

Chapter 24

One of my favorite parts about my haven of a cabin was the small lake out back, with a dock on the side of it.

At the end of the dock were two Adirondack chairs where I had spent a lot of time journaling and reading over the last few months.

That was where I found myself now, just a few hours after Ace helped me achieve the most toe-curling orgasm I had ever experienced.

I sat in my little chair with my knees pulled up to my chest, staring out at the glistening water and listening to the trees blow in the wind. I hadn't been able to sleep for long.

It was peaceful and nice to know that there wasn't anybody around for miles. It reminded me of the lake about forty-five minutes walking behind my house that Ace and I used to go to as children.

Hot summer days spent splashing around in the water with my best friend were my favorite kind of days.

I had pulled the tracking device out from under my shirt and was slowly circling the button with my thumb, thinking about how much I wouldn't mind if my thumb slipped to alert Ace of my location.

He could have been there within a few hours.

And all of this could be over.

Was that what I wanted?

Because what was I really achieving? It was nice to be independent, to help out on Otto's farm, and to have time to process everything that happened to me.

But when it came down to it, the only thing I had done that I was proud of was apply for college.

That's right, I was going to tell Ace to shove it and go to college no matter what he said.

I wished I could talk to him about it. I wished I could talk to him about everything that had been on my mind over the last few months.

Like my dreams.

They had been getting worse, more vivid. Sometimes, it felt like I was stuck in whatever memory my mind projected, as if I was reliving it instead of just dreaming it.

The dream that woke me up from my blissful nap that afternoon had been particularly intense.

I dreamed I was in one of the guest rooms at Ace's house. I couldn't have been very old because Ace's mom was there.

Esther Stoll died of brain cancer when I was only eight, so I had very few memories of her. It was a pleasant surprise to find her in my dream.

It was even more of a surprise to watch her shift into her wolf right in front of little eight-year-old me while I cowered in a corner.

Mr. Stoll was there, too, screaming and shouting. For whatever reason, he seemed to be upset over Esther shifting.

"How could you! No, Esther! No!" Mr. Stoll grabbed Esther's wolf by the fur on either side of her face and tugged her to him, screaming into her face.

Esther snapped her massive jaw and struggled against Mr. Stoll's hold on her, but it was no use. He wouldn't let her go, no matter how hard she thrashed.

"Esther!" Mr. Stoll continued. "Look at me! You have to take it back! You—"

I pressed my exhausted body further into the wall behind me, trying to hide from the snarling, raging beast.

I couldn't process what was happening in front of me. It felt like everything was moving in slow motion. The room spun around me, and my stomach twisted with nausea.

All I knew was that I was scared. And my arm hurt. I must have fallen on the bed.

"A-Ace...", I whimpered. *I want my friend. Why isn't he here?*

Mr. Stoll's head snapped up. Our eyes met, and I quivered at the aura of dominance that surrounded him.

"You did this," Mr. Stoll spat. "I'll kill you for this, Omega. Do you understand me? You're dead! Dead!"

I had woken up a second later in a pool of sweat, screaming for my mate.

The memory was as confusing as it was terrifying. I mean, it made sense why the lock had blocked the memory, as Ace's mom literally shifted right in front of me.

But the rest of the dream was unusual too.

Why had I been sleeping at Ace's house? Ace and I almost always slept at my house because there was more stuff to do. We only went to his house when there was an emergency.

And why was I in a guest room? Why wasn't I sleeping with Ace, in his bed? Where even was Ace? There was no way he would have left me alone with his father, even when we were that little.

I must have been sick. The stomach flu, maybe? That would explain the nausea and spinning room. And why Ace and I were separated.

What it didn't explain, however, was what the hell happened to Esther. What made her shift? Why was Mr. Stoll so angry?

Why did he threaten to kill me?

Part of me wondered if I had made it all up. That was the only answer that made any sense. Maybe this was one of the rare cases when my dream really was a dream and not a memory.

At least, I hoped that was the case. But this wasn't the first time I'd dreamed about Mr. Stoll making threats.

While I'd been in the hospital after the kidnapping, I remembered him telling a young Ace that he would take me away from him if he didn't start acting more like an alpha.

But if Mr. Stoll wanted to kill me like the memories suggested, he had ample opportunity to do so over the years, so why didn't he?

It made me think back to the night that I lost my virginity to Ace. He left me only a few hours later to go to Croatia because his father had apparently tried to kill his cousin.

Ace called me the next day to tell me that he was on his way home and excited to see me.

When I asked what had happened between him and Mr. Stoll, all he had said was, "Everything worked out. I took care of him."

"Did you hurt him?" I pushed. "Did he hurt you?"

"I'm fine, baby," Ace assured me. "There's no need to worry about me. I'll tell you more when I get home. I'm on my way to the plane right now. I'll be by your side again by morning."

Ace never did get the chance to explain to me what happened between him and his father. It was during that same conversation that Robert showed up and stole me out of my own home.

Mr. Stoll had never liked me. That much I knew. But I never thought he would go as far as to consider *murdering* me. Seemed a bit extreme, even for an alpha werewolf with an alpha's temper.

"I should talk to Ace about it."

It was information he would want to have, even if it was just a silly dream.

I looked at the silver bracelets on the armrest of my chair that I had purposefully left on so that I could continue to feel our mate bond, and then back down at the tracker in my hand.

I let out a heavy sigh. *Is it time to go back? Is it time to give up my freedom?*

Before I got a chance to decide, my attention was stolen by some sort of commotion behind me. There was a loud bang and then a male grunt.