

## **Kings Breeder 381**

### [Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 381](#)

: A Special Cake for My Love

He didn't elaborate, of course, and only asked, "Now what?"

"I have to find some way to make the king like me," I said as Theo and I walked back toward my room. I wished he would've just left this to me, but he seemed determined to be involved in every aspect of this. Maybe he wanted to make sure I didn't mess it up.

Brook met us outside of the library, and she was very supportive of my trying to win the king's heart again. "You could make his favorite dessert. He loves royal cherry revelry cake. Remember when you tried to make it for him last year, and you accidentally burned it?"

I didn't remember that, of course, but I couldn't tell her that. Theo and I knew that we were the only ones who remembered who we were. I couldn't help but wonder what had become of Warren and Sophia.

"What do you think, my lady?" Brook asked me. "Shall the two of us head to the kitchen?" She gave Theo a look that

said that he wasn't welcome.

"I think that's a good idea," I told her, but when we started to walk down the hallway, in a direction I knew would lead

us to the kitchen, Theo was walking right behind us.

"You're going to cook?" Brook asked him. "I didn't know that guards were capable of making cakes."

Theo ignored her altogether and entered the kitchen.

"Hey!" Brook chased after him, and all I could do was shake my head. Hopefully, we all would forget about everything that had happened in this illusionary realm in the end.

Eventually, we made it to the kitchen. I had never been very good at cooking. As much as I tried to learn from my mother and her head cook when I was younger, it just didn't seem to be a skill I had much luck with.

I was better at doing things outside in nature. I could start a

fire with two sticks and cook a small animal for dinner if I

had to, but I couldn't take a bunch of ingredients and mix them together to make a dessert to save my life.

Maybe that was exactly what I was doing now-baking a cake to save my life....

Brook got the ingredients together. Most of them I could identify-flour, sugar, butter, eggs, milk, cherries, some sort of liquor, and oil. I thought I could handle all of that. She turned the oven on to preheat.

Theo was keeping his distance at the moment and was

simply watching us. I tipped my head to the side and asked him, "Are you even going to help us?"

He said nothing, only glaring at me from a few feet away, his arms folded across his chest. His body language told me that he didn't want anything to do with cooking or pleasing whatever king that I was supposed to impress.

"Uhm, I seem to recall this isn't exactly for me." I turned to see Brook was still gathering dishes and utensils. Taking a step closer to Theo, I asked, "Is this berry we're after for me? Am I the one who needs it?"

Theo grumbled under his breath and stepped closer, but something told me he wasn't actually going to do anything to help me with this task. He didn't seem like the homebody type who would be keen on cooking.

"Okay, first we need to open the flour and measure out three cups," Brook said, gesturing at where she'd set the bowl I was supposed to put the flour in.

"No problem," I replied, seeing a measuring cup sitting on the counter. Theo was in my way, and I had to lean past him. I didn't like the heat I felt radiating off of his body. I found it distracting. Quickly, I grabbed the utensil I needed and got back into my own space.

Clearing my throat, I opened the bag of flour and started to measure it out. "Oh! You need to make sure you grease the pan first!" Brook said, and the way she said it made me think that it was an emergency, so I switched tasks, picking up the open bag of flour and moving it out of the way.

I set it down on the counter in front of Theo rather hard,

and the next thing I knew, he was coughing.

I turned to look at him and shrieked, covering my mouth.

with both hands.

Prince Theo looked like a ghost! When I'd set the flour bag down, a bunch of the white powder had come shooting out the top, sprinkling him from the top of his head all down.

the front of his shirt with the white substance. It even

coated his eyelashes.

I wanted to laugh, but if I did, would he grab one of the kitchen knives from behind him and plunge it into my heart -berry or no berry?

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Rather than letting the laugh I was fighting out, I said, "I'm so sorry about that."

He glared at me, and Brook broke into a fit of laughing. "Serves you right!" she said, having no idea that she was actually talking to her prince.

Theo's face darkened. Before he could scold Brook again, I

handed him a towel. "Take it, so that you can wipe yourself."

However, he didn't take it. "You do it."

"What? Why?!"

"You're the one who caused this," he shrugged.

Brook pointed at him. "No, no! You're a guard! How could you ask our lady to clean up for you?"

To prevent Brook from calling other guards and throwing him in the dungeon again, I sighed and told Brook, "Uh... he has a point. It's okay."

Brook's eyes widened in disbelief while I did my best to get the flour off of his face. But I couldn't get it all out of his dark hair, and it wasn't coming off of his uniform either. He'd probably need to take a shower later. But then, it would likely turn to paste.

Oops!

After cleaning Theo up, I returned to the counter while he looked at me out of the side of his eye. I didn't think he was actually mad. In fact, he seemed to have a hint of amused expression on his face.

"Alright, now, let's put all the dry ingredients in that bowl and mix them." Brook instructed, "Then add an egg and

some milk and oil."

I blended all of that together and then "folded" in the cherries, whatever that meant. Theo got himself a cup of water, still just... watching.

"This dessert would probably taste a lot better if you just made it for me, Brook," I complained.

"No, no, my lady. I cannot do this for you. I don't have the most important ingredient to put in."

"What's that?"

"Love, of course!" she beamed, and Theo let out a cough

behind us, almost choked on his water.

While it wasn't true that I loved the king, I did want to do my best to make it so that he liked it.

After a while, the timer on the stove beeped, and Brook pulled the cake out. She stuck a toothpick into the middle of it and pulled it out clean.

"It's done!" she declared. "Now, we just have to let it cool, and then we can put whipped cream on top and serve it to the king. I'm sure this will win a spot in his heart!"

I looked at the cake and was quite astonished that I had made it almost completely by myself. It was very pretty with its red swirls through the white cake.

“It’s a very special cake,” Brook said, leaning back against the counter near where the cake was cooling. “It’s said that whoever bakes it must insist that the one she loves most

has the first bite. Then, a blessing will be bestowed upon both the baker and the one who tasted it.”

I raised my eyebrows. “That does make it seem like a special cake,” I agreed with her.

We continued to chit chat while the cake cooled. Then,

when we were satisfied that it had cooled enough to take out of the pan and put on a cake stand, Brook gave me special instructions on how to get it out without making it crumble. I took my time, finessing every movement, until I managed to get it out and onto the platter.

“I’ll get the whipped cream topping and a few more cherries to add to the top,” she said, stepping away to go to the refrigerator.

I took the baking pan to the sink to wash it out, again thinking it would be best not to leave a mess.

When I turned around again, I saw Theo standing over my cake, a fork in his hand-and he was chewing!

“What in blazes are you doing?” I demanded, rushing over

to him to pull the fork away from him. If he’d been trying to keep me from doing so, I wouldn’t have been able to dislodge it, but he let go, and my hand went flying backward as I glared at him.

“I was just making sure it tastes okay,” he said with a simple shrug.

Furious, I demanded, “Didn’t you hear what Brook said?”

“So? If it doesn’t taste good, the king may dislike you even more.”

I was speechless. Brook began shouting at him, too. “You ruined it! You ruined the whole cake!”

“Relax.” Theo took the whipped cream from her and began to pile it on top, easily covering the small hole where he’d taken the bite. By the time he was done, it did look like it

had been untouched.

“There. Now put some cherries on top,” he ordered Brook.

Brook gave him a glare but had no choice but to do what he asked. Luckily, she was able to decorate the cake beautifully, and no one would be able to tell that a small

piece had been taken from it.

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As I prepared to take the cake to the king, I heard Theo say quietly, “And yes, I did.”

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Taking my time, I carried the cake I had made for the king into his private chambers. I could foresee myself tripping and dropping it or landing face-first in the cake, so I had to take my time and be careful

not to let all of my hard work go to waste, although it was bad enough that Theo had technically ruined how special it was anyway.

I walked into the room to see the king standing with his back to me, looking out the window. He looked familiar, with broad shoulders and dark hair. He was tall and well-built, but it wasn't until he heard the sound of my footsteps on the floor that he turned to look at me.

The cake platter slipped from my hands at the sight of him, and I only just grabbed it before it hit the ground. I couldn't believe the face I was looking at.

Warren!

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: The King's Love

Warren was playing the part of the king!

I could hardly believe what I was seeing, and I was certain I was gawking at him.

"Ah, I'm glad you're here," he said as he turned and walked toward me. His hands were folded behind his back, and he looked quite regal and important, much like he did in real life, but with an air of arrogance about him I'd never seen

with Warren before.

"I brought you your favorite dessert," I purred, trying to sound, um, seductive, I guess? That was hard for me.

"Put it down," he said. "That's kind of you, but I'm afraid I'm not in the mood for dessert."

I set the cake down on a side table, along with the two plates and two forks I'd managed to bring along with me. I could tell by his expression that whatever it was he was going to say to me, I wasn't going to like it. "What's wrong?"

I asked him.

I hadn't talked to him about the other woman yet, but as he walked toward me, the graveness of his expression told me

he was going to reveal his decision to me. I was so nervous, my hands were shaking.

It was strange. I could tell that those emotions were not mine, yet, I was still controlled by them. On one hand, I knew this was all just an illusion that the Moonlit Crystal created, on the other hand, it was so real that I almost

thought I was her, the king's mistress.

I bet without knowing their own identities, Brook, Jake and even Warren would truly think they were the people from

this world.

He didn't answer me, so with my nerves getting the best of me, I continued to speak. "I took a lot of time making this cake for you, Your Majesty."

He shook his head. "You didn't need to go to any trouble for me. I've appreciated how well you've treated me these past three years, how you've always been there for me, but that time has ended now."

"What?" My voice trembled with emotion as I spoke. "You can't be serious?"

"I'm afraid so. It seems... I don't love you after all. I am in love with someone else, and I plan to marry her. Again, I thank you for your service, but that's in the past now, and I will move forward with my fiancée, the love of my life."

"That's okay," I said quickly, trying my best to think of a way to salvage the situation. "Even if you love someone more, I can still be of service to you. I can still accompany you. The people in the castle know and respect me. They will continue to do so. I am willing to be your silent partner."

He shook his head. "No, no. That won't be necessary. My partner will be here with me every step of the way. In fact, the only reason I ever chose for you to accompany me to begin with is because you remind me so much of her."

With that, he gestured to the open door behind me, and when I saw who was walking inside, with a triumphant smirk on her face, my first thought was to grab the cake and shove it in her face.

Sophia!

Boy, whoever set this world up sure had an interesting sense of humor.

She pranced over to him, her high heels clacking on the stone floor, and I did my best not to glare at her. I wouldn't be able to convince the king that I was the right woman for him if I'd made him mad then by disrespecting her.

I watched as she approached him, moving gracefully but seductively. She paused beside him, placing her hand on his chest and leaning forward to kiss him on the cheek,

leaving a faint smear of red lipstick in her wake. "Hello, my handsome King," she said, her voice just as annoying now as it had been before we got sucked into this place. "I've missed you so much."

Warren—the king—wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close, and I tasted bile in the back of my throat.

the king had been someone else, I would have been fine, but... why Warren? This entire situation was making me sick.

Warren lifted his other hand to brush her hair back away

from her face, and when he did so, his sleeve moved back, exposing to the light the bracelet I had gifted him.

Sophia saw it, and I noticed her eyes going wide. "Ooh, what's this?" she asked, running her fingertip over it lightly.

"Someone special gave this to me..." Warren sounded confused when he answered, like he wasn't quite sure why he was saying that, but then he gave me a look that I couldn't quite read. I assumed it was part of our true history mingling in with what was going on in this magical place. But Warren certainly didn't remember who he was or he wouldn't be treating me this way while he was being so nice to Sophia.

"I absolutely love it!" Sophia gushed. "Oh! May I have it, pretty please?" She made some sort of pouty duck face and

blinked her eyelashes at him again and again.

"Oh... no, I think not," he said. "I'm sorry, precious, but this bracelet is extremely important to me. I can't just give it to

you."

"Why is it so important?"

"I..." But Warren couldn't come up with the answer. He pressed his temples as if something was bothering him.

"Your Majesty, you told me that I'm the most important one to you," Sophia begged. "And you said you loved me! If you love me, you'll give it to me!"

"I do love you, but—" Warren began. "But that doesn't mean I can just hand it over to you."

Then, she began to cry. Actual tears began to roll down her cheeks! She had always been a beauty, even when she was crying, but the entire scene was so ridiculous, I could hardly believe what I was seeing.

She certainly acted the same as she did back where we came from. Spoiled. Entitled. Bratty. That was the true Sophia.

"Fine, fine, darling," Warren finally said, taking the bracelet off of his wrist and sliding it onto hers. Immediately, her tears dried up, and she began to smile as bright as the sun. "I'm so sorry that I made you cry, my dear."

"It's all right, Your Majesty. I love you so much! I'll forgive you!" She leaned over and rubbed her nose against him, giving him a butterfly kiss, and I couldn't watch any more.

I couldn't believe he'd just handed over the bracelet so easily. That bracelet wasn't just important to him, it was important to me! Yet, he'd just slid it off and given it to her.

It was as if my heart was pulled out from my chest, thrown on the ground by the person I longed for years, and shattered in thousands of pieces.

It wasn't his fault, I understood, he didn't know who he

was... but that didn't make it hurt less.

Depressed and defeated, I backed up to the side table where I'd placed the cake and hoisted myself up to sit next to my creation. The two of them continued to make lovey dovey faces at one another, and with every exchange, I felt more and more sick to my stomach.

What better way to keep from throwing up the contents of

my stomach than to put more in it? "Well, if no one else wants to eat this cake, I guess I'll eat it myself," I said. I picked up a fork and dug into the cake without even bothering to

Theo was right; it was pretty good. It wasn't the tastiest thing I'd ever eaten, but considering I'd made it,

I continued to shovel it into my mouth while the two of them gazed into each other's eyes. Really, the entire situation was ridiculous. Even though it was an illusion, it was u

Without even chewing up all of the cake I had in my mouth, I blurted out, "I don't get it."

Both of them turned to look at me with arched eyebrows.

"What's that now? Why is she here?" Sophia whispered to the king, but he put out a hand to quiet her.

"What are you talking about?" he asked me.

I cleared my throat, wishing I'd thought to bring a drink along for our dessert party. "For being so elegant, you certainly are being heartless, Your Majesty. I was just thinking about what you said earlier. Rememb

"Ah! That's so sweet!" Sophia gushed. She started in with the baby talk again, so I had to speak up to be

"If you like her so much, why even bother with me to begin with? She was your true love, so you cherish want to be

with her."

Sophia was extremely pleased to hear what I said and hugged Warren even tighter.

I took a sip of water and continued, "If she was so important to you, and no one would replace her in your heart and you're so faithful to your love for her, why did you even come to me to begin with?"

Warren's eyes widened and he was stunned. Sophia wanted to say something, but Warren gave her a g

"I just don't get it!" I concluded.

"Well, I... uh..." Warren said, placing his free hand on his hip in a fist. "I've never heard you speak like that before

I felt called out a bit, and for a moment, I thought perhaps I'd ruined everything. I replied, "Same here, Y

wouldn't have chosen to be with you!"

His mouth opened and closed, but he didn't say anything.

“Sorry if my attitude is surprising you, Your Majesty,” I said, not really caring anymore. “But this is just ho

Both of them stared at me, and all I could do was laugh. Maybe it was all of the sugar, or maybe it was t and sometimes it’s easier to laugh than to cry.

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Plan B It Is!

Frustrated with the entire situation with Warren and

Sophia, and with my stomach aching from eating so much cake, I headed out into the hallway, thinking I would have to come up with another plan. I should have known that simply baking a cake wouldn’t be enough to get to the man’s heart. After all, as a king, he had a ton of chefs to do that.

Almost the second I walked out into the hallway, Theo was there waiting for me, an expectant look on his face. “Well?” he asked me in a low whisper. “How did it go?”

“Great,” I told him. “The king and I are getting married right this very moment.”

He narrowed his eyes at me. “Your face said something else.”

“Okay, I failed,” I admitted, but I must have looked very upset.

That was why Theo gave me a somewhat sympathetic look. He led me around the corner where we’d be less likely to be overheard. “What happened?”

“First of all, your brother is the king.”

“Okay, then?”

“Sophia is the one he is planning to marry.”

“Oh, right.” Prince Theo nodded like it didn’t surprise him at all.

My eyes bulged slightly as I considered that response. “You’re not surprised that the king would rather marry Sophia than me? What? Do you think she’s prettier than me? Smarter? Sweeter?”

“I didn’t say any of that, Ciana,” he said, huffing a little. “Focus.”

I shook my head to clear it. “Fine, so we are going to have to come up with something else because he seems pretty set on the fact that she is the woman for him.”

“What did you do exactly to change his mind?” Theo asked.

“What could I do? He didn’t even want to talk to me other than telling me he was going to marry Sophia.”

“And the cake didn’t help?”

“Yes, it did,” I said, watching Theo raise an eyebrow while I completed my sentence angrily, “It helped to fill my stomach!”

“You ate the cake?”

I thought Theo would be upset, but after only a quick pause, he chuckled lightly. For some reason, I felt he’d been in a fairly good mood lately. “All right, Ciana, what’s going on? You seem way more upset than you should.”

“Do I?”

He nodded. As his intense dark gaze fell on me, all of a sudden, I just felt so aggrieved that I needed to vent. “She even talked him into giving her a special bracelet!”

Theo arched an eyebrow in confusion. “What bracelet?”

I was in no mood to explain to him my childhood encounter with Warren, but at that moment, I saw that Sophia had turned the corner, walking toward us.

“Look at you. How pathetic!” Of course she would humiliate me whenever she got a chance to. She raised her slender arm and on her wrist was my special bracelet.

“It fits my skin tone really well, don’t you think?”

“No need to rub it in my face,” I snapped back. “And I won’t give up yet. We shall see who laughs until the end.”

Sophia sneered, “Indeed, we shall see.”

After she walked away, I turned around and shrugged.

“Well, you asked about the bracelet, and she just showed you.”

“You said Warren gave it to her?” Theo asked, seeking clarification, and I nodded.

I couldn’t quite read Theo’s expression, he seemed really shocked. But why?

He mumbled, “How did he even get it...”

“What did you say?” I asked him, confused.

“Nothing. It doesn’t matter.” He focused back on me. “Based on what you said, it sounds to me we should move

on to plan B.”

It wasn’t my preferred way of handling this situation, but at this point, I needed to be open-minded.

“What do you have in mind?” I asked, folding my arms.

“He’s in love with Sophia in this illusional world?”

I nodded. “It definitely appears to.”

“Very well. Then we’ll make him trade her life for marrying you.” He made the statement like it was not a big deal.

“How do we do that?”

“It’s simple. We’ll find a way to take her prisoner, hold her for ransom, and before we release her, he’ll be forced to marry you. If the king refuses to marry you, we will kill her.”

“You and your killing people,” I said, shaking my head.

“Do you have a better idea?”

I did not. I couldn’t think of anything better, so after a few moments, I said, “No. Fine. Okay. We’ll do it y our way.”

I almost thought he was smiling, but whatever that expression was, it faded away quickly enough.

“So... when do we do this?” I asked him, hoping he had already worked the plan out. He seemed to be very set on this plan, after all, so surely he had some ideas.

“The day of the wedding.”

“Won’t there be a lot of guards around them both at that time?” I asked him, slightly confused.

Theo shook his head. “No, there will be at the venue most likely, but we will get her here at the palace before she is on her way to the wedding venue, which is likely going to be the royal chapel. Any royal palaces would have tunnels and

secret passages. That should make it easier for us to find her and take her hostage without anyone detecting what we are up to.”

He did have a plan in mind alright. “How do you know that?” We hadn’t been here that long.

“I hear things.”

“All right,” I agreed. “That sounds good. But we will need to take some time to figure out the map of the place and the terrain. We will need to make sure we have everything under control before we attempt t o take her prisoner.”

He nodded in agreement with me, and I smiled slightly,

satisfied that I had come up with something that actually contributed to the plan.

“We should have some time,” he said, thinking again. “Although I’m not exactly sure how time works he re in this realm.”

“Me neither,” I admitted. I hoped we could get all of it done and still get out in time to use the crystal to help with the

berry.

“All right. Let’s go to your chambers for some more planning.”

My chambers?

Immediately, I felt my cheeks heat up and had to look away from him. I was certain all he wanted to do was speak about the plans we had for Sophia, but just the thought of being in my bedroom alone with him again had my head spinning slightly. I was so out of sorts that I didn’t realize a guard was approaching us until I heard his voice.

“Miss?” he called, and I thought that might have been the first time anyone had addressed me so casually since I got

there.

“Yes?” I said, turning to face him. “How can I help you?”

“I am to escort you to Miss Sophia’s palace right away,” he explained to me.

Confused, I turned to look at Theo. He shrugged at me.

Turning back to the guard, I asked, “Uhm... why is that?”

“You are being summoned to be the new maid for Miss Sophia, and you must report there at once,” he said in a gruff voice.

I frowned. Sophia was not married to the king yet and she didn’t hold any more of a royal title than I did. How could

she treat me like a servant?

Then I caught Theo’s eyes, and he nodded.

He was right. We needed to figure out all of the secret tunnels and map out the palace. That would be a great opportunity to do so.

I kept my face in a scowl so that the guard wouldn’t think I was happy about it, but it was actually going to work in our favor. To prevent the guard from feeling suspicious, I

sighed in an unwilling tone. “Fine. I will go.”

The guard shook his head. “Like you had a choice.” He turned, snapping his heels together, and I followed him, with Theo tagging along behind me.

As we walked, I hung back slightly so that the two of us could talk. The guard looked annoyed to have been long as I was coming without giving him too much trouble.

“Exactly what we needed,” Theo whispered.

He was right, of course. And if I could get Sophia to trust me, that would make it even easier for us to take. While we were making our way through the palace to a much smaller, beautiful little house set off in the distance, I did, too, including where the guards were positioned, how many there were, and how attentive they seemed. After a few minutes, the guard escorted us inside Sophia's palace. I was surprised that she was already in the king's quarters...

"There you are, girl!" she barked at me. I tipped my head to her, hard as it was, trying to be respectful. "No longer favored by the king, I will teach you some humility! It will be your job from now on to wait on me

hand and foot!"

I did my best to look upset by this information. As much as I didn't want to serve the brat, if she sent me to the kitchen, it would actually help me get the palace mapped out sooner. But I was too optimistic.

"Now, the first thing I will need for you to do is to go out to the garden!" Sophia swung her arm around the door

the window.

It was gorgeous, full of beautiful red rose bushes and other flowers.

"What would you like for me to do in the garden?"

"Silence!" she shouted her nose in the air. "You will not speak to me unless I speak to you first!"

"Yes, miss," I said.

"I just said not to speak to me!"

"Unless you speak to me first," I reminded her. "Which you have."

She narrowed her gaze at me, and I thought I heard Theo snicker, but he was standing far behind me, trying to remain unnoticeable.

"You will pick the roses for the wedding ceremony," she instructed me. "And you will not come back in unless you have them."

"Yes, miss," I said. "How many do you need? Two, three, or a dozen?"

"Thirty-three," she replied, and I nodded in understanding. That seemed easy enough. "Dozen."

My mouth dropped open. "Thirty-three dozen?"

Her grin widened into a snarl, showing off her pointy canines. “Yes. Three hundred ninety–six roses to be exact. De–thorned.”

“Great,” I murmured, swallowing the lump in my throat.

I wasn’t going to have time to investigate how to pull off our plan—I was going to be picking roses for the rest of my life.

I turned to look at Theo, but I couldn’t tell if he was angry... or amused.

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: That’s Not Helping

“Forty-seven,” I said, doing my best to avoid the thorns on this long-stemmed rose as I clipped the stem with a pair of shears.

I had gotten them from the garden shed. I’d actually found several pairs and was trying each of them out to see which worked best. So far, that one was my favorite pair. It cut fairly cleanly, but it was still taking forever to harvest all of these roses. The stems were covered with thorns.

And I hadn’t found any gardening gloves.

Theo was standing off to the side, and I had to assume he was looking around, trying to figure out if there were any tunnels or secret doorways out there, but I was a little annoyed that he wasn’t helping me. He was standing in the shade of a large flowering tree, while I was sweating beneath the hot sun.

“We heard from other servants that you’re forced to work. What’s going on, my lady?” Brook asked worriedly. I turned to see her approaching along with Jake. It was clear from the way that she addressed me that she still hadn’t remembered who we really were or what we were doing here. Jake looked the same as before as well, so he also didn’t know.

“I am picking roses for the king’s wedding,” I replied, snipping another stem and removing the thorns before I nestled this one on top of the others-number forty-eight.

“How many do you have to pick?” Jake asked, eyeing the basket that was already very full. I had seen a couple more in the shed, so I had a feeling I’d make them all fit, but it would be close.

“Uhm, four hundred,” I said, rounding up.

“Get out of town!” Brook said, and I almost laughed. She

was too sweet to swear.

“That’s right,” I told her. “I’m about an eighth of the way there.”

“This is not your job, my lady!” Brook grabbed the shears from my hand. “I’ll call our guards and we’ll take care of this for you.”

Jake also agreed, “Brook is right, my lady.”

I shook my head and sighed. “She... I mean, the king’s fiancée, wants to humiliate me; that’s why she gave me this task. So if she finds out that I’m not working, I might be in more trouble.”

And I needed her to lower her guard with me, thinking I wouldn’t fight back, so that it would be easier for us to execute our plan.

“But you’ll be out here forever, working by yourself,” Brook noted. She turned and gave Theo a hard look, but he wasn’t even paying any attention to us from what I could tell. “Do you have any extra shears? Please, at least let us help you then.”

“Okay, thank you!” I nodded at the shears sitting on the ground. “You don’t have to, but it would be nice.”

“Of course!” Brook said, practically skipping over to me to pick up the shears off of the ground. “What about gloves?”

“Sadly, no. I can’t find any. Just be careful. Some of these thorns are very long,” I warned them.

“I see that,” Brook noted.

The two of them went down to the next rose bush and began to cut the roses, making a pile on the ground.

They were working so hard. Brook continuously wiped her brow with the back of her hand because she was beginning to perspire. Jake looked like he might melt, too.

I looked over at Theo and noted that he was still standing in the shade, looking bored. “I have another pair of shears, you know,” I called to him, stretching my back.

“So?” he asked. “In case you break those?”

I practically growled at him. “You know, you could help, right?”

He shook his head. “No. I don’t do such things. Never have.”

Irritated, I tried to remind myself that eventually we would get out of here, and he’d be the prince again. I needed to be nice to him. “What sort of things is it that you don’t do?

Manual labor or helping your friends?”

“Picking flowers.”

I didn't feel like letting him get away with being a prima donna at the moment. “I'm sorry, remind me again. Who is it that wants this to work? Who wants his precious berry? Is

it me? No, I don't think so.”

He grunted, but at least he came over and picked up the shears. Dropping to a knee, he began to cut through the stems, and I had to turn my face away to keep him from seeing my satisfied smile.

“Ouch!” Brook cried, shaking her hand. Tears formed in her eyes, and I could see that her hand was bleeding.

Before I could say anything, Jake was attending to her.

“You okay? Let me look at it for you.” He gently took her hand and began to examine the wound, and I saw Brook's cheeks turning pink as she glanced up at him through her eyelashes.

Were they flirting with one another?

I couldn't help but smile at how cute they were. Jake pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, gently cleaned the wound, and then wrapped it up. It was so adorable. For a moment, I was jealous of how the sparks flew between them.

“That's so sweet,” I muttered, but Theo didn't even acknowledge that I was speaking. But knowing how observant he was, I was sure he had to have seen it-even though he pretended not to.

A few moments later, a large thorn pierced my skin, biting through my thumb and cutting it deeply.

“Ouch!” I shouted, shaking my hand and immediately shoving the wound into my mouth. I pulled it out to look at it. “Dang, that hurt!”

I looked over at Theo, and he hadn't even turned his head.

“I cut myself pretty deep on a thorn!” I explained to him.

“Sounds painful.” He went about his work, not even lifting his gaze.

“It's bleeding profusely!” I told him.

“Try not to get any on your clothes. It'll stain.” He snapped through another stem.

“Seriously?” I mumbled to myself as I wrapped my hand in the hem of my dress. I didn't have anything else. I squeezed it tightly until it stopped bleeding, and then went back to

work.

“It's about time you got back to it,” Theo said, shaking his head at me, like I had been slacking because I didn't want

to work.

The nerve of this man! Had I actually had sex with him? I must not have fully arrived here mentally when that had happened.

"You know," I said, as I moved to another row of roses, "if you let me borrow your gloves, maybe I'd be less likely to poke myself again." I looked at the pair of thick black gloves. he had on and then met his dark gaze.

"Not on your life," he said, shaking his head. "Don't even think about it."

My eyebrows arched. I didn't understand why he was so protective of those gloves. He'd gotten so mad at me

before, when I'd simply picked them up while we were in his room that night when I'd first become his personal attendant.

The only time he hadn't worn them was when we first arrived in this world and we were both naked...

"Why not?" I asked, pushing it a little. I knew better, but I was so frustrated that he hadn't helped for so long, and then he hadn't even cared when I'd ripped my thumb open. "Why can't I borrow them? Lend them to me, Theo!"

"No!" His tone was sharp. "Now, knock it off!"

Now, I was growing angry. "Fine-if you don't want to lend them to me, I guess I'll just have to take them." I knew there was no way in the world I was going to be strong enough to overpower him and take those gloves off of his hands, but at that moment, I was impulsive and I didn't care.

Without thinking, I reached for his hand.

Immediately, Theo yanked away from me, and I saw anger rise up in him like nothing I'd ever seen before, not even when he had killed those would-be assassins.

His eyes began to glow and then, suddenly, he shifted, his uniform tearing into a thousand pieces as a giant black

wolf with red streaks stood next to me, towering over me. The gloves in question were shredded and on the ground

beside me.

I fell backward onto my bottom, staring up at him, my heart racing as I wondered if I'd truly pushed him too far that time. Did I really make him this upset?

Maybe I shouldn't have been so forceful. I should have let it go. Recently, Theo had been a lot more approachable and I almost forgotten that... he was the ruthless Dark Prince

after all.

He hovered over me for a moment before growling and lifting his front paw. I closed my eyes, waiting for the blow to land, anticipating that he would rip my face off.

Instead, he leaped over me, and when I opened my eyes again, I felt a whoosh of wind and looked up to see the tip of his tail clearing my head. He went to the first rose bush and began to tear it apart, ripping it out of the ground, red blooms flying up into the air and snowing down all over the place, many of them landing on me as I stared at him in

shock.

After that rose bush was destroyed, he quickly moved to the next and the next. I caught Jake's eyes as he yanked Brook out of the way, staring after the giant wolf in shock. I could tell he was considering whether or not he should shift

and take him on, but Theo had nearly worked his way through all of the rose bushes by then, and all around us there was nothing but destruction.

When the eruption was over, Theo disappeared behind what was left of a bush that no longer had roses on it, and I had to think that he had shifted back into his human form

and was on his knees.

Part of me wanted to go to him, to apologize, to see if he'd cut himself at all with all of that, but I couldn't move. I knew that I was in shock. I hadn't been expecting any of that, and here he was, destroying the entire garden.

Just as the ramifications of what had happened registered in my mind, I heard a booming, angry voice behind me.

"What the hell has happened here?" Sophia demanded. "What have you done, you vulgar woman?"

I turned to look at her, and it seemed that her eyes were about to bulge from her head, she was so angry. She looked even more upset than Theo had right before he shifted.

"I-I'm so sorry," I began, noting she had a half dozen guards with her. "I didn't mean-"

"Shut up!" she demanded. "You did this on purpose, didn't

you? You tore up my roses so I couldn't use them in the wedding! You don't even want us to get married! You're trying to sabotage me because the king chose me instead of you!"

"No, that's not true," I told her, but there was no use. She

didn't believe me. Honestly, if I were her, I wouldn't either.

"That's it!" she snarled. "Guards, take her to the dungeon!"

The guards moved toward me, and I couldn't help but sink a bit. Why was I always getting thrown in the damn. dungeon?

“No!”

I heard Theo’s voice and turned to look in the direction where he’d disappeared. The bushes hid most of him, but he was naked from the waist up at least as he said, “I did it, not her. If you want to throw someone in the dungeon, take me.”

### [Sold As The Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 385](#)

#### The Dungeon

\*Theo\*

“Where shall we take him, my lady?” one of the guards asked Sophia as I stood in front of them, wearing the torn remains of my guard pants.

Sophia puzzled over me, stroking her chin with one finger as she thought about what to do with me. I knew that Ciana was panicking back behind me in the garden area still, near where all of the shredded rose bushes lay, but there were guards between us.

“Take him down to the basement,” Sophia said. “I saw some kind of cages down there. Put him in one of those.”

I snickered, knowing she couldn’t legally hold me. After all, ‘she wasn’t yet married to the king, so she wasn’t the Luna Queen. She had absolutely no authority whatsoever to take me prisoner or hold me in a dungeon.

But I went along with her, all of it part of the plan.

“You can’t do that!” Ciana shouted.

I turned and looked at her, willing her to be quiet. She had to know by now that I was up to something, didn’t she? The panicked look on her face said otherwise.

Was she really worried about me? That silly woman...

It was nice to think that she might care a little bit about what happened to me, but in reality, she was probably just concerned that we’d never get back to our own reality if I was locked up somewhere and not able to help with our plan.

In the basement, I immediately noticed that it was not a dungeon. There were bars here and there that formed different areas, but I saw telltale signs that this room held lots of secrets. I had to wonder who had lived here before Sophia and what kinds of activities they might have used the area for.

It wasn’t to hold people as prisoners, not for long anyway. Of that, I was fairly certain.

“This’ll teach you!” one of the guards said as he shoved me behind a flimsy barrier of bars.

“Yeah, he’ll die down here! Starve to death!” another one laughed.

They all traipsed up the stairs, and I shook my head. Getting out of there would take me less than five minutes.

But that wasn’t what I had in mind.

I could tell by the way the stones were constructed both in the walls and the floors that this place wasn't as solid as it was meant to appear to be. There was more to it than that, and I intended to discover exactly what it was, even if no one else understood my purpose. It might seem to be a distraction from the true matter at hand, but I needed to sort it all out because I thought it just might make our task easier.

For a couple of hours, I took my time feeling along the walls and floor, looking at the different way that the rocks fit together, searching for some sort of weakness, a breach in the strong hold. A few areas interested me more than others. I thought I saw a switch mechanism in the floor, but I was afraid to push it because I didn't know exactly what it did. It would probably be better to do that under cover of darkness.

"That was rather impulsive," Ciana said as she rushed in, seemingly appearing on the other side of the bars out of nowhere. "You had to go and destroy all of those rose bushes and get yourself thrown in the dungeon!"

The worried look on her face actually made me feel good. What the heck was wrong with me?

Trying not to smile, I addressed her. "It's not as bad as you think. Didn't you notice how unique this place is?"

I knew her better than she thought I did. I saw the way that she was always looking at every place she was at, studying it, taking it all in.

"So?" she asked me. "You're trapped now."

I shook my head at her. "I don't think I am. You see-"

Before I could finish, I heard the familiar voice of my brother and saw him traipsing over to the other side of the bars to stand beside her. "What in the world happened?" Warren asked, still thinking he was the king. "I've heard Sophia was giving you a hard time. Are you hurt?"

He was speaking to Ciana, toying with her, acting like there was a possibility he still had feelings for her, and it made me want to lash out irrationally at him. How dare he choose to be with another woman but think that he still had possession of her?

Momentarily, I forgot that it would actually work in our favor if Warren was still interested in Ciana.

Instead, I found myself shouting at him. "Well, if it isn't the high and mighty king," I said, my eyes narrowing as I felt a darkness settle over my countenance. "Who do you think you are? If you've made the decision to abandon her, why are you even here now? Or... deep down, you don't even know which of these women you want, do you?"

"How dare you address me in such a manner?" he asked me, coming a bit closer. He and Ciana were right on the other side of the bars now. "You're just a guard, and I'm the king."

Snarling at him, I approached the button in the floor I'd found earlier, a loose stone cast among the others. I wanted to get out of there so I could teach him a lesson. No longer caring that it would be better to do this behind his back, I stepped on it, hoping that the flimsy bars would fall away.

I saw Ciana's eyes widen first as her hands went shooting up in the air. Warren's did, too, but I wasn't as concerned about him.

It wasn't the bars that fell away-it was the floor! And it just so happened that both of them had been standing over the trapdoor I'd just triggered when the mechanism was tripped.

"Ciana!" I shouted, diving forward to try to grab her through the bars. She was a bit on the edge of the part of the floor that fell away, so I hoped I might be able to reach her or that she might be able to grab hold of the side.

Warren disappeared beneath the floor almost immediately, but Ciana's hand darted out to catch the lip of the opening. I dropped to my knees and shoved my hand through, straining to reach her. Just as my fingers grazed the back of her knuckles, she lost her grasp and disappeared from my sight with a small yelp.

"Shit!" I fell back onto my ass. That had not been what I had in mind at all...

\*\*\*

\*Ciana\*

Water. I heard the sound of flowing water. My body ached, and my eyes refused to open at first. But somewhere nearby, there was definitely a body of water.

Blinking, I forced my eyes to open, doing my best to ignore the splitting headache that made even the dim, flickering light around me painful. I managed to sit up, pressing the heel of my hand to my forehead, and slowly, I focused, trying to figure out where I was.

At first, I thought I must've fallen into another realm. The place where I was lying was unbelievable, like something out of a dream. I'd been in a few enchanted forests in my time since I loved to chase animals and explore, but I'd never been to any place like this before, and I wouldn't have thought it was real.

We were in a cave. The walls were high and smooth, with a few stalagmites and stalactites here and there. The rich sienna color glowed in the amber lights that flickered off and on all around us, and when I tried to get a sense of just how many fireflies were flickering as they fluttered by, I knew it would be impossible to count. There had to be thousands of them.

The water lapped at my shins, so I wasn't completely immersed in it, thank goodness, or I likely would've drowned. Something told me I had been there a while. Looking straight up, I couldn't see the hole I'd fallen through. We must've washed down the river or something.

It was then that I realized that I was thinking "we" because I wasn't alone. Warren was lying on the ground next to me, and it was clear that his injuries were worse than mine. His face was pale, and his breathing was shallow.

"Your Majesty?" I said, shaking him slightly. "Wake up, please. Open your eyes." I slapped his cheeks a little until he began to blink. Then, he opened his eyes, and I could see he was just as confused as I was.

"Wh-where are we?" he asked. "What happened?"

“We fell through a trapdoor, remember?”

“That’s right! That little cuss pushed a button and made us fall.” He tried to sit up then, fueled by his anger, but he wasn’t strong enough, and he fell backward onto his elbows, swearing under his breath.

“What hurts?” I asked him.

“I’m fine,” he insisted, trying again. “I’m the king. Nothing can hurt me.”

I smiled a little at his determination. “You are the king, but you’re not immortal. Still, I agree. We can’t let anything happen to you.”

He looked into my eyes then, his eyes widening slightly, and I almost thought it was the real Warren looking at me, his expression was so tender.

It was clear he thought I was concerned about him because I had feelings for the king, but had actually been being selfish when I’d said those words. We needed Warren to help us with the task at hand, and if he was dead, well, how would we ever get the crystal to work?

He knew nothing about that, of course, so he was looking at me like he thought I was in love with him still. He brushed a hand along my cheek as he continued to stare into my eyes. “You were always so sweet...”

What was that? Did he still have feelings toward me or was he actually feeling guilty now for how he had treated me? If I were myself, I might smart off to him and he’d be offended, but I remembered I was playing a part. I thought... maybe I should try Plan A again by winning him over and getting him to marry me.

In any case, we needed to assess our situation and get back to the castle. I checked him for injuries. He had a large gash in his leg that started at his knee and ended at the top of his thigh. It was deep, and he had lost a lot of blood.

Somehow, he was still alive, though, which made me think he had already started to heal. Using some scraps of material from his shirt, I bandaged him up.

It was clear to me that he couldn’t walk at the moment, not until he had the opportunity to heal a little more.

So... the only thing I could do was carry him. “We should get out of here,” I told him, suddenly having a bad feeling.

“But how?” he asked, gesturing at his leg. “It would be better for you to go out alone and look for help.”

I fluttered my eyelashes to him and shook my head with a determined look on my face. “If I need to carry you, I will, but there’s no way I will leave your side.”

He seemed to be shocked to hear my words as he murmured, “You don’t need to...”

I interrupted him firmly, “I do! And don’t worry, my dearest,” I said to him. “I will never let anything happen to you. You are by far the most important person in the world, and as long as I have breath in my lungs, I will do whatever it takes to keep you safe.”

Yes, he was important. If he died in this illusional world, we wouldn't be able to complete that darn quest.

His cheeks turned pink as he took in my words. Muttering something under his breath, he looked away, and I thought he said, "I never deserved you."

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Chased

My first thought was that we needed to start walking, that we needed to get out of there and see if we could make our way back to the castle. I had no idea what might happen. down there in that cave. We moved to the mouth of the cave, but that was all of the movement I could get from Warren with his injuries, so we stopped and sat down so I could figure out what to do next.

In one direction, it was nearly pitch black, and the edge of the cave seemed to be surrounded by forest. On the other side, I could see the night sky and thought that might be the way to go. While there were still trees in that direction, at least it wasn't as thick as the path to my right.

For now, we were cold and wet. A fire would be nice for us to sit next to and dry off. I would reassess the situation after that.

With the woods nearby, I was able to gather some wood and kindling. My hands were trembling slightly, so it wasn't easy to get the fire going, but eventually, I managed to get a spark.

"That's impressive," Warren said. "Not many people can start a fire that way, by rubbing two sticks together. How did you learn to do that?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I've spent a lot of time outside."

"You have?" he looked puzzled, like that didn't fit with the woman I was pretending to be.

"We should get our clothes dry," I reminded him.

"Right. Don't worry. You're safe to undress. I promise not to look at you."

I certainly appreciated it. As the king's mistress, I was sure that they had seen each other naked before, but that wasn't the real me. I'd already had quite an embarrassing incident with Theo; I really

didn't need another one with his brother.

I created a way to hang our clothes closer to the fire. It was difficult for Warren to undress with his injury, so I helped him. Then I stripped down to my underwear. We sat with our backs to one another in an attempt to give each other some privacy.

"Thank you for staying with me," he said in a quiet voice. I tried not to groan aloud because I didn't want to talk about it right then. But it seemed he was insistent. "I know it might be hard to believe, but I really have loved all of the time we've spent together. I appreciate you so much."

"But now you've chosen another," I reminded him, unable to keep the bitterness from my voice.

“Yes, it’s true. It’s not because I don’t love you. It’s just... I made her a promise long ago. When I first saw her, I fell in love with her. I promised her then that if we ever meet again, I would marry her. How can I deny what’s in my heart?”

“Easily,” I mumbled, but I was so quiet, he didn’t even hear me.

He continued, “Now, here she is, not only did she come back, she also... brought our son.”

My eyes widened. I hadn’t known that! But either way, the news didn’t matter to us, nor would it change our plan.

He sounded sincere. I couldn’t help but think about how pathetic he would be when Theo and I kidnapped Sophia and forced him to marry me so that she wouldn’t die.

“I can’t bear the thought of disappointing her again. I hope that you can understand, dear.” He truly did sound upset. “I am very sorry that you and I were not able to make it work. You will always have a place in my-”

“It’s fine,” I interrupted him. “You’ve gotta do what you’ve gotta do.”

“You... you’re not angry with me anymore?” I could hear the surprise in his tone that I had given up on him—the king—so easily.

“Nah, I hear you. You love her and all of that. I understand and it’s in the past now. I’m sure you two will be very happy together. Really, there’s no need for you to apologize or even bring it up again.” I picked up a stick and poked at our clothes where they hung over the fire. They were beginning to dry but weren’t quite there yet.

“I mean... I thought you’d be a little more upset than that.”

All I could think to say was, “Meh.”

I heard him gasp and almost laughed. “Did you say... meh?”

“Do you think it’s going to rain?” I asked, looking off in the distance. “It would be really bad if we dry our clothes only to get rained on.”

“Uhm, I don’t know. You... you’re different now.”

Perhaps I had hit a nerve with him? Most likely, he was just offended that someone wasn’t dying to be with him.

“What do you want me to say, Your Majesty?” I suddenly felt bad for whoever this woman was, and felt I needed to say something to the king. “To beg you? I’ve already done that. To tell you that I love you for more than anything in the world? I’ve done that too. You told me over and over again you’ve made up your mind, Your Majesty. So why do you care whether I’m upset or not?”

He couldn’t answer me.

Ignoring him, I poked our clothes again and decided that they were dry. “We should get dressed.” That odd feeling I’d had earlier, before we’d left the water, was back. I thought perhaps we were not alone.

I put my clothes on rather quickly and was stepping into my shoes when I thought I heard a whisper carried to us in the wind. It sounded like people, in the distance, having a conversation.

And then the howling began.

Only it wasn't the sound of regular wolves, like the wolf shifters that we were. No, it sounded much more savage, like perhaps they were some sort of wild beasts.

"What the hell is that?" Warren whispered. I could tell he was nervous.

"I don't know."

We were both facing back toward the darkness in the back of the cave, where the noise was coming from. Whatever the beasts were, they were somewhere deep inside of that inky blackness.

But with every howl, they sounded a lot closer....

"Don't panic," Warren said, like a real king would during a crisis. "We'll figure it out. We'll be fine." He said it as if he was trying to persuade me as well as himself.

I closed my eyes to try to concentrate on my hearing. "I wonder whether those are—"

"Those sound like savage beasts that are hell bent on tearing us both apart." Warren frowned.

Another howl split through the night sky, and I could hear snarling as well.

"True," I told him. "But... I think it will be alright. Please wait here."

It was obvious that I'd surprised him again, but I couldn't explain because I was too busy trying to reach out to the beasts the way that I had always done to calm wild animals. I'd never failed to make a friend out of a beast before.

But it wasn't working. No matter how hard I tried to use my special abilities, the snarls, growls, and howls were getting louder and meaner.

"It isn't working!" I muttered under my breath as I realized what the problem was.

Ciana could tame the wild beasts, but this person that I was now probably couldn't!

"We need to get out of here!" Warren said. "We're wasting time! You should shift and run away. I know your wolf is small. You won't be able to carry me, but you can save yourself." He had a desperate look in his eyes, and I could see that he was genuinely hoping to save me.

Perhaps, deep down, he was still that kind and gentle Prince.

"No!" I exclaimed, forgetting for a moment all about the roles we were playing. This wasn't the king—this was Warren—and I cared about him. "I'm not going to leave you behind! Now, come on!"

As tempting as it was to shift, since I couldn't yet in my real life, I didn't want to take the chance right then when Warren needed me.

"I wish I could shift to protect you, but I can't. I'm too weak and injured." Even standing there, Warren wasn't putting any weight on his injured leg.

“Oh, don’t be such a martyr,” I said to him. I grabbed him by the waist and jerked him around so that we were facing toward the woods, the opposite of the way I had wanted to go. “Come on, let’s go! Hobble as fast as you can.”

“You do know the definition of the word ‘hobble,’ don’t you?” he asked.

Under normal circumstances, I would have laughed. But I didn’t. I just dragged him as quickly as I could toward the woods, hoping we could either get lost in there or maybe even climb a tree.

The noises were growing louder, and I could even feel the ground beginning to tremble beneath our feet. I could tell these beasts were large, and they were coming up on us fast. I couldn’t imagine the pain we would experience, and it was beginning to terrify me.

Who would’ve thought that I would be killed by wild animals when normally all beasts love me?

I also couldn’t help but wonder... if we died here, would we just snap out of this reality, or would we be dead dead??

“Really, you should let me go so you can run away,” Warren said. “I’m just slowing you down.”

“I’m not leaving you. Now, shut up and come on!” I ordered him, and his eyes enlarged as if he couldn’t believe I was bossing him around.

We had made it into the forest, but that actually made our path more treacherous. Lots of tree branches and bushes with sharp thorns reached out to poke us, so we had to slow down a little bit.

This was a mistake.... I should’ve gone the other way.

We continued on, going as quickly as we could, trying to dodge around trees and low branches. I had no idea how long we had run, but it seemed like a lot of time had passed. In the woods, the canopy above us was so thick, I couldn’t see the sky.

“If somehow we survive, I’ll make sure to treat you well....” Warren muttered, and he sounded almost delusional. I wondered if he was bleeding again and the loss of blood was making him delirious.

We continued to meander through the woods as fast as we could, but I could feel the beasts bearing down on us. As much as I thought it would slow me down to look over my shoulder, I was compelled to do so.

All I saw were dozens of pairs of glowing eyes in between the trees right behind us.

These animals were working together, in a pack. That it was unusual for them.

The only reason they would be doing that is if someone had summoned them, if someone was commanding them. No wonder they didn’t listen to me earlier.

Theo!

It had to be Theo!

As if I had somehow summoned him by thinking his name, when I turned back around, I saw the man in question standing in front of us. !

Both Warren and I came to a full stop in front of Theo, and it was obvious that he was seething. Why, I didn't know.

But then he told us. "I've sent these creatures out looking for you, but all you do is run from me?"

My mouth dropped open. They hadn't been chasing us- they'd been searching for us??

### [Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 387](#)

: The King's Bride Is...

After all of that running through the woods, trying to get away from the beasts that had been chasing us, both Warren and I were exhausted. Theo didn't seem tired at all. He led the way for us back to the palace, where Sophia had been waiting for us there.

The moment we came into view, Sophia came running over to us, already crying and carrying on, blubbering all over Warren.

"There you are, my darling! My King! I was so unbelievably worried about you! I thought I had lost you forever!" She flung herself into his arms and began to cry even harder.

It wasn't good for his hurt leg for him to be standing there, supporting her and himself. Since we'd stopped running, his injury had seemed to be healing somewhat, but now, it made me worried that he'd be hurt all over again.

Some of her guards had come out with her. I turned to one of them and said, in my most authoritative voice, "Fetch a healer for the king."

The guard looked at me like he wasn't sure whether or not he should do what I said.

"Now." I told him, and he jumped into action.

Theo arched an eyebrow at me, clearly surprised to see me take control of the situation. He also had a sour expression the entire time we'd been walking back. I had no idea why.

Warren was still leaning on me so that I could help him walk. Nothing else was happening between us. Of that, I was certain. So when Warren addressed Sophia by saying, "We need to talk about this wedding," my ears perked up immediately.

What was going on?

He sounded like he was about to give her bad news.

She didn't hear it that way. "Oh, don't worry! I have been working on things while you were gone, even though my roses were trampled!" She gestured toward the destroyed flower garden nearby, but Theo simply folded his arms across his chest, uncaring.

Keeping her at arm's length, Warren began, "I've had plenty of time while I was gone to think about this situation, and I'm afraid I've made a grave mistake."

Suddenly, Sophia was starting to get it. Her face blanched and she stammered, "Wh-what?"

"I have only been reunited with you a short amount of time, and even when we were together a long time ago, it was a few months. But I've been with Ciana for years. Just now, in the cave and the forest, when I was injured, when we were being chased, she proved herself to me. She helped me to survive out there. I can't just forget about that."

Sophia's eyes turned on me, and she glared in anger. "Are you saying you'd rather marry this... tramp than me?"

"Please, don't use such foul language to describe the woman I love. I know it's hard for you to understand, but you and I have been apart for many years, and people change. I realized I cannot hurt Ciana this way."

Sophia said nothing, only stood there, staring at him, with her mouth hanging open.

"What about... me? What about our son?!"

"You both are welcome to stay in the royal palace if you want... and our son will still be the prince. However, as a king, I can only have one queen, and it has to be Ciana!"

"How could you do that to me?!" Sophia covered her mouth with both hands, started crying even harder and turned around and ran away, back toward the palace, screaming over her shoulder, "I hate you! I curse you! Both of you!"

Watching her go, no one said anything. Even the guards didn't seem to know what to do. I was as stunned as Sophia and could only stand there, speechless.

It was Theo's voice that pulled me out from my shock. "Wow, I can hardly believe my ears. After all of these years, now you want to marry this woman? After the way you've just treated her? You are such a prick!"

"Theo!" I scolded him, wishing he would just stop. He was just a guard here, after all, and he shouldn't be addressing the king in such a fashion.

But Warren didn't seem angry. It was almost like he was his old self, from our world. "I know I have not treated you well of late, Ciana, and I apologize for that." He turned to face me, taking my arms gently. "You have been acting in the capacity of the Luna and queen of this land for so long. Now, it's time I made you my Luna Queen officially."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

Behind me, Theo grumbled, "It's too little too late if you ask me."

I wanted to step on Theo's foot to make him shut up. Why did he say that? From what I'd just heard, we were getting exactly what we wanted, and we didn't even have to kidnap Sophia and threaten to kill her.

"I haven't been a good man to you lately," Warren continued. "I'm honestly not a good person in general, but I'm glad it's not too late. I didn't go through with my decision to marry her because I know that this is right—you and me."

I heard Theo groaning behind me, so I turned around and gave him a look that told him he needed to stop it. He glared at Warren but eventually walked a bit away from us. I was relieved that Theo stopped influencing Warren's decision.

"Let's return to the castle and get some rest," Warren suggested. "The healer will be looking for me. Tomorrow, I will make sure that the finest wedding gown designers are at your disposal. This wedding will be perfect, and you shall have everything you deserve!"

I nearly jumped up and down with glee. I was so happy—not that I would have a wedding with Warren, but the fact that we were about to complete the quest!

Theo walked back to the castle, keeping his distance. I could feel his anger radiating off of him, though.

"Would you calm down already? What's going on?" Once we got back to my courtyard, I lowered my voice to reason with him. "Wasn't this exactly what we wanted?"

"Exactly what YOU wanted!" He scoffed and walked back to his own room.

I just didn't understand why. What was wrong with him? If I hadn't known better, I'd say that he was jealous!

The next morning, Brook and Theo both came with me to try on the gowns. I was escorted to a large room near the library, and when I entered, I found it wasn't just one designer, but multiple designers were there with racks of dresses, and all of them were very excited for me to try on their gowns.

A short woman with dark hair pounced on me first. "Try this one, my Lady!"

"No, try mine first!" a tall, thin man with a large nose insisted.

"You simply must try this one!" a plump older woman said, holding up a gown with a long train.

I felt a bit overwhelmed, looking at all of them. Everywhere my eyes fell, all I could see was miles and miles of white satin, tulle, and shiny white pearl buttons.

After careful consideration, I chose a dress to try on. The designers gathered around, watching to see my reaction. It was beautiful. I really liked it. Wearing it, for the first time in my life, I actually felt like a princess.

Everyone oohed and ahed, and I couldn't help but smile at my own reflection.

"You look so beautiful," Brook said, and I thought she had tears in her eyes.

I thanked her, but then, I saw Theo standing in the corner of the room.

"What do you think?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "I mean... with a skirt like that, you look like you could be dropped out of an airplane at ten thousand feet and sail gently to the ground."

My mouth dropped open. I almost laughed, it was so absurd—and a little funny. Although this was just a quest, not my real wedding, I still didn't want my gown to look like a parachute.

Turning on my heel, I headed back to the changing area, and Brook helped me put on a simple A-line gown. The skirt wasn't nearly as full on that one.

I made my way back out to the mirror and climbed the steps again. Swirling slightly, I took it in. The gown wasn't as full or complicated, but it was elegant, and I liked it.

"You look so regal!" Brook told me.

Again, I thanked her, but then, I could see that Theo was making a face. "What's wrong with this one?"

"Nothing," he said with a shrug. "I hope it doesn't snow, though. In a dress like that, we'll never find you."

"So this one is too white?" I asked him.

His only response was another shrug.

I headed back behind the screen to try on another dress. The next one was strapless, and it made my breasts look rather large, pushing out the top of the gown.

As soon as I stepped in front of the mirror outside of the screen, I knew that Theo would have something to say.

"What?" I asked him.

"Nothing. I just think maybe you should try a dress on in the right size. That one clearly doesn't fit. You're spilling out all over the top of it."

Frustrated, I turned to look at him. He came a bit closer to me, and I set my hands on my hips. Brook walked away, clearly understanding that I wanted to speak to him in private, and the designers were busy preparing the next dress for me to try on.

"Listen, you and I both know this is a fake wedding, so who cares what the dress looks like?" I asked him.

"Clearly, you do," he replied. "I guess you're happy to be marrying Warren, even if it's not real. You've always liked him, right? And why wouldn't you? Warren is a great guy. Sweet, charming, good looking. No, it's clear you're happy about this, and why wouldn't you be?"

Again, if I hadn't known better, I would have thought he was jealous. At that point, the best explanation I could come up with for his strange behavior was that he didn't like Warren for some reason.

I had no intention of spilling my guts to him, but I didn't like seeing him act this way, even if he was usually rude to everyone. Seeing him angry and frustrated made me feel anxious. I needed to fix it. Finally, I sighed, "There's a lot to my relationship with Warren that you don't understand."

"I'm listening." He folded his arms and leaned in toward me, like he was truly interested in what I had to say.

With a deep breath, I told him, "Spending time with Warren now reminds me of the time I spent with him many years ago, when we were both younger." My thoughts went back to the time in the cave, not the scary nightmare version, but the pleasant interactions that had happened in real life.

“You spent time with Warren when you were younger?” He was obviously confused, and I couldn’t blame him.

I’d started peeling the onion, and now, all I could do was explain. “Do you remember that bracelet Warren gave to Sophia?”

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#### The Truth About Our Childhood

\*Theo\*

“The bracelet? The one that you were very upset about?” I was shocked, seeking confirmation from the beauty standing in front of me. I couldn’t help but wonder, was it possible that Ciana was... her?

Watching Ciana prepare for her wedding to Warren was frustrating in more ways than I could list. She seemed so happy about the entire situation. Her face was beaming, and she couldn’t stop smiling.

It was almost as if she’d forgotten that none of this was real, that we were only playing our roles, and that she wouldn’t really be marrying Warren.

‘I couldn’t think of anything nice to say about seeing her in any of the wedding gowns, but the words I used to describe the gowns didn’t really reflect my opinion about her.

”

In fact, she looked beautiful in anything that she wore.

So if my stupid brother didn’t notice that in this realm or in reality, then there was truly something wrong with him.

Now, with her still wearing the dress that complimented her breasts so nicely, she had begun to tell me something that might just change everything forever.

“Well, I have a secret....” she confessed.

I tried to hide my curiosity behind my scowl. It was easy-scowling was pretty typical for me.

“Well, you see, a long time ago,” she began, sinking down to sit on the edge of the little stage in front of the mirrors, “I was chasing a beautiful white pony through the woods when I found an injured young man.”

A chill went up my spine, but I was able to hide it from her. I knew this story-very well. “And?” I asked.

She looked up at me, and I saw that my sharpness had wounded her. Not for the first time. “I will spare you all of the details, but we spent some time in the woods together. I helped nurse him back to health, and he got a very special flower for me, one I couldn’t access by myself. It was nice. I felt like I had a connection to him.”

“What was his name?” I blurted out, wondering if she even knew what he was called.

She shook her head. "He didn't tell me, so I also decided not to tell him. But it was still one of the best memories in my life. It was just about... being there together. Helping one another. Before he left, I left him a special bracelet..."

I took a deep breath, held it for a second, and then let it out. "As a gift." That was a statement, because I also knew the story.

She nodded. "Yeah. I thought maybe it would be useful to him, but if I'm honest, I also hoped it might help me find him again one day. He had on a mask the whole time, so I could see his eyes, but I never saw his face. I didn't know if he'd recognize me in the future though. He'd been ill, injured, so maybe he hadn't been paying attention."

Or maybe he could barely see, and even when he got better, he had double vision the entire time because of the extent of his injuries.... I didn't say that aloud. She didn't need to know.

"So... the bracelet Warren is wearing, it's like the one that your father made for you?" I clarified.

"It isn't like it. It IS it." Ciana sounded quite sure of herself. "I'm positive. I would know that bracelet anywhere. I didn't take it off for many, many years."

Being indifferent was difficult, but I pushed through. "So... you think Warren is this injured young man you found in the woods, and that's what makes you love him now?"

She scoffed at me, twisting her arms around and shrugging. "I don't believe I ever said that I love him." She blushed a little. The temptation to argue with her, to tell her that she didn't have to say it, almost got the best of me, but I bit it back. "He is the boy, though."

"How can you be certain?" I challenged her. "Maybe it's just a similar bracelet. Maybe he found it. Maybe the young man that you gave it to tossed it in the trash, and Warren found it there."

Then her gaze narrowed, and I could see I'd angered her. "He wouldn't throw it away!" she said. "I guess it's possible, but he has the same eyes."

Ciana groaned and ran both hands through her hair, pulling some of it loose from where it had been tied in the back of her head. Those loose ringlets framed her face, making her look even more beautiful than before.

"Your Highness," she said, and when she addressed me like that, it usually meant she was upset. "I'm not stupid, and I'm not infatuated with your brother. I understand that what transpired between us all of those years ago happened when we were young. We didn't know one another well, and we were relying on one another to get through a tough situation."

I listened, but I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing.

She continued, "Over time, memories fade and are replaced with approximations of what truly transpired. I don't know if the images I have in my mind of the young man are real or not, but I do know that it was an important memory in my life."

My mouth dropped open for a second, but then I snapped it closed. It wasn't like me to get emotional about something like that, her connection to the injured young man. I refused to comment at all because I figured anything I said would come out wrong. So I just continued to listen.

Ciana's eyes focused on something in the distance, like she was actually looking back in time. "I have some fond childhood memories of Warren in the woods, and I will always appreciate his kindness in getting that flower for me, but thinking that I was in love with him, well, that's just silly. Now that I look back, I was too young to know what love was."

A question formed on my lips before I could stop it. "And now?"

She turned to look at me, and for a moment our eyes met. I saw a flicker of emotion I hadn't ever seen in anyone's gaze before.

For a fraction of a second, I thought I saw in her eyes that she was genuinely considering whether she was in love at that very minute. Not with Warren, though....

Then, it faded, and she said, "And now? I think that Warren is a wonderful person. He's kind, considerate, and caring. He's gone out of his way to help me in ways that no one else ever has." Her words were complimentary of my brother, but they also implied that I was the opposite.

She was right, of course. It seemed that every time my brother had come to her rescue, it had been because of something I had done to injure her or cause her despair.

Warren was most certainly the good brother.

"Keep trying on your dresses," I said as Brook came back over to where Ciana was now pulling herself up off of the stage. "I'm going to go get some fresh air."

She didn't say anything more to me, and while I knew it had to have been difficult for her to open up and share such an intimate secret with me, I had to keep acting like it wasn't a big deal.

Once I was outside, I took a few deep breaths and looked up at the sky, piecing together all of the information she had disclosed to me and what I knew about the situation in my mind.

The bracelet. I knew it well. A while back, I was injured and hid in the Moon Goddess temple to recover, and I lost it. I went back many times to look for it but to no avail. It wasn't until a few days ago that I realized that it had somehow ended up with Warren.

I'd wanted it back....

The memories of what happened in the woods were vague to me. I'd been injured so badly, I thought I might die. When the girl came across me, I almost attacked her. Like a wild animal, an injured one, I'd lashed out at her.

But she was persistent, and she wouldn't give up, no matter how much I'd pushed her away. For days, she'd mended me, helped heal my wounds. She'd brought me food and water. And in repayment, I'd almost hurt myself again getting that flower for her.

I'd never done anything like that for anyone before. Something about this girl had made her so very special to me. I couldn't imagine shrugging off her story when she'd said she wanted that flower.

When I'd left, I'd done so in the middle of the night, realizing that I couldn't let the relationship continue to develop. Already, I had put her in danger. Already, I had created a situation where she could be hurt or killed.

At the time, there weren't many people I would've cared about when it came to having blood on my hands. But she was one of them. I wouldn't be responsible for causing her pain.

The image of the girl's face in my mind was blurry, but when I stopped to think about it, I could see characteristics of her that lined up with Ciana.

Her hair, her petite figure, though she was taller and curvier now, her long, slender fingers.

Then there was her voice, her laugh, the way she cared about other people.

Yes, it seemed clear to me now. I didn't understand how I hadn't seen it before. But now... I knew.

Coincidences did not exist; therefore, for some reason, this girl who had saved my life all of those years ago had been dropped right back into it when I needed her most.

It was a lot for me to take in, but at the same time, I had to think it through. I couldn't do anything rash or based on emotion.

And perhaps most importantly, I had to figure out whether or not to tell her the truth.

The injured young man in the woods that she'd thought she loved wasn't my brother Warren at all.

It was me.

### [Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 389](#)

#### The Wedding Ceremony

The wedding was moving forward far too fast. I didn't like it, but it had to happen.

I was assigned to do one last round of security checks in the wedding venue before the wedding party, and the guests were coming in when I saw Sophia. She was standing up by the altar where the ceremony would be held, and she had something in her hands, something small and delicate.

"Put it down!" I commanded.

Immediately, she set the ring that she had been holding back on the pedestal where it had been sitting. She seemed to have something else in her hands, too, but she hid it from me, and I didn't have a lot of patience for her bullshit right then.

"What are you doing here?"

She scoffed, "What's the big deal? He has already chosen her and I've accepted that fact. Are you saying that I can't even take a look at the ring? It was supposed to be put on me!"

"You wish!" Brook arrived behind me and said with scorn, "That isn't just any ring! Your Majesty chose this ring as some- thing special just for her. You will never, ever have any chance to wear it, no matter what!"

I knew how the ceremony worked. The couple would choose something special as a token of their love. This ring was the first real gift that the king gave to his mistress when

he confessed his affection to her, and now it will solidify their promise to stay together.

It wasn't just any ordinary wedding ring.

"Stay out of it, you lowly servants!" Sophia shouted at us. "You have no idea what you're talking about! He loves me, not that stupid bitch."

Just then, the high priest came out. Although Sophia swore and grumbled, she did move to the back corner of the room. Seeing that the ridiculous woman no longer posed a threat, Brook and I also backed away.

I kept an eye on Sophia; her hands were in her pockets. It seemed strange that she'd wear a gown with pockets, but she was. Everything about her was peculiar. She shouldn't have even been there. But the guests started to enter the venue

and I didn't want to cause a scene.

I was close enough. If she dared to cause trouble, I'd be able to take control of her immediately.

Warren appeared next to the high priest. My brother had always been a good-looking guy, and today, he looked even more regal and outstanding. Would Ciana really fall in love with that handsome face? I shook my head and forced myself to focus back on the security of the wedding instead.

The music started and there she was, walking gracefully

toward the altar.

I didn't notice how beautiful Ciana looked in her wedding gown as she stood at the front of the chapel, next to my brother. I refused to notice how that flowing white gown hugged her in all of the right places and made her legs look so

long while showing off her slender waist.

It didn't register in my mind that her hair was curled and framing her face, that she was smiling, that her eyes were sparkling, or how her lips looked like luscious red rubies.

No, I refused to notice any of those things....

To distract myself, I switched my attention to the overall security and Sophia.

Why was that woman messing with the ring? Just to take a look at it? What kind of woman would want to admire the token of triumph of her love rival? She must have had other motivations, but what could they be?

The priest had them both repeat some sentences. I wasn't paying close attention until I heard Warren ask Ciana, "May I have your wrist?"

Ciana looked at him a bit confused.

There was a crooked grin on his handsome face as he looked down at her and said, "I want you to have this back."

Warren pulled out the bracelet, the one that Ciana had given to me all of those years ago in the woods. Her face lit up when she saw it. Clearly, that bracelet meant a lot to her, and she thought that it was a special memento between the two of them.

Now I was a bit regretful that I hadn't told her the truth when I had the chance.

"Marvelous! Now, let us present to the Moon Goddess your token of love," the priest said, picking the ring up.

Not far away from me, I heard Sophia's scoffs again. I turned to look at her and saw that she had something in her hand. It looked fairly small and made of glass. I thought I saw a green liquid inside of it. She was admiring the object, but as soon as she saw me looking at her, she slipped it back into her pocket.

Turning back around to see Warren holding Ciana's hand and looking at her lovingly, I thought about the size and weight of that ring. I'd seen something like it before. I wondered if...

"King Warren, slide this ring onto Miss Ciana's finger so that we know you promise your love to her," the high priest was saying in his authoritative voice.

Then, I realized what Sophia had done. How could she stoop so low? It seemed she was somehow even more evil in

this world than in the real one!

I wasn't sure what would happen in the real world if any of us ended up dying here. It was only our consciousnesses, our souls, so to speak, that were pulled into this world. If we did die in this realm, would we wake up in the real world like we would wake up from nightmares, or would we get stuck here forever and our body would slowly fade away? I didn't know, so I couldn't take the risk.

"Wait!" I shouted. "Don't do it!"

Brook and Jake both tried to grab me.

"What are you doing?" Jake asked. "Have you lost your mind?"

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"Stop it, right now!" Brook whisper-shouted.

I ignored both of them. This was important.

Warren had the ring in one hand and was holding Ciana's outstretched fingers with his other hand when I pushed my way through to them. Both of them turned to look at me as I shot up to the front.

"You can't put that on her." I shouted as I reached them.

"Theo!" Ciana whispered, pulling my arm. "What are you doing? This is what we want to happen, remember?"

"I know the significance, but you have to believe me. If you die... you might die!"

"What does that mean?" Warren asked, but we both ig-

nored him.

Even though she clearly didn't understand what I was doing, Ciana's eyes were wide now, and I could tell that she believed me.

"How dare a simple guard interfere with the royal wedding?" Warren pushed me away from Ciana, and the royal guards started to gather around me, protecting the king.

"The ring, it's been tampered with—"

"Oh really?" Warren said. "Or you are just causing a scene so that you can distract us? I know you've been in love with Ciana. I let it be because you've been protecting her. But you're just a guard and you'll never be able to give her what I'm able to..."

"That's not at all it. The ring is dangerous! Sophia was touching it, and I'm certain it's been poisoned!"

"What?"

Seeing that Warren had put down the ring, I was a bit relieved that at least there was no immediate danger to Ciana, so I also added something I had wanted to say, "And unlike you, I won't keep breaking my own promises, and maybe I'm more qualified to be the one who she spends the rest of her life with!"

Warren's eyes bulged, and he didn't know what to say for

a moment.

The rest of the royal guards gathered around me. But before they could pull me away, I caught Sophia running up to the front.

She grabbed the ring and started forcing it on Ciana's finger!

"Sophia!!" Warren roared and I shifted immediately, shook off the guards around me, and reached Ciana just in time to use my paw to smack the ring off her hand.

The ring fell on the floor, revealing a small needle that was built into it that was set to trigger when it was put on, injecting poison into the wearer.

Warren came at Sophia, too, and as she turned, I saw a flash of silver as a knife came flying at Ciana, but it was caught in Warren's arm instead. He screeched, but it only made him angrier. Between the two of us, we managed to get the knife out of her hand. Sophia was screaming as the guards came in to pull her away.

"Are you all right?" Warren went to Ciana, grasping his bleeding arm with one hand. Blood spurted between his fin-

gers, coating his suit jacket as it trickled all the way down to his hand. But clearly, he was more concerned about her than himself at the moment.

"I'm fine. It's just a little scratch on my hand," Ciana said, raiding her palm to show him. "How are you?" I could see that she was genuinely concerned about him.

I tried to ignore the pain that radiated through my chest as I saw her gazing into his eyes.

As Warren reached for her, his red blood dripped down her arm and her white gown.

“Don’t worry about me,” he insisted. “I’ll be alright. Despite all of this, I know more than ever that I want to marry you. I love you so much. No one else would continue to stand beside me when something so devastating has happened.” He took her hand in his, even though it was bleeding.

“But... we can’t finish the ceremony without the ring... It’s the token...” Ciana’s forehead knit together.

Our gaze all landed on the ring, which was lying quietly on the floor. As Warren was hesitating about whether he should pick it up again, some green liquid leaked out from the needle, and the ring was quickly dissolved-Sophia must’ve just filled it with whatever poisonous and corrosive green liquid it was in that vial!

“No-!” Ciana cried, reaching out to the ring.

“It’s all right, darling!” Warren hugged her tightly to hold her back and urged, “I don’t need it on your finger to take you as mine. We’ll come up with another token of our love, and I’ll buy you any ring that you want in the world...”

Ciana dropped on her bottom, and turned to look at me as she murmured, “What shall we do now?”

I was still in my wolf form, so all I could do was shake my head. I saw her mood darken, and her eyes began to glisten with unshed tears.

There was extreme disappointment in her eyes and we both realized at the same time that, now that the ring was destroyed, she wouldn’t be able to complete the ceremony with Warren.

And without marrying Warren... we’d failed the task we’d been sent there for. That meant the crystal couldn’t be cleansed or activated and we wouldn’t be able to use it to

create a false blood moon!

Out of nowhere, I began to feel very strange. My breath caught in my throat, my heart began to pound in my chest. Meanwhile, my head started to feel like it was being squeezed by a vice.

The world around us began to spin.

I knew this disorienting feeling from when we were first pulled in there, and I hated it. I closed my eyes, hoping the world would stop spinning soon.

What did this mean? Now that we had failed the quest, would we go back home, or would the crystal send us somewhere else?

Shit! We never should have gotten involved in all of this to begin with!

[Sold As The Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 390](#)

Theo’s Past I

My thoughts were fuzzy as I tried to keep track of what was happening all around me. A whoosh of wind flew around me, and I felt like I was both floating and falling at the same time.

With a thump, I hit the ground, my legs slamming into what felt like a stone floor. I lay there for a second, opening my eyes slightly. I had to figure out what to do next.

Well, if the mission had failed, and the crystal hadn't been cleansed from the last user, then we would have to wait until the next real blood moon to plant the berry, and I would just have to find a way to make sure that I didn't hurt anyone else until then.

If that meant I would have to seclude myself and stay away from everyone until that could happen, then that was exactly what I would do.

It wasn't like I'd never done that or been alone before. I was quite used to either anyway.

Pushing up off of the floor, I turned around and sat down, the world still spinning slightly. At least my organs seemed to have settled back down. My heart was no longer hammering, my lungs could suck in a full breath of air, and my head was no longer pounding.

Something was still different, though. Something was off. The room I was in looked like my own bedroom, but I could tell there were minor differences that made it seem like per-

haps I hadn't quite reached reality after all.

Glancing around, I saw that I was alone. The others were not there—Ciana, Jake, Brook, Warren, and Sophia. That made

no sense.

I got up and started for the door, but it was then that I heard maniacal laughter behind me and turned around to see Luther standing across the room. He hadn't been there before; I was sure of it.

"You've got a lot of nerve to show your face," I sneered.

Luther walked toward me, his arms folded across his chest as he continued to chuckle. "Seriously?" he asked. "You still haven't figured all of this out? You are the one who should be concerned."

"Obviously, you and I see things differently."

I didn't have time to chat with him, so the sooner I'd taken care of him, the better. I was about to shift when I realized

that I couldn't.

"Hahaha!" Luther laughed. "Prince Theo, why didn't you show me your wolf? Is it because... you can't?"

"What did you do?" I narrowed my eyes as I waited for him.

to answer me.

"You know that every pack has an artifact from the Moon Goddess, right?" he asked, a snarky smile on his face.

Of course, I knew that. Everyone knew that.

“Well, before you had your brute of a Beta go out and track down the Moonlit Crystal, maybe you should’ve done a

little bit of research about where it came from.” He still had that look on his face.

Shit!

“Bingo!” he laughed again. “That’s right. It belongs to my pack, Ortiz—mine. And that means... I’ve been the one pulling the strings all around this little adventure you’ve just been through. Did you enjoy it? How did it feel to be able to touch her smooth skin? It must be so good to fuck that little—”

“SHUT UP!” I roared.

Anger coursed through me and I felt my furious blood rush to my face. I realized that if he had been behind all of it, it wasn’t over yet. After all, I was still pretty sure I wasn’t back to my own reality yet.

“What are you so angry about? Aww, are you worried about her?”

“Leave her out of this!”

Luther let out another shriek of laughter. “Why don’t you beg me? If you drop to your knees, maybe I’ll consider it.”

I took a deep breath, calmed myself, and quickly analyzed the situation.

“Luther,” I said with scorn. “Why don’t you beg me instead?”

“What are you talking about?!” His face dropped.

I scoffed, “If you were able to fully control the crystal, I bet you’d prefer us to be trapped there forever. So let me guess what happened. Something didn’t quite work out as you expected, did it?”

Luther’s complacent smile faded away, and I knew I was right. So I continued, “You didn’t expect us to have kept our memories, and you surely didn’t expect that we would be able to get out of here. You had to use whatever was left in the crystal just in time to keep me here.”

Luther clenched his jaw, and that confirmed my guess. I silently let out a breath of relief—it seemed that at least Ciana and the rest of the group should have been returned to reality now. Things were not as bad as I thought. That was good to know so that I could focus on dealing with Luther.

He stared at me viciously. The angrier he was, the closer I was to the truth. So I chuckled again, “So now what? Why don’t you show me what else you’ve got?”

Luther’s face twisted in hatred, but he soon calmed himself down and he put on his fake smile again.

Surprisingly, he wasn't as easily agitated as I'd hoped. I didn't like that. Enemies who were level-headed were much

more difficult to deal with than those who were emotional.

"You've used up all my patience," he said as he narrowed his eyes even more. "Let me remind you- I'm in charge here. Now, Prince Theo, it's time for you to get back to the show."

"I'm not a good actor and you'll be disappointed," I said, continuing to provoke him, "again."

He didn't take the bait this time and only sneered, "Well, we'll find out, won't we?"

36.20%

As soon as he finished his sentence, I felt like my feet

were glued into place. He was right-I wasn't going to be able to do anything to stop him.

As I began to slip into that dream state again, I heard him say, "It's time for your nightmare to continue, Prince Theo. Get ready for your worst memories to replay in a loop!"

Then he slipped away, and everything around me began to change.

The room we'd been standing in morphed into a field outside of the castle. The scent of the green grass hit my lungs as a warm breeze ruffled my hair.

But that wasn't the only thing that had changed.

I was small - very small. My hands were outstretched in front of me, ungloved, and I hardly recognized my own arms, they were so short. Glancing down at my body, I realized I was a small child again, and as the rest of the scene came into focus, I knew exactly who I was, where I was, and who I was killing.

In front of me stood one of the largest, most powerful, and most bloodthirsty warriors in our pack. He was originally sentenced to death for murdering his brother, but Father spared him and made him a soldier because of his battle skills. He was in his human form dressed in the uniform of our castle guard. I remembered that this was back when my father had been putting together a detail to go fight in an important battle.

This man, whose name was Zade, was supposed to be the most merciless and deadly of all of my father's troops.

50.06%

But he wouldn't be going on that campaign. Not after I

was finished with him.

The look of terror on his face continued to increase as he realized what was happening to him-that he was dying.

That I was killing him.

My body, on the other hand, felt riveting. Power, strength, youth—all of the attributes that contributed to Zade’s prowess as a warrior were seeping into me. I watched his face continue to pale and shrivel up as the very essence of life was sucked away from him, flowing through the air and rejuvenating me.

I wanted to stop. I wanted to find a way to end the pull that was sucking the life out of him, but I couldn’t. I didn’t know how.

And then, there was my father, who was standing next to me laughing and clapping.

Never in my entire life had I heard King Sebastian say anything even remotely kind to me. He’d either ignored me or put me down in every instance possible.

Until that moment.

And that’s why I hadn’t stopped. No, the rush of energy I got from Zade was nothing compared to the euphoria I felt from hearing my father praise me for the first time.

When Zade finally collapsed next to me, I began to feel all of the emotions the man had on the brink of death—panic, despair, and overwhelming terror, even longing for love. All of those waves of emotion consumed me and I couldn’t breathe.

I was too young to understand all those feelings. I couldn’t

handle it. I was dumbfounded; I stood there, panicked and scared to the core, until I felt tears streaming down my

cheeks.

When he fell to the ground, the link between us faded, but I could still feel the emotions from his death lingering in

me.

All I wanted to do was run away and hide, but my father was still overjoyed. “This is it! Exactly what I needed!” He ran his hand through my hair and patted my back. “I always knew you could do it.”

I stared at him and couldn’t fully comprehend what had just happened.

“You’re a perfect monster!” he exclaimed.

My eyes widened and I couldn’t believe what I’d heard. Monster? Had he called me that? Is that what he thought?

I turned to look at my mother blankly, hoping that she could wipe off my tears, hold my hands, hug me, and tell me it was okay. But when I saw her, all I could see was her widened eyes filled with disbelief, pain, and... disgust.

“Mama...” I murmured. I stood in the middle of the crowd.

No one else dared to come close, and all of a sudden I felt so lonely and cold. I desperately needed an embrace from my mother, so I called her again. “Mama?”

“Isn’t he amazing?” my father asked my mother after he laughed heartily once again.

I stared at Mother, my arms reaching out to her. How I wished I could see something warm in her eyes and hear

something comforting from her lips. But I didn't.

"No!" she screamed. My arms froze in the air as I saw her dropped on the ground, covering her face.

"No-" she cried.

At that moment, I felt as if every single drop of blood in my body froze. I couldn't move, couldn't speak, and I couldn't even hear anything around me except for the echo of her sob- bing.

I looked around at the other faces- my father's guards, other servants, all assembled there. All of them looked terri- fied and repulsed.

No one wanted anything to do with me.

My father continued to sing my praises as my mother was helped by her servants to stand back up. My father ordered that she be escorted back to her room.

"Mama!" I shouted. "Please, Mama! Come back! Please don't leave me! Don't you love me, Mama? Don't you love me?" I wanted to run after her because she was the one that I cared about, but my father took my hand and pulled me away.

From that moment on, she would avoid me at all cost, not wanting to have anything to do with me. The day I showed my father that I could do the parlor tricks that would make him powerful, was the day I lost my mother.