

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 239



Chapter 19: This Was Heat

Maeve

Dinner with the Alpha and Luna of Greenbriar was a spectacular affair. The dining hall had been returned to its formal glory with the long wooden table returned to its rightful place and set with our finest china. The cook had outdone herself tonight; our usual roast meat and potatoes was replaced by an extravagant array of game meats and side dishes, large bowls of exotic fruits and bottles upon bottles of vintage wine.

Ernest was back to his usual self, too. His dry monologue nearly put our guests into a stupor as they gulped their wine. Alpha Julian seemed pleased by the conversation, though, nodding his head and actively listening as Ernest drawled on.

Opaline was nearly overcome by boredom, and I was thankful when she announced she would retire to her room for the night, giving me the freedom to take my leave instead of entertaining her in my seldom used sitting room after dinner.

But then I found myself with several hours of free time before, well, whatever Aaron was planning on doing to me.

I went up to my room and changed out of the evening gown I had worn to dinner, choosing a comfortable, silken nightgown and a matching robe. The fabric felt weightless and luxurious against my skin as I slipped into it. In Winter Forest, I was almost always decked out in thick flannel pajamas no matter the time of year. Our house was heated solely by two wood stoves that we always failed to stoke throughout the night. Dad liked the chore of chopping wood and the accomplishment of heating the house by hand himself, even though a servant could have done it for him, but his simplistic desires caused the rest of us grief and chilly toes by morning.

I looked at myself in the mirror, admiring the new freckles on the bridge of my nose. The sunburn had faded and left a soft pink glow in its wake. I was feeling confident, feeling ready. When Aaron came in, I wouldn't shy away, I told myself. I'd do what I needed to do, and maybe even enjoy myself.

But an hour passed, then another. I laid sprawled out on the bed looking at the ceiling as the clock chimed ten times, signaling the hour. Nothing. No sound from his room, no footsteps in the hallway.

I rolled out of bed and turned off the light as I left my room, my bare feet soundless as I walked down the stairs and toward the library. There was still life in the castle at this hour. Servants were busy tidying up from the day, and the kitchen was noisy and filled with the sound of running water and clanging dishware.

But the library was quiet, shrouded in soft, inky darkness. Moonbeams fell in long shafts across the rugs on the library's lower level, dust floating in their wakes. I didn't even bother lighting a candle as I reached the ladder leading to the upper loft and climbed up to the second story, smiling as I laid eyes upon my favorite place in the entire castle.

The loft was cozy, yet spacious, a corner of it lined with cushions and low-lying chaise lounges. It was large enough to house five rows of bookshelves; however, the space between them was totally shadowed by darkness. No one came up here but me, it seemed. I could leave a book open in the nest of cushions and no one would come and close it or put it away. It was my place, my haven.

I hadn't been reading long before I heard the library door open and shut and a light move through the dark below me. Someone cleared their throat as they set a candle on a table, then cursed under their breath as something fell and bounced across the carpet.

I crawled on my hands and knees over to the railing, looking down to see Aaron standing in the center of the library, his face tilted up toward the ceiling with a large journal of some sort in his hand and a pencil in the other. I watched him for a moment as he studied the mural above our heads, his pencil moving across the paper with great speed.

But then his eyes met mine. And he screamed.

I screamed too, his outburst scaring the absolute wits out of me.

His face reddened furiously as his breathing returned to normal and he bent to pick up the journal and pencil he had dropped, straightening up and fixing me with a steely glare.

"You scared me to death!" he said, his voice choked and gravelly. I got off my knees and stood, gripping the railing. "I thought you were a ghost, or demon."

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"A demon?"

"You already are a demon. A real pain in my-" He mumbled inaudibly as he righted the papers that had come loose from his journal when he dropped it.

"Were you drawing? Were you drawing the mural?"

He looked up at me, his face still serious and twisted in a scowl. "Why weren't you in your room? I was looking for you."

"I waited up for you. It was getting late."

"What are you doing up there?" he asked, closing the journal.

"I asked you first," I said, tilting my head to the side. He looked down at the journal in his hands and sighed, reaching over to grab the candle from the table before making his way over to the ladder.

A few seconds later the journal landed with a thud on the floor of the loft, followed by Aaron and the candle he had balanced in one hand. I crept away from the railing, giving him room to climb up over the ladder. He handed me the candle, and I took it, setting it down on a stack of thick books and then sat back down in the nest cushions, my heart thrumming rapidly against my chest.

Aaron crawled into the nest and plopped the journal between us, grunting softly as he made himself comfortable. I had the sudden image of him as a wolf, imagining him with thick, dark brown fur and the same spectacular eyes. He'd be huge, I was sure, lurking in the dark of the night and pawing the ground like he was currently doing to the cushions.

"Can I open it?" I asked, my fingers tingling as my hand hovered over the well-worn leather cover. He sighed deeply, his cheeks flushing a delicate rose as he nodded, turning away as I gently picked it up and set it in my lap.

Inside were dozens of sketches done in pencil, the lines blurred in spots where his hand had brushed against what looked like hand-pressed paper, some sheets harboring tiny traces of plant matter and dried petals.

I turned the pages slowly, taking time to linger on each page. He had drawn landscapes, portraits, and pictures of boats so realistic it looked as though they'd come off the page and settle in my hands. I stopped on a page where he had drawn two men seated at a small table outside of a bar, rolled cigarettes hanging off of their lips as they bent over a chess board. I could smell the picture, smell the smoke and taste the tang of the bitter ales sitting in the warm sun on the table as they played.

"These are incredible," I whispered, careful not to touch the delicate charcoal marks.

There was a picture of a woman, her face obscure as though he was drawing her from a distant, almost unreachable memory. This one was done in color, gentle watercolor marks that pooled in some places. Brown hair, soft peach-colored skin. I looked up at Aaron as a sadness swept over me, tightening around my heart. This was someone he had lost. "Who is she?" I whispered, looking up at him.

But he only shrugged, picking at the tassels on one of the pillows, avoiding eye contact.

I turned the pages as the candle burned down, the flame casting a soft glow across the drawings.

"Wait-" he said softly, reaching out as though to take the journal from my hands as I turned another page, the image filling the paper taking my breath away.

It was me.

I was laughing, my mouth open in a beaming smile. My hair was piled on top of my head in my signature bun the kind I did when my hair was too big and too knotted to even attempt to brush through it. He had drawn the sharp angles of my face, the curve of my shoulder and the scar above my left breast that was just visible where the image faded into smears of charcoal and dust.

"I can't get your eyes right," he said softly.

"It's like looking into a mirror. I..." I felt choked up, the tears beginning to well in the corner of my eyes as I looked up at him.

He reached out, his fingers touching my temples, smoothing the hair from my face. It's that look. Right there. I just can't. I can't get it right." He leaned in, brushing a kiss on my cheek, then my jaw, the sensation sending ripples of gooseflesh up my arms. He kissed my mouth then, slowly, his hands running down over my shoulders and forearms as he took my hands in his. It wasn't a hungry, needy kiss. There was no primal greed. It was not like the kiss that day in the field or the kiss the night before that was driven by purpose. This kiss was for us, and it was perfect.

I let go of his hands, reaching up to run my fingers through his thick hair. I felt warm all over as he took my face in his hands,

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pulling me closer, kissing me with more power and conviction. Before I knew it, he was guiding me backward onto the cushions, his hands running down my belly and waist and scrunching the fabric of the silk dress up my thighs as his hands continued to explore.

It wasn't long before we were naked against the cushions, his body glazed with sweat and glistening in the candlelight. He took his time, moving against the wetness between my legs, his fingers gripping my hips as he took me, gently at first, then harder and hungrier as he pushed me towards the edge, the sharp fullness giving way to pure, unadulterated ecstasy.

Whatever this was wasn't just business. This was heat. Need. A deeply rooted longing that threatened to shatter my carefully crafted life. I was a goner, I realized. How could I let this end and watch him go, separated by a turbulent and unforgiving sea?

His name was at the tip of my tongue as another wave of pleasure washed over me, causing me to arch my back and cry out. He was smiling, laughing into my chest as he collapsed, wrapping his arms around me and bringing me to his chest as he rolled onto his back, holding me against his heart.

No, this was more than business. He was more than a breeder.

And I would never be the same.