

Kings Breeder 541

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 541

Lena

I hadn't seen or heard from Xander in a week.

I'd spent most of that time in bed, sweating beneath three thick quilts and even thicker flannel pajamas while Heather fussed over me, making sure I was taking the antibiotics the doctor had prescribed for what he said was a severe viral infection of some kind.

All of it felt odd. The days passed in a blur, day fading into night over, and over. I didn't seem to get better, however. My body was numb and frequently chilled despite how warm Heather tried to keep me.

The worst of it was having to come clean to both of my roommates about what had actually happened in Crimson Creek one feverish night when I'd spilled hot soup on my shirt, and Heather helped me remove it.

They saw the long, jagged scars across my belly, and had screamed, then were frantic and shocked beyond belief as I told them the incredible and unbelievable story.

I'm not sure if they believed it. They probably thought it was some tall tale my fevered mind had concocted.

But something changed the night before graduation.

Viv came into my room, balancing a large, hot mug of tea in her hands. Her face was drawn in a grimace, and in a split second, I knew why. I sat straight up.

"Where did you get that?" I cried, and Viv looked at me in shock. She set the mug of murky black liquid on the beside table that separated my bed from Heather's bed.

"Xander dropped it off. He said you liked this tea and he could only get it in Crimson Creek."

I paled, looking down into the mug and watching the sheen that had developed on top of it. Blood root. I hadn't seen him because he went back to Crimson Creek.

"Is he here?" I asked, but Viv shook her head, looking a little sheepish.

"No. He left in a hurry. He told me how to brew it and I... do you really like it? The smell is just awful. I was going to try it but-" she held her stomach, looking a little green.

"How did he know I was sick?"

"Viv went to him the night Slate assaulted you," Heather said from the doorway, unwinding her scarf from around her neck and tossing it on her bed. I hid to swallow but found it impossible.

"I told him what we thought happened. And then when you got sick I... I know his roommate Adrian; we have classes together. I told him you were sick and then didn't see him again for several days."

I brought the tea to my lips and drank deeply, watching the disgusted looks on my roommates' faces as I tilted it back and drained it.

"What is it?" Heather asked as she took the empty mug and peered inside.

"Blood root," I said, then watched as she began to put the pieces together.

"You mean... everything you told us about Crimson Creek... it actually happened?"

"Yes," I said, laying back down on the pillow and rolling onto my side.

Xander- had been here and didn't say anything to me. He'd gone all the way to Crimson Creek and back just to get the blood root. Wiry? Wiry bring me blood root and instruct Viv to have me drink it?

The answer was clear several hours later, late into the night. I woke from the deepest sleep I'd ever experienced. Heather was snoring in her bed, and pale moonlight was drifting through tire frosted windows as I stood. There was no shake, no pain my bones and joints. My skin wasn't hot to the touch and my mind was clear.

I was healed, entirely.

I blinked into tire moonlight as a weight settled on my shoulders.

My powers, long dormant, had sent me into a fever. Blood root had made me whole again.

What did this mean?

There was only one person who I could ask. And I'd see him-tomorrow.

At graduation.

By the grace of the Goddess, and likely prodding by the student body, the informal graduation ceremony for those students graduating in December had been moved from the shabby conference room in the library to the small auditorium used almost exclusively by the theater club. I'd never been inside, not in tire three years I'd spent on campus, but found it cozy and decorated with sparkling lights.

None of us had dressed up. I sat with my legs crossed, running my palms over my jeans as Heather and Viv mingled with a group of students in tire aisle near the row we'd chosen to sit in. I'd promised my parents that if they'd just let me get this small formality out of the way, I'd walk in the official graduation ceremony in May, wearing a cap and gown and letting the announcer call my full, formal name instead of the alias I'd been using around campus.

I figured enough time would've passed by then for my friends to get over their shock, and likely anger, at the fact I'd hidden my true identity from them for so long. I hadn't told them, not yet. In fact, wanting to tell Heather tire truth was the last thing I remembered before I fell ill.

It was too chaotic now to say anything. No, not yet. Now was not tire time.

I'd woken up to the hallway outside of our apartment filled with floral arrangements from "Mom and Dad," and my roommates and I had our coffee with the rich smell of lilies and roses permeating the air of our tiny apartment after we'd brought them inside, every surface covered with flowers.

We'd walked arm in arm to campus, Viv chattering away about how excited she was to accept Abigail's diploma for her- since she was still overseas in the Isles.

I looked around the auditorium and did a double take before quickly turning my head away from the entrance of the theater. Xander had just walked in, and I felt his gaze on me instantly, little ripples of heat prickling over my neck and shoulders.

Heather saw him and glanced at me, but I stifled my nervous expression and pretended to be reading the pamphlet in my lap, looking over the names without actually reading them.

He didn't sit nearby. Not in front of me, at least. He wasn't in my line of sight when Heather and Viv finally sat down and the lights began to fade.

The woman from the dean's office stepped onto the stage, her dark hair shimmering in the lights above her head. She looked around, smiling broadly as she tapped her finger on the microphone and then adjusted its height.

"Welcome graduates, friends, and family-" she said, and then went through a little spiel. There were many murmurings in the crowd, all whispers about who she was, and what she was doing here. It was likely no one knew the Church had sent someone to oversee tilings on Morhan's campus.

After a while, and several other speeches done by professors and senior faculty, Mara began to call the names of every graduate. Heather went up to the stage, met with applause. Viv accepted Abigail's diploma, which caused a brief moment of confusion but was quickly sorted.

My name was called, and I walked up to the stage, my feet feeling heavy. The lights were blinding enough that they cast a glare on the audience, and I could see nothing but darkness.

"Congratulations," Mara smiled, handing me my diploma.

I gripped it, giving her a tight smile.

And that was that. No frills, no tossing of our caps. That would come in May, and I'd heard a rumor I was in the running for valedictorian of my graduating class as well. As I walked back to my seat, I began to wonder what people would think about that. Would they accept that I had earned my grades, or would they think my status as a royal had bought my way to the top?

I tried not to think about it as I sat back down, Heather and Viv squeezing my arms in silent congratulations as the rest of the overachieving seniors made their way to the stage.

Xander's name was called, and I watched as he walked across the stage.

But the way he narrowed his eyes at Mara, the way he leaned in to whisper into her ear....

I straightened up a bit, noticing how level she kept her expression despite the sharp look on Xander's face. What had he just said to her?

He was off the stage almost as quickly as he'd come, and then disappeared behind me, not even glancing in my direction as he walked up the aisle. My stomach knotted with grief, heartbreak, and suspicion.

Xander was up to something, and I needed to find out what.

"Lauren Hanover said there's a party downtown, in one of the warehouses," Viv said as she opened the box of pizza we'd picked up on our way home from campus, her eyes looking over the pizza with skepticism. "They didn't put pineapple on it!"

"Good, about the pineapple," Heather laughed, crossing her legs on the couch and leaning back with a wine glass in her hands. "You're the only one who likes it on pizza."

"I don't mind it," I argued, giving her a teasing smile. "There's some canned pineapple in the pantry, Viv."

Viv shot Heather a dirty look as she crossed the kitchen and reached into the pantry.

"I'm glad you're feeling better," Heather said to me, a smile touching her lips.

"I am too," I replied, sinking down into the couch and closing my eyes for a moment.

We'd stopped at the medical clinic in town and picked up my blood work, which had to be sent to Breles, so it took a while to get back to Morhan. Nothing was amiss. I wasn't anemic. My blood cell count was near perfect. I wasn't pregnant, either.

But I'd been on my deathbed from what Heather described. That only confirmed that something else was going on, and it likely had to do with what happened to me in Crimson Creek.

"Does everyone want to go to the party, or chill?" Heather asked Viv and me.

Viv shrugged, struggling with the can opener. "Wiry not? Could be firm. One last party before everyone starts leaving for winter break," she said.

I nodded, tucking my knees into my chest. I needed my roommates to go to tire party because I needed to go. The old Xander, at least before I knew him, tended to make an appearance at every single party that was thrown on campus and the surrounding town.

I'd find him there, and if he didn't show up, I'd track him down.

But something inside of me was telling me not to bother. He'd stood me up the night Slate attacked me and dragged me down tire alley. He was obviously avoiding me, and despite how I felt, the last thing I wanted to do was come off as some lovesick, obsessed girl nursing a terrible crush.

It wasn't a crush. I was filled to the brim with regret. I loved him. And most of all, I needed him to tell me everything about Crimson Creek, everything he'd hidden from me-every detail, every secret.

And in turn.... Well. I'd tell him the truth.

“Well, let’s eat real quick and go, then. The warriors will likely shut the party down before it gets too rowdy,” Heather said as she rose from the couch.

I watched her begin to tease Viv as she arraigned tire pineapple on one half of tire pizza.

An hour from now, everything would be different. I just knew it.

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Lena

“Abigail won’t mind, not one bit,” Heather grinned as she pulled a studded leather jacket from Abigail’s closet. She turned it around, holding the hanger as she ran her fingers over the leather. “You know how she is, always wanting us all to dress a certain way for these tilings.”

Heather wasn’t wrong. We’d been calling Abigail our pageant mom for years now, but tonight just didn’t feel the same without her.

I glanced in the mirror in the tight bedroom Viv and Abigail shared, fluffing my hair. Heather had curled and styled it to fall over my shoulders in beachy waves, which highlighted the angles of my face beautifully.

Hair, check. Makeup? It would do. I wasn’t used to seeing myself with dark plum lipstick and heavy, vampy eyes, but the liner Heather had chosen did bring out the flakes of blue that speckled my gray irises.

It was my outfit that felt off, despite Heather’s and Viv’s attempts to loosen me up with a glass of wine. The dress was a deep midnight blue, tight around the waist and chest and then hung loosely over my hips. It wasn’t incredibly short, but there was a slit up one side that went nearly to my hip bone. Underwear was impossible, but that was the whole point, at least that’s what Abigail had told me the day she bought it, roughly two years ago.

We’d been browsing through one of the upscale thrift shops in downtown Morhan one sunny, spring Saturday during our sophomore year. She turned toward me, two dresses in her hands, holding them up for me to see.

“What do you think men see when they look at dresses like these?” she’d asked. The other dress was a pale pink bodycon style that seemed grossly out of fashion, and I shrugged. She held up the pink dress, playfully tilting her head toward it. “This one screams “Date Me,” and maybe, “Take me home to meet your parents-”

“I’d be mortified meeting someone’s parents in that!” I’d laughed, shaking my head as I flipped through a rack of sweaters.

“But this one,” she said longingly, running her fingers over the silken blue fabric of the second dress, her finger’s toying with tire upper thigh-high slit. She paused, her eyes flicking to mine. “Men are thinking of only one thing when they look at our outfits.

Did you know that? Normally they don’t even notice what we’re wearing. Ask any man what you wore yesterday and he won’t have a clue.”

“Your point?” I laughed, folding a sweater over my arm.

“This dress is a “f**k me’ dress. Do you know why?”

“No, why?”

“Because when a man sees you in something like this,” she held it to her chest, doing a little twirl, “the only thing he’s thinking about is how easily he can get it off of you.”

Her voice played through my mind as I looked in the mirror in her bedroom, two years later, wearing the very dress I’d teased her about. It was fitting for the situation, although I refused to admit it out loud. I wasn’t dressing for myself. Knee-high black leather boots, the dress, and an acid-wash denim jacket were a far cry from the leggings and button-up denim shirts I gravitated towards on a daily basis.

I was dressing for Xander.

I blushed, glancing away from my reflection while Heather and Viv chatted as they readied themselves for our walk to the warehouse. It was only two blocks, but we’d likely be frozen solid by the time we reached the party.

We were dressed to kill, and thick parkas would ruin the vibe, according to Heather. There was bound to be underclassmen at the party, and we were seniors—not only that, but graduates. We were ready to kick ass and take on the world, and we were definitely dressed like it.

“You look delicious,” Heather teased as I followed her out into our front hallway.

I blushed again, swallowing back my deep desire to run to my room and change into sweatpants. It was too late to back out now, anyway. I needed to do this. I needed to see Xander. If he wasn’t at the party, well, I’d sneak home and wallow in my own self-pity within the next two hours or so.

“I wonder what Abigail is up to now,” Viv quipped as we left our apartment building and walked out onto the snowy street. The cold hit me like a freight train, and I wrapped my denim jacket tightly around my middle, hugging myself as I shuffled alongside my friends.

“I bet she’s having the time of her life,” Heather replied, her teeth chattering by the time we reached the street corner and turned to walk down the street toward the warehouse. “I bet she’s bagged one of the princes already, having to work so closely with the royal family of Poldesse, you know.”

“Do you think it’s Prince Charlie? He is so dreamy,” Viv purred, and I stifled a laugh.

“No way, not Charlie. He’s too... good for her, you know? Not like she doesn’t deserve him, but he doesn’t seem like the wild type. Abigail needs wild. I was thinking Prince Oliver is more her type.” Heather glanced back at me, eyeing me as I lowered my gaze to my feet to avoid her gaze. “What do you think, Lena? Which Prince is better for Abigail?”

Oh, Goddess. This was the perfect opportunity for me to drop a truth bomb on my friends.

“Actually,” I said after a moment of consideration, “I think you’re right about Oliver and Abigail. He’d like her.”

“How do you know?” Viv teased. “You always avoid chatting about the royals.”

I opened my mouth to answer her, but we were met by another group of students heading to the same party, our conversations mingling. I shut my mouth, smiling softly to myself. No, not the right time to shock them to the core with the truth. But, I'd been willing, and ready, to do so. That was a step in the right direction, at least.

A few minutes later we reached the warehouse, which was settled against the slow-moving, ice-covered rivers that hugged the town of Morhan. Music spilled into the street as we approached, and we were immediately met by a rush of warm air as we finally gained entrance to what looked like a huge turnout.

The warehouse, once empty and stale, was decorated with twinkling lights that hung from the ceiling, and tables with refreshments lined one wall as we stepped inside. Heather looked around, taking it all in.

"I was skeptical about the location, but this isn't that bad," she grinned, leaning in to talk into my ear so I could hear her over the music.

There was a swelling crowd beneath the twinkling lights, and people were already dancing to the thrumming music that sent little shockwaves across the concrete floor. I swallowed back my nervousness, then followed Heather and Viv as they walked through the crowd toward the bar that had been set up on the other-side of the warehouse.

A banner stretched across the far wall, hung from the rafters and illuminated by the star-like lights. "Congratulations Winter Graduates" it read, and I felt the lump in my throat loosen. I didn't have a reason to feel out of place. I'd be leaving in two days. This was my last real college experience. As Heather handed me a can of hard seltzer, I decided to make the most of it.

I'd lost Viv and Heather ages ago. The amount of people stuffed into the warehouse seemed impossible, but I'd given up on trying to count heads and doing the math. I danced a bit, then broke away from the fray for some fresh air, grabbing another drink before heading out the back door of the warehouse that had been propped open to let fresh, cool air inside.

The dock had been cleared of snow and just as finely decorated as the inside of the warehouse. Propane heaters lined the dock, and a few small groups were milling about, their breath coming out in puffs of mist as they spoke. I walked to the railing overlooking the river below, watching a chunk of ice slide beneath the dock and out the other side.

"Hey, uh, you're Lena, right?"

I turned my head to the voice, coming face to face with Adrian, one of the guys Xander was often seen hanging out with around campus. They were roommates.

"Yeah," I said, furrowing my brow.

"Oh, well. Uh-" He leaned on the railing, looking over my face with marked curiosity before giving me a soft smile. "Xander's kinda a prick sometimes, but he's not a bad guy."

I turned to face him fully.

“Did he send you here to talk to me?”

“No,” he smirked, “and he’ll be pissed that I am. I just felt like the two of you needed a third party to help untangle this, uh, situation.” He waved his hand in a circle, arching his brow at me.

“There is no situation,” I ground out, giving him a glare.

“That’s not what I heard.”

Fury flamed across my skin as I took a single step toward Adrian. “What exactly did you hear?”

“Well, he stood you up, and felt awful about it. Then he ran back to Crimson Creek to fetch that miracle root powder to save your life after you got sick. How did that happen, exactly? A little more than a cold-”

“He told you everything, didn’t he?”

“Well, yeah, of course he did.”

My stomach tied in a knot as I watched mirth dance behind Adrian’s eyes.

“He likes you, a lot. Xander’s always been a stuck-up, emotionless succubus of a person and I’ve known him my entire life,” he continued, but I cut him off.

“What a way to talk about your friend-”

“All I’m trying to say,” he urged, raising his hands in surrender, “is that he loves you, Lena. And he’s willing to do some really stupid things in order to keep you safe, including letting you go. I don’t think that’s what either- of you want, right? If it’s not, I need you to do something so he gets his head back on straight.”

“Whatever happened between us, we ended it mutually. It was his decision as much as it was mine-”

“Who are you dressed for, then? I’ve never seen you at a party, Lena.”

I smoothed my jean jacket over my chest, fighting back the blush. Adrian could see right through me in that moment, and his arched brows said it all.

“Talk to him,” he urged.

“No! He was the one who-”

“Adrian,” came a deep, male voice in the doorway of the warehouse.

and I turned to the doorway, my heart leaping in my chest as the shadowed figure stepped into the light.

“Do you want to explain what the hell you think you’re doing?”

Every cell in my body was on fire as Xander stepped forward. He looked peeved, his eyes narrowing on Adrian for a long moment. I didn’t hear what Adrian said; I wasn’t paying attention.

Xander’s eyes moved from the toes of my boots up my legs, then along the open slit that ran up the entire length of my thigh, before settling on mine.

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Adrian retreated from the area, glancing back only once as he slipped back through the door of the warehouse.

Xander didn't speak. He just looked at me, his hands tucked in the pockets of his jacket.

I waited for him to say something for a moment, to say anything, but he was silent.

I shook my head, looking down at my boots before straightening up and attempting to walk past him toward the door.

He caught me by the elbow, pulling me to a halt.

"What are you wearing?" he asked, his voice low with a hint of rage.

"A dress," I sneered, yanking my arm free.

He ran his tongue along the inside of his lower lip, looking me up and down. I wished the hunger in his eyes hadn't had the effect on me that it did. My stomach tightened with anticipation as his gaze slowly met mine again.

"What do you want, Xander?"

"I need to apologize—"

"Need, or want? Those are two different things—"

He closed the distance between us with a single step, leaning down to whisper in my ear. His breath was warm on my neck, bringing a fresh wave of fire across my skin.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when Slate assaulted you in that alley."

I closed my eyes, breathing in his scent. He was wearing cologne, something woody and warm. I lost myself in it for a moment before I broke away from him once more.

"I need to find Heather and Vivien," I said flatly, void of emotion.

"They left," he replied, and my shoulders fell.

"What?"

"Heather left with a man, someone I don't know. And Viv told me she'd seen you come out here. I promised her I'd walk you back to your apartment when you were ready to leave."

I sighed, gritting my teeth as I looked up into his eyes. "I don't need your- help getting home. It's not far."

"If Slate—"

"Slate's gone," I said, a little too loudly. I flushed as a group of partygoers standing on the edge of the dock looked in our direction.

Xander took a step closer to me, furrowing his brow. "What do you mean he's gone? I saw him yesterday."

"You did?" I felt my knees start to weaken as I thought back to tire night in the alley, about the blinding light, and waking up alone and covered in an inch of fresh snow.

"What did you do to him, exactly?" he whispered, his hand gliding down my back.

I didn't realize he was holding me upright until I reached out to steady myself on the railing, wrapping my hand around the ice-covered metal.

"I don't know, Xander. I really don't."

"You used your powers."

I looked up at him, tears welling in my eyes despite my efforts to stop them. "I'm not who you think I am," I whispered as tire truth rose like bile in my throat. "My name is Selene. My father is--"

"I know," he replied, reaching up to brush a lock of hair from my face and tuck it behind my ear.

"You don't understand--"

"I understand more than anyone," he interrupted, then reached out to pull my hand from the railing, wrapping his hand around my chilled fingers. "You spent yourself using your powers--"

"Why did the blood root help me? Wiry did you go back to Crimson Creek?"

"We need to talk about this in private," he said as a group passed us on the dock.

He took my hand, but inside of leading me around the warehouse, he brought me back inside, and we were hit with a rush of warmth as we entered the crowded warehouse and walked beneath the twinkling lights.

He took me to the bar and began to pour two glasses of punch.

"What are you doing? I drougt we needed to talk?"

"We do," he said, handing me a glass as he took a sip, grimacing as he swallowed it down. I knew it was heavily spiked; I could smell the liquor die second I brought it to my lips. "This is your last college party though. Let's live it up, for a minute. It's still early." He downed the punch in a single gulp, and I couldn't fight the smile that spread across my mouth as his eyes watered.

I finished my punch with a similar expression, and in a single flash of twinkling lights Xander had his arm around my waist, leading me to die dance floor.

I made a promise that I'd never forget that night. My jacket had been tossed somewhere along the sidewall long ago now, leaving my skin exposed for Xander to touch. His fingertips along my upper amis as we danced felt like little bursts of electricity, die sensation mingling with music as he moved with the crowd.

I was close to him, my chest pinned against his abs as he held me close.

Perfect. This moment was perfect. The music and the alcohol made every thought, every stress, and every anxiety I had flicker into embers to be replaced by a growing desire to get Xander alone.

That feeling was only heightened when his hands traveled down my waist, his fingers toying with the break in the fabric over my hip bone. He chuckled, bending down to whisper into my ear.

“You’re not wearing underwear, are you?”

“No,” I breathed, closing my eyes as his lips grazed over the top of my ear.

The music seemed to only get faster and more sensual. His hands continued their exploration of my body. Abigail had been right about the dress. Xander couldn’t keep his hands off of me.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this. We’d ended things. There was only one thing we needed to talk about now, and it had nothing to do with our relationship.

I couldn’t help myself, though. All of the questions I had, everything I needed to know just... faded into oblivion, leaving me wanting for only one thing.

“We should get out of here,” he whispered into my hair, turning me around to face him.

I was glistening with heat in the soft white lights above our head, and my hair was damp with sweat around my temples. I didn’t know my mouth was slightly ajar until he kissed me, his tongue sliding over my lips and then against my tongue. A fever shot through me, blinding me to everything, and everyone, in the room.

“Where’s your jacket?”

“I don’t know,” I said against his lips as he pulled me into a deeper embrace, our bodies still moving to the music.

“I’ll buy you a new one,” he growled hungrily, his hands planted firmly on my hips.

I could feel his need through the jeans he was wearing, and I subconsciously ground myself against him. He hitched his breath, then smiled lazily, wrapping one arm over my shoulder.

“We’re going back to my place.”

All I could say was, “Okay.”

Xander wrapped his jacket around my shoulders as we walked out of the warehouse. I slipped on the snow-covered sidewalk but he caught me, murmuring about having to carry me back to his apartment. His place was across town, from what he said, and when I argued that we could go to mine, he shook his head, saying he didn’t want an audience to the conversation that needed to be had.

The mention of what we needed to talk about brought me back to reality. The cold was biting into my skin as we walked, even with his jacket covering me and his steady arm over my shoulder.

Talk. It was the last thing I wanted to do. I wanted to be alone with him. I wanted to run my fingernails down his naked back and let him claim me again, and again, and again.

We crossed a snow-packed street and Xander stopped, pulling into a diner.

“What are we doing here?” I asked as I let him lead me into a booth near the window overlooking the street.

Snow was falling again, thick and heavy. He ruffled his hair, sending little sprinkles of water over our table.

“Eating,” he said casually as a bored looking waitress set two menus on the table.

I shifted my weight in the booth, looking around at the patrons of the dinner. It was quiet here, nothing but the sound of the cook tapping his spatula against the griddle and the soft hum of dated music drifting out of an old jukebox in the far corner.

“You’re thin, Lena.”

“I was very sick,” I mumbled, opening my menu. His jacket was covering my exposed shoulders and fell over- the slit up my thigh. I was thankful for that, but felt guilt as I noticed his arms prickle with gooseflesh. He was wearing only a tee shirt and jeans. He had to be freezing. “Take your jacket back-”

“No,” he replied firmly, glancing at me through his lashes before settling his gaze back on his menu. “Not while you’re wearing that dress. That’s only for me to see.”

Only for him to see. His words sent another thrill of desire shooting down my spine. He’d told me once, in the throes of passion, that I was his.

But then I thought about how I’d asked him to mark me, and he hadn’t. We ended things there.

I ordered a plate of over-easy eggs and bacon with a side of pancakes. Xander- watched me as I recited my order to the waitress, waiting for me to finish before he added a side of hashbrowns and sausage gravy to what I’d be eating. He ordered something similar, and two coffees for the table, and then the waitress left us.

Neither of us spoke for a moment, not until we had our coffee in front of us. He watched me over the rim of his mug, his dark eyes fixing on my own.

“You could’ve told me who you were from the beginning,” he finally said, breaking the silence between us. I cleared my throat as I toyed with a packet of sugar, glancing up at him for a moment before looking away.

“No one knows. I wanted to keep it that way.”

“Even from your friends?”

“Yes.”

He pursed his lips, nodding.

“I thought this had something to do with why you’re always so high strung. Being a princess will do that to you, I guess.”

I looked down into my coffee. "I wanted to do this on my own and not have anyone question my skills, or grades, based solely on my rank. I got into Morhan on my own."

"And your family used some kind of fake name to pay your tuition-"

"I have an aunt in Red Lakes. She paid it under her name," I said softly, the corner of my mouth twitching as I thought of my golden-haired aunt, Kacidra. and my uncle Pete. Kacidra was a physician, and Pete had been, and still was, a stay-at-home father to their six, yes, six, children.

"Your family must be proud of you," he said softly.

"They are, but..." I trailed off, sipping from my coffee before continuing, "My studies don't matter much in the grand scheme of things."

"What do you mean?"

"Any career I have... wherever I choose to go after this... it'll be short lived."

Xander- arched his brow, but I was interrupted from continuing by the waitress returning with our food. She set several platters in front of us, enough food for a small army, and I swallowed involuntarily as I stared down at the stack of pancakes glistening with syrup and butter.

"You were saying?" Xander- began to eat his meal, his eyes flicking up to mine, waiting for me to continue.

I cut into my pancakes, toying with them before meeting his eye. "I'll be the White Queen one day."

"Tire White Queen? You?" Xander looked, and sounded, shocked. He cleared his throat, and for a split second, a look of dread washed over his features. What was that about?

"Now you know," I murmured, then I took a bite of my food. I hadn't realized how hungry I was until I turned my attention to eating, the two of us sharing a moment of silence.

But every time I glanced at Xander. I noticed his face was drawn. He looked as though he was fighting some internal conflict.

I didn't eat much, but I ate as much as I could, pushing my half-empty plate to tire end of the table. Xander was just sitting there, looking down at his plate.

"Are you alright?" I asked.

"I thought it would be a while before you had to consider becoming the White Queen," he said hoarsely. His eyes met mine, intense, and desperately conflicted.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you outright," I said, but he shook his head, reaching into the back pocket of his jeans to pull out his wallet. He set a stack of bills on tire table, then motioned toward tire door.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

I nodded, wondering if whatever I'd said to him had made him change his mind about taking me back to Iris place.

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 544

Xander

Lena, the White Queen?

I chewed the inside of my lip as I held the door of the diner open for her. We stepped out onto the sidewalk, and I moved her to my side so she was walking near the buildings, and I was closer to the street.

Not that a car was likely to bound over the sidewalk-I'd seen more cars in Crimson Creek than I'd ever seen in Morhan.

It was that snake, Slate, that I was worried about. I was waiting for him to just appear out of a shadowed alley and try to finish what he'd started with Lena at any second.

We only had three more blocks until we reached my apartment, however. For now, we were safe, and alone.

Alone. Alone with my thoughts. Alone with the crushing certainty that I would never be able to be with Lena like I had intended to.

I couldn't take her away now. I couldn't ask that of her. She was more than just a descendant of Rosalie, those women with their special, life-giving blood. She was an heir to the most significant throne in the realm of light. I couldn't take that from her.

I thought other's would be in line for the crown first, but she made it seem like that wasn't the case. Those strange powers she held inside, bottled up and buried, were much more than some fluke in her' genetic code.

She had those powers for a reason. I saw it clearly now.

Adrian was right. What reason did I have now to tell her the whole truth about who I was and why I was here? Even if I told her the truth, she'd never accept the terms of what our relationship needed to look like. It wasn't like she could get on a ship, or a plane, to come see me while I ruled my lands, and vice versa. A sacrifice would need to be made.

I wondered if I could be the one to make that sacrifice as I looked over at her. Snow stuck to her eyelashes, and the tip of her nose was red from the cold. I wanted to tease her, to tell her this is what she deserved for wearing a scrap of fabric to cover her body in the middle of winter, but I kept my mouth shut. My eyes drifted down to where the slit in her dress exposed her hip bone, although it was currently covered by my heavy jacket.

I wouldn't even need to take the dress off of her to do what I desperately wanted to do to her.

But I shouldn't touch her. It felt wrong. The only thing keeping me from turning around and taking her back to her apartment, saying goodbye for good, was the simple fact that there was nothing else I wanted to do less than say goodbye. If we only had one night together before parting forever, maybe it wasn't so wrong to make the most of it.

Especially if I told her how I felt.

I guided her across one last snow-packed street and into my apartment building. It was quiet inside the foyer of the building. We climbed the three flights of stairs to the shabby two-bedroom unit I shared with Adrian. He'd already told me he wouldn't be coming home tonight. He meant to make the most of our last few nights in Morhan as well.

But his absence was for another reason too. It afforded me the privacy I needed with Lena. I wouldn't have this chance again.

I closed the door of my apartment behind us as we stepped into the front hallway. Lena shrugged off my coat and hung it on the coat rack, and I brushed melted snow from my arms before taking off my boots.

My skin was freezing, and the rush of warm air in the apartment made it tingle as I looked up, watching Lena walk into the open kitchen, living, and dining area. She looked around, her bare feet soundless on the carpet. The streetlight flooding through the window overlooking the street washed over her skin, highlighting the muscles of her arms and upper thigh, where the dress parted and swept over her leg.

The look of her was enough to drive me crazy with desire. She turned, her breasts hugged by the silken fabric as she faced me, giving me a soft smile.

"It's not much," I breathed, walking toward her, "but it's home-and affordable."

"It's nice," she smiled, but she wasn't looking around anymore. She was looking at me, her pale gray eyes fixed on mine.

"Lena," I began, taking another step in her direction.

She straightened her shoulders a bit, gearing up for what looked like a fight. I hesitated. What could I possibly say to her?

"What are we doing?" she asked, her voice a barely audible whisper.

I ran my tongue along my lower lip, dropping my eyes from her and settling them on the floor between us. "I wish I had a straightforward answer for you--"

"Why were you in Crimson Creek?"

"Alma told me you'd need the blood root for a time. I don't know how or why it affects you. I thought it was because of your injury, but now I'm not sure. It might have something to do with you being a White Queen--"

"Why were you acting so weird in the diner after I told you?"

"I-didn't know about the line of succession." I paused. It was a half-truth, at least.

She blinked a few times, and I noticed her eyes were misted with tears. I wanted to reach out to her, to pull her into an embrace. But my hand curled into a fist at my side inside.

"I'm tethered to this path, Xander. I was born for this role. I don't have the same freedoms as others. One day, I'll move to Winter Forest, and I will live there until the day I die."

"You're next in line? You said--"

“My Aunt Maeve is my grandmother’s heir, but...” Lena took a deep breath, looking at me through tears. “She stepped down from the line of succession. There’s... more. But I don’t think.... It doesn’t matter-”

“What if you didn’t accept the throne?” I asked, but she shook her head, hugging herself with her arms.

“I can’t reject it. I’m the only female heir in this generation. It’s mine. The title will pass to my daughter-if I have one.” She stopped talking abruptly, exhaling through her nose.

An indescribable pain washed over me. I hadn’t told her what Alma had said about her ability, or lack thereof, to have children.

“I had a very privileged life,” she began, her eyes fixed on the far wall, staring at nothing in particular. “I can admit that. I am loved deeply by my parents and my extended family. But I’m different. I was born different. And no one knows what that means for my future.”

“What do you mean?”

“My powers, Xander. Do you not remember how I told you I almost killed my mother? I’ve done other things without knowing how to control it. I can’t stop it. It’s tied wholly to my emotions, and I’ve spent my life keeping my emotions at bay. Do you know... do you even know what being with you has been like for me? This game we’re playing just... it just...”

“This isn’t a game to me, Lena-”

“Then what are we doing, Xander? Please!”

“I love you,” I said without trying to stop myself.

She stared at me, her eyes shining in the faint light from the windows. I repeated the words, and the weight that’d been pressing down on my shoulders since our first night in Crimson Creek finally eased.

“Don’t say that to me,” she said, her voice full of pain.

“What? Why-”

“Because I don’t just want you for now!” she cried, and I grabbed her, pulling her into my chest. Oh, Goddess. What the hell was I going to do?

“We can make this work—”

“You don’t understand-”

“Then tell me, Lena!”

She pushed away from me, swallowing hard as she reached up to wipe away a rogue tear rolling down her face.

“My mother is... and my dad...” She shook her head, obviously trying to gather her thoughts. “I’m different-”

“You said that,” I breathed, grabbing her by the shoulder. “How are you different?”

She looked up at me, sniffing. She looked pathetic and desperately sad. I held her to my chest again, wishing I knew how to comfort her.

“Have you ever heard the fable of Leto and her twin children?” she whispered into my chest.

Adrenaline burned through my body, and I had to fight not to grip her too hard as I held her close.

“Lycaon and Morrighan,” I said, and she nodded, laying her cheek against my arm as she looked up at me.

“The lines split long ago. Morrighan was the first White Queen, and her twin brother, Lycaon, he... There was war when my parents were young, when they were our age. My mother is Lycennian and my father...”

I gripped her, hard, holding against my chest for dear life.

How did I not know this? How could I have been in this Goddess forsaken realm for a year and not known?

“There was a prophecy. My parents and my aunt and uncle fought against the woman who wanted to see the pack lands fall and the prophecy unfulfilled.”

“What prophecy?” I whispered into her hair. My voice was trembling, but my body was still and rigid as I clasped her against me.

“Me,” she whispered painfully, a choked laugh escaping her mouth and sending vibrations over my skin. “It was me. I was the prophecy.”

Two lines into one. I thought, my mind racing as memory after memory of my boyhood came rushing back to me.

Two lines into one. The builder of realms seeks its throne. Through the trials of the court of blood and fury, out of darkness comes light, as day turns to night. A new dawn of the Empire of eternal sun.

I blinked, the poem I’d read during my school years flooding every recess of my mind. Two lines into one. Two lines into one...

“Xander,” she asked, her voice penetrating the memories that had overwhelmed me.

“I’m here,” I whispered, turning my head toward the window. Snow was still falling, and the window was frosted and sparkling with icy flakes that clung to the glass—little crystals shining in the pale amber streetlight.

Oh, my Goddess. It wasn’t a poem. It was a prophecy. I held her at arm’s length, looking into her eyes for any shred of understanding. I wanted her to read my mind, to pull the suffocating thoughts out into the open and make them clear enough for me to decipher.

Tell her, I told myself. Tell her who you are!

But my mouth and mind were not currently intertwined. Instead, I kissed her, the gentlest and most earnest kiss I’d ever given.

"I love you," I repeated against her lips, and I meant it with every fiber of my being. "We're going to figure this out. I will make this right, all of it."

Because I had to.

Because as my hands began to wander over Lena's body, my mind continued to race and flood over the poem from my childhood. A court of blood and fury?

It could only mean one thing.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 545

Lena

I would live in this moment forever.

Moonlight dripped through the living room windows, mingling with the faded amber reflection of the streetlights. Xander was shirtless, his muscles taut and glistening with sweat as he stepped away from me.

This was it. I felt it in my bones. Every touch, every kiss, every uttered word felt like the last as he whispered my name against my skin. He didn't say Lena. He said Selene, the sound of it like music as he trailed kisses down my neck and shoulder.

He knew the truth now, but I don't think he understood my internal battle. It wasn't like I was debating jumping headfirst into love; what I felt was true, fated love.

He'd be gone by my twenty-first birthday. That much I knew. I didn't know where, but he'd be gone, and I'd be left to pick up the pieces of my shattered heart.

My life wasn't my own. If what the prophecy said was true, I was the Moon Goddess reincarnate. I didn't know what that meant for my future. And if I wasn't sure about what it meant for me, how could I be so selfish as to allow someone to tether themselves to me in life, in love, and marriage?

I'd told myself long ago that I wouldn't bear children. What kind of mother could I possibly be? An earthbound deity, changing diapers? A mother with power so great, yet so uncontrollable? It wasn't safe. I wasn't a safe person. I didn't deserve that kind of life.

But I wanted it. I wanted it desperately. And as Xander knitted his hands in mine after lowering me onto the carpet, I wanted it with him, and only him.

I'd have this one taste of love to hold fast to as the years ticked by. I'd shelter it, keep it tucked away, a memory for my eyes only.

I opened my legs to him and he came to me without a moment of hesitation, his length filling me, his width stretching me until I was full, panting and whimpering beneath him.

He chuckled under his breath as I lifted my hips to him, pleading as he brought his grinding movements to a painful, teasing slowness that left me desperate.

"I plan to take my time," he purred, dipping his head to run his tongue along my collarbone.

I moaned his name, and he growled in response, taking one of my n****s between his teeth.

Worship, that's what this was. He kept the tempo of his thrust slow and teasing until I was nearly delirious and begging him for release. I tangled my fingers in his hair, pulling him close as I wrapped my legs around his waist, lifting my body off the ground so he could take me deeper.

I wanted all of him. I wanted him to hurt me, to claim me as his once more. I dug my fingernails into his back, scratching him until his skin gleamed red in the light spilling through the blinds.

He kissed my neck, then my mouth, sucking on my lower lip until I finally cried out and threw my head back in ecstasy.

I didn't realize he was holding himself back until he sheathed himself inside of me with one final, violent thrust. He cried out as my muscles flexed around him, growling deep in his throat as I pulled him closer to me, refusing to let go.

We lay on the ground for a moment, our bodies spent. He propped himself up on his elbow, looking down at me, the fingers of his free hand tracing circles over my hip bone.

I reached up and tucked his hair behind his ear, running the back of my fingers along his cheek. He was still inside of me, and he made no moves to separate us either. His hand moved down my thigh, wrapping around the underside of my knee, his soft touches sending ripples of electricity over my skin.

"That tickles," I whispered, my mouth twitching into a smile.

He tickled the skin behind my knee and I writhed beneath, the motion causing his breath to hitch as he tightened his grip on my leg.

"Keep doing that, and I'll have to take you again, right here on the floor."

"Is that a promise?" I purred, wriggling my hips.

His c**k responded before he could, hardened as he pressed deeper inside me. "Lena—"

I moved my hips up and down, my breath escaping my throat in a shallow moan.

"More," I whined, and fire flashed behind his eyes. My pitiful begging had awoken the primal side of him that I so desperately needed to see, one last time.

He flipped me over so I was straddling him, his arms outstretched and gripping the bottom of the couch as I rode him to climax after climax. There was something so powerful about this position. I was totally exposed to him, my breasts and stomach illuminated by the light coming through the windows, my skin glistening with sweat.

He was watching me, his eyes narrowed to slits as I pushed him closer and closer to his edge. He gritted his teeth, hoarsely saying "F*ck!" as he tilted his head back, his muscles going rigid.

He was always the one in control, but not now. I slowed down, teasing him like he'd teased me for nearly an hour.

"Lena," he said sternly, opening one eye to look at me.

"You don't like being teased," I panted, a wry grin touching the corner of my mouth.

I'd forgotten one thing about Xander. He was a wrestler, and in one swift movement I was back on my back, his arms pinning to the ground as he lowered himself over me.

He didn't enter me again, however. He just looked at me, an amber ring glistening around his dark irises. Primal. Animalistic. His wolf was more in control than he was in that moment.

Wait.

"Xander," I said, fighting against his grip. "Xander, wait--"

"You're mine," he said, his voice steady and serious as he lowered his head to whisper against my breasts. "Mate."

"You can't know for sure!"

He looked up at me, watching the panic flutter over my face. He softened his grip on my arms and I broke free of him, and held his face between my hands.

"I'm certain," he said, but I shook my head, tears beginning to well in my eyes.

"Even if="

"Even if what, Lena? I don't want to fight this anymore. I'll do whatever it takes."

Submit, I thought. Surrender. I didn't have all the answers. Why waste my life on what ifs and what nows?

I exhaled, blinking back the tears.

"What if I can't give you what you want, Xander?" I asked.

He touched his forehead to mine, exhaling deeply. "You're the only thing I want. The only thing I've ever wanted="

I kissed him before he could finish the words. It was a full, deep kiss, and quickly turned into pure, unadulterated heat that reignited the passion between us once more.

"I don't know if I'll ever feel the mate bond, Xander. I've had my powers since I was a child," I whispered against his lips.

"Not your wolf--"

"I don't know--"

"Lena," he said, his voice edged with a nearly inaudible frustration. "You're mine. I'm yours. Whatever happens next," he breathed, kissing me deeply before continuing, "this will be for us. A tether. A thread to keep us grounded to each other."

His teeth grazed my shoulder, and I winced. He pulled away, looking over my naked body. The sight of me, splayed out and glimmering with sweat, sent a thrill of desire through him and he sheathed himself inside of me once more, which made me gasp and arch my back.

He was going to mark me. I could feel it in my soul. He was looking for a spot as he moved within me, his breath coming in quick, fevered pants.

Chaos took over. I felt out of body as we moved against one another, my body already spent, tired, and sore.

Whatever this was, was magic. I knew that for certain. Maybe these feelings were the early, indiscriminate signs of the mate bond after all. Mark me then, I thought. Mark me; claim me as your own fever, and ever.

We were wild, our fingers tearing at each other and the carpet. Any sense of reality had slipped through my fingers as he came, and then his teeth met with the skin above my left breast. I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. All I felt was a rush of pain, which was quickly replaced with a feeling of euphoria I didn't have the words to describe.

He collapsed on top of me, trembling and breathing heavily. I wrapped my arms around him, the two of us just a tangle of limbs on the bare carpet in the middle of the living room. My skin was throbbing where he'd left his mark, and the feeling of his body on mine was different somehow. I was calm. Utterly, totally calm.

It wasn't until he slowly pulled away from me that I saw it. I didn't taste the blood on my lips or even remember doing it, but there it was—a half moon wound on his shoulder, partly darkened by the shadow falling over his back as he knelt on his knees over the top of me.

He touched his shoulder, a fleeting smile touching his lips.

If I'd had the energy to say anything, it would have been "What now?" We'd marked each other, cementing our relationship for eternity.

The thread he spoke of was already weaving itself through my ribs, tying like a knot around my heart.

Did he feel it too?

My legs shook as he helped me to my feet, and I had to hold onto him as we walked to his bedroom.

He laid me down in his bed, sliding in beside me and holding me to his chest, falling asleep before his head even hit the pillow.

Bliss. That's the only word to describe this. The sky could cave in over the top of our heads and all would feel right in my world.

My eyes fluttered, my body relaxing into a state of numbness as the snow continued to fall, clinging to the glass that filled the final moments of my lucidity.

But I woke up again in what felt like seconds. Sunlight spilled through the window I could have sworn I was just gazing through. Night was over in a flash, replaced by day, replaced by the reality of our actions.

Reality hit hard as raised voices spilled through the gap between the floor and the door to Xander's bedroom. I rolled over, finding his side of the bed empty and cool to the touch.

I sat up, looking around with fresh eyes in search of anything to cover my nakedness.

“When?” came Xander’s voice from just outside the door.

“Your guess is as good as mine. Soon, from what I could tell.” Adrian’s voice was level but had a hint of uncertainty to it, maybe even... fear?

“And you spoke to him this morning?” Xander replied, and the doorknob began to turn.

I gathered the sheets over my chest as the door swung up, revealing a disheveled-looking Xander and a nervous Adrian, both of them staring right at me.

There would be no good morning kiss, judging by the look on Xander’s face. He looked me dead in the eyes, but I saw nothing but darkness.

“I need to take you home now,” he said, and I bristled at the coldness in his voice.

“Xander-” Adrian began, but Xander held a hand up, cutting him off.

“Now, Lena. You need to go home.”

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 546

Lena

Heather was pacing back and forth across the living room of our apartment, her face screwed up in a vicious scowl. I was sitting on the couch, my cheeks tear-stained and the tender skin above my left breast throbbing painfully as Viv held my hand, toying with my fingers to mask her own nerves.

“And he didn’t even walk you home?” Heather spat, her face flaming with fury.

I choked back a sob and nodded, to which Heather replied by throwing her hands in the air and stifling what could have only been

a scream.

“F*ck these Morhan men, seriously,” Viv mumbled, her face flushed of all color as she glanced at me, then down to where Xander’s mark was, although it was hidden by several layers of clothing, and a thick robe, at this point.

I was freezing. Everything hurt. I felt like I was being torn to shreds from the inside out. Rejection. It had to be rejection. How could I have been so stupid?

“I say we kill him,” Heather said sharply.

I would have thought she was joking or trying to make me feel better, but her expression was deathly serious. “I’ll be fine,” I cried, but I didn’t feel fine.

“What the f*ck was he thinking! Marking you, then kicking you out-” Heather was raging.

I’d never seen her like this before, and if I hadn’t been on the verge of a total breakdown, I would have been incredibly impressed by her ability to throw herself into this kind of fury.

I was crumbling. My entire body was shaking as Viv tightened her grip on my hand.

This kind of anguish should have sent me into a tailspin and ignited my powers. But for whatever reason, all I felt was grief.

My fingers weren't prickling. Plants weren't growing between the gaps in the hardwood floor, and I hadn't obliterated my roommates in a burst of light.

I was just devastated, and for the first time in my life, I was able to feel every single excruciating emotion without it causing me to spiral out of control.

Normally I'd retreat. I'd back myself into the darkness, looking for the door to the secret place, the garden I kept hidden in my mind.

I hadn't been able to find it today. I was numb to everything but the pain radiating through my body.

Xander had sent me home in a pair of his sweatpants and sweater that hung so loosely from my body that I had to hold my pants up as I walked the five blocks between our apartments. Xander was a mess, fighting with Adrian the entire time I dressed, the argument spilling into the hallway and down the stairs into the lobby of the apartment building.

At first I thought someone must have died based on the severity of the fight, or that we were under attack. He was frantic, pulling on a coat and hat and practically pushing me out the door, telling me to go straight home without giving me a single second to ask why, or what had happened.

He stalked off down the street, in the opposite direction, while I stood on the snowy sidewalk in my walk of shame outfit, the sweatpants I was wearing covering the black leather boots I'd worn the night before, which were useless in the thick snow.

Adrian had tried to apologize, but I had been too shocked to register what he'd said. He took off after Xander, leaving me alone.

The pain didn't start until I was halfway home. The ribbon woven through my body, tying me to Xander, felt like it was fraying, pulling so tightly around my heart I thought it would rip and fall to pieces.

I'd never known anyone who had been rejected by their mate. Xander and I had chosen each other only hours before. The tears had started to fall when I began to wonder if he had woken up next to me, full of regret, his decision marred by alcohol and primal passion.

Stupid, stupid, stupid girl, I thought. You i***t. You knew better. This went against everything you promised yourself, everything you knew that was right.

How many times had I ended up on this couch surrounded by my roommates as they tried to help me? I was nothing but a burden.

I was leaving tomorrow. It was a good thing.

But as I sat there, watching Heather and Viv argue about what could be done, I felt a sudden, inexplicit peace wash over me. I leaned into the couch cushion, taking a shuddering breath.

There was a deep void inside of me, whatever had been there before replaced by numbness.

The thread that bound me to Xander quivered, then slackened, its hold around my heart falling away as the throbbing of the fresh mark wound faded.

I stood up, leaning forward as I tried to fill my lungs and slow my pounding heart.

Heather and Viv watched me I staggered toward the kitchen and poured myself a glass of water.

“Talk to us, Lena. What can we do?” Heather pleaded, but I chugged the water, closing my eyes as it wet my parched throat.

“Nothing,” I breathed, setting the cup down on the counter. “I feel better.”

“What-” Viv asked, but I shook my head, cutting her off as I turned to look at them.

“It’s gone,” I said softly, my voice losing its tremble.

“What’s gone?” Heather growled, still looking as fierce and heated as before.

“I don’t feel it anymore. It doesn’t hurt.” I touched the mark, then shrugged.

Viv let out her breath, but Heather furrowed her brow, looking exceedingly suspicious.

No one said anything after that. I padded to my room, shutting the door behind me and sinking down into my bed.

Hours passed before I opened my eyes again. The sun was setting as I rolled out of bed, finding the apartment empty as I walked back out into the living room.

Viv and Heather had been packing up for their journeys home for Winter Break. Their suitcases were open and half full. Little piles of clothes and shoes were scattered on the rug in front of the couch.

I owed them an apology. I owed them endless thanks for caring for me repeatedly over the past few weeks.

I had to tell them the truth, just like I’d told Xander, regardless of the outcome.

I went back into my room and rummaged through the desk in the far corner, finding two pieces of paper and a pen. I spent the next hour spilling my truth out on paper, crumbling the sheets between my hands and starting over, and over, again.

Eventually, I gave up, flopping down on my bed with my arms splayed and my eyes closed. I heard Viv and Heather come home, their muffled voices coming from beneath the door as I propped myself up on my elbows.

There was a male voice with them, and I rolled out of bed before my mind could catch up with my body. I opened the door, coming face to face with Adrian.

I stepped out of the room, a feeling of dread washing over me as the three of them turned to me.

“What’s happened?” I asked, a lump forming in my throat. I reached up to touch the mark on my chest.

Adrian glanced between Viv and Heather before looking back at me. "Xander left town," Adrian replied, his voice low and hoarse. His cheeks were flushed a rosy pink, and based on the sweat lining his temples, I assumed he'd run all the way here.

"Where did he go?"

"Lena, I don't know. That's why I'm here. Did he tell you... did he tell—" Adrian's words dropped off abruptly and he shook his head, glancing at me before turning for the door. "He didn't tell you—"

"Tell her what?" Heather snapped, just as irritated as she had been when I came home earlier in the day and told them what had happened.

"When do the three of you leave Morhan?" he asked us, turning back around to face us.

Viv glanced around nervously, and Heather looked somewhat shocked.

"Tomorrow, all three of us," I replied, narrowing my eyes at him. "What's going on? Does this have something to do with Crimson Creek?"

He didn't answer, but his eyes told me everything I needed to know.

"When is he coming back?" I pressed, but Adrian only shrugged, looking defeated. I wished that Viv and Heather weren't in the room so I could ask him for details. I knew he wouldn't tell me anything in front of them.

"I don't know."

"There has to be something—" I began, but Adrian was heading for the door.

Heather and Viv glanced at each other as I followed him out into the hallway, closing the door behind me and praying my roommates weren't eavesdropping.

"What the hell is going on, Adrian?"

"What did he tell you last night?" Adrian hissed, turning around to face me before he reached the stairwell.

"What do you mean?"

Adrian looked deep into my eyes, searching for something. I blinked, pursing my lips as I waited for him to tell me something, anything.

"Is he in trouble?" I asked, but Adrian shook his head, leaning on the railing overlooking the stairs.

"A man came looking for him last night. He showed up at the party after the two of you had already left. Gideon, I believe."

"Gideon was here?"

He nodded. "He said he needed to speak to Xander, but I... I didn't think it was serious enough. I thought Xander was going to tell you—"

"Tell me what?!"

Adrian's eyes were deeply blue, and shone like gems in the dim light in the hallway. He was handsome, but boyish, his blond curls ruffled and falling over his ears and forehead.

He considered telling me. I could see the internal argument he was having flashing behind his eyes. But he decided against it, shaking his head and then turning toward the stairs.

"Is he gone?" I asked, my voice catching. "Is that why I can't feel... I can't feel the mark anymore? I felt like he might have been rejecting me--"

"What time do you leave tomorrow?"

"In the early morning. I'm catching the six o'clock train to Breles."

Adrian nodded solemnly. "I'm sorry, Lena. I can't give you the answers you need. It's not for me to tell you."

"Is he gone?" I repeated, damn near begging for an answer.

"Not gone, not like that," Adrian said, a soft smile touching his mouth. His eyes met mine for a moment, then he turned, and walked down the stairs.

"Whose Gideon?" Heather said from the door I hadn't noticed was open.

I turned to her, trying to stop the furious flush from coloring my cheeks. "Part of that strange family in Crimson Creek. I think... I don't know, Heather. This is all too much."

She gave me a soft, knowing smile.

"Well, I say f*ck it all. Let's go do something tonight, celebrate, you know? I heard the ice skating rink was recently cleared of snow...."

I followed Heather into the apartment, looking over my shoulder at the empty stairwell.

Where are you? I thought, wondering if Xander could hear me.

And what the f**k is your problem?

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 547

Lena

I would live in this moment forever.

Moonlight dripped through the living room windows, mingling with the faded amber reflection of the streetlights. Xander was shirtless, his muscles taut and glistening with sweat as he stepped away from me.

This was it. I felt it in my bones. Every touch, every kiss, every uttered word felt like the last as he whispered my name against my skin. He didn't say Lena. He said Selene, the sound of it like music as he trailed kisses down my neck and shoulder.

He knew the truth now, but I don't think he understood my internal battle. It wasn't like I was debating jumping headfirst into love; what I felt was true, fated love.

He'd be gone by my twenty-first birthday. That much I knew. I didn't know where, but he'd be gone, and I'd be left to pick up the pieces of my shattered heart.

My life wasn't my own. If what the prophecy said was true, I was the Moon Goddess reincarnate. I didn't know what that meant for my future. And if I wasn't sure about what it meant for me, how could I be so selfish as to allow someone to tether themselves to me in life, in love, and marriage?

I'd told myself long ago that I wouldn't bear children. What kind of mother could I possibly be? An earthbound deity, changing diapers? A mother with power so great, yet so uncontrollable? It wasn't safe. I wasn't a safe person. I didn't deserve that kind of life.

But I wanted it. I wanted it desperately. And as Xander knitted his hands in mine after lowering me onto the carpet, I wanted it with him, and only him.

I'd have this one taste of love to hold fast to as the years ticked by. I'd shelter it, keep it tucked away, a memory for my eyes only.

I opened my legs to him and he came to me without a moment of hesitation, his length filling me, his width stretching me until I was full, panting and whimpering beneath him.

He chuckled under his breath as I lifted my hips to him, pleading as he brought his grinding movements to a painful, teasing slowness that left me desperate.

"I plan to take my time," he purred, dipping his head to run his tongue along my collarbone.

I moaned his name, and he growled in response, taking one of my n****s between his teeth.

Worship, that's what this was. He kept the tempo of his thrust slow and teasing until I was nearly delirious and begging him for release. I tangled my fingers in his hair, pulling him close as I wrapped my legs around his waist, lifting my body off the ground so he could take me deeper.

I wanted all of him. I wanted him to hurt me, to claim me as his once more. I dug my fingernails into his back, scratching him until his skin gleamed red in the light spilling through the blinds.

He kissed my neck, then my mouth, sucking on my lower lip until I finally cried out and threw my head back in ecstasy.

I didn't realize he was holding himself back until he sheathed himself inside of me with one final, violent thrust. He cried out as my muscles flexed around him, growling deep in his throat as I pulled him closer to me, refusing to let go.

We lay on the ground for a moment, our bodies spent. He propped himself up on his elbow, looking down at me, the fingers of his free hand tracing circles over my hip bone.

I reached up and tucked his hair behind his ear, running the back of my fingers along his cheek. He was still inside of me, and he made no moves to separate us either. His hand moved down my thigh, wrapping around the underside of my knee, his soft touches sending ripples of electricity over my skin.

"That tickles," I whispered, my mouth twitching into a smile.

He tickled the skin behind my knee and I writhed beneath, the motion causing his breath to hitch as he tightened his grip on my leg.

“Keep doing that, and I’ll have to take you again, right here on the floor.”

“Is that a promise?” I purred, wriggling my hips.

His c**k responded before he could, hardened as he pressed deeper inside me. “Lena—”

I moved my hips up and down, my breath escaping my throat in a shallow moan.

“More,” I whined, and fire flashed behind his eyes. My pitiful begging had awoken the primal side of him that I so desperately needed to see, one last time.

He flipped me over so I was straddling him, his arms outstretched and gripping the bottom of the couch as I rode him to climax after climax. There was something so powerful about this position. I was totally exposed to him, my breasts and stomach illuminated by the light coming through the windows, my skin glistening with sweat.

He was watching me, his eyes narrowed to slits as I pushed him closer and closer to his edge. He gritted his teeth, hoarsely saying “F*ck!” as he tilted his head back, his muscles going rigid.

He was always the one in control, but not now. I slowed down, teasing him like he’d teased me for nearly an hour.

“Lena,” he said sternly, opening one eye to look at me.

“You don’t like being teased,” I panted, a wry grin touching the corner of my mouth.

I’d forgotten one thing about Xander. He was a wrestler, and in one swift movement I was back on my back, his arms pinning to the ground as he lowered himself over me.

He didn’t enter me again, however. He just looked at me, an amber ring glistening around his dark irises. Primal. Animalistic. His wolf was more in control than he was in that moment.

Wait.

“Xander,” I said, fighting against his grip. “Xander, wait—”

“You’re mine,” he said, his voice steady and serious as he lowered his head to whisper against my breasts. “Mate.”

“You can’t know for sure!”

He looked up at me, watching the panic flutter over my face. He softened his grip on my arms and I broke free of him, and held his face between my hands.

“I’m certain,” he said, but I shook my head, tears beginning to well in my eyes.

“Even if—”

“Even if what, Lena? I don’t want to fight this anymore. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

Submit, I thought. Surrender. I didn't have all the answers. Why waste my life on what ifs and what nows?

I exhaled, blinking back the tears.

"What if I can't give you what you want, Xander?" I asked.

He touched his forehead to mine, exhaling deeply. "You're the only thing I want. The only thing I've ever wanted—"

I kissed him before he could finish the words. It was a full, deep kiss, and quickly turned into pure, unadulterated heat that reignited the passion between us once more.

"I don't know if I'll ever feel the mate bond, Xander. I've had my powers since I was a child," I whispered against his lips.

"Not your wolf—"

"I don't know—"

"Lena," he said, his voice edged with a nearly inaudible frustration. "You're mine. I'm yours. Whatever happens next," he breathed, kissing me deeply before continuing, "this will be for us. A tether. A thread to keep us grounded to each other."

His teeth grazed my shoulder, and I winced. He pulled away, looking over my naked body. The sight of me, splayed out and glimmering with sweat, sent a thrill of desire through him and he sheathed himself inside of me once more, which made me gasp and arch my back.

He was going to mark me. I could feel it in my soul. He was looking for a spot as he moved within me, his breath coming in quick, fevered pants.

Chaos took over. I felt out of body as we moved against one another, my body already spent, tired, and sore.

Whatever this was, was magic. I knew that for certain. Maybe these feelings were the early, indiscriminate signs of the mate bond after all. Mark me then, I thought. Mark me; claim me as your own fever, and ever.

We were wild, our fingers tearing at each other and the carpet. Any sense of reality had slipped through my fingers as he came, and then his teeth met with the skin above my left breast. I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. All I felt was a rush of pain, which was quickly replaced with a feeling of euphoria I didn't have the words to describe.

He collapsed on top of me, trembling and breathing heavily. I wrapped my arms around him, the two of us just a tangle of limbs on the bare carpet in the middle of the living room. My skin was throbbing where he'd left his mark, and the feeling of his body on mine was different somehow. I was calm. Utterly, totally calm.

It wasn't until he slowly pulled away from me that I saw it. I didn't taste the blood on my lips or even remember doing it, but there it was—a half moon wound on his shoulder, partly darkened by the shadow falling over his back as he knelt on his knees over the top of me.

He touched his shoulder, a fleeting smile touching his lips.

If I'd had the energy to say anything, it would have been "What now?" We'd marked each other, cementing our relationship for eternity.

The thread he spoke of was already weaving itself through my ribs, tying like a knot around my heart.

Did he feel it too?

My legs shook as he helped me to my feet, and I had to hold onto him as we walked to his bedroom.

He laid me down in his bed, sliding in beside me and holding me to his chest, falling asleep before his head even hit the pillow.

Bliss. That's the only word to describe this. The sky could cave in over the top of our heads and all would feel right in my world.

My eyes fluttered, my body relaxing into a state of numbness as the snow continued to fall, clinging to the glass that filled the final moments of my lucidity.

But I woke up again in what felt like seconds. Sunlight spilled through the window I could have sworn I was just gazing through. Night was over in a flash, replaced by day, replaced by the reality of our actions.

Reality hit hard as raised voices spilled through the gap between the floor and the door to Xander's bedroom. I rolled over, finding his side of the bed empty and cool to the touch.

I sat up, looking around with fresh eyes in search of anything to cover my nakedness.

"When?" came Xander's voice from just outside the door.

"Your guess is as good as mine. Soon, from what I could tell." Adrian's voice was level but had a hint of uncertainty to it, maybe even... fear?

"And you spoke to him this morning?" Xander replied, and the doorknob began to turn.

I gathered the sheets over my chest as the door swung up, revealing a disheveled-looking Xander and a nervous Adrian, both of them staring right at me.

There would be no good morning kiss, judging by the look on Xander's face. He looked me dead in the eyes, but I saw nothing but darkness.

"I need to take you home now," he said, and I bristled at the coldness in his voice.

"Xander—" Adrian began, but Xander held a hand up, cutting him off.

"Now, Lena. You need to go home."

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 548

Lena

Heather was pacing back and forth across the living room of our apartment, her face screwed up in a vicious scowl. I was sitting on the couch, my cheeks tear-stained and the tender skin above my left breast throbbing painfully as Viv held my hand, toying with my fingers to mask her own nerves.

“And he didn’t even walk you home?” Heather spat, her face flaming with fury.

I choked back a sob and nodded, to which Heather replied by throwing her hands in the air and stifling what could have only been a scream.

“F*ck these Morhan men, seriously,” Viv mumbled, her face flushed of all color as she glanced at me, then down to where Xander’s mark was, although it was hidden by several layers of clothing, and a thick robe, at this point.

I was freezing. Everything hurt. I felt like I was being torn to shreds from the inside out. Rejection. It had to be rejection. How could I have been so stupid?

“I say we kill him,” Heather said sharply.

I would have thought she was joking or trying to make me feel better, but her expression was deathly serious. “I’ll be fine,” I cried, but I didn’t feel fine.

“What the f*ck was he thinking! Marking you, then kicking you out—” Heather was raging.

I’d never seen her like this before, and if I hadn’t been on the verge of a total breakdown, I would have been incredibly impressed by her ability to throw herself into this kind of fury.

I was crumbling. My entire body was shaking as Viv tightened her grip on my hand.

This kind of anguish should have sent me into a tailspin and ignited my powers. But for whatever reason, all I felt was grief.

My fingers weren’t prickling. Plants weren’t growing between the gaps in the hardwood floor, and I hadn’t obliterated my roommates in a burst of light.

I was just devastated, and for the first time in my life, I was able to feel every single excruciating emotion without it causing me to spiral out of control.

Normally I’d retreat. I’d back myself into the darkness, looking for the door to the secret place, the garden I kept hidden in my mind.

I hadn’t been able to find it today. I was numb to everything but the pain radiating through my body.

Xander had sent me home in a pair of his sweatpants and sweater that hung so loosely from my body that I had to hold my pants up as I walked the five blocks between our apartments. Xander was a mess, fighting with Adrian the entire time I dressed, the argument spilling into the hallway and down the stairs into the lobby of the apartment building.

At first I thought someone must have died based on the severity of the fight, or that we were under attack. He was frantic, pulling on a coat and hat and practically pushing me out the door, telling me to go straight home without giving me a single second to ask why, or what had happened.

He stalked off down the street, in the opposite direction, while I stood on the snowy sidewalk in my walk of shame outfit, the sweatpants I was wearing covering the black leather boots I’d worn the night before, which were useless in the thick snow.

Adrian had tried to apologize, but I had been too shocked to register what he'd said. He took off after Xander, leaving me alone.

The pain didn't start until I was halfway home. The ribbon woven through my body, tying me to Xander, felt like it was fraying, pulling so tightly around my heart I thought it would rip and fall to pieces.

I'd never known anyone who had been rejected by their mate. Xander and I had chosen each other only hours before. The tears had started to fall when I began to wonder if he had woken up next to see, full of regret, his decision marred by alcohol and primal passion.

Stupid, stupid, stupid girl, I thought. You i***t. You knew better. This went against everything you promised yourself, everything you knew that was right.

How many times had I ended up on this couch surrounded by my roommates as they tried to help me? I was nothing but a burden.

I was leaving tomorrow. It was a good thing.

But as I sat there, watching Heather and Viv argue about what could be done, I felt a sudden, inexplicit peace wash over me. I leaned into the couch cushion, taking a shuddering breath.

There was a deep void inside of me, whatever had been there before replaced by numbness.

The thread that bound me to Xander quivered, then slackened, its hold around my heart falling away as the throbbing of the fresh mark wound faded.

I stood up, leaning forward as I tried to fill my lungs and slow my pounding heart.

Heather and Viv watched me as I staggered toward the kitchen and poured myself a glass of water.

"Talk to us, Lena. What can we do?" Heather pleaded, but I chugged the water, closing my eyes as it wet my parched throat.

"Nothing," I breathed, setting the cup down on the counter. "I feel better."

"What—" Viv asked, but I shook my head, cutting her off as I turned to look at them.

"It's gone," I said softly, my voice losing its tremble.

"What's gone?" Heather growled, still looking as fierce and heated as before.

"I don't feel it anymore. It doesn't hurt." I touched the mark, then shrugged.

Viv let out her breath, but Heather furrowed her brow, looking exceedingly suspicious.

No one said anything after that. I padded to my room, shutting the door behind me and sinking down into my bed.

Hours passed before I opened my eyes again. The sun was setting as I rolled out of bed, finding the apartment empty as I walked back out into the living room.

Viv and Heather had been packing up for their journeys home for Winter Break. Their suitcases were open and half full. Little piles of clothes and shoes were scattered on the rug in front of the couch.

I owed them an apology. I owed them endless thanks for caring for me repeatedly over the past few weeks.

I had to tell them the truth, just like I'd told Xander, regardless of the outcome.

I went back into my room and rummaged through the desk in the far corner, finding two pieces of paper and a pen. I spent the next hour spilling my truth out on paper, crumpling the sheets between my hands and starting over, and over, again.

Eventually, I gave up, flopping down on my bed with my arms splayed and my eyes closed. I heard Viv and Heather come home, their muffled voices coming from beneath the door as I propped myself up on my elbows.

There was a male voice with them, and I rolled out of bed before my mind could catch up with my body. I opened the door, coming face to face with Adrian.

I stepped out of the room, a feeling of dread washing over me as the three of them turned to me.

"What's happened?" I asked, a lump forming in my throat. I reached up to touch the mark on my chest.

Adrian glanced between Viv and Heather before looking back at me. "Xander left town," Adrian replied, his voice low and hoarse. His cheeks were flushed a rosy pink, and based on the sweat lining his temples, I assumed he'd run all the way here.

"Where did he go?"

"Lena, I don't know. That's why I'm here. Did he tell you... did he tell—" Adrian's words dropped off abruptly and he shook his head, glancing at me before turning for the door. "He didn't tell you—"

"Tell her what?" Heather snapped, just as irritated as she had been when I came home earlier in the day and told them what had happened.

"When do the three of you leave Morhan?" he asked us, turning back around to face us.

Viv glanced around nervously, and Heather looked somewhat shocked.

"Tomorrow, all three of us," I replied, narrowing my eyes at him. "What's going on? Does this have something to do with Crimson Creek?"

He didn't answer, but his eyes told me everything I needed to know.

"When is he coming back?" I pressed, but Adrian only shrugged, looking defeated. I wished that Viv and Heather weren't in the room so I could ask him for details. I knew he wouldn't tell me anything in front of them.

"I don't know."

"There has to be something—" I began, but Adrian was heading for the door.

Heather and Viv glanced at each other as I followed him out into the hallway, closing the door behind me and praying my roommates weren't eavesdropping.

"What the hell is going on, Adrian?"

“What did he tell you last night?” Adrian hissed, turning around to face me before he reached the stairwell.

“What do you mean?”

Adrian looked deep into my eyes, searching for something. I blinked, pursing my lips as I waited for him to tell me something, anything.

“Is he in trouble?” I asked, but Adrian shook his head, leaning on the railing overlooking the stairs.

“A man came looking for him last night. He showed up at the party after the two of you had already left. Gideon, I believe.”

“Gideon was here?”

He nodded. “He said he needed to speak to Xander, but I... I didn’t think it was serious enough. I thought Xander was going to tell you—”

“Tell me what?!”

Adrian’s eyes were deeply blue, and shone like gems in the dim light in the hallway. He was handsome, but boyish, his blond curls ruffled and falling over his ears and forehead.

He considered telling me. I could see the internal argument he was having flashing behind his eyes. But he decided against it, shaking his head and then turning toward the stairs.

“Is he gone?” I asked, my voice catching. “Is that why I can’t feel... I can’t feel the mark anymore? I felt like he might have been rejecting me—”

“What time do you leave tomorrow?”

“In the early morning. I’m catching the six o’clock train to Breles.”

Adrian nodded solemnly. “I’m sorry, Lena. I can’t give you the answers you need. It’s not for me to tell you.”

“Is he gone?” I repeated, damn near begging for an answer.

“Not gone, not like that,” Adrian said, a soft smile touching his mouth. His eyes met mine for a moment, then he turned, and walked down the stairs.

“Whose Gideon?” Heather said from the door I hadn’t noticed was open.

I turned to her, trying to stop the furious flush from coloring my cheeks. “Part of that strange family in Crimson Creek. I think... I don’t know, Heather. This is all too much.”

She gave me a soft, knowing smile.

“Well, I say f*ck it all. Let’s go do something tonight, celebrate, you know? I heard the ice skating rink was recently cleared of snow....”

I followed Heather into the apartment, looking over my shoulder at the empty stairwell.

Where are you? I thought, wondering if Xander could hear me.

And what the f**k is your problem?

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 549

Lena

I woke around 4:00 a.m., taking a hasty shower and readying for my journey. The last three years of my life were packed in boxes and stacked in a pile next to the front door of our apartment, waiting for the postman to pick them up later in the day.

I wouldn't come back here. Maybe to visit, maybe, but otherwise, this chapter of my life had closed. I looked around the living room and kitchen as I slung my duffle bag over my shoulder, taking it all in—the twinkling lights that hung over the window, the pothos vines that climbed up the brick wall in the living room, the empty bottles of wine and pizza boxes in the kitchen.

Heather and Vivienne were still asleep. We'd said our tearful goodbyes last night. They thought it would be for a long time, but they were wrong. I slid two envelopes on the kitchen counter, one for each of them before I headed out the door.

It was a short walk to the train station. It was frigid, but the sky was clear and stars still hung bright over the top of my head as I walked through the snow. I only saw a few people waiting for the morning train to Breles, which was less than a two-hour journey by train, their figures shrouded in shadow.

But one of the figures turned to me as I walked up the steps to the platform, and the thread tied around my heart tightened, taking my breath away. Xander walked toward me, his face void of expression, and took my duffle bag from my shoulder, carrying it for me as I followed him to the opposite end of the platform.

I was too shocked to speak. His cheeks, and the tip of his nose, were reddened from the cold. He'd been out here for a while then, and for a moment I thought he might be taking the same train. But he had no luggage with him. He set my duffle bag on a bench, exhaling deeply before he turned to me.

His eyes were dark wells, the little sparks of amber on display beneath the fluorescent lights of the station.

"I'm sorry."

"What happened?" I whispered, my voice edged with a nearly inaudible plea.

"It doesn't matter right now," he replied. He made no moves toward me. He tucked his hands in his pockets, his gaze drifting from my face to the snow-covered trees beyond the tracks.

"Are you rejecting me?" I dared to ask. I had to know.

But he didn't answer. He continued to look out over the park, his expression totally unreadable. "What did I do wrong?"

"You didn't do anything wrong—"

"Then why—"

"I can't keep you safe," he said sharply, his eyes meeting mine again so intensely I took a step away from him.

"Safe from what?"

He shook his head, shifting his weight as he looked away from me again.

So, it was going to be like this again.

"You hate me" I began, but he snapped his head toward me, fixing me with a glare.

"I don't hate you—"

"But you continue to play games with me. I thought you... I thought you wanted this. You marked me—"

"I marked you because you marked me first," he sneered, and my heart dropped into my stomach. I wanted to throw up. I wanted to sob. I took another step away from him, turning away so he couldn't see the blush sending a wave of heat prickling over my neck and cheeks.

"I don't remember doing it," I whispered, low enough I wasn't sure he'd heard me.

"It doesn't matter—"

"What matters to you then, Xander? Were you just in this to sleep with me? To claim me as some prize, to be able to say you bagged the Princess of Valoria? Or was it my powers you were after?"

His face was twisted with fury as he slowly turned his head to look at me, eyes flaming with fire as they narrowed on mine.

"You really think I'd use you like that—"

"You did, Xander. You did. And then you sent Adrian to clean up the mess—"

"Adrian?" he hissed, taking a step in my direction.

"He came to my apartment yesterday. He asked me if you'd told me... told me the truth—"

"Adrian doesn't know what he's talking about—"

"He was upset. He said Gideon had come looking for you, and that you went to Crimson Creek—"

"I didn't go to Crimson Creek," he said, his voice so sharp it could have cut me like a knife.

"Then where the hell did you go?!" I cried, unable to stop the tears from spilling over my eyelashes.

"Why do you continue to do this to me? You push me away, then do everything you can to pull me back in, making me promises, telling me you love me only to push me away again. You're cold, Xander. You're a liar. You've been playing me the entire time."

"If thinking that makes you feel better, then by all means—"

"Are you joking?" I choked, trying to keep my voice low so the other people standing on the other side of the platform couldn't hear us. "Even if I actually marked you first, which I don't believe for a single

second, you marked me, Xander. I've never experienced the kind of pain you put me through yesterday—

“I'm sorry—”

“You're not sorry! You keep saying that, but you've never meant it, not once.”

He was looking at me, his face stone cold. I wanted to slap him just to get a reaction out of him, but my arms felt weak at my sides. My heart was shattering in my chest, held together by the thread.

“I realized I was wrong. I woke up that morning and I knew it was a mistake. I have nothing to offer you but heartache and loss, Lena. That's all I can say.”

I arched my brows, his words like a blow to my chest. The platform began to vibrate as a soft rumble sounded in the distance, followed by the lights of a train as it came around the corner toward the station.

Xander swallowed, his throat working and jaw flexing as he looked into my eyes. There was something behind his stare that gave me a single shred of hope. It was a look of absolute distress, like every word that came out of his mouth had been another set of his lies.

“This is over then,” I whispered, my voice drowned out by the train as it pulled into the station. He reached for my duffle bag, but I grabbed it, moving away from him.

“Lena—”

“What else can you possibly have to say to me?”

If he said he loved me, I would really hit him, not just think about it. He was silent, however. I gave him one last look before I slung my bag over my shoulder and walked briskly away, the lump in my throat strangling me as I fished for my ticket in the pocket of my jacket.

In a perfect world, this would have just been a tiff, a lovers' quarrel. Xander would run after the train as it pulled away, rain would fall from the sky as I jumped out and ran to him, wrapping my arms around him as he kissed me, telling me he was wrong, that he loved me, that he'd meant it when he said it.

But this wasn't a fairytale. I boarded the train and walked as far forward as I could so I wouldn't see him standing on the platform as the train lurched forward. I set my duffle bag in my lap, hugging it like a pillow and leaning my head on the window, closing my eyes.

But I didn't feel the pain of rejection like I had the day before. My heart was broken, shattered beyond repair, but I didn't feel like my bones were breaking. I didn't feel like I was going to die from grief.

I closed my eyes as the train began to move, a slow crawl at first, then gaining substantial speed as it traveled out of Morhan.

It was over, all of it. What happened in Crimson Creek was just a fading memory. Morhan University was nothing but a chapter, now closed, my diploma tucked safely in my bag as I clutched it to my chest. My friends would move on after reading the letters I'd left them.

And Xander?

I knew in my soul I'd never know a love like this ever again.

I surrendered to the grief as the train sped away from the life I'd been living, leaving every mistake I'd made in its wake.

Hot sun beat down on me as I stepped out of the plane and walked across the tarmac. The pavement was golden in the bright light, and I had to shield my eyes as I walked, my legs numb and beginning to prickle as my muscles, stiff from a twelve-hour flight, adjusted to the movement.

I'd slept for most of the flight, and woken to nothing but endless turquoise water as I looked out the window in my row. It was a full flight, and as we neared Avondale, everyone on board began to murmur in excitement.

Golden beaches. Clear, warm water. The perfect distraction.

I felt fine as I walked off the plane. Some rest and distance from the mess I'd made gave me a new outlook.

But it was short-lived.

As I walked across the tarmac, I noticed a black SUV parked on the pavement, the heat moving in waves over it, making the car look like only an illusion.

But the back door opened and a man stepped out, dressed in a light blue button-up shirt and a pair of khaki shorts. His brown hair was swept back off his face, his temples flaked with gray. I nearly dropped my duffle bag on the ground as I broke from the line of passengers walking toward the airport, running as fast as I could and throwing myself into his arms.

"Dad!" I cried, and he squeezed me, whirling me in a circle.

Rowan Gray, the Alpha King of Valoria, kissed me on the forehead, his deep blue eyes creasing with relief. He held me at arm's length, smiling down on me, his wide mouth curving into a smile.

But something about the warmth and love behind his smile snapped inside my heart. My lower lip began to tremble.

"Lena, honey, are you alright?" he asked, his dark brown brows furrowing as he squeezed my shoulders.

I opened my mouth to say something along the lines of, "I'm fine," but all that came out was a choked sob.

He clutched me to his chest as I broke down in tears.

"W-where's Mom?" I cried, my voice hitching in my throat as he held me by the back of my head against his chest.

"She's at the palace. What happened? Are you hurt?"

Yes, yes I was, but as I stained my father's shirt with tears, I found it impossible to tell him anything close to the truth.

Could I possibly say... that I'd let someone I barely knew mark me, and he'd broken my heart?

Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 550

Wedding Preparations

Lena

Sometimes I wished I had been old enough to remember what Avondale was like before the reign of my Aunt Maeve and Uncle Troy. It was hard to imagine what the pack lands had dubbed "The City of Gold" as anything less than it was now.

Resorts and restaurants lined the public beaches from end to end of the island capital, their golden facades glimmering like gems in the sun. Palm trees hugged the sprawling tropical parks and greenbelts that wove through the neighborhoods that surrounded downtown Avondale, where the nightlife was lively and the daytime was rich with markets and entertainment.

I'd heard the stories, of course. Maeve and Troy hadn't had the easiest time when they first came to claim Troy's rightful territory and his pack. The Isles of Denali had been in a state of ruin and decay for decades.

But they'd done it. They brought the Isles back to life in the two decades they'd ruled as Alpha and Luna. They were beloved by their people, even if their rule had been unorthodox.

Uncle Troy, the Alpha of Poldesse, had been a pirate. Before that, he'd been an uneducated, unattended orphan running with a pack of other young boys and smuggling goods for the previous Alpha of Poldesse before he was even ten years old.

Aunt Maeve, well, she was just Maeve, and rather hard to describe. Her temper was legendary, but so was her kindness. Together, they formed a team that seemed to have been pulled straight out of the pages of some sweeping fantasy novel.

Under their rule, Avondale was paradise. Even the incredibly gigantic palace nestled atop the highest point of the island, overlooking the ocean, seemed cozy and warm. This place was filled with love.

But even as I sprawled out in the bedroom I'd spent a month in every year since I was born, the walls painted a pale pink and curtains drifting in the soft, tropical breeze, I couldn't shake the emptiness inside my soul. I'd been here for a week and was no closer to feeling whole again. Not after Xander.

I wondered, painfully, if I'd ever feel whole again.

Aunt Maeve knew something was up. She'd been giving me that look of hers that told me she was going to find out the truth. She always did; she had her ways. Oliver and his brothers always complained about their mother's ability to sniff out the truth and unravel their plans before they had a chance to act on whatever misfortune they were plotting.

So far, I'd successfully hidden the fact that my solemn attitude was about a man, and chalked it up to being sad about college being over. My mom was giving me space, for which I was thankful. Aunt Maeve, on the other hand...

I'm sure Maeve thought my melancholy mood had something to do with my powers, or lack thereof. It wouldn't take long for her and my mother to find out I was just a sniveling, heartbroken, puddle of emotions... my heart shattered by a fleeting crush.

I rolled over in my bed, staring out the open window. Bright sun. Blue skies. Another picture-perfect day I'd spent wallowing in my own pity.

But then I heard heavy footsteps in the hall, and Oliver practically kicked in the door on his way in, his voice booming through my cave of self-inflicted depression.

"You're being really lame, Lena," he said, flopping down on the empty side of my bed. I rolled over, glaring at him before I kicked him as hard as I could in the shin.

Oliver was handsome; I'd give him that, with his curly, copper blond hair, sun-kissed skin, and the sharp, angular features all of us cousins shared. While I had the delicate look of my grandmother Rosalie, Oliver favored his mother, and our grandfather, Ethan—sharp nose, high cheekbones, and a wide, white smile.

He was sarcastic and annoying, but I was allowed to say so. We'd been raised more like siblings.

He was the only triplet who'd inherited my uncle Troy's eyes, however. One was a piercing glacier blue, while the other was steel gray. His uncommon eyes were fixed on mine as he reached out and snatched the pillow from under my head, smacking me firmly over the face with it.

"Get out!" I screeched, but then slid off the side of the bed, my legs stuck in the satin sheets as I sunk clumsily to the floor.

"Well, now that you're up, let's go do something today. Anything—I don't care; I just need to get out of here."

I peered at him from over the top of the mattress, reaching up to smooth the static from my hair while fixing him with a scowl. He blinked at me a few times, then shrugged, rolling off the opposite side of the bed and walking toward the door.

"I'm supposed to be the sad one," he continued, tapping his fingers on the doorframe.

"I'm not sad—"

"What would you call it, then?"

I pursed my lips, unable to think of a quick excuse for the fact I'd spent the last week closed up in my room.

"You can tell me all about him while we lay out on the beach," he said, barely slipping out of the way before the pillow I'd chucked across the room hit its mark, which would have been his face.

How did he know?

"I'm not—" I was interrupted by the door closing firmly behind him, leaving me alone, again. I sighed heavily, pulling myself upright and walking across the plush, carpeted floor to the vanity on the other side of the room, glancing at my ruffled reflection in the mirror before pulling a silk robe over my

pajamas. I tied the robe across my middle as I padded barefoot toward the door to my bedroom, but paused as my hand rested on the doorknob.

Maybe talking about Xander would make me feel better, despite how foolish I felt.

I opened the door and stepped out in the breezy hallway, then made my way toward the informal dining room on the first floor.

"It's a shame, really," Aunt Maeve murmured as she lounged with her bare feet propped on the sofa, a pen between her teeth. She was holding a stack of papers in her hands, reading over the fine print of some documents pertaining to the wedding. "I often wonder if all of this is for show. The flowers, the band, the candlelit walk down the aisle.... It'll be daytime." She ran her pen over a line of print with a sigh.

I shifted my weight in the armchair I was sitting in, looking past her at the open doors of the terrace that wrapped around the backside of the castle. "Why is it a shame?" I asked.

Maeve glanced at me, her deep blue eyes flashing playfully as she turned her attention back to her papers.

"I don't think I've heard you say a single word since you got here, honey."

"I haven't been feeling well," I replied, crossing my legs. "I'm... jet-lagged."

"Mhmm..."

I chewed the inside of my lip as she set the papers down on the coffee table, twirling her pen over her fingers.

"Where's Mom?" I asked, hoping to change the subject.

Maeve's eyes narrowed on mine for a moment, but then she shrugged, motioning her hand toward the terrace.

"She went on a walk with your dad. They'll be back in time to greet your grandparents and whoever else shows up today." Her face fell a little as she spoke, her brows arching as she sighed. "So much to do—"

My great aunts and uncles would be arriving for the wedding, which was taking place in just a few days. My great aunt Vicky's three daughters, their husbands, and all nine of their children were also expected to attend. George and his two sisters, Eliza and Beatrix and their parents, my great aunt Georgia, and my great Uncle Talon, had just arrived this morning.

My mind spun as I tried to remember all of the faces and names. No wonder Maeve was feeling overwhelmed.

"Can I help in any way?" I asked.

Maeve considered her answer, looking me up and down before rising to her feet. She was tall, almost a head taller than me, and I had to look up at her to meet her eye.

“Well, the ballroom is being set up for the party tomorrow night. The florists will be here any minute. Maybe you could oversee the centerpieces?”

My stomach was tied in a knot as she spoke. Oh, Goddess. Out of everything she could have had me do, this was it?

She walked away before I had a chance to ask for another task.

The ballroom was decorated lavishly, and I could help but gape as I walked inside. Luke, my ten year old cousin and the fourth and final child of Maeve and Troy, was walking beside me, looking bored with a glimmer of mischief in his gray eyes.

“Don’t touch anything,” I said sternly, to which he rolled his eyes and stuck his hands in the pockets of his shorts.

“This is so boring! Why do I have to be here?” he griped, kicking at the mosaic tile with the toe of his sandal.

“Because your dad said so, that’s why.” I didn’t have much patience at the moment. Luke was a little menace, and my grandfather had said on multiple occasions that he was Maeve’s karma for all of her antics as a child.

Luke was gone in a flash, his curly brown hair flying out behind him as he sprinted to the far side of the ballroom.

“Time how fast it takes me to run back to the other side! I can do it with my eyes closed, and while holding my breath!”

“No! Don’t—” I stopped mid-sentence, my eyes fixing on the red-haired woman watching my exchange with Luke. She was looking right at me, a good distance away, but I knew she’d recognized me in an instant.

“Lena? What are you doing here?” Abigail said excitedly, setting down a basket of orchids and lilies as she walked in my direction. I froze.

I’d known this moment would come. Viv and Heather would have already not only received my letters explaining everything, but also two invitations to the wedding, and a tab paid by the palace at the same shop where I’d purchased my dress.

“Leeeeeeeeena! How many seconds was that?” Luke screamed as he slammed into me, nearly knocking me off my feet.

“I—”

“Oh my Goddess, how the hell did you get a nannying position here?” Abigail gaped as she closed the distance between us. She peered down at Luke, whose face was previously pink. Little devil.

“That’s a bad word,” he mumbled, and Abigail gave him a brilliant smile, which made him beam up at her. “Lena’s not my nanny, she’s my cousin!”

The floor dropped from beneath my feet. I closed my eyes, wincing as I waited for the onslaught of shocked and angry questions to flood from Abigail's mouth. But when I opened my eyes, she was just smiling at me, a smirk plastered on her mouth.

"So," Abigail grinned slyly, crossing her arms. "Are you going to introduce me to the princes, or what?"