

Chapter 59 – Healing the Broken Alpha

I was still reeling from the discovery. It was a lot to take in. My father was a liar, and my mother and the brother I never knew about were living in the forest outside the packhouse like a couple of rogues. It seemed extra cruel and unfair to find that I had an older brother, but to know that my brother had severe developmental disabilities. It was like Dardanos was lost before he was ever found.

It was so overwhelming that I might have come undone, if it were not for Lenora's gentle, steady hand. That my sweet, innocent Luna had forgiven me for what I had done the other night, for being so rough and so cold, for walking away and leaving her as I did, well that only went to prove how amazing she was. When I needed her most, she put aside her very legitimate hurts, and welcomed me, into her arms and into her body, and this time, I made sure I took her slowly, taking great care to her pleasure and her comfort. Lenora came twice before I even let myself slide into her hot, wet center.

If there was really a goddess, then I had to believe she had sent Lenora to me, not only to be my luna, but to be my angel. In her I found peace, peace that transcended all the madness that had happened to me in the last year, all the craziness of the present moment, even all the haunting memories of the past. In Lenora, I felt like a whole man, even without my wolf.

When I woke in the morning, our bodies were still joined, and she, still half asleep, moaned lightly, and began to rock her hips, starting the dance all over again, building to a crescendo before she had even fully opened her eyes. When I poured myself into her yet again, and fell back down against the pillows, I contemplated canceling all my plans for the day, just so I could stay in bed with her.

I slid a hand down her body, which seemed to be glowing in the pink pre-dawn light. How much she had changed in the last months, from an underweight, unhealthy looking girl to a ripe, vibrant woman. I could swear that her breasts were fuller, the nipples larger and darker, and the swell of her belly now soft and rounded instead of concave. It was as though she was growing more beautiful by the day.

I pressed a kiss against her belly before I crawled over her to kiss her lips. "Rise and shine, Nora," I said, kissing her lightly on the lips.

Her eyelids fluttered open and she gave me a sleepy smile.

"Let's get a shower and get started. I want to check the old cellar hole you were talking about yesterday.

I felt her body stiffen slightly beside me, though I might have imagined it. With a sorrowful sigh, she pushed the blankets aside, kicked her feet free of the sheet, and slid out of the bed. She didn't bother with a robe, but walked across the room to the bathroom,

giving me a fine view of her back, and her full, round ass. I scrambled off the bed to follow her, ignoring that nagging voice that told me I was becoming too dependent on her.

I didn't care. I would be dependent on her, if that's what it took to keep the feeling.

After a long shower, we took a simple breakfast, and then walked out into the woods, hand in hand. Anyone watching from the house would have only seen two lovers going for a stroll, and indeed, someone was watching. When I looked back at the house, I saw my step-mother's scowling face in the window of the suite where she had been sleeping of late. She and my father had not been cohabitating since the day Asher had tried to rape Lenora.

Lenora could have traveled much faster on her own, if she had shifted into her wolf. Instead, she walked quietly beside me, as we followed the small stream up the mountainside behind the packhouse. It was neither that fast, nor that deep, but it did run year round from the spring. In the deeper parts small brown trout darted behind rocks, and in the slower, deeper pools, lazy crayfish waited patiently for unsuspecting prey to drift into their reach. Green frogs sunned themselves on the glistening rocks, and a great blue heron stood on the bank, gazing into the water. When we approached, he gave us a disdainful look, before he unfolded his great wings and lifted into the sky.

Higher we climbed, and the vegetation under the trees thinned out, allowing a longer line of sight through the forest. It looked beautiful, bright and inviting, just as I remembered from the days when I used to romp through these woods as a kid, but somehow it felt different. Despite the dappled sunlight dancing on the forest floor, it felt dark and foreboding. I felt like each step was taking me towards something terrible.

Finally we broke into the little clearing of what must have been some early settler's homestead. Low stone walls still divided up the land, and the rough native stone had been fashioned into the cellar hole and chimney of what must have been a small farm house, as well as the foundation of several smaller outbuildings that might have been barns and wood sheds. Now the broken chimney stood like a bony finger pointing toward the sky. Moss grew over the stones, and a set of marble blocks led to a threshold that no longer existed. Instead the steps fell away into a cellar hole that was about five feet deep. Over more than two centuries, it had backfilled with rotting leaves and debris, so that it was now only slightly depressed compared to the surrounding stone foundation.

I lifted my nose, but of course, I could smell nothing but moldering leaves and damp earth. Lenora gave me a sideways look and shook her head. "There's no scent here, only the smell of some herbs...I think they are covering their scent with some kind of herbal wash. But look there," she pointed toward a corner of the cellar hole, where some things had been arranged neatly. A tattered scrap of a blanket, an old, ratty teddy bear, an old children's book, the kind with cloth pages and velcro, buttons, zippers and snaps to manipulate.

I jumped in and examined the items closely. Surely someone had been in the hole, and not too long ago. Back on the marble step, Lenora turned a full circle, examining the area. “Danny?” she called softly. “Are you here? We’ve come to talk to you! I’ve brought you some candy!”

A twig snapped in the distance, and she froze, her eyes darting in that direction. I couldn’t see what she saw, but I saw the way her brow wrinkled up. She touched a finger to her lips, indicating I should keep quiet, and she began to move, slowly and silently, until she disappeared from my sight behind the chimney. Following her lead, I crouched down in the shadows of the corner and waited.

My own breathing sounded too loud in my ears as the steps slowly came closer and closer, until the person was in the clearing, still standing just out of my sight. I wanted to raise my body up, to look over the lip of the cellar hole, to see who had arrived. My gut told me it wasn’t Dardanos, or my mother. Lenora wouldn’t have hid herself from them.

I heard a familiar, impatient huff. “Come on Danny-boy!” A man’s voice called out. “I haven’t got all day! Come out, come out!”

I knew the voice, but I had to see it with my own, disbelieving eyes. I lifted my body slowly, carefully, holding my breath, trying not to make even the slightest noise that his werewolf ears would detect.

There, standing in the clearing, wearing a pair of faded jeans and a red flannel shirt, was my cousin, Zachary Blackstone. He propped his hands on his hips and looked toward the old root cellar, whose oak door was still intact. We’d explored that old, cold excavation when we were kids, and I knew it was empty, save for the spiders and other creepy crawlies that appreciated the cool dark hole. There were some rotted shelves and a wooden barrel, but nothing else of interest.

The door to the root cellar groaned as it opened on ancient hinges, and I saw one large, bare foot as Dardanos made his way out of the small, hobbit sized opening with surprising agility.

“Dan!” Zachary said, his voice taking on a false, playful tone, “Let’s go! I’ve got a job for you!”