

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 232



Chapter 232: This is Really Happening

Maeve

Horace stood in the shelter of the darkened corridor, a candle in his hand. He was dressed for bed, a silly cotton nightcap and long nightshirt covering his withered body. .

Oh, Horace was a grumpy old bat. He didn't care that people thought that of him, either. Gemma and I had playfully tried to guess his age, once, and I don't think my guess of one-hundred was far from the truth.

Usually he ignored me, only giving me a very stern passing glance, but something in his beady black eyes made a shiver run up my spine as he watched me move away from the door.

"I heard something, Horace,"

"Rats, probably. Nothing you need to pay any mind. Go to bed, mistress. You shouldn't be wandering the halls at this hour." He motioned his hand to shoo me away, narrowing his eyes as I passed by and walked back toward the stairs.

Horace acted as an advisor to Ernest and his Beta, Lance. I never saw Lance; apparently he lived in the village with his family just off the castle's ground, but Horace and Ernest were constantly in each other's company. In the rare event that Horace wasn't lurking behind Ernest like a shadow, he was bothering Gemma, giving her some remedial task or lecture.

I looked over my shoulder, noticing Horace staring after me. I looked down at my short evening dress, quickly crossing my hands over my chest as I stepped down the stairs, a faint blush rising on my cheeks.

I woke at noon, the hot sun beating down through the windows and warming my sheets to an uncomfortable temperature. I rose, slowly, stretching my legs before stepping out of bed and cranking the window open to let in the air.

I could feel my hair shrinking into tight ringlets the second the stifling humidity touched me, and started to crank the window closed again when a knock sounded on my door and a maid stepped in, carrying a tray of food.

"Impeccable timing," I said with a smile, nodding my thanks as she set the tray down on top of the dresser and turned to take her leave. "Wait! Did the post come today?"

"Yes, Mistress," she said, bobbing her head in farewell,

That's odd. I hadn't had a single letter from home in the past three weeks. The post arrived weekly, and usually I would receive a few letters at a time from my parents and Rowan. I wrote to them every night, after all.

I pursed my lips, looking at myself in the mirror before pulling the oversized T-shirt I slept in over the top of my head. Mom always wrote me back with long, beautiful letters filled with pressed flowers and recipes for my favorite foods to give to the kitchen. Dad usually added a line or two, mostly just to tell me to behave myself. Rowan was my spy, however, and I looked forward to his letters the most. I counted on him feeding me the most up to date gossip from back home.

But three weeks with nothing?

pulled on one of the new dresses Gemma had bought for me and headed out the door, not bothering to put shoes on as padded across the carpeted floor toward the stairs. Ernest always lunched in his office; he would know what was happening with the mail.

I walked into his office on the first floor without knocking, sitting down in one of the large leather chairs in front of his desk. He looked at me, surprised, and shut the ledger he was pouring over. "Maeve...?"

"What's going on with the post? I haven't received a letter in three weeks."

"Well, I received mail for the castle this morning," he said, tapping his pen on his desk. "Have you been writing correspondence?"

"To my parents. And my brother. I'm getting a little worried,"

Ernest shook his head, waving his hand in dismissal. "If something were amiss in Winter Forest I would know, alright? There's no need to be worried."

The tension left my shoulders a little. I knew he was right. If something was wrong back home, we would know, and not by post. It was faster to send word by plane during times of emergency, or even warriors who were conditioned to run over the mountains that separated the North Eastern Territory from Valoria.

"I will talk to the post office personally, next time I'm in the village."

"Thank you, I appreciate that."

Ernest gave me a wide, generous smile. I guess he wasn't so bad.

I stood, smiling back at him as I turned toward the door. That's when I noticed it out of the corner of my eye; a baby blue cardigan with fake pearls instead of buttons. It was laid out over the sofa along the far wall of his office, nestled between two large bookshelves. "Is that Gemma's sw-"

"I found it in the hallway," he said abruptly, the blood draining from his face. I gave him a look, arching my brow as he continued to pale.

"Oh, sure," I said playfully. Should I let her know it's here?"

"She knows," he hung his head, bringing his hands to his face. He obviously hadn't meant to say it.

"Hmm..well, I'll see you later!" I said quickly, stifling a laugh as I left the room and shut the door behind me. Gemma and Ernest? Ernest?!

I wanted nothing more than to go back into his office and pry every detail out of him, but based on the look on his face, Ernest wasn't going to say a word, probably for the first time in his life.

I went back to my room and changed into a cozy set of leggings and matching crew-neck sweater, walking back downstairs and into the large gymnasium that connected to the backside of the castle, a relatively new addition. There were a few other people in the gym, a handful of warriors playing basketball and lifting weights, but no one seemed to mind when I went to my usual corner of the gym that had a set of full-length mirrors and a ballet bar.

I stretched, using the bar to maintain my balance. Mom taught me how to dance ballet when I was a kid, and she even had some other girls from the village join us for lessons. One summer, for my birthday, the cast of an opera had visited the Winter Forest pack. All of the villagers crowded into the school gym to watch the performance. I hadn't cared for the music but had been in total awe of the dancers.

For a while, I had dreams of being a dancer, of traveling the world and dancing in front of crowds of hundreds or even thousands of people. I kept it as a hobby, and even after training as a warrior I still preferred the soft, gentle movements of ballet over more tedious exercises.

"Can I join you?"

I looked over my shoulder, letting go of the bar as Aaron approached, his eyes dancing with mischief. "Absolutely not," I said, trying not to smile.

"I didn't want to, anyway," he shrugged, tilting his head in the direction of the warriors playing basketball. "I'm here for a game."

"Basketball?"

"Yeah, you know, I'd never even heard of it before coming here-" he paused, biting his lip.

"Well, uh, I guess it's not that popular in the west,"

"Sure. Well, I'll see you tonight. You can watch, if you want."

"Tonight?" He meant for dinner, I thought, feeling slightly stupid. But he gave me a quizzical look, an expression of confusion, then concern, playing over his face.

"Did no one tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

He glanced over his shoulder at the men playing basketball and then stepped toward me, closing the distance between us.

"Maybe you should talk to Gemma,"

"About what? She's still in the village, I think. I haven't seen her,"

"Maeve..." He bent his head, looking me straight in the eyes. It was quite intimidating, honestly, and I fought the urge to take a step away from him.

"What, Aaron? Why are you being so weird?"

"It's, uh, nothing. Don't worry about it. I gotta go, okay? I'm sure Gemma will find you." He walked away, glancing over his shoulder at me before joining the game. I watched as the ball was passed to him, and he attempted to toss it into the hoop. It bounced off the backboard and flew over the players' heads, bouncing to a stop on the other side of the gym.

Wow, he was not good at basketball. I clapped, and he looked over at me as he ran to get the ball, glowering.

"Go pick on someone else, Maeve!"

"You said I could watch—"

"I changed my mind!" He threw the basketball again, this time making it into the hoop. He glanced at me, his brow arched in a challenge.

Not wanting to embarrass myself by joining their game I left the gym, stopping in the kitchen to ask for dinner to be brought up to my room. I paused on the second floor as I made my way back upstairs to my room, looking down the western corridor to where Gemma's bedroom was located. I almost went to call on her but then decided against it. If something was going on tonight that I needed to know about, I'm sure she would have told me already.

What Aaron meant by 'tonight' didn't hit me until later, mid-shower, as I lathered my hair with shampoo. My hands fell to my sides, shaking, and I felt suddenly cold despite the hot water pounding against my shoulders.

Had he meant...?

I shook my head, tilting my head back into the flow of water to rinse the shampoo from my hair. I would have been told if tonight was the night I was to be bred, surely. Someone would have let me know.

I got out of the shower, bending over and wrapping a towel around my hair and putting on a plush, white robe. I wiped the fog from the mirror and brushed my teeth, catching a glimpse of my reflection before the mirror began to mist up again.

I heard a knock, then someone entered my room. Quiet voices drifted under the bathroom door. I froze, listening as a door shut again and footsteps padded across the floor.

I took the toothbrush out of my mouth, pausing for a second before twisting the doorknob and lunging out of the bathroom, wielding my toothbrush like a weapon.

"Jeez!" Aaron nearly jumped out of his skin, flinching so hard his hair trembled as it fell down around his ears.

"What are you doing in here? Get out!"

He tilted his head, smirking as his gaze raked over me. I reached up and pulled the towel off my head, my cheeks pinkening.

"Well, only one of us will have to do the undressing part of un-of this," he said, sitting on the edge of my bed.

"What are you talking about?"

"Did no one tell you? For real?"

I felt myself pale, my stomach clenching painfully as I watched his face.

Oh, my Goddess. This was happening.