

Chapter 1: Cedric

I'm at home, in my pack. It's the day of my Alpha ceremony. Having turned 18 several months ago, my father gave me time to find my mate, but after traveling to nearly every pack in the country, I still haven't found her.

Eventually, my father relented and agreed to make me Alpha, knowing I would continue to be exposed to other packs, increasing my chances of finding my mate. So, here we are, standing on the stage in front of our pack, my mother standing proudly behind us as my father begins the ceremony. Hundreds of our pack members are in attendance, as it's rare to see the swearing-in of a new Alpha. Every pack member will swear their allegiance to me, their new Alpha.

As my father says the words, cutting my hand with the ceremonial blade, an attack begins, and the hunters emerge. They shoot arrows laced with wolfsbane and bullets made from silver. My father, myself, and all the warriors in our pack quickly shift, ready for combat. It is evident that the hunters have killed our patrols. Otherwise, the howl of alarm would have alerted us, but we had none. They planned this perfectly.

I begin to fiercely tear through the hunters. Every wolf from my pack is here, and if we manage to reach our enemies, their attempts at resistance will be no match for our superior strength and speed. The challenge, however, lay in reaching them unscathed. The onslaught of guns and arrows is making it difficult, and I see wolves falling all around me, wounded but not dead; as they shift back to their human forms.

At some point during the fighting, I realize the enemies are handcuffing the injured with silver, keeping them from healing. They think they can take my pack members for their experiments, but I won't allow it.

With furious energy, I begin ripping the hunters apart. I hear screams and wails all around me, but one, in particular, catches my attention. I whip my head around just in time to see my mother's throat sliced by a hunter. My father is fighting several hunters, but at the moment that he feels her life slip away, he falters, and the hunters take him down. I howl a wail of pain and grief. The pack joins in and begins fighting with renewed vigor.

From the corner of my eye, I see the hunters dragging injured and unconscious wolves away. I rush forward, intending to assist, when an arrow punctures my ribs, going into my lungs. I collapse to the ground, before struggling to my feet; driven by adrenaline, I run toward the hunters, dragging our pack mates away. Another arrow hits my ankle, and I yelp in pain, coughing up blood. Despite the pain, I push on, taking a few more steps before a third arrow finds its mark in my shoulder. The wolfsbane coursing through my system overwhelms me, incapacitating my body.

I jolt awake, the dream causing me to jump to my feet, snarling. I look around and realize I'm in my cage under the Arena, and reality hits me. I've been captive for almost a year, and today, I faced off against a powerful warlock. I had severe burns all over my body. I wasn't sure I was going to win. I'm actually surprised that I'm still alive.

I turn and see Tana sitting at the bars that separate our cells. Her hand is in my cell. I look down at my body. She healed me again. It's not the first time. I don't know how she does it, but she is a powerful she-wolf. The most powerful she-wolf I've ever met.

After calming myself, I look at her and see that she has deep claw marks going from her shoulder to her hip. She was scheduled to fight after me today, and from the looks of it, she also barely won her fight. I run to the bars, taking her hand.

"Tana. Tana, can you hear me?" I ask.

She has dried blood caking her entire torso and most of the front of her leather leggings. I hear a clink, and I see the supernatural on her other side trying to steal her food while she's unconscious.

I snarl at him, but he merely smirks at me. He doesn't realize that no one steals from Tana, not while I'm awake to protect her food. Without a second thought, I grab a rock and swing it with all my might, breaking the shifter's hand as he reaches for her food. His howl of pain falls on deaf ears; he's new here and won't last long. Tana has stood by my side throughout this ordeal, and I won't let anyone harm her.

Without being at full strength, I can't be certain, but I think she might be my mate. I feel a pull towards her, even without the ability to feel the bond. I reach my hand through the bars again, tapping her face lightly. "Tana, wake up."

She moans softly, her head turning toward me before her eyes open slowly. "There she is," I say, smiling at her.

She gives me a weak smile in return. "You healed me again, didn't you?" I ask her.

"You looked pretty bad, even after my fight."

"You need to stop draining yourself to heal me, Tana. I will heal; it just takes time," I insist.

She turns her head back, her eyes falling closed, nodding slightly. "What can I do to help you recover?" I always ask her this. It bothers me as an Alpha male that she helps me heal, but I can't help her.

"Keep that s**t-for-brains away from my food."

I smile; it's good that she's being snarky. "Already done."

She opens her eyes, looking over at the other shifter. "Wow, you really are dumb. You tried to steal my food?" Tana asks mockingly.

He's holding his broken hand in the other hand. "I'm hungry."

"We're all hungry, i***t. We only get fed every two to three days in here. Haven't you been here long enough to realize that?" Tana retorts.

She turns back to me. "Was it a warlock or a faery?" she asks me.

I cringe. For her to know it was one or the other, my burns must have been bad. "Warlock," I tell her. "What about you?"

She sighs; I can tell she's trying to hold back tears. Neither of us enjoys what we do. This is for survival, not for fun. We're shifters, which may mean we kill others when needed, but this is different.

"Hey, none of that," I say, grabbing her hand. "We do what we have to do to survive in here." She and I know that better than anyone else.

"I think I killed the last living Kodiak bear shifter. I'm not sure if they screwed up or if they didn't dose him enough, but he was able to partially shift," she says, using her hand to showcase the claw marks down her torso.

"He shifted?" I ask.

"Partially."

"And they let him continue?" I ask. This is new. Usually, if they don't dose us enough to keep us from shifting then they either kill the opponent or shoot them with whatever it is that keeps that particular shifter weak.

"They did."

I sit back. This isn't good. It means that Tana is marked for the kill; they just need to find a shifter strong enough to do it.

"We need to get out of here," I whisper.

She turns her head to look at me. "Yeah, did you come up with some new way to escape? Because we've been wracking our brains for months."

I can't let her die. I won't. I've lost too many people I care about, and I refuse to lose her as well.