

12. Déjà vu

"Look at us! We are even sharing clothes now!" Savvy said, pulling on the sweatshirt he gave her. "And here I thought that I wasn't special to you!"

"Savannah..." He groaned, and she imagined that the king of the North was angry with her. He had to be since she was just a nuisance to him.

"Excuse me, Your Majesty," she giggled. "Don't be offended. I know very well that I am just one of the twenty or so contenders. Oops. Pardon me, twelve. Twelve contenders. We don't count those poor girls who came in the wrong colour dresses, right? They committed such a serious offence!"

"Are you done?" Kai growled, waiting for her impatiently.

"Oh, I am far from being done!" the princess snorted when she realised that the sweatshirt was barely covering her bottom. However, she had to admit that it was better than nothing, and she would have to be content with having just this on her. It was better than the two of them staying naked together. Nothing good could come out of that. "In fact, I could go on about all this for hours!"

"That's not what I am asking," Kai cut her off. "Are you dressed?"

"If one can call this short hoodie a dress, then yes. ..." The girl muttered and didn't even get to nish her sentence when the lycan's strong hand grasped her forearm, pulling her out of the bushes into the moonlight.

"Good," he said calmly and pushed her against the tree where just a few minutes ago, the bear was holding her hostage.

Déjà vu.

"And now tell me who the man you were with a few minutes ago was."

He tucked his nose into the crook of her neck, taking a deep breath of her scent mixed with the intruder's, and his elongated claws sliced the tree bark right next to her.

"Damn, Kai," she chuckled, demonstrating that he wasn't intimidating to her at all. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you are jealous!"

He pulled away from her quickly.

Way too quickly.

Their eyes met, and he quickly averted her gaze, making her blush at the realisation that there might have been some truth to her joke.

The king cleared his throat. "Don't change the subject. It's absolutely unacceptable that my... one of the contenders is sneaking out with some guy in the woods!"

"Imagine my surprise when I thought I was coming here to get married and found my groom-to-be with twenty other women!" She didn't hold back a smirk that curled her lips, and he nally locked his eyes with hers. They stared at each other as if it was a competition, and Savvy experienced a wave of triumph when he sighed heavily and looked away.

"I didn't know, okay?" Kai ran his hand over his hair. "I..."

"...asked for my hand in marriage when you really did not want anything to do with me. And then asked your sister to handle it for you," she said coldly, and he felt respect for her. Her composure was admirable. After all, he was the one clearly at fault here. "And then you decided to humiliate me more and..."

"No," he stopped her right there. "Savannah, I didn't. I didn't know it was you."

"How could you not know?" She wanted to walk away, but he didn't let her, pressing himself harder into her. So, she placed a hand between the two of them, and her touch did something to him that he couldn't explain.

"You didn't know that it was me either," he chuckled, leaning lower.

"Because of your ridiculous beard!" the princess pointed out.

"I thought you liked it better that way." The man scoffed, and she rolled her eyes at him.

"Back then, I thought you were a simple gardener. ..." She pointed out with a raised brow.

He wanted to tell her a lot of things, but instead, he asked, "Does it change anything?"

"It changes everything." The woman in front of him didn't hesitate with her answer, and he knew that she was right. The moment he stopped being a gardener and she stopped being his little maid, it was over.

It wasn't supposed to start in the rst place, and he couldn't believe that the one time he allowed himself to enjoy life at least a little bit, he got into that mess with one of the Stormholds.

The North would never accept her, and she would never bend herself to make them accept her. The rivalry and animosity with the West was in their roots. This was what they lived and breathed. There were too many wars in the past, and his people did not forget or forgive easily. If she was his mate or came with a particular piece of land, it would be different. But that wasn't the case...

"For what it's worth, I am sorry it turned out like this." Kai found himself apologising to her. He owed her that much.

"Thank you." Savannah nodded and looked him straight in the eye, still trying to push him away slightly and meeting resistance. She could have pushed harder. He could have stepped back. Yet here they both were, in the darkest shadows of the night forest. Where no one would be able to see them. Alone and oh so close...

"So, where do we go from here since you are sorry and all that?" Savvy snapped out of it rst. She had enough men playing with her in one lifetime. She had had enough of those. Unfortunately, even if he apologised, he was still one of them. She was literally a participant in the game he hosted.

"I..." He stumbled to give her an answer.

"All right." She let out an annoyed breath and furrowed her brows. She had to be the reasonable one, and this was her moment. "Sign the alliance agreement with Gideon, and I will be gone the very same day."

Her words hit him like a slap, and he tried scanning her face for any kind of emotions. Yet the Western Princess only raised her chin higher, proud and stubborn, just as her brother.

Kai knew that she was serious. All he had to do was sign the paper conrming that alliance that didn't even look that bad now since he knew there was a looming threat from the white bear packs. Gideon was a prick, but that white monster...

One signature and Savannah would go back to her kingdom forever. She would nd her mate, or her brother would arrange another marriage for her... She wouldn't be his problem anymore.

"Don't!" Asgard growled inside of his mind. That fellow wasn't talkative, but now he was surfacing more often than ever.

"Why?"

"You know why!" The wolf insisted. "We want her."

"She is not our mate. Just forget it." Kai tried to reason with his partner.

"No, she is not. But I will not forget it, and neither will you." He had to shut him off, but deep inside, he knew that Asgard was right. Letting Savannah go felt wrong, and he was used to trusting his instincts.

"So?" she tapped her bare foot on the grass impatiently.

"No," he said rmly, and she gaped at him.

"No?" Her whole body got tense hearing his words.

"No." He repeated himself, still not taking a single step back.

"Okay," Savannah let the air out through her nostrils angrily, "I am afraid I will need an explanation to go with that. Care to elaborate? Why the hell not?"

"First of all, I don't trust your brother too much, and I need to investigate the situation more," he replied calmly and heard her teeth gritting. For some strange reason, he enjoyed that more than he should have.

"You had months for that!" Savvy reminded him, appalled by his arrogance.

"Exactly. So, waiting a few more weeks wouldn't make a big difference." Kai chuckled, and the princess clenched her sts.

"Just wait until I am done, and then maybe I will agree to that alliance." He couldn't even hide his smirk when he declared this. The thoughts of her not wearing anything under that sweatshirt raced in his head. His eyes lowered to her chest, which was rising and falling in a sharp rhythm.

"Well, that's ignorant!" She squeezed both her hands in between them to fold them simply to demonstrate to him how unimpressed she was. "After all, you probably need this alliance more than we do from the looks of it. We got rid of the foxes and the bears on our territories while they roam freely on yours."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kai's smile dropped.

"It means exactly what it means." The girl nally managed to push him away and get out of his grasp. "You have a fox and a werebear in the competition, and I just met a bear who felt as if he was at home here. Not to mention that your sister even found a witch somewhere. I really want to know where she managed to get her! A part of me wants to see her win the Trials. I bet your face would be priceless!"

"Ha-ha, very funny!" The king shook his head, chuckling. "Just when I thought that you could be serious. No bears can enter my land. Even that girl Brigit arrived without other werebears. She was provided with a few werewolves to help her instead."

"Maybe this is what you think." Savvy shrugged her shoulders. This conversation was just a waste of time, and she wanted to get back to her room sooner. "But I am telling you, that male you smelled on me just a few minutes ago was a huge haughty white werebear with a nice body covered in weird scars and one eye missing."

The moment these words left her mouth, it was as if a lightning bolt had struck him. Kai instantly knew who she was talking about, and he couldn't believe that this was the truth.

He couldn't get here.

He wasn't supposed to be here.

Kai was personally hunting him for the last month, and his trusted sources fed him the information that the bear in question was either dead or gone to a different continent. The information proved to be not true by the snarky western princess. He considered, of course, that she could be lying about that encounter, yet he didn't sense anything coming out of her. No worry, no agitation of any kind. She was annoyed and slightly bored. Which only led him to the conclusion that she had no idea who she had just met.

No one met Darius Bjorn and stayed alive. No one.

Except for Savannah Stormhold.

"Did he touch you?" Kai shifted back to her, trying to take in and check every inch of the stubborn girl who had no idea that she had just avoided death.

"You see," she slapped his hand that was about to contact with her skin, "if we were engaged, you could have asked me that question. But as of now, the answer is: It's none of your business."

"Savannah!" the king growled, grasping both of her shoulders. "Did he do anything to you?!"

However, he knew the answer. He knew it the moment he smelled the male's scent on her. Bjorn touched her. He was so close that Kai could still smell one of his fake scents on her skin.

Savannah couldn't smell like anyone else! He hated it. He hated it so much that he was ready to do anything to ensure it was gone from her.

On an instinct, he dipped his head into her neck, brushing his lips and tongue over it – the fastest way to scent her. And also the most desirable.

"He denitely allowed himself less than you!" She kicked him on the leg. Not hard, but enough for him to feel it.

Without thinking, he threw her over his shoulder and started walking.

"Seriously, Kai, what do you think you are doing?" she demanded, scratching his naked back and not realising that the sensation wasn't unpleasant for him.

"You can't get back to the castle smelling like another man, Savannah," he bried informed her. "We are going to x this."

And with that, he placed a resounding slap on her bottom...

NOTE: We are still voting for chapter length in Marissa Gilbert's Reading Circle group. Join if you want to have your say. For now, I see that longer chapters and their prices do not bother you much.

Remember that the new schedule is Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday. I usually post right before midnight London time, but hiccups happen. The schedule is to be used as a guide only.

P.S. Please, do not worry about the notes, I will clear them when the book will go to ptr. I don't know when this will happen, it's not signed yet, so it's too early to think about it anyway.