

## Mated To An Enemy - Chapter 4

Ashleigh stayed in her room the rest of the night. Her experience with Caleb had exhausted her both emotionally and physically. It didn't take much effort to convince Corrine that she wasn't feeling well.

Even her father had forgiven her absence when he saw the state of her.

Ashleigh shifted in her bed, thinking back to her and her father's conversation when they first arrived at the Blood Moon. At that time, all Ashleigh had wanted was to get away and spend some time with Granger.

As she thought back on the memory, her excitement was almost laughable now.

"I understand the importance of the Blood Moon Gathering, I do. I really, truly do. But let's be honest.

Over the years, it has become less of a significant cultural event and more of a... speed dating event."

The man sitting across the table coughed, choking on the wine that had barely passed his lips. Finally, he cleared his throat and leaned forward. His large frame made the table appear to be made for a child. The grey bushes that made up his brow furrowed together, expressing his irritation at the comment she had made.

"Ashleigh," his gruff voice came out as his amber eyes darkened.

"Father, listen, I said that I understand the importance. Me. But the others do not," she said firmly.

He cleared his throat and leaned back in his chair once more. The corner of the room they sat in was dark. Still, the small light that flowed down from the window highlighted his tightly woven braids of grey and white. Sitting atop his head like a plaited crown, serving to emphasize his role as the leader of his people. He crossed his thick arms over his chest, lifting his chin towards her.

“Ashleigh—”

“All I’m saying,” Ashleigh began, licking her lips nervously. Standing from the table, she paced back and forth as she spoke. “Is that while the basis for this event is an important moment in our history, the event itself has become more about trying to find a mate. And since I already—”

“Ashleigh!” he shouted angrily, slamming his hands down on the table, causing a splintering in the wood.

Ashleigh stopped her movements and stared back at him carefully.

“Sit. Down.” PANDA-NOVEL.COM

“Yes, Father,” she whispered as she moved to her seat once more. She glanced around at the other tables in the room, making sure no one had noticed the outburst.

‘Definitely noticed,’ she thought to herself, observing the eyes that desperately avoided her gaze. As they all tried to pretend they hadn’t.

‘Good plan,’ she sighed internally.

“You are the daughter of Alpha Wyatt of the Winter Pack,” he stated firmly.

“Yes, Father,” she repeated her reply.

“You have to represent our pack in all things. Both as a member of the Cold Warriors and as my daughter.”

“I know.”

“If you knew, then you wouldn’t have made such a ridiculous request!” he growled.

Ashleigh flinched.

Her father was an alpha, no, the Alpha. His presence alone made her bow her head.

She was no pup, not yet eighteen, but her skills were well advanced for her years. She had gone through her shift at only eight years old. Survived the trial and had raced ahead of those who trained with her. When she was eleven, she could already spar with the senior members of the Cold Warriors without any hesitation.

Yet here she sat, shrinking away like a child as her daddy yelled at her. PANDA NOVEL

“Besides,” he said, catching her eye, “there is no point in your request.”

He sat forward in his chair once more, putting an elbow on the table and leaning his mouth against his fist as though he were thinking, but never losing her eye contact. Her brows knit together in confusion as she saw what looked like playfulness dance across his eyes.

“I have already heard and rejected Granger’s request to be excused.”

The warmth crept up her spine and spread across her face. She looked away just as her father let out a deep-throated laugh.

“No need to be embarrassed, my girl. I understand.”

With her cheeks still burning, she felt there was nothing to lose in a shameless request now.

“If you understand, then why not—”

“No,” he stated firmly.

She leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms, looking away from him.

“Ashleigh, I recognize the desire in your heart. I know the pull of a mate. I understand the thrill of young love. But you are not yet eighteen.”

“Almost,” she whispered.

“But not yet!” he growled. “You know the traditions and laws of our pack more than anyone. After your eighteenth birthday, you will be married and mated at the full moon. Not before.”

“I know,” she sighed, “it’s not like we were planning to run away. We just wanted to spend some time together.”

“It’s too great a risk. The mate pull is strong, especially during the Blood Moon. We would not want to allow for any mistakes to be made.”

A darkness fell over his eyes as he finished his statement. Ashleigh understood what he meant. Being mated before the first full moon of her eighteenth year within the Winter Pack was a severe offense. It could be seen as a direct insult to the Goddess.

“But Father!” she shouted indignantly, pushing herself up from the table to look down at him, not caring at all if anyone saw or heard her.

His only response was to growl at her. She sat back down and looked away.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“Ashleigh, I am the Alpha of this pack before I am your father. As your Alpha, I am reminding you once more that it is your duty that comes before your heart.” His stern tone was emphasized by his Alpha presence.

“Yes, my Alpha,” she replied, bowing her head.

“As such, you will remain for the rest of the Blood Moon Gathering and give offerings to our Goddess.”

Ashleigh repeated, looking even more sullen this time, “Yes, Alpha.”

“And as your father, I am reminding you not to be in such a rush to grow up.”

Ashleigh looked up at her father once more. She expected to see his stern face, the severe Alpha he was. But, she saw the kindness in his eyes that he rarely showed. Instead, his expression was soft and warm.

She tilted her head to him, not sure what to expect. Her father reached a hand to her, and she took it. He rubbed his thumb across the back of her hand as he spoke.

“Ashleigh, you will be married and mated soon enough, and though you only think of being with the one you love, you must remember that a wolf is only mated once. This is for the rest of your life. So as much as you love the boy and as much as I welcome him, as your father, I would be foolish not to remind you to be sure of your decision.”

“What?” she asked, genuinely confused by his words. “But he is my mate.”

“That may be, but there is no rush.” Alpha Wyatt frowned. “To be honest, it’s quite strange that you found your mate so early.”

PANDA NOVEL “I don’t understand.” Ashleigh frowned. “What are you saying?”

A genuine concern began to settle into her heart, a panic she didn’t recognize rising deep within her.

“It’s nothing, my girl. Just think of it as your father being unwilling to see his little girl grow up.”

“But—”

“Ashleigh,” Alpha Wyatt sighed, “the Blood Moon Gathering is a sacred time. It is when we honor our Goddess and receive her blessing. As such, you and Granger should be happy to be here. The Goddess is the one who gives us our mate bond. Wouldn’t it be best to receive her blessing at this sacred event with your wedding approaching? Won’t this only serve to strengthen the bond you share?”

Ashleigh felt a calm reconciling over her panic. Her heart settled.

Their conversation came to an end when her father wished to hurry and find her mother. He hoped they could share in a dance or two before his duties prevented their time together. Nevertheless, Ashleigh was left feeling a warm appreciation and hope that she and Granger would find the same kind of happiness together.

Not ten minutes after speaking with her father, the bond between her and Caleb had ignited in a fire that still left her aching.

Ashleigh quickly got out of her bed. Rushing to the bathroom to be sick as the reality of her situation fell over her once more.

“Just a few more hours,” she whispered to herself as she splashed the cold water on her face. “A few more hours and then....”

Ashleigh lifted her head and faced herself in the mirror.

‘Then what?’ she wondered to herself. ‘Going home doesn’t change anything.’

There was a knock at the bathroom door.

Ashleigh gripped the counter and sighed. Her head was aching, and she felt exhausted. She reached for the door, expecting to see her mother waiting on the other side.

As she opened the door, her head felt light, and then she felt herself falling.

She gasped as two strong hands caught her shoulders. She looked up sluggishly. The sight that met her only added to the throbbing of her head.

He smiled at her with his gorgeous pale blue eyes. It was beautiful.

That was her real mate. Not Alpha Caleb.

"I'm sorry," she whispered as her consciousness slipped away.