

Chapter 15

Ivy

I watch Kyson leave, and once I am sure he has left, I rush toward the fire, trying to warm myself, my bones ache from the cold, and my teeth chatter uncontrollably when an unexpected noise outside startles me. My first thought is it might be Kyson, and I immediately worry he's angry with me. The fire crackles in front of me, providing little comfort against the chill that has nothing to do with the cold night air. As I glance around, the hair on the back of my neck stands on end. There is a strange scent in the air, familiar, but I can't place it. The stables are deathly quiet, too quiet, and the horses all stand with their eyes trained on the stable doors. I strain my ears to catch any sound that might tell me more. Rising to my feet, I go to see if someone is outside... perhaps one of the guards.

I see a large, dark shape come into view in the stables. At first, I wonder if it's Kyson in his Lycan form. Only, just then, the horses start to go wild. My heart stops for a moment before racing uncontrollably. It's a bear. And a large one by the looks of it. I can tell by its hunched shape and slow prowl.

I stay rooted, frozen in place, watching the bear sniff the ground, raise its head, and turn its attention to me. I've never seen a bear before, but I do recall you weren't supposed to run from them. It's massive, with dark fur and eyes that reflect a wild hunger. My feet feel rooted to the ground, and I stagger as I take a step back. It growls and I slowly take another step back.

As the bear stalks toward me, a deep, paralyzing fear grips me. I'm dead, I think to myself, not seeing a way out of this. As I scramble backward, a bit faster this time, my hand shoots out, pulling a burning stick from the fire without thinking, burning my hands painfully. The bear lunges when I hiss and drop it. My scream is blood-curdling as I quickly move out of its way, adrenaline pumping, I don't feel the burning stick as I grab it. I wave it frantically, hoping to scare the bear away, but it only seems to anger it more. I scream for help, my voice shrill and desperate in the quiet night.

The bear lunges at me, and at that moment, I prepare for death. But then, out of nowhere, another huge, black shape tackles the bear. At first, I think it's another bear before realizing it's a Lycan. It's Kyson, his form massive and intimidating as he collides with the savage bear, it turns on him quickly, and he's thrown back, crashing into a stall with a loud thud. My heart is in my throat, helpless, as I watch the bear turn to finish him off.

Acting on instinct, I rip a piece of wood from the stall and hit the bear with all my strength.

Pain explodes across my face as the bear turns and slices me with its claws down my face. Blood blinds me, hot and sticky, trickling down my skin as I stagger back clutching my face. I'm sure this is the end, as I swipe my face frantically, trying to clear my vision, but then I hear the sounds of a fierce struggle. Kyson, in his Lycan form, is attacking the bear, driving it back with powerful blows. He punches the bear, makes it sniff and paw at its nose before Kyson plunges his own claws into its side. With a final injury to the face from Kyson, the bear retreats, fleeing into the night.

Shouts echo outside from the castle. The noise has alerted the guards, who rush into the stables. They burst inside but instantly back up when they're faced with the king in this form. I don't recognize a single one of them and Kyson, still feral in his Lycan form, moves to attack them. Heart hammering in my chest, I move, grabbing his fur knowing he won't forgive himself if he attacks his men. He freezes when I grab his fur. He whirls around, snarling at me, and I drop to my knees in submission, my hands shaking as I clutch at the fur on his thick thighs. His eyes blaze with a wild light, and I brace myself, certain he's going to attack.

But then, to my surprise, Kyson's Lycan demeanor changes, recognizing me. He lowers his head, his rough tongue licking my arm, healing the gash the bear left. His attention moves to my burnt fingers, and he gently licks them, soothing the pain when his licking becomes frantic on my face.

The guards hesitate, watching us warily. Kyson's Lycan side seems to sense their presence and growls, his protective instincts kicking in. He drags me around like a prized possession, pulling me into one of the stalls. The guards back away, unsure of how to approach the situation. It's clear his Lycan is not hurting me, but rather protecting me in his own way, even if it is from his own guard.

"I'm fine, he won't hurt me," I murmur to them, hoping it's true, even though his Lycan is unpredictable. I peer up at him, and he growls, tucking me closer. I shriek when his long claws nick me. The guards hesitate, staring at me worriedly.

"Get Damian," I stutter. They rush off immediately.

I'm still trembling, the shock of the encounter with the bear and Kyson's unexpected defense of me overwhelming. Kyson curls around me, his massive body a protective barrier between me and the rest of the world as his weight crushes me into the hay. I move trying to get out from under him, but he snarls snapping

sharp teeth at me. I freeze momentarily, my eyes meeting his when I show him he's crushing me. He sniffs me but my huge beast of a mate seems to understand because he moves off me. When I try to climb out entirely though, he growls again making my heart race. I nudge his huge shoulder, trying to get him to understand. He doesn't budge, so I tap his chest. Still nothing.

Leaning forward, I press my ear to his chest, listening to the hard steady thump of his heart. That seems to work because he rolls on his back, dragging me onto his chest before turning slightly so I can't see past him. It's like he's using himself like a wall separating me from everyone else or maybe trying to stop me from escaping. I press my hands against his chest, trying to warm them, and feel him sniffing my hair.

The warmth of his fur and the steady rhythm of his breathing slowly calms me.

As I lay there, tucked safely under Kyson's protective Lycan form, I realize the complexity of our relationship. He may be harsh and distant at times, but his instincts are still to protect me. Or his Lycan instincts are. He can deny the bond, but the bond will remind him, just as it did tonight when he came back for me.

The guards maintain their distance, but I know it's one of the royal guards—not Damian or any scent I immediately recognize, but they're respecting Kyson's clear message to stay away and keep their distance. I'm grateful for their understanding, knowing that any attempt to intervene might provoke him further.

I lean against Kyson, my mind slowly processing everything. The fear, the pain, the relief – it all mingles together in a confusing bundle of emotions. But through it all, there's a newfound respect and understanding for Kyson.

The night wears on, the fire in the stall flickering softly, casting a warm glow around us. I close my eyes, allowing myself to relax in his embrace. The events of the night have drained me, and despite the chaos, I feel safe here with him. Even if I can only feel safe with him while he's in this form.