

The Alpha King's Human Mate by HC Dolores

Chapter 7

“No one is free, even the birds are chained to the sky.”

Bob Dylan

When I finally made it home after school, my body was still bruised from warrior training. The house was quiet when I walked in, but that wasn't unusual. My dad and Sebastian were mostly likely handling some sort of pack business, and Grace liked to spend her afternoons helping in the pack nursery.

That was fine by me my bed was calling. I desperately needed an afternoon nap after the ass-kicking from this morning.

“Clark?”

Just as I was about to ascend the stairs, a voice stopped me in my tracks.

I turned around to see Sebastian standing in the living room, looking even more serious than usual. I was surprised to see him here. In the year since he'd graduated high school, Sebastian had been spending less and less time at the house. My dad was grooming him to take over the Alpha position, and that meant keeping Sebastian glued to his side.

“Yeah, what's up?”

“Can we talk?” He asked, his eyebrows furrowed.

As he'd gotten older, it seemed that Sebastian's face was permanently stuck in the same serious, concerned expression. I'm not sure if it came from the responsibility of being the next Alpha or just the firstborn son in a werewolf family.

“Sure.”

I hopped down from the last stair and followed him into the living room. “Is dad home or is it just us?”

“No, it's just us.”

He sat in my dad's favorite recliner and I plopped down onto the couch.

“What did you want to talk about?”

Sebastian sighed and I saw him gesture to an open envelope on the coffee table.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA was stamped on the front.

Oh no.

I could feel the blood drain out of my face, and I took another look at Sebastian's grave expression. I didn't need to read the entire paper to know it was a rejection letter. I'd specifically requested for any acceptances and rejections to be sent to my email address just so I could avoid this very scenario, but I guess not every college was paying attention.

"You want to explain what this is?" Sebastian's voice was calm and composed, but I could tell he wasn't happy. He'd clearly read the letter, and he knew I was applying to colleges across the country that I was trying to leave.

"Well, uh," I scratched the back of my neck, "It's a rejection letter from a potential college. I've been applying to those, you know. It's almost that time."

"I thought you were going to the University of Washington, that you were going to just commute from home," Sebastian said, crossing his arms.

It was hard to explain that I'd lied to dad. Our father had made it pretty clear he wanted me to stick close by, and if I'd told him I was applying to colleges across the country, he would've talked me out of it. So, I had come up with a little white lie – I told him that I was only applying to local colleges that would allow me to live at home, like the University of Washington. Q

To be fair, I did get an application from the University of Washington, I just didn't fill it out.

"Well, I've been broadening my search, you know," I said, "I've lived in Washington my whole life, Sebastian. I just want to explore, maybe spend some time in a place that's a little sunnier."

"You want to leave the pack."@

"It's not like I'd be gone forever," I told him, "Going to college in another state doesn't mean I'd never come home to the pack. There's still holidays and the occasional weekend."

Sebastian had the same piercing blue eyes as my dad and Lily – the kind of eyes that made you feel like he was looking straight through you whenever he made eye contact.

And knowing Sebastian, he was definitely seeing straight through my excuses.

“Come on, Clark,” he sighed, leaning back into the recliner, “You and I both know this isn’t about you exploring or getting a little sun. You want to get away from the pack, from your family.”

There was plenty of hurt in his tone, and a pang of guilt ran straight through me. It sounded so awful once Sebastian said it out loud. I didn’t want to sound ungrateful for what my dad or the pack had given me. Deep down, I knew my life was much better here than it would’ve ever been with my mother. Life with my mom had been cheap hotel rooms, fast food, and getting handed off to “aunts” and “uncles” like candy.

I might’ve felt like an outcast, but life with my dad had always been stable. I had two sober adults that loved me, a homecooked meal on the table every night, and there were no strange men hanging around.

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Actually, I should probably rephrase there was no shortage of strange men

coming to speak to my dad about pack business, but none of them had ever leered at me the way my mom’s old boyfriends had. O

See? Look how great your life is here. You’re really going to leave that behind?

I swallowed down the guilt.

Stick to your guns, Clark. You’re eighteen, you should be allowed to explore and experience the world. Most people your age aren’t chained to a werewolf pack.

“Seb, you know I love you,” I said, “You, the family, even the pack. I care about everyone, but this had to happen sometime. I’m not like you guys. Once I graduate, there won’t be anything for me here.”

“What do you mean, ‘not like us?’” Sebastian narrowed his eyes. His face was blank, and I inwardly cursed my brother. It was times like these that I wished he was easier to read, but he’d learned how to hide his emotions from our father.

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He wasn’t like me I wore every emotion on my sleeve. Or, to be accurate, my face.

“You know,” I said, “I’m not a werewolf, Seb. I know I’m still part of the pack and I’ll always be part of the pack, but there’s not an actual place for me here. I won’t become an Alpha like you and I won’t have a mate like Lily. Sooner or later, I’ve got to leave the nest.”

His expression remained blank for another moment, and then I saw him sigh and run a hand through his hair. “God, I hate how much I sound like dad right now,” he said, “This whole conversation...I’m not trying to be your parent, Clark, I

swear.” 3

I felt a twinge of sympathy, and I moved closer to rest my hand on Sebastian’s arm. As much as I felt like the odd one out, I knew Sebastian’s situation wasn’t easy either. He was the golden boy, the firstborn son that had to live up to everyone’s expectations. A world of responsibility rested on his shoulders all the time, but he grit his teeth and bore it with a smile.

“It’s okay, you’ve pretty much mastered dad’s raised eyebrows,” I teased, trying to lighten the tension. Sebastian let out an airy chuckle.

“I know you’re worried about me, Seb,” I said, “I’m sorry I wasn’t straightforward with you about the college stuff. To be honest, I knew dad would be pissed if I told him and I didn’t want to put anyone else in the position of lying for me.”

Sebastian squeezed my hand, “Sometimes I forget that you’re not tethered to this world the way that Lily and I are...but I hope you know that this pack will always be your home.”

Sebastian looked up at me with a smile, and I couldn’t resist hugging him. As little as I saw him these days, feeling my brother’s strong arms around me soothed something deep inside.

“You know dad is going to be totally pissed when you tell him, right? You might want to wait until after this big diplomatic meeting.”

“Don’t worry, I don’t plan to tell dad until my car is already packed and the engine is running.”

Sebastian rolled his eyes playfully as he pulled away from me. He grabbed the rejection letter in his hands and crumbled it up. “I’ll throw this away for you.”

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Sebastian got up to leave, but before he could walk away, a random thought popped into my head. I wasn’t sure what possessed me to ask – maybe my conversation with Kara had sparked an interest earlier but the words were out of

my mouth before I could stop them. “Hey, Seb, what do you know about the Alpha Prince, Griffin?”

Sebastian’s eyes widened in surprise. Clearly, he was just as shocked to hear me ask as I was. I rarely asked questions about anything regarding the werewolf world, let alone a mysterious Alpha King or Prince I’d never met.

“Griffin Bardot, you mean?” Sebastian asked, “I’ve never met him. I’ve heard some stuff about him, but that’s about it. Why the sudden curiosity?”

I didn’t want to tell Sebastian about my dreams of a man with a griffin tattoo – it was probably random, and I didn’t want to see Sebastian laugh at me when he confirmed that.

It was just a dream, Clark. It’s not any more meaningful than when you dream about living in a mansion made of candy canes. Just because the guy’s name is Griffin doesn’t mean he has a griffin tattoo – that’d be a little on-the-nose.

“Kara was talking about him during class today,” I finally said, “And I figured he’ll probably be at the diplomatic meeting. The guy’s a literal prince, so I guess I just don’t want to embarrass myself or give him a reason to tear my throat out.”

That explanation seemed to satisfy Sebastian.

“Well, I know he’s twenty-five,” Sebastian told me, “He’s next in line to be the Alpha King, but probably not for a few years. From what I’ve heard, he’s done a lot of military and diplomatic stuff, fought in pack disputes, and helped settle pack conflicts. Apparently, he’s pretty ruthless. I heard he took off some guy’s head just for looking at him wrong once.”

“Wow, sounds like a charmer.”

“That’s just a rumor, of course,” Sebastian clarified, “But it wouldn’t surprise me if it were true. He is next in line to be Alpha King and he can’t look weak, otherwise, someone might challenge him for the throne. And he hasn’t found his mate either so that probably has something to do with it.”

“What do you mean?”

“You might not have learned this in school, but the longer a wolf goes without their mate, the more hostile and aggressive they become. The guy has spent nine years without his, so I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s got plenty of pent-up aggression.”@

Great. I'm going to spend next week in the same room as a guy who tears people's heads off for looking at him the wrong way.

Might as well tell my dad about college now, because who knows if I'll be coming home next week? 5

The fear must've shown on my face because Sebastian quickly back-tracked. "Sorry, I don't mean to scare you, but you did ask. There is a good chance we'll meet him next week, but nothing's going to happen to you. If dad's theory is right, he's going to spend the entire time scouting the place for his mate. He won't care about anything else. So, don't worry about it."

I nodded and mustered up a smile before Sebastian walked off.

His words should've reassured me, so why was there still a pit in my stomach? *