

The Alpha King's Human Mate by HC Dolores

Chapter 26

“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”

Tony Robbins

I would have laughed if someone had told me a week ago that I'd be spending my evening with the Alpha King at an intimate dinner party. Well, I would've started laughing, and then I would've faked appendicitis or food poisoning to get out of coming to the diplomatic meeting. That way, I could've spent my evening the way it should be: in bed with a tray of snacks and something on Netflix blaring in the background.

Unfortunately, hindsight is 20/20 not that anybody was warning me to begin with.

Instead of binging the latest season of Ozark or The Vampire Diaries, I was sitting across from the most powerful werewolf in the world. 4

Griffin had just finished telling me that he wanted to get to know me (better than myself apparently), which made me a little nervous. When he had tried to “get to know me” this afternoon, all he'd wanted to know was my sexual history. What was

he going to ask next? For a map of my entire family tree?

“Tell me about yourself, little fox,” Griffin said, a small smile on his face.

“What do you want to know?”

“Everything.”

Well, that's vague.

Before I had a chance to fumble for an answer, the door opened and a couple of kitchen staff appeared. They were wearing the same uniforms I'd seen at the dinner party with the former Alpha King and they carried trays of food in their hands some sort of meat that looked too fancy for me to identify at first glance. It also looked like way too much food for two people, but I wasn't about to complain.

“Honey roast duck and cilantro-soaked rice, Your Majesties,” a young staff

member said, her voice timid and small. “Would either of My Graces like a glass of wine?” She kept her eyes on the bottle of red wine in her hands the entire time she spoke as if she wasn’t allowed to make eye contact.

Maybe she isn’t.

While I wasn’t normally a big drinker. or really one at all a glass of wine to settle my nerves and make it through this awkward dinner sounded wonderful.

“I would like a glass of wine please,” I piped up and I could see Griffin raise an eyebrow out of the corner of my eye.

If I’m going to be spending in a castle for the foreseeable future, I might as well take advantage of some of the perks like fancy, expensive wine.

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Besides, the drinking age is 18 in Canada.

I expected the girl to start pouring the wine into my glass, but instead, she just looked at Griffin. He shook his head slightly and she left without another word my wine glass still empty.

Annoyance crept into my veins. Did having a single glass of wine really require his permission? And why did everyone seem to know that but me?

“What’s wrong with a glass of wine?” I asked, narrowing my eyes. “You said you wanted to know stuff about me well, fact number one, I sometimes like wine with dinner.”

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An amused smile made its way onto Griffin’s face. He could obviously sense my annoyance but it didn’t upset him – he must’ve thought it was hilarious that he had the final say on my drink decisions. Q

“It’s our first dinner together,” Griffin said, “I’d rather you not be intoxicated for it.” 2

I rather would be. 2

“It was one glass of wine,” I countered, “I didn’t realize what I put in my body needed your approval first.”

Griffin smiled and I caught a glimpse of his sharp teeth. “Oh, little fox,” he said, “Everything you put in your body requires my permission.” (@

My face flushed red I hadn’t meant it like that!

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“I wasn’t trying to make an innuendo,” I said, and my frustration only seemed to amuse him more. “And it was just one glass. Not even my father cares if I have a glass of wine, you know.”

Griffin smirked and I swear I saw his eyes darken. “I’m definitely not your father, little fox,” he said, “But at some point, I suspect you will be calling me Daddy.”

I couldn’t even pretend to hide the tomato red blush on my face or the way my thighs seemed to squirm at that last part. Unfortunately, that seemed to be the reaction he wanted.

Quick! Change the subject, Clark!

“You said you wanted to get to know me,” the words stumbled out of my mouth, and I tried to pretend that he couldn’t see just how much he affected me. “So ask me something and keep it PG-13.”

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2

If the large smirk on his face was any indicator, Griffin knew exactly how off-

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balance he’d thrown me and he loved it. He took a bite of his roast duck, his eyes thoughtful. O

As he thought of a question, I finally began cutting up my food. The sexual innuendos had made me completely forget about the heavenly-smelling food. sitting in front of me.

And, after taking a bite, I realized the duck tasted just as divine as it smelled.

“When did you learn of the existence of werewolves?” he finally asked, curious and

dark eyes on me. I was surprised by the question – I had been half-expecting something sexual and way too personal.

“When I was eleven,” I told him, “That’s when I started living with my dad. He

told me almost immediately. There was just no way to hide the large furry wolves that kept running by the house or why everyone kept referring to my dad as

—

Alpha.”

4

Now it was Griffin’s turn to look surprised. “You didn’t know until you were

eleven?” he asked, “I knew you were human but I was under the impression that you’d lived with wolves your whole life.”

I shook my head. “No, I lived with my mom until I was eleven,” I said, “I found out about the existence of werewolves and the fact that I had a dad within the same week. What about you, when did you learn about the existence of wolves?”

“What do you mean?” Griffin raised an eyebrow, still smirking, “I’ve been a wolf my entire life, little fox.”

“Well, yeah,” I said, “But like, you never had questions as to why you could transform into a big furry wolf as a kid? I thought that would at least warrant a conversation.”

Understanding dawned on Griffin’s face. “Oh, yes,” he said, “I shifted for the first time when I was fifteen, but I’ve known I was a wolf before I could talk in complete sentences. He explained what being a werewolf would entail, and even more, he

told me I would rule the wolves one day.”

A dark look suddenly passed over Griffin’s face. “He wasn’t very gentle about it, either,” he said, “It didn’t matter to him that I was just a kid. He wanted to make sure I knew everything.”

I couldn’t explain why I was so interested in Griffin’s history with his dad maybe it had to do with the fact that he’d beheaded the guy earlier but I wanted to

know more.

“What do you mean?” I asked gently.

Griffin looked up at me, a bitter smile on his face. "I'm not sure how much you know about my family's history," he said, "But my mother died in childbirth with me. She was my father's mate, he was hysterical about her death...he never really recovered. He could never understand that her death was just an unfortunate tragedy her body just wasn't physically strong enough to handle it."

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He paused before continuing. "He had to find some explanation for it somebody to blame. From what I understand, he started with the healers who helped deliver me. He was convinced they had done something wrong that caused her death, and even when he wasn't able to find a mistake, he killed them anyway."

my throat.

I barely suppressed the gasp in my

"He wasn't satisfied," Griffin said, and then he averted his eyes, "Pretty soon, he stopped blaming the dead healers and started blaming me. As soon as I was old enough to speak English, he made sure I knew I was the one who caused her death."
(2

I felt a pang of sympathy for Griffin deep in my chest. Regardless of anything else, nobody deserved to be told that. Especially not a child. For a brief moment, I was actually glad that the former Alpha King was dead. He'd never be able to spit vitriol like that at my mate ever again.

Wait, my mate? 2

Where did that come from?

"I'm sorry," I told him, "You didn't deserve to hear that to be blamed for something that was an accident."

Griffin barely smiled it was almost too small for me to see but I could tell it was genuine. "It's okay, little fox," he said, "For as long as I've known him, my father has been a man full of hatred. He's never been able to realize that most of that hatred is self-inflicted so he had to take it out on everyone else even his own son. Since my mother's death, he's been obsessed with snuffing out weakness. He thought making me aware of every harsh truth of the world or what he viewed as truth – would eliminate any weakness I had."

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He was gripping his fork so hard that his knuckles whitened and the metal fork actually began to bend.

I'm not sure what possessed me to do it, but I suddenly reached over, laying one of my hands on top of his. "No offense, but your dad sounds like a total dick."

Griffin stopped for a moment, just staring at me with a look so intense that it left me practically shaking.

And then he started laughing. Q

Chapter 27

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment." @

Buddha

The rest of the dinner party didn't last long.

Before I was even halfway through my duck, a burly man in a military uniform entered the room, looking frantic. He whispered something into Griffin's ear and I noticed that he didn't look at me once it was like I wasn't even there.

I would've been offended but I had a feeling he wasn't trying to be rude. After the wine glass incident, I was pretty sure that people were just afraid to interact with me if they didn't first have Griffin's explicit permission.

"You'll have to forgive me, little fox," Griffin said, "But there's a situation I need to address immediately."

"Is everything okay?" I asked. Griffin didn't seem upset but the guy next to him. looked freaked out.

"Yes," Griffin said, "Word has begun spreading about my actions this afternoon. After all the witnesses this afternoon, most of the werewolf world has already learned that I'm King now...and the way that it happened has not sat well with everyone."

Translation: not everyone is super happy you killed your dad in a room full of people.

Griffin stood up from his seat and closed the distance between us in one stride. "I wish I didn't have to leave you," he said, and he rested his large hand on my cheek, "But the sooner I ease the worries of our people, the sooner I can return to you. If nothing else, we'll spend the day together tomorrow."

Your people, I wanted to correct him but there was no point. (

"It's okay," I said instead, "You should just deal with whatever you need to deal with."

Griffin gave me a soft smile and then leaned down to press a chaste kiss on my forehead. I tried to pretend that his soft lips didn't leave my entire face tingling. "I'll see you soon, little fox. In the meantime, you should finish your meal here and then Esther will escort you back to our room at least, what is our room for the time being."

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I nodded and watched Griffin leave the room, the other man whispering beside him the entire time.

Griffin hadn't given me the details

maybe he didn't even know himself — but I

wondered how upset the rest of the werewolf world was about the change in the power. Surely, committing regicide wasn't encouraged

human mate.

especially not over a

The thought that my presence could put Griffin in danger left a sour taste in my mouth. I didn't like it. I didn't want Griffin in danger.

Before I let the thought unsettle me even more, I decided to finish off my duck. Just because the dinner got cut short didn't mean the food had to go to waste.

As I finished up the last few bites, I heard a knock echo from the other side of the door.

"Your Majesty," Esther called, "I'm here to escort you back to your rooms. May I come in?"

I swallowed the last piece of duck. "Yes, I'm ready."

She entered the room moments later, looking as cheery and as nervous as she had when she dropped me off.

Does the lady ever do anything but not smile? (2

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The walk back to my rooms. – Griffin's rooms, I mean was short. Esther tried to make polite conversation about some of the artwork on the wall but I felt like I was zoning out. Was this my life now? Stuck waiting in a room for Griffin to return and being escorted everywhere?

Everything about the situation felt uncertain and the worst part? After spending most of the day in Griffin's presence, I could no longer pretend to hate him. Whether it was the mate bond or not, I liked being around him. I never knew what

he was going to say next and every touch, every forehead kiss, every stroke of my cheek felt like a swarm of butterflies flapping in my stomach. (2

Nobody had ever made me feel like that before.

The longer I was around him, the more I worried that I wouldn't be able to dig myself out of the hole I was sinking in. I had dreams things I wanted to do with

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my life that I already knew Griffin wouldn't let me pursue. He'd already told me that college was a no-go, and if he wasn't going to let me walk back to my room by myself, I doubted he was going to be cool with a career.

What worried me the most is that sooner or later, I'd no longer care about those things. Every interaction with Griffin made it harder for me to dislike or detach myself from him. Was I going to just wake up one day and not care about anything but him? Would the mate bond just take over one day? Would I end up like most female werewolves in a couple of years? Just a glorified housewife with a pregnant belly who took her mate's word as law?

As Esther continued to ramble about some painting on the wall, all I could see was my dreams dissipating into smoke. (5

Just as I felt like I was on the verge of some nervous breakdown, I caught a glimpse of dark curly hair rounding the corner

Alessia!

“Now, this image is supposed to represent the moon goddess’ unconditional love for ”

“Esther,” I cut her off, “As much as I love hearing about this, would it be okay if I walked the rest of the way alone? I can already see the door in the distance.”

“Oh, I’m not sure about that,” she said with furrowed eyebrows, “The Alpha King instructed me to -”

“Please,” I said. I could already see Alessia disappearing in the other direction and I didn’t want to lose her. “It’s just a few feet and I’m feeling kind of bloated from that dinner. Not sure the duck agreed with my stomach.”

I’m not sure why I was so hellbent on talking to Alessia, but there was a huge swell of relief upon seeing a familiar face.

She looked like she was still considering it but after a moment, she sighed and nodded.

“Please be careful, Your Maj -”

“Thanks!” I was already speed-walking away from her, determined to catch up to Alessia before she vanished from my sight.

I rounded the same corner she had, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Where did she go?

I glanced around but this part of the hallway was empty. I was just about to wander off when I caught sight of a familiar door – it was the same door that led out to the balcony where Alessia and I first met.

How much do you want to bet she’s getting a little fresh air?

I didn’t think too much about striding over to the door and pulling it open. The bitter Canadian cold hit me like a punch to the stomach and I immediately began rubbing my bare arms.

1

Why did I think it was a good idea to go outside without at least a jacket?

“You look cold,” Alessia’s voice cut through the cold and I turned to face her. She was leaning against the other side of the balcony with a smirk plastered on her face. Her hair was blowing in the chilly breeze and the moonlight illuminated the long scar on her face.

Despite only wearing a leather jacket, she didn't look the least bit cold.

"Here," she said, and then she shrugged off that same jacket, "Here, take my jacket."

"Oh, you don't have to -"

"Please," she said, smirking at me, "I could never allow my Queen to be cold, could I?"

Chapter 28

"I'm not running away. I'm moving on."

Irvine Welsh

It wasn't the first time someone had referred to me by that title, but coming from Alessia's mouth, it made me feel like even more of an imposter. It didn't fit – I knew it, and given the amused expression on Alessia's face, she knew it too.

"We could just go inside and talk, you know," I said, taking her jacket, "That way, nobody has to stand out here with no jacket." Although it still couldn't compare to the Canadian cold, the jacket definitely helped me tolerate the freezing night.

Alessia rolled her eyes. "Please, there are guards everywhere," she said, "You want the entire castle to hear our conversation?"

"Definitely not."

"That's what I thought," she said, and then she gave me a teasing smile, "So, your Queen now, huh?" (3

"I'm surprised you heard," I told her, "I didn't see you at the meeting earlier."

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It was weird to think the meeting had only been a handful of hours ago it felt more like months.

"Oh, yeah," she shrugged, "I didn't feel like going. A room full of territorial Alphas fighting over a pack dispute? No thanks. But the castle has been in an uproar given all the drama, I kinda wish I wouldn't have missed it."

"By drama," I said dryly, "You mean Griffin recognizing me as his mate and then killing his father in the span of five minutes? I don't know if I'd classify that as drama."

I guess so,” she chuckled, “So, how does it feel?”

“How does what feel?” I asked.

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“Being Queen, being the mate of the Alpha King – whatever you want to call it. Had I known you were going to be such a big deal when we talked last night, I would’ve kissed your ass more.”

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I couldn’t stop the laugh from bubbling up. Although I didn’t know Alessia well at all, something about her was comforting. She wasn’t someone to be trifled with the scar on her face proved that but she wasn’t fake either. She wasn’t afraid to tell me the truth, and in turn, it made me feel like I could be honest with her.

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“You want the truth?” I asked her, leaning against the balcony.

She nodded.

“I can’t tell what’s coming from me and what’s coming from this stupid mate bond,” I confessed, “When Griffin recognized me as his mate, I was horrified. I know mates are supposed to be a good thing, and for werewolves, I’m sure they are. But I had a life, things I wanted to do...like go to college.”

“And if you’re chained to the King for the rest of your life,” she said, “You never will.”

”

“Pretty much,” I said, “And every part of me wishes I could just completely hate him...but I can’t. This mate bond or whatever it is it’s like my feelings only grow the more I’m around him.”

“Oh, that’s the mate bond for you,” Alessia said, “Not that I would know from firsthand experience or anything, but that’s usually how those things go. I imagine it’s more subdued for you since you’re human, but it sounds like you’re still feeling

it.”

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“I’m worried,” I said, “I’m worried that if I spend too much time around him, I’m going to forget about everything else going to college, seeing my family, doing normal human things. I’m worried I’m going to lose myself. I’ve seen mated couples before. They pretty much revolve around each other and that’s it. But it’s not like I can do anything to stop it, I’m trapped here.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say you were trapped,” she said with that same teasing smile, “I mean, by yourself sure. You don’t stand a chance of getting away from the King or his pack on your own. This place might be a castle but it’s an isolated fortress

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too. Unless you know how to navigate all that forest

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which you don’t, I’m

guessing you’re screwed. The only other way you’re getting out of here is if you leave undetected with someone else who’s allowed to leave.”

She spoke as if she was just thinking out loud but it did get me thinking. Alessia was right. I was smart enough to at least realize I couldn’t navigate the forest on my own. I regularly got lost on the way to school, there was no way I’d make it through a thick Canadian forest alone. If I didn’t die of hypothermia first, Griffin or one of his pack members would most likely just find me and bring me back.

My best chance was hitching a ride with someone who was already leaving the

castle – someone who wouldn’t immediately find me and report me to Griffin. Someone I could reasonably trust more than a stranger.

Someone like Alessia.

As soon as I thought it, I was turning to Alessia with frantic eyes. “Alessia,” I said, “I know we don’t know each other very well but you could be my ticket out of here. You’re visiting just like everyone else, which means you’ve got to go home to your

pack soon I could come with you!”

Alessia looked at me like I’d grown three heads.

“Are you crazy?” She hissed, “I wasn’t trying to give you ideas, Clark! There’s no

way it would work, and even if I did agree to help you, I’m pretty sure my head would end up on the floor like the former Alpha King’s did once your mate found

out.

“Not if we succeeded,” I told her. Suddenly, the gears in my head were turning as I tried to think this is through. “You would just have to smuggle me out of here.”

“And how do you suggest I smuggle you out? You’re the literal Queen,” she said, crossing her arms.

1

“Only as of today,” I said, “Some people know about me...but it’s unreasonable to think that everyone would, right? Like whoever drives you to the airport? I doubt word has spread that far. You could just say I’m part of your pack one of your warriors sent to protect you. Once we make it onto that plane, you’re home free.”

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“And where are you going to go after that?” she asked, “My pack is in California and there’s no way you’re staying with me.”

California.

That’s where my mom lived. Or that’s where she used to live as far as I knew. It’s not like I had a current address for her.

“I’ll be okay,” I said, “I have family in California. I just need you to get me out.”

Alessia scoffed, shaking her head. “Look, I sympathize with you, girl – I do. I wouldn’t want to be in your position, and normally, I’d be all for sticking it to the monarchy but not when it comes at the price of my own head.”

Realistically, it was hard to argue with her. I knew that helping me was a big risk. for her, and it’s not like I had much to offer in return.

Guess I’m on my own.

“What is that smell?” she suddenly asked. She sniffed the air with her eyes closed.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s you,” she said, and her eyes narrowed. She walked closer to me, nostrils flared. “It’s the same scent I caught last night – it’s coming from you but it’s not actually you. God, it smells so good. It smells like mate.”

Her eyes gleamed in the darkness.

Mate? How could I smell like her mate if I'm not actually her mate? It must've been someone I interacted with or shared clothing with or

Reality suddenly dawned on me. D

I couldn't believe I hadn't pieced it together before. Last night, I'd shared a bedroom with Lily before I talked to Alessia. Today, I was wearing Lily's dress that

she had left me.

I wasn't Alessia's mate. [2

But my sister was. 6

Granted, it was just a theory but it made sense. Who else had been in such close contact with me today and last night? Not even Sebastian had gotten that close and her mate certainly wasn't Griffin.

"Alessia," I said, "What if I told you I could you offer something in return? For helping me?"

Her eyes narrowed dangerously. "Oh? Like what?"

"Like the name of your mate and where they are. I have a pretty good idea of whose scent you keep smelling." O

She growled. "You know my mate?"

"If you're sure the scent you're smelling belongs to your mate, then I know who it

1. I can tell you where they're at this very moment. And I'm willing to tell you for

just the teensiest, tiniest favor in return."

"Let me guess," she huffed, "You tell me the name of my mate and I let you leave the castle with me. Tell the driver and anyone else we encounter that you're a part of my pack."

Coercing Alessia's help felt manipulative but she was my only shot out of here. I didn't know her that well but I at least knew her better than the other forty Alpha kids who had made an appearance at the diplomatic meeting.

And if worst came to worse, I'd protect her from Griffin. I wouldn't let her head up on the floor. She wouldn't suffer for me. I'd throw myself at his feet and beg his forgiveness, lock the chains on myself I'd do whatever I needed to protect Alessia from his wrath.

But it won't come to that. @

You'll get away and nobody will get hurt. It'll all be worth it.

"So, that's it then? I help you and you tell me where my mate is," she said. Her face was blank again, unreadable.

"Yeah, that's the deal."

She sighed, looking up at the moon. "Moon goddess help me," she muttered, "I'm only doing this because you know the name of my mate. And I want to stick it to the monarchy. And also...you're kind of okay."

I grinned. Relief flooded me – I was going to get out of here. I could be in California by this time tomorrow.

"You're pretty okay too, Alessia."

Chapter 29

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."@

Benjamin Franklin

Alessia and I sat on the balcony for more than an hour fine-tuning the plan. I

learned very quickly that Alessia was a natural strategist. Maybe it came from her Alpha heritage, but either way, I was glad to have her in my corner.

"I'll meet you by your rooms at 11:30," Alessia told me, "I'm supposed to meet my driver by the south entrance at noon, so that should give us enough time to get there. You're sure that the King won't be in the room with you?"

"Pretty sure," I said, "He's dealing with some crisis regarding the incident with the Alpha King. He explicitly told me that he'd see me tomorrow. It would surprise me if he was back in time."

"Okay, good," Alessia said, "There's no way I'm going through with this if the King

is with you. If I run into him, you're on your own."

Even I could realize that our plan was dead in the water if Griffin showed up early. I couldn't say for sure that he wouldn't be back before Alessia was set to leave, but it was a risk worth taking. This was my one shot out of here and I wasn't going to waste it.

"We should exchange numbers too," Alessia said, "It'll be easier for you to just

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text me if something's wrong that way I don't have to explain why I ended up at your bedroom door."

"Deal."

We did just that and then Alessia and I parted ways.

Fortunately, Griffin's bedroom was too close for me to get lost and the room was empty when I entered. Alone in the dark with only the moonlight illuminating the room, it felt lonely.

It's definitely not because Griffin isn't here.

I approached the bed and almost did a double-take there was a white slip of

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paper lying on one of the pillows. Upon further inspection, I could see it was a note written in someone's elegant handwriting.

I wish I didn't have to be away for our first night together, little fox. But once I've dealt with this minor inconvenience, you'll spend every night in my arms.

Yours, Griffin Bardot

—

There was something sweet about the note that he hadn't forgotten about me. Although I'm not sure I'd call soothing the entire werewolf world after beheading my father a "minor inconvenience." (2

As sweet as the note was, it left me with guilt as heavy as lead weight in my

stomach. I had told Alessia that nobody would get hurt if we enacted our plan, but that wasn't completely true. Griffin would get hurt. He was definitely expecting me to be here when he returned and he'd definitely be upset that I was gone.

3

Suddenly, I recalled our conversation that we'd had earlier in the day when I had first tried to convince Griffin he'd be better off without me. Griffin had said that he wouldn't let anything keep us apart, not even me.

But if I ran, would he really chase me? (22)

Maybe he'd be upset initially, but he had a kingdom to time to hunt down a human girl.
O

– he wouldn't have

And, after a little bit of time, he'd probably just move on to

Someone else. Someone more suitable for him. A strong female wolf capable of running the kingdom by his side. Someone who would love to be the Queen and Griffin's mate.

Even as I thought it, the thought of Griffin looking at someone the same way he looked at me left a hollow feeling in my stomach.

That's just the mate bond talking, Clark.

You need to get out of here, don't let a little jealousy stop you now.

Leaving is what's best for you and what's best for Griffin. He may not realize it yet but he will once I'm gone.

The argument felt empty, but it's what I continued to tell myself as I changed into some PJs I'd brought and snuggled into bed. I tried not to think about how much the bed smelled like Griffin

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or how this would probably be the last time I smelled

his scent.

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I got up early the next morning and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw the room Griffin hadn't returned.

was still empty

I packed my sparse belongings back into my backpack and changed into something comfortable and low-key. I didn't want to draw attention to my appearance in case some of the guards recognized me or had been told what I look like. Given my natural red hair, it was a little harder said than done hoodie, a pair of jeans, and a tight bun certainly helped. O

My phone dinged.

All clear? A text from Alessia read.

Still good to go, I texted back.

but a comfy

I still had twenty or thirty minutes until Alessia was supposed to arrive, and I watched the door with bated breath. I was in the home stretch now. the last thing I needed was Griffin to return just a few minutes before I managed to leave.

Every pair of footsteps outside the door left my heart drumming, but fortunately, none of them were Griffin.

I stared at the note he'd left on the bed last night.

For some reason, I had the urge to leave him a note too to let him know that I wasn't trying to hurt him by leaving. It wasn't his fault, not really. Maybe things would be different if he wasn't a King or a possessive Alpha or even just a werewolf. If Griffin were human, I had no doubt that I'd give him a chance. (5

It was all the baggage that came from being mated to a wolf that held me back.

I sighed and grabbed a black pen from one of his nightstands. I flipped the note over to the blank side and didn't hesitate to start writing.

I'm sorry, it's not your fault. You deserve someone capable of being your Queen and I need my freedom.

As I heard Alessia's knock on the bedroom door, I placed the note in the same spot where it had been. Q

And then I left. 2

Chapter 30

“Some people just disappear from our lives as if they never came at all.”

Unknown

“Can you stop twitching? You’re going to draw attention to us. We’re supposed to be flying under the radar!”

“First of all, I’m not twitching! I just have some nervous energy

”

“Please, you’re twitching, Clark. Your ‘nervous energy’ alone is going to make us both look suspicious.”

Alessia was right – I was practically twitching with anticipation but I could hardly help it. We strode down the castle corridors together, trying to look inconspicuous as possible.

So

far, things had gone to plan. I had left the note on Griffin’s pillow, Alessia had shown up at the bedroom door to collect me, and now we were headed towards the south entrance. There, we’d meet the driver that was supposed to take Alessia and now me – to the airport.

Although most of the hallways were empty and nobody seemed to look twice at us, the sheer amount of nervous energy I felt didn’t lessen. It felt like Griffin could return any moment just to catch me in the act of escaping, and I’m not sure I could lie my way out of this one. I was wearing the backpack that contained everything I’d brought with me and I had left a note for him on his bed. 2

Just a couple of hours and you’ll be home-free, Clark.

Alessia was a lot calmer than I was. Although she did seem to have her guard up, she wasn’t shaking or giving herself whiplash every time she heard what sounded like a footstep in the castle hallways. She walked through the castle like she belonged here and I could only hope some of her confidence rubbed off on me by the time our escape plan was finished.

Every step felt like a step closer to freedom, and by the time the south entrance came into view, I was digging my nails into my palms so hard that I drew blood. (2)

“I see someone,” Alessia whispered, and my stomach dropped. “That’s my escort – Benito. Don’t say anything, I’ll do the talking.”

Sure enough, a tall, middle-aged man stood by the door to the south entrance. He reminded me a lot of Esther. He had the same cheery smile plastered on his face.

“Alpha Alessia,” he greeted her as she got closer, “Are you ready to depart to the airport? A car and driver are waiting for you outside.”

As we got closer, his gaze shifted to me. “Oh, who’s this?”

“She’s with me,” Alessia answered curtly, “She’ll be leaving with me.”

Benito raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Nobody arrived with you, this must be a new friend you made while you were here.” I tried my best not to make eye-contact.

Two things were clear: one, Benito wanted an actual explanation of who I was, and two, our original lie was slowly unraveling. Alessia and I had originally planned to say that I was part of her pack, but since Benito had been Alessia’s escort at the

castle, there was no way he’d buy that. He knew she had come alone.

Despite Benito’s curiosity, Alessia shut him down in a very Alessia-like fashion.

“Look,” Alessia snapped, “Her pack is in California. She needs a ride and I said she could come with me that’s the whole story, okay? Is that a problem with you? All the Alpha kids have to be out by this afternoon anyway. Do you really want another guest stuck here?”

I held my breath.

This was the moment of truth. Either he was going to let us go or he was going to hold us up and ruin my one shot of getting out of here.

Benito’s eyes glazed over for a moment and then he looked back to us, smiling. again. “I’ll arrange for another plane ticket for your friend, but in the meantime,

there’s a driver waiting for you outside.”

He opened the door for us and Alessia immediately pushed past him. “Thanks,” she muttered. I wasn’t far behind her, and I tried not to make eye contact with Benito. He was looking at me closely, like he was trying to see if he recognized me.

5

"Thanks," I said, and then I walked into the crushing Canadian air. It was even colder than I expected, but fortunately, a black SUV was only steps away. The driver was at the ready to help us with our bags but Alessia completely ignored him, throwing her bag and my backpack into the trunk.

As I climbed into the SUV, I finally let out the breath I'd been holding.

I'm in the car. This is it, I made it.

Alessia sidled in next to me while the driver slid behind the wheel.

Okay, let's get this show on the road I want to leave this castle behind as soon.

as possible.

I looked out the window. Benito was still standing in the open doorway, staring at us with that same chipper smile. The SUV rumbled to life and we began moving.

2

Finally!

"Goodbye!" Benito waved to us, "Safe travels, Alessia and Clark!!" (19

I gave him an awkward smile and Alessia completely ignored him.

"That was fucking close," she muttered to me, "I was lying my ass off to that guy." Her voice was low, and had I not been next to her, I wouldn't have heard her. Now, in the confined space of the SUV, Alessia felt like the nervous one. She wasn't as shaky as I was, but I could read the anxiety in her body language.

"You did good," I whispered back, "You're good on your feet." She scoffed but didn't reply.

Although I was still practically trembling, it felt like my nervous energy was dissipating with every mile we put between us in the castle. The driver was silent and I watched the dark evergreen trees pass in a blur.

I'm out of his castle, and once I'm on that plane, there will be no way for him to stop me.

It wasn't until we were halfway to the airport that I felt a startling realization wash over me like cold water.

How had Benito known my name?

I had never told him my name, so that meant one thing: he had known who I was.

