

Alpha's STOLEN Mate c 5

I'd rather crawl

Elowen

The steady beeping of medical equipment pulled me from the depths of unconsciousness like a reluctant swimmer breaking the surface. Golden light filtered through the windows at a sharp angle—the sun was well past its peak, meaning I'd been unconscious for over a day. My mouth tasted like copper and ash, and every breath felt like inhaling broken glass. But I was alive.

Fucking fantastic.

I forced my eyes open, squinting against the dim light filtering through what looked like a medical facility. Not the dungeon—somewhere cleaner, though the antiseptic smell couldn't quite mask the underlying scent of blood and despair that seemed to permeate everything in this godforsaken fortress.

My fingers. I could move my fingers. The relief was so overwhelming I nearly sobbed, but I bit down hard on my lower lip instead. Small victories. I wiggled each digit experimentally, testing the connection between my brain and my extremities. Everything above my waist seemed to be functioning.

Below my waist was a different story entirely.

Nothing. Complete, terrifying numbness from my spine down to what I assumed were still my toes, though I couldn't feel them to confirm. I tried to shift my legs, to feel *something*, but it was like trying to move phantom limbs. The wolfsbane had done its work thoroughly.

Don't panic. Don't you dare fucking panic.

I reached for my wolf, that familiar presence that had been my constant companion since I'd learned to shift. But there was nothing there—just an echoing void where she should have been. The wolfsbane had severed that connection too, leaving me more human than I'd been since I was a child.

The sound of a door opening made me freeze. I didn't need to look to know who it was—that scent hit me like a physical blow, sandalwood and winter pine mixed with something darker, more dangerous than I remembered.

Kaius.

I kept my eyes fixed on the ceiling, jaw clenched so tight I thought my teeth might crack. Maybe if I ignored him, he'd leave. Maybe this was just a check to make sure I wasn't dead yet.

"I know you're awake." His voice came from the foot of the bed, low and gravelly with an edge that made my skin crawl. "Your breathing changed."

I continued staring at the ceiling like it held the secrets of the universe.

"Look at me."

The Alpha command slammed into my consciousness like a sledgehammer, sending spikes of agony through my skull. My wolf might be suppressed, but the mate bond apparently wasn't dead enough to save me from his authority. My eyes snapped to his against my will, and I immediately regretted it.

Four years had made him more dangerous. Where the future Alpha King I'd known had been handsome in a cold, calculated way, the man standing before me now was pure predator. His jaw looked like it had been carved from granite, and those storm-gray eyes held a cruelty that made my blood run cold. Power radiated from him in waves—not just supernatural power, but the kind of authority that came from absolute dominion over life and death.

He was also furious. The barely leashed violence in his posture made every survival instinct I possessed scream warnings.

"Why the fuck are you here?" I managed to rasp, my voice rough from screaming. "Let me go. I don't fucking need you to treat me."

A bitter laugh escaped his throat. "Before I decide how to deal with you, I need to ensure you stay alive. Can't interrogate a corpse."

Deal with me. As if I were a problem to be solved rather than a person. The casual cruelty in his tone made my stomach churn.

"Besides," he continued, taking a step closer to the bed, "we have plenty of history to catch up on. But what's really been driving me crazy..." His voice started to rise, control slipping with each word. "Why the hell would you rather die on that platform than tell me who you were? You'd fucking rather bleed out anonymously than admit you were my mate?"

The question hit me like a slap. Of course he was angry about that—his ego couldn't handle the thought that his rejected mate had nearly been executed without him knowing.

"I don't want anything to do with you," I said, putting every ounce of contempt I could muster into the words.

Something flickered in his eyes—surprise, maybe, or wounded pride. Then his expression hardened into something genuinely terrifying.

"Listen carefully," he said, his voice dropping to that deadly register that made Alpha wolves cower. "Our bond is still intact. You are still mine. I suggest you start acting like it."

"Never." The word came out through gritted teeth, sharp as broken glass.

"Fuck!" The explosion of rage made me flinch despite myself. He slammed his fist into the wall beside my bed, the sound echoing like a gunshot. "Then why didn't you accept my rejection four years ago? Why didn't you sever our bond? You know I hate having any connection tying me down!"

The words cut deeper than they should have. Memories flooded back—how even after his public humiliation, I'd still harbored pathetic fantasies that maybe he'd change his mind. I'd worried that severing the bond might damage his strength, might even cost him his Alpha position.

God, I'd been such a pathetic fool.

His eyes narrowed, something calculating shifting behind the fury. He studied my face like I was a puzzle he couldn't quite solve.

"You've changed," he said quietly, and there was something almost like respect in his tone.

"You've changed too," I spat. "You've become heartless. A tyrant. A murderous Alpha King who slaughters innocents for sport."

Instead of the rage I expected, he moved closer, his fingers sliding under my chin to force my head up. The touch sent electric sparks racing across my skin—the mate bond's cruel reminder of what should have been.

"You're stronger," he murmured, his thumb tracing the line of my jaw with deceptive gentleness. "You survived that level of wolfsbane torture and you're still fighting me. Maybe you're not the weak wolf you were four years ago. Maybe the Moon Goddess had her reasons for pairing us after all."

The way he said it made ice form in my veins. There was something predatory in his gaze, something that spoke of plans I definitely didn't want to know about.

"Don't even think about it," I snarled, trying to jerk away from his touch despite the betraying warmth that spread from every point of contact. "I'd rather die than let you mark me."

"Oh, you don't need to worry about a permanent mark—for now," he said with a cold smile that made my blood freeze. "Until I figure out exactly what you are, what happened in these four years..." He leaned down, his face mere inches from mine, close enough that I could feel his breath against my skin. "I won't mark you. But I can't promise I won't do other things. You know how powerful our bond is."

The mate bond thrummed treacherously between us as he drew closer, his nose almost touching my neck as he inhaled my scent. Electric sparks danced across my skin where his presence lingered, and I hated how my traitorous body responded.

No. Absolutely fucking not.

"Get away from me!" I snarled, using every ounce of strength in my upper body to launch myself sideways off the bed.

The world spun as I crashed to the floor, my shoulder taking the brunt of the impact with a sickening crack. Pain exploded through my torso as medical equipment scattered around me, but I didn't stop. Even as agony tore through my ribs, even as something warm and wet began trickling down my forehead where I'd struck the corner of a metal cabinet, I kept crawling away from him.

"You're going to kill yourself!" he roared, and I could hear genuine shock in his voice. "Do you have any idea how much wolfsbane is still in your system?"

I turned to face him from the floor, blood streaming down my face, my breath coming in ragged gasps. The pain was excruciating, but the look of stunned disbelief on his face made it worth it.

Blood filled my mouth, but I smiled anyway, showing him crimson teeth.

"Don't pretend you care if I live or die."