

## Chapter 14

I wasn't sure what I expected, but a log cabin, a mansion wasn't it. "Welcome to our humble abode," Dean said, getting out of Mom's car. "This is your house?"

Dean shot me a cocky grin and wagged his eyebrows at me.

"Yes it's our house, but it's also the packs," Emily replied. When she saw my confusion, she added, "A packhouse is like a meeting hall, recreation center, and boarding house all mixed up in one. We live here but so do many others. I hope this won't be too much of a problem for you."

The almost nervous and hopeful expression on her face made me nervous. I kept having the nagging suspicion I was missing something important. "I guess not. As long as no one tries to kill me or smash me into the ground, I should be good."

"Oh no. Violence isn't allowed in or around the packhouse. My husband disapproves of it," Emily said.

I waited for some sign she was joking, but Emily's expression remained serious.

"Come on Brookie, let's get inside," Dean said. He gave me a wink and followed his mom inside.

My stomach knotted in with nerves as I grabbed my things and followed them. As we walked through the halls, I couldn't help but feel like a freak show. A lot of people stopped and stared at me, whispering to the others with them. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but I had a good idea. It seemed even here they heard about Missy Mistake, the girl who never should have been born.

Emily and Dean stopped at a door on the second floor. "Here, you can stay in this room for tonight. Rest or change and come downstairs with us. One of us will be happy to show you around. The choice is yours, and both options are okay," Emily said.

"You need any help. I am great at unpacking things," Dean said with a sly grin.

"No, you don't. You go on and give her some space." His mom waved her hand at him dismissively.

"That's no fun," he complained but went downstairs.

She shook her head and smiled at me again. "He means well. I promise. Take care, rest up and try not to worry. You're safe here."

The jury was out on that one, but I walked inside, dropping my backpack next to the door. The room was decorated in dark blues and purples and definitely a guy's room. There was clothing already in the dresser, shampoos, and stuff in the adjoining bathroom and a few posters tacked up on the walls.

By the name on the trophies, this was Ryder's room. Why would they put me in his room? I'm sure he wouldn't be happy about that. Again, I didn't understand. In all honesty, my head hurt too much to try. Whatever their plan was, I guess it wouldn't hurt to get cleaned up and rest. I was tired.

I wasn't sure how long I slept, but I felt better and a little adventurous. With my hands in my hoodie pockets, I wandered around for a bit.

"Hey, you're Brook right?" A really tall guy asked. He had to be like over six feet, long blonde hair in a ponytail with gray-blue eyes.

"Uhm, yeah," I said hesitantly.

He smirked at me and gave me a funny look. "You sound as if you're not sure."

"Well, it all depends. What does it matter to you if I'm Brook?"

"Right, nothing awful. The alpha thought it'd be a good idea if I introduced myself and all that."

My throat tightened, and I tried not to show how nervous it made me.

"Why?"

He held up his hands. "Because we have a little bit in common that's all. My parents weren't mates either."

"Really?"

"Yep. It's not so uncommon actually." He shrugged and offered me another smirk.

The way Mike talked, such a thing was practically a crime against nature. "But you're still a werewolf. I'm just a lowly human."

He tilted his head. "You don't seem that short to me."

I started to say something then stopped. "That's not what I meant."

He grinned. "I know. My name's Andy, and I find humans to be pretty cool."

"Great. Now I'm the weird kid your mom makes you play with because they have no friends."

"Maybe," he said, drawing out the word. "We could use another weird kid in the gang, Dean is just annoying now. Come on, let's get some lunch."

"Sure." I shrugged and followed him into a large kitchen. A grandmotherly looking woman smiled at us when we came in and without a word set down a couple of plates for us.

"Thanks, Rose," Andy said before eating the sandwich on his plate.

I watched him eat torn between awe and disgust. He ate messily, getting what looked like tuna salad all over his mouth. You'd think the guy hadn't eaten in a week.

"Something wrong?" he said with his mouth half full, noticing I'd not yet started on my own sandwich.

"Andy, you are not an animal, so please refrain from acting like one," Rose said, taking a napkin and cleaning his face as if he was a toddler.

An embarrassed flush turned his cheeks pink. "Sorry," he said, looking at me before grinning at the older woman. "I can't help myself. Your cooking is so good it makes me forget myself."

She shook her head at him then gave me a sharp glare. "You, girl, eat. You're way too skinny. I don't like the look of your skin either - too pale, too shallow."

"I am not." Yet, I picked up the sandwich as she gave me another sharp stare. Best not piss off the werewolf. "It's good. Thanks." The woman, Rose, gave me a stiff nod and went back to cutting some vegetables.

"So, ready to go see the alpha?" Andy asked once we'd finished.

My stomach clenched, making the food I just ate heavy. "Why? Why would I go see the alpha?"

"It's cool. No worries. That's just what happens when someone new comes into our territory. It's usually just 'hey, how ya doin. Need anything just ask' kind of deal."

"Do I have too?" I asked, hugging myself with my arms.

"To refuse would be rude and insult our alpha, girl," Rose said, her back still to us.

"Oh."

"Come on, Brook. I'll take you to him. I promise it's no big deal. You'll see," Andy offered, standing up and waving me to follow him.

I followed him through a maze of hallways until we reached a large room with large glass windows on one side. A bar was on the other side, a couple of tables where several people sat watching a group of guys playing pool. There was a table for table tennis, air hockey, and several old-fashioned arcade games along the walls. At the pool table, there were about five guys, various ages, playing.

One of the players was Dean. He leaned on his pool cue waiting on another, older werewolf to line up a shot. The sound of pool balls hitting against each other and the unmistakable sound of one going into one of the pockets sent a loud round of cheers. "I do believe Dean you're getting your butt handed to you," the oldest man said.

Dean rolled his eyes. "Whatever old man. I'm just biding my time is all."

The others laughed and teased him. Again the sounds of the balls crashing into each other and the table before falling into one of the pockets rang through the room, and Dean scowled while others laughed. The older man laughed the loudest of them all. His laughter echoed through the room like thunder. "Well you better hurry up the little pup, this old man is about to win the game."

"Actually if you could just end his misery, Alpha," Andy said loudly to get the older man's attention. "I've brought Brook to see you."

My eyes widened in surprise. This was the alpha? The room suddenly fell

silent as everyone turned to look at us. I squirmed under the attention. Sweat making the back of my neck itch.

The alpha tossed his cue to one of the guys. "Looks like you lucked out this time Dean," he told his son. Knowing who he was, I could see the resemblance. "Andy how about you take my place. Don't let Dean win. Without Ryder here, he's been getting cocky."

"Sure thing," Andy said, joining the others.

I glanced up at the alpha who extended his arm for me to take as they do only in old movies or romantic comedies. Glancing over at the others still watching, I took his arm. The last thing I wanted to do was insult the alpha, especially in front of his people. That would only make him more likely to hurt me. He walked us out of the room and through a mass of hallways and into the backyard.

"Much quieter here," he said, walking over to a black metal and glass table with four matching chairs. He pulled out the chair for me, but I stood there eyeing the chair and him suspiciously. "You have nothing to fear from me Brook. I'm not like Ryan. In all honesty, I'm honored to finally meet you."

I frowned, sitting in the chair he offered, and he sat across from me.

"Honored? Why would you be honored to meet me? I'm no one."

"No one is no one, Brook," he said, leaning back in his chair. Resting an ankle on his knee, he leaned back in his chair. "First introductions. It's not right I know your name, but you don't know mine. I am Alpha Brent Williams, alpha of the Blue Crescent pack and Ryder's father. Now you're not an idiot, but you've been through a lot. So I let me ask you this, how much would you like me to explain?"

I didn't hesitate. "Everything. I don't understand why you and your people are so hung up on me staying here. You don't know me. I only just met Ryder."

Alpha Brent grinned and nodded, apparently pleased with my response.

"Ryder may not be happy I told you, but we can't keep waiting for him to quit dicking around, now can we? Brook, I'm honored to meet you, and my people and I care about your well-being because you are Ryder's mate and our future Luna."

I think my stomach dropped to my feet while my heart tried to burst through my chest and run for the hills. I surely didn't hear that right. "I'm sorry, say what?"

The alpha laughed and smiled as he repeated his earlier statement.

"But...how do you..." This had to be impossible.

"Ryder told me. He knew you were his mate as soon as he smelled your scent and laid his eyes on you. Our mate's scent calls us to them like no other. It's why he showed such a gross loss of control when Mike had hurt you and claimed to take you as his own. His own what I don't even want to imagine." He looked genuinely disturbed by the idea of Mike getting his hands on me.

Suddenly all the little odd things about Ryder made a lot more sense. Another ugly truth was also clear to me now too. "You're never going to let me leave, are you?" All of my dreams of going to California, going to college, all of it was gone, just gone. Now I was Ryder's, and that was all that mattered.

The alpha frowned as he looked at me. "That is entirely up to you, Brook. Once your observation period is over, and you're given a clean bill of health. You are free to return to your mother's care and wherever that may take you."

"But the whole mate thing?"

"Fate has deemed you as the best match for my son and our Luna, but you must decide if my son and this pack is the best match for you. However, if you leave Ryder may well follow you. He seems quite taken with you already."

My stomach tightened, and my cheeks warmed. "Follow me? But..."

Alpha Brent held up his hand to stop me. "It's his life, his choice."

I sighed, rubbing my temple, the nagging headache I had before crept up on me much stronger now. "Sir," I said softly, deciding to test just how different he was. "I'll try, but I don't think I could live here."

"I understand why you would think that. You've suffered at Ryan and his son, Michael's hands greatly. I'm not like Ryan, Ryder isn't Michael. This

pack isn't Black Mountain. Not all werewolves are the same. Please, try to give us the benefit of the doubt and consider life here. I believe you'd like it here if given a fair shot. Now let's get you back to your room. I'm sure you could use some more rest.'