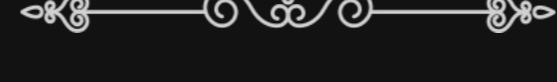


Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 227



Chapter 7: The Birds and the Bees

Maeve

I spent the rest of the morning trudging through the tall grass, which had sprung back up to its usual height after the sun came out and began to dry the weighed-down blades. I struggled against the unruly grass, the sharp, dry blades constantly snagging on my shirt and poking the skin on my hands and neck.

"Damn you, Aaron," I hissed, finally popping out of the field and into the castle's well-kept grounds. The garden was empty of its usual inhabitants. Everyone, including the gardeners, were helping clean up the aftermath of the storm. I found the emptiness peaceful, and instead of going back inside the castle I found myself wandering around the gardens for at least an hour.

It wasn't until Gemma came out looking for me that I went inside. She picked the grass out of my hair as she walked behind me, talking incessantly about the storm's damage.

I started up the stairs, but she stopped me, grabbing my elbow. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, um. To my room, to change."

"Don't worry about it. There's no time."

"For what?"

"Oh damn, I forgot. Maeve, I'm sorry. I should have mentioned it last night but with Aaron showing up and"

"What is it, Gemma?"

"Horace scheduled an appointment for you with the doctor today, in a few minutes, actually. It'll be brief."

I stepped off the stairs, a strange sensation rippling through my stomach, something like excitement, or nerves. I wasn't sure

"in the infirmary?" I asked, letting her take the lead. We walked through the winding hallways on the first floor, passing the dining hall and library as we made our way to the far eastern wing of the castle, a darkened, rarely used area.

Sure enough, the lights inside the infirmary were on and I could hear Ernest's voice from within the sterile waiting room.

I entered behind Gemma, who had gone stiff and flushed as I stepped to stand beside her. I looked at her, then turned to where she was looking, my hands tightening into fists.

Aaron was standing in the corner of the infirmary's entrance, his arms crossed casually over his chest as he talked to Dr. Metzger and Ernest

"Stop shaking," Gemma whispered, giving me a side-eyed look. "There's nothing to be worried about. He's just going to take some blood,"

"I'm not worried. I'm mad," I whispered back, still looking at Aaron, who gave us both a nod in greeting.

"What's the matter?"

"Ladies!" Ernest exclaimed, clapping his hands together. He pranced over to me, bending down to kiss me on each cheek before I could dodge him.

"What's wrong with you-" I mumbled, but he ignored me.

"Gemma, my dear. Excellent work on managing the castle in our absence," he said with a genuine air of gratitude as he looked from me to her. Gemma flushed with pride.

I smiled softly to myself, happy for Gemma. Ernest was kind to her and really did appreciate her help around the castle. I looked down at my feet as the two exchanged niceties.

But I felt a sudden rush of heat touch my cheeks as I waited to be told what to do. I looked up slowly, making eye contact with Aaron. He was staring at me the same way he always did, his eyes focused intensely on mine, taking me in.

And, like the times before, it was almost as though a silent conversation was passing between us, something I couldn't yet

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decipher. Maybe, I thought as I narrowed my eyes at him, he was trying to apologize for his forward behavior.

He narrowed his eyes back at me, his mouth tilting into a sly smile.

Never mind. He was taunting me.

"Maeve, it's your turn "Dr. Metzger said in a dry, monotone voice. He was an owlish man, short and stocky with a few wispy white hairs left on his head. He motioned for me to follow him through one of the doors off the infirmary's entrance, away from the small waiting room where Gemma, Ernest, and Aaron stood, all three of them watching me in silence.

"Sit down here, please," the doctor said, taking his seat on a swivel stool while I sat on the exam bed. I crossed my legs, tapping my foot as he asked me a variety of questions.

When was the last day of my last period? Were they regular? How much do I weigh? How tall am I?

He made a face as he wrote down my height and chuckled to himself.

"What?

"Oh, this baby will be a giant," he mumbled, shaking his head. "Or giantess."

"Great!" I said sarcastically, uncrossing my legs as a nurse entered the room, pushing a cart with the supplies for a blood draw.

"Do you understand what you must do in order to make a baby?" the doctor said, flipping over the paper on his clipboard. I stared at him blankly, unsure if I had heard him correctly.

Are you asking if I know how to.. how to-"

"Has anyone explained to you how babies are made?"

I opened my mouth to say something cutting but decided against it. The nurse pursed her lips, trying not to laugh as she continued to prepare the needle and cartridges.

"1-Yes. It was explained to me," I said through gritted teeth. Was a grown man really asking me if I knew where babies came from?

"Good. Good. Well-"Dr. Metzger stood, flipping his paper back to the front page where he had written down my vitals. "Based on your last period, I would assume your fertile window is in about ten days, give or take. You'll need to report here every morning for the next few weeks, at least until you conceive. Brenda will walk you through what that will look like."

He nodded his head toward the nurse, who gave me a gracious smile. The doctor left the room just as Brenda was leaning over my arm, the needle dipping into my flesh as she released the tunic she had placed on my upper arm.

My blood flowed through the narrow plastic tube, turning the little glass vials a deep red as they filled.

"You have a high pain tolerance, don't you?" Brenda said with a smile, capping one of the vials and filling another.

I nodded, not the least bit queasy or lightheaded.

"Well, that'll do it." She pulled the needle from my arm and placed a bandage over the spot where the needle had been placed in the crook of my elbow. "You might bruise a little, fair skinned as you are."

"What's this all for, anyway?" I asked, waving my hand toward the vials of blood.

She discarded the needle and tubing, placing the vials in a little blue box and setting it on the counter behind her before taking a seat on the stool.

"Well, we want to get an accurate reading of your blood type and make sure you're not anemic. We also want to know if you're a carrier for any genetic diseases."

"Alright. But don't forget to save any you don't need for healing," I said.

She smiled. "We won't forget, don't worry," she said. "So, did your mother struggle with her pregnancies? Bad morning sickness, difficult labors?"

I shook my head. "If she had, she didn't tell me."

"Well, that's alright. Everyone is different." She paused, searching my face. "We will run the same tests on him, you know."

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I shook my head, pulling the covers up to my chin and rolling onto my side, hugging my knees against my chest.

"Do you want to see anyone? Gemma?" he paused, shifting his weight. "Ernest?"

I shook my head again, swallowing against the painful lump in my throat that prevented me from saying a word. There was a moment of silence before I heard him cross the room. He opened a drawer and rummaged for something. Then, a tearing sound. I fought the urge to peak out from my nest of blankets as he placed something at the edge of the bed.

"I don't have any ink," he said softly. "but I have a pencil. I'll... I'll let the kitchen know you won't be coming down for dinner. I'll have something brought up."

"Thank you," I said weakly, but the words hung on the tip of my tongue. How did he know I wanted to write a letter home?

His footsteps padded across the carpet and then a door opened and shut. He was gone.

I brought the covers down and looked toward the end of bed. He had left a large book, a worn hardcover with bent and frayed edges. I reached for it, examining the cover. It was so worn, so used that the text on the cover was no longer visible. He had even stitched the spine back together several times from what I could see, and dozens of the pages were bent to hold his place. I opened it, marveling at the pictures inside.

It was maps, dozens and dozens of maps drawn in watercolor and ink. He had loved this book, so much so that he left small handwritten notes in the margins. I ran my finger over the indents left by his pen.

He had also left me a piece of coarse paper ripped out of a journal and a short, hand-sharpened charcoal pencil. It was the kind of pencil used for sketching, and it was half the length it should have been had it been new. He must have used it often.

I turned it over in my hands.

Who are you, Aaron? I thought as I placed the piece of paper on the book, using my knees as a makeshift desk.

Who are you, really?