

## Owned by the Alphas |

### The Reason

Kai had been completely serious about not leaving my side. He literally hadn't. He helped me bathe, he waited while I used the toilet, I wasn't even allowed to brush my teeth alone.

I thought it would have gotten on my nerves by the third day, but it hadn't. He made me feel better. Just his presence was enough to help soothe the aches and pains that still lingered.

I thought I was starting to get better, but the third day hit and I was miserable again.

I sniffled, hiding in Kai's grasp as I shivered.

I clenched my eyes shut against the throb in my head, my hand on his torso, my nails digging in as I fought the urge to bring up the minimal amount of water I had been able to keep down.

"Is it normal for humans to be so sick?" he whispered, his fingers running up and down my back.

"After a hit to the head? I think so," I said, trying to make him feel better, but the truth was, I had no idea.

I had never really been sick. A bit of a cold every now and then but nothing serious. Not like the other humans. Mom had said it was the winter born in me protecting me from the bugs, but it wasn't protecting me from this one.

The shadows were quiet too, like they didn't know how to help either. They stayed calm in me, always soothing, always trying to fight the fever that had crept back up overnight.

And the link was weaker, like something was obstructing it. It felt like there was a block in it, but I had no idea what could cause that, and the wolves still weren't agreeing on whether to get Tabitha involved.

I could still feel their emotions if they were strong enough, but we couldn't share thoughts as easily as before. Maybe if I tried, but I was too tired at the moment.

"Maybe it was something Elias did? Like a curse or something for killing him?" I wondered, shivering again, getting closer to the heat of Kai's huge body.

He sighed heavily. "I will figure it out, Little Human. Just give me a bit longer to convince the other two that Tabby can help."

He kissed my forehead before hissing and putting the back of his hand against it. He cursed and moved away.

I shivered and whimpered, reaching for him, but he shook his head, kissing my hand.

"I've got to let you cool down. Wait there," he said, then went to the bathroom.

He brought back a cool cloth and some water, as he had every time my fever got out of hand.

I let him take care of me, too tired to rebel against the idea that I couldn't look after myself. I had to be honest with myself, I just couldn't right now.

He laid the cloth on me, but I didn't want it, I wanted him. I reached for him, pressing my lips against his.

He sighed into me and I pushed my tongue along his, wanting the good feelings he gave me to take over for just a little bit.

He growled against my lips and pulled back, the strain noticeable in the way his eyes flashed red.

"Not yet," he breathed.

I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and brought him back down to my mouth.

"We can go slow. I want to feel good," I whispered.

He didn't answer me, but his lips kept moving over mine, so I said nothing, kissing him back.

I arched into him as he pressed me gently against the mattress. My leg went up around his narrow waist, and I deepened our kiss.

And then he pulled back, breathing hard, digging his claws into his thighs, turning away from me.

“Come back,” I breathed, and he shook his head.

“We need to find out what’s wrong with you,” he bit determinedly. And then he was climbing from the bed and scooping me up in his arms.

“What’s wrong is I haven’t had any of you in too long and my body is having a physical reaction to that trauma,” I teased, and he smirked.

“I wish that was true, Little Human. But just to make sure, I’m taking you to Tabitha’s,” he decided.

It was where I had been telling them to take me for days, so I didn’t mind. Until Brax swung the door to my suite open with a feral snarl.

“No you’re fucking not.”

“Brax, move,” Kai warned.

Brax shook his head. “She’s not going there. Tabitha is the reason she’s even sick in the first place,” he argued, still blocking the door.

“We don’t know the reason. You won’t let me turn her. You won’t let me take her to Tabby. Any other suggestions then, Brax? Because if you’re fresh out of ideas on how the hell we get her better, then get the fuck out of my way so I can do something instead of just sitting here,” Kai growled.

I clung to him, looking over the fear in Brax’s face. I hated that he was so torn, but there was nothing I could do. He had to learn to trust Tabby in his own time.

“I thought that hiding in here was all you wanted to do?” Brax challenged. “Go out there and you risk meeting your mate.”

I sucked in a breath, wincing at the painful reminder that Kai and I were living on borrowed time together.

Kai snarled, and I was pretty sure he would have charged Brax if I hadn't been in his arms. He might've been about to do it anyway when Derik stepped in the room, his face somber.

"I'll take her," he said, holding his arms out.

Kai narrowed his eyes on Derik. "You've changed your mind?" Kai checked, and Derik nodded.

"Yes. She needs something that we obviously don't have, and we have no other options. We promised to keep her safe, and her mother is asking questions. She wants to know why she didn't come home on the full moon like we promised.

"If our word is questioned then the humans might start getting rebellious. This is the only thing we can do—and hope that something good will come of it," Derik explained, and my heart twisted painfully at the thought of my mother finding out exactly what I had been doing on the full moon instead of visiting her.

Kai hesitated, then handed me over to Derik.

"Keep her safe," he warned, before kissing me. "See you soon, Little Human. Only you," he said, kissing me again before Derik stepped back.

Brax was seething, anger rolling off him and tainting the link, but he still followed Derik out the door, shutting Kai in my suite where he lived now.

"Thank you," I said, my eyelids closing as I leaned into the crook of Derik's neck.

He held me tightly and said nothing, running me downstairs and out the door, putting me on his lap in the carriage. Brax sat next to me, putting my legs across him, grabbing my hand as the carriage moved.

We made it to Tabitha's quicker than last time, and when we got out, she was already waiting for us with Cain. She chuckled at us.

"Kai is quite determined not to mate, isn't he?" She smiled with those knowing eyes, and I immediately got curious as to what she knew.

Brax stopped on the porch, refusing to get closer until they moved inside.

“Hasn’t left her room in days.” Derik shook his head.

“And I am assuming you have brought her here for answers?” Tabitha said, like she didn’t already know, but I found that hard to believe since the sofa was already pulled into the middle of the room, the teapot already boiling with five cups in front of it.

Derik laid me down, then kissed my forehead as I rested my eyelids for a bit, still listening but just so tired.

“She has a concussion from Elias, but she’s not getting better,” he admitted.

“A concussion can last for weeks, sometimes months in humans. You think she has something different though, don’t you?” Tabitha said in that smiley voice that said she already knew the answer.

“I don’t think anything, I’m worried. We were hoping you could help.” He sighed, bending down in front of me, kissing my cheek and pushing my hair back from my damp face.

I forced my eyelids open to look at him, moving to kiss him. He kissed back, then took the tea that Tabby handed him out to Brax.

I sat up a little more, expecting a tea, but she never handed one over to me. I frowned at that; normally she did.

“Not for you, deary. I’ll pour you a cup soon,” she said with a wink before sipping her own, sinking into her rocking chair next to the sofa I was on.

Derik came back in then and grabbed his cup. He sat on the end of the couch as Cain grabbed his. They all sipped their tea, the silence almost deafening.

“Do you know what’s wrong with me? Or is it just a concussion?” I asked, sick of waiting.

Tabby smiled behind her cup. “Oh, there is nothing *just* about a winter born, deary. And yes, I have a suspicion. But we are waiting for Kai before I explain,” she said, and I frowned, sitting up with stiff movements.

“Kai is back—”

“Thanks, Tabby.” Kai grinned, coming out of the room to the left that I think was the bedroom.

I raised my brows at Tabby and Kai, who grabbed his tea and emptied the cup. He planted a kiss on Tabby's cheek, then mine.

He sat down on the ground in front of the sofa before hanging his arms on his knees, like it was totally normal that he had appeared out of thin air.

"How?" I asked.

"Magic, of course. A simple summoning spell that I reserve for special cases," Tabby grinned, eyeing Kai, who grinned back at her.

I shook my head, not sure how to begin to process that but winced when it made my skull ache. But I didn't bother questioning it anymore.

Tabitha had her own system or magic thing she had going on, and it wasn't something I felt like she was going to explain to me anytime soon.

I was too human.

My head throbbed again to remind me of that fact, and I grimaced.

Kai reached over his shoulder and held my hand.

"Braxton. I do believe it will be easier to hear and more polite if you were to bring your presence inside," Tabitha said in between sips.

The door opened and Brax came in with a thunderous glare in her direction. He slammed it shut, then leaned up against the wall.

"Can you fix her?" Brax asked, not even trying to contain the hostility in his voice.

Tabitha smiled anyway and shook her head no. Even my shoulders sagged in defeat at that.

"No," she said, taking a sip of her tea. "But you can."

"How?" Kai demanded.

"Patience, sweetness." She smiled.

I was really going to have to get her to teach me how she deactivated Kai's crazy so quickly.

Kai leaned back and waited as Tabitha got up. She moved to her cabinets that were covered in crystals and potions, herbs and spices, plants and candles.

As she began mixing, putting everything in a wooden cup, I watched in fascination, listening as she hummed.

“The thing is, what has happened has never actually happened before. I wasn’t even sure it could happen. I had my suspicions, but they were not founded until now.”

She smiled, still adding and mixing as Cain waited in the kitchen in all his black clothes and piercings, watching every move like a hawk.

Brax got crankier at that, while Kai looked on hopefully. Derik clutched his cup in a tight hold.

“You knew she would get sick?” Brax growled, but Tabitha shook her head.

“Not sick. I wondered if she might get weaker.”

“Does it have anything to do with the shadows? Elias’s ones inside her?” Derik asked, and I waited for the “Yes, she’s going to die” comment, but it never came.

Instead, she turned to us all, a smile wide on her face, her eyes glistening as she looked at each of us, then landed her gaze on me.

“No. Those shadows are helping her. I daresay she’d be much sicker than she is now if she didn’t have those helping to keep up her strength.”

“Why? What’s wrong with me?” I asked, sick of her not giving a straight answer. Especially when she clearly knew.

But Tabitha just smiled. “Nothing is wrong with you, deary. We just have to—”

“Tabby. Give us the answer we came for. Please,” Kai asked in a tone that I had only heard in the last few days. The desperate one, the pleading one.

It broke my heart and had Tabitha turning to us all with a hesitant look before she sighed and handed over the concoction in the cup to Cain.

He whispered some words on it before handing it back. She took it and put it down in front of me.

It was purple, waves of aroma wafting out, but it had my mouth salivating. My headache lessened just at the smell of it, and I looked back up at Tabby, who nodded with a soft smile.

I grabbed the cup and sipped it, surprised at how warm it was. It tasted amazing, like a vanilla smoothie, and softened all the aches and pains, leaving nothing but a homey, cozy feeling inside me.

Kai turned to face me, waiting. Brax looked ready to kill Tabitha the instant I showed any sign of a bad reaction, and Derik just sat there, silent and tense.

But I felt better. I still had the weakness there, but it wasn't accompanied by pain for the first time in days.

"I feel better. Thank you," I said, sipping more of the potion, whatever it was.

"As I suspected then. You'll need to drink that every day to stay on top of the pain." She nodded toward the drink, then turned to put more of the same ingredients in a large jar.

"Cain will come and spell the ingredients for you," she said, and I frowned.

"Every day for the rest of my life? Why? What is it fixing?" I asked, putting the empty cup back on the table with Kai's help.

I sat up, propped on the arm and cushions. Tabitha paused her actions, then turned to me. She smiled and came over, grabbing my hand. I let her, and she held it tight.

Kai shuffled out of the way so she could sit on the sofa next to me, perched on the edge, her long, loose patterned dress flowing over our hands.

"Is your link open?" she asked. "Stronger now?"

I checked the link with my wolves, grinning as their thoughts and emotions filled me. I nodded. "Yes."

"Then close your eyes. I will show all of you what I see," she said, and Brax growled.

I looked over at him. "Please, Brax?" I asked, and he pursed his lips but nodded once, coming to stand behind the sofa, as close as he could get.



I knew through the link that it was a protection detail. Derik shuffled closer, his hand on my leg, as Kai grabbed my other hand.

“Okay.” I nodded, and she grinned before my eyes closed with hers.

And I saw it. The vision she saw. It was everywhere, so many pictures, so many possible futures spinning through my mind so fast, until a single thread stood out.

A baby.

A tiny, formed human child rolling inside what looked like a womb, floating, but it was staring at me, like it knew I was watching it.

I gasped and snatched my hand back, my eyes snapping open, my gaze clashing with Tabitha’s.