

The Edge of Reason | Chapter 25 by Michelle Torlot

Chapter 25

EMBER

I stare at Damon when he's finished explaining how dangerous this path can be. Perhaps the gods really do have it in for me.

My life couldn't be more perverse. When I wanted to die, so many obstacles were put in my way that I couldn't. Now that I want to live, it seems fate wants me to die.

Well, screw fate. I intend to live, and what's more... I intend to be happy.

I glance over at the healer, who is lurking on the periphery. "Do it," I state.

The healer looks at Damon like he's asking for permission, which pisses me off. "Don't look at him," I hiss, "look at me. I'm the one who decides."

The healer swallows nervously, and Damon chuckles. "You heard your luna. She is my equal in all things, so do her bidding."

The healer nods and walks toward the bed. A syringe lies on a stainless steel tray, filled with some kind of ominous-looking, bright green liquid.

"This is a drug that can force a shift," he begins. "The danger is that it pushes the human consciousness to the background and forces the wolf forward."

I nod. "Similar to an alpha command?"

The healer frowns. "Similar, but if your wolf is too suppressed, she won't be able to take control. However, your human side will still be pushed back. Therein lies the danger."

I swallow nervously. "If that happens, I die?"

He quickly shakes his head. "Not necessarily, but possible. Certainly, it may cause you to lapse into a coma." He hesitates. "Do you still want me to proceed, Luna?"

I glance between him and Damon. This won't just affect me; it will affect Damon as well. If I die, then Damon might go mad from the pain of a second severed mate bond, or even die as well.

Damon takes my hand and presses his lips to my knuckles.

"We don't have a choice, do we?" I question.

Damon shakes his head slowly, his face a mask of sadness. He doesn't want the healer to do this, any more than I do, but we have to try.

Even if this works and I regain my ability to heal, it will take my wolf a while to heal me fully. I will have the added power of my father's gift, but I still have no idea what that might be, or if I'll even be able to control it.

I look at the healer. "Do it. Do it now, before I have a chance to change my mind."

Damon wraps an arm around me, pulling me close. Even without my wolf, I can feel the mate bond thrumming between us beneath the surface.

The healer clears his throat, and we both look at him. "I would suggest keeping your distance once I inject the serum," he says to Damon. "If this works, the luna's wolf may be a bit...cranky."

Damon smirks before pressing his lips to mine.

The kiss starts soft and gentle, but when the realization hits us both that this could be the last time we taste each other, it turns hungry. It's almost as though sparks are igniting across our skin where we touch.

When our lips finally part, I can't help the words that escape from my lips. "I love you, Damon."

His hand reaches out and gently caresses my face. "I love you more...come back to me, Ember," he whispers, before nodding to the healer and taking a few steps back.

Despite Damon still being in the room, the loss of his touch makes me feel empty. I need him just as much as the air that I breathe, and I know by the look on his face he feels the same.

I offer up a small prayer to the Moon Goddess that I can survive this. Not just for me, but for Damon as well.

The healer gently takes my arm and swabs the skin with a piece of cotton wool doused in something cold. I shiver a little, but I'm not sure if it's from the chill on my skin or the fear of what's coming.

I wince slightly when the needle penetrates my skin, but the slight discomfort is nothing compared to what follows.

The healer presses the plunger on the syringe, pumping that green liquid into my veins. I can't help but scream. It feels like the liquid is burning me from the inside out.

I hear Damon growl, or rather, his wolf does. I've never seen his wolf quite so close to the surface. Even when Damon marked me, he still had control. At this moment, I'm not sure.

As selfish as this may sound, though, Damon and his wolf are the least of my worries at the moment.

As the fiery liquid spreads through my veins, the world around me grows distant, almost like a dream.

My vision blurs. The sounds in the room turn muted, like I'm in a bottle, like some demented genie. I try to fight it, but it's no use.

As the world slowly fades, I wonder if this is it. Is this what it's like to die?

Did my grandfather finally get his way?

The last thing I hear before I'm consumed by darkness is a growl. Is it my wolf? Or has Damon finally lost control of his wolf?

Whoever is making the noise, I'm not awake long enough to find out who or what it is.

DAMON

I struggle to contain my wolf as our mate's screams rend the air. If the healer had warned us that it would be this painful, I doubt that we would have been so keen to proceed. I certainly wouldn't have been.

My wolf wants to rip the healer's throat out, but we've started this process now. I'm not about to stop him halfway through, or all of Ember's pain may have been for nothing. It still may be for nothing, but only time will tell.

As the last of the disgusting green fluid enters her body, Ember's whole body stiffens. Her back arches, and just before her body goes limp, I feel a connection forming—or rather, my wolf does.

It's weak, but it's there.

As pleased as I am that we can both now feel her wolf, the sight of Ember on the bed, limp and lifeless, tears at my heart. I'm about to rush over, but Joshua holds me back.

I watch as Ember's body goes briefly still and lifeless, then starts to writhe and contort. She's shifting, but it's not fluid like a normal shift, or even slow and fitful like the one other time I saw Ember shift.

Bones reshape, taking their wolf form before they suddenly snap and morph back into human form. I thank the Goddess that Ember is unconscious, because if she wasn't, if she was awake, the pain would likely be unbearable.

The healer backs away from the bed, his face ashen.

“Where the fuck do you think you’re going?” I hiss.

He stares at me. “If... I mean, when her wolf emerges...” He hesitates, swallowing nervously. “She’s going to be angry...really angry.”

He shakes his head. “The only one who will be safe is you...her mate. Anyone else, she won’t hesitate to attack.”

I glance over my shoulder at Joshua. “Go,” I urge.

He frowns. “Are you sure? I won’t leave you if you’re in any danger, Alpha.”

I shake my head. “She won’t hurt me. I’m her mate.”

I’m not sure that Joshua is convinced. I’m not sure I’m convinced either. Ember’s wolf already tried to challenge me once, but that was before I marked her.

Perhaps I should shift. That way, if her wolf wants to mark me, just as Ember does, I might just get out of this without violence. Even in rage, I doubt Ember’s wolf would be able to hurt me, but I don’t want to fight her if I can avoid it.

I watch as the healer bolts for the door. Joshua follows him a little more slowly, leaving just me and Ember in the room.

Only it isn’t Ember. Nor is it her wolf. It’s a mixture of the two. She’s still phasing between wolf form and human, limbs shifting and twisting in a way that has me wincing in sympathy.

“Don’t fight it, Ember,” I whisper, almost like a prayer. “*Let your wolf out.*”

I say the words out loud and in my head both, and something changes. Maybe Ember can still hear me, or maybe it’s my wolf talking to hers. I guess we will never know, but the next time Ember’s wolf pushes forward, she doesn’t phase back.

Hair begins to push through her skin, and claws erupt from her fingers. Her face changes shape and her canines elongate.

A deep growl erupts from her mouth as she rolls onto her stomach.

When her eyes open, they are pitch black, with no trace of Ember’s blue. It’s just the wolf in charge now, and she looks pissed.

She tries to stand, but she’s too weak and flops back down on her stomach. I want so much to walk toward, but I know that’s a bad idea, at least while I’m still in human form.

“*Shift. Go to mate,*” my wolf growls in my mind. This time I agree, and begin to remove my clothes.

Once they're gone, I give my wolf control. I may be Ember's mate, but her wolf has a stronger connection to my wolf form than my human form.

It's his call now. If he lets his mate mark him in wolf form, then hopefully the curse will be lifted.

That's a big if, though. It's very rare for an alpha wolf to allow his mate to mark him in wolf form. Alpha males are usually too dominant for that.

If he won't, then we will have to wait until Ember's human consciousness returns. Then she can mark me, just as I marked her, in a partial shift.

I watch through my wolf's eyes. I'm nothing more than a passenger, although I can still talk to him, just like when I'm in control and he can speak to me.

He approaches the bed slowly, although there is very little need.

As soon as we shifted into wolf form, Ember's wolf stopped growling. Now, she just stares at my wolf, her head slightly tilted to one side.

I suddenly realize that although they've been communicating with each other, my wolf and Ember's wolf haven't actually seen each other since that first time, when she challenged him and he scuffed her.

Usually, one of the first things that newly marked mates do is run with each other. Of course that wasn't possible, not with Ember's injuries.

I realize all at once why her wolf can't stand up from the bed. It's not weakness, it's because her legs are still paralyzed.

"You must allow her to mark you. If you don't, she won't be able to heal," I beg my wolf.

He doesn't respond, but he knows what I'm telling him is the truth. After all, it was he who insisted that I mark Ember.

He springs onto the bed. When he reaches Ember's wolf, he nuzzles her shoulder, then rubs his scent on her back.

I don't doubt that they are communicating, but whatever they are saying, my wolf doesn't want me to hear.

She nuzzles him back and licks his snout. Then, before I realize what he's doing, he clamps his jaws on her neck and bites down, piercing her skin.

Ember's wolf yelps. As my wolf releases his grip, he licks the wound he just made.

Sneaky little bastard. He's marking her as well.

This is almost unheard of in werewolf circles, for a male wolf to mark his mate in wolf form. It's even more unusual for a she-wolf to do the same, but that certainly looks like what is about to happen.

My wolf rests his head on the bed in obvious invitation, and Ember's wolf clamps her jaws onto his neck.

I feel the sharp pain momentarily. Then it passes, and she licks the wound she made in turn.

And so, it's done, but neither of the wolves shows any signs of shifting back. I don't really mind. I need to let my wolf bond with Ember's wolf. I've had so much time to touch and talk with Ember, while these two have had so little physical contact.

My wolf nips at her ears playfully. Ember's wolf doesn't seem to mind; in fact, she seems to be enjoying it. She lifts her tail and tries to nuzzle into my wolf.

I suspect I know where this is going, so I decide to let my wolf take complete control as I retreat into our consciousness. They deserve their privacy.

I just hope this will be enough. Enough to lift Ember's curse, and allow her to heal properly.

Chapter 26

EMBER

I feel strange. But if I'm feeling anything, I have to assume I'm not dead. The Moon Goddess hasn't showed up to claim me, Zeus and Ares haven't showed up to berate me, so I guess the serum worked.

Something is still a little off, though. My breath isn't moving the way I'm used to, my limbs don't feel like they're in the right places.

Damon's scent is powerful—stronger than it was before the healer injected that foul green liquid into my veins. I can feel the thrum of our mate bond, stronger than ever.

It's a struggle, but I force my eyes open.

That explains why I have this strange feeling. I stare down at two furry paws.

I panic slightly when I realize I'm still in my wolf form. I don't have anything against this body, but normally whenever my wolf takes control, she is angry.

But what's stranger than the unaccustomed configuration of limbs—my wolf is calm. Dare I say it? Even content.

I know I could force a shift back to my human body now if I wanted to, but I don't. I want to savor this moment. My wolf and I are finally working together—and I think I know why.

Curled up on the bed next to her is Damon's wolf, so huge that he makes my wolf look like nothing more than a pup.

"Just a few minutes more," she huffs in my mind. I can't believe this. She's actually asking me rather than demanding.

I don't mind giving her more time; I'm still feeling exhausted. I wonder if she is too. I hope she didn't attack anyone when we shifted. All I can remember is the intense pain. She probably felt it, too.

I don't have a chance to find out, though, because the door tentatively opens.

My wolf immediately takes full control, and I'm too weak to stop her. Her lip curls back in a snarl as Joshua enters and immediately bares his throat. Is the pack's beta really submitting to us?

Damon's wolf opens one eye languidly and stares at Joshua.

He bows a little deeper, still in his submissive posture. "Alpha, Luna, apologies, but there is a delegation at the border."

Damon's wolf uncurls himself from mine and jumps from the bed, shifting back before his feet touch the floor. Joshua barely blinks; apparently it's normal for him to see his alpha in a state of undress after a shift.

My wolf stretches, lifting her hindquarters as she does. Wait a minute...she's standing! How did that happen? How long have I been out?

I focus and slowly shift back into my human form, half afraid that it's going to hurt as much as it did when the serum forced the shift.

I'm more than a little relieved when it doesn't—in fact, it might be the smoothest shift I've ever done. I barely feel my bones break and re-form.

I feel my face heat up once the shift is complete. I've never been completely happy being naked, either before or after a shift. Today is no exception. Joshua averts his eyes before Damon has a chance to chastise him.

"I...I'll wait outside," Joshua quickly offers before fleeing the room.

Damon glances at me and chuckles. "Come on, little mate, let's find you some clothes." He pulls on his trousers, which are lying on a chair near the bed, and offers me his shirt.

I gratefully accept. The shirt reaches mid-thigh, so it covers most of me. I do hope that we will return to the pack house to get dressed properly before meeting with the delegation, whoever they are.

I have a horrible feeling that Alpha Stone may be behind this. I hope Damon has learned his lesson after what happened the last time, and will be more cautious of hidden traps.

Once I'm covered up, I slide off the bed, allowing my feet to touch the floor. Before I even have a chance to bear any weight, Damon is there at my side, his arm wrapped around my waist, steadying me.

"Take it easy," he whispers. "Your wolf looked a little like Bambi the first time she tried to stand."

"*I did not*," she grumbles.

I can't help but smirk at her denial. I have no reason to disbelieve Damon, and I know how much my wolf hates to be perceived as weak. If I feel unsteady on two legs, then she must have been a sight to see on four.

My wolf has always tried to maintain a tough act, all through our time with Craven Moon Pack, and even more so when we first arrived here. It's probably what helped us to survive.

Now, though, we have our mate. She doesn't always need to be the tough one anymore. She's allowed to show weakness—and so am I. I've always been ashamed of being weak, but now, maybe it's okay.

I walk slowly across the floor. It must be slightly annoying for Damon how much time I'm taking, but he doesn't say anything. He just gives me small smiles of encouragement every so often.

When we reach the door he opens it, but before I have a chance to step across the threshold, he scoops me into his arms.

"Hey!" I exclaim. I've only just gotten the use of my legs back, and now he wants to carry me again.

"Let me just carry you back to the pack house so we can find you some clothes. Then we'll drive to the border. You need to save your strength for whatever 'delegation,'" he air quotes with his fingers, "we find there."

I sigh, but nod. He's right, of course. I have no idea who or what will be waiting for us, and I have no idea if I've unlocked any special gifts given to me by my father, now that my mate bond is complete.

I may be heading out there like a lamb to the slaughter.

Besides, it'll take some time for me to regain all my strength, even if I can heal myself now. So I let Damon carry me into the bedroom and place me on the bed. He heads straight into the closet, and returns to hand me a pile of clothes.

I unfold the dense material of the jumpsuit, and frown slightly. I was half-expecting him to bring out a dress. After all, I would have expected that the alpha and luna meeting someone at the border would require a degree of formality.

He seems to sense my confusion. "I'm expecting the worst, Ember. I doubt that whoever is at our border is here for a social call, and this time I intend to be prepared."

I swallow nervously at the thought of Conrad Stone returning, but I can see that after last time, Damon is taking no chances.

Of course, this delegation could be someone completely different, but I suspect that is a naïve hope.

I remove Damon's shirt and dress in what I can only describe as military garb. At least this time I won't have to worry too much about getting hurt. My only regret is that now I won't be able to heal Damon if something happens to him.

Damon pulls on a similar-looking jumpsuit in a larger size. I guess he isn't taking any chances either.

I feel the front of my shirt. It's thick, and quite harsh to the touch.

"No silver-laced arrows will penetrate that." Damon smirks. "I learned my lesson last time."

I nod and force a smile, feeling a little more confident now that I'm protected this way. Damon holds out his hand, and I accept it without hesitation.

He gently squeezes my hand, and leads me from the alpha quarters toward the car, to find out what waits for us at the border.

I'm not surprised when we get there and find Conrad Stone waiting with a smirk on his face. He hasn't come alone, though. The man beside him exudes a strong alpha presence.

I don't know who this new man is, but Damon seems to know—and from what I can sense through the mate bond, he doesn't like him. In fact, I can feel anger seeping out of Damon's every pore.

Damon growls under his breath. "What do you want?"

The man glances at me, then looks back at Damon. "You should kneel before your king, Damon."

I gasp. I can't believe I didn't recognize our Alpha King—but then, I've never been important enough to see him in person. I'm about to kneel, as is the protocol, but Damon holds tightly onto me, keeping me on my feet.

To be fair, the king is disrespecting Damon too. Rightfully, he should be calling him “Alpha Scopus,” not his first name. But he may be choosing the more casual form of address pointedly because Damon refuses to kneel, or even bow.

“Just because you wear the crown, Marcus, doesn't make you the rightful king.”

My heart hammers loudly in my chest, and I can barely breathe. Not only did Damon disrespect the king by calling him by his name, but his words were tantamount to a challenge.

The king narrows his eyes, but he surprisingly lets the insult pass. His next words shock me to the core. “I believe you have one of my chosen in your dungeon, little brother.”

I stare at Damon in disbelief. Damon is a royal wolf? Not just any royal, either. He's the king's brother, and it appears there is no love lost between them.

Damon scoffs. “If that mutt is an example of one of your chosen, then I'm surprised you can hold on to your power.”

He glances next at Conrad Stone. “And consorting with cowards, is that how a true king would behave? I somehow doubt it. But let's face it, you're not really any better than cowardly Conrad, are you?”

The king lets out a growl, and Conrad Stone takes a step back, proving how much of a coward he truly is.

“Our father was weak, so I destroyed him,” the king pronounces. “Just as I will destroy you when I take the conduit from you.”

Damon steps in front of me. “You will do no such thing. She is my mate, and you will take her over my dead body!”

The king smirks. “The pleasure will be all mine.”

