

111 111- Leaning Into Him

Phoenix: 1

He wasn't the Jai I knew. This man felt like a stranger.

I was aware that he had just lost his brother, but he also needed to understand that he couldn't blame me for Brian's recklessness.

"I'm ... I'm here to be with you, Jai," I frowned when I felt a light stinging on my cheeks.

Damn those tears.

They were sliding down the same cheeks, he had spent two years treating. My chest ached as I tried to reach out again, trying to hold his hand, to remind him who we were.

But he jerked my hand away as if my touch burned him.

Goddess. It hurts.

"Leave!" he said, louder this time, and wiped his face with the back of his hand, "Just leave, Phoenix. I can't..." his words got caught in his throat as he waved his hand at me helplessly.

I was hating it. I was hating myself for doing this to him.

The way he was looking at me, as if my presence

was enough to tear him apart.

We both were crying, yet we weren't hugging each other.

"I ... I didn't mean to ... get Brian ki*kled ... I ..." my voice trailed off when I swallowed hard, "None of this is easy for me, Jai. I ... I've no one except you..."

And now? Now you also have no one except me. Please don't let them win, Jai. I pleaded silently.

I was back to square one. A beggar, begging for love. Not a warrior, I was supposed to be.

"Believe me, Jai. I didn't want any of this..." He was there, dammit. He saw how Brian behaved. Why was he pinning this on me?

He didn't answer me, and for a moment I thought he might break.

Hug me, Jai. Say something. Anything. Tell me like you used to, when we were bestest friends. That everything will be alright. Because you're here for me. Just like I'm here for you.

But no.

He avoided eye contact.

A few moments back, the pack took my room, and now they had taken away someone who was closest to my heart.

He opened his mouth to say something, but then shut it again. Maybe he wanted to remind me again that I shouldn't have come here.

I stepped back, slowly.

Though my insides were screaming. Something deep inside warned me that we were drifting apart.

We had drifted apart, and this was the final goodbye.

I sniffed my nose and wiped my face. My mask had gotten wet because of the tears that were sliding down nonstop.

I saw him closing his eyes and then shaking his head, maybe trying to wake up from this scary dream.

Without uttering a single word, he went back to the room and slammed the door behind him with a thud. My wobbly lips curved down like a baby's. My eyes shifted to the guard who was standing there. We both had forgotten his presence.

Even he seemed misty-eyed.

"Don't worry," I tried to make my tone casual, "He is mad at me. He'll come back."

I snapped my fingers and pointed at the door, "He can't live without me. He'll come back."

With that, I turned on my heels and walked as fast as I could down the corridor. I tried to ignore the way my chest felt like it would split open.

The moment I stepped outside, the cold air slapped me, and I broke into a run.

I didn't stop until I reached the part of the forest where I had started training and where the world felt far away.

My legs gave out beneath me, and I dropped to my knees in the dirt.

The sobs that came out of my mouth were fast and ugly, before I could hold them inside. My mask was soaking more, now clinging uncomfortably to my skin, but at this point, I didn't care.

My body curled forward as I doubled over from the ache clawing through my stomach.

And then it hit me harder. Jai.

Someone I had started leaning on. My only friend. I had lost him, maybe forever.

The thought was enough to make my bile rise as I leaned to the side, puking into the soil until my throat burned raw.

My hands dug into the ground, trembling, "Stop," I whisper to myself, choking on tears, "Please..."

just stop..." 1

That's when I felt it. A warm hand rubbing my back gently in circles.

"It's okay," a soft voice murmured near my ear,
"You'll be alright."

I froze and turned my head just enough to see her.

Amora.

But I had to look away. My stomach twisted again, and I doubled over, retching into the dirt while tears kept spilling hot, down my face.

"Don't fight it, love," she told me softly, "I'm right here. Let it all out."

I pressed my forehead to the damp earth, my palms dug into the dirt, and I cried harder.

Every sob felt like my heart could burst any minute.

"Urgh. I asked you to stay away. Let me handle this, Sebastian," Amora said loudly.

Was Sebastian here?

Why?

Panic rushed through me.

"She needs a woman, Sebastian," Amora said as she tucked my hair behind my ear, "I told you, I'll

call you if this gets out of hand."

I didn't want him to see me in such a vulnerable state.

Broken, weak, doubled over in dirt. I was supposed to be a Royal warrior now, and I couldn't be seen as a weak person.

Warriors were not allowed to crumble like this.

"Fu*ck your theories, Amora. She needs me," before I could understand what was happening, he was there.

He lowered himself right beside me, on the filthy ground, not caring that my vomit might stain his clothes.

I felt him pulling me closer, kissing my wet, sweaty temple.

For a second, I wanted to push him away.

But the truth?

Before my mind could catch up, my body was already leaning into him.