

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 21

Astrea

We had to warn the Royals about what we had smelt. If the rogues were so close by, it meant that they were frequently infiltrating the patrols at the perimeters.

“We must call the Queen,” I gasped.

Leo glanced at his watch.

“But it is already past midnight,” he pointed out.

My mouth widened, appalled by his revelation.

“What? Have we stayed out that long?” I exclaimed.

“Yeah... I guess we lost track of time. So, now what?”

“Call Xander. He might still be awake,” I indicated.

He called him without any delay. When he answered the call, Leo put it on speaker so that we could speak.

“Hello,” he answered groggily.

“Hey, Xander, we need to talk...”

“What... you still out?” Xander seemed to have woken up.

“Yeaaaaahhh, we kind of lost track of time,” he sheepishly mumbled.

“But forget that, we just sensed the presence of rogues when we were walking back home. We need to alert the Queen!” Leo exclaimed.

“Are you sure that you sensed their presence?” Sir Elliot asked.

I nodded.

“A hundred percent sure. It was undoubtedly their distinctive burning rubber smell,” I confirmed.

Sir Elliott’s jaws clenched and his eyes clouded. He most probably was mind linking the scouts on duty.

“We need to find out how they keep infiltrating our borders. We have increased the number of guards on duty due to this,” the Queen mumbled, massaging her forehead.

“Right,” Sir Elliot noted. “The lookouts are now scouring the woods and I have ordered the guards at the Palace to keep watch on every entrance to the Palace. Even the windows and the air vents. I don’t like how the rogues are acting,” he added, as his glance shifted towards us.

“Xander didn’t notice anything?” He questioned.

Nodding his head, “I came back at around ten. Danisha went home with Emma and Natasha since their homes were close by,” he clarified.

“So Leo and Astrea were out until?” Sir Elliot cocked a brow as his haze pierced into us.

“I thought you all were together,” the Queen frowned.

We exchanged glances.

“Umm... we were. Then I wanted to come home early....”

“Xander,” the Queen sighed. “Tell us the truth,” her countenance was grim. I fiddled with my icy fingers.

“Actually,” Leo mumbled. “I wanted to leave the party early. Because it was kind of... awkward in there,” he shifted in his seat.

“So we left and went for a walk in the park. There... umm... we kind of lost track of time,” he added sheepishly.

“Sorry,” he added.

Heaving a deep sigh, “at least you are safe,” Sir Elliot mumbled and pursed his lips.

The Queen's glum demeanour made me uncomfortable.

"Don't stay out late, hereafter. Since you sensed the rogues' existence so close to the Palace tonight, we can undoubtedly say that it isn't safe out there. I know both of you are skilled fighters. But I don't want to take a risk. As much as I know, they might ambush you and coax us to give in. I don't know what they are after, whatever it is, it doesn't sound good," the Queen expressed.

Nodding our heads, " Yes, Your Highness," we responded.

"Now go and get some sleep. It is already too late," she added, and pulled her lips into a thin line. Her eyes kept searching my face. I felt that she wanted to say much more than what she had said. Perhaps she held back.

Offering a polite smile, I stood up. Xander and Leo walked ahead of me to exit the meeting room. Just as I was about to exit, the Queen called me.

"Astrea."

I halted and looked around. She still had that meaningful look on her face.

"Just be careful," she advised.

My lips parted. I think I knew what she was referring to. She didn't want my personal life to be in a mess.

Gulping, " Yes, Your Highness," I replied.

Although it was a Sunday, I couldn't sleep in. I woke up early and rushed to the infirmary when I received a desperate call from Sarah.

Her mate's heartbeat had suddenly started to drop.

When I arrived, she was hysterical. Elena and the others were trying to calm her down, but she wouldn't stop crying.

"What if I lose him? I don't even know his name," She kept whimpering as the healers tried their best to stabilise him. Her tears had already soaked her shirt and her eyes were red and puffy. Yet, the best I could do was hold her hands and offer my support. Let her know that she wasn't alone. I felt useless, nonetheless. I didn't know what to say to make her feel better.

“Please, wait outside. The room is a bit too crowded,” one of the healers told us after some time.

“No! I want to stay with my mate,” Sarah’s voice reduced to a mere squeak as she fought hard against her tears.

Squeezing her hand, “let her stay?” I suggested.

The healer nodded, “Okay, the two of you can stay. But the rest, please wait outside.”

Elena hugged Sarah before she left with Arnold and Rafael. The healers continued to stabilise him, but in vain. The beeping of the heart rate monitor continued to get stagnant.

“No, please,” Sarah was trembling.

My eyes glossed as I watched from a distance, wondering how it could have gotten this far. I thought he was getting better.

“We are losing him,” a healer mumbled.

“No...” Sarah whimpered.

An older medic rushed inside and at once started to work on him.

“Please...” Sarah continued to beg silently.

We watched helplessly as the heart rate monitor stopped beeping and the faces of the healers wilted in defeat.

I froze. Did we just... lose him?

My breathing was arrested in my throat and my limbs were numb. I slowly glanced at Sarah. I couldn’t even imagine the pain she would be going through.

“No,” she whispered, crying. Her tears continued to stream down her cheeks as she removed herself from my arms. I didn’t stop her.

She waddled towards the bed. After staring at his lifeless body for a while, she burst into sobs. Biting my lips, I remained mute. I didn’t want to cry. I wanted to stay strong for her, but it was overwhelming.

“Mate... you left me without saying hello,” I heard Sarah’s painful sobs. It was heart wrenching. Despite my efforts, I couldn’t hold my tears back.

The healers watched her mourn, in silence. The sound of her sobs and grievances resounded in the room.

“I... don’t care. I will always be yours...” she whispered, making me frown. I watched in anticipation as she slowly lowered her head towards the crook of his neck. From the angle I was standing, I could see her canines elongate.

My eyes widened. Was she marking him?

My mouth hung open in shock, but I couldn’t muster up the courage to utter a word. Everyone in the room was astonished by her gesture. After making sure that her essence was injected, she retracted her canine, and licked the wound clean.

I expected the wound to bleed, because he was gone. However, what happened next was nothing short of a miracle. The wound closed and the heart rate monitor unexpectedly jumped to life, startling all of us.

Sarah’s tear-stricken face suddenly gleamed with hope. The healers sprung into action and this time, it didn’t take much time for him to stabilise.

After making sure that he was fine, the healers took a blood sample to run some tests and left. They needed to find out what caused his condition to deteriorate. Everyone was expecting him to wake up this week.

Sarah rushed to his side and admired the mark on his neck. It was a beautiful white wolf howling towards the moon. Her name was written in cursive beside it. Sarah, it said.

She chuckled humourlessly. “I hope he doesn’t mind that,” she mumbled.

“You just saved his life... again. He wouldn’t complain, I’m sure,” I reassured her.

Time passed with no more complications. It looked like her essence had saved his life. The reason for the sudden decline in his state remained a mystery, until the blood test results came back.

His blood contained evidence of grayanotoxin, a poisonous substance that caused the sudden drop in his heart rate. Miraculously, his mate's essence was strong enough to help him fight against it, before it was too late. The healers mentioned that, if Sarah had been even a minute late, he might not have made it.

Now the question was, how did it enter his bloodstream? Someone must have done something. But who?

Our friends, Leo and Xander racked our brains over the matter.

"He was fine when I went to sleep last night. He was doing great. Anyway, why would anyone from this kingdom want to harm him?" Sarah wondered.

I narrowed my eyes. "Or maybe, it is someone who has a connection with the rogues," I mumbled. "Remember how they tried to kill him that day?" I reminded Sarah.

"You mean they have a helper in the kingdom?"

I pursed my lips. "Maybe... I can't think of a reason..." I trailed off. What was I saying? If what I mentioned was true, then none of us were safe. Who knew if the perpetrator wasn't listening to our conversation in the hospital?

"We should check the CCTV footage," I finally stated, and gave my friends a meaningful glance.

After what happened, Sarah couldn't leave her mate alone, even to go and check the footage. She was scared that someone might try to harm him again. So I went with the others to see if anything was recorded on the tape.

The Queen and Sir Elliot too arrived after hearing what had happened. From the footage, we saw Sarah leave at around 11 pm at night. The corridors were deserted except for an occasional healer who crossed the path. The room in which Sarah's mate was placed was peaceful. No one entered, except for the healers. What caught my attention was when a medic entered the room, right after a healer left after taking down the readings. This newcomer locked the door as soon as she entered and took an injection from the tray she was holding. She hastily injected its contents into the IV injection and hastily left the room.

Unfortunately, the perpetrator had her cap lowered so that her face wouldn't be recorded in the footage.

"Now, who is that?" Questioned Sir Elliot.

The healer in charge was perplexed. "I... I don't think I have seen her before..." she stammered, her eyes glued to the screen.

Days passed. Ever since we found out that there was a traitor in the kingdom, the security of the whole area had been increased ten fold. The problem was, we couldn't find out who. Her scent was masked, and there were no fingerprints on any of the equipment. The best thing we could do was, take turns in the hospital so that Sarah could take a break.

Thankfully, after five days, her mate started to show signs of waking up. He wiggled his toes and groaned. Sarah waited in anticipation, chewing on her lower lip. She was undoubtedly anxious.

After moving his head from side to side, he finally opened his eyes. He flinched, perhaps the brightness of the room was too much for him. The healers hastily checked on his vitals and nodded in approval. He was fine.

He looked around in confusion until his eyes landed on Sarah's blue-grey ones.

His eyes widened in shock.

"Mate!" He growled loudly. Crying tears of joy, she nodded and stretched her hand out.

"Mate," all she could do was whisper.

My heart soared and tears of happiness welled into my eyes. I felt Leo hold my shoulders. Leaning against him, I cried and laughed at the same time.

I was just too happy for her.

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 22

Astrea

Smiling through tears of joy, I watched as the star-crossed lovers held hands. Sarah was a crying mess and although her mate wasn't crying, we all knew that he was elated that he had found his mate. Their wordless gestures were heartfelt. I felt Leo squeeze me against him. I sighed. I would love to share the same bond with him.

I wiped my tears. We had to try and communicate with him.

"How are you feeling?" I asked him after giving them a few minutes.

"My body is in pain," he spoke slowly. His lips tugged upwards slightly as he glanced at Sarah who was holding his hand, "but I've never felt so pleased. I have found my mate," his smile widened. Sarah smiled back at him as she clasped her finger around his. He then looked at me and then frowned.

"But... how did I end up here?" He arched his brow. "I have never stepped inside such a beautiful place," he glanced at the machines in the room. Wrinkling his forehead, he studied the tools.

"With a lot of complicated... equipment..." the creases on his forehead deepened

"Where am I? And who are you? How did you find me? And why did you bring me here?"

Without waiting for an answer, he kept spilling out his queries. I was glad that he was enthusiastic about finding his mate, and at the same time, I understood that he had every reason to be confused.

Chuckling, "you have a lot of questions, don't you?" I mumbled. "We found you in the woods. Can you tell us what you remember?"

He stared into space. His lips pulled into a thin line, he continued to think. I suppose he was trying to recall what had happened to him. His countenance slowly changed. He gulped as his eyes clouded with uncertainty. His lips parted as he glanced at me and then at Sarah.

"Umm... where am I?" He asked once again.

I pursed my lips. I wondered if he was worried about being chastised because he was a rogue.

“It is okay. We know that you are a rogue. But you are also our friend’s mate and I can see that both of you are excited about finding each other. We just want to know what you remember,” I spoke as carefully as I could.

He had just woken up from a coma, and I didn’t want him to stress. Nevertheless, we had to know what he could recollect.

He exhaled a breath of air as he looked intently at Sarah.

“You... knew?” He seemed to be ashamed of it.

Sarah nodded in response.

“Yes, and that is the least of my worries,” she said.

A breath of relief escaped his lips. “I was worried that the wolves in the packs wouldn’t accept me...” he trailed off, chuckling to himself. There was no humour in his laugh. Perhaps due to the pain and weakness in his body.

“Do you remember anything?” I inquired.

“Yes,” he sighed. “I... they caught me. I was trying to sneak into their so-called laboratory. I heard that they were preparing a vial to make us stronger,” he hesitated.

He studied our faces and ran his tongue over his lips. His face suddenly wilted.

“I... should leave... I don’t belong here...” he mumbled under his breath.

I looked at Sarah. Her eyebrows were knitted together in concern.

Heaving a deep breath, “don’t you want to be a part of a pack?” I asked. “Don’t you want to be with your mate?” I inquired further.

Shaking his head, “no... I mean I want to... but... “

“It is your choice.... What is your name?” I asked, cutting him in.

“Allan,” he replied.

Nodding my head, "it is your choice, Allan. You can either choose to leave or stay and submit to our leader. As for us, we are ready to accept you as long as you are willing to submit," I told him firmly.

Staring at me blankly, "are you the alpha?" He questioned, making me chuckle.

"No," I smiled. "You will meet our leader soon. The point is, you can choose to become a better person and let go of the past. You have your mate beside you and we are all here for you. Yet, if you choose to leave, we won't stop you," I told him firmly.

Looking at Sarah, "I want to stay," he declared. "But..."

Silence followed.

Sucking in a breath, "but what?" Sarah asked softly, her gaze intense as she scrutinised his demeanour.

"I have done a lot of... things... that I'm not proud of..." he gulped.

"Well, are you willing to change and be a better person?"

The Queen's voice made us look at the entrance. Her aura filled the whole atmosphere, making our knees go weak. I glanced at Allan. He seemed to be dazed. Perhaps the sudden change in the atmosphere made his wolf shaky.

"Yes," he mumbled, staring blankly at her.

"Good. Will you submit?"

He gulped.

"Y..yes," he replied.

Smiling, "see, there is nothing to worry about," she said. "I heard that you woke up, so I thought I would come and pay a visit. Rest well and get well soon," she beamed and turned around to leave.

"Don't ask too many questions today. He needs time to heal," she told me on her way out.

Bowing, "Yes, Your Majesty," I said.

“Majesty?” Allan mumbled, as soon as she left. He still had that stunned look on his face.

“Yes, that was the Queen,” Leo smirked. Allan’s eyes widened in shock.

“Holy shít! No fúcking way!” he exclaimed.

We let him relax the whole day. We took the Queen’s advice and didn’t stress him with questions. He was astounded to learn that the Queen had taken her time to visit him, but later he managed to relax.

The healers soon shifted him to a private room when he had woken up. It was a good thing, because Sarah didn’t move away even for a minute. At least in the room, she could rest on the couch and freshen up using the attached toilet. Though we left them alone, allowing them to bond, we decided to take food for them so that they could eat.

Regarding the issue with the rogues, we halted our investigation for a while so that we could focus on Sarah’s mate. He could tell us a lot of things, but to gain his trust, we had to let him loosen up and get used to us. The Royals focused on the security of the kingdom. More scouts guarded all the important places in the kingdom and more guards were assigned to patrol the woods. The perimeters were also well policed. We still had to find out how they managed to penetrate the perimeters.

Perhaps they discovered that we could use wolfsbane for that? It could be possible. Our pack members had been using them for the past few years.

Although we couldn’t be precisely confident why they were plotting against us, we now knew they might attack at any moment. So the whole kingdom was on standby. Everyone was prepared for war. The underground bunkers were already packed with food and water in case of an emergency and all the warriors were on alert. The packs had also prepared well, so that even in the case of a surprise attack, they would be able to defend themselves.

By the end of the day, Allan had grown pretty comfortable with us and, to our relief, his recovery was prompt. That night, we had our dinner together in the room of the infirmary. We waited to chat for a while and he started to tell us about his past.

“So, yeah. I am a rogue. I never belonged to a pack. My mom was a lone she-wolf. I don’t know why, or how she became a rogue, and I don’t know who my father is. But that isn’t an issue among us. Anyway, we used to live in peace as loners until we heard that all the rogues were uniting against injustice. The wolves who spoke to us claimed that they wanted to build an empire... you know, a pack... and to attain that they said that they had to defeat the current Queen,” he smiled sheepishly.

“At first, mom was thrilled by the thought of belonging to a pack. I didn’t understand what it meant, because I never knew what being in a pack was like. I followed her anyway. I trusted my mom. I didn’t realize what they were up to. I just joined the drills. You know, they taught us how to fight and I was fascinated by it... you know. I was fifteen and it intrigued me.

But as years passed, I think mom started to realise that they weren’t the right type of wolves to blend with. She wanted to escape and spoke to me about it. I was naive and rebelled. I thought she was wrong...” he sighed sadly.

His face withered as he glanced away. “I should have listened to her. Maybe if I did, she would still be alive,” he whispered.

My lips parted. “What?”

Sarah intertwined her fingers with his and offered a sympathetic smile. He forced his lips to stretch. Heaving a shaky breath, he spoke.

“I resisted. She didn’t want to leave without me, but then, the others heard that she was trying to leave. I still remember that day. They ganged up on her and ripped her throat open...” he trailed off. Pulling her lips into a thin line, Sarah hugged him. There was no doubt that Allan was volatile.

He gulped a couple of times as he blinked away the tears that glossed his eyes. His mouth opened, and it seemed to me that he was forcing himself to speak.

“They... they threatened that I would have the same fate if I tried to escape,” he paused. The tension in the atmosphere was too much. Hoping that speaking about it would lessen his burden, I listened to him.

“That was the point I felt that mom must be right. They were hiding something. I wanted to leave, but was hesitant... you know. I wanted to try anyway, but at the same time, I was worried that no pack would accept me unless I had solid

proof, so I tried to sneak into their laboratory,” he chuckled. “That’s where they caught me.”

I glanced at Elena. She nodded. Leo and Xander gave me a meaningful glance. So they had a laboratory. Maybe we could ask more about it.

“So what is in the laboratory?” I implored.

Shrugging, “I am not sure. I wasn’t a part of their strange investigations. I was more like a puppet who blindly followed their instructions. I trained to fight for them. And when the time was right, to go to war,” he told us.

“You mean... They are preparing to fight... a war?” I raised an eyebrow.

He nodded. Just then, a male healer entered the room. So we ceased our discussion.

“Have you had your pills?” He asked.

“Yes. I would like to use the bathroom,” Allan told him. The healer helped him onto his feet and took him to the bathroom. While we waited, I kept theorizing and trying to make sense of what we had found out so far. So they have a laboratory where they are preparing a vial. In addition to that, they were preparing for war. What we didn’t know was what the vial does. Perhaps it would have some connection with their secret weapon. I looked at Leo. He, too, was deeply immersed in his thoughts. But we didn’t say anything. Despite the room being full, no one uttered a word.

The bathroom door opened and the healer helped Allan back to his bed. When he returned, his face was contorted in confusion.

Looking at Sarah, “why is there a mark on my neck?” he asked, bewildered.

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 23

Astrea

Days passed. Allan’s recovery was remarkable. Although he was confused when he saw the mark on the crook of his neck, he was quick to accept it, especially when we explained what had happened. He was allowed to go home. However, since he was new, and didn’t have a home, the Queen allowed him to stay in Sarah’s room in the warrior’s quarters.

“Mates shouldn’t be separated, especially if they are willing to accept the bond,” she told us.

Everyone on the team was given separate rooms, except Elena and Rafael, who have been sharing the same room ever since they found out that they were mates. Since the beginning, I have stayed in the Palace. I guess the Queen would have allowed us to move in together if we were mates. I just couldn’t help but wish that we were fated together.

The days expired rather quickly. We knew we were running out of time before the blood moon, but there was little we could do. Allan didn’t know how to tell us the directions to the laboratory, and he was still healing from the numerous trauma he had suffered in the rogues’ hands.

So we chose to prepare ourselves for the upcoming war, training well, and sharpening our combat skills. The lookouts and the scouts were informed to be more cautious. The basement of the school and infirmary were also packed with food and water, in addition to the packed underground bunkers. So that in case the whole kingdom needed to go into a sudden lockdown, the commoners inside those buildings would be stable until help arrived.

By the time a month passed by, Allan had recovered enough to be active and chose to join the army. He had a lot to learn, but at the same time, we also learnt from him. The rogue’s tactics and secrets. At least some of them. Allan didn’t hesitate to tell us what he knew. Unfortunately, he didn’t know much about the vial or the secret weapon.

Sir Elliot wasn’t too surprised when he saw that, despite being a rogue, he was pretty good at fighting, and his tactics were rather similar to ours.

“I think Calvin is involved,” he had commented. It made sense. Calvin was a trained guard who started to rebel. He must have taught what he knew to the rogues.

I supposed the war would be intense. And to top that, they had a vial and a secret weapon. Anyway, we had the Lycan army with us. They were way stronger than any wolf, but I knew we shouldn’t underestimate them. After all, they were developing something we weren’t aware of.

“Just a month is left for the blood moon. I wonder if they would try to attack that night,” I voiced my concern as we relaxed after the regular workout sessions.

“I bet they would,” Leo mumbled, sipping on his water bottle.

“I feel the same,” Arnold agreed, as the rest of the group nodded and mumbled out their affirmations.

I glanced at Danisha, who seemed to be a bit too silent. Since we now trained with the lycans in training, I was kind of forced to spend time with them too. At first it was awkward. They apparently didn't enjoy my presence. But as time passed, I learnt to ignore the uncomfortable atmosphere and do what was needed.

Natasha was also there. She didn't speak much to me, but at least she no longer tried to get close to Leo. Regardless, we weren't friends, there was no doubt about that.

“What are you thinking about?” I cocked a brow at Danisha. She seemed to be in deep thought.

Blinking, “huh?” Danisha uttered and forced a smile.

Shaking her head, “nothing,” she mumbled.

“I must leave,” Xander sighed and stood up. “My special classes start in an hour,” he said, standing up. Danisha followed, and pecked his lips right before he jogged off.

“We are also going. See you tomorrow,” Danisha stated, glancing at us. I knew that the smile that she forced onto her face wasn't genuine. Perhaps she was trying to be polite.

Anyway, she never tried to be a friend to me, despite being close to Xander, and I think I knew why. Her best friend didn't have a chance with Leo because of me. I didn't care anyway. Offering a polite smile at the duo, I nodded.

“I also should be going,” Leo stood up and stretched himself. Arnold, Rafael and Elena too stood up to leave.

“Let's go,” Sarah nudged my hand. We walked towards the warrior's quarters where Sarah would go to her room and from there, I would walk into the palace.

“I don't like that chick,” Sarah suddenly mumbled.

“Who?”

“Natasha and Danisha. They are so... weird...” she stated, making me chuckle.

“I think it’s a personal grudge,” I told her and explained what I had learnt from Leo. Natasha used to make awkward comments and try to get close to him. Which stopped after he took me to her sister’s birthday celebration.

“Yeah, stay away from him. Eww,” Sarah pretended to gag, making me laugh.

“Babe,” Allan’s voice made us stop in our tracks just as we were approaching her room. We turned around to see him jog over to us, a broad grin spreading across his face.

“Guess what? I get paid for being in the army!”

He sounded ecstatic. I beamed. He wouldn’t have thought that he would get paid. Especially since he was here temporarily. When things get solved, Sarah would go back to her pack where Allan would become an official member. Their alpha had already accepted him as his pack member. Nonetheless, a few formalities had to be finalized.

Giggling, “of course, you would!” Sarah exclaimed.

“I never even dreamt of this,” he admitted, clearly elated. “We can have our own house soon!” He gleefully blurted out.

I suppose the little things we took for granted were massive for him. Getting paid, having clean clothes, good food and a roof over our heads. Allan seemed to be grateful for every little thing he received.

When he grabbed her and crashed his lips on hers, I smiled. It had been just a month since they met, but they were undoubtedly deeply in love.

“Allan, I am sweaty,” Sarah giggled, smacking lightly on his chest.

“So what?” He shrugged, earning another playful smack from his mate.

Chuckling at their playful exchange, “I am going,” I told them and walked away, wishing for a day that I could have that with the one I love.

As the days passed by, everyone in the kingdom waited in anticipation, unsure of what to expect on the night of the blood moon. Even in the pack, things were hectic. Dad had tripled the security at the perimeters and ordered every able wolf to protect themselves. The night of the blood moon was the night everyone was waiting for. And it was just a fortnight away.

Whenever I called my parents, they would advise me to be careful and this call wasn't any different. They told me about their preparations in the pack. I had never seen them so tense. Perhaps, because this time, I was going to join the fight and they wouldn't be there for me. They would have to stay in the pack in case of a mass attack and protect the pack's land.

After ending the call, I walked towards the open window and stared at the star-studded sky. It was the night of the new moon. Only the stars that twinkled in the night sky were visible. I sighed.

"What storm do you have in store for us?" I whispered.

The following days passed faster than I wanted them to. As usual, I was alone in my room after a busy day when someone knocked on the door.

I groaned, feeling exhausted. I didn't want to separate from the comfort of my bed. The person knocked again. Despite my desire to sleep, I tore myself off of the sheets and dragged myself towards the door.

"Who?" I asked as I opened it. Instead of answering me, Leo slithered inside as soon as the door unlocked.

My jaw dropped open, but a chuckle escaped through my lips.

"What are you doing?" I was pleased to see him. Nevertheless, it was a risk. The Queen wouldn't be amused to see him in my room.

"I missed you," he mumbled, collecting me in his arms. Using his leg, he closed the door and leaned against it, as he held me in his arms.

Smiling in satisfaction, I breathed out a sigh and closed my eyes. How could I resist his charm? He was the love of my life. We stayed like that for sometime. Ash was purring in my head the whole time and I felt that I could stay like that forever. When I was with him, I was at home.

“I love you, Rea,” he whispered in my ear, making me shudder. When he started to trail kisses all over my face and down my neck, I found myself involuntarily craning my neck to give him better access.

His hands started to explore my form. When he grabbed my a*s cheeks, I gasped. Without a warning, he crashed his lips on mine and hungrily dominated them.

“I. Love. You,” he mumbled in between kisses.

My breathing became ragged and my chest heaved against his. The thin fabric of my pyjamas didn’t help.

When he grazed his teeth against my marking spot I let out a shameless moan. The waves of pleasure that coursed throughout my body were too much to handle.

“How I wish I could mark you tonight,” he groaned in my ear.

Panting, “wh... why c... can’t you?” I stuttered.

Sighing, he held me against his chest. I took my time to catch my breath as I listened to the erratic beats of his heart.

“Well, for one thing, I literally can’t until I complete my shift. Zoro says anytime soon. I just hope soon enough. Because I want to make you mine as soon as this mess related to the blood moon is over,” he explained. “Tomorrow night is the night. I hope that they stop or get killed... I mean... seriously,” he added.

I frowned.

“I can mark you,” my tongue formed the words before I could hold it back. But as soon as I did, I covered my mouth.

Chuckling, he kissed my forehead. “Well, do you want to?” He asked.

My face heated up at his question. Did I want to? Oh, hell, yes! But should I? Maybe not.

“Umm...” A bashful smile curled on my lips as I tried hard to hide my flustered cheeks.

He laughed. "We will wait. Just a few days left, anyway," he said, and I nodded in agreement. Leaning against him, I yawned. I was drowsy and tired, yet, I desired to be with him.

"You are sleepy, my love," he whispered. Humming in response, I smiled and inhaled his wonderful scent. I would love his scent to mix with mine. I would love to belong to him. I would gladly flaunt his mark on my neck when that happens.

He bent down and placed his hands under my knee to lift me up in his arms. A sigh of contentment escaped my lips. He carefully placed me on the bed and covered my body with sheets. He was about to leave after kissing me goodnight, but I held his arm.

"Wait, please?" I pleaded. He gulped. He was hesitating, yet sat on the mattress and started to run his finger through my hair. It was soothing. If only I could feel the sparks....

My eyelids grew heavy and, despite my desire to stay awake a while longer, I drifted off into dreamland.

As expected, he wasn't there when I woke up. He must have left as soon as I dozed off. Anyway, that night was the best night of my life. I fell asleep with a smile on my face and woke up elated. However, as soon as I remembered that we were expecting chaos by the end of the day, my excitement died down.

After throwing the covers, I rushed to start the day. I had a feeling that it was going to be a big night.

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 24

Astrea

"So, what's the plan?" I asked as the sun lowered itself, nearing the end of the day. My heart was hysterical and Ash seemed to be on the edge. To tell the truth, everyone was anxious, yet we had to face what was inevitable.

"I expect them to infiltrate the security at the border. I don't know how they do it, but if their so-called secret weapon is going to be ready tonight, I expect

them to do something if they are trying to defeat the current Queen, as Allan had said. So we will wait for an indication from our spies and then act,” Sir Elliot mumbled as he scanned through the rows of warriors who had gathered on the pack ground. Among them, Xander, who had completed his shift recently. Leo wasn’t allowed to join us, since he had not shifted.

“Are the old and sick moved to the bunkers?” The Queen questioned.

“Yes, Your Highness. At least two healers are in each bunker, to attend to them in case of an emergency. The minors and women who aren’t taking part in the fight are also in the safety bunkers,” I explained.

“And the infirmary?”

“Is on standby,” confirmed Sarah.

She asked us to check with the head healers if everything was ready and we did.

The light of the natural torch soon faded and we didn’t have to wait much longer. As the darkness of the night spread, the Royals received an alarming mindlink. The scouts who were patrolling the perimeter were falling down, unconscious onto the ground one by one.

“What in the world...” Sir Elliot gasped as all of us rushed outside.

“Quick! To the borders!” he ordered.

Soon, a massive army of wolves and lycans were dashing through the trees – an army which I was proud to be a part of. Some of us were in our wolf form while others were not.

When we arrived at the border, we were shocked to see several guards unconscious on the forest floor. They were completely motionless. Fearing that they were already dead or seriously injured, we hastened to attend to them. Upon checking their pulses, we found out that they weren’t deceased. They were just unconscious. No signs of external injuries could be detected, adding to our confusion. Yet, they were quickly taken away to be attended by the healers.

“Carry them to the infirmary! Quick!” The Queen ordered.

Some of our warriors obliged without wavering, while the rest remained, waiting for any orders. Before we could analyse what was going on, a distinctive and irritating scent hit our noses. The atmosphere tensed. I channeled my senses with those of my wolf and squinted into the darkness.

“Ash, be ready,” I called my wolf.

“Always,” she replied, allowing me full access to her senses.

Someone was there, and not just anyone. The rogues. We were right. They were here on the night of the blood moon. I glanced at the sky. The full moon was already up in the sky. However, it was still silvery white, which meant that the blood moon phase had not begun yet.

“Show yourselves! Cowards!” Sir Elliot growled, baring his teeth. All of us were on full alert.

Soon, a tall, buff man stepped out of the bushes, followed by an army of rogues. One by one, they revealed themselves. The tall man stepped forward. I could clearly see that he was strong. The silvery light of the moon highlighted his bulging muscles and well-toned body. An annoying smirk was plastered on his face as he glared at the royal couple.

“Calvin,” the Queen snarled. “How bold of you to step in front of us. You are a prisoner who has escaped from the dungeon. Aren’t you afraid that we might capture you or kill you on the spot?” She implored.

He chuckled.

“Still the same, eh? Arrogant and full of yourself. Five years have passed since we last met, dear Queen,” he mocked, deliberately pressing on his words as he addressed the Queen.

“I served you for three years before I was locked up. Where are the pleasantries?” he scoffed and glanced at his men.

“I thought I would have to sneak into the Palace and demand what I want from you all. But I guess you have made my work easier. You are here to see me,” he chortled.

The sound of his unsettling laughter made a shiver run down my spine.

“You never expressed your gratitude for my service... our service. The warriors do all the hard work yet you take all the credit!” He growled and scanned through the Queen’s army.

“Join us! I promise better days!” He bellowed. With an erratic heart, I glanced at the Queen, who was squinting at Calvin with a critical glare. Her fists were clenched and I knew she was on the edge of shifting to her lycan. What surprised me was when Allan, who was in his human form, stepped forward and faced the rogue leader.

“He lies! He will not give you better days. Your Queen takes good care of you. Don’t be fooled by his devious words!” He shouted loud enough for everyone to hear.

That seemed to have infuriated Calvin.

“Traitor!” His thunderous voice boomed, disrupting the peace of the night. His muscles bulged, yet suddenly he relaxed. His eyes clouded for a while and a sly smirk spread across his face.

He started to laugh. I shifted uncomfortably on my feet. The way Calvin acted was giving me the creeps.

“I doubt anyone would listen to a wolf who had lived as a rogue his whole life,” he snickered.

Silence followed until the warriors in the Queen’s army started to validate their loyalty to the Queen. Soon the whole atmosphere was booming with the heart-warming sound of their confirmations.

Calvin’s eyes widened, yet soon he composed himself. The Queen held her hand up, gesturing to her warriors to be silent.

“Not everyone is deranged and power hungry like you, Calvin,” she sneered.

“Whatever. Anyway, that isn’t why I was trying to sneak into your territory,” he stated. “I have come here to take what is mine.”

Once again, his eyes glimmered in an unnerving manner.

“Get real, Calvin. What you need to do is change. But I don’t see that happening anytime soon. So you need to get back behind bars,” Sir Elliot

growled, glancing at his warriors. I knew he was about to command the fighters, so I prepared myself.

“Uh, uh” Calvin’s smirk widened.

“Before you do that, I think you should know that I have something very precious to you,” he snickered and snapped his fingers.

Two rogues who were standing beside him bowed down and rushed towards a bush. To our surprise, they dragged a limp body out of it. Her eyes were closed and her blond hair was tangled. There were red scratches and bruises on the visible parts of her body. She sure seemed to have struggled against them. Growls of anger rumbled throughout the Royal army.

My breathing caught in my throat. How...? My shock soon changed to fury. I felt my muscles stiffen as rage coursed through my veins. My face heated up in anger. All I wanted to do was rip that disgusting rogue apart, yet I would have to wait for the orders from our leaders.

“Zelda!” The Queen screamed.

“What! I thought she was in the bunker!” I heard Sarah gasp.

“She was...” I managed to growl in between my gritted teeth. I had seen her go into one of the bunkers. Danisha also confirmed that she was there. I couldn’t discern how she ended up with the rogues.

Anyway, that wasn’t the biggest concern at the moment. Why, and how would have to be answered later. My biggest distress was thinking of a way to get her back from those filthy scoundrels.

“Let my daughter go! You rascal!” Sir Elliot was raging. I had never heard him that angry. I literally felt the earth rumble at the force of his growl.

Clicking his tongue, Calvin tilted his head. He didn’t seem to be even a little bit intimidated. Or he was good at hiding it.

“Anger will get you nowhere, Sir,” he stressed on the word ‘sir’ as though he was taunting Sir Elliot.

“Your precious princess is too young anyway. I don’t want anything to do with her. Now give me what belongs to me, and I will return your precious daughter to you,” he demanded.

The Queen gulped. “What do you want?” She asked, clenching her fists.

Snickering, he pointed his finger in my direction. My heart raced.

“Her,” he signaled, and I felt as though the world stopped revolving.

“What?” The Queen hissed. “You are crazy!”

Xander stepped forward, while Sarah clasped her hand around mine. I could feel the heat of anger radiating from Xander as he stood beside me. After all, it was his little sister who they had held captive.

I was staring at Calvin in disbelief. Why did he want me? We never met, nor did we have any connection. I just couldn’t think of a good reason why he would want me in exchange for the Royal Princess.

“Give me what belongs to me,” he grumbled, and this time, he was looking straight at me. The hair on the back of my neck raised as I shuddered, yet I faced the perpetrator with all the courage that I could muster.

I heaved a deep breath and glanced at the Queen and her husband. They were undoubtedly troubled. They wouldn’t want to give me up, but it was their daughter who the scoundrels were holding hostage.

Nevertheless, I knew what I should do...

“I’ll go with you,” I stated firmly.

Xander glanced at me with wide eyes. “But... they... you...”

“We will try to trick them,” I mind linked him and the Royals. “I am a fully shifted alpha and Zelda is just a minor. I should go,” I told them via our link.

“Uh, uh. No secrets in public, my darling,” Calvin chuckled. He must have realised that we were mindlinking.

Narrowing my eyes at him, “I don’t care what you think. None of us does,” I scoffed.

“Feisty,” his grin widened. “I like feisty chicks.”

I felt like gagging.

The Queen walked up to me and held me at her arm’s length as tears brimmed in her eyes.

“Be careful,” her voice quivered. Nodding my head, I turned towards them.

“I will go with you, if you bring her to her parents. Now bring her here!” I demanded.

My stance seemed to amuse Calvin. He gestured to his loyal men, while the same annoying smirk was plastered in his face.

“You heard the lady. Take the girl,” he said. “But first, Elliot, step forward with my girl, so that we can exchange them,” he proposed.

I gritted my teeth. I wanted to scream. I was not his girl! It irked me that he kept calling me that.

Sighing, Sir Elliot held my hand. One of the rogues slowly picked Zelda’s motionless body up and sauntered over to us. Slowly, we also moved forward until we met.

My heart tugged when I saw how badly Zelda was battered. There was a dark spot on her forehead and fresh scratch marks on her arms. Since she was an unshifted lycan, she was generally like a human, hence her healing wasn’t accelerated.

I was prepared to fight as soon as they handed Zelda to her father. But as he handed Zelda to him, he mumbled something under his breath and blew into our faces.

I staggered back. Something wasn’t right. I was suddenly feeling drowsy. My eyelids drooped despite my efforts to stay awake and soon I was kneeling on the first floor.

“Now!” I heard a yell and then chaos. I glanced at Zelda through my eyelashes, who was now lying unconscious in front of me. Sir Elliot was in the same condition as I was. Regardless, he held onto his daughter, with whatever strength left in him.

I couldn't focus on the mayhem on the field. The Royal army clearly outnumbered the rogues and I was sure that we had the upper hand.

My eyelids closed. I couldn't help it. The force putting me to sleep was too strong. I felt myself being lifted up.

Who was that? I couldn't detect the scent. Ash... where was she? I couldn't hear my wolf. Maybe she was also under whatever spell the rogue had cast.

I tried to fight, yet, I had to give up. The spell was weakening me. All I wanted to do was sleep.

Yes... sleep. That was what I should do. I stopped struggling and slowly surrendered to the force that was putting me to slumber.

In Love With My Best Friend Chapter 25

Astrea

I was in pain yet, slowly, I started to wake up. My head felt like it might split. Wincing, I groaned and turned around. Without opening my eyes, I started to massage my temple, hoping that it would reduce the suffering.

"Wake up, darling," a dreadful, deep voice whispered, and I felt my whole body stiffen. I focused on the scent of my environment. The atmosphere wasn't familiar to me. I sniffed the air, hoping to catch a whiff of the person who spoke to me, but nothing. Maybe they had somehow inhibited his scent.

Frowning, I forced my eyes to open. The room was dark. However, with the gift of our night vision, it wasn't hard for me to look around. Though it wasn't as clear as it would be during the day, I could look around just fine.

I wasn't in the palace. I realized. My surroundings were unfamiliar. The room was compact and monotonous. The dull cement blocks of the walls and the cement floor had no life in them. A wooden door was right in front of me and a little window beside it revealed a glimpse of the silvery moon, but that was it. There was nothing else. No furniture, not even a mattress. I was lying on the cold floor. But who was the one who spoke to me?

The creases on my forehead deepened as I looked around. My breathing hitched when my gaze zeroed on a tall, well-built man who was leaning against the wall behind me... wait.. I knew him... Calvin!

I gulped. Being in the same room as him meant trouble. Staring at him, I tried to analyse the situation. They had brought me here. We were at the perimeter, trying to settle everything. I squinted at him, as I tried to recall what had happened next. They had Zelda, and he wanted me in exchange for her. Yes, I remembered.

A cold shiver ran down my spine when I remembered how he kept calling me his girl. That was cringe-worthy. Why would I be his girl? He was nothing but an eccentric criminal and we met for the first time. Suddenly, my headache didn't matter much to me. The matter at hand was worse than I thought and I knew I couldn't slack. I had to fight against all odds.

"Hello, my darling," he smirked as I sat up.

What he might do to me scared me a bit. I knew he was a Lycan, hence stronger than me. Moreover, I was most probably where they wanted me to be, on their turf... if we could call this land their turf...

Regardless of the situation, I wouldn't go down without a fight. I would strive till the end and if I had to die, I wanted to die fighting. Like a true heroine.

"How are you?" He asked, tilting his head, as though everything was perfectly fine.

I scoffed.

"You mean, other than the fact that you have kidnapped me? I am fine," I grimaced. I had no interest in entertaining him, and it irritated me that my response seemed to have amused him.

He chuckled. "You see, I haven't met a girl as fiery as you. I like it," he snickered.

I rolled my eyes.

"What do you want?" I demanded.

Shrugging his shoulders, "you, of course," he stated as a matter of fact. I gritted my teeth.

I wanted to challenge him, but I knew I had to use my brains against him. He was physically stronger and I didn't have my weapons with me. In addition to that, being away from my home was an added drawback.

"You are crazy and you can't have me," I spat. I just had to say it.

"If you think you can claim me just like that, you are wrong! My heart belongs to someone already. Someone much, much better than you. He isn't a crazy lunatic who keeps trying to snatch what isn't his," I mocked.

The thought of being with him made me want to puke.

I wished I could tear his limbs on the spot. He was getting more and more bothersome by the second. The annoying grin on his face was adding to my discomfort. He looked outside the window and pointed outside. He didn't seem to be offended by what I had said. In fact, he didn't seem to care.

"See the moon, darling?" He said. "Do you know what is special about this night?" Still grinning, he glanced at me. My eyes darted towards the moon. My lips parted when I saw a reddish shadow blocking the silvery light of the moon.

The blood moon!

Gulping, I glanced at the moon. The moon looked more like a crescent. But I knew that it was a full moon night. That shadow could only mean that the phases of the blood moon had begun.

s**t! I had forgotten about it!

But why did he ask me that stupid question? I glanced at him skeptically. I didn't have a good feeling about it. Yet, I chose to remain silent.

"See that red shadow?" He sounded excited. "It is a very special night for me... for us," he said.

Not knowing what to expect, I stood up. I need to think of a way to escape. The only way out was the door and the window. But with this lunatic with me, it would be impossible.

Deciding that I would attempt to run out as soon as he left, I studied his countenance. I just couldn't understand why he sounded so excited. And why was he in the same room as I was? Shouldn't he be with his followers?

"Ash?" I called my wolf.

Silence.

"Come on... Ash! You can't go silent now," I pleaded through our link. Yet, I received no response.

Perhaps she was resting.

I told myself for self satisfaction and tried to gulp down my anxiety. I could feel her presence, so I wanted to assume that she was fine.

"Just a moment more," he whispered, looking intently at the moon that was now almost completely red.

I gulped. I had never thought anything could be eerie and amazing at the same time until I saw this. Eerie, because what awaited us in the near future was still a mystery and amazing because it was simply extraordinary.

Anxious, I watched the silvery moon slowly change its colour. The red shadow engulfed the moon and it looked like a bloody red moon... my heart raced. So that was the blood moon. My anxiety skyrocketed. Something was supposed to happen tonight... but what?

Calvin walked towards me and I naturally took a step backwards. However, the room was tiny and my back soon hit the wall. My eyes shifted from the dangerous rogue approaching me to the window that revealed the bright red moon. It has happened. It was the blood moon. I trembled in fear when I saw him saunter over to me. I was more worried about what Calvin was about to do. I proceeded to move, slithering away from him.

However, after some time, it seemed that he had had enough and dashed towards me. He was fast, and it wasn't a surprise. He was a fully shifted lycanthrope and a trained guard.

Everything happened so rapidly. One minute he was moving slowly, almost crawling at the speed of a snail, and the next minute, he was right in front of

me. Placing his hands on either side of my face, he caged me in-between his arms.

His face was uncomfortably close to mine. The stench of his breath was making it hard for me to breathe.

“Get away from me!” I demanded and tried to push him away.

He didn’t budge. Pushing against his rock hard chest was like trying to move a stubborn boulder from its place.

“Don’t you still get it?” He suddenly asked, making me halt.

“Get what?” I shook my head. “I don’t care! I don’t want you to be close to me. Go away!” I screamed. Within a flash, he grabbed both my arms in one hand and pinned them above my head.

My chest constricted in fear. What was he doing?

“Ash! Help!” I desperately called for my wolf. She stirred in my mind, rather uncomfortably.

“Astrea... those sparks....”

I froze. My eyes widened and I could have sworn that my heart stopped beating. Could it be? No... no, no, no. It couldn’t be.

“Do you feel the tingles?” He whispered. My heart was hammering in my chest. I gulped.

No!

I wanted to scream. Lintels of sweat trickled down my face. My chest heaved as I twitched.

No! He couldn’t be my mate!

I wanted to cry. However, it was undeniable. The tingles exploded where he was holding my hands and it was very noticeable. At first it was faint, almost imperceptible. However, as time passed, the tingles started to get more and more central. It was undeniable.

Tears gathered in my eyes. No.

His smirk widened and there was nothing I liked about it. I suppose that he realised that I also felt it. He looked evil... he was evil.

“Hello, little mate,” he snickered under his breath and lowered my right hand, pinning it against the wall. He made sure that he held my other hand and sandwiched my body between him and the wall, making it impossible for me to flee. Slowly, he lowered his head towards the crook of my neck. I felt that my soul might leave my body.

I can't let him mark me... not like this. Not ever!

“No!” I screamed and thrashed against him with all my might.

He can't mark me! He can't!

I resisted. I didn't want to allow him access to my marking spot. It was supposed to be reserved for Leo. Only him.

A menacing growl erupted from his chest when he found it hard to sink his teeth in. He bared his yellowing teeth at me and forcefully tilted my head, while still holding me using one hand. He was bigger and stronger than me even in the human form. The other thing was, he was a supreme lycan and I was just a wolf. An alpha, however, a wolf.

No!

He ran his tongue over my marking spot and it irked me to no end. It didn't make sense. If he was my mate, everything about him would be likeable to me. Yet, I was irritated at being held by him. Was it because I was being held by force? I couldn't care less about it. I wanted to prevent him from imprinting me.

I squirmed and revolted. Nevertheless, my pleas and protests fell on deaf ears.

Despite my efforts, I couldn't free myself from his grip. He was just too strong. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I felt his canines scrape the surface of my skin.

No... please...

“Let me go!” I shrieked, still struggling against him. However, he didn’t budge. His disgusting breath fanned my skin, and the urge to scrub my skin clean was increasing. He was too close to me, too close.

“Let me go... please...” My pleas eventually reduced to weak sobs as I felt his teeth pierce my skin. The pain of being imprinted on, ripped throughout my frame, sending me into a state of panic.

Inhaling deep gasps of breath, I tried my best to withstand the agony. Tears continued to spill out of the corners of my eyes. This wasn’t supposed to be how someone marked his soulmate. It wasn’t presumed to be painful. It was reckoned to be pleasurable. It was supposed to be done out of love. Not by force.

Oh the pain...

It was unbearable. Waves of agony pulsed through my physique. I stopped fighting and my tears dried up. I was exhausted. I felt his canines being slowly retracted and he stepped back.

I stumbled onto the floor, exhausted. I was still aware of what was going on, yet had no desire to react to anything. My fight against him had worn me out. He didn’t bother to pick me up, or help me stand. He didn’t even care about checking if I was fine. He simply did what he wanted to and walked away.

I heard his footsteps and the door clicked open.

“See you later,” he snickered. “Mate,” he added, as though he was making fun of me.

The door closed and the lock clicked. He locked it from outside. As I lay staring into the expanse, a lone tear rolled down out of my left eye.

My gaze shifted towards the open window. The redness of the moon was slowly clearing away.

“Astrea...”

I heard Ash’s voice. She was also worn out. My wolf and I had lost our first battle against him.

“I... “

“Shhh.”

I hushed her. I didn't want to talk. Not yet.

“Please listen to me,” she begged. Pursing my lips, I let her know that I was ready to listen.

Sighing, “this bond seems weird to me. Mates are supposed to be able to detect their scents. I didn't sense that. Just the sparks...” she trailed off.

My lips parted. “I know,” my voice was hoarse.

Neither my wolf nor I could fathom what was going on. All I knew was he had forcefully marked us and I felt ruined. I was supposed to let Leo do that, not some deranged criminal.

A sob escaped my lips.

“Ash... I... I am tired... please...” my voice quivered.

She heaved a sigh. “Same here,” she confessed.

Silence followed. “Rest, Astrea,” she whispered and retracted to the back of my mind.