

Kings Breeder 351

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 351

A Night in the Prince's Bedroom

No one answered.

I stuck my head in and noticed it was dark inside. He wasn't there?

It should've been reason enough for me to close the door and prepare for bed, but once again, curiosity got the better of me, and I found myself creeping into his room.

A chill went down my back and through my arms at the temperature of the room. It was much colder than my own room had been, colder than any other part of the castle.

The prince's bed was empty, the dark blue bedspread still tucked up into place. My eyes wandered across the rest of the room when a rustling sound behind me made me almost jump.

I snapped around and spotted Prince Theo sitting on the couch in the dark. My heart nearly leaped out of my chest.

My immediate reaction was to get down on my knee and announce myself, but then I heard the faint sound of even breathing.

I looked up and realized that he wasn't awake. His head was tipping to the side and only a thin stream of moonlight illuminating his slumbering form!

My feet were light on the carpet as I approached, wondering what a man like him must dream about. In his mind's eye,

right now, was he slaughtering other wolves, or was he envisioning himself in a peaceful meadow with a beautiful young lady? Not me, obviously.

In the moonlight, without the scowl on his face, I could see him more clearly than I had before. His dark eyes were closed, so I could focus on his other features-the perfect slant of his nose, the way his jaw was set so squarely, almost perfectly.

I also noticed how masculine the bit of shadow that covered his chin looked with his dark hair. If he always looked this peaceful, perhaps he wouldn't be quite so terrifying.

Standing in his room staring at him was probably not part of my new duties, but it was chilly in the room, so I decided the least I could do was toss a blanket over him. His demeanor might be cold, but his body didn't need to be.

I moved to grab a quilt off of the back of a chair and noted he wasn't wearing the gloves he usually had on. His fingers were long and slender, glowing pale in the moonlight.

I knew the strength of those hands as I had seen him crush bone and rip out tendons with them only a few days ago, but they looked innocent enough now that they were exposed.

Gently, I tossed the blanket over him and turned to go, but then I noticed his gloves were on the floor next to the coffee table. I wasn't sure if they'd always been there or if I'd inadvertently knocked them off when I moved the cover, so I bent down to pick them up. The material was different than I expected it to be. Thicker. Heavier.

I was just about to set them back on the table when I heard a rough voice demanding, "What are you doing here?"

I turned to look at him and saw the hint of anger in his eyes. "I—"

"Who said you could come into my chambers without my permission?" No longer peacefully slumbering, Prince Theo looked like he wanted to kill me again.

I quickly put his gloves on the coffee table and turned to face him.

"Forgive me, Your Highness," I said, my voice vibrating with each word. "Since I have been assigned as your personal attendant, I thought I should come and check on you."

"Does coming to check on me involve touching my personal belongings?"

Pushing the blanket I had covered him with away, he dragged his hands over his face, and I just stood there, not able to answer his question.

No, of course, it didn't, but I thought his gloves shouldn't be on the floor where they could be trampled.

However, I didn't think my words were something he needed to hear though. I waited, wondering if I should just go or if he would call the guards in to drag me out.

With a sigh, he asked, "Who are you, anyway, woman? And why are you always there every goddessdamn time I turn around?"

His question was muttered under his breath, so I wasn't sure if I should answer him or just keep quiet, but when he looked at me, I thought I should say something.

"I'm... just... a girl," I said, simplifying my answer.

Immediately, he paused, his eyes seemed to open slightly wider. "What did you say?"

Startled, I jumped back a few steps. He must not have liked that response. "I'm-Ciana Black," I told him. "From—"

"I don't care where you're from." He interrupted me, stood up and stepped closer. Somehow, I managed to hold my ground and keep from retreating.

"I don't care who you are or why you're here, but from now on, if you're to be my personal attendant, you don't do a damn thing without my express consent. I don't want you anywhere near me unless I call for you. Understand?"

His eyes penetrated right through me as he waited for me to regain the ability to speak. I managed to say, "Yes, Your Highness." And he backed away a step or two.

In my mind, I couldn't help the anger that was beginning to replace my fear. Just who did he think he was, assuming everyone wanted to be near him all the time, so much so that we'd risk everything to be in his presence? The nerve this man had. I hadn't chosen to win that stupid contest or be named as his assistant!

I lowered my gaze and kept my eyes trained on the intricately woven rug beneath the coffee table where we were standing, not allowing myself to show my fury. I needed to be careful, for my own sake, and for my pack's. I needed to get out of here alive....

His mood was still dark as he said, slowly, "You must learn not to do anything without my orders."

Clearing my throat, I replied, "Yes, Sir," and waited, not even sure I should breathe without his consent.

For a few seconds, it was awkwardly quiet in the room, so I peeked up slightly, and saw he was staring at the spot where his gloves rested on the table, as if he wanted them. However, I didn't move to get them for him for fear he'd only lose his cool again. I wanted him to dismiss me so I could run back to my room and pound the pillows with my fists.

"Get out. Now."

My first instinct was to obey him immediately, and I took a few hurried steps toward the door. But then, I realized, knowing what I did about the prince, he wasn't likely to seek me out to give me a list of assignments.

So... mustering all of my bravery, I asked, "Your Highness," His threw me a look as if he regretted that he didn't silence me forever just now, but before he could make a sound, I quickly blurted out, "-might I know what my duties for tomorrow will be?"

I figured... with all of the trouble King Sebastian and Beta Xavier had gone to in order to bestow this position upon me, the prince wasn't likely to strike me down for asking such a simple, purposeful question.

He turned to look at me, his hands fisted on his muscular hips. I kept my eyes down, not willing to look at his body like many of the other girls often did.

"What are your duties?" he repeated.

I said nothing, only waited. Maybe some people would be content to lounge around and spend their time doing nothing, but I wanted something to do to keep me busy.

"You seem to have a lot of energy," he said, which might've been a compliment coming from anyone else, but I doubted that was what he meant. "Since you like to work so much, tomorrow you can begin cleaning the entire wing, top to bottom. I want everything shiny and bright like it was the day the castle was built."

I had noticed there were no servants on this side of the castle. The guards who greeted me earlier seemed to be there only temporarily. It was as if Prince Theo hated everyone so much, he didn't want to be near anyone, not even servants, so I had no doubt everything here would be a mess.

The way he made it sound, this would be an enormous undertaking, so I didn't let him see that it actually made me happy to have such a job.

Not only would it keep me busy for a while and not be bothered by anyone, it would also help me better understand the layout and function of the entire wing.

"Yes, Your Highness," I said, keeping my tone and expression flat so he couldn't see I was pleased.

He waved his hand at me, which I took as my dismissal, and without another word, I went back through the door I'd used to access his room in the first place. This time, I shut it fully. I didn't see the harm in ensuring he knew I intended to leave him be.

With a heavy sigh, I made my way across the room to the bed

and tossed myself down, staring up at the wood panels on the ceiling. Prince Theo was a jackass if I'd ever met one. It was as if he hated everyone who'd ever existed.

I felt sorry for him, in a way. It must be miserable to be like that, without any friends, not even caring for your family. He would likely die all alone, his wife and children not wanting to have anything to do with him.

I decided not to waste another moment thinking about him. It wasn't worth my time or effort.

Instead, I quickly unpacked my luggage and put on a pair of comfy pajamas. This room wasn't as chilly as Prince Theo's bedroom, but it was colder than I was used to in the other part of the castle, so I knew I'd be happy to snuggle beneath the plush blankets.

But before I climbed into bed, I pulled a small memento out of the pocket of my dress. It was a bit wilted, but for the most part, the petals were alive and vibrant.

Placing the flower Prince Warren had given me onto the pillow next to my head, I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and prayed to the Moon Goddess for happy dreams.

With any luck, I'd be back in the forest with my "secret boyfriend."

Only this time, it would end pleasantly, not in a pool of blood, but hopefully, with Prince Warren's smile.

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My Bracelet

My eyes flew open before the sun was fully up. I remembered instantly where I was, and my interaction with Prince Theo weighed on my mind.

I took a few deep breaths, trying not to let his constantly irritated state get to me. I had slept well, had good dreams, and had a lot of energy pulsing through my veins. Why would I let his pessimism ruin my day before it had even begun?

I glanced down at my pillow and saw the flower that Prince Warren had given to me and instantly felt a rush of

adrenaline.

No wonder I'd gotten a good night of sleep. The blooms were slightly faded from the vibrancy they'd had when he'd first picked it and handed it over to me, but the fragrance still filled my lungs when I inhaled, and I thought it might last another day or two.

I quickly put the flower in the top drawer of the night stand and hopped up, ready to prepare for the day. Lots of hard manual labor lay in front of me, but I was mentally prepared for all of it.

After a few hours, I had almost finished wiping down the entire wing. Almost, because the ceiling was too high for me to reach. While I was pondering what I should do to get

myself up there, I had an overwhelming feeling that someone was watching me from behind.

I looked down the hallway and saw a tall, lean form coming toward me, and immediately, my heart knew who it was.

Quickly, I sprinkled some water on the floor so I'd have an excuse to speak to him. "Be careful, Your Highness!" I called. "The floor is wet here!"

"There you are!" Prince Warren greeted me as he approached, staying back from the area I'd just dampened. "I had wondered why you weren't outside with the animals. So... you were chosen to be my brother's personal attendant, huh?"

Something was slightly off about his tone. He was saying kind words, but he didn't exactly seem happy about the news.

"This is my assignment, for now," I said, keeping my head down. "It was... an accident... sort of." I couldn't quite explain to him how I happened to be at the pavilion at the same time that Prince Theo was expecting his attendant there.

"Well... congratulations." His smile looked forced for some reason that I didn't understand.

"Thank you," I said. "But honestly... if I had a choice...." His eyebrows raised, and he took a step closer to me, as if he knew I was hesitant to say what I was trying to get out, which was true. "I wouldn't have chosen to be Prince Theo's attendant."

I wasn't sure whether it was a good idea to share my displeasure about one prince with another prince, but looking at Warren's face, I knew I could trust him.

"Really?" His tone suddenly changed, and I thought I heard a bit of lightness to his voice. "Well, it looks like you've got quite

a bit of work to do, cleaning up this wing of the castle. You know, a personal attendant isn't meant to be a maid."

I felt my cheeks redden as I thought about how I had gone

into Prince Theo's room last night and ended up getting myself into this predicament. But at least I had something to do. "I don't mind a bit of hard work," I told him.

"Perhaps I could help you? I've never done much cleaning, but I can give it a try." He flashed a kind smile to me that made my heart skip a beat, and I wondered if he could hear it.

"I couldn't ask a prince to help me clean!" I had to turn down his offer. "That wouldn't be appropriate at all!"

Prince Warren laughed, and the sound of it made my cheeks flare up again. "You're not asking me, silly," he reminded me. "I'm volunteering-as a friend."

I was tempted to accept his offer to help, simply because I wanted to spend more time with him. I glanced around and suddenly realized exactly what I could ask him to do. "Well, I am having a bit of trouble reaching those cobwebs up there in the corners," I said, pointing one out to him. "I'm just not tall enough to reach, even on the stepladder."

Prince Warren looked at them for a moment, his hand in his pocket as he studied the problem. He gave me a nod and smiled again. "I think I can help with that."

Taking hold of the ladder and a duster with a long pole, he moved over to the corner and climbed up, stretching to reach the webs in the corners along the ceiling.

When he did so, his sleeve moved back just enough, and my breath caught in my throat as I got another, clearer look at his bracelet.

recognized it. Not only was it the same material and color as the one I'd given away as a gift all those years ago, I could see some wear on one of the beads. I remembered scraping it on a rough tree trunk when I was climbing in the woods one day.

Trying not to stare, I looked away, but I couldn't lose this opportunity to satisfy my curiosity. It had to be him!

Clearing my throat, I said, "That's an unique bracelet you have there, Your Highness. Where did you get it?"

It took him a moment to respond since he was working. When he finally lowered the duster down, he said. "This?" He held it up so I could see it. His gaze seemed to get even softer as he said, "It was a gift I received a long time ago."

"Oh?" I asked, my heart thumping against my rib cage again. "From... whom?" I was fishing for information now. I needed to know what he remembered. Was there any way he recognized me?

"Someone special gave it to me." He climbed down off of the ladder and moved it to another corner so he could reach

another web above him.

"Oh. That's... nice. Do you have fond memories of receiving it?"

"Uhm...yes. I suppose I do. She's a very important person to me." He turned and looked at me, and I had to avert my eyes, grabbing the mop and sliding it across the floor as if I were focused on my work. "Why did you ask?"

"I-I was just curious."

That was going to be all the information I got from him for today before he got suspicious. I had to pretend like I didn't know where it had come from.

It wasn't as if I could just blurt out to him that it had come from me, that I'd been the girl who saved him in the woods all those years ago. I wasn't sure whether this was a good time for me to reveal that.

Before I could even say anything else, an annoying voice hit my ear, and I suddenly wished I'd mopped the entire floor with the slickest soap possible.

"Well, isn't that pathetic! Look at her, girls. She's supposed to be one of Prince Theo's bride candidates, but here she is again, doing the dirty work that only maids would do! She must have embarrassed Prince Theo so much that he can't

even stand to be near her."

Sophia stood a few feet away, her arms folded, her friends gathered at her shoulders, all of them looking down their noses at me. Sophia bowed down to greet Prince Warren, "You Highness, please do not be deceived by her. She would bring you nothing but disgrace. She was supposed to serve Prince Theo, yet now, she is shamelessly throwing herself at you!"

Prince Warren turned to look at her and then climbed down off of the ladder. I couldn't quite read his expression. Was he irritated or amused?

"What a whore!" Sophia added.

Prince Warren frowned. "It's not lady-like at all for you to

speak that way. Likewise, you shouldn't be spreading rumors and speaking unkindly about others. That's not the job of a Luna."

Sophia opened her mouth but then closed it again, dropping her eyes. She raised them to glare at me before she said, "Come along, ladies. Let's get back to the clean part of the castle. Clearly, this girl is a terrible maid who doesn't know how to keep a place swept up."

They went off, still making snarky comments about me, and I got the distinct feeling that she didn't like me being so close to Prince Warren. She probably saw it as a threat to her somehow.

What was more, she was going to be making more trouble for me soon. I could feel it.

Once she was gone, I turned to Prince Warren. "Thank you for sticking up for me."

His warm hand touched me briefly on the shoulder. "You're quite welcome, my dear..."

I felt a tingle of electricity roll through my arm.

"...friend," he finished his sentence. When he pulled away, my skin felt cold again.

Prince Warren couldn't stay long, but while he was there, I enjoyed his company. He was so different from his brother, so much more thoughtful and kind. I wished I had been assigned to be his personal attendant instead of Prince Theo's.

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I wished I had been assigned as his bride candidate, for that matter....

Later that evening, I headed to Prince Theo's office to report my progress.

I knocked on the door and waited for him to call me in, which took a long time. He didn't exactly think about other people or try to spare them any trouble.

When he finally called me into his office, I had to wait for him to finish whatever he was working on so that he was looking at me before I could even make a statement about what I had finished.

His eyes were narrowed, and his expression was dark and sullen, even more so than usual. "Yes?" he asked me, dropping his pen and folding his arms across his chest.

Clearing my throat, I said, "Your Highness, I finished cleaning the hallways today, and I was able to start on some of the empty rooms."

"Congratulations on doing your job. Do you want a medal or something?" "

"No..." I took a deep breath and tried my best to maintain a professional and respectful tone. "Your Highness. I only wanted to inform you of my progress."

My impression was that he wasn't a man of many words, so I hadn't expected him to be so sarcastic. Did he treat everyone around him like this or was it just me?

"Yes, well, perhaps you would've gotten more done if you

didn't spend so much time chatting with whomever wandered by," he said. His tone was flat, but I could still tell he wasn't exactly happy.

My brows furrowed as I lifted my eyes to look at him. "Pardon me?" I had spoken to Prince Warren for a few minutes, and Sophia, which I didn't even count as a conversation, but... that was earlier in the day. I had been working non-stop for the past several hours.

But I bit my tongue. Arguing with a royal wouldn't do me any good.

"Everyone who works for me needs to follow one rule, Ciana." I didn't like the way my name sounded on his lips. "That is, to keep your mouth closed!"

Nor did I appreciate what he was saying.

He continued, "The palace isn't as safe as you think. You'll never know what information others want to get from you, and what you might have leaked..."

What did he mean? Was he saying that Prince Warren was trying to spy on him and somehow harm him?! How ridiculous was that?!

I had to say something. “Your Highness, the only person I spoke to was your brother! Prince Warren is a kind and gentle soul. All he did was to help me clean. There wasn’t a single word he asked about you or-”

“That’s it.” He interrupted me, and his expression was even darker. He stared at me for a couple seconds and I had no

idea what he was alluding to.

“You’re no longer my personal attendant, Ciana Black,” he said coldly. “Effective immediately, you are being replaced.”

Taking a deep breath, I braced myself, trying to figure out what he meant.

I was replaced? By whom?

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To Eat or Not to Eat, It Was A Problem

“Don’t feel bad,” Brook said to me as I returned with all of my belongings to the room I’d shared with her. “I’m sure you did a great job as the prince’s personal attendant. Maybe he just wants everyone to have a try.”

I sat down on the end of the bed next to her and smiled at her. She was so sweet, always trying to cheer other people up, always trying to spare people’s feelings.

The truth of the matter was, I wasn’t upset about being

removed from my post by Prince Theo. In a way, I was glad to be back here with the other girls. It would give me more of an opportunity to blend in with them and make sure not to put such a target on my back.

On the other hand, unfortunately, I would have fewer opportunities to run into Prince Warren if I wasn’t in Prince Theo’s wing, which was closer to his brother’s rooms. But I had seen Prince Warren a few times before, so it wasn’t completely impossible that I might continue to run into the person I possibly shared an important history with.

“Ciana?” Brook asked, elbowing me. “Did you even hear me? You have a distant look on your face.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I just have a lot on my mind,” I told her. It still irritated me that Theo had made such strong accusations against me, but I really shouldn’t be so surprised. He already had a bad impression of me to begin with.

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Brook leaned close, and whispered with a teasing smile on her face, “Are you still thinking about Prince Warren?”

My face was heated up. Thanks to Sophia spreading the rumor, now everyone thought I had a crush on Prince Warren, so eventually, I had to explain to Brook that I might have found the person I’d been looking for.

I shook my head to deny it and tried changing the topic, “No, no, I was just worried about Sophia...”

Brook sighed, “You’re right. Now that Sophia has been announced as the prince’s personal attendant, she will have a lot more freedom to do as she pleases. She can likely go wherever she wishes. I hope she doesn’t try to take any of her anger or selfish behavior out on us.”

“I hope so...” My voice withered away as I considered what my friend was saying. I hadn’t been paying much attention when Beta Xavier had announced the new personal attendant for the prince. I’d only been thinking about how much work I had already done in that wing of the palace and how the next girl should have an easy job of maintaining it.

But I knew Sophia wouldn’t dare lift a manicured finger to clean. And Brook probably had a point. She very likely could take her anger out on us.

“I’m sure it will be fine,” I told her, though I wasn’t exactly sure. “Perhaps she will suit Prince Theo better. They both tend to speak poorly of others behind their backs.”

“They do?” Brook asked, alarmed. “What do you mean?”

I had said too much. Brook didn’t need to know that the

prince had made accusations against his own brother. And in a way, perhaps Prince Theo was right to think that I was out of line to even speak with Prince Warren. After all, I was meant to be here as a candidate for his wife, not his brother.

“Nothing, I’m just being petty. I guess I am a little miffed that he wouldn’t let me stay in my role. That’s all.” I pressed a smile to my lips and tried to play it off.

But Brook was too smart for me. “Wait a minute!” she said, pointing a finger at me. “Does this have anything to do with what Sophia said about Prince Warren?” she asked me.

I felt the color draining from my face. “Prince Warren?” I asked. “Uh, what? Who? Who, uhm, who is Prince Walter again?”

Brook laughed at me. “Nice try, Ciana. You’re so silly. Sophia said that Prince Warren was helping you with some of your chores. Are you saying that Prince Theo didn’t like that? Was he jealous?”

“No! Prince Theo is certainly not jealous of Prince Warren, and you should be careful not to listen to what Sophia says. You know most every word that comes out of her mouth is a lie, don’t you?” I arched my eyebrows at my friend, hoping she believed me—because it was true.

A crooked grin broke across Brook’s pretty face. “All right. I get it. This has nothing to do with handsome Prince Warren, a man you hardly recognize when you see him.” She winked at me, and I slowly shook my head.

“We’re playing a card game. Do you guys want to join?” One of our roommates asked.

“Surely!” It seemed like a good way to pretend to be part of the group and to distract Brook from asking me more about Prince Warren.

But I didn't get to finish the game before Sophia showed up at our room. I could tell by the wicked look on her face that she had something she wanted to say to me, something I wouldn't like.

"Yes, Sophia?" I asked her. "Can I help you?"

A twinkle of mischief lighted her eyes as she said, "You may call me Personal Attendant Sophia from now on, girl."

I cleared my throat. "All right then. How may I help you, Personal Attendant Sophia?"

"Well, I just came to tell you that Prince Theo has ordered that you not be given any food for the next several days for doing such a horrible job as his assistant. He said if you even go to the cafeteria, you will be taken outside and whipped."

"What?" Brook said, stepping up next to me. "You can't do that."

"Oh? I can't? You're right, I can't, but Prince Theo can!" she claimed, narrowing her eyes at Brook. "He actually said that you shouldn't have any food either just for being her friend. Believe me, the orders have already been given. So... I dare you to show up with the other girls to get food. See what happens to you." She gave us both a pointed look and then turned and sauntered out of the room like this was her castle and we were just a couple of mice.

However, knowing Prince Theo, I knew he probably would be

happy to see me being smacked by Sophia.

I sighed. "I'm sorry, Brook. It was my fault. Now, you're suffering because of me."

"Don't say that. It's not your fault." She patted me gently. "But... the problem is, what do we do now?"

"We'll figure it out," I told her.

She nodded, but I saw concern in her eyes.

I kept a close watch on Brook for the next day or so, and what I was seeing didn't make me very happy. The longer she went without food, the paler she became. Someone so thin and frail like Brook wouldn't be able to go too long without eating. I was stronger and had more muscle. While it wouldn't be comfortable, I'd be all right. Not Brook.

The other girls in our room were nervous about her, but they didn't dare bring her back so much as a dinner roll for fear they'd get in trouble.

At the end of the second night, Brook's body gave out on her. Without warning, her eyes rolled back into her head, and she swooned to the side. Thankfully, I caught her before she injured herself, but that was a sign to me that something had to be done.

After everyone went to bed, I headed out under cover of darkness, thinking there had to be something edible on the grounds somewhere.

There were large established gardens in the palace and I'd spent enough time in the woods to know what was edible, so I

began to hunt around.

My scavenging led me into the enclosure where my friends, the animals, the prince's pets, were kept, and almost as soon as I'd walked through the gate, I heard a familiar slithering.

"Perceval!" I said, reaching down to pet his head. "There you are. How have you been, my friend?"

He arched his back and moved beneath my outstretched hand until I'd petted the length of his body.

"It's very nice to see you, too," I told him.

The loud rumbling of my stomach made him perk up his head a little. I was a bit embarrassed. "Sorry, Perceval, I'm just a bit hungry."

After he'd stared at me curiously for a few moments, he took off slithering across the moonlit grass, staying just a bit in front of me and looking back over his shoulder as he went.

The snake was leading me somewhere again. The last time I'd followed him, I'd ended up in a position I didn't want to be in, though I did appreciate looking at the beautiful pavilion.

I realized quite quickly that he was taking me back to the same location, and as the building appeared in the distance, I came to my senses, my mind cleared despite my hunger.

There were berries in there!

Picking up speed, I walked alongside Perceval until we reached the wooden structure. Then, I carefully walked inside, making sure no one else was here. He slithered up the stairs in front of me, and then, at the top of the staircase, I paused.

After having gone a couple of days without eating, the vision of the berries gleaming in the soft glow of the moonlight had my stomach growling again. They looked so delicious, and I moved toward them.

"Do you think anyone would mind if I ate just a couple?" I asked the snake. Not all of these berries were the same. I could try a different kind, or I could go back to the ones I'd loved so much before.

One of the plants looked quite unique, and stood out from the rest. It had a berry that looked beautiful in the moonlight, shimmering like a purple gemstone. My hand reached out for that one, but I forced myself to think twice before I plucked it.

What if Prince Theo found out about this? His frightening scowl came to my mind, and I was struck awake a bit from hunger.

Did I really want to risk stealing from his personal greenhouse?

But on the other hand, I was so hungry that I wasn't sure whether I had the energy to search for another place for food....

Either I took my risk and dealt with the consequences if Prince Theo ever found out what I had done, or I starved to death.

It didn't take that long for me to make up my mind.

I reached out my hand again and touched the biggest, roundest, most alluring berry in the center.

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He Kissed Me!

The sweet juices burst with flavor as I chewed, saturating my tongue with a tangy flavor that made me want to cry out with pleasure. It tasted so good, but I kept my moans to myself, wondering how the fruits on other plants would taste when this one was so good.

But I didn't get the chance to try another one.

The sounds of footsteps met my ear right before I heard Beta Jake's horrified voice, "Miss Black... what are you doing here?!"

Seriously, what kind of luck did I have?

I turned to look at him, no, them, wondering if my teeth were stained purple with the juice. I doubted I could say anything to hide the fact of what I was doing, and I'd probably be in worse trouble if I lied.

"Good evening, Your Highness, Beta

Jake..."

They both looked at me in disbelief, and finally, I heard Prince Theo yell, "Just what the fuck are you doing now?!"

All right, I'd done it.

This was the first time I'd ever heard him raise his voice and curse. Needless to say, he was beyond furious. I didn't even have the courage to imagine what the consequence could be that was waiting for me.

Why must fate hate me?

Dipping my head, I apologized. "I'm... I'm sorry, Your Highness," hoping with miracle, my good attitude would lessen my punishment.

"You need to do it now before it's too late, Alpha," said Jake, ignoring me as he made his suggestion in an urgent tone.

What did he mean? To do what?

Before I could react at all, Prince Theo had already moved toward me. Within a split second, he was on me and moving me backward in a hasty retreat until I hit the wall.

He had a look on his face I couldn't quite place, and a thrill pulsed through me as my very life flashed before my eyes. It was as if he wanted to kill me and eat me at the same time, but there was no way for me to run.

Prince Theo leaned in, his dark eyes locked on mine, and I immediately felt like an animal, caught in the gaze of a predator.

This was the first time I was able to see eyes so closely. As frightened as I was, I had to admit that he had a pair of enchanting orbs. They were dark, deep, but at the same time, clear. My own reflection was in them and I didn't want to look

away.

My heart started beating loudly and uncontrollably, and then the next moment, his warm lips were pressed against mine.

Shock, disbelief, confusion and mortification... waves of emotions overwhelmed me. My natural instinct to resist him and to try to escape quickly melted away as he continued to

My mind began to grow fuzzy, and an ache formed deep within me. I couldn't quite understand what was happening. My knees were so weak that I felt I couldn't keep myself standing, but then one of his arms moved to my waist, holding me up and stopping me from getting away from him.

Unlike his cold demeanor, his body was very warm, and the heat radiating from his body through his clothes felt as if it would light me on fire. We were so close that I could even feel his heart beating powerfully in his chest.

His masculine scent, which reminded me of the forest after a fresh rain, filled my lungs, making it difficult to hold onto logical thought.

Even when the kiss deepened and his tongue began to tangle with mine, I allowed it, because my mind was in a mess.

Just as I began to drift away into the overpowering sensation, a sharp pain radiated through my tongue, and the metallic taste of blood filled my mouth.

My eyes shot open. Had he bitten me? On purpose?

Prince Theo didn't pull away from me. Instead, he continued to kiss me, hard, as the taste of blood continued to coat my mouth. I didn't know what to think— every emotion washed over me, everything from confusion, to shame, to anger, to...

fear.

Something about this wasn't right... but there was nothing I could do but stand there and let him get whatever he wanted from me.

I nearly lost my ability to breathe. His gloved hands stayed

firmly planted on my waist, though. He didn't try to touch me anywhere else, only kept them planted firmly so that I was steady against him.

I couldn't get away from him now—even if I tried.

Eventually, the prince pulled away from me, leaving me gasping for breath as I wiped my mouth off on the back of my hand. Smears of blood streaked my hand, and when I looked at the prince, I could see he had a bit of blood next to the corner of his lips as well, making him look... sexy and tempting in a way I couldn't describe.

His dark eyes continued to stare at me, but there were gleams in them that I couldn't fathom what emotions they carried.

As air flowed back to my lung, so did my ability to comprehend the situation.

Prince Theo... he just took my first kiss!

How could he? How dare he!

The more I thought about the situation, the more I could feel fury build up inside me. If it had been anyone else, I likely would have lifted my knee straight into his crotch by now.

But this was the prince; this was his pavilion, and it was me who stole his berry...

"I guess it's too late," Jake mumbled under his breath.

Prince Theo turned and looked at him, nodding, but he didn't say anything.

"She must've already absorbed everything the dreamberry

had to offer. Sorry, Alpha." Jake looked down at the ground and shook his head. Then they both walked away from me and shifted their focus on the plant in front of them.

I was already pressed against the wall, but as the two of them approached the plant, I did my best to fade away from them so that they would have their conversation without thinking I was eavesdropping.

Not that I wasn't doing my best to hear every single word of what they had to say....

Prince Theo lifted up the vine from which I had taken the berry and his expression was dark. I immediately felt guilty.

"I'm sorry, Alpha. I shouldn't have done a better job guarding it."

"Not your fault." Theo lifted his hand to stop Beta Jake's apology. He was way more forgiving to his Beta than to me. That was for sure.

Jake sighed. "Now what shall we do to help restrain your..." He was shaking his head, clearly distraught, but Theo threw his Beta a glare, and I got the impression he didn't want me to know what they were speaking about.

Jake immediately lowered his head again without making another sound. He clearly understood that he should not have said what he had said.

"What's done is done." Prince Theo regained his usual, cold and distant tone. It was as if some of the emotions he showed just a few minutes ago were just my imagination.

Then, he turned toward me again.

I wanted to explain to him how it was his own snake that had brought me here, but I said nothing, still not wanting to insert myself into the conversation.

"When is the next blood moon?" I knew Prince Theo was asking Jake, not me.

"Not for a while," Jake replied. "I'm not sure of the exact date, but at least a few months."

His eyebrows raised for a moment as he contemplated the answer. "Well, keep this one safe until then. We'll need her blood when the time is right." Theo was looking at me when he said those words, and I felt my blood run cold.

What in the world would they need my blood for? When he said they'd need my blood— did he mean... all of it?

Jake seemed to realize they'd alarmed me, and a small chuckle came out of his mouth as he said, "Miss Black, do not worry. Just a bit from the tip of your tongue. To help with the fertilization."

"Fertilization?" I repeated, but Theo was clearing his throat. He really didn't seem to want me to know much about this.

The prince's dark eyes landed on me, and he finally fully turned to face me, taking a few steps closer. I told him, "I'm very sorry I took your fruit without permission,"

"I had no idea it was special. I was just... hungry."

"Hungry?" he repeated.

I had learned my lesson that when I was with this cranky prince, the less I said, the better, especially since

"But how?" Jake was curious. "Do you and the other ladies not get enough to eat from the royal chefs?"

Theo scoffed. "Or she just enjoys going around at night looking for other food to devour."

My eyes widened as anger began to take over me. He was the one who gave that ridiculous order to starve me and Brook, yet, here he was, acting like he had nothing to do with it!

I couldn't hold back what I wanted to say. "I have no idea what the other young ladies have gotten from t managed to keep my voice even, but just barely. The urge to yell at him was

overwhelming.

"What? Order for you not to eat?" he frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Yes, that's right. The day that I was told I was no longer your personal attendant, Brook and I were told we could no longer eat until you said so. I've been able to manage, but she... Well, Brook's a petite, delicate, waif of a girl. She could

Perceval led me here." I looked down at the snake, who was still slithering near my feet.

The prince looked at his snake as well, almost like he was trying to figure out whose side the pet was on

When he returned his heavy gaze to me, he asked, "Do you really think I'm bored enough to make order that nature?"

I opened my mouth to tell him I did think so, since the order had been given to me, but then I stopped.

"Sophia!" I mumbled under my breath. I should've known this was all her doing and the prince hadn't rea

Shaking my head, I folded my arms and thought about all of the mean things I'd like to do to that girl for messing with me, but more importantly, for messing with B

"Who is this Brook?" Theo asked me. "A friend of yours?"

"Oh, yes. She is. She's lovely." I was about to tell him more about how kind and polite she was, but then I realized the e

Why would he want to hear anything about one of the girls that was there to see if she was a good match for him to bec

"So..." Jake said, moving to stand next to his Alpha. "Regarding Miss Black..."

Theo switched his attention to his Beta, and I saw a hint of annoyance growing in him. Slowly, he shook his head. "There has to be another way, doesn't there?"

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Be My Woman

"I would say not," the Beta said quickly. "It's too risky to do anything else. Besides, if what she says is true, Miss Chambers has been misrepresenting you, Alpha."

All I could gather was that Jake thought the prince should do something with me, and the prince didn't think it was a good idea.

If it had been the other way around, I might be nervous, but from the few brief interactions I had with Jake, he wasn't one to suggest harming someone for no reason.

"All right, you take over from here." With that, Theo's dark eyes penetrated through mine one more time before he turned around and strode out of the pavilion. I heard his boots echoing on the stairs before Jake even began to speak.

From the bottom of the stairs, Theo called, "Perceval!" and the snake took off heading down the stairs, pausing at the top to look back at me. I signaled for him to go to his rightful owner.

"Beta Jake," I asked, trying to hide my nervousness. "What is my punishment this time then?"

"Well, Miss, I'm afraid I have no choice..." he paused, and my heart sank as he continued, "but to put you in a position where we can keep you safe until the next blood moon when we can replant the dream berry. So... you'll be returning to your previous assignment as of tonight." He said it with a solemn face, but I just felt that he was messing with me a

little.

My mouth dropped open. "Wait—I'm going back to stay with Prince Theo? Right next to him?"

"That's right," Jake confirmed for me. "And... you will be his personal attendant again. That way, we will be able to guarantee your security. Then, you will be able to help replace the berry you took, and no harm will be done."

My eyes went to the berry plant. Although I hadn't quite worked out what it did for the prince, it was quite clear to me that what I ate was far more important than I'd realize d. I could have picked from other plants, yet I chose the one that was most special.

The only good news was, for that reason, I knew I would be safe for a while.

"This way please," Jake said, and he turned quickly on his heel to move toward the door.

I followed along behind him, not speaking, and when we stepped out into the moonlight, I saw Theo in the distance, walking quickly back toward the castle.

Perceval was slithering behind him, but as I walked behind the Beta, I couldn't help but give a low whistle and wait.

Immediately, the snake turned around and shot back at me at full speed. I couldn't help the light laughter that escaped my lips as he fell into step beside me.

Theo paused for a second, but then he continued without turning around. I wondered how he felt about his pet python

choosing me over him.

Maybe I shouldn't irritate the prince in such a manner, but I just couldn't pass up the opportunity. He took my first kiss, and this was the least I could do to get back at him.

And it was too much fun.

Jake told me he would take care of everything- and he surely did.

When I got back, the chefs had already prepared freshly cooked meals just for me and Brook, and the palace healer was also sent to ensure that Brook was okay.

I knew Brook was doing much better when I noticed that she had helped to get my bags ready.

"You didn't have to do the packing for me, Brook. But thank you so much!"

"You're so welcome!" she beamed. For some reason, I thought I caught a hint of mischievousness in her smile. "I'll miss you! Hopefully, I still get to see you sometimes." She gave me a hug before I left our shared room.

When I hauled my luggage back to the side chamber I'd recently left, I was in a much better mood thanks to the delicious food—until I saw Sophia stepping out of the room.

She had all of her friends with her, and each of them was carrying one of her suitcases. I'd never seen so much luggage in all of my life! The room was ample size for me with my two small bags, but I was wondering how she'd managed to get all

of her clothes into the closet.

“Well, look who it is,” Sophia said, glaring at me. “The shameless girl who will do whatever it takes to have her way. You tramp!”

Ordinarily, I would just ignore her, but something had gotten into me earlier, and I wasn't willing to just let her walk away without addressing a

t least part of what she'd done.

“Why do you insist on being difficult for no reason?” I asked her. “You made that up about Brook and I not being able to eat, and now, you're trying to tell me I'm being shameful for doing what we're here to do—get close to the prince.”

Sophia wasn't carrying any of her bags herself, so she was able to stomp her foot and fold her arms across her chest, humphing in front of me in the hallway. “I didn't think the pair of you needed anything else to eat—with thighs like that,” she said, looking down at my legs.

I rolled my eyes at her. I had shapely, toned legs from all of the walking and climbing I did in the woods. And while Brook wasn't as sporty as me, she had a slender yet curvy figure that made her stand out even among a group of beautiful girls.

“You're ridiculous!” I told her.

“And you— if you feel that you need to throw yourself at Prince Theo because that's why we are here, why have you kept bothering Prince Warren? Leave him alone! He has nothing to do with this contest, and yet you're constantly flirting with him as if you think he's the one you're here to marry and bear a child with!”

I opened my mouth to argue with her, but she had a point—we were there for Prince Theo after all.

So... why was she so concerned about Prince Warren?

Was it possible that she was actually...?

Rather than trying to guess which prince this brat of an Alpha's daughter was trying to impress in the middle of the hallway, I leaned forward and whispered, “Sophia, like you said, I'm a girl who will do whatever it takes to have my way, so stop bothering me, or...”

I didn't need to finish my sentence. She was already taken aback. She looked at me warily and her lips were pressed tightly together as if I would do something to hurt her right at that moment.

Happy to see my bluff seemed to be working, I took the chance to move past her and head into the room.

The strong scent of gardenia perfume hit me right in the face, making my nose wrinkle immediately. It smelled as if Sophia had dumped an entire bottle of her favorite fragrance in the room, and not only did it remind me of her, it made my head hurt.

I quickly went about changing the bedding, thinking there was no way I would be sleeping in the same bed that she'd just vacated without doing so, and then gave everything a good scrub down. When I was done, the room smelled like citrus cleaner—and gardenia.

Exhausted, I headed to the shower to rinse off from the long night, and while I was there, my mind went back over

everything that had happened. No matter how hard I tried to hide from him, I continued to end up right next to Prince

Theo.

And then... I thought about what had happened in the pavilion.

I couldn't believe that he had actually kissed me!

All of this time, I'd been dreaming of that one person I'd met in the forest all of those years ago, thinking of what it would be like to have his lips on mine. Now, the possibility of sharing my first kiss with Prince Warren, had been ruined.

Most importantly, to Theo, he probably didn't even consider it as a kiss! He was after that stupid blood o
Anger and embarrassment rushed through me, and I just wanted to scream. But of course I couldn't, be
Finally, I dragged my exhausted body out of the shower.

I rang out my hair, twisting it up and fastening it with a clip. Then, I wrapped a large towel around myself and headed out into the bedroom, intending to grab some pajamas from my yet-to-be-unpacked luggage.

But when I dug them out of my bag, I noticed a few other pieces of clothing tumbling out.

My eyes almost popped out when I saw what they were.

There was some sexy lingerie in the pile where I'd placed my nightgowns! There was also piece of paper
'Ciana, when my family got word of why we were summoned here, my sister bought these and mailed them to me. But I think you will have better use for them now. Love, B

I felt my own face flare up. Brook totally misunderstood the whole situation!

Before I got the chance to put on anything, I heard a quick knock on my door. "No!" A bleat came out of my mouth, but by then, it was too late. The door wa

Theo was standing only a couple of feet away, staring at me, his eyes slightly widened, his mouth agape
Quickly, I dove for my bed, pulling the comforter back and sliding in beneath the blankets, ripping them u

It was then that I noticed the sexy lingerie was still on the bed, and I could only imagine what he was thinking my intentions

were.

He cocked his head to the side and stared at them for a moment as my face heated up. I didn't even bother to explain. bury myself in it?

His startled expression faded quickly, and then it was as if it was no big deal at all to him, both the fact that I was wearing nothing but a bath towel and that I had all that embarrassing lingerie.

He stood near the foot of the bed, next to one of the posts, staring at me, as if it were nothing at all to him to be here, telling me what to do at this hour.

“Ciana,” he said, his tone commanding, “Be my woman.”

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You Don’t Have To, Kitten

“W—What are you talking about, Your Highness?” I stammered, still in shock that he was even there, let alone what he was talking about.

“You heard me,” he replied concisely.

“But, Prince Theo, Your Highness, I was of the opinion you didn’t exactly care for me— at all,” I reminded him. “Do you recall—”

I didn’t get to finish my sentence as he interrupted me. “This is an order, Ciana. I’m not here to debate with you. Beginning tomorrow, you will be by my side throughout all of the waking hours of the day, unless excused by me.”

“But you said that you didn’t want a woman—a wife— and that you weren’t interested in any of us?” I tried not to argue with him, but he was definitely confusing me. It made little sense to me that he had just said he didn’t want to marry any of us, but now he wanted me by his side at all times.

“Things changed,” he replied, his eyes narrowed. “This is what I’m saying now.”

“You said if I even thought about trying to be around you, you’d kill me, didn’t you? Isn’t that what you said, Your Highness?” I could hear the snideness in my voice, and it was a bit rude, but my confusion was running over my manners.

“Are you questioning my order?” The prince’s eyes narrowed even further. His patience had run out.

“Alpha.” Thank the Goddess, Jake was here. As he slipped into my room, his eyes settled on my hair for a moment, and a confused look took over his face before he suddenly turned a bit red and took on the initial, fleeting expression the prince had worn. “Sir, I believe she’s just gotten out of the shower. Perhaps we should come back another time.”

Theo turned to Jake and concluded, “She’ll do what she was told.”

“But—” I still wanted to protest when Jake cleared his throat and drew my attention to him. He averted his eyes, kept a safe distance between us, and stated in a professional tone, “Miss Black, the truth of the matter is, Alpha needs your help with the king.”

Finally, someone I could actually communicate with!

Adjusting a bit beneath the blankets, I asked, “Help with him. how?”

“Well, if I may be completely honest,” he continued, “the king wants to make sure that Prince Theo is making progress with his search for a woman that he may be interested in marrying.”

I pondered what he was saying for a moment before I blurted, “But... why?”

Jake looked at Theo, who was staring at me, his expression still dark and unwavering. Since he wasn't insisting that Jake stop speaking, his Beta went on. “It would be for the best if the king thinks that Prince Theo is trying to meet a girl that makes him happy, one that he could potentially marry and have an heir with. So... since you're his personal attendant now, it may as well be you.”

“So... you want me to pretend that I am in love with the prince? And... he will pretend to be falling in love with me?” I asked, my eyes shifting from one of them to the other.

“Precisely,” Jake said. “And we would like for you to put on a believable show whenever the king is around.”

I was on the same page as them now. It was all meant to fool King Sebastian into thinking that Theo already found a woman he wanted to be with so he wouldn't have to keep looking through the other girls.

“Why?” I asked, still thinking over the situation.

“Why what?” Jake asked me, not realizing I was just thinking out loud.

“Why would the king want so badly for His Highness to find a woman? Why doesn't he want him to take his time and be happy with whoever he finds?” Although Theo was also there, I asked Jake, who I could carry on a normal conversation with.

The prince stared at me long and hard, and I realized then that I'd made a mistake by overstepping.

“That... isn't your concern,” he said in a low voice.

His answer was to the point, but his tone wasn't as angry as I would've expected. No, when I stopped to dissect it, the emotion I picked up on was more distress or perhaps even sadness than anger.

“Very well then, Your Highness,” I said with a nod of my head. “I'll do it.”

Theo cleared his throat. “All right then... Ciana. I shall see you in the morning.” With that, he whirled around and left the room.

Jake let the Alpha go first and then moved to follow him, but before he left, he said, “I'll just... go ahead and lock this for you.” He flipped the button on the door so that when he closed it, it would be locked, and I was thankful for his thoughtfulness.

Falling backward onto the bed, I stared up at the ceiling. What in the world had I gotten myself into now?

In the next few days, rumors of Prince Theo had found his new favorite were spread in the palace. I was following him everywhere at his request, but most of the time, I tried to keep myself entertained in his office while he was working.

For example, this afternoon, he had some war journals out at his desk and was taking notes or something. I actually had no idea what he was doing, but watching him work wasn't the most fun way to kill time.

What I wanted to do was straighten his bookshelves. It seemed to me that the books were simply stacked on the shelf, without any rhyme or reason. I wanted to put them in order from tallest to shortest or color code them. Instead, I sat in a chair across from him, staring at him, thinking this was a colossal waste of time.

I couldn't even use the opportunity to speak to him to get to know him better because he was working, and I knew better not to interrupt....

Just when I was about to ask if there was anything at all I could do to help him, the door opened, and the king came in.

We both stood and bowed to him until King Sebastian waved for us to sit down. "Now, now, you two love birds, don't mind me!" he tittered, sitting down on a couch beneath the window.

I cleared my throat, not sure what to say to that, but I felt my cheeks heating. I hoped the king would mistake my distress for passion.

"Yes, Father," Prince Theo said, sitting back down. He picked up the coffee mug off of his desk and finished it off, setting his cup back down with a disappointed look.

I'd just reclaimed my chair when I suddenly saw a way to be useful. Hopping up, I said, "Let me get you some more," and took his cup from the desk.

"You don't have to... kitten." The term of endearment fell awkwardly from his tongue, almost making me laugh.

"I want to," I said. "How much cream do you take again, dear Prince?"

"Just a splash," he told me, forcing a smile that looked unnatural on him, so rarely did he actually wear such an expression.

I hurried into the other room where I'd seen the coffee maker earlier and poured him a cup of coffee. Then, I opened the refrigerator to get the creamer and froze. There were two different kinds. One was toward the front of the fridge and looked to be recently used. It was banana cream pie flavored. The other one, pushed all the way to the back, was caramel

macchiato.

"Which one would he prefer?" I asked myself aloud.

It seemed that he would be more of a caramel macchiato sort of a guy, but then, he had just finished a cup of coffee, and that creamer was way in the back.

So... I went with the banana cream pie.

He'd said just a splash, so I poured a little in, but the color of the coffee didn't change at all, so I added a bit more until it was a light brown. Then, I took it back to the prince and set it on his desk before resuming my chair.

I kept a wide grin on my face the entire time, remembering that I was asked to put on a show for the king.

"Th... thank you," the prince said. It must be so rare for him to thank anyone that the phrase of appreciation didn't sound natural at all. He waited a few moments to taste his coffee, so my eyes were focused on the king. He had brought some files with him and was working in his chair.

The sound of Theo nearly choking on his coffee had my attention drawn back to him. He coughed a few times and set the cup back down.

"Is everything all right?" I asked him, wondering if he needed a pat on the back. "Do you not like it?"

"Uh, yeah. It tastes... fine," he said, coughing again. "You... certainly make an interesting cup of coffee."

I had chosen the wrong one. Dang it! "Oh, uh... do you want me to try again?" I asked him.

His father shifted his files, likely watching Theo to see if he would lash out at me for messing up.

The prince looked physically pained as he said, "No need." Then as if he was trying to convince me, he

I almost wanted to laugh. It hadn't been my intention to make him drink something he obviously didn't like when I'd made the coffee, but it was sort of his fault since he was the one who'd come up with this silly scheme.

"Theodore, where is that book with the facts about the Lake of Wallup? I need to check how many varieties of fish live there before I approve this request for another pier to be installed in the port."

"Oh, uh... it's uhm-" Theo strained to look at the bookshelf without getting up.

I hopped out of my seat. "I can fetch it for you, Your Highness," I said, looking for a book that mentioned Lake Wallup.

"It's that purple one near the top shelf." Theo's voice was unexpectedly tender. If he always spoke to other girls thi

"You won't be able to reach it, kitten." He tagged that last word on when he realized he'd been too harsh with his statement. This time, however, it

"I see it!" I exclaimed, stretching up on my tiptoes to try and pull it down, but he was right, I could hardly get my fingers on

it.

He got up from his chair. "Move aside." Coming up next to me, he whispered in a low and soft voice. His breath blew in my ear, and a chill coursed throu

Stop, stop, stop! I screamed at myself in my mind. What was I thinking?!

I snapped back to reality and warned myself not to be distracted again. "I've almost got it." I strained to r and move out of his way.

"I'll get it," he signed gently, his tone almost... doting.

However, I was still standing there when he reached up, and his gloved hand brushed mine.

I lost my balance slightly and toppled backward, my head knocking into his shoulder. For a moment, his other arm came around me to steady me.

A bolt of electricity shot through me and my thoughts all went fuzzy. I inhaled the scent of the woods after a rainstorm, pine and cedar, leather and bergamot. He smelled masculine, delightful, an

As quickly as my legs could function again, I pushed away from him, holding my breath and trying to make sense of my reaction to him. I shouldn't be feeling this way. Prince Theo had made it clear that

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So... why were the tips of his ears red, and why was he looking at me through his eyelashes, his breath caught in his throat?

"Thank you," I muttered.

He nodded once and then blinked a few times before taking the book from the shelf and stepping over to hand it to

cruel Dark Prince?

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 357

Have A Baby with This Woman

Theo

I'd touched her.

I'd touched the girl, Ciana, and she hadn't pulled away from me. She wasn't afraid, nor did she seem disgusted by me.

"Here you are, Father," I said, giving my dad the book that he'd requested. "If you would be more comfortable working in your own office, I can have whatever books you require brought to you."

"Nonsense," the king said, taking the book. "I am quite enjoying seeing my son with such a lovely young lady. The two of you are quite a match." He chuckled, and my stomach twisted in a knot.

While I was happy my plan was working and we were able to fool him into thinking that Ciana was a woman of interest to me, I didn't appreciate having to pretend like this in my own office.

And that coffee she'd brought me was dreadful! It was clear she'd grabbed that nasty banana creamer Jake uses, rather than my own. And she obviously didn't know what a "splash" of creamer meant!

As I walked back to my desk, I gave Ciana a look, hoping she could read it. I was somewhat regretful that I had come up with this idea now that my father was hanging around for so

long, but I was also hoping she would find some magical way of making him leave.

She must've read my expression, because she came over toward me, which made me stop in my tracks.

What was she planning on doing now?

"Might I have a hug, my prince?" she asked me.

"A... hug?" I asked her, swallowing hard. "Not right now," I said, stepping away from her. "I think we should save that for when... we're alone."

"Oh, but it's just your darling father who loves you so much who is present," she reminded me, and I knew what she was getting at. She wanted to hug me precisely because my father was there.

"Yes, let's have a hug!" my father exclaimed.

I turned and gave him a pointed look, and he chuckled under his breath.

I glared at him for a few seconds, unable to keep from doing so, and then turned back to the girl.

"Really, I don't think-

Before I could finish the sentence, her thin arms were wrapped around my shoulders, and she was pressing herself against me.

My breath caught in my throat. But when I finally relaxed enough, I gently put my arms around her.

She was warm and soft, and I realized how small she was in my arms. This wasn't the first time she had been in them. I

remembered that night in the greenhouse... but this time, it

felt different.

When she pulled away from me after a brief moment, she was still smiling. The hug was obviously fake, but it wasn't painful as I thought it would be, not even a little bit.

It was quiet and peaceful.

I headed back to my desk, and Ciana reclaimed her chair.

Just then, my father cleared his throat and set his book aside. "That's it, then. I've made up my mind. Theodore, this is the one, the girl for you."

"Father?" I said, looking at him with a look on my face that would certainly tell him I didn't understand.

"I want you to have a baby with this woman," he said, a delighted smile on his face.

My eyes went to Ciana, and I could tell she was even more shocked than I was, if that were possible, with her mouth hanging open and her eyes wide.

“But... Your Majesty, sir,” she said, tipping her head down in respect. “We’re not even betrothed, let alone married.”

“So what?” he asked. “You don’t have to be married to bear an heir.” Turning his attention back to me, he

Ciana

King Sebastian’s proclamation rang in my ears. I couldn’t stay there alone with Theo any more, so I asked to be excused. He must have felt as

Later that evening, I decided to go and check on Brook. It had been a few days since I’d seen my friend. As I walked down the hallway, I pondered what the king had said. Theo and I were ordered to have a ball and that definitely wasn’t Prince Theo.

Images of my young man from the woods entered my thoughts, and then those visions morphed into a picture. That was why when I saw the form of a woman being dragged outside through a window at the end of the hallway

The man who had a small redheaded girl under his arm looked up at me, his jade green eyes nearly glowing. “Hey!” I shouted, running after him. “What in the world are you doing?”

It was Brook! I would recognize her anywhere, and as she disappeared from my sight, I picked up speed. The man ran through the woods with Brook tossed over his shoulder. She was unconscious, or else I would have free herself from him by beating on his back with her fists, but she just lay there limply, bobbing up and down with each of his long strides.

My pace was just quick enough to keep up with him as he twisted and turned through the gardens and nearby woods. The weight of the woman must have been slowing him down, or else I wouldn’t be able to keep up with him.

I was amazed by the size of the royal residence, because after almost half an hour of running, we were still within the walls of the royal palace territory.

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Eventually, I saw a mansion in the distance. Its size was decent, but it was dilapidated, with ivy and other plants growing up the sides all the way to the roof. The paint had long since faded, and some of the tree branches were battering against the shingles, knocking them free.

He quickly tore inside, leaving the door ajar. I hastily made my way up the steps, barely missing a hole that might’ve cut my foot off at the ankle.

Inside, I slowed and looked around. The marble floor was covered with dirt and windswept leaves in the corners. The furniture was nice-antique velvet couches, maple tables, marble busts, and the like-but it was all dirty and broken.

I heard footsteps further down the hall and followed, trying my best to use caution, but now that I was in this situation, I realized it would be difficult for me to fight this man off. I'd do what was necessary to save my friend, though.

In the back of my mind, I considered what I might do if I needed assistance and wondered how feasible that might

be...

Entering the room, I saw a muscular man wearing all black standing beneath a dirty chandelier that flickered as it swung slightly above him. His green eyes were narrowed on me, his hair slicked black, and the scowl on his face told me he was ready to handle me in much the same way that he'd taken care of Brook.

She lay on a dusty couch behind him, moving slightly, which made me think whatever he'd done to knock her out was beginning to wear off.

"I don't know who you are or why you've taken my friend, but she's coming back with me right now," I said in my most stern

voice.

A smile cracked across his face. "Your friend can go wherever the hell she wants to," he said with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. "It's not her I'm worried about."

"What's that?" I asked him as he came a few steps closer to me. I wanted to retreat, but I had to hold my ground-for Brook's sake.

"I didn't go there to take this little nymph," he explained, pointing at Brook. "I came there for you."

I pressed down the wave of confusion that was washing over me and just quietly stared at him while I quickly evaluated my retreat options.

An evil laugh ricocheted off of the walls. "I knew if I took her, you'd follow along like the sweet little puppy dog you are. Do you know why?"

Father had once taught me that I should never follow the verbal traps my enemies set for me. Since he obviously wanted me to ask for an explanation, I decided not to behave as he wished. "I don't have time for this! Release Brook, right now!" I demanded.

As expected, even without me pressing him, he told me what he wanted me to know. "I've heard about King Sebastian's plans for you, Ciana Black, and I have to make sure that they don't happen. You cannot have a child with Theo."

My mouth dropped open as I digested what he was saying. How in the world had he heard about this already? I'd only found out myself a little while ago. My disadvantage was that he seemed to know me quite well, yet I had no clue who he

was.

My brain quickly came up with a reply that may help to get some information out of him. "It's none of your business!" I scolded him. "And who are you to disagree with King Sebastian's order?"

"You can call me Luther," he grumbled under his breath. "Sebastian might be your king, but there are plenty of people, including many in your own pack lands, who rebel against his rule."

What?!

Sometimes at the dinner table, I had heard Mom and Dad talking about their disagreements with King Sebastian's policies, but I also remembered how they'd said that simply

overthrowing the royal court would only cause more issues for the already unstable society.

The bottom line was that having different political opinions and publicly rebelling against the royal court were two very different things; the latter could easily result in the destruction of our entire pack!

I pressed down my emotions and purposely rolled my eyes. "Yeah, right," I said, trying my best to maintain a level tone and pretending that I didn't care what he had to say, even though I was desperate to learn more about what might have occurred in my pack.

"Ciana. The rebellion has already begun. Why, even in your own homeland, there are people who are against King Sebastian, those who would cast off your father for being loyal to him. Join me..."

I couldn't help but scowl at this man for bringing my dad into it. "What made you think that I would trust the judgment of a stranger who kidnapped my friend rather than my own father's!"

"Well, well. I'm not going to continue to stand here and have this conversation. I have other plans for you, gorgeous." With that, he came at me, and I hastily dodged out of the way, grabbing a small table that was sitting by the door and tossing it in his direction.

Brook was stirring again on the couch, but she was so out of it, I didn't think she could be of any help.

"Not bad," he praised. "But your opponent is me." Suddenly, his hand moved as fast as lightning and his powerful fingers

were wrapped around my throat. His other hand had grabbed both of my wrists, and I wasn't able to move anymore. I was captured!

"Now, be a good girl," he chuckled in a low voice. "You're a slippery one, but I've got you."

Just then, I heard thundering footsteps in the hall. My help had arrived.

I looked him in the eye and gave him a bright smile. "Oh, really? Have you?"

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The One She Cares for the Most

I let out a low whistle, and the next moment, a lion came flying through the doorway, aiming right for my assailant, who had to let go of me.

Perceval slithered in, tripping Luther up, and the Samson the tiger came charging in with a roar and forced the man to back further away.

I rushed to Brook and wrapped my arms around her. "We need to get out of here," I whispered to her. "Are you well enough to stand?"

She had a confused look on her face as her eyes shifted back and forth, but she quickly collected her senses and gave me a firm nod.

As we moved toward the door, I caught a glimpse of Luther. He pulled a long blade from somewhere I hadn't seen and swiped at Linus, cutting the lion in the leg, then he turned to the tiger and did the same.

"No!" I cried. The last thing I wanted was for my friends to get hurt.

He kicked Perceval aside and quickly closed the gap between us. I realized that the animals were outmatched by him since he had weapons, and that Brook and I would be as well. I could only pray that with the animals running through the palace to get here, it had caused enough commotion to draw the attention of the guards.

"Brook, keep running and get help!" I was about to stop and go back to deal with the attacker when I heard a piercing howl. We turned around and saw a large wolf. It was

beautiful-its fur was a deep onyx black that shimmered in the light, with glimmering gold stripes on both sides of its back.

That had to be Prince Theo.

He took one look at the bleeding animals and went after Luther, who still hadn't shifted.

Luther swiped at the upper shoulder of the wolf. Theo lunged at him anyway, pushing the attacker backward, causing Luther to almost collide with us. Immediately, the tables had turned on this battle.

I let out a breath of relief. The most powerful warrior of the country had arrived, I knew we were safe. But then Luther let out a chuckle and whispered in a voice that only I was close enough to hear, "Naughty girl...."

Before he stood to go after the prince again, he shoved something in my hand. "You may think you know everything, Ciana, but you don't. Use that when you want to see me again -if you're still alive then."

Everything happened so fast, and before I knew it, Theo went after Luther again. The kidnapper was back up, swinging the blade toward the prince's wolf.

I didn't have time to stand around and see who won the fight because Brook still looked quite concerned. "It's all right," I told her. "The prince will protect us." I believed those words, and as he went at the man again, I saw his teeth chomp down on the hand holding the blade. The kidnapper roared, let the

blade go, and tossed himself into the woods.

Night had completely engulfed the forest. Knowing that we were safe now, Brook and I dropped on the ground to catch our breaths, then I heard a familiar voice behind us.

“What did you think you were doing, leaving the castle like that?!” he asked, storming up behind us and dropping a shirt over his head. The fact that his clothing wasn’t shredded made me think he must’ve undressed before he shifted, rather than just bursting into his wolf to run into the house to save us.

Priorities....

“I had to get to Brook,” I explained.

A dull pain began to form in my head, and I thought it might be a stress headache from too much excitement all in one day. I loosened my grip slightly on my friend, which was her cue to break away from me. She took my hand instead, fully capable now of walking on her own.

“Not your job,” the prince said, coming up on my other side. “This is what we have guards for.”

“Well, if the guards were so good, Brook would’ve never been kidnapped by Luther to begin with,” I said, tilting my head up. to stare down my nose at him the best I could, considering he was a full six or seven inches taller than me. “I am sorry about your animals, though.” That was true. I hoped they’d all be all right.

“Luther?” he asked. He had a bit of blood on his neck, chest, and shoulder-based on how he moved right now, I assumed

the blood was from our enemy.

My head began to hurt even more, and I didn’t answer. I had to turn my attention back to the walkway so I didn’t lose my footing as he continued to berate me. “Whoever that was... your job is to be with me at all times, remember?” he said. “From now on, you don’t leave my sight.”

I whipped my head around so fast, stars formed in my field of vision. How badly did I want to tell him where he could shove that directive, but before my mouth opened, Brook was squeezing my hand.

She leaned in close to my ear and whispered. “Oh, how romantic! He loves you so much, he can’t stand the idea of the two of you ever being apart!”

I turned to face her, wanting to tell her that wasn’t it at all, but then I remembered I was supposed to be pretending that Theo and I were in love-to everyone. So I kept my comments to myself.

Besides, the pain in my head was beginning to splinter now. Every ounce of light was like an icicle being rammed into my eyes, and I felt the world beginning to slip away.

“Do not run away from me again, Ciana,” Theo was telling me in a voice that seemed quite a bit more calm than the tone he’d been using previously.

“I wasn’t way... running from prince... you....” My words were becoming jumbled, and I suddenly had to stop walking.

Brook was swaying back and forth when I looked at her, and I thought she was going to tumble over again, but as the

ground reached up for me, I realized it wasn't her that was having the problem staying on both feet.

It was me.

"Ciana!" Prince Theo shouted as strong arms surrounded me. I heard Brook scream, and then, both of them faded away and all I could think about was how unbelievably badly my head hurt.

Theo

"Ciana!" I shouted her name as I scooped her up into my arms. She didn't answer though, and as her friend began to scream, all I could do was rush her back to the castle as quickly as possible, swearing under my breath.

Foolish woman! How did she let this happen?

Using the mind-link, I called ahead for the healers to be ready in my room. Her blubbering friend trailed along behind us, crying and calling out her friend's name.

As soon as I reached the castle, the guards threw the doors open for me. They waited for her friend to catch up, but I sprinted down the hallway and shoved my bedroom door open with my foot as I backed into the room, spinning her around and laying her on the bed.

The royal healer Dottie, a larger woman who was old enough to be my mother, went about checking her-listening to her heart, checking her pulse, all of the things one usually did when someone was involved in some sort of an accident or an

attack.

"This isn't an ordinary injury." She turned to face me. "I'm afraid the girl has had a curse cast on her."

My heart plummeted at the words. It was exactly as I had suspected.

Next to me, Ciana's little friend began to cry again. Jake handed her a tissue and comforted her.

I had more important things to think about than the fact that the redhead was crying once more. This was a serious problem. Ciana couldn't die.

I needed her blood at the next Blood Moon, after all.

"What can be done?" I asked the healer. Not only had Dottie studied medicine, she'd also done quite a bit to learn about different magic and potions since she was in the service of my father. In a place like this, one needed to know about all kinds of magic-particularly the dark kind.

And curses certainly fell into the realm of dark magic.

"I'm not exactly sure," Dottie replied, walking over to Ciana's side. She arranged her hair so that it was lying neatly around her face, framing it.

Whenever Ciana was awake, it was hard to not pay attention to her eyes-she was kind, witty, and brave, and her eyes reflected those qualities, which shone even brighter than her stunning natural beauty.

Right now, her eyes were closed, and I couldn't deny her pretty facial features.

However, I shouldn't let myself think about how beautiful she looked or how delicate she seemed when she was so still, like she was sleeping. No, at a time like this, I couldn't let such thoughts invade my mind.

"Do you have any ideas?" I asked Dottie, wondering if I should head to the library and begin looking at books about curses.

"Well, I do have one," she said. "Sometimes, when a curse affects the mind like this one obviously is, it's best if one can jar a person from their agitated state of mind with a delicate touch to the forehead."

I was puzzled over her words. "That seems simple enough."

"Yes, but it can't be just anyone to do it, or else it won't work," Dottie continued, settling her hands on her ample hips. "It can only be the person that the one in the coma cares for the most. If it's anyone else, not only will it not break the curse, but there's a possibility it could force the affliction deeper into the mind, and it could make it even more difficult for the person to snap out of their sleep-like state."

I listened to her, scratching my chin in contemplation. "Are there any other risks?" I asked her.

"Well, whomever takes on the task most certainly must care about her as well. They could potentially end up shouldering part of the burden. They will bear the emotions of the curse as well. It's not a task to take on lightly."

It all became clear to me, then. Luther had assumed that Ciana and I were in love because he'd heard the rumors about her and I having a child. He naturally had assumed Ciana would care for me most of all, and I'd be the one who would

have to break the spell by touching her.

But then, Luther obviously knew about my power....

He probably hoped that I would be the one to try to break Ciana from the sleeping spell, and when I did, I would kill her, which meant she'd never be able to have an heir to the throne for my father.

"Your Highness," Dottie began, her voice a quiet whisper, "we all heard about you and Miss Black... would you like to help her, since obviously you are the one she loves and I assume she cares about most?"

I shook my head.

Dottie took on a disappointed look. In her view right now, I must be such a selfish jerk.

The fact was, put aside the potential harm my power could cause her, most importantly, I was most definitely not the one who could lift the curse.

I thought back over all of the conversations I'd had with Ciana. While we'd had a few amicable conversations, for the most part, it seemed quite clear to me that Ciana couldn't stand me in the least.

Dottie sighed, "Well, perhaps there's someone else nearby that she cares about." She turned her attention to Brook.

The girl was no longer crying, but her eyes were almost as red as her hair, and her cheeks were puffy.

Jake asked Brook, "Miss Ellsworth, you're friends with Miss. Black. Who do you think she may care about..." Jake thought

of something, and added, "...ahem, um, besides Prince Theo?"

The girl named Brook shook her head, as if she was worried that she might get into trouble if she told the truth.

Jake analyzed the situation for her. "There's nothing you need to worry about," he assured her, "Your friend is dying and we're trying to help her. So... is there anyone you can think of?"

She weighed her options for a moment and eventually, she took a few deep breaths and said, "I think I know someone that she cares for very much... here in the castle."

Dottie sighed with relief as I braced myself. "And who might that be?"

With another deep breath, the girl said the one name I most definitely did not want to hear.

"Prince Warren."

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Is It Really Warren?

I tried my best not to let my irritation show on my face as I digested the name the redheaded girl had just divulged.

She was under the impression that my brother might be the one person on the planet who could save the life of the woman I was meant to have a child with.

I needed to concentrate on the fact that the blood within the girl was the most vital part of the equation to me. I had no reason to want to see any harm befall Ciana. She was nice enough, I supposed, but to me, her true value lay in the blood coursing through her veins.

"Shall I send for Prince Warren, Your Highness?" Dottie asked me respectfully.

"No," I said immediately, my voice stern enough that everyone in the room flinched. I took a deep breath to steel myself. "I will fetch him myself."

The moment I walked into the hallway, my head cleared a bit, and I felt like I could pull a full breath of oxygen into my lungs. Something about being in that room with all of those concerned people had been like a weight on my shoulders. But now... my thoughts were sharper. I could sense reason.

Winding my way to the other side of the palace where my brother's rooms were, I took my time.

He only needed to give it a try so we could see if it worked, but there was no need for him to know that Ciana was fond of

him....

Two guards stood here, neither saying anything to me but making a sign of respect. Unlike me, Warren was constantly surrounded by people. They knocked and opened the door for me.

My brother was clutching a book in his hand. "Oh, Theo," he said, setting the book aside. Obviously, he was enjoying a leisurely evening. "What in the world brings you here?"

"I have a bit of an issue, and I was hoping you could help." I tried to keep my tone as relaxed as possible.

Immediately, my overly helpful brother snapped to attention. "Of course. What is it?"

"One of the girls who is here as part of Father's task was unconscious. Dottie thinks it may be a sleeping spell... a curse of some sort. There's a possibility that you might be the one to wake her."

"That sounds just awful!" he said, resting his palm against his heart. "The poor girl! Why does Dottie think I can be of

assistance?"

"I'm not exactly sure," I lied. "I guess... perhaps... you know the girl... well?"

"Who is it?" he asked, leaning toward me slightly as he shook his head. "I haven't spent much time with any of the girls. They are here for you, after all."

Why did I feel relieved? Whether he knew Ciana well or not had nothing to do with me!

With a sharp nod, I tried to forget all of the times I had seen him with her myself. "She's called... Ciana, I believe," I said, forcing nonchalance into each word

"Ciana?" he repeated, his eyes widening. "Oh! Oh, no!"

"So you do know that one?" I asked, sarcasm dripping from the question even though I intended it not to.

"I do. I ran into her a few times. Such a sweet, intelligent young lady."

"Is she?" I asked, folding my arms. "I guess you know her better than I do."

"Isn't she your personal attendant now?" Warren asked me.

Shrugging, I said, "You know, they all sort of look alike to me."

"Well, I'd be happy to try and do what I can," he said, putting on a jacket. "Although, I hardly doubt there's much I can do. It's unfortunate that I didn't get to know her better."

The two of us were about to leave the room when we realized that he had another visitor who had been standing right outside the door.

She looked familiar to me... I wondered how much of our conversation she had overheard.

She wasn't my concern at the moment, so I hardly spared her a glance and simply walked past her, signaling to Warren to follow me.

“Your Highness! Please!”

We both stopped.

“Is she here for me or you?” Warren whispered. “What’s her name again?”

I looked over at him. “No idea.”

“She is one of the eighty girls father got for you, right? I thought she used to be your personal attendant too.”

So this was the girl who’d withheld the food from Ciana and Brook, allegedly on my order.

“Prince Warren, Sir,” she said, dipping her head. Then, she turned to me. “I beg your forgiveness, Prince Theo.”

“Good evening, Miss-?” Warren replied.

“Sophia Chambers,” she said. “Please forgive me for interjecting, Sir, but I’ve been studying sleeping sicknesses like this one for many years, and I don’t believe one exists like your pack healer is describing.”

“You overheard our conversation?” Warren asked her.

“I.. I happened to walk by...” The girl’s cheeks reddened, but she didn’t answer him directly, only continued, “Sir, I believe it’s a curse that’s been cast on her, and if you are to touch her, you could also become a victim of the same curse. You mustn’t allow yourself to be harmed for someone as lowly and inconsequential as her!”

My eyes narrowed. I should have already dealt with her, but this wasn’t the right time. I was about to step forward and pull Warren away when I heard him say, “Miss Chambers!” His tone was sharp. “I will decide for myself what is a risk for me and

what is not. Besides, you shouldn’t keep speaking about your peer that way! You made fun of her for feeding the animals and made demands of her while she was cleaning, neither of which was acceptable.”

Tears glistened in the girl’s eyes as she looked up at him. “Forgive me, My Prince. I was only trying to help.”

“You may leave,” he said to her, and with that, he turned around, a more determined look on his face than ever, and he began walking toward my chambers with me.

I was glad to see that he had put the other girl in her place and was resolved to help Ciana, but I didn’t particularly like that he was so protective of Ciana. She was my attendant, not his.

When we arrived at my chambers, Brook was still there, sitting on a settee across the room from where Ciana slumbered.

Ciana looked like she was just lying there asleep. For a moment, I let myself imagine she was resting, dreaming, and I wasn’t able to peel my eyes away from her. But then I forced those thoughts from my mind. She was a means to an end, nothing more.

Warren sat down on the bed next to her, concern marring his handsome face as he studied her. He picked up her delicate hand in his and stroked it gently. "How long has she been this way?" he asked.

I hadn't asked him to touch her hand, had I? I pulled her hand out from his and tucked it under the blanket.

"A couple hours," I answered.

"Poor girl," he sighed.

"I believe, Your Highness, if you simply press your fingers to her forehead, if you are truly the one she wants most in this world, she will awaken," Dottie explained to him.

Warren turned to look at the healer. I hadn't quite told him all of that, and I could see he was surprised.

"But why would she -" He stopped talking, his shock not allowing him to finish the

sentence.

"She is awfully fond of you," Brook said from her seat across the room. "She often spoke of how kind you were to her."

Warren looked at Brook, and the two of them smiled at one another for a moment before he returned his attention to

Ciana.

My stomach twisted into a knot. I felt like I was going to be sick. It must have been because I was so worried about not being able to use her blood to grow the berry.

What other reason could it possibly be?

Warren lifted a hand and carefully placed his fingertips on Ciana's forehead. We all took a deep breath and held it,

collectively.

Nothing happened.

He closed his eyes and scrunched up his face, as if he were trying to will the curse out of her and into him.

Still... nothing happened.

"Ciana?" he whispered. "Ciana, can you hear me?"

A minute went by, two. Still, she slept on. And Warren was completely unaffected.

Eventually, my brother gave up, and for some unknown reason, I wanted to smile. I had no idea why. It didn't make

sense.

We all turned to face the healer. She was shaking her head. "I don't understand it. I thought for certain that would work, because Prince Warren is her..."

“Enough!” I interrupted Dottie.

I wanted to say, ‘Turns out Ciana doesn’t care for Warren after all.’ But instead, I kept my mouth quiet.

The healer turned to me. “Your Highness, I will do some research. There must be something that can be done to help her.”

I nodded. “Yes, do that.” Then I looked at Warren. “Warren, thanks for coming.”

My brother got up off of the bed, his shoulder slumped as he approached me. “I’m so sorry, Theo. I tried my best.”

“It’s all right. Perhaps she has a sweetheart back home. Or only her mother can break the spell. Or knowing her... maybe she has a pet dog.”

His eyebrows lifted suspiciously. “I thought you said you didn’t know her well?”

“Um... let’s call it a night,” I changed the subject.

Luckily, he didn’t say anything else.

Everyone left my room, including Brook. I sent Jake to walk her back.

Once they were all gone, I turned to look at the woman sleeping in my bed. “Well,” I said, strolling over and sitting down next to her. “This is a fine mess you’ve created now, isn’t it?”

Of course, she said nothing.

For once in my life, I would’ve been happy to hear her voice- even if we were just arguing.

How could I wake you up, Ciana?