

## CHAPTER 41

Kai POV

I finish banging Candice and order her to leave. When she's gone, I sit in my chair and twiddle my thumbs. My mind keeps flashing back to the fact there is a prisoner in the dungeon. While part of me is more than happy for them to cool their heels and wait for me to go down there, another part of me is almost desperate to see this prisoner, my wolf especially. Does he know something that I don't?

Please go down to the dungeon. For heaven's sake, stop procrastinating.

It's just a pathetic shifter, Storm, why bother? We can leave them for a few days. They're nothing special. Plus, they are an idiot for traveling alone. They can take the time to think about their stupidity.

But something is telling me it's important. Always trust your gut.

Will you leave me alone for Christ's sake? You are imagining things.

Not until you go down there.

Fine, you annoying mutt, I'll go down there. Happy now? I swear...

Yes, very.

Damnit Storm, I think to myself rather crossly. I stomp out of the room and ignore the startled pack members who watch my every move. I imagine some of the women are turning away in disgust, over the horrible scars that are prominent on my face. I don't blame them, even I know how

hideous I look. After all, I'm definitely no Prince Charming, and that suits me just fine.

I stomped outside and over to the dungeon doors. Storm is excited for some inexplicable reason and it's annoying as hell. The door opens with a loud creak and I make a mental note to fix that. It looks just like I remember it as I progress down the stairs. The same smell of dampness and mildew, not to mention the metallic scent of blood. It's dark, the only light coming from barred windows. It's not the most welcoming place, but it's not designed to be. It's designed for torture and imprisonment.

I sniff. There's a curious smell wafting towards me, like strawberries and cream. My stomach gets butterflies to my astonishment. Is it some sort of strange perfume? I frown. I'd just realized that I never bothered to ask Langdon if the prisoner was a male or female. That was a stupid oversight. I walk towards the cells, Storm howling in my head as I tell him to shut the hell up. My gaze falls onto the small girl inside and my heart skips a beat. This had to be a mistake or a cruel prank of some kind, anything but what it is.

No, dear god, this isn't happening. Not again. I have a girlfriend, who I might not exactly love to pieces, but that I really liked having around. This had to be a mistake. I walked closer, my eyes narrowed as I looked at the girl. She's small, delicate looking, bruises covering her arms and face. I feel a spurt of anger at the thought that one of my men might have caused it. If they had, I'd kill them. She's slightly dirty and when she turns towards me, our eyes meet and I'm absolutely speechless, staring at the most beautiful girl in the whole world as the mate bond comes to life.

"Mate" I whisper quietly and she nods. But she doesn't speak to my shock. What's up with that? I need to know her name, my whole body craves to speak it out loud.

"What's your name" I demand and she just waves her hands around. Is she an idiot? You can't just ignore an Alpha when they ask you a question. Was she doing this intentionally?

I took a deep breath and thundered "What's your name?" in the Alpha tone, commanding her to tell me.

She points at her throat, mouth opening and closing with no sounds.

She can't talk to you, moron. Way to go. You're scaring her.

You know that we can't accept her as our mate, Storm, so don't bother even thinking about it.

Why? She's a damn sight lovelier than Candice and I won't let you reject her.

You can't stop me, Storm.

I can refuse to let you shift and trust me, you reject this poor girl and that's exactly what I'll do.

Fine, then I guess I'll make her life a living hell.

Do what you have to do, but I'm not rejecting her. She's ours and you'll see that for yourself one day if you stop being such a stubborn jackass. You really can be a dick sometimes, you know.

I sigh and fold my arms. The girl is still eyeing me, as though frightened, and I feel a small pang of guilt. I hadn't meant to frighten her. If I'd known beforehand that she was mute, I wouldn't have used my Alpha tone on her. But I don't know what to do with her. Because in spite of Storm's threats, I don't want to reject her. Besides, how would that work, when she can't form the words to accept the rejection? I don't think her writing down the words will be enough.

She's not like Elena. Give her a chance.

I hear Storm's words but refuse to believe them. After all, before Candice came along, no one had been interested in dating me, even as one of the strongest packs and Alpha in the country. I might be known for being strong, but my looks had put off every female that had come across my path. Females were, all the same, this one wouldn't be any different.

I open the cage door and she slowly shuffles through, her eyes gazing up at me with what looks like adoration. She's about to get a shock but I can't see what else I can do. I can't have her near me, my feelings for her will only get stronger and I don't want her anywhere near Candice. The last thing I need is that. God knows how Candice would react. She doesn't need to know, I decide, feeling a tad guilty. After all, it's not like I'm about to do anything wrong. Candice would be fine.

"Follow me" I ordered, and went upstairs, glancing back over my shoulder. She's tightlipped and pale but follows me nonetheless to my satisfaction. At least she can follow orders. That's useful. In fact, that gives me a great idea.

I almost shoved her into my office and closed the door. For some strange reason, she cowers in the chair. Is she afraid that I'll hit her? I've never hit a woman in my life. I feel a bit dismayed. Storm keeps calling me an idiot.

I sat down opposite her and regarded her quietly. She's avoiding my eyes and looking around the room with interest. She's so childlike, innocent and it's hard not to watch her. It was hard to keep myself from touching her.

"Listen," I said, grabbing a piece of paper and pen. "How about we start with your name first?"

She quickly scribbles down something and I glance down to see 'Winter.'

"Winter's your name?" I checked and she nodded. It's a cute name and it really seems to suit her well. I shook my head and cleared my throat.

"Winter, I want you to understand something," I say sternly, and finally, she meets my eyes. "I don't want a mate, not now and not in the future. I'm perfectly happy with the life I have and I'm not about to ruin it."

She gives a nod and I swear I see tears in the corner of her eyes, even though she blinks them back. I feel like a right bastard now.

"I have a girlfriend and I just can't have you near her. So, what I'm going to do is make you an omega", I say, and she stiffens. I know this must seem like an insult to her, but I couldn't reject her with Storm threatening to keep me from shifting. A tiny, tiny part of me wants to keep her hanging around. Selfish, but I'm an Alpha and I can do whatever I want. Besides this way, she'll be able to earn a living and I can keep an eye on her at the same time. For all I know, she could be a spy from another pack.

I watched her nod, looking miserable. I harden my heart before I soften towards her. "I'm about to mind-link the head omega," I tell her, leaning back in the chair. God, she smells so good, my cock is twitching like a traitor. The sooner I get her out of here, the better.

The head omega comes bustling in. "Alpha Kai" she greets me cordially "what can I do for you?"

I gesture towards Winter, who's sitting there and listening. "I have a new omega to help you with your duties. Please show her to a room, Maria", I say with a sigh as she nods and begins to gesture for Winter to follow her.

"Wait," I say suddenly, and Maria looks at me confused. "Winter is mute, she can't speak", I explain, "please let the other omegas know as well, so there are no misunderstandings", I say grimly, and watch as Maria drags Winter off. Winter glances over her shoulder one last time with a pleading look and I force myself to stare back at her, watching her face fall as she leaves.

This is a complication I definitely don't need. Maybe, in time, I think a little hopefully, Storm will see the futility of having Winter here and agree to reject her. But something tells me that my wolf won't be so easy to dissuade and that the longer she's here, the harder I'm going to find fighting the mate bond. I dread having to tell Candice about her. Would it be so bad if I kept Winter a secret? Candice doesn't really need to know. At least not yet. I walked outside. I need to do some training and work out my frustration. Some sparring should do the trick. In fact, I think I'll go find Langdon, he has some serious explaining to do, and what better way to get it out of him, than to fight him in the training ring?