

## Mated To An Enemy - Chapter 2

Ashleigh didn't know how long she had laid there crying or how long she simply stared up at the sky.

She suspected it had been more than an hour, closer to two.

The fireworks began, signaling that the Alphas had just finished the opening ceremonies to the Goddess in hopes of receiving her blessing for the year.

"Blessings," she scoffed to herself bitterly.

Even now, the 'blessing' she had received was threatening her sanity. Her senses were still reaching out for him. The scent was faint; his heartbeat faded to a whisper in her mind.

After she had given in to her need to simply lay still and cry, the pull of the mate bond had waned to a bearable level. She assumed Alpha Caleb was likely too busy with his duties to search for her.

'Your duty comes before your heart,' her father's words echoed in her mind, and she couldn't help but notice the disappointment she felt in them.

'No,' she thought to herself firmly. 'It's a good thing. The busier, the better.'

Of course, the fireworks meant that this would not be the case for much longer. Alpha Wyatt had told her several events required all of the Alphas to honor the Blood Moon. But she suspected Alpha Caleb was not opposed to hunting his prey between those events.

She wondered how long she could avoid him.

Ashleigh's presence, or lack thereof, would not go unnoticed at each of the offerings. She had already missed the opening ceremony. And her father had made it clear that she was expected to be at every event.

'Would father let me leave if I told him the truth?' she wondered. It seemed like a reasonable plan until a pair of pale blue eyes entered her memory, a kind smile. 'If I tell father, I will have to tell Granger....'

Her heart ached at the thought of telling him. The hurt he would feel, would he blame her? PANDA-NOVEL.COM

'No, no... I can't tell anyone. Not until I understand what is going on. I can't have two mates. That's impossible!' she thought angrily.

"Right!?" Ashleigh shouted as she got to her feet. She stared up at the sky with resentment filling her heart. "One mate, one!"

The moon may have left, but the Goddess would still hear her.

"That's the deal, the promise, isn't it? The blessing you bestowed on us all? One perfect mate bonded for life."

The tears she thought had run dry came once more.

"I love Granger!" she cried out. "He is my mate. Only him."

As if the Goddess herself was responding to her ungrateful tone, a wave of warmth spread over her body.

She gasped at the onset and took a deep breath, calming herself, attempting to tame the primal parts of her mind that threatened her control. As that enthralling scent provoked her senses once more.

"Damn it!" she shouted in frustration.

He was coming to her. She could feel it. Ashleigh considered shifting, she could run faster in her wolf form, but the question was whether she would run away or towards the danger. It was best to avoid the risk.

From what she could remember of the schedule, it wouldn't be too much longer before another of the events started. The Alphas had several tasks they were committed to that evening, as well as a meeting in the morning. PANDA NOVEL

"So, all I have to do is skip every event I promised father I would attend. Then win a twelve-hour game of hide and seek with an Alpha," she whispered to herself with a defeated chuckle. "Oh, and he's got a built-in homing device on me. Great."

"Ashleigh?" a familiar voice called to her.

Ashleigh turned around to see a Viking beauty before her. Blonde hair bound in a high crown built of folded braids and knots. A lilac gown with a brown corset belt. A pair of emerald eyes that sparkled brightly no matter the time of day or night.

It was difficult not to find Luna Corrine beautiful.

"Mother," Ashleigh replied softly.

"Ashleigh, what are you doing here? We've been looking for you for hours! You missed the opening ceremony, and believe me, your father noticed. Come on."

Her mother linked their arms and pushed her daughter forward, not allowing her any room to object.

She chastised her for running off the entire walk back to the party. As they made their way, Ashleigh's mind was occupied looking at every person they passed, checking for those cold eyes.

So distracted in looking for him, she didn't notice that her symptoms had already subsided. Not until her search was interrupted by something more recognizable.

Ashleigh felt his gaze on her, the familiar pull of their bond. Closing her eyes instinctually, she let it roll over her. The comforting warmth and tenderness, as though he stood behind her, wrapping her in his gentle embrace.

She opened her eyes and looked at him over the crowd. All around them were pack members from all over the world, a sea of people she didn't know, and her eyes were drawn only to him.

His black hair had always stood out against the white snow that covered their lands back home. He wore it long, just past his chin. Most of the men in the Winter Pack wore their hair long, but unlike the others, he didn't keep his hair fashioned in braids or knots like the Vikings their lands had once belonged to. Instead, he allowed it to flow freely in the cold wind, loose and inviting. She longed to run her fingers through his smooth hair. p○○d○○○○○○

Their eyes met, sending a fluttering into her belly and a thundering into her heart. Even at this distance, she knew that those pale blue eyes were filled with a swirling blend of adoration and need. Because her own eyes could only reflect the same feelings.

Granger lifted his mouth in a half-smile. His lips formed the words she heard as a whisper carried on the wind.

'I love you.'

Her heart ached. Any other day, any other time, she would have felt the joy in her soul that only he could give her. She would have returned his words of love without a second thought. But now, she felt as though she had betrayed him.

It didn't matter that she loved him. It didn't matter that she never wanted to meet Alpha Caleb, much less be his mate. It didn't change the fact that it was true.

PANDA NOVEL She was saved at this moment by the man that stood beside him, leading his attention elsewhere. Ashleigh took the opportunity to look away from him, not wanting to risk seeing those loving and trusting eyes again.

"It won't be long now, my darling."

"What?" Ashleigh turned to face her mother.

"Your wedding, dear. I know how hard it is to be patient after you have found your mate," Corrine smiled warmly, "but it won't be long now. Just a couple of weeks."

A weight settled into Ashleigh's chest and pressed down into her stomach. Guilt and fear crept over her mind.

"Actually," she swallowed nervously, "I was thinking that it might be best to move the wedding to the next moon."

Corrine was taken by surprise and unable to mask the shock.

"Ashleigh, has something happened between you and Granger? Did he do something? Ashleigh did that boy try to force——"

"Mother, no!" Ashleigh shouted, "No! Never. Granger is amazing. He is kind and wonderful and more than I deserve."

"Well, then I don't understand. You were so excited just a few days ago, so what changed?" Corrine sighed.

“Nothing, nothing has changed,” she replied, “I’m not saying I don’t want to marry him, only that we should wait a little longer.”

“But why Ashleigh? You can’t just say you want to push the wedding back out of nowhere without reason.”

Her mother was sharp and unrelenting. Without a satisfactory answer, she would never drop the subject.

“When I spoke with Father earlier, he told me not to rush myself, and I wonder if he might have a point.”

Corrine did not believe her. Ashleigh and Granger had known for two years that they were mates. They had been waiting eagerly for this day to come. She would not have changed her mind based on one conversation with her father.

“Ashleigh, tell me the truth,” Corrine demanded.

“I am!” Ashleigh replied quickly, “No, listen, Mother, I just mean the wedding. My birthday is in two weeks, and we are already having a big celebration, the full moon is only a week later. Honestly, I have been so busy planning the birthday party that I haven’t spent much time on the wedding.”

That was a lie. Ashleigh had dreamed of the day she and Granger would be mated for two years. She knew every detail of the day. But luckily, she truly had been busy with her party and hadn’t had the chance to share those details with her mother.

“I just feel like our wedding would be rushed if we have it so close to my birthday party. So, if we push it back just one more month, it will give us time to put together the wedding we want without rushing. That’s all.”

Corrine looked carefully at her daughter. Then, she smiled and reached a hand to Ashleigh's cheek  
after a moment.

"As long as you are happy, my love. But just remember, you and Granger will need to continue to be  
patient until then."

"Mom!" Ashleigh cried out with embarrassment.

The mother and daughter pair laughed together in a way that made Ashleigh forget for just a  
moment about the terrible situation she was currently experiencing. Just for a moment.

And after, that peace was ruined.

The feeling on her skin came first, like a hot breath against her throat. Then, the mesmerizing  
fragrance entered her lungs, filling her with the desire she tried so hard to fight. It took all her self-  
control to hold back her natural reaction to the sudden stimuli.

Excusing herself quickly, she ran down one hallway and then another. She didn't pay attention. Her  
concern was not letting her mother see her reaction, not wanting Granger to see it. But,  
unfortunately, it was too late when she realized that instinct had led her, and instinct had betrayed  
her.

"It seems that hide and seek is not your best game."