

Chapter 148

I wake up to the smell of my brother in the next room. I'm not sure when they switched over, but I'm glad he's here now. After using the restroom, I walk out and find him still asleep on my couch. I don't want to wake him, so I reach into my mind and find the link to Michael.

I'm so sorry. I'm not sure when you went to bed, but I didn't want to wake my brother. Can you walk me down to the kitchen?

No apologies are necessary, Princess. Toby will be there shortly. He will be with you this morning.

I quickly dress in jeans and a white shirt, pulling on a chef's jacket and kitchen shoes. I leave a note on the coffee table for Robbie so he will know where I am and then wait at the door, opening it quietly as soon as I smell Toby approaching.

"Good morning, Princess," he says with a slight smile, though he seems a little confused.

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to wake my brother," I tell him. "I swear, I only opened the door once I smelled you were close."

"Quite alright, ma'am," he tells me and turns, but he stops. "I believe I'm taking you to the kitchen this morning. I was under the impression you were to only eat in your home while the Prince is away."

I giggle at him. Michael must have sent him in blind. "Yes, but I'm not eating. I'll be working in the kitchen today. I can assure you that Seth will not care."

"Yes ma'am," he says and leads me downstairs. "The prince asked me to let you know that he's returning home today. He should be back later this evening."

"Good!" I say with a smile. Michael was nice and all, but Toby seems much more relaxed to be around me. "Was everyone alright after the incident last night?"

He furrows his brow, looking at me for a second. "I'm sorry, Princess. I didn't expect you to ask so I did not check this morning. Two men were injured severely, but they were receiving medical attention last night. I can check on them, if you would like."

"I would, thank you!" I say, opening the door to the kitchen. "I should reach out to their mates and see if there is anything I can do."

"Oh, guards don't have mates," he tells me, stopping me in my tracks.

I stop and look up at him, grabbing his arm so he will not continue to walk. "I'm sorry? Come again?"

He chuckles a little at me. "The Royal Guard, none of us have mates. It would be too risky. Should we come across our mate, we reject them."

"What?!" I exclaim, shocked to learn of this and even more shocked that he's saying it so casually. "That's terrible!"

"Not at all," he says with a bow. "I've dedicated my life to protecting you and your family."

"Oh," I say and he smiles at me a little. "So you don't have any goals for your career, or after. Just protecting me."

"Princess, my ultimate goal is to become the head guard for the little princess," he tells me with a smile and bows.

I can't help but return his smile knowing that there are good people who want to protect my special girl. "How much do you know about her?"

"I know she's special and will need more protection. It sounds challenging, and I like a challenge," he tells me, opening the door for me. "I know she may not have a wolf, but may have magic. I assume she will have a small wolf, like you, if she has one."

I give him a sad smile. "My wolf is so small because of the spell that was placed on me. It's why my human form is so small, too."

He frowns at that, shaking his head a bit. "I am sorry, Princess. It has all worked out, though."

"It has, Toby," I say, giving him a genuine smile. "It truly has."

"I shall be back here, Princess," he tells me with a bow and I continue into the kitchen, walking up to a station and looking around.

I smell Oliver as he walks up behind me, causing me to smile at the familiar scent. "Where did they find your guards?!" he asks me and I giggle, turning around to give him a hug.

"I don't even know," I tell him. "They just keep appearing."

"Well, I'm going to need you working down here the whole time you're here if they'll be joining you," he tells me with a mischievous smile. "I think I prefer the grumpy one, though."

"Toby is substantially more friendly," I say, nodding in his direction with my head. "What am I doing today?"

He pulls out a piece of paper and hands it to me. "You good to handle chopping for prep? I think I'll have you making pancakes after if you're good with that."

"Whatever you say, boss," I say, looking over the list of items to chop.

Oliver stops and wrinkles his nose at me. "I don't like that you're calling me boss, Princess," he tells me with a dramatic bow.

"Oh, stop it," I say with a giggle, walking away and heading to the refrigerator to grab the items needed.

I pull out the required vegetables and move back to the station. My knives are at the palace now, so I go to the office and grab an old set I had that was left here. It's been a while since they were used, so I sharpen them, making sure they're in tip top shape before I get started.

I look back and see Toby standing by the door, watching everything going on in the kitchen as pack members arrive to work and welcome me in, giving me smiles and hugs as I work. It feels so good to be back here, in a place that truly feels like home. My friends have called me Princess and bowed just the first time when they walked in but after that, I'm suddenly just Molly again. I realize that I truly needed this today, just some sense of normalcy.

After we finish breakfast, I help them all clean up, moving to the sink to get to work on the dishes. Stella joins me the room and stands beside me, helping me organize and load the dishwasher.

"Molly, can I ask you for a favor?" she asks and I nod, turning to her and giving her my full attention. "Can you ask if I have done something to upset the Alpha? He's been acting so strangely around me, but I don't know what I've done. I've tried my best to be so friendly, but it doesn't seem to matter."

Oh goodness, he really hasn't been able to hide it around her. Her birthday can't get here soon enough. "I'm sure it's nothing," I tell her with a reassuring smile. "He's under a lot of stress being Alpha now, and without having a mate, it's even more difficult. I'm sure he'll pull it together soon."

"I hope so," she says, unsure about my answer. "It seems like it's just me, though."

"Oh, Stella," I say, leaning over to hug her. "You're the best, really. He's just a jerk sometimes. Give it some time. So, tell me, have you shifted yet?"

She shakes her head but smiles. "I think I will this moon. My birthday is in a week!"

"How exciting!" I beam at her. "Maybe once these pups arrive, I can stay for a moon and run with everyone. It's something I've never been able to do."

Once the dishes are done, I make my way upstairs, Toby following right behind, but I decided to make a detour into my brother's office. He's not there, but I go in anyway, looking at the shelves and taking a book about fated mates. I scratch out a note letting Robbie know that I've stolen it for a bit and go upstairs to my temporary home.

"I can't believe you made me an accomplice to your theft," Toby says with a smile as he closes the door behind him.

I laugh, realizing I hadn't really thought of it that way, but he's right. "You're more fun than Michael. I don't think he likes me very much."

"He likes you," he reassures me, sitting in a chair at the dining room table as I sit on the couch. "He's just like that with everyone. One of the girls that works in the King's office swears that he used to be fun, but he's been like that since his mate rejected him."

"She rejected him? That had to hurt him," I muse, realizing that maybe he's not so terrible, he's just a little grumpy.

He makes a face but doesn't say anything, causing me to raise an eyebrow in question.

"Listen," he says, hands in the air. "I don't know for sure, and it's not my business. You seem like a pretty decent wolf, so I'll tell you that I've heard that his mate was a HE, not a SHE. That probably didn't help the situation any."

"Oh," I say, thinking back to Oliver and his situation.

"Some people are gay, and it's fine, but for some wolves... well, they have a hard time accepting it. It's not always accepted in some packs, either. The whole situation can leave their mates hurt," he tells me and I realize he misunderstood my expression.

I nod, agreeing that what he's said is very true. "My friend, Oliver, that you saw downstairs, he found his mate recently. He didn't reject him, but he wouldn't even acknowledge the bond at all. I hate it for him, because he's a really amazing guy and deserves to be treated better than that."

"That might just be worse," he says, pulling out his phone and reading the screen. He looks up at me with a small smile. "The Prince is a few hours away. He should be here in time for dinner."

I smile at that, thrilled that he's going to be home. Whatever happened with his uncle, and now his uncle's mate, is really hurting him. I just want to be able to wrap him in my arms and help him through it.

I begin reading through the book, looking for anything that mentions a bond like the one Seth and I have. After last night, I'm growing concerned that any harm to him, and then transferred to me, could also be causing harm to our babies. It seems ridiculous, but our entire bond seems ridiculous.

The babies are wiggling so much and I'm so uncomfortable, so I decide to lay down in bed, hoping that it will be more comfortable. I prop myself up on my pillows and lean back, reading and taking note of anything that could potentially be important. If I'm being honest, though, it isn't much.

The next thing I know, I hear a knock at the front door and it wakes me up. I must have fallen asleep, and I didn't even realize it. I can smell Oliver and look at the clock, realizing that it's lunch time.

Stumbling out of the bedroom, I walk into the living area to find Michael instead of Toby and he's closing the door behind Oliver. Oli walks to the table and sits down a tray with some sandwiches and cut vegetables with hummus for us.

"Thank you," I tell him with a yawn.

"Not used to being awake so early anymore, Princess?" he asks with a smirk on his face.

"Excuse me," I say, feigning offense. "I'm growing the heir to the throne! And a bonus pup! It's hard work. Really, though, I was just reading the most boring book that's ever been written."

I sit on the couch and tell him about last night. About how I could feel Seth's pain because of the bond and how weird the bond we have can be.

"But the pups are fine, right?" he asks me, very concerned. "Do you want me to take you to Sofia to check?"

I shake my head with a smile. "I'm sure they're fine, but I'm worried about it happening again, or often. They've been moving like crazy today."

"Can I feel?" he asks me and holds out his hand, but I grab it quickly.

"Not yet," I tell him gently. "Soon, though. I promise."

"We'll, good luck with your book," he tells me, standing and walking to the door. "Be sure to tell me if you find anything about how to reject your mate who won't acknowledge your existence."