

## Chapter 25 - Stop at nothing

Zara's POV

"Ah, Zara," my father's voice chimed in my ears, and my gaze turned to where he and Beta John came closer. "Have you finished eating?"

"I have, thanks," I replied as I stood up from the dinner table. Levi got up from his chair beside me, holding my hand in his.

Beta John stopped my father, and he turned to face him.

"I will talk about the specifics right now," my dad answered the silent question.

"And that other problem?" Beta John inquired with a worried tone.

"It is not up to you to decide," my father replied. "I will talk about it when the time is appropriate."

Beta John attempted to countermand, but my father stopped him with a raised hand.

"Beta, we already have enough problems on our hands," my dad remarked. "I can't add more. Furthermore, how would it alter our lives right now?"

Beta John let out a sigh.

"I honor your desires, Alpha," he said, glancing sideways at me before moving away from my father's side.

"What the heck was that about?" Kaya yapped from the back of my mind. "Is your father withholding information from you?"

"It would not be the first time," I answered. "I am still curious as to why he kept the tunnels' destination a secret from us."

"I suppose now would not be the best time to ask him," Kaya remarked. "He appears worn out, almost emotionally spent."

"I wonder what is upsetting him," I remarked. "I do not think Beta John was referring to the war, although I realize it is a lot to take in. There must be another issue at hand."

"Is there any chance Levi would know?" Kaya asked.

"He might. I do not know," I answered. "We'll ask him a bit later."

"I want you to walk with me," my father said, extending his hand.

I felt a chill go down my spine as soon as I took his hand, alerting me to the fact that something did not feel quite right.

"Do you want me to go...?" Levi asked.

"No, old chap," my dad interrupted. "This time, I need to talk to my daughter alone. You will have your mate back in a few minutes. I will not require much of her time."

I shot Levi a quick, comforting smile as his worried eyes came at me.

"I will be back sooner than you think," I reassured him. "I will see you in our quarters."

"Are you certain?" he asked.

Could he sense something was off with my father?

"Relax, Levi," I said. "I will be alright! Nothing bad is going to happen to me."

I released Levi's hand and went outside with my father, but as I turned to leave, I glanced back at him.

"I want you to find out about the tunnels, why it is off limits, and why our pack does not go to the heart," I mind-linked him.

"I promise to try my best," he answered, his eyes gleaming with anticipation at sharing a pack secret.

We arrived at my father's office quickly, and I took the same seat at his desk when Alpha Noah came to visit.

"Levi seems tense," my father commented, going around his desk. "He is acting like a true mate."

"Acting," Kaya laughed out loud in my mind. "That is an interesting word choice. I wish your father could see how adept you two are at playing the parts."

"Not now, Kaya," I growled as I returned my attention to my father.

"What is the purpose of this meeting, father?" I asked. "You appear anxious about something."

"This whole thing is a mess," he said, taking his seat behind his desk.

"He's got that right," Kaya said. "If only he knew how big this mess actually is."

"Damit Kaya, stop talking!" I snarled at her.

"I just cannot figure out why Alpha Noah feels the need to go to such extreme lengths in order to claim you," he remarked. "We took all reasonable steps to guarantee that this would occur."

"Is that the reason why I am called to your office," I asked. "To talk about Alpha Noah? Would you prefer that I change my mind, give him another chance, and make him my mate?"

My father sighed as an unidentified emotion flickered through his eyes.

"He looks scared," Kaya said as she approached. Her eyes glowed with worry, overriding everything she had said.

"No, dear girl," my father muttered, his face becoming tense. "I promise never to abandon you to the mutts. I adore and love you excessively. You mean so much to me and the pack. The future lies with you."

"So what is this about?" I asked.

He let out another breath, ran a hand through his silver winter hair, and just stared at the ground.

"He seems to get tenser by the minute," Kaya made the concerning observation. "I wonder what is really causing him distress."

"We will find out soon enough," I told her. "I have strategies to get my dad to talk, and if he doesn't, I will take action to obtain the information I need."

I looked back at my dad, and his eyes grew gloomy.

"I recognize that expression," Kaya pondered.

"Yes, me too," I said. It was the same dejected expression he had when he recalled the memory of my mother giving birth to me.

"Dad?" I called in the hopes of getting his attention.

"Yes, sorry?" He answered with a bewildered look in his eyes.

"You were about to give me an explanation for why you called me here," I said.

"Oh, yes," he straightened his back and replied. "Earlier today, Alpha Nicholas Dalton called."

"Holy crap," I muttered to myself as my heart skipped a beat upon hearing Nic's name.

What the hell did he discuss with my father?

Did he inform him that we were mates?

"Calm down," Kaya mewed. "He had to have had a purpose for calling."

"What if-"

"Ray would never allow Nicholas to do anything to hurt us," Kaya rejected the idea.

"Ray?" I questioned, confused, and Kaya purred at the sound of the name.

"Yes, that is the name of the silver-chested beast we saw during your

mating ritual," she answered drooledly.

"In regard to what did Alpha Nic call?" I asked.

When he heard what I call Nicholas, my father winced momentarily but recovered quickly.

"Well, that was strange," Kaya said.

"Perhaps he did not realize I knew him," I remarked.

"You will need to exercise caution," Kaya warned. "Your father doesn't look too pleased."

"He made a reservation for the two of you at the Golden Gate Hotel," my father said, cutting Kaya's warning short. "Tomorrow afternoon."

I was not expecting that. I understood that Nic was eager to see me, but really, was this not a little too public?

The Golden Gate Hotel was a luxurious hotel situated in the nearby city, centered between eight different packs. The Midnight Moon Pack owned the hotel itself and was one of many more owned by them in the city, but this one was situated on the beachfront with views of the ocean and forest.

"Any particular reason why I need to meet him?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, that," my father said. "Alpha Nicholas desires to formally bind the pack in a treaty."

"Well, that is wonderful news, but with me?" I asked. "I haven't taken over the pack as Luna or leader. Should you not do that?"

"That is his only condition," my somewhat irritated father interrupted. "He will sign the contract with you and you alone—not with anyone else. You will have to go on your own."

"But?" I attempted to argue.

"We need this, Zara," my father slammed his hands on his desk, growling, to get me to stop talking. "We can easily stop Alpha Noah with his help. In addition, it appears that Alpha Nicholas knows you."

I looked at my father stunned.

"Alpha Nicholas's Beta will pick you up around 4 p.m.," my father went on. "He will take you to the hotel and make sure you get back safely."

"And in the event that he doesn't?" I exploded, scrambling to my feet.

"Alpha Dalton gave me his word to keep you safe," my father replied. "I trust him."

"You don't know him," I argued.

My dad felt quiet and looked out the window.

"Remember, there is a war coming up," I said. "My ex-mate is insane and wants me for himself, even after..."

"Zara," my dad said, gesturing for me to stop, then he looked back at me. "Alpha Noah will not launch an assault until after the full moon. Despite his obsession with you, he is not a moron. He will still abide by the law. To guarantee your safety, the council took measures earlier this afternoon."

"I firmly believe that Levi ought to accompany me," I declared. "As a safety measure. He does not have to be at the signing, but having him nearby will make me feel safer."

With a sigh, my father shook his head and forced an idiotic smile onto his lips.

"You cannot even go a few hours without your mate, can you?" he remarked.

"No," I answered with a straight face.

"Your mother was the same; she never left the pack without me," he said.

"Well," I replied. "Is that not what mates ought to be like?"

"Okay," he finally gave in. "I will check to see if Alpha Nicholas agrees to it."

My excitement shot through my veins, causing me to smile.

Nic would not object. I had no doubts about it. He will stop at nothing to ensure my happiness, even if it means bringing Levi along.

The knowledge that I would see Nic tomorrow suddenly caused excitement to bubble up inside of me. And with a signed treaty between the two packs, we could use the excuse to meet up in public again.

Still, I never thought our first public meeting would go as wrongly as it did.