

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder

Chapter 229



Grandfather, It's Me

Aaron

I could hear her quick footsteps behind me, her sandals tapping on the stone pavers as she struggled to keep up. "Aaron!" "What?!" 1 rounded on her and she stopped short, skidding to a stop a few feet from where I stood. She had followed me out of the garden and across the wide stone walkway that led from the castle to the outskirts of the village below. "What, Maeve?" "Why did you just walk away? I was talking," "I don't want to talk about that day, alright? I'm sorry I'm not-not practically deformed, like you assumed." Her mouth dropped open for a second, then she snapped it shut, her sapphire eyes narrowing into cat-like slits. "I never said you were deformed!" "You thought I should have been. Your memory is lacking, Maeve. How old were you? Six? Seven?"

"I was ten, Aaron-"

Ah, see? How much could you possibly remember from back then?" Sweat was prickling on my brow. I dug my fingernails into the palm of my hands, waiting for her reply. Oh, Maeve was an open book. Every emotion danced across her face. She had no control of the furious red blush that spread across her cheeks and neck. She was a vision in the cream-colored set she was wearing, the loose fabric trembling in the breeze. Her hair was falling over her shoulders, long and bleached a vibrant golden color that reminded me of the vivid sunsets back home, when the sun turned the ocean a warm, pinkish orange as it dipped below the horizon. She was beautiful. I couldn't deny it. I wanted to reach out and touch the half-moon scar on her chest as she stood in front of me, slicing into my soul with her gaze. She had freckles all along her collarbones, surrounding the scar like constellations in a cloudless sky. I would draw her like this, standing in the field with the sun behind her and golden blades of grass at her feet, just like I had drawn her the night after I met her for the first time in the market, drawing her with her mouth stretched into a wide, full smile and her eyes creased with laughter. "What are you staring at?" she demanded, crossing her arms over her chest. Oh, there it was the one part of her I couldn't capture with my pencil. That look behind her eyes whenever she was vexed, something like excitement. Something that told me she would always have the last word. "You look like a scarecrow," I said flatly, knowing my comment would send a fresh ripple of emotion through her features. She did, in my defense, have on a ridiculous wide-brim straw hat.

She closed the distance between us, her chin jutted forward, and her eyes narrowed into slits as she looked up at me. "I'm being serious!" "So am I, I caught her by the wrist as she attempted to swing at me, my mouth twitching into a smile as she struggled against my grip. Maeve had every attribute of someone who had grown up with boys, especially brothers. She wasn't the meek, submissive type of female so prevalent across the pack lands. No, Maeve was a powerhouse. But so was I. So when she attempted to knee me in the groin, I caught her by the thigh, tossing her sideways into the tall grass. She scoffed as she stood, picking pieces of grass from her hair and securing the hat snugly on her head. Oh, she was seething. I knew this was exactly what she wanted. She had been avoiding me since the night she came into my room, sliding into my bed the day after the storm. It had been totally innocent, of course, but the kiss hadn't been, and I knew she felt the same way. I only ever saw her during dinner, and even then her conversation was short and directed at Gemma rather than myself. Seeing today in the garden had just been chance, and I could tell by the look in her eye that she had mischief on her mind. She wanted a fight, for whatever reason, and I had never turned down a fight in my life. "Is that all you got?" I said, balling my hands into fists and crouching, egging her on.

She inhaled, nostrils flaring. She swung once again, and I blocked her, catching her hand in mine. She didn't struggle this time. Instead, tears began to well in her eyes and rolled onto her lower lashes. "Oh, sh*t. Maeve, I thought," She burst into tears. F*ck. I pulled her into my chest, my hand on the back of her head as she trembled, her tears wet against my skin. "I'm sorry. I was being too rough. I can't-I can't read emotions well. I try, but," Suddenly I remembered I was half naked and covered in charcoal from cutting down that charred tree, and I pushed her away, my hands on her shoulders as I held her at arm's length. She was covered in it, black smears all down her chest and arms. She looked down, tears rolling from her cheeks and onto her neck as she did so. "Oh," she said softly, sniffing. "Gemma- Gemma is going to be so mad. This is new." "Maeve, I'm sorry." She touched the black stain on her shirt and rubbed the charcoal between two of her fingers. "Why weren't you like this before?" she said softly, not looking up at me.

"I-I was young.. insecure, maybe." I said, hoping I sounded convincing. She looked up at me, her eyes an even brighter blue than before as if the light was reflecting off the tears that lingered on her lashes. "Honestly, Maeve, I was probably severely concussed. I don't remember it at all." "Oh, I... I didn't even think of that." "Why was it so important to you that I had a scar?" I asked, my thumb tracing her collarbone as I continued to grip her shoulders. "I wanted you to still be that Aaron," she said, her face undergoing a rapid change. She was suddenly serious. "I needed you to still be that Aaron."

"Why?" "Because I—" She paused, the muscles in her shoulders tightening against my touch. I let her go, letting my hands fall to my sides as I watched a myriad of emotions play across her face. "It doesn't matter." "I think it matters to you. A lot," I said, matter-of-factly. "Every time you look at me it looks like you're about to fight me, yell at me, or cry." A smile touched the side of her mouth, fading as quickly as it had come. "I didn't expect to," "Mistress," came a voice I knew all too well. I looked over the top of Maeve's head as an elderly man came to a stop along the stone walkway, his eyes cold and narrowed as they made contact with mine. Maeve turned around, startled. Horace stood with his fingers knitted, his face drawn and expressionless as he nodded his head at Maeve in greeting. "You're needed in the infirmary." "1- "She glanced back at me, her arms wrapped around her chest to hide the blackened fabric as she stepped away. "I'll find you later," I said quickly, not taking my eyes off Horace. She tensed, sensing the tension in the air as she passed Horace and continued up the walkway, looking back over her shoulder at me before disappearing from view. "Whatever you have done," Horace growled, his black eyes fixed on mine, "fix it." I reached down to my belt buckle and unfastened it, pulling my pants down around my waist and kicking them into the brush. "There's nothing to fix," I said coolly, turning my back to him. "He is expecting you, tonight. You know where to find the key."

"Yes. I do." 14 i I shifted as Horace retreated, his footsteps echoing on the stone walkway as he neared the castle. I watched him through the tall, swaying grass for a moment before disappearing into the brush, my paws beating against the ground as I neared the edge of the forest. I had almost been caught. She had come so close to the truth. Worse yet, Horace had seen it, witnessed it somehow. I entered the forest, running the long, circular path other wolves had beaten down over the years. I couldn't slip up again. – I inserted the skeleton key into the ancient-looking lock, turning the key until the lock creaked and clicked, the door sliding open as I pushed against its weight. There was a staircase inside the small, darkened room as I stepped inside, shutting the door behind me as quietly as possibly could. The staircase spiraled upward, made totally of stone. It led to the tower of the castle, a part of the massive fortress that had remained untouched since it was built hundreds, if not thousands of years ago. I swallowed against the lump in my throat, using the wall to guide my steps as I ascended an additional three stories to the top of the tower. A single door was at the top of the stairs, slightly ajar as light poured out onto the steps. I pushed it open, slowly, gingerly stepping inside the ill-lit circular room. It was the dead of night. No moonlight trickled through the windows. A single tallow candle burned on a table inside a cell, iron bars reaching from floor to ceiling across one half of the room. An elderly man sat in the corner of the cell, his head hanging limply on his neck. At first I thought he was dead, panic welling in my chest as I hastily stepped forward. But he looked up, his eyes fixating on me as I took another step toward the bars. He didn't speak, his face blank of all expression as I crouched, peering at his weathered form in the dim, yellow light. "Romero," I said, my voice trembling. He watched me for a moment, his eyes lighting up momentarily as a look of familiarity crossed over his face. "You," he said, his voice low and gravely.

"Grandfather," I said, not totally sure he recognized me. It had been twenty years, after all. "It's me."