Chapter 39

A/N
Here it is, the penultimate chapter. Enjoy!

Jonathon Lancaster

I stood deathly still, staring at my father's crown—*my* crown atop the table in front of me. I thought about all the Lancastrian kings who wore it before me, how all of them were born with a responsibility, but not all of them rose to the occasion. Would I be a good King?

"Jon? I'm ready to go." Serena's soft voice danced through the room. I shook myself, clearing my throat as I faced her. "What's wrong?"

I blinked at her, trying to find the right words.

"One of my great grandfathers, King Perseus Lancaster—he inherited a crown severely in debt." I started. I saw Serena's confused face, so I continued. "He thought of a lot of ways to solve the financial problem, but they were all long term and the crisis was so severe. No one had the patience to wait. Eventually, he was deposed—assassinated by his cousin Rama. Two days into King Rama's rule, the gold rush happened and the debt ended. The only reason King Rama did not share his cousin's fate was because of pure luck."

Serena's hand reached up to brush my curls away from my face. I closed my eyes and growled.

"What if I'm King Perseus, and I can't end the war before morale dwindles completely?" I murmured. Serena sighed and took my hand, leading me to sit down in one of the couches.

"You know what the difference is between you and King Perseus?" Serena gently asked.

"What?"

"You said it yourself—he *inherited* the crown. You didn't, Jon. You took what was freely and willingly given by your father and your people."

"Isn't that the same thing?"

"Perseus became king after his father's death. You've been King apparently for a few years now—you just didn't have the title. You're king because you were chosen, and that's why we'll all follow you to the end of this war—because we trust the choice we've made, and that choice—you, will not let us down."

I closed my eyes, reveling in the trust she was expressing. Did I deserve such trust? Had I done enough to earn it?

"Serena, we're going to war." I murmured.

"I know that."

"No, *we* are going to war. It used to be just me, but now you're going to war as well. I'm going to be thinking of you the whole time. I'm scared beyond belief. I can't get scared."

"Of course you can. For Goddess sake, Jon, you're the one leading the charge. If you weren't scared I'd think you were a sociopath! Now come on, get your crown and let's leave Lightwing to get this goddamn war started." Serena impatiently said. I chuckled humorlessly and stood up.

"I'm not bringing the crown."

"What?"

"It will mean nothing up north. Like you said, they're not following me because of the title."

"Whatever floats your boat, love." Serena beamed.

Our suitcases in tow, we made our way to the foyer. I looked at Serena falling in step beside me, smiling to myself as I saw her walk with regality and grace. She looked every inch a queen—the same magnificent wolf who belonged with the Gods. Only a year ago, she was walking through these halls apprehensive, but now her movements were sure and her confidence was brimming.

I was so proud of her.

We approached the foyer, and we immediately saw Patrick, Valeen, and my mother and father. We approached my parents first. My mother embraced me tight, and Serena also.

"I'm so proud of you both, especially you Jonathon." My mother sniffled. "Keep each other safe, and come home soon."

She said a couple more things that had Serena sobbing and me almost tearing up, and I felt a pang of sadness. Serena hadn't had a mother's touch for years now, and I was glad that she and my mother had a special connection. The way my mother's hand held Valeen's as well, I was proud to have such a wonderful and understanding parent.

"I may not have gone about it in the best way, but I'm proud to have raised a son like you." My father said, clapping his hand on my shoulder. "Finish this war, and make our ancestors proud."

I embraced my father. For all his faults, he was still the man who molded me to be dutiful and honorable. Maybe it was always a son's destiny to finish his father's battles—maybe that was the circle of life. Whatever happened, I would always be able to count on his wisdom and counsel. He taught me so much about what it meant to love and always put family first. The way he treated my mother—it served as an example for Patrick and I on how to treat our mates and I was glad we had him to look up to.

As Serena chatted with my parents and Valeen, I turned to Patrick. I took my time perusing my brother—he certainly looked older, I resisted the urge to chuckle when I realized how much we resembled each other.

"I know we didn't have time for an official ceremony and the papers have already been drawn, but I need to say this to you." I said, putting a hand on his shoulder. "I, Jonathon Lancaster, King of Werewolves, hereby appoint my brother and heir, Prince Patrick Lancaster, as my regent, to serve and protect our race in my absence for the War against the Rogues."

I took the ring my father had given me, and slipped it into Patrick's finger. He was speechless, his body shaking slightly and eyes brimming with unshed tears. I was about to say something else to deflect the tense moment, but I was stunned when he launched himself into my arms and embraced me. I held him, noting how his strong arms, once scrawny and lanky, were now grown enough to be able to fight me in combat.

He was now truly a Prince.

"I'm proud of you, Patrick. You may be an idiot, but never doubt my love for you. I'm counting on your support to get me through this war. Take care of mum and dad, take care of Valeen, and good luck." I said, my hand squeezing his shoulder.

"Thank you, Jon." He croaked. "I don't know how I'll survive without my big brother watching over me, but I think I'm ready. Go...go win us a war..." Patrick admiringly said, fighting tears. Valeen turned, and seeing her mate distressed went to his side and held his hand affectionately. Patrick immediately lightened up. I looked at my new sister and smiled.

"Is there anything you want from the North, Valeen?" I asked. She looked up in surprise, nervous and intimidated. She was still not yet comfortable around me.

"Valeen?" Patrick coaxed. She shook slightly, but composed herself.

"My mother had a pendant she wore around her neck. When she died, my father would not give it to me. He wears it now." She murmured softly. I gently put my hand on her arm. She flinched, but did not recoil.

"I will bring you your mother's pendant. Think of it as my present—I never had the chance to congratulate you two on your mating." I said. Valeen gasped, her eyes sparkling with dim hope.

"Thank you, Prince...I mean King Jonathon." She softly said, looking down shyly.

"Keep him out of trouble, please?" I asked, giving her a kiss on the head. She smiled.

"Jon? The car's ready." Serena called. She went over to us and said her goodbyes to Patrick.

"Prince Regent." I seriously said, holding out my hand. Patrick shook it eagerly. "Goodbye."

I made my way to the door, but Patrick's voice stopped me.

"Hey!" I turned back and saw Patrick with a mischievous grin. "Don't kill another Alpha."

"Don't mark another rogue." I shot back. We both laughed warmly, and finally, I was able to exit the palace with a lighter heart.

I saw the other cars of warriors, and Serena's team starting up. We waved at a few of them until they drove away. Finally, it was just me and Serena loading up our baggage and getting into the car. Making sure that Serena was buckled in; I took one last, longing look at Lightwing.

"It's gonna be a long time before we see it again." Serena called from inside the car. I smiled.

"I know." I murmured. Giving one last look at my home, I entered the car and started the engine. "Time to go north."

Serena held my hand, and I immediately thought back to when she first did when were both on the car on the way to Lightwing from Eastern Claw. Her grip then was unsure and hesitant, but now, I felt the confidence, the warmth, and most especially, the love.

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Five days, two motels, and about a hundred rest stops later, we finally made it to our destination.

"Serena...wake up..." I shook her. She shrugged and blinked, sitting upright. We were driving past a lake, and some beautiful fjords. There was an outline of an ancient castle in the horizon.

"I thought I told you to wake me up when we got to Alpha Adam's territory." She growled at me, about to resume her sleep. "We're in a human town!"

"I know. We're about five hours away from the northern pack."

"Then why the hell did you bother my sleep?"

"Because we're getting off in a few minutes." I said, exiting from the highway and into a local road.

"Wait, what?" Her eyes widened. "Where are you taking me? Oh my God, I'm getting kidnapped!"

"Stop being so dramatic." I rolled my eyes. We were going into the town center. It was a sleepy, small town with cobblestone streets that catered to a lot of human tourists because of the castle nearby. "We're just making a quick stop. Tarrowton, Mallory City"

"A quick stop? Jon, we could make it to Alpha Adam's territory before sunset!"

"I'm not going to war before we get to do this." I stubbornly said.

"Do what? Go sightseeing?" Serena incredulously asked. I parked in front of the town hall and turned off the engine. "Jon, what the hell? I don't wanna be on the road at night!"

"Then we'll sleep in a motel." I shrugged. "This is Tarrowton town hall, and right now, we're going to get married." I grinned.

I swear I literally saw her freeze.

"Jon...you're not...you're not serious..." She whispered.

"Serena, I'm not going into war if I'm not your mate and *husband*. So I suggest you close your mouth and let's go because we only have half an hour before we're scheduled to go in front of a judge."

"I...what?"

"I scheduled everything ahead of time. We'll spend our wedding night in that nice inn over there."

"But...but I thought you wanted...in front of our family and friends..." She stammered.

"We will have that, after the war." I explained. "Look, I marked you in front of a *lot* of people. I think it's fair that our wedding, our *real one*, will be just the two of us."

She blinked at me and laughed nervously.

"Jon, you're serious about this, aren't you?"

"If you don't wanna marry me, say the word and I'll drive away. But Serena, everything I need to get married, I have right here in this car."

She was silent, looking out of the window.

"I'm getting married today, aren't I?"

"Yes, you are." I grinned. We both exited the car. I was about to lead her to the town hall but she made a beeline to a boutique nearby.

"I am not getting married in this sweater. I'm pretty sure I drooled over it. And you've been wearing that shirt for two days now so come on." She said, ushering me in the store.

"We only have half an hour!"

I found a dark blue cashmere sweater and some new jeans while Serena fished through the dresses. I quickly changed.

"You done?" I asked Serena through the curtain of the dressing room. A few seconds later, she emerged wearing a red dress that hugged her figure perfectly. It showed off her soft curves and left her arms blissfully bare.

She looked like fire.

"Red?" I curiously asked. I figured she would want to choose white, but I didn't care. I'd marry her even if she wore a burlap sack.

"I read somewhere that women wore white at their wedding to symbolize their purity. Their grooms didn't know them, so the white is a clean slate. That's not us, Jon, and I'm so glad. I'm not *pure*. I have my faults, but you know them. You know me." She shrugged. "Besides, I'm saving the big poufy white dress for our second wedding because I doubt your mother would let me wear red."

"Fuck I wanna marry you." I whispered. We paid for the clothes and Serena stopped to buy a bunch of yellow flowers from a stall outside. Finally, we walked up the steps of the town hall and made it just in time to stand in front of a judge.

The ceremony, if you could call it that, was quick and simple. I wasn't even listening to half the words the judge was saying.

"Couples usually take a minute or two to say some things. Would you like to?" The judge asked. I shrugged at Serena, who beamed at the judge.

"Yes." The judge nodded understandingly.

"Jon...I'll admit it wasn't exactly love at first sight. I kinda thought you were into my cousin and not me." Serena began. I snorted, chuckling at the memory. "But...oh my God I love you so much. You believe in me all the time, even when I don't believe in myself. You love so much, and you never ask for anything in return. I'm proud to call you mine, Jon. I vow to always come back to you, to support you, to keep you in check, and to be *yours*, in every sense of the word. I love you, and I can't wait for all the adventures we'll have together."

By the time she finished, I had to blink a hundred times to stop the tears. Goddess, I can't be crying at my own wedding. I'm the *groom*!

"Serena, before I met you, my life was so dull. I mean, you probably already knew that but I think I needed to say it. You bring sunshine to my life. You're so easy to love, and I'm so...honored...to have the privilege to love you and be loved by you. I know life with me can be challenging, but you live it so easily that I can't help but think that you've always belonged with me. I love you, my light."

Serena began to sob, sniffling and bawling her eyes out. I took out a handkerchief and gave it to her. The judge looked at us, amused, before clearing his throat.

"Do you, Serena Basco, take Jonathon Lancaster to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, so long as you both shall live?"

"I do." Serena beamed, wiping her tears.

"Do you, Jonathon Lancaster, take Serena Basco to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, so long as you both shall live?"

"I do." The only two words I knew to be true in my life.

"Then by the power vested in me by the City of Mallory in Tarrowton, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride."

Impatiently, I pulled Serena to me and wrapped my arms around her, kissing her deeply. She responded favorably, snaking her arms around my neck and grinning into the kiss. We signed the marriage license, put on the rings that I bought a few days prior, and the judge had the certificate printed for us. He was even kind enough to take a picture.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster, congratulations." The judge said, shaking our hands. We thanked the him and waved as he left. I scooped Serena into my arms and carried her, making her giggle. People stared as we grinned goofily at each other, but we didn't care. Moments later, I was driving towards the charming inn I had booked for us.

"I can't believe you planned all of this! The wedding, the inn? Jon!" Serena sighed dreamily.

"Well, I figured we only have one wedding night." I winked. Serena laughed. There was silence for a while, but suddenly, she perked up.

"You know what, let's do something cool." Serena grinned, bouncing up and down her seat. "Let's pretend there's no war."

I scoffed, but Serena grinned excitedly.

"Let's pretend there's no war, that we're just two humans. We just eloped because...umm...our parents didn't approve or something. So went to this town to get hitched and no one knows." Serena smiled.

"Huh...alright, why not?" I shrugged. Serena kissed my cheek.

I pulled into the inn and parked the car. "Remember, we're humans and this is our wedding night."

We grabbed our bags and after I checked us in made our way to our room. I carried Serena into the room, as tradition dictated.

"I love you, Mr. Lancaster. I'm so glad I made the decision to meet you under a tree at midnight so we could run away and elope." Serena giggled, her imagination running wild and a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"And I love you, Mrs. Lancaster. Don't worry, I'm sure our parents will come around." I teased, giving her a kiss on the forehead.

I wasn't going into this war a King, I was going into this war a *husband*, and somehow, that meant I had something bigger to fight for. I was fighting for my family, for my future, and for my *wife*.

I am fighting for my *light*.

A/N
Next chapter is the final one. Here's to an amazing ride, folks!

How are you all feeling? Any thoughts on the chapter? How was the Jon-Patrick dynamic on this one? Did you like the surprise wedding?

Much love!

Continue to next part