

Chapter 9 – Healing the Broken Alpha

I had never been so brazen in all my life! To think that I had touched his body so intimately! I almost felt guilty for taking advantage of a disabled man, but if his huge erection was any indication, he had enjoyed my attention just fine.

I felt uneasy leaving his bedroom. I didn't want to run into the Alpha's half brother again. I didn't like Asher, and I didn't trust him. His behavior toward me after breakfast spoke volumes about his character. Not only did he not respect me, he clearly did not respect his brother or the authority of his alpha. Even if our mating was arranged and our situation was unconventional, for the pack's beta to try and touch the alpha's mate was inconceivable!

And if the beta has such loose morals in his personal business, then how was he handling the pressures and temptations of pack business?

I desperately wanted to tell River what his brother had said to me in the hallway, but I knew I couldn't. It was my first day in Blackstone, and River would think I was deliberately trying to sew discord within his family. He would certainly believe his brother before he listened to an outsider.

I could only hope that Asher had gotten my message loud and clear. I wasn't interested.

I carried the tray into the kitchen. Breakfast had already been cleared and the kitchen had been cleaned. The room was empty, so I went about preparing a new meal for my mate by myself. He was a big man and he was still recovering from a serious illness, it wouldn't do for him to skip meals.

Opening the industrial sized refrigerator, I poked around at the available ingredients. I might not have had a good education or an impressive job, but I had a few useful skills, and cooking was one of them.

My mother used to say that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach. I wasn't entirely sure that River Blackstone even had a heart, but it couldn't hurt to try. I whipped up a crust less quiche, fried some bacon in the air fryer, and put some fresh blueberry muffins in the oven to bake. While the items cooked I cleaned up the kitchen and washed my dirty dishes.

In just an hour's time I had a hot, fresh meal arranged on the tray, and I was marching back up the stairs. With all the flights of stairs I was climbing up and down in this pack house, my legs should be toned and gorgeous in a few weeks. This time I found the door unlocked and I let myself in.

He was on the bed, laptop in front of him, phone pressed to his ear, some papers spread out beside him. He barely glanced at me as I entered the room. I tried to be quiet and inconspicuous as I arranged the tray and pushed it close to his bedside.

“I don’t care if it’s the latest and greatest in AI automation, the answer is no. We will continue to manufacture our products by hand, and provide secure jobs for our pack community. It’s not always about the revenue, Tyler.” I heard his stomach grumble and he eyed the tray. “Okay, I need to go, there is something urgent I need to attend to at home—.”

River cut the call abruptly. “What’s all this?” He lifted the cover from the tray.

“You didn’t eat breakfast,” I said nervously, “So I thought...”. Suddenly I wasn’t so sure this was a good idea. He had not requested more food, and I didn’t know him well enough to know his likes and dislikes. I had probably just opened myself up to more criticism and ridicule.

“You made this? For me?”

I looked down at the floor and nodded. I heard him pull the tray closer and hazarded to look up. It seemed that the hard look on his face had softened, and his lips were curving into an almost-smile. He picked up the fork and stabbed it into the quiche, and took an experimental bite. I cringed and waited. What if it was terrible? What if he hated it?

Instead he hummed in appreciation and dug into the food with enthusiasm. He had cleared most of the tray before he spoke again. He gave me a long, considering look. “You know you don’t have to cook for me. We have staff to do that work.”

I nodded again, fighting the urge to squirm.

“But I’m glad you did.” He set his fork down with a satisfied sigh. “That was the best meal I’ve had in months. Thank you, little mate.”

Little mate. I wasn’t sure if I found that cringy or endearing.

Before I could think of anything else to say, there was another knock at the door, and I jumped. I was half afraid it would be the alpha’s brother again, so I strategically moved around, putting River and his hospital bed between me and the door. However, the door opened and two unfamiliar men began carrying in the parts and pieces to another bed. When I sent River a questioning gaze he merely shrugged. “It’s better than sleeping on the couch.”

I could have made do with a cot, or something, but the bed that was being assembled was huge. It had four big posts and a special mattress to accommodate the extra large frame. Once the men had tightened down all the bolts, one of the maids appeared with fresh linen to make it up. Before she had finished, my new father-in-law strode into the room.

He didn't bother knocking, and I could tell by the way that River stiffened that it bothered him.

"Well, my boy, I see things are moving right along," Darian said, with a speculative look at the big bed.

River ignored his comment. "What do you need, Dad?"

"I came to talk to you about taking your mate into the office tomorrow."

Tomorrow? So soon? I felt panic crawling up my spine.

River's usual dark frown was back in place. "The office? What for?"

Darian again outlined his idea to have me present at Blackstone Innovations as River's representative. "She's your mate, I think it's prudent that she has an understanding of the family business," His father said, pulling up the chair and sitting beside the hospital bed. "Besides that, I think it will settle some of the unease in the chatter if the Luna is seen now and again in the corporate offices."

"I hardly think that's necessary," his tone was as dark as his countenance, and I felt my spirits sink a little. He didn't want me in the office any more than his stepmother and his half brother did. He probably also thought that I was too ignorant to be useful. I knew he wouldn't approve of this idea! I lowered my head and curled my fingers into my palms so that he wouldn't see the expression on my face.

"River, I don't think you understand the situation," Darian continued in a serious tone. "If we don't give the board some reassurance that things are stable and strong, there is a very real possibility that there could be a vote of no confidence." I felt Darian's eyes on me. "She'll start as my apprentice and learn the ropes. I'll keep an eye on her. Its just a stop-gap measure, until you are well enough to resume your full responsibilities within the company."

The way he said it, it sounded like he was going to be babysitting me like a small child.

River drummed his fingers on the rail of the bed and was silent for a long moment as he considered it. "Okay, but only part time. Three days a week." He turned his head toward me, and I could not read his expression. "I can also teach her the ropes of the business, while I am working from home."

Darian's face brightened and relaxed. "Excellent idea! I hadn't even thought of that! Fine then, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays she can come with me." He rubbed his hands together. "It will be good to have an assistant, too. I'm getting too old for this stuff."

I wasn't sure if I should feel relieved or happy or angry. I felt like a hungry dog who had just been thrown a bone to keep me from whining at the door.

