

Kings Breeder 481

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 481

Ciana

I wandered through the palace trying to see if anything felt familiar. According to Brook and Warren, I'd been there almost a year. I couldn't remember anything about it. None of the rooms or decorations looked familiar.

I felt like I was seeing it all for the first time.

Yet, my feet knew where to take me. I didn't recognize anything I was seeing, but I wandered purposefully to the library. I suspected I could find a map there to reacquaint myself with the palace and the surrounding territory.

"Good morning, My Lady," someone said, nodding their head as I walked by.

"It is good to see you up and about, Miss Black," a servant said, bowing.

I waved awkwardly at everyone I passed. They all seemed to hold a high amount of respect and reverence for me. That wouldn't have happened if they didn't know me already.

Still, it wasn't the usual kind of respect I should have been shown. In the palace, I was just an Alpha's daughter. At the palace, I wasn't anything special.

I spent some time studying the maps and the surrounding territory in the library. Growing up, my father had me get into the habit of reading maps and learning about my surrounding areas when I got to a new place.

When I looked at the map of the palace grounds, it didn't look familiar, yet I used the most efficient way to get to the library purely based on my instinct. My feet seemed to know the right place to go.

My body's autopilot taking me where I needed to go probably meant that what everyone was telling me was true-I did spend time here.

I passed a picture of King Theo on the wall. A portrait that must have been painted when he was in his late teens. I paused at the painting, still trying to wrap my mind around how we had become friends.

Somehow I felt it looked different. For no reason whatsoever, I thought it was a nicer and more welcoming fit than a painting of a pitch black wolf with mesmerizing eyes for this spot.

I focused my gaze on the king's face. Did I really want to be "friends" with a guy that jumped me and kissed me the moment I woke up after being unconscious? From the way the others reacted, it appeared that it was normal for me to be kissed by the king.

I shook my head and kept walking. It was hard to believe. All I remembered of him was how arrogant and ruthless he was, like his late father. And that kiss attack wasn't helping me see him differently.

My stomach squirmed and I looped an arm around myself. At the same time, when I thought of him, he had that stomach fluttering effect on me.

The jackass kissing creep! It was all his fault!

I got to the garden and immediately spotted Prince Warren. Unlike his brother, Warren was a gentleman, polite and considerate. With his warm smile, he was so easy going and it was nice to be around him.

“Hello there, Your Highness,” I greeted, bowing my head to him.

“Ciana, you don’t need to address me so formally. Call me Warren. We’re definitely close enough for that,” he smiled.

“Really?” He seemed really familiar. And not just because I had missing memories of him.

“Really. We are... very good friends,” he nodded politely.

I tilted my head and looked at him for a little longer. He was a little uncomfortable due to my gaze. After clearing his throat, he said, “I apologize if I had food crumbs on my face.”

I let out some laughter. I knew he was a prince and I should behave elegantly around him, however, I found Warren’s embarrassed face quite entertaining, just like how friends teased each other.

“Prince Warren, you’re so graceful, elegant, and kind-hearted. King Theo, on the other hand, he’s so... rough,” I giggled, “If it was up to me, I would support you as the king over Theo.”

Warren chuckled and shook his head. “I appreciate your compliments. However, Theo is a great man and leader. You’ll remember that someday.”

“I hope so,” I muttered. I didn’t say it aloud, but if I didn’t remember it, I wasn’t sure I’d ever be able to believe it.

That night, after attacking my lips, he didn’t even have the courtesy to apologize to me! Then he just stormed out of the room like I did something wrong to him! Whatever, I bit my tongue. He was the king, so for this time, I would just have to be a grown-up and deal with it.

Warren sighed and I looked him over. His eyelids were a little droopy and puffy. There were some lines around his mouth, like he’d been frowning a lot.

“Ciana, did you find something new on my face?”

“Oh, sorry,” I said, deciding to be honest, “I just... you look tired. Are you sleeping okay?”

“The king has assigned me a lot of work. It has kept me busy and... off my normal sleep schedule,” he explained, fighting back a yawn.

“Why does he make you work so hard? He can’t do that, can he? Or if he has to, he should be leading by example.”

“Oh, believe me, I’d never seen anyone more workaholic than Theo-“

“Save it. I know he’s your brother and you’re defending him. But the facts speak for themselves. For example, I’d been wandering around leisurely, and somehow I could barely go 10 minutes without

running into him. Either my walking route just overlaps with the king's workplace, or he is just as free as me."

He acted like those were all casual encounters. Did I really look that naive? After the "Kissing Creep", he had earned himself a new "Stalker" tag.

Warren tried to suppress a smile from his face, but he failed. He forced himself to look serious. "He's the king Ciana, leaders lead, they don't have time to do. That's why they have people like us."

I rolled my eyes. "That is such a cop-out. He's a hypocrite!"

Warren pinched the bridge of his nose and turned to the side. He closed his eyes like he was trying to think of something to say.

I looked around the garden a little and saw a flower that I recognized. While Warren stood there uncomfortably, I went over to the flower and picked it. Lifting it to my nose, I inhaled deeply, breathing in the floral scent.

"Here you go," I said, tapping Warren on the shoulder and handing him the flower.

Warren raised an eyebrow at me. He hesitated and then took the flower.

"It is Lavendlilly. I heard they are good for helping people sleep," I added.

Warren creased his brow and studied the flower for a moment. His eyes were distant, lost in an old memory. Then he stared at me for a long moment.

So long, I started to feel funny and shifted my weight back and forth on my feet.

"Where did you learn about this flower?" he asked, finally.

"Uhh..."

I had no idea where I'd learned about the Lavendlilly. It wasn't a flower that grew in my pack's territory. I couldn't even remember seeing it before today. But someone had told me about Lavendlilly. Of that, I was sure.

"Well, I don't really remember," I admitted, shrugging. "It was someone very special to me, I think. At least, that's what I feel." The feeling touched my heart.

"You're something... Ciana," Warren managed to utter. He seemed to be a little emotional.

"Something's wrong?"

He shook his head and asked hoarsely, "Can I have a hug?"

"Oh..."

It was an innocent enough request and I felt like I had a deeper connection to Warren than all the other people I supposedly knew.

"Warren!"

Both Warren and I started at the intruding, booming voice. In unison, our heads snapped to the edge of the garden where Theo was approaching.

I rolled my eyes. It had been nearly twenty minutes since the last “casual encounter.” I should have known he’d be showing up any second.

“Alistair has been waiting for you,” Theo told Warren when he was closer to us. He had a stern look on his face as he stared at his brother.

“Oh, my meeting with him is in half an hour and he usually is right on time or runs one or two minutes late,” he thought for a moment, and he met Theo’s darkened face and quickly added, “but this must be something really urgent. I better go.”

“Well, then, off you go. Miss Black doesn’t need any more confusing thoughts right now,” Theo ordered, motioning for Warren to leave. “Also, if you can review the stack of the national security improvement proposal on my desk. I’d appreciate it.”

Warren glanced back at me quickly and waved me goodbye. As he left, I could’ve sworn I heard him whisper, “Goddess, sometimes I think you keep me around as free labor instead of your brother...”

I bit my lip to hold back my giggle as Warren disappeared. When I glanced at Theo, I saw the scowl on his face. Clearly, he’d heard what Warren said but he hadn’t reacted or called him out on it. The two of them were kinda funny, the way I imagined brothers were together.

Still, it didn’t seem like Theo was being that fair to Warren.

I swallowed hard, ignoring the fact that I was having trouble tearing my eyes away from Theo’s handsome face. My heart fluttered uncontrollably as he slowly turned to face me.

“Your Majesty, Prince Warren works very hard. I don’t think he got much sleep last night in an attempt to meet your demands. You might want to try being a little nicer to him.” Even though it wasn’t my place to say so, I felt the need to stand up for my friend.

Did Theo hear me? I wasn’t sure, because his eyes narrowed in on my lips. They glazed over with a lustful look.

My stomach dropped into my feet and I giggled nervously.

“Is that so?” he asked gruffly, still staring at my mouth.

Unconsciously, I licked my lips, and the look in his eyes smoldered even deeper.

“Well, a good leader leads by example, don’t they? If you want him to work harder, wouldn’t it make sense to show that you’re dedicated to your own work, setting the right example?” I asked, raising a challenging eyebrow.

Theo scoffed. He crossed his arms and tossed his head back. “I have something more important to do than set an example for my brother.”

“Like what?” I asked, glaring at him. “As a king, what could be more important than ruling your country?”

“Right now? Making sure that the most important woman in my life is safe at all times,” he explained casually.

It took me a few seconds to process what he said. I couldn’t remember seeing Theo with any women other than Brook. Jake was her mate, though, so I seriously doubted that Theo meant her.

King Theo’s mother was in the palace. She’d taken it upon herself to get to know me a little better.

“You mean Nita?” I asked. “I just had afternoon tea with her a few hours ago. She’s completely safe and sound... actually, she hardly ever leaves her wing of the palace. Doesn’t get much safer than that.”

Theo fixed his eyes directly on my face and stared into me like he could see right into my soul. My breath caught in my throat and my skin burned hot as a blush spread over me like wildfire.

“I don’t mean my mother. I mean you,” he said firmly. I was again stunned by the perfect proportion of his facial features. It was as if the Goddess poured all her love when placing them on the man standing in front of me.

In my chest, my heart palpitated and I stared right back into his eyes. I felt feverish suddenly. Those bottomless deep, dark orbs could have swallowed me whole.

I cleared my throat and looked away from him. Just because he looked good didn’t mean that he was good. Appearances weren’t everything.

“Your Majesty, I really don’t know what you’re talking about and I definitely don’t know you! You’re intimidating.”

I bit back the words “arrogant” and “overbearing” so that I didn’t sound too rough on the king. “See, I can’t even go to the library without you skulking around.”

Did honest, normal men follow ‘the most important woman in their life’ around like she couldn’t be trusted?

I added, “You also seem like the type to have a bad temper, and I hear whispers about it in the palace halls. I apologize for my honesty, but I don’t see myself falling in love with someone like you.”

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Theo

Every time I tried to get close to Ciana, she pushed me away or avoided me completely. Since she yelled at me in the garden, it was harder to get close to her. I’d been keeping a close eye on her because I needed to know she was safe but she was making it difficult.

While standing nearby in the garden, I signed off on a new budget plan with Simon while Ciana was smelling flowers and talking to Brook. I knew better than to interrupt a girl’s afternoon.

I glanced over at Ciana and saw her describing something with big arm movements. A smile tugged at my lips.

I thought back to the beginning of our relationship when we first met. She’d worked hard to avoid me then, but fate kept throwing us together, like with Perceval and the Dreamberry.

If we were really destined to be together, fate would do its job again and bring us back together.

I was too impatient for fate!

Sighing, I handed the signed documents back to Simon and sent him on his way. I took a few steps toward Ciana and Brook but was interrupted again.

"Alpha, I have a report on the scroll translation," Jake said, coming up to me from another direction. "I think you'll want to see what we've come up with."

I looked back at Ciana and Brook. They were giggling together and having a good time. I knew my guards would keep a close eye on them.

"Alright."

As we walked through the palace, Jake caught me up on some of the new information.

"We haven't come across any information about how to control your power, but the scroll does say your power is only activated through physical contact," he explained.

"Hmm." I acknowledged. That made sense. The first time I thought I'd killed Maggie, I never even touched her. I hadn't felt her life force, either. She'd been able to trick me because I was so out of control, I thought I'd just hadn't noticed what I was doing.

"That explains why Maggie only faked her death. What about you and Ciana at the pavilion? The two of you fainted. Why was that?"

"At the time, we assumed it was because of your power. With this new information, the Moonlit Crystal was also there. We don't know everything it can do, only Luther understood its true power. It could have easily been the cause of us fainting," Jake theorized.

"Hmm..." I pondered for a moment and thought of something that was far far away in my memory. Something that haunted me till this day. "There was still one more time that doesn't make sense."

I stopped walking and turned toward Jake. He met my gaze and I knew that both of our minds wandered to the same incident.

"Jake, be honest. Have you ever resented me for making you my Beta?" I asked in a heavy tone, looking at my most loyal friend and subordinate.

"Alpha, if it weren't for you. I'd be dead." Jake shook his head and chuckled dryly.

"I killed two of your people. You don't hold that against me?"

It was a topic we both tried our best to avoid for years.

No one knew Jake was one of the innocent prisoners who shared the same cell with me when I was ten, along with twenty of his other pack mates. He was one of the kids.

Jake looked back at me a little longer this time. "With everything that has been happening lately, I've had a lot of time to think about things and," he said, slowing down his usual speaking speed, "some memories from back then have started to come back to me."

“Sorry man.” It must be hard to harbor the thoughts of seeing his friends and family killed by a ten-year-old monster.

“I’d been wanting to tell you about it for a while, but the timing was never right.” He let out a breath, a hint of pain flickered in his eyes, but he kept his usual, calm tone. “That year, back when you were ten and Sebastian threw you in jail with us. Well, I remember how you would rather starve to death than to kill any of us. And no matter how bad it got...” Jake trailed off.

“But-“

“Let me say this, or I might lose my nerve because it is heavy,” Jake interrupted me. This almost never happened.

I nodded and motioned for him to continue.

“We knew that if you died, Sebastian would have killed the rest of us, too. We were watching you getting weaker and weaker. I was just a kid and I barely understood what was going on. But my grandfather and another elder decided you were our only hope to survive, even if sacrifice was also needed.”

Jake’s face contorted slightly and I understood how painful the memory was for him. He’d lost family that day.

“My grandfather... Well, he and another elder decided to hold your hands.”

My eyes popped open wide and I stared at Jake. What was he saying? I couldn’t remember the details. I’d been starving and half out of my mind. I looked at my hands and just couldn’t believe what I was hearing...

“Alpha Theo, are you listening to me?”

I lifted my gaze to meet my Beta’s, but I looked through him and saw the young kid curled up in the corner of a dark dungeon. His words continued to flow into my ears.

“I was only seven and I was pretty traumatized, so the memories were buried pretty deep.” He took a deep breath and let it out as if he felt relieved of what he told me.

“You didn’t choose to harm us. It was my grandfather’s choice to help save the rest of our clan.”

I couldn’t believe what I heard.

“Therefore, your power isn’t as uncontrollable as you think. It wasn’t uncontrollable when you were ten. You fought it and almost killed yourself doing so, Alpha.”

I flexed my fingers and lifted my hands. They’d been weapons for so long that sometimes I forgot they were also just hands.

“If you can avoid physical contact, your power won’t activate,” Jake concluded.

I was happy to hear that I had more control over my power than I thought, even if I didn’t know how to turn it off when I wanted to. It was good news.

“Thank you for telling me this, Jake. And, still, I’m sorry for your loss.”

“It’s been years. I’ve moved past it. Especially now,” Jake managed to put on a small smile.

As good as the new information was, however, it didn’t help me with Ciana and her memory loss, or the fact that I might actually hurt her with my touch now.

“I know, it doesn’t help with Ciana,” Jake said, like he was reading my mind.

“Does the scroll say anything else?”

We started walking again, toward the room where Jake had the scroll tucked away. Only a select few were allowed to work on it, at least until we knew more about what it said and what power it had. Right now, no one else was around, just me and Jake.

“Well, we’ve got a few theories about that,” Jake said. “Now, keep in mind, we don’t know if any of them are true or have any merit, but they are working theories.”

“Elaborate,” I demanded, holding my hand out and beckoning Jake to continue.

“According to the scroll, we were able to confirm that Dottie’s tale about the White Queen and Dark King weren’t just legends. Like our Dark King Lycaon, the White Queen also exists somewhere, and possibly still does,” Jake began.

“If Ciana has some connection to the White Queen, or even of the Moon Goddess herself, that could explain her immunity to your power.”

I stroked my chin and contemplated what Jake was saying. Could Ciana be the descendent of the White Queen like I was of the Dark King? It would be poetic if that were the case. We were like yin and yang.

“Remember the first time we encountered Luther? He put a curse on Ciana, one that she was able to wake up from on her own,” Jake reminded me.

I nodded slowly. It had been a mystery at the time. Dottie hadn’t even been able to figure out what the curse was or what would break it. But Ciana still came back to us- back to me.

“Dottie and Warren have looked into it more extensively. They think that Ciana’s connection to the White Queen, or even the Moon Goddess, is what protects her from your power,” he elaborated, “to a degree.”

Things were starting to make sense. The curse was lifted spontaneously, and when Ciana and I were in the Moonlit Crystal we were the only ones that were able to recover our real world memories.

She’d made a joke about how maybe the Moon Goddess really liked her...

Maybe it wasn’t a joke after all.

Frowning, I looked at the floor. “Does that mean... you think Ciana is also descended from the Moon Goddess?”

“Not necessarily... It would have been more likely that she was a descendant if she hadn't been affected by you when she was weak. We think now that it is more likely she was blessed by the Moon Goddess or the White Queen.” Jake stopped walking and sighed suddenly.

I slowed down and glanced over my shoulder at him. His head was bowed as he studied the floor.

“You think the blessing is wearing off, and that's why I... hurt her?”

“The thought crossed my mind. I know that isn't what you want to hear, but it is just a theory,” Jake said.

Perhaps it wasn't a blessing at all. Ciana had been given protection just long enough for me to know what it was like to touch someone I loved and hold her, to know her intimately and have a sense of every inch of her body curved into my soul, just for me to learn that I wouldn't be able to feel her again.

Perhaps, it was my punishment all along to feel that joy only to have it ripped away.

“You know, it is possible she is still blessed and the blessing was only weakened by her injury,” Jake interrupted my thoughts.

I muttered. “I guess the only ones that know for sure and can give us any answers are her parents, right?”

“Talking to them would be helpful. It would also bring her comfort, I'm sure. She still feels surrounded by strangers,” Jake agreed.

“Well, then we should invite them here. Send for Alpha Soren Black. Hopefully, he's back from his long trip,” I demanded.

Jake grinned at me. “Actually, that was the other thing I wanted to talk to you about. We finally received word. Alpha Black is on his way back. He should be here in a few days.”

I nodded absently and glanced down the hall toward the garden. Maybe it was my imagination, but I swore I could hear Ciana laughing in the gardens still. What was I going to do about Ciana and her father, now that he was coming here?

“Alpha, what's wrong? You look concerned.”

Sighing, I pinched the bridge of my nose. “Her father is coming.”

How was I supposed to persuade Alpha Black to let me marry his daughter?

Should I even bring it up until we were sure I wouldn't hurt her? Let alone, she still didn't remember me.

Jake chuckled understandingly. He knew what was going through my mind. “I think you'll have to win her over first. You've got a couple days to do it!”

I groaned and shook my head. “Are you helping or taunting?”

“A little of both. But seriously, if you want your Ciana back, perhaps approach her differently. When she first came here, she was headstrong and stubborn. That kind of woman isn't going to respond to you

following her around and quote, protecting her. She can't even remember what she needs protection from."

"Then what else should I do?"

Jake's eyes widened, and he stared at me.

"What?"

"D-did you just ask for advice?"

"Jake, not the time."

He couldn't hold back the grin on his face and shared his opinion enthusiastically.

"Just be nice to her!"

"Like keeping her safe and showing up every fifteen minutes to say hi? I've already done that. It didn't work."

"Then do something else!" When was the last time I saw my Beta so passionate about any actual work of his?

He continued, "Do something for her that will make her feel special and cared for."

"Like what?"

"Like something that she had asked you for in the past."

"In the past when I asked her what she wanted, she said she wanted to spend time with me. But now, all she does is push me away and avoid me. It is hard to show her anything," I grunted.

"Quickest way to a woman's heart is a gift, trust me on that. Now, I don't mean some normal, corny gift like chocolates, flowers, or jewelry. No, you need to do something personal that speaks to her interests," Jake told me. "What does she like?"

I was quite pleased to discover my Beta's new skill set as a romantic advisor. He had some practical theories.

"Um... other than me, she always liked animals."

Jake slapped a hand on his thigh. "That's a great idea! How about a cute cat as a pet for her?"

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Ciana

The air was cool today but not in a way where it wasn't pleasant to be outside. The last few days had been weird, to say the least. I had settled into the palace well even though it didn't feel like I needed to settle in. This place, as strange as it sounded, offered me a certain peace.

My mind wandered to a pair of mesmerizing dark eyes and the way that they tried to lure me in.

I shook my head, trying to rid my mind of King Theo's presence.

Jake said to trust him but I didn't know why I just couldn't. There was something familiar about him but I couldn't bring myself to take that leap.

I had just turned the corner when I was nearly toppled over by one of the servants who were sprinting in the opposite direction from me.

"Forgive me, my lady." She bowed before sprinting past me.

Three more servants followed after her, brushing past me.

"What's going on?" I muttered to myself as I walked into the square and searched for what they were running from.

"Why the hell is it so damn big?" I heard Jake's muffled voice in the distance.

I hid behind one of the finely pruned hedges and looked through the small opening. There was Jake, approaching the square. But he wasn't alone.

Was that a... leopard? I squinted my eyes and zeroed in on the moving object.

Yep. That was a leopard, all right.

Why on earth was there a leopard on the loose in this grand palace?

Jake looked around the area and then turned to the leopard that was now moving toward the large oak tree.

"Here kitty, kitty, kitty..." He moved to the animal slowly and groaned, "Why didn't I recommend a normal gift? Like a diamond or a damn handbag?"

Gift?

"Did you find it?" Warren came out of seemingly nowhere. "Of all the things this man could have bought, he decided to get her a leopard?"

"She likes animals." Jake scratched the back of his neck.

"Then get her a cat, not a freaking predator of the jungle," Warren panted. From where I was hiding, I could see his face was red from trying to get on the tree. It was rare to see the elegant and graceful prince frustrated like this.

"Believe me, that was what I meant when I said a cute cat. Sir, can we please just get it down before we ruin the surprise for her?"

"Alright. You go to the left, I'll be on the right to corner this baby," Warren instructed. As they slowly moved to the tree, Warren commented. "But I'm pretty sure that Ciana will love it. She has always had an affinity for animals."

What? This leopard was a gift for me? From the king?

That same light fluttery feeling returned to my chest. It happened whenever his name was mentioned or when he was close to me. I didn't fully understand my bodily reaction to him. It unnerved me.

“Ciana?”

Jake was staring right at me.

Oh well, they saw me.

I stood to my full height and hoped my cheeks weren't flaming red.

“Prince Warren, Beta Jake, fancy seeing you two here.” I cleared my throat and came out from behind the bush, plastering on a fake smile, looking at both men.

My eyes flicked to the leopard that had now settled at the base of the tree. It was unlike its nature to not climb, but then again it probably felt safe here. I pointed to the predator on the ground, “I see you both are quite busy on this fine day.”

The two men exchanged a look between themselves.

“Anyone going to say something?”

Jake snapped out of his trance as if a lightbulb had just gone off in his head. “Can you watch him for a second? I need to run and get the king, I will be back real quick.”

“I also have a meeting to run to,” Warren, smiling nervously, also started to back away. “You are good with animals, right? He won't bite, at least I don't think.”

“Wait,” I looked at them both.

“See you around,” they both said in unison.

“Okay...” I waved robotically, “...bye.”

They skittered off like two little pups that had been caught red-handed.

I then turned to the leopard that was looking directly at me.

I'd always had an affinity for animals, it wasn't a secret. Seeing the leopard reminded me of my friends in the woods back home. I missed them.

“You are gorgeous.” I looked at the majestic beast, the apex predators-the kings of speed. I thought back to the servants who had run away with fear in their eyes.

“There's no need to fear you.” I smiled at her. “Don't worry about all those people that were running from you. They just don't understand your beauty.”

The sun hit her in just the right spots to truly highlight her fur. “You are magnificent.”

I walked over to her slowly, closing the distance inch by inch. When I was about a foot away I stopped, not wanting to spook her or make her think I was coming to attack her.

Patience, slow movements and being friendly, those were the keys to dealing with animals.

I held my hand out to her and waited for her to allow me to approach her. Then she raised her head and sniffed my hand. When she was sure that I was not a threat, she placed her forehead on my palm.

I relaxed a little and settled in next to her.

I laid my back against the bark and looked up at the sky. It was a beautiful day.

The leopard placed its head in my lap and nuzzled up close to me. I stroked her fur and we just enjoyed each other's company for a quiet moment.

I looked down at the animal and she was already staring up at me. "You need a name, sweet girl. What should we call you? Leapy?"

She purred and scratched behind her ear.

"No? Alright, Aurum? It matches your coat."

She scratched her face.

"Um...What about Neava? It means strength and resilience. Do you like that name?"

She purred and I knew we had found our winner.

"Good girl! Let's have some food, Neava!" I jumped up from the ground and went straight to a little shed off to the side. "I will be right back. You stay here."

By the time I returned with food, it struck me again, I just knew exactly where to get food. It was what I had been feeling for the past few days. These halls, these walls and even the people working in the building. I just knew them even without specific memories.

There was no doubt that I'd been here and people around me did seem harmless to me. I just wish I could remember exactly what happened.

The vibe of the palace felt strange to me. On one hand, I didn't particularly like to be trapped within the walls, but on the other, there was something attracting me here.

I sighed, and decided not to get bogged down in the fog in my head after a few tries.

"Enjoy it," I smiled as Neava lifted her head and then looked at the meat treats in my hand. Animals don't smile but in that moment I swear I saw Neava smile. I could see the happiness in her eyes.

I leaned my head back against the tree and looked up at the sky.

Had Theo really gotten Neava as a gift for me? Why would he do that? It wasn't my birthday nor was it any other special occasion.

"Beautiful day isn't it?" A deep and smooth voice sent a frenzy of flutters into my chest.

I snapped my eyes open and looked at the king.

"Your Majesty," I cleared my throat.

He stared directly into my soul, his gaze intrusive and sharp. "Theo. I'm only ever Theo to you."

"Yes, Your Majesty." I insisted on keeping the formality.

He didn't fight me back on it, only walked over to the leopard and crouched down. He reached into the bag of treats beside him and offered them to Neava, who gladly accepted the food and purred at his presence.

"I'm impressed, Your Majesty," I smiled, trying to find a common ground for us, "Few people get along with large animals like Neava this easily."

"What is there to fear?" He rubbed Neava's forehead. "Wait, you named her?"

I nodded, a small blush heating my cheeks. "Yes, Neava. It's an ancient name from her ancestral land that means strength and resilience." I looked down at her. "A beautiful name for a beautiful creature."

"Yes," his voice came out much softer than before.

When I turned to look at him I saw him staring directly at me. My breath hitched.

I flusteredly looked away. "Who taught you how to handle animals?"

"A very special person in my life."

"I bet I could be good friends with that person then. We both love animals!"

His face softened. "I'm sure you would."

I found myself staring at him longer than what would be considered polite, so I cleared my throat and looked away from him. "I feel much better now. I think now it's time for me to return back to my home pack. Thank you for your hospitality, it was greatly appreciated."

"I don't think you should leave..." I shot him daggers with my gaze. What did he mean? I wasn't a prisoner! "...Yet," he added, after seeing my unfriendly glance. "Your father is on his way here. He sent word yesterday and should arrive shortly."

"My father?"

"Yes. So instead of rushing back maybe you can wait for him here."

I nodded with my face heated a little, feeling guilty that I misunderstood him, "Okay. Thank you. Your Majesty."

He gave me a pointed look. "I told you, it's Theo."

It was still weird for me to say his name out loud in his presence, but if that was what he wanted then I would do it.

"How about you join me for a walk?"

I didn't immediately say yes.

"You will be gone in a few days and I won't get to see you anymore. Besides, would you really turn down the king's invitation?"

He was right.

"Okay," I stood from my place next to Neava. "Please lead the way."

Theo nodded and called to Neava to follow him. I fell into step with him and we walked to the back of the royal gardens.

"It's such a beautiful day and these gardens are magnificent," I breathed in the fresh air and let out a low sigh, "they really are."

The green grass and the pruned hedges just added to the grandeur of the entire area. "I know you have all these wonderful expensive plants closer to the center, but this part of the garden has to be my favorite."

"It always has been," Theo said with a distant look on his face. "You always felt better in nature. You seemed to be calmer there."

One side of his lips tilted upward as he watched Neava walk ahead of us.

"You would sometimes spend hours here in the garden." He flashed me a quick glance before turning back ahead. "I think out of all of the women who came to the palace, you were the least excited one to be there. And you made sure that I knew it even from day one."

"Your Majes-I mean Theo," I corrected myself. "I don't remember any of these moments you are talking about."

He let out a heavy sigh before turning toward me. "I know you don't. I hope one day it will all just come flooding back."

Then he scoffed at himself and muttered something. I thought he said, "Or maybe not."

I didn't mistake the sadness in his voice, even though he didn't display it on his face.

"Tell me more about...our time together." I relented thanks to the subtle sadness in his tone. It broke my heart.

"I didn't meet you for the first time when you came here."

I thought of something important so I asked aloud, "Why did I come here in the first place?"

He studied my face, as if he was weighing on whether to tell me the truth or not. Eventually, he sighed. "The late king wanted me to have an heir, so he gathered some consort candidates for me."

"Wait, you mean, I am one of the consorts?"

No wonder everyone felt it was okay for him to kiss me!

"Yes, but usually, you tried to get away from the rest of the consorts and me."

He was smiling. Oh, my goddess. I couldn't peel my eyes off him!

If I had thought Theo was handsome before, now I just thought he was breathtaking. Who knew the goddess could create such wonders?

He realized that I was staring at him so he held his gaze on mine. With a faint smile still on his face, his hypnotic eyes captured my soul, and I stopped breathing.

For a few seconds, the world around us faded away and all that remained was him and I didn't know how to describe it as it was a new experience for me, but I felt tense.

Not the "I was going to lose a limb" type of tense, but the "somehow the air between us crackled and electricity shot out all around" type of tense.

He moved in closer, his muscular frame enveloping me as my body trembled.

"I want you, Ciana," he said in a husky voice. "You will be the mother of my child."

I noticed that he was wearing his gloves, like always. All of a sudden, I was curious how it would feel if they touched my skin.

Then his strong hand caressed my arm and his warm breath blew against my neck as he whispered, "I know you feel it, too."

My heart screamed, "Yes."

But as he leaned forward to find my lips, all I could breathe out was, "No."

No. I couldn't be thinking of the king in such a way. He was the king and I was not his and he was not mine. We didn't belong together.

I looked at the tall walls around us. No, I wouldn't want to spend the rest of my life here. Royalty life might sound glorious for some, but for me, I belonged to nature and the vast world. There were new places I would like to visit, new people that I would like to meet, and being confined within a few acres for the rest of my life wasn't what I wanted to sign up for.

Besides, how many girls were in this consort? How would I ever allow myself to share my husband with others?

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Theo

Before I could do or say anything else, Ciana artfully avoided my half embrace and skittered away.

I remained speechless as I stood there, watching her run away from me again. My head tilted back and I closed my eyes.

She had been so close. I could still sense her warm presence in the air and I inhaled deeply to indulge myself in her enticing, waterlily scent a little longer.

However, that single word breathed out from her pink and alluring lips rang in my ears and was sharper than any knife. It sliced through my chest and left my heart throbbing helplessly.

It only took Alpha Black two days to arrive at the palace. I was waiting for him at the front doors before he could run into Ciana. We hadn't had a chance to fill him in on what she was going through.

"Alpha Black," I greeted, nodding respectfully to him.

“Greetings, Your Majesty. I didn’t expect the king himself to be my welcome party,” he replied politely, slightly lowering his head to show respect to the crown, but the way he carried himself made it feel as if we were equal in status.

And I greatly appreciated it. Because he treated me as someone that he respected as a person, not due to my title. Even if I hadn’t been the king, I was confident that he would do the exact same thing.

He lifted his eyes and looked me over quickly and meanwhile, I also got the chance to do the same to him.

He was a tall and good-looking man with a full build. Jake told me he was my father’s age, but other than some hint of gray in his jet-black hair, I wouldn’t think he was in his fifties. Probably because his piercing grayish-blue eyes caught most of my attention immediately.

They were deep and calm and through them, I knew for sure that their owner was a man full of stories. I could see where Ciana got her bright, captivating eyes from.

“You got here a bit sooner than we anticipated,” I said as I gestured toward the meeting room.

“Where my daughter is concerned, I don’t leave anything to chance. Where’s my daughter, Your Majesty?”

“I assure you, Ciana is fine right now,” I stated quickly so he wouldn’t get the wrong idea. “However, she is dealing with something and I wanted to update you before you saw her.”

He narrowed his eyes at my reply. Without saying anything, I could already sense the warning from his gaze.

“Please, tell me what is happening with my daughter.”

His piercing eyes told me silently that if anything happened to Ciana, we’d all feel Alpha Black’s wrath, something I would never want to deal with from my future and only possible father-in-law anyway, but especially after meeting Soren Black in person. I bet no one in the world would want to mess with this composed yet extremely dangerous man’s beloved family.

So I decided to be completely honest and straightforward with him. If anything could help me with the man in front of me, my gut told me it was honesty and sincerity.

I looked him in the eye. “I’d like to start by saying that I love Ciana more than anything in the world. I’ll do anything to protect her and treat her well.”

My words seemed to have taken him by surprise, and he remained silent for a few seconds.

I didn’t rush him and waited for him to respond to me. Maybe some fathers in this country would feel that their daughters being favored by the crown was an honor, but I was sure my title wouldn’t earn me any additional points from Alpha Black when it comes to his daughter’s happiness.

I didn’t have any problem with that. In fact, I was grateful that my Ciana had loving parents who truly cared about her.

It took him a few seconds, which felt like hours, before he said, "I appreciate that. Fathers like to hear that their daughters are cared for."

His reply was vague, and I got the impression that while he appreciated my gesture, he wasn't over the moon about his daughter having the king's favor without knowing Ciana's own opinion.

"The reason I would like to meet with you before you see Ciana is that we need your help. Actually, Ciana needs your help," I clarified. "Not long ago, she was injured, and while she's on the right track with her recovery physically, she lost her memory."

The atmosphere in the room immediately changed. Tension started to build up as Soren's expression grew darker at the bad news.

"I'm really sorry for not doing a better job protecting her," I apologized sincerely. "Please allow me to fill you in with more details."

I'd been thinking about how to explain to her father everything that Ciana and I had been through together, especially with some parts of them being secrets of the royal bloodline and our unpleasant past.

But once I'd met Soren in person, I decided to be completely transparent with him, not just because I immediately knew we both had a common goal to help Ciana, but also because as dangerous as he was, I knew I could trust him.

It was my instinct.

"Please take a seat. It might take a little time, but I'll be as concise as I can be."

Soren made himself comfortable and listened to me patiently without any interruption. He was attentive and seemingly calm the entire time. The only way I knew he was worried and upset from time to time was when I noticed that his fists were clenched slightly, usually whenever I mentioned Ciana being hurt or in danger.

When I was done, he took a few moments to process the information and creased his brow. "She doesn't remember anything?"

"She seemed to remember everything before she arrived at the palace. As for her memories about the palace...She's expressed familiarity with some things but she cannot recall what happened here before."

Soren nodded his acknowledgement and stood up. "Your Majesty, I appreciate you taking care of my daughter in her time of need. Now, I really would like to see her on my own."

"One moment, please. I have a request." I took a deep breath in and let it out slowly, calming my rapid heartbeat. Yes, I was nervous. How could I not be?

If I was a father, would I allow my daughter to marry someone she couldn't even remember?

I'd have to convince Soren that I could make Ciana happy and that I was going to protect her, but ironically, I was the one who almost sucked out her life!

Yet, as confused, anxious and...helpless as I was, I was desperate for her. I loved her

and I needed her. Nothing could change that.

I knew she once felt the same, and given time, she would feel the same again.

No matter what it might take, I would never allow myself to just give up on our relationship and our future. At least, not without trying everything I could.

At least, not now.

I looked him in the eye and said slowly, "Alpha Black, I love your daughter, and I would like to ask your permission for her hand."

He didn't agree or reject immediately.

"I know it's a lot to ask," I added firmly, "but I'll keep trying until everything is fixed and I'll never allow anything bad to happen to her again."

His piercing eyes held my gaze as he responded slowly and seriously. "Your Majesty, with all due respect, I'm afraid I have to say no."

I sighed.

To be honest, I hadn't expected him to immediately agree to my request for her hand. It sounded illogical, but somehow I was glad he said no, because again, it showed that he only wanted the best for his daughter.

Politely, he stated his reasons, "I can't make this decision for her, and based on what you told me, she's not in the right frame of mind. Not to mention, life with you is too dangerous. She's already been hurt."

I heard the determination of a protective father coming out in his words, and I knew it would take a lot more for me to convince him, which I was prepared to do.

"Alpha Black, no one is more heartbroken or concerned about Ciana's injury than I am. I'd rather die ten times over than see her hurt. At least, may I have the honor to court your daughter?"

"Your Majesty, as a father, I appreciate your consideration. However, I can't allow my daughter to be injured again, and unfortunately, royal life by default would be filled with danger. I would like to take her home."

"I would like to ask you to reconsider it," I stood up, reacting quickly.

"Humph," Soren narrowed his eyes, and then questioned with a dangerous glare. "She's my daughter. Are you going to force me to leave her here? My pack supported you because they believe you can restore justice and peace. If you're planning to go to war simply to force my daughter to marry you, how are you any different from your father?"

he questioned.

I shook my head. "You misunderstand. Alpha Black. I wouldn't attack your pack should Ciana reject me. We love each other, even if she doesn't remember it. Given time, I'm confident she will fall for me again."

“Is that so?” Soren asked, scoffing. “You seem overly self-confident and arrogant. I’m not sure you’re my daughter’s type?”

That was Ciana’s initial reaction to me too. Now I knew where she got that from. The only way I could convince him was to show him my heart.

“We were in love, Alpha Black, before her memory loss. If you take her away from me now, aren’t you taking away her chance to get to know me again and make an informed decision?” I countered.

Like me, he obviously wasn’t used to people questioning his decision, but he didn’t let his frustration show through. Instead, he maintained his level tone and asked me something that had been on my mind too.

“Even if you can protect her and win her heart again, she’s not even twenty-one yet. What if she isn’t your mate?”

I told him the answer that had been in mind for a long time. It never changed since the day she kissed me after knowing my dreadful ability.

“To me, it doesn’t matter. My mate sense has been suppressed.”

His brow slightly furrowed.

“Believe it or not, I won’t be able to feel my mate even if she is right in front of me. I used to hate my fate for it, but now I’m thankful. Because my heart will forever only belong to Ciana. If the Goddess blesses us and she’s my mate, I’d cherish her the way I’m cherishing her now. If somehow she’s not... Well, I guess I would never find out because I won’t take the risk.”

He stared at me with surprise and his brow furrowed more. His face softened a little then he asked, “You’re only talking about you. How about her? What if her mate is someone else, and she finds him?”

I’d thought about it too.

I turned my gaze to the horizon outside of the window. Of course, I’d thought about this possibility, and for a while, it haunted me day and night. But eventually, I’d come to a conclusion that I could live with.

I smiled bitterly, “Then I’ll bury my love for her in my heart and do everything I can to protect her, her family and her peaceful life from a distance, as that would be the only solace for my lifelong loneliness.”

Astonishment flickered in his eyes. I didn’t know whether he believed me or not, but that was the only answer from the bottom of my heart.

There was no way out for me when it comes to Ciana. If the Goddess blessed her with a mate that could bring her a better life, I would have to let her go. I’d be happy to let her go, as long as that was what she wanted.

He didn’t say anything for a while this time, eventually, he let out a sigh. “You remind me of when I was in my twenties...” His voice trailed off, and then he smiled. “But then I met Ciana’s mother. Your Majesty, you and Ciana both are still very young, and life changes. You can never say never.”

His tone was much softer this time. It was a good sign, but it wasn't enough for him to relent yet. I needed one more reason to convince him and I knew exactly what it was.

"Alpha Black, again, I sincerely ask you to reconsider allowing me a chance to pursue your daughter. Besides, you wouldn't want your grandchild to be born without a father, would you?"

Soren gaped at me. "Ciana is...."

"Yes, she is pregnant!" I confirmed and couldn't help the upcurl of my lips. "However, I haven't told her yet. I didn't want to scare her."

Soren let out another heavy sigh.

"Your Majesty, I need some time to rethink your request. However, you mentioned you need help. You have my service here. What can I do?"

That was the best outcome I could ask for at this moment.

Well, first of all, please tell me everything you know about the White Queen."

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Soren froze.

I let out a breath of relief inwardly. Based on his reaction, it seemed he knew more about the White Queen than us.

"What do you want to know about her?" he sighed after his short pause.

"As I mentioned before, Ciana was immune to me, but we don't think she is right now, or at a minimum not as much as before."

He nodded to let me know he was listening.

"We of course dare not test it by risking her life without knowing why she wasn't impacted by me to begin with. So far, all the information we gathered leads us to believe she was blessed by the White Queen somehow, but that's as far as we got."

I sighed, "Only very recently we'd heard of the White Queen and believed that she may exist. Other than that, we know nothing about her. Whatever you could share would be a great help."

I couldn't read exactly what his mixed emotions were, but whatever they were, it meant only one thing. Soren Black had not only heard about this mysterious character, he might even know her well.

As expected, he chuckled lightly. "I was planning to tell Ciana when she turns twenty- one. Since she isn't... ready, I'll tell you, Your Majesty."

"Please."

He stood up and paced to the window. The sun had started setting, and the bright orange rays warmed his features. He said in a tone as if he was telling a fairytale story from long ago, but I knew it was his own memory.

“The White Queen does exist, just as the Dark King does. As crazy as it sounds, there is more than one realm in this world, and where we are right now, is the Realm of Shadow, ruled by the Dark King Lycaon and his descendants,” he explained.

I added for him, “And the realm that the White Queen rules is the Realm of Light.”

I’d heard that from Dottie once, and Jake’s study of the scroll also confirmed that.

“Exactly. And that’s where I was born!”

I gasped. He didn’t wait for me to say anything, and asked, “You want to know why Ciana was immune to your deadly power?”

I nodded, waiting anxiously for his answer. However, all of a sudden, his eyes turned cold, and without any reason or advance notice, he charged at me, a knife in his hand.

I paused for a second, trying to figure out what he was doing and how I should react. But he was too fast.

Before I knew it, the blade shredded my gloves and then was thrust right toward my heart. Soren’s movements were like lightning and all I could do was defend myself instinctively by grabbing his wrist.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!” I grunted through clenched teeth.

“Not bad, Your Majesty,” he smirked as I threw his hand, which was holding the knife, away from me.

He complimented, “You’re indeed a great warrior.”

But I was extremely frustrated and didn’t understand what it was all for. If he wasn’t Ciana’s father, I might’ve had him thrown out of the palace.

Then I realized something crucial.

“You’re also immune to me!” I exclaimed.

“That’s right. As you can see, I too am immune to your power thanks to the White Queen. In fact, not only did I know the White Queen in person, years ago, she blessed me with her blood before Ciana was born. My daughter carries my blood, so she has the same blessing and immunity.”

“Then... why did she lose that immunity?”

“Your Majesty, where do you think your power comes from? What do you think contains the most power within you?” Soren asked me casually, like a teacher quizzing a student.

“My power comes from my bloodline. The part that contains most power within is...my blood?”

Soren nodded and smiled. “Correct. The same goes for the White Queen and those who accepted her blessing.”

Now everything made sense.

“That’s why Ciana’s immunity weakened!” It was like a light bulb went off. I murmured, to him and to myself, “Because she lost enough of her blood!”

My eyes lit up with hope and I couldn't hold back the trembling in my voice. "Then, does it mean that as long as the White Queen is willing to help Ciana by blessing her again with her sacred blood, she could have her immunity back?"

Soren nodded, "I believe so."

"That's... that's amazing news!" I started pacing impatiently. It was such good news, and I could sense the hope in the air!

"Then how can we reach out to the White Queen?" I urged.

"Your Majesty, the two realms are two completely different worlds. They each have their own space and sometimes even rules. No normal transportation could take you there."

That was what I thought too. Otherwise, I wouldn't have just recently heard of the White Queen and the Realm of Light.

"The only way to get there is through some sort of a gap between the realms, a magical portal, so to speak. With the right artifacts, it can take us to the Realm of Light. Not many know of it or how to access it. I've kept it a secret for a long, long time myself."

Some bothersome thoughts flashed through my mind, but I couldn't catch them. All my being was overwhelmed by the great news that there was a way to solve the biggest obstacle between Ciana and I. If this worked, not only Ciana would be safe from me, but also our child!

I couldn't wait even one second longer!

"Alpha Black, when can we leave? The earlier we can get Ciana her immunity back, the safer she would be from me. By the way, I could not thank you enough for trusting me with this knowledge!"

"I trust you because Ciana is also my daughter," he smiled, "and you are not your father."

I stilled for a moment and was at a loss for words, swallowing a lump in my throat.

"Thank you," I said gratefully. Although we'd only met for a short period of time, and we still hadn't gotten to an agreement on whether I could court his daughter, Soren had earned my gratitude.

Any adventurous explorers were obligated to inform the royal court of new territories. Soren, however, kept it a secret to himself. I was sure he had many reasons to do so, but one of the most important reasons was probably to protect the Realm of Light

from the Lycaon bloodline, people like Sebastian and me.

Yet, he chose to be honest about his homeworld with me. I'd forever be honored and grateful for that trust.

"However, young king, unfortunately, the portal isn't something that stays in one place waiting for anyone to walk in and out at will."

"You mean, it moves?"

He nodded. "Yes, and while I was able to go back and forth between the two realms, the last time I did that was many years ago. The next time I tried to go back there again, it was already gone. I have been looking for it ever since but I haven't been able to find the portal again."

I remembered the stories that the 12-year-old Ciana told me about her family trips all over the world, and the recent years when the Alpha and Luna of Alvar pack would "travel" a few months every year. Was that because he'd been investigating the location of the portal?

My heart sank. It was a cold bucket of water dumped right over my spark of hope. Soren had spent the last twenty years without luck, how much longer would we need?

Five years, ten years? Even if I would be patient, was it fair to Ciana and our unborn child that I couldn't even touch them?

"Also, please handle the portal subject with delicacy. It should not be public knowledge."

Then I suddenly remembered what that bothersome thought was. This wasn't the first time I heard about a "portal"!

"Alpha Black, does the portal always connect to the Realm of Light?"

"In my experience, yes."

"Then does it feel all dark and cold, and lifeless?"

He paused for a moment and asked surprisingly, "Not to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

I explained what we saw that day in our final battle with Luther and that Warren and Jake had also told us that the source of the chill-to-the-bone darkness was also a "portal".

His face turned deadly serious. "Under no circumstances should two moons exist at the same time. I don't know it for sure, but if what you said was truly a portal, I'd say it is not meant to be opened at all."

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Warren burst into my office without waiting for a reply.

I noticed Warren's windswept, frenzied appearance.

"Warren, what's wrong?"

"Ciana has run away!" he panted.

"What!?" Soren and I cried together.

Ciana

I couldn't stay in the palace anymore, and if Dad was on his way, I might as well run into him on my way out.

I couldn't stay in a place I had no memory of. I couldn't live with everyone else telling me who I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to feel.

Especially, I couldn't allow myself to fall for the king who used to have a harem, yet tried to convince me that I was the most important woman in his life.

I slipped out of the gardens, smiling to myself. It was easy to sneak away while the king was busy. Whoever he was meeting with, that person must be important, and I owed him or her a big thank-you for keeping Theo distracted.

As soon as I made it out of the palace walls, I giggled giddily and held my arms out to the world.

"I'm not going to be trapped in a palace. I want the whole wide world. Hooray!" I cheered triumphantly, jumping into the air with a whoop.

Traveling on foot was a little slow but I remembered the roads from the maps I'd studied in the library. With a grin on my face, I skipped down the road, looking forward to all the places I could go and explore. I was free!

After a short while on the road, I spotted the outskirts of a town and hurried towards it. I could rest my feet and grab a drink and maybe a bite to eat. As soon as I stepped onto the town square, the outdoor market sucked me in.

I had enough coins on me to pick up a cool drink that was fizzy and sweet. The taste of mango and honey lingered in my mouth after I finished it and went to look over the dresses and accessories. Just being out here exploring was so much fun and I'd

definitely been missing it!

As I lifted a string of pearls to my neck and looked at myself in the mirror, a strange movement in the corner of my eye caught my attention. A slow feeling crept over me. It felt as if someone was watching me and I wondered if Theo's royal guard had followed me. I decided that it was time for me to move along.

I took several twists and turns through town to lose whoever might be following me and darted into the woods as soon as possible. It took several minutes of walking amongst the cool foliage before I began to relax, but I was too optimistic.

Rustle. Rustle.

I froze and glanced sideways at the bushes by the side of the road. There was no wind and only one bush was rustling.

Someone was following me.

My father had taught me all kinds of self-defense. I knew not to let them know that I knew they were there too soon.

Shrugging, I started walking again, acting like I didn't think anything was wrong.

I only made it a few more steps before someone lunged out of the bushes and tackled me.

"Ack!" I cried as their body slammed into me.

My brain rattled in my skull as I hit the ground hard.

“Fuck,” I groaned, grabbing my head. I sat up slowly, feeling a little woozy.

When I looked up, I saw Hawke standing over me. His eyes were bloodshot, spit flying from his mouth as he exhaled.

His arms hung limply at his sides, twisted at an impossible angle. Like they’d been broken and healed all wrong.

“Hawke?” I asked, squinting up at him, the sun started to dim behind him.

“I’ve been waiting for the chance to get you alone,” he snarled.

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I couldn’t remember the last time Hawke and I had a conversation. He was Raymond’s son, the guy my father had left in charge when he went off on his travels. Raymond had been holding the pack together and Hawke had been helping.

Why was he so angry at me?

“What happened to your arms?” I asked as I rubbed my temples. My headache was going away quickly.

“Like you don’t know!” he growled, spitting on the ground at my feet.

“I really don’t,” I shrugged. Slowly, I stood up and brushed the dirt off my pants.

“You fucking cunt! If it weren’t for you, none of this would have happened!” He nodded toward me, his entire body shaking with fury. “Don’t play dumb, bitch!”

“What in the world are you talking about!”

Hawke lunged at me again and rammed his shoulder into my chest. My lungs seized and all the air was knocked out of me.

Gasping and groaning, I rolled onto my side. I tried to breathe but my throat closed and I just gasped and wheezed.

“Ha... w...” Why was he doing this? What was wrong with him?

“I’m going to teach you what it means to lose the use of your body!” he cried.

Hawke roared and his foot was kicking toward my stomach with all of his might.

I curled in a little ball, trying to prepare for the upcoming pain.

“I’ll teach y... NO!”

I cradled my head but the anticipated pain didn’t land on me. I heard snarling and growling and felt a shadow pass over me. Then Hawke wasn’t kicking me anymore.

Glancing up, I saw a massive he-wolf standing over Hawke’s unconscious body.

Gasping, I sat up and stared at the sleek, silky wolf as its tail swished back and forth. His jet-black fur was thick and glossy with a red streak, his eyes deep and familiar. I was mesmerized.

“Ciana! Ciana!”

It was my dad!

My father’s voice snapped me out of my daze. I got to my feet, turned around, and saw his familiar, tall and strong form rushing toward me. Without thinking, I ran to Dad and threw myself into his arms.

“Ciana, are you okay?” he asked, hugging me tightly.

‘Daddy! It really is you!’ I couldn’t believe my eyes! ‘I’m okay. Someone saved me just in time.’

I glanced over my shoulder and saw that the he—wolf was gone. Who was he?

‘Did you get hurt anywhere?’ my dad asked worriedly.

“My arm is a little bruised but I’ll be okay. Hawke, he attacked me for no reason, but a large, beautiful he-wolf saved me. I wanted to thank him but he ran off.” I rested my head on my dad’s shoulder.

Dad didn’t seem to care about who my lifesaver was, nor Hawke who was unconscious on the ground. He replied dismissively, “Leave Hawke where he is. As for your rescuer, if he left, he probably doesn’t want to be bothered. Just let him be.”

I nodded and smiled, “Okay Daddy. I just wanted to say a quick thank-you, one moment please.”

Then I took a step back from my dad, put both of my hands on each side of my mouth to make a simple speaker, and yelled toward the direction where the wolf disappeared, “THANK YOU FOR SAVING ME!”

Dad chuckled lightly and dotingly rubbed the top of my head. “You monkey girl, haven’t changed a bit!”

I winked at him. “Admit it, you love me for it! Daddy, I’m so glad to run into you here. They told me you would be going to the palace, and I was worried I’d miss you.”

He let out some hearty laughter, and then patted my back lightly. “No, it’s all good. Best this way. Are you able to walk around?”

“Yes. Just some scratches on my arm, don’t worry.”

‘Then let’s find a safe place nearby so that you can get some rest. How does camping out sound to you?’

It was a lovely evening. The moon hung high up in the night sky, round and bright, yet I was still able to see a few stars twinkling. The breeze was pleasantly warm. It indeed was a perfect night to camp out.

“Daddy, you know me too well!’ I jumped up and hugged his neck.

“All right, young lady,” he laughed, patting my back. “Get down.”

As happy as I was to see Dad, in my head, however, I had a million questions.

Why did Hawke attack me?

Who was the he-wolf that saved me?

Where had my parents been? Did they know about my memory loss?

Were they aware of the whole royal consort situation?

If they heard about what Theo said to me, what would they think?

I didn't know where to start, nor did I want to make Dad too worried. So I decided to just take it slow and see what Dad would have to say.

It took us less than half an hour to find a small dry dent and get a nice fire burning. I sat down on some dry grass, leaning on Dad, who had already hunted a rabbit for dinner and was now rotating the wild game over the fire.

The grease dripped into the fire every few seconds, making the flame dance happily. It was almost meditating to watch. I let out a long breath, feeling my nerves soothed by the peaceful forest night.

'So... how is mom doing?' I asked.

I was a little surprised that my mother hadn't come with my father. If what they were saying was true about my memory, I hadn't seen her in even longer than I knew.

"She's doing well. We got back just a few days ago and she had a lot of pack affairs to take care of," he smirked, "You know her work habits."

"I do," I giggled, "Leave her alone when she's busy. Goddess forbid if you get in her way during work. And once she gets started, she won't stop until it's all done."

'Exactly, so I came here to find you and that should give her enough time to get her work done. That gives you and me some time to catch up, right?'

I agreed. "Nothing beats a delicious dinner and a nice long talk in the woods!"

My father laughed and put his arm around my shoulders. He squeezed me against him in a side embrace and kissed the side of my head.

"I've missed you a lot, my dear. How have you been, really?"

His gaze looked into my soul, and I'd learned since a young age that nothing could escape his pair of piercing eyes. Sooner or later, he'd find out, so I might as well just be honest with him.

"I've been good, in general," I sighed, "but I don't want to lie to you, daddy. They said I lost my memories while I was in the palace. King Theo seems to like me, but I don't think I want to spend the rest of my life there, so I escaped and ran into you.'

My dad didn't seem to be too surprised. He nodded, 'I actually came from the palace and I talked to King Theo.'

My eyes widened, "You have already met him?! He...he knows I've escaped then? What if he sends his guards after us?"

My dad smiled, "I bet if he really loves you like he claims, he would let you choose how you would like to live your life. If he had lied about his feelings for you, then it shouldn't be a big deal for you to run away. Either way, you're fine."

"Um, you're right."

It was strange. When I was in the palace, all I wanted to do was run away. However, while I was relieved that Theo wouldn't send men after me, I was also a little...

disappointed.

How ridiculous was that! I must be losing my mind. I shook my head and tried to push Theo's dark, deep eyes out of my head when I heard a light rustling sound from the woods.

My dad's eyes shifted toward the thick forest and I followed his gaze.

Between the trees, I thought I saw a shadow move... and then there was only darkness.

"What's there?" I asked, turning back to my father.

"Probably just some forest predator," he said, cupping my chin in his hand. "Now that you're with me, they know not to bother you."

Rolling my eyes I scoffed. "You know, if those are forest animals, they're more likely to listen to me than you."

"Ha ha ha, you're probably right," he laughed proudly, "but that's because you learned from the best."

I glanced over at him and smirked, "You have to pat yourself on the back, don't you?"

Then I couldn't help but laugh loudly with him too.

"Kiddo, some fresh barbecued wild game?" Dad cut off a small piece of meat and handed it to me, but I shook my head.

"I thought this is your favorite?"

I looked down at my feet. "Actually, I haven't had a great appetite recently."

In fact, in the past few days, I couldn't quite keep my food down, but I kept that to myself.

I looked up at my father and saw his eyes darken. He looked away from me and his mouth tightened into a firm line.

"Daddy... It's okay. I probably just had a stomach bug. I'll be fine in a few days," I tried to lighten it.

"Also, maybe it's part of the memory loss that I can't remember what I like."

My dad forced a smile on his face and shook his head. Then he pulled me against him in a firm, warm embrace. "Ciana, remember, no matter who you are or what you do, we are your parents and we'll do anything to support you. You got that, baby?"

I leaned against him and buried my nose in his shirt. It smelled warm and spicy, a scent burned into my memory from childhood and all the times he scooped me in his lap and told me stories.

"Dad, are you okay? Am I okay?" I asked as I pulled away. "You're scaring me."

"I just want to make sure you remember who loves you and supports you." He kissed my forehead.

"Daddy, is it bad that I lost my memory?"

“Honey, usually sudden onset amnesia is to shield the mind from a bad memory or trauma. I’m compelled to ask, are you happy now?” he asked, his eyes softening into the father I’d always known.

My heart ached a little. It was a complicated question. Honestly, I escaped the palace, but was I really unhappy there? Everyone treated me nicely and I ought to have no complaints, yet I wasn’t satisfied.

Then I ran away, and I thought I finally got the freedom I wanted, but I felt something was missing within me.

It was so strange and I couldn’t describe it to Dad, so I smiled and nodded. “Of course, I’m happy. With you at my side, why wouldn’t I be?”

“I’m glad to hear that,” he said, chucking my chin. “I didn’t mean just right at this moment.”

“Well, I’ve got plenty of animal friends in the woods back home, I can’t wait to see them again. You and mom are back so there’s nothing I need to worry about.”

“But you’re turning 21 soon and will have your wolf. What do you want to do afterward? What will make you happy?”

“I want to explore the world just like you guys do, Daddy. Ideally with a few friends, but if I have to. I’d do it alone. I want to visit different places, try different foods and meet different people, and maybe help out when someone needs help.” I smiled, looking forward to my dream life.

“One day, I may find a place to settle down, and who knows, maybe I’ll find my mate.” When I talked about finding my mate, I thought of the teenage boy I met in the woods. I tried to remember his eyes, but all I saw was Theo’s face in my mind. Instantly, my heart started to flutter.

No, King Theo would never live that kind of life with me...

“I’ve got things to look forward to, and that makes me happy,” I concluded.

“If that’s the case, let’s not cling to the past then. We can move forward and make new memories,” Dad suggested.

“I like that idea. Daddy,” I agreed, nodding. “Let’s go home.”

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 487

I woke up early in the morning and stretched my limbs. The warm rays of the sun were on my face and I smiled at the familiar comfort of being in my own bed. I turned, reaching out to the other side of the bed and frowned at the cool emptiness beneath my hand.

Why did it feel strange? I sat up in bed and looked around my room. Nothing seemed missing or out of place but still, something was off. I reminded myself that I had been away for a year based on what everyone told me, and whatever I did during that time, my body had to get used to being back home again.

My stomach growled and I hurried to get cleaned up and dressed for breakfast. Rushing into the dining room where the staff had already prepared my favorite foods, I felt myself frowning again as I sat at the empty table.

My father was usually a very early riser and I assumed he must have already eaten and gone to catch up on business he missed with the elders. It was so quiet. At the palace, people seemed to fuss over me nonstop, which I hated. But, I didn't like the feeling of sitting alone to eat either. There were so many things on my mind but no one to talk to.

I reminded myself that my forest friends would have missed me and were eager to hear whatever I was thinking about.

After I hurried through breakfast, I wrapped a spare biscuit in a napkin, grabbed a pencil and sketchbook, threw a shawl over my shoulders and made my way from the house into the forest, enjoying the crisp morning air and warming sunshine.

Birds fluttered happily in the tree canopy and rabbits scampered along the path. It didn't take long for me to get to my favorite spot beneath a great oak tree.

"I can see that you all missed me," I teased the animals that seemed curious and shy about my return. 'Apparently, I have been away for a year. But, I have lost my memory. Don't be shy. It's the same old Ciana.'

I set my pencil and sketchbook down before unwrapping the biscuit and breaking off a piece. I crumpled the pieces between my fingers and sprinkled the crumbs on the ground. The birds dove in first and were joined by the squirrels and rabbits.

'Okay, so you remember me now...'" I giggled and smiled as they got comfortable gathering together for the crumbs I tossed on the forest floor.

When the biscuit was all finished I brushed my hands together and picked up the sketch pad.

"I have to say, I am so happy to be back home. When I was in the palace, I really didn't have anywhere to go or even any room to breathe. Everyone seemed concerned because I was injured and I did lose my memory."

A red robin landed on my shoulder and nudged my cheek while a squirrel took a moment to blink at me sympathetically.

"Dottie, the healer, was very kind. Then there was Brook who felt like a sister. She was in love with the king's beta," I emphasized dramatically and they all rustled around excitedly. 'Yes, he loves her too. His name was Jake and they are mates and getting married.'

Even more excitement rippled through them.

"There was Prince Warren who was polite and tender, he's the king's brother. And then King Theo. He has a zoo."

They all looked stunned by the idea.

"Oh, he had all kinds of beautiful animals. All were very smart and clever..."

Theo's eyes flashed in my mind and I put down the pencil I was sketching with.

“The king... He told me to call him Theo... He knew how much I like animals and he bought me a gift. It was a very sweet leopard. I named her Neava. Warren and Jake were supposed to make it a surprise but I stumbled upon them with her.”

I laughed as I remembered the time he and I were together in his garden. My fingers touched my lips as I remembered the kiss he gave me when I first woke up.

When I came out of my daydream the animals were looking at me in anticipation.

“I... I think I might miss him... all of them,” I whispered, ‘ They are not as free or as much fun as all of you but if they are that kind and caring after a few days, maybe I do have deep and significant memories of them that I should uncover.”

The animals looked at me with sympathy.

I moved to pick up my pencil, I wanted to finish that last sketch before I left. When I was done, I let out a heavy sigh and tossed it aside.

On it was a handsome man under a tree with a python and a leopard next to him.

I wrapped my arms around my knees and looked out at the horizon.”

Perhaps I should ask daddy to help me recover my memories after all.

Just then, the sudden cracking of a twig startled me. I turned to see what stepped on it but then felt strong slender arms holding me tight.

A cloth came over my mouth as I struggled to free myself. I quickly became dizzy. The world spun around me and I crumpled to the ground as all went dark.

Theo

I sat at my desk, slumped over the budget for the palace staff and soldiers. After staring at the file for five minutes straight, I tossed my pen down.

I was thinking about Ciana again.

That day, I had a long conversation with her father, and I was hopeful.

The portal, the Realm of Light and the White Queen. Everything seemed to have come together, then she ran away.

Her father Soren didn’t deny my request of courting her, and at some point, I would. However, after following her all the way home, after seeing how happy she was with her father and without me, I couldn’t bring myself to force her back here anymore.

Her father was right. She was so free, energetic and joyful outside of the palace, why would I bring her back? She was safe and happy at home, and that was all that mattered.

One day, if she could recover her memories and then... maybe...

I looked at my hands. Maybe what? Even if she remembered, we might get together, then I would brush against her, and it would happen all over again or worse.

I shook my head. There was no “maybe” until we could find the portal to the Realm of Light and get her the blessing from the White Queen again.

A quick knock at the door let me know that Warren was about to enter. I picked up the pen again and looked up as he brought yet another stack of papers for me to review.

“Hey Theo.” Warren scanned my desk for an empty space. “The census results have come back in for each of the packs. You promised to send aid as needed. These are the figures for the assistance they are asking for.”

“Of course.” I shifted papers to clear a spot for him to place his papers then went back to work on the budget. Warren put the papers down but remained in the room... hovering.

I knew he was going to try, yet again, to bring up Ciana. I kept my eyes on the numbers hoping he would get the hint and leave.

He didn't.

“I think that it is time for the palace and its new King to host a Moon Ball,” he said.

I put the pen down as a million reasons why that was a bad idea ran through my head.

“Warren, it will be a miracle if we have two coins to rub together after all the aid and repair we have to pay for. The country is just getting up and running. No one will have the time or the energy for a dance.”

“I forget how antisocial you've always been, A Moon Ball is about more than dancing, Theo, mothers and fathers bring their best and brightest, coming-of-age children to meet and match with their potential mates. Nothing is more imperative to the future of this kingdom than seeing that the packs remain amicable and form friendly and familial alliances.”

“Those are a lot of words...’

“I rehearsed them.”

“Of course you did. Fine. Sure, let's throw a Moon Ball, for the best and brightest...”

“...coming of age children,” he recited again. “I knew you would say that.” He reached into his lapel and extracted a folded piece of paper. ‘Here is the start of the invitation list. Do you want to look it over?’

“Put it down there. I'll look it over later.’

Warren huffed and sighed with frustration.

“What now?” I asked.

“Theo, you have been working night and day nonstop. You can't keep this up.”

“I'm fine.”

“Bro, if you miss her so much, why didn't you go get her and bring her back?”

“She is happy now and she is living the life she has always wanted. Besides, do you not remember what happened the last time I touched her?”

“How many times do you have to be reminded, it was an accident, and especially now we know it’s much more manageable? Besides, that didn’t stop you from pursuing her before you knew you could touch her.”

“I wasn’t pursuing her, I was protecting her,” I reminded him.

“Yeah, from the competition of another man,” he muttered.

“Warren-“

“All right, my point is, if you love her, then do something! Not just sitting here, burying yourself in work and slowly killing yourself.”

I stared at Warren. The determination on his face told me that if I tried to blow him off one more time, he would make the rest of my night a living hell.

“You don’t understand. I haven’t seen that kind of pure, simple and content smile on her face for a long time, even before she lost her memory. I sometimes wonder whether she is better off without me all together.”

“You’re wrong,” he commented. “Because you both love each other too much.”

“Yes, I’ll love her the same, but loving her doesn’t mean restraining her freedom. She isn’t here because she doesn’t want to be.”

“Well, then I guess you’ll just have to find a reason to invite her here, and make her want to be here. Something fun... Like a Moon Ball.”

He placed the guest list on top of the budget I was working on. My eyes scanned over Ciana’s name at the top.

“Any more excuses?” he asked.

When he saw that I had no more rebuttals he smirked and turned on his heel to leave. I decided then that it was time for me to take a break. I didn’t want to go to my room.

There was no torture like the memories of having Ciana there in my room, in my bed, in my arms, beneath my touch.

Her fading scent of fresh water lily was faint but still there. Memories chased my footsteps out into the garden and along the path through the zoo and to the pavilion.

I shook my head as I remembered our first interactions, how she’d bravely spoken back to me when I was rude and the impressive way she handled feeding my animals that would have frightened almost anyone else.

The first time I’d kissed her, the taste of her mouth mixed with her blood and the dreamberry.

Something cool was rubbing against my leg. I looked down and there was Perceval. He found me in the pavilion and wrapped himself around my ankle.

"Yeah, I miss her, too," I told him as I took a seat and he raised his head to be eye level with me. "I could've been nicer to her. I could have treated her better and had more respect for her. But, the moment I realized I could touch her I just... I just took what I wanted."

Perceval cocked his head to the side as if he was puzzled by what I was saying.

"I just should have asked her if she wanted to be my mate. I claimed her without even taking into consideration that she might not be my mate in the long run. I don't know how she felt about that. I'm just selfish and I'm not good enough for her. I never will be. You know, perhaps she's better off just forgetting about me."

Perceval rested his head on my shoulder in sympathy and I sat quietly with my thoughts for a while. In the distance, I could hear rapid footsteps and knew that someone was running and tugging on the mindlink.

'Alpha!' Jake's voice called to me anxiously in my head.

*Yes, Jake. What is it?' I asked, standing on alert and ready to shift as Perceval found a safe place to retreat.

'It's Ciana. She's missing!'

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 488

Ciana

I was fading into and out of consciousness, moving between my dreams and reality.

The first thing I noticed was that wherever I was, it did not smell like my room. Instead, it smelled of old wood and musk.

Hushed voices reached my ear.

"This is stupid. There is no telling if this will even work." The first voice was female. "What if the rumors aren't true? She will know exactly who we are within seconds."

"Don't be such a pessimist, Jennifer. The rumors are true. She went back home. Why else would she be back in her home pack and not at the palace?" another female voice replied.

There was silence for a few moments.

"I still think this is a dumb idea. We could die once they find out. Let's just kill her and be done with it."

"We can't kill her!" The softer female voice exclaimed. "Those were not Luther's instructions."

"Is Luther here? No. Why? Because of her!"

'Keep it down, Jennifer! Do you want to wake her? She will be confused and disoriented when she wakes up. We need her to trust us.'

“Magnolia, I could give two shits about this girl. She is vulnerable and weak right now. All I need to do is take one clean swipe and this will all be over with. Just let me do it.”

The Jennifer woman sounded very angry.

“No. You will not touch her. She is our Luna!”

Jennifer scoffed.

‘You loved Luther and this is the best way to avenge him. We all miss him, Jen. But you can’t be reckless. We need to be careful how we proceed from now on. Okay?’

There was silence again. I heard some shuffling but I didn’t open my eyes.

Who were these women and what did they want with me?

“I think she’s waking up. I heard the change in her heartbeat.” The voice I now knew to belong to Magnolia said. “Luna Ciana? Are you awake?”

Slowly I blinked my eyes open and stared up at an old white ceiling. The paint was peeling and there were cracks in the corners. Slowly I turned to my left and saw two women standing not too far from the small couch I had been placed on. One looked at me with concern and the other looked at me with disdain and hatred.

I quickly sat up with my eyes scanning the room. The wooden floors were rotting and the white walls were stained with various liquids, one of which I was sure was blood. The place looked more like a crime scene than a living room to me.

I was sure I had never been here before but there was a sense of familiarity about it that I just couldn’t shake. The air in this room smelled familiar and even felt familiar. Darn those lost memories!

Flashes of me walking down a pristine white marble hallway came to mind. But as quickly as the memory came it fled from me. I held onto the side of my temple and groaned as the dull ache in my head started.

“Luna, are you okay?” One of the women came to the couch and knelt before me. “We aren’t going to hurt you. You are safe here.”

I moved away from her to one side of the couch. “Who are you?” I demanded.

“My name is Magnolia and this is Jennifer.” She pointed to the woman who still looked like she wanted to kill me. “We are your friends. Do you not remember us?”

I shook my head. “What kind of friends take someone from their home?”

Magnolia let out a nervous laugh. “We heard the rumors of your memory loss and we knew if we came to you directly at first you would reject us. But what we have to tell you is very time sensitive and couldn’t be delayed.”

“You could have asked for an audience with my father. He would have told me about you.”

Magnolia shook her head. “Alpha Black doesn’t know us but you do.”

“No I don’t. I don’t remember many people who claim to have known me. For all I know you could be lying to me.”

“Luna, we aren’t lying to you—”

“Why do you keep calling me that? I am not your Luna.”

“But you are,” Magnolia smiled at me. “You are the Luna of the Ortiz pack. Can’t you feel your connection to this place? This was once your home. You were once the bride of Alpha Luther.”

“Fuck this.” Jennifer stormed out of the room we were in leaving just me and Magnolia.

‘Don’t mind her.’

“She doesn’t like me very much.”

“Jen doesn’t like a lot of people.” Magnolia came to sit beside me. “But back to why you are here. You are here to avenge Luther.”

“I don’t even know who this Luther is. I’m sorry but I don’t remember you or this pack or anything to do with this Luther guy. Now, will you please take me back to my pack? My father would be looking for me.”

I went to stand but Magnolia placed her hand over me stopping my movements.

“I can help you remember.’

I stilled. “What?”

“I can help you remember.’ Magnolia let go of my hand and walked over to a bag that laid on the floor. She dug into it before she pulled out some sort of clear rock. Crystal maybe?

“With this. I can help you bring back your memories. Then all of this will make sense.”

“I don’t understand. What is that? How is a rock supposed to help me remember my past?”

She lowered her gaze. “This isn’t just some rock. It’s a crystal. The Moonlit Crystal to be exact. It’s a sacred artifact and linked to the moon Goddess. It will allow me to penetrate into your mind and unlock the memories that have been kept from you.”

The first person that came to mind was Theo.

Maybe this would be able to make sense of all of these things that I felt on the inside. All the things Theo told me about. The life we had supposedly built together. I would finally be able to learn the truth.

But, from what Magnolia was saying Theo wasn’t my beloved-Luther was.

“Do I have your permission to unlock your memories?”

I hesitated for a moment but after realizing that I needed to learn the truth, I nodded.

Magnolia smiled and instructed me to lay down and I did as she told me.

She then pressed the crystal on my heart and placed her hands on top of it. She closed her eyes and began chanting inaudible words.

A gentle heat warmed my chest and I felt a tingle run up and down my spine. My head spun slowly, my mind flashing this bright light.

I let out a small gasp, my hands clinging to the torn leather of the couch. It wasn't painful but it was intense.

"Allow me into your mind, Luna. Let me show you the truth." Magnolia instructed. "Let go."

My eyes closed on their own accord and I was plunged deep into my subconscious.

I fell back into the expensive leather in the car. My heart hammered in my chest.

Everything felt so surreal. It was like I was in a dream state but I was living through the experience in real life.

I looked down at my body and saw I was in a rose-gold gown. Tall trees passed us by out the window as the car moved down the long road.

"I've been waiting for you." A handsome man brought my hand to his mouth and kissed its back gently. "My dear Ciana Black."

He knew my name. But how?

"Luther?"

His smile widened and his eyes danced with an emotion that I couldn't quite place.

Was that happiness or was that joy?

My head snapped back and my eyes shut again. I felt a force push me backward until I opened my eyes again revealing a beautiful garden before me.

This time I was dressed in casual clothes and Luther stood next to me looking at a bed of flowers.

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

He shook his head in disbelief. "Why did you say those things? Don't you hate me?"

I placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I don't hate you, Luther. I understand you. King Sebastian destroyed your pack and you seek revenge...We don't have to be enemies."

I heard myself say those words, and everything was like *deja vu*. Those... were my memories?

He let out a laugh. "I must admit, you are a lot more interesting than I expected."

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

Then again, everything faded and Luther was carrying me out of a banquet hall to a lounge. Once we were in the private lounge, he put me down on a couch and gently lifted my twisted ankle, popping it up on a pillow.

He was so gentle, just like a tender lover.

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

His tone was so serious, his gaze intensely on me.

This moment seemed intimate and special and yet I felt nothing within my chest. There was no flutter or spark there. Surely, for the man who I loved so dearly I would feel that blazing fire.

"I told you. we don't have to be enemies," I repeated the words I said once before.

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

I opened my lips. "Yes I do..."

The words came from my lips but they didn't feel like my own. An unsettled feeling bubbled up in my chest.

Was this it? Was this what love felt like?

Luther beamed at me but then his smile quickly dissolved as he fell to the ground. His hand let go of mine and his face turned into total paleness.

"Luther!" Dread seeped into my bones as I dropped to my knees.

"Fate is unfair... What did I do wrong?"

His eyes looked up at the shadow that stood over us.

When I moved my head to look up I stilled.

Looming over us with a look of pure evil.

"King...Theo?"

He was the villain in this story and he had taken from me that which I had loved the most in this world.

I finally understood. I finally knew the truth.

No wonder Dad said that usually sudden onset amnesia was to shield the mind from a bad memory or trauma.

All of a sudden, desperate pain due to the loss of my family and my pack, overwhelming hatred towards the royal court, devastating determination to seek revenge... all sorts of foreign but powerful emotions suffocated me.

I felt those emotions didn't belong to me, but they were forced into my mind no matter how much I struggled.

Slowly, I couldn't breathe, nor could I think.

Who was I?

When I tried to focus, my head was about to explode, and it felt like there were thousands of pounds weighing on my chest.

I desperately wanted to get out, but I couldn't. I was trapped in endless darkness and coldness, tormented by desperation and fear.

The only way to survive was to fuel myself with fury and hatred. Finally, my eyes shot open and I sat upright on the couch. My body drenched in sweat and my lungs gasping for air.

A woman was at my side rubbing my back and trying to soothe me.

"You...you are...?" I asked. As soon as I tried to remember something, my head hurt.

"Luna Ciana, I'm Magnolia. Do you understand now? King Theo has lied to you..." her words sounded from far far away. I shook my head to try to hear it clearly, but I couldn't, even though she was right in front of me.

I heard myself ask, "I... love Luther?"

Magnolia smiled brightly, "Yes, my lady, you do. And King Theo is our enemy. You must take revenge for Alpha Luther!"

I nodded my head, but I felt I forgot about something very important. "Who...am I?"

"It doesn't matter, my lady," she said with a satisfied smile. "You only need to remember one thing, and you know exactly what it is."

I nodded, yes, I did know that one thing.

King Theo must die!

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 489

Theo

"Watch out!" Jake shouted.

I cranked the steering wheel and the car let out a piercing squeak. We barely made the sharp curve on the road which was next to a cliff.

All the evidence and intel attributed Ciana's abduction to the Ortiz pack.

I sped off again as massive raindrops pelted down on the windshield.

"If you continue to drive like this you'll get us both killed before we even get there!" Jake tried to reason with me.

"Shut up!" I roared.

Ciana was missing! How could I afford wasting even one second?

The rain started falling faster and my windshield wipers were on full blast. The roads were slick. I felt my tires slip a few times and even with my high beams on, I could barely see 10 feet ahead of me.

I swerved to miss a massive puddle and hit a muddy patch. Mud splattered the windshield and I slammed the brakes on. My car skidded to a halt. My knuckles were white around the steering wheel.

I glanced at Jake and saw him holding onto his “oh-shit” bar for dear life, his face pale.

“That was insane...”

“Road is blocked. We’ll get out and run from here,” I said as I shifted. Behind me, Jake had shifted too.

Without any more delay, we ran through the rain. I knew my way to Ortiz pack and a little storm wouldn’t stop me.

My paws squelched in the mud and cold rain pelted me but it didn’t slow me down.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

Why did I pull back the security details around her!? What the fuck was I thinking about!? Why the fuck did I think that it was good to let her enjoy life without bodyguards?!

I’d never forgive myself for that stupid decision.

‘Alpha! Slow down. We have to think about this,’ Jake warned through the mindlink.

‘If it was Brook, would you hesitate?’ I asked back in the mindlink.

Jake growled behind me.

‘No, probably not. But this is Ortiz Pack. All of this feels like a trap. It was too easy to track them down.’

I shook my fur again and ignored his worries.

“It doesn’t matter. This is Ciana!”

If Ortiz Pack wanted a fight, they were going to get one. Their Alpha was dead and they had no Luna. Whoever was left in that mangy, run down pack had no strength to stand against me and Alpha Soren Black.

Soren would meet us at Ortiz Pack to save his daughter.

My heart raced in my chest with more than the exertion of running. Ciana was in trouble. She was vulnerable and helpless without her memories. If she couldn’t remember anything from her life at the palace, she definitely wouldn’t remember anything about Luther or Ortiz Pack.

What could they possibly want from her?

Most likely and hopefully their target was me and Ciana was a lure for them. They knew I’d come as long as they had Ciana.

It was impossible to know what they were trying to do. I doubted that Alpha Soren had advertised that his daughter lost her memory. The ones that took her might not even know how vulnerable she was, which just put her in more danger.

I glanced up at the sky. Even through the thick storm clouds I could see a glimmer of silver light pushing through.

The Moon Goddess was always there watching over us.

I needed her right now. Ciana needed her right now. Silently, I said a prayer to the Moon Goddess, begging her to keep Ciana safe.

My strength and speed rivaled Jake's, so I pulled ahead of him as we neared Ortiz Pack.

'Alpha!' he called to me through the mind link. 'We should wait for backup.'

'I'm not waiting,' I insisted.

'Then at least wait for Alpha Soren. He's the one she remembers. We have other warriors coming. We don't know what kind of force is waiting.'

I snorted, ignoring Jake's pleas.

The reinforcements would arrive when they got there but I wasn't slowing down. I couldn't let Ciana be hurt or influenced by them.

I hated thinking of her in terms of someone that was vulnerable because she was one of the strongest people I knew. She'd overcome everything that was thrown at her. But she was at a disadvantage without her memories and I knew my enemies would exploit that to all ends.

The Ortiz mansion loomed in front of me. Rain splattered against the driveway, the stone steps, and the marble walls. There were outside lights but they hardly cut through the pounding rain.

The front doors opened and someone stumbled out, their arms looped around their stomach.

Immediately, I shifted back to human.

I'd planned ahead, strapping a pair of gloves and sweats to my leg before shifting. I threw them on quickly, but they were soaked almost immediately.

The person stumbled again and her scent wafted to me through the rain.

Ciana!

She staggered again and I rushed toward her, catching her just before she hit the ground.

"Ciana!" I held her against my chest tightly.

Based on her scent and how she felt in my arm, it was her. Thank the Goddess!

However, she didn't respond to me. I looked at her face and noticed that her eyes were distant and unfocused.

A chill ran down my spine.

I looked her over and she didn't seem injured. What was wrong with her?

"Ciana, talk to me. What did they do to you?" I asked, shaking her slightly.

Ciana gasped and her eyes locked on mine.

“Theo...”

“Yes, I’m here, okay? Did they hurt you?” I asked, looking her over again. I didn’t smell any blood on her. She looked a little pale but she wasn’t acting like she was injured or in pain. She was acting disoriented.

I looked into her eyes, wondering if someone had drugged her.

‘King Theo?’ she asked in a strained voice. Her body was shivering and her teeth were chattering.

‘Yes, it is me... Dammit, I need to get you somewhere dry. Come this way!’

I wasn’t sure whether she was able to walk, so I planned to just carry her, but she pushed me away and stared at me.

‘I’m... okay. I’m... this is where I... belong,’ she said, her voice broken, her eyes confused.

“Goddess, I’m just glad you’re okay! Let’s get you dried off and warmed up,” I insisted. The Ortiz mansion was the closest place we could go to get dry and warm. I knew that no one in there would be able to stop me.

“Aren’t you curious about why I’m here? Why do I want you here?” Ciana asked.

I rubbed my gloved hand against her arms to keep her warm. Was she delirious because of the cold and rain?

“We can talk about that later. First, I need to get you somewhere safe and somewhere dry,” I insisted, looking around again.

“I’m here because I am the Luna of Ortiz Pack,” she muttered.

“What!?” I gasped, looking down at the woman half cradled in my arms. “What are you talking about?”

I frowned. Things may be way more complicated than I thought.

Her eyes were wide. Judging by her look, she really believed what she was saying.

That fucking Luther and his Shadow!!

I took a couple deep breaths and lowered my voice, so that I didn’t sound furious. If she wasn’t clear headed, the last thing I wanted to do was scare her.

“Ciana, you’re not the Luna of Ortiz Pack. You’re the daughter of Alpha Soren Black of Alvar Pack. Who told you that you were the Luna?”

“No one had to tell me, I saw it! I remembered it!” she cried, pounding her palm to her chest.

“Remembered?” I asked, creasing my brow. “Ciana...”

What the hell was going on?

The first time she was here, she was sent by Raymond as part of Luther’s plan. She’d stayed at the mansion for a brief time while I was around, but she’d never had a romantic relationship with Luther.

In fact, she made it a point to show me that because she'd had to pretend to get along with him to get close to him.

I ground my teeth together and clenched my fists at my sides. Whatever Ciana was going through, it didn't matter. We could sort that out later. Right now, I just wanted to get her out of here before we put ourselves in more danger than we were already in.

'Ciana, I don't know what witchcraft this is, but you don't belong here. You never did and you never will.'

'That's just what you want me to think! You can't trick me. I've seen the truth in the crystal,' she insisted, tears brimming her eyes.

"If you don't believe me, you should at least believe your father," I tried to reason with her. "He's on his way."

"Father... who is my father...?" Confusion flashed on her face and she seemed to be trying to remember. Then she cried. "Ahhh! My head hurts! It hurts a lot!"

She wrapped her hands around her head and she started to shake her head vigorously. Soon after, her eyes were wild and bloodshot.

She jumped back and shook her head at me. "Don't touch me! You don't get to touch me! Not after you killed my beloved!"

"Your beloved?" I asked. I pressed my palm to my forehead and shook my head. Her delusion was getting more and more convoluted.

I had to strain to hear Ciana's voice in the crashing rain, and then the ear-splitting crack of thunder subsequently drowned out any sound around us.

Part of me knew this had to be a horrible dream. There was no better explanation. Maybe I'd fallen into a messed up Moonlit Crystal dream.

"You killed Luther!" Ciana cried, pointing accusingly at me.

"Yes, I did, because he was a very, very bad man that tried to destroy the entire world," I tried to explain. I had no idea what else to say except to agree with the things that were true.

"You killed my beloved, my mate and my Alpha..."

"Ciana, stop that! That's not true! You're no one's Luna. You are Ciana Black!"

"King Theo..." she murmured a sentence but I couldn't hear it properly.

"Fuck! What did they do to you? Wake up!"

The expression on her face told me that she was in serious pain and I was heartbroken watching her suffer.

"King... Theo..." she continued to murmur.

"I'm here. Ciana, wake up!" I shook her slightly.

She stared at me and said again. "King Theo... must..."

I leaned closer to hear her clearly.

A bright white lightning tore the sky and I saw a flash of silver fly across the front of me.

In Ciana's hand was a knife. The next moment I knew, it slammed into my chest.

White hot pain shot down my spine and my arm. Warm blood covered my chest and mixed with rain, getting runny and covering me with crimson.

I stared at the knife, blinking.

The thunder of the earlier lightning finally arrived but I was still able to hear the entire sentence that she had been saying.

"King Theo must die!"

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Ciana

Blood pumped out around the knife, mixing with raindrops and smearing Theo's skin with red. He reached out to me and grabbed my arms, holding me close to him.

For reasons that I couldn't fathom, my heart started to ache. Tears started to stream down my cheeks, but were washed away by the rain immediately. Theo was my enemy and I should be happy, but why did I feel this way? Like the knife wasn't stabbed in his heart, but mine?

His eyes were wide. Confusion and worry flickered through them and I was captivated by his deep, swimming orbs for a moment.

He should have been mad at me, furious at me, but his eyes were soft and unaccusing. I was waiting for him to give me a deadly blow after my assassination attempt, but he didn't. Instead, he was trying to pull me closer and comfort me like he thought I was going to be upset.

He just stared at me, his breathing heavy and sharp. He looked at me with such deep concern.

'Ciana... are... are you okay?' he gasped, reaching for my face.

"Why...?" I muttered.

Why did he care? I'd just stabbed him! He should hate me. He should be lashing out.

His utter lack of response had me frozen in place. I couldn't figure out what was going on with him.

The knife was sticking out of him pretty far, my fingers still curled around the blade, camping in place. It might not have hit his heart all the way or he'd be dead. I'd have to shove it further in to end his life.

My mind screamed at me to finish it but I couldn't get my trembling hand to move any further. As much as I willed it, my own body turned against me and refused to respond to my goal.

Suddenly, confusing memories burst through my mind.

“Do I love you?” I heard Theo say in my mind, “I love you more than life, Ciana.”

I could almost see the turmoil of pain, care, desire and love in his dark eyes when he said it. No one would ever doubt the sincerity of that pair of eyes and the weight of the words.

What was happening to me? I saw Luther reaching a hand out to me, caressing my cheek. Then the memory flickered and it wasn't Luther in front of me, it was Theo. His touch was so gentle and loving. It stirred powerful feelings inside of me.

However, with every piece of those memories that appeared in my mind, it was as if thousands of vicious sharp claws were scratching inside my skull, trying to tear my brain into shreds.

I groaned in unbearable pain and squinted my eyes shut. It seemed the only way to alleviate the pain was to stop the crazy memories that flooded me.

Then I saw the vision from the crystal again, how Theo had killed Luther. I saw Luther's hand outstretched to me in the garden, how I'd taken it and felt so warm and so wrapped in love.

That's what I remembered of Luther.

And in my head, that was what Theo had taken away from me.

But my heart was breaking for a different reason. My heart was breaking because Theo was bleeding in front of me and I was trying to kill him!

How could I want something so badly in my head when my heart and the rest of my body revolted against it?

My stomach curdled and I thought I was going to be sick.

More memories bombarded me and I didn't know what was true and what was made up anymore. Was anything I remembered even real? Who and what should I trust in my own memories?

I saw an image of Theo smiling at me and even the image made my heart flutter.

But another voice in my head told me I wanted Luther. I wish for Luther from the very bottom of my heart. He'd been so strong, even after so much had been taken from him.

That voice told me that I should kill Theo. He'd taken the love of my life away from me. I needed to avenge Luther and I wanted Theo to feel the pain I'd felt when he killed the man I loved.

“You... you killed him...” I groaned.

“Ciana,” he whispered my name.

I felt his fingertips on my cheek but I couldn't open my eyes.

More thoughts and feelings flashed through my mind. My heart was cracking into a million confused pieces and if it wasn't wrapped in bandages, it would shatter and break completely.

“What's happening to me!?” I screamed. My head felt like it was splitting in two.

I kept one hand on the knife and pressed the other to my temple, trying to stop the memories from ripping me apart, literally.

Why was he worried about me? He was a coldhearted murderer that had killed Luther. He wouldn't worry about me...

I opened my eyes, straining to see through the rain and the blinding pain that pounded against the inside of my skull.

Theo's hands still held me tight and I stared at my own hands. The memories of Luther were growing more and more distant in my mind.

Other memories began to take them over. I saw a sky with a crimson moon looming over me and I felt like screaming in terror at that horrible, bleeding moon. The scream stuck in my throat and the pressure in my head kept building.

There were two voices screaming at me in my head.

"Push the knife into his chest. Push it all the way in and end Theo! End the tyrant king!"

"No! Stop! Don't hurt him! You don't want to hurt him! He means so much to you."

The two voices battled louder and louder, screaming at me. My vision blurred as the pain in my head got stronger and stronger.

One voice started winning out over the other and I narrowed my eyes, glaring at him. The tyrant king.

"I'm going to kill you, Theo!" I snarled. I pulled away from him, ready to finish what I'd started.

"Ciana, look at me," Theo panted in a deep, soothing voice.

I froze, my body trembling at the tone of his voice. A large part of me wanted to fall back into his arms and feel his strong embrace. I didn't know why, but he made me feel safe, even though he was a murderer!

I locked eyes with him. My mind reeling, my hands trembling.

Theo's face was somber. "You have all of me, Ciana. You have my love, my heart, and my soul. If you want my life... it is yours."

"Wh-what... why are you..."

I shook my head. Everything about him was off. He was supposed to be a menacing, horrible murderer but he was forgiving me.

'Is this really what you want, Ciana?' he asked, breaking into my thoughts.

"Stop!" I screamed.

I burst into tears and pushed Theo away, letting go of the knife. It stuck out of his chest but he didn't try to remove it either.

My legs trembled and gave out and I fell to my knees. Mud and water seeped into my clothes and covered my legs. I saw traces of blood still mixed with the water and mud. How much blood had Theo lost?

My head was still pounding and throbbing. I cradled my head in my hands, groaning and sobbing.

Luther. Theo. Theo. Luther.

Who was who? I could barely tell them apart anymore in my mind. There were nights I'd spent wrapped in the arms of someone that loved me and that I loved too. Such warm, tender moments that couldn't be replaced.

But who was it I spent them with? I couldn't put the pieces together and that terrified me so much! Was there anything in this world that I could trust?

"Help me... who can help me... please..." I whimpered and slammed the heels of my hands into my forehead. It didn't make the pain feel any better.

I tried to close my eyes tighter, hoping to block out the pain, but it didn't help.

"Please... do something... anyone..." I begged whoever was listening.

"Ciana!"

Theo's thick, deep voice cut through the rain and the pain. I opened one eye and saw him half-kneeling in front of me. His blood was still gushing out and he could no longer support his own weight either. Why wouldn't he just let me go?

I looked up into his face. It was blurry from the pain. He was only inches away but he felt so far away. It felt if I reached out to him he'd float away or disappear. I waved my arm in front of my eyes, trying to clear my vision.

My heart ached and I thought it would fall right out of my chest. I clutched my heart, feeling it thud heavily against my chest like it was going to beat right out of my rib cage.

"Theo..." I gasped, unsure what to believe anymore.

Tears poured down my cheeks and dripped from my chin. I was soaked to the bone and I didn't know if I'd soaked myself with my own tears or if it was the rain pouring down. I could hardly tell if it was raining anymore or if I was just crying so much it still felt like it was raining.

I heard a dull groan as Theo pulled the knife out from his chest. Blood rushed out.

I failed my mission. Strangely, the pain in my chest was relieved slightly. However, on the contrary, the pain in my head was a hundred times worse.

I watched the blood as it streamed from the cut, around the blade, and then mixed with rain. Streaks ran across his skin and through the mud. He looked paler than he had when he first showed up. Was he losing too much blood or was he just cold?

"Ciana, you're okay..." He reached one of his hands to me, his voice faint. "Just don't run away from me anymore. I... I won't be able to..."

“STOP!” I screamed through the tears and the pain. “Don’t... don’t come over! I’m not okay! You’re my problem! You’re living and breathing, that’s what’s wrong with me!”

Theo chuckled darkly. His smile faded quickly and he took a deep shaking breath and grunted. He leaned against the mansion wall. His entire body shuddered and it looked like he was going to collapse on the ground completely.

He gripped the corner of the building and steadied himself but I could tell he was in pain. It was so subtle. If I didn’t know him well, I never would have seen it.

Did I know him that well?

“Listen to me, Ciana, no matter what, I don’t blame you,” Theo said.

I stared at him, trying to process what he said, but my mind was clouded and I couldn’t seem to be able to think straight. Then I heard other voices shouting at us through the rain.

“Ciana!?”

‘King Theo!?’

My limbs felt like they weighed a thousand pounds. I thought I’d sink into the mud and get swallowed up by the ground. Maybe that was what I deserved.

“Ciana, baby!”

A couple of new voices rang out, and I knew them. I just couldn’t recall who they were.

Blinking several times, I glanced around to see two familiar faces approaching.

“Mommy?” I asked in a small, fragile and uncertain voice. “...Daddy?”

“Ciana!” the woman I believed to be my mother gasped, her eyes wide as she stared at me and Theo.

“What did you do?”

“I...”

“It’s okay, sweetheart, it’s okay,” the man who I believed to be my father said. He came up beside me and leaned down, looping his arm around my shoulder.

“Help... please...” I gasped. I’d do anything to stop the throbbing that was about to tear me apart. “It hurts so much...”

I saw his eyes dart to Theo, full of questions. Theo just shook his head and nodded toward me.

Whatever that meant, my father seemed to understand.

“Kill... please... Daddy, help me...” I mumbled.

“Sweetheart, it’s okay,” my mother cried as she cupped my face. Then I saw her and my father exchange a look and she nodded her approval.

The next second, something heavy hit the back of my head.

The world around me shut down immediately and I was never so grateful for whoever did that to save me from my miserable agony and heartbreak.