

## Chapter 13

Ember

*“Ember? Wake up!”*

I let out a gasp, which turns into a cough. I can barely swallow, my throat is so dry. It doesn't take long to realize the voice that I'm hearing is in my head.

My wolf. She's back—and she seems surprisingly perky. She's not ready to end our lives, or to attack the first thing in sight.

“Easy there.” A large hand cups the back of my head, and I immediately realize who it is. His deep voice and masculine scent settle something in my gut that I hadn't realized was unsettled.

I force my eyes one

my eyes open, a little relieved that I can actually open them this time, though I still have to struggle against a crust of dried tears that wants to glue my eyelids shut. As expected, Alpha Scopus sits at my bedside.

He presses a cup to my lips, and I open my mouth slightly as the cool water slides across my tongue, then down my throat. He only allows me a few sips before he takes it away, leaving me wanting more.

I lick my lips. “Please...” I croak.

He smiles softly. “Just a little, then. The healer says we could to take it slowly.”

He puts the cup to my lips again, allowing me to drink a little more. This time, when he takes it away, he lowers my head back onto the pillow.

I glance to the left and see a bandage on my arm and a tube coming out of my hand, just like the IV I had in the hospital.

At least this time I know it isn't feeding me poisonous wolfsbane—otherwise I wouldn't be able to feel my wolf. “How long?” I croak.

Damon looks at me pensively, making me think that he doesn't want to tell me.

Everything that happened comes rushing back as the fog in my mind lifts. My brother. Being grabbed by the other tributes. The brand, and my paralysis.

I move my fingers, relieved that they are still working. I try to move my arm, but I only manage lift it a few inches from the bed before it drops back down. It feels like lead, but at least I can move to it.

Damon's hand rests on the top of mine. “Just rest. You're still weak.”

I glance at the bandage on my arm.

“It's healing.” he adds. “It will just take time.”

I close my eyes and sigh heavily. Why is he being like this? Kind. He must want something.

Panic grips me as I suddenly realize. He must know. He must know my secret, but how? No one is supposed to know.

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## FIFTEEN YEARS EARLIER

I look at the little bird on the ground. Its wing is hanging at an angle that looks wrong, and every time it tries to get up, it fall over. I saw it when it crashed into the window, and ran outside straight away.

I glance around to make sure there is **no** one there. I know I shouldn't do this, but I want to help the little bird.

I pick it up and cup it in my hands. Closing my eyes, I focus on taking away

I jump when I hear Mama's scolding voice. "Ember? What are you doing?"

I spin around to face my mother. "A bird. It's hurt."

I open my hands to show her, and the bird flies away. I can't help but smile as I watch it take flight. "I fixed it, Mama."

She grips my shoulders so hard it hurts. "What have I told you, Ember?" she scolds.

A tear trickles down my cheek. "I'm sorry, Mama. I just wanted to make it better."

She looks at me and sighs. “I know, sweetheart, but not everyone will understand. There are bad people out there who will want to hurt you if they see what you can do.

“Just promise me you won’t do this again. Promise me you will never tell a soul about your gift.” She wipes my tears away with her thumbs, her eyes beseeching me to see how serious this is.

“I promise, Mama,” I whisper.

She kisses the top of my head. “Good girl, Ember. Always remember that this is for the best, and that I love you.” She gives me a little shove toward the house. “Now, go take a nap, because you’ll be **tired.**”

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NOW

I try to push myself into a sitting position. “My wolf is back, so healing the brand won’t be a problem for me anymore.” The lie flows easily from my lips, much to my wolf’s disgust.

“*He* knows,” she hisses, but she doesn’t tell me how he knows or what he intends to do with the information.

Is Alpha Damon one of the bad people my mama warned me about?

His hand presses suddenly on my shoulder. It’s all the pressure that’s needed for me to collapse back onto the bed.

He narrows his eyes. “Don’t lie to me, Ember. I despise liars, and I can smell the lie on your breath. Besides, I know more about you than you realize.”

I close my eyes and swallow nervously. The softness that was in his voice when I first woke gone now. He’s back to the gruff alpha, which is exactly what I expected.

“*You lied to him, but he still cares for us. He still wants us,*” my wolf huffs up. She’s not usually this talkative—or at least, she never has been until now. We’ve always had a tense relationship, which worsened after our mate rejected us.

I roll my eyes at her. “*He doesn’t care for us,*” I scoff. “*He just wants us for our gift.*”

She growls at me like that’s my fault.

I don’t know why I missed her, but I did. She’s such a temperamental bag of bones. It would be nice, **just** once, if we were **on** the same page.

“*He does want us,*” my wolf snaps. “*At least, his wolf does. He’s chosen us. We’re his now.*”

Realization suddenly hits me. Stupid wolf. She’d do anything for a mate. Just because Damon’s wolf flirted with her a little, she spilled all our secrets.

“*You told him, didn’t you? You told his wolf what we are.*”

“*How could you be so stupid? What possible use could they have for our gift? They’re a warrior pack. All they want is strength and power. He’ll use us, just like our mama warned,*” I hiss.

She glares at me. “*I keep my promises,*” she huffs. “*I never told him.*”

We don’t have the best relationship, but my wolf wouldn’t lie to me. I don’t think she could, even if she wanted to, since we share each other’s thoughts.

But if she didn’t tell my secret, that leaves only one other person: my brother.

I would **have** forgiven him for what he did in the dining hall. The way he tossed me aside when he found his mate. But this? I won’t ever forgive him for this. He chose **his** mate over his own flesh and blood.

Damon warned Crystal about what would happen if I got hurt. Then, I got hurt. I begged him not to take it out on Crystal, but that obviously wasn’t enough. So my brother threw me to the wolves, literally, to protect his mate.

I was just a pup when Mama died. Oliver and Papa tried to tell me that she was killed by rogues. They thought I couldn’t handle the truth, that our alpha murdered her when he found out about her gift.

I may be small and weak, but there is nothing wrong with my ears, or my nose. I could smell their lies. I’m not sure my relationship with Oliver has ever been the same since that day.

But despite his lies, Oliver knows what happened to Mama. He knows exactly what Alpha Damon will do as well, now that Oliver has sold me out.

The alpha will use me as a breeder. He'll force me to mate and bear him pups, in the hope that I will produce a powerful she-wolf for him to use.

I can't let that happen. But now that Alpha Scopus knows about me, I don't know how to stop it.

I can't voice my fears about this to the Alpha King, or the governing council that's supposed to make sure all the packs are treating their members appropriately.

Even if I could get there, they would only make things worse. Once they knew what I am, they would use me, too.

Our choices are limited. I know my wolf won't be happy, but what else can I do?

*"I know you think he wants us, but he only wants our pups. Do you really want your pups to be enslaved? Used for their power?"* I challenge.

She growls at the thought.

*"We can't stay here,"* I add. *"As soon as I am healed, we have to leave. Run away from this place."*

She retreats to the back of my mind, unhappy with my assertion, but she knows I'm right.

My mama was lucky when she found my father. He was kind to her, a supportive mate and an equal partner. But he was the exception rather than the rule.

Alpha Scopus blows hot and cold. One minute he's kind, then the next he goes all alpha on me. I don't trust him, and I know that

even now, a few soft words from his wolf to mine will have her rolling over for him.

I won't become a tool for some power-hungry alpha. And now that my brother has betrayed me, there is nothing left to keep me here.

I slow my breathing so that the alpha thinks I'm sleeping. I need to play the part of the submissive little she-wolf for now—at least until I can come up with a plan to get us out of here.