

Chapter 57 – Healing the Broken Alpha

I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths to calm myself down. I felt dizzy and overwhelmed. It's not that I didn't believe Lenora when she told me she'd met a man in the woods, but it was quite different to come face to face with the man.

It was almost like coming face to face with myself. Although the man was dirty, gaunt, and hairy, there was no mistaking the family resemblance. Immediately I thought either my father or my uncle must have fathered a child. Did they even know? It seemed impossible that they would have left him to wander around in the woods, half-naked and hungry. Even if he was somehow developmentally disabled, they would have made sure he was well taken care of.

Wouldn't they?

I strode back into the packhouse, determined to confront my father, but Lenora put a hand on my arm. "Wait, please."

I would have ignored anyone else, but she looked at me with those pleading, chocolate brown eyes, and I had to stop, I had to listen. She pulled me into the library and closed the door behind us. "Before you tell your father what you saw, I was just wondering..." She grasped her hands together in front of her, in the way she did when she was anxious about something. "Do you have any pictures of your mother?"

I jerked as if she'd pricked me with a needle. I had no memory at all of my mother, and I preferred not to dwell on the thought of the woman who had abandoned me and broken her mate bond with my father. I didn't know her and I didn't want to know her, and truth be told, I was a little ashamed to have come from such a person. "I don't have any photos," I said flatly. "My father took down all the family pictures after she left, because it was too painful for him to look at them. Why do you keep bringing her up?"

She turned toward the window and rubbed her arms like she had a chill. "I don't know, I just have this feeling. I saw a wolf by the river, and I think it was Dardanos mother... and I was thinking..."

I felt the same chill then run up my spine. "You think Dardanos is my brother?"

She stepped closer to the window, and seemed to be searching the tree line, as if she would find the answer in the woods as the afternoon shadows were stretching long into the evening. "What if she was pregnant when she left your father?" She put a hand against the glass. "What if she never really left the pack? Or what if she left, but she was forced to come back, and knew she couldn't go back to your father after breaking the bond?"

Her questions made a sickening kind of sense. It would explain the family resemblance. It might even explain why I had lived my whole life without ever knowing about Dardanos. “But how could they pass all this time without anyone knowing they were here? Surely, someone would have noticed them? Someone would have told my father.”

She turned back toward me, and spread her hands in a helpless gesture. She didn’t know any more than I did. I rubbed my jaw and considered the books on the shelves. No one read them any more, but the staff kept them impeccably dusted. “I think he keeps her photograph in a file in the office,” I said. But if you only saw her as a wolf.

“Maybe,” she said. “Can we see it?”

“What do you mean maybe?”

“Maybe...maybe nothing. There was a woman at my Luna ceremony... She wore a hat with a veil that concealed most of her face. She seemed familiar somehow, and I just thought...”

I ran my hands through my hair in frustration. “And you are just telling me this now?”

“It didn’t seem important at the time! I met hundreds of people at the ceremony!” She retorted defensively.

Taking her hand, I led her back out of the library, down the halls to my father’s office. It should have been my office by now, but rather than displace the old man, I’d chosen to work from my own place. The room was cool and dark, with the drapes still closed over the big windows. I went around behind the desk and started pulling open drawers to the filing cabinets on the walls.

There was supposed to be a file for every registered member of the pack. Many of them held nothing more than a birth record, as they lived out their lives without any happenstance that needed notation in their file. However, as I rifled through the files, I didn’t find my mother’s record in the alphabetical listing, neither under Blackstone, nor under her maiden name of Carson.

I turned to my father’s desk. Did I dare to invade his personal space?

I started pulling open drawers. Most of them gave easily under my hand, revealing pack stationary and office supplies, a bunch of files that needed his attention, accounting files for the pack. Until I reached the bottom left hand drawer. It was locked. But the flimsy metal lock couldn’t stand under my strength, even if I was human. I gave it a good hard yank and broke it.

I’d deal with my father’s ire later.

And there it was, all the way in the back of the drawer, a fat hanging file labeled “Shanna Carson-Blackstone” The file had been worn smooth so that the cardstock felt velvety soft under my hand, like my father had handled it too often. I pulled it out with a deep feeling of dread and sat down in my father’s chair before I flipped it open. Lenora came and stood beside me, laying a comforting hand on my shoulder.

At the top of the pile was a photo that must have been taken at their marking ceremony. My father looked so young, as he would have been barely twenty, and beside him, a tall, willow woman, with long, wavy brown hair. She held his arm and looked up at him as if he was her whole world. I pulled out the photo and held it out to Lenora.

She took it carefully, handling it by the edges and studied the image. “It could have been her, but I’m not sure,” she said. But the woman at the Luna Ceremony was tall, like this one.

I continued flipping through the pile of papers, most of it meaningless to me. Receipts, certificates, a warranty on a freezer. About halfway through, another family photograph slid out, upside down. I flipped it over and felt that cold feeling grip my gut again.

The photo showed my father, smiling proudly, one arm wrapped around my mother, while the other was on the shoulder of a small boy of about five or six. My mother was still smiling up at my father, and she had her hand spread over her belly, which was as round as a watermelon under the pretty floral dress she was wearing.

The boy in the picture could have been me. He resembled me, the same green eyes, the same tousled hair. But it couldn’t be. My mother left when I was two. And, when I picked it up and looked closer, I noticed something a bit off about the boy, a grin just a little too wide, a sort of absence in his gaze as he stared off at something just off to the right of the camera. There was no date on the photo, but I was pretty sure I knew.