

The Alpha King's Human Mate by HC Dolores

Chapter 107

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Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7) Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

"after a good dinner, one can forgive anybody, even one's own, relations."

Oscar Wilde

Aria wasn't sure she'd ever felt so much like a helpless lamb headed into a den of starving wolves. Or, in this case, werewolves. In preparation for the dinner party, she wore the blue cocktail dress she'd found on her bed when she returned from the walk with Sebastian ~ a gift from his sister, Lily.

Aria didn't want to reject the gesture, especially since it was a beautiful dress, even if it only made her more anxious. She was staring in the mirror, fiddling with her hair for the thousandth time, when a familiar knock sounded on the door.

Sebastian, His delicious scent gave him away every time.

"You can come in," she called quietly, "I'm decent."

He walked through the door, decked out in a blue button-down shirt that matched her dress (and his eyes), and froze as soon as he saw her.

Immediately, Aria felt her stomach drop. "What's wrong?" Even as she asked the question, she was already using her bare arms to cover up as. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

much of her body as possible. "It's the dress, isn't it?"

She shouldn't have worn this ~ she knew it. She knew the blue body- con dress had been too revealing. It showed too much cleavage and outlined every curve of her body...of course her mate would think it was

inappropriate.

She should have asked for his approval or maybe asked him to pick out her outfit — that would have been the safe option. That's what her mother would've done, what a good mate would've done.

Sebastian swallowed, unable to take his eyes off her body. "'Wrong'?"

She could practically feel her body folding in on itself, and she wanted more than nothing than to crawl under the covers and never come out. "Pm sorry," she muttered, "I shouldn't have worn this, I know it's not ladylike and I should have asked your permission first, it's just your

sister ~"

Sebastian was suddenly in front of her, his large hands on her shoulders and looking into her eyes. "Woah, slow down," he said, a smile cracking on his face, "I'm not upset. Like at all."

"You're not?" She peered up at him, suddenly aware of the height difference. He really was quiet tall, but he didn't throw his size around like most Alphas did. It was only times like now, when they stood face- to-face (more like face to chest) that she was reminded just how much taller he was. |) Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

Sebastian shook his head and furrowed his eyebrows. "Of course not. Why would I be?"

"Well, it's just...you came in and you were staring at me," she said, looking anywhere but him, "And I know this isn't the kind of dress that I should've worn, but your sister left it, so I just thought it'd be okay... but I should've waited for your permission before putting it on."

Sebastian's face had slowly transformed into a deep frown as she spoke. "aria," he said, and she tried to suppress the shiver that rolled through her when he said her name. "You don't need my permission to wear a dress, regardless of where it came from. I would never be mad at you for what you wear."

"But wouldn't it embarrass you?" She asked. "If I wear something inappropriate around other people, then I'm making you look bad."

Sebastian looked flabbergasted, like she'd just asked him to solve a complicated math equation in his head. "No," he said, his tone tinted with confusion, "Why would I be mad or embarrassed about what you wear? You'd look great in anything."

Her mind flashed to a specific memory, when she'd been nine years old and her mother wore a tanktop during one of those scorching Texas summer days. She'd been tending to the garden in the light, low-cut top and a pair of shorts, Aria helping her pull out the weeds.

It been a pleasant day...until her father returned home from helping the warriors trained. She could still vividly recall the way his face Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

twisted with anger as soon as he caught sight of her mother, and the way he pulled her up by the arm, shouting that she needed to change immediately.

Her mother had started sobbing almost immediately as she hurried off to do as he'd asked, leaving Aria to cry in the garden with her father. He'd squatted down to her height, wiping away her tears. "Are you scared?" He asked her.

She'd nodded frantically.

"You don't need to be," he'd said, his voice much gentler this time, "Your mother made me act that way. I wouldn't have had to yell if she hadn't tried to embarrass me like that. What do you think would've happened if some unmated male had walked past the house while she was dressed like that? He might not have been able to control himself, and you or your mother could've gotten hurt." He ruffled her hair. "You

understand, don't you, Aria?" She'd nodded.

"aria," Sebastian's voice snapped her back to the present, "I need you to understand something. I would never get upset at you for something as trivial as what you wear. I'm pretty sure there's absolutely nothing you could put on your body that I'd dislike."

She blushed, and no longer feeling so anxious about her outfit, she asked, "Nothing at all? Not even if I wore a trash bag outside?" Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

"[I'm sure you'd find some way to make even a trash bag look lovely," he said with a lopsided smile.

Aria wasn't sure why she said what she said next - she knew it was pushing her luck, but the words were spilling out of her before she could stop them. "And if I wore nothing at all? If I just decided to do my grocery shopping topless, that wouldn't upset you?" (7

Sebastian's eyes widened in surprise ~ he clearly hadn't expected her to say that either ~ before they narrowed playfully. "No," he said lightly, "I may have to claw out the eyes of anyone who tries to stare at you, but I certainly wouldn't be upset."

As if he'd been discussing the weather with her, Sebastian took her hand. "We should probably head to the dining room," he said, "I'm pretty sure we're late for dinner:"

They headed out of the room, hand in hand, and Aria felt a new emotion swell up inside of her. Something she hadn't felt in so long that she almost didn't recognize it.

Safety. GI9IOP

The dining room was grander than she could've imagined — certainly more luxurious than any part of Liam's pack house. What surprised her more than that, however, were the kitchen staff. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian(7)

There were plenty of kitchen staff, both men and women, bustling in and out of the kitchen and the hallways, and none of them wore revealing outfits like the women at Liam's pack had.

By the time they were escorted into the dining room, everyone else was already seated. Lily and Alessia were both seated beside each other on the left, the latter looking even more unimpressed than she'd seemed earlier.

However, Aria's stomach rolled when her eyes landed on the other two inhabitants of the room: King Griffin and Queen Clark. Her eyes couldn't help but linger on the Queen, and she almost couldn't believe how different this woman looked from the first time she'd met her in that cell.

It wasn't just the fact that she was no longer covered in dirt and grime or wearing a soiled dress.

The most striking difference was her countenance. Back at Liam's pack, the Queen practically reeked of terror and paranoia, her face almost always riddled with anger or anxiety. Like she might have to fight for her life any second.

This woman looked nothing like that. There wasn't an ounce of fear on her face or a single frown line. Queen Clark looked peaceful. Content. Her green dress made her red hair shine in the light of the dining room, and without a sheen of dirt on her face, Aria could make out the smattering of freckles that covered both of her cheeks. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

Aria was almost afraid to look at the man attached to her side. King Griffin was handsome, there was no denying that, but everything about him was intimidating and big and too much. Whereas Sebastian's dominance felt soft and quiet, the King's felt overwhelming and suffocating. His power leeching out of every pore, blanketing the room in a heaviness that made her wolf want to lie down and submit.

She had no idea how the Queen dealt with it.

As if he could feel her anxiety, Sebastian squeezed her hand and led her to the remaining empty chairs. The King and Queen sat at the head of the table, Sebastian to the Queen's right and Alessia and Lily directly across from them. Alessia was across from her seat, and she ignored the woman's leveled stare when Sebastian pulled out her seat.

It wasn't just Alessia's stare she could feel on her ~ it was everyone's. She could feel Lily's curiosity, the King's judgement, and even the Queen's gaze.

She really didn't want to be here, but instead of dashing from the room, she just squeezed Sebastian's hand.

He squeezed back.

In front of them, they all had glasses of what smelled like white wine, but their plates were still empty.

"Seb, glad to see you made it." It was the Queen who broke the silence first, smiling lightly at Sebastian. Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

He smiled back. "Of course, I wasn't going to miss a family dinner, especially one as fancy as this."

"You guys remember the last dinner we had in this room?" Lily spoke, and then she huffed. "Griffin, I don't know if you know this, but your dad was a major dick to us."

Aria froze. Had Lily really just said that? Addressed the Alpha King so informally and insulted his father?

To her surprise, the King didn't seem the least bit offended by the comment. Instead, he just smirked, taking a sip of wine. "Oh, I'm sure he was. Dear old dad didn't have a polite bone in his body:"

"You know," Alessia piped up, taking a swig out of her own wine glass, "Pm a little upset that I played hooky and never got to go to this dinner:"

Lily turned to her with a smile. "Why, because you would've met me sooner?"

"Well, that," Alessia replied, brushing a strand of blonde hair out of her mate's face, "But also so that I could tell everyone I saw the former Alpha King when he still had his head."

King Griffin chuckled, his smirk widening. "Don't worry, you didn't miss much...and he was much better company without it."

"Pve got to agree," Queen Clark said, "Mostly because the man was Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

actively trying to kill me."

Aria's breath hitched — she knew the rumors, she knew what King Griffin had supposedly done to his father...but how could they all sit around and joke about it?

King Griffin suddenly turned to the Queen, and his gaze became serious. "As if | would've ever let him touch a hair on your head, little fox," he murmured to her, but with Aria's supernatural senses, she heard just fine.

Something intense and intimate passed between the two, and Aria had to look away ~ she felt like she was intruding on something private.

Fortunately, a round of castle staff entered the dining room just then, their hands loaded with silver trays that smelled divine. A castle boy placed Aria's dish down, and she saw what she'd been served ~ a juicy rib-eye steak larger than her head, whipped mash potatoes, and green beans.

Once all the plates had been served, Queen Clark raised her wine glass to make a toast. "I know it's a little cheesy," she said, "But since we're all here with our mates, I do want to say something:"

She paused to make sure she had everyone's attention. "The past several months have really been...something," she started, "A year ago, I was applying to colleges, hoping to live a human life where the only werewolves I regularly saw were in the movies. Everything changed the first time I came to this castle." She turned to King Griffin. "You Bonus Chapter - Aria & Sebastian (7)

changed things. I wasn't happy about it, and I probably dragged too many people into it trying to get away from you -" She glanced at Alessia. " - But the fact that I get to sit here right now with my mate and family...there's nowhere I'd rather be."

The Queen's eyes landed on Aria. "I know change can be scary when you've only ever known one thing, but sometimes, you just need to embrace that fear. Lean into it and see where it takes you. You might be surprised where you end up. I was:"

Aria's chest felt heavy, and it wasn't until the Queen finished her toast by clinking glasses with everyone else that she finally felt like she had room to breathe.

Lean into the change, See where it takes you.

In an effort to ignore the real meaning behind the Queen's words, she dug into her food just like the rest of the table.

There was a few moments of peace and quiet as they all savored the delicious food, but Aria had a feeling it wouldn't last.

Something told her this dinner was just getting started.