

The Alpha King's Human Mate by HC Dolores

Chapter 16

“A bond between souls is ancient – older than the planet.”

Dianna Hardy

When Esther opened the door to the meeting room, every eye was on us. The first thing I saw was a gigantic conference room table, and the Alpha King was at its head.

There was an empty chair beside him, and on the other side, there were two men. One of them was middle-aged with greying hair and the other looked like he was in his mid-twenties.

My eyes raked over the rest of the room. Almost every other seat in the room was taken by kids of varying ages, genders, and races – some of them looked like they were my age while others looked closer to twelve and thirteen. These must've been the children of Alphas, the other kids invited to this meeting. It was startling to see that some of them were so young but I guess I couldn't be surprised. The directive was for every Alpha child over the age of thirteen.

Even from the doorway, I could see stern-faced guards stationed at every room corner. They didn't look at us, but I had no doubt they were watching us closely.

“Ah, our last guests have arrived,” the Alpha clapped his hands together, “Sebastian, Lily, Clark – please come in. You make take your seats.” He pointed to three empty seats near the end of the table and I breathed a sigh of relief. At least we weren't seated anywhere close to the Alpha King. 2

As we approached our seats, the entire room was silent – all eyes were on us, the last to arrive. We weren't late, I knew that, but we were barely on time.

The tense silence and staring made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. You know that feeling when you walk into class ten minutes too late and the teacher is already feeling? It kind of felt like that – but amplified by ten. (3

Out of us three, I was the last to snag my seat. Sebastian sat at the very end of the table, Lily was between us, and then there was me. I nearly groaned when I saw who was sitting on the other side of me.

Ezra.

He grinned at me as I took my seat but I avoided eye contact. I didn't want to encourage whatever sick fascination he got out of taunting the only human around.

"I believe that is the last of our guests?" the Alpha King asked Esther, who was still standing by the door.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Thank you, Esther. You may leave," he said. I noticed that the Alpha King looked a lot more put together today than he had at the dinner party. He was wearing a similar military uniform but this one was even fancier. There was no wine glass in sight either.

"Now that we've all arrived," the Alpha King said, "I believe it's time to discuss why we're here. I've called this meeting today to resolve the pack dispute between Alpha Abel from the Pacific Rocks Pack -" He paused to gesture to the middle-aged, greying man beside him, "And Alpha Liam of the Crescent Moon Pack." This time, he looked over at the other man in his twenties.

Now that the Alpha King was getting the ball rolling, it felt like I could relax. The attention was no longer on Seb, Lily, and I's entrance to the room.

As he spoke, I let my gaze roam over some of the other faces in the room. I didn't recognize most of them but I did spot Aakesh and Angel a few seats down. Angel's eyes were on the floor

no surprise there

and Aakesh faced the Alpha King like

—

a diligent student taking notes in class.

—

Unfortunately, Alessia was nowhere to be found.

Guess she decided to play 'sick' after all.

I looked around the room again.

Is the Prince here?

I had no idea where the thought came from but it did. The Alpha King himself had said his son would attend the meeting, but looking around, there was no Prince in sight. Granted, I had no idea what he looked like but I doubted he was the

fourteen-year-old boy squirming in his seat across from me.

Well, there is an empty seat beside the King. Guess he decided to play hooky today.

It was odd, considering that this meeting was half-orchestrated so that the guy could find his mate. But it's not like I was complaining. The less drama, the better.

"Now, let's get into the specifics of this dispute," the King's voice boomed around the room, "Alpha Abel has complained that you're encroaching onto his territory, Alpha Liam." Alpha Abel nodded from his spot beside the King. He looked tired. Like this entire affair was exhausting him.

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"Yes," Alpha Abel said, and even his voice sounded tired, "My patrols have found his pack members on our land several times. We've asked them to politely leave but they've come back time and time again. This last time, one of his pack drew the blood of one of my warriors."

There were a few murmurs around the room at that last comment. Even I knew that attacking someone from another pack was a big no-no. It was practically a declaration of war.

"I see," the Alpha King, "Alpha Liam, what do you have to say about these claims?"

Although he looked so much younger than Alpha Abel, there was nothing youthful or innocent about Alpha Liam. His face was hard and sharp and he looked bloodthirsty. He wasn't even looking at me and I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

1

"Those lands once belonged to the Crescent Moon Pack," Alpha Liam said, "A former Alpha gave them up to the Pacific Rocks pack hundreds of years ago. I want them back and I think I've made it clear. If Alpha Abel wishes to keep them, perhaps he should defend his border better."

Whispers broke out across the room. There were a few gasps and a couple of kids even chuckled.

“Alpha Liam,” the King boomed, “Do you really think harming another pack is an appropriate way to reclaim your lands?”

Alpha Liam didn't look the least bit sorry or regretful.

“Of course not, Your Majesty,” Alpha Liam said but his voice lacked any kind of sincerity, “It's just that wolves are territorial by nature and I let some of my instincts get the best of me. I should've talked to Alpha Abel about reclaiming his lands.”

“Yes, you should have,” the King said, “But if anyone understands possessiveness, it's an Alpha. To compensate Alpha Abel for his lost pack members, you'll give two of your own to his pack. You'll also stay off his lands. Whether they belonged to your pack hundreds of years ago or not, that's irrelevant now.”

Alpha Liam nodded, but even across the room, I could see the rage simmering in his eyes. He was barely keeping it together, and I had a feeling he would've attacked Abel if this exchange wasn't happening in front of the Alpha King.

“Good, good,” the Alpha King nodded. If he saw how unhappy Liam was, he didn't say anything about it.

Well, that was quick.

The King's eyes suddenly glazed over he was using the mind link.

It was quiet for a few moments and then he gestured to one of the guards. “My son has just arrived at the south entrance. Please escort him here.”

I guess the Prince will be making an appearance after all.

More whispers across the room but this time they were excited whispers. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw many of the girls fixing their hair or their clothes. I didn't need to be a genius to figure out why.

They want to look good for the Prince in case they're his mate. ?

The effort felt kind of fruitless to me. The prince was only going to have eyes for his mate, and one of these girls happened to be the lucky winner, it's not like he was going to turn her away over a few loose hairs or a wrinkly shirt. But then again, I wasn't the one throwing my hat in the ring.

“You're not going to fix your hair?” a teasing voice to my right asked. Ezra.

Great, it's the literal last person on the planet I feel like talking to.

I almost just ignored him, but I had a feeling Ezra would just keep bothering me until I talked.

“Should I be?” I asked flatly.

“No, of course not,” Ezra grinned, “A puny human like you has zero chance of ever being a wolf’s mate, less alone a prince.”

Before I could retaliate with something snarky, the doors to the meeting room opened and every eye turned to the entrance.

Two burly guards entered first and then I saw him.

Prince Griffin.

The first thing I noticed about him was his height. He was tall, even for a werewolf, and he must’ve been at least 6’4 or 6’5. He held himself the way that most Alphas did like he had all the confidence in the world. But there was something different about his demeanor.

You could usually only see the power that most Alphas had when they expressed it – usually by barking orders at their pack or through physical brunt force.

But this guy?

He exuded power.

It rolled off him in waves, you could feel it in the air.

I had never seen another werewolf exhibit power like that, not even the actual Alpha King.

The second thing I noticed about him was just how beautiful he was. He had bronze skin, dark hair, and dark eyes that were trained on the Alpha King.

Even just looking at him turned my stomach into knots.

“My son!” The Alpha King said, gesturing him over, “How lovely of you to join us, Prince Griffin...only several minutes late.”

He strode across the room, not even sparing a glance at any of the Alpha kids, me included.

“I had to deal with a few rogues on the border,” he told the king, stopping just before his father. “You’re lucky I made it at all.”

“Well, all that matters is that you’re here now,” the King smiled but there was an odd tension between them. The King’s smile was forced and the prince didn’t even bother to try and fake one.

I also noticed how casually the prince was dressed too. Instead of the formal military uniform that I’d seen the King and several of the guards wear, the prince was in jeans, a dark t-shirt, and a flannel.

Well, I guess you can wear whatever you want when you’re royalty.

Suddenly, the prince’s head snapped up and his nostrils flared, like he’d caught a scent.

As his body turned, I caught sight of his arm.

He had a griffin tattoo.

1

I let out some sort of strangled gasp and his eyes met mine, widening.

“Mate.”

Oh no. 24

Chapter 17

“Hunger drives the wolf out of the wood.”

German Proverb

It was completely silent.

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke.

I was frozen, like a deer caught in the headlights or like a lamb spotted by the wolf.

No.

No.

No. Nope. No way.

This is not happening. He can't be talking about me.

Although I remained still, my eyes darted around the room, looking for some other person that the prince must've been talking about his real mate. Clearly, I was mistaken. There was no way he was talking about me.

But there was no one else.

He was looking at me.

And, when I say looking at me, I mean it.

His dark eyes roamed over my body, drinking me in like a starving man dying of thirst. I wondered if he could hear my heartbeat. I knew wolves had superior senses, and right now, it felt like my heart was trying to beat right out of my chest.

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We both just stared at each other for a good minute me in horror and him in something, I'm not sure what. O

When he finally did move, it happened so fast I wasn't expecting it.

One moment I was sitting in my chair, trying not to have an anxiety attack, and the next, he had scooped me up and pressed me into his chest.

I gasped but the sound was muffled since my face was pressed into his shirt. I felt.

—

his hands all over me stroking my hair, my bare arms, and my lower back. Although I barely had time to register it, his hands felt divine. Everywhere that his hands met my skin seemed to tingle under his touch. 5

He smelled good too. Earthy. It wasn't the smell of some cologne or perfume -1

could tell it was just his natural scent. I wanted to roll my entire body in his scent.

Oh, God.

What is happening to me?

Is this the mate bond doing this to me?

"Mate," he growled and I felt the noise deep in his chest. "Mate. Mate. Mine. My mate." He kept repeating the words over and over again like a broken windup toy.

I was practically trembling in his arms but I don't think he noticed.

I felt him nuzzle his face into my hair and inhale. He clearly liked my scent as much as I liked his. @

"Griffin!"

The King's voice thundered throughout the room, darker and scarier than I'd ever heard it. Instinctively, I jumped, curling closer to Griffin's chest.

Griffin growled loudly but he didn't turn around to face the King. He continued to nuzzle into my hair like we were the only two people in the room.

"Griffin!" The King growled, "What is this meaning of this? What are you doing with that girl?" The last word came out like a hiss and from the rumble in Griffin's chest, I could tell he didn't like it.

"She's my mate," Griffin said but he still didn't turn to face the King, "What do you think I'm doing?"

"You cannot be serious!" The King roared. I couldn't see his face but it was pretty clear he was not happy about this turn of events.

"She is a human!" The King continued, "A weak, pathetic human. I will not allow my son to take a human for a mate. My bloodline will not be sullied by one of her kind. Do you realize she is human, Griffin?"

Griffin stilled and his grip on me tightened to the point where it was almost painful. I bit back a whimper.

I had barely registered any of what was happening, but in that moment, I feared for my life. Was Griffin about to kill me? Would he end my life here and now so that he wasn't mated to a "weak" human?

I didn't want a mate bond but I also didn't want to die.

Instinctively, I tried to pull away from him but Griffin's grip on me didn't budge. He must've felt my fear because he began stroking my hair. "Hush. It's okay, little mate," he whispered to me, his voice barely above a growl. @

I didn't know if his words actually comforted me, but at the very least, it sounded like he wasn't going to kill me.

“Do you hear me, Griffin? She is human! If you do not kill her, I will!” The King shouted again and it practically shook the walls. Q

This time, Griffin didn't ignore it. I hadn't even processed the fact that the King had just threatened my life by the time Griffin spun around, pushing me behind him.

For the first time since Griffin had scooped me up into his arms, I saw what everyone else in the room looked like.

The King stood at the end of the table and he was seething. I'd never seen such unadulterated rage on another person's face before he looked more like a wild animal than a man.

And his eyes were trained on me.

A whimper escaped my throat.

This man wants to kill me.

Oh, God. I'm going to die today.

—

Please I don't want to die yet.

I couldn't bear to make eye contact with the King anymore so my eyes darted around the room. The guards that had been stationed at the room corners were now completely alert like they were ready to fight. As to who they'd been fighting for, I had no idea. 4

Every Alpha kid in the room was staring at me, Griffin, and the King some in disbelief, horror, and others in plain fear. I caught Lily and Sebastian's eyes last. Sebastian was gripping his seat so tightly that his knuckles were white and Lily looked terrified.

“Are you threatening my mate?” Griffin asked, still standing in front of me. His entire posture was rigid and his voice was low and dangerous. It might've been scarier than the King's, but since Griffin wasn't actively trying to kill me, I couldn't say for sure.

“Your mate?” The King spat, “You call that creature your mate? Humans are weak, pathetic things and I will not —

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The King never finished his sentence.

Griffin moved in a blur.

I didn't see his claws come out.

I didn't see him attack the King.

But I did see the King's head roll onto the floor, his dead eyes still full of rage.

Chapter 18

"The most part of all princes have more delight in warlike manners and feats of chivalry than in the good feats of peace."

—

Sir Thomas More

Lily screamed first.

And then a lot of other people screamed.

There was a lot of ruckus.

The guards who'd been standing near the doors and the corners suddenly swarmed the king's body or what was left of it. None of them tried to touch or attack

Griffin, although they did watch him with wary eyes. I don't think any of them

really knew what to do. I imagine there's training and protocol for when a rogue or an enemy attacks your King, but what about when your Prince decapitates him?

I didn't scream.

I didn't cry.

All at once, a cold sweat broke out over my entire body as if the room had turned to

ice. My body certainly felt like it was frozen I couldn't move or think the way I wanted to. All I could see was the fallen King's head and his lifeless eyes.

He beheaded the King.

He beheaded the King.

Oh

my God, he beheaded the King.

Those words ran on an endless loop in my mind as I stood in the same spot, my feet stuck like glue.

“Clark! Clark! Can you hear me? Clark!”

Someone was trying to grab my attention.

Sebastian. He was suddenly in front of

me, his hands on my shoulders and his blue eyes wide. He looked terrified.

“Clark, are you okay?” I could hear what he was saying but his voice felt distant. and muffled

like someone had plunged me underwater.

God, am I going into shock?

Is that what this is?

Why does it feel like my body is numb right now? I just watched someone get their head chopped off, I should be feeling something!

It took every ounce of strength I had to focus on Sebastian and not retreat into my own head. “Seb,” I choked out and it was barely above a whisper.

“Hey, it’s okay,” he said, “Just keep looking at me. Don’t worry about anything else. – I’ll protect you.”

Protect me?

Protect me from Griffin? 2

Instinctively, my eyes searched the room for the man in question. He was still standing above the remains of his father’s body with long, dark, and bloody claws protruding from one hand. He was staring at his father but not in any kind of terror or horror like you’d expect just dark eyes analyzing the fallen king. Like he was

analyzing his next move. 2

All of this had happened in mere seconds.

the beheading, the screams, Sebastian.

checking on me, and Griffin standing over the body. It was just seconds and it felt like hours.

And then, those seconds were over.

Griffin's head snapped up, we made eye contact, and he started to walk toward me.

Oh, God.

My body trembled and Sebastian instantly pushed me behind him and assumed a defensive position.

Griffin paused when he saw the way that Sebastian stood in front of me and his eyes narrowed. "What is this?" he asked and there was a hard edge to his voice.

Had I not lost all the feeling in my limbs and been capable of actually speaking, I would've told him that Sebastian was just my brother and that he was only defending me.

Instead, all I could do was watch helplessly as Sebastian growled defensively.

Griffin's eyes narrowed even more and he growled back. It was louder, deeper, and it exuded power. Several of the wolves whimpered in response. Even from behind, I could see the way that Sebastian shook at Griffin's loud growl but he didn't back

down.

"She's my sister," Sebastian said, "I won't let you hurt her."@

Griffin paused. "How noble," he said casually, "But you've seen what I do to those who stand in the way of my mate. Back down, cub, or your head will end up next to my father's."

No.

Please no.

Something in me broke through the shocked, numb haze I'd been floating in. It couldn't let Sebastian die protecting me. No, I wouldn't let his blood end up staining the floor.

"No!" I choked out and I forced myself to move.

No no no. Sebastian can't die!

My legs felt like stiff cardboard and I stumbled past Sebastian, falling into Griffin's arms. My body was shaking like a leaf, but he caught me and pulled me into his chest.

I felt a purr of approval deep in his chest.

The last thing I wanted to do was be anywhere near Griffin but I wasn't about to let Sebastian die. I had just seen what Griffin was capable of if that meant I had to throw myself at his feet to appease him and spare Sebastian's life, I'd do it.

"Please don't hurt him," I whispered, my face pressed into his shirt, "He's my brother please don't."

I was glad that my face was hidden. It meant that he wouldn't see how terrified of him I actually was.

"Hush," Griffin said, and I could feel his bloody hands combing through my hair, "You're with me. You're safe. Nobody will hurt you."

I wanted to scream. No not me, you lunatic! My brother! Please don't hurt my brother!@

"Y-your Majesty," a distant voice spoke and it sounded like one of the guards. Griffin growled.

"I don't mean to interrupt," the guard continued, "B-but what would you have us do with the former King? We'll need to dispose of his body." D

Former king.

A terrifying realization dawned on me in that moment.

Griffin was the prince, the sole heir to the throne – and in seconds, he'd eliminated the only thing that stood between him and that crown.

I wasn't mated to the prince of werewolves anymore.

I was mated to the Alpha King.

No.

No no no.

A wave of dizziness suddenly washed over me and dark spots danced in my vision. I felt my head lull farther into Griffin's chest – oh God, am I fainting right now? 3

The world went dark. 3

Chapter 19

“Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.

Richard Lovelace

The first thing I noticed as I awoke was just how dry my throat was. It felt like I was swallowing sand as if I hadn't had a sip of water in days.

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The second thing I noticed was that the soft silk sheets I was lying on were not my own. As nice as my bedroom at dad's house was, he wasn't splurging for Egyptian.

cotton.

Wait, is someone stroking my hair?

Still half-asleep, I forced my eyes to open and tried to blink the blurriness away. It took a second, but slowly, an unfamiliar room and bed came into view. This elaborate bedroom was ten times more luxurious than my castle suite. Dark furnishings and expensive art hung on the walls, and to my right, there was a large glass window where you could see the castle grounds sprawled out below.

Before I could take in any more of my surroundings, the dryness in became overwhelming and I started to cough.

“Would you like some water?”

I nearly jumped out of bed when I felt Griffin's hand rub my back.

When did he get here?

my throat

I managed to nod my head once my coughing fit ended and I watched him disappear into what I assumed was an in-suite bathroom.

Where am I?

As soon as he was out of sight, I whipped my head around, trying to discern as much about the bedroom as possible. It didn't feel like a guest bedroom. The furnishings were too lavish and all of the decorations felt personal.

This must be his bedroom.

Oh, God.

I'm in his bedroom.

He must've taken me here after I fainted.

Like a tidal wave, the events of the past few hours came rushing back all at once: Griffin declaring me his mate, the King's threats, the beheading, and my fainting spell.

Anxiety clawed at me and I threw the covers off.

I have got to get out of here.

"Where do you think you're going?" My feet hadn't even touched the floor before Griffin was at my side again, a glass of water in hand. "You need to get back into bed, sweetheart." In one fell swoop, I was back on the bed and laying underneath.

the covers. 4

Geez, he's fast. @

"Come on, little mate," he said, "You need water."

Well, he is right about that. I could definitely go for some water.

I'll drink this and then I'll be on my way.

I tried to grab the glass from his hand but he pulled it out of the way. I gave him a questioning glance – was that not for me?

A teasing smile played at Griffin's lips, and I'm ashamed to admit this, but the sight actually gave me butterflies.

Stupid mate bond.

Still keeping the water out of reach, Griffin pulled me up with one hand and that arranged himself so that he was behind me on the bed. In other words, I was practically lying in his lap. O

Alright, this is embarrassing.

I made another grab for the glass of water but he jerked it away from me – again!

Okay, what is this guy's deal?

If his goal was to keep me dehydrated while simultaneously touching me as much as possible, he was certainly achieving it.

“Are you done being stubborn?” Griffin asked but his voice was light and teasing. I wanted to scoff or roll my eyes – anything that would avoid amusing him more but I was also incredibly thirsty.

So, I nodded my head.

“Good girl,” he said, his voice low and smooth.

God, his voice is hot. I could just

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No, no, no! Stop it right there, Clark! This isn't you talking. It's the mystical, stupid mate bond that's making you feel this way.

You need to keep it together. You need to get out of here.

Slowly, Griffin brought the glass to my lips and tilted it just far back enough for me to drink comfortably. I gulped the water down like a hungry animal and drowned the glass within seconds.

“You really were thirsty,” Griffin said, placing the glass on the nightstand beside us. I expected him to get up but he remained behind me, petting my hair.

His hands were soft and gentle, and just as I was beginning to relax in his hold, I remembered what he'd done with those hands earlier today.

He beheaded his own father in front of everyone.

I stiffened and Griffin must've felt it because he stopped petting my hair.

“What's wrong, love?” he asked.

Where do I begin?

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Should I start with the facts that it's absolutely ridiculous I'm mated to you or how you committed regicide earlier? O

I knew I had to tread carefully here. Although Griffin hadn't given any indication, he wanted to hurt me, I'd known him less than a day and most of our interactions had been bloody. He wasn't just unpredictable, he was also the most powerful werewolf in the world right now. The last thing I needed was me or someone I knew ending up without a head.

"Earlier today," I started, swallowing down my anxiety, "You killed the King." Your father, I added in my head.

Griffin hummed thoughtfully. "Yes, I did."

"Why?" I asked, turning my head around to look at him. His dark eyes were unreadable and his face was blank. "I know he threatened my life, but he was your family, right? I don't understand."

I don't understand how you could murder your only living parent and then sit here, acting like it was nothing.

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Griffin's eyes narrowed. "Yes, he was my father," he said, "But you said it he threatened your life. I know him more than anyone. It wasn't an idle threat and I would never let anyone put my mate in danger not even my own father."

His words sent a chill down my spine.

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I'd heard all my life about the mate bond – how werewolves would do anything for their mates, but this was the first time that I was seeing anything in action. And even worse, I wasn't a bystander here. I had a front row, center stage seat.

"You must understand something, little mate," Griffin said, and his face softened, "I have waited nine years for you. That's nearly a decade that I've felt this emptiness inside me. Part of me began to wonder if you didn't exist or you'd already died. And then I found you, right inside my own home." (@

He used one of his hands to stroke my cheek and tingles erupted everywhere.

“I’ve spent enough time without you and I will not let anything else keep us apart. Not other wolves, not my drunken father who’s barely held himself together the past twenty years, not your family and not even you.” (14)

Chapter 20

“I’m waiting with bated breath to hear that silver tongue of yours.”

Jodie B. Cooper

Before I could respond or even properly think about what Griffin’s words meant, there was a knock on the door and Griffin’s eyes glazed over as he used the mind

link.

Someone’s here. Maybe Lily or Sebastian?

I didn’t even say anything but Griffin still squashed my hope. “That’s the castle healer,” Griffin told me, “Now that you’re awake, I want to make sure your physical health is okay, given your reaction earlier today.”

You mean when I fainted after watching your father’s decapitated head roll at my feet? Was there a more appropriate reaction I should’ve had to that? Q

I bit my tongue as the door opened and a middle-aged woman with a medical bag approached. I tried to squirm out of Griffin’s hold so that I could greet the woman or just get a little space but his arms felt like iron. He clearly had no qualms about PDA, and judging from the healer’s quiet, meek demeanor, she wasn’t going to say anything about it. 6

“Your Majesty, will you allow me to approach your mate?” the healer asked. Griffin stiffly nodded and the woman perched herself on the side of the bed. “May I touch her?” Another nod. The healer held my chin in a gentle grip as she examined my pupils.

It didn’t escape my notice that the healer never talked to me directly during the entire exam. She never asked me for permission for anything. Every move she made got the seal of approval from Griffin – as if I was an object he owned or a toddler incapable of speaking.

6

Anger settled into my stomach and grew as the exam went on. By the time the healer had finished and declared my fainting spell a minor stress reaction, I was practically seething. I waited till she closed the door and asked Griffin for another cup of water. I wasn’t even thirsty but I just needed a minute to think without his tingly little touches or his hulking presence looming over me.

Was this the kind of treatment that I could expect from a mate bond? I knew wolves were territorial and possessive – especially over female mates but it was another thing to experience it firsthand.

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A previous conversation popped into my head. It was the talk I'd had with one of the pack elders at the meeting where I learned that I'd be going to the castle. That old man was the first person to warn me that humans could have werewolf mates. Although I had completely dismissed the idea of it ever happening to me. He had also explained just how possessive werewolves could be over their human mates. I

recalled his words:

“What do you mean?” I had asked.

The elder smiled ruefully. “Having grown up in this world, you already know how possessive wolves can be, especially male wolves,” he continued, “Most wolves are naturally territorial of their mates. It's in our nature to be protective and dominant of what's ours. The higher ranking the wolf is, the more possessive they'll be. Alphas are the most possessive, and while I've never met the Alpha King or the Prince, I assume they're even worse than normal Alphas.

As you know, humans are more fragile than werewolves. Your senses aren't as good, you break more easily, take longer to heal, and you get sick. Having such a fragile mate would put any wolf on edge any possessiveness or protectiveness they'd feel just gets amplified ten times over.”

I took a deep breath. I wasn't just mated to a wolf. I was mated to the Alpha of Alphas. Within one day of meeting him, he'd already beheaded his last living parent for threatening me and made a werewolf doctor ask his permission to touch

No, no, no. This cannot be my life.

There's got to be a way I can get out of this.

Maybe I can reason with him he just met me and the bond is fresh, so maybe there's still time to convince him that he doesn't want a “weak human” when he could have a strong werewolf mate?

Even I could admit that my plan wasn't great but it was all I had.

“Are you okay, little mate?” Griffin popped back into the room, a full glass of

water in hand.

“Yeah, I’m okay,” I said, trying to hide my anxiety. I took the water from him, and this time, he let me. “Actually, I was wondering if we could talk. I have some questions.”

Griffin looked curious and sat next to me on the bed. To absolutely nobody’s surprise, he took the opportunity to touch me again by rubbing my back. O

“So, you know I’m human,” I said, “I’m not a wolf like you.”

Griffin nodded with narrowed eyes like he wasn’t sure where this was going.

“And you’re werewolf royalty,” I continued, “You’re the heir to the throne.”

“I’m not the heir anymore,” Griffin said, “I hold the crown, little mate. After my father’s death this afternoon, I am the King now.”

“Right,” I said, “You’re the King and that’s a ton of responsibility. I guess I’m asking, where do I fit into that equation?”

Griffin tilted his head as if I’d just asked him if the sky was really blue or if the sun.

was yellow. “You fit exactly where a King’s mate should,” he said, “You will rule beside me as my Queen.” He smiled like he was picturing it in his head.

“And as Queen, I would be free to do what I wished? Like, say, go to college or take the occasional solo vacation as long as I came back?” I asked. Although I already knew what the answer was going to be, I had to at least ask. I wanted to know just how broad the boundaries were how much Griffin thought he could restrict my freedom.

Griffin narrowed his eyes and I heard a low rumble in his chest. “You’re asking if you’d be allowed to leave me?”

“Well -”

“The answer is no,” his voice was sharp and hard, leaving no room for argument. ‘I spent nine years waiting for you and I’m not going to let you leave me, not for any reason. You will be my Queen. There will be those that wish to harm you because of me, and your human status will only encourage them. You will stay here, under my protection and with me.’

Griffin turned away, and I’m pretty sure he thought the argument was over. And, hey, the guy was royalty. People took his word as law, but I wasn’t so easily

convinced.

I had not waited this long for freedom to go to college, to feel human in a human world again – just so a paranoid Alpha King could take it from me. I understood that it wasn't his fault, not really. He didn't ask to be mated to me, but even so, why did my life have to end so he could have a little peace of mind? 3

Time to turn on that classic Clark charm (although charm is probably a strong word).

"I get it," I said, "You're the King, so people are going to be after you and in turn, be after me. But wouldn't it be easier if you had a mate you didn't have to worry about all the time? I'm human, I could break my neck walking down a flight of stairs or die of cancer when I'm, like, forty. That's not including anybody who actually tries to hurt me to get to you. I can't hold my own against a werewolf, I'm done-zo if there's an assassination attempt. Is that really the kind of Queen that you want or that your people deserve?" [5

He stared at me, not responding. Once again, his expression was blank and

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unreadable I had no idea what he was thinking, but hopefully, he was mulling my words over.

Alright, time to drive your point home, Clark.

"You're the Alpha King," I said, "You deserve a strong mate that can rule by your side and take care of herself, not some weak human. And us humans have it's new. There's still plenty of time for us to part ways so that you can find a mate that's truly worthy of you and your people."

I watched with bated breath as he continued to stare at me.

There was silence.

Finally, Griffin spoke and I noticed an odd twinkle in his eyes. "I think you're right, Clark," he said, "I do deserve a worthy mate. Someone who can rule by my side."

Wait, really?

That's it?

That convinced him? Q

Hope blossomed in my chest – maybe my life wasn't doomed after all.

A cunning smile spread across Griffin's face. "My Queen will be someone who is

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like a fox clever and sly. Even too clever for her own good. What do you think, little fox?"
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The hope in my chest extinguished. O

Danger! Danger! If my body had warning sirens, they would've been blaring. 2

As I made a move to lean away from him, Griffin's smile became predatory and he pounced. One moment I was sitting up in bed and the next, he was on top of me, his dark eyes only inches away from mine.

"I had no idea you were such a tricky little thing," Griffin said, and then he leaned down to brush his nose against my neck. "Did you really think that would work? That I wouldn't see your manipulation?"

My heart was beating a hundred miles per minute and with his face in my neck, I wondered if he could feel my racing pulse.

"I figured it was worth a shot, you know. And it's not like it wasn't true."

Griffin tore his face from my neck so that he could look me in the eyes again. I couldn't recognize the expression in his eyes, but whatever it was, it unnerved the

hell out of me. 2

"You seem to be unclear about how I feel about you and our mate bond," Griffin said, and his voice was barely above a growl, "So allow me to clear things up for you. You are mine, little fox. It does not matter to me if you are human or not. You are mine and I take care of what belongs to me. If someone wishes you harm, I'll slaughter them. If I have to lock you in a room and throw away the key to keep you safe from others or yourself – I'll do it."

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He paused and I watched his sharp canine teeth gleam in the light. "And if you're stupid enough to think you can run from me, I will chase you to the ends of the earth." 18