

CHAPTER 78

Kai POV

Winter is placed carefully in the backseat of the car. The doctors managed to get her condition stabilized and it looks like she'll survive, which is excellent news. Langdon has personally come down with a small entourage of vehicles and warriors, dragging a kicking and screaming Candice out and throwing her into the back of an SUV. Her screams are muffled by the gag that's been placed in her mouth. I see it with a great sense of satisfaction. Oh and she's doing plenty of screaming. She knows what's coming and what's in store for her. Good. I'm reveling in her terror.

"She has been secured," Langdon said, coming to my side and gazing in at Winter, highly concerned. "What are your orders involving her Alpha Kai? What would you have us do with her?"

"Secure her in the dungeon but no one touches her. I want Winter to have a say in what happens to her. But she's not getting out of this one alive. It's rather a matter of how slowly she dies, instead" I say, "after all the crap she's pulled and the number of times she's hurt, my mate."

He gives a nod but looks rather grim. I open my mouth, intending to ask him what's wrong, when another voice interrupts me.

"Alpha Liam has been secured and the elders are on their way," Teddy said cheerfully, clapping me on the back with a wide smile on his face. "Chantelle is on her way back to her family" he added, and I gave a small nod. That's one bit of good news. I feel bad for cutting the girl's fingers

off though. I wish she had just talked in the first place, but at least we can make sure her family is safe.

"Langdon, this is Teddy the ahem" I cough "chief of security. Teddy this is my Beta Langdon."

They shake hands.

"I've gotta go, but I wanted you to know you're all set," Teddy said with a low whistle and a shake of his head "I hope your mate will be alright."

"Doctor says she'll recover" I mumbled automatically, not wanting to talk about it.

Langdon squared his shoulders. "We're ready to move out. Two of the other cars will stay behind and be your guard on the way home" he explained, as though he hadn't already told me all of this in the mind-link earlier. But he looks pale and haggard, withdrawn. Something is amiss. Something is wrong and I need to know what it is. He's keeping something from me, I can sense it.

"Is something wrong, Langdon?" I probed delicately and he shook his head at me, seemingly startled out of his thoughts.

"Nothing is wrong, Alpha Kai," he says politely and I swat at him.

"Cut it out with the title" I growl and he huffs out a laugh.

Langdon gathers his troops and they get into their cars, in a line, a procession, leading the way back to the pack house. I get into the driver's seat of my own car and glance back over my shoulder at Winter. She was covered in bandages but her wounds were already beginning to heal. She would have scars though, from the silver dagger and that pissed me off. Her beautiful pale skin was already covered in traumatic scars and now she would have even more to look at and remember what happened. My hands clench on the steering wheel. Damnit. Damnit, Damnit, I swear in

my mind, thumping the steering wheel with my hands. She never should have had to go through what she had in the elevator. It was all my fault.

I let her down, there's no denying it. Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if she hated me when she woke up. It's the least of what I deserve. I should have been protecting her. Heck, if I'd been by her side she probably never would have even been attacked in the first place. Candice was going beyond obsessive and I hated the fact she was still ruining our lives and our chance at happiness. She was going to pay, but it would never be enough to undo the hurt and all the damage that bitch had caused. Why hadn't I seen just how crazy and obsessive Candice was? Why hadn't I seen her as a threat? The signs were all there, I had just been completely oblivious.

Winter mumbles incoherently and then stills as I start the car. I've got her tucked in and belted up, but I'm still not going to take any chances on accidentally jostling her if I can help it. We could have stayed another night, but Winter's attack had effectively broken up the all-important summit and I didn't trust that Candice and Alpha Liam didn't have a plan b of some description. She was safer at home, with me and the pack. At least, that's what I'm hoping. I'm starting to doubt my ability to keep her safe at all. Considering I was failing miserably at it.

I pull out, watching in the rearview mirror as the two cars follow behind me, as Langdon promised me they would. I don't need a guard, but I guess for Winter's sake that it was good I acceded to it. It's cold, slightly chilly. Is Winter cold? Maybe I should stop and pile more blankets on top of her? I hesitated but then turned the heater on in the car. It would have to suffice, the trip is only a few hours, and she would be alright. At least she won't freeze to death in that time. Plus, my heater is quite strong and before I know it, the car is toasty warm.

We finally made it back to the pack house and I parked the car at the front of the pack house in relief. God, we've made it. My fingers are numb from clutching the steering wheel so hard with my fingers, and my shoulder

hurts from constantly looking over my shoulder to make sure that Winter is alright. But I can't help myself. Storm also feels the desperate need to continually check up on her and make sure she's doing alright. Both of us are feeling overprotective towards her right now.

Langdon greets me before I can gather up Winter, who's sleeping peacefully, her soft snores reassuring to hear. Clearly, the drive hadn't caused any more damage to her body. Thank god. I gave a small smile. The fact she's sleeping so peacefully despite being in the car is very reassuring to me.

"Everything has been carried out. Candice is in the dungeon, awaiting your arrival", he tells me, and I give a wicked grin.

I had gone easy on her the last time, because of all our history together, but this time it wasn't going to be anywhere near as soft or held back.

"She stays there. I want Winter to have a say in whatever happens", I ordered, reaching out and stroking Winter's hair, pulling a stray strand of hair back from her face. She looks so vulnerable, so innocent. My guilt is overwhelming me and it's killing me on the inside.

"That's been arranged," Langdon says briefly and then hesitates, something flashing across his eyes. Just as quickly, it was gone and I blinked my own in confusion. I knew something was going on with him.

"Alpha Kai. I have a request that I would like to ask of you", Langdon says with a quietness that makes me stiffen. Never once has Langdon ever asked me for a favor. Not for himself, not for anyone. So it had to be important for him to even bring it up. I straighten. Winter's still snoring in the background, but I'm not walking away from this car. I fold my arms and give him a stern look as he looks away sheepishly. Whatever this request was, it had better be good.

"Ask me and I will tell you if I'm able to grant it" I challenged, watching as he took a nervous gulp and then a big breath. He looks pale, ashen and I realize that he's worried about telling me whatever it is.

"I only ask that I not be involved with torturing Candice," he says, and my mouth drops open in shock.

Was he really asking me such a thing? Not once had Langdon ever balked at torturing prisoners, not even female ones, who deserved it. Why was he suddenly avoiding my gaze and looking off into the distance? What made Candice so different from the others he'd helped me with in the dungeon?

I'm tempted to shout at him for an explanation, but one glance at Winter has me gritting my teeth and clenching my hands into fists instead.

"Explain why," I said tightly.

He looks away, a flush rising up his neck as though he's deeply embarrassed. He's silent for so long, that I'm pondering whether or not he's turned mute.

"I can't be involved in torturing my mate" he whispered, and I stared at him in utter shock.

What the hell did he mean by that? Candice had told me she'd never found her mate when we got together. Had she lied to my face? Oh god. My stomach churns. How had Langdon felt when he'd watched me be with her? It must have killed him and he hadn't said a single thing.

"Candice is your mate," I said numbly.

"Was my mate," he said seriously, "she rejected me the first chance she got. I wasn't far enough in the hierarchy for her", he added bitterly.

Poor bastard. She'd really done a number on him, as well as myself.

"Then why," I started, and he interrupted.

"I just couldn't. I can stand by while she's being hurt but I can't partake in it myself", he hisses, and I nod, my hands relaxing by my sides.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted you to be happy and if Candice made you happy, then I wasn't going to ruin that," he said bluntly, "even if I hated her guts for it. You deserved better but you wouldn't listen" he points out.

I might have listened better if he'd told me the truth, I think to myself a little grumpily. He didn't have to protect me. I'm not a damn child.

"I won't make you do it" I promised him, hurting when I saw a look of relief in his eyes. I'd put him through the wringer and he was still loyal to me. It boggles my mind.

"Did you accept the rejection?" I asked and gave a hiss when he shook his head.

"I was too much of a coward" he mumbles and I give a shudder.

"So every time we were together..." I trailed off.

"I felt it" he finished. God, I feel sick to my stomach.

"You might want to accept the rejection, Langdon," I told him quietly, trying to persuade him, "because she's going to die and that's the last thing you need to feel."

"I know," he says grimly. "I'm going to, it's been more than enough time. I just can't torture her."

I bend back down and undo all the restraints and seatbelts off Winter, cradling her in my arms and slowly backing out of the car. Langdon was polite enough to shut the car door closed.

"I'm going to be inside with Winter until she wakes up," I told Langdon staunchly. "we don't get disturbed unless it's a damn emergency and someone keeps an eye on that bitch Candice the entire time. Do you hear me?"

He nods. "Take care of your mate Kai," he says a little wistfully as we begin to enter the pack house. "Mates are precious" he finishes.

Mates are precious, I think, holding onto mine tight as I ascend the stairs. One day, I hope Langdon gets a second chance, mate. If anyone deserves it, I think it's him. I pray to the moon goddess to grant him that gift as I put Winter to bed and snuggle up against her.