

Finding His Mate

Liam Gold couldn't believe he'd finally found his mate. Yes, she'd been sleeping at the time and they hadn't actually met as such, but he'd still found her. As he stood with Finn, waiting for his father to make his appearance, he found his attention drifting to her. As he had followed Lily and Finn to Charlotte's hospital room, the sweet oral smell of jasmine had grown stronger and stronger until he was standing in the doorway, staring at the woman he knew without a doubt was his mate.

She was a small and delicate-looking woman, and her time in the Portland pack house was evident in her sunken cheeks and too-thin arms. Still, she had a kind of elven beauty with her smooth pale skin, sharp cheekbones, and small and perfectly straight nose. She had been sleeping, so Liam hadn't been able to see her eyes, but something told him they would be a warm brown—like her brother's.

He knew that she must have been nineteen based on when he had felt her go through her first shift—werewolves could always feel it when their mates shifted for the first time upon turning eighteen. She looked younger though. Perhaps it was because of how short and petite she was, but it could have also been her small nose and full pink lips. There was just something so innocent and delicate about her—it reminded Liam of the feeling he got when he saw something fragile and he was too scared to touch it and risk breaking it.

Her hair was short and wavy, resting just on top of her shoulders, and the color of it was a light golden-brown that was far too similar to Lily's for Liam not to notice. It was that similarity that had jarred him from his xation enough to hear his name being spoken.

"Liam, what's going on?" Lily had asked.

Liam had wanted to find his mate since the day he had felt her go through the first shift about a year earlier, but finding her after he already had feelings for someone else wasn't exactly the plan. As much as he felt himself being pulled towards Charlotte, it didn't mean that what he felt for Lily had just vanished—it didn't work like that.

He moved his eyes from Charlotte to Lily, the woman he was pretty certain he was still in love with. Yes, they were friends, but for him, it was more than that. "She's my mate," he had explained dazedly.

"What?" Greg shouted, standing up from his chair in a way that suggested he wasn't too happy that Liam was his sister's mate.

"She's my mate," Liam repeated unnecessarily, his gaze being drawn unconsciously back to Charlotte.

"Aren't you twenty-two?" Greg asked, sounding disgusted.

"I'm twenty-four," Liam corrected him automatically, his eyes still locked onto his mate's face.

"She's only nineteen," Greg spat out accusingly as if Liam had chosen who his mate would be.

In truth, Liam might have agreed with him a few years earlier—he had always seen himself with someone only a year or two younger than him. When he hadn't felt his mate go through the shift by the time he was twenty-one, he had started to wonder if he even had a mate out there at all. But when he was twenty-three it finally happened, and he was so happy to have felt his mate—too far away for him to track her, but still out there somewhere—that he grew used to the idea of a younger mate.

Meeting Lily who seemed so much older than her actual age also helped him to understand that age doesn't always determine how old someone is. In her case, bad experiences had forced her to grow up too soon.

"Um Greg, I'd like to remind you that there's almost a two-year difference between Finn and me," Lily intervened with a huff.

"That's—that's different," Greg spluttered.

"How?" Finn asked with raised eyebrows, his lip twitching as if he were trying hard not to smile or laugh.

"Because she's my sister!" Greg said in frustration. Liam wondered if he would have been okay with any guy being mated to Charlotte. It wasn't unusual for brothers and fathers to be overprotective when a female werewolf found their mate.

"Would you keep your voice down?" Liam asked in annoyance, gesturing to his sleeping mate. It wasn't that he didn't want her to wake up, but he could tell from the dark circles under her eyes that she needed the rest.

Greg looked down guiltily at his sister at Liam's words, but she hadn't even stirred.

"Look, could you two maybe discuss this later?" Lily asked with a sigh. "We have more pressing matters to attend to."

"Fine," Greg mumbled with a glare at Liam. "Let's talk in the next room though," he said as he gently pulled up Charlotte's blanket to cover her thin arms.

The rest of them followed him out into the hallway and then into the room right next to Charlotte's. Liam left last, casting one last look at her before he reluctantly followed the others. The revelation that Charlotte was his mate had come at a time when they all needed to focus on the reason they had gone into that room in the first place. They needed Greg's help to ruse Liam's father, who was one of the ten Council Masters.

Master Gold was on his way to Portland, which meant that Lily was in danger. She was a Lycan, a species that had larger wolves and that could shift during the day as well as at night. They were also meant to have been extinct for hundreds of years and the Council would most likely kill her if they got their hands on her. Liam was a Council member himself, so he knew how they felt about wolves who were different.

Finn and Lily hadn't told Greg the reason he needed to lie to a Council Master, but after explaining what he would need to do, Greg didn't hesitate in agreeing to what they had asked. All he had to do was mention in front of Master Gold that Lily's wolf was small and that she was back safely in Seattle, but Liam was still surprised that he agreed so quickly and easily—lying to a Council Master was a serious offense.

After going over the plan one more time and after Liam had warned them all that his father was particularly observant, Lily returned to Charlotte's room and the rest of them headed downstairs and out of the pack house.

The area in front of the house was still packed with werewolves, but it was no longer the chaotic mass of moving bodies it had been after the battle had ended. Some semblance of order had been achieved in the hours that had passed since then, so the chaos that was Liam's mind stood in stark contrast to it.

His thoughts and emotions flew between joy and excitement over finding his mate and confusion about the feelings he had for Lily—Lily, who was mated and was pregnant with Finn's child, Lily who Liam knew that he had no future with. Would he be able to forget about her and move on with Charlotte? Or would it be unfair to start anything with his mate while he still loved Lily?

Moreover, how could he move on with Charlotte, when Greg had mentioned that she would be going back to Seattle with him? It meant that Liam would probably see Lily every day and be constantly reminded of his feelings for her. Nothing made sense to him anymore, and to top it all off the father who had barely shown him a shred of love was about to arrive and probably further complicate things.

Sure enough, when Master Gold arrived, his men trailing behind him at a distance, he greeted Liam in the same uncaring and cold way that he always did, and although their plan to make him believe that Lily had already gone back to Seattle seemed to have worked, Liam's stomach still felt tight with worry. His father was as smart as he was devious, and as well as Greg had played his part, Liam couldn't be sure that his father had bought the charade.

"You're all free to go as soon as your guards have been relieved," Liam's father told Finn.

The Council would be taking over the investigation into the Portland pack's illegal actions, which was the reason he was there in the first place. The Council was the group of werewolves that enforced the law and in doing so made sure that humans never found out about their supernatural existence. Any werewolves or packs that grew too powerful were seen by the Council Masters as a threat to their secret, which is why they could never know about Lily.

"Thank you," Finn replied respectfully. "I'll inform the head of my pack warriors that you'll be taking over."

Both Finn and Liam turned to leave, but the Council Master wasn't done with Liam yet. "Son, we need to talk," he said, stopping both men in their tracks. "Privately," he added, with a frustrated look at Finn, who looked reluctant as he left them to talk.

"Liam, I need you to tell me the truth about why you stayed in Seattle," Master Gold said to his son once Finn was out of earshot.

Liam had stayed in Seattle far longer than his assignment had called for. The Council had sent him to investigate the death of a male werewolf, whom Lily had killed in self-defense, but the more Liam found out, the more he was sure that there was more to Lily than met the eye. He had initially extended his assignment in Seattle because he wanted to find out what she had been hiding, but his reasons for wanting to stay started to change the more he got to know Lily.

"Like I told you on the phone, I suspected that Lily was in danger," Liam replied testily, "And I was right."

He had updated Master Gold on the situation weeks earlier, telling his father about his suspicion that someone was after Lily, but the Master had shown little interest or worry. In fact, Liam had had to agree that he would owe his father a favor in exchange for being allowed to stay on in Seattle. He didn't know what the favor would be, but something told him he wouldn't like whatever it ended up being.

"And your investigation into the girl? Did you discover anything of value?" his father snapped.

"No," Liam sighed heavily. "Like Greg said, her wolf is smaller than average. The only reason she could kill Kyle was because Finn had been training her in her human form and Kyle attacked her during the day."

"So, you've wasted months of the Council's time on a girl that's about as special as a hairbrush?" the man seethed. "Did she at least have a pretty face?" he scoffed.

Liam swallowed and looked to the side to avoid his father's knowing eyes, resisting the temptation to clench his hands into angry fists.

"You're kidding me," Master Gold said in outrage. "Tell me all of this wasn't over some stupid infatuation," he demanded, to which his son remained silent. "That's it, you need to return to Boston immediately," the man told him, his voice more furious than Liam had ever heard it.

"I can't do that," Liam replied with a wince. Disobeying his father had never been easy, but there was no way he could go back to Boston yet. Not now that he had found Charlotte.

"Why the f**k not," his father roared in disbelief.

"Because I found my mate," Liam admitted.

"What? When?" his father asked with wide eyes. It was the first time that Liam had seen him look taken off-guard, and the sight of it sent a small thrill through him. Surprising Master Gold wasn't something many could do.

"I found her about half an hour ago," Liam explained. "She's injured, so her brother wants to take her back with him to Seattle. I can't leave. Not now."

"Fine," the Master snapped. "According to Council rules, you have a month of time off to make arrangements with your mate. I expect to see you in Boston as soon as that time is up," he warned his son before gesturing for his men to follow him as he walked away.

Liam didn't return to Charlotte's hospital room after that, knowing that Lily was in there as well. He needed to think and he couldn't do that with her around. He would have four weeks with Charlotte before he needed to go back to the Council headquarters in Boston, but how could they possibly get to know each other well enough by then? Usually mates moved in together soon after finding one another, but he didn't know if Charlotte would be willing to move across the county after only knowing him for a month.

Liam realized he was getting ahead of himself thinking about that though. They hadn't even met properly for heaven's sake! As he strolled through the streets of the pack house, he found himself wondering what Charlotte would be like instead. He had fallen for Lily's strength, kindness, and fighting spirit, and he wondered if Charlotte had any of those characteristics too. Only time would tell, he supposed, and in the meantime, he had to work on letting Lily go.