

## Chapter 31 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I don't know what it is that finally woke me, whether it's the throbbing headache I have or the strange burning sensation that's all over my body. It's intense and I swear it's getting worse as the seconds pass by. I slowly got up, putting a hand to my head and I glanced down to see that all of my stab wounds were fully healed. There's no pain whatsoever as I move and I stagger to the entrance of my little cave, peering outside and promptly swearing. Fuck. How long have I been out? Too long, I'm guessing.

The last thing I remember is it being past sunset and then nothing. But I suspect it's been more than a few hours since I passed out, not just because of my dry parched throat or growling stomach, but because it's a full moon outside. It's been more than a goddamn day and it's now my eighteenth birthday.

My legs buckle as the heat gets to excruciating levels, and my body is prone on the ground. I'm helpless to stop the pain, tears welling in my eyes as I pray for it to stop, feeling like I might be dying, it's that bad. No, I'm not being melodramatic. I scream as my left leg suddenly moves and breaks. It looks like I'm about to go through my first shift and all alone at that. I can't risk any wild animals hearing my screams in case it alerts them to my presence, so I whimper as my bones all begin to crack and break, adjusting themselves. It's the worst pain I've ever felt in my entire life and it seems like a lifetime. I'm panting heavily, not sure I'm going to make it without passing back out when suddenly the heat begins to subside and my bones stop moving. Is it over? I move everything experimentally and then, slowly, get to my feet, looking down to see I have paws! Well, tiny paws anyway.

Hello Winter, I'm your wolf Sabriel.

I've never been so excited about hearing another voice.

I like the name Sabriel, it's beautiful, I tell her, and she gives a little laugh, sounding pleased. She seemed to like the compliment.

Winter is just as beautiful for a beautiful girl such as yourself.

Sabriel, I really want to see what we look like. Is it safe to go to the stream? We can look at our reflection.

Everything is scarily in focus and I can see so far in the distance it's like having my own personal binoculars attached to my face. I can smell so many different scents it's hard to tell what's coming from what, almost like I have to unravel each one to determine it.

It's safe to go to the stream. There are only small animals around and there are no humans or other shifters. We won't be in any danger.

It feels surreal walking on my paws and I'm tentative, my paws sinking into the hard dirt earth as I make my way towards the little stream nearby. Once I'm there, I peer into the water and see our reflection. I inhaled in shock.

We're beautiful Sabriel, I enthuse, looking at every single detail in awe. Our fur is silver but it shimmers and glistens, something I haven't seen before in other wolves. I'm silver all over except for my paws, which are white and just as shiny. Sabriel fairly preens at my compliments.

There's only one thing that concerns me and I'm hesitant to bring it up to Sabriel, but I have to know. We're smaller than most wolves. In fact, the only way to describe it is that we're a runt. There's no other polite way to say it. I hadn't been expecting that and I wonder why I'm so small. Is it because I'm so malnourished or have something to do with all the abuse I've had to put up with over the years?

Sabriel, why are we so small? I thought we would at least be as big as the average wolf I asked and I sensed sadness emanating from her.

I'm a representation of you Winter. At the moment, we're small because that's how you feel. Once you've accepted yourself for who you are and believe in what you are capable of, you will grow. Being a runt doesn't make us any less powerful, she adds, and I give a small nod, although I'm disappointed. It was my fault we were so little and I can't help but feel slightly down about it.

Winter stop stressing about it. We are perfect no matter what.

I know it's just that...

Stop comparing us to other wolves! We are unique, beautiful and a hell of a lot smarter than most, she tells me and I snort, unable to help myself. My Wolf is sassy and has an outgoing personality, as opposed to my introverted one.

Now, how about we get this gorgeous body of ours moving and go for a run? You'll get tired after that, so I suggest spending one more night in the cave before we set off in search of a pack. What do you say?

Hell yes, I want to go for a run. I can't think of anything better. I start to run, my paws avoiding broken twigs and leaves, leaping over branches. The trees passed by in a blur and I let out a small howl, giving in to my wolf instincts. I smelled a deer nearby and followed it, tackling it to the ground. This is where it gets a bit gross and I start to eat it raw in my wolf form, my stomach so hungry that I've eaten a fair bit before I realize what I've done. My animal instincts had completely taken over and, without consciously trying, I let Sabriel take the driver's seat.

You did well, she compliments me and I grin and settle back to watch as she dashes through the trees towards the cave, stopping every so often to sniff and track a scent. I'm not in a hurry to get back, this is too much fun, but eventually, we end up back at the beginning of our run and Sabriel reluctantly lets me have control again. This time I had no idea what to do.

Picture yourself as a human. From your hair color to your eyes, all the way down to your toes, Winter. Picture it clearly in your mind. Everything that makes you unique.

I form a picture in my mind, imagining myself, and hear my bones cracking and shifting. This time it's merely uncomfortable, thank goodness, instead of painful and in no time I'm in my human form and standing there. I shivered and looked down with a groan. I was completely naked. I'd shredded my clothes when I shifted. Damn it. I should have thought about that. Sabriel sounds calm.

You won't feel the cold so much now that you have a wolf. Go to sleep. When you wake up tomorrow, we'll go for a quick run and steal some clothes from someone's washing line or something. We'll work it out.

That sounded like a plan. I feel myself yawning even though I've spent a day unconscious and head towards the back of a cave. It's going to be uncomfortable, but right now my body needs to recover while I sleep. I closed my eyes.

Goodnight Sabriel.

Goodnight Winter.

## Chapter 32 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I'm running in wolf form, as fast as my little legs can carry me, grateful for the speed that I possess. The trees pass by in a blur and I easily jump over broken twigs and branches. I have to keep going, I can't afford to stop. Not now.

Keep running Winter Sabriel tells me urgently and I continue to do so, my nose picking up a horrid scent of rotten eggs and meat, wrinkling my nose in disgust. The scent is overwhelmingly familiar and I begin to feel slightly panicked as I start to run even faster.

How close is the rogue?

He's gaining on us fast Winter. I don't think we're going to outrun it. We're going to have to turn and fight.

But I haven't practiced much, Sabriel, I don't know if we can take them. I don't know how to fight!

We have no choice, Winter, now turn around before he tackles you!

I turned and jumped neatly to the side in time to avoid the rogue which had jumped to tackle me from behind. I stare. It's thin, mangy looking, and malnourished, as though it's been a long time since they last ate. Its eyes are a crimson blood color and it's a dark gray color, much like a normal wolf. It's drooling as it snarls at me and I flinch, staring into its eyes, my whole body tensed as I wait for the inevitable attack. I feel slightly sorry for it, which annoys Sabriel.

Jump. Attack first Winter.

I jump, landing on it and surprising it for a moment as I rake my claws against its back. They howl and then I feel them nipping at me as I fall off and roll over. It leaps at me and I howl as I feel its jaws clench down on my leg, effectively breaking it. I know they're trying to make me helpless and I get to all fours, whimpering slightly as I'm forced to keep one off the ground. I'm a goner. There's no way I can take them out now. But Sabriel refuses to let me give up. Urging me to continue to fight.

Fight through the pain. I'm not dying today and neither are you. Run and tackle it into the tree.

I almost scream at the pain as I do what she says but the rogue isn't expecting me to attack and I easily thrust it back into the tree, snapping and biting at it in desperation. It bites back and we roll over and over, both of us scratching and clawing at each other. Without knowing it, I rip through his stomach and dig my claws in as hard as I can as I drag them through, rolling over and away as they lie there, not moving. I can see their chest heaving up and down and know they aren't dead yet.

Finish it, Winter. We can't afford for them to keep tracking us, Sabriel tells me, and I hesitate. I can't bear to think of taking another life, even a rogues. After all, once upon a time, they used to be a shifter like me. How could I blame them for doing what their nature demanded of them? It wasn't fair or very sportsmanlike. Plus, I hate the idea of killing something that is so defenseless right now. They clearly aren't going anywhere.

That compassion is going to get you killed, Sabriel grumbled at me.

I pushed her aside and concentrated on the rogue who was staring at me, not moving. It's in a great deal of pain and, from the looks of it, it would live but take hours to heal. Hours I could use to get away.

I can't kill them, Sabriel, rogue or not, I can't. They are in no condition to continue fighting. Let's just leave them alone and get away.

They'll kill someone else.

Why are their lives forfeited just because they are rogues? Everyone deserves a chance to live. I refuse to end another's life when I can avoid it.

Fine. Do what you want, Winter, but don't say I didn't warn you.

I shifted and limped, biting my lip against the pain of my leg, searching for the small backpack I flung into the trees earlier before turning around. Another item I've stolen from an unsuspecting household. I open it and grab what I'm looking for, a shirt that I tear into long strips as the rogue watches me, clearly confused. I approach it slowly, hands open, uncaring that I'm naked and vulnerable. There's such sadness in its eyes that it tugs at my heart. It doesn't seem like an ordinary run-of-the-mill rogue, at least not like I'd imagined them to be.

I try holding my arms out as it gives me a low growl, its head staring at me as I show them the makeshift bandages I've created out of the shirt.

Just let me help you, I think to myself, praying they will, and it seems to eye me for a moment and then lowers its head as I place one against the wound, wiping up what blood I can. It whimpers but doesn't try and do anything. I start to wrap up the wound, being as quick and as gentle as I can. Then I gave the wolf a gentle pat and stood up, moving back into its eye line. Every step is excruciating and I know I'm going to have to take care of myself shortly as well, but a broken leg heals incredibly fast.

Staring directly into its startled eyes. I also grab some food that I have stolen and place it next to them. They give it a wary sniff.

I hope they eat the food. They looked hungry. I then grab some clothes for myself and hastily get dressed, keeping an eye on the wolf the whole time. It would make sense for me to shift, but not with a broken leg. I want to walk normally for a bit as my leg is already beginning to heal and reserve my strength. I grab a large branch to use as a walking stick, cursing vehemently in my mind with each step as the wolf whines slightly behind me. I swear Sabriel rolled her eyes.

See what you've started. Now the rogue is acting like a big baby and it's your fault for caring for it like a pet!

Leave it alone Sabriel, what's done is done. Let's just focus on getting out of here and you can continue to yell at me later, I tell her tiredly.

She goes quiet as though realizing how fed up I sound. I wince as I begin to limp, the backpack securely on my back, pain shooting up my leg with every step. I glance over at my shoulder and see the rogue digging into the food and give a small smile. Perhaps I had treated it like a pet, but I've never been able to see an animal in pain and not help. Besides, who knew, maybe they would be grateful for me saving it and leave me alone. It can't hurt to be optimistic, right? But I can't help remembering its eyes and frown. Now that I think about it, they also seemed quite tall, not just for a rogue but for a shifter in general. I shrug it off but still feel uneasy. Never mind, right now, my main focus needs to be putting as much distance away from the rogue and myself before it starts to move again.

## **Chapter 33 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

## 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.

## **Chapter 34 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

Kai POV

It's midday and I'm sitting at my desk, frowning as I look over at my warriors' pathetic training. My hand unconsciously touches the scars I have on my face, dark gashes from being attacked by a rogue when I was just a little boy, who didn't have his wolf. A knock on the door had me swivel my head around. I'm anything but pleased by the interruption.

"Come in," I said gruffly, thinking it might be my Beta Langdon, but it was not. It's Candice. I should have known, she absolutely reeks of perfume.

She sashays in, a smile on that perfect face of hers. The dress she's wearing leaves nothing to the imagination, just the way I like it. Her raven black hair is loose over her shoulders and her green eyes are narrowed in determination. She's been my girlfriend for several months. I know what you're thinking, most wolves wait for their mates but I'm 25 years old and I haven't met one yet, or at least one that's willing to accept me.

Flashback

I can smell the delicious scent of strawberries wafting towards me as I walk on pack grounds. I've just gotten my wolf and it's going crazy inside of my mind. I

feel an irresistible pull, a drive to find out who the scent belongs to. I sniffed the air and began the hunt, finally ending up by an old oak tree, a girl sitting underneath it. She's so beautiful that I observed her for a moment.

I knew the girl. She was in some of my classes at school. A quiet type, with the most beautiful blonde hair and big blue eyes. She was such a dainty little thing, engrossed in her book when I approached. She doesn't even register that I'm there.

The closer I get, the more disturbed the girl, Elena looks, her eyes finally meeting mine as she whispers 'mate' out loud. My wolf and I are ecstatic and joyous. Ready to celebrate. I'd never imagined I would find my mate so quickly. She stands up and tucks her hair behind her ear and she looks serious, grim, rather than happy like I am. Something is very wrong. My wolf can sense it as well.

I reach out to touch her hand and she flinches as I frown. I was definitely feeling the mate bond, wasn't I? Then why was she so unaffected? Instead, it's like she's avoiding my eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked quietly. She knows that I'm going to be taking over as Alpha soon, but that doesn't seem to impress her at all. Instead, she just bites her lip and turns pale.

"We're mates" I burst out. "isn't that something to celebrate? The moon goddess chose us to be together."

"I don't want you" she whispered and I stilled, feeling myself going cold inside. Surely she hadn't just said that. I had to be imagining things.

"What do you mean you don't want me" I managed to utter, my heart feeling like it's been ripped to shreds. She trembles at the look on my face.

Elena looks down at the ground, and I feel nothing but anger. Why can't she just look me in the face? Was I that repulsive to her?

"I'm sorry," she says, "but I can't bear to even look at your face. I can't accept someone that looks like you do as my mate, even if you are going to be Alpha."

That's it, my heart breaks in two. So my looks were more important to her than what was on the inside. I never knew she could be that shallow. My scars

cover half my face, but until then I hadn't thought of them as hideous or repulsive, but now I can't forget about them.

"Then I guess there's nothing to do but reject me" I whispered thickly, looking away. So much for finding my soul mate. I feel bitter and angry at the moon goddess for choosing Elena as my mate. It was a cruel joke that devoured my soul.

Elena took a deep breath. "I, Elena of the Midnight Sky Pack, reject you, Kai, as my mate, now and forever more."

God that hurts, like an arrow right through the heart.

"I, Kai of the Midnight Sky Pack, reject you, Elena, as my mate now and forever more" I, managed to gasp out, feeling something stretch and snap between us. No doubt it's the mate bond being broken. Elena looked relieved.

"I'm sorry" she whispers and picks her book up and walks away, without a backward glance. I watched her go, my hands clenched into fists. I vow to never ever keep a mate if I get a second chance. I won't be rejected ever again. I won't let myself be vulnerable ever again.

Candice interrupts my thoughts, leaning over my desk and showing me a rather extensive view of her cleavage in the low-cut dress she's wearing. My member twitches, even though my wolf is not pleased by my sleeping with Candice. He, unlike me, still holds out for a mate.

"Can I do anything to help you?" she says to me saucily and I raise an eyebrow, mulling over her request. I can think of a dozen things she can help me with.

"Well now," I say slowly, standing upright and grabbing her while she squeals with laughter. I gave her a quick peck on the lips. I don't do long kisses or romances. Candice knows the drill and begins to unzip my pants as I stand there, licking her lips as I shudder, thinking about her tongue and her mouth around my cock.

A knock on the door interrupts what was clearly going to be a damn good time, and I swear as I hastily zip up my pants. This had better be important or I'm going to kill whoever is on the other side of the door. Candice looks pissed and sits down opposite my desk sulkily. She doesn't like to be interrupted either.

"May I come in Alpha?" asks my Beta Langdon, clearly aware of Candice's presence in my study. He knows better than to just waltz in, thank god.

"Come in," I said with a sigh and a roll of my eyes. This day just kept getting better and better.

Langdon comes in and raises his eyebrows at the sight of Candice. I know that he can't stand her and barely tolerates her at the best of times. But he keeps his mouth shut because she's my girlfriend and because I refuse to listen to any of his arguments.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," he says warily as Candice glares at him. "But there was a security breach on the grounds today. I thought you should know" he added, and I drummed my fingers on my desk. A security breach could be anything.

"What kind of breach, Langdon?" I asked, mildly curious. He fidgets slightly. That's weird for him. In fact, he looks downright uncomfortable.

"A bunch of rogues were chasing a shifter, Alpha Kai."

That was interesting but hardly concerning. "What happened to the rogues?" I asked.

"They were killed by patrol and their bodies have been dealt with. The shifter was traveling alone and came across the group. They were wise enough to get on pack grounds for help."

"A lone traveler," I said, frowning slightly. Most shifters were smart enough to travel in groups, because of this exact situation.

"What an idiot" Candice mutters and Langdon scowls at her.

"Yes, traveling alone. They've been put in the dungeon for safekeeping for now. I wonder when you would like to visit the prisoner?" he asks "I don't think they pose a threat to our pack."

I almost scoff at the idea of one shifter posing a threat to my pack. It's completely laughable. Still, they followed my orders and placed them in the dungeon. It wasn't that concerning for me. I'd go down and have a look at them when I chose. For now, they could cool their heels.

"Is that all, Langdon?" I said impatiently and he sighed.

"That's all Alpha Kai," he says pointedly, still looking angrily at Candice.

"You can go then," I said dismissively.

He leaves without another word and almost slams the door to my office closed. I'd have to talk to him about not doing that. I can't be fucked with fixing the door.

Candice stands back up and begins to shimmy out of her dress, as a broad grin stretches on my face. Damn, she's so fucking gorgeous and she's all mine. My hands skim along her body eagerly as I stand up, feeling her breasts and her buttocks, my cock rock hard.

"Bend over," I said huskily, almost tearing her panties off in my haste. She does and I stare at her delectable ass, right in front of me. She looks over her shoulder and winked and I almost came undone.

Slowly, I position my cock at her entrance and push in as she moans, the sound filling the empty room and exciting me even more. God, she's fucking tight. I push all the way in and pant, struggling to keep control, my hand gripping her hair as she rocks back against me, urging me to move.

"Stay still" I growl and she stills, before I start to furiously thrust back and forth, hard, rough, just the way she likes it, her gasps and moans music to my ears.

But as I pound away, seeking my satisfaction, my thoughts go back to the prisoner, and I'm left to wonder just why I'm so intrigued by them and why my wolf wants to seek them out so badly.

## **Chapter 35 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

Kai POV

I finish banging Candice and order her to leave. When she's gone, I sit in my chair and twiddle my thumbs. My mind keeps flashing back to the fact there is a prisoner in the dungeon. While part of me is more than happy for them to cool their heels and wait for me to go down there, another part of me is almost desperate to see this prisoner, my wolf especially. Does he know something that I don't?

Please go down to the dungeon. For heaven's sake, stop procrastinating.

It's just a pathetic shifter, Storm, why bother? We can leave them for a few days. They're nothing special. Plus, they are an idiot for traveling alone. They can take the time to think about their stupidity.

But something is telling me it's important. Always trust your gut.

Will you leave me alone for Christ's sake? You are imagining things.

Not until you go down there.

Fine, you annoying mutt, I'll go down there. Happy now? I swear...

Yes, Very.

Damnit Storm, I think to myself rather crossly. I stomp out of the room and ignore the startled pack members who watch my every move. I imagine some of the women are turning away in disgust, over the horrible scars that are prominent on my face. I don't blame them, even I know how hideous I look. After all, I'm definitely no Prince Charming, and that suits me just fine.

I stomped outside and over to the dungeon doors. Storm is excited for some inexplicable reason and it's annoying as hell. The door opens with a loud creak and I make a mental note to fix that. It looks just like I remember it as I progress down the stairs. The same smell of dampness and mildew, not to mention the metallic scent of blood. It's dark, the only light coming from barred windows. It's not the most welcoming place, but it's not designed to be. It's designed for torture and imprisonment.

I sniff. There's a curious smell wafting towards me, like strawberries and cream. My stomach gets butterflies to my astonishment. Is it some sort of strange perfume? I frown. I'd just realized that I never bothered to ask Langdon if the prisoner was a male or female. That was a stupid oversight. I walk towards the cells, Storm howling in my head as I tell him to shut the hell up. My gaze falls onto the small girl inside and my heart skips a beat. This had to be a mistake or a cruel prank of some kind, anything but what it is.

No, dear god, this isn't happening. Not again. I have a girlfriend, who I might not exactly love to pieces, but that I really liked having around. This had to be a mistake. I walked closer, my eyes narrowed as I looked at the girl. She's small, delicate looking, bruises covering her arms and face. I feel a spurt of

anger at the thought that one of my men might have caused it. If they had, I'd kill them. She's slightly dirty and when she turns towards me, our eyes meet and I'm absolutely speechless, staring at the most beautiful girl in the whole world as the mate bond comes to life.

"Mate" I whisper quietly and she nods. But she doesn't speak to my shock. What's up with that? I need to know her name, my whole body craves to speak it out loud.

"What's your name" I demand and she just waves her hands around. Is she an idiot? You can't just ignore an Alpha when they ask you a question. Was she doing this intentionally?

I took a deep breath and thundered "What's your name?" in the Alpha tone, commanding her to tell me.

She points at her throat, mouth opening and closing with no sounds.

She can't talk to you, moron. Way to go. You're scaring her.

You know that we can't accept her as our mate, Storm, so don't bother even thinking about it.

Why? She's a damn sight lovelier than Candice and I won't let you reject her.

You can't stop me Storm.

I can refuse to let you shift and trust me, you reject this poor girl and that's exactly what I'll do.

Fine, then I guess I'll make her life a living hell.

Do what you have to do, but I'm not rejecting her. She's ours and you'll see that for yourself one day if you stop being such a stubborn jackass. You really can be a dick sometimes, you know.

I sigh and fold my arms. The girl is still eyeing me, as though frightened, and I feel a small pang of guilt. I hadn't meant to frighten her. If I'd known beforehand that she was mute, I wouldn't have used my Alpha tone on her. But I don't know what to do with her. Because in spite of Storm's threats, I don't want to reject her. Besides, how would that work, when she can't form

the words to accept the rejection? I don't think her writing down the words will be enough.

She's not like Elena. Give her a chance.

I hear Storm's words but refuse to believe them. After all, before Candice came along, no one had been interested in dating me, even as one of the strongest packs and Alpha in the country. I might be known for being strong, but my looks had put off every female that had come across my path. Females were, all the same, this one wouldn't be any different.

I open the cage door and she slowly shuffles through, her eyes gazing up at me with what looks like adoration. She's about to get a shock but I can't see what else I can do. I can't have her near me, my feelings for her will only get stronger and I don't want her anywhere near Candice. The last thing I need is that. God knows how Candice would react. She doesn't need to know, I decide, feeling a tad guilty. After all, it's not like I'm about to do anything wrong. Candice would be fine.

"Follow me" I ordered, and went upstairs, glancing back over my shoulder. She's tightlipped and pale but follows me nonetheless to my satisfaction. At least she can follow orders. That's useful. In fact, that gives me a great idea.

I almost shoved her into my office and closed the door. For some strange reason, she cowers in the chair. Is she afraid that I'll hit her? I've never hit a woman in my life. I feel a bit dismayed. Storm keeps calling me an idiot.

I sat down opposite her and regarded her quietly. She's avoiding my eyes and looking around the room with interest. She's so childlike, innocent and it's hard not to watch her. It was hard to keep myself from touching her.

"Listen," I said, grabbing a piece of paper and pen. "How about we start with your name first?"

She quickly scribbles down something and I glance down to see 'Winter.'

"Winter's your name?" I checked and she nodded. It's a cute name and it really seems to suit her well. I shook my head and cleared my throat.

"Winter, I want you to understand something," I say sternly, and finally, she meets my eyes. "I don't want a mate, not now and not in the future. I'm perfectly happy with the life I have and I'm not about to ruin it."

She gives a nod and I swear I see tears in the corner of her eyes, even though she blinks them back. I feel like a right bastard now.

"I have a girlfriend and I just can't have you near her. So what I'm going to do is make you an omega", I say, and she stiffens. I know this must seem like an insult to her, but I couldn't reject her with Storm threatening to keep me from shifting. A tiny, tiny part of me wants to keep her hanging around. Selfish, but I'm an Alpha and I can do whatever I want. Besides this way, she'll be able to earn a living and I can keep an eye on her at the same time. For all I know, she could be a spy from another pack.

I watched her nod, looking miserable. I harden my heart before I soften towards her. "I'm about to mind-link the head omega," I tell her, leaning back in the chair. God, she smells so good, my cock is twitching like a traitor. The sooner I get her out of here, the better.

The head omega comes bustling in. "Alpha Kai" she greets me cordially "what can I do for you?"

I gesture towards Winter, who's sitting there and listening. "I have a new omega to help you with your duties. Please show her to a room, Maria", I say with a sigh as she nods and begins to gesture for Winter to follow her.

"Wait," I say suddenly, and Maria looks at me confused. "Winter is mute, she can't speak", I explain, "please let the other omegas know as well, so there are no misunderstandings", I say grimly, and watch as Maria drags Winter off. Winter glances over her shoulder one last time with a pleading look and I force myself to stare back at her, watching her face fall as she leaves.

This is a complication I definitely don't need. Maybe, in time, I think a little hopefully, Storm will see the futility of having Winter here and agree to reject her. But something tells me that my wolf won't be so easy to dissuade and that the longer she's here, the harder I'm going to find fighting the mate bond. I dread having to tell Candice about her. Would it be so bad if I kept Winter a secret? Candice doesn't really need to know. At least not yet. I walked outside. I need to do some training and work out my frustration. Some sparring should do the trick. In fact, I think I'll go find Langdon, he has some serious explaining to do, and what better way to get it out of him, than to fight him in the training ring?

## **Chapter 36 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

## Winter POV

It's hard not to be hurt by that yet again. Another mate doesn't want anything to do with me. Was it me? Did I have some sort of personality flaw that screamed reject me? The man is called Alpha Kai and he's one of the most intimidating men I've ever seen in my life. I try not to dwell on the fact he's pretty much left me in limbo, not accepting me but also not rejecting me as a mate. Why not just get it over and done with though? Did he have plans to use me in some way? Like a mistress?

God, he's sexy though. Muscles all over and a six-pack chest. He's got light stubble on his chin and his eyes are a dark brown, almost black color. He's got scars on his face and I assume it's from claws, maybe from a rogue? It doesn't bother me one bit, but I did notice that he constantly touched them as he talked. Is he self-conscious about them? Because to be honest, I liked them. But then, the second I lay eyes on him, I liked all of him. Guess it was the mate bond. Can't exactly say I'm thrilled with him at the moment. Neither is Sabriel. In fact, she would like nothing more than to rip him to shreds for what he'd done.

Being an omega is hard work. But I suppose it's not as difficult as being a slave to one's father and brother. Maria seems nice, chattering away as she shows me to a small room. I blink in the darkness as she turns the light on and want to cry. The room is bare except for an old mattress on the floor and a chipped dresser. Not that I have any clothes to put in it, mind you. Maria seemed to follow my gaze, understanding exactly what it was I was thinking.

"I'll organize some basic clothes for you dear. We don't wear uniforms here, but I'm sure I can rustle up some old clothes from other omegas" she says, and I give a nod, feeling shy. But beggars can't be choosers. I'm not exactly into fashion either.

"Now then," she says briskly, with a bit of a wrinkled nose. I guess maybe I don't smell the best, but to be fair, I've been in the dungeon. "I think a shower might be in order first."

She leads me down to a bathroom down the hall. I open the door and look at my reflection in the mirror, taking in just how matted my hair is and how bruised my body looks all over. It's not exactly the best impression. No wonder he'd looked at me with so much disgust. Who would want a mate that looks like this?

The bathroom is minuscule, consisting of just a shower, a small basin, and a toilet. Something tells me the omegas share it.

"This is the omega's bathroom", Maria says, starting the shower to my surprise. "We all share it so make sure you knock before you enter."

I nod. It's simple enough to remember to do that. But Maria looks concerned now. "You won't be able to call out if you're in the bathroom. Maybe we need to make some sort of signal for when you're in there, like three taps on the wall or something."

That's a good idea. Somehow I don't want to be walked in on while I'm doing my business. That would be awkward, not to mention embarrassing.

The water's heavenly and although the soap doesn't particularly smell of anything, I happily lather it onto my body, finding small bottles of shampoo and conditioner, which makes my hair feel sleek and shiny again. I'd just forced myself to step out when Maria came bustling in.

Her arms are loaded with clothes. "Here," she says, hastily handing me some to put on, "we need to go and prepare dinner for the pack."

At least I'd know where the kitchen is, I thought to myself, following behind her. Within moments, I'm standing there in an apron, chopping up vegetables and doing whatever Maria asks of me. The food gets placed onto a large dining table (when I say large, I mean easily feeds 50 people or more) for the pack members to help themselves. My stomach growls and Maria chuckles. "The omegas eat later. Pretty much whatever you can scrounge up for yourself in the kitchen. We all have odd hours and different break times, so it's what's easiest. Once everyone's finished eating, you and I will sit down and have some dinner."

Thank god, my stomach is starving. I almost drool at the thought of food.

Our mate's a real dick

Sabriel, what have I said about language?

It's true though. I can't believe he's made us an omega. He could have just rejected us and we could have gone on our merry way.

We still could

But now we have the mate bond to contend with. Winter, you know that if you go too far from your mate, you end up in excruciating pain. The only upside is that he'll feel pain as well. Stupid man.

We just have to make the best of it for now.

I wish we could spit in his food or add hot sauce to it.

I ignore my wolf who's pouting. Instead, I began to place plates down at every setting, rearranging the cutlery as I went. It's not long before I can hear the sounds of voices as pack members begin to come in and I hustle, determined to get it done and away from everyone. It's not meant to be, however.

Just as I'm about to place the last plate down, I feel a hand caressing my butt. I flinch and remove the hand, only to hear a man chuckle behind me. I stiffen instantly.

"Aren't you a pretty little thing" he whispers in my ear as I go completely still, his hand now on my arm. I started to feel panicked, tears coming to my eyes as I trembled, wanting nothing more than to wrench my arm away, but not sure how much trouble I'd get into doing that. Or even if I would get into trouble. Surely Alpha Kai wouldn't blame me for defending myself?

"How about you and I go upstairs to my room and have some fun" he whispers, and I shudder, Maria looks at me anxiously and looks about to intervene when I hear a familiar voice.

There's a ferocious growl and everyone in the room goes deadly silent. "Get your hands off of the girl" he growls, and I close my eyes in relief as the man turns around, to face his extremely pissed-off Alpha.

"I didn't mean any harm, I just thought..."

"That you'd accost an omega and force them to be with you?" Alpha Kai says mildly, myself turning around to see his eyes flash toward me.

"Put him in the dungeon" Alpha Kai growled to some men nearby, who hastened to obey. "I won't have someone mistreating another member of my pack, regardless if they are an omega or not."

He stares directly at me. Is he angry about the situation? Because I hadn't done anything to warrant such an attack. A woman with stunning black hair

and a figure that makes me envious comes into the room and throws herself into Alpha Kai's arms. He smiles, but even I can tell that it's fake. God, my chest feels tight and I feel a spurt of jealousy as the woman gives him a long kiss, right in front of me. All I can think about is getting the hell out of here. Sabriel wanted to rip her eyes out.

He has the decency to look somewhat ashamed as he speaks to me. "You may go back to your omega duties," he says calmly, and I can't help but glower at him a little before stomping back into the kitchen where Maria gives me another task to perform.

By the time I finally crawl onto my woebegone mattress, I'm absolutely drained and all I can think about is the way Alpha Kai kissed the woman back and the way he held her. Was she the reason that he didn't want a mate? She had to be special to him. My heart hurts to think that I'm never going to be wanted by anyone and I quickly close my eyes. I knew tomorrow was going to be just as difficult, but it didn't stop me from quietly sobbing into my pillow.

## **Chapter 37 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

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 more clear," 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.

## **Chapter 38 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

Kai's POV

I watch the training ring and some of my warriors sparring, correcting their moves every so often. It's boring and sometimes tedious, but I take pride in how good my warriors are, training some of them personally myself. An Alpha needs to keep himself in shape, you know.

"Watch your stance" I roared to one, in particular, watching with approval as they immediately corrected themselves. They know better than to talk back to me or ignore my instructions.

I see something out of the corner of my eye and turn to see it's none other than Winter. What's she doing out here, I wondered to myself, feeling highly irritable. Omega's hardly stepped foot outside, unless it's for a good reason. I spotted the water bottles and heaved a sigh of relief. That's why she's come out then. Not because she's seeking me out. I paused to observe her for a moment. She looks so beautiful, even as pale and delicate looking as she is. I can't help but wonder what her wolf looks like and whether or not she knows how to fight. Well, there was an easy way to find out. I decide, ignoring my wolf who's protesting that this is a very, very, bad idea.

"I need someone to spar with Winter", I asked the crowd, ignoring the pleading look in her eyes. This was for her own good, I tell myself. Esme volunteers to my relief and I order them both into the training ring, Winter looking very hesitant. Don't tell me she doesn't know how to fight at all. It's clear when they go at it in human form, that Winter knows absolutely nothing when it comes to defending herself and I notice that she doesn't go on the offensive at all. Clearly, she doesn't like fighting.

I don't like seeing our mate fighting. She's going to get seriously hurt Kai, you should stop this.

She'll be fine Storm, she just needs more confidence.

I don't think so, Kai. I really think you should stop this.

I'm not going to Storm, she can start training like everyone else.

I put up a barrier against my wolf and turned to view both of them. I want to see Winter's wolf and how she handles herself against another wolf. I stopped Esme and her from leaving.

"I want Winter to shift and dodge your attack, Esme," I say, and Winter looks decidedly nervous. I felt a pang of sympathy towards her but waved it away. Everyone should learn how to fight. This would be a good lesson for her.

Esme shifts and waits patiently for the signal, Winter shooting me covert looks as though she's trying to tell me something. Whatever it is, it's unimportant. But part of me is suspicious she's not going to willingly shift.

"Now" I boom and Esme straight away leaped towards Winter, who is hesitating. "Shift" I thunder, using my alpha tone, and watch as her body cracks and adjusts itself until the most beautiful wolf I've ever seen is right in front of my eyes.

Fuck. She's a runt. If I'd known that, I never would have insisted on her fighting. She's way too small to be able to fight back against a full-blown wolf. This must be why she'd sought help on my grounds from the rogues. Damn it, Langdon, I grumbled to myself, he could have at least mentioned Wolf was a runt to me. I watch wide-eyed, helpless to stop the inevitable, as Esme tackles poor Winter to the ground, her claws shredding into her skin and blood pouring out of the wounds around her.

I'm already racing towards her, Esme looking like she's in shock, as I bend over and cradle Winter into my arms. God, she's so small, so frail looking. My heart skips a beat and bile rises in my throat. This is all my fault.

"I didn't know" she whispered apologetically.

"It's not your fault, I didn't know either," I told her, looking down at Winter, who was unconscious. I start walking towards the hospital, my heart thumping wildly in my chest, sparks sizzling where our flesh is meeting. No doubt the work of the mate bond.

Thank god the hospital was close by and I raced through the front doors, to be met by a frazzled doctor. Dr. James is one of the best and this is a shifter hospital so I don't have to worry about protecting her identity or anything else. He's discreet as well, always a bonus when you are an Alpha in need of keeping something secret.

"What happened," he asks as he leads me to an empty room. He motions for me to place her on the bed. I place her down gently, feeling immensely guilty, seeing blood on my clothes and arms from her wounds.

"She was sparring," I said quietly, avoiding his gaze, "and got injured."

He looks suspicious. "Sparring wouldn't normally cause wounds this deep unless it got out of hand," he says prodding.

I exhaled. "I ordered her to shift and didn't know that she was a runt" he explained as he harrumphs at me.

"I'm assuming she shifted before falling unconscious/"

I nod. I don't think Winter was even aware she'd done it. It had taken all of my self-control not to look down at her naked body.

He begins to examine her wounds, frowning in concern. "They're quite deep and will take some time to heal, but she also appears to be malnourished and dehydrated as well. Is she not getting enough food?"

I flush. I did not have any idea if she was eating properly or not. I didn't tend to check on the omegas. I would have to ask Maria if Winter had been stopping to have breaks. Now I feel even worse and more of an asshole. Winter didn't deserve this, any of it. It was my cowardice and not wanting a mate that had led to this.

"Well, I can definitely build up her strength while she's here" Dr. James mutters, still examining her and checking her pulse, "but when she goes back, you'll have to ensure that she continues to eat and drink."

"I will," I told him firmly, meaning every word of it. He stares at me for a minute and then gives a slow nod.

"How long will she need to stay here for?" I asked quietly and he thought for a moment, his eyes piercing into mine. Does he know that she's my mate? He couldn't could he?

"A few days. The wounds will take a day or so, but I want to keep her and get her eating well before she leaves", he tells me calmly. I nod.

"Keep me informed as to her condition" I said, turning around and about to leave.

"Alpha Kai," Dr. James says, stopping me in my tracks. "It's plainly obvious for everyone to see that you're mates. Do you not want to stay with her?" He sounded puzzled.

I flinch. I can't afford to stay with her, not when Candice is still my girlfriend.

"I haven't accepted her as my mate" I growled. " Please don't tell anyone else."

He looks mystified but nods his assent, and I leave the building, my thoughts full of Winter and how pale and fragile she looked, lying on the hospital bed.

## Chapter 39 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

Fuck, where am I? I'm slow to open my eyes, feeling pain shoot through my body with every movement. I stare at the white-washed walls and the hospital gown that I'm wearing. What the hell happened to me? Damnit, Kai has a lot to answer for, I grumble to myself, annoyed.

We lost the fight with another wolf. Don't you remember Winter?

Ouch, guess that's why I'm in so much pain.

We look good in a hospital gown though, totally rocking it.

You always look on the bright side, Sabriel.

Guess what? Kai was the one who brought us here.

Don't get your hopes up, Sabriel. He only did it because we needed medical attention. I told her bitterly.

After all, he's the reason we ended up in the hospital in the first place.

I blink against the bright light and try to sit up, causing machines to start beeping. Damnit. A man in a white doctor's coat comes running in, stopping short as he sees I'm awake. I looked at him hopelessly and motioned toward the machines with an apologetic glance.

"Calm down" he murmurs to me and I stop wriggling around. "Let me get those needles out of your arm", he adds, and I flinch as he begins to do just that. God, it stings.

"Sorry" he apologized. I just nod. I want out of this place. The sooner the better. Besides, I have omega duties to take care of.

I read his name tag. It reads 'DR JAMES.' He seems like a nice doctor and I relax somewhat. At least he has a good bedside manner.

"Winter," he says quietly, "do you know where you are? Do you remember what happened?"

I nod. It's not like I can actually say the words.

He looks thoughtful. "Alpha Kai did say you were mute" he mutters, "so I guess I'll have to do all the talking", he adds with a smile.

"I need you to stay for the next few days" he explains, "not only were you injured while sparring" he coughs, "but you're severely malnourished and underweight. Do you remember to eat while doing your omega duties?" he asks quietly.

I stop and think. It's true, I do tend to forget to eat while I'm working, most of the time, because I just want to get my work over and done with. But I hadn't quite realized just how many meals I'd been skipping until now. Maria was going to have my head when I got back.

I shake my head at the doctor sheepishly and he scribbles something down on that clipboard of his.

"Well, from now on, you're going to be eating regular meals," he tells me sternly. I gulped at the serious expression on his face and nodded frantically. I really don't want to get on a doctor's bad side.

"There's something else I want to mention" he pauses and eyes me sternly. "There are old scars all over your body that will have been made by silver. Can you tell me how you got those?" he asks and I shake my head, very adamantly. There's no way in hell I'm going to divulge how I got those scars. He seems to sense it too because he gives a long-suffering sigh.

"There's someone that's been wanting to see you. If you don't mind, I'll inform them you're awake" he says gently with a sympathetic smile at me.

What the hell's up with that? I brighten, thinking it's Maria that wants to see me. She's the only friend I've really made in the time I've been in the pack. How nice of her, I think, eagerly watching the doorway for her to come in.

"I'll be back later," Dr. James said, and I nodded, watching him go and waiting for my visitor.

It's only a few minutes later and he comes walking in. What the hell is he doing here? He doesn't give a damn about me. In fact, he's the very reason I'm in the hospital in the first place. I glared at him, even as Sabriel began to wag her tail in my mind. Where was the loyalty? My wolf was hopeless when it came to being in Alpha Kai's presence. I, on the other hand, despised him. I just want him to reject me and leave me in peace. I don't care how guilty he's feeling right now. Screw him.

He looks hesitant as he comes into the room and takes in my appearance. I'm pretty sure I look disheveled, but what did I care? It's not like I'm trying to impress anyone. Especially not him.

"Winter," he says quietly, "I came to see how you're doing."

I look away. He comes in further. "I should not have ordered you to train", he says, and I blink in surprise. Is the big bad Alpha actually apologizing? That's a first, I think sourly.

"If I'd known you were, well, a runt," he says, "I would never have even dreamed of making you spar in your wolf form."

I shrug and it seems to anger him because his eyes flash. Good, I was pissing him off. Now he knows how it feels.

"I'm apologizing," he said tightly. "Do you think you could at least do me the courtesy of looking at me?"

I stare at him and he softens, coming over and sitting beside the bed, putting his head in his hands and shaking it slowly.

"What am I going to do with you" he mutters, and I leave him be. Clearly, he's talking to himself. Was he losing his mind? Maybe all the stress is getting to him. Or he's feeling guilty. I'm guessing it's the latter.

"I'm selfish" he murmurs, looking up at me, his eyes glinting "I can't bring myself to reject you, but I also don't want to accept you as my mate either. I won't let myself be hurt ever again" he exhales, and I wonder what he's talking about.

Am I the second mate he's come across? But if that's the case, what happened with the first one? Was that why he didn't want to be hurt again? What had they done to him, to make him so afraid of having a mate? Despite

myself, I feel a tad bit sorry for him. It's clear how conflicted he is, but I'm the same. Part of me hates him for doing this to me, but part of me still feels the pull of the mate bond and wants to be near him. It was pure hell.

He's eyeing me now, his eyes switching from black to normal, over and over again as I stare at him, fascinated. He seemed to be wrestling with himself. Then he stands up, knocking the chair over in his haste, his hand reaching out to grip my chin as I sit there, holding my breath. What does he want?

"So beautiful" he mutters, and I watch, wide-eyed, as he bends his head towards me and gently places his lips against mine. I jolt from the sparks, my lips opening eagerly to his, his tongue delving inside my mouth and caressing mine, his hands moving to the back of my head and gripping my hair.

It's like a lightning bolt, shooting through me and the sensation of him kissing me is pure heaven. He begins to kiss me even harder, and I move my hand to grip his hair, my mouth responding back just as hard against his. He lets out a long groan of pleasure and I find my hands moving up and down his arms. God, I want more, starting to feel my body responding and I worry that he could sense my arousal. Then again, I see his cock is erect, so I'm affecting him as well from the looks of it.

Then, just as suddenly, he moves back as though he's been scorched. His eyes are wide and beseeching as he stares at me, taking in my swollen lips and disheveled hair. I'm confused. Why was he looking so angry now? He was the one who kissed me. I didn't kiss him, he started it.

"God" he chokes out, "I should never have kissed you."

I feel deflated. That's the very last thing I want to hear from him and I feel tears forming in the corner of my eyes. He sees them and looks even more panicked.

"God, I'm so stupid" he mutters, backing away as I watch, my heart hurting "I can't believe I just did that," he says, swearing vehemently.

"I gotta go," he says, and I watch with tears in my eyes as my mate leaves the room, in a mad rush, as though he can't wait to get away from me. Could this day possibly get any worse?

## **Chapter 40 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate**

## Kai POV

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I can't believe I just did that. My mind whirls with the implications. I should never have done it, let alone even gone to see her. What on earth was I thinking? My wolf is pleased, sending me all sorts of naughty and inappropriate images in my mind, which is not helping with the situation. I can't stop thinking about that kiss. God, her lips were so soft and gentle and those moans of hers. My cock twitched just thinking about it. If I hadn't pulled back when I did, we would have ended up doing it on the hospital bed and how embarrassing would that have been? Storm doesn't think it would have been embarrassing at all, the bloody horn bag.

I can't be near her, I decided. It was too dangerous to control my feelings when it came to Winter. Even though she can't speak, she still draws me in. Something about those large eyes of hers that beseech me and make me feel like a right bastard. Even now, I bet she's hurt at me leaving. I swear there were tears in her eyes.

Would you just accept the mate bond already and get rid of that slut Candice?

She's not a slut, she's our girlfriend and I can't just upend her for Winter. Remember, I don't want a mate that's going to hurt me like the first one did.

She's not going to reject you. When are you going to realize that? Would you get over the scars you possess already? Winter doesn't seem to be bothered by them.

That's because she can't tell me she is. I won't be put in a vulnerable position again.

Candice just wants to be Luna, you know that as well as I. Stop being so blind to her.

Shut it wolf. I won't break up with her, so just leave it.

He sulks but shuts up thankfully as I head back towards the pack house deep in thought. I wasn't oblivious to Candice's faults, contrary to what my wolf believed. But shouldn't she expect to be Luna after dating me for so long? Wasn't that a normal thing to do? I could just mark Candice but my wolf feels sick at the very thought of it and I just feel hesitant, as though I'm forcing myself to do something I don't want to do. Damn it. Why was this so hard? Why can't I just reject Winter and get rid of all the drama? But she looks so

fragile, so in need of protection and I feel protective of her. My wolf is just as protective and it's ironic because he doesn't feel protective when it comes to Candice at all.

Maybe I should just lock myself up in the study and bury myself in paperwork. That would take my mind off of everything surely.

My wolf snickers.

Sure, paperwork is really going to help. You try that, you moron.

You're pushing it.

So are you with this nonsense? You're a bloody fool, Kai. The mate bond is only going to get stronger. I can't wait for the day when you realize just how stupid you've been. You're going to have a lot to make up for when it comes to Winter and, at this rate, she might find a way of rejecting us.

I'd no sooner settled myself in my study when Candice came sashaying in. For the first time ever, instead of lighting up when she comes in, I feel nausea in her presence. Why is she disturbing me when I'm busy? I instantly feel bad for thinking that and try to give her a smile, even though it feels forced.

"Candice, is there something you need?" I asked pleasantly enough.

"I just thought I'd come to see you" she purrs and leans forward, giving me a glimpse of her rather generous cleavage. I swallow hard. My wolf is extremely annoyed in the background and I put a block up, ignoring his protests.

"Well, I'm always happy to see you" I lied.

She's wearing a killer red dress that leaves nothing to the imagination and it enhances her beautiful figure perfectly. I have an idea of what it is she's after and my cock twitches as I look at her all over.

She trails her fingers down my arm. To my surprise, I felt numb, and not as excited as I usually am. Still, I stood up and kissed her, deeply, disappointed not to feel any sparks or tingles. I just need to get Winter out of my head, I think to myself grimly. Candice senses there's something wrong and pulls back, her eyes shining with concern. Love?

"You're a bit tense" she comments and I almost laugh. She's not kidding, I'm so bloody stressed out, it's not funny.

"How about a massage?" she offers and I sit back down with relief. At least she's not angry. Not that she has any reason to be, I think, a tad bit guilty. After all, that kiss meant nothing. Nothing. But my body and my wolf think otherwise.

She begins to knead my neck and I tip my head back in appreciation, feeling my tense muscles begin to relax underneath her ministrations. This was heaven. I moan and she smiles widely at me.

"Poor thing" she commented sweetly, "you're all tense and well, stressed out. I know exactly how to fix that" she murmurs and moves me from out of my desk, still in my chair as I face her.

Her long fingernails undo the zipper on my pants and I'm not wearing any underwear. I usually don't, it just gets in the way. She pulls out my member and gives me a seductive smile, getting to her knees and beginning to lick the tip, as I shudder in pleasure.

She knows exactly what to do, slowly placing my cock inside of her mouth and beginning to suck, slowly at first, her hands moving up and down on my shaft as I lean back against the chair.

God, she's fucking good. It's not long and I'm struggling to maintain my self-control, putting aside all thoughts of Winter. This is my life, this is what I want. A girlfriend who's crazy about me. Who will never ever hurt me. Who shows me just how badly she wants me all the time. I couldn't take it anymore and hastily stood up, my cock standing to attention.

"I think maybe it's time for you to have some fun too," I said firmly, and she gave me a knowing look, sliding out of her panties and flinging them to the far corner of the room. My throat goes dry.

"Bend over the desk" I growled, desperate to be inside of her.

She bends over, her dress up to her waist, her hands on either side of her head. She waits. I stare at her delectable ass but don't feel the lust I normally feel. Why was this happening? All I wanted was to take her and dispose of her, not feeling as tender towards her as I usually feel.

I position my rock-hard cock against her entrance as she wiggles playfully against me in encouragement. She's more than ready for me, I can smell her juices and the scent of her arousal. I push in, hard, getting all of my cock inside of her in one fell swoop. She loves it, crying out as I begin to pound into her without mercy, thrusting hard and rough, her moans and cries spurring me on. But there's something that I can't seem to control and, no matter how rough I take her or how animalistic I am, I can't seem to cum and, shamefully, I begin to imagine that it's Winter beneath me, the one that I'm fucking instead. It seems to do the trick, making my cock tingle all over and I let out a huge shout as I spill my seed inside of her, shuddering, giving one last thrust as Candice's walls clench around me and she orgasms tightly while I'm still inside.

Panting heavily, I slowly pull out and Candice turns to grip me tightly. "I have some shopping to do" she murmurs and, without a word, I pull up my pants and hand her my credit card while she beams at me.

"Have fun" I manage to grunt as she puts her panties back on and waves, shimmying out. I watched her go regretfully. She had no idea that I was pretending to be with someone else and I put my head in my hands and swore quietly. All I can think about is Winter and the knowledge that she would have felt the pain of me being with someone else. I really am a right bastard. Not only that, but I shamed Candice by imagining my mate beneath me. How was I going to fix this mess without hurting either of them? Was that even possible?