

## Chapter 9: Tana

I have no idea where we are. When I was captured, they sedated me and put me in an enclosed van with no windows. We drove for what felt like days. Now, all I can see is atlands. I need to nd a mountain range where we can hide until Cedric regains consciousness and I can gure out what happened to him.

Because I can't risk being seen, I y as high as I dare, hoping I'm not limiting Cedric's oxygen supply at this high altitude. I stay above the clouds until it gets dark. In the distance, I see a mountain range where I can land and look for a cave or someplace to stay for the night.

I land as gently as I can, ensuring Cedric doesn't roll off my back. I shift slowly, and when I'm done, he's practically crushing me. Gently, I roll him off me. I sniff his body, smelling silver. I look around, wondering if there is anything I can use to get the silver out, but I don't see anything. I extend a claw and slowly, carefully begin to dig out the multiple bullets he must have taken from the Keeper.

When I'm done, I check to make sure that the bleeding is minor enough that it will heal. I search the cave I found up here, and nding it empty, I move him inside. Once I have him settled, I go looking for the water source that I can smell. When I nd it, I dive into the rst clean water I've touched in a year. It feels and tastes divine. I quickly look around, realizing there is no easy way for me to bring water back to the cave. I search the trees and nd some older branches. I rip them off, then gut them, leaving them closed on one end and use them to collect and carry the water back to Cedric.

I wash his wounds, enjoying this opportunity to explore his body unhindered. He's lean, thinner than he should be from lack of food, but his body is still muscular. The Alpha genes gave him an advantage, one that kept him alive in the arena.

When I'm sure I got all the silver out and that he'll heal, I go out to get food. I shift, letting the dragon eat her ll before catching a buck for Cedric. I listen carefully as I get close to the cave. Not hearing any sound or movement, I land, shift, and spend the next couple of hours preparing the deer meat, making a re, and nding anything soft to lay Cedric on. His wounds have started healing, and I expect he'll wake up sometime tomorrow.

I put the meat over the re to cook and sit outside the cave, watching Cedric while he sleeps and the food cooks. I look up at the night sky that I haven't seen in over a year. Based on the stars, it's early spring. Up here on the mountain, there is a crispness to the air. I check on Cedric, making sure that he's not getting cold and that he's close enough to the re.

After I pull the meat off the re, I set it aside and just sit and enjoy the night sky and the fresh air. It's been so long since I've been able to enjoy nature. It's early in the morning when I can't keep my eyes open any longer. The re has started to burn out, so I throw some more wood on and breathe a little more re on it to keep it going before walking into the cave and lying down beside Cedric. His body is a bit cold, so I pump heat through my body, heating his as I lay against him.

In his sleep, he rolls toward me, seeking my heat source. I nally decide to lay on top of him, pushing my heat out toward him and settling before nally falling asleep.

I thought he would wake up the next morning, but he still hasn't woken. I go out to get more water and feed again. I'm a dragon, and I can eat a lot. I can go for long periods without food, but if I have a choice, I prefer to eat daily.

I come back to nd that Cedric is still out, so I set aside the water, check the food, and lay beside him again, taking the opportunity to rest some more before he wakes up. Noticing that Cedric's body has cooled once more, I lay on top of him again, pushing my heat into him before falling asleep.

There's a wonderful feeling all around me. I'm warm and comfortable, and something smells delicious. I'm a dragon; any sort of earthy scent smells good to me. But this, this is like the air during a spring rainstorm. It's wet but fresh and clean, and the taste ... I can almost taste it on my tongue. As I try to understand what I'm smelling, I feel lips pressing against my head. That wakes me up.

My head pops up, and I suddenly remember where I am. I'm lying on top of Cedric. We're in a cave on a mountain. It's dark outside. I must have slept the entire day.

"Cedric! You're awake!" I say, scrambling to get off of him. However, he wraps his arms around me, holding me in place.

"I knew it. I knew you were my mate," he says, looking at me like I'm the most precious thing in the world to him.

His mate? I can't be his mate. I'm a dragon, and he's an Alpha werewolf. The way we claim our mates is different.

"How do you feel?" I ask, trying to change the subject.

He smiles at me, still staring at me like he's never seen me before. His hands are running up and down my back, and his touch feels incredible.

"I feel amazing."

"Really?" I ask, frowning. I thought silver made wolves feel like s\*\*t for a while.

"Yes, I found you. I knew it in the arena, but I couldn't be sure. Now, I can feel the tingles from our touch. Don't you feel it?" He asks me seriously.

I'm trying not to freak out. I don't want to scare him by telling him I'm a dragon, but I also don't want to lie to him.

"Your touch feels amazing," I reply, my gaze holding his. And it's true. His scent, his touch, it's almost overwhelming. It's like his waking up has brought all his Alpha aura, his scent, his touch to life. It's distracting me from making sure he's okay.

"I got you food," I tell him. His hand stops, and I immediately miss the feeling of his touch. He looks around.

"Where are we?"

"I'm not exactly sure. I found a mountain with a cave, and I brought you here."

I watch as his memory starts ooding back, and he sits up. I scoot off him, helping him when the pain of his injuries causes him to inch and almost fall back.

"How did we get here?" he asks.

"Ishir got you out of the arena as it was crashing down, and I shifted and got us here." No need to tell him what I shifted into.

He turns, smiling at me. "Aren't you clever? And strong, Tana." He takes my chin in his hand, pulling me to him for a scorching kiss. I let myself fall into the pleasure of his lips touching mine. I fell in love with Cedric a while ago. I just couldn't do more than help him survive before. Him calling me his mate, kissing me like this? It's making my body do strange things.

I pull away, my eyes slowly opening, as I let the taste of his lips linger on mine. "You need to eat. You must be starving. Then there is a lake nearby we can go to, and you can wash up. It felt great," I tell him, smiling.

He frowns. "You brought me food?"

"I caught a buck for you yesterday and cooked it last night. I thought you'd be awake sooner, but you did have a lot of silver in your body."

He looks thoughtful for a moment. "The bullets."

"Yes."

"And you got them out?"

"I did. I made sure you were healing, then I used some of the water to wash the blood off."

"I think I want water before food," he says, and I can tell he's starting to take inventory of his body. From what I know of wolves, the mate bond can overwhelm their other senses. Me reminding Cedric of his basic needs is forcing him to realize his body needs more than just me.

"I have some. I went this morning and brought some back. I'll be right back. You stay put." I rush out of the cave and get the water I had set aside, along with some of the meat I cooked last night.

"Here." I hand him the water and watch as he guzzles it down. I give him the food, then stand to go get more water.

"Where are you going?" he asks.

"There's more water out there; I'll be right back."

He nods and begins eating. I get him another branch of water and come back in, handing it to him. He drinks this one more slowly, watching me over the rim of the branch.

"You healed me again. How many times are you going to save me, Tana?" He asks, his look intense.

"As many times as it takes," I tell him.

When he's eaten his ll, I help him to stand. "Do you want to go to the lake?"

"Yes. A bath in fresh water sounds divine."

"It really was," I tell him as we begin our descent to the lake. It's much slower going since we're walking, but we get there soon enough.

Cedric walks into the water, and I hear him sigh as he crouches down, letting the water drift over his shoulders. He leans his head back into the water and looks up at the night sky.

"I've missed this," he says.

I nod, moving to join him in the water. "I stayed up almost the entire night last night, just enjoying the fresh air and watching the stars."

He pulls me to him, wrapping my legs around his waist before walking out into deeper water.

He leans in, kissing me, and he tastes delicious. His tongue slides into my mouth, his hand into my hair while he dominates my mouth with his tongue. I can feel his Alpha aura pouring out of him, and I feel him growl before he pulls away, looking at me.

"Mine!"