

Tasting Nora-Pleasing Her Stepbrother Mates #Tasting 151 - Read Tasting Nora-Pleasing Her Stepbrother Mates Tasting 151

Tasting 151

151—I Am A Liar

Nora:

“Cain drinks that much?” I asked cautiously, feeling uneasy about it. Do we even know each other well enough?

“Um, he does. But not all the time. Usually, he does it when he’s super upset.” Silas parked the car in front of a street.

“And does he tell anyone? I mean, confide in someone about his problems?” Since the brothers didn’t really have friends, I wondered how they coped with daily life traumas or if they had someone to share their worries with.

“Cain? No! None of us do. We like to keep it to ourselves,” Silas said before he walked out of the car and over to my side, opening the door

for me.

“Don’t worry, nobody is going to bother you here. The only people who come to this bar are the rich ones who don’t want to drink and get photographed,” he added as he led me down a narrow street.

At the end of the street stood a not-so-big bar. He was right. If he hadn’t told me about it, I would have never guessed there was a bar here.

“Come on,” he held my hand and guided me inside.

Right off the bat, I could smell alcohol and cigarettes. It wasn’t large, and there was no music or anything fancy going on. There were cubicles, and everyone was sitting alone with a bunch of bottles on the table in front of them. It felt like the loneliest bar ever.

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I could tell from the bar’s condition that Cain must have been very upset and sad to leave the comfort of his studio.

“The last one,” the bartender glanced at Silas and immediately knew who he had come here looking for.

We began to walk towards the end of the bar, and as Silas had said, it wasn't too bad here. Nobody was looking at me or making remarks. They were all lost in their own thoughts.

Once we reached the last cubicle, sure enough, we found Cain inside surrounded by a bunch of empty bottles.

"Cain! How many of these did you—" Silas stopped himself as he started counting the bottles and lost track.

"Dude!" Silas stepped in.

"It reeks in here," I whispered as I entered second behind Silas so Cain couldn't see me

Cain looked like a mess with his hair tousled and his eyes swollen.

"Why are you here, Silas?" he asked in a grumpy and unhappy tone.

"To fetch you, of course. The pack is angry, and you're drowning yourself in alcohol. What happened now?" Silas was stern, standing before his brother with hands on his hips, closely observing Cain's every move.

"There are three of you. Why do you need me?" His voice was raspy as he spoke with his brother.

"And yet we need you. If you don't want to protect the pack, then let us know. We'll... make Nora the Luna Queen of the East," Silas joked, but Cain's response bothered me a little.

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His body flinched at my mention, and he instantly grabbed a bottle from the side, gulping it down his throat. I tried to convince myself it was because I was his mate, and he might need me when he was suffering from whatever pain led him to abandon everything and rely on alcohol.

"Come on, Cain! We need you," Silas groaned, snatching the bottle from his hands. Cain resisted, turning his body and giving me a double

take.

A smile spread across my lips to let him know I was there for him. He kept staring even as Silas pulled back and studied us for a few seconds.

“She came here to look for you,” Silas broke the silence, but Cain only lowered his head without returning the smile to me.

“Cain, let’s go home. There’s so much going on,” I stepped forward, hoping to break through to him. There was indeed a lot that needed his attention and guidance, not just for the pack but for my own troubles as

well.

“Silas, don’t you know you’re not supposed to bring her to places like these?” Cain’s response was harsh and quick, and he didn’t spare a glance at me.

“I insisted on coming,” I said stubbornly, hands on my hips. But Cain still didn’t turn to look at me.

“There are too many drunk men here,” he hissed, shaking his head at his brother.

“Then come home because I couldn’t leave her alone, and she wanted to find you,” Silas explained.

“Take her and go home,” Cain grumbled.

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“I won’t go if you won’t,” I stubbornly pouted, but each time I spoke, Cain’s reactions seemed to grow harsher.

He lowered his head and shook it, but the way his jaw clenched stunned me. I don’t know why, but he was emitting a strange energy.

“Don’t be a child; your pack and people need you,” Silas hissed at him. Finally, Cain attempted to get up but nearly stumbled, almost falling if Silas hadn’t caught him.

Once Silas had a firm hold on him, he guided Cain out of the bar and to his car, with me silently following them. Silas settled Cain in the backseat, then straightened up to look at me.

“I’ll go pay the bill and be right back. Stay inside the car, okay?” His voice had grown even raspier from all the convincing he had to do to bring his brother back home.

After nodding, I sat in the passenger seat and turned to speak to Cain.. This was the first time we were alone since last night.

“Cain, are you okay?” I asked, concerned. He didn’t break eye contact with me, leaning back and staring at me in an awkward silence. His legs were spread wide, hands resting between them.

“Did I do something wrong?” I finally gathered the courage to ask him that question.

He continued staring and then let out a scoff. “You’re a liar,” his words. hit me straight in the heart. I frowned, tilting my head, urging him to explain his comment.

But he closed his eyes as if signaling he needed rest, and Silas returned by then.

Tasting 152

152–It’s Getting Messy

Nora:

Throughout the entire car ride, I couldn’t help but wonder why he called me a liar. What did he mean by that? I just couldn’t believe my eyes. His stare was off. It didn’t hold the same kind of love and

affection for me as I had seen before. I shook my head and turned to look outside the window to forget about that comment. Maybe he made

that comment because he was too drunk?

Once we got home, I didn’t rush to my bedroom. In fact, I stayed behind Silas as he laid Cain down on the couch in the living room. “Stay here,” Silas pointed his finger at Cain as if he would run away if not told to stay. Silas ran into the kitchen to get him some lemon water while I stood before Cain, who was sprawled on the couch with his head leaning back and his legs spread out. Even his arms were spread across the couch.

“Don’t just stand here and ruin my mood. Get out of my sight,” he commented harshly without even opening his eyes.

I narrowed my eyes at him in bewilderment. This is not how he had ever spoken to me. What did I do wrong? “Cain? What are you saying?”

“Why are you being so rude to me?” I couldn’t hold it in anymore. He

was making it seem like whatever was bothering him was related to me, because he spoke nicely to his own brother. So why be so disrespectful to me?

“Huh! Nora! Don’t force me to say anything. Just leave me alone for some time,” he grumpily folded his arms over his eyes, his request. sounding more like a threat to me.

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“But why? What have I done?” As I continued, I watched him lower his arm from his eyes and give me a deadly glare.

The hair on the back of my neck stood up and I flinched in shock. “Why are you being like this with me?” I asked again, this time locking eyes with him.

“He’s drunk!” Silas intervened, clearly unaware of why his brother’s rude behavior was so shocking to me. He handed Cain the lemon water, and Cain drank it while deliberately avoiding looking at me. It was as if Cain wanted to ensure I knew I was the reason for his erratic behavior.

“Listen, you need to go take a shower. Dad will be home soon, and we have things that need our attention,” Silas patted Cain’s back, who grimaced. He was clearly in a very bad mood and had also hurt me. I don’t know if I’ll forgive him easily for acting like such a jerk after drinking so much.

“Hmm!” Cain grunted and got up, slowly making his way upstairs. “The keys to your studio are near the vase.” Silas yelled after him, and Cain raised his hand in acknowledgment.

“What happened to you?” Silas sighed, observing me standing there with a sad expression on my face.

“He was being so rude.” I murmured under my breath.

“That’s normal. Usually, when alpha kings drink, they act like that. Don’t take it personally and go grab yourself something to eat. Today has been a big day, and it’s still not over,” Silas rolled his eyes, wearily slouching back on the couch.

“What’s going on with the pack? And what does Dad want to talk about?” I felt like a guilty person trying to pry.

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I had a feeling he must have received a call from the principal.

“About the pack, of course,” Silas shrugged.

It was no use speaking to him since I could tell he had no clue what had happened at school. I went back upstairs, wishing to have another talk with Cain and ask him what had been going on, but he had

actually locked his studio door for the first time. All these signs were scaring me now.

Once in my room, I paced around and didn’t even let Akira out. Maybe I had been very careless all these days. In fact, so careless that I forgot why I was here in the first place. I needed protection and help. But look at me, I got myself into so much trouble now. And if the pack members and the council believed Natalya’s words, even the brothers might face hate.

Soon, I heard some noises downstairs and realized they had gathered there. I rushed out of my room and found Cain leaving his studio as well. He was dressed all in black, his hair was wet, and his steps were still a little wobbly. It was surprising how quickly an alpha king recovered from a hangover.

“Cain!” I called out to him, but he avoided me and continued walking downstairs as if I didn’t even exist.

I hated being treated like this.

“If I’ve done something wrong, just tell me,” I insisted, walking closely behind him.

“For fuck’s sake, look around before you talk,” his scolding took me by surprise as he turned sharply to glare at me, then towards the others. sitting down.

I recoiled and hugged myself, feeling insulted, but Cain continued to approach his brothers and sit with them.

I arrived and noticed everyone was present except for Nash. It was then that my eyes landed on Dad, who sighed with his head down.

“Dad, what’s up?” Ryker inquired after giving me a quick scan from head to toe.

“I got a call today that left me deeply disturbed,” he mumbled, already alarming me.

“A call from whom? Tell us the name, and we’ll make sure the caller never dares to bother you again,” Silas calmly made a threat, his eyebrows narrowed and his hand resting behind the couch.

“It was from Nora’s school. They told me some things,” Lord Atwood finally said it, raising his head to look at me.

My heart sank as I realized it was happening. He had received the news. He heard about the rumors which is why he looked so sad

Tasting 153

153–Dating The She–Devil

Nash:

“You’re doing it again,” I narrowed my eyes at her face, threatening her with my glare. But she seemed determined to argue with me.

“How much do you know about her?” she asked, her head tilted and her eyes showing a strange danger in them.

“Enough! I know enough about her. And if there’s something she hasn’t told me, I’m sure it’s because it’s not related to me. Everyone has secrets, Daphne. And if I find out that anyone has breached hers—,” I was talking nonstop when her smirk silenced me.

Then, in a very calm tone, she added, “There’s a rumor going around. that reached my ears today.” She had her arms folded on her chest, no longer holding her stomach. Her face started to show color too, no longer looking blue and cold.

“What rumor?” I asked with a frown.

“Nora has been intimate with her stepbrothers,” the words from her mouth shook the ground under my feet, but I kept my posture to not give her the satisfaction of seeing me react to something crazy about Nora.

“That is nonsense. You started this rumor, tell me now,” I demanded angrily, watching her shake her head at me as if she thought I was some idiot.

“Nash! Her own best friend saw Nora kissing Ryker and Cain painting her naked,” she mused, making my heart skip a beat.

The hair on my skin stood up, and my throat started to dry. I knew she was getting aroused, and it wasn’t something I didn’t know already. However, I was shocked that Daphne knew about it now.

“Who told you that?” I growled, showing her my anger so she wouldn’t pass this information to someone else.

“Everyone in the school is talking about it. Apparently, her friend saw her kissing Ryker and getting intimate with him. And then she went on to date Brody. It’s like she’s being passed around—” The minute she said that about Nora, my hand raised beyond my acknowledgment. Her body flinched when I stopped my hand midair and quickly stepped away from her. Her eyes grew double in shock at what I was about to do.

“How dare you!” I yelled, still not over the fact that she said something like that about her.

“How dare me? Why don’t you go listen to what everyone is saying about her? You’re lucky your name wasn’t in it because I’m pretty sure your brothers are going to lose their crowns for having inappropriate relations with their stepsister,” she continued, but not in a whisper this time.

She wasn't wrong, though. This could happen. If the council believed them, they would take harsh steps, including sending Nora away forever.

I couldn't believe this. Even when Nora had told me about it, I just found it odd that she did all that. I am sure she was young and maybe feeling something. But why? Why would she lead on both my brother and Brody? What about my brothers? Did they know she was intimate with both of them, or were they unaware of it? It was all so messy, and

if they knew, why didn't they stop her? She is just a young girl without a wolf. They have their wolves; they have more control than her.

"What happened? Shocked?" she grimaced, shaking her head and looking me in the eye with anger.

"It is all a lie. That never happened. That friend of hers—" I was talking when she interrupted me.

"I heard she has some proof too. In fact, maybe the council will be on their way to check Cain's studio just now," she whispered and then pulled back.

"Oh! So they're going to find your painting there too?" As I said that, her mouth turned dry.

"See! This is why you never wish for someone's downfall. You don't know what you'll get entangled in," I was certainly worried for Nora and my brothers and knew I had to deal with all this mess.

"I wasn't—" Before she could continue, I approached her and held her hand.

"I know. But Daphne, you have been to our home. You know Nora never acted that way around us, don't you?" I hated that I had to be that close to her again. But we needed witnesses who could say Nora was innocent.

"I—" she frowned in confusion, her eyes constantly traveling to my hands holding hers.

"Listen, I don't know what her messy friends are up to, but I didn't expect that from you. I was planning a date for us, and you're over here talking crap about my stepsister?" I shook my head at her in disappointment, watching her eyes regain their shine.

"You—you're going to—" her smile returned.

“I was angry with you, but that didn’t mean I would leave you. Haven’t we fought before? But I’m so disappointed you would go that far to say that we brothers—” The minute I wrinkled my nose, she started shaking her head vigorously.

“No! Absolutely not. I didn’t believe it. That’s why I came here to tell you so you can go and handle the mess before it grows,” she cupped my face in her hands, her cold palms concerning me.

Was she sick?

“Ah! But you ruined the date surprise,” I shrugged, and she pouted.

“I am so sorry, but I’m so glad you told me. I could have died thinking you were never coming back to me,” she quickly wrapped her arms around my neck and leaned in for a kiss.

Reluctantly, I kissed her and hugged her back. This issue needed immediate attention and a solution. Otherwise, Nora would be snatched away from our home. So even if it meant I had to deal with Daphne a little longer, I was ready to compromise.

“I am so glad you’re not like those messy she-wolves,” I rolled my eyes after breaking the kiss and hugging her.

She was rocking my body happily, and I felt so stuck now. But it was something I had to do now.

Tasting 154

154—I Am Seducing My Stepbrothers

Nora:

My heart was jumping up and down as Lord Atwood started talking about what he got from the school.

“The principal told me that the students are a bit outraged about a rumor and want an immediate explanation to see if it is true,” he added, and I slowly sat down on the lonely sofa.

All eyes turned to me, and I buried my head even lower.

“What rumor? What is going on?” Silas asked casually. Obviously, he had no clue about the mess happening around him. In fact, he would be so relieved to find out I was not exactly an ideal stepdaughter like he had always warned his father.

“The

is that—Nora is intimate with her stepbrothers,” it took him such courage to say it. His face turned red, and he constantly covered it with his hands.

The looks on others’ faces told me they were horrified that the news got

out.

“What?” Silas yelled, straightening his back.

“Who started this rumor?” Ryker was the second one to question, while Cain sat with his head down, his eyes searching for answers.

“Her friend,” Lord Atwood said, and Cain instantly raised his head and rolled his eyes.

“Of course, she did,” he clicked his tongue in disbelief.

“Why? Do you know something about it?” Lord Atwood was now giving his full attention to Cain.

“She was hitting on me hard. Even convinced me with the help of Nora to paint her naked. I did paint her, but I wasn’t feeling it, so I didn’t paint her face, and she got upset,” Cain scoffed loudly, sighing as he finished talking.

“That is why she started such a nasty rumor?” Lord Atwood raised his tone, his eyes displaying anger.

“Why else

would she?” Cain muttered under his breath.

“But she is saying she has proof that you painted Nora naked,” Lord Atwood remembered the detail, and Cain raised his head to look at his father.

What?” It i

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that Cain was now reconsidering his lie.

“And everyone is saying Ryker kissed Nora,” Lord Atwood grimaced at the thought of it, but he had to tell his sons what else was being said.

I was pinching my fingers hard, watching them talk about it and feeling so bad about my actions.

“And?” Silas intervened, and I raised my brow just a little. Maybe he was scared that his little play with my breasts was also revealed.

“That’s it, why?” Lord Atwood turned to him and gazed at him for looking obviously distressed.

“I mean, why would they pick these two randomly?” Silas cleared his throat and adjusted his posture.

“So

you think we did that?” Ryker hissed at him, but Silas was quick to deny it as he shook his head.

“Of course not,” he said.

“I am so shocked. Now Natalya is saying she has some proof and all, and even April is involved,” Lord Atwood wasn’t even able to make a full sentence, and I could tell why. It wasn’t just a small thing to hear about his sons and stepdaughter doing all that right under his nose.

“I will tell you why,” Nash’s arrival broke the attention and shifted it to him.

He casually stepped in, but his popping muscles gave me the hint that he was also angry about these rumors spreading around.

“Why?” Lord Atwood asked quickly, maybe hoping his son would give some insight that would dismiss this news.

“Because Natalya likes Cain and April wanted to date Ryker. It was all obvious. The two got rejected and took all their anger out on Nora. They befriended her only so that they could get access to Cain and Ryker,” Nash seemed so convinced that I felt bad. I remembered I had told him about my little adventures with his brothers.

So him defending me even after that was sweet but also disappointing because I was making him lie to his father.

“I didn’t know she was that crazy about me,” Ryker rolled his eyes at the mention of April.

“Anyway, that is the case. And I am sure they will not provide anything because they won’t have anything,” Nash sat down, but I could tell from the way he was shaking his leg that there was some tension in his body.

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“However, I was thinking,” Nash steadily scratched his scalp and slid to the edge of the seat, “now that this has been brought to our attention, can we not just tell everyone-” Nash was in the middle of talking when Lord Atwood turned to me as if he remembered something.

“And they said you are dating Brody? There is some text they sent me that you forwarded to Natalya,” he looked a little hopeful, but as he posed that question, all eyes landed on me.

“I won’t be angry if you are indeed dating him. In fact, I heard Brody also confirmed that you never rejected his proposal and that you two decided to give it some time so that he can return from his pack’s visit,” Lord Atwood reminded me of what Brody had said during combat. class when he was defending me.

The looks I was getting from everyone compelled me not to look directly at anyone.

“I will be so relieved if that is the case. Just tell us because that will shut everyone up,” he looked hopeful, his eyes shimmering as he pleaded for me to tell him the truth.

“I read the text so there is no need to be shy about it,” he continued.

I felt pressure being under scrutiny from my peers, my two

stepbrothers, and the stepfather who had been nothing but kind to me all this time.

He had done so much for me that now, when he wanted me to help him get out of this mess where he would be questioned for how clueless he had been about something inappropriate going on under his nose, I took a deep breath and nodded to myself, as if to boost my confidence that I was making the right decision.

Tasting 155

155–I Will Reject My Mate

Nora:

“I actually...” I paused when Ryker coughed and straightened up in his seat. “Dad! Give her some time. She must have been through so much horror at school. If all that happened on the school grounds, I can’t imagine how they have treated her,” his intervention prompted Lord Artwood to lean back in his seat and give me a apologetic smile.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t think about it. Why don’t you go rest and then, when you wake up, talk to Brody and then tell me. This relationship will be a good save,” he continued, and Ryker gently patted his back.

“Dad! Let it be for now,” his insistence was not only noticed by me but by his brothers too. However, everyone kept their silence and let Ryker deal with it.

“Okay, go back to your room,” Lord Atwood spoke softly to me. Even when I was being accused of something so terrible, he was being nice to me and considering my feelings. It made my guilt bigger in my eyes.

I got up and walked away from them. It was the hardest walk I had taken because all eyes were on me. Once in my bedroom, I sat down on my bed and started sobbing into my palms. I hated how Natalya betrayed me and April just went along with it. I wondered if I had made the right decision, especially when it came to befriending someone.

After a few minutes of sobbing alone, I heard a knock on the window and instantly knew who it was. There was only one person who used the window to climb into my bedroom. I rushed to the window

and let

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him in.

The moment Ryker entered the bedroom, I rushed into his arms. All anger and arguments aside, this situation had me messed up. I badly needed someone to hug me, especially my mate.

“Hey! Everything is fine. I got you,” he didn’t waste a single minute before hugging me back tightly and holding me close to his chest.

“I was so humiliated on the battlefield today, Ryker. They shoved me around and hit my head. They even called me names and... I felt horrible,” I sobbed against his muscular chest, his scent softly comforting me.

“I will take care of everyone who misbehaved with you,” he broke the hug and cupped my face in his hands, planting a gentle kiss on my lips. The fact that we both forgot about our earlier arguments told me that our mate bond was far more sacred than some petty disagreements.

“Now what? Dad wants to know if I’m dating Brody or not. And I’m not,” I uttered in frustration.

“Then why did you tell Natalya that you were dating him?” he asked, guiding me slowly to my bed and helping me sit down.

“Because she was threatening me,” I explained, pulling out my phone and handing it to him. He read the conversation and finally understood why I had to tell her that I was dating Brody.

“Nora! If you had told me that before, all this could have been avoided. I would have dealt with it before it even got out,” Ryker sighed. As he put my phone away, he held my hand and kissed the back of it.

“But I will fix it all. You don’t need to do anything before Dad or lie about dating Brody,” he began, but I didn’t wait for him to finish before

sighing in relief.

“Really?” I smiled widely, but then I noticed he wasn’t done yet.

“All you need to do is reject Cain,” he added, and my body flinched as

freed my hands from his grip.

“Nora! What’s wrong with that request? If I had a mate, a second mate, wouldn’t you ask me to reject her before you accepted me?” he asked, narrowing his eyes as he waited for my response.

“Sure. But are you willing to tell everyone I’m your fated mate?” I inquired. He pulled back, rolling his eyes as if tired of me bringing up the same conversation over and over again.

“What’s wrong with being called a second chance mate? In fact, you will tell Cain that I’m your second chance mate and that you felt the mate bond with me after his rejection,” he made things so complicated. It was as if he truly wasn’t ready to accept me for who I was.

“Why? Because those who had multiple mates were frowned upon in the past?” I scoffed and shook my head in disbelief.

“Just do as I’m telling you,” he grunted at me.

“No! If you’re going to accept me, you’ll accept me for who I am. I’m not going to lie about anything. And you’ll accept me before I reject Cain,” I stomped my foot and got up from the bed, watching him stare at me as his face started to tense up.

“Why? Let me ask you something. If Cain accepts you first, would you reject me?” That question from him came out of the blue.

I hadn't thought about it myself either. I mean, I was attracted to both of them, but picking one over the other had never been an option. No wonder the Moon Goddess made them both my fated mates.

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"Your silence really upsets me," he commented.

He slowly got up and adjusted his coat. "Reject Cain, Nora. I'm telling you to reject him and do as I say," he repeated before walking towards the window.

I felt like I needed to take a stand for myself. I cannot let him make all these decisions for me when he cannot even accept me for who I am.

"No! If you ask me again, I will reject you," the moment those words slipped from my lips, he stopped dead in his tracks. I saw his fists clenched, but he never turned around to face me.

After pausing for a few seconds, he left through the window in a hurry, and I regretted saying that last phrase. It's just that his controlling behavior was getting on my nerves now.

Tasting 156

156—Not Accepted As Their Mate

Nora:

Now that Ryker had made it clear he wouldn't accept me so easily, I had only one option left.

"I need to speak to Cain. He has to tell his father that we are mates," I said, pacing around the bedroom.

"It will hurt Lord Atwood so much that we hid such a big thing from him," I understood where she was coming from. But I was also in a situation where I needed to tell him now before it was too late.

"Better late than never," I groaned.

"But do you think Cain is even in the mood to have this talk with his father?" Her question elicited a grunt from me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

“Oh, come on, Nora. Don’t you remember how he acted with us a few hours ago? After that, even when he knew we would be stressed out, he never came to have a talk with us. Even Ryker came but Cain didn’t,” she was right in a sense that Cain was acting differently all of a

sudden.

“Wait! What if Cain had heard about the rumor and that’s why he was so cold towards me?” I jumped on my bed, piecing clues together, and it made sense. Right after Cain started acting up, the whole rumor thing came. Maybe his guard or spies had told him about the rumor before it even spread? Or maybe Natalya did.

156–Not Accepted As Their Mate

“Oh no! Why didn’t I think about it before? Of course, it would upset him,” I felt a little relief at least knowing what the problem was.

“I will go have a talk with him, and I am sure he will figure something out,” I jumped out of bed and had only just opened the door when I found Silas standing there as if he was about to knock.

“Silas! What are you doing here?” I asked, frowning.

“I am not alone, Dad came with me,” he stepped aside to reveal Dad, who looked visibly upset. Every time I saw him like that because of the rumor, I felt like slapping myself awake.

“Can we come inside?” Lord Atwood asked, and I had no choice but to lead him in. I quietly needed some time to speak to Cain before Lord. Atwood asked me if I was dating Brody or not.

“Sure,” I led them in

He paced steadily near the couch and sat down, while Silas folded his arms and motioned for me to sit next to Lord Atwood.

“I don’t know where to start,” Lord Atwood kept his head down as if he were embarrassed about something.

“Dad has been very upset that he failed to protect you from such nasty rumors,” Silas added. It was confirmed that Silas had brought him here

to have a word with me.

“Dad, you didn’t do anything wrong,” I

mured softly.

“I was also thinking about the whole mess and realized, what if—” Silas paused when Lord Atwood raised his head to hear him clearly.

I held Lord Atwood’s hand, and he instantly kissed the back of it, showing me that he was on my side.

“What if we just tell everyone that she is not our stepsister and that we don’t even see her like that?” Nash interjected, stepping in, saying what Silas couldn’t. My Body tensed up curiously, hoping to get a good response to the question.

Lord Atwood immediately withdrew his hand from mine and watched as his sons exchanged a glance.

“Think about it, it will resolve all the issues. It’s not like she’s related to us by blood or that we’ve grown up together. She’s not adopted either. She just came here to live with us. It’s like when two friends say, ‘Oh, she’s like a sister,’ but does that make them siblings?” Silas continued to explain.

I stayed frozen, liking the idea so much.

I honestly hope Lord Atwood accepts this idea because it would save me from having to beg any of my mates to tell their father about us.

“I think Nash is right. It’s natural for our enemies or others to talk about our dynamic. Since we all know the history of her mother—” Silas scratched the back of his neck when Nash signaled him not to say anything bad about my mother.

“Look, she has her father lurking around somewhere with her brother. So why should we take that responsibility? I mean, we’ll keep her here. as a guest, but giving her the title of stepsister? Why force it?” Nash continued firmly.

For the first time, I felt hopeful.

“It will be hard to recover from it, but once you make that announcement that she wasn’t adopted on paper, it will all be fine. We’re alpha kings, who would dare disrespect us?” Silas shrugged.

I didn’t want to say it, but for the first time, I was so happy with Silas talking. He was saying all the right kinds of things, and Lord Atwood was listening attentively as well.

I sank in and waited for Lord Atwood to respond to them.

After they were done talking, Lord Atwood turned to me and gave me a broken smile before he looked back at his sons.

“That is not possible,” he said in the calmest way possible.

“Why not? Imagine if she were one of our mates, would you have said the same thing then?” Nash blurted out without realizing that was indeed the case.

Lord Atwood gave another silent stare at me.

“I mean, Nash is right. I never thought about it. But what if that were the case? What would you have done then?” Silas queried his father.

I was now listening even more keenly because it was exactly the right question to ask Lord Atwood. This was precisely my situation.

After a deep sigh, Lord Atwood lowered his head and clasped his hands together to respond to his sons, “I would have requested Nora to reject the mate.”

I don’t know if I heard him right, but whatever I heard, it broke my heart into tiny million pieces.

Tasting 157

157—I Am Dating My Stepbrother’s Enemy

Nora:

The room fell completely silent, so I stepped in because it really hurt my feelings that he thought asking me to reject my mate would be the right thing to do. “Why?” I asked, shocking the brothers. I’m sure they didn’t expect me to react this way to a hypothetical question. I was fighting tears now.

“Huh?” Lord Atwood looked confused and turned to me.

“Why would you ask someone you claim to love and care for so much to reject her mate?” My voice was breaking, but I didn’t want to come off as obviously hurt. But what could I do? It was a serious question.

“Because—” Before he could continue, I interrupted, “Is it because I’m not good enough? You can keep me as their stepsister but not your son’s mate?” I felt horrible saying it, but thankfully, Lord Atwood was not one of those men who uses every word against you.

“No, Nora! You are perfect. I’m glad you’re picking Alpha today because I know you deserve the best. I’m so happy that you’ve also found an alpha,” he continued, dodging my question.

“She’s upset because of how you said it—” Silas quickly brought his attention back to the main subject until he received a glare from Nash and added, “Oops, sorry!”

“Do you want to know why?” Finally, Lord Atwood seemed to answer my query.

“Because it was your mother’s dying wish that I accept you as my

Am Dating My Stepbrother’s Enemy

stepdaughter and for the brothers to be your stepbrothers. Those were the last words that came out of her lips before she passed away. She wanted nothing but for you to have my sons as your stepbrothers, and as much as I know how important the mate bond is, my hands would have been tied,” he explained, pulling the ground from under my feet.

“But that’s a bit much. Last words don’t mean that much,” Nash shrugged.

“Here they do. It wasn’t just her last words. She made a deal with me that I must accept her daughter as my stepdaughter to protect her from her crazy father and brother, and in return, she gave me something. I just want you to know, there’s a heavy burden on my chest. It will only be lifted the day the adoption papers are signed,” he finished, and the brothers nodded, finally understanding the importance of accepting me as their stepsister.

I was speechless. It felt like I was now trapped in the emotions of our mate bond and burdened with the responsibility to help Lord Atwood uphold his end of the deal, which had caused him so much pain.

“Now you understand why it’s important?” Lord Atwood asked his sons.

“Hmm,” Nash sighed, stepping away slowly and running his hand through his hair. Silas stood still, a frown forming on his lips.

“Anyway, why are we discussing this now? We need to ensure all kinds of rumors are dispelled. Any speculation, no matter how small, must not linger,” Lord Atwood began speaking with much more confidence and energy now that he had clarified his position.

I felt utterly powerless and despondent. Part of me wanted to flee and never return to this mansion, but another part feared for Lord Atwood. He needed me now.

1574 Am Dating My Stepbrothers Enemy

“I think Nora dating Brody will also help a lot. Once it’s known she’s already dating an alpha, everyone will back off,” Lord Atwood was the only one speaking, while his sons nodded in agreement. Nash continued to pace around, casually throwing glances at me, while Silas stood with his arms folded.

“So you think she should date Brody?” Silas inquired.

“Even just for the time being. I mean, give it a try and if it doesn’t work out, breakups happen,” Lord Atwood turned to me after realizing I hadn’t spoken a single word this whole time.

I didn’t have anything to add to the conversation; I was deeply disturbed and bothered. Also, I wanted to tell Lord Atwood the truth about me, his sons, and the mate bond. But then I was afraid he would ask me to reject them if I revealed any truth from that entire conversation.

“Tell me, Nora. If you don’t want to date Brody, do you have anything else in mind that would help you and my sons with their reputation?” He held my hand, giving me the opportunity to tell him the truth.

But I was afraid. Afraid I would ruin everything. It had been going so perfectly until now. With my head down, I took a deep breath and shook my head. “You’re right. I have no other option,” I uttered faintly.

Just as I spoke, Cain walked in with his hands in his pockets, his eyes scanning me. It wasn’t as if he could do anything anymore anyway.

“I will date Brody,” I said as I straightened my back. I expected Cain to be angry or look betrayed, but instead, he scoffed and smirked in a taunting way. This was another reason I was so quick to accept the date plan. Cain had been so distant from me, especially after we slept together. Now that I think about it, my first time with him was

followed by him going missing on me and then treating me so poorly.

157 Am Daling My Stepbrother’s Enemy

“Good, I was expecting this from you. It will all be fine now,” Lord Atwood smiled in relief, getting up from his chair, probably to inform the council that everything was resolved.

“What about the proof? Natalya claims to have something on Nora, maybe the painting?” Silas brought up another issue that we had entirely forgotten about. My heart skipped a beat, and I gulped nervously.

“Cain! Is it true?” Lord Atwood asked Cain, who shook his head calmly, not even making an effort to deny the accusations.

“You can check my studio. You won’t find her painting because it never happened,” he spoke confidently while maintaining eye contact with me.

I was so surprised by what he said. What did he do to my painting?

Tasting 158

158–The Dirty Paintings

Nora:

Lord Atwood had gone to Cain’s studio just to double-check. Even though he trusted us, he wanted to ensure he could report to the council that he had inspected the studio and found nothing.

Finally, I stepped out of my room to join Silas and Nash, who were standing by my door, keeping their eyes on the studio entrance.

“Dad must be taking his sweet time in there,” Silas remarked, breaking the tension. Nash and I frowned at him.

“What? I’m serious. I wonder what kind of portraits Cain paints,” he shrugged, folding his arms.

“Have you never seen your brother’s work?” I asked Silas, who pouted.

“I’ve seen the ones he sells. But I bet the ones he keeps are the really spicy ones. Imagine Dad in there, having to sift through all that,” he rolled his eyes until they widened, and I swear I could see a wild thought pop up in his head.

“Wouldn’t it be awkward for Dad to be searching for her painting?” Silas nudged Nash and tried to say it under his breath, but I heard him loud and clear.

He wasn’t wrong.

I felt goosebumps at the thought of Lord Atwood stumbling upon my painting.

“I’m sure Dad trusts them, which is why he’s taking this step,” he answered his own question, as even Nash was silently staring at the studio.

Nash was the only person I had confided everything in regarding my stepbrothers. He hadn’t really looked my way since I left the room. It made me wonder if he was finally seeing me with disgust now that tension had strained our relationship boundaries.

“Ah! Dad is taking forever. I’m sure he’s—” Silas finally stopped when Nash shot him a glare.

“Fine. I’ll shut up,” Silas raised his hands in surrender.

“Why are you even waiting here if you’re so done with this issue?” Nash asked Silas. I wasn’t sure when Silas had made it seem like he was done with the issue. It seemed more like Nash wanted to take out his frustration on someone, and Silas happened to be speaking up.

“I’m actually waiting for Dad to come out so I can confirm if he found anything inside or not,” Silas nonchalantly commented, making me watch his face in disbelief.

Now I knew what his problem was. He loved annoying others too much, but the moment someone joked with him, he would get upset.

However, my worries were no longer just about him.

I had just agreed to date Brody. I’m not even sure why! I sighed and straightened my back when Dad walked out of the studio. Just like Silas had been talking about, I couldn’t help but notice the sweat on his forehead.

“What the heck are you thinking when you paint these things?” Dad took out a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat away.

150–The Dirty Paintings

Silas turned to Nash and quickly winked at him before adopting a serious expression. “Are you okay? Do you need help? I can call someone—” He stopped short after Cain shook his head.

“Was there nothing there?” Nash asked, glancing briefly in my direction.

“Of course there was nothing,” Cain rolled his eyes, crossing his arms and leaning to the side. “I don’t just paint anyone random. My models are handpicked and special,” Cain’s comment stung my pride. I held my tongue because I couldn’t argue with him in front of everyone. But why was he so indifferent towards me?

“Everything’s fine. Anyway, once Nora starts dating Alpha Brody, all this mess will be cleared up,” Lord Atwood didn’t stick around as if he urgently needed to get away from his sons.

“Dude! You scared Dad. Now I’m curious to know what you paint in that little hell of yours,” Silas pointed at Cain’s studio door and Cain rolled his eyes in response.

“Let’s not discuss it again. Anyway, Nora will be dating Brody from now on so—hopefully—we won’t hear these rumors again,” Nash struggled to finish his sentence.

Silas shrugged before adding with a smirk, “I can’t believe that jerk will be coming to our place again.”

“I’ll be in my studio. Make sure you guys get off my door,” Cain didn’t linger for a conversation and waved his finger at his brothers before heading back into his studio.

“You rest too,” Nash muttered, not looking directly at me.

“I have to go check on a patient,” Silas stretched his arms. He seemed

158–The Dirty Paintings

to have had the most fun out of this situation.

Once he walked away, Nash started to leave too, but I had some questions for him.

“Do I disgust you now?” I asked, and he slowed his steps. He turned around and stared at me blankly.

“I just didn’t want you to date Brody. None of us like him, but I guess it is what it is now,” his comment was straightforward. He also made it clear that their dislike for Brody stemmed from their own personal issues, which I had never explored until now when curiosity prompted me to do so.

After Nash left, I returned to my bedroom.

“I feel so terrible,” I covered my face with my hands and sat down.

“Why did you agree to date Brody?” Akira hissed, not even asking how I was coping with the situation.

“Akira! Do you really think I had a choice? Besides, it’s not a scheme. I’m giving him a chance like he asked,” I shot back at her, frustrated that she didn’t consider what I was going through.

“I get it, but Nora! What chance? Are you seriously going to consider dating him?” She sounded increasingly irritated.

“Maybe yes,” I replied bitterly.

“Before you judge me, tell me which of my mates actually stepped up to accept me in this dire situation? And even if they could, they can’t. Didn’t you hear Lord Atwood?” I wanted her to understand the seriousness of the situation.

“Things can always be fixed. You know what you have to do,” she

warned, with a hint of malice

Tasting 159

159—Welcome Home Boyfriend

Nora:

After talking with Akira, I decided it was a better choice to shut her out for a while. There was no way I was going to go along with what she was suggesting. Not until I was certain it was safe enough for me to take that step.

I rested and woke up to a knock on my door. The maid informed me that Alpha Brody was in the living room. He had been summoned to the mansion by Lord Atwood to discuss a few things.

I couldn't believe it was all happening so quickly. I really didn't want it to happen that fast.

After changing into a short black dress, I headed back to join them. As I descended the staircase, I saw Nash standing there, staring at me.

"I hope you understand I have to do this," I apologized. He had never asked for anything, and I knew he wasn't making any demands even now, but deep down, he wasn't happy with the idea of me dating Alpha Brody.

He had made his feelings clear many times, but I didn't have a choice.

anymore.

"They're in the living room," he stepped aside. I entered the room to find Lord Atwood and Brody sitting together, sharing a laugh until Brody's eyes fell on me.

"There she is," Lord Atwood smiled, gesturing for me to sit down. I sat beside him but couldn't say a word.

159 Welcome Home Boyfriend

"I hope you will take care of her and be a good boyfriend to her. She is precious to me, Brody. I hope you know," he started, making it easier for me because I kept thinking about how I would talk to Brody about this situation.

But it seemed Lord Atwood had already briefed him, and from the way Brody nodded his head and smiled, it was clear he was already on board with the decision.

“You will not regret this decision,” Brody smiled, giving Lord Atwood a final bow as Lord Atwood stood up to leave us alone to discuss things further.

Once he walked out of the living room, I watched Brody stare at me for a few seconds, as if waiting for me to start a conversation.

When he realized I had nothing to say, he slid to the edge of the couch

and took the lead..

“I know you’re not doing this because you decided to give me a chance, it’s your stepfather’s decision. However, if you want me to back down, let me know,” thankfully, he wasn’t some pushy guy who refused to acknowledge the stress I was under in accepting to date him.

“It’s just that, Brody, I’ve rejected your offer before and now—I feel very selfish,” I uttered in a guilty tone. It was even hard for me to raise my head and meet his eyes.

“If that’s what’s bothering you, forget about it. I guess it was just the Moon Goddess’ plan to make you give me a chance,” he tried to joke about it, and I managed a faint smile.

“Hey! Don’t be so sad. I know you’re making this decision to help clear your name, and I don’t mind. I’m also certain all these accusations are baseless. They were spread out of malice. I just want you

to know that I

185–Welcome Home Boyfriend

will never pressure you for anything. I understand why you’re giving me a chance, and I’ll be patient,” he placed a hand on his heart and spoke softly, finally allowing me to breathe peacefully and return his smile.

“Thank you, Brody. I was so scared and upset,” the moment I found him being so supportive, I started to break down little by little.

“Hey, hey!” He left his seat to sit with me, his arm wrapping around my shoulder and pulling me close to his chest.

“You don’t get it. The way they all looked at me in school today, Brody! I felt like they would set me on fire like they’d caught a witch,” I sobbed, seeking comfort leaning against his chest.

“They would never do that. I won’t let it happen. Besides, tomorrow, I’m giving them a task that will make them cry for days,” he teased, making me raise my head and watch him pout like a child. He looked so adorable.

I guess Lord Atwood was right. I needed to give him a chance. My own mates were barely understanding me. I needed someone who could assist me with everything.

“When you have me, you don’t need to worry about anything,” with those sweet words, Brody pulled me close to his chest again, and I didn’t object. I needed that comfort—the warmth of someone affectionate towards me who showed me care. As he hugged me, we stayed like that for a few minutes until a scoff from the door broke my attention, and I realized the comforting moment was over.

I raised my head from Brody’s chest to see Ryker standing in the doorway, glaring at us.

“What the hell is going on here?” he didn’t hold back, and as he yelled

at the top of his lungs, Brody got up to shield me.

But I should have known Ryker wasn’t coming for me; his target was clear—he was attacking Brody. Without a second thought, Ryker leaped at Brody, throwing me against the wall in the process, causing me to hit my back and land on all fours. Brody hissed, lifting his head and revealing his wolf.

Ryker’s growl and the sound of limbs breaking echoed for a moment. I was stunned to witness the two preparing to transform right in the living room. As Brody lunged at Ryker, he was thrown back again, but he didn’t give up.

“Stop it!” I exclaimed, covering my ears as their howls and growls shook me to my core.

“Please!” I whispered under my breath, closing my eyes and retreating into a corner.

Brody attacked Ryker again, landing a punch on his shoulder this time. That seemed to push Ryker over the edge. He began punching Brody and kicking things around in a frenzy.

Tasting 160

160—After A Brawl

Nora:

As the commotion escalated, I huddled even closer into myself. Finally, a third growl reached my ears, and when I dared to open my eyes, I saw Nash step in between them and shove Brody away. The next to burst into the living room with great energy was Silas.

The moment he entered, the voices began to fade. It wasn't magic but his growls.

"Enough!" Silas shouted, stepping in front of Ryker while Nash positioned himself behind, wrapping his arms around Ryker's stomach to restrain him. Ryker was behaving wildly, limbs extending and skin darkening.

"Look at me." Silas demanded, grasping his brother's face firmly. Ryker continued to resist until his gaze met Silas'.

Suddenly, his movements began to slow, and the dark energy around him dissipated.

"Now listen to me, Ryker. Don't let him take control. Keep him inside," Silas said firmly, his veins pulsating in his neck. I had never seen him. so commanding.

"Listen to my voice. Leave him behind and come out on top," he continued, and Ryker obediently listened.

While they attended to him, I turned to Brody and observed him getting to his feet, clutching his stomach. Naturally, an alpha's pride would be wounded after being attacked in his girlfriend's mansion. He

wasn't weak, just no match for Ryker. If it were anyone other than my stepbrothers attacking Brody, he would have torn them to pieces.

But Ryker! There was something profoundly dark about him, almost inhuman. It was unsettling because we all have a bit of that inhuman side within us.

Brody rushed out, presumably heading for the woods to transition. I remained standing, watching Silas comfort Ryker until his body returned to normal.

Silas finally stepped back, gently wiping the blood from his nose. Meanwhile, Nash released Ryker and stepped away, glancing in my direction.

"Are you okay?" Silas asked in his deep, husky voice, though he didn't look directly at me, focused on cleaning up the blood.

I wondered why.

I knew he was the pack's healer, but I didn't understand the extent of his abilities until now. Was he hypnotizing Ryker or simply comforting him? I couldn't be certain, my mind was clouded with worry about what would happen now that Ryker was fine and Brody was nowhere to be seen for him to take out his anger on.

"Why don't you ask her what she was doing in the arms of that alpha?" Ryker hissed, quickly regaining control. He had healed despite being on the verge of transitioning.

“Ryker! Dad allowed it,” Nash muttered under his breath, placing his hands on Ryker’s chest to prevent him from approaching me any closer.

“Huh? Dad allowed what?” Ryker hissed angrily.

“You know, the whole thing—Dad suggested it would be a good idea for her to date Brody,” Nash explained. The moment he said that, Ryker pushed him back. Nash wasn’t expecting it, so his body recoiled further than intended.

“Hey, calm down,” Silas grunted, hands on his hips as he watched his brothers wear

“Who is Dad to make that decision for her?” Ryker jabbed his finger into the air, referring to their father.

“I am her stepfather, and she agreed with my decision,” Lord Atwood intervened, likely arriving after hearing the commotion.

“But why? Why does she have to datug

someone to prove her innocence?” Ryker’s open disagreement with the decision was surprising. He didn’t bother hiding his frustration.

“Ryker! I hope you’ll let it go. She’ll date someone eventually, so just leave it be,” Lord Atwood tried to pat his shoulder, but Ryker stepped away, avoiding his touch. His eyes held judgment, and I could only imagine how Lord Atwood must have felt.

“Really Nora?” Ryker called out for me this time. It was certain from his gaze that I needed to think before I responded to him.

“Are you dating him?” he groaned.

I gulped but I knew my answer. He had hurt me when he kept asking me to do this and do that or else he wouldn’t accept me. And now he was acting like a stubborn child before everyone.

“Yes,” I mumbled meekly but everyone heard me clearly.

“She didn’t have to date anyone to prove anything. So what if someone

thinks I kissed her? I’m fine with it. Why is it bothering everyone else so much?” As Ryker spoke those words, I saw Lord Atwood’s eyes widen, and my heart skipped a beat.

“Did you—” Before Lord Atwood could ask him a question and potentially provoke a confession, Nash stepped between them once. again.

“A hypothetical statement won’t benefit us, Ryker. I asked Dad the same question before, and he explained why it’s important for her to remain our stepsister. Her mother made a deal with our father, and he’s honoring that agreement despite the pain of not fulfilling it,” Nash tried earnestly to make Ryker understand that he shouldn’t push further.

“So? He made the deal, not us. Why should we bear the burden of his actions?” Ryker argued back, inciting Lord Atwood to hiss in response.

“She is not a burden,” Lord Atwood corrected him. He shook his head, wearily, prompting Silas to step beside him and wrap an arm around his shoulder for comfort.

“Dad needs to rest. You take care of these two and make sure they’re in separate rooms,” Silas instructed Nash, prompting me to secretly roll my eyes at him. Silas could be so peculiar. He always seemed to lighten up when it was someone else’s mess; otherwise, he maintained a stern demeanor all day.

“Come on, Dad, let me take you to your room or maybe Cain’s studio,” I heard Silas joke as they left the living room.

“Now, she has chosen to date Brody herself. I hope you’ll respect her decision like the rest of us,” Nash directed Ryker’s attention towards me, though it wasn’t the smoothest way to explain my new relationship with Brody. I felt a bit uneasy until Ryker looked at me in shock, and I

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Tasting 161

161–My Stepbrothers Take Care Of Me

Nora:

“That was pretty crazy how Ryker didn’t even care what he was saying,” I had to let her out. I needed someone to talk to.

“And yet again, he had to lay out those rules for me to follow before he accepts me,” I scoffed, shaking my head aggressively as I paced around from one corner of the room to the other.

“I wonder why,” she uttered.

“Because he’s embarrassed of us. How many times do I have to remind you that he’s already accepted that he’s embarrassed of us?” I hissed at her, breathing heavily like a bull.

“Oh, right,” she sighed slyly

That’s when my phone beeped, and I noticed a notification from a group chat. I didn’t remember being in a group chat at all. I frowned and stared at the group before cautiously opening it.

My heart dropped when I saw my school fellows’ names in the group chat. They were all chanting some pretty outrageous words at me.

Maleeka: I heard Natlaya has some proof. I bet it’s a sex tape.

John: If she was so horny, she could have asked me. I would have lent her my dick for a night.

Mikal: For a night? Dude! Have you seen her? She looks like a sex goddess. I think she would need more than one night to be satisfied.

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My cheeks turned red as I kept reading the chat, and tears welled up in my eyes again. I didn’t want this reputation, but what could be done?

I quickly exited the group, but they added me back again. I had to leave again and then uninstall and shut down my phone.

Tears streamed down my face at this point, but my biggest fear lay in the first message I had read in the group.

“Natalya has some proof. What kind of proof could it be?” I bit my bottom lip, feeling sick with worry.

“Hey, calm down. Maybe she’s bluffing. Why would she even have proof?” Akira suggested, but my heart told me she must have something to make such a crazy claim.

“Akira! I feel like the walls are closing in on me,” I gulped and sank to my knees.

“Hey! Calm down. It’s because you’re worrying too much. How about we take a cold shower—” her voice started to fade as the world around me began to shake.

It was so bad that I had to place my hand on the floor to keep my balance. With shaky hands, I adjusted the ring back on, and that was all I could do before a scream escaped my lips and my body limped to the ground.

I felt numb. I couldn't move a muscle, but I hadn't passed out. The next thing I knew, there was a knock on my door.

"Nora! Are you okay?" Nash called from the other side of the door.

I could only blink because my body was frozen. I opened my mouth, but only weird noises came out.

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No, I was not okay. I desperately wanted someone to come to my rescue.

"Why are you outside her room?" All I could do was listen to them talk. It was Ryker asking Nash.

My stomach was turning upside down, compelling me to throw up, but if I did, I would choke on it and probably die.

Should I twist the ring on my finger again? But it hadn't helped when I was falling down.

"I heard her scream, so I thought she might have injured herself," Nash muttered from the other side.

"What? And you're knocking on her door asking if she's fine? Fucking step aside," Ryker yelled, clearly losing his temper.

"Ryker, let me ask her again—" Nash began to argue, but Ryker hushed him with a grunt.

"As if an injured or passed-out person would respond to you," Ryker retorted.

Thankfully, Ryker didn't hesitate. With one firm push, he broke down my door. Now, I could see the figures of two broad, tall men enter my room and gasp at the sight of me. It was as though I had been keeping myself awake because I was worried nobody would find me. But the moment they did, my eyes gave up on me, and I rested peacefully. I could only feel myself being lifted from the ground and placed on a much softer surface.

My body relaxed, and the feeling of nausea subsided, but I was still too weak to move a muscle.

I drifted in and out of sleep several times. During one of my brief

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moments of wakefulness, I managed to open my eyes. I heard noises and understood that they were taking care of me.

“But what could have happened to her?” Nash asked someone while I was awake again, though my eyes remained closed.

“I’m checking her phone, but I need a code,” Ryker said.

“Don’t just do that,” Nash argued.

“Wait, I’ve got an idea.” I heard Ryker say before feeling him touch my hand and press my finger against my phone’s screen.

I was in disbelief, but Ryker would never breach someone’s privacy. I was glad Nash was on my side.

“Tell me you didn’t just do that,” Nash grunted.

“You want me to lie to you?” Ryker’s nonchalant tone didn’t surprise me at all. Then I heard him grit his teeth so loudly that even I wondered what he found on my phone.

“These fucking assholes,” Ryker’s tone was harsh, and I could tell he had found the group chat.

“Show me,” Nash sounded curious. “Oh! Somebody is getting a fist down his throat,” his comment followed immediately.

“Give me that phone,” finally, it was Cain’s voice. So I assumed he had just arrived.

I felt the bed bounce slightly and could guess Cain had thrown the phone on the mattress.

“Dad is not well either. Silas is checking on him, so after he’s done with Dad, he’ll come take a look at her,” Cain uttered, still using a very

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calm tone.

Did none of my misery bother him at all? I didn’t know if I should be mad at Ryker for being overprotective or at Cain for not caring at all.

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Tasting 162

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162–Silas Is Powerful

Nora:

“So, what’s going on with her?” Nash asked. I had passed out again after hearing all the commotion. I woke up to a pair of cold hands touching my forehead and arms.

“She’s running a fever, but it should come down soon. Give her this. medicine, and she’ll be fine,” Silas said, his voice coming from close by. He sat right beside me, checking on me.

“What’s that?” Silas asked, touching my ring.

“Her finger’s turning blue. Do you think she’s losing blood in her finger?” Nash asked, and I started to force myself to snap out of it. I didn’t want them to take that ring off

“This ring used to be pretty loose on her finger, right?” Silas inquired.

“Do you think the illness affected her fingers?” Nash continued.

“I don’t know. It doesn’t seem so; they still look pretty slender and sexy to me,” Silas’s comment was met with a scoff from Nash.

“Please, after what happened, just spare such remarks.” Nash grunted at him.

“What are you two doing?” Ryker’s voice came, and I relaxed as I felt him release my hand from Silas’s grasp.

“I think we should take off her ring, or else she might lose her finger,” Silas suggested.

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I wasn’t sure what they were talking about. I didn’t feel any pain in my finger. Was it really turning blue? And if so, why?

“That’s none of our business,” however, Ryker somewhat shocked me with his response, “she’s dating that alpha. Let him deal with her issues. Why should we worry when she doesn’t give a damn about her brothers not liking that asshole?”

I was shocked, and I'm sure his brothers were too because none of them. spoke for a while until Silas spoke up.

"I don't know about you guys, but I take my patients seriously."

"She's not a patient. She's just stressed," Ryker scoffed, "I'm sure beating up her boyfriend made her a bit disappointed in him, and the anger reached her head."

I had to wake up now to glare at him. He was unbelievably arrogant, and finally, I started to open my eyes.

"Okay, she's waking up. Those who have a problem with her should just leave," Nash commented, and the moment I opened my eyes, I watched Ryker leave.

"You're okay now," Nash leaned over me and smiled, his fingers brushing my cheek as he tried to tuck away bothersome strands of hair. He quickly withdrew his hand at Silas's remark.

"Someone said not to do anything inappropriate anymore," he muttered under his breath, filling a spoon with medicine for me. Nash rolled his eyes at the reminder of his earlier joke that Silas had teased him about.

"Come on, big girl, get up!" Silas encouraged, holding the spoon towards me.

I struggled to keep my eyes open, but thanks to Nash who lifted me

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slightly and helped me sit up, I managed. Silas leaned over me, and that's when our eyes met as he offered me the medicine.

His eyes!

They were so beautiful, a stunning shade of gray. In fact, as I kept staring into his eyes, I noticed the gray color seemed to shift. It began to swirl and coalesce, forming what looked like a full moon. No, not a moon, it was actually a crescent moon. But then black started to blend. in with it. The gray was trying to escape from the black, and I was completely absorbed in what was happening.

"Hey!" Suddenly, a sharp noise snapped my attention away from Silas's eyes. Nash had pushed Silas back and away from me.

"I'll kill you if you did that again," Nash's voice growled beside me.

What did Silas do?

“Fine. I was just trying to make sure she’s okay.” Silas raised his hands in surrender, stepping back while Nash continued to glare at him.

“What happened?” I asked in a timid voice, causing Nash to turn and face me. Silas lowered his hands and glanced at me from behind Nash, a faint smirk appearing on his lips before he slid his hands into his pockets and walked out of the room.

“Look at me. Don’t let him take care of you without my help, okay?” Nash’s tone was serious, but I couldn’t understand why.

“His medicine is already working.” I grinned foolishly, trying to convey to Nash that Silas seemed to know what he was doing.

“No! Listen to me, okay? Don’t let him treat you. Especially after he gives you medicine, don’t look him in the eye. In fact, after the medicine, don’t look at him at all,” his warning sent shivers down my

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spine.

I couldn’t understand what had upset Nash so much and made Silas leave the room.

“Okay,” I shrugged, not really grasping his point.

“Nora! You might think I’m crazy, but I’m saying this for your own good,” he sat down with me after calming down. He seemed more frightened than I was.

“But Nash! He didn’t do anything. He was just taking care of me,” I smiled at him, letting him know Silas’s medicine worked like a charm.

“I’m sure he was. He’s an excellent doctor. But remember, whenever he gives you medicine, you become his patient. Right after you take the medicine, don’t look him directly in the eye, or just avoid him entirely,” he repeated himself, making me frown.

“He was taking care of me, don’t worry.” I reassured, until he finally explained why he was so concerned for me.

“He was hypnotizing you,” he finished, and my mouth dropped open.

“Huh?”

“I’m sure he was doing it to find out what happened to you. But I’m not sure if you want him to know things about you that even you don’t,” his words scared me.

Silas could hypnotize someone?

“Don’t look too surprised. He’s not the best healer for nothing,” he muttered, then added, “but don’t worry, he doesn’t harm his patients.”

I don’t know why, but suddenly I was afraid of Silas.

Tasting 163

163–The Shadow People

Nora:

Life never went back to normal. It had only been a day, but it was the toughest day of my life. I felt guilty despite not having done anything wrong. I could have dated anyone since I was single, so why couldn’t I meet Ryker and Cain’s eyes?

Anyway, it’s not like I faced them. Nash and Silas were another mystery. Nash’s changing behavior and Silas’s whole demeanor were suspicious.

“Yeah, I’ll start going to school again tomorrow,” I told Lord Atwood as I joined him for dinner. I had just sat down when he suggested I should go back to school now.

“Hiding isn’t for the innocent. You didn’t do anything wrong, so you don’t have to worry,” he was partially right. Now that we’ve covered it up, I didn’t need to worry, but I still felt guilty about what people were saying about me.

“That’s true, and if anyone picks on you, message me,” Nash said, taking a bite of his steak. He didn’t wait for his brothers to arrive and started eating while his father and I waited patiently.

Then Silas came first, wearing his casual white hoodie. Behind him was Cain, dressed all in black. He appeared without glancing my way.

“Where’s Ryker?” Lord Atwood asked, looking behind them but not seeing his son.

“He left early with his gear. I don’t think he plans to return for a day or

two,” Silas, Mr. Know–It–All, responded to his father.

“Dad, the complaints about the shadow are gone, and there are no more dead bodies found around the pack’s border,” Nash cleared his throat, mentioning something I had entirely forgotten.

“The fog? It was really strange when I spotted those people,” I chuckled a little, shaking my head. My focus returned to the food as soon as I finished my comment. I didn’t realize I had become the center of attention for those around me.

There was something peculiar about the way they were studying my face, to the point where I had to stop eating and look up at them.

“What did you say?” Silas took the lead, his eyes narrowing on my face.

“I came across the fog and those people. The pack members hardly moved a muscle, but whenever I looked away, they would take a step closer,” I shook my head at the memory of that day. It was so eerie that I forgot about my school bullying troubles and only remembered them.

“Nora! What do you mean by ‘people’?” Everyone else remained silent, letting Silas handle the issue. At this point, I wasn’t foolish enough to not understand that something serious was being discussed. Whatever I saw that day must have meant something horrific, and now they wanted details.

“I left school early to avoid bullying. That’s when I came across the fog and these figures standing in it. I couldn’t see their faces, just their lower bodies. They seemed like shadows,” I held my breath to explain further. “And every time I looked away and then looked back at them, they had moved closer. But they never moved while I was watching them.”

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I stopped talking because now I wanted to see what they had learned from my experience with those people.

“They weren’t members of the pack, Nora,” Nash stated, glancing at his brothers before turning to me. “You need to look at me and understand this,” he insisted, grabbing my full attention. Lord Atwood covered his face in his hands, as if on the verge of a breakdown. Their reactions were scarier than my recounting of that memory.

“Those people are deadly. Everyone who has come across them has died,” his statement shook me to the core. I leaned back and broke eye contact with Nash. My eyes scanned the others, hoping one of them would admit they were joking. When no one did, anxiety began to creep in.

“But I’m alive.” I shrugged shakily, trying to appear confident that their assessment was wrong.

“For how long?” the moment Silas said that, everyone turned to him and stared at his face.

“We can’t lie to her,” he said in self–defense.

“Wait a minute! You’re not suggesting that I’m going to die, right?” I let out an uncomfortable laugh, but the way Lord Atwood kept hiding his face was unsettling.

“Of course not. You won’t die because we won’t let it happen. But—you need to make sure you don’t come across them again,” Nash added, at strange fear for me evident in his eyes.

“How do I do that?” I gulped.

“We don’t know,” Silas interjected gently.

“Don’t scare her,” Cain finally intervened, slapping Silas’ shoulder and

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leaning over the table to speak with me. “Avoid going to certain narrow areas—streets, alleys, or hallways, at least not when you’re alone.”

“I wasn’t scaring her. I was just telling her what usually happens after that,” Silas uttered under his gritted teeth but so softly that his words barely reached his father’s ears.

“But what about school hallways?” I asked, feeling oddly frightened because they seemed serious.

“Abandoned places,” Cain corrected himself. “And don’t worry, we’re researching this. In fact, Silas will be embarking on a journey in a few days to find out more about these fog people,” Lord Atwood finally uncovered his face once his sons had informed me what I needed to do to avoid encountering those deadly individuals again.

“Okay, I’ll be careful.” I mumbled, barely touching my food anymore.

“Now, let’s talk about some good news,” Lord Atwood forced a smile, prompting his sons to look his way.

“There’s good news, and you kept it from us?” Cain leaned back in his seat, raising an eyebrow at his father.

He hadn’t spoken to me privately again, and his behavior now seemed normal—not like a mate talking to his mate, but more like a stepbrother concerned for his stepsister.

“I’ve planned a fall ball, and I want all of you to bring your mates or people you’re interested in to this ball.”

Everyone fell silent after the announcement, despite Lord Atwood expecting a cheerier response.

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Tasting 164

164–The Defiant Mate

Nora:

I sat in my room, nervously biting my nails and staring at the wall in front of me. I wasn’t particularly interested in the wall, but in the words of Lord Atwood that had upset me. I felt so irritated about the whole ball situation. But then, a part of me felt mischievous, wondering how my mates would react to seeing me go to the ball with Brody. They should understand that none of them had been brave enough to accept me and tell their father that we were friends.

“But would you have done the same?” Akira asked. I knew what she was hinting at. The words of my mother have been engraved in the mind and heart of Lord Atwood. He believed he was supposed to take care of me or else he would be in eternal pain.

“Don’t forget about the promise Lord Atwood made to your mother,” she teased, and I rolled my eyes.

“I don’t understand why dying people make such promises and deals,” I sighed, realizing it was out of our hands now. Lord Atwood was convinced that if he didn’t uphold his end of the deal, he would face severe punishment.

“And what did Lord Atwood get from her in return for this deal?” Akira was on the spot. He never actually told us about that.

“It doesn’t matter. It is his matter. My mates—they are my problem and they are big problems,” I scoffed.

“Then let’s not badmouth our mates because we also found ourselves agreeing to date Brody,” she snapped at me, and I relaxed a bit in my seat. My body felt drained of energy.

A sigh escaped my lips as I stared into space, wondering what would happen at the ball.

“Let’s pick out a gown!” she cheered, almost as if she had forgotten we were going with our boyfriend, whom we didn’t even agree to date because of our feelings but to clear our name.

“Not right now, Akira. I’m so torn. Ryker didn’t ask me how I was feeling. The way he left the room after finding out I was dating Brody made me lose hope in him,” I grunted, shrugging my shoulders.

“And Cain is such a mystery,” I mumbled, until I remembered I needed to find out what he had done to my painting. Lord Atwood couldn’t find my painting in his studio—did that mean he had sold it? It annoyed and worried me.

I grabbed a brown sweater and threw it on, rushing out of the room. The evening felt unusually lonely. Lord Atwood and Nash had left the house for some work. Ryker hadn’t returned, and the maids were off duty.

As I turned the corner, I accidentally bumped into someone, knocking them to the floor.

“Oh my Goddess! I’m so sorry,” I apologized, feeling guilty for hurting her, and quickly extended my hand to help her up.

She stared at my hand in silence, unmoving.

“Um, hello?” I worriedly hunched over, but strong hands suddenly gripped my waist from behind, lifting me effortlessly like a doll. Silas placed me to the side so he could see clearly.

I froze for a moment. The way he carried me without a word left me

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wondering. Then, I watched as he reached out his hand to help the lady up.

“You should go home now,” he spoke softly to her, giving me a slight reason to frown.

She was probably in her early twenties, with jet-black hair and brown eyes. She nodded obediently and walked downstairs, leaving just the two of us behind.

“Is that your girlfriend?” I queried in confusion and curiosity. I had never seen him bring a woman home, so she had to be his girlfriend. He studied my face wearily, hands on his waist.

“Not everyone who comes into this home is someone’s love interest,” he remarked, still guarding her identity.

“But then who is she, and why was she on the third floor?” I persisted, not letting him walk away until he told me who this stranger was.

He continued to stare at me, his eyes narrowing, as if weighing whether to answer. Finally, he relented.

“She’s my patient. Since I have to stay home, I decided to see her here. Any more questions?” he raised his brow, and I shook my head slowly.

Saying nothing more, he turned around and marched upstairs again. If he said she was his patient, then she must be. She did appear a bit unwell.

In fact, she looked extremely ill. Shaking my head to clear my thoughts and focusing on the task at hand, I headed towards the studio. The odd thing was that Cain was now locking his door. His change in behavior didn’t go unnoticed.

I placed my hand on his door then turned it into a fist and knocked to

get his attention. He didn’t answer the door right away, which only fueled my curiosity. The longer I stood outside his door, the more anxious I became about how he might react.

Finally, he opened the door and revealed himself. He was still dressed all in black from earlier, his hair messy across his forehead.

“I need to speak to you-” My words were cut short as I tried to step into the room, but he quickly stretched out his arm to block me from entering. He did it so abruptly that I almost bumped my nose against his arm. This had never happened before; I had always been welcome in his studio.

“Aren’t you going to let me in?” I asked, sounding a bit disappointed.

“Talk here,” he insisted grumpily, his hand firmly gripping the door to make it clear he wouldn’t allow me inside.

“Okay,” I replied, thinking maybe he was being cautious because of the rumors that had circulated last time we were seen together.

“What did you do to my painting?” I asked, feeling a lump in my throat as I waited for his response. I wouldn’t be happy if he had sold it.

“I burned it,” came his reply, and it was the worst possible answer I could have received.

Tasting 165

165–He Invited Natalya

Nora:

I studied his face for a moment before closing my eyes to take a deep breath and ask him again.

“You did what?” just to be certain I heard him clear the first time, I asked him again.

“I burned it down,” he repeated his answer with an even carefree attitude.

“Cain, can you just once be serious and not lash out because you’re upset about something else?” I was so sure he wouldn’t destroy my painting that I couldn’t believe he was saying those words himself.

“Why do you think I’m lying?” He frowned, furrowing his eyebrows.

“Because there’s no way—” I didn’t finish before he cut me off sharply.

“Nora! There’s no painting of you in my studio anymore. This conversation is over. I have a guest coming and I need to make arrangements. Can you please leave me alone for a while?” His gentle tone when he requested this didn’t soften the offense I felt at his

command.

I wasn’t finished yet, but the way he interrupted me made it clear he

didn’t want to talk to me.

“May I ask what’s wrong?” Standing my ground stubbornly, I questioned his sudden change in behavior.

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“Nothing’s wrong anymore,” he replied wearily.

“There definitely is. How else would you go from loving me to being so rude? Is it because of Brody?” I asked, and he scoffed, rolling his

eyes.

“No! I’m not happy that he’s dating you, but that’s because neither of us brothers likes him. If you were to choose someone from the pack, I’d be happiest.” That was it. His calmness was now irritating me.

How could he treat me like this? Acting as if it was okay for me to date anyone?

“Remember, we’re mates, don’t you?” I hissed through clenched teeth. He tilted his head but didn’t respond.

Then his phone beeped, and he pulled it out to check the notification.

“Hey, I’m talking. Can this wait?” I scoffed, demanding he finish this conversation and be honest with me.

“There’s nothing more to talk about. I told you I have a guest coming over. It’s best for you to stay in your bedroom and not come out,” his urgency to confine me made me regard him skeptically.

“Who’s coming over? Is it some model you’re going to paint?” It had to be a model. He doesn’t have friends, and no other males come over to our mansion like that, especially to his studio.

“Think whatever you want. I can’t change your mind,” he shrugged, stepping back and leaving me stunned with my jaw hanging low.

Before I could ask anything else, he had shut the door in my face. I was not just shocked but deeply hurt, standing motionless in front of his door.

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Part of me wanted to hurt him as much as he hurt me, to say things that would ache his soul like he did mine. But I couldn’t even do that. He shut the door without letting me respond.

I stormed back into my bedroom and paced hastily. I was seething, recalling one thing after another.

He said he burned down my painting, why? And was he still dreaming about that woman in the veil?

My phone rang, distracting me for a few minutes. It was Brody calling. Seeing his name on the screen gave me a small sense of relief. I wasn’t alone. If these brothers thought they could leave me broken and unwanted, they were wrong.

I answered the call almost instantly.

“Hey,” I forced a sweet voice, greeting him.

“Whoa! That sounded seductive,” he remarked.

“I meant to call you sooner and ask about your health. But I was so ashamed of my stepbrothers that I couldn’t,” mentioning Ryker as my stepbrother, I clenched my jaw.

"I'm fine. I just had to leave before things got worse, and I didn't want you to witness all that violence," his words brought a fleeting smile to my lips.

I felt somewhat relieved now, but not entirely. Soon, memories of Cain. would bring anger rushing back into my veins.

"So, I heard about the ball. Your stepfather sent me an invitation card," he continued, causing me to pace idly.

"Yeah, he told me today too," I replied.

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165-He invited Natalya

"I thought it was obvious we would go to the ball together, but then I decided to ask you, just for the sake of romance," his voice softened sweetly, "will you come to the ball with me?"

I stared blankly ahead and replied, "Of course."

"I was hoping we could go together to get you a gown, but then decided to keep it a surprise," he continued, speaking for a few more minutes.

Throughout this time, I responded absentmindedly.

After he hung up, I sat down and sighed tiredly. I couldn't find comfort after Cain treated me like I didn't matter.

It was then that I realized I needed to confront Cain and tell him one last time what I thought of him.

He hurt me, so now it was time to hurt him.

Leaving my room with even more determination this time, I reached his studio and knocked harder than before.

There was so much I wanted to say to him before telling him I was done with him. I waited, and just like last time, he took some time before opening the door.

However, he was dressed completely differently this time. Wearing a black suit, he looked like a handsome fictional character.

"What are you doing here again?" The bored look on his face hurt my feelings. It was as if he didn't even want to watch my face anymore.

“Because you didn’t let me speak last time,” I uttered, however he rolled his eyes tiredly.

165 He invited Nataly

“Because there is nothing left to talk about,” he hissed. I wasn’t going to stop, I planned to ask for answers and give him a perfect response to his rudeness too.

“I ne—” Before I could finish, I heard a familiar voice from the background.

“Is that Nora?”

My heart sank when I realized he had none other than Natalya with him in his studio.

Tasting 166

166—It Was Only Lust

Nora:

I stood frozen for a minute, unable to comprehend what I had just heard,

“Cain! What did I just hear?” I smiled like a fool, completely convinced I had lost my mind and heard Natalya’s voice. It had to be in my head.

Cain tilted his head, his muscular arm with sleeves rolled up resting on the door, ensuring it was half closed.

“What are you here for now? Didn’t I tell you I was having a guest and not to bother me again?” He spoke calmly.

But I couldn’t remain calm anymore. I could see things in the background. He had illuminated the studio with lights and balloons. There were candles on the bookshelves. It was a date.

But who was inside with him?

“Who is in there with you?” I asked, this time attempting to push his arm aside to enter.

“Go back to your room. This doesn’t concern you,” he hissed, threatening me with his eyes.

“Open the damn door—,” the moment I applied more pressure and slid his hand down, I rushed in.

I wish I hadn't.

I must have seemed desperate. The one about to lose her own mate to someone she was certain he would never pay attention to.

Inside his studio, there was definitely a date in progress. He had placed a table on the terrace of his studio, a place he had never taken me. And there was food on the table, but it wasn't just the food I noticed.

It was the person sitting in the chair, staring aggressively as I entered Cain's studio.

In a stunning and sultry red dress, Natalya sat with a wine glass in her hands. She didn't even resemble the Natalya who would usually wear her hair in two braids and look innocent and meek. Her confidence was captivating as she took a sip from the glass and then stood up from her

seat.

My heart was pounding in my chest, almost reaching my throat.

"Natalya," I grunted through gritted teeth.

"Hey, why do you look so unhappy?" she asked, her tone taunting, as she stopped beside Cain when he walked in.

"What are you doing here?" I asked her, then quickly gave up and turned to Cain. "What is she doing here?" I was on the verge of tears.

It wasn't just jealousy, though I was jealous because he was my mate and she was my ex friend. More importantly, I felt betrayed. This girl had started a rumor that ruined my reputation, and Cain thought it fitting to bring her into my home over... I don't even know over what fault of mine.

"What do you mean? Can't you take a hint?" she joked, giggling as she wrapped her arm around Cain's. The messed-up part was that he didn't stop her. He let her.

"I am dating your friend." Cain interjected, taking the lead, his hand rubbing and placed on her back as she clung to his arm.

"Yes, now I'm your sister-in-law," she teased, hugging his arm and pressing her body against his muscular frame.

Cain shamelessly watched my face without blinking. Was he enjoying my misery?

“But why? She’s not my friend. You know what she did, right? She started a rumor against us which got me bullied in school. How could you bring such a shameless person into our mansion?” My voice broke as I lost all confidence in front of them.

The news weighed heavily on my heart. I couldn’t bear to hear them repeat it.

“Nora, don’t be dramatic. There was a misunderstanding that was cleared up when you started dating Brody. Now, I don’t want you to misbehave and upset her. This mansion belongs to my girlfriend as much as it does to my stepsister,” he said, a reminder of where I stood with him.

So that’s all I was to him?

I narrowed my eyes, losing my calm and ready to explode when he clenched his jaw and unwrapped her fingers from around his arm.

“Let me take her back to her room,” he told Natalya, who nodded.

“What do you—” I wasn’t sure what he meant by that until he grasped my arm and almost kicked me out of his studio while she watched and smirked.

He dragged me out but didn’t stop there. He took me all the way back

to my bedroom and pushed me inside. Then he walked in himself and locked the door behind us.

“What the hell was that? Why did you come to my studio? Do you want her to think all the rumors were true?” he grunted, pointing his finger in my face as my body trembled.

“Why are you dating her?” I asked the same question again.

“Because I’ve come to the realization that I need to be with someone

who is so crazy about me that she will be ready to put effort into pursuing me,” he hissed, keeping his voice low, but his words stung as loud as they could.

“Huh? That’s it? You want to be pursued? What the hell is wrong with you? How desperate are you for attention?” I raised my voice until he took a big step towards me, and I flinched, backing down.

“Just stay in your lane and don’t meddle with my affairs. I am happy for once; let me be,” his demand crushed my heart.

“No! I will not accept this. She hurt me so much and—what about us? We are mates. You loved me—,” as I repeated that word twice in at single day, he paused.

But unlike before, he responded this time with a little scoff, almost like a chuckle.

“When did I ever say I love you?” he placed his hand over his eyes and then covered his mouth to hide his laugh.

“I thought you fucking me meant you loved me,” I uttered in disbelief. I knew what he would say next to completely shatter me, and he did.

“That meant I wanted to hit that pussy. That’s all. There was no love,
you.

Tasting 167

167—Brutally Pushed Away

Nora:

“No! You’re lying.” I said, almost pleading.

“I’m not. I was drawn to your body, but after we had sex, I realized it wasn’t worth all the trouble. I’m moving on, and so should you. You’ve never been loyal anyway. Go enjoy your dry sex with that alpha boyfriend of yours,” he spat angrily. His veins bulged as he hissed at me, which shattered me even more. I didn’t even pay attention to responding to his accusations. I was super focused on Natalya and his relationship.

“You need to kick her out of your studio right now,” I said, trying to assert my authority over him, though I wasn’t sure why I believed I still had that power. Sadly, that wasn’t the case anymore.

When I grabbed his collar to stop him from leaving and listen to me, he slapped my hands away and quickly freed himself. He continued to glare at me as if I had committed the gravest sin.

“You’ve lost the right to touch me,” he warned, oblivious to my tears.

“Fine then. I’ll go and kick her out myself,” I said defiantly, attempting to walk past him. I don’t think I’d ever been that angry before. It was like he had brought my worst enemy into the mansion right before my

eyes.

“You will not do that,” he said, gripping my arm tightly, causing me to grimace in pain.

“If you disrespect her, I’ll tell Dad and show him how crazy you are,”

he threatened, moving his face closer to mine. “If you ever argue with Natalya or upset her, Nora, there will be serious consequences from me.”

The threat was deadly serious, and tears started streaming down my face as he pushed me back and left my bedroom.

I was left with a broken heart and bruised ego. I couldn’t move or recover from it. With my hand on my heart, I knelt down and covered my face with my hands to cry silently.

“It was the worst kind of feeling. I feared that the next time I let my wolf out, she would feel the pain of betrayal. And then what? How would I comfort her? I didn’t even know how long I stayed there on the ground, mourning over my broken heart. But even the knock on the door couldn’t snap me out of my trance.

Soon, the door opened as if someone had grown tired of knocking. I heard footsteps, but my mind was so blocked that I thought maybe Cain had returned. Perhaps he had reflected on his actions and realized his mistake. So I waited for his apology instead.

“Nora! Are you okay?” Surprisingly, it was Silas’s voice that broke through my thoughts. I raised my face from my hands and saw him standing over me,

his forehead creased with concern.

“Cain is dating Natalya,” I said, feeling miserable and seeking comfort in him despite the circumstances.

“That snake? No way,” he exclaimed, shaking his head and wrinkling his nose in disgust.

“She must have lied to you,” he assumed it was Natalya who had given me the news.

“I saw them together in his studio just now,” I sniffled, feeling tears welling up.

“Are you sure?” he knelt down, his arms folded over his knee.

“Yeah, I’m sure I heard Cain tell me that I need to respect Natalya now.” I finished, not expecting him to go against his brother.

“I don’t want to control who he dates but why her? Why that girl of all the people in the pack?” I was losing my mind thinking about Cain and Natalya being together.

I just needed to confide in someone about what happened, to see if I was the crazy one or if I was overreacting.

“Has he gone mad? Why the hell would he bring that bitch under our roof again?” Silas’s tone grew harsher this time, his eyes briefly flashing a different color that I couldn’t quite discern.

“I’ll go make her leave,” Silas tried to get up, but I held his arm, freezing him for a moment. The awkwardness lingered until I released him and sniffled again.

“No, it’s alright. He’s made it clear that he’s happy with her,” I said after some thought. Despite feeling broken and upset, I didn’t want anyone to force Cain to end his relationship. After all that had happened, would it really make things better between us? Never. I would never be able to move on from today.

“I can’t believe this,” Silas muttered under his breath, shaking his head slightly.

“I have no clue what my brothers think sometimes,” he continued. It was oddly comforting to see him react just like I did.

“You know what, come on, let’s go for a walk,” he said, grabbing my

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arm and pulling me up.

“No, I’m fine. I’ll just rest now,” I insisted, but he was insistent when he wanted something.

“I said, let’s go. Why sit here and cry when they’re the ones at fault? If they enjoy each other’s company so much, you need to show them you can have fun without them,” he said, poking my nose with his finger before dragging me along.

“But where are we going?” I asked.

“We’re going to party at the wildest club tonight,” he announced, surprising me with his determination to introduce me to wildness.

“But what about Dad? Won’t he be upset?” I asked as I was pulled along behind him.

“Nah, I’ll take care of it,” he muttered, still upset at his brother’s actions.

But the moment we reached downstairs, I freed my arm and shook my head.

“I don’t want to be around too many people right now,” I said, turning to face him. His arm rested on the railing of the staircase.

“Not even me?” His deep stare and his tall, imposing figure made me gulp.

“You’re okay,” I replied, feeling foolish for blushing.

“Then let’s go somewhere to have fun, just the two of us,” he murmured, grabbing my wrist again and pulling me along behind him.

At this point, I felt it was the right move to leave the mansion. When I

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Tasting 168

168–The Sins Of Someone Else

Nora:

The car ride was so quiet. My mind was flooded with Cain’s words.. The pain he caused me was unmatched by anything else. And my wolf wasn’t even unleashed yet. She would make the pain double once she is set free.

“Relax! If he wants to date her and you’re not comfortable with her being around, he’ll have to make sure he finds her a different house where they can meet,” Silas groaned. I could tell he wasn’t very happy either. He had been grumbling a lot and his veins were popping in his forearms.

“That won’t be necessary. I don’t want him to feel like a stranger in his own house. He can bring whoever he wants home,” I replied as I looked out the window.

I didn’t want to seem jealous of them. My anger could be mistaken for being upset at my stepbrother for dating someone who had wronged me so much.

“But where are we going?” I asked Silas, who had picked up sandwiches on our way to the mountains.

“We’re going to spend some quality time near the waterfall. You know, food and isolation can also be very comforting sometimes,” he forced a smile despite feeling uncomfortable about Cain dating Natalya.

He pulled over near the road, and we got out to hike up the tallest mountain. It wasn’t too bad; I had so much anger and frustration in me that the hike didn’t tire me out. Soon, we arrived near the waterfall. It

COOL

was the most beautiful sight ever waterfall so close to it.

—

– the tallest mountain with the

We sat down with the sandwiches in our hands. It took me only a few minutes to devour mine. I didn't even notice he had been watching me the whole time. It was only when I finished my sandwich that he offered me his own, which he had barely touched.

"Thank you," I accepted his sandwich, taking on the task of finishing it next. Meanwhile, he sat in front of me with his arms wrapped around his legs, leaning back and keeping his eyes fixed on me.

"I never knew pretty girls could eat so much," he remarked, catching my attention. I looked up at him and finally realized how much I had been eating.

"It's just that I've been so upset that–," I murmured quietly.

"It's okay. I understand," he replied.

"But I don't understand," now that I was done with the food, I focused on some unresolved issues.

"What is it that you don't understand?" a hint of playfulness in his tone.

"Why did you change your behavior towards me?" I asked, watching him gaze deeply into my eyes, a faint smile forming on his lips.

"When you first came, of course, it wasn't easy for me and my brothers. to accept you. It reminded us of our father cheating on our mother with your mother. So, we decided none of us would accept you, which obviously turned out to be a lie from my brothers, since they accepted you into the family

long before I did," he paused, but the way he looked down made me believe he felt betrayed by his brothers.

25.301

"And then I began to believe you had come into our lives to make us suffer on purpose. I was so convinced of it until you started to ignore me. I asked myself, why would a girl who wants to annoy me pass up every chance? You didn't even tell Dad about what happened at the party. And then, since my brothers had forgotten about their mission, I let my guard down too. And I realized, you're not that bad," he smiled, but the pain in his voice was too distracting.

"You hate my mother the most, don't you?" I questioned.

“Nora! She stole our mother’s happiness from her. When our mother needed Dad the most, he was busy having an affair with your mother. She would call him at odd hours, demanding he visit her, and he would. We brothers would stay awake beside our mother, telling her stories, even singing to her. But none of it ever comforted her. It wasn’t fair to her, Nora. Especially when all she had left was a few months,” he drifted off, recalling his mother’s painful final memories.

“I’m so sorry. I wish I had been an adult back then to stop my mother,” I said quietly, feeling guilty knowing how they must feel when they look

at me.

“In the beginning, we were angry at you because we found out you saw our father and your mother together. Your father told the council about it, but since you were a child, the council forbade your father from using you as a witness,” he explained, maintaining eye contact with the waterfall this time.

I didn’t have the courage to ask him any more questions.

“Which is why I believe Cain is dating Natalya, to finally get back at you and your mother,” his conclusion weighed heavily on my heart. I swallowed hard and frowned to myself. Could it be true?

Then I remembered when Cain changed. The very next morning after

53.311

The Sins Of Someone Else

he had been intimate with me, he stopped paying attention to me. Did he finally take revenge for his mother?

No! I won’t let him punish me for someone else’s sins.

“I think we should head home now. I feel much better,” I gave Silas a smile, and he nodded in agreement. As he stood up, I felt compelled to stop him by holding his arm. This time, even as his eyes focused on my grip. I didn’t let go.

“Thank you for being here with me today,” my words were sincere, and he sensed it too.

He gave me a small nod before leading me back to our car. I was determined to go home and talk to Cain one last time. Not to beg him to leave Natalya, but to let him know I am his mate, and I deserve answers if he sought revenge for my mother’s affair.

Tasting 169

169—She Is His Mate?

Nora:

After getting home, I asked around and discovered that Natalya had gone to the hostel. Apparently, one of the drivers had dropped her off.

I couldn't understand why Cain would do that to me until Silas brought up a valid point. Now, I wanted the truth straight from Cain himself.

"Dad and everyone are waiting at the dinner table," Nash appeared from the living room to inform Silas and me.

We both nodded, but before we could pass him, Silas stepped in Nash's way. So, I halted too.

"Where did you take her?" Silas asked with concern in his voice.

"Don't worry, she's fine," Silas reassured, placing his hand gently on his brother's shoulder and guiding him aside.

"Are you fine though? You seemed to have swollen eyes. Have you been crying?" Nash inquired of me in a little whisper.

"Yeah I am fine now. Silas helped lift up my mood," I had to say that so that he doesn't think I had been crying because of Silas.

"Are you sure you are fine though?" he scanned me worriedly. At least these two were concerned for me. I don't know what happened to my own mates and why they were acting so oddly with me. It was the fact that Cain never even told me what changed his attitude towards me. As if he didn't even care if I had an excuse for it or not. He just got rid of

1. me.

To my surprise, Cain was seated between Lord Atwood and Ryker, feasting shamelessly.

The moment our eyes met, my body tingled.

But our eye contact was brief. Soon, he looked away, barely acknowledging me.

Now, we all sat down to enjoy the feast, appearing like a happy family. A family that had never betrayed each other.

“So, Dad, do you know what happened today?” Silas suddenly began speaking, and my heart skipped a beat. His tone suggested he might do something reckless.

“What happened?” Lord Atwood immediately focused his attention on his son’s words.

“I was at home and found out that Cain had invited his girlfriend over for a date,” he said with a sarcastic smile towards Cain, causing everyone to turn in surprise.

“My son, you’re dating?” His father’s happiness made me feel guilty. He must have hoped his sons would find someone to spend their lives with, only to discover his stepdaughter wasn’t comfortable with his girlfriend.

“Yes,” Cain obediently replied, though his gritted teeth drew most of the attention.

“And you’re not going to tell everyone who she is?” Silas continued.

I noticed Cain’s gaze turn towards me, almost angrily, holding me accountable for his brother’s reaction.

12187

“There will be a perfect time for it,” Cain uttered.

“Oh, come on. It’s a perfect time. We’re all sitting together as a family– or if you’re too ashamed of yourself, I’ll do the honors,” at this point, Silas’ taunting tone had become too obvious for anyone to ignore.

Ryker leaned back in his chair with his arm stretched out, barely touching his food. He seemed uninterested in the conversation.

Nash frowned, hunching over his salad bowl. Dad watched everyone’s faces intently.

Silas wore an angry smirk, while Cain countered with a threatening stare.

“What’s going on? Why would he be ashamed of dating someone?” Lord Atwood caught on but still didn’t know what Cain had done.

“Ask him.” Silas folded his arms, leaving it to his father.

Lord Atwood turned to Cain and cleared his throat, “Who is this lady you’re dating?”

Cain sighed, dabbing his mouth with a tissue. He seemed ready to leave after making her introduction.

young

“Natalya!” he uttered, prompting his father to shake his head, as if to confirm he’d heard correctly.

My heart raced again. Hearing him say her name wasn’t going to be easy for me.

“As in the snake Natalya?” Nash asked, and Cain immediately shot him a disapproving glance.

His overprotectiveness of her didn’t sit well with me. It made me anxious and upset.

“She’s my girlfriend now. I won’t tolerate any disrespect towards her,” Cain hissed at Nash, who straightened up and visibly frowned. He exchanged glances with his father and brothers to ensure they heard Cain’s rebuke for defending Natalya.

Throughout this, Lord Atwood observed my face. Ryker, who had his head down, was now looking at me through his eyebrows.

“Dad, you’re not going to say anything?” Nash finally broke his father’s silence with a direct question.

Lord Atwood uncomfortably shifted in his seat, avoiding eye contact with me. At that moment, I sensed something was amiss. If he were truly on my side, he wouldn’t have hesitated.

“I know what Natalya did was wrong. But I think she genuinely misunderstood the relationship between Nora and her stepbrothers,” he began, causing my heart to skip a beat.

He noticed my expression and quickly added, “I’m not siding with her. That girl has lied before. But when it comes to dating and mates—”

He paused abruptly, and I frowned at his insinuation.

“What are you trying to say?” Nash asked in an authoritative tone.

“Isn’t Nora also dating our enemy?” Cain interjected softly.

Now that all eyes were on me, I straightened up defensively. “To clear our names,” I asserted.

My words came out almost hissing at Cain. In response, he let out a taunting chuckle and shook his head.

66.21%

“Even before that, when your brother wasn’t happy about your friendship with Brody, did it stop you from inviting him over to the mansion?” Cain mentioned Ryker, whose grip on his fork tightened, but he remained silent.

I felt disbelief and guilt. I was being accused of hypocrisy.

“And I’m not just dating her for no reason. I have an even stronger reason to be with her,” Cain added, drawing everyone’s attention to him.

“She’s my fated mate,” Cain declared, making my heart stop. His eyes bore into mine as he made that claim, almost as if mocking me.

There was no way he was telling the truth.

Tasting 170

170—My Heartless Mate

Nora:

“What?” I almost gasped but that didn’t stop him from repeating himself twice.

“As I said, I have finally found my fated mate,” Cain announced again, Nash and Silas looking so shocked.

“That makes sense,” Lord Atwood, evidently briefed by Cain already, nodded.

My head was throbbing with overwhelming fears. Why on earth did Cain blatantly lie about the mate bond with Natalya? Was he so desperate to date her that he’d fabricate something so significant?

She must have been the one to tell him to lie. Was she really taking over his mind like that?

Everyone started eating as if the argument had been settled, but I couldn’t swallow a single bite anymore.

“You’re not eating,” Lord Atwood asked, sounding guilty.

“I’m full. I already had sandwiches with Silas earlier,” I managed to mumble. The way everyone’s eyes turned towards me only heightened my discomfort. I just needed an excuse to get away for now.

“Oh, you two had fun?” He tried to spark a conversation that didn’t involve heavy topics. I forced a headnod, trying to hide my eyes because there was this sadness growing

inside me, branching out and taking over every part of my body, controlling every aspect of my life

12190

170—My Heartless Mate

now.

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“I’ll go get ready for bed,” I said, pushing my plate away gently and retreating to my bedroom.

Once I was out of the living room, I hurried up the stairs to reach my room before tears could escape.

I couldn’t believe all of this was happening. They had hated Natalya, so why did they suddenly want to date her?

After locking the door, I collapsed onto my bed and buried my face in my pillow, sobbing.

‘You are free to show your pain,’ I twisted the ring on my finger, feeling a sharp pang in my heart. It was worse than a heart attack. I curled my toes and bit my lip, trying hard to endure the pain.

‘I’m so angry,’ she hissed, finally released. Tm

‘I understand the pain, especially knowing he did it right after he had sex with me,’ I whispered to myself, realizing he probably only wanted to use me once before abandoning me entirely. All the signs pointed to him exacting revenge on me in the cruelest way possible.

This pain is unbearable, Nora,’ Akira moaned, clearly suffering.

Seeing her pain, caused by others’ mistakes, I sat up, wiping away my tears with the back of my hand.

It was the feeling of being used that I couldn’t shake off. How dare he use me and then start dating my enemy? No, I wouldn’t let it go.

“What are you doing?” Akira noticed my determined stride towards the door.

170 My Heartless Mate

“I’m going to remind him that I’m his mate, so he can’t lie about having a bond with Natalya,” I said, adjusting the ring on my finger, and stormed out of the room, heading towards his studio.

Soon, he came upstairs, walking steadily with one hand in his pants’ pocket and the other holding his phone, absorbed in it.

“I need to talk to you,” the moment he heard my voice, he raised his head and rolled his eyes, showing how annoyed he was with me.

“Again? What now, Nora? Can’t you accept that I’m dating your friend? Or is jealousy clouding your judgment?” his tone and body language were irritating me. I couldn’t believe this was the same guy who used to care so much about me.

“Why did you lie about that?” I asked, my fists clenched.

Leaning to the side, still holding his phone, he had a subtle smirk on his lips that I couldn’t ignore. It made me wonder if he found pleasure in my misery.

“I didn’t lie about anything,” he shrugged.

“Yes, you did. You said she’s your fated mate. If that’s true, then what am I to you?” I asked, clenching my fists tighter.

He raised an eyebrow and chuckled mockingly.

“Are you serious? Why would you be my mate?” the amusement in his eyes as he teased me was heart-wrenching.

“You must be joking,” I had to ask because I couldn’t believe he was serious.

“Why would I joke?” he leaned forward, “Just admit you had a crush on your stepbrother. You wanted me to pursue you, and when I didn’t,

170—My Heartless Mate

you got bitter,” he shocked me with his words before continuing, “That’s what I’ll say if you tell anyone you felt a bond with me.”

I stepped back, gasping for air. Was he threatening me? I couldn’t comprehend the sudden change in him. So much hatred and animosity. What did I do so wrong that he didn’t even believe I deserve to know what I am getting punished for?

“Nora! If you breathe a word to anyone, I’ll ask you to shift before them. Do you know how devastated Dad would be to find out you’ve been lying about your wolf all this time?” His demeanor remained calm, as if none of this affected him.

Tears welled up, blurring my vision and shielding me from gaze.

“Why? Why would you manipulate me like this? Because of my mother?” My voice cracked with impending tears.

Facing such a betrayal had never crossed my mind. After enduring abuse throughout my childhood, I had hoped to find a new family here. But I never imagined I’d never be truly welcome while keeping so many secrets in my heart.

“Maybe,” he shrugged. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have work to do.” He opened the door to his studio, leaving me outside with a shattered. and betrayed heart.

In shock, I returned to my room.

“Fuck him! Chasing after him will only get us into trouble. He won’t hold back, and he’s already warned us,” Akira spoke with a heavy heart and voice, making a valid point.

“Besides, we’re also dating someone they hate. Let’s just move on from him,” I knew it wouldn’t be easy for us.

I just couldn’t comprehend how Cam could do that Was his wolf that heartless?