

Chapter 2

Sage

My anxiety grows with every step I take as I rush home. I have an important guest, well important to me anyway, and he's injured. He was still unconscious when I left him this morning and I've worried about him all day. I hope he's okay.

I don't know his name or where he's from. All I really know is that he needs me. I was working in the fields yesterday when he stumbled into our pack, covered head to toe in blood from several nasty looking wounds. It was a gruesome sight and I was terrified, but before the shriek could tear from my lungs, he collapsed at my feet.

I'm ashamed to admit I hesitated to help him, concerned he might be a rogue. Harboring a rogue is punishable by death in my pack and I wasn't sure I should risk it. But on closer inspection, he was wearing expensive clothes and even the blood smearing his face couldn't hide his handsome features. He smelled amazing too, like fresh, crisp winter air, not putrid like a rogue.

Everything in me screamed to help him. If I did nothing, he'd die of his wounds and I couldn't live with myself if I left him to that fate. So, with all the strength I could muster, I managed to drag him home and laid him on my little cot. I cleaned and dressed his wounds and watched him through the night, bathing him with cool rags whenever his fever spiked.

I hated to leave him this morning, but if I didn't show up for work, Daphne would have sent someone looking for me. Then we'd be caught for sure and we'd both be dead. I just hope he survived the day.

When I finally make it home with my little bundle of food, I rush inside, eager to check on my patient. He's still on the cot but he's sitting up now and his face has a little more color. I take that as a good sign.

"How are you feeling?" I ask, hoping he's a tiny bit more talkative now that he's feeling a little better.

He doesn't answer me, glaring at me as he scans me from head to toe like he's just seeing me for the first time. Then I swear I see his gray eyes flash amber as he lets out a ferocious growl.

"Who hurt you?" He roars.

"I'm fine." I brush off his concern, too embarrassed to tell him about the abuse I endure.

"You're not fine! Now answer me!" He grinds out, his jaw clenched in anger.

"Why does it matter?" I snap back. "You're still too injured to help and nothing can be done about it anyway. But if you really want to know, I'll tell you all about it when I'm done changing your dressings. How, how are you?"

He stares at me a moment longer, clearly unhappy with the bargain. But finally nods and answers, "Still weak, but alive, thanks to you." His full lips turn up in a half smile and I feel myself blushing at his gratitude. "I appreciate the risk you took, bringing me to your home. Are you sure it's safe for me to be here? I can go if you want me to."

"Trust me, if you don't want to be found, there is no safer place to hide than in my home. No one ever comes looking for me." I say a little too bitterly.

But if he notices my tone, he doesn't comment, just nods and winces from the pain the movement caused. I can see from here that some of his dressings need to be changed, already bleeding through the fabric of his clothes. I start to remove his clothes but his hand darts out, grabbing mine with surprising strength for someone so weak.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm undressing you." I answer matter-of-factly. "You can't expect me to treat you with your clothes on. Besides, It's not like I haven't seen you naked before. How do you think I took care of you last night? Those dressings didn't get there by themselves."

He says something that comes out as a grunt but releases my hand. I take that as permission and help him remove the rest of his clothes, all but his underwear. It takes every ounce of willpower I have not to stare.

It's clear this man takes care of his body. Every inch of him screams power and strength, muscles rippling under his gorgeously tanned skin. Aside from his current wounds, only a few scattered scars mar its perfection.

"Uh, I'll just go get the first aid kit. I'll be right back." I stand, forcing my eyes away.

I hurry into the bathroom, my chest heaving and my heart pounding. "What is wrong with you, Sage? So what if he's devastatingly handsome! The man is injured!" I scold myself. "Besides, you're a wolfless nobody. He won't look twice at you once he's well. Don't forget that!"

Lecture complete, I grab the kit and rush back to his side. I make quick work of cleaning his wounds and redressing them. He watches me the entire time, his intense steel-gray eyes never leaving me and his firm, square jaw never shifting from its neutral expression.

"You're good at that." He deadpans, an observation not a compliment.

"I've had a lot of practice." I shrug. "I tend to get hurt a lot. And no one is around to treat my wounds." I leave out the part about them not being willing to help even if they were nearby.

"Huh." He grunts and I clench my jaw. He could at least say thank you.

"So, would you mind telling me how you ended up inside our pack border?"

"I was attacked by rogues. I managed to get away and was looking for a place to hide." He states flatly, again no emotion in his tone. "I'll go as soon as I'm healed. I know you're taking a risk by having me here."

"Some of these injuries are serious. You'll need to be monitored for infection. I don't think you'll be going anywhere anytime soon." He stares at me for a moment but doesn't argue as I expect him to.

For reasons I can't explain, the thought of this stranger I just met not being here makes me sad. Maybe it's because I sense a kindred spirit in him. I can't even sense his aura like other wolves. His wolf must be really weak, or maybe he doesn't have one just like me.

I'm lost in my musing as I work but as soon as I apply the last bandage, I look up to find him watching me intently. "Are you done?" He asks.

"Yes, for now." I reply.

"Good. Now tell me who hurt you!" He demands.