

Chapter 10

Damon

The scream that comes from Ember's lips pierces me like a silver dagger. Then, her eyes flutter and she goes completely limp. If not for the guard holding her up, she would have fallen to the floor.

My wolf growls. "*It should be us holding her, not him.*"

For the first time since her brother arrived, both he and Crystal give Ember their full attention, staring at her in horror. When Oliver takes a step toward her, I growl.

"Leave her," I command.

He wasn't prepared to acknowledge her before, too busy cuddling up to his new mate to spare a thought for his sister, so he has lost that privilege now,

I rush around the table and take her from the guard. "*Serve the meal,*" I mind-link Joshua as I carry her bridal style from the dining hall.

The warriors at the double doors open them swiftly to let me pass through. They bow, but I don't acknowledge it. I only have one thought on my mind, and that is to make sure that my little wolf recovers.

When did I start calling her mine? My wolf chuckles. It must be him putting those ideas into my mind. I shrug it off as I head to my quarters.

The alpha quarters are on the third floor of the pack house, and that's where I head.

Normally, the only person who ever comes to my private quarters 'is Joshua. I certainly never allow any female visitors into my domain. I haven't done since my mate betrayed me, **so** why now?

"You want her as much as I do," my wolf scoffs. *"You just refuse to admit it."*

I ignore him **as I** enter my private apartment. He certainly doesn't need any encouragement.

I walk through the entryway, head to the bedroom and close the door behind me before gently placing the frail little she-wolf on the bed.

I don't understand why is this happening. I've used that brand on every wolf I've ever welcomed into my pack. Some have been braver about it than others, but no one has ever passed out before. Why her? Why now?

"Because we suppressed her wolf," my wolf growls.

I sigh and shake my head. He's supposed to work with me, not against me.

"Now you know how she feels," he snaps.

For once, my wolf is wrong. Neither of us has any idea how Ember feels. We were betrayed but not rejected, not officially.

We *were* never kicked out of our **pack** because of that betrayal, nor were we spurned by our family.

My wolf and I weren't separated from each other, or abandoned by someone we trusted, or bullied by some low-lives in our most vulnerable moments.

I have to claim some responsibility for how bad Ember is feeling. I was the one who chained her. I was the one who ordered her wolf subdued. But how was I to know that her mate had rejected her?

"Now you're going to reject her too," my wolf huffs.

I roll my eyes. *"She's not ours to reject. Besides, she's a member of the pack now, and we look after our own, mate or not."*

He grunts and retreats to the back of my mind. This is an argument neither of us is going to win.

I sit on the edge of the bed and run my thumb across Ember's brand. She doesn't even stir, despite **how** painful it looks.

By now, it should look just like a human tattoo. The surrounding skin should be smooth, the mark healed to become part of her within minutes.

Ember's mark looks nothing like that. The skin is red and inflamed, and the mark is swollen too. If her wolf had been present, that would not have occurred, and the pain would have been **less**.

I gently stroke her cheek, trying to soothe away the soreness that asshole of a tribute made when he struck her. Her lip is swollen too.

I somehow have to make this right.

I mind-link Joshua. “*I need you to bring the pack doctor to my apartment to tend to Ember.*”

He doesn’t respond for a moment. When he does, it’s with another question, which irks me slightly. “*She’s in your apartment?*”

I clench my jaw. I don’t have time for his shit. “Just bring *the fucking* doctor,” I hiss through the link.

I sit on the edge of the bed, my fingers teasing Ember’s golden locks. They are soft. In fact,

everything about her is soft, from her tiny stature to her delicate skin. That’s another reason why she could never be our mate, I think.

The Dark Moon Park are warriors, and if there’s one thing, I’m almost certain of, it’s that Ember is no warrior. Her wolf might be, but if her slow, painful transformation yesterday was anything to go by, Ember isn’t very attuned with her wolf.

I wonder if they have always been this way. I try not to think too hard about it, since my wolf is annoyed with me enough as it is.

Being close to her seems to calm him, I realize. Since Ember arrived, he’s been calmer than I’ve ever known him, at least in the years since our mate betrayed us.

When I hear the knock on the door, I pull my hand away from Ember's skin like it's been burned. The last thing I need is for Joshua to see my gentle touches and get the wrong idea about my feelings. toward Ember.

Besides, the touching isn't for me; it's for my wolf. Joshua wouldn't understand that.

I stand up and walk toward the door, stealing one more glance back at Ember before I open it.

Joshua stands there with the pack doctor, who is holding a small black bag in his hand. "She reacted badly to the pack mark," I state blandly, stepping aside to let them both enter.

The doctor walks over to the bed, tutting and shaking his head. "You shouldn't have gone ahead with the ceremony without her wolf present," he chides.

I roll my eyes. Tell me something I don't know.

"I guess we'll just have to heal her the old-fashioned way until her wolf returns."

I frown. "Old-fashioned?"

The doctor looks at me and chuckles. "The way doctors heal humans, with time and rest **and** medicines. It's our wolves that heal us so quickly in normal circumstances."

My wolf paces in my head. "*You made our mate human! No wonder you think she's weak.*"

I hate when he uses **my** own thoughts against me like that. We **are** one and the same, though, so it's not really a surprise that

we know what the other is thinking. It's only awkward when we want different things, like now.

I watch as the doctor bandages Ember's arm. Then he lifts one **of** her eyelids and shines a torch in her eyes. She still doesn't move. He pulls a syringe from his bag and lifts the hem of her dress to

My wolf growls. "No one *should touch her except for us.*"

I ignore him and instead, look toward the doctor. "What was that?" I ask.

"Just a painkiller, just in case she comes around. It would probably be better to do this back in the hospital, where I can monitor her," he adds.

My wolf growls an emphatic "no," and this time, I agree with him. I want Ember here. She'll be safe here.

"No," I state, more calmly than I feel. "When do you expect her wolf to return?" I add.

The doctor sighs and stands up. "It depends. Wolfsbane isn't an exact science. A mark from her mate, even a non-fated one, would help kickstart the healing process."

"Let's mark her. Mark her now," my wolf yips excitedly.

I ignore him. That is never going to happen. Then I glance over at Joshua, who is smirking. He raises an eyebrow.

I know exactly what he's thinking. He thinks Ember means something to me. He's wrong.

“No,” I growl, out loud so that it’s an answer for the doctor as well as my wolf. “I will not allow her to be marked without her permission.”

Marking a she-wolf without permission is the equivalent of a forced marriage or rape in the human world. I will not tolerate it in my pack, and I certainly won’t commit the act myself.

Other alphas will quite happily force a mating between two unmated wolves if they think it will benefit their pack. I wouldn’t be surprised if this happens in the Craven Moon Pack sometimes.

It may even have been that pathetic alpha’s idea to have Ember’s mate paired with a stronger she-wolf, leaving Ember spurned and mateless.

No one in my pack will ever be forced to mate with someone, though, and my wolf should know better than to suggest it.

My wolf grumbles something unintelligible and sulks again.

I pull the bedroom door open and stand there, saying nothing, giving the doctor and Joshua **at** significant look. Both men recognize this as their cue to leave.

They know better than to try and continue this conversation, either with me or with each other. I have the final word.

I close the door with a slam behind them. I should have told Joshua to retrieve Ember’s clothes from the room she shared with Crystal, so that she can spend the night here till she wakes, but I really don’t need his sarcasm or innuendo right now.

Instead, I remove my shirt. Ember can wear that for now.

My wolf purrs. He likes the idea of her wearing our clothes. At least it may keep him quiet for a while.