

The Alpha King’s Human Mate by HC Dolores

Chapter 76

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“Home is people. Not a place. If you go back there after the people are gone, then all you can see is what is not there anymore.”

Robin Hobb

I wish I could say that the next couple of weeks were spent in peaceful, easy-going bliss with a newly returned Griffin. Unfortunately, I cannot say that.

The next couple of weeks were spent bouncing from one obligation to the next with little downtime. When I wasn’t training with Ivan, I was meeting with Nadia to discuss more details of my coronation ~ from the decorations in the throne room to the dress I’d wear and the seating arrangements.

Part of me just wanted to throw my hands up and tell her I’d be happy with anything, but I didn’t want to shirk my royal duties. It was my coronation ~ the first of any in decades. I needed to be involved, even if I had no real opinion on preference for having dusty pink or rose pink bouquets.

My time with Griffin felt far too little. He spent most of his days cooped up in conference rooms with warriors and councilors, trying to figure out Liam’s next move. The only time we were able to spend together

was at night, but even then, I could tell that the Liam situation weighed Chapter 76

on him heavily. As soon as my coronation was over, I knew he’d have to

leave again. But after Liam is dealt with, we’ll get to spend more time together. I think.

Thope so at least.

My mother used to tell me that time flies when you’re having fun or dreading something. I was doing the second. Not only was I dreading another bout of Griffin’s absence, but I was dreading the inevitable reunion with my family.

More specifically, my father.

We hadn’t talked since I’d left for the diplomatic meeting. I had planned to, but then I learned that he was the one responsible for cutting my mother out of my life for so many years. That was a hard pill to swallow. The last thing I wanted to do was deal with his anger - or even worse, his attempts to use my new position to further his pack’s standing in the werewolf world. But I knew I had to face him eventually. At least it would be in a crowded room full of other werewolves and my mate. You know, the kind of place where he wouldn’t be able to ream me out with a lecture.

And as much as I was dreading the temporary future, time did fly. Before I knew it, it was the morning of my coronation and some of the female castle staff were dressing me in the gown I’d be crowned in. Chapter 76

“Mary, hold the sides of the dress please,” the older woman lacing up the back of the dress said. Mary, a staff member I’d met once before, did as she instructed. (!

And I didn’t do anything except stand still with my arms out, letting them poke and prod at me. The gown was more luxurious than anything I’d ever worn — or probably ever seen ~ in my life.

It was a baby blue gown with straps that laid below the shoulder, a neckline that dipped enough to show off a little cleavage, and a skirt that flared out. There was even a long train that trailed behind me, but the finishing touch was the white lace crescent moons sewn onto the skirt.

I felt like a princess. Or a queen, I suppose.

I’d picked the design out a couple of weeks ago with Nadia. All of the options she’d shown me were beautiful, but this one had caught my eye.

Well, it’s good to know that my taste isn’t completely terrible. I think even Lily would be impressed with this one.

Or will be impressed, I should say ~ I’ll be seeing her in a couple of hours.

Since it was the day of my crowning, werewolves from all over the world would be arriving at the castle shortly. My own family included. I’d asked a couple of the guards standing by the entrances to alert me Chapter 76

when my mother got here. “You look so beautiful, Your Majesty,” Mary said, smiling at me.

“You really do,” the castle girl on my right said. She was currently pinning my hair into some elaborate updo.

“Thank you,” I said, blushing. And I did feel beautiful. More beautiful than I could ever remember feeling in my life.

Although I can admit that my confidence is definitely coming from this gorgeous dress and the makeup, not my natural features.

“I don’t think the King will be able to take his eyes off you, Your Majesty,” the old woman said, a teasing smile playing on her lips. That statement only made me flush more, but deep down, I hoped she was right.

Griffin hadn’t seen the hours of work that had gone into my coronation outfit yet. Apparently, that was part of the tradition of a coronation ceremony - the King didn’t see the Queen until the moment she walked into the throne room to be crowned. When Nadia had explained that to me, I couldn’t help but think of how similar it sounded to a human tradition. A human wedding tradition, that is.

Not that I’m getting married or this is even remotely similar to a wedding. Griffin is just crowning me. This is about the werewolf world, I’m doing this for them. Chapter 76

“Okay, just one more pin, and I think...” the girl working on my hair poked at my scalp with a bobby pin, and I withheld a wince. “We’re done!”

The three women moved back, examining me. “I believe that was the final touch, Your Majesty,” the old woman said, “You’re completely ready now. You look every bit like the Queen you will be crowned today.” She bowed her head as she spoke.

“It’s only due to your work,” I said, “Without you three, I doubt I’d be looking even a tenth what I do now. So, thank you.”

“It was an honor getting to dress you, Your Majesty,” Mary piped up, “We still have a little bit of time before the coronation starts. Would you like us to keep you company or would you like a few moments to yourself?”

The thought of being alone - even if it was just to worry about the impending family reunion - was too good to pass up. “I’d like to be alone if that’s alright.”

All three women bowed their heads to me as I thanked them again and they made their exit.

I sat down on the edge of the bed, sighing. Well, there’s no turning back now, Clark. You’re in this for real.

It’s not just about Griffin or accepting the mate bond anymore. You’re Chapter 76

committed to the werewolf world now ~ to the people you’ll promise to rule over today.

I assumed that thought would terrify me, but it didn’t. Was I nervous that I’d royally mess up ruling the werewolf world? Of course. I was still a teenager, someone who had spent a good portion of my life trying to escape this world. I hadn’t grown up thinking I’d rule my entire life as Griffin had.

But amidst that anxiety, something about the situation just felt...right. Like I was putting together another puzzle piece of my life, one I hadn’t known I was missing.

A knock on the door startled me from my thoughts.

“Your Majesty,” the muffled voice of a guard filtered through, “You asked us to inform you when a family member arrives. I’ve just been

mind-linked that your mother and her mate have come through the south entrance. Is there something you’d like us to do?”

I held back a chuckle when the guard referred to Steve as my mother’s mate. Maybe he was in some ways, just not by the werewolf definition.

“Could you have my mother escorted here?” I called back. “Of course, Your Majesty.”

I let out a sigh of relief. I wasn’t even sure why the thought of seeing my mom soothed my anxiety so much, but it did. My coronation Chapter 76

might’ve been a werewolf event, but it felt wrong to walk through the throne room without seeing my mom first. I wasn’t even sure why I felt that way. She had missed plenty of pivotal moments in my life, so why was this one any different?

Maybe I’m just making up for lost time.

It took at least ten minutes, but eventually, there was another knock. “Clark?”

Mom. Her soft voice was unlike any of the guard’s.

“Mom?” I called back. Instinctually, I went to get up but then I was reminded of the heavy fabric I was wearing. “So, uh, I’d let you in, but I’m afraid to rip or wrinkle the dress I’m wearing right now.”

That was all it took for my mother to crack open the door, slipping into the room. As soon as she’d closed it behind her, she was taking me into her arms and squeezing me tight.

She smelled of vanilla perfume — just as I’d remembered.

“Oh, Clark,” she said, and I could hear her voice waver. She was barely keeping it together. “You have no idea how happy I am to see you.”

“Yeah, me either,” I said, pulling back to look at her. She was wearing a pink dress — or dusty pink as Nadia would most likely say - and her hair was pulled back. Chapter 76

“You look so beautiful,” she said, and her eyes roamed over the dress. “Like a...well, a Queen.” She laughed a little at the end, wiping at her watery eyes. “God, you look so grown up.”

“Well, you don’t look so bad yourself,” I countered. Emotion swelled in my chest. Having my mother here only made all of this feel more real. It made me want to cry more, and if it wasn’t for the fear that I’d have to spend my coronation with mascara running down my cheeks, I might’ve.

“Oh, please,” she chuckled, “This old thing? It was collecting dust in the closet. I think Steve was just happy I finally had the occasion to wear it”

She paused for a moment and then she looked at me, her expression more serious than it had been before. “Clark, honey,” she said, “I need to know...are you okay? Like, you want this?”

There was no hesitation in my answer. “I do.”

“It’s just that not so long ago,” she continued, concerned eyes looking down at me, “You were running from this whole world, from the idea of being locked down for the rest of your life. I know that I haven’t been there when you needed me, but I’m here now. And if this isn’t what you want, if you feel forced into this at all...you can tell me, honey. I’ll help you. I’m not exactly sure how I’ll help you, but I will. I mean, that last text you sent me? And now you’re getting crowned Queen? It’s a bit of a fast turnaround, honey. You’ll have to make sure this is what you want, and not something you feel pressured into.” Chapter 76

There was something almost comical about the idea of my human mother helping me run from the guards or fending Griffin off with her purse. Comical but sweet.

“Mom, I’m really okay,” I said, “I know that I was dead set on leaving this world the last time we saw each other, but back then, I hadn’t really given any of it a chance. Griffin and I had a rocky start, but now that I’ve seen what this world is really like and what my place in it will be, I know that this is what I want. I think I need this, and maybe this sounds dumb, but...I think maybe this world needs me too. Just a little bit”

My mom smiled, and I could see her visibly relax. “If you’re sure,” she said, “That’s all that matters. I just want you to be happy, Clark.”

“I’m sure,” I replied, “But are you going to be okay? I mean, there’s a reception after the coronation. You’ll be in the same room as dad. Are you going to be okay?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” she brushed me off, “Besides... think

your father and I are long overdue for a talk.”