

Mistake – 32

I pulled on the restraints, growling in anger. How they could hold me down. I'm a werewolf! No cloth cuffs should be able to keep me tied to the bed. This was unbelievable. Alpha Ryan had Brook, and here I was, strapped to a hospital bed. Who knows what he was doing to her? It was my fault. I should have been faster. I failed my mate, and I had to fix it!

My whole body ached with my wolf being so close to the surface. My nails had grown longer and darker, while dark hair peppered my arms. The new sharpness of my teeth cut the insides of my mouth, and I tasted blood. It only made the wolf even more anxious. I pulled on the cuffs again, to no avail, and howled in fury.

"If you want out of bed, you're going to need to calm down, Ryder," Dad demanded from the door. His face was uncharacteristically hard. In his eyes, I saw the wolf and something that looked a lot like fear.

I stilled, confused. Was Dad afraid? Did my uncle do something to Brook? "How am I supposed to calm down? He has my mate."

"Yes, and unless you want to hand him the pack and kill your mate, you need to calm down."

What he was saying made sense, but every fiber in my body screamed at me to get free at any cost. With a roar, I tried to rip free of the restraints, but again I wasn't able to. I fell back on the bed, panting with sweat. Now way was I going to give up. I was an alpha, and I would save my mate. With my teeth clenched, I tried again, and again, and again until my wrists were so raw they bled. Sweat drenched the bed and me. Exhausted, my wolf returned to the recesses of my psyche.

"Finished?"

I growled at him, but I was too tired to do more. I was a failure. What kind of alpha was I? I couldn't get out of one stupid bed! I failed Brook, and I failed my pack. Eventually, I nodded.

"Good," Dad said, walking over and sitting next to me. "Ryder, what are the rules for being an alpha?"

Seriously? Did he want to rub my failure in my face? "Dad—"

"What are the rules?"

I sighed, trying to swallow down the shame. "Always be fair and just. Alpha isn't a king, but a guardian. We serve the pack, not the other way around. The good of the pack must come first."

"Our pack is almost two hundred members strong and around sixty of those members are under the age of eighteen. The elderly make up another twenty something members. This means the civilian population, the children, and the older generation sum up half the pack. They depend on us to keep them safe, to protect them and we must make our decisions thinking of them."

My heart stopped as I stared at him. He wasn't suggesting... Dad wasn't considering sacrificing Brook for the pack, was he? "Dad—"

"Go on. Say the rest."

I licked my lips, hoping I was wrong. "An alpha must be strong and true."

He nodded, his expression grim. "Do you understand what that means?"

"Take care of yourself, so you're strong. Be true."

"And what does it mean to be true?"

"You don't lie to the pack," I replied.

He gave me a small smile. "Not quite. Alphas must be strong, but not physically, or at least not just physically. It refers to all kinds of strengths. The strength to admit you've made a mistake. Strength to lie down one's pride. The strength to know when to fight or when to kneel. And the strength to keep going despite how dismal the outcome looks."

"No," I growled. "If being a good alpha means I have to let Uncle Ryan keep Brook, then I don't want to be a good alpha."

"Calm, Son. I'm not finished. There is the other part — being true, remember. Being true doesn't always refer to being honest in the sense that you're speaking of. Despite being in the pack's service, we must also remain true to ourselves. If we betray what's most valuable to us for the pack, we will only foster resentment and hate."

"What are you trying to say here, Dad?"

"Ryder, today you're going to bear some of the weight of being alpha. You're going to do things you may not like to ensure the safety of the pack and your own. Why do you think Ryan took Brook? He could have taken you instead of her. Imagine, the future alpha as a hostage."

I paused, realizing he was right. My uncle could've taken me. That trick with the dirt took me out of the fight. "Why didn't he?"

"Ryan is a sociopath. He's going to use Brook to manipulate us into giving the pack to him. Ryan is going to do everything in his power to make you lose control because it would push me to the edge. He knows I would do anything for my family."

Something in his expression turned my blood to ice. "What's going on, Dad?"

"I need you to master yourself, Ryder," he said, a hint of desperation in his voice. "I need you to master yourself for the pack, for me, and Brook. We all need you to stay strong." He handed me my phone. On it was a text from my uncle.

Such a pretty little mate you have, Ryder. Despite just being a human, she has a lot of defiance and strength in her. Maybe that's why my son is so fond of her. I can't seem to get him off her for very long. If you don't want your precious little mate spoiled by my son, give me what I want.

My blood boiled, and everything went red. I didn't realize my grip had tightened on the phone until I heard the screen crack. I would kill him. No idea how I would do it, but I would kill my uncle for this and if Mike... if he... I'd kill him too.

"Ryder," Dad said. His voice was sharp, making me look up from the damaged phone to him. "To save Brook and the pack, you need to dominate yourself — strong and true. We have the upper hand here if you can do that." As he spoke, he removed the restraints on my arms.

"How do we have the upper hand?"

"We know what he wants, and as long as Ryan thinks he can get it, Brook will be safe."

"Safe?" Didn't sound like she was safe to me.

"He'll hurt her, yes, but he won't kill her. He needs her to get the pack. Now here's the plan. We need to let Ryan think everything's going according to his plan. You'll have to stay out of sight while we spread rumors you've lost it. Soon, I say two days tops, he's going to contact me for negotiation. He'll demand I hand over the pack, but we'll both know I can't do that, so Ryan will offer an exchange — me for Brook, or perhaps he'll wait for me to suggest it."

"Wait, you can't do that. It will leave the pack without a leader."

"It's what he expects. He expects I'd do anything to save you, even hand myself to him. We're going to play that card, leading him to the idea he's forced the pack into a weakened state, and he'll lower his guard. When he does, I'll be right there to stop him for good."

Did I just hear him right? Was he talking about... killing someone? "Dad, you're not—"

"I've done it before, and it has to be done. I don't like it, but he's given us no other choice. Despite how much I loathe the man, I've tried to negotiate with him for years. I told you, sometimes you'll need to do things for the safety and well-being of the pack you will not like. I have to do this; for you, for Brook and for our pack. Do you understand?" There was something desperate in his voice and face. It was like he needed me to understand so he could do what he needed to do.

"Yeah, Dad, I understand."

He smiled at me and patted my shoulder a couple of times. "Don't worry so much. Everything is going to be okay. I do know what I'm doing. You just keep to your part and Brook will be home soon."

"And you too, right Dad?" I insisted. All of this made me realize how unprepared I was to be alpha. I was nineteen and an idiot. I would've fallen for my uncle's trap. The pack needed Dad as alpha more than me.

"I will do my best, Son."

"Alright. So what do we do next—" I started, then remembered. "Andy, is he okay?" God, I was such a dick! I should've asked about him sooner.

Dad grimaced, and I felt my chest tighten. "He'll survive. We arrived

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 +20 BONUS

soon enough to unblock his trachea and prevent suffocation, but his bones had healed over in the broken state. It had to be re-broken, and this caused some major nerve damage. The damage was extensive, and we're not sure just how long it'll take for his body to repair itself. As of right now, Andy is paralyzed from the waist down, and the estimates for total recovery put it at a couple of years." 

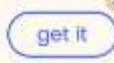
Relief and sadness filled me in equal measure. Andy was going to hate being confined to a wheelchair. He was an on the go, outdoorsy, sports type of guy. "Can I see him? Or can he come to see me?" I hoped I wouldn't get to be around my friends during this whole time.

"He's still pretty out of it, but as soon as he's able, Kara will bring him to see you. Now I have to get to work and set this plan into motion. We've got a Luna to get back."

"Dad," I said as he turned to leave. "I hope I can be as good as alpha as you are someday."

He now smiled a genuine smile at me. "I'm sure you will be."

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