

## The King's Tainted Mate Chapter 13 - Tips

Nothing was ever that simple anymore... Why wasn't it? A tightness invaded my chest at a question as simple as that. Having woken up to the sight of all the luxury I had never known, dressed in the most expensive gown I had ever worn, I longed for simple. I longed for my life that had always been simple. A humble home, loving parents, the best sister. We lacked many things, but never happiness. Even though we lived in the forgotten village, a place shunned by many, my days had always been filled with light, laughter and loving embraces. I had been like a bird. Free to spread my wings and fly.

But now, all that seemed like a distant memory. I was still that bird, but my world was now a cage. The simplicity was gone and with it my freedom, my joy. In its place a darkness that threatened to swallow me whole had taken root. My once free soul had been plunged into a sea of hate, desire for revenge. A thirst to spill blood...his blood.

It was his fault. Everything that had gone wrong in my life was his fault. He'd made that darkness to spread when once again he'd chosen to lavish on me a punishment I did not deserve. This time, he'd made sure to trap me like a criminal too. An animal in a cage. I was dragged, paraded and bound like a common thief. Locked up in a filthy dungeon. It did not matter that it was empty and I did not get to share it with some other filthy criminal, or that I'd been there for a mere few hours. Nothing would ever change the desperation I had felt when I was left alone in the darkness. When the doors had been bolted and the deathly silence overwhelmed me.

Forced to face the cruelty of my mate, my heart had shattered anew. My tears had spilled as anguish had devoured me in the darkness. For the longest time only the sound of my sobbing and my wolf's whimpers kept me company until they didn't and I was plunged into a sea of dreams. Nightmares filled with lonely beasts welcoming me to a life of solitude.

"Oh, you are awake?" Someone chirped, an unmistakable warmth dripped with their words, but it was not enough to thaw the block of ice that was lodged in my heart, neither was it enough to sway me from the plotting going on inside my head. I needed to get out of here.

I had been awake, for a while now. My eyes had opened to the beautiful room I was in, but I had not even spared a moment to admire it. I had spent my time

pondering on how I could make my escape from the palace...from him and the bond that still bound us.

"I apologize on behalf of those fools. Whatever made them think a dungeon was a place for a maiden in your condition."

My condition? A growl escaped my lips as my hand fell to my belly protectively. He'd already figured it out?! I had hoped for a different outcome. It was one of the reasons I had ignored his question and the desperation that came with it. But again, fate had favoured him once more and it only served to deepen my resolve to make my escape while I could. Before he decided to take my baby away too. Fear gripped me at the thought and both hands wrapped around my middle in a gesture to protect what was hidden there.

"You have nothing to fear from me, my dear. I was merely worried that you would sleep throughout the night without eating. You know that is not good for either you or the baby." Despite the gentleness and the semblance of honesty in her words, I shot my visitor a defensive look. It was almost night time and only the fading glow of the setting sun made for the only light in the room I had been brought to, but I could still make out the warm smile on her face. Wide and bright, and strangely soothing to my wounded soul.

"W-Who are you?"

"Oh, forgive me, child. I should have probably introduced myself first." She walked over with confident steps. Everything about her was confident, I noted. "I'm Liira and I'm here to make sure you and the baby are alright. His majesty—"

That couldn't be right. How was she a nurse? My troubles momentarily forgotten, I stared at the woman. I might have been ignorant of the matters of royalty, but I knew of hierarchy in Xatis and the ranks that came with each family. Her rank smelled higher to be an ordinary nurse. As high as him. She was royalty too.

I sat up straighter on the bed I had woken up on and appraised her as she spoke. She may not have been dressed in one of those fancy gowns I had seen on many noble ladies from the capital, but there was no mistaking her status. She was no servant, which left me wondering why she would be doing this. Had she been put in charge to keep me from escaping perhaps? Everyone knew how strong the wolves from the royal bloodline were and I wondered if that was the reason she'd been brought in to watch over me.

The thought brought my guard up instantly. I watched warily as she went about the room lighting up the many candles, determined not to be fooled by the gentleness that she naturally displayed. If it came down to it, she would be an enemy I would have to face if she stood between me and my freedom. But my resolve shook when she turned back to me with that bright smile and uttered the last words I expected to leave her mouth.

“Firstly, congratulations on your pregnancy.” My throat tightened instantly and my eyes stung. Hearing that, disarmed me in ways I had not expected it to. I had been so wrapped up in the pain that had befallen me that I had not stopped to think of what a beautiful thing carrying my baby was. And before I could recover from it, the bed dipped and I was thrust forward into the warmest of embraces that cracked all my defences.

Against my better judgement, I leaned in and relished the comfort that came with it. She was a stranger, a potential enemy, but like Gol she was what I needed in the moment, so I dived in, relishing every bit of comfort she granted me.

“There...” Liira eventually pulled back, an expression of happiness and something that resembled relief graced her face. It was as if that embrace was more for her than it was for my own comfort. “You will be glad to know that you and the baby are doing just fine.”

Had she examined me while I slept? “Why wouldn’t we be?” I frowned knowing I had no reason to be worried. I had been feeling just fine despite everything else.

Liira took my hands before she spoke. “Yours is one delicate pregnancy and given what you have been through already, it’s a wonder that you two are still doing alright. I guess we have fate to thank for that.” I almost rolled my eyes at that. Would that be the same fate that had plunged me into all the chaos that had come my way?

“You said a delicate pregnancy, what does that mean?” She still wore a smile, but there was a hint of concern there too and it unsettled me.

“First time pregnancies are always hard on any she-wolf, but special rare cases like yours make the journey even more difficult.”

“Special? Rare?” I frowned at the nurse.

“You do not know?” Surprise registered on her face and my frown only deepened. I was pregnant and that was that. What else was there to know? “Oh my dear.” Liira cupped my cheeks and held my gaze. “How many wolves do you know that have been able to conceive a pup before shifting?”

I froze at the question, eyes boring into Liira’s. Having been brought up in the forgotten village, I did not know many people, but I knew the answer to her question. None. Our kind would only bear their young after gaining their wolf. Except for a special few. A rare special few. Those blessed by the moon goddess to—. Surely I couldn’t be—

“What a glorious way for the heir of Xatis to be conceived!” There was pride in Liira’s words, but they only sang of a burden I was unwilling to bear.

I was carrying the heir of Xatis! I fought from letting that truth sink in, but it did anyway, flooding me with reasons why he would never let me go. This was not just my baby, it was his baby, the kingdom’s baby and its future. He would never let that go.

“I need air.” I mumbled as a lump formed in my throat. “Please.”

Liira merely studied me for the longest time before pointing towards the door. “Out the door to your right. There is a garden, you’ll be safe.” I needed no further invitation as I scurried towards the door. It was huge, but surprisingly easy to open. It couldn’t swing fast enough, however, as the tears spilled from my eyes. I was only too glad when I found no audience to witness my melt down. And wishing not to alert Liira to my sobbing, I turned hastily to my right and headed for the garden, hoping to let it all out there.

I was already a couple of steps away from the door when the sound of my own footsteps brought me to an abrupt stop.

Silence. It was everywhere and an instant temptation. A temptation that had me hastily turning my plan of escape in my head. I listened for any other signs of life, but there was nothing. Apart from Liira and I, there seemed to be no one here. No one to stop me. My heart raced at the possibilities laying before me. If the garden was to my right, where would my left lead me to? Freedom?

I wiped at my tears before retracing my steps. It was now or never...