

Chapter 6 – Healing the Broken Alpha

It was a handsome face, but it was also careworn, and showed the telltale ravages of his mysterious illness. He was just a stranger to me, but somehow my heart softened toward him for everything he must have suffered. I was startled when his eyes opened suddenly, as though he had been fully awake the whole time and perfectly aware that I was staring at him. But I refused to look away, but rather continued my assessment of his appearance shamelessly. His eyes were such an amazing color of green, like a green mist, and I noticed how the color changed subtly as his irritation grew. There was also a small spot on his left eye that wasn't green at all, but a slice that was dark brown. How very unique.

I had no idea how I had ended up in his hospital bed. I last remembered lying down on the couch. Funny enough I still had my mother's quilt bunched around me, which made me wonder if I had somehow sleep-walked my way into the man's bed. Perhaps my disordered sleep habits had gotten worse. I felt my face flush with embarrassment. "I-I'm sorry Alpha," I stuttered as I untangled myself and slipped from the bed. "I hope I didn't hurt you or-"

I saw his irritation rise to fury like flood waters cresting a river. "Do I seem that fragile, madam? That you would crush me by sleeping beside me?" He practically spit the words at me.

I took another step away from him and lowered my eyes. I had no desire to keep looking into the face of an angry man. "I do not know the nature of your condition, Alpha. I do not know if you are in pain. Forgive me for my ignorance."

Truthfully I felt a little glad that he was confined to his bed. At least I did not have to fear that he would jump out of bed and strangle me for annoying him. I carefully folded my blanket and returned it to the suitcase, and found a change of clothes.

His eyes were still on me when I emerged, and I hesitated. "Do you need anything from me? Should I assist you to get dressed?"

His eyes darkened dangerously, before he turned his face away. "Go take a shower, Lenora," he growled.

I hurried into the bathroom and shut the door behind me as quietly as I could. I reached down and locked the door out of habit, even though I knew River could not get out of the bed to harass me.

One thing was sure though. He was not the weak and sickly man my brother had painted him to be. I very much doubted that River Blackstone was going to leave me a widow any time soon.

I took my time to shower, letting the hot water pound away the tension from my muscles. I realized that I had no soap to wash my body, so I picked up the bottle of body wash that must have belonged to River. I squirted it into my hand and sniffed it.

It was citrusy. Not the sandalwood and vanilla essence I associated with River at all. I felt a little disappointed as I lathered it onto my skin. For reasons I couldn't quite fathom, I wanted to bathe myself in his scent.

Apart from that I realized I had no idea what went on in this man's personal life. This lemony shower gel might belong to another woman for all I knew. Just because he had taken me as his official mate didn't mean anything. He could still have a mistress on the side.

The fact that he was disabled meant nothing. He was still an attractive and virile man, not to mention that he was a powerful Alpha with a huge business holding.

Of course there would be another woman. Or many women.

I shouldn't care. This was just an arranged marriage. I didn't even know River Blackstone, let alone have any feelings for him. What he did outside of our marriage was not my business.

I would have to remain indifferent.

I stepped out of the shower and slowly toweled off. I brushed the tangles out of my long hair and left it loose to air dry. I brushed my teeth and then wiped the fog away from the mirror so that I could examine my appearance.

My brother often mocked me for being ugly. He used to tease me, saying that I must have been switched at birth, because there was no way we had the same parents. "It's no wonder you haven't found your mate," he teased, "he probably took one look at you and ran away!"

More likely he never had the opportunity to find me. Jenson kept me confined to the pack house most of the time. I didn't go out to socialize or attend shifter events. But since my fated mate was probably going to reject me on sight for being weak, unattractive and useless, it hardly mattered. In a strange way my brother was sheltering me from the pain and embarrassment of rejection.

And now that I was tied to River Blackstone, all hope was severed. He would mark me, and that was that. I sighed in resignation and pulled open the door.

With the morning light streaming in through the tall windows, the room looked less gloomy than it had last night. The natural stone in the walls actually glittered in the light, as they contained some sort of reflective mineral. Still, the room was quite bare, without

any decorations or personal touches. It was dominated by the hospital bed, and the minimum of furnishings.

River was obviously still on the bed, and he now had an expensive looking laptop set up on the rolling side table. He seemed to have brushed out his hair and somehow managed to shave his face while I was in the shower. The look he gave me was cold and indifferent. "Go take breakfast with the family," he said dismissively. And then he turned his attention back on his screen and ignored me.

Without a word I went to the door and let myself out of the room. I should have been all too relieved to escape from his dark, oppressive presence. Instead I felt a little sad as I navigated the halls back to the dining room that one of the maids had showed me yesterday.