

Chapter Thirteen

Ava

Forty minutes later, I'm sitting in a hospital bed wearing one of those horrible scratchy gowns. Different colored cords snake across the blankets, keeping me and the baby hooked to the monitors.

I can't take my eyes off the screen that shows the baby's heart rate. The nurse told me they'd want to do an ultrasound to make sure she's all right, and every minute we've had to wait has felt like an eternity.

"She's fine," Garrett reassures me softly, leaning in and taking my hand. "You don't have to keep staring at that monitor. I can hear the baby's heartbeat from here."

"Really?" I ask.

Garrett nods, a small smile playing on his lips. "I like it. It's almost as though she's right here with us."

"It could still be a boy," I tease, mostly to take the edge off my nerves.

"Mmm, maybe." Garrett's midnight-blue eyes twinkle playfully, and I'm stunned by how relaxed he seems after everything that's happened.

A man tried to kill me tonight and very nearly succeeded. Garrett pulled me out of the wreckage and then changed into a giant wolf. I watched him rip another shifter's throat out, and now he's sitting here acting as though we're a normal couple who just came in for a routine doctor's appointment.

If I hadn't seen him change with my own eyes, I never would have believed it possible. Part of me still wonders if I sustained a concussion in the wreck and imagined the whole thing.

"It was Hyacinthe, wasn't it?" I ask quietly, staring down at our interlocked fingers. "She asked Robert to drive the car off that bridge."

Garrett looks away, and I know I guessed correctly.

"Yes," he rumbles, swallowing thickly. "But I promise you, Ava . . . I will deal with my sister."

I grimace and tilt my head to the side. Is he going to deal with her the way he dealt with Robert? "And your other siblings?" I ask.

“I’ll deal with them, too,” he snaps.

“You can’t murder your whole family,” I whisper, giving his hand a squeeze.

When Garrett finally meets my gaze, his carefree expression has disappeared. His face is marred by deep lines of fury, and his eyes are silver again. “For you — for her — I would burn the whole world down.”

I swallow. There’s something about the lethal tone of his voice that tells me Garrett means it. That should terrify me, but it doesn’t. It only makes me love him more.

I open my mouth to tell him so, but somebody yanks back the curtain beside my bed, and a man in a white coat appears.

“You must be Ava,” he says. “I’m Dr. Turner.”

“Nice to meet you.”

There’s an awkward pause as Garrett gets to his feet to free up the stool for the doctor. Dr. Turner wheels himself over to my bedside and shines a bright light in my eyes.

Garrett stands at the foot of my bed, watching him with that same predatory look I saw when he confronted Robert. I have a feeling that if the doctor made any sudden movement, Garrett would have him pinned to the wall before he could even draw a breath.

“It seems you were very lucky,” Dr. Turner concludes, turning over my injured forearm and staring bewilderedly at the freshly healed wound.

He raises an eyebrow. “Old injury?”

“Yeah,” I say quickly, wishing the hospital gown had long sleeves that I could pull down over the gash. “I-I’m a waitress. I got cut a while ago with some broken glass.”

Dr. Turner stares at the wound for a few more seconds but doesn’t press the issue. “All right. Let’s have a look at that baby . . . just to make sure everything looks good.”

Dragging in a shaky breath, I fold the blankets down around my waist and pull up the front of my gown. I stiffen as the doctor squirts the cold gel on my belly and moves the ultrasound wand over my stomach.

A grainy picture fills the screen on the little machine beside my bed, and I see Garrett’s posture change. His head juts forward, and his brows knit together as he searches for a glimpse of our baby.

“And . . . there we are,” Dr. Turner mutters, moving the wand until the ghostly white outline of a baby solidifies.

Tears burn in my throat, and I feel my eyes start to tingle. This is the second time I've seen the baby on an ultrasound, but this is the first time it actually looks like a baby.

"Good strong heart tones," says Dr. Turner.

I let out a breath, and Garrett steps forward until he's standing less than a foot from the screen. He's staring at the baby as if he's some NASA scientist seeing an alien life form for the very first time.

His throat bobs as he takes in the image of our squirming baby, and I notice his eyes look oddly shiny.

"Little guy looks great," Dr. Turner concludes. "I wouldn't worry."

"W-what?" I stammer, turning to look at him.

"Oh, I'm sorry." The doctor rubs his forehead, looking frustrated with himself. "Did you not want to know the sex? I shouldn't have said anything."

"No, it's —" I break off, reeling from the news. I'm going to have a little boy. Our baby is really real. "I just . . . didn't know."

"Oh." The doctor looks relieved. "Well, congratulations. I don't think you have anything to worry about."

Except that I'm about to give birth to a wolf-shifter baby, I think. Will the baby come out as a wolf?

The thought makes all the blood drain from my face, but I decide to worry about that later.

I don't hear what the doctor says next. I'm too busy trying to wrap my head around what it's going to be like raising a little wolf shifter. He turns off the ultrasound machine and hustles out of the room, but Garrett continues to stare at the blank screen.

"Are you okay?" I ask, suddenly nervous that seeing the baby on the ultrasound made it all too real and that he's having second thoughts.

But when Garrett finally turns to look at me, I'm startled to see that he has tears in his eyes. "Better than all right," he rasps. "I . . ." He drags in a shuddering breath. "I don't think I've ever felt this happy in my life."

My heart swells at those words, all fears of giving birth to a wolf baby evaporating at once.

"It's a boy," I sigh, tears leaking from my eyes as I imagine holding a tiny baby with curly brown hair and big blue eyes.

“It’s a boy,” Garrett repeats. “A son.” His voice breaks on the last word, and I can see that he’s overwhelmed. He’s probably thinking of his own shitty upbringing, but I know in my heart of hearts that Garrett isn’t anything like his father.

“You’re going to be an amazing dad,” I assure him.

Garrett cracks a soft smile, and his gaze turns tender as he looks at me. “You’re already an amazing mother.”

Something about that statement tugs at my heart, and it’s all I can do to keep from dissolving into a fit of full-blown tears. In the span of one night, I was almost murdered. I found out that my baby daddy is a powerful wolf shifter, and I learned that I’m having a son.

Garrett heaves a sigh and sits down on the bed, staring at my injured arm as if he’s still beating himself up for what his sister did.

I don’t blame him for Hyacinthe’s fucked-up actions, but I do have a lot of questions. “What happened tonight . . . back at the bridge?”

Garrett’s brows knit together. “What do you mean?”

“I mean . . .” I open my mouth and shake my head. It’s such a loaded question. “How did you manage to heal me?”

Garrett’s lips twitch as if forming words, but no sound comes out. He lifts one shoulder in a careless shrug, and I get the feeling he doesn’t want to tell me. “It’s a shifter thing.”

I narrow my eyes and tilt my head to the side. “Garrett . . . What aren’t you telling me?”

He ignores my question and starts fussing with my blankets, tucking them securely around my legs. I watch his ministrations in fascination. My big bad wolf is nervous.

Finally, Garrett stops moving and heaves a heavy sigh. “I . . . healed you with my venom.”

I can’t help it. I laugh.

Garrett jerks his head up and looks at me as though I’ve lost my mind.

“Your venom?” I repeat. “Like, vampire venom?”

“No.” He shakes his head. “It’s a venom wolf shifters only secrete at a . . . very special time in our lives.”

“A very special time in your life?” I repeat. “What’s that? Like, shifter puberty?”

“No.” He screws up his face. “What, you think I just went through shifter puberty tonight?”

“I don’t know how your species works!”

Garrett chuckles and takes my hand, his expression growing serious. “Wolf shifters produce a healing venom when we give the mating bite.”

I swallow. That sounds pretty serious. “The mating bite?”

Garrett nods. “We don’t bite people to turn them into wolves. The only time a shifter will bite another, apart from a fight, is when he’s marking his mate.”

My eyebrows shoot up. “Marking her?” I’m not sure I like the sound of that. “Like, marking his territory?”

“Basically.” Garrett chokes out a laugh. “Only we don’t pee on our one true love. We mark her with a bite.”

My mind starts and stutters as I try to piece together everything he’s telling me. “And . . . why would you be, uh, secreting your super-special venom tonight?”

Garrett licks his lips and moves his other hand to my belly, roving possessively over my bump. “I’ve produced the venom every time we’ve been intimate,” he murmurs. “My wolf wants to mark you.” His blue eyes flicker up to meet mine, and I remember when they were that wolfish silver. “You’re my mate, Ava — my fated mate.”

My heart does a funny tumble in my chest. “I-I don’t understand.”

“Most of us mate for love or politics, but it’s said that every shifter has one true mate. I always thought that was just a myth, but . . .” Garrett drags a hand through his wild curls and lets out a throaty chuckle. “Here you are.”

I gape at him.

“I’ve known shifters who’ve supposedly found their fated mates,” he says, playing with our interwoven hands. “I always thought they were pretentious assholes.”

I lift an eyebrow. “Says the guy who drives a nineteen twenty-eight Mercedes Roadster.”

“Touché.” Garrett’s mouth turns up in a self-deprecating grin. “They say that once you find your fated mate, it’s impossible to let her go. You crave her every minute of every day. You are . . . soul-bonded.”

“That . . . sounds intense,” I murmur, because I have no idea what to say.

But there’s no mirth in Garrett’s eyes when he meets my gaze again. “It’s what I felt the moment I met you. This feeling that I had to be with you or I’d spend the rest of my life going crazy.” He swallows. “That’s why I tried so hard to find you.”

“I’m really sorry I left.”

He shakes his head. “You never need to apologize for that again, angel. You never need to apologize for anything.” He presses his lips together in a thin line and winces. “Besides, my sister tried to have you killed, so I think we’re even.”

I snort, and Garrett tightens his grip on my hand. “I don’t care about what happened before, angel.” He nods at my belly. “We have our son to think about now. I just want to move forward.”