

## **Kings Breeder 441**

### [Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 441](#)

I stared at Warren as he held the knife to his throat. His words ached my heart.

"You shouldn't think so low of yourself," I softened my tone and wished he could see that I wasn't trying to be his en-

I took a step toward him tentatively, ensuring that he wouldn't do anything to harm himself immediately, and then moved close enough to get to his right hand which was holding the knife.

My hands gently wrapped around his and slowly moved it away from his neck. "You have a lot to live for. Also Warren, I'm not worth ending your life over."

Warren's face fell. He lowered his gaze and his hand loosened so the knife dropped on the hard floor, making a clanging sound.

I gave a brief sigh of relief.

Grief and sorrow could cause erratic behavior, but if he could just get past the worst of it, he would be able to find the meaning of life again and start to appreciate it.

"You still have people that care about you, Aurora, for example. Does she not matter to you? Even if right now it's hard to see beyond the gloomy days, you have to live on for your sister and your mother. Let alone one day, you'll find your mate, too."

Warren glared at the floor and shook his head. "You know nothing!"

"We're leaving," Theo urged.

I glanced at him and nodded my head.

Leaving was the right thing to do. If Warren was going to make good on his threat to end his life, he'd do it with or without me there, but I had faith in him that he wouldn't.

I had faith that he was strong enough to pull through this, and that he just needed some time alone.

So leaving was the best choice before things got too escalated. However, Warren bounced up and charged toward Theo.

'Enough, Warren!' Theo hissed.

"I'm going to avenge Maggie! I owe her that. I challenge you, Theodore Crimson, to a duel," Warren declared, pointing at his own chest.

"I decline," Theo said flatly, tugging me again toward the door.

"You cannot decline! You will disgrace the Moon Goddess and King Lycaon if you do. Do you think that is what Father will want to hear, a royal prince not accepting a duel?"

'I don't care what Father has to say and the Goddess will forgive me.'

I was relieved that Theo wasn't going to fight him.

“Why, are you afraid?” Warren continued to provoke.

Theo shook his head. “Whatever you say.”

“Asshole!”

“Warren, calm down! Even if Theo accepts it, do you really think you could win?”

“Of course not,” Warren smiled wryly, “But this isn’t about winning. Can’t you see, Ciana, you’re right that I have something to live for, and that is to prove I am worthy of Maggie, as her brother, and as a warrior!”

‘You’re not a warrior right now, Warren, and I’m not fighting you. It won’t disrespect anyone for me to deny a challenge from my grief fueled brother,’ Theo stated, glanced at me, and turned around. “We’re leaving.’

This time, I didn’t hesitate. He was right, the sooner we got out of here, the better for all of us.

I hurried my pace beside him and didn’t even bother to ask where he was taking me. The truth was, even though I didn’t know what I felt for him, I was .happy to be with him.

“GET BACK HERE!” Warren roared behind us.

He ran out of the room, closing the space between us in a few long strides. His nostrils flared as he heaved and panted, approaching us with malice.

“You can’t run away from this Theo! You can’t bury it! You killed Maggie. She just wanted to help you and you killed her!” Warren shouted.

Theo quickly turned to Warren and tucked me behind him, protectively.

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“How could you be so cold-hearted? How could you stoop so low? How could you let yourself do that?” Warren scolded. “I’m sorry Warren, I didn’t mean to kill her!” Theo growled. “For you, it’s just three words, but for her, it’s her life!”

“Warren. Whatever happened already happened. You and I can settle this in the future. I’m only here today for Ciana.”

“What makes you think you’re the one who decides when and where things happen? Just because you’re more power-

Theo’s lips were pressed into a thin line.

Is that why? Because Maggie or me or anyone else isn’t as strong as you are, you can just kill and walk away as you please?”

“I never thought that!” Theo growled. I felt it rumble through his chest and it vibrated my bones as I leaned against him. His body was so rigid and tense, like a spring ready to release.

“Theo, no,” I whispered, thinking he might have changed his mind on fighting Warren. I grabbed his shoulders, but he stood his ground, so firm and solid.

Warren roared, “What fucking makes you think you’re the one who controls others’ lives?!”

“No, I’ve never ever thought that in my life! I tried every fucking thing I could to control my damn power, but I can’t!”

Warren’s anger broke for a moment, and he took a half step back.

“pts 99 This rucking Pmv« was stunned at the news as well. What was he talking bout? His power? The power he needed the dreamberries Or? What kind of power was it?

“What... did you say?” Warren murmured.

“Do you think I want this fucking power? Do you think I Jet a say on when and where it fucking chooses to act out?” theo growled, shaking his head.

Warren stared at him, dumbfounded. He was at a complete loss for words, his eyes empty.

“I’d... I’d rather drag my ass to bloody hell a million times than do what I did to Maggie!”

I tried to digest what Theo said, I still had doubts but one thing for sure, was that he didn’t hurt Maggie on purpose. Hearing him say it with such raw emotion confirmed the truth for me.

I hoped that it would help Warren see that he wasn’t the only one hurt by Maggie’s death, Theo wasn’t the monster he thought he was, but most importantly, let go of his hatred.

“Call me all the names you need, brother. I’ve called myself worse, and I deserve worse. I know that,” Theo said, his voice sharp. “Believe it or not, I’m very sorry for Maggie.”

I peeked over his shoulder at Warren, hoping he would back down now, but unfortunately, Warren snarled instead.

“Don’t say her name! You don’t deserve that! You don’t deserve to feel sorry for yourself! Now, fight me!”

He lunged at Theo.

Thu • ‘Voucher: Instantly, Theo pushed me out of the way and spun around, dodging Warren’s attack.

I fell on the ground. Quickly, I rolled over and sat up to see what was going on.

Warren gnashed his teeth. He spun around and tried to punch Theo in the face. Theo blocked the punch and Warren lifted a knee into Theo’s stomach.

Theo grunted and stepped back, but he didn’t seem too thrown off by the blow.

“It doesn’t matter how it happened, Theo, you don’t have the right to mourn Maggie!”

Watren lunged forward, tackling Theo. They tumble around on the ground.

I couldn’t see what was going on or if either of them were injured. They rolled so fast and I could hardly tell whose limbs were whose.

“Fighting me won’t make her care for you any more,” Theo snarled. He pinned Warren’s arms behind his back and stood up, forcing Warren to stand with him. I noticed that Theo was wearing his gloves. He must have put them on at some point after he arrived.

“Sparing me won’t make her love you,” Warren shot back.

He twisted away from Theo and punched Theo in the face. Theo reeled back.

I thought Warren was referring to Maggie, but then I realized he was talking about me.

Leave Ciana out of this!” He growled, his eyes lighting up with anger.

“You think you’ll ever be able to get close to her without putting her in danger? Like you said, you can’t control it! What makes you think you won’t kill the girl you love?” Warren taunted as he pulled a small knife from his pocket.

He brandished the knife toward Theo and motioned for Theo to attack. They both had small cuts and scratches on their faces and arms, but there were no serious injuries, not yet. Theo was still holding back.

“I will never hurt Ciana!” Theo insisted with a snarl.

Warren smirked and glanced at me. Then he looked back at Theo. “I bet you thought the same about Maggie.”

Theo roared and lunged at Warren. He reached out, ready to grab Warren and throw him down. Warren slashed at Theo’s hands and I heard a soft ripping sound.

Theo’s gloves tore on the knife. blade. They hung off of Theo’s fingers in threads.

Immediately, Theo bent his arms, thrusting his elbow into Warren’s nose. I saw how much he tried not to touch Warren with his exposed hands.

‘Why don’t you just kill me too?’”

Suddenly, it seemed like Warren had the upper hand. He threw kicks and punches, Theo blocked, but he couldn’t block them all without using his hands. Every time that happened, Theo would take the blow rather than hurt Warren.

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Theo doubled over, groaning. I couldn’t tell for sure, but it seemed like that kick actually hurt him.

“Warren, you don’t fucking understand... stay away from me, now!”

Warren slammed his fists down on Theo’s shoulders. Theo dropped to his knees. His eyes blazed and he glared at War-

reen.

“I don’t need to understand a murderer!”

Theo retreated as fast as he could, but Warren wouldn’t let him.

Seeing Theo hiding his hands behind his back, Warren was enraged. "Fight me, you coward! Use your hands, why would you fucking insult me like this!"

"Stop, Warren!" Theo shouted again.

I ran at them, ready to intervene. This had gone too far!

Warren grunted as he used all of his might to punch when I threw my body in between them.

"Ciana!" Theo called out, reaching out to block Warren's attack. His palm briefly got in touch with Warren's fist before my body knocked both of them apart.

I hit the floor hard, so did Warren.

However, when I got up from my fall, to my surprise, the fight had ended, because Warren was still on the ground.

Did I injure Warren by accident?

'I rushed over to check on Warren. His skin went pale and his eyes closed. His mouth slightly opened. I watched as his body went rigid and his breathing started to fade.

I shook him, but he didn't wake up. He didn't react at all.

A terrible theory busted into my mind.

Oh no... no, not again.

"Theo, what happened?!" I cried, looking at Theo who was staring at me with panic in his eyes.

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•Theo •

I watched my brother fall to the ground in a lifeless heap.

'Theo, what happened?!' Ciana asked me.

What could I say? That after killing Maggie, I just had another "accidental" murder?

"Oh Goddess! Warren!" Ciana let out a shrill cry. She went to his side and dropped to her knees, looking horrified. "Warren! Warren!"

He didn't move.

'Theo, do something!'

But there was nothing to be done. I'd touched Warren, that meant the worst of my fears. was possible. In fact, it might have already happened.

How much of his life my body had sucked out, I didn't know. My only hope was that Warren, being a descendant of King Lycaon, sharing the same blood as me, would help him withstand my cursed ability more than normal people.

"I told him not to get close..." The words caught in my mouth and I felt like my whole world was caving in on me.

"Warren, come on, open your eyes! Warren please." Ciana patted his face, trying but failing to wake him. She pressed her ear to his chest and lifted her gaze to me, seeking my help.

But I couldn't help her. I couldn't help anyone. The only thing I could bring was death.

"Theo, are you listening to me?" Ciana tried to get my attention. "Theo!"

I looked at her numbly when Jake burst through the door. "Alpha, sorry, I'm a little late. After getting your order, 1—"

He didn't finish his words when he realized what might have occurred.

His eyes moved from my bare hands to Warren's body on the ground. He stood as still as a statue as his eyes continued to look at my brother.

"No." He gasped slowly.

\*Ciana•

Neither of the men before me moved. They both stared at Warren completely lost. I didn't understand why the heck they weren't jumping into action.

Thank the Goddess, I could still feel Warren's heartbeat under my palm. He was alive but barely.

"His heart is still beating but it's really slow. Don't just stand there, we need to get him help." I bellowed at them.

"What did you say?!" Jake's eyes widened and he immediately rushed to my side. We moved Warren to a bed in the

Oeah nearest room.

A hopeful glimmer appeared in Theo's eyes as he snapped out from his trance, "You say he is—"

"Alive," I assured him. "But I need you to tell me what is wrong with Warren so I can try to help him. What exactly did you do to him?"

Theo fell into silence again.

Jake glanced at Theo, quickly assessed the situation, and looked back at me, sighing, "First thing first, I need to get in touch with Dottie."

I nodded, watching Jake walk out of the room to send the message. Looking around, I noticed the servants and guards had gathered around us. I spotted Aurora, who almost fainted the moment she saw how weak Warren was.

"Aurora, first, please tell everyone, not a single word leaves this property, otherwise, the consequence is fatal, understand?" I didn't need Demarco or Luther to know what had occurred. The situation was messy enough.

She nodded her head.

“Second, could you prepare some clean water and medical supplies? We need to bandage both of the princes up.”

As soon as Jake walked back into the room, he assessed the situation, dismissed everyone, and got the security of the entire property under control.

Warren’s wounds were soon cleaned up, but he remained unconscious.

At this point, all we could do was wait for the royal healer to arrive.

Theo sat on a sofa at the far side of the room, staring at Warren. I couldn’t tell what was going through his mind and thought it might be a good idea to give him some space.

‘Jake, I’m going to get some food. Could you help me?’

Jake gave me a knowing nod and followed me, leaving the royal brothers in the room. Once we were out and away from the door, I crossed my arms in front of my chest and asked, “Now, could you tell me everything?”

He took a deep breath and went straight to the point. “Alpha has an ability to take away other’s lives if he touches them using his hands, or his fangs.’

His voice was barely above a whisper but I had heard him clearly.

I froze. I had long known Theo possessed dangerous powers, but this was still beyond what I’d expected.

“You mean, all he needs to do is.... touch?”

“Yes. Alpha’s touch drains the life source out of a person. It was so powerful that whoever that comes in contact with him that way would be killed.

No wonder he was invincible.

“I know what you’re thinking, but Alpha is undefeatable not because of his ability. In fact, he does everything he can to avoid using his power. If anything, his ability is a constraint, not a help for him.”

I was shocked. “Why?”

“Ciana, you may not believe me, but Alpha doesn’t like killing at all.”

“I believe you,” I said firmly. I had no doubt.

Jake paused for a moment and then smiled, ‘You have no idea how happy you would make him had he heard what you just said. No, he doesn’t enjoy killing like the rumor says, especially not with his ability.’

His gaze met mine as he continued, “Because it’s a curse like no other. With the life force, it also pulls all of the worst emotions one would ever experience before their death. There’s no happiness, peace, or even hope. Only the most twisted fear and the darkest, vicious pain. You and I would never understand what it really feels like, but I’ve seen the suffering that he went through.”

My eyes widened. I would never be able to wrap my head around it, all I could feel was a dull ache in my heart.

“To make it worse, it is not a power he has control over. He couldn’t always choose to shut it off. We spent years trying to find remedies.”

“And that’s why he needs dreamberries?”

Jaye nodded. “Indeed, and it worked for a period of time.”

Now I felt terrible for eating that precious fruit. I caught something that he implied, “It worked? How about now? We harvested the replacement using the Moonlit Crystal, right?”

Jake shook his head, “That was when everything went

awfully wrong. For some reason, ever since Alpha took the last dreamberry, not only did it not help, it made things worse.”

“What?! Why?”

“We don’t know,” Jake shook his head. “You remember fainting at the pavilion?”

“So did you... but neither you or I were even touching him!”

“Correct, and that’s exactly why we’re so concerned. It doesn’t happen often, but according to Alpha, there are rare situations when he believes that he has absorbed others’ lives without physical contact.”

I gasped.

Jake let out another sigh. “He wears gloves and keeps his distance. No one would ever believe that the Dark Prince chooses to be alone not because he’s coldhearted, but because he wants to protect those around him.”

And that was why he kept pushing me away after we returned from the illusional world. That was why his attitude shifted dramatically before I left the palace for the second time!

It wasn’t because he was mean for no reason, but because he was trying to do what was best for me.

My heart started to pound harder in my chest, and I felt tears welling up in my eyes.

“Growing up, everyone was afraid of Alpha, except the king. He took a special liking to his youngest son, not because they shared a special bond. It’s because the Dark Prince is his

secret weapon.”

He swallowed the large lump in his throat, trying to continue what he needed to say. “One touch and his enemies are dead. There is no need to train massive troops when one man can kill an army. The king uses him to seize territories and force his enemies into submission. To him, Alpha isn’t his son, but a useful tool.”

My hands covered my mouth as I sucked in air.



I couldn't fathom how a father could be so cruel to his offspring. All this time, Warren held resentment and thought his father didn't love him and that he was the rejected son. While in reality, Theo was being treated even worse.

And the packs that the king had ordered Theo to take out... I couldn't imagine how he felt when he was forced to fight those innocent people.

"Did he not try to break free from the king?"

Jake stared at me solemnly for a few seconds. "Ciana, think it through. If you were Alpha, I'm sure you would make the same choice as him by staying in his role."

As I took a moment to digest Jake's words, many things flashed through my mind.

Right... With or without Theo, if the king is determined to do something, it would get done, except, it would get done in an even more ugly and cruel manner.

At least, if Theo was in control, he could choose to minimize the loss of lives.

A conclusion jumped into my head. "Theo never truly obeyed the king's orders. He didn't wipe out the packs like he was supposed to, he figured ways to spare their lives..."

Jake smiled wryly. "If not, where do you think Luther's Shadow recruits came from?"

It felt like my chest was crushed by something so heavy that I couldn't breathe. How could one man carry the weight of the lives and pain of hundreds and thousands of people?

Suddenly, Jake's ears wiggled slightly. It was a sign someone was mindlinking him.

"Ciana, Dottie is close, I'm going to pick her up. Keep an eye on Alpha for me, will you?"

I swallowed the bitterness down my throat and gave him a nod. "I will."

As I approached the room again, I quietened my footfalls.

Theo was sitting in the same spot, talking to Warren as if he could hear him.

"When we were young, you envied me for the attention and praise the king gave me." Theo looked at Warren's motionless body. "But what I got was never love or adoration. I was being beaten and trained to be a killing machine. I never wanted this kind of life."

His voice was quiet. Not cold, not aloof, not sad either, just hopeless. "You get to choose where your path leads you. You get to decide who you love, who you become, and what you stand for. I never had that luxury, and never will. You have no idea how much I envy you..."

I didn't mean to eavesdrop so I cleared my throat, announcing that I'd returned.

His eyes trained on me as if he was searching my face for something.

Fear? Anger? Disgust? I could assure that he wouldn't find any of those on my face.

In fact, I respected him more than ever for what he had done and my heart ached for him.

I wanted to tell him that he'd done enough, and from this moment on, I would be there for him. No matter how heavy his fate was, I'd be there to shoulder it with him.

"Theo..

"Stay away. Like Jake told you, I can't control this darkness in me. I'm a monster. Warren and Luther were right. All I do is destroy everything I touch no matter how hard I try not to.'

I shook my head. "We will find a way to navigate this. There is always a way out."

"There is no way out for me. I shouldn't be here. It's better for everyone.'

"Says who?" I walked toward him while he stood up and took two steps back. "Because I know for a fact my life would be worse off without you."

"It's only a matter of time before I hurt you too and I will..." He looked away from me for a moment before regaining his composure and looking back at me. "I will never allow that to

A kina' oearth happen. I'd rather kill myself a million times than see you get hurt. Stay away, please!"

"Theo, let me make my own decision." I took another step toward him to which he backed away more until his back hit against the wall. Pain flared in his gorgeous dark eyes.

'Let me follow my heart."

I was only a few more steps away from him.

"Stay back, Ciana! Fuck! Do you not understand I will kill you if I touch you."

"No, you will not.'

Maybe the confidence in my voice gave him hope. I took one last step into his personal bubble and he didn't move away this time.

Then I reached out, grabbed his face in both my hands, pulled his mouth down, and without any delay, sucked his warm and surprised breath into me as his lips covered mine.

His arms went rigid by his side as his lips succumbed to a momentary quiver. Soon I felt them grow still and then relaxed. I moved my lips against his and feared for a moment that my bold move would be met with no response.

His kisses wouldn't kill me. They didn't in the past, and I knew they wouldn't in the future. I didn't know where my confidence came from. Maybe it was simply because I didn't care whether or not my life was at risk at that very moment.

I kissed him sweetly, feeling the worry and tension evaporate from his body.

I just wanted to show him that I wasn't scared of him. He was not the monster so many had accused him of.

As he began to respond to me, a pleasant rush of triumph warmed my flesh. His lips were soft and searching before his tongue plunged deep into my mouth. The sensation was different, deeper and

more urgent than the other kisses we shared, taking my breath away as he licked and sucked my tongue.

He turned his body to guide me to the wall. Placing one hand on either side of me, against the wall, he pinned me in place with his body. I moved my hands from his face and pushed my fingers through his hair as my arms made their way around his neck to further deepen the kiss. He moaned with pleasure as his body heat began to rise.

I closed my eyes and allowed myself to melt and be carried away into this kiss.

The sweet kiss of death.

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\*Theo\*

Her warm lips captivated me, moving so slowly and enticingly against mine. Her arms around my neck held me close and her breasts moved against my chest with each breath. I lifted my hands to pull her closer and stopped, clenching them into fists.

How easily I could forget myself and stay in her embrace with her warm, comforting lips. As Tallis, I had been able to lie to myself that as long as I was careful, I wouldn't hurt her.

But Maggie and Warren had reminded me of just how unpredictable and dangerous I was with their own lives!

I used all of my strength to leave those two soft, alluring lips, but the moment our kiss broke, I regretted it.

Her back was against the wall, her cheeks were pink and her sweet breath was rapid.

My eyes locked on her watery blue orbs and couldn't move away. Under her gentle gaze, the cold and rigid shells that had been sealing around my heart for years started to break down, revealing my extravagant desire to seek warmth and...love.

But how could I?

I took a step away, but I couldn't peel my eyes off her.

She had a light blush on her cheeks and I tried so hard to not pull her back.

I took a deep, trembling breath and steadied myself. Inside, I felt like I could explode at any moment, but after seeing Warren lying there, I couldn't let myself lose control like that again.

'Alpha, Dottie is here.' Jake's mindlink dragged me back to reality. A few moments later, he reappeared, and behind him was Dottie.

"Your Highness." Dottie lowered her head as a brief greeting and I gestured to her to check on Warren.

"Oh Goddess..." She put down her medicine case and started her routine immediately.

I caught Ciana's eye for a moment and she gave me an encouraging look before she followed Dottie to Warren's side.

My brother was still pale and pasty. Unlike before, now he was shivering a little even though Dottie had covered him in thick, down comforters. His eyes were closed, and every now and then, he winced and gasped.

Otherwise, his breathing was even.

Dottie put a wet cloth on his forehead and then put her fingers at his wrist, taking his pulse.

I swallowed into a tight, constricted throat as I stared at his unconscious form. The frown on Dottie's face told me he wasn't doing well.

Ciana went to the edge of the bed and took Warren's hand. Under any other circumstances, the worry in her eyes might have sparked jealousy in me, but now, I wished I could provide some type of comfort to him as well.

My gaze fell on my hands, which were inside a pair of gloves again. They were only capable of killing and destroy- ing. They would never provide comfort.

What a pair of fucking hideous hands! I hid them in my pockets so that I didn't need to see them.

"How is he?" Ciana asked Dottie, her voice pulling me from my thoughts.

"He's in bad shape," Dottie said somberly.

"How bad?"

"He won't wake up on his own. He will stay like this and get worse," Dottie explained, her eyes darkened as she went back to tending to Warren.

"Is there... What can we do for him?" Ciana's voice was trembling, taking the bad news in with great difficulty.

Dottie shook her head. "Nothing to my knowledge. This is not a normal coma, Miss, and therefore normal healing won't have much effect on him."

Ciana frowned slightly. "Normal healing won't have much effect... Do you mean there are abnormal ways that might help?"

Dottie signed, "Maybe. A very slight maybe."

No matter how little hope there was, it was better than none.

"Dottie, explain," I demanded.

"Your... power has drained Prince Warren's core life essence. In order for him to recover and awaken, he needs new essence poured back into him. His body isn't able to re- store what was taken on its own. It must be replaced by an outside source." She turned from Warren and raised an eye- brow at me.

"You mean, I can return the life back to him?! How?"

If that was the case, if I could, then wouldn't all of my problems go away?

However, to my grave disappointment, she shook her head and sighed, "That wasn't what I meant. I wish it was that simple. Prince Theo, has His Majesty never told you about the royal bloodline?"

I shook my head. Everything I knew. I learned from tears and blood. Why would that heartless beast ever want to share anything with me? To him, I was only a fucking killing weapon nothing more.

Dottie gave an understanding nod. "I suppose it is up to me then. What do you know about your ancestor, King Lycaon?"

"He was the beloved son of the Moon Goddess," I said, but the look on Dottie's face implied she expected me to know more. To be honest, I wasn't that interested in my family lineage.

Ciana jumped in. "...and the sole ruler of Egoren. We were all taught in nursery school."

"But that's only a very small part of the legend," Dottie explained, "King Lycaon wasn't the only child of the Moon Goddess!"

The rest of us were shocked. Nowhere had we ever heard that part of the story. We waited for Dottie to continue.

"Legend says that she gave birth to her Sacred Twins, Morrighan and Lycaon. However, unlike normal twins who shared lots of similarities, Morrighan and Lycaon were totally opposite. Well, at least their powers were. Their powers represented two sides of a coin. Brightness and darkness, light and shadow..." She turned her head and glanced at me to finish her sentence, "...life and death."

Warren twitched slightly, and Dottie leaned over, dabbing his lips with a moist cloth, wetting them so that they wouldn't crack open due to dehydration.

"The Moon Goddess divided this world in two. The realm of light was given to Morrighan, the White Queen, and all of her descendants. The realm of shadow was given to Lycaon, the Dark King, and his offspring."

I clamped my lips together and motioned for Dottie to continue.

"The White Queen's power is to give. Give life, rejuvenate, and create. The Dark King's power, on the other hand, is to take. Take life, destroy, and terminate."

My heart sank more. I didn't need another reminder of what a freaking monster I was!

"You think a descendent of White Queen Morrighan could return Warren's life essence then?" Ciana asked quickly, as if she wasn't worried about the horrible ability I was cursed with.

"Maybe," Dottie let out another sigh. "But young lady, ever since you were born, have you ever heard about the White Queen? Even if she exists, she rules in another world."

"Another world, like the Heavens?"

"Whatever that means."

"Then... there is no way to save Warren," Ciana muttered, despair filling her voice.

That same despair filled my chest and I looked away from Warren.

"I didn't say that either. Please don't jump to conclusions so fast. What I wanted to tell you was perhaps King Sebastian knows of a way to restore a stolen essence," Dottie suggested.

I could read the look on Jake's face. We both knew my bastard of a father would never lift a finger for Warren!

"Dottie, I want to know more about what my father might be able to do," I said. I wasn't done with her story. If it was something the Dark King's descendants could do, maybe there was a way for me to do it too.

She was the one that brought it up like it was some great, important history lesson. Nothing she'd said had been action-able, with the exception of my father might know something.

Dottie sighed and rubbed her hands on her thighs. I got the sense that she was about to tell me something my father didn't want me to know. Something that she could get in trouble for sharing with me.

She'd been around the palace a long time. While tending to the sick and injured, she probably heard a lot of things, just as an unseen bystander.

"How could my father help Warren?" I repeated the question more firmly.

"I said there might be a way, but I don't know that for sure. There is a legend that says one of the dark kings, hundreds of years ago, was able to save his wife by sharing his life with her. It returned her longevity. The story does not say how it was done, only that it might have occurred. King Sebastian might know more."

"What made you think that he has that kind of knowledge?" I stared at her, pressing her, "Dottie, what else are you not telling me?"

She looked a little anxious, as if she was weighing whether she should tell me the truth.

I crouched down so that I was at the same eye level as hers. True that she worked for the crown, but she was one of the very few that had shown genuine care to us when we were young.

All my siblings and myself were treated by her at some point.

"Dottie, you watched us grow up. Warren... is a kind soul. Help us, please."

She sighed, "I'd get myself in trouble if this gets into another pair of ears."

"You have my word to ensure your safety."

She fell into silence and I gave her time to consider. Ciana and Jake were also waiting quietly and patiently.

Finally, she took a deep breath and looked me in the eye.

"Every pack has a sacred artifact. Do you know what the Royal artifact is?"

"The heirloom. It's a necklace that gets passed down from the king to his successor, but that was more like a symbol of power. To my knowledge, it doesn't have any function."

Dottie shook her head. "That's because it's not the real artifact. It's a secret because the king didn't want anyone to know."

"What's the real artifact?"

"It's a scroll."

"What?"

"It is a scroll that is said to have been written by the Moon Goddess herself and given to her son, Dark King Lycaon. Except for the king, no one knows what was written in it. However, to get to it, you will need the necklace, as it is the key to the Sacred Scroll storage."

After saying it aloud, there was relief on Dottie's face. Her motherly demeanor returned, and she seemed to be happy to help.

"That scroll may have information about Lycaon's power and different ways to use it," Dottie said.

"And one of those ways is to reverse what was done?" Ciana asked.

"Perhaps. If it doesn't have exact answers, it could, at least, provide a roadmap. Again, only the king knows exactly what's on the scroll."

No one spoke for a long time. Dottie finished cleaning up and left a few healing salves and teas for Warren. Nothing that would fix him, but they'd help with the bruising and help keep his strength up until we could figure out how to help him.

"We have to ask King Sebastian for help," Ciana said, breaking the silence finally.

"It's going to be a hard sell though," Jake pondered as he spoke.

"He may be ruthless usually, but once he knows how seriously injured Warren is, he may have a change of heart. This is his son we are talking about after all."

I caught her hesitation when she said "his son," while Jake played the devil's advocate, "Well, he had one of his own sons executed for treason."

Ciana got off the bed and came to stand right in front of me. "Warren has never broken any laws or been disloyal. Besides, we don't really have a choice, do we?"

"I'm not saying we won't give it a try, but don't be too hopeful."

Ciana frowned, "Even if the king doesn't agree to help, we can't just give up on Warren!"

"No, we won't. I promise," I assured her.

Ciana let out a breath of relief and glanced back at my comatose brother.

I turned to Jake, "Prepare the transportation, and we'll leave in two hours at sunrise to go back to the palace."

"Yes, Alpha," Jake replied and walked out of the door.

I softened my voice and said to Ciana, "It has been a long night. Ciana, would you do me a favor and get some rest?"

Her beautiful doe eyes focused on me, and it was almost impossible to peel my gaze away.

"Theo, I want to stay with you."

Those were such simple words, yet, just like a warm spring breeze, they gently swept through my chest and immediately warmed my stone-cold heart inside.

When she kissed me, I could feel her rapid heartbeat and her affection. She believed in me, for some unknown reason. She'd seen everything I was capable of and she still wanted to get closer...

How I wished I could be next to her at all times, indulging in her warm demeanor and sweet scent, so that I could forget about those lonely, dark days of my life.

But I couldn't. Dottie had made it clear that I was born to take and destroy.

"Ciana, I need some time alone to think about how to persuade my father. Listen to me, get some rest."

Her lips parted and closed. In the end, she gave me a nod and left me in the room.

Heavens knew how much effort it took for me to not run after her and pull her back into my arms. I wanted to tell her that I'd trade everything I had in exchange for the privilege to be with her.

However, I had long lost the right to choose my fate.

I sat on the edge of my bed and turned my hands over.

Regardless of what I wanted, there was no future for us.

Or for me.

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\*Ciana\*

I couldn't believe I dozed off!

Theo said they would be leaving in two hours-were they already gone?

I ran to check on Warren. He wasn't in his room. For a moment, my heart sank to the bottom and I thought they chose to leave without me.

Thank Goddess, when I got to the foyer, Jake and a couple of guys were getting Warren loaded into a van. He was strapped on a gurney, still unconscious.

Aurora was there, saying goodbye to Warren. Her eyes were glassy with tears.

I walked over and was about to ask Aurora whether she would like to come with us to the palace, when I realized that Theo actually hadn't extended the invitation for me to go with him.



I watched Theo and Jake getting prepared to set off, and couldn't help but decide to find out what was their plan.

"Do you have a plan on what to do now?" I asked, walking up beside Theo.

His face was drawn and distant again. The past 12 hours seemed extremely long, and he'd been so obviously upset and emotional at what happened to Warren and what he was capable of.

ty.

For a few moments, he'd even let me see that vulnerabili-

Now, he was the same old aloof Theo again.

"Yes, to a degree. We've made some arrangements in the palace," Theo said.

"Okay," I said softly, looking at the ground.

Theo's 'we' only included himself and Jake, obviously. It didn't sound like I was being included to return to the palace.

I couldn't assume that I'd be welcome to accompany them without an invitation, as the royal palace wasn't my backyard. Now that I'd technically "dropped out" of the running for Theo's potential bride, there was no reason someone like me would have to go to the castle.

The palace wasn't exactly open for anyone to come and go as they please.

But I wanted to. My heart ached with the desire to stay with Theo and to see Warren recover.

Theo wasn't inviting me, so I wasn't sure if he'd be receptive to me asking to tag along, because I might end up being more of a burden to him. He had a lot going on in his head with what he'd been through recently.

Then there was the promise I'd made to Lady Nita. I'd told her I would stay away from Theo and the palace if she helped him. She'd kept up her end of the deal. I couldn't go back on mine.

Besides, and most importantly, I'd kissed Theo last night and he'd... he hadn't mentioned anything about it.

At this point, I could no longer lie to myself.

Yes, I fell for the Dark Prince.

I wanted to be with him and be there for him. I wanted him to know that he wasn't alone.

But what did he think about me?

Yes, he was protective of me, I knew that, just like he cared about Maggie, Warren, and even Jake. But was there anything more than that?

"Ciana, you in there?" Jake asked, waving his fingers in front of my face.

“Y-yes, what?” I asked, snapping out of my trance.

“I’ve been calling you. You must have been thinking pretty deeply.”

“Oh, yeah... I just hope Warren gets the help he needs,” I forced a smile on my face and played it off like it wasn’t a big deal that they were leaving without me.

But it was.

“Well, we’re headed back to the palace.”

I was extremely disappointed that Theo didn’t want me to go with them. I could feel my face fall and I couldn’t maintain that earlier smile.

Oh well, I’d better bid them goodbye so that they could leave and get Warren the help he needed. As for myself, I was seriously considering tailing them secretly...

“You know, Brook is still there. She misses you a lot,” Jake added.

“I miss her too,” I admitted, sighing heavily. It felt like I hadn’t seen her for years.

“She’s been... well, she hasn’t been feeling all that well lately,” Jake said. He blushed suddenly, like he wasn’t supposed to know about Brook’s personal life.

I blinked a couple of times and nudged his shoulder. “It is okay to care about her and worry about her.”

“I know. I just think she’d feel better getting a visit from you,” he added.

“I’d love to see her. I’m just “

“Besides, we might need help with Prince Warren. He’ll need a lot of care, and who knows what the king will decide,” Jake cut me off.

“I’ll go!” There was the invitation I was hoping for, and there was no way I’d let the opportunity pass.

“Great!” Jake lowered his voice as if he was worried that his Alpha would hear him. I glanced at Theo, who wasn’t paying attention, apparently.

The purpose of my trip was to see Brook and to help with Warren. As long as I wasn’t going back for Theo, Lady Nita couldn’t say I broke my promise, right?

I was a bit nervous when we got into the van. What would Moucher:

Theo say? What if he scolded me and asked me to stay behind? I would tell him that my friends needed me, and it was none of his business.

With that in mind, I was ready to face his challenge.

However, other than freezing at the car door for a couple of seconds, he didn’t say anything or do anything else before sitting down next to me. My eyes didn’t leave his face the entire time, and I could have sworn I saw a hint of relief in his composed dark eyes.

So, he was okay with me tagging along after all?

All of a sudden, I felt energetic and in a much lighter mood.

When the car started moving, I was sure that he wouldn't be able to get rid of me at this point, so I turned my attention to Warren.

He hadn't changed at all since the night before. Still pale and unconscious. Periodically, I checked his pulse. Some- times, he was so still that I was afraid he wasn't breathing any- more.

Theo hadn't said anything to me at all. He looked at War- ren sometimes and then looked out the window.

At first, I was simply happy to be with him, but after more than an hour, it was still dead quiet in the car. I felt the need to break the awkward silence.

"Do you think Warren will be alright?" I asked, even though in this case, we both had exactly the same amount of information, and his answer wouldn't be wiser than what I'd already know.

"Yes."

"I hope so too."

"Do you think King Sebastian will help?"

"No, but we'll figure out a way to make him do it."

"How?"

"Don't know yet."

Alright, I gotta say, conversation wasn't Prince Theo's forte.

"I haven't seen Brook in so long," I changed the topic ca- sually.

Theo grunted in response.

"Jake said she's been feeling a bit under the weather. He thinks seeing me will help cheer her up. I'd like to be there for her," I added.

"I'm sure she'll appreciate that," Theo said absently.

"And you know, I can help with Warren, too. It won't be easy looking after him while you figure out what to do."

Theo just nodded.

"So, you know, don't send me away. I'm going back to the palace to help two friends," I reiterated.

Theo raised an eyebrow at me but he didn't say anything.

All right, I admitted it, sitting in awkward silence was probably way easier than trying to chat the crown prince up.

I was hoping to get a sense of what he was feeling about me, but at this rate, I was simply happy that he didn't outright reject me.

When the car pulled through the majestic front gates, I felt it had been ages since I last set foot in the royal palace.

With Jake's super efficiency, Warren was fully settled down in his room within twenty minutes, including proper security and medical support.

"Theo," I noticed that he stood up and was walking toward the door. "Where are you going?"

He looked me in the eye, "I'm going to see the king. I have my men here, they'll only listen to you, so most people in the palace shouldn't bother you. Take care of yourself and Warren."

"Of course!" I nodded, "That's the least I could do. Good luck!"

Jake smiled and followed Theo, "We need it! By the way, Brook should be here soon."

I watched them walk away as I said a prayer to the Moon Goddess.

Sure enough, not long after that, Brook showed up.

"Oh, I've missed you so much!" she said happily.

"I missed you too," I smiled, then immediately noticed someone else was also here.

Brook whispered, "She insisted on coming. When she heard Prince Warren was ill, she lost it!"

As soon as Sophia saw Warren's form laying in the bed, she bounced on the balls of her feet and let out a high-pitched cry, "Your Highness! Oh no, Prince Warren!"

"Miss, you're not allowed in here!" One of Theo's men said, blocking her at the door.

"I'm not allowed, and those unruly women are?" She pointed at us. "Let me in!"

"Miss Ciana has special authorization from Prince Theo. If you continue this behavior, I'll have to remove you from here by force."

"Ciana!" Sophia shouted my name, and the guard grabbed her arm.

What did she want?

Brook tugged my sleeve, seemingly worried that I might get into an argument with Sophia. "Ciana, just ignore her."

I thought Sophia would flip out and start cursing, but she didn't.

"Ciana, Let me in... please."

Brook and I exchanged a look, and we saw surprise on each other's faces. Was this really Sophia?

I let out a heavy sigh and told the guard. "Hold on for a moment please."

He followed my instructions immediately and loosened his grip. She flung her arm free.

"Sophia, I can let you in, but I have a condition."

“Humph!” She clenched her fists and was back to her proud and bratty self. “What do you want? Money, power, or resources? Ciana, really, how poor and pathetic your pack is that you need to take every possible opportunity to get a little benefit?”

I rolled my eyes. “My condition is—lower your voice!” Then I said to the guard, “Please let her in.”

“But Miss Ciana—”

I smiled at the guard assuredly. “Don’t worry, she is going to be fine.”

It appeared that Sophia was dumbfounded that I let her in that easily. She smattered, “That...that’s it?”

“Or do you prefer me asking you to cut me a large check? Look, I did this only because you’re really worried about Warren. The more people here to take care of him, the better. And, you’re welcome.”

Sophia stared at me for a moment. Then, without another word, she went to Warren’s side and took his hand.

Brook whispered, “You’re sure this is okay?”

I nodded. Sophia was simple to read. Whatever she liked or hated, she would tell you and show you. She was in love with Warren. I could tell that the worry and concern in her eyes were genuine.

If the king didn’t care about his children, he would at least care about the powerhouses backing them. Warren getting acquainted with the Alpha’s daughter of the Pomeni pack would only help him in the future.

We shifted our gazes from Warren and Brook pulled me to the living room of Warren’s suite.

“Jake told me about Prince Warren. Are you holding up okay?” she asked.

“I’m as good as can be. At this point, there is not much we can do.”

Brook nodded in understanding. “Other than Prince Warren, how has life been, you know, away from the palace?”

I had been expecting her to be a little less energetic, based on what Jake said about her feeling unwell. Maybe seeing me was enough to make her feel a bit better.

“A lot has happened. I thought I’d just return to my pack and life would go back to normal but...”

I had no idea where to start with answering her question about my life. Too much had happened for me to squeeze it all into one conversation.

“Tell me, what’s been going on? I feel like I am sheltered here from all the good things. The palace is so quiet and boring sometimes.” Brook rested her head on my shoulder.

“It was just chaotic. My parents were gone for a while and that caused some problems. Thank the Goddess Warren and

Theo were there to help smooth things over. It was nice to go home, even if it was just for a little while. I wish I could have stayed longer.”

“Why didn’t you?” Brook asked, her eyes big and curious.

“Um, because I was traveling with Warren.” I chose to keep things simple.

“So... you were traveling with Prince Warren. Did you ever confess to him?” she prodded, nudging me with her elbow and winking at me.

“Confess?” I asked, creasing my brow.

“You know, about your past with him. Did you confirm that he’s your secret boyfriend?” she asked, giggling still. him.”

Sighing, I shook my head and looked at my lap. “It wasn’t

“Oh,” Brook said, her joy fading slightly. “Sorry about that.”

“No, don’t be!” I didn’t want Brook to think I was upset about it. “Honestly, I was somewhat happy it wasn’t him.”

“Why?”

Why? I found myself not able to answer immediately. I fell silent as Theo’s face popped into my mind when I thought of my past.

And when my stomach squirmed at the word “boyfriend”.

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\*Theo•

I took a deep breath outside my father’s door.

This was a long shot, to say the least. The man didn’t have a single sympathetic bone in his body. The likelihood of him helping Warren was slim to none but I had to try.

His life was on the line. I’d done what was irreparable to Maggie, but for Warren, at least, there was still a chance.

Bitterness and guilt wormed their way into my chest and refused to let go. Words could not describe how sorry I was, but sorry couldn’t make anything better. As long as I was breathing, I wouldn’t give up on Warren.

It was a promise I made to Ciana and myself.

I raised my fist to the door and knocked.

“Come in.” My father’s muffled voice came from behind the door.

His suite was mainly decorated with simple and warm colors, such as light gold and clean cream. It looked dignified and classy like most of the other rooms in this palace. However, the bright room couldn’t lessen the callous and vicious vibe of its owner.

“Theo, you rarely come here. I’m hoping you’re here to bring me good news, not trouble.” He didn’t lift his head from his

document, nor did he seem interested in what I was about to say.

“I need your help.”

“Oh, my help you say? Interesting.” He finally put down the documents he was reading and took a sip of the half-drunken amber liquor from a cup on his Jesk.

“Tell me, what exactly do you need help with?”

“Warren is dying.”

Not even a single twitch. That fucking psycho remained completely passive.

He took the horrible news about his second oldest son no differently than a report about upcoming inclement weather.

“Okay. If he is sick, Dottie is a better person to talk to.” He lowered his head and was about to pick up his paper again.

A rush of anger boiled inside of me, but it wasn't the time to unleash my fury. I took a deep breath, “No, she can't help. No healers can. Warren was injured.. by me.”

“Oh? And how exactly did he end up in this uh...unfortunate predicament.”

I balled my fists at the side of my body. “I touched him by accident. I drained the life out of him.”

“Then he should be dead by now. Your touch is lethal.”

“He isn't dead, but he isn't awake either. That's why I'm here.” He stared at me and silence gre between us.

It was no secret I loathed him. He knew that but he didn't care. Why would he care about what a tool felt about its master? However, I would hope that after all the blood I had spilled for him, he would do this one thing for me as a courtesy.

“No. I'm afraid I can't help.”

“You didn't even know what I about to ask before you turned me down.”

He nodded slowly, “That's correct. I don't need to know.”

“What do you mean you don't need to know? Warren is your son!” I tried my best to control my volume, but I knew it was getting very difficult.

“Warren is my son, that's true, but with or without him, my country won't be different.” He khrugged.

“The strong should survive in this world. Even if he makes it through this time, it won't be long before he runs into another problem. And I don' t have the time and energy to babysit a useless weakling.

My fists clenched so hard that I could hear my knuckles pop. I bit my tongue so hard to hold back my burning fury that I could taste the blood in my mouth.

This was not for me. It was for Warren, for Maggie, and for Ciana. I had to try harder.

“How about you treat this as a favor for me? Father, a reward for your obedient, useful... weapon?”

He let out an aloof chuckle and shook his head. His lighthearted tone was like oil pouring on my already burning

fury. "Theo, to be honest, I'm quite surprised to see you here today. What happened to you? You're never the sentimental type. If anyone, I'd think that it would be Maggie who would come and beg me."

"Maggie is dead. She was killed by me." I was amazed that I was able to say those words in such an even tone. "Your

Majesty, You don't have many children left. With the tasks you assign me, who knows when I'll die? Simply for the sake of securing a successor, wouldn't you want to have Warren there in case one day I can't return?"

"Maggie's dead?" He was a little surprised. But only surprise, there wasn't any additional emotion whatsoever.

I nodded, hoping he would reconsider my request. I wasn't afraid of him, but killing him right now would not help us accomplish what we were looking for.

"Okay," he acknowledged mildly and thought for a few moments before looking me in the eye again. "I agree. What you said was quite right."

Holy shit, did I fucking persuade him?!

I was just about to let out a long breath of relief when I heard him add, "That's exactly why you need to give me an heir. The time is ticking. And it's actually perfect that you arrived. I have a present for you. Greta, sweetheart, you can come in now."

The door to his bathroom opened and in walked a half-naked woman. But that wasn't what caught my attention. It was the scent that wafted in the air.

I did my best from inhaling it because I knew exactly what it was.

An aphrodisiac, curated by magic to arouse the wildest, ugliest desires!

"She has hips suitable for childbearing and she is a little easy on the eyes too. I've tested her a few times and I don't mind sharing. She is good at what she does and she will make sure you are pleased well."

My father walked out of the door of his bedroom. "You will produce an heir for me tonight, Theo. If you are obedient and do as I say then maybe I'll consider helping your brother. But if you choose to defy me then your brother is as good as dead."

The strength in my body dissipated, and I felt dizzy and warm.

Guards ran over to the door as the king peered over his shoulder and said, "The door will remain locked until you do as I say. And it's been charmed so not even you with all your strength can break it down."

I growled and charged toward my father but only in time to slam my fist against the hardwood.



My wolf was on edge and begging to be released but I fought back the urge to release it as I knew my beast would be even more tempted due to the drug.

"Your Highness," the half-dressed woman said from behind

"Shall we begin? The king will not release you until you bed me."

I didn't dare turn back to her.

The scent of the aphrodisiac was already stirring up feelings that were only meant to be reserved for a special person. However, even thinking about her at this moment was an unforgivable insult to her.

I felt the woman's hand on my shoulder and I tensed. She trailed it all the way down and then she made her way to my front.

I felt a tingling sensation on every inch of skin she touched. Blood rushed to my groin on its own accord.

"Can't you see how much you want me, Your Highness?" She giggled, pressed her body against mine, and whispered in my ear, "I can make you feel so good."

She placed her hand over my growing length and I jerked away. I was disgusted despite the burning pain in my cock that ached for release.

I pulled away from her and ran straight for the large window and plunged out of it without even thinking it through.

My father's room was on the third level and I was sure I would break a few bones. But I didn't care. I had to get as far away from that ugly succubus as possible.

I shifted mid-air and did my best to land on my paws but I misstepped.

My wolf let out a low whimper as I heard some sickening cracks.

Shit! I growled as I toppled to the ground. To my pleasant surprise, the pain helped clear my mind.

My body was still on fire and I knew what I wanted. I only prayed that the effect of the aphrodisiac wore off quickly.

Without any delay, I took off running to the western side of the palace, so I could wait for the drug to run its course undisturbed.

I shifted back and slammed the door of my suite closed, panting heavily with my naked body pressed against the door. More than ever, I was grateful for my dark, cold and deserted sanctuary.

However, I immediately realized that someone was already there, and the next moment, I was immersed in the most delicious, sweet and alluring scent.

My heart started to pound frantically. What was she doing here?

A shiver traveled down my spine as I stared at her. The aphrodisiac's effects hadn't worn off and I couldn't control myself when I was like this.

Her usual soft and elegant scent of water lily was now irresistibly intoxicating, drawing me in. I couldn't stop my feet from moving in her direction.

"Theo?" She gasped, and her eyes were wide open and her adorable cute mouth slightly ajar. I knew I needed to get out of there as soon as I possibly could.

But it was too late.

In a blink of an eye, I had her pinned against the bed and I was hovering over her. I dipped my head down and nuzzled my

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nose in the crook of her neck. I breathed her in more deeply. Mine.

That was all I could think about. I wanted to make her mine. I wanted her to wear my mark and bear my pup. She was the one I wanted. She was the one I needed.

"Theo... "

Her voice quivered, and I could sense fear in her tone.

She was afraid of me! That thought struck me and chilled me to the core.

"GET OUT!"

I ripped myself from her hold and covered my body with a blanket. But the burning need within me was too strong to bear, I bit down on my forearm, hoping the pain would cleanse my mind again.

"STOP!" she screamed, pulling my arm away from my teeth. "Oh, Goddess, What happened?"

The initial shock in her voice faded, replaced by concern.

"Theo, your body is burning! What did they do to you?!"

"Aphrodisiac...he... the king... wants an heir and he locked me with a woman. I... I jumped out the... the window... FLICK!" I could barely articulate, and all I wanted to do was feel her pure, cold, delicious body against my burning skin and make her mine.

"Leave..." I begged, the heat was spreading all over my body. I could feel the beads of sweat accumulating across my forehead, and the taste of blood spreading in my mouth.

"No, I can't leave you like this!"

Her voice was gentle but determined. Then, the next second, her arms circled around my neck, she drew me in closer and whispered, "I... I want to help. Theo, let me help you..."

Without warning, she kissed me

Her scent invaded my senses and her presence excited every cell of my body. My brain became a burning mess.

Her delicate tongue gently licked my cracked lips, and she opened her cute little mouth to welcome my tongue, which claimed and tasted every inch of her luscious mouth without hesitation.

Her soft breasts were against my naked chest and her core against my hard erection. I could not suppress the moan that escaped my throat.

"Theo..." she panted, her face was pink and her eyes were moist. However, when I looked into them, I saw my own reflection—a horrendous beast defeated and driven by a stupid aphrodisiac!

It was like a bucket of ice-cold water dunked over me.

Yes, I wanted her, but this was not right.

Not like this. Not in this way. No at this time.

I thrust myself away from her and jumped out of the bed, didn't even dare to look at her.

If I did, I knew I would stay.

After slamming the bathroom door closed, I threw myself into the running icy cold shower.

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\*Ciana•

The bathroom was locked from the inside. The shower ran full force, and cool mist came from under the door.

I took a few deep breaths to cool my mind down, but it wasn't easy. What happened just now played in my head over and over, sending waves of heat through my body.

What was I thinking? Seducing a royal prince while he was drugged? What was wrong with me?

I covered myself.

Ever since our kiss at Warren's summer home, we barely touched that topic. I felt I'd done enough to show him how I felt about him, and I thought he cared about me. But even to this day, he'd never told me how he felt about me.

Thinking about what just occurred, my heart swelled with both bitterness and sweetness, and I just didn't know which one I felt more.

I couldn't bring myself to see him suffer, and I was willing to do whatever I could to provide him relief. Yet, he'd rather bear his painful desire than be with me.

On the other hand, I felt respected and somewhat relieved that he chose not to take my virginity simply to fulfill his

physical need.

I went to Theo's bed and sat on the end of it, waiting for him to reemerge.

I had no idea how to face him again or what I should say when he came out, but I just couldn't allow myself to leave without at least talking to him again—whatever the topic was.

In addition, I did recall why I was here in the first place.

He hadn't told me anything about whether or not his father was going to help with Warren. I wasn't going to leave until I knew the verdict.

Theo took a long, long time in the bathroom. Even after the shower stopped running, he didn't come out right away.

I sat on my hands and waited patiently. Hopefully, he wasn't expecting me to leave.

It took a while, but finally, he came out of his bathroom with a black towel wrapped around his waist. He looked exhausted, but it didn't stop my eyes from traveling down his bare chest and solid abs, causing my face to heat up again.

He paused when he saw me. Our gazes locked and I could tell his dark eyes were back to their usual calm and collected state.

Without saying a word, he moved past me and went straight to his walk-in closet. When he came out again, he was fully dressed.

"So..." I started.

"So..." he said the same word at the same time as me. Then he cleared his throat and gestured for me to go first.

"So... did the king agree to help Warren?" I asked, jumping to the safer and most important topic.

He looked very relieved at the subject I'd chosen. Then his eyes darkened and his brow creased.

"No, he's not going to help," he replied bitterly. Theo leaned against the wall with his arms crossed in front of him and scowled at nothing.

I clenched my fists and stood up, like that would make a difference. "Warren is his son and he's not going to..."

I trailed off, shaking my head. How could Sebastian be that callous and cruel and just watch his own son die?

I thought even the most horrible man had something to care about. Based on what I'd seen in the Moonlit crystal, I thought there was a chance he'd help Warren. Then again, I had no idea how truthful the illusionary world was compared to reality.

Theo confirmed it again by shaking his head. Then he started to walk away, causing me to reach out to grab his arm.

"Wait, don't leave yet. What are we going to do?"

Theo stiffened in my grasp and I quickly released him, stepping back. I looked down shyly. Apparently, we still weren't past the awkwardness.

I thought he was about to leave me here by myself, but he stopped at his fridge and pulled out two bottles of water, handing one to me.

I took it robotically— did the Dar Prince just "serve" me? That thought made me snicker.

“To be honest, I didn’t go in with high expectations. I know him too well. Our best bet now is getting the scroll and unlocking its secrets ourselves.”

He took a sip of water. I watched the lump on his throat, and somehow, that made my heart speed up.

“I agree,” I tried to focus back on our task at hand. “How do we go about doing that?” I asked, raising an eyebrow and meeting Theo’s eyes again.

“The scroll is stored in a safe. So we’ll have to get the key and unlock the safe.”

“Err... you made it sound so simple, but we both know it’s easier said than done. We don’t even know where the safe is.”

Theo smirked lightly, “You don’t really think I went to my father’s chamber just to have an unpleasant conversation with him, do you?”

I jumped up, “You know where the safe is?”

“Yes. It isn’t difficult to guess. We’ve confirmed that he has a secret locked compartment in his chamber, and the scroll is stored there.”

“How did you figure this out?”

“When I told you I needed some time to think about our plan, I didn’t just sit there and do nothing.”

I froze for a second. I was sure when he said “our plan” just now, I was part of it. This simple finding just made my day.

“And the key to the safe is around his neck and he never takes it off,” I voiced my thoughts, “Yoår... The king is always cautious around people, not to mention, he has guards around him all the time.”

I refused to address Sebastian as Theo’s father ever since I learned what a psychopath he was.

“That’s true.”

Groaning, I pressed my palm to my forehead. When I said it was easier said than done, I should have said it was impossible.

We stood there in silence for a moment. I tried to think of how to get the king parted from his key while Theo just stared at me. His gaze was almost gentle.

I felt my face begin to get warm To avoid any unnecessary distraction, I gave him a nudge, Aren’t you worried? How are we going to get the key then?”

He looked away and chucked the rest of the water. “Um, we could get him unconscious then the key would be in the room with the safe.”

“True!” I clapped my hands and added on to what he said. “And, we could get in, get the scroll, and get out without him even knowing. He’d wake up with the safe locked and key still around his neck!”

However, I thought of another problem, “But doesn’t he normally have guards around him twenty-four seven?” “So?” he shrugged, “do you hav that little faith in my unbeatable reputation?”

Was he trying to lighten the mood for me? I froze for a second, and couldn't decide whether I should shake or nod my head.

"I have faith in you, of course, it IS a good plan. But I'm worried that when the king is awake, he'll find out from the guards what we've done. Stealing the symbols of power is an act of betrayal and treason."  
"

"What are you planning that would lead to treason?" a familiar voice rang behind us, and I looked around to see Lady Nita coming through the door connected to the side chamber, my old room.

I forgot to lock the door again!

She was poised, elegant, and distant as usual, but her words were sharp and hard to swallow. "I thought you agreed to leave my son alone and never come back here."

I opened my mouth, trying to come up with a quick explanation, but Theo jumped in, stepping between me and his mother.

"Ciana is helping me save Warren's life."

"What happened to Warren?"

Theo scoffed, "You don't even care about your own son, why would you care about the son of your hated husband and his mistress?"

"Theo, is this how you should speak to your mother?" she asked evenly.

"You stopped acting like a mother years ago. Now, we're busy, if you're not willing to help out, then at least, get out of our way."

Displeasure glimmered in Lady Nita's eyes, but she didn't turn and leave. Surprisingly, she didn't force me to leave either.

She and I hadn't been on good terms, and I appreciated Theo standing by me. However, the way Theo spoke to her still bothered me a little.

I knew some of their history and could totally understand why Theo kept his distance. However, my intuition told me that deep down she loved him, and deep down, Theo loved her back. If there was any possibility; I would love to see them reconcile.

I also wondered if I should tell her about Luther. He was the only family she had, outside of Theo. Maybe it would make her less bitter if she knew she still had family out there. At least, it might give her something to hope for.

"Very well, what are you planning to do?"

"We can handle it on our own," Theo muttered, crossing his arms.

I grabbed Theo's arm and stepped around him. Quickly, I glanced at him and shook my head. "We need all the help we can get," I reminded him.

Theo sniffed and stared at me for a moment. Finally, he nodded and we both turned back to Lady Nita.

“We believe there is something in King Sebastian’s bedroom that has the answer on how to save Warren.” I tried to keep it as simple as I could without giving away too much sensitive information. After all, we’d promised to protect Dottie and not get her in trouble.

“So you need to get into Sebastian’s bedroom and look for it?”

“Yes. What’s more, we also need the key around the king’s neck. So we were discussing how we could make him unconscious without him and his guards finding out what we are doing.”

“Getting a man as suspicious as Sebastian to let his guard down won’t be easy,” Lady Nita commented flatly.

“And that was the same conclusion we came to just as you arrived,” Theo said, his voice tight and unfriendly.

but for me, it shouldn’t be too difficult,” she finished her words.

“What are you planning to do then?” Theo asked her.

“For years, I’d been denying him to approach me, but today, I happened to have a good reason to ‘make it up to him’,” she smiled confidently.

I’d never seen her smile before, but a quick glance of that immediately made me understand why she was called the most beautiful woman in the world when she was young.

The sharpness of her facial features immediately softened, and her cold demeanor was swept clean as light gathered in her gentle green eyes. The corner of her lips slightly curled

up, forming an alluring and elegant curve.

No one could doubt a smile like that.

However, Theo’s brow creased more. If Lady Nita had a way to help us achieve our goal, that could save us a lot of trouble. But why was Theo so upset about it?

“No, I disagree,” he said, “We can do this on our own, I don’t need you to—”

I realized he wasn’t upset about it. He was worried about his mother’s safety.

“Theo,” she interrupted him, “I’ll be safe. Don’t worry.”

“I...” He turned his head away awkwardly and murmured, “I’m not worried about you.

“In that case,” she said, arching an eyebrow, “you guys find a place in that wing to hide, and I’ll be there in an hour.”

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\*Theo

“Wow, Prince Theo, I’d always known you’re good at fighting, I just never knew you were also so good at sneaking around!” Ciana commented as we dragged the third guard who I just knocked out into an empty room near my father’s suite.

“Wait a moment.” She uncapped a mini flask and placed it under each of the guards’ noses for a few seconds.

“What’s that?”

“Strong anesthetic. Dottie gave it to me. This will make sure they get a good sleep for at least four hours. Too bad it doesn’t work on the Dark King’s descendants.”

It took me quite some effort to peel my gaze off her bright eyes. Now that the hallway was cleared, we quietly moved to the open entrance of my father’s suite.

The door was left ajar, I thought my mother did that intentionally, so Ciana and I could peek through the seam.

She was holding a plate with a small cake on it, a smile on her lips. There was a freshly opened bottle of wine on the desk in front of Father and two glasses filled with the deep, red liquid.

“What are you doing here?” my father asked sternly, a sneer on his lips.

“Have you forgotten that it is my birthday today?” she signed.

I clenched my fists. Ciana turned to me, her eyes wide, as if she was asking me whether I knew about this.

I gave her a nod.

“I have not forgotten,” my father replied. His sneer turned into a tense smile.

I could see that she was lowering his guard.

“But you’ve never come to spend your birthday with me,” he said, his lips curving down.

“In light of recent events, I’ve been... I’ve been thinking about how short life is and how much time I’ve wasted being selfish and cold,” she said. Her tone became somber and she looked down.

Ciana’s mouth formed a small “O”, and she gave my mother a thumbs-up, despite the fact that she would never know that. And I just kept watching.

“I made this cake for myself and realized I wanted to share it with someone. You are the only one that has been there for me since I came here. I thought that maybe... maybe you’d share this night with me,” Nita continued.

He leaned forward. Although he was still suspicious, it was obvious that he was much more relaxed.

He smirked. “I tried very hard to win you over. Nothing worked. How do you know I’m still interested?”

She bit her lower lip and approached him



Setting the cake on the desk, she slid into his lap. She looped one arm around his waist and reached for a glass of wine. She handed it to Sebastian and then picked up the second glass.

Clinking hers against his, she took a sip. "Would you rather I leave?"

Watching my mother lower herself to please my father made me angry. I didn't want to watch her play into his hands, even if it was all an act.

She poured him another glass of wine. It was his third by now. She'd only taken little sips off her own.

When he tipped the glass up for another sip, I saw something fizzing at the bottom.

I realized that she came prepared. She was trying to get him drunk but it looked like she'd also slipped something into his glass, sleeping pills or powder. Something to quicken the process.

My father had his arm around her waist, holding her hips tightly. She leaned against his chest and he was clearly pleased with how proactive she was.

As much as I didn't like what I was seeing, her plan was working. I had to give her that.

"I heard about what you did for Theo," she said, reaching over and running a finger down his cheek.

He grinned. "What did I do for Theo?"

"The consort you found for him. He has never shown so much interest in a woman before. It is good that he finds a mate. We both know how much a young man can benefit from the company of a thoughtful young lady," she said with a charming grin.

I grimaced and clenched my fists.

My father chuckled.

"Only young men?" he asked, delivering a quick slap to my mother's behind.

A glimmer of fury flashed across her eyes, but it disappeared almost instantly.

"He better go down soon!" I muttered through my gritted teeth.

Ciana reached out and gave my arm a light and consoling squeeze. I could tell she was just as uncomfortable with the situation as me.

My mother skillfully stood up and moved back to her chair. "It is good for him to branch out. And it is very admirable that you stepped up to help him. So, thank you." She raised her glass again.

"I must say, Nita, this is a pleasant change in attitude since the last time we spoke. I can't remember a time when you chose to be this... close," he smirked, stroking his chin.

"I've been feeling very lonely lately, and it is my own fault. I pushed everyone in the palace away. As years pass by, I question myself why should I let the past dominate my future."

"You're so right, my dear." He let out a hearty laugh.

"I'd like to repair the relationship between us.

"I must admit, I've wanted to hear you say that for a long time," he reached out and caressed her hand.

"Then, this is our lucky night." She poured yet another glass of wine for him.

He'd been drinking them voraciously, but he didn't show any signs of the sleeping pills taking effect yet. He didn't even seem to be getting drunk.

Shifters had a high tolerance to both but it should have him slouching or starting to be drowsy by now.

"This is taking too long," I grumbled.

Ciana touched my arm and gave me a comforting smile. I was glad she was with me or I didn't know if I'd make it through without bursting in there and breaking this up.

"Nita," my father raised from his chair this time and walked toward my mother, he leaned over and murmured something in her ear.

She looked up at him with wide eyes. "Really?"

He smirked, "Yes. With Warren sick and Maggie... gone, I've been thinking I need to have more children. The royal line is thinning. Theo, our son, is the strongest, most powerful of all my children."

"Most useful," I muttered under my breath.

"And you're the most beautiful of all my consorts. I would prefer having more children with a woman who comes from a strong bloodline, one who I know will give me strong children," he said. He leaned in and kissed her neck.

I saw my mother's face contort, and for a moment, it seemed like she was going to lose her composure and throw Sebastian off of her.

But Instead, she leaned into him, a dark flicker of hatred in her eyes.

I clenched my jaws and balled my fists. If that bastard dared to advance on her, I would tear his head off!

Footsteps down the hall drew our attention from the bedroom.

"I swear I heard something," a guard said, and I could hear footsteps from two more following him.

They were headed straight toward us!

Ciana and I were standing right out in the open. Just a few more steps and they'd be able to see us.

"Shit!" I whispered.

I pointed at a closet door across the hall, practically shoved both of us inside, and locked the door behind us.

"Theo wh--"

I wrapped my forearm over Ciana's mouth and widened my eyes at her.

"There are guards in the hall," I whispered.

Ciana nodded.

Face to face in the tiny closet, there wasn't much room for us to move around. It had a low ceiling so I had to lean against the wall with my legs bent slightly. This forced one of my legs between Ciana's.

Since she was shorter than me, she was pretty much sitting on my leg, our hips inches apart. Her breasts inflated against my chest with each inhale, and since I was bent down, they puffed up right under my chin.

She had her hands on my shoulders, holding herself steady so she wouldn't topple over. I had my free arm wrapped around her hip.

We hardly had any room to move, so when I removed my arm from her mouth, Ciana gasped. Our eyes met in the darkness. Her quick, shallow breaths tickled my face.

The doorknob was digging into my back uncomfortably. I had no idea how long we'd have to hide there but I could hear the guards opening every door in the long hallway, looking for some kind of disturbance.

I had to think of a way out of this before they got to the closet we were hiding in. We had time, but I wouldn't be able to think straight with a doorknob digging into my back. With a deep breath, I shifted my position as best I could.

My leg lifted higher, pressing up between her legs. Ciana squinted her eyes closed and bit her lower lip, a small, muffled moan. I could feel the heat between her legs through my pants. I tried to keep myself from getting aroused, but in such a close space, it seemed impossible.

Ciana let out a low sigh and bowed her head slightly. Our foreheads met, lips hovering inches apart.

I felt my pants tighten and whatever remained of the aphrodisiac my father had exposed me to flared up in my veins. Gritting my teeth, I held my breath so I didn't have to smell her sweet scent.

It was no use. I could still feel every inch of her touching me.

Her pulse thumped against my palm and her thighs clenched around my leg. I swallowed hard, saliva pooling in my mouth. hungrily. The warmth of her lips was just out of reach. If I tilted my head up slightly, I could capture hers.

My cock jumped in my pants, and heat was rising, coursing through my whole body.

Ciana sucked in a sharp breath and her hands clasped and unclasped around my shoulders.

I was surprised that she hadn't tried to move or ask me to move. She might have understood how pointless and useless it would be. There was a part of me that wondered if she was feeling the desire herself and perhaps enjoying it.

I was, even though it was an absolutely torturous situation..

Ciana licked her lips and her tongue grazed my lips every so slightly. I bit my tongue to hold back a groan. If I had enough room to move my arm, I would have slipped it around her and pulled her even closer. I wanted to feel every inch of her skin on mine.

"There's a crack in the door," Ciana whispered, breaking me from my naughty thoughts.

"Can you see?" I whispered back,

"Umm... can we move to the left a little?" she asked.

"Lean a little closer, I have an idea," I said.

Without hesitation, she leaned in, her cheek pressing against mine. Her soft breath tickled my ear and a shudder ran down my spine. My cock stiffened even more and heat pulsed through my veins.

I looped my arm around Ciana's back and pulled her a little closer. She fell against me but it gave me just enough wiggle room to slide left.

"Not your left, my left," Ciana hissed quietly.

"Damn it!" I whispered, nearly losing my balance. I tightened my arm around her waist again and shifted in the other direction.

My foot slid a little on the floor, causing me to slide down further. Ciana's breasts were right in my face. She'd looped her arms around my neck as we moved and her legs straddled my waist now.

She used her position for leverage, pushing herself up higher to see through the crack. When she did, her cleavage pressed against my cheek and her thighs clenched around my hips.

Another groan rose in my throat, but I ground my teeth together to hold it back.

Fuck, how I wanted to loop my arms around her and pin her to me!

Through her shirt, I felt her hard nipple caress my cheek and I tighten my thighs to fight against the growing pain in between them.

Ciana let out a quiet moan that she quickly cut off. The heat between her legs intensified and I was surprised she couldn't feel how turned on I was.

She probably could, she just wasn't going to call attention to it.

It took every ounce of willpower I had not to roll my hips against her and feel her pressing against me.

"I can see," Ciana whispered suddenly.

"Thank the Goddess," I muttered. "Where are they?"

"Close. There are only a few more doors before they get to this one," she reported.

"I locked it. That won't stop them, though. They'll either have a key or break it down," I explained.

"There's no way out of here is there?" Ciana asked.

"No. We're totally screwed," I whispered.

"Wait, someone else is coming... from the opposite direction," Ciana said. Her arms tightened around my neck, pressing her breast closer to my cheek.

My cock ached and I held my breath to keep from moaning.

“Who is it?” I asked in a strained whisper.

“I can’t see...”

“Prince Alexander?” one of the guards asked.

Alexander didn’t say anything in return. He never spoke to anyone.

“Oh, was that you just now, Your Highness?”

He must have nodded, because I heard the other guard say, “We are sorry to have bothered you.”

Their footsteps retreated down the hall. Alexander had snuck up completely silently. I hadn’t heard his footsteps at all.

“Is he gone?” I whispered to Ciana.

“Oh no...”

“What?”

“He’s staring at us.”

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Ciana whispered, “Do you think he can see us? How does he know we’re here?”

“Even if he does, he won’t say anything.”

“You sure?”

I nodded. I knew my nephew.

Alexander’s dad was my oldest brother Justin, he was executed a few years ago when Alexander was only one or two. I didn’t know how much he remembered his parents, but that didn’t traumatize him any less.

Knowing the king was upset about Justin, no one in this palace wanted to be acquainted with a traitor’s heir. Some even bullied the kid for fun-it probably made them feel superior while telling their drunk friends that they once picked on a prince and were able to get away with it.

Well, if they didn’t run into me. Those bastards got what they deserved and I made sure that they’d never set foot in the palace again. However, I knew that wasn’t the first time, nor would it be the last time. And I wouldn’t be there for Alexander all the time.

The best I could do was teach him some combat skills once in a while when I had my brief stay at the palace between my tasks and ask Jake to keep an eye out for him.

However, in this brutal royal palace, I was sure he didn’t have a fun and pleasant childhood.

“He’s just staring at the closet door. Oh, there he goes.”

“Alright, let’s get out of here,” I said.

I moved Ciana aside, as best as I could, and I opened the door. A wave of cold air rushed in and I breathed, feeling the cool relief through my entire body.

My mother opened the bedroom door and arched an eyebrow at us as we spilled out of the closet. "You can go in now."

I turned to Ciana with my hand on the doorknob to my father's room. "Ciana, you stay."

"Why?" She creased her brow at me. "I'm here to help too, Theo."

I pulled her back toward the closet. "If something goes wrong, I don't want us both to be on the hook. Stay here, out of sight. I'll take care of this," I assured. I brushed the back of my fingers along her cheek.

"No. I'm going with you. This is for Warren and We're in this together," she insisted.

I glanced over at my mother. Her gaze didn't leave us, her chin high, her back straight and one hand gently placed on the other in front of her center belly-her posture might be poised and composed, but I knew she was losing her patience.

"We don't have all night. I'm not sure how long the alcohol and sleeping pills will last," my mother reminded us.

"Ciana, listen to me. First, we need someone to keep an eye out here. Second, if anything unexpected happens, I'll need you to get help," I reasoned with her.

"Alright," Ciana sighed, "you convinced me."

"Stay out of sight, okay?" I said, nodding toward the closet.

Ciana nodded and went back into the closet, closing the door. I waited until she was completely shut in before opening my father's bedroom.

"You don't need to come with me either," I said to my mom, but she didn't listen to me.

"If anything happens, he'll already know I'm involved."

She followed behind me. I sighed, I did still need backup when dealing with my father.

My father was passed out on his bed with his shirt unbuttoned, revealing the chain for the key.

I frowned. Did Mother partially undress him? I didn't need her to do that for me.

"Hurry up," she whispered behind me.

I slipped my pinky finger under the chain around his neck and lifted it carefully. There was a clasp on it that I could release to get the key without lifting the chain over his head.

With my other hand, I reached for the clasp and I pinched it open.

I let out a breath of relief. Things went more smoothly than I expected.

Suddenly, a thick hand came around my wrist and my father was staring up at me.

His bloodshot eyes narrowed, like a cunning hunter who had been waiting for his prey to step into his trap.

A cold chill coursed down my body, and my heart sank.

“And what do you think you’re doing?” he scoffed wickedly, sitting up and shoving me away.

I jumped back and crashed into the desk. The empty wine glasses clattered together.

My father scoffed and shook his head. Quickly, he tucked the key and chain away and buttoned his shirt up. His face twisted up in disgust.

His eyes traveled to my mother and he smirked at her, shaking his head.

“You thought it would be that easy? But your eyelashes and I’d forget it all?” he asked.

My mother maintained her poise and a haughty look on her face. She taunted, “Knowing you, yes. I don’t think you’ve ever turned down an offer from a woman.”

The king stood up, glowering. He raised his hand to strike her.

“Mother!”

She cringed away from him and his eyes lit up excitedly. He lowered his hand and looked at me. “I knew Nita was planning something. She was laying on the praise a little too thick. From a woman that told me she’d kill herself if I ever touched her again... it was too much of a turnaround,” he said.

I sighed. Of course, he would be too paranoid and suspicious to fall for that.

“I only let it get this far because I wanted to see what you were up to. So this is what you’re after, huh?” He pulled the key out of his shirt and ran it back and forth along the chain.

Glaring at him, I perched on the edge of his desk and crossed my arms.

“My only question is... why? That safe holds a lot of treasures, and I can only think of a few that you’d be interested in... given that you made a heartfelt appeal for that waste of a brother of yours,” Sebastian said, scoffing and rolling his eyes.

“Does it matter?” I countered.

“No, I suppose not. I’m more interested in how you got your cold-hearted mother to participate in this scheme. She doesn’t care about Warren anymore than I do. He’s not her son,” Sebastian said, eyeing Mother curiously.

“No, I don’t care about Warren, but do you really think I would miss the opportunity to ruin your day?” she asked, grinning and laughing cruelly.

My brain was spinning fast. Mother was buying me time by intentionally irritating him. What should I do next?

“Nita, Nita, you never change, do you? I should have broken you years ago,” my father said. He rubbed his hands together.

“You tried, remember? All it did was make me hate you. I will never stop hating you after what you’ve done!” she snapped, pointing accusingly at him.

My father growled and pushed her hand aside. “Clearly, I gave up too soon!” he hissed.

“You could never break me enough to forget what you did to my pack. You murdered my family, you destroyed my people, you destroyed my son! You’re a tyrant,” she cried.

My heart clenched in my chest. My own mother thought I was a monster, thought I was “destroyed.” After everything I’d done recently, I couldn’t blame her. It still hurt hearing my mother say that.

“You’re right, I can’t break you. That means there is only one thing left to do with you,” my father said, pulling me from my thoughts. “You’ve outlived your usefulness, anyway!”

“No!” I cried.

“Oh yes, my boy. Nita will be sentenced to death,” he said, grinning evilly at her.

Roaring, I leaped across the room and pounced on him.

“Theo, no!” Mother shouted behind me.

I ignored her and pushed the king back on the bed. Jumping on top of him, I pinned him down and grabbed him around the throat with gloved hands.

“You’ve taken everything from my mother, taken everything from me,” I hissed.

Sebastian’s eyes widened and he snarled. Grabbing my wrists he twisted them until I couldn’t grasp my fingers. He threw me down on the floor and put his heel against my neck.

“Did you forget who you’re dealing with, Boy!?” he sneered. He glared down at me, eyes bloodshot and wild.

I smirked at him. “No. I know all your weaknesses.” I jammed my fist into the back of his right knee.

My father roared, his knee buckling. I rolled away from him as he slammed down on the floor, his knees cracking against the thick stone.

“You rotten, ungrateful, bastard!” His voice thundered around the room as he clapped his hands.

The next moment I knew, we were surrounded by at least ten wolves. It was as if they appeared from nowhere. I recognized a couple of them.

They were not ordinary palace guards, but the most deadly warriors and trained assassins.

“How dare you raise your hand to me. I gave you everything and I made you into something,” my father roared. His face and mouth were smeared with blood and he looked like he’d torn some animal open and eaten its insides.

I stood between him and my mother, but I knew it was too late now.

“Now, take my ungrateful moron of a son and his slut of a mother away,” Sebastian said, tossing a dismissive hand at his henchmen and pointing the other at me. “Lock him up in the dungeon!”



I growled and gave them warning looks, and none of them was willing to get close.

I was pretty sure, as my father's confidants, they knew what I was capable of. There weren't that many of them. It would be easy enough to fight through them and escape with my mother. I could get her somewhere safe and come back.

There was just one problem with that, and it appeared that Sebastian was also aware of it.

"Theo, think twice before you try anything."

After taking a moment to catch his breath, Sebastian seemed to be in a better mood now. He sneered arrogantly, "You know what I just found out? You have more friends than I thought. Do you know what it means?"

Of course I knew. If I acted out again, he wouldn't just take it out on me. He'd take it out on Jake, Ciana, and anyone else I was close to.

In my moment of hesitation, Sebastian snapped his fingers and his guys wrestled me to the floor. Soon after that, I was on my knees and bound in restraints.

A hint of concern flashed across my mother's eyes. Was she worried about me?

Sebastian hadn't given orders about her. I hissed at him, "Do not touch her! Or I promise you'll regret it!"

He let out an ear-piercing and triumphant laugh.

"Oh Theo, my son, you surprise me every day."

I didn't like where he was going.

"You know what, as long as you continue to be useful, then she will be fine. I'm a forgiving man, especially for those who bring value."

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\*Ciana\*

My breath came out in low and shallow pants as I heard the protests from Nita and the roars from the king.

However, I couldn't see anything from here until I saw Theo and Nita being escorted out of the room. When Theo walked past the closet, I thought I saw him shift his eyeballs very subtly.

Yet I understood what he wanted from me.

Stay safe.

I had hoped for this plan to go smoothly but I should have known someone like Sebastian wouldn't be easy to trick.

It wasn't like I didn't consider bursting out of this closet and playing the hero, but that would've been flat-out stupid.

Theo had placed me here for a reason and I agreed with him on that. At this point, I was their only hope, and getting myself locked up with them really wouldn't do us any good:

When I was sure everyone had left the king's suite, I counted to 100 before slowly opening the closet door and peeking down the hallway.

Empty.

Perfect.

Keeping my steps as light as could be and sticking to the corners, I managed to get out without drawing any more unwanted attention.

Where would Jake be? I needed him. Now.

He would know what to do in times like this.

My legs took me back to Theo's wing. Jake had to be waiting there. However, as I got close, I stopped when I heard someone jogging over from a distance. My first instinct was to hide, but then I recognized the footsteps.

"Brook?"

"Ciana! Thank the Goddess you're here!"

A sense of foreboding rushed through me. "What happened?"

"They took him." She cried. The tears streamed down her face and her cries got harder with each passing second. "They put him in chains and took him away."

"Who, Brook? Who did they take?" I pulled out of her hold and grabbed her shoulders. "Jake?!"

"Yes!" she sniffed. "One moment he was at the library with me and the next these guards came barging into the door and put chains on him. They beat him into submission because he was trying to push me out of the way."

My heart sank.

"I came here to seek help for Prince Theo because Jake is his Beta." Brook probably noticed my face was as pale as ash. "Ciana, don't look at me like that. You're scaring me now..."

"They took everyone then." I stared at her solemnly. "Brook, we're in big trouble now,"

"Everyone?" She wiped away the last few stray tears.

I nodded. "Prince Theo and Lady Nita included."

"No..." Brook covered her mouth with her hands.

We looked at each other worriedly, and we both saw panic in each other's eyes.

What was I going to do then? Everyone I knew that could help was gone and I had no idea where to even begin!

Brook grabbed my hand and looked me in the eye. "Ciana, look at me. Take a deep breath."

What she said sounded familiar...

She forced a smile on her face, and said, "That's what you taught me on our first day here, remember?" Then she took a deep inhale and let out a long breath.

I followed her and did the same. Inhaled...exhaled.

King Sebastian wouldn't kill Theo, at least, not now. With Justin and Maggie dead and Warren unconscious, Sabastian didn't have many other options. The only one that carried the royal bloodline was young Prince Alexander, but he was too young to be sent to battlefields like Theo.

Therefore, he needed Theo, and at least would spare his life until he found someone or something to replace him.

I took a few more cleansing breaths and felt much better.

Smiling back at Brook, I squeezed her hands. "Brook, you're amazing. Thank you!"

"You're welcome. I learnt from the best." She blinked a few times rapidly. "It seems that you have some clue now. Mind sharing with me?"

"I didn't know you could read minds," I chuckled, trying to lighten the mood a little. "Yes. I think I have an idea of where they might be, well, at least where Theo might be."

"Once we find Prince Theo, he can point us to the right direction where others might be, even if they're not with him."

"Exactly."

Brook and I started walking towards my side chamber which was connected to Theo's suite. "Theo is the crowned prince and it would make the royal court look bad to have the crowned prince in a public prison."

Brook nodded. "That's true. News would spread quickly."

I continued, "If I were the king, I would need to hide Theo someplace where no one could have easy access. Somewhere no one even knows."

Brook was following my train of thought. "Somewhere that is close enough for him to check on the situation easily and frequently."

I nodded. "You stay here and stay out of sight, okay? The king just got betrayed by the woman he desires and the heir to the throne. He's going to be even more paranoid. Watch out for yourself and stay away from him."

She nodded her head and I snuck out of the room.

It was deep in the night, and I'd been circling around the king's wing for a while now.

The place was guarded heavier. The patrol was more frequent, and it was even harder to navigate without being discovered compared to our last unsuccessful visit.

I'd been here for a while, but there was no sign of a dungeon or basement. Maybe I should try again tomorrow, or maybe I should go back and discuss with Brook to brainstorm some other approaches...

Suddenly, I felt a hand cover my mouth.

King Sabastian found me! My heart plummeted to the ground and I almost screamed and flailed my arms about.

"Shhh."

I stopped fighting and the hand released me slowly.

I realized it was quite a small hand, and its owner had a small frame too. I stilled.

Alexander.

"Prince Alexander," I whispered, "What are you doing here?"

He placed his finger against his lips for me to be quiet and he grabbed my hand.

I followed him through the garden and down to the brightly lit hallway. He wasn't going to get me exposed, was he?

I was astonished to find that somehow he avoided all the guards and patrols perfectly, and entered a room I had passed many times but didn't pay much attention to.

A small library.

Because there was no door for this room. Anyone could see everything in it from the hallway, so how could it hold any secrets?

But Alexander walked us to a bookcase and rearranged a few books. When he pulled it forward, a staircase revealed behind it, leading downwards.

Too stunned to say anything, I allowed him to pull me down the darkened staircase that connected to a concrete walled passageway. The only thing illuminating it were the dim orange light bulbs that were mounted to the walls.

We came to a complete stop at the end of the passageway. Then he let go of my hand and turned to leave.

"Wait," I called after him. "What is this place?"

He put his wrists together like he was in shackles.

"A dungeon?"

He nodded.

"Theo is here?"

He nodded again.

"You don't want him to die either, do you? You care about him."

He nodded a third time and then turned on his heel to leave.

I let out a shaky breath and continued my way alone.

The deeper I went, the dimmer the lighting was, which I appreciated. As I approached the end of the narrow pathway, I heard the cracking of whips every few seconds, mixed with hushed grunts.

Theo!

My heart hammered in my chest as I moved along the shadows. Soon, I got to the end, and the space opened up.

It looked like a naturally formed dent, with large and small rocks scattering the ground, which would provide great cover for me.

I hid behind a large rock and saw two dingy cells in the far corner of the dent. Outside of the cells were two posts, where Theo and Jake were each tied to one.

“Had enough, little prince?” One of the guards cackled.

Red liquid trickled down Theo’s face, and his clothes were drenched in a mix of sweat and blood.

I clenched my fist hard to suppress my anger. How could they... how dare they!

I needed to get Theo out of here quickly.

The guards who were beating Theo carefully avoided tearing the thick gloves on his hands, and kept their distance from him.

Jake was locked in the cell next to him, also shackled and stripped down to shorts like his alpha.

“Stop!” Jake panted. “He is your prince, and wait until the king knows about this!”

“Shut your fucking mouth. We know who he is! Guess what, we’re just following His Majesty’s order! And you be quiet!” The second guard whipped Jake’s back which made him hiss in pain.

My stomach churned at the sign of their ripped flesh.

The guards continued to whip them over and over again. With each strike, I felt anger boiling within me more and it was about to make me explode.

I was ready to go to war with Sebastian for what he had done!

“Let’s go. Let’s give these traitors time to heal before we go again.”

After shoveling Theo and Jake into their cells, the guards started to walk my way, and I quickly shrunk myself behind a rock. Neither of them noticed me and they walked right by.

After they were out of sight and the surrounding fell silent, I rushed to the cells.

“Theo!”

He turned his head to the side and I gasped when I saw his face.

His face was as pale as paper, his eyes were bloodshot and his lips were cracked with dry blood. Numerous cuts criss crossed

his chest, not to mention the peeling flesh on his back.

Those monsters!

His lips quivered, and I heard him say, "Why... are you here?"

"I am so sorry I'm late...." Tears brimmed my eyes as I searched for a way to break them free.

He looked at me with so much emotion in his eyes it hit me like a ton of bricks. "Ciana, you need to get out. It's not safe for you here."

"I'm not leaving without you! We are leaving this dungeon. together. Do you hear me?" I cried.

"Ciana," he gasped for air. "Please. I can't...I can't protect you like this."

Jake added, "Alpha is right."

They were both strong men, but now...even breathing seemed difficult. I was on the verge of breaking down.

"I'm not going."

"He still needs me," he groaned as he tried to rise to his feet. "And Jake is my Beta. He won't kill us. Go, please."

I glanced at Jake, who looked just as bad if not worse than Theo, but he gave me an assuring nod.

I shook my head and I stood my ground, but then there were footsteps coming down the hallway.

"Hide!" Theo hissed.

I jumped up and scrambled my way toward a large rock, desperately seeking shelter.

As soon as I got to my hideout, I walked the spawn of the devil himself, Sebastian.

"So my boy, have you learned your lesson?" The king's voice echoed in the small dungeon.

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Sebastian wasn't alone. His Beta Xavier was behind him.

Theo ignored Sebastian's question and kept his silence.

"Prince Theo, Your Majesty asked you a question! Did you not hear?"

Xavier's arrogant tone made me want to strike him down and punch him right in the face.

Jake obviously felt the same as me as he said, "Beta Xavier, who do you think you are to speak to His Highness like that!"

Xavier glared at Jake viciously and looked like he was about to explode. But Sebastian didn't seem to mind his son's silence. He ignored the tension between the two Betas and walked over to Theo's cell.

“How are we feeling?”

Theo didn't even lift his gaze, only kept his eyes on the ground.

“I know normal wounds won't kill you and I'm sure you're quite used to pain,” Sebastian chuckled, “So hopefully, the wolfbane extract on the whips was able to help you remember something important...”

Wolfbane extract?! That freaking cursed bastard! What kind of father would seek joy in his son's suffering?

Sebastian took a pause and completed what he wanted to get across, “You should never go against the law.”

Theo finally scoffed, “Law? What law?”

“I am the law, son. I am the king!” He spread his arms out wide. “And you are my gift from the Goddess herself. She knew I wanted all the land to obey me and she gave me you.”

“Being related to you is my greatest curse.”

“Curse? Ha ha ha!” Sebastian laughed hysterically, however, there were no happy vibes at all, “Theo, that's no curse! I gave you power! You should thank me for raising you, training you, and maximizing the blessing you received from the Goddess and King Lycaon! Do you understand how lucky you are?”

“I...” Theo took a few fast and shallow breaths before he could continue, “I wouldn't consider being raised as a monster and used as a tool as lucky.”

“I was preparing you to be king! I had such high expectations. for you, but you disappointed me greatly. I even offered you many whores to bed or do whatever you want with them! But just like your pathetic brother, you wimped out. You couldn't even stick it in that little blonde haired one. What's her name again? Kiki? Crystal?”

“Ciana,” Xavier finished off for the king. “Ciana Black. Your Majesty. The daughter of Alvar pack. A cute little slut.”

Hearing my name from Xavier's disgusting mouth made me want to puke.

“Shut your filthy mouth!” Jake scolded Xavier. It was rare to hear Jake lift his volume.

“How dare you speak to me like that!” Xavier growled, his face turned burning red. He probably felt greatly offended, especially in front of Sebastian, but it was obvious that Jake had never cared about what Xavier had to say.

“He dares because he's my Beta. Do you have a problem with it?” Theo gave Xavier an icy glare which made the king's Beta swallow back what he was about to spill.

However, the cunning Beta then turned to Sebastian and complained to his master, “Your Majesty, please forgive me! All I wanted to do was to help but Prince Theo-“

“Enough!” Sebastian waved his hand, and thank the Goddess that Xavier's annoying voice stopped talking. “He is your prince and you're just a Beta, I don't want to hear any whinings about your disagreement with the crown prince, you will show respect!”

Xavier gritted through his teeth reluctantly, "Yes... Your Majesty."

"And Theo," Sebastian turned to Theo, "I expect you to show the same respect to me, your father, your king!"

Theo responded to Sebastian's comment with a sneer.

"I see you may have a different opinion. Now, I want to remind you of something. I gave you everything. Your power, your status, and your privileges. That means I can also take them back. For example," Sebastian said, that sickening smile was back on his face. "Xavier, you have my permission to teach Beta Jake a GOOD lesson!"

Xavier smirked viciously, "Understood, Your Majesty!"

He opened Jake's cell and planted his heel on the side of Jake's head. He kept going until Jake slumped down to the ground, but Xavier didn't stop there. He took his fist and hit Jake's lower back over and over again.

I had to look away for a few seconds, my stomach churning at the sight of Jake's blood spewing all over the place.

"That is enough."

Xavier didn't want to stop, but more so, he didn't dare to disobey the king. He let go of Jake, and came out of Jake's cell with a bruised fist but a satisfied look on his face.

"So I'm going to ask again, have you learned your lesson?"

"Yes...Father."

Sebastian looked at Theo with joy in his eyes. "Good boy! I'm glad to hear that. Now tell me, what have you learned?" And he had the audacity to laugh!

"I learned..." Theo glared at his father and whispered in a hoarse voice, "I should've killed you right there yesterday!"

The smile slipped from Sebastian's face and twisted into a dreadful scowl. "Obviously, I've been too tolerant of your unruly behavior!"

Theo panted. "Humor me, Your Majesty. Let's be honest...the only reason that I'm alive is because you need me!"

Sebastian's expression was even darker.

"May I make a suggestion?" Xavier had a grimy smile that made the hair on my body stand up.

Sebastian gave him a slight but impatient nod, seemingly not too unhappy about Xavier interrupting the conversation.

"Your Majesty, I heard that Pomeni Pack has a secret way to, um, make people listen..."

"Really? How Interesting! Why don't you tell me more about it?" Sebastian was intrigued, but I had a really bad feeling about this.



“Surely, Your Majesty! I heard that they were able to turn the most feisty soul into a compliant companion. As skillful of a warrior as Prince Theo has been, he has, however, disobeyed you enough times already.”

The king contemplated what Xavier was saying as he stroked his chin.

Xavier took the opportunity to try to convince him, “It would be an honor for the Pomeni pack to perform this task for you, I’m sure!. After that, you’ll have a son who’ll never go against you ever. Wouldn’t that be a wonderful solution?”

Although I didn’t know exactly what that meant, I knew for. sure it wouldn’t be anything pleasant. I needed to stop them!

“That is not a bad idea at all! See to it that the message is sent to Pomeni and you can make all necessary arrangements.”

“Yes, your Majesty! And I know exactly who to talk to in this palace.”

I ran for my life up the stairs and made my way to Warren’s room. I had to stop this!

By the time I made it across the palace, I was out of breath but the adrenaline was surging through me and I didn’t dare even a split second of delay.

When I got to Warren’s door, I didn’t bother knocking.

“What the hell!” Sophia was about to curse when she saw it was me. “Ciana? Are you f... kidding me?”

I closed and locked the door behind me. “Sophia, I need to talk to you!”

“What do you want?” she snarled, “You better not be here to take Warren away from me. I have been making sure that he’s doing okay. He needs me and I am staying right here by his side.”

She wasn’t too friendly, but her hostility was the least of my concern. I went straight to the point. “I need your help.”

She stared at me for a few seconds, her eyes wide. “Did I hear what I thought I heard? You, Ciana Black, out of all the women. in the palace, need my help? Either I’m out of my mind, or you are.”

“We don’t have time for this. Sophia, does your pack have some sort of ways to totally change people’s behavior, or attitude, or...” I tried to figure out what else I could describe what Xavier referred to, “keep them totally under control?”

There was no doubt that I set off her alarm because her eyes shifted away and wouldn’t look me in the eye. “I... I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“All right, thanks for being honest.” I almost rolled my eyes. Could she be a worse liar? “Sophia, you have the answer written all over your face.”

“I really don’t-“

“Let me finish before you turn me away. Theo has been trying to figure out a way to save Warren, and he needs the king’s help. However, not only did King Sebastian refuse to help, he kept Theo captivated.”

Sophia's eyes were even wider, however, I had the feeling that she did believe what I told her.

"In addition to that, the freaking psychopath Beta Xavier suggested to the King that your pack has some secret way of making people compliant. Is that true?"

She was still hesitant about whether or not to be honest with me or not.

I urged, "Sophia, Theo is Warren's only hope! Please! You and I can sort out our problems in the future, but this is a life or death situation for Warren!"

"All right, all right!" Sophia finally said, "Fine, I'll tell you."

"Oh, thank the Goddess! I'm listening."

"The sacred artifact of my pack is a dagger. It was said that it was a weapon of mercy from the Goddess because it doesn't kill the person even if one gets stabbed in the heart by it."

"Is that true?"

"Do you want me to talk or what?"

I nodded rapidly, pressed my lips tight, and used my hand to gesture a zip motion.

"However, that person will not be considered alive either....." She gave me a warning look as if she knew I wanted to question her, so I held back my "why".

"Because it was said that that person's soul would be sent to the Goddess, and only his body remains. Such a body keeps its physical strength and can follow simple instructions, however, it wouldn't have free will anymore. I'm pretty sure that's what Xavier was referring to."

"You mean... they basically want to make Theo into a soulless, obedient puppet?!"

Sophia nodded with a serious expression on her face. "That's my best bet."

I gasped. "Sophia, you gotta stop them! I know we've never gotten along, but this time, could you please help me, no, could you please help Theo and Warren?"

She bit her lower lip. "I... I don't know."

She went to sit back down beside Warren and grabbed his hand. He looked even paler. All I knew is that we were running out of time for both brothers.

"What do you mean by you don't know? Do you want Warren to die?"

"Of course not!" She retorted, looking back at me. "But how am I able to say no to the king if he asks me to do anything?"

Yes, I love Warren, but I can't bring disaster to my pack!"

I found myself not able to argue with her. As an Alpha's daughter, we all had our responsibilities, and keeping our packs safe was on top of our lists.

“Sophia,” I looked her in the eyes, “Sebastian is ruthless and his goal is absolute obedience from any pack. Honestly, the more powerful a pack is, the more threatened he would feel and it would be just a matter of time before he does whatever is needed to bring the pack down.”

Sophia murmured, “I don’t believe you...”

“Then name the ten most powerful packs in the past twenty years and tell me where they are now?”

She didn’t answer me this time. I knew she wouldn’t be able to.

“Pomeni pack is the biggest pack now, and thus will be his next target, I promise! Especially, if he turns Theo into a mindless killing machine, not only your pack, the entire country would suffer.”

“The rest of the country is none of my business,” Sophia argued again, however, her voice was softer. I felt she was trying to convince herself to stay out of trouble.

“Do you really think so? Don’t lie to yourself.”

“But-“

“Now, think about this. If you save Theo this time, the Dark Prince would be forever obligated to protect your pack to return the favor.”

“What if I fail?”

“Then King Sebastian continues to rule and we’re all doomed anyway.”

“It’s too much. I need to think about it. Even if...” Sophia’s eyes were glimmering with worry and she shook her head. “No, I can’t. I don’t even know what I can do...”

I gave her an assuring smile, even though I felt nervous sweat moisten my palm. But this was one of those fake-it-until-you-make-it type of situations.

“I have an idea that may work. It’s risky, but if we work together, we can get it done. What do you say?”