

Chapter 2

Ember

I pack what few possessions I have into a small backpack. A photograph of my parents and another one of me and Oliver in happier times.

It still seems unfair that I should be the one that has to leave. Unfair, but not surprising.

I don't understand why he is sending me to the Dark Moon Pack. Rumor has it that everyone there is trained to fight, even the females.

Here, the females aren't allowed to train at all. Not even for self-defense.

I'm small as well. Smaller than the average wolf. The Alpha will probably take one look at me and kill me on the spot.

Rumor has it that he can't tolerate weakness of any description.

I stare at myself in the mirror. I'm skin and bone. Since Noah rejected me, I've barely eaten, despite my brother coaxing and cajoling me.

I was never very big before, but now there's even less of me.

I worry about what my wolf will do. There's more than one way to end our miserable existence and if she can, she'll find it.

Another reason why I haven't shifted. I try to keep her locked away, but every so often she tries to take control. I have no idea what she'll do if and when we shift.

A loud bang on the front door tells me it's time to leave. The hour they gave me has gone by quickly.

A gentle tap on my bedroom door, and then Oliver gently pushes it open.

"The Beta's here."

He looks at the floor.

"I can't come with you to the border. Alpha's orders."

I nod, and Oliver wraps his arms around me.

"Just keep your head down, and do as you're told," he whispers.

This is the last cruel act of our Alpha. Oliver is not even allowed to wave me off. He just wants me gone and forgotten.

I pray to the moon goddess that my brother won't forget me as well.

When I open the front door, the beta is standing there impatiently.

"Hurry up," he snarls.

There's a large SUV parked outside the house. The beta's car. I pull open the passenger door and climb inside.

He doesn't say a word, and I jump when he slams the driver-side door shut.

I have no idea how far away the dark moon pack is. All I know is that the beta is driving me to the edge of our pack's territory. He seems to begrudge even that much.

We arrive at a T-Junction and the car comes to a halt. The road is just outside of the pack territory in no-man's-land.

“Get out,” he growls. “They’ll be here for you shortly.”

I swallow nervously and open the door. As soon as I’m out of the car and the door is closed, he accelerates away, the tires kicking up dirt as he leaves.

I can’t believe he’s just dumped me at the side of the road.

I sit on a small tree stump and wait.

I have no idea who I’m waiting for. Maybe they haven’t transferred me at all. Maybe he’s just dumped me outside the pack border.

I think about sneaking back home. It would probably take a good few hours. I could tell everyone that they never collected me.

The thought barely forms in my mind when I hear the sound of an engine. Looking up, I see a mini-bus approaching. It’s completely black and the windows are tinted, so I can’t see inside.

Is this my doom?

It pulls up close to where I’m sitting and the door slides open.

A large man with heavily tanned skin looks down at me. His hair is long, but it’s tied in a ponytail. Dark brown eyes scan me before a frown appears on his face. His clothes are dark and the tee shirt he wears clings to him like a second skin, doing little to

hide his muscles. Cargo pants tucked inside heavy boots make him look like a soldier.

“Ember? Ember James?” he questions.

I nod and stand up.

He jumps out of the bus and stands at the side of the door.

“I’m Beta Joshua Vance. You’re our last pickup. In you get.”

He smiles as I walk past him and climb in. It surprises me slightly but I don’t return the smile. I don’t have much to smile about.

Any plans to sneak back home are well and truly scrapped.

I glance around the bus. There are five other people. Three men and two women.

They look happy; I don’t know why.

The men are a similar size to my brother and... My heart clenches at the thought of Noah, so I try to push it away. The women are tall and beautiful. They have curves and muscles in all the right places.

No wonder the beta frowned. He was probably expecting me to be the same, but I’m nothing like them.

None of them are from my pack. If the women were from my pack, they wouldn’t be dressed as they are.

They look fashionable in jeans and tight tee shirts. Totally different to my simple shift dress which falls below my knees. All the females from my pack wear the same.

‘My pack’. Only it’s not my pack anymore. Unless the Alpha of the Dark Moon pack sends me home, which isn’t very likely. Even if he did, I doubt they would have me back.

I find an empty seat at the back in the corner.

As soon as I’m seated, the bus moves forward with a jerk.

I lean my head on the window and wrap my arms around my body. I watch the trees until they thin out and the forest eventually disappears, leaving just fields as the view. I doubt I’ll ever see this place again.

“Hey, my name’s Crystal. What’s yours?”

I glance around to see one of the women. She has bright red hair and green eyes. She’s stunning.

“Ember,” I mumble.

She reaches into a bag that’s on the seat next to her and pulls out a pack of sandwiches.

“You want some?” she questions.

I shake my head and look away. Staring out the window once again.

“Suit yourself,” she huffs as she tucks into the food.

Maybe she’s trying to be friendly. I won’t be around long enough to make friends.

Everyone on this bus is big and strong, even the driver.

I’m small and weak and I know I won’t last five minutes.

The beta comes and sits in the seat in front of mine and leans over. He has a sandwich in his hand, which he offers me.

“You should really eat something. It’s a long journey.”

I look at his chest, avoiding eye contact.

I shake my head.

“I’m not hungry,” I mumble.

It isn’t a lie. I’m not. I haven’t been hungry since the rejection.

Flashback

There is a buzz of excitement in the pack today. Three of our young warriors are returning after spending three years away. Noah, Samuel and Peter.

They had the honor of being chosen by the Alpha King himself. To train with the Royal Guard for three years.

It was a win for all. An honor for the boys who left and would return as men. A gift from the pack but also a gift to the pack as they would return as some of the best-trained warriors there are.

Every year, the King travels around the packs and chooses juvenile wolves to join his elite guard. It is a great honor to have one person chosen from your pack, let alone three.

I was only sixteen when they left. They were two years older than me. Just at the age when they would find their mates. There is much excitement among all the she-wolves who are of age to find

their mate. Hoping that one of our three best warriors might claim them.

I usually work in the hospital, but today they need more help to prepare the feast for the homecoming heroes.

We hear the cheers from the kitchen as the warriors approach the pack house. We drop what we're doing and run outside to join the rest of the pack in welcoming them home.

As they walk towards the packhouse I catch a scent in the air. It's so enticing I have to get closer.

When I see his shock of red hair hanging loosely at his shoulders, I know instantly what's happening.

'Mate' my wolf growls.

I run towards him, waiting for him to do the same. Only he doesn't. He stops dead in his tracks.

"Mate," I whisper.

He glares at me. Then he begins to laugh.

"You seriously think I would want a runt like you as a mate?"

This isn't the Noah I remember. The Noah I remember was kind and thoughtful. He always had a smile for everyone.

He takes a step towards me.

"I, Noah Danson, reject you Ember James as my mate."

Gasps come from the assembled crowd.

He takes a step towards me.

“Accept it. Now,” he growls.

I clutch my chest and fall to my knees as pain erupts inside.

“I accept your rejection,” I mumble, as tears cascade down my cheeks.

He grits his teeth and grimaces slightly. I know he feels it too, but a warrior is trained to deal with pain.

He glances to the left and walks towards the assembled crowd before wrapping his arm around another she-wolf. I don't know her, but he's making a point. The point being that anyone would be better than me.

“You're more my type,” he chuckles as he presses his lips to hers.

She squeals in delight as she wraps her arms around his neck.

The crowd surges towards them, and resumes their cheers, leaving me on my knees in the dirt like I've ceased to exist.

*****End of Flashback*****

The beta looks at me and frowns.

“Did you volunteer for this transfer?” he questions.

I should tell him yes because I know that all transfers should be voluntary. If they aren't, then the Alpha of the pack could get into trouble.

It's supposed to stop the transfer of troublesome wolves that the Alpha doesn't want to banish. No pack wants a troublemaker.

I should, but I don't. If I lie, he'll be able to tell. Besides, why should I be loyal to my Alpha? He's rejected me, just like my mate rejected me. Probably the pack where I'm going will do the same.

I swallow nervously and shake my head.

He stares at me and narrows his eyes. He's probably assessing me, trying to decide if my old pack wanted to get rid of me because I was rebellious and troublesome.

I was neither of those things. I was always a good wolf. I always did as I was told. Even today, I did as I was told and didn't put up a fight.

He stands up and walks to the front of the bus before pulling out a phone. He glances back at me again before tapping out a message.

I'm as good as dead.