

Kings Breeder 421

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Secret Weapon

My name rolled off his lips. He had a nice voice, but it made the hair on my body stand up regardless.

Luther stood before me, looking effortlessly handsome. His hair was slightly messed up and buzzed at the sides. I could see droplets of water, probably from a fresh shower he had just taken.

Honestly speaking, he was good-looking. His chiseled jaw was sharp and angled. His seamed shirt sculpted to fit his body perfectly, and his gray suit pants shaped his strong long legs.

In this outfit, he almost looked as elegant and attractive as a fine prince.

However, my body resisted going to him.

If Theo's vibe was dangerous, then Luther's vibe was vicious. It was that aura he carried that made me want to stay away from him, in spite of his good looks.

"Ciana?" Getting no response from me, he called again. Surprisingly, like a gentleman, he stepped toward me but not close enough that he penetrated into my personal bubble.

My eyebrows pulled together and I remembered the purpose of this trip. "Forgive me if I'm a little bit confused. One moment I was in my homeland and now I am—"

"Here." He finished for me.

"Where exactly is here?"

He snapped his fingers. "Now you are asking the right questions. And to answer said question, here is my home. Welcome to what remains of the Ortiz Pack."

I had heard of the name of the pack when I learnt about Theo's mother, but that was as much as I knew.

As Jake said, the history was obscured. Their disappearance was rarely talked about. It was as if they never existed at all.

"I can see the look on your face. I'm glad at least you know who we are."

I shook my head. "All I know is your people faded out decades ago."

"Faded out?" He let out a humorless chuckle. "Is that what they taught you in school?"

"We never learnt of your pack. I found that out lately."

The smile slipped from his face for a moment. "We didn't fade out. We were wiped out. Well, at least the majority of us. Our remaining survivors were those who happened to be away at that time! This place is what remains of my people. Welcome to my humble home."

His 'humble home' was a mansion that could rival my family home back in my pack. The grounds were neatly kept and not a hedge was left uneven.

“Let me show you around.” The easy smile returned to his face. “Follow me please.”

I hesitated for a moment before I followed him into the building in front of me. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was walking right into the mouth of a viper.

Luther stopped and looked over his shoulder at me. “I'm not going to bite you, Ciana. Unless you want me to.”

My stomach churned at his sordid attempt to flirt. “No. No, thank you.”

Where was Theo? He had said we needed to figure out what Luther wanted. I hoped he was somewhere nearby.

“Watch your step.”

Luther was obviously a lot more relaxed compared to the last few times I'd seen him, which was quite understandable. However, whatever he was up to, I needed to find out before it was too late.

I nodded and followed him into the mansion.

I walked into the grand foyer and observed my surroundings. This place was beautiful. White marble covered the floors and large crystal chandelier hung high above us. In the center of the room sat a small table with a white vase with pink cherry blossoms in it.

However, as we came to the end of the hallway, it split left and right, leading to opposite directions. I was surprised to see the left hand side looked dilapidated, as if it had gone through major destruction and hadn't been repaired ever since, while the right hand side was pristine and lavish.

“The guest wing is on the right.” Luther gestured for me to follow him.

“What's on the left?”

“That's where I stay,” Luther answered with a smile, but I could sense pain in his voice. “I know what you want to ask. I intentionally kept the master wing the way it was since that horrific day, so that I'll always remind myself what Sabastian had put us through!”

“I'm sorry for your loss.” At that moment, I truly felt bad for Luther. As much as I dislike Luther, King Sebastian was as much to be blamed, if not more.

He stopped in his tracks and turned to look at me.

“Ciana, you have a gentle heart.” He smiled. However, the next moment, his face fell, and his tone turned cold as he continued, “But kindness is useless! Now come, we still have more to see of your new home.”

“This is not my new home.”

“Well, it's not like you are leaving anytime soon.”

“You can't keep me captive here for long. My people will come for me. My parents will come for me!”

“Your people sent you here, Ciana. Raymond trusts me and we made an agreement. As for Alpha and Luna Black, even you don't know where they are and when they'll be back. Am I right?”

Damn it, he obviously had done his homework.

I stopped short. "What kind of agreement did you have with Raymond?" I figured, there was no cost for me to ask the question.

"One that you need not concern yourself over." He started walking up the stairs, "Come on, catch up."

"I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what is going on."

"Who do you think you are to speak to Alpha Luther like that?" A woman dressed in a beautiful blue dress walked towards us.

She looked almost ethereal. Her bleach blonde hair was done

in an elegant up-do and her striking gray eyes found Luther. But her gaze shifted to mine as she scowled.

"Alpha," she walked over to Luther and placed a kiss against his cheek, "I heard we had a guest. I didn't realize it was 'she'."

The way she said 'she' was like it was bitter acid to her tongue.

"Ciana, this is my partner, Jennifer. Jennifer, this is a very special guest of mine, Ciana. We will welcome her with open arms."

"She is no guest of mine. She associates with those ones."

"No, she doesn't. She will soon be joining in our fight." He bit out and gave his order to Jennifer. "Now you may carry on. I have much to discuss with her."

"Alpha, are you sending me away?" Jennifer stared at Luther like she could not believe what she was hearing.

"Be good." His words weren't harsh, but the warning in his tone was very clear.

She didn't dare to linger around any more and walked away unhappily. The clicking of her high heels echoed in the hallway.

Luther ignored the noise and turned his attention fully to me.

"Ciana, if you would follow me please. I'll take you to your room."

Luther offered me his arm and I reluctantly took it.

"Sorry about that. But do not mind her. Sometimes, Jennifer can be a bit childish," Luther apologized, however, he didn't sound that sorry.

"It looks like I'm not welcome here," I scoffed as we walked down the marble halls.

"She'll be fine, Ciana. "You have my word that no one is rude to you going forward."

Had I not had the two previous interactions with Luther before, I might actually have appreciated his gesture.

However, he wasn't a friend. That was for sure.

“She’s your partner and I am-”

“The key to getting my revenge. You see, Sebastian took my home from me. He destroyed the hearts of my people all because of greed and stupidity. He ruined countless lives and now I will get my revenge. I have tried many times to take him and his son down....”

I smirked, intentionally irritating him a little, “But Prince Theo is way too good of a warrior, and you haven’t been successful?”

Luther wanted something from me, so I assumed at least he wouldn’t physically hurt me.

“That smart mouth of yours will get you in trouble,” he chuckled. I couldn’t tell whether he was upset or not. “Luckily, I’m a forgiving man.”

I almost rolled my eyes. My mind was transported back to that time when I first met Theo. The girls who had lunged for him, trying to kill him. Was it Luther who was behind that assassination attempt as well?

“You were the one who sent those seven girls, those assassins who were part of Theo’s consort?”

Luther smiled. “Yes and no. I didn’t send them. They volunteered. All I did was train them and show them an opportunity... but too bad it didn’t work out. If the Dark Prince could be taken down so easily, he wouldn’t be the Dark Prince.”

“How could you say it like it was no big deal? You knew it wouldn’t work! You knew that they wouldn’t survive Theo and Jake. There was no way they would be a match for them. Those young girls didn’t need to die!”

“They didn’t need to, but they chose to. Ciana, do you understand that there are people whose sole purpose of living is to avenge? Also, you don’t blame the one who killed them, but you blame the one who trained them?”

“Luther,” I looked him in the eye and did not hesitate to point out the flaw of his logic, “What you’re saying is that a victim should be blamed for self-defense.”

Luther stared at me for a second and shrugged. “It seems like you and I would have to agree to disagree.”

“Revenge won’t make you feel any better. Also, Prince Theo isn’t the cause of any of the tragedies.”

“What do you know?!” He snapped.

“I just do,” I stated firmly. “Especially for you, it’s a fool’s errand. You’ll never be able to defeat him.”

Luther’s expression changed from irritation to surprise and then to an emotionless smile again. “That is where you come into play, my dear.”

We came to a stop in front of one of the guest rooms. He opened the door for me and motioned me inside.

“This will be your room for the time being. Please, make yourself at home.”

“You can’t keep me locked up like some kind of criminal,” I protested.

“Oh, but I can. You, my dear, are the key to everything. With you here I know that I will have Theo’s undivided attention.”

“What do you mean?”

“Patience is a virtue, Ciana.” A smirk took over his lips. “But I’m a generous host. To answer that question, you are my secret weapon.”

He reached out his hand and traced his finger across my jaw. I moved away from his touch and growled at him.

His smile slipped from his lips. “I will be hosting an evening event the day after tomorrow. You’ll be my esteemed guest.”

He grabbed the door and slowly began to close it. “Oh, and here’s my friendly warning, this place is a fortress. No one gets in or out, so I’d recommend you save your energy from trying to escape.”

He closed the door leaving me alone in the luxurious room.

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Theo Saves The Day

After Luther left, I rested on the bed. The mattress was soft and plush and made staying awake hard.

With all that had gone on in my pack and now this with Luther, my body was spent. Sleep found me long before I could even fight it.

The next time I opened my eyes it was to the sound of light knocking. I groaned and sat up in bed. It took my mind a moment to remember where I was.

The door to my room unlocked and in walked a middle aged woman dressed in a maid’s uniform.

“Good morning, Miss Ciana.” She bowed her head and walked in with a trolley with an assortment of different foods. “Alpha Luther sent me with your breakfast. I will be bringing your clothes shortly.”

She pushed the trolley to my bed where I caught a whiff of the food. It smelled heavenly and my stomach responded by grumbling.

“The chef prepared eggs Benedict. Will this suffice for you?”

I nodded looking at the food. As far as prison food went, this wasn’t half bad- honestly, way better than when I was in Theo’s dungeon. If I hadn’t been so hungry I would have denied the tasty breakfast but I needed my strength.

The thought of Theo sometimes made me question my own judgment. There definitely had been times I wished I could strangle the Dark Prince, yet, in a situation like this, he was the only one I’d trust without any reservation.

After we’d been through so much together, I wondered whether he trusted me as much as I did him?

“My name is Magnolia and I will be your aid.” She smiled and bowed to me before leaving the room.

I pulled the sheets off my body and walked to the trolley.

The food was delicious, I had to admit. Getting myself replenished with energy was a wise choice in a situation like this.

I wondered what Tallis, or should I say Theo, had been up to? Did he know where Luther took me? Was he with me in this place? If so, where would he be?

It had been more than 12 hours since I'd arrived and I hadn't gotten any news from him. Should I be worried that he somehow didn't make it? After all, the Dark Prince was very busy. Or what if... he got into trouble?

I shook that thought off. No, he was the most fearsome person in the world. Anyone could get in trouble with him, but probably not the other way around. However, whatever his situation was, if I didn't hear from him for another day, I would plan to escape on my own. I didn't want to be here longer than I had to.

Just then, the door opened again. Speaking of the devil.

However, to my disappointment, it wasn't Theo.

Magnolia returned to the room with a movable rack of gowns along with other things.

"Miss, I'm glad that you seem to have enjoyed your food." Magnolia was happy to see my empty plates. Behind her, a young girl took my plate away and cleaned up the room.

"Yes, it's delicious. Thank you. Would you be able to take me to the kitchen so that I can say thank you to the chef?" I needed to do my best to familiarize myself with the layout of this place. Sitting there and waiting for others to come to rescue me was not my way of handling life.

Magnolia nodded to me. "Of course, Miss, but we need to prepare for the event first."

"Now? It's not until tomorrow evening."

Magnolia looked me up and down. I felt like she was judging me even though she didn't make any comments. And then she said with a polite smile. "We have a lot of work to do. Not only do we need to get this fitted to your body but I'm afraid that we'll have to give you a good scrub."

"I don't need to be 'scrubbed'. I am perfectly capable of bathing myself."

She maintained her emotionless smile and kept the same even tone. "It's about grooming, Miss. This event is very important to Alpha and he needs you to be at your very best. We need to do a full beauty treatment on you today and that could take hours. Tomorrow, we can just focus on styling."

"Hours?!" I exclaimed. "I agreed to go to the party, but I didn't agree to any of this! Please tell Luther that-"

"Alpha Luther. You cannot call him without his title. You are not of the same rank as him."

I rolled my eyes. "Fine. Alpha Luther is out of his mind if he thinks I'm going to sit for hours while my body is pruned and pricked two days in a row. I am not some breeding horse that is being put on display."

“Alpha didn’t mean anything bad, Miss,” she said, “There are women here who would scream for being treated special by Alpha. You’re a lucky lady to be favored by him. Look at all those dresses and jewelry he prepared for you.”

“I’m his guest, not part of his harem.”

Magnolia closed her eyes and let out a steady breath. “Miss Ciana, please allow me to perform my job, and if you refuse, it will not be you who is in trouble but me. My children depend on me in order to survive. So please do me a favor and cooperate.”

I was heavily against all of this. I was not some little doll that Luther could play dress up with. But at the same time I knew I needed to play a part. For my pack, for Theo, and... I probably wouldn’t want to be the cause of her starving children.

“Alright. But no dying or bleaching my hair. And no tweezing.”

“It’s fine. We just need to wax.”

“Wait, what?”

“Just kidding,” she quipped. “Now, let’s get this started.”

After two hours of being scrubbed down in the shower and then being forced to sit in a milk bath I was out of the water and being dabbed dry. I had insisted that I could do it on my own but the woman was persistent. She wouldn’t let me lift a single finger.

Then I was forced to lay down when she gave me a facial and applied other products all over my body.

The process was tedious and boring, and I couldn’t imagine anyone who would voluntarily sit through the process. The only useful information I got from Magnolia was that they called Luther Alpha, but in reality, they were all from different packs originally, and now they gathered under Luther, and called their group “Shadow”.

After she was finally done, she told me, “Please take it easy for the rest of the day, and I’ll be back with a stylist. Once you pick out the dress, we’ll need to get it fitted for you before tomorrow’s event.”

I wanted to tell her it really was not necessary, but she probably wouldn’t listen to me, so I saved my comments.

Not long after she left, I heard another knock at the door.

Sighing, I dragged myself to go open it. I really wasn’t looking forward to sitting through another session.

“It’s you.” I exclaimed, couldn’t help the happiness in my voice.

“Expecting anyone else?” Tallis cocked an eyebrow.

“No, not really,” I pulled him into my room to make sure that no one saw him. “How did you get in here without anyone knowing?”

“I have my ways. Besides, the security here is flawed. I was able to pick up on their patterns after two hours. You would think a man such as Luther would have better security around his base.”

Having Theo around me made me breathe a little easier.

“Theo, did you find a way out of here?”

He scowled, “Why do you keep calling me Theo?”

I stepped closer to him and pressed my hand over his chest. I felt the lapel pin under the fabric of his shirt. There was no doubt in my mind that this was Theo. I was sure of it now even more than ever.

“Why do you constantly deny it?”

He stepped back so that my hand stopped touching his body.

“I’m not him.”

I sighed but didn’t fight him on it. He had his reasons for denying the truth.

He looked at the wide selection of dresses, shoes and jewelry by my bed and then he looked back at me.

“What’s going on here?”

“Luther has an event tomorrow night. He said that I need to be in attendance.”

“Looks like a costume party,” he frowned at the clothes.

“What?”

“I can’t believe how bad his taste in clothing is. Look at this and this,” he said, picking up an elegant golden gown and a graceful black cocktail dress, “Is he a bumble bee or what?”

I almost spat out the sip of water I just took.

Was the problem with Luther or was that just Theo? I remembered his comments about the wedding gowns I tried on in the illusionary world. Just how picky was he about clothes? I meant, it wasn’t like he was so stylish either. From what I remembered, the only color he wore was black-or at most, different shades of black, except when he was in his carnival outfit.

I rolled my eyes. “He’s not a bumble bee, but a wolf. A big bad wolf. You know what, let’s focus on the right thing. Have you figured out where we are?”

“It’s a hidden valley. It probably is where the Ortiz pack used to be. All of the roads leading to here are blocked or destroyed, so it’s hard to locate this place without knowing exactly where to go.”

“That makes sense. So, now what’s your plan?”

He didn’t answer me. Instead, he asked, “What’s the event for?”

I shrugged, “I don’t know. It seems like there will be guests. Hopefully we can figure out who else Luther is working with. After that, I need to go back to my pack. I’m worried about them and we need to get Warren out as well.”

“Agreed.” He walked to the window and looked outside. “The patrol at the borders of this territory has been enhanced since we arrived. And now that he has you here, I’m sure he is going to beef up security even more. As much as I want to, we can’t fight our way through.”

“So what do we do to get out of here?”

“We go underground. I found a tunnel that leads right out of the territory. I think they built it in for safe passage in case of an attack. We can use that to leave. But there is a problem.”

“What’s the problem?”

“We need Luther’s fur to unlock the entrance of the passageway. Without it we can’t access the tunnel.”

I walked up to him and stared out to the horizon he was looking at. “The fur of his wolf?”

He nodded. “It can’t be his human hair. It has to be his wolf.

And you need to get ahold of it.”

“And how do you suppose I do that? I can’t just ask him to shift for me.”

“You’re a smart girl, you’ll figure it out.” He turned to me.

“While you work on that, I’ll look for other alternatives just in case.”

This was a lot of pressure to put on me. “I’ll try my best, but I can’t guarantee I’ll be successful.”

“I have faith in you.” He moved away from me and made his way to the window. “I’ll try to come back tonight to check on you, but if I can’t make it, then see you at the garden. tomorrow night during the party. I need to go now.”

“Why do you need to go now?” I asked, but he had already jumped out of the window and disappeared.

“Miss Ciana, the stylist is here.” Magnolia’s voice traveled through the door.

How did I always forget about his damn good Alpha hearing?

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Can You Do Me a Favor?

I did everything I could to be cooperative with what Magnolia wanted me to do. Once everything was done, I was finally able to leave my room and get some fresh air.

Getting Luther’s fur. That was the task Theo, who still wanted

to be called Tallis, had given me. I don’t know where his confidence in me came from, but I guess neither of us had another option.

Tallis wouldn’t reappear until the set time we’d agreed to meet. And I better have what we needed by then...

I needed to think about how to get close enough to Luther to get his wolf’s fur. Heading out into the gardens, I wandered through the little pathways looking at the flowers.

In the entrance to the garden, there were beautiful tulips and irises poking up through green ground cover that had small blue flowers on it. The gardens were well cared for and so vibrant and colorful.

Walking deeper into the garden, I passed by an old fountain that wasn't in use. The basin was empty and the statue at the center was faded. It looked like the fountain hadn't had any water in it for years.

On the opposite side of the fountain the garden changed.

There were rose bushes that were thick with thorns and vines and hardly any flowers. The smaller plants that grew around the base of the rose bushes were wilted. Their stems arched over, the petals of the flowers curling at the tips and turning brown.

The soil was so dry on top that it was blowing around in the wind.

This part of the garden hadn't been taken care of in a long time.

I looked around and saw a few gardeners in other parts of the garden. They were working hard and I could see how healthy those areas were. Why did no one come and take care of these flower beds?

It was strange that Luther kept most of the mansion in good order while intentionally leaving some parts in their dilapidated state. Maybe like the left wing of his mansion, there was some sentimental meaning of these flower beds as well.

I knelt down beside one of the rose bushes and pulled some fallen leaves away. Underneath was a small sprout, struggling to get free. I helped the little sprout angle toward the sunlight.

Poor thing wouldn't last long without water and proper care.

The same weedy vines that choked the rose bushes would take over this little plant, too.

Feeling bad for the garden, I went to the nearest tool shed.

There was a watering can and a hose and a bunch of little rakes and trowels. I even found a pair of pruning shears. I gathered it all together and went back to the neglected flower beds.

On hands and knees, I worked to cut the vines off at their base and dig up the roots. These weeds would strangle the entire garden, eventually. With each plant I freed from the vines, I raked the topsoil, turning the cooler soil from underneath, then I watered the plants.

When I was done weeding, I moved on to pruning the rose bushes, cutting the vines off them and trimming back the leaves and branches.

"What are you doing?" Luther's voice came from behind me.

I whipped around and tucked my free hand into my pocket. There were leaves and brambles all around my feet.

"I could tell this area used to be beautiful. It's a shame to leave it like this. I love flowers, and since I've got some time, it's a good way to spend my afternoon."

Sighing, Luther shook his head and walked around me. He stroked his chin and looked at the rose bushes.

"These were my mother's favorite flower beds," he explained. "Sebastian killed her, and all of my pack. Since then, I haven't let anyone touch her prized flowers."

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to be intruding,” I whispered, “I didn’t know.”

“How could you? I doubt Sabestian is so forthcoming with the skeletons in his closet. Even with someone he wanted to see end up with the Dark Prince,” Luther said, giving me a wry smile.

“He just needs someone to be with Prince Theo, anyone” I explained quickly and redirected the topic back to him. “Do you know if there are any other survivors?”

I wondered if he knew about Theo’s mother, Lady Nita.

“He killed everyone! I buried their bodies with my own hands! The only one I couldn’t find was my aunt. I hope she was able to escape. I’ve been looking for her for years, but I couldn’t find her.”

“Your aunt?” I asked.

Luther had been able to manipulate the Moonlit Crystal. So had Theo’s mother, Nita. Theo and Jake had said she was from the same pack and could also manipulate the Moonlit Crystal.

Was it possible that Nita was Luther’s aunt? If she was, that meant Luther and Theo were...cousins?

I was stunned by my guess and I had to try to confirm it.

“Looking at you, I could imagine that your mother and your aunt were beautiful women.” I gently caressed the leaf of one of the plants next to me and smiled. “They must both have had beautiful names, didn’t they?”

Luther nodded, “Rita and Nita. I’d always loved my mother’s brunette, wavy hair and beautiful green eyes. As for my aunt, they said that she was the most beautiful woman of her time.”

I tried my best to maintain a casual smile, but deep inside me, I was shocked! Luther’s aunt didn’t just vanish, instead, she was taken by King Sebastian as a trophy because of her beauty. Not only that, she was still alive, and gave birth to Theo!

Did Theo know? Did Nita know? Theo obviously knew his mother and Luther were from the same pack, but did he know he was related to Luther?

After all, other than her name, not a lot was known about Nita in the palace. She was basically a hermit and the king didn’t like when others talked about her. Probably because he didn’t want them talking about how he practically wiped out her entire pack.

I wondered if Luther knew the truth, would he be so quick to attack Theo and try to destroy him? Family had to account for something, right?

“But that is all history now,” Luther sighed and shook his head, bowing it heavily as he stood before the rose bushes. “When I see these flowers, I think of my mother and I don’t want to be reminded of her,” Luther said somberly, pulling me from my thoughts.

“I’m sorry that your pack suffered, that your family suffered, at the hands of the king,” I said gently. I came up beside Luther and gave him a friendly, understanding smile.

This seemed like my chance to get closer to him. He’d opened up to me, and if I played my cards right, I’d be able to get the wolf fur from him.

Luther scoffed. "You don't have to pretend to be nice over it. I know where your loyalties lie."

"Before now, I didn't know what King Sebastian was truly capable of," I said, keeping my voice soft and gentle.

There was a part of me that wanted to tell him Theo was his cousin and that his aunt was alive. Given what he'd just told me, the news of his aunt might upset him more. He'd probably never accept that Theo was his cousin and it could shut him down completely.

It was better to keep the focus on him and his family.

"You know, I think that we should restore these rose bushes and flower beds," I said, pulling out the pruning shears and smiling at Luther.

He arched an eyebrow at me. "Why? They are an unpleasant reminder."

"That's a dark way of looking at it. These were your mother's favorite flowers. Taking care of them would honor her memory. Besides, it is a reminder that she existed, a reminder of the time you did have with her," I answered, smiling to keep things light.

Luther shook his head, unconvinced. When he went to turn away, I grabbed his arm. He gave me a look and I quickly released his arm.

"Look, your mother planted these flowers and made them beautiful. In honor of her, they should keep on being beautiful. It is the mark she left on this world, the legacy she left for you. If she was still alive, what do you think she would want for these flower beds?"

Luther's eyes widened and he stepped back from me. For a moment, I thought I'd crossed a line with him, but his scowl softened and he nodded once.

"Why did you say those things? Don't you hate me?" he asked, tilting his head to the side.

"I don't hate you, Luther. I understand you. King Sebastian destroyed your pack and you seek revenge. Believe it or not, I think I have some personal insight into that," I explained.

My mind instantly wandered to Raymond and Hawke and all the damage they'd done to my own pack. Luther was a part of that, but maybe, by establishing common ground, I could convince him not to support Raymond.

"I'm not saying we're going to be friends, but we don't have to be enemies," I suggested, giving him a hopeful look.

Luther stroked his chin in deep contemplation, his eyes unfocused and distant. After a long, long moment, he raised his eyes to mine.

We stared at each other while he thought things over.

"Well, Miss Ciana, you've won me over. I'd like to see my mother's flower beds restored. If you'd like, you can help," he offered.

"I'd like that. I like to work in the gardens." I nodded happily. I was so close now to being able to get what I needed from him.

Luther and I got to work preening and watering the flowers. He even found some fertilizer in one of the garden sheds and we added it to the soil so they'd have plenty of nutrients. By the time we were done, the flowers were already perking up and they looked so much nicer and cleaner without any weeds.

We stepped back to examine our work. My hands were covered in dirt and I had dirt smudges on my knees. Luther had a smear of dirt on his cheek.

There were still some flower beds that had flowers that were beyond repair. They were dead and brown, all dried out. I felt sorry for the plants. They'd never recover, but they could still be replaced.

He chuckled and rubbed the dirt off his face. "I must admit, you are a lot more interesting than I expected."

I laughed and tossed my hair over my shoulder. "A lot of people tell me that."

Luther grinned back at me. I hadn't seen him this relaxed or this open since I'd met him. He wasn't thinking only of revenge. I realized, this would be the best chance I'd have to do what I needed to do.

Suddenly, I had an idea on how to get Luther's fur.

"Luther, could you do me a favor?" I asked softly.

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Green with Jealousy

"Tell me, my friend, what can I do for you?" Luther smiled.

I had to hold back my scoff. Friend? The man kidnapped my dear Brook, cursed me, tried to kill Theo, and worked with Raymond to lead my pack to destruction. Just because he was polite right now didn't mean there was a chance for us to be friends.

"Look," I lifted my gaze and pointed to one bare spot of the flower bed. "Those little ones are all dried now, I don't think I can revive them, but I think it would be good to get some more color in here, don't you?"

"I agree, whatever makes you happy," he commented.

I wanted to say that what made me happy was to let me go back to my pack, but I doubted he would go with that. So I continued, "I want to get some flower seeds to replant them today."

He gestured for me to continue.

I brushed my hair away from my face and put it behind my ear. "I recognize some of them, they grow in the wild, but I assume I don't have the freedom to leave this property on my own? So I wanted to ask if you could accompany me and take me outside to get some seeds."

This time, he didn't say anything immediately. He stared at me for a moment. His eyes bored into mine. I did my best to remain calm.

Luther was like Theo when it came to analyzing people. He noticed every single detail which made it hard to get anything past him.

I had to bring out my best acting skills here, which to be honest were less than stellar.

After a while, his smile returned. "Just that?"

"Yes, just that," I assured him.

I couldn't read his expression, but to lower his suspicion, I shrugged, "If that is too much of a problem, I understand. After all, I'm not really a friend, just a prisoner."

Finally, he let out a chuckle. "It would be my honor to accompany you."

"Really?" I clapped my hands and did my best to sound excited. "That's wonderful! Where are we going? Is it far?"

"It's in the valley. I know exactly where to go. My mother used to take me there."

"I can't wait!" I smiled. "Maybe we could get there faster if you shift and carry me on your back. What do you say?"

"That's right, you can't shift yet."

I nodded, "My birthday isn't for a little while."

"I will carry you."

Luther began to unbutton his shirt.

"What are you doing?" I turned around so I didn't see his naked torso.

"I happen to like this shirt and I don't want it to be ripped to shreds." He let out a soft chuckle. "You know, as wolves, I thought you are used to nudity just like me. Why are you looking away?"

I felt the heat creep onto my cheeks. "Of course I know that. It's just that..."

I couldn't find the words I wanted to say. It was just that if Theo was around, I didn't want him to see me staring at another naked man, especially when that naked man was his enemy.

When I looked over my shoulder he had now stripped right down to his boxers and had an amused grin on his face.

"I'm glad you find this amusing," I said to Luther.

"You're adorable, do you know that?"

"So I've heard," I grumbled. "Now are you going to shift or are you going to just keep messing with me?"

He smirked and looked away from me. He did a little running before he jumped into the air and shifted into an impressive gray wolf. He landed on his paws gracefully and turned to face

I walked up to him slowly, as he watched me carefully through his amber eyes. Every movement I made was analyzed and anticipated. Despite that he called me a friend and he acted friendly, deep down, he was still skeptical towards me.

I raised my hand and reached out to him. His nose lifted and he smelled the air around me. Wolves could often catch onto things that we normally couldn't in our human forms.

When he was satisfied with what he had found he tapped my palm with his nose.

I was in the clear.

Luther lowered himself so I could get onto his back. I carefully straddled him and got into a comfortable enough position.

He let out a little huff and looked over his shoulder at me as if to say, hang on tight.

I lowered myself and clutched onto his fur.

By the time we returned to the mansion it was sunset and the day had already come to an end.

"Thank you for spending time with me today."

Luther smiled, "You're welcome, Ciana. And thank you for reminding me of something today."

We stopped walking when we got to my room. I held onto the seeds in my hands, my body shifting a little uneasily from Luther's proximity.

"What is that?"

"A shift in perspective. I never wanted to ever plant flowers in my mothers garden bed because the memory of losing her was too great and still felt too fresh no matter how many years passed. But you," he stepped a little closer, "reminded me that

it's okay to look back on those memories with fondness and to allow her memory to live on."

The sincerity in his voice threw me.

All of a sudden, I felt a little guilty because everything I did was to get his fur.

Luther grabbed my hand and kissed it gently. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," I replied gently. Would he feel even worse if he ever found out the true purpose of what I did today? I sighed, "It has been a long day. I should get some rest."

Luther nodded and stepped away from me. "See you tomorrow, Ciana."

"Good night, Luther."

I walked into my room and pressed my back against the door. I let go of the breath I hadn't known I had been holding and closed my eyes.

I reached into my back pocket and fished out the fur I had gathered.

Mission accomplished.

I poured myself a cup of water and sat down on the couch. Now all I needed to do was wait until tomorrow's party.

It was late and Theo must be doing whatever he thought was necessary at the moment. I probably should get some rest like I told Luther.

"You're back." A low voice rang in my ear.

I nearly jumped out of my skin from the sight of Tallis.

"You scared me! Why are you just standing there like that?"

His jaw was locked in place and he looked like he was on the verge of exploding.

Immediately my heart dropped, "What happened? Why do you look so mad?"

"Where have you been all day?" He bit out.

It took me a moment to register his words. "What do you mean where have I been? Did you not tell me that I needed to get the fur from Luther?"

"I said get the fur, not go on a date with the guy."

I blinked at him trying to process exactly what I just heard.

"You're joking, right? Need I remind you, Tallis, that you are the one that told me to go to him in the first place. You said that I needed to figure out a way to get the fur and I did. Why are you mad at me?"

"I'm not mad." Tallis moved to the bed. "Why would I be mad?"

"Did you not hear what you said? And look at yourself!" I grabbed a handheld mirror and lifted it up to show him his own face.

"I know what I'm saying." He glanced at the mirror and pointed at his reflection. "What are you trying to say about my face? That frown is just my normal expression, nothing special."

I didn't even know whether I should laugh or cry. "Can we just have a normal conversation?"

"Yes, we're having a normal conversation. Did you have fun on your little ride? What did he do? Woo you and whisk you away to some fancy restaurant in the town square?"

Looking at his scowl, I shook my head. At first, I was upset, but now, I found it kinda funny. "You are kidding me. Are you...are you jealous right now?"

His eyes snapped to me. "Jealous? Please. I am not a child. I have no reason to be jealous. Why would I be jealous of that half breed alpha anyway?"

I pressed down the upcurl of my lips, and decided to play along.

"You are the one who said I needed to get the fur. Did I flirt with the guy to get what I needed? Yeah. But did it mean anything? No." I stood up from my seat and made my way over to him.

"So you admit you flirted with him." He pointed a finger accusingly at me. "You find him attractive?"

"I'm not blind." I shrugged and rolled my eyes, again, intentionally to irritate him. "Any female with eyes would find him appealing to the eye."

"Appealing to the eye," Tallis mocked. "The guy is incompetent and generic. There is hardly any real substance to him. Is that what you're into, Ciana? Men with the same personality as a cardboard box?"

Yep. Theo had lost it.

"You are being ridiculous. And even if I was flirting with him, then so what?"

Tallis took a dangerously slow step toward me. "So what? He is the culprit for the problems in your pack!"

"Raymond is a bigger problem."

"Ciana, I can't believe you just said that."

"I can't believe you are acting like this."

"I am trying to help you so that you're not deceived by that Luther, rebellion guy."

"I don't need your help. Also, I'm the daughter of an alpha and you are just a stupid carnny. How is who I flirt with and don't flirt with any of your business? You are not my father nor my boyfriend."

Rage flared up in his heated gaze and I regretted the words as soon as they left my lips. Even though I was just messing with him to begin with, I felt I might have crossed the line.

But he had been poking at me and insinuating that I was being some loose slutty woman, which was really annoying.

"Stupid carnny, huh?" He took a dangerous step toward me causing me to step away from him. We continued this little dance until my back hit the wall and I was cornered. "Nowhere to run, Ciana."

I gulped.

His two hands pressed against the wall on either side of my head and drew his face closer to mine.

"Close your eyes."

My heart was thumping against my chest. I knew what was going to happen next and I closed my eyes, obeying him.

He then crashed his lips onto mine in a heated and possessive kiss. It was the kind of kiss that you felt all the way down to your toes.

I felt the tingles move up and down my spine as his lips coaxed mine into movement. It took me a few moments to begin to move to the same rhythm as him.

His tongue brushed my bottom lip asking for entrance which I gladly gave.

This felt like heaven.

And his familiar scent of the forest after a fresh rain... yep, it had to be Theo.

His kiss left me feeling breathless and delirious all at the same time.

When we finally pulled apart, my lungs desperately tried to take in as much air as they needed.

His eyes had darkened and I could see the lust swimming behind his irises. He was just as affected by the kiss as I was.

I raised my hand which still clutched onto Luther's fur. I slowly opened my palm showing him what was inside.

"This was the only reason I was with him today. Nothing more." My voice came out low and draped in heat and lust. "And I didn't flirt with him. He told me about his mother, that was all."

I stepped out of his hold and dropped the fur in his gloved hand.

"Now, please get us home."

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Maybe I Could Fall for You

The night of the party, Magnolia and the stylist came to dress me. After yesterday's preparations, things got done. quite efficiently.

I'd settled on a slim fitting dress that was lavender colored. It had little off the shoulder, three quarter sleeves and a chiffon fringe around the waistline and down the front of the skirt. The fringe went around the hemline at my shins.

It was a good dancing dress, but I didn't think I'd be doing much of that. I was only going to the party as a way to get Luther to let his guard down so I could get out of there. Still, I had to look nice and like I was enjoying myself.

After they were done doing my hair and makeup, and draping me with expensive jewelry, I looked at myself in the full length mirror. I never want to sound arrogant, but I did look beautiful.

If Theo saw me, he'd probably get upset again, thinking I was trying to impress Luther or something.

At the thought of Theo, my lips stung and I raised a hand to them, brushing my fingers along them, remembering his kiss.

Shaking my head, I pushed that memory aside and I headed to the banquet hall where Luther had the party going. Already, there were a bunch of guests there.

Many of them I recognized as alphas and leaders of other packs. I wasn't sure if they would recognize me.

I was surprised, because it seemed that Luther's influence was way more than I originally anticipated. I did a quick count and noted down those alphas' names.

There were a lot of other people there, too. People that probably worked for Luther. This was his party at his mansion, after all.

I'd need to keep my guard up and be careful. Otherwise, I'd never pull this off.

“Hey you,” Luther said, coming up to me and taking my shawl, like a gentleman. He handed it off to a waitress that walked by.

“This is a lot bigger than I expected,” I commented, taking a look at all the people dancing.

“I would like to introduce you to people,” he said, holding his hand out to me, “but before that, may I have a dance?”

I looked at his outstretched hand and hesitated. This wasn't why I was here. I didn't want to get too distracted or wrapped up in things, or give “Tallis” more of an excuse to freak out. Still, I needed Luther to drop his guard, too.

“Of course,” I said, taking his hand.

Luther led me onto the dance floor amidst a swirl of other gowns. He was dressed nicely in a deep, black tuxedo that shimmered like satin under direct light. Sometimes, his hand- some face made it hard to relate him to a vengeful rebellion.

He held my right hand firmly and then looped his arm

around my waist, pulling me close. My cheeks flushed a little at how close we were and I pressed my free hand to his chest to keep some distance between us.

“Don't be so shy. This is a party,” Luther teased, winking at

I reminded myself that I needed him to loosen up and let his guard down. With a gentle smile, I moved my hand to his shoulder and allowed him to pull me against him.

Luther was an excellent dancer. I was a little surprised by how gracefully he moved me around the dance floor, spinning me and twirling along with the other bright colored dresses.

I smiled, despite myself, thinking how much like royalty Luther seemed to be. It was clear that I really didn't know much about him and his past, other than the tragedy he told me about.

After spinning me away from him, Luther pulled me back. He positioned me so my back was against his chest and his lips were near my ear.

“You look amazing,” he murmured, “and you're a fabulous dancer.”

“Ha. I was going to say the same to you. I didn't expect you to dance so well,” I said, smirking.

Luther chuckled. “There's a lot you don't know about me. If you're interested, I'd be happy to share my life with you.”

“That's going to take you a while. You're a busy man. I don't want to be blamed for your lack of productivity.”

“Ha ha ha!” Luther let out some hearty laughs and seemed to be entertained by me, “You know, if Theo wasn't in the pic- ture, maybe I could fall in love with you.”

“I think you have some serious misunderstandings on the relationship between Prince Theo and me.”

Luther purred in my ear. “Is that so?”

"In reality, you don't know me that well."

"Then why don't you tell me some more about yourself?" He spun me around again and pulled me close.

"Well, what do you want to know?" It had been a long time since I had danced like this. Luther was so fluid. He guided me perfectly in time with the music and never missed a step.

"Let's start with who taught you how to dance? Your mother?"

I smiled, "Actually, my dad, and he'd always told me that a male that could dance was a male that was well cultured. How about you?"

"My mother. She taught me a lot of things before she was killed. After I lost her, I dedicated myself to being the best I can be at the things she wanted me to learn. Dancing was one of them. I think she always thought I'd end up in a leadership position or closer to royalty and wanted me to be prepared," he explained.

"I don't know if my dad expects me to be close to royalty, but sometimes he does want his daughter to behave like a lady rather than a little monkey."

"You're funny." Luther chuckled lightly and tightened his arm around me, holding me a little closer.

"Funny is okay, but not funny looking, I hope."

"Ha, ha, ha." He laughed again. His eyes brightened and he smiled warmly at me. Good, I was getting to him. He was starting to loosen up and be more comfortable around me.

The song ended and I pulled away from him. Now, I'd gotten him to lower his guard just a little bit. I needed to make sure he remained relaxed. At least, until I got out of the garden.

"Thank you for the dance," I said. "I had fun."

A servant walked over and bowed to him. "Alpha Luther, Miss Jennifer said one of the guests from the northeast was asking for you."

Luther nodded to him and then grinned at me, "I'll be around all night if you would like to dance some more."

He went off to greet more of his guests and I headed to the banquet table to get myself a drink. Just before I raised the glass to my lips, Jennifer approached me, eyes blazing, nostrils flaring.

"Who do you think you are?" she asked, poking me right in the shoulder and crossing her arms.

"I'm Ciana Black, daughter of Alpha Soren Black. We met briefly a couple days ago." I answered, raising an eyebrow at her.

Jennifer scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Don't be a bitch. I saw you dancing with Luther. You can't have him!"

"I didn't realize that Luther is your personal property," I said, getting her more riled up. If I needed a distraction, what was better than a cat fight?

“Shut up!” Jennifer spat. “You can’t just waltz in here and act like you own the place. I worked hard to get where I am now.”

“Right, and you don’t want any competition. Is that it? You want to be the only woman in Luther’s life? I’m wondering if you’ve ever asked him if that is what he wants.”

Jennifer’s jaw dropped open. She shook her head and glared at me. “I’m the only woman he needs.”

“Which is why he just danced with me and hasn’t even looked your way,” I said, shaking my head and smiling humor- lessly.

I reached for my drink and took a quick sip, preparing my- self for some more talking while Jennifer fumed, her nostrils flaring. She pointed a finger at me and sputtered a few times.

“Wh-what! Y-y... you’re such a cunt!” she snapped.

I kinda felt bad for her. If I were her and I had an issue with my partner, I’d go directly to my partner for verification rather than going to an outsider. The fact that she came to me instead of Luther, probably meant that she wasn’t confi- dent enough in herself.

Normally, I would just walk away, but tonight, I had to cause commotion in order for me to sneak away, and she hap- pened to be the perfect trigger that I needed.

I sneered, trying to make myself sound arrogant, “I’m not the one trying to keep a man that doesn’t care about me from being with anyone else,” I pointed out. I set my empty glass down and crossed my arms, facing off with Jennifer.

If I riled her up enough, she’d make a scene.

“No, you’re just the one trying to steal him from me!” she said, her voice rising in volume.

A few heads turned our way, but when I looked around, I saw that Luther was far away. He was deep in conversation with someone else and he wouldn’t look this way unless things with Jennifer escalated even more.

“If you want him, you should sort this out with him, not me. Or... do you even not dare to talk to your Alpha?” I tossed a casual wave at Jennifer and turned away from her. I said dis- missively, “You know what, to be honest, now that I get to know him more, he is not even my type.”

Before I’d taken my first step, she grabbed my shoulder and pulled me around to face her again.

“How dare you just use him and dump him? Where’s your heart, you fucking bitch?” Jennifer yelled. She threw her arms up in the air and glared at me accusingly.

“A, Watch your choice of words, or you’ll regret it; B, Whatever. Your love fantasy isn’t my concern,” I said, shaking my head.

“Fantasy? Luther and I are meant to be together. That isn’t a fantasy, it is fate!” Jennifer shouted.

Fate? Was Luther her fated mate? He hadn’t said anything to me about it and as far as I could tell, other than referring to Jennifer as his “partner”, he didn’t say anything else about her.

I got the sense that she was just being overly dramatic.

"If it's fate, then you should have nothing to worry about. Since you're so uncertain about your relationship with him, yeah, it sounds like a fantasy you have."

Jennifer's arms trembled, her hands turning to fists. She glared at me and her face started turning colors. Her mouth opened and closed several times. Then she stamped her foot and put her hands on her hips.

"You don't know anything about Luther and me! I suggest you keep your mouth shut about what you don't understand," she warned, shaking her head.

"Whatever you say." I shrugged, casting my eyes over to Luther.

He glanced my way. Smiling, he gave me a quick wave and then went back to talking. I made sure to smile back, just as big and wide.

Jennifer saw it all.

"Ugh! You fucking bitch! Cunt," she cried. Jennifer stepped forward and pushed me on the shoulder abruptly.

She clearly wanted to assert her authority over me. But it was exactly what I needed to cause a scene.

"Ahhck!" I yelped. Stepping back, I forced myself to lose my footing and I fell to the floor, even though I could've steadied myself had I tried.

Jennifer's face paled and her eyes widened. "Wh-what?"

I hit the floor hard enough to hurt but not enough to severely injure myself.

Every guest in the banquet hall stopped talking and looked over at us. Jennifer was still standing over me, staring down in shock.

"Oh, come on, I didn't even push you that hard," she said, her voice ringing out through the silence. Quickly, she covered her mouth with her hands, her cheeks turning a bright, crimson red.

I grabbed my ankle, holding it like it was injured.

"What is going on over here?" Luther asked firmly, hurrying across the hall.

"It wasn't me," Jennifer repeated, giving Luther a pleading look. "She fell on her own!"

He glared at Jennifer, crossing his arms.

"I'll ask again, what happened!?" he demanded.

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Do You Have Feelings For Me?

I kept holding my ankle, sucked in a sharp breath, and batted my eyelashes until I could force out a few tears.

"I didn't push her that hard! Luther, she's faking it, she set me up," Jennifer whined, pointing at me.

"But you did push her, didn't you?" Luther asked, crossing his arms and glaring at Jennifer.

"I... well... yeah, but not hard enough to hurt her," Jennifer said again.

I just held my ankle tightly and let out a low sigh. If I kept my silence, Jennifer would look more and more guilty. She'd even look a little wacky. I'd remain innocent.

"Luther, please, you have to believe me! I didn't mean to hurt her," Jennifer insisted, stomping her foot like a rebelling child.

"I don't have to believe you," Luther muttered. "Especially, when my eyes can tell me that you are lying."

"But I..."

"That's enough. I will deal with you later," Luther said. He took a knee beside me. "Ciana, are you okay?"

"I... my ankle is twisted pretty bad," I muttered, looking at him with wide, glassy eyes.

Behind him, Jennifer fumed, her hands balled into fists again. If Luther hadn't been there, she probably would have attacked me.

I ignored her. I needed to keep playing the role of the injured victim.

"Let me see," Luther muttered, taking my hands tenderly and pulling them from my ankle.

"I probably just need some rest. Is there somewhere I can lie down?" I asked, biting my lip innocently.

"Yes, of course."

I struggled to stand up, but gave a soft whimper of pain. Before I could try moving, Luther scooped me up in his arms, princess style. My legs bent over one of his strong arms and his other looped around my back. He cradled me against his chest.

"Luther, I'm sorry," Jennifer said, reaching for him as Luther walked by her.

"You've done enough. Don't worry, I'll follow up with you when I get Ciana settled," Luther snarled under his breath.

Jennifer looked like she was ready to cry. I sighed inwardly. I believed she did really care for Luther.

After we left the banquet room, I sighed, "Luther, Jennifer isn't a bad person. She just cares about you a lot." Although I somewhat used Jennifer for my plan, I didn't want her to really get punished because of me.

"You're still speaking for her after what she's done to you?"

"It was somewhat an accident." I told the truth. Sort of.

He carried me out of the banquet hall to a lounge and laid me down on a couch. He grabbed a pillow and gently lifted my ankle, propping it up on the pillow.

Luther gave me a soft look and stepped away for a moment. He came back with a cold bottle of water and a blanket. Gently, he laid the blanket over me and pulled the edges so it covered me completely.

"How is that?" he asked, handing me the bottle of water.

I nodded, unscrewing the cap and taking a quick sip.

"This is just what I needed. I'm sure I'll feel better in no time," I said, offering him a sweet smile.

Luther grinned back, his eyes lighting up. He pulled a chair up next to me and removed the blanket from my ankle, looking at it more closely.

"It doesn't seem to be swelling," he said. "That's good. Hopefully, it is a minor injury."

"Should I put ice on it, or maybe heat?" I asked, taking another sip of water.

Luther slid his eyes to me and chuckled. "Why don't you just rest it for now. If it starts to swell or get worse, I'll get you some ice."

"Alright, that sounds good," I said, nodding.

"Is there anything else I can get for you?" he asked as he covered my ankle again.

He was being so sweet and tender, I almost felt sorry for what I was about to do. I might not agree with his methods of seeking revenge, but I did feel sorry for what the king did to his pack and family.

Since my arrival, Luther had been polite and decent to me.

"I think I'm all set. Thank you and... I'm sorry."

Luther's eyebrows lifted and he cocked his head at me. "What are you sorry for?"

Damn! I shouldn't have said that. Now, I was making him suspicious.

"Oh... I, well, I'm sorry for causing trouble and ruining your party," I said, thinking quickly.

"The party is getting boring. It isn't as interesting as you," he said with a shrug. He cracked a quick smile and reached out, covering my hand with his.

"Still, this was a nice event," I said, looking down at his fingers curled around mine. I tried to pull my hands away, but failed.

"This isn't your fault, Ciana. Jennifer can be... passionate at times. Don't worry, I'll make sure she leaves you alone in the future," he assured with a nod.

"Luther I... I apologize for making a scene," I muttered, stopping myself before I said something I'd regret.

Luther's eyes stuck on me like glue and he stared hard. Slowly, I lifted my eyes to his. His bright orbs were full of curiosity.

ana, tell me if I'm crazy for asking this but... Is it possible that you have feelings for me?" he asked.

My jaw slackened slightly, and I swallowed quickly, composing myself.

"I told you, we don't have to be enemies," I reminded him, smiling lightly to try and change the seriousness of his question.

"That's not what I mean and you know it. Do you have real, romantic feelings for me?" he asked, tightening his fingers around my hand.

I sighed and thought carefully about how to answer. If I shut him down, he'd put up his emotional walls again and it would be harder for me to slip away. If I gave him the wrong idea, he might try to follow through on something right here, right now.

This was not the time for me to try and spurn an unwanted romantic advance. I had to choose my words carefully so Luther didn't become suspicious but also didn't take things the wrong way.

Finally, I smiled, "Um... that's a good question."

Luther smiled and waited for me to continue. I shifted my eyes to the ceiling, coyly, like I was pretending to think about the answer.

"I'll have to think about it. If you're gentler with me than Prince Theo, maybe I could."

Luther smirked and nodded, like I'd just given him a challenge. "Well, I'll just see what I can do about that."

A knock on the door interrupted our banter and a maid came in. She looked at her feet while she approached.

"My apologies, Alpha Luther. There are guests at the party wondering where you are," she said, keeping her eyes down. Her cheeks burned red.

The poor girl wasn't a very good liar. I recognized her as one of Jennifer's maids. She'd probably sent her here to check on Luther and me and report back. Jennifer didn't want Luther and me to be alone, so she was using her maid to separate us.

"My guests can wait. I'm helping a wounded friend," Luther argued, waving to dismiss the maid.

She stood her ground, probably ordered not to leave until Luther did. I was sure Jennifer assumed we wouldn't do anything with a maid in the room.,

"Luther, you should get back to the party. I'm sure there are a lot of people you haven't talked to yet," I urged.

As grateful as I was for his assistance, my plan hinged on him being distracted at the party and far away from me.

Luther sighed and nodded. He squeezed my hand once more and stood up. "Ciana, tell me if you need anything else. I'll be in the banquet hall," he said.

"I know where to find you."

“Great. I’ll be back to check on you shortly,” Luther assured. He winked at me as he headed to the door.

“I promise I’ll be fine.” I gave him a light grin.

The maid glared at me behind Luther’s back, seeming angry that I was talking to Luther.

I simply gave her a nod and turned away from her gaze. I didn’t see Luther that way. Why didn’t anyone believe me when I said I wasn’t interested?

First Sophia, now Jennifer...

I waved after Luther as he left with the maid following close behind.

As soon as the door latched closed, I jumped up and stretched. It was dangerously close to the time I was supposed to meet “Tallis” out at the garden. Luther had wanted to stay and talk and I hadn’t thought of a way to get rid of him.

I wondered what Jennifer’s reaction would be had she known that by sending her maid in, she did me a great favor.

I snuck out of the lounge, keeping light on my feet as I headed down the hall. I was careful not to attract the attention of any maids or guards still on duty. Fortunately, with the party going on, that was where most everyone’s attention was.

“Tallis” was already in the gardens when I got there. He was standing in the shadow of a tree. I could tell it was him based on his stiff posture.

The moment he saw me, he let out a breath of relief and his whole being seemed to soften up a bit.

Had he been worried about me?

A surge of warmth flowed through my heart. After all, he did care about me, right? tree.

“Hey, thanks for waiting,” I said, jogging up to him at the He almost gave me a smile. But then he sniffed a couple times and crossed his arms, giving me a hard look. I could clearly sense the vibe of irritation he gave off.

What was going on with his swift change of attitude?

“You’re late,” he sulked.

I swore it seemed impossible to please him sometimes, and for a moment, I wondered why I was going with him just to be reminded how much I irritated him when Luther had been nothing but nice.

Maybe I could turn around and get back in the mansion and stay with Luther instead.

But I immediately shook my head and got rid of that silly thought.

There were people who had a nasty outer shell but good heart; And there were people who could appear to be nice but were vicious deep down.

I knew for sure Theo, or Tallis, or whatever he wanted to be called, was the first kind.

“I know, as I just said, thanks for waiting.” I arched an eye-brow at him. “But I’m here now, so we can go ahead with the plan.”

“Did you enjoy dancing with that usurper?”

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Prince Theo’s Match

Not this again.

Was he jealous for no reason whatsoever again? Now was not the time nor the place to address any of this.

“Can we go? We are on limited time. Luther could come back and see that I’m not there.”

He looked me up and down for a moment. “I would love to, but how are you going to make a run in those?”

He pointed down to my heels.

He was right. They were beautiful shoes but they were not built for escaping a fortress like this.

I went to kneel so I could unclasp the little hooks but “Tallis” had already dropped down to his knee.

“What are you—”

“Ciana.” He didn’t look up at me.

“Raise your leg,” he ordered.

I did as I was told and raised my foot in the air without thinking. His hands made quick work of removing the buckles and freeing my foot without touching my skin.

I was still in a fog, and couldn’t believe what was going on

— the most fearsome warrior in the world, the cruei Dark Prince... he just kneeled down to unbuckle my shoe?!

I must be dreaming... or losing my mind!

Even without direct contact, I felt the heat rise to my face. Little prickly sparks moved against my skin.

When he was done, “Tallis” stood to his full height and looked down at me. “Make sure you keep up. We have one shot at this and if we don’t make it in time we will both be dead.”

“O-okay...” I realized that he had replaced my high heels with a pair of comfortable flats. I never knew he could be so thoughtful.

Less talking and more moving then.”

He turned and started jogging into the forest, I followed closely behind him, picking up my dress so it didn't get caught on anything.

How far away is the tunnel from here?"

He looked over his shoulder at me. "I would say probably a good ten to fifteen minutes. It's not that far. But we just need to make sure that we don't get caught by any of the patrol wolves."

"You said you had mastered their changeover times."

"I have. But you can never be too careful. You are impor-

tant to Luther and he will do whatever it takes to keep you in his possession. Not to mention you told the guy you were falling in love with him."

I rolled my eyes at his comment. "I didn't."

'I can feel you rolling your eyes behind me.

"You need to let this jealousy thing go. I am not in love with Luther. Trust me, he is the last man I would fall in love with."

"And who would be the first then.

I kept my mouth shut, just in time to swallow back a word that almost slipped from my mouth.

I would have said it if I had the confidence. But I didn't so I chose silence.

He •looked over his shoulder at me. "What? Nothing to say?"

"It doesn't matter. Anyway, it wouldn't be a carny. How much further?"

"We're here." We came to a halt to what looked like some kind of cave entrance. There was a small pedestal off to the side where I presumed the locking system was.

"Tallis" walked up to the pedestal and placed the fur we had collected in the small hole. He took a step backward and waited but nothing happened.

He frowned and moved back toward the pedestal. "That should have been enough. Why isn't it working?"

I dropped the skirt of my dress and walked toward the pedestal. The full moon hung high above in the evening sky casting just enough light to read the inscription on the stone.

"Only the true blood can open this pathway to freedom," I read out loud. "Does this mean anything to you?"

He nodded. "It means that only the blood of the Alpha or his descendants can open this passageway. '

"This can't be happening. How are we meant to get Luther to drop his blood in there? The fur was hard enough but blood? We are screwed aren't we?"

I paced around the small area, my mind whirling with different scenarios playing in my head.

It was only a matter of time before Luther noticed my absence. I had played with his trust and emotions. Luther did not seem like the forgiving type.

If he didn't need me alive I was sure he would not hesitate to kill me.

"No. We'll be fine."

"Fine?" I looked at him like he was delusional. "We are surrounded by his men. We need Luther's blood to unlock this door. There is no one else who possesses the blood of the Alpha apart from him. As far as I know, he has no other siblings or children, not around here anyway. This feels like we are very much doomed."

"What happened to that childlike faith of yours?"

I narrowed my eyes on him. "Now is not the time to bicker. We are in trouble."

My irritation grew but I didn't voice my frustration. It would do us no good by arguing.

He walked over to the pedestal again and looked at it with inquisitive eyes. There was no way of bypassing the security measure they had put in place. We needed the blood or we would be stuck here.

"Maybe I can go back and get his blood somehow."

Tallis glanced at me with a look that read, "Are you nuts?"

It was the best that I could come up with at this given point in time. "Don't look at me like that. If you're so great, why don't you come up with any better ideas?"

He stood still and looked down at his hand for a few seconds.

"Tallis?" He didn't move. "What's going on?"

As I started to worry that he had frozen in place for some reason, he said with a distant look in his eyes. "I can open it."

"How?"

He dug into his pocket and produced a pocket knife. He placed the sharp blade against his skin and pressed down, gliding the metal against his skin.

Blood leaked out of his palm and he squeezed his fist shut, drawing out even more blood. His eyes were focused on the keyhole, willing the door to the tunnel to open.

He stepped back after he was done and waited.

After a few seconds had passed, I thought that maybe his efforts had been in vain until I heard the creaking of the stone.

The ground shook slightly as the heavy stone that had blocked the entrance rolled away opening up to the cave.

“How did you...” my voice trailed off at the realization of what he had done. Of course, he was related to Luther. Nita was the daughter of the late Alpha of the Ortiz pack, which meant that she carried the blood of the Alpha. The same way that Theo did.

This only confirmed what I already knew.

“You’re him, aren’t you?” I walked in front of him. “You’re Theo.”

I stared into his eyes, willing him to tell me the truth just this once.

“Let’s go,” he simply said.

I shook my head. “Why do you continuously do this? Why do you deny that you are Theo? I don’t understand.”

He dropped his gaze, ignoring my question again and only said. “Focus on your steps, Ciana.”

I pressed my hand on his chest and I felt the outline of the lapel pin. This was him but he just continuously denied it. “What are you afraid of?”

He kept his silence.

I lifted my gaze to meet his once more. “You can deny it all you like but I know the truth. I know who you really are. And whether you choose to acknowledge it or not doesn’t change that fact.”

He opened his mouth to say something but then his face

Match hardened and he looked to the left.

“They’re coming.” He pulled me behind him and angled his body so he was facing in an eastward direction.

“Who’s coming?”

He lowered himself slightly, “Luther.”

“Correction,” Luther appeared from the shadows dressed in his tux. “I am already here. My, my, looks like we are having a little party over here.”

My back stiffened at the sight of him. Luther had a confident smile playing on his lips. The same smile he had when he talked of ending Theo’s life a while back.

His eyes moved from Tallis to me. It was only for a moment but I saw a flash of betrayal go across his eyes. “I cannot believe it. You played your role well, Ciana. You almost had me believing you there for a second.”

“Sorry about that, Luther,” I kept my voice strong and passive. “But be honest with yourself, I was never anything more than a weapon against Prince Theo, right? The reason you treated me differently was simply because you needed me to be on your side and somehow you believed that I could hurt the Dark Prince.”

Luther seemed to be a bit surprised, but then, a grin appeared on his face. “Ciana, you know, sometimes you’re too smart for your own good.”

“So after everything, what did you really expect? My loyalty will always be to my family and my pack. You should understand.”

He balled his fists at his side. “Yes, I understand. You only proved to me why women are good for only one thing in this current time.”

Tallis growled at him on my behalf. “Shut the fuck up.”

“None of your business. I will speak to her however I want to. ”

“The hell you will,” Tallis began to slowly edge us toward the entrance of the tunnel. Once we were inside the door would shut, giving us a head start on Luther. “She belongs to no one but herself, Luther.”

“And who are you?” Luther turned his nose to Tallis.

“Move or be killed. The choice is yours.’

‘How about neither?’

Luther smirked. “Arrogant. A stupid trait of weak men of this world.”

“Weak or not, you’ll find out,” Tallis snapped.

Luther scoffed and ignored Tallis’ comment. He then shifted his gaze to me. “You said you were falling in love, Ciana. I thought we were real.

“You said that?” Tallis’ brow furrowed.

“I said I MIGHT if he treats me better than the Dark Prince,” I explained quickly, “but the prince has never kidnapped me. From that perspective, Luther would never be Prince Theo’s match!”

“Now that’s a good answer.” Tallis chuckled, and his mood seemed to be lifted immediately. Gosh, how childish was he?

Looking at Luther now, I would be lying if I said I didn’t feel a pang of guilt hit my chest, but I knew I did it for a just reason.

Tallis pushed me through the entrance of the tunnel and he stood in front of the entrance.

“Get them!” Luther ordered and men appeared from the shadows and charged at us.

The entrance was slowly closing off. With Tallis guarding the gate, no matter how hard Luther’s wolves tried, they just couldn’t get past Tallis.

The opening of the entrance was getting smaller and smaller, finally, Tallis entered the tunnel and the door shut just in time, separating Luther and his group from us.

“She will never fall in love with you!” Tallis yelled as loudly as he could. I was pretty sure, even through the stone gate, Luther could hear it. “Never!”

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Ciana’s Charming Spell

The tunnels were too narrow to fit a wolf and thus Tallis couldn't shift. We had been running for what felt like hours.

"Wait..." I panted trying to catch my breath.

Tallis looked like he had barely broken a sweat and meanwhile here I was gasping for dear life. It was annoying just how athletic he was but then again he was an alpha, a royal one at that.

"We need to keep moving if we want to make it back to Alvar on time.'

"We will," I panted, "I just need to catch my breath. Not all of us can be insanely fit like you.'

"I'll take that as a compliment." If I didn't know any better I would think that Tallis was flirting with me.

In your wildest dreams," I stood to my full height, my vision becoming a little clearer than it had been some time ago. "We can go now.'

And we picked up right where we left off. This time I was able to keep in step with him.

We arrived in Alvar just before sunrise. My gown was completely ruined and my hair was most likely a huge mess. But at least I was home.

I was about to step out of the tree line when Tallis grabbed me and pulled me behind some greenery nearby. I ampler 86 CianSs Charming Spell was about to complain when he clasped his arm over my mouth to keep me from speaking.

"Quiet," he whispered. He then nodded to his left and that's when I saw the patrol wolves milling close by.

'Did you see anything?'" One of the wolves asked. "Nah, I think it's just the wind or something."

They gave the area the once over before they left.

Tallis waited a beat before he removed his hand from my mouth.

I scowled at him. "You didn't need to cover my mouth.

"You were literally about to blow our cover. Need I remind you you were treated as a criminal last time you were here? Raymond is still in power."

"I hope not after what he did. The people know the truth. They won't allow him to cling onto power after witnessing what happened."

"Don't you think you're too optimistic? You disappeared for days and no one sounded the alarm bells. Why? Because Raymond told everyone that this was the deal you two agreed upon. The man may have lost some support but he still has a good hold on the pack as a whole."

But I'm back now and I am sure my people will take my side once they see that I have returned and can speak for myself."

"If only it was that simple. Think about what happened last time." He began ushering me deeper into the forest. *'apter 86 • Clan'' Channing sr./' be naive. Come on.

“Where are we going?”

He looked over his shoulder at me. “Let’s recon. This is not the same Alvar we left behind.”

“Alright.”

We had managed to find a disguise for me. A brunette wig, a large black hoodie and some glasses.

We were currently in the town square café sitting in the corner booth. Tallis and I had done some snooping around and we had both come to the conclusion that Alvar was in shambles.

The pack was divided right down the middle. There were some who were loyal to Raymond and believed that he should remain in power. Then there were those who believed that Raymond should be punished for his wrong doings, and they’d sent out scouts to look for me and my parents.

Tensions between the two sides were growing and I feared that a riot would break out any time.

I knew Raymond was willing to do just about anything to remain in power. He had proven he was willing to go far when he turned Jasmine into a fake me, and then killed her mercilessly.

“Stop scowling.” Tallis looked at me over the rim of his coffee mug. “You are meant to be blending in, not staring people down.”

I loosened my posture and unfolded my arms.

Ovatm•na Spen

‘How can you sit there and be so calm?’

He shrugged, “Because I’m trying not to get us caught. We need to leave now.’

“Why?”

“Not here.” He got up from his seat and threw some bills onto the table.

“Where did you get that money from? Did you steal it?”

He didn’t say anything. “Shh!”

‘Oh my days, you stole it!’

He hissed under his breath and dragged me out of the coffee shop. “What part of incognito do you not understand?”

“Did you get it from that old lady? Oh my goddess. You did, didn’t you?”

He grabbed onto my arm tighter. “I didn’t steal it, dammit. Now come on.’

He led us up the side walk back in the direction of the woods.

Once we were safe under the cover of the trees he turned to me.

‘Raymond has taken Warren.’ He didn’t even look the slightest bit concerned. In fact, he seemed completely unphased by what he had just said.

“As his prisoner?”

He gave me an incredulous look. “No, as his drinking buddy. Come on, Ciana.”

“I’m sorry. I’m just a little shocked. Warren is a prince, how dare Raymond!”

“Well get it together. I need you to be on your A game. Word will spread soon enough that you are no longer with Luther and when that happens, you know Raymond will come looking for you.”

I waved him off. “Right now I don’t care about what gets out and what doesn’t. Our main focus should be breaking out Warren. Now I’m thinking I’ll go distract them, and you break in and bust Warren out.

He stared at me.

Let’s get started. How about we take action at sunset tonight?”

I didn’t remember agreeing to the plan. No.”

“What do you mean, no?”

‘It’s a simple two letter word that means not going to happen or I don’t want to. You pick which one best fits.”

“And why not?”

He shrugged like he couldn’t care less that his brother was currently locked up in chains. What if they have him drugged with wolfsbane? What if they had cut off a limb or two.

“What’s wrong with you? You can’t be serious right now. We can’t just sit here and do nothing. We need to go and rescue him,” I hissed.

Oupt« 86 Spen

“That is not a good enough reason for me to risk my life to go and save him.” I could practically taste the sourness of his words. “And don’t even think of playing a solo hero. I just got you out of the clutches of one psycho. I don’t want to have to do it again.”

“So let me get this straight.” I pinned him with a cool stare. “You don’t want to help me save Warren and you also don’t want me to go and save him alone. So what? We just leave him there to rot?”

‘Raymond isn’t going to do anything to Warren. He knows that a live prince is more valuable than a dead one. He is most likely going to try to use Warren as leverage against the crown.”

“All the more reason to save him! This way your father won’t get exploited and your brother will be safe. This is your brother! Why don’t you care?”

He narrowed his eyes at me and leveled me with a cold glare. “Because I’m just a stupid carny, not some noble prince. Or have you forgotten what you said?”

I blinked and stared at him blankly. It took a few seconds for his words to register to me.

I had said those words when we had our quarrel the other night. The night he kissed me like he owned every single part of my heart. Really, just how long did he have to hold a grudge against what I said during a fight?

Before I could say anything, Tallis spoke again. This time there was a ghost of a smile playing on his lips. It was barely noticeable had I not paid close enough attention.

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“I will reconsider saving this Warren guy if you ask me nicely.”

“Like saying please?”

He must have been joking!

He pretended to think over what I had just said. “That would be a start but not enough.”

“You’re kidding!”

“Then I guess Warren stays in his chains.”

I didn’t think I had ever seen him this way before....Was this really Theo?

Fine.” I held my hands up in surrender. “Tallis, oh wonderful Tallis. Please help me rescue Prince Warren from the evil clutches of Raymond.”

He stared at me for a moment. What I would have done to get a sneak peek inside of his head. “I think you can do better than that. I’m not impressed right now.’

I didn’t miss the way one side of his lips tilted into a smirk, and I found it...sexy. Even in his disguise, this man’s gorgeousness penetrated right through it.

Stop, Ciana... focus. Saving Warren was the priority right now, not drooling over Theo’s good-looks!

I closed my eyes and swallowed the mixture of frustration and helpless laughter that threatened to escape my body. When I opened them again, he was staring at me waiting for me to begin.

Ciana’s Charming Spell

I stepped toward him so that we were merely a few inches from one another and I looked at him through my eyelashes. His strong scent of musk and freshness assaulted my senses, throwing me off my game a little bit.

Without overthinking it, I placed my hand on his chest and cleared my throat. “Tallis, the invincible and unparalleled, I come to you in my hour of need looking for your assistance. You are the bravest. The strongest...”

His eyes widened as if he couldn’t believe what I said, so I quickly blurred out the rest. ...and of course the most handsome of handsome in all of the land. There is no one else who could help me to accomplish such a task. Would you please do me the extraordinary honor of helping me to help your brother, Warren?”

As soon as I was done, he coughed a few times. I could tell he was trying hard to suppress his chuckle. Finally, he let out two words. "Too fake."

"What?! That's it! You're having way too much fun!" I protested. When I looked up, I realized my face was so close to his that I could feel his hot breath fanning my skin. All of a sudden my heart raced in my chest.

I watched as he swallowed the lump that had formed in his throat.

Just like that, I brushed my lips against his.

The electricity between us crackled to life as the tension in the air thickened.

Tallis ripped his lips from mine, but his voice was thick and coated in desire and need. "What the hell are you doing, CisnSs Charming don't you know how—

I blinked, my mind still in a daze. "I'm sorry, I..."

I didn't care about what I had meant to do. All I cared about now was tasting him again. I wanted more. Much, much more.

I closed the distance between us and gently kissed his lips again with my own. Electricity shot throughout my entire body bringing every cell to life.

What was I thinking, what was I doing?!

I closed my eyes, ready for him to scold me, but then I felt his lips claim mine, fiercely and passionately, as if he was pouring every ounce of emotion into this heated kiss.

His touch was magic and his taste was addictive. I wanted to drown myself in him and completely submerge myself in all that was him. At that moment, my world consisted of only him.

He was all I could feel. All I could see. All I could hear.

When he pulled away, I was still in a daze, trying to suck in some air.

"Let's go," he said, his voice low and hoarse.

I couldn't follow him. "Where?"

"Warren isn't going to save himself," he said. "Weren't you the one who begged me to help?"

He turned on his heels and started walking back toward the town.

I touched my swollen lips still feeling the tingles.

I watched his retreating figure and all I could think was,

'That jerk...'

"Wait for me," I called after him.

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I Have Avenged You

I snuck into the dungeon with Tallis, down to the cell where Warren was being kept.

However, Warren wasn't the only one there. Raymond was standing in front of him with the sacred feather in his hand. He had a smug smile on his face that I would have loved to rip off.

"Having a prince being held hostage is incredibly advantageous. I can use you to trade back to your father. I'll lose a prince, but I will gain something much more," he taunted, waving the feather back and forth in front of Warren's eyes.

Warren looked dirty and pale. I wondered if Raymond was starving him and trying to weaken him. My stomach shifted uncomfortably. I'd barely thought about what had become of Warren since he was taken prisoner by the guards.

However, Warren remained calm and poised, despite how he looked.

"I think you overestimate how much my father cares for me. He's not going to do what you want."

Raymond threw his head back and laughed. "I think you underestimate what lengths your father will go to for family and blood. For him, it is all about image. As a member of his family, you are a part of that image. Having you taken prisoner will make him look weak."

Warren pressed his lips tightly, but he didn't make a sound or lash out.

Raymond laughed again. "Fortunately, I'm not greedy. I'm not asking for much. See, the king has the power to name me Alpha of pack Alvar. It won't cost him anything to say 'yes' to my demands and then he'll get his son back and never have to admit how weak his bloodline is."

I clenched my hands into fists. Raymond needed to be punished!

I glanced at Theo, and he just shook his head, silently telling me not to be impulsive and run out to punch Raymond in the face.

"I already have the feather. The symbol of power in Alvar. My position in the pack might be a little shaky right now, but once your father names me Alpha, no one will dare question my authority again," Raymond explained. "I'm already the leader here, for the most part. Your father just has to nod and make it official. I can't wait to hear them call me Alpha!"

Anger boiled inside of me and my blood ran hot. I couldn't hold back any more and stepped out from the corner I was hiding behind.

"You'll never be Alpha!"

Warren's eyes lit up when he saw me and he smiled. Raymond whipped around, glaring at me and snarling.

"You're going to pay for Susan and Jasmine's deaths," I added.

Raymond's eyes went wide and his face paled slightly. He tightened his grip on the feather like he was worried I would

You take it again.

“Guards! Come and arrest this wench!” Raymond hissed, pointing at me with a heavy glare.

I heard footsteps running into the hall behind me. They were still around the corner, and I heard Theo shift. The guards screeched to a halt and I heard their shocked gasps. A shiver ran down my spine when I heard Theo’s snarls and the click of his claws on the stone floor.

My mind wandered back to the assassins he’d killed right in front of me, taking them out in seconds. I imagined his massive wolf form launching at the guards and ripping them apart quickly and efficiently.

The sounds of their fighting got more distant and it sounded like Theo had taken them outside, probably to keep Warren and Raymond from seeing him and guessing who he was.

“How did you...” Raymond’s mouth fell open as he glared at me.

I smirked as he realized his guards were being taken out and no one was coming to arrest me. Raymond bared his teeth at me, his eyes glowing. For a second, I worried he would shift and tackle me, the same way he killed Jasmine.

Theo was still nearby, even if he was outside. I trusted that he wouldn’t let Raymond hurt me. Raising an eyebrow, I glared at Raymond, daring him to do something.

The pounding of footsteps down the stone corridor drew my attention, along with Raymond and Warren.

Two pack elders came into view, Frederic and Murray.

“What is going on here?” Frederic asked.

Raymond had said his position in the pack was shaky. Theo and I had discovered that a lot of pack members were starting to question Raymond.

He still had elders on his side, and I didn’t know if Frederic Murray supported him, so it was better that I didn’t throw around until I knew where their loyalties lied. Other than they’d never believe me, just like the rest of the pack Raymond had brainwashed.

“Ciana, are you the real Ciana Black?” Murray asked me.

I nodded. “I’m back to restore the pack.” I lifted my chin and showed them all the authority of an Alpha’s daughter.

The fact that he at least asked the question rather than blindly believing whatever Raymond had to say meant he was at least suspecting Raymond, if not fully against him.

“Then you’re just in time to see us take this traitorous scum into custody. He has a lot to answer for,” Frederic said, nodding toward Raymond.

“Agreed,” I said.

Behind me, I heard heavy breathing and I glanced around the corner. Theo was back from taking out the guards. He had a little blood splattered on his skin but where my gaze fell was the firm, bulging abs that lined his abdomen.

Eyes wide, I just stared for a moment until he covered his body in those stupid carny clothes. All part of his disguise so no one knew who he really was.

I peeled my eyes off the lines of his muscles and pushed the landscape of his body out of my mind.

Talk about eye candy.... Focus, it wasn't the right time!

"If you're here to take Raymond into custody, I will help," I said, turning my attention back to the others and trying to ignore the smoking hot god-like man who was still partially naked behind me.

"Alright, I see I am outnumbered. I know when I'm defeated," Raymond said with a sigh. He lifted his hands into the air, ready to surrender.

Frederic, Murray, and I moved in to take him into custody, blocking his exit just in case he tried something. I got to Raymond first and grabbed one of his wrists.

Quickly, Raymond spun around until he was behind me. He pinned my arms against my back and held me still. With his free hand, he brought a knife to my throat.

"Nobody moves. I'm not letting you take me to face your judgment. I'm better than that! I'm your leader," Raymond snarled, pressing the knife harder to my skin.

I inhaled sharply. The tip of the sharp knife stung my neck and I felt a pinprick of warm blood against my skin.

"Don't come any closer," Raymond ordered.

Frederic and Murray backed off, opening the way for Raymond to escape from the dungeon.

454 "Ciana," Warren called to me.

I shook my head at him, telling him not to worry. Raymond wasn't going to get away!

He held me toward Frederic and Murray, the knife against my throat, and back toward the dungeon stairs. I stayed calm and steady, knowing this would be Raymond's biggest mistake.

As soon as he got close to the corner where Theo was hiding, Theo thrust his strong, powerful fist and punched Raymond in the face.

Groaning, Raymond's grip on me loosened and he staggered back. Murray and Frederic rushed forward and the three of us pounced on Raymond, pinning him down and holding him still. He roared and struggled against us but we had the upper hand now.

"Make sure to search him for more weapons," I said.

"We'll take him to the pack square where he'll be brought to justice. Meet us there," Frederic said to me.

"I'll be right behind you," I told Frederic.

“Prince Warren, let us help you to the packhouse where you can recover and get some rest. We’ll handle the situation from here,” Murray said as he opened Warren’s cell and two pack members helped Warren to stand up.

“Warren! You alright?” I rushed over.

“Yes, I’m okay... Thanks for coming back for me.”

“You’re welcome. Let me—”

One of Frederic’s men interrupted as he ran back to me. “Miss Ciana, everyone is waiting for you! Your Highness, please allow us to take you there.”

I looked at Warren apologetically, but he immediately gave me an understanding smile. “You go right ahead. Don’t worry, I’ll be fine.”

“All right, I’ll stop by as soon as I’m done,” I said, nodding back to him before running towards the town square.

All of Alvar pack had gathered in the pack square. Frederic and Murray had Raymond handcuffed and sitting in a chair. His legs were also chained to the chair so he was completely trapped.

“Raymond, Beta of Pack Alvar, you stand accused of atrocities against the pack, including murdering pack members and even attempting to usurp and murder Ciana Black, daughter of Alpha Soren Black,” Murray said to Raymond.

“Those are vicious lies,” Raymond hissed. “I’ve served this pack my entire life and only ever had the pack’s best interest at heart.”

“Is that why you brought an imposter in to pretend to be Ciana? We all saw that with our own eyes,” Frederic said, sweeping his arm over the gathered pack members. They nodded and murmured in agreement.

“You also had Susan killed. We all saw you murder another pack member that stood against you, and you let your son attempt to assault me, more than once,” I said, finding my voice and approaching the chair Raymond was chained to.

He looked at me with such anger, hatred, and disgust. I’d never thought anyone could seem so deadly with just one look. I slowed down, worrying that he could still be a threat.

Shocked gasps rippled through the crowd at what I said.

“You’re a bane to our existence and you’ve done nothing but make things worse. You are being charged with the crimes of murdering pack members, trying to overthrow the Alpha, and bringing violence and treachery into our midsts. If anyone disagrees, let them speak now,” Murray said, his voice booming through the courtyard.

No one spoke up. Most of Raymond’s loyal followers had been taken out by Theo, anyway. Still, I was relieved that no one argued.

“Well then, we as pack elders sentence you, Raymond, to be executed for your crimes. Ciana Black’s name is cleared and we welcome her back as the true daughter of our Alpha,” Frederic announced.

Claps went through the crowd and I felt a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. I could finally call my pack home again, and they saw me and accepted me.

“Susan, you are now avenged. •I told you I would see it happen, and now it has,” I said softly. Closing my eyes, I whispered a small prayer to the Moon Goddess to watch over Susan’s soul. Tears sprang to my eyes knowing that she’d now be at peace.

Sharp, bellowing laughter cut through my thoughts and my eyes snapped open. Raymond was staring at me, laughing until his chest and belly shook. His eyes were bloodshot and wild.

“You think you’ve won!?” he cried. “You’re all so stupid! Sebastian will be overthrown. That is going to happen and anyone who denies it is an idiot. It is just a matter of time.”

I motioned to Frederic and Murray. They unhooked Raymond’s feet and hauled him up. More guards moved in as they started dragging him off to the dungeon.

When he was pushed by me, Raymond struggled against his chains and he caught my eye.

“You think I failed?” he asked in a low murmur. “You’re wrong. She’ll save me—

Raymond’s voice cut off with a sickening squelch. An arrow came through his throat. Blood spurted out from an artery and he only gasped once before he crumpled to the ground, dead.

It was a perfect, lethal shot!

I looked to my right where Theo was standing in a nearby shadow. With his superior hearing, I knew he’d heard what Raymond said to me. Our eyes locked together and I knew we were sharing the same thought.

What did Raymond mean? Who was this “she” he answered to?

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Is That Invitation Still Open?

With Raymond out of the way and my name restored, I left the pack courtyard and the trial and ran straight to the packhouse to check on Warren.

“Ciana, you’re okay,” he said with a relieved sigh. “Slow down. Thank you again for coming back for me.’

“No, Warren, I should be thanking you. You helped me so much. I’m sorry that you went through all of that. I don’t know what I can do to repay you,” I blurted out, squeezing his hand.

“Silly girl! We’re friends, right? That’s what we do. You have no idea how worried I was about you. When you fainted and they took you away...” Warren’s face wrinkled at the bad memory. “Thank the Goddess you are unharmed.”

He opened his arms like he was going to hug me.

Someone cleared their throat behind us and I saw Theo, or Tallis as he was still pretending to be, standing against the nearest packhouse wall. He was glaring at Warren.

Theo?" Warren asked.

"I'm not Theo!" he hissed moodily. "My name is Tallis."

"Oh..." Warren stared at him for a moment, and murmured to himself, "Sorry, you remind me of my brother. I mean, you look different, but just..."

I jumped in, "Warren, believe me, I was confused at first too. But this is Tallis. He's Nelson's brother. Nelson is the car-

nival director," I said, covering for Theo. I figured he probably had a good reason to keep his identity a secret, even from his own brother.

"Hmm. Well, you are dressed like you work with Nelson," Warren said with a chuckle. He turned back to me, looking at me with deep, emotional eyes.

"Yes, he does, doesn't he? I don't think Prince Theo would ever wear colors like that," I said, giggling and giving Theo a challenging look.

Theo snorted and looked away from me.

"I heard my name," Nelson arrived with a concerned look on his face. "Geez, Tallis, there you are! I've been looking everywhere for you. They told me you're at the packhouse. The carnival is packed up. Are you ready to go or what?"

"I'm ready," Theo said stiffly.

"Great. Well, say your goodbyes and let's get going. We're all waiting on you," Nelson said. He clapped his hands to hurry Theo along.

I bit my tongue to keep from laughing, seeing the dark, dangerous look in Theo's eyes. If Nelson wasn't careful, he'd end up dealing with the Dark Prince.

Theo glanced at me and crossed his arms. He gave a final nod and left after Nelson. It was already getting late and if he hung around too long, it would seem suspicious. Especially if he kept hanging around me.

"Warren, how are you feeling?" I asked, turning back to Warren.

He still looked a little pale and dirty. I hoped after a nice shower and some fresh clothes, he'd look and feel better,

Warren sniffled and rubbed his head.

"Honestly, I've got a bit of a headache. I'm not sure if I'm getting sick or I just need good food," he admitted.

Warren and I headed back to my parents' house. As we went, he started sniffling more and rubbing his temples. He was definitely sick.

I got him set up in one of the guest bedrooms. “You probably just need a good night’s sleep and some hot food. I’ll make sure to get you a good dinner. I’m just going to run out for a few minutes. Try to rest,” I urged.

“Thank you,” Warren murmured, his eyes already closed.

If Warren was sick, I figured that Theo would want to know and maybe would send Warren back to the palace. I hurried after Theo to where the carnival had been set up.

When I got there, the tent was gone. All the tents were gone with nothing left except a few pieces of trash. Sighing, I kicked at an old can. I wondered where they were going next and how long it would be before I’d see Theo again.

Warren was still asleep when I got back to the house. I

made him some soup and set it on the night table, along with a mug of tea and water. It would be there when he woke up. A strong shifter like him would only need a few days to recover.

Things in my pack had started to settle down. I was happy to see everything reverting back to normal, more or less.

8B. That Sol’

After making breakfast for Warren one morning, I headed off to Susan’s gravestone in the pack cemetery. Her death had been avenged, but I still missed her and felt bad about what happened. She’d been killed because of me.

I put my hand on her grave marker and sighed.

“I miss you. I’ll never be able to express how sorry I am that you were killed because of me. Raymond is gone, though, and I think he suffered. Be at peace, dear friend,” I whispered softly.

“Hey, there you are,” Warren said, coming up beside me.

I pulled my hand from the grave and looked at him. “I just wanted to give her an update about what’s going on.”

“Things are going well, then?” Warren asked.

“They are. Thanks again. You look quite energetic. Feeling 100% now?” I asked, addressing the more important question.

Warren grinned and rubbed his belly. All the color had returned to his cheeks and he was looking stronger.

“I’m feeling great. That breakfast you made me this morning was fantastic. Who needs medicine with you as a cook?” he grinned.

I chuckled and shook my head. No one had ever praised my cooking before. I couldn’t tell if he was just being nice or if he meant it.

“Frederic and Murray seem to have stepped up to help or ganize the pack,” Warren added, getting back to his original topic.

Äapter 88. ISThai InvitatiM Still

We walked side by side through the pack territory. It was a nice day with warm morning sun shining down on us and a soft breeze through the grass.

“They’ve helped a lot. With Raymond dead and Hawke ex iled, no one is left to cause problems. I keep going to their meetings, but every time they have it all under control. I hardly have anything to do.”

“That’s really good news, Ciana. I’m glad your pack is do ing better. It makes me feel better about asking,” he said, smiling lightly.

“Asking what?”

My stomach flipped a little. What could Warren want to ask me?

I intended to go visit my sister’s pack from here. I’d still like to do that now that Raymond isn’t a threat. I wanted to know if you’d visit her pack with me,” he said, giving me a bashful smile. His cheeks tinged pink

“Oh, that’s right. Am I keeping you from visiting your sister?” I asked guiltily.

“Not at all,” Warren said, touching my arm. “I’m glad I took time to recover from being held prisoner. So, do you want to

I bit my lower lip in thought.

Warren’s sister married to the alpha of Vaner pack.

I’d been there once many years ago with my parents, and) r membered liking the territory and thinking it was beautiful.

“So what do you say?” Warren nudged me.

It had been a long time since I traveled, now that every thing seemed to have settled in the pack, it would be a pleas ant change from what I was dealing with, but...

I glanced at Warren and saw that hopeful, bright look in his eyes. Clearly, he still held some affection for me. If I went with him, he might think I had feelings for him, too. I didn’t want to give Warren the wrong message. It probably wasn’t a great idea to spend too much time alone with him.

The pack was still dealing with a lot. I was the only member of the Alpha family in pack territory at the moment. My pack was still vulnerable and I didn’t want to leave and allow someone else to come in and do the same thing Raymond had.

“That sounds like a really fun trip, but Warren, I should really stay here until my parents get back. Alvar needs strong leadership right now,” I said.

Warren’s eyes fell and I could see he was disappointed. He took my hand and squeezed it.

‘I understand,” he said, nodding and smiling warmly.

Warren went back to my parents' house to pack and I headed to the courtyard to see if Frederic or Murray needed me for anything. I was impressed with how well they were handling things, but I still wanted to be involved so I could tell my parents everything.

"...carnival is gone... so sad," I heard some girls whispering together.

88' That Open?

At the mention of the carnival, my ears perked up.

. that Tallis... so handsome. I would have bedded that..

"... you're so bad. They didn't go far..."

"Oh. They are only... Vaner.

"Isn't that Alpha Demarco and Princess Maggie's pack...?"

Theo went to Maggie's pack? Wasn't that where Warren was going too? I started to reconsider joining Warren on his travels.

No, my pack came first!

"Ciana!" Murray called me. He ran across the courtyard, waving to me.

"I was just on my way to find you," I said, smiling at him.

"Ciana, Mr. Thomas has just returned. He's heading to your parents' house right now," Murray told me.

"Thomas?" I asked, my heart leaping into my throat. Thomas was one of my father's best friends. I'd called him Uncle Thomas when I was younger.

"I just got word and came to find you..." Murray yelled behind me, "Slow down, young lady, manners...."

I hurried back to the house, hardly pausing to consider how rude I'd been to Murray. He was a pack elder and even as an Alpha's daughter I needed to show him respect, but I couldn't wait a second longer!

I hadn't seen Uncle Thomas in so long, though. He might

know where my parents were, too!

Thomas was standing at the porch when I got to the house. I ran right up to him and threw my arms around his neck.

"Ciana, is that you?" Thomas asked, hugging me back. He was just as strong and powerful as my father, and he always had a smile on his face.

I always thought he would make a good Alpha, but instead, he stood by my father as his friend. I remember when he used to be Dad's Beta too, but that changed when I was young. He told my dad that he enjoyed traveling too, and Dad allowed him to be relieved from his Beta role, which would require him to stay with the pack most of the time.

That was why Raymond ended up being the Beta instead.

"I've missed you," I said, squeezing him tightly.

Thomas chuckled and lifted me up in a big bearhug. He set me down and pulled me to the wicker couch on the porch. We sat down together and quickly filled him in on what had been happening in the pack.

By the end, Thomas's brow was deeply creased and he looked troubled.

"I'm sorry you had to find a way to resolve that on your own," he said, cupping my cheek in a fatherly way.

"Do you know when my parents will be back?" I asked hopefully.

Thomas sighed and shook his head. "I wasn't traveling

with them this time. However, I am back to fill your father's shoes. Since Beta Raymond is gone, it is my place to be Beta until your parents return.'

"So, you're going to be here for a while?" I asked, brightening.

'Yes. Ciana. After what you told me, I will stay and make sure the pack is restored in accordance with your father's wishes. I will hold things together until he gets back," he explained.

I sighed with relief. Elder Murray and Frederic were doing a great job but they weren't Thomas. They weren't my parents.

Now that Thomas was back, I had nothing to worry about, and that meant I could take a little break, right?

I went into the house and found Warren in the guest room, packing.

"So, is that invitation to travel to your sister's pack still open?" I asked coyly.