

**Mistake - 34**

The drive was quicker this time. I still continued to pray when the van stopped. Mike's dad pushed open the door and pulled me out. Again, he didn't even let me have the chance to gain my footing. As I looked around, I realized I had no idea where I was. We stood in a field of wild grass with a cliff to the right of me. I heard water, so at the base had to be a lake or a river of some sort. Mike and three of the alpha's men came with us. They all seemed to wait for someone and as I heard an approaching car, again dread filled me.

Please let it not be Ryder's dad.

A black SUV stopped not too far from the red van and I slumped in despair as I saw Blue Crescent's alpha step out of the passenger side. Ryder wasn't with him, but four others came with him. Some I recognized but didn't have names for. They walked up to us until there were perhaps five feet between us.

"Oh, no Ryder? I would've thought he'd be dying to see his mate," Alpha Ryan said with a sneer. He looked down at me and the sneer grew. "Perhaps we've overestimated your worth, human."

Ryder's dad cleared his throat, adjusting his suit. "My son is... indisposed at the moment," he said, then his eyes met mine. They held a strange look, but I had no idea what it meant. "But he would've been here if possible."

My throat tightened as Alpha Ryan laughed a cruel, bitter laugh. "Or maybe he doesn't want my son's sloppy seconds?"

Anger replaced my dread. This was Alpha Ryan's plan. I wouldn't let him use me like this. I opened my mouth to tell Alpha Brent nothing happened, but grunted as the alpha squeezed my arm so hard I thought

he might crush it.

Ryder's dad's expression darkened as his eyes did that icy glow thing. "Enough, you asked me here to negotiate, so let's negotiate."

Alpha Ryan loosened his grip on my arm. "Of course, you want the human and you already know what I want, Brent."

"I can't just hand over the pack to you, Ryan. Be reasonable for once in your damn life."

Mike's dad grinned. "So, if you won't give me the pack, what is it you're willing to give me?"

"An exchange — me for Brook."

My heart stopped at those words, then pounded in my chest like some drummer gone wild. Mike said this would happen. He said it would be the start of everything, leaving the people I cared for dead. I couldn't let this happen. I had to stop it somehow. "Alpha Brent," I started, wincing when Mike's dad's grip on my arm tightened.

When Ryder's dad looked at me, there was a resolved sadness in his eyes. He offered me a small smile. It was then I realized he knew what the alpha was doing. He knew, and he was going to let it happen. And all for me? If he did that, no one could stop Mike's dad. No, I wasn't worth this. This was a price that he couldn't pay. It was too high. "Alpha Brent," I started again, ignoring the pressure on my arm from Mike's dad's grip. "I can never thank you enough for what you've done for me and for my family. Sorry, I wasn't more appreciative. I'm sorry about leaving, about Andy, about everything."

"You're welcome and you've done nothing wrong, Brook. None of this is your fault."

"How touching," Alpha Ryan jeered. "I agree—" he said, but I cut him off.

He glared at me with angry irritation, but I ignored him. I focused only on Ryder's dad. I didn't want the alpha to see what I had planned. For this to work, I needed the element of surprise. "Tell Ryder that I'm sorry; I wanted to give him that chance. Also, I am sorry about all this, but I know my worth and I'm not worth this. It's too much."

"What are you talking about, stupid human?" Mike's dad snapped, but Alpha Brent's eyes shot wide.

"Brook, no," he shouted, but it was too late.

Turning, I tackled the alpha. With the element of surprise, I knocked him off balance. I kept pushing him until he stepped off the edge of the cliff. He teetered, trying to regain his balance. Mike's dad growled at me. His grip on my arm tightened as he struggled. "If I go, you go, human!" His voice was full of malice and smug conviction.

I grinned at him. "That's the plan." With a scream, I threw myself into him and sent us both tumbling off the cliff.

For a moment, I felt like I was flying. It was kind of exhilarating. Then the world tilted, and I lost perspective of up and down. My stomach lurched as I felt the fall. Everything became a kaleidoscope of blurred colors and shapes. Sharp bursts of pain flared through me but came and went. It was hard to tell what I had hit or where.

With a hard jolt, Mike's dad and I hit the ground. It was the worst pain I had ever experienced. It was as if everything inside of me squished into a fraction of the original size. Blood filled my mouth, dribbling out the side of my lips. Every nerve in my body screamed in agony, but I couldn't move a single muscle. After a lot of effort, I lifted my head a little. I was lying on top of Alpha Ryan. The remains of his head were the most

grotesque thing I'd ever seen. His lifeless eyes stared up at the sky, and part of me was horrified. I had killed him.

I laid my head back down on his unmoving chest, realizing there was water all around us, but I didn't feel it. Trying to swallow, I coughed, choking from the blood that kept filling my mouth. I was broken and dying. It wouldn't be long, I thought. At least, my mom was safe and with Harry. Would she even miss me? I couldn't help but wish she was here with me. I didn't want to be alone, but I was always alone. Why should death be any different?

My vision blurred with tears. My life didn't flash before my eyes like they say it does. So I thought of Ryder. I regretted not telling him I did like him and his brand of craziness. I also regretted he'd never known I had stopped thinking about running to California. He'd never know I would've stayed with him. A choked sob escaped me. To him, I would always be the one trying to run away, and that was the worst part of this dying thing. 1

As my vision darkened, I pictured Ryder's face. I was lucky he ever thought I was worthy of being with him. It was getting harder to breathe and fear trickled through me. My thoughts turned to my dad. Was this what it was like for Dad when he died? Was he afraid, or was it quick? Would he be waiting for me? Everything was dark now, and my thoughts were sluggish. I didn't want to die!

I tried to fight the numbness as a strange buzzing filled my ears. A spark of hot, burning pain tore through me, and if I could've screamed, I would have. Yet as a flicker of hope shot through me, the numbness returned, devouring it and my willpower. I was powerless to resist it. Goodbye Ryder...