

## Chapter 5

### 5. The Mate Dance

I never imagined that in this lifetime I would witness the RedSand pack buzzing with such activity. The preparation for the Mate Dance was treated as if the president of the country or the Alpha King himself was gracing our presence.

Alpha Samuel spared no expense to ensure that the Mate Dance Ceremony would go flawlessly. Pack workers scurried around in a frenzy, creating a chaotic scene. Fortunately, as Diana's appointed personal servant, I was spared the burden of working on the preparations for the grand event. Instead, I utilized whatever free time I had from attending to Diana's needs to plan my escape from this place.

Although Diana rarely assigned me tasks, I had to create them for myself to avoid arousing suspicion among the pack members. Diana was kind, but the rest of the pack was not, and I refused to let her generosity lead me to greater harm in the future—assuming I didn't succeed in escaping on the night of the event.

I struggled hard to push away thoughts of what might happen to me if I were caught. My brain screamed at me to stay put, but my heart yearned for freedom. I knew that if I were apprehended, I would be thrown back into the dungeon, and this time, the consequences would be even more severe. There would be more suffering and punishment, and perhaps this time, Sean would finally have his way with me. No amount of pleading from Diana to spare me would save me this time.

Was this a risk I was willing to take? Yes. Maybe in the past, I had endured torture and a life of slavery, but this time, if I were caught, I would choose freedom—even if it meant not being free from the pack but finding solace in the embrace of death, joining my parents in the heavenly abode.

I had already packed a small bag for my departure: two dresses, two pairs of shoes, a blouse, trousers, and some undergarments. Diana had gifted me some snacks days ago, which I had set aside for my escape. The problem was that I had no money, and once I ran out of food, I would have to rely on my hunting skills until I reached a human society where I could blend in and find employment. I knew it wouldn't be easy, and there would be hardships ahead, but anything would be better than staying here. Now, all I had to do was wait for the opportune moment to arise, and then I would make my escape.

Diana always made sure I was at arm's length, her attempt to protect me, which I was grateful for. If I was not doing chores around her house, I was by her side, standing meekly or trailing after her every movement.

Diana was given the task of ensuring that the preparations were proper and perfect, or rather, in this case, we could say that she was the event planner. It was strange watching Diana give orders and coordinate the work crew. It showed strength and courage that I wished I had at the moment. If I am able to escape, would the human people respect me just as the wolves in my pack respected Diana?

I watched silently in envy while taking notes, but there was no bitterness or resentment in my heart. I was jealous, but I was still proud of the woman she had become. Hopefully, this mate dance brings her mate to her, and she finally gets to be completely happy. I wished I would be there to see her belly round with her pups or even help her out in raising them, but I couldn't stay. Even the love Diana had for me would not change my mind. I have lost so much in the past three years, and I need to regain or at least have the chance to, rather than wallow in pity and eternal suffering in a pack that would never see my worth and would never treat me with respect.

If only the hands of time could change, I would go back and save my father from his madness, or better still, I would save my mother by any means possible. People say dwelling on the past means nothing, but when the past is all you have got at the moment, there is nothing left to do but dwell.

"Anna! Are you taking notes of the things that we would need to get?" Diana's voice snaps me out of my train of thoughts, and I nod in response. "That is good, Anna. I know you must be tired from having to follow me around. I never expected the preparation for the ceremony to take this much energy and time."

"I am fine, Diana," I assure her. She need not worry about my well-being. Following her around is much better than being stuck in the dungeon, better than being molested by Sean, better than being used and teased by Vera and every other pack member that fancies my pain. At least by Diana's side, I get to breathe fresh air and admire how beautiful my pack surroundings have grown to become over the years. By Diana's side, the pack members do not disturb me. Rather, they treat me like I don't even exist in the first place, and I am not complaining one bit. I just hope that they keep up the same energy on the day I execute my escape plans.

Diana spares me a sad glance. "Do you think you would be up for shopping?"

"Shopping?" I ask, confused.

"Yes, dear. I was thinking that we would go shopping for our dresses," she explains.

"Oh!" I respond weakly. Our dresses? Was Diana thinking of dressing me up for the event, an event I had no wish of attending or participating in? But Diana has no idea of my plans to run away, or else she would not have suggested that I buy a dress.

Diana caresses my arm lightly. "Honey, I know that you don't want a mate, but that doesn't mean you should not enjoy the party. And it has been a long time since you have done anything to enjoy yourself. Anna, you deserve to be happy, regardless of what others may think. You should be happy."

I smiled weakly as Diana's words touched me, like a mother comforting her child. Diana was truly motherly, and she would eventually be a good mother to her pups. It's funny how we were both the same age, but she seemed to have advanced psychologically over these three years. "Thank you," I said, tears glistening in my eyes, but I held them back. I would not cry anymore for my predicament. My freedom was here, and I would take it.

"No need to thank me. You deserve more than I can offer, Anna," Diana cooed.

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Maybe choosing to shop with Diana was a wrong idea. I had imagined that tailing Diana around the pack would be tiring, but I stand to be corrected. Shopping with Diana was proving to be even more challenging. But as challenging as it was, it brought delight to my soul as I watched Diana giggle over every dress that caught her eye.

"You have to try this one," that was the nth time Diana had said to me as she pushed me to change several times in the dressing room. I wanted to complain, but I decided not to. Apart from today, I don't think there might ever be a chance for me to go shopping with Diana like this. So, I let her have her way, disregarding the stress it was putting on my body.

"This is the one!" Diana gushed as I stepped out of the changing room. Surprisingly, I agreed with her. The dress was simply beautiful yet simple. It hugged curves I did not think I had, and the material was soft to touch. The plain blue coral below-the-knee dress made me feel like a forest princess, and my long black hair cascading down my back completed the look. "You look beautiful, Anna," she said, wiping her face afterwards. I had not realized that she was crying, and it broke my heart. Before I could say a word, she enclosed me in a tight hug. "I promise you, Anna, I will protect and fight for you from now on. I promise you."

My heart broke even more listening to her as she vowed to stand beside me, but I had no intention of staying. If Diana chooses to fight for me, to stand up against her father, her family, and the pack, she would eventually share in my curse. That, I cannot allow. Her future does not need to be tainted by my sins. What would her mate make of it? Diana being friends with the enemy of the most feared Alpha in the region—she could face rejection, and her life would eventually end up like mine.

"Thank you," I said. It was all I could say. I was grateful she was willing to stand by me, and I will never forget that. Hopefully, she forgives me for escaping this place, and maybe one day we would meet again when the world has ceased to be my enemy, and we would be sisters forever.

"No need to thank me. Come on, go change. We are getting this dress. Meet me by the counter," Diana says.

"What about your dress?" I asked, confused. I thought this shopping was for both of our dresses.

Diana chuckles, "I already had a dress, but this was the only way I could think of making you agree to come with me," she confesses.

"There was no need to trick me. I would have followed you regardless. I am your servant," I pointed out.

"Stop that! I do not want to ever hear you say that, Anna. You are neither my servant nor my slave. You are my friend and you are my sister. I need you to understand that. Do you get me?" Diana emphasized.

"But—" I wanted to argue, but I decided not to. "Okay, I understand," I affirmed.

"Good," Diana smiled brightly. "Now go change and meet me up front. We still have to fix your hair," she added, and my eyes widened. Was this a makeover or something?

"Is this—" I started to ask, but I got cut off.

"Yes, it is a makeover, and you cannot turn it down. I thought you would know by now. I have been struggling to keep it in from mindlinking it to you all day. I am surprised you didn't hear me," Diana explained.

I hung my head down before confessing, "I can't mindlink anymore. I am on wolfsbane."

"What!" She gasped.

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The Moon Goddess had to be on my side this time. It was like she was urging me on to pull through with my plans. I could almost feel it at the back of my mind.

After Diana discovered that I could not mindlink and I could not change because of my wolfsbane diet, she was outraged. Surprisingly, the Alpha had succumbed to her demands, and I was off wolfsbane.

Two weeks had passed, and I still couldn't mindlink, but I could feel my wolf surfacing, and maybe soon I would be able to change again. I wished I would be able to do it earlier, preferably tomorrow.

Tomorrow was the day. Tomorrow was the mate dance ceremony. Everything was in place, every arrangement for the mate dance had been met, and so were my arrangements for my escape. I was sure that no one suspected me, and tomorrow, when the event starts, I will make my way to freedom. Freedom was dearest within my grasp, and there was no going back. If I don't succeed, I will gladly let death claim me. I refuse to be caged again.