

## Chapter 26-2

Mom grabs the remote and pauses the movie, turning to me and grabbing my good hand in hers. “Molly, he can’t reject you. You know this.”

“I know.” I tell her, trying to hold back tears. “But that doesn't mean he has to mark me. He could just live his life without a mate.”

“That man is out in Rogue territory with your brother trying to find a way to heal your hand while keeping you safe.” she begins, squeezing my hand. “Those aren’t the actions of a man planning to leave you.”

I know she’s right, but my fears have been so prevalent my entire life that it’s hard to believe it’s really not an issue for him. I’d bring nothing to this relationship, much less the kingdom. I may as well be human. I take a deep breath before deciding to let go of the matter for now. “Will you help me do something to my hair? It’s a mess and I just decided to throw a hat on and not deal with it earlier.”

“Oh! Of course!” My mom says, full of excitement. “Let’s wash it and then I’ll dry and fix it, just like when you were little.” And she does exactly that. She’s honestly made it look better than it has in months. It’s a shame Seth isn’t here to see it like this, clean and straightened with small waves she put in with the curling iron.

“We’re going to go upstairs and have dinner with your Father, Peter and Audrey.” She tells me. “The story we’re sticking with is that the boys have gone looking for the witch in hopes you have a wolf in there that can heal your hand, or that she can heal it. We’re avoiding human doctors if possible. There will be absolutely no talk of the little wolf and not even a thought of green eyes while we’re with them.”

“Yes, ma’am. I understand.” I tell her, reminding myself of the severity of the situation. “Why is it so important that they not know, though?”

My mom sighs deeply, obviously troubled. “Personally, I think you should know. But your dad, brother AND mate ALL decided it’s best not to tell you yet, in case it’s nothing to worry about.”

“And you think it’s something I need to worry about?” I ask.

“I honestly don’t know, dear,” she says, looking sad. “Things happened then. Some of them shouldn’t have, and some of them were terrible but necessary. We were all different people then. We’ve all grown into who we are now, and we all love you. I don’t know if it’s anything to worry about at all, but the boys all just want to protect you.”

“Do you want to pick my outfit for dinner?” I ask her, changing the subject. I’m confused about what is going on, or not going on. I don’t have enough information about it and it’s probably best to just let it go for now. None of those men are going to let any information slip to me, anyway.

My mom beams at me and heads straight to my closet. “Oh, I absolutely do!”

A short time later we find ourselves upstairs in the dining room of the pack house having dinner with the King and Queen and my dad.

“It’s so nice to have some time with just you, Molly.” Peter tells me and I’m really unsure why, but I would never dream of telling the king that.

“Thank you, sir. I must agree.” I say with a smile.

Peter glances at my arm. “How’s the hand today?”

“Umm, not great.” I tell him, feeling suddenly self-conscious. “It’s been hurting quite a bit. I accidentally bumped it a few times this morning trying to tie my shoes and angered the injury.”

“Why didn’t Seth tie them for you?!” Audrey asks the question they’re all thinking.

I’m so embarrassed about this morning I can’t help the blush that travels across my face. “He would have, and eventually did. I just didn’t want to bother him since he was leaving.” A half truth should do. They don’t need to know I was upset because their son refused to mark me.

“Maybe we should go ahead and hire someone to help you.” Audrey says, taking another bite of her food.

I pause for a moment in confusion. “Why would I need someone to help me?”

“We’ve let Seth out of a lot of his duties because he’s just met his mate, that’s normal.” Peter begins, “But eventually, we’ll return to the palace, with you, of course, and you’ll have someone around to help you. They’ll help you with your hand until you’re healed and then as an assistant with your royal duties.”

Oh. I hadn’t put much thought into what exactly life at the palace would look like, but it didn’t include an assistant. “Oh, I’m sorry. Seth and I haven’t really talked much about how things will be at the palace. My hand has been a bit of a distraction.”

“Of course, Molly!” Audrey says with a smile. “Why don’t we have a girls night with your mom tonight and we can talk about your new role as a princess?”

I’d just taken a bite and almost choke when I hear the word princess. The Goddess surely has a sense of humor to put me in this position. I look to my mom and she nods slightly. “That would be lovely, Audrey. Thank you.”

After dinner, I find myself down in my suite, sitting on the sofa between my mom and the queen, being told of all the things I’ll be expected to do once Seth marks me and I’m officially named the princess. “Eventually, Peter and I will step down. Once you’re queen, you’ll take over my duties as well.” She tells me excitedly, naming more things to look forward to.

“Oh, wow.” I say quietly, feeling overwhelmed. “I didn’t realize there would be so much.”

“Most people don’t realize, “ She says. “That’s why I like you, though. Many girls dream of becoming queen, dream of the power. I very much think that you’d rather not become queen, but you’d like to keep my son.”

“It’s very overwhelming.” I tell her honestly. “Mom and Dad sent me to all the Luna classes, but I was sure that I wouldn’t have a mate, and definitely not a high-ranking one if I did. I didn’t take them as seriously as I should have. You’re right though, if given the chance to not be queen but still have Seth, I would absolutely take it.”

Audrey smiles at me. “Good, always stay that way. Always be a mate first, and a royal second. Seth is so lucky to have you, dear.” She says and it’s nice to hear her approval. “He’s been so protective of you, especially once you got hurt. He didn’t want to tell you about your future life at the palace because he didn’t overwhelm you. I knew you could handle it though. You’re strong.”

I knew Seth was acting very protective of me, but I didn’t realize that he’d been trying to keep his parents away as soon as I told him about the eyes. My heart warms at knowing this though, and it causes me to miss him even more.

“Why the frown, Molly?” my mom asks.

I look up at her, not realizing I had been frowning. “Sorry. I just really miss him.”

“Of course you do.” Mom says. “The first time your mate is gone is always the hardest. Why don’t we say goodnight and get you tucked in?”

I nod in agreement and thank Audrey for her lessons tonight. “It’s a lot to take in,” She tells me, “But I just know you’re up to the task. I can feel it in my bones.”

“Thanks. It’s intimidating, for sure, but I’ll definitely give it my best.” I tell her with a smile.

“I know you will. You’re so much like your mom,” she says, surprising me a little. “I have no doubt that you will adjust to it amazingly. Be thinking about if there’s someone here you’d like to bring as your assistant and if not, we can look at the palace, or further. We want to find the right person to help you.”

With hugs shared around, Audrey leaves us. Mom helps me get out of my clothes and into pajamas, pulling a dirty t-shirt that smells of my mate over my head.

“I’m going to stay on the couch tonight.” She tells me. “Remember, if you have dreams of the wolf, don’t touch it.”