

Chapter 22

Damon

I grip Noah Danson's hair in one clenched fist and slam the other into his face. Noah is shackled to the wall of my dungeon with silver chains that suppress his wolf.

Those chains are the only thing holding him up, because his legs are next to useless. Even if I were to let him go, he would never walk again.

Poetic justice, really; Ember's legs are currently the same, and Noah is as good a scapegoat for that as any. My only consolation is that Ember's legs may heal. Noah Danson's will not, but he won't live to realize that.

"Where is Stone?" I growl as blood drips from the broken warrior's face.

"I...I don't know," he stutters.

I curl my lip. The scent of fear and lies is seeping out of him. How could this piece of shit ever have thought he was better than Ember? His loss was my gain.

"Liar," I hiss, letting go of his hair to wrap my hand around his throat. "Why did you come for her? Why did you come for my mate?"

He shakes his head as best he can. "She's not your mate...she's mine," he rasps.

I slam his head against the stone wall of the dungeon—once, twice, three times. Blood trickles down from his wounded scalp.

“You rejected her, you piece of shit. You were never worthy of her, anyway. Now, tell me the real reason you came for her.” I hesitate for a moment, then add, “And if your tongue spews another lie, I will cut it out myself.”

His face pales, and I know it’s not because of the blood loss. “Y—you can’t. I’m one of the king’s chosen,” he splutters.

I can’t help but laugh. If this is one of the Alpha King’s chosen warriors, then there is little or no hope for that supposedly elite defense force of his. I shouldn’t be surprised. Marcus always did value brute strength over integrity.

“You have a choice. You can either tell me everything and have a quick death, or I’ll torture you slowly until you’re begging to tell me. After that, if the king really wants you, I’ll send you back to him, one piece at a time.”

I stare him down for a moment before releasing my grip on his throat. “I’ll give you a few moments to decide. When I return, I expect answers.”

I turn and walk out of the cell, then head to the next one, which holds Ember’s brother.

He’s a little better off than Noah, but not by much. He isn’t chained to the wall, but I’ve still ordered silver shackles placed around his wrists and ankles. His skin is already beginning to blister as the silver burns his skin.

His face is also swollen and bruised. Not my doing, but the guards don't like a traitor.

If it hadn't been for Ember, I would be dead. My pack doesn't like the idea that Oliver James might be partly responsible, and I won't fault them for using their fists in my defense.

I fold my arms across my chest, but before I can even begin to question him, Oliver opens his mouth.

“My sister...is my sister all right?”

I frown slightly. I can't sense any deceit coming from him. Those that lie or fake concern will always give off a scent, though it's usually only discernible by higher-ranking wolves like alphas or betas.

All I can scent from Ember's brother is concern, and maybe a little fear. The fear at least is understandable; I am prepared to end him if Ember condones it when she wakes up.

He buries his head in his hands. Is he upset for himself, or for his sister? For now, I'm not about to let this show of emotion affect me.

“Did you tell your alpha?” I growl. “Did you spill your guts to him as you did to me, and let him know what Ember truly was?”

He shakes his head vehemently.

“No! ... No. I swear, I would never do anything to put her in danger.”

“If you didn't tell him, then how the hell did he find out?” I hiss.

He raises his head and looks at me. “I swear, I don’t...” He stops mid-sentence as realization crosses his face.

“The healer,” he announces. “Ember used to work at our pack’s hospital. She was only supposed to clean and bring the patients their food, but I know she was doing more when no one was watching.”

He sighs. “Sometimes she would come home drained and exhausted. That healer was so arrogant. Telling everyone he was the best healer in the land, because his patients never needed to stay in the hospital for long.

“After Ember was sent here, he must have realized something was amiss. He must have realized it was Ember doing the healing all along.”

I clench my jaw. I have no way of knowing if this is the case, as that healer is now dead, along with the rest of the male members of the pack.

It doesn’t matter now, anyway. I can smell that Oliver James isn’t lying, so I know that he wasn’t involved, and that’s enough for me. Punishing him further will only hurt Ember.

He’s still her brother, after all, even if he did betray her secret to me. And even if I’m angry at him for betraying her trust, I am grateful that he let me know what I needed to help her.

I nod to the guard who is standing just outside the cell. “Release him, but put him under house arrest.” As much as I believe him, I’m not taking any chances.

The guard nods and unlocks the silver shackles.

“What about my sister? Please tell me she is all right,” he begs.

I sigh. “She is stable. That’s the best the healer can tell me. She healed me after your cowardly alpha’s attack. She absorbed the silver and wolfsbane from the arrows, and has remained unconscious since.”

His shoulders sag, and grief and sadness exude from his pores. The scent is overwhelming.

“I will keep you informed of her status,” I say, voice clipped.

I watch as the guard leads him away from the cell. Maybe I misjudged him. I guess time will tell.

I do know that I didn’t misjudge the piece of shit who is chained to the wall in the other cell, at least.

I’m about to head right back to fulfill my earlier threat to torture everything out of Noah, when I feel the pressure of Joshua’s mind-link.

“Damon. You need to come to the hospital. The luna is regaining consciousness.”

Thoughts of anything other than Ember are immediately purged from my mind. I run from the dungeons to the hospital.

Guilt rolls over me. I wanted to be there when she woke. Instead of being by her bedside, I’m plotting to beat the crap out of her former mate in an attempt to find and kill her former alpha.

Even if I find out where Stone is, nothing will change. He’ll still be aware of the gift that she has. He may have broadcast it to all and sundry the moment he left my territory.

I don't doubt that at least Stone's beta knew, but from what I can gather, apart from the idiot in the cells, Stone hasn't told anyone else...yet. Well, at least not any of the surviving females from his pack.

Whether he has managed to tell anyone else since then, I don't know. More to the point, would they believe him?

I wouldn't have believed stories about a conduit myself, let alone a she-wolf who could produce lightning out of thin air. I barely believe it now, except that I've seen Ember with my own eyes, and experienced her healing power.

As I push the door to her room open, everything I want to say to Ember, everything I want to ask her, disappears from my mind.

Her blonde hair is splayed around her head, and her eyelids flutter. The machine by her bed beeps steadily—until I see her nostrils flare as she takes in my scent.

Then her eyes snap open and focus on me; the machine's rate of beeping kicks into overdrive as her heart beats faster.

I rush to her bedside, and she reaches out her hand to touch my face. "Y—you're okay," she croaks.

I shake my head. "If you ever do that again, if you ever put your life in danger..."

She presses her finger to my lips. "I need to mark you," she whispers.