

CHAPTER 72

Kai POV

The summit seems to be going really well and I'm careful to keep Winter by my side as long as I can. Except for that one incident involving that drunken bastard of an Alpha trying to force Winter to go with him, the night has run quite smoothly and Winter in particular seems to be having a wonderful time. I'm glad about that at least. I would have hated it if she was miserable being here, because that was not my intention at all, bringing her here.

She seems to be really fitting in, doesn't she, Kai? She doesn't look out of place at all.

I guess so Storm.

Did you ever think that you would fall so hard for your real mate? I told you, all you had to do was give her a chance.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, rub it in, why don't you?

Well, if you hadn't been so bloody stubborn you jackass.

Storm, you're pushing the friendship line.

Fine, but you should know that there's someone here that you definitely don't want to have to see again. Disgusting piece of trash that she is. I hope she dies of food poisoning or someone kills her for being mouthy. Urgh. I feel the need to take a shower and get clean.

Who on earth are you talking about Storm?

I trail off as the familiar scent of perfume hits me, stiffening as I grab hold of Winter instinctively. Well, that was just fucking great. So much for having a good night. This was more than bound to ruin it. Who in the bloody hell had brought her along to this summit? Unless she had suddenly found her mate, but I highly doubt that. Fuck, fuck, fuck. This was the last thing I needed to deal with right now. All my plans for a wonderful evening are going up in smoke right in front of my eyes. Damnit.

"Alpha Kai" comes her voice, sickeningly sweet, and I close my eyes, take a deep breath and turn with Winter still clutching my hand, a forced smile on my own face. Two can play that game. I can pretend she's not bothering me. How hard can it be?

She looks just the same, clad in a bright red dress, so tight it pulls along her chest and shows off her impressive cleavage, with killer heels to match. She's dressed to the nines and it's a far cry from Winter's own outfit that she'd worn for comfort. She's also clinging onto Alpha Liam's arm hard, her eyes narrowed and calculated as she stares at me and glares hard at Winter. I glared back at her, holding tightly to Winter's hand in a possessive manner that leaves no confusion. Not to mention the mark on Winter's neck that shows she's been claimed by me.

"Hello, Candice," I said between gritted teeth. Now I know why I haven't seen her around the pack lately, she must have left and gone traveling and Langdon wouldn't have cared enough to inform me about it. She looks way too relaxed next to Alpha Liam, whose eyes are hard. I've never liked the man, and the feeling is mutual considering how hard he's glaring at me.

"Hello," Winter says in a subdued tone and I watched Candice gasp, surprised that my mate is now able to speak. Clearly, she hadn't been

anticipating that at all. I fight the urge to smirk at her, pulling Winter tighter and tucking her under my shoulder, in a blatant and possessive move that Candice understands, her anger showing in her face. I resisted the urge to flick my finger at her. Winter just looks annoyed.

"Winter" she coos, "how lovely to meet you again."

Winter stiffens next to me and then raises her head and stares challengingly at Candice. "Really," Winter says icily, "because I have to say that it's not really a pleasure to see you again at all," she says with a sugary sweet tone as I blink and almost jump in celebration. So, Winter's not going to fake niceties. It's good for her. Candice is taken aback; I can't help noticing with amusement. She wasn't expecting that type of response. Either that or she didn't know that Winter can talk now.

"Quite a mate you've got there" Alpha Liam finally speaks, "Is she always this rude?"

I scoff. "Only when it's deserved."

Candice just bites her lip and fumes. I guess she thought I would be brokenhearted or something because now she just looks disappointed. Ha. I hope she leaves now.

Then her eyes begin blazing. "How nice that Winter can look past your ahem" Candice coughs "Scars. Don't you ever get self-conscious being with him" she added cruelly, looking over at Winter.

I stiffen. With those words, I'm back to being self-conscious, trying hard not to trace my scars with my fingertips as Candice smirks at me, clearly proud of herself.

"Never," Winter whispers, "His scars prove how courageous and brave he is. I consider it an honor that he is my mate and I would never feel self-conscious being beside him. If that's how you feel, then I feel sorry for

whoever ends up as your mate. Beauty doesn't last forever, you know, and it's what's inside those counts. Pity you haven't learned that yet" she tells Candice before turning to me. Alpha Liam's mouth opens in shock as well. She deliberately ignores both of them.

"Kai, would you dance with me?" she asks and I beam, taking hold of her hand and shooting Candice a triumphant glance.

"I would be honored," I told her and walked away without turning around, hearing Candice wail and splutter in the background as I placed my hand around Winter's waist and took her hand, moving slowly back and forth to the music, Winter leaning her head against my chest, sparks flying between us.

"I'm sorry about Candice". I apologize "I didn't know she would be attending."

Winter searches my eyes for the truth and then nods. "I didn't think you did," she says calmly, giggling as I twirl her around. "You can't be responsible for everything Candice does," she said truthfully 'that woman looks like she loves trouble."

She had that right.

The music peters off and Winter yawns, making me smile down at her. She looks like she's pretty wiped out and swaying slightly on her feet. The poor thing must be exhausted and too afraid to say anything. If I'm honest with myself, I'm pretty wiped out too. Candice had managed to ruin the night for me, and probably for Winter as well. I sigh.

"How about we go back to the hotel room?" I suggested and Winter nodded, letting me drag her to the elevator. We're on the top floor and damn, I'm so hoping that Candice isn't. That's the last thing either of us bloody needs right now.

I help her out of the elevator and take Winter to the last door on the right, using the keycard to open it, opening the door with a flourish and making my mate giggle as she walks in and makes a beeline for the bathroom.

I sat down on the chair and rested my head on my hands. I wanted this to go perfectly and in the course of one night, Winter had to contend with a drunken fool of an Alpha hitting on her and then deal with running into Candice. God, I'm hopeless at this romantic stuff. I just wanted the night to go without a hitch and instead it had gone horribly wrong. I wouldn't be surprised if Winter was angry at me right now for it. She would have every right to be. Hell, I would be if it was me in her shoes.

But when she comes out, she looks remarkably calm. Her hair is slightly disheveled, but to me that just makes her look even more adorable than she already is. Her eyes are sparkling as she looks at me and there's something else on her face, something that I can't quite put my finger on. Was she upset?

"Kai, I want you to know that even though there was that thing with Candice, I had a wonderful night with you," she said, and I stared at her in astonishment. Did she really mean that? I'm almost beaming with pride. She had had a good time then, despite it all. I had pulled it off and given her something to remember.

"I'm glad," I told her honestly., "I thought you would be angry or upset with me about what happened. I really did try to give you a perfect night", I say, and she bites her lip, looking at me, her eyes searching for something like she's trying to come to some sort of decision. I wait. I don't want to interrupt her if she has something on her mind or something she wants to say.

"I know I'm not like Candice" she begins, and I stop her right there, holding a hand up to stop her mid-sentence.

"Whoa" I exclaimed, "you're nothing like Candice and I'm grateful for that. Winter, you're so much better than her. You're kind and warm, you care about the pack, and you're beautiful and sweet. I could go on and on, but do you get the gist? You're my mate and you're the one I want now. Please don't think that I'm comparing you to Candice, because I can tell you, she'd come off as the loser."

Winter giggles, her face smoothing out as she smiles. Is that what she was worried about? That I was somehow comparing her to Candice and finding her lacking? There was no way I would ever do that to her. Not in a million years. Now I feel like a right asshole. How long has Winter possibly been feeling this way, and why haven't I picked up on it?

"I guess we should get ready for bed," I say reluctantly, even though I'm looking forward to going to sleep cuddling Winter. Storm is the same. As long as we get to hold her, the other thing can wait until she's ready. We won't pressure her into doing anything she doesn't want to do. Especially after having gone through such a traumatic experience with that asshole, Thomas. The last thing I want to do is cause her to remember things she doesn't want to.

Winter bites her lip though and eyes me shyly.

"Is something wrong Winter?"

She shakes her head and sits down on the edge of the bed as I stand up. She's avoiding my eyes now and I swear she's blushing. Something is on her mind.

"I want you to make love to me" she mutters and my heart skips a beat.

Did I really hear that right? Had she really just said those words to me? She looks nervous and I have to clarify.

"You want me to make love to you," I say, and she nods.

I hesitate. I don't think she's ready, but I can't deny my cock is twitching at the thought of taking her.

"If you don't want me", Winter mutters, and I kneel beside her, looking deeply into her eyes.

"Winter, it's not that I don't want you, but are you really ready for this? I don't mind waiting if that's what you need. Don't pressure yourself into something that you don't want. It has to be your decision."

She takes a deep breath and stares back, her eyes mesmerizing me. "I want this, Kai, I want you" she pleads and I'm helpless to resist her plea, even as I shrug out of my jacket.

"If that's what you want" I growled in my throat, "then your wish is my command", I finished, my eyes turning pitch black in response.

"Lie down on the bed" I command and she obeys.

"Good girl" I whispered, thinking to myself, let the fun begin.