

TWENTY-THREE

"Do I really have to wear these?" I wriggled my aching feet on our way to the mall. So far, Scarlett was proving to be a darling. We have only spent ten minutes in each other's company since breakfast and I can totally understand why Vadirr was smitten by her. She is a real one.

After breakfast, Draven had some important meetings to attend and he told Smythe to take I and Scarlett to the mall for shopping. He made it clear the choice of clothes he wanted on me. No short or tight dresses, nothing revealing, with emphasis on 'outfits befitting my new status'

I was however glad when Scarlett volunteered to go with me. He'd not agreed to it on the spot, but eventually just nodded his head and handed Smythe his credit card.

Now alone with Scarlett, I decided that I liked her within the first minute of our being together. She had a great sense of humor and her laughter reached her eyes, but she was pretty chatty and overly inquisitive. Since I got here, she's the only one who didn't look at me in a weird way or didn't see an omega. I'm not used to people being all friendly with me, but it wasn't hard warming up to her. The knowledge that she was a werewolf when she met her mate made it easier to relate with her. She'd only just recently transitioned to a Lycan after months of bearing her mates mark as I just learned.

A werewolf could become a Lycan if mated and marked by a strong Lycan. Cases like this are rare and not very common, but it happens, and I'd not believed it was true at first until Scarlett told me this herself.

She held her sides as she chuckled hard, and a smile spread across my lips until I was grinning too. Apart from Ailana, no one bothered to be friendly with me at Silver Moon, and I knew people will try to befriend me because of my new status, after all being Prince Draven's mate means

a lot. But Scarlett didn't need to pretend because she already had a close relationship with Prince Draven as she was mated to his best friend. If she is pretending, then I must commend her because she is doing a pretty good job.

"Yes you must," she finally answered, "You are Draven's mate!"

I felt a tiny bit of guilt when she said that. In the last few minutes, she'd been nothing but truthful to me, but I was living a lie. I looked away and shrugged.

"You know I'm glad that Draven finally found his mate," she continued when I didn't respond "It's not just because we will finally be having a king, but because he deserves it. Maybe you could be the one to finally connect to him? Maybe soften him a little?" she sounded skeptical as she said it.

"Soften him?" I scoffed. It sounded ridiculous to me, but I didn't say it with words, I let my expression do the talking.

She shrugged "I mean, that's like hoping for the impossible. But he's been through so much already..." she stopped and sighed.

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously. I only knew about the Lycan Prince from what I'd read in books, but I knew there was a whole lot I didn't know. Scarlett looked uncomfortable for a second, glancing at the rearview mirror to be sure Smythe's attention was on the road, and it had me feeling even more curious.

"I can't say much," she shook her head "I mean he's your mate and all ..." her voice trailed off, and I saw fear in her eyes. It was gone in a second, but I was so sure I had seen it, "Look, he's a lot to handle, and honestly, when I heard he found his mate, I felt pity for you," she paused again and my frown deepened.

"I'm scared," I admitted, allowing my shoulders drop forward. Scarlett's eyes softened but I pretended not to notice.

"That's obvious," she mouthed. "It's hard not to. Even Vadirr who has been friends with him for years still walks on eggshells around him. His is just not obvious,"

Vadirr didn't look scared of Prince Draven. I'd say they make a very good pair and he's one of the few that would dare to speak when the Prince speaks. But Scarlett knows better.

"He's a scarred man, Esme," she sighed again. The look of fear returned to her eyes, and she shook her head vehemently, pushing it aside and her smile returning to her face "But no matter how fearful he is, he'd definitely feel the mate bond, even stronger than any other Lycan or werewolf," she didn't sound like she believed her own words, but I nodded anyway as I started to feel uncomfortable with the topic. But Scarlett wasn't going to let it go so easily, and her next words had me stuttering like a thief caught in the act.

"So tell me, what does it feel like to be mated to the strongest and hottest of our kind? You are falling head over heels for him, I mean it's so beautiful, right?" she beamed at me.

"I-I mean," I swallowed, "The way you make it sound – " I was going red with each word I managed to let out. What did she mean I was head over heels? I admit I'd felt a sort of way when I thought she was one of the women in his life, but what she was saying was totally out of it.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of Esme, he's really, really cute," she stressed on 'really' "And Besides he's your mate. I hope you can transition to be a Lycan like I did," she added.

"I don't think so," I answered a little too quickly. Scarlett raised one

brow.

"Is being a Lycan such a bad thing?" she asked.

"No, No," I resisted the urge to face palm so hard. Everyone wants to be a Lycan. They are the strongest and most gifted of our kind. Apart from the fact that I knew I was a traitor and not worthy of being a Lycan, I knew that it wouldn't happen because I wasn't mated to Draven. "That's not what I mean. It's just that I don't want to get my hopes high,"

"We're here," Smythe's voice announced as he pulled the car to a stop in front of the mall. The Lycaon mall was big as expected, more than ten times the one at Silver Moon. The stores were still very much open with cars parked at the parking lot, but to my surprise, there was no sign of anyone present.

I stepped out of the vehicle as Smythe held the door open for me and looked around, but there was no trace of any person. As we made our way inside, I realized the sales personnel were perhaps the only people present at their workstations. There were no customers besides from myself and Scarlett who just arrived.

The first clothing store we entered, we were welcomed by a middle aged man and two other women who had the widest smiles on their faces "Welcome to Xquisite designs, your highness," the man did a quick bow of his head and the woman next to him curtsied.

I glanced at Scarlett for some kind of explanation, but she just shrugged. They just referred to me as your Highness, and while my brain was still processing the words, one of the women started to usher us in.

"We have an array of attires that you will like..." she started to say, leading us into a different section of the store that had women clothes.

"We'll take it from here," Scarlett says, cutting her short "There's no need for a tour. I know this place all too well, and if we need anything, I'll let you know," Scarlett had just said those words when I noticed the woman's quivering hands.

"Very well then, Happy shopping," She smiled, bowed her head to us and left.

"What was that about? And where is everyone? Doesn't anyone visit the mall here?" I asked Scarlett the question that had been bothering me for a while.

"Draven cleared the whole place," She replied, sorting through some dresses on the hanger.

"What? Why did he do that?" I asked with raised eyebrows.

"Because you are coming. It's just how he is. No one can be at the mall when he's there. If he ever had to visit this mall by himself for any reason, then he'd send a message to clear out every customer before he arrived. So it's either they thought he was coming with you, or he told them to clear the place for his mate," She smiled "Everyone also has to be at their feet to try and impress you, because of fear of what will happen if they offered a bad service,"

"Oh," that explained the woman's jittery hands, but I'd be stupid to complain about anything to the prince, it didn't make any sense, but Scarlett didn't think it absurd. It was a norm to her.

"Ohh this is beautiful," she gasped, pulling out a dress and holding it against my chest. The dress was everything Draven said he didn't want on me, but Scarlett winked and chuckled mischievously.