

Chapter 10

Dressed in my traditional hoodie and jeans, I groggily walked down the stairs towards the wonderful smells coming out of the kitchen. My legs and feet were still sore from my little trip through the woods, but the cuts the branches gave me had stopped stinging. I heard Mom rummaging around the kitchen, and I hesitated. She was really mad last night, like the maddest I'd ever seen her type of mad.

I told her I ditched school with a couple of friends because I wasn't feeling well and all we did was hang out by the river. So she grounded me for about eighty years after the nearly two-hour lecture about my future and how the choices I made today will form who I shall become.

I will admit, but in Mom's hearing range, after the first half-hour, I did kind of stop listening to her. Instead, I did the standard: yes mom, I'm sorry mom, I won't do it again. With careful repetition of those little beauties and listening for keywords, she never noticed I wasn't listening.

My stomach grumbled as I entered the kitchen carefully.

"Morning. Breakfast is on the table," Mom said. Her terse voice told me she was indeed still mad at me.

I cringed. "I'm sorry, Mom. I really am. I swear I never meant to make you worry."

She turned to face me, her lips pressed so tightly together, they were a good shade paler. "I know you didn't, Brook, but that's not the problem here. The problem is something's going on, and you're not talking to me."

The urge to tell her everything and I mean everything started to press against me. I even opened my mouth to say it but memories of those days after Dad died rushed to the forefront. With that, I closed my mouth and shook my head. "It's nothing mom. Everything is cool."

Mom sighed, her shoulders slumped, and she shook her head at me. "Baby girl, I have been your mother too long for not to notice something has been bothering you and has been for a long time. I can't help you if you don't let me in."

Guilt swelled in me, and I felt so horrible for keeping her out, but I didn't want to lose her like that again. "I'm fine. If there is something you can help with, I won't hesitate to ask you. I swear mom."

She shook her head again. "Alright Brook but remember I'm here. For anything."

When I finished breakfast, I head out. Surprise flashed through me when I saw Ryder waiting for me on the corner. "Hey Brook," he said, smiling down at me.

"Hey back." My stomach did that weird twisty thing, making me a bit nauseous. What was it about him that made my body act all weird? In all truth, it all still seemed so unreal. I had really expected to wake up this morning and find it had all been a dream or at least the parts with Ryder in it. "Should you really be walking with me? Mike won't-"

"I don't care about Mike. After what you told me yesterday my dad is going to try to convince the surrounding packs my uncle needs to be removed as alpha after what he and Mike have been doing to you and are threatening to do," he explained and stared at him for a moment.

"But I'm just a human. Why would any of your kind care about they do to me?"

"My uncle, Mike, and this pack, it's not how we are. I have no doubts the other packs will see what they've done for what it really is - barbaric and cruel. Those are two things an alpha should never be" We stopped by my locker, he leaned against the one next to mine, facing me. "There is something else I have to tell you Brook-" The bell rang, cutting him off. "I guess I'll have to tell you later." With a light laugh, Ryder leaned over to kiss my cheek.

My stomach fluttered as I watched him leave for class then realized I needed to get to class myself. I quickly opened the locker, shoving everything I didn't need inside and slammed it shut. I raced to Math, but as I turned the corner, someone grabbed me and shoved me into what I think was the janitor's closet. I turned and pressed back against the metal shelving when I saw Mike closing the door behind him. "Mike..." I breathed, fear slammed into me at the dark look his eyes. He must've seen the kiss

Ryder given me. I was dead, so very, very dead.

"Missy, Missy, Missy," he said moving his head side to side slowly with a disapproving tone. "You of all people should know better than run around with Dean Williams."

Oh, God! Please help me...someone. A shudder of fear tore through me. "We were just...he didn't mean..." My mind ran blank, and I was unable to finish a sentence. He walked closer and the shelving bit into my back as I pressed against it. His fist hit me so hard and fast, I was doubled over before I'd even realized what happened. The air escaped my lungs, and as hard as I tried, I couldn't get the air to go back in.

Mike seemed satisfied as he watched me try to gasp for air and just when I thought I might pass out, I finally managed to take a deep breath.

Grabbing my shoulder, he pulled me back up and into the shelving. "Stay away from him, Missy. Stay away, or I will really punish you, got it?" When I didn't answer Mike grabbed my shoulder and shoved me hard against the shelf. "I said got it?"

"Y-yes, I got it. I w-won't go n-near R-Dean again." God, I should've known.

"That's my girl," Mike said, patting my head like I was a pet or a child before he leaned into me, grabbing my face. "And don't let him kiss you again. If he kisses you, I'm going to rip out his spine and beat you bloody with it. Then I'll pay your mom a visit."

I gasped but nodded quickly. "I-I won't."

Mike grinned, apparently pleased with my compliance and leaned towards me until our foreheads touched. "I knew you wouldn't let him interfere." His hand brushed along my still throbbing stomach. I stiffened and the hairs on the back of my neck on end. This wasn't good. He was acting strangely. Mike never got this close to me before, and he never touched me like this either. I didn't like it, not at all.

"If you behave and do what I tell you, Missy, I'll protect you from my dad," he said, almost in a whisper. "I promise if you follow the rules the only one who will hurt you will be me."

If I thought I was scared before, it had nothing on right now. The need to

escape slammed into me. "I'll behave," I said, my voice shaking. I'd do anything to get out of here right now. "If you protect my mom. I promise I'll stay away from Dean, and away from everyone. I'll follow our rules until I leave for college."

Mike's eyes snapped to look into mine, glowing now. I must have said something wrong, but I didn't understand I agreed with him. "Leave? You can't leave! You're mine. I need someone to hurt so I don't hurt my mom or Beth." He twisted one of my wrists as if to prove his point.

I cried out as the sharp pain raced up my arm. "B-but don't you have like a mate or something. Wouldn't she do that for you?" I felt awful for even suggesting someone else should take my place, but I had to get out of here.

Mike snorted, repulsion on his face. "I don't need a mate," he snapped then sneered at me. "But if that's what you want I can do it." He brushed his nose softly against my cheek. "Could actually be fun...I could even turn you so I wouldn't have to be so careful."

Terror and panic slammed into me. Oh God, anything but that. I couldn't let him do that to me. "No!" The most basic, primitive part of me screamed to get free. My knee jerked up, hitting him hard in the groin. He yelled out in surprise and pain, letting me go as he fell to his knees. I ripped open the door and ran, but Mike recovered faster than I expected. He grabbed the back of my hoodie and swung me around, throwing me face first into the lockers.

Pain exploded in my head as I bounced off the metal and hit the floor. My vision was blurry, and I had to blink a few times before I get the black dots to go away. Something warm ran down the side of my face. When I touched my forehead, they came back red with blood. I gasped in shock then looked up at Mike looming over at me a furious wild look on his face. He looked ready to kill me.

A scream ripped from my throat and despite it was pointless, I tried to get up and escape, only I couldn't manage to stand so I just kind of crawled and dragged myself away from him.

Just as he reached out to grab me, I heard Ryder yell, "Keep your hands off

her!"

"Screw you, Dean! Keep your nose in your own business. She's mine, and I do what I want with her."

My blood froze as Ryder's expression turned wild. His body was tense with his hands in fists at his sides. His eyes were glowing an icy blue and promised a level of violence I thought only Mike or his dad was capable of. "Brook isn't yours. She'll never be yours," he told Mike, his voice didn't sound like him at all. Yet, his words eased some of my fear. He'd keep Mike away from me.

"She already is mine, you idiot. She was mine long before you ever came here! Stay out, or my dad will deal with you." Mike's face started to change into something grotesque and monstrous.

Ryder's face took on the same grotesque shapes as Mike's. "No, Mike, not ever. She's mine and only mine."

Mike looked as shocked as I was. His? The fear returned, but this time much stronger than before. What did he mean by I was his? I didn't belong to anyone. This wasn't the guy who kissed me in the park and walked me to school. I watched horrified as the two changed into massive snarling beasts that tore at each other. Was this what werewolves were really like? Panic tore through me, erasing all thoughts but the need to run.

I don't remember getting to my feet or running home, but the next thing I knew I crashed into Mom, nearly knocking her over. I hugged her tightly, my whole body shaking as I cried. "Brook, what's wrong? What happened?"

"They're monsters. I thought... oh God, they're nothing like us. We have to get out of here."

"Monsters? Brook, what you are talking about?" Mom brushed my hair away from my face then gasped. "You're bleeding. What happened?"

"How bad is it?" Harry walked up to us.

Panic seized me, and I pulled Mom away from him. "Stay away from us! I know what you are."

He froze looking at me in shock and maybe a little guilty.

"Brook Veronica Grigsby, what has gotten into you?" Mom demanded.

"They're monsters, Mom! Please, you have to believe me. We've got to get out of here now. They'll kill us if we stay!" I took her hand in both of mine and tried to pull her upstairs.

She glanced at Harry then back to me. "Stop pulling me and tell me what in the world you're talking about. Who are monsters? Who is going to kill us?"

"Brook," Harry said in a soft, calm voice. "I don't know what happened, but I promise I'd never hurt you or your mother. Tell us what happened so we can help you."

Instinct still demanded I run, but this time I stayed. "You lied to us. Your kind are monsters! You all will kill whoever's in your way without a second thought." I looked at Mom. "Please, we have to leave. The alpha wants to kill us. Mike told me. They're evil Mike's been hurting me since we moved here. I didn't tell you, because, well because, but I swear, it's true. They hate us and want us dead. Please, we have to leave."

"Brook, you need to calm down. You're not making any sense."

I made a grunt of exasperation. "Mom! We need to get out of here!"

"I'm not going anywhere until I understand what's going on and for me to understand what's going on, you need to calm down."

"What is there to understand. They want to kill us! I can't believe you're not listening to me." A scream of frustration bubbled out of me, and I ran upstairs. How could she just stand there looking at me like that? Harry started, taking a step toward me but I ran up the stairs into my room. I slammed the door closed, locking it and sticking a chair under the knob for good measure.

I collapsed on my bed, burying my head in the pillow, ignoring the pain the movement caused me. I had always put my mom first, and the one time I needed her to put me first, she refused to listen. I sobbed, rubbing the pain in my chest. What was I going to do? I had to get out of here. There was no way I could stay. I wasn't safe as long as I was around werewolves. Why wouldn't Mom listen to me?