

## Chapter 23

Ember

When I take in Damon's scent, my heart nearly explodes out of my chest. Partly with relief, even though the Moon Goddess told me he was okay, but partly with trepidation.

I know he's going to be more than a little cross with me. The last thing I remember before I blacked out was him telling me to stop, and I didn't. I couldn't. I couldn't let him die, not even if it meant dying myself.

Despite all that, I don't have time to waste. I need to mark him. I need to lift this curse. If Alpha Stone knows about me, then how many others do as well?

If what the Moon Goddess told me is true, I won't be able to pass on my abilities to a pup, but no one else knows that.

They'll just use me to try and get what they want—and then, perhaps, kill or banish me and my pups both when it turns out they're not conduits.

The other problem is, will Damon believe me? How can he possibly believe that I just spoke to the Moon Goddess in my dreams, or that both my mother and I were actually children of the gods?

I barely believe it myself...but deep down, I know it's true.

A part of me hates it. Hates that my earthly father never knew that my mother had cheated on him.

Or did he? Did he betray my mother to Alpha Stone as vengeance for her unfaithfulness? Was that how the alpha found out about her gift?

I snap out of my wandering thoughts as I feel Damon's hand grab hold of my own where it's still pressed to his lips. He pulls my fingers away before gently kissing the tops of my knuckles.

Then he cups my cheek in his large hand, and I can't help but lean into him. I still feel the tingles when he touches me, despite my wolf being silent again from the second dose of wolfsbane.

"I would like nothing more than for you to mark me," he says gently, "but without your wolf, how do you propose to make the bite? Your body is still filled with the poison from the assassin's arrow, both wolfsbane and silver."

It feels like someone has just tipped a bucket of ice-cold water over me as the realization sinks in. Damon is right. I need my wolf to be able to mark him.

I glance over at the healer, who is standing sheepishly in the corner trying to be unobtrusive about observing my reunion with Damon. "There must be something you can do to get rid of the poison," I plead.

I look back at Damon. "I need to be able to mark you to lift this curse."

Damon sighs and shakes his head. "Your lack of healing ability is not a curse. It's who you are. No marking will change that. It's

only because I'm an alpha and your mate that our bond is helping you to heal.”

I shake my head and begin to sit up. “No, Damon, you don't understand. The Moon Goddess told me...”

I feel Damon's hand gently pushing me back down onto the bed. He glances at the healer.

“It's likely that the poison in her system is causing her to hallucinate. It will be better if she sleeps it off,” the healer states as he picks up a syringe from a stainless-steel tray.

No. This can't be happening. Not again.

“Please, Damon, you have to listen to me,” I shriek as the healer continues walking toward the bed.

I glance between the pair of them, but Damon shows no sign of stopping him. “If you care anything for me, then you won't let him do this,” I sob.

Damon's fingers gently card through my hair, caressing my scalp with the tips of his fingers. “It's going to be ok,” he soothes. “When you wake up, this will just seem like a bad dream.”

I wrench my head to the side, pulling away from him. His fingers snag in my hair, and it feels like a thousand needles pricking my scalp. I don't care about the pain. I just want him to listen to me, to trust me.

He looks surprised at my reaction. He'll be even more surprised in a minute.

“If you do this, Damon, I swear it will be all over between us, mate or not. You asked me to trust you before, and I did. Now it’s your turn to trust me. I’m not hallucinating. I know what I saw.”

Damon furrows his brow, then sighs. He probably thinks he needs to humor me, but he holds his hand up, halting the healer in his tracks. I breathe out a sigh of relief.

Then I try to think fast. Damon may have stopped the healer from sedating me, but now I have to persuade him somehow that I’m telling the truth. That the wolfsbane in my system hasn’t driven me crazy.

Damon removes his fingers from my hair and folds his arms across his chest, staring at me expectantly.

If he wasn’t pissed off with me before, he certainly is now. He’s a typical alpha in some ways. He doesn’t like to be confronted, or told that he might be wrong.

I push myself into a sitting position. I’m still so weak that it’s a struggle. Damon is obviously conflicted, but at the end of the day, he is my mate, so he helps me to sit.

“Firstly,” I begin, “there isn’t really any such thing as a conduit. I could produce pups until I’m blue in the face, but I would never produce one with any special powers.”

Damon throws a startled glance at the healer, obviously surprised I’m willing to talk about this in front of an audience. Then he frowns and takes hold of my hand. “That’s not why I wanted you, Ember. You must realize that.”

I nod. He seems upset that I would think that of him. I don't—not anymore. Maybe I was worried at first, but as soon as he put his mark on me, I understood that the bond between us is true.

“I know. That's not why I told you. I just need you to realize that everything that everyone believes about conduits is wrong. My mother was a conduit, yes, like me, but it wasn't her who gave me my powers. This...”

I tap my chest. “Whatever you want to call it, this gift or curse, it isn't what I truly am.”

Damon shakes his head, looking confused. I'm a little confused myself.

A new voice speaks from the doorway. “The lightning...the storm. That was you, wasn't it?”

I glance over at Joshua as he stalks toward the bed. When did he get here? I've only had eyes for Damon.

I can see by the look on Joshua's face that he doesn't entirely trust me. Why would he? He's never seen anything like me before. Neither have I.

I shake my head. “No, it wasn't me.”

Joshua glares at me. He thinks I'm lying. “Then who? It only happened when you became angry, and everyone else was incapacitated.”

Damon nods in agreement. “He has a point. It was only when Noah tried to grab you that everything changed.”

I sigh. “I don’t know who caused that lightning. Maybe my father? Or perhaps my grandfather.

“I was only with the Moon Goddess for a short while. Time on the celestial plane flows more slowly than it does on Earth. I didn’t have the chance to ask her everything.”

Damon rolls his eyes. “Yeah, of course, time flows differently,” he mumbles under his breath. “That makes sense.”

He still doesn’t believe me, and if I’m honest, I don’t really blame him. Some of what I’m saying sounds like it’s coming straight out of a fairy tale.

“I know this all sounds crazy, but it’s true. The Moon Goddess showed me what happened just after I was born. Zeus is my mother’s father, and Ares is mine.

“Zeus was pissed at Ares because Ares had bedded Zeus’s daughter. He was also pissed at the Moon Goddess for saying I was more beautiful than my mother.

“So, he cursed me to punish them both. All the power I’m supposed to have, my birthright from Ares, I can’t use it without causing myself pain. The only way to lift the curse is for me to find my mate, and for us to mark each other.”

I sigh. “Zeus thought that by causing me to be so weak, that wouldn’t happen. I would perish, because no mate would want me.” I look up at Damon.

“Having you as a second-chance mate was all part of the Moon Goddess’s plan. She knew that Noah would reject me because I was small and weak.

“She also knew that Alpha Stone would take Noah’s side, and likely want to get rid of me from his pack.”

Damon sighs and leans forward. He cups my cheeks in his hands. “Even if what you say is true, Ember, and not some strange dream...how are you going to mark me without your wolf? Did the Moon Goddess tell you that?”

I lower my eyes and stare into my lap. It’s a valid point, and I have no answer. I reach inside to try to find my wolf, but once again I come up blank.

Damon places his finger under my chin and tilts my head up. My stomach flips as we make eye contact.

By now, I’m not sure if it’s the mate bond making me feel like this, or if I’m starting to fall for him. I feel a little guilty for threatening to end us, but at least it made him listen.

“Honestly, Ember, I don’t care if you have some kind of dormant powers. I only care about you. But you have to ask yourself, what do you really want? Do you want the power to destroy, or the power to heal?”

“If not for you, I would be dead. I’m only here with you now because you were able to heal me. I know you think it’s a curse, not being able to heal yourself, but it’s also a gift to be able to heal others.

“Only you can decide which gift you want. Whatever you decide, I will support you. For now, though, you need to rest.”

I stare at Damon. I never thought about it like that before.

What should I do? When my wolf returns, as I know she will, I will need to choose. I will either need to accept the power to destroy, or keep the power to preserve.

I can't have both.

It's a choice that only I can make.