



I Reject You, Mate

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1. The Wedding Assignment

Sinclair Winchester.

Keep that in mind, just as I have over the past week, pondering deeply on why he singled me out to hand me a job that I do not deserve. Obsessing over the possibility of *luck shinning on me.*

Because it made no sense.

I have no qualifications--none that matter in this realm anyway--no skills or experience, in comparison to my competitors.

And he had picked me. A novice. A nobody in this world. A penniless lycan with nothing but her pride to go on.

Countless times, I have found myself pondering on the day I had left my home with a promise never to look back. Perhaps, I should have packed up enough gold to last me for a lifetime, but I had been too mad to consider it, much too broken to think about money, or food.

Despite knowing what my previous engagement had put me through, my father had tried to sell me off to the next highest bidder who looked to be interested in making me into his breeding mare.

No matter that the male had been my uncle.

My ringtones jars me from the painful direction of my thoughts and I tap on my earbuds as I step on the engine. "What?"

Ray's voice flows in through the receiver, her voice strained in a hushed whisper. "Yo Chica! Yo ass better be in this building with those rings. This is gonna be a disaster if you're not here in ten!"

"It's not my fault someone didn't consider his wedding important enough that he left the rings behind," I growl.

"Listen up, Gin. Don't you dare screw this up. This is the first decent job you've got in months. Drop that whole princess-y attitude, buckle down, and do what you gotta do. Lose this job as well, and I will kick you out. Girl, I like you, for real, but I can't keep feeding your grown ass and paying the rent too."

My cheeks heat up, and my fingers tighten around the steering wheel. Ray has been good to me. She had found me on a bench at the park, bawling, and she had taken me in, no questions asked about who I was, or where I had come from.

It was she who had recommended that I apply for the position of PA at her place of work, howbeit jokingly, and somehow, I got it.

"I'm on my way, Ray," I say a tad quieter, stepping on the gas, and she hangs up.

I sigh, straightening to look in the mirror. Soft blue eyes covered in dark make up stare back at me. It is the first time in ages I bothered with my appearance.

Might as well look good on my first day at work.

I smack my lips together and roll my shoulders as I take the next turn that gives way to the street teeming with an unending crowd. Paparazzi flashes erupt like fireworks, and I can see the silhouettes of celebrities gliding inside, all radiating wealth and enigma. It feels like the entirety of New York is in attendance, and in a different time, I might have belonged in a place like this.

Lips tugging down into a frown as I try to secure a path to drive through, all to no avail, I result to ditching the car and walking the rest of the distance. Or running. I run pretty fast.

Clutching the boxes in one hand and car keys in the other, I weave through the bustling crowd, shoving and pushing until I make it through. Upon reaching the entrance, a stern security guard demands to see my invitation.

I don't have one, but I have a VVIP pass. It came along with the invitation.

He takes one look at the golden frame and ushers me in.

I dash through the grand foyer. The hall is breathtaking, with exquisite decorations adorning every corner. Crystal chandeliers cast a soft, romantic glow, and the scent of fresh flowers lingers in the air.

I swallow painfully, memories from my failed wedding resurfacing as I rush through. Hate shimmers within me at the bright decorations and the smiling guests chattering all about how beautiful the bride's dress looks and how they can't wait to see how big the stone on her ring is. Hate for Rune, the man I should have married. Hate for Astrid, the woman he chose to be with. Hate for this atmosphere and the sick air of love and happiness in it.

A happiness I have been deprived of.

Someone tugs on my sleeve, and only then do I realize I have stopped moving. I stand at the middle of the room, on the blue carpet that stretches out further into the hall, no doubt ending where the altar stands. "C'mon, Chica! Don't just stand there. Get 'em the damned rings."

I blink, turning left. Ray's chocolate brown eyes meet mine, giving me a pointed look.

Her usually curly hair has been straightened and styled into a high ponytail. Her smooth, richly hued skin glows like polished mahogany in the golden light of the hall. A blush stains her cheek and her lips are painted in deep red that immediately draws attention to them. "You look great."

She smiles, looking at me from beneath faux lashes. "You like?"

I make a face and she laughs, shoving me ahead. "Go on, darling, I'll be workin' the bar. Need to get laid by one of these hunks tonight! Flash 'em these assets, and they'll be offerin' me mansions in no time!" she says, pushing her generous bosom up for effect and my lips twitch.

Ray is a comic relief, and if she hadn't found me, I might have died somewhere solely from depression.

She walks away from me, hips swinging left and right, earning looks from men around us, even if they have women beside them.

How she does it? I have no idea. Not that it matters. I can't be with a human. I tried once. It didn't end well. Too gentle. Too delicate. Too easily broken. I had expressed my desire to be roughly handled, and he had tried. The strength of a human is nothing compared to that of a wolf's or lycan's. It had felt like being held by a child.

Then I had proceeded to take control, and he'd left my apartment--Ray's apartment with a dislocated arm.

In the weeks that followed, I had cursed the treaty that binded us to our oath to stay away from the humans. Not everyone obeys, but finding one of us in these lands is an extremely rare occurrence.

Swearing never to return home, I came to terms with the truth. I'm probably never going to find an Erasthai to imprint on. Only wolves have the gift of turning humans. Lycans are born, never made, except for the cases of mating with wolves. Only wolves, because they are strong enough to survive the transition from wolf to lycan.

Humans aren't. They'd die from just getting bit by a lycan.

Essentially, I have ruined my future by fleeing from home. But I will not return if it means marrying my uncle.

I begin the arduous walk to find the altar when my chest suddenly constricts. My breath hitches and I pause, brows furrowing. My finger rises to my chest, the cool metal holding my keys together pressing against my skin.

Something snaps, and I jolt, an inexplicable force pulling me forward. Ezra yowls excitedly, and my heart starts to race. I surge forward, unable to control myself, or Ezra.

I know what this is. I have enough of the stories to understand that Ezra has found us a mate. Our destined other half.

Not in the least curious to find this person, I fight against Ezra, willing myself to ignore the bond that tugs me toward whoever is at the other end of it.

But I can't, and my feet takes me forward, deeper, until I come close enough to see the wedding officiant.

And the couple.

I see the female first. Stunning, hair of burnt copper plaited into an elegant braid with jewels glimmering in each, soft honey brown eyes filled with so much love, it makes me want to vomit, and a smile every woman should have on her big day.

My gaze shifts then, to meet piercing sapphire crystals. The groom is already staring at me, dark brows furrowed in confusion.

"No," I whimper as Ezra mutters the word that dooms me.

Erasthai.

"No," I whisper again, jerking, and he goes still.

"Mr. Winchester?" I hear the officiant faintly say, but the groom doesn't look at him. Or his finacee. His head tilts to the side, a frown marring his sharp, stunning features.

He takes one step down the altar with preternatural grace that can only belong to one of my kind.

The hall has gone quiet behind me. I'm not sure anyone is breathing. I'm not sure I am breathing. Time stands still as he holds my gaze, walking toward me, unable to resist that which draws us together. Those eyes seek me out, feel me out, stripping me bare and redressing me like he knows every inch of me, like he knows of the scars that line my lower back and my very soul, like he can see whatever pieces of my heart is left and is curious enough to keep seeking out the other pieces. To glue them together or shatter them some more, I can't tell.

My entire being trembles as he descends the next step.

"Sinclair?" The woman calls out, voice ringing through our the hall.

But he doesn't stop walking to me. Another step down, and I take one back. What will he say? It's his wedding and by the familiarity with which she calls his name, I'm the other woman here.

I can't bear another heartbreak. I can't bear another rejection. I will break. I am not as strong as Astrid was, forging through Rune's rejections until she got him. I am not nearly as patient or optimistic. For very good reason.

Never have I gotten the things I truly wished for. Craved. Needed. I've had to fight and fail, and I am tired of fighting.

That too, for a man who is at the altar about to give himself to another woman. I already feel betrayed, even if I am only just meeting him.

I can't.

Turning away from him, I flee past the confused crowd whose gazes threaten to pull me down.

"Wait!" I hear him say, but I don't stop. I can't stop.