

Chapter 25

Ember

I stare at Damon when he's finished explaining how dangerous this path can be. Perhaps the gods really do have it in for me.

My life couldn't be more perverse. When I wanted to die, so many obstacles were put in my way that I couldn't. Now that I want to live, it seems fate wants me to die.

Well, screw fate. I intend to live, and what's more... I intend to be happy.

I glance over at the healer, who is lurking on the periphery. "Do it," I state.

The healer looks at Damon like he's asking for permission, which pisses me off. "Don't look at him," I hiss, "look at me. I'm the one who decides."

The healer swallows nervously, and Damon chuckles. "You heard your luna. She is my equal in all things, so do her bidding."

The healer nods and walks toward the bed. A syringe lies on a stainless-steel tray, filled with some kind of ominous-looking, bright green liquid.

"This is a drug that can force a shift," he begins. "The danger is that it pushes the human consciousness to the background and forces the wolf forward."

I nod. “Similar to an alpha command?”

The healer frowns. “Similar, but if your wolf is too suppressed, she won’t be able to take control. However, your human side will still be pushed back. Therein lies the danger.”

I swallow nervously. “If that happens, I die?”

He quickly shakes his head. “Not necessarily, but possible. Certainly, it may cause you to lapse into a coma.” He hesitates. “Do you still want me to proceed, Luna?”

I glance between him and Damon. This won’t just affect me; it will affect Damon as well. If I die, then Damon might go mad from the pain of a second severed mate bond, or even die as well.

Damon takes my hand and presses his lips to my knuckles.

“We don’t have a choice, do we?” I question.

Damon shakes his head slowly, his face a mask of sadness. He doesn’t want the healer to do this, any more than I do, but we have to try.

Even if this works and I regain my ability to heal, it will take my wolf a while to heal me fully. I will have the added power of my father’s gift, but I still have no idea what that might be, or if I’ll even be able to control it.

I look at the healer. “Do it. Do it now, before I have a chance to change my mind.”

Damon wraps an arm around me, pulling me close. Even without my wolf, I can feel the mate bond thrumming between us beneath the surface.

The healer clears his throat, and we both look at him. “I would suggest keeping your distance once I inject the serum,” he says to Damon. “If this works, the Luna’s wolf may be a bit...cranky.”

Damon smirks before pressing his lips to mine.

The kiss starts soft and gentle, but when the realization hits us both that this could be the last time, we taste each other, it turns hungry. Its almost as though sparks are igniting across our skin where we touch.

When our lips finally part, I can’t help the words that escape from my lips. “I love you, Damon.”

His hand reaches out and gently caresses my face. “I love you more...come back to me, Ember,” he whispers, before nodding to the healer and taking a few steps back.

Despite Damon still being in the room, the loss of his touch makes me feel empty. I need him just as much as the air that I breathe, and I know by the look on his face he feels the same.

I offer up a small prayer to the Moon Goddess that I can survive this. Not just for me, but for Damon as well.

The healer gently takes my arm and swabs the skin with a piece of cotton wool doused in something cold. I shiver a little, but I’m not sure if it’s from the chill on my skin or the fear of what’s coming.

I wince slightly when the needle penetrates my skin, but the slight discomfort is nothing compared to what follows.

The healer presses the plunger on the syringe, pumping that green liquid into my veins. I can't help but scream. It feels like the liquid is burning me from the inside out.

I hear Damon growl, or rather, his wolf does. I've never seen his wolf quite so close to the surface. Even when Damon marked me, he still had control. At this moment, I'm not sure.

As selfish as this may sound, though, Damon and his wolf are the least of my worries at the moment.

As the fiery liquid spreads through my veins, the world around me grows distant, almost like a dream.

My vision blurs. The sounds in the room turn muted, like I'm in a bottle, like some demented genie. I try to fight it, but it's no use.

As the world slowly fades, I wonder if this is it. Is this what it's like to die?

Did my grandfather finally get his way?

The last thing I hear before I'm consumed by darkness is a growl. Is it my wolf? Or has Damon finally lost control of his wolf?

Whoever is making the noise, I'm not awake long enough to find out who or what it is.

DAMON

I struggle to contain my wolf as our mate's screams rend the air. If the healer had warned us that it would be this painful, I doubt that we would have been so keen to proceed. I certainly wouldn't have been.

My wolf wants to rip the healer's throat out, but we've started this process now. I'm not about to stop him halfway through, or all of Ember's pain may have been for nothing. It still may be for nothing, but only time will tell.

As the last of the disgusting green fluid enters her body, Ember's whole body stiffens. Her back arches, and just before her body goes limp, I feel a connection forming—or rather, my wolf does.

It's weak, but it's there.

As pleased as I am that we can both now feel her wolf, the sight of Ember on the bed, limp and lifeless, tears at my heart. I'm about to rush over, but Joshua holds me back.

I watch as Ember's body goes briefly still and lifeless, then starts to writhe and contort. She's shifting, but it's not fluid like a normal shift, or even slow and fitful like the one other time I saw Ember shift.

Bones reshape, taking their wolf form before they suddenly snap and morph back into human form. I thank the Goddess that Ember is unconscious, because if she wasn't, if she was awake, the pain would likely be unbearable.

The healer backs away from the bed, his face ashen.

“Where the fuck do you think you're going?” I hiss.

He stares at me. “If... I mean, when her wolf emerges...” He hesitates, swallowing nervously. “She's going to be angry...really angry.”

He shakes his head. “The only one who will be safe is you...her mate. Anyone else, she won’t hesitate to attack.”

I glance over my shoulder at Joshua. “Go,” I urge.

He frowns. “Are you sure? I won’t leave you if you’re in any danger, Alpha.”

I shake my head. “She won’t hurt me. I’m her mate.”

I’m not sure that Joshua is convinced. I’m not sure I’m convinced either. Ember’s wolf already tried to challenge me once, but that was before I marked her.

Perhaps I should shift. That way, if her wolf wants to mark me, just as Ember does, I might just get out of this without violence. Even in rage, I doubt Ember’s wolf would be able to hurt me, but I don’t want to fight her if I can avoid it.

I watch as the healer bolts for the door. Joshua follows him a little more slowly, leaving just me and Ember in the room.

Only it isn’t Ember. Nor is it her wolf. It’s a mixture of the two. She’s still phasing between wolf form and human, limbs shifting and twisting in a way that has me wincing in sympathy.

“Don’t fight it, Ember,” I whisper, almost like a prayer. “*Let your wolf out.*”

I say the words out loud and in my head both, and something changes. Maybe Ember can still hear me, or maybe it’s my wolf talking to hers. I guess we will never know, but the next time Ember’s wolf pushes forward, she doesn’t faze back.

Hair begins to push through her skin, and claws erupt from her fingers. Her face changes shape and her canines elongate.

A deep growl erupts from her mouth as she rolls onto her stomach.

When her eyes open, they are pitch black, with no trace of Ember's blue. It's just the wolf in charge now, and she looks pissed.

She tries to stand, but she's too weak and flops back down on her stomach. I want so much to walk toward, but I know that's a bad idea, at least while I'm still in human form.

"Shift. Go to mate," my wolf growls in my mind. This time I agree, and begin to remove my clothes.

Once they're gone, I give my wolf control. I may be Ember's mate, but her wolf has a stronger connection to my wolf form than my human form.

It's his call now. If he lets his mate mark him in wolf form, then hopefully the curse will be lifted.

That's a big if, though. It's very rare for an alpha wolf to allow his mate to mark him in wolf form. Alpha males are usually too dominant for that.

If he won't, then we will have to wait until Ember's human consciousness returns. Then she can mark me, just as I marked her, in a partial shift.

I watch through my wolf's eyes. I'm nothing more than a passenger, although I can still talk to him, just like when I'm in control and he can speak to me.

He approaches the bed slowly, although there is very little need.

As soon as we shifted into wolf form, Ember's wolf stopped growling. Now, she just stares at my wolf, her head slightly tilted to one side.

I suddenly realize that although they've been communicating with each other, my wolf and Ember's wolf haven't actually seen each other since that first time, when she challenged him and he scuffed her.

Usually, one of the first things that newly marked mates do is run with each other. Of course that wasn't possible, not with Ember's injuries.

I realize all at once why her wolf can't stand up from the bed. It's not weakness, it's because her legs are still paralyzed.

"You must allow her to mark you. If you don't, she won't be able to heal," I beg my wolf.

He doesn't respond, but he knows what I'm telling him is the truth. After all, it was he who insisted that I mark Ember.

He springs onto the bed. When he reaches Ember's wolf, he nuzzles her shoulder, then rubs his scent on her back.

I don't doubt that they are communicating, but whatever they are saying, my wolf doesn't want me to hear.

She nuzzles him back and licks his snout. Then, before I realize what he's doing, he clamps his jaws on her neck and bites down, piercing her skin.

Ember's wolf yelps. As my wolf releases his grip, he licks the wound he just made.

Sneaky little bastard. He's marking her as well.

This is almost unheard of in werewolf circles, for a male wolf to mark his mate in wolf form. It's even more unusual for a she-wolf to do the same, but that certainly looks like what is about to happen.

My wolf rests his head on the bed in obvious invitation, and Ember's wolf clamps her jaws onto his neck.

I feel the sharp pain momentarily. Then it passes, and she licks the wound she made in turn.

And so, it's done, but neither of the wolves shows any signs of shifting back. I don't really mind. I need to let my wolf bond with Ember's wolf. I've had so much time to touch and talk with Ember, while these two have had so little physical contact.

My wolf nips at her ears playfully. Ember's wolf doesn't seem to mind; in fact, she seems to be enjoying it. She lifts her tail and tries to nuzzle into my wolf.

I suspect I know where this is going, so I decide to let my wolf take complete control as I retreat into our consciousness. They deserve their privacy.

I just hope this will be enough. Enough to lift Ember's curse, and allow her to heal properly.