

A heartbreaking rejection.

Aphrodite

"I'm here to see the Alpha King," I announced to the woman who opened the door of Asher's breathtaking mansion.

The woman was petite, with shoulder-length brown hair and piercing green eyes. She wore a crisp white blouse and a knee-length black skirt, giving her a professional and polished appearance.

On the other hand, I was dressed simply in a pair of trousers and a plain shirt, while Lara was dressed casually in jeans and a T-shirt, with comfortable sneakers completing her relaxed look. In summary, she made us feel out of place.

Gripping my bag tightly, which contained enough clothes to last me for a month, I smiled nervously at her as Lara stood behind me holding her own luggage.

"You must be Aphrodite. Come with me this way. The Alpha has gone out for a business meeting, and it might take a while for him to be back," she replied, leading us through the grand entrance hall, which was exactly how I had remembered.

But before we could go any further, she turned around unexpectedly, causing me to halt my step and giving me an icy look.

"What's her problem?" I wondered.

"I was told we would only be having one guest," she scowled, pointing at Lara, who was busy gawking and taking pictures of the beautiful surroundings.

I had hoped to keep Lara out of this, but I had no choice but to bring her along with me after lying to my mother, who had made sure she helped us pack our luggage before sending us off with hopes that we would never return and nd our mates.

"She's my best friend and coworker, and I plan on sharing a room with her," I explained quickly, hoping to smooth things over. "Don't worry, I'll inform the Alpha myself. Can you show me to his oce? I'll wait for him there."

The woman's lips curled into a frown, and she shook her head. "I'm afraid his oce is being renovated, so you can't wait for him there."

"Okay, then what about his room? I can wait for him there," I pressed, growing increasingly frustrated, but her expression only hardened.

"I'm afraid the only woman allowed into the Alpha's room is me," she hissed, giving me a tight-lipped smile that made me furrow my eyebrows in confusion.

"I am the only one allowed to cater to all his needs, if you know what I mean. My name is Hilda. They call me Alpha King Asher's shadow," she growled possessively, giving me a daring look to go against her, and my wolf howled in annoyance at her audacity.

"The king has warned you to stop acting crazy and delusional, Hilda, hasn't he?" A rough male voice interrupted from behind me just as I was about to respond and give her a piece of my mind. I turned to see a tall, handsome man with blue eyes approaching with amusement, though not as handsome as Asher.

I couldn't hold back my laughter as I watched Hilda's face turn all shades of red in embarrassment as the man moved to stand beside me, extending his hand for a handshake.

"Hi, I'm George, the Alpha King's beta. You must be-" George couldn't nish his sentence as Lara growled possessively and pushed me out of the way. Since the push was unexpected, I stumbled, nearly falling to the ground. This time, Hilda burst into laughter, but I didn't care, nor was I embarrassed, because my eyes were wide in shock at what was happening in front of me.

"Mate," Lara said, her voice low and dangerous as she stared at George.

I gasped in shock, my eyes widening as I realised what she had just said. George Asher's beta was her mate?

George looked equally stunned; his eyes locked with Lara's in disbelief.

"Mate?" George stuttered, clearly taken aback by Lara's declaration. How come he didn't know?

"Yes, we're mates. Can't you feel it? My name is Lara, and it's nice to meet you." Lara grinned happily, and I couldn't help but smile, not minding the fact that my butt was still on the ground.

I couldn't believe that the universe was with me, making Asher's beta Lara's mate. The guilt I was feeling in my heart after lying to my mom disappeared in a second. George glanced nervously between Lara and me before nally nding his voice.

"I... I'm sorry, Lara," he stammered, his tone apologetic. "I don't need a mate right now."

Fuck.

Lara's smile faltered, and so did mine; her eyes lled with tears. "But... but I'm your mate," she protested, her voice trembling.

George shook his head; his expression pained. "I'm sorry, Lara. I hope you nd a good man who can love you the way you deserve," he murmured. Then he turned and walked back the way he came, leaving Lara standing there, tears streaming down her face.

Quickly, I lifted myself off the ground and rushed to her side, wrapping my arms around her and holding her close as she sobbed uncontrollably. I couldn't believe George was heartless enough to reject my best friend, who was the sweetest person in the world. But why?

"Maybe he has his reasons, just like you did to our mate," my wolf whined inside my head.

"I will show you to your room," Hilda interrupted coldly, seemingly not caring about what had happened. Lara snied, wiping her tears, and nodded silently. I shot Hilda a hateful look before turning back to Lara and offering her a reassuring smile.

"It's going to be okay, Lara," I whispered, squeezing her hand gently. She nodded again, trying to compose herself as Hilda led us down the hallway to our room. I had a feeling that things were about to get a lot more complicated.

Hilda left us alone after showing us our room. As soon as we entered the huge, beautiful room, I gasped at its grandeur. The walls had intricate tapestries, and the large windows offered a breathtaking view of the surrounding forest. There was a massive four-poster bed in the centre of the room, and its soft, inviting covers made us want to rest immediately. But Lara didn't seem to notice any of it.

Without a word, she threw her bag onto the oor and opped onto the bed, burying her face in the pillows.

"I just want to be alone," she muttered, her voice mued by the fabric. I sighed in understanding, watching as she curled up into a ball, seeking solace in sleep. It had been a long and emotional day, and I knew that she needed some time to herself.

"Take as much time as you need, Lara," I said softly, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder. "I'll be here if you need me."

With that, I quietly left the room, leaving Lara to her thoughts. As I closed the door behind me, I felt helpless watching Lara cry. I knew I had to do something to help. Ignoring the ache in my heart, I made a decision. I needed to nd Asher and get some answers.

Following my instincts, I decided to trace Asher's scent, hoping it would lead me to him. The scent guided me through the halls of the mansion, leading me to a large door at the end of the hallway.

As I pushed open the door, memories of our rst meeting came ooding back. The room was just as grand as I remembered it, with its high ceilings and luxurious furnishings. But now, it felt different, charged with an undercurrent of tension and uncertainty.

I took a deep breath as I stepped inside and was surprised to nd Asher sitting by the window, even though Hilda had said he was busy with a meeting.

I hesitated for a moment before gathering my courage and stepping further into the room. He didn't turn to look at me, but I could feel his intense gaze on me.

"I... I was looking for you," I admitted, knowing he could feel my presence.

Asher remained silent for a moment; his back still turned to me. Then, nally, he spoke, his voice low and controlled.

"And why is that? I know you aren't here to accept me as your mate," he said, his tone unreadable. Summoning all my courage, I decided to be honest.

"The truth is, I'm here because your beta rejected my best friend, Lara, just a few minutes ago," I confessed, my voice trembling slightly. "And I want to know why. It's hurting, and I can't stand to see her like this. This is the rst time I've seen her cry, and it's tearing me apart."

Asher turned to gaze at me; his expression softened slightly, and for a moment, I thought I saw a icker of sympathy in his eyes. But then, just as quickly, it was gone, and he returned his gaze back to the window.

"I see," he said, his tone neutral. "I'll talk to George and nd out what happened. But for now, you should go. We can discuss this tomorrow."

Feeling a mix of disappointment and frustration, I nodded silently, knowing that I had no choice but to leave. A part of me was tempted to ask if he was okay or what was on his mind that seemed to be disturbing him, but I refrained because a part of me already knew the answer.

As I opened the large door to leave, I was taken aback to nd Hilda standing there, her arms crossed and a erce glare on her face.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, her tone sharp. "I warned you not to snoop around."

I took a step back, feeling a surge of panic rise within me. "I was just..." I began, but Hilda cut me off with a wave of her hand.

"I don't want to hear it," she snapped. "Just stay out of things that don't concern you, or there will be consequences."

"Hilda, that's enough," Asher interrupted with a commanding voice. "You will never speak to any of my visitors like that again. They are guests in my house, and they will be treated with respect. And remember, you're only a maid here. If you can't follow my orders, then I'll have no choice but to dismiss you."

Hilda's face paled, and she took a step back, her eyes wide with shock. For a moment, she looked as if she might argue, but then she seemed to think better of it and nodded quickly, her expression sullen.

"Yes, Alpha," she muttered, throwing me a hateful glare. Satised that he had made his point, Asher walked towards me, his expression unreadable.

"Come, we have much to discuss," he said simply, gesturing for me to follow him.

I did, but his pace quickened, and before I could keep up, he disappeared into the shadows. Sighing loudly, I had no choice but to return to my room, calling it a day.