

# Mated To Five Alpha Brothers

## Chapter 48

People stared as I ran past, a task made that much harder by the long train of the dress that dragged behind me and the ridiculous heels that caught on every crevice or bump in the ground. But I paid no mind because I had other, more important, and dire things to worry about. Like the bond.

My mind still could not comprehend what had happened back in the packed hall. Had it really been the effects of the bond or had it been a symptom of the stress overload that I had been experiencing of late? The answer to that question did not come easy. Or maybe... I was just unwilling to admit it.

Hurrying down the long corridors, I nearly cried in relief when I finally came upon the doors that led outside into the cool night. The first breath of air felt like heaven as I greedily gasped in a lungful. Closing my eyes, I let the darkness wrap around me as the lights, music, and partying faded into the background. No more stares, whispers, or, torturous displays of affection. It was just me and the night.

The traitorous bond was silent just like it had been for weeks. There were no strange flickers or pulls or incessant tugs. Then what the hell was that back there? I had assumed that the bond had somehow died but what happened at the packed hall had me revisiting that theory.

It was then that I cursed myself for not taking an interest in learning about this world and how bonds worked because now, I had no clue what was happening to me or what I could do to stop it. And at this stage, I couldn't rely on anyone to give me the answers without raising suspicion.

My heart dropped. I was beyond help at this point.

A heavy sigh passed my lips. I felt weary, weathered down, and defeated. There didn't seem to be a point in trying to escape this anymore. The last shred of hope that I had desperately clung to had been crushed and thrown at my feet. And I had no energy left to pick up the pieces.

Tears ran down my face uninhibited as I silently bore the loss and the pain.

It was over. I was done.

It felt strange that only an hour ago, I had looked myself in the mirror and felt hope. But all of that had changed now...

"Hello?"

I jerked in shock at the sound of the voice, my eyes flashing open at the unexpected intrusion. Whirling around immediately with my heart slamming in my chest, I ended up knocking into the person who was standing unbelievably close.

The two of us fumbled for a second, arms flailing against each other before I staggered a few steps back and avoided an imminent fall.

"Oh! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to startle you. I called out a few times, but you didn't turn around..."

The strong, feminine voice had me looking at the intruder while also trying to calm my racing heart. I wasn't a fan of being caught out in surprise, something that Sasha always took advantage of, much to my irritation. But unlike Sasha and her childish antics, this woman, with her bright red hair, alabaster skin, and dark red robes appeared to have done so unintentionally.

Still reeling from the shock, however, all I could manage in response were half-choked words. "I'm ok..."

She smiled before her eyes dropped down to my dress. "Gosh! Look what I've done to your beautiful dress! I'm so sorry!"

Confused, I glanced down at myself and noticed a dark patch on the bottom of my dress. What the... It looked like a stain, most likely red wine which I was certain I didn't have but another glance at the woman seemed to solve that mystery.

Held tight in her right hand, was a glass of wine. Or at least, what was left of it.

I sighed before reaching down to touch the stain.

"Oh... allow me."

A pale hand came into view, waving over the stain gracefully. And right before my very eyes, the stain grew smaller before it completely vanished! What the fuck! I opened and closed my mouth while rubbing the spot several times to make sure that my eyes weren't playing tricks on me, but the spot remained clean.

Sputtering, I straightened up to properly stare at the woman. "H-how did you... how did you do that?"

A smile lit up her face as she waved her hands in the air. "I'm a witch...and the name's Aurora by the way..."

"A witch...?" This was just too bizarre for my frazzled brain to follow. I gave her another once over. "...yeah sure..." My disbelief had clearly seeped through into my voice because she laughed and shrugged her shoulders good-naturedly. I frowned in return, still wondering if this was some kind of tasteless joke or a cruel game of "let's trick the idiot human".

"So, what does that mean? You can do magic...?" I noticed that she didn't possess any tell-tale signs of being a witch. No tattoos, garish jewelry, crystals in her hand, heavy eye makeup, or the smell of incense wafting from her clothes. Contradictory to the description in my head, this woman looked elegant and beautiful.

Another shrug. "Part of the job"

"...and move things, predict the future, voodoo spells, and everything?"

Her delighted laugh rang through the air as she raised her eyebrows in my direction, her voice still light-hearted but holding a hint of defensiveness. "Would you like a demonstration as proof?"

Feeling a little self-conscious that my words might have sounded accusatory or dubious, I backtracked. "No, I didn't mean it like that."

Smiling kindly in response, Aurora pointed at the gazebo in the garden. "Shall we sit somewhere a little comfortable?"

I immediately hesitated, looking behind me at the doors, wondering if I should return to the party. It was a miracle that someone hadn't run after me already and I didn't want to push my luck, despite hating the idea of going back in there.

Sensing my reluctance, Aurora intervened. "Oh, come on. ItsIt'sidious in there. Let's just sit a while."

I turned to the door once again, hearing the muffled sounds of the music through them. An image of Alex reveling in Amelia's arms flashed through my mind, making me gag. No, I wasn't ready to go in. Clenching my hands into fists, I took a deep breath and nodded at Aurora before walking the short distance to the gazebo.

"I'm Mia."

She laughed once again, her eyes twinkling with mirth. "Yes, I know."

"Oh..." Unsure of what else to say, I fell silent as we reached the gazebo and looked around. The little seating area was covered in vining plants, flowers hanging off their ends, and draping around the frame of the roof. There was a mild floral scent in the air combined with the smell of earth and grass that was soothing to the nerves. I could feel myself calming down as I took a seat and looked out into the night.

We sat that way for a long time before Aurora broke the silence. "Do you want to talk about it?"

I turned towards her, suddenly on guard and uncertain of what her intentions were. "Talk about what?"

She sighed and faced ahead before responding. "You were upset when I came up to you."

I shifted in my seat, feeling uncomfortable and on edge. "It's nothing."

"Hmm."

We fell quiet once again, the night breeze gently caressing my face as it blew by. My emotions felt somewhat under control even if I didn't enjoy the fact that this woman had seen me at my most vulnerable, so...broken and defeated. I fought back the sudden tears that welled in my eyes. I couldn't do this anymore...I couldn't...

"Does it have something to do with that Gamma in there?"

Ever since my kidnapping, I had had my fair share of surprises and shocks but this...! Her words had effectively jarred my very existence as my melancholic train of thoughts cut off abruptly replaced instead with terror. It took a second for my brain to catch up but when it did, I jumped to my feet immediately and stared at this woman. How the fuck did she know!

But more importantly, what was she going to do with that information?

Aurora watched me, her demeanor very calm and composed as she responded with an exasperated sigh. "Relax, I'm not going to do anything. I'm on your side."

Unconvinced and on the verge of panic, I spat out. "W-what do you know about that? Are... are you using your magic on me? Reading my mind or something? Because that is just..."

"I don't need magic to know when a man is besotted. That pretty boy could not take his eyes off you."

My words died as I gulped nervously. If she had noticed, then who else did?

"Your secret's safe with me"

I paused the chaos that had unleashed in my mind as I took in her words, disbelief reigning front, and center. "Why?"

She shrugged. "Like I said, I'm on your side."

I frowned at her nonchalance. "Why?"

She looked at me then, her face holding sympathy and another emotion I couldn't identify. "Because it looks like you could use a friend."

That shut me up. Yes, I could do with a friend in this fucked up place but trusting an absolute stranger who claimed to be a witch sounded like a very bad idea. But on the other hand, what did I have to lose?

Nothing.

We remained silent as the insects called and chirped around. My mind raced with questions about this woman. Who was she and why did she claim to be on my side...What if it was a trick and she went to Alex with this information...what if...

"You know, it would be better to just talk about what you're thinking rather than batter me with it."

"Huh?"

She sighed. "Your energy...your thoughts. It's loud... raw and wild...too easy to decipher. You need to learn to control your emotions."

A memory of Marcus saying something along those lines made it into my mind but I shrugged it off. "Who are you and what do you want from me?"

"Mia, we already covered who I am and..."

"Yes, but you don't know me!" I practically screamed in her face, not bothering to lower my voice as my emotions ran high. "And yet you know things about me and say that you're on my side. Did Alex put you up to this?"

Her face fell into a frown. "Alex? As in the Alpha of this pack?"

I neither confirmed nor denied, my mind set on thinking that this had something to do with Alex and his twisted idea of fun.

When I didn't respond, she looked at me seriously, her voice sounding genuinely sincere. "Look, no one put me up to this and I did not use magic to read your mind or conjure up some witchy trick. I merely pointed out an observation..." She then tilted her head to the side as she regarded me closely before adding, "...and judging by your reaction, I would say that my observation was pretty accurate."

Shit. Had I just given myself away? But even if that was the case, I still could not bring myself to trust an absolute stranger. "Why should I believe you?"

"You don't have to. That's your choice."

Now, I felt lost and confused. Tempted, as I was to accept her kindness at this point, I could not help but wonder if trusting someone from this world was a wise thing to do. After all, everyone here, with the exception of Liam, had had a hand in the current state that I found myself in, be it directly or indirectly. So how could I throw caution to the wind and... And what? Spill everything?

No. It felt too risky.

But on the other hand, the fact that she was a witch opened up some very real possibilities. What if she could really help? After months of living a torturous existence, was I going to turn away the one person who wanted to help and wasn't in any way tied to this pack?

I glanced in the direction of the pack house, wondering what I had waiting for me back there that was worthwhile.

That answer came easily.

Nothing.

So, I decided to take a shot, well aware that if it backfired then I was probably going to end up dead somewhere in a pit. But if it worked...

Sitting back down, I faced forward, my voice trembling slightly as I began in a small voice. "Ok...you were right...I...may have done something."

Aurora took a breath and sat back down, her body tilted in my direction as she listened. And now that I had said the first words, the rest seemed to flow out in a torrent.

"It was in the moment... I was upset and tired and..." My voice faltered as I struggled with the emotions barraging me from within. "...I kissed him."

Harshing out loud felt relieving and scary at the same time. My chest tightened as I witnessed the emotions I had burst on her face and the admiring whip of her judgment. Clearly, my desperation had outwitted my rational senses, seeing how quickly I had divulged all of the private details to someone I barely knew.

But instead of hurling cruel words, Aurora sat quietly for a few minutes before she responded in a tone that sounded confused. "You kissed the Gamma?"

Unable to repeat the words, I merely nodded.

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"Hmm. And this is a problem because...?"

Now it was my turn to look bewildered. What was she not getting? "Because it means I cheated on my mate..."

"Huh."

That was definitely not the reaction I was expecting. Aurora appeared genuinely surprised at my explanation as she sat back and exhaled loudly before lapsing into silence. And this was one silence that I could have done without as my paranoia itched to know what was going through her mind. But what if I had just outed myself again? The question made me repeatedly glance at her face which had begun to develop a frown as the minutes ticked by. And just before I could lose my grip and force her to speak, she turned to face me.

"How much do you know about the shifter culture?"

Though a bit embarrassed at admitting my appalling lack of knowledge, I went with the honest answer. "Not a lot."

Her eyes ran over my face as her lips pulled into a thin line. "Well then, you shouldn't be making such harsh judgments on yourself."

"What?"

Aurora moved to the edge of her seat, staring intently at my face. "Tell me, Mia...In the time that you have been here, have you ever heard anyone use words like relationship or boyfriend, girlfriend, marriage, and the like?"

I thought back to my conversations with Thomas and Liam and realized that such terms had never come up in our interactions.

"No"

"Well, that's because such things don't exist..." Downing the last drops of her wine, she chucked the glass into a bush nearby before continuing.

"...see, when it comes to mating among shifters, there's the claimed - that's the wolves that are marked and then you have the unclaimed - the ones that are not. When shifters want to "commit" they mark. There are no two ways about that. Males challenge each other to win females and females generally will mate their way up the mark. So, any form of loyalty comes after they are marked and mated... Rarely before. And seeing that you don't bear a mark, you would technically be classified as a free agent."

Ok. I did not know that.

"But I'm bonded to Thomas..."

She laughed. "Every shifter is born with a bond. From the moment they draw their first breath, they are mated to someone out there. But that doesn't mean they refrain from exploring their carnal pleasures. They all do. Including your Thomas."

"Yes, but that was before me..."

She sighed. "Mia, if anyone has done a disservice then it's him. Not you. He's kept you unmarked all this time. In their world, it's not what they do and to you, it's a sign of disrespect, especially considering that you are his fated mate."

I fell silent as I digested her words. Of course, I couldn't tell her the reason why Thomas hadn't marked me but she had certainly opened my eyes to the concept of mates and marking. Why then, could I not shake off the guilt?

"I'm human. Their rules wouldn't really apply to me..."

Aurora quickly intervened, stopping that thought in its tracks. "The fact that you are blessed with a bond makes you more of a shifter than an ordinary, regular human."

That didn't sit right. If I had to give up my humanity and the values with which I was raised, what the hell was I? I definitely wasn't one of them...

But talking of the bond, I was suddenly reminded of what I had experienced in the hall.

"The bond... I'm not sure... I think it's dead"

"Why do you think that?"

"I just haven't felt it in a while."

"Mia, bonds don't die or fade away. It's not how they work. They may be suppressed for a time but given the right circumstances, they will resurface again."

My heart pounded wildly. If Aurora was right, then what I had felt in the packed hall was the bond!

No!