

Not Your Mate

The alpha's son. My mate was the alpha's son, the future alpha of my enemy. The son of the pack that murdered my grandfather. Son of the man who had just tortured me for days. He wasn't here to help me; he was here to manipulate me into helping them.

My heart pounded in my chest as I dropped the broken chair leg to the floor and ran past him. I sprinted down the hall and threw the door to the suite open before pushing myself into the hallway.

"Which way, which way," I muttered before turning right and cheering internally when a staircase came into view. I ran down it and sprinted across the pack house entry and out the front door. I winced as the sun shone down into my face, and I shifted, letting Aria take control.

"Aria!" I heard him roar at me from inside, his voice laced with undiluted fury, as we bounded across the open field and toward the forest. I could smell the fresh air and the freedom as we pushed further into the trees, running west toward my pack.

"Keep going, Aria!" I cried as she pushed herself faster through the forest. We ran hard and fast, and I could feel the border get closer. "Dad!!!" I screamed through the mind link, praying anyone was listening.

"Emma!!!" my entire family yelled back. "Where are you?!"

"I'm almost to the west border, hurry!" I cried, hope building in my chest as I ran further away from my captors. My heart quickened as a collection of howls rang out through the trees.

Suddenly, the air was knocked out of me as I was thrown to the side. Aria scrambled back to her feet, and panic filled me as the massive black wolf stood before me again. Aria let out a snarl, the hair on her back standing high as he circled around us.

The wolf launched itself at us and we wrestled into the dirt and leaves until once again he was above us, pinning us to the ground. He shifted back and held us down. "Shift. Now," he growled. I could see the dried blood on his temple where I had caught him with the chair leg, and for some reason, I felt a little guilty. But only just a little.

Aria struggled in his grasp until his grip tightened, and she let out a pained yelp. I finally did as he said his hand still held firmly around my neck. "Just let me go," I said softly as tears fell down my cheeks.

"No."

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I can't let you leave. Even though I want to."

"If you want to then—"

He shook his head at me, his anger slowly fading. "The moment you were brought to this pack, you ruined everything. All of my plans and hard work down the drain the moment you showed up."

"Then why bring me here?!"

His eyes softened for a moment. "I couldn't not take you with me."

"You couldn't let me go but don't want me here... just pick one!" I shot back. "I'll make it easy for you. You don't want me here, and I don't want to be here, so let me leave!"

"It's too late for that. If I don't return with you, it's my head." He pulled me up from the ground and yanked me back through the trees toward his pack house as I struggled in his grasp.

"You're the alpha's son. He won't kill you," I muttered, turning back to search for my family through the dense trees.

"If you think that, you truly learned nothing down in those cells," he replied darkly.

"And if you think I will ever go back with you willingly, you've learned nothing." I snapped, finally pulling my arm from his grasp and moving back toward my family. I gasped as his hands gripped my waist and he threw me over his shoulder. I kicked his chest and pounded my fists on his back as he walked carelessly back to his pack, my screams ringing in his ears.

I sucked back a sob as I heard the broken howls at the border, my family waiting for me on the other side. I closed my eyes as I listened to them, letting them sear into my memory. I would never see them again.

He threw me on the bed in his suite and walked to the bathroom. "Don't think of trying that again. The alpha set guards outside the suite now that you've tried to escape."

"I hate you," I growled, earning a dark chuckle from him as he closed the door behind him. I dropped to the bed and stared up at the ceiling. "What am I going to do now?" I whispered, listening as the shower turned on in the bathroom.

"A shower does sound nice..." I muttered, staring down at my dirty clothes.

He stepped out of the bathroom ten minutes later, a towel wrapped around his waist. His broad, hard chest was tan and chiseled. His arms were thick, and I could make out small scars that dotted his upper body, clearly from battle. Small drops of water fell from his dark hair, and I looked up at his face only to find his eyes already staring at mine. I flinched in surprise, earning a smirk.

"Like what you see?"

"Not at all, just waiting for the bathroom to become unoccupied," I replied innocently as I stood from the bed. As I walked past him, his hand gripped my upper arm. "I have a mess to clean up because of your little stunt. You will stay in this room until I return for you—do you understand me?"

"Yes, alpha," I ground out, giving him my best glare.

He looked me up and down for a moment. "Xaden."

"What?"

"My name. It's Xaden."

"How lovely," I said, yanking my arm from his grasp. "See you later, alpha." I closed the bathroom door behind me, smiling as I heard his growl.

When I emerged from the shower, he was gone, and I released a long breath of relief. I frowned as I realized I didn't have anything to change into and rummaged through his things, settling on a pair of boxer shorts and an old tee shirt that was way too big. I padded out of the room, my bare feet thumping on the cold hardwood floors. I walked around the suite, giving myself a small tour of the rooms until finally taking a book off a shelf and dropping to the couch to read.

Hours later, I'd made it halfway through the book when my stomach let out a low rumble. I groaned, realizing it had been days since I'd had a real meal. I stood from the couch and padded to the cabinets beside a small table and rifled through them, frowning when I found this room was sorely lacking in snacks.

I opened the door and jumped back as a tall, menacing man stood just outside. "Get back inside," he

grumbled.

"I'm hungry."

"Not my problem," he replied before grabbing the door handle and slamming the door shut. I stepped back with a frown and walked back to the couch. I picked up the book once more and wondered when Xaden would decide to grace me with his presence again. Not that I wanted it.

After spending the entire day smoothing things over with my father, I limped into the suite with two plates of food. I winced as I set them down on the table. My father's brand of punishment for offenses always erred on the side of cruelty. And not even his own son was safe from his punishments. I'd had to fight him and act as if I wasn't stronger. I'd had to allow him to not only beat me but also make him think I could be broken like when I was a child. As if his words still had any effect on me after all these years.

I turned quickly when something moved in the corner of my eye. I looked down to find Aria asleep on the couch. Her wild blonde curls fell into her face and down her back. Were those my clothes? I stepped closer and felt myself harden at the sight of her in my oversized shirt that hung off her shoulder, my boxer shorts barely covering her assets.

I could feel Kai purr in the corners of my mind at the sight. I wanted to pull her into my arms and never let go. I shook the thoughts from my head. I could never let things progress between us. She was better off as far away from me as she could get.

Then why didn't you let her go? Kai murmured.

I knew why. Because no matter what my logical thoughts told me, I felt drawn to her. I needed her.

I knelt down and touched her shoulder gently, trying to ignore how soft her skin was beneath my fingertips. "Aria," I whispered.

Her eyes flitted open then closed, and she smiled as she stretched. "Hmm, Xaden."

Her sleepy words made me smile.

Suddenly her eyes shot open, and she jumped up, her smile disappearing immediately. "Oh!" she gasped, sitting up straight. "What do you want?" she scowled.

"I brought you something to eat," I said as I stood and walked to the table.

"Oh..." she muttered before standing. "That smells delicious," she said quietly as she took a seat at the table.

"It's not much," I replied, surprised when she immediately dug in.

"I haven't eaten anything in two days," she said between bites.

I winced as I poured her a glass of water. "I'm sorry, I completely forgot. I would have brought you something sooner, but..."

She waved her hand at me before shoving another spoonful of potatoes in her mouth.

I took a bite of my food, watching her as she began to slow down as if she realized nobody would be taking the meal from her.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

"Fine," she replied stiffly.

I dropped my fork on my plate and sat up straight. "Look, today has been..."

"Long. Horrible. Miserable. Exhausting," she listed off with a shrug.

"Yes to all of the above," I sighed. "Can we maybe start over?"

She looked up at me with a scowl. "Are you serious?"

"Yes?" I said, suddenly less sure of myself.

"Xaden, I will despise you for the rest of my days. What you and your father have done to me, to my people... I will never forgive it."

I frowned at her words. "Never is a long time."

"It's the truth," she said as she pushed off from the table and walked to the bedroom.

I finished my meal before following her in a few minutes later. I rounded the bed and yanked off my shirt and shoes before climbing in beside her.

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She sat up, her eyes wide. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Going to sleep," I replied as I lay on my back, my head resting on my arms and my eyes shut.

"Not with me you aren't," she shot back.

"This is my bedroom and I've had a long day. I will be sleeping comfortably in my own bed. You can sleep on the floor if it bothers you that much."

When she didn't reply, I opened one eye slowly, shutting it quickly when I caught her stare. "I won't do anything to you."

"And how am I supposed to trust you?" she grumbled as she lay back down. "What was it you said? Oh, I remember—gain her trust by whatever means necessary." She leaned over and I could feel her face close to mine. I opened my eyes to find her right beside me, her face inches from mine. "And what, pray tell, are the means you plan to use to gain my trust? Are you going to pamper me? Tell me some sob story? Screw me into submission?"

"Dirty, dirty words," I whispered, her breath hot on my cheek.

She gave a tight-lipped grin as she scooted back and rolled over, her back now facing me. "Don't touch me. Ever."

I grinned as I rolled closer, my body mere inches from being pressed against hers. "And what am I to do when you ask me to touch you? When you're begging me?" I whispered.

She inhaled sharply, her body stiff, and I could hear her heartbeat quicken. She rolled over, her features a cold mask. "I'm positive you'll never be put in that position. I won't be doing that."

I ran my finger down her arm, igniting goosebumps along her skin. "You will."

She snorted and rolled over again. A chuckle escaped my lips, and I scooted back over to my side and closed my eyes, willing myself to calm down and my body to ignore the intense desire coursing through me.