

Run, Little Mate

The water is scalding.

I let it pound against my back like punishment, like it might burn the stench of blood from my skin the way she wanted it to.

And her voice echoes in my head.

You're covered in blood. Take a shower.

I grind my jaw.

No one tells me what to do.

No one ever has.

I am Kai—Alpha of the strongest pack on this continent. Alphas listen when I speak. They move when I decide they move... or kneel. Warriors bleed when I say they bleed. Entire packs bow simply because I exist. Enemies die.

Women... obey.

And yet—

She looks me straight in the eye when she says it. Like she has every right.

Not pleading, frightened or submissive.

Commanding.

As if she expects obedience.

The audacity coils heat low in my gut.

I slam my palm against the tiled wall, water splashing violently around me.

It's the rst time in my life a woman has ever commanded me. The rst time I even consider obeying one. Instinct screams for me to push back—to remind her exactly who stands above whom. To bare my teeth. To make her submit. I want to snap at her. I want to shove her against the wall and make her feel how small she is compared to me.

I hate it.

And gods help me—I want her more because of it.

Because it's her.

She's my mate.

My fated mate.

The words feel unreal in my mind. Heavy. Sacred. Mine.

Our rst night. Our rst space together. And she stands there with that sharp mouth and those dangerous blue eyes, telling me to wash like I'm some unruly warrior who dragged lth into her home.

I snort under my breath and swallow my pride—just this once.

There will not be a second time.

I will enjoy taming that mouth. Slowly. Thoroughly. I'll remind her exactly where she stands—omega, woman, beneath me.

And even if she weren't an omega, being a woman alone places her below. That is the order of the world. The way it has always been.

Equal?Never.

And yet—

She looks at me without fear.

She dares to look at me like an equal.

Like she would rather burn than bend.

The memory sends an unwanted surge of heat through my veins.

A reaction I hate myself for enjoying.

I curse and twist the tap, letting cold water crash over me, washing away the blood, the ght, the aftermath—

It does nothing for the harder problem pressing against me. The tension. The need.

Leaving her alone in my bed takes every shred of control I possess. Every instinct screams to go back—to cage her beneath me, to mark her so the world knows she belongs to me.

My body reacts to her like it was made for nothing else.

I exhale sharply and let the cold bite until the edge dulls.

Still—when I think of her—

Those eyes.

I drag a hand down my face, breathing hard.

Her image ashes in my mind unbidden.

Too beautiful.

Painfully so.

Skin untouched by hardship. Lips made for sin. And her eyes—gods—blue like shattered ice beneath moonlight. The kind of beauty that hurts to look at. The kind men ruin themselves over.

If she's an omega and she looks like that—

My vision darkens.

Men would have fallen at her feet. I know it. I feel it in my bones. They would have tried to touch. Tried to claim.

The thought of another man's hands on her—on my mate—makes something feral rise up my spine.

Never.

Never again.

She belongs to me now.

I would kill for her.

I would raze cities.

I never expected this.

I never expected her.

Fated mates are rare—golden-myth rare. The kind warriors joke about and elders whisper about around relight. Most of us marry for power. For alliances.

I thought I would take the princess. Thought it was inevitable. Alpha of the strongest pack, future king—it made sense.

Then I meet her.

And gods, meeting her in the esh... it is worth every whispered legend.

And that kiss—

Fuck.

Nothing prepares me for it.

The pull. The way my wolf slams forward like it has been starving its entire life. The certainty. The need.

I will not give this up.

I shut off the water abruptly and step out, grabbing a towel as adrenaline oods my veins. I don't bother drying properly. I don't need comfort. I need her. Need to see her—to feel her presence anchor me before the storm inside me breaks loose.

I push the bathroom door open, already forming something wicked on my tongue—something meant to steal her breath, to remind her exactly who she belongs to—

And then—

I freeze.

The bed is empty.

My steps falter.

The door—open.

The lock—broken.

"What the f**k...?"

My heart slams once. Hard enough to hurt.

Kidnapped?

No.

No one would dare. Not here. Not knowing whose room this is. And I don't smell anyone else—no intruder, no lingering fear. Nothing but her fading presence.

Which means—

She ran.

She escaped.

"How?" I mutter, dragging a hand through my damp hair as frustration ignites, white-hot. Those locks are reinforced. High-security. Designed to keep anything inside.

And yet—

She's gone.

Why?

The question hits harder than it should.

Did she run back to her family?

My jaw tightens.

She'll pay for this.

Disobedience has consequences.

The moment a woman meets her mate, her world is meant to revolve around him. That is law. That is instinct. That is nature.

She is meant to orbit his gravity—to bend, to follow, to submit. Her wants shrink beneath his will. Her deance is a aw meant to be corrected.

Family comes second.

It only matters if I allow it.

I stare at the broken lock, fury coiling tighter with every breath. The metal hangs twisted and useless from the doorframe.

Running from me is a mistake.

A dangerous one.

Because now—now I am going to nd her.

And when I do, she will remember exactly who her Alpha is.

Run if you want, little mate.

I will nd you, and we are going to have a very long conversation.

The walls tremble with my rage.

Find her.

My voice slams through the mindlink, raw and edged with claws.

"Turn this hotel upside down." I snarl. "I want eyes on my mate now. If she is not in my arms within the hour—if any of you fail me, if even one of you decides to be useless today—I will personally break every bone in every body under my command."

I pause, letting the threat sink deep.

"And then I will start on your families."

A chorus of terried acknowledgements oods back instantly.

Fear makes men fast.

I hiss under my breath and yank on my clothes with violent, careless movements. Shirt. Pants. Boots. I don't bother xing anything properly. Rage hums too loud beneath my skin. My wolf paces inside me, furious and confused, snarling for blood.

I drag in a sharp breath and force myself to focus, letting instinct take over.

Her scent—soft, intoxicating, dangerous—is faint now. Thinning. Slipping away like smoke on the wind.

I follow what little remains of her trail into the corridor, through stairwells and narrow halls, past startled staff who atten themselves against the walls the moment my alpha pressure crashes over them.

"f*k," I growl.

She didn't just leave the room.

She left the hotel.

The realization tightens something ugly and vicious in my chest.

By the time I reach the entrance, the trail is gone.

Vanished.

As if she was never here at all.