

## Chapter 7 – Healing the Broken Alpha

“Just have a seat,” Darian said, gesturing to the empty chair next to Asher. I tried to slide the chair further away from him before I sat down. I gave a timid smile of thanks and waited while the servers brought out the food. A plate of eggs, sausage, and fresh fruit was placed before me. It looked and smelled delicious but my nervous stomach was dulling my appetite. I had barely choked down two bites when Darian asked me, “Did River... treat you kindly last night?”

Had he? I took a moment to stir my tea and compose my thoughts. “He was not unkind,” I finally replied. I could hardly tell my new father in law that his son had been cold and harsh. River seemed to despise me, and yet he had allowed me to sleep in his bed. My Alpha mate’s mood was very unpredictable.

“River has gone through a lot in the last year. Please be patient with him.” Darian said. “He is not a bad man. Even if he is unable to walk, he will be a good mate to you.”

I thought I heard Asher snort into his eggs. When I glanced at him he merely smirked at me and reached for his glass of orange juice.

“So, Miss Moore, what do you do?” Gayle asked the question innocently, tilting her head toward me, but I immediately sensed it was a set up.

“I do not have a career,” I murmured, feeling those two bites already looking for a way to exit my stomach.

“Oh, what did you study then?”

I ducked my chin, wishing I could slide beneath the table. “I don’t have any formal education,” I admitted, feeling my cheeks burn red with shame. “After my father died...”

I couldn’t tell them that my brother had refused to allow me to leave for college. He used the excuse that there was no money left to pay my tuition, but then he used to say, “There’s no point in educating an idiot.”

“Well, I was thinking that perhaps you should be employed at Blackstone.” Darian said, pouring himself more coffee. “It would be good to have you there as River’s representative, while he is recovering.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Asher objected. “She just admitted that she has no education and no experience. She will only embarrass herself.”

“I agree,” Gayle set her fork down decisively, “Sending an incompetent woman into the corporate office will not help the Blackstone image.”

Although the things they were saying were derogatory, I couldn't help but agree with them. Blackstone Innovations was a billion dollar international company. I probably couldn't even qualify as a janitor in the complex, let alone pretend to be an executive.

"She might as well start learning now." Darian said, apparently dismissing the others' valid concerns. "She can begin as my intern. And then, perhaps start taking some business classes online. Blackstone would pay for your tuition. Would you be interested, Miss Moore?"

If I had my choice, I wouldn't choose to study business, but if Blackstone was willing to pay for my education, why shouldn't I take advantage of the opportunity? And besides, what else was I going to do with my time? I swallowed down the contents of my stomach. "I would be very glad to work for Blackstone, Alpha."

"No need for such formality. You can call me Darian, or just Dad now. I'll talk to River about it later, but I'm sure he will agree."

I pushed a ball of melon around my plate. I couldn't imagine calling the man "Dad," but the fact that he had offered made me feel a little warm and nostalgic inside. My own father had been gone for years, but I still had that hole in my heart.

I could feel Gayle's disapproval hovering over me like a spirit, and Asher seemed to have lost his appetite. I stabbed the watermelon and put it into my mouth. Somehow I doubted that River would approve this plan, so there was no point getting my hopes up.

Once the meal was finished, the servers appeared to clear the plates, and the family stood to start their workday. Gayle, I learned, was the head of the advertising department at Blackstone, while Darian had come out of retirement to act as the interim CEO. While the Old Alpha ran the company, Asher had been given the responsibility of running the pack.

I quietly admired the way the family had stepped up to help after River was incapacitated. I wanted to ask questions about River's condition, but there hasn't been an opening in the conversation where I could interject.

Perhaps it would be better if I asked River myself. Would he tell me, or would he just turn his head away from me and stare at the wall?

"I'll walk you back to your room," Asher said, appearing beside me in the hallway.

"Thank you, but it's not necessary, I know the way." He had made me feel uncomfortable all through breakfast, the last thing I wanted was to walk with him.

"Let me walk with you," he said, and there was something low and threatening in his voice. His hand descended on the small of my back, and began to push me down the passageway. When I tried to sidestep from his grasp, his fingers dug into my flesh.

I was grateful when I spotted the door to River's room. I didn't like the way that Asher was touching me, and I just wanted to get away from him. But just before I reached for the doorknob, he pushed me up against the wall. My back scraped against the cold stone, and I felt my stomach lurch dangerously. Asher trapped me there with a hand on either side of my body.

"I know my crippled brother can't satisfy you," he said in a low, suggestive tone. He leaned closer and pressed his nose against my neck. "When you want a real man, you come to me."

I narrowed my eyes on him. "You are a very bad brother," I said coldly. "How dare you proposition me right outside of the Alpha's room?" I was trembling, and my inner wolf was shifting nervously, ready to come to the surface if he continued to threaten me.

Asher pushed back from the wall and laughed at me. It was a cruel laugh. "The offer still stands, sweetheart. My rooms are just down the hall and to the left."