

## Chapter 8

"Oh," was my brilliant response. I had to fix this. I had one alpha who wanted me dead. I didn't need another. I tried to remember everything Harry told me about alphas, I lowered my gaze, sinking in on myself to seem smaller and less threatening. "I'm sorry...I didn't mean..." Dean or better said Ryder, suddenly knelt in front of me. I flinched as he took my face in his hands and forced me to look at him, face to face.

His touch was gentle, and my skin warmed where he touched me. "Brook, don't. I told you I'm not Mike. I don't want...I don't need anyone to bow to me, especially not you."

Especially me? Why did he say that? My breath caught as he leaned in towards me. He wasn't going to...was he? His lips brushed against mine gently as if hesitating before he pressing them more firmly in a definite kiss. My eyes closed by their own will and I had no idea what to do. Yes, I'll admit it. I am seventeen, and the closest thing I've come to kissing a boy is when I was nine. Gerald, a stick of a boy, gave me a slobbery peck on my lips behind the dumpster at school.

I kissed him back, praying I was doing it right. My heart turned up to hummingbird speed when he pulled my swing towards him, so he was kneeling between my legs. Okay, this blew Gerald's kiss out of the water. When the kiss ended, and Ryder leaned back, A hot flush bloomed in my face. "Why did you do that?"

"Because I've wanted to do too since I met you."

I went tomato red. That's right just call me Brook 'Beefsteak' Grigsby. My stomach clenched on itself and sending a jolt of shock from the top of my head all the way to my toes. I swallowed and unsure of what to say. I am proud to say I didn't stupidly ask him why he'd want to kiss me. Actually, the only thing I could think of to say was a change of subject. "So, uh, why are you pretending to be your brother?"

Ryder grinned at me as he sat on the swing next to mine. He pulled the seat of my swing to the side, so we were still facing each other. Was this real? I am starting to wonder if I didn't pass out in the woods and this was

all some dream.

"My uncle suggested our packs do an exchange as a show of faith in that sad excuse of a peace agreement, he and Dad made. My brother would live with them and my cousin, Beth, would live with us. Something didn't seem right, so I told my dad I'd go in his place. My uncle never saw my brother or me before. I came here to find something, anything to prove my uncle was up to no good."

I wondered if what Mike told me about his dad planning to put the blame of my murder on him would be considered no good. Seeing what I knew of werewolves probably not.

"Me finding you was an awesome surprise," Ryder said, breaking me out of my thoughts. He had a strange expression on his face when he said it too.

Confusion and stomach butterflies made me feel almost nauseous. "What do you mean? I'm no one." I tried to appear cool instead of like I'm going to toss my cookies at any moment.

Ryder grinned again, pulling my swing closer to his. "You're not no one. Brook, there is something else I need to tell you. You're..." His phone loudly came to life. After a moment of hesitation, he sighed and pulled out the phone. "It's your dad - I mean Harry."

My stomach dropped. How could I have forgotten about Mom and Harry? Ryder answered the phone, silent for a moment. "Yeah, I found her...no...I don't know she wouldn't tell me. No, she seems alright for the most part...I think so. She said they had a chat."

I gave him an irritated look. I didn't like being talked about as if I wasn't there. Ryder hooked his leg around mine, keeping our swings close as he set his hand on mine. "Alright. We'll be right there." He hung up and put the phone back in his pocket. "I have strict orders you are to come straight home with no dilly-dallying. Harry's words, not mine. What happened Brook? They're going to want an explanation."

My throat tightened, and I had to bite my lip hard, the pain stopping me from doing something stupid like crying. "Mike," I said, not sure why I wanted to tell him. Why a part of me hoped might be able to help me. "He said his dad is planning on killing my family and me. He's mad Mom is

more important to Harry than him.'

'Not going to happen,' Ryder said, sounding so sure of himself. 'I promise you, Brook, he won't hurt you or your family.'

I didn't think he could stop the alpha, but something inside me relaxed at his words.

'Come on, let's get you home.' Ryder unhooked his leg with mine and stood.

'You're right. The alpha won't kill me. Mom will do it for him.'