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Ryder

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I laid on the bed next to Brook. Mom had put her in a coma. Apparently, it would help her heal better. "You would not believe how Dean is pampering me. I swear it's hilarious," I told her. "Ever since you came back and I could be 'okay' again, he has been asking about my health and even brought me my lunch today. The guy is terrified with the idea of something happening to me and that he'll have to be the alpha."

I continued to rattle on, hoping to distract myself when all I wanted was Brook to open her eyes to tell me she was going to be okay. When Harry and Brook's mom came in, I sat up. It was awkward lying next to her with her mom in the room. "Hi," I said, rubbing a kink out of my shoulder. Man, I hated these beds.

"Hello Ryder," Brook's mom said with a tight smile. She smoothed down Brook's hair, although it looked fine. Must be a mom thing. Mine did it all the time to me too.

A moment later, Mom joined us. "Good, you're all here."

"What's going on?" I asked, trying not to sound as worried as I felt.

Mom gave me a brief smile. "The full moon is tomorrow, and plans need to be made," she told me and turned her attention to Harry and his mate. "Brook's recovery is going well, but as expected, she's still not healed enough that I feel comfortable with her first shift. My team and I have devised a plan, and with your okay, we'll begin moving ahead tomorrow evening a few hours before moonrise."

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Harry and Brook's mom nodded, waiting for Mom to continue.

"If we give Brook a super dose of muscle relaxants and painkillers, she will suffer much less trauma during the shift, especially with Ryder with her."

Brook's mom interrupted her. "Wait, how can he be with her. He's going to shift like the others and how would he help?"

"He'll be here in his wolf form and Brook will sense Ryder near, and it will help keep her calm. However, we'll be prepared to introduce her into a deeper coma if need be."

"Is that safe, putting her under like that?" Harry asked, holding his mate's hand. "And why can't you silver her to prevent the shift?"

"It'll be safe. We can put her fully on life support if needed and I want to avoid silver, if at all possible. While the typical silver-filled plastic zip ties prevent a shift, it's stressful on the werewolf, which is something we have to avoid at all costs."

Harry looked at Brook's mom and squeezed her hand. "It's your call. What do you want to do?"

She shook her head. "I don't know if I can make an informed decision on this. What do you think, Harry? This is your people, your world. Does this sound reasonable or like it will work?"

Harry kissed her on her temple. "It's our world, Nan, but yes, this sounds like Brook's best chance. I think we should do it."

"Okay, do what you have to do, Emily."

"I'll begin the preparations immediately. I promise I'm going to take the

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best possible care of your daughter," Mom told them.

"You?" Harry asked, looking as confused as I was.

I'm not a doctor, but I'm pretty sure you needed hands for what she had to do. Mom gave us a tight smile. "I'm going to silver myself, so I may see the whole procedure through. Painkillers and I'll be fine."

Mom sounded like she could say that to herself as much as us. Silvering on a full moon was far from pleasant. "You don't have to do that Mom."

"Yes, I do. She risked her life to save my mate and children. The least I can do is share a little pain with her tomorrow night to make sure everything goes as it should. Now if you have no more questions, I'm going to get everything ready."

As the full moon came closer, the tension grew. I hardly slept or ate. My wolf was close to the surface. I was an anxious mess.

"Ryder, it's about time to change," Mom said when the evening drew close. Dad was with her. "Before Nancy and Harry arrive, we should discuss something. While I know you won't harm Brook, I am a little concerned about the staff. Try to focus on the fact everyone here is going to do everything they can to save Brook. None is a threat."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"We can be more instinctive when in wolf form. Despite what instinct may tell you, doing nothing will be better than doing something. If you can't help yourself, Gwen has a sedative especially for you ready."

Now I got the point. If I got in the way, I was out. "Don't worry I won't."

Mom smiled and gave me a nod. Nancy and Harry arrived shortly after.

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She went through the process with them again. When she finished, she gave Brook the muscle relaxants and painkillers. "Alright, every wolf out. I don't want any shifting in this room. Ryder, that means you, too. Go get changed and get back here," Mom said.

"Good luck, Em," Dad said, kissing her cheek and left with Harry.

I wanted to kiss Brook too, but it was just too weird, so I just left to shift.

There was something liberating in wolf form. I shook out my fur before nudging the bathroom door open with my snout. A chorus of howls had already begun outside of others who'd already shifted. I started to reply with my howl but remembered I was in a hospital hallway. There were other patients here beside Brook and they all needed their rest.

I admit I was a little disappointed I couldn't be out there, but tonight my mate needed me. I trotted towards Brook's room and jumped up on her bed. Sweat beaded along her brow and the edges of her mouth turned downward. I look over at my mother. She seemed anxious and scratched at the zip tie around her wrist. When Mom saw me watching, she gave me a tight smile. "It's beginning. Stay close to her. Keep her calm if you can."

Worry peppered through my mind, but I snuggled up against Brook, laying my head next to her shoulder. The beeping of the machine beeped more often, and I glanced up at my mother. She licked her lips in a nervous gesture as she kept her attention on the machine and many others. Mom made adjustments here and there. I turned my attention to my mate. Brook's face looked more strained than before.

I caught a hint of fear coming from her. I gave off a worried whine and rested my head against her shoulder once more. The beeping kept going faster and faster, and soon other machines started making more noises. I scented more fear coming from Brook and mom's expression was

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serious.

"I didn't think something like this was possible," she said, as one nurse showed her something.

With a whine, I pleaded for her to explain.

"Her body is trying to fight against the shift, even to the point her antibodies are nuts."

"Can she somehow sense the shift coming?" A nurse asked.

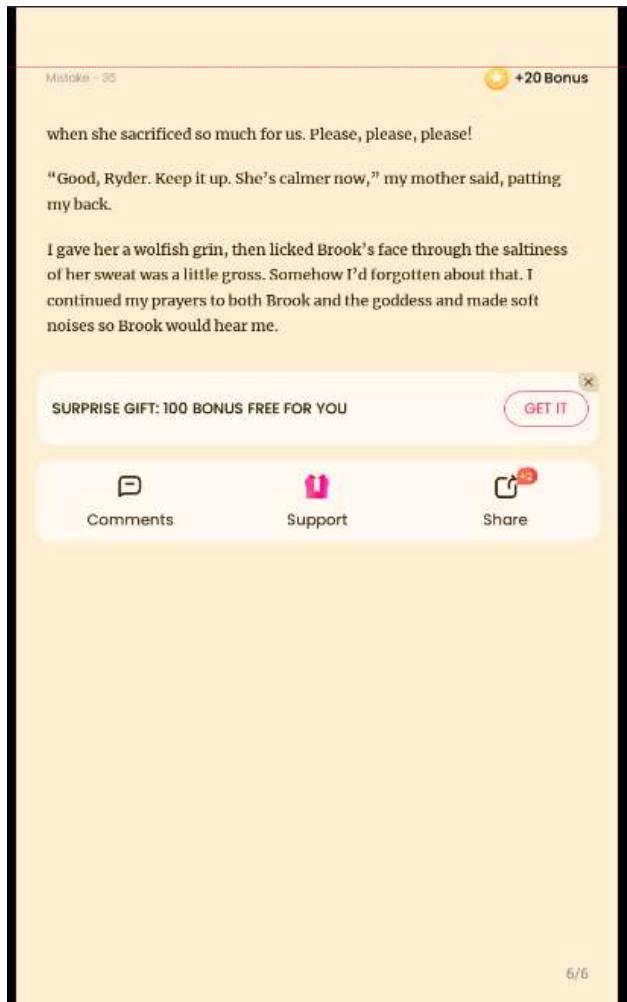
"It's possible. Brook fears something. I can smell it. Either way, if she keeps going through this level of stress, she'll never survive."

My heart jumped up into my throat, and I let out a fearful whine.

"Alright. Let's do this," Mom began, then looked at me. "We have five minutes, Ryder. Do anything and everything you can to assure her," she said, then looked at the others. "If he can't help her calm down, then we take her down as far as we can."

I inched up towards Brook's face and brushed my snout against her cheek. It was cool with sweat and only made me more worried. I huddled up as close as I could to her, hoping maybe my body heat would keep her from getting too cold. I made a small, pleading whine; begging her to calm down. She was alright and safe. I was alright and safe. The annoying beeping slowed down some, and my mother gave me a look of approval.

Don't be afraid, Brook. You're just changing into one of us. I thought with all my strength as I whimpered as I brushed my head against hers. Please, be strong just a little more. Please, Brook. I can't lose you! With a pitiful whine, I sent my thoughts to the goddess next. Goddess, please protect my mate. Please help her through this. She can't die now. Not



Commented [Ma1]: