

**THE ARCAV KING'S
MATE: BONUS CHAPTER**

HOPE HART

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V^arian

I AM A VERY CONTENT MALE.

I have left my mate in bed, after exhausting her last night with my insatiable need for her. This morning, I woke Harlow her favorite way, with my head firmly between her soft thighs. Now she is snoring softly, and I am late for a meeting.

Humming softly to myself, I greet Harlow's friend Sara who is arriving with coffee and breakfast. I take the exit out through the garden and freeze in place.

Harlow's creature is lying limply on the ground as if dead, although it rouses itself enough to hiss weakly at me as I approach.

I feel a cold drop of sweat make its way down my neck. This creature is one of the crucial components of my mate's happiness in Arcavia. I do not think I have ever seen her as surprised and grateful as I did when I brought it to her.

I take a small step closer, conscious that if I get too close, the animal will likely attempt to fight or flee, doing further damage. I crutch down slowly and curse. Blood is staining the ground underneath it, and the fact that it is not moving means that the wound is likely devastating.

If Harlow sees this, she will be devastated too.

I despise this beast almost as much as it despises me, but part of my mate's contentment depends on its continued health. It shifts, growling at me, and I move back, reaching for my communicator.

"Methi," I say. "I need you to do two things. First, bring a healer to our garden. Do not enter through the main door, and keep your voices low. I also need you to find a way to keep Harlow busy this morning."

Methi frowns. "Uh, Your Majesty—"

"Did I stutter?"

"No," his face clears. "I will be right there."

I pace impatiently, hoping Harlow rests for a little longer. She has been more tired than usual, and waved me off with an exhausted flick of her hand when I asked if she would like coffee this morning.

I eye the animal, who is barely moving. If it becomes aware that I care about its continued health, it will likely die just to spite me.

Methi finally arrives with a healer I do not know.

"Where is Brin?"

The healer shuffles his feet. "He is currently seeing a patient. My name is Gouza, and I assure you that I am exceptionally skilled as a healer, Your Majesty," he says, straightening his shoulders.

I nod, gesturing for us all to move further from the door.

The healer frowns "Where is the patient?"

I wave my hand toward the spot where the animal is still lying, no longer growling.

“Uh, Your Majesty.”

“Fix it,” I say, voice low, pinching the bridge of my nose as his face pales.

“Of course, of course. I am also available to treat your headache as well.”

“Just attend to the vrexing creature.”

He gulps and moves closer. “What type of animal is this?”

“It is a cat.”

Methi clears his throat, obviously amused.

“It is a feline. Its name is Tom. It eats a carnivorous diet and likes to hunt for small animals at night and sleep during the day.”

I frown at him. Should I know these things about my mate's pet?

Gouza creeps closer and stills as he takes in the blood.

“It appears that the animal has been attacked by something much larger. It is breathing, but its outlook is not good. It needs to be put into stasis and transported to the medi-center immediately.”

“Do it.”

“Uh I do not believe we have a stasis chamber small enough for an animal of this size.”

“Make it work.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

I turn to Methi. “Have you arranged for a distraction for Harlow?”

He nods. “Meghan will be stopping by to take her out for breakfast. Harlow has not seen Meghan for a few weeks, so I am sure that she will want to go.”

The muscles in my neck ache from tension, and I

stretch it as the healer talks to someone on his communicator. I stride closer to the cat, daring to bring my face within clawing reach.

“If you die,” I tell it, “I will replace you with an agreeable creature.”

“Perhaps a canine,” Methi says.

The cat gives one weak hiss, and I walk away to pace.

Harlow

I’ve just shuffled out of my bedroom, desperate for coffee, when Varian appears, slamming the door to our garden shut.

“What’s up?”

“There has been a sighting of a Vetis in our garden. It is a dangerous animal, and I have men looking for it now. Until it is found, you will stay away from the garden.”

I stare at him. “Rephrase.”

He takes a moment, and then steps closer, a charming grin on his face.

“Harlow,” he says, “light of my life. Will you please refrain from walking in the garden until I let you know it is safe?”

I smirk. “Fine.”

I’m getting a weird relief from the mating bands. It could just be that he appreciates that I won’t be in any danger, but I’m also sure I just felt a spike of guilt.

“Varian—”

A knock on the door interrupts us, and Varian turns, almost rushing to answer it. I frown at him and then find myself grinning as Meghan walks in.

“Hey! I’m going to go grab some breakfast, and I might meet up with mom. You wanna come?”

This girl is like a ray of sunshine and I can’t help but laugh as she dances around the room, picking things up and examining them before placing them back down.

Weirdly, the thought of breakfast makes my stomach churn uneasily, and I freeze as I feel sweat break out on my forehead. Oh my god.

I rush into the bathroom, Varian at my heels, and lose my non-existent breakfast. Varian is immediately there, stroking my back, and he hands me a cool cloth to put on my forehead.

“We will go to the healers, mate.” His voice is hard as he helps me gently to my feet.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You don’t go to a doctor just because you vomited once. It was probably something I ate.”

He narrows his eyes and I narrow mine back before spinning and reaching for my toothbrush. I brush my teeth, ignoring him as he watches me like a hawk.

“Don’t you have things to do today?” I ask around my toothbrush.

“I rescheduled my meeting.”

I frown. “How come?” My toothbrush hits a sensitive part of my tongue, and my stomach clenches, leaving me gagging in the sink.

Varian takes a towel, wipes my face, and lifts me into his arms.

“Oh Rhett,” I mutter sarcastically. “You’re so manly.”

Truthfully, I’m feeling pretty sorry for myself, and Varian’s strong, warm arms around me are about as comforting as my favorite old blanket from home.

“I’m just going to go back to bed, okay? I promise if I still feel terrible later on, I’ll go to the healers. Deal?”

Varian hesitates, and I watch the war on his face. Meghan's eyes widen as he strolls through the bathroom door and back into the sitting room.

"Ohmigod, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Varian's overreacting," I call as Varian carries me back into my bedroom.

"You will rest today," he says, and I sigh.

"Varian."

He places me on the bed. "I apologize. I would appreciate it if you would rest today. I will stay here with you."

"As much as I love you, I really don't need you to hover all day. I know you've got things to do. Go to your meeting, and remember, we have a date tonight."

He frowns at me, and I glower back. We've already had to reschedule our date twice due to various Arcav emergencies.

"Only if you are well."

"I will be." We're going back to the market where Varian took me on our first real date. I'm going to shop for another glass figurine to add to my collection, gawk at all the different things for sale, and eat dinner with my over-protective mate.

My stomach rolls at the thought of food and I snuggle down under the covers, already falling asleep.

Varian

I am unable to concentrate throughout the day, my thoughts returning to my mate again and again. According to Brin, humans' digestive systems are much more delicate than ours, and it is not entirely uncommon for them to get something he calls 'food poisoning.'

I had been ready to hunt whoever had thought to poison my mate when Brin quickly explained that this just means the food is not agreeable when eaten. I make a mental note to speak to the chef who cooks all of Harlow's food as I make my way back to our rooms.

According to Gouza, Harlow's creature is doing well. He was transported to the medi-center in stasis and then healed, although he must spend a night being observed due to the amount of blood he lost.

I will return the beast to the garden tomorrow morning, and planning to distract my mate enough that she will not notice that he is gone. I feel a slight pang of guilt for my deception but harden my resolve. Harlow does not need to worry about her animal when she is already unwell.

A low growl escapes me as I walk into our bedroom, where Harlow is standing in a short, white dress. It cups her breasts, the way my hands itch to, and her face brightens as I walk in.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine, really Varian. I had some tea and toast a few hours ago. I'm just excited that we get to spend some time alone together."

"I know I have been busy with the Fecax situation and the human slaves. I apologize."

"That wasn't a dig," she smiles up at me and I can't help but drag her closer, so that I can take her lips. "I've just missed you," she murmurs.

"I've missed you too."

I would like nothing more than to rip the gauzy material off her and roll her back into bed, but I know how much she has been looking forward to tonight.

We take a pod to the market, and I allow Harlow to drive, ready to take over at a moment's notice. She has

been taking lessons from Methi, and is more than competent, swinging in and out of traffic with a confidence that borders on arrogance. She slides me a smile as if reading my mind, and lands the pod on the roof of the market, ignoring the guards who follow us inside.

Harlow chooses a delicate necklace for Meghan to ‘apologize for bailing on her this morning.’ We then make our way to find a glass figurine, and I pull her close as I remember the last time we were here, just a few months ago.

“You know, that was the night I began realizing that I had feelings for you,” she tells me as we walk away, a tiny glass dancer tucked in her hand.

“I had feelings long before that night,” I say. “You were determined to keep me at a distance.”

She shoots me a look from under her lashes. “You’re not at a distance now.”

We go to the food hall, and Harlow’s head whips from side to side as she takes in all of the different sights and smells.

We choose a savory meat dish that she has not tasted before and make our way to a table that my guard has already chosen, positioning themselves accordingly.

I lean back, content to have this time with my mate. She reaches for her fork and brings the food to her mouth. I do the same, and then frown as she hesitates, seemingly unable to continue.

“Is something wrong?” My voice is sharp, and she smiles, shaking her head as she takes a bite.

My stomach sinks as she turns deathly white, spits the food into her napkin, and runs toward the bathroom, two members of her guard following her.

Harlow

Okay, so maybe I'm sick. I finish rinsing my mouth, conscious of the fact that Varian is waiting for me outside. The moment I walk out, he begins hustling me to the exit, placing me in the passengers' seat of our pod and taking the wheel himself.

"Let me guess, we're going to the medi-center, I say, resisting the urge to kick the dash in front of me.

"You are not well."

"It's just a bug, Varian!"

He chooses not to reply, and I slump down, conscious of the fact that I'm being a brat. This is just not how I wanted our date to go.

I had imagined that we would have a long, romantic meal, maybe stop somewhere for a glass of wine, and then I would seduce my mate before getting about sixteen hours of sleep.

We reach the medi-center, where I insist on walking like an adult. Varian hovers, and I manage to resist the urge to snap at him. I can feel his fear and concern down the mating bands, and I know he's unused to those types of emotions.

We walk through the doors, and the foyer looks exactly like the last time when I was here a few months ago when I was given the Alni plant. This time, instead of turning right, we turn left, where we find Brin waiting for us.

Brin's welcoming smile drops when he sees the look on Varian's face.

"Your Majesties," he says, nodding solemnly. "Please follow me, and we will soon see why Harlow is feeling unwell."

We follow him down a long corridor, and we're nearly

through the last door when I hear a long howl. I pause, and Varian's guilt and panic hit me like a sledgehammer.

"What—"

The howl is followed up by a hiss and a grow, and I spin, running toward the sound.

"Tom?"

I push open some double doors, and my mouth falls open as I see my cat, lying in a glass cage, clawing at it frantically.

"What the hell is going on here?"

"Harlow—"

"Why is Tom here? Is he sick?"

Varian's face is pained. He knew my cat was sick and he didn't tell me.

"I will tell you everything, Harlow, I promise. Just please sit down."

He toward a chair, and I sit, staring hollowly at Tom, who gives me pleading kitten eyes.

"I found your creature injured this morning, and I had him placed in stasis and brought here."

He looks up, his face a mask of rage as another Arcav walks through the door, eyes widening.

"Hello, Your Majesty."

"Who are you?" I ask, and he smiles nervously at me, taking a large step away from Varian.

"I am Gouza, Your Majesty. I have been looking after your feline."

"What happened?" I can't even look at Varian, and I can feel him tense beside me.

"He was injured by another animal. It was very serious, so we placed him in stasis so we could treat him here. He is doing just fine now, although I wanted to keep him overnight for observation as he lost a lot of blood.

However, he does not like the cage, and I did not want to risk giving him a sedative for Arcav animals.”

“Take him home.”

“Uh, excuse me, Your Majesty?”

“Take him back to the palace and let him free inside our rooms. Either you or another healer can stay and keep an eye on him. God knows there are enough spare rooms.”

If Gouza’s eyes get any wider, they’ll pop out of his skull. I’ve never seen such a meek Arcav before, and it’s reassuring to know that even though they can crush humans without breaking a sweat, not all of them are as arrogant as the Arcav males who surround me on a day-to-day basis.

Gouza turns his gaze from me to Varian and I grind my teeth. Varian stares at him for a moment.

“You heard your queen,” he says softly, and Gouza nods, immediately getting busy so that Tom can be moved.

Varian reaches out a hand which I ignore as I get to my feet. I’m livid, and I walk silently to where Brin is waiting, following him back toward the last room down the hall.

He directs me into a large room, obviously for VIP patients, with a huge bed and plenty of lush furniture.

“This will just take a moment,” he says, gesturing for me to sit on the edge of the bed. Varian sits beside me, his expression so morose, I could almost laugh. I reach out and take his hand as Brin brings a weird machine closer to me, and Varian clutches it like its a lifeline.

Brin scans my entire body, nodding occasionally, and then takes the machine away to see the results. I shift nervously. I’m sure I’ve got some sort of stomach virus, but can’t deny that Varian’s overreaction has got me worried.

Brin turns suddenly, beaming.

“Congratulations, Your Majesty. You’re pregnant.”

Varian

My entire body shakes as I stare at Harlow. My beautiful, angry, pregnant mate.

I will be a father.

We will raise a child.

Harlow is as white as the walls behind her, and I stroke her cold hand.

“Is this... okay?”

She blinks a few times as if stunned and then smiles at me.

“I guess I don’t have to ask what you think of this,” she says.

I am sure she can feel my joy and triumph coursing through the mating bands, and I pause, attempting to distinguish her emotions from my own.

Intense shock, the remnants of anger, and a soft, quiet joy that seems to be growing by the moment.

“I’d never even considered it. I’m not on the pill since I left it in Chicago, but I hadn’t even thought about getting pregnant. Pretty dumb huh?”

I tread cautiously. “You are pleased?”

She grins. “Of course. I’m just a bit shocked. No wonder I’ve felt so shitty today.”

“This is normal for human females?”

“Of course! Let me guess,” she says, rolling her eyes. “Arcav females don’t suffer from morning sickness.”

Brin clears his throat, a smile hovering around his mouth. I had forgotten he was still here.

“They do not, Your Majesty. However, we will find a way for you to manage these symptoms. This is not the first

pregnancy between an Arcav and a human, although we are still learning as we go.”

We agree to return the next day for more testing, and I take Harlow’s hand, clutching it to me as we leave the medi-center.

“I am sorry that I did not tell you about your pet.”

“Sorry you did it? Or sorry you got caught?”

I think on this. “Sorry I got caught.”

She snorts, but it turns into a laugh. “What was your plan? Sneak him back in and pretend nothing had happened?”

“Of course.”

Harlow sighs. “I know you think you were doing me a favor, and you probably didn’t want to bother me once you knew I was sick. But you can’t keep shit like this from me Varian. I’m not a child you need to protect. I’m your equal. And we’re going to have our own child together.”

I study her stomach, imagining how it will look as she grows with my child.

“I apologize. You are right. I will not keep things from you again.”

She smirks. “We’ll see how long that lasts big guy. You know I love you, right?”

“Of course.” If there is one thing that I am certain of, it is that our love is forever. “I love you more than life.”

“Always gotta one-up me.” Harlow laughs, and I lead her toward the pod so I can take her home.

THE END

If you enjoyed the Arcav King’s Mate, I would LOVE to

hear your thoughts. Please consider leaving a review- they keep me writing!

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