



THE MATING RITUAL

By

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(Epilogue to Dark Stallion)

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Cover Art by Alex DeShanks, May 2011

New Concepts Publishing

Lake Park, GA 31636

www.newconceptspublishing.com

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“Other-worlder”

Emma’s breath caught in her throat and she stopped in her tracks as she instantly recognized the man’s voice behind her. Now that he had addressed her, she knew better than to ignore him, and so she turned to greet him, curtsying as she did so. “Your highness,” she said, turning to face him before bowing her head to him in respect.

“I am curious to know if you were ever officially claimed as a mate.”

That comment had her head snapping up like a whip, and she noticed a hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth as he awaited her response. The blush that crept up her cheeks at the question quickly suffused her entire being. She opened her mouth to reply but was thankfully not given the chance.

Colwin and Aydin, having seen King Dresden approaching their mate and having overheard the conversation, stepped in.

“We were waiting until our fathers had come back and we had the entire family together. Now that the war is over, for the time being at least, and you have brought everyone home, we are ready for the ceremony.”

Aydin stepped closer to Emma, brushing his lips along her forehead before grabbing her gently by the upper arms and holding her slightly away from him so that he could look her in the eye when next he spoke. “Go to our mother and let her know that the festival tonight will not only honor those that fought in the war but it will be a celebration of our commitment to one another, for we will let it be known to all of our people, so that there is no doubt in anyone’s mind, that you are our chosen mate.”

Emma worried her bottom lip with her teeth. Aydin didn’t look very happy about this celebration. Flicking her gaze over to Colwin, she saw that he didn’t look any happier about it. Shouldn’t they be happy? Wasn’t this sort of like marriage for them? If they didn’t want to, they certainly didn’t have to. She wasn’t going to force them, she thought a little irritably. No one was forcing them. So why then would Aydin say it if he didn’t want to? Everything about the situation was confusing her. She decided it would be best to go to his mother, like he said, and talk to her about it. Maybe she could clear some things up. “Alright, Aydin. I’ll let her know.”

Aydin bent low and brushed his hot lips against her suddenly dry mouth, inciting a reaction in her that enveloped the entirety of her body as the familiar taste and scent of him saturated her senses. She didn’t realize she’d closed her eyes until he spoke again.

“Go now, Emma,” he commanded softly in a low voice that was suddenly husky.

She nodded and left, albeit a little reluctantly. Although she felt a little awkward in the King’s presence, especially given the direction of the conversation, she didn’t want to be away from Aydin and Colwin for very long. She consoled herself with the knowledge that she would be with them again soon at the festival.

Finding their mother, Sarah, wasn’t too hard. She was hard at work preparing for the festival.

“Hey, Emma, wanna help?”

“Uh, actually, I do but there’s something I need to tell you first.”

“Oh? What?”

Emma frowned as she contemplated telling Sarah everything that had happened. She decided she was ready for some answers of her own right away, so she gave her the condensed version. “Aydin and Colwin said that we’d let everyone know we were mated tonight at the festival. What did he mean by that?”

Sarah’s mouth fell agape.

Well, that was a reassuring reaction. This couldn’t be good.

After a few seconds, Sarah managed to collect herself. "Sorry, honey, what you said caught me completely by surprise. The village doesn't have mating rituals very often anymore. Actually, there hasn't been one since" She blushed slightly and changed the subject. "What brought this on?"

"King Dresden asked if we three were officially mated to one another."

"Ah," Sarah said with a knowing nod. "I see."

Emma tried hard not to run over to the other woman and shake her until she told her more. "So . . . what exactly takes place at the mating ritual?"

"Well, it's complicated, honey. But don't you worry about a thing. My boys know what to do. All you have to do is show up." Abruptly clapping her hands together, she promptly changed the subject. "Well, now! We don't have time to talk. We'd better get you dressed!"

It wasn't long at all before Emma was wearing something very akin to lingerie and standing in the center of the village trying not to look at the crowd of centaurs staring back at her. Where were Aydin and Colwin? She jumped all over when she heard the drums start. Even though they had surprised her, she was kind of glad for them. At least there wasn't an awkward silence anymore. The beat was very tribal, slow and seductive. She'd never really thought much about musical instruments before but she decided she liked the drum. It was capable of pulling at very primal emotions.

When she heard the crowd stir, she looked up and saw them begin to part and sighed with relief when she saw Aydin and Colwin approaching. As before, their expressions were very solemn. She supposed that was only natural for men, whether they were from her dimension or not, commitment was always a hard pill to swallow. That thought made her heart clench uncomfortably for a second. After all they'd been through, she would've thought they would gladly accept her as their mate. It brought back insecure feelings about the differences between them. Would they always be disappointed that they didn't have a centaur woman for a mate?

When Aydin reached Emma's side, he turned to address the crowd. "Let it be known that I choose this woman as my mate."

"Let it be known that I choose this woman as my mate," Colwin reiterated.

Emma shifted uncomfortably. Sarah hadn't told her she was supposed to recite any vows. This was awkward. Should she say anything? She was very nervous with everyone watching and didn't want to do anything she wasn't supposed to. She had no idea how this worked and that worry only strengthened the earlier concern of the differences between them. Hell, even Sarah knew what went on in this ritual. Of course, she'd lived among them a lot longer than she had.

Aydin turned back to Emma, giving her his full attention as he closed the distance between them.

"What am I supposed to do?" she whispered, trying not to open her mouth very far so that maybe no one else saw her talking if she wasn't supposed to be talking.

Aydin didn't answer her.

Before she got the chance to ask him anything else, he covered her lips with his in a possessive kiss.

She was held prisoner by surprise. Yes, back home couples kissed in weddings, she was just caught off guard because she hadn't been expecting it so soon. Confusing sensations bombarded her, held her captive, dislodging the nervousness from earlier, or perhaps only served to aid the fear produced adrenaline coursing through her veins that her reticence about the situation she found herself in had created. The heat of his seductive tongue as he infiltrated the cavernous depths of her mouth elicited a reaction from her that left no part of her being untouched as the taste and smell of him permeated her senses. Despite the fact that the urge to give in to his ministrations was overwhelming, she fought it, struggled to maintain her awareness of the crowd around them and to displace the allure of his enchantment.

Aydin abruptly halted the thorough examination of her mouth and commenced to spearing it with his tongue, pumping it in and out in a rhythm reminiscent of sex.

The movement and the images it induced together were enough to sufficiently drain the last vestiges of her resistance, replacing her unease with a sense of desperation that magnified one hundred times over every second.

Closing her lips about his tongue, she began to suckle it.

Her reaction shredded his failing grip on the remnants of his control. Tearing his lips away from hers, with one fluid movement he ripped the ceremonial garments from her body, letting them puddle on the ground at their feet.

Emma gaped at him in complete and utter disbelief and tried to cover herself with her hands as her brain worked feverishly to form a verbal protest.

The second she felt his hot wet mouth consume her breast, however, any heated response she might've issued was completely forgotten.

The combination of the intense warmth of his mouth and the tormenting prod of his tongue had her head swimming and her body laboring to haul necessary oxygen to her lungs and brain, forcing her awareness away from her situation to center on the feelings surging through her entire being.

As he shifted his attention from first one breast and then the other with the torment of his tongue, the evocative feelings his touch induced ripped through her, becoming almost unbearable in their intensity.

When the feelings burgeoning in her had culminated until she thought she would perish if he didn't relent for at least a second, she gasped his name in a desperate entreaty. "Aydin."

Though only seconds ticked by, it felt like an eternity as she waited on his response. Just when she thought he hadn't heard her, he stopped touching her completely and slowly lifted his head to look her straight in the eye. With a monumental effort, she managed to swallow her initial sensory deprivation shock, but her body's overwhelming demand for his touch wouldn't be denied for long. "Please, Aydin. Don't torment me!"

Aydin's facial features twisted at her words, almost as though he was in pain.

Emma didn't have time to process his reaction before he leaned closer and enveloped her lips in a kiss again.

He took an almost savage possession of her mouth as he slid one hand down the length of her body to the mouth of her sex, which he outlined with his fingers before separating the folds, probing her briefly with a thick digit.

She was filled with disappointment when he stopped and withdrew. But the feeling was only short lived.

Suddenly, with the amazing strength of a centaur warrior, Aydin lifted her straight off the ground and held her there as Colwin spread the cheeks of her ass with his thick probing cock. Almost as one, they penetrated her, stretching her passages with their engorged flesh, slowly filling her.

Their primal possession of her body forced undulating passion to ripple through her entire being, carrying her to new horizons even when she thought that it was impossible, that no greater pleasure could be had or ever had been had.

Emma grabbed a hold of Aydin's arms as both men pulled out and pumped into her again.

He took a hold of her by her hips, keeping her in place as they both began pumping in and out of her in a series of deep, frenzied thrusts.

The tension inside of her built and built until, suddenly, it burst in an explosion that sent liquid hot pleasure coursing through her like a conflagration.

Aydin and Colwin both growled like feral beasts as her release forced her muscles to clench their cocks spasmodically, taking each of them over the precipice, milking them of their fluids.

When their orgasms finally subsided, they leaned against one another for several minutes, trying to gather their strength in the aftermath.

Emma was weak in the wake of her orgasm and felt like hot wax that had cooled on a candlestick. Eventually, all systems began to operate on normal again. Now that the men weren't distracting her, the questions from earlier burgeoned to life once more.

She leaned back and looked Aydin in the eye. "Why did you do that?" she asked in an angry whisper, as their current location in front of the entire village came back to her.

"Because if we did not perform the mating ritual, another could claim you as their own."

“Oh,” she said softly, blushing a little in embarrassment at what had happened. “Well, you could’ve at least warned me,” she whispered indignantly, understanding now why they’d acted as they had.

He cupped her face in his hands as Colwin wrapped his arms around her waist and held her tight from behind. “But then you might’ve run and then where would we be, my mate?” he asked, a smile playing about his lips.

“Well, that is how we met. It seems to have worked out pretty good in my opinion,” she said, smiling back at him before kissing him and then Colwin and showering them with all the love she had for them in her heart.

The End

Want to know how Emma, Aydin, and Colwin met? Check out Centaur Chronicles Book II: Dark Stallion. Would you like to get even more background on Aydin and Colwin and the centaur culture? Check out the first book in the Centaur Chronicles series, Unbridled. These books are stand alone books, but the author recommends reading them in order.

Raven Willow-Wood is always happy to hear from her readers. If you have any questions about something you read or something she might have in the works or just want to talk, you can send an email to ravenwillowwood@yahoo.com