Chapter 25

A/N

Are you all ready for some good fluff? Thanks for 25k reads, babes!

Serena Lancaster

Life in the palace had always been relatively comfortable. Life in the palace while having a prince to make love to, however, was delightful.

It didn't matter to me that we weren't yet sure if we already loved each other. I had nothing to be scared of, I'm sure love would come and we had time. I myself had not yet begun to think about my feelings for him.

Or have I?

I knew I didn't just care for him—I shot straight past care territory a long time ago and it was unfair to say otherwise. No, there was something deeper about our bond that we had sealed through our mating. It wasn't purely romantic; it was more of mutual understanding, the knowledge that once and for all it was going to be us until the end. For me, that was so much more fulfilling than romance.

Oh, I wasn't stupid. I knew I was falling in love with him. How could I not be? But did I already love him? Maybe. I don't know. Feelings give me a headache.

In the weeks that followed, life went on, only mildly modified. Jon and I made good on our promise to not cause any more scuffles. Truth be told, I think part of the reason why were always so angry and passionate and brash was because we were sexually frustrated. Now that we were getting some every now and then, we were both more relaxed. Jon was less uptight, and I was more tranquil.

The war council had been welcoming to my presence, even if I mostly just sat in and listened. General Craft was civil, thankfully, and had even apologized. Jon didn't object to us being in the same room together—which reinforced my earlier theory that Jon just needed to get laid.

Maybe I could use sex to make sure that didn't happen again? But I couldn't just drag him to bed every time he looked to be getting angry or impulsive. No, King Armand was right. I needed to get better at keeping him in check.

Slowly but surely, I began to find my own voice in the council. I figured someone needed to balance out the testosterone in the room. My priorities never changed. The safety of those poor she-wolves and their children were still paramount and I made sure they all knew it.

General Ivon mentioned that they had a lead on the location of the King Beyond the Border's stronghold. When General Craft carelessly mentioned to just bomb the place, I countered with an adamant NO. Until we were sure that about the safety of the innocents, there would be no bombings anywhere.

I offered another solution.

I learned that the reason Jon had visited Eastern Claw was because our mountain ranges easily provided a path up north without disturbing the trenches in Alpha Adam's borders. These borders would be our main camp for the war and they were always closely watched by the rogues. The rugged path leading downwards east could be used to smuggle the females out.

It would have to be done by a separate group though, to avoid suspicion. General Hassan proposed that to designate a small faction of warriors dedicated especially for the task. I readily agreed.

Although I got nervous when Jon said I had to lead it.

Was I ready for that vital of a responsibility?

Could I even pull off something that extremely dangerous? Jon said I could pick my own team, though. But how could even manage that I? I could barely pick a favorite cupcake flavor!

The meeting ended with Jon saying I had until the end of the week to think about it.

For now, he wanted to pause all talk of war so that everyone could enjoy the Autumn Festival for the Goddess.

Wolves have celebrated autumn in reverence to the Moon Goddess for as long as out history told. It is a celebration to thank the Goddess for a wonderful harvest, and a prayer for a good winter. The festivities would usually begin at sundown just when the Moon Goddess would start her watch.

Tonight, Lightwing was going to be emptied out because everyone was heading into town to celebrate.

I dressed in a short-sleeved dark green dress and paired it with black stockings and chunky heeled boots. I threw on a silver scarf in case it got a bit cold, but these lands were particularly warmer so I didn't bother with a jacket.

"Are you ready to go?" Jon called as he donned a dark blue sweater over a white collared shirt and dark jeans.

"Yep!" I said, taking his hand in mine. The sun was just beginning to set as we went out of the palace. Lightwing residents were already walking down the path that led into town. Some parents were trying to keep their little ones in line as they skipped excitedly.

There were some people going around giving silver colored ribbons and flags. The children took them excitedly, yipping happily as they bounded into town. I took two, tying one on my golden bracelet while Jon did the same to his.

The town was decorated beautifully. Well-lit lanterns hung above us, serenely swaying as gentle winds blew them. There were bustling stalls selling all kinds of goods. I spotted a few of my she-wolves manning a bake sale near the town square. I saw Patrick trying to flirt with some girl selling artisan craft supplies—Jon was not as amused as I was. There were teenagers playing with firecrackers, and a few games for the kids.

We said hi to a few people. No one seemed to care that royals and ordinary wolves were mingling naturally. Of course, there were a few officers stationed to keep the peace, but no one was making trouble. The King and Queen were busy distributing food and making sure everyone was having a good time, which left Jon and I to our own devices.

Jon held me close. It seemed this anonymity had caused him to be more affectionate in public. I didn't mind. A few times, he'd gather me close and kiss me but most of the time we just silently walked hand in hand observing everyone's merrymaking.

Everyone seemed to be in high spirits. The Moon Goddess had made us into social creatures, that's why we lived in packs. I sincerely felt her joy raining down on us. I looked up at the sky—I gave silently thanked the Goddess for giving us all a lovely evening.

In the middle of the town square was a makeshift dance floor. A band played music on an elevated platform in front. I searched around the town square until I found what I was looking for: The Life Tree.

The Life Tree was a staple in every pack's autumn festival. It was usually any kind of big tree that people hung their wishes on. There was a big table underneath it with someone giving out small pieces of papers and pencils. Wolves would write down any wish and take their silver ribbon and hang it on the tree. Children usually made a big game out of seeing who could climb better and hang their wish on the highest branch.

"Prince Jon, Princess Serena! Care to make a wish?" The man behind the table asked.

"Of course! It's our first festival together!" I happily said, gratefully taking the paper and pencil from him.

I tried to remember what I wished for last year in Eastern Claw: a new phone? A beehive to fall on Erica's head? An additional three inches to my height?

I wonder what Jon's wishes had been? Or was he the type to not hang wishes on the Life Tree?

"Thank you, Harold." Jon murmured. He quickly wrote down his wish before folding the paper in half. He untied the silver ribbon from his bracelet and looped it around the paper.

"That was quick! What did you wish for?" I asked.

"It's a secret." Jon chuckled.

"Whatever happened to there are no secrets between mates?" I teased.

"This is the exception." Jon said, punctuating his statement with a kiss on my lips. There were onlookers smiling approvingly at us. I blushed.

What did I wish for? I looked at Jon as he turned to chat with Harold. My life in the palace was slowly falling into place. Thanks to Jon's leadership, I was sure this war would go our way. There was really nothing to wish for that wasn't already guaranteed. Except...

Love.

A bit cheesy for my tastes, but why not?

I wish I could easily tumble down my walls and let myself love him as he deserved. I wanted to experience that fireworks, as you wish, I'll-never-let-go-Jack kind of love. Most importantly, I wanted to experience that with Jon.

I realized now how closed off I had been. All this time, I had only been thinking of Jon as my mate and a prince—someone I shared my life with and who I would rule with. I never separated him from those two titles and that was a mistake. He was more than that. Definitely.

I thought about how his smile made me weak, or how butterflies erupted in my stomach every time he fussed with his hair. It was time to stop thinking of Jon as just my mate and my prince and start thinking of him as a man

If Jon wasn't a wolf and a prince then who was he? He was a man who was smart, caring, and who thought of others before he thought of himself. He was a man who took one look at my shampoo bottles, realized that I liked the scent of coconuts and had the maids change the air freshener to accommodate that. He was a man who respected my opinions, who looked out for me. He was a man who made love to me in the gentlest, most tender way.

Oh, Goddess.

Silently, I folded my paper in half and looped my ribbon around it.

"Where should we hang our wishes?" I asked. Jon turned to look at the tree and pointed at a large branch a few feet above us.

"How about there?"

"Great. Go climb up!" I said, pushing my wish into his hands.

"What? No, have to hang your wish yourself!" Jon exclaimed.

"I'm wearing a dress, I can't climb a tree in this." I said, putting my hands on my hips.

"There's a simple solution for that." Jon said, his eyes glinting with mischief. He took one step towards me and I instinctively stepped back.

"Jon..."

"Here we go." He said. With one deft move, he put his hands on my thighs and lifted me up so I could easily reach the branch. I gave a yelp as I struggled to balance myself.

"JON! What the hell? Put me down!" I demanded. My arms shook as I tried to stay upright.

"I'll put you down when you hang your wish."

"I can barely stand!" I said as I bent forwards before holding on to the trunk of the tree. "Put me down this instant! People are looking they're going to see up my skirt!"

"I'm the only one with that view, don't worry." Jon winked.

Sure enough, people had come to see what all the fuss was about. They were laughing as I comically tried to tie my wish to the branch.

"If the rogues don't kill you, I will." I growled as I double tied the silver ribbon. "There! Now put me down!" I ordered.

Gently, he sent me down on my feet and gave me a kiss on the cheek. Suddenly, the onlookers had applauded. Some were cheering and hooting for me.

I narrowed my eyes at Jon.

"And how are you going to get your wish beside mine? I'm not going to carry you." I smugly said.

He shrugged at me before borrowing a chair from a happy young pup who had just tied his wish. I gasped in horror as he stood on the chair and tied his wish beside mine.

"You! You...cheater! Argh!" I cried, stomping my feet. He chuckled as he returned the chair. He smirked at me before kissing me on the forehead.

"All's fair in love and war." He murmured as he embraced me. I rolled my eyes, leaning my head against his chest.

Just then, the band started to play a familiar song. I'll Be by Edward McCain—that song from A Cinderella Story. I smiled as my heart stilled—that was one of my most favorite movies. I put my hand over my heart as I saw some couples go to the dance floor.

"Jon, let's dance."

"Alright, but just a second." He said, pulling me back to him. He handed his phone to Harold.

"Will you take a picture of me and my mate, please?" He asked.

"Of course, Prince Jonathon."

"You want a picture of us?" I asked, resisting the urge to swoon. "But you don't even have Instagram!"

"It's not for Insta-what." He said. I shrugged, smiling. Even though it was nighttime, the lanterns would provide ample light that would make us the whole picture glow. I pulled Jon from underneath the tree and positioned us so we were under good lighting.

I smiled and motioned to Harold to take the picture. I put one hand on my hip and the other around Jon's waist. He put his hand on the small of my back.

"One, two, three..." Harold called out. As soon as he got to three, I got startled.

Jon grabbed me and pulled me to him, and quickly that I didn't even have time to register what was going on, he dipped me down and kissed me. One foot instinctively popped up like Princess Mia's did, and I placed my hands against his chest.

In full view of everyone, under the lovely lanterns, while one of the most romantic songs I've ever heard was playing, he kissed me. I closed my eyes as I heard the shutter click. However, when people started applauding and hooting again, I remembered my propriety so I broke off the kiss and stepped back. I was pretty sure I was blushing to my roots.

Great, now we had a kiss picture. If it were anyone else I'd think it was tacky. But it wasn't.
It was sweet. So gut-wrenchingly sweet that it left my throat dry. Oh Goddess!

I needed to stop overthinking and just focus on the romance.

"That was beautiful, Prince Jonathon." Harold cheekily said as he handed the phone back to Jon.

Oh Goddess what is this man doing to me?

"You surprised me. I'm pretty sure I looked like a potato there." I pretended to grumble as I tried to keep my blushing in check.

"You look beautiful." He said with much conviction that I was tempted to believe him.

I grabbed the phone from his hand and looked at the picture. Sure enough, it was perfect. Just like the moment.

Just like Jon.

I was embarrassed about all the people staring, but I also felt like singing to the heavens. In that moment, I felt romanced, cared for, and loved. Sparks flew as I put my hand in his, and suddenly, my mouth felt dry. My heart started beating fast and my stomach fluttered.

I knew it wasn't because he had surprised me with a kiss in front of all these people. They stared at us, smiling knowingly as if they knew a secret that I didn't.

What was it?

Oh.

Goddess, I've been so blind.

I love him.

Oh dear.

I'm in trouble, aren't I?

Definitely. But the way I see it, I could start pondering it now, or I could just enjoy the present and analyze everything later.

Yup!

With that realization, I pulled him to the dance floor. I didn't care that the song was about to end. He put his hand on my waist and the other held my own. Uncaring, we started to sway to our own rhythm. I don't think we were even listening to the music anymore. We were lost in our own little world.

Jon looked at me, his gray eyes boring into mine. I wondered if I had been caught. Did he know that just minutes ago I had realized something that I had probably been feeling all along? That I loved him and I was just too much of an over thinker to actually admit it? That it took one kiss, one camera, and one wish for me to able to get over myself and realize it?

The stars twinkled above us as he held me close. I looked to the heavens, praying to the Goddess to have mercy on my heart. As Jon planted a kiss on my head, I knew that it was him whom I should beg to hold my heart dear—for it was his.

I was his.

A/N
You're gonna be needing these lovely feelings because the next few chapters are gonna be difficult. It's time to move this story onwards!

I've already finished chapter 30 of this book and I need some motivation to finish the last 10 chapters! Help! Please drop me a comment or vote.

PS: if you wanna know more about me and this story, I'd be happy to answer any questions!

Continue to next part