

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 9 - Tips

"The people are getting anxious, your Majesty." I glared at the assembly of council men, seeking to spot whoever had dared to anger me so early in the morning. The sun was not yet up and I had barely put my behind on the seat reserved for me at the head of the table before the culprit dared to open his mouth. It was the usual practice, but my mood this morning was not exactly as usual. It hadn't been for a while now. I was more beast than human and that person should have discerned that. That is if they wished to keep their head on their shoulders.

"Over what exactly?!" I growled, ready to pounce when my blazing eyes spotted him.

"You promised to play nice, Your Majesty." I felt a hand rest on mine as Rakon spoke over the mind link and it earned him a glare too. "Remember, this is for Xatis. You can't keep executing men for simply speaking."

"I damn well can, even for simply breathing!" I bit back, meaning every word and Rakon only sighed, probably convinced by what had made for my very recent gory past. My hands were stained with the blood of men whom I had not cared for their innocence except for their disobedience. If I shed blood this morning however, that blood would be on Rakon's hands for insisting I be the politician I was expected to be and attend this useless council meeting.

The council chambers was not where I wished to be. Not today. If I had my way, I would have been in my bed drowning in wine or catching up on that amount of sleep I had been so forced to give up. But as the new king of Xatis, rising early was a fate I was expected to endure. Sleep was simply a luxury I could not afford and drowning in wine had led kings to their downfall apparently. It was ironic that I could not enjoy such simple pleasures.

I had taken over from my father. Crowned king in the most majestic ceremony. The whole of Xatis had celebrated for a whole month. Congratulatory messages had poured from far and wide. I had no doubt everyone had blessed the moon goddess on my behalf and prayed for my reign to be peaceful and successful and yet here I was. Out of my bed, seeking to shed the blood of the men charged with ruling beside me while all the commoners still remained under the comfort of their blankets. It was as if my life had been turned upside down and I was the slave and not Xatis's king. I was failing and I hated it.

There was just so much that needed my attention. The trade routes had been met with enemy competition and the kingdom was losing money. That in turn affected the farmers. With no safe way to trade, most of the produce lay rotting in our barns. And unhappy farmers made unhappy husbands and that trickled further to make unhappy wives. I couldn't have a bunch of those. No one knew better than me how much trouble an unhappy wife could be, so I had put away the simple luxuries of sleep and rest to avert that trouble. But despite all my efforts, there was always something not going right, someone needing something more, a part of Xatis that was not happy with its king.

However, what the man was alluding to was something of my doing, entirely. My biggest failure as king or was it fate's doing? Perhaps that was the reason hearing of my people's anxiety angered me so much.

I bored my murderous gaze into the noble who had dared to highlight what I had known since the day I wed my queen. The man swallowed hard, beads of sweat appearing on his brow as he struggled to find the right words that would not anger me any further. What he didn't know, what they all didn't know, was that, merely waking up angered me. And that was in no way because of the thousand tasks that awaited me each day or my lack of sleep or rest. This was something different, strange too. It was responsible for the beast I'd become. It was something lodged somewhere deep within. In a place I seemed not to be able to reach. All I knew was that it affected me and my wolf. There was simply no appeasing either of us. Not even with wine. And the fact that the reason for it had kept eluding me no matter how much I pondered on it, had resulted in my constant foul mood that put everyone around me at risk of their necks being slashed if they so much as stepped a toe out of line.

"Well..." the man croaked out, his throat as dry as a twig used to light a fire. "With no announcement of a royal heir's banquet, everyone is beginning to worry for his Majesty's and Xatis's future." I was tempted to roll my eyes at that concern. It was too early for anyone to think I would never birth any heirs, but I understood why my own people would be anxious.

My chosen mate, my queen, was still without a child in her belly. I clenched my fists at the thought of that reality. Despite having consummated our marriage on our wedding night and each day after that, she still smelled the same. Her scent had not changed to speak of the conception of my heir. It was a disappointing start to my reign and our chosen bond. With no heir conceived on our wedding night, my children would be ordinary princes and wolves. But that did not mean I was about to indulge these hungry politicians in my bedroom affairs.

I was about to lash out as my anger flared, but something odd happened. My raging emotions calmed in an instant and the strangest set of words left my lips. "If my people are anxious, let them seek the face of their king and pour their hearts out in my hearing." Surprise registered on the faces in the council chambers, with a few donning looks of triumph. I knew those snakes that sought to control me and my soft answer must have convinced them of the beginning of their victory. I couldn't have that. As much as that calmness overtook me, I couldn't afford to look weak. "Of course, if they are bold enough to stand in their king's presence, I hope they are bold enough to endure his verdict too."

"O-Of course, your highness." The man who'd brought the matter to my attention sat down quicker than he had stood. No doubt afraid that I would be handing out a punishment to him. He would have received one, but even in my anger, I perceived that he was merely a puppet of some strong noble house that would rather hide in the shadows than face me.

"Cowards."

"Perhaps if you had marked her on your wedding night, we would not be in this situation."

That scheming snake! I glared at the man who had just spoken, hating that I could do absolutely nothing to him in this setting. Being from one of the notable noble houses, I couldn't unleash the fate I desired on him. Not if I did not wish for the whole kingdom to rise up against me. The fool knew it too, going by the smug smile he donned. And if not for Rakon's hand that held me down on my seat, my canines would have sunk in his throat already, damn the consequences.

"Lord Evarius, since when did your king's bedroom matters become your concern?" I spat through gritted teeth. He'd been hounding me on the matter but I had ignored him. But now that it was out in the council, this was about to get political. A seed had been planted to highlight my inadequacies and if not dealt with hastily it would lead to many doubting my capabilities as a king and a man. I would have argued that reasoning earlier to keep the matter from getting to this point, but the truth was, neither I knew why I hadn't. If I had marked Myrna, perhaps as Lord Evarius claimed, I would not be in this situation, but something had kept me from doing it that night and every other day and night after that.

I still did not understand it, but one thing I was certain of was that I owed no one any explanation over my actions. Whether I marked my queen or not, was a matter between me and my chosen mate and since I knew this to be simply a ploy to highlight my incompetences as a king, I chose to indulge the man. Well, that is if one would call accusing a man of treason indulging.

“Did my queen perhaps seek the comfort of your bosom over the matter or perhaps you wish for her to bear your mark?”

“Your Majesty!” Lord Evarius exclaimed, feigning shock while the rest of the council spoke loudly amongst themselves at the accusation.

“Well that’s one way to get a dog to behave.” Rakon chuckled in our mind link, but I found nothing amusing about the matter. I had hit a nerve. Lord Evarius was many things, but he was not one to make his emotions known so carelessly, making me wonder what that display was meant to hide from me.

“Forgive me, your Majesty. It was not my intention to anger y—”

Noise... That was what that meaningless apology was and it only served to anger me and remind me of my many failures as king. I could not even tame my own council.

Or perhaps nothing that had befallen me was the problem. Not my enemies in this council or outside. Not my lack of sleep or rest. Not the many things going wrong in Xatis. It was her. My wretched mate and her betrayal. Finding her should have completed me. With her by my side, I would have been perfect at this. Just like father had been with mother at his side.

Finding my mate however, had been my undoing. My curse. She was the reason everything refused to go right. Even when I had done the worst to punish her, I had found no satisfaction as I had hoped. And as I listened to the mockery of an apology, I sought blood. Perhaps one less enemy would sooth the beast in me. The calm I had felt earlier was long gone and only anger raged.

“Your Majesty?” I ignored Rakon as I indulged my dark side. My eyes were set on Lord Evarius’s neck, watching as his vein pulsed each time his fearful heart beat in his chest. It was the first time I let the alpha in me loose, making everyone in the council bow as I showed them who was king. Canines elongated on their own accord while my claws itched to tear at that pulsing. My tongue longed to taste the warm metallic taste and just before I leapt I was

tackled to the ground. My claws slashed and Rakon's pained growl snapped me out of my daze.

"Damn it, Elian!" He was on all fours and still in his human form which explained how I had been able to strike him so easily. "Have you gone mad?"

"Stay out of my way!" I growled.

"That fool is not worth the trouble."

"I do not care!" I ignored Rakon once again as shifted my focus back to my treacherous prey.

"They found the ring!"

"What?!" The news wiped what remained of my rage instantly. "This had better not be one of your stupid ploys, Rakon!" I warned.

"Well, we won't know if you keep insisting on staining the council chambers with bitter blood."

Hearing that something had finally gone right, I sprang to my feet and was out of the council chambers in a flash. Relief, joy and something I did not recognize washed over me as I itched to get my hands on the long lost treasure. I was already in the hallway leading to my study when Rakon caught up.

"As per your instruction, the ring and its bearer are already inside your study." I nodded, thinking nothing of his words as my mind readied itself to meet the stranger I had deflowered that night. Was it the same person as the ring bearer? And why was my heart fluttering all of the sudden? My wolf was acting strange too, forcing me to pick up my pace. I had to get in there.

I was a few paces from my study when a familiar sweet sugary scent filled my nose and I froze. What was she doing here?! Realization had me glaring in my best friend's direction.

"What did you do?!" Because he was the only one to sing about her innocence and chastize me over what a mistake the fate I had lavished on her was, I held him by his neck and slammed him into the wall. My claw marks on the side of his face were already fading and I was ready re-print them if he did not start talking.

“What the hell?!” Surprise flickered in Rakon’s eyes, but I knew better. If he had dared to disobey me on this matter, his would be the blood I would be spilling right this minute. “What did I do now?” He didn’t bother to fight me and merely stared at me, confusion clouding his eyes. It was unlike him and had I been in my right frame of mind, his state would have convinced me of his innocence. “Whatever it is, I swear I know nothing of this.” Rakon finally caught on when I did nothing but glare at him. “Someone just mindlinked claiming they’d found an outlaw, a maiden in the capital bearing your ring. She had been trying to exchange it for gold.”

“An outlaw?” That one word brought my whole world to a stop. It couldn’t be! As my mind pieced together every other thing Rakon had hastily spewed out of his mouth, I couldn’t help but think of the first and last time I had been in the forgotten village. An outlaw...that’s what she would be after I banished her.

“That’s what the message said.” Rakon growled, his hand massaging his neck. “What is this? Do not tell me you have changed your mind now that it has been found.” Rakon frowned.

That was definitely not it, but what were the odds of it being what I thought it to be? My legs refused to work, but I willed them to as I took determined steps towards my study. I had to know.