

Mated To Five Alpha Brothers

Chapter 40

James

The elevator seemed to take forever as it tediously climbed the 52 floors of our busy head office. My eyes landed on the large mirrors on either side which accurately reflected my aloof, self-contained, and formally dressed exterior but failed to portray the instability that was swirling within. The only dead giveaway was the hint of turmoil that peaked through the deep-set hollowness of the eyes.

Snapping my gaze away, I took in a deep breath and loosened the tie around my collar, my gut churning uncomfortably at the thought of facing Mia again.

From the moment I had left her, unceremoniously in that claustrophobic cabin, the disastrous conversation replayed constantly in my mind. I was plagued with arguments and counter-arguments to the various ways that conversation could have gone but in the end, I could never truly reach a conclusion. Because logically, I couldn't argue with my actions or the lack thereof but logic it seemed had failed me in this instance.

What my mate required was emotional support and I had spectacularly failed her when she needed me the most.

My fist connected with one of the mirrors at the thought, distorting the perfect image as it cracked down the middle. The beast within me snarled as he pushed to the front; eyes glowing bright at the sight of me in the mirror. Canines extended along with the claws as they wrestled for control.

Shoving my fist further into the cracked mirror, I closed my eyes and fought him with all my strength. My body shook with the strain as my heart raced and sweat dripped down my skin. Some of the shards shattered, dropping to the ground as my knuckles began to bleed profusely; the pain forcing the snarling and raging wolf back into the deep pit of my mind.

I panted as I struggled to catch my breath. This dance between my wolf and I had become a regular occurrence every time the wolf's bane began to wear off in the system. The struggle to hold him back in such times took immense determination and strength but this time it was that much harder. The beast was enraged and I couldn't argue with him. After all, it was I who had caused his mate's suffering, and that went against his very basic instinct.

Pulling my hand away, I watched the skin stitch back together, forcing out the splinters from my knuckles as it began to heal. The momentary relief that the pain had caused was gone along with my peace of mind.

The guilt swarmed back, tugging at my conscience as Mia's plea echoed in my mind. There was something about this emotion, this guilt, that was downright disconcerting and intensely uncomfortable for me. Not only did it hint at a sense of regret over misguided words and actions but it also made me question my ability to make astute decisions. There was nothing that escaped my thorough process of inspection and critical thinking but all the thinking in the world had rendered my decision-making ability in this scenario utterly flawed.

How could I be the advisor to the pack when my counsel only operated from a place of logic and never from compassion? Every single recommendation that I had advised my brothers to take when it came to Mia, had gone from bad to worse including the decision to not give into my instinct in that cabin.

Of course, I had my well-intentioned reasons for putting a stop to the need flaring between us at that moment before it progressed into something I couldn't control; but I was having a hard time coming to terms with the price I or we were willing to pay in order to maintain the status quo in the pack.

Had we become so heartless, emotionless that we were prepared to turn a blind eye to our mate's suffering? Was this all really worth it in the end?

My jaw clenched hard at the lack of answer just as the elevator doors opened to the topmost floor.

I almost buckled at the scent of my mate that hit me full force. There was an undeniable hint of fear in that sweet floral scent but it also held a touch of anger.

At my brief loss of control, my wolf surged forward, pushing me in the direction of the scent. I didn't fight him on this as I was just as eager to see my mate. Striding forward, I made my way down the corridor before turning into Marcus's office where I could scent her the strongest. Pushing the door open, I felt a pang of disappointment when my eyes landed on Marcus typing away on his computer with no sign of Mia.

Marcus continued his work, never glancing in my direction but addressing me in a hard tone.

"You were supposed to accompany her."

I felt the irritation rise as I turned my head down the corridor, looking for my mate before turning back to Marcus.

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"Where is she?"

Marcus did not answer immediately, taking his time to type, his concentration never wavering for a second.

I walked into the office, pacing beside his desk as I waited for an answer. My hands trembled with the effort of keeping my wolf in check who was eager to go on the hunt for his mate but I needed answers first.

Marcus's fingers moved over the keyboard for another couple of seconds before he leaned back casually. His eyes took in my state, pausing at the sight of my fist where the remnants of blood still stained my skin.

"You look like hell."

Forcing to steady myself, I gripped the chair in front of me as he added, "You just missed her. She's in the conference room, meeting her friend."

I gulped as the sickening weight of my actions crashed back down. I had done this. I had doomed us all to this miserable existence.

Wordlessly, Marcus reached for the top drawer, pulling it open and removing a long needle filled with the vile green liquid. My wolf growled, not keen on being sedated again but Marcus gave me a knowing look as he rolled the needle in my direction across the desk. "You need this."

I grabbed the needle off the desk, tempted at the thought of injecting myself with the wolf's bane and silencing the snarling beast within but the sickening feeling only increased, the longer I stared at the liquid in my hands. Hands shaking violently I tossed the needle to the ground. "No. I'm not doing this anymore."

Marcus stared, neither upset nor excited about my words. "What do you propose to do instead?"

I felt a moment of shock, not having expected him to stay calm but I recovered quickly. Marcus always had a keen sense of knowing what hid beneath the surface. There was nothing that escaped his notice.

"Brother, I think this has gone far enough. This is taking a toll on all of us, Mia included..." Wincing inwardly when the image of Mia passed through my mind, I forced myself to continue. "...I mean, look at us. Alex disappears for periods at a time. Kole is barely holding it together. You hardly say anything anymore and I..."

My voice faltered, unable to formulate into words the chaos I was feeling within. What could I say? That I had fucked up?

"What happened at the cabin James?"

I looked at Marcus, dumbfounded. It wasn't a surprise that he had easily picked up on what was bothering me but Marcus's uncanny insight into things always left me feeling unnerved.

"Uh...nothing."

A raised eyebrow was all the warning I got before Marcus's eyes turned black as he summoned my wolf.

Images and emotions raced through my mind.

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Mia's touch, her lips, her soft body pressed against mine, her tears and whispered words flickered brightly for a few minutes before dimming out of existence. My wolf receded back into my mind, handing me back control as I opened my eyes to find Marcus looking vaguely amused.

"You have no right to pry into my mind like that, Marcus. That was a private..."

"On the contrary brother, I have every right..." Marcus's eyes flashed gold, "...I am your Alpha."

Any retort I could think of at that point would have fallen flat against the claim because despite being my blood, Marcus was first and foremost my Alpha. I swallowed all the words I wanted to throw at him, knowing that my rage was more at myself and my failure than at my Alpha brother.

"You need to stop doing that to yourself. We are all to blame for what has happened."

I flinched, hating the fact that I was so emotionally weak that my thoughts were like a signboard with neon lights flashing on it. Struggling with the guilt, I tried to explain, "But I was..."

Marcus held up his hand, stopping me mid-sentence as he continued calmly, "You gave us suggestions James and that is your job. You put the interest of the pack before your own and that is nothing to be ashamed of. Yes, we could have chosen differently but we didn't... and that's not on you brother."

The guilt roiled in my stomach, nausea crawling its way up as I recollected where my "suggestions" had gotten my youngest brother and my mate. "But Mia...she's not well Marcus. I felt it in the cabin. She is deteriorating and I think it's the bond. I assumed with her being human, she wouldn't experience the effects of being unmarked but I think that's what's happening to her."

Of the hundred and thirty-two years I had known Marcus, I had never seen him look this concerned about something before. My brother and Alpha who rarely showed any strong emotion looked visibly tense as he digested the information. A brief feeling of worry radiated from him before he shut himself off. "Get Joanne to take a look when she gets back to the pack grounds. Ask her to keep an eye on Mia."

My frustration rose. This whole charade was backfiring on us and my brothers were either plainly ignorant of it or were arrogant enough to think that they could pull this off without any major consequences. "But how does that solve anything, brother? The pack already suspects that something is going on. What with Mia's absence in pack gatherings and Tommy's prolonged demotion, we are running out of plausible reasons to give them. And worse, I'm fairly certain that news of a human mate has probably traveled far and wide by now. Everyone will want to witness it with their own eyes. What then? How long are we to continue like this Marcus?"

For the longest moment, only silence greeted my words. Marcus sat unmoving, his eyes glued to the desk in front of him, emotionless and vacant. Even my wolf couldn't sense anything from him. Worried, I moved closer, unsure of what to make of his silence.

"Not for long."

My body stilled, hairs raising at the back of my neck as I tried to process his words. There was something so dead and final in the way he had said it, that my guts churned all over again.

"What do you mean? What's going on?"

He let out a sigh, his posture almost deflating as he confided in a tired tone. "Alex is with Father at the moment. He's explained everything."

I felt my blood run cold at the mention of Father. A man who didn't deserve that title let alone have children. We had all suffered at his hands, especially Alex and Kole. The man was a monster and if Alex had gone to him, all hope was indeed lost.

My voice cracked. "Why? Why would he go to him?"

"As you said, the news has traveled somehow. For the last few weeks, we have been receiving calls from every pack. They all want to confirm the rumor that a high-ranking wolf in our pack has chosen a human for his mate. It won't be long before it reaches the council and ultimately our father. And he wouldn't take it kindly, hearing it from someone else."

At this point, I had no words as I stared at my brother in shock.

"In a week's time, our pack will be throwing a party where we will announce the union between the North Dakota pack and ours. Alex and I will take the Dawson sisters as our mates. At the same time, we'll give the world a chance to see Mia and Tommy."

Words stuttered out of my paralyzed brain. "This is madness"

Ignoring my interruption, Marcus continued, "We'll then choose mates for you and Kole. Alex suggested the pack near British Columbia. They are a small pack but are gaining good ground in Canada..."

He trailed off as he stared into the distance with a pensive expression on his face before continuing to talk about the ridiculous plan that Alex had come up with, no doubt with the help of my Father whose signature handiwork was written all over it.

"...once we are all mated, Tommy can then mark Mia."

I was beyond furious with the utter absurdity of this plan. "How do we know this will work? By the time we mate with these she-wolves, do you think Mia is still going to be sane? Or Thomas for that matter? His wolf needs to claim her. NOW. What part of her health declining do you not understand brother? And how do we even know our beasts will allow us to mark someone other than our mate?"

"Alex..."

"Do not tell me what Alex thinks! That right there is precisely the problem! Alex does not think!! He rushes in half-cocked..."

Suddenly, my words froze, my throat constricting as I was forced to the ground, wheezing and gasping. My wolf whimpered at the blast of anger radiating from his Alpha. Bones cracked, shifting and dislocating before realigning into place for a moment; only to start again. A whine left my lips at the searing pain that drummed into my skull as my wolf lowered his head in submission.

"You suffer your place brother. Do not ever talk of your Alpha that way? Are you that ungrateful that you would forget the countless times he suffered at the hands of our father so we could be spared his wrath? Or are you forgetting the time that he carried you bruised and bloodied out of the battlefield while he himself was halfway at death's door?"

The pressure in my neck built, compelling me to turn to the side and present it, in the ultimate show of submission. My whole body shook violently as the pain increased before I finally conceded.

Immediately, I felt the air rush back into my lungs as I glanced up, out of breath and completely drained of energy. Marcus's eyes slowly returned to his original grey as he stared down with a hard expression.

Wiping away the spittle from my mouth, I pled my case with the last of my energy. "Please, brother. We can still turn this around. We can claim our mate..."

"And what? Look like fools in front of our pack? Who would trust us after that?"

I closed my eyes as I tried to control the emotions that were firing in all directions at once. "They would respect us for doing the right thing brother... even if it started out wrong. But once we announce it to the rest of the world... there is no coming back from that."

Marcus did not answer but reached down and helped me back up.

I felt a small prick on my arm as Marcus injected the wolf's bane into my blood, the liquid racing through my veins and silencing the beast within. I glanced at Marcus, feeling hurt and betrayed but was shocked to see the tortured expression on his face as he responded in a sombre tone.

"I know."