

## Kings Breeder 551

### [Sold As The Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 551](#)

\*Lena\*

Mom spread the amber-colored gown over my bed, taking a step back to look at it fully. Her pale brown eyes moved over the glistening silk fabric, but her black brows knitted in frustration.

"No, not this one," she murmured as she turned back to the wardrobe and began to flip through the assortment of dresses she'd packed for me before arriving in Avondale.

I was sitting at the vanity while a maid curled and braided my hair for the ball, the first event leading up to the wedding. My lowlights had all but vanished now, leaving nothing but a sheet of silver-white cascading down my back. I dusted my cheeks with blush while I watched my mom through the mirror. Her fingers settled on an ice-blue gown, embroidered with silver crescent moons. It had long organza sleeves, with a low back and a high neckline. It was one of my favorites, and most importantly, it would hide the half-moon scar Xander had left above my breast.

"Your dad wants you in the amber gown, but it just doesn't work with your eyes," she said in a low voice, almost to herself.

I smiled at her through the mirror as she pulled the blue dress from its hanger and laid it over the bed. "I like the blue one better. It's a better fit. I can still wear my tiara and sash with it. Everyone knows I'm part of Drogomor, anyway," I said playfully.

Mom gave me a sideways smile as she stepped away from the dress and made her way to the vanity, smiling gracefully at the maid.

"You can wear the moonstone and opal tiara your grandmother gave me." She twirled one of my curls around her finger before pinning it in place.

My mother's name was Hanna, and she was the daughter of Eugene, the Alpha King of Findali. But she hadn't always held her titles. There'd been a time, twenty years ago now, when she was a troubled girl from Red Lakes, whisked away to Winter Forest when Dad was meant to marry my aunt Kacidra, instead of her.

But my parents had been mates, and the first year of their relationship had been marred by troubles I couldn't fathom. Born during the war of my grandparents' time, they'd be raised in peace, but when they were my age....

The maid took her leave. Mom started to rummage through the jewelry box on the vanity, pulling out a few dainty bracelets. I turned to look at her, admiring her long, ink-black hair that was braided and twisted into an updo. She rarely wore makeup. She'd never needed it; her face was always beautifully pink around her cheeks and her dark lashes brought out the color of her eyes.

Growing up, I'd longed for even an ounce of her beauty. Compared to my mom, and my aunts, I felt rather plain.

"Are you ready to get dressed?" she asked, and I nodded, but then went rigid beneath her touch.

“I can do it, Mom. You still need to get dressed too.”

I didn't want her to see the mark. I hadn't told anyone yet, even when Oliver prodded me for details and made fun of me for wearing a shirt over my bathing suit when we went to the beach last night to catch the sunset.

I was planning on introducing him to Abigail tonight. I'd secured her an invitation to the ball, and I knew for a fact she'd spent the majority of the day shopping for a dress.

“Well, we have about thirty minutes until we need to be downstairs to greet the guests,” she reminded me, then kissed me on the cheek.

I closed my eyes against her touch, smiling to myself as she pulled away and left the room. I glanced at my reflection once more, then padded across the carpet, lifting the blue gown into the air.

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The ballroom was glimmering in the light of three crystal chandeliers. The whole place was dripping in gold as I walked around the room gripping a flute of pink champagne. It was too sweet for my taste, but so was everything else in the room. The cake table was stacked full, nearly toppling over with sweets.

I smirked as I saw the top of Hollis's blonde head in the crowd, her mouth twisted in a beaming smile as the Alphas and Lunas from across the pack lands greeted her and bestowed their congratulations. Will was nowhere to be found, at least so far. I'd seen Charlie though, the most amiable of my cousins, and was pleased to indulge in some quiet conversation with him before the guests began to fill the ballroom.

This party, this ball, it was meant to be a celebration of the upcoming nuptials. It was one of three royal events that would take place before the wedding ceremony this weekend. It felt like overkill, in my opinion, but knowing Hollis and Will, I wouldn't have expected anything less.

Through the crowd, I spotted the back of Eliza's head, her black hair long and loose over her dainty shoulder. George's sister turned to me as she approached, her green eyes widening as she took in my gown.

“I've been looking for you all night,” she beamed, taking my hand and squeezing it. “I thought you were supposed to be wearing the colors of Drogomor.”

“It's not like I blend in,” I laughed, bringing the sickly sweet champagne to my lips. Isla, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Beta Keaton, and his mate Myla, watched me with curiosity as I scanned the crowd.

“Who are you looking for?” Isla said with a tilt of her head. She had Keaton's golden hair, but it was curly, and she favored her mother's deep skin tone and dark eyes. Isla was going to be an absolute stunner in a few years. She was wearing an age-appropriate dress with turquoise ruffles, her hair woven through a tiara littered with sea glass.

“Oliver,” I replied, glancing between Eliza and Isla. “Have you seen him, Lizzie? I've been walking around the ballroom for the better part of an hour with no luck.”

“I haven't, but I'm not surprised. This has to be exceedingly painful for him. I heard Hollis hasn't even looked in his direction in the past several weeks, and Oliver has been having to run all kinds of errands with Will in preparation for the wedding.”

I grimaced, shaking my head. Poor Oliver—the love of his life was marrying his brother, and yet he'd still been happy and playful like usual. This entire situation made my problems seem small.

“Maeve said you're sad over a boy. Is that true?” Isla asked innocently, fluttering her eyelashes. What was up with this younger generation? Luke had said something similar, but he wasn't nearly as gracious about it.

“What makes you think I'm sad?” I asked, wiggling my brows at her.

She giggled, but then snapped her head toward the end of the ballroom where her parents were currently making their way through the crowd.

“They're here to send me to bed,” she said under her breath. “I'm gonna go hide—”

“I'm supposed to be keeping an eye on you!” Lizzie cried, turning to chase after Isla.

I had been the babysitter of my younger cousins not too long ago, but that privilege had been passed on to the now eighteen year old Lizzie. I sighed, feeling a bit sorry for her before downing the rest of my champagne as I started to turn about the ballroom once more.

No one other than my family members talked to me as I made my way through the party. People glanced in my direction, of course, their curious gazes taking in my white hair.

They didn't look at me the same way they gazed upon my grandmother Rosalie. They looked at me with skepticism, obvious curiosity, and fear.

If Dad had ever been approached by another Alpha to ask about the possibility for my hand in marriage, he'd never said so. I found it unlikely anyone had, despite my incredible rank. As I turned the corner in the ballroom, walking past the sweet table once more, an Alpha actually moved his handsome adult son away from me, whispering frantically into his ear as they watched me walk past.

I ignored the stares, but that didn't mean they didn't hurt. I'd grown so used to blending in and just being normal, being me. Not Princess Selene.

“Lena!”

I turned my head to find Abigail standing toward the center of the ballroom, her face flushed from dancing. She waltzed over to me, doing a little spin in the emerald green gown she was wearing that hugged every curve of her body like a glove. The tops of her breasts were on full display, and I smirked as the group of young men she'd been talking to watched her walk away, their eyes wide and full of longing.

“Having a good time?” I grinned as she hugged me.

She was panting slightly, but her mouth twisted into a huge smile, nodding her head. “This is the best night of my life. I still can't believe it. I honestly don't know how you were able to keep this a secret for so long. Why? Are you not, like, proud of all of this?”

“Look around,” I said into her ear, “Do you see how everyone is looking at me? It's like you think it is.”

Abigail saw the odd looks as people turned their heads in our direction, always looking away before I could catch their gaze.

“They’re intimidated by you—”

“They’re scared of me. There’s a difference. I’m supposed to be the White Queen one day, and no one looks to me as a leader. I’m a freak—”

“You are not a freak,” she said in a low, serious voice. “Goddess, Lena. Cut yourself some slack. You’re the most striking woman in this room. That Hollis chick has been glaring at you all night, trust me. You’re upstaging her.”

Good, I thought, but then felt a little mean. I didn’t dislike Hollis before, but I just couldn’t help myself now.

“Look, what if I stayed with you tonight, stayed by your side? I’ll fight anyone who even flashes a narrowed eye in your direction. What do you say?”

“I’m so happy you’re here,” I breathed, leaning into her for a moment. “But look, all of those guys are waiting for you to come back—”

She threw her head back and laughed, shaking her head. “Oh, them? Nothing but sons of Betas and warriors.”

“That matters?”

“Of course it matters!” she laughed, a glimmer of mischief in her eyes. “I’m surrounded by royalty, Lena. The least I could do is aim high. This might be my only shot.”

I knew she was joking, of course, doing her absolute best to get a rise out of me and make me smile.

“I met your cousin Charlie. Well, I saw him. That counts, in my opinion. He’s just as handsome as I knew he would be.”

“He’s not your type,” I said as a waiter passed with a tray of champagne. We each took a glass, turning back to look over the crowd. “I love him dearly, but he’s... too nice. He’d never challenge you, and you need that.”

“Hmm.... You’re not wrong. I do like a bit of turmoil from time to time.”

But she suddenly went rigid, her fingers grasping the champagne flute so tightly her knuckles turned white. I looked around, then relaxed my shoulders, giving Oliver a wry smile.

“Oliver, have you met my friend Abigail?”

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\*Lena\*

Oliver stopped short of us, his gaze moving slowly away from my face and settling on Abigail. I looked between them, noticing the flex of Oliver’s jaw and the way Abigail swallowed, her mouth twitching into a nervous smile.

Normally, my boisterous, confident Abigail would have had him already wrapped around her finger, deep in some conversation while she purred into his ear. But she was shockingly quiet, and her cheeks had gone pink.

“Abigail, you said?” Oliver bowed his head lightly in greeting, which caused Abigail’s hand to twitch as it grazed my own. He met her eye, and the look they shared made me blush. I’d been right, I guessed. Oliver was much more suited to her than Charlie would have been.

“Yes,” she replied, her voice dripping with nothing but politeness. She began to curtsy to him, but he held out a hand, touching her lightly on the elbow to stop her before she bent her knees.

“A friend of my cousin is a friend of mine,” he grinned, which made Abigail blush even harder.

I rolled my eyes away from them and looked out over the crowd once more. People were milling about in groups of varying sizes. There was no real itinerary for the night’s activities. The only thing on the menu was dancing, eating, and being merry. At least, that was according to my extremely stressed-out Aunt Maeve.

My mother walked by our little group and gave me a smile, her eyes glancing at Oliver and Abigail. She tilted her head toward them as she passed, and I shrugged one shoulder, her silent chuckle as she turned away bringing a ripple of warmth across my chest.

Oliver laughed at something Abigail said, and it was a real laugh, not the good-natured chuckle of the aristocrat that he’d been trained to be. I turned back to them, nothing the blush had faded from Abigail’s face and she seemed much more at ease now that the theoretical ice had been broken.

“You did the flower arrangements?” Oliver asked her, his eyes dancing with delight.

She grinned, nodding her head and giving him a little shrug of her shoulder. “I did.”

“They’re delightful,” he replied, just as a man walked up behind him, drunkenly slapping him on the shoulder.

“Oli, good to see ya, man. I did’na think you’d show up to this—uh—whatever this is,” slurred the young man. He smelled sharply of champagne, and his tuxedo was unbuttoned, his bowtie hanging limp against his chest.

I recognized him as Rex, the son of a lesser Alpha who ruled over a young pack in the eastern tip of Valoria. Rex looked Abigail up and down several times, his green gaze fixing itself firmly on her chest. Oliver shrugged him off, and Rex staggered backward, then forward again, almost crashing into the three of us as he tried to right himself.

“Must be weird for you, huh? At a party for your girl—” Rex swayed again, clasping the shoulder of an unsuspecting waiter who happened to be walking by. “Oops, sorry—” he giggled.

Abigail raised her eyebrows, and Oliver began to seeth, his cheeks going ruddy as he took a step in front of Abigail, shielding her as Rex let go and took one stumbling step forward.

He bumped into me, and I glared at him, but he only giggled like a schoolgirl as he reached up to poke my hair.

“What an odd color. I’ve heard about you—”

“Go away!” I said with conviction, but Rex’s eyes twinkled with mischief. I could see the heat beginning to blaze behind Oliver’s eyes as he glanced at me, then looked over his shoulder at Abigail. Oliver loved a good fight. I thought it likely that he’d somehow get Rex out into the back gardens and beat him to a pulp if he had the chance to do so without being seen.

“Who is that?” Rex purred, then hiccuped, pointing a finger at Abigail.

Oliver stepped to the side, his hands reaching behind him to move Abigail into his shadow.

“Ah, new girl, huh? What was it like losing your girlfriend to your brother? Look at this place—” Rex waved his hand in a short circle, his eyes glossed over and red with drink. “This could’ve been for you—”

“That’s enough,” Oliver said, his voice sounding so much like our grandfather’s.

Abigail glanced at me, but I kept my gaze on Rex. People were starting to stare in our direction, drawn by Rex’s not-so-quiet ramblings.

“You’re no fun,” Rex hiccuped, turning and stumbling away, his body swaying violently to one side and knocking into a woman standing nearby.

She dropped her drink and glass shattered across the floor, followed by loud exclamations for everyone nearby.

We watched as two warriors approached Rex, taking him by the arms and dragging him away.

Oliver looked around, his eyes narrowed on the crowd for a moment before he relaxed. He released his grip on Abigail’s hands. I hadn’t even noticed he’d been holding them until he returned to his original position in front of us.

“Sorry about that,” he said with a wry smile toward Abigail, smoothing down his tuxedo.

“What a jerk. His father is going to be so embarrassed,” I added, sipping from my champagne.

“His father isn’t here. He’s one of Will’s friends,” Oliver said, low in his throat.

I saw a flash of hurt wash over his face, but only for a moment.

“This must be awful for you,” Abigail said softly. I could hear her voice wavering for a moment as she said the words.

“I think I may have gotten off easy,” he shrugged, settling his eyes on her face. “I mean, Rex wasn’t wrong. Look at this place. This wouldn’t have been what I wanted. I know Will had little to do with this. This is all Hollis.” He paused, looking down at his feet for a moment before meeting my eye. “I don’t think I knew her as well as I thought.”

I smiled at him, relief flooding through me. I’d been worried about what this week would be like for him. I knew his self-deprecating jokes and overall playful demeanor were just a mask over what he was really feeling.

The two of us had always been good at that.

Oliver turned to Abigail and asked her to dance. She happily agreed and looked over her shoulder at me as he led her away, squealing internally and grinning as broadly as possible.

I thought back on that day in the cafe, the last day anything had felt even remotely normal. Abigail had joked about dying her hair blonde to catch the attention of the princes.

But look at her now, twirling in Oliver's arms, I thought, smiling and crossing my arms over my chest as I watched them.

"Who's that?" Dad asked behind me.

I glanced over my shoulder at him, smiling as I turned back to Oliver and Abigail. "Abigail, my friend from Morhan—one of my roommates."

"I haven't seen Oliver smile like that in a long time," he said softly, then he chuckled as he lifted his glass of scotch to his lips before adding, "Your grandfather will be happy."

"Well, Oliver is his favorite, so that doesn't surprise me," I replied shortly, shaking my head. "When do they get here, anyway?"

"Last I heard, sometime tomorrow," he replied. "Listen, your mother and I need to talk to you about something—tomorrow, when your grandmother is here."

"About what?"

But Dad didn't reply. He turned, greeting another Alpha who had walked up to us, the two of them exchanging niceties and then turning away from me completely.

They were going to be discussing what was next for me, that was certain. I'd probably be told I'd be going to the Castle Drogomor to begin my duties as Princess, or worse, they were hoping to marry me off to some son of an Alpha, hoping for an advantageous connection between our families.

I found the idea of being married off unlikely. Times were different now. Hollis had come from a wealthy, high-ranking family in Poldesse, but she wasn't from a royal bloodline. Will was, essentially, marrying a commoner.

I let my mind wander as I turned back to the dancers, wondering painfully what options I would have if things had been different between Xander and me. He'd told me he would've made it work. I wondered if that meant following me from throne to throne as my rule extended from not only Drogomor and Winter Forest, but the entirety of Valoria.

I was the only child of the Alpha King.

I'd be the first Alpha Queen, if there was such a thing, in the entire history of the pack lands. That was, of course, on top of being the White Queen in tandem.

No wonder everyone looked at me weird.

I decided to turn about the room again and stopped at one of the long tables that was filled to the brim with all kinds of different foods. I picked up a bacon-wrapped date and plopped it into my mouth, chewing meditatively as I looked back over the crowd.

The sun had set, and the ceiling-height windows reflected the golden light coming from the chandeliers. People were milling about along the terrace behind me, all six doors open to the ballroom to let in the tropical air.

I looked back at the dance floor and noticed that Abigail and Oliver were gone. I couldn't see them anywhere as I scanned the faces of everyone in the room. Hopefully, they'd snuck off together, I thought with a grin, but then I felt a little pinch along my breasts beneath my dress.

I reached up to touch the mark through the fabric. It burned, and the fabric was rubbing against it. It hadn't hurt before.

"You okay?" Oliver said as he walked up beside me, his hair ruffled and face reddened from the exertion of dancing with Abigail. She was beside him, looking just as ruffled, but her smile was undeniable.

"I'm fine," I said, but it was a lie. My chest tightened as the mark began to throb, the pain of it sending a rush of heat up my neck and into my cheeks.

There was a ripple of fresh conversation washing over the crowd. A commotion of sorts was taking place near the entrance of the ballroom. Oliver turned his head, his brows raised as the crowd began to part. I could see Aunt Maeve in the distance, turning her body to look at the entrance with a quizzical, then surprised look etched across her face.

I held my hand to my chest, swallowing against the lump that was forming in my throat. My eternal reminder of Xander hadn't troubled me at all until this moment, and now I was close to tears.

"Lena, what's wrong with you?" Oliver urged, his voice edged with concern as he closed the distance between us.

But then the crowd seemed to part, and a man stepped forward, dressed in a tuxedo with a black and crimson sash draped over one shoulder that was pinned with the emblems of the pack in which he ruled.

I opened my mouth, but there were no words on the tip of my tongue to convey my shock and confusion as the man walked closer.

I looked up into his dark eyes, the flakes of amber glistening in the chandelier light above our heads.

"Xander?"

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\*Xander\*

If she didn't know the truth, well, she knew now.

The look on her beautiful face was exactly what I thought it'd be as I walked up to her, bowing my head toward her in a formal greeting. But I gave her a wry smile as I straightened my neck, looking into her pale gray eyes as they widened.

I bobbed my head at Abigail, whose mouth gaped in surprise. Prince Oliver arched his brow at me, then looked at Lena, his face lined with confusion.



“You know this guy?” he said, pointing his thumb in my direction.

Lena snapped her mouth shut, her eyes narrowing and her shoulders trembling. She was going to bolt.

One, two, three...

She was gone in a flash, running out the open doors to the terrace and disappearing around the corner. I pursed my lips, tilting my head toward Abigail.

“How are you—”

“What the hell are you doing here!” Abigail hissed, her face flushing with all color.

“You know him too?” Prince Oliver was thoroughly confused, looking from me to Abigail as he waited for an explanation.

“I apologize,” I said, smiling at Oliver but not bowing. His rank was below mine, after all. “I’m Alexander Crimson, Alpha King of Egoren.”

“Alpha King?” they said in unison, to which I smiled, arching my brows.

“Did you say Crimson, as in Crimson Creek?” Abigail asked with marked confusion.

“Unrelated; that was merely a coincidence,” I replied, tapping my fingers on the glass of bourbon I was holding.

“I’ve never heard of Egoren—” Oliver began, but I waved my hand in dismissal.

“It’s far south—”

“South?” He crossed his arms over his chest, looking me up and down, his gaze settling on the crest pinned to my chest. “A new pack, then?”

“Very old, actually. Anyway, it’s been a pleasure. Congratulations on your new sister-in-law, Prince Charlie—I mean Oliver. I need to go find my mate.”

Oliver was seething, but I just couldn’t help myself. I’d spent the last hour trying to gain entrance to the ballroom, being stopped by everyone and their mothers it seemed. Before that, I’d spent the last week jetting across the entirety of the f\*cking pack lands trying to find the couple that could help... help all of us. I’d been successful, and

Lena was who I was here for now.

I had an incredible amount of explaining to do.

“Did you just say your mate?” Abigail asked, her mouth remaining ajar out of surprise.

“Didn’t Lena tell you?”

“Tell me—No. No, you’re not. You can’t be—”

I passed them in two long strides, Oliver hollering after me as I stepped out onto the terrace and walked briskly around the corner where I’d seen Lena disappear. I could feel her. The mark on my shoulder was throbbing painfully as I walked the length of the terrace. Being a stone-cold bastard to her on the train

platform in Morhan had nearly killed me. The train had pulled out of the station, ripping my heart out with it.

But she'd been in danger without knowing it, and I had no choice but to leave her behind while I sought help.

Ethan Gray. There was a time when he'd just been the Alpha of Drogomor, his title hardly holding weight. Now, he was titleless because he'd stepped down from all of that but remained the most powerful man in the pack lands because of the way he'd spread his family into positions of power that spanned continents. He was the King of the World, in my humble opinion. And I'd just spent the last three days groveling at his feet.

Whether or not he'd believed a word I had said, well, that was yet to be seen. His eyes had flashed with understanding the second I spoke his brother's name, however. The doors were opening, so to speak, and we had no way to stop it.

There was only one person who could, and she had no idea how.

I reached the edge of the terrace after a good while, which I found exceedingly annoying. It wrapped around the whole castle, which was three times as large as any castle I'd ever seen. It was a city within a city, and I was breathing heavily by the time I reached the gate to the secluded back garden. It was ajar, the wrought iron handle still warm from Lena's touch.

"Lena!" I called out, stepping into the shadow of a thicket of towering palm trees tangled in Monstera vines.

I took a few steps more, breathing deeply in the rich, humid air. It felt nice here. Really nice—

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\*Lena\*

My hand throbbed and I stifled a scream as I held it to my chest, the force of the slap I'd just planted on Xander's face reverberating through my body as I staggered backward. He cursed, bending over as he held his cheek, then turned his head to look at me, his teeth pulled back in a sneer.

His lip was bleeding, the blood staining his teeth red in the eerie light of the moon drifting through the palm trees, shrouding us in darkness.

"I deserved that—"

"What the hell are you doing here?" I screamed, but in reality, it was only a strangled sob. I reached up to wipe my tears, praying to whoever was listening that my makeup was still intact.

"To find you, obviously," he said, rubbing his cheek. I'd left my handprint on the side of his face.

"You broke up with me, Xander!"

"I had to get you as far away from me as possible until I figured this out!"

I glared at him, crossing my arms over my chest. He huffed, then spit blood onto the sand-colored tiles beneath our feet.

“You look beautiful, by the way,” he said, wiping his mouth and straightening his tuxedo.

I looked over his outfit, my eyes lingering on the royal crest on his sash. “Who are you?” I asked, meaning for it to come out harsh and cold, but my voice was a whisper edged with grief. I barely recognized him.

“The Alpha King of Egoren,” he said softly, damn near casually as he adjusted his sash. He wasn’t even looking at me as he said it.

“There are only two Alpha Kings—”

“In this realm,” he interrupted, his eyes piercing mine.

I swallowed, furrowing my brow. “Realm? I don’t understand—”

“I don’t want to talk about that right now. It doesn’t matter, not yet.” He took a step toward me, but I moved away, shaking my head.

“We will talk about it now.”

“There are other things—”

“Xander,” I breathed, fighting back tears as I looked into his eyes. “Please.”

The pain was evident in my voice, and he didn’t miss it. His face softened, his eyes misting for a moment before he cleared his throat and tucked his hands into the pockets of his trousers.

“I came here a year ago. I was looking for something... someone, in particular.” He sighed, his face etched with pain for a moment. “You told me your mother was from Lycaon’s line... from the people of Lycenna. Well, so am I, but it’s different—”

“What are you talking about—”

“I’m trying to explain!” he bellowed, then shook his head, mumbling an apology as he ran his hand over his face.

“My people left your realm, starting new in the kingdom Lycaon created before he died. I rule it now. But, my line... my ancestors passed on powers like your own. It was a curse, though—dark powers, soul-sucking powers.”

He shifted his weight as I held my breath, my mind reeling as his eyes met mine again.

“My uncle married someone with the powers of the White Queens, someone from your line, but removed. A distant cousin, perhaps. They were able to wed, to be together. They were mates.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“My mate was here, Lena. I left my home to find her. I left to find my Luna, the mother of my future children—”

His eyes widened as he dropped his gaze to his feet, then staggered back a step, pinching the bridge of his nose like he had a headache.

“Are you alright?” I asked before I could stop myself. Every fiber of my being wanted to rush forward and throw my arms around him, to comfort him, even though he didn’t deserve it.

“I’m fine,” he replied, but it didn’t sound like he meant it. He didn’t sound fine at all.

Several moments of silence passed, filled with the faint vibrations of the lively party going on in the ballroom on the other side of the castle, and the waves as they rushed the shore beneath the bluff upon which the castle had been built. I waited for him to continue, my blood rushing through my body, my mind reeling as it waited for answers.

“I needed a White Queen,” he said, meeting my eye again. “My curse is not as strong as those who came before me, but it’s there. We’re cursed with living without the light that illuminates our powers, Lena. You’re that light for me.”

“But we met in college—”

“It was all fabricated, everything. I am intelligent; don’t get me wrong. My course of study came naturally, but I had none of the prerequisites to gain entry to the program in a traditional manner. I lied, Lena. I lied because I was trying to find you.”

“How would you have even known I was there?”

“Rumors alone. You had the uh, the hair—” he waved his hand in my direction, looking suddenly boyish. “I went to Valoria first. I thought your aunt... I didn’t know how large your family was. I didn’t know about your generation. Luna Maeve was already married—”

“Are you serious?” I gaped, unable to hide my shock. “You had a list of White Queens—”

“Of course not!” he snapped. “I only had the little information I’d been told as a child, Lena. I thought all White Queens had white hair, for one. I thought it was odd that you were the only one outside of your grandmother who had that mark of your heritage. I came to Morhan when I heard the rumors in town that the princess, the grandchild of the White Queen herself, was studying abroad. I went to six different campuses before I found you.

And I didn’t know... I didn’t know what you’d be to me—”

“What I’d be to you?” I repeated, taking a step toward him. A memory flitted through my mind of when the two of us were on our field study, snuggling up in the bed we’d shared. It felt like a lifetime ago now. Things had been so easy then, before everything had turned to ashes.

“I was going to take you away. Back to my home. I... I figured love would come later. I didn’t believe my only chance of having a mate would be... I love you. I knew you were my mate the second I saw you for the first time—”

“You were going to take me away?”

“Yes, by force, if necessary.”

He was being brutally honest with me. I could see the pain of it written all over his face.

“You knew who I was the entire time?”

“Yes.”

“What happened the morning after—” I reached up to touch the mark on my chest.

He ran his tongue along the inside of his lower lip, his eyes flicking down to meet mine.

“Crimson Creek—”

“Lena?” Uncle Troy’s voice cut through Xander’s words, and we both turned to face where he was standing at the gate to the back garden. He was staring at Xander, his eyes narrowed on his cut lip.

“What’s going on out here?”

I pursed my lips. Uncle Troy, well, he’d seen some things in his days. If I were to place my money on a fight between him and Xander....

“Catching up with a friend is all,” I said quickly, hurrying forward and passing through the gate. Xander followed me with his eyes and I gave him a look and a quick gesture of my hands to keep quiet.

“Uh-huh,” Troy said, his eyes still on Xander. He eventually took a step backward through the gate.

“Your parents are looking for you,” he said, walking to my side. He looked back at Xander once more before extending his arm to me.

“I think... I think I’m going to go to bed, if that’s alright. I don’t feel well, I’ve had too much champagne.”

“I’ll walk you—”

“It’s fine,” I said hurriedly, shaking my head as I walked with him across the terrace.

My heart was bursting out of my chest, my fingertips prickling with heat.

I needed to be alone.

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 554

\*Lena\*

The ballroom was situated toward the main entrance of the palace, and I found it rather easy to sneak into my room without being seen leaving the party.

The night was young, but I tore away at my gown anyway, struggling to find the zipper under the pale blue tulle that fell over my shoulder and down my back. I was panting by the time I’d stepped out of the dress and taken out the pin holding back my hair. I glanced in the mirror as I pulled on a silky pajama set, noticing my smudged makeup and overall disheveled appearance.

Xander was an Alpha? How could that possibly be? And where the hell was Egoren?

I paced the room, cleaning up the pins I’d shaken from my hair, and hung the dress back in the wardrobe. While my room was far removed from the ballroom, I could still feel the vibrations of music and chatter coming up from the carpeted floor, tingling up my legs as I paced.

But strangely enough, the back of my head began to tingle, like little pops of electricity going off inside my head. I blinked, scratching my temple as static filled my mind, followed my silence.

'Where are you?' Xander's voice came through my mind, clear and edged with frustration.

I blinked again, furrowing my brow as I turned to face my reflection in the vanity.

'I know you can hear me—'

'Get out of my head!' I said over the mind-link, adrenaline coursing through my skin as I looked around the room and then went to the window, standing to the side so no one below could see me.

'We need to talk about this!'

'I need to process what you've told me, Alpha King,' I said with a hint of sarcasm.

He was quiet for a moment, then a low chuckle filled the far recesses of my mind. We were able to mind-link because of the mark; I knew that for certain. What I didn't know was how to block him out. I retreated from the window and sat on the edge of the bed, gripping my knees.

'Where are you?' he repeated, but I shook my head, trying to will my mind to close whatever door he'd opened to me.

'I'm in my room—'

'And where is that? This place is... huge.'

'You're not coming up here—'

'Second or third floor, then?'

'Didn't my uncle kick you out of the party?' There was silence again, but only for a moment. I could feel the smirk touching his lips from wherever he was.

'Quite the opposite, actually. I'm rather fond of your mother, and that tall woman... Luna Maeve?'

I paled, glancing out the window once more before I rose from the bed and slipped a robe over my pajamas. It wasn't cold. It wasn't ever cold in Avondale, but a chill ran through my body nonetheless.

'What did you say to them?'

'Nothing about us,' he said, and I could tell he meant it. His voice caught, almost like he was disappointed. 'That wouldn't have been fair—'

'Like you know anything about fair, Xander.' I walked to the door and flipped off the light, shrouding myself in darkness.

Xander's voice ceased to tickle the recesses of mind, fading into the darkness.

But then there was a knock on my door.

I turned my head sharply toward the barrier, noticing I'd left it unlocked. I threw myself at the door as it opened, but Xander wasn't the man who walked through the threshold.

I'd been trying to launch myself into the door to prevent it from opening, and I would have been successful had I moved just one second sooner.

I tackled Oliver, throwing my full weight against him, which sent us spilling into the hallway. He yelped in surprise as the back of his head hit the floor.

"I'm sorry!" I cried, my robe caught on the royal broaches lining his sash as I tried to roll off of him.

"Goddess, Lena! What the hell!" He reached up and unclasped the sash, and it dangled from my robe and I stood up.

I towered over him, my face twisted in concern as he felt the back of his head and then looked for any traces of blood on his finger. He relaxed then, sighing deeply as he continued to lay on the floor.

"Mom would've killed us both if we got blood on the carpet. They just refurbished this entire area."

"What are you doing up here?" I asked, reaching down to help him to his feet.

He straightened his tuxedo, then reached up to undo the tie he was wearing, loosening it from his neck.

"Hiding," he answered, a teasing grin on his face. "Just like you. Your mate is the talk of the party now. Hollis isn't happy."

His grin grew a little wider at his ex-girlfriend's expense. He stepped past me into my room and flipped on the light, then sat on the edge of my bed.

I stood in the doorway, searching his face.

"So, are you going to tell me what's going on?" he asked, tapping his fingers on his knee.

"It's none of your business—"

"It's about to be everyone's business," he retorted, tilting his head.

I picked the sash from my robe, tossing it on a table near the door and walked inside, closing and locking it behind me.

"What has he been saying?"

"Just explaining who he is," Oliver said causally, examining his nails.

"And?"

"Introducing himself to the family—"

"But what did he say, exactly?" I pleaded, which caused Oliver to shift his weight uncomfortably on the bed.

"Well, he told your parents, and mine, where Egoren is, for one. Soren, you know—"

"W-what? As in—"

"Another realm," Oliver said dramatically, wiggling his fingers with a smug look on his face.

"That can't be right—"

"Your parents seemed to believe it, as did mine. No one batted an eyelash at it. Will was a little skeptical. He asked him a bunch of questions before Mom told him to go tend to his betrothed," Oliver

sighed, arching his brows as he considered his next words, “but I think Will was more bothered by the fact every female eye in the room was fixed on your mate the second he walked into the party.”

I could have made a comment about Will. It probably would have lightened the mood, given the obvious rift between the two brothers. But I fixated on how Oliver had, for a second time, called Xander my mate.

“How did you know?” I asked, and he knew exactly what I was referring to.

He knitted his hands around one knee, leaning back a bit as he looked me up and down. “He told me as much after you took off. It’s true, isn’t it?”

“Kind of—”

“He marked you, then.” Oliver’s voice was suddenly grave, his eyes flashing with fury as he waited for me to say something like, “Xander forced me into it,” or, “He did it against my will.”

“I marked him, too,” I breathed, feeling a little lightheaded as I sank into the stool in front of the vanity.

“Why? You’re not twenty-one—”

“You and I both know why,” I whispered, looking into his eyes. Understanding flashed behind his eyes as he chewed the inside of his cheek, nostrils flaring.

“Do you love him?”

I shifted my weight on the stool, crossing my legs.

“I did... do. But we ended things. Mutually.”

“You rejected each other?”

I thought of the mind-link and the way my mark was still searing the skin around it.

“Not totally,” I answered, stealing a glance in his direction.

“Well, you’re going to have to marry him—”

“Why would you say that?”

“Because it’s true. The second the family finds out about it... when our grandfather finds out about it—”

“No one is going to find out,” I said sharply, my words cutting through the air like a knife.

Oliver arched his brow, then shook his head, rolling his eyes as he leaned back. “My parents invited him to stay here, at the palace, as a guest.”

“You’re joking,” I gasped, but he shook his head. “Why? He wasn’t invited to the wedding!”

“He’s a royal, Lena. Every Alpha is here. And, being the Alpha King of Egoren, well.... My mom wants him to meet Grandpa, you know.”

I pursed my lips, tapping my foot in rhythm with the beating of my thundering heart. “What part of the palace is he staying in?”



“The western wing,” Oliver shrugged, toying with the laces of his shiny black dress shoes. Oliver was usually in sandals and denim shorts, and he looked unrecognizable with his curly hair brushed and gelled.

“What am I supposed to say to my parents, Oliver? I didn’t think this through!”

“What were you thinking, Lena?”

“That I loved him. That he was the future I wanted—that I still want. And that was before I knew who he was, and where he was from. I thought it was impossible then! Now, I... I’m supposed to be White Queen.”

“Yeah, well, so is Mom. But Grandma, well...” He smirked, his eyes glimmering with mirth. “How many times did she say she should’ve died at this point? She’ll be on that throne until we’re old and gray.”

“Grandpa won’t allow it.” I smiled, my mouth twitching as I thought of him. He’d been a grumpy old man all of his life, according to my aunt Maeve. He was in his prime now that he was in his seventies.

“Well, I doubt my mom will let her step down. She doesn’t want to leave Avondale, you know.”

“Have your parents ever discussed what that would look like, when she did have to go rule in Winter Forest?”

Oliver exhaled, shrugging one shoulder.

“Will will likely rule as Alpha of Poldesse. Charlie doesn’t want the title; he’s happy in the navy.”

“What about you?” I asked.

Oliver shrugged again, a wry smile touching his mouth. “I’m gonna just... explore. I’ve been thinking of going to stay with George and Joy in New Dianny, actually. That whole continent is just... endless, untouched.”

“Maybe I’ll go with you,” I grinned, but he gave me a funny look.

“You have to go back to Valoria after this. I thought that was the bargain you made with your parents.”

“We’ll see what happens,” I breathed, turning on the stool to face the mirror. I saw his brow furrow in the mirror’s reflection and smiled softly to myself.

I had no desire, or plan, to go back to Valoria after the wedding.

And, I had no plan to go to Egoren with Xander, either.

“What are you plotting?” Oliver said with a sly grin.

“Nothing,” I said, and it was only half the truth. I’d been looking at jobs in the far-flung packs that rode the far western side of northern Findali for months now. I’d sent out a few letters but hadn’t received a response, at least not yet. “So,” I breathed, crossing my arms over my chest as I looked up at Oliver, “how did things go with Abigail?”

He smiled shyly, rolling his eyes. But a faint blush colored his cheeks, and that was enough of an answer for me.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 555

\*Lena\*

I slept in and found the palace unusually quiet when I finally dressed and walked down to the informal open kitchen and dining room area used primarily by the family. There was, of course, a commercial kitchen occupied by the cooks and servants of the royal palace, but it was easy enough for one of us to make a piece of toast or pour our own coffee and tea.

I wasn't alone as I padded into the kitchen. I looked over my shoulder at the three men seated at the far end of the dining room table, mugs of coffee and empty breakfast plates in front of them—my dad, my uncle Troy, and to my surprise, my grandfather Ethan.

I slid a plate from the dishrack as they eyed me, my father's gaze especially intense. Whatever murmuring conversation they'd been having had ceased entirely when I'd entered the room. I realized then that there was only one thing they could have been talking about, and that was Xander, of course.

I swallowed and turned away from them as I balanced my plate of fruit, bacon, and breakfast sausages, pouring myself some coffee. Troy murmured something I didn't catch, and Dad laughed low in his throat. Grandpa, of course, stayed silent.

"Grandpa," I grinned as I walked toward the table. I set my plate down, deciding to take a seat next to my dad. I walked to the end of the table before sitting down and wrapped an arm around my grandfather's shoulder, giving him a soft peck on the cheek. Those dark brows didn't arch a fraction of an inch as I pulled away and slid into my seat.

"Good afternoon, my favorite granddaughter," he said with a smile as he wiped my chapstick from his cheek.

It was incredibly easy to see that my grandfather had been quite a handsome, albeit formidable, young man. He had the deep cobalt eyes synonymous with his side of the family, eyes he shared with his sister Georgia and had passed on to his daughter and nieces and nephews. His hair was pepper gray and was still thick despite his advancing age. His face showed signs of a long life, a good life, but those lines around his eyes told me he'd seen a thing or two in his day.

He commanded every room he was in, despite the fact he'd been retired for nearly two decades. He was currently flanked by two Alphas but was still the one in charge.

"I'm your only granddaughter," I grinned, then forked a grape into my mouth.

He gave me a sideways, tight-lipped smile in return before he exhaled through his nose and tapped the side of his coffee mug, glancing between my dad and Troy.

"Did I interrupt something?" I asked, but none of the men looked in my direction.

"Nothing, kid. Just business about New Dianny," Troy said softly as he leaned back in the muted yellow chairs that surrounded the table. Compared to the rest of the palace, this section was soft, lived in, and felt more like a home than a testament to their rank. Books lined the far wall, nestled in built-in, ceiling-

height shelves made of the palest wood I'd ever seen. There was no hearth, which would have been a silly addition given that it was humid and warm in the Isles year round, even in the dead of winter. A worn-in, slightly frayed rug lay beneath the scratched-up dining room table, and there were even rings from water stains in the wood. I traced on with my finger as my dad pursed his lips and tilted his head in Troy's direction.

"I take it Robbie and Alison have finished their move to New Dianny, with their pack?"

Troy nodded, and his eyes darkened for a moment as he looked down into his coffee.

"They've recently finished construction on the village, roughly five miles inland. They mean to keep the jungle intact and build out toward the hills beyond, toward the outskirts of the valley where Dianny used to be."

Smart, I thought, listening to their conversation in silence as I ate my breakfast. The Southern Jungle was prone to tropical storms of unheard-of strength. The jungle lining the beaches acted as a barrier. The trees and dense foliage would act as a shield for the village, even if the worst of weather.

"And George is truly going?" Dad asked, his chestnut-colored brows arched as he looked from Grandpa to Troy.

Troy shrugged one shoulder, a gleam of mischief in his eyes as Grandpa groaned and shook his head.

"Gemma and Ernest are in a fit over it," Grandpa said hoarsely, coughing a bit as he lifted his mug to his lips. "But I suspect it has more to do with Eliza likely attending university in Mirage next year. Empty nest."

A hush fell over the table as I glanced at the men over the rim of my coffee mug, each lingering in contemplative silence over a shared grief. I suddenly saw them all for their ages.

Troy and Maeve still had a son at home, a young son. Luke. But everyone else?

Grandpa coughed again, clearing his throat. "Lena?"

"Yes?" I asked, briefly narrowing my eyes at him as he shifted his weight in his chair.

He was still a lean, healthy-looking man, but I'd noticed the color was missing from his cheeks, and the dark circles beneath his eyes were heavier than they had been the last time I'd seen him. The cough was new, as well.

"Your friend, Alexander—"

"He's not my friend," I said, a little too quickly.

Troy's brow arched, and my dad's eyes narrowed as everyone turned to me. I stifled a blush, tilting my head away from the men and pretending to be invested in the single grape that remained on my plate, which was a bit too bruised to be appetizing.

"Whatever he is to you then," Grandpa continued cautiously, although he looked as though he could see right thru me at that moment, "he is... trustworthy, this Alpha King?"

Trustworthy? What could I possibly say? Xander had spent weeks lying to me....

But had he really lied? Maybe not totally. It was more like he'd left major pieces of the truth. He'd also saved my life, marked me, told me he loved me....

I prayed no one could see the heat prickling on my cheeks as I cleared my throat and nodded, but internally, my mind began to spin. He had said he'd come here to find a Luna for his kingdom, a Luna from my bloodline, from the White Queens in particular. He'd said, I was pretty sure, that he meant to do that by any means necessary....

"Wait—" I said, but was cut off by the sound of something thudding against the kitchen counter. Maeve had come into the room, quiet as a mouse, but left no means to let us continue the conversation in peace as she spread the three-ring binders she'd dropped on the counter out in front of her.

The four of us looked up at her, and eventually, her eyes turned on us, narrowing into slits.

"What?" she asked, looking more than a little frazzled as she opened one of the binders.

"There's fresh coffee—" Troy began, but she waved a hand in dismissal.

"Daddy?" she asked tersely without even glancing at the table.

"Yes, Maeve?" Grandpa sighed, rolling his eyes to meet Troy's gaze with a look of indignation spreading over his face.

"Have you been on your walk today?"

Grandpa ran his tongue along his bottom lip, holding my uncle's gaze. I wished I had access to whatever conversation was going on between them, likely over the mind-link, and likely something along the lines of Grandpa willing my uncle to put a muzzle on his mate.

"No—"

"Doctor's orders," Maeve clicked her tongue, her eyes still fixed on the binder she had opened, pieces of lace sticking out between its laminated pages.

Grandpa looked at Maeve then, biting on his lower lip as though he were contemplating saying something cutting, then rose, waving away my dad and Troy's attempts to help him out of his chair.

"I haven't had a shred of peace," he murmured, pointing a shaky finger at Troy, "since you took her away on that boat—"

"I heard that," Maeve said with a smirk.

Dad exhaled deeply, looking from his father to his younger sister.

Grandpa unhooked the top of his cane from his chair and grumbled his farewells, hobbling toward the entrance of the kitchen. He smacked Maeve's ankle with his cane before walking out of sight. She hissed, glowering after him.

But Troy chuckled to himself.

"Leave the man alone, honey—"

"He looks awful, Troy. Rowan, you have to have noticed—"

“Of course, I have,” Dad said in a low hiss, shaking his head. “He’s old, Maeve.”

“He’s not that old. Late seventies isn’t old,” she protested. “Late seventies or no, he’s been through a lot—”

“Mom is set on just letting him be tired, grumpy... limping around with that cane.” Maeve was talking to no one in particular as she looked back down at her binders, but I heard, and saw, the hurt lingering behind her words.

“Is he sick?” I dared to ask.

“I don’t think so, honey. It’s nothing to worry about.”

“Why doesn’t Grandma just give him some of her blood?” I pressed, which elicited a nudge of warning from my dad.

“She won’t do it,” Maeve said heavily, flipping a page in the binder.

I wanted to ask why not, and it must have been written all over my face because Troy inhaled, tilting his head as he looked from his wife, to me.

“Your Grandpa is tired, is all. The journey here was hard on him. I think it’s best if we all—” he looked at Dad, then Maeve, his eyes giving them a silent command, “leave him alone, and let him be.”

It was an answer meant for a child. I furrowed my brow, leaning back in the chair with my arms crossed over my chest.

“He’s dying, isn’t he?”

“Selene—” Dad began, but I caught Maeve’s eyes.

She nodded, her eyes misting for a moment as she gathered up the binders.

“What’s wrong with him?” I asked.

Troy was chewing the inside of his cheek, and Maeve’s eyes flicked from mine to Dad’s, her gaze sharp enough to kill.

“We didn’t want to worry any of you kids,” Dad began as I turned my eyes to meet his.

“We’re not kids,” I said sharply, then winced as Dad’s face fell, his eyes clouding.

“I know. I know,” he said. “He’s been having some trouble with his heart—”

“And he passed out and fell down the stairs at home in Winter Forest! That’s why he’s using a cane!” Maeve cut in,

looking furious.

“He was also cleared by Kacidra,” Troy said sternly, “who said he was fine.”

“She didn’t say he was fine,” Maeve argued.

“She gave him a list of things he needs to do to better his health, Maeve,” Dad corrected.

“Like take walks, and not drink coffee!” she pointed a finger at the coffee mug he’d left on the table. Troy leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest.

“It’s his life, Maeve. He doesn’t want your mom’s help in the matter, and we need to respect his wishes. How would you feel if our sons starting bossing us around and getting on our—”

She held the binder, her face going red with fury. Then, she turned on her heel and sped out of the room.

Troy sighed, running his hand over his face and pinching the bridge of his nose as he said, “Goddess, I cannot wait for this wedding to be over.”

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 556

\*Lena\*

I spent the remainder of the day avoiding everyone. It was rather easy to do, given the immense size of the palace.

I even missed dinner, which was being held in the formal dining room. I knew Xander would be there. I knew without a shadow of a doubt as I went hungry in my room, telling a maid to relay a message to my parents that I wasn’t feeling, that he was schmoozing with my family and using every charismatic weapon in his arsenal to win them over.

He was likely being totally honest about who he was, too. Out of everything we’d done, and we’d done a lot, that was something he’d chosen not to do with me.

I went to bed, expecting Xander’s voice to creep into my head again, but I fell asleep to silence, nothing but the waves outside my balcony lulling me to sleep.

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The morning of the wedding.

I wanted to throw up.

I stood on my balcony with my arms crossed as I stared down at the beach below, where people were walking along the sand in total ignorance of the chaos going on inside the castle. My view was of the public beach, which was surprisingly quiet. I longed to be free of the tight hot rollers covering every inch of my head and the constricting shapewear I was wearing under my robe.

The red dress I’d bought in Morhan had arrived before I’d even touched down in Avondale. It was quickly altered to fit my frame, but I’d chosen the dress before Xander had marked me. The mark would be on full display above the neckline that had my breast on display, even if it was modest enough for a family wedding.

It was too late to turn back now. I’d either have to deal with the questions about my choosing a different dress, or come clean. I didn’t have a choice.

Maeve had seen the dress and thought it was perfect. Mom, on the other hand, was a little vexed at the idea that I’d chosen something so vampy for my cousin’s wedding. Had Maeve not told my mom about

the dress before I came up with some excuse not to wear it, this day may have gone smoother than I expected it to now.

Maybe everyone already knew. Maybe Xander had told them everything at dinner the night before. Maybe he'd even explained what happened in Crimson Creek.

But I doubted it. He'd already said he wouldn't. I had to trust him.

But the mark on my chest... how the hell was I going to explain that?

"There you are!" Eliza said as she came into the room, closing the door behind her with a grin of pure elation on her face. Her hair had been styled in tight curls that bounced on her shoulders as she walked toward me, a tiara laced with pink jewels glinting in the soft midday light.

Eliza was one of Hollis's bridesmaids, an honor that hadn't gone unnoticed when she chose Eliza over me, even though I wouldn't have said yes. Hollis had twelve other bridesmaids, which seemed astronomically excessive. No wonder Maeve was in such a tizzy.

"I thought you were going to get ready with us," Eliza pouted, noticing the hot rollers. I'd yet to put on makeup, but I had at least two hours before the ceremony began. I had time to wallow in my own terrible choices and grab a stiff drink on my way to the altar.

"I don't know any of Hollis's friends," I said softly, leaning on the railing of the balcony.

"They're interesting, I guess. I don't think all of them are her friends, really. They didn't seem all that friendly."

They were likely eyeing a spot in her court, even though no such thing existed. Hollis had skyrocketed to fame in the last year after her relationship with Will became public, and it was no surprise to me that young women began vying over a position in her inner circle.

I tapped my fingers on the railing, wondering if Heather and Viv were going to be here today. If so, my small inner circle would be present as well.

"You should see the dresses we have to wear," Eliza grimaced. "Pure pink. Like, the worst shade of pink you can imagine. Frills, lace... I think it's all to make Hollis look better."

I gave Eliza an easy smile. I could easily gossip about Hollis. I'd grown up with her, known her practically my entire life. I couldn't be upset with her about choosing her mate over Oliver, but that wasn't why there was such a rift between the brothers.

Hollis hadn't broken things off with Oliver before.... I felt my cheeks flaming as I thought about it. Despite what she'd told Oliver, I suspected Will and Hollis had been carrying on a relationship months before Hollis even turned twenty-one.

How lucky she'd been, in retrospect. Oliver would've married her solely out of love, making her a princess while his mate was still out there, undiscovered. She broke his heart, and still ended up royalty.

I blinked away the wave of emotion that washed over me. Eliza clicked her tongue.

"Is Oliver even going to go?" she asked, seemingly reading my mind.

“Yes,” I breathed, shifting my weight as I looked out over the beach. Oliver wasn’t one of Will’s groomsmen. I’d heard that Charlie had even tried to get out of it, but Maeve had protested. “But I’d be surprised if he was at the actual ceremony.”

“Well, I hope he comes to the reception at least,” Eliza said softly, twirling a curl around her manicured finger. “I need to go get dressed. Pictures, and all—” she said with a little twist of her hand in farewell. I watched her walk out of the room and shut the door behind her.

But I wasn’t alone for long. Just as I finished my makeup, my mom walked in the door, smiling down at me as she looked around the room.

“You’re not dressed,” she said with a little laugh, glancing at the clock on the bedside table.

“I have time, don’t worry.”

“Your aunt wanted family pictures taken before the ceremony,” she said as she walked toward the four-poster bed and ran her fingers over the fabric of the red dress I’d hung from the canopy of the bed.

I sighed as I applied a dusting of blush to my cheeks, catching my mom in the reflection of the mirror. She had dressed already and looked pretty in her muted gold gown with her hair loose over her shoulders. But I could feel the tension coming off of her.

I had to tell her now if I was going to tell her at all.

“Oliver said the man, that Alpha King—”

“Alexander,” I said softly as she turned to me.

“Yes, Alexander,” she said, sitting on the edge of the bed and looking at my reflection in the mirror as I opened a tube of mascara. “He said he came up to you at the party, just before you ran off.”

“Did he?” I said, grinding my teeth as I thought of all the ways I’d punish Oliver later.

“He said you seemed upset. I met the man formally at the party, of course. But he came to dinner last night. He’s staying here, you know.”

“I know,” I said, trying to stifle the emotions threatening to bubble to the surface as I applied the last of my makeup.

“He’s quite nice. Well educated, traveled—”

“As in traveled, you mean from another realm?” I said with a little laugh.

She gave me a tight smile in response. “How do you know him, Lena?” Her voice was still soft, but I could hear a whisper of concern touch her lips as she spoke.

I sighed, rubbing my lower lip before applying a shade of lipstick darker than I’d ever worn before. “I met him at Morhan,” I said with a second of hesitation.

“At school?”

“He was a student there, apparently. We did our field study together.” I swallowed, glancing at her face through the mirror as I willed myself to go further. “I didn’t know who he was. He didn’t tell me.”



“That’s odd—”

“I know. I didn’t know.... He caught me off guard when I saw him at the party. That’s why I... why I ran off.”

“He didn’t say anything about being a student at Morhan.”

So he hadn’t said anything about Morhan, and he likely hadn’t said anything about Crimson Creek, either. I let out the breath I’d been holding, the tension in my shoulders easing a bit as I checked my reflection before turning in the stool to face her.

“Do you know what he is?” she asked suddenly, before I could tell her the truth.

I opened my mouth, but the words failed to appear at the tip of my tongue. She waited for me to respond, and all I could do was give her a half-hearted shrug.

“I guess, but I don’t fully understand it.”

“He’s a Dark King, as they call it in Egoen. That place... their realm was built for people like my mother’s pack, the Lycennians. All of their power stems from Lycaon’s line, not Morrighans.”

Ah, the ancient goddess and god people wouldn’t stop talking about. Morrighan and Lycaon, the twins who split the pack lands and our powers in two.

“I didn’t know,” I said honestly. “What does it mean that he’s a Dark King, that he’s evil?”

She gave me a knowing smile, but shook her head. “His family has powers, maybe had, in his case. I know his uncle was exceptionally powerful and could suck the life force right out of someone.”

“What?” I said, unable to stop the shocked laugh from escaping my throat.

“I’m not totally sure how it works. Your father and I were... we weren’t heavily involved when Ethan found out what had happened to Soren. Rowan was transitioning to being Alpha King, if you remember.”

I did remember, and it had been an odd time in the family. A shadow had been cast, so to speak, threatening to swallow us whole. We’d been kids, my cousins and I. My memories were faint.

“Alexander... the men of this line need.... How do I explain this—”

“You don’t have to,” I cut in, then took the deepest breath I’d ever taken in my life.

“I think it’s important you know. He asked about you at dinner—”

“I knew he would,” I said, my voice cracking with sudden emotion.

Mom’s brow furrowed for a moment as she watched me reach up to touch the lace robe I was wearing, my fingers prickling with heat as I debated untying it, and just showing her, hoping that was enough.

“Mom,” I said, meeting her eye. “There’s something I need to tell you. Something... I need your help with. I know Alexander... I call him Xander. I....”

I closed my eyes, then let my robe fall over my shoulder.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 557

\*Lena\*

Hanna of Red Lakes, the Luna Queen of Valoria, my mother, was the most emotionally controlled person I'd ever known.

And as her eyes grazed over the faded mark above my breast, the wound already healed and a muted white against my skin, her face didn't change. She was expressionless, and her eyes gave me no hint of what she was thinking.

Her calmness in chaos used to infuriate me. Both of my parents were that way, although my father did have a flair for the dramatics from time to time. Mom? No. Even now, she remained stoic and unbothered.

Several moments passed before her eyes met mine again. I swallowed against the lump in my throat, tears threatening to spill from my eyes as she reached a hand out to cup my cheek.

"Why?" she asked so softly I had to read her lips instead of registering her words.

"I don't know," I whispered back, then hung my head in shame.

She walked over to me, tilting my chin with her fingers so I was looking into her face. "He didn't say anything to any of us about it," she replied.

She knelt on the ground before me, her voice a lullaby against the agony ripping through my heart. That tether that bound me to Xander went taunt for the first time since I'd left Morhan, searing through my body as I let my true feelings bubble to the surface of my mind.

"He said he wouldn't," I choked. "He said it was something for me to do, if I chose to. I didn't... I loved him. Love... still do. But it hurts, Mom. Is it—is it supposed to hurt this bad?"

My makeup was running. I sniffled as she pulled me off the stool and into her chest, holding me like I was only a child and not a full-grown adult. She ran her hand over my back in a soothing motion that made me want to do nothing more than curl up in bed and listen as she read the book of folklore that always sat on my bedside table back home in Mirage.

"I'm so sorry," I sobbed, but she shook her head and shushed me.

"There's nothing to be sorry about. This was your decision to make—"

"I have no control over it, Mom. My emotions, everything is just—"

She pulled away from me and reached behind me for a tissue from the box on the vanity, lightly dabbing at my eyes. She gave me a kind, comforting smile.

"Have you been counting to ten?" she asked, and I swallowed back the frustration that coursed through my body like a wall of fire.

My fingers began to prickle, and I folded them in the lap, biting my lip so hard I tasted blood.

“That worked when I was a kid, Mom. I... I’m going to be twenty-one in a few months. What Xander made me feel in all... in all aspects... I felt like I could rip the world in half if I wanted to. Like, I could do it. I can feel it.” It was the brutal, honest truth. Whatever I’d done to Slate in the alley was only a glimpse of what power I knew I had within me—power that, to this day, I had no control over.

Mom was listening intently, her eyes not leaving mine even though I’d broken away from her gaze. If anyone knew what this felt like, if anyone understood a shred of what I was going through....

She’d fought her own demons. Her mother had been something called a Dream Dancer, someone capable of traveling to what she called the “Spirit Realm,” a ribbon of sorts between the place of the Gods and our own world.

My mother’s powers had been the same, only much, much stronger as the years went by and she grew into adolescence. Before she was my mother, Hanna of Red Lakes had just been a reclusive, silent person, always lost in the inky black depths of her dreams.

My father had opened something inside of her that allowed her powers to manifest. My grandmother had trained her to use them. And in the end, she had defeated the greatest threat the pack lands had ever seen—a woman, much like herself.

But I did more than dream dance. I could do much, much more. And I’d had my powers since I was born.

“What have you done with them?” she asked in the steadiest of voices, her hand encircling mine.

What had I done with my powers? What had I done with them, besides blast Slate into oblivion, or so I thought?

I told her about the alley, which led to a lengthy explanation about who Slate was and how Xander had confronted him that fateful day on my way to class, a moment that had been a catalyst to everything that happened to us from that point forward.

But despite how important it was, and how much I knew I needed to tell her, to tell anyone with the means to do something about it... I couldn’t bring myself to tell her about Crimson Creek. My family, everyone but George, thought I’d just spent the last six weeks near Red Lakes. No one questioned it. No one thought it was odd that Kacidra and Pete mentioned that I didn’t visit, not once.

Somehow, some way, I just knew in my bones that what happened in Crimson Creek was something I needed to handle myself, alone, if I needed to handle it further at all.

I thought of the blood root, and how it’d saved my life twice now, how the force of my power against Slate had nearly killed me, but the blood root had brought me back to life. And the fanged man from my dream.... How could I forget him, and his words?

My mark twinged at the thought of him, which sent a jolt of unease rippling over my skin. He’d called me his queen.

What if I’d been wrong about everything? What if that mysterious man from my darkest nightmare was my mate, and he was trying to save me from Xander, and not the other way around?

I hadn’t noticed my mother’s tense demeanor until I broke from my musing as I looked up at her. She was still kneeling in front of me, her hands still wrapped around my own.

She slowly removed her hands and used her thumbs to gently untangle my knitted fingers. Soft, white rose petals fell from the palm of my hands and drifted down onto the floor where they quickly wilted, turning to ashen dust before I could even suck in my breath.

“Have you had any visions?” she asked, her voice taking on a serious note as she stroked my wrists, her touch cooling the fire blazing over my skin. “Just... dreams—a nightmare.”

“You dream danced?”

“No, it wasn’t... I was ill when I had it. I couldn’t make sense of it. I don’t remember much of it.”

“Lena,” she whispered, leaning in to press her forehead against mine. “It’s time, alright?”

I knew this was coming.

I knew this would trump everything else—my degree, my career, my mate.... The mark had no meaning in terms of my inevitable future.

“When?” I whispered, feeling nothing but dread.

“After the wedding,” she coaxed, dabbing at my smeared makeup, “but after you spend some time at home, maybe a few weeks.” She paused, gently wiping the tissue beneath my lashes as I looked into her eyes. “I know it’s not what you want, but Rosalie... your grandmother. She’s the only one who can help you with these powers now, Lena. You need to know how to use them.”

“I never wanted them!” I protested, and the look of absolute heartbreak on my mom’s face shattered my heart.

“I know,” she breathed, looking as though she were about to cry herself. “I never wanted this for you, either.”

I could feel the generational strain between us—a mother and daughter, the same as she’d been with her own mother, long ago now. I’d never known her mother, a woman named Leera. She’d been a Lycennian woman, stolen away as a baby and raised in the West, away from the cult-like pack of Lycaon followers.

I wondered if my mom had ever had a similar conversation with her mother.

“Xander,” she began, her pale brown eyes flicking up to meet mine. “Are you—”

“We ended things. At least, I thought we did. I... we have trouble... I never really knew who he was.”

“Do you love him?” she asked, and I knew she’d support whatever answer I gave.

I opened my mouth to reply, but my words fell flat. “I think so,” I said quietly, taking the tissue from her and shredding it between my fingers. “I wanted to, I... I wanted him to mark me. I wanted control over that, at least, if I couldn’t have control over anything else.”

“You’re breaking my heart.” Mom swallowed, and I instantly regretted my words.

“I’m sorry, Mom—”

“No, Lena, you have no reason to apologize. We always knew you were different. Always. Before you were born I—” she paused, then hesitated to continue as she looked over my face. “Lena, I knew you were before I.... This is going to sound insane—”

“Try me,” I said with a little halfhearted laugh.

She gave me a weak smile, but her eyes remained serious. “Dreams carry weight, Lena. You and I are the only people in this world who can dream dance, at least, that I know of. But when we dream, like actually dream—that’s where our powers truly lie. I dreamt of you. I hadn’t dreamt in years until that night. You were younger, a teenager, and the second I saw you I felt bound to you. You followed me, Lena. You were the force that not only saved my life that day in the caves in Valoria, but the pack lands. That dream told me my future, Lena, in a way I couldn’t interpret until that day we... when you....” she gripped my hands suddenly, the force of her touch sending my powers surging forward.

When I hurt her. When I’d almost killed her with the powers I couldn’t control.

“Mom—”

“What did you dream of, Lena?”

“A temple,” I answered, unable to stop myself. “I was in a temple, on a beach I didn’t recognize. You were there, and you said I told you that I... that I wouldn’t recognize you—”

Her eyes glittered with tears, but she laughed, actually laughed as she squeezed my hands once more before letting go.

“You did tell me that,” she said as she wiped a tear away from her cheek, sniffing a bit. She met my eye once more and gave me a pained smile. “You’re coming into your power now, Lena. I didn’t know what I was capable of until I went to Winter Forest with your father. I needed Rosalie to show me what I could do. I don’t know how she did it, but she knew. She needs you, too. She’s going to need you more and more as the years go by. I know this isn’t what you wanted, but it’s your birthright. Your destiny.”

I closed my eyes, the soft sound of chatter drifting beneath us as guests began to arrive for the wedding taking place in the back gardens.

“And your mate,” she continued, the corners of her mouth twitching. “Your grandfather was an Alpha King, married to the White Queen. It can be done, and will be if it’s what you want.”

“There won’t be a double wedding today, if that’s what you mean,” I teased, but her words weighed on me.

If that’s what I want. If that’s what I want....

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 558

\*Xander\*

I’d never seen so much pink in my life.

I felt a little nauseous as I walked through the throng of people gathered to witness the nuptials of Prince William of the Isles and whoever the hell he was marrying. Pink flowers lined the walkway that

wove through the tropical back garden of the palace, which would have been beautiful had it not been tarnished by the bubblegum color streamers hanging from the palm trees.

People did comment on the absurd decorations, but nobody looked more uncomfortable than the Luna of Poldesse, who was looking just as green as I felt as she greeted the guests with a mask of dignity and grace.

William hadn't been at the dinner the night before, and neither had his betrothed, and as dinner progressed and the wine was poured, it was painfully obvious to me that no one was particularly looking forward to the marriage.

I'd heard the rumors, of course. It was hard not to after spending several months on campus in Morhan, where every girl had a marked obsession with the princes of Poldesse. Poor Prince Oliver was jilted by his longtime lover, and now she was marrying his brother.

It made my complicated relationship with Lena look like a walk in the park.

Speaking of Lena, I hadn't seen or heard from her in the past twenty-four hours. I knew she was avoiding me, especially since I'd been invited to stay at the palace until the wedding took place and had accepted the invitation.

I'd hoped to get her alone again by now to clear the air and patch things up, but that seemed more and more unlikely as the day went on.

Now the guests were filling the aisles of white wrought-iron chairs woven with pink tulle, and Lena was nowhere to be seen.

I lingered in the back, hoping to catch a glimpse of her before I took a seat but found myself glancing toward the only shred of gold shimmer against the dense foliage and tower palms that sheltered the garden. The palace was just visible as I turned around, watching as two figures moved behind the foliage. If they were trying to stay hidden, well, they weren't doing a very good job.

Curiosity got the best of me and I broke for the trees, nodding my hellos to the passing nobility of whatever the hell packs they came from as I walked briskly toward the palms.

I saw the glint of a glass bottle catch in the sun as I walked around the palms along a stone pathway, and I came face to face with Oliver and Charlie, who were standing out of view from the guests and leaning against the back wall of what looked like a pool house. Oliver paused with the bottle of bourbon in his hands, his eyes meeting mine before he lifted the bottle to his lips and took the longest, most deliberate swig I'd ever witnessed.

"You're going to throw up," Charlie said as he took the bottle from his brother, then tilted his head to me in greeting. Oliver wiped his mouth, his cheeks going ruddy as the alcohol burned through him.

"If you do, aim for the flutist," I said, giving both men a wry grin.

"Ears ringing too?" Charlie said with an arch of his brow.

I liked Charlie. He'd been at dinner that night before, and I found his company agreeable and enjoyable, which was rare. I was only a few years older than the triplet princes, and Charlie and I were both men of the world and had an awful lot in common.

Everyone had been kind, actually.

Oliver, on the other hand....

“What do you want?” he slurred, reaching for the bottle that Charlie was holding just out of his reach.

“Entertainment,” I deadpanned, motioning for the bottle, which Charlie handed to me without hesitation. I took a swig, but not nearly the amount that Oliver had just downed. He looked as though he was maintaining his composure, at least.

The three of us stood in awkward silence for a moment before Oliver fixed his gaze on me, looking me up and down.

“Have you seen Lena?” I asked.

Oliver narrowed his eyes, giving me a ferocious scowl. Charlie, ever amiable, shrugged and shook his head.

“I’ve seen her like, twice, the entire time she’s been back on the island,” Charlie said as I passed him back the bottle. He bent down and tucked it behind a rock, ruffling the leaves a bit to cover it lest someone walk by. “She keeps to herself.”

“Oh—”

“She’s avoiding you,” Oliver said sharply, pointing a finger at me.

“I’m sure she is,” I replied, which startled him a bit. “I did wrong by her. I’m here to make it right.”

“Really?” Charlie chuckled, looking somewhat confused.

I’d talked to him for most of the dinner the night before, but not once had anyone mentioned Lena’s name. It wasn’t for me to talk about, anyway. This was her family. This was her decision.

“He said she’s his mate,” Oliver said hotly, but Charlie only seemed slightly amused as he looked at me with those familiar blue eyes—blue gems, sapphires. Oliver had one that color. He had his father’s set of mismatched eyes, one blue, and one gray. The combination made Oliver look like some unearthly being, especially with his red hair and the snarl plastered on his face as he looked at me.

“She is,” I said slowly, beginning to raise my hands. “But we ended things—”

“She obviously doesn’t want anything to do with you,” Oliver snapped, but Charlie held his hand up, his curiosity overwhelming whatever desire he had to protect his cousin’s heart.

“She didn’t know who I was, not fully. I need to talk to her. Where can I find her now?”

“Well, the ceremony is starting any minute,” Charlie said, straightening up and smoothing his tuxedo. He was dressed to the nines, whereas Oliver was wearing a loose-fitting button-up shirt, shorts, and sandals. He looked more like he was going to the beach than his brother’s wedding. “The bride is running late. I assume Lena is with the other women, helping her dress, or whatever they do during these things.” Charlie waved his hand in dismissal.

“In the palace?” I asked, taking a step to the side to take my leave.

Charlie nodded, but Oliver straightened to his full height, his chest puffing out like he was readying for a fight.

I could take him. All of the princes were strong, built like workhorses just like their father. I doubted Oliver had done much combat training, however. I'd have him on his belly the second he lunged at me.

I eyed him, nostrils flaring as I silently willed him to try.

"Would you relax?" Charlie hissed at his brother.

"Leave Lena alone," Oliver growled. I realized then, based on the look of pure, unadulterated hatred toward me in his eyes, that Oliver might know the whole truth about us. I'd wondered if Lena had a close familial confidant, and that was definitely Oliver.

"I will," I said, taking another step backward, "once I have a moment to talk to her—"

"Hey!" Oliver snapped as I turned on my heel and walked briskly toward the palace.

I heard Charlie mumbling at him, telling him to calm down.

I walked along the side of the palace where guests were mingling in small groups, standing in the shade while they waited for the wedding to begin. No one seemed to notice when I rattled a few side doors to the palace, eventually finding one unlocked, and slipped inside.

\*\*\*

\*Lena\*

The red dress fit like a glove. I ran my fingers over it as I stood in front of the full length mirror in my room, my mom looping the crimson pearl buttons up my back.

"It's beautiful," she breathed, her eyes twinkling as they met mine in the mirror. "This color is incredible on you."

"I thought the wedding was taking place in the cathedral," I murmured, unable to hide the color rising in my cheeks. "It feels too formal for a garden wedding."

"It was a last-minute change. Your aunt is... Maeve told me she's taking a long vacation after this is all said and done," Mom said with a wry smile, walking around to look at the front of the dress. She fluffed the sleeves and smoothed the fabric over the bodice as I held my arms out for her. "Just lovely, Lena. I'd never thought of a cut like this for you. It suits your body so—so well—"

Her eyes were watering as I looked up at her. She was starting to cry.

"Mom?"

She smiled, shaking her head. "I'm fine. You're just so... so grown up now, is all. A graduate, with a mate—"

"Maybe a mate," I murmured, sighing through my nose. "Xander and I have a lot we need to discuss, and not about... not about us, really. More about his lies."

"Well, you attended Morhan under an alias. He was just doing the same—"



“He knew who I was from the beginning, and he kept that from me because he was looking for someone from the White Queen line to take as a wife,” I said hotly, adjusting my voluminous hair in the mirror.

“Well,” Mom said, pursing her lips, “if you love him—”

“We have to consider more than love, as royals.”

She gave me an odd look, some pain lingering behind her eyes as she took a step back to allow me to twirl my skirts.

“Especially now that I’m to go to Winter Forest—”

The door burst open, bouncing off the wall. Maeve caught it, looking rather frazzled as she stepped into the room.

Her cheeks were flaming a deep fuschia.

“Goddess, Maeve, what’s the matter?”

“Hollis,” Maeve said hotly, “wants alterations done to her dress, and we’re nearly an hour late for the ceremony already! I need your help, Hanna. I know you can sew.”

“Sew? Now? What kind of alterations?” Mom gathered up her skirts and began to walk toward the door. Maeve’s eyes flicked to me, then she turned to face me fully, sucking in her breath.

“Oh, my Goddess. You are a vision,” she said, some of the heated color leaving her face. She smiled, her brows raised as she took what looked like the first deep breath she’d taken all day.

Mom placed a hand on Maeve’s shoulder as both women looked lovingly at me, their eyes misting with tears.

“Stop,” I murmured, blushing furiously as they continued to stare.

“I feel like she was just born,” Maeve said, her voice cracking with emotion. Mom’s tight, pained smile told me she was thinking the exact same thing. “Look at our girl, Hanna.”

“You’re going to make me cry,” I whispered, “and I just fixed my makeup.”

Maeve hiccuped, then took my mom’s hand, and the two walked out into the hallway, talking in low whispers as they walked away.

I looked at my reflection in the mirror for a moment, fluffing my hair and running a finger under my bottom lashes to stop a rogue tear from spilling down my powdered cheeks. I looked aflame, like hot embers burning in the snow.

“You’re beautiful,” came a low, rasping voice from the doorway.

My heart nearly burst out of my chest as I turned to the voice.

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 559

\*Lena\*

Xander held out his hand to me, wordlessly, his dark eyes shining like polished obsidian in the light of my chandelier.

I didn't question why he was here, in my room. The ribbon around my heart was tight, straining against every beat as I slowly placed my hand in his and let him guide me into the hallway. He didn't take his eyes off me. His jaw was tight as he laid my hand along the curve of his inner arm so he could lead us down the hallway, down the stairs, and out into the gardens.

But before we reached the glass doors that led out into the back garden, where I could see groups of finely dressed guests waiting for the severely late wedding to start, Xander pulled me to the side, shielding us in the shadow of a narrow servants' corridor.

"What—"

"I am sorry," he said urgently, taking my hands in his.

"You've already apologized," I said, tilting my chin toward him.

"You haven't accepted—"

"I accept your apology. Better?"

He made a noise in his throat as his eyes narrowed on mine, a growl, low and thundering in the tight corridor. I ran my tongue along the inside of my lower lip, heat rising in my cheeks.

"Well then. My mark on your chest is on full display. Are you showing it off?"

"I don't have much choice—"

"And what does that mean, for us, for your family? What will they think?"

"I told my mom we ended things—"

"But did we really?"

"Don't gaslight me, Xander—"

"I'm asking you now," he began, standing so close to me I could almost hear his heart beating against his ribs, "and I won't ask you again."

"Asking me what? You haven't asked me anything—"

"I want you, Princess Selene of Valoria. I want you by my side—"

"Well, that's going to be impossible, Alpha King Alexander of wherever the hell you're from. I'm being sent to Winter Forest after the wedding, thanks to you. I have to begin my training."

"Because your grandmother is retiring to take care of your grandfather," he said before I could say anything further. "Your grandfather told me."

"You talked to him?" I gasped, and he nodded, then rolled his eyes as I opened my mouth to argue.

"I told him about Crimson Creek. I left you out of the conversation. I didn't even mention you were there."

"You told him—"

"Of course I did. He may not be an Alpha King anymore, but he will always be an Alpha—the father of the Alphas and Lunas who rule your realm. He needed to know what we're up against."

"I don't even know what we're up against, remember? You haven't told me anything!"

"I will," he breathed, "I promise you—"

"Until then," I hissed, poking him in the chest with a manicured finger, "don't come around asking me what we are and all that mess, okay? I already told you this was impossible—"

"There was a moment when you didn't, Lena. I told you I'd find a way—"

"There is no way, Xander. You rule in an entirely different realm! I'm needed here."

Silence fell, so still the only noise was the sound of his heavy breathing. He was angry, his fists clenched at his sides as he looked me up and down.

"We're going to this wedding, together," he said firmly. "As dates."

"No."

"It's not up for debate. I put my mark on you, and I mean to have what's mine."

A chill ran up my spine at the tone of his voice. He was serious.

"You can't force me—"

"I can, and I will. Your family will see the mark and have questions, and I won't sit back and let them assume I abandoned you."

\*Lena\*

Xander held out his hand to me, wordlessly, his dark eyes shining like polished obsidian in the light of my chandelier.

"It was mutual—"

"It was not. And one day I will explain everything to you, but today is not the day, Leno. Come," he said firmly, but I shook my head, ready to stomp my foot in defiance. He flexed his jaw, eyes twinkling with a silent challenge. "Get your ass over here and take my hand!"

"I hate you!"

"Oh, I don't like you very much right now either, but I'm not playing these games with you today, Leno."

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

"The only person who can protect you from what's coming, what I plan to tell your entire family before we leave these islands, but only if you take my f\*\*\*\*\*g hand and pretend everything is fine and we are a happy, loving couple!"

I wanted to smack him, but instead, I took his hand and dug my nails into his skin. He growled, pushing his weight into me and pinning me to the wall for a moment, which had an effect on me that I hadn't expected.

Desire. Heat. Want.

"I will punish you for this later," he whispered into my neck.

I couldn't help but close my eyes against the way his words tickled my skin. "Not if I punish you first."

He leaned away from me, his mouth curved into a sly smile. I maintained my clamped grip on his hand as he led me out of the corridor and into the foyer, but we paused before the doors.

"We can't take this back. Once they know about us—"

"I don't care," he said, then he opened the door to the garden.

\*\*\*

Grandpa wasn't looking toward Will and Hollis as they exchanged vows. He was turned in his seat, staring right at me with narrowed eyes. I arched my brow at him, tilting my head in the direction of the nuptials and giving him a little shrug and gesture to turn back around, but that cobalt gaze was locked on mine.

"What?" I mouthed, and his eyes flicked toward Xander, who was seated to my left. I pursed my lips, turning my eyes back to the altar where Hollis continued her drawn out speech about true love and undying loyalty.

She looked beautiful, I'd give her that much. Her long golden hair was pinned away from her face with pearl clips and her dress, which was just as frilly and over-the-top as the coke-like bridesmaid dresses her posse was wearing, billowed out from her slender waist in a full skirt that trailed behind her when they finally wrapped up the ceremony and the happy couple walked down the aisle. Well, Hollis was happy, at least. She was beaming at the attention. Will looked happy it was over and accepted a flute of champagne from someone sitting at the end of the aisle as they walked past.

"Are all royal weddings like this?" Xander asked, leaning into me as chatter began to wash over the congregation.

"This was the first royal wedding in decades, technically," I said as I rose from the choir and fluffed out the full skirt of my dress. Xander brushed my hair from my shoulder, his fingertips lingering on my skin for a moment. "Thanks—"

"Decades?" he asked, and I nodded, tilting my head toward where my parents and my aunt and uncle were talking near the altar.

"My parents eloped, at least at first. Then they had a small ceremony with just family present at the Temple of the Goddess in Miroge. It wasn't an affair like this, that's for sure. My Aunt Moeve and Uncle Troy didn't even have a wedding."

"Why not?"

I looked up at him as he took my hand and led me out of the aisle. Everyone was leaving the ceremony grounds now that the wedding party had exited toward the ballroom and terrace above the poloce's private beach, where the reception was being held.

"It was mutual—"

"It was not. And one day I will explain everything to you, but today is not the day, Lena. Come," he said firmly, but I shook my head, ready to stomp my foot in defiance. He flexed his jaw, eyes twinkling with a silent challenge. "Get your ass over here and take my hand!"

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"What?" I mouthed, and his eyes flicked toward Xander, who was seated to my left. I pursed my lips, turning my eyes back to the altar where Hollis continued her drawn out speech about true love and undying loyalty.

She looked beautiful, I'd give her that much. Her long golden hair was pinned away from her face with pearl clips and her dress, which was just as frilly and over-the-top as the cake-like bridesmaid dresses

her posse was wearing, billowed out from her slender waist in a ballgown that trailed behind her when they finally wrapped up the ceremony and the happy couple walked down the aisle. Well, Hollis was happy, at least. She was beaming at the attention. Will looked happy it was over and accepted a flute of champagne from someone sitting at the end of the aisle as they walked past.

“Are all royal weddings like this?” Xander asked, leaning into me as chatter began to wash over the congregation.

“This was the first royal wedding in decades, technically,” I said as I rose from the chair and fluffed out the full skirt of my dress. Xander brushed my hair from my shoulder, his fingertips lingering on my skin for a moment. “Thanks—”

“Decades?” he asked, and I nodded, tilting my head toward where my parents and my aunt and uncle were talking near the altar.

“My parents eloped, at least at first. Then they had a small ceremony with just family present at the Temple of the Goddess in Mirage. It wasn’t an affair like this, that’s for sure. My Aunt Maeve and Uncle Troy didn’t even have a wedding.”

“Why not?”

I looked up at him as he took my hand and led me out of the aisle. Everyone was leaving the ceremony grounds now that the wedding party had exited toward the ballroom and terrace above the palace’s private beach, where the reception was being held.

“Well, Maeve was dying, and my grandmother married them in a field outside of Mirage after their plane crashed. They were flying from Winter Forest to have the triplets—”

“Goddess,” Xander grimaced.

“You asked,” I teased, and the tone of my voice softened his expression.

“I hope this isn’t the kind of wedding you want,” he murmured as he stumbled over a strip of pink tulle that had fallen off one of the chairs as I moved through the aisle.

“I’ve honestly never thought of it,” I answered, holding up my dress as I followed out into the crowd making their way to the reception.

“The beach would’ve been nice for this,” he said, almost to himself.

I watched him, noticing the odd expression clouding his features. “Have you given your own wedding any thought?”

He glanced at me, reaching back to clasp my hand.

“You mean our wedding?”

“First of all,” I said hotly as he led me down the main aisle and toward the palace, “you’ve never asked to marry me—”

“What would you say if I did?”

I tried to pull my hand from his grasp, but he clamped his fingers around mine.

"I'd say no because I have no idea who you are," I replied.

"You know who I am—"

"I knew Xander, the chemist, the wrestler, my field study partner. I don't know you, Alpha King."

My words had an effect on him I didn't expect. He looked briefly solemn as we walked through the garden and into the palace, where the foyer had been redecorated and arranged to house half a dozen cocktail tables for people to stand around while they sipped champagne and whatever pink cocktails Hollis had chosen to have served at the bar.

"I've never been anyone but myself," he said, so quietly I almost didn't hear him.

I didn't like the way I felt. I felt mean, like I was being too hard on him, and maybe I was.

We entered the ballroom after a short walk across the sprawling foyer. The ballroom's normally golden sheen had been replaced by more pink. I grimaced as we walked through the high-arched double doors and stopped, taking it all in.

"Good Goddess," Xander whispered as he looked around. "This is awful."

"Don't tell my aunt that, okay? She's been in a fit over this for months."

"Well, I hope her new daughter-in-law is grateful for... for whatever this is—" he waved his hand in a circle, making a face as other guests stopped to stare at the, uh, cotton candy-themed splendor.

We accepted flutes of champagne from a passing servant, and I looked around at the mingling crowd. Long tables dressed in white satin tablecloths with pale pink lace runners ran in long rows down the length of the ballroom, and an empty dancefloor sat at the far end, where a string quartet was playing a soft, whimsical tune.

That's when I saw them, two women standing shoulder to shoulder dressed in fine gowns of violet and muted yellow.

Heather turned in our direction, her face going pale as she met my eye. She nudged Viv hard enough that they both spilled their champagne.

Xander followed my gaze, his brows arched in surprise.

"I didn't realize you'd told them the truth," he said as he brought his flute to his lips, giving me a wry grin.

I cleared my throat and freed my hand from his grasp. "I need to say hello," I whispered, my nervousness evident in my voice.

"I'll leave you to it," he replied, then turned on his heel and walked away.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 560

\*Lena\*

“Lena?” Viv said, her voice a little shaken as I approached.

I bobbed my head, bending my knees into a shallow curtsy, an act that startled them both.

“I’ll be damned,” Heather whispered in disbelief. “You weren’t lying.”

“I’m sorry,” I began, but Viv burst out in a laugh, shaking her head as she gripped Heather’s upper arm to steady herself.

“Are you kidding? This is the coolest thing to ever happen to us,” Viv panted, wiping a tear from her eye.

Heather, on the other hand, looked more shocked than anything.

“I should have been honest from the beginning,” I exclaimed to Heather in particular.

Heather tilted her head, eyeing me with interest, taking in my clothes and jewels. I felt completely exposed to her gaze, especially when it gently lingered on the faded mark about the neckline of my dress.

“I see you patched things up with Xander,” she said tartly.

Viv made a face at her, then glanced at me.

“I didn’t. He showed up here two days ago, and he’s... well, he’s not just a college student.”

“What do you mean?” Viv asked, her dark eyes going wide.

“He’s an Alpha King of some... far off land, somewhere that’s accessible now that the southern pass is open for travel,” I lied, unsure how, or if, I should explain where Egoren was.

“You’re kidding,” Heather said, looking incredibly suspicious as she looked around the crowd toward the entrance of the ballroom.

“I swear,” I replied, following her gaze.

Xander was nowhere to be seen, swallowed up by the crowd.

Before I could say anything further, a squeal pierced the air, and a flash of red hair enveloped our group as Abigail bounded into us, pulling all three of us into a tight embrace.

“Can you believe our luck?” she exclaimed. “Our quiet, somewhat stuck-up Lena is a f\*cking PRINCESS.”

For the next hour, I gave the group a brief history of my life, evading the tidbits about my powers and those belonging to my family members. They listened intently, Viv and Abigail more thrilled about it than Heather, whose stone-cold expression alluded to the fact that she was pissed about my elaborate plot to hide my true identity from them for three years. Her face softened when I explained why I had to do it that way, telling them it was out of safety, and most importantly, at least to me, my ability to prove myself outside of my rank.

I should have sat with my family at the front of the ballroom, where their tables flanked the heavily decorated table set aside for the bride, groom, and their wedding party, but I chose to sit with my friends instead, and together we enjoyed a fine meal.



For a moment, it felt as though we were back in the cafe on campus, gossiping about the royals instead of attending a royal wedding.

But then, Abigail brought up Oliver.

“Have you seen him today?” I asked.

She shook her head, washing down her food with a glass of iced tea. “Not at all. But I wasn’t at the ceremony. I was setting up the last of the floral decorations.”

“Hmm...” I swirled my second glass of champagne, looking toward the table my family had taken over.

Everyone was there—my great aunts and uncles, my numerous cousins, including second and third cousins. The Beta of Poldesse and his family were seated with Maeve and Troy, their young children flanking them as they ate from plates piled high with sweets.

No sign of Oliver. Or Charlie.

Or Xander, for that matter.

I dropped my napkin on the table and rose.

“I’ll be back in a little while. Let me know if anyone makes a regretful speech. I can tell half of the groomsmen are drunk already,” I winked, then pushed my chair in and made my way across the ballroom.

\*Lena\*

“Lena?” Viv said, her voice a little shaken as I approached.

I stopped at my family’s table, leaning down between my parents.

“Have you guys seen Oliver?” I whispered so I wasn’t overheard, but there were numerous conversations going on.

“I haven’t seen him ol day. He missed the ceremony,” Dad said, glancing down the table before leaning back in his chair to continue, “Troy has already been out looking for him.”

“I don’t blame him in the least bit,” Mom replied, her voice heavy as she brought a glass of water to her lips.

“I’m going to go find him—”

“Lena, my dear! Look at you—” I turned to see my great aunts Georgina and Vicki near the head of the table, seated with my grandparents.

Dad patted my hand before I could rise to my full height, leaning to whisper to me, “So you’re running to fetch something for me so you don’t get tropped by your aunts, honey. I had to pretend I was having a heart attack to get away from them earlier.”

“Dad!” I laughed, but he shrugged, and was then swatted firmly on the arm by Mom.

I walked away from my parents, coming up behind my grandparents and giving them each a hug. They both kissed and squeezed my cheeks like I was an infant, but I blushed with pride nonetheless.

"This dress is heaven on you, darling," Aunt Georgio cooed, making me do a little twirl. "Don't you think, Rosalie?"

"Red suits her," my grandmother smiled, and I smiled back at her, noticing the warmth in her eyes.

"Hi Grandpa," I grinned. "I'm on an errand for Dad, but I'll be back in a moment."

I looked at Grandpa, who was fixing me with a suspicious eye. I narrowed my eyes playfully and held his gaze as I walked away, not breaking from it until I saw a twitch of a smile touch his wide mouth.

He was always so tough—at least he thought so.

Dad was right about mentioning an errand. The group quickly moved on in their conversation after a moment of gushing over my outfit and how "grown up" I was now.

I smirked to myself as I walked briskly through the foyer and through the door to the back gardens. It was late evening now, and the sun was beginning to set as I walked along the stone path that led to the narrow stairs that led down the beach. I hesitated for a moment, remembering I was wearing heels, and expensive ones too. I took off my shoes and tucked them in a bush before lifting my skirts and descending the stairs.

The beach was private, tucked in a gentle cove and surrounded by sea cliffs that hung with rich green vegetation. It was a beautiful place. The water was a bright, clear turquoise and the sand was white, but glistened a fiery orange as the "golden hour" took hold and cast the entire cove in a blanket of yellow, magenta, and violet light. I could see three men clearly as I carefully maneuvered down the stairs.

I was not dressed for the beach, that was for sure. The landlady was going to be pissed when she saw the sand grit stuck in the hem of my gown, but I brushed the thought away for a moment. Xander turned to look at me as I approached. He'd shed his tuxedo jacket and undone the first three buttons of his shirt, the skin of his chest glinting gold in the sun.

Charlie had shed his tuxedo jacket as well, and the two of them were barefoot with their pants rolled up over their ankles, standing just within the gentle wash of the waves lapping the shore. Oliver, however, was passed out on the beach like a starfish, one leg propped up and a piece of driftwood.

"Is he okay?" I exclaimed, rushing over as fast as I could with my skirts hiked up and the back of my dress dragging in the sand.

"He's extremely drunk," Charlie chuckled, tipping his bottle of beer in Oliver's direction.

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"He's extremely drunk," Charlie chuckled, tipping his bottle of beer in Oliver's direction.

"Why did you let that happen?" I pressed as I stood over Oliver's body, peering down at him. He was breathing, snoring. I kicked at his sandaled foot with my toes and he twitched.

"F\*ck off," he murmured, then went right back to sleep.

"Me?" Charlie laughed. "I'm not my brother's keeper—"

"He looks awful, Charlie. The whole family is upstairs—"

"So are every Alpha and Luna in the pack lands, here to witness what he thought was the love of his life marrying his brother."

"Cut him some slack, Lena," Xander added, but my eyes shot to him, narrowed into slits against the burst of sunset casting Xander and Charlie in a golden shadow.

"You don't get an opinion on the matter, because you don't know us—"

"He got to know us pretty well at the dinner you missed last night," Charlie argued, looking smug behind the lip of his beer bottle.

I scoffed, letting my skirts drop over my ankles as I stepped toward them.

"How are we supposed to get him back up to the palace?" I asked with urgency, but Xander and Charlie only looked at each other and laughed.

"We? He's above the tideline. No rain in the forecast—" Charlie began.

"You're going to leave him down here? Charlie—"

"We've all slept on the beach plenty of times. He'll get pinched by a crab and wake up with a righteous hangover and itchy skin, that's it."

I swallowed, stealing a glance at Oliver before I let the tension leave my shoulder and resigned myself to leaving my cousin on the beach to sleep it off. Xander and Charlie stared at me, waiting for me to continue the argument.

"I have nothing else to say," I said after a moment.

"That's a first," Charlie and Xander said in unison, then looked at each other and laughed.

"I hate you both," I sneered, then turned on my heel to go back to the reception.

"Come on, Lena. We're just messing with you. Stay, okay? We brought a few beers down. It's going to be more fun than the reception, I guarantee it." Charlie reached into a cooler I hadn't noticed was there

and offered me one of the frosted amber bottles. He popped it open using only the palm of his hand and wiggled in front of me.

“Fine,” I said, snatching it from him and taking a sip. It wasn’t strong, likely some of the floral beer Avondale was famous for that barely gave you a buzz after drinking several of them, but it was refreshing and bitter after the single glass of heavy, sweet champagne Hollis preferred. “What are you guys doing down here, anyway?”

“Talking,” Charlie said with a shrug. “Hanging out.”

“We were talking about Charlie’s next assignment,” Xander corrected, giving Charlie an arch of his brow, “through the southern pass.”

“Really?” I said, suddenly very interested in the conversation.

“It’s not a naval assignment.” Charlie smiled. “But I’m taking grandma and grandpa to see New Dianny this spring, once you’re settled in Winter Forest.”

A prickle of unease raced over my skin. That couldn’t be right. Grandma was going to be training me in Winter Forest. Why would she be leaving on a long trip in the middle of that?

“Mom never wanted the title. She has her books, you know. She wrote that one about when my parents were younger—”

“What did you just say?” I snapped, having missed the first part of the new conversation.

Charlie gave me a funny look. Xander’s face changed, his eyes widening as he slowly raised his hand to stop Charlie from speaking, but it was too late.

“That Mom stepped down from the line of succession for White Queen,” Charlie said, looking a little confused as all the color drained from my face. “Didn’t you know that?”