

## Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 235



### Chapter 15: A Worried Queen

Rosalie

"I'll just put these away before I go for the day, Queen Rosalie," said the pleasantly plump elderly woman as she sidestepped around the kitchen counter, a basket of laundry in her arms.

"Oh, don't worry about that Gretchen, just leave the basket next to the stairs and I'll do it later."

Are you sure? I don't mind,"

"It's nothing, really! There's much less laundry to put away now that the kids are gone." I swallowed against the lump in my throat, giving her a forced smile. Gretchen gave me a sober smile of her own, her eyes misting with understanding.

"They always come back, my Queen. I promise, they do. Soon you'll be overrun by grandkids, mark my words!" She walked out of the kitchen and into the hallway, setting the laundry basket on the stairs before retrieving her coat. "I never did find Rowan's flannel. Is he sure he didn't leave it down by the water during one of his runs? With how high our tides have been lately..."

"Maeve took it with her," I said with a little laugh. The flannel in question had been one of Ethan's, the fabric worn out and softened with age and wear. Rowan claimed it one day, appalled that Ethan was wanting to throw it out, and he and his sister had been fighting over it ever since.

Gretchen gave me one of her signature wide mouth grins. "Ah, of course. She always has to have the last laugh, doesn't she?" "Always," I smiled, missing Maeve terribly. Gretchen took her leave as I picked up the basket and carried up the stairs, walking down the hallway to the bedroom I shared with Ethan.

He had designed this house from the floor to the ceiling. He knew the placement of every nail, the shade of every color of paint and exactly how many shingles lined the roof. We had raised our children here, being closer to the river than the royal palace quarters, yet safely tucked behind a security wall, it was a great place to raise a family.

Ethan and I loved our home by the water. Cooked dinners in the kitchen and spent evenings huddled around the hearth in the living room, Ethan's voice lifted and animated as he read stories to Maeve and Rowan, their eyes dancing with delight.

It was everything I had ever wanted. It was a life that I, once the abused, humiliated daughter of a lowly Alpha, couldn't have even dreamed of. Ethan and I had been through so much, endured the impossible. The idea of settling down and putting down roots had seemed like a distant, hazy dream.

Ethan turned that dream into our home.

I put the clothes away in the dresser, glancing through the bay windows as I shut the dresser door. I could see him sitting on the lower deck, lounging on one of the chairs with his ankles crossed and resting on a footrest.

I went to him, lingering for a moment in the hallway where Maeve and Rowan's rooms sat across from each other, their doors slightly ajar.

Twenty-six years had passed since I first laid eyes on Ethan. Twenty-five years since we first held our son, the tie that bound us, in our arms. Twenty years since we first marveled at our daughter's fine, newborn curls that were the color of the sunset.

The same sunset that cast the deck in golden-orange glow as I stepped outside, wrapping my arms around Ethan's shoulder and resting my cheek on the top of my head.

"Hey."

"Hey. Come sit with me," he said, taking my hand and leading me into his lap. I sat down, leaning back against his chest and reaching up to run my fingers along the side of his face. Ethan had just started to gray, his dark hair now peppered with silver along his sideburns and beard. The beard was something that had happened inadvertently, the product of busyness and life with a child and newborn living in the house. An infant Maeve had screamed the day he finally shaved it off, refusing to make eye contact with the stranger who had replaced her father. He never shaved it fully again.

"What were you reading?" I asked, motioning toward the blue folder sitting on the side table. He reached for it, handing it to me.

"It's Rowan's, his blueprints for the radio towers,"

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"Oh!" I exclaimed, opening the folder and slowly flipping through the pages. "He has measurements and everything."

"They're perfect." Ethan breathed, his tone heavy, "He worked hard on this."

"Well, you'll allow him to run with this now, won't you? Now that he agreed to find his mate?"

"The deal was more than that, Rosalie. Eugene..." He tapered off, resting his hands on my thighs.

"Eugene wants Rowan to marry one of his daughters?"

"Preferably Kacidra, apparently. The younger one is spoken for."

"Ah, I didn't know," I said, closing the folder and setting it back down on the table. I turned to him, wrapping my arms around his neck and resting my head against his.

"I shouldn't have bribed him. He deserved... so much more than that. I wish he had shown me these plans before he left. He left them in my office, practically hidden them there, like he was embarrassed of them but still wanted me to see."

"It is time for Rowan to find his mate, Ethan. You're not wrong about that."

"It's the way I went about it that's the problem."

I sighed, looking out over the railing at our view. We could see the entire inlet from the deck and the village below, the metal roofs of the cabins reflecting in the blood-orange light of the sunset. This time of year the sun barely touched the horizon before lifting again, the sky a seemingly permanent violet blue. 'Land of Midnight Sun,' or so the villagers called it.

"Should I have let him go to University, in Mirage?" Ethan said suddenly, kissing my shoulder.

"Yes, I believe you should have," I said, squeezing his hand. "And it's not too late to give him your blessing. Isn't that what we're supposed to do, as parents? Give our children everything we never had?"

Ethan smirked, shaking his head. "No one taught us how to be parents, Rosalie. Only how NOT to be parents."

"You got that right," I said with a little laugh, relaxing into him.

"Sending Maeve away was a good idea, though."

"Yes, yes it was." I laughed a little harder this time, even though her distance was killing me. She was our baby, the child born out of love instead of duty. She was also a menace, and her bull-headed personality had only grown stronger over the years.

But she was a true leader, that one. We both knew that once she stepped into her power the world would never be the same. Winter Forest was too small for someone like Maeve. We had to give her space to grow into herself.

I had been angry when I first found out what I called the "Grand Plan" to send Maeve away to join the Drogomor pack. As someone who had once been a breeder myself, the idea of my daughter meeting the same fate made my skin crawl.

But, her situation was markedly different from mine. Maeve was in control. Maeve was safe. Maeve would eventually rule alongside her cousin, Ernest, while they raised her child to be the heir of Ernest's title of Alpha. It kept Drogomor in the family and allowed Ethan to maintain his hold on Valoria while I ruled in the North.

Maeve had also been willing from the start. She seemed happy there, based on her previous letters, but there hadn't been word from her in close to a month. Oh, how useful Rowan's towers would be right now.

"She's fine, Rosalie." Ethan said, as though he read my mind.

"I know, I just doesn't it strike you as strange that she hasn't written? A month ago we were receiving entire bundles of letters. Now, nothing. Rowan, who never writes letters, has written to us twice since he left and it's only been ten days!"

"If anything were wrong, we would know. Ernest would fly here himself; you know that."

That was true. The only reason I agreed to this insane idea was because Maeve would have family there, Ernest, and he was one of the most loyal and trustworthy people I had ever met. He had become Alpha at seventeen when Talon and Georgia relinquished it, seeking greener pastures and a simpler life. He had been ready for the role, always a quiet, fiercely intelligent child who operated more like an adult than a little boy. That was why Ethan had passed him the title of King of Valoria for now, instead of retaining it for our own children, who simply weren't ready for that sort of responsibility. Ethan needed someone he could trust in power, someone within our family line.

The passing of the title had been a permanent one, sealed by Maeve's agreement to produce an heir. I had often wondered why

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Ethan had done things this way instead of giving it to Rowan when he came of age, but I never dwelled on it. I could see the look behind Ethan's eyes when he looked at our son, the look that told me he was carving a greater path for him. It was the same look I had just seen as he glanced down at the folder on the side table.

But I had been with Ethan for the majority of my life. The mention of Maeve and her lack of communication made him tense up, his face briefly shadowed with concern.

"Is she safe, Ethan?" I asked, knitting my fingers in his. "Yes. She's safe."

"Promise me."

"Honey, you know I wouldn't send our child away if I didn't think-" He paused, looking down at me. "Look, I have to go to Red Lakes in a few weeks. I don't have to be there for long, a few days at the most. Rowan and I will travel to Valoria from Red Lakes

"The only way to do that is by boat, down the coast of the Western—"

"I know, Rosalie, listen," he gripped my hands in his, his eyes pleading with mine to hear him, "tell me now. Do you feel like something is wrong?"

"I- I don't know, Ethan. It's just not like her."

"Isn't that the whole point of this? Sending her out into the world? Giving her this responsibility?"

I pulled away from him, my hands on his chest. "This responsibility? Becoming a mother?"

"You know what I mean, Rosalie."

"This is our daughter, Ethan. Our daughter who," I sucked in my breath, the lump in my throat that had been stuck in my throat for weeks tightening around my words, suffocating me, "Maeve is a breeder, Ethan. I worry..I worry about her. I worry about what she's going through, alone."

"She's not a breeder. She has a breeder, it's different."

"Is it? Is it really that different? Do you not remember what we—"

"We were mates when all of that happened. We just didn't know it at the time. Like I said, it's different. Plus, Maeve is a different breed. You know that. If anyone can handle it, it's her. So-" He touched my cheek. "Do you really feel like something is wrong?"

"I don't feel like everything is right, if that makes any sense."

"I can go Valoria tomorrow, Rosalie, if you really feel"

I shook my head, waving my hand in dismissal.

He leaned down, brushing a gentle kiss against my lips. "I will go to her, alright? Rowan and I will go to her the second we leave Red Lakes. But I am sure, completely sure, that we will have heard from her by then. And," He kissed me again, brushing the kiss against my cheek this time. "You'll go to her yourself, when she's close to delivering the baby. Our grandchild."

I smiled despite the uncomfortable tightening in my chest, biting the inside of my cheek.

"Come on," he said softly, patting my thigh, "it's late, we should go to bed."

I stood, looking over the water in the distance that was now dusted with a soft purple glow as the sun hovered just above the horizon.

"I'll just be a minute," I said, smiling at him as he gathered Rowan's blueprints and walked into the house, glancing at me over his shoulder. He looked concerned, a wariness behind his eyes.

I knew we both felt it, despite his protests and my doubt. It wasn't necessarily that something was wrong. But something wasn't right.

It didn't feel right at all.

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