

The King's Mate - Chapter 4 –

What just happened? It took me a moment for my insanely overwhelmed mind to grasp the situation before me; Andrew, a Lycan in the service of the King, had just lied to the Luna, the wife of the Alpha. The Alpha who owned the very land he was standing on, for me!

For a girl he did not know—a girl who had just made him a sandwich in the dead of night because he had said he was hungry—yet here was the Luna of a pack. A Luna who had opened the doors to her home and welcomed him in with open arms, and was the King's host. He lied to save an anonymous girl, and I would now see him in a different light forever.

“Are you sure? I think I can smell her around here,” she said as she scanned the kitchen. I took a few steps back, hiding behind the shadows in the pantry, praying that the darkness would hide me enough even from their sharp eyes. Then again, she did know that I was here; she was simply making a show of things to make me nervous, which I really was—a bundle of nerves—though she had never expected Andrew to play dumb and actually hide the truth from her. She was mad, really mad; I could hear it in her tone.

“Are you calling me a liar?” Andrew let out a low, indignant growl that made me shiver. He was warning her. The growl was a clear sign not to press on; even the Luna acknowledged that as she bowed her head in submission, her heart picking up speed. I could hear it, the sound bursting into my eardrums. She was scared of him, and I felt smug about it. She looked toward the other females standing close to her, no doubt giving them a signal to leave, and they did. It was as if I could breathe again.

It was about time someone stood up to her, but it took a Lycan's threat to make her retreat. If it were any other pack member, I'd be in the dungeons—weak, starved, and beaten to a pulp. My wolf would heal me, though, but that didn't mean it wouldn't hurt.

I stood in the pantry for a few minutes, waiting until the coast was clear, when I opened the door to reveal a very smug-looking Lycan staring straight into my eyes. I hate how they all do that. Must they do that? Must they disarm me with their eyes?

Stupid male Lycans and their stupid eye magic, I cursed internally.

“She's gone now, so you don't have to worry. There's no need to hide behind cupboards anymore.” Andrew sulked as he opened the fridge again. It was then that I noticed he hadn't put the milk back.

“Does she hurt you?” His voice sounded a little concerned.

What do I tell him? Should I tell him how I am practically the slave of the house, forced to live in the shadows, only coming out at night to cook and clean for people who don't even know my name, despite my living in this darkness-filled hellhole for the past eight years of my life? The rest of the pack has so much, yet somehow, I have nothing. That I get so lonely and sad, and as the years pass by, I grow more and more detached from myself; I don't think I even know who I am anymore. No identity—just an irrelevant person.

I have had my share of misery in the pack house, courtesy of the Luna, of course. I still remember everything: the beatings, the long nights working tirelessly tending to her son's friends, the constant looks of disapproval. It wasn't that bad. That I could handle. I could handle the long nights of cleaning, the continuous rants, and the evil death glares thrown my way. What I couldn't stand was being humiliated in front of my kind. I may not have turned, I may never will, but my wolf is still there—still alive.

So how could I explain? I do not think there are words that would describe my situation clearly. There's so much to say and so little time, so much baggage to unpack, and so much to learn about myself. How can I tell someone who I am when I don't even know who I am?

And so I did what I always do: I gave him a small smile. It was evident by the way he raised his eyebrows that he did not believe me, but before he could say another word, I bolted out of the kitchen and into the snow. I know I was a bit rude to him—he had just saved my hide—yet I ran again. It seems like all I do these days is run away like a coward.

There was still time. I knew for a fact that I'd see him again soon. After all, they were not leaving until the next full moon, which was twelve days away. Twelve more days to see Andrew and twelve more days to have my mystery man around me.

The forest was silent. Not a creature was out—not a bird nor a hare. The only sound echoing through the brown, leafless trees and snow-covered ground was the crunch of my feet as I took slow but steady steps deeper and deeper into the dead of winter.

My mother used to love the forest. I'd often follow her, and we'd walk around, sometimes playing hide-and-seek; she'd always let me win, of course. I felt a sort of comfort among the trees; I felt like I wasn't alone. Sometimes, it was as if I could hear them whisper to me, calling me. When I was little, I was convinced I could talk to them, and they'd talk back to me. Apart from Noah and Cassidy, the trees had been my friends. And then everything changed. And just like that, I couldn't hear the trees whisper; I couldn't see the wind.

"You came," a voice said from behind me, and I felt a shiver run through my spine. Then I smelled it again—raindrops and orchids—the scent that had left me blissfully enchanted for a while. It came from him. I wasn't too shocked that the scent and the man—both of whom I had been obsessing over—were one and the same. The smell belonged to him; of course, it did. I turned around, the snow giving way beneath my abrupt movement as it scattered around me.

He was leaning against a dead tree, a wisp of delight in his eyes. Had my presence put that there? Was he happy, or feeling triumphant that I had listened to him? I could not tell, but then again, I did not care. He was even more perfect up close—his sea-green eyes, the black tangled mop of curls tied lazily behind him by the Goddess. Even the way he dressed made me flutter. I wondered how his muscles would feel beneath my palms; his skin was tan and looked rough, with light sprinkles of hair adorning it. He looked divine, and I wanted him. I wanted him to be mine for all eternity, and I would make sure of it.

"You're staring," he accused teasingly.

"I know," I said, surprising myself with my abrupt lack of shame. I had almost forgotten how my voice sounded. Years of submission had made me barely recognize myself. His gaze brought my spirit out.

“Oh,” he began, smirking a bit, finding humor in what I had just said. “Well then, aren’t you going to tell me your name?”

“You haven’t asked,” I retorted, and he took a step closer, our eyes never leaving each other.

“Right then. What is your name?”

“Genesis.”

“Genesis, Genesis,” he repeated my name, trying it on for size. “An odd name. You look like a Hannah.”

“You look like a Richard, but I’m not one to judge. A name is a name; it’s the person that has value,” I said, my viper tongue challenging him. To say that I found this thrilling was an understatement, and judging by the way we were now inches apart, I could see the slight smile he was trying to suppress.

“Genesis is a good name. It suits you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Snowman.”

His face shut down at the mention of the nickname I had given him, and I couldn’t help but smile at his astonished expression.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Mr. Snowman—that’s what I call you,” I said. “You tend to stay out in the snow, and you hardly move around, like a snowman.”

“I have a name, you know.”

“No, I don’t. I’ve told you mine, yet you haven’t told me yours.”

He stared at me for a brief moment before speaking.

“Fair enough. It’s Killian. My name is Killian.”

“Killian, Killian... an odd name, but it will have to do,” I said cheekily, repeating his earlier jest back to him. He laughed, and I smiled. I felt like I was back to my old self again.

“Well, Genesis, I didn’t see you around. I feel like I’ve met all the pack members—even the children—yet for some reason, I haven’t met you before. Why is that?”

Should I tell him? I hesitated. What would he think of me if he found out that I was just a slave, the wandering cleaning ghost of the pack house, an orphaned Lycan in the service of werewolves—a breed considered inferior to hers, yet she was the slave? What could I say except the truth?

“It’s because I’m not part of the pack. I’m a slave. I was brought here and made to work as one. I take care of the pack house. I’m only allowed out at night.”

There was a moment of silence. He looked like he was thinking about many things, then he spoke, his voice firm yet gentle.

“Do you have no mate?” I knew he’d ask that.

“No, I haven’t found him yet. I don’t think I ever will.”

“You could run away. There is no shame in living as a rogue.”

“I can’t. I’ve never shifted before—some sort of defect.”

“What do you mean by defect? Don’t you werewolves shift instinctively by your thirteenth birthday?” he asked. His eyes were now gazing intensely at me; he looked almost wounded by what I had revealed. It pained me.

“I’m not a werewolf.”

“Then what are you?” he asked, his voice now a whisper.

We were nose to nose, and I could feel his warm breath against my pale, freezing skin. His eyes scanned my face, and his heartbeat was steady, soothing, lulling me into a false sense of security. I was breathing through sheer will alone, and my body grew hot.

“I’m a Lycan.”