

Chapter 14

Damon

Why did Ember lie to me? If there's one thing I hate above all else, **it's** being lied to. Lying leads to betrayal. I could tell my former mate was lying to me about something, but I turned **a** blind eye. look where that got **me**.

Now Ember is lying there, pretending to be asleep. Does she think I'm a fool?

“She's angry *and frightened*. She wants to leave us,” my wolf growls. “*We* must mark her to *make her* stay. *Her* wolf wants us, but *Ember* does not.”

He hesitates. “Just like you,” he adds bitterly.

I clench my jaw. If I'm honest, I'm not sure anymore what I want. I want to protect Ember, but do I really want another mate? Do I want to risk betrayal yet again? I wish my thoughts were as straightforward as my wolf's.

With anger and compassion warring inside me, I wrap my hand around Ember's tender throat.

Her eyes snap open as she glares at me. I could easily snap her neck if **I** chose to, but she shows no fear. When did she become so bold? Perhaps it's her wolf's doing.

“First **you** lie to me, then you fake sleep. Do you take me for a fool, Ember James?” I growl. “What are you planning?”

I feel the bob of her throat against my hand as she swallows nervously. Her face pales slightly, but then her eyes narrow.

“What are you planning?” she counters croakily.

I’m taken aback by her response, again bolder than I was expecting, but I try not to show it.

I don’t want to hurt her; besides, I promised my wolf I would not. I release the pressure on her neck a little.

I’m not sure if the croak in her voice is due to the pressure of my hands, or thirst after being unconscious for five days. Perhaps I should show more restraint.

Even if Ember is planning to run again, it won’t be today. She’s far too weak for that. She can barely sit, let alone stand or try to run.

I won’t allow it, today or tomorrow or any other day.

“My wolf wants to claim you as his,” I begin, leaning in so my lips are almost touching the shell of

I breathe in her scent. She smells like me, but her own scent lingers as well. Is this what she will smell like if I mark and mate her? “I am not totally against the idea, either,” I growl softly, realizing the truth of it as I speak.

Goose bumps dot her neck in the wake of my breath, and a small gasp escapes her lips. “Y...you can’t,” she stutters.

It seems her sudden boldness has flown out of the window. Probably, as I suspected, the boldness came from her wolf rather than from Ember.

Her wolf wants this just as much as mine. It's Ember who wants to run.

I release my hand from her throat, to grip her chin instead. She tries to **pull** away, but it's a futile effort. I just increase the pressure of my hold.

Tilting her head to the side, I lean forward and stroke the column of her neck with my tongue, stopping at the place on her neck that will bear my mark if I give in and mate her.

I suck gently, and she moans as she tries to fight off the pleasure of the sensation. "And who is going to stop me?" I growl. "Certainly not your wolf" I smirk against her skin- "or you, it seems.

I remove my lips from her soft skin and release my grip on her chin when I hear a knock at the door.

Ember's face is flushed, and not in a fearful **way** either. I **have a** sneaking suspicion that she enjoyed the closeness just as much as I did.

If not for the interruption, I'm not sure if I would have been able to maintain my control. My gums ache a little from where my wolf's teeth were trying to push through.

"Come," I growl as I stand up and straighten my clothes. The door opens slowly to reveal Joshua and the healer.

The healer raises an eyebrow. I was supposed to tell him when Ember regained consciousness, but it completely slipped my mind.

He walks toward the bed. “How are you feeling?”

She scowls at me, then glances back at him. “Fine,” she huffs.

Joshua raises an eyebrow at me as he stifles a chuckle.

“Has your wolf returned?” the healer questions Ember.

She nods, but says nothing more.

The healer begins to unwrap the bandage on her arm. She winces. As expected, her wolf is doing little to aid in the healing process.

“Careful,” I growl. My wolf is close to the surface. He hates the idea of anyone hurting her. If we were doing a better job of showing Ember our protectiveness, **perhaps** she would be more amenable **to both** of us.

Her wolf knows, of course, but it seems that the two are still at odds with one another.

The healer’s face pales. He knows not to incur my wrath. He continues unwrapping the bandage, his fingers moving more gently now.

His brow furrows when he sees her arm. Normally, if **her** wolf had returned, then she would have healed herself. The still–angry wound **doesn’t** surprise me, though, because I know the secret that Ember keeps.

Ember must realize by now that it’s her brother who told me. **If** she’s pissed with me, it will pale into insignificance compared to what she feels toward her brother.

I’m a little angry with Oliver, myself. If he told me, barely knowing me, who else might he tell?

“I don’t understand why she isn’t healing,” the healer states, glancing up at me. “I will investigate further, Alpha. I will find out why her wolf isn’t healing her.”

Ember’s brother may have offered up her secret, but I will not. The less people who know about this, the better. Currently, as far as I know, the only ones who know are Ember, her brother, and me.

I glare at the healer. “**You** will not. You will heal her as a doctor would a human,” I state.

He frowns. “But Alpha...” he begins...

“No,” I growl, using my alpha command to reinforce the message.

“You will not investigate, and will not reveal the fact that she cannot heal herself. No one in this room will.” The air ripples the power of my voice.

The healer bears his throat to me in submission. Even Joshua bows his head.

Ember whimpers. She has not heard the full power of my wolf before now. I rarely need to use it, but in this case, we both know that it’s necessary.

I sit on the edge of the bed and gently stroke her face. Then I lean into her and whisper almost silently in her ear, “Do not fear me, Ember. I will keep your secret, and I will keep you safe as long you are mine.”

Silence pervades the room. Joshua and the healer seem shell-shocked by both the command and the show of tenderness toward

Ember, given how careful I've been up till now to deny any such feelings for her.

The healer begins to re-bandage Ember's arm. His hands shake slightly. No one wants to be in the presence of an angry alpha, and he is **no** exception.

Once he's redressed the wound, he removes the cannula from Ember's **hand** and passes me a small bottle of tablets. "She needs to take these three times a day to prevent infection."

I look at the bottle, then at him, and nod. Normally a werewolf wouldn't require these, but I have come to learn that Ember is anything but normal.

The healer rushes toward the door, but then glances back. "Contact me if you are worried at all." With that, he scuttles out.

Joshua glances at Ember, then at me. "Anything you need, Alpha?"

I shake my head, but before I have a chance to dismiss him, I hear Ember's soft voice. "Clothes. Please, can I have my clothes?"

Joshua looks at me, waiting for permission.

I scratch my chin. "Purchase new ones for your luna. Return the hand-me-downs to the den mother."

Joshua's eyes go wide, but he dispenses with his usual lighthearted banter. He just bows to me and

then to Ember.

"Alpha. Luna," he states, before removing himself from our presence.

EMBER

When the door closes, I push myself up into a sitting position. It takes a lot of effort, but Damon lets me sit up this time.

I can't keep thinking of him as Alpha Scopus—not after he's had his mouth on my skin. Not after he called me what he just called me. I glare at him. "What did you just do?"

Damon smirks. "I haven't done anything..." He hesitates. "Yet."

I shake my head. "I'm not your mate, and I'm not your luna." That's a term reserved for the alpha's mate; not a role I've ever imagined for myself, even before my true mate rejected me.

The smirk doesn't leave his face, but his hand cups my jaw. His thumb gently caresses my cheek and I can't help but close my eyes for a second.

He knows what he's doing, and I hate it. If my wolf were on my side, she would help me to resist, but she isn't. If anything, she's making things worse. I can feel her straining toward Damon's wolf in my **mind**.

"Your choices are pretty limited, Ember. My wolf won't let another wolf touch you, and I doubt your wolf will either.

"Besides, you're a member of my pack now. No other pack will touch you. Even if they did, what sort of future could they offer for a conduit such as yourself?"

My eyes snap open. “That...that’s blackmail! You said my secret was safe.”

Damon shrugs. “I said it was safe as long as you’re mine, Ember. Will you be mine?”

I narrow my eyes. I don’t have much choice, and he knows it. “I have conditions,” I warn.

Damon chuckles. “I don’t think you’re in any position to start demanding conditions, but I’m nothing if not reasonable.”

“Reasonable” wouldn’t be my first choice of words to describe Damon, but he’s right. My choices are pretty limited, and sometimes it’s better to stick with the devil you know. Better him than my former alpha, in any case.

I straighten my shoulders and try to hold a firm pose, even though I’m trembling inside. “I want my own room, and there will be no pups,” I state.

I never want one of my pups to suffer the way I have. To have to hide for fear **of** what powerful men

I’m more **than** a little proud of myself when my voice doesn’t shake, but you know the old saying; pride comes before a fall. When Damon opens his mouth, I realize I might as well have fallen into hell.