

Chapter 41 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I watched him walk away, feeling nothing but regret. I knew he wasn't happy that he'd kissed me, but it wasn't like I forced him to. I feel indignant now. My mind is still spinning from his kiss and the feel of his hands on me. The tingles and the sparks that flew between us and my body already craves more. Still, even though I'm sure he had felt the same things I did, he almost ran out of the room like a bat out of hell. That stung like crazy. Was the kiss that bad?

It's less than an hour later and I feel the most excruciating pain in my chest, one that has me doubling over and wheezing. I can't scream for help and I feel helpless, tears running down my face. . I'd never felt this pain before, clawing at my chest as shouts rang out from the corridor, nurses and the doctor racing in, mystified for a moment and then I heard the doctor ordering the nurses to leave.

Sabriel, what's going on? What is this horrendous pain?

It's because of our mate she tells me sadly and I can feel her anguish and despair. I'm confused though, by what she means. How is the pain linked to Kai? How is he managing to hurt me from far away? It didn't make sense.

Mate is sleeping with someone else. Now that we've met him and he hasn't rejected us, we'll feel this every time he sleeps with another.

Asshole, he literally kissed me and then went and slept with Candice? God, what a bastard, I thought furiously, trying to take deep breaths in the hope that the pain would go away. Nothing seems to help. I noticed the doctor was organizing something on the IV and looked at him questioningly. Please let it help the pain. I'd take anything to make it go away.

"It's morphine," he said quietly, "it will dull the pain but won't take it away completely," he said, looking upset. Part of me is suspicious he knows exactly what the pain is and where it's coming from. He looks grim. "It will help with your injuries as well", he adds.

I gave him a thankful smile and he nodded. He looks at me regretfully.

"There's nothing more I can do, but the morphine is strong and may even put you to sleep. That would be a small mercy in itself" he murmured to himself, looking away.

He leaves the room and sure enough, within a few minutes, the pain has subsided to a dull pain. It stings and the knowledge of my mate being with another has me in tears. Why can't he just reject me and let me move on? How would he feel if I chose to go and sleep with another? It was humiliating. Sabriel was lost in the midst of her own despair. All we could do was try and comfort each other, the best way we could.

I feel sleepy and settle back into bed. The pain might not be completely gone, but it's tolerable. I know they can't give me too much morphine but at the moment I'm thankful to have it at all. It's even helping with the pain of my wounds. My eyes feel heavy and I feel like I'm floating in the air. It's surreal. Like an out-of-body experience. I gratefully go to sleep and feel no more pain as I do so.

I can't say what woke me up. It could have been hunger. My stomach was growling rather loudly. Or it could have been due to the change in lighting and realizing it was now late at night. I'm still dazed and confused from the morphine and my body is feeling strange. The pain of Kai being with someone else is gone, at least for now. I'm not so naive as to believe it won't happen again. But I can also swear I just saw a shadow move around in the room and then hear footsteps leaving before my eyes could adjust to the darkness. Was it a nurse, I thought to myself. But then, why would the nurses be doing their job in the darkness? Why not just turn the light on and wake me up? It seems silly not to disturb me, especially since it seems I've been out of it for most of the day and a portion of the nighttime. Why make their job harder?

Why do I feel so uneasy? Like something is majorly wrong? I'm in a hospital, for heaven's sake, one of the safest places I can possibly be. I know it wasn't Kai in the room, I would have smelt his scent. In fact, I'm not really familiar with the scent in the room at all and I'm sure that it must belong to a nurse. They must have been making some observations or something.

But my body won't respond to any of my commands, feeling much like I'm paralyzed and my limbs refuse to move at all.

That wasn't a nurse. Something's wrong. Winter, you have to move

I can't. My body won't do anything I want it to.

If you don't, we will die. Your morphine is way too high. Rip the iv out if you have to.

I can't make my arms move! Or my legs Sabriel! It's hard to feel anything!

Do something and make it quick!

What the hell did Sabriel want me to do? I can't frigging call out, I can't move. No one knows what's just happened and by the time someone comes in it's going to be too late. As it is, I can feel my body becoming more languid and loose. I'm starting to panic now. Sabriel's just as concerned. I could barely take a breath and I gathered up all of my courage and all of my strength, rolling over and falling to the ground with a large thud. The iv rips out in the process and blood pours out onto the floor. Ouch. But at least I've managed to make one hell of a racket. That should send the nurses to my room.

Thank god, I've managed to do even that, but I'm still incredibly weak. Luckily, there's the sound of running footsteps and the doctor comes racing into the room, his hair disheveled and dark circles beneath his eyes. He looks like he's woken from a deep sleep. Was he watching over me or worried something would happen? Or was it because I was the Alpha's mate and he didn't want to have to explain that something bad had happened? I don't care, right now all I want is for him to give me some medical attention.

He takes one look at me and the IV and a fierce expression comes on his face. He knows instantly what's happened. He slowly bends over and picks me up, placing me on the bed tenderly and ordering a nurse to fetch some bandages. The other nurses come pouring in and he turns on them, anger clear in his voice.

"Who messed with the morphine dosage" he roars, and even I flinch from how loud he is. It's a far cry from the quiet, gentle doctor I met earlier.

The nurses looked confused. All of them are shaking their heads.

"Someone had to or are you telling me that a stranger made their way into the room and did it while she was sleeping? Because Winter was asleep the last time I checked and I very much doubt she tried to kill herself" he roars.

I'm shaking my head. No way, even with how messed up my situation is, would I try and kill myself. He has that right. But how did someone sneak in and out without attracting any attention?

Still, none of the nurses come forward and the doctor, James, looks exasperated. "Until I find out who the culprit is, no one is allowed to enter this room under any circumstances."

The nurses look annoyed but have no other option than to assent. He orders them out and turns to me, bandages in his hands.

"Alright Winter, let's take a look at that arm," he says.

I'm shaking as I hold it out, finally getting some feeling coming back into my limbs and body. He wraps the wounds and sighs. "I'm going to have to inform Alpha Kai of what's happened."

I look at him pleadingly, but he's stern. Great. Why does he even have to know? I think a little bitterly, it's not like Kai would care. Hell, if I'd died, I'd have done him a massive favor.

"It looks like you managed to rip the morphine drip out just in time," Dr. James says quietly, "but I'm no longer comfortable, leaving you in this room by yourself."

Sabriel agrees.

He takes a key out of his coat and glances at me apologetically. "If anything happens to you, Alpha Kai will have my head. I know it doesn't seem like it, but he does actually care for you, in his own misguided, stupid way" he adds, and I deflate.

I disagree but watch anyway as Dr. James locks the hospital room. Now it makes sense as to why I've been put in a room with glass doors. At the time, I hadn't even considered there might have been a reason for it.

"I'm going to stay here with you, until morning, and then I'm going to speak to Alpha Kai about discharging you" he mutters, "somewhere safe and away from here."

He settles himself in the chair. "Go back to sleep," he says, and I hesitate. But I know it wasn't him in the room earlier, his scent is far too different. "Rest is what your body needs right now to recuperate, and you're safe for now. Don't worry. I've already mind-linked Alpha Kai" he adds reluctantly.

I tentatively closed my eyes, still feeling quite sedated from the morphine. Knowing Dr. James is with me makes me feel a lot more secure and it's not long until I feel the darkness surrounding me and fall into a deep sleep.

Chapter 42 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Alpha Kai POV

It's the next day, and although I know I shouldn't, I find myself heading towards the pack hospital anyway. At least Candice isn't hanging around, wondering where I'm going. She's too busy going out and shopping. My wolf points that out rather sourly, but I ignore him. At least it keeps Candice away for a while. I really shouldn't feel like that, considering she's my girlfriend, but I can't help noticing I'm feeling that more and more these days. Was it because I'd found my mate, or was I getting tired of her? My wolf has made his opinion on numerous occasions, but why am I starting to agree with him? Why am I suddenly finding myself disliking Candice so much? What has changed?

I walked through the front entrance confidently, seeking out Dr. James. I want to find out how Winter is going and whether there's a change in her condition. My mind flashes back to our kiss and I cringe. That was wrong of me and I would have to apologize. I don't want Winter to get the wrong idea.

I was a little mystified when I was told by the head nurse at the nurse's station that Dr. James is currently locked up in Winter's room. He'd failed to mention that last night when he informed me of what was going on. I feel a spurt of rage. What is he doing in there, alone with my mate? My wolf is in agreement, growling lowly in my head. I almost stomped down to Winter's room and peered inside to see Dr. James slept rather uncomfortably in a chair, beside Winter's bedside. Well, at least he's not in her bed, not that I think my mate is capable of anything like that, even with what I'd done to her.

I knock softly on the door, seeing Winter is still sleeping peacefully, her hair spread out on the pillows and neatly tucked underneath a blanket. His eyes open and he sits upright looking startled, before turning his head around and viewing me guiltily. I watch as Dr. James gingerly gets to his feet and tiptoes to the doors, unlocking them and quietly coming out into the hallway, where I'm waiting impatiently for him.

"I need to speak to you, rather urgently, Alpha Kai", he tells me and he sounds grim like there's something serious he needs to tell me. I made a motion for him to walk with me but he shook his head.

"I cannot leave Winter alone in her room," the Dr says reluctantly, and my eyebrows rise in surprise, even as I begin to feel a tiny bit suspicious. I should have paid better attention to what he tried to tell me last night.

"Then give me a moment to mind-link Beta Langdon. He can come down and keep an eye on her", I said firmly, and did that, Langdon assuring me that he'd be a moment. The doctor looks grateful.

"Thank you Alpha Kai", he breathes " there's a good reason for needing someone outside of Winter's hospital room and I don't want to disturb her either while she's asleep", he adds. I'm in agreement. Part of me is happy she's asleep, it means prolonging the apology that I felt I owed her.

We waited, I was impatient, until Langdon finally turned up, looking breathless, as though he'd run straight to the hospital. I eye the sweat on his clothes and surmised that he probably had run.

"Yes, Alpha Kai," he said, and I turned to him.

"Beta Langdon," I said quietly, keeping my voice low, "I need you to keep an eye on Winter and don't let anyone besides yourself into her room. Is that understood?"

Dr. James speaks "that means no nurses, doctors, or anybody. Nobody should be stepping foot in her room at all."

Langdon looks bewildered but nods. "Of course, I'll keep a close eye on her, until your return", he tells me, and stations himself against the wall, his arms folded and a serious expression on his face. Thank god I had someone I could trust to have my back. Even with something as small as this.

"This way" Dr. James whispers and leads me to his office, closing the door securely behind him and motioning for me to take a seat.

"Winter is healing remarkably well" he started off as I listened intently, glad to hear it. " Her wounds are beginning to close and she's not in any pain right now. I don't know if you are aware, but she felt the pain of you being with someone else yesterday" he says, fixating his eyes on me. I feel a little indignant. How dare he scold me like that? I'm the Alpha, but another part of me acknowledges the truth of his words and I feel ashamed of myself. I wriggle uncomfortably in the chair. I feel like a child in the headmaster's office.

"There's something else as well. Her body is covered in scars, Alpha Kai, old ones that were clearly made with silver."

"I didn't torture her," I said dumbly, and he looked at me exasperated.

"I'm aware," he says with a groan, "but somebody has. It's been going on for years."

I'm quietly taking that in, feeling anger rise inside of me, even though I know I can't do anything for her, nothing can heal wounds made by Silver. Well, scratch that, the wounds would heal but the scars would remain.

Dr. James takes a deep breath and looks at me apprehensively. I know he's been holding something back. We wouldn't have had to go to his office if all he wanted to tell me, was to inform me about Winter's current condition.

"There was an incident last night," he tells me grimly. "Someone entered Winter's hospital room and increased her morphine dosage. It was put incredibly high. If she hadn't managed to rip her iv out, it could very well have been fatal."

I exploded. He'd failed to mention the part about the morphine, instead stating that Winter had been involved in an incident and that he was taking care of her. I should have asked questions, I thought to myself grimly. But then, the doctor probably assumed I didn't care much for Winter. Even though a small part of me does care for her.

"Your nurses must be incompetent" I, raged, standing up and pacing back and forth. " They put my mate's life in danger. How could they have made such a stupid mistake?" I'm incredulous at the thought of such a huge mistake taking place under Dr. James's supervision.

He holds up a hand to stop me. "That's the thing, all of the nurses deny that they entered the room and messed with the dosage. All of them have been working for me for years and I believe them. None of them know that she's your mate, Alpha Kai. I've not disclosed that information to anyone."

My eyes narrow as I realize what he's implying. "You think she was targeted because she's my mate?" I ask angrily and he nods.

"I'm positive. The thing is, how many people know about her?"

I stop and think. Langdon, of course, knows, but so do several of the patrols that were on the night that Winter stumbled onto my territory. They wouldn't know we were mates but I had been acting differently in her presence. Had someone maybe picked up on it? Overheard something they shouldn't have? Or was it just a lucky guess?

I cursed and threw my hands up in the air. I feel a sense of frustration and concern. Winter wasn't safe in the hospital. Now, what was I going to do? My wolf wanted to take her home with us, but it could have been anyone and there was no guarantee of her safety there, not to mention I didn't want Candice to find out about her, not yet anyway. That was a discussion to have with her another time, once I'd made up my mind about what I wanted to do.

"What do you suggest?" I asked the dr evenly as he thought about it.

"I'm prepared to discharge her, but she still needs to rest. Is there someone you trust completely with Winter's care? Someone who can guard her and keep her safe from harm?"

Oh, I have someone alright, but I doubt he's going to be pleased with the plan that's whirling around in my mind. My wolf is annoyed that we aren't taking care of her and sulks. I ignore him.

"It's safe to discharge her?" I confirmed and Dr. James nodded adamantly.

"So long as she rests, she'll be fine. I've got painkillers I can give her but I think she'll probably manage without them."

"I take it you locked yourself in the room then to keep Winter safe" I commented dryly and he blushed and looked at the ground.

"Forgive me, Alpha Kai" he stammers. "I didn't know what else to do. Her safety was my number one priority."

I waved his apology away. In the grand scheme of things, I didn't blame him. He'd taken care of my mate and kept her safe, going well above and beyond his job. I was grateful to him, more than anything.

"Thank you for taking care of her, Dr. James. You have my thanks" I told him, standing up and walking to the door, "arrange for Winter's discharge and I'll organize the rest", I added grimly, walking back towards the hospital room and wondering if Winter had woken up yet. I knew instantly she wasn't going to like

what I had in store for her, but there was no other choice, so she'd have to suck it up and deal with it. So would a certain someone else. I gave a wicked grin, this was going to be very interesting.

Chapter 43 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

My eyes feel heavy and gritty as I blink them open, the light bright and the hospital sounding busy from what I can discern. I had apparently fallen asleep during the night while Dr. James watched over me. To my surprise though, he seemed to be gone and I wondered if he'd left to deal with a patient. He is a busy doctor after all and has to supervise his staff.

Oh well, I thought to myself with a shrug. It was none of my business and it was morning anyway. I doubt anything's going to happen to me during the day. I take care of my business and look down at my hospital gown with a sigh. I don't have any other clothes to change into, so all I can do is grab a new gown and have a quick shower, before walking back out and frowning. There's a man I recognize, well sort of, standing guard outside in the hallway, his head peeking in as he watches me. What's he doing here, I wonder? Had Doctor James told him to stand guard? Or was it someone else? He looks so serious as well though. What's up with that?

"I'm here to watch over you," he tells me gruffly, and I give him a nod and a small smile. Well, that's a relief, I guess, but I wonder who has given him the order to do that. Was it Dr. James or was it, Alpha Kai? I suspect the latter even if I can't prove it. I felt a little flutter in my stomach at the thought that Alpha Kai might have come to visit me or that he cared enough to send one of his men to take care of me. It gives me a warm feeling, even if he hasn't accepted me yet, he still shows signs of caring. I would hold onto that as small as it might seem.

I climb back into bed, shivering slightly from the cold, and hastily pull my blankets back over me. The man is watching my every move, but he's also scanning his surroundings with his eyes. What kind of danger does he believe I might be in? I honestly think that last night was an accident, but I'm now seriously thinking that I'm wrong. Otherwise Dr. James' wouldn't have reacted the way he had.

It wasn't an accident, Winter, it was a deliberate attempt on your life. You have to be careful and don't trust anyone, especially not Alpha Kai. Asshole that he is.

Sabriel, watch your tongue. I know that you don't particularly like Alpha Kai, but he is in a difficult position. After all, he has a girlfriend already. It must be hard for him. It's like he's stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Not really. He's just making it hard. Trust me, the mate bond is sacred.

I still want to believe he'll come around.

Of course, he will! He's crazy not to want someone as incredible as you Winter.

I love you Sabriel.

Love you too, girlfriend.

I smell the most delicious scent and inhale greedily. I know this smell and would recognize it anywhere. It's Kai's and he's heading toward my hospital room. I can hear his footsteps as they approach and they sound angry, stomping like he's majorly pissed off and I cringe. Was he mad at me? I haven't done anything wrong though, I think to myself, slightly annoyed.

The footsteps stop just outside of the door though, and I exhale in relief. Then I hear his voice muttering to the man who is watching me from outside.

"Langdon", Kai says firmly "I require your assistance with something."

"Whatever it is, I'm at your service" the man, who must be Langdon, said calmly.

"Good, because it's an unusual request."

I frowned at that, wondering what kind of request Kai was going to make. Is Langdon perhaps his Beta? It would make sense. It must be pretty important if he's asking his Beta for something.

"I need you to take Winter in for now and keep watch over her."

I hear a splutter and realize it's coming from poor Langdon, who obviously hadn't been expecting such an unusual request. I feel a little indignant as well.

I didn't need anyone watching over me, I was perfectly fine with keeping myself safe. After all, I'd traveled a fair distance on my own, and that hadn't been easy. Even as a mute.

"Alpha Kai," Langdon says slowly, once he's recovered from the initial shock, "do you really believe I'm the best man for that job? Isn't there someone else you'd rather assign to this?"

"There's no one else I trust. Someone tried to kill Winter last night. It could have been anyone. You're the only one I would trust wholeheartedly with my mate."

"Someone tried to kill her" gasps Langdon, and although I strain my ears, wanting to hear more, they drop their voices so low that I'm unable to hear any more of the conversation.

Damn. Sabriel is excited that Kai's showing he cares for us. I'm confused as to why I'm being watched over by someone else if he cares so much. Then footsteps again and Kai comes bustling in, looking absolutely furious as I blink at him.

"Winter," he says gruffly as I sit upright and regard him warily. "This is Langdon," he says, motioning to the other man who comes in and looks hesitantly at me.

"I want him to keep watch over you for now," he says grimly, and I just nod, looking down at my hands and feeling disappointed. He was handing me over to another man, instead of protecting me himself. It more than stung a little.

He exhales, sensing my disappointment. It might be my imagination, but Kai also looks slightly guilty, fidgeting and moving from one foot to the other.

"About yesterday," he says finally, avoiding my eyes, and I felt myself instantly deflate, suspecting where this was going and not wanting to hear it. Please, I think to myself, please don't say the words I think you're about to say. I don't know if I can bear it.

"I should never have kissed you as I did. I had no right, please forgive me" he adds, and I feel sick to my stomach. He's apologizing for the kiss like it didn't mean anything to him, while it had meant so much more to me. I try to keep tears from forming in my eyes.

Langdon looks around the room, looking distinctly uncomfortable, also not meeting my eyes. Clearly, he hadn't been privy to that information, because he also looked very surprised.

"Langdon," he says, addressing his Beta, who snaps to attention, "do not let Winter out of your sight for any reason."

Langdon nodded, looking serious. I want to scream and am bitterly aware that I cannot. I'm here, I want to scream, right here, and I can hear everything. Talk to me!

Kai looks at me and something flashes in his eyes, so quickly that I almost miss it. Was that concern? Or perhaps guilt?

"Winter, I want you to listen to Langdon. He's here to protect you and to keep you safe. Dr. James informed me as to what went on last night and I'm making sure nothing else happens. Until we can find the culprit, you'll be staying with Langdon."

Well gee, thanks, I thought to myself sarcastically. I would hate to ruin his day. I know I'm being irrational, but he's making me absolutely furious, so much so, that my hands are slowly balling into fists.

"Alpha Kai, how long am I required to keep Winter with me?" asks Langdon unsurely.

Kai's head whips around and he glares at Langdon, who gulps nervously. His eyes turned pitch black for a moment and I stared in fascination, wondering if his wolf was in control or if Langdon had just made him that angry.

"For as long as it takes", he thunders, and Langdon flinches.

"Yes of course, sorry Alpha Kai" he quickly mutters and Kai just harrumphs at him.

"Dr. James is discharging you, Winter, so Langdon, you're to take her to your place and wait for further instructions. If anything happens, inform me immediately", Kai snarls, and Langdon emphatically nods while I just stare at both of them in a rage. Do they not realize how condescending it is that they're talking about me as though I'm not even in the room? It was infuriating.

"I have to go," Alpha Kai says quietly as I stare at him, my eyes pleading for him to stay. He seems to hesitate. "I have to go and talk to Candice" he murmurs and my heart sinks. Of course, he was going to his girlfriend. How stupid of me to think otherwise. After all, why would he choose to actually be mates with me, when he had someone like that wanting to be with him? I couldn't even compare to how beautiful that girl is.

Langdon and I watch as Kai turns and leaves the room, his footsteps thudding loudly on the hospital floor. Langdon gives me a long considering look and I can't help it, my face crumples and my tears start to flow, making Langdon even more panicked as he attempts, rather futilely, to comfort me.

Chapter 44 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Kai POV

I sighed and put my head in my hands. Winter's been entrusted to Langdon, so I should feel relieved, but if anything, I'm even more nervous. We haven't been able to find the culprit who deliberately increased Winter's morphine and tried to kill her. Nobody saw anything, which meant the person responsible had to be in and out of her room within seconds. It was infuriating not being able to get the information I required. As Alpha, it was my responsibility to find the person responsible.

I wonder how Langdon's getting on. I know he wasn't pleased with me when I demanded that he take Winter in and she become his ward, but what else am I supposed to do? It's not like I can take her in. I can't help but remember the look in her eyes when I apologized for kissing her. How hurt she looked, as though I'd betrayed her and the guilt was slowly eating me inside. Why had I done that? I could have just said nothing, instead of breaking her heart the way I had. God, I was such a bastard. I've really sunk low.

That's it, I can't keep myself back anymore. Winter's in Langdon's house right now, and I need to know exactly how she's doing. I mind-link him, not caring how grumpy he sounds when he responds. I'm the Alpha, he does as I say. Besides, this was an emergency of sorts. What if she was in danger? I ignored the small voice in my head that reminded me that Langdon would mind-link me if that was the case.

Langdon, how is Winter going? Is she safe? Are you treating her well?

He sounds irritated when he replies. Depends on what you mean by how she's going. She's a right pain in the ass if you ask me. Not that you care, you're the one who stuck her with me.

My wolf gives a low growl at that. Remember who you are speaking to Langdon. Don't piss me off right now.

He sighs. I apologize, Alpha. But ever since we've come back here from the hospital, she hasn't done much. She's just moping around and looking bored. Nothing I do seems to spark any interest in her. It doesn't help that she cannot speak at all. I've provided her with paper and a pen, but she doesn't want to write unless I ask her some sort of question. She seems to be severely depressed.

I flinch at that. I have the feeling that I'm responsible for that.

Are you saying she's being difficult on purpose? Or is she upset? If she is upset, I know it's because of what I've done. It would have nothing whatsoever to do with Langdon, especially since he was only following my orders.

It's more like she's given up. I don't know how else to describe it. She's just not happy, I think you might have broken her when you apologized for kissing her. She hasn't even smiled once since she's been here.

Ouch. It sounds really bad now. But what could I do to make things any better? Is she taking care of herself at all? Eating, sleeping, all of that?

No, Alpha Kai. She has barely touched a thing and hasn't been sleeping well at all. If I didn't know any better, I would say she was having nightmares. She gets up at night and just wanders through the house, eventually passing out on the couch. She won't let me put her back to bed either, seems to prefer sleeping out there instead.

I really don't like the sound of that. What could she possibly be having nightmares about, that would make her prefer to walk until she collapsed exhausted on the couch? My wolf is also in agreement, his concern almost overwhelming for our mate. I resist the urge to go out there and check up on her, although my resistance seems to be weakening when it comes to Winter.

Has she confided in you at all?

No Alpha. She hasn't attempted to communicate with me much at all, even though I've provided the necessary stuff, pens and paper, and whatever else she needs. She's just not interested in anything. Perhaps it would be best if you took her in instead?

I hesitate. It does sound like Winter isn't doing well, but then, I still have Candice to contend with. Besides, Winter wouldn't want to be with me anyway. At least I assume she wouldn't. I trace the scars on my face thoughtfully. If I just rejected her, she would be free to leave, but my wolf howls at the thought and begins to furiously threaten me, calling me all sorts of vile insults. Not only that, but he begins to berate me over Candice, calling her a gold digger and a hussy, not worthy of us and a bimbo. He was not holding back. Then again, when it came to Candice, he never did. Plus, I don't want to reject Winter, as I've started daydreaming about what it would be like to be with her instead of Candice. Another bad sign.

If the situation doesn't resolve itself soon, in the next few days, I'll consider moving her elsewhere. Do you think she would be more comfortable living with a female member of the pack?

I can tell that Langdon is mulling that over. It'd never occurred to me that Winter might possibly not want to be living with a male, but there are really no females that I trust completely to take care of my mate. There is no way in hell I'd even consider having her close to Candice. That was a sure way for a recipe for disaster. Plus, Candice gets jealous when another female so much as looks at me too long.

I don't know. It's entirely possible that she would be more at ease in a female's company. She could be afraid of men, for all we know.

I frown. I thought this would have been the perfect solution and now I was going to have to think of something else. I don't want Winter to be completely miserable. That's not fair to her. Then again, was any of this current situation fair to her? My wolf didn't think so. My heart is screaming out to take her in, to do what's right and even my wolf won't let up. I'm forced to put a block up rather than continue listening to him rage and vent at me.

Continue to inform me of her condition. If she continues to deteriorate or show signs of starving herself, then I'll take her out of your custody. In the meantime, think of someone we can entrust to her care. Which female member of our pack do you trust implicitly with something as important as taking care of my mate?

That's a tough one, Alpha Kai, but I'll do my best to think of someone. Give me some time to think about it. I can't think of anyone off the top of my head, but it will come to me. Just wait and see.

Take all the time you need Langdon. That's all I need to hear right now. Thank you for your report.

I cut off the mind link and groaned out loud. I hope Winter's not being difficult because she's mad at me, but another part of me is worried that I've completely broken her heart. A small part of me is whispering that I should go and see her for myself, but another part of me is desperately ignoring that voice, saying that Candice is more of a priority. But why? For the first time ever, I find myself questioning why I'm continuing to see Candice when I had a real-life mate right in my grasp. Was all of this worth it? Was Candice worth holding onto? She's been loyal, that part's true. But she's also had her eyes on being Luna right from the beginning.

In fact, even now as I think about it, I can't think of a single thing that Candice has done for me in the relationship, that doesn't include sex. Have I been a fool and been swayed by the fact that she's been one of the only women wanting to be with me and willing to look past my scars? Was I letting my fears hold me back from finding true happiness? Was my unwillingness to be vulnerable ever again ruining any chance I have of having a relatively normal life and a family of my own?

Maybe it is time to seriously ponder the possibilities and what I want in my future. Because if I'm forced to be entirely honest with myself, I didn't see Candice as my future wife. In fact, I have never seen her in that role. But when I picture Winter, I can clearly see her in a wedding dress, looking beautiful as she walks down the aisle. My stomach churns and my head begins to hurt. Then there's a knock on the door and I shudder, knowing instinctively just who is on the other side, the last person I want to see, let alone talk to right now. Why did she have to come and interrupt me right now, while I was feeling like this?

Chapter 45 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

It's been months since Winter has been gone and I've gotten myself a regular job in a cafe as a barista of all things. Can you imagine that? I never would have thought I would have to be as responsible as I now am, taking care of

the bills and still going to school at the same time. Is this how Winter felt every day when she had done all the household chores and responsibilities?

"Thanks, have a good one" one of my regulars yelled out as they left, the last customer of the night, and I closed the door gratefully and locked it. Now all I have to do is clean up and I'm done for the night. It doesn't take long, I've got myself into a regular routine and before I know it, I've put my coat on and ducked out the door. Brrr, it's slightly cold and I shiver, putting my hands in my pockets.

I walked home slowly. It's otherwise a beautiful night and the stars are twinkling overhead. I don't bother to use the car anymore. Not when I can avoid it anyway. Walking saves gas and means I have more money to take care of the bills. Besides, it's not like home is that far away and I'm not frightened that someone's going to jump me. I'm a shifter for heaven's sake, not to mention, the town is mainly made up of pack members and shifters.

I stared at my house, feeling strangely hesitant. It looks so uninviting and cold. Then again, it's felt that way since Winter's been gone. I never really saw just how having my little sister around made the house feel more like home. I miss her laughter and her smiles, even if her smiles were rare and few and far between. I miss Winter. I miss my little sister more than I ever thought possible.

I unlocked the door and put my keys away in the entrance hall, turning on the lights. It might seem silly, but I hate that the house is dark when I get home. I really should remember to at least leave the front porch light on, but it always seems to slip my mind. Sigh, the refrigerator is practically empty. Damn. I'll have to go grocery shopping tomorrow. My stomach growls. Damn, I'm hungry.

Then it hits me. There's a scent in the house and it doesn't belong to me. It's not Winter's either. It's also frighteningly familiar, although I can't quite place it. It's definitely not father's, I'd know the smell of that bastard anywhere. It seems to be throughout the entire house. Has someone broken in while I've been working? But nothing appears to have been stolen. Then again, it's not like there's anything worth stealing in this house anyway.

I sniffed and began to do a methodical search of the rooms, my body tensed and poised to fight. But there was no one there. The smell is faint like it's been several hours since whoever it belongs to has been here, but there is one more place that I have yet to check and I'm not looking forward to it. But the

basement needs to be checked and I'm not going to shy away like a coward. But why the hell is this scent so familiar to me? It's like I've smelt this scent before but I can't for the life of me think who it might belong to.

The smell is stronger as I approach the door leading down to the basement and I give a grin. If the person is still down there, they are in for one hell of a beating. I opened the door cautiously and began my descent down the stairs, listening for any signs of a person waiting to ambush me, the smell getting increasingly stronger. I have no doubt that there's someone waiting down here for me and my eyes continually scan my surroundings. My whole body is tense, ready to shift at a second's notice in order to protect myself.

Where are you, you bastard, I think fiercely to myself, prepared to shift at a second's notice. I reach the bottom of the stairs and begin to move forward, ears pricked for the tiniest of sounds. The basement is dark and I curse the fact that I've never gotten around to replacing the light globe that's no longer working. Some light would be really useful right about now.

I'm cautious about moving around the various bits of junk and furniture that are piled haphazardly all over the place. The basement's been used primarily as a junk room over the years, but it also contains one other thing that makes me sick to my stomach as I stare at it. The cage, or more accurately a cell, stands in one corner, made of silver with shackles and restraints against the wall, to keep someone immobile and unable to move. A cell, that I remember with remorse, Winter was often placed in and locked up for what our father deemed as misbehavior. Even now, I can still remember her screams as she pleaded to be let out. The crying. God, my stomach churns to look at it and I resolve to get rid of the cell as soon as humanly possible. There's nothing but bad energy down here and it's like it sucks all the happiness out of you.

The sound of footsteps rushing towards me, has my body turning, but too little too late as I feel a sharp pinprick in my thigh. I fell, my knees buckling to the ground, feeling strange, my body almost paralyzed. What the hell have I been dosed with? How could I have been so stupid and let my guard down, even for a moment? What is it that this person wants from me? They'd been hiding in the shadows, awaiting the perfect opportunity to strike and I'd given it to them. I'd let myself be distracted by the cell and gotten lost in my memories. How stupid could I be?

My head feels like it's spinning and becoming hazy as I drop to a lying down position on the hard concrete floor. My body refuses to move, let alone shift,

and it's now that I realize I'm unable to hear my wolf at all. That meant only one thing. I've been dosed with wolfsbane.

"Who are you" I managed to mutter, my throat seizing. The footsteps are slower now and the person comes right around to my front, giving me a perfect view of them. My eyes widened in horror. I must be imagining things surely. The wolfsbane must be playing havoc with my mind. That's the only logical explanation I can think of, as they bend over me. They're not real, this is just a dream of some sort. I'm hallucinating. This wasn't possible at all. Had I been drugged back at the diner? Had someone put something in one of my drinks?

Because this can't be happening. My eyes are feeling heavy now and I'm struggling to keep them open. The person chuckles down at me as I flinch. The person sounds real, but do they feel real? The prick in my leg had felt real enough.

"Well now" he murmurs, " it looks like you're in a bit of a sticky situation now, aren't you Damien", he says with a smirk. He's getting blurry now but the voice, the voice is exactly how I remember him. How is he here? Why is he here and what is it that he wants? Oh god, is he after Winter? Darkness surrounds me and I succumb to it, passing out completely unconscious and left to this person's mercy. How is he still alive and what does he want from me after all this time?

Chapter 46 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

I woke up, my eyes feeling gritty and my throat parched. My whole body feels warm all over and there's a distinct ache that I can feel throughout all of my muscles. I can also feel my flesh burning as I open my eyes, seeing straight away that I'm restrained and shackled in the cell that poor Winter used to be punished in. Fuck. I'm in trouble.

What the hell was going on? Then I remember and suck in a shocked breath, still unable to believe it myself, but knowing that I had seen it with my very own eyes. I struggle against the restraints but am not surprised when they don't budge, the burning of the flesh making me howl.

"It's pointless," his voice says as he comes out from the shadows, a massive smirk on his damn face. I hiss and he just smiles wider, enjoying my predicament.

"You" I gasped, tugging on the restraints and cursing "how is this possible? I thought you were dead", I hissed and he laughed, the sound filling the silent room and sending chills down my spine. He's clearly enjoying himself right now.

"That's what I wanted all of you to believe. It took a while for me to recover and it served my purpose for everyone to think I had perished. It allowed me to plan my revenge and my next move" he almost purrs as I spit at him in defiance. I don't know why Thomas is here, but something tells me it's because of Winter and has nothing to do with me. Plus, he smells funny, like he's not just a shifter anymore. In fact, it's almost like he's a hybrid. But how is that possible?

"What did you do?" I breathed, feeling sick. "How is it possible you are here?"

He cocks his head at me. "Funny, I would have thought you'd know what a vampire smells like now. It's wonderful", he adds quietly, "my parents tracked down a vampire and had me drink their blood to stay alive. Now I'm a hybrid" he whispers as I shudder, "and I enjoy it. It was worth the months of pain as I went through the transition. You would have thought it would be quick and painless, but that's all a lie. Not to mention not everyone survives the process of becoming a hybrid, but I got lucky. Picture the speed I possess and the ability to heal even quicker. Sadly, I'm not a full vampire, but drinking the blood healed me far quicker than being a shifter would have. I guess money really can buy everything" he adds thoughtfully "I even have a perfume that will hide the vampire scent from other shifters. I just don't see the point of applying it right now. You're going to die anyway."

He holds up a silver dagger, his hands clad in leather gloves, and I gulp, eyeing it nervously. His grin grows wider.

"What do you want" I spit out, wishing I could lay my hands on him.

"Isn't it obvious" he growls, "I want to know where your sister Winter is, Damien, and you're going to tell me everything" he whispers threateningly.

So I was right then, he wanted my sister and I was just a means of getting information to him. Bastard. As if I'm going to give my sister up after everything he'd put her through. He's a monster.

"I don't know where she is" I hedged, not exactly lying. She could be freaking anywhere by now, it has been several months now after all.

He looks displeased and comes closer, touching the blade and waving it around. Without warning, he plunges it into my thigh and I give a loud howl, my skin burning, red-hot fire running through my veins. It hurts like a bitch and I wriggle around, trying to dislodge the bloody thing, with no success. God it hurts, it's excruciating and it takes all my self-control not to scream and give that bastard the satisfaction of hearing it.

He pulls it out and it makes a sickening slurping sound as it leaves my body. I slump in relief. But it's short-lived.

"Where's Winter" he breathes. "I've missed her, you know. Sweet little thing that she is."

I feel the bile rise up in my throat. After everything, he still wants her. He's out of his mind or delusional, or both. Either way, he's a serious threat to her.

"I don't know", I spit at him and he sighed.

"You're making this harder than it needs to be, Damien. You know it hurts me to have to do this to a close friend of mine, but you're leaving me no other choice."

He plunges the blade into my ribcage and pulls it down as I scream, my bones cracking as he pulls it out, blood trickling down my side and onto the floor. Fuck. I curse at him vehemently and he just stands there, his eyebrows raised, waiting for me to finish yelling obscenities at him.

"Fuck you", I yelled at him.

His eyes narrow and he glares at me. "This can all end now. Don't pretend you give a damn about your little sister after all this time, Damien. I can remember everything you did to her when you bullied her. Not to mention, this cell or cage was hardly made for you, was it? You put Winter in here, so don't act all high and mighty with me. You're just as much a monster as I am. The difference is, I can admit it."

Damn him for being right. He glances over at the nearby trolley of implements and puts the dagger down, grabbing a whip with silver studs instead, and examining it carefully.

"I bet you used all of these on Winter, didn't you," he whispered, "and I bet she screamed every time. Now tell me where she is" he snarled, and I shook my head.

Crack. I feel the whip as it hits me directly across the chest, the silver studs digging in and ripping flesh out as he pulls it back. It hurts like a bitch. I scream as he hits me over and over again, the whips leaving large gouges and scratches all over me, blood pouring out of all of the various wounds. I'm panting, trying to keep conscious and bitterly aware that, at this rate, I'm not going to be able to keep myself awake much longer.

He finally stops and I choke, spluttering and trying to get my breath back. I can feel myself weakening.

"I can do this all night if I have to," Thomas says pleasantly, as I flinch. He's not bluffing. Even I know that and there's no one who's going to check on me and find me down here. I'm literally fucked.

He brutally kicks me and I scream as I feel the bones break in my leg, cracking, the pain shooting upwards as I swear and scream, panting heavily as I glare at him. My whole body is in excruciating pain, I'm trembling against the wall and can't move a muscle, limp in my restraints now.

"Do I need to keep going?" Thomas asks, and I can't withstand the pain anymore. Call me a coward, but there's not much else I can do. If he continues, I'm going to die by his hands. Besides, Winter is most likely far out of his reach by now, or at least that's what I'm hoping.

"Stop" I heave "just stop."

He cocks his head at me and smiles smugly. The bastard knows he has me right where he wants me, his eyes are gleaming in satisfaction.

"Where is she," he demands, and I'm astonished that he has no idea that she's been gone for months. Had he literally come here, straight from his recovery? Or his hiding out and waiting for the right time to strike? Why was he striking now? What had changed that made him go looking for her?

"Gone" I coughed out, blood spraying on the floor.

"What do you mean gone?" he asks, annoyed.

"She's been gone for months" I say miserably, "had enough of all the bullying and everything else and up and left."

He looks pissed. "Where would she go," he says irritably, and I stare down at the floor, everything going blurry now.

"I don't know. She wanted to find a pack to call home" I coughed out, "that's all I know."

He moves closer and leans in to whisper into my ear as I shudder, " You had better be telling the truth, Damien, because otherwise, I'm coming back to finish your sorry ass off and that's a promise."

"I'm not," I wheezed and apologized profusely to Winter in my mind. The second I get out of here, I'm going to be searching for Winter and, with luck, I'll get to her first. That's if I live to tell the tale, that is.

He kicks me in the gut as I cough blood, stepping back and sighing. "There's no point killing you, not when you'll just die down here on your own anyway," he says as I can barely look at him, the room beginning to spin.

He began to walk away, a thoughtful look on his face. "I bet she went south" he muttered to himself, "there are a lot more packs to travel to in that direction."

He turns and regards me from the bottom of the stairs. "Good luck", he smirks, "you're going to need it. At least I know you can't warn Winter. She was always too poor to have a cellphone, wasn't she," he grins.

I shakily give him the finger as he chuckles and begins to ascend the stairs, every footstep like a dagger in my heart. Soon enough, he's gone and I finally close my eyes, my body hurting all over, and gratefully succumb to the darkness which surrounds me and embraces me.

Chapter 47 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Johnathon POV

I scowl. It's been only one day, but even I've noticed that Damien didn't make it to school today. Normally, I would shrug it off, but since Winter's been gone, Damien has attended school without fail, as well as doing that job of his afterward. Either he's sick and I'm being paranoid or something has happened to him. I suspect it's the latter because that's what my gut is saying to me.

I impatiently wait for school to finish, the ticking of the clock driving me insane. As an Alpha, I can just get up and leave, and nobody would dare to stop me. But as a son with a scary mother, it's wiser to just wait rather than deal with something horrendous later. My mother scares everyone when she's angry.

Thank god. The final bell rings and I peel the hell out of there, getting hurriedly into my car, and ignoring the girls who continually try to swarm me. Jessica, in particular, has been nothing but annoying and almost throwing herself into my path. No matter how much I tell her that I'm not interested, it's like she thinks I'm playing hard to get instead. I shudder. As if I wanted her lips anywhere near mine.

Damien's house isn't far and it looks dilapidated from the outside. It's certainly in shoddy shape and that's putting things kindly. I frown. I never realized just what bad a shape his place was in. The door is locked and I rattle it, knocking on the door. There's no answer and I sigh. But I'm positive that I can smell his scent, it's quite strong in fact, so it would make sense that he was in there. I ponder what to do and then shrug. I could worry about the damage later. I picked up a rather large rock and broke a window in the living room, using my elbow to push out the stubborn bits that still clung there. At least now I can get in. Damien can curse at me later for what I've done.

"Damien" I called softly, but there was no reply. I glanced around. The kitchen is empty and all the lights are off. I sniff, his scent is strong and permeates throughout the entire house. Still, it seemed to be more pungent towards a certain door and I opened it, seeing stairs descending into a dark room. The basement. I tread lightly, my body tense, prepared for an attack, but nothing happened. Bile rises in my throat as I smell the metallic scent of blood, both old and new. Something has happened down here.

I have to move past bits of furniture and various piles of junk to get to the source of the smell and once I'm there, I halt in my tracks unable to believe what I'm seeing with my own eyes. My heart gives a jolt. Damien is shackled to the wall inside a large cell, his body slumped and there is blood, so much blood everywhere, a lot of it dried on his body. Someone's beaten the living shit out of him. I raced to the cage and it was unlocked. I ignore the burning of

my flesh as I rip the door open and rush inside. I can see his chest moving, slowly, so he's still alive, thank god, but barely.

I need a key for the shackles and restraints. Damien's head is slumped and I gently tap it, hearing him moan as his eyelids fluttered open. "Damien, where's the key?" I ask urgently and he blinks at me, still confused and disorientated.

"Kitchen, pantry, hook" he rasped out and I raced upstairs and located the key exactly where he said, hanging on a hook in the kitchen pantry. Seconds later, I'm cursing and undoing the restraints, etc while my flesh burns. Unfortunately, Damien drops to the ground and I fail to catch him. He moans.

I rolled him over so that he faced me. I can tell he's been stabbed multiple times and whipped as well. "Damien", I whisper "who did this to you?"

He stays silent and I wonder if it was just a random attack. But his eyelids flutter and then I hear his voice. "Thomas" he moans and I stop cold.

I must have misheard him surely? Maybe he was thinking about Thomas but it couldn't have actually been him, because Thomas was dead, everyone knew that.

"Who?" I asked again as his face turned towards me, ashen and drained of color.

"Thomas" he whispers hoarsely, and I flinch. No, that can't be.

"Thomas is dead," I said firmly, but he shook his head.

"Not dead," he rasps, "alive. He's a hybrid now, half shifter, half vampire. I saw it with my own eyes."

Fuck. Hybrids are dangerous creatures and shifters and vampires are the two strongest races in the world. I'm amazed that he survived the transition, most attempting to become hybrids don't. I can't believe Thomas risked it, but it explains why Thomas is still alive.

He struggled to sit upright and I helped him, panting heavily from the exertion. Now that he's no longer touching the silver, his wounds are slowly starting to heal in front of my eyes.

"Thomas is alive," he tells me in a slightly stronger voice as I blink at him astonished. How was this even possible?

"What does he want?" I ask, but part of me suspects that I already know the answer, feeling sick to my stomach.

"Winter" answers Damien and bile rises in my throat. I had thought that this had all been put to rest, that Thomas was no longer a threat to Winter. She believed him to be dead. She had no way of knowing he was still alive and out to get her. She was in danger and she didn't even know it.

"Fuck" I swear, punching the wall in a fury while Damien chuckles lowly behind me.

"He's already gone after her," he says bitterly, "has at least a day's headstart. He won't rest until he finds her" he exhales, placing a hand on his side and wincing in pain.

"I need to take you to the hospital", I tell him, but he shakes his head.

"There's no time for that. I'm going after him. Either I take him out, or I find Winter so that I can warn her." His voice was resolute. There is no arguing with him, not when it sounds that final.

"Why didn't you mind-link me?" I asked.

"Bastard injected me with wolfsbane, so I couldn't. It's barely worn off yet."

I don't blame him for wanting to protect his sister. But if Thomas is this determined and this crazy to find Winter, it would be suicidal to go on his own. He wouldn't stand a chance if he came across a group of rogues during his travels. Idiot. I ran a hand through my hair in frustration. I'm not about to let Thomas get his hands on Winter either. She might no longer be my mate, but she was a kind and loving person, who deserved far better than to have Thomas try and take off with her. Besides, part of me really wants to know if she's alright and if she's found a pack to call home. This was my chance. If only to make sure she's happy. Besides, I can't just stand around knowing she's in danger. Not when I can help save her.

I looked at Damien grimly. "Fine, but I'm going with you," I said, helping him to his feet as he stumbled awkwardly.

"I can't ask you" he protests weakly and I wave it away.

"You're not asking me, I'm telling you", I snapped and he grinned, his eyes lighting up with fervor.

"Let's go then," he says and I roll my eyes.

"We need supplies, clothes, and food. Medical items", I say pointedly, and he swears, vehemently. I merely stare at him and wait until he grudgingly agrees. For a man that's wounded, you would think he'd realize that medical supplies were a necessity for Christ's sake.

I get my own clothes delivered to me and sort out the rest. Within an hour, both of us are ready to go on foot so that we can travel like wolves and be inconspicuous. Besides, I doubt Thomas is driving, especially given his state of mind. I walked into the forest, Damien close on my heels. I pray we get to Winter first or come across Thomas because if we don't, there's a high chance that this time, she won't survive her meeting with him.

Chapter 48 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

God, I'm pathetic, that's the only way I can think to describe myself. Ever since I left the hospital and have been confined to this large house of the Beta, I've moped around and refused to eat. I can tell Langdon is getting fed up with me, but honestly, I'm so far gone by this stage that I don't even care. All I can think of is him and the way he treats me, one moment like I'm precious to him and he can't wait to touch me and then, at the same instant, like a burden. He could easily get rid of me by rejecting me. Why hasn't he? It would solve both of our problems.

Sabriel, of course, is clinging to hope. He'll come around, just you wait and see Winter.

Sabriel, why do you care so much? Honestly, I think we could do so much better, don't you? What is it about this man, that has you drooling for him so much?

He's handsome for a start and I bet he's well-endowed.

So? I'm willing to bet we can easily find another man just as handsome and, ahem, well-endowed. Besides, it's not the size that matters but how you use it. Isn't it?

He might not show it but he needs us.

No, he doesn't Sabriel, he's an Alpha. The last thing he needs is a weakling like us or a mute Luna. Honestly, he'd be doing himself a huge favor by rejecting us.

Don't ever talk like that! Otherwise, I'll do something to embarrass you the next time we shift Winter, I mean that.

You wouldn't dare.

Try me. We both know I'm not bluffing.

It's not an empty threat and I'm frightened to wonder what it is that she would actually do. With Sabriel, there's no predicting her next move. But I'm bored as all fuck. However, something Sabriel has said excites me and I perk right up. It's been ages since we last shifted and went for a run. What is there to stop me now? I grinned to myself. Langdon's already left to go discuss god knows what with Alpha Kai in regards to pack business and sternly told me to stay put. But why should I listen to him? I have a right to do what I want so long as it doesn't hurt anyone. Besides, it would just be for a little while. I'm dying being cooped up inside this bachelor house of Langdon's. I need a good distraction.

Sabriel, I want to shift. Let's go for a run.

You don't have to tell me twice, but what about Langdon? He'll be super angry with us. I'm not taking the blame for this, not when it's your idea. Remember that.

Screw Langdon. He doesn't own me and he can get stuffed if he thinks I'm staying here on his orders.

I knew you had it in you girlie. Let's get this party started! Oooh yeah.

I shift, not even caring that my clothes are ripped to shreds in the process. Sabriel is ecstatic at being free, prancing around in my head. I laugh, realizing that we maybe should have shifted outside, but at least we stand a better

chance of getting away quickly, right? I let Sabriel have control, if only to get her to shut up. But then she does the most disgusting thing ever by the front door, resting on her haunches and literally peeing next to the door as I stared in disbelief. She lets out a low growl of satisfaction and begins to trot toward the woods, her tongue lolling out of her mouth.

Sabriel, you have just marked Beta Langdon's door. Do you have any idea how angry you've probably just made him?

Well, I didn't have to do the other one, otherwise, I would have left a steaming heap of it to go with. Show him what I truly think about him.

Ewww, that's disgusting Sabriel. I don't care if you are a wolf, there are boundaries, you know!

I don't believe in boundaries. Ever.

Well, clearly.

It's beautiful outside, the sun is warm and shining down on us. We creep closer to the trees and sniff at the pine scent, delighted in the nature surrounding us. We run, trees passing by in a blur, our paws hitting the dirt floor with a thud. I feel the exhilaration of being free from everything and away from all of my troubles, even if it's just for a little while.

We come to a small stream and, out of interest, Sabriel stops to look at it. I drew in a breath shocked. Is it my imagination or are we slightly bigger now? Not too much, but enough that it was noticeable.

We're bigger because we're growing as a person. You defied Langdon's orders to stay put and put your wants first for a change. This is only the beginning of what our transformation could be. Just grow as a person and become more confident. Winter, that's all it takes. Not to mention believing in yourself.

You make it sound so easy, Sabriel.

That's because it is. Wolves are cocky, don't you know? We have no room for doubt in our heads. We just do it, so to speak. Bet we get massive once you finally do the deed.

Did you really have to bring that up for heaven's sake?

Hours passed by and with great reluctance I took back control, trotting back towards the pack house and our prison, so to speak. Damn it. I hate this, Alpha Kai bloody well needs to explain himself to me, and soon! We were approaching the edge of the forest when we heard a low, furious growl from right in front of us. Langdon is standing there with his hands folded across his chest, glowering down at me. Well, I'm fucked, I think mildly to myself. Sabriel just swears at him in her mind and threatens to pee on him as well. I seriously consider letting her do it. That's how annoyed I am.

"Did you have a nice run?" Langdon says sarcastically, "because you've been gone for hours, Winter" he snaps, and I tremble while Sabriel wants to chomp at him.

His eyes narrow and he grits his teeth. Man, he looks majorly pissed off. "You peed on my door," he says incredulously, while Sabriel snickers in amusement. "Literally peed on it" he fumes.

"Peed next to it" he corrects himself, "but you still marked your territory!"

Ha, guess he had no one else do that to him. I was betting a crazy ex of his would have. Just goes to show.

Shut up Sabriel, can't you see how mad he is right now?

I can always make him madder!

Please don't, I don't think my heart can take it.

Langdon lifts his head up to the skies and squints his eyes at the brightness. "God, I don't get paid enough to deal with this shit. He can darn well look after you himself. I don't have it in me to keep playing nursemaid, I'm a man for heaven's sake". Now he's almost shouting at the sky, Sabriel listening intently, fascinated by him, "A man's castle should be private" he's venting, walking back and forth. At this rate, I'm going to end up with whiplash from looking back and forth. Sabriel is fascinated by his behavior and enjoys herself by watching it.

I think we've tipped him over the edge, Sabriel.

Yeah, he's gone loco. How cool. We should have done this to him earlier.

"I've been nice, I've followed his instructions, and does he thank me", he's roaring now as I sit on my haunches and watch. I don't dare interrupt his tirade. Besides, at the moment, it's like he's completely forgotten about me.

"If he wants her to be looked after, then he can bloody well take care of his own mate" he booms at the trees, birds taking flight as he startles them from their perches. "I need my space back" he wails tragically. Even Sabriel is feeling sorry for him now. Clearly, he misses being a bachelor.

Suddenly, he stops in his tracks and stares directly at me, his jaw clenched and his eyes dark, almost pitch black. "Shift" he whispers furiously and I reluctantly do so, standing there, completely naked in front of him and shivering slightly.

He averts his eyes and pulls his shirt off, handing it to me. At least he's still being semi-nice. It doesn't last long.

"Right" he mutters once I'm dressed "that's it, new plan. This isn't working, I'm going to force him to do the right thing" he snarls, gripping my arm and forcing me to keep up with him.

I wonder where we are going. I don't have long to wait. "I'm taking you to the dungeon" he explains apologetically as I stare at him in shock "it's the only way I can think of that Alpha Kai will come to see you. I refuse to be put in the middle anymore", he adds grimly, and I stumble along with him, feeling sorry for myself. Will Alpha Kai actually care enough to come down and retrieve me from the dungeon or will he let me stay down there out of his sight and neatly tucked away? This blows. So much for being free. Sabriel is wrestling with the notion of biting Langdon and I plead with her not to. That will only make things worse.

The door to the cell slams shut and I stare at Langdon morosely as he flushes and glances away. "I'll come and get you if he doesn't come," he says guiltily, "but I'm at my wits' end Winter! I'm a bachelor for heaven's sake and I'm too young to play a father. Besides, Kai needs someone like you, he's just too bloody stubborn to see it. Wait down here, I bet you anything he'll be letting you out by nightfall and, finally, he can darn well have a proper conversation with you, as your mate" he growls. The door to the dungeon shuts with a loud clang and I sink to the floor with a grimace. Langdon had better be right about this because Sabriel was coming up with all sorts of unique ways to pay him back and he didn't want to know just how far she was willing to go. I'm even

scared of some of the ideas she's coming up with and how willing she is to take her revenge.

Chapter 49 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Alpha Kai POV

God, this is so frustrating. The words on the papers are completely illegible and it's all I can do to look at them blankly. In the two hours I've spent here, I've literally got no work done. Nada. All I can think about is Langdon's last report on Winter. Was she really not eating or doing anything? Or was he just trying to wind me up? I know that he doesn't care for the way I'm treating Winter, but as the Beta, he needs to obey my will, even if he doesn't want to. I ignore the guilt that's eating inside of me that tells me I shouldn't be treating a friend this way.

Just go and talk to her. Stop being such a coward, my wolf growls in my head and I pointedly ignore him. He might have readily accepted Winter as our mate, but I'm still hesitant. Besides, she was doing fine, wasn't she? Langdon was probably exaggerating. The bastard that he is. It couldn't really be that bad, could it? Now I'm hesitating and wondering if I should contact him again. Damn it.

Oh god no. The familiar scent of a sickening perfume permeates through the air. She's the last person I want to see right now. I've been avoiding her like the plague and readily handing my credit card over, in an attempt to avoid her as much as I possibly can. I brace myself as the door bursts open and she comes sailing in. I stared at her in shock. What on earth is she thinking? Especially dressing like that? It's beyond ridiculous. God, does she not look in the mirror?

For once, instead of being turned on by her outfit, I felt repulsed by it instead. Candice has dressed herself in a large coat which she's peeled off, to expose herself in a red racy baby doll and matching g-string and suspenders. Usually, my cock would twitch and I'd get all excited seeing her like that, knowing exactly what it was she was after, even if my wolf blocked himself in my mind so he wouldn't have to see or hear anything. Her hair is in curls down her back and she's taken special care with her make-up as well. But it's all too much, all too painfully obvious that she's over-trying it. Or had she been like this all the time and I just hadn't noticed? Surely I wasn't that blind? Was I?

"Hello handsome" she purrs and I cringe. Her voice sounds sugary sweet and completely fake to me. My Wolf is in full agreement. It's also extremely annoying and whiney. It's actually grating on my nerves.

"Candice," I said shortly, "now is not a good time" I added, pointedly looking at her ensemble with disdain. Her face contorts into a shocked expression before she hastily replaces it with a large smile. All I want is for her to leave before I say something I regret. Or do something. But she doesn't seem to get the hint.

"Don't be like that" she breathes, coming around the back of my chair as I am still, in stunned disbelief. She begins to massage my neck and I feel nothing but disgust at her touch, wanting to slap her hand away from myself and barely holding back. My wolf wants to claw her eyes out, but that's nothing new. Me, feeling this way towards her, however, is. It's also a complete shock.

I placed my hands on top of hers and forced her to stop. She makes her way to the front of me as I turn in the chair to regard her, my eyes pitch black as my wolf comes dangerously close to the surface. For once, he hasn't blocked himself from me.

Candice pouts at me, batting her eyelashes dramatically. I'm completely immune to her charms.

"You need to leave," I say gruffly and she stiffens, her own eyes narrowing now, anger clearly visible on her face.

"Why" she shoots out, her arms folded across her chest "why do I have to leave Kai? Tell me what's going on" she snarls and I slam my hands on the table, angered at her impudence. How dare she question me, the Alpha of the pack! Even if she's my girlfriend, I won't tolerate this disrespect coming from her.

"I've told you" I began furiously, still hoping to prevent myself from blowing over and losing it completely.

"I've been by your side for almost a year or is it longer" she wails, "and in that time, you've never, once, embarrassed me like this. I thought you loved me" she sniffles and I feel a pang of guilt. She's right, this is the first time I've refused her. The first time I'd felt this much disgust towards her.

But then she provokes me further. "It's that rogue, isn't it? The girl who came into the territory and couldn't speak? I'm not stupid, Alpha Kai" she mocks "I've heard the rumors and the gossip going around the pack and it says that you and she are mates!" She almost explodes as I sit silently in the chair. I should have known that nothing could be kept a secret in the pack. Winter's identity and who she was, was bound to get out sooner rather than later. But why has Candice waited until now to ask or say anything? How long has she known? Or had she just found out?

"Winter is my mate", I acknowledged heavily, and she looked taken aback for a moment, as though the news had truly shocked her. Or maybe it was because I had so readily told her the truth instead of lying to her face.

"Reject her"

"What?" I say, confused, and she leans into me, her lips close to my ears.

"Reject her" she whispers, "let me be your Luna, Kai, I'm the one you love, not her, not that pathetic little weakling" she breathes, "reject her" she demands.

I stand up and tower over her as she bites her lip, excitement in her eyes. "How dare you" I hiss as she pales. "Candice, you were never going to be Luna, not now, not ever. I had no intentions of putting you in charge of my pack with me."

She pales. "But I thought" she begins to sob, a hand to her mouth, distressed, "I thought that eventually" she trails off and goes silent as I shoot her a withering glance. Did she think eventually I'd mark her and make her Luna of the pack? A pack that despises her? Not a chance!

My head fills with an image of Winter, courtesy of my wolf who's encouraging me, doing his bit to get me to let go of Candice. Her eyes are angry now. "I've wasted all this time on you" she screams, hands clenched into fists " Do you know how hard it's been to pretend to love someone who looks like you? To not cringe when I touch those scars of yours? I endured everything so I could be Luna" she, hissed, and I closed my eyes. I should have known that was all she was after.

"Well, it didn't work out, did it," I say calmly as she continues to spit venom at me. "Leave Candice, at once. I'm afraid that we're over, done with. Stay out of the pack house and stay away from Winter, the girl who is my mate."

She drops her hands, looking defeated. "You're going to accept her aren't you" she whispers, her voice thick with emotion, "a little weakling is going to be Luna over me". She begins to laugh hysterically and I firmly steer her towards the door, watching her body slump over as she walks through the doorway. She glances back at me, hatred in her eyes.

"You have no idea what you've done," she tells me furiously. "I would have been a perfect Luna."

I gave her the stink eye. "You would have been a terrible Luna. The pack hates you", I say quietly, and she begins to sob, running wildly down the hallway as I flop back into my chair. Great, it's not even nighttime yet and I want to curl up with a drink in my hand and forget everything that's happened today.

I eyed the coat she left on the floor in her haste to get away. She has literally just run out wearing lingerie and my wolf is laughing at her expense. I feel numb though, empty. Candice had claimed to love me but had been pretending all this time. Her words washed over me and I flinch when I remember what she said about my scars and touching them. I'd just dodged a bullet and by a narrow escape from the looks of it.

I scowl as Langdon enters the study, an amused expression on his face, his eyes twinkling with humor. "Was that Candice I just saw running away in lingerie?" he asks with a low whistle. I frowned at him.

"We broke up" I muttered, avoiding the delighted expression on his face. He's never liked Candice and I knew it. I wasn't in the mood for him to give me pretend platitudes.

"Sorry dude" he mutters and I just wave it away. My heart will heal. To be fair, I wasn't really feeling that broken since Candice had spat out those insults at me. I am more angry than upset right now.

Langdon causally sits on the chair opposite to me and folds his legs over, patiently waiting. I frown. I wasn't expecting him for any meetings, so why was he here?

"Something I can do for you," I say, disgruntled, and he leans forward, a tense expression on his face.

"Sort of," he hedges, "it's to do with Winter" he adds, standing up and leaning against the doorway.

"What is it?" I growled impatiently.

"She's in the dungeon, she's now your problem. I need my space back and you're her mate, not me, so deal with it" he says in a rush, laughing maniacally and racing down the hallway before I can digest his words properly. Once I do, I poke my head out of the doorway and scream at the back of him. "You put her in the dungeon, you're supposed to be looking after her. I'll have your head for this", I threatened him as he ran out onto the grounds. Fuck. Another problem I would need to deal with. I was going to kill Langdon when I got my hands on him. Then again, I muse to myself, maybe Langdon has done me a favor after all.

Chapter 50 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

God, it's ridiculously cold in here. Langdon's shirt is doing absolutely nothing to keep the chill at bay and I sit there, my arms folded, shivering, and trembling as I wait to see if I'm let out. Langdon had better be right about this, I think sourly. Otherwise, I might just let Sabriel do whatever she wants to him and his precious bachelor pad.

Should have pissed all over his house, given him something to really be angry about. Especially if he was going to punish us both this way.

Sabriel, is your answer to everything going to be piss on it?

Well, I could do the other thing, but you're too much of a lady to let me. Or are you?

That's disgusting

Says you. I call it Karma.

I hope Langdon comes back to let me out soon. I can tell that the sun is beginning to set and it's only going to get colder at nightfall. I doubt I can make it through the night without freezing to death, shifter or not. Plus, I'm so annoyed, I feel like punching the wall, but that's not going to make anything better.

I closed my eyes and leaned back against the hard bricks of the building, my body aching all over and my stomach growling in hunger. Then, a miracle of miracles, I hear the loud creak of the dungeon door opening and then tense as a familiar scent washes over me. What on earth is he doing here? I'd been so sure that he would have just left me down here. Sabriel, of course, is smug. The damn wolf is cocky as hell.

Of course, our mate is coming. He can't resist us. We're the most beautiful creatures he's ever seen. Or at least I am, although you're pretty cute too.

Wow, so humble Sabriel.

I tell it like it is. It's not my fault you don't like it.

He's probably just come to yell at us or something.

Winter, has anyone told you that you are way too pessimistic? Why do you have to be all doom and gloomy? Save that crap for Halloween.

You're way too optimistic.

Well, one of us has to be.

Sabriel is driving me insane, prancing about excitedly in my mind, while all I can hear is the loud thudding of my heart, beating wildly in my chest. I feel a small spurt of hope, despite all of my protestations. His footsteps are loud like he's storming downstairs and that doesn't bode well at all. Even Sabriel has stopped her prancing and is listening nervously. He sounds like he's angry, but with luck, it's directed at Langdon and not at me. A girl can hope, right?

"God dammit" he mutters to himself as he walks down "fucking Langdon. I swear to god, when I get my hands on him, I'm going to rip his head off his body."

That seems perfectly acceptable to me Winter. See he's defending our honor.

I honestly just think he's mad at Langdon Sabriel. It has nothing to do with our honor.

Pity, I'm rather bloodthirsty.

Of course, you are. Has anyone ever told you that you're strange, Sabriel?

Not as weird as you.

That's debatable, I think idly to myself as he finally reaches the end of the stairs and comes crashing over, his eyes wild and his hair all disheveled. I gulp. He looks half crazed and now I'm thinking it's safer to be in the cell, than out of it with him. I guess he sees the fear in my eyes because he straightens up and attempts to smooth his hair down somewhat and make himself more presentable.

"Right then" he snaps, "Langdon should never have locked you up. But you" he booms, pointing his finger at me as I cringe, "should never have even left the house" he roars, "I put you there to keep you safe. Why is that proving to be so difficult?" He sounded completely perplexed.

Right. Not to keep me away from his so-called girlfriend. Is he kidding himself right now? I roll my eyes and he stares at me incredulously, not able to believe that I'm showing him such disrespect. Well, he started it.

He fumbles slowly inside his pockets and produces a key, examining it thoughtfully. I resist the urge to reach for it as he begins to pace back and forth.

"This is the last thing I need" he mutters, glancing at me, "the last thing I want. Why does it have to be so hard though" he exhales, staring at me intently, and I squirm at how intense his gaze is. Maybe Langdon doing this was the last straw and Kai has finally lost his senses and his mind.

"I just broke up with Candice," he says irritably, and my heart skips a beat at the words. Hope fills my body, even though I'm certain there is a but coming. There's always some sort of string attached. I don't even know why he's bothering to tell me this. I'm not the reason for his breakup unless she found out about me, and even so, that wouldn't be my fault. Or is there a reason behind his telling me? Sabriel is almost dancing for joy.

He slowly unlocks the cell door and pulls it open. "Well," he says quietly, seeming to calm himself down somewhat, "are you coming?"

I stood up and slowly went towards him, Kai backing away so that I could walk out. My body is trembling and my mouth is dry. Was he just going to abandon me with Langdon again? Is that why he wanted me to come with him? Or worse? Was he going to throw me out of the pack and leave me to fend for myself? I feel nauseous, my stomach churning as I try to remain calm.

"Come on" he barks impatiently, and I follow him upstairs to the main area of the pack house, astounded when he begins to ascend the stairs.

I've never been upstairs. It was forbidden for myself and other omegas to go up there. It was explained that the Alpha didn't want lowly omegas to enter his rooms, apparently several of them had tried to seduce him and he got tired of it. Marias was one of the few he entrusted to clean his private rooms. He's an enigma, this Alpha Kai who's supposedly my mate.

I'm in awe as he ushers me down the hallway and into his bedroom, or at least I presume it's his bedroom, ushering me in frantically and closing the door. I looked around with interest. The room itself is massive, huge in fact. The four-poster bed looks so inviting with its beautiful green bedcovers and I sit down, feeling just how soft it is. The room doesn't contain much besides the bed, just a dresser and wardrobe. I can't even see much in the way of personal effects and that makes me feel sad for some reason. It's not the homeliest feeling of bedrooms.

He watches me looking around, a small smile on his face. Then he stands in front of me and I blink, looking up at his big hulk of a body. He looks tentative, hesitant and I brace myself for whatever it is that he's about to say. But he manages to surprise me.

"Listen," he says gruffly, folding his arms and staring intently down at my face "I just left Candice because my wolf and I can't keep ignoring the mate bond anymore. Turns out she was only interested in being Luna anyway", he muttered, and I felt sympathetic towards him. That must have been horrible for him to find out. It must have been one hell of a breakup. The sympathy fades quickly, however, when I remind myself just how badly he's treated me thus far.

"I don't know what to do with you," he said quietly. Every time I look at you, I'm blown away by your beauty and your innocence. I've been rejected before and it sucks. If you want me to reject you, however, especially after the way I've treated you, I can look into how we do it?" He doesn't sound too enthusiastic about the idea though, but I could be reading him wrong.

I shake my head. I don't really want to go looking for another mate and, despite everything, my heart is screaming out for him. I feel more than I ever felt with Johnathon. I want him. My mind is screaming. Sabriel is screaming it in my mind. He looks pleased. Was he hoping that would be my response? Or did he expect it? Then he does the unthinkable and swoops down, his lips

landing on mine as he kisses me, roughly, his tongue demanding access which I eagerly give him, my arms holding onto his as I try to keep upright on the bed. Sparks fly between us and Sabriel is giddy in my mind. When he finally let's go and backs away, I feel disappointed. I really hope he's not about to apologize for this kiss like the last time. I don't think my heart could take it. But instead, he gives me a wicked grin that makes my heart start to beat loudly in my chest.

"I think it's time we tried being proper mates, Winter, don't you" he drawls, and I can't help it. My mouth opens wide in shock as Sabriel screams out in joy in my mind. Was he finally accepting me? Or, my heart skips a beat at the thought, am I just a replacement for Candice now that she's gone?