

The King's Mate - Chapter 3 –

It was eight o'clock, and I had been staring out of my window for what seemed like an hour now; the pack house had come to life with the silent footsteps of the pack and chatter. At around seven, I could hear beds creaking, running water, and the pitter-patter of feet below me; by 7:30, I could hear the sounds of silverware clicking together and the rustling of plates with light conversation. By 8:00, I heard the front door open three times and the sound of a car driving out of the driveway, and by 8:30, Mr. Snowman hadn't made it out of the house yet. And as the old, broken-up clock on my wall struck 9:00, I decided to give up all hope and get some rest. I don't know why my heart ached; it wasn't like he had left me at the altar and run off with another woman he didn't know existed, and I...

Tap.

The small, faint sound dragged me out of my thoughts. I opened my eyes and looked around. Nothing. It was silent. Had I imagined it?

Tap tap tap.

And there it was again, and this time, I knew where it was coming from. Who could possibly be throwing rocks? Maybe it's Angela, Luna's niece. She must be playing outside, and they normally throw things. I found that little child as unbearable as her aunt, though she does hate the snow...

Tap. Tap.

The tapping had become unbearable; I sat up and craned my neck to look out of the window. Perhaps I could shoo that spoiled demon away and actually get some sleep. I had been expecting a tiny brunette with bouncy curls and a bow on her head as I stared out of the window. I was wrong. Instead of a child, I saw a man, and a handsome one at that. My mystery man had been the culprit behind all the tapping. That excited me. He stared into my eyes, and I into his, for what seemed like a series of lifetimes, and then he smiled, and I gulped—hands sweaty, pulse racing. This was what I had been imagining in my head all night, and now it was actually happening. I knew this wasn't a dream. For one, I have never experienced a good dream ever since I came to the Red Hallow Pack.

Without breaking his gaze, he held up his hand and gestured to me, pointing at the forest. Then, in the next second, he was gone. He had disappeared into the forest, and I could feel my soul return to my body and my shallow breath calm down.

Did he want me to follow him?

I am not very fond of breaking the rules; it isn't that I am afraid of the consequences, but instead, I find no thrill in breaking them. I stood up, my soft, bony feet landing atop the dull brown wooden floor. I paced around, my mind in a whirl with almost a thousand ways this could end, and nine hundred and ninety-nine of them said that this would end really badly. The Alpha knew that disobeying him again would most definitely get me more than a broken nose, but I was willing to risk it.

Damned if you do, damned if you don't, Genesis.

I had made up my mind. I would accept any punishment the pack would give me, just if it meant being close to him, even if for a while. And so I took the crucial first steps of my act of rebellion and opened the door at 9 a.m., when the pack was awake, and the King was somewhere in the pack house. To go to the forest where I had been forbidden, to see a man who perhaps was a King's guard.

So many rules broken, yet so much happiness to gain. I had made a plan. I would sneak out through the kitchen's back door. In the eight years I have been living in the pack house, I have found one simple thing: the kitchen is almost always empty. In a large pack such as this, it isn't hard to find that your favorite bag of chips or yogurt has been stolen, so most of the members tend to store their treats in their rooms.

Aside from the pack of females who gathered around in the kitchen to cook lunch and supper, it was pretty quiet, and they were only there for a few hours at a time.

But I needed him. It seems crazy to say such a ludicrous thing, but it wasn't a lie; my wolf craved him. She hadn't shown much interest in any male over the years. Even the crush I had on Noah was all me; of course, my wolf wanted none of that. She was comfortable sitting that love adventure out and watching me ultimately plummet into a dark, deep sinkhole of depression after Noah had shut me out of his life and forgotten about me. I licked my wounds quietly, with her occasionally nudging me to cheer up. Without her, I would be nothing. We both agreed that we'd entertain the idea of the mystery man a bit, but if he had a mate, we would have to back away.

As I walked past the rows of gray-painted doors of the pack rooms and down the rustic wooden stairs, I couldn't help the excitement coursing through my veins. I was smiling. I had almost forgotten what true joy was. The kitchen had been empty. Finally, I walked past the counter, just three inches from freedom.

"Hey, it's you?"

I gasped. In my little fit of happiness, I hadn't noticed him standing behind the counter—the wolf from last night. He had a carton of milk in his hand.

"I guess I keep surprising you," he chuckled. "I might as well introduce myself. I'm Andrew. What's—"

An audible laugh stopped him from completing his sentence. I knew that laugh, and just like that, I bolted and hid behind the pantry closet doors. I found myself praying to the Goddess that she'd pass by, but I was wrong. The door flung open, and Luna Sarah came in with two other women. She didn't look intimidating; at five feet, the woman could be considered more petite than the average wolf. With shoulder-length copper hair, pale skin, and soft, doll-like features, she didn't look like a person who could cause any harm. I knew better. Goddess, why did she have to be here now?

The woman would undoubtedly cause me a lot of grief when she found me here, out and about in the daytime, in the kitchen with a Lycan. She wasn't fond of competition; by that, I mean she despised anyone who would talk to her guests without her permission. She believed that everyone was like her, a social-climbing snob who desperately wanted to be high up in shifter society, and if she had her way, she would be.

I couldn't have picked a worse place to hide. The pantry wasn't the best choice; for one, the pantry door was made purely of plantation shutters. I hoped the darkness helped, but maybe she wouldn't notice me. Andrew, as he had presented himself, had remained still, confused by my sudden speed as I scrambled to hide myself. I wonder how I looked in his eyes when I ran—probably like a little duck trying to catch up with its mother. I wasn't graceful at all, though I could be, if I wanted to and with the right motivation. He must think I'm mad, but that's okay with me as long as he keeps his Lycan mouth shut. I have no plans of getting caught, and his willingness to stay silent is the only thing keeping me from seeing Mystery Man.

"Oh, hello," Luna Sarah said to Andrew, who still looked quite confused.

My heart sank; he was going to give me up, and I'd be flogged—or worse, I wouldn't have the chance to meet Mr. Snowman. It was then that the Luna sniffed the air, and I held my breath, willing myself to stay as still as possible. She had smelled my scent; of course, she had. That woman was the Alpha's daughter. Her senses were above normal for a werewolf, and by the way her face twisted in disgust and anger, she knew it was me.

"Luna, I smell it too," one of the women with her, Rachel, said.

Ratchet Rachel, as I called her, was sniffing the air too, her eyes contorting into a sadistic form of glee. She enjoyed it when the Luna tore into someone; I could almost say she lived for it. She was always by the Luna's side, whispering in her ear. Everyone in the pack was wary of that plump red pig. She was a bad one. She had single-handedly sent eight women to the torture chambers just because they had said the Alpha was having an affair with Laura, the boa shifter who lived at the edge of the forest. It wasn't pretty. The Alpha had to step in and abolish the sentencing the Luna had made—one hundred lashes each. That hardly seemed fair, considering it was the truth; the Alpha had been having an affair and still was.

She turned to look at Andrew, who was now looking at them with his head tilted to the side. It was still amazing how her face changed, how she could look so sweet and kind. It made me sick—such a vile creature who was really a good actress. Even I had to admit that. To the unsuspecting, she could come off as the most loving person in the world. Most people believed it, too, and judging by the way her eyes glanced at Andrew, she was planning to make him see that as well.

"Have you seen a dark-haired girl down here, by any chance?" she asked.

I felt tears sting my eyes, and rage flooded my bones. That heifer knew but wanted to pretend, wanted to show me her power. She wanted Andrew to give me up; it would be an even bigger crime if he did. I'd be harassing the Lycans, the Alpha King's guard, and Andrew would undoubtedly tell her. This was it. I had lost, and she had won. It left a bitter taste in me.

Andrew stood in silence for what felt like forever.

"No, I don't believe I have,"