

HIS REJECTED MATE'S REVENGE

Chapter 4

Astrid's POV.

Sometimes at night, when the house is quiet and Ariana is probably texting a dozen boys who worship the ground, she walks on, I close my eyes and wish for one thing:

A mate.

Someone who will look at me and not see Ariana's less-pretty twin.

Someone who will love me for the way I lose myself in art, who will think my messy hair and paint-stained hands are beautiful. Someone who will make me feel like I'm not... nothing.

Someone who won't see me as the weird red-haired that deserved to be hidden.

Pathetic, right?

Almost eighteen years old and still dreaming like a kid. But dreams are the only thing keeping me sane in this house.

At least they were—until today.

I walk into my room after school, humming softly, only to freeze when I see Ariana sitting on my bed. My bed. With a smug smile stretched across her glossy lips and a stack of papers in her hand.

My heart stops.

No.

She found it.

What I have kept hidden since last week.

My Edom art school application form.

She searched through my room.

“Ariana,” I whisper. “Give those back.”

She waves the papers in the air like a victory flag.

She was never up to any good.

“Edom School of Art? Wow, Astrid. Really aiming high, aren’t you?”

Heat floods my cheeks.

“Give. Them. Back.”

She smirks.

“You really think they’d take someone like you? I mean, come on, Astrid. You can barely look people in the eye, and you think you can live in some big art school? Please. How are you going to afford Edom? Do you think father or mother would pay? Silly Astrid.”

I lunge for the forms, but she dances out of reach, laughing.

“Oh, Mom and Dad are going to love this.”

“Ariana, don’t—” My voice cracks. “Please. Don’t tell them.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” she purrs, her eyes glittering with malice. “You should know by now... I love telling them.”

She sashays out of my room, and panic slams into me like a punch to the gut.

“Ariana!” I scream, chasing after her, my feet pounding down the stairs.

She was already in the living room, holding up the forms like a trophy.

“Mom! Dad! Look what Astrid’s been hiding!”

My parents look up from their conversation, curiosity flickering into shock as Ariana hands them the papers.

“What is this?” Mom snaps.

“It’s... nothing,” I stammer, reaching for the forms, but Dad snatches them away before I can touch them.

“Nothing? You were planning to apply to an art school? Without telling us?”

“I—I just wanted—”

“You just wanted to embarrass this family?” Mom cuts in, her face twisting in fury. “Do you have any idea how ridiculous this is?”

“It’s not ridiculous!” I shout, surprising even myself. “It’s my dream!”

Mom laughs—a cold, bitter sound.

“Dreams don’t put food on the table, Astrid. Dreams don’t strengthen alliances. You have a duty.”

“A duty?” My voice trembles with anger.

So I had a duty now.

After being ignored and treated like shit for years, suddenly I have a duty?

“What about Ariana? Does she have any duty to this family, or is it just me who has to sacrifice everything?”

“Ariana is precious,” Mom snaps without hesitation.

“She’s caught the eye of Damian—the Alpha heir. Do you understand what that means? Ariana is special. You…” Her lip curls in disgust.

“You’re not beautiful, Astrid. You have nothing. And you probably won’t even find your mate, so stop living in a fantasy. Art school? What do you think will come out of it? Who do you expect to pay for that?”

The words hit me like bullets, each one tearing through what little armour I have left. Not beautiful. Nothing. Won’t find your mate.

They never believed I would find my mate, and I won't be worth being mated to.

They didn’t even believe I could survive without them.

They had no plans for me.

I can barely breathe.

Dad steps forward and rips the forms in half, the sound sharp and final.

“You’re not going to that art school. In fact, you’re not going anywhere. From now on, you stay home. No more nonsense. School is putting useless ideas in your head. Maybe it's time for you to stop schooling.”

“No!” My scream rips from my throat before I can stop it.

“You can’t do this!”

“We just did,” Mom says coldly. “You’ll stay here and learn the books. One day, you’ll handle the accounts for the gold mine. That’s your place.”

“My place?” I whisper, shaking. “You think my place is in a cage while Ariana gets to live her perfect life?!”

Ariana, who’s been standing there like the devil in designer jeans, smirks.

“Well, someone has to, right?”

Something inside me snaps.

Before I even realize what I’m doing, I’m storming up the stairs, ready to lock myself in my room, when I notice something.

My portfolio—the leather folder that holds every sketch I’ve ever poured my soul into—is gone.

“Ariana,” I breathe, ice flooding my veins.

When I whirl around, she’s standing at the bottom of the stairs, holding my portfolio like a prize. Smiling.

When did she even take that?

“Give. That. Back.”

She tilts her head.

“Or what?”

The rage that explodes inside me is wild and uncontrollable. A growl—an actual growl—rips from my throat, startling even me.

And then I’m flying down the stairs.

“Astrid!” Mom screams, but it’s too late.

I slam into Ariana, and we crash to the floor. Her gasp turns into a shriek as my fists pound, my nails claw.

I yank her perfect hair, scratching across her flawless face. She screams again, trying to push me off, but I’m stronger. So much stronger than I ever thought I could be.

“You ruined everything!” I roar, my voice animalistic, foreign.

“Everything!”

“Girls! Stop this!” Dad booms, and suddenly strong arms are dragging me back, hauling me off Ariana. I thrash against him, shaking, my chest heaving, a snarl curling my lips.

Ariana scrambles to her feet, her face streaked with blood and fury, hair a tangled mess. She glares at me like she wants to kill me.

But when I look at Mom, I see something I’ve never seen before. Fear.

She’s afraid of me.

The realization slams into me like ice water. My breathing slows, but my body still trembles violently.

“You...” I point a shaking finger at Ariana. “You’re dead to me.”

Her eyes widen, but I don’t wait for a response. I rip free from Dad’s grip, storm up the stairs, and slam my door so hard the walls shake.

Then I collapse onto the floor, tears burning my eyes as sobs tear out of me.

My chest aches, my throat hurts, my hands are raw and bloody, but none of it compares to the pain clawing at my heart.

I wanted freedom. I wanted art. I wanted... love.

And now all I want is my mate. Someone to take me away from this hell because the last thing I’ll ever do is stay here and rot behind a desk, watching Ariana live the life I can only dream of.

That she will get everything and everyone at her beck and call while I struggle to gain scraps.

I didn't want that life.

I didn't want my life to be here.

Someone, please. Come find me.

Before I lose what’s left of myself.