

## Chapter 3

### GANNON

Last night, the king granted me special leave while Ivy was transitioning. I have been in the car ever since.

Desperate to reach Abbie, I repeatedly dial her number, hoping to persuade her to see reason. My calls go unanswered, just as they have in our previous attempts. Abbie has been purposely avoiding me, shutting me out of her life.

My mission is to report any issues. It angers me that Kyson won't allow me to forcefully remove her from her mate. Such an act would certainly create tensions as well as be deemed unlawful, especially if she wished to remain by his side. As his mate, she belongs to him. However, the temptation to break that law gnaws at me relentlessly. Love makes you do weird things. I am prepared to face any consequences, be it imprisonment or lashings. I just don't want Kyson's already fragile political situation as collateral damage. If it meant freeing Abbie from her undeserving mate, I would do it

I knew Kyson would hesitate to pass such a sentence, especially under pressure from the packs he governs. It wouldn't bode well for a king to defy the very laws he helped establish – laws put in place to halt Alphas

from forcibly marking multiple women and tearing them away from their true mates. That was precisely why Kade refrained from marking any of his wives; technically, they were free if they found their destined mates.

However, Abbie was an exception. He had marked her, fully aware that having a mate made him stronger. Despite the futility of my efforts thus far, I have no choice but to persist. Going against a mate bond is nearly impossible for she-wolves, and my attempts to expose Kade's infidelity has fallen flat.

So, for now, my only option is to convince Abbie to willingly leave him. He didn't deserve her. Neither did I, but I would spend the rest of my life trying to prove my worth to her if she would have me. As stupid as it might be to try, I have to.

We rarely come this far out into the pack. Even when invited to stay, as we passed through it sometimes, we always sought accommodation elsewhere. We feel uncomfortable within packs, never fully certain of their allegiance or potential ties to the hunters. Caution dictated our actions. Nonetheless, Alpha Kade has shown us kindness, always extending his help unquestionably whenever we need him to send his men to scout for hunters in his area. He is still a disgusting werewolf, treating women as if they are nothing more than trophies or possessions.

My phone jolts me from my thoughts, and I pull over to answer it, knowing I will soon need to input the address. Damian's name illuminates the screen, and I swiftly connect the call, placing the phone

against my ear. When travelling we try not to use the mind link, it can be distracting while driving.

“Have you obtained the address?” I inquire, rummaging through the glove compartment, searching for a pen and paper.

“Yes, I have it right here. Remember, Gannon, remain unseen. If you are caught lurking without formal notice, suspicions will be raised,” Damian advises, caution evident in his voice.

“What did you tell him?” I query sharply.

“I informed him Ivy wanted to send a care package,” he responds.

“Very well. I’ll stop along the way and purchase some items; I can play the role of a delivery boy,” I retort with a hint of annoyance.

“Good idea. But please, Gannon, refrain from causing harm. We cannot afford any bloodshed,” Damian pleads.

“I am solely here to retrieve Abbie,” I state.

“You mustn’t force her; you know the consequences if you do,” Damian reminds me.

“Perhaps I am willing to accept those consequences,” I confess.

“And what becomes of Abbie if she chooses to return to him? You would be banned from entering his pack, leaving her trapped there. The king would have no choice but to administer one thousand lashings and imprison you, as per the law. Don’t make him do that. You witnessed what happened last time; it nearly destroyed one of our own,” Damian counters.

“But that imbecile forcefully claimed the girl. I am not seeking to claim her; I only wish to take her away,” I argue.

“Semantics matter little, Gannon. Don’t force my hand in ordering you to retreat,” Damian warns firmly.

“This is Abbie we’re discussing, Damian,” I breathe, desperation tinging my voice.

“I am well aware, but our hands are tied. Kade is the only Alpha with whom we have a genuine alliance,” Damian reminds, his tone laced with resignation. I glare out at the forest beyond the windshield, frustration coursing through my veins.

“So, what’s your decision? Shall I command you to return, or can you restrain yourself?”

I snarl. “Fine, I won’t force her. But if he has harmed her in any way, I swear I will kill him,” I vow vehemently.

“The king mentioned that he saw Abbie, and she appeared to be in good health, aside from Kade’s infidelity,” Damian interjects.

“And that is still hurting her,” I counter sharply. “There’s no way it can’t.”

“Gannon!” Damian’s voice rises, reprimanding me.

“Fine, I will keep my hands to myself. Just give me the address,” I concede, fearing he will order me back home after driving all this way. As a mere Gamma, alongside Dustin and Liam, I hold little power compared to Damian, who holds the rank of Beta. If he commands my return, I will be powerless to resist. With haste, I jot down the address before ending the call and inputting it into the GPS. The destination is indeed located outside of town, miles away. I had expected Abbie to be at the packhouse, for that was where an Alpha’s mate should reside – not hidden away in some secluded cabin. Kade has isolated her from everyone and everything, including the town itself.

A growl escapes as I realize she is out there alone, especially with hunters on the prowl. Starting the car, I drive to the nearest town before stopping at a general store to fill a basket with items. I carefully select all her favorite fruits and candies, products I have persistently encouraged her to try since she was initially hesitant to accept anything from me back at the castle. Toward the end, however, she had let her guard down, and I had managed to convince her to be with me, only for that wretched Kade to intervene and shatter our fragile connection.

Surveying the store for additional gifts, I find that even flowers are absent from this meager establishment. Perhaps Abbie will appreciate a book, I muse momentarily before remembering her inability to read. A comic book might suffice; maybe she could interpret the story through the illustrations. If she were to return with me and reject her mate, I could take it upon myself to teach her how to read.

Thirty minutes later, I arrive at the outskirts of Kade's territory. Abbie's dwelling is barely on the border, and I navigate down a long, winding dirt driveway. The place before me hardly deserves the title of a house; it resembles more of a shack – a structure that seems poised to crumble with a mere gust of wind.

I catch sight of Abbie at the clothesline, her gaze shifting toward my approaching car. Shielding her eyes from the sun's glare, she squints to discern my identity. Swiftly parking the car, I send a text message to Damian as per his request. Abbie gazes apprehensively at the vehicle, her worry evident. I wonder why a random car would cause her concern. Nevertheless, she appears unchanged – save for a slight tan, as if she has spent ample time outdoors. Her cheeks bear hollow contours, more pronounced than when she departed, and her skin wears a wearied pallor. Despite these signs of fatigue, she seems to be holding up well, or so I hope.

“Oh, it's you,” Abbie states, her tone laced with nervousness as she approaches. “Why are you here?” she asks, her lips caught between her teeth.

“What? Is that all you have to say?” I inquire, raising an eyebrow in surprise. A small smile tugs at the corner of her lips before she rushes toward me, and I swiftly enclose her in my embrace.

“God, how I’ve missed you,” I confess with sincerity. Abbie nods, her thin arms wrapping around my neck. She lets out a relieved breath, and I can’t help but wonder why she was anxious about an unfamiliar vehicle. But for now, she is safe, and that is all that matters.

“Why are you here?” she murmurs.