

THE ALPHA AND THE MISTAKE

Chapter 21

Chapter 21

"Alright everyone," Ryder's mom said, coming into the room. "I need to do a checkup so everyone out."

"Come on Dean," Andy said, grabbing him and pulling him up and off the bed.

"Hey, I'm family," Dean argued.

"Out," his mother told him.

Dean pouted like a three-year-old but left with everyone else. Ryder however still sat in the corner with

an expression I hadn't managed to read when his mom flashed a light in my eyes.

I jerked back and glowered at her. She just laughed at me. "That looks good. How are you feeling? Any

nausea."

"I'm alright. A little sore. So what happens now?" Andy had told me Ryder's dad didn't like violence. I'm

pretty sure they weren't going to give me a get out of jail free card.

At first, Emily didn't reply but instead continued her examination. She took my temperature, checked on

my left arm, and made me follow a small penlight with my eyes. "I'd thought to give you girls kitchen

duty, but seeing your state, I'm inclined to give it all to Beth."

"You're kidding right?"

She gave me a curious look. "Why would you say that?"

"Beth hates me."

Ryder's mom frown and shook her head as if asking me "and your point is?"

"You give her all the kitchen duty, and she'll kill me. No, she insulted me, but I am the one that started

the fight. I'm in the kitchen right along with her. I will not be looking over my shoulder every time I leave

my room.

Emily nodded. "Okay, if that's what you want." When Ryder's mom finished, she gathered her things

and stood. "Kitchen duty or not you need to take it easy. No using your left arm and no more fights.

You've been extremely lucky with your concussion. Let's not push that luck."

When she left whatever had been keeping Ryder so quiet was gone. He sat where his mom and been

and smiled before giving me a peck on the lips.

I jerked a little surprised. "What was that for?"

"Well, I like kissing you." He grinned more. "But also because you did well."

"What do you mean?"

"Mom offered you an out, and you didn't take it."

Something in me froze, and I narrowed my eyes at him. "Was this all some kind of test?"

Ryder stilled with what really looked like a guilty expression. "No, not at all, but if it was, you would've passed."

Narrowing my eyes even more at him. "Yeah? And what would've happened if I failed? You all decide

it's not worth war and send me back to Mike and his dad?" The words came out a lot more bitter than

I'd intended.

"What? No!"

"Or is it, they're trying to see if I'm good enough for their son. Can I be a good little mate? You know

what, tell them to stop wasting their time - I'm not good 'mate' material."

Ryder held up his hands. "Whoa, wait."

"No, I don't think I will." I threw back the sheets of the bed and stood, ignoring the throb of pain through

my head. Now wasn't the time to show weakness.

"Brook," Ryder said, sliding off the bed.

"If they want to rescind their offer of protection that's fine too. I can be gone like that!" I snapped my

fingers. I started for the door when Ryder stepped in front of me.

"Brook."

"I don't want to hear how you rationalize this bull shit, Ryder. Just get out of my way." I sidestepped him

only to have him move with me, but before I could complain his mouth was on mine. With a startled

squeak, I took a step back. Ryder took a step forward, his lips still pressed against mine, and he

followed me until I bumped into the wall. My anger melted into something else, something warmer and

darker, and I returned the kiss.

Ryders slid his hand around my waist, pulling me to him as he broke the kiss and instead, pepper

softer kisses along my jaw, moving towards my ear. Stomach tight and heart racing, my eyes closed on

their one as each touch of his lips on my neck sent an electric jolt streaking through me right down to

my toes. My breath hitched in my throat as his teeth graze the skin between my neck and shoulder.

Ryder started to suck and nip at the skin there, each time was harder and sharper than the last. I

gaspd when it started to hurt. He stiffened then relaxed, stepping back.

"Sorry." Embarrassment

colored his face. "Instincts kicked in, I only meant it to be a quick kiss because...you weren't letting me

talk."

I lifted an eyebrow and crossed my arms over my chest. "You kissed me to shut me?" I should've been

offended, but for some reason, I wasn't.

"Well," Ryder rubbed the back of his neck. "I didn't think you were going to give me a chance to

apologize before you stormed out."

"You were going to apologize? Shouldn't your mom be the one to do that?"

"No, she wasn't testing you. Mom doesn't like games. It was just me sticking my foot in my mouth

again."

"And, I didn't let you apologize. So I-Owe, what are you a vampire too," I complained when I touched

the part of my neck he'd apparently gnawed on.

Ryder actually turned bright pink. "Sorry, instincts..." he shrugged. "At least it doesn't look too bad."

My eyes widened. "You left a mark? Did you...did you give me a hickey?"

His embarrassment turned into a smug smirk.

"Smirk all you want. When my mom sees this she's going to kill you."

Ryder shrugged, still smirking. "Then you could grant me one a dying wish."

"If it's something guy-ish, the answer is no," I said, crossing my arms again.

"Guy-ish? I'm not Dean." He laughed, running a hand through his hair.

"No, I'd like to take you somewhere." He took my hand and with a tug, led me out of the room.

"Somewhere? Where exactly?"

"You'll see," he said cryptically, giving me a secretive smile.

We continued to wind through the maze of the house when Ryder opened a door, revealing a small

living room. In the center was a huge overstuffed couch and across from it was a just as huge flat

screen. There were a couple of love seats scattered around the room and a coffee table in the center.

"Movie night, what do you think?"

I smiled at the slight nervous strain in his voice. "It is your last night alive, so yeah, this is cool."

Ryder grinned walking over to a couch and sat down, tugging on my hand to sit with him. "What would

you like to watch? It can be anything, but a chick flick."

"Those are usually depressing, no I'd rather watch something fun."

We finally settled on watching the Avengers and eating our dinner, pizza. After a while, all the

awkwardness and nervousness was gone. When the movie ended, I noticed just how close we were

sitting and how at ease I was around him. "That wasn't so bad. I can't believe I haven't seen it until

now."

"Good. If there is anything, you've never done but wanted to do. Just let me know, and we'll find a way

to do it."

I narrowed my eyes at him again. "So if I said I wanted to go skydiving over the Grand Canyon or to

Pamplona to run with the bulls?"

He looked at me strangely as he laughed. "Okay so maybe not anything, because that would take a

while to set up."

"If I'm honest there is nothing right now. My life has enough excitement as it is. This was probably the

best thing we could've done."

"Really?"

I nodded. "It was normal. That's something I haven't felt in a long time, Ryder."

He frowned, nodding then smiled. "Great, that's what I want." He brushed his knuckles across my

cheek, sending a wave of warmth through me.

My heart pounded in my chest so loudly he had to have heard it. "What about you? What would be the

one thing you'd like to do?"

"Kiss you again."

I blushed, glancing down at my lap, self-conscious. "Seriously Ryder." I nudged him with my shoulder.

"Seriously. I really want to kiss you again...so can I?"

My breath caught in my throat, and it seemed impossible to breathe. Unable to speak, I gave Ryder the

slightest of nods. He leaned forward until his lips barely touched mine, but it made every cell of my body come alive. Perhaps this whole mate thing wasn't so bad after all.

Chapter 22

Ryder had put in another movie, but I was falling asleep about halfway through. I woke when I'd rolled

on my bad shoulder and hissed with the stinging pain. "You okay?" Ryder asked. "Want me to get a

pillow or something to support your shoulder."

"No, I'm fine. I should probably go back to my room and go to bed." As me being half asleep wasn't

proof enough, I yawned loudly.

Ryder grinned but held me to him when I tried to get up. "We could just lay here for a while. I like this,

and the couch is big enough."

"But I'm falling asleep."

He shrugged. "Yeah, me too, but I don't want you to leave."

I started to laugh, despite the fact I kind of didn't want to leave either.

"Werewolves are so weird."

Ryder grinned again. "So is that a yes? Will you stay with me? It doesn't have to be here, we could go

to your room or mine."

That sounded a little too... "Uh..."

"I'm talking about going to sleep, nothing more. Only doing it together."

"Sure, I bet that's what you say to all the girls," I told him, sitting up.

Ryder actually snorted. "They wish."

I glanced over my shoulder at him and narrowed my eyes. "Oh really?"

"Yep, but this offer is for one girl only - you."

It was stupid, but it was flattering. I returned Ryder's smile. "Okay." Why not? YOLO, and all that right?

"Okay? Really?"

"Yeah, but let's go. I'm tired, and my head is starting to hurt."

Ryder practically jumped off the couch to take my hand and helped me up. He laced his fingers with

mine as we walked down the hall.

My nerves grew as we walked into his room. What was I thinking? I was going to sleep in Ryder's bed

while he's sleeping too...at the same time? Ryder sat on the bed, taking off only his shoes before

pulling back the covers and lying down. I blew out a breath as I did the same. Only I was on the very

edge of the bed.

Ryder snaked an arm around my waist and pulled me to him until my back was against his chest. "Just

sleeping, that's all," he said, sounding tired. "Do you want me to leave the lamp on or are you good with

the dark?"

"Seriously, what am I, six?"

He grinned. "Hey, don't be hating. There is a lot of people afraid of the dark and are older than six."

"Sounds like you're talking from personal experience to me?"

"Maybe."

I looked at him over my shoulder. "Really?"

"You're not going to make fun of me are you?"

"No, of course not."

Ryder hesitated. "I was afraid of the dark until I was fourteen. It's true." I gave him a dubious look. "Why

would I dare make up something like that? My rep would be ruined if it got out. I hadn't shifted yet, so

my night vision sucked. I always had this paranoid fear of someone being in my room without me

knowing. Dean knew about it and would always psych me out before we had to go to bed."

I smiled despite my best attempts not too. I couldn't help it.

"You said you wouldn't laugh."

"I'm not."

"You're smiling, that's like silent laughter."

"Silent laughter? Really? I wasn't smiling because I was laughing at you. It's just I thought it was kind of adorable."

He gave me a deadpanned expression. "Adorable? Ugh, that's even worse for my rep. We'll just have

to keep this a secret." He grinned again. "So what are you afraid of Brook and don't go all deep on me.

I'm talking about is it bugs, heights, water?"

"Bugs are iffy, they creep me out, but I'm not afraid of them. I can deal with heights, but I get dizzy, and

I love swimming. I guess what scares me is thunderstorms. You know, the really big ones with all the

wind, lightning, thunder, and tornadoes. Really freaked me out."

"Good thing we don't have too many of those here." Ryder hugged me to him some more. "Night

Brook. Thanks for staying with me tonight."

"Night and no problem."

I groaned as someone shook me. "Come on, Sleeping Beauty. Time to get up," someone said,

sounding way too cheerful. It took me a minute to realize it was Ryder.

"What time is it?" I groaned, trying to hide under the pillow, but the ass stole it from me.

"Almost four in the morning, so you better hurry."

I managed to peel one eye open to glare at me. "Are you kidding me? Four in the morning? Why are

you bothering me at four in the morning?"

"Because you don't want Beth to hate you and agreed to do kitchen duty when starts in an hour. So

chop, chop." He clapped his hands.

I glared at him as I sat up. I was going to kill him if he clapped one more time. Just one more and lights

out! I stood, shuffled to the bathroom with my eyes half-open. I nearly jumped in fright as I looked at

myself in the mirror. My goose egg was a lovely shade of purplish-brown. My face, in general, was pale

and puffy. Man, even my eyes were all crusty, and let's not talk about my hair. Did Ryder saw me like

this?

Insecurities raised their ugly head, and I felt myself sinking. I'm sure Ryder is re-thinking whole mate

thing now. I sighed and turned on the water, letting it warm up. This whole girlfriend/boyfriend or mates

thing sucked. I never cared about what I looked like when I woke up before. Why did it have to now?

When I finally got the courage to leave the bathroom, Ryder was in bed - asleep. How dare he...little

bastard. I went right back into the bathroom, filled up a glass of cold water. With silent, evil laughter I

poured it over his head. He shrieked like a little girl as he shot up from the bed and I tossed the glass,

thankfully plastic, and ran. When Ryder shouted my name, I ran as if the devil was chasing me, which

in this case just might be true.

Somehow I managed to make it downstairs without killing myself. I came sliding into the kitchen,

earning strange looks from Beth and Rose. I ran next to Beth and ducked behind the island. She gave

me one of her death glares, but I was more worried about Ryder at the moment.

"If you tell Ryder you haven't seen me I'll do one of your dirtiest chores today. I swear it!"

Beth continued to glare at me, but her head shot up when someone came into the room.

"Brook here yet?" Ryder demanded.

I bit my lip to keep from laughing, and when Beth didn't answer him at first, I was sure she was going to

rat me out. "No, I haven't seen her," she said finally. "If you do. Tell her she's late. I'm so not doing this

by myself since it was totally her fault in the first place."

"You're not covering up for her are you?"

Beth made a condescending laugh. "Why would I do that?"

"Alright enough of this silliness," Rose demanded. "You get out unless you're going to help," she

demanding to Ryder I assume. After a moment she said, "He's gone. You can get up now."

"What did you do to him? Beth asked as we washed our hands.

"He woke me up and had the gall to go back to sleep even before I left the room. So I gave him a cold

water bath."

Beth scowled but the way the corner of her mouth twitched, I think it was only so she wouldn't laugh.

"You doused the future alpha with cold water?"

"Yep. He screamed like a fangirl with her crush."

"You know some packs would consider that an act of disrespect which is punished harshly."

"Well, then those packs need to get their sticks out of their asses. He totally deserved it, and I'd totally

do it again. I bet you would've done the same thing in my place."

She glared at me, but I didn't think it was as cold as before. Suddenly, I wondered if Beth had any

bruises to hide as I did. I know Mike tried to avoid hitting her but did their father? He hit their mother

and Mike. Somehow I couldn't see him sparing Beth.

"Enough gossip! Time for work," Rose demanded, making both Beth and I jump. "We have almost forty

hungry wolves waking up soon, and they're going to want to eat."

"Yes, ma'am," Beth and I said almost at the exact time. She gave me an odd look, and I made an

exaggerated shudder.

"Creepy," I told her.

"Yeah, no kidding."

Chapter 23

"I think kitchen duty is ruining my love for food," I complained as I stirred a ginormous pot on the stove.

"I don't think I've managed to eat a proper meal since we started here," Beth replied, cutting some

vegetables on the kitchen island.

It had been just a week of our punishment with three more to go. I doubted if I would last that long. I tell

you one thing, though, I will never start a fight again. Ever! On the plus side, Beth and I weren't exactly

enemies anymore. We weren't friends, but she stopped looking at me like she wanted to strangle me. It

might have helped that Dean and the others were nicer to her since I threatened to stop talking to them

forever if they didn't. It proved to be pretty effective, especially against Dean.

"Seriously I don't see how you can stand making all this food three times a day, every day."

Rose rolled her eyes at us. "It's not so bad. You two just love to complain."

Beth scoffed. "You get up super early, spend hours cooking, hours cleaning. When you finally finish you

have to start all over again for lunch then again for dinner. How is that not slavery?"

"It's not slavery it's my job. Now get rid of those poor orphan girl look. They won't move me. Now get to

work. Werewolves aren't happy when they're hungry."

"Well I'm an unhappy werewolf, and I don't see anyone around here cares," Beth grumbled under her

breath.

Rose snorted but kept chopping the meat before her.

"I swear I'm going to beg Ryder's parents to give us a pardon or something," I insisted then frowned.

"Where are they? I haven't seen them at all lately." Nor had I seen Kara either. Andy said he was busy

with some work for Ryder's dad.

"Did you forget there is a war out there?" Beth's voice was sharp as she gave me an accusing glare.

"Is it getting worse? Has the fighting started?" Guilt made my stomach twist. I'd forgotten about the war.

"It's war and, of course, the fighting has started. It started a while ago. Where have you been?" Beth

kept giving me the glare.

This time I deserved. How could I have forgotten? Was Kara involved? My stomach twisted tighter. I

hurried to finish up to meet Mom and Harry for lunch. I needed to know what was going on. Ryder or

the others hadn't said anything, and I hoped, it was because they were as clueless as I was. If that

wasn't the case, I was going to be so upset with all of them, especially Ryder.

Finally, we finished, I cleaned up and met Mom and Harry in the dining room. "Hey Honey," Mom said,

smiling. "Haven't seen you much this week."

"Slaving over a hot stove will do that to ya." I got the laugh I was trying for.

"Not so fun when you're the one doing the work. Is it? So what's going on?"

"What do you mean?" I gave her an innocent look.

She didn't buy it one bit. "You're usually with Ryder and the others. So I'm assuming you want

something."

"Is not spending time in the company of my loving mother and stepfather, not enough?" I did my best to

sound offended.

Harry let out a snort and shook his head at me. "Spill."

I grinned at them with a shrug. "I was wondering if you heard about what was going on with this war

that is supposed to be going on between Mike's dad and Ryder's."

"I'm afraid I don't," Harry said, his expression turning grim. "What little I do know is the violence has

started. Ryan isn't holding back. Some other packs have gotten involved, some for us, some for Ryan. I

heard he promised to give Beth to an alpha thirty years her senior as a mate if the alpha supports him

against Brent."

Seriously? Did that monster not have any limits? "Is Mike's dad winning?" My stomach churned at the

thought of it. No way was I going to be able to eat like this.

"No one is really winning. Both sides are evenly matched, both in force and in casualties."

How did Andy act normal with Kara out there? "Why is everyone acting like nothing is happening?"

"The fighting still is taking place on the borders, more specific, the eastern borders. When the pack's

hospital became overrun with the injured they set up several medical camps a few miles from the

borders to tend to the non-critical injured or those who wouldn't live long enough to reach the hospital."

"Brook," Mom said, patting my hand with hers. "You shouldn't think about this. It's only going to make

you feel bad, and there is nothing we can do, but wait."

Maybe she couldn't do anything, but this was about me, and I was doing nothing. The feeling I should

be doing something, anything, wouldn't leave me. Only I had no clue what.

Throughout the next week, I tried to find out more about the war, but I didn't get too far. Ryder didn't

seem to know any more than I did. When I finally got the nerve to ask his Dad, Brent just told me he

couldn't give me details, and I should try to simply enjoy my stay in his home.

Once I left the bathroom, I sat on my bed and brushed out my hair. Thankfully, it no longer smelled like

fried chicken. I glanced at the clock on the wall. I had five minutes to meet Ryder and the gang for

dinner. I jumped, nearly ripping out a small portion of my hair when my phone rang. It was Anna. I had

tried to call her a couple of times since I got here but always got voicemail.

"Brook," Anna said in a hurry as soon as I answered the phone. "Is it true? Are you really Blue

Crescent's future Luna?"

Well hello to you too. "Yeah, it is. Why?"

"Oh thank, God. You have to help my family and me! The alpha, he knows we were friends. Please, he

beat up my dad and my brother nearly killing them. He says he's going to come back later and finish

the job. Please, Brooke, help us."

My heart jumped into my throat. Alpha Ryan was a monster? How could he do these things to his

people? "Of course, I'll help. What can I do?"

"I - we are just outside of Blue Crescent Territory. Can you come and help us pass the borders. We

don't want trouble. Just, please Brook. If you tell them we were friends, they'd have to let us pass,

right?"

"Of course. I can Alpha Brent to come with me-"

"No," she shouted, making me jump again. "There's no time. You have to come now! I think the alpha

knows we ran. It has to be you, and it has to be now."

I frowned, not sure what to say. I've watched enough videos on Youtube about scammers to figure out

when someone says it has to be now they're usually lying. Yet, this was Anna, my one and only friend

until now. If there was even a chance the danger was real, I had to do something, right? "Alright, where

are you?"

"Southeast border, near the interstate."

"Okay, stay hidden and keep quiet. I'm coming." I got out my little can of silver pepper spray, stuffing it

in my hoodie pocket. When I was in the car, I called Ryder. "Hey, Anna, a friend of mine in Black

Mountain pack, called. She and her family are in danger. They are trying to come here for asylum. I'm

going to get them. She says there isn't much time so I'm on my way now. It's the southeastern border

by the interstate." I hung up and stuff the phone in my pocket too.

Chapter 24

Beth

I sat with my legs dangling into the cool water of the pool as I listened to the boys. They had been nicer

to me lately. Brook did something. I wasn't an idiot. I knew how they saw me. They didn't understand. I

couldn't help Brook even if I wanted too. Dad made it very clear no one was allowed to show her any

kindness. If I wanted to survive, I had to obey. But they don't get that. Their parents are cool and nice.

"Earth to Beth," Dean said, splashing me with water.

Andy snorted with an unimpressed look, and I scowled at him. I wasn't sure why I liked him before. He

was such a jerk.

"So what are you risking unsightly wrinkles for?" Dean asked, pulling himself up out of the water and

sitting next to me.

I shrugged. "How different our families are. Your parents are cool, and they don't care if you act like an

idiot."

"Hey, I'm not acting like an idiot."

"True, you just are one," Andy said, splashing us both with water.

Something eased in me. I was honest, and nothing bad happened.

"Well, Dad would have a fit if you did back in Black Mountain." Clearing my throat, I imitated my dad's

deeper voice. "Alphas are superior to all humans and wolves. If you don't act with superiority, then

you're just embarrassing yourself. I don't allow embarrassments in my family or my pack."

They started at me for a moment, and I thought I had made a mistake when Ryder spoke. "I'll make

sure you don't have to go back there."

"Yeah no kidding," Andy said, shaking his head.

"Don't you worry, Bethy poo. We'll watch out for ya," Dean offered.

I relaxed and smiled back at him. Dean gave me a nickname. He actually gave me a nickname. For the first time since well probably forever, I felt accepted. Nothing could dim my smile, or well at least that's what I thought before Dean shoved me into the pool. Andy and Dean laughed, high-fiving each other but, this time, they didn't seem to be laughing at me.

Ryder grinned as he helped me sit back up on the edge of the pool. "You're a lot nicer to be around now that you're not trying to be the queen bitch."

I started to argue then stopped. "Yeah, I wasn't really nice was I?"

His phone rang, and he picked it up. "Brook, hope she's not trying to ditch us again." As soon as he answered, I heard Brook go on a tirade about Anna and how she was in danger. Oh no. My stomach filled with lead and sunk.

Ryder looked at the phone confused. "Okay, I gotta go get Dad, Brook's friend needs help."

What should I do? I bit my lip, indecision freezing me. "Ryder, stop I'll get your dad. You need to get to Brook before she gets to Anna." I wouldn't sit by and do nothing anymore. I didn't need to survive as I did in Black Mountain.

"What? Why?"

"No time to explain. Her life is in danger, seriously in danger. Go!"

Ryder ran for the door. Andy jumped up and out of the pool. "Wait for me, I'm going with you."

"We need to find your dad A.S.A.P."

Dean followed me out of the pool room. "What's going on?"

Guilt made me hesitate. "I...Anna, she's not the friend Brook thinks she is." I broke into a run.

We found Uncle Brent with his council in his office. "What's wrong?" he asked as we burst into the room.

"It's Brook," I told him. "A girl pretending to be her friend for years just called claiming she needs

Brooks help to get into your territory. I...it's my dad. He..."

My Uncle didn't need to say a word before the entire council jumped to their feet and began organizing

a rescue. A stab of jealousy stabbed my gut. No one in my pack would have ever done anything like

this for me, and that was wrong. A pack was supposed to be like a family, with people you could count

on."

The room emptied of everyone but Dean and my aunt. "Do you realize what you've just done, Beth,"

Aunt Emily said, her voice soft.

"What did she do?" Dean asked confused.

"She's betrayed her father, and if he were to ever find out, she would be exiled and considered rogue

that is if he decided to let her live."

My head bowed, and I fought the tears. It was true, but what choice did I have? I was tired of all these

games and trying to pretend as if I was better than everyone.

"Why would you do that? You don't even like Brook?"

"It's my fault. Anna was trying so hard to be popular, and I don't know why I thought it'd be funny for her

to pretend to be Brook's friend and tell me and well, I can't call those leeches friends. We would make

fun of her and stuff. I only meant to do it once, but when Mike slept with her, he forced Anna to keep

doing it so he always knew where she was and when he'd be able to ambush her."

"That's some cold stuff right there," Dean said.

"Well, she's doing the right thing now, when it matters the most."

"I hope so." Maybe, when this was over Ryder would still want me to stay too.

Chapter 25

I parked the car on the side of the interstate and called Anne again. "Hey Anne, I'm on the interstate.

Where are you?"

"Down the hill towards the little patch of woods. Hurry Brook! I can hear them coming."

"Why don't you come up here. It'll be-"

"Please Brook," she said, sounding really desperate.

I didn't like this. I didn't like this at all. "Alright, I'm coming. Tell me where you are so I can find you

quicker."

She gave me instructions, and I found the small clearing easily. My finger hovered over the button to

call Ryder's dad.

"Brook you came," Anne said stepping out from behind a tree.

I relaxed with relief. False alarm. "Of course, I did." I froze mid-step when behind her, Mike's dad

emerged from the shadows. My heart slammed in my chest in one hard thump as fear sliced through

me. I watched, horrified, as a cold, malicious grin spread on Anna's face.

"Why?" I said, taking a step

back and running into someone. Hard arms wrapped around me trapping me. I looked up, and my fear

intensified. Mike!

"Hey, Missy. Miss me?"

"No, let go of me you, psychopath," I yelled and slammed the heel of my foot on his toe as I pressed

the hotkey to call Ryder's dad. Mike didn't even flinch. "Alpha Ryan, you won't get away with this," I

said shouted, feeling lame for using such a cliché line, but I was hoping Brent would be able to hear

me.

"Thank you, truly, for making this so easy future Luna of Blue Crescent," Mike's dad said, with a

mocking bow. "Let's go, no doubt Brent will be here soon enough."

"No, I'm not going anywhere with you," I took out the silver spray and sprayed Mike's hand. He

shrieked, letting me go, the skin of his hand bubbled up and gooey like all his skin was gone, leaving

just the muscle and bone.

I sprinted back to the interstate when someone grabbed my hair and flung me back. Tears filled my

eyes, and I hit the ground with a gasp.

"Nice try, but I don't think so," Mike's dad said.

I lifted the spray to give him a good dose in the face when he slapped my arm. The sickening crack of

bone followed by pain, burning up my arm. It was so intense I lost my breath. I couldn't even scream.

"Now see what you've done. You stupid, pathetic human," the alpha said with a sneer.

"Let her go," Ryder shouted with Andy beside him.

Oh no, I led them both right into a trap.

Alpha Ryan turned his sneer on Ryder. "Ah, the future Alpha of Blue Crescent. I'm honored, but I'm

afraid I am going to have to decline. You see this girl belongs to me."

"No, she doesn't. Brook and her mother are a part of my pack now," Ryder told him.

The alpha offered him a cool smile. "Then she's a prisoner of war."

"Not while I'm alive," Ryder said with a growl, his body starting to change.

"Now that is a price I'm willing to pay." The alpha's tone was light as if this was all just some game to him.

I struggled to free myself but stopped when the alpha took my broken arm in his other hand and squeezed. Again the breath left me.

"Alpha Brent, every guard, and soldier are on this way right now. Let Brook go, and you might get away," Andy said. His eyes practically glowing yellow.

The alpha frowned momentarily then forced a grin on his face. "Perhaps you're right. We should go."

He took a step back, letting go of my injured arm, but his grip tightened on my other one.

I dug in my heels, looking behind me to see Mike and Ryder wrestling with each other and Andy was

racing towards us. Ryan shoved me to the ground, but thankfully I fell on my right arm instead of my

left. The fall still hurt like hell though.

The alpha jabbed Andy hard in the jaw. The punch echoed through the clearing making me cringe, but

Andy just got right back up. He tackled Ryan then used his advantage to slam his fist into his face. I

stood to my feet, holding my broken arm close to me, preparing to run when a sickening crack stopped

me. My jaw dropped as I watched Alpha Ryan let go of Andy who crumpled to the ground, his neck

twisted in an unnatural position.

No, this couldn't be happening! Not Andy! He couldn't be...Tears flooded my eyes, and my heart ached.

What have I done? This was all my fault. God, I deserved to be Missy Mistake.

"Brook run," Ryder yelled, still fighting with Mike.

I froze, unable to look away from Andy. He was...and it was my fault. I looked up to see Alpha Ryan

was walking towards Ryder. My heart seized and fear-filled every pore. I wouldn't let him kill Ryder too!

Finally, I managed a screaming picking up a rock from the ground. Enough was enough. I threw the

rock, using every ounce of strength I had. "You jerks, I hope you all die!" A morbid thrill ran through me

as it hit him right in his nose.

His head jerked back as blood burst from his nose and he took a few steps back. I grinned and

grabbed another one. Amber eyes trained on me, the alpha's expression was murderous. Good. I

threw another rock, hitting his left eye. Again he stumbled back and let out several curses. I picked up

another rock, but when I stood, he was in front of me. I gasped and tried to take a step back, but he

grabbed me.

Despite knowing it was useless, I tried to free myself anyway. Alpha Ryan swung me hard, slamming

my back into a tree. Black spots filled my vision as once again I found the rushing out of my lungs. I

started to slide down to the ground, but Ryan pulled me back up. He started to say something when he

paused, his head cocked to the side as if he was listening to something.

"Lucky for you, I've run out of

time."

Letting me go Mike's dad ran to Ryder. He shoved Mike aside and slammed his fist into Ryder's temple.

Ryder fell, clearly dazed by the attack. "Take the bitch. I'll deal with him."

I struggled to my feet and raced to the alpha. I needed to stop him. I couldn't let Mike's dad hurt him,

but before I even got halfway, Mike grabbed me.

"Let me go, you bastard!"

Mike, of course, didn't listen. Instead, he carried me away from the clearing and shoved me into a red

van. There were a couple of men waiting and Anna. I screamed again and threw myself at her. I clawed

her face with my good hand. "You..." I yelled, but there wasn't a word that could come close to how

horrible she was.

Mike pulled me back and forced me on a seat which ran along the length of the van's sides, but not

before I'd pulled out a good chunk of Anna's hair. "Enough," he said, plopping down next to me.

"You took long enough. See what she did to me," Anna whimpered.

"Not my fault you can defend yourself from a human," Mike told her. He and the others laughed, and

Anna's face bloomed bright red.

"You got off lucky! Next time I'll rip out all of your hair!"

Again the others and Mike laughed as if this was the funniest thing they'd ever seen. It only made me

angrier.

"Shut up," Anna snapped at me then after a pause added, "Bitch."

"How about you shut up," A bulky man told her. "So where's the alpha?"

"Dealing with the alpha's pup," Mike told him.

"Should we go help him?" By the sound of his voice, the man would rather stay right where he was.

"My dad can deal with one pup on his own," Mike snapped then smile at me with that cold, cruel smile

of his. "Don't worry Missy. He won't kill your precious mate." he took my hands, and I gasped at the

sharp pain lancing up my left arm. Zip tying my wrists together, he said to the others, "Be ready to

leave as soon as he gets back. Blue Crescent is on our tail."

A moment later the doors opened, and Mike's Dad climbed inside, sadly without a scratch on him. He

hit the side of the van, and it jerked to a start. I sucked in a breath as I bumped into Mike. I expected

some kind of sneer about staying off him, but he didn't even look at me.

"I have to say this went very well," Mike's dad, looking enormously pleased with himself. Mike nodded,

but his expression was blank. If the alpha noticed, he didn't care. Instead, he reached over and tugged

on the zip tie. I bit my tongue, tasting the metallic tang of blood, as more pain raced up my arm.

"I did my job," Mike told him, scowling.

Without a word or hesitation, his dad punched Mike in the face. "Your tone, boy, watch it!"

Mike shook his head. "Yes, Sir." The words slurred some, and his jaw didn't look right.

It took me a minute to realize it was because the punch had at least dislocated it. My eyes widened as I

watched it heal before my eyes, sliding back into place with a wet, slurping sound. When I shuddered,

Mike smirked at me for a very brief second before going blank again. Silently, I breathe in and out, slow

and deep. The differences between Ryder and his dad and Mike and his was like living on Earth

compared to Mars. How had I not seen this before?

After what felt like forever, yet not long enough the van jolted to a stop. "We're here alpha," the driver

announced.

"Good job, men. Get rid of the van and then go have a drink on me," Alpha Ryan said, grabbing the zip

tie again and got out, dragging me behind him. The pain was so intense I lost my breath and my vision

blurred. It was only until I was almost inside before I realized this was the alpha's house.

A beautiful woman walked into the room as the door close. "Everything going as planned, my alpha?"

Mike's dad placed his hand on the back of her neck, pulling her in for a rather embarrassing to witness

kiss. "It did, Helena. I'd like you to meet the future Luna of Blue Crescent Pack," He pulled me forward

with a cold laugh. "I mean would've been the future Luna."

"Pretty girl," she said but cringed as the alpha growled at her.

"She's a pathetic human is what she is."

"Of course. You're absolutely right my alpha. I-I apologize. Stupidly, I forgot again."

"You're not stupid, Mom," Mike said, a hint of anger in his voice. "She is a worthless human, but she is

pretty too." Despite the anger, his voice was soft and kind in a way I didn't think Mike was capable of.

"What she looks like doesn't fucking matter. I have more important things to do than bicker with you two

idiots. Mike, take the girl downstairs and make sure she receives a proper welcome, or I'll make your

mother regret ever giving birth to you." He shoved me to Mike then slapped his mom across the face.

"Remember, forgetfulness is laziness."

"Yes, my alpha," she said and nodded several times, getting up and heading into the kitchen.

Mike glared at his father, but grabbed the zip tie and pulled me along with quick, jerky movements that

brought tears to my eyes. God, my arm hurt so much. He pulled into the kitchen and through a door. I

gasped stumbling a step in the narrow stairwell. If he hadn't grabbed my shoulder, I would've gone

headfirst down the stairs and into a cement basement, lit by a single bare bulb. On one side was a cot, on the wall next to it, nearly the floor, was a thick chain and metal cuff. It all looked like it had been used before. Oh God, they were all psychos!

"Welcome home, Missy," Mike said, pushing me across the basement. With a hand on my shoulder, he forced me to sit on the cot. Mike knelt, taking my right foot and closing the metal cuff around it, locking it in place with a small, but a heavy-looking padlock. He stood and rolled his shoulders. "This isn't the way I like to do things, but orders are orders." Before I could ask what he meant he slapped me hard, a lot like his dad did to his mom.

I started to sit back up when his hands wrapped around my throat and squeezed. My eyes shot wide, and I clawed at his hands, trying to breathe. I wasn't sure how many times he'd hit me as my head became fuzzy. New pain blended in with old. Just when I thought I was going to pass out, Mike let me go. I coughed and gasped for air through my raw throat which only brought more pain. Fear trickled through me at the realization I might not live through this.

I sat up, shaking and cold, and glanced up at Mike. His face was blank, but his eyes were golden. "You shouldn't have run, you know," he said so quietly I almost couldn't hear him. "Of course, I should have. My mistake was stopping. I am not worthless." My voice hoarse and brittle, which was bad enough, but then I felt tears stinging my eyes.

"I know, but you would've lived longer if you stayed."

I scoffed and sneered at him. Derision dripping from my voice as I said, "Of course, I would." What did I

have to lose? My life? I wasn't sure how much longer I was going to hold on to that.

"Yes, you would, and you know what? I would've hit you, yes, but you'd be alive, and Ryder would be

alive. His family and yours would be alive."

Ice slide down my spine and through my veins. "What?"

He gave me a look which almost seemed like pity. "Yeah, Brook. Why else do you think Dad took you?

He's going to use you to slowly break down my cousin. My dad is going to show Ryder your bruises

and cuts. He's going to spin a tale of half-truths, so Ryder thinks you're being tortured and raped by

me. Ryder starts to lose it and control over his wolf. That will start breaking Uncle Brent.

Once my uncle submits, he'll kill you, destroying Ryder completely and in turn destroying Uncle Brent.

Aunt Emily will probably kill herself or become a catatonic shell at the loss of her mate. Dean is

completely useless. He'll never be able to rally the pack behind him, so my father will be free to walk in

and take the pack from him. He'll kill Dean anyways, just to be on the safe side. Next, comes your

Mom, Harry..."

How could so many people be so insane? "But they're your family too. How can you do this to them?"

"If I don't I'm dead right along with them. Once I'm gone who will protect Mom from him then, hm

Missy?" He said, his face turning red with anger. He straightened and sniffed. "That's something I'm

sure even you can understand." Mike turned and went upstairs, not once looking back at me. A

shudder ran through me, and I hugged myself, doing my best not to think about Andy or who else might

die soon.

Chapter 26

Ryder

I pulled on the restraints, growling in anger. I didn't understand how they could hold me down. I'm a

werewolf! No cloth cuffs should be able to keep me tied to the bed. This was unbelievable. Alpha Ryan

had Brook, and here I was, strapped to a hospital bed. Who knows what he was doing to her? It was

my fault. I should have been faster. I failed my mate, and I had to fix it!

My whole body ached with my wolf being so close to the surface. My nails had grown longer and darker

while dark hair peppered my arms. The new sharpness of my teeth cut the insides of my mouth, and I

tasted blood. It only made the wolf even more anxious. I pulled on the cuffs again to no avail and

howled in fury.

"If you want out of bed you're going to need to calm down, Ryder," Dad demanded from the door. His

face was uncharacteristically hard. In his eyes, I saw the wolf and something that looked a lot like fear.

I stilled, confused. Was Dad afraid? Did my uncle do something to Brook?

"How am I supposed to calm

down? He has my mate."

"Yes, and unless you want to hand him the pack and kill your mate, you need to calm down."

What he was saying made sense but every fiber in my body screamed at me to get free at any cost.

With a roar, I tried to rip free of the restraints, but again I wasn't able to. I fell back on the bed panting

with sweat. I wasn't about to give up. I was an alpha, and I would save my mate. I clenched my teeth, I

tried again, and again, and again until my wrists were so raw they bled. Sweat drenched the bed and

me. I felt my wolf, exhausted as I was, go back into the recesses of my psyche.

"Finished?"

I growled at him, but I was too tired to do more. I was a failure. What kind of alpha was I? I couldn't get

out of one stupid bed! I failed Brook, and I failed my pack.

"Good," Dad said, walking over and sitting next to me. "Ryder, what are the rules for being an alpha?"

Seriously? Did he want to rub my failure in my face? "Dad-"

"What are the rules?"

I sighed, trying to swallow down the shame. "Always be fair and just. Alpha isn't a king but a guardian.

We serve the pack not the other way around. The good of the pack must come first."

"Our pack is almost two hundred members strong and around sixty of those members are under the

age of eighteen. The elderly make up another twenty or so members. This means the civilian

population, the children, and the older generation sum up half the pack. They depend on us to keep

them safe, to protect them and our decisions must be made thinking of them."

My heart stopped as I stared at him. He wasn't suggesting...Dad wasn't considering sacrificing Brook

for the pack was he? "Dad-"

"Go on. Say the rest."

I licked my lips, hoping I was wrong. "An alpha must be strong and true."

He nodded, his expression grim. "Do you understand what that means?"

"Take care of yourself, so you're strong and to be true means you don't lie to the pack."

"Not quite. Alphas must be strong doesn't mean physically or at least not just physically. It refers to all

kinds of strengths. The strength to be able to admit making a mistake. The strength to lay down one's

pride. The strength to know when to fight or when to kneel. And the strength to keep going despite how

dismal the outcome looks."

"No," I growled. "If being a good alpha means I have to let Uncle Ryan keep Brook then I don't want to

be a good alpha."

"Calm, Son. I'm not finished. There is the other part - being true, remember. Being true doesn't always

refer to being honest in the sense that you're speaking of. Despite being in the service of the pack, we

must also remain true to ourselves. If we betray what's most valuable to us for the pack, we will only

foster resentment and hate."

"What exactly are you trying to say here, Dad?"

"Ryder, today you're going to have to bear some of the weight of being alpha. You're going to have to

do things you may not like to ensure the safety of the pack and your own. Why do you think Alpha

Ryan took Brook? He could have taken you instead of her. Imagine, the future alpha as a hostage."

I paused, realizing he was right. My uncle could've taken me. As much as I hated it, he'd bested me in

the fight. "Why didn't he?"

"Ryan is a sociopath. He's going to use Brook to manipulate us into giving the pack to him. He's going

to do everything in his power to make you lose control because, in turn, it would push me to the edge.

He knows I would do anything for my family."

Something in his expression turned my blood to ice. "What's going on, Dad?"

"I need you to master yourself, Ryder," he said, a hint of desperation in his voice. "I need you to master

yourself for the pack, for me, and for Brook. We all need you to stay strong." He handed me his phone.

On it was a text from my uncle.

Such a pretty little mate you have Future Alpha Ryder. Despite just being a human she has a lot of

defiance and strength in her. Maybe that's why my son is so fond of her. I can't seem to get him off her

for very long. If you don't want your precious little mate spoiled by my son, give me what I want.

My blood boiled, and everything went red. I didn't realize my grip had tightened on the phone until I

heard the screen crack. I would kill him. I had no idea how I would do it, but I would kill my uncle for this

and if Mike...if he...I'd kill him too.

"Ryder," Dad said. His voice sharp, making me look up from the damaged phone to him. "To save

Brook and the pack, you need to dominate yourself — strong and true. We have the upper hand here if

you can do that." As he spoke he removed the restraints on my arms.

"How do we have the upper hand?"

"We know what he wants, and as long as Ryan thinks he can get it Brook will be safe."

"Safe?" Didn't sound like she was safe to me.

"He'll hurt her, yes, but he won't kill her. He needs her to get the pack. Now here's the plan. We need to

let Ryan think everything's going according to his plan. You'll have to stay out of sight while we spread

rumors you've lost it. Soon, I say two days tops, he's going to contact me for a negotiation. He'll

demand I hand over the pack, but we'll both know I can't do that so Ryan will offer an exchange — me

for Brook, or perhaps he'll wait for me to make the suggestion."

"Wait, you can't do that. It will leave the pack without a leader."

"It's what he expects. He expects I'd do anything to save you, even hand myself to him. We're going to

play that card, leading him to the idea he's forced the pack into a weakened state, and he'll lower his

guard. When he does, I'll be right there to stop him for good."

Did I just hear him right? Was he talking about...killing someone? "Dad you're not-

"I've done it before, and it has to be done. I don't like it, but he's given us no other choice. Despite how

much I loathe the man, I've tried to negotiate with him for years. I told you, sometimes you'll need to do

things for the safety and well-being of the pack you're not going to like. I have to do this. I have to do it

for you, Brook and our pack. Do you understand?" There was something desperate in his voice and

face. It was like he needed me to understand so he could do what he needed to do.

"Yeah, Dad, I understand."

He smiled at me and patted my shoulder a couple of times. "Don't worry so much. Everything is going

to be okay. I do know what I'm doing. You just keep to your part and Brook will be home soon."

"And you too, right Dad?" I insisted. All of this made me realize how unprepared I was to be alpha. I

was nineteen and an idiot. I would've fallen for my uncle's trap. The pack needed Dad as alpha more

than me.

"I will do my best, Son."

"Alright. So what do we do next -" I started then remembered. "Andy, is he okay?" God, I was such a

dick! I should've asked about him sooner.

Dad grimaced, and I felt my chest tighten. "He'll survive. We arrived soon enough to unblock his

trachea and prevent suffocation, but his bones had begun to heal over in the broken state. It had to be

re-broken, and this caused some major nerve damage. The damage was extensive, and we're not sure

just how long it'll take for his body to fully repair itself. As of right now, Andy is paralyzed from the waist

down, and the estimates for total recovery put it at a couple of years."

Relief and sadness filled me in equal measure. Andy was going to hate being confined to a wheelchair.

He was an on the go, outdoorsy, sports type of guy. "Can I see him? Or can he come see me?" I hoped

I wouldn't get to be around my friends during this whole time.

"He's still pretty out of it, but as soon as he's able, Kara will bring him to see you. Now I have to get to

work and set this plan into motion. We've got a Luna to get back."

"Dad," I said as he turned to leave. "I hope I can be as good as an alpha as you are someday."

He now smiled a real and honest smile at me. "I'm sure you will be."

Chapter 27

\$Chapter

I paced from my cot to as far as the chain would let me go and back again. The cast on my forearm

was heavy. It surprised me they even bothered to bring in Doctor Samson to look at me. That was

awhile gone, but that while could've been a day or a week. The only window down here had been

blocked off with cardboard and duct tape, so I had no idea if it was day or night. I hated it, and I hated

not knowing anything. Was Ryder okay or Kara? Did she even know what happened to Andy?

I heard the door creak open, and I sat back down on the cot. The soft steps then a moment later I saw

Mike's mom's baby blue flats. When she'd first come down here, I tried to plead with her to let me go. I

told her Ryder's Dad would take her and her family in, but she only told me to shut up. Soon after Mike

can down and hit me a few times, warning me never to upset his Mom again.

I gave her a narrow-eyed glare and a scowl. I saw a flash of guilt before she hid it behind her own

scowl and a plate of food on the floor. Mike's Mom placed it so far away from me, I didn't think the chain

would reach. I continued to give her my best death glare. This was her fault. She had the power to stop

this, stop all of it, not only for me but for her children too. Mike at least got a few bruises, so I had no

doubts Beth got some too.

Yet, their mom didn't care. She just walked around here as if everything was okay and awesome. She

refused to see anything beyond that. As if sensing the direction of my thoughts she stared down at me

and said, "Loyalty is nothing you humans understand."

"So loyalty is letting toxic people beat the crap out of you? Yeah, if that's loyalty I'll stay ignorant."

With a 'hmpf' she turned and returned up the stairs, slamming the door. I waited with bated breath for

Mike to come down and hit me for upsetting his stupid Mom. After a long silent moment and no sign of

Mike, I relaxed and began pacing again. No way I would eat anything they gave me. I wouldn't put it

past the alpha to poison me just to make sure his twisted little plan worked.

However, the smell of the food tempted me and my stomach cramped up as it rumbled. I looked back

at the plate, my mouth watering instantly. With a scowl, I walked over to the plate. As I expected I really

had to reach to get it. Once I picked it up, I threw it at the stairs. Satisfaction filling me when the plate

shattered and food splattered everywhere. I gave the mess my own 'hmpf' and resumed my pacing

until the weight of the cuff began to chafe my ankle.

I sat on the cot, giving the padlock a hearty tug. I would never be able to break it, obviously, but tugging

on it made me feel like I was doing something. I sighed and leaned against the wall, staring up at the

ceiling. It seemed like an eternity passed when I heard the door open again. With a deep breath, I

prepared to pay for breaking the plate and making a mess.

"What the hell?" Mike said as he came downstairs then shot me a glare. He navigated through the

splattered food and walked right over to me. I shielded myself with my arms, but I remained slumped

over from when he slapped me across the head. He pulled me upright. "Mom worked hard on that."

Like I care? I didn't say it though, being hit once was enough. Mike forced me to sit up. To my surprise

and dread, he unlocked the cuff around my ankle and pulled me to my feet. "Showtime, Missy," he said,

grabbing my wrist and leading me upstairs. As soon as I was in the kitchen I had to shield my eyes, the

light too bright.

"There's our little hostage," Mike's dad said and with a violent jerk, grabbed my bicep and pulled me

towards him. He dragged me out of the house, unwilling to let me get my footing after I tripped. My

heart pounded in my chest as he shoved me back inside the van Mike had shoved me in the first time. I

swallowed as I sat, trying not to flinch as the alpha sat next to me. Mike sat across from me, his

expression unreadable - not that I wanted too. The alpha hit the side of the van. "Let's go."

I had no idea where we went, but the drive wasn't long. When the alpha dragged me out of the van, we

were standing in a small field on the edge of a cliff that fell off into a small rocky beach and then the

ocean. The closeness of the edge made me nervous, Ryan could just toss me off if he so decided. The

sound of another set of cars tore my eyes off the cliff edge to two large black SUVs pulling up next to

the alpha's.

My breath caught as I saw Ryder's dad get out, along with several of his men. They walked towards us

until they were about from us. "Oh, what's this? Ryder didn't come to negotiate for his mate?" The

alpha said with a sneer. He looked down at me, the smirk grew. "Perhaps I overestimated his affections

for you."

Ryder's dad cleared his throat, adjusting his suit. "My son is...indisposed at the moment," he said then

his eyes met mine. "But he would've been here if possible."

My throat tightened with dread as Alpha Ryan began to laugh a cruel, cold laugh. "Or maybe he doesn't

want a mate my son's been with first?"

Anger replaced my dread. This was Alpha Ryan's plan. I opened my mouth to tell Alpha Brent, nothing

happened, but sucked in a pained breath as Mike's dad squeezed my arm so hard I thought he might crush it.

Ryder's dad's expression darkened and his eyes started to do that icy glow thing I'd seen Ryder's do.

"Enough, you asked me here to negotiate. Let's negotiate."

Alpha Ryan loosened his grip on my arm. "Of course, You want the human, and you already know what

I want, Brent."

"I can't just hand over the pack to you, Ryan. Be reasonable for once in your damn life."

Mike's dad grinned. "So if you won't give me the pack, what exactly is it you're willing to give me?"

" An exchange - me for Brook."

My heart stopped at those words then pounded in my chest like some drummer gone wild. Mike said

this would happen. He said it would be the start of everything, leaving the people I cared about dead.

"Alpha Brent," I said. Mike's dad's grip on my arm tightened. Ryder's dad looked at me. There was a

resolved sadness in his eyes as he offered me a small smile. He knew the alpha would kill him, but I

doubted Ryder's dad was aware that he was endangering his family.

I couldn't let it happen. I had to do something. I cleared my throat. "Alpha Brent, I'm sorry. I'm sorry

about leaving, about Andy, about everything."

"You did nothing wrong, Brook. None of this is your fault."

"How touching," Alpha Ryan sneered. "I ag-" he started to say, but I cut him off.

He glared at me with angry irritation, but I didn't care. I focused only on Ryder's Dad. "Tell Ryder that

I'm sorry too. I'm sorry, but I can't let you do this, and I had to stop it."

"What are you talking about, stupid human," Mike's dad snapped, but Alpha Brent's eyes shot wide.

"Brook, no," he shouted, but it was too late.

I tackled Mike's dad. With the element of surprise, I managed to knock off his balance, and as I kept

shoving him farther back until he stepped off the edge. Alpha Ryan's growled at me, his grip on my arm

tightened as he teetered. "I go, you go, human," he said, softly. His voice was full of malice.

"That's the plan," I replied and with one last push, sent us both off the cliff edge.

The world tilted, and I lost perspective of up and down within seconds. Only sharp bursts of pain

recorded our descent to the rocks. Hitting the ground was the worst painful burst of them all. Blood

filled and bubbled out of my mouth. Every nerve in my body screamed in agony. I managed to lift my

head a little to see I laid on top of Alpha Ryan. The remains of his head were the most grotesque thing

I'd ever seen.

Mike's dad was dead, and as I realized I didn't feel the ocean crashing against us, I would die soon too.

I let my head slump down against some part of Alpha Ryan. My vision blurred with tears. My life didn't

flash before my eyes like they say it does, but I did think of my family and friends. Mostly, I thought of

Ryder. I regretted not telling him I really did like him and his brand of craziness.

He'd never know I had stopped thinking of when would I be able to run away to California and how I

might be able to live here with him. To him, I will always be the one trying to run away. That was the

worst part of it all. As my vision darkened I pictured Ryder's face. I was lucky he ever thought I was

worthy of being with him.

It was getting harder to breathe and fear trickled through me. Was this what it was like for Dad when he

died? Would he be waiting for me? Everything was dark now, and my thoughts were sluggish. I didn't

want to die! I tried to fight the numbness as a strange buzzing filled my ears. A spark of hot, burning

pain tore through me, and if I could've screamed, I would have. Yet as a flicker of hope shot through

me, the numbness returned, devouring it and my willpower and I was powerless to resist it. Goodbye

Ryder...

Chapter 28

Ryder

"What time is it?" I demanded.

"You know full well what time it is," Andy said flatly. "You're supposed to be making me feel better, not

the other way around. If you haven't noticed, I'm kind of paralyzed!" He smacked the wheels of the

wheelchair as if I would possibly miss the fact he was sitting in it.

I gave him an apologetic grimace. "Sorry man, it's just Brook," I said, running my hands through my

hair.

"We get it but asking us every five minutes what time it is or how long it's been isn't going to help

anything," Kara told me. "Now how about we figure out what we want to do when she gets back."

"Not a whole lot I can do," Andy complained, crossing his arms over his chest. "I'm a freaking disabled!

Who's ever heard of a disabled werewolf?"

"Oh not this again," Kara groaned. "You act as it'll be forever. It's only like this until you heal."

"Right, it'll heal, but I'll be Disabled Andy, forever."

"Oh, grow a pair. There is a lot of people who are disabled and don't whine like a baby as you're doing.

Here's the kicker, they won't even heal from it."

"Right, says the one who can walk," Andy replied, petulantly.

I chuckled as I listened to them argue. "I like Disabled Andy, or maybe I'll just call you Disandy for

short?" I hope to relieve some of the tension or put it on me. I'd hate for Andy to say something to her

and later regret it.

"You call me Disandy and I will kill you," Andy threatened, but the edges of his mouth started to turn

upward. "If you really want to see a baby, you should look at Dean. Misses W is forcing him to act as if

you're completely out of it and now he's the future alpha."

I grinned at the thought. I'm sure Dean was on the verge of cracking by now.

"Thanks, man, and thanks

for trying to keep her safe."

He shrugged. "She's our friend. What else was I going to do? It's not like you wouldn't have done the

same for Kara."

Andy was right. Suddenly a lot of shouting came from outside. "What's going on?"

"Let me check it out. You," Kara said, pointing to me. "Have gone crazy, remember." I scowled but

stayed put. Kara opened the door, peeking out and letting the chaotic sounds come in.

"Hurry, get her on the bed! Tyler I.V. now," Mom said, her voice tight with urgency.

I stiffened. Mom was supposed to be waiting for Diego to return with Brook. Why was she here?

"It looks like someone is really hurt," Kara said, still sticking her head out.

Andy and I raced towards the door at the same time, but just as I got close, a sharp pain shot through

my foot. "Ow, what the hell, man?" I complained, glaring at Andy. He'd run over me with his stupid

wheelchair.

"Disables get right of way, punk," he said, pushing in front of me and crashing into Kara.

"Ow," she yelled. "Get off of me or, at least, let me get out of the way before you run me over!"

I mumbled an apology and started to back up when I saw Dad. What was he doing here? As much as I

was happy he's okay, he was supposed to be a hostage by now. My heart stuttered to a stop when I

saw there was blood all over him. "I didn't know what else to do, Emily! It was the only thing I could

think of." Grief chiseled hard lines into his face. He ran his hands through his hair, apparently unaware

they too had blood all over them.

Mom stopped what she was doing and took my dad's face in her hands. "I understand Brent, but if you

don't let me work, it won't matter. The bite alone won't be enough to keep her alive."

Her? Oh God, it couldn't be. I looked at the stretcher surrounded by nurses and doctors. No! This was

not happening. I pushed the others out of the way, or they moved, I wasn't sure which.

"Ryder, wait," Mom yelled, her hands up to stop me, but someone grabbed me before I reached her.

"Let me go," I growled, trying to push ahead.

"Stay back," Diego said, against my ear.

My strength faltered as I finally saw Brook. The world stopped. I couldn't move, blink, hell or even

breathe as I stared at the cut, bruised, and swollen body. If I didn't already know it was Brook, I

wouldn't have recognized her.

"Come, get her into the O.R. now," Mom barked to the nurses and doctors, who all stared at me with

sympathy and pity.

I struggled against Diego as they pushed the stretcher down the hall and away from me. "Stop Ryder!

You can't help her. Emily and the medical staff are her only chance. You have to let them work," he told

me.

I slumped to the ground, despair making my head spin. This wasn't happening. How did this happen?

Rage filled me, and I stood quickly. "What happened? My uncle wasn't going to kill her." I glared at

Dad. "You said he would keep her alive. You said it!"

Dad's expression of grief intensified. "It wasn't Ryan, or at least he didn't cause the fall."

"Mike?" If I got my hands on that son of a...

"No, it was Brook."

My eyes widened. "What?"

"She figured out the plan and decided to stop him. When I realized what she was going to do...I tried to

tell her, but it all happened so fast. One minute she was apologizing and the next she was shoving

Ryan off the cliff and they both fell," he finished, his voice cracking.

"Oh wow," Kara breathed, her eyes watering over as she stared at my dad.

"Wait," Andy said coming to a stop next to me. "How is she alive? She would have died on impact."

Dad glanced over at me then looked back to Andy. "The way they fell, Ryan had softened the blow, but

she was still dying, bleeding from everywhere it seemed. I did the only thing I could think of. I bit her.

Healing is the first to benefit from the lycanthrope genes. I figured if I bit her..."

"Well, it looked like it worked. She survived long enough to get here," Kara said, looking impressed.

I just stood there, not sure what to think. So many emotions and thoughts streamed through my head

that I barely had time to process one when another took its place.

"You good?" Diego asked me.

I gave him a nod although I wasn't sure that was exactly true. Brook sacrificed herself to save my dad,

the pack, me? I wasn't sure if I should be proud or angry. Why didn't she wait for us to get her out?

Guilt tainted my anger, and I sat down, holding my head in my hands.

"Alpha," Diego said, to Dad. "Shall I treat with Black Mountain's new alpha. Hopefully, he's not as bad

as his father, yes? You need to be here with your family now."

Dad gave the Hispanic wolf a brief smile and a nod. "Thank you, Diego. Yes, go speak with Helena and

Michael and see if we can't end this stupid war."

The beta left, and we fell in silence, waiting for news. After a moment Kara jumped to her feet. "Her

mom," she said. "We need to tell Brook's mom." She didn't wait for any of us to volunteer before racing

out of the waiting room.

It wasn't long before Harry and Brook's mom joined us, Harry nearly carrying her. I stayed silent. What

could I say? What words would be able to express just how horrible this situation. No way would I be

able to say everything would be okay. Everything wasn't okay and wouldn't ever be if Brook didn't

recover from this.

Two hours passed when Diego returned looking grim. "Any news?"

Dad shook his head. "What about you?"

"There is good news and bad news. The good news is that the war is over.

"And the bad news?" Dad asked, looking up at him.

"Helena took her life when she learned of Alpha Ryan's death."

Grief and Anger mixed and danced along Dad's expression. He always felt betrayed when Aunt Helena

had refused to leave Alpha Ryan when showed his true colors as an abusive bastard. Not even when

the alpha hurt her children and made her miscarriage three times did she allow anyone to even suggest

she should leave him. "It was to be expected." Dad's tone was cold. "Anything else?"

"Ryan's replacement beta, Zackery Algiers, has taken the alphaship and took Michael as a prisoner. He

was going to execute the boy but..." the beta looked hesitant then sighed. "I convinced him to give the

boy to us as compensation... I'm sorry Alpha. I know I should've discussed this with you, but he's barely

eighteen..."

"No. You did the right thing," Dad said.

Was he serious? "What? He's as bad as Uncle Ryan."

"He's done what he's been taught and told to do. Take him to the rogue cells. Keep him there until

we're more prepared to discuss his future."

Really? Mike had abused Brook for years, and they were just going to act like that didn't mean

anything. I started to object to the idea when I noticed Mom out of the corner of my eye. I shot up from

my seat. "Mom! Brook is she...please, tell me she's okay."

Silence fell as all eyes turned on her. She looked exhausted. Her skin was pale with dark bags under

her eyes, and most of her hair fell out of the bun it had been in earlier. "For now, she appears to be

okay,"

I let out a breath relieved then paused. "Wait, why for now?"

"Your father's bite has successfully turned Brook, and she's healing, but slowly. The full moon is in two

weeks, and the first shift is always very touchy for the bitten. The truth is I don't know if Brook can heal

enough from her injuries in two weeks to give her a chance at surviving her first shift."

I covered my face with my hands. She survived the fall to only probably die during her first shift. Just

when I thought the nightmare couldn't get worse. Someone touched my shoulder with a light touch. I

looked up to see Mom kneeling in front of me.

"My team is working on a solution, Ryder. There may be ways to soften the shift or speed up her

healing. We've already got several theories working. Don't lose hope."

Chapter 29

Ryder

I laid on the bed next to Brook as I told her how much Dean had been babying me lately and how he

kept asking me if I'm alright when he gave me my lunch today. The hope time I wished she'd open her

eyes and prove to me everything was going to be okay. Brook had been in a coma since she fell. Mom

said she'd heal better that way, but I hated not being able to talk to her or hear her voice.

Harry and Brook's mom came into the room as I finished telling Brook about Dean. I sat up. It was

awkward lying next to Brook with her Mom in the room. "Hi," I said rubbing a kink out of my shoulder.

Man, I hated these beds.

"Hello Ryder," Brook's mom said with a tight smile. She smoothed down Brook's hair although it looked

fine. Must be a mom thing, mine did it all the time to me too.

A moment later Mom joined us. "Good you're all here."

"What's going on?" I asked, trying to sound as worried.

Mom gave me a brief smile. "The full moon is tomorrow, and plans need to be made," she told me and

turned her attention to Harry and his mate. "Brook's recovery is going well, but as expected, she's still

not healed enough that I feel comfortable with her first shift. My team and I have devised a plan, and

with your okay, we'll begin moving head tomorrow evening a few hours before moonrise."

Harry and Brook's mom nodded, waiting for Mom to continue.

"If we give Brook a super dose of muscle relaxants and painkillers, she will suffer much less trauma

during the shift, especially with Ryder with her-"

Brook's mom interrupted her, worry on her face. "Wait, how can he be with her. He's going to shift like

the others and how would he help?"

"He'll be here in his wolf form and Brook will be able to sense Ryder near, and it will help keep her

calm. However, we'll be prepared to introduce her into a deeper coma if need be."

"Is that safe, putting her under so deeply?" Harry asked, holding his mate's hand. "And why can't you

silver her to prevent the shift?"

"It'll be safe. We're capable of putting her fully on life support if needed and I want to avoid silver if at all

possible. While the typical silver-filled plastic zip ties prevent a shift, it's stressful on the werewolf which

is something we have to avoid at all costs."

Harry looked at Brook's mom and gave her hand a squeeze. "It's your call. What do you want to do?"

She shook her head. "I don't know I can make an informed decision on this. What do you think Harry?"

This is your people, your world, does this sound reasonable or like it will work?"

Harry gave her a kiss on her temple. "It's our world Nan, but yes, this sounds like Brook's best chance.

I think we should do it."

"Okay, do what you have to do, Emily."

"I'll begin the preparations immediately. I promise I'm going to take the best possible care of your

daughter," Mom told them.

"You?" Harry asked, looking as confused as I was.

One that I shared. I'm not a doctor, but I'm pretty sure you need hands. Mom gave us a tight smile. "I'm

going to silver myself, so I may be able to see the whole procedure through. Painkillers and I'll be fine."

Mom sounded like she could be saying that for herself as much as us. Silvering on a full moon was far

from pleasant. "You don't have to do that Mom."

She shook her head. "Yes. I do. She risked her life to save my mate and children. The least I can do is

share a little pain with her tomorrow night to make sure everything goes as it should. Now if you don't

have any more questions, I'm going to start getting everything ready."

As the full moon came closer, the tension grew. I hardly slept or ate. My wolf was close to the surface, making me more anxious.

"Ryder, it's about time to change," Mom said the evening of the full moon. Dad was with her. "Before

Nancy and Harry arrive, we should discuss something. While I know you won't harm Brook, I am a little

concerned about the staff. Try to focus on the fact everyone here is going to do everything they can to

save Brook. None is a threat."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"We can be more instinctual when in wolf and despite what instinct may tell you doing nothing will be

better than doing something. If you can't help yourself, Gwen has a sedative especially for you ready."

Now I got the point. If I got in the way, I was out. "Don't worry I won't."

Mom smiled and gave me a nod. Nancy and Harry arrived shortly after. She went through the process

with them again. When she finished, she gave Brook the muscle relaxants and painkillers. "Alright,

every wolf out. I don't want any shifting in this room. Ryder that means you too. Go get changed and

get back here," Mom said.

"Good luck, Em," Dad said, kissing her cheek and left with Harry.

I wanted to give Brook a kiss too, but it was just too weird with her mom right there, so I just left to shift.

There was something completely liberating in wolf form. I shook out my fur before nudging the

bathroom door open with my snout. A chorus of howls had already begun outside of others who'd

already shifted. I started to reply with my own howl but remembered I was in a hospital hallway. The

war had filled all the rooms with the injured, and they needed their rest. I admit,

I was a little disappointed I couldn't be out there, but tonight my mate needed me. I trotted towards my

mate's room and jumped up on her bed. Sweat beaded along her brow and the edges of her mouth

turned downward. I look over at my mother. She seemed anxious and scratched at the zip tie around

her wrist. When Mom saw me watching, she gave me a tight smile. "It's beginning. Stay close to her.

Keep her calm in you can."

Worry peppered through my mind but I snuggled up against my mate, laying my head next to her

shoulder. The beeping of the machine started to beep more often, and I glanced up at my mother. She

licked her lips in a nervous gesture as she kept her attention on the machine and many others. Mom

made adjustments here and there. I turned my attention to my mate, I saw her face looked more

strained than before.

I hint of fear coming from her. I gave off a worried whine and rested my head against her shoulder once

more. The beeping kept going faster and faster, and soon other machines started making more noises.

I smelt more fear coming from my mate and mom's was serious.

"I didn't think something like this was possible," she said, as one of the nurses showed her something.

I whined, pleading for her to explain.

"Her body is trying to fight against the shift, even to the point her antibodies are nuts."

"Can she somehow sense the shift coming?" A nurse asked.

"It's possible. Brook is scared of something, I can smell it. Either way, if she keeps going through this

level of stress, she'll never survive."

My heart jumped up into my throat, and I let out a fearful whine.

"Alright. Let's do this," Mom began then looked to me. "We have five minutes
Ryder. Do anything and

everything you can to assure her," she said then looked at the others. "If he
can't manage it then we

take her down as far as we can. We have to get her calm."

I inched up towards my mate's face and brushed my snout against her cheek,
it was cool with sweat

and only made me more worried. I huddled up as close as I could to her,
hoping maybe my body heat

would keep her from getting too cold. I made a small, pleading whine; begging
her calm down. She was

alright and safe. I was alright and safe. The annoying beeping slowed down
some, and my mother

gave me a look of approval.

Don't be afraid, Brook. You're just changing into one of us. I thought with all
my strength as I

whimpered as I brushed my head softly against hers. Please, be strong just a
little bit more. Please,

Brook. I can't lose you! With a pitiful whine, I sent my thoughts to the goddess
next. Goddess, please

protect my mate. Please help her through this. She can't die now. Not when
she sacrificed so much for

us. Please, please, please!

"Good, Ryder. Keep it up. She's calm now," My mother said, patting my back.

I gave her a wolfish grin then licked Brook's face through the saltiness of her
sweat was a little gross.

I'd forgotten about that. I continued my prayers to both Brook and the goddess
and making soft noises

so Brook would hear me. Hours seemed to pass, Brook's clothing and blanket
were drenched with her

sweat. I kept continuing to whine and whimper, sending her my encouragement as best as I could.

My mother watched the machines like any predator, not willing to miss even the smallest movement.

She was silent most of the time which drove me insane with worry. I had no idea what was going on.

Was Brook doing okay or did things look bleak? Suddenly the machines started making a bunch of

noise. All the nurses and my mother jumped into action, pressing buttons here and pushing them there.

Brook began to convulse on the bed, and I jumped to my feet, unsure what to do. I didn't know if I

should lay on her to keep her from falling or stay back. I whined with indecision and looked to my

mother for some direction but she was staring at Brook in surprise. "I don't believe it," she breathed.

I looked back down to my mate and made a startled yelp. She was shifting, like actually taking a wolf

form! I figured with the coma, the muscle relaxants, and everything, she wouldn't actually shift. "Hold

her down," my mother ordered the nurses. "But not too tight, let her bones morph as they should."

The nurses all fell around me, holding Brook's arms and legs. She convulsed and twisted violently. Her

muscles contracted and relaxed in grotesque waves. I'd never seen anything like this before. At a

snail's pace, her form began to twist and change. Despite the coma and painkillers, her face twisted in

agony. It made my stomach turn, and I was afraid I was about to get sick. My first shift, while it hurt like

hell, Brook's shift seemed worse.

Minutes seemed like hours as Brook changed. I wanted to comfort her, but I was too caught up in my

own fear of what was happening. I was helpless, completely helpless. My mate was suffering, and

there was nothing I could do to help her. "Ryder," my mother said to me sharply. "Relax, she can detect

your fear now. So calm down and keep talking to her."

I swallowed, forgetting now she wasn't human she could do that. I laid down next to her but not too

close, I didn't want to hurt her and whimpered to her again. All the while, silently sending her

encouragement. Finally, Brook's shift completed and part of me expected her to wake up or do

something but she just laid there. She was a small wolf, her fur was brown with bright auburn and gray

highlights.

She looked like a red wolf, and she was beautiful. I looked up my mother worried Brook wasn't moving.

She was leaning over us, looking at Brook. She checked her blood pressure, among many other things

that I didn't know what was for. "It's done. Ryder. She's going to be okay."

I gave her another wolfish grin. I stood up, stretched then curled up around my mate, sharing my

warmth with her and placing a paw over her. Now, this was over, I swore she'd never had to go through

anything like this again. I took in her scent, taking in the small changes to it now she was a werewolf.

Good job, Brook. I'm so happy you're alright. Feeling myself relax for the first time in at least two

weeks, I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 30

Imagine being hit by a semi-truck then having said truck back over your broken body, only to run over it

again. That's me right now. My whole body ached and my mouth dry. I thought when you died all that

stuff didn't happen anymore. Unless I wasn't dead, but that was impossible. I fell off a freaking cliff. I

opened my eyes slowly, looking at the room around me.

No angels or heavenly trumpets and it was too cold and stank too much of disinfectant to be hell. So

alive - right now, I might have preferred dying. It hurt less. The door opened, and Emily walked in,

smiling as if she'd just won a million dollars. "Hello, Brook. It's good to see you awake. How are you

feeling?"

"Confused," I said honestly. "I am pretty sure I should be dead right now."

Emily laughed, pulling one of those stools on wheels all doctors have. "It was touch and go there for a

while."

A while? How long was I out? I started to ask her when she spoke again.

"What do you remember after the fall."

"I remember dying. There was a burning sensation, and I blacked out I guess."

"Burning?" Emily repeated, curiosity filling her voice.

Okay, now I was even more confused. "Yeah like fire ants under my skin, but it didn't last long."

"Interesting," she said but the before she could say more Ryder walked in the room. He stopped

halfway, staring at me. It was kind of creepy.

"Hey," I said, self-conscious as he kept staring at me. I glanced down at my lap, noticing my arm no

longer had the cast. In fact, it looked good as new.

Suddenly, Ryder was next to me, my hand in his. "You're awake! How do are you? Did you know yet?

Mom, did you tell her?"

I blinked at him, confused. His mom laughed, giving me an apologetic grimace. "No, I didn't tell her, I've been busy with my checkup."

I swallowed as I looked between the two. "Tell me what?"

"It doesn't matter right now. For now, I want to examine you. Besides the confusion, how are you?"

I didn't like the vibe I was getting from her, but I answered her question. "Like I've been hit been ran

over a few dozen times. My body aches everywhere, and I'm really thirsty."

Ryder leaped off the bed, running, and shouted he'll get me some water. I blinked again. He was acting

kind of odd. "Was I that bad or is he just being weird as usual?"

His mom grinned at me with a laugh as she checked me over. "You were that bad. I wasn't too sure if I

could keep you with us, despite all the measures we took. What kind of aches are these? Is it like

general soreness or to a specific area? Also, how is the ache burning, stabbing, stinging, throbbing?"

"It's a general ache, and more throbbing than anything."

Ryder's mom continued to question me for a while, helped me sit up when Ryder returned with my

water. It was room temperature, but to me, it was pure heaven. "So what exactly happened to me?" I

asked when I finished.

"You were right, Brook. When you fell, you were dying and would've been dead in a matter of minutes.

Brent did the only thing he could to save your life. He bit you," she explained.

"He bit me," I repeated, and she nodded. Did that mean what I think it meant?

"Yes, starting the change in you from human to werewolf."

My mouth dropped open with a gasp, and my eyes shot wide. Ryder took my hand, lacing his fingers

with mine, and gave it a soft squeeze. As much as I wanted to return some gesture back. I couldn't. I

was too in shock. His mom gave me a small smile and began to explain things about the ability to heal.

Also, some other things I didn't understand.

"So let me get this straight," I said, rubbing my forehead. "I've been in a coma for half a month, and

when the moon is full I'm going to turn into a wolf?"

"Actually, you've already shifted once," Ryder said, grinning.

"What? That's impossible. I would remember if I turned into a wolf," I said, coming close to hysterics.

"The full moon passed two nights ago Brook and while in a coma you did go through your first shift.

Complete wolf form," his mom said, her tone cautious now.

Whoa, this was...I didn't even know what to think.

"You must be overwhelmed right now. I get it," Ryder's mom said. Overwhelmed didn't even cover it.

"But you need to rest, you're still healing from the fall and the shift. Take it easy, no more heroics. Got it."

I grinned despite everything. "I don't plan to," I said adamantly. Next time Ryder's pack can go save itself.

"Good girl. Now I'm going to make my rounds. The others will want to see her too. I'll also get someone to bring you something to eat."

When she left Ryder suddenly hugged me to him. "I'm so glad you're okay, Brook. I thought I lost you.

Why did you even do that?" His voice taking on so many emotions it was a little difficult for me to keep up.

That's when it, whatever it was, hit me. This smell coming off of Ryder. It wasn't bad, just the opposite.

Everywhere he touched made my skin tingle, and it rippled through me like some electric wave. "Mike

told me how his dad was going to use to me to break you then break the rest of your family and my

family. I couldn't let him do it, and it was the only option open," I replied, breathless.

"And you didn't stop to think we had a plan for it?"

"How was I supposed to know?" I said, a little angry. These feelings were weird. I was warm and tingly

like I was wrapped in blanket straight out the dryer. "Ryder, can I ask you something and you promise

not to laugh at me?"

"Sure."

"Why do you...smell so good and why is it when you touch me, it weird?" I narrowed my eyes at him

when he grinned. "No laughing remember."

Still grinning, he held up a hand in mock surrender. "I'm not laughing and I won't. It's nice the bond isn't

so one-sided now."

Could I get any more confused? One would assume I'd somehow understood them now, but nope, still

clueless. "What is one-sided?" He grinned some more, and I let out a little growl, surprising the hell out

of myself. I slapped my hand over my mouth, and now he laughed. "You're laughing," I said behind my

hand.

"Yeah, at the question. That has to be the most adorable growl ever," Ryder said, pinching my cheek,

granny style.

"Ryder," I whined pitifully. "I nearly died, and all you're going to do is make fun of me now?" I said,

giving him my best sad face and man did it work like a charm.

A guilty expression spread over his face as he looked at me in horror. "I'm sorry I didn't mean-"

"Exactly! So start answering my questions," I demanded, tossing away my sad face and crossing my

arms over my chest.

He grinned and hugged me to him, sending all those weird sensations into overdrive. "What you're

feeling is the mate bond. It's how we are able to recognize each other. Though I've never heard it

described as weird,"

"You're a werewolf, everything about you is weird."

"Yeah, well you're weird too now," Ryder replied.

"Which is even weirder. I can't believe it, I'm not like a human anymore." It was as if I'd suddenly lost

something very precious.

Ryder cupped my face in his hands and forced me to look in his eyes. "Hey, you're still human. You're

just a little more than human now."

I like the way he said it, made everything seem less estranged. I wanted to tell him to thank you, but my

mouth didn't want to work as I stared into his eyes. It was like they were pulling me in and I had no

choice but to fall into them. As our lips touched, it was as if I'd grabbed onto a live wire but not in a

painful way. It was like a sort of energy ran through me, charging all my cells and bringing them fully

alive.

My eyes slid closed as the sensation wrap around me like a warm blanket on a cold day. We deepened

the kiss, and I love all sensation that wasn't him, me, and our kiss. Never in my life had I experienced anything like it in my whole life. Good thing I didn't die or I would've missed. It.

"Oh God, no! My eyes, my poor virgin eyes," Dean practically screamed.

Someone snorted. "Glad to hear you're finally admitting you're a virgin," they said, and it sounded a lot like...

I pulled away from Ryder, breaking our kiss and Ryder groaned in a complaint. "Andy! You're alive! But how? I saw him kill you?"

Andy scoffed waving at me. "Please, him? Kill me? I'd be offended if I didn't know you better." He gave Ryder an apologetic grimace. "Sorry for the cockblock."

Ryder grumbled a sour reply and helped me sit up when he noticed me struggling. All my muscles had the shaky feeling one gets after a hard workout.

"So why are you in a wheelchair?" I asked, my curiosity ignoring any kind of filter. "Well when you get your neck broken isn't good on the spinal nerves," Dean said with a smirk. "He's our little cripple now,"

he added then yelped as Andy ran over his foot with one of his wheels. "Hey, what was that for!"

"Really, Dean, really," I said, shaking my head at him, then smiled when I noticed Kara. "You're okay too!"

"Of course. Why wouldn't I be?"

I grinned more and shrugged. "So what exactly is going on now?" I asked, taking Ryder's hand in mine.

God help me, but I liked touching him or him touching me...yeah so not creepy at all.

"The war is over," Kara replied, pleased.

"Alpha Ryan didn't survive the fall like you did little beastie," Dean said with a snicker.

I gave him an unamused glare then asked, "So this means Mike is the alpha now, right?"

"Actually, he's our prisoner," Ryder said, putting his free arm around my shoulders. "One of my uncle's

men took over and agreed to give Mike to us as a prisoner."

"Wow," I breathed, overwhelmed again.

"You take one little nap, and the world moves on without you," Dean said with a snort. He then

suddenly climbed on the bed and hugged me, well Ryder and me since he was so close. "Welcome

back, Brookie," he said in an imitation of a fangirl voice which made my ears ring.

"Hey get off. She's mine," Ryder growled at him, pushing him off the bed, making Dean make a high

pitch squeal and glare at Ryder from the floor with a ridiculous pout.

"Don't be a dick," Dean replied, standing and rubbing his backside.

"Watch it, or I'll ask Mom to teach you how to be alpha again," Ryder threatened.

Dean's eyes widened. "N-no, no, no, no. No thank you." He waved his hands above his head as in

surrender.

I shook my head leaning back into the bed, tired. "Thanks for coming to visit, guys." I rested my head

against Ryder's chest.

"Hey you guys, I think it's time to call it quits for now. Mom said she's still healing from the fall," Ryder

said, and the others nodded. Dean groaned, but Andy threatened to roll him over again. I smiled

watching them leave and then snuggled against Ryder.

Chapter 31

It took me a couple of days before I was discharged completely from the medical ward. I couldn't be

happier to get up on my feet and be able to move about. Of course, that was before people started

smothering me. My mom, Harry, Alpha Brent, Ryder's mom, Ryder and the gang, and even people I've

never even met before. It was nice at first but after a week of gushing, praises, gifts, and all that I'd had

enough.

So I kind of took to hiding when I could again. One thing anyone refused to talk about was Mike. No

one wanted to talk about where he was or what was going to happen to him. Not even Alpha Brent

when I asked him. It was downright frustrating. As time went on and people's expressions were getting

more serious every time I asked. I had a feeling whatever answer they'd give me I wasn't going to like.

Somewhere between then and now, I decided to take matters into my own hands. It took a while to

finally find out where Mike was. I crept as silently as I could, pausing ever so often and listening for

sounds of people. These super senses were awesome. They were keeping Mike in a holding cell their

version of jail. With the war over and only Mike to watch, it wasn't difficult to convince the few guards

there were that I deserved to see Mike. If only for revenge sake.

His cell was underground. Those were reserved for the really dangerous or the really disliked. Despite

everything, I didn't see Mike as super dangerous. He was sitting on the cement floor with his knees up

to his chest and his arms resting on his knees. His head bowed, but he lifted it as soon as he heard

me. "Missy? Still alive and kicking."

"It's Brook now, Mike. I'm not going to be Missy ever again," I told him walking up to his cell.

"What are you here for, Brook? Want to gloat how now I am the unwanted mistake, now my family is all dead?"

"Beth is alive," I replied.

"Beth is a traitor who sold out her family for a better one," he said, his tone sharp with anger.

"Can you blame her for wanting to be happy and un-abused?"

Mike scowled and looked away from me.

"Mike I'm sorry you lost your parents. I know you loved your mom," I told him, and he still wouldn't look

at me. I took a step towards his cell and grabbed the bars. I jumped back a second later with a yell. I

looked at my hands in confusion while Mike laughed as if it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen. Oh

right, I'd forgotten about the silver thing. I was going to have to throw out like half my jewelry now. I

scowled at Mike. "Oh shut up! I came here to help you, you big dumb idiot."

"You? Help me?" He repeated with disbelief. "Why would you do that when you hate me?"

"I don't hate you, Mike," I told him. "You, in the end, were doing what your dad told you to do because if

you didn't you or, worse yet, your mother, would pay for it. I hate Anne. She pretended to be my friend

and everything for no one but herself and her stupid ideas of being popular. I hate her, and she better

hope to stay far away from me," I said with a growl. I tossed a large orange letter-sized envelope, rolled

shut at the top, at him.

He flinched then looked confused. "What's this?"

I leaned against the wall near the bars but making sure not to touch them this time. "Your fresh start.

It's not a whole lot, fifty thousand, but it'll be enough to start over. Harry gave it to me to escape, but I

don't want to go to California anymore."

"You expect me to believe you're going to give me a bunch of money and what let me walk out of here?"

"Believe it or not, but yes that's what I'm doing."

"Why?" Suspicion and wariness colored his expression.

"You lost her because of me," I said with a pang guilty. "Also, you haven't done anything so bad you

need to die for it and fear is never a good decision-maker. Now, don't get me wrong. You're a big

bullying asshole, and I never want to see you again after today, but Beth is getting her second chance

so why shouldn't you? Go far away from here and be Mike, not Mike Alpha Ryan's evil son."

"My uncle will never let me walk out of here."

"Probably not, but I convinced the guards to take a break. They think I'm extracting some kind of

revenge on you. So decide, a fresh start or die as the bad guy?" I unlocked his cell.

Mike scrambled to his feet and ran out of the door, and I smirked as I closed the cell door, making sure

not to touch the bars. I walked upstairs, leaving the keys, pleased with myself.

"So Mike's gone then?" Ryder's dad said from behind me.

I paled, debating if I wanted to turn around or not. Hesitantly I turned on my heel to face the alpha.

"Uh... Alpha, I can explain," I said, getting in touch with my kid caught red-handed in the cookie jar vibe.

"I know. There are cameras down there," he said, and I cringed. "I've been arguing with my council

since his capture for this very result. They all are too afraid he'll become his father and return for

revenge."

"We'd be no better than Ryan if we treated Mike like them. As a doctor once said, we have to be

better," I replied, glad Alpha Brent didn't seem angry.

"What doctor was this?" Ryder's dad asked.

I scowled at him. "Ugh, you're not supposed to say what but who! What a way to ruin a joke," I

complained as Alpha Brent looked at me confused.

"Right, so let's go tell the others your decision to Mike's fate and remind them no one has more say

than you."

The council wasn't exactly happy, but I stood my ground, even against Ryder. Mike deserved a second

chance. When Ryder got over being butthurt about it, he agreed with me. The council was sore for it for

a while. When a year passed, and there were no tales of the cruel, revenge-obsessed Mike, they got

over it.

I'm expecting a little brother in a few months. Mom surprised me with that bit of news. I think Dean is

the most excited and I have no clue why. I really wish that guy would get his mate already! Beth found

hers half a year after her brother left. Some up and coming, enforcer from Louisiana I heard.

All I know is she almost fell down the stairs when she first met him. I'd call her idiotic, but now I can feel

the bond, I get how it makes you do some stupid stuff. Andy recovered fine and is good as new, but

Dean and Ryder call him Disandy from time to time to piss him off. Now as for Ryder and I, we're doing

great. Despite my instincts, we're taking it slow.

I won't have some stupid bond tell me who I should love. It's not that I don't love him because I do but I

want things to be my choice. Like going to college and forcing Ryder to enroll too. If he wants to be

alpha, then he should be educated as possible. His parents really love me now.

In the end, I have to say my plan to escape to California was utterly destroyed and stomped into the

ground, but life gave me a much better plan I never saw coming, and I'm so much happier.