

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 81 - Tips

With everything that had been going on, my birthday had completely slipped my mind. Not that I had a reason to look forward to it as everything that excited many she-wolves about their eighteenth moon birthday, I had already experienced. And even as Zillah wished me a happy one, I had merely stared at her, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

She had called it the right moment and somehow, with her very surprising presence, the history I was now aware we shared, what she'd uttered about my uncle and my tattoo summoning her, I had known that fate was at it again. And there was no way in hell I could have been prepared by what my eighteenth moon had brought with it.

That shoe had dropped with a loud thud that I was sure had echoed all the way to the ends of the realm. Sarabeth had given reasons of why I had been summoned to the council chambers, but with the appearance of Zillah those reasons had turned out for lack of a better term 'false'.

It was not because I was the king's future queen or the mother to Xatis' heir that made my presence of utmost importance in the council. And those were definitely not the things that placed me in a position to hold his place until my mate returned as claimed by Liira. No. It was something else entirely. Something that apparently had come to fruition now that my eighteenth moon birthday had finally come to pass. At least that is what I had gathered from all the strange words spoken by the very ancient wolf that had been summoned by Liira. Cerus, she called him.

And the more he spoke, the more I felt as though the entire realm was weighing heavily on me. The more I wished to slip out of the council chambers and away from the excitement that graced every other face except mine as the old wolf kept speaking. I wished to get away from the discoveries I was making of my own existence with each word that proceeded out of Cerus' mouth.

"So I was right to think she had traces of being an alpha?" Liira's excitement, the expectation I knew the rest of the council shared, only served to burden me even more.

"Not exactly." Zillah, whose gaze I had avoided for the most part answered. "Referring to her as an alpha is belittling the gift bestowed on her."

She called it the gift of the twin wolves. What I had known to be nothing but ancient lore about twin wolves who had been charged with being protectors and balance keepers of the realms, was apparently true. From the woman I had called mother once, had come the narration of the tale, told while we all sat around the hearth back in the forgotten village. A tale of twin wolves, born of an ordinary she-wolf and yet bestowed with the power to watch over the magical creatures. Both the powerful and not so powerful. Those above the surface, the deep and below the surface.

The men had walked the realms as ordinary creatures doing that which the gods had charged them with. Until power went to their heads and they desired to be as gods among those they meant to serve. Reigning with an iron fist as they sought to subjugate all the creatures they were meant to watch over.

For that, the gods stripped them of that power and would later split it among all the magical creatures. With each species having a chosen among them to carry that power. One deserving in a particular generation and bloodline of the gods' choosing.

For the creatures of the moon, the lot had apparently fallen on me.

Something Zillah claimed she'd known I would possess when the tattoo had appeared on my arm all those years ago, making me the chosen wolf. I called it a curse, however, and the root of all my misfortune.

It was as she claimed what my uncle had always been after. The reason I had been snatched from my mother barely hours after my birth. The reason my mate was now in the clutches of my perverse uncle and the reason Xatis and the entire realm faced an evil that threatened their very existence. And it had been what Zillah had been protecting more than anything...more than me. I was simply the vessel that carried it. Fate's pawn. That had left a bitter taste in my mouth.

"It is more than being able to bark orders at other wolves and having them fall at your feet or do your every bidding. Definitely more than possessing brutal strength." At this, Zillah's gaze fell on me, the conviction therein stirring something within me. "It is about restoring and keeping balance. And I wouldn't think of it as traces either. It would only seem so because she has not yet come into the fullness of her gift."

Balance... I'd never hated a word before, but I did now. Keeping balance, watching over kingdoms, fighting evil, was what the gods did, not mere wolves. Not me. I only longed for the simple things in life. To smile with the rising of the sun each day. To be free to do that which I loved and more recently, to love... I only longed to be by his side. If I was willing to fight for anything, it was him, the child I carried and the bond that bound us. The one I was unwilling to let Myrna have or anyone else for that matter.

"And it is because of all that that makes you the perfect wolf to embody the power of the gods." As if she could gaze right into my soul and tell what I was thinking, Zillah gave me that reassuring smile that always showered me with the will to keep going, except this time I merely shook my head, unwilling to accept what she termed my destiny. Because despite everything, I realized that I had been the source of pain. Of mine and those close to me. This destiny bestowed on me had been the thing to set the wheels of fate turning and granting me a stake in everyone's pain that came with it.

I turned to my father. He wore the smile I'd come to love, but the worry lines were evident too and I couldn't fault him for that. Because we both knew that one way or the other, I would be taken from his side yet again. And whether I would be back there again depended on fighting my own flesh and blood in a war I had only discovered had been years in the making.

Evarius, as warm as he had seemed, had set his sights on acquiring the seat of power that would place him above every wolf, creature and kingdom in the realm. And for that he'd traded in his heart for the darkness. For sorcery. And for years he'd patiently waited for the one chosen by the gods to end his madness. But a fight was not what he prepared for while he waited. No. He'd waited for the chosen, because as it turned out, he'd discovered that to have success in his endeavours, whatever the gods had endowed the chosen with, was what he'd need.

"How did we not know this? We could have done a better job at protecting the poor girl and stopping Evarius." Frustration laced Derian's words. "My son would be here right now and we wouldn't be risking everything by agreeing to that lunatic's demands."

"Every generation brings with it someone with an insatiable appetite for power." Zillah pointed out. "And to maintain balance, it is the gods' business to whom such secrets are entrusted to—"

“Except a mere throne is not what he desires, but the vastness of the realms. He longs to be a god and e\*\*\*\*\*e us all! Surely the gods would have made exceptions so that we were better prepared.” Derian let out an exasperated sigh.

It should have spurred me into accepting who I was meant to be and relieve him of that burden, but watching the former king of Xatis grab at straws while searching for ways and means to avert what was coming only added to the burden brewing in my heart. I wanted no part of it. The whole ordeal could go horribly wrong and I could end up giving Evarius the very thing he sought and damn every soul while at it. The guilt of that would consume me whole. “I need a moment.” I sprang up from my seat and flew across the room catching everyone off guard.

“Shyla! It’s not safe— will someone stop her!” Derian’s tone was full of panic, but I couldn’t bring myself to stop.

“I just need a moment to breathe.” I told myself as the heaviness of it all kept pressing.

“My lady!”

“Dear child...you can’t—”

Pleas to stop rang out in my ears, but I ignored every one of them as I scurried down the hallways seeking any door that would lead me into the open. And if I had doubted Zillah’s or Cerus’s words before, the strength with which my feet carried me cracked that disbelief. Together with the hasty way that the sea of guards parted to let me through as I drew near. It was as if an invisible force willed the men to stay out of my way and while I marvelled at the sight, I chose not to stop to comprehend it.

“Oh my lord, is this not inappropriate for a man of your standing?” A maiden’s giggles drew my attention to a couple standing in the shadows. But it was not the indecent show they were putting on that made me turn in their direction.

“Pardon me.” I slipped past them and towards the open door, hoping the couple’s smell of wine and scent of arousal would at the very least throw those intent on stopping me off my scent.

The sun was already setting and the air outside was fresh, but the grounds were littered with guests. Drunk guests. And when the first of them slurred a greeting, I shot for the woods, hoping to find solitude there.

“Dear child, where in God’s name do you think you are going?” My father, with Rakon by his side had been the first to emerge. Followed by Liira, Zillah and my personal guards. So much for hoping they’d been thrown off my scent. “There is nothing there except darkness.” My father pointed out of the unfamiliar woods I was headed for. I should have stopped, but it only spurred me on, knowing that that was exactly what I longed for at the moment. Solitude. Even if it was to be had in darkness.

“My lady, please—” Rakon’s tone held more panic than my father’s, but not even that would stop me. And if I was not so intent on getting away, I could have sworn that another force had been behind my desire to escape.

“What in God’s name is this?” Liira cursed from behind me. A lot further back than I had expected her to be and when I looked, I realized that she was not the only one. They’d all stopped for whatever reason. I thanked the gods for it and moved deeper into the woods without a moment’s hesitation.

“Well, well, well. If it’s not the king’s little mate, all alone in the woods.” My hairs stood on end as my eyes sharpened at the sound of a familiar voice. I’d heard it only once but it inspired the same fear I’d felt the first time I’d heard it. “Talk of the favour of the moon goddess. Presenting this old wolf with such a precious and delicious gift at this time of day.” A tongue llicked at the lips of the ghastly one eyed wolf that stood in my path. He had survived! Panic washed over me as I beheld the leader of the vicious outlaws I had fought before. When I’d encountered him on our way back from Dovah, he had been a whole man and intent on having me.

“Stay away from me.” Hands resting on my belly protectively, I growled to which the wolf only chuckled.

“I wouldn’t be that ungrateful to the moon goddess for this second chance, la.ss. You and that mate of yours caused me a great loss...” He pointed to his missing eye and his small band of wolves. “...why would I throw away such a golden opportunity to get some of that back?”

Growls filled the air as wolves fast approached and circled me without a moment’s notice. They would not wait to attack, I realized. And even if I could howl for help, no one would get to me in time. Both hands dropped to my

belly. Whether for protection or in apology to my child for my recent stubbornness, I was not sure. What I was sure of was that I was all alone and being left with only one choice, I hoped, I prayed that this 'gift' had exceptions as I let my wolf have control.

It was an odd time to accept whatever I was and as I looked to the gods, I made promises I shouldn't have. If I and my child would get out of this alive, I would do whatever it was they required of me.

I shifted and a startling truth hit me almost instantly. My shifting was different. It wasn't as I had come to know it. There were no breaking of bones. At least not as I had experienced before. Only a warmth that engulfed me as I slipped from one form to the other. Something cradled my heavy belly as it suddenly felt weightless allowing me to land on all fours, growling and snarling at the enemy.

"It's not possible! What kind of sorcery is this?!" I could have asked the same thing, but I was caught off guard when my mind link merged with the wolves surrounding me and I was thrust into their loud conversations that consisted of nothing but fear of the sight before them. I could have shut it off, but I fed off of it as I claimed my first victim, their warm blood sending my wolf howling in victory.

If the remaining wolves had been smart, the sound should have sent them running, but they foolishly came at me, teeth bared and intent on avenging their fallen brother. We were ready. How? I did not know, but my wolf answered to every growl, every snarl before breaking out in the dance of death. Bones cracked under the pressure of its canines, flesh tore with ease as the blood of our enemies soaked up my wolf's fur. Yelps should have inspired my wolf to let go, but they only spurred it on as it saw, drew closer with insane speed and conquered.

Only when nothing but the silence of the woods remained did my wolf let go and I slipped from one form into another. The bitter cold greeted my naked self whose hand still cradled my belly and reminded me that nightfall was upon me. And as spectacular as my conquest had been, I was unwilling to face another. So I reached for my gown which I slipped on with a little difficulty.

"Help us!" I was about to turn away when pleas came from behind the bushes, tugging at my heart. I should have been on my way, but something wouldn't let me take a step towards the palace. "Please!"

My decision made for me, my eyes darted to the bodies that lay on the ground. Realizing none of those would ever see the light of day ever again, I headed in the direction of the voices as quickly as my feet could carry me.

The sight of a long line of shackled maidens brought my feet to a stop.

“My lady, please help us. Those men...” Fear, more than I had felt a moment ago was buried in the face of the one who addressed me and it made the words I uttered next worth it.

“You are free now. Those men...” I thought of the dismembered corpses that littered the ground. “They won’t hurt you anymore.” As I said those words, relief and gratitude graced the maiden’s faces and nothing was more satisfying.

“We will forever be in your debt.” The maiden said as I moved to undo their binds, but I merely shook my head.

“You owe me nothing.”

“Allow us to serve you then, my lady. In whatever way.” She pleaded.

“Besides, we have nowhere else to go. It has been years since we have seen our families.” Because them having nowhere else to go sounded more acceptable than a bunch of maidens thinking they owed me their lives, I gave in and invited them along on my journey back to the palace.

“My lady, are you alright?!” Rakon stepped forward, tension evident in his whole frame and the hand that held his drawn sword.

“Dear child, what happened to you? Are you alright?” Liira rushed towards me, Zillah too, but they both stopped right next to Rakon. Right where they’d stopped when they’d chased after me earlier. Because I’d wished to be left alone then, I had thought nothing of their choice to stop persuing me, but now...

“I’m perfectly alright.” Unbelief greeted me as eyes took in my bloody gown. “Not my blood. I ran into some uninvited guests.” I hastily replied.

“Uninvited guests?” My father stepped closer, but he too stopped where the others had.



Knowing Rakon and Gol would understand, my answer was more for them. “The same men we had encountered on our way from Dova. At least one of them was. Their leader.”

“And yet you are here? How did you—”

“Everyone is dead, my lord.” Someone from behind me answered Gol, making themselves known.

“And how many is...everyone?” Zillah’s lips split into a knowing grin while everyone else stared, eyes wide.

“It is really hard to say, my lady.” The maiden replied and I wished she would hold her tongue, but she kept talking, her tone full of pride. “Their state could not really allow for one to count the corpses, but of those that had captured us, we knew they were not less than thirty men.”

“Thirty men?!” Rakon’s jaws dropped. “In your condition, and yet—oh, he’ll definitely have my head when he returns.”

“We saw nothing of the battle, but even with our ears, we knew it was nothing short of fierce. I assure you that my lady was definitely not the one in danger.”

“That is quite enough.” I chastized the maiden. “I wish to speak of none of it.” I took a step forward, intent on not lingering on the bloody events of my recent past, but loud protests left me rooted on my spot.

“You can’t—”

“What?” I frowned at my father, but it was Liira who answered, letting me know that I couldn’t step back into the palace grounds. The reason they’d all failed to step out.

“Your wretched uncle has put a spell on the palace, locking us in like cattle.”

## **The King’s Tainted Mate Chapter 82 - Tips**

“Come to me...” My mate invited yet again, but I opted to stand back and behold from a distance that beautiful body that was heavy with child, and yet still possessed enough allure that left me thirsting after her. Denying her request was not my intention. I just did not wish to taint her angelic self with



the dark magic I knew now resided in me. Not that I was certain that it was possible for the sorcery to find its way out of my body and into hers.

“He cannot do anything to me. Not now and at least not here.” She’d kept on saying that, but I had chosen to be cautious still. Because I did not know how far the bastard’s sorcery could go, I’d kept my hands to myself even in my dreams. For all I knew, this could be another of Evarius’ ploys to get to Shyla. I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction.

But hips, tender and sweet, claimed mine in a lingering kiss, deepening my thirst and drowning my resolve. The hands I’d kept at my sides reached out, burying themselves in the silk of her hair as I answered her kiss.

Just this once... I thought to myself. I would let her go once I got a taste of her. But a taste was simply not enough and I found myself desiring to have her whole. I longed for the warmth of her body, wrapped around me as I drowned in the sweetness of her.

“Take me, Elian.” She broke the kiss to make her request and I was happy to oblige. Parting her legs gently, I slipped in and instantly found rest for my soul.

My hands grabbing hold of her well rounded hips, I gave of myself. Intent on pleasuring and satisfying her every need and getting my own release while at it. “I love you.” Drunk on my mate, the words I’d long desired to speak in her hearing escaped my lips, but like a whisper, they faded into the darkness. Never to inspire the curve of her beautiful hips or the fluttering of her heart at the sound of them.

“You don’t look so good your majesty.” Evarius’ tone was more of a taunt than a concern and if I could despise him anymore than I did, I would have, but only for cutting short the dream I had been having of my mate and dragging me into a reality that was filled with her absence. “Perhaps you should eat something.”

I glared, not bothering to behold the food he was offering. It was not what I needed. My connection to my wolf was. Now that I was awake, I was reminded of the emptiness I felt. The emptiness he’d caused with his darkness. He’d not only blocked my mind link, but my connection to my wolf had been weakening and I was afraid that it would merely be a matter of time before I would stop feeling it completely. Then Evarius could kill me senselessly or he’d steer me in whichever direction he wished and I would not have the bone in me to fight back. I would be but a puppet in his hands.

I had wondered if that was what had happened to Zastan. The man was nowhere to be seen, but if his secret trip to Xatis had taught me anything, it was that it was possible to break the binds of Evarius' tether. If only but for a moment. So before my beast went completely quiet, I'd kept fighting for that moment. Even if it was just by the sheer will of mind. I'd held onto the memory of my mate, knowing tearing me from her too would give Evarius exactly what he wished for.

"If you must know, it's not poisoned." A reassuring smile that was as odd as the enemy offering it split Evarius' lips. "She would never forgive me, if when she got here, she was met with a corpse of her mate."

"When she got here?!" Despite my weakened state, my instincts sharpened even when I thought I had not heard him clearly. Shyla was coming?! I'd known his plans revolved around her, but hearing the bastard proclaim that she would be here...wherever here was...I cursed my position even more. I would be unable to protect her. Surely someone in the palace had the sense to keep her from Evarius! But judging by the sinister smile on the bastard's lips, I'd say that was not the case.

"Do not look so surprised or panicked, dear Elan." I swallowed the insult that came with his informal address. "You didn't really think it was all about you, now did you? Well, it was about you." The bastard considered for a moment before continuing. "Seeing how she cared about my mate even when the maiden had betrayed her, I always knew she would willingly do so much more for her mate. Hence my decision."

"Your mate?" The bastard had a chosen mate, but somehow I knew this was not about his wife. And I did not dare think about who he meant, because then it would highlight my own failures and the ease with which I'd let his trickery weave its way into my life. "How long have you known that Myrna was your mate?" Despite my resolve, I asked away anyway, feeling every bit dumb each time I was hit with a memory of Evarius standing up for Myrna. Practically shoving her into my arms. How had he done it? Myrna remained unclaimed and unmarked, so how had Evarius stomached having another wolf touch his mate in his very presence without so much as flinching? Was it sorcery too?

Learning of this new layer about the man left me feeling uneasy because despite aiming to know my enemy, I'd been confronted with facts that only proved how little I knew of him, his capabilities. And that made him twice as dangerous.

“Oh, I do not think we have enough time to get into that. My guests will be arriving soon.”

“Soon?” She would be here soon?

Evarius smiled coily at my question. “You didn’t expect me to wait for centuries now that what I need is within my grasp, did you?” Wait for centuries? I would take that if it would give me the time needed until I was able to protect her. And now I had what? Mere hours before she presented herself in the devil’s lair?

“What are you going to do with her?” I growled, but Evarius just flashed me that sinister smile. “What?!” I growled yet again, to which he only chuckled.

“You and her are truly perfect for each other. I can’t fault the moon goddess over that.”

“I don’t need you telling me what I already know.” I sneered at his all knowing tone that was still not giving me what I wished to know.

“True.” He shrugged. “But that just makes my decision that much sweeter when you hear it.” It would by no means be sweet. I knew that, so I glared, but he merely watched me, amused, before opening his filthy mouth. “Do not fret my king. I won’t hurt her if that’s what you suppose. What I need from her, she can only grant me willingly, so I will have to claim and mark her. And to do that, I guess I have to be on my best behaviour.”

“Mark her?” He was insane! “She’s practically your daughter!” I sought to shift and tear his head off at his declaration. That sparked a connection with my wolf. It was a tiny thread, but I grabbed hold with everything in me.

“A minor technicality. I just need what she possesses and then perhaps I might—”

“Might what?!” I growled. The thought of his canines burried deep in her neck for whatever reason, left me feeling more murderous than ever. There was no coming back from being marked. Even if Evarius got what he desired, she would forever be his and no longer mine... Needing to keep that from happening, I pulled at that connection with my wolf, desperately.

“Definitely not let you ride into the sunset, that’s for sure.”

"You are a fool if you think you can bargain with my life." I sneered. "I'm nothing to her." For the first time I wished that were true. Because then, my being captured would not force her to endure her uncle's lunacy. But last night had proved otherwise. When she'd fought for me and given herself to me.

Evarius probably knew that too, but if only I could convince him that she would not give up herself for me—

"That is the thing about mate bonds. We love those we hate." The bastard wasn't going to bite. "Even more so when a part of ourselves is deeply embedded in us." Embedded? My child! The thought of losing them both to the bastard heightened my desperation and that surprisingly had the connection to my wolf growing unusually. My beast and I stirred and growled. It would be the thing to help me make a startling discovery too.

Evarius flinched! With all his claims about my wolf being useless around here, the man flinched at my furious growls. It was so subtle I could have sworn even Evarius wished I had not noticed it. But I had and something more was already brewing deep within as realization that that was the thing I needed to break the binds of Evarius' tether settled in.

Masking his momentary loss of control and the surprise that came with it, the bastard smiled. "Oh don't look so restless. I happen to be a good host and will probably let you see her when she does get here. And do not worry, your little bastard will be well taken care of too. That is, once all this is over. He's after all my flesh and blood too and a part of my future mate. I wouldn't wish for her to be sad over such a loss." Evarius kept mumbling, but I was no longer listening as I focused on what he'd said. He would let her see me! Of course I knew that I couldn't trust his word, but I hoped he would keep it. Even if it would be meant to flaunt my loss and his victory. Or I hoped Shyla would ask that of him. And however that went, it would be my window. If I was going to save her...them from whatever evil he had planned, that would be my opportunity. And I hoped to the gods that Shyla would forgive me once it was done.

## **The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 83 - Tips**

I'd dreamt of him yet again. And this time, my mate had finally given in to my request. He'd finally taken me, but curse whichever wretched soul had decided to wake me before I could find my release.

My body still ached with desire and was in dire need of release when I finally opened my eyes.

“Good morning, dear child.” Eyes blinking, I took back my curse when the wretched soul who’d woken me turned out to be Liira. “I’m sorry to wake you, but it can’t be helped. I need to ensure that you and the child are still alright.”

“I feel fine.” I declared. Well, except for my own excess desire for my mate.

“Oh, thank the gods.” The relief in Liira’s tone made me frown.

“Did something happen while I slept?” Nothing in my body pointed to that fact, but the receding worry lines on Liira’s face were enough to make me think so.

And instead of furnishing me with an answer, the matriarch merely watched me before focusing on whoever stood behind her. “Should this be happening?” I expected to see Astryn or Carlytte, so when Zillah and Cerus appeared instead, I shot up to a seating position, hands cradling my bulging belly.

“Should what be happening?” Apparently Liira thought something was wrong. I felt it in her tone and it was enough to rouse my own worry.

“She’s perfectly alright. This could just be the normal transition from slumber to wakefulness.” Zillah smiled. “Her collapse had nothing to do with crossing the spell’s threshold around the palace.”

The spell’s threshold around the palace? Faint memories of my legs giving out from under me plagued my mind, making me dig deeper into that state of wakefulness Zillah had mentioned. What I discovered left me eyes wide and clearly understanding Liira’s worry. It seemed that for a moment I had forgotten the recent happenings in my life.

“She was simply too tired.” Zillah continued. “It appears even the chosen can do that after over exerting themselves as you did in the fight.” The chosen? If my eyes could get any wider they would have as pieces to the puzzle in my mind fell into place.

“It was not a dream?!” I knew it wasn’t, but I still stared from one face to the other, hoping one of them would tell me that all the memories flooding my mind were nothing but a dream. Neither did, making me shoot to my feet and

rushing to the bed chamber's balcony. I did not know what I sought to see. Perhaps the realm covered in fire and ash? When I was greeted by the familiar sight of green and peace, my heart relaxed. Just a fraction. I still had time.

"Dear child, calm down. Think of—"

I couldn't. Even when Liira's tone was close to begging, I couldn't. Now that I was awake, the dire situation the realms were faced with was all so clear. The fight. The spell. All the people...my family, all the dignitaries from faraway kingdoms that had been trapped by my uncle. His insane plans to rule all the realms. Elian...my mate...it all came back to me. My own promise to the gods...I was the chosen. I swung back to stare at the figures that had remained quiet as realization settled in my soul. "I am the chosen." I declared, not because everyone stared at me differently. I felt it. I was different.

"You are." Pride and warmth filled Liira's tone. And for the first time, it was not fear of the burden that I felt. No. As acceptance of who I was settled deep in my soul, so did a familiar warmth in every part me, leaving me unusually comfortable in what I felt was new skin. My wolf stood taller too. Pacing the recesses of my mind with a grace it had never known.

"And we are here to serve you." Zillah bowed.

"All of us." Liira followed suit. Their actions should have felt too quick and too soon, but I felt none of that as I nodded at the matriarch, my wolf accepting their submission without question.

I, however, should have known that 'all of us' did not exactly mean all of Xatis or the entire realm. At least not all of the men who still thought that their experience gained through fighting wars for years on end outweighed the gift gained by a she wolf who'd barely sniffed at her eighteenth moon birthday.

The council chambers were full to bursting with lords and dignitaries alike. With the threat having spilled to foreign kingdoms, it had been decided that they too be included in the plans meant to foil Evarius'. But looking at all the angry faces and arguments that filled the large room, those plans would birth little to nothing if each wolf only longed to agree with what suited them.

"Selfish pricks. You'd think all these old fools would have learnt a thing or two about putting their egos aside when faced with a common enemy." Liira

scoffed before going silent. I realized she was mind linking someone when her son perked up and stared in my direction.

“My lords, the chosen is finally here! My son’s mate and future queen of Xatis.” Derian’s voice carried over the gathered wolves and brought them to silence. His tone dripped with pride that I’d not known before. I wondered what had finally made him a believer.

“This is her?” A burly figure suddenly stood up and stared me up and down. The distaste in his gaze stirred the beast in me that wished to put him in his place. “You mean to say the fate of the realms lies in the hands of this—this child? A mere child?!”

“Make that a heavily pregnant child.” Another wolf sneered.

“I highly doubt the tales of her recent conquests are quite...accurate.” Someone scoffed and besides me, someone drew a sword.

With their intent to protect oh so clear, Gol and Rakon marched towards the wolves who had dared to insult me. “If you are quite done with your insults—”

“That is enough.” I may have longed to put the wolves in their place, but I was not about to allow bloodshed for a few insults from a couple of unguided wolves. Of course, my wolf was not as forgiving. A menacing growl tore from my lips catching me and the entire council chambers off guard. And more than having my wolf act independent of me, the postures of every wolf present in the room left me picking my jaws off of the chamber’s floors.

“Forgive us, my lady.” The man who’d been the loudest now bowed with his head so low he could practically lick the ground. “I...we did not mean to disrespect—”

“Liira, Zillah?” Stunned by the turn of events, I turned to the two she wolves, seeking an explanation. They too were bowed impossibly low and they only lifted their eyes when I asked them to.

“It is part of the gift, my lady.” Zillah smiled. “Every wolf is bound to you. Regardless of who happens to be their alpha.”

Every wolf is bound to you... How could she smile when uttering such grave words when the mere thought of them left me wishing to escape the skin I had so generously accepted a moment ago. My eyes landed on every man in the



chambers, their postures bearing witness to Zillah's words and that burden I no longer felt, crashed in, pressing ever so heavily.

It was not about keeping the balance. I was meant to be the balance.

## **The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 84 - Tips**

Merry making had finally ceased around the palace as news of the chosen reached more and more ears than I would have liked. It seemed I had underestimated how much palace gossip could travel around the royal abode and how many believers in the chosen Xatis actually had. Not even the spell that surrounded the castle had kept that news in the confines of it. That was evidenced by the multitudes who had now flocked around the spell's barrier wishing to get a glimpse of the chosen. Although, for some I suspected it was out of fear after what had transpired in the council chambers. It seemed knowing about the chosen and actually meeting them had inspired different emotions. The display of fear on some of the wolf's faces in there was still etched in my memory. It was by no means how I wished anyone to relate to me. Gift or no gift.

"My life will never be the same, will it?" I sighed as I hid behind the curtain drawn over a window that overlooked everyone who longed to have a glimpse of me. Some powerful chosen I was.

"Our lives are never meant to be the same, my lady." Astryn pointed me to my seat, comb ready to style my hair for what could be the last time. With my impending journey from the palace, I was aware that this could be the last time I would be seeing and hearing my maid speak her mind in my presence. And the sadness that came with it had caught me off guard. Blocking out the undesirable emotions, I walked towards her as she continued speaking. "And rather than be afraid of failing, we can only do our best."

At that, I almost smiled. Because for once, my maid was wrong. I was not afraid of failing, but of something much worse. "What if it changes me? This gift, what if—"

"Is it not too late to worry about such things, my lady?" Astryn frowned at my reflection, making me sigh.

"That is not exactly comforting."

“Forgive me, my lady.” My maid’s frown morphed into an apologetic look. “What I mean is, it’s not like you can ask the gods to take any of it back.”

“That, she cannot.” Liira walked into the king’s chambers I’d retreated to, trailed by Zillah, my mother and more maids carrying all sorts of items I was sure I did not need but Liira would insist otherwise. The entire entourage made it appear as though they were on a mission to ready a bride for her wedding banquet when what they were here for was not even close. “Because then she’ll doom us all. And that is by no means meant to scare you, child.” The matriarch offered one of those comforting smiles that did little to hide the excitement she was feeling. Despite the looming war and the burden it placed on me, one I had barely been able to ignore, Liira had been beaming with confidence in my capabilities and my sure victory. Her only regret was that she would not be there to see my uncle’s downfall or to be a part of it.

“And perhaps this makes for a right moment to let you know that you do not have to do this alone.”

“I don’t?” I faced Zillah wondering what she meant. Up until now, she’d not mentioned anything of the sort. I was aware that with every wolf being bound to me, I could easily command armies of my own. Even with everyone trapped within the palace, many still remained free outside the spell’s threshold, but I’d already decided against it. Until it became absolutely necessary I would not be placing anyone else in danger.

“It is a burden you can choose with whom to share. Different magical creatures have once before chosen to share it with their given mates. Once they mated or accepted each other, a part of them, if the chosen wished to, transferred part of their gift. But being free to do so means you can share it with whomever. And it is by that fact that Evarius hopes to get his hands on your gift.”

“Wait. Does that mean my own uncle wishes me to mark him? To be mated to me instead of fighting me for the gift the good old fashioned way?” I was beyond appalled by the very idea.

“Evarius would mate with my daughter?” My mother’s voice boomed in the chambers. An unlikely display from the usually calm woman.

“We can assume, that is the reason he captured your mate. In exchange for him, he hopes you’ll willingly give yourself to him.” Zillah replied, making me

think that to be the stupidest plan yet. And if Evarius was even remotely banking on my cooperation then there lay his downfall.

“Of course, underestimating the fool is what got us in this predicament in the first place.” Liira warned, but underestimating my uncle was by no means the reason that sense of victory had washed over me and drawn a smile out of my lips. It was Evarius’ own underestimating of the mate bond. His own actions so far placed him at thinking I would do anything for my mate because of the mate bond. Of which he was quite right.

“Astryn, have Lord Rakon ready the former queen. We’ll march to wherever my uncle wishes once I’m done here.”

“So soon?” My mother rushed to my side, distress gracing her face. “We have barely said our goodbyes.”

“It cannot be helped, mother.” I marvelled at the unusual calm I felt after having been unsure of myself. Perhaps it had everything to do with knowing that I could choose not to do this alone. I could have him fight by my side. Despite our past, and apart from Gol, there was no one I’d rather have standing by me. “The sooner we journey, the sooner this madness has a chance of ending.”

“You say that as though it were some minor quarrel.” My mother protested, making me smile.

“I thought you had faith in the chosen. In your daughter.”

“You just came back to us.” Warm trembling hands cupped my cheeks. “So forgive my reluctance to let you face that mad man all alone. And besides—” Those trembling hands dropped to my belly. “You shouldn’t be doing this in the first place.”

“I shouldn’t, but I am. And I will come back to you. I promise.” I got up before my mother could protest some more and proceeded to readying myself.

“I’m afraid there has been no progress with the spell surrounding the palace, so you will have to journey alone.” I simply nodded at that. They didn’t know it, but Zillah’s words were a source of comfort as I knew that apart from my mate, everyone else I cared about would be safe. Even if it meant them being trapped behind the palace walls.

With my newfound abilities, I would not need it, but the dagger gifted to me by my mate was the first thing to find its way on my body while I dressed. Well, make that the second thing as I couldn't very well strap the dagger to my body without the stockings. In my state, they were a bit uncomfortable, but I had Astryn help slip them on for reasons that my heart demanded. I missed him.

And if it had not been a sensible thing to take a moment to think before giving in to my uncle's demands, I would have indulged in a senseless rescue just so I could inhale my mate's scent again.

"Because Lord Quent will not be able to stand by your side, he hopes you will accept his gift." Liira handed over an exquisitely wrapped gift box that once opened revealed one more of Quent's brilliant designs. The gown was quite unusual. Seemingly metallic, but to the touch it was as any other precious material. "It has protective properties, but besides all that, the man insisted you need to look the part." Liira rolled her eyes, making me smile.

"The fourth noble house has my gratitude." I bowed while Liira took up the honours of slipping the gown on me. And a look at the resulting image had even me looking twice at my own reflection. I did not just look the part. I embodied the chosen, the queen... And as heads bowed one after the other, those of former kings, of lords and commoners alike, it made for the most glorious of goodbyes to a once insignificant maiden that could have never dreamt of having the realms look to her for their safety.

Gratitude instead of pride still gripped me as I stepped into the carriage meant to slip me and Myrna out a secret gate, away from all the multitudes gathered around the palace.

"You took your damn time!" The bitter greeting from the former queen of Xatis was to be expected. What I did not expect, however, was the accusation that seemed to have been festering right until the moment I sat facing her. "Are you here to gloat?" Huddled in a tiny corner, Myrna sneered, looking every bit like a crazy wolf. "Did he make you scream? Moan at the top of your lungs while he claimed you? Did you like it, Shyla? Writhing with pleasure, knowing very well how much pain you were putting me through?"

Yes, would have been my answer to every one of her questions, but I refused to entertain her misplaced grievances. She was my prisoner after all and catching up was the least of things I'd be indulging on the journey. So instead I turned to Rakon, asking the head of the king's guard to ensure that her shackles would not be coming loose for whatever reason.

“You would have me remain shackled?” The shock in her tone was actually amusing, making me stop to marvel at her.

“How should traitors be treated then, dear sister? Perhaps leave you unchained, but have a brute defile you before snuffing the life out of you? Would your own ways be preferable to you?”

“So what is this? Revenge?” She smirked and dared to look at me with her haughty attitude. But I wouldn’t be having that today and before she realized, I let my wolf at her. Growling and snarling, right into her mind link.

“You would have to be someone important for anything of the sort.”

“W-Wait, h-how did you do that?” If she could find refuge in the carriage’s walls, the traitor would have begged the wood to swallow her up and keep her from the terror my wolf seemed to have inflicted. And I should not have enjoyed the sight, but seeing Myrna not know what to do with me for once was unusually satisfying.

## **The King’s Tainted Mate Chapter 85 - Tips**

Horns, trumpets and battle ready men met our carriage’s arrival at our unexpected destination. Of all the places Evarius could have crawled under to hide, this particular place would have never crossed my mind. And going by the display of military power, my uncle was not exactly hiding.

My wolf was exceptionally pleased at the sight. Something about not being underestimated by the enemy. While I, I was gripped by the sad reality of what could have been. I hadn’t yet been to my parent’s home, but the emblems flying high on every raised banner was a familiar figure in my eyes that had me recognizing what would have been my childhood home. The beauty of the grounds against the golden sunset painted just the right amount of outdoor magic that would have appealed not only to the younger me, but the older too.

“It’s mine now.” Myrna mumbled, drawing my attention. It seemed to have taken the entire journey and my silence for her to find her composure once again. Or at least the part of her that still thought could draw the jealous bone out of me. “All of it. Now that my mate will make every one of you insignificant lot pay for—”

I scoffed. I had resolved not to let her have a reaction out of me, but I couldn’t help but scoff at Myrna’s delusions. Did she actually believe that Evarius and

her would end up victorious and be the ones to rule the realms? The smug look she now wore even when she remained shackled seemed to say so and I couldn't help but feel sorry for her.

"Stop the carriage!" Ignoring Myrna's haughty attitude, I commanded the small band of guards Evarius had waiting for me and Myrna once we had exited the palace walls to stop. Their work was done and henceforth began mine. And perhaps I couldn't pass the opportunity to slap Myrna with the truth of who was actually in charge in the face.

"My lady, this is not exactly where the lord is expecting you." If the guard who seemed to be the head of the small group could look anymore apologetic, he would have as he relayed his orders as though they tasted like sand on his tongue. "He was very specific in his instructions."

"As lord of the third house, I'm not here to bow to Evarius' wishes."

"Lord?" The surprise in Myrna's tone should have been satisfying, but I ignored her as I straightened up once my feet touched the ground. My words seemed to have caught the guards by surprise too. But once recognition settled in, there was no doubt in their eyes about my claims.

"Lord L— I mean, Lady Lily?" Relief graced the features of all the guards as they finally took me in in light of my own introductions. "We thought—" The head of the guards nervously scanned his surroundings before focusing back on me. "Surely Lord Lydo wouldn't have let his long lost daughter back here?" The warning was clear in the man's tone making me realize the men were not on Evarius' side even though they were carrying out his demands.

It was a little matter I could not celebrate however, as I was aware that with all the sorcery at his disposal, that fact could change at any moment. And until I knew for sure how far his sorcery could go in manipulating these wolves, I wouldn't be letting my guard down for whatever reason. No matter how safe I felt among my people or despite this being my home, I still had to remember that this remained the devil's lair. And until I had my mate by my side, I was but one wolf surrounded by what could turn out to be a problematic enemy even for the chosen.

"Letting his only daughter back here? Of course not. You know the man well enough in that regard." I smiled at the men who'd since straightened up and were according me the due respect of lord and not just the noble lady they'd been told to escort.

“B-But—” Strange looks passed from one man to the next. “Then how is it that you are here? Surely Lord Lydo should know that his younger brother has gone mad and that this is no place for the only heir to the third noble house to be. Not if the Lord does not wish for his line to end with him.”

“Because as the chosen, I maybe the only one capable of curing my uncle’s madness.” Jaws dropped as figures dropped to their knees in awe.

“Forgive us, my lady.” The head of the guards’ countenance was shining with excitement when he looked back up. “We thought the chosen was still within the palace walls and did not realize how great a presence the gods had graced upon us while we journeyed. If we have offended you—”

“You are the chosen?!” I’d thought she was not listening, but Myrna’s shackles rattled as she cut off the man’s apology. “Is this some kind of a joke?” Not waiting for my reply, she laughed bitterly and if she could curse at the heavens she would have as she glared at what I assumed were the gods. “Wait, is that how you were able to get into my head?” Suddenly that realization had her sinking back into the carriage and I would have relished the terror that filled her eyes if not for the heavy presence that made itself known, forcing my wolf to be more alert than before.

Evarius stood with arms open wide in a welcoming gesture. And if one did not already know the dark reasons that had brought us together, they would easily mistake the smile gracing his face as of one extremely happy to welcome a long lost daughter of the house.

“Now there is a sight that could warm a man’s heart for all eternity.” I cringed at the odd greeting, knowing of the man’s intentions. Evarius on the other hand wore a victorious grin as he rode towards our carriage.

“Oh, Evarius, my love! See what they did to me!” Naturally, Myrna assumed she was the centre of attention, but this time around, I chose not to fault her for it, but used the opportunity to observe any weaknesses my uncle might have.

It turned out that he was not immune to the mate bond. If the death glares that landed on his mate’s shackles were anything to go by. But that did not mean he’d let it control him. The man was impressive when with just one more look at his shackled mate and his composure settled in effortlessly.



I did not need to face Mryna to know how much that shattered her. The whimpering that followed her mate's choice was enough to let that fact be evident.

"I can see that you honoured my terms." Evarius observed with a tone I did not appreciate.

"I don't exactly see you doing the same." I growled and the lack of cracks in his composure told me exactly what I needed to know. Whatever he'd done was working perfectly against my gift. Bringing him into submission was out of the question. But that was something I'd expected.

"I must say you have grown since the last time I saw you." The way he took me in had my wolf growling and itching to mark some kind of boundary. Evarius was not welcome or more importantly, he was not worthy. And while that was a total surprise to me and something that let me know that there was no way in hell my wolf would let him mark us, Evarius seemed to be aware of it.

"No matter, I'll be worthy...eventually."

"Eventually?" I was missing something. Something important and I couldn't help but ask.

"First things first, dear child." Instead of furnishing me with an answer, the man turned to his shackled mate, making me ready myself to reject his request to let her free. But her freedom wasn't exactly what Evarius was after. "I, Evarius, do hereby reject you Myrna..."