

Chapter 6

Damon

I stare out the window, watching my warriors train. My eyes keep focusing on my newest tribute, Oliver James. The former gamma of the Craven Moon Pack, and brother of Ember James.

Joshua found him at the pickup point yesterday, just as I demanded. Alpha Stone is nothing if not a coward.

I shouldn't have given Stone the option of sending another tribute. I should have just gone there, wiped out his misogynistic pack, and put his head on a spike **as** a warning to others.

But that would have meant killing Ember's brother. Under **normal** circumstances, one extra death wouldn't bother me, but that pack has already hurt Ember enough.

Everyone I've ever spoken to has claimed that the females of Craven Moon are happy under Stone's yoke of oppression. I don't know if I believe that, but it's not my place to interfere in how another pack operates.

According to Ember's brother, though, his sister found it much more difficult to fit in or at least, her wolf did.

Ember's wolf was never content to be subdued by the males they forced her to run with. It's likely that asshole of an alpha was only too happy to find an excuse to get rid of her, before she caused some sort of rebellion among the females.

Unfortunately for Ember, her wolf's rebellious nature turned on itself when she lost her mate.

I can sympathize with that, as can my wolf. Perhaps that's the real reason he didn't end her when she attacked. He could no doubt sense her pain, a twin of the pain we felt over Alessia.

I study Oliver James carefully, but he looks nothing like his sister. In fact, they are polar opposites except for their strikingly blond hair.

Oliver is tall, muscular, and solidly built. As I watch him spar with one of my strongest pack members, I can tell that he fights with his brain as well as his brawn. Meanwhile Ember is small, thin, and looks like a gust of wind would blow her over.

I sigh. I'm not happy about having to drug her wolf, or her for that matter. A cocktail of wolfsbane and a human sedative knocked them both out. It had to be done, though. I can't have an out-of-control wolf attacking me or my pack members.

Normally, a pack teaches all its pups—males and females alike how to control their wolves. But the Craven Moon Pack is anything but normal.

I will take them down, one of these days. But right now, I need to fix this broken little she-wolf, especially since my own wolf seems so keen to protect her.

A loud bang on the door breaks me out of my musing. I growl as the door bursts open. No one enters my study unless I bid them entry first—not unless it's an emergency.

Joshua stands there, his eyes wide. I'm not sure if it's because he just burst in and knows that annoys me, or if it really is an emergency.

"Your little tribute has done a runner," he states.

I narrow my eyes, all my annoyance gone as I process this news. "What do you mean? She's in the hospital."

Joshua shakes his head. "She was. She was either faking sleep, or she woke up and decided to make her bid for freedom while the nurse was out of the room.

"I don't know what she was thinking. The weather has taken a turn for the worse after that storm, and she's only wearing a flimsy hospital gown. She could freeze to death out there."

I sigh. "That may have been her intention. How long has she been gone?"

Joshua frowns, then shakes his head. "Only about fifteen minutes. She won't get far. I've already sent Samuel after her," he says, naming one of the pack's larger warriors.

The thought of another male touching Ember has my wolf pacing in the back of my head. I've been trying to ignore his sudden, unwarranted interest in her, but it only seems to be getting stronger with time.

My wolf has shown no interest whatsoever in any female since we lost our mate. Now all of a sudden, he wants to protect this **one**—maybe more, if I let him.

That isn't going to happen. The last thing I need is another mate, and certainly not a suicidal one.

“Tell him to bring her here. And she is not to be harmed, understand?”

Joshua bows his head before leaving the room. I think he half-expected me to consign Ember to the dungeons. Perhaps I should. But my wolf growls at that thought.

How can one small female can cause **so** much trouble?

It's only a few minutes later when Samuel returns, Ember in tow. I can hear her before they **even** approach the door to my study, yelling and cursing angrily.

In some ways, I find it quite cute. She's so **small** that even the weakest of my warriors could crush her, but that doesn't dissuade her from putting **up a** fight.

My door crashes **open** again, and Samuel walks through. His arms are wrapped around her tightly, pinning her arms to her sides. It doesn't stop her from trying to struggle, though, or from trying to kick him.

She looks livid. As soon as Samuel crosses the threshold, her angry eyes turn *to* me.

“Release her,” I growl, and he does. Ember's eyes haven't left mine, and I fight the urge to smirk.

“I hate you,” she screams. “You evil, vile piece of shit, how could you?” Then she rushes toward me, her small hands balling into fists.

She wants to punch me. I consider letting her for a moment, but Samuel is still standing there, staring at her. He won't touch her unless I tell him to, but it certainly wouldn't look good if I allowed Ember to hit me.

It was bad enough sparing her life when her wolf attacked—although, to onlookers, her wolf was so small they probably thought it was a pup.

With that in mind, I grab her wrists before she has a chance to throw a punch, spin her around, and pin her against the wall, her hands held above her head.

She tries to kick me, but I move forward. My body presses against hers, stopping all movement.

It doesn't stop her from struggling, though, and I can't help but smirk at her efforts. This seems to rile her up even more.

“You think this is funny?” Her voice cracks, and I can see tears pooling in her eyes.

“You're all the same. You think I'm worthless, well, I am now that you've taken my wolf. I'm less than worthless. You should have killed me or left me to die. My wolf was right; we'd be better off dead.”

Her head drops, and she looks at the floor. A single tear trickles down her cheek.

I look over my shoulder toward Samuel, who is staring at her. I don't want anyone seeing her like **this**, in despair. “Leave us,” I growl.

Once I hear the door close, I hold her wrists in one hand and stroke her cheek with the back of my other hand. She tries to pull away, but she has nowhere to go.

“I know what happened to you, Ember,” I say softly. “I know your mate rejected you, and I know

your wolf wanted to throw the pair of you off Lovers ‘Leap.’”

Her eyes snap upward. She’s not as angry as she was, but there is still a look of rebellion in her eyes.

She’s still feisty, despite everything that has happened.

“You have no control over your wolf, sweetheart,” I continue, “and I’m not about to let her, or you, end your life.”

Ember narrows her eyes. “You can’t decide that. It’s my life and my choice,” she snaps.

I shake my head and smirk. “Not anymore, it’s not. You belong to me now. Your alpha gifted you to

me as a tribute.

“**If** you or your wolf try to harm yourself, then the treaty that I hold with your pack will be forfeit. Do you know what happens then?”

She swallows nervously and shakes her head.

I hate that. All my pack know to respond to my questions with words, no matter how difficult they find it. For now, though, I will let it pass.

“If the treaty is forfeit, then I will wipe out your former pack, and everyone in it,” I threaten.

She lets out a small gasp. “N...no! You can’t. I have a family. Friends.” Something in this smells like a lie, oddly, but I don’t pursue it for now.

I gently brush a hair from her face. “Then, little tribute, I advise you not to try to harm yourself, or run away.”

She opens her mouth to say something, but then apparently thinks better of it. Instead, she bows her head, submitting to my command. “Yes, Alpha,” she whispers.

I nod. She learns quickly, and puts others before herself. She’s loyal, although I will never know why she is loyal to that shitty pack.

I can probably use that to my advantage. She has no idea that her brother is here, but even if she did, I doubt she would want her former pack coming to harm—nor will she wish to see anyone else hurt on her account.

I mind-link with Joshua. If my instincts are right, then Ember’s empathy toward others will work in my favor.

“Send for the girl. The one who tried to befriend Ember.

Crystal, you said her name was? I have a

I don’t have to wait long before I hear a knock at the door.

I release my grip on Ember. **If** my warning about her pack didn’t sink in, then the next one undoubtedly will. “Come,” I growl.

Joshua enters with the female tribute in tow.

When I first saw this female, I knew she had already trained as a warrior. She's here because she wants to be. She has a golden opportunity to rise up the ranks in my pack; that's why I chose her for this **task**.

Gripping Ember by the shoulders, I gently guide her toward where Joshua and Crystal are standing.

"Crystal," I begin, "I am putting Ember in your care. It is your responsibility to keep her safe. If anything happens to her if she comes to harm, or attempts to harm herself you will be severely punished. Do you understand?"

Crystal bows. "Yes, Alpha," she whispers.

Ember glances between me and Crystal, a look of horror on her face.

"You understand, Ember? What will happen if you attempt to harm yourself?"

I watch her jaw clench. Her eyes snap to mine, but then she lowers them. "Yes, Alpha," she grits out.

"Good," I respond. "You may go. The pack mother should have some clothes that will fit you. The ones you brought are **not** appropriate."

Ember crosses her arms over her chest as she follows Crystal from the room, glancing behind to give me one final glare.

Joshua stays in the office. "Very clever, Alpha. I hope it works."

I smirk. "Don't worry, Joshua. It'll work."