

Alpha's STOLEN Mate c 3

The One About the Birthday Bread

Elowen

The guards dragged me through corridors that seemed to descend endlessly into the bowels of Nightfall. The stone walls grew older as we descended, rough-hewn and stained with centuries of suffering. The air grew thick with the stench of fear, blood, and despair.

We passed cell after cell, some empty, others containing huddled figures who didn't look up as we passed. Soft moans and whimpers echoed through the darkness, a chorus of the broken and forgotten.

Finally, we stopped at the deepest level. The guard captain—a wolf with kind eyes and graying temples who looked more like someone's grandfather than a torturer—unlocked a heavy iron door.

"In you go," he said quietly, almost apologetically. There was something gentle about his manner that seemed out of place in this hellish environment.

The cell was small and damp, with silver-reinforced shackles mounted to the wall. They locked the chains around my wrists and ankles, the metal burning through what little strength I had left. The drugs were still working through my system, keeping my wolf suppressed and my abilities locked away.

As the guards turned to leave, the official from the execution platform appeared. Even in the dim torchlight, I could see he was younger than I'd initially thought—maybe early twenties, with sharp features softened by surprisingly gentle blue eyes. His icy blue hair was neatly styled, and he carried himself with the quiet confidence of someone used to authority.

"Captain Marcus," he said to the guard captain, his voice cultured and refined. "The prisoner is to remain untouched until the Alpha King conducts his interrogation tomorrow morning."

Marcus nodded respectfully. "Of course, Beta Frost. Though if I may ask—what makes this particular rogue so special? We've handled dozens like her."

Frost's eyes flicked to me briefly, and I caught a glimpse of something calculating behind that gentle facade. "A wolf with no scent whatsoever? When have you ever encountered such a thing, Captain?"

Marcus frowned, considering this. "Never, I suppose. But surely—"

"The Alpha King's orders are clear," Frost interrupted smoothly. "She remains unharmed until he questions her personally."

After Frost departed, I allowed myself to relax slightly. The constant effort of suppressing my scent was exhausting, and with only Marcus and a few guards around, I let my defenses slip just a fraction.

Big mistake.

Marcus had been pacing outside my cell, but he suddenly stopped, nostrils flaring. His entire demeanor changed in an instant.

"Well, well," he murmured, moving closer to the bars. "What do we have here?"

I quickly tried to reassert control over my scent, but it was too late. That brief moment of vulnerability had given me away.

"Frost was wrong, wasn't he?" Marcus stepped closer, his grandfatherly appearance taking on a more predatory edge. "You do have a scent. Faint, but definitely there. You've been fooling everyone."

My blood ran cold. This wasn't the gentle old guard I'd initially perceived.

"Sorry, dear," Marcus said, his voice taking on a sickeningly sweet tone as he unlocked my cell door. "Change of plans. The interrogation starts now."

The door clanged shut behind him, and suddenly we were alone.

"Now then, little liar," Marcus said, his kind mask completely dropped. "Let's start with the truth. What are you, and why can you hide your scent?"

I stared at him in silence, my jaw clenched tight. Whatever he wanted to know, he could go to hell. I wasn't giving this bastard anything.

Despite the silver chains weighing me down, I dragged myself closer to the cell door, desperation making me bold. "This isn't where you're supposed to be," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "You didn't hear your beta's orders? 'She remains unharmed until he questions her personally.'"

Marcus paused at the threshold and began to laugh—a low, cruel sound that echoed off the damp stones. The seemingly gentle mask he'd worn moments before cracked and fell away completely.

"That was before I realized you really do have a scent," he said, stepping inside and closing the door behind him with deliberate slowness. "Before I thought you might be some mysterious ancient bloodline, some rare shifter variant, some wolf blessed by the Moon Goddess herself—all the interesting possibilities. But now?"

His laughter grew harsher. "Now I can smell exactly what you are—a wolf with unknown motives, carrying out some hidden agenda. The biggest suspicion? You're a spy."

Spy on your pack? I thought desperately. *Your pack is rotten from the Alpha King all the way down to the prison guards! Who the hell would want to infiltrate this cesspit?*

Marcus continued, his voice taking on an almost conversational tone that was somehow more terrifying than outright rage. "Our Alpha cares about results. Efficiency. If I can determine exactly who you are, what your purpose is here... maybe I'll finally have a chance to escape this dungeon life I've been trapped in for so many years."

He gestured toward a metal chair bolted to the floor in the corner of the cell—a chair equipped with restraints that had clearly seen extensive use. Dark stains covered the metal surface, and the leather straps were worn smooth from countless struggles.

"No," I gasped, trying to back away, but there was nowhere to go.

Marcus grabbed my chains and began dragging me toward the chair. I fought with everything I had, but the silver sapped my strength and the drugs still coursed through my system. Within moments, he had me strapped down, the metal cold against my back.

"Now then," Marcus said, settling into a more comfortable position. "Can you tell me who you are? What you came here to do? Who's behind this little mission of yours?"

I lifted my chin defiantly, even as fear clawed at my chest. "I won't say anything until the Alpha King arrives. You're torturing a prisoner without authorization—you'll be the one who dies for this."

Marcus just smiled and walked over to a cabinet I hadn't noticed before. When he opened it, my blood turned to ice.

Inside were instruments that belonged in nightmares—knives with serrated edges, pliers designed for pulling, and worst of all, a leather whip whose strands were stained dark with what looked suspiciously like wolfsbane.

My bravado crumbled instantly. The silver poisoning my system was already agony—if he added wolfsbane to the mix, I'd never have another chance to escape. The combination would leave me completely helpless.

"I can only tell you that I'm not a spy," I said quickly, my voice barely above a whisper. "I was arrested completely by mistake. I don't even know why I was taken."

Marcus paused, seeming slightly intrigued. "Oh? Then perhaps you can explain what you were doing in Willowbrook?"

I stared at him for a moment, then let out a bitter laugh. "Today is my birthday. I went to buy bread."

"Bread?" Marcus repeated slowly.

"Honey cinnamon bread, specifically. We don't have the good stuff where I come from—you know, the kind that actually tastes like something other than cardboard? So I figured, hey, it's my birthday, let me splurge on some decent pastry for once." The words tumbled out in a rush of nervous energy. "I was going to buy enough to last me for days, maybe even share some with the local strays. Call it a birthday charity project."

Marcus stared at me as if I'd grown a second head.

"You're telling me," he said slowly, "that you traveled to Willowbrook—a town on the edge of Alpha King territory—to buy birthday bread?"

"The really good kind," I confirmed. "With real honey, not that artificial garbage."

Marcus's friendly mask shattered completely, revealing the cruel predator underneath. "You want to play games? Fine. Let's play."

The beating that followed was methodical and vicious. The wolfsbane-coated whip cracked through the air, each strike tearing through flesh and sending liquid fire racing through my veins. Marcus had clearly done this before—he knew exactly how to make every lash count.

The poison spread with each blow, seeping deeper into my system. My wolf spirit writhed in agony as the toxin attacked everything that made me what I was. Blood filled my mouth, metallic and warm, spilling down my chin as I fought to stay conscious.

"Still nothing to say?" Marcus panted, wiping sweat from his brow as he prepared for another strike. "How about now?"

The whip fell again, and this time I couldn't hold back the scream that tore from my throat. The wolfsbane was eating me alive from the inside, every nerve ending on fire.

Through the haze of pain, some primal part of me snapped.

When Marcus leaned over to check if I was still conscious, I lunged forward with the last of my strength and sank my teeth into his forearm. I bit down with everything I had, tearing through muscle and sinew until I felt flesh give way.

Marcus howled, trying to pull away, but I held on like a rabid animal. The taste of his blood filled my mouth—metallic, bitter, satisfying in the most primitive way.

But the effort cost me everything. The wolfsbane that had been building in my system suddenly exploded through my body like molten metal in my veins. My vision went white, then black, and I felt myself falling into an abyss of pain and darkness.

As consciousness slipped away, I heard Marcus cursing, his voice distant and distorted. My last coherent thought was bitter with dark satisfaction: Well, Kaius, looks like your mate might die in your own dungeon after all. At least I took a piece of this bastard with me.

Then the darkness swallowed me completely.