost and then everything that he had gained. He visualized his favorite tapestries as they now hung from batik style frames on the walls of his Royal Quarters. He shook out and re-folded his clean clothes. Beta-Amber had kindly included them with her laundry and had returned them after breakfast. He knew he was being particular but he preferred the seams of his trousers to fall a certain way and the arms of his tunics to be folded inside the body when being stacked on a shelf.

“Salut. Bon Matin.”

“Good Morning, Sebastian.” Oscar stuck his head into the main room of the den and saw the grinning omega holding up two cups of steaming tea.

“Care for one?”

“What is it?” Oscar asked, wary of being subject to another one of Misha’s special brews.

“Good old Earl Grey. I think you’ll like it.” He handed over a cup, “I’ve added a dash of milk and a touch of honey.”

Oscar took a sip. He normally took his teas black without sugars but the blend was pleasant. “Thank you. You are in a good mood this morning.”

“The days seem brighter even if the weather is not matching my mood today. It is hard to believe you are with us a week.”

“The days have flown by.”

“Do you miss them?”

“Every minute in here.” Oscar put his free hand over his heart. “But I know they are being well cared for. Nathaniel Wolf is most likely standing over their crib challenging anyone to mess with them and him.”

“Is The Nathaniel Wolf still attending the nursery?”

“Oh no. He has tutors and advisors now. It is strange to see everyone bowing to a ten year old. He saved me one day.” Oscar laughed and Sebastian quirked his head in curiosity. “I got lost. The palace is like a maze. It was that first month. My head and my heart were… I don’t know where they were… with Kenneth I suppose… I would have gotten lost in a one roomed cave… So I found myself in this tiny courtyard garden spinning on my heels. I heard laughter from above me. Nathaniel was up a tree, hiding from his history tutor, but he gallantly descended and guided me back to Daniel’s apartments, colliding with the harried history teacher and having to attend his lessons.”
“You bring back good memories for me. I grew up at Roché House. It is a dinosaur of an estate with
cottages and farmhouses for the pack members and many living at the main house. Maman and I
lived in our rooms on the third floor but my cousin the Pack Alpha resided in a whole wing. Alpha
held court in the manner of a king or a baron of old. When we learned about the North American
packs, they always said One Blood was the one most like our own. It was quite a surprise when I
arrived here and Mark expected me to live in a hole in the ground.”

“I grew up in a modern apartment.” Oscar bit his lip and changed the subject. Some things were still
too raw to speak of. “Can I ask you? What do you think about Daisy and Jacob?”

“Je ne sais pas quoi penser… apologies I forget you are not used to my Frenchisms, I will stick to the
old language”

“Hey, Korean here. Don’t worry about it.”

“I said I do not know what to think. I want her to have a wonderful life. This alpha, her uncle, has
promised her that future. I saw him you know at Vincent’s memorial.”

Oscar nodded and waited. He remembered standing under Kenneth’s arm while he watched Jacob
Star kiss the back of Sebastian’s hand.

“I couldn’t look at him. His nose is a little flatter, maybe it was once broken, and his hairline is higher
off his forehead but if I squeezed my eyes to blur my vision, or when I saw him from afar, I would
think he was my lost mate. When he took my hand part of me wanted to drop to my knees and open
my mouth to receive his cock…”

A look of confusion passed over Oscar’s face wondering about what sort of mating dynamic
Sebastian had lived in with his alpha.

“… Another part of me wondered how Jared could cope with being within a hundred feet of him.”

“Do you worry that he would not treat Daisy right?”

“I have a momma’s worry that no-one will ever treat my girl well enough. Oscar, she is amazing.
She is so special. I lived only for her for a long time. You have no idea. I know every momma must
say their kit is special but there is something unique about Daisy. From the moment she was born.
She was the first to suckle. Mark held her and she opened her eyes to meet his. I could see he fell for
her. Through every terrible thing that happened next, I believe I would have succumbed if she had
not survived. She is a fighter. I know she is alpha. It is not speculation. When I carried her inside my
body I would kneel in front of Mark in our den knowing I was in the presence of two alphas.”

Sebastian paused a moment and took Oscar’s empty cup to place it next to his own on the worktable.

“I will not deny her the chance to be a Pack Alpha but it will tear me apart when she goes to live in
Star Valley.”

“That is not for many years. I am sorry for raising such a painful subject with you. To live in the
moment and enjoy the jewels of each day with your daughter is a more pleasant way than to
speculate on the future as I have prompted you to do.”

“No no. Dear wolf. Do not apologize. She is my little fille but she will not be a little girl forever. The
rage could come as early as in three years time or as late as eight years from now. I will cherish each
moment with her, like a jewel you say?”

“As a polished gem.” Oscar affirmed. He was polishing his time at Padalecki Lake to add to his own
Across the weekend the weather remained sultry with sunny showers. A break in the downpours led to Bradley deciding that the pack would risk having the midday meal outdoors.

Jared moved his hips on the bench, still unaccustomed to his new midtable spot. Jensen didn’t seem troubled as he chatted to Oscar who knelt beside David to their left. Looking up at Stephen helping Amber carry the large crock of soup to the table, Jared saw his mother coming towards him. She paused behind his back, “How are you Jared?”

Jared noticed the slight glance back to his father. He recognized the non-verbal exchange from growing up. She was seeking Gerard’s approval. His father gave the expected almost imperceptible nod.

“How do you actually care Mother?”

She was stunned at his retort. Bending from her hips she put her head between his and Jensen’s and spoke low enough that only Jensen could overhear. “You ruined my life.”

“Well you did your very best to ruin mine, you unfeeling cur.”

“You insolent kit.” Sherry snarled.

“Beta Sherry!” It was Bradley, standing at the top of the table with his hand on Alexander’s shoulder as if preventing his alpha from taking to his feet. “Decorum at table. Back to your place beside your alpha, now please.”

Sherry whipped her body around and stalked over to the vacant place beside Gerard, but she forced out the words, “Yes, Pack Vixen.”

Gerard grabbed her wrist and tugged her down onto the bench.

Jared’s bread tasted like saw dust. He fed most of it to Jensen. He only took every fourth spoon of soup for himself. By the time cookies were being passed around he could barely manage to pass one to Jensen. He blinked as Jensen handed his cookie on to Oscar and levered himself up to whisper in his ear, “Come to the den.”

Jared stood on autopilot and let Jensen lead him home.

“Can I have one of my pills?” Jared asked from the chair, not remembering how exactly he came to be seated.

“Which ones Jay?”

“The tiny white ones, Loraz-ie-thing on the label.”

Jensen squinted to read the label. His glasses were in the omega den. The drug was Lorazepam and the typed script advised three 0.5mg pills a day. “Have you had any yet?”

“I took one this morning before you came.”

Jensen tipped one into his alpha’s hand and passed over a cup of water.

“I wish I could slap her. How can she speak to you like that?”
“She’ll never change, Jen. I wished for so many years that she would care for me.”

“I know.” Jensen sat with his legs curled under him and rubbed his head against Jared’s knee.

“Matt and David said I should talk about memories when they surface in my brain, not shove them back down.”

“You thinking of something Sherry did?”

“No. Not really although it was partly for her benefit or satisfaction. Did you see Colin has started to wear Bradley’s old maternity tops?”

“Yeah, I noticed. He got teased mercilessly this morning.”

“Will you let me hold you?”

Jensen scrambled to half straddle and half squeeze in beside Jared. His alpha curled his arms around him and spoke softly, “One day when I was thirteen, Colin’s parents came to our den to see my father. Colin was four. Uncle Devon and Colin’s papa said that they had gone through his last heat. They had already given their baby things to other pack members and their older mated daughters.”

Jensen nodded, his eyes half lidded in his mate’s embrace.

“They no longer needed omega maternity clothes. Devon asked Father if he would like to give them to Jim Beaver’s pack omegas or donate them in Lakeside. Father decided to give them to the goodwill store in Lakeside and gave the parcel to Mark to bring with him on the supply run.”

At the mention of Mark, Jensen snuggled in closer, but he didn’t interrupt. He wondered if Jared was going to tell him some more of the terrible things that he had never spoken of before. In the last few days Jared had begun to take the advice and to tell, to speak about what had happened to him. Jensen had wept until his tear ducts dried as Jared explained to him the violence that had led to his visits to Doctor Morrissey. He had held Jared as he explained how he had learned to pop his jaw for Mark’s knot. In the early hours of the morning under a star lit sky, Jensen-fox had chased Jared-fox through the woods until his mate’s sorrow at the lack of parental love during his childhood drove him to beat down a path to the ancient oak tree. Far enough away to not be overheard, Jared shifted. He roared and screamed at the Gods, asking why his mother didn’t protect him, why she hated him, why she couldn’t love him? Finally he let Jensen hug him tight and tell him what a good father he was to his own kits and took the solace Jensen offered.

Jared continued. “Mark went to Lakeside the next morning. After midday meal he took me by the hand. My heels dug into the ground, but he whacked me on the ass to get me moving and took me to his den.”

Jared closed his eyes and scented Jensen’s hair.

“He had the omega maternity wear. He told me he wanted to see what I would look like when I was carrying his kits. It felt wrong, so wrong, but I did as I was told and stripped off my tee and shorts and put them on. He wrapped his hand around my neck so I could feel his collar around me. I had to kneel in front of him and place my hands on my flat stomach while he jerked off on the idea. His knot grew he was so turned on, and the hot streams of come poured down my cheeks and got in my eyes. He told me I was beautiful and I dutifully licked him clean. He made me stay in position until my mother could come. She gushed and coo-ed at my dress-up and told me she was proud of me, but I didn’t feel proud, Jensen-mate. I felt dirty and wrong and scared.”

Jared choked up.
“What happened then?” Jensen’s voice broke, cracking on the words.

“That day? Nothing. Mother went off to get the evening meal organised. Mark brought me a wash cloth and let me change back into my own clothes. I was so confused. I babysat Colin in the omega den that evening while the alphas had their meeting, wondering if in a year or two I would be bringing my and Mark’s kits there for a break.”

“Had they completely convinced you that you would be omega?” Jensen asked. He had been curious about this part of Jared’s story since the first night that he heard about the abuse.

“Yes and no. I had been told for years that I was. Mark would tell me he saw the signs when he... he... violated me. I adored being allowed to take care of Colin, Lilly and Emma. I was often subdued and silent especially if I was carrying a physical mark or painful reminder. However Oliver had already knotted but he often deferred to me when we argued or debated. Colin’s sisters Eve and Sophie didn’t treated me as if I was. My father never referred to my gender, in fact he would drop pieces of advice as if I would be beta or alpha. I didn’t know what I was except that I was going to belong to Mark as soon as I had my heat.”

Jared stood up. “Will we find the kits?”

Jensen smiled. “Play pack central is the old shaman den this month.”

Jared took his hand and brought it to his mouth, kissing the back. They stayed linked as they made their way out to go around the hill.

As they passed Felix’s old den, Jensen asked, “Would you like me to move back into our nest?”

“Only if you are ready Jen.”

“I want to.”

“Then I can honestly say you have changed this day into a happy one.” Jared pulled him close and sought out his lips. He sucked on Jensen’s bottom lip, and then carefully explored his mate’s teeth and soft inside of his cheeks. A little moan escaped from the omega.

“You are wet for me.” Jared breathed with joy.

“You are hard for me,” Jensen rutted and ground his body against his alpha.

“Fuck Jen, we are not going to make it around the hill.” He grabbed Jensen and carried him in a fireman’s hold into Felix’s den.

They tore off each other’s clothes in the reception chamber. Jared caught a discarded cushion and pushed it under Jensen’s hips for his comfort.

“Now Jay. I need you. Please.”

Jared sucked hard on Jensen’s nipples, pulling them long with his teeth. He licked a path along his hips and sucked a mark on his mate’s inner thigh. Jensen moaned beautifully and grabbed into Jared’s hair. Then Jared’s lips were finding his own. Their mouths clashed eager for each other. Jared ran his hand down Jensen’s heaving chest and caught under the small of his back. Jensen arched up easing his alpha’s access. Jared growled his need, filled him and pushed home. The slick release rippled through Jensen’s muscles, as Jared’s hand found his hard cock and pumped in time to the driving rhythm he had set. Jensen felt the knot beginning to swell. Jared hissed and sighed pounding forward.
“Jensen, my perfect mate.” He moved harder driving Jensen’s body back off the cushion. Jensen wrapped his legs around Jared, holding on to him as the knot breached his rim and he cried out. “Jared, love you.”

The knot pulsed and filled him with his alpha’s come, connecting them as they grasped each other’s bodies and spoke into each other’s ears.

“Mine.”

“Mine.”

Neither mate knew who had spoken first.

Jensen’s nails cut into Jared’s shoulders as he came, his clear spend coating their bellies.

Jared turned them so they could lie on their sides, wrapped in each other until the knot reduced enough for Jared to ease it out.

“Can we go for a swim when we wake up?” Jensen mumbled groggily.

Jared chuffed, “I will have mercy on you Jen. I won’t leave you all marked and sticky.”

“That’s cos you are the best alpha.” Jensen’s voice trailed off into post-mating sleep, but Jared heard him and his heart swelled with adoration for his mate.

He wasn’t cursed or a victim. He knew he was the luckiest fox in the world, to be able to hold Jensen in his arms and live the rest of his days with him as his mate.

Chapter End Notes

Four chapters and the epilogue to go.

Thank you all.
Alexander knew now why Jared had claimed a corner of the old cabin for himself. He had turned the high-backed armchair so that he couldn’t be seen from the window and was tapping his pen on the edge of the fold-out side table. Several balled up sheets of paper lay scattered on the floor. He turned the wick up on the oil lamp to give his scribbles more light.

“Alex-mate?” Colin called from the door-way. “We are looking for you.”

“Where am I needed?” Alexander stood up and prepared to store his letter away.

“Just us, darling.” Bradley appeared behind Colin.

“Where is Stella?” Alexander peered over Colin’s head as if Bradley was hiding her in the small of his other mate’s back.

“In with Sebastian’s triplets. Elise is learning to dry flowers from Daisy, who is as good at it as Rosie now.” Bradley answered. “What are you doing Alex?”

“I was writing a letter.” Alexander licked his lips. “In fact it is good you are both here. Will you let me read it to you? And make some suggestions if I can improve it?”

“Can I sit on the sofa? I need to raise my feet.” Colin asked.

“Of course.” Alexander took his hand and led him to the old sofa. Bradley turned the key in the door and then took one of the omega kneeling cushions and used it to prop Colin’s feet up. Alexander leaned down and cradled Colin’s face in his hand. He stroked his cheekbone with his long fingers. “Are you comfortable Colin-mate?”

“This is good.” Colin confirmed and let a hand rest loosely over his baby bump.

Alexander turned the armchair back around and gestured to Bradley to take the red horsehair one. The omegas waited for Alexander to speak.

“I have been writing to Stellan.” The alpha gestured at his balled up discards. “Trying to write.”

Bradley nodded and reached an arm across the space between them to touch his mate. “You are upset, Alex, saddened?”

“Not truly. I’m more regretful for all the years. Gods. I see you with Elise and Stella. I look at Colin,” Alexander smiled at his second mate, “carrying our new babies, and I feel such love and tender paternal bonding. I can’t imagine if our kits were taken from us.”

Bradley rubbed Alexander’s arm.

“Elise will soon be six. My age… My brain doesn’t even compute what Zander must have felt. I can’t fathom the depth pain that would have driven Stellan and the other omegas at Star Valley to try and commit suicide.”

Colin wiped away a few tears with the back of his hand. When Alexander saw he was crying, he
moved to sit on the arm of the sofa, between his two mates, and let both of them stay in physical contact.

“I should have been kinder to Stellan when we lived there. I didn’t remember him. It must have been torture for him to see me every day and yet I didn’t know him as my Papa.” Alexander’s voice broke on the final word. He swallowed and straightened his back. “I needed to send a message to Jacob about accepting his offer to stay during the Fox Council meeting and I wanted to put a personal note in for Stellan.”

The two omegas nodded but stayed quiet letting Alexander continue. He leaned backwards and stretched an arm to retrieve the letter.

“This is my note to Jacob… ahem…
I will bring Daisy with me in November.
I would appreciate it if you would pass the enclosed letter to Stellan, Alexander”

His mates barked out laughs. “Oh Alex, that is such a typical alpha letter.” Bradley lisped with laughter, “I hope your one to Stellan is longer.”

“Hey. I can’t stand that jerk. He is lucky I was polite.” Alexander put the first sheet to the back and began to read the main letter. “Dear Stellan,”

“A good start.” Colin chuckled.

“Colin!” Bradley glared at the dark haired fox for interrupting.

Alexander waited and then cleared his throat again. “It is difficult for me to put pen to paper. Almost as difficult as it is for an alpha to apologise.
I want to say that I am sorry for the lack of consideration I showed your feelings when I came to Star Valley. I was absorbed by my family cares and failed to see how little effort I put into trying to remember my childhood before I was taken.
My parents were only vague shadows in my mind. I couldn’t…”

Alexander snatched the pen up and scratched the last two words. “This is better.....
I didn’t try to connect you to those lost memories.
Seeing my mates with our children has sparked small remembrances over time and I have been remiss in not communicating these to you earlier.
Did I have a wooden boat with a red sail? I remember being very young and holding your hand to take it to the stream.
Did I have twin baby sisters? I can see them as tiny blonde foxes in your arms and feeling amazement when you let me hold them.
Did Zander bring me on a supply run to the city a few weeks before I was taken?
I remember you singing to me at night, Momma.
It is with regret that I consider how distant I was with you at Star Valley. I didn’t know what to do with your need for me.
I enclose pictures of your grandkits. Elise is tall for her age and she is wonderful with her younger siblings. She plagues envoys from the west of any news of you. Stella has your nose, as well as your name. It looks like Alexander Junior and Candice will be with us sooner than expected as Colin feels they are impatient to enter the world.
If you are taking your daily walk to the pasture of the ancestors, say a prayer for us all at Padalecki Lake. I have taken Pack Alpha due to Jared’s ill health. Jensen and Jared could benefit from your prayers.
We will all come and stay at the pack when I attend the council meeting in November. I will bring
Daisy. Sebastian will feel her absence. He was distraught when she was missing. Only you can know what he went through.
May the Great Foxes bless you,
Your son.
Alexander”

Alexander looked up. He had expected many interruptions and suggestions but he had reached the end to a silent audience. Colin’s face was wet with tears. Bradley was bent double with his head in his hands, his shoulders shaking with emotion.


“It is perfect.” Colin sobbed.

“You wrote it beautifully, Alex-mate.” Bradley said and moved over to sit on Alexander’s knee.

“Would you change anything?”

“Not one word.” Bradley said.

“I feel the same. Send it as it is.” Colin nodded.

Alexander pulled Bradley to the floor so they could kneel beside Colin as he lay on the sofa. Somehow the tall alpha managed to position them so he could receive a joint hug and offer them comfort in return for their support.

“I asked my Papa for his prayers, but I am truly blessed by the Gods already.” Alexander said into Bradley’s blond hair.

Chapter End Notes

This was a short one I know, but I wanted the scene to stand on its own.
After breakfast on Friday, Stephen drove Jared, Jensen and James into Lakeside. Stephen was hoping that a letter from Felix may have arrived at the clinic. James was under strict orders to buy the final three books of an adventure series about something called Ice Warriors for his son Jack’s eleventh birthday. Jared was in for blood tests and Jensen was there to support him and have a strong filtered coffee in Misha’s kitchen.

James left them at the clinic. He was heading for the bookstore via the post office, entrusted with Alexander’s letters for Star Valley, one from Bradley for Felix, four separate ones for Lilly also going to Eccleston Caves with ones for Tyler from Oscar and Jensen, and a fat envelope to One Blood from David. Jensen slipped him an additional one for Christian c/o Omega Equality Now’s HQ.

Jared’s step faltered at the clinic door. “I don’t think I can, Jen.”

“You’ll have to go back in there at some stage. Come on. I’m here and Stephen is here.” Jensen coaxed his mate through the door to the scene of his attack on the old doctor.

He could have slapped Carole for the flinch she gave when she saw the former pack alpha. Luckily Stephen stepped up and asked if there had been any letters delivered for the pack. His face transformed into a display of joy when he took the letter from Felix. There was one for Alexander from Ian, and two for Oscar bearing the royal seal. “Would you mind if I got a bagel and coffee and read this? I won’t be able to get it back out of Bradley’s grabby hands once we get home.”

Jared and Jensen gave their easy agreement and Stephen made his way to the diner.

“Exam room three is vacant. Would you care to wait for Dr Cohen there?” Carole said.

Jared nodded and his shoulders slumped as he made his way to the room. Jensen hissed across the counter, “He’s not dangerous. You could have let us wait with the other patients.”

There was a muttered apology which Jensen ignored to catch up with his alpha.

“They will all look at me like that now. That crazy alpha. I should never leave the den. Nothing good comes of it. I’m not coming down here again Jen. I’m not.” Jared’s shoulders shook. “The town no longer respects me. Some of them know don’t they? They’ve been talking to each other. They know how dirty…”

“Stop. Stop. Please Jared. Please mate. They don’t know. Don’t do this to yourself. Don’t punish yourself like this.”

“Where is your tag?” Jared’s eyes red rimmed and wet, shot open.

“On my collar. Look. It is there. Ok.”

“Ok.” Jared took a breath.

“Will we sit and wait for Matt?” Jensen caught Jared’s hand and sat them both on the edge of the bed. He played circles onto Jared’s thigh and let his alpha rest his head on his shoulder.
“Tough morning?” Matt said as he came in and shut the door behind him.

“Tough coming back here.” Jensen replied on Jared’s behalf.

“How are you feeling Jared?”

“Better every day, but right now, I feel like crap.”

“What about the medication? Any side effects? Do you think it is doing you good?”

“Yeah. Fine. I’m thirsty a lot and tired but fine.”

“Good good. You are on a low dosage. I want to ask you some questions and then will take some bloods and you can go. OK?”

“Fine.”

“Jensen would you like to go in to see Misha. He is baking some iced cookies for Jack’s birthday. I’d like to ask Jared some personal questions.”

Jensen quirked an eyebrow to check if Jared wanted him to stay but his mate patted his leg and nodded for him to leave.

Misha was mixing cookie dough with a smear of white flour on his face and a scattering of flour dust in his hair. Jensen leaned against the open French windows and laughed.

“Jen!” Misha dropped the mixing bowl and dashed around the breakfast bar and sofa to catch Jensen in a hug.

“Hey. Nice to know I’m welcome but...” He pointed at his tag and Misha let him go.

“Come in, come in. I’ll put on the coffee. How are things at the lake? How’s Oscar? Does Jack like icing? What time are we to be there tomorrow? Is Jared with Matt? How are Colin and Allyson? I have e-mails for you if you want to read them? Did Alexander really forbid Christopher from hitting Sebastian?”

Jensen let himself be led to the kitchen and be put to work. Somehow he made butter-cream icing to fill the double cookies while answering all Misha’s questions.

Both omegas sat with their feet on the coffee table sipping their brews while the cookies cooled on wire racks. Jensen had print outs of the e-mails from their omega friends. He had to wipe away a few stray tears at their messages of support. Misha produced a tissue at one point.

“You think we could try Skype?” Jensen asked.

“Yeah. Computer is in sleep mode, just boot her up.”

“Good. Christian says here that he will be at OEN offices today, so we might be lucky.”

A few minutes later Jensen was mirroring the grin on Christian’s face as they viewed each other on their screens.

“Hey man. You are looking goooooood. All those summer freckles. Lickable.”

“Stop that you are incorrigible.”
“You love it. How’s everything?”

“You mean how is Jared?”

“No I mean how are you?”

“I’m good. Million times better than when you were here. I’ve sent you a letter. We are getting there. Jared’s gonna need a lot of healing but we’ll make it.”

“How’s that adorable kit of yours?”

“Hunter? He is good. Happy like the rest of our brood that we are all back in our own den. Trying to
take care of their Papa and Daddy, which is a little heartbreaking to be honest, but as I’ve said we’ll
get there. How are you, Chris?”

The other omega nodded down the webcam. “Comme ci comme ca. I didn’t think I’d make it in
today. Last heat hit me hard. I’m on a cycle off the suppressants, to give the old body a break.
Couldn’t get to an OEN member and had to hole up in one of the OS Home emergency heat cells in
Wentzville Missouri.”

“Oh good gods. That sounds like a nightmare. Couldn’t you have called Trent in Toledo? I’m sure
they would have come to get you? Or you could have gone to the Missouri Accola village?”

“I was forty five minutes drive from a coyote settlement where a distant beta-cousin of mine is on the
town committee, but my vision was blurring, I couldn’t drive. I had to throw myself on the mercy of
the fucking state system. They gave me a heat-gown to wear. Have you ever seen one? It is like a
hospital shift with no sides. They found my OS number for me, and even contacted fucking Kane to
tell him where I was.”

“Listen Christian. Don’t ever let that happen again. One of the wild packs will let you use their
omega den. Was it truly awful?”

“Humiliating and lonely more than awful. Clinical and professional. With medically approved dildo
fucking machines and uniformed sterile attendants. My bodily needs were taken care of but I can’t
imagine what it must do to the poor boys who live there all the time. More than that they didn’t want
me to leave.”

“What?”

“They were applying for a court order to get me admitted to the institution, because I was an
abandoned mate in need of a home.”

“What did you do?”

“I punched the fucker’s lights out. Broke into the office and got my clothes and my car keys and set
off the fire alarm.”

Jensen had to laugh. He could picture the chaos and Christian with his hair flying wearing virtually
nothing streaking for his mustang.

“You had a lucky escape.”

“Makes what we are doing even more important to me, ya’know.”

“I know. When will the lessons be ready for me to work through?”
“They are ready now Freckles. When will you be ready? Will Jared still allow this?”

“Let me talk to him.” Jensen could see outrage on his friend’s face, “No no. You are picking me up wrong. He is supporting me. I need to talk to him about when I start and how we are going to work it. Is there a deadline for the lesson plans to be finalized?”

“The OS want our final versions for the end of July, so they are ready for the fall syllabus, if they put their stamp of approval on them.”

“I think with a little work I can do that.” Jensen smiled.

“Hey Freckles. I’ve gotta go. I’m standing up for Omega Aziz this afternoon. It is the first court hearing in his custody battle.”

“Good reason to have to run. We’ll talk soon and I’ll speak with Jay. Take care.”

Jensen swiveled the office chair around to see Jared leaning in against the door jam. His hair was hanging in his eyes and he had two band-aids on his inner arms from the tests. He walked over and put his arms around Jared’s waist leaning his head into his alpha’s chest.

“How is Kane?”

“Good Jay. We were talking about the home schooling units. The government wants the final versions by the end of July.”

“If we waited another week or so, would you still have time? I need to get used to coming here. I got a little freaked out after you left.”

Guilt clawed at Jensen. “Oh Gods, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have gone. Are you ok now?”

“I’m fine.” Jared wrapped an arm around Jensen’s shoulder. “Hey I wouldn’t be much good as an alpha if I can’t spend an hour away from my mate. Matt asked me lots of very personal mating questions which I still think are inappropriate and none of his business. He want to know about our sex lives and if my knot was flabby from the medication. I mean. Come on. You don’t ask about another alpha’s knot or his matings.”

Jensen snorted his held in laughter. “Oh you alphas. You would be scandalized and mortified in an omega den.”

“What about you? Our sexlife?”

“No Jay, but we do talk a lot about our heats and our slick and how virile our mates are and we tease each other about our bodies.”

“That sounds horrifying.”

“So you told Matt you didn’t have a flabby knot? It felt firm to me last night.”

“No flabby knot.” Jared rolled his eyes, and Jensen secretly smiled at his mate’s improving mood. “I
must come back in next week for the test results and they might stop the sleeping pills and adjust the other ones.”

Stephen pulled up the pack car, just as Jared was finished speaking. James was already in the back with his bookstore haul. Jared took the front passenger while Jensen climbed in beside James.

“Home?” Stephen asked.

“Home.” Jared sighed happily.

So then...” Daisy stood on the felled tree trunk in front of her captive audience. “It is decided. I am pack alpha.”

“You know it isn’t.” Wesley said. “It is Jack’s birthday. He should get to be pack alpha, and Devon isn’t here yet.”

“I’m here!” Devon shouted running around the bend in the path to join up with everyone else outside the play den. His brown hair flopped into his eyes and he raised a hand to push it back. “Whadid I miss?”

Wesley huffed. “We are playing pack and Daisy says she is the alpha.”

“It is my turn Daisy.” Devon complained.

“No it isn’t cos Baz told me that you all played last night after evening meal when I had to babysit the three new ones.” Daisy glared down from her perch, “Devon you can be my pack vixen.”

“I will not.”

“Can I be pack vixen?” Elise asked, “Cos I know all about it and if Papa and Colin were sick I could even do it for Daddy, and then I could go to a salon in the town and get my hair done.”

“What?” Daisy tilted her head.

“Where do you get to go?” Cissy asked as she and her sisters lost interest in the daisy chain they were making with Ashley.

“In Lakeside, all the ladies, they go to a sale-loon or a salon and they get their hair made all soft and different colors and they get their nails dyed and their eyelashes polished. So I think we should have two packs and I can be Devon’s pack vixen and you can be Daisy’s.”

“Na-ha.” Daisy objected. “Hunter and Basil are going to be my two pack vixens.”

“No no.” Olivia said. “That’s not fair cos Basil is your brother, you can’t mate him, and Hunter has nice hair like Papa so he doesn’t need to go to the hair place. We all have Dad’s hair and he spends ages making it nice. So I say we should get to be vixens and go to the hair makers.”

“I think we could have three packs.” Jack said. “And then whoever wants to be vixen can be.”

“It is your birthday.” Daisy conceded.
So Jack with his three pack vixens, Olivia, Cissy and Jenny went on a trip to the hair salon (the inside of the play den), with Devon and his vixens Ashley, Elise and Faith. This involved lots of cups of water being brought to the den by the male kits, who found the game much less enjoyable than they thought it would be. There were some firm words about the mud and sticks in the girls’ hair by their parents when they got home, and had to be bathed again before the birthday celebration.

Meanwhile Daisy and her vixens Hunter and Basil, cos it didn’t matter if he was her brother cos it was a game and if he wanted to be a pack vixen then Daisy said he could, made a list of stupid ideas and good ideas.

Among the stupid ideas were Daisy’s suggestions; having three play packs, going to town hairdressers and babysitting, Basil’s suggestion; babies who scream like Poppy, and Hunter’s suggestions; kits having arguments on people’s birthdays and blue tags.

Good ideas were written in Daisy’s new pink gel pen included her own; listening to Daisy, making lists and taking care of your papa, Basil added swimming and friends, and Hunter got Daisy to write down alphas who are nice to people, foxes remembering to bring sweets back from town, and hugs.

“Thank you my proud vixens. My list is complete. I will now remodel Star Valley on your advice.” Daisy held her chin high, “There will be sweets, swimming and hugs, everyone will be friends and not argue or split into different packs, papas will be taken care of and their babies will not be screamers or have to be babysat by older sisters. I will not allow any horrible tags. The pack will have its own hairdresser and everyone will listen to me.”

Hunter and Basil gave her a round of applause. Daisy bowed in response and grinned at her brother and friend. “Come on then. Let’s go and see if there are any hidden sweets in the supply cupboards.”

Chapter End Notes

Nearly there everyone.

I'm going to be on the ice cream and chocolate posting the last few chapters.
Chapter Twenty Three

Misha sat with Jensen in his little herb garden. Jensen was bravely sipping a chamomile, rose, and lavender home brewed tea.

“It is like drinking a bunch of flowers Mish.”

“I know. Delightful isn’t it?”

Jensen stayed silent rather than disagree.

“They won’t be long today, Jen.”

“I know. I’m still worried. You know. The way he is willing to talk now… It’s good.”

“But?”

“It is very difficult to hear. I can’t believe he didn’t collapse years ago. Sometimes I get angry with the older pack members. Did they not notice something was wrong?”

“Do you think they did and turned a blind eye?” Misha twisted his body to face Jensen more.

“Jared says they didn’t. He says they all thought he was a quiet shy kit, which added to the whispers about him being meant to be Mark’s mate. Then later when Mark came back from Star Valley and was his alpha trainer, he says it was so hidden and secret by then, no one would have known.”

“You don’t think so?”

“You know the meal I told you about when Sherry…”

“Was put in her place by young Bradley?” Misha flashed a toothy grin, “I would have paid good money to see it.”

“Yeah, well I was looking around the table and Tony and Christopher kept their heads down. They were friends with Mark, maybe they listened to him chat about his twisted dreams.”

“They might have been avoiding the confrontation.”

“Yeah. I don’t know. Maybe I’m paranoid. I mean I do believe that Gerard hadn’t a clue. It isn’t all Mark that he is talking about now. Jared told me more about the ST house last night. Me and Oscar. We were in the den with David. Gods, Misha. It really was a prison. Both of them shared their stories. In the end Oscar and I were wrapped around each other between the two seats and I had a hand around Jared’s leg, while Oscar had a palm around David’s ankle. We told Bradley and Colin in the omega den this morning, and they already knew everything about how it was in those places, but added on how Alexander had to fend off sexual advances every time the guards’ backs were turned. At least Jared and David were huge mature alphas when they went in. Thank the gods the ST houses are gone.”

“You want another cup Jen?”

“No thanks Misha. Could I get a cup of water?”
“You didn’t like it did you?”

“No. Sorry?”

“What would you like?”

“A soda?”

“I have homemade lemonade. I bought it at the town fair yesterday. Jules’ mother made it.”

“I’ll have a glass.”

When Misha returned with two tall glasses clinking with ice, he could see Jensen’s skin pinking up in the sun. “Will we move indoors? You are burning.”

“Oh Gods, I’ll be one big mass of freckles by my heat.”

They moved inside to the sofa. “I’m going to Philadelphia for my next heat.”

Jensen spun to face his friend. “To the omega hospital?”

Misha nodded. “Matt got us a place in the heat room.”

Jensen disregarded his tag and put a hand over Misha’s one. “Bet he had to pull some strings for that.”

“Dr Jenkins in Lexington recommended us. We have to agree to be part of the fertility study for the university, but that is no problem. I always thought I’d make history, just didn’t think it would be medical history.”

Jensen smiled weakly at his friend’s attempt at humor.

“When I go into pre-heat we have to call Professor Webster and they will be set up for us when we arrive. Will you take Valerie at short notice?”

“Of course we will.”

“It will be my second heat since I… ripped open again… they will supervise everything… they have medical techniques and can intervene to help me… but… they say… Dr Jenkins and Professor Webster… It is my last hope, Jen. If I rip again, they say I’ll never…”

“Hey hey, Misha, what about all the innovations in beta fertility, you know the artificial insemination and stuff?”

“Even if you could stimulate the body to accept it, there is still the pressure, Jen. Of the omega womb on the channel, I wouldn’t be able to carry.”

“Fuck Mish.”

“I know.”

“You are brave to try.”

“I need to. I need to give it one final chance. Then I’ll redecorate the room and forget about it.”

Jensen pulled Misha down so that his head rested on his lap. He stroked the other fox’s hair and
crooned a lullaby noise, like he did for his kits when they weren’t feeling well.

When Jared came in, he took a look at the two omegas. Jensen tensed wondering if Jared’s jealousy would flare, but he only picked up sympathy through their mating bond as Jared told him that he would wait outside.

It was another glass of lemonade and a few tissues later before Jensen joined Jared on the bench in front of the clinic. Alexander was still at the notary’s office or the bank, so they waited for the pack car with their hands intertwined.

“Matt told me about their plans to try and conceive. I guess Misha told you too?”

“Yeah, I think he is very brave, Jay. He wants another kit so much.”

“Matt is in pieces over him. I think he is willing to forget about it, but he will try for his mate. I hope it works for them.”

“Me too.”

“I need to come back on Thursday.”

“More blood tests? You will be like a pin cushion.” Jensen smirked.

“No. Matt wants me to talk with a therapist. She works out of Greenwood, but she is willing to travel here to take me as her last appointment on a Thursday.”

“What do you think Jared-mate?”

“I think it is not fair on you to distress you repeatedly with the details of what happened.”

“I’m not objecting.”

“I know you are not, and I won’t keep anything from you, but Matt says she is a professional that she works with the urban health services with…” Jared gulped but took a quick nasal breath and continued. “…rape survivors. I promised to give her a chance. If I find her helpful then maybe we could arrange your Omega Equality work around my appointments.”

“I’d like that.”

Jared pulled Jensen closer and kissed his forehead. “I would too.”

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Oscar dangled his feet into the lightly rippled waters of the lake. The foxes had a beautiful den. It didn’t have the high plateau landscape of Three Mountains, or the bustling friendly atmosphere of One Blood, but it was lush and green and filled with good people. All the mated couples lived close by one another and shared their lives like one large family.

Jet, Kendra and Opal filled his thoughts. His three week stay was coming to an end. He would see them as soon as The Royal Couple collected them and took them home to One Blood. He knew the pups were well cared for and looked forward to burying his nose in his fur.

Rays of evening sunlight broke through the clouds and Oscar tilted his face to catch them. He sensed that he has company. David sank down on the rock beside him.
“Your highness.” Oscar acknowledged.

“Stop with the highnesses, Oscar. Please call me David.”

“Good evening David. It is a beautiful evening.” Oscar ducked his head shyly.

“That it is.” David plucked a long grass and stripped it.

Oscar saw underneath David’s closed mouth smile, to the pain underneath.

“I brought Vincent here… after I freed him from that appalling OS house. We only had a month together and we spent it here.”

Oscar tentatively reached over and rubbed the royal alpha’s arm. David lifted his other hand and placed it over Oscar’s own. “I still miss him. Somewhere deep inside me, there is a part of me missing. I barely got to know him. I don’t know what his favorite color was, or if he liked snow, or what names he had considered for our pups, but Vincent was my true mate and he was taken from me.”

“You are a good friend David.” Oscar spoke so quietly David strained to hear him.

“Why do you say?”

“To return here with such sad memories, to stay here for your friend Jared. It is the mark of a fine alpha.”

“Look who is talking. You have separated yourself from your pups for Jensen.”

“We go home in the coming days. I will see them soon.” A smile lit up Oscar’s face.

“You are stunning when you smile.”

Oscar was bowled over. He only closed his mouth when he began to panic that his body would respond inappropriately in front of the King’s brother.

David smirked at the reaction he had provoked and gazed out over the shimmering waters of the lake. He dropped his hand down to link into Oscar’s one that had been resting on the omega’s lap.

“Two survivors of their true mates’ passing, in a pack of foxes, on a balmy evening. Do you think you might do me the honor of spending some of your free time with me back at the palace?”

Oscar nodded at the big handsome wolf, saying “I’d like that,” and squeezing the warm palm with his own.
They had Matt and Misha’s house to themselves. Matt had been called out to deliver a coyote pup to a beta couple who lived a few miles outside Lakeside. Misha was attending a parent teacher meeting at Valerie’s school.

Jensen sat at the Cohen’s dining table on the computer surrounded by scribbled notes and some printouts of lesson plans. Jared was stretched out across the sofa, supposedly reading a self-help book that Matt had recommended. Snorting noises interspersed with disbelieving cuss words, led Jensen to conclude that Jared was not enamored with the advice he was reading.

“Listen to this Jen. Write a letter to your young self, ideally in the year before you hit puberty.” Jared gave a cackle, “Dear Jared-kit, Run away. If the government catches you don’t worry cos you’d have ended up in an ST house anyway…. Fucking bullshit.”

“Don’t read it if it is making you angry.” Jensen turned his chair, but he could only see Jared’s feet flopping over the arm of the sofa.

“I’m not angry. It is fucking hilarious. How is any of this crap meant to help someone?” Jared flung the book on the floor. “The freaking therapist had better not be into all that douchenozzlery.”

“Jay, that isn’t even a word. I’m sure the therapist will be completely professional.”

Jared remained silent. Jensen waited a moment, but it was clear that his alpha was lost in his own thoughts. He returned to analyzing the Social Studies assessment folder that had been part of the printed material sent from OEN.

“Jay, listen to this part… ‘The grade for the Civics Unit will be awarded with 40% weighted on the report submitted and 60% on the merit of the volunteer work undertaken’. Christian has annotated ‘Jensen make suggestions here’.” Jensen tapped the sheet where Christian had scrawled his message.

“Yeah?” Jared indicated he was listening from the sofa.

“How is an unmated omega meant to be able to do charity work?”

Jared’s head popped up over the back of the seat looking puzzled.

“I mean,” Jensen gestured his frustration with his hand raised and fingers splayed taut, “You can’t leave the house without permission and in some families without a chaperone. It is not like in a pack. The suggestion is impractical. What charity would risk having an uncollared omega in their midst? I will write across it that the unit is impractical.”

“Wait.” Jared’s urgency stopped Jensen from lifting his pen, “Why can’t an omega volunteer somewhere? If their family alphas, or beta parents, are allowing them to take this homeschooling unit then they are not going to deny them the ability to complete it and receive their grade.”
Jensen chewed over Jared’s words and the inside of his bottom lip. “But Jay, you can’t realize how
difficult it is to leave the house even with permission. If we sanction this and some random alpha
claims one of the students while they are selling charity cookies door to door, we will have been the
ones to place that young boy at risk.”

“That do what Kane asked of you, make suggestions. Include a list of suitable activities in the course
material. I mean…” Jared paused to think, “a homeless charity wouldn’t be right if the young omega
was out at night delivering soup and blankets to indigent alphas, but maybe that soup is made in a
kitchen staffed by betas who need an extra pair of hands, or perhaps the homeless charity needs
someone to answer phones, or has a shelter where they assist homeless omegas…”

“Yes, Yes Jay that could work. Or if the student has their home office qualification they could work
like I did,” Jensen’s enthusiasm showed. “I used to data entry handwritten reports and accounts.
Surely charities need that done too. Or they could visit local hospitals, with the proviso that they are
given non-alpha wards only. Or if their local kindergarten was staffed by betas they could volunteer
there too. They could be involved in baking for local fundraisers, or poster design for elementary
school events.”

“Betas and children.”

“What?” Jensen had turned back to the keyboard to begin to type but he swung around at his mate’s
comment.

Jared had stood up and made his way over to stand behind Jensen’s chair. “Why all this helping of
betas and with betas? Can’t they be asked to help other omegas?”

“I suppose I was thinking of them helping anyone and everyone, but what are you thinking?”

“Well Jen, you know how you have told me some of the terrible cases of widowed omegas and
elderly ones whose so-called-families abandoned them to die in OS houses?”

Jensen nodded. His gut clenched as he thought once more about the horror of those urban omegas’
situation, disregarded at time in their lives when they should be cherished pack elders living in their
omega den if they hadn’t a family to remain with. He reminded himself once more that even if it was
in a generation in the future, he would never let that happen to Christian.

Jared wrinkled his nose, moving his glasses up a fraction by the action. “Could the teenage omegas
visit them? Many of those elders probably never receive a visitor. There would be no risk of being
claimed by a stranger alpha, if the young omegas were escorted or chaperoned to and from their local
OS home. We could, I mean OEN could, provide links on their website allowing disparate isolated
omegas to arrange to meet up and visit their nearby OS homes together?”

“Brilliant. You are a genius. It is brilliant.” Jensen stood up and threw his arms around his surprised
alpha’s neck. “I love it Jay. Love you Jay.” He planted a kiss on Jared’s jaw. “They are forgotten
about, in those barren homes until they die. It would be a wonderful act to organize, and it would let
lonely teenage omegas meet each other. When I was young I knew there were other unmated
omegas in Rock Hill but I never was permitted to socialize with them. This would be a vehicle for
them to meet in person and to bring some light into elder omegas’ lives.”

Jared grinned at Jensen’s breathy wonder-filled speech. “Glad you like it.”

“Like it? Didn’t I say I loved it? We could name the action, the volunteering and register it as a
charity. I’ll talk to Trent about it. We could get official backing for it, and maybe some guilt driven
donations from the douchebag families who threw their Papas away. We could liaise with the OS to
ease permission for the students to visit the homes, and maybe provide a small fund to cover any travelling expenses for poorer families.”

Jensen was on a roll, his mind firing off in different directions. “Can I phone Christian?”

Jared laughed, “You had better find a landline number for him or use Skype because I don’t think pack funds could cover this conversation as a cell to cell call.”

“I will.” Jensen gave his mate another kiss. There was the sound of the front door banging and Valerie’s lisping laughter. Jensen couldn’t contain himself, “Misha, Misha,” he shouted, “Jared had an inspiration.”

It was dark when Tony finally got to drive them home. Jensen felt a little guilty that the beta had been detained so long by all the calls to Trent and Christian, and Misha’s insistence on floating the idea on the Wild Omegas Together message boards.

Matt, Jared and Tony had taken Valerie to the diner for a meal. It was clear that Misha and Jensen were uninterested in cooking or eating anything, although the others did bring back some take out for the omegas.

Jensen sighed and rested his head on Jared’s shoulder as the car made its final turn towards the barn. “I don’t think I can wait until Thursday to get back down to Misha.”

“That’s fine, Jen. Nothing will happen over the weekend. We could ask Alexander if we can spend Monday afternoon there perhaps.”

“That would be good, and if nothing urgent comes out of that session, we need not go again until your appointment.” Jensen snuggled in closer. He was tired now that the adrenaline high was gone. He drifted a little as the car was parked up.

“What in tarnation?” Tony growled as he opened the driver’s door. “I nearly fucking drove over them.”

Jared and Jensen were out of the car like bullets. In the scattered hay on the barn floor were Hunter-fox and Basil-fox, wrapped around one another, blinking their way back to wakefulness.

“What are you doing here? Hunter, it is dangerous to sleep in the parking barn, you could have been hurt.” Jared’s voice was raised, but Jensen could feel beneath the harsh tone that his alpha was as shocked as he was at the dangerous place their son had chosen to nap.

“Daddy, daddy, I’m sorry,” Hunter sent via the fox mind and then both kits shifted. Hunter threw himself around his father’s leg while Basil put up his arms for Jensen to pick him up.

“I’m sorry Dada. We wanted to be first.” Hunter sobbed into this father’s body. Jared bent down to lift him up, mirroring Jensen’s move to hold Basil.

“First at what?” Jensen asked.

“To tell you, before any big foxes.” Basil said his brown eyes wide and staring.
“Tell us what?” Jared asked, more patient now that the shock had receded.

“Oscar’s pups are here.” Hunter squeaked and added, “And the wolf king and queen and their pup.”

“They are early.” Jensen hadn’t expected the royal party until the following day, but was smiling at the prospect of meeting Oscar’s children and of seeing Daniel. He noticed the second car at the rear of the barn.

“They are. It was a big surprise.” Basil laughed and Hunter started a sniggering laugh too.

“What is so funny?” Jared asked suspiciously as they started to walk up the hill.

“Alexander was making sure the latrines were being moved all the right way and then there was all the smelliness and then he had to go to the meeting stone all stinky.” Hunter snorted a laugh and Basil giggled. Jared bit his lip and Jensen sucked a breath trying not to encourage the hilarity.

“I am sure that Joseph understood. He arrived unexpectedly.” Jared managed to say without breaking into laughter.

As soon as they crested the hill, Rosie ran to meet them. “Basil Eccleston, you will be the death of me.” She said lifting the kit from Jensen’s arms, “Where have you been?”

“They were waiting to intercept us with the news.” Jensen supplied.

“Basil, you should have been in your nest ages ago, I don’t think Daisy is going to read you a story tonight.”

“I don’t care, cos I got my own story now about being in barns in the dark. Ha!”

“What will we do with you?” Rosie asked rhetorically and let the kit hug into her.

“I’ll find the rest of the kits, Jen and put Hunter down with them. Do you want to go to the omega den? I am sure Daniel and Oscar will be there.” Jared asked, but as they approached the main area they found everyone. The beta-mothers and omegas were under the canopy with many of the pack kits up beyond their bedtime, and the male betas and alphas were around the eating table.

Hunter slipped out of Jared’s arms and skidded over to find Hillary who was talking to a dark haired wolf pup about their age.

Jared gave Jensen a peck on the cheek and removed his red tag, then headed for the dining table.

“Jensen. Surprise.” Daniel said and made his way over to give his friend a kiss on both cheeks.

“Great to see you Dan.”

“I brought someone with me this time.” Daniel took his pup by her hand and waited the moment for her to stand next to him, “Jensen this is my daughter Irene. Reenie, this is my friend Jensen-fox.”

“I am very pleased to meet you.” Irene intoned carefully and then ruined it all, “I’m a princess you know.”

“Reenie!” Daniel admonished.

“But Papa when Daddy does the telling thing he says this is Princess Irene or The Irene Wolf.”

“Baby girl, that is formal. This is amongst friends. You wouldn’t like it if your friends had to call you
those long names all the time.”

The pup turned towards Hillary, “’s ok, I can call you Hillie now and you can call me Reenie, Momma said.”

“Who else came?” Jensen asked.

“Just Larry, who drove us, and Oscar’s pups of course.”

Jensen looked under the canopy where Oscar was bouncing a little infant boy on his knee, while Katie held a grey wolf pup and Colin had the other pup asleep on top of his baby bump. He broke out a cheek splitting smile. “They are beautiful.”

Oscar smiled back. “This is Jet.”

Jet crowed “Mamama.”

Oscar moved him so that he held him against his body and rubbed circles into his back. “Colin has Kendra and Katie’s got Opal.”

“Can I?” Jensen asked.

Oscar passed Jet over. The infant gave a gurgling giggle as he felt Jensen’s evening stubble and tried to insert a finger up Jensen’s nostril. The fox laughed. “I think you should go back to your Momma before I get a finger in my eye. He is a cutie.” He added to Oscar.

Several times Jensen thought he was going to fall asleep but the conversation flowed. He filled everybody in on the Omega Equality education developments. Daniel told them about their time at Five Rivers and Two Moons. Oscar told a few stories about the pups as they were moved around between all the foxes who wanted to hold them. Irene made her Papa tell the story of how her litter was born in a hotel in Iowa, three weeks early as the royal couple travelled home from Seven Hills. Finally sometime in the early hours Bradley was prompted to ask if everyone wanted to retire by the sound of his mate’s snuffling snores. Jensen realized that they were surrounded by dozing kits and Sebastian was also asleep with Kendra on top of his chest. He looked over at the eating table empty of wolves and foxes.

Lifting Hillary and Alan into his arms, Jensen was as silent as he could be entering his own den. He found the rest of his kits in the large basket. He didn’t want to wake them, so laid the two he had carried into the second one and tucked a blanket around them.

He splashed his face with water and gave his teeth a quick going over. Once he was out of his clothes he shifted and curled around his mate’s fox form.

In the morning the kits sneaked out trying not to wake their parents. Jensen could hear them whispering about breakfast and if wolves ate weird stuff. They were cheerful and he let them head out, giving him time to make sure Jared was alright before he caught up with them.

Jared woke slowly as he often did with the medication. Jensen already had a bowl of warm water prepared. As soon as Jared shifted he passed him a warm flannel to wipe the sleep from his eyes.

“Morning Jen.”

“Good morning to you, sleepyhead.”

“I don’t think we will be able to luxuriate here this morning.”
“Not a chance.” Jensen had moved over the shelves and was using a small bowl of water and his own razor to give a clean shave. “I don’t want to miss the last few hours with Oscar and I’m sure you’ll want to have a while with David and Joseph before they depart.”

“Oscar’s pups are cute. Don’t you think Jen?” Jared had eased himself up and was rooting in his clothing hamper for some soft sweats and a clean hoodie.

“Adorable, sweet and so fluffy with all that wolf fur.”

“Opal turned on her back for me,” Jared preened, “let me rub her belly. She only let the wolf alphas and me play like that.”

Jensen smiled, a sweet soft expression flowing from the thoughts in his mind, “I’ll be in heat soon. I already have the slightest hint of the prickling sensation. Should be in about week.”

Jared nodded gravely. “Would you like me to ask Alexander to release Bradley from his duties so that he can stay with you? Or do you want Misha?”

“Misha’s going to go about the same time as I am, but I didn’t mean that. I could stay here with you, Jay, in our den.” Jensen bit his lip and shifted his weight unconsciously from one leg to the other.

“I can’t ask you that. Not now.”

“Why Jay, if we are blessed I can continue with the OEN work for months, maybe until the New Year. It would work. You could have me here, in our blankets, pinned down by your knot, filling me up.”

“Gods!” Jared panted and wiped his brow, “I can’t babe, my sweet omega. I can’t believe you are offering me this. I know you want a break and I don’t know if I am strong enough.” A broken sob left Jared’s throat, “I’m not well, Jen. I’m not. I know I’m getting better, but I’m still all fractured inside. I can’t be strong for you. When you are pregnant protecting you and keeping you safe consumes me… I’m so sorry.”

“Oh Jared. Oh baby. Shush now. I’m sorry. It was dumb of me. I am a stupid omega. I was all broody seeing the wolf pups and I didn’t think. It was thoughtless. Please forgive me.”

Jared pulled his mate into his arms and quelled his own sobs. “Nothing to forgive Jen and you are not stupid and dumb. Please don’t say those things. You are clever and kind and my darling.”

Jensen sniffed in his alpha’s scent and let Jared rest his hand over their claiming mark.

“Bradley said to tell you that if you don’t come out he is coming in.” Devon announced from the entry way.

“Come on Jay. Big pack breakfast in the guests’ honor I presume.” Jensen pulled on Jared’s hand.

“No freaking way.” Jared protested. “My hair! I can’t go out like this.”

Jensen bent double with mirth. “Dev pet, get Daddy his hair brush and alpha-grade serum stuff while I give him a quick shave.”
Alexander had one of the Wolf party’s cases while Jared had a bag of gifts Oscar had managed to accumulate. They were bringing the bags to the car to save on journeys for David and Larry.

“So by the time Elise found me where I was supervising the moving of the latrines, I didn’t have time to wash up. I had to stand there smeared with filth and greet them.” Alexander’s face twisted in disgust. “Jared?”

“Yes alpha? Sorry I was miles away.”

“You good?”

“Yeah. Jensen and I had a good talk this morning is all.”

Alexander used his free hand to clap Jared on the shoulder, “I’ve been thinking. You know I’m going to the council meeting next month and to Star Valley for most of November?”

Jared nodded.

“I’d like you to take pack second when you are ready.”

“Next month?”

“I’ll have to go to the meeting. I can’t let Felix be swallowed whole, Bradley would never forgive me. You’ll be my proxy pack alpha while I’m gone.”

“Maybe not next month, Alexander if you don’t mind. Jensen’s heat is coming and he has all the OEN work to do, and I’m beginning my therapy sessions. Also David has asked me to visit. For all of us to visit One Blood, I was going to ask your opinion and permission.”

“That is a very generous offer. When are you thinking of going?”

“Maybe August. Oliver will keep the pack safe for the few days you are gone for the next meeting. I’d be honored to take second when we return from New York. You know I want to support you when Colin’s kits are born.”

Alexander nodded and moved a step ahead as the path down to the barn narrowed for a stretch, “I still have to decide on my pack hierarchy. I was thinking of asking Emma to take fifth. She is our pack envoy, she deserves a position. I’d like to give James a bigger role too.”

Jared grunted approval at the thought out decisions and then caught up with his pack alpha. He laughed suddenly, “There is Amber’s missing red scarf.”

Alexander looked up to spy a small dash of ruby material poking out from near the roof of the barn. “How did it get there?”

Jared tapped the side of his nose. “Insider knowledge, alpha. There is a ladder against the wall. There must have been more kit play here yesterday than Hunter and Basil’s stunt. I know all the hiding places, but you Alexander are mated to the expert. Don’t ever let Colin tell you he can’t find something or someone in this pack.”

“I won’t Jared.” Alexander chuckled putting his burden down on the hay floor next to the royal car. “We will talk more about the pack. I appreciate your advice.”
Jared gathered the kits in a neat row across his den entrance. They had all obeyed his order to shift to human form. The sun caught their hair and Alan put his hand up to shield his eyes from the glare. Jared wondered if his son had inherited Jensen’s eyesight and decided to bring him to Lakeside to the opticians.

“I’m sorry, I was delayed deflecting Valerie and Daisy’s curious questions about our family meeting.” Jensen took a spot on the ground next to Jared, who had crossed his legs and sat in front of the smoldering fire pit. They faced their kits. Jensen curved his body so that Jared could easily press him in under his arm.

“Kits.” Jared brought their wandering attention back to him, “Papa and I have something to tell you.”

Seven little faces focused on their Dad. A few expressions of curiosity, but he was saddened to see the simple statement bring concern to the others’ eyes. He broke out a wide dimpled grin, “We are going on an adventure. David has invited us to spend a few weeks with him at One Blood.”

“Are we leaving the Lake?” Olivia asked.

“Only for a vacation, baby.” Jensen answered.

“What is a vacation Papa?” Hillary asked.

“It is when a family goes somewhere new together and enjoy themselves. We will all get the train in Charlotte and David will collect us in Albany.” Jensen explained.

There was a rush of simultaneous questions. Alan wanted to know if he could bring his books. Olivia wanted to know if there would be princes and princesses. Cissy wanted to know if they had to go to school there. Hunter started crying when told Basil couldn’t go. Jenny announced they needed new dresses if they were going. Devon wanted to be called his Daddy’s second if they were travelling as a family pack. Hillary wanted to know if they could stay in Irene’s den. Jenny declared herself a train expert because Elise had explained to her how to buy tickets from a booth.

Finally once every question had been answered and Hunter had shifted to fox and fell asleep on Jensen’s lap, Jared could see in his kits’ faces the joy and wonder at the prospect of traveling to the wolf pack, seeing amazing things, and coming home to their friends full of tales from their vacation.

This was joy. He raised his head letting a cool zephyr of summer breeze cross his skin.

Jensen was beside him. His kits were surrounding him.

There was no pressure to be anything other than a mate and a father, providing his family with childhood memories of love, laughter, summer and innocent joy.

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue to follow.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Many years later....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

________________________________________________________________

AMAZING OMEGAS: A HISTORY OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR EQUALITY

By

Professor Elise Star-Padalecki

________________________________________________________________

Dedicated to:

Alpha Daisy Star
In recognition of her lifework,

To my loving and patient mate Hillary,

And

To our Papas

________________________________________________________________

Foreword and Dedication
It is an honor and a pleasure to write these words. When my twin’s mate asked me to pen the foreword and dedication to her great treatise, I was humbled and sure there were many who would be a more suitable choice. I suggested Elise’s papas, my Papa, my Papa-in-law, Senator Kane, and our cousin Wild Were Council Speaker Felix.

Hillary and Elise sat me down in their home den back at Padalecki Lake and told me that Elise was taking the title of her work from my kits’ bedtime tale: Amazing Omegas, Dmitri, Tilda and Lexie’s nightly story. Therefore my beta twin declared it was my duty to begin the story. I am no scholar and I am sure my foreword will reflect this. The laws that allowed omegas attend university came too late for me, but I thank my Papa that I received a wonderful education at our ‘canopy school’ and later when I followed my parents to One Blood, I absorbed knowledge like a sponge.

Should I begin my foreword at the start? Professor Star-Padalecki brings you back to the medieval laws and the role of omegas in the civil war. She covers how the struggle for equal rights by the Wild Alphas opened the door for Wild and Urban Omegas to join together in their own campaign for equality.

I will begin my story on a more personal line. I am the middle child of thirteen, born to my papa’s second litter of his five. When I was a little kit, my father led my papa around on a leash. Papa wore a red tag and one of his closest friends wore a blue and a green tag. To students reading this, the idea of a green tag being worn in living memory may seem abhorrent and outrageous. It was. The outlawing of the leash came early, before there was a single omega elected to office. Senator Kane and Prince David Wolf drove through the anti-tag measures before my maturity.

My father Jared Padalecki is a complex alpha. He is a hero of the Wild Alpha struggle and gave every part of himself to his pack and his family. My papa Jensen is my hero. His compassion and empathy for his fellow omegas made him the heart of the rights campaign. His life from independent urban fox, to pack vixen, to his later role after my father’s pack alpha reign, as Royal Omega Rights Consultant fully deserves the whole chapter that Elise has given him in this work.

My parents loved each other. They still do. They are devoted to each other. In winter they spend their days together at Padalecki Lake with their grandkits and youngest unmated beta children, Donna and Ian. Each summer they return to New York State and spend a long vacation with their dear friends Princes David and Oscar Wolf at One Blood. They are retired from pack life and from pack politics, but have assumed the mantle of Fox Elders. They remain the patrons of Aid for the Elders, the charity they both founded, which my sister and brother in law Olivia and Wesley now run.

There were many involved in the Omega Equality campaign whose names will figure largely in this volume. Many others played more anonymous roles, big and small. Personally I cannot let the following go unmentioned; Misha Cohen (affectionately aka The Overlord), Senator Christian Kane (OEN founder and the first elected omega senator), Trent Ford (The Tag Thief), The late Rob Benedict (who famously called The Anubis out in public on the Jackal Omega Rules), Tyler Padalecki (Eccleston Caves Vixen who speaks with his alpha at the Wild Were Council), Milo Ventimiglia (who won the supreme court case to inherit his alpha’s assets) and The Oscar Wolf (who with his mate David has spoken worldwide on omega rights).

I have yet to mention any Star foxes. The author, Elise Star-Padalecki, is someone I am proud to call family. Emeritus Professor in Modern History at Princeton, she blazed a trail in academia with the first lecture course in omega history. Her insightful and scholarly approach re-envisioned the history that had been presented until that time. This work, her magnum opus, gives the lay person and the new student an opportunity to see our history through new eyes.
Elise is the daughter of Padalecki Pack Alpha Alexander Star and his Pack Vixens Bradley and Colin. Under their leadership the Padalecki Pack has carried on the torch lit by my parents. Elise’s sister Stella is the mate of my brother Alpha-Devon, pack second, and they are as committed to omega rights.

Amazing Omegas is dedicated to Pack Alpha Daisy Star of Star Valley, founder of SOFS. I have known Daisy all my life. She is an amazing alpha. I was nine years old when her alpha rage hit. I have never seen anything like it. It manifested in the most powerful urge to protect her Papa and us proto-omegas (me and her brothers Basil and Sage). No-one could look askance at any of us for the whole month of August that year. Alpha Daisy has been open and honest about her family history. I am not here to add anything to statements that she has made, but I will confirm that I was present the night before her Uncle took her to Star Valley, the night my father and her papa told her the truth. Her dignity and compassion in the face of the devastating revelations proved to us all once again what an amazing alpha she is.

For a long time I fantasized that Daisy would return to Padalecki Lake and take me as her mate. We kept in constant communication. I was the bane of the other teenagers as I hogged time on the pack computer in our solar powered cabin. We talked through her decision to change her name to Star on the day she turned sixteen and assumed Star Valley Second. She was nineteen when Jacob suffered his massive stroke placing the pack in her hands. I joined the Eccleston family and Daisy’s Padalecki Pack friends in their journey of support. Basil and Sage took her up on her offer as their closest blood alpha to remain at Star Valley, their father having passed that winter.

When the government announced they were closing the Unclaimed Omega Houses, the OS homes, hundreds of omegas had nowhere to go. Star Valley Omega Freedom Sanctuary (SOFS) is the most wonderful altruistic act of our generation. Daisy would say it was not altruism, that she did it for her Papa, brothers, mate and all omegas. All of Star Valley’s resources were plunged into the project. The other wild packs were quick to come on board and these days SOFS receives the majority of its funds from urban donations and fundraisers.

SOFS is a village of its own within a pack, from the central quadrangle of apartments Maison Sebastian Roché, to Sage Elementary and Basil High schools and the omega focused local hospital. It is a haven for all omegas in need.

Finally I would like to thank Daisy for a very personal boon, my true mate. When I was twenty four, I borrowed Senator Kane’s mustang and travelled to California with my younger alpha brother William, and my friends Faith Marsters and Libby Ford. We arrived in Star Valley in time for two naming ceremonies. My closest friend Basil’s new litter was presented to his sister. The next morning the SOFS medical centre was dedicated as Hunter Clinic. I was taken on a tour as the humble guest of honor. Then Daisy left me to explore the new facility. I found my alpha with his head stuck inside a refrigerated blood unit. While I had spent my early twenties away assisting The Oscar Wolf and my papa, my alpha had been a late bloomer. By the time I learned he was an alpha, his genius mind had earned him a place at a prestigious boarding school. I knew he was at medical school in California. Misha and Matt’s much longed for younger child, Jensen, who was volunteering at the new omega and pack clinic. A twenty year old medical student in dusty scrubs with a mop of black hair and blue eyes, my true alpha mate, my Jensen.

May the gods bless you all with hope for the future.

May our alpha, beta, omega and normal kits live in equality and liberty, in union together for a better society; wild and urban, fox, wolf, coyote, raccoon dog and jackal.
In peace and love,

_Hunter_

Senator Hunter Padalecki-Cohen,
Senior South Carolina Senator,
Senate Office Buildings,
Washington.
Residence: Lakeside, SC.

Chapter End Notes

_Spectrum_

“Say my name,
And every color illuminates,
We are shining,
And we'll never be afraid again”

A/N: I just want to say that I have been overwhelmed by all the kudos, love, comments, downloads, and bookmarks for my dear foxes. Writing this verse has been a wonderful journey for me. I began with chapter one as a one-shot, then I wanted to know what Jared's POV was, then what would happen to Jensen back at the pack, then what was poor 16 year old Alex's story, then there were kits, especially Daisy and Hunter, and Oscar's tale... Safe to say I never thought I'd be pushing 190K by the end.

So thank you again for all your support. I hope you enjoyed reading as much as I did writing.

Natasha

P.S. One final timestamp added... read on for The Truth. X

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!