

CHAPTER 43

Winter POV

It's been a hard few days, not going to lie, but I've settled into a nice routine of sorts. It's far nicer than being a slave and, apparently, I get paid for it too! Maria sends me on an errand to take out bottled water to the training grounds and I'm more than happy to do it. The sun is shining, there's a cool breeze that makes my hair whip around and the grass is so green and beautiful. It's a perfect day to be outside.

You should be a poet. That sounds so dreamy and romantic.

Stick it, Sabriel. Stop making fun of me.

The training grounds aren't far and I try to be unobtrusive, dumping the water and about to turn away when I hear his voice, one that sends shivers down my spine. I hadn't realized he was there.

"What are you doing here?" he asks, sounding aggrieved. As if I'd gone looking for him. I was performing my duties, that was all.

Clearly, he wasn't expecting an answer. I tremble as I realize everyone's eyes are on me now, looking me over with curiosity. So much for trying to have a low profile. Damn the man. Why can't he just let me go back to the pack house in peace?

"Well, since you're here," Alpha Kai says as I turn to face him, "then you might as well join in on training", he adds, and I stiffen. Surely, he has to be joking?

Sabriel and I aren't really fighters and I didn't have any experience with training. This would be my first time joining in on something like this.

I eye the two currently sparring. They are in human form, throwing punches and kicks at each other, but it's not long until they've shifted to their wolf forms and begun to fight. I swallow hard. Their wolves are so much bigger than mine and they know how to fight with their claws and jaws. I was going to be a goner if I so much as stepped foot inside that ring. Did he know that? Was this some sort of form of entertainment for him? Or was this a punishment for merely being his mate and him not wanting me? Did he think this whole thing was amusing? Bastard.

"I need someone to spar with Winter" he declares to the crowd as I flinch. I stare at him with pleading eyes, but he takes no notice. A woman comes sashaying out. "I can spar with Winter," she says with a smile, and I look at her helplessly. She's beautiful with her vibrant red hair and green eyes. She also looks friendly enough, but still, what was I going to do? It's not like I can communicate with her and tell her that I'm not capable of training.

"Fantastic, Esme, get in the training ring," Alpha Kai says and I sigh. This isn't going to be pretty.

"Winter, you too," he added, narrowing his eyes, "let's see what you're capable of."

I scowl and walked extremely reluctantly into the ring. I'm trying to be as slow as possible, not really wanting to do this, but fearing I have no choice.

"Esme, you might want to show Winter some defensive moves. I have a feeling she doesn't know much" he mutters, and I light up. Perhaps this won't be as bad as I feared. Esme is sweet, showing me several moves while Alpha Kai moves around and watches from a distance. I feel nervous as well as self-conscious. He claps his hands. "Now fight", he

orders, and Esme launches herself at me. We go down and I kick and roll around, feeling like a complete moron. I swear she's going easy on me and I thank God for that, getting kicked in the midsection and clutching my stomach in pain. Esme looks concerned but Alpha Kai merely looks bored and a little annoyed. Like it's my fault I don't know how to fight. Damn it, it's not like I wanted to do this anyway!

Esme helps me up from the ground and I look at her gratefully. Maybe now we could just stop the fighting and I could leave intact and in one piece? I'm already feeling shaky and embarrassed at my lack of prowess. I'm about to limp out of the training ring when his voice rings out.

"I think you should spar in wolf form."

I go cold inside. My wolf is tiny, a runt compared to the average wolf. Sabriel has no chance of winning, let alone staying in one piece, no matter how much I love her tenaciousness and determination to win.

Esme is also looking extremely reluctant as well. Perhaps she senses just how bad I am at fighting. Either way, it's clear neither of us wants to do this. He doesn't seem to care.

"Both of you stay there. Esme, shift, I want Winter to dodge your attack while shifting simultaneously."

I closed my eyes. I'm a goner. I might as well write my last will and testament now.

We can take her

Sabriel, I love you, but her wolf is going to be a lot bigger than ours. I'd rather run away.

I'm not running away with my tail between my legs, it's undignified Winter.

What do you suggest then?

Well, if we have to lose, then let's lose fabulously.

You're no help. We're so dead.

Esme shifts into her wolf form and I stare wide-eyed, not just because she's large but because she's beautiful. She has silver all over, with the merest hint of white on her paws. She sits there and waits, patiently for the signal to attack. I so badly want to yell at Alpha Kai and something tells me, if I had a voice, I would have. How dare he do this to me? Part of me rationalizes that he has no idea of what he's about to do, but another part of me wants to scream at him and even hit him. I'm now that angry.

"Right then," Alpha Kai says decidedly, "Winter will shift when you attack and dodge. Is that clear?"

I'm shaking my head at him. I just want to go back to my omega duties. He narrows his eyes at me.

"Maybe I should have been clearer," he says with gritted teeth. "Neither of you has a choice. I want to see what happens and where Winter needs improvement," he adds. I wish I had the guts to flick him the finger. Smarmy bastard.

Esme cocks her head. I wonder what will happen if I refuse to shift. Something tells me that it won't matter. He looks pissed now. Fuck you, I thought defiantly, facing Esme's wolf with trepidation.

"Now" he booms and Esme leaps. I waver and he realizes, using his Alpha tone, of all things to command me.

"Shift" he booms and I feel my body changing against my will. We're in my tiny wolf form and Esme has already leaped toward me. I'm just a second too slow as she tackles me to the ground, her claws ripping into me as I give a long howl, blood pouring out of my wounds.

God, it hurts so bad. Esme backs away and shifts, trembling all over as she comes over to me. She looks over at Alpha Kai who's already racing into the ring. "I'm sorry Winter, I didn't know," she tells me as I descend into darkness and gratefully go unconscious. My last thought is, I hope he's happy now.