

CHAPTER 39

Winter POV

It's been a few weeks now and both Sabriel and I are growing weary of being outdoors all the time and continually looking over our shoulders. Not to mention avoiding packs whenever possible and traveling solo.

Please, let's go to the next territory, even if it's just to eat and rest. I'm tired of sleeping outdoors.

You're a wolf, Sabriel, all wolves do is sleep outside for heaven's sake.

Just because I'm a wolf doesn't mean I can't appreciate a soft mattress once in a while.

You're so spoiled.

I'm a princess Winter and princesses deserve to be pampered.

I'll think about it.

The more I think about it, the more tempting it becomes. The pack's not that far and to be honest, it would be nice to eat something different for a change instead of hunting my food down. Then I feel Sabriel in the back of my mind, tentatively sniffing. My blood runs cold. I can smell the scent of rotten meat and eggs and there's only one thing that I can think of that makes that kind of smell. Rogues, several of them approaching. That's worse than just one lonely rogue. I'm extremely fucked.

I warned you; you should have killed that rogue back there.

Leave it alone, Sabriel, besides there's more than one coming towards us.

It's a whole group, Winter. We stand no chance against them. Not with so many.

I guess we're going to the nearby pack after all. We have no choice.

Well duh, I kind of want to live, you know. It's not like I have a death wish.

I can hear the crashing sounds behind me. Thank God, I'm already in wolf form, because several rogues step out from behind me and circle me, snarling, their red eyes glowing brightly in the sunlight. I gulp. There's at least half a dozen of them and they all look mangy and thin, as though they are starving. Their jaws are pulled back and they're frothing at the mouth. One leaps at me and I roll, neatly avoiding them, taking advantage of the small opening to run.

I feel canines piercing my back leg and let out a howl at the pain, shaking them off as I continue to run. I'm small and agile, but they are easily able to keep up with me and it's going to be a battle to get to the pack in one piece.

Duck

I duck and a rogue goes flying overhead. It turns and I stop in my tracks as it lets out a ferocious growl, snapping its jaws. Great. The others behind me are catching up. He tackles me to the ground and we roll over and over, scratching, clawing, and biting me in a desperate attempt to get free. God, the pain is excruciating and I finally threw him off me. Sabriel is impressed despite herself.

The pack is really close girl. You need to haul your ass before we become dinner for these morons.

What do you think I'm trying to do, Sabriel?

Well, to be fair, you're not doing a very good job of it.

I'm doing the best I can.

Are you Winter? Are you really?

Damn you, Sabriel. I cursed at her in my mind and pounced. The rogue's not expecting it and I'm able to jump over him or maybe it's her. I'm not entirely sure and I'm not about to look at their private parts to find out, running as though my skinny ass depends on it. Which it does.

I can sense the pack's territory coming up and I run even faster, pumping my little legs for all they are worth. I jump, several wolves from that side growling, launching themselves at the rogues and, thankfully, leaving my sorry ass behind. I watch wide-eyed as the fight turns into chaos, wolves everywhere, springing and jumping, clawing and biting. It's a bloodbath. I feel sorry for the rogues. In the end, they were still shifters, just ones without homes and extremely hungry.

Winter, you really need to stop being so damn nice.

I'm not ashamed of being Kind Sabriel.

Well, I'm just saying it wouldn't hurt to be nasty once in a while, you know, maybe be a little bloodthirsty.

Sabriel, I'm not that kind of person. I can't be.

I could be that kind of wolf if you'd let me.

No. I'm not going to say it again.

You're no fun.

Sabriel begins to sulk in the background while I roll my eyes. This wolf is so damn irritating at times, but she's also my best friend. I can't stay mad at her. I watch as the rogues get taken one by one, keeping myself way back from the fighting. I feel like a coward but I'd only get injured in

the chaos. As it is, I can still feel pain in my back leg where a rogue has bitten me.

It finally ends, blood everywhere and dead rogues scattered along the ground. One of the shifters shifts back into their human form and I eye them warily. Something tells me this isn't going to be a warm welcome, but I can't really blame them. I'm the one who's brought rogues to their front doors, literally. I'd be pissed too. Still, I couldn't help looking at the man. He's completely naked, which makes me blush. Can wolves blush? I'm not sure. He's got the most stunning blonde hair and piercing blue eyes and he's muscled all over.

Not to mention well-endowed Winter

I really didn't need to know that Sabriel

He looks angry. I tense, preparing myself. He's clearly a warrior that was on patrol when I crashed into their territory. I remind myself; he's just doing his job.

"Shift" he snaps irritably and I do so, picking myself up off the ground and trying very hard not to remember that I'm naked the same as him. Who am I kidding? Of course, I'm aware of it.

"What are you doing in our territory? Are you a rogue as well?" he demands and Sabriel snorts in my mind. She finds that question hilarious.

I shake my head. I try to convey that I can't actually speak, but I don't know if he's realized it yet. Damn it. It was so hard when you couldn't actually speak what you needed to say.

He looks thoughtful. Maybe he'll be merciful towards me? The other wolves mill about, some going off and I presume it's to make sure there aren't any more rogues approaching or hiding from them.

"Why are you traveling alone" he demanded, and I sighed. Clearly, he still hasn't realized that I can't talk. Even Sabriel's feeling frustrated now.

I wave my arms around and he just glowers, crossing his arms over his chest and waiting for a response that I can't give him. I start to huff and then grab a stick as he tenses. There was soft dirt nearby and I walked over, digging the branch into it and carefully writing the words "can't speak."

He stomps over and reads, frowning. "You can't speak" he mutters. "Are you mute?"

I nod. He sighs. "Great, just great. So, you can't answer any of my questions. Not unless I get a pad and paper."

He looks annoyed. Like it's my fault I can't talk. Come on. Does he think I'm putting it on? I fight the urge to poke my tongue out at him.

Another shifter comes out in human form. "There are no signs of any more rogues Sir. We've conducted a thorough search and combed through the woods."

"Well, that's a relief," the man says, gesturing towards me. "I don't think this little girl is a threat but we have to treat her like we treat all suspicious shifters on our territory."

The other shifter glances at me, a surprised expression on his face. I'm wondering what the man means by suspicious Shifter. I'm hardly a threat. Was traveling alone enough to make me suspicious?

"Are you sure?" the other man says tentatively. "I mean she's just a young girl. I don't think it's really..." he trails off and bites his lip, looking sheepishly at me.

"I'm afraid Alpha Kai would not be pleased if we just allowed her to wander around freely," the man says, "he's left clear instructions on what

we are to do in this situation, and I for one am not going to disobey him. I'd rather keep my head attached to my body", he adds grimly.

The other shifter looks apologetically at me. I guess he doesn't like to follow orders or he feels sorry for me. I feel sorry for myself.

The man runs a hand through his hair and looks exasperated. "First off, get her some clothes while we wait."

I'm grateful for that at least. I've never been one to enjoy showing off my body. In fact, I'm also shivering in the breeze. Clothes would be very welcome.

The other shifter runs off and comes back minutes later with a long shirt, handing it to me. I quickly put it on, pleased that it ran down to my knees like a dress. It's extremely comfortable.

"She can't speak," the man says, and the other shifter looks uncomfortable now. "You know what to do, but just be gentle. I can't see her running off, can you?"

The shifter shakes his head and steps towards me, looking remorseful.

"I'm afraid I have to take you to the dungeon," he said quietly, and took hold of my arm. His grip is gentle though instead of rough. I don't blame him for having to follow orders and I'm not about to try and do something stupid like run. He walks me through the pack grounds as other pack members stare at me curiously, and over to a lone building. He lets go of me and opens the door, gesturing for me to walk inside.

The inside of the building smells of dampness and mildew. Several cells stand against the sides, a basic cot and a toilet in each of them. They're not the most pleasant-looking things and I can also smell the scent of old blood surrounding me. Clearly, the dungeon is used a fair bit. The shifter opens the nearest cell and glances at me, looking extremely apologetic.

"I'm really sorry, but I can't go against Alpha Kai's orders" he muttered and I nodded, walking slowly inside. I'm trying not to cry. I hate small spaces, but I hate what feels like a cage more. Especially since my father enjoyed putting me in one and torturing me. I can see torture implements on a trolley nearby and my stomach churns. It would do no good to torture me for information when I can't actually give it.

The shifter follows my glance. "Oh god, no, that won't be used on you," he says, shocked, and promptly wheels the trolley out of sight. "The Alpha will be informed of your situation," he says firmly "and he'll decide what to do with you. In the meantime, I'll organize food and drink to be brought to you. You look like you haven't had a decent meal in a long time."

I'm grateful. Sabriel's extremely grateful. She gets sick of hunting animals all the time. Plus, she loves human food.

He goes to leave, giving me one last regretful look before the door slams closed and I'm left in near darkness with nothing but myself for company. I gingerly sat down on the cold concrete floor. There's nothing I can do but wait and see if the Alpha sees fit to free me. In the meantime, it looked like it was best to get comfortable. I have no way of knowing just how long I'm going to be locked up. I really, really, hope it's not too long though. Something tells me that would be a very, very bad sign. I'm also thinking that this Alpha Kai is not the warmest of Alpha's, judging by the way the guards spoke about him.