

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 222



Chapter 2: Some kind of Animal

Maeve

He stood only inches from me, his arm outstretched and his fingers gripping my arm. He had a bottle of beer in his other hand, the foam bubbling over the lip of the bottle. He let go once I regained my balance, giving me a sideways smile that showcased a single dimple in one cheek.

He was ruggedly handsome with tanned skin and brown unruly curls that were tucked behind his ears. He was tall, towering over my 5'8" frame with ease. I felt hot, a little too hot, as I looked up at him, running my tongue along the inside of my lower lip.

"Uh, thanks," I croaked, slightly taken aback. He nodded, his eyes taking in my face, eventually meeting my own.

One eye was blue, an icy, glacier blue. The other was steel gray. I couldn't help but stare.

"Take a picture," he said, his voice slightly lifted and playful.

"What?"

"Take-take a picture, it'll last longer," he stammered, his cheeks going a rosy pink as his mouth widened into a boyish grin.

I looked at him, blinking, then shook my head. "Are you serious? That's the cheesiest."

"Couldn't help myself." He breathed; his eyes still fixated firmly on my own. "I've been waiting for an opportunity to say that all day."

I opened my mouth to speak, then closed it again, forcing down a laugh that was inching up my throat. There was a moment of silence then, just long enough to be acutely aware of the fact that we were still standing on the sidewalk, staring at each other.

"You're rather tall for a lady," he said in all seriousness, taking a small sip of his beer.

"1-what?"

"SAID YOU'RE RATHER TALL FOR A—" he said loudly, leaning close as though I couldn't hear him.

"I heard you the first time!" I interrupted, and this time I did laugh. "What's wrong with you? Thank you for, um, stopping me from falling but... did you hit your head, or something?"

"Why do you ask?" He sipped from his beer again, his mouth twitching into a smile as the mouth of the bottle touched his lips.

"24" I was truly at a loss for words,

"Well, nice meeting you," he said, turning away. I gaped after him as he took a few steps forward, then turned around again, tilting his head in the direction of the bar. "Want a beer?"

I did want a beer, and I was oddly curious about this man and his strange behavior. He was teasing me, trying to get a reaction out of me somehow. I liked it.

"You're not going to try to kidnap and murder me, are you?" I asked in response. He pursed his lips, looking around at the crowd of people still hovering on the sidewalk as they watched the aftermath of the fight.

"Well, not anymore. Everyone heard you say that," he said, looking around in mock suspicion before tilting his head toward the bar again in earnest. "You coming?"

"I'm actually supposed to be meeting someone

"Great, I'll go with you."

"Why?" I laughed, shaking my head. "You have no idea who I am or where I'm going."

"Well, I'll probably know soon. That counts for something, right?"

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"Uh, sure Tine. Come on," I stepped off the sidewalk and waited for him to catch up, the beer still clutched in his hand, My stomach did a little flip as he reached my side. I didn't know why I thought letting this, this lunatic, to put it plainly follow me around the market was a good idea, but I couldn't resist.

"Want some?" He offered me the beer as we walked, but I shook my head, giving him a playful glance.

"We don't know each other, remember? I don't want your germs, and I doubt you want mine."

He arched one brow, giving me a look that sent a warm ripple up the base of my spine, "What's wrong with you, Maeve?" I thought to myself, breaking eye contact with the man.

"Did you know that our mouths are cleaner in wolf form than they are."

"Stop. I've heard that one, and it's not true," I laughed.

"How do you know?"

"You're telling me you've brushed your teeth as a wolf? Maybe even flossed?"

He shrugged, "Of course, what do you think I am? Some kind of animal?"

"Well, in a literal sense"

His mouth widened into a brilliant smile and he laughed, the sound full and genuine. He passed me the beer, and this time I took it, drinking deeply and enjoying the bitter taste of it. I handed it back as we walked on, stopping in front of Myla's stall. It was empty, the table cleared of her usual goods,

"Oh," I said, looking around for Myla's tell-tale raven black curls. She was nowhere to be seen.

"Weren't you supposed to be meeting someone?" said the man, following my gaze as I scanned the ever-increasing crowd.

"This is my friend's stall," I said, tapping my finger on the empty table. "I guess she's not here."

The man took another sip of beer, emptying the bottle. "Well, what now?"

"I don't know," I replied, reaching up to twist my hair into a bun on the top of my head. It was hot, the sun beating down on the street and causing sweat to prickle along my forehead and neck.

I felt the man's eyes on me, his gaze lingering on the back of my neck as I tied my hair back. I wanted to look at him as intensely as he was looking at me. Something about him was pulling me in, so to speak.

"Are you from around here?" he asked, breaking the spell. I looked for Myla one last time before looking over my shoulder at him.

"Yeah, I live here," I said, purposefully leaving out the fact that I, in fact, lived at the Alpha of Drogomor's castle. "What about you? I've never seen you around."

He shrugged as we began to walk away from Myla's stall, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his faded jeans. "Just visiting," he said casually, smiling down at me.

"From where?" I was genuinely curious. He was deeply tanned, his skin a fiery bronze against his loose, white button up shirt. He looked as though he had been somewhere tropical for a long time.

"Somewhere with fewer people than this," he said as a woman shoved past him. I reached out and grabbed his arm, leading him closer to the sidewalk.

"What brings you here, then?"

"Oh, I don't know," he breathed, looking around. "I've never been to Valoria. Thought I'd check it out. I've never even been to a big city before. I wanted to experience the culture, the art."

As if on cue, a man who was walking a few yards in front of us abruptly stopped walking, then bent over and retched loudly into a waste basket. I snorted with laughter as my companion motioned toward the man, sarcastically alluding to the idea that this was the culture he had come to see.

"Is it always like this?" my new friend asked, his voice lifted in concern.

Ne at all" I laughed, shaking my head "s the spring festival People come from all over, you know. There are a least ning packs in Valenia now, Drogamer being the biggest there are files over there" | said, pointing to an open heht m the far distance where the old buildings gave way to somtiered homes and vast greenbelts, "There're balls every

Ballen He stopped walking, glancing over at me with one brow arched "As in, dancing?"

"Well, Nanaume no They're moaty event for single people,"

"Why just amule people?" he asked. It was a casual question, but his face was lined with concern as he looked at me farvean, they're not just for single people, I guess But people sometimes find their mates during these festivals At least that's what I was told, I haven't been to one myself but Myla."

He looked around awkwardly, his eyes settling on a stall on the other side of the street. He walked toward it, leaving me standing atupidly alone. I reached up to wipe the sweat from my brow, my breathcoming a little faster than usual. A bead of sweat rolled down my temple and pooled in the corner of my eye irubbed it away, opening iny eyes to find the man atanding in front of me with a giant cup of what looked like lemonade In hie hand

"Why are you so red?" he asked, holding the drink at me.

"I'm a little hot," I panted, holding the drink with both hands and letting the frosted glass chill my fingers, "I don't do well in the heat."

"You look awful."

"Oh, thank!" I took a drink of the lemonade and blinked into the overwhelming sunlight,

"It's because you have red hair"

*That's why I look awful?"

"No jeez You're just fair. Can we get off the street and sit down somewhere? Before you pass out?" He didn't wait for my reply, taking me forcefully by the elbow and leading me off the street and into the shade of an awning covering the entrance of a shop.

I plopped down on a shaded bench, sighing with relief. He didn't sit down beside me like I had expected, however. He reached down and began to pull down the zipper of my jacket

"Hey!"

"What?"

"What do you think you're doing?" I swatted his hand away, almost spilling the lemonade I was holding in the other hand, "Getting you out of this jacket?" he replied, giving me an incredulous look.

"I can do it."

"Just let me help you-" He reached down again, but I caught his hand in mine, digging my nails into his skin. "Ow! What's the matter with you?"

"What's the matter with me? You're trying to undress me in public!"

He arched one eyebrow, his eyes flashing with jest. "You want to go somewhere private?"

"No!"

"Just drink your lemonade and let me help you before you have a heat stroke on the sidewalk-."

I tightened my grip on his hand, my nails digging deeper into his skin. He bared his teeth, inhaling with a hiss.

We stared at each other for a moment, his eyes piercing mine while I continued to squeeze his hand,

"What's that over there?"

"What-."

He yanked down on the zipper of my jacket before I had time to react. A blast of cool air rolled over my chest, stopping the waves of heat that had been rippling over my midsection. I let out my breath, releasing my iron grip on his hand as the cool air of our shady perch penetrated my skin.

He was just standing there, staring at me. His gaze was fixated on the exposed skin above the tank top I was wearing, just above my breasts. I paled, if that was even possible given the beet-red coloring of my sun-soaked skin

I didn't flinch or attempt to stop him when he reached out once more, running his finger along the jagged, half-moon scar above my right breast.

"It's not that cool of a story." I breathed, wiggling out of the jacket and letting it fall around my waist.

He looked over my bare shoulders and arms, his face etched in curiosity as he took in my, unfortunately many, scars. "Whai are you, a street fighter?"

I laughed, sipping the lemonade as he sat down beside me.

"No, I just played a little rough as a kid." And that was the truth. There hadn't been much else to do in Winter Forest besides roughhouse with Rowan and climb trees, among other dangerous things. I never let my mother heal my wounds with her powers, either. I looked tough with my scabs and countless bandages, and looking tough meant the big kids took me seriously. But now, as an adult, people tended to look at my scars with varied expressions of surprise, and sometimes disgust. Women were very prim and well kept in Mirage. I didn't fit the bill.

"is this why you kept your jacket on? It's not that bad."

I shook my head. "I just forgot to take it off, I guess. I... You're a little distracting, honestly."

He paused, then gave me a soft smile. "It's because I am very good-looking."

"That's enough," I laughed, holding the lemonade to my chest and letting it cool me down.

We sat in silence for a few minutes, watching the market-goers pass by in droves.

"You know, your height plays a part in why you got so hot. Closer to the sun, and all."

I glowered at him. "Why are you so obsessed with my-"

"Hey!" Myla was bounding toward us, her thick black curls bouncing on her shoulders with each step. She stopped short of the curb, her head tilted to the side and a look of shock on her face. "Wow, are you okay? You look terrible."

"Told you," the man said, taking the lemonade out of my hands and taking a long drink.

I ignored him. "I'm fine, it's just really hot today!"

"I know! It's supposed to be like this all week! Hey, who's your friend?" She looked from me to the man.

"This is—actually, I don't know his name!" I laughed, looking at him.

"Seriously, Maeve! You finally make another friend and -"

"Maeve?" He stood abruptly, his face suddenly drawn in confusion. A fleeting expression of what I can only describe as despair washed over his features.

"Hey, are you alright-"

"I have to go," he said, his voice suddenly serious. He looked, and sounded, like a totally different person.

He turned away, taking a few steps forward before turning back, his mouth open as though he were about to say something

"Wait-" I said, but it was too late. He turned away again and disappeared into the crowd, his frame disappearing in the swell of people.

"What was that all about?" Myla asked, sitting down next to me,

"I have no idea."