

Chapter 11

Jonathon Lancaster

Blinking wearily, I turned to look out the window—it looked to be about 10 or 11 in the morning? I felt my stomach grumble in hunger and I groaned, slumping my head back into the pillow.

The past 12 hours have been nothing but stressful.

I had killed an Alpha in a fight that was not meant to end in death. The rules clearly stated that. My father had discussed with me earlier that we might be receiving messages from the tribunal soon.

I'd have to read up of the laws of The Claiming.

Wearily, I looked to my left and my breath hitched. Serena was fast asleep, her right hand curled around mine and her head burrowed into the pillow by my shoulder. She looked so peaceful asleep, and I did not want to wake her. Waking her would subject her to the nightmare that I had selfishly brought her into.

All night long I was waiting for her to snap at me, to hit me and fight me, as I deserved. Maybe the selfishness of my act had not registered into her mind yet. She had not given me trouble throughout the trip. Maybe she understood that I had had a momentary bout of recklessness. Maybe her brain was still addled.

She was a Gold Ranked female who was ready to take on an Alpha Wolf just to stay unmated. Yet, when I forced my two marks on her, she did not claw at me or challenge me. Was she afraid of fighting me? I blinked, looking at her bracelet. I'd wager that if we fought, it would be a fairly even fight.

Instead, she just calmly packed her things and joined me.

I was unworthy of such a mate.

We both needed to eat. I groaned inwardly and put my hand on her warm shoulder. It was only then that I noticed she was wearing my clothes. The fabric swarmed her and the leather sleeve hung over her slightly freckled shoulder, exposing the soft skin.

My primal instincts were satisfied by her choice to put on something of mine. I gulped; this feeling of possessiveness was entirely new to me. I welcomed it of course; eager to see how far it went.

I shook her as gently as I could.

"Serena...mate, wake up." I said, cursing myself for my gruff voice. I meant to be gentler in my tone. Her eyes snapped open as soon as I spoke.

So she was a light sleeper.

She blinked slowly and adjusted herself. I watched, mesmerized as she sat up, rubbing her eyes and sitting cross-legged on the bed. She swallowed thickly and grabbed her hair tie from the side table, quickly tying her hair.

I had never before watched a female groom herself. It was truly a strange sight.

"What time is it?" She asked, yawning. I grabbed my phone and showed her the time.

"My family is expecting us for brunch." I said, still looking at her. She blushed when she saw that I was staring, and in turn I felt blood rush to my cheeks when I realized I had been caught.

Suddenly, her eyes flitted across my body and she frowned slightly. I cleared my throat and looked at my appearance—was there something wrong? Was I not appealing to her?

"Your clothes." She simply stated, sighing. I tilted my head.

"What about them?" I asked, suddenly feeling self-conscious.

"They're dirty, and you slept in them." She said, sounding slightly annoyed. Realization dawned on me. Truth be told, I never really thought about it—I was tired. Maybe that's why she borrowed my clothes to sleep in. Was she sensitive in matters of cleanliness? I nodded hastily and jumped off the bed.

"I'm sorry." I said. This was not the proper way to start courting my mate, I chastised myself.

She shook herself and her eyes widened.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to be...anyway, it's your bed. Sorry." She muttered, her freckled cheeks blooming in a blush. I shook my head. As the female, she would have a bigger say in matters of how we kept house.

I resisted the urge to grab a piece of paper and list down all the things that needed to change. I needed to be cleaner. The maids usually cleaned up after me but I needed to tone down the mess now that I was sharing my room with my mate.

"It is our bed now." I stated. She nodded and looked down.

"I borrowed your clothes to sleep in. I hope you don't mind." She murmured, tugging on the shirt and teasing me with the quick flashes of soft skin.

Before I could stop myself, I spoke.

"Why would I mind?" I wanted to shoot myself by how clueless and idiotic I sounded, but I meant the question. We were mates now, and mates shared everything. She now had access to everything I owned.

"Because they are yours?" She said, as if she was unsure.

Oh.

"Mates are supposed to share everything." Was all I could reply, reciting a statement about mating that one of my tutors taught me. She bit her lip and slowly nodded.

Silence followed.

"I guess I should change. We have brunch and...stu..." She murmured, getting off the bed and grabbing her neatly folded clothes from the table.

All I could do was watch as she went inside the bathroom. When she closed the door, I let out a breath I did not know I was holding. Listening to the sound of water from the faucet, I began to realize how clean, neat, and well groomed my mate was. Unable to stop myself, I sniffed my own body.

I needed to be more hygienic now. I was by no means filthy, but because my mate appeared to be sensitive to matters of cleanliness, I would need to step it up. I caught my reflection by the glass windows, and I ran my fingers through my hair. Did she think my hair was unruly? Did I need to have a haircut? Should I shave?

Subconsciously, I knew it was the mating instinct driving me to please my mate. I leaned into it.

I quickly tied my hair back as neatly as I could before changing into a fresh gray shirt and a pair of dark jeans. Just as I was fumbling with the material of my shirt, I heard the door to the bathroom open. My mate emerged wearing the shirt she changed into in the car. Her hair was tied back neatly into a braid and her face looked bright and fresh—she had obviously washed it thoroughly.

She folded the clothes she had worn to sleep and placed them on the now empty side of my closet. It appeared someone had cleared space out for her things. I was very, very thankful for whoever had the initiative. I would have been embarrassed if I took my mate someplace where there was no room for her belongings.

Silently, she padded across the floor and sat down on the chaise next to the window, scrolling through her phone. I sighed and made my way to the bathroom.

I saw that she found one of the new toothbrushes that the maids usually kept under the sink. It was green, and now joined my black one on the same cup. I saw that she had used one of the fresh towels and it was hung neatly beside my own. My heart clenched at the domesticity of it all.

As quickly as I could, I washed my face with some soap and brushed my teeth. I put my palm on my stubble—it was close to becoming a beard. I knew I didn't have time to shave so I just tightened the bun at the nape of my neck and dried my face.

I exited the bathroom to see that she was still lounged on the chaise. The sunlight streaming through the window alarmed my earlier suspicions.

She did indeed belong with the Gods.

When she saw that I had emerged, she looked up and sighed. She opened her mouth, as if to speak, but closed it. I waited patiently, if my mate wanted to say something, the least I could do was listen.

Finally, she spoke.

"What's going to happen with the Alpha Theodore situation?" She asked, her voice holding a hint of fear. The urge to get rid of the source of my mate's fear rose in me. Having a mate was making me impulsive, and more prone to hurting others. I resisted the urge to growl. Thankfully, she continued.

"Or am I not allowed to know..." She murmured, blushing slightly and looking down.

That statement confused me to no end. As my mate, she was now privy to everything—duty demanded that I do not hide anything from her. I began to wonder how mated couples in her pack were like.

"I will not hide anything from you." I said. I cursed myself, I'm sure that what I said was not very reassuring. Thankfully, she did not call me out on it and instead folded her hands on her lap and waited for me to speak.

I knew I'd have to swallow my pride and ask Patrick for help on how to talk to my mate.

"My adviser is still at Eastern Claw. The Tribunal might call on us so we both might need to make statements. That is all the king told me." I said. She nodded understandingly before her fingers flitted to her mark.

"Before your fight, Alpha Theodore said something...he said it wasn't allowed..." She murmured, looking at me curiously. I sighed and sat down on the chaise next to her. She instinctively made room for me.

"That's a technicality. Beta Jasper, however, made the split decision to allow it." I said. I took a deep breath and again her fingers feathered over the two marks.

"Is there a chance they'll annul our mating?" She asked. My hackles immediately rose and I growled, causing her to flinch. She recoiled slightly, leaning away from me.

CONTROL.

I grimaced, disappointed in myself for having frightened my mate. I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself down.

"I think...the wolf inside of me might have thought of that. That's why I marked you twice. They can't overturn this." I tried to sound as reassuring as I could. I put my hand over the marks, linking my fingers with hers. She nodded and stayed silent.

"You have two of my marks in your neck, Serena. Whatever the tribunal decides, they won't be able to overturn it." I confidently said.

I wasn't so sure, but I'd fight for the right to keep my mate if I had to.

The Tribunal was going to fight us on technicalities. They'd question if the second mark was consensual—second markings were rarely done and were a delicate issue. They'd also ask why I wasn't on the roster. Just thinking about it gave me a headache.

So I stood up and offered her my hand. Reluctantly, she took it and let me lead her towards the dining room. The brunch would include just me, Patrick, and the king and queen. I was adamant that Serena stay out of the public eye for as long as I could stall—I at least owed her that much.

I wanted her to adjust. I had years of training becoming a royal. I wasn't going to thrust her into this overnight.

I had been selfish. I was about to fight a war, and yet I dragged a poor innocent woman into all of this.

Gold Ranked or not, she deserved to have a say in her destiny.

I looked at my mate, who I could see was trying to hold it together as much as she could. I tried not to look so nervous as I silently walked with her. Now was the time to demonstrate weakness.

Already I could feel my insides changing—my possessive instincts were acting up, I was becoming quicker to anger and more prone to reckless decisions, especially if it came to Serena. If duty and obligation were my life before, my instinct was slowly remedying that. They were making room for her, my mate.

My life is never going to be the same.