

Mated To Five Alpha Brothers

Chapter 36

"Are you being serious?"

The complete look of horror on Liam's face combined with his incredulous tone had me stifling my laughter against the coffee mug held tightly between my lips.

An hour of observing the gradual shift in his features, which had gone from excited curiosity to utter shock as I regaled him with stories of how "their world" was portrayed in Hollywood movies had been sadistically entertaining on my end.

Liam on the other hand, was thoroughly unamused.

His brows threatened to disappear into his hairline as the poor man sat at the other end of the table looking absolutely bewildered and perhaps even a little offended.

"Is that what humans believe? Silver bullets, glowing vampires, and musical elves?!"

"It's sparkling. Not glowing..." I corrected politely in between my barely suppressed giggles. "...and I said Elves were shown to be ethereal. Where the hell did you get musical from?"

Liam grunted, his features set in a humorless expression as he continued to eye me in a way that questioned mankind's sanity.

"Hey! Don't sit there looking all judgemental! Not when your knowledge about humans comes from porn!"

A devious smirk lit up his face in response. "So, you're telling me that humans do not eat each other's excrement during mating? I watched two females -"

"Ewww! Stop! That's disgusting!" I barely suppressed a shudder at the thought. "Normal people would never do half the things you see in porn! How could you believe that?!"

"In the same way, you believe a piece of metal can kill us and vampires glitter in the sun?"

His quick-witted retort took us both over the edge as we burst out laughing, the ridiculousness of the whole conversation hitting us both at the same time.

And while we continued to guffaw like idiots for the next few minutes, I eyed the male seated across the table with affection, realizing that I hadn't laughed like that in a long time. Hadn't felt so unrestrained and free from the stress and tension that had weighed me down since I arrived here. It warmed my heart to know that this male, who owed me nothing, somehow cared enough to see me happy.

I knew then, that this friendship was quickly becoming an important anchor to my new life here in Portland.

Thinking of my "new life" however, my mind irrevocably drifted back to the recent events that had taken place since the pack announcement. Two weeks had passed since Thomas and I had settled into our new home on the pack grounds. The place was a modest one-bedroom cabin, a bit bare-boned but clean and well-maintained. Surrounded by nature within a secluded cluster of trees, the place was warm and comforting. Like an actual home.

The peace and quiet that followed the move did wonders for my mental state as the days slowly passed by. Or maybe it was because the other four brothers hadn't bothered us since the night of the announcement. Whatever the reason was, my moods improved, and the constant fear that I had been under had finally begun to recede. Of course, I wasn't foolish enough to think that all was well when I still remained in this place against my will but my mind no longer suffered from frequent attacks of paranoia and anxiety.

But what I did suffer, was the terrible bouts of loneliness and heartache every time my thoughts drifted to the other four.

This time, however, I wasn't flying blind. Now that I was schooled on the effects of the mate bond, I realized this feeling for what it was but I still couldn't help but feel ill-equipped to overcome it. When fighting it proved unsuccessful, I turned to the only thing I could do in this instance – distract and avoid. So, I had busied myself with decorating and organizing the place when my things finally arrived from my flat in Manhattan. Even managed to dig up a small patch in the back for a little garden! Something that I had always wanted to have but couldn't do while living in the city.

With the "moving in" process beginning to progress rather pleasantly, I found myself eager to take the next step and learn about my mate's world. And much to my surprise and Thomas's delight, I took everything in with ease. I did not flinch when confronted with "wolf" facts or have a meltdown when something could not be explained logically. Instead, I took it in stride, adjusting and adapting to this new norm.

Obviously, the fact that I was surrounded by two people who deeply cared about my wellbeing and my friends kept my mind when things felt a little too overwhelming and stressful. Their attention and thoughtfulness when it came to my needs never ceased to fill my heart with warmth. But other times, I tried to push through it on my own. This was my choice after all. It would serve no purpose to fight against the inevitable. So I trudged through it all, learning and adapting to the changes as best as I could.

But yet, there was a part of me that missed the city. The people and the crowds. A life where I wasn't an outcast, where I wasn't isolated and denied social contact. A world where I didn't need to prove anything to feel like I belonged.

And this ache was never more apparent than the times that Thomas left for his duties. His arduous shifts kept us apart for long hours at a time, sometimes extending well into the nights, leaving me alone and cold in our bed.

A part of me had initially suspected Alex. Thinking that this was another plan concocted by him to punish his brother but that theory was quickly put to rest when Liam mentioned that such shifts were quite normal for border patrol guards. This was one of the reasons why the patrol mainly consisted of unmated males, according to him.

So, in the end, here I was, left alone most of the time with my only reprieve being such moments when I spent time with Liam. His humor and easy-going nature helped fill some of the loneliness that had begun to plague my soul.

"Are you alright?"

I blinked out of my somber thinking, refocusing on a pair of concerned eyes. "Y-yeah.... I'm good. Just wondering if... mermaids were real..." He huffed before rolling his eyes in exasperation. "Female, you have to stop with all this movie nonsense. It is...disturbing."

I chuckled at the clear frustration in his voice. "Ok fine. Then tell me about the others. Kole spoke of Elves but I want to know what else is out there."

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Liam nodded at the mention of elves and took another drink before continuing. "There are the main four – Shifters, Vampires, Witches and Elves. Ancient records show the existence of many other races. Some died out while some others remain hidden or wiped out, we do not know. There isn't enough information to know the fate of every race that has ever existed."

His face scrunched up, his eyes moving along the surface of the table for a few seconds before he looked up. "But I have never come across any mention of a sea-dwelling race."

I let out a laugh. "Alright. No mermaids then. How come only four remain?"

He shrugged. "It's simple. We survived because we learned to integrate with the human world in some way. And it also helped that we live in groups or packs or covens. Solitary living killed many."

"Hmm. Interesting. Thomas mentioned other shifters. Are they very similar?"

"Yes and no. There are several kinds of shifters. Their beasts can be large cats or bears... some even say there used to be shifters who could transform into birds. Not sure if those were mere tales or true sightings."

Sipping on my coffee, I let it all sink in. The idea that so many "creatures" were living and breathing amongst humans without being discovered was mind-boggling. But then again, the "detectives" who had handed me over seemed to be aware of what was really happening. Or at least a part of it. How long had humans known? How long have our governments worked with these races in secret?

I glanced back at Liam as he stood up and gulped down the last of his drink. "Next time, I'll bring a few books from the packhouse. You can learn about everything there is to know about our world."

I smiled, touched by his thoughtfulness. "That would be great. Thank you."

He smiled back before adding, "Tommy just mind-linked. He's on his way back. You two enjoy the rest of the evening."

A thrill shot through me immediately, making me bounce off the chair with excitement. Gathering our mugs, I walked over to Liam and gave him a one-armed hug before muttering my heartfelt gratitude into his chest. "Thank you for today."

He stilled, a surprised gasp escaping his lips as he stood rigid with his arms to his sides. Confused by the sudden change in his demeanor, I stepped away to study him. But Liam refused to meet my gaze. Instead, he shuffled on his feet awkwardly for a minute before offering me a small smile. "I better get going."

Still feeling baffled, I raised my arm in a wave. "See ya."

Hearing the door close after him, I shrugged away his reaction and made my way to the kitchen. Bloody werewolves!

Knowing that Thomas always came back hungry after his shifts, I began dinner, noting with surprise how domesticated my life was turning out to be. Having always pictured myself as a career-oriented person, this change felt odd and uncomfortable. While I enjoyed the quiet, laid-back rhythm of the days, I realized that I was starting to get restless.

For the first time in my life, I had no purpose. Nothing to work towards and nothing to look forward to. And that feeling was disturbing, to say the least.

The sound of the door opening had me pausing to look over my shoulder. I couldn't stop the delighted squeal that went past my lips as I noticed the tall form of my mate in the doorway. I had missed him. Immensely.

With only a pair of track pants covering his lower half, his sweat-drenched, rippling torso was on full display.

"Hello wife"

I chuckled as I set aside my cooking on the stove and made my way over to him. The greeting had become a tradition after Thomas and I had watched a couple in a movie greet each other in that way. I had offhandedly remarked that it was cute and endearing. Suffice it to say that since then, Thomas had always addressed me as "wife" as soon as he walked through that door.

Rising up on my toes, I looped my arms around his neck and pecked his lips lovingly.

"Hello husband"

His eyes danced with adoration as he gazed back in a way that made my insides flutter pleasantly. But before I could cover his face with kisses and show him how much I had missed him, a figure moved into view, blocking the doorway behind him. Startled, I withdrew from his arms with a gasp.

Thomas quickly drew me back into his arms, whispering soothingly. "Hey... It's ok. This is Oliver."

My eyes darted back to the stranger and I let out another gasp as recognition hit me in full force. This was the same person who had "rescued" me from Aidan on the plane. The one who had stood by to make sure that I watched Thomas get beat to a pulp on my first day here in this place.

"You." My voice hardened, the memory of that dreadful day flickering in rapid succession through my mind. I did not register the soothing circles that Thomas had begun to trace across my back as I continued to stare at the man at the door.

Oliver's eyes shifted uneasily towards Thomas before landing back on me. His dark hair and eyes played well against the tan of his skin. And unlike Thomas, he was wearing in a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt.

He cleared his throat, his deep rich tone holding a hint of unease as he addressed me directly, bowing his head in respect. "Beta female. It's an honor to meet you. I'm one of the head warriors in the pack."

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Thomas let out a laugh. "And my boss."

I didn't join in with the laughter. Instead, I glanced at Thomas with an eyebrow raised. Taking the hint, he immediately elaborated. "This sector falls under Oliver. So technically I report to him."

Pursing my lips, I looked at the man who had helped kidnap and bring me here. Although I welcomed the respect he showed by addressing me with the formal title, in spite of Thomas not being the Beta of the pack, it still did nothing to motivate my respect in return. However, I had no intention of making things awkward between Thomas and his so-called boss.

Collecting myself, I smiled politely back at him. "It's nice to meet you."

Thomas gave me a squeeze and planted a kiss on the side of my head before adding, "I'm going to hop in for a quick shower. Oliver, why don't you come in and stay for dinner? My mate would love the chance to talk to someone that isn't me or Liam."

I cursed inwardly, at once feeling agitated at the prospect of spending the evening in this man's company. And judging by the look of shock on Oliver's face, I guessed he wasn't too keen on that idea either.

"Oh, no Beta. Thank you, but I only wanted to stop by and congratulate you both on your mating." His eyes slipped down to my neck, widening for a brief moment before looking back at us and continuing hurriedly, "You know... since I wasn't there that day of the announcement."

Thomas waved his hand dismissively after noticing his discomfort. "Ah. It's alright. Thank you. Mia needs to settle down first before we can even think of officially mating. But as of the dinner... I insist that you join."

Oliver smiled, his eyes holding mine as if wanting to know where I stood in this. Not wanting to be openly rude as Thomas had also turned to watch my reaction, I mustered up the courage to hastily add to Thomas's words, my voice squeaking horribly towards the end. "Yes, please do. I would definitely enjoy the change in the company."

"Wonderful. I'll be right back." And with that, Thomas made his way in the direction of my bedroom, leaving the two of us to end in awkward silence. But the need to understand why Thomas would invite the man who kidnapped me to our home forced me to stand the strained stillness.

The minute I heard the shower start, I took a deep breath and lowered my voice. "Does Thomas know?"

Oliver's face instantly changed. His eyes narrowed with guilt and concern and his lips pulled into a thin line. He seemed to understand what I was referring to, even though the question sounded awfully vague.

Giving a stiff nod, he whispered in return. "He does. It's also the reason why I wanted to meet you personally." Taking a tired breath, he lowered his face to the ground, his voice filling with regret as he continued. "I wanted to apologize for what happened that day. I want you to know that I was only following orders."

I hissed, my temper breaking through my calm façade with a vengeance. "Was letting me get sexually assaulted also a part of your orders?"

He flinched, his eyes darting back up to my face anxiously. "I should have been watchful from the start. But I swear on my honor, that if I had known Aidan would behave in that manner, I would never have let him along. But I cannot change what's been done. I can only ask for your forgiveness."

My eyes narrowed. "You told Thomas about Aidan?"

Oliver shook his head, his hand running through his hair as he let out a huff. "I haven't. I was -"

"Good. Keep it that way. Everything is still too... sensitive... too precarious at the moment. I don't want any trouble for him. Understood?"

He balked at the tone of authority in my voice before responding hurriedly, "Yes Beta female."

"But that doesn't mean I'm ready to forgive and forget."

Nodding solemnly, he added, "I understand. But if there is anything that I can do, anything at all, please don't hesitate to ask."

I regarded the man carefully. Forced, he had stopped Aidan that day on the plane and made sure that I wasn't seated next to the creep in the limo but he had in fact granted me to watch Thomas suffer at the hands of his brothers. And while I understood that he was only doing what those idiots had asked him to, this concept of blindly following orders was beginning to irk me to no end. What the fuck happened to free will?

Hearing the shower turn off, I heaved a sigh and invited Oliver in before heading over to the kitchen to finish up the cooking.

Within minutes, the table was set, glasses filled and everyone was digging into the pasta bake with relish. The two men spoke about mundane things in the pack, the easy camaraderie clearly noticeable between them. Oliver respected his former Beta's views and never once acted superior or better than him, despite the fact that he now ranked above Thomas and could easily push his weight around if he wanted to. But he did not. And I knew the value of that action, seeing how rank mattered above all else in their world.

My heart warmed at the gesture. I had been worried about Thomas losing the respect of his pack when he had been demoted but that didn't appear to be the case. At least, not in this instance.

"Beta female, the food is delicious."

I smiled genuinely this time. "Thank you. But please, call me Mia."

Oliver nodded respectfully and offered a smile in return.

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"So, what did you and Liam chat about this time?"

Turning towards my mate, I chuckled. "I found out that human depictions of the supernatural don't really fit in with the actual thing."

"Oh?"

Swallowing a bite of food, I nodded in amusement. "Yeah. Apparently, you guys are not the crazed, bloodthirsty monsters that turn into wolves on a full moon and hunt people. What a letdown"

The men laughed at my disappointed tone before Oliver turned his attention to me. "Actually, that theory is not too far-fetched if you ask me."

Perking up with interest, I looked over at him, "Really? So, there are werewolves then?"

He shook his head, letting out a chuckle when I huffed in irritation. "No. There's never been any creature like the werewolves you talk of. But there is one that comes very close. They were called Lycans"

"Lycans?" I wasn't an expert on the supernatural, but the term definitely sounded familiar.

Thomas nodded. "That would make sense. Lycans were large beasts. Almost humanoid in appearance but had fur and features like a wolf when they shifted. They didn't live in packs and never discriminated against their prey. Anything was fair game. Possibly hunted humans as well."

"I heard that they were more beast-like."

Looking at my confused expression, Oliver elaborated on his comment. "Us shifters, we can differentiate our own emotions and instincts from that of our beasts but lycans were said to be one and the same. Human and beast melded as one. Perhaps that's what your human stories were based on."

"Huh. That definitely sounds like werewolves alright. But Liam didn't mention lycans."

Oliver nodded in between a sip of wine. "Because they don't exist anymore. They died out. I think the last recorded lycans were somewhere in Scandinavia over 500 or 600 years ago. There is a legend even... about one of them."

Thomas snorted. "If you are talking about the three brothers who were cursed by the Moon Goddess to suffer immortality, you know that's bullshit right. They died. It's not a legend. It's just rumors -"

Oliver was quick to interject, "Not rumors. The three Lycan brothers did exist. They caused enough terror and death that every single text you pick up talks of them. What happened to them in the end though, still remains a mystery."

My eyes went to Oliver hoping he would continue when Thomas suddenly yawned.

Noticing the tired lines on his face, I knew my mate needed rest. "I think that's enough for tonight."

Oliver stood up, stepping to the side of the chair before glancing at the two of us. "You're right. It's late. Thank you both for the wonderful dinner."

Standing up, I waited for the men to exchange their goodbyes before turning towards Oliver. "I'll walk you out."

Thomas threw a puzzled glance in my direction but didn't object as he carried the plates to the sink.

Reaching the door, I noticed that Oliver appeared to be more comfortable in my presence, his initial awkwardness seemingly less pronounced as he smiled and thanked me once again for the dinner.

I took a deep breath, wondering how best to phrase my request. Ever since he had mentioned that I could ask him for "anything", a plan had begun to brew at the back of my head. I had no intention of taking advantage of his guilt but did not want to miss this opportunity either.

"Umm. Remember when you mentioned that I could ask you for anything?"

He seemed surprised at the question but nodded just the same.

"Well, I would really appreciate it, if I could have more time with my mate. His current shifts are quite... taxing if you know what I mean."

For a few seconds, Oliver simply stared, his features remaining solid, giving nothing away. Then with a slight quirk to his lips, he responded, his voice taking on a professional tone. "I'll see what I can do Beta female. Good night."

I smiled as I watched him leave before I felt arms wrap around me from behind.

"What was that about?"

Turning around, I kissed my mate and nuzzled into his neck. "That is me making sure that you are stuck with me forever. Every minute of everyday"

Thomas chuckled, kissing me back with passion before he growled huskily in my ear. "Sounds like a plan."