

The Edge of Reason | Chapter 16

Chapter 16

DAMON

I always thought my fearsome reputation would stand me in good stead—and it did, up until today.

I also knew that everyone outside my pack assumed I had killed my own mate. No one knew the true story, and I thought it wouldn't hurt if I let the stories spread.

Fear is a useful weapon, one that makes it a lot easier to get what I wanted. No pack has ever wanted to stand against me, which is why they send tributes without me even asking.

But that reputation almost cost me dearly today. If she hadn't literally needed me to save her life, I doubt I would now be holding Ember in my arms. She was afraid of me. She assumed I was exactly the monster I pretend to be.

Feeling her soft skin under my fingertips makes me realize just how lucky I am. The Moon Goddess has given me the gift of a second mate. I will be sure to cherish and protect her.

The Moon Goddess always likes to test her strongest children, and I suspect that's why neither Ember nor I felt the full impact of the bond until now. I'm sure we both felt something, but it took a mate's mark to bring it into focus.

As soon as I marked her, though, the mate bond kicked in, and I feel exactly what my wolf has been feeling all along. Ember is my other half. Nothing can pull us apart. I would die to protect her.

My only hope now is that the healer was right, and our mate bond will help Ember to heal. I'm happy to share my healing ability if it means curing her of the traces of celestial silver that run through her veins.

The Dark Moon Pack has always used that brand for a reason. Not only because it marks each wolf for life, but also because it weeds out the weak wolves.

The tradition started with my grandfather. A warrior pack needs the strongest warriors, he always said, and the tradition always stuck.

These days, though, there are rarely any wars between the packs. After what happened to Ember, I wonder if now is the time to dispense with this archaic practice.

That's not to say that our pack shouldn't carry a mark, but there are other less painful, and less dangerous, ways for the pack to be marked.

Perhaps this is why the Moon Goddess chose Ember for me, to challenge me to see value in something beyond warrior strength. Perhaps she chose that dickhead from Craven Moon Pack for Ember as a test as well.

Whether that test was for him or for Ember remains to be seen, but Ember is mine now, and I have no intention of surrendering her to anyone.

I reluctantly remove my hand from underneath her shirt, and my lips from the newly created mark on her neck.

I chuckle when her hands don't move from my shirt in turn.

"We have to bathe, little wolf," I whisper in her ear, seizing the opportunity to deeply inhale her scent.

She sighs, but she does release her grip and let me move away.

I leave her sitting on the counter. She can't move from there without my help, which makes me wonder how soon the healing process will begin and how long it might take.

I turn on the bath taps. While I'm waiting for the tub to fill, I mind-link the healer. "*How long?*" I demand.

I've never been the most patient of alphas, and the healer knows this. His answer comes quickly, but it's not necessarily the answer I want.

"It's not a definitive science—especially where your mate is concerned, as she has no ability to heal herself."

I growl. The only thing that bolsters my patience is the fact that the healer referred to Ember as my mate. I liked hearing that. I want to hear it more.

I want to present her to the pack as their luna, I realize. But that might prove difficult if she is unable to walk.

Normally, once the introduction ceremony is completed, the pack's alpha and the new luna will shift and lead a pack run. I imagine if Ember is unable to walk, her wolf won't be able to either.

I grind my teeth in frustration.

"Don't fuck this up," my wolf growls in my head. "*~None of this is her fault.~*"

The bastard is right, of course—again!

I take a deep breath and roll my shoulders before turning off the taps, the bath full and steaming. I know my frustration will ease as soon as I'm holding Ember again. It will ease even more once she marks me, completing the mating process.

It won't be easy for her. For a wolf to mark their mate, a partial shift is needed, which means the wolf side needs to be united with its human counterpart.

As much as my wolf and I disagree at times, we do have a strong bond. I didn't even have to think when I let him take my body for the mating bite. But I fear that Ember and her wolf may have a more strained bond.

I try to push the thought from my mind as I turn from the bath and head back to the counter, where Ember is still sitting patiently. The sight of her immediately calms me.

I quickly remove my clothes. Her face flushes, and she looks at the floor.

These days, most wolves will sleep with a few people before settling down with their mates. The chance of finding your mate as soon as you come of age is remote, so it's not a big deal to experiment in the meantime.

But I can tell immediately that my little mate is as pure as the driven snow. I should have realized that as soon as I saw her so hesitant to remove her clothes and shift when she first arrived.

I don't understand why she's so self-conscious. She's beautiful, and that isn't just me feeling it through the mate bond.

I stride toward her and gently put my fingers under her chin, even that slight touch causing electricity to pulse across my skin.

I brush the pad of my thumb across her plump lips, and hum with satisfaction as she opens them slightly. Then I gently press my lips to hers—and this time, she responds.

While she's preoccupied with the kiss, I unbutton the shirt she's wearing and slip it from her shoulders.

She gasps, and I take the opportunity to fully taste her as my tongue invades her mouth.

Ember doesn't resist as our tongues collide. Is this the mate bond, or is she finally starting to accept me? To realize I'm not the complete bastard that everyone makes me out to be?

She moans against my mouth as I scoop her into my arms and carry her toward the large bathtub, never breaking the kiss.

Her small hands wrap around my neck, sending shock waves down my spine and straight to my cock, which is now standing rigidly to attention.

I desperately want to claim her, to mate her, but I don't know how far her paralysis goes. I want her to enjoy our first time together, and if that means I have to be patient, then patient I will be.

I step into the bath and finally break the kiss. Ember's brows furrow at the loss of contact, and I can't help but smile as I realize she wants this as much as I do.

As I sit down in the bath, I position her between my legs, pulling her back into my chest. She lets out a small gasp and tenses slightly. No doubt she can feel my hardness against her back.

"Relax, angel," I whisper in her ear. "Nothing will happen until you want it to." I gently caress her newly-made mark with my lips, knowing it will be sensitive for her.

She moans, and it's like music to my ears. As she relaxes into me, I know it won't be long before she'll want to complete the claiming. I can't wait for her sweet voice to beg me to be inside of her.

My wolf purrs in the back of my mind.

I silently pray that Ember's legs will heal so that our wolves can run together. Ember's wolf needs it just as much as mine.

The opportunity to run freely, without male wolves trying to keep her in check. The opportunity for Ember's wolf and mine to mark each other.

I realize now that every time one of those Craven Moon mutts tried to tame Ember's wolf—every time a wolf who wasn't their mate touched her, let alone tried to subdue her—it must have hurt them both.

The thought of any other wolf touching what is ours angers both me and my wolf. We won't let that happen again.

I let myself look at my mate's sweet, naked body in my arms, but then furrow my brows when I see the purple marks on her chest. Why didn't I notice these earlier?

My fingertips gently touch the discolored skin. "Who did this to you?" I growl lowly, barely managing to hold back my wolf's rage, and mine.

"I... It was me," she stutters, "when I hit you. If I try to cause harm, it's reflected back on me."

I've never heard of anything like this. I clench my jaw. How could the Moon Goddess be so cruel? Not only can my little mate not heal herself, but she can't defend herself either. Not without causing herself injury and pain.

She must sense my rage, which isn't aimed at her, but at the unfairness of her situation. No one deserves a fate like that.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbles, her voice barely above a whisper.

I press my lips to her temple.

“You have nothing to be sorry for, my angel,” I whisper. “I will always protect you. No harm will come to you while I still have breath in my body.”

As soon as the words leave my mouth, I decide that I won’t wait to present her to the pack as my luna. I’m proud of my mate, without regard for weakness or injury, and I want to show her off.

We can delay the pack run, and when it happens, it will be a celebration not only of Ember being my mate and my luna, but also of her recovery.

Chapter 17

EMBER

I’ve never been a needy person. Hell, I’ve barely even been social, preferring my own company. That’s suddenly all changed.

Since Damon marked me, I can’t get enough of his kisses and gentle caresses. Every time he touches me, it’s like little shock waves pulse through me.

My mind doesn’t have any control anymore. My body seems to be calling all the shots. I can’t even blame my wolf, not anymore.

I get the distinct impression that Damon is feeling the same, and I haven’t even marked him yet.

I’m both excited and scared to think what will happen if I do mark him. I can barely function now without his touch; when the bond is complete, will we just walk around in constant contact like conjoined twins?

I relax into Damon’s chest as he bathes me. Even as I try to luxuriate in the moment, I can’t help but feel a little guilty that his mate is so worthless. I can’t even walk, and despite what the healer says, I wonder if I will ever walk again.

I focus on my feet where they’re poking up through the soapy water, and will them to move. Nothing happens.

I let out a heavy sigh.

It’s bad enough that Damon has a mate who is unable to heal or defend herself, but one who can’t walk? He’s an alpha. His luna needs to be strong, not weak and pathetic like me.

Damon’s hand wraps gently around my throat, his fingers softly caressing my skin. “Don’t overthink it, little wolf. Just be patient,” he whispers, his lips almost brushing the shell of my ear.

How does he even know what's going through my mind? "But what if...?" My voice trails off as the realization hits.

"*Traitor,*" I growl at my wolf.

The only way that Damon could know what I'm thinking is if my wolf spilled her guts to his wolf.

"*You don't need to do this alone. Not anymore,*" she huffs.

I hate to admit it, but she's right. It's been so long since I have been able to talk freely to anyone. Until now, only my brother knew that I was a conduit, and we never talked much about what that meant to me.

Oliver barely had the time to listen—or chose not to. It's strange to think I have someone who's willing, maybe even eager to hear my feelings. About my injury, and about the strange legacy that leaves me able to heal everyone but myself.

"What if my legs never heal..." I start, tentatively.

"Then I'll carry you," he soothes.

"But if anyone else finds out about..." I'm cut off by Damon's finger pressing gently to my lips, shushing me. Then his fingers move to my side, gently trailing across my rib cage.

"You feel that," he whispers, his breath on my neck making me shiver with pleasure. I moan an acknowledgment as sparks light up my skin.

His fingers slowly move, tracing random patterns across my lower abdomen. "And this?" he coos.

I can't even find any words. I just whimper as his fingers move lower. His hand cups my mons, and his fingers brush close to my entrance. "What about this?"

I arch my back, and I can't help the moan that escapes my lips. Every nerve in my core seems to pulse; I feel like I'm standing on a precipice and one little touch will push me over the edge.

Damon sucks on my mark, and that's enough. I tumble into ecstasy.

"Just tell me to stop and I will," he offers.

I quickly shake my head. "Please," I moan breathily.

"Please? You want me to stop?" he questions. His fingers stop moving, and he starts lifting his head away from my neck, though he can't quite hide the disappointment in his voice.

I shake my head. That's not what I want. The last thing I want him to do is to stop. "No. Please, Damon, don't stop."

Permission granted, his finger slips inside and gently strokes the little bundle of nerves, and I shatter for the second time.

Lost in a wave of ecstasy, I don't feel him move from behind me. But when I open my eyes, feeling wrung-out and wonderful, he's standing, leaning over the bath.

The water drips off of his bronze skin, his v-line disappearing beneath the white towel that's wrapped around his waist.

He's brought me to the peak of pleasure twice, but I haven't done anything for him yet, except whine about my own weakness.

My eyes dart down toward the towel, and I can feel my face flushing.

He chuckles in response, and the sound sends waves of arousal through me. What the hell is wrong with me? "This isn't about me, Ember. This is all about you."

He bends over toward me. "Now, put your arms around my neck and link your fingers together tightly."

I don't question him. For the first time since I arrived here, I do exactly as he tells me.

As my fingers link behind his neck, his lips gently brush mine, far too fleetingly. Before I can respond, he stands up straight.

I'm only now realizing how tall he is. He must stand around six foot four, whereas I'm only five feet tall even in low heels.

He pulls me from the bath. My useless legs hang limply, but he pays them no mind as he sets me on the counter to wrap a huge, fluffy towel around my body.

Then he scoops me into his arms once again as he walks toward the door.

I unlink my fingers and tease the hair that's hanging loosely on his neck. A deep growl, almost a purr, erupts from his throat. I wonder if it's his wolf making that noise, or him.

I don't have too much time to think about it before he opens the door and we head back into the bedroom. I gasp when I see bags too numerous to count littering the floor, designer names emblazoned all over the sides.

"Now, let's find you something to wear," Damon chuckles.

He places me gently on the bed and starts to pull clothes out of the different bags, tossing them onto the bed all around me. I'm quickly surrounded by sleek, brightly-colored tops and skirts and shoes like a jungle of fashion.

It's almost like he is looking for something, and I realize that's exactly what he's doing when he pulls a stunning dress from one of the bags.

He walks over and holds the dress up against me. The material is the softest thing I've ever felt.

In my old pack, we weren't poor, but we weren't rich either. There certainly wasn't money to spare for fancy dresses, and I wouldn't have had a reason to wear them anyway. Helping out at the hospital wasn't a formal occasion.

I've never seen a dress quite this beautiful, or obviously expensive. It's made of the softest silk and edged with gossamer-thin lace, pure white like a wedding gown, but form-fitting and sleek.

I've never even imagined wearing something like this. I gasp and hold it against me.

"This is too much," I whisper.

Damon just looks at me, his eyes roving my body. "You're worth every penny. Besides, when I present my luna to my pack, I want her to wear something as stunning as she is."

I look down. I suddenly feel sick. Damon wants me because I'm his mate, it's instinctual. But what about the rest of the pack?

Do they feel the same as those tributes who attacked me in the corridor? That I don't belong here, that I must be a spy or worse?

I feel Damon's fingers gently touch the underside of my chin as he tilts my head up, obviously getting a report on my thoughts from my wolf again and wanting to reassure me.

"Those mutts weren't even members of my pack, and now they never will be. You are my mate, and my luna. My pack will love you just as I do."

His lips brush mine in a delicate kiss. It's fleeting, but it carries a promise of so much more.

I watch Damon as he walks toward the walk-in wardrobe. It's hard to take my eyes off him, the way his muscles move as he walks.

He's almost at the door when he stops and turns to look back at me. "Do you need any help getting dressed?"

I glance at the dress and then back at him. My face flushes slightly, thinking about the sort of help he could give.

He smirks at me.

Damn wolf. She's still telling him every wicked thought I have in my mind.

I clear my throat as I drag my eyes away from his body. "I could use some underwear," I mumble.

Damon chuckles and walks back over. He peers into several of the bags until he finds the one that holds the underwear.

He raises an eyebrow, but there's a glint in his eye as he carries it toward me. I look inside, and can't help the blush that covers my face.

I've never worn underwear like this before. It's all silk and lace, and very sexy.

Damon laughs at my embarrassment before heading back out to find some clothes for himself.

I could remind Damon that Joshua picked this out, but I doubt that would go down very well. Besides, Joshua probably had female help; I doubt any man would feel comfortable alone in a lingerie store. I wonder if it was Crystal.

Even though she deserted me, I still kind of miss Crystal. I've never had a friend before; Crystal was the closest I've ever come. Even in my old pack, I avoided friendships just in case they found out about my gift.

If I'm introduced as Damon's luna, and if the pack doesn't reject me outright, I guess I'll have lots of people vying to be my friend now. It's a powerful position, after all. The luna is the pack's beating heart.

I swallow nervously. Butterflies seem to be breeding in my stomach. I've never liked being the center of attention; I guess I'll have to get used to it.

By the time Damon returns, I have managed to get dressed. It's surprising how awkward getting dressed can be when you can't stand up.

Damon struts out of the wardrobe dressed in a designer suit and shoes polished to a shine that you can almost see your face in. The top few buttons of his white, button-up shirt are unfastened, revealing a few wisps of his dark chest hair.

I can't help but lick my lips. Damon is always all alpha male, but this outfit really highlights it.

His eyes rake over my outfit, and he lets out a low growl. I guess I pass muster too.

Then he walks toward the bed and scoops me into his arms. This way of getting around is something else I'm going to have to get used to, I think, as I wrap my arms around his neck. But if I'm honest, I don't mind at all.

