

# The Edge of Reason by Michelle Torlot

## Chapter 11

### EMBER

I try to **open my** eyes, but it's like a heavy weight **is** keeping them in place. It's the same when I try to move

my arms or my legs. Nothing.

**It's** like I'm in some sort of limbo. The worst part is that I can feel everything, smell everything, and hear everything. I just can't move. If I could open my eyes, I'm sure I would see everything too.

The last thing I remember was the burning pain, as though my whole body was on fire, **and** although I can't see where I am, I know I am close to him, the alpha, the one who put my body through all this pain.

I can smell him. I feel like I'm wrapped in his scent. It's all around me, enveloping me in a cocoon. This must be his bedroom, and his bed.

I can hear him talking to others about me. They talk about wolfsbane, about forced mating, about horrifying options that I can do nothing to refute, frozen in place as I am.

After the other voices leave, I hear the rustle of clothes and something lands on the bed. For once, I'm grateful that my eyes are glued shut.

Alpha Scopus is undressing. The last thing I need to see is my alpha naked—because whether I like it or not, the mark on my arm means I'm now a member of this pack. At least until he realizes I'm

worthless.

I feel the bed dip. Panic begins to surge through me. I feel his fingers graze my skin as he lifts the

hem of my dress.

Despite not being able to move, tears escape my eyelids and trickle down. my cheek.

I realize now why he didn't want anyone else to mark me. He wants to use me as a breeder. It's not unheard of for mateless alphas to use a mateless she-wolf as a breeder so that they can have an heir.

They don't usually force them, but this is Alpha Scopus of the Dark Moon Pack. The same alpha who is rumored to have killed his mate. He still needs an heir, and he is going to use me for **that**

purpose.

As soon as my mind begins to spiral, I feel the hem of my dress drop. The rough pad of Alpha Damon's thumb wipes away the tears that streak my cheeks.

\*\*Ember?" His voice is so deep it sends a shiver down my spine.

I want to tell him I'm here. Tell him I don't want this.

His fingers gently card through **my** hair. "You're in there, aren't you? I know you can hear me," he whispers, his voice soft and low.

I feel him take my hand. "**Just** squeeze my hand if you can hear me."

I try, I really do, but my body is useless to me.

He sighs. "I don't know **if you can** hear me, **but** I'm just going to change your clothes, that's all."

I don't know if I should believe him, but it's not like I can **do** anything to stop him if he's lying

He continues to lift the hem of my dress, and then I feel the warmth of his hand on my back as he sits me up. I shouldn't like the feeling, but I do.

I feel **a** chill as he pulls the dress over my head. Goose bumps emerge from my skin before it's wrapped in something soft; his shirt. It still smells of him. In a **way**, it's comforting, but I don't know why.

He gently lowers me back onto the bed, and then I feel something heavy cover me.

**His** warm hand rests on my forehead. "Sleep well, little wolf," he whispers. Then I hear **his** footsteps recede, and the sound of the door opening and closing. He's gone.

I should feel relief that he didn't take advantage of me, that he's gone and has left me in peace. For some reason, **though**, I don't. I feel lost and empty without his presence.

I

put

it down to the pack bond, even though I don't feel that due to my current lack of wolf.

Instead of trying to puzzle things through any further, I allow whatever the healer injected into me to take hold. As I drift, I pray that I'll somehow come out of this limbo, and that my wolf will return.

## Chapter 12

DAMON

I'm torn away from the sight of the little wolf, helpless and splayed across my bed wearing my clothes, by a sudden mind-link from Joshua. "Damon. *Oliver James is outside your office. He's demanding to see his sister.*"

My wolf growls at the disruption to our little moment.

Demanding? Who the hell does he think he is? I'm the alpha here. If anyone is doing any demanding, it'll be me.

When I reach my office, Oliver James is standing outside. When he sees me walking toward the office door, he comes striding toward me. "I want to **see** my sis..."

I cut him off as I grab him by the throat and pin him against the wood-paneled wall.

"You don't get to demand anything, you worthless piece of shit," I growl, "not after what did."

you

I release my grip, and he drops

to the floor. I didn't even use **my** alpha voice, and he's already baring his neck in submission. "Please," he begs, "you don't understand..."

I'm still fuming as I glare at him. "What don't I understand? That you knocked Ember down without

a thought for her well-being? That despite her fragile state of mind, you didn't even give her a second glance once you smelled your mate?"

Oliver looks down at the floor and shakes his head. I watch as he swallows. I'm not sure if it's because he's nervous or because I've damaged his throat, but it looks labored.

"Ember's different...special," he whispers. He looks up, his eyes glistening. Perhaps he is sorry for

**what** he did after **all**.

"Not sorry enough," my wolf growls.

Oliver doesn't avert his eyes this time. "Please, promise me you won't hurt her. She can't heal

herself. Not like a normal wolf can."

I frown. Oliver doesn't know that his sister's wolf is suppressed by wolfsbane. He's not talking about that. He's talking as though her wolf can't heal her at all. How is that possible? "Explain," I growl.

He glances around nervously. He clearly doesn't want to talk about this out in the open.

Walking to my office door, I open it and stand to the side. "In," I growl.

He scrambles to his feet and walks into the office, making sure to keep his head down. I follow him

in and close the door behind me.

Before he can say anything. I point at the chair that faces my desk. "Sit and explain."

I walk around the desk, then realize **that** he's waiting for me to sit before he does. At least he is showing me proper respect.

Once we're both sitting, he holds his face in his hands before running his fingers through his hair. "Our mother," he begins, but I interrupt him.

"I don't care about your mother, I just care...want to know about Ember."

He sighs. "I need to explain about our mother...to help you understand about Ember."

He looks up expectantly, so I nod for him to continue.

"Our mother was a rogue. She wandered **into** the Craven Moon Pack's territory and **my** father found her. He realized she was his mate, so the alpha spared her life.

"I was born shortly after they sealed their mate bond. A couple of years later, Ember was born. My mother was a little like Ember. She was different. Small, and weak...

"*How dare* he call her weak?" my wolf growls **in** my mind.

I ignore him and instead, pour a glass of water and pass it to Oliver. It's not new information that Ember is small and weak, even if my wolf wants to deny it.

Oliver takes a sip of the water and continues. "My father was the first to notice. How he would never

tire when my mother was with him.

"One day, a group of rogues ambushed them. My mother was no fighter, but my father defeated them all with ease. He was strong, but not strong enough to defeat that many rogues single-handedly -until that day.

"He didn't say anything, but he was suspicious that somehow my mother was involved in his sudden show of strength. He did some research and then confronted my mother. She admitted to him that

she was a conduit."

I raise my eyebrows and stare at him.

I've heard of conduits, but they're incredibly rare—and incredibly sought-after. Conduits are wolves who channel the power of others. It's both a gift and a curse, because they can only use their power to help others and not themselves.

If this story is going where I think, that means Ember is a conduit as well. But if that **was** the case, then why on earth did Conrad Stone let her go?

"I don't have to tell you that our old alpha isn't a good man," Oliver continues.

"My father tried to keep my mother's gift a secret, especially after Ember was born. He found out that a conduit is only ever female, and if she passes the gift on, it will only ever be passed to a daughter."

Oliver sighs and runs his fingers through his hair once again, a nervous tic I've noticed him.

Emergency calls only MO

"Alpha Stone found out about my mother's gift, and wanted to use her power to bolster his own strength so he could attack a neighboring pack. When she refused, he killed her and blamed it

rogues.”

I stand up, pushing my chair back with a clatter. It takes all of my control to keep my wolf inside. He wants blood. Specifically, Alpha **Conrad** Stone’s blood.

Oliver looks up at me and shakes his head, seeming to guess the direction of my thoughts. “He doesn’t know about Ember. He would think she was of no use anyway, except perhaps to brood an army of conduits. Her gift is different to my mother’s.”

I frown and stare at him. “What is her gift? I question through gritted teeth.

He swallows nervously. “She has the gift of healing, which means she can’t heal herself, only often. That’s why I’m asking you...no, begging you, please don’t hurt her.

“I know you have a reputation, but you didn’t kill her when she challenged you, and you helped her when she collapsed. I just need to know you’ll keep her safe...”

I grip the edge of the table. She’s upstairs now, not able to heal from the brand I inflicted on her. Even if she had her wolf, she wouldn’t be able to heal herself. Why didn’t I see this?

“Leave,” I growl, “go to your mate.”

“You won’t...” he begins.

“Your sister is safe,” I snap. “”now go.”

I watch him as he scuttles to the door. Just as he opens it he turns to look at me.

“Thank you,” he whispers before he literally runs out of the door.

“I told you.” my wolf scowls. “She’s special, and she belongs to us. She can heal an. Only we can protect her.”

As much as I hate to admit it. I fear that this time he is probably right. If Ember can heal my wife’s shattered heart, then she does indeed belong to us.

□

## Chapter 13

**EMBER**

*“Ember? Wake up!”*

I let out a gasp, which turns into a cough. I can barely swallow, my throat **is** so dry. It doesn't take long to realize the voice that I'm hearing is in my head.

My wolf. She's back—and she seems surprisingly perky. She's not ready to end our lives, or to attack the first thing in sight.

“Easy there.” A large hand cups the back of my head, and I immediately realize who it is. His deep voice and masculine scent settle something in my gut that I hadn't realized was unsettled.

I force my eyes one

my eyes open, a little relieved that I can actually open them this time, though I still have to struggle against a crust of dried tears that wants to glue my eyelids shut. As expected, Alpha Scopus sits at my bedside.

He presses a cup to my lips, and I open my mouth slightly as the cool water slides across my tongue, then down my throat. He only allows me a few sips before he takes it away, leaving me wanting

**more.**

I lick my lips. “Please...” I croak.

He smiles softly. “Just a little, then. The healer says we

cd to take it slowly.”

He puts the cup to my lips again, allowing me to drink a little more. This time, when he takes it away he lowers my

head back onto the pillow.

I glance to the left and see a bandage on my arm and a tube coming out of my hand, just like the IV I had in the hospital.

At least this time I know it isn't feeding me poisonous wolfsbane—otherwise I wouldn't be able to feel my wolf. “How long?” I croak.

Damon looks at me pensively, making me think that he doesn't want to tell me.

Everything that happened comes rushing back as the fog in my mind lifts. My brother. Being grabbed by the other tributes. The brand, and my paralysis.

I move my fingers, relieved that they are still working. I try to move my arm, but I only manage lift it a few inches from the bed before it drops back down. It feels like lead, but at least I can move

to

1. it.

Emergency calls only

Damon's hand rests on the top of mine. "Just rest. You're still weak."

I glance at the bandage on my arm.

"It's healing." he adds. "It will just take time."

SW82%

13:10

I close my eyes and sigh heavily. Why is he being like this? Kind. He must want something.

Panic grips me as I suddenly realize. He must know. He must know my secret, but how? No one is supposed to know.

\*\*\*

FIFTEEN YEARS EARLIER

I look at the little bird on the ground. Its wing is hanging at an angle that looks wrong, and every time it tries to get up, it fall

over. I saw it when it crashed into the window, and ran outside straight

away.

I glance around to make sure there is **no** one there. I know I shouldn't do this, but I want to help the

little bird.

I pick it up and cup it in my hands. Closing my eyes, I focus on taking away

I jump when I hear Mama's scolding voice. "Ember? What are you doing?"



I spin around to face my mother. "A bird. It's hurt."

its pai

I open my hands to show her, and the bird flies away. I can't help but smile as I watch it take flight. "I fixed it, Mama."

She grips my shoulders so hard it hurts. "What have I told you, Ember?" she scolds.

A tear trickles down my cheek. "I'm sorry, Mama. I just wanted to make it better."

She looks at me and sighs. "I know, sweetheart, but not everyone will understand. There are bad people out there who will want to hurt you if they see what you can do.

"Just promise me you won't do this again. Promise me you will never tell a soul about your gift." She wipes my tears away with her thumbs, her eyes beseeching me to see how serious this is.

"I promise, Mama," I whisper.

She kisses the top of my head. "Good girl, Ember. Always remember that this is for the best, and that I love you." She gives me a little shove toward the house. "Now, go take a nap, because you'll be

**tired."**

\*\*\*\*

NOW

I try to push myself into a sitting position. "My wolf is back, so healing the brand won't be a problem for me anymore." The lie flows easily from my lips, much to my wolf's disgust.

"*He* knows," she hisses, but she doesn't tell me how he knows or what he intends to do with the

information.

Is Alpha Scopus one of the bad people my mama warned me about?

His hand presses suddenly on my shoulder. It's all the pressure that's needed for me to collapse back

onto the bed.

He narrows his eyes. "Don't lie to me, Ember. I despise liars, and I can smell the lie on your breath. Besides, I know more about you than you realize."

I close my eyes and swallow nervously. The softness that was in his voice when I first woke gone now. He's back to the gruff alpha, which is exactly what I expected.

"*You lied to him, but he still cares for us. He still wants us,*" my wolf huffs.

up is

She's not usually this talkative—or at least, she never has been until now. We've always had a tense relationship, which worsened after our mate rejected us.

I roll my eyes at her. "*He doesn't care for us,*" I scoff. "*He just wants us for our gift.*"

She growls at me like that's my fault.

I don't know why I missed her, but I did. She's such a temperamental bag of bones. It would be nice, **just** once, if we were **on** the same page.

"*He does want us,*" my wolf snaps. "At least, his wolf does. *He's chosen us. We're his now.*"

Realization suddenly hits me. Stupid wolf. She'd do anything for a mate. Just because Damon's wolf flirted with her a little, she spilled all our secrets.

"*You told him, didn't you? You told his wolf what we are.*"

"How could you *be* so stupid? *What possible use could they have for our gift? They're a warrior pack. All they want is strength and power. He'll use us, just like our mama warned,*" I hiss.

She glares at me. "*I keep my promises,*" she huffs. "*I never told him.*"

We don't have the best relationship, but my wolf wouldn't lie to me. I don't think she could, even if she wanted to, since we share each other's thoughts.

But if she didn't tell my secret, that leaves only one other person: my brother.

I would **have** forgiven him for what he did in the dining hall. The way he tossed me aside when he found his mate. But this? I won't ever forgive him for this. He chose **his** mate over his own flesh and blood.

Damon warned Crystal about what would happen if I got hurt. Then, I got hurt. I begged him not to take it out on Crystal, but that obviously wasn't enough. So my brother threw me to the wolves, literally, to protect his mate.

I was just a pup when Mama died. Oliver and Papa tried to tell me that she was killed by rogues. They thought I couldn't handle the truth, that our alpha murdered her when he found out about her gift.

I may be small and weak, but there is nothing wrong with my ears, or my nose. I could smell their lies. I'm not sure my relationship with Oliver has ever been the same since that day.

But despite his lies, Oliver knows what happened to Mama. He knows exactly what Alpha Scopus will do as well, now that Oliver has sold me out.

The alpha will use me as a breeder. He'll force me to mate and bear him pups, in the hope that I will produce a powerful she-wolf for him to use.

I can't let that happen. But now that Alpha Scopus knows about me, I don't know how to stop it.

I can't voice my fears about this to the Alpha King, or the governing council that's supposed to make sure all the packs are treating their members appropriately.

Even if I could get there, they would only make things worse. Once they knew what I am, they

would use me, too.

Our choices are limited. I know my wolf won't be happy, but what else can I do?

*"I know you think he wants us, but he only wants our pups. Do you really want your pups to be enslaved? Used for their power?"* I challenge.

She growls at the thought.

*"We can't stay here,"* I add. *"As soon as I am healed, we have to leave. Run away from this place."*

She retreats to the back of my mind, unhappy with my assertion, but she knows I'm right.

My mama was lucky when she found my father. He was kind to her, a supportive mate and an equal partner. But he was the exception rather than the rule.

Alpha Scopus blows hot and cold. One minute he's kind, then the next he goes all alpha on me. I don't trust him, and I know that even now, a few soft words from his wolf to mine will have her rolling over for him.

I won't become a tool for some power-hungry alpha. And now that my brother has betrayed me, there is nothing left to keep me here.

I slow my breathing so that the alpha thinks I'm sleeping. I need to play the part of the submissive little she-wolf for now—at least until I can come up with a plan to get us out of here.