

Tasting Nora-Pleasing Her Stepbrother Mates #Tasting 171 - Read Tasting Nora-Pleasing Her Stepbrother Mates Tasting 171

Tasting 171

171–Facing The Bitches

Nora:

When I woke up the next day for school, my eyes could barely open. They were swollen shut, and I hated that I had shed so many tears for Cain. I didn't even feel like having breakfast. Sitting with them and eating, especially after they had welcomed her into this mansion, was just too much for now.

In fact, I wouldn't have been so upset if Cain weren't my mate. Obviously, the brothers wouldn't understand and would just confuse the situation with me dating Brody. But the only reason I said yes to dating Brody was because none of my mates could step up to accept me in front of their father. They just had their fun and then ditched me.

"Aren't you going to join us for breakfast?" Lord Atwood managed to get my attention as I walked past the living room. I turned to the open door and saw everyone sitting and eating breakfast as if it were a normal day.

"No, I'm not really hungry," I excused with the fakest smile ever.

"But you didn't eat dinner either," Lord Atwood continued.

"Dad, she's not a child. If she doesn't want to eat, let her be. You don't have to beg her to eat," it was Cain upsetting me once again. He seemed to have made it his life's mission to hurt me.

Not only did he not care anymore, but he didn't like anyone else caring for me either. Would I be able to live like this if he continued to make my life miserable?

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"He's right. No one has to beg me for anything," I retorted, though it didn't seem to affect anyone as I briskly walked past them to get out of sight.

Once outside, I glanced around at the cars and their drivers. Until now, I had never been allowed to have my own driver. Lord Atwood had always insisted that one of the brothers accompany me for my safety. But I supposed with the man who used to call the monsters behind bars now, there was no external threat.

I took a deep breath and approached one of the drivers. "Can you take me to school?" I asked, not really knowing which brother he worked for.

"Miss Nora!" a driver called from behind, prompting the one I was speaking to to point in the opposite direction.

I turned and watched as the driver approached me.

"You'll be coming with me today. I'm just waiting for Lord Atwood to arrive," he explained, making it clear that Lord Atwood intended to accompany me today. I nodded and stood beside the car, waiting for Lord Atwood, who didn't take long to appear before me.

The two of us got into the car, and soon our journey began. I wasn't naive; I knew he had something to discuss.

"Nora! Are you upset with me?" he began, his tone gentle.

"No! You and Cain made sure I understood how the decision was made. She is his fated mate," I replied, trying not to sound taunting, though I couldn't help it.

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"And you know how hard it's been for my to find a fated mate," he added.

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"You see, I would have intervened, but he told me he allowed you to date Brody, the guy they dislike so much. Besides, he promised that Natalya wouldn't interfere with you anymore," he smiled, unaware of how much seeing Cain dating Natalya bothered me. The fact that Cain had told Lord Atwood that Natalya wouldn't bother me explained what a liar he was. He knew I couldn't help but be affected by seeing them together.

"I understand. It's just that I might need some time to accept this change," I mumbled softly, feeling there wasn't much left for me to say but to accept it.

Soon, we arrived and I jumped out of the car. Being back at the school, where I had been bullied mercilessly made my heart race. I took a deep breath and marched inside, straight to the lockers.

However, the whispers were absent this morning. Nobody pointed at me or made fun of me. Everyone was minding their own business. I had expected some of them to talk or make comments, but it seemed everything had been taken care of

As I reached the lockers, I noticed someone giggling beside me. To my left stood Natalya at her locker, dressed in her old attire. Her ponytails were short but neatly done.

There was a smile on her lips that couldn't be wiped away.

"Hello, sister-in-law," she teased, her tone mocking and her smile taunting me.

"Get a life, Natalya," I retorted, shoving my books into the locker.

"Instead, I ended up with an alpha king," she said with a deep breath. "What were you thinking when you told him not to date me? You intimidated him. You were supposed to be a friend, but you

decided to

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be a snake. You tried to snatch him away from me," she continued, repeating the same accusations she had hurled at me before.

"Maybe you're forgetting that I encouraged him to paint you. It wasn't my fault he didn't feel like touching you. Your desperation grew, and you ended up showing your true colors, all of which is not my fault," I shrugged.

The way she scrutinized my face made me wonder if she wanted to say more than she was letting on. But clearly, she wouldn't.

further by reminding him of his stepsister's behavior.

"Do you know he came to the hostel to tag or set Cain

me? He was so gentle and even gave me a hug. He said he didn't know I was in love with him. That you hid such an important thing from him. I'm so glad he came because we were able to talk things through and feel a mate bond," she giggled, making my skin crawl.

I wanted to slap her or call her out on her lies, but I was interrupted when another one of my 'friends' appeared.

Tasting 172

172–Took My Place

Nora:

Watching April again after she changed sides was hard. Made two friends and none of them turned out to be honest or loyal to me.

“Hello Nora, where have you been?” Her taunting tone made her position clear. She was against me too.

“I expected that from Natalya, but I should have been more certain about you. Since your track record has been so messy from the start,” I hissed, acknowledging my fault in befriending those who had shown they could get messy if they didn’t get what they wanted. Not to

mention, these girls have shown interest in my brothers so many times. I just turned a blind eye to it.

“Really, what did I do? Did I ask your crush not to speak to you? Did I forbid him from ever falling for you? No! I didn’t. But you know who did?” she hissed back, her eyes showing the anger she had been holding for me. “You did. You knew I liked Ryker, but you decided to ruin it for me. I don’t understand why. I was starting to like you. Boy, I was wrong about you. You are the real snake here, Nora,” she added, folding her arms across her chest. Natalya walked up to her and stood

beside her.

“But it’s all over now. I bet everyone knows your true colors. They might not say it out loud, but they see the real you,” April made me aware of the secretly passing glances my way.

“They are just afraid of your stepbrothers and stepfather. The day you lose that title, you are done,” her threats were scary. The idea of losing my stepfather’s support was indeed threatening.

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“As for Natalya, I’ve decided to have her move in with me. We’ll be roomies from now on,” April cheered, clapping her hands as she delivered the news.

“Thank you so much,” Natalya replied, holding April’s hand and

giggling. They seemed insincere, but just imagine them living together. They would surely conspire to disrupt my peace. All they would do is gossip about me and scheme against me.

“Maybe we could double date too,” April suggested, furrowing my brow. I didn’t exactly know who April was referring to, nor did I want to ask. But I knew whatever they were saying in front of me was well rehearsed to provoke a reaction from me or deliver some news.

However, I kept my calm and decided to walk away from them. But April wasn't finished yet.

"And by the way, if you think I'll let you date my cousin, you're wrong. You tried to ruin my happiness, so I'll make sure I ruin yours in the worst way possible that you'll think twice about ever dating anyone again," she said, her tone serious now, with Natalya no longer smiling.

Their threats were serious, and I was certain they meant harm to me. I turned around again and hurried away. Everything they said put me on high alert. I couldn't stay silent about these threats. Somebody needed to know what these two were up to. Of course, Cain wouldn't care or believe me. He wanted revenge and he took it.

"Nash!" I exclaimed aloud. I don't know why, but his name popped into my mind. He was always keen on justice, always on the side of what was right.

"Maybe he will believe me. I was determined to talk to him about April. As for Natalya, Cain would defend her, so there was no way I could say anything about her right now without any proof. Otherwise, I

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would end up looking like the jealous stepsister who doesn't want her stepbrother to date her ex– friend.

Throughout class, I couldn't help but notice April and Natalya sitting together, whispering and occasionally turning their heads to laugh at me. It was hard to concentrate with so much pressure on my heart and mind, but somehow I made it through the day.

Once the bell rang, I didn't even go back to my locker; instead, I hurried towards the exit. I wanted to get away from these toxic people. I could still avoid Natalya when she comes home; I'll just confine myself to my bedroom then.

Then there was Nash, Ryker, and Silas, who wouldn't allow her to annoy me at my own home.

As I stood outside, I wondered who would come to give me a ride. I hadn't spoken to Ryker since that day, so I didn't even know where he stood. In fact, it was odd that for the first time, he didn't try to climb up my balcony to talk or pursue me, showing he wasn't on Cain's side.

The fact that my mate didn't come to comfort me when my other mate betrayed me should have been a big warning.

While I was thinking about all that, I saw Ryker pull up on his bike. Even though I was angry with him, seeing him come to pick me up gave me a little hope in my heart. But I had to keep up the facade of being upset with him.

“Ryker!” I attempted to sound grumpy when deep down, I was relieved. to see my mate. Now that Cain had betrayed me, I wished I had rejected him and accepted Ryker like he had always asked from me.

“Hey, why are you here? Why didn’t Dad send a driver to pick me up?” I pouted, folding my arms over my chest. I was so used to him always.

172–Took My Place

trying to chase after me that I didn’t realize there was a change in his body language.

He took off his helmet and rested his arm on it in his lap. After taking a deep breath, he spoke, “I’m not here for you. Dad did send a driver to pick you up.”

My frown deepened. “Then who are you here for?” It was starting to weigh heavily on my heart because deep down, I could sense what was happening.

He glanced steadily behind me and then smiled. That’s when April rushed over to grab a helmet from his hands.

173–Bang My Ex Friend

Tasting 173

173–Dating My Ex Friend

Nora:

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Disbelief and shock paralyzed body for a while. I watched her jump into the back with the helmet on and then wrap her arms around his stomach, holding him tightly. The two took off right before my eyes. and I couldn’t even object. My heart was pounding so hard that I stepped back and started taking deep breaths.

“I need to–,” I looked around, noticing how everything had started to blur up. It was as if the stress was slowly blinding me. This couldn’t be possible. Cain could do it because he wanted revenge, but Ryker? There was no way the guy who was obsessed with me would date. April. This didn’t seem right. Maybe he was just trying to make me jealous to get a reaction out of me? Or he might have done it in response to me dating Brody. Because other than these reasons, I couldn’t really believe Ryker would do that to me.

I had barely calmed myself down when a hand on my shoulder jolted me to reality. I spun around to find Brody standing there with a smile on his lips.

“Thank goodness you’re here,” I instantly smiled for him, showing him how desperate I had been for some affection. “Hey, are you okay? Did something happen in school? Please tell me no one bothered you.” His smile vanished when he saw how worried I looked.

“I’m fine. It’s just that the driver isn’t there yet, and I freaked out,” I lied, rubbing my palms anxiously. I wanted to scream, but it wasn’t the right time or place to show my craziness.

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“Actually, I’ve come to drop you home myself,” he stepped ahead and opened the door to his car. I was stunned to realize he had come and parked his car right in front of me and I couldn’t see it. How lost I was in my thoughts.

“Thank you,” without a second thought, I jumped in and closed the door. Next, I texted the driver not to come to the school.

Throughout the car ride, Brody talked about a multitude of things, but I couldn’t focus on anything he was saying. I was worried: if I confronted Ryker, would he hurt me like Cain did? Or would he feel guilty? He didn’t look guilty when he picked her up though. I was convincing myself that Ryker did it because I was dating Brody. That made sense. Why would he hold back when I was dating his enemy?

“Are you alright? You’ve barely spoken a word,” he laughed uncomfortably, jolting me awake.

“Oh, I’m sorry, what were you saying?” I shook my head and asked him.

“Eh!” he chuckled a little, “girls love the topic of shopping. And you showed no interest, ouch!” he joked.

He was so pleasant. I could be so happy just being with him. No drama. or worries. No fear of getting caught with him. Why couldn’t I

convince myself to do just that? Because of the mate bond. I was tied to those who were so mean and cold.

“It’s actually— I don’t think April and Natalya like me very much,” I murmured under my breath.

“Why? You should be the one hating on them since they started that rumor,” he corrected me.

"It's just that April told me today that she has asked Natalya to move in

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173 Dating My Ex Friend

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with her. I'm not sure how much it's not related to me," I nervously chewed upon my nails.

"Oh, that. I don't think she means any harm to you. She's just that way. She's messy, sure! But she moves on from stuff quickly. And as for asking Natalya to move in with her, once she befriends someone, she wants them under her nose. So I'm pretty sure it's just them bonding," he explained, kind of defending her actions.

I wasn't certain if I could even say anything more about her. The fact that Ryker and Cain chose those whom I hate was just too much of a coincidence. Did they plan all that to hurt me? Was revenge always on their minds?

Once we arrived, I got out of his car and so did he. That's when I watched Ryker returning. He had dropped her off and was already coming back. It gave me a little idea.

I needed to know if he felt the same way about me or not. It was just a little test, something that would comfort me into knowing my mate was still not entirely done with me. I turned to Brody when I watched Ryker take off his helmet and look our way. I held my breath and smiled for Brody, who was frowning in bewilderment.

"Thank you so much for the ride. You have no idea how much I had freaked out outside that school," I laughed even when there was nothing to laugh about.

"Thank you," repeating myself, I leaned over him and kissed him on the cheek. The way his body flinched filled me with guilt. He was so sweet and nice, and here I was using him to see if my mates

were even still in love with me. Love was actually a huge word; even if they cared a little, it would be enough.

Then, as expected, Ryker narrowed his eyes and put his helmet aside.

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173 Dating My Ex Friend

His brisk walk made it clear he was not happy to see us together. It raised my hope. I watched him approach us and stand face to face with Brody, who also straightened his back. Now, I was regretting my actions. If Ryker insulted Brody because of the kiss I gave him, I would be the guilty one and responsible for it.

However, my hopes died very instantly when instead of showing jealousy, Ryker pressed his lips tightly and uttered, "I think it would be better if we keep our differences aside just for the sake of you dating my stepsister." My jaw hung low, but Ryker wasn't done yet. "And I am also dating your cousin April. So I guess it is safe to say we are even and that we need to accept each other's presence from now on."

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Tasting 174

174–The Angry Wolf

Nora:

"I think you're right. I can do that for Nora," Ryker uttered, giving me a smile, but I couldn't smile back at him. In my head, I was lost. Both my mates had decided to punish me for dating Brody. Or maybe it was for my mother's sins. I just couldn't be sure what it was. I stayed silent and watched them shake hands on it. Although it wasn't clear if they still hated each other, Ryker made it very clear that he was over me.

"I'll see you tomorrow then," Brody gently caressed my cheek, but Ryker didn't stay to see it. He had already started walking away from us. I gave Brody a nod, and the minute he slipped into his car, I spun to chase after Ryker.

How dare he! How dare they! What kind of messed-up game were they playing with me?

The moment I caught up to him at the entrance of the mansion, he rolled his eyes and placed his hands on his waist.

"What is it?" He didn't even let me start talking and asked me directly.

"What was that? You dating April?" I frowned.

"So what? You're dating her cousin too," he shrugged. I was still certain that one reason Ryker chose to date my enemy was because he was jealous and upset that I was dating Brody.

“Because you were nowhere to be found and we needed to protect me. It was your father who suggested that I date Brody,” I explained to him, but he shrugged.

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“Okay! And I guess he made the right decision,” he sounded so nonchalant. It was not the Ryker I was used to talking to.

“What did I do wrong?” I asked, “If it’s about me dating Brody, I will break things off with him.” I just wanted to know what ticked them off so much. They were punishing me without even telling me what my crime was.

“Oh, really? Now you want to cut ties with him? Back when I used to beg and request you to leave him, you acted so arrogant and full of yourself. You were having fun juggling so many guys, but now that they have moved on from you, you’re shocked? You want to make things right?” Hearing Ryker talk about it just hit differently.

I was used to him being completely after me. I don’t know if it was love or what, but he would not speak to me that way. If anything, he would express his love to me in so many different ways before.

“So you’re only doing this because of Brody?” I asked, as if that would make sense.

“No! I just got over you. And I figured who’s the best I could date to feel loved, someone who chases after me and doesn’t just like to be chased. That’s when I recalled April, and she seemed like a perfect option,” he shrugged, causing my eyes to turn misty.

“You are my mate,” I uttered, “and I know what you’ll say to that. The same thing your brother said,” I gritted the words under my teeth while a tear rolled down my cheek, “you’ll threaten to make me look like the desperate one and ask me to transition if I claim to be mates with you.”

He listened to me attentively, and once I was done, he sighed.

“Go back to your room and rest, Nora. We all had a wild day,” his voice suddenly calmed down, but I could still see he looked exhausted

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174 The Angry Wolf

with me.

I was deeply hurt by their actions.

“So you’re going to keep dating her? Are you going to tell everyone that she’s your fated mate like Cain did?” It was eerie that both of them had used the same kind of excuse.

“You’ll find out soon,” he replied, then marched past me. At this point, I didn’t have anything to argue over. It was made clear to me that they didn’t want me for a mate.

I rushed upstairs, upset tears crossed my face, and once in my room, I threw my bag aside and grabbed a pillow.

“ARGHHHHH!” Screaming into the pillow didn’t help. My body was having a weird reaction to the betrayal of my mates.

I assumed it was because my wolf wanted to feel the pain and then cope with it. But we couldn’t even do that.

I sat on my bed, shedding tears before finally twisting the ring on my finger.

“Ugh!” a painful cry escaped my lips when Akira woke up.

“No! This can’t be it. There’s no way all this happened. Both our mates, Nora. Do you have any idea what that means? They’re not going to tell anyone about us, hence no rejection or acceptance. We can’t live like that. We’re creatures of love; we need a mate. We need closure,” she was right, but what could be done?

I tried every method, had so many conversations with Cain, but every time he hurt me more.

“And more than that, I need to transition,” once she added that last.

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part, my body flinched.

“No, Akira, just rest and calm down. Maybe think about Brody. He cares about us,” I instantly realized I was hurting her by constantly seeking answers from those who didn’t even care about us anymore.

“You don’t get it, Nora. I can’t hold it in anymore. It’s been so long—,” she grimaced in pain, making my heart skip a beat.

“Akira! We’ll be on death row, stop it,” I fixed the ring on my finger and I knew I pissed her off because the sudden loss of energy made me believe she was now doing her best to get to me.

I felt like I had upset her as well. Everything was falling apart, and I needed to find a way to be happy, or else Akira would break free. I had an inkling that the next time I shifted the ring on my finger, Akira might come out to transition.

That would be my last day here if it happened.

Tasting 175

175–Picking A Gown With Silas

Nora:

“Have you picked out a dress yet?” Lord Atwood asked, sounding surprised because he could tell from the look on my face that I haven’t bought anything for the ball yet.

He was extremely excited and wanted everyone to start preparing.

“I’ve been waiting for Brody to come back from his pack,” I replied, absentmindedly playing with the peas on my plate. It’s been a week, and things have only gotten messier. Ryker would show up at school, and April would ensure everyone saw them together. Natalya always talked about Cain, but I haven’t seen her at home since then. Nobody spoke to me at school, which also proved April’s words to be true. They had just been holding back for the sake of the alpha king’s stepbrothers and Lord Atwood.

It felt like I was living in a place where I wasn’t welcome, reminding me of home. It wasn’t any different back at home. Dad hated me so much that he let my brother take control of my life. They called me weak and wanted me to be a monster like them. This week brought back those memories. I took a deep breath but kept my head down. I haven’t had a conversation with my so-called mates again. They were busy with their lives after ruining mine, and I didn’t plan to intervene in their matters again either. If it was over, it was over.

Today, everyone was eating at the breakfast table, but I hadn’t once lifted my head to look at the brothers.

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“There’s no problem in that. I can take her out for shopping,” Silas, who was the last one to acknowledge my existence, spoke up.

175 Picking A Gown With Silas

So far, he showed more understanding than the others. He was kind now and didn’t argue with me, at least for now. Who knows if he’ll change tomorrow too?

“There’s no need for it. I’ll wait for Brody,” I lifted my head and finally looked at the brothers. I didn’t want Silas to waste his entire day for me. He works really hard taking care of the pack’s patients, mostly those who can’t be treated at the hospital.

“Why not? Do you want all the good dresses to be taken?” Nash joked, clad in a black shirt. He wore a smile on his lips, more empathetic than teasing.

“I think Silas is right,” Lord Atwood stated with a careful tone in his voice. I turned to Silas and saw him in a brown hoodie, looking almost dreamy.

“Thank you,” I almost whispered to him. Then my gaze shifted to the other two, one in white and Ryker in black. They watched me until I met their eyes, then quickly looked away. They must be enjoying watching me suffer, trapped in a situation where I couldn’t even tell anyone they were my mates.

My heart had been aching for the past few days. On top of that, I hadn’t spoken to Akira. I feared she would explode, and that fear might have deeply upset her.

I had come to this family hoping to find love and good relationships, but instead, I was losing whatever I had when I arrived here. Silas finished his meal and snapped his fingers in front of my face to get my attention. I raised my head to find everyone gone except him and Lord Atwood, who watched me with teary eyes.

“I’m sorry. I’ll go get ready,” I said, steadily rising from my seat and walking away from them.

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175- Picking A Gown With Bilas

“Dad, it’s alright. She’ll be fine. But can you blame her? Both your sons chose the girls who had been targeting her, trying to ruin her reputation. She’ll need time to heal and accept this,” Silas told his father.

Of course, Lord Atwood had noticed the change in me. I was growing weaker, no longer smiling or running around to annoy others. After slipping into a baggy sweater and gray sweatpants, I walked downstairs and was greeted by Silas. He scanned me from head to toe before leading me towards the exit.

Once we were in the car and he hit the road, I noticed his veins popping out.

“Nora! Just tell me what I can do to cheer you up,” instead of heading straight to the shopping mall, he stopped the car near an abandoned parking lot and turned to me. It was unexpected.

“You don’t need to do anything, Silas. I’m fine. Actually, I appreciate your help in picking out a dress,” I forced a smile, but soon my eyes started to water. Having two mates who slept with me and then left made me feel like a whore. Did anyone at school even like me?

“Okay, tell me if you want me to take care of those two girls. I can do it, and no one will find out,” he shrugged, surprising me.

“You don’t need to do that. They are your brothers’ mates,” I hissed.

“Hmm, then what can I do?” Silas seemed desperate to help me with something.

“If I ever want anything, I will come right to you,” I smiled, at least this time I was genuinely smiling because of the concern he was showing for me. I was grateful for his understanding.

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175 Picking A Gown With Slas

“Just tell me something, why were you trying to hypnotize me the other day?” I raised my brow. The moment he heard that question, he leaned back and his eyes narrowed, as if searching for an excuse.

“I know it doesn’t make sense, but I got curious,” he mumbled softly, his voice husky and deeper.

“Curious about what?” I asked, confused.

He paused, not moving a muscle and just staring at my face before saying, “About you.”

My heart skipped a beat, but I forced a confused look on my face, “What is it that you wanted to know?”

“It’s not that I wanted to ask you-” he paused and shook his head, “forget it. I don’t want anyone to start rumors about us. You’ve suffered enough.”

Though he didn’t answer my question, his words left me stunned.

Tasting 176

176–But He Liked The Red One

Nora:

After that little chat, I couldn't bring myself to ask him any more questions. I was feeling even shyer around him now. What did he mean by people spreading rumors about us? What could he possibly want to find out from me that he needed to hypnotize me for?

We drove past the mall, and I turned around to double-check if I had seen it correctly.

"You left the mall behind," I blurted out. He shook his head, snapping back to reality. "Oh!" was all he said before hurrying ahead. I noticed how lost he had been now

Soon, we arrived at the mall, and he led me to a boutique of a particular designer.

"These are expensive," I murmured, having only glanced at the price tag on one of the dresses before stepping away from it.

"Good thing the Alpha King you're with is loaded," Silas whispered in my ear from behind, straightening up as I spun around to look at him. He was so tall and broad.

I began to look at the dresses. I had told Brody that I was going to the mall with Silas. He wasn't very happy because he wanted to help me find a gown. Now that he couldn't find time, he had to accept that I would be attending the ball in something Silas might have picked out.

"Look at this one," my heart sank as I gazed at a beautiful red gown. It stood out among the others, so red. Silas had pointed it out from a

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distance, drawing my attention to the stunning gown.

"This will complement your hair, eyes, and skin so well," Silas remarked, approaching me instantly and whispering, his fingers gently touching the gown before clearing his throat and adding, "it's beautiful."

"Then I'm taking this one. But do you think the cleavage is a bit too much?" I didn't want him to feel uncomfortable. I remembered that both him and Nash didn't like me wearing clothes that showed too much skin.

Silas stared at the gown and then at my face. The eerie silence made me look away from him.

"Don't worry, if anyone stares, I'll rip their eyes out," he commented, leaving me frozen.

I tried to recover quickly, but why the heck was he talking like that to me? Or maybe he was just trying to cheer me up. He did mention he wanted to lift my spirits. So maybe his way of cheering someone up was to be extra sweet.

“Hey! I hope you haven’t picked something yet,” to my surprise, Brody appeared, holding a white gown and a bright smile on his lips.

“Brody! How-“I was shocked to see him here.

“I was already on my way to your mansion when I got your message that you were headed to the mall. I decided to surprise you. I picked this dress from their website. Check this out,” he said all in one breath, giving a jerk to his brown jacket and barely acknowledging Silas beside me. He handed me the white gown.

“This is the prettiest gown in the store,” he insisted, urging me to try it

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176–Out He Liked The Red One

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I stared at it and then at the red one. I really wanted the red one, but the way Brody was so adamant that I try the white one, I felt like I would hurt his feelings if I didn’t accept his choice.

“I’ll go try this on,” I mumbled, stealing a glance at Silas.

I walked over to the changing room and tried it on. It was indeed very beautiful, but my mind kept wandering back to the red one. Not because Silas liked it, but because I liked it too.

I didn’t come out wearing the dress because we wanted to keep it a surprise.

“So?” Brody rubbed his hands excitedly, waiting for my response, while Silas stood behind him with his arms folded and his eyes on me.

“I like it,” I said with a forced grin. The fact that he came all the way here to support me when buying a gown meant a lot to me.

“Perfect, I’ll get it ready for you then,” Brody grabbed my arm and rushed towards the counter.

“Why didn’t you pick the red one?” Silas asked, using a calm tone.

“Brody really liked the white one,” I uttered softly, taking deep and shallow breaths. I was just very tired and upset. Maybe Cain and Ryker were the reason behind my sadness.

“So? Is he the one who’s going to wear the gown? You liked the red one, Nora,” he shook his head slightly, indicating I should choose what I liked.

“It’s alright, really. I’m going to the ball with him. I want to dress up to impress him anyway,” the lack of enthusiasm in my voice about the

52.431

176 But He Liked The Red One

ball made Silas tilt his head and sigh.

“You’re really not excited for this ball, are you?” he approached me and chuckled.

“No, it’s okay. But what about you? Who are you taking to the ball?” Since I’ve never seen him with any girl, I couldn’t help but ask.

“Hm, well, I don’t have anyone, and I don’t wish to go to any ball with someone I’m not interested in,” he shrugged, making me wonder if he was the only one not attending. Maybe Nash wouldn’t come either.

“You know what?” he suddenly turned to me with a smile on his lips. and a mischievous glint in his eyes.

“What?” I asked in confusion.

“If you weren’t my step-” Before he could finish, Brody interrupted, and I felt like I would never find out what Silas was going to say.

“Let’s go, I’ll drop you home in my car,” Brody wrapped his arm around my back, giving Silas a strange look before pulling me away from him.

“But I came here with Silas. He’ll get upset,” I stopped, turning around to look for Silas, but he had already disappeared.

“Well, I guess you’ll be coming with me then.” Brody joked, and we continued to leave the mall with the order placed.

79.07%

Tasting 177

177–Kissing My Boyfriend

Nora:

"I'm really looking forward to this ball. I hope we can hang out more and really build a good relationship," Brody beamed as he drove me home.

It was unsettling, or even strange, how my energy had dropped again. But I hadn't felt this drained while shopping with Silas. I enjoyed his attention.

Oh goddess! Am I really so shallow?

Why the heck was I so excited to be around my Stepbrothers?

Do I have a kink for forbidden romance or what?

"So, what do you think?" Brody asked again, but I hadn't heard a word. However, he did shake me awake to reality and I slightly turned to acknowledge him.

"Come on, Nora! What's going on?" He slowed down to check on me.

"Nothing. I just miss my mother," I muttered.

I noticed a slight shift in his body language, but I couldn't tell what it meant.

"By the way, I was thinking we could visit my pack after the ball," he repeated, avoiding the topic of my mother.

I couldn't help but remember how he acted with Natalya, lying about

122.21

177–Kissing My Boyfriend

her wolf. Could he feel awkward about my mother, given she was accused of seducing Lord Atwood?

"I'm not sure. I'll have to ask Lord Atwood," I mumbled, turning my head to look out the window.

"Don't worry about that. I've already spoken to him and he liked the idea," Brody said, causing me to close my eyes before turning to him. and forcing a smile.

"Great. I'll be excited to see your pack," I faked enthusiasm, but he believed it. Leaving the mansion to go stay in his pack for a day or two will be hard on my wolf.

The unavailability of chances to transition were coped with the scent of my mates most of the time. So staying away from them would be hard and painful.

The whole time, he was happily chatting with me while I was feeling low in energy. What was wrong with me?

Any girl would love to be in my position, pursued by a handsome alpha like Brody. So what was my problem?

Or maybe who was my problem? I just didn't get why the Moon Goddess mated me to these two brothers and then made them so strong that they didn't even feel the pain of staying away from their mate.

We pulled up at home, and Lord Atwood was standing at the entrance with Ryker, who was leaning over the car hood, a map spread out on it. They seemed deep in conversation until they spotted Brody's car.

"I'll go say hi," Brody said, getting out of the car and leading me towards Lord Atwood, who greeted us with a smile as he watched Brody, the alpha, with me.

18.321

1221

177–Kissing My Boyfriend

"Where did you catch him?" Lord Atwood asked playfully.

I laughed in response, though it was more forced. Ryker bent further over the map, one arm resting on it, his body turned towards us, studying us.

"Why don't you stay for lunch?" Lord Atwood offered Brody, who nodded and accepted.

As I watched Ryker, something stirred inside me. I wanted revenge on him and Cain. I wanted to settle scores with everyone who had hurt

1. me.

"Come on, you can wait in my room until then." I moved closer, wrapping my arm around Brody's and giggling.

Ryker immediately looked down, focusing on his map again, marking it with pointers while his father stood beside him.

Walking away arm in arm with Brody, I felt a strange satisfaction when Ryker looked away. It might have meant nothing, but I wanted to believe he was a little jealous. Or maybe I was imagining things?

We headed straight to my bedroom, and now I was lost. I didn't know

what to do.

Brody was sweet and eager to build our relationship, but I was still haunted by my past.

I was also anxious about the lingering mate bond. Would they never accept me? I needed to move on and find happiness soon. If my human self is content, when I twist my ring again, Akira won't go completely crazy on me. She'll be somewhat calmed down.

"Come, sit here," I said, settling on the bed and patting the space beside me.

4477

1221

177 Kissing My Boyfriend

Brody rose and sat next to me. I grabbed the remote and turned on the TV, browsing for a movie to watch. It seemed like a good way to spend the afternoon without worrying about starting a conversation.

"Maybe we should talk," Brody suddenly took the remote, lowering my hand to prevent me from starting a movie.

"About what?" My heart raced at how serious he looked.

"About us, Nora." He turned me to face him. "I know you agreed to date me to clear your name. But remember when I said we should genuinely give this a try? I'm not feeling it. It seems like you're not even making an effort to get to know me." The sadness in his eyes weighed heavily on me, leaving me speechless and filled with guilt.

"Are you embarrassed by me because I'm not your fated mate? Have you only ever wanted to be with your fated mate?" His question brought back memories of when I asked Ryker the same thing and his disappointing response.

"No! Absolutely not, Brody," I insisted.

"Then what is it? The spark I once saw in your eyes for me is completely gone," he reminded me of when we first met. Back then, I did feel something for him, albeit small.

But he was mistaken to think it had vanished entirely. Perhaps the whole ordeal with Ryker and Cain had left me feeling lifeless. Yet, I still found Brody very attractive. After thinking it over, I decided to leave my past behind and find happiness in the present.

Brody was kind and my boyfriend. Maybe all we needed was to spice things up a bit.

“The rumors have gotten me down a bit. But you’re right. I’m willing to
e

177–Kissing My Boyfriend

give this a try,” I said, and a smile spread across his face. Leaning in, I surprised him as our lips met.

Tasting 178

178–Hand In Hand With My Boyfriend

Nora:

His lips tasted like cherries, soft and gentle as he held me close. We had been kissing for the past few minutes, lying in my bed, our hands exploring each other’s bodies. I don’t know what came over me, but the more we kissed, the more memories flooded back of how Cain had treated me before he abruptly ended things.

A tear burned my cheek, catching both of us by surprise. Brody pulled back to look at me. “Are you crying?” His reaction was immediate, sitting up and gently holding my face in his hands.

“No, I’m fine,” I lied, trying to turn away from him.

“Something’s bothering you, Nora,” he insisted, taking my hand and rubbing the back of it. “You seem different, and I don’t know why.”

“It’s really nothing. Sometimes I just wonder if I’ll ever have a stable family,” I murmured softly, realizing my words were barely coherent as Brody studied my face, waiting for me to explain.

“It’s nothing. Lunch must be ready,” I sniffled, rubbing my hands over my face. I rolled out of bed and held my hand out to him. He hesitated before taking it, walking with me out of the room. As we left my bedroom, I noticed someone else was coming downstairs.

Cain.

He barely acknowledged me until he saw I wasn’t alone. I watched as he side-eyed Brody before continuing downstairs. Walking together with Brody and Cain ahead of us felt incredibly awkward. We all sat

down in the living room where lunch was being served. I tried to smile often for Brody; I didn't want him to feel insecure because of me.

As I looked around at everyone, I also noticed the absence of Sials.

Life is so strange.

The two I used to find annoying were now the ones I looked for whenever I entered any room in this mansion: Nash and Silas.

"Did you find something you liked in the store today?" Nash asked cheerfully. He had been so kind to me that talking to him had become

so easy now.

"I actually picked a gown of Brody's choice," I mumbled, and Lord Atwood clapped his hands excitedly like a teenage girl.

"This year's ball is going to be very special. All my kids will be attending," Lord Atwood exclaimed, his teeth gleaming.

"Not everyone is coming. Silas refuses to go," Cain sighed, lifting his head from his plate to look at his father. Since I sat so close to Lord Atwood, his gaze sometimes landed on me.

"He doesn't have a girlfriend, remember?" Ryker commented. The brothers were back to their usual routine of bickering or making jokes. Of course, they were happy in their lives. I was the one suffering the

most.

Or maybe I should just go back to my normal self as well. The only

question was,

How?

"He can still come," Brody spoke up. The brothers refocused on their food, which annoyed me. I remembered how Cain defended and

12.211

supported his supposed mate. Why couldn't I do the same for Brody?

"Can he really?" I turned to Brody, showing interest in his words.

“Yeah, there will be other single people there. It’s the evening of love; he might find someone,” Brody smiled at me, understanding what I was trying to do.

“Brody’s right. Silas should reconsider,” Lord Atwood chimed in.

I noticed Mia, the omega maid, lingering around. It was the first time she caught my eye.

“By the

way, you didn’t tell me what you’re wearing,” I said to Brody, who smiled charmingly.

“It’ll be a surprise. In fact, I’ll come pick you up myself,” Brody whispered, ensuring only I could hear.

“Dad! So, what’s been happening at the pack’s border?” Ryker’s question made Brody and me stop talking and turn to Lord Atwood.

“Why, did something occur?” Lord Atwood’s response was strange, almost as if he didn’t know what his son was referring to.

Did Ryker start that conversation just to silence us?

The rest of lunch passed quietly. After Brody finished eating, I took his hand and walked him to the door. Instead of leaving, we strolled in the garden for a few minutes.

“Can I ask you something?” I inquired. This question had been on my mind for a while now, and I had meant to ask him several times before.

“Sure, you can ask me anything.” Brody had his hands in his jeans pockets, his jacket slightly askew.

“Do you live with your cousin? I mean, with Natalya and April?” I murmured, instantly turning my head away.

“I do.”

“Oh, okay! “I floundered in failure. I didn’t want to acknowledge that. Or maybe I did. But why was he staying with them?

The two most evil people and my boyfriend living together indeed was awkward for me.

“Why, does that make you uncomfortable?” he leaned in closer to nudge me with his elbow. I sighed and, upon raising my head, noticed Rykler, Cain, and Nash standing on the terrace of the second floor, glancing our way. I bet they were discussing us as well.

“Do they talk about me?” I forced my gaze downward, trying to avoid

them.

“I haven’t heard them talk about you personally. In fact, I barely go to the mansion. Only after I finish exercising and working in my room do I leave for the kitchen. Most of the time, they stick to their

own corner,” he explained, and his tone sounded genuine, not trying to ease

1. me.

“But if it bothers you so much, Nora, I can get an apartment here,” he finished abruptly, then smiled.

“Why are you smiling like that?” I inquired with an eyebrow raised. He appeared extremely happy as if an idea had just popped up in his mind.

“I’m going to get an apartment. So that you can visit me whenever.”

That smile he gave me was all I needed in that moment to escape the scrutinizing glares of the brothers.

1221

“That’s perfect,” I mumbled, watching him lean over and unexpectedly press his lips against mine.

12

Tasting 179

179–The Unwanted Transition

Nora:

He broke off the kiss but only to wrap his arms around me and pull me closer. My body warmed up as his hot skin came into contact with mine, even through the clothes. His hands moved up and down my back, groping my body. He tilted his face and deepened the kiss, slowly sliding in his tongue.

Just like a hungry tigress, I sucked his tongue instantly.

“Ahm!” A little moan escaped my lips into his mouth. He rubbed his lips all over mine, his hands exploring my body. The wind blew, and we finally realized we were not in the comfort of my room but outside, under the gaze of my brothers. I almost didn’t even remember. As we broke off the kiss, we stood under the cloudy sky with our foreheads

touching, breathing rapidly and staring at each other's lips. It was then that I realized this is what I wanted—to forget about the harsh past.

Just one kiss from him, and for a few seconds, I was in a completely different world.

“Thank you for coming here today,” I said breathlessly.

“I would even cross the border for you,” he laughed against my lips. before planting another kiss and pulling away from me. It gave me tingles, or maybe because deep down, I knew he cared about me. And in his care, there was no hidden agenda or revenge.

“Let me walk you to the exit,” I said and held his hand. However, as I walked away with him, I recalled something that made me uneasy.

1272

“Do you hate my mother?” The question slipped out, shocking him into turning to me and watching my face in bewilderment.

“What? No! Why would you say that?” he frowned, but there was a sweet smile of disbelief on his face.

“Earlier, when I was talking about her, you didn't even react and changed the subject,” I reminded him about our car ride back home.

He narrowed his eyes but zoned out to recall the full incident before he started chuckling, shaking his head at me in disbelief.

“You silly one. I just didn't know what to say. I'm not really good at comforting someone,” he winked, scratching the back of his neck. “Unless it's a kiss. I can do that for you anytime,” he playfully licked his bottom lip, and I shyly slapped his chest.

“But it's true. Not that I hate your mother, but I do look at you and cannot believe you are the daughter of the woman the entire pack hated,” he decided to be honest with his words.

“Why? Because of the alpha king?” I questioned.

“I guess. The other packs weren't informed of the personal matters of the pack, so I can't be sure. As for me personally, I didn't even know your mother, so I can't say much. But definitely, whatever everyone. used to say about her must be wrong.” he caressed my cheek gently, and that was all I needed to hear at the moment.

“I'll leave now. Today is a full moon, and I need to have a meeting with my pack's royal beta as well. I'll let you know when I get the

apartment,” he was so excited to have an apartment of his own where he could invite me over.

Not going to lie, it would be for the best as well. I was really not okay

1232H

173–The Unwanted Transition

with him living under the same roof as the two people who hate me desperately. Once he left, I sighed and spun around to get into the mansion. These days were so difficult for me to get through.

Most of the time, I just sat in my bedroom and either watched TV or did my homework, which I had no interest in anymore.

I strolled steadily back to the mansion, and once I stepped in, I came face to face with Ryker, Cain, and Nash.

They seemed to have been waiting for me. Ryker was leaning his back against the wall, his legs stretched out and his body bent forward with his hands in his pockets. Nash was pacing around, clenching his fists, and Cain was standing straight with his arms folded over his chest.

“What was that!” Nash broke the silence, making sure to show that he was unhappy about something.

“What?” I asked politely, avoiding the two behind him.

“We get it that you two are dating, but to make out in front of your stepbrothers? Did you not understand that he was hurting our pride by groping and kissing you in front of us? It was like he was taunting us for sleeping with our stepsister,” Nash kept going, angrily hissing every few words as well.

“Oh, I don’t think he did it to make a point or anything,” I defended Brody. Although I used a gentle tone, Nash was seething with anger.

“He did it. I know him. He wants to get back at us. And by the way, weren’t you only supposed to date him to clear your name?” He placed his hands on his waist, grunting as he demanded I answer him.

The ones beside him had barely said anything. They were making sure they stood beside their brother but not to intervene too much at the

179 The Unwanted Transition

same time.

“I have decided to give him a chance,” I murmured softly, “I’ll be in my room.”

Before Nash could react, because I’m sure he was going to, I briskly walked past him to my room.

While getting away from them, I had to walk past all three of them, and it was so hard to inhale their scents and avoid them. Once in my room, I scoffed. My fingers rested on the ring on my finger.

I wanted to twist it and let her out to have a word with her. I owed her an apology and needed to explain why I had kept her trapped for so long. Taking a deep breath, I twisted the ring. Since I was in a much better place today, I expected her to be calmer than before.

However, I was wrong. She had suffered so much in silence that the minute I let her out, she lost control and did exactly what she was not supposed to do..

She started the transition.

1227

Tasting 180

180—She Called Him Mate

Nora:

“Akira!” I yelled, even louder until realizing I didn’t have to shout to make her listen to me.

“Please calm down.” I started begging, running into the bathroom and turning on the shower. I stood under the cold water without even taking off my clothes.

My white shirt got soaked, revealing my bra, and my white shorts became transparent. It was getting chilly under the cold water, but I needed to cool her off in any way possible.

“I can’t hold it in. So much pain,” she grimaced. I wanted to fix the ring on my finger, but leaving her like that would make her go through even more intense pain.

“But

you have to. There is no way they will leave us alive after they see you,” I was begging her to not transition,

“I’m not doing it by choice, Nora!” she groaned in pain.

“You are not transitioning on me, Akira!” I almost cried out. That’s when I heard someone knock on my door.

“Shit! Akira, please cool off,” now the weight of everything was on my shoulders. I was fighting for my life, rubbing my palms together to

comfort her.

“Please,” I pleaded, dropping to my knees.

122

I didn’t even remember locking the door until I heard the door click and somebody walk inside.

My heart began to pound loudly. Fixing my ring was not an option. I couldn’t risk giving Akira so much pain.

“You can fix the ring, Nora. I’ll get you in trouble,” she insisted as the footsteps drew closer.

“What about you?” I asked, worried.

“I’m already suffering from the betrayal of my mates. It is my fate now,” I shut my eyes tightly, hearing her mention how much she had dealt with all alone while being trapped inside me.

My fists clenched, and through gritted teeth, I muttered, “No! I won’t let you suffer alone anymore. If anyone has to see me in this state, let them.”

I kept my eyes closed to fight the transition, but I promised not to trap her inside me by force anymore.

“Nora! Are you okay?” The voice was recognizable.

I opened my eyes to see Nash standing in the doorway, looking at me with shocked eyes.

“I’m in pain,” I grimaced, still on my knees and under the cold shower.

“But what is happening to you? And why are you under the shower?” He ran to turn off the water, and my eyes widened in worry.

“No! Don’t do that,” I yelled, raising my hand. He stopped himself from turning off the shower.

He then quickly knelt before me and held my arms.

1222m

“What is happening to you?” The little hint of shock in his voice was a sign that he already figured out what was happening. He just wanted to hear it from me or was probably confused about how it was possible.

“Your wolf-,” his eyes widened some more, “your wolf is waking up?”

Even though I was in pain, his words sparked a suggestion in my head, and I nodded meekly.

“That’s good news,” he smiled, but then he noticed how much pain I was in.

“But what is going on? Either you transition or you don’t. This mid- situation is odd,” he rubbed my arms, pulling me closer to cup my face in his hands and observe my eyes.

“Nora! Are you resisting the transition?” He freed my face and asked, concern etched on his face.

“I am scared,” I admitted honestly. That part I didn’t lie about.

“You will be fine. The transition might sound scary in the beginning, but you will feel much better after you have transitioned rather than resisting it.” Obviously, he had no clue what I was truly afraid of.

I shook my head because I could use that excuse to hide my wolf.

“This pain is too much,” I groaned, my back slowly beginning to arch.

“But-” he reckoned I was in no shape or form ready to transition at the moment. So he decided to help me out of it.

“I can give you some wolfsbane to calm you down,” he insisted, but something odd was happening to my body that I couldn’t understand.

This weird mixture of suffering and excitement started after Nash

1220

180—She Called Him Mate

arrived. The more he stayed close to me, the more I felt this tingling sensation in my veins.

“Let’s get you out of here first, and then I’ll go get you wolfsbane.” He ran his arm under my body and carried me, making me wrap my arms around his neck. He took me to my bed and sat me down, wetting the entire mattress and bedsheet.

“Ugh,” Nash groaned as he attempted to get up, then sat down

abruptly. With a hand on his heart, he grimaced, his eyes downcast.

After a few seconds of not moving, he raised his head, and our eyes connected.

The night was upon us, and the little bit of light coming from the window had now vanished.

But I remembered Brody’s words.

It was a full moon night.

Nash’s eyes locked onto mine, and I realized we could no longer break eye contact.

“What the heck!” I watched him mouth the words. He was as shocked as I was.

My heart raced in my chest until it matched the rhythm of Nash’s. Fear engulfed me, but the feeling of finding a mate was so empowering that I forgot about everything in the moment.

We just stared into each other’s eyes, hearing our hearts beating in sync before I heard my wolf cry out softly, “Mate!”

“Ah!” he gasped, unable to pull away from me or break eye contact.

1222

Our hearts had now synced, and slowly, our bodies regained their strength. We were able to move again. His eyes traveled down to my transparent shirt.

This time, he didn’t force his gaze away. I watched as a gulp ran down his throat.

“Nash!” I uttered his name. My wolf had now calmed down. Of course, she did. She got herself another mate, another fated mate who was my stepbrother—or supposed to be.

12321