

Chapter 10 Mate Bond

ELIANA.

It was well into the dead of night when the car came to a halt. I gazed outside my windows to see people flood through the Villa's entrance. They were dressed extravagantly in the brightest colors, even some wearing masks. That sort of thing wasn't unusual in werewolf ball parties.

In fact—I looked to Adam who had driven me here.

"I told you." He heaved. "You were right!" Braiding the rope of my mask through my hair, I balanced it upon the bridge of my nose and a scoff escaped my lips. Only then was I ready to alight and he came down too.

We walked up the sidewalk before I turned to the side again.

"This is the perfect disguise."

We made our way up the steps, gliding through the bodies of Pack Members scattered around the pub and it wasn't until we entered through the door that Adams and I came to a halt. Looking around, it wasn't any more quieter inside here. The air was filled with the intoxicating blend of laughter, clinking glasses, and the faint melodies of a live jazz band.

"This way," Adams drew my hand as we dashed through the heart of Oakland's grandest party—the Moonlight Ball. Not even once a year, this was a special party that was only observed right before the swearing of a new Alpha King. The Moonlight Ball would act as his final opportunity to seek a bride of the thousand-and-one eligible spinsters and princesses that would come lining up in front of him.

At the end of the night, he must then make his decision and the bride would move into the Villa without wasting a second. The marriage would be imminent—this was tradition. There wasn't any proclaimed Alpha King that hadn't gone through this.

In fact, it was even how my dad met my mom.

She struck her neck up amidst the crowd and like a light in a dark room, she drew his eyes toward her and her alone. The two of them met during his Ball almost thirty years ago and now, unfortunately, it was Jaxon's turn. His eyes had coveted the crown and Alpha title for so long now.

He was growing so impatient that he'd already set in tow all the marriage rites even before my father passed. I stopped in my tracks for a moment as my eyes scanned the crowds, the most beautiful women had lined up, their faces caked with makeup as they desperately fanned themselves so that it didn't smear.

They were in haste for their lives to change forever.

I wish I could tell them that it was far from a fairytale with Jaxon.

"Eliana!" Adams sharply called and as I kicked my feet forward, a hard lump slipped down my throat. He drew my hands upstairs and I knew the way to my father's room. The entire place hadn't changed so much.

"Jaxon's downstairs with Sienna, they're going through his options for a bride which could buy you some time" Adam whispered as we halted right in front of the door. "I'm not sure how long but you have to hurry up and wear the mask when you're coming out so no one sees you" He then pushed the door and they gave way with a creaky clang.

The air that hit me in my face was familiar.

"Be careful. I'll be waiting for you outside" Upon throwing one last look over my shoulders, my eyes met Adam's before he closed the door. The immediate silence rang through my ears and for a moment, all I could hear were the thuds of my feet against the wooden floor.

I was careful as I walked further into the room. Although the corridor was dark, there was a candlelight set upon a table in the distance. It was warmer with each step I took closer and the moment my eyes fell on him, my heart sank into my chest.

I straightened my back, pulling away from the walls.

He was backing me but I met his eyes through the mirror.

"Dad?" I called softly and there was a sting in my chest. He was immobile in a wooden chair that faced the mirror and seeing him so lifeless that way, broke my heart into pieces. I threw myself in front of him, grasping his frail tender hands in mine.

His eyes fell to me with blankness but I could tell he was still there. My Grandma said he'd been sick for some time now, that it first started with memory issues some months ago. Then he couldn't go by the day doing the normal things he usually did.

His cognitive abilities started to slow down and he couldn't even move by himself. It was like he was dying slowly, like his body was giving out but his soul was still fighting. I could see it in his eyes that he was a fighter.

He was much worse than she'd described. Maybe she didn't want to break my heart by telling me the whole truth. My father says in that chair, hands crippled and his neck bent to the side. He was drooling from his lips and his eyes and the silence that existed at that moment was deafening.

He was so much different the last time I saw him. Even though he hated me with a passion, all I ever wanted was his love. For him to one day step up for me against the abuse and the mistreatment. For him to look at me without feeling as much resentment that I took my mother's life.

But all those years, he hated me. And because of that, I started to hate myself too. I never got the validation from him, nor did I get a single word that wasn't a rain of insults. Yet in that moment, sympathy wrapped around my heart like a clenched fist and a tear rolled down my cheeks.

"He's incapable of ruling over a Pack now" Nana had said earlier that day as I sat right next to her. "And the people have started to notice. You can be anything in the world but you can't be an incapable leader. Because as soon as the Pack loses that respect for you, it's utter chaos"

"And it's not your father's fault, I know. He's been to every top doctor and medical personnel in all of New Orleans, the traditionalists, and even humans too. No one knows what this is, no one has the answer" She said and I gulped down a hard lump through my throat.

A painful sensation shot up my chest and it never really left me until that night. "Hey..." I softly said, squeezing his hands softly. I raised his neck and wedged it more comfortably against the chair and he closed his eyes in a way that showed relief.

He didn't take them off me when they opened like he was trying to tell me something that his lips couldn't say. For the first time, he wasn't yelling. "Yes...it's me" I whispered.

"It's your daughter and I'm right here." His lips fell apart and his teeth ended up gnashing against each other like he was cold and with all the strength he could garner, he stammered his name.

"Ja...Xon."

"Jaxon" I repeated after him with an arch coming between my brows. "What happened to him?" I asked although I knew it was a reach. All my dad did was just shake his head and terror immediately filled his eyes.

"It's okay," I reassured.

"Grandma told me everything, about his plan to take over the Pack even though you're still alive and I won't allow it" I gritted through my teeth and somehow he was able to hold my hands this time. Giving it a tender squeeze, he drew my eyes back to him.

My father shook his head again as he pointed to me.

"Me?" He nodded.

"Ma...Te" He fought to get that word out and it was a slap in my face because I knew exactly what he was talking about. Nana had said exactly the same thing earlier that day.

"So how are we going to challenge Jaxon for the Alpha title?" I asked her that morning. "Isn't there supposed to be some kind of battle?" I wasn't so familiar with the rules and traditions of the Pack.

I've been away for six years, spare me!

But at least I knew there was one way to challenge an Alpha for the crown, and that was by declaring a battle. A battle where one must kill the other and the one who survives gets the crown. I couldn't face Jaxon, don't get me wrong, I've trained for the last six years to be a warrior back in the commune. It wasn't that I couldn't face him, I didn't want to.

It was too risky and I was still yet to see what he looked like now.

"No, Eliana" Luckily, I wouldn't have to.

"There's one other way you can challenge him for the crown. Being the firstborn child of the throne, even as a woman, you are entitled by rite to the crown—" "But I can't be an Alpha" I interrupted and Blood Hound wasn't as progressive yet to have their first sole ruling Luna.

I could force my way to the throne but what was the point if they never respected me? Besides building it back up from the mess it was now would take more than me. There was no way I could do this on my own.

"But your mate can." My Grandma interrupted my thoughts and I batted my lashes for a moment. "My mate?" I echoed. "You may not be able to challenge for the crown all by yourself, not unless you present your mate as a contender. Now, he would be the one to fight Jaxon and should he win, you both get to rule the Pack and Jaxon's gone" She explained but I was still hung up on that one word.

Mate.

Did she know who my mate was?

This is unbelievable, this is impossible.

"Eliana..."

"I can't, ma" I shook my head. "I don't have a mate," I lied. "And even if I did, I would probably still prefer fighting Jaxon myself" I added and she heaved an exhausted sigh. "But it's the only way" She chastised but I ended up standing from the chair.

"I mean it, I can't." I argued. "That's final."

Storming out of the room, the memories flooded back to me in hot flashes. That night. Him across the room, the papers laying in front of me and his soulless eyes when he muttered those words.

"I, Alpha Malik Denver hereby reject you, Eliana Jacobs, as my mate, bringing an end to this union." His voice sliced through my heart that day and I don't think I ever fully healed. Sometimes, I thought there really was no healing from something like that.

You see in a lifetime, you only get one mate. But finding that person isn't always the hardest part. It's making sure that you both accept the mate-bond, giving into the fate of whatever the Moon Goddess has planned for you. It's tying your souls together so you won't ever be alone again.

But when your mate ends up rejecting you, it doesn't just mean rejecting that fate. It also means all your life, you're going to spend it alone.

Second-chance mates were only for those who had lost their loved one to an unjust death but at the end of the day, it's the Moon Goddess who decides who gets what and who gets who.

And from that day, I accepted that I wasn't going to get anyone else. I accepted a life without a mate because I already had the greatest gift of all and that was my son, Elijah. I was content, I didn't really need more.

I didn't really need Him.

Until now.

"You have to present your Mate as a contender." My Grandmother's words kept echoing in my ears as I stood there. I knew that was what my father was trying to say too. But it was much more complicated than that, I wish they knew.

I wish they knew that I'd tried.

Denver wanted nothing to do with me the last time, he'd made it abundantly clear and I'd spent the past six years hating him from afar.

There simply had to be another way.

But just then, I heard the sound of approaching footsteps drawing close to the door. I charged my eyes up and in a split second, the locks clicked and the doors opened again. My heart sank in my chest immediately.

"Shit."