

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 8 - Tips

"Make it stop." I pleaded while sweat and tears rolled down my face. After all the pain I endured while shifting, one would think I could bear just about anything. That was not the case. I was hurled in a corner inside our shack, desperately clutching onto my chest as wave after wave of pain hit me.

I had cried, cursed, pressed, rubbed and even hit my chest in a violent manner, but whatever was lodged in there kept on piercing further. Digging deeper into my heart's flesh and thickening the sadness and sense of loss I felt.

"Please... I can't bear it, Gol." I looked up.

Gol merely looked on, a thoughtful look pasted on his face. He'd been like that since he'd brought me back to the shack. He'd merely placed me on the bed, covered me up and stood back. I had hoped for more when it dawned on me that no weapon had actually pierced any part of my body. I had hoped that he would figure out what was wrong with me and help, but all he'd done was stare.

No amount of begging had shaken him out of his state either, but still, I kept on. Still holding on to the hope that he would do something, anything to ease the pain. I was mistaken, and had I not known how much he cared for me, I would have thought he enjoyed seeing me suffer.

"It will all be over." He finally spoke, but his words brought me no sense of comfort. And when I found his eyes once again, a knowing look had replaced that thoughtful one, but not even that eased the pain I felt. "You have only to hold on until it stops."

Hold on? His words reminded me that I was all alone once again. I and my wolf were left to face this monster of pain alone. She had retreated to the crevices of my mind, but we both shared in the ordeal. Perhaps she felt it even more than I did. Painful howls filled my head each time that wave came crashing in and they lingered long after.

"How long then!" I snapped, hating that even after knowing what ailed me, the one person who could help me would do nothing still. But before Gol could get a word out, everything stopped and I drew in the longest breath I had since the beginning of my painful ordeal.

I was no longer in pain. That sharp stab to my heart simply vanished like mist in the presence of flame.

“Are you alright?” Gol stepped forward, hands stretched out, but I merely held my hand up in a gesture to keep him from coming any closer.

“Why did you not help me?”

“Because I couldn’t.” Regret flashed in his eyes. “Nothing I could have done would have helped you in any way. At the very least, I could have made your situation worse.”

“And how is that?” He was not making much sense. “You knew what was wrong and yet you let me endure it the same?” I couldn’t keep the accusation from my tone, neither could I keep from growling at him.

“Because this has the markings of a bond being betrayed.”

I stared at him like he had lost his mind. Knowing what I knew, he had to be mistaken. “I do not have a mate!” I spat, my own words stirring something in my heart. My wolf whimpered too. I did not appreciate the feeling. It was as if I was experiencing everything twice. Everything I felt was mirrored to my wolf and back, but declaring that fact couldn’t be helped. Gol had to be mistaken. There was no bond to be betrayed. I had made sure of that or he had made certain of it. The mere memory of it threatened to plunge me into another sea of pain. “There is no bond to be betrayed.” My words were barely a whisper. And was that shame or regret I felt? I chased the feeling away and focused on Gol. That thoughtful look was back on his face. Together with something else. Something that unsettled me.

“Are you sure?”

I opened my mouth to speak but quickly shut it. It was my turn to stare at him thoughtfully. He’d asked if I was sure. Not if I had met my mate. Knowing I had just shifted, that should have been the most probable question and yet it wasn’t.

“I am.” I merely mumbled, seeing no need in explaining how I was sure.

“How so?”

"It does not matter." I wrapped myself in the blanket before reaching for my gown. I wondered what time Gol had brought it in. It should have remained in the place where I had shifted and yet it hung right next to the bed.

"Except it does. If being with another she wolf brings you this much pain, it matters a whole damn lot."

"Well, not to me, it doesn't." That was a lie, but I wasn't about to unearth what I was still wishing to forget. Besides, I was fine now. There was no more pain.

"Shyla..." Gol held me back as I walked past him. "I know what you are thinking."

"And what might that be?" Wishing to protect myself, I wiggled out of his hold and stood back, arms wrapped around myself.

"That this will not happen again, but it will."

"Then I will simply endure it." I bit back. What else was there to do?

"As long as your bond still remains, each time he takes a she wolf, it will happen. Again and again. With each time being worse than the last."

I hated the picture he kept painting. More so because I could picture Myrna, with her smug smile, flaunting how she had gotten everything that should have been mine. I hated imagining my mate buried deep inside her, relishing the pleasure she would give him. I hated being alive and being able to have such visions. But more than that, I hated what Gol was not saying. That truth hidden among his words. He didn't have to say it and as much as I wished to deny it, I could feel it too. Despite being rejected, I was still bound to my mate somehow. If it were not so, thoughts of him wouldn't hurt this much. Picturing him with my sister or any other she wolf wouldn't pierce my soul this much.

"But how could it ever remain if I was rejected?" There was no surprise in Gol's eyes over my rejection and I chose not to inquire how he'd known.

"You would have had to accept his rejection for your bond to—"

"But I did accept his re—" I froze, thinking back to the moment I had opened my mouth to accept the prince's rejection. It was so painful, I could not even bring myself to look at him while I spoke. But then, he'd interrupted me...he'd

interrupted me! I felt the ground under me shift and my legs want to buckle. "He didn't let me." I was trapped in the bond...by my own mate.

"Shyla..." I stopped by the door, hand already on its handle when Gol called.

"Air." I mumbled. I needed something more than that, but I was not about to confess that to Gol. "I just need to breathe." With that I stepped out and I was glad he made no other attempt to stop me.

The sun was high up in the sky by the time I stepped out of the shack. It was midday I assumed, blinking up at the bright hot rays. Despite the heat from the sun, however, I felt cold. On my body, my heart and soul. I pulled at my garment to cover up some more, but as I suspected, nothing changed. Why would it anyway when fate had ensured it.

I walked away wondering why. Why would he do it? For a moment, something flickered in my heart, but was hastily doused by common sense. I was the one in Dovah, while Myrna remained at his side. There was nothing there in his heart for me. Except, disdain, hatred and a mighty huge desire to get back at me where it would hurt the most. Revenge... That had to be it. Rejecting me was not enough. Banishing me from the only home I'd ever known was not enough. He had to ensure I suffered in the most painful way and for how long? As long as I lived?

What kind of person was he to punish someone for the rest of their lifetime? I found myself strangely grateful for what had befallen me. Grateful for being rejected as such a person would never be deserving of my love.

I had betrayed our bond, but at least I had an excuse for hurting him, what was his?

My thoughts drew me to a place behind our shack. To a spot I had promised myself to forget the last time I stood over it. The precious ring was buried there and as I unearthed it, I thanked the moon goddess for it. It still bore that heaviness in my hands, but I chose to ignore it. Whatever it was or meant, I would face it later. Right now, my survival instincts were focused on self preservation. I stood by that spot for God knows how long pondering on what to do until I settled on one choice.

I knew I could do nothing about the punishment lavished on me by my mate, but perhaps putting a great distance between the prince and I would save me from it. The ring would be my saving grace in that regard. I only needed to

exchange it for gold, then I would be free to travel to the furthest kingdom of our realm. But to do that, I had to revisit my past one last time. The capital of Xatis was the only place I knew where I could do such an exchange without being robbed, without Gol. Or so I thought as I shot an apologetic look towards the shack before deciding to shift. It was ungrateful of me, but I couldn't risk him stopping me.

"You need to eat something." I jumped, startled at Gol's sudden appearance. He knew... I could see it in his eyes when I met his gaze. He knew what I was thinking and he was going to stop me, force me to stay or at the very least force me to consider whatever plan I had cooking in my head.

"I do not feel like eating." That was the truth, but I also needed him to let me be so that I could be on my way. It was wishful thinking if indeed he had an inkling of what I was up to, but I still hoped.

"It's your favorite."

"What do you think you are doing?" I felt a wave of dizziness when he suddenly dragged me by the hand and almost made me trip. His grip was firm and I wondered if that was to keep me from falling or from escaping. The urgency with which he dragged us back to the shack also left me thinking he was being a little bit weird. It was so unlike him. "Gol?!"

He paused and appraised me for a moment at my protest before resuming our movement. "It's been a couple of hours and you have had nothing to eat." He forced me to sit down once we got inside and placed a bowl of rabbit soup in front of me. My very recent favorite food... My stomach growled as if to agree with Gol, but I could not blame it either. The aroma was to die for and even if I had a pending engagement, I found myself reaching for the spoon and digging in.

"It would give me extra strength for the journey." I reasoned as I shoved the spoonful into my mouth. One bite and I was lost. Gulping mouthfuls greedily. I was not one to have favorite foods, but ever since Gol made that soup, I wished to have it every single day. It was the perfect bribe he could offer me. For the time being anyway. "That was delicious." I looked up sheepishly after draining every drop from the plate.

"There is more where that came from." Amusement danced in his eyes and I blushed at how unladylike I had just behaved in front of him. It was not that I

had been the perfect lady in front of him, but I guessed this was a bit too much. “You do not have to be embarrassed for someone in your condition.”

“In my condition? What condition?” Rejected, yet cursed to suffer at her mate’s unfaithfulness? I stared at Gol confused.

“You are with child.”

“What?!” I knew he was being weird a moment ago, but this?

“It is written all over your face. You are glowing.”

“That is ridiculous, even for you.” I unconsciously reached for my face thinking whatever he saw there were merely the results of my embarrassment. His assumptions had to be ridiculous.

“Except I’m not being ridiculous, Shyla.” The serious expression on his face had me shifting nervously on my spot. “I smelled it the moment you shifted. And well everything else points to that fact.” His gaze flickered to the empty bowl of soup and my spoon slipped from my hands.

“Is that why I have been craving rabbit soup?” Craving? My own choice of words left a bitter taste in my mouth. This had to be a joke. It had to be! I couldn’t be pregnant just after one regrettable time. I didn’t even know who the father was...

“Among other things, yes. And you should know we are almost out of rabbits the entire forest. I might have to break some laws by hunting in those forbidden lands. Should be plenty there.”

“Is this a joke?” I glared at Gol for choosing this moment to reveal what I thought was his dark humor.

“Which part? The rabbit or—”

“Gol!” I couldn’t take it and sprang up from my seat. I did not believe a damn thing he’d said but a lump lodged itself in my throat still. “Don’t.” I swatted his hand that sought to keep me from walking out.

“Shyla...”

I ran out and was about to shift when I felt Gol’s strong hand on my shoulder. “Perhaps, now is not the time to—”

"Are you serious?!" I fought the tears that threatened to fall.

"Yes. Not until a doctor says you can."

"A doctor? And what do you propose I should pay for those services with, huh?! I lashed out, hating that once again I was being forced to walk a path I had no desire to tread. I possessed nothing and yet fate still insisted on burdening me still. My own words surprised me too. It was as if a part of me had accepted this innocent life I was not even sure was growing inside of me. "How will I raise—"

"Breathe." Gol commanded. "We'll figure this out together."

"Together? He's not even yours!" I knew he was not the enemy, but I hated how Gol made this sound like it was some simple occurrence in my life that could be dealt with easily.

"He?"

"What?"

"You said 'he'. Pretty strange for a she-wolf to want a son."

"Stop distracting me, you know what I mean." I huffed.

"One day at a time, hmmm?" Gol cupped my cheeks, that fatherly look comforting me instantly. Was this the reason he'd come into my life or I had come into his? In this moment, my sanity remained intact only because of his presence.

"I don't even know its father, Gol." I wasn't going to cry, but the thought unearthed all the painful memories I thought I had tucked away. The ones I wished to forget. The ones that the mere sight of this child would bring to my remembrance each waking day. What if I would be unable to love this child because of it? Was I even fit to be its mother after the manner in which it was conceived? My mind flooded with every reason this should not have been happening, but as my hand caressed my belly, something warm flooded my soul. A comfort I did not anticipate covered me like a warm blanket on a cold winter's night and I smiled.

Perhaps, in a far away land, far far away from the source of all my pain, I would be able to love. My child would be okay. My child... Looking down at my non-existent baby bump, I knew I had a new reason to trade that ring.