

# The Alpha King's Human Mate by HC Dolores

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“Romantic love is an addiction. A perfectly wonderful addiction when

it's going well, a perfectly horrible addiction when it's going poorly.” )

Helen Fisher

The hollow feeling in my chest never dissipated.

If anything, it only seemed to get worse the farther Griffin got from me. Every time that I thought about him - which was quite a lot - the claiming bite on my shoulder pulsed. Like it yearned for Griffin's touch.

Deep down, I knew it was the mate bond making me feel this way. It had to be. As little attention as I paid in my werewolf education classes, I'd remembered that. Once you completed the mate bond, it became stronger. It got harder to spend time apart.

But hearing about in a classroom couldn't compare to how it actually felt. As cheesy as it sounded, it felt like Griffin had packed my heart into his suitcase. \")

And even thinking that felt embarrassing.

Even with the mate bond, I'd hardly known Griffin more than a month. Amonth - that's all the time it had taken for him to burrow his way

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into my soul like he'd always lived there.

You survived eighteen years without Griffin, surely you can stand another month.

So much for wanting to be independent.

The worst part was the nightmares that started a couple of days after Griffin left.

I dreamed of Alpha Liam and Griffin in a stand-off, like one of those old Western movies. Instead of guns, their claws were unsheathed.

I always woke up at the same part ~ right when Liam sliced Griffin's head clean off his body. I usually woke up gasping in a cold sweat too, and it would take me a moment to realize that the dreams weren't reality. That was Griffin was still alive, and had he died, | would've known. Not only would the castle be in an uproar, but I was sure that I would've felt it through the mate bond.

Suffice to say, I wasn't sleeping that well these days. There wasn't even a reliable way for me to contact Griffin either. He'd be traveling, meeting with Beta Williams, and possibly walking into a fight. That didn't leave a lot of time for casual texting, although it's not as if I had a phone to text him on.

Pretty sure my phone is still sitting cracked on the pavement of Yorba Linda. Chapter 71

Still, I didn't want to wallow in the anxiety of Griffin's absence. I knew that moping around would only make the time pass slower, so I threw myself into one of the few distractions | had: training with Ivan.

If nothing else, Ivan's sharp criticism kept my mind focused on something besides Griffin.

“Is there a reason you can't seem to land a punch today?” Ivan asked, his accent sharp and harsh. He held the punching bag in place for me even though my hits hardly seemed to move it anyway. “You look like you're half-asleep. You hit like it too.”

After a couple of sessions with him, Ivan's comfort level with me seemed to dramatically increase. I'm pretty sure he realized I wasn't going to tattle to Griffin every time he offered a little criticism.

“Yeah, well, that's probably because I feel like I'm half-asleep,” I said, reaching for my water bottle.

“Oh, why is that?” Ivan asked, raising an eyebrow, “Are the king's quarters not luxurious enough for you? Can't get a good's night sleep?” Ivan's tone was sarcastic, but I'd learned that was just him. Brash with no filter. Maybe it was the sleep-deprivation talking, but I didn't mind it these days. He was about the only person currently in the country who didn't tip-toe around me, afraid they'd offend their Queen.)

“No, that's not it,” I rolled my eyes, “It's these...well, can I ask you a question?” Chapter 71

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“Well, you're mated, right?” Ivan's eyes narrowed. “Yes.”

“Have you guys ever been separated before?” I asked, “Like, for a week or longer.”

Recognition crossed Ivan's face — he knew where I was going with this line of questioning. “A couple of times,” Ivan said, “When I was in my prime, I occasionally went on missions to settle pack disputes. I had to leave my mate to do so.”

“How did you deal with it?”

Ivan's face twisted, like he was remembering something awful. “It is... not easy,” he said, “There are no shortcuts for the absence of the mate. You must simply endure.”

“Did you ever have...nightmares?” I asked. I wasn't sure why I was so

hesitant to say it. Maybe it just felt like I was admitting something vulnerable about myself.

Ivan paused, looking me over in what it looked like pity. Or, at least, the closest that Ivan could get to pity.

“During my absence, I dreamt of my mate dying in odd ways,” Ivan confessed, a pained look in his eye, “Sometimes in a fire. Sometimes in

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a rogue attack. Sometimes just in a mundane way, like of a heart attack.”

So, it's not just me. Is this just a mate thing?)

I certainly don't remember vivid, haunting nightmares being part of the package when everybody was bragging about the mate bond.

“It made for some long nights,” Ivan continued, “But eventually, I found the source of it.”

“The source?”

“It's the mate bond,” he explained, “It's the bond's way of trying to force you back together. Cause enough panic and you won't want to leave your mate's side again.”

He was silent for a moment and then he asked, “What is it you're seeing?”

I debated on answering Ivan, but he'd been truthful to me. I could to the same.

“I see him fighting Alpha Liam and losing,” I said, “Getting killed.” When Ivan didn't immediately reply, I continued talking. Every anxiety

and worry that I'd experienced over the past few days spilled out of me. “I know that it probably wouldn't happen. That if Griffin and Alpha

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Liam did fight, Griffin would be the victor. But it still keeps me up at night. The scene replays like a constant loop in my head.”

“This is the burden of the mate bond,” he said, “The moments together are euphoric. Addicting. Yet it only makes the moments apart all the more painful.”

“You know, most humans would that call that withdrawal, which isn't usually a good thing,”

“What do you humans know about mate bonds? Their view of love is heavily skewed,” Ivan sneered, and then after a moment, he added, “No offense.”

Trolled my eyes. “Well, say what you want, but I can tell you that most humans don't get vivid nightmares when their partner goes on a business trip. Human love is very different from the way werewolves love. Granted, everyone is different...but most humans like being independent. They don't feel the overwhelming need to be possessive over the people they date. They also don't pick life partners as soon as they make eye contact for the first time. They spend years finding out if someone is the right fit for them.”

“Yes, and I pity them,” Ivan said, “They will never experience the deep connection of a mate bond. They will never know what it feels like to meet the other half of your soul, to feel love so deeply that losing it would cost you your life. Humans put so much emphasis on separation. Of being independent of those they choose to spend their lives with. Wolves do the opposite. We have no desire to separate ourselves from

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our mates.”

“But doesn't it scare you?” I asked, “You said it yourself. Losing a mate could cost you your life, or at the very least, your sanity. Are you not scared of losing your own mate?”

“Pd be a fool not to,” Ivan said, and I was surprised to hear him confess it so openly. “But I'd rather live in a short life having experienced the consuming love of a mate than a long one without it. You are one of the lucky ones, Your Majesty. You get to experience this kind of love too — in a way that most humans will never be able to fathom, let alone experience.”

There was more passion in Ivan's voice than I'd ever heard before, and it felt like I was seeing a new side of him. And had I not been so sleep- deprived, maybe I could've come up with an equally great response to his speech.

Instead, I just nodded and turned back to the punching bag. Ireeled my arm back to make a fist, but Ivan raised his hand. “I think that's enough training for today. We'll pick this back up tomorrow,” he

said.

raised an eyebrow. We hadn't even been training for an hour, and most of sessions lasted several.

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“You're useless when you're so sleep-deprived like this,” Ivan grumbled, and he began putting the punching bag up, “You can hardly listen to. instruction, let alone throw a decent punch. Tomorrow, I expect to see you well-rested.”

I just nodded. I knew he was right, I just hoped that I'd actually be able to get some rest.

I turned back to gather up my water bottle and the jacket I'd brought with me.

“One more thing,” Ivan called out, and I looked back at him. I was prepared for his final piece of criticism or back-handed compliment ~ but it never came.

“ask the staff to brew you a cup of valerian root tea,” he said, and then his face softened, “The nightmares won't last forever, my Queen. It will

get better.”

Thope so.