

Chapter 27

"Alpha, please, we need to talk to you. You have to shift," Madoc begged me.

He stood outside the bars of my cell with Clara by his side. They had been trying to communicate with me for the last half an hour. But nothing they were saying was registering with my animal side.

My wolf had been in control for nearly four days now. He hadn't slept, had barely eaten, and had ignored my every attempt to shift back to our human side.

All I could do was wait for him to drop from exhaustion. This was how the last two months had gone.

I tried to shift back, to convince him that we would have a better chance of finding our mate if he'd let me shift, but he was beyond the point of reason. He was beyond anything, really.

Except freaking the fuck out.

He didn't want to miss any chance to connect with our Doe. He lived for the moments when she reached out to us through the bond, removing whatever fucked-up block she was using to keep us out.

Silver. She had to be using silver to block our connection, wearing it somewhere on her body. It would be exhausting for her to hold us otherwise. She was already so weak.

Yes, that explained it. She was wearing pure silver somewhere on her body, only removing it when she wanted to feel close to us, usually at night when she couldn't sleep.

Or yesterday, when she was so wound up, she had no other choice but to reach out to her mate to help her find release.

Yeah, my wolf and I enjoyed that moment quite a bit. My wolf even allowed me to shift, knowing it was best to give my human side control when giving our mate pleasure.

I didn't mind that Doe had only used me to give her an orgasm. I was more than willing to assist.

In fact, I had found my own release while helping her. I had been so aroused by her growing pleasure and quiet pleas that I'd taken my steel cock in my hand and joined her.

She'd kept our link open for a few hours after that—the longest she'd allowed since leaving Embermoon.

She missed me. Her resolve was breaking. She wanted so badly to return to my side, to give in to the demands of biology and her heart.

All I could do was send love down the bond and hope she knew I wasn't mad at her for running away.

I was devastated that I had somehow pushed my perfect little mate to do something so drastic, but I wasn't mad.

I was proud.

Not even the most powerful werewolves could run from their mate the way mine had and survive for this long. To withstand a starving mate bond was a level of hell that no one should have to experience.

But my Doe was so fucking strong.

She was right. It was time I started treating her like it.

While trying to convince her I wasn't upset with her, out of the blue, something changed in her emotions. She felt fear.

It wasn't as strong as when Robert had her or when Mitchell died in front of her, but it was still there.

I tried to get through to her, but she must have put the silver back on because our connection was suddenly cut off. I had no idea if she was okay now.

Or what if she is feeling fear because she's in danger, and someone forced the silver on her?

In my thoughts, my wolf threw himself at the walls of his cell with powerful force. He growled and barked until his vocal cords were raw. He was in a constant state of ferocious, unadulterated panic.

He was on the brink of going feral. I could already feel my thoughts and those of my wolf combining.

"It's about the luna," Clara continued, still trying to get my attention. "It's about Dorothy."

My wolf snarled, not processing a single thing the other two werewolves said to him.

He scratched at the hole in the cement that he'd been working on for the last few days. His paws were bloody, his claws were worn down, and he'd barely made a dent in the hard wall, but he continued.

He needed to get to his mate.

"Mate. Mate. Mate," he chanted in my head. *"Mate. Mate. Mate."*

"It's about Doe," Madoc corrected.

At last, it seemed to get through, and my wolf's ears stood erect.

"That's right, we have information about your mate, Doe. Can you please let us speak to your human side?"

Despite being a literal wild animal, my wolf understood some English. Doe didn't have a wolf to communicate her thoughts with him like most mated couples, so he'd had to learn to understand her.

Right now, though, he didn't have the mental capability to process a form of communication that didn't come naturally to him. The only words that registered with him were "Doe" and "mate."

And fuck if hearing those two words didn't break his fucking heart all over again. He sat, tilted his head back, and let out the loudest, most sorrowful howl I had ever heard.

Both Clara and Madoc recoiled and slammed their hands over their ears.

"Fuck!" Madoc cursed. He stumbled back and braced himself against the wall behind him. Slowly, he slid down until he was on his knees, clutching at his head.

All werewolves were naturally programmed to respond to their alpha's howl. It was a call to action.

But as my beta, Madoc had it a million times worse. Madoc and I were bonded, kind of like my bond with Doe but without the sexual attraction.

This meant he felt my pain, grief, and sorrow as if it were his own. As if it were his mate who was missing. As if he were the one who was suffering.

Clara was somehow able to remain standing, although she didn't seem to be doing much better than Madoc.

"What do we do?" she called over my wolf's never-ending, heartbreaking howls. "We have to make him stop!"

She was right. If my wolf didn't stop soon, we would have every werewolf in a fifty-mile radius at my doorstep, ready to shift on their alpha's behalf.

I fought for control, pushing against the wall of my consciousness, but I was no match for him. I never had been. If my wolf had his way, I would never shift again. My very existence was at his mercy.

"Clara!" Madoc yelled over the howls. "The syringe is in my backpack!"

Gamma Clara crawled toward Madoc's backpack, which was lying against the wall opposite my cell, and unzipped it with trembling hands. She shed something out of the bottom.

"I'm so sorry about this, Alpha," Clara whispered.

Then she plunged the needle into the side of my wolf's neck.

Quiet.

My mind was...silent. Empty.

Panic gnawed at my gut.

After Clara stabbed me in the throat, my wolf had fallen to the ground.

For a minute, the world had gone dark. When I awoke, I was shocked to find that I was no longer a wolf. I had shifted.

I grunted and rolled onto my side, lifting my very human hands to my face to inspect them.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit. Is my wolf dead?

"Alpha?" Madoc asked from outside my cell. "Are you all right?"

"What the fuck did you do to me?" I rasped. "I can't feel my wolf."

"We suppressed him," Clara said, still clutching the syringe tightly in her fist. "As long as we gave you the right dosage, he should be fine—just unconscious."

"You...you suppressed my wolf? How?"

"Dr. Tucker finished developing his tranquilizer," Madoc said. "He's still testing it, but I tried it out myself, and it seemed to work."

I asked Scott Tucker to join our pack almost two years ago.

Many thought I'd brought him on to replace our pack doctor, Dr. Bess, but that wasn't the case.

I brought Dr. Tucker on because he was a vet. He specialized in the anatomy of animals—the anatomy of large animals, to be exact. Specifically, wolves.

Dr. Tucker had spent the last twenty years studying wolves and working for zoos and wildlife conservation refuges throughout the United States.

He understood the biology of the wolf better than anybody in the world. He knew how to perform surgeries on them, and even more importantly, how to tranquilize them without hurting them.

Now, I was paying him to give medical attention to my pack members who got hurt while in wolf form.

A few months ago, however, he saw the way I struggled to control my animal and offered to develop a tranquilizer that would put my wolf to sleep without affecting my human side.

I didn't believe it was possible.

I stand corrected.

"I'm sorry we couldn't ask you first. I didn't want to alert your wolf." She studied me, trepidation marring her expression. "How do you feel?"

"I feel...fine," I breathed out. "Weak but calm."

It was a miracle, really. I had never been able to think so clearly before.

Clara threw a pair of sweatpants at me through the bars of the cell, averting her gaze.

It wasn't possible to shift back with clothes on, so seeing each other nude wasn't an uncommon occurrence for werewolves, but I tried to put clothes on as fast as possible out of respect for my mate.

My body belonged to Doe and Doe alone.

Plus, I don't think Doe would be happy if she knew I was standing naked in front of Clara right now. And when Doe wasn't happy, I wasn't happy.

"How long do I have before he wakes up?" I asked, standing on wobbly legs and tugging the pants on.

"A few hours probably. Maybe more. We don't know how the drug will affect you yet. We gave you a pretty large dose. Do you want us to call Dr. Tucker?"

I put a hand on the wall next to me to steady myself. *Fuck. Is this how humans feel all the time?*

"Doe," I rasped. "I need to use this time to look for her. Please tell me I wasn't hallucinating when you said you had information about her."

"You weren't hallucinating," Madoc said. "We think we know where she is."

After settling upstairs around the large table of my dining room, Madoc slid a small stack of papers toward me.

"There's a couple in northern Colorado who recently made a police report that an eighteen-year-old girl who was renting their guest house went missing," Madoc explained.

"They claim they witnessed her talking to two other people at the edge of their lake dock right before all three of them disappeared into thin air."

"So, what? You think this girl is Doe?" I asked, scanning over the papers he gave me.

"I know it's Doe. The police report said the girl's name was Dorothy K."

"Then where did she go?" I sat forward, my heart plunging. "Did they search the lake? Could she have fallen in the water?"

I thought about the panic I felt coming from her through our bond yesterday. But I thought I'd felt her calm down right before she cut off our connection. Even so, anything could have happened.

"No," Clara responded instantly. "As far as we know, the luna is okay. Even with the blocks she's put up, you would be able to feel it if something really bad happened to her."

That settled my wolf a bit.

"We think it was Queen Belle Stoll," Madoc said. "She's the only one we know of who can make a person disappear like that."

"And the descriptions that the farmer gave match the luna, the queen, and her guardian, Liam Blackwood. Look." He pointed at the papers he handed to me. "It has to be her."

I stared at the words, but I was struggling to process anything after being in beast mode for so long. "Is this the only lead you two have?"

Clara and Madoc exchanged a look and then nodded. "Yes. But we think it's worth pursuing. Don't you?"

"Grayson recently put a portal entrance to Zaweth in Minnesota," Madoc said. "You could take the pack's private jet and be in the supernatural kingdom in just a few hours."

It was a long shot, but it was better than nothing.

I got to my feet. "I'll go call my cousin."