

## Chapter 9 Whose Bride

"I'm surprised you have a cook here." Lucy said as she stared towards the kitchen where the chef had disappeared after asking how she wanted her eggs.

"Really? Well, I guess it would seem odd if we were just a bunch of vagabond vampires." Tonya said and ashed a bright smile as Zach walked into the room, taking a seat next to her at the long table.

"I bet you thought we were just a small band of rogue vampires, huh?" Zach chuckled as he kissed Tonya's temple.

"Hey, I wasn't going to judge." Lucy smiled sheepishly. She denitely thought they were just a random band of rogues. She could tell from their scent they were vampires. And it wasn't unusual to have vampires band up together as their own group. So naturally this is what she assumed.

"Nope. Not us. We are the prince's men." Zach said, causing Lucy to spit up her drink.

"You are Derek's men?!" Lucy coughed out. She looked over at Ryan and he tilted his head smiling at her.

"You know our prince?" Zach said and then ashed his eyes up to Ryan then back to her. "And why are you speaking his name so casually?"

"Well..." Lucy squirmed a bit in her chair uncomfortably. She wasn't going to say anything about who she was but maybe it was best. After all, if Ryan knew she was his prince's ancé then he would understand why she couldn't be his mate. She dded with her ngers as she stared at them. "I'm Derek's ancé." She looked up to see Zach and Tonya's jaws drop. Out of the corner of her eye, she looked at Ryan. She noticed his eyes ickered slightly but his expression didn't change.

"Wait. You are the prince's ancé? Then that means you are the werewolf princess?" Zach asked, watching her slowly nod her head. "Bloody hell how the hell did you end up captured?"

"That is what I want to know too." Ryan's eyes darkened as his voice crept low.

His changed demeanor made Lucy look at him for a moment. She didn't know exactly why, maybe because he was her mate but hearing him upset made her feel upset.

"I allowed myself to get taken. I wanted to know what they were up to. I heard them mention my pack's name... so I thought I would get answers."

"So you willingly let them take you?" Ryan growled, turning his full attention to Lucy. His amber eyes seemed to glow as anger radiated from him. "You could have been killed."

He was her mate and that made her want to be upset that he was angry with her. But she was also a princess, a natural leader. And THAT made her want to lash back. "For my people, I will risk my life. How many of my people could be killed? What is my one life compared to the masses?" Lucy smiled and shrugged. "If they want to kill me then they can try. I'll take as many of them down with me as I can."

Ryan continued to lock his eyes on hers. "You should be more careful because of who you are. Do you think you can easily be replaced? We all need our leaders. What happens with the treaty if you die? What about the masses then?"

Lucy smirked and sipped her coffee. She held it in front of her and looked at Ryan. "Well, I have to marry the prince for there to be a treaty. So are you relinquishing the bond?"

Ryan chuckled darkly. "Not. A. Chance."

"But Ryan... she is the prince's girl." Zach said mortied.

"She is mine." Ryan said, challenging Lucy with his intense stare.

"Do you think that someone who was willing to die for her people wouldn't sacrice this much for them as well? I am sticking to the treaty" Lucy felt bile rise in her throat even saying the words. She watched the amusement shine in Ryan's eyes as he stared at her.

"You are very loyal to the prince. You two must be close." Tonya said innocently.

Lucy looked over at Tonya and felt her stomach drop. She wasn't close with Derek. She honestly barely knew him. He acted like he didn't want bothered by her. They could have been better friends if he wouldn't have gotten weird with her. Around puberty... hmmm. She wondered if maybe he had gotten a girlfriend. Maybe this was why he started distancing himself from her. Though according to Jasper, he still kept tabs on her. Derek confused her. She didn't know him. Her face was giving her away as it became cresfallen. Her eyes dropped to look at her hands in front of her. She was going to be marrying a man who has only looked at her as an obligation. He never looked at her like she was precious, not how Ryan already looked at her.

"Oh look, the food is done." Tonya said happy to distract Lucy from whatever she was thinking about. Her pained face was obvious to everyone in the room. She looked up at Ryan whose eyes looked to reect Lucy's pain. She wondered what he was really going to do about this situation. He couldn't go against the prince. Would he try to plead his case to the prince? Surely, he wouldn't try anything stupid...

"These are scrambled eggs, Lucy. We use this metal object called a fork to eat with. Or would you prefer a dog bowl so that you can lap it up?" Zach chuckled at his own joke.

Lucy snapped out of her inner turmoil and looked over at the unamusing jokester.

"As you can see, having a mate isn't everything." Tonya teased and icked Zach on his forearm.

"Ouch!" Zach pouted, rubbing his arm.

Lucy smiled. Tonya could say that playfully, but it was obvious by the way the two of them looked at each other that they were very much into one another. From the side, the two men playing games earlier walked in together.

"Lucy, this is Enzo and Lenny. Guys this is my mate, Lucy." Ryan said, giving Lucy a cocky smile.

"Yeah, she is also Prince Derek's ancé so we may be getting a new leader soon." Zach laughed with a mouth full of food.

Enzo laughed. "You like to live on the dangerous side don't you Ryan." He grabbed a seat at the far end of the table and Lenny followed suit.

Lucy quietly ate her food. The whole time she could feel Ryan's gaze burning a hole into her. Her every move was being watched by him. The caring and possessive way he looked at her actually gave her a small thrill. At least she was able to see it. At least for once, she was able to be looked at like that. It would be something she would secretly hold close to her heart. She would keep the memory of her mate close and dear so that she could remember that at least to someone she was their world at one point.

"You are going to have to give me your full name so that I can reject you properly." Lucy said, glancing up to the masses to Ryan. He tilted his head and grinned.

"You are not rejecting me."

"Wow. For being their 'leader' you are not very smart. I have a ancé. Remember?" Lucy sat her fork down and looked into his amber eyes.

"I am your ancé. You are mine. And I am yours. You are the one who is not listening to me. I am keeping you. From now on... you are mine. My mate." Ryan rejected his hand as he smiled at her. His eyes wandered over her slowly as he took her in. He wanted to hold her closer. He wanted to mark her as his. Her body was still healing so he would wait. But she was his. His eyes trailed up to look at her lips. He wanted to taste them too. He then looked up to her green pooling eyes. He could see the pain in them. "Lucy..."

It wasn't like she wanted to do this. Didn't he think she wanted her mate? Of course, she wanted to be with her mate. It was natural. Your mate was the one person that was made just for you, the other half of your soul. No, she didn't want to be separated from him. No, she didn't want to go to another man who seemed hardly interested in her. But she had to. She was going to do this for their two species. And more than sacrificing her life in death this was actually the greater sacrice. It was forfeiting her heart.

"I think the prince has a woman anyways. I don't see why you two can't work it out." Lenny said as he ate a biscuit that was on the table.

Lucy shot her head up to Lenny. "What do you mean?"

"The last time I was there I saw the prince at a distance. He was walking in the garden hand in hand with a dark-haired woman." Lenny shrugged. "Maybe it can just be a diplomatic marriage where you both get to keep the person you really want."

"You don't know that was the prince you were seeing. You have never seen the prince up close. We were hand picked by the king to be the princes' men." Enzo gave Lenny an annoyed look for spreading gossip about their prince.

Lucy stayed quiet. She wasn't sure if she believed he had someone or not. But she couldn't deny that it made sense. It could very well be the reason for his personality change with her. Okay, he had his person. But this still presented a problem. She had to produce his heir. There was no faking that part of the relationship. On another level hearing this gossip about Derek bothered her. This was his prince. She wouldn't want her people to misspeak about her over rumors or unproven facts. She looked up at Lenny.

"I think it is best not to say such things without proof. You do not wish to tarnish your prince's name. He has done a lot of good for your kind and even sacrices his happiness for his people as well. He has to take me as his bride and not his mate. Those sacrices should be remembered when you casually speak about your prince." Lucy's eyes gleamed with a hint of sharpness as she looked at Lenny.

Tonya smiled and looked up at Lucy. "Already defending your future husband even in his absence. You have good qualities." She looked across the table at Ryan who studied her with a frown on his face. Did he not like her coming to their prince's defense or was it something else?

"You are right. I misspoke." Lenny said quietly.

"It's okay." Lucy smiled. "So you guys like to play racing games?" She watched the two men grin.

"Yes, we do."

"Any good at it?" Lucy quirked her eyebrow at them and gave them a side smile.

Enzo laughed loudly. "Are you challenging us?"

"Well, I thought I would show you how to really race. Unless you are content staying on the kiddie track." Lucy smiled and bit her bottom lip.

"Haha, game on." Lenny said as he pumped his st in his hand.

"I'm in on this game too." Ryan said as he continued to look at Lucy peculiarly.

Lucy smiled and shrugged. "Well if you don't mind looking bad in front of your people." A wide grin rose on Ryan's face as he stood up. He walked over to Lucy and she was back in his arms again. He cradled her into his chest and leaned his head down so that his lips were near her ear.

"Show me what you've got... princess." His hot breath beat against her ear making her body shudder. She felt her treacherous heart begin to pound in excitement. It was hard enough being near him like this. The least he could do was put a shirt on. Her resolve was being chipped away as her body begged her to give into him.

No. Now was not the time. She needed to focus on the battle at hand. Racing karts was not for the weak at heart. People have lost friendships over games like this. She needed to focus and bring her A game. She would show them her power. She spent years playing against Aiden and Justice. And now she would see if her years of training would pay off.

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