

Chapter 9

Jonathon Lancaster

Reckless.

It was word o en attributed to my younger brother. It was never a word that described me.

Until tonight.

I meant it when I said I had no intention of taking a mate before the war was done, but since meeting Serena Basco, The Gold Ranked female, I felt something inside me shi . She was no ordinary she-wolf.

Not because she was practically one of a kind as a female with a golden bracelet, but because she seemed to hold some sort of ferocity—she looked untouchable. Without realizing it, I observed how she went around the pack. Everyone seemed to treat her with some sort of reverence and respect, even if they did not know it.

Her father had mentioned that she was not much for pack life, opting to indulge the more human side of our nature, but I couldn't help but disagree. When that bastard Alpha Theodore defeated all the other claimants to her hand, she looked so ready to fight.

She looked like a warrior.

With her bright red hair, freckled face, and curvy frame, I could not deny she was beautiful—a bit on the short side but beautiful nonetheless. And when she stepped forward to challenge Alpha Theodore, I could swear I was looking at the Goddess herself.

My stomach immediately twisted. I just knew that if this magnificent she-wolf were mated to Alpha Theodore, it would be such a waste of her potential. She did not belong in some secluded pack in the West.

She belonged with the Gods.

My instinct took over and for the first time in my life, I pushed reason to the side and opted to embrace the animal inside of me. I did not think twice about killing Alpha Theodore.

Marking her twice was my absolute honor. I knew marking was supposed to be private and intimate, but with my adrenaline pumping and my wolf way too close to the surface, I couldn't resist.

She might give me hell for it later, females were sensitive about these matters, and I'd take any punishment she'd throw at me. Goddess knows I deserve it.

But now that my wolf was buried down again by reason and rationalization, I began to think about the consequences to my actions. I just killed an Alpha from a strong pack. I'd need to face the tribunal for that; there would be no excuses. Fights in The Claiming Pit were never meant to be to the death.

Most importantly, I just marked a female who had no interest whatsoever in becoming my mate. This was a girl who was ready to fight an Alpha for her independence. I forced some unknowing woman into a life with me, a man she knew absolutely nothing about. This poor girl would now be subjected to the scrutiny of the royal court, the pain of having a warrior for a mate, and the pressures of being a crown princess.

My instincts told me I could not have made a better choice. The human side of me was disgusted with my actions.

Selfishness.

My parents drilled me to never be selfish, to think of other before myself. I'm sorry to have disappointed them, but I was selfish towards a woman who, by duty, I should always strive to protect.

War is my destiny.

But her destiny? Is it to watch as I subjected myself to the pain of the battlefield?

There was no turning back now. I had marked Serena, twice if it still isn't clear to anyone with eyes. I, a man who knew nothing of romance or courting, was now a mate. For the first time, none of the books I've read and the strategies I've studied could help me with this problem.

War is not a woman, and a woman is not war.

Wolves mate for life. I had just tied her life to mine. War is her life now too.

I stepped into the Alpha's o ice as the commotion outside continued to grow. My friend and adviser, General Hassan, was somewhere else—dealing with the mess I le, I suppose. I dressed myself with the clothes inside my bags. Grabbing my phone from the desk, I called on my parents.

My father answered a er one ring.

"Son, what did you do?"

It was a tone my father rarely used on me but always used on my younger brother. His voice betrayed fear, and anxiousness.

"I claimed a mate." I calmly said. "Serena Basco, daughter of Alpha Santino Basco."

"You killed an Alpha." My father hissed. "Your mother is worried sick. Your brother is o asking if you're dead.Come home at once!"

"In a while. My mate is packing her things." I stated. My father drew a sharp breath.

"You claimed a mate, we know nothing of her! Your choice of mate should have been approved by—" I growled, feeling the instinctive need to defend my mate. It was a feeling I wasn't familiar with.

"Approve? You would not approve of the onlyeligible Gold Ranked female in existence? I hissed at the phone. My father grew silent. I could hear him muttering to someone, presumably my mother.

"I want both of you in the palace by sunrise." My father curtly said, putting down the phone on his side. I sighed and slumped into a chair.

Disappointing my father was not something I did o en.

Just then, the Alpha opened the door and entered. I stood up and look at him square in the eyes. This man was now my father-in-law.

"Alpha Santino." I greeted.

"Well, if it isn't my son in law." He grimly said, sitting down behind his desk. I inwardly groaned and sat in front of him.

"I've already called my parents, they've been informed of the situation." I said. Alpha Santino nodded.

"The Claiming will be postponed until tomorrow. I have a meeting with the Beta of Alpha Theodore's pack later tonight. There will be a fallout from his death, Prince Jonathon." Alpha Santino said. I nodded understandingly.

"My adviser will be staying behind to represent me. Your daughter and I have been summoned—we need to be in court by the morning." I stated. Alpha Santino growled.

"Why did you claim my daughter? Because of her rank?" He demanded. I was taken aback. I did not reply, for even I didn't know the answer.

"Yes, you've built some idea about her due to her rank, haven't you? I will tell you this, Prince Jonathon, if you expect my daughter to fight your war, you'll have another thing coming at you." Alpha Santino said through gritted teeth.

I stood up and growled, the thought of my new mate in harm causing my blood to boil.

"No harm will come to Serena. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go fetch my mate. I'll see you during her coronation." I retorted. I stood up and exited his o ice.

Taking a deep breath, I followed her citrusy lemon scent upstairs. I looked inside her room to see her sitting on her bed fumbling with a scarf. Her friends were packing her bags. My eyes flashed when I saw a male putting some books into a bag.

I growled. They all stood up and gave awkward bows.

I glared at the male. He seemed to get the message because he quickly scurried out.

"We better go, we'll bring your stu down." Serena's blonde friend muttered. They took her bags and rushed out.

Silence followed. I watched as she took a deep breath and looked down the floor. I flinched when I saw her tear-stained cheeks.

You selfish bastard.

"How...how are you...holding up?" I awkwardly asked. She glanced up and looked at me curiously. She put a shaking hand above the two marks I gave her.

"...it hurts...a bit..." Serena said, her voice shaking slightly. I walked towards her and she grimaced. Seeing her reaction, I stopped and just sat down on a chair near her desk.

"I apologize." I gru ly said. Serena took a deep breath and nodded.

"I don't understand." Serena helplessly said, and I clenched my fists as I saw that tears were again threatening to spill down her eyes. Gathering my courage, I walked over and sat down next to her. I put my arm around her, forgetting how awkward everything seemed between us.

She instinctively leaned into my hold.

"The King and Queen are expecting us in the morning." I said, clearing my throat. She immediately sat back up. I cursed myself—that wasn't how I was supposed to talk to a girl who was about to cry.

"Oh...okay..." She said, her voice shaking.

"How...how are you...feeling?" I asked. That was how males comforted their mates, right?

"I'm...still in shock. At least, that's what my friend said." She murmured. I nodded understandingly.

"Please tell me if you need...anything, alright?" I asked, meaning every word. I had a mate now, and mates were supposed to be cared for. It was my duty to care for her.

"Okay." She replied. Silence followed.

"We have to leave soon. Anything you haven't been able to pack, your father could send them over. I'll meet you downstairs in five minutes?" I asked, unsure if five minutes was enough. If she needed more time, I could at least give her that.

"That's fine." She said. I resigned myself to the fact that she wasn't going to be too chatty for a while.

I leaned in and gave her forehead a kiss, feeling awkward as I did it. She blushed—oh Goddess, it's awkward for her too. I had zero experience with courting females, which was my younger brother's forte. I had no idea how to be smooth or a ectionate, but I knew I was required to learn now that I had a mate.

I took a few steps backward before looking at her one last time, exiting as quickly as I could.

I went downstairs and looked outside the window. Everyone was still outside, probably gossiping about the whole debacle. My mate's bags were propped up on top of a chair. I could see her friends hovering near it, their heads bunched together and their conversation hushed.

A few moments later, Serena walked down. She had changed into a brown wool pullover, black jeans and ankle boots. Her gold bracelet glistened under the light.

I saw her friends perk up and rush to her side, helping her walk downstairs. One by one, they gave her big embraces. I resisted the urge to growl when the males hugged her, but they were her friends and I could not take her last few moments with them from her. I just stood there awkwardly waiting.

I looked at my phone, seeing that my adviser texted me that he was currently in a meeting with the Beta of Alpha Theodore's pack. He would be staying for two more days to sort everything out.

From the corner of my eye, I could see my mate's father beckon her to his o ice. She hesitated before following him.

One of the males cleared his throat and I turned to face him. He bowed in submission.

"Where can we put her bags?" The one with blonde, curly hair asked.

"The Rover running outside." I curtly said. They gathered her bags and exited the pack house.

I waited for a few minutes before Serena and her father exited his o ice. Serena looked miserable, and I felt my hackles rise—did her father say something to upset her? She looked up at me and took a deep breath, walking over to me.

"I'm ready." She gently said, hitching her brown handbag on her shoulder. I nodded curtly at Alpha Santino, who only nodded back.

Without hesitation, I took my mate's hand, feeling muted sparks where we touched. I pulled her gently towards the door of the pack house. The cold air blew gently on our faces when the door closed behind us.

Looking at Serena, I saw her look wistfully behind her. I began to feel another pang of guilt. I was taking her away from her whole life—a life she gave no indication of not liking.

But I had been selfish, and she now had to pay for the consequences. I could only hope that one day, she would forgive me.