

## Silent Mate 51

### Chapter 51 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Kai POV

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

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

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

"You can walk around the pack house and the grounds," I said reluctantly, "but try not to stray too far from the house if possible. You can't call out for help and unless you're ready for me to mark you..." I trail off and see her pale before she quickly shakes her head. Storm is annoyed, but I won't do it against her wishes. I've already done enough to her as it is. She needs to learn to trust me and marking her against her will isn't the way to go about it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On it.

I'll be there shortly.

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

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

I run, my paws thudding against the ground, my body flying through the air as I leap and jump, getting to the southwest corner in record time, several pack members already engaging the small group of rogues. I tackled one to the ground and ripped his throat out at the same time, spitting out the blood in my mouth in disgust. Yuck. I jump on another one that's sneaking up on one of my men and we go rolling, both of us clawing and swiping furiously at each other as we do so. I howl as I feel its claws rip across my mid-section, a deep gouge that bleeds as I get back up on my feet and growl at it. We circle each other, the rogue looking desperate and frothing from its mouth. Its red eyes flashed with anger.

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

I'm shaky and wobbly on my paws as I stand back up and look over the scene in front of me. The last rogue in the group is being taken down by three of my best warriors and the others have all been dealt with, their bodies scattered on the forest floor, blood droplets and sprays everywhere. The smell of blood was pungent and overwhelming. I could see several of my pack members had been wounded in

the fight, but not fatally, and breathed a sigh of relief. None of my pack members have died and that's what I'm truly thankful for. It could have been much worse.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 52 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter's POV

There's a commotion of sorts outside and I'm watching, seeing warriors forming a group in the distance. I can only think of one thing that would cause that sort of reaction in the pack, and that's a rogue attack. I feel dread inside of me, even though I don't know why. Kai is an Alpha, one of the strongest werewolves in the country, and more than capable of defending himself. But my concern is great and I hold out hope and a longing that he does not get hurt. Even now, I still can't bring myself to hate him, not when he's finally showing me, even if it's only a little bit, that he does care for me.

If he gets hurt, we can play nurse. How cute would that be? A little nurse's outfit, tending him back to health...things start to happen when he gets better, hint, hint.

Sabriel, I'm not buying lingerie to play nurse because you have a fantasy in your head.

We don't have to be an actual nurse, besides, Kai would appreciate the effort we go to, to make him feel better.

I bet he would, but I'm not doing it and I doubt that you would have the same impact, dressed in a wolf nurse outfit.

You never know where his kinks lie.

You are twisted, Sabriel.

But fun. Winter, lots of fun.

I shake my head at my wolf's antics, still watching outside, but the wolves are so far in the distance I can't make anything out and I flop on the bed with a sigh. I still can't believe Kai wants to try being mates, after everything. My heart goes out to poor Candice who he'd broken up with, even if Kai claimed she just wanted to be Luna. Surely, their relationship had to have meant something to her. Nobody's that cold or calculating. Are they?

You always want to believe in the best of people Winter. It's adorable. But it means you'll always be hurt by people, even those you trust.

It's better than believing the worst Sabriel.

True, but it's unrealistic. Evil exists in this world. It's best to accept it and learn.

I want to believe it is good as well, Sabriel, rather than always seeing the bad aspects of life.

Hold onto that, it's a rare quality in a person.

I can hear shouts now and I feel a dark, achy, pain in my chest and midsection, that seems to come out of nowhere. I wasn't injured, so at first, I'm confused. Realization strikes and my eyes widen. Could this pain be coming from Kai? Was the mate bond allowing me to feel his injuries? Was he dead? Oh god no, please don't let him be dead. Not now.

I felt grief for a moment. There was a loud pounding on the door. Langdon bursts in, looking frazzled, and completely naked, and I immediately avert my eyes.

"Winter" he pants, looking pleased to see me and distraught at the same time. Something's happened.

I looked over his shoulder to see that two men were carrying Kai between them. What has happened to him? I look at Langdon, who looks sheepish as he directs them to place Kai on the bed. My heart skips a beat as I take in the injuries he sustained in the fight. There was dried blood all over him. I can smell it and my stomach churns with nausea.

'He was hurt', Langdon tells me unnecessarily, as I can see that for myself. "A rogue managed to get a few good hits in. We need your help" he tells me, and my eyes widen in disbelief. How can I possibly help him? I don't have any powers to speak of.

"He'll heal much faster, with his mate by his side," Langdon says, shoos the other men out of the room. They leave after casting me curious glances. I guess they don't know who I am. Well, now that they do, it's bound to get all over the pack by nightfall. Gossip can be a real nuisance in a pack. I ignore the looks and focus on Kai.

I walked over to Kai who was breathing steadily, even if he is unconscious. I touched his scars, feeling how jagged and rough they are on his face. I feel tingles through my fingers and Langdon gives a small smile as he watches.

"You know," he says quietly, "I don't believe I ever saw Candice touch his scars ever. You're not afraid of them, are you?"

That makes me look at him. Why would I be afraid of his scars? To me, it was a sign of how brave he was and courageous. I would never be disgusted by his scars. You would have to be pretty shallow to be, vain, or both. I'm none of them.

"If you could maybe, lie next to him or keep touching him" Langdon suggests gently, "then I'm sure he'll heal in no time."

I nod and trailed my fingers down Kai's bare arm, feeling the sparks that are always there.

Langdon backs towards the door. "I'll arrange for some tea to be brought to the room later," he says, and I nod, giving a half-hearted wave as he leaves us, the door closing softly behind him. I felt awkward and a little anxious as I hesitantly curled up beside Kai, snuggling hard against him and resting my arm over his chest. It seems to do the trick because he mutters something and slightly shifts closer to me as I hold his hand. Right now he looks so vulnerable, a stark contrast to the confident and overbearing man that I've seen the few times I've been with him.

His wounds begin to knit together as the hours pass by in a blur. I'm enjoying actually touching my mate, but feeling bad it's while he's unconscious and there's no way I would touch him below the waist, even if Sabriel's urging me to at least look at his cock which makes me blush. God, I'm tired, I think, as the sun begins to set. My stomach gives a loud growl of hunger and Sabriel giggles in my mind.

I can think of something to put our mouths on, but it won't really satisfy our hunger.

Sabriel! Now is not the time to be such a horn bag!

There's always time to be a horn bag Winter, I'm not ashamed.

Fine, but he's injured. We should at least show some concern towards him.

I am concerned, who knows whether his downstairs has been affected? What if he's hurt down there?

Really Sabriel?



You should check.

Right, that's it, I'm blocking you.

I slowly climbed out of bed, doing my best not to disturb Kai, who was now resting peacefully. But I'm also hesitant to leave his side for a minute, let alone long enough to grab something to eat. Didn't Langdon promise to send food? I'm starving.

There's a gentle knock on the door and I open it curiously, grateful to see an omega on the other side, holding up a dinner tray with all sorts of goodies on it, including a teapot and freshly made tea. My mouth waters.

"May I put this down" the girl chirps cheerfully and I nodded, motioning for her to place the tray down on the dresser. She does so and goes to leave, but I grab her arm and mouth the words 'thank you' to her. She beams, before leaving, shutting the door quietly behind her.

I examine the tray but my eyes dart to the tea. My throat is parched and I'm incredibly thirsty. It would also help slightly with my hunger. I pour some into a cup and sit on the edge of the bed. I sniffed the tea, puzzled. I have no clue what kind of tea it is, just that it's an herbal one. It smells slightly bitter but that would be normal for such a tea. I sip it. It tastes like peppermint with a hint of something else I can't quite put my finger on. But it's not horrible, in fact, it's refreshing and I sip away at it, content as Kai begins to fidget and move around in his sleep. At this rate he'll be awake soon, I think, to myself pleased. That means he's healing incredibly fast, but for an Alpha, that's not really that surprising. They heal faster than normal shifters. Lucky bastards.

I finish the tea and place down the cup with regret. My stomach is beginning to feel slightly uncomfortable now and I wonder if it's hunger or the tea. Then the room begins to spin around me as I sit there, my limbs feeling like they are paralyzed. My throat begins to close up and my body topples to the floor, my eyes fixed on the ceiling as I feel like I'm choking. It's like the air is being sucked out of me and I lie there, unable to do anything, unable to grab anything to alert anybody to my predicament. Just as I fall unconscious, a thought enters my brain. THE TEA WAS POISONED!

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Winter POV

I could hear voices, as though they were coming from a great distance, as I lay there, feeling completely paralysed. At least somebody found me from the sounds of it, but was it in time?

"What happened?" That was Langdon's voice and he sounded panicked, as well as slightly angry.

"I don't know, I woke up and she was lying there like this" growled another voice. That sounds like Kai. I guess being near him healed him quicker, especially if he's woken up. At least he seems to be okay. I was worried about him.

"Get her to the hospital", Kai orders, and then I feel like someone's picked me up, my body floating and my head lightheaded. My eyes refuse to open, no matter how hard I try. I feel absolutely exhausted. Drained.

Then the sound of someone else's voice. "Describe how you found her, did you see anything unusual, and what are her symptoms?"

"She was lying unconscious on the floor, froth in her mouth and she has not been responding to any stimuli" came Kai's voice. He sounds pissed. "She has to have been poisoned somehow. I'm going to kill whoever's done this to her" he growled. Wow, he sounds like he really cares about me. It's a nice feeling.

I feel myself being placed down onto what I think must be a bed, hands touching my body and carefully examining it. I hear the doctor take a huge sniff and I wonder what he's smelling.

"Wolfsbane" he muttered.

"Are you sure?" Kai growls and Langdon makes a choking sound in the background.

"Son of a bitch" growls Kai "someone's deliberately poisoned my mate. I'll fucking kill them" he roars and my heart almost sings with joy, despite my current situation. He sounds so protective of me.

Wait a minute. Hold on. I tried extra hard and finally managed to open my eyes, blinking against the white light that was blaring into my eyes. Kai's shadowy figure moves closer and then I feel his hand grip mine, his gorgeous eyes looking directly at me.

"Winter," he says quietly, giving me a gentle squeeze, "just hold on okay? The doctor will make you better, I promise."

"I'm going to go and check the room, see where she might have managed to ingest the wolfsbane," Langdon says urgently, and I stare at him as he hesitates by the doorway. I need to tell him somehow. He stops to look at me, realizing I'm trying to tell him in my own way.

My limbs are tingling now and I manage to raise a hand to my mouth and mime drinking. Langdon's eyes widened. "You drank it?"

I nod. He looks at Kai.

"I had food and drink brought to the room. I noticed there was a teapot on the dresser. I'll have it analyzed" he says, before giving me a cheeky grin and a wink "get better soon," he says, sailing out the door, shooting me an apologetic glance on the way.

The doctor inserts a needle into my arm and I flinch. "Sorry" mutters Dr. James "this will help neutralize the wolfsbane you've drunk. All we can do is wait now, for you to fully recover. It's lucky that Langdon came to check on Kai when he did and found you there."

I can't help remembering what happened the last time I was in the hospital and my body begins to tremble at the thought. If Kai leaves me alone, what's to prevent someone from trying to kill me again?

Kai sees my body's reaction and frowns, silently putting a blanket over me. I'm not cold but it's a nice gesture, nonetheless.

"I won't leave your side," he tells me gruffly, and Dr. James nods.

"Nobody but you will tend to Winter," Kai tells him and he readily agrees.

"I was going to make that suggestion myself," Dr. James says cheerfully enough "I'll even ensure I'm the one preparing any food or drink that enters this hospital room."

Kai looks relieved and I relax slightly, feeling nauseous. Whatever drug the doctor gave me, is making me feel extremely ill. I'm fighting the urge to vomit, bile rising in my throat.

Dr. James grabs a wastebasket and passes it to Kai, who looks startled. Without warning, I turn my head and vomit into it as Kai grimaces. My throat feels like it's on fire. It hurts.

"Sorry", Dr. James apologies "but I need you to vomit whatever you haven't had enter your bloodstream yet. I had to give you something to make you purge it up."

You could have warned me, I think, a tad grumpily while Kai looks like he's about to be sick himself. I hope he's not a sympathetic puker. That's the last thing we need, is both of us being sick at the same time.

Another wave of sickness comes over me and I vomit again as Kai swears in the background.

"How long will this take?" he demands irritably, and Dr. James looked at him thoughtfully.

"It could take a few minutes, or up to an hour, before she stops being sick. It depends on how much she ingested of the wolfsbane."

Damn. I'm hoping it's a few minutes. Something tells me that Kai is going to toss his cookies if I continue to vomit much longer. He's handling it like a pro so far, clutching the wastebasket and leaving it in reach in case I need to be sick again. I wrinkle my nose at the smell. The puke smells sickly sweet and I assume it's due to the wolfsbane herb.

"I will be back momentarily" Dr. James informed us and Kai nodded, shooing him away with one hand.

I struggle on the bed and Kai immediately leaps up and helps me to sit upright. Thankfully, my limbs are working enough now, that I'm able to take the waste basket out of his hands and hold it for myself. I

swear I've never seen a man look so relieved in my life. His eyes glazed over. Someone must be mind-linking him. Whatever they are saying, has Kai riled up, I can see how agitated he's getting by the conversation. He cuts it off and looks at me angrily.

"Langdon found wolfsbane in your tea. The herbs that were in it helped to disguise the smell and the taste somewhat. Had you had more than one cup, you would be dead by now" he said quietly, looking away and staring out the window, deep in his thoughts. His eyes are pitch black now, which means his wolf is dangerously close to the surface, something that only occurs when you're angry. I can't sense Sabriel at the moment and hope it's because of the wolfsbane. I could have used her to cheer me up a little bit.

Who is this desperate to get rid of me? I haven't made any enemies that I know of, but then a slight suspicion took hold. What if this was Candice's doing? A small voice reminds me that she didn't know about me while I was in the hospital and I slump. Damn. That left her out as a suspect. In this case, it could be anyone. Kai seems to be thinking along the same thoughts.

"When we get back home," he says, turning back to me, his arms folded across his chest. Damn, he looks smoking hot. My mouth absolutely goes dry at the sight of him. "you're not drinking or eating anything that's brought to you. I don't want you to leave my side if you can help it."

I nod slowly. I'm not about to argue with that. I really don't want to die. I wish I could speak to Sabriel, just hearing her voice would make me feel better immediately. I would just have to be patient until I could talk to my wolf again. . I miss her voice more than I thought I would. I know for a fact she'd be making inappropriate remarks about our mate if she could.

Dr. James comes back in. "Has she been sick in the last few minutes?" he asks Kai, who shakes his head firmly.

Kai looks extremely relieved at that.

I haven't been, I slowly realize. Does this mean that the drug has done its work? Maybe I hadn't ingested a large amount? I can feel my whole body covered in sweat and I feel disgusting, not that Kai seems to care at the moment.

"That's a good sign. It means we got there early. She could be discharged tomorrow but you're going to need to stay overnight, or I will if you require me to Alpha Kai. It's entirely up to you." he added hastily.

Kai shakes his head and sits down on a chair, his arms folded and a resolute look in his eyes. "I'm not going anywhere and no one is getting near my mate" he growls. The doctor nods and leaves without another word as I lie back down and close my eyes. I need sleep and before too long, I'm completely out of it, surrounded by darkness and smelling the familiar and comforting scent of Kai still nearby and by my side.

## Chapter 54 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

### Winter POV

Needless to say, I was still exhausted and drained the next day, and Alpha Kai was still watching over me. I examined him while he slept, fascinated at how peaceful and innocent he looked as his soft snores filled the air. His scars were just as rugged and stood out against the whiteness of the hospital lights, but to me they made him look even more handsome. I still caught him out of the corner of my eyes during the hours he spent by my side, occasionally tracing them when he thought I wasn't looking. I suspect now, that it has nothing to do with being self-conscious, but rather that there's a whole other story, one that he has yet to tell me, that causes him to do it.

When I'm discharged, I'm relieved, as is Kai, who claims he has important paperwork to get to. I feel bad for disturbing his business, but he doesn't seem to be too phased. I'm wondering how I'm going to walk back to the pack house, my limbs still quite shaky and, to be honest, I'm that tired, I'm not sure I'll actually make the trip when Kai shocks the hell out of me by picking me up and carrying me bridal style. As we make our way out to the main entrance, I see several nurses stop and stare and Dr. James, I swear, winks at me on the way out. I grin. I'm rather fond of that doctor. He's so jolly it's hard to find anything to dislike about him.

"Let's get you home" Kai mutters, my arms wrapping around his neck tightly. His hair is soft against my hands and I have to resist the urge to tug on it. His grip is so secure, that I have no fears of him dropping me. Not with his muscular body and the protective look in his eyes. I trust him completely and that alone shocks me. When was the last time I allowed myself to trust anyone? Even someone whose family is like my brother Damien? Too long. But with a childhood like mine, was that really not to be expected? It feels nice to trust someone, even if it's slight.

You know, you could easily kiss him from your position, right? Those luscious lips of his, just begging to be touched with ours...

Sabriel, I don't think now's the time. Besides, we're still becoming accustomed to trying this whole mate thing and that's if I don't get killed first.

That's the thing with you humans, you always have to take it so damn slow. How do you expect to get laid, if you don't start getting the show on the road?

I'm not ready for that, Sabriel.

Well, at some stage you're gonna do the deed. Unless you want me to take over and do it in wolf form with his wolf? Because I'm totally ready to make that sacrifice for you Winter. Just say the word.

Um no thanks Sabriel. I would rather not have you make that sacrifice.

Sigh. Well, if you change your mind, woman, I'll be ready to step in in a heartbeat.

She sends me inappropriate images of her getting it on with his wolf and I fight the urge to block her. Right now, her presence is soothing, even if she's frustrating me just a little bit. The day is pleasant at least, with the sun shining and a gentle breeze caressing my skin and hair. The sky is so blue with barely a cloud in the sky and I inhale the scent of pine and dirt coming from the nearby forest as we walk. It's a beautiful day, one that's meant to be enjoyed.

"I'm going to put you to bed" Kai mutters, his arms tightening further around me as I look up at him wide-eyed. "You need to rest, Winter" he adds firmly as I shake my head at him.

I pout, but he's not dissuaded. "No, you will do as I say", but his voice is teasing and lighthearted. It's pleasant to hear and to see him looking so carefree, instead of strict and foreboding.

Fine, if he wants to take care of me, then maybe I should let him. He's only trying to take care of my well-being after all, and being in a relationship is all about compromise, isn't it? I can accede to his wishes for now. But only for now. I can be just as stubborn when I want to be.

The pack members openly stare out on the grounds, several jaws dropping open as they see their big bad Alpha Kai, holding a woman in his arms and openly carrying her into the house. I guess even with all the gossip, it still shocks them to see Kai with his mate in the open. Hopefully, they see it as a good thing.

He's careful to take me up the stairs slowly, my heart thudding wildly in my chest, despite knowing he would never drop me. He takes me into the bedroom and gently places me on the bed, taking my shoes off and placing the bedcovers over me. I want to moan, I'm in absolute heaven.

"I'm going to place a guard on the door" he mutters. "make sure no one enters the room while you get some sleep."

That sounds a bit overprotective, but I can see his point. Someone has tried to kill me twice now. It's not such a bad idea. It means I'll sleep a hell of a lot easier.

Then he surprises me even more, giving me a gentle kiss on the forehead as I stare up at him, my eyes shining brightly at him. The last person to ever do that was my mother when I was little and it brings back a feeling of nostalgia.

"I'll see you later" he promises and is out the door before I can so much as nod. I watch the back of him and feel a sense of loss, even though I know he's only going to be downstairs and in the study. It's not like I'm not going to see him again for Christ's sake.

I don't know how long I've been asleep for when I'm rudely awakened by someone shoving me roughly off the bed. I hit the ground with a thud, wincing at the pain as my eyes shot open and I looked up to see an angry, pissed-off woman, her arms on her hips as she glared down at me. How the hell did she get past the guard? I know who this woman is, I've seen her before, hanging off of Kai and it makes sense that it has to be none other than Candice, whom Kai had broken up with recently. What the hell was she doing here, and what the fuck did she want?

Kick her in the nuts

She's a woman, Sabriel. She doesn't have nuts



Kick her in the vagina then, I'm guessing it will still hurt.

I can't do that, let's just see what it is she wants.

I don't think she's here for a friendly chat somehow Winter. I don't like the look on the bitch's face.

She's Kai's ex-girlfriend. I can't just hit her.

Say's who? She's not even supposed to be here. Where the fuck is the guard?

I awkwardly scramble to my feet and back away slightly. A quick glance at the doorway shows the guard wasn't there. That's not good. How did she manage to get him to leave his post?

"You must be Winter" the woman sneers and I give a small nod, watching her every move tentatively.

Her eyes narrow as she rakes me over with her gaze, a look of contempt in her eyes. I flinch but bravely stand my ground.

"I don't know what he sees in you," she says heatedly "you're nothing but a pathetic omega. You're too skinny, you're dirty and you can't even speak. How on earth are you going to be his mate when you are this weak?"

I just blink. Maybe if I just stand there, she'll just leave me alone. She strides forward and stares at me, shaking in her anger.

"I deserve to be Luna" she hisses, "not you. Do you have any idea how repulsive it was to pretend to love that disgusting man with those horrendous scars? How much effort I put into pleasing him? I was all set to be his chosen Luna and then you had to come along" she says shakily, and I feel sick to my stomach.

She'd led Kai along on a string and the only thing she gave a damn about was the fact she wouldn't get to become Luna? Cold, calculating bitch.

Kai isn't repulsive. How anyone could use someone like that is beyond my comprehension. All she'd ever wanted was to be Luna, and she'd been prepared to lie and manipulate in order to get what she was after. She was disgusting, not Kai.

She must have sensed my reaction because she raised her hand and swung it, intending to slap me across the face.

My hand grabs her arm before she can, to my astonishment. My reflexes were quick, it seemed, and before I could stop myself I slapped her instead, watching in great satisfaction as she clutched her red cheek and howled.

Unfortunately, this time I'm a little slower and she gets a good kick to my guts as I double over and clutch at my stomach. Fuck that hurt. Sabriel's ready to shift and tear her into strips, but it turns out not to be necessary.

Just as I'm straightening back up and she's preparing to take another swing at me, a voice speaks from the doorway, causing me to stiffen and her to stop short, her mouth opening in shock.

"Candice, what are you doing to my mate?"

It's Kai and his eyes are pitch black as he stares at his ex-girlfriend.

"Kai" she, stammers "I was just coming to meet your mate," she said, pointing at me, "and she attacked me" she lied. My mouth falls open.

Kai sauntered into the room, his eyes never leaving hers. "I put a guard on Winter's room," he said softly, his tone dangerous and ominous. "Where is he?"

"He wasn't here when I came to the room" Candice muttered, but neither I nor Kai believed her.

His eyes glaze over and it's evident he's mind-linking someone. Several warriors come rushing in. "Take Candice to the dungeon" he demands, and Candice's mouth falls open as she begins to back away, a terrified look on her face now. Did she honestly think there would be no repercussions from this? To be fair, I wasn't sure he'd punish her for this, but he looks determined to. Sabriel was prancing around like a unicorn in my mind, pleased at our mate's decision.

"Kai, you have to believe me" she pleads, "it was all her."

He's having none of it. "I saw what happened, Candice", he shoots me a look, "and I'm proud of Winter for standing up for herself. " He adds with a low growl.

The warriors grasp hold of her as she kicks and bucks, screaming obscenities as she's dragged roughly away. "You'll pay for this" she screams over and over, but everyone ignores her and before too long she's gone, her voice fading away completely. I stared at Kai uncertainly. Am I in trouble? But instead, he crossed the room and held me tight against him, his head on my shoulder. "Sorry" he murmured in my ear, "I'll make sure she never troubles you ever again."

#### Chapter 55 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

##### Kai POV

I'm restless, my wolf is seething with anger. I barely acknowledged the guards as I pushed past them, determined to get to my destination before Winter realizes what I'm up to. She's too nice, my mate, too forgiving for her own good. She might not want Candice to pay for what she'd done, but I needed to prove a point. That no one attacks or insults my mate and gets away with it, no matter who they are, or what they once were to me. Winter is to be treated with respect. There was no point trying to be mates. If I wasn't going to show everyone just how serious I was about it, was there? Nobody messes with me or disrespects me like that and gets away with it.

God, It stinks down here, is my first thought as I storm downstairs, barely greeting the guards who all scramble to get out of my way. Then again, what was I expecting? It's a dungeon for Christ's sake. It's supposed to smell like old and new blood, as well as dank and mold. Still, it wouldn't hurt for it to be cleaned, I thought to myself, making a mental note. It really is putrid down here. I sure as hell am not going to be spending any more time down here than is necessary to make my point.

"Where is she" I growled at the last guard and watched him gulp nervously, before his hand pointed towards the last cell on the right, trembling in his fear of me. Good. He should be afraid. My wolf was dangerously close to the surface and I'm not in the mood to be trifled with.

"Get the trolley", I grunted and wandered down to the last cell, feeling a sense of satisfaction as I heard her crying softly. She should be afraid. I can't believe the nerve of her. Did she really think there would be no repercussions? I know all she wants is to be Luna, she never really cared for me at all, but why attack Winter then? Was she that delusional that she thought we would get back together again if Winter wasn't in the picture? After everything, she'd said and done?

They've followed my instructions and she's dangling from the ceiling, restrained and shackled, a look of absolute terror in her eyes. Terror, I notice idly, that seems to vanish the instant she spots me. Does she think that I'm going to go easy on her? When she'd all but confessed she hadn't given a damn about me and it was all for show? Did she think I would be merciful because of our past? I feel a pang of regret. Because if that's what she's expecting, then she's in for a rude awakening.

"Here, you go, Alpha Kai" the guard stammers and I wave him away, watching her mouth open in shock as her eyes dart back to me.

"Kai" she stammers, "please, you don't want to do this. Think about what we had together."

I cock my head at her. "It's Alpha Kai to you bitch" I snarl "and tell me what it is I don't want to do?"

I observed the trolley, watching her pitiful attempts to break free. As if she could. Silver prevents werewolves from shifting and she's surrounded by it all, which is painful in amongst itself.

"What about what we meant to each other" she tries and I scoff at her, unable to keep a straight face.

"We meant nothing to each other, remember Candice? I was just a means to an end, a way for you to become Luna", I hissed and she stared at me, her eyes wide, her breathing becoming faster and more panicked.

"That's not true" she protests weakly and I say nothing, slowly putting my gloves on and picking up a small silver whip, smiling down at it as she wiggles in her restraints.

I strike her, watching her back arch in shock as she lets out a small whimper. I actually held back. But she acts as though I've put all my strength into it. I strike, again and again, putting more effort into it each time. Her cries and whimpers become louder and more hysterical as time progresses.

"Please stop" she screams, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry", she sobs and I put the whip down and look at her tear-filled eyes, feeling numb inside. I feel nothing, no mercy towards her, no feelings whatsoever, even after spending so long with her by my side.

"You attacked my mate" I growled, picking up a small dagger that made her gulp nervously.

Her eyes stared directly into mine, beseeching me to stop.

"I won't do it again" she spits out, her body swaying slightly in her shackles "I swear, I won't do it again. I was just upset" she whimpered, "you broke up with me like I meant nothing to you."

Does she think this will appeal to my sympathy? Because her words mean absolutely nothing to me whatsoever.

"As I recall, you were the one to tell me it was all for show", I snarled and thrust the dagger into her leg, pulling it downwards in one long stroke as she screamed and screamed, the sound filling the otherwise silent dungeon.

"You bastard" she screams, and I do it again, not liking the disrespect. She shuts her mouth and looks at me fearfully as I hold the dagger in my hand and begin to circle around her. The silver burns her flesh, the dagger leaves long scars that will never heal. A testament to just how angry I am with her.

"Why her" she sobs and I stare at her, incredulous as to why she's even daring to ask that question. "Why her? What's so good about that girl, that you would give me up for her? She's not even that pretty!"

Now she sounds pitiful, completely pathetic. I don't want to answer, but part of me, a small part of me, believes that maybe I do deserve to give her an explanation. Maybe she'll realize the futility of going after winter if I speak. Besides, Winter is beautiful. She might not be like Candice who likes to wear

makeup and go to extreme lengths to dress nicely, but she has her own inner beauty and looks pretty without all the makeup. She was pretty and beautiful in her own way. But I doubt Candice would understand that.

I thought about my answer. "She's kind", I said quietly, "she'll go to great lengths to friend anyone. She's pure, untainted like I am. She can make everything better by simply smiling at me. Material things don't matter to her and I'm just starting to realize that" I breathe out "all she's ever wanted was to be loved and cared for and I'm going to make that happen for her. I never felt this way towards you, Candice, not ever. I'm sorry, but you just weren't the one for me and you know that too. You'll find your own mate one day and then you'll understand what I mean."

For a minute, Candice was silent, digesting my words and I put down the dagger, my heart no longer in it and no longer wanting to take part in any of this torture.

"She'll ruin you," Candice says and my head shoots up in disbelief, my eyes glaring daggers at her. "You think she's so innocent, but what if she's not Kai? What if you're only seeing what you want to see? Nobody is that pure, nobody. You're living in a fantasy world" she laughs, "and I can't wait to see what happens when reality hits you, because it will, and it will hit you hard", she sneers.

I shake my head. She should have kept her mouth shut, I think to myself. This was all on her now. Without warning, I picked up the silver cat with nine tails and began to whip her hard, ignoring the sounds of her screaming, the shrieks, and the pleas for me to stop. When I finally do stop, it's because my arm has become sore from overusing it and her body dangles there, blood splattered on the floor, the walls, and even on the ceiling. She's quiet now, her eyes barely open and I feel nothing but contempt and disgust towards her. I tried, I really did, to make her see my point of view, but all she's interested in is trying to break me and Winter up. Why can't she just move on? Especially since she claimed she didn't love me in the first place? It's infuriating.

I take off my gloves. There's no point continuing the torture any further. The guards sense my anger and stay well back as I leave her cell and turn to them.

"Get her medical treatment," I said snidely, "not that she deserves it. A few days in here and then let the stupid bitch go". I snap and they nod their heads at me. Glad to be finished now, and certain that Candice understands my position when it comes to my mate, I start to turn and head up the stairs when I hear her voice, so quiet that I almost miss it. The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end with her words.

"I'll get you back for this" she whispered, "don't think I won't, Kai. You'll regret you ever did this to me."

I laughed it off. There's no way she's going to be stupid enough to lay a hand on Winter again. Not when she fully knows the next time will result in her death. But it doesn't stop me from hearing it in my mind, over and over again, as I leave the dungeon and head towards my mate who is most likely waiting for me in the bedroom. Could Candice really be that stupid and would I have to continue to regard her as a threat? I decide to mull things over and think about banishing my ex-girlfriend from the pack. But I won't burden Winter with that information. I don't want her to speak on Candice's behalf. She might not get how vengeful my ex-girlfriend could be, but I have my suspicions that Candice isn't finished when it comes to my mate, and that's what scares me the most.

## Chapter 56 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

### Thomas POV

Goddamn, these fucking woods. It's been weeks since I set out to find the little bitch and there's been no sign of her. In fact, it even appears, she avoided traveling to most packs who claim to have not had her there at all. Since when did Winter enjoy camping for fuck's sake? I smirk though, feeling the satisfaction that Damien is most likely dead by now, and feel absolutely no remorse whatsoever about it. I only got close to him so that I could see Winter on occasion, not because I wanted to be friends with that asshole. God, this bloodlust is insane. All I want is more of it. Killing creatures doesn't seem to be enough to quench my thirst. My whole throat is on fire and it's difficult to pretend to be a shifter sometimes when visiting packs. So far, no one has realized that I'm a hybrid, something that is working to my benefit.

Ah, Winter. I brighten instantly just thinking about her. I can picture her easily in my mind, her angelic face, her beautiful figure, those expressive eyes of hers. Her pale porcelain skin, the way she smiles. I remember every little tiny detail about her. This would all be worth it in the end, if only I can find her. I'm starting to suspect I might have gone the wrong way. But this is the path with the most packs and would have been the safest to take. So it made more sense to me that she should have gone this way. After all, Winter is a clever girl, not stupid like most of the bimbos at school. She had substance and quality, like a shiny coin, while the other girls were all tarnished, dirty, unclean, and impure. Not like Winter. Winter was pure goodness. She didn't deserve to be treated like she was by her own family. I should have killed that bastard Damien from the start. Never mind. The wolfsbane should have done the trick. It would have prevented him from mind-linking, anyone, for help at any rate. The poor bastard had to be a goner by now.

God, I feel disgusting. I'm covered in dirt, I've got foul body odor and I'm absolutely drenched in sweat. I've been switching from my wolf form to my human one over and over again and it's starting to take a physical toll on me. There's a pack up ahead and I'm determined to talk my way into spending a night there. I really need to sleep in a comfortable bed. I hate the outdoors and always have. I miss my gigantic mansion. At least it was civil, unlike what I was forced to experience now. I make sure my eyes are back to their normal color and not glowing red, needing to put on my fake facade. How stupid is it that shifters can't seem to smell vampires? Or maybe it was just hybrids in general? I will have to research that later. I was intrigued by the notion.

I'm stopped by pack members, clearly patrolling the boundary of their territory. I almost wanted to cry in relief, but instead, I school my face to look relieved. I need to look non-threatening, a lone traveler going from pack to pack.

"State your business" one of the guards, a tall bulky one, with muscles to spare, says to me grimly and I blink at him. If I had to take him in a fight, he would definitely come off the worst. I refuse to let them intimidate me though and remember that I need to be polite if I want them to help me.

"I'm in search of a long-lost sister of mine" I lied through gritted teeth, forcing a shy smile on my face. The guard's clearly not expecting that and looks at his comrades a little nonplussed.

"She ran away from home a few months back and now I'm trying to find her. I've been going from pack to pack, hoping she's taken up roots somewhere. I was hoping you might have seen her, even if it was a while back" I said.

The guards begin to mind-link each other while I fidget impatiently. Finally, the original one to speak to me, talks, his voice gravelly "what is your sister's name" he asks suspiciously, eyes boring into mine.

"Winter" I answered confidently, "but she's mute, so she can't speak and she prefers to keep to herself for the main part." None of that's untrue.

The man's eyes widened in recognition.

Yes, I cheer, he knows her, which means she definitely came this way and I'm on the right track. Thank fuck.



"Why did she run away?" he asks and I know he's testing me, prepared to lie if I don't answer him in a manner that seems truthful, even when it clearly won't be. Damn him for being so fucking suspicious. Then again, wouldn't that be a normal thing to be considering? Maybe I should cut the loser some slack. He's only trying to do his job.

"She and my father didn't get along. He tended to beat her" I whispered, "and I wasn't able to stop him." I hung my head, pretending to be ashamed.

The guard looks disgusted now, but it's not aimed at me. There is some truth to what I told him after all, even if it's not the exact reason Winter ran away.

"What a bastard" he exhales and turns to the small group, motioning for the men to get back to their posts.

He turns back to me. "Winter only spent one night here, before leaving to go on her way. I only remember the poor girl, because she couldn't speak and because she was extremely sweet. It made no sense, her traveling by herself, but she refused to be accompanied to the next pack, even when the Alpha tried to offer. She was determined to continue on alone, which is dangerous, but we had to respect her wishes."

That's because she probably had no intentions of staying there, I think to myself absent-mindedly. She probably wanted to continue further up ahead and didn't want to let them know. Clever girl. Clearly, she wasn't trusting anybody with her location or which way she was going.

"Oh dear," I said in alarm, "do you know how long ago this was?"

Please don't let it be months, I thought to myself. I'm not sure how much longer I can keep this horrid trip going much longer. I want to be back to civilization soon.

He seems thoughtful now, looking off into the distance as I attempt to wait patiently. It wasn't that bloody hard to remember, was it?

"Must have been a few weeks ago now" he finally says, glancing down at me, a small smile on his face.

I gave him a small smile of thanks. I'm closer to Winter than I thought. Especially if she does find a home in one of the packs along the way, something I fervently hope she's done. It will make getting to her much easier. Plus, it's really nerve-wracking traveling on your own. Even as a hybrid, I can't guarantee I can take on several rogues and come out as the winner.

"Would you like to stay for a night or two" the guard offers. "I have to admit, it's ballsy of you to travel all on your own. You're lucky you didn't come across any rogues" he added, looking at me expectantly.

I had considered that. But rogues are stupid creatures and I could easily determine if there were any nearby by the disgusting stench of the mangy fuckers. There had been a few close calls, that was for sure.

"I would appreciate it," I said hesitantly, "if it's not too much trouble to stay. Just for a night, get cleaned up" I said a little pathetically, really laying it on thick. The last thing I need is for this man to become suspicious of me. Besides, packs generally pride themselves on their hospitality. This one would be no different.

It seems to work because he slings an arm over my shoulder and begins to turn me towards, I presume, the direction of the pack house, which I can see in the distance.

"So what's your name, anyway," the man asks, "mine's Grant, by the way."

"I'm Damien" I lied. "it's lovely to meet you." It's really not.

"We'll get you situated in a guest room" he laughs, "and you can get cleaned up. No offense man, but you stink. You've clearly been traveling a while now, he adds, looking impressed. "You really love this sister of yours, huh?"

"I do and I really need to find her" I murmured back.

"And no offense taken" I replied, staring at the pack house in awe. It's as large as the mansion I was forced to leave behind, maybe a tad smaller, but it reeked of elegance. Thank god. I was back in civilization, at least for a little while. This is what pack houses should all be like, but unfortunately, some of the packs were a lot more wealthy than others and it showed. This would be a wealthy pack.

"Alpha Gordon wants to meet you," Grant says, and I look at him panicked. He laughs at the expression on my face. "Don't stress", he soothes "he likes to meet all travelers. You can clean up first and then meet him downstairs in the study", he added, and I visibly relaxed. Good, no one was suspicious of me then. Great, now all I have to do is charm them and be on my way tomorrow. That's easy enough.

I climbed into the shower, thanking Grant for showing me to a room, he's even organized fresh towels and a spare change of clothes for me. As the water cascades down onto my poor aching body, I close my eyes and breathe in the steam, relaxing for the first time in a long time. All I can think about is Winter, my cock twitching in excitement at the thought of her. I'm aching with need and my hand grips my shaft and begins to move up and down along it as I picture Winter in my mind, imagining how she'd feel beneath me as I took her, my desire growing and my hand pumping furiously, until with a growl, I cum, hard, all over the shower floor, panting heavily from the exertion.

Soon, Winter, I thought to myself, with a wicked smile, soon you'll be mine forever and this time I'll make sure you can never escape me. I'm coming for you and it won't be much longer, my love, until we're reunited again.

## Chapter 57 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

### Winter POV

I'd heard rumors and gossip going around the pack house that Kai ended up torturing Candice for what she'd done to me. I don't know how to feel about it. On one hand, the bitch had tried to attack me, but on the other hand, she had also been Kai's girlfriend. Wouldn't it have hurt him to have done something so cruel and mean to her, even if she claimed to have never loved her?

She deserves it, Winter. No one can attack an Alpha's mate and expect to get away from the consequences. Not even an ex-girlfriend. He's showing the pack there are consequences for touching you. It was to be expected and she knew it as well.

I know, but sometimes I feel detached from Kai, or maybe really detached. I know we're still trying this mates thing but it feels so awkward and stiff. I know almost nothing about him. Part of me really wants to get to know him some more.

We could seduce him.

That's not what I meant by getting to know him, Sabriel!

But you would be getting to know a part of him, hint, hint.

You have absolutely no shame, do you?

None whatsoever and that's the way I like it.

The door swings open and I crinkle my nose as the stench of blood and lots of it, permeates the air. My eyes widened in shock and disbelief as I saw a disheveled Kai, with blood splattered on his clothes. I feel nauseous. Was this blood Candices? I guess he had done the torture thing after all. I almost backed away but he held up a hand, halting me in my tracks.

"Steady now," he said soothingly as he walked slowly into the room, shutting the door and locking it as I watched "I'm going to get cleaned up, and then we are going to talk." Um, I think a little amused. "Well, I'll talk" he amends, hurrying into the bathroom. I'm left wondering what it is he wants to discuss.

There you go, he wants to have a discussion. That's great Winter. Maybe he'll tell you about himself.

That would be nice. I feel like we're just strangers sharing a room at the moment.

Well, you could acquaint yourselves with each other.

Sabriel, stop going there, you're a horndog.

Yeah, but a horndog will get some eventually. You, on the other hand, are being as pure as the goddamn snow. You need to get laid girl, release some of that frustration. Heck, jump his bones, you'll thank me later. Or go join him in the shower.

No thanks, he's covered in blood and I'm not going to lose my virginity in the shower?

Why? It will mean you're extra clean?

I don't think it works that way, Sabriel.

There's one way to find out.

I'll pass, thanks.

I dimly hear the shower turn off and stare in awe as he makes his way into the room, dressed in only a towel that wrapped around his delicious body. My mouth drools as I stare at him, unable to look away from his muscled chest and arms, my heart thumping wildly while Sabriel begins to prance around my head, like an excited puppy. For once, I was too shocked to scold her. His eyes glint with amusement as he looks at me and cocks his head.

"Like what you see?" he says huskily as my jaw drops open and I feel myself becoming flushed.

Yes, oh god yes, I wanted to scream out but instead forced myself to look down at the ground and blushed, highly embarrassed by my reaction to his body. He gives a chuckle and I hear him rifling through the drawers for clothes, which makes Sabriel extremely sad. Now she's pouting like it's my fault he's putting clothes on.

"You can look now," he says gruffly, and I look up, seeing him come towards me, a smile on his lips. He kisses me, the sensation so pleasurable my lips tingle where we touch, his tongue caressing me until I open to him, his tongue delving in and beginning to plunder me as I gasp, my body beginning to quiver. Reluctantly, he pulls back and I blink, coming back down to earth with a disappointing thud.

"We need to talk," he says and gently tugs me to sit on the bed, while he fetches a pen and paper for me. "It occurred to me, that neither of us knows each other's stories," he said, "and I think you deserve to know why I initially didn't want a mate, even if I've changed my mind now."

I gave a small nod and waited for him to continue. He looks off towards the window, deep in thought. Finally, after a few excruciating moments of waiting, he begins to talk, quietly at first, while I listen intently and hear his story that makes tears well up in my eyes.

"I've had these scars since I was little, due to a rogue attacking me as a child. It never really bothered me much, I was young and foolish enough to think everyone would treat me the same way they had before I got them. But it didn't end up turning out to be the case."

My heart hurts to think he might have been treated differently due to a few scars. How could children be so cruel? So evil?

"I found my mate, my first one at least" he continued, as I felt a small spurt of jealousy within my breast, "not long after, I shifted into my wolf. She was a quiet, studious girl, one that I went to school with and she had the most delicious scent I've ever smelled, well at least until now" he added, glancing at me as I blushed.

"She was sitting under a tree, reading a book as I came up to her. I was so full of myself, so high and mighty, it never occurred to me that I might be rejected. Not when I was in line to become the next Alpha."

He exhales and shoots me a wry glance. "So it came as a complete shock to find out that she was more than willing to reject me. I could have lived with that" he admitted sheepishly "if she hadn't told me that the reason she didn't want to be with me, is because of these damn scars", he said, tracing them with a finger. I wanted to reach out and stop him, but I didn't dare.

I felt nothing but pain for him. The scars weren't hideous and it wasn't a reason to reject your mate. It must have been devastating for him. Was it any wonder that he was self-conscious about them? What kind of girl did that to someone with whom they were meant to be with? A shallow, vain girl, that's who. Was it any wonder he fell for someone like Candice?

"Ever since that day," he says, fidgeting with his hands, "I've told myself that I'll never put myself in a position where I can be rejected by another mate or in a vulnerable position again. Candice was one of the few girls I dated, and she lasted the longest. Most women look at me and see my scars, instead of the real me. I know now, that Candice was really only wanting to be Luna, but I convinced myself that no one would ever love me for myself."

I want to cry, his voice sounds so pained, so full of anguish. I want to take it all away, show him that there are women who will love him and not because he's an Alpha. He could have been an omega and I would have accepted him still, scars and all. Why couldn't he see just how handsome he is? I barely even notice the scars anymore. They're a part of him.

I reached out and took his hand, holding it firmly in my grasp and eyeing him carefully. It's moments like these that I really wish I could actually speak and tell him what I'm thinking and feeling. I even opened my mouth to try but nothing came out. I saw a flash of disappointment on Kai's face as well.

"Anyway, you deserve to know. I will change Winter. That is if you're willing to forgive and forget everything that I've done to you so far. We could start with a clean slate?" he offers and I can hear the hope in his voice. He was trying to extend an olive branch. The question was, would I take it?

I want nothing more than to start with a clean slate and forget about the past. He was hurting and I was hurting. Wasn't it time to embrace each other and what the future might hold for us instead? I have to release my hand so that I can scribble something onto the paper he's given me. I held it up for him to read.

I forgive you.

He looks relieved, hugging me so tight, that it's hard to draw breath, slapping me awkwardly on the back. But there's something that is preying on my mind and it's only right that I tell him my story too, so that he can understand where I come from and why I feel the way I do.

I begin to scribble while he looks over my shoulder.

My name is Winter and I'm eighteen years old. My mother was killed by rogues when I was small, and my brother Damien and father blamed me for her death because she died protecting me. They beat me and made me into a slave for them. The scars on my body are mainly from them.

I was bullied relentlessly at school as well and life did not get easier. Then one day, my father sold me, like a prostitute, to a friend of my brother's called Thomas, who tried to rape me. I ended up having to kill him, to save myself. Not long after that, some students stabbed me and blamed me for Thomas's death, resulting in my running away.

I traveled alone through packs and the forest until I came upon a group of rogues who chased me into your territory. The rest of what happened to me, you already know.

It's not very descriptive, but it's to the point and I see his eyes darken as he reads it. He looks furious.

"Son of a bitch" he swears as he finishes, holding me in a tight hug again "I didn't know Winter. I must have made things so much worse for you. I swear, I'm going to make this up to you, make you see that you're meant to be my mate and that I'll treat you right," he promised thickly, and I melted in his embrace, a smile on my face. Because there's nothing but the truth in his words and I believe him one hundred percent. The path we choose now is the one that will determine both of our futures.

## Chapter 58 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

### Damien POV

Crack, rustle. The twigs cracking beneath our feet were loud in the otherwise silent forest, but to be honest, we'd both reached the point of not caring, neither one of us giving a flying fig about the sounds or possible rogues. We're just that exhausted. Johnathon is definitely not the traveling buddy of my dreams.

Thomas hasn't stopped at every single pack as we both have, but both Johnathon and I are too worried about going in the wrong direction to avoid any of the packs along the trail we take. One wrong move and we could end up further away from Winter, instead of heading towards her like we initially planned. Every move we make we analyze. It's exhausting.

It hasn't been the smoothest of travels, not when Johnathon and I didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. It doesn't help that the last few days and nights have been cold as well as rainy. Even wolves don't like to get wet and there was a storm brewing, judging by the dark black clouds gathering over our heads. Just what else we needed. I shiver slightly from the cold, feeling extremely frustrated.

"I think we should set up camp" I shouted out to Johnathon, my hair beginning to fly wildly in the wind. I hope he can hear me, otherwise, I'm going to have to mind-link the blasted Alpha.



He turns to look at me, as grumpy as ever. For an Alpha, you'd think he would be used to bad weather and travel. Apparently not.

"The pack up ahead is not too much further. I would rather spend time in a nice warm bed than sleep out here again in the bloody cold" he grumbles. Yeah, I don't think we're going to have a choice tonight.

I shot another glance upwards. "We're not going to make it, best to set up camp" I argue. The next pack is several miles away and we've spent the majority of the day in our wolf forms up until now. We need time to recuperate. Setting up camp is the best option for both of us, he just has to stop being so goddamn stubborn.

Besides, who made Johnathon the bloody boss? I didn't ask him to come along, he insisted. I can tell he's annoyed, but I don't care.

"Fine" he snaps irritably, pulling the tent out of the backpack as I join him. I'm already shivering from the cold and it's not even raining. At this rate, snow was going to be inevitable as well. I smiled at that. Winter loves snow and always has. I guess that's one of the reasons I always felt that her name suited her. God, how I miss my little sister.

"We're wasting time doing this" Johnathon grunts as he begins to pull the tent up. I rolled my eyes. I wish I could bury him in the snow, just for some peace and quiet.

A loud crash of thunder makes both of us jump. I give Johnathon a told you so look, which he pointedly avoids, scrambling now to get the tent up. We huddle inside, both pointedly keeping our distance from one another. As far as we can, considering it's a very small tent and we're both bulky teenagers.

"Do you think Winter found a pack to stay in?" Johnathon asks quietly.

I stopped to think for a moment. I hope she has. I want nothing more than to find her and find out she's finally happy. She's already been through so much, if anyone deserves to find true happiness, it's her.

"I hope so" I muttered as he fell silent.

"Maybe I shouldn't have rejected her" he murmured, presumably speaking to himself. "She wouldn't have run off then. I could have at least given her a chance" he says regretfully.

I'm staring at him in disbelief. Did he really think that this was all because of his stupid bloody rejection? That might be one piece of the puzzle, but I'm betting the bullying and the beatings had something to do with it as well. He really needs to get over himself. Besides, what the hell is he going to do when we find Winter? I can't exactly see her welcoming him with open arms. Actually, I don't even think she'll greet me with open arms. I wouldn't blame her though. Johnathon is an idiot. A big one.

"She would have left anyway," I say finally and he sighs, looking despondent and rather pathetic if I'm being honest. "She was bullied at school and was beaten at home. I'm amazed it's taken this long for her to run away from home and never look back. If it was me, I would have left a long time ago. But she's always been the stubborn type." My voice cracks and I glance away from him.

The wind picks up outside and I shiver, the tent not quite keeping all of the warmth inside or the wind from seeping in. Then the heavens opened and the rain began to pour down. Great. We were both stuck there with each other whether we liked it or not. At least outside we could keep our distance and not be offended. The tent was meant as an emergency one but it has been coming in damn handy lately, even if the Alpha snores so loudly, I'm frightened that wild animals will get curious enough to investigate the loud sounds. I can at least be grateful to Johnathon for insisting we take a tent along. There's something to be said about not freezing to utter death.

My nose wrinkles. I can smell the dirt, pine, and the smell of the rain as it pours down, but I swear I'm picking something else up, something that we hadn't anticipated. Especially not in this weather. Fuck, I thought to myself with a groan. Not now. It smells absolutely putrid though and not something you can miss.

"Can you smell that?" I asked Johnathon and he nodded, grimly peeking out of the tent and scanning the woods.

"They might just be going through" he mutters to me, "at any rate they are still a fair distance away. Besides, they don't like the rain any more than we do, do they?"

Not exactly the right words to make me calm down. I'm trying to think positively, at least from the smell, there appears to be only one of them and there are two of us. That made the odds better on our side, especially with a ferocious Alpha. Heck, Johnathon could probably take them down on his own and never even break a sweat. That's what I'm telling myself anyway.

"The smell is getting stronger," I tell Johnathon nervously and he nods, his expression looking grim. Reluctantly, due to the rain and the cold wind, we were forced to step outside. If we shift inside the tent we'll only rip it to pieces and we very much wanted the tent to stay intact. The smell of blood and rotten meat met my nostrils and I cringed. It was definitely coming closer. Was it looking for a fight? Because we'd give him one. But it was sheer stupidity on his part to approach an Alpha. Most rogues would have the sense to stay away, so why the hell wasn't this one? It was bloody infuriating.

Johnathon was busy cocking his head, listening for the sounds of the approaching rogue, his eyes wary as he glanced at me. I gave him a nod and moved, keeping my back to him and trying to view this so-called rogue from a distance. He wasn't that far out that we shouldn't have been able to spot him. Especially with our shifter eye-sight. We can see for miles with it.

My mouth pops open, and I give Johnathon a nudge on his shoulder. He too stares in fascination. We're used to rogues being in their wolf forms and preparing to fight, and it actually takes us a moment to realize the man coming towards us was in fact one in human form. It was completely unexpected. If it wasn't for the smell and his glowing red eyes, we would have mistaken him for another shifter. A normal one.

The skinny, ragged-looking man holds his hands up as though surrendering. "I mean you no harm" he rasps as Johnathon and I glance at each other in surprise. "I have information, I believe you may want."

I'm suspicious. As if he's going to have any information we want from him. What kind of rogue is this? I thought they attacked on sight, but this one really does seem to be harmless, even as I remind myself to remain on my guard.

"What do you think?" I whispered to Johnathon.

"I think we should hear him out" he answers quietly "I'm curious to know what kind of information he thinks we want to hear."

So am I. But I'm not about to forget that he's a rogue either. I'm not about to let myself be killed if I can help it.

"Come forward slowly," I told him, firmly. Johnathon tensed beside me, prepared to shift at a second's notice. The man gives me a small nod and walks very slowly, forward until we're meters apart. He keeps his hands up as though surrendering.

"What do you want for the information?" Johnathon asked. It was a good question. What did we have that the rogue could possibly want? Well, besides our blood, I think a little maliciously.

The rogue licks his lips. "Spare food and water" he croaks, and Johnathon grabs a water bottle and some food from our backpack and returns, throwing it to the rogue, who eagerly catches it in both hands. He drinks thirstily and I realize, due to his malnourished and skinny frame, that he clearly hasn't been able to have a decent meal or satiate his thirst in a good long time. I actually find myself feeling sorry for this dude. How unreal is that? I feel sorry for a rogue.

"What's the information," I ask and he pauses, and wipes the water dripping down his chin with one hand, even as we're still getting rained down upon. It must be a habit. Or a reflex.

"I heard you're looking for a girl, one who has been traveling alone," he says gruffly and my heart skips a beat. Could he possibly be talking about my sister Winter? I try not to get too excited. He could be lying after all, trying to get us to let down our guard.

"We might be," Johnathon says cautiously. "why would you tell us?" He sounds curious rather than angry.

The rogue hesitates and looks a little shamefaced. 'If she's the one, I think you're looking for. She saved my life. I attacked her, desperate for food and she came out better off. Instead of finishing me off, she wrapped my wounds in bandages and left me some food to replenish my strength. She could have killed me. Hell if I'd been in her position, I would have, but she chose to help me instead. She did me a kindness and I'd like to pay it back."

That sounds very interesting. Winter, of course, would have her wolf long by now. But it's curious she didn't kill the rogue. Most shifters didn't hesitate like she clearly had.

"Could she speak?" Johnathon yelled out to him and the rogue shook his head.

"No," he said decisively, and my eyes lit up. It has to be her.

"Where did she go?"

The rogue comes closer and we don't move to stop him. The information he has is too important to ignore and could very well lead us to my missing sister. Besides, he seems to be relatively harmless, especially for a rogue.

The rogue's eyes are twinkling. "I can do better than that," he says with a small smile. "I can lead you right to her. I kept an eye on her after she left me, and wanted to thank her in some way. Then I heard from other packs once I saw she was staying where she was, that there were some boys looking for her. One of them being her brother, the other an Alpha. Figures it had to be you."

"What's in it for you?" I asked suspiciously.

"If I take you to her," the rogue says quietly, "can you do something for me?"

"Depends what it is," Johnathon says.

"Tell her thank you from me. Once I've done this, I'm off to find a home, settle down and stop being a rogue. She gave me that motivation to change.'

Chapter 59 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Kai POV

I feel like a completely different person. Like weights been lifted off my chest. Winter trusted me enough to divulge her story to me and I'm outraged on her behalf. Her brother was an asshole and so was her father. It was too bad I couldn't get my hands on both of them, because if I could, I would be torturing them slowly, listening to their screams with pleasure as their blood splattered all over the dungeon walls and floor. I can't believe Winter has forgiven her brother, despite everything he did to her. She's just so forgiving and kind. So sweet. So beautiful. She's perfect in my mind, absolutely perfect.

Alpha Kai, Alpha Laurence is in your office, requesting to see you.

What on earth is he doing here?

I've no idea, sir, do you want me to tell him you're unavailable?

No, I will be down there momentarily.

I break the mind link off, feeling highly annoyed. I wanted to spend time with Winter today. I eyed her thoughtfully. Maybe she wouldn't mind coming to the office with me and meeting Alpha Laurence? It can't hurt to ask anyway.

"Winter?" I asked gruffly, feeling a bit out of my depth "would you like to come down to my office and meet another Alpha from a neighboring pack?"

Her eyes lit up and she gave a fervent nod. I wonder if she's bored being here, with me constantly hovering over her. Am I being too possessive? I have no clue. But my wolf wants to be near her all the time, and if I'm honest with myself, so do I. I make a note, to stop being too clingy and make sure she has room to breathe.

I take her hand and walk downstairs with her, feeling the usual sparks as my wolf almost purrs in contentment. He's been a lot happier since I accepted Winter as my mate, instead of constantly being irritated at me. It makes a nice change. Usually, we're bickering with each other or blocking each other out of anger. Storm's become a lovesick puppy at the moment.

We walked through the office where Alpha Laurence was waiting. I stared at him with a grimace. I've never liked the man. He's probably slightly older than me and has shaggy auburn reddish hair with green eyes. He's shorter than me, I noticed with a small smile of satisfaction, but still stout and bulky with muscles that fairly bulge from his arms. Winter looks a little hesitant and I give her a small smile, drawing her forward as Alpha Laurence smiles at her.

"Alpha Laurence," I said firmly, "I would like you to meet Winter, my mate."

He looks absolutely shocked for a moment, but then recovers and smiles brightly as he gently takes Winter's hand and gives it a kiss. My wolf and I glared daggers at him, both of us feeling the urge to rip the man to shreds right then and there.

Winter gives a shy smile.

"You are the most beautiful creature I've ever seen," Alpha Laurence tells her and she beams at him.

She looks happy. I feel grumpy.

"To what do I owe the pleasure, Alpha Laurence," I said tightly, wanting nothing more than for the man to leave the office so that Winter doesn't have to be in his proximity anymore. Maybe asking her to come down to the office was a mistake. I'd forgotten how bloody handsome the other Alpha was. Now I'm irritated and trying hard not to show it.

I motioned for Winter to sit down, Alpha Laurence sitting in the chair beside her, while I sat across from them.

"Are you comfortable my dear?" Laurence asks her and she nods and bites her lip, shooting me a helpless look as I scowl at the other man.

"Winter is mute," I told him, "she cannot speak but she can write down anything you want to know."

I hand Winter a pen and paper, which she accepts, looking grateful.

"My apologies sweetheart," Laurence tells her, sounding remorseful.

I glower at him. Nobody gets to call my mate sweetheart but me!

Fuck this, let's just rip him a new asshole and be done with it.

Storm, we can't do that to another Alpha, no matter how much I'm tempted.

He's hitting on our mate, right in front of us.

I think he's trying to be polite.

I don't. If he keeps looking at her like that, I'm going to rip his fucking head off.

Calm down Storm, let's just see what he wants first.

I think it's fairly obvious what he wants, Kai, can't you see him making eyes at her?

We just can't attack another Alpha because we're jealous Storm.

Who made that stupid rule?

"I have some news that you might find interesting. There are several people that are traveling throughout the various packs and territories. Two, in particular, were of interest and now I know why. They are looking for Winter apparently. One of them claims to be her brother. I didn't know who Winter was. I was informed of this by another pack further away, in case they posed a threat to the woman. It's pure luck that I came here first. I wanted to make a personal visit to a friend of mine in the next pack over and stopped here first. Now I'm glad I did."

I look over at Winter, whose eyes are opened wide as she listens intently. She makes a scribbling motion with one hand and I realize what it is she wants, realizing the pen I gave her wasn't working, and hastily grab another one from the desk and hand it to her. She leans against the table as she scribbles, showing Alpha Laurence the paper first and then me.

Do you know if any of the men were called Damien at all? He's my brother.

"I believe that might have been one of the names," Alpha Laurence said regretfully. "I'm afraid I can't say for certain, but at least now you can be on your guard, should they come to your territory, Alpha Kai."



You bet your ass I'm going to be on my guard. If they step foot on my grounds I'll kill them. Or torture them. I don't know, but I don't care. I want revenge for Winter and what he did to her. But why does she look so excited at the prospect of seeing him again? I know she has told me, well written down, that she's forgiven him, but that doesn't mean I automatically have to like him.

"Anyhow," Alpha Laurence says with an easy-going grin as he stands back up "I believe that I'll be going to visit that friend of mine now. You'll let me know of any further developments?" he asks, and despite myself, I nod.

He had the courtesy to come and speak to me, and now because of him, I'm aware of a possible threat to Winter. It could be someone posing as her brother and even if not, I'm suspicious of these two people's motives. He's done me a kindness and I need to remember that, no matter how much Storm hates the man.

"Thank you for speaking to me", I grunted out.

"Winter," he says, turning to my mate, who looks startled, "it was a pleasure meeting you my dear", he adds and gives her a cheeky wink while I stand there fuming.

If looks could kill, Alpha Laurence would be a dead man walking by now. As it is, the bastard shoots me a wink and then leaves while I stand there dumbfounded.

You know that unmated males will continue to hit on our mate, don't you?

Storm, she's not the kind of girl to welcome that sort of attention.

I'm not saying she is, but don't you think it's dangerous that she isn't marked yet? At least if she bore our mark, the unmated males would know that she's been claimed. What if the other boy looking for her, is that first mate of hers? Johnathon, wasn't that his name? The one who rejected her. How long did it take for her to admit to us she'd been rejected as well? Maybe she's not over him. Did you consider that?

It better bloody well not be him looking for her.

It's a possibility, Kai. Even you know it could be him, I can feel it. I know it's him. What if it's because he's changed his mind and wants to be her mate now? What if he tries to break you and Winter up? What then?

Even if it is him, and I'm not saying it's going to be, we will deal with that when he gets here. He's not going to just waltz in and declare his love for Winter and take her away. At least I don't think he will, damnit Storm, now my stomach is in knots.

Need I remind you of that night when one of the pack members accosted her while she was setting the table as an omega? Do you want that kind of thing to keep happening to her? Especially when she can't scream for help? If she was able to mind-link us, don't you think that would be a lot more reassuring? Not just for us but for her? It would make things a lot safer for her if she had the ability to get help when she needs it. Besides, it's not like you don't plan on marking her at some stage anyway, is it?

Storm, don't you think you're being a little too overprotective?

If anything, you're not being protective enough, Kai.

Storm is making a valid point. Winter has been in danger numerous times since she arrived at my pack. Part of it was because of me. I recognized that, but someone was still causing trouble for her. What would happen if I couldn't get to her on time? She'd be a goner. Her wolf was too small to stand up to even an average wolf at the moment. She was frail as a human being too. Delicate. I can't be with her every minute of every hour of the day, no matter how hard I try. I could put guards on her, but then what if the guards tried something? Langdon wouldn't babysit her, not anymore. Maybe this was the best option? I'm so confused but I have to make a decision.

All I want to do is protect her. Storm's words keep echoing inside my head as I stand up and gently tug on a bewildered Winter's hand. She looks puzzled but stands, leaning into me as I bend down my head and gather her in for a kiss, my tongue delving into that sweet mouth of hers, caressing her tongue, gripping her hair tightly with one hand, and twining it around my fingers.

Winter will always be in danger while she's unmarked.

Storm's words are insistent and loud in my head. He's not wrong. Before I can think it over some more, or hesitate about what I'm about to do, I find my mouth trailing down her neck, kissing the nape of it softly as her eyes close and she grips my arms tightly with her hands. She's so trusting, I think, a little sadly. There's no hesitation in that girl at all, not when it comes to showing affection, and I wonder if it's because she's had so little of it since she was a small child. I would have thought she'd shy away from it, but instead, she eagerly welcomed all of my attention.

Slowly, I let my canines out, feeling regret and guilt for what I'm about to do, but Storm's words won't stop repeating in my head and it's making it difficult to change my mind. With one smooth motion, I pierce her delicate skin with my teeth and bite down, eliciting a hoarse gasp from her as she struggles in my grip. I shrink my canines back inside my mouth and slowly pull away, licking over the wound until it seals itself closed. There's a tattoo of a black wolf on her neck, dark and prominent against her pale, ivory skin. Now, no one would touch her, the mark clearly stating that the Alpha, which is me, has marked her as his mate.

She's so pale though and trembling as I look back at her. There's such anger on her face that I flinch, her eyes are swimming with tears. But there's something else that doesn't quite seem right. Her eyes roll up into the back of her head, and I only just get to her in the nick of time, scooping her into my arms as she faints dead away. I wiped the tears away from her eyes, feeling like a right bastard.

"What have I done?" I whispered to myself, ashamed at the action I'd taken and wondering what caused her to faint.

It's not the typical reaction of a mate that gets marked, but maybe I frightened her that badly? Fuck. God, I'm an asshole.

I carry her all the way to the hospital, making a nuisance of myself until she's placed in a room, and settle myself into a chair. I will be there when she wakes up, and I will suffer the consequences of what I've done. But even as I vow to do that, a small voice in the back of my mind tells me that I've done the right thing. I just hope Winter realizes that and forgives me for what I've done.

Chapter 60 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I felt the sharp prick of Kai's canines piercing into my skin before excruciating pain ripped through my entire body. I'd never heard of such a thing happening before. Whenever I'd heard of someone being marked by their mate, it had always sounded pleasurable and painless. Why did it hurt so badly? The pain is so bad, that I feel my body beginning to stiffen and before I know it. I collapsed towards the ground and then there was only darkness surrounding me. What the hell has he done to me?

I don't know where I am, only that I feel like I'm wrapped in a cocoon as time slowly passes by, like I'm awake but asleep at the same time and it's surreal, like an out-of-body experience. It gives me time to think. I don't know how to feel about the marking. It came out of nowhere. I hadn't been expecting it at all and I don't know what suddenly possessed Kai to do it all of a sudden. It made me angry but confused at the same time. Isn't this what I wanted? To be fully claimed by my mate and marked?

A small voice in my head pipes up.

You wanted it to be special, didn't you, Winter?

Yes, I did and he'd taken that from me.

You wanted to do it back to him at the same time, mark each other when you were more in tune with each other's needs and wants.

That was true. But was there any sense in being angry about it? It couldn't make Kai take it back, could it? My throat feels like it's on fire, heat spreading all around it, as I lay wherever I am, my hands gripping my throat in a futile attempt at getting whatever is happening to stop. Instead, it gets worse.

Then just as quickly it's gone and I hear voices above my head. "Is she going to be alright?"

That was Kai's voice.

"She should be. It's a miracle what's going on right now. I can only speculate as to why, but it appears that the mixture of your Alpha blood and her blood has caused this sudden reaction."

Caused what? I wonder rather stupidly. What reaction? Damnit, tell me!

"She's going to be so surprised", Kai's voice again, this time with a tinge of excitement. How dare he sound so damn nonchalant after what he did to me! Bastard!

"I think she's coming out of it" Dr. James' voice is distant like he's far away and I struggle, my eyes suddenly shooting open of their own accord, blinking against the sudden harsh white light coming from the hospital ceilings.

"Winter," Dr. James said to me jovially as I frowned up at him.

Why the hell was I in the hospital again for heaven's sake, "How are you feeling?" he asks, and I glance over at Kai, whose face looks absolutely devastated, realizing with a gasp that he's holding my hand tightly, as though he never wants to let go. I might be angry, but not enough for him to look so damn miserable. Although, a tiny part of me takes pleasure in his guilt. Maybe I should let him stew for a while after all.

"Sore" I rasp out and the room, goes still. I stiffen in shock. Had I just spoken that word out loud, or was this all in my head? My throat is sore and my voice is hoarse as I try again. "Sore" I repeated, and then looked at the doctor confused. Why am I now suddenly able to talk? Especially when the other doctor, before I came here, had seemed certain that my vocal cords were damaged beyond repair.

Dr. James speaks to me as Kai listens from his position by my bed. "I think that Kai's blood mixed in with yours when he marked you, sped up the healing process of your damaged vocal cords", he answers my unspoken question.

I frown. I thought that they were damaged beyond repair. Isn't that what the first doctor had said?

"Your vocal cords were extremely damaged but were slowly healing on their own. It might have taken another year, but you would eventually have been able to speak. Kai just sped up the process, so to speak" he chuckles at his joke.

My eyes widened in excitement. I turned to Kai, who was eyeing me tentatively. I threw my arms around him. I can speak again, it's a miracle and I feel like crying in my joy. "Thank you" I rasp as he hugs me back.

"You have every right to be pissed at me" he murmurs back, but I shake my head.

I'm ecstatic to have my voice back. What he did to me wasn't right, but when this was the end result? It was more than worth it. We would have a discussion on boundaries and consent later. But now I can talk! I want to shriek in happiness.

You can talk now Winter! Hell yeah, this is awesome.

Thanks, Sabriel

We can finally tell people how we feel about them, to their faces. Let's start with that bitch Candice. I dare you.

I think it might take a few days before I can talk properly, Sabriel.

That's alright, we can practice. Start with Kai, cause you are still pretty pissed at him, even if you're happy to have your voice back. Step out of your comfort zone girl, tell him. Tell him what a bastard he is. Go all out and do some swearing at the boy.

Alright, enough Sabriel. I get it. But I'm not angry at him anymore.

Sigh. That's the problem with you being nice Winter. It means you ruin all my fun.

Sabriel!

Sorry Winter. I didn't mean it.

Dr. James is excitedly chattering away in the background, but all my focus is on Kai who's still holding my hand and looking sheepish. He damn well knew what he'd done was wrong and there's something hovering in my mind as the rage builds.

"Winter", Dr. James says as I swivel my head to look at him "you can go home as soon as you feel ready to, but would it be impertinent to ask if I can take an x-ray of your neck and vocal cords again? I just want to make sure I've gotten pictures from every angle to examine."

"That's fine" I rasp painfully, and Dr. James scurries out of the room, presumably to set that up.

"I can't believe you have your voice back," Kai says quietly. "are you happy about that Winter? I swear I didn't know it would happen, but I can't say I'm sorry this happened because of what I did."

I'm conflicted. I am happy to have my voice back, but at the same time, part of me hadn't really missed it all that much. It was like I'd just retreated with the loss of my voice and now that I have it back, I'm wondering if it's time to find my voice for real, instead of hiding in the background. Would I have the strength to step forward and become the new me I want so badly?

I eyed Kai. "What you did was wrong" I whispered, and his face fell. He looks at me with remorse on his face.

"I know," he says, looking away,

"Why?" I ask and he knows what it is I'm really asking.

"I got jealous" he whispers, "so did my wolf while you were talking to the Alpha. I rationalized that marking you would keep you safe from unwanted attention, but that doesn't excuse the fact I should have asked you first. It was wrong and I'm sorry", he apologized.

I nodded emphatically at that. Consent was important. Right now, though, I'm annoyed at him. He could have just told me how he was feeling instead of going to such extreme lengths. I would have listened and tried to reassure him. I hadn't been interested in the other Alpha one bit, I only had eyes for Kai. Stupid foolish man, letting his feelings get the better of him. Although part of me is thrilled that he got jealous.

I tugged on his hand gently.

'Come closer" I whispered, my throat feeling like it was closing up every time I uttered a single word. Still, this was important to me. I was determined to do this.

He moves so close that he's inches away from my face, his eyes staring into mine as I give a small smile. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, I decided triumphantly, but I wouldn't go about it like he did. No, I would at least give him the courtesy of being able to refuse. Unlike what he'd done to me.

Slowly, I let my canines inch out of my mouth until he can see them, nice and pointy. For a minute, he looked extremely confused and then his eyes lit up with realization.

'You want to mark me?' he asks uncertainly and I give a very firm nod, my eyes never leaving his.

"Are you sure?" he asks, "you could still try and reject me. If you mark me, it will be a lot harder to do so."

I'm beginning to feel impatient now. I know what I want. I don't need other people making decisions for me. I've had enough of that. This was my choice. He doesn't need to keep me from making a mistake. Mistakes are made so we can learn from them.

"Yes," I said as firmly as I could with the hoarseness of my voice.

He hesitates and I think he's going to refuse, but then, to my surprise, he submits, showing his neck to me as I lick my lips.

'It would be an absolute honor for you to mark me' he whispered with a crack in his voice.

I bend my head down to his, licking along the nape of his neck as he shudders, aiming my teeth at the perfect spot and slowly, gingerly, lowering them down until they pierce his skin. I go deeper, wanting the mark to remain, not wanting to have to redo it. He stays completely silent as I slowly retract the canines and lick the spot I've pierced him, sealing the wound closed. An image of a wolf, a tattoo the same as the one I now have, appears instead and he traces the mark with his hand, his head shooting up as he stares at me with awe and something that looks remarkably like pride.



Now he's mine. I've claimed him, the same as he claimed me, and no one has the right to try and take him. That Candice bitch is fresh out of luck. He's mine now.

I point to his chest. "Mine", I growl and he does the same, pointing his finger at my chest and gazing into my eyes.

"Mine," he says back and my heart skips a beat. Now both of us are bonded together, forever.