

Chapter 18

Damon

Ember wraps her arms around my neck, sending a shower of sparks down my spine. I'm already worked up, between making her come apart with pleasure in the bath, and seeing her decked in pure white lace.

If I didn't need to present her to my pack as my mate and luna, I would turn right around and rip the flimsy dress from her body. Then I would make her scream my name, over and over.

But I can't, at least not right now.

As we leave the bedroom, it takes all my self-control not to claim those plump, perfect lips and devour her mouth.

I take a deep breath to calm both myself and my wolf. I am an alpha, and I have to show restraint. It's my job to set an example. If I don't, I will be no better than Ember's worthless brother who lost his mind at the scent of his mate.

My wolf growls at the memory of Oliver sending Ember flying, then at the memory of him spilling his guts to me, telling me Ember's secret that should have gone with him to the grave.

How many others has he told? His mate? Others from his former pack? Did he beg his former alpha not to send him here? Did he divulge Ember's secret to Stone in hopes that Stone would allow Oliver to stay?

It doesn't matter now, because I will rip the heart from any man or woman who tries to hurt her.

Ember's secret is mine, and it will stay that way unless she wishes otherwise. If Oliver James weren't her brother, I would end him so that her secret could die with him.

I won't, though. At least not yet. But at the first sign of betrayal, he will surely sign his own death warrant.

Ember furrows her brow. She must be able to feel my disquiet through the mate bond, or my stupid wolf has blabbed to hers.

I hadn't thought before about how our connection works both ways. I will find out things about Ember through our wolves, but she will also find out things about me.

I don't really care what my wolf tells hers, I decide. I don't intend to have any secrets from her.

"You should tell her about Alessia then," my wolf grumbles.

I ignore him. Of course, I will tell her in time, but now is not that time.

"What's the matter?" Ember asks.

I press my lips to her temple. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

She pouts and frowns at me, clearly not believing me.

I relent. "I'm still cross with your brother...for everything he's done, that's all."

Ember nods in acknowledgment and sighs. She's still upset with him too. I don't need my wolf to tell me that.

“But today is not about him, it’s about you, and presenting you as my luna. Are you ready?” I ask.

She swallows nervously. “I’m ready,” she whispers in response.

I press a final, chaste kiss to her lips and head down the stairs.

Joshua is standing at the bottom, dressed smartly in a suit. He looks at Ember and smiles before bowing to her. “Luna, you look stunning.”

Ember’s face flushes, and Joshua quickly changes the subject. “I obtained one of these while I was out and about today. I don’t know if you want to use it?”

I frown as Joshua gestures toward a wheelchair that I didn’t notice before, perched to the side.

“I don’t think...” I begin, but Ember cuts me off.

“Thank you, Joshua. That was really kind.” She glances at me, then turns her gaze back on Joshua and smiles. “Perhaps I can use it when I need to get around the pack house.”

I nod in agreement. As much as I never want to let Ember go, I realize she won’t want to have me carrying her everywhere all the time, and I still have a pack to run.

As hard as it will be, I need to trust my pack members around Ember. She is my mate now. After this evening, she will be my Luna, and theirs.

Joshua nods. “Of course.” He looks at me and gestures toward the large dining room. “I gathered the pack as per your instructions, Alpha.” He bows before following me toward the dining room.

“Ready?” I whisper softly in Ember’s ear.

She smiles and takes a deep breath. “Ready,” she states.

I hear small gasps and whispers as I carry Ember into the dining room, like a groom carrying his bride across the threshold.

It’s unusual for an alpha to carry his luna to a ceremony like this. Normally the alpha waits with his beta at the top table while the luna-to-be walks through the pack toward her mate.

The last time the pack saw Ember, I was carrying her out of this very room, unconscious. Now I am bringing her back in the same fashion, this time as my luna.

Hopefully, in time, she will be walking among them, without the need for me to carry her. For now, though, they will have to get used to it.

As we reach the stage, Joshua ducks around behind me and pulls out the chair designated for my luna, the one I never thought would be filled again.

I gently place her there. It looks right. Like the seat was always meant for her.

Joshua sits to her left, and I will sit on her right. For now, though, I stand and face my pack.

As soon as my eyes are on them, the whispering and the gasps stop, and I’m met with silence. I wait for a few moments, embracing the silence, before I speak.

“Today, I present to you my mate and your luna.” I smile and look at Ember. “Ember James is my mate. The Moon Goddess has

blessed me with a second-chance mate, and has blessed this pack with the luna that we deserve.

“Dark Moon Pack, I present to you your luna, Ember James.” I gesture toward Ember with my hands.

The assembled pack erupts into raucous cheers and whoops.

It hurt them as much as it hurt me when Alessia betrayed me, so they are as happy as I am that we have been blessed with another Goddess-chosen luna.

Under normal circumstances, the luna would stand now, but I know that for Ember that isn't possible. At least, I didn't think it was.

I hear her voice in my head as she mind-links not only me but also Joshua. “*Help me. Help me to rise.*” Joshua's eyes go wide; this isn't something that either of us was expecting, but I give him a tiny nod and we step toward her in tandem.

Ember grips both of our forearms when they are offered. My other arm wraps around her waist.

She rises from the chair, supported by her mate and her beta. To all intents and purposes, it looks like she is standing. Only Joshua and I know the truth.

She swallows, a little nervously. “It is an honor and a privilege to be welcomed to this pack as your luna. I thank the Moon Goddess for gifting me with such a perfect mate.”

She smiles as she casts me a glance before focusing back on the room. She has the pack eating out of the palm of her hand.

“Alpha Scopus is also my second-chance mate. My first mate rejected me...” She pauses at the sound of gasps from the pack. They are horrified.

When a wolf rejects their fated mate, it’s like slapping the Moon Goddess in the face. We have always frowned upon that sort of behavior in this pack, and we always will. “But,” Ember continues, “his loss was my gain.”

The pack applauds their luna, and I am filled with pride. But I do sense her tiring from having to be upright on legs that won’t support her, so I nod to Joshua and we ease her back into her seat.

I take Ember’s hand and press my lips to her knuckle. Her handshakes, so I squeeze it gently. This was a big ask for her, but she saw it through without me even suggesting it.

Standing once again, I quiet the assembled crowd by holding up my hand.

“Normally for a welcoming ceremony, we would conclude events with a pack run led by your alpha and your luna. Unfortunately, this will not happen today as your luna is injured.”

There are a few gasps and mumbles, but I wait until silence once again falls.

“Some of the celestial silver in the marking brand has found its way into Luna James’s body. She is healing, but it may take some time. Once she has fully healed, we will celebrate with a pack run. Until then, enjoy this feast.”

As the words leave my mouth, the omegas start carrying in huge, steaming platters of food. I glance down at Ember and smile.

The sooner this feast is over, the sooner I can take her back to my room and complete my claim.