

## **Kings Breeder 581**

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 581

Chapter 81 : Breeder to the Night King

\*Lena\*

The man from my nightmare flitted through my mind as I slowly raised my cheek from the stone floor of my cell, looking Slate straight in the eyes.

"Vampire?" I asked, a violent chill descending on me and making my skin burn with bitter cold.

"You're kidding, right? You didn't know?" Slate laughed, actually laughed, and leaned backward, hugging himself. "You—you have to be joking, Lena. Seriously."

"I don't know what you're talking about—"

"That's enough," came a gruff voice down the corridor, followed by echoing footsteps.

My heart sank as Maxwell Radcliff's voice filled my ears. The last time I'd seen him, I'd hit him in the head with a flashlight. "She needs to eat something, and rest—"

"I'm just having a little fun," Slate pouted as Maxwell stopped at his side. Maxwell nudged him with the toe of his boot. Slate groaned, then hopped to his feet, scowling at me as he tucked his hands in his pockets. "She stinks. She needs a bath too. I can do the honors—"

"No," Maxwell said firmly as he unlocked the cell, glancing at Slate with a snarl on his face. Slate paled, sheepishly shrugging one shoulder as he rocked on heels. Maxwell held his gaze, his darkened eyes cutting through Slate like a blade, and Slate cowered before he turned on his heel and walked away.

"I'm sorry about him—"

"Get away from me!" I screeched, which caused Maxwell to startle in surprise.

He raised his brow, shaking his head as he set a brown paper bag on the ground in front of me. "Food, and a water bottle," he said with a gentleness that made me want to vomit.

I bared my teeth at him as he took a step in his direction, and he halted.

"Eat."

I spit at him, and he backed up a step, a wry smile touching his lips. "He'll be impressed with you. You should be grateful for that."

"I'm not going anywhere—"

"That's not up to you. You're going to open a portal for us into King Nikolas's realm—"

"No, I am not!"

"You are," he growled, crouching down to look me in the eye. "You don't have a choice."

"I'd rather die—"

“Then I’ll turn you, Lena, into something like Jen. That’s what those beasts are—did you know? They’re shifters who had the blood drained from their bodies and replaced with the blood of my kind. We need access to his whole army, not just the handful of creatures roaming Crimson Creek. You killed them all, Lena. And now the king would like to meet you.”

“I can’t do that—”

“If you are what they say you are, you can. And you will, or we will ravage the pack lands and kill everyone. Your family and friends will be first.”

I swallowed back the bile rising in my throat as I pressed my cheek back to the ground. “What does Slate have to do with this?”

“He’s been working for us for a while now,” Maxwell sighed as he leaned his shoulder against the wall. “He brings the women the king needs for, well, what you’re going to be used for in that realm.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re his breeder, of course. No one else can handle his, uh... Well, here’s the thing—” he kicked off the wall and took a few steps toward me. I flinched away from him as he crouched in front of me again. “There’s two types of vampires. There’s the High Vampires, the elite, the immortal. And then there’s the Lower Vampires, or Vamps. They’re not immortal, and can have children, which allows the High Vampires to maintain a large slave and feeder population.”

I needed to throw up. My stomach clenched as I mulled over his words. Feeder? Vampires ate... other vampires?

“The Vamps follow some pagan religion tracing back to the witches of the realm.... I don’t really know,” he waved a hand in dismissal. “They revolted against the prior king, and a massive civil war broke out and lasted for nearly two hundred years. Some of the Vamps, freed from their shackles, were able to escape and crossed to this realm with the help of the witches. They set up here, in Crimson Creek, having their children and living in secret among your kind.”

I thought of Gideon and his family, my heart breaking with this new knowledge.

“I’m a Vamp,” Maxwell said with a shrug. “But I won’t be for long... no. See, Vamps aren’t immortal, but we do live for a long, long time. I’d like to make that... forever. The king is willing to grant me that wish in exchange for you.”

“I won’t help you.”

“Slate,” he continued, “has been essential in finding young women to bring to Crimson Creek. Normally they’re just brought to the barrier between our realms as sacrifices—”

“You said you needed me to open a portal, but you already have one?”

“It’s not that simple,” he hissed, his canine teeth elongated. “The Vamps in the Night Realm are slaves, remember? They mine the bloodstones needed to activate the witches’ powers to open small, temporary portals to this realm. The captured witches often refuse to do it, and are tortured if they do not comply. For centuries, the king has been trying to open a permanent portal to this realm to no avail.”

But then... the prophecy of the moonstones came to fruition, a prophecy shared with the Night Realm. The Moon Goddess would come back, to walk among the mortals again."

"So he needs me—"

"High Vampires have been around since the dawn of time, Lena. They were created alongside the gods, according to legend. The king believes that you, a goddess, is the only way he can produce a true blood heir. He is at risk of losing his stronghold on the Night Realm, but if he produced an heir—a child of a goddess, well... he could retain his power forever, cementing his positions among the gods."

"This is ridiculous," I muttered, wanting nothing more than to close my eyes.

"This is reality, and you will obey him, and me, while you're in my possession."

"What happened to Carly?" I whispered.

To my surprise his face fell, his eyes shadowed by a sudden, undeniable sadness. "Slate brought her to me to bring her to the king. I tried to wipe her memory by draining her, essentially killing her, but she was... strong willed—a fighter. The king had been looking for women who had White Queen blood, and Slate thought, based on her appearance, she may be related to the White Queen line in some capacity. I think he was right. She healed when she shouldn't have. She was likely some long-lost cousin of

yours from a distance branch of your lineage, Lena. And I..." Maxwell hesitated, swallowing painfully as he met my eye. "I fell in love with her. Unrequited, of course, but I loved her. I loved her to the point that I defied the king. I lied about her, hiding her away and telling him she was dead. He believed me."

"Where is she now?"

His face hardened and he looked away, refusing to answer.

"Where are you keeping her?" I pressed, but he clamped his mouth shut for what felt like several minutes.

"The blood root is a substitute for the blood Vampires need to survive. We purposely infected Crimson Creek with it. Usually, it kills shifters. We knew you and Xander were different after Jen... after she bit Xander and Henry had to use it on him as a last resort to save his life. The king originally wanted Xander, as well, to turn him and keep him as a feeder to harness his shadow powers, but now that you're mated to him, he's a threat."

"I'll kill you all if you touch a single hair on his head," I hissed, and I felt the fire burning within me again. I clenched my fists, preventing the light from spilling forth against my will, but Maxwell noticed and rose to his full height, a smug smile on his face.

"Interesting," he mused, rocking on his heel.

"Leave him alone," I warned, feeling the power course through my veins.

"We'll talk more after you eat," he said casually and turned to walk away, but then stopped, looking down at me. "You should give Slate some credit, Lena. He did actually like you. He wanted to keep you for himself."

“I’ll kill Slate too, I don’t care—”

“The king told him he’d give him a territory within the Night Realm if he did his bidding, and said you could be his Luna once the child you will bear for the king is born. I don’t believe it, but Slate does.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because,” Maxwell said with a moment of hesitation, “if there was anyone who would be willing to help you, to make you more comfortable, it would be Slate. Maybe he could, I don’t know, locate Xander—”

“You’re trying to trick me into bringing Xander here, and I won’t fall for it.” I wanted to blast him into oblivion, to scar his face with my fire and light like I had done to Slate. I knew what I was capable of now, but I was holding myself back, my mind overwhelmed with the need to protect what I carried with me in my heart, and in my womb—my child... our child. What if I harmed her while taking down my enemies?

“Do you want to know what happened to Henry and Elaine?” he asked, his hand resting on the bars.

I did want to know, and maybe that showed on my face as tears began to well in the corners of my eyes.

Maxwell looked pleased by my pained reaction, smirking as he relaxed his shoulders. “You’ll be happy to know that we have no idea where they are. Elaine was lured into the Night Realm, and Henry followed, trying to save her before it was too late. But they were never captured; they got away. Maybe if you opened the portal, you could find them—”

“I won’t,” I said with a heavy hurt. I felt completely shattered as he shrugged, walking out of the cell and closing the door behind him, stopping only to say, “Suit yourself,” before a massive padlock clicked back into place.

I curled my knees into my belly and whimpered, trembling from the horrible truths he’d thrown at me. I knew he’d find Xander and bring him here. I knew Xander was likely on his way and would do anything to get to me, to save me.

This was a trap set to find him, I realized. Maxwell’s eyes had given it away. The mention of Xander had reignited my powers, the powers they needed to open a portal to a realm of nightmares.

And they’d use Xander to make me do it.

And I would... if it meant saving his life.

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 582

Chapter 82 : I’m Coming for You

\*Xander\*

The girl’s name was Sasha, and she hadn’t let go of my hand for the last eight days.

Blonde, blue-eyed, and innocent, she had no idea what was going on or the level of c\*\*\*\*\*e we’d left behind when I’d carried her out of the forest. Even now, she seemed oblivious, perfectly content in the arms of strangers as she sat in my lap on the ferry as we neared the port of Avondale.

It was the closest we could get to Breles. We'd left the coast of Finadli from a small port town called Porthaven, and had been on the ferry for several days now. The journey out of Cedar Hollow had been a nightmare on every level.

I'd come out of the woods within minutes of dropping from what felt like the sky onto the forest floor. I had a few broken ribs, that was for sure, and I had been in total shock, handing Sasha off to a stunned Adrian and Abigail before turning on my heel and walking back into the forest.

I spent a full day looking for Lena. It would have been more had Adrian not physically removed me from the area and thrown me on a bus, holding me down until we were far enough away from Cedar Hollow that I couldn't sprint back into the smoldering remains of the territory.

It was gone, all of it—the village, the Alpha's castle... everything. I'd spent the day walking through the wreckage, screaming Lena's name into the trees as I stepped over the bodies of villagers and the hybrid beasts who had hunted and killed them. Survivors milled about, taking stock with pale faces lined with shock and confusion.

I had no idea what had happened, not until the initial fury and panic over what I thought I saw happen to Lena subsided, leaving me in a state of numbness.

I was sure I'd seen her lifted into the sky by a beast with bat-like wings. It happened in the blink of an eye, and then she was gone.

I was beginning to think I'd imagined it—all of it—her garden realm, Henry, the voice that was my only companion.

But then Adrian started talking.

I felt like I'd spent only a day or two in the realm of Lena's creation, but it had been weeks. Weeks had gone by in my absence, and as we arrived in Porthaven, I learned that all available warriors from all three continents were gathering off the coast of Breles.

The same beasts that had attacked in Cedar Hollow were attacking the smaller pack villages between Crimson Creek and Breles, making their way toward the capital city during the night and disappearing during the day.

As the days passed in an anxious blur aboard the ferry, which had stopped along the coast of northwest Findali before making a three-day long jump across the open ocean to the Isles of Denali's capital of Avondale, I had time to wrap my mind around the situation.

War. Blood. Death.

I'd warned Ethan of this. It was happening.

And I couldn't do anything to stop it.

"We need to talk about what's going to happen when we, uh, you know," Adrian said under his breath as he walked up to where I was sitting, Sasha sprawled on my lap flipping the pages of a children's book I'd read to her at least a dozen times this morning already.

I made no move to get up, and Adrian sighed in resignation as he crossed his arms over his chest.

'No one has seen Clare,' he said over the mind-link, tilting his head toward Sasha, who was invested in the pictures in the book and not giving Adrian a single second of her time.

'Clare?'

'Her mom! I explained this to you already,' Adrian said with a peeved expression.

I rolled my eyes toward the ceiling.

I was numb. I felt nothing—not anguish, not heartbreak, not panic. Just... nothing.

The only thing stopping me from strangling the captain of the ferry, turning it toward Breles, and storming the shore was the fact that I knew Lena was being kept alive. They needed her alive. He, the Vampire King, needed her alive.

I could feel her holding on. She was weak, but she was there, hanging on by a thread across the mate bond. Stay with me, I thought, praying she could hear me, or at least feel me through our bond. I'm going to come get you, I said to her as I met Adrian's gaze again, no matter what.

Adrian narrowed his eyes at me, tapping his fingers on his elbows as he waited for me to react to his command.

"You should just be Alpha King," I breathed, watching his eyes narrow further. "I'm tired."

"We're going to be in Avondale tomorrow morning," he said through gritted teeth.

"I know," I replied, reaching into my pocket and pulling out a caramel candy wrapped in shiny green paper, pressing it into Sasha's waiting palm. "It'll be fine. I already know what I'm going to say."

"That you lost their princess?"

"Ms. Grayleigh isn't a princess," Sasha said flatly as she opened the candy. "She's my teacher."

I smirked as Adrian looked down at Sasha with a furrowed brow. She plopped the candy into her mouth, unbothered.

"Sasha," Adrian said with remarkable calm and even a shred of sweetness in his voice, crouching down to look her in the eyes, "I need to talk to Xander for a minute. Could you go find Abigail? She has some... hair stuff you can play with." He waved his hand around his head, and I couldn't help but raise my brows as I watched him interact with the girl. Sasha frowned at him, looking him up and down before hopping off my lap and hugging the book to her chest. She walked off without a word and disappeared into a corridor leading down to the inner rooms of the large boat.

Adrian sighed as he rose to his full height, shaking his head as he said, "What are we supposed to do with her?"

"Several people were taken, from what I've heard. Her mom could be one of them."

"Their Alpha, her uncle, is gone too. I think it's more likely he's dead."

We would likely never know for sure. If he was in the castle, well, nothing would be left of him but charred bone. Sasha told us she had been walking home from a diner, or restaurant, with her mother when the attack began, and the two of them had been separated.

She was alone, but something stopped me from handing her off to one of the families who had left Cedar Hollow and fanned out along the coast as the ferry made its way toward the Isles. Maybe it had been the look in Lena's eyes before she'd been taken, something that commanded me to keep the girl with me, to protect her, to get her to safety.

"We'll hand Sasha off to Lena's family. The palace is crawling with kids; at least it was during the wedding. They're set up for it."

"They likely evacuated their families somewhere else, somewhere hidden. We're walking into a warzone," Adrian protested.

I shook my head. "Avondale hasn't been touched. It won't be touched by the Vampire King's forces, either—too much sun, too much heat." I ran my tongue along the inside of my lower lip as I bent forward and ran my fingers through my hair, ruffling it. I wanted a shower, a real one, not a cold drip that was all that was available on the ferry. "This is the plan," I exhaled, looking back up at Adrian.

We were going to dock in Avondale and immediately go to the palace. From there, we'd explain everything to Lena's family. We'd ask for help getting to Breles, and they would no doubt allow it. They had to. They'd use their power to get us a ship, maybe a navy cruiser, and we'd land in Breles in less than two days. From there...

"Lena is our priority. This goes beyond my relationship with her, Adrian. Okay? She's the only one who can stop this."

Adrian nodded solemnly, his eyes flashing with the memory of her powers. He'd told me about the silver wolves she produced, and commanded, which had likely saved the lives of countless villagers. She'd ended the battle in Cedar Hollow, and then she'd been taken.

We needed her. I needed her.

I swallowed back the fury rising like bile in my throat. Whoever had taken her, whatever it was, well... I'd have its head on a stake in a matter of days.

"There's one more thing I need to discuss with you, Alpha," Adrian said slowly, sitting down on the bench next to me. His blue eyes shined in the fluorescent lights over our heads, and a hopeful, almost pleading emotion fluttered across his face.

"She's your mate, isn't she?" I asked, settling my back against the bench.

Adrian pursed his lips and nodded, his cheeks coloring a bit. "We haven't done anything to, uh, consummate the bond, you know," he coughed, clearing his throat. "I haven't marked her. She's thinking about it."

"You want her to come to Egoren?"

“Yes, if that’s what she wants. It’s hard to see... to see a future right now, if I’m being honest, all things considered.”

Adrian’s words cut into my heart as I looked over at him. The mate bond between Adrian and Abigail had surprised me. Abigail wasn’t his type at all. He tended to lean toward the more submissive, easygoing type of woman. Abigail was a force to be reckoned with.

She’d rule beside him, whispering her commands and opinions in his ear as he served as my Beta, no doubt.

She’d be great at it.

“You have my blessing, of course,” I said with an easy smile, patting his on the back. He shrugged in response.

“If she’ll have me.”

“I think she enjoys the chase,” I muttered, giving him a wry look. He shook his head in resignation, but a playful smile stretched across his mouth.

“That was supposed to be my thing, you know. I feel like the submissive, emotional one in the relationship, whatever it is.”

“Maybe that will be a nice change of pace for you.”

“She doesn’t like oatmilk, so that’s already a nice change.”

I laughed lightly, crossing my arms over my chest as I looked out over the enclosed viewing deck at the endless ocean fanning out around us.

A moment of contemplative silence settled between us, and then I exhaled, looking over at him.

“We will need to go back to Egoren, and bring reinforcements through.”

“I know,” he replied, blinking back whatever emotion was trying to play on his face. “When?”

“After we find Lena. But, if you want to take Abigail there, to keep her safe—”

“No, she stays with me.”

His words were said with seriousness and finality. I understood him. I knew why. We were both fighting for our mates now, for their lands, for their realm.

And they’d fight beside us.

“Prince Oliver’s going to be pissed,” I laughed, sighing as I tilted my head back to look up at the ceiling.

“What? Why?”

I gave Adrian a look, and he quickly caught my meaning as he ground his teeth. “He has a bit of a crush on Abigail from what I know,” I said as I nudged him with my elbow.

Adrian scowled—mates, always jealous, always territorial.

"I can take him," Adrian smirked, slapping his knees as he stood. "I'm going to go rescue Abigail from Sasha. Are you coming down for dinner?"

"Later," I replied, turning my gaze from him to look out over the water again. I closed my eyes as he walked away.

I'm coming for you, I said through the bond. It's going to be okay. I'm coming.

I felt a rush of warmth embrace me, and suddenly I felt Lena's touch against my skin. I opened my eyes, looking around. I was alone, and the deck was empty, but I'd felt her.

She was okay. She was—

Pregnant... she was pregnant. The knowledge was clear as day in my mind. My stomach twisted in a knot as I tried to stand, trying to link with her again.

"Lena," I cried, clutching the armrest of the bench for support.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 583

Chapter 83 : Full Sail Ahead

\*Xander\*

By the grace of the Goddess, the first person we ran into was Oliver. It had been random—Abigail, Adrian, Sasha, and I were walking through the market square on our way to the palace with little more than the clothes on our backs.

Oliver looked shocked, his face draining of color as he stalked toward us, glancing over each shoulder to make sure no one he knew, I assumed his family, was around to see the group of us together.

If I hadn't been carrying Sasha in my arms, Oliver would have decked me in the jaw. I knew it; he knew it. We fixed each other with glares so intense that Sasha squirmed and Abigail cleared her throat, looking exceedingly uncomfortable.

"We need to talk—"

"You're f\*\*\*\*\*g right," Oliver ground out, fury blazing behind every single word. He tilted his head toward the edge of the market square where the golden facades of the buildings housing the resorts and restaurants faded into more commercial-type buildings, shadowed by palm trees.

The market square was vibrating with activity, but not because of a celebration, market, or event. Warriors milled about, some in their wolf forms decked out in armor, while lines of young men and women stretched far beyond the square itself.

These people... all of these people—they were signing up to fight.

My heart squeezed in my chest as we cut through line after line of fresh-faced youths, all of them bursting with excitement and pride. I felt helpless. I wanted to reach out to one young man in particular, who looked as though he couldn't have been more than eighteen, and shake him, telling him to go home, to save his own life.

Oliver led us through the fray and down a long, dimly lit alleyway that opened up to a residential neighborhood of neat townhouses on a palm tree-lined street. He waved us over, silently motioning for us to keep up as we followed him down the street and into a long, curved driveway leading to a stand-alone house with a lush front garden.

“Get inside before anyone sees you,” he growled in a low warning tone as we shuffled inside the house. There was no need to turn on the light in the foyer. Sunlight poured through the windows, glimmering off pale wood finishes and white carpets. Oliver shut the door soundly behind us and turned around.

“Come with me, Sasha,” Abigail said hurriedly as I set the girl down.

Sasha stuck out her bottom lip and reached for me, but I shook my head, giving her an apologetic look as she disappeared around the corner to what appeared to be a sitting room. The furniture in the house was modern and clean-cut, all whites and neutrals. Oliver crossed his arms over his chest, his jaw flexed as he glanced between Adrian and me.

“Where the f\*\*k have you been?” he snarled.

“This is a fine house,” Adrian said, whistling as he rocked on his heels and looked up at the domed ceiling.

“Uh, thanks—”

“Lena is in danger and we need a boat to Breles, now.” I watched Oliver’s face contort with rage as he took in my words, his different-colored eyes shining like blue and gray gems polished to a fine finish.

“What—”

I told him everything, from the beginning—about Crimson Creek, about the Vampire King, about the Night realm and Henry and the missing women. His face fell further and further as Adrian took over and explained the battle in Cedar Hollow, and what Lena had done to stop it.

“They took her,” I said firmly. “And we need to get her back before they give her to the king.”

Oliver gaped, opening and closing his mouth like a fish. “What the fuck—”

“We need a boat!” I said through clenched teeth, my hands curling into fists.

“How the f\*\*k am I supposed to get you a boat to Breles? Do you see how many people are signing up to fight?”

“Your dad was a captain—a pirate, right?” Adrian said, the corners of his mouth tightening as they curved into a smile.

Oliver raised his eyebrows at us, a choked laugh escaping his lips before he could stop himself. “You’re kidding—”

“I’m guessing his old boat isn’t being used to take warriors to Breles, is it?” I added, catching Adrian’s drift with a smile. “What was the name of it?”

“You want me to let you take the Persephone to Breles? Do you have a death wish?”

“Yes,” Adrian and I said in unison, and Oliver choked on another laugh, his eyes going wide and he dissolved into hearty laughter.

“That’s actually really funny. I thought you were serious—” but he stopped laughing, his eyes narrowing on the severity of our expressions. “Wait, you are serious—”

“Can you pilot it?” I asked, cutting him off.

“Yeah, I... wait—”

“Well,” Adrian said, slapping his thighs as he stepped toward Oliver, who was too stunned to speak. “Let’s go—”

“You want me to help you steal the Persephone in broad daylight?” he gasped as Adrian patted him firmly on the back, moving him toward the door.

“Your family hates me already,” I said with a wry smile. “We have nothing left to lose.”

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We left Abigail and Sasha behind in Oliver’s house with instructions to go to the palace the next day and explain what we were doing, giving us a day’s lead before Lena’s family found out about her situation. It seemed like the best option. She could facilitate our plans while handling the family, and then meet us in Breles once we had Lena.

It turned out the Alpha of Poldesee, Troy, was already in Breles with the first fleet of warriors, and Luna Maeve was holding down the fort. We assumed that meant Keaton, the Beta of Poldesee, was with Troy....

But we soon found out that we were wrong.

Oliver snapped back to reality during our journey to the ship, a crushing truth hitting him as we ran through the city center and into the tropical jungle that cut the palace off from the rest of Avondale. He was willing to help and understood our urgency. There would be no need to tie him to the helm, after all. Apparently, the Persephone was being housed in a sheltered cove nearby, and Oliver knew where to find it, and the code to get through the gate.

I’d heard about the Persephone, but seeing it took my breath away. It was constructed from golden wood, four or five stories high and modernized with three massive engines. But it was a man-of-war, a ship that would have sailed the seas centuries ago, and it was in stunning condition.

“Holy s\*\*t,” I murmured as we stood atop a bluff and looked down at it. Oliver smirked, crossing his arms over his chest as he gazed down upon the ship in all its glory.

“Damn,” Adrian laughed, clapping us both on the back as we admired it for a moment.

“And there’s no one aboard?”

“The crew went with the Navy,” Oliver said with certainty, a gleam of mischief replacing the fury that had once danced behind his eyes. “But I was serious about this being a death wish. You’re both going to die.”

“You’re going down with us,” Adrian quipped as we followed Oliver down the bluff and onto a wide dock.

I looked to my right and noticed a tall house built in the trees against the cove. Sunlight reflected off the windows, sending a spray of rainbows across the sand.

“Who lives there?” I asked, and Oliver squinted his eyes toward the house as he pulled on a rope ladder along the side of the ship and began to climb up.

“Keaton and his family,” he answered, and I said nothing further, focusing on the incredibly steep climb.

After a few minutes, we were on the deck, taking instruction from Oliver as we began to climb the ratlines to let down the sails. Oliver disappeared below deck for a moment, and soon a gentle hum reverberated as the anchor rose from the cove’s floor.

Oliver reappeared, looking pleased with our progress as the mainsail billowed in the wind.

“We can’t use the engine until we get out of the—”

“OLIVER! What the f\*\*k are you doing!” came a bellow of surprise and frustration from the bluff. We nearly snapped our necks as we looked up and saw a blonde, middle-aged man running down the bluff toward the dock.

“Oh, s\*\*t! We need to go—full sail, or whatever the f\*\*k!” Oliver stammered, the mischief in his eyes glimmering even brighter than before.

“Who is that guy?” Adrian asked, but Oliver was at the helm, screaming at us to finish dropping the sails. The wind caught the mainsail, filling it up until the sail went taut and the boat launched forward into the cove.

“Oliver! You motherfucker, stop!” cried the man, and I watched as I hung from the rat lines as the man leaped toward the boat, arms outstretched, and missed the rope ladder by mere inches, falling into the water.

I gaped as the man appeared again, his face red with fury and blond hair sticking to his face as he was treading water in the boat’s wake.

“IT’S AN EMERGENCY!” Oliver bellowed, his mouth pulled into a wide, almost delirious smile. He whooped, and we joined in, glee and adrenaline coursing through our veins as the *Persephone* left the cove.

“YOU BASTARDS!” came the man’s voice, faded with distance as the ship moved gracefully through the calm water.

“That was Keaton,” Oliver said casually. “He must be leaving with the new recruits.”

“Isn’t this your dad’s boat?” Adrian asked, then swung down from the rat lines, glowing with excitement.

“No. It’s Keaton’s. We’re just going to borrow it for a few days, right?”

I felt like a teenager as I grinned broadly, looking around the ship and taking it all in.

"I need an eye patch!" Adrian laughed, leaning over at the waist to look down at the water.

"How long until we reach Breles?" I asked, swallowing back the delirium.

Oliver turned the ship toward open water, away from Avondale.

"A day at the most, unless we hit bad weather."

A day—just one more day... a day to Breles, then another few hours to Crimson Creek.

I'd have Lena back. She'd be okay.

And I'd kill anyone who got in my way, and everyone who hurt her.

"I need you to take the helm," Oliver said to me, motioning for me to meet him on the uppermost deck where a steering wheel as large as the average man was housed. "Just hold it steady while I turn on the engines."

I nodded as I walked up the stairs and took over the helm, glancing at Adrian as he walked across the deck to look at the water on the other side.

Avondale disappeared behind us, and we faced open water.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 584

Chapter 84 : Pitch Black

\*Xander\*

The weather had been in our favor as we sailed to Breles. The three of us spent most of the journey arguing about what needed to happen when we got there.

I wanted to drop the anchor of the ship outside of Breles, somewhere we wouldn't have to cut through the city and risk being seen on our way to Crimson Creek. Adrian thought docking in Breles was the best chance of finding a vehicle that could take us to Crimson Creek, but Oliver shot down both ideas, worried about something happening to the Persephone in our absence, and also worried about our journey being hampered by being caught by his father on our way through the city if we chose Adrian's route. Oliver thought it best we leave the ship in open water and take a skiff to Breles, waiting until nightfall to steal into the city and find a car, or a truck, or someone willing to drive us where we needed to go.

We ended up drawing straws, and Adrian's idea won out.

All I cared about was getting to Crimson Creek. I didn't care how it happened as long as it happened fast. When we got there, our first stop would be at Gideon's house, and from there we would do everything we could to find Lena and rescue her from her captors, whoever they were.

But there was a war to worry about. The cities of the west were being attacked at night by the hybrid beasts, but Oliver's knowledge of the situation lessened my anxieties.

From what he told us, I gathered that the attack in Cedar Hollow had been calculated—an isolated incident. And whoever was commanding the king's beasts had spared none of their forces in attacking the village and finding Lena. Oliver said it had been a week since there was news of any towns and villages in the southwest being attacked, and the warriors were on standby in Breles.

Just waiting.

We waited in open water outside of Breles until nightfall, then skillfully docked the Persephone alongside a handful of navy cruisers and ferries in the middle of the night. If we were seen, well, everyone who knew the Alpha of Poldesse would just assume the Beta of Poldesse had arrived with fresh recruits instead of the truth, which was that the Prince of Poldesse and his new buddies had stolen it and sailed it across the vast channel between the Isles and Finaldi

It was chaos in Breles. The warriors were working in shifts maintaining the city's perimeter. The port, which was a town in itself, was crawling with warriors when we snuck off the ship, and to my surprise, we blended right into the billowing crowds waiting in line for food or enjoying a pint outside of the many bars and restaurants that were only open now for the warriors to enjoy.

I didn't know where they'd evacuated the people of Breles. I didn't ask. I didn't want to know in the event that information was ripped from me in a moment of weakness... or torture.

"Are you sure you don't want to find your dad? If you want to stay here, we can stick this out on our own—" I began.

"No," Oliver replied firmly as we walked toward the outskirts of the city, where the crowds were less but the presence of on-duty warriors had increased two-fold. We had to slink between darkened alleys to avoid their prying, suspicious eyes. "I'm going with you. She's my cousin, and I might be able to help in other ways."

"What other ways?" Adrian snickered, but Oliver shot him a look.

Things were tense between the two of them. Adrian hadn't been quiet about the fact that Abigail was his mate, and I could see the glimmer of jealousy in Oliver's eyes even now. Poor guy... he really couldn't catch a break.

"I have healing powers in my blood, for one. Among other things."

"Other things?" I whispered as we pressed our backs into a brick building, hiding in the shadow of an alleyway as a group of warriors passed by on the street.

"I can do some of the things Lena can do," he said casually.

Before I could push him to elaborate, we were on the move again, and a heavy silence passed over us, reaching a high when we came upon a truck running idle against the curb a few blocks from the edge of town.

We crouched behind a dumpster and watched three warriors standing with their backs to us, smoking cigarettes. They'd crossed the street after a moment and went into a small bodega, their bodies moving against the bright, fluorescent lights as they spoke to the shopkeeper. I glanced at Adrian, noticing his narrowed eyes.

“We need that truck,” Oliver hissed, and Adrian nodded, turning his eyes to mine.

I nodded my agreement, and the three of us sprinted from behind the dumpster and made a break for the truck. I jumped behind the wheel, and Oliver took the passenger seat. Adrian flung his body into the bed of the truck, landing as ungracefully as possible with a cracking thud that alerted everyone in the area to our presence.

“Drive!” Oliver cried as the three warriors whipped their heads around and came barreling out of the bodega.

I threw the truck in reverse by accident, slamming into a light pole. Adrian yelped in surprise and was immediately thrown backward as I threw the truck into drive and sped off down the street, the warriors screaming for us to stop.

Within minutes we were driving out of Breles, and for the first time in days, I felt like I could breathe.

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“Have you seen them at all?” I asked Oliver as we drove through the pitch-black night. I had my headlights off, letting the moon guide us along the totally empty highway as Adrian slept in the bed of the truck and Oliver sat by my side.

I’d been talking to Oliver for three hours as we sped toward Crimson Creek. He’d just told me the whole story of Hollis and Will, and I felt an irrational anger toward Hollis, who I hadn’t even spoken a word to.

“No, not at all. Will is in Breles from what I understand, and I don’t know where Hollis is. I’ve been staying at my house instead of at the castle.” He glanced back at Adrian, who was snoring so loudly we could hear him over the hum of the engine. “I am happy for them, you know—Adrian and Abigail, that is. I couldn’t care less about Hollis and Will.”

I pursed my lips, giving Oliver a tight smile.

“It’s weird for you though?”

“Yeah, it’s weird,” Oliver admitted, crossing his arms over his chest. “I... I saw Abigail at the party before the wedding and I thought I felt... I was sure I felt the mate bond, but it was just a flicker, like someone lighting a match and then putting it out between their fingers.” He mimicked the movement, then shrugged, shaking his head. “I’ve never felt that before. I know it’s supposed to be—”

“All-consuming, painful, like you can’t think of anything else.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, slumping in his seat.

I turned my eyes toward the highway, unnerved by the total darkness. We’d passed several towns that were empty, black shadows in the distance—no lights, no cars, no people.

I felt Oliver’s eyes on me and glanced at him. “What?”

“Is that what it feels like for you, toward Lena?”

“Yes,” I said, exhaling on the word.

I looked down at the dash and calculated how much gas we had left. We could make it to Crimson Creek, but barely. We'd likely be running in our wolf forms to Gideon's property on the far edge of town. "I felt it first, obviously. She's not twenty-one for another couple of months. But the first time I touched her...." I tapered off, clearing my throat as I gripped the steering wheel in preparation for what I was about to say next. "I mean, like, really touched—touching her because I wanted her. That's when I felt it. That's when I knew."

I knew Oliver and Lena were close, more like siblings than cousins. I was better off being honest with him than glazing over the truth of the matter.

"I never thought I'd find my mate," I admitted. "I'm still coming to terms with it."

"Well, I'm sorry it's Lena."

"What?" I choked, glancing at him.

He shrugged, a smirk flashing across his mouth. "She's a real pain in the ass sometimes," he laughed, running his fingers through his russet hair, the red strands catching on the moonlight coming through the windshield. "I love her, of course, but hell... we just stole the Persephone and a truck, and now we're on a cross country road trip into the depths of hell to rescue her from what, vampires?"

I raised my brows, a laugh escaping my lips as I shook my head. He wasn't wrong.

Silence passed between us for the next hour, broken only by Adrian knocking on the window.

"Pull over!" he shouted, wincing a bit.

I pulled the truck onto the side of the road, and he hopped out, followed by Oliver. They walked into the sparse bushes on the roadside, a good distance apart, and came back within minutes with Adrian complaining that his hands and feet were frozen.

Oliver took his place in the bed of the truck, and Adrian slid in beside me, warming his hands on the dash.

"You good to drive? You've been up all night."

"I'm fine. It's not much further," I assured him.

On we went, and I didn't notice how hard I'd begun to grip the steering wheel until my hands began to ache, and I relaxed my grip. I didn't know what we were walking into. I didn't want to think about it, to dwell on it.

"Do you think Gideon is even home, with everything that's been going on?"

"Where else could he go?" I replied, but then I slammed on the brakes as something moved onto the road one hundred yards or so in front of us, stopping along the centerline. Adrian started, and for a split second I thought the fatigue setting into my body was playing tricks on me.

But then...

"Get out. Get out, get out—"

I shoved Adrian against the door and he opened it, toppling onto the highway. Oliver was standing in the truck bed, looking at the shadow no doubt, and I pounded the back window and screamed at him to run.

A screech filled the air, the same I'd heard while in the cave with Henry, and my blood ran cold.

"As your Alpha, I command you to run!" I screamed at Adrian, who was standing now, staring blankly at the shadow as it unfurled its wings.

Oliver didn't hesitate. He was in his wolf form in an instant, large and red as blood as he tackled Adrian to the ground, snapping him out of his stupor. I was pulled from the truck in the opposite direction, but I watched Adrian and Oliver as Adrian shifted and the two of them hesitated before sprinting into the darkness.

Hands were on my shoulders, my arms, dragging me across the asphalt. I watched the darkness, not taking my eyes off the direction Adrian and Oliver had gone. I heard a howl just before a bag was placed over my head, something tightening around my neck.

Adrian and Oliver would go to Gideon. They'd find him. They'd find help.

These beasts only wanted me.

Whoever held me captive didn't make a sound, but whatever they swung into the air and cracked over the top of my head did.

I'll be there soon, I said into the bond to Lena, just as my vision went black.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 585

\*Lena\*

I didn't have to open my eyes to know who they'd laid in front of me on the other side of the bars. An electric pulse echoed through my body, lighting all my senses on fire in a single breath.

I'd been here for a week, at least, based on the number of times I'd been fed—a week spent praying Xander wouldn't come here... that he wouldn't be taken here.

But as I fixed my pale gray eyes on the bloodied form of the man who was facing me with his cheek pressed painfully against the stone floor, my heart sank into my stomach just as a warm, shadowed embrace wrapped itself around me, guarding me—protecting me.

All I could see were his eyes, black and flaked with amber as they reflected the dim lantern light. Blood... so much blood—it slid down his forehead in a steady stream.

I heard a hiss as something large and heavy was extended backward and then slammed into his back. But he didn't make a sound. His eyes were fixed on mine, searching my eyes for pain, for evidence I'd been hurt.

'Xander,' I begged down the bond as they continued to beat him in front of me. He blinked, but his face remained guarded and expressionless.

But I could feel him tugging on that invisible thread he'd wound around my heart. Whatever this was, it was more than a mind-link. Not only could I hear his words flooding my mind, but I could feel him. I

could feel every emotion gripping him. And I knew if he hadn't laid that shadow of his power over me, I would be able to feel the pain wrecking his body, too.

'Use it on yourself,' I pleaded down the bond, my eyes spilling with tears. 'Use this power to shield yourself—'

'You're pregnant,' he said, his voice heard by every fiber in my body as it whispered silently across my skin. Another whack, and this time he winced but then steeled his expression.

A daughter—I sent this between us, and through the pain etched into his face, I noticed the tightness around his mouth as his lips twitched into a smile, a tear rolling off his lashes and sliding across his cheek before dripping to the ground.

How'd we end up here, separated by rusted iron bars? I felt like just yesterday he was standing in front of me on that gravel path leading to the greenhouses on campus, the embroidered "Morhan Varsity Wrestling" sweatshirt he was wearing glinting in the sun as he squinted down at me, a wry, somewhat devilish smile on his face.

He'd put himself in my path. He'd followed me to Crimson Creek. He'd gone through every trial and tribulation I'd faced.

And now? We were mates. I was carrying his child. This was everything I'd ever wanted but had refused to let myself admit.

I reached for him, my fingertips touching his through the bars as another blow landed on his shoulders.

Why us? Why this?

"Don't do it," he said out loud, his voice laced with pain. "Don't do—" His words were cut short by a grunt of frustration as whoever was standing over him ripped his shirt open to expose his bloodied back.

They were torturing him in front of me so I'd bend to their will.

"Get her up," came Maxwell's voice through the darkness.

I hadn't broken my gaze from Xander since I'd first opened my eyes, and I hadn't yet taken stock of those who were standing in the tight, damp corridor leading to the cell. Xander was dragged out of the way, and the cell door swung up. Within a second, I was hoisted to my feet and held there by two unfamiliar men, their touch cold as ice.

I was filthy, covered in grime, and my clothes were damp and stained. I was still wearing the bloodstained, tattered sweater and sweatpants I'd been wearing the night Cedar Hollow was attacked. I felt the sodden fabric sticking to my skin as they shoved me forward through the cell door.

"Lena! Don't do it—Ah! f\*\*k you, Slate, you piece of s\*\*t, I'll kill—" Xander hissed and groaned as the toe of Slate's boot met with his mouth, and I cried out in response to the way Xander curled his body into the fetal position. He was hurt, badly. I bucked against the grip the guards had on me as they dragged me in front of Maxwell.

"Ready to do this?" he asked casually, as though a man wasn't being beaten to death only a foot away from us. I spit on him, baring my teeth.

I knew my powers were returning. I could feel the heat and mist coursing through my veins. I could blast them all into oblivion, harnessing that light I'd used to maim Slate in that alleyway.

Maybe my thoughts were showing on my face, or maybe Xander could feel that power through our bond, because he tugged on that thread—hard.

“No,” he growled aloud, spitting blood. “No!”

‘Don’t show them what you’re capable of.’ The words drifted through my mind and over my skin. I let the power drift away, taking a choking breath.

“I won’t do anything if you continue to hurt him,” I snarled at Maxwell, who only smiled in response and snapped his fingers before Slate could land another blow to Xander’s back.

Slate looked disappointed, biting his lip as he glanced down at Xander with pure hatred, and maybe jealousy, burning behind his eyes.

Maxwell looked at the guards and nodded, stepping out of the way as I was taken away, the tips of my toes brushing the floor as the guards held me upright and walked through the corridor to a set of stone stairs leading up.

A dungeon—that’s where I was. Was I underneath the manor? Was I even in Crimson Creek? No one had told me anything since I’d woken up in that cell.

I called out Xander’s name as they dragged me up the stairs. There was no door at the top, nothing but a worn-out wooden hatch that hid the stairs from the world above. I was dropped onto my knees, and fine dust swirled around my legs as I looked up, seeing nothing but endless stars.

I knew where we were now. We were in the hills outside of the Radcliffe Estate. The hills rose up around me, sheltering me as I knelt in a narrow glen speckled with gnarled, dead trees. I turned my head to look back at where we’d come and watched as Maxwell and Slate dragged Xander out of the hole that led to the cell. Stones encircled the place, the remains of what could have been a temple of some kind, long lost to time and decay.

“Further,” Maxwell commanded, motioning toward the guards as he struggled to pull Xander up the last of the stairs and into the glen.

The guard yanked me upright and dragged me several yards away from the ancient temple, centering me at the base of the glen where the hills began to give way, and a view of the landscape beyond was visible.

No lights flickered in the hills. If Crimson Creek was in front of me, well, it was darkened, empty, not a single sign of life evident among the sea of stars creeping along the horizon.

That shadow of power Xander had embraced me with started to tighten around me as I was dropped to my knees once again.

‘Don’t do it,’ he pleaded through the bond, and the mark on my chest seared with heat as his words echoed through my body.

“Alright,” Maxwell said over the sound of Xander’s body hitting the ground. I turned to look over my shoulder at him, narrowing my eyes as Maxwell walked toward me, his hands tucked neatly behind his back.

Why hadn’t I noticed him before? That odd coloring to his skin in the cloak of night and the way his eyes glowed like sparkling, crimson orbs?

It was a transformation, I realized, a little too late. I knew nothing of his kind. He could hide this side of himself and blend in, pretending to be one of us, luring his prey with kindness, with charm.

I thought of the attic where he’d kept Carly Maddox. I thought of the butler. I thought of the man from my nightmare.

A monster—Maxwell was a monster. And he wanted me to unleash the rest of his kind upon my lands.

“We’ll kill him if you don’t comply with the king’s demands,” Maxwell began, sensing my hesitation.

“You’ll kill him anyway! You’re killing him, right now!” I snapped, rounding on him and positioning myself on my hands and knees. He was standing between Xander and me, with the guards behind me and Slate standing behind Xander.

Xander’s eyes were open, watching, his mouth slightly ajar. I could feel the shadow waning as it started to pull away—no, fade away. I looked at his chest, his shirt hanging in tatters from his skin. His breathing was shallow, uneven.

He was dying.

“Let me heal him,” I breathed, my voice catching in my throat as I turned pleading eyes on Maxwell.

“Please. I’ll do it. I’ll—”

I’ll open up the portal. I’ll expose my homeland to the terrors of a realm of nightmares.

“I’ll do it,” I repeated more firmly, holding Maxwell’s gaze. “Let me heal him, and I’ll do it. I’ll go to the king. I’ll be his breeder.”

I’d rip him to shreds before he could send his forces through the portal. I’d tear his realm inside out. I’d kill everyone and everything.

I’d do it. I could do it.

Because I was the Moon Goddess, and this realm was mine.

Maxwell didn’t stop me as I crawled toward Xander. I didn’t look up at him as I passed. I felt weak, my body aching with every movement that I made.

Was I strong enough for this? Was I risking the child I was carrying by using the whole force of the powers I didn’t yet know how to control?

Xander didn’t move when I reached his side. He was staring forward, unseeing. His obsidian eyes reflected the stars over our heads as I placed my hand on his cheek. I breathed his name, tears streaming down my face as I took my hand away. I looked at my palm, bloodstained and torn from my crawl, and I saw the lines Elaine had once tried to read.

I had one true love, according to that line that stretched across my palm. It faded in places, bending and curving like the veins of a great river. I closed my palm, holding it over Xander's mouth.

A single drop of the healing blood passed down to me by my father and grandmother fell onto his lip. It would be enough.

"Let's get on with it," Maxwell growled as I looked at him over my shoulder. Slate was moving in on me from the side, just visible in my peripheral.

The guards were walking behind Maxwell, the group of monsters encircling me as I slowly bent and laid my cheeks against Xander's shoulder.

Light fluttered from my skin in little streams, dancing and whirling upward in a strange, unnatural dance. Maxwell stopped short of us, then took a step back, motioning for the guards to stop. I watched him, my eyes narrowing on his eyes.

And then, I smiled, and blew them all away in a blast of pure light that sent a shockwave through the dry, dead grasses in the distance.

Screams ripped through the air as I wrapped my arms around Xander.

"We have something we need to do," I whispered against his skin, and I closed my eyes as the world went black.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 586

\*Oliver\*

Adrian was a stealthy wolf, his fur a blazing gold that caught the moonlight as he trotted ahead of me.

I was much, much larger than him, and he knew it. When Xander had kicked us out of that stolen truck, and we'd made a break for the hills, we'd shifted almost immediately. I was big, red, and looked rather intimidating, in my humble opinion. Adrian hadn't looked at me without his ears pinned back against his head since the second he turned his head to look at me the first time, and I took that as a compliment.

But the dick-measuring contest between us didn't last long. We'd only retreated far enough away to size up whatever threat Xander was facing so we could shift and fight.

But some unearthly demon from the depths of hell itself had dropped out of the sky right in front of us and plucked the distant figure of Xander from the ground, disappearing into the clouds in a shadow of bat-like wings.

Adrian and I couldn't mind-link with each other, being from different packs and, well, different realms. But the look in his eyes told me everything I needed to know.

We were fucked—royally. And Xander had definitely been eaten by whatever had taken him, of that I was sure.

Adrian hadn't wasted any time. I followed him blindly into the rolling, barren hills. I knew he was going to Crimson Creek. I knew I could trust him to find Lena because she was his Alpha's mate.

But I'd never been this far west before. George had been the one to travel to Crimson Creek when the Alpha of Breles asked for an ambassador from the Alpha King to follow up on the investigation taking place there.

Lena was an i\*\*\*t for thinking George wouldn't talk about the fact she was there. It was the first thing he'd said when he arrived back in Breles, where he'd met with Alpha King Eugene and my uncle, Alpha King Rowan.

Rowan damn near burned Morhan University to the ground when he found out, and he had a full investigation ordered into the inner workings of the university, coming up with stack upon stack of wrongdoings that eventually cost the dean and the administration their jobs.

But he'd never once stopped Lena. He hadn't sent a single warrior to Crimson Creek to protect her, even in secret.

He trusted her. Or he was scared of her. I honestly wasn't sure which.

Whatever the case, nothing much had come from the investigation in Crimson Creek... at least, nothing like what Adrian and Xander had explained to me.

And now we were running right into the thick of it with no backup, no warriors, and no way to communicate with each other.

It took hours to reach Crimson Creek, and the day was fading into dusk when we reached the outskirts of the town.

It was barely a town—not even a village. A single street was lined with buildings made of stone; that was it. Large manors dotted the barren landscape in the distance, but otherwise, it was... desolate and empty.

It looked like it had been abandoned for a while. Pieces of trash drifted in the breeze, rolling over the cobblestone street as we padded along, peering into dusted windows that reflected a stunning sunset.

Rays of gold and fuschia blazed in the sky above us as I stopped in front of what looked like a hotel and pressed my snout to the glass. There was a restaurant, it seemed, but the chairs were toppled over, rotting food left on the tables and evaporated glasses of wine sat untouched.

Where was everyone? Every single building was empty.

Adrian yipped ahead of me, and I turned my head to see him waiting for me in the distance. He lowered his head, whipping his tail as he willed me to follow him, and I did.

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Gideon was not what I was expecting he'd be based on Xander's and Adrian's descriptions. He was a vampire of sorts, and in my defense I knew very little about their kind, but he didn't have fangs or molted skin.

He was a small, slight man, and roughly my age. He had a handful of brothers, too. It was his sister who was the most interesting of the group of pale, dark haired people we'd come upon in the hills on the very edge of Crimson Creek's territory well into the night, a full day after Xander had been taken.

Alma was her name. She wasn't particularly beautiful, but she was striking, to say the least. She'd nearly killed us both the second we stepped foot, or paw, on the property, and we'd shifted back, covering our nakedness with our hands while we pleaded with her and tried our best to explain what had happened to Xander, and what we were doing there.

She'd given us clothes and food, and soon we found ourselves sitting in their somewhat dilapidated living room in front of a blazing hearth, full and warm.

None of them would speak of what they knew about where Xander and Lena might be. Adrian and I had spent the entire day combing the town and the hills surrounding it. We'd even gone to the Radcliffe Estate, where Lena and Xander had spent several weeks working as field hands.

There was no sign of them, nothing... not a single shred of evidence.

Adrian was leaning forward with his elbows resting on his knees, tapping his fingers against his leg. Gideon was sitting opposite us, watching us both closely as Alma busied herself with tidying up the room.

"Where is everyone?" Adrian finally asked, and Gideon inhaled, glancing at Alma before crossing his legs and leaning back in his armchair.

"Gone, and for some time now. I don't know where."

"Everyone just up and left?" I replied, and Gideon's eyes met mine with a steely, dark embrace.

"Yes, as they should have done long ago," Alma said quietly, her voice barely a whisper over the hearth as she swept the floor with a broom. "I assume it's been explained what we are, and why we're here?"

"Yes," Adrian replied before I could open my mouth and ask the burning questions lingering on the tip of my tongue.

Do you drink blood? Can you read minds? If you walk by a mirror, can you see your reflection?

"Then you'll know the kind of danger our class of Vamps are in," Gideon said as he crossed his arms over his chest. I raised my brows, looking at Adrian for clarifications, but he had his eyes narrowed suspiciously on Gideon.

I waited for someone, anyone, to speak.

Finally, Adrian asked, "Why are you still here, and everyone else has gone?"

"Because our family has held this property for longer than most packs in this land have been in existence," Gideon replied, stone-faced.

I glanced at Adrian, still wondering what the hell they were talking about. Vampires? In the pack lands? For how long?

"Prince Oliver," Alma chimed in, her voice low and gentle.

I looked up at her as she leaned on the broom, her dark eyes piercing mine as though she could see my thoughts, my very soul. "What happens now is war, and your kind does not have the forces to defend themselves. Once King Nikolas finds a way into this realm, he will unleash hell."

“Of course we have the forces to defend ourselves,” I said, not bothering to hide the hint of malice in my voice. “We already have an army in Breles—”

“That is barely holding onto the territory during the day, let alone at night when the hybrid beast attacks your camps.” Alma’s voice cut through the air like a knife, and I surrendered to the darkness that fell over the group.

“How many?” Adrian asked, looking exceedingly exhausted.

Gideon bit his bottom lip. “Tens of thousands of lower vampires, like myself, who still reside in the realm of night and will be forced to fight. The High Vampires, the lords and gods... hundreds, maybe less. But they will be the ones commanding the army, and their power is out of the scope of what you can even comprehend.”

“Then we need to know what we’re up against,” Adrian bit out, running his hands down the length of his thighs to rest on his knees.

I swallowed as I looked from Gideon to Alma, to the two unnamed brothers who watched us as they leaned against the far wall.

“What are the hybrids, exactly?” I asked, thinking of the winged beast who’d taken Xander the night before.

Alma adjusted her weight as Gideon cleared his throat, a look of terror flashing momentarily behind his eyes.

“Shifters, like yourself. They’re turned into what they are by High Vampires, by the Lords. Something about the combination creates... mutants. Beasts with extraordinary power that can only be controlled by the Lord that created them. The winged beast you saw,” Gideon said as he pointed at us, his face flushing with color, “was created by the king himself. King Nikolas has the power of flight, and he passed that on to his chosen hybrid. That beast in particular... his name used to be Seamus. He came to Crimson Creek a hundred years ago or so—”

“Immortal?” Adrian asked, his voice all business, but I could see the apprehension in his eyes.

A flash of a smile touched Gideon’s lips, but he shook his head. “Not like the Lords. But they do live a long time like we do.”

“How old are you?” I asked without a moment’s hesitation.

Gideon met my eye. “Two hundred something. I’ve lost count.”

“How long does your class live?” Adrienne pressed, and it was Alma who replied.

“Centuries, if we have enough food. Our family doesn’t pray upon shifters, but we do hunt animals and take blood root. It’s enough for a long life.”

Xander had explained what blood root was, and I had noticed an odd, acrid taste to the food we’d been served when we arrived at Gideon’s house. I ran my tongue along the inside of my lower lip, my stomach clenching at the leftover metallic taste. Alma was watching, and huffed a short laugh.

“It’s not harmful to you, prince. Not with your White Queen blood.”

“What about him?” I said, jabbing a thumb toward Adrian, whose brow was furrowed in sudden shock.

Alma sighed deeply as she set her broom against the wall and walked around the couch, sinking into the cushions next to Gideon.

“There was once only one realm, the realm of the gods. Legend has it they were bored, and created a new realm as their plaything... your realm, to be exact,” Alma began, smoothing the fabric of her skirt over her thighs. “They created people in their own image, and for thousands of years people toiled and struggled, until Leto.”

“The Moon Goddess,” I cut in, and Alma nodded.

“Before she was the Goddess, she was only a mere, mortal human. The God of the Night fell in love with her and gifted her with his powers under a cloak of secrecy. But with his gift, she found her mate, a mortal man who was not the God of Night. The God of Night felt her despair and gifted her the moonstone, cementing her status as one of the gods, which infuriated the others. The God of the Night was cast out of their realm, doomed to rule in a realm of Nightmares from which he couldn’t escape. Through his fury, his powers twisted and turned sour and deathly. He created the people of his realm in his new image, and thus vampires were born—”

A thunderous shutter rang out through the hills outside the house, followed by a shockwave that shattered the windows. We dove to the floor, covering our necks as glass rained down on us. Gideon was up in an instant, running toward the window.

I rose to my knees and looked over the top of the couch as a great white light faded in the distance, followed by what looked like a waterfall of stars.

Gideon turned around, his face twisted in terror.

“She did it. She opened up the realms to each other.”

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder Chapter 587

Chapter 87 : We Need to Get Out of Here

\*Xander\*

I opened my eyes to the feeling of someone wrapping their hands around my throat. Slate was hovering over me, blood drenching his hair and face as his eyes widened with surprise.

I shoved him off, and he screamed, and screamed, and...

“Oh, s\*\*t!” I cried, the words hitching in my throat as I dug my heels into the ground and sat up. Slate’s screams had faded into nothing but a distant echo. Before me was a gorge, and I was sitting right on the edge of a cliff.

I struggled to catch my breath as I rose to my knees and gingerly looked over the edge of the cliff, my eyes widening at the sheer gravity of the depth of the gorge below. Slate was nowhere to be seen.

“Well, that takes care of that,” I mumbled under my breath as I scooted away from the cliff’s edge and ran my fingers through my hair, ruffling the filthy, black strands that had grown far too long for my liking.

But then I snapped back to reality.

I was up in an instant, turning and looking wildly around. Lena was laying on her side, facing away from me, her arms wrapped protectively around her stomach.

I ran to her, turning her over and checking for any sign of injury. I ran my fingers through her hair, which she had cut short. I brushed a few of the white, chin-length strands away from her face, then shook her, hard.

“Wake up!” I cried, and she groaned, blinking into the soft pink sky above our heads. I held her face between my hands, breathing heavily as I watched her come to. “Lena—”

She took a sharp breath, and her eyes flew open, just as a shadow passed over us.

One of the guards who worked for Maxwell stumbled toward us, his eyes wide with confusion. He stopped walking, looking down at his tattered clothing and burnt skin, then looked up to meet my gaze.

Steam, or smoke—I wasn’t totally sure—wafted off the exposed pale skin of his body, and he started to scream in agony. I rose to my feet, looking around at the jagged, black mountains and sparse trees I couldn’t name.

“Shut up!” I hissed, pointing my finger at him. “You need to shut up!”

He continued to scream, trying to shield himself from the faint light traveling through thick, gray clouds. We weren’t in Crimson Creek anymore; that was for sure. I’d seen a sky like this, a mix of pale pink and violet, once before.

When I’d left Henry’s cave.

We were in the realm of Night.

The guard rushed me, and I wasn’t entirely sure whether he was attacking me or only trying to shield himself in my shadow, but I acted before coming to a conclusion. I shoved him, then drove my shoulder into his chest, sending him staggering backward and over the cliff’s edge. His scream faded as quickly as Slate’s had, and soon we were cloaked in eerie silence once more.

I turned to Lena, panting with exhaustion as I studied her face. She was pale, her lower lip trembling as she looked past me, through me, toward where the guard had disappeared over the edge of the cliff and into the gorge.

“Lena,” I said slowly, holding my hands up in surrender. “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” she said weakly, hugging herself with her arms.

But then she burst into tears, and I ran to her, skidding to a stop on my knees as I wrapped my arms around her. I pressed her into my chest, scrunching the fabric of what was left of her soiled sweater in

my fists. I laid my cheek against the top of her head and breathed, taking what felt like the first full breath I'd taken in weeks.

But she stiffened under my touch, and as I pulled away I noticed the look of rage blurring her features.

"What?" I said in a low whisper.

"Where the hell have you been?"

I ran my tongue along my lower lip, fixing her with a glare as I leaned back on my knees away from her.

"Where have I been?" I repeated, sliding my hands down what was left of my jeans. "You're asking where I've been?"

"Yes," she growled, rage flashing behind her eyes. "You just left me—"

"You blasted me into another realm, Lena!" I started, crossing my arms over my chest. "Your realm, actually... your garden."

"W-What? My garden?" Her face flushed, but the fury tightening her shoulders eased as she relaxed. She looked utterly confused as she looked up at me and met my eye.

"I saw your paintings, and met your friend, that weird voice."

"You couldn't have been there. I would have felt your presence there!"

"Well, I was there. For a month, it sounds like, based on how much time had passed in your realm." I sat back against the soft, damp grass that grew in patches around the edge of the cliff and wrapped my arms around my knees. "Have you been there recently?"

"No," she admitted, her eyes shining in the violet light. "I don't go to the garden often anymore. I used to go all the time as a little girl."

"How did you make it?"

"I don't know. I just did."

"And the voice? Is that your subconscious—"

"No," she said briskly, her eyes flicking away from mine as she examined the tears and tattered fabric covering her knees.

"Then who is it?"

"I don't know. It's always been there—"

"Lena," I said hurriedly, noticing the shadows beneath her eyes.

She looked exhausted, thin, and battered beyond a doubt. Anger surged through me, not toward her but toward the people who had locked her up and forced her to use her powers like this.

She looked up at me, her eyes shining with tears.

"I'm sorry—"

“Don’t apologize to me,” I said gruffly as I inched toward her, reaching out a hand to gently graze her cheek with the back of my fingers. “I know now that you... you didn’t know—”

“How did you get out?”

A rumbling echoed through the gorge, and I instinctively grabbed her, gathering her in my arms as I rose to my feet. I was holding her upright, and at that moment I realized how weak she truly was.

We needed to get out of there.

“I closed it behind me,” she said weakly, her cheek pressed into my chest as I gathered her in my arms and cradled her like an infant. “The portal... it’s closed.”

She closed us in, more like it.

“I can open it—”

“No, you need rest. We need to find shelter.” A chill ran up my spine as a distant screech ripped through the air.

Lena didn’t even flinch, her eyes fluttered against my skin. The pinkish, violet sky was beginning to fade into a rich navy, and distant, faded stars were visible on the horizon. Night was coming. I thought of Henry and his mirror-lined cave, his fear and urgency when he’d led me off that peak and into his hideout.

“We need to find shelter,” I repeated to an already sleeping Lena.

Had she been awake, I would have shifted and had her ride on my back, but there was no way I could do that safely now.

I held her firmly against my chest as I walked away from the gorge and into the dense trees, glancing over my shoulder only once before I let the dark forest embrace us.

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I’d never experience such darkness. My eyes didn’t adjust to the night as it crept over us... no moon, hardly any stars, just a black, inky abyss that swallowed us whole.

I’d been walking for at least two hours, occasionally crouching behind a thicket of brambles or resting against a tree. Lena was completely out, a dead weight in my arms as I gingerly walked in what I hoped was a straight line through the forest and not in a circle that would lead us back to where we had started.

I had plenty of time to think back on my experience with Slate, Maxwell, and his guards as I carried her through the forest. I had time to go over every morsel of conversation I’d had with Henry. Henry had mentioned cities in this realm, cities of slaves, cities of Lords and their riches. But he hadn’t mentioned a forest.

I had no idea where I was going or why. I just knew I needed to keep moving until daybreak. I couldn’t rest, no matter how much I needed it. Lena had healed me, that was obvious, but I was starving and exhausted.

The second we stopped, and I let the fatigue set in, however, we'd be sitting ducks... prey, waiting for slaughter.

But after a third hour of walking, I started to get disoriented. The trees were only getting thicker, and carrying Lena through the dense underbrush was becoming impossible. I was out of breath and exhausted beyond belief.

If the sun could just rise... just for a moment...

I saw a light in the distance, flickering as it moved through the trees... or, the trees were moving, tilting in a breeze. I stopped moving, my breath caught in my throat as my chest tightened with unease.

I was imagining it. The light disappeared, and a silence fell over the forest, broken only by the soft, rhythmic sound of Lena's breathing.

But then the light reappeared, closer this time, swinging as though someone was carrying it.

I backed up, my arm scraping against a tree and tearing the remaining fabric of my shirt clean off my arm. I hissed out a breath as the rough bark sliced my skin.

The light stopped moving again, only ten or so yards in front of us.

We were dead. This was it.

The crunch of leaves sounded as the light began to move closer again. I backed up further, but my back hit a tree. I couldn't see anything but the light. If I made a break for it, I risked slamming into a tree or tripping over roots or low-lying branches. I was stuck in place.

I tightened my grip on Lena, and she flinched and cried out under the strength of my hold on her body. The light stopped for a moment, and whoever was holding it hesitated.

"Hello?" came a feminine voice, oozing fear.

I cast that shadow of power over Lena, protecting her from whatever was coming our way. The light moved again, and again, as whoever carried took two more steps toward us, then stopped as the light moved over my face.

She was a small woman, slight in build and barely tall enough for the top of her head to reach my elbow. Her hair was shrouded in a thick cloak made of black fabric that made her nearly invisible in the darkness surrounding us.

She was one of them, I realized... a lower vampire, like Gideon and his family. She nearly dropped her lantern in her haste to get away from us.

"Wait!" I cried. "Please, we need help!"

The woman stopped short, her lantern illuminating the forest around her as she slowly turned her head back to me, her eyes focusing on mine. Could she see the warm color of my skin? Could she smell my scent?

"I'm a wolf," I said hastily, then nodded down to Lena. "She is too. She's pregnant. We need shelter."

The woman paled, if that was even possible, as she moved her gaze to Lena. She tilted her head as her eyes moved over Lena's body, then stopped as she glimpsed her hair.

The woman said something in a language I didn't understand. It was an exclamation of surprise. She looked back up at me, her eyes widening with sudden understanding.

"Come," she said, extending her hand. "Hurry."

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 588

Chapter 88 : Kingdom of Brune

\*Xander\*

This was a major risk.

The woman hurried ahead of me, her feet sure and agile as she stepped over the roots that covered the forest floor. We followed no trail, but I knew she was aware of where she was going. She exuded the signs of someone who spent time hunting... or being hunted.

She stopped twice, abruptly, covering the lantern with her cloak and shrouding us in complete darkness. I didn't breathe during these moments, didn't even dare to move as the woman scanned our surroundings. Small creatures moved through the forest. Birds flapped their wings and shook the branches over our heads. But there was nothing large nearby, at least from my own awareness and understanding.

She was moving faster than I could handle while carrying Lena. My arms and shoulders were numb after hours of effort, and my feet were bare and bruised. I almost asked her to slow down, but I wasn't sure if she could understand me. It turned out that I didn't have to because one moment the woman was in front of me, and the next moment she disappeared into the darkness.

I come to an abrupt stop, looking wildly around for her lantern light. I heard a soft whoosh of movement where she had just been standing, and I turned back toward that spot as the lantern light spilled toward me, illuminating the space where I was standing.

I looked up to find a giant, towering tree directly in front of me. There was a cleft in it, just wide enough that I could step inside of it as I followed the lantern.

I lost my balance as the ground beneath me fell away, and I stumbled on what felt like stairs. Two small, childlike hands came up to steady me.

"Down," said the woman, and she hooked the lantern's handle over one of my fingers as she stepped behind me. I heard rustling and turned to find her moving several bundles of tree branches woven with alders in front of the cleft in the tree, sealing us inside.

I turned back to the stairs. They spiraled down into darkness... more darkness, just darkness.

"Go!" she hissed behind me, and I did, the lantern swinging on my finger as I balanced Lena in my arms in the crowded space.

"Where are we?"

“Safe,” the woman breathed, and I heard a rustle of fabric that I assumed was her removing the cloak from over her head.

We reached the bottom of the stairs, and I stopped, waiting for further instructions. The woman squeezed past me, grabbing the lantern from me as she moved into the darkness. Suddenly, the area was showered in warm amber light as she used the lantern to light a torch, revealing a long, curving corridor.

I hadn’t noticed the basket the woman had been carrying. It was dangling from her waist by a strap that hung from her shoulder. The basket was full of plants I couldn’t name and had never seen before, several of which were white flowers that had a strange, iridescent glow to them. She noticed my gaze and shrugged, motioning toward the basket.

“Herbs,” she said casually, then started forward down the corridor before I could utter a single word in response.

So, she did speak my language, or at least enough of it that I could understand her, and she could understand me. But I bit my tongue as I followed her, the unease of being stuck in a dark, endless forest in a world full of vampires replaced by the fact I had followed one inside a tree, and underground.

But I found myself at a loss for words when we rounded a corner and came face to face with a heavy, ornate set of double doors, two torches already lit on either side of them. My mouth dropped open as my gaze moved up along the symbols and designs, all of them etched into what looked like solid gold and embellished with gemstones.

“Safe, inside,” the woman said, nodding her head toward the door. “She needs the healer.” She pointed at Lena, a look of concern flashing over her dainty features.

This woman was young, little older than a teenager, and based on the velvet, emerald-green dress she was wearing beneath the black cloak and the polished moonstones she wore in her earlobes and pinned throughout her long, golden braid, I assumed she was some kind of royal, or at least wealthy.

She pounded a rhythmic pattern against the door, and after a moment it creaked open, warmth and light spilling into the corridor.

I damn near dropped Lena out of sheer surprise.

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\*Lena\*

The ceiling was low and covered in plaster that was painted in a mural of sweeping florals and foliage. I’d been staring up at it for hours, unbothered by the women circling around me with their kettles of richly brewed herbs wafting fragrant steam into the air as they rubbed my arms, legs, and stomach with poultices.

I didn’t protest. I didn’t utter a word. I just laid there.

Maybe I slept; I wasn’t sure. Time seemed to stand still. Eventually, I was propped up, a blanket laid over my body and several thick pillows stuffed behind my back so I was forced to sit.

A tray was laid over my lap, and an unfamiliar woman fed me spoonfuls of hearty stew while another waited to tip a teacup into my mouth. They didn't give me the option of feeding myself. I ate everything they offered me, every single morsel of food they had. Slowly my strength began to return, and the blanket of exhaustion lifted, and I was struck with a crushing reality.

"Xander?" I said sharply, which shocked the women who were circling the bed, all of them dressed in gowns of fine silks and velvet. Their hair was twisted in challenging braids and coils, roped with strings of gold and pinned with jewels. "Where am I?"

One of the women stepped forward, placing a pale, thin hand on her companion's shoulder as the other women slowly retreated from the bed.

Oh, Goddess, I thought, sinking into the pillows as my gaze left the woman, and I looked wildly around the room at its finery, wealth.

Was I in the castle of the Vampire King?

The woman who had stepped forward bowed deeply, and her companions followed suit. I glanced at each and every one of them, seeing them for what they were past their riches... vampires, all of them.

"How do you feel?" the woman asked, her jet black hair swept away from her ageless face.

"Where am I?"

"Safe," she said, and she sat on the edge of the bed, motioning for two of the women to pull back the curtains to reveal a giant window overlooking... daylight, green hills, green trees, a waterfall, and the sparkling lights of a village beyond. I narrowed my eyes, gaping slightly as I tried to catch the breath that was stuck in my throat.

"But..."

"Artificial light," she said, matter-of-factly. I snapped my eyes to hers as she continued, "It mimics the day you experience in your own realm."

"Am I being taken to the Vampire King?" I asked, fear prickling in my fingertips as I gripped the bedsheets.

She looked surprised. "No, of course not. You're safe here—"

"Where am I? Where is Xander?"

A low, playful murmur passed through the group standing at the edge of the bed, and several of the women blushed deeply.

"Your mate is fine, resting before he meets the king... our king, that is, my husband."

"I don't—I don't understand—"

"I understand you've met my niece, Alma. She is a talented healer based on what she was able to do to the wounds you have on your belly."

"Alma?"

The woman nodded, a genuine smile spreading across her face. She looked like she could be younger than Alma, maybe even younger than myself, but her voice was that of a woman who had lived a long life and was rich with wisdom. "My sister's daughter. I never had the chance to meet my nieces and nephews, unfortunately. But that's a story for another time." She paused, rubbing the corner of the bedsheets between her thumb and forefinger.

"This kingdom is a prize, a precious jewel. Long ago, my husband's grandfather created this place as a refuge for the lower vampires who were facing slavery—and worse—in the lands above us. We are the lucky few who don't have to bend the knee to the King of Nightmares, Nikolas."

A chill ran up my spine as I thought of the man from my dream, and my fear must have shown on my face, for she placed a hand on my ankle over the bedsheets.

"You're safe here, White Queen. We know what's happening to your realm. Whispers of an invasion have been trickling down here for years now. Your arrival is well-timed. The Wise Women have been expecting you."

"Who?"

But before she could answer, there was a knock on the door, and a maid stepped inside, nodding in greeting to what I assumed was the queen's court. The queen rose, nodding to the maid.

"We must get you dressed for dinner," she said, and then looked down at her hands as she chuckled. "A dinner we will eat together."

I blanched, adrenaline coursing through me as I realized a silent question about what, or who, they'd be eating for dinner had been sitting on the tip of my tongue.

The maid retreated into the hallway as the court circled the bed, and helped me dress with all the gentleness in the world. I'd been scrubbed clean, my hair washed and styled, although several of the women clicked their tongues and commented on how short it was. But after nearly an hour of preparation, I was led in front of a mirror, and I barely recognized the woman in my reflection.

I was dressed in a gown that looked as though it were made of stars... long sleeved, but rather racy as it hugged every curve of my body like a glove.

"A goddess," the queen cooed, extending her hand for me to take.

I wondered if she knew that was exactly what I was.

"Will Xander be there? I need to talk to him."

"Of course, White Queen. He is waiting for you now. Come, let me show you the Kingdom of Brune."

I was led out of the room and into a corridor that shimmered like the inside of the diamond. Everything was all colors and life, nothing like I thought I'd find in the realm of the vampires.

"My name is Kiern," the queen said as she tucked my hand in the crook of her elbow.

"Selene," I replied, and I thought I saw a flash of understanding pass behind her pale auburn eyes.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 589

Chapter 89 : Blood for the King

\*Lena\*

The dining hall was the most luxurious room I'd ever stepped foot into. The walls were lined with golden and cream-colored wallpaper trimmed with marble, veined with gold that continued to the floor and stretched across the entire room. A crystal chandelier the size of a small house hung over our heads, illuminating the domed ceiling.

But my eyes were fixed on Xander, who was standing to the left of the King of Brune and Queen Kiern as I walked into the room.

Kiern was graceful, and her voice was like music as she announced our presence. The table was set for many, many people, and soon the chairs were filled with the members of their court. Kiern didn't take her seat beside her husband before she led me to Xander, smiling softly as he bowed to her and put my hand in his, leading me into the seat next to him.

I watched her walk away, finding it hard to swallow as the members of the court, men and women dressed in riches beyond anything I'd ever witnessed, stared at us.

"Are you alright? Are you hurt?" Xander whispered into my ear as I looked down at my place setting.

I squeezed his hand under the table, but neither of us let go. It had been over a month since we'd been together. Watching him being nearly beaten to death didn't count as quality time.

There was a lot we needed to discuss.

"My father would have given anything to be in the presence of a White Queen," the king said, and I snapped my eyes up from my plate to meet his gaze. Like Kiern, the King of Brune looked shockingly young, even though he was likely several hundred years old. I still wasn't sure how that worked. Maxwell had said lower vampires weren't immortal, right?

Then, these were the High Vampires, the Lords and gods of the realm?

The King of Brune watched me closely with his violet eyes sparkling in the light of the chandelier, searching my face for any silent questions, or plans, lingering behind my hopefully neutral expression. He was tall, lean, and had a sly smile on his full, wide mouth. He glanced at Kiern, who beamed at him, and then gave Xander and me a little shrug that made his tawny blond hair tremble.

Beautiful... all of these people were the definition of gorgeous, with not a blemish, not a scar, not a single thread of hair out of place.

"You have not told her your name," Kiern teased the king, and he raised his brows, letting out a friendly laugh as he relaxed back into his chair that was situated at the head of the long, narrow table.

"King Costas of Brune, your servant," he said in a dramatically formal voice.

Xander raised a brow, a hint of mirth lingering behind his eyes as he looked Costas up and down. I wondered what the two of them had talked about, what Costas knew about the situation in our realm, and what he knew about me.

Xander knitted his hand in mine beneath the table as we turned our attention to a set of double doors that had just opened. A trail of servants fanned out, pushing carts laden with the finest food I'd ever seen.

'I'm confused,' I said, down the bond, and I glanced at Xander out of the corner of my eye, noticing the corners of his mouth twitching into a smile.

He didn't answer me, and I turned my attention to the servants as they placed heaping platters of fruits I couldn't name on the table, separated by roast chickens, prime rib, and roast pork. The court talked excitedly over the spread, but no one touched the food. I felt my mouth watering as I eyed a platter filled with what looked like palm-sized meat pies, the pastry perfectly golden and crackling with butter and steam.

A final servant came out of the doorway holding a golden platter in one hand. He approached King Costas, bowing low and then setting the dish in front of him, removing the lid to reveal a goblet of what looked like wine.

But I knew it was not.

My stomach clenched, and I felt bile rising in my throat as I forced myself to hold my gaze on the royals and not look away in haste, giving my discomfort away.

Costas rose from his seat and held his goblet of blood in the air, saying some kingly spiel to his court. I couldn't focus on his words. I could only see the blood as it sloshed around the crystal goblet, then met his lips....

"Oh, Goddess," I choked, covering my mouth with my hands as I nearly doubled over.

I struggled out of my seat, caught by the elbow by Kiern, who was suddenly at my side when a second ago she had been sitting opposite me at the table. She whisked me away, my feet barely touching the floor, and made it out into the corridor just in time for me to throw up in whatever Kiern had handed me, which turned out to be a vase adorned with rubies.

"I am—I am so sorry," I said, the words a struggle.

Kiern patted my back, smiling down at me like we were close friends. "How far along are you?" she asked, arching a perfect, black brow. She snapped her fingers and a maid rushed forward, taking the vase from my hands and handing me a glass of cold water in the same motion.

"I honestly don't know," I replied, leaning against the wall. I drank the water as sweat prickled along my brow.

"Have you gotten sick like this before? Or is it the first time?"

"I thought—I taught kindergarten. I thought the kids gave me the flu."

Kiern looked confused, but I didn't elaborate. I highly doubted vampires had kindergarten, or flus. I just shook my head and began to apologize profusely.

"Oh, shush. It's not that big of a deal, really. You're not the first person to faint or get ill at our dinner table. Half the women of the court still can't look in Costas' direction when he drinks his, well, dinner."

"Whose blood is it?" I asked without thinking. I cowered, but Kiern wrapped her around my shoulder and began to walk me down the corridor, away from the dining hall.

"We have a few feeders, those who volunteer their blood to the king. They're taking care of and are here of their own free will, I assure you."

"I don't know anything about your kind," I said, the words laced with fear and pain.

Kiern furrowed her brow, then pursed her lips into a sympathetic smile. "Well, I'll have something bland sent up to your room for dinner, and you can eat while I tell you everything you need to know. How about that?"

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I was sprawled in the gigantic four-poster bed, an empty bowl of oatmeal sitting in the crook of my arm as Kiern rested in an armchair by the fire. She had left me in the hands of two maids, who dressed me in the softest cashmere pajamas and tucked me into bed so gently I half expected them to read me a bedtime story and kiss my forehead before they took their leave.

Kiern was also dressed for bed in a lacy, silk robe the same color of the blood Costas had had in his goblet, her long, ebony hair undone and falling around her shoulders as she swirled a glass of wine.

"I don't have a taste for blood," she said, continuing her explanation of the eating habits of the vampires in her court. "But I need it to survive. I get by with a pinch of it here and there, like now, mixed in with my wine in the evenings. I don't know anyone who actually bites their feeders. It's a messy ordeal. We eat food, drink wine and tea, and enjoy a chocolate cake from time to time, just like you." She sipped her wine, shrugging as she set it on the side table next to the armchair and crossed her legs. "What else would you like to know?"

"Are you a High Vampire?"

Her expression stiffened, a vivid sadness sweeping over her eyes as she slowly shook her head and turned her gaze away from me.

"No, we're not."

"What's the difference?"

"We're more like your kind than not, Lena," she said, returning her gaze to my face. "The High Vampires... they're gods in their own rights, powerful, so, so powerful. It's hard to comprehend what they're capable of. They've torn this realm apart, killing thousands and even killing each other. Nikolas is... he's the last High Vampire left. That's it. We've been trying to find a way to kill him and free our kind for centuries, to no avail."

She leaned forward, reaching for the wine glass and draining it swiftly, as though washing his name out of her mouth. "As vampires, we have the ability to live a very, very long time—centuries, especially if we're in good health. King Nikolas has been alive since the dawn of time in our realm, an impossible amount of time. Like you, I have powers, but they don't go further than moving a swift breeze. But Nikolas... he can get into your mind, change you, morph you into what he needs. That's how he keeps the rest of our kind as slaves, you know. He survives off their blood. They build his empire, supply him his army."

"He's going to destroy my realm if I don't submit to him," I said, meeting her eye.

She nodded, and an understanding settled between just as the door opened and Xander stepped into the room. He glanced at Kiern, bobbing his head as he thanked her for looking out for me.

"I'll come fetch you in the morning, Lena," Kiern said as she rose, smiling at me in farewell. "There's someone I want you to meet."

With that, she was gone, and she closed the door behind her.

Xander looked around the room before he settled his gaze on my face.

"I'm fine," I breathed, tapping the empty bowl of oatmeal with my fingertips as he narrowed his eyes at me. "Morning sickness—"

"It's not morning," he countered, bending down to remove his shoes. He was dressed just as fine as the men of the court in a black-on-black shirt and trouser getup, adorned with rich purple embroidery on the stitching. He kicked his shoes in two different directions, and then took his shirt off, then his pants, until he was in nothing but a pair of boxers that hugged his ass and thighs.

I swallowed, finding my throat dry as I watched him move across the foot of the bed in my direction, his eyes blazing with what I hoped was desire, and not anger.

"You owe me," he growled, low in his throat, "for leaving me stranded in your garden."

I was aware of the challenge in his voice, the hunger that lingered there. All of the things we needed to talk about, be damned.

He was on top of me in an instant, rolling over with me in his arms as he pressed me to his chest, the bowl of oatmeal crashing and shattering on the floor beneath the bed.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder Chapter 590

Chapter 90 : Secret Plans

\*Lena\*

I brushed a kiss against Xander's lips, but then pulled away. I looked down at him, taking in every line and sharp curve of his face. I ran my thumbs along his jaw, holding his face between my hands as I met his eyes.

The room around us was quiet, and the curtains to the strange underground world outside the palace were closed, shielding us inside a sanctuary of deep greens and red velvets. I did feel safe here. I felt safe for the first time in a very, very long time.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked, his voice the softest whisper. I nodded, shrugging a shoulder as I continued to look down at him. “Did you really think cutting your hair was going to be enough of a disguise to prevent people from finding out who you were?”

I glared at him, then attempted to roll off of him as a playful expression played across his face. He held me in place, arching a brow.

“I thought you’d left me,” I said sharply, swatting him.

He only tightened his grip. “Do you understand now that I’ve never done that to you, not even once?”

“What about the train station?” I countered, and he let out his breath.

“I thought I was protecting you from... from this.”

“You should have told me about the vampires.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I should have, but I honestly thought I could prevent this from happening.”

I could hear the regret in his voice—could see it flashing behind his eyes. Silence settled between us for a moment, and I placed my hands on his chest.

“Are you healed?” I asked weakly.

He nodded, then smirked, rolling his eyes as he gathered me against his chest and rolled me over so I was laying against him instead of straddling him.

“Did you get the royal treatment too?” he asked with a little laugh.

I matched his smirk with one of my own. “Are you telling me a group of men held you down while they rubbed you with oils and herbs?”

He blushed, pursing his lips into a tight line. “I’ve never felt better, honestly.”

“Adrian will never let you live this down,” I smiled, but choked on the laugh threatening to escape my throat. “What... what happened in Cedar Hollow after I was.... Where is Sasha? The little girl I was....” Tears welled in the corners of my eyes as I pressed my cheek against his chest.

Xander took a deep, pained breath. “She’s fine. We couldn’t find her mother...”

I listened with a heavy heart as he explained the aftermath of the attack. Clare and Hale hadn’t been found, but the castle had burned down to the foundation. Several people died, but the power I’d unleashed had effectively ended the attack, and the families were able to escape and start what would become a long journey to safety along the northwestern coastline.

“We found Oliver when we reached Avondale. He... he came with Adrian and me across the sea to Breles. We took the Persephone—”

“You what?” I gasped, lifting my head to look him in the eyes.

"I can't go back to Avondale, just so you know. Keaton will have my head. We technically stole it—"

"You STOLE the Persephone?"

He nodded, a boyish gleam in his eyes as he fought the urge to smile. He told me Abigail had stayed behind in Avondale to make sure Sasha was delivered to the palace, and that he, Adrian, and Oliver made it to Breles but didn't make it all the way to Crimson Creek.

"As far as I know, Adrian and Oliver are safe," he concluded, but I could sense the worry in his voice. He didn't look at me, his eyes were fixed on the light fixture on the ceiling, looking far, far away as he lost himself in thought.

I didn't press him for details about what had happened during his time in Maxwell's keeping. We didn't talk about what I'd done in the ruins of the ancient temple outside of the estate, either. We just held each other.

A clock chimed somewhere in the room. It was midnight, and I lifted my head off his chest as I looked toward the door to our bedroom.

"Do they sleep at night, like us?" I looked toward the curtains, noticing the light of their artificial day had ebbed into darkness.

"Costas said their lights are timed so that it's day here when it's night above ground. So they have a similar sleep schedule that we would have, I guess. He said they don't need to sleep often, or very much."

"Are we the only shifters here, at least in Brune?"

"Yes," he said with conviction, meeting my eyes. He took a deep breath, pulling me close. "He's going to use this as an opportunity to declare war on King Nikolas, to free his people. He knows about your powers, what you are.... We need to leave tomorrow, Lena, and go back to the pack lands if you're strong enough to open the portal again. Costas said King Nikolas uses the lower vampires to mine bloodstones, which allows him to temporarily harness powers that allow him to open small breaks between our realms."

"I know," I whispered.

"We can't be here. This isn't our fight."

He was right about it not being our fight.

It was mine.

I closed my eyes, letting the conversation drift into silence. I didn't want to talk about it. I wanted to remain in this cloak of safety, and quiet, and just be with him for a moment before we had to decide on our next move.

Because I knew we'd be separated again, and I didn't know how long it would be this time. There was something I needed to do before I left this place.

And Xander couldn't know my plans.

An hour passed, the clock chiming again to announce it was now one o'clock. I languished on the edge of sleep, my body and mind totally confused on what the actual time was in my own realm.

Xander's hand eventually drifted to my belly, spread wide over my navel. I almost flinched at his touch.

"You're sure?" he said in a whisper, and I nodded against his chest, my eyelashes grazing his skin.

"I know you said it wasn't possible—"

"I'm sorry, Lena."

"Why are you apologizing—"

"Because this isn't what you wanted," he said, the sharpness in his voice making me wince. "At least, not with me. Not like this."

Everything I'd said to him about how complicated our relationship would be as rulers of two different realms came bursting to the forefront of my mind, and I felt a pang of unexplainable guilt and hurt.

"This is what I always wanted, but never thought I'd have," I admitted. "I don't care what comes next. We'll figure it out. You always said we would."

He relaxed as I spoke the words and nuzzled against him. Let bygones be bygones, I thought, closing my eyes.

His hand remained on my stomach, tracing little circles across my skin with his thumbs.

"You said... I was sure I heard you say we're having a girl—"

"I did," I replied, my voice a whisper against his skin.

He sighed deeply, and I looked up to see a smile flicker across his lips. His eyes were closed, and for a moment I had the urge to tell him I'd met her, that I'd seen her—that she looked like him.

But I didn't. I felt as though I needed to keep that knowledge to myself, to keep it safe, and secret, but only until what I needed to do was done.

"What happens now?" I asked, and he groaned in response, turning over onto his side so he was facing me. He ran his finger along my cheek, then bent his neck and kissed me deeply.

Shivers of longing ran down my spine as he deepened the kiss, his tongue parting my lips.

"I missed you," he whispered against my mouth. "And as much as I want to talk, to plan—"

I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him close, kissing him fully and hungrily.

He made love to me so gently I could have cried. He moved against me, grinding against my hips so slowly and deliberately that I could barely stand it.

"Please," I begged, running my nails down my back.

He growled against my neck, nipping me on the collarbone, which caused me to cry out in ecstasy.

"I plan to take my time," he whispered, trailing kisses across my chest.

And he did take his time.

Hours later I lay tangled in the sheets, his body wrapped around mine as he slept. I was watching the window, waiting for the first inklings of day to filter through the curtains.

Before he'd fallen asleep, Xander had told me about his first meeting with Costas. Costas had asked him to do something, for me to do something, and I felt that knowledge weighing so heavily on me now as I tried in vain to fall asleep.

He wanted us to open the portal and keep it open. He needed us to do it, to allow King Nikolas's forces to invade my realm so that he could strike the king when he was defenseless.

In return, Costas was going to send his own forces into the pack lands to aid our own armies.

My head spun as I tried to wrap my mind around the fact that Xander had just told me the Kingdom of Brune wasn't the only secret hive of vampires lurking below the surface of the realm of nightmares above. There were four kingdoms below ground, all of them willing to do what they needed to do in order to end King Nikolas and free their enslaved brothers and sisters.

Would their forces be enough to save our lands?

It didn't matter. It wouldn't matter. Not if I was successful.

I snuggled deeper into the pillows, and Xander huffed out his breath, shifting his position in his sleep. He said he'd be making a decision tomorrow, but I'd already made mine.

Xander and I would be leaving this place, going back to the surface. I'd open the portal to our realm.

But it wouldn't be for the kings of the underground network of lower vampires.

I'd send Xander back through the portal, out of harm's way. I'd stay behind, closing the portal behind him.

I'd wait until nightfall and bait the vampires in. I'd let them take me to their king.

And I'd face King Nikolas. I'd pretend to be there to do his bidding in exchange for peace in my own realm.

And when I had him right where I wanted him... I'd kill him.