

Chapter 14

"Shift," I told the massive wolf in front of me. I ran my hand through his soft fur, humming happily. "I want to talk to you."

Ace cocked his wolf head to the side in question. It was adorable.

Being with Ace's wolf was like having a giant—and I mean *giant*—pet dog.

A pet dog who never left my side, who sat on top of me when he didn't get his way, and who loved to lick my neck until I was a puddle beneath him.

So, not so different from his human side, really.

We had spent the last several hours in the woods behind my house, running around, chasing each other, laughing, and soaking up the sunlight. It was the perfect way to spend my fifteenth birthday.

Now, I was kneeling in front of him next to the edge of a small lake. It was one of our special spots.

There was a light feeling in my chest. Happiness. I was so, so happy.

I giggled. "Please. I've spent all day with your wolf. I need your human side for something."

Ace glanced down at his body and then back at me.

He didn't need to speak for me to know what he was saying. If he shifted right now, he would be completely naked. He'd left his clothes in my backyard, which was a couple of miles away.

I lifted myself higher on my knees and nuzzled my face against the side of his soft head. "I don't care about that."

I had never seen Ace naked before—at least, not since we were little—but Ace was so confident in his body, I was pretty sure he wouldn't care either. But it was nice of him to check with me first.

"I promise that what I have to tell you will be worth shifting for," I whispered next to his ear. "You'll like it."

Ace pulled back and studied me for a second before finally conceding and shifting right in front of me.

I dropped my hands from his body. I had seen him do it now several times, but it was still unnerving to hear his bones break and watch his skin stretch. I had to fight to even keep my eyes open.

A few seconds later, Ace sat before me, completely human.

And completely naked.

He was leaning back against his arms, a casual and incredibly attractive boyish smile on his face. I still knelt in front of him, but now I was between his outstretched, parted legs.

Before I could stop myself, my eyes darted down to the part of him that I had promised myself I wasn't going to look at. He was...bigger than I'd expected.

And he seemed to be getting bigger the longer I examined it.

I gulped. Yeah, I definitely was not ready to go anywhere near that.

But it was good to know what I was dealing with.

"Well?" Ace asked, grabbing my attention.

My gaze jumped back up to meet his, and I blushed, knowing I'd been caught ogling him.

His lips lifted on one side. "What was it you wanted to tell me, Doe?"

Regaining my composure, I put my hands on his shoulders and matched his smirk. "It wasn't what I wanted to tell you so much as what I wanted to *do* to you."

Ace's eyes flashed. "Oh, yeah?"

I nodded. "You haven't kissed me all day. And on my birthday. What kind of boyfriend are you?"

"Boyfriend?" Ace's eyebrows shot up. "Is that what I am to you?"

"If that's what you want to be."

We admitted our feelings for each other several days ago but had yet to make things official.

Things had been too crazy since Ace brought me to the warlock to take the lock of my mind. We'd spent most of our time getting to know one another again.

Now, though, it was time to explore this new side of our relationship.

Ace's answering smile was blindingly wide. "Do you have any idea how happy you make me?"

"Probably about as happy as you make me."

Ace growled and leaned forward. He was just about to place his mouth against mine when a voice came from behind me.

"What the fuck is going on here?"

I gasped and turned. Mitchell was standing several feet away, his expression twisted with fury.

Shit.

I shot upright in bed, gasping, my heart pounding like a drum in my ears.

A dream, I told myself. *It was just a dream.*

But I knew it wasn't really.

Even though the dream had ended, I *remembered* what happened next.

Mitchell had been so angry. *Scary* angry. Out of his mind with rage over the fact that the lock had been broken, allowing me to learn about werewolves.

When I'd tried to reason with him, he'd grabbed me by the throat and screamed in my face.

"You're mine!" he'd spat. "*My* daughter! Mine! You will come live with me now, and I will never have to let you go again—"

Ace pounced, back in his wolf form, forcing Mitchell to shove me away from him to defend himself. I fell to the ground. My head slammed against a nearby rock, causing the world to spin around me.

Worried about me, Ace turned his back on Mitchell, giving my birth father just enough time to pull a pocket knife out and advance.

The last thing I remembered seeing was Mitchell stabbing his knife into Ace's wolf's back.

"Oh, my God," I whispered into the dark room. My eyes were stinging with tears.

Mitchell wasn't thinking clearly. He didn't just come after me. He was going to kill both of us.

All because I had learned about wolves.

It didn't make any sense.

Ace was right: Mitchell was out of his mind. He didn't put the lock on me because he wanted to "protect" me from werewolves. He did it because he was obsessed. He wanted to control me.

I wouldn't have been safe if I'd had to live with him. And I would've been without my mate there to protect me.

That's why Ace had decided to put the lock back on me.

"A—Ace?" I whispered. I reached to the side of my bed, searching for my mate, only to find an empty mattress. My chest constricted.

Right. For one blissful moment, I had almost forgotten. Ace wasn't with me. I was in my room by myself, stuck in my own personal hell.

It'd been three days since the conversation with my father. I'd barely slept during that time, my thoughts constantly switching between my dad's offer to help me escape and my worry for Ace.

When I did manage to fall asleep, I was plagued by the most vivid dreams, even worse than the ones I had been having before.

No, not dreams. *Memories.*

Most of my memories were still gone and would never return. The lock had made sure of that. But I had no doubt I was dreaming of things that had happened before.

I put it down to the fact that I was eighteen now and the lock had worn off entirely.

But whatever the reason, the moment I shut my eyes, my subconscious immediately went to work, pulling moments that had gone forgotten.

Usually, I remembered moments from our childhood or from our brief time as a couple when we were fifteen. They were mostly sweet and innocent.

Sometimes, I remembered times when Ace's father was upset with him. Or holding my mate while he cried after his mom had died.

It wasn't a surprise that my dream memories were almost solely about Ace. After hearing he was locked up, barely in pain of his wolf, I couldn't stop worrying about him.

Was he in pain? Who was feeding him? Did he have a bed, or was he sleeping on the cold floor?

Unable to stop myself, I searched through my subconscious, opening my mind wide to Ace's and my bond, hoping to hear his deep voice in my head.

Panic speared the walls of my throat when all I was met with was silence.

I fumbled to find my phone in the dark, my shaking hands nearly knocking everything off my bedside table.

I needed to talk to my mate, hear his voice, and know he was okay. All my previous reservations about communicating with him went out the window.

I pulled up his contact and brought the phone to my ear, anxiously waiting for him to pick up.

No answer.

My stomach knotted with fear. I could feel him in my mind, trying to reach out to me, but the connection was too weak. Our bond was starving, which meant mind-linking wasn't an option.

So, why wouldn't he answer my call? Wouldn't he jump on the opportunity to talk to me?

Was something wrong?

Madoc. I could call Madoc. He would know what's going on with Ace. My dad said he'd been watching over him.

I scrolled through my contacts until I found his, pressed call, and brought the phone back to my ear.

"Dorothy?" Madoc answered on the first ring. *Thank God.* "What's wrong?"