

CHAPTER 162

Winter POV

I wonder what Kai has been up to today? I ended up taking a huge nap and sleeping until early afternoon. I guess pregnancy takes it out of you. But when I went looking for my mate, there was no sign of him and he wasn't responding to my trying to mind-link him either. IT was making me suspicious.

He's probably doing something important with Prince Jasper girlfriend. No need to be paranoid.

I know but after the debacle with Vanessa and everything else, I can't help but worry that something is going on.

Perfectly normal, but I'm telling you, the man is fine and he's not doing anything wrong. Trust me, you know I would be the first one to tell you if I thought otherwise. Relax.

Fine, then what do you propose we go do?

Enjoy the outdoors. Go for a walk. Breathe in the fresh air. At least air can't make you feel sick, at least as far as I know.

Good point, let's go outside for a walk.

Yay!

Sabriel makes me laugh as I shake my head at her antics and walk out of the bedroom, going downstairs. Prince Jasper is just by the front entrance

to the castle to my surprise, his eyes twinkling as he looks at me. I frown. Is it my imagination or does he look like he's harboring a secret? Or that he knows something I don't.

"Winter" he says jovially "are you going somewhere?"

He looks a bit anxious but that could be my paranoia.

"I thought I would go for a walk outside, get some fresh air" I tell him.

He looks concerned. Then his expression clears up a bit. "Actually, if you wait a moment, I may join you, if that is alright with you?" he asks.

I wonder why his eyes went glazed for a moment. Can he mind-link with his people like shifters can? I have to ask. "Can you mind-link with other members of your pack?"

"Any member of the royal family can" he says easily "other pack members can but we're able to mind-link for miles. Why?"

"No reason" I mutter "curiosity, that's all."

He just chuckles, opening the large doors and ushering me outside.

We walk in silence for a bit, Prince Jasper's steps purposeful, as though he's specifically heading somewhere. Maybe he needs to speak to someone? I don't care. It's beautiful outside, the sun is brightly shining down on us, there's a soft and gentle breeze and the smell of pine from the forest drifts towards us. The grass is soft and squishy beneath my shoes, my feet sinking down with each step. Bees flutter from a nearby patch of wildflowers and I see a butterfly flying away. It's heaven. Perfect weather and my nausea subside as we walk further away from the castle.

To my shock, Kai comes towards us, meeting us with a large smile on his face, his eyes sparkling.

"I'll take it from here, Prince Jasper. My thanks for helping me" he says mysteriously.

It makes me wonder what Kai asked for help with.

Prince Jasper gives him a smile back. "Goodluck" he tells Kai as I look on in puzzlement, the Prince turning around and striding away with large steps as though in a huge hurry.

Kai leans down and kisses me with an intensity that leaves me breathless. I moan into his mouth, feeling his tongue delve inside my mouth, touching my own tongue and caressing it. Sparks fly between us and tingles run down my spine. His hands grip my arms tightly, but not painfully.

By the time we pull back I'm panting with need, Kai looking extremely reluctant. He gently takes hold of my hand, squeezing it.

"I have something to show you" he tells me quietly "if you'll come with me."

I follow, his hand still holding mine, as we go further away from the castle, until we come to a large wooden gazebo that looks freshly painted. It has bench seat all around it and there are fairy lights twinkling all over it. I glance at Kai speechless. It's beautiful, and it overlooks the forest and the castle. Even though it's in the middle of the grounds, it looks like it belongs there.

We step inside, and I look around in awe, loving the view. I can see the trees swaying in the forest and the mixture of pine and dirt fills my nostrils. It's romantic and I love it. I have a hard time believing that Prince Jasper would have put something like this on his grounds though. It just doesn't seem like him. Then again, I could be judging him unfairly. Perhaps Queen Arabelle had put it up? I sit on the bench seat and just inhale deeply, Kai watching my every move, his hand dropping to his side

as he lets go of my hand. For some inexplicable reason, he looks incredibly nervous now.

"Kai what's wrong? Why couldn't I find you earlier?" I ask "I tried to mind-link you and you had me blocked. I was worried about you" I burst out, feeling frustrated.

He grimaces. "I'm sorry Winter. I had something important to do and I didn't want you to know what I was doing. I had to go out for a while."

"Next time just tell me you're out. I don't have to know what you're up to if you don't want me to know. I just don't want to worry about you unnecessarily."

"That's fair" he acknowledges "I'll do that next time."

I smile at him. He looks relieved, although his hand constantly goes to his pocket in his jeans. Is he still nervous?

"Winter there's something I want to say to you" he starts, coming forward and taking hold of my hand "and I want you to listen to me."

"Okay" I say slowly. This was so unusual.

"Thanks" he says anxiously. "Listen, I know that our relationship has had its ups and downs. When we first met each other, I didn't want anything to do with you, and yet, I couldn't stop thinking about you. I refused to reject you, but I kept you away from me as well. That wasn't fair to you. You were innocent and pure, and all I could think was that you wouldn't want someone like me. Someone with scars, both inside and out."

I open my mouth to protest, but quickly shut it when he shakes his head at me. "Then we had the incidents with you almost being killed several times, because I was too stubborn to see who the culprit was. Your father tried to kill you and you ended up being a hybrid because I was too late to save you. I blame myself for that."

My heart gives a pang. I never realized that he blamed himself for something he wasn't responsible for. I had known the risks when we concocted the plan. I was also to blame for what happened.

He wasn't finished. "You had to torture your own mother for information to save other shifters and races, you now have a half-brother you didn't know about, an older brother you discovered and now you're pregnant. Our relationship has been fraught with danger and you've almost died several times" he continues.

Where on earth is he going with this? His eyes soften as he stares at me. "When we met, I was a cold, unkind man who didn't care about your feelings, or anyone else's for that matter. But you changed me, Winter. You taught me what it was like to fall in love with someone, to be able to show them affection and how to care. You slowly pushed your way into my life and it began to change for the better. "

"Oh Kai" I say flattered, my heart swelling with joy. His admissions were so heartfelt that it was tugging on my heart and causing tears to come to my eyes.

"You're such a wonderful person Winter. You're loving, kind, compassionate and brave. One of the bravest and most courageous women I have ever had the pleasure to meet. You're full of forgiveness and you'll do anything to help someone who's in a bind or who needs it."

He pauses and takes a deep breath. "I love waking up in the mornings with you by my side. Feeling your body next to mine, even if it's just to cuddle. I love kissing your soft lips and touching you, even if it's just to hug you. Your smile makes me smile and your laughter is like music to my ears."

I was more than flattered now, blinking back tears as they threatened to well over and trail down my cheeks. Gabriel was listening intently as well.

"You've grown so much as a person and your wolf is amazing" he continues as Sabriel preens in my mind. "Your wolf has grown as you've gotten stronger and more assertive as a person. I know I haven't been the best mate; in fact, I've been downright rotten to you. I'm trying to do better though, trying to show you how much I love and adore you. I never want to hurt you again. When you're sad, I'm sad. When you're feeling low, I want to be the one to try and make you happy again. I want to hear your laughter every day, for the rest of my life. I want to see your smile when I wake up in the mornings. I want to hear your voice, every hour of every day."

He was making my heart pound loudly in my chest. My throat felt tight as I listened to his words.

"You mean the world to me Winter, and to Storm" he adds hastily as though his wolf was listening in as well. I give a small giggle at that thought.

"I know I don't tell you often enough that I love you Winter, but I promise to change all that. I promise to tell you every day that you are the one for me, the mate I've always wanted, the one I want by my side forever."

I gasp, putting a hand to my chest. His eyes are pitch black now, as they bore into mine. He begins to fidget slightly with his hand, plunging it into his pocket and withdrawing a small red box, getting down on one knee as I stare at him in disbelief.

Am I dreaming? That's the thought that enters my mind. Surely, he's not doing what I think he's doing? He lets out a large exhale and slowly opens the box, showing it to me. Oh my god! He is.

"Winter, my beautiful, gorgeous mate" Kai says slowly, staring upwards at me as I wriggle on the bench seat in excitement "will you do me the honor of marrying me?"

Stunned silence. For a moment all I can do is stare at him and the ring box in shock. Then my throat convulses and I let rip with a gigantic shriek "yes, god yes, Kai of course I will" sobbing as he slowly pulls the ring out and puts it on my shaking finger.

It's beautiful, a large single diamond on a white gold band. It suits me perfectly and it's a perfect fit. I fling myself into Kai's arms and sob on his shoulder as he holds me. The empty ring box sits forgotten on the floor of the gazebo. Then, I move and press my lips against Kai's, kissing him gently, my tears dripping down my cheeks. He strokes my hair, and as I pull back, he murmurs to me softly "I love you so much Winter. I always will, now and forever."

My heart skips a beat.

Then "I love you Kai, forever and always."

We stay there, in a tight embrace, time slipping by. It feels so surreal, like something out of a fairytale. It was the most perfect proposal a girl could ask for.