Chapter 35

"There they are," Sebastian whispered in my ear as we strolled through the park.

It had been about two weeks since I mentioned that I would like to meet his family. Now it was finally happening and I wished that I had just kept my mouth shut. Not that I didn't want to know more about him, but more for the fact that I hoped that they would know less about me.

I didn't think I was an awful person or even an unlikable one. I thought high enough of myself, I suppose, but meeting in-laws was always a terrifying experience. What if they thought lowly of me? What if they altered his opinion of me? It was less common in the werewolf realm because of the strength of mate bonds, but that didn't mean it couldn't happen. I could easily remember how much I had hated Sebastian because of false information. It could reasonably go the other way.

I was about to open my mouth and suggest we go back to the car, keeping my eyes on a man and woman seated on a picnic blanket. My words would've been invalid if they had come out because there was a loud shout, almost like a battle cry, and arms were wrapped around Sebastian's torso. An unseen opponent was trying to take him down to the ground as he let out a grunt, obviously his weight to stay upright.

"Seb!" I shrieked, my mind filled with all of the people he had wronged. Dear God, someone had rattled us out and now they were coming for him.

I didn't think. I lunged forward. I used my nails like talons, digging into the attacker's arms with all my might, hoping to draw blood and loosen his hold. When the arms stayed tight around my mate I decided the next best thing I could do was bite down.

"Hey, hey, easy," Sebastian soothed with a laugh, stopping me with my jaw unhinged and my teeth exposed. "Humans are looking, Char."

At his words I realized that he was right. My screaming had certainly drawn some attention. Thank God I had had the good sense not to shi at the first sight of danger. We would've been in a very di erent situation very fast.

Sebastian reached behind his back and did something I couldn't see that caused his attacker to his in pain. The arms released and there was a heavy thump on the ground.

"Charlotte, I would like you to meet my brother, Colin. Colin, this is my mate, Charlotte," he introduced.

Colin was at least a few years younger than Sebastian. While I assumed Sebastian was in his mid to late twenties I had to guess that Colin was in his early twenties, maybe just fresh out of high school. While Sebastian had filled out his form completely with tight muscles Colin was thin and lean. He looked a lot like what I seen in Sebastian's hockey photo, brown eyes, brown hair, so tall it was almost absurd. He was what Sebastian would've been if he hadn't been cursed.

"Nice to meet you," Colin grunted, managing to get back on his feet. "And thanks for not biting me."

"Oh my God," I gasped, clapping a hand over my mouth. Here I was, all worried about first impressions, then to try to physically attack his brother a moment later. I was certain it would take a year for all the warmth to leave my cheeks now. "I'm so sorry."

"All good," Colin replied, glancing away.

"I didn't hurt you did I? God, I'm such an idiot. Really, I am so sorry."

"It's all good," Colin repeated. "We all know the risk with him. I guess it's kind of comforting to know that he has someone who will try and defend him, but you should probably work on your tactics a little bit."

It didn't matter how dismissive Colin was of the fact that I would've broken his arms if I could've, I still felt awful. Sebastian saw the horror and distress in my eyes and tossed a comforting arm around my shoulders.

"Colin and I fight a lot harder than biting each other and trying to claw skin o ," Sebastian teased, his lips close to my ear. I don't know if he did it on purpose but the closeness made me shiver. I was so focused on his closeness I almost didn't realize that my feet were carrying me towards a couple seated on a blanket.

"You must be Charlotte," a woman squealed, unfolding her legs and leaping to her feet when she saw us approaching. She was all petite and full of flair and when she was nearly running towards me with open arms,

Nervousness twisted my heart and my muscles tensed in anticipation. Sebastian released me in that moment and threw his arms around his mother in a tight hug, kissing the top of her head. For the time being I was saved but I saw his mother poke her head around one of his bulky arms, trying to catch another glimpse of me. Still, she sank into her son's arms like it had been much too long.

Sebastian taking the blow, gave me a brief chance to collect myself and survey the people I was going to be trying so hard to impress. And it only made me feel worse.

They all looked like they were out of a sporting goods commercial. Colin was wearing basketball shorts and a sweatshirt. The man I presumed was his father was seated on the blanket still, looking like he might start stretching at any moment, getting ready for a marathon. And his mother, all of her fiery spirit was tucked into yoga pants and a zip up sweater.

It all made me feel ridiculous for attempting to prefect my eye shadow and sleeping in braids so my hair would be wavy. I just wished I had worn the outfit I hiked in instead of skinny jeans and a long sleeve blouse.

"It's nice to meet all of you," I managed, feeling all of their eyes on me.

"Come sit," his mother said, gesturing for us to join her mate on the blanket.

Sebastian sat on the blanket, looking as at ease as I had ever seen him. Colin took his lie side and I folded myself cross legged on his right side. I wanted to smile and introduce myself, be all bright and vibrant, the kind of girl someone couldn't forget, but I just stared down at quilted blanket beneath my legs.

"Oh, silly me, I'm Rita," his mother said with a bright grin. My eyes rose and I gave her a tight smile. "This is my mate, Henry and I think you've already had an introduction to Colin."

"Hello, I'm Charlotte," I mumbled. My God, I can't believe I suggested this.

"So how is school going?" Sebastian asked, turning the attention right onto Colin. Poor kid looked like he wanted the world to swallow him whole in that moment and judging by the glares from both of his parents I knew why. "Cal, come on, I know you don't like school, but you have to at least try. Soccer got you into college, but it won't keep you there."

"I know, I know. But what does it matter anyway? Since you're gone I'm going to have to be alpha in your place," his brother protested.

"And you don't think that leaders need to be educated?" Sebastian bit.

I had never considered what Sebastian would be if he hadn't been given the task of cleaning up scum of the werewolf world. Being an alpha made complete sense considering his poise and his power. Sure, the curse had added to it, but it took a level headed, calculated man to handle this kind of burden.

And now, I was able to completely see just how hard he had worked for something that was now irrelevant. He was supposed to lead his pack in his father's place. He had spent his whole life thinking that being an alpha was fate and his duty. It had been ripped away from him.

"Don't be so hard on your brother," Rita piped up. "He's doing his best. Intelligence isn't just measured by your ability to do well in school. Colin is our best fighter. He can protect the pack better than anyone and he was raised there, he knows every face, every name."

"Your mother is right," Henry agreed.

Sebastian opened his mouth to say something, but when I caught a glimpse of Colin's downcast gaze I laid my hand on top of his, Amber eyes snapped to me, seeming almost startled by the touch but I just shot him a nervous smile.

"What about you, Charlotte? Do you have any siblings?" Rita asked, delighted to take the attention o her youngest son.

"I do. A little sister, but she's quite a bit younger than me."

"How wonderful, so you can be quite the positive influence and good example for her."

"I guess so, but there isn't much of a chance of that happening now," I muttered.

The instant I saw Sebastian tense out of the corner of my eye I wished I could put the words back into my mouth and swallow them. I hadn't meant it like that and I wanted to explain it, but wasn't even sure how.

Thankfully, Henry swept in to save me. "Sebastian told us that your parents basically kicked you out of your own pack. I can understand that it would be di icult to face something like that."

"They made their choice," I said carefully. "When I went back last time they made it clear that I'm no welcome anymore. I mean, I didn't fully understand the situation back then either, but they could've at least tried to listen to me. The only thing I would change would be being able to see my sister, but she's too young to make her own decisions."

"Absolutely," Rita agreed. "We don't always know what is happening with Sebastian and when this whole thing started we had no idea what to do. We thought something was wrong with him, we were terrified for him and even for ourselves. But we would never abandon him and we would never keep Colin from him either."

For a moment I could say nothing in response. I stared down at the quilt once more, feeling so overwhelmed with emotions. These people, they were so kind and so accepting. From where I was sitting them seemed like ideal parents, ones that could o er love and support at the drop of a hat. And it was a stark contrast to the parents who kicked me out of my own home the second they saw who I was mated to, the same parents who used my friend's death to emotionally blackmail me while I was still raw, before I hated him for all I was worth.

"Oh, I almost forgot, I brought some food," Rita announced, then dug around in a large beach bag she had brought. A giant bucket of fried chicken was placed on the blanket, along with a container of fries and several cans of soda.

"I inherited my inability to cook, if you couldn't tell," Hades teased.

"Oh lord, I'm quite useless in the kitchen. These boys grew up in packaged salads and pre-cooked chicken breasts," Rita giggled.

"Char is an amazing cook," Sebastian bragged, pulling me tight against his side in a single arm hug. He continued as I blushed bashfully. "Just a couple of days ago she made this dish with shrimp and vegetables and rice. It took her four hours. I don't remember you spending more than half an hour in the kitchen at a single time."

"It's called gumbo," I whispered.

"Right, right, and before that she made me this thing with pineapple and jalapenos."

"My," Rita said, her eyes sparkling. "We are going to have to spend some time together and you're going to have to teach me how to cook."

"I'd like that," I confessed, snuggling into my mate's side.

~~~Distraction Section~~~

Hello everyone. I hope you enjoyed this super long super so chapter. I know that many of you are melting over Sebastian's sweet side.

Question of the Day: What is the best way to spend a Sunday?
~~~