

## Chapter 4 – Healing the Broken Alpha

Something didn't compute. River Blackstone was supposed to be a sickly invalid, but his body was thick with muscle. I didn't have a whole lot of experience with the male physique, but I'd seen my brother more times than I wanted to, and Jensen wasn't nearly as jacked as the man on the bed.

River was...breathtaking. Just looking at his bare torso made my heart flutter in my chest.

He wanted to be bathed, so naturally I assumed he wanted me to clean him everywhere. I was shamelessly eager to see what was under those pajamas, but before I could sneak a peek, he had grabbed me and pulled me over on top of him.

I should have been afraid, but something else quickened my heartbeat. I found myself staring at the perfect little dent in his chin, over his sensuous lips, until finally my gaze met his stormy green eyes. He had gorgeous thick curling eyelashes that rather negated his angry stare.

"Do you always do what you are told?"

Oh, if only he knew.

"Not always," I replied, but a more accurate answer would have been, "almost never." And that's why I was usually in trouble with Jensen. But he didn't need to know that. Not yet, anyway. Because for some reason, I wanted River Blackstone to like me.

That was a foolish thought, and River proved it, because in the next breath he had shoved me away from him roughly. I stumbled and almost fell, barely catching myself on the bedside table. I felt my heart drop heavily.

"Get out," he growled, turning his face away from me once more.

I straightened, determined that he wouldn't see that his rejection affected me at all. And why should it? He was just a stranger to me, even if he was now my husband. I'd only known him for a matter of minutes. I lifted my chin and smoothed down my t-shirt.

"Where am I supposed to go?"

"Anywhere but here. My physician will be here soon, and I want privacy." His hand passed over his face. "Come back after dinner."

I nodded curtly and turned on my heel to walk out of the room. I closed the door as gently and quietly as I could. Looking up and down the hallway, I had no idea where to go. I heaved a sigh and tried to retrace the steps that had taken me to that room.

River

If Lenora had continued her task of bathing me, she would have found more than she bargained for beneath my pajama bottoms. It had been a very long time since my body had responded to any woman. So much so that I'd begun to suspect something was wrong with me; that the stroke that killed my wolf had also killed my sexual desire. But one sweet, innocent touch from her small, soft fingers, and my manhood had sprung to life. It was both a relief and an annoyance.

I didn't want to want her. That wasn't part of the plan.

I had to push her away, or else I was going to do something I was sure to regret. For a moment I saw hurt shadow her delicate features, but just as quickly it disappeared, like someone had pulled a shade over the window of her soul. Without another word she turned and walked out the door, shutting it softly behind her.

I waited a second to make sure she was really gone before I swung my legs off the bed and stalked over to the door to secure the lock. No one in the house knew that I had regained the full use of my legs months ago. Only my physician and my massage therapist knew my secret. Until I fully understood what had happened the night of my so-called accident, I had decided to keep playing the role of a helpless invalid.

Being cooped up in the house for months on end was enough to drive any man out of his mind. I passed the time by training my body, taking care of business remotely, and reading books. I couldn't very well hide free weights in my bedroom, but Julian, my massage therapist and one of my closest friends, had installed a pull up bar in my closet. He had also provided me with a set of resistance bands to do the work of weight training.

Without my wolf, I was going to need all of the physical stamina and strength I could muster. I could no longer shift and my healing abilities were now on par with an average human. I was only a man, no longer fit to be called Alpha. But my father wouldn't let me relinquish my title. Not yet anyway.

Without my wolf, I also couldn't find my mate. My senses were dull, I could hardly smell a damn thing. My soul mate could have walked right in and sat in my lap, and I wouldn't sense her.

Taking a chosen Luna had been my father's idea, but Lenora Moore had been my choice. I'd seen her only once, a few years ago, but I'd never forgotten her. And conveniently, her pack owed me a large debt for a loan the late Alpha Moore had taken before his demise. It gave me the leverage I needed, and Jenson Moore was despicable enough to trade his own sister to clear the debt.

He was an a.sshole. I could almost excuse myself by thinking I'd done Lenora a favor by getting her away from her sleazy family.

But I was an even bigger asshole, tying her to a weak and wolfless man, using her as a distraction and a decoy in this rather dangerous game of hide and seek I was playing with an unknown foe.

She deserved better. She deserved her own, true fated mate.

I took out my frustration on the bands, adding extra resistance as I worked through each muscle group, until my arms and chest were burning and my muscles were trembling with fatigue. I was wet with sweat and about to start my legs when there was a light knock on the door.

“Who is it?” I bellowed.

“It’s Luke,” came the deep reply. No one could fake that voice. I had installed a remote locking mechanism I could potentially trigger from the bed, but since I was sure it was the doctor, I walked to the door and unlocked it myself.

Dr. Lucas Parker was an inch or two taller than I was, and he always looked impeccable in a shirt and tie, with his signature white lab coat over top. He carried a leather bag full of medical supplies, and wore a stethoscope around his neck like a necklace. I sometimes wondered if he slept with that thing. I had never seen him without it.

He slipped in the door and I shut it behind him, turning the lock once again.

“Hey,” he gestured toward the door, “I met a young woman downstairs, is that...?”

I rubbed the sweat out of my eyes. “Lenora Moore,” I grumbled, and strode across the room for a towel.

Luke whistled between his teeth. “Well she’s a pretty little thing, isn’t she? I wouldn’t mind taking her home to the boys—“

“That’s my wife!” I snapped. “Don’t even think about making her part of your orgy!”

“It’s not an orgy,” Luke argued mildly, “It’s polyamory.”

I growled low in my throat and he held up his hands in mock surrender. “Okay, okay, I was only kidding.” He gave me a sideways look as he shoved aside the bath wipes and put his bag on the table. “Look at you, all possessive already!”

He was right, I was feeling possessive. But I tried not to think too much about it. Naturally, Lenora was mine. I wasn’t going to share her with anyone else.

He pulled out some bottles from the bag. They were vitamin and herbal supplements, but he dumped them into the bottles that were labeled as painkillers, muscle relaxers, and blood thinners. I had long since stopped taking any of the heavy medications.

Luke was trying to help me find the cause of the mysterious incident that had nearly killed me. He had taken samples of my blood and sent it off to another doctor friend, but so far they had been unable to find any cause for my mysterious “accident.” But they all agreed that my condition was suspicious. A young, healthy Alpha werewolf didn’t suddenly have a near fatal stroke and lose his wolf.

Someone had done this to me, I just wasn’t sure who or how. Which meant I regarded everyone around me with suspicion. Even my own family.

Lucas checked my blood pressure and made a few notes before he packed up his bag. “Everything looks good,” he said as he pulled the zipper. “If it wasn’t for your wolf, I’d say you are in the best shape of your life.”

I only grunted. Talking about my lost wolf was a sore subject.

“Shall I send the young lady back in?”

I lifted my arm and had a sniff. I cringed at my own odor. “Let me get a proper shower first,” I grumbled, “Give me ten minutes.”

Goddess knows, I couldn’t endure another sponge bath with the wipes tonight. I locked the door again after Luke stepped out and went to the bathroom, shoving aside the handicap shower chair. I quickly indulged in a hot shower, and ran a razor over my face. I dried my body and slipped into clean, fresh pajamas before I made my way back to the hospital bed. If anyone asked, I would tell them that the doctor had helped me bathe.

I hated that hospital bed with every fiber of my being. It had been my prison for months on end. I climbed back beneath the sheets and arranged my legs in the most comfortable position possible, knowing that I was going to have to keep still if anyone else came into the room. I took out the book I had been reading on Roman military strategy, and used the remote to unlock the door.

A few minutes later there was a soft knock, and Lenora poked her head in the door, her eyes large and uncertain. “Um, hello again.” She held up the tray in her hands. “I’ve brought you dinner.”

I frowned at her. “Normally Remmy brings my food,” I said, referring to the butler.

She blew her hair out of her face and walked inside, setting the tray on the bedside stand. She didn’t quite meet my eye, and her tone was both self deprecating and a bit sarcastic when she responded. “Well, like you said, you paid a lot of money for my services, so I might as well serve a purpose, right?”