

## Chapter 4: Tana

I don't know why Cedric is so damned hardheaded. I've been marked for death. Nothing that he does will keep me alive. If I were capable of shifting, I would have months ago and gotten everyone out of here.

"Did you hear anymore about that dragon shifter?" I ask him, wondering why, if they found another dragon, they weren't in the pits today.

"No, maybe it was a misunderstanding, and they were talking about the pride of lions, or maybe they knocked the dragon out and haven't woken yet."

"Yes, but then, wouldn't that be the fourth in our ght next weekend?" I ask.

"I haven't smelled a dragon," Shere Khan says, looking at me meaningfully. s\*\*t, does that mean he knows what I am?

"You know what a dragon smells like?" Cedric asks him.

"Yes, but unlike other shifters, they don't share a similar scent based on their breed. It depends on their element," he replies.

"What do you mean, their element?" Cedric asks.

"Do you not know anything about dragons?" he asks, looking at me again.

Cedric shakes his head no.

"Dragons fall into one of four elements: re, water, air, or earth. Depending on what element they were born into, their scent will be different, smelling similar to their element," he replies.

"How do you know so much about the Elemental Dragons?" I ask him.

"I met the Earth dragon before I was captured. An interesting fellow."

"You're friends with a dragon?" Cedric asks.

The tiger shrugs. "As friendly as two loners can be."

"What was he like, the dragon?" Cedric asks him. I know Avani. His earthy nature makes him stubborn and unbending. I can see why he and the tiger hit it off.

"Dragons are different than us, than other shifters. They don't have a dragon spirit; they are the dragon. They've evolved to shift into a human form because they've been hunted nearly to extinction. Last time I checked, there were less than 10 in the world." He's looking at me again. Most of those were my family. We were able to hide more easily because we could live in volcanoes, a place where humans can't go. But now, I am all that is left of the re dragons.

I shake my head at him. I see his lips thin into a tight line. He understands that my family is gone.

We hear the last of the chiefs leave, the lights turning off. Not that it matters; as shifters, all of us have excellent night vision. The lights are for the humans.

We wait another 15 minutes to make sure everyone is gone before I turn to the tiger. "So, what's your idea?"

"We stage a coup," he says as if that explains everything.

"Excellent idea. Why didn't I think of that?" Cedric scoffs, and I have to admit, it's not like we've never given it any thought. But we're all stuck in these cages. How can we overthrow the leaders and get everyone out?

"I'm not following your logic, tiger. And do we get a real name now?" I ask.

"My name is Ishir. I never shared it because it makes it harder to kill and be killed. And think about it. We will be the main event. They will have us in our cages for hours, but we'll be outside of this space where they pump the air full of whatever keeps us from being able to shift. We'll be stronger." He says, watching our reaction.

"Not only that," he continues, "but there will be four of us. If we can get the lion to agree, rather than killing each other, we'll have four nearly fully functioning shifters able to ght back. We can begin to take out the leaders and the keepers. Someone will have to get back down here to open the gates, but once the doors are open..."

He stops, but I nish his statement. "Chaos, mayhem, and death to the hunters."

"Exactly."

"So, how do we get the lion on our side, especially since you just killed his brother?" I ask.

"A good question that I don't have a good answer for. But we need him. If he's after me, I can't help but ght against him. If we could get word to him, and we knew he agreed, then we'd stand a better chance."

"There might be a way to get word to the lion," a small girl from a few cells down says.

I stand up and walk to the front of my cell, trying to see down to her. I don't recognize her.

Ishir lifts his nose, trying to capture her scent. "And what would that be, little Kestrel?" Ishir asks her. His ability to scent and identify shifters is unparalleled by anyone I've ever met.

"My sister is in here somewhere. I can call to her and see if she can speak to the lion if he'll listen and talk to her."

"We can give it a try," Cedric says, having come to stand beside me at the front of our cells.

We hear her screeching, chirpy call. She waits a minute, and when she doesn't hear a response, she does it again. This time, we all pick up the faint sound of a similar response.

"She says she can see him. He's been pacing ever since they brought him back in. She's afraid of him and doesn't want to interrupt him," the girl says.

"He can't get to her. Trust me, if there were a way through these bars, we would have found it by now. Tana and I have been here a very long time," Cedric tells her.

She calls out again, and the response is quicker, but we hear a roaring sound as well. The lion is aggravated and doesn't like her chirping sound.

"Tell her that there is a big event coming next weekend with four contenders, and we think he is one of them. Have her tell him that we are developing a plan to overthrow the arena leaders so that we can escape."

It's quiet for a while; then a call comes back.

"He wants to know who the other contenders will be," she says.

"Tell him two alpha wolves and a tiger," Cedric says to her. I notice the side-eye glance that I get from Ishir. He knows I'm not a wolf.

When the message is delivered, we know immediately. We hear the angry roar of the lion from here.

"Tell him we know he's angry and wants revenge, but the tiger is not who he should be angry at. Tell him the only way for us to do this is if we work together to ght the real enemy," I suggest.

I hear her chirping again. It's quiet, but eventually, a response comes back.

"My sister says he hasn't said if he'll join you, but he has stopped pacing," the Kestrel tells us.

"So, while the lion decides if he'll work with us or against us, let's talk about how to burn this arena to the ground," Ishir states, looking at me.

"How do you propose that we burn this place down?" Cedric asks.

"There are those massive torches they use to light the place at night. They should be lit for our event since ours will be last," he responds watching me. He knows I'm a re dragon, and even if the torches aren't lit, I can set this place on re.

"It just means we must have a good plan to get everyone out. We don't want to kill the supes, only the hunters and the keepers," I emphasize.

"Agreed. Let's see if the lion feels any differently after sleeping on our discussion," Ishir suggests.