

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 2

“Elian!”

I winced at my mother’s scolding tone. Even when I was set to take over the kingdom from my father in a few months, that tone still made me relive my most mischievous childhood days that had earned me some serious scolding and wh!pping from the king and queen of Xatis.

“Elian!” She called again and I contemplated on pretending to be asleep, but knowing my mother, whatever it was she was mad about would only worsen her temper if I so much as tried to ignore her.

“Elian!”

“Mother?” Seeing her domineering form appear in the doorway, I sat up in my monstrous bed and faked a smile. I didn’t have to fake it, but I had the worst pounding in my head and I really hoped her scolding wouldn’t go on longer than necessary. “I would say good morning, but seeing the absence of your lovely smile, I’m guessing it would not be appropriate?”

“Do not get smart with me, young prince.” She sneered before holding up a pile of clothes that resembled mine, except for the filth they were covered in. “What is the meaning of this?”

Effects of regret, sorrow mixed with cheap wine. “I slipped and fell. Last night’s downpour was a hell of a monster.” It did rain, heavily, but even she wasn’t so gullible as to believe my terrible lie. My garments were indeed filthy, but not from having fallen on the muddy ground.

“They wreak of cheap wine and...oh dear god!” She let out an exasperated sigh before dropping the pile on my bedroom’s floor.

Cheap wine and se.x? I almost laughed at my mother’s modesty except I was hit with memories of my own escapades last night. I could not remember her face or her name, not even how she smelled, except for how she made me feel once I broke through the barrier of her innocence. It wasn’t the first time I’d had one of those, but something about her, how she’d felt perfectly wrapped around me, how she’d moved once the pain of losing her innocence was over. It had made me wish she was the one. My mate, whom I had spent eternity searching for. Or perhaps it was just the wine that had been talking

last night. Because she was nothing. Just another of those many poor maidens looking to make some money to better their simple lives.

She had made more than enough with me. As drunk as I was I made certain to pay my dues, handsomely if I might add. I proudly stared at the empty spot on my fingers where the said payment had previously sat.

What the hell! I stiffened, as the pounding in my head intensified. My eyes had fallen on the wrong empty spot or I had given away the wrong ring!

“Wipe that stupid grin off of your face. I’m embarrassed enough as it is already.” My mother must have not noticed the change in my mood and I used the opportunity to compose myself. This was a disaster. Whatever had possessed me to carry around the most precious heirloom of our kingdom.

“You will be expected to present yourself in front of the king before breakfast.” I stiffened even further, forcing my mother to come closer.

“Elian,” she said in her most gentle voice that made me want to curl in her laps like a little boy. “We have discussed this already and your father has finally agreed to your request. Please do not anger him any further.”

It was not that I intended to anger the king. I and my father simply held different views over who I wedded. The old man was too impatient to get me to sit on the throne and was willing to marry me off to the first she wolf he saw, while I preferred that she wolf to be the one the moon goddess had gifted me. But after searching for so long with no luck, I could not blame him if he decided to line a few of those she wolves and force me to pick one. I had stalled long enough.

“I have no such intentions mother.” I mumbled.

“Great! I suppose you’ll hear all about it when you meet with him.”

“Of course, mother.” I gave her a kiss and walked her to the door. “See you at breakfast.” Once the door closed I headed straight to my wardrobe and had a change of clothes as I formulated my schedule for the day. Only one thing mattered. I needed to retrieve that ring at all costs.

“We need to leave for the forgotten village once breakfast is done.” I said as I walked past Rakon.

“His Majesty will be pleased at the news. I, however, I’m surprised at your eagerness, your highness.” My best friend since childhood and now the head of the prince’s guard flashed me a mischievous grin. “Was she that good?”

“It’s not what you think. I lost something.” I lifted my hand and pointed to the empty spot on one of my fingers and his eyes widened.

“Where you robbed?” Instinctively he reached for the hilt of his sword. “I knew I should have escorted you.”

“I wish I had.” I sighed.

“I do not understand.”

“I mistakenly paid for you know...” I cleared my throat before looking around for curious faces. I couldn’t risk my father getting wind of this. Not yet anyway.

Realization registered on Rakon’s face. “I’ll get the carriage.”

“No need. We’ll run.”

“As important as this is, you still need to do the other thing too. Can’t go looking for a bride in your wolf form, now can you?” Trust my best friend to think of everything. By the time Rakon disappeared from my presence, my father was singing his good morning greeting.

“I slept just fine, father.” I bowed before the king I was meant to replace not too long from now. His mere presence was enough for me to doubt if I would ever fill his shoes. My mother was seated right beside him on the huge dining table looking more composed than the woman who almost threw a fit in my room earlier.

“I hear you have every intention to go into the forgotten village today.” Father got to the point, thankfully. Not the point I wished to discuss but it was better than being plunged into the politics surrounding Xatis that would result in a long lecture about being a good king.

“I do.” I nodded, wondering what else he’d heard.

“I know that this is just your tactic to delay the inevitable, but I’m a fair and just king. I’ll let you have your way, but if at the end of today you still fail to find your bride, one will be chosen for you.”

“But—”

“No buts! Tonight we shall celebrate your engagement. So either return with a bride or one will be waiting for you once you return.”

“Tonight? That is not exactly enough time for me to—”

“You’ve had eternity boy and now my patience has run out! Tonight.”

Father dismissed me before I could register anymore protests. This was my fault anyway. I did not believe one bit that my mate could be found in the forgotten village. There was a reason it was named the ‘forgotten village’, but anything to keep me from being wedded to one of those snobbish highborns who had been happy each time a search for my mate turned out empty.

I met up with Rakon just as he finished giving out instructions to the little band of soldiers I assumed would be acting as my escort for the day.

“Ready?”

“Think you can keep up?” I rolled my eyes as I headed into the forest that surrounded the castle. “I’d worry about you if I were you” I spoke into my mindlink, earning myself a snort from Rakon. We had both shifted and were headed in the direction my sorrow had led me last night.

The inn looked run down, now that I was in my right frame of mind and as we walked up to the entrance, a man I assumed to be the inn keeper came out to greet us.

“It’s good to have you back so soon, your highness. I presume our services were somewhat satisfying?” I hoped no one recognized me last night, but looking at the pleased expression on the man’s face I knew it was wishful thinking on my part.

“His highness is looking for a maiden.” Rakon stepped in between me and the keeper forcing him to maintain an acceptable distance.

Pleased, the man nodded and ushered us inside. After a few minutes of waiting, a line of maidens flowed out of a familiar passage, each one’s eyes widening at the sight of me.

"Which one of you was I with last night?" I scrutinized each face as everyone got thoughtful for a moment.

"That would be me, your highness." One of the girls suddenly exclaimed and I craned my neck to look at her. She was not the one. As drunk as I was last night, I remembered how nervous the maiden had been and this one was oozing of experience.

"No, It was me."

"You liar! It was actually me, your highness." This thin thing shamelessly flashed me a seductive smile. "You did say you had a nice time. Are you perhaps back for more?" I rubbed my temple in frustration, realizing all I had here were a bunch of liars hoping to get in bed with me and receive a hefty reward.

"Girls! Do not embarrass yourselves. His highness can clearly see through all your lies." A beautiful blonde walked up to the little assembly, her body swaying in a sexy manner meant to entice its audience. I, however, had my mind on more important matters. "If his highness has an itch he wishes to scratch perhaps picking someone who knows how its done right is what he should be looking for."

"I know damn well what I'm looking for!" I growled as I squeezed the maiden's hand that had dared to touch me. My wolf loathed the action too. "You are not it. And next time you dare place your filthy hand on a royal, one hand is all you'll have to please your customers with." The maiden yelped and jumped back, fear replacing that hint of seduction that had clouded her eyes.

"Forgive her your highness. She meant you no harm. Perhaps if you told this servant of yours what it is you seek, perhaps I and the maidens might know which direction to point you to." I was not about to do any of that.

"Are these all of them?"

"Yes, your highness. If you seek another, perhaps she was simply a customer looking for a good time." Now that the man mentioned it, I remembered that the person I was with last night had not asked for a payment. If anything they were more eager to get out than asking for a bag of gold. I had slipped the ring in her dress without her even knowing. Damn!

Realizing this would yield nothing, I marched out of the inn. Rakon was hot on my heels, talking about letting him at the innkeeper to find out what else he knew.

“The person we are looking for might not even be aware that they possess the ring.” I kicked the dirt in front of me in frustration.

“How so?”

“Unless they have a habit of searching the crevices of their dress for things they did not put there, they won’t know until they do. And that leaves me with only one choice. Confess to father of what I have done and suffer the consequences while I wait until that person tries to exchange the ring for actual gold.”

“Or you could report it stolen and offer a reward for anyone who returns it.”

“I could never throw an innocent person in the dungeons.”

“Well they are not exactly innocent if they are willingly giving themselves to strangers. Besides, you and I know it will be the quickest way to retrieve it.”

“Not quick enough.” I sighed, my mind going to my father’s ultimatum. The sun was already high up in the sky, reminding me of how much little time I had left before my engagement. “Perhaps I should head back and get ready for the inevitable.” I started for the castle, when I and my wolf suddenly got curious. The strangest of feelings had me desiring heading in the opposite direction. A sadness that was not my own. “Do you feel that?” I turned before I could get an answer from Rakon and before long I was in a sprint.

“Your highness! Elian, damn it!” Rakon cursed after me, but I didn’t care. I was too focussed on the pull that was getting stronger with each step I took.

“Let it be her.” I thought as that feeling brought me to a tiny house perfectly hidden among the trees. Then the scent hit me so hard I howled in jubilation. I did not care who heard me. I had finally found her...my mate. The sugary scent was perfect for me and I couldn’t wait to taste it. To taste her.

Two figures appeared in the doorway and my wolf screamed the one word I had longed to say for the longest time. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. Apparently, everyone’s description of their mates was true. I took a step forward with every intention to have that beauty fill my arms. To

get a feel of her body against mine. The mere thought had me instantly on fire, ready to warm my mate in ways only I could.

“Your highness! To what do we owe this honor of you visiting our humble home?” The one I did not care for stepped forward while my mate stood rooted on her spot. It stung to note that fact. Did she not see me or sense me at all? “Perhaps she has not shifted yet” I resolved. That had to be it. I hoped it was until-

Anger rolled off me in waves when I noticed why my mate had not moved an inch. She had been crying and I realized it was her sadness that had led me here. Desiring to comfort, I dashed to her side and took her hand. Sparks erupted and it took everything in me to keep from giving into my urges right in that doorway. “Who hurt you?” I growled, but my mate simply snapped her eyes at me before jumping back. It was as if my touch burned her. My wolf whimpered. Something was wrong. “I promise I won’t hurt you.” I stepped towards her, but she stepped back.

“You have to forgive my sister, your highness. She’s had a rough night.” Anger flickered in my mate’s eyes and I swear it was the most seductive sight. I could spend days gazing into that show of power by one of the most delicate parts of her.

Focus. I snapped back to the present. So they were sisters. And since my mate seemed reluctant to talk I turned to her sister to get what the hell was going on. “She’s still stuck in a fit of regret.”

“Regret?” I stared at my mate, wondering what such a beautiful creature had to regret about.

“She just lost her innocence last night in a less than glamorous way.” Had she been forced? I instantly got ready to track down the culprit. I would rip his throat out for touching her. “I guess she had thought it would be sweeter than the painful ordeal she just went through.” Her sister shrugged her shoulders and I felt my world shattering. She hadn’t been forced. She had actually wanted it?

Suddenly all those rules and declarations that had governed Xatis came to bite me. Mate or not, there was no way father would accept her. I couldn’t sit on the throne if I chose her. I had no doubt some distant cousin would be offered the one thing I had been trained for since I was born. I couldn’t have that. I hoped these were just lies.

“Do you know what the punishment for lies is?!” I turned away from my mate and glared at her sister. She had to be wrong. I hoped to the gods that whatever I was hearing was not true. I couldn’t lose her, not when I had just found her.

“If his highness does not believe me, then do inquire yourself.”

I did not need to. The guilt was oh so clear in her eyes and I had merely been grasping at straws, hoping it was not true. My legs almost buckled from under me.

I had known pain in my life, but none of that compared to what I felt when I looked at my mate. She’d betrayed me...us. She took away my chance at happiness. I did this for her. Waited for eternity so I could wed her and together we’d have the strongest heirs Xatis had ever had.

“Inform my father that there will be an engagement tonight.” I turned to my best friend who had finally caught up with me. I ignored his bewildered look, that spoke volumes of what he wished to say.

“But your highness!” My mate’s sister was quick to protest, while my mate refused to even spare me a glance. She was not going to fight for me. I was not important to her.

Wounded by the thought, I reached for her sister’s hand instead, determined to return the favour.

“What is this your highness?” Her sister gasped, but I knew she was merely being dramatic. I knew her type. Innocent on the outside while treachery filled every bone in their body. She was not someone I would ever consider a potential bride, but if there was something I knew about sibling rivalry, it was that everyone had potential to hate their own flesh and blood if they happened to grab something that belonged to them. Or so I hoped when I uttered my next words.

“I, Prince Elian, future king of Xatis do hereby reject you...” I trailed off when I realized that I did not even know her name. Fate had not given me an opportunity to even know her name.

“Shyla, your highness,” her sister mumbled, snapping me out my thoughts. “She’s Shyla and I am Myrna.” She curtsied and smiled awkwardly at me, but I acknowledged neither.



"I do hereby reject you Shyla, as my mate and future queen. As for you Myrna, I choose you today as my chosen mate, future queen and the mother to my heirs. Do you accept?" My eyes stayed on my mate but except for the clenching of her fists, she still refused to look my way, shattering my heart even more.

"Oh your highness! Of course I—"

"I Shyla..." She finally spoke, cutting her overly excited sister off and it was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. It's comforting tone dripped right into the crevices of my wounded heart and for a moment I could breathe easily. But then it suddenly squeezed, bringing me the worst pain when I realized she was about to accept my rejection.

"Do you possess anything of value you would wish to bring to the palace? If not, my lady, then shall we?" I would not let my mate accept my rejection, so I ignored her presence altogether and instead offered my hand to her sister. She would not be rid of me so easily. But I on the other hand would, in the most painful way.

"Just my parents, your highness."