

## Not again, mother!!!!

Aphrodite

After taking a few seconds to collect myself, I stepped out of the empty oce and into the hallway. As I emerged back at the entrance, I wasn't too surprised to nd that Asher, the landlord, and his group of workers were nowhere to be seen, leaving only Lara standing there looking a bit lost.

I gave her a small smile as I set to work, gathering up our belongings and carrying them back into the oce. It was a daunting task, but piece by piece, I began to rebuild our lives, placing each item back in its former position with care and determination to set things right.

Lara watched me silently, and I could feel her curiosity, but she knew better than to ask questions. She knew that I needed to focus and channel all of my energy into other distractions, so she simply assisted me in returning everything to its rightful place, and we both worked tirelessly to undo the damage that had been done.

Finally, after what felt like hours, we were almost nished. The oce was once again lled with our belongings, and a sense of normalcy had been restored. But as I looked around at the familiar surroundings, I knew that things might never truly be the same again, as Asher would make sure of that.

"What happened in there?" Lara questioned me as I busied myself arranging the last part of the les on my desk. I could feel her heated eyes xed on me, so I paused for a moment, weighing my words carefully. This wasn't like the last time when she heard every conversation between Asher and me, so I had the choice to keep secrets to myself if I wanted.

"Let's just say if I don't make any silly mistakes, then this whole building could be ours," I replied cryptically. I watched as Lara's eyes almost popped out of their sockets as she processed my words. Then, without warning, she let out a scream of excitement that made me drop the stack of les in my hands. Hastily, I clapped my hands over my ears, trying to block out the sound.

"Lara, please!" I exclaimed, laughing in spite of myself. "Keep it down, will you?" Lara gave me an apologetic look as she nally seemed to register my plea and tone down her excitement, though the sparkle in her eyes remained.

"Sorry, sorry," she grinned. "I just can't believe it! This could be amazing for us, Aphrodite."

I managed a weak smile, but inside, I was tired, both physically and emotionally, and I didn't want to talk about it anymore, wishing my life could go back to the past that didn't involve Asher.

"Lara, I'm exhausted. Can we talk about this later?" I said, and Lara nodded understandingly.

"Of course, Aphrodite. Let's go home, but one more thing. If that tall, dark man is your mate, then trust me, you must have done something good in your past life. Holy cow, he is so hot," Lara giggled while I rolled my eyes at her and then proceeded to lock the oce.

Making our way home, I hurried into the house while Lara parked the car outside. As I stepped into the house, I was unprepared for the sight that greeted me.

My mother was in the kitchen, cooking dinner as if she belonged there. I blinked in surprise, my mind struggling to process what I was seeing. I hadn't called her, and I hadn't invited her... so what was she doing here? Most importantly, how did she get my keys?

The comforting aroma of my mother's cooking lled my nose, but instead of feeling soothed, I felt a surge of frustration as my belly rumbled in hunger.

"Mom? What are you doing here?"

My mother turned from the stove with a warm smile on her face. "I thought I'd come by and cook you girls a nice dinner," she said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. I frowned, knowing that, as usual, she had something up her sleeve, and I had to gure it out before anyone got hurt. I wasn't in the mood for her games.

"Mom, you should have called. I am busy working," I said, trying to keep the irritation out of my voice, but my mother waved away my concerns as she set the table with delicious-smelling dishes.

"Working, working, working," she said, shaking her head. "When are you going to quit that job and nd yourself a nice mate? Someone who will take care of you?"

Anger rose within me at her words. Didn't she understand that my job was important to me? That it was more than just a way to pay the bills? Although she didn't actually know the type of job I was doing, I just wanted her to leave me alone.

"I don't need a mate to take care of me, Mom. I can take care of myself," I said coldly, hoping she would nally understand, but my mother just shook her head, as if she couldn't understand why I was being so stubborn.

"Again with that nonsense? You're too independent for your own good, Aphrodite," she said, gazing at me, clearly frustrated. "One of these days, you're going to realise that you can't do everything on your own."

I opened my mouth to protest, but before I could say anything, Lara stepped into the kitchen, her eyes widening in surprise at the sight of my mother.

"Mrs. Johnson!" she exclaimed, feigning excitement. "What are you doing here?"

My mother turned to Lara, a warm smile on her face, as if she had never gossiped about her or asked me to stop being friends with her.

"I thought I'd come by and cook you girls a nice dinner," she said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Lara's eyes widened in surprise, but she didn't say anything. Instead, she just stood there, staring at my mother as if she couldn't quite believe what she was seeing.

I sighed, knowing that this was going to be a long night, but at least I wouldn't have to cook dinner tonight or order in.

We all sat down at the table, and I helped myself to a plate of food, and Lara did the same. I gazed at her from my side, silently pleading for patience until I found a way to get rid of my mother.

"So, girls," my mother said as she helped herself to another serving of food, "I've decided to stay for a month."

I nearly choked on my food at her words, my eyes widening in disbelief.

"A month?" I exclaimed, meeting Lara's eyes to see her close to fainting.

"Mom, you can't stay for a whole month!" I said, but my mother just smiled serenely, as if she hadn't heard me.

"Oh, it'll be fun," she said, waving away my concerns. "We can spend some quality time together, just like old times, and I can help you both nd suitable mates since you are taking forever to do so."

So that was why she was here. I should have known.

I exchanged another panicked look with Lara, who seemed to have recovered but still looked just as surprised by my mother's announcement as I was.

"Actually, Mom, Lara and I were thinking of... traveling," I blurted out, my mind racing for an explanation. My mother's eyes widened in surprise, her fork freezing halfway to her mouth.

"Traveling? Where?"

I could feel the panic rising within me as I struggled to come up with a plausible explanation.

"Lara found her mate," I said, closing my eyes as I lied so she wouldn't gure me out. "And... and we thought it might be a good idea for me to... to try and nd mine too."

Opening my eyes, I heard the sound of a spoon hitting the oor. I looked at Lara, whose eyes were staring at me as if I were a ghost, but thankfully she didn't say anything. Instead, she just sat there, staring at me, as if she couldn't quite believe what I was saying.

My mother, on the other hand, seemed thrilled by the news. She took Lara's hands into hers, patting them softly.

"Your mate?" she exclaimed, gazing at Lara for the rst time with eyes lled with love.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" She questioned Lara, who was still speechless, so I had no choice but to answer in her place, forcing a smile on my face.

"She hasn't informed her parents yet, as she wanted it to be a surprise. So please don't tell anyone yet." I lied, my heart racing in my chest. But as I looked at my mother's excited face, I couldn't help but feel a surge of guilt. What had I gotten myself into? What had I gotten Lara into, and how was I ever going to get out of it?

"So who is he?" My mom questioned me, and I could feel her excitement growing. Again, another surge of panic rose within me as I struggled to come up with more lies.

"It's... it's the Alpha King's beta," I blurted out. Lara shot me another surprised look, but to her credit, she didn't say anything, just gazing at me as if I had grown another head.

"The Alpha King's beta?" my mother echoed, her eyes widening in surprise. "Well, that's quite the catch! Lara, you are so lucky."

I forced a smile, trying to keep the panic out of my voice. "Yeah, she is pretty lucky," I lied, my heart racing in my chest. I sighed in relief, thinking that was all and that I had nally gotten rid of my mother for good. But my mother cleared her throat and gazed at me, making my heart skip a beat.

"This is a great opportunity for you, Aphrodite," she said, her eyes shining with enthusiasm. "You should use this chance to make the Alpha King yours. After all, I heard he doesn't have a mate. It's the perfect opportunity for you to make your move while Lara goes visiting his beta."

I nearly choked on the water I was drinking at her words, and Lara quickly moved to pat me on the back. I could tell she was holding back her laughter.

If only my mother knew the Alpha King was actually my mate. I bet she wouldn't hesitate to throw me into his arms herself.

"Are you okay, Aphrodite? Is the food not to your liking?" My mother asked, and I nodded, trying to regain my composure and give her a fake smile. But inside, I was reeling. How was I ever going to get my mother off my back and live my life?

"The food is delicious, mother. Very delicious."