

## Chapter 13

I sat down on a picnic table at the small truck stop. The cold rubber covered bench made a shiver run down my spine. I hunched up and leaned over, resting my head on my arm as I waited for nausea to pass. I replayed everything that happened this morning in my mind. A shiver of fear ran down my spine remembering how Mike and Ryder fought each other.

After a while, I lifted my head and rested my chin on my arm, feeling the loss of Mom's presence hit me deep in my soul. I had to stay positive. It wouldn't be forever, but a few days or weeks. Harry and she would join me in California. I would finish school, go to college and everything would be perfect.

"Are you alright?" A girl about my age asked, startling me.

I jumped to my feet, making me lightheaded. The girl rushed over and took my arm, steadying me. "Uh, hi, yeah I'm fine," I said offering her a smile, realizing what I must look like an accident victim with my hoodie splattered with blood. "It's not as bad as it looks, really."

She gave me a half-smile tossing her pink-streaked blonde hair out of her face. "I don't know. You looked like you're ready to fall over there a minute ago. I think you should go see somebody."

Panic hit me. I couldn't go to the hospital. It would be too easy for them to find me. "No. No hospitals. I mean...it's okay. I'm alright now."

The girl gave me a knowing smirk. "Right. Of course. I'm Kara."

Confused, I gave her a wary stare. "I'm Brook."

"Brook, I'm going to be blunt here. It's obvious you're running from something. I get it, but girl, right now you'd make a ghost seem bronzed if it stood next to you. I got a friend. She's really cool about these kinds of things. She's a nurse down at Saint Mary's Hospital and would be happy to make sure you're alright. I bet she'd even cut through all the red tape crap so you can keep your anonymity."

"Why would you do that?" I hated to admit it, I was feeling pretty bad, but why would she help me when she doesn't even know me.

"Because that's what people do or it's what they should be doing. I'd like to think if I were looking like you do now someone would stop and help me out!"

I chewed my lip, not sure what to do. "How far is it?"

"Five miles southwest of here."

"Uhm alright, I'll follow you in my car." My luck had to change at some moment right?

"Actually, I think you should let me drive you there. I'll get my guy to pick up my car later."

I sighed, rubbed my forehead only to hiss in pain as I get the bump where my stitches were. "Okay, let's go."

"Great. I'm going to call my friend and tell her we're coming."

I nodded, leaning back in my seat. A wave of nausea made had me taking slow deep breaths. I did not want to throw up in front of a stranger.

"Hey Misses W. So I'm bringing in someone for you to a check-up. We need the red carpet treatment. Yep. Okay, we'll be there in a few." Kara flashed me a bright grin when she hung up and started Mom's car. "She'll have everything ready when we get there."

I admit I was a little surprised when she pulled into the large, crowded parking lot of the Hospital. Looks like my luck was indeed changing. We walked into the hospital, but instead of going to the reception or a waiting room, Kara led me through a mass of identical halls. We went into an empty examination room, and once again Kara called her friend.

We weren't waiting long when a woman, maybe mid-forties but very good looking, walked in. She looked familiar. I swore I'd seen her somewhere, but I had no idea from where. "You must be Brook," she said as she walked up to me "I'm Emily, and it's a real pleasure to meet you."

She smiled at me brightly as she put on a pair of latex gloves and my stomach knotted with nerves. Emily was friendly but too friendly. It was odd.

"I'll stay and help out if it's all right with you and Brook."

"She can stay," I said, not sure I wanted to be alone with this nurse, but then again that meant I was outnumbered.

"Alright, let me take a look." The nurse brushed my hair away from my face as she looked the cut on my forehead. "It appears to be good, but I'd like to run some tests to make sure the inside looks as good, okay?" Emily took off the gloves and handed me a paper gown. "I'll need you to take your top off."

I started to pull off the hoodie when I heard them both gasp. Realizing my mistake, I quickly tried to pull down the t-shirt under my hoodie.

"No, let me see." Both the nurse and Kara looked horrified.

"It's okay. It's really nothing."

"That's nothing. Please, I just want to make sure you're alright."

I sighed and lifted my shirt until it was below my chest. Both looked at me with a horrified expression. My whole torso was filled with bruises of various ages and colors. Not being able to stand it any longer I pulled my shirt down. "All that's old stuff. It's no big deal." I looked up at the nurse and froze. Her expression was angry, and her eyes were an icy blue, almost glowing. Werewolf. I scrambled back on the bed to get away from her.

"Woah, easy Brook," Kara said, stopping me before I crawled right off the bed.

I flinched and went to move away from her, but she held onto me.

"You're..."

"Yes, we are," Emily said, looking much calmer now. "But we're not here to hurt you. We want to make sure you're okay."

"I'm not going back. You can't make me." Who was I kidding? They could so make me. I was just a human.

"Of course you're not," Kara spat, sounding angry.

"What?" I glance at them, not sure what to think.

"No one wants you to go back there. Not your mother, not me, and especially not Ryder," Emily said.

I sucked in a breath. "You know Ryder?"

"Does she know Ryder?" Kara said with a snort and a laugh. "She's only like his mom."

I managed to free myself from Kara and get off the bed, but they were blocking the door.

Emily sighed. "Kara, dear. We're trying not to freak her out." To me, she said, "Yes, Brook. I'm Ryder's mother and the Luna of Blue Crescent Pack."

More Alphas. This had to be a nightmare. "What are you going to do to me?"

Kara looked at me oddly while Emily smiled. "Exactly what I said I was going to do. I'm going to run some tests to see if you need any further medical treatment. Once I have the results, we'll go from there."

"And if I want to leave right now?"

Emily's smile fell. "I'm sorry, Brook but I can't allow you to leave if you're in need of medical help. I would never live it down nor do I think your family would forgive me if you got hurt or worse."

I bit my lip, fighting tears. I had expected her to refuse, but it still sucked to hear it.

"Brook, we're not Black Mountain. You will not be treated like you were there."

"Yeah, sure. Whatever," I said defeated. Truth or lie, it didn't matter. I was powerless to do anything to stop them.

Emily sighed again, but the smile returned. "Now, let's get those tests done shall we?" She laid a hand on my shoulder. I flinched and jerked from her. She frowned but said nothing as she led me out of the room.

An hour later with all tests done, I sat in a little office with Kara as Emily made sure we got the results as quickly as possible. More likely Kara was my jailor to make sure I didn't run off.

"Hey Mom-" a guy said as he walked into the office. I jumped startled and turned to face him. He looked about my age and height with a football player type of build. "Well hello gorgeous," he said to Kara who rolled her eyes at him. A cocky grin appeared on his face as he noticed me. "Oh, you

have company." He leaned on the large desk by me. "What should I call you besides beautiful?"

Kara started to laugh. "Really Dean? You only now met her and you're already hitting on her?"

He shrugged, still grinning at me. I simply stared at the two, not sure what to do or say.

"And you really expect that to charm the pants off of her?"

"Well doesn't have to be the pants. Shir is fine by me. I'm not picky," he said, winking at me.

"Save it, Mr. Smooth. This is Brook."

His face fell with what looked like disappointment. "This is Brook? Figures."

I frowned. Was I missing something?

Emily walked back into the room as soon as she saw Dean she said, "Dean, save it. That's Brook."

Dean sighed. "So I've been told. It's no fair! Ryder never leaves anything for me."

"Excuse me. I'm right here. What the hell are you people even talking about?"

Dean started to say something when Emily stopped him with a glance.

"I'm sorry. Brook. I'm afraid this is a topic you'll need to discuss with Ryder."

Oh yeah. That so wasn't going to happen. As soon as I could, I was going to get back into Mom's car and keep driving until I was a couple of hundred miles from here.

"Now I've got good news and bad news," Emily said. "Good news is I didn't find anything broken and all your organs appear to be in good condition. The bruising as bad as it is is only muscular."

"Damn, Ryder wasn't kidding then was he?" Dean asked, looking surprised and his mother shot him a chastising glare.

"Hush, please. Brook, I'm afraid you've got a concussion, Brook. I didn't see

any swelling or bleeding, but I'm still worried about your symptoms. I'm afraid you're in no condition to be on your own or driving."

My stomach sunk to my knees. Of course. I'm not surprised. I wonder if I even really had a concussion or it was all simply an excuse to keep me here.

"I get you're not exactly comfortable with us. So I'm willing to let you stay here in the hospital for your observation period but I will have to notify your mother, and as the stepdaughter of a member the Black Mountain pack, I'll have to also notify Alpha Ryan..." Emily said.

"No," I gasped. "You can't then Mike will know exactly where I am and he'll make me go back. You said you wouldn't make me go back. I'd rather get in a car accident before I ever go back there again."

"Chill girl, let my mom finish. Geeze, high strung isn't she?" Dean said.

His mother shot him a heated glare but offered me a smile. "Brook, the only other option is to take you to our home."

"I vote for that option," Dean jumped in, giving me a wink causing Emily to pinch the bridge of her nose with an expression of exasperation.

"Or we could forgo the whole observation thing, and you could take me to my car." They all gave me a pitying look. I'm sure they were all thinking poor little, stupid human. How dumb can she be? "I don't really have a choice."

Dean walked over me. He slung his arm over my shoulder making me flinch. "Of course you have a choice but staying with me is the only smart one." He gave me yet another wink.

"You mean us, right son," Emily said, shaking her head. "And will you please behave. You're going to make Brook's already bad image of us even worse."

"God, what'd I say? Geez, won't let a guy breathe. Can you believe them, Brookie?"

Despite everything, I gave him a small smile. Something about Dean put me at ease.

'Wow, see Mom. I'm not that bad! I got a smile.'

'It's the concussion, Sweetheart,' Emily told him, patting his shoulder with a patient expression and looked at me expectantly. 'You have the choice of which you prefer the hospital or the packhouse. It's all I can reasonably offer you.'

Frying Pan or the Fire? There was only one choice I could make. I'd do anything never go back to Mike or his father. 'I'll go with you.'