

To heal a Rogue #Chapter 2: Sticky Situation - Read

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LYSANDER

"But you have a child."

The words came out before I could arrange them into anything more articulate. Uncle Cornelius had just told me the throne of the Alpha King would pass through me, and then he had handed me this, the information that dismantled the most obvious question I had been holding since the moment he made his declaration downstairs. The son. The cousin I had partly grown up alongside, who had trained for this, who had been groomed in ways I had not been because I had been the nephew and he had been the prince.

My uncle's expression did not change. "Well," he said. "Now you know."

The fire crackled behind him.

"I have no intention of humiliating her," he said, and I understood he meant his wife without him needing to say her name. There was something careful in the way he held his voice, something that had been practiced into evenness. "Or myself. This is not about a scandal. I do not even know if it has always been this way." He paused. "But I cannot allow this throne to pass to a bastard."

The word dropped into the room like a stone into still water.

I stared at him. "My cousin did nothing wrong."

"Do not be naive, Lysander."

The dismissal in his tone was not unkind, which somehow made it worse. He said it the way you say something to someone who has just pointed out that rain is wet. A fact so elementary it barely warranted the air it used. My cousin had done nothing except exist in circumstances he had no hand in creating, and my uncle was looking at me like I was young for thinking that should count for something.

I exhaled. It came out longer and louder than I intended, the kind of breath that carries everything you have decided not to say.

My uncle stood. He crossed the space between us with the unhurried steps of someone who had spent decades never needing to rush anywhere, and he stopped just in front of me, close enough that I had to adjust my weight.

"I did not imagine," he said quietly, "that the offer of a throne would leave you in a state like this."

"It is not helping." I started to say something else. Something I had been building toward, some way to explain the full architecture of my refusal. "It is not helping, but that is not—"

My body disagreed with the entire conversation.

The twitch started at the base of my spine. It moved up through my shoulders with the

speed of something that had been waiting very patiently for its moment, and then it was everywhere at once, a full involuntary shudder that rattled through my frame and did not care at all that I was standing in a library with the Alpha King. The pheromones came with it. I could not stop them. I felt them leave my body the way you feel a held breath finally escape, that horrible release of something you had been clenching too long.

My uncle stepped back.

"What the—" He stopped himself. His nostrils flared once. I watched his expression shift from careful blankness into something much more alert. "Lysander, are you in—"

"Forgive me, Uncle Cornelius."

I was already moving. I did not wait for him to finish the sentence because I already knew what the end of it was, and I could not stand in that room and hear it said out loud by someone whose respect I had spent years doing nothing to earn and everything not to lose. I got to the door, and I got through it, and the corridor air was marginally better than nothing.

The healer had warned me. She had not been vague about it either. She had been very specific, too. Long-term suppressant abuse did not disappear because you eventually started taking the prescription correctly. It accumulated. It sat somewhere in the body's memory, waiting for a moment of particular biological stress, and then it collected everything you owed it at once. My rut was not behaving like a rut. It was behaving like several ruts that had been held at knifepoint for years instead of months and had finally gotten loose at the same time.

I had also taken extra pills that evening.

Healer Cress had turned her back to reach for something on the shelf, and I had looked at the small tin container in my coat pocket and made a very deliberate choice. I was not going to let my body run its agenda in the middle of my uncle's estate during the most politically significant night of the last decade. That had felt like a reasonable position to take at the time. What I was feeling now was the receipt.

I found a room off the main corridor. A lounge of some kind, low lighting, furniture arranged for conversation that was not currently happening. I stepped inside, pulled the door most of the way closed behind me, leaned against the nearest wall, and breathed.

My hand went into my coat pocket and closed around the tin.

I pulled it out. Worked the lid open with my thumb. The pills inside were small and white and entirely inadequate for what was currently happening to me, but I was not interested in adequate. I was interested in getting through the next two hours without my body staging a complete collapse of every social boundary I had ever built.

I tipped one into my palm.

My wolf said one word.

Mate.

It was not a thought. Neither was it a question. If anything, it was a declaration. A

declaration, delivered in that register that lived below language, the one that bypassed every rational process entirely and landed somewhere older and more certain than reasoning. I had heard my wolf speak before. I had never heard it speak like that.

With nothing but hunger.

The door opened behind me.

The honey smell filled the room as if it had been waiting just outside for permission to come in. It was sweet, warm, and remarkably distinct.

I turned around.

The retainer stood in the doorway.

He was frozen the way prey froze, not from stupidity but from the very accurate understanding that movement might make things worse. His eyes were wide. He had followed my uncle out of the library and down the corridor and directly into the worst possible version of what this night could become, and I could see him processing that fact in real time.

I looked at him.

I reached at the bond.

I could feel it the way you felt a hook, not painful exactly, but undeniably present, something that had caught and held and was not interested in being removed. The bond between a wolf and its mate did not ask for your opinion on the matter. It simply was. And it was here, right now, pulled taut between me and this man who was standing in a doorway looking at me like I was something that had just gone terribly wrong with the evening.

Was I... Huh?!?

The pill was still in my palm.

I stared at him and thought, with the small rational part of my brain that had not yet been entirely consumed, that I clearly did not know as much about myself as I had believed.

He found his voice first. "No." He stammered slightly on it. Then more clearly, with conviction that might have worked on a different night: "Not you."

He turned to run.

I moved.

There was no decision in it. My wolf had already made the decision before I was aware there was one to make, and what followed was simply execution. The speed at which I covered the distance between us was not a speed I consciously produced. My hand closed around his arm, and I turned him, and then I lifted him with an ease that I registered somewhere distantly as a measure of how far gone I already was, and I brought him back into the room.

The door hit the frame hard enough that something on the wall rattled.

The honey smell was everywhere now.

My wolf no longer lingered behind my eyes. Now it stood before them, peering out. The difference was unmistakable, like the shift between gripping something and being gripped by it. I was entirely in its grasp, claimed by a presence that had been waiting far longer than this night to step into this very room.

The retainer had his back to the far wall. His chest moved quickly. His eyes had not left me.

I advanced toward him, each step deliberate, as if I carried the certainty of fate itself and knew there could be no other outcome.

"You are mine."

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.