

Chapter 207: A Trade is Proposed

"Rosalie, it's too dangerous for you to go!"

It was only Ethan and I left in the throne room after Jace brought another piece of news—the troops of the Western Kingdom had been fully dissolved by Damian.

Since there wouldn't be any immediate battles I needed to attend any more, I saw there was a necessity for me to go to the islands.

"Ethan, I'll be fine." I reasoned with him, "You and I know Damian isn't a trustworthy person and he does what will bring him the biggest reward—"

He interrupted, "Glad you agree with me."

"However, because of that, it's not hard to guess his motivation."

Ethan arched an eyebrow.

I tipped my head to the side and studied my mate's face for a moment and continued, "Clearly, Damian is afraid of you. That was why he eliminated Kal for us, because he knows that it's just a matter of time before we win the war. When that happens, he wouldn't be able to fight against us on his own, therefore he proactively chose to kill Kal as a favor to us, showing us his intent to be our ally."

Ethan listened patiently this time, although I knew he must have also thought about all of this.

"That being said, why in the world would he want to do something to potentially make you want to kill him?" I asked.

He shrugged, and I knew he understood I had a point. "Well, I still think it's too dangerous," he told me.

"It is dangerous," I agreed. "But Ethan, I'm not some fragile flower that you have to guard over for the rest of my life—not anymore anyway."

Was it all that long ago that I was willing to just give up and die because Ethan wanted it that way? It seemed like it had happened in a different life, but it really had only been less than two years.

Finally, he sighed and pulled me into his arms, "I really don't like this..."

"I understand. Believe me, I don't want to deal with Damian either." I leaned my head against his warm chest, listening to his strong heartbeat. "However, I am hoping he wants to give us back Soren. Whatever his conditions are, I will listen, if it involves the release of your brother... and my friend."

"My brother and your friend who is in love with you," Ethan reminded me. He didn't sound jealous like he had with Alex and that new person today... oh, Robert. He only sounded matter-of-fact.

"Well," I said, "whether he does or doesn't, he is an important part of our family. And Rowan loves him."

Ethan couldn't argue with that. "Let me sleep on it overnight."

I stared at him. "Toward what end? Ethan, I have to go!"

"Toward trying to make sure you have the right team, Rosalie. I trust your judgment. If you think you'll be safe, who am I to argue with Your Majesty?"

I honestly didn't think he gave in so easily. My eyebrows arched. "Who are you, and what have you done with my mate?"

He laughed. "Good question." He lowered his head and pressed his lips to mine.

I could not be more thankful, yet again, that the Moon Goddess had blessed me with such a wonderful man.

The next day, I found myself making a trip I never thought I would make again.

I was back on a boat, headed to Avondale.

Sitting on a bench, looking out at the water, my mind went over what it had been like on my last trip to the islands.

I was excited and frightened, looking forward to starting a new life. However, at that point, I had no idea that the so-called new life was only illusions fabricated for me by someone else.

This time, I was no longer timid. I knew exactly who I would be dealing with and what I needed to do.

I felt confident in myself and the team.

Jace, Richard, a few more of Ethan's men who had come here with him before, as well as Georgia.

"Are you nervous?" Georgia asked me as the islands finally came into view in the distance.

"A little," I admitted. "But I have courage and faith that this will work out."

"Sh*t," Georgia muttered. "You're two steps ahead of me then. I'm scared as f*ck."

I couldn't help but giggle. "What are you scared of? Being captured or killed?" I couldn't imagine that's what she was referring to. Georgia was known as a dare-devil.

Georgia shook her head. "No... I'm scared that what we think this is about... isn't what it's about."

I patted her knee. I understood.

I was worried about Soren, too.

We disembarked at the port and found two large SUVs waiting for us. I thought I recognized them from what had previously been Soren's fleet.

"Queen Rosalie," one of the men who was waiting for us said, "Alpha Damian sends his regards. He is waiting for you at the mansion."

"Alpha?" Georgia said beside me, her tone sarcastic.

I lightly elbowed her in the side. Now was not the time to irritate the big men with all of the muscles.

"Thank you," I said, and the two of us climbed into the back of one of the vehicles along with Jace and Richard.

As we drove through Avondale, the sights outside of the window brought back so many memories to me, both good and bad.

I thought about the time I'd been beaten and robbed, and I remembered how upset I was when I found out it was Soren who had arranged everything.

But I also thought about how he did everything he could to cheer me up.

Closing my eyes, I saw Soren's smiling face. He always knew how to make me laugh. Back then, he was so different from Ethan, and that's why I liked him from the very beginning.

Yes, he had other motives when he approached me, however, it still didn't change the fact that he was there for me when I needed support and caring most in my life.

Now that I looked back, perhaps some of the things he did for me were truly from of his heart.

I took a deep breath and slowly let it out, praying to the Moon Goddess, "When we leave here, please let us have Soren with us."

We arrived at the house where I'd first stayed with Soren.

It was interesting that Damian chose it out of all the locations on the island as the meeting spot for us.

The driver opened the door for us. Jace and Richard insisted on going in first to make sure it was safe. When they were satisfied it wasn't a trap, Georgia and I went in, along with the rest of my detail.

I was escorted to Soren's old office.

Many of his belongings were still everywhere throughout the house. It felt like the house was waiting for its old master to return.

Damian sat in Soren's office chair, swiveling it back and forth slowly. When he saw me, he hopped up, a smile of relief crossing his face. "Thank you for coming, Queen Rosalie." He offered me his hand.

I stared at it for a moment before I decided to play nice and shook it. "Damian, I'm not sure whether we are allies or not," I admitted.

He nodded. "I understand, but I assure you, I want nothing more than to win your trust."

"That will take some doing." I was kind but honest.

"I know," he said. "I can't blame you. But I assure you, if you give me what I want, I will give you what you want."

Clearing my throat, I asked him, "And what is it that you want, Damian?"

With an uneasy shrug, he said, "Your assurance."

"My assurance?" I repeated. "Of what?"

"Your assurance that I will be pardoned of any crimes you and Alpha Ethan may feel I have committed and that I will be left alone to continue to rule the islands." He said it in a straightforward tone.

I chuckled, "Damian, I'm not a businessman, but even I know that trades should be fair. You are asking a lot."

He looked at me quite surprised at what I'd said. Then he chuckled, "I thought I'd shown Your Majesty enough sincerity by contributing to ending the war?"

"Even if you didn't, you knew the result wouldn't change. Also, you know if Ethan chooses to, he can take over your island."

Damian's eyes flickered.

Yes, I would like to free Soren... however, I also knew I couldn't let Damian feel he had the upper hand.

I watched him hesitate about what to say. It was obvious that he hadn't anticipated me being difficult.

I felt it was time, so I smiled at him.

"Alpha Damian," I said. He was surprised by how I addressed him. "I came here today not because I want to challenge you. In fact, I can see that you've done a fine job ruling the islands."

He looked at me with uncertainty in his eyes.

"You felt comfortable inviting me here because you know that I'd hate to see any disruption brought to the islands, right?"

I didn't wait for his answer, and stated, "I'm not a born politician, and I'm not good at playing bargaining games. So, here's my offer. You can continue to rule the islands as long as you pledge your loyalty to me, and promise to treat your people with care and justice."

His eyes widened and he seemed to be still digesting my words.

"What do you say?" I pressured him for an answer.

He took a few breaths, and finally, he shook his head.

I arched an eyebrow, Did he just turn down my proposal? I had thought through the situation, and I was quite sure....

Damian let out a chuckle, "I really had not anticipated that... Your Majesty. You've changed a lot."

I kept my smile and maintained my composure. "I heard that a lot lately. We all have, including you, Damian."

He stood up from his chair, walked to me, and bowed, "I accept your offer, Your Majesty! You have my word that as long as the Denali Islands are under my rule, they will be ruled with respect, care, and justice!"

I secretly let out a breath I had been holding for a while. Then, I took a pause, tried my best to make myself sound calm, and asked the question that had been lingering in my mind for days. "Now, tell me, where is Soren?"