

Chapter 4

GANNON

My face nestles in the curve of her neck, seeking solace in the delicate intermingling of scents. The familiar fragrance of her skin, a sweet blend of vanilla and lavender, wraps around me like a comforting embrace. Her question hangs in the air, dripping with skepticism and a hint of longing.

“Why are you here?” she repeats, her voice wavering with a mix of curiosity and apprehension.

“To see you,” I reply, my words laced with an undercurrent of urgency, trying to hide my disappointment that she isn’t more excited to see me. “Why else? You haven’t been answering my calls.” Gently, I guide her back onto her feet, my gaze fixed upon her. It’s impossible not to notice the weight she has lost, a feat that defies logic given her already slender frame. Her pants, rolled at the hips to keep them from slipping off, appear several sizes too big. Even her white shirt, a piece borrowed from Kade’s wardrobe, hangs loosely on her fragile form. And as I observe her, I can’t help but notice the nervous glances she steals down the driveway. Instinctively, I turn my head to follow her gaze.

“Expecting someone?” I inquire, a note of caution creeping into my voice.

“Kade hasn’t been by for a couple of days,” she confesses, her voice tinged with uncertainty. “He said he was out of town, but...” She leaves the unspoken words to hang between us.

“But what?” I press, my curiosity piqued.

“Nothing,” she dismisses with a forced laugh. “Probably just me being paranoid.” She gestures toward the kitchen. “Coffee?”

I nod in response and make my way back to my car, retrieving the bags before joining her inside. The worn porch creaks beneath my weight as I step gingerly across its aging planks. As she opens the door, it swings with a slight tilt, its hinges worn and weary. Stepping into the dwelling, I can’t help but be struck by its tiny size. The kitchen, bedroom, and living room mold together as one in this cramped space.

“Where is the bathroom?” I ask, my curiosity leading me to seek out the necessities.

“There’s an outhouse out back,” she nonchalantly replies, her attention focused on turning on the stove and filling a camping kettle. I scan the surroundings in disbelief, my mind struggling to reconcile this meager existence with the knowledge Kade, the leader of one of the wealthiest packs, is her mate. There is no bed, only a fold-out couch neatly made

and calling to mind images of discomfort. I perch on its edge, feeling the groan of weary springs and the bar at the center of the bed digs into my backside.

“You should come back with me,” I implore her, my voice tinged with a mix of concern and frustration.

“Not this again, Gannon, please,” Abbie whines, her plea echoing with weariness. A growl forms deep within me before I remember the bags clutched tightly in my hands. I extend them toward her, watching as her brows furrow in confusion.

“Take it,” I insist, a hint of urgency lacing my words. She sighs heavily, her steps carrying her toward me as she accepts the bags. Placing them on the table, she peers inside, her eyes lighting up with delight as she pulls out a bag of sugar clouds. It’s a small pleasure I’ve noticed she treasures; whenever we ventured into town together to gather supplies for Clarice, I couldn’t help but notice her longing gaze fixed on these sugary treats. And so, I made sure to keep a constant supply on hand whenever our paths crossed.

She pops another sugar cloud into her mouth, which stains her lips crimson and coats them with a fine dusting of sugar. A chuckle escapes me as I watch her struggle to pull her loose pants up, the candy acting as both a delightful distraction and an inconvenience. Her pants continue their descent down her hips, and she absentmindedly rolls them up once more. Observing her movements, I can’t help but notice the emptiness of the tiny fridge, save for half a bottle of milk and a

solitary block of cheese. Rising from the couch, I swing open the cupboards to find them nearly bare.

“Why is there no food here?” I growl, my frustration simmering beneath the surface. What is going on here? Something isn’t right.

“Kade said he would come out soon to bring more,” she shrugs, her voice carrying a hint of resignation as she retrieves coffee and tea bags.

“What have you been eating then?” My words escape with a sharp edge, directed more out of concern than anger.

She nervously chews on her lower lip, her gaze drifting toward the forest visible through the window.

“Have you been hunting for your own food?” I inquire, my tone softening as I try to understand her circumstances.

“No, I promise. I didn’t kill anything,” she stammers, her words stumbling over each other in a rush to explain. “I just took some bird eggs.” Her gasp betrays her fear that my anger is directed toward her for resorting to hunting.

“Bird eggs?” I scoff, my disbelief evident.

“I tried to catch a rabbit once, but I couldn’t do it. I swear,” she stutters, her voice tinged with guilt.

“I don’t care about you hunting, Abbie,” I assure her, wanting to alleviate any sense of blame she may feel. “My point is that you shouldn’t have to. You are an Alpha’s mate, not some slave or a hidden secret.” My voice bristles with indignation.

“I’m not... He’s introducing me to the pack soon. It’s just not safe right now. He’s having issues with a neighboring pack,” she stammers, her eyes darting back to the kettle that has started to whistle.

“Do you realize how absurd that sounds? You’re his Luna, and yet he has you living out here in these conditions,” I argue, exasperation tingeing my words.

“It’s not safe,” she defends him, her voice laced with a mix of loyalty and fear.

“The safest place for you would be by his side, don’t you think? Not out here along the border where anyone could get to you,” I reason, my frustration mounting as she continues to offer excuses, lies he has fed her.

It’s like arguing with a brick wall. I despise this mate bond nonsense with every fiber of my being. It blinds she-wolves to their mate’s faults, making them gullible and vulnerable. And all it takes is the smallest

flicker of what they perceive as kindness, something she has been deprived of for so long, to make her believe she should trust him blindly simply because he is her mate.

“No, you’re coming back with me,” I declare, my grip tightening on her arm.

“What? No! I have a mate. I can’t just leave. He’ll worry,” she protests, her voice trembling with a mixture of fear and uncertainty.

“Worry? Then where the hell is he, Abbie?” My frustration boils over as I try to drag her toward the door.

“No!” she screams, thrashing against my grip. “Gannon, stop!” Her voice cracks under the weight of her emotions, tears streaming down her face. “He loves me. He said he loves me. He’ll be back,” she sobs.

“I fucking love you. He doesn’t,” I scream at her, my words dripping with desperation.

Abbie whimpers, and I suddenly become aware my claws have slipped out, grazing her delicate skin. Thankfully, the wounds are shallow, and I release my hold on her, watching as they swiftly heal.

“You have a mate out there somewhere. How can you say that?” she demands, her tear-filled eyes searching mine for answers.

“No, I don’t. I want you. Can’t you see that?” My voice cracks with a mixture of longing and frustration.

“But I am not yours. I am Kade’s mate. He loves me, and I love him,” she insists, her voice wavering with a mix of conviction and doubt.

“If you think this is love, you are mistaken. Love doesn’t hide someone away. Love doesn’t force them to live like this,” I snap, my words tinged with both sadness and anger. Her brows furrow, tears pooling in her mesmerizing hazel eyes. She shakes her head before sniffing and wiping her hands on the front of her shirt.

“You should go,” she whispers, unable to meet my gaze.

I swallow hard, my heart heavy with unspoken words. She wraps her arms around herself, seeking solace in the comforting pressure of her own embrace as she turns back toward the kitchen.

“Abbie?” I call out to her softly, my voice filled with a mix of longing and resignation.

“Gannon, please... just don’t,” she breathes, her words barely audible.

“Tell me... Tell me you’re happy here,” I implore her, my voice a mere whisper in the air. “Tell me something because this... this isn’t right. I would take care of you.”

“I’m not yours,” she says slowly, emphasizing each word with a quiet determination.

“But you could be,” I murmur earnestly. “You just need to see beyond the bond, Abbie. See through his lies.” My voice trails off, uncertain if there is another way to convince her, to break through the walls that surround her heart.

“You were willing to be mine before, Abbie,” I tell her.

“That was before I discovered my mate, and you’re a Lycan it would never work.”

“I would change you, make you a Lycan, but you need to reject Kade and come home with me.”

“I can’t, he...he... He loves me,” she says, staring at the ground.

“But do you love him? Think about Abbie. If he wasn’t your mate, and you are locked up here, would you stay or come back with me?”

“That’s not fair,” she says.

“Answer me,” I demand.

“That would be different,” she says, gazing around at the place.

“You live in a castle. Who would choose this place over that?” she finally says.

“Fine, then if he wasn’t your mate, who would you choose, him or me?”

“But he is my mate!”

“Exactly, the mate bond tells you to love him, to stay with him, it is not a damn choice! But if you had one?”

She bites her lip. “I don’t know! I... please you must leave, you’re confusing me, stop. It all needs to stop.”

“Come back with me, even for a little while, just come back, come see Ivy, you wanted to see Ivy, right?” I beg.

“It’s unsafe; I have to stay here; Kade will take me to see her. He promised he would.”

“I’m fucking Lycan. What safer place is there to be than by my side?” I curse while shaking my head and pinching the bridge of my nose in frustration.

“He’s my mate,” she says, even though she looks confused about what she wants. And that stupid marking on her neck I wish I could remove so she could think clearly.

I move toward her, and she backs up, her bum hitting the kitchen sink. “Come back with me.”

“I can’t, Gannon.”

“But you want to, don’t you?” I ask her, and she looks away.

“I can’t leave my mate. It would hurt him if I did.”

“What about the pain he causes you?”

“Ah, not this again, he wouldn’t do that; I’m his mate,” she says, trying to push past me.

“He has multiple wives, Abbie. Why do you think he keeps you out here?”

“You’re lying, I already asked him, and he said you are just jealous.”

“Of course, I am jealous, but I wouldn’t fucking lie to you,” I tell her.

“You need to leave,” she says, but I grab her, pushing myself against her and gripping her neck. My lips crash against her plump ones, and she tries to shove me away when my tongue forces its way between her lips.

Abbie moans as my tongue invades her mouth. Her attempts to shove me off stop and her hands run up my chest, and she kisses me back hungrily. I grip her thighs, placing her on the edge of the sink and pressing between her legs when she gasps, pulling away from me.

“Why would you do that?” she growls.

“Still think a mate can’t cheat on a mate?” I ask her.

She shakes her head. “No, it’s because you’re Lycan, you did something!”

“I didn’t make you kiss me back, Abbie.”

“She-wolves are attracted to men of dominance, it’s...it’s... it’s in our DNA! You need to leave,” she says, shoving me away feebly. But she is much too weak to move me.

“Abbie, he is no good for you.”

“He is my mate; I am destined to be with him,” she sobs before pointing at me. “You made me. I wouldn’t have if you...” she shakes her head.

“It’s okay to love someone else, Abbie.”

“I don’t; I love my mate, I...” she says and looks around frantically, her body trembling.

“Really, because back home, you seemed to like me, too.”

“Yes, before I found my mate.”

“You still do!” I tell her.

“Of course, I do, Gannon; you’re Lycan I’m a werewolf. It makes me submissive to your kind.”

“Doesn’t make you love someone,” I tell her.

Seek us out, yes, but I can’t make her love me. It is in their DNA that she-wolves seek out dominant males for safety, but that doesn’t mean they love them. I know she loves me too, or she wouldn’t have always sought me out or let me follow her around like a damn lost puppy. Damian even offered to tell me to back off. Still, she refused, saying she liked me being around her, and she never reacted to Damian like

this, and he is of higher rank than me, she even asked to be put in my quarters, and we all agreed before Kade came into the picture.

“You need to leave; I want you to leave, please.”

“Come back with me.”

“No! Just go. You can’t force me. It’s against the law. I may be stupid, but I know that much,” she says, looking away.

“You are not stupid; misguided, yes, but not stupid, Abbie, don’t say that,” I tell her.

“Leave; I have asked you to, so please, Gannon, don’t make this harder than it has to be,” she says, and I sigh. I pull my phone from my pocket and glance at the time. I was only granted an hour here, and I am already fifteen minutes over.

“When you change your mind, you call me. I don’t care what time it is; I will come for you. Do you still know my number?” She nods. “My number, Abbie.” She sighs and rattles it off, knowing it by heart. I kiss her forehead before nodding. “Answer my calls.”

“I will okay, just leave,” she says, and I chew my lip before turning and sulking out the door. When I get in the car, I start the engine and glance up to find her standing on the porch watching me. She waves before

looking away, and I turn the car around. When I drive over the boundary, Damian rings.

“What?”

“Are you on your way back with her?”

“She wouldn’t come. There is no food in that place. It’s a shithole.”

“She has to come willingly. You can’t take her.”

“It’s fucking bullshit. I should command her,” I tell him, and I should and take whatever punishment Kyson delivers. She would have no choice, I am Lycan she would do as I commanded.

“You do, and she will always question whether she made the right choice,” Damian tries to reason. I growl, and eventually, he hangs up when I come to the town. I nearly drive through before I curse and pull into the grocery store. I fill a trolley with different foods before driving back, unable to get the thought of her eating bird eggs and whatever she could find in the forest out of my head.

Returning to her place, I swiftly unload the groceries, careful not to make any noise that might disturb her slumber. Through the cracked window, I catch a glimpse of her sleeping on the fold-out bed. I knock gently on the door before hurrying away, unable to trust myself not to break the rules and forcibly drag her away. As I drive off, my mind

consumed with thoughts of her, I catch a fleeting glance of her through the rearview mirror. Her gaze lingers on the groceries before shifting back to my retreating vehicle.

I know I'll face severe consequences for going back and being late, but I can't bear the thought of her going hungry. Damian will lose his mind when he finds out, but perhaps Kyson will understand the importance of ensuring Ivy's safety? If she knew about Abbie's living conditions and Kade's deceit, she would surely be outraged. I'll find a way to tell her, even if it means facing the king's wrath.