

Chapter 21

ELLE

The last thing that I felt was the excruciating pain of being strung up on the wall and being whipped over and over again. It was not the first time that a whip was taken to my flesh, but the difference this time was that I still had the wolfsbane on my skin which then got inside of the cuts every time the whip split my skin apart.

My final thought before everything turned black was a pair of grey eyes that belonged to my mate. I held out as long as I could until my body fell into the void.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

The sound was the first thing that I became aware of.

The second thing was feeling of being encased in warmth. It was not like the fire of wolfsbane. It was a warmth that brought tantalizing sparks with it.

The third thing was the scent of cinnamon espresso. He found me just like I knew he would. I never doubted that he would come for me or that he would save me.

"Please come back to me, darling. I've never once needed anything in life more than I need you. I'm sorry that I couldn't get to you sooner. I'm sorry for what they did. I'm sorry that I

failed you. I need you, Elle," he whispered into my ear. I hated the pain and desperation that rang out clearly in his voice.

His words elated my heart because it showed me what he truly thought about me and about our bond. I also never needed anything in life more than him. I doubted that there ever could be.

"You saved me," I somehow croaked out. Goddess, my throat was drier than the Sahara.

I heard his huge intake of breath. It took a couple of tries to open my eyes, but I was able to see his grey orbs filled with such emotion as they looked down at me. Kade looked rough like he had not slept in weeks. There were dark circles underneath his eyes and creases next to his eyes and lips that showed his stress.

"Elle," he cried out.

His eyes swept over my entire face, taking it all in as if he was afraid that he would never see me wake up again. I could only imagine the state that he found me in. I knew what I had felt like, but I was certain the appearance was even worse.

"I wouldn't leave you," I promised, and I meant it.

"Good. I wouldn't leave you either. We tried to get to you sooner, but it took some divine intervention and Gabriel's epic bond to find you," he told me.

His fingertips trailing over my jaw. I loved the sparks and the warmth he was providing me. It pushed away the memories of the night. We got Jesse and saved him. That was the aim of the night, and we did it. That was what mattered to me. I would take anything to save my people. They had always been my priority.

Tyre mentioned to Faye that we were like the Omega's Alphas. Neither of us had ever considered it like that, but it was a fairly apt description. We took care of, nurtured, and protected our little pack. They were our priorities, and nothing would stop us from doing what we could to save them.

"How's Jesse?" I asked, clearing my throat.

Kade reached over to the bedside table and grabbed a cup of water, holding the straw up to my lips. The cool liquid washed away the dryness, and I took a few more pulls before stopping. I did not want to get sick for drinking too much too quickly. I had been in that boat before, and it was not a good boat to be in.

"He was released a little while after he was brought here. The worst was of it was the wolfsbane in his system, but they flushed it out, and he's fine. You did good in finding him, darling," he praised me and kissed my forehead.

I went to answer him, but the door opened to show a disheveled Gabriel who looked like he ran all the way here.

His eyes were laser-focused on me, as if not fully believing what he was seeing either.

"Em. I'm so fucking happy to see you awake." He rushed into the room and took a seat in the chair next to the bed.

Gabriel looked just as rough as Kade did. My best friend was the type of person who always looked put together no matter the situation. It was one small way that he was able to have some semblance of control when our lives never allowed it.

"I'm happy to see you too. Anyone want to fill me in on why you're both acting like you can't believe I'm awake?"

They exchanged a look before Kade pulled my body further into his. He was laying on his side with his arm over my waist, and it felt amazingly distracting. I could feel his muscles given that he was just wearing a pair of shorts and a tank top. I vividly remembered what he looked like without a shirt on, and I had to push that memory out of my mind or else everyone would smell just what that memory did to me.

There was absolutely no denying that my mate was very sexy. He did not seem arrogant about it though which was nice. I hated arrogance with a passion, so it was good that he did not seem like that type of person or Alpha.

"It took them nearly three hours until they told us that you were stabilized but wouldn't wake up. They weren't certain why you were out of it other than you sustained extensive

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injuries. That was two days ago, darling," Kade informed me, watching my face carefully.

Two days? I had been in the void for two days. Now, I understood their reactions. Well damn.

'Faye?' I asked. Nothing. I tried it again but still nothing.

I was not certain what expression I had on my face, but the monitor picked up my increased heartrate which was not helping one bit to calm me down.

Kade turned my face gently to look into my eyes. I saw his lips moving, but I could not hear what he was saying through my panic.

Sparks shot through me as his lips pressed against mine, breaking through the panic. His lips were soft, but the kiss was demanding. His lips demanded control. Control that kept me focused on him instead my panic. His hand cradled the back of my head, pulling me to him even further. I gasped with how incredible it felt, which he took full advantage of, and his tongue danced along mine. It was completely intense.

He broke the kiss before kissing the tip of my nose and forehead as well. It was such an incredibly sweet gesture that had me swooning.

"That was my first real kiss. You're the only person I've ever kissed actually," I said, blushing. His eyes brightened with that bit of information.

"Good to know. That was the best kiss I've ever had. Now, tell me why you were panicking."

I tried reaching Faye again, but I got nothing at all. What did that even mean? What if they did something to her? I could not lose her. She was the other half of what made me who I was.

"I can't reach Faye," I said quietly.

His fingers played with my hair while he thought. Tyre pushed forward and placed a kiss to my forehead, comforting me too.

There was a knock on the door, and Gabriel came back in. He probably decided to flee to safety and give us privacy. He sat back down in the chair, and I could feel Vince tugging on the bond.

"She's there, but it feels like she's passed out. They used a lot of wolfsbane on you, and the extent of damage to your body weakened you pretty badly. I think the reason it took so long for you to wake up was because of her being passed out, so you didn't have the shifter healing to help you recover," Gabriel explained, reassuring me.

I nodded and gave him an appreciative smile. That helped me relax quite a bit. I was afraid that they somehow destroyed her. I did not know what I would do if Faye was no longer with me. That would not be fair to Tyre either. It would have broken my heart more for him than anything

though. He needed her too.

The doctor came in and examined me, saying that she was happy with my progress. I needed to take it easy and wanted to keep me one more night. Then I would be released in the morning if there were no complications.

When the doctor left, the guys filled me in on what all happened. The first thing that Kade wanted me to be aware of was how impressed he and Tyre were of Faye's fighting.

The next bit of information relayed what happened with the Alpha family. I listened intently to the play-by-play of their torture of Alpha. I wished I could have seen it, but I could not wait to visit them and show how he failed so miserably. Kade did make sure to tell me that Alpha did not enjoy having his dick threatened. I could imagine my mate taking that knife to his dick. I would have given anything to witness that, but perhaps I would still get my shot to.

A smile graced my lips when Kade told me Grant's message. I could not wait to see him in her realm and even after he was reborn. He would be in an allied pack, so Kade promised that we would see him once we knew who he was paired with. I never had anything against Grant. It was just Eric that I hated.

"So, out of the seventy-five pack members besides the Omegas, we could only approve of thirty of them to take to Nightshade. We'd like your feedback when you're up to it though. Gabriel said that you would have the most inside

information," Kade said, lacing our fingers together.

He was still cuddling with me, and I would not want him anywhere else. I felt everything would be okay while he held onto me. I was not afraid or anything. I just felt grounded with him like this.

The two of us did not really get a chance to bond much at all before we went to rescue Jesse, but it felt right to be so close to him like this. His scent swirled around me, keeping me relaxed.

"Yeah. Get me a list with names of the people and who they're related to. I'll see what I can do," I told him.

He grabbed a paper from the bedside table and winked at me before waving it around. I rolled my eyes and tried to grab it, but he moved it out of my reach. His eyes twinkled with mischief as he teased me. It was nice to see him like this. I was getting another good look into who Kade was, and I enjoyed it. He could be just as playful as he could be serious.

I leaned up and pressed my lips to his. His surprise gave me the split-second distraction that I needed in order to grab it from him and wave it triumphantly like a victory flag.

He chuckled, pulling me back into his side. I snuggled against his chest, loving the way it felt to be next to my mate. This was what a true mate-bond felt like. Kade felt like home to me, and I had never felt something so amazing

before.

I read through the names twice before looking at Gabriel in question. He just shrugged and leaned against the wall, waving for me to continue.

"You've got to be kidding me. Where's the real list?" I asked them.

Kade looked between the two of us, clearly confused as to what was going on. I took this list and tore it in half before flinging the halves to the floor, hopefully conveying my irritation that those people tried to play a game of innocence when they were anything but.

"None of them are eligible. I don't know what they claimed that they did or didn't do, but you don't want these people in your pack, Kade," I told him seriously.

Gabriel clapped his hands together and smiled proudly at me. Vince shimmered through, telling me that he was proud of me too. Vince was just as important to me as Gabriel was. I was blessed to have them both in my life.

"Told you that Elle would be the best for this. You told the previously in-charge assholes that she wasn't forgiving to what they did to her people. Elle's been keeping track of every single indiscretion. She kept quite a bit of it from me because she knew I'd go apeshit, and she wasn't wrong."

This was a mess. I had no idea what was going to happen with all of those people who were ineligible, but I did not

care too much. They made their own beds and could lie on them. Half of the people on the list had a minimum of four offenses over the years. That number steadily rose as more Omegas were brought into the pack. We had about fifty now, but many had gone 'missing' over time.

It was the reason Gabriel, and I never left the pack because then nobody would look over our people. We could not do much to protect them, but we did everything that we could. We were responsible for them and did what we could to make their lives easier. 1

"Our pack, darling," Kade reminded me.

"Our pack." I smiled at him with that declaration.

My body was not fully back on track, so Gabriel bid me farewell when I yawned. I had been asleep for two days, but that did not mean I did not mean that I actually rested my body. I could only imagine how hard my body had to fight in order to heal.

We agreed that we would all meet up with the Council to explain things. It was not just my word for all of this because I literally kept track, and it was enough evidence to fill a binder. People came to me with their complaints, and I documented all of it. These were my people, so I made certain that I had everything necessary to be their voice if I ever had the opportunity.

I fell asleep with my head against Kade's chest and Tyre

purring to me. I had never fallen asleep so quickly or felt so relaxed before. Everyone always heard about the mate-bond, but it was incomprehensible until you experienced it for yourself.

I was no longer in the hospital when my eyes opened. Selene's beautiful realm surrounded me. The colorful flowers and landscape were the exact same. Wolves played in the distance, yipping, and growling at one another. It all brought a smile to my face. Those were future counterparts. It was very miraculous.

Two arms circled my waist, delicious sparks covered me, and warmth from his body pressed against my back. I looked up at Kade who was in awe of everything. I certainly understood that feeling because there was a peace that settled in one's soul which wiped away everything that was not the sanctity of this place.

"Where are we?" he whispered into the shell of my ear.

"This is Selene's realm. Isn't it incredible?" I asked.

Kade simply nodded because he was as overwhelmed as I was the first time that I was here. In all honesty, I was still overwhelmed, so I wondered if it would be the same no matter how many times one might come here.

"You two are beautiful together. Perfect complements just like Faye and Tyre are," Selene said, startling us from behind.

We spun around and saw her face-to-face. She looked the

exact same as always. The only difference was the color of her dress. It was a beautiful teal color today but still floated around her as if the wind carried it even though there was no breeze in the air.

Kade submitted himself to her just like I had. Her soft chuckle was followed by her pulling him into an embrace. To say he was shocked would have been an understatement. It took him a couple of long moments to break through that shock before he returned her embrace. Afterwards, he wrapped an arm around my waist, holding me to him.

"I am incredibly proud of you both. We have some things to discuss, but I will tell you the same thing that I told my sweetest Elle and had her tell Gabriel. Please feel free to call me Selene. You are now part of this as well." 1

Her smile was soft and patient because she understood that it was a transition for someone to know of her and then know her. Those were two very different things. She was our eternal mother who watched over her creations even when we lost sight of that.

"Thank you for everything, Selene," Kade said as he side-eyed me.

"You are most welcome, Kade. It warms my heart to see you two together. You will have a fruitful mateship. Come and sit," she said, gesturing towards the fountain that she and I had sat at before.

I was happy that he was getting to experience this with me. I hated that I had not gotten the chance to explain things to him, but he told me that Gabriel had. It would have come from me had the events of that night not gone how they did. That was neither here nor there though. It happened and was done with. It was our turn to move forward now.

Kade pulled me into his side once we sat down. His touches could get addicting because I felt whole in his embrace. I felt safe. It was interesting how the bond worked like that. Perhaps it was just him instead of the bond. Either way, I was thankful for it.

"Grant is doing well. When the wolves come back to my realm, they begin again as pups. He is currently being nursed and will be old enough to meet with you in about six months. He will be given to the Alpha heir in the Silver Creek pack shortly thereafter. That is the good news. Now, we need to discuss a few important things that will impact your future," Selene said.

Apprehension knotted my stomach with her words...