

## CHAPTER 122

Jonathan POV

They're here, they're finally here. Winter looks as lovely as always, although there's something that's slightly different about her. I can't quite put my finger on it. She looks radiant but fierce, stronger somehow. It's unsettling and awe inspiring at the same time. Kai looks the same, same grumpy expression on his face, Langdon isn't much different but Damien looks more confident, settled. Being Langdon's mate really seems to suit him. He's more laid back as well.

"Tell us about these rogues" Winter says quietly as we gather in the study, my mother, bless her heart, thankfully gone for the day, otherwise she'd be butting her head in and asking what everyone wanted to eat.

"There's not much to tell" I say with exasperation "we've always had the odd one, here or there to take care of but there seems to be a pack of them now, just sitting and waiting. Anyone travelling this way is going to get attacked."

"Why haven't you just wiped them out" growls Kai looking at me with a raised eyebrow.

"I was waiting for your assistance" I admit "and your guidance" I say pointedly at Kai who has the decency to look semi ashamed of himself. Winter glowers at him and he shuts up.

"I think it's fantastic that you've asked for help" Winter says enthusiastically. For a moment her eyes glow and I stare at her stupefied. Did her eyes just glow red? Or was it a trick of the light?

"No Alpha likes asking for help, but there's been too many injuries on my side to ignore it" I say with a growl "my people are good fighters but not against a whole pack of rogues."

"Do you know their location?" asks Kai "where they have holed up for now?"

"They haven't moved. They're a little south of here, away from the border, but with a clear view of the pack. They can see our incomings and outgoings."

"Not good" Kai mutters. He takes a deep breath. "Tomorrow, we'll hunt them down along with your best fighters. I have several of my own men still coming" he promises me.

"Thankyou" I mutter, my hands clenched into fists.

Winter is pensive. She's glancing out the window and frowning as I watch her, one hand under her head which is cocked slightly to the side. She's staring in the direction of the rogues. "These rogues" she mutters softly, looking over at me "they look rather thin and mangy, don't they? Like they haven't eaten in days or even weeks properly. Are they really attacking your pack?"

I flush. "They're rogues. They don't need to be attacking to be eliminated. They're bad wolves who like to kill. It's better to kill them first." My voice rings out loudly.

Winter looks at me disappointed, turning to the others as I flinch from the look on her face. "I don't know" she mused "I don't believe we should kill,

just for the sake of killing. If they're only hungry, why can't we just help them with food and water?" she asked Kai who looks taken aback.

Is she insane? You don't just go up to a rogue and say, hey, do you want some food. They'll attack you on sight. I wait for Kai to back me up, but he too is looking thoughtful.

"Kai, you can't honestly be thinking that she's right" I say annoyed "you know what rogues are like."

He exhales. "I do, but Winter has me thinking that maybe not every single rogue is bad. She helped one long ago and in return he helped you, did he not?"

I scowl. "That was a one off" I mutter "it's not likely to happen again."

"We don't know that" Damien cuts in. Great, another soft-hearted shifter. Maybe I should have gone alone on this. It was infuriating listening to them give a damn about some pathetic, weak rogues.

Just then a mind-link comes in

Alpha Johnathon, the rogues are approaching towards our territory. They don't appear to be hostile yet, what would you have us do?

Continue to patrol and I want everyone prepared to fight if they get any closer. Is that clear?

Understood Alpha Johnathon. We will advise you if the situation changes.

See that you do.

I cut the mind-link off and stare around the room incredulous. "See" I accuse them, pointing and waving my arm in exasperation "the rogues are

already coming closer to the boundary line. You can't tell me they aren't planning on attacking. Why else would they come so close."

"Food and water" shoot out Winter with a roll of her eyes. She glances at me and then scowls. Whoa. This is a totally different side to Winter than I've seen before. This one is more aggressive and loads more confident. I have to say, even if I don't like her attitude, I'm certainly admiring her for her convictions.

"Let's go check the situation out" Kai says pleasantly, putting his hands in his pockets.

"You better be prepared to shift" I warn grumpily. The last thing I need is a dead alpha on my conscience, because he was too stubborn for his own good.

"We'll be fine" Langdon says cordially as I begin to walk towards the doorway, feeling like a nervous wreck. These people are going to get me killed, I just know it. I stomp down the hallways and out to the grounds. None of them shift. I gape. Are they going to present themselves to the rogues as humans? Winter raises her head and places her hand across her eyes due to the glare. "Which way do we go from here?" she shouts.

I point and then gape as she disappears. She's a complete blur. I've never seen a shifter move so fast. It's incredible. None of the other's look worried at all.

"Aren't you worried she'll get attacked?" I say urgently.

I swear I hear Damien give a snort. "They should be worried about her" he mutters under his breath. I still hear him though.

Even Kai looks nonchalant about his mate going towards the rogues so fast. What on earth is going on?

I begin to run, shifting into my wolf form, the others doing the same and trotting towards the direction of the rogues. When we get there, Winter is standing directly in front of them, her hands held out like she was surrendering.

"I am not a threat" she yells out, the wind distorting her words "I just want to speak to you. Please, if one of you could shift, we could talk."

She's greeted with growling and snarls, but they don't attack. In fact, they look like they might be mind-linking each other. I didn't even think that rogues could mind-link.

Damien and Kai's wolf come up behind her, Langdon behind them, all of them ready to attack at a moment's notice. I just watch in disbelief. I just wanted the rogues gone. Couldn't they understand that? This was foolishness. Stupidity at its best. Good intentions or not, they were going to get themselves killed, or at least Winter was. Not that she seemed to be aware of it. She continued to plead with the rogues.

One rogue in particular pushes their way to the front of the group. Its eyes search us all, but its red eyes rests on Winter for some reason. It cocks its head, its tongue lolling as it pants like a dog. Winter reaches over to touch it. Kai growls in warning but it doesn't stop her as she touches the fur and strokes it, the rogue letting her.

"Strange" Winter whispers "this wolf seems very familiar to me. Like I've seen it before, but I don't know where."

She sounds completely puzzled, staring at the wolf in fascination. It sits on its backside and views her quietly.

Kai shifts back to human form. He looks sheepish. "They don't appear to be attacking" he calls to me. I frown. That's what they want you to believe.

I don't trust them for a single second. Then there's the sounds of bones cracking and adjusting, and one of the rogues shifts to their human form. He's thin, incredibly so, with long blonde hair that's matted, a long grisly beard and his eyes are red. His body is clearly malnourished. I feel sick just looking at him. He's been starving for a long time.

"Help us" the rogue says in a croaky voice, "please we are all starving. We were never going to attack, we just wanted food and water, supplies" he says, his whole-body trembling. He can't be older than thirty but he looks so much older. Time has not been kind to him.

"Are there any more of you?" asks Kai, drawing back his shoulders. The rogue gives a small nod.

"There are some more women and children back there. "

God, I feel like a right bastard. I shift and walk closer, standing beside Kai. "I'm Alpha Johnathon, the Alpha of this pack. If you all need food and water, you are welcome to come on my lands" I say, taking a chance as Winter beams at me "but should you show any signs of violence. . ." I trail off thoughtfully.

"I promise we won't" the man says hastily. "And we can't thank you enough for the offer."

I just grunt. We'll see. I still don't trust them, but even I'm not a complete asshole. There are children starving for heaven's sake. No one could ignore that. Well, no one with a conscience anyway.

Winter is still staring at the wolf in front of her. "Will you shift?" she asks the wolf and it seems to hesitate.

"Please" cajoles Winter. I wonder what her obsession with this wolf is. But to be fair, Damien is also eyeing it strangely. Maybe they both know it from somewhere.

The wolf stands up and shakes itself all over. Then the sound of shifting can be heard and suddenly, instead of the wolf, there is a woman standing in her place.

Wow is my first thought. Even though the woman is dangerously thin, she's still beautiful. She reminds me of Winter, with her long hair and skin tone. They could easily pass for family members. Heck, for all I know they are family members. The woman is silent, her head down at the ground. Winter is staring at her, her face pale.

"Look at me" Winter hisses, Damien moving to stand beside his sister, his own face ashen now and his body trembling all over. Kai seems to sense there's something wrong, standing protectively behind his mate. Langdon moves behind Damien, still in his wolf form, his jaws open at the ready.

The woman is hesitant. Or afraid. Her hair is covering her face completely. She's clutching both hands together tightly and not uttering a single sound. Winter looks excited and dismayed at the same time, one hand to her lips. Are those tears in the corner of her eyes? Damien's jaw is locked tight and his eyes don't move away from the woman. The other rogue keeps looking back and forth, unsure of what is going on.

Winter holds out a trembling hand, her sobs filling the air. My heart gives a pang. She sounds devastated. This rogue woman is completely affecting her. Kai grips her from behind and hold her as she begins to cry. Damien winces and gives his sister a sympathetic look.

"Will you please look at me?" Winter sobs "I feel like I know who you are. So, what is the point of hiding it? What good is that going to do? Damien can see you too. We both can. Why are you trying to hide?"

The woman slowly turns her head. Progress. Slowly her head begins to move backwards until she is staring back at Winter, her hair still around her face.

Winter reaches out and smooths back the hair, revealing the woman's face to everyone, a trembling smile upon her lips.

"Hello mother" she whispers and then faints dead away while the woman lets out a shocked cry. I could not have foreseen this coming in a million years. Winter and Damien's mother was a rogue who'd been on the run for a very long time from the looks of it. The question was why?