

15. Almost

Frustrated and annoyed, Kai found himself in the foulest of moods. After spending the night in the woods hunting for Bjorn, he hadn't gotten much sleep. There was no trace of the enemy, yet a million scents of all kinds of creatures, which shouldn't be present in the first place, lingered all around him. It was as if the rotten bear was mocking him. Was this why he touched Savannah but left her alive? To let him know that he touched one of the contenders for the Luna of The North? That he had touched something that was his?

Before that, anyone who crossed him in the woods was later found dead. Mostly in pieces.

There was, of course, the option of Savannah working with Bjorn. The more he considered that notion, the more he realised it was unlikely Gideon would ever let him close to his sister. He scratched that thought from the depth of his mind.

Savvy didn't know. She had no idea who she had met and how dangerous he was.

Thinking of her, he remembered how her bare flesh felt against him, how intoxicating her scent was ... and how angry she got with him the previous night. He didn't like her being unhappy with him. Somehow, the more he attempted to create goodwill between them, the worse the situation became.

Whatever the results, here he was now, unable to remove thoughts of her out of his head while he was attending to an entirely different task altogether.

"Kai, don't just stand there!" Elene jabbed him gently with her elbow. "Go talk to the girls. The deal was that you would get better acquainted with each of them!"

He didn't want to be rude, so he said nothing to his sister, who he blamed for his current predicament.

It could have been different. If there were no Luna Trials, he would be engaged to Savvy at this moment.

She probably wouldn't be thrilled, but he would have pursued her, made her see him from a different angle, a different perspective.

He couldn't believe that his mind had gone there. Again. He had to snap out of it and get back to the responsibilities at hand.

Scanning the garden, he couldn't locate her, and wondered if she did get sick after all. She was trembling when they returned to the castle, and although he ordered his chef to make her a hot soup in the middle of the night, he did not follow up on that.

"Oh, look!" Elene said in a tone that he knew far too well. The tone that meant she was acting again. "It's Penelope! Hi, Pen! How are you doing?"

"Elene! Kai!" The girl went up to them with a happy expression on her face. Her violet dress was a replica of what his mother had worn in one of her earlier portraits, and he recognised it at once.

"You look gorgeous! What a stunning dress!" Elene praised her best friend, although she was probably the one who suggested she wear this outfit. "Doesn't she look gorgeous, Kai?"

"She absolutely does," he nodded, looking for Savvy with his eyes. "Will you excuse me?"

"Of course not!" his sister stepped in his way. "You are not going anywhere, Kai Fionnlagh! You know very well that you have to talk to every contestant. You can start with Penelope, since you are both here. I expect at least fifteen minutes of quality conversation!"

"Fine," he groaned and watched his sibling walk away, happy with herself.

"We can just stand and pretend that we talk." Penelope winked at him the way she used to do since their childhood. "You just do nothing, and I will move my lips. She will never spot the difference!"

"Sounds good," he agreed, looking for Savvy again.

"Gee, Kai!" Penelope snorted. "Way to make a woman feel special!"

He shot her an apologetic glance. They had been friends since childhood, after all.

Well, she was Elene's friend, but it meant that she was in the house a lot. And when their parents died, he thought that he would lose his sister to grief as well. Penelope was the one to step in and help them both. So, he owed it to her.

"Sorry," he muttered. "It's just ..."

"You are waiting for someone?" she asked, studying his face, and he nodded. For a second or so, her expression was unreadable, but then she grinned at him. "Is that a contender? Do you have your eyes on someone?"

"Pen, please!" He stopped her because she wasn't the one he would pour his heart out to.

"Gosh! It's that serious?!" she giggled, playing with her dark hair. "You surprise me, Kai!"

The girl touched his shirt, gently brushing her fingers over it, nally bringing his attention to her.

"You even dressed up!" she smirked. "I remember that Elene couldn't make you wear this shirt. You absolutely loathed it when she gave it to you for your birthday!"

"It was the first thing I grabbed this morning," he brushed her off.

That was a lie, of course. Kai spent at least an hour staring at his wardrobe, realising that all his shirts looked the same to him. Then he noticed this and remembered how Elene told him he should wear it when he wanted to impress a girl. It was a joke, and he knew it, yet somehow, he wore that one, feeling dumb on top of everything. If Savannah Stormhold would be impressed by anything, it wouldn't be some stupid shirt.

The scent of bluebells hit his nostrils, and his head snapped in her direction. Some girl dressed like a giant cake was pulling Savannah away. He found himself begging Fenrir for her to at least look at him once, and when his wish was granted, he was disappointed again.

The way she glared at him didn't promise him anything good. She wasn't over what happened yesterday. So, he would have to work for her forgiveness.

"Moon Goddess!" Penelope gasped. "Don't tell me you like the western princess!"

"I don't know what you are talking about." He gave her a warning glance and took himself under control. Was it so obvious that he paid attention to Savannah?

"The way you just stared at her ..." The girl insisted, lowering her voice so no one could overhear them.

"Pen!" he snarled at her, and she pursed her lips.

"Kai," Penelope whispered even quieter. "Out of all girls here, she and the werebear are definitely not the options for you. People would rather go with the witch or the cats than either of them! Trust me on this."

"I think everyone has forgotten that I am the king, and no one decides for me!" He stated firmly. "Now, excuse me. We'll chat some other time."

He left his friend, seeing only Savannah before him and ignoring everyone else who tried to talk to him on his way. He would fulfil his duties later, and now he had more important things to deal with.

"Ladies, it's nice to see you here again," he tried to sound polite and not rushed, but Savannah only scrunched her nose at him.

"We are honoured by your presence!" she said, every word laced with sarcasm. "Excuse me, I see someone I need to talk to."

She didn't have anyone to talk to here, and everyone knew it, but she intended to escape him, and he wasn't having any of this. So, he grasped her delicate arm in his huge palm, shocking everyone here because it was against all known etiquette rules. Not that he cared.

"Actually," he lowered his head, wishing nothing more than to brush his lips over her skin, "I wanted to talk to you for a moment."

"Some other time!" The girl sneered, and a growl escaped him as she removed her hand from his grasp and tried to walk away.

He didn't hesitate to catch up with her and, to her surprise, lifted her in his arms, rapidly walking away from the scene. She didn't even struggle, simply staring at him in shock.

"What do you think you are doing?!" She demanded, grasping his shoulder for balance. She didn't even trust him to carry her properly, and this only made him angrier.

"What does it look like I am doing?" Kai huffed.

"Being a brute and grabbing people without consent?" She arched her brow. "Then again, it's not your first time, is it?"

"What are you talking about, Savannah?"

She chuckled wholeheartedly.

"You tripped, and I am ensuring your safety!"

She only looked annoyed hearing his words.

"Is that how the news is going to show it tomorrow?" The princess tried to get off him, but he held her in place and added a growl to it that made her eyes go wide.

"How would you like the news to show it?" Kai asked, not understanding why it bothered her in the first place.

"Oh, I loved their clinging story! Let's stick to that!" Savvy rolled her eyes. "They can say that I tripped on purpose and hung on you while you just had to, absolutely HAD TO, carry me."

"What are you talking about?" The king asked, confused, but he could nally put her down as he got them deep enough into the garden that no one could see them, and they could have some privacy, at least for a few minutes.

"You know very well what I am talking about," she hissed, narrowing her eyes. The princess wasn't in the mood for his shenanigans, and everything was merely a repeat of what happened just yesterday. When his goal was the exact opposite.

"I am sorry," he said, and she froze. Then she blinked her long lashes, and her lips parted slightly. Those lips he couldn't get out of his mind for a while already. "For everything. I want you to know this."

"What difference does it make to me now?" She averted his gaze. There was no point in all of this. "You already said you didn't know about the Trials, but you are not giving me my alliance so that I could leave this humiliating show. What do you want from me now? I am not going to thank you for your insincere apology."

"I don't need you to thank me." He placed one hand on a tree behind her, backing her into it. "I want you to know that I have my reasons for not letting you leave."

"And that reason is - you don't trust my brother!" She scoffed, rolling her eyes.

"I don't," Kai agreed with ease. "But he has nothing to do with why I want you to stay."

"What..." She didn't get to finish her sentence because he crushed his lips into hers, crumpling them mercifully and making them part as his tongue effortlessly slid between her sweet lips. The king's strong hands wrapped around her slim waist, but one of them greedily caressed the bare skin on her back. It slid all the way to her neck, bringing her closer so that he could devour her more.

She probably should have pushed him away, but it felt so right that she simply couldn't do it. It was as if she needed it, his touch, his lips, his closeness. Maybe more than he did ...

Kai did not want to stop. The more he tasted her, the more he wanted to continue exploring, not that his life had he experienced anything like this. If his wolf shouted MATE now, he wouldn't be surprised. Yet Asgard did no such thing. The damn wolf only urged him to give in to his desires.

He broke the kiss to get some air, and their eyes met, only igniting the fire between them.

"Savannah," he whispered into her ear, biting her earlobe gently and then left a trail of soft kisses down her neck, stopping at its base. He wanted to sink his canines into her smooth skin right now and mark her for good. So that no bear could ever touch her. So that no man could ever touch her ... He let them grow, grazing the sensitive spot ...

And this was when Savvy snapped out of it.

"Stop!" she nally found the strength to push him away.

"Why?" He didn't move but retracted his canines, replacing them with his soft lips. She was trembling in his arms, and he knew that she wanted this to some extent as well. "I like you, Savannah Stormhold. More than just like you..."

"Too bad!" She tried to distance herself, but he wasn't letting her go, still holding her waist.

"I can't say the same! The more I find out about you, the more disappointed I am."

That hurt. But he knew where she was coming from.

"What can I do to fix it?" He asked bluntly because he wasn't one to beat around the bush. "I am serious about this."

"Then prove it!" She met his gaze again, and he rubbed his chin, thinking of ways to do it.

Someone was approaching them, and their Lycan ears picked it up easily.

"King Kai! There you are!" Savvy recognised Petra's voice. Only the pink-haired girl could decide to follow them when they left in such a way!

"Oh, look!" Savvy couldn't help her smirk. "It's your child bride!"

He gave her a reproachful look, but she already got out of his grasp and was walking away from him, holding her skirt. He followed her with her gaze until she was completely out of sight.

Savannah was so glad that she managed to escape him. This whole quandary with Kai was getting out of hand, leaving her lost an avalanche of emotions.

She was supposed to win the stupid Trials, get her alliance and get the hell out of here. However, she was not supposed to make out with that stupid hot king, and she was not supposed to want him so badly. She had a great plan, and this was definitely not the plan!

All she had to do was to get back to her original intention.

On her return, she couldn't help but notice that everyone present in the gardens had their eyes on her as she walked out. It only worsened when she returned to the contenders, and she quickly realised that she was probably now smelling like Kai.

"That was fast!" Celine accused as she walked out arm in arm with her blonde best friend, and they both stopped right in front of her with unpleasant smirks on their faces.

"I hope you don't think that by spreading your legs, you are going to fix your sad situation!" Inga pretended to look at her nails. "Kai never gets serious with his bed warmers. He has them once or twice, and then he moves on."

"Exactly. He wouldn't touch a girl he was serious about in such a manner and in front of everyone!" Inga sneered.

"Oh, good then!" Savvy mimicked their tone. "Then Penelope has nothing to worry about, right? He had an opportunity but hasn't touched her for, what? How many years now? Ten? Twenty?"

They both gasped at her words and clearly wanted to add something else, but it wasn't meant to be.

"Enough!" A sharp and authoritative voice cut through the air, immediately stopping their banter.