

## Chapter 20

Damon

I'm a fool. An arrogant fool. I should have realized that Stone would use underhanded tactics. When it comes to an alpha wanting something, they will get it any way they can.

Now I have two dead warriors, and my mate is in a coma.

At least Joshua is okay. He only took a graze from the wolfsbane-dipped silver arrow, and was able to shake off the worst of the effects after about an hour. But that same type of arrow killed both my warriors, and would have killed me, if not for Ember.

I stare at Ember. I haven't left her side since she collapsed. Why didn't she listen to me? Why didn't she stop healing me when I told her to?

The incessant beeping of the heart monitor is driving me crazy, but at least every beep that comes out of the damn thing tells me that Ember is still alive, even if she is only hanging on by a thread.

If our bond healed her arm from the celestial silver brand, I can only pray it will do the same for the wolfsbane and silver that she absorbed from me.

She's fighting on two fronts now. She still has the remnants of celestial silver that paralyzed her, running through her bloodstream, weakening her. And now she's also carrying the silver and wolfsbane that were meant for me.

I sit on the edge of the bed and stroke her hair. It turns out, in a crisis, my little mate wasn't as vulnerable as we both assumed.

She called on the forces of nature, summoning a lightning strike powerful enough to make the cowardly Alpha Stone flee.

Did she know she could do this? I have a feeling she didn't. If she had known, she would have likely used it before. Now I wonder if she is truly a conduit, or if there's something else at work here. Was her mother also something else?

After Stone fled, I sent my best warriors after him, but they were unable to track him down. He must have had some sort of help. An alpha can't just disappear like that, nor could he have come by silver and wolfsbane arrows at the drop of a hat.

My men did at least track down the archers who launched the poison arrows, a clear act of war. Those archers have already been executed.

Now the rest of Stone's pack is about to be wiped off the face of the earth. If Stone was fool enough to return to his pack house, then he will be killed along with them.

As for Ember's former mate, Noah...he resides in my dungeon, along with Oliver. Both of them are bound in silver chains.

The tree broke Noah's back when it fell on him. He won't be healing anytime soon, and since the silver chains cut off his ability to heal, the damage may be permanent.

Not that it matters. As soon as I have all the information I need from him, I intend to end Noah's miserable life. And if I find that Oliver had anything to do with this attack, he will die as well.

I intend to interrogate them both myself, but they can wait for now.

My eyes snap to the door of the hospital room as Joshua enters. His shoulder is bandaged, and he has stitches. Thanks to those deadly arrows, it's like a human injury, but he's at least healing faster than my mate.

"We're ready to leave," he states.

I press a gentle kiss to Ember's lips. It reminds me of the old fairy tale of the sleeping beauty. Ember really looks like she is just sleeping, and can be roused by true love's kiss.

Sadly, she doesn't stir. I don't want to leave her bedside, but I have to lead my warriors. I have to make an example of the pack that dared to attack mine. Dare to attack me and try to kidnap my luna.

I slowly rise from the bed and walk toward where Joshua is standing. "I want you to stay here. I need you to protect your luna."

Joshua frowns. "Damon! You need..."

I interrupt him before he can finish. "You're injured, Joshua. I won't risk you being hurt any more than you are already, and I need someone I can trust to make sure that bastard doesn't come back for Ember."

Joshua shakes his head. "You saw as well as I did what she can do. She's quite capable of defending herself. If anything..."

"If anything, what?" I growl.

Joshua stares at Ember. Neither my wolf nor I like it. I narrow my eyes and swallow the growl threatening to break forth.

“How do you know she’s not dangerous? She might not even be...” He glances around furtively, as though he’s waiting for someone to jump out. “A werewolf. She might be something else,” he whisper-shouts.

Joshua doesn’t know what I know, that Ember is a conduit. I certainly don’t intend to share that secret without Ember’s permission.

But even so...is it possible that as a conduit she has powers I don’t know about? Hell, I know little enough about conduits as it is.

All I do know is that she’s, my mate. I don’t care whether she’s a full werewolf, or some kind of hybrid. I will protect her with my life, and I expect Joshua to do the same.

I stalk toward Joshua and wrap my hand around his throat as I slam him into the closed door. “She is your luna, and you will treat her with respect. Do I make myself clear?” I growl.

“Yes, Alpha,” he croaks out.

I release him, and he bears his neck in submission.

“I want extra guards stationed at the hospital. That piece of shit Stone is out there somewhere, and I’m not taking any chances.

“Extra guards in the dungeons as well. I don’t want anyone trying to break out her brother and that so-called warrior,” I command.

Joshua nods, and I watch his eyes flash black as he mind-links my orders.

“I will deal with your impertinence when I return,” I growl.

I leave Joshua standing in the hospital room with my mate. I trust him not to betray me, but his doubt about Ember is certainly cause for concern.

The sooner I deal with what remains of the treacherous Craven Moon Pack, the sooner I can return to Ember’s side. Then I will deal with her brother and her pathetic ex-mate.

As soon as I set foot out of the building, I shift, along with the large contingent of warriors that I’m taking with me.

They saw the aftermath of Conrad Stone’s attack, they saw the bodies of their two fallen brothers, and they all want revenge just as much as I do. There will be none of Stone’s pack left by the time we’re finished.

My wolf surges forward, and I let him take control. He’s just as angry as I am, if not more so. The thought of someone trying to take his mate from him makes him see red. The only thing that will ease his anger is the blood of our enemy.

“*They all die today,*” he growls, as we run at full speed toward Craven Moon Pack territory.

Conrad Stone hasn’t even bolstered his border defenses; there’s only a contingent of about ten wolves patrolling, and they don’t look as alert as I would expect for a pack expecting battle.

Did Stone think I wouldn’t come after him and his pack, or does he not even care? His pack is relatively small compared to mine, so it’s likely he doesn’t have the warriors to protect anyone regardless.

That's not my concern. If the pack continues to follow a weak alpha, an alpha who turns around and makes war on the most powerful pack around, then they deserve everything they get.

I rip the throat from the first guard I come across before he even realizes what's happening. My wolf raises his head and howls to our warriors to commence the attack.

The border warriors are patrolling in pairs. The guard paired with the one I just killed is as cowardly as Alpha Stone, turning tail to flee toward the pack house. One of my warriors runs him down and instantly snaps his neck.

*“Kill the rest of the males, and round up the females and pups. If you find the worthless alpha before I do, keep him alive until I come for him,”* I growl to my warriors through the mind-link.

As I search the territory for any sign of Conrad Stone, I blank out the screams of fear, mostly coming from the females.

They probably expect us to brutalize them. Use them for our own amusement. They shouldn't judge all male wolves using their own alpha as an example.

My warriors won't harm them needlessly, though if they refuse to submit to me then they will be signing their own death warrants. Otherwise, they will be treated like any other refugee and offered a place in my pack.

As I suspect, I find no sign of Conrad Stone. He fled from the scene of his crime and he has deserted his pack.

By the time I reach the pack house, all the males are dead. The smell of copper lingers in the air, and bodies of warriors, young and old, litter the ground.

My warriors are nothing if not ruthless, but at least the deaths of these males have been quick and clean, which is more than can be said for the two warriors I lost.

Poisoning by silver and wolfsbane is never a pretty sight. I would have suffered the same fate if not for Ember.

My warriors have rounded up the females and their pups. They huddle together, whimpering with terror.

I look at my lead warrior. "Report," I command.

He stands at attention. "All the males are dead, including the ranked males. The alpha and beta are both missing."

I nod. It seems like all the leadership of this pack are cowards. "Good work. Arrange transport for the rest. I don't trust any of them not to run. I'll deal with any who still support their old alpha when you return."

He bows in acknowledgment, and I quickly shift.

I need to get back to my mate. The closer I am to her, the quicker she will heal.