

The King's Mate book by Kimberlycullen14

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When I was ten, I had to watch my parents die. I saw their bodies torn into shreds by our rival pack. They destroyed my pack and took over their lands. It had been a dark day for me; I was just a child, yet I saw my mother being torn to shreds by a grey wolf before my very own eyes, her blood-churning screams blending with the sounds of the flames and the howls of wolves. I wasn't the same after that.

We became rogues overnight. With no home and no pack, we were alone. John, the Beta, took me to my mother's old pack. He had survived the attack on us, but just barely. He had lost an eye and his mate, Edith, the Head Pack warrior.

"Come, Genesis, I'll take you home."

He took me to the Dark Moon Pack, where my grandmother lived. I never saw him again after that. I never saw anyone from that pack again. It had taken me a while before I could actually talk again; the nightmares never left, though; they echoed in my mind. Sometimes, I could hear the screams in my head, and when I closed my eyes, I could see my mother's eyes, devoid, her body in shreds, her jaw displaced, and so much blood.

When I was twelve, they came back again, and this time it was my grandmother who died. She was the pack doctor, and she had been working late into the night that day; two females had gone into labor, and the birth process had been taking longer than expected. I hadn't been afraid of staying home alone, and I kind of liked it in a way. At around midnight, I heard the growls and the howl of the Alpha—the call to arms; somehow, I knew what would happen. And it did. It began with the pack warriors answering the Alpha's call. Then the streetlights went off, then the smell of smoke, and finally the screams of dying wolves. I was scared. I hid myself underneath my bed, where I stayed, but they found me in the end.

They spared only the kids, and they took me with them. We were forced to join the Red Hallow Pack, some of us fortunate enough to get adopted by pack members who didn't have children, like Cassidy, my friend. The rest of us were put to work cleaning, mending, fixing. There was so much to do in a pack of eight hundred members and only fourteen children.

As we grew older, some of us made it out. One by one, they left; others trained to be warriors. Noah, the boy whom I had the greatest crush on when I was fifteen, became the Alpha's son's close companion. He had always been a friendly person, and the boy could brighten up a room with just three words. Sometimes, he didn't have to say or do anything. He was like a fireball. It was impossible not to notice him. As a result of his cuddle-bear-like personality, he had become the next in line to be the next Beta of the pack.

I was happy for him. After all, we had gone through so much together. His mother was a nurse in the Dark Moon Pack, so we were fairly close in the past; we'd run and played in the forest and played doctor together with Cassidy. We were the three musketeers. Wherever they went, I went.

We had a bond. But the bond was not strong enough. We drifted apart. Now it's like I do not exist anymore, like I'm just a haunting memory he needed to lock up in a safe with chains and throw into the deepest parts of the ocean.

“Stop bringing up the past. They're dead! The past is the past, Genesis... I've changed.”

That was what he said to me when I asked him why he had been so distant, why he wouldn't look me in the eye, why he would pretend that I wasn't there. I have to admit, it did hurt; it felt like I had lost another person in my life. It felt like my heart and lungs were cut open, and all the oxygen and life had been drained out into a jar and then shattered before my eyes.

I got over it eventually, but now I'm twenty years old. Time had passed by so fast, yet it felt like I hadn't moved a muscle. I was still stuck. The rest of them had left, found their mates, and some became official pack members. They even had a pack initiation ceremony that I had catered for with the other females. I remember that day; I had practically slaved all day, cooking and cleaning nonstop for two days. The pack house had been buzzing with excitement; I was excited, which was shocking because I was never excited. Everything had become so mundane.

Nobody knew who'd be accepted into the pack; it was the Alpha's decision, and he'd be the one to call up the names of all the initiates, and he'd link them; they'd officially become members of the pack. On the night of the ceremony, the pack house came alive. Eight hundred wolves were scattered all about the green yard, tables upon tables decorated with green and white tablecloths, with bouquets of white roses placed neatly in the middle. The properly set gold plates, spoons, forks, and knives glowed in the light of the garden lights above. I had put on my favorite dress. It was Cassidy's, but she gave it to me. It was too large; she had a slim figure with chocolate-brown curls framing her face, and she was also shorter than I, at only five-six. The dress was a silver sleeveless dress with a few patches of black lace adorning it. On Cassidy, it was a monstrosity; on me, it was perfect. But not everything could be perfect. The Alpha didn't mention me. I had waited at the far back next to the other teens, and my name never came up. At the end of the ceremony, I was the only one left. It was confusing back then, and painful, being rejected by the whole pack. I wasn't good enough to join them; to them, I was not good enough, and I would never be good enough. I was the last one standing.

I sat by the fire at night as I sipped the hot chocolate I had made, thoughts of the past swarming my mind. It got better as time went by, but the pain—that is, my life—not so much.

I have become a nocturnal creature over the past few years. I slept during the day and worked during the night. The pack house was large—eighteen rooms in total—and only little old me to take care of it all. I was thankful that I was not allowed inside the other pack members' rooms. Wolves can be territorial. I mostly cleaned the common areas, and with eight years of experience, I could do it with my hand behind my back.

It was winter, and the pack house was almost empty. The pack house could get quite chilly around this time. It was also when most of the pack members left the pack house to visit close family.

I stared at the fire as it crackled, bright yellow embers occasionally dancing alongside the warm flame. With a rugged old plaid quilt to keep me cozy, I sat there in silence. I've always thought about my mate. When I was sixteen, Cassidy found out she had a mate, and she left the pack. She didn't say goodbye, but then again, we had drifted apart over the years.

In the depths of my nostalgia-filled heart, I still considered her a friend. At sixteen, I was hopeful, but by nineteen, I knew that I didn't have a mate. Not finding your mate by the time you are nineteen means that your mate has died, or they have chosen another. I desperately wanted to believe that mine had died. Perhaps that would mean that I was not entirely unwanted. It was just that death had decided to take him earlier, and that my ill fortune had struck once again.

With my mug in my hand, I sat there in blissful silence until the fire began to die down and the morning cold began to seep through the cracks of the house. The windows were decorated with morning frost, and the sky turned a bright fusion of pinks, oranges, and peaceful lilacs, and the distant sounds of forest creatures waking to start their day pierced the silence. While the world was waking up to a new day, I was ending mine.

Standing up, I became all too aware of my aching bones; I was tired, and even my body was crying out. The pack must be coming back from the ball at any moment. I had to disappear into my room as quickly as possible if I didn't want to meet them. I had worked tirelessly to make sure the end-of-year ball was a success.

"Don't disappoint me, or I'll have you flogged."

Luna Sarah, the Alpha's mate, had scolded me. I had been in charge of making sure that everything would be perfect. The Alpha King was coming all the way from Europe, and he and his entourage would be staying temporarily at the pack house. I personally couldn't care less; their presence didn't mean much to me.

As I made my way up the stairs and through the wide, long, dimly lit hallway to my room, I smelled a strong scent of the forest and something else, like raindrops and orchids. It was strange yet intoxicating, and my wolf stirred within me. That very smell had been tormenting me all night while I was cleaning. It was faint in the corridor and in the dining area, lingering hollowly around the house, but it was strongest in the Alpha's study.

I did not have the time to find out where that smell came from. I needed to get myself to my room and out of sight before they came back, so reluctantly, I put one step forward and forced my body to move. My wolf, of course, didn't like it. No, she wanted to stay back and find the source of that smell. I had to fight her in order to move my legs, a tough thing to do with a wolf as stubborn as mine.

I had just made it to my room when I heard the sound of cars in the driveway. They were back, and I was in my bedroom—a success.

It wasn't big. My bedroom, that is, was simple: a bed next to the small round window, a wardrobe to my right, and a makeshift bookshelf that I DIY'd out of some old furniture that was lying around in the house. The old pink-and-white floral paper on the walls was worn and, in some places, torn up. The floors were not the vibrant brown like they were in the rest of the house, but a dull brown—yet clean. It was my little sanctuary, and I liked it a lot.

I had a routine. I would walk to the shelf and pick up the book I was currently reading or a book I wanted to read. Then I'd go to my wardrobe and pick out my sleepwear, which was always the same: a large, oversized shirt left behind by guests. Then I'd jump onto my bed and read while gazing at the view of the pack house's backyard that bordered the forest.

They had been noisy coming in; loud footsteps echoed throughout the pack house, some I knew, a few I didn't. I heard the Alpha's voice as well as the Luna's and the guests'. They were talking downstairs. I found it hard to concentrate, and so I decided to watch the snowfall—and that's when I saw him. He was tall and unbearably handsome, with only a button-up shirt and pants. Standing in the middle of the yard, he stood out like a beacon in the white snow with his all-black attire, his hair long and tied roughly at the back.

I could not stop staring. Couldn't he feel the cold? Perhaps he was one of the King's men. That's why he couldn't feel the cold. Lycans were a different breed compared to the other types of wolves. They were the original shifters, made by the Goddess herself. The other shifters, like the Arabian wolves, steppe wolves, Himalayan wolves, and Eurasian wolves, evolved over time. Lycans were stronger, faster, and twice the average size of a normal wolf.

Luna Sarah once said that the King was over a thousand years old. I believed her, which was saying a lot because I absolutely despised the woman. She was right; the Alpha King had been mentioned throughout the history books. He had single-handedly brought the shifter race out of the darkness and mediated peace between the humans, humanoids, and every shifter kind alike; even the mermaid clans were loyal to him. But the mystery man in the snow could not possibly be him. The King was older; this man was young and in his prime.

Fifteen minutes passed as he stood there. I started counting the seconds after the first minute, waiting for him to leave, but he was still there. He occasionally walked about. I could only see the side of his face—his perfectly perfect face—and I tried to memorize it: his sharp nose, the new stubble on his face, and his frown.

After eighteen minutes, something happened. Another man came out. This one wasn't like Mr. Snowman, the name I had given to my mystery man. This one was shorter, with shorter coal-black hair and softer features. He bowed to him, which was odd.

Perhaps my mystery man was his superior, a general or the head warrior. He talked to Mr. Snowman for a while, then made his way back to the pack house. Mr. Snowman followed but hesitated and looked up at my small window, and our eyes met. My heart stopped. He stared at me, and I felt like I was in a head-on collision with the moon and the stars. His mouth curved a bit, and then he walked away. It was then that I came back to reality.