

## CHAPTER 57

Kai POV

Mate. The word won't stop running through my head. I have a mate. One that I've just, miracle of miracles, have just promised to actually try this mate thing with. My mind flashes back to Elena and even though, I know, just by looking at her, that Winter is nothing like her, the old hurt and stinging pain remain, even after all of these years. But I have to take a leap of faith. I can't keep living like this, not trusting anyone or letting anyone in. I'm tired of feeling lonely, even when I'm surrounded by people.

Winter looks awestruck at my proposal, as though she'd never dared dream that I would offer to try and I feel an overwhelming sense of guilt and loss. I've put her through so much and even now, she's adamant she wants to be mates. Her eyes are shining and so vivid with happiness that I almost come undone. God, what a bastard I've been to her. I don't deserve her, but I still want her. Storm wants her. We both want her.

"I don't want to confine you to my rooms," I said slowly as she looked at me, her eyes looking slightly concerned. Maybe she thinks I'm going to make her an omega again? Like hell, I will. I don't trust any of the unmated males in my pack not to try and get in her pants or lay a hand on her. The last one who tried ended up losing a very valuable finger. He was lucky it wasn't something much bigger and more important to him. Next time it would be, he'd been warned. All of the males in the pack would be warned.

"You can walk around the pack house and the grounds," I said reluctantly, "but try not to stray too far from the house if possible. You can't call out

for help and unless you're ready for me to mark you..." I trail off and see her pale before she quickly shakes her head. Storm is annoyed, but I won't do it against her wishes. I've already done enough to her as it is. She needs to learn to trust me and marking her against her will isn't the way to go about it.

I cleared my throat. "I just don't want you to put yourself in any danger", I finished up and she looked pleased with my concern.

Is it really this easy to be a mate? It was almost instinctual, the need to keep her safe and be overprotective. Storm, however, is prepared to keep her confined in the rooms, not caring if it makes her hate us. He's the overprotective one out of the two of us. It takes all my self-control to keep him from taking over.

*It's not safe. Until we mark her, she should stay here, in the room. She doesn't need to go anywhere; we can have someone attend to her every need. Heck, if she wants a sandwich, we can make her a damn sandwich. It's not hard.*

*We can't mind-link yet, remember? Bozo. Besides, Winter needs to know that it's alright to get around and see the actual pack. I trust her. She's not going to run away, at least I don't think she will if we give her back her freedom. If she does run, it's the least of what we deserve after everything we've put her through.*

*But I don't want to give her freedom. What if she finds someone better than us?*

*She won't have to look far Storm, trust me.*

*That's your opinion, but I'm a beautiful sexy hunk of a wolf. Why would she want to leave me? You, I totally get, you've been a right douchebag.*

*Gee, thanks, it's always so nice to have these conversations with you, Storm. You're so humble.*

My wolf just laughs and blocks me before I can. I swore at him in my mind and turned to Winter, who was smiling wide from ear to ear. "Listen, you're to stay in my room from now on", I added, and she looked down and twisted her hands before glancing at the bed. It doesn't take a genius to work out what's on her mind.

"We will sleep together but not do the other thing," I say firmly, meaning it, and she bites her lip but nods. God, she's adorable. Too cute for words.

Before I can say anything further, there's a mind link and one of the patrol members speaks in a rush.

*There's a rogue attack in the southwest corner of the grounds. Several of them.*

*Move to intercept them, and get the rest of the warriors to attack. Do not let them escape.*

*On it.*

*I'll be there shortly.*

I cut the mind link off and groan. But it's my duty as Alpha to keep the rogues away and that's what I intend to do.

"Rogue attack gotta go" I blurt out and I'm out the door before she knows it, racing downstairs and out the door before I shift into my wolf form, a large black wolf that easily towers over the others.

I run, my paws thudding against the ground, my body flying through the air as I leap and jump, getting to the southwest corner in record time, several pack members already engaging the small group of rogues. I tackled one to the ground and ripped his throat out at the same time,

spitting out the blood in my mouth in disgust. Yuck. I jump on another one that's sneaking up on one of my men and we go rolling, both of us clawing and swiping furiously at each other as we do so. I howl as I feel its claws rip across my mid-section, a deep gouge that bleeds as I get back up on my feet and growl at it. We circle each other, the rogue looking desperate and frothing from its mouth. Its red eyes flashed with anger.

I brace myself and dodge to the side as it races towards me head-on, turning around swiftly as it jumps back towards me, my own body racing to meet it, sending him flying into a nearby tree. It howls and I feel a sense of satisfaction, but the fight is not over yet. Even though it's been badly wounded, the rogue gets up once more, this time I'm just a second too late, his claws shredding across my chest as he tackles me and I bite into him angrily, shaking him like a rag doll, my own claws ripping him to shreds across his stomach until finally his body slumps, and I realize that he's now dead, flinging the body away in contempt.

I'm shaky and wobbly on my paws as I stand back up and look over the scene in front of me. The last rogue in the group is being taken down by three of my best warriors and the others have all been dealt with, their bodies scattered on the forest floor, blood droplets and sprays everywhere. The smell of blood was pungent and overwhelming. I could see several of my pack members had been wounded in the fight, but not fatally, and breathed a sigh of relief. None of my pack members have died and that's what I'm truly thankful for. It could have been much worse.

I shift, yelling as I turn back into my human form, the pain excruciating from my many wounds as my men also shift. Langdon is there and he rushes to my side as I clutch at my chest, my breathing labored and wheezy.

"Alpha Kai," Langdon says in concern, "you've been badly wounded, I think you should go to the hospital."

"No" I wheeze, shaking my head at him, ignoring the fact that he's actually supporting my body and that's the only reason I'm remaining upright. "I can't."

"Yes, you can", Langdon urges, but I'm not about to let him take me. I need to check on Winter. I just left her there, back in the room. The poor thing's probably terrified right now.

"All I need is rest. You know that as an Alpha, I heal remarkably quickly" I protested, my voice full of determination.

He gave a loud huff next to me, sounding exasperated. He should know by now that I'm stubborn. I've never once agreed to go to the hospital. I don't need to now.

"Stubborn jackass" he mutters, loud enough for me to hear it.

I scowled at him but remained silent. It takes too much energy to talk right now.

A patrol warrior joins us, covered in blood, but it's not his from the look and smell of it. "Alpha Kai," he says formally, "what would you have us do now?"

I looked at the small sea of bodies lying there. "Burn the bodies and clean up as best you can," I told him grimly. "I don't want to see any signs that there was a rogue attack here."

He nods and quickly steps back, going over to the men who are uninjured, the other ones limping towards the hospital. Trusting that they would follow my instructions, I began to limp towards the pack house myself. I need to get to Winter.

"Where are you going" snarls Langdon, reluctantly letting go as I move forward.

"Pack house" I wheeze and he puts his hands on his hips.

"You know if you were near Winter, you would heal much quicker being mates and all. She could help heal you."

"I know" I wheezed. "Why do you think I'm going back to my room? She's there already."

His mouth drops open and he almost jumps up and down with joy. "I knew it" he crows. "I knew you would finally see sense. It's about bloody time" he grumbles, and I ignore him. The ground is beginning to spin and I feel my stomach churning with nausea.

"Winters in my room. Don't scare her" I told Langdon, my voice sounding muffled and like it was far away, as I stumbled and fell to the ground. Before my Beta can reach me, I succumb to the darkness gratefully, distantly hearing Langdon calling my name in the background.