

Chapter 24

Damon

I should laugh off this crazy story that my mate just told me. Perhaps the healer is right. Perhaps she's hallucinating.

But deep down, I know she isn't. I can sense these things as an alpha. Although no one follows the old gods anymore, we still pray to Selene, the Moon Goddess. If we believe in her, then it follows that the old gods must still exist as well.

Did Ares rain down the lightning that rent the tree in half to protect his daughter? Or perhaps it was Zeus. Because if Ember's story is true, then she's, his granddaughter.

I know if I had a daughter or a granddaughter, I wouldn't want any harm to come to her. Some soft part of me that I've long denied wonders if Ember might want pups, if I can indeed play the protective father someday.

I gaze at Ember where she's lying on the bed. She's sleeping again now. A natural sleep, not the forced one that the healer would have given her.

I'm being selfish, I know I am, but I can't help it. I like the idea of having my own little healer. Ember did save my life, after all. If at some point in the future, my life once again hangs in the balance, I could die without her healing powers.

I also like the idea of being the one to protect Ember, to keep her from harm. If she marks me, she will no longer need me to protect her. She will be able to heal herself and call upon the power of Ares, whatever that power may be.

But what if she doesn't mark me, and then something happens to me? If I die because she isn't there to save me, what happens to Ember?

She will no longer have a protector, and she'll have no way of protecting herself.

It's not my decision to make, it's hers, but I know I can sway her. I can persuade her to either mark me or not mark me.

She didn't ask about Stone and I didn't tell her, but with him still at large, he is a risk. Not to me, I can defend myself and my pack...but to Ember. He could reveal her secret, and that could unleash forces beyond what even I can protect her from.

A tap on my shoulder disturbs my thoughts, and I glance to my left to see Joshua. There's no joking or smile on his face. He's in serious beta mode. "What will you do?" he questions.

I shrug. "It's not for me to decide. It's for Ember. Either way, I will support her, and I expect you to do the same."

Joshua bows his head. "She's my luna, and I swear to protect her."

I nod in acknowledgment—but I wonder. If something happens to the alpha of a pack, the luna loses her title. Without her title, would Joshua still protect Ember?

Unless Ember and I do make an heir together, it will fall to Joshua to lead the pack after my death. I doubt he would harm Ember, but he might not feel the need to protect her the way that I do.

I walk over to the healer, who is looking at a clipboard. “Is there a way to reverse the effect of the silver and wolfsbane?” I question.

He looks at me and frowns. Then he glances over at my sleeping mate. “There is, but it’s fairly untested, and could be dangerous.” He hesitates. “Even fatal...”

I sigh. At the moment, even if Ember wanted to mark me, she couldn’t. I want her to have that choice, but the clock is ticking.

I don’t doubt for one second that Conrad Stone is trying to gather allies. I didn’t become the alpha of the largest and strongest wolf pack without making a few enemies along the way, and those enemies would only be too happy to see me fall.

I sit on the edge of the bed, gently stroking Ember’s face. I should really let her sleep, but there are decisions to be made. Her eyelids gently flutter open, and she smiles when she sees me.

“How are you feeling?” I begin.

She frowns. I should know better than to skirt around the issue.

I sigh. “I know I haven’t given you much time, but you need to decide. Alpha Stone...”

I hesitate. How do you tell someone that you have destroyed every single male member of her former pack, but the alpha who wants to kidnap her is still at large?

“He got away, didn’t he?” she whispers.

I nod. Trust my gorgeous mate to make this easier for me. “I don’t doubt that he’ll be back. When he returns, I will protect you with my body and soul, but should anything happen to me...”

Ember furrows her brow. “You think I should mark you?”

I take her hand in mine. “The selfish part of me wants you to remain as you are so that you need me. Need my protection.”

I sigh heavily. “The logical side of me knows that I can’t leave you vulnerable. You may not always be near me if my life is in danger. I can’t bear the thought of you getting hurt because I was too selfish to allow you the ability to defend yourself.”

Ember nods. She can see how torn I am. “Thank you,” she whispers, “thank you for being honest. Even if I have my father’s powers, I have no idea whether I will be much of a fighter.”

Then she smiles. “I’ll always need you to protect me, Damon. Even if I can protect myself. But as much as I want to mark you and be able to heal myself and stand by your side in a fight, I can’t do that until my wolf returns.”

She sighs. I know what’s coming next. Her wolf is still dormant from the wolfsbane; my wolf can’t sense her at all, and he’s pretty annoyed about it.

I don’t want to put Ember’s life at risk, but I’m not sure there is another way. “The healer,” I begin, “he says that he can bring your wolf back.”

Ember's eyes go wide, and she pushes herself up to a sitting position. "What are we waiting for?" she asks excitedly.

I shake my head. "It's dangerous. It could even be fatal. Only you can decide, Ember. I don't want to lose you, but it seems this is your only chance to get your wolf back before it's too late."