

## Chapter 5 – Healing the Broken Alpha

I nodded and went to drag my suitcases to the door that I had rightly guessed led to the walk in closet. Although it wasn't huge, there was still plenty of room to hang my few outfits. I went through the chore of unpacking as quietly as I could. I didn't know where to put my undergarments. He hadn't offered me a drawer in his dresser, and it felt too weird to ask, so I just left them in the suitcase and pushed it to the back of the closet. I took a little bag of personal items into the bathroom, and added my shampoo to the shower stall, and my toothbrush to the cup on the sink. My hair brush and lotion I put in the little cupboard next to his shaving kit. The air in the bathroom was moist and warm, and it smelled delicious, like sandalwood and vanilla. It had a strange effect on me, making me feel unnaturally calm and peaceful. I lingered there for a minute, just breathing it in. It must have been the products he used on his skin, because I had noticed it earlier, when I had been bathing him. I looked at the plastic shower chair and wondered what he had to go through, to get his paralyzed body into the shower and get washed. I wondered if he would ever ask me to help him with that.

Finally I went back out into the room. River had finished eating and had pushed the table and the tray away, and currently had a book in front of his face. I took that as a clear sign that he had no desire to make polite conversation. I returned the tray to the kitchen and then stood around, wondering what I was supposed to do next. River was ignoring me, and there wasn't a television or anything to entertain me in his room.

Finally I went back to the closet. From my second suitcase I removed my mama's quilt and went to the small couch that was pushed against the wall beneath the window.

It wasn't exactly comfortable, but it was long enough to stretch out my legs. I used one of the throw pillows to cushion my head, and wrapped myself in the faded quilt, trying to imagine that it was my mother's arms holding me in a warm, tight hug.

I didn't have to wonder what my mama would think of this situation. She'd be as mad as a wet hornet. She always used to tell me to hold out for my real fated mate. "Don't settle Lenni. Your soulmate is out there, searching for you, and when you find each other, it will be magic."

Well, I sure had settled. Not only had I failed to find my mate, but I had just married a stranger.

But I would just have to make the best of it.

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River

I picked up my book and tried to ignore Lenora moving around my room. She was being careful and quiet, but I was still intensely aware of her presence. I couldn't concentrate on the words on the pages, and instead kept lowering the book to surreptitiously watch her.

What was it that had captivated me about this girl? She was beautiful, but I have always been surrounded by beautiful women. There was such an honesty and an innocence about her that had made me want to claim her the very first day I encountered her. It defied explanation. I would have done it too, but she was too young then, she hadn't even finished her senior year of highschool. I often wondered if she could have been my mate, but back then, she didn't have her wolf yet.

And I didn't have mine now. So there would be no mate bond for me.

But for three years she had become the standard to which I measured all women, and not a single one of them could reach her threshold. I wasn't a saint, and I had taken other she-wolves to my bed, but beyond satisfying my carnal needs, they barely interested me.

Finally, I had claimed her, only to drag her into this mockery of a marriage. She was moving around in my bedroom, putting her things next to mine in the closet. The whole time she kept silent, her brows slightly knit, as though she were deep in thought.

By and by, things grew quiet and still. This time when I lowered the book, I found her curled up on the couch by the window, wrapped up in a ratty old quilt. Her face had relaxed in sleep, her mouth slightly open.

S.hit, I hadn't meant to make her sleep on the couch. I was supposed to tell Remmy to arrange a bed for her, but somehow I'd forgotten. And she was too meek to demand better accommodations. She had a blanket and a pillow, and she'd probably be alright there for the night, but it didn't seem right. She was my wife, my chosen Luna. It was her first night in Blackstone. I couldn't leave her to sleep on an uncomfortable sofa!

After assuring myself that she was really, truly asleep I kicked off my blanket and slipped off the hospital bed. I stood in front of the couch looking down at her for a long moment, feeling something tighten in my chest. Finally, I bent and scooped her up. I couldn't untangle her from the quilt without waking her, so I took it all, like a little she-wolf burrito, and laid her down on the hospital bed.

She made an adorable little grumbling sound and burrowed deeper into her blanket, then she was still. Her soft, even breaths resumed. I climbed into bed beside her. The custom-made hospital bed was extra long and extra wide, so there was enough room for her small body next to mine. I covered both of us with the blanket again and used the remote to shut off the lights and lock the door for the night.

I turned my back to her and adjusted my pillow. I wasn't used to sleeping with anyone in my bed. In the past, when I had brought a woman for pleasure, I made sure she left

immediately after. I never wanted to deal with that uncomfortable and unpleasant morning-after.

I lay awake for a long time listening to her breathe. It was strangely soothing. I tensed when she mumbled something in her sleep. It sounded like, "too hot!" and she began to squirm her way out of the quilt. She freed her arms and flung one over my side. A few minutes later, her foot followed suit, and her whole leg ended up draped over my thighs.

What was I supposed to do? If I shoved her off, she was sure to wake up. And it wasn't as though I was very uncomfortable. On the contrary, I quite enjoyed it. I didn't snuggle or cuddle the women I took to my bed, but Lenora pressed her warm body against my back and relaxed with a contented sound.

Since I had lost my wolf, my body had been cold, like there was a core of ice in the middle. But as Lenora unconsciously shared her body heat with mine, I felt warmth spreading through my body, easing away that incessant chill, and pulling me into a deep, peaceful sleep. The best sleep I'd had since my incident. And maybe the best I'd had in my life.