

Welcome to Ashen Vale

The moment we step into my chambers, I feel it.

The bond. It hums. Pulls.

Kei freezes for half a second—then turns into an absolute menace. He starts prowling, circling the room like a wolf let loose in a perfume shop. He touches the curtains, runs his fingers along the bedpost and the back of my chair, inhales like he's trying to memorize the air itself.

He stops near my wardrobe and closes his eyes for a second, jaw tightening, his expression turning into something that is definitely not polite.

"Stop touching my things," I snap, already irritated because he's practically dragging me around with him as he does this.

He opens his eyes and looks at me like I've just told the sun to stop being hot.

"I can't help it," he says honestly. "Your scent is everywhere. It's... driving me insane."

That should not do things to my stomach.

And yet, it does.

He drags a hand over his face, visibly trying to rein himself in. "Tomorrow, we're taking all of this. Your clothes. Your books. Whatever you want. I want you comfortable. I want you to feel like you're home."

Home.

The word lands strangely in my chest.



The palace has never been home. It's been a cage with prettier walls and silk curtains. Rules. Silence. Watching eyes.

And the stupid, infuriating part?

The thought of him carrying my things across packs just so I'll feel safe warms something in my chest I really wanted to keep cold.

I hate that I can't fully hate him.

I hate that he gave me back my wolf.

I hate that the bond keeps humming like it's pleased.

And I hate that part of me—just a small, traitorous part—wonders what home would feel like if it wasn't a cage at all.

I shove the warmth down before it can turn into something dangerous and reckless, then lift our joined hands between us, the cuff chain clinking.

"What about these?" I ask. "I need to shower. And I need the bathroom. Since it's just the two of us, why don't you take them off? It's not like I can run away from you or something."

He doesn't blink.

"Don't use that trick on me again," Kei says flatly. "I'm not falling for it twice."

I sigh. "So what—are you planning to follow me around like a very large, very annoying shadow?"

"Yes."



"I don't want you seeing my body."

He steps closer—close enough that I can feel his heat, his presence pressing into my space. His eyes darken, his voice dropping into that infuriating Alpha register that makes my wolf bristle and my stomach do traitorous flips.

"Your body is mine," he says quietly. "Every inch of you was made for my eyes, princess." His voice lowers, heavier with possession. "The same way mine is for yours. There's nothing to hide."

I look away, jaw tightening. "In your dreams."

"And in yours, before you get these cuffs off," he replies, unbothered. "You've already proven you can escape. I'm not giving you that chance again."

"Then put the other cuff back on properly so I can move freely," I shoot back.

"No."

Of course.

He turns toward the bathroom, tugging me along as if the decision is already made. "If you don't want to look, and you're shy, close your eyes."

"What—wait—"

Too late. He's already inside, already starting to strip like he's in his own quarters.

I freeze.



Then I do the only sensible thing.

I stop short and squeeze my eyes shut, heat rushing to my face despite myself.

"Oh, for the love of—warn a woman before you start doing that," I mutter. "This is indecent."

He laughs. Actually laughs—low, smug, and far too pleased with himself.

"What's wrong, princess? Can't handle me?"

"I did not agree to... to... visual trauma," I snap.

I turn my face away, just in case my traitorous eyes decide to betray me. It isn't the first time I've seen a naked man, but somehow he makes me feel like a shy teenager all over again. Curse the mate bond.

"Not even a little curious?" he asks lazily. "About how big my coc—"

"Finish that sentence and I will bite you," I cut in, my ears burning.

I keep my eyes closed, but that doesn't stop my imagination from betraying me. I hear the water running. I can picture him moving, muscles shifting, confidence carved into every line of his body. The image is uninvited—and entirely too vivid.

I hate my brain.

I force myself to think of flowers. Of wolves running. Of anything—literally anything—that is not Kei bathing five steps away from me.

He takes his sweet time, of course. Because of course he does.

When he finally finishes, I'm still standing there like a very dignified statue with my eyes squeezed shut.



"You can look now," he says, far too amused.

"I don't want to."

Still, I open one eye just long enough to confirm he's decent again, then immediately look away with a huff. "I'm not showering anymore."

"Scared?" he asks.

"Annoyed," I correct.

We end up on the bed, still bound by the chain, still orbiting each other like two stubborn moons. I turn my back to him, spine stiff, determined to sleep exactly one mile away—on a mattress that absolutely does not support my plans—and to keep whatever fragile control I still have.

It doesn't last.

Sometime in the night, I feel him move. An arm slides around my waist, firm and unyielding, pulling me back against his chest like it's the most natural thing in the world.

I tell myself it's just the cuffs.

I tell myself it means nothing.

But my traitor wolf settles, quiet and strangely at ease, as if this—of all things—is exactly where she expects to be.

Warmth.

That's the first thing I register when I wake.

Just warmth—and the steady rise and fall of something solid beneath my

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cheek.

For one blissfully stupid second, I think I'm still in my bed.

Then the world jolts.

Wood creaks. Wheels grind against stone. A horse snorts somewhere ahead. The air smells like leather and pine and—

Not my room.

I open my eyes.

I am not in my bed.

I am in a moving carriage.

And I am very much in Kei's arms.

His arm is wrapped tightly around my waist, my back pressed to his chest, our cuffed wrists resting against his stomach like this is the most natural thing in the world.

I stiffen.

"Finally awake, Sleeping Beauty." His voice vibrates against my temple.

I tilt my head up slowly, my glare fully loaded. "Why am I not in my room?"

He arches a brow. "Because my arms are much better than your room."

"That does not answer my question."

"It answers it perfectly."

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The carriage jolts again, and I try to sit up, but his arm tightens instinctively, steadying me.

"Where are we going?" I demand.

"My pack," he says simply. "Your new home. For the meantime. Until you're trained—and better behaved."

I stare at him.

"Trained?" I repeat slowly.

His lips twitch. "Don't look so offended."

"I am offended."

"You should be grateful."

I shove at his chest with my free hand. "You kidnapped me."

"I relocated you."

"You left without waking me!" My irritation spikes. "You took me against my will. I didn't even get to say goodbye to my mother."

His mouth curves slightly. "What about your father? Aren't you devastated you didn't get a farewell embrace? A kiss goodbye?"

I glare so hard I'm surprised he doesn't catch fire. "You're not funny."

"I disagree."

"Don't joke."

His expression shifts just a little, amusement dimming.



"Your mother said not to wake you," he says. "She gave me this."

He pulls a folded parchment from his coat and holds it out to me.

My breath catches.

I take it quickly, my fingers brushing his. For a brief second, our eyes meet—something unspoken flickers between us. Then I tuck the letter inside my clothes, close to my chest.

"I'll read it later," I mutter. My mother's words are for my eyes only.

"We'll be in my pack in five minutes," he says.

I blink. "Wait. So soon? I didn't know your pack was this close to the royal territory."

"It isn't."

"Then how—"

"We left as soon as I was sure you were deeply asleep," he says calmly. "I made sure of it."

Suspicion prickles. "Why?"

"So you wouldn't be able to trace your way back without me," he continues. "Besides, I could have carried you in my wolf form. It would've been faster—but it would have woken you, and I didn't want that." His gaze lingers on me for half a second too long. "You look... beautiful when you sleep."

My heart stumbles at his words, and for some reason I can't stop the image from forming—him carrying me through the forest, against his fur, or the two of us running side by side, grinning like fools.



I swallow and look away before he can read my thoughts.

The carriage slows, then stops.

Kei straightens, his gaze sharpening.

"We're here," he says.

The door opens. Cool air rushes in.

He steps out first, then turns and lifts me down—gently, far too gently—like I weigh nothing at all.

"Welcome to Ashen Vale," he begins—

A scream tears through the air.

"The pack is under attack!"

Everything explodes at once.

Another scream. Smoke coils into the sky—thick, black, suffocating.

My eyes lift—and freeze.

Fire.

Houses are burning.

Flames crawl hungrily over rooftops. Wolves sprint across the grounds, some shifting mid-run, others dragging injured bodies. The scent of blood hits my nose seconds later.

Metal clashes.

A child cries somewhere to my left.



Something slams into the carriage behind us, knocking it sideways.

Kei's entire body goes rigid.

Then he roars. It isn't a human sound as it shakes the ground beneath my feet.

The air shifts—his presence surging outward, violent and commanding. Wolves drop instinctively around us, some in submission, others in panic.

"Protect the elders!" he bellows. "Form defensive lines! Find the source!"

He's already moving before I can process it, dragging me with him because of the cursed cuff.

Arrows whistle past.

A warrior flies through the air, thrown by something I can't yet see.

This is chaos.

Pure chaos.

I glance at the burning buildings, at the smoke swallowing the sky, at the blood staining the entrance of his pack.

I blink once.

Twice.

Well.

What a warm welcome.

So this is the place he wanted to call my home.

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I inhale smoke and sarcasm at the same time.

Wonderful.

Absolutely perfect timing.

I barely arrive, and the universe decides to set it on fire.

Home sweet home, I suppose.

big sale: 100 bonus free fou you

get it

