

Kings Breeder 361

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Who Lifted the Curse?

Theo

“Mom... Mama....”

The girl kept crying out in her sleep, sometimes for her mother, other times for her father. I thought it was a good thing that she was at least speaking, even if she seemed to be having nightmares while she rested.

go?

It was a long night, but I stayed with her.

After all, she was asleep in my bed. Where else would I

Sitting next to her, I did my best to keep her calm, but it was difficult, and as the night wore on, I began to grow rather weary myself.

“Daddy!” she shouted, flinging both arms up into the air. “Daddy-no!”

“It’s all right, Ciana,” I said, smoothing her hair back and trying to get her to stop moving her arms so wildly. “It’s just a dream. You’re okay.”

“Daddy, please! No!”

The way she was crying out, I thought perhaps her father or her mother had done something awful to her at some point in time. But other times, the things she said made it seem like someone was hurting her parents.

I knew it had to all be just dreams, but it was all very dis- turbing, even for me.

I didn’t know how to explain what I was feeling. When she was awake, the things that she did, the words that she said just made me want to throw her out of the window some- times, so shouldn’t I be happy that she wasn’t able to bother me at this moment?

Yet, I didn’t like to see her so upset. I didn’t like hearing her cry out like that. Perhaps it was because she was still too noisy. So... I smoothed her hair and whispered to her, “Hey, it’s all right....”

Her lips were chapped, probably because she hadn’t had anything to eat or drink for a while. I didn’t want her to get sick. I did need her blood after all. I took a glass of water and slowly dripped it into her mouth, being careful not to choke her.

She seemed to be awake enough to swallow at least. I managed to get a little bit of water down her, which helped her fall back to sleep for a short while until she started wig- gling again in her nightmares.

After a few rounds of this, even I was exhausted. I sat down on the edge of my bed next to her and closed my eyes. just to get a few minutes of rest.

But my mind was busy with thoughts of everything that had gone on that night. Luther... or whoever the hell that was- what did he want?

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And Ciana. What could I do to wake her up?

“Mama?” Ciana’s voice brought me out of my attempt to

sleep. I leaned over and looked at her. Moonlight steamed over her face, her hair reflecting the light and creating a soft glow around her.

Now that I had the chance to actually appreciate her facial features, I had to say, she really was strikingly gorgeous. Even through my gloves, I could tell her skin was smooth like porcelain, and it went really well with her bright blue eyes... when they were open.

Perhaps what made her even more appealing was the fact that she didn’t seem stuck up about how pretty she was at all,

unlike most of the other candidates.

“No, no...” Ciana moaned again. “Somebody, help!”

I hated to see her this way. Because... I was worried about her blood, of course.

I smoothed her hair away from her face. “It’s all right. You’re safe. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

She turned on her side so that she was facing me, and when she did so, she bit down on her pink lips, the ones that I had kissed... I remembered they were soft and warm...

I felt my heart rate speed up. This was wrong... I needed to back away from her.

I should have done so immediately.

But... this was the girl who had hugged me voluntarily. Did she do that simply because she was putting on a show? Or maybe she didn’t loathe me as much as I thought she would.

Maybe it was because of the berry she’d eaten that she

felt guilty toward me. Or maybe she truly was... foolish. She had no idea how dangerous that was!

Her eyes were damp with tears that had slid out at some point while she was thrashing. I gently wiped them.

her.

“I’ll find a way for you to wake again. Soon,” I promised

“Water...” she muttered.

Without putting too much thought into it, I took a sip from the cup, and leaned down to gently press my lips to hers. They were warm and soft and I wanted more...

My eyes widened and I forced myself to sit up again. After pushing the water into her mouth, I jerked myself away from

her.

What the fuck was I thinking?!

Ciana

Something was different....

Yet again, I was opening my eyes in a room I shouldn't have been in. My head ached, and my body felt stiff as I turned around to try to figure out where I was.

The bed linens were familiar to me, and someone else was laying next to me.

His slightly disheveled dark hair laid over his forehead. His perfectly sculptured face was so close that I could feel his warm breath gently blowing on me.

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Even with the light crease in between his brow, I couldn't deny how strikingly handsome he was. If only he could smile...

Wait, wait, wait!

This was... Prince Theo!

I was struck awake immediately, and everything came back to me.

Brook had been kidnapped. I'd chased after her. Theo had come to help us. I'd fainted....

Now, I was here. In his bed. Next to him. What happened between us after I fainted?! Did we...

Lifting up the blanket, I checked to make sure I was still dressed and was thankful to see I had the same clothes on as I'd been wearing when I chased after Brook.

All right... at least nothing like that had happened. I let out a breath of relief and immediately felt my face heated from even having that kind of concern.

It wasn't like Theo liked me or something.

I slowly and quietly moved out from the bed. Finally, I was able to breathe freely without worrying about waking up the royal prince.

Then I noticed that his body was stiff. Obviously, this wasn't a comfortable position for him to sleep in, and the only blanket was covering me.

Did he look after me the whole night when I was uncon- scious?

The grumpy, impatient, cold-hearted royal actually took care of a lowly commoner like me the entire night? I wanted to deny it, but based on the exhausted look on his face, it had to be the case.

But why? He could have asked someone else to do that... oh, right. It must be because of my blood.

But even though I knew the answer, I still felt a flow of warmth run through my heart. Maybe he wasn't really as bad as he appeared to be....

After hesitating for a moment, I grabbed the blanket to cover him. As I leaned down, his eyes snapped open, and I almost jumped.

"I... I'm sorry! Your Highness, I wasn't trying to touch any of your belongings!" I explained, remembering the last time. When he was mad when I picked up his gloves.

But he didn't say anything. Instead, he was gazing at me, a shocked look on his handsome face.

"Your Highness?"

He scooted away from me but then leaned up so that he was resting on one arm. His brow furrowed as if he was puzzled. "Are you... awake?" he asked.

"I think so," I replied, wondering why it was so difficult for him to tell. "Either that or this is a very strange dream."

He shook his head. "Yes, I know you're awake. That's not what I meant. How are you awake?"

"Um... am I not supposed to be?" I didn't know the specifics of what had happened to me.

"You had a curse cast on you. The healer said you wouldn't be able to wake up on your own without lifting it."

My eyes widened. I thought I just had a bad headache, but obviously, it was way more dangerous than that. The good news was that I seemed fine now, although I had no idea how that might've come to pass. "I don't know," was the best I could say.

It was awkwardly silent for a short moment before he said in his usual flat tone, "You didn't sleep well last night. Go get some more rest if you want."

I should've just bowed and excused myself, but I felt the need to confirm something. "You... were here... the whole time?"

He shrugged and looked away from me before he said, "Well, you were asleep in my bed. What else was I going to do? Sleep on the couch?"

Again, I thought it better not to say what I thought. He could've slept in any other number of bedrooms. But he'd chosen to stay here with me.

A whisper in the back of my head said, 'He needs to look after your blood, stupid.'

Right. He was supposed to be protecting me until the next Blood Moon.

"I'll get the pack healer in here to look you over." He got out of bed. His clothing was wrinkled, but even in his disheveled state, he still looked like a regal prince.

A few moments later, a middle aged woman who looked very motherly walked into the room with a black bag. "I hear you are awake," she said with a bright smile, although she looked just as shocked as Theo had been when he saw me awake.

My eyes didn't stay focused on her, though. Over her shoulder, I saw another familiar face that had me hiding a grin.

Prince Warren.

"Good morning, Ciana," he said. "I was so relieved to hear that you're feeling better."

"Thank you, Your Highness," I said, hoping he couldn't tell I was blushing.

The healer set about doing an examination. "Well, I don't know," she said. "I honestly have no explanation for how this can be possible. Unless--"

Abruptly, she stopped speaking, her eyes wide and her lips clamped together tightly.

I wanted to know what she thought might be the reason I woke up.

Prince Warren must've thought her abrupt conclusion was odd as well. "Unless... what?" he asked her.

"Oh, uh..." the healer stammered. "Unless... the curse didn't take all the way. That must be it. She must not have taken the full brunt of the curse."

I looked at Prince Warren, and he shrugged.

On the other hand, Theo, who was sitting in a chair across the room, looked disinterested. He certainly wasn't paying me any mind.

But... the healer's reasoning made no sense to me.

If the curse hadn't been fully taken, I wouldn't have faint- ed the night before-would I? I was fairly certain that curses were either complete or didn't work at all, not somewhere in

between.

"All I can say is, you seem pretty healthy to me, miss. I suggest that you take it easy for the rest of today, and proba- bly for a few more days after that. Don't do too much moving around until you feel completely well again, all right?"

I nodded, though I wasn't sure whether I would be able to follow her instructions. Staying still was always difficult for me. And, more importantly, I wanted to get out of Prince Theo's bed.

"If you need anything, have someone come and fetch me, dear," the healer said. She patted me lovingly on the arms and then got up to leave.

She seemed nice enough, but it was clear to me that she had more thoughts about what had happened that she wasn't telling me.

"You should get some more rest," Prince Warren told me with a friendly smile.

I nodded. When he made the recommendation, it seemed a lot more acceptable to me than when Theo had said exactly the same thing.

He turned to walk away but then stopped and swiveled back to look at me. "I am so very happy to hear that you are feeling better, Ciana," he said, his tone warm and soft. I felt every word that he spoke in my heart.

"Thank you, Your Highness."

After Prince Warren left, I still had a big smile on my face, but then I felt a bit uneasy again.

Prince Theo-he was scowling at me.

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: Whose Side Are You on Anyway?

Theo hadn't even looked up or shown any interest until Warren and I had begun speaking to one another. Then, he had just scowled at me. Why?

Oh, right. He didn't like me talking to Prince Warren. He'd told me that before.

With Theo staring at me, the two of us didn't seem to have much else to say. To avoid the awkwardness, I cleared my throat. "Um... do you mind if I go back to my room and try to get some more sleep?"

Theo gave me a nod as he got up and walked away. "Go ahead. If you need me, I'll be in my office."

One of the maids had brought in a tray of food, and I'd nibbled at it for a few minutes, but I really wasn't hungry. I had so much on my mind.

My thoughts went back to what Luther had said to me the night before. He'd mentioned that there were rebels in my own pack and insinuated that my father, our pack Alpha, was in trouble.

My parents were not home at the moment. This time of year, they normally would leave our pack lands for a couple of months. His Beta would still be there, as would some of the other pack leaders, so they should be able to manage.

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Although generally speaking, for the last couple of years, I

had been the one to manage the leadership and monetary affairs of the pack. So... if the situation was going poorly, why hadn't anyone in the pack reached out to me?

It didn't make any sense.

I had sent inquiries to all of the important people. I was eager to make sure that all was well back home. My parents would be surprised to return and find me absent, after all.

But it had been two weeks, and no one had responded. It was strange. I'd written to my governess, my best friend, the Beta and his wife.... Not a single letter in response.

Could it be that they weren't getting the letters? Or maybe they were getting them, but everything was in such shambles that they didn't have time to write back. Maybe everything was just fine, and they saw no reason to reach out to

me....

All of the possibilities continued to turn around and around in my head until I decided I needed some answers. I couldn't just sit there and wonder what was wrong with my people when there was a possibility that Luther could tell me

more.

I wasn't an idiot, though. I knew better than to go out there and face him without proper preparation.

It took me a great deal of time to make up my mind that this was what I needed to do. After going over the pros and cons of contacting the hidden enemy, I finally convinced myself that I needed to know what was happening in my pack.

Readying a plethora of weapons, I prepared for my meeting with him. I had knives, throwing stars, swords, and many

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other types of sharp weapons hidden all over my body, as well as strapped to my back and legs. I didn't want to take the chance of letting him hurt me again.

However, I had thought through the situation again. If he had really wanted to cause me harm, he would've done it then – wouldn't he have? So was there something about me that prevented him from hurting me before?

A nervous ball of tension formed in my stomach, and I knew it wouldn't go away easily.

I had no way of knowing, but as I thought about the situation, I grew even more nervous. As a result, not only was I covered when it came to all of the weapons I knew how to use, but I also made sure that my friends were prepared this time.

The last time I had faced off against him, I'd called on the animals to come to my rescue, but they hadn't known what they were getting into. This time, when I left to walk into the woods to locate the house, I brought them along with me and we formed a battle plan as a group.

Two bears, a tiger, a lion, a giant python, three badgers, a boa constrictor, a pair of jaguars who always stayed right next to one another, and a cheetah.

I thought I had the numbers on my side when it came to being able to fight against one he-wolf, but then, Luther seemed to be a skilled warrior, and I figured his wolf was not someone to be trifled with.

It started to get dark. With the dilapidated house in the distance, I stood outside in a clearing in the woods, with my animal friends around me, praying to the Moon Goddess that

wasn't doing something entirely idiotic.

My lips quivered just slightly as I lifted the whistle that Luther gave me and gave it a sharp blow.

It only took a moment before I heard some noises from the forest, and Luther stepped out.

He didn't look nearly as intimidating now, dressed in gray slacks and a blue shirt. Not being clad in all black gave him a bit more of a human appearance. Still, my nerves continued to get the better of me. I held one of my knives in my hand, twisting the blade back and forth as he approached, trying to calm myself.

A smirk formed across his face as he took a few hasty steps toward me. A growl emanated from each of the mammals' mouths, and the snakes slithered impatiently.

"You should probably stay back." It wasn't a warning. It was a fact. I might be intimidated, but my friends were not.

His smile widened. "I knew you'd call for me. Sooner or later."

"I want to know what you meant when you were speaking about my pack," I told him. "You said that there were rebels back there as well. But no one has contacted me to let me know what the situation is. Why is that?"

"Easy. They never received your mail," he said with a simple shrug.

My eyebrows knit together. That made no sense to me. I continued to shift the knife in my hands as I spoke. "Of course, they have," I said. "I've written to them. They know—"

"If someone didn't want your letters to get to your pack, they'd surely figure out a way," he replied, interrupting me.

Shaking my head, I tried to figure out what he meant. My stomach was beginning to ache from the knots twisted there. "You! You stole my mail?!"

"No! Believe it or not, it wasn't me." His smile grew crooked as only one-half of his mouth pulled up higher, like he was attempting to fight his amusement and only half-winning. "Not only did I not intercept any of your messages, because I'm a nice guy, but I'll also give you some news. There is an imposter in your pack."

His grin was beginning to annoy me, but even more bothersome were his words. "An imposter?" I repeated, biting down on my bottom lip for a moment. "Are you saying that there's someone in my pack pretending to be me?"

One simple, sharp nod was all that I got in response to my inquiry.

"No!" I said. "They would understand that it's not me. I've lived there my whole life. Those people know me. Not to mention, the Beta was there when I got on the train to come here."

He shook his head the entire time that I spoke. "Would they? Listen, Ciana," he said, folding his arms across his muscular chest. "You're caught up in all of this. You seem like a reasonably nice girl. But the bottom line is, your entire pack is under the impression that you brought shame upon them by failing almost immediately here at the palace, and with your doppelganger in place, no one is the wiser."

There were a million questions running through my head, but all I knew was that I needed to get back to my pack. I needed to check out exactly what was going on, and get

things sorted before Mom and Dad came back.

But I had another question for him. "Why did you tell me all of this?" I asked him. "Why not just keep all of this information to yourself? After all, if what you're saying is true, and the rebellion you are a part of is behind this activity in my pack, aren't you hurting your own cause by telling me?"

"Am I?" His smirk was gone now as he shoved his hands deep into his pockets and shrugged. "I think you already know the answer to that question, Ciana. You're a bright girl. You know what the most important thing is to me."

I thought about the words he'd said to me the other night. He didn't want Sebastian and Theo to have the heir the king wanted.

"You want to get me away from Prince Theo," I whispered.

"Bingo!" the kidnapper said. "Now, if you will excuse me, I have business to attend to. This rebellion isn't just going to win itself." He winked at me, and then he turned around and disappeared into the woods.

I was still staring after him when I thought I heard a rustling in the trees behind me.

Quickly, I turned around, my knife at the ready, but I didn't see anything. My forehead wrinkled as I continued to stare between the tree trunks looking for any clue that someone had been listening.

I didn't see anyone....

Shaking my head, I turned back around, and taking into the knowledge that Luther had just disclosed to me, I gath-

ered my menagerie around me and prepared to head back to the palace.

But then I did catch the scent of some unusual flowers.

Gardenia.

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: The Girl Is a Spy

Theo

A knock on my office door drew me away from the work that had occupied most of my day. I'd thrown myself into it, trying not to think about the events of the past few weeks.

My assistant, Ciana, had made a full recovery from the curse that had befallen her-or whatever it was that made her lose her senses that night-and since that time, I'd hardly seen her at all.

Which was for the best.

Now, I had to assume this knock on the door was likely her, coming to ask me some silly question.

"Come In!"

The door opened just a crack, and a woman stuck her face in.

But it wasn't Ciana. It was that other girl... Sophia? Was that her name?

"Pardon me, sir, but... I have some important information I think you need to hear. I don't want to intrude."

I blew out a deep sigh. Of course, she wanted to intrude. This girl was very much about attempting to secure a place with the royal family for herself, though I wasn't exactly sure it was me she was after....

"What is it?" I asked since she'd already barged her way into my thoughts.

She approached my desk and stood on the other side, her hands folded, her head tipped down. "It's about your assistant, Your Highness."

Here we go again. She was going to try to tear Ciana down somehow. "Make it quick."

"Your Highness, I thought you should know, I just saw her meeting with some man outside in the forest. She was talking to him by this rundown house. It was all very strange."

I set my pen down and looked into her eyes. The rundown house wasn't something that Sophia could make up, and that was where the kidnapper Luther had led Ciana. Why would she go there? Who was she talking to?

Sophia gave a little shrug and said like she was just trying to help me out, "I don't think we should trust her."

Who was this "we" she was referring to? I wanted nothing to do with this arrogant woman.

"I think she might be... a spy," she concluded.

I didn't want to believe her. She'd been trying to get Ciana in trouble from day one. But somewhere, deep in my gut, I began to wonder what Ciana had been up to lately.

"All right then. I'll check," I said, dismissively. "Anything else?"

She opened her mouth as if she might say something else, but when she saw the look on my face, she knew better.

"No, Your Highness." She bowed again and left.

I attempted to continue to do my work, but I couldn't get her

I'd had many attempts on my life lately, and somehow Ciana always seemed to be right there when it happened.

Pushing up from my desk, I headed outside to see what I could discover.

I hadn't made it very far when I heard someone moving around, and I knew that it had to be her. I could almost feel her presence.

The next thing I knew, my "personal attendant" was jumping out from behind a tree with a knife in her hand, lunging at me. "You're so done!" she yelled.

Immediately, I knocked the blade out of her hand, but at the same time, multiple throwing stars flew at me and almost took me by surprise. I wasn't afraid of her. Even with her weapons, she was no match for me.

"I didn't know you could fight like this." I sneered.

She paused, inhaled deeply and covered her mouth with both of her palms.

"Oh, Your Highness!" she declared.

I narrowed my eyes. She was a very good fighter... way more skillful than I thought of an average Alpha's daughter. Had she been hiding her true strength from me intentionally?

"What are you doing here?"

"I..." she swallowed, "I was just taking a walk..."

She lied.

I narrowed my eyes and challenged her. "Taking a walk with yourself fully armed?" My tone grew colder.

"I... I'm so sorry. I just saw a shadow in the dark, and I was frightened. I didn't mean to-"

"Didn't mean to kill me? And when you realized your plan had failed, you wanted to pretend that this was just an accident, and you would be off the hook easily again?"

"Your Highness-"

I interrupted her. "Now tell me, what exactly did Luther ask you to do?"

"What?" she blanched, her eyes widening. "Luther? I was just

"Answer me! Were you or were you not out here meeting with him?"

She stared at me blankly, not saying anything.

Her lack of a denial was confirmation enough for me.

Folding my arms across my chest, I took her in. She was a good-looking woman, and she had a pair of seemingly innocent eyes, but those were the ones who would get a man in the most trouble, if he wasn't overly cautious.

Sophia's words rang in my ear. "She's a spy!"

Was she no different from the other men or women who wanted my life?

Why was I so surprised? They were around me all the time, but Ciana.... What made me think that she wasn't one of them?

For some reason, I felt rage rushing through my veins, as if I was betrayed by someone who I trusted. It was ridiculous; she was just one of those eighty women who were forced on me. Why did I feel she was... special?

I should have killed her that first day, when I slaughtered those other assassins in my office with Jake. She should've been among the first to fall. That way, she never would've weaseled her way into court the way that she had.

Now, she had completely fooled me and Jake. Hell, even Warren seemed to be taken with the little liar.

This entire time, she's just been waiting for the right time to kill me!

When I went to her rescue last time, that was probably all just a show for Luther. And the curse? Of course, it didn't take! It was all faked. It was all just part of the show she was putting on with Luther. I had stayed up all night nursing her, hoping she'd be all right, and she was probably awake the whole time, inwardly giggling every time I whispered words of comfort to her....

How ridiculous that I'd even kissed her lips! The thought of it now made me want to punch my fists into a wall, I was so angry.

All this time, she'd been having all of these little "accidents," and I'd been stumbling along behind her, trying to ensure her safety. I was as big a fool as anyone!

"Jake," I called using the mind-link.

"Yes, Alpha."

"Meet me in the garden and collect my personal attendant."

"Collect? Yes, Alpha," he said immediately. "Where do you want me to put her?"

"The dungeon," I replied sternly. Jake could interrogate the little miss and see if he could get any information out of her. I was washing my hands of Ciana Black once and for all.

A few minutes later, Jake arrived next to me. I watched Ciana's expression change as she figured out what was going on. "Please, Prince Theo, if you just give me a chance to explain myself, I promise I can clear this up."

I shook my head. "It's too late for all of that. I gave you a chance to tell me the truth, but you lied. Jake, take her to the dungeon."

Jake hesitated, and when I turned to look at him, his head was tipped toward the ground. He wouldn't disobey me, though. He didn't grab her. He didn't have to. Ciana went with him, suddenly showing her obedience.

I took a deep breath, letting the night air calm me. I still had her blood for the blood moon, but at least this way, she couldn't bother me.

And she wouldn't be able to cause any more trouble either.

Jake

I waited outside of my Alpha's door for him to tell me to come in. When I did, I found him at his desk looking over some files, so I waited for him to acknowledge me. Eventually, he looked up, his brows raised.

Reporting on this issue was difficult for me. Anytime I felt Prince Theo had made a mistake, it was hard for me to tell him so. Even though we'd been friends for a long time before I became his Beta, like most people of importance, he didn't like to be told he was wrong.

"Miss Black hasn't broken yet. It's been two days with no food or water, Alpha, just like you said." I let that sink in and waited for him to respond.

"She's a spy yet you're still calling her Miss Black?" he asked me. I shrugged, not sure why that was relevant. He pondered my statement for a moment before he said, "Well, she had dreamberries. It will take a bit longer for her to suffer physically because of it."

I waited. For the first time in seven years of serving as his Beta, I saw that he was indecisive. If he truly wanted me to break her, he would have me torturing her. But that wasn't what he had ordered. I was simply supposed to ask her questions while she went without food and water.

And so far... all she'd said in response to my questions was that she didn't know, and she wasn't a spy.

And I believed her.

"Alpha, I told you before I did a thorough background check on her. She's not from one of the packs that have taken issue with you or the king. If she truly were a spy, I could break her easily enough if you allowed me to use the usual methods. But--"

"I don't want you to do that," he said, looking directly at me for the first time.

His words were a comfort to me as I didn't want to harm the girl either. Like he mentioned, the dreamberry Ciana took would give her extraordinary strength and would keep her alive without food or water much longer, although she would still feel the hunger and thirst.

Still... I wanted to get to the bottom of this.

He was different when she was around. Most of the time, Alpha Prince Theo was a monotone. His emotions ranged from dull to slightly more dull. But when Ciana was nearby, he had a pulse. He was alive in ways I couldn't quite explain.

She was good for him in many ways, and perhaps it was the fact that she brought him to life that had him afraid of her now, thinking that if he truly confirmed that she had been lying to him, and that whatever had prompted him to throw her in the dungeon was real, what would he do?

Could he really bring himself to... end her?

That was why he chose to let her sit down there while he sorted this out on his own.

It was troublesome to me and everyone else who knew the girl though. No matter how I looked at it, I couldn't bring myself to believe that she was working for our hidden enemies.

In addition, her friend Brook was worried sick about her. The

little redhead had been pestering me everyday, and I couldn't tell her the truth.

"What would you have me do?" I asked him, keeping my tone as even as possible.

"Don't... don't do anything," Prince Theo replied. "Just leave her be."

"Leave her be?" I repeated. "Does that mean continue with no food and water, but don't increase the amount of pressure she has on her to confess, if there's anything to confess to?" I asked, seeking clarification.

The prince ran a hand through his hair and then slowly nodded. "Yes, that's what I'm saying, Beta Jake. Leave her alone for now."

"All right, Alpha," I said, but I was watching him carefully.

The prince pressed his fingertips to his temples, as if he had a headache coming on.

Ordinarily, something like that would be a minor

inconvenience, but if this was a sign that he was truly losing control of his emotions. Well, what happened next wouldn't be pretty.

I turned around and left his office, knowing he'd tell me the instant he'd changed his mind and had different orders. For now, I'd leave Miss Ciana Black alone in the cell deep down in the dungeon, hoping that whatever deity she believed in was on her side and she'd be out of there soon.

Or else... I didn't know what might happen to... my Alpha.

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We Eloped!

Ciana

Darkness surrounded me as I sat there on the dingy dungeon floor-waiting.

Waiting for what, I wasn't sure. My mouth was so dry, my tongue was practically stuck to the roof of my mouth. My stomach was so empty, it had given up rumbling long ago and now just consisted of a dull ache deep within me.

My dreams, when I managed to doze off, usually consisted of me standing next to a beautiful lake full of water that I couldn't get to, no matter how hard I tried, and a feast full of all kinds of my favorite foods that I simply couldn't taste.

I wanted to tell Jake the truth. In fact, I had told him the truth.

But he couldn't release me.

At this point, if I had been a spy for that Luther person, I probably would've confessed. But I had nothing to tell Jake or Theo or anyone other than the truth.

I had been hoping to find out more information about the state of things in my own pack, and that's why I'd gone to look for that man who had kidnapped Brook, and nothing more....

Brook. The thought of her made me sad, not because I missed her so much, though it was true that I did, but because I felt so sorry for her. She had to be worried sick about me.

"Ciana!"

Why, even now, I was hallucinating that I could hear the sound of her voice. Goodness, how I missed her.

"Ciana? Are you in there? It's so dark."

288 Vouchers.

As quickly as I could get up off of the floor, I rose, stumbling on unsteady legs as I went to the unguarded, but locked, bars that made up a cell door.

"Brook?" I questioned; reaching through to touch her hand. It felt so warm compared to my cold one.

"Are you really here?"

She pulled me to the bars, hugging me tightly. "Oh, thank goodness you're all right. I've been so worried about you!" Her tears landed on my cheek, and my tongue darted out to lick them up without me even thinking simply because it was moisture.

She let me go. "Here, I brought you some water."

"Brook, you're my angel!"

I gulped down an entire bottle of water. Thank heavens! I hoped that amount of liquid could last me a couple more days in this hideous dungeon.

"How did you get here?"

"I probably shouldn't say," she whispered. "But... Beta Jake is not as mean as he lets on."

I couldn't help but smile. I figured that must be the truth. While he had denied me any food or water for the last few days while I was a prisoner down here, he hadn't harmed me, and I had a feeling he could do that if he wanted to.

"I need to find a way out of here," I whispered to her. As I rehydrated, I could think a bit clearer.

"I had a feeling that Prince Theo would release you soon," Brook said. I looked at her surprisingly as she offered me her analysis, "otherwise there was no way Beta Jake would allow me to sneak in..."

"Brook, Prince Theo isn't that forgiving." I interrupted her. Any positive feelings I ever might've had toward Theo, feelings that perhaps he wasn't as bad as I'd thought, or maybe that he could be kind when he wanted to be, had faded as quickly as the last food I'd eaten had faded from the memory of my discontented stomach.

Perhaps I was important to the prince because of his stupid berry, but I really didn't care if he never managed to grow another one after the way he'd treated me.

However, I didn't want to debate with my good friend when she was taking a great risk to pay me a visit.

"Oh Ciana, I wish I could help get you out," Brook signed, and I could see fresh tears welling up in her eyes, even though it was so dark. "But not very many people have access to the key to your cell door."

"I know," I said, thinking it was impossible or far too dangerous for her to try and sneak the key away from Jake or Theo. "Who else would have the key?" I muttered aloud.

Suddenly, an idea came to me. "Brook!" I said, grasping her arms tightly in my grip. "I know who you can ask for help!"

Puzzled, she stared at me as what I was sure had to be a

maniacal grin crested my face. "Who?"

All I could do was chuckle with delirium as I told her my plan.

"It was very kind of you to come to my aid, Your Highness," I said, still slurping on a canteen full of water. I'd already eaten a few pieces of fruit, some dried beef, and some raw vegetables. They were the most portable foods I could ask for when I was being sprung from the dungeon and allowed to run away.

"Again, just Warren please. You don't want others to find out our identity, right?" Prince Warren said as he walked along beside me and gave me a wink.

My face heated, and finally I gave him a nod. We'd run at first, once we got outside of the castle, but then, I'd gotten tired, probably because of a lack of food, and now, he'd slowed to my pace.

"I can't imagine why my brother would be so unreasonable as to lock you up as a spy when all you've ever done is try to help him."

A smile brightened my face, but I looked away from the handsome prince. All I'd asked him to do was unlock the cell door and look away as I did my best to sneak out of the palace and make my way home.

But that wasn't enough for Prince Warren. Someone so good and kind had insisted on coming along with me to make sure that I got clear of the palace guards and made it safely out of Theo's reach.

While I understood that we weren't out of the woods yet- both literally and figuratively as we were actually walking through a densely wooded area-I felt a lot better about my chances of escaping with my hero next to me.

As we walked along together through the woods, memories of the last time I'd been alone in the woods with Warren came

back to me. At least, I was fairly certain now that it had been him who was with me. He had my bracelet, after all.

"I just hope they don't find out that you helped me and punish you," I told him. I'd already gone over all of this with him when he'd first come to unlock the cell, but he wouldn't listen to me then, and he wasn't listening to me now.

The prince was determined to keep me safe, no matter what.

“Brook is the only one who knows what I did,” he told me again. “And there’s no way that she would tell anyone. Besides, it isn’t like we eloped or something. Even if they do find out, what is my brother going to do to me? He might be more popular with our father, but I’m still a prince. They won’t harm me.”

I hoped that he was right, but I’d certainly seen my fair share of Theo’s reactions when he was determined to punish someone. I didn’t want to see Prince Warren be the one who got caught up in all of that rage.

When he’d showed up to get me out, I’d tried to convince him to go into the cell and tell the guards I’d tricked him when they arrived. Or, I told him I’d pretend that the alleged group of assassins Theo thought I worked with had broken me out. He’d said that was ridiculous, and he’d just help me escape.

At one point, we had run into some guards, but I’d hidden, and when they’d asked if he’d seen me, he told them he’d seen a group of moving shadows, and they must be the ones who had broken me out. That had been enough to get them to rush away from us, and then, I’d scurried from my hiding place, and we’d taken off again.

On my back, I wore a pack that Brook had helped Prince Warren pack for me. It had some clothes in it, as well as necessities for hygiene and some extra food and water. I’d already drank so much water, I thought my stomach might explode, but my body desperately needed it.

The moon was high overhead, lighting our way. It wasn’t full, but it was bright, and even though I wouldn’t have been afraid to be in the woods by myself, I was glad that Prince Warren was with me.

If we needed to, he could shift into his wolf form, and I could climb on his back so we could travel more quickly, but he was pretty certain no one would be missing him.

“It’s not as if my father ever cares where I go,” he commented, not for the first time. I felt bad for him. It was clear to me that he was the least appreciated of all of his siblings, at least from his father. It was like he was just a spare in case things didn’t pan out with Theo becoming the next king.

It made my stomach twist into knots a bit to think of Theo being king. Someone like Warren would make such a better ruler. He was kind and understanding. He would listen to the people and do what was necessary to keep everyone safe and happy.

Theo, on the other hand, would likely just throw everyone into the dungeon when he got angry at them....

“Will they wonder where you are, though?” I asked.

Warren shook his head. “No, I told my most trusted personal attendants that I was going away to one of my summer homes for a while. They believed me, and everyone else will because I’ve never lied about it. I’ll get you safely to your pack lands, go to spend some time at my summer home, and then return to the palace. No one will be suspicious of my absence. They won’t even notice that I’m gone. Believe me.”

I wasn’t sure about that. I could think of at least one other person who might very well notice he was gone and call attention to it. But then, if the rumors were that Prince Warren had gone to one of his vacation homes, then chances were even Sophia would have to accept it.

Silence settled around us as we continued to walk. I was careful to watch where I placed my feet with each step, and I was starting to get tired. We'd been walking for a while now, and I hadn't gotten any rest in the dungeon. I'd fallen asleep there, but it wasn't restful.

"You seem pretty comfortable out here in the woods," Warren said to me.

He must not remember a thing about me from before. The thought made a blanket of sadness settle over me for a few moments. "Yeah, I am," I told him. "Growing up, I've spent a great deal of time traveling with my parents or in the woods on my own, and the animals always seem to like me."

"I noticed that with my brother's pets as well," he said. Then, he cleared his throat and said, "You're a special girl, Ciana

Black."

I felt a blush creep up my cheeks as I thanked him. Maybe he didn't remember who I was before, but he knew who I was

now, and he seemed to like me.

And that was promising.

[Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 365](#)

Sharing A Room with Him

Lightning illuminated the sky above us, and I wrapped the raincoat Warren had packed for me tighter, but it wasn't doing me a whole lot of good.

To avoid being tracked down by the city security, who reported directly to Theo, we intentionally avoided public transportation until we got outside of the greater capital city

area.

It had been raining for hours, and I was beginning to feel drowsy from trudging through the mud in such foul weather. I sneezed, again, this time barely getting my arm up to cover my face, and I willed myself to keep walking.

Warren was concerned about me, and he had been for the last few hours since I'd begun to cough and sneeze. He wanted to shift and let me climb on his back, but I'd refused. We would save that for if we were in danger. Right now, I was miserable, but I wasn't going to die.

"I see city lights off in the distance, Ciana," he told me. "We're almost to a town."

His words entered my mind, but I was having trouble processing them. Unless it was a town with a giant bubble over the top of it that would protect me from the rain, I didn't

care.

Trudging on, I began to lose most of my conscious thought. I just continued to lift one foot and then the other. Eventually, I

noticed that Warren was guiding me, his arm around me, and then, the mud of the forest changed to open green grass, to pavement, to a sidewalk... to steps.

"Where are we going?" I muttered.

"A hotel," he explained. "You need to rest and recover."

"Let's find a small one," I mumbled my explanation. "Fewer security cameras around."

"Good point!" He chuckled under his breath and commented, "You surprise me all the time, you know that?"

"Goodness gracious!" a loud female voice proclaimed. "You poor dears look half drowned."

"Yes, we need a couple of rooms, please," Warren explained to her as I leaned against his side to keep from falling over.

"I'm afraid I only have one," the woman said. "But it's got a big bed in it."

"That will do." Warren held on to me as he fished out payment for the room from beneath his raincoat, and I wrapped my arm around his middle to steady myself, my eyes locked on the floor where a puddle was forming from all the water dripping off of me.

I wanted to apologize to the custodial staff for making such a mess.

Halfway up the stairs, I lost my footing and almost tumbled back down, despite Warren's grip on me.

"All right, that's it," he proclaimed, and the next thing I knew, I was being lifted off of the steps into his arms. I didn't protest. Even if I'd wanted to, the words wouldn't come out of my mouth.

Once we were in the room, he helped me out of my raincoat, and then I insisted that I could change into dry clothes myself. I went into the bathroom and took a shower with very warm water, which I enjoyed.

When I returned to the room wearing fresh dry clothes, Warren had also changed. He looked at me very concerned. "I think this is worse than just a cold," he told me.

I waved a hand at him, but even that seemed to be moving in slow motion. "I'm okay."

"I think you being in that hideous dungeon for all of that time has left your immune system weak, Ciana. Climb into bed, and I'll get you some chicken soup."

My stomach protested the thought of putting anything inside of it, but I didn't have a problem crawling into the nice warm bed. The next thing I knew, a spoon was being coaxed into my mouth. I split my lips and slurped up the broth, but I didn't even know how the soup had gotten there.

Had I fallen asleep?

Warren sat beside me, getting me some soup and water. Then he said, "I'll go see if I can find a pharmacy that's still open."

A peel of thunder shook the entire establishment. "No..." I muttered; my mind was cloudy. "It's not safe. You'll catch a fever... and... die."

He chuckled under his breath. "I think I'll be okay. I take my vitamins every day."

"You're a... good prince... Unlike..."

"Unlike what?"

"Unlike... your brother. He's..." Um, my head was so heavy and I felt I couldn't think straight, but it didn't prevent me from concluding my thoughts about Theo, "...an asshole!"

I heard a low chuckle, followed by Warren's gentle voice. "While I don't disagree with you, I know you're delirious because my sweet, mild-mannered Ciana would never say such..."

His words trailed away. My head lolled to the side, and I noticed the print on the wallpaper. It was a fleur-de-lis print, white on gray, very pretty....

When I turned back to say something to Warren, he was gone.

I fell in and out of sleep, tossing and turning. I had vague recollections of someone helping me with liquids and medicines, but for the most part, I had no memory.

I had a lot of strange dreams, and although I couldn't remember the details, I knew they were about my parents and my pack.

Except for one. Maybe it was more of a nightmare.

I'd dreamt that Theo had been kissing me....

A couple days after we arrived at the hostel, I awoke with a start, much like I had when I'd snapped out of the curse. The

sun was streaming in through the window, and Warren was sitting in a chair across the room, reading a newspaper.

"Ah! The sleeping beauty awakens!" he teased, causing me to blush.

"How long was I asleep?" I stretched my arms up over my head.

"A while," he said with a grin. "How do you feel?"

"Much better." Then, I remembered how he'd gone out in the rain to get me medicine and fed me soup. "You took care of me."

It wasn't a question, but he nodded. "I wanted you to get better."

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. Thank you!" He was such a good man. "We should be on our way soon so that you can get back to the castle. They're probably missing you by now."

"Nah," he said, smiling. The soft afternoon sunshine gave him a golden glow and I felt my heart skip a beat. "I seriously doubt they are. Besides, it's getting kind of late. It's been a bright, sunny day, but it'll

be dark in just a couple of hours. It would be better if we continued our journey tomorrow when we'll have all day to walk in the daylight."

I knew it wouldn't do me any good to try to talk him out of it, so I nodded. "All right then. I'm going to go outside and get some fresh air."

"That's a good idea," he said. "There's a beautiful little courtyard around back, full of bright flowers that have flourished after the rain. Check them out."

I thanked him for the suggestion and headed into the restroom to make myself somewhat presentable. I looked like I had slept for a long time, that was for sure. My hair was sticking up all over the place, and I had a crease on my face from the pillow.

I couldn't help but chuckle at myself.

After dinner, I made my way outside and quickly found the courtyard he'd been speaking of. It was lovely. Sitting down on a quaint bench beneath a tree full of fuchsia blooms, next to several rose bushes in a variety of vibrant colors made me feel at peace for the first time in a while.

I tried to think only positive thoughts, but my mind kept going back over everything that had happened in the castle. I thought about Prince Theo and how, for a while, I'd thought perhaps he truly could be kind when he wanted to be.

That had ended abruptly when he'd had me thrown in prison for doing nothing wrong. No, I was certain now that he truly was as ruthless as everyone said.

Parts of what had unfolded while I was at the palace seemed like a dream to me.

Other parts seemed like a nightmare....

And then there was Warren. My long-lost childhood friend.

I had wanted to ask him so many times if he had any memory whatsoever of being in the woods in a faraway land when he

was young, but I hadn't had the courage to bring it up yet.

Footsteps drew my attention around the corner toward the path that led back to the guest rooms. When Warren's

handsome face came into view, I couldn't help but smile back at him.

"I brought a bottle of wine." He held it up in one hand. "I thought we could use something to help us relax a little bit."

In his other hand, he held two wine glasses.

"That sounds lovely," I agreed.

He poured one for me first and then one for himself, and the two of us sat back and enjoyed the peaceful sounds of nature as we tasted our drinks.

Sitting there with the kindhearted, handsome prince, I couldn't help but think back on the time I'd spent with the young man in the forest. He was standoffish and cold most of the time back then, but I still knew he had a good heart.

"What are you thinking?"

I tilted my head to look at him with a smile. "Thinking about flowers."

I had gotten flowers twice from him-the sun blossom he had gotten for me a long time ago, and the lavendlilly he gave me while we were at the palace.

"What kind?"

"Lavendlilly and... sun blossom." I finally said it. My face blushed a little, and my heartbeat was increasing as I waited

for his reaction.

Would he remember our encounter? He had the bracelet, so he must have memories about it, right?

But his answer wasn't what I expected.

"Lavendlilly, I know what it is. What about sun blossom?"

He'd forgotten about it? To my disappointment, I didn't see much emotional change in his gentle eyes.

Did he forget about me? Did he forget about the time we spent? Or perhaps the memories I had for the young man in the woods were only special to me?

After all, why would a prince keep thinking about a strange girl he'd met years ago?

"You seem lost in thought," Warren noted, nudging me lightly in the shoulder with his elbow.

"Yeah, sorry. I was thinking about something that happened to me a long time ago."

"Oh?" he asked, his tone laced with curiosity. "Is it something you wish to talk about, or would you rather keep it to yourself?"

Turning to look at him, I contemplated what my response should be. All this time, I'd wanted to know if he remembered anything at all.

Now was as good a time as ever to find out....

"Many years ago, when I was a girl of twelve, I followed a majestic pony into the woods, and there, I came upon an injured young man...."

[Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 366](#)

Should I Date Him?

Warren

Sitting on the bench in the gardens, sipping wine, and listening to Ciana's story, wave after wave of confusion washed over me.

She was speaking about an incident eight years ago, and yet... I didn't remember it at all.

Lost in the woods? Wounded? Collecting a flower blossom for her from the top of a mountain on the cliff? I was fairly certain that if I had been there, I would remember at least a bit of this.

When she concluded her story with, "When I saw your bracelet, I knew for sure... you were the one. You were the young man I found in the woods all of those years ago. All this time, I have been dreaming of meeting you again." Her cheeks blush a dark crimson, and I understood that she was saying these things as more than just a girl who has found a long lost friend.

She had feelings for this young man-for me?

"Wow..." I said, not sure how else to respond. "All of this time...."

"Right?" She beamed and then looked away from me, sipping her wine. "I can't tell you how happy I was to find out it was you." She wouldn't look at me now, and I felt my own heat speeding up.

Ciana was a beautiful young lady. Her long blonde hair and light colored eyes that glimmer in the moonlight make her stand out, even above all of the other girls that had been brought to the castle by my father to court my brother.

Any man would be happy to be paired with such a lovely woman. Any, except for my brother. Just thinking about Theo set my mood off, so I decided not to think about him at all.

But the story Ciana had told me didn't line up at all with how I'd gotten this bracelet. She seemed certain that this was the same bracelet, too, the one she'd given to the young man.

So... how had my sister come across it?

I remember distinctly the day my older sister, Maggie, gave it to me, slipping it onto my wrist as she told me it would be a good luck charm for me, that she'd found it in a special place, and it would bring me blessings if I wore it every day.

Well, if it brought me to Ciana, then... my sister was right. It was definitely good luck.

Nevertheless, something wasn't adding up here. Perhaps I was so injured in the woods that I simply couldn't remember the events?

No, I was positive I had never been in that sort of situation. Whoever she'd met in the woods, it wasn't me.

When she turned to look at me again, her cheeks were still pink, and she was smiling so happily at me, I couldn't bring myself to be the one to make that smile fade. Rather than telling her the truth, I said, "I've always wondered what happened to that girl in the woods." Her smile widened even

more. "It's amazing that fate has brought us together again."

“Yes, isn’t it?” she agreed, laughing softly before she diverted her gaze again. She raised the red liquid to her perfect pink lips again and took a sip.

I was lost in her smile for a moment.

I thought about the research I’d done after she had so easily awoken from the curse only a few weeks ago. I could tell Dottie hadn’t told me everything, and that made me curious. I’d wanted to know how it was possible that Ciana could wake up on her own from the evil words that had been hurled at her.

In the library, I’d found a few helpful books. I’d spent quite a bit of time reading them because, honestly, my schedule was fairly empty most of the time. No one had noticed I’d been in the library for days, just like no one had probably noticed that I’d left the castle yet either.

One of the books talked about how some of the most dangerous, deadliest curses could not be completely cast on those who had been blessed by the Moon Goddess.

Was it possible that Ciana was one of those special people?

Not a lot of people in my kingdom believed in the power of the Moon Goddess anymore or worshiped her much at all, but I got the impression Ciana might.

It would also explain how my brother had become slightly interested in her. Perhaps he could sense she was special and might be able to help him with his... affliction.

A shudder went down my spine, just thinking about it. All of a sudden, I’d made up my mind.

“Are you all right?” Ciana asked me.

I forced a smile, despite my thoughts lingering on Theo. “I’m fine. I was just... remembering my injuries. I’m so glad that you were there to help me.”

She blushed again, but it seemed like something was bothering her. I couldn’t help but reach over and brush her hair back over her shoulder, my fingertips grazing her skin.

Touching her skin sent a bolt of heat and excitement up my arm, leaving me slightly breathless.

Beautiful, intelligent, kind, and... brave. She seemed to always know exactly what she wanted and took actions to make them happen. Like this time, she escaped my brother’s dungeon to make her way home when it was so far away, over such rough terrain. I couldn’t imagine any other girls in her group would’ve even thought about trying such a thing.

Not like me... born as a prince, but had lived a life that was filled with boredom and emptiness.

Ever since she came to the palace, she was like sunshine, brightening the days for those who were around her, making the usually dull and gloomy palace life full of pleasant surprises.

She was truly special.

Now, she was running away from my brother, and my heart longed to help her....

“I’ll make sure you don’t have to worry about Theo anymore,” I told her, continuing to run my fingers through her hair. She was smiling at me, but there was a slight shift in her eyes. I thought perhaps I should pull my hand away from her, but I didn’t....

“Ciana,” I said, my voice so quiet, it was almost a whisper. “What would you think about the two of us... spending some quality time together?”

Her eyes widened. “Haven’t we been doing that?” she practically whispered back to me.

I couldn’t help but grin and chuckle at her. “Well, yeah, I guess so. But I meant... like a date.”

“A date?” She looked surprised but not horrified.

It was my turn to turn bright red. “I mean, if you want to. You don’t have to or anything.”

“I think that would be nice,” she said, still smiling, but I thought I saw something behind her eyes, something that told me there was more to what she was thinking than what she was saying to me. I didn’t question her though.

I was just glad she’d said yes.

Her face was bright red, and she was absolutely adorable. “But...” she continued.

I sighed inwardly. There was a “but,” of course. Why was she shying away from me?

“My pack is in crisis right now. If anything that I’ve been told is happening there is true, I need to find out about that first, and

then, if you still want to...”

“I’ll wait for you.” I placed my index finger against her lips and assured her again, “I’ll gladly wait for you.”

“Thank you for understanding.” The red on her face deepened, and I felt my insides melting.

I poured myself some more wine and took a long drink. The day had been full of revelations. Just when I thought I was starting to understand this girl, it turned out... maybe I was

not.

“You’re most welcome, my sweet Ciana.”

Ciana

I may have just ruined everything!

Finally, I’d had the conversation with Warren I’d been thinking of starting since I’d first seen the bracelet on his arm, since I’d first seen his eyes the day I arrived at the castle.

And now, here I was, refusing to go out on a date with him!

It wasn't as if my reasoning wasn't solid. How could I possibly consider going on a date with a handsome prince when my pack lands might be in jeopardy? I'd have to be very selfish to even entertain such a thought.

But I knew in my heart that it wasn't just concern for my pack that had me turn him down.

My mind flickered back to the time that Prince Theo had

kissed me in the pavilion. I knew, logically, that he'd only been doing such a thing because he wanted my blood and

whatever essence he thought may have remained in my mouth from that berry.

Still, kissing him had been exhilarating to me in a way I couldn't quite put my finger on, and the feeling lingered on my lips even now, after all of this time had passed.

Prince Theo had treated me horribly. He'd made me feed his animals, not realizing I would enjoy it, asked me to clean his filthy part of the palace, accused me of trying to kill him, and threw me in the dungeon without food and water for a long time.

So... I should hate him.

However, while I did hate some of the things he did to me, for some reason, I couldn't bring myself to hate him as a person.

It was so confusing! What was wrong with me?

All of these years, I'd thought that I was in love with the young man from the woods. I'd never let my mind drift to another man, thinking that once I found him, I'd confess my feelings for him, and he'd take me in his arms, kissing me deeply and telling me that he loved me, too.

Now, I was sitting on a bench in a beautiful garden, sipping delicious wine, enjoying the company of that amazing person who'd been in my mind for years, but something felt off, something felt... wrong.

Why hadn't I tossed my arms around Warren's neck, hugged him tightly, and told him I loved him?

Could it be that my feelings for him were not as strong as I had always thought that they were for all of these years?

I couldn't even think of the possibility. He was a good man, so much better than his brother in every way possible, and yet... I was letting thoughts of Theo interfere with my feelings.

It didn't make any sense. I was self-sabotaging!

"Ciana? Are you all right?" Warren's rich tenor sang out to me. I turned to look at him, seeing concern in his dark and gentle

eyes.

I managed a smile. "Yes, I'm fine, thank you. Only thinking."

He reached over and placed his hand on top of mine. I should've pulled it away, but I didn't. As much as I didn't want him to think that I was giving in to his romantic advances, I also couldn't bear to hurt him, not when I was just confused.

I was certain that was all it was—confusion. I had loved him since long ago, and I was attracted to him when I was in the palace. That must mean I loved Warren, right?

I turned to look at him again, but in my heart, the only thing I was certain of was that I wasn't certain.

We fell into silence for a short moment, until some commotion from the main building caught our attention.

[Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 367](#)

Take Me to Your Room

We weren't too far away from the back door. It seemed that quite a few people were in the hallway. They were checking out, maybe?

"It's getting late," Warren said. "We should probably go back inside and prepare for our journey. We have a long trip ahead of us tomorrow."

He was right. If we continued to walk to my pack lands, it would take a while. We'd discussed the possibility of taking public transportation, now that we were in a village, but I thought it might still be a bit risky until we were farther away from the capital. He could be recognized, and then word could get back to Prince Theo of where we were.

Just the thought of Theo discovering what we were up to made my stomach ache. I didn't want to think about how terrifying his reaction would be when he found out I'd escaped.

Without a word, I stood and took Warren's offered arm. He carried the wine and the glasses but disposed of the empty bottle in a trash can outside of the building. I hadn't drunk that much, which meant that he had consumed most of the bottle, but he didn't seem drunk at all. I figured a man of his size could probably handle his liquor.

When we walked inside, the sweet older woman who ran the hostel was standing behind the desk.

"Let me return those glasses to the front desk. I'll ask whether they have another room available." I looked at Warren gratefully. He was always so considerate.

It was obvious that the receptionist was charmed by Warren. Who wouldn't be? The moment she saw us, she

had a big smile on her face.

"Mr. Travel! Good evening! This must be Mrs. Travel! So good to see you're getting better. Aww... you two are so adorable!" she said, causing me to stop and look at her, not quite understanding what she was saying. "It's so sweet the way that your husband took care of you when you were ill!"

she said to me.

My mouth hung open as I turned to look at Warren. He was chuckling, but he didn't correct her. He must have made up a name when checking us in...

My face was burning, and I was so embarrassed. Meanwhile, Warren just nodded at her like a gentleman.

"Such a beautiful, gentle little wife, and a handsome, masculine, but tender man. You are both very lucky to have

found one another," she continued. "Very few people are so lucky as to find their perfect match in a spouse!"

"Uhm, actually-" I began, no longer wishing to live the lie, especially since we were about to ask for another room. But before I could say a word, I felt a cold chill go down my spine and realized we were no longer alone in the reception

area.

"Actually," a deep, dangerous male voice said behind me, "she is not my brother's wife, not even a little bit."

I turned around to see the dark eyes of an irate prince and felt my knees cave in on themselves. If Warren hadn't been holding my arm, I might've fallen.

"Prince Theo!" I gasped. Then seeing his angry face, I forced a smile and lowered my head, "Greetings, Your Highness..."

"Cut that. Where do you think you're going?" His tone was cold as he quickly closed the space between us.

"I..." I swallowed hard. "I just wanted to go home."

As soon as I said the word "home," I turned around and ran for the door, but I wasn't fast enough. Next thing I knew, I was already pulled into Theo's strong arms.

"Let me go!" I protested loudly.

But his arms were even tighter. I felt I needed to work hard to suck in air.

"Like I said, where do you think you're going?" Theo's refreshing scent surrounded me, and it smelled... alluring. Who would know that it belonged to such a devil?!

I was grateful to Warren when he stepped in. "Theo, please don't do this-"

"It's none of your business," Theo warned Warren. His tone was icy.

"But-"

"Last time I checked, she is my luna candidate, not yours!"

The receptionist gasped loudly and slowly backed away from us, disappearing out a side door. I couldn't blame her. I wouldn't want to be mixed up in the royals' problems

either if I didn't have to be.

Warren didn't give up. "Listen, Theo, there was a misunderstanding here. Ciana isn't a spy. If you just allow us to explain-"

Theo certainly wasn't going to listen to either Warren or me. He had a habit of forming his own opinions about situations and refusing to listen to anyone who might be

able to tell him that he was mistaken.

"Stay out of this," he said, and I could tell that was all the patience Theo was willing to give, "or I'll throw you in the dungeon for releasing my prisoner!"

"No," Warren said, his hand on my arm. "She is not a criminal, and I will not let you hurt her again!"

Rather than acknowledging anything that Warren had just said to him, Theo took a step forward and deepened his glare. "Step. Aside."

Warren stood to his full height, the scowl on his face more outraged than I'd ever seen him look before. "Make me," he said.

It felt as if the temperature around us had dropped. A chill coursed down my spine. I could sense that Theo was

getting angry.

Most of the time, the dangerous prince didn't have strong emotions. He was just cold and distant. However, at this moment, I could tell he was really getting angry.

Then I remembered all of the stories I'd heard about the

Dark Prince. He was ruthless, and he probably wouldn't mind beating up his own brother if Warren continued to

stay in his way.

I'd already gotten Warren in a lot of trouble, but I would never allow Warren to get harmed because of me!

"Prince Warren!" I shouted, successfully drawing both of their attention to me. "Stop, please."

Warren turned and looked at me, his eyes wide with surprise. "No, I can't just let him take you."

"It's okay," I assured him. "You should just go. Prince Theo won't hurt me...." At least not until he got his stupid

dreamberry.

"Ciana!" Warren said, his eyes pleading as he leaned close to me. "How do you know that? What if-"

"Trust me," I urged. I took a deep breath and told him, "Leave now. I promise I'll be okay!"

His eyes locked on mine, and for the first time since I'd met him in the woods all of those years ago, I wanted to kiss him, to raise up on my tiptoes and press my lips to his.

I'd been a fool for ever hesitating when he'd asked me on a date. And for what? The monster wrapped around me?

Warren was hesitant. I continued to beg him, "Warren, I know what I'm doing. I'll be fine, and I don't want to see anything happen to you. Please, listen to me, just this once.

Please!"

Theo let out a displeased humph. For some reason, he always had a problem whenever I tried to do something or say something for Warren's sake.

"You heard her," Theo said to his brother impatiently. "Move or else you will get hurt."

"I don't care about me! But if you ever hurt her," Warren began, turning to point at his brother as he glared at Prince Theo, "I swear it will be the very last thing that you ever do, brother."

Theo smirked coldly, but he didn't reply to Warren's comment.

My heart swelled at Warren's words. He was standing up for me to the most fearsome man in all the land. A

thousand thoughts filtered through my mind, but there was no way that I could express my gratitude to him in mere words, so my tear-filled gaze had to do.

I had no idea what would become of me now, and I didn't really care.

I had been attempting to save my people by escaping the palace, and I had failed.

I'd also managed to get the kindest, most gentle man in the world in trouble....

I hoped that Theo would at least spare the people who owned the hostel.

The warmth from Warren's gaze slowly traced my face before he turned and walked out through the main entrance, leaving me alone with the Dark Prince.

Relieved at the fact that Theo didn't plan on punishing Warren, I turned my full attention to dealing with the devil.

Theo's arms loosened a little, and his tone softened slightly. "Now tell me, why did you run away?"

Was this guy serious?! He threw me in jail and starved me for days for no reason, and now he felt I was in the wrong to run away from the hell called the royal palace?

He must be joking, right?

Well, thank goodness I still had my wits about me.

“Because... I was playing a game of hide-and-seek,” I told him, glaring right back at him. “I guess you won that round. Let’s try again.”

He scoffed, and one side of his mouth actually turned up in

a slight grin before he caught himself. “Let’s go,” he said, motioning for the door. “Walk with me, or I can drag you along. Your choice.”

“How generous!” I couldn’t help but bite back sarcastically. “The Dark Prince was willing to let someone choose to walk or to be dragged to their death!”

His dark stare fell on my face, and I felt the need to swallow back the lump of terror in my throat, but I didn’t. I kept my eyes locked on his, doing my best to show him that I wasn’t afraid.

I announced my decision before he said anything else. “I | | walk.”

The farther away from him, the better.

I knew my escape attempt had come to an end, and the wise thing to do was to obey him at the moment. There was no point in fighting against him. I didn’t stand a chance to win, especially since I knew that Theo’s men were around us somewhere, providing protection for their prince, even though I couldn’t see them.

He released me from his arms as he took a few deep breaths in. Then he said in his usual cold tone, “Take me to your room.”

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Do Not Test Me Again

“My... room?” I was immediately wary.

“Pack up, and we need to get going.”

I let out a breath of relief....

What was I worried about? Theo had no interest in me as a woman. He only wanted my blood.

However, his words still made my heart catch in my throat. By going, he meant back to the palace, of course. He was taking me back. Despite the fact that I didn’t want to marry him, and he most certainly didn’t want to marry me,

he was going to drag me back to the castle-when I was trying to get back to my pack lands where I could check on my people.

“Lead the way, Ciana.” He gestured toward the stairs.

I said nothing, only climbed the stairs as quickly as I could.

The room I’d shared with Warren was unlocked. The moment I walked in, I missed him already. I’d had such a heart-felt discussion with him not long ago, and I’d

anticipated a nice journey with him, where we could get to know one another even better.

Now, all of that was ruined, thanks to Prince Theo.

But there was one thing I was right about. Theo wouldn’t harm me. It had been proven again and again. As long as

he hadn’t gotten his dreamberry, he would have to keep me intact.

With that, I felt a little more secure about my own life and was willing to push the boundaries if I felt the need to.

Sulking, I went over to the dresser and began shoving items into my bag, trying not to mutter under my breath. The window was open, and a breeze wafted in, making the hair on my arms stand on end. I needed to get my emotions

under control.

Raising my eyes, I looked at Theo, who was standing behind me, an irritated look on his face as he glared at the

bed.

“Did that mattress do something to offend you, Your Highness? Or is that scowl just a permanent fixture on your face?” I had to let my negative emotions out somehow,

right?

He lifted his eyes and met my gaze in the mirror, a frown on his face.

I couldn’t help but smirk as I turned around, my bag packed. “What? You don’t like it when people are honest with you, do you? You want everyone to walk around telling you how lovely it is for you to treat them so terribly?”

The urge to continue speaking was overridden by his dangerous demeanor.

“I was just thinking about how brazen you and my brother are, sharing a bed when you were my personal attendant and meant to be part of my court.” He folded his arms and looked down at me, judging me, as if he were the most virtuous person in the world. “I know you prefer his company to mine, but I had no idea it had gotten this... heated.”

What was he talking about? Fury ran through me. "Why don't you just go ahead and accuse me of being a whore, Your Highness? Is that word too simplistic for you?"

He only stared at me. His lips pressed tightly together.

"If you must know," I began, placing my hands on my hips, "I was quite ill by the time we arrived here, no thanks to you and the lovely accommodations of your dungeon. You might want to get an exterminator in there, by the way. At any rate, your brother was kind enough to nurse me back to health."

"Sick?" He repeated the word in such a way that I couldn't tell if he didn't believe it had happened or if he was actually slightly concerned.

I might've found the latter endearing if I wasn't fully aware that there was only one thing the prince wanted with me.

"That's right," I told him. "No food or water for days, a long walk over rough terrain, and a rainstorm. Turns out, I'm human after all." I cocked my head to the side and made a face at him, and I thought I saw a flicker of guilt cross his face as he dropped his eyes slightly.

But then they were right back even with mine. "Sorry if I didn't have a whole lot of empathy for the woman who tried to stab me in my own garden and ran away with my

brother."

"Oh? Is that what you think happened? Seriously?" All I could do was shake my head at him. "It's one thing for you to continue to accuse me of trying to kill you, but you know, it's just plain wrong for you to think that your brother would sabotage your efforts in finding a wife!"

"Is it? Are we talking about the same man who snuck down into my dungeon and released a prisoner of mine? Yes, he seems quite loyal." He took a step closer to me so that only about three feet were between us now.

It made my heart flutter in my chest, partially because I was growing more and more scared of him by the moment, but I also felt a tingling sensation deep in my gut, one I seemed to only feel when Prince Theo was around.

"Prince Warren was trying to help me because he is a kind man. You could learn a thing or two from him!" I lifted my hand and pointed at him, but when his eyes focused on my finger, I immediately dropped it.

"One thing you should know." He studied my face like he couldn't figure out how I'd managed to live this long without pissing off the wrong person. "No one talks to me the way that you do, Ciana-no one."

"Well," I said, folding my arms and looking down at the faded blue carpet between my feet. "Maybe... other people should." Since I felt like my life wouldn't be taken from me

at that moment, it made me say things I would ordinarily keep to myself.

He stepped forward, his gloved hand taking hold of my chin and forcing me to look him in the eyes. He didn't have to use much pressure to get me to comply, and when I looked into his eyes, I thought I saw something shimmering

behind his irises.

"You're very lucky that you ate the dreamberry." His voice was even and still, but it left me quivering. "If you hadn't, I would've killed you after the first time your smart mouth betrayed you."

Realization sank in as I continued to stare at him. A loud

guffaw escaped my lips as I pushed his arm away. He let go; otherwise, I wouldn't have been strong enough to free myself. "That's right!" I said. "You can't kill me. You need me! My precious blood is so important to you! I bet when you go to bed at night you think about that kiss we shared

"I do not!" he bellowed, his face turning a little red.

"Oh, I bet you do! I bet you think about how you kissed me- and how disgusting it was! How it's the worst thing you ever had to do because someone ate your treasured berry!"

He took a few deep breaths and stepped away. "I have no interest in arguing with an insane woman."

"Insane? Maybe I am! But I'm an insane woman that you can't touch because I have useful blood-or something like that." He turned his back to me, which inspired me to continue to mouth off. "So... if you can't kill me, what are you going to do?"

He spun around and glared at me. His eyes narrowed, and his jaw clenched.

Then, before I knew it, I was pressed against the wall by

him. His face was right next to mine and his hot breath blew on my face. There was no way for me to get away

now.

The worst thing was, his powerful and slender fingers were circling around my neck-they didn't touch my skin, but I knew that if he squeezed, I'd be dead.

My heart was pounding. Did I overestimate how much he needed that berry? I didn't want to die yet!

"You... you can't kill me." I reminded him. "Not until after you use my blood. Otherwise, all of this lovely, crimson juice will go to waste!"

"I might not be able to kill you, but..." He leaned even closer, and our lips were almost touching. "Do not test me again.

You don't want to know what I would do."

With that, he backed away, and I sucked in the air greedily. Not that he choked me or anything-it was just that I was so nervous that I held my breath on my own.

Neither of us spoke anymore. I took a few moments to calm my racing heart when I heard a slithering sound. Then, I saw a familiar form peeking through the open window.

“Perceval!” I exclaimed, and the snake took my greeting as

an invitation and slithered his way into the room, making his way to me as quickly as he could.

“Really? You came all this way... for me?” I stroked the snake on the head. He gave me a gentle nudge to confirm my

guess.

“Percy, come!” the prince ordered. The python turned his attention to his owner, and then looked at me, seemingly having a difficult time choosing a side.

Seeing that Perceval didn't immediately follow his order, Theo's expression grew even darker. Eventually, after a short hesitation, Peceval moved to Theo, nudged him gently, and licked his hand using its fork tongue, like a kid who had made a mistake and was begging for forgiveness from his parent.

Theo pinched the bridge of his nose, and then he walked over and sat down on the bed, turning to stare at the wall. I

realized then that all of the anger had gone out of him. It was the most defeated I'd seen him.

By then, the tense atmosphere in the room had changed thanks to Perceval. Maybe the previous quarrel had also helped to let out some of my build-up resentment. I was in

a better mood now.

The snake returned to me and danced around me. I

continued to pet him, so glad to see him again. I might not have had a lovely time while I was at the castle, but at least I'd made some animal friends.

After a few minutes, I went around to the other side of the

bed and sat down so that my back was even with his. If I leaned back, I could see his face, but I didn't want to, not to tell him what I needed to say.

Perceval continued to wind around me as I spoke. “Luther told me that my pack was in danger,” I explained to him. “My parents aren't there, and I am worried that some sort of upheaval is going on. That's why I attacked you in the garden-I thought it was Luther who came back and didn't

expect it was you. And... that's why I needed to leave.”

Theo was quiet for a long moment. He probably wouldn't believe so just based on my words. To my surprise, he didn't make any nasty comments. He only asked, “Do you know what Luther is planning? Has he told you anything... about me?”

I shook my head. Feeling his eyes on the side of my face, I knew he could see me. “No,” I finally said. “We aren’t friends or co-conspirators. I have no idea what the situation is between the two of you. I simply need to get back to my pack to see what the problem is.”

He pursed his lips together, a look I’d come to recognize as the prince in deep thought.

I had to press my luck. “I know I’m important to you- because of my blood. I get that. But... if you’ll just let me go back to my pack and check on the situation, I promise you that I will return to you by the time you need my blood. I give you my word.”

“You want me to let you go off to your pack, on your own, without knowing if anything you’ve told me is true?”

“I know it’s a lot to ask.” I had to try, interlacing my fingers in my lap. “But please... just let me go.”

“No,” he said, and I couldn’t hold back the sigh of distress that shot out of me.

“Unless someone goes with you.”

“Really?” My eyes widened as I looked into his. “Who?”

I prayed he’d say Warren. But I wasn’t that lucky.

“Me.”

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Prince Theo, Be My Servant

Jake drove us to my pack lands. The ride was almost ten hours, and Theo and I spent most of the trip in relative silence. The good thing was, the car used to transport royals was spacious enough for the two of us to maintain a

comfortable distance from each other.

To not draw any unwanted attention, we were dropped off at the border of our pack lands, and we would walk the rest of the way.

Theo suddenly began to speak. “Who am I?”

I cocked my head to the side and studied his face for a moment. Did the brioche he had for lunch give him

amnesia?

Then I understood what he meant.

He couldn't go into my pack as Prince Theo. It wouldn't be safe for the security of the palace for people to know he

wasn't there.

At the moment, he was wearing a pair of nice gray slacks and a blue button-down shirt that made him look almost like a regular person-

An incredibly handsome regular person with perfectly straight teeth, hair that was never out of place, and the muscles of a warrior....

"Doesn't the king know you're gone?" I asked him, still not sure what we should say about his identity.

"I told him I had some work to take care of right away and hinted that it might have to do with an uprising without being so bold. He is obsessed with this wife hunt at the moment and thinks that nothing else is as important."

"Except for perhaps squashing a rebellion?" I filled in for

him.

"

"Precisely."

That made sense. "Well, if you really want to go incognito, I suppose you'll just have to be my servant." I couldn't help the sly smile that covered my face as I drew the conclusion.

"Your... servant?" He said that last word like it was an obscenity, a word his mouth couldn't articulate.

"That's right. What's wrong with being a servant?" I leaned over and whispered, "Is it beneath you, Your Highness?"

He only increased his glower. "Yes."

Laughing, I pulled my bag up my shoulder. "Oh, well, I

suppose you probably have a better idea, what with you being the most intelligent, sophisticated, wise man in all of

the land."

He was right on my heels as I headed toward the exit. I felt his breath on my neck as he ordered, "Think again, if you don't want to be punished."

A shiver went down my spine, but it had nothing to do with the threat from his words. No, this trill was from something

else.

I turned to smile at him. "That's the best I could come up with. We don't have much time; the village is right there. We need a name for you too. How about Mikey?"

"Don't call me that," he snapped.

"Bobby."

"Something else."

"Right... well, considering how you have been nothing but a pain in my backside, how about Thorn?"

A low rumble emanated from the back of his throat, and it made me laugh.

"Thorn it is." Then I reminded him, "And please suppress your Alpha demeanor and don't scare people away."

He let out a humph, and I took it as an "okay."

I led the way across the countryside to the town where I'd grown up. Just being back here brought a smile to my lips. I breathed in the fresh air, looking around, my eyes darting off among the trees and the forest that surrounded the

town.

I hadn't been gone that long, but it felt like a lifetime.

As we approached the gate, I noticed immediately that something was off. Normally, my father had at least a dozen guards stationed there, but I saw no one.

Theo noticed, too. "Where are the guards?"

"I don't know." I didn't need to say more because he could read my expression. This wasn't normal.

"Halt!" I heard a high-pitched voice shout, and turning to my left, I saw a familiar face running toward me. She was wearing a uniform that was way too big for her, and the way she was practically galloping, moving so slowly, with her clothes billowing around her, was almost comical.

"Susan?" I questioned as she stopped in front of me.

"Miss Ciana!" she exclaimed, her expression of fear melding into something else. Shock maybe? "What are you doing here?"

Luther said there was an imposter, but based on Susan's reaction, it seemed that they were still expecting me to be away in the palace. Did that mean, somehow, I'd beaten the imposter here?

Or was I misunderstanding the situation?

"I came back to... uhm... I was dismissed." My eyes went

wide as I considered what I should or should not say.

"Dismissed?" she questioned, releasing me. "What do you mean? Oh! You mean from the prince? I had heard this whole thing was about the Dark Prince trying to find a luna. Is that true, then?"

I nodded, trying to look solemn. "Yes, unfortunately, Prince Theo and I were not a match. He was looking for a selfish, angry brat. And he found one rather quickly in a girl named Sophia."

Prince Theo cleared his throat next to me.

"Oh, dear. I'm so sorry to hear that." Susan, who had been a governess to me for several years, patted my arm. We'd always been close, but she was very gullible, and it had

always been easy for me to pull one over on her. "Well, I'm actually kind of glad. As much as it would've been nice to know that you had become the princess, I was a little concerned. After all, everyone knows how dangerous he is!"

From behind me came a low growl, and I almost laughed. How must Prince Theo feel, standing there, hearing her say

those things about him when he wasn't himself?

"Oh, who is this?" Susan asked, seeming to notice him for the first time.

She was apparently very good at guard duty.

"This is... my servant," I said. "Thorn."

"Oh?" There was a high, intriguing tone to her voice as she stepped around me to look at him. "Hi Thorn."

Theo mildly nodded his head as his response. That was the best Susan could get out from the prince.

"He's awfully handsome," she said with her hand next to her mouth, but she didn't lower her voice. "Are you sure he's not your boyfriend?"

I choked on my own spit and started coughing to cover up my embarrassment. "Thorn? No, no, please, Susan! Don't be ridiculous."

"But if he didn't have that scowl on his face, he'd be so cute.

And you so deserve a handsome, kind young man, Miss Ciana." She squeezed my arm and gave me a dreamy look. "Unlike that ferocious Prince Theo."

Again, Theo let out a low growl, and this time, she heard him and jumped a little.

Just like any good border guard should do....

"Oh, no, Susan. Trust me. Thorn is not romantically interesting to me at all. I found him standing on the corner of the street in one of the little villages that I passed through."

“Really? What kind of man would pass on a fine lady like you?” she asked. Of course, she wasn’t expecting me to answer, so she answered her own question. “Only the stupid ones! This Thorn must not be too bright.”

I could sense the anger started to build within the prince next to me and I glanced over my shoulder to see him glaring at Susan.

She leaned in closer to me. “Why is he looking at me that way?”

“Oh, well,” I had to come up with something really quick, so I said without thinking, “He was begging on the streets. It’s

really a sort of a sad story. You see, Thorn was... kicked in the head by a mule when he was younger. Now, well, he just doesn’t have any sense at all. So... he has to beg for food from the townsfolk.”

“That’s just terrible!” Susan said. “Poor lad. No wonder! Can he even hear what I’m saying?”

“Yes, yes, he does hear well...” I tried to make Susan drop the topic. “Susan, let’s um... talk about...”

But Susan continued, “He can hear, oh good. Then does he understand me? Why doesn’t he say anything...”

“He picks up bits and pieces,” I said, nodding my head and plastering what I hoped looked like a proud smile to my face. “But sometimes he gets confused and thinks people are making fun of him, even when they’re not.”

“Poor, poor dear,” Susan said, shaking her head, and I thought I saw misty tears forming in her eyes.

She was truly the last person who should’ve been on patrol out there. “Where are the guards?” I asked her, ignoring the daggers Theo was shooting at me. “I have no idea why you’

re out here.”

Susan turned to face me, her mood sobering up as she began to speak. “Well, as you may know, your parents are

still away. They haven’t returned, and it’s been a little while since anyone at the castle has heard from them.”

Immediately, my heart lurched into my throat as my mind went wild with the possibilities of everything that might’ve happened to them. I couldn’t ask Susan her opinion on

whether or not they were okay, though. She would have no

idea, and it wasn’t worth it for me to hear all of her

speculations since they were likely to be unnerving.

“So... in their absence, some strange things have been going on. Many of the guards and warriors are struggling. They feel like the orders they’ve been given are not in line with what your parents would want from them, but if they

dare to protest, they are often arrested or thrown in prison by the ones who are willing to do the bidding of a tyrant.”

She said that last word with emphasis, and once again, I felt

a wave of anxiety wash through me. I didn’t want to interrupt her to find out exactly what she was talking about, so I kept quiet.

“So without the warriors out here on patrol, or at least not as many of them, then us ordinary citizens have been assigned these duties. You know me. I have a family to think of, so I can hardly go against the orders I’ve been given.” I could see the distress on her face.

“Yes, of course,” I said, understanding what she meant.

Susan was married and had three children, two boys and a girl. If she were thrown in prison, they wouldn’t have anyone to take care of them. “So are most people doing what they’re told, even though they don’t think it’s in line with what my parents would want?”

“Yes, they are,” she said, and I could see the inner struggle she shared with the other citizens written on her face. “He’s almost as scary as the Dark Prince himself.”

I braced myself for her answer as I swallowed hard and asked, “Who, Susan? Who is giving these orders?”

She took a deep breath and looked around, as if she wanted to make sure that no one was listening in. She finally said one word, and I wasn’t surprised to hear the name considering the description she’d just given me. “Raymond.”

I gave a sharp nod and said, “Right.”

“Who’s that?” Theo asked coldly.

“Ray. Mond.” Susan said loudly this time, overly articulating for my “slow” servant. “He’s a mean man here.”

I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing.

As amused as I was at Prince Theo’s expression of utter displeasure, what Susan had just told me was not funny at all.

“Why in the world would Raymond be giving everyone orders and disrupting the flow and processes in the territory?” I wasn’t asking her as much as I was thinking aloud.

But Susan answered me anyway. Her response was only one word, but it sent chills up my spine.

“Revolution.”

[Sold As The Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 370](#)

: This Is a Trap

Theo

As I followed Ciana and her former governess, or so I'd learned, back to the Alpha's mansion, I couldn't believe the story she'd made up about me. How dare she?!

The girl was obviously having way too much fun. It all seemed so amusing to her, and I just wanted to shake some sense back into her— to take her in my arms, stare into her eyes, breathe in her scent—and tell her it wasn't funny at all.

But I knew it wasn't the right time to do so, so I forced myself to filter the nonsense pouring out of those two women and focused on the key piece of information-

revolution?

Would it have anything to do with that Luther guy? What was their ultimate goal?

Regardless of the situation, something wasn't right here, and I needed to know exactly what was going on, not only for Ciana and her pack, but also for the overall security of the country.

After turning the corner, we arrived at our destination. The

J

Alpha's house was clean, fairly sizable, and well kept. The moment we entered it, I could tell the owners put their heart into their home.

Unlike the royal palace, which was filled with meaningless luxuries, the design and decoration of this place was quite simple. Yet, the mood was such that the moment anyone walked in, they would feel welcome and relaxed, like a long-time traveler who had finally reached their home.

Needless to say, Ciana's parents had good taste. Maybe one day, I would be able to meet them.

I followed Ciana through the door and noticed that, unlike most Alphas' residences, there weren't other servants. The place was quiet—quiet and nice.

"Miss, you must be very tired," Susan said to Ciana while looking at me. Did she want anything from me?

I ignored her and walked straight through the door, as I heard her mumble to Ciana, "Miss, he doesn't act like a servant at all... I can ask my nephew to come here to help, if you're okay with it."

"Oh, no, no need, Susan! Um... Thorn is actually very competent."

"I don't see it. Miss, you need someone who is smart and understands what his master wants to serve you."

I clenched my fists. Ciana better get this done quickly. My patience was limited. Obviously, Ciana could tell I wasn't happy. She looked at me with a bright smile.

Good. And she'd better say something nice.

"Thorn, would you fix Susan and me a nice glass of lemonade?"

I frowned. She really wanted to treat me as a servant? Was I too nice to her?

But then she gave me a pleading look, and she mouthed, "Please."

I stared at her for a second, and for the reason I didn't understand, I nodded. Maybe I knew she was trying to put some distance between me and that Susan woman, so that I wouldn't hear more of her ridiculous comments, or maybe I just couldn't seem to be able to turn her down....

As I was making the drinks, I saw Ciana offer Susan a chair and then struggle out of her jacket, hanging it on the back of her seat as she pulled out the heavy chair and sat down.

Susan made a noise that drew my attention to her. "Really, Ciana, what kind of a servant is he that he doesn't help with

your jacket or pull out your chair for you?"

"He was busy making our drinks," she said, a bit more defensively than I would've expected for her to be when it came to defending good ol' thick-headed Thorn.

"Still," Susan said, shaking her head. I supposed she thought I didn't understand her—since I'd been kicked in the head by a mule and all. "What is it that made you choose him as your servant? He's so... daft and inept."

I had never in my life had someone talk about me like that

right in my face. So I picked up the lemon scooper—thingy and placed it down into the table with a clatter that startled

them both.

"See!" Susan spoke again, trying to prove her point. "I told you he's—"

"Susan!" Ciana prevented her from saying anything more. Then she lowered her voice. Maybe she thought I really couldn't hear her when she whispered, "Well, he is... hot."

What?

Susan giggled and covered her mouth. "You've got that right, dear. Man, oh, man. He's got such a tight bottom, and those abs—"

Ciana cleared her throat. "Anyway... what else is going on around here?"

Hot? Was that how she felt about me?

I couldn't help an up-curl on my lips. Good to know....

Susan started talking about this Raymond fellow, who clearly needed to be investigated by my people and dealt with—easy enough—and Ciana sipped her lemonade. The face she made wasn't missed by me.

"Oh, my!" Susan also took a drink of hers and sputtered, sending the yellow, sticky liquid all over the white tablecloth and nearly hitting Ciana in the face. "This is dreadful. It tastes like... piss."

Now Ciana almost spat out her drink.

I grunted and was about to say something but Ciana got out of her chair, standing between us.

“Thorn, it’s all right, honey,” she said, patting me on the shoulder while she gave me a look that was meant to

remind me not to blow our cover. “Susan didn’t mean it.”

I cemented my lips together in an effort to keep my language to myself.

Ciana turned back to Susan. “I think it might be time that Thorn lays down for a nap. He gets agitated when he’s tired. Perhaps you could go?”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea, dear?” Susan asked. “You don’t know him that well. He might be dangerous.”

Ciana laughed. “Susan, you know what I’m capable of.”

“True, true,” she said, also laughing. She pulled her plump bottom up out of the chair. “All right. We’ll talk soon.” She didn’t approach Ciana to hug her, probably because she knew I’d strike her down like a bear swinging at a beehive looking for honey.

The moment she was out of the room and we were left alone, I turned on Ciana. “Kicked by a mule, huh?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, trying to bite back a laugh. “I just thought it would be more believable that way, and if you did accidentally say you were the prince, I could blame it on your head injury.”

“Don’t be mad... please?”

I didn’t know what this girl did to me, but when she was not intentionally provoking me, it was hard for me to stay angry

at her.

I sighed. “It doesn’t matter now,” I said curtly. “We need to go.”

Her forehead crinkled, and her eyes narrowed at me. “Go?

Go where?”

“Back to the palace of course.” I started to walk to the door, but she wasn’t budging.

“What? No!” Ciana shouted. “I just got here, to see if my

pack was in trouble, and it turns out it is. So you want me to leave? No way!”

“Ciana, I will take care of the situation here.” I folded my arms and glared at her, thinking it would just be easier to pick her up and carry her out of there. But that would cause alarm, so I didn’t want to do it that way.

“You’ll take care of it?” she repeated. “And how exactly are you going to do that?”

"I haven't quite worked out all of the details," I told her, but

it wasn't her concern. "I'm responsible for the safety of the country. Even in your packland, I'm still in charge here, over your father. I said I will handle it, and I will—unless you want.

me to leave it to your father."

"So you don't really have a plan!"

I frowned. We were running out of time. I tried to be as patient as I could. "But I will. I came all the way here with you. You confirmed the situation, and now it's time to go."

"You're the one who insisted on coming with me. I didn't even want you here. This is my pack! I can't just leave when I know it's in trouble!"

Letting out a loud sigh, I tried telling her the truth of the situation. "Listen—"

"I don't want to."

"Ciana, think it through! You have just done exactly what those people wanted you to."

"Those people?"

"Those who are trying to overthrow your parents. Can't you see? That Raymond will know you're back very soon, and if what Susan said was true, I doubt you're welcome here."

"I'm not welcome by my own pack?" she asked, her hands on her hips now. "Please, just go ahead to m stories!"

"You waltzed right back into your home where they can get you." Leaning even closer to her, I said, "This She took a few moments. I was sure that as smart as she was, she understood the situation. "Now, let's go," I urged

her.

However, she didn't follow me. "Your Highness, I have an obligation to my pack members. My parents are gone, and that leaves me as their only hope. I can't just leave."

I looked her in the eye. "You no longer had an obligation to this pack from the day you were summoned to the palace Now, your one and only obligation is to me. And as your prince, I am ordering you to return to the castle with me.

Now."

She stared at me long and hard, a fire burning behind her eyes before she shook her head. "You are so unbelievably

selfish."

"What?" I'd never dragged a woman forcefully before, and I wasn't planning to start now, but damn if she wasn't making it hard.

“All you can think about is your stupid berry! I wish I could just slit my wrist and pour all of my blood out for you right now.”

It was true that her blood and the berry were important to me, but was that the only reason I wanted her

I didn't know. What I did know was that my patience was running out.

I took a few deep breaths so that I could reason with her.

“Let me make it clear, Ciana Black. A, you stole from me, and yes, because of that, you have an obligation to keep yourself safe— to keep your blood safe. B, you put yourself in jeopardy. I am trying to help you, even though I don't have still tasked with the royal duty and you were not supposed to leave the palace. After everything I've done for you, I'd hope you would show some appreciation and make the right choice. I'm done arguing with you. We're leaving.”

“No!” She was up in my face again. “You mean, after everything you've done TO me? You want to play the victim here because I'm a stupid berry of yours? If I hadn't been half-starved, maybe I wouldn't have eaten it!”

Our noses were so close together now, we were breathing the same air, and even though I was frustrated with her,

other thoughts came to

mind.

I pushed them away. This was stupid. She had been nothing but a pain in my ass since the moment I'd met her, but why was I not able to control my thoughts around her, and why did I keep breaking my own rules for her?

“No,” she said, her tone quiet now as she took a step back. “I'm not going. You volunteered to help me, and while I appreciate the offer, I'll stay here and find out what's going on with Raymond on my own.”

“Ciana, if you stay, I will not be able to protect you. If you get yourself into trouble, I won't be here to bail you out.”

Every word came out of my mouth with a hint of pleading. How she would interpret them, I wasn't sure, but by the expression on her face, she thought I was threatening her.

“It's okay, Prince Theo,” she said. “Strong people can accomplish great things all alone. You of all people should

I took one more look into her eyes before I turned and walked away.

“Do whatever you want!” I said as I slammed the door.