

The Alpha King's Human Mate by HC Dolores

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Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

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"There are two things in life you cannot choose: the first is your enemies; the second is your family."

Carlos Ruiz Zafon The next time Aria woke, she was alone.

Daylight filtered through the windows, and for the first time in what felt like years, she didn't feel exhaustion settling into her bones.

She felt...refreshed.

Logically, she could've chalked it up to all the extra sleep she'd gotten the past few days, but part of her had to wonder if it had more to do

with the proximity of her mate. Was it a coincidence that she'd gotten the best sleep she'd ever had in years on the same night her mate slept

only feet from her? He's good for us, her wolf said.

Her wolf had been doing that a lot these past few days — talking. She'd barely uttered a peep the three years she'd spent with Liam, but lately, her wolf was more vocal than ever, as if she'd been roused from a deep

sleep. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

Just as she finished putting on a fresh set of clothes that had been laid out for her, there was a knock on the door. She didn't need to hear his voice to know who it was - Sebastian. She could sense his presence before he'd ever touched his fist to the door.

"Is it okay if I come in?" His soft voice filtered through the closed door.

Aria's response was automatic. "Yes." She hadn't even meant to sound so eager, but...

Sebastian entered the room without hesitation, looking even more beautiful than Aria remembered him. This time, his tousled brown hair had been styled and he was wearing a sweatshirt with a leather jacket and boots.

"Lm glad you found the clothes," he said, and he didn't seem too shy about letting his eyes roam over her body.

"Yes, they're quite warm," Aria said, and she wasn't lying. Whoever had left the clothes, whether it was Sebastian or some part of the castle staff, had clearly dressed her for Canada's chilly weather. Not that she was as sensitive to the cold as humans were, but the insulated long-sleeved shirt, jeans, and warm coat were a nice consideration. (7)

It also let her assume that someone had plans for her to leave the bedroom.

"Iwas hoping," Sebastian said, scratching the back of his neck in what looked like nervousness, "You'd maybe want to go on a walk with me." Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

Everything in Aria screamed at her to say yes ~ of course she wanted to spend more time with her mate — but that little voice in the back of her

head started whispering to her.

Is spending more time with him a good idea? You'll just get attached, and then it'll hurt more when he discards you.

She must've hesitated too long because Sebastian piped back up, "Hey...it's okay if you don't want to go on a walk. We can just stay here or I can even leave you alone if you want." She could tell he was trying to hide it, but he was hurt. He was taking her silence as a rejection.

"No, it's just..." She started to say something, but she couldn't quite get the words out of her throat.

No, it's just that if I spend anymore time with you, I might not be able to stop...and then it'll only hurt worse when you decide you're disgusted with me.

That's what she wanted to say, but didn't for obvious reasons.

"aria," Sebastian's gentle voice drew her from her thoughts, and she turned to look at him. His eyes were soft again ~ they were always soft. "You don't need to justify yourself or do anything you don't want to do. It's okay. We can wait another day."

Aria should've just nodded her head at that and let him leave, but just as he started to turn away from her, she blurted out, "Wait!" Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

He whipped around to face her, his blue eyes alight with hope.

"Perhaps," she started, fidgeting with the drawstring of her borrowed coat, "A walk might be nice. I've been feeling a little cooped up in this room."

Sebastian's smile was so wide that it made Aria's stomach ache - God, he was so beautiful. She never wanted that smile to leave his face.

And as she followed him out the door, she tried to pretend that it

wouldn't.

VOU

"You know, Washington isn't as cold as this place...but the weather can be pretty tumultuous throughout certain parts of the year," Sebastian told her as they strolled through the castle grounds. There was no snow on the ground, but Aria was grateful for the warmth of her new outfit and coat ~ it certainly helped her fight off some of the chill.

Despite the size and grandeur of the castle, it was hard to focus on anything but Sebastian...especially when he still had that breathtaking smile on his face the whole time.

"Really?" Aria said, "I've never been, but it sounds nice...despite the weather."

"Where are you from?" Sebastian asked, "Like your family. Your pack." Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

"Texas," Aria said. "It's always hot there. Even in the dead of winter,

you never really escape the heat." "That sounds kind of miserable," Sebastian replied lightly.

"You get used to it," Aria said, and then her lips curved into a fond smile, "When I was a kid, my mom used to make these giant batches of strawberry lemonade in the middle of the summer and pass them out to all the men patrolling our borders. The drinks were only supposed to be for our border patrol, but she'd always let me sneak a glass."

"Maybe I'll get to try some of her strawberry lemonade one of these days," Sebastian said. "And you can show me around your home."

Aria frowned. Home.

She hadn't been home in more than three years, hadn't talked to her mother or father. The last time she'd spoken with them had been right before she left with Alpha Liam, and she was pretty sure that her "desire to serve the cause" was the closest her parents had come to being proud of her.

But I failed their cause. There's no way they would welcome me home now.

The face of Aria's father flashed through her mind, disappointed and disgusted, and her gut clenched. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

Damaged goods.

"I think P'd like to go back now," she said, stopping in her tracks. "I've had enough fresh air."

Sebastian's eyes widened. "Hey, did I say something wrong?" he asked, "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable." He reached for her hands, but Aria pulled away, and it felt like someone was twisting a knife in her stomach when she saw the hurt on his face.

Damaged goods.

Understanding dawned on his face. "I'm sorry," he said, "I shouldn't have asked about..." Sebastian swallowed. "Let's get you back inside."

Careful not to touch her, Sebastian began leading Aria back the way they came, a heavy silence descending upon them.

Aria wanted to tell him that it wasn't his fault, he didn't know her family was such a sore subject, but once again, the words never made it out of her mouth.

It was better this way.

They'd made it nearly halfway back to the room when they turned a corner and two of the most beautiful women she'd ever seen in her life came into view. The first girl reminded her of one of the dolls she used to place with as a kid - tall and lean with glossy blonde hair and striking blue eyes. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

The girl next to her was only slightly shorter with thick, curly hair, tawny skin, and a long, thin scar that ran across her face. She was just as beautiful as her counterpart, but there was something deadly about her ~ maybe it was the confident way she walked or just the guarded glare on her face, but whatever it was, it made Aria want to cower behind Sebastian.

She hoped neither of the women would notice them as they passed by, but luck didn't seem to be on her side today.

"Seb!" The blonde girl called out, and something twisted in Aria's gut as she noticed the way the blonde's eyes lit up when they landed on her mate. "We've been looking for you."

Seb?

She knows who he is, and she has a nickname for him? Who is this woman, and why was she looking for my mate?

Aria didn't have a good reason for it, but suddenly, she despised this beautiful blonde woman. There was a swell of possessiveness inside her. She wanted to claw this woman's eyes out so she could never lay eyes on Sebastian again. She wanted to tackle her to the stone floor, and break her nose, do something to make her just a little less beautiful to look at, and -

"If you don't stop staring at my mate, I'm going to make you," a low growl snapped Aria from her violent thoughts. It was the curly-haired girl who'd spoken — she was staring at Aria with narrowed eyes and a Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

snarl on her face. Aria's heart raced with fear, and she took a step back instinctively.

Sebastian was by her side in a flash, stepping in front of her with his hands raised. "Hey, calm down," he said, addressing the curly-haired woman, "There's no need for threats right now. You're scaring my mate."

"Well, did you see the way she was looking at my mate?" The woman shot back. "Tell her to keep her eyes to herself!"

Wait, mate?

Aria glanced between the two women, confusion settling over her. The blonde girl was her mate?

To her surprise, the blonde woman glanced at Aria over Sebastian's shoulder and smiled. Well, it looked more like a smirk than a smile, but it was a smile nonetheless. "So, you're my brother's mate," she said, "Sebastian told us about you. Truth be told, I've been wanting to lay eyes on you myself, but Sebastian's been a little possessive. Won't let anyone see you. I'm Lily by the way. I wasn't sure what to expect, but you're cute."

Brother?

Understanding dawned on Aria. This was Sebastian's sister ~ his other sister, the full-blooded wolf. Now that her thoughts weren't clouded by jealousy, she could see the resemblance. They both had the same sharp Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

jawline and icy blue eyes, although Sebastian's always looked soft and Lily's eyes looked like she was trying to size you up.

She probably was trying to size Aria up.

The realization that this was Sebastian's sister and not some sort of lover sent relief rolling through Aria. Lily was still staring at her, sizing her up, and although she wanted nothing more than to hide her entire body behind Sebastian, it felt like she needed to say something.

"Pm Aria," she spoke meekly, "And t-thank you."

The curly-haired girl scoffed. "Well, I'm not impressed," she said, crossing her arms over her chest, and Aria could see the way her wry muscles strained through her shirt. "The little thing can't even get a sentence out without stuttering."

Lily turned to the woman, and through clenched teeth, said, "Alessia, be nice."

Alessia rolled her eyes. "I am, trust me."

"Were you guys really looking for me?" Sebastian asked, and Aria had a feeling he was trying to break up some of the tension between the group. He was still standing in front of her though, and Aria didn't mind the protective stance. It made her feel safe.

Lily nodded. "Yeah, Clark invited us to dinner tonight. Me, you, and our mates, You're coming, right?" Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

Sebastian nodded. "That sounds nice. You can count me in." He glanced back at Aria, "Would you like to come with me?"

Aria's eyebrows furrowed. "You're asking me?" Sebastian cocked his head. "Of course. Why wouldn't I?"

"Oh, it's just..." She swallowed down what she started to say, and instead, replied with, "Okay."

It's just that I didn't think you'd give me a choice, is what she really wanted to say.

Usually, she didn't. Back home, her father was the one who decided what kind of events their family attended. It was just her mother's job ~ and hers as she got older ~ to smile and look nice when he invited another family over for dinner or dragged them out of the house.

Maybe it was just for show because his sister is here, I'm sure he would've been upset if I said no.

However, Sebastian's smile was so bright and genuine when she agreed that it was hard to believe he was capable of the kind of rage she'd seen men display all her life. She couldn't imagine his voice booming throughout the house like her father's, or the twisted fury she'd see on Liam's whenever he didn't get his way.

And she didn't want to. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (6)

"Well, that's settled," Lily said, "We'll see you guys tonight." She smiled at Aria again. "It was good to meet you, especially now that you're part of the family."

Alessia gave her one more once-over before the two girls were on their way, leaving Sebastian and Aria in the stone corridors.

"Pm really glad you said yes," Sebastian told her once they'd disappeared from view, "I know you've already my other sister, but..." He scratched the back of his neck. "The circumstances were less than desirable, so I think this dinner will be a good thing.")

Unfortunately, that sentence did nothing to ease her anxiety. Not only was Aria going to have to sit through a dinner with Lily and Alessia — the latter who didn't seem to like her at all — but she was

going to have to face the Queen and the King again.

Yeah, she was not looking forward to this dinner.