



# The King's Mate

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult, Paranormal

**Description:** King Aleo needed a mate. Tradition meant that all the female shifters in the kingdom came to the castle to pledge their love for him in the hopes that they would be chosen to be his forever. However, Piper arrived at the ceremony with another problem at hand and she fully intended to challenge everything the king believed about their traditions. Humans were forbidden to mate with shifters, but Aleo's love for Piper was not something he could ignore. Will Aleo be forced into a custom that rips him from his true love forever? Or will the King be able to change the rules before the matching ceremony begins?

**Total Pages (Source):** 15

# Page 1

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## Prologue

“Get your hands off me! I didn’t do anything wrong!”

Piper Marsh lifted her head from the desk she’d been hunched over for the past three hours. With a quick glimpse out the window, she saw the king’s emblem and hurried to the door. Struggling in one of the king’s guard’s grip, her father protested his arrest.

“What are you doing?” she yelled at the men. “Let him go!”

A guard stopped her. “Your father was reported trespassing in the village. A lion shifter said a human fitting his description was harassing them which you know is against the rules.”

“I did no such thing, Piper,” her father objected. “They’re lying.”

She stared at the guard. Unfortunately, she knew all the king’s guards a little more than she wanted. They knew her quite well, too. The one standing before her leered at her a little too much. The damn past was coming back to bite her in the ass.

“What do I have to do to make this right? Pay a fine?”

His gaze raked over her body. “A fine isn’t going to fix the issue.”

She scowled at him. “Then I’ll have a meeting with the king.”

“Good luck with that. The matching ceremony is in a few days. You can’t get anywhere near the palace unless you’re a shifter. And we all know you’re not.” The guard reached out to touch her arm, and Piper flinched. “You’re smart if you’re scared of our kind. I could have you if I wanted. I could also kill you with a flick of my wrist. Let this be a lesson to you. Don’t cause trouble in the village. Other lion shifters aren’t so nice.”

Piper watched as they carted her father off. He yelled back at her about his innocence. He shouted that the king would understand, that she just needed to speak with him.

She watched them until they left her sight.

The king.

She ran her fingers through her hair as she thought about their situation now. Piper didn’t know how the king would react to her coming to see him, but he was her best and only shot of getting her father out of the dungeon. If she had to suck up her pride and face the king, then so be it. She’d do whatever it took.

## Page 2

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### Chapter One

“Ah, shit.”

Aleo sat on his throne staring at the human waiting in line before him. The matching ceremony was for lion shifters only. Females from all over the kingdom came to the castle to try to appeal to the king for the potential to mate him. The ceremony was ancient, and everyone knew the rules. Humans weren't allowed.

So what the fuck was she doing here?

Her sea green eyes met his in pure defiance across the room. The strands of her long brunette hair would feel silky in his grasp. She wore a white dress that left little to the imagination, and he was fairly sure that if he stared hard enough, he could see the dusty rose color of her nipples. His mouth watered to taste them, to pinch them and suck them like he had every fucking right. As if she could read his mind, she folded her arms over her chest. They'd known each other for two years. When they'd been together it had been intense. His father had put a stop to them seeing each other when he found out things had grown serious between them. But it didn't stop him from fantasizing about her. The woman was a real piece of work, and his cock hardened in his pants just thinking about it.

“What is it, sir?”

He didn't say anything as he kept his attention on the woman in white. Hell, she was gorgeous. Her pouty lips were rosy and plump. He'd pictured them wrapped around his cock more than once over the past few years, and the image of it now only made

him harder. She had a look of innocence that he found so damn alluring. He knew from experience though that she was far from the image she portrayed. Forbidden. He knew it. She knew it. Everyone knew it. His cock, however, didn't get that fucking memo.

"Ah." Keenan, a royal guard, grinned as he saw the troublemaker wreaking havoc on King Aleo. Hell, everyone saw it, even the females that he was able to be matched with. "I'm guessing you want me to get rid of her?"

He scowled at his friend, and Keenan held up a hand. In more bold defiance, she stepped out of the line and walked toward him, completely disregarding the rules altogether. Several of his potential mates glared at her while Aleo couldn't help scratching his chin in amusement. She was one hell of a woman, and it fucking sucked that she had to remain completely off-limits.

"I need to talk to you," she said. She stopped at the bottom of the stairs leading to his throne. When he didn't say anything to her, she lifted her dress and climbed them. Keenan made a half-hearted attempt to stop her, but Aleo held out a hand, curious as to what she intended to do. Nobody approached him. It was a well-known rule for meeting with the king.

"My father has been arrested by your goon squad. I want him back."

Aleo blinked a few times. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. He was in the village. There was supposed to be a peace agreement between your kind and humans, but your goons arrested him for trespassing." She narrowed her eyes at him. "I don't know what kind of game you want to play, but I can tell you right now, you won't win."

Threatening a king was a serious offense. The maximum punishment was life

imprisonment. How the hell did he land himself in this position with her? “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but I will look in to it.”

“That’s it? You’ll look in to it?”

“As you can tell, I’m kind of busy right now.”

“Kind of busy? Like when we were in the cabin together and you stepped outside to talk with your father?”

Yeah. She was never going to let that go. Thoughts of her naked body facing him filled his mind before he could stop them. He’d been wild and carefree back then. He’d also been a prince without any responsibilities. When he’d whisked her away to a cabin in the middle of nowhere to have his fill of her, his father found them. Aleo had tied her to the bed and planned to have his wicked way with her, but instead, he’d had to indulge his father’s command to meet him outside. Not only did he get a lecture by the king on the forbidden nature of humans mixing with shifters, but he’d left her naked and exposed with the rest of the guard. His men still talked about her. A smile tilted his lips. Two years had passed, and she was still pissed at him for it.

“Being royalty is more difficult than you think.”

She jumped on him, reaching for his throat. Aleo grabbed her, quickly forcing her arms to her sides before she could do any real damage. Once he captured her, he motioned for his guards to clear the room. Not only did she threaten him, but she tried to strangle him, too. The people would demand punishment if he wasn’t careful, and he’d have to do something to keep the peace.

“I know you’re fucking crazy, but don’t ever do something so stupid like that again.” Pressing his forehead against hers, he panted against her lips. His fucking hard-on didn’t help the situation any. His fingers wrapped around her tiny wrists tightly.

Because he could, he forced her arms above her head as he pressed her body in to the wall behind him, pinning her in place.

“Or what?” she asked boldly. Her nipples poked out beneath the thin white dress, begging for his attention. Her breasts brushed against him, and he held back a groan while she struggled in his hold.

“You won’t like it.”

It would be so easy to fuck her right there. Her dress left little to his imagination. A simple tug would have her breasts bared to his gaze. She wore nothing underneath, and he could have her open to him within seconds, plunging deep into her wet warmth before she even had time to protest.

He caught a whiff of her scent and nearly groaned out loud. The predicaments he found himself in were intriguing. He’d seen hundreds of women, some were gorgeous, some were friendly. None were like the firecracker standing before him. It’d been so hard to keep himself away from her for two years, and it seemed even harder now to not lean in and taste her lips.

“Get that stupid expression off your face,” she commented, drawing his attention back to the present situation. “I’m not here to mate you or bed you. I want my father released. I couldn’t care less about you.”

“I said I’d look into it.” His attention focused on her pouty lips. “But if you think you’re going to come to me making demands, threatening me, and attacking me, to get what you want, you’ve clearly forgotten who I am. My father would have had you executed.”

“Would you rather me show you my tits?” She shimmied a bit in his hold.

He smirked before he could stop himself. “I think you need some time to cool off. That temper of yours is getting the best of you. Quite frankly, I want to wring your neck myself.”

She narrowed her eyes but didn’t say anything. What the hell did he do with her? Besides stealing her away to his room, there wasn’t much else he could do at the moment. His potential mates had seen her attack him. Most of the people in the kingdom knew she was human. Piper Marsh had a reputation thanks to his brief relationship with her and his father’s intervention. He had to punish her somehow for the day’s events.

He glanced over his shoulder at Keenan, who did his best to keep his expression neutral.

“I think Piper Marsh needs some time to cool down in the dungeon.” He passed her off to Keenan. “King’s orders.”

“Yes, sir.” He took her out the side door.

Scrubbing a hand over his face, Aleo tried to focus on greeting his guests. Behind Piper’s defiance was a serious amount of hurt. Aleo knew it was because of him. Not only with the shit that happened years ago, but with the matching ceremony, too. He didn’t know what the issue was with her father, but he’d fix it. Taking a moment, he adjusted himself. It wasn’t so easy for him to get over her either. He kept his distance, after his father had threatened him with exile, but thoughts of her never stopped entering his mind and driving up his libido.

How the hell did he live with a woman from the chosen line-up, when there was only one that made him burn? He sat down on the throne and motioned for the doors to be opened again. The women before him came and offered their best in the hopes that they’d appeal to him and be chosen. Hell, he didn’t even pay attention. It pissed him



off that Piper had defied him. He also found himself liking it more than he should. The sexual frustration alone had him damn near ready to walk to the dungeon himself, lay her on the flimsy mattress in the cell and fuck her until he got his fill. He tried to pay attention to the women before him, but the sassy Piper Marsh was the only woman on his mind.

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### Chapter Two

Piper stepped into the dungeon, scowling at Keenan as he locked the door behind her.

“Hey, I’m just following orders. I had nothing to do with you attacking him in front of a roomful of people.”

She rolled her eyes. Aleo was the king now. He’d been a party boy up until his father’s death nearly a year ago and spared no feelings about how much he loved the ladies. He also never shied away from the attention he gave human females either, much to his father’s dismay. It was forbidden for shifters to be with humans, but Aleo always did whatever the fuck he wanted.

Today, she took her cue from him.

She rubbed her arms as she stared at the guard. “So he’s going to keep me down here while he picks a mate upstairs?”

“Probably.”

“And then what?” She tilted her head to the side. “He’s going to beat me? Kill me? What exactly is my punishment?”

Keenan glanced to the right. “He’ll probably forget about you. You can’t be a thorn in his side if you’re out of sight and out of mind.”

“Right.” She folded her arms over her chest. She knew the king’s thoughts about her.

She'd felt his reaction when he pushed her up against the wall. "Don't you have something better to do? Wipe his ass, maybe? Isn't that your glorious job? The royal ass wiper?" She paused a moment. "Oh, wait. No. It's royal ass kisser. I forgot."

Keenan's face turned red. "I don't know why he doesn't just end you. You're not worth the trouble."

He left her alone, and she glanced around at her new home. It was less than stellar, but she'd stayed in far worse. The mattress was bunched up in the corner of the cage with no blankets or pillows. Once she found out where her father was, then she'd work on getting them both out of the dungeon.

Sitting on the mattress, she thought about the first time she'd met Aleo. He'd been a pretty boy back then, not that he wasn't that now. He used his looks to get whatever he wanted and thought he was damn well entitled. It pissed her off mostly, even though she would never admit he had an effect on her.

She'd been one of those dumb girls back then, too. Fell victim to his charm and ended up in his bed. It fueled her temper just thinking about it. She relived the embarrassment of that night every time she saw a royal guard. Aleo had left her there, naked, for everyone to see. She'd never had so many men stare at her naked body before. It had taken a while, but after screaming at them to let her go, one of the guards finally cut her loose.

Piper stared at the torch hanging on the wall. Aleo hadn't protected her. He'd been so angry with his father that she ceased to even matter to him. It was the cold dose of reality she'd needed to get her head back on straight.

And she was still pissed about it.

"Well, look who got herself arrested." Tito, a king's guard, smiled as he peered in her

cage. “I’m assuming the king doesn’t know you’re down here?”

She snorted. “He put me down here.”

The guard laughed. “I never thought I’d see that day. He’s had a hard-on for you since he first saw you. You must have done something really bad.”

“Do me a favor. Tell me where you’re keeping my dad.”

He glanced toward the left. “You mean that old man that keeps begging us to meet the king?”

“Where is he?”

“Don’t worry about it. He’s in good hands.” The guy laughed as he walked off.

Piper chewed on her lower lip before standing. “Dad? Dad, can you hear me?”

She listened and heard nothing. Huffing a breath, she went to the corner of the cell and peered through the bars. Cage after cage went for as far as she could see. There weren’t that many people in the dungeon, and she figured that her father was being kept as far away from her as they could get.

So how did she get herself out of the mess she’d gotten herself into? When Piper had gone to the castle, she’d fully intended to seduce Aleo into giving her what she wanted. One look at him and she understood why women came from all over the fucking land with the hopes that he’d chose them as his mate. Hell, like he really even had a choice. They put names into a cup, and the shaman drew one out. It was completely out of his hands, though she supposed he had some say in which names went into the fucking cup. He wouldn’t mate some ugly girl with missing teeth or a hairy birthmark. He was more superficial than that.

And his personality sucked.

After sneaking into the castle, she'd stood in line like the other women, convincing herself that she could do it. She could walk up to him calmly and offer herself in exchange for her father's freedom. Ha. That lasted all of five seconds when she got into the throne room. Flashbacks of his naked body moving along hers were enough to get her hot and bothered, but her temper got the best of her.

When she had stepped out of line, she'd had every intention of talking to him. Yet, he always had a cocky smirk on his face, and she wanted to rip his head off. She probably should have felt bad about attacking him. That alone could get her some serious time in the dungeon. She didn't want to admit that her body still tingled from him pressing her up against the wall. He smelled like pineapples since they were his favorite fruit. He'd probably had a few before she got to the throne room. Maybe one of his little bitches had brought him a fruit as a way to buy his love.

She snarled, though she didn't know why she was so damn pissed off. He claimed he didn't know what happened with her father when she knew he was aware of everything. He was the fucking king, for crying out loud. The feigned ignorance was another thing that set her off, and she couldn't really be surprised that she found herself in the dungeon.

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Bored and cold, she stayed in her cell for nearly an hour before Keenan appeared. He unlocked the cage and opened the door.

“The king wants to see you.”

She glanced around and shrugged. “He knows where I am. He put me here.”

The guard narrowed his eyes. “Do you want out, or not?”

“I’m fine where I am.” She pulled her leg beneath her. “Go bug someone else.”

Keenan cursed and slammed the door shut. She watched him walk away in frustration knowing that Aleo wouldn’t be happy. She was probably the only woman he’d ever met that didn’t cater to his demands. Hell, she came so damn close that one night, but fortunately, his father had knocked some reason in to her. Aleo showed her who he truly was, and that was something she needed to stay away from.

A few moments later, Aleo came around the corner, stopping at her cage. “I trust your accommodations meet your high standards.”

Piper arched an eyebrow at him. “The king does know where he puts the lowly humans. Shocker.”

“Your father’s been released.” He cleared his throat. “It was a misunderstanding, and it’s been taken care of. You, however, have some serious offenses. Threatening the king. Attacking the king.”

“They were nothing you didn’t deserve.”

He smiled. “I’m going to let you make it up to me.”

“Really?” She glanced around. “I’d rather stay in the dungeon.”

He motioned for the guard to unlock the door. Piper felt an immediate change in power when he stepped inside the small cell with her. If he wanted, he could hurt her really bad. Nobody would protect her. Nobody would save her. He was a fucking lion shifter, for crying out loud. Nobody went against the king. Some rumors floated around the town about his temper. The beast inside him was far from tame, and she was fairly sure she didn’t want to see it in full effect.

“It’s not an option.” He stared at her. His dark hair was spiked from his fingers. She had noticed he ran his fingers through his short hair when he was frustrated or annoyed. He wore a white button-down shirt with black pants that highlighted his thick muscles and powerful body. He did have a great body.

“What exactly do you want me to do?”

“You’re going to be my personal servant. You will attend to all my private matters such as bathing and my nighttime routine. You will also make sure my bed is to my specifications.”

Piper snorted. “And if I don’t?”

“You will.” He said it with an air of authority she didn’t question. “Starting now. It’s been a long day. We have the matching ceremony tomorrow. I need a bath and a good night’s sleep.”

He stepped to the side and motioned for her to leave the cage. Being the king’s

servant couldn't be that bad. She'd rather spend her time in the dungeon, but as long as her father was out of that dreaded place, then she really didn't care. She'd be Aleo's servant until he found his mate, and then she could go home like the normal human that she was.



### Chapter Three

Aleo smiled while Piper poured the warm water into the bathtub. She hated her new task, and he fucking loved it. He intended to have her hands on him as much as he could without actually fucking her. Now that he'd met all the potential mates, he had to behave himself on a personal level. It looked bad to his future bride if he was screwing around with another woman the night before the shaman selected her. He didn't think Piper would go for it anyway. She was still pissed. A night he relived over and over in his mind all the time.

"You've got your water. There's the soap. I'm going to the laundry to get some clean sheets." She met his eyes with a boldness he rarely ever saw in a female. "Is there anything else you want?"

"Undress me."

She blinked a few times. "What?"

He held out his arms. The look on her face told him to go to hell. Instead of saying anything, she moved forward and started to undo his shirt.

"I'm not scared of you," she commented. "You may be a shifter and the king, but that means nothing to me."

"Really?" He watched as she opened his shirt and pushed it off his shoulders. Her hands lingered along his chest, her gaze taking in the view before she finally looked up at him. She wasn't completely immune to him. The interest was there, and it hurt

to think about it.

“Really.” She brushed the backs of her knuckles along his stomach before gripping the fly of his pants. He held his breath while she undid his pants. “I may have fallen victim to your scam two years ago, but I’m wiser now.”

She shoved his pants down, freeing his cock from the confinements. Aleo watched as she bent slightly, her mouth inches from his dick as she tugged the fabric down his muscular thighs. It damn near killed him to entertain the idea of bending her over the bed and fucking her senseless. If she kept licking her damn lips when she stared at his cock, he probably would.

Meeting his eyes, she said, “Completely unaffected.”

He stepped out of his pants and walked toward the bathtub. “Good. Then you have no problem getting the soap and bathing me.”

He didn’t bother looking at her as he stepped into the bathtub. He sank back in the hot water and closed his eyes. He listened while she rummaged around. Then the slap of the wet washcloth came against his chest. Meeting her gaze, he stared into her eyes.

She’d push every button he had if he let her. He gripped her wrist and held her to him. “The nicer you are, the nicer I’ll be. Remember that when you have one of your fits.”

“What else can you really do to me?” she stared into his eyes, almost as a challenge. “I’m already your slave.”

He brushed her nipple with the knuckle of his finger. It beaded with his faint touch. “I have a creative imagination. Don’t test me unless you’re really prepared.”

She smeared the soap along his chest. His fingers left the fabric of her dress wet, making her dusty rose nipple visible. She wasn't completely unaffected. If he wanted, he could have pulled her in the bathtub with him and kissed her senseless.

"You smell good," he commented. "Sweet."

She dipped her hands beneath the water to wrap the cloth around his cock. He moaned softly as he laid his head back against the bathtub. Two strokes of the washcloth had him hard. Her lips were inches from his eyes as she bent over the bathtub, her breasts rubbing along his arm.

It would be so easy to give in and take her. He thought about what it would feel like to bury himself inside her, fucking her like he wanted. Nothing sounded better in that moment.

"I guess you want me to wash your ass, too?" she said.

He blinked his eyes open. "What?"

"I can't wash your ass if you're sitting on it."

Instead of saying anything, he reached up and gripped her neck. Staring into her eyes, he leaned in. Her lips parted slightly from the shock, and he pressed his lips against hers. He kissed her aggressively, exploring her mouth with his tongue. She propped herself above him, half leaning into the tub and half out. His body felt on fire. Desire he'd been fighting all the fucking day for her flooded through him. She made his head spin. Made him think and do crazy things he wouldn't normally do. She had him so completely on edge he couldn't think of anything but what it would feel like to have her. To make her his.

When he pulled back, he let her go slowly. The defiance had left her eyes, and he

almost missed it. He liked a woman that challenged him. Most of his youth had been spent seeking out women who flattered him, but he liked Piper's indifference. He liked knowing that no matter how hard she fought it, she wanted him, too.

"Get me a towel," he said letting her go.

Piper stood and grabbed the towel she'd brought in for him. "I'll go get some clean sheets for the bed."

He stood, his cock erect from the teasing. After dabbing his arms and chest, he wrapped the towel around his waist. Piper had moved to the side, watching him. The top of her dress was damp from the bath, and he could see her hard nipples and the outline of her luscious breasts.

His idea of not fucking her backfired. Every time she was around, his entire body knew about it. He wanted nothing more than to spend his last night as a single man buried inside the one woman that he could never have. She cleared her throat and walked across the room. Before she could leave, he grabbed her, pulling her back to him.

"Nobody gives a fuck about clean sheets." He stared into her eyes. "If I told you I wanted to fuck you, what would your response be?"

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Piper's gaze darted around the room. "Your future mate wouldn't like that."

"No." He shook his head. "But she's not here, and you are."

The slender column of her neck had faint marks from his fingers. He liked how possessive it looked. "Take your dress off."

"I don't think..."

"I didn't tell you to think. I told you to take your dress off. Now."

Piper moved away from him. He watched her a moment as she walked across the room. She turned to face him. "No."

The defiance was back. His pulse sped up. "No?"

"No." She propped her hand on her hip.

He stalked toward her. "That sassy little mouth and that revealing dress have had me hard all day. You've awakened the beast in me, sweetheart. Now you're going to learn what that really means."

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### Chapter Four

Aleo pushed her against the wall, spreading her thighs with one of his knees. Piper wanted to deny that he had any effect on her, but she couldn't. Her thighs were wet from her moisture, and he hadn't even touched her yet. He gripped her wrists and pinned them above her head with one of his hands. She sucked in a breath of air right before he leaned in to kiss her. He swiped his tongue along her lower lip then tugged on it with his teeth. She moaned into his mouth as she closed her eyes, melting into his kiss.

Despite her reservations, he felt good against her. She kissed him as hard as he kissed her. Ever since he'd asked her to bathe him, her body had been on fire. One touch of his knuckle against her nipple and she was ready to lift her dress and sink down on his thick cock, the past be damned.

He gripped her throat and pushed her away from him. "That pretty little mouth is begging to be filled."

Piper stared at him anxiously waiting for what he wanted to do next. He pushed her to her knees and pulled the towel off. Staring at his thick dick had her mouth watering. She wasn't the most experienced person when it came to sex, but she wasn't the most innocent either. He gripped the base of his cock and angled it to her mouth. With one hand on the back of her head, he pushed his cock against her lips, rubbing them lightly before sinking into her mouth. Piper closed her eyes and sucked him.

Groaning, he watched as she glanced up at him. Piper moved along his swollen shaft, taking as much of him into her mouth as she could. The tip touched the back of her

throat, and Aleo's eyes darkened. She did it again, and he growled. Piper felt a sense of power as she watched pleasure flood his face. He rarely ever let his guard down around her. She'd never truly had the upper hand. Resting her hands on his hairy thighs, she worked his thick shaft with her mouth. Then his fingers tangled in her hair as he thrust.

She closed her eyes, moaning as she sucked him faster. Her fingers clutched his ass as the tip of his cock bumped the back of her throat. She swallowed, drawing a strangled groan from deep inside his chest. She did it again before he yanked her head back and pulled his cock free from her lips.

"You like sucking my cock?" He stared down into her eyes. His free hand stroked her throat. He touched her skin, taking his time to caress her chin and then her lower lip. "You like feeling as though you have control over me?"

Piper swallowed. "I don't?"

He shook his head slowly. "Open your mouth."

She stared at his cock. It was covered in her saliva. He tugged on her hair, yanking her head back so that she only looked at him. When he didn't say anything, she stroked his thigh.

"I'm not going to tell you again. Open."

Piper's lips parted slowly. With his free hand, he gripped his wet cock and pushed it inside her mouth. He grasped her neck and tugged on her hair, while his cock bumped the back of her throat, repeatedly. He fucked her mouth like a madman, forcing her to take all of him. Her eyes watered. She dug her nails in his thighs.

"You like my cock down your throat?"

Piper moaned. She did. She loved the way he claimed her. Possessed her. Wanted her. There were a million sluts out there willing to do the same fucking thing to him, but he wanted her. It meant something. It meant everything, because in that moment, she wanted him, too.

Her pussy tingled as he continued to face-fuck her. When he let her hair go, he reached down to squeeze her breast. Hard. Her nipples ached for attention. One little touch had her damn near ready to explode, and she wanted it.

“Stand up.” He pulled away from her. “Get that damn dress off now.”

Piper stood and pulled her dress over her head. Aleo grabbed her and shoved her up against the wall. His powerful body pinned her in place as his intense amber eyes stared into hers.

“You don’t have much defiance in your eyes right now. Are you sure you’re not scared of me?”

She sucked a breath in through her nose. “Not even a little bit.”

“Is that pussy wet for me?”

She pressed the tip of her tongue to the center of her lip. He gripped her upper arm and pressed harder against her.

“There’s that defiance.” He held his intense gaze on her lips. “It turns me on more than you can imagine.”

With one hand pinning her wrists to the wall, he used the other to lift her leg to his hip. He rubbed his cock against her clit, forcing her to suck in a breath of air. He knew what he did to her. Her body ached for his touch, and he wanted to make her



admit it.

“Answer me.” He pulled his hips back slightly before pressing between her thighs again. “Is this hot pussy wet for me?”

“Yes.”

He grinned. The cocky bastard knew he had power over her. Knew that she wanted him as much as he wanted her. He had to make a point to get her to fucking admit it. He dropped her wrists and lifted her, pressing her against the wall with his body. His cock slid between her slick pussy lips without penetrating. Piper bit her lip, clutching his shoulders as he held her. It took all her strength to not rock against him.

“Needy, sweetheart?”

Piper frowned, narrowing her eyes. She raised her hand and slapped him across the cheek. His eyes flashed with fire before he jerked her away from the wall. Piper didn’t know why she wanted to test her fate. He pinned her to the bed with his hands wrapped around her wrists.

“All these offenses you keep collecting are going to force me to mate you or kill you.” She dropped her legs to each side of him, and Aleo angled his cock against her wet flesh. “And mating with a human is against the rules.”

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He shoved his thick cock into her with one harsh stroke. Piper cried out, arching against his hold as she took him, every inch of her pussy squeezing around his thick shaft. He took what he wanted and gave no apologies for it. Aleo leaned forward and bit her nipple, dragging his teeth along the sensitive tip while he fucked her relentlessly. Sounds of their skin slapping against one another filled the silent room.

Yes, it was exactly what she needed. A harsh, unforgiving fucking. It was the least she deserved after he forced her to watch him from a distance. He couldn't be with her, but that didn't change the way she felt. The way he caused her to feel about him. Piper strained against his hold, though he only squeezed her tighter. His cock shoved deeper and deeper inside her cunt, forcing soft little sounds from the back of her throat. She closed her eyes as his balls slapped against her ass. It was so damn good.

He let her breast go and pushed up over her, meeting her gaze. "You're mine."

His amber eyes glowed with his declaration. She swallowed hard as he shoved inside her, forcing her to feel every inch of him.

"Mine."

Piper didn't have a retort. In that moment, every part of her wanted to be his. He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers in a sloppy kiss. Instead of soft and sweet, she bit him, scraping her teeth along his tongue and lips before he got the memo and bit her back.

He pinned her wrists to the bed above her head and reached between them to fondle her clit. Piper whimpered, thrashed. Her body shook as her orgasm claimed her. Aleo

moaned against her mouth, eating all the harsh sounds coming from her lips while his dick pumped inside her spasming pussy.

His grunt of pleasure came next with the hot splashes of his release filling her. He pushed up from her and met her gaze.

“I don’t give a fuck what happens tomorrow. You’re mine, Piper. Mine.”

### Chapter Five

Aleo lay beside Piper wondering how the hell he always managed to get himself into these messes. She was a biter. His lips still ached from the effects of her teeth. He knew his lips would be bruised by morning, which wouldn't fare well for the matching ceremony. Her body had marks from his fingers, too. It made him prideful. Possessive.

"Do I have to be nice to you now?" Piper asked, disrupting the silence in the room.

"No." A lazy grin lingered at his lips. "But the nicer you are, the nicer I'll be."

She snorted. "I'm not sorry for anything I did."

"Me either." He pulled her to him and draped a leg over her body. She felt good against him. He buried his face in her hair and breathed her in. Cuddling with Piper was something he found himself liking. When she wasn't busy busting his balls, she could actually be soft and sweet.

"So is my debt paid? You fucked me. Can I go home?"

He traced her lips with his finger. "No."

He gripped her cheeks and kissed her. Everything about her made him want to claim her. Possess her like an alpha would. He was the fucking king, and she was a human. It was forbidden, but that didn't seem to matter much now. He'd have whatever he wanted, and if that included her, so be it.

Piper pushed away from him. "I'm surprised you're not ready to kick me out of your bed now that you've had your fix."

"The only way I'd kick you out of my bed is to fuck you on the floor. Or against the wall. Or in the bathtub." He rubbed a hand over his face. "I'm far from having my fix of you."

She sat up and glanced around. "I'm not sure I'm up for another round."

Aleo stroked her back with the tips of his fingers. "Tell me about yourself."

"No."

He chuckled. "You really like that word, don't you?"

"No more than you do." She stood and walked over to the bathtub. After checking the temperature of the water, she stepped inside the tub.

He watched her a moment before getting up to join her.

She pinched her nose and dipped beneath the water. "You want to give me a bath?"

He stared at her. "Not really."

She smoothed her hair away from her face. "Then go away."

He laughed and scooted the little stool beside the bathtub with his foot. Hell, he'd never given anyone a bath in his life. Sitting on the stool, he reached for a clean washrag and dipped it in the water. Piper watched him, giving him a puzzled look.

"You are the only person in the world that can say the king gave them a bath." He

smoothed some soap onto the rag and began washing her body.

She watched him, not quite relaxing enough to trust him. Self-consciousness filled him, making him wonder if what he was doing was right. Was there a proper way for a woman to bathe? Was it different than men?

“Why is the king giving me a bath?”

He didn’t have an answer. It felt more natural than to stay in his bed away from her. He wanted to be with her. It was an unusual reaction for him and something he’d never done before. Instead of answering her question, he draped the washcloth on the side of the tub. “After your bath, I want you on my bed with your legs spread.”

He stood, half-hard from touching her. She glanced at his cock before she finally met his eyes.

“I’m more than a hole to sink your cock into.”

He bent down, propped himself up on the edges of the bathtub while he put his face in hers. “Yes. You are. I plan to lick that juicy cunt until all that attitude disappears, too. Then I’ll make you say my name while I fuck you. You won’t forget who’s been inside you tomorrow, Piper. Memories of me will be branded inside your head, and you’ll get wet just thinking about what I’ll do to your body next.”

She fidgeted in the water, and he smiled. “Take your bath. Then get on the bed and spread your legs for me.”

He moved away from her.

“Where are you going?”

“To get some nourishment for us. It’s going to be a fucking long night, and we need to keep our strength.” He grabbed his dressing robe and left the room to find a servant.

When he came back, Piper was finger-combing her hair at the end of the bed. He had a plate of food and a bottle of wine for them and set it on the table beside the bed. She looked so damn beautiful that he stopped mid-stride to stare. Something about her always caught his attention. It didn’t matter what she was doing. Clothed, she was alluring enough, if not defiant. Naked, she was fucking mouthwatering and completely vulnerable.

Piper glanced over at him and then back at the bed. She crawled onto the soft mattress, naked, and turned to face him. Spreading her legs, she laid back, arching her back as her fingers slipped along her slit. Boldly, she met his gaze and parted herself for him with two fingers.

“Is this what you wanted?”

Aleo stared at her pink pussy. “Yes.”

She stroked her clit with one hand, while using the other to squeeze her breast. The last thing he expected Piper to do was put on a show for him. He folded his arms over his chest, watching the little minx work.

“You don’t act like you want it.” She stroked her clit a few times before sliding her

middle finger inside her and bringing it to her lips to suck clean.

Aleo scratched the stubble growing on his chin. Everything she did made him hard. That was her power over him. He could control himself for the most part, but he couldn't control his reaction to her. His cock had a mind of its own, and it fucking loved it when Piper teased.

He closed the distance between them and leaned over her for a kiss. Surprisingly, she wrapped her arms around his neck as he devoured her mouth, kissing her like his life depended on it. She felt so good beneath him. Right. All the bullshit about mating ceased to matter with her. He could never take a mate now because all he wanted was this woman.

“No biting or slapping?” He dragged his mouth away from hers. “You’re giving me complete compliance?”

She lay back, smiling up at him. “You only annoy me when you talk. It’s far easier for us to get along with your tongue inside my pussy.”

“I knew there was a catch.” He glanced down at her. “I wish I could say that it mattered, but it doesn’t.”

He pushed her thighs wide and kissed along the flat expanse of her belly. She liked provoking a reaction out of him, and he knew it. If she really was indifferent toward him then he wouldn't waste his time. Instead, she liked to push him. Any other person would have different consequences for going against him like she did, but he was fairly certain that Piper could do anything she wanted to him without real consequence. She knew how far she could push him, too. It was what made her different.

And he liked it a lot.



He buried his face in her pussy, and she arched against him, reaching out to hold him to her while he licked and sucked at her juicy cunt. There were few things he liked better than eating a woman out, but the fact that he had Piper before him, begging him, made it better than any time before. He licked and sucked her wet slit, loving how she rocked her hips against him, forcing his attention to where she wanted him to go. He gave her that freedom for a moment before pressing his hands on her inner thighs and holding her down.

“Do you want me to tie you to the bed?” He glanced up at her. “Stay still.”

Piper swallowed hard as he returned his mouth to her cunt. Hell, he didn’t expect her to obey him. That was half the fun of fucking her. Soft little gasps came from her lips as she held still, letting him do whatever the hell he wanted. He inserted two fingers inside her, working the tiny hole to drive her closer and closer to madness. She dug her fingers into the sheets beneath her, soft little whimpers leaving her throat as he continued to torture her.

He loved it.

“I can’t do this,” she dropped her head back. “I need...”

“What?” he asked, pulling back from her. He let her clit go with a pop and stared down into her eyes. “What do you need?”

She panted, each breath rushing from her plump lips as she stared at him. He waited patiently, gently stroking her clit with his finger. It was a matter of wills. Piper didn’t beg, and neither did he.

“You know exactly what I need.”

He smirked. “I want to hear you say it, though.”

Frustration filled her beautiful face as she contemplated what she wanted to do. He could do this all night with her. Eat her pussy. Make her come. Make her beg. Give her his cock. Repeat. Hell, he wanted to do it all night. He wanted to do it for all eternity.

“I want your cock.” She didn’t quite meet his eyes when she said it.

“What?” He moved over her so that he could stare into her eyes. “I didn’t hear you.”

He rubbed the tip of his dick against her clit. Piper’s sharp intake of breath was music to his ears. He loved it when he had her full attention. She was stubborn and sassy, but there were little moments when she let her guard down and allowed herself to be needy and vulnerable. Those were the moments he cherished with her.

She leaned forward and bit his earlobe. “I want your cock,” she whispered. “Now.”

“No.” He grinned. “Get on your hands and knees.”

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She stared at him. “No?”

“No.” He moved away from her. “Don’t make me repeat myself.”

Piper scoffed. “Fuck you.”

He grabbed her, flipping her to her stomach. She liked to fight him, and he liked it, too. Holding her arms behind her back, he moved in between her legs. She struggled a moment before he clutched her hair in his hand, tugging her head back.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous when you fight me.”

Piper scowled. “Kiss my ass.”

“I will.” To prove his point, he leaned forward and kissed her bare cheek before scraping his teeth along the fleshy skin. She sucked in a breath, jerking as he bit her.

Instead of drawing it out any longer, he pushed his cock inside her, clutching her hands at the small of her back. He loved her tight pussy. Loved the way it gripped him and clenched around him every time he pushed inside her. Piper let out a low moan as she closed her eyes, resting her face against the mattress.

“Is this what you want?” he asked, pumping his hips against her.

“Yes,” she gasped. “Fuck, yes.”

He slapped her ass with his free hand before grabbing her hair again and pulling her

head back so that he could kiss her. Rough fucking wasn't for everyone, but he sure as hell enjoyed it with her. She could take what he gave her and give him more. She squeezed him inside her, and Aleo groaned into her mouth. He knew within the very depths of his soul that there was no going back after this. He wanted her, and there was nothing anyone could do about that.

“Do you like my big cock fucking you, Piper?” he asked. “Is that why you came here today? To finish what we started?”

“If I wanted a big cock, I could get one. I don't need you for that.”

“No?” He shoved into her hard. “You just wanted to free your father?”

“Yes,” she hissed.

“Liar.” He let her arms go and dragged her hips so that her ass was in the air for him. “You wanted my cock from the first time we met.”

“Don't flatter yourself.” She gasped as the tip of his dick bumped against her G-spot. Her pussy spasmed around him as she closed her eyes, a silent cry lodged in her throat. She looked so damn beautiful when he made her come. So fucking perfect.

Her orgasm caused his, and Aleo found himself collapsing on top of her, wrapping his arms around her tiny body while he breathed her in. Neither one of them seemed to have a care in the world, and it felt fucking great.

Sometime later, Aleo moved off her and sat up to open the wine bottle. Piper didn't move, and he couldn't resist leaning over to kiss the small of her back.

“Eat with me.”

She groaned and pushed up from the mattress. “Don’t let what I’m about to say go to your head.”

He reached for the plate of food he’d brought in earlier. “Okay.”

“Thank you for taking care of that mess with my dad.” She didn’t quite meet his eyes as she reached for a roll. “I didn’t know what else to do. The royal guard laughed at me when I tried to get them to let him loose. I was angry when I came here. I shouldn’t have attacked you. I’m sorry.”

Aleo reached for her and pulled her between his legs. “You’re forgiven.”

He pressed a kiss to her sweaty temple. Red marks covered her inner thighs from his scratchy beard, and he couldn’t deny that he liked the look of it. Aleo lifted a piece of meat from the plate and held it to her lips.

“Is this another first? The king feeding someone?” She took the food he offered and almost smiled at him.

He nibbled along her cheek. “Yes.”

Piper smoothed her hand along his calf. “Why me? You know we can’t be together.”

Whenever he wanted to do something, yet didn’t want to give a reason why, he stated, “King’s orders.” Piper felt like that to him. There was no reason for why he wanted her. She was different. She made him smile. She teased him. She fought with him. She loved him like Aleo only dreamed a woman should. Why not Piper, was his question.

“I rather enjoy doing what I want.” He looped his arm around her body so that his hand rest against her stomach. “The fact that you’re human doesn’t change that.”

“Do you ever shift?” she asked, dropping her head back against his shoulder to look at him.

“Yes.” He pressed his lips to her cheek. “If there’s something for formality or if I feel threatened or offended. I protect what is mine, there’s no question about that.”

“Would you protect me?” Piper asked. “You said I’m yours.”

He kissed her shoulder. “That’s a complicated question with an even more complicated answer.”

She lifted a piece of meat to his lips. He took the bite, letting the room fall into silence. How did he change the rules? Piper was his, that was true. He could mate with a woman in the kingdom, but his heart would never be hers. Hell, he didn’t know when it happened, but over the course of the past two years, the feisty brunette that kept him on his toes had won him over.

### Chapter Six

Piper stretched, yawning, as she woke from one of the best sleeps she'd ever had. She opened her eyes and turned to her left, bumping into a large, warm body. For a second, she couldn't remember what happened the night before. She squeezed her thighs together, and all the memories came flooding in.

Aleo groaned in his sleep, draping his arm over her body. She'd actually slept with the king. Lifting his arm, she tried to push him away. Instead, he pulled her closer.

"Sir, there is a situation going on with the shaman to perform the ceremony." Keenan stepped into the room and stopped when he saw Piper in the king's bed. "Uh..."

Aleo groaned and sat up. "I'm sure someone else can take care of it."

Piper glanced around the room, clutching the blanket to her chest. The thin garment she wore hung off a chair on the opposite side of the room. There was no way she was standing, naked, in front of Keenan to grab it.

"Perhaps." Keenan stared at her. "Uh, sir, I must warn you about what others may think of this."

"I'm aware." Aleo rubbed a hand over his face. "Take care of the shaman problem."

Aleo stood from the bed, nude, and grabbed a dressing robe from the hook on the wall. He pulled it on and tied the sash as Keenan left the room.

“I’m assuming my servant status is complete.”

He stared at her. “It is. You’re free to go.”

She nodded. Pointing at her dress, she said, “Will you please hand me that?”

He turned and grabbed it, holding it out to her. Piper took it and pulled it over her head. She blushed at the memories of the previous night. She couldn’t move without recalling the way Aleo filled her, the way he took control over her body and made her ache for him.

Piper stood next to the bed and glanced over at Aleo’s grimace. “What’s wrong?”

“You need something else to wear. That dress is too revealing.”

Piper glanced down. Her nipples beaded beneath the thin fabric the longer he stared at them. Beard burn marred the skin of her breasts and thighs, and it took an extreme amount of effort to keep from reaching out to touch the sensitive areas.

“I’ll have someone bring you something,” he said finally. He walked to the door and yelled at one of his servants.

“It’s really okay.” Piper walked around the bed. “The less people who know what happened the better.”

Aleo didn’t say anything. She could only imagine how it looked to the outside. A woman was about to mate with the man for life, and he’d just spent the night before with another lover. She swallowed hard. It made sense to leave before anyone else woke up.

“Uh, I’m going to go.” She walked toward the door. “Good luck with the matching



ceremony. I hope you get the woman you want.”

He smiled. It was an arrogant smirk that had her skin warming. Something about his expression said that he’d already had the woman he wanted, and the thought made her blush. What happened was in the past. There was nothing she could do to change it.

She escaped out the door and took the nearest stairwell to let herself out of the castle. The matching ceremony had twice as many people attending since the families had come to support their daughters. She did her best to keep from being noticed by anyone.

Before she could make it out of the castle, one of Aleo’s guards grabbed her arm and pulled her into a nearby room. She jerked away from him, glaring at him for touching her.

“The king wants you to be present during the ceremony.”

“Why?”

“King’s orders.” The guard shrugged. “You can wait in the throne room with the rest of the women.”

If she left anyway, he’d send out a squad to hunt her down. Why did he want her to watch him get mated to another woman? She walked toward the throne room before choosing instead to head out the side door of the castle when the guards weren’t looking. There was no reason to stay. Last night had been foolish, but she didn’t regret it. Maybe Aleo was right. She wanted to rectify their unfinished business before he mated another female. Whatever it was, Piper knew it had ended, and she had to find a way to move on.

Shifters filled the castle grounds each hoping that their pick was chosen. Piper did her best to make her way through the crowded area before someone stopped her.

“What on earth is a human doing at the matching ceremony?” A young lion shifter held out his arm, his eyes pinched as he stared at her. His question drew the attention of his friends, who all circled around her.

“I had business with the king, and now it’s over.” She shoved at his arm. “Let me pass.”

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He grabbed her and pulled her to him. “No human will ever take the place of a female lion shifter. I don’t care how good the pussy is under that skirt.”

Someone touched her thigh and she tugged her dress down. “Let me go.”

He sneered at her and shoved her toward a female in his group. “She’s trying to steal your place, Tasha.”

The woman shoved her to the ground, causing her to fall back in a puddle. The cold water splashed her legs and butt, soaking her thin dress with mud. Piper struggled to move as the female shifted, her fangs exposed as she growled.

“Uh-oh. What is a little human female like you going to do to a shifter?” one of the guys mocked.

The female pounced, and Piper scrambled away, an entire audience staring as the lioness came after her. She had no defenses. She had no weapons. The female swiped her nails along Piper’s dress, and she screamed as she ran. Fear pumped through her veins as harsh and cold as the mud coating the backs of her legs. The tips of the female’s nails scratched the surface of Piper’s back, the burn aching the more she ran. Sweat stung the scratches, and her legs and feet ached from running so fast.

A roar sounded behind her, and Piper turned to see another ball of fur coming toward them. She screamed, tripping over a branch. Her body landed facedown on the grass, and she huddled into a ball, shaking as she waited for death. Instead, Aleo knelt beside her, running his hands over her hurt back before he took off his jacket and wrapped her in it. When she didn’t move, he lifted her into his arms and held her a

moment.

“Shh. I’ve got you. It’s okay.”

She blinked a few times before wrapping her arms around him. “Was that you? The big ball of fur coming after us?”

“Yes.” He held her to him. “You’re okay. Nobody is going to hurt you.”

She glanced around. “The girl?”

“Taken away.” He cupped her cheeks and stared into her eyes. “I’ve got you.”

Piper let him carry her back to the castle doors. Plenty of people stared at them all with questions dancing in their eyes. Aleo had shifted to save the human woman. That spoke more than any words ever could.

“Put me down.” Piper stood, thrusting her arms into his jacket and walked inside the castle. She made her way to the throne room and took a seat on the left side of room, across from the potential mates. He wanted her to watch him mate someone else, then she would. But she was going home afterward and never gracing the doors of the palace again.

It seemed everyone stared at her messy self while they took their places and waited for the matching ceremony to begin. Piper couldn’t help feeling self-conscious. A lion shifter had attacked her. Not to mention, the king wanted her to hang around and witness someone else getting what she couldn’t have. Any other woman could have let her emotions get the best of her, but Piper couldn’t. She wouldn’t show weakness in front of the shifters no matter what happened to her.

Sucking in a breath, she watched as Aleo stepped out of a doorway, taking his seat on

his throne. For a man that had everything he could ever want, he played the part well. His clothes were expensive. He wore his royal robe. He looked like a god on the throne, and all the women below him were willing to bow down and worship without question. His gaze scanned the large room and stopped when he spotted her. Just one look from him had her body tingling despite everything. He didn't stare at her like a giddy lover that liked her. He stared like he owned her.

The entire ceremony was crazy. The shaman collected the names of the women on the right side of the room and put them in a golden cup. He said some magical words over it and then picked one of the names for the king. Piper folded her arms over her chest and watched. Drums played an ominous tune. She didn't know why everything had to be so dramatic, but she sat there hoping it would all end soon.

The shaman took the cup up to Aleo, and the king reached in to pull out the name. Once he read the name of his mate, he stood. The shaman frowned as Aleo kept his eyes on her. The intense expression made her feel even more self-conscious about everything.

"The old rules don't apply." He was speaking to her. Piper glanced around as everyone stared. "My father's rules don't apply. I am the king, and I will mate whoever I want." He held up the slip of paper that the shaman gave him. "This ... this doesn't matter. Not to me, anyway. I knew who I wanted the very moment she said hello to me in the village. She has my heart, and there isn't a god in the universe that will ever change that."

Piper shook her head. He was making a fool of himself if he broke every rule and called her name. There would be so many unhappy females. Maybe even challenges to the throne. They could be banished for going against the old rules. The gods could punish them, too.

"But..." he continued. "I must do what the gods choose for me to do. It is my job as

king. And part of that job is to accept who is chosen for me to spend my life with. This person will be your queen. She will be the female alpha leader of this pride. She will be my lover.” He stopped and stared at Piper. “My confidante.”

Why did he have to rub it in? If he would just say the female’s name and get it over with, it would all end and they could move on with their lives. The longer he stared at her, the more her emotional wall started to crack. She just wanted to go home. To crawl in her bed and pretend she never met him.

“I protect what is mine, too. Should there be any problems with this decision, you will reap the consequences of my wrath.”

Was that a warning? Piper thought. She rolled her eyes as she rubbed splotch of mud on her dress. She was done fighting with him. He could do whatever he wanted with whomever he wanted. She had no desire to protest against the decision.

“So, now that everyone knows the rules, I will admit I did bend them a bit.” Aleo finally looked away from her and addressed the crowd of women seeking his affection. “I added a human to the cup.”

Gasps sounded in the room before all gazes landed on her. An empty chair she hadn’t noticed sat across the room, and Aleo held out his hand for her.

“Piper Marsh, would you please take a seat on the other side of the room?”

She stared at Aleo, curious as to how that could have happened. She was human. She couldn’t be mated with the king. How did her name even get in the cup? The shaman was supposed to oversee it even if Aleo did tell him which names to put in there. He would have protested a human being tossed into the mix.

Piper stood and walked over to the empty seat. The room was so silent that she could

have heard a pin drop on the expensive marble floors. People waited for the revelation. But Aleo kept drawing it out. He studied her, and Piper wanted to know what it was that he saw so fascinating. She was a mess.

“Will you get on with it?” Piper finally asked. “Reveal who you’re going to mate and let the rest of us go home.”

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He smiled at her, that sexy knowing smirk that made her tingle. God, what the hell was wrong with her? All the emotions swirling inside her made her a fucked up mess.

Aleo handed the paper to the shaman and took his seat on the throne. The shaman, an older gentleman, set the cup aside and opened the paper.

“The gods have chosen. The mate of King Aleo is ... Piper Marsh.”

The room erupted into chaos. Piper stared at him, wondering how he'd managed to pull it off. The gods surely didn't pick her out of everyone to be his mate. The whole thing had to be rigged.

“She can't be the chosen one. She's human!” One of the women came after her, and Piper jumped up to defend herself before the woman shoved her down to the cool marble flooring. A loud roar sounded as a flash of golden fur filled her line of sight. Aleo roared at the crowd, standing between her and them in his lion form. She shrank back, seeing only the gold mane of hair and the large paws. He had the stance of an alpha protecting its mate. Piper sat up, watching as he effectively dismissed the women from the ceremony, daring anyone to make another peep about the decision.

Piper watched him in all his glory. The real beast had come out last night when he'd been inside her. But she liked this side of him, the wild side, that made her feel protected.

Special.

When the room had cleared he changed back into his human form and turned to her.



Instead of saying anything, he scooped her into his arms and sat with her on his lap in the chair she'd once occupied.

Piper's muddy legs draped over his expensive clothes, and he didn't seem to care. She let him brush her hair from her face and kiss her lightly on the lips. "How did that happen?"

The whole point of mating was to preserve the bloodline. By Aleo putting her name in the cup, everything was threatened.

"There's no rules for which names go in the cup." He brushed her hair from her cheek. "I told the shaman to put your name in the cup, and he did. I had no power over whose name was chosen, but I think the gods knew who was best for me, shifter or not."

His hands cupped her ass as he held her on his lap. "I love you, Piper. I think my heart threatened to beat out of my chest when I saw you running from Tasha. I'd never felt that way before. I honestly don't want to feel that way again."

He leaned in to kiss her.

He loved her? When did that happen? Her mind reeled with all that was going on. He held her close, and she simply lay against him, resting in the comfort of his arms. She wasn't scared or upset. Somehow, he managed to soothe the emotions running wild through her.

However, she hadn't accepted yet. Nothing was official. He had to have her consent to mate before anything became official. Piper sat back and met his gaze.

"Maybe I don't want to be your mate."

He stared at her a moment before chuckling. “Why would you not want to be my mate?”

She swallowed. In the moment, she didn’t have an answer. Her body still tingled from his touch. Her head was still whirling from the fact that he’d admitted publicly that he wanted her. Out of everyone that came to pledge their love and allegiance, he wanted her. And when some didn’t like the choice, he defended her like an alpha male would.

“My father was arrested.”

“It was a misunderstanding.”

“You threw me in the dungeon.”

He licked his lips. “I probably should have left you there. You tried to strangle me. And let’s not forget that slap you gave me when you didn’t get your way in the bedroom.”

He did have a point. Caressing her arms with the tips of his fingers, he made her forget what her point was.

“Let’s not forget our original dispute over you leaving me naked on the bed in front of your father and the royal guard.”

He chuckled. “That was two years ago! But I will say that hot pussy had everyone hard for weeks. I’m getting hard now just thinking about it.”

She narrowed her eyes. “It’s not funny.”

He cleared his throat though he didn’t hide his amusement. “I promise to cover you

with my own naked body from anyone peeking in on our affairs.”

She rolled her eyes.

“What do you want me to do? Beg?”

He sat her on her feet and dropped to his knees in front of her. Wrapping an arm around her legs, he said, “Please have me. I’d be nothing without you.” He slid her dress up and dipped his head toward her so that he could press a kiss to her bare pussy. “I need you.” He flicked her clit with the tip of his tongue, glancing up at her. “I want you. I love you.”

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Piper closed her eyes as he sucked her clit between his lips. She dropped her head back with a moan. “You’re lying.”

He lowered her to the marble floor and forced her legs apart. “Am I?”

She nodded as he slipped two long fingers inside her. “You don’t beg for anything.”

“True.” He pressed his lips against her mound. “I take what is mine. And you, sweetheart, are mine. I told you this last night.”

Piper ran her fingers through his hair, tugging so that he met her gaze. “I’m not yours.”

“No?” His tongue circled her clit.

She melted beneath his touch. When she’d first met him, there had been an instant connection. It went beyond attraction and beyond anything she’d ever felt with another man before. He was a shifter. She’d seen him change his form twice, and it was to protect her. He didn’t scare her. Just the opposite. She felt safe with him. Aleo didn’t lie about anything. She believed him when he said he wanted her. He could fuck anyone he wanted, so it went beyond sex. Something deeper developed between them over the years, and she was glad they could finally enjoy it.

“No.” She tugged at his hair forcing him to look at her. “You’re mine. Don’t forget it.”

The End