

Kings Breeder 641

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

CHAPTER 641 : OF ALL THE NIGHTS TO BE BORN

Xander

Rowan was pacing back and forth across the length of the library, a glass of scotch clutched so tightly in his hand that I thought it was going to crack. Troy and Ethan were quietly chatting as they sat opposite of each other in two high-backed armchairs. They seemed calm, practically jovial.

Rowan, on the other hand, looked like he was going to murder someone.

Lena had kicked me out of the bedroom she was laboring in. I didn't protest, not at the time. I was planning on going back up there to relieve Maeve of her "support person" duties once I finished the light dinner a maid had brought up for us in the library.

I was also waiting for news about the ship carrying Adrian and Abigail to the port of Findali, which was late because of the thunderstorm that was brewing over Mirage. Rain was starting to patter against the windows, but I found the sound comforting. I hoped Lena would, too.

"Can I get you another drink?" I asked Rowan, who was either ignoring me or didn't hear me, whichever one. I let out my breath in a long, drawn-out sigh. I hated that Lena was suffering. Knowing that she was in pain was ripping me to shreds. But her agony was coming out sideways, and she was lashing out at everyone and everything. I couldn't comfort her right now, and it was killing me.

I didn't let it show. I walked back over to the long table in the center of the library and forked another bite of roast beef into my mouth, washing it down with tepid coffee. It was going to be a long night. Lena wasn't progressing as fast as we originally thought.

The library door swung open and Maeve walked inside, red in the face and her hair tied in a messy, somewhat sweaty bun on the top of her head.

Everyone in the room turned to her, and for a moment my heart dropped into my stomach thinking I'd missed the birth, but Maeve caught my gaze and shook her head.

"She's fine—pissed, but just fine. She said she was going to try to sleep for a while," Maeve breathed, glancing toward the food on the table.

I motioned for her to eat as I walked toward the door leading out of the hallway and into the first-floor corridor. I didn't look back as muted conversation about Lena and the baby rippled through the air. Maeve would fill them in, I was sure, and I'd find out for myself what kind of shape Lena was in now.

I walked up the grand stone staircase to the third floor. It was quiet up here, and down one darkened corridor I could see our bedroom door was slightly ajar, but darkened. I let out the breath I was holding, thankful she was able to get some rest.

But then I heard whispering coming from the sitting room just across the hall from our bedroom.

I stepped inside the sitting room to find Hanna with her arms crossed over her chest, her cheeks pink with emotion while the midwife, a portly older woman who I found out had a mean streak, packed up her things.

"What's going on?" I said in a hiss as I stepped into the room.

Hanna's eyes flicked up to mine before she ran her hands over her face, her shoulders slumping in resignation.

"The labor has stalled. That baby isn't coming 'til tomorrow, I guarantee it—"

"Where are you going?" I asked sharply as she gathered up her bag. She blinked up at me, shrugging her shoulders.

"Another birth. I'll be back in the morning," she replied casually, pushing past me toward the door.

I opened my mouth to tell her to stop, and that she was staying, but she was gone before I could utter another word.

Hanna sucked in her breath behind me, hugging herself. I turned to face her, my face twisted in confusion. "What the hell is going on?"

"Lena's contractions slowed, and she hasn't made any progress since this afternoon—"

"So the midwife just left?"

"There's another mother who is progressing quicker, I guess."

"Hanna," I protested. But before I could say anything else, I heard yelling in the hallway.

Rowan stormed into the room, red in the face.

"Where the hell does she think she's going?" Rowan growled, shutting the door behind him. I exhaled, crossing my arms over my chest as Rowan and I turned to Hanna, who paled under our shared gaze.

"There's nothing I can do about it!" she argued. "Lena is fine, anyway. She's asleep—"

"I'll call the car around. We're taking her to the hospital," Rowan said firmly, running his fingers through his hair.

"No, that's not what she wants!" Hanna protested, and I felt the electricity between the two mates fall over us like a wet blanket.

"We're going to let her sleep," I said with conviction. "If things get worse, we'll have the midwife come back. If her labor has truly stalled, then there's nothing a hospital could do for her, either." I turned to Hanna, looking deep into her pale brown eyes for understanding. "Is she alright—and the baby?"

"They're fine."

"Then we wait it out."

"There's another midwife nearby. I'll have someone call down to her practice and see if she can come," Rowan said, his voice leveling out as his initial anger subsided.

"I think it's best if the original midwife doesn't come back, anyway. Lena doesn't like her, and I don't either," I declared, which elicited a nod from Hanna.

I let my arms relax at my sides and gave them a nod in farewell as I stepped out of the room and walked across the hallway, sliding into our bedroom and shutting the door behind me. Lena was asleep in the bed with what looked like five bedrooms worth of pillows around her. Her hair was damp with sweat, and her face was twisted in a painful scowl, but she was asleep. She was fine. She'd be fine.

I walked across the room and sat in the armchair near the window so I could have a full view of her face as she laid on her side. Rain was streaming down the windows now, and outside, the wind was starting to pick up. I'd been warned about the thunderstorms in this part of the realm; they were vicious and violent.

"Of all the nights to be born," I whispered to my unborn daughter, "you chose this one?"

Lena let out a howl that made a shiver run down my spine. Her fingernails were ripping through my skin as she stood in front of me, bent at the waist, her head pressing into my stomach. I was breathing hard, watching as Maeve and Hanna hurried around the room with two maids as they laid out towels, linens, and supplies.

It was 3:00 in the morning. The sky outside was black as death, and thunder made the glass panes in the windows tremble violently as the room was lit up by a flash of blue lightning. Lena screamed, and not from the storm. This baby was coming now, and fast.

"There's no word at all from the midwives," a third maid cried as she rushed into the room with a basket full of supplies. Gauze and antiseptic jostled in her basket as she hurried to the bed, where Maeve was laying out several blankets and towels. There was an old infirmary downstairs that hadn't been staffed in years, but it had everything we needed. At least, I hoped.

Two hours ago, Lena had woken up screaming for help. Now, I was holding onto her for dear life while she brought our daughter into the world without any assistance from the midwives.

Lena stilled, looking up at me with tears in her eyes, but no fear. Determination was etched into her expression, a righteous fury behind her eyes that immediately sent a rush of calm through my body.

"Are you ready?" I asked, and she nodded.

I sucked in my breath and tore my gaze from hers to look at Maeve and Hanna, who were standing side by side as the maids readied the room.

Rosalie walked through the door, glancing at me and Lena with a soft smile on her face as Elaine and Clare lingered in the doorway.

There were three White Queens in this room. We'd be okay. All I could do now was to continue telling myself that Lena and Alexis would make it through this.

"The creek overflowed and the road to the castle is washed out. I don't know about the trail—" Rosalie began, but Lena's moan of pure agony cut her off.

I held her head against my chest, her cheek pressed against the sweat-soaked fabric of my T-shirt. I closed my eyes, letting that shadow of power embrace us, trying in vain to take the edge off some of her pain.

"Where do you want to be?" I asked in a whisper. "Do you want to lie down?"

"I don't think I can move," she breathed, her body beginning to tremble. I opened my eyes to find Hanna, Maeve, and Elaine hurrying to gather the towels off the bed and lay them around Lena's feet. Clare stood next to Rosalie, her face pale and eyes wide.

I was holding Lena upright, and she was using me to bare down. But her knees began to give out, her body trying to slump to the floor.

"I need to lower you down—"

"It hurts so much," she cried, looking up at me through eyes blurred with endless tears.

I felt the fear pass through her. She'd been laboring in absolute agony for hours now, the contractions unceasing. She was exhausted, I could see it in her face as I bent my knees and gently lowered her to the ground so she was lying on her back.

It dawned on me what was about to happen.

So it seemed like I was going to be the one to bring our daughter into the world. It was going to be me.

I'd never delivered a baby before. The only newborn experience I had was holding Flora and Ava with Ciana hovering over me like a hawk, making sure I was supporting their necks.

Lena was whimpering, her face reddened with pain and exertion. The pale gray dress she was wearing that fell just below her knees was soaked with sweat, clinging to her skin. I kept my eyes on her as I reached between her legs and felt... a foot.

I stifled my internal panic, but I flicked my eyes toward Hanna, who noticed the way my body went rigid. She took a few slow, cautious steps toward me and knelt beside me, her hand on Lena's knee. She felt what I'd felt, and she met my eye.

What the f**k were we going to do?

I didn't notice Clare until she squatted at my side. She sucked in her breath, looking between me and Hanna as understanding passed through her eyes.

"You need to get her up, now. She needs to be standing—"

"What—" I choked, but Clare cut me off.

"She needs to be standing! Get her up!" Clare's voice was laced with urgency.

Lena was crying now, calling out for Hanna. My heart squeezed in my chest as I wrapped my arms around Lena and tried to get her upright, her screams of pain and protest cutting through my soul.

"The baby is breech," Clare said sharply toward Maeve, Rosalie, and the maids. Clare rolled up her sleeves and shoved past a maid toward the bathroom, and I heard water running. Lena was clawing me with her fingernails as I held her upright, her body shaking violently.

Clare came out of the bathroom smelling sharply of rubbing alcohol, but her eyes were blazing with determination. How did she know what to do?

She was kneeling at my feet in an instant, guiding our child into the world while I held onto my mate for dear life.

Clare grunted with frustration and Lena screamed loud enough to drown out another clap of thunder.

Maeve rushed forward, her voice a soft lullaby as she matched Hanna's calm words of encouragement in Lena's ears. Lena was beyond lucidity at this point, a contraction rolling through her that nearly made her eyes roll back in her head.

"Push now, Lena!" Clare cried, and Lena did.

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CHAPTER 642 : THE MOST PERFECT THING

Lena

"She'll never deliver another baby in this territory again," Dad huffed, crossing his arms over his chest as he glanced at the armchair near the window where Xander was on the edge of sleep with a bundle of blankets against his bare chest, our newborn daughter nestled warmly against his skin. Xander's eyelashes were fluttering, his breath slow and easy as he began to fall asleep.

I nodded at Dad as he caught my eye, and he walked over to Xander, slowly taking Alexis from my mate's arms so as not to startle either of them. Xander's head slumped forward, his body relaxing into a deep, likely dreamless, sleep.

We were all exhausted. Three hours ago, I'd looked down over the top of the swell of my belly as Clare and Xander crouched in front of me. Mom and Maeve held me upright as Clare guided our daughter into the world, and Xander caught her, his hands the first thing Alexis would ever touch.

My healing blood immediately started to knit together the trauma of the surprise breech birth. That's why Dad was so angry. The midwife hadn't called or come back to the castle now that early morning was upon us to check on me and Alexis, and she hadn't said anything about the baby being breech— not once.

She might not have even known, which I tried to explain to Dad as he rocked on heels, patting Alexis lightly on the back. But then, if she hadn't, she probably wasn't a very good midwife to begin with.

Mom quietly snuck into the room carrying a breakfast tray. I could smell the heavily sugared tea with milk, and I swallowed against the dryness of my throat in anticipation.

"Oh," she said, glancing at Xander as she set the tray on the bed. "I brought him some breakfast too. I'll take it back down to the kitchen to keep it warm—"

"I'll just eat both," I said with a smile, my stomach tightening with hunger.

My body was sore and aching with fatigue, and the smell of bacon, oatmeal, eggs, and toast with plenty of jam and butter was intoxicating as Mom adjusted the tray over my lap and fluffed my pillows to make it more comfortable to sit upright. Dad watched her pour two cups of tea, and he smiled lovingly as she handed him one. He deftly balanced the tea and Alexis at the same time, looking so much more at ease than I'd seen him in the last several weeks.

"He used to wake up with you," Mom said as she sat on the edge of the bed, smiling up at her mate. "He used to drink his coffee while walking you around the castle so I could get a few extra hours of sleep."

I smiled weakly as I brought my tea to my lips, my hands still a little shaky from the birth.

"Alexis will likely sleep for most of the day, for a time. We can take her downstairs for a while if you want to try to get some rest," Dad said, his voice a soft whisper.

I ate a few spoonfuls of oatmeal, the ache of hunger in my stomach beginning to ease.

I felt oddly empty, and I realized with a pang of sadness that I'd no longer have Alexis's kicks to keep me company. I looked at her, her mouth a perfect O against Dad's pale blue button-up shirt. She had a full head of thick, jet-black hair that was already starting to curl around her tiny, pink ears.

She was the most perfect thing I'd ever seen in my life.

I felt a tear slide down my cheek as I bent my head to finish eating my breakfast, as well as Xander's, while Mom and Dad spoke in hushed tones at the end of the bed.

Mom cleared my plate away and poured me another cup of tea before she leaned down to kiss me on the forehead and smooth away the strands of hair that were sticking to my face, dried with sweat.

"Try to get some rest, alright? Maeve called down to the hospital, and a doctor is coming by later this morning to check on you both."

I nodded as I rubbed fatigue from my eyes. Xander stirred in the armchair, adjusting himself into a more comfortable position.

"I'll make sure he has a warm meal to look forward to when he wakes up," Mom whispered, kissing me once more before she followed Dad out of the room.

I laid back against the pillows and sipped my second helping of sickeningly sweet tea. I could already feel the effects of the hot meal and tea taking hold on my body, giving me and my powers the energy they needed to heal.

I had almost fallen asleep when Xander jumped to his feet, his body so tense every single muscle was tight and rigid across his chest and abdomen.

"Mom and Dad took her downstairs so we could rest," I said sleepily, patting the bed. "You should come lay down."

Xander exhaled deeply, his shoulders relaxing a fraction of an inch as he ran his hands over his face and sat on the edge of the bed, facing away from me.

I ran my fingers over his back, just marveling at him for a moment. My mate—he was my mate. And he’d given me a daughter.

“Are you feeling alright?” he asked as he turned and slid beneath the covers. I nodded at him, tears welling in my eyes as he opened his arms to me.

He wrapped his arms around me as we laid side by side, my cheek pressed against his chest. He took a trembling breath, and I glanced up at him through my lashes, noticing the far-off look in his eyes.

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know,” he replied, his words whispered against my hair. “I don’t think it’s really hit me yet that we just had a baby.”

“Well, it’s only been three hours.”

His chest trembled with a laugh, and he relaxed around me, nestling me closer.

“You were very brave,” he murmured, and I blinked back a fresh round of tears.

“So were you.”

“Thanks,” he sighed. “Clare was the real hero, though. I don’t even want to think about what would have happened if she hadn’t... If she hadn’t known what to do.”

He was right. Clare had likely saved my life, as well as Alexis’s, by guiding her into the world. Alexis was born feet first, but it was obvious she was stuck, and likely had been for a while.

My throat tightened around my first memories following her birth. It felt like ages went by before I heard her first cry. The silence had been deafening, broken only by my choking sobs while I begged for someone to tell me that she was okay.

Mom, Maeve, and Elaine had laid me back against the carpet, tending to me with the gentlest words and touches imaginable while Clare, Grandma, and Xander coaxed Alexis to take her first breath.

But she did breathe. Her skin turned a rich pink, and her cries mingled with the thunder ripping the sky in two. It was the most powerful, earth bending moment of my life.

A new White Queen had been born.

And then I’d been cleaned up and tucked into bed with Alexis snuggled against my chest, her little legs tucked up under her belly like she had been in the womb. I didn’t think I’d stopped crying since she’d been born, and my cheeks were tight with dried tears.

Within a few minutes, the room had been cleaned, and Xander and I had been left alone with our daughter, a sense of peace embracing us as if we hadn’t just been on the verge of a tragedy.

“You should rest. I can go downstairs to eat and check in on Alexis,” Xander muttered as he toyed with the strands of hair falling down my back.

“You need to rest too—”

“I slept already—”

“For twenty minutes!”

“It’s only six in the morning, Lena. I’ll come take a nap later, I promise.” He turned to the window, noticing the gray blue light coming through the curtains. A dreary, cloudy day was breaking through the darkness of the storm that had raged all night. “Adrian and Abigail should have been able to disembark their ship by now, if they made it to the port.”

“They’re in for a surprise when they get here,” I smiled as Xander sat up and reached for my tea, draining it in a single swallow.

“Get some sleep,” he whispered as he bent his head. He kissed me fully, richly, his tongue running across the length of my lower lip. I felt a surge of desire for him, and was slightly disappointed when he broke away from the kiss and hopped out of bed.

He pulled on an old sweatshirt of his from his days at Morhan and ran his fingers through his hair before leaning over the bed to kiss me again.

“I love you, Lena. Thank you—” he added with another kiss. “Thank you for giving me a daughter. I’ve never known a stronger woman in my life. I’ll never come close to deserving you.”

“Xander,” I cried, my voice breaking around his name.

He only smiled at me, his finger running along my jaw as he backed away and rounded the bed.

I laid snuggled into the pillows, closing my eyes to the sound of the door opening, then shutting as he left the room.

I woke an hour or two later to gray light pouring through the window, and the soft sounds of a crying infant coming closer and closer to the room as whoever was carrying her back to me neared.

I turned over and sat up to face the door as Abigail stepped inside, Alexis bundled in a blanket in the crook of her arm.

“Holy s**t, Lena,” she beamed, looking from me to Alexis with a wide, somewhat disbelieving smile on her face. “I can’t believe all of this came out of your body! She’s huge!”

I rolled my eyes and shifted my weight in the bed, opening my arms to accept a very hungry Alexis to my chest. Abigail watched me nurse, her brow furrowed.

Nursing... hurt. It did not feel good at all. Abigail noticed when I winced and her body went a little rigid with concern.

“I’m fine, really. Mom said it gets better after, like, a week.”

Abigail grimaced, shaking her head as she sat down on the edge of the bed, looking around the room.

“So you had her right here, on the carpet?”

I nodded, raising my brows as Abigail looked around in disbelief.

“I missed you,” I breathed, and she turned to me with tears welling in her eyes.

"I'd hug you, but I don't want to squish the baby," she replied tearfully. Tears of my own were falling again. "Adrian and Xander are giving us a minute, but Adrian really wants to see you, too. He was really worried when we found out about the baby."

"Oh? When you got here?"

She shook her head, shrugging her shoulders as she folded her hands in her lap. "We made it to the port just after the storm started to wane and stayed in this run-down motel near the water. Everyone was talking about how the Princess of Valoria had her baby, a new White Queen, and there were rumors about the birth. None of them were true, which we just found out. But we set out for the castle just before dawn. It was the slowest train ride of my life."

"Did you—" I began, switching Alexis to my other breast. "Did you meet—"

"Elaine. No, not yet," she breathed, meeting my eyes. "She's asleep."

The door to the bedroom, which Abigail had left slightly ajar, opened wide as Xander and Adrian stepped inside. Adrian let out a breath, relief sweeping over his face as he awkwardly held up a bouquet of flowers.

"I hope you're treating my goddaughter well, Lena," he teased.

Xander rolled his eyes and stepped forward with a tea tray, setting it over my lap and kissing me on the forehead.

"Hi, Adrian," I smiled, then met Xander's gaze.

He was glowing with pride as our friends met our daughter.

Our daughter.

Ours.

"I love you," I whispered as he poured me a cup of tea.

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Chapter 643 : A Dark Omen

Lena

The air was warm and humid in the atrium, which was probably my favorite room in the entire castle. Three-story-high windows towered over us as Xander and I sat in wicker chairs in the center of the room.

The windows were dripping with moisture, and the air was thick. It felt amazing, and Alexis seemed to like it, too. She'd been sleeping peacefully in Xander's arms for the last half hour without stirring.

Xander had his eyes closed as he rocked her in his chair, and I was busy looking around at the huge tropical plants that were older than I was, some likely forty or fifty years old at this point.

I yawned hugely, blinking into the muted afternoon light shimmering against the water droplets trickling down the glass panes. The sliding door to the atrium slid open, and Adrian stepped inside, holding

something in his arms. Xander opened one eye and settled it on Adrian, but he opened both eyes wide when he noticed what Adrian was carrying.

“Remember this?” Adrian said as he walked over, opening a large, heavy book and setting it on the table in front of us. I leaned forward, arching my brow as I looked down at the book. For a moment, I thought it was the spellbook that was now in Maeve’s possession, but this one was... different. It felt different, if that even made sense, when I reached out and ran my fingers along the ancient script.

It also wasn’t written in a language none of us could decipher with divine help, which was a nice change of pace.

I was, however, totally uninterested in magic books from bygone eras at this point. I’d had my fill of magic for the time being.

“Would you care to explain why you have this?” Xander said, his voice sharp and clipped as Adrian rocked on his heels, a mischievous look in his eyes. He tilted his head to the side, shrugging. “Adrian. Did you steal this from the Temple of Lycaon?”

“I borrowed it,” he argued, his perfect white teeth on display as he gave Xander a crooked, boyish smile.

“Why?”

“Because the one I found in this realm is likely nothing but ash—”

“Oh, my Goddess! I totally forgot!” I snatched the book off the table before either man could protest my rough handling of what was quickly explained to be one of the most important religious items in all of the Dark Realm. Adrian had dropped what I assumed was a copy of this book on my bed in Cedar Hollow, but I hadn’t had a second to react to it, or ask about it. Within minutes, Cedar Hollow had burst into flames, and we were under attack.

I flipped through the pages, scanning the text. It was mostly just... lore, maybe some guided prayers to a God, rather than the Moon Goddess.

“I found the other copy in a library in a town called Raven’s Peak, just north of Red Lakes. I stopped there on my way back to Cedar Hollow and it was literally just sitting on a shelf, Xander, just sitting there between some book about animal husbandry and one about the proper way to mix cement.” Adrian plopped down in a chair opposite mine, stretching his legs out in front of him. “I might need a raise, Xander. I had to pay three whole dollars for it. It wasn’t on sale.”

Xander shot Adrian a dirty look.

“Why the f**k was The Canonical of Lycaon in a bookstore in Raven’s Peak? And why did you—”

I gasped, and both men looked in my direction as I lowered the book back on the table. An entire page, yellowed with age, was covered in illustrations that had faded with time. But it was clear what was on the page. My heart was beating rapidly as my eyes left the illustration and met with Xander’s.

“Is this... is this supposed to be me?” I asked in a voice that I had meant to be small. Shock rippled over my skin as I held his gaze, which was knowing... understanding passing behind his dark eyes.

Adrian huffed out his breath, crossing his ankles. He glanced at Xander, then back at me.

"Xander came here to find a descendant of the White Queens to marry, you know. At least I hope you know, that this isn't coming as a surprise—"

"Adrian, please shut up," Xander breathed, closing his eyes for a moment.

"I did know that," I chuckled, glancing between them. I looked back down at the image, and the sunstone I'd been wearing around my neck since the day I left the Night God's company grew warm against my skin.

The page was a blur of florals and stars, most of them faded to the point it was impossible to see what their original colors would have been. But, in the center, was a woman with long white hair, her eyes a soft silver and her palms outstretched, vines dappled with white roses falling from her open hands. But around her figure was a darkness. It was a shadow, I realized as I slowly looked up at Xander, who was watching me closely.

The shadow was embracing her, protecting her, and in a way... bowing down to her. But it could've been something else entirely, something more sinister.

"This text belongs to the church founded by the early followers of Lycaon," Xander began. "I've never read the entire thing."

"Why not?"

"Because it's not allowed," Adrian cut in, stretching his arms over his head. "We studied some of it in school, but only what the priests and elders of the Church wanted us to see."

"We were meant to worship Lycaon as a god, not as a man gifted with magic and curses," Xander added, shifting Alexis's weight as she began to stir. She rooted against his shirt as he rose from his chair and carefully placed her in my arms.

"So you've never seen this picture?" I asked as I pulled my shirt up, making sure I wasn't accidentally flashing Adrian as Alexis latched onto my breast, her eyelids fluttering as she nursed herself back to sleep.

"I hadn't seen it until I had to spend seven hours on a bus back to Cedar Hollow when I was coming back after looking for Xander," Adrian replied. "I remembered a poem from school, something dark and creepy that one of our teachers made us memorize."

"Two lines into one. The builder of realms seeks its throne. Through the trials of the court of blood and fury, out of darkness comes light, as day turns to night. A new dawn of the Empire of eternal sun," Xander recited as his eyes met mine. He leaned forward, his hands resting on his knees. "That night at my apartment in Morhan, when you were telling me about your parents... That's when I realized the connection. Two lines... that was you. I'd known about the vampires by then, and assumed the Court of Blood and Fury had something to do with their realm. I realized then I would never be able to keep you safe from them—"

"Because it was all prophesied," Adrian shrugged.

Xander gave him a look.

"But what is the role of the White Queen in your realm? I don't understand why there would be a picture of—even if it's not me, still. This is a White Queen. Lycaon hated his sister, and she was the first White Queen."

"I don't know," Xander said honestly.

"I realized you'd likely done something to Xander when I remembered the line about a builder of realms," Adrian cut in, his eyes meeting mine. "Obviously, I didn't have time to explain, or ask if you'd sent him somewhere, even accidentally."

I ran my tongue along my lower lip, nodding as I adjusted my shirt. Alexis was asleep again, dreaming cozily against my stomach. Shortly after Adrian had come back to Cedar Hollow, the pack was attacked, and the book had been lost.

"Why would there have been a copy of this in my realm?" I asked.

Adrian shrugged, but Xander let out his breath, looking contemplative.

"You said the Lycennian refugees went north, right? Some of them obviously didn't cross the Northern Tundra like you thought, because they ended up in the west—Slate's family, Clare and her family. The only explanation is that the Lycenna pack had their own copy—"

"I don't think it was a copy," Adrian said, clapping his hands on his thighs. "I think it was the original."

We both looked at him, but anything left to be said was quickly forgotten as the door to the atrium slid open, and Abigail stepped inside, followed by Elaine.

I hadn't seen them together yet. The entire reason we were sitting in the atrium was that Abigail and Elaine were reuniting for the first time since they were toddlers.

I realized why I hadn't immediately noticed the similarities between the two women when I first met Elaine. They didn't look all that alike, if I was being honest. There was something about the shape of their eyes, and the way their lips parted into a smile that was identical, and the color of their hair was exactly the same.

But Abigail was softer, her face more round and cheeks more full. Her curls were looser, and her hair was swept in a long sheet down her back.

Elaine's face was more intense, much sharper than Abigail's soft femininity. She was slightly shorter than Abigail, and her hair fell over her shoulders in tight, auburn curls.

I also hadn't noticed the tattoos that decorated Elaine's torso and back until now, which was the first time I'd seen her in anything but a flannel or sweatshirt. The colors in her tattoos were visible through her white tank top, but I didn't have a moment to ask to see them or ask about them.

The twins moved in on us, smiling.

Adrian looked Elaine up and down with raised brows.

"We had a lot of catching up to do," Abigail said with a shrug, smiling at her mate as Adrian's eye met hers.

“Abigail told me that... that Prince Oliver—”

“I don’t know where he is. And I don’t know for sure if you are... if you are mates,” I said quickly, swallowing against the lump in my throat as I looked at Elaine.

She gave me a weak smile, nodding in understanding.

“I think they are,” Abigail argued, sitting down in Adrian’s lap.

Adrian blew out his breath, pretending to wince as she swatted him playfully. I couldn’t help but smile at the happy couple, now a married couple, as she bent to whisper in his ear. I turned to Xander, who was gazing at me with a knowing look in his eyes.

I rose from my chair, gathering Alexis against my shoulder. I felt Xander’s hand against my lower back as we walked out of the room, leaving Elaine, Abigail, and Adrian to catch up.

“Are you feeling alright?” he asked as we stepped into the corridor.

I nodded, smiling up at him as he closed the door to the atrium and fell into step with me.

“Are you sure? You gave birth less than a day ago.”

“I’m fine, I promise. It feels good to get up and walk around.”

It felt even better to close up some loose ends about our trials with the vampires. But now, after seeing the book, I felt a sense of unease settle in my stomach.

Was that shadow behind the White Queen in the book just a coincidence? Was it the imagining of the prophecy Xander and Adrian had talked about?

Could it just be me and Xander?

Or, was it something sinister, a warning or an omen?

That darkness had surrounded the queen in the image, wrapping itself around her...

“What’s on your mind?” Xander asked as we walked towards our room.

“I... nothing. It’s nothing.”

And I prayed that it was, in fact, nothing.

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder

Chapter 644 : The Unknown

Lena

A full week had passed since Alexis was born, and as the days flew by, I began to feel a little more at ease.

But it was an odd time in Castle Drogomor. Maids were packing up my belongings into boxes and trunks while I stayed in my mom’s sitting room with Maeve day in and day out, readying for my upcoming wedding.

Abigail and Elaine were making up for lost time. Xander and Adrian had been spending time in Mirage, meeting with the High Elder council about relations with Egoren going forward.

I flipped through one of the wedding magazines Maeve had brought with her, looking at the different hairstyles and makeup options. Everything seemed excessive, and I was starting to regret my decision for a large wedding instead of eloping with Xander, which he'd promised was also an option.

"We have two hundred RSVPs so far, and another hundred or so outstanding," Mom said as she paced around the room with Alexis pressed gently against her shoulder. Maeve nodded, scribbling something down on a notepad. "The photographer is booked, the kitchen has the menu finalized, the alterations have been made to Lena's dress—"

I sighed deeply, sinking deeper into the couch as I flipped through the rest of the magazine without even looking at what it said.

"Have we talked about the seating arrangements? Rowan said the Alphas of Crescent Hall and Granite Springs are having issues—"

"Their wives are sisters," Maeve corrected, twirling her pen over her fingers. "They are the ones fighting, not the Alphas."

"Well, do we seat them together, or is that just asking for trouble?"

I turned away from the conversation as Clare sat down next to me on the couch. She picked up one of the magazines before glancing at my mom and my aunt, rolling her eyes and giving me a knowing look.

"Where's Sasha today?" I whispered as I opened a fresh magazine.

Maeve's trove of wedding literature was endless, and it was currently stacked so high on the coffee table that the magazines were starting to lean over.

"She made a friend with one of the maid's daughters. They're in the kitchen making cupcakes," she said softly. "She told me today that she wants to stay here."

"In Mirage?"

"No, in the castle. She tells everyone we see that she's a princess. I think this finery is going to her head."

"Well, isn't she a princess?"

Clare didn't answer right away. There had been talk about Clare going back to Cedar Hollow to rule as Alpha, but nothing had been decided yet. Those who survived the attack on the village were scattered all over the pack lands now, but the majority of them were settling down in Mirage with no plans to leave.

Even if they did go back, there was nothing left to return to. Cedar Hollow had burned to the ground.

"She's not," Clare said simply, turning a page of her magazine and glancing at where Mom and Maeve were talking in the corner of the room. "Even if I wanted her to be... she's not. She never was. Neither was I."

"Was your older brother also Carl's—"

"No," she said quickly, interrupting me.

I knew Clare was hating every second of this conversation, but I'd been walking on eggshells with Clare since the moment I met her. I didn't have much to lose in terms of our relationship.

Clare had been hurt in a brutal way, and it was painfully obvious she had no desire to actually live a life instead of just surviving. The man who had assaulted her was dead. He was no longer a risk to her daughter.

"I don't know what happened to my mother, so don't bother asking," she said calmly, flipping another page. "And Maeve offered me an apartment, and a job as a temple attendant in Winter Forest if I want it. So don't ask about whether or not I'm going back to Cedar Hollow."

"Okay, I won't," I replied, chewing my lower lip as I turned my gaze back to Mom, who was currently rocking Alexis back and forth near the window with Maeve by her side, neither woman close enough to hear our conversation.

A hush passed over the couch, but a question burned on the end of my tongue.

"Sasha was breech," Clare said after a moment, her fingers smoothing a fold in the page she was looking at. "I delivered her myself."

"What?" I choked, turning to look at her.

Clare only raised a brow, her eyes purposefully not meeting mine. I knew Clare's powers of sight were weak at best, but her ability to feel... to sense? She was likely reading my mind without needing to see the images or hear the words passing through my subconscious.

"I hid that I was pregnant for as long as I could," she breathed. "I was terrified, but not of what my father would think. I didn't care what he thought. I cared what my pack would think of me, though. I was... I thought I could hide the pregnancy and travel with the baby far south where I wouldn't be recognized as the daughter of an Alpha. I was planning on starting a new life, somewhere where no one knew us, where he couldn't... where her father couldn't find us."

"What happened?"

"I almost died, that's what happened. My mother had been a midwife before she left us. I remembered hearing the stories of a breech twin birth where she'd delivered both of the infants safely, and saved the mother's life. I knew she had to... turn one of them, by pressing on the woman's stomach. I tried that on myself but it was too late. Sasha was born feet first, like Alexis, feet first and ready to take on the world."

"What about you?"

She glanced at me, her face draining slightly of color.

"Hale found me. I was on the edge of death. I would have welcomed it, honestly, had it not been for... hearing her cry for the first time."

"You saved Alexis's life," I whispered, the emotion behind my words nearly choking me as I held her gaze. "You saved Sasha's life, too. And now you have nothing left to run from, Clare."

"It's not about running. My life fell to pieces in Cedar Hollow. Even if I'd told the truth about what happened to me, no one would have believed it. My father blamed me for what happened; he said it tarnished our family's reputation. And he was right; it did. First, my mother left, then his daughter gave birth to a bastard child at the age of sixteen, with no clue of who the father might be. Rumors ran wild up until my father's and my eldest brother's deaths. Hale became Alpha and used his power to protect me and Sasha, but I couldn't have a life there. I couldn't be anything but the w***e they all thought I was. Cedar Hollow burning to the ground was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Her voice caught on the words, but she didn't shed a single tear.

"I won't go back—"

"I understand," I said, reaching over to her, my hand hovering above her own. I slowly clasped her hand, and she didn't pull away for several seconds.

"I can start over in Winter Forest. Hardly anyone knows me there, and those who do aren't the ones who had anything to say about me or my daughter."

"You could come with Xander and me to Egoren," I offered, but Clare shook her head, sliding her hand away from mine.

"I can't take Sasha into the unknown, not now."

My chest tightened around the word. Unknown—Clare was right about that. Despite Xander's descriptions and explanations about his home, his culture, and his people... I still wasn't entirely sure what I was walking into.

Clare heaved a breath, clearing her throat as she crossed her legs and settled back against the couch.

The conversation was over, just like that.

"Thank you for what you did for us," I said after a few moments of silence. "All of it—everything."

I could have sworn, even if just for a split second, I saw the corner of her mouth twitch into a smile.

Xander had his hands on the bed on either side of Alexis, looking down at her. She was fast asleep as usual, her cheeks rosy and round as her tiny chest rose and fell with each breath.

"This is all she does," he murmured, running the tip of his finger over her cheek.

Her mouth reflexively widened into a sleepy smile, but then relaxed again, her eyelashes fluttering.

"She's only a week old," I whispered as I took off my dress and hung it over the chair next to the window.

Xander watched me undress, and I gave him a shy smile as I began to turn away from him to take off the nursing bra that was holding back my incredibly massive, and pained, breasts. Everything about my body felt and looked different.

I quickly pulled a T-shirt over my head and slid into the bed as Xander watched me, a familiar look of desire flashing behind his eyes.

“What?” I murmured as he scooped Alexis into his arms and walked her over to the bassinet next to our bed.

He laid her down, his hand resting on her head for a moment.

I could have sworn I heard him praying, but to whom, I didn’t know. It was the calmest I’d ever seen him, every muscle in his body relaxed even as he stood guard over our sleeping daughter.

For the first time since I’d met him, Xander was at peace.

The only light on in our room was on his bedside table. He turned it off as he slid in beside me, wrapping his body around mine. He was in nothing but a pair of boxers, and his legs were bare against mine as he settled against me, kissing me on the neck, his lips brushing over my skin.

“Xander?” I whispered, knitting his fingers in mine.

“Yeah?”

“Are we going to be... are we going to be okay in Egoren?”

“What do you mean?”

I rolled over to face him, our noses touching as I let every anxiety gripping me come to the surface.

“I’m afraid to leave my realm, my family, and my friends. I almost lost everyone I loved, and they have already lost me once. I don’t know how else to explain how I feel.”

“I know,” he whispered, tucking a lock of hair behind my ear. “That’s why I asked if your mom would come and stay with us for a while until you feel settled.”

“You asked her that?”

“I asked them both to come with us, actually.”

“What did they say?”

“Your mom didn’t hesitate to say yes. Your dad, well, he is going to come with us, but doesn’t know how long he can stay. He told me it depends on Oliver.”

“Oliver?” I propped myself up on my elbow, furrowing my brow at him.

“Your dad means to make him Alpha of Drogomor,” he said, running his fingers over my upper arm. “If we can find him.”

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder

Chapter 645 : Missing a Son

Xander

From what I understood, the Alpha of Drogomor was once a stand-alone title that hadn't always been connected to the title of Alpha King of Valoria.

Ethan had been the first to hold both titles, and he had passed the title onto his nephew Ernest in order for Rosalie to rule in Winter Forest. Ethan had kept the title of Alpha King during that time, and when Ernest stepped down from the seat of the Alpha of Drogomor, Rowan took his rightful place upon that throne.

Now Rowan held both titles, the Alpha King of Valoria and the Alpha of Drogomor. He'd held the dual titles for nearly as long as his own father had.

The Drogomor pack wasn't large by any means. Its territory encompassed the area of "Old Town," which bordered the sprawling city of Mirage, where a handful of packs surrounded the city, their people mingling with other packs on a day-to-day basis.

Drogomor was old and had long, winding roots in the culture of the east. The title should have been Lena's by birthright, but she was a woman.

And so far, very few packs had let go of the notion that the males were the ones destined to inherit the title of Alpha over their daughters and sisters.

I already knew that Lena had no interest in becoming the Alpha of Drogomor. She'd never even mentioned it, but I knew it was something Rowan had been considering. As the Alpha King of Valoria, placing his daughter on the throne as an Alpha would have been a tremendous upset to some of the more old-fashioned Alphas.

But putting his nephew on the throne?

No one would bat an eyelash to that, except maybe Oliver himself.

With Charlie set to step into the role as Alpha of Breles alongside his mate, who had very distant ties to the family who laid claim to the title, and Will and Hollis taking over as the Alpha and Luna of Poldesse, Oliver was the only triplet who currently had no claim to any territory.

And as I stood in Rowan's office on the first floor of the castle, I realized Oliver would likely want to keep it that way.

No one would know for sure, not for a while at least, because Oliver was missing, and had been for months. There had been no word from him. No one had seen him, not even a glimpse in passing. There was a rumor that he was in Dianny, but Alpha Robbie and his Luna quickly set things straight in that regard. They hadn't seen him—no one had.

But today, we'd gotten a single shred of news.

"His house is completely empty. It was packed up and sold to one of his friends," Charlie said as he turned from the window to face the men congregated in the office. "His friend said the sale had been done through a mediator. He never saw or talked to Oliver."

Troy ran his tongue over his teeth, glancing down at the floor. Rowan exhaled through his nose, nostrils flaring as he shook his head.

"There are only so many places he can go," I said, tapping my fingers lightly on the windowsill as I mulled the situation over in my head.

Lena was outside with Elaine and Abigail in the front garden, Alexis in a carrier on her chest. They were trimming roses, which were in full bloom, and putting them in baskets at their feet—flowers for the wedding, which was in three days.

Lena and I were getting married at the cathedral in the center of Mirage. Barriers to hold back the crowd as we arrived had already been put into place when I visited the location yesterday. I'd been alone, and no one on the street knew who I was just by a glance. I had the place to myself, and I was in awe of it. It was made of white stone, the ceiling towering several stories above my head. Stained glass of every shade of blue and silver sent sprays of light over my face as I walked down a long aisle between rows upon rows of pews.

I stood at the altar and looked out over the empty rows that seemed to go on forever, knowing in a few days' time it would be filled with people, most of which being the countless relatives connected to the royal family.

It wasn't every day the daughter of an Alpha King got married. It wasn't every day that an Alpha King got married, either.

While Will's wedding had been grand, our wedding was... something else—a public spectacle.

I'd marry Lena right now if I could, in this house, with no fanfare or ceremony. And I knew she felt the same.

But, it was too late for that now, and part of the reason her parents had gone so large and extravagant with the ceremony and reception was that they were trying to draw someone out of hiding.

"Oliver won't miss her wedding," Troy said with conviction. "He wouldn't do that to her."

"I know," Rowan said softly, running his hand over his face as I turned from the window to face them.

Charlie let out his breath, glancing at me with a pained expression. "Could he have gone to Egoren?" he asked.

I shook my head, not wanting to believe that was even a possibility. "Egoren is not friendly to outsiders. The portal is sacred and heavily guarded. If someone was able to pass through into my realm, I would know about it."

"But you're here," Rowan said, and I nodded.

"I would have been told. There have been... messengers going between the realms for years—"

"You mean spies?" Rowan interrupted.

I felt my cheeks prickly with heat as I met his eyes and pursed my lips, my expression giving him my answer. "There was no malice in my intentions to gather intel on your realm."

"You were looking for my daughter, then," Rowan said, breaking our gaze.

The air in the room felt thick, and beside me, Charlie shifted his weight.

"You got me there," I said with a shrug.

Troy snorted with mirth, shaking his head as he clapped Rowan on the shoulder.

"Lighten up, Grandpa," Troy teased.

"You seem awfully chipper for someone who is missing a son—"

"Oliver is not missing," Troy breathed, his tone sharpening. "I know how he's feeling. Maeve and I both understand what he's going through. He needs time, and we've given that to him. But it's time for him to return."

"What if he doesn't?" Charlie asked, his eyes betraying his calculated calm. "What if he's hurt—"

"He's not, Charlie. You know he's not," Troy breathed, giving his son a tight, understanding smile.

Charlie's chest relaxed, but he huffed a breath, shaking his head as he looked down at his shoes.

Troy was right. There was no doubt in my mind that Oliver was alive. I'd seen that son of a b***h fight off vampires and burn entire cities to the ground, sometimes at the same time. There was no one more capable of surviving than Oliver.

If he wanted to survive, that is.

I remembered the shattering grief when I had thought I'd lost Lena. Even with her here with me, safe, I still felt the remnants of that crushing numbness that had threatened to send me spiraling into oblivion.

Darkness, that's what it was. I'd sought darkness. Oliver was doing the same.

I followed Charlie out of the office, leaving Troy and Rowan alone. I fell in step with him as we walked through the castle, which was thrumming with activity as preparations for the reception began.

"Jasmine said Lena had to be refitted for her dress after all," Charlie chuckled as we passed a trio of maids carrying armfuls of fine fabrics, their faces pink with exertion.

"Alexis is nursing her to death, I think. She's thinner than she was before she got pregnant," I replied, unable to hide the concern in my voice.

I hoped that was the reason, anyway, and not the stress of moving to an entirely different realm to rule as my Luna. Lena had seemed more at ease with the fact that her parents would be joining us for a few weeks to help us settle in, and we already had plans to return to her realm for Winter Solstice.

I heard rapid footsteps behind us and turned around, jumping out of the way as Lucas came bounding down the hallway, red in the face.

"Luke? What are you—" Charlie snapped, but was interrupted by a startled exclamation coming from Rowan's office.

The door to the office burst open, and Troy stepped out, his face nearly as red as Lucas's had been.

“Where,” he said through gritted teeth, “did he go?”

I gaped at Troy, who was holding a snake in one of his hands, the reptile coiling itself around his arm while he kept a firm grip on its head.

It wasn't a large snake by any means, but it was bigger than the snakes I'd stumbled upon in the grass in the back of the castle.

All three of us looked to the stairs, where Lucas had just stumbled in his haste to get away.

Troy stalked after him as Lucas squealed, stumbling several more times on his way up the stairs and out of sight.

“You're sleeping with this snake tonight! I'm letting it go in your room—” Troy said before his voice faded into the castle above our heads.

Charlie blew out his breath, chuckling lightly. Rowan came up behind us, looking a little pale.

“Little demon,” he rasped, wiping a bead of sweat from his forehead. “He put the snake in one of the drawers in my desk.”

“Was it there the entire time we were talking?” I asked.

Rowan nodded, smoothing his button-down shirt over his chest as he cleared his throat.

“It scared me half to death. Lucas was hiding in one of the cabinets lining the wall.”

“I better go check on them. I don't like the idea of a snake being loose in the castle while I'm sleeping right across the hallway from him,” Charlie laughed, jogging towards the stairs.

I was left alone with my soon-to-be father-in-law. I glanced at him, trying not to laugh at the look on his face.

“Don't like snakes?”

“No,” he replied firmly. “I'm going to go get a drink.” He turned on his heel and walked away.

I looked around, trying to decide what to do.

It was strange living in another Alpha's space. I'd felt idle and bored for weeks, if I was being honest. We had endless help with Alexis, and Lena had been busy with the wedding preparations. She'd declined my offer of help, even though it was a burden we both should have been sharing.

I sighed, pursing my lips.

“Do you want to come with me?” Rowan asked from down the corridor, his hands tucked in his pockets.

“Sure,” I said, giving my father-in-law-to-be a wry smile. “We don't have many snakes in Egoren, as far as I know, just so you know.”

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 646 : Reunion

Lena

Abigail had spent the last two hours bossing me and Elaine around as we snipped roses in the front garden, filling heaping baskets of roses and whatever other blooms we could find in the garden. Elaine gave me a look as Abigail slowly went through each basket, pulling out what she must have thought were prized flowers based on the judging look on her face, and placing them in clear vases of water and some special solution to keep them full and perky until the wedding reception.

My fingers were raw and shriveled from wearing gardening gloves all afternoon. I tossed the gloves on the bistro table in the sunroom and unstrapped the baby carrier from my chest, lifting Alexis out of her cozy nap spot that had left my shirt damp with sweat. Alexis's legs were still reflexively tucked into her stomach, her little fingers curling into fists as she blinked into the soft sun filtering through the windows and grimaced.

"Oh, goodness gracious," I cooed, patting her on the back as I comforted her against my shoulder. When she started to try to suckle on the strap of my tank top, I promptly sat down and gave her what she was truly looking for.

"She is so freaking cute," Elaine grinned as she sat opposite me at the table overlooking the front garden. All of the windows were open, but there was no cool breeze to be had. It was absolutely stifling today.

I reached up to wipe a bead of sweat from my brow, wanting nothing more than a cool shower and maybe something iced to drink. As if I'd summoned her, a maid walked in carrying a tray of cookies, sandwiches, and a giant glass pitcher of lemonade full of ice and fresh lemons, the glass frosted and cool to the touch.

All three of us sighed with relief and thanked her profusely as the maid set the tray on the table.

"Luna Hanna wanted me to let you know that she can take Princess Alexis for a while if you need free hands," the maid said sweetly as she poured me a glass of lemonade.

I looked down at Alexis, who was staring up at me with a skeptical expression on her face. She'd finally started waking up a bit over the last few days, giving Xander and me our first real clue about her eye color. They were fading from a deep navy black to a pale blue, like my father's.

She stopped nursing, her mouth trembling for a moment as I gently stroked her perfectly round cheeks with my finger.

"What do you say? Do you want to go see your grandma?"

Alexis unlatched, her eyes still firmly fixed on mine, looking at me like she just noticed I was more than just a pair of boobs.

I nuzzled her cheek, burped her, and kissed her on the forehead before handing her to the maid, who cradled Alexis in her arms and cooed as she turned to leave the sunroom, her hips swaying as she rocked Alexis.

"She looks just like Xander to me," Elaine said as she poured herself a huge glass of lemonade, then one for Abigail, who was still busy preparing the roses. "It's the hair. I can't believe she was born with all of that!"

"Dad told me it's going to fall out," I playfully pouted, crossing my fingers under the table in an attempt to stop that from happening.

"It's perfectly normal," Abigail clipped, giving me a smug glance. "What color was your hair when you were born, Lena?"

"White. Whiter than it is now, actually," I replied, popping a piece of ice into my mouth and holding it there. Goddess, it was hotter than hell. There was a fan in the sunroom, but it seemed to just be blowing hot air all over us instead of keeping the room cool.

"You were born with your hair like this?" Elaine gasped, furrowing her brow. "I thought only a White Queen who summoned the power of the Goddess had white hair. It's like a rite of passage—"

"I am the Goddess," I said with a little laugh.

The words felt strange leaving my mouth, however. I'd only ever said it in my head, usually when I was trying to convince myself that whatever I was planning to do was a good idea.

"And white hair is a mark of impending death for a White Queen," Abigail added.

Elaine nodded, raising her brows as she looked at her twin.

"But your grandma is still very much alive," Elaine noted, and I nodded, dropping an ice cube between my breasts and sighing with relief.

Elaine giggled, and Abigail rolled her eyes. Abigail was also sweating profusely, but I knew she'd never admit to either of us that she was uncomfortable.

"We don't have to sit in here—" I began, but Abigail gave me a sharp look, motioning toward the roses.

"They're used to heat after being outside. They will wilt if I bring them out of the sun—"

"Okay, okay!" I laughed.

Abigail exhaled through her nose, nostrils flaring as she turned back to her work.

"We could help you," said Elaine, but Abigail shook her head, waving the offer away. "She is very serious about her work—"

"I heard that!"

"It's true," I said to them both, giving Abigail a grateful smile as I raised my glass of lemonade in a toast to her skills. "I expect the castle in Egoren to be full of flower arrangements day in and day out."

"Speaking of Egoren," Abigail said as she trimmed a thorn-covered rose stem with her bare hands, "Are you going to... use your degree at all?"

I sighed, narrowing my eyes at Abigail as I adjusted my weight in the bistro chair, my thighs sticking to the seat. I knew this conversation was coming. Abigail might be married to the Alpha King's Beta, but

Xander had already filled me in on the crusade she had started back in Egoren before they returned to the realm of light. She'd laid out designs for a full renovation of the castle's gardens, which went on for acres.

I hadn't even seen the castle that I'd soon be calling home, but based on what I knew about Xander, I was sure it was just fine. Xander liked nice clothes and was well-kempt. I was sure his home was just as well maintained as he was.

"It's the creepiest place I've ever been in my life—thorn bushes everywhere, dark corners, you name it. Adrian says the castle is haunted."

"I'm sure he was just messing with you," Elaine retorted, noticing the look of concern flashing across my face.

"What do you mean haunted?"

"Like, ghosts, Lena. Adrian and I have a suite on the far side of the castle. I did some exploring while I was there and got desperately lost, first of all. Secondly, I swore someone was walking up behind me one day when I was walking back to our quarters, but when I turned around, no one was there!"

"Oh, please," Elaine groaned, waving her hand in dismissal. "Come eat some, Abi. You're losing your mind!"

I wasn't afraid of ghosts. The castle we were sitting in right now likely had ghosts creeping around at night, based on how old it was. But the castle in Egoren sounded... huge. So did the realm, for that matter. And I was about to be the Luna of all of it.

"Xander wants me to do some research into the differences between the flora in the Realm of Light and his realm. He told me he could hire a team of researchers to help me do it," I said, changing the subject away from the creepy castle I was going to be living in sooner rather than later.

Abigail opened her mouth to reply, but then her brow furrowed as she gazed out the window, her mouth hanging slightly ajar.

"No f*****g way," she gasped, setting her clippers down on the table where she'd laid out all of the roses.

"What?" Elaine and I said in unison as we turned to look out into the front garden.

A warrior was waving his hands wildly, then pointed an accusing finger at whoever he was speaking to. It was two people, actually, and I sucked in my breath as the first person came into view, pointing her finger right back at the warrior.

Abigail and I darted out of the sunroom, Elaine looking thoroughly confused as we ran through the door leading back to the front garden.

"You cannot be on the grounds—"

"Bring your comrades out, I dare you!" Heather snapped, her face reddened with fury.

“Stop!” I cried, trying not to laugh as the warrior whirled around, bobbing his head in a hasty bow in my direction.

Heather let out her breath, her eyes misting with tears as she threw open her arms and Abigail and I tackled her to the ground, dragging Viv down with us.

“We were still on campus when it happened,” Viv said, swirling her wine glass.

Xander and Adrian were listening intently as we all sat on the back patio enjoying each other’s company and the cool night air. “We were just sitting at home and this... alarm started going off. The power went out, and suddenly—” Viv paled, glancing at Heather.

“Warriors were all over the place. We didn’t know what to do. It was a few days before anyone knew what was going on for sure.” Heather shifted her weight in her chair, a withdrawn look in her eyes. “We’d been in the apartment for a full day, two nights... that second night one of our neighbors knocked on our door, needing help. There was a warrior dying in the stairwell. I went down to help, and he told us everything.”

“Vampires, can you believe it?” Viv breathed.

Adrian and Xander glanced at each other before they settled back in their seats, looking slightly uncomfortable. Xander reached over and took my hand, knitting his fingers in mine while he sipped a beer in his other hand.

“How’d you end up fighting, Viv?” Adrian asked.

Abigail walked out of the castle with a fresh round of beers and another bottle of wine. I was sticking to lemonade, nursing the glass I’d been working on for over an hour. Alexis was sleeping soundly upstairs, but I knew she’d be waking soon to nurse. I wanted to hear the rest of their story, however. I needed to know.

“We tended to the injured warrior until daybreak, and then we, along with some of the tenants in the building, went out to try to find some help. Heather and I ended up in a war camp, and we were asked if we were... able to fight. They were desperate. We signed up immediately.”

“Viv and I were given weapons and sent out into the city at nightfall,” Heather said solemnly. “That was the night—the night Morhan University was attacked. It was... it was Hell, you guys. I don’t know how else to explain it.”

A hush fell over the group. All of us had been students there. At that moment, it didn’t matter that Adrian and Xander had been faking it. They’d had friends there. They’d sat around the fountain and chatted with their peers. They’d walked through those halls, gone to the same parties we had.

Heather sucked in her breath, her eyes glistening with tears. “The dorm for the first-year students was under attack. I could hear them screaming. We’d all been told to stay in our homes. There was no order to evacuate, not in Morhan. Now I know that Morhan was one of the first cities to be attacked, but I was angry about it for a long time. I still am. Some of the other warriors started torching the campus. Viv and I were with another small team of civilians and warriors who were trying to clear out the people stuck in

the dorms. We had to fight our way in to save those first years. We couldn't get to them all." Heather hung her head, and Abigail moved toward her, wrapping her arms around her.

Viv swallowed, her eyes totally and completely dry. She was looking out over the back garden, her eyes focused on nothing and everything all at once. I realized, as I squeezed Xander's hand, that our sweet, innocent Vivienne was gone. Troy had told me that she'd fought. She'd become a warrior.

I had a hard time believing him at the time. But looking at her now, I could see it. I believed it.

"I fought in Breles," she said, a distant look in her eyes. "Then I was transferred up north. Heather was injured in Morhan and joined the healers working in the northern camps. We've been living in Red Lakes for a few weeks now. Your aunt Kacidra found us, Lena. She gave us the wedding invitations."

"I didn't know where you were," I said through tears. Viv turned to me, and I saw the ghost of a smile touch her lips. "But I heard you were likely up north."

"It feels like it was all a dream," she breathed. "Now we're here. You and Xander are getting married, which is just... I remember the day Heather burst into the coffee shop and told us he was asking about you—"

Heather choked a laugh, her mouth stretching into a smile.

"And you had a baby? You have a baby upstairs! We're alive. We're alive! We f*****g made it."

I looked around the patio, taking in the faces of my roommates. We'd been through everything together the last three, almost four years.

Xander put his arm around my shoulder, pulling me close.

"Do you think Morhan is going to give me my tuition back for this past semester?" Viv asked after a moment, a teasing smile touching her lips.

Heather and Abigail laughed, as did Adrian, throwing his head back and nearly spilling his beer.

Xander leaned his head against mine as the conversation took on a lighter tone. I sat in awe, unable to contribute, lost in my own thoughts.

We were okay. We were alive. And we were together again.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 647 : Wedding Day

Lena

"Lexi drank a whole bottle," Mom said happily as she squeezed my shoulders, her eyes meeting mine in the mirror.

"No way! I didn't think she would!" I sighed with relief as I reached for a makeup brush and blush, watching as Mom padded across the room to gaze out of the window at the front garden. "Who fed her? Xander?"

“No, not Xander. She broke his heart, I think. She’s taken a liking to Chrissy, the kitchen maid.”

I smiled at the thought of Chrissy’s cheeks pinkening with the glory of getting Alexis, who had so far refused anything but my breasts, drinking from a bottle for the first time. Chrissy had served me, Abigail, and Elaine lemonade and sandwiches on the day Viv and Heather showed up at the castle, and since then had been an incredible help with Alexis while Xander and I readied for our upcoming wedding.

Xander had mentioned possibly offering her a position at his castle in Egoren as Alexis’s nanny, and I was hoping she’d accept. At first, I hadn’t wanted a nanny. I didn’t like the idea of not always being available for our child.

But I was going to be a Luna Queen. I needed someone I could trust in my corner to care for her when I wasn’t around, even if those times were far and few between.

“She’s sleeping now.”

“Good, poor thing. It’s been a very long morning,” I breathed, dusting my cheeks with blush. I stared at my reflection in the mirror, my chest tightening at the woman staring back at me. My eyes had once been such a pale gray they were nearly silver, and my hair had always been a soft, straight white. I ran my fingers over the sunstone necklace hanging around my neck, the stone warm to the touch. Inside the stone, my powers lingered, tucked away and safe for when I needed them again.

The Night God had gifted me with something I never imagined I’d have the opportunity to be, without constantly being weighed down by powers I didn’t understand.

He’d made me... Lena—just Lena.

I dusted my eyelids with pale pink eyeshadow, which made the blue in my eyes shimmer. They were bluer than they’d ever been, and against the white of the silk shift I was wearing, my hair was a pale gold as the midday sun sparkled over my skin.

“How long?” I asked.

Mom turned around, a loving smile touching her lips.

“We need to get you in your dress, honey. We have to be at the cathedral in an hour.”

An hour, that was it.

I was an hour away from becoming Xander’s wife.

Mom’s tears were silent, and she quickly dabbed them away with a tissue as I stood in front of all of my friends, my grandmother, my aunts, and my mom. My aunt Kacidra clasped my mom’s hand and squeezed, whispering something inaudible as Clare and Bethany worked to fasten a veil onto the moonstone and diamond tiara at the crown of my head.

“I’m stunned, to be honest,” Abigail grinned as Clare and Bethany draped the floor-length veil over my shoulders and turned me to face the group of women. “You had a baby like, two weeks ago!”

"She's sucking the life out of me," I laughed, trying not to cry as I met my mom's eyes. I'd never seen her smile the way she was smiling now, and my heart squeezed to her the sheer joy behind her gaze.

The dress had been taken in around the waist but was still pretty... fluffy. I patted my sleeves down, much to the chagrin of my friends, who scolded me and rushed to my side to fluff the fabric back into place.

"I'm a cupcake!"

"Not even," Elaine teased, straightening the sunstone necklace. "More like a... cream puff, an expensive one!"

Clare snorted with laughter, and I frowned, trying to smooth the fabric down again.

There was a knock at the door and a hush swept over the room.

"It's me," Xander said after a moment, and then the room erupted into noise once again.

"Do NOT come in here, Xander!" Abigail said firmly, making her way toward the door.

"I'd like to talk to my soon-to-be wife for a moment, alone—"

"It's not possible. It's bad luck to see her in her dress!" Viv chirped, rushing up beside Abigail as she opened the door a crack and stuck her head into the hallway.

They were arguing with Xander, who was arguing right back. I looked around, noticing Maeve rolling her eyes as she began to shoo everyone out of the room.

"Just stay behind the door. You can talk and not look at each other, right?" Kacidra laughed, giving me a loving smile as she escorted my friends out of the room. Kacidra's short blonde hair trembled as she laughed at something Clare had said as they left, leaving me standing nearly alone, save for my mother.

"Alexis is riding to the cathedral with me, Maeve, and Troy," she said as she hurried over to me, taking my hands in hers. "She'll be fine—"

"I know," I said, my vision blurring through tears.

Holy s**t, this was it. This was really happening.

I heard the murmured voices of my friends and family as they teased Xander in the hallway. Everyone would be loading up in the parade of fancy cars taking them to the cathedral in Mirage in a matter of minutes.

I knew my dad would be waiting for me in the foyer. We'd be riding into town together, the Alpha King of Valoria escorting his princess to the altar while we were made to wave at the crowds that had been gathering all morning. It felt like a circus, if I was being honest. But soon we'd be back at the castle for a private reception with everyone we loved.

"I love you, Mom," I sniffed, and she gripped my hands a little tighter. A single tear rolled down my cheek and she dabbed it away.

"I love you too. I'm so proud of you. I'm so happy for you, honey."

She let go of my hands and walked away, looking over her shoulder once before disappearing through the door. It closed behind her, leaving me alone.

I waited for a moment, listening as Mom's voice retreated down the hallway. Xander's soft laugh of a reply traveled beneath the door, instantly easing the anxiety rippling through my body. I glanced at myself in the mirror once more, looking like a cloud of white and jewels. I huffed a breath, patting my fluffy shoulders as I walked toward the door, my white satin shoes tapping on the floor.

I pressed my hands against the door, aching to just turn the knob and look at him.

We hadn't slept next to each other last night. He'd been dragged out of the castle for a night on the town with Will, Adrian, and Charlie. Even Gideon and Ben had gone with them. Where, I didn't know. I'd stayed here at the castle being pampered by my friends.

I woke this morning and snuggled Alexis in bed until the clock chimed seven, and then all of my friends and female family members funneled through my door.

There hadn't been a moment of silence since then.

"Are you alone?" Xander asked, mere inches of wood separating us.

"Yeah, I am," I replied, a little breathless. "I thought you left for the cathedral already?"

"I have—" he paused, and a smile swept over my lips as I imagined him looking down at his watch. "I have exactly two minutes and forty-eight seconds until Troy, Adrian, and Charlie drag me to the car. Listen, I... I know we agreed to say the official vows of the Church, but I wanted to... I needed to vow something to you first. A few things."

My stomach tightened, whether from shock or excitement, I didn't know.

"Lena," he breathed, and the door shook as he shifted his weight behind it. I felt as though he was pressing his hands to the door just like I was, his hands over my own. "I was the biggest i***t when we first met. I did a lot of stupid things that I can't take back, and I can't promise you I'll stop making dumb decisions—"

"These are some vows—"

"Just listen to me for a moment," he laughed.

I pressed my lips together, unable to stop myself from smiling.

"I love you. I've loved you since the moment I saw you, and I mean that, and I always will. I knew you were my mate then, even if I was forcing myself to not believe it. You have been the biggest pain in my ass but also—"

"Xander!"

"But also the light of my world. The light to my shadow. My mate. My fated mate."

I pressed my forehead to the door, my eyes misting with silent tears.

"I'll never even come close to deserving you, but I promise... I vow to you that I will never stop trying. Every day for the rest of my f*****g life, I promise I will try to be the mate that you deserve. And when we're old and gray, and our grandchildren's grandchildren have grown.... When it's time for you to take your place with the Gods, Lena... I'll go. I'll gladly go into death knowing I got to spend my days with you, loving you."

Tears began to trickle down my cheeks as my fingers curled into fists. One of my hands shot to the doorknob, but I heard footsteps in the hallway beyond the door. Adrian's voice was lifted in concern, something about already running late.

"I love you," he repeated, his voice a whisper. "I'll see you soon."

His footsteps receded down the hallway, my hand still resting on the doorknob. I straightened up, dabbing at my tears with the backs of my hands.

I took a deep breath and opened the door, finding the hallway empty. The castle itself seemed empty. I was alone.

I walked down the hallway, the train of my dress and veil fluttering over the stone pavers. I was just about to turn the corner into the foyer when my dad walked backward into view, motioning for me to stop.

His eyes were locked on mine, tears shining in the light of the chandelier above his head.

I heard car doors shutting, then gravel crunching as a car left the driveway.

"Alright, it's safe for you to come out now," he said softly. "That is... quite a dress."

"Don't make fun of me," I pouted, sniffing as I dabbed at a fresh batch of tears. They were happy tears, brought on by the way my dad was looking at me right now.

He extended his hand, and I took it, letting him lead me out into the foyer. His emerald green sports car was running idle just within view of the two-story front doors leading out of the castle, the top down, ready to drive me through our kingdom to the altar.

He looked behind us at the stairwell, where stained glass stretched into the upper floors of the castle. I followed his gaze, noticing how he was lingering on the image of the Moon Goddess.

"When you were a baby, I'd stand on that landing and let you run your hands over the glass," he said, his eyes lingering on a distant memory. "I told you a few times... that that was you—the Goddess."

"Really?"

He nodded, then shrugged, meeting my eye again.

"Your mother and I had no idea what we were doing in so many ways, Lena. There was a time when we weren't sure who you'd be, what you'd have to do. We wondered if you'd even be able to stay with us, or if you'd come of age and be whisked away by the gods. It seems silly, now. But we were never afraid of you. We were always afraid of losing you, or of you losing yourself."

I knitted my fingers in his, desperately trying not to cry again.

"I didn't think I'd ever see you in a wedding dress," he said, his voice breaking on the words. He was crying now, a few tears rolling off his lashes.

"Dad," I whimpered, reaching past him for the box of tissues sitting on one of the side tables in the foyer.

I dabbed my eyes for what felt like the millionth time today as he led me out onto the front porch. I could hear the crowds from where we stood. There would be people lining the streets to catch a glimpse of their reclusive princess on her wedding day.

"I'm kind of scared," I said honestly.

"Don't be," he breathed, tucking a tissue in his pocket. "You've faced death, honey. Today is about love and life. Come on. Maeve will kill us if we're late, and I think it's going to take a minute to fit your dress in the car."

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Chapter 648 : It's Our Wedding and We'll Do What We Want

Xander

"You look like you want to kill everyone in this room," Adrian hissed. "Loosen up!"

I fought the urge to look over my shoulder at him, keeping my eyes fixed firmly on the aisle running down the center of the pews, which was full to the brim with people. All of Lena's family was here, as well as her friends and our shared friends. The Alphas and Lunas of practically every single pack were in attendance, and to my surprise, several vampires. I'd been scanning the crowd for several minutes, nodding at those few people I knew who were in attendance.

Lena and Rowan were running a bit behind it, it seemed.

Hanna was seated in the front row, Alexis sleeping in her arms as Hanna turned to speak to Georgia and a woman named Gemma, who was George's mother. I continued to scan the crowd, my shoulder relaxing a bit as I met Theo's eye. Ciana waved, beaming at me. And sitting right next to her was Soren, who was leaning to speak into Ethan's ear, the two elderly brothers looking jovial.

My family from Egoren arrived late last night. They were staying in a very ritzy hotel in the center of Mirage, even though Rowan had offered them suites at the castle. I had a sneaking suspicion the hotel in the city center had been Flora's idea, judging by the look of glee and mischief drifting over her face as she spoke with Lizzie, George's sister, who was roughly her age.

There were so many people in this cathedral—hundreds of people, all waiting for Lena.

The bridesmaids consisted of Abigail, Heather, Viv, Elaine, and Bethany. I hadn't even recognized Bethany at first. I was so used to seeing her covered in grease and dirty, wearing coveralls instead of a sparkling gown with makeup on her face. She looked beautiful, and I quickly noticed the engagement ring on her finger.

I looked back over the crowd and raised my brows at Gideon, who nodded at me when he met my eyes. Gideon had refused to be my groomsman, saying it was a strange ritual. I thought it likely had more to do with the fact that he was a vampire, and he was already getting cautious glances from some people in the crowd.

I felt my shoulders go rigid at the women seated behind him, chatting animatedly with an unassuming older woman, who was looking a little pale.

Narcissa, a f*****g Goddess of the Night Realm, was at our wedding.

She looked totally out of place, given her weird eyes and silver skin, but she seemed totally unperturbed by the glances of mingled concern and interest being cast in her direction. She looked... happy, excited actually. She must have sensed that I was looking at her, because she turned to me, smiling broadly as she waved.

I lifted my hand to wave but then flinched as the pianist slammed clumsily on the keys of the piano, then started pounding the keys in a very dramatic, somewhat excessive fashion.

Adrian was trying as hard as he could not to laugh. I turned to glance at him, noticing Charlie standing behind him, red in the face, his eyes watering with silent laughter.

I wished, with all of my heart, that Oliver was here.

Because he would have laughed, and loudly.

I heaved a breath, glaring at them both before I turned to the grand glass doors leading into the cathedral. I straightened my shoulders, trying to steady my breathing as the doors opened and a spray of sunlight drifted down the aisle. Applause rang out from the street as Lena and her father stepped inside. She was covered in flower petals, her body turned to wave at the townsfolk who had gathered outside of the church. I found it hard to breathe as the doors closed and Lena turned, her eyes settling on mine.

She was stunning, even in the dress she'd been complaining about for weeks. She looked like a dream, like something out of a fairytale Ciana had read to me as a child. I flexed my jaw, finding it damn near impossible to even form a smile as she began to walk forward, Rowan guiding her down the aisle.

I was in shock, I realized. None of this felt real.

Everything else about this moment faded—all the people, all the music. She looked like she was just drifting toward me, her eyes clouded with tears.

I vaguely realized I was shaking Rowan's hand until he let go, and Lena's hand replaced his. I clasped her hand in mine and we turned to face the altar, where the high priestess was waiting to marry us.

"Hey," I said to Lena, the word feeling kind of stupid leaving my mouth as I looked down at her.

"Hey," she replied, looking just as nervous and shocked as I felt.

The priestess was saying something, some spiel. I didn't hear a word she said as I looked down at my mate.

"So, do you come here often?" I said, the corner of my mouth twitching into a smile as a glimmer of mirth flashed behind her eyes.

"First time," she replied in a whisper.

"Me too," I said, wanting nothing more than to bend down and kiss her.

"I'm starving," she whispered.

"I know a place, it's just around the corner. We can go now, if you want."

She pressed her lips together to stop herself from giggling as the priestess went on and on.

I knitted my fingers in hers, pulling her a little closer so we were standing shoulder to shoulder, facing the priestess.

"I got you something," I breathed. She arched her brow but kept her face forward. "Do you want to know what it is?"

"We're supposed to be paying attention—"

"It's our wedding, we can do whatever we want."

She swallowed, her cheeks coloring beautifully as she glanced at me, which sent a thrill of desire sweeping up my spine. I glanced at her dress, wondering how difficult it would be to get underneath her skirts and have my way with her when we got back to the castle. I wanted to be alone with her, even if I had to do so in a broom closet.

"What did you get me?" she whispered, her eyes shimmering in the light of stained glass windows that towered over us.

"A ring," I whispered back.

She gave me a look, then silently chuckled as she turned back to the priestess, who was still going on and on about something, I wasn't sure. I hadn't been paying attention at all.

"You already gave me a ring—"

"This one is new, and it's not finished yet. It's missing something—"

"Do you, Alpha King Alexander Crimson—" I snapped my attention to the priestess as she had me repeat very specific vows to Lena, and I did so enthusiastically, taking Lena's hand in mine. Lena repeated the vows, and Lucas was shoved forward by Maeve, handing Lena and me a set of platinum bands, which I'd chosen to match the family ring I'd given her when I proposed.

Lucas looked entirely embarrassed to have to stand up in front of hundreds of onlookers, but he was behaving himself, so I couldn't complain about the grimace stretching across his face.

"Is this the ring?" she whispered, and I shook my head.

"Later," I whispered, and then, at the priestess's command, I kissed her fully, sliding my hand down her back as I dipped her into a dramatic kiss that caused a wave of applause to erupt from the crowd.

Lena was red in the face when I released her, but her smile was undeniable.

"Alright, let's go," I said, clamping down on her hand and rushing down the aisle.

She was tripping over her dress as she tried to keep up with me, so I scooped her into my arms, her head thrown back with laughter. Everyone was clapping, yelling out their congratulations as we left the church.

The noise only increased as we stepped out of the cathedral door, stopping before the steps leading down to the street, where a car was waiting to take us back to the castle.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of people cheered as I set Lena back down on her feet. I was stunned, honestly, unsure of what to say or do for a moment.

"Smile and wave," Lena said as she nudged me.

"Kiss her!" someone called out from the crowd, and that was definitely something I could do.

I kissed her soundly, having to fight off her veil, which was billowing in a warm breeze.

There were more cheers, more applause.

"Come on," I said, practically running down those shining marble steps toward one of Rowan's many sports cars. I opened the door for her and motioned for the warrior who was in the driver's seat to get lost.

I'd be driving my wife back to the castle, and we'd be driving fast.

The warrior looked somewhat stunned as I hit the gas and drove away, Lena's veil fanning out behind us as we drove around a long curved driveway and out into the city.

"Do you even know where you're going?" she laughed, trying in vain to reign in her veil.

"No," I replied, my heart racing. I didn't think I'd ever been this happy, not in my entire life. Lena was my mate, and now my wife. She was the Luna Queen of Egoren. She was the mother of my child. "What do you want to do now?" I asked, taking a sharp turn that I hoped was a shortcut to the castle.

She sucked in her breath, squealing as the car sped through an empty commercial street away from the crowds that had gathered for the wedding.

"Our reception—"

"We have an hour and a half before it starts," I winked, peeling onto another empty street. Late afternoon sunlight was spilling through the magnolia trees that lined the street leading to the castle that rose above us in the distance. "I want you alone," I growled.

Lena's eyes widened, then narrowed. She reached over, running her hand up my thigh.

I wondered how fast this car could go, and how pissed Rowan would be if I sprayed gravel all over his front garden if I took the final turn too sharply.

But I didn't care.

I pulled the car into the driveway and lifted Lena out of it before she had a chance to open her own door. A maid stepped outside, looking somewhat shocked to see us so soon. I hurried past her into the castle with Lena squealing in my arms.

"It's going to take hours to get back into this dress, Xander!" she cried as I ran with her up the stairs. She swatted me as I groaned under the weight of the fabric as I carried her, turning down the hallway toward our bedroom.

"Don't care," I huffed, kicking open our door and slamming it shut with my foot. I threw her on the bed in a blur of white satin. She reached up to straighten her tiara as I hastily undressed.

She purred my name.

"Did you get me a wedding present?" I asked as I stalked toward her. She shook her head, her mouth curving into a mischievous smile. "You'll have to make it up to me, then," I growled.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

CHAPTER 649 : WEDDED MATES

Lena

Xander's hands roughly looked for a way to get me out of my dress, but even I didn't know where the clasps of my bodice began. He looked me in the eyes, those obsidian, crimson-flaked pools glittering with mischief as he grabbed a fistful of fabric from my skirt and tore the skirt open in one single motion.

"Xander!"

"I'll buy you a new one," he growled, bending over me to nip me right above my hipbone, through the fabric of my shift.

A flood of desire washed over me, and suddenly the last thing on my mind was the dress. He scooped me into his arms so I was standing and began to tear at the dress, finally finding the clasps and freeing me of the tight bodice. I was left in nothing but the shift, which clung to my heated skin as he backed me against the wall. He was panting, but some of the animalistic desire left his eyes as he looked at me. He ran the back of his fingers over my jaw, and I turned into his touch.

"You are beautiful," he whispered, brushing his lips against mine.

"I love you," I said against his lips as he stole the words from my mouth with a deep kiss, his tongue darting against mine.

He hiked my shift over my waist and pressed against me, running his hands down the swell of my hips. He cupped my ass, lifting me off the ground as though I weighed nothing.

"Wrap your legs around my waist," he commanded, the tone of his voice sending a shiver of red-hot anticipation down my spine. He groaned low in his throat as my slit brushed against the crown of his c**k, a soft murmur of approval leaving his lips as he felt how ready I was for him. "Good girl."

That was enough for me to lose it. I held onto his shoulder as he slid inside of me, burying himself to the hilt on one gentle thrust. I choked on a moan, my fingernails digging into his arms as he thrust into me again, harder this time.

It was probably a little too soon to be having s*x after having a baby, but I was a White Queen. Those healing powers had to be good for something, right?

I rocked my hips against him as he drove himself into me, his hands fixed firmly on my hips with my back pinned against the wall. He cursed, kneading the fullness of my hips as he brushed kisses against my neck and shoulders, then carried me to the bed.

He fell on top of me and the tangle of remnants from my dress. I cried out as he reached between us to stroke my clit. My muscles locked around him and he gripped the sheets, chuckling low in his throat.

"If you keep doing that," he growled, "I'm not going to be able to hold on much longer."

"Please," I whimpered, grinding against him in a desperate attempt to reach my own climax.

He choked out a breath at my movements, closing his eyes.

"Lena—"

I ran my nails down his shoulders, begging him for me.

He flipped me over so I was on my belly and grabbed me by the hips, pulling me back against him. I could have screamed, but I stifled the throws of ecstasy ripping through my body by biting down on the satin of my destroyed wedding dress to stop myself from screaming his name. I clamped my eyes shut as a soul-shaking orgasm rolled through me. Xander didn't hold back as he cried out my name, driving himself into me with one final thrust.

We collapsed onto the bed, my wedding dress in pieces all around us. I reached over and placed my arm over his chest. My legs were shaking, and my body fell into a blissful numbness that could have put me to sleep had we not had our wedding reception to attend in a matter of minutes.

"Don't fall asleep," I whispered as I opened my eyes and looked over at Xander.

He had his eyes closed, his breathing starting to regulate.

"I won't," he smiled, blinking a few times before looking at me and brushing a lock of hair from my face.

"You still have your tiara on—"

"I totally forgot about that!"

"How are we going to explain the dress?"

I paused, running my tongue along my lower lip as I tried to come up with a good excuse for the level of utter destruction Xander and I had just caused.

"We need to get rid of the evidence," I giggled, rolling over so I was tucked into the crook of his arm.

"How quickly do you think we can bury it?"

Thankfully, I had another white gown in my closet that ended up being perfect for the reception. Xander helped me dress and fix my hair before we gathered the remnants of my wedding dress into a pile and stuffed it into a cabinet in a seldom used sitting room on the fourth floor with a plan to deal with it later.

The reception dress was much more sleek and simple compared to the satin cloud I'd worn to walk down the aisle. Even better, I could nurse Alexis while wearing it, which was making the night so much easier already.

I'd spent the last several hours mingling with my friends, family, and the wide array of guests who'd attended the ceremony. Xander and I were peppered in congratulations, and even had the opportunity to dance together as the sun began to set.

Now I was sitting alone, taking a breath as I cradled Alexis in my arms.

The rose garden sparkled with tea lights as I lounged in a chair near a bubbling fountain. Alexis had fallen asleep, her mouth forming a perfect O as she tilted her head back against my arm. Mom came up to me, handing me a fresh glass of sparkling apple cider.

"Your dad wants her," she said with a smile as I placed Alexis in her arms. "He says he's going to give a toast soon."

I looked toward the silken tents that had been erected in the fields. The sun was setting fully, casting a golden glow over the castle grounds. The tall grasses had been mowed, leaving acres and acres of space for all of the children to spread out and run to their hearts' desire while the adult guests mingled over glasses of champagne and wine.

Xander and I had decided against a formal sit-down dinner, opting for a buffet style instead, which allowed our guests to mingle in small groups through the grounds. Sprays of fresh flowers lined the walkways snaking through the grounds and the gardens, and the air was thick with the scent of magnolia and hyacinth.

It was perfect, every detail.

I followed Mom through the garden, stopping to look at a group of little girls who were playing in the corner. Narcissa was among them, two little girls weaving roses into her hair. Narcissa, a terrifying vampire goddess, was playing with dolls with the little girls sitting around her, one of them Sasha. I smiled, feeling tears begin to well in my eyes as Narcissa looked up at me, a beaming smile on her face.

I'd never known someone so thoroughly loving.

"She's been keeping all the kids busy," Mom said as she smiled warmly and nodded her head at Narcissa, who bent back down to continue playing with the girls.

"Are their parents okay with it?" I whispered.

Mom nodded, her brows arched in surprise. "Yes, actually. Narcissa introduced herself to practically everyone who attended the ceremony. Several Lunas who brought their young ones have asked her to come home with them to help with their children, jokingly... I think. Some of them might be serious. Narcissa is incredible."

“She doesn’t seem like a several thousand-year-old vampire goddess, does she?” I replied, smiling to myself as Narcissa’s laughter drifted through the air.

“None of the vampires are what we assumed.”

And there had been several vampires at our wedding.

Zeke and Penny were ruling over the vampire settlement in Crimson Creek now. Kiern had stepped down as queen. All three of them had been in attendance during the ceremony, as well as Gideon, Alma, and their brothers. Kiern and Alma had sat together, which warmed my heart exponentially. Kiern had mentioned to me once that Alma was her niece. I wondered if I’d ever get a moment to hear that

story, as well as learn the details about King Costas, who hadn’t been the man we thought he was after all.

The vampires had stood out during the ceremony in their dark clothing to shield themselves from the sun, but now that darkness was falling over the castle ground, they looked just like us, acted just like us, and seemed to be having a great time as I made my way back toward the tents.

My friends were currently tearing up the dance floor, music blaring as I smiled and watched Abigail wrap her arms around Adrian’s waist and drag him onto the dance floor, not taking no for an answer. Xander was talking to a group of Alphas, his tuxedo unbuttoned and his bow tie slightly crooked. He caught my eye and winked before turning back to his conversation.

A microphone screeched and several people covered their ears as Dad tapped on the mic a few times, grimacing an apology. Xander was at my side in an instant, his arm snaking over my shoulder.

“I’d like to take a moment to thank you all for attending my daughter’s wedding. I couldn’t be happier for her, and my son-in-law Alexander. Grab another drink and let’s raise a toast—”

Dad stopped talking, his eyes narrowing toward the back of the crowded tent. I turned to follow his gaze but couldn’t see over the swell of people behind us. Xander turned, then stiffened, his arm falling down my back.

“What is it?”

Elaine came up behind me, clutching Bethany’s arm as the two women, who were both taller than I was, looked toward the far end of the tent.

The crowd began to part, but Xander didn’t move. I looked back at Dad, who lowered the microphone and then dropped it onto the ground, the sound of the impact thundering over the speakers.

“I’m really sorry I missed the ceremony.”

I whirled around, face to face with Oliver. I launched myself into his arms, pressing my cheek against his chest as he bent to rest his cheek against the top of my head. “I’m an asshole.”

“It’s alright,” I whispered, feeling tears begin to well in my eyes. I heard him murmur a similar apology to Xander, but then he stopped talking entirely, his body going rigid.

I squeezed him a little tighter, a tear rolling down my cheek as I realized what, and who, had made him go quiet.

"You," he whispered, and not to me.

"Hey," Elaine said in a choked whisper.

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

CHAPTER 650 : NEW BEGINNINGS

Lena

"What now?" I asked, my arms wrapped around Xander's neck.

It was closing in on 10:00 p.m., and most of the guests had left the wedding, at least those who weren't staying the night in the castle. All around us, people were dancing to a slow, romantic song, just like we were.

I hadn't seen Elaine and Oliver since shortly after Oliver arrived. He'd simply taken her hand, and the two of them walked away. Dad was stunned but was able to hastily finish his toast to us before he walked back into the crowd in search of Troy and Maeve.

I was happy for them, especially Oliver, even if he had missed most of my wedding day.

I looked around the dancefloor, watching as people began to take their leave in search of refreshments or a quiet place to sit and talk. I felt a pang of guilt, and maybe even regret at the fact that all of this may not have been possible if we hadn't won the war that had torn through our realm.

Our realm was still rebuilding, and likely would be for a while, maybe even years to come.

"Well, we have a week before we leave for Egoren," he said. "I talked to Will about spending a few days in Avondale before we head through the southern pass, a little honeymoon. There are not many beaches in Egoren, at least not like in the Isles."

"I wouldn't mind that," I said, smiling against his chest. But then I remembered something. "I have something for you!"

"I have something for you too, but I thought said you didn't get me anything for our—"

"It's not something I can give you. But I want—can we go somewhere in private, for a moment?"

He gave me a sly glance, and I narrowed my eyes playfully at him.

"Not like that. It's something else!"

"Okay, come on. The rose garden's empty."

We left the dance floor and walked hand in hand toward the garden. Guests mingled in small groups, some even sprawled out in the grass, their faces lifted toward the stars.

We reached the garden, and I turned to him, taking his hands in mine.

"I've been thinking about this for a long time. I want to... I want to offer you something, offer your people... our people, something."

"What—"

"I want to keep the portal between our realms open, permanently. I want our lands to be as one, with no need for magic or moonstones. I know it's... it's going to be your decision. I know there will be politics involved—"

"We've already elected a high elder to your realm's council, and started talks about trade—"

"Is this what you want?" I asked, feeling somewhat sheepish. It didn't feel like much of a wedding gift, but I felt in my heart that this was something that needed to happen. A line in that poem from Lycaon's book had stuck me with over the past several weeks—two lines into one, land of the eternal sun.

What if Xander had interpreted the poem incorrectly? It wasn't about me at all. It was about our realms.

It was about repairing the split Lycaon had caused between our kind.

"Can you do it?" he asked in a low whisper.

I reached up to grasp the sunstone necklace.

"Yes," I whispered.

He held my gaze for a moment, then nodded once.

I ran my thumb over the surface of the stone, feeling it warm against my skin. I closed my eyes, the corners of my mouth twitching into a smile as I asked the Night God for a little... help.

Gasps of surprise, then applause, rang through the air. Xander grasped my arms, going rigid as I opened my eyes and looked up. A shimmer of lights washed across the sky, like the stars were moving in a gentle, snaking rhythm. My body felt hot, burning with energy for a long moment. I found it hard to breathe for several seconds, and a jolt of electricity ran up the length of my spine. I stepped away from Xander, afraid my powers would spring forth. But then a feeling of calm swept over me, of peace.

Then, nothing.

'Congratulations on your nuptials, Selene,' the Night God said, his voice a gentle whisper in my mind.

Xander met my gaze again, looking a little shocked. He stepped toward me, his hand running down the length of my back.

"Now, what did you have for me?" I said a little breathlessly, reaching up to brush a lock of hair from my eyes.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," I said honestly. "I'm just fine."

Xander looked a little skeptical but cleared his throat, shifting his weight before he gingerly reached out to touch the sunstone that hung from my neck.

"I had a ring made to hold the stone," he whispered. "I worry Alexis is going to rip it off of you one of these days."

"She already likes to play with it," I beamed, leaning into him as she wrapped his arms around me.

"I can't believe—I can't believe I married the Moon Goddess," he said with a little laugh, then kissed me on top of the head.

"I'd say you're pretty lucky," I teased, and he snorted with laughter before turning to walk us back to our wedding reception.

I was the lucky one. I was the one who was blessed, and in more ways than one.

"Was that light show—was that you?" my father asked.

"The portal is open," I breathed, knitting my fingers around his. "Our lands are unified, forever."

Xander

The library had become a haven for the men who'd attended my wedding to hide from their wives and daughters, who were all giddy and hyped up on champagne. The air in the library was spiced with scotch and whiskey as I settled into one of the leather couches. Rowan was splayed out in an armchair on the other side of the room, his legs propped up on a foot rest. Alexis was fast asleep on his chest, her head tucked beneath his chin. I smiled into my scotch, praying to whoever was listening that she never lost those perfectly round chubby cheeks.

Rowan had barely put Alexis down since the ceremony. He seemed perfectly content, however. He spoke in a low voice to two men as he patted Alexis's back.

The wedding had wound down significantly as the hour neared midnight. Lena was still outside in the rose garden, chatting with her friends as she sipped sparkling cider and nibbled on whatever food was leftover. I had finally had an opportunity to try the food and drinks an hour ago, and it hadn't been enough. I was still sober—and starving.

As much fun as this had been, I was ready to crawl into bed beside my wife and close my eyes.

Troy plopped down on the couch opposite the one I was sitting on, crossing his ankle over his opposite knee. He motioned to Charlie, who filled Troy's glass with two fingers of the incredibly expensive scotch Ethan had insisted on buying for the wedding, even though I'd argued against it.

"I just got stuck talking to your great aunt Georgia for the last hour," he said to Charlie, then drank deeply from his scotch.

"My sister has always been insufferable, but it's only gotten worse in her old age," Ethan gruffed as he walked over and sat down next to me.

I leaned forward and grabbed the bottle of scotch off the coffee table, pouring him a dram. He nodded his thanks as he settled back against the leather.

But we almost spilled our drinks when Oliver jumped over the back of the couch and sat on the other side of me, looking more than slightly disheveled. Troy arched his brow as Oliver adjusted his wrinkled clothes, and I noticed he'd missed buttons when he hastily dressed.

Ethan pursed his lips and eyed his favorite grandchild skeptically for a moment, then shook his head and sipped his scotch, meeting Troy's eye with a smirk.

"Things going well with Elaine?" I asked.

Oliver didn't even try to hide the smile that spread over his face.

"She's definitely my mate," he said slyly, his cheeks a little red and his hair sticking up all over his head.

There was a very serious conversation I needed to have with him, but that could wait. I'm sure Adrian, Charlie, and I would have it out with Oliver over his abandonment once the rest of the guests had left, or at least gone to sleep.

For now, I couldn't have been happier for him.

"There you are, you old bastard. I thought you died," Ethan grumbled as Soren rounded the couches and took a seat between Troy and Charlie.

Soren gave him a dirty look and rolled his eyes. "What a mercy that would be," he murmured, taking Charlie's scotch right out of his hands and draining it. Charlie blinked in surprise, and Troy chuckled as the two patriarchs began to grumble incessantly back and forth.

"Uncle Soren," Oliver said, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees.

"What?" Soren asked, meeting his eye.

"What's your story?" Oliver replied, narrowing his eyes at the man.

"There's not much to say—"

"Oh, that's bullshit," Troy laughed, his eyes glimmering with some distant memory. "I used to tell the boys stories from the year you lived on the Persephone when I was putting them to bed."

Soren raised his brows, pursing his lips.

"Hopefully only the good ones," he replied, a soft smile touching his cheeks.

I noticed Ethan's contemplative expression as he crossed his ankles. He rested his elbow on the seat rest and looked at his brother, his eyes laser focused on Soren's face.

I wondered how much Ethan knew about the last half of Soren's life. I realized at that moment it was likely very little.

"How did you end up in the Dark Realm?" I asked.

Soren turned to me, and I felt suddenly unsure whether I should have asked that. A darkness flashed behind his eyes, but only for a moment. Other memories lingered there, some good... some not so good at all.

“Yeah, how did that happen?” Charlie asked.

“How did you find your mate?” Oliver added, leaning forward to pour himself a glass of whiskey. I glanced at Rowan, who was still seated in the armchair, but his eyes were narrowed on our conversation. Alexis was still sleeping soundly on his chest.

“I already said it’s not much of a story,” Soren protested, but none of us were having it.

Finally, after much coaxing, he rose from the sofa with a groan and filled another glass of scotch before walking to the front of the couches and clearing his throat.

“I guess... I should start at the beginning.”

The End