

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 41 - Tips

I was beginning to get a headache, but whoever was demanding for my attention would have to wait still. As long as I remained in my bed chambers, basking in the reality of my mate laying peacefully in my bed, my mind link would remain shut. And with all the heaviness that surrounded the invisible link, I knew someone or a host of them had been trying to force me to answer their calls. But as long as Xatis was not burning, I considered every other reason less important compared to being with my mate...at least for the next few moments.

I knew I had Rakon to thank too. For holding down the fort and having no one finding themselves at my door, banging and demanding to be let in. I just hoped that the ordeal had not sucked away the entirety of his patience and charm, otherwise I would be faced with a very grumpy head of my guard which in turn would not favour me at all or those who'd been seeking my attention. Because without Rakon to make me see reason if anyone got unreasonable, not even this immense peace I felt at the moment would be able to save them.

"Perhaps you should bring her along too." My gaze fell on my mate at my mind's suggestion. And while I should have thought it ludicrous, I found myself considering it...seriously. I'd never considered anything of the sort with Myrna. If I was being honest, apart from the moments I got intimate with my chosen mate just to father my heir, I preferred her far away from me as possible.

Shyla was a different story however. And not for the fact that I was reluctant about being away from her, but because there was just something that felt right and appealing about having her by my side in those endless council deliberations. While I attended to all those matters that plagued Xatis and listened to individuals that were less than desirable to listen to.

Shyla would keep me calm no doubt, for the fact that she was my mate, but I possessed a certain curiosity as to how she'd react to important matters to do with Xatis. Would she welcome being by side in such a manner? I found myself hoping she would. And if Liira's fascination with my mate spoke of anything, it was that she would not be the type of queen meant to just have tea and conversation in a pretty garden while she looked pretty herself. The battle in Dovah proved that, making my mind's suggestion even that much more appealing.

But then, she'd only just accepted me. I couldn't burden her with such responsibilities just yet. Especially when I hadn't made her queen yet.

I had turned the idea in my mind for a while now. Before she accepted my proposal, the idea becoming a reality was far fetched then, but now, I could almost taste it. I just needed a plan of execution of which I'd need Liira's years and year's worth of kingdom politics to make it happen. I made a note to see grandmother later over it and maybe she would share the discoveries she made about my mate last night too. I hoped none of those put my mate in a dire situation in any way.

"Perhaps if she were awake I would consider it." I gazed, amused at the sight of my mate.

The morning sun was all the way up in the sky and yet I still waited for those very beautiful eyes to grace me with their enchanting gaze. Shyla still remained asleep, albeit peacefully. I did not know whether to attribute that to the fact that it had everything to do with being in my bed or just the plain fact that her body had taken on too much and it needed more rest than usual.

A smile danced on my lips and a warmth spread in my heart at the memory of her shattering in my hands. I probably felt an inch taller too.

And whatever the reason, I was not complaining at the moment as the sight of her would serve as inspiration for the little note I was about to pen to her. One I hoped she'd wake up to in the absence of my presence. I did not wish for her to wonder of my whereabouts, or to think I regretted our intimate moment and bolted before she awoke. So I'd decided to leave a note to that effect.

I meant to make it short and sweet, but I was feeling very poetic. Or perhaps it was because I knew how much she'd enjoyed my little invitation that I wished to pen more words than I had settled for when I invited her to dinner.

I reached for a new bundle of parchment paper I had delivered from the capital. The merchant assigned to supply it had done an excellent job at selecting the simplest yet exquisite paper that I knew would appeal to my mate if not my own words. I smiled at the thought of how she might stack them in a private place to read them over and over just as Astryn had narrated to Rakon my mate had done. The maid had innocently narrated the story out of fascination, but unknown to her I got wind of it and now I had every intention of surprising Shyla with as many of these as I could pen. The sneaky idea left me feeling giddy too and was glad I was still behind closed doors. As

the sight of the king of Xatis with an endless stupid smile pasted on his lips would not just do out of the confines of my bed chambers.

Satisfied with myself after the little deed and after a chaste kiss for goodbye on my mate's temple, I schooled my facial features before slipping out of the room. I expected to encounter a fuming Rakon but was instead faced with a frowning outlaw. His eyes went beyond me and to the door I'd just closed.

"She lives." I mumbled when he looked at me askance. "Only she's still sleeping." I kept the fluttering of my belly at the thought of why to myself as the man relaxed only a fraction, a hint of unbelief in his eyes. "See to it that she's not disturbed." My command was met with a scowl.

"She's my concern so I do not need you telling me what to do." I could live with that so I made no point to argue. Apart from Rakon, he was probably one more person I trusted to keep Shyla safe. Despite my dislike for their relationship, I had no doubt he would lay down his life for her if it came down to it. Why that was, I was yet to discover.

"Your majesty." My own guards straightened when I stepped away from the door.

"Rakon?" I inquired as I acknowledged the greeting.

"My lord was summoned by former queen Sarabeth, your mother." The guard bowed while I frowned.

"And what is it my mother required of him?"

"I do not know, your majesty. Although lord Rakon did say to inform you of his whereabouts once you had awakened since he could not get through to you and neither could her highness."

Hearing that my mother was among those searching for me, I took down the barrier I had put up. But instead of linking my hand to her, I opted for my best friend just so I could get a hint of what the hell was going on before I walked into a regrettable situation. "Do you favour serving my mother more than your own king now?"

"About damn time!" Rakon's reply was immediate and filled with relief. I was glad to note that there was no grumpiness in his tone too, despite my actions.

“What are you, my wife?” I eased into the conversation as I normally would between us.

“I would choose anything right now, except the bastard who’s keeping the king hidden.”

I let out a chuckle at the exasperation in my best friend’s tone. “And who has accused of you of such a crime?”

“You better get here.” Seriousness crept into his voice and I knew the matter could not be ignored.

“And where exactly is here?”

“Your mother’s private garden.”

I frowned at Rakon’s answer. “Isn’t mother supposed to be entertaining the noble ladies right about now?” I knew this to be true because it was a long standing tradition for the wives of the most influential men of Xatis to meet in such a manner the morning after a dinner as I had held last night to speak of anything that might have arisen during the meal. Which I seemed to have forgotten was overwhelming after my proposal. A glance at a palace window I’d just passed agreed with my assumption that the timing was just about right. “Why the hell would you be stuck in the midst of a bunch of those? Why would they let you stay at all?” The whole function spelled of secrecy among the noble ladies and having Rakon in their midst was more than odd.

“Apparently she’s doing more than entertaining and you happen to be the centre of attention. Well, your queen too.”

“Myrna?” I had always dismissed the entire thing as nothing more than a moment chosen by the noble ladies to gossip, but knowing Myrna was there too had me heading to my parent’s wing of the palace in haste before whatever this was, got out of hand.

The moment I stepped into my mother’s private garden, a weight rammed into me and I was instantly washed by the scent of that bitter plant...Draxuin. I hated how I was hit with a desire to lean in and inhale some more. Thankfully I regained my senses just as quickly.

“What is the meaning of this, mother? Annoyed by my queen’s reception, I couldn’t help but growl while I pulled away from Myrna, determined to keep her away from me.

My mother only stared, her lips at a loss for words. A glance around the space revealed varied expressions. Mostly judgemental ones. And if I wasn’t keen on getting an explanation to what was going on, I would have dished out punishments at the noble lot who at the moment thought themselves worthy to judge their king.

“You’ve been with her?” Myrna did not give me a moment’s rest before she accused.

Not that I had any intentions of hiding the fact, I just did not appreciate her demanding tone and so I hissed. “And since when was I answerable to the queen?” I would be to Shyla. I realized that I did not mind that at all.

Rakon stepped up. “Perhaps we should all sit down before this gets out of hand.”

“This?!” Anger raged as my eyes darted between my best friend, my mother and chosen mate. And only that second look made me see what I had not seen before. “What happened to you?” Utter surprise overshadowed my anger. This would make it the first time I had ever seen my queen not so put together. I doubted she’d taken an effort at all. She was as someone mad with her hair out of sorts. Her face covered in the dried remnants of what I knew to be tears and she was still clad in her night gown that could have easily passed for tatters. I was beginning to realize that something was wrong.

“If only you’d answered when I called, this could have been avoided.” My mother finally found her voice and scolded in our mind link.

“I do not understand. Am I being blamed for something here?”

Mother sighed. “Apparently whatever you did or did not do with your uh...mate seems to have plunged your dear wife in immense pain while you were at it.” When I only frowned at her, my mother blushed before speaking again. “I know not if this is true, but she claims the mark she’d oh so lovingly placed on you is to blame.”

“Her what?” My gaze shifted to Myrna. And while I wished to dismiss my mother’s words as nothing but my wife’s antics to get her way, my chosen

mate's sadness hit me without warning, making me realize that her claims had to have some truth to it and that I had still underestimated the power of Myrna's spell despite the warning from Cerus. Her and me both apparently. If the misery that now clouded her eyes was anything to go by.

## **The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 42 - Tips**

I had waited for a moment after the bedroom doors to the king's chambers had been shut. Just long enough to ensure that my mate was truly gone and would not be returning, claiming to have forgotten something or anything of the sort. And only when I was sure of it did I open my eyes.

Thanks to years of perfecting faking deep slumber when I wished not to be woken too early by anyone, I was able to convince him that I had truly been sleeping while he watched and waited. Until he gave up.

I was as a thief, scheming as I sought to avoid him completely. One would even call me ungrateful for attempting this after how he'd taken care of me. But while I had relished being wrapped up in his arms, being taken care of by him, I wasn't quite ready to face him yet. Not after what had gone on on his bed in the wee hours of the morning.

I blushed at the mere thought while my hands grabbed a fistful of the silky bed linen. Even when I was alone, I did, because why wouldn't I when the whole incidence was just as scandalous even in my mind and still too fresh too.

I bit back a moan even as visions I had barely been able to keep away flooded in, bringing to remembrance every bit of my own reckless pursuits. Moments I had given in to be pleased by mate. Moments that were from out of this realm.

"Moments I shouldn't be relishing if I wish to find my way out of here and to my own chambers before he returns." The sensible part of me reasoned, making me abandon the bed. Landing on the carpeted floor, my feet relished the plush comfort below, reminding me of the times I hated and cursed waking up and stepping on the cold floor back in the forgotten village. "No time to think about that either." Right. I stood on my feet and scurried towards the doors, but a few steps later realized that I was dressed in nothing but my night gown. One I had no memory of slipping back on after... I clenched my legs together as if that would stop the swirl of need that assaulted my core at the mere thought that he'd had his hands on me. Long after I had crumbled under the intensity of being pleased and seen stars while at it. Had he stared? Or

perhaps touched me to his heart's content while I slept? Had I moaned and did he like it as much he'd had when I was awake? Had he...? I froze at the many improper questions that assaulted my mind, hands shy of glazing the part of the night gown that layered over my chest. I was a hot needy mess. Something I thought my shameless indulgence would have taken care of. But alas, here I was, ready to touch myself in the absence of his strong hands that I was certain were imbued with some kind of magic. Just because I'd never thought hands were capable of driving one insane in a manner they did me when he stroked and touched.

The doors opened soundlessly and I yelped when a figure slipped in unannounced.

"Oh, forgive me, my lady. I did not realize you were awake." A maid bowed as soon as she noticed me. "I would have knocked if I had."

Glad that it was not my mate and for not being caught in what would have been an embarrassing act, I simply waved her away. "It is alright and I was just leaving."

"Leaving? Will you not have a bath my lady?" Eyes wide, the maid's gaze darted between me and a door I assumed led to the bath before they fell on a tray that she carried. "A few drops of these and your bath will be ready."

"I...I will. Not just here." My gaze fell on the room looking for my garments in haste. "My gown, where is it?"

"It has been taken to be washed, my lady."

"What?!" I snapped. It was not my intention, but I realized that without my gown I was stuck here and he would find me. I couldn't have that.

"Forgive me, my lady, but had I known that you would be awake or had a prior engagement, I would have fetched your gowns from the seamstress before I came."

"Seamstress? Gowns? I have no need of those."

"His highness already placed an order for more gowns to be delivered to his chambers."

“He has? He expects me to stay? Here?” I blushed while the maid seemed at a loss for words. No doubt because to every one of my questions she had no satisfactory answer.

“I will send for your clothes at once, my lady.”

“No need.” I couldn’t risk him finding me. “I—I’ll just take this.” I grabbed his cloak and draped it over my shoulders as the maid’s eyes widened.

“He’ll surely have my head.” She lamented. “My lady, please reconsider and let me get you proper clothes at the very least.”

“If his highness asks, you will inform him that this is my decision and mine alone. That way you will suffer no consequences.” My words did nothing to ease the poor maiden’s discomfort and unfortunately for her, neither did I have time to ensure they did.

“What is this?” I reached out to pick up a neatly folded parchment paper that I had not noticed beside the pillow I had been resting on.

“My lady?”

“This? Would you know what it is?” Even as I asked my heart hammered in my chest. Something said I should be the one to know what was contained in that exquisite piece of paper.

The maid lost her look of horror and blushed instead. “His highness never leaves parchments lying around. If it was on the bed, perhaps it is meant for you. You should unfold it and see what it says.”

“Oh, I couldn’t.” I protested even when a part of me was curious. Very, very curious.

“What if it is something important? Something he might have wished to say but couldn’t since you were deep in sleep?”

The reminder that I had shared the bed with the king of Xatis at all had me slipping the note in the crevices of his garment and rushing for the doors. Perhaps I would read it...later. In the privacy of my own chambers. I ignored the impatient part of me that protested my decision. The one that had my belly fluttering and curiosity growing at whatever was contained in the little note.”



“But my lady—” I shut the door before the maid could say anymore.

“Are you alright?” Gol was by my side in a flash, making me yelp a second time today.

“Oh goodness, it’s just you.” I laid a hand on my chest as I inhaled while Gol studied my face and the oversized cloak covering my little frame.

“Are you by any chance running away from somethi—someone?”

“Of course not!” Gol only arched a brow at my reply that was more of a denial. “On second thought you and you and... you.” I pointed at a few guards. “Make sure I am not followed...or greeted... by anyone.” I pulled at Gol’s cloak and I breathed a sigh of relief when he did not fight me. “You are with me.”

“But my lady...” I stopped hastily, head swinging towards the guard who spoke.

“What is it?” I hoped he was not about to point out that I could not command them. Which would be true in essence. I was just the king’s mate. Nothing more.

“What if the said person is his majesty?”

My cheeks heated up at the mere mention of him and the poor guard seemed to notice this and he fought to keep his expression neutral. “Especially his majesty.” I croaked out before being on my way and before I got more protests. Or before the said king found his way back and decided that I was to be locked up in his chambers, never to see the light of day.

“He did not rouse any feelings in me to give him a beating when he walked out of the chambers this morning, so why then are you escaping? Was he less than a gentleman perhaps?”

My mind filled up with all the ways the king had not been a gentleman in the early hours of this morning, making me want to clench my legs as I walked. If only that would not have looked weird and invited questions from Gol and curious eyes from the palace staff.

And even when Gol had chosen to speak to me through his mind link, I still glanced all around me to ensure no one else heard that. “I am not escaping.” I

kept my eyes trained at his back and hoped he didn't choose to turn and study my face. He did.

"Uh huh." Skepticism coloured his face and I was glad it was that and not a smirk which would have coloured my face scarlet.

"I am no lady, but even I know never to speak of such intimate matters with my gua—uh shack mate."

"You can say it, you know?" Gol said after a long moment and I was about to protest thinking he meant me speaking of my escapades with my mate. "Being your guard gives me purpose, so never regard this as degrading for me."

I stopped and stared. So not what I was expecting. At the very least, I expected a few more moments of being taunted about my escape as he called it. "Somehow I doubt that." I scoffed, choosing to lighten the moment that was a perfect distraction from the burning reason I was bent on running. "I would think you spend nights cursing fate for taking away the privilege of pushing me around in the name of training."

His lips twitched, making him appear stranger than he did in the guard's uniform that I still had not gotten to seeing him in. "You only have that prince or princess to thank for a lack of that. I'm sure his majesty would gladly sanction lessons that ensure his mate's safety."

I shook my head at the thought that would definitely be my nightmare. Gol and my mate barking orders at me all day, everyday? "Perhaps we should just keep walking." The sight of familiar hallways made me relax an inch as I realized that we'd finally entered Liira's side of the castle. I was finally free and could breathe. I took in the different entrance we'd used. "I was not aware there was another entrance into this place." I spoke to no one in particular, but one of the guards took the liberty to answer me.

"My lady would need a grand tour of the palace to know of such." A hint of pride laced his voice. One I thought was well deserved. The royal palace was indeed magnificent and its inhabitant being proud was expected. "Perhaps his highness will give it to you soon."

"I'm sorry, give me what?" I struggled to keep the embarrassment away at the thought of the king giving me anything after what he'd given me earlier.

"The grand tour of course."

“Or perhaps Liira will.” If anyone noted my blush or reluctance at having their king do the honours, none let it be known.

“The matriarch is a good choice too.” The guard who’d suggested the tour nodded before falling into awkward silence.

I needed the privacy of my chambers before I made a fool of myself any longer. And when they came into view, I practically ran past Gol and slipped in without so much as a word.

“Well, about time you showed up.”

“Oh gods!” My heart leaped into my throat at the unexpected presence of someone in my chambers.

“Oh dear child, its just me.”

“Liira?” So not the privacy I had hoped for.

The matriarch stood to her feet. “I was beginning to think he was planning on having you the entire day and we’d get nothing else done.

“He wouldn’t—wasn’t—” Was he? I stumbled all over my words, trying to deny the obvious.

“Relax child. Do not look so scandalized as it is not my intention. Although...” I flinched, unsure of what to expect from Liira’s mouth that curved mischievously. “It is good for the child you carry.”

Embarrassment morphed into curiosity. “What is?”

“Intimacy between mates.”

“I-I-we didn’t.” Well he didn’t- while I...For all that was sacred, I prayed that my mate’s grandmother would not embarrass me any further.

“We are wolves dear child. No use in denying anything. If not for the lingering scent, your face says it all.”

I paled at Liira’s words as I realized that I just announced to pretty much everyone we’d encountered in the palace of my escapades with their king despite bragging to Gol that I had no intentions of doing such a thing. I should have really listened to the maid and taken that bath and change of garments.

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 43 - Tips

"There is really no need to make a fuss over the matter when all that is required is a simple solution to remedy it."

"I must say I do agree with you lord Hadwyn. His highness is surely not the first wolf to come across his moon goddess given mate after having chosen another."

"My lords, at least you must understand his highness' position—"

"That we do, lord Nevan. Is it not why all the five noble houses came in haste when the king summoned us?"

"That and the fear that if this matter is not resolved quickly the consequences might be dire for the whole of Xatis. I'm sure that no one here needs reminding of what the consequences for an unstable kingdom means not just for the royal house but for us all."

"What do you propose then?"

"Ah, lord Quent, I was beginning to think that the fourth noble house had enriched itself so much it did not care what happens to the rest of the kingdom."

"That perhaps might be the only thing that the third and fourth noble houses agree on, lord Evarius. We both know that there is no such thing as being too rich."

"Well, bless the gods that we at least agree on that much."

"Are we all in agreement then?"

Noise. That is what all this talk about my queen and mate by the five lords was and I'd had enough. Whatever gave them the impression that they had a right to interfere in my personal matters. In my choices.

My anger raged each time one of them opened his mouth to spew out words that only served to annoy me. And if they spoke so carelessly in my presence, I couldn't help wonder what kind of conversations they'd had in the confines of their homes when their beloved wives had obviously narrated what had transpired in my mother's garden.

It was no surprise that despite what their own ears had heard over dinner, Myrna had still played the chords of their wife's hearts and gained their sympathy by portraying herself as the one who'd been betrayed.

My wife's treachery or choosing between her and my mate however, was not why I had required the presence of the lords in the council chambers. Well, it was something to do with my mate, just not what they thought.

"As brilliant as all your words sound, my lords, I regret to inform you that that is not the reason you've been summoned today." Confused faces turned my way.

"My king, if not to speak of her majesty remaining as queen by your side, while her sister remains your concubine, then what else does his majesty require of us?"

Concubine? I hated the sound of the very word, even more so when it was meant to be attached to my mate. "Lord Hadwyn, perhaps if you had revered your king enough, those would have been your first words out of your mouths the moment I stepped inside the council chambers." I all but snapped.

"Forgive us, my king. It would appear we have been too ahead of ourselves." Evarius bowed, but it did nothing for my annoyance. "Perhaps, his highness can share his thoughts with the rest of us?"

I let out a chuckle at Evarius' words, but it was by no means out of amusement.

"Did I perhaps anger you, my king?"

At least the fool was wise enough to pick on my disapproval. "Careful lord Evarius. You make it sound as though I am incapable and are in need of you holding my hand even with my own thoughts."

"Forgive me, my king. That was not my intention."

"If his head is what you wish for today, count on me not to keep you from having it." Rakon mumbled in our mind link. But as tempting as it was, I couldn't deviate from the important reason I was here for. But before I could utter a word, the doors to the chambers opened and in walked Liira, surprising not only the council, but me as well.

“Grandmother, I was not expecting you.”

“Well, you did want me in the palace and I’m afraid there is little to entertain me around here.”

I knew that not to be true, but it was pointless to argue. Neither could I kick her out of the council chambers as she had every right to be here as a member of the royal family. And perhaps having her here would turn out to be a good thing after all.

I watched as she floated in while all the lords rose to their feet in panic.

“Well, there is a sight I haven’t relished in too long.” I most definitely agreed with my best friend. The utter discomfort on the lord’s faces at my grandmother’s presence was quite entertaining even to my annoyed self. While they enjoyed a certain freedom in my presence whenever I was calm, the lords of the most influential houses had simply never known what to do with Liira. To them, she was as the wind. One they could not determine from whence it came or went and as such never really quite knew how to handle her.

Someone put on a brave face and I watched in amusement. “Retirement has been good to you, my lady.”

“Are you calling me old, Hadwyn?” Liira stopped in front of lord Hadwyn, eyebrows raised as colour bloomed on the face of the lord of the first house.

“Of course not, my lady.” Despite his involuntary reaction, the lord reached for Liira’s hand and placed a chaste kiss there. “Age has certainly got nothing on you.”

“Well...” Liira scoffed at the obvious charm where she could at the very least have accepted the compliment. “What did I miss?” If lord Hadwyn was offended by her lack of respect, he did not show it. Neither did any of the lords voice their thoughts at having been ignored by the matriarch as she went to take a seat beside me.

“Liira.” I bowed to acknowledge her presence.

“Just get on with it as I’m excited to see how well my own grandson is able to make these perceived powerful men who are nothing but twerps tremble in

their own fancy boots.” She chirped in our mind link, making me stare at her disapprovingly.

“You are impossible.”

“And you love me regardless.” I resisted the urge to smile at that and turned to the lords.

“I was just about to inform the council that the banquet announcing the heir of Xatis will be held soon.”

“Oh, it’s about time Xatis knew of my great grandson.” Liira beamed.

“Is the queen finally with child, my king?” Lord Nevan asked excitedly while the rest of the council looked on, expectation written on their faces.

“My mate carries my heir.” My heart fluttered at the thought while it took everything to not get distracted by the hot memories of her that I had locked away for the moment.

“But my king, I thought you just said our words over the matter were brilliant. Will you now choose to present a bastard as—”

Temper flared and canines elongated as my wolf came forth ready to punish whoever had dared to insult my unborn child. Liira was quick to distract me however, as she gripped my hand.

“As entertaining as this might be, a lord murdered by his king at such a time as this will just not do.” When I didn’t relent, she added. “The fool will get his day, do not risk everything by indulging in what will turn out to be a regrettable deathly lesson for all of us especially the one I assume is the reason you are doing all this.”

Shyla’s face flashed in my mind and more than Liira’s sensible words, it calmed the beast in me. Enough to send me back in my seat and breathe easily. “I said they sounded brilliant, not that they were, lord Evarius.” I leaned back. “Should I take it that the third house will not—”

“Of course not, my king.” Heart still hammering in his chest, Evarius bared his neck in submission. “The third house will do it’s due diligence for the banquet of the young prince...or princess.”

Evarius' answer was satisfactory, but I did not acknowledge it as I chose to address someone who clearly did not expect me to. "In light of this, a ceremonial gown detailing our ancestry will be required."

"And you wish for me to create such an important piece of attire?" The man swallowed hard.

"Will there be a problem, lord Quent?"

"Will there be a problem, lord Quent?"

"Of course not, my king. It is just that you caught me by surprise. That is all."

"Surprise?" I arched a brow. "Doesn't the fourth noble house boast of the best designs in and beyond Xatis?"

The enigma of a man straightened proudly, his expression more open than it had ever been. "It does, your majesty."

"But?"

Quent's eyes darted to lord Evarius as I had expected or hoped before falling back on me "Well, you did refuse my house's offer to dress the queen when you wedded."

"Oh that was purely my Queen's decision." I did not care for it at the time, but after seeing the interaction between Evarius and Myrna, I wished I had. "I was made to believe the third house's designs were more to her taste."

"Oh? And is his highness' mate leaning towards the fourth house then?"

"My mate cares not for such things, but I have every reason to believe that whatever would come out of the fourth house will definitely be to her taste."

Delight and pride painted the lord's face. "In that case, I and my house would be honoured to do this sacred undertaking."

"It is comforting to know that you understand that the whole undertaking is sacred and not just some event meant to showcase your designs." Liira narrowed her eyes at lord Quent. "I'd hate for anything to go wrong when the moon goddess already laid a blessed path for my great grandson when he was conceived before his mother ever shifted."



Eyes widened at Liira's last statement including mine. But one in particular unsettled me and I couldn't help growling at the excitement that flashed in lord Nevan's eyes.

"My mate shall not be used in any of your experiments lord Nevan!" I all but growled.

"Of course not, your majesty. But—"

"But?! You dare defy your king?"

"Oh great king! It is not so." The man of medicine bared his neck in submission. "Believe me when I say that my house will consider this a true blessing to be enjoyed in our lifetime and as far as studying goes, we will only go as far as his highness sees fit. Assuming this is something the king would be proud of being mentioned of his heir in the history books."

Truthfully, I hated it, but I also knew it had to be done. And because it infuriated me to no end that I had to bow to our traditions once again, I dismissed everyone so I could understand grandmother's need for doing this.

"Why would you reveal such a delicate thing in front of those snakes?" I all but sighed at my grandmother. And only because scolding her would earn me more than a scolding. King or no king.

"Do you think me immortal that you have now decided to take your damn time to learn from me?" Liira scoffed while she patted the space next to her. "There is a war on the horizon. One meant to shake your reign and this has been done to ensure that once everything has come to pass, Xatis and you will stand proud. And don't go pretending as if you yourself aren't doing the exact same thing."

"I do not know what you are talking about." I feigned innocence.

Liira scoffed. "We both know how proud Quent's house is and you granting them the chance to dress your mate for such an important event is more b.uttering of their behinds than anything. You may have just earned their loyalty and put more strain on their relationship with the third house."

"Well, they are the best and nothing but the best for my mate." A smile graced my lips as I sipped my wine that I had not touched until now. "And while I cannot have Evarius' head yet, I can have his pride."

“Divide and conquer.” Liira took in a breath as though the very words bore a nice fragrance she longed to inhale. “Well played. I might have been wrong about you taking your time to learn.”

“Of battles and wars, it is always to one’s advantage when they are not seen coming.”

## **The King’s Tainted Mate Chapter 44 - Tips**

How did one escape or hide from a person they did not wish to see? I stared out of my bed chamber’s window and into the dense forest below, wondering. It is not that I did not know how. Once upon a time I was so good at it. I would even dare consider myself a master. Back in the forgotten village, it was as a game for me when I was younger. Well, not as young as I ought to have been when playing such games. That I could admit. But never the less, one could never deny how good I was. Disappearing in plain sight, hiding in the most unusual places and crevices, never to be found unless I wished it so. The palace had a lot of those. I had no doubt that even if one could sniff out my wolf scent, I could still earn myself enough time before they found me after I hid and yet I could use none of them as the person I sought to escape resided in places I could not run away from even if I wished to.

Elian... The mere thought of his name sent my belly fluttering so much I had to hold my breath while I waited for the wave to fade away. My hands clutched to the edges of the large window as I rode the current wave that was mightier than the last. It was as if the more he invaded my thoughts the more difficult ignoring the king of Xatis became. Against my wishes, he’d slipped into the innermost parts of me, leaving me yearning for him than escaping.

Revenge...that is what it was supposed to be about, but one night... one hot night filled with untold pleasures had reduced my brave self into a maiden that was always longing, yearning and yet never brave enough to claim what she desired the most. I had no doubt he’d be more than glad to satiate my lingering thirst, but one night of shameless indulgence had left me too embarrassed to even face the king of Xatis. My every action that was driven by my own thirst that night had come to bite me in my behind. I could not even behold my own reflection without my face blooming with colour. How then would I be able to face him? How would I be able to show my face in the very hallways where I’d made it clear what his majesty and I had been up to.

Not that that fear had done anything to dissuade my own heart from longing. Days and nights had come and gone. Faithful as they were meant to do by the gods and yet here I was as though today was the very day I had escaped his chambers as Gol had put it.

I wished my own growing need to seek him out had been fashioned after the pattern of the rising and setting of the sun. The heavens knew I could do with moments filled without all the longing, but as I had learned earlier on, this was the curse of the mate bond and I sure as hell knew the moon goddess spent her current days wearing a pleased smile.

“How long will you remain hidden behind these doors, my lady?”

Astryn’s accusatory tone jolted me out of my thoughts, keeping me from letting out a curse at the moon goddess. “I am doing no such thing.” Letting go of the window’s edges, I swung around to face the maid. Partly because I wished to convince her of my innocence even when I was as guilty as hell. My attempt was as futile as my own attempts at keeping my mind from dwelling on nothing but thoughts of my mate.

Astryn studied me before she made it oh so clear that even if what I’d said was not true, she was going to agree with me. “Oh, I’m so glad to hear that. I was afraid I might have to drag you for your first engagement this morning.”

“My first what?” I frowned at the maid’s beaming face. I knew not of any engagement and neither did I wish for one. In its entirety, I did not wish for anything that would deprive me of the faux comfort and privacy that came with staying behind my chamber’s closed doors.

“I was not going to say anything, but...” Astryn suddenly collapsed on my bed and lay there hands and feet sprawled in all directions while a contented sigh escaped her lips. “I knew my king was many things, but a romantic? That was a total surprise.”

I should have reprimanded her. Saying such a thing about the king was not proper, but the maiden had already asked for forgiveness and I was no proper lady to care about her speaking her mind. Besides that, I did agree with her as I was just as surprised too. My eyes fell on his little note, heart skipping beats. It was peeking from under my pillow where I’d placed it reluctantly after reading it for what would make it a thousand times. The moment my eyes had fallen on it, I knew his words would remain timeless and I? I would forever be smitten.

"I can still not get over the fact that the stone that had the noble maiden's wish to claw each other's eyes out whenever they were invited to the palace now rests on your finger. But I must say, it's perfect. You two are perfect." A dreamy sigh escaped Astryn's mouth, making me blush and regret letting her speak freely at all. Because now I had been plunged deeper in the sea of longing.

I cleared my throat, seeking to get the maid focused again. "What am I to do over this engagement?"

"Oh, only lady Liira knows that. She awaits your presence in her private gardens."

Private gardens, I had come to understand, were not just places where the royals enjoyed tea or the smell of flowers. Despite their location being on the outer walls of the bed chambers, they happened to be the safest place for important conversations to be had. I, however, could not think of anything of importance that Liira would need to speak to me about. But knowing my mate's grandmother, mine was not the duty to question why, but to grace the matriarch with my presence. And perhaps if I was lucky, our conversation would give me that long overdue distraction.

I followed Astryn's lead out of my bed chambers, but our journey was interrupted right at the open doors. Guards were busy hauling furniture along the hallway and disappearing with it into a room a few doors from mine. "What in god's name is going on?"

"Oh, his highness has decided to move his study on this floor."

"He what? Why?" I couldn't hide my surprise. Had he done this because I had been avoiding him and he was looking to make sure I couldn't?

"Something about being close to lady Liira, now that the matriarch has chosen to return to the palace. Did you know that he was always close to her?" Astryn kept casually speaking of my mate's and Liira's relationship, but I was no longer listening, my mind stuck on something she'd said.

"He'd moved in..." That was all I'd heard. And my stupid heart...that piece of me that I was sure was not a part of me at times, was both fluttering and hammering in my chest at the mere thought that he would be spending days and nights just a few doors down from mine. Would he sneak out in the middle of night and seek me out? Would he even need to sneak out? Or perhaps...

“Come, I do not wish to keep Liira waiting.” I tugged on Astryn’s arm and dragged her away much to her surprise.

“Is everything okay, my lady? You look—”

“Everything’s fine Astryn.” I mumbled even when I knew that nothing was. So much for wishing to hide and escape from him.

## **The King’s Tainted Mate Chapter 45 - Tips**

“Should I perhaps summon lord Nevan?”

I scowled at Rakon’s ludicrous suggestion. I was frustrated, not sick. And the fact that my best friend found my state so amusing as to suggest inviting that insufferable lord of medicine, infuriated me.

“It was just a thought.” Rakon shrugged his shoulders playfully, making me wish I could bite his head off.

“I did not ask for your help.” I snapped before shovelling at the parchments littering my study table. I should have been studying these carefully instead of spending the entire time I had been awake tonight thinking of my mate. Someone who I was sure as hell was not sparing me even a single thought at the moment.

“Doesn’t mean I cannot offer it. I mean it’s pretty clear you need some intervention of some sort.”

“I am perfectly fine, thank you very much.”

“But are you?” Mischief danced in my best friend’s eyes and as much as I did not wish to succumb to Rakon’s taunting, I found myself giving in.

“How in god’s name does she do it?” Exasperated, I pushed my seat backwards, the furniture making enough noise to wake the dead on the floor. Whether I meant for it to be heard by her all the way in her chambers, I did not know.

“How is she not being driven insane by the pull that exists between us?” It had been days since that night. The night I was sure would birth many more like it. The night whose morning my mate had chosen to leave my chambers never to return.

I had expected to find her lying comfortably in my bed, patiently waiting for my return. Or perhaps lost in the sweetness of the words I had penned to her. My heart had fluttered as the thoughts brought a smile to my face. I was in for a surprise, however. My chambers still held the same lonely feeling. Quiet as ever and with the bed linen having been changed and her gowns washed, not even a whiff of her scent had remained.

A quick mindlink to the maid who'd been charged with her for the day only revealed the unexpected. Shyla had practically escaped my chambers not so long after I had left which only spoke of the fact that she'd been very awake while I still remained in the chambers. She'd played me.

"What exactly has she done?"

Apart from the fact that she'd done everything possible to avoid my presence, she'd rendered my entire move to Liira's wing utterly useless. I had thought I would outsmart her by having her this close, but the doors to her chambers remained locked, denying me access even when she slept. She'd made sure to move out only when she was certain I was nowhere nearby. And between me and her, one would think she was the king as she'd gotten nearly every staff on her side, leaving me scraping for anyone willing to furnish their king with what I wished to know.

As much as that frustrated me, I couldn't deny the pride I felt too. I did not care about what she'd done or said to inspire such loyalty, only that if she could do such a thing, it was evidence of how perfectly suited she was for me. The mere thought stirred something in my blood and it only served to deepen my longing.

"How many rooms down the hallway are we?" Ignoring Rakon's question that had an obvious answer, I got up from my seat and walked over to one of the windows in my study.

"What madness is this? Don't tell me you intend to sneak into her room." It was clear Rakon was amused by this.

"If she insists on playing this game..." I undid my cloak and set it aside before loosening my boots. "Why not?" Excitement replaced the frustration I'd felt, my wolf sharing in it too. My heart fluttered at the thought of her reaction. Was she going to scowl, kick me out or melt into my arms?

"You are insane."

I was, but more than that I was thirsting for her. And tonight, with my little plan, my thirst would be filled.

"May I remind you that the archers won't spare a dark figure scaling the walls seeking entry to your mate's chambers."

"A matter that can easily be resolved." I smirked as I linked the head of the archers, making my instructions clear. "Done."

"Or you could just walk over to her doors and knock."

"And spoil the fun?" Now that I was doing it, I wished for nothing less. I was too excited to consider changing my resolve. But that was not to be had just yet as the doors to my study burst open revealing a less than amused former king of Xatis. "Father?"

The man's gaze took in my form before inviting himself to sit. With that scrutinizing expression that used to drown my confidence when I was younger, he kept his gaze trained on me.

"I would never peg you for a night owl even in your retirement." Despite my state, I stood straighter, ascertaining my position before he thought me as his son only.

His gaze took in my new stance before letting out a sigh. "How can I sleep when trouble is looming everywhere?" I had endured sleepless too, but I was not about to admit to that lest father thought the little schemes cooked up by the noble houses was of any significance. Districts all over Xatis were beginning to riot over the most insignificant things. On the surface, it seemed justified, but I was aware invisible strings were being pulled by those who had the most to gain from it. And my sleepless nights had been as the result of deciding what the fitting punishment would be for the culprits. Well, a bit of that, with the rest being taken up by thoughts of one beautiful maiden that had made it her mission to avoid me.

"Perhaps because it is not your burden to bear anymore?" Annoyance prickled, but if he noticed it, my father chose not to acknowledge it. He instead shifted in his seat, ensuring he was comfortable. His determined look making me know he would stick to his mission.

"Would it kill you to give in even one single time?" He did not have to mention what I needed to give in to as we both knew what he was referring to.

“You know it would.” The mere thought of what he was asking of me hardened my expression.

He sighed. “It is not like you have to give her up to appease them and avoid this looming nightmare. She would still remain by your side, but not just—”

“If that is all you have to say, I’m afraid I do not have the time.” I growled, dismissing him. I needed to see my mate, not stand here and listen to my own father speak of a ludicrous decision.

“Son... You have to believe that I’m on your side— what in God’s name are you doing?”

“I will see you father.” Having had enough and feeling more annoyed than amused, I went through the window and jumped to the next without a second thought and before the former king of Xatis could say anymore.

The journey turned out to be shorter than I had thought and thanks to the warm weather, Shyla had chosen to leave a window open. I watched for signs of life before I slipped in. Her scent was ready to welcome me and I inhaled to my heart’s content before a sudden movement from her bed caught my attention.

“Your majesty?” She all but squeaked and if I wasn’t still annoyed I would have smirked at her reaction. “I mean, good evening, your majesty.” She bowed impossibly low and I instantly hated it. She was no servant of mine to greet me in such a manner and this time around I hated her calling me by my title. But then I realized that she was merely using this to hide from me. She’d been hiding and not avoiding me. I ate up the distance between us at the realization, heart wishing for nothing but to be close.

“Please rise.” I was no longer interested in playing.