

Kings Breeder 651

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

CHAPTER 651 : THE BOOK OF MAGIC

Maeve

Winter Forest, One and a Half Years Later

Troy came into our room like a battering ram, his shoulders and hair dusted with a thick layer of snow. He gave me a boyish grin as he shook himself off and began to unwind the scarf from his neck.

"What have you been up to?" I asked as I eyed him from the foot of the bed where I was pulling on a pair of thick socks over my wool pants.

It was another frigid day in Winter Forest. Outside our bedroom window, the stars were dense, the moon casting long icy shadows over the castle grounds below.

"I walked Luke to school," he gruffed, hanging up his damp sweater near the fireplace.

I couldn't help but arch my brows and chuckle to myself as I eyed Troy's snow-coated pants and the damp spots around his knees and elbows.

He caught my gaze and rolled his eyes before continuing to undress. "He fought me the whole way."

"It almost looks like he won," I mused, bending down to fetch my warmest boots.

We'd been living in Winter Forest for a year now, and Lucas was worse than ever. He'd been home-schooled by a private tutor when we lived in Avondale, but we thought Winter Forest would be a great place for him to broaden his horizons and make some new friends. He was attending the same school where Rowan and I had once been students, and at first, it had gone well.

But recently Luke had been acting out, even sneaking out of class or not showing up altogether. He was running with a group of boys his age, having sword fights with icicles and throwing snowballs at unsuspecting passersby while hiding behind snow berms on the way to the market square.

One of his friends was named Brady, and he was a vampire. That wouldn't have mattered much to us at all, had it not been for Brady's mother coming to the castle, dragging Brady by the ear, to complain about Luke's "bad influence."

I didn't blame her in the slightest. It hadn't been the smoothest of transitions for the vampires who settled in Winter Forest. Aside from Crimson Creek, Winter Forest was now home to the largest population of vampires, all of them refugees from the Realm of Night. Most were families or women and children who had lost their fathers and husbands during the war. Brady was one of the lucky few to have both parents still living.

His father worked closely with Troy training young warriors. His mother was a seamstress and one of the matriarchs in the community of vampires who now lived amongst us. She worried about fitting in, about her safety as well as the safety of her family.

Winter Forest had been more welcoming than most packs, but there were still a few people who feared the vampires. Having little vampires running around being menaces wasn't a good look, but neither were the prince's antics. And Luke was, I was sure, the ringleader in his little gang.

Luke had been acting out, and any attempts to help him assimilate to our new life in Winter Forest seemed to push him further into his devious behavior. He wasn't used to being an only child. He missed having his brothers around. We missed having his brothers around, too.

"Brady and Luke are starting warrior training today after school," Troy said as he pulled a fresh sweater over his shoulders, smoothing it over his chest. I blinked up at him, c*****g my brow. He shrugged, striding over to me and kissing me on the forehead. "I have to wear him out somehow. Both of them. Brady's father is one of the trainers, and it was actually his idea."

"Aren't they a little young?"

"Brady took on four sixteen-year-olds," he breathed, sitting down next to me on the bed. "And Luke finished them off. I spent yesterday afternoon talking to their parents. Something has to be done."

I blew out my breath, my eyes clouding with tears of frustration. Troy ran his hand down my back, then put his arm around my shoulder, pulling me close. "It's not your fault," he said.

"It feels like my fault. I uprooted his life—"

"He was up to the same stuff in Avondale, Maeve. He's a scrapper, always has been, and always will be. He needs an outlet for his energy, and if he wants to fight like the big dogs, he needs to train like them too."

I snorted with mirth, wiping a rogue tear from my cheek. Troy squeezed me to him for a moment, then reluctantly released me, a glimmer of longing behind his eyes. "What are you getting all dressed up for?"

I smirked, glancing down at my wool pants and clunky boots. "I have an errand to run with Clare today," I answered, rising from the foot of the bed and striding toward our closet. I opened the door, looking over my shoulder at him. "I'll be back in a few hours. We're going on a... walk."

"You're finally going to the old temple to return the book, aren't you?" He rose from the bed as I tossed him a pair of socks, his mouth twitching into a smile that warmed me from the inside out. I hoped to carry some of that warmth with me today while I trekked into the unforgiving chill with Clare, lugging that Goddess-forsaken spell book over ice and knee-deep snow to where I hoped would be its final resting place.

"I am," I replied, taking a shaky breath as I turned back to the closet to finish getting dressed. "It'll be quick."

At least, I hoped it would be quick. The spellbook had been sitting at the bottom of a seldom used closet on the upper floors of the castle for months now, out of sight and out of mind. It was Clare who came to me yesterday, telling me with a firmness that made me want to bend the knee to her that it was time, that we'd put this off for far too long.

That kind of magic didn't belong in our world. We had no use for it. We prayed we didn't need to use it again.

“Are you donating blood today, too?” Troy asked, his voice wavering a bit.

I turned to him, clutching my favorite purple turtleneck sweater to my chest as I huffed a long, shallow breath. “I did yesterday. I’m taking a break for a few days,” I replied, but he narrowed his eyes at me.

“Troy, it’s for the children—”

“You’ve been doing too much,” he said, running his tongue along the inside of his lower lip. “After you get back from your errand, you should take a break for the rest of the day. Eat something. Take a nap.”

“You know that’s not going to happen—”

“You’re burning yourself out.”

I gave him a tight-lipped smile in response. Troy was right. The past year had been the busiest year of my life, and then some.

But I was the White Queen now. This was my pack, my territory.

And I was the only person who could give the vampires what they needed to survive in our world.

“The pill form seems to be working,” Clare said softly as we made a path through the snow toward the mouth of the river. The river that looped around Winter Forest met the inlet not far from where we were now, and crossing the frozen mouth of the river was the only way to reach the sunken, ice covered island where the ancient temple stood in decay and disrepair.

“I heard as much. It requires far less blood that way,” I replied with a sigh, shifting the weight of my heavy backpack. The book weighed as much as a small child, and my thighs were beginning to ache as we broke through the ice crusted snow. “The blood is mixed with blood root, and some other vitamins and minerals.”

“Well, a weekly dose is all the mature vampires need at this point. The children who are taking the supplement are able to handle the sun—”

“Really?” I stopped walking so I could face Clare, who was walking a few paces behind me. She raised her eyebrows, nodding.

“It’s been tested in Crimson Creek, and successfully. One pill, once a week, and the kids can play outside. The adults can even handle the sun in small doses now.”

“Then it’s working—”

“It’s working,” she said with a soft, fleeting smile. Her shoulders relaxed a bit as we caught our breath, our faces lifted to the first inklings of late winter sunshine that had just begun to peak over the mountains in the distance.

I’d been donating blood for the past year and half, sometimes multiple times a week. There were other people willing to donate the life-giving nutrients the vampires needed to survive, of course, but there was something different about my blood, even that of my mother and my niece.

We noticed it last year, the first spring I'd spent as the White Queen. After a dose of my blood, some of the vampires were able to handle an hour or so of sunlight without their skin reddening and blistering. Plus, just a taste of my blood was enough to sustain them for days.

We knew a lot more about these so-called "lower vampires" now that we'd been living in close quarters with them for a while. They could eat the same kinds of foods we did. They had a similar culture and lived in family groups like we did. They matured fully around the age of twenty and aged slowly from then on. Not immortal, so to speak, but some of the vampires I'd met who looked elderly were several hundred years old, and even some of the young looking one were two hundred years old, or more.

Children were far and few between, but there were enough to fill classrooms in the school in Winter Forest. Two vampire babies had been born in the past year, both of them delivered by Clare, who had spent her time in Winter Forest training to be a midwife.

There had even been a few weddings between vampires and shifters, and a few of those unions had produced pregnancies. One of those women was due to deliver in a few weeks.

The only hybrid shifter vampire I knew was Bethany, whose mother had been a vampire, and her father, Henry, was a shifter. She had shifter powers but didn't need blood to survive. Whether she'd inherit the vampire lifespan was yet to be seen.

These magic pills Clare spoke of, however... well, they were changing everything. A single pill a week made it possible for the vampires to live like we did, walking in the sun and not needing drops of blood in their coffees, wine, and soup to fuel their bodies. It also meant I wasn't constantly light headed and drained, my arms no longer yellow and purple with bruises from constant needling.

"Sasha made friends with one of the vampire children. Her name is Vanessa. I honestly wouldn't have known she was a vampire had it not been for her mother telling me as much. She's been taking the pill for three months now."

Success—that's what this was. My chest felt a little lighter as we continued to make our way through the snow.

The deep snow gave way to ice as we reached the frozen mouth of the river. I took a ginger step onto the ice, finding it still thick and firm. I nodded over my shoulder at Clare, bidding her to follow.

"We won't get sucked into a portal, right?" she asked, half joking.

I swallowed back my own apprehension but couldn't answer.

Hanna had come here, something pulling her to this long forgotten place. We'd found it years ago, so it was known to us, but we hadn't paid it any mind until that fateful night Hanna wasn't able to sleep for whatever reason and took off in a cloak of darkness.

Inside, she'd found Oliver, Lena, and Xander, and we'd heard their harrowing tale. Somehow, the temple was used as a bridge between our realm, and the realm of what Lena had called the witches.

But the realm of the witches had been tethered to the vampire realm from what I understood. The Realm of Night was gone now. I didn't know what that meant for the realm of those who had given us—given me—this book of magic.

We reached the temple as the sun drifted over the tallest peaks of the far flung mountains. I crossed through the doorless threshold, my feet crunching on the snow that piled along the windblown and toppled stone pews. The ceiling was barely intact, but it was enough to cover the altar from the elements.

“Are you just going to leave it on the altar?” Clare asked behind me, her voice trembling a bit as she looked around. It was her first time here.

“Yes,” I breathed, unzipping my backpack and wrapping my gloved fingers around the book, holding it up to look at it one last time.

It had shown me my death once, and I had been angry. But what I hadn’t realized then is that it had given me the gift of knowing I would live a long, fulfilled life. I’d die in the arms of my mate, tucked into the same bed we shared now at the castle, our hair gray and our skin withered with lives long lived.

It showed me that I was meant to be here, in Winter Forest.

Most of all, it showed me that I wouldn’t die with white hair. I wouldn’t need to call upon the Goddess and exchange my life for a glimpse of her power. There would be peace until my dying day.

At least, I hoped so.

I set the book down on the altar and turned my back to it.

“Thank you,” I said in a whisper, and then the hair on the back of my neck rose, a chill running down the length of my spine as a soft gust of wind rustled through the temple. I turned back around.

“Are you coming?” Clare said from the doorway, her eyes wide and face flushed. She wanted to get out of here as much as I did.

“Yeah,” I breathed, blinking at the altar.

The book was gone, just like that.

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CHAPTER 652 : MORE THAN I COULD HAVE IMAGINED

Oliver

Mirage, Five Years After Lena’s Wedding

Sunlight poured through the kitchen windows. All of Elaine’s flowers were in bloom. Early spring roses trembled against the glass in the soft breeze. From the windows, I could see Old Town rising out of the blinding sunlight reflecting in a shimmer against the moisture from last night’s thunderstorm. The kids had slept terribly, which meant I had also slept like absolute s**t.

Thankfully, Elaine was due home in a few hours. She’d spent the weekend away, enjoying some time with her twin sister at some spa near the port of Valoria while Abigail was visiting from Egoren. I’d been the one pushing for my wife to spend some time away, to take a break from the kids. I told her I could handle it, that everything would be fine.

I'd just lifted my coffee to my lips when a crash rang out from upstairs. I waited for a moment, my coffee barely touching my mouth as muffled voices drifted down the staircase. Then, a squirmish. Then, Lucy's high-pitched screech of pure fury sent a tremor through the stone walls of the house.

"Isaac!" I called out, taking a quick sip of coffee as I stalked out of the kitchen and into the foyer. I nearly tripped over a pile of toys at the bottom of the stairs then gingerly made my way up the staircase while stepping over more discarded toys, construction paper, and a variety of children's clothing.

Lucy continued to screech, her voice a high-pitched squeal of frustration as I finally reached the top of the staircase and struggled with the baby gate while my kids battled it out just out of sight. I beelined it for the back bedroom that Elaine and I had turned into a playroom. The door was slightly ajar, so I pushed it open, more toys blocking the door's progress.

"Isaac, what—"

"Daddy, help!" Isaac, our four-year-old son, whimpered as Lucy tangled her tiny fingers in his shaggy blond hair, her legs crossed around his neck.

"Lucy!" I grumbled as I knelt and untwined her fingers from his hair.

I'd have sworn she hissed at me, baring her teeth as I tried to pry her loose from her angry grasp on her brother. Lucy was almost two and so far had proven to have a mean streak if provoked. She pointed and babbled something terse and incoherent at Isaac, who paled as he reached up to rub his head. "What's going on up here?"

"Lucy took one of my trains, and I took it back," he pouted, his lower lip trembling. "She bit me!" He held up his arm, where a red mark was puffed up against his suntanned skin. "So I pushed her, and then she knocked over my train set—"

Lucy cut in with more incoherent words of her own, her eyes narrowed on her brother. I sighed heavily, reaching out with one hand to run my hand through Isaac's hair, Lucy perched on my other arm.

"Everybody's okay—"

"Mama!" Lucy cried, her fingers clutching my shirt.

Isaac looked up at me, his blue eyes misting with tears.

"She's coming home today, okay? We're gonna walk down to the train station to pick her up in a few hours... after lunch, and after your naps—"

"NO NAP!" Lucy screamed into my ear.

I winced, trying not to grind my teeth as I pressed her against my chest and gave Isaac a sympathetic look. A nap was exactly what she needed at the moment. I was sure it was hard being two, and even harder after spending a night woken repeatedly by a thunderstorm and without a mother's touch to comfort her. I couldn't blame her for her attitude. I also wanted her mama back.

Desperately.

“I was going to make a snack, maybe some popcorn. Do you want some?” I asked Isaac as I turned to walk out of the playroom.

Lucy’s eyes were already growing heavy as she laid her head against my shoulder, her glossy red ringlets tickling my jaw as she stuck her thumb in her mouth. Isaac perked up at the mention of his favorite snack and nodded his head enthusiastically, following me into Lucy’s bedroom. I laid her in her bed, and she surrendered, her arms splayed on the mattress and eyes open to only slits as I motioned for Isaac to back quietly out of the room.

I gathered all of the toys off the stairs on my way down, tossing them into the toy box in the front hallway. Isaac skipped ahead of me into the kitchen. He knew how to make popcorn. He was pretty independent now, which was an exciting change, but it also broke my heart. He was born exactly nine months after I had met my mate at Lena’s wedding.

I smiled to myself at the thought, shaking my head a bit as I poured myself a fresh cup of coffee. Elaine and I hadn’t waited to get to know each first at all, really. We’d gotten married only a few days after Lena’s wedding. We bought this house and spent over a year renovating it. Both Isaac and Lucy had been born in this house, and neither Elaine nor I had plans to move into something larger or more regal. It was home—the Alpha of Drogomor’s home.

Yeah, about that. Uncle Rowan had bestowed the title of Alpha of Drogomor onto me shortly after Lena departed for Egoren. The Drogomor pack was small and laid claim to the territory called Old Town on the outskirts of Mirage.

It hadn’t always been this way. I thought often of the days when my grandpa Ethan and great uncle Talon ruled as Alpha and Beta... how different things were then, for everyone. How much harder things were for them than they were for us.

I attended pack meetings every week, conferred with the neighboring territories, and saw to the welfare of my pack on a daily basis, Elaine by my side as my Luna through all of it. But I still had the time to walk Isaac to school, to take the kids to the park in the evenings, and to spend my nights cuddled in bed with my wife. I hadn’t had to face off with another Alpha, or wage war—at least not yet.

Maybe not ever.

I never pictured myself as an Alpha, but maybe my notion of Alphas was skewed because of my privileged upbringing. Drogomor was humble and cozy, and the house of its Alpha had creaky pipes and a washing machine that sounded like it was trying to up and walk out the door every time I ran a load of blankets. The walls weren’t dripping in gold and finery, or cloaked in dismal dark and secrets.

My pack... my home. It was peaceful. I was at peace.

Finally.

“We need to clean up the house before Mama gets home,” I said as I poured popcorn into a large steel bowl and slid it across the kitchen island, where Isaac was waiting with open arms.

“What about the vase?” he quipped, jabbing his thumb to the counter behind him where the remnants of my desperate attempts to glue Elaine’s antique vase that she put her roses in back together. I pursed

my lips, giving Isaac a defeated look. Roughhousing with the kids had taken a turn for the worst, I was afraid.

I let out the breath I'd been holding all weekend as Elaine stepped onto the platform, her arms outstretched to catch Isaac and Lucy as they ran to her, squealing with delight. I gave her a short wave, meeting her eye as she looked me over as though to confirm I'd survived the weekend alone with our little monsters in one piece.

Isaac ran back over to me, jabbering about the dead squirrel he found at the park yesterday while Lucy clung to Elaine for dear life, refusing to be put back down.

"Hey," Elaine grinned, kissing me firmly on the lips. I felt myself melt into her touch. This was the longest we'd been apart since, well, since the day I finally found her. "You look like hell!"

"I'm going with you next time," I whispered into her ear as I wrapped her in an embrace, squishing Lucy between us. Lucy giggled and reached up to run her fingers along the stubble along my jaw as I kissed Elaine a second time. "Hanna and Rowan will take the kids."

"Oh, will they?" Elaine laughed. I grabbed her suitcase, and the four of us walked off the platform and headed back to the house, Isaac leading the way and waving at everyone we passed. "We'd better book a weekend away soon if they're going to watch the kids. They're going to have to go to Egoren soon—"

"But they were just there." I gave Elaine a suspicious glance, and the color to her cheeks and the smile she was trying to hide gave away the answer. Lena was pregnant—again. "What is this? Their fourth?"

"Yep. Another girl—"

"Another girl?" Four girls in a row—I'd met Alexis of course, and Jaqueline. Their third daughter couldn't be more than a few months old judging by the date of Lena's parents' last trip to Egoren.

"Abigail said they were trying for a boy—"

"What are they going to do with four girls?" I laughed, glancing over at Lucy. I only had brothers, and Isaac coming into our lives had been a seamless transition. I knew what to expect from him. Boys were easy. But Lucy? She scared the hell out of me every day. Thinking about her future made me nearly crippled with anxiety, and we lived in the Realm of Light, for Goddess's sake. Egoren wasn't nearly as progressive.

"Abigail is pregnant, too," Elaine grinned, then kissed Lucy on the cheek. "You're going to have another cousin!"

"Abi's pregnant?" I felt a weight lift from my shoulders at the news.

Abigail and Adrian had been trying for several years now. Elaine caught the emotion in my voice and smiled up at me, her eyes misting.

"It's still early, but I said I'd go to Egoren for the birth. We'd all go, actually. Isaac and Lucy haven't been yet."

“We’ll plan on it,” I breathed, reaching down to take her hand in mine. Isaac ran ahead of us into the front garden of the property, his golden locks gleaming against the deep greens and reds of Elaine’s rose bushes.

Two hours later, the kids were fed, bathed, and tucked into their beds. A calm quiet I hadn’t felt in days descended over the house, broken only by the crackling of the fire I’d started in the living room fireplace. I set two mugs of tea down on the coffee table as Elaine came downstairs, her hair still damp from her shower. She looked rested and absolutely radiant.

“I missed you,” I said before I could stop myself.

She paused in the doorway, her eyes alight and shoulders slackening as she took me in. “I missed you, too—a lot. I know it was only three days—”

“Three days was long enough,” I said with a little laugh as she sat next to me on the couch. She laid her legs over my lap, and I draped a blanket over the both of us. I could feel her gaze on me as I reached for our tea, her eyes boring into the side of my face so intensely I felt a chill run down the length of my spine.

“You’re having nightmares again—”

“Only one,” I said softly, meeting her eyes as I handed her the tea, holding my gaze. “And I was fine afterward.”

“What did you dream about?”

I ran my tongue along the inside of my lower lip, shaking my head. I’d never been able to answer that question. The war felt like a lifetime ago now. The scars of it were still evident if one traveled west to Findali, but mostly they were carried in the minds of those who had fought. I’d seen things I never imagined could happen. I’d done things I’d regretted. I’d lost everything for a time, and then found her, alive and well.

Something pulled me back to the pack lands shortly before Lena and Xander’s wedding. I’d been in New Dianny, preparing to travel as far south through the southern jungle as I could, exploring what could have possibly been the last piece of uncharted space in our realm. I’d let the idea of being alone, mateless, consume me.

But something nagged at me every time I set out on that journey. Maybe it was guilt for ignoring the fact that Lena was getting married. Maybe it was regret because I was essentially abandoning my family, forever.

I looked over at Elaine, watching the light from the fire dance over her beautiful face.

Everything I’d ever done had led me here, to this moment. To this life, a life that was so much more than anything I could have ever imagined.

A moment of silence passed between us, both relaxing further into the couch. Not a peep came from upstairs, both kids blissfully sleeping, hopefully through the night.

“So,” Elaine said, lifting her tea to her lips and giving me a teasing grin. “Which one of our monsters broke my vase?”

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CHAPTER 653 : I LOVE YOU, MATE

Xander

Seven Years After Their Wedding

"No," I said firmly as I shrugged off my jacket. I tossed it over the side of one of the chairs in the breakfast nook nestled in our private kitchen, which was currently full of cooking smells, toys, and screaming children.

Lena arched her brows as she stirred a pot of stew, her hair tied in a large, messy bun on the top of her head.

"What do you mean, no?" she replied with a smug laugh, her eyes sparkling with mischief and excitement.

Alexis darted between my legs, and I almost tripped over her as I made my way toward the kitchen island, laying my palms flat on the surface.

"Lena," I said slowly, flexing my jaw as a scream pierced the air. Alexis, who was now seven, and Jaqueline, her six-year-old sister, were currently holding Rosie, who was five, down on the rug and tickling her while our sweet, amiable two-year-old daughter Daphne stood by and watched, her mouth twisted in a mischievous smile around her thumb.

That's right, we had four daughters. And we had a son, Rhys, who was currently clutching Lena's shirt so tightly his knuckles were turning white as he eyed his sisters. We'd just returned from the Realm of Light after celebrating Rhys's first birthday with Lena's family, and judging by the look of the wing of the castle designated for our private use, none of the children had adjusted to life back at home after being spoiled by their grandparents for two months.

"What are we supposed to do with another one?" I said through gritted teeth, Lena rolled her eyes, pressing one of Rhys's ears to her chest while she covered the other with her hand.

"You should have thought of that," she whispered, "before you knotted me that night we spent in Avondale!"

I ran my tongue along the inside of my lower lip, fixing her with a playful glare. I remembered that night well, very well. How could I possibly forget?

Especially since nine months from that night, we would have an everlasting reminder of our late night romp on one of the private beaches in the Isles of Denali.

I relaxed my shoulders, huffing a breath as I pointed my finger at her. "This is the last one, okay?"

"You said that after we got pregnant with Daphne," she laughed, shifting Rhys to her other hip.

"Well, I mean it this time," I said, extending my hands toward Rhys so I could give his mother a break for a moment. Rhys eyed me skeptically like he always did when Lena was also in the room. When it was just the two of us, or us and all of his sisters, he was fine. But Rhys was my spitting image to the point I

was almost convinced that none of Lena's DNA had mixed in with mine to create our son. It was sometimes frightening how much he looked like me, like looking decades back in time every time I looked into his eyes. He had black, softly curling hair and even darker eyes, flaked with crimson and amber. He was going to be tall and lean, which was evident already.

And, just like his dad, Rhys only had eyes for Lena.

He reluctantly leaned into my arms but snapped his head toward Lena as I walked him over to where the girls were now wrestling on the carpet.

We'd designed this wing of the castle to suit the needs of our family and Lena's desires to be as hands-on with our children as possible. It was a large "house" within the castle's walls, situated inside the left side of the castle, with several large bedrooms and a kitchen that was open to an informal dining room and living room.

Alexis, Jacqueline, and Rosie shared a room, while Daphne and Rhys shared another room right next door. The entire area was filled with children's toys, and the walls were littered with drawings and paintings. Neither of us had the heart to throw any of their art away, so we hung everything up wherever we could find the space.

Other areas of the castle were starting to show the signs of young children living within the walls. On my way to our family's wing, I'd picked up an armful of toys that had been left out in a long trail from one side of the castle to the other, leading from my office all the way to our quarters.

One of the maids was carrying a tricycle when I passed her in the hallway, and two more were admiring a colorful mural made with chalk that roped around a curved corridor. Upon closer inspection, the mural had been a picture of our family, including every maid and servant we had on staff.

There was a time when this castle was cast in a shadow of darkness and mystery. It was almost unrecognizable now, every darkened corner now bursting with light and life.

Daphne wrapped herself around my leg, and I dragged her over to where the older girls had each other in chokeholds on the carpet. Alexis, Rosie, and Rhys all looked like me with their dark hair, but Daphne and Jaqueline favored Lena's family. Jaqueline's copper blonde curls reminded me of Maeve, and Daphne's straight golden locks were about as close as any of the kids were going to get to Lena's white hair.

I dumped Rhys on the couch and scooped Daphne up by her ankles, dangling her upside down before tossing her next to her brother. The older girls began to try to wrestle me, but I was the one who had taught them all of their moves.

"We're out of bandages, and I'm not walking anyone down to the infirmary tonight," Lena warned from the kitchen over the sound of running water. I had Rosie and Jaqueline pinned beneath me, and Alexis was on my back with her arms wrapped around my shoulders.

"Daddy says bandages are for babies!" Rosie squealed. Lena looked in my direction, her eyes narrowed.

"I did not," I growled, tickling the little girl mercilessly. I looked up and watched Rhys slide off the couch, looking over his shoulder at the fray and giving me a devilish smirk before waddling back over to his mother, who likely had free hands for the first time today.

"Is Ava coming over?" Alexis asked, rolling off my back and onto the floor. I sat up, releasing Rosie and Jaqueline and watching as they scurried off around the corner into their bedroom.

"Mom and I have an event tonight," I said to Alexis, who looked slightly disappointed. She was starting to realize there was more to Lena and me than just being Mom and Dad. We were still Alpha King and Luna Queen of Egoren, and while we had the freedom, and desire, for our kids to just be kids for as long as they could, it wouldn't stop reality from creeping into our home, and their lives.

Alexis was a White Queen, and as the first-born female, that title was her birthright. Lena had taken her to the temple of the White Queens in Winter Forest during our latest trip, and she'd stood with her mother as Rosalie, Maeve, and Lena posed for a very special picture.

Four generations of Queens stood in front of that altar. It was a sight to behold, if I was being honest. Alexis looked up at Lena and I think, at least I thought, she saw her mother for what she was for the first time.

And I worried that Alexis might be starting to feel the weight of that birthright, even at only six years old.

Was this just the way things were for those of us who were fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to carry these titles?

I looked over at Lena, who had her back turned to us as she continued preparing dinner for the children. I rose onto my knees so I could look over the top of the couch, catching a glimpse of Rhys as he pulled a few pots out of a lower cabinet in the kitchen.

So many children. So many little royals.

And we were having a sixth.

I turned to Alexis, who was watching me closely as I shifted my weight and crossed my legs, motioning for her to come forward.

"I thought you liked it when Ava came over?"

"I do like it," Alexis shrugged, sitting down next to me on the carpet. "She lets us read her magazines."

"Do you understand why Mom and I have to go out tonight?"

"You have to dress up in your costumes and be like Grandpa and Grandma," she said, toying with the fringe on the end of the carpet. "And be queens and kings, like in our storybooks."

"You are correct," I replied, nudging her with my shoulder. She smiled up at me, but I could see the disappointment in her eyes. "We're going to come back. It's just for the night. We'll be home before you wake up for school."

"Will I have to get dressed up and be a queen like Mommy one day?"

I paused, letting out my breath as I shifted my gaze toward the far wall. Pictures of our family lined the walls, interwoven with their drawings and dried flowers hanging in frames.

"Only if you want to," I said as I looked back at Alexis.

“Dada,” Rhys said somewhere behind me, and I turned to look up at Lena, who was standing nearby, her eyes glimmering with silent tears, a look of relief, understanding, and love playing over her face.

Lena

Xander unzipped the evening gown I’d worn to the Gala at the Temple of Lycaon, which had been an extremely loud and busy affair. Alphas from all over the realm had been in attendance, and my throat was dry from talking for what felt like hours.

I shrugged out of my dress, sighing with relief as the fabric slid down over my waist and thighs into a puddle on the floor. Xander’s arms came around my waist, his lips brushing over my shoulder as he pulled me against him.

“Xander...” I breathed, closing my eyes against his touch.

“Hmm?”

“It’s two in the morning!”

“And the kids are asleep, and we’re alone.”

His hands moved up my belly to my breasts, which were swollen and aching from the new, still very early pregnancy. His hands were cool against my heated skin, and I sighed with relief as they slid beneath my bra.

“You looked beautiful tonight,” he whispered against my neck. A shiver of pleasure ran up my spine as he kissed the space just behind my ear.

Based on the low growl in his throat, I gathered that if I hadn’t already been pregnant, he would’ve definitely gotten me pregnant tonight, of that I was sure.

The fact that we had five children and one on the way wasn’t entirely my fault. We just couldn’t keep our hands off of each other, and that apparently led to lots and lots of kids running around.

It wasn’t always easy. I’d been juggling my responsibilities as the Luna Queen with small children at home in a realm that was totally new to me. Different customs, different expectations, different beliefs.... It had been a rocky transition, to say the least.

But there was nothing in my life that I was more proud of than how far Xander and I had come in the past seven years. I thought of those early days in Crimson Creek often, those days when we had loved each other from that very first moment we looked into each other’s eyes, but felt like there was no way our lives could ever interconnect. Those days when I thought I was incapable of having a mate, and I had wondered if I’d ever have the opportunity to just be Lena, and not Selene, the Moon Goddess.

But here I was, standing in the bedroom I shared with my mate and father of my children while he turned me around to face him as he laid me on our bed and began to take off the tuxedo he was wearing.

He didn't break from my gaze, not once. Hunger and sheer animalistic desire flashed behind his eyes as he practically launched himself onto the bed, naked as the day he was born, and covered me with his body.

I tangled my fingers in his hair, pulling him in for a deep kiss.

"I love you, mate," he whispered, his breath a rasp as his mouth hovered over mine.

"I love you, too."

[Chapter 654](#)

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

Season 5 – Soren's Blackfire Luna

: Is This a Dream?

Soren

"Boss, what a victory!" someone shouted from across the inn. He stood up and raised his glass to me.

I raised my glass back as others cheered and added to the toast.

"Cheers for the boss!" others chorused together.

"Soren! Soren! Soren!"

They all went wild and the bartender came around with more pitchers of beer and hard liquor. The party was really getting started now.

Why wouldn't they celebrate and be happy? They might be unwanted outcasts, but they were alive.

I listened to the sound of the wind outside. It had died down considerably and pellets of sand weren't pelting against the outside of the inn anymore.

Every day, these men were alive was a blessing from the Moon Goddess. Today, it was even luckier. Not everyone had escaped the sandstorm. On top of that, they had finally secured a large territory for themselves. A place to build on—a place they could always return to.

"Have another one, on me," I declared and smirked.

I nodded to them and tipped my glass back. They called me "boss." Not because they worked for me but because they had the freedom to come and go and not be beholden to a pack, as long as they followed my two rules.

One: don't ask about others' pasts. We all had secrets and none of us wanted them spread around. We respected that about each other.

Two: don't commit any new crimes. I didn't care what they'd done in the past. That wasn't important. All that mattered to me was they didn't do anything to disturb the area where I lived.

As a result, we all stayed out of each other's way but were there to give each other a hand when needed. They could live their lives and I could live mine.

My men didn't hold back their rambunctious drinking and hollering. They didn't have to worry about putting on a "decent" show. No one else was coming to stay at the inn. They were all secured inside their homes and other buildings, waiting for the sand to clear.

The chatter started to die down and I scanned the bar, seeing that several of my men had passed out drunk. They were draped over the bar and over tables. Some of them were just flat on the floor. If it was a hard surface, someone passed out on it.

I smirked and raised my own glass to my lips, finishing off the amber liquid inside. Immediately, I went to the bar and refilled it. My senses were hardly numbed from the drinking and on a night like this, I wanted to forget...

The picture in my other hand crinkled and I glanced at it. Brunette and beautiful, Rosalie smiled out of the picture at me.

Today marked the thirteenth year since I had said my goodbyes to Ethan and Rosalie. I'd left their realm and come here, to make my own future. Over the years, I'd returned to my home realm several times to check on them.

Ethan and Rosalie were happy. Their children had been growing up and were doing well.

So many times, I had wanted to tell them I was back and talk to them. But then what? I couldn't stay in that realm, not with Rosalie so close... It was too painful.

The inn was completely quiet now and stank of sweat and booze.

I wrinkled my nose and headed outside for some fresh air.

The air was gritty with sand particles that were still unsettled from the storm. I lifted my collar at my neck and covered my nose and mouth with it so I wouldn't breathe them in.

From the porch, I could see the yellow sand dunes had filled the streets. It would take some work to clean that up.

The sun was getting low and the air was cooling rapidly. Stars started to glitter in the sky and the air was frigid with nighttime, desert cold. I shivered and took another large swig from my drink and headed back inside.

Carefully, I stepped over the passed-out drunks on the floor and headed to my room. Already, my eyelids were heavy and I felt like I could have fallen asleep standing up.

I tossed my shirt aside and stripped off my pants before sliding under the covers. The moment my eyes closed, someone gasped beside me.

Before I could move, a soft, trembling body threw themselves on top of me. Her scent filled my nostrils and her hands curled around my shoulders.

Too stunned to move, I felt her lips on my neck, kissing and sucking.

Instantly, my c**k twitched.

“What the...”

I grabbed the woman’s arms and tried to push her away.

“No...” she panted. She whimpered in protest and clung to me tightly. I relaxed my hands on her when I saw her soft, brown hair with a reddish hue. I couldn’t deny her anything now. Euphoria, disbelief, and the alcohol from earlier had me feeling like I was in a dreamy haze.

Was this really happening?

“Rosalie... Is it really you?” I asked, pushing some of her luscious hair out of her face.

Her hair was so soft and silky I wanted to bury my nose in it and breathe her in. I couldn’t remember the last time I’d touched her so familiarly, if ever.

“This is a dream,” I whispered, leaning in and pressing my lips to her forehead.

Her skin was cold and she leaned into my lips. Her hands slid up my shirt and around my neck, fingers locking together so I couldn’t escape. Her breath tickled my neck and she pressed against my lips, preventing me from breaking the kiss.

“Rosalie,” I murmured against her cold skin.

My groin heated and my pants tightened. This was a most enjoyable dream.

I tried to pull away from her but she whimpered again and wrapped her arms around me, locking her body against mine. She slid into my lap, wrapping her legs around my hips and locking her ankles, refusing to let me go.

My c**k ached and I leaned in, nuzzling my nose against her neck.

“I missed you,” I groaned, squeezing her hips.

She mumbled something and pressed her lips to my cheek. I lifted my head and she pressed her lips to mine, her eyes only half open.

I didn’t remember Rosalie being this forward or passionate.

She leaned harder against my lips and all doubts and conscious thought left my head. I kissed her back fervently, wrapping her tightly in my arms. I rose on my knees and laid her on her back, thrusting my firm erection against her.

Rosalie groaned and tightened her legs around me. She kissed me urgently, like my lips were the air she breathed.

I ran my hands up her sides and she arched into my touch, moaning into my mouth. Heat pulsed from between her legs, sinking into the fabric of my pants until I could feel the heat against my c**k.

“Rosalie...” I gasped against her lips. “You have no idea... I’ve missed you so much... I’ve wanted this for so long... I have loved you since the moment I saw you...”

She kept interrupting me with more, needy kisses, her hands pulling at my shirt like she couldn’t get my clothes off fast enough.

I pulled my shirt off and tossed my pants aside. Gently, I pushed the woman's dress up her legs and body. She moaned and writhed on the bed as I pushed the dress over her head and tossed it away.

Immediately, she reached for me again and pulled me down to her.

I sighed and caressed her sides as I started kissing her again. She rolled her body against mine, my c**k throbbing with need.

Guilt swelled in my heart. The real Rosalie would never act like this, so needy, forward, and passionate. Especially not with me. I could convince myself that this was Rosalie, to ease my years of loneliness. It was all a dream, a fantasy, and I could do what I wanted.

I kissed her neck, sucking and nibbling gently as I ran my fingers down her stomach. She pressed into my hand and moaned wantonly as shivers ran through her. I moved my hand lower, between her legs, where her p**y was already sopping wet.

My c**k twitched and I kissed down her throat and to her breasts. She shuddered as I sucked on her n****e and coaxed her legs open with my fingers. I slid my hand between her folds, exploring her swollen womanhood.

Moaning and panting, her fingers curled in my hair and tugged at me with desire.

I stroked until I found her swollen clit. My thumb ran over the bead and she shuddered, crying out in pleasure and want. Her creamy scent filled my nostrils and I wanted to devour her completely.

I rubbed her clit and sucked on her n****e as she writhed around and moaned loudly. Her moans turned into sobs and her legs clenched around my hand as a trembling orgasm took hold of her.

Groaning, I moved my lips to hers and pushed my tongue into her mouth. She met my tongue with hers, breathing heavily as she practically tried to swallow my tongue. I pulled her thighs apart and pressed my swollen, throbbing tip to her slick entrance.

She shuddered and I pushed inside of her. Her insides tightened around my c**k and pleasure shot through me.

I gasped and moved my mouth to her neck, sucking and nibbling. I wrapped my arms around her body, pinning her to me as I thrust into her. Years of longing, years of waiting! No dream or fantasy before this could have prepared me for how amazing she felt.

Her eyes rolled back and I grabbed her arms, pinning them above her head at the wrists. She rolled against me, matching my thrusts, sucking me deeper into her tight, twitching p**y.

I kept her arms pinned with one hand and looped the other around her waist, holding her right against me.

She wrapped her legs around me, squeezing tightly as another release overpowered her.

My c**k quivered and I held her as tight as possible as I came hard.

"I love you, Rosalie," I groaned as my release sent tremors of pleasure through me.

Sweat coated my skin and I felt heavy, too heavy to move my arms from around her. She kept her arms around me and I rested my head against her breast, listening to her heartbeat.

Copper filled my nose. The scent of blood.

I creased my brow and looked down, seeing a glimmer of blood between her legs.

She was a virgin!

What a strange dream and fantasy...

I rolled onto my side and tucked the young woman against me. Gently, I kissed her forehead and her nose. I held her securely and caressed her sides and back until we both fell asleep.

Mila

A thousand needles pricked my skin all over. Like tiny little pins, they stabbed into my flesh, ripping through my clothes and burning me down to the bone. White hot, searing pain burrowed through my skin.

Every nerve screamed in agony, burning like I'd been lit on fire. My skin felt like it was being shredded by jagged shards of glass.

I wrapped my arms around myself, trying to hold myself together or I might shatter into a million little pieces.

Every step I took was like walking on a bed of razor blades. Each breath was agony as my lungs spasmed from the pain and heat.

Blistering heat poured down on me and my skin cracked and burned. My lips were so dry and chapped, I tasted blood every time I licked them.

Tears streaked my face, evaporating so quickly that they offered no relief from the pain.

The street I shuffled down was empty. The town was deader than a graveyard. There was no way my pursuers would follow me here, not in a raging sandstorm.

Thank the Goddess for the sandstorm. It would cover my trail and keep me safe. Otherwise, I never would have escaped. I could deal with the heat, the pain from the bullet like grains of sand, and the sunburns all over my body. I would endure knowing that I was free.

But I wasn't safe, yet. I needed to get inside, and fast. The sun was setting quickly and if I was outside when night came, I'd freeze to death. I'd barely survived a day in the heat. There was no way I could survive the night, too. Maybe if I was at full strength...

"Please, Goddess, help me," I prayed, my voice cracked, sounding alarmingly hoarse from how dry and rough my throat was.

One step at a time, I dragged myself forward, looking for a place to find shelter. All the houses were closed and boarded up tightly. It didn't feel like the kind of place that would respond if I knocked on doors. People would think I was crazy for being out in the storm.

They'd ask too many questions. I just needed a place to survive.

On the edge of town, I saw a building with the lights on. Even from down the street, I could hear the music and voices inside. There were people there, maybe they'd let me stay with them.

With a deep breath, I gathered my strength and shuffled along. My legs trembled and my knees gave out. I fell on all fours in the sandy street.

Groaning, I pushed on. I crawled through the burning hot streets. I couldn't die yet. I had to live!

I crawled onto the porch, the laughter and voices inside had faded to just a few voices left. They sounded really, really drunk. This close, the music thumped and pounded through my head. My brain rattled inside my skull painfully.

I knocked on the door, my arm nearly dead and my fist raw. It hurt so much but I tried to knock again and again.

No one answered.

"s**t!" I cried, hoarsely, kicking the door.

No one could hear me over that pounding racket. Scoffing, I slid down on the porch and hugged my arms around myself.

At least, the porch sheltered me from the wind.

I could feel the warmth inside and knew that I had to get in there. Gathering my strength, I pulled myself up and moved around the side of the building. I found an open window and lifted myself inside.

I fell through the window and collapsed on the floor, warmth flooding me. The pounding music thudded through me rhythmically. I was exhausted and in so much pain. If this is where I was going to die, I wanted to fall asleep and forget about the pain.

No, I couldn't die here! I saw a blurry set of stairs and dragged myself to them. On my hands and knees, I crawled up the stairs and into the nearest room. There was a bed.

Suddenly, I felt a surge of energy. I jumped on the bed and threw the blankets over me. So warm, so soft! I closed my eyes.

In a half-asleep state, I rolled over and found something warm and firm beside me. It was like a space heater.

Shivering, I threw myself on top of the warmth and clung to it, kissing anything I could reach, begging that warmth to wrap around me and keep me safe, to take my pain away.

Half-conscious, the first thing I noticed was that I wasn't in as much pain. Sighing, I leaned into whatever it was that was taking the pain away. I felt like I was being rubbed down with cool ice, and it took all the blistering, stabbing pain away inch by inch.

Something else touched me too, something soft and warm. It took away the bite of cold and made me feel perfectly comfortable from the inside out and pain free.

My eyes fluttered open but I couldn't see anything. I was so lost in the feeling of relief that washed over me that I hardly cared where I was or who I was with.

And I was with someone. I heard their voice off in the distance. They sounded a million miles away, but I knew they were right next to me. Then the voice was in my ear, whispering a name. It wasn't my name... at least, I didn't think it was.

I hardly had any concept of who I was or what was happening. I just wanted to keep feeling that amazing relief and painlessness.

Suddenly, that name was shouted louder, and I knew it wasn't my name!

The object that was making me feel so good tried to leave me. I clung tighter, holding it close and as hard as I could. I never wanted it to leave. I never wanted it to stop touching me and making me feel like that.

I wanted to touch it and hold it and kiss it. I kept begging it not to leave and not to go, but I didn't know if I was thinking the words or saying them aloud.

Tighter, I clung to it, willing it with my mind to stay with me.

[Chapter 655](#)

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

His Name Is Soren

The ebb and flow of water gently rocked me back and forth to the rhythm of waves. The smell of the sea lingered all around me and I couldn't help but believe that I was on a boat.

I leaned into the rocking. It felt pleasant, calm, and soothing, like it would lull me to sleep forever.

Was I asleep?

I tried to sit up but couldn't. I tried to open my eyes but couldn't. I tried to open my mouth to call out but couldn't.

'Hello...?' I attempted to reach out through the mindlink but was only rewarded with the hollow echo of my voice in the void.

I must have been alone.

Relaxed, I thought, if I was alone, even if I was dreaming, I had to be safe.

All I wanted was to rock in that gentle rhythm until the end of time. I felt safe and protected in that space, surrounded by warmth and the constant lapping of water, like waves against a boat.

Words came to me. Like a muffled whisper, they softly brushed against my ears but I couldn't make sense of them. I just knew they weren't mine.

Suddenly, the gentle, rocking ocean vanished and I came crashing down to earth. Fog surrounded my senses and I was trudging through thick chowder, trying to find my way back to some normalcy. I had to wake up.

The words around me got louder and more clear, like the more I struggled against the thick, chowdery fog, the closer I got to those voices.

The first voice I latched onto was deep, composed and soothing. His tone was dominating and authoritative but fresh and familiar. It made me feel safe again.

“Do some investigation on her,” he ordered.

A younger voice spoke next. “Yes, of course, Soren.”

The speaker was respectful, but he wasn’t nearly as pleasant as the previous man.

“Ask the healer to come to my room, as well,” the first voice continued and I took another set towards consciousness. I wished he would speak again, and again.

Soren... was that the name of the first man, the one whose voice I wanted to hear?

It was a rather unusual name. I liked it. The name alone was enough to send a pleasant shudder through me.

Whenever I heard his voice, the thick fogginess receded and I was more connected to the world and to myself. When his voice was gone, I felt like I was floundering around blindly.

There was a moment of silence and I was getting dragged back into the fog. I tried to open my mouth and call out to them but I couldn’t control my own body. The fog swarmed in my head and around my senses.

“What is it?” Soren’s soothing voice asked, tugging on me again.

“Well, why do you think she is here?” the younger voice asked, his tone hesitant.

Was he talking about me?

“No one should know about this place. We aren’t on a map and without a guide that already knows the way, few people can find their way here even with perfect weather, let alone in a sandstorm...” the younger one said.

“So? She isn’t exactly strong. She’s young and doesn’t look like she’s in the best health,” Soren countered.

They were talking about me! He wanted to know how I’d survived the desert and made it to this village. The Moon Goddess had guided me.

‘Wake up!’ I screamed into the echoing void. This was awful.

How long had I been here like this?

Again, I was swirling through the fog, trying to find my way back to myself. The longer the silence dragged on, the heavier and denser the fog became. My mind was slipping into darkness. I couldn't see through it no matter how hard I tried.

I wasn't even sure if I was connected to my body at all. Did I still have arms and legs? Did I have a mouth? I knew I had ears because I could hear them talking but everything else... it was missing.

Was I a ghost?

A hand on my arm, I felt that! But where was his voice now?

I tried to see through the fog. I wanted to know who was there. Who was talking about me and did I need to get away from them?

Were they dangerous? Would they send me back?

Desperately, I needed to hear the first voice again. I wanted to feel that soothing and safety deep in my bones. He would ground me. With his voice, I'd be able to cut through the fog and see what was happening.

The younger voice didn't press, and Soren stayed silent.

"My apologies, Soren. I shouldn't have asked that question," the younger man said. "It's just that there have been regional wars. They don't impact us directly, but the outside always seems to be closing in on us. None of us want that. I know you don't, either."

Regional wars? That sounded familiar, and it didn't. I could barely string a thought together as the fog closed in on me like a coffin.

"We work hard to stay away from the outside world and to stay out of all their issues," the young man continued. "It would be a shame if we invited that trouble in, no matter how pretty."

I heard a soft, low growl from Soren. Even his growl was enough to help me cut through the dense fog. I felt like it was getting thinner, and if I could just hold onto that sound, I'd make it back to myself.

"We have to be vigilant. We don't want another spy getting in. And what better way for the other packs to get a spy past our security? None of us would expect such a pretty face to be treacherous," the young man added.

Soren grunted. Still, he didn't speak, as much as I willed it with my mind.

I didn't even know this Soren guy but I felt he was someone I could rely on.

Maybe I needed to get to know him. Having a friend or ally with power and authority would be... most beneficial.

The young man's words rang in my ears, "We don't want to let in a spy."

Who were these people that the packs would want to spy on them?

I wasn't a spy, was I?

Suddenly, my thoughts clicked into clarity and the denseness of the fog cleared. I was still wandering through a misty world but it wasn't as dark or numb as before.

Was I in danger?

These men, whoever they were, thought I was a spy. Would I get a chance to explain myself? Would they help me if they knew the truth?

I couldn't even remember where I was!

Most importantly, I couldn't understand why I wasn't in a lot of pain. I could still remember it was almost unbearable before. Now, it was numb, almost pleasantly numb, or it would be pleasant if I could just see who was talking while still being this numb and pain free!

All these thoughts raced through my mind and panic rose in my chest. I still wasn't strong enough to get up and run away. Besides, where else would I go, back to the desert? I nearly died the last time. I needed a better plan than that if I was going to survive!

Then another strange thought occurred to me. What if I hadn't survived? What if I was already dead and this was some weird afterlife thing?

I couldn't feel my body. I couldn't control myself. My memories felt so far away. Maybe I really was dead!

My mind and thoughts got so jumbled and messy.

The voices I'd been clinging to started to drift away. They were muffled, like they were talking through a pillow, and I couldn't focus enough to hold onto them.

After a few minutes, I couldn't hear anything at all.

A dark, unsettling coldness filled me. I was completely alone. They'd left me alone, trapped in this foggy place. I had no way out.

This wasn't good. If only I could force myself to...

I focused all my energy on opening my eyes and sitting up but I just couldn't do it! I was still too lost in that fog to connect back to myself.

Slam!

A door slammed and I started. My entire body jerked.

Relief swept through me. No, I wasn't dead. I hadn't suffered through that painful ordeal in the sun and wind just to die.

I tried to recall the last coherent memory I had. I'd struggled through the sandstorm and came to a town. Was that what the younger man had been talking about? Was this some unmapped spot in the desert?

After that... things got fuzzy. It'd been so hot and cold at the same time and the sun was setting. I remembered trying to find a warm place to stay for the night but after that, there was nothing.

I kept remembering flickers of warmth and comfort. Someone had been there with me, giving me strength, making me feel safe and...comfortable again. I didn't know who it was or what had happened.

Apparently, I hadn't died. That was a starting point, at least.

A new voice broke through the fog. It was a female voice.

"Soren, I went to grab Lee. Who's injured this time?" she asked.

So, there was another woman in this place. Perhaps, she could understand my situation and would be more willing to help compared to others. I felt myself relaxing in her presence, feeling less threatened.

She kept speaking but I wasn't even trying to listen anymore because something new struck my senses. It was a scent, warm and calming.

I recognized the scent...it was with me for a while when I was in darkness.

It filled my nose and then raced through my whole body. From the roots of my hair to the tips of my toes, every fiber of my being was calm and soothed by the warm scent of cedar and amber.

I sighed, inhaling more of that familiar deliciousness. It smelled so, so good. The fog in my mind vanished, and so did all my panic, worries, and doubts.

Given the chance, I would totally sink into that luscious scent and float away with it.

[Chapter 656](#)

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

: WHO ARE YOU?

Soren

When the healer, Lee, arrived with Ashley, I motioned to the bed where the strange young woman slept.

Lee immediately started examining her, frowning and making strange faces.

I looked at Payne and Ashley.

"Wait outside," I instructed.

Neither of them protested and I shut the door gently behind them.

Crossing my arms, I leaned against the nearest wall and watched Lee examine the girl. The previous night, my drunkenness and fatigue had kept me from seeing anyone but Rosalie. Now I had a chance to really look at her.

She was much younger than I thought, only in her early twenties. No doubt beautiful—the kind of dangerous beauty that was bound to come with a troubled past, secrets, and baggage no one wanted to handle.

Even while she slept, eyes closed, her delicate, soft features had me captivated. She had pale skin, like a porcelain doll, and it was just as perfect and blemish-free as porcelain. And yet, her cheeks were flushed with a gentle rose color, giving her a warm and soft look.

Her hair framed her face perfectly, making her red lips and gentle cheeks pop out noticeably.

Then there was her body... I'd seen more than enough of that to know what was hidden under the sheets. A slim little waist with ample curves in her breasts and hips with a hint of athleticism.

I couldn't help but appreciate her.

There was more to her than physical attractiveness. Something in her aura told me that what I saw, part of her charm was her ambition. She was a blooming red peony, so rare and vibrant that once seen, no one would look away.

Even as I stared at her, unable to pry my eyes off, I thought of Rosalie. Sweet, gentle, quiet Rosalie. She was a white rose, soft and beautiful but not overbearing. Low key and innocent with a certain grace and elegance that made her stand out.

Nothing like this stranger in my bed.

In her sleep, her lips twitched in a slight smirk and I realized that she had a stubborn streak, perhaps even a little immaturity. The kind of immaturity that leads to rebelliousness and determination. She hadn't lived long enough for the world to strip that away from her yet.

Seeing that on her face, I realized she was one of the most good-looking women I'd ever laid eyes on...

What the f**k was I thinking?

Standing here, eye f*****g a twenty-something-year-old girl who happened to fall into bed with me... for one night! This was ridiculous.

One-night stands were meant to be just that... one night.

How did I get stuck with her the next morning?

Sighing, I shook my head. I managed to keep my eyes off of her for a short moment, but like a black hole, she kept sucking me right back in.

Over the years I'd had my share of one-night stands. I was a man, after all, I had needs. But there were rules. The first and biggest rule was that after that one-night, we went our separate ways.

We didn't ask for names, or exchange life stories, we just gave each other what we needed and then we were done.

Groaning, I rubbed my sleepy eyes. Seriously, I must have been hungover because I wasn't thinking straight.

I hadn't needed to think about or analyze my romantic life in a long time. Mostly because the only woman I had ever loved was someone I couldn't have. I'd accepted that I would never have Rosalie but I also accepted that I'd never love anyone else.

Because I loved Rosalie, I could never give my heart to anyone else, not fully. It wouldn't be fair to them and it would eat me alive with guilt thinking I'd betrayed her somehow.

Was I that pathetic? How could I betray a woman who was never mine? Love was useless in my life.

I didn't need love. I had more important things to worry about. That's why it was safer to keep my heart in a place far away and unreachable, I knew I'd never get what I longed for.

The girl on the bed, she was just a random hookup.

That was best for everyone, but especially for her. I'd never be able to give her what women wanted.

Lee moved the bedsheets around and exposed a small splatter of blood. He glanced up at me with a pointed look and I shrugged nonchalantly.

I vaguely remembered smelling the blood the night before. As it was, in the morning, when I'd put her dress back on, I had seen it on the sheets. The way she'd thrown herself at me, literally, I hadn't expected her to be a virgin.

If the circumstances were different, I might have felt a little bad for taking her virginity. But I knew enough to know she wasn't an ordinary woman.

Innocent, fragile women didn't just show up in this village in the middle of a sandstorm. Hell, most women never came to this village even when the weather was ideal.

My suspicions about this girl grew more and more as I considered the circumstances of her being here.

Either she herself was a problem, a spy like Payne suggested. Or, she had a lot of baggage and that was going to bring problems to my doorstep. Whatever she was, I didn't care about the details. All that mattered to me was whether she was or was not bringing problems.

It wasn't like we had to know anything about each other's pasts to have a one-night stand. As it stood, she needed me and I needed her. We could leave it at that, once she woke up... whenever that would be.

"Why isn't she awake yet?" I asked.

There were no visible injuries on her body, nothing more than a little blistering and dehydration from the desert. And she'd been asleep for hours. She should have been rested by now.

Lee tucked the sheets in around her and left her lying on the bed. He'd done a thorough examination and the look in his eyes told me it wasn't good news.

"She's been poisoned," he said bluntly. "It is a poison that attacks shifters. Best case scenario she loses some of her senses, can't use the mindlink or sense the mate bond, and can't shift."

"What?" It took me by surprise and I spent a moment digesting the news. "And... worst case?"

"She'll die," Lee said. "She appears to be one of the rare and lucky ones if she isn't dead... yet."

"There's still a chance she might die?" I asked. Quickly, I glanced at her face again. It would be a shame for someone so appealing to die so young...

What was I thinking?

“At this point, I can’t tell whether or not she’ll make it. See, it isn’t just the poison in her system. The two substances could be interacting adversely. Even if the poison wasn’t meant to be fatal, it could still be,” he reported.

“What else was she given?” I asked, creasing my brow.

Lee cleared his throat. “Well, she has copious amounts of aphrodisiac running through her system. Normally, someone with that much in their blood would be... very amorous, but it appears her needs have been... satiated.”

f**k! She was drugged? I thought she was drunk like me! How was I supposed to know that?

No, it wouldn’t help anyone if I obsessed over this one-night stand. I just needed to focus on getting rid of the problem before it came back to bite me.

“The aphrodisiac should clear out on its own, right?” I asked based on my mild understanding of them.

“Yes,” Lee confirmed with a nod.

“Is there anything you can do about the poison? That’s what is going to kill her,” I pointed out.

“There are some meds that might... help. Whether or not she’ll make it is up to the Goddess, now,” Lee said.

I nodded slowly and pushed off the wall, uncrossing my arms. “Give her what you think will help.”

“Soren... given the circumstances, sometimes it’s better to do less in order to prevent trouble,” Lee said as he got his things together.

“I understand, thank you for coming.”

My suspicions about the girl were already high. Lee’s reminder helped me look past her face for the moment. She wasn’t some innocent woman that showed up here. Helping her could cause more problems than I wanted to deal with.

“If I were you, I would move her to the shelter outside of town without treating her. If she wakes up on her own, she can leave from there with no memory of this place. If she dies... then the problem will have taken care of itself,” Lee added.

“Right...”

A soft sigh came from the bed and I looked over. The girl’s lips were slightly parted sensually. She rolled away from me and all I could see was her rich, reddish brown hair down her back.

From behind, she looked just like Rosalie the first time I ever saw her. The first time I realized I loved her.

I opened my mouth to agree with Lee. However, instead of saying “okay,” my words were “Let me think about it.”

“Alright, I will write up the prescription and instructions on how to use it. It will be up to you whether or not you administer it,” the healer said.

“Payne,” I called after Lee left.

Payne and Ashley came into the room, ready for instructions.

“Tighten security around the inn and our territory,” I told Payne. “Ashley, get these meds. I want you to give them to this woman according to the instructions and monitor her for the next twenty-four hours.”

“Consider it done,” Ashley said. She took the prescription and headed off.

“Payne, there’s something else I need from you,” I called, stopping him before he left after Ashley.

Ashley paused too, lingering in the hallway.

“I need you to get a thorough background check on this girl. I want to know who she is, where she’s been, where she was going, everyone she’s had contact with.”

Whatever threats this girl brought with her, I needed to know if I was risking people’s lives here to keep her from dying.

“Yes, boss.”

Payne shut the door on his way out and I turned my eyes back to the girl. A moth to a flame, I couldn’t look away.

She had rolled on her back again and revealed her face again. Still so beautiful and dangerous.

“Who on earth are you?” I asked in a harsh whisper.

[Chapter 657](#)

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder

: Rich and Powerful, and Dangerous

Ashley and Lee cared for the girl for a few days but it didn’t seem like her condition was changing. Lee mentioned it could be dangerous to move her while she was still unconscious, so I left her in my room and I moved to a room down the hall.

So far, she hadn’t woken up and Payne hadn’t reported back with any information about her.

We all gathered together for dinner in the bar most nights. Unlike the night the girl arrived, we weren’t always partying and drinking. I sometimes thought of it as a community meal because these shifters were as close to a community or a pack as I had.

I sat at the head of the table.

“Has anyone heard from Payne?” I asked as I finished off a glass of wine.

My men hurried to swallow whatever they were devouring to offer answers.

“Last I heard, he was heading east.”

“He hasn’t checked in for a few days.”

“He didn’t have anything new.”

I nodded and they all went back to their voracious eating. Unlike most of them, I'd been raised in a family that had strict table manner requirements and I had been hating it. It was refreshing to be around those who didn't care what they looked like while eating, and just simply appreciate the enjoyment food would bring.

Three days and no one had heard anything new from Payne.

I poured myself another glass of wine and swirled it slowly around in the glass.

Usually, when Payne set out to find information on someone, he got answers very quickly. Of course, he usually had more to go on than a first name, which we discovered when going through her things.

Mila.

Sighing, I finished the wine and headed upstairs.

Someone so uniquely beautiful had to be known. She was the kind of girl that turned heads when she walked into a room and drew stares from across the street when she passed by. Someone had to have seen her and know something about her.

I walked past the door to my room. It was closed so the girl could rest undisturbed. One door down was where I would stay temporarily.

When I pulled my shirt off to change for bed, my elbow knocked a vase on a table. I grabbed it and set it upright.

"Ugh..."

This room was a lot smaller than mine. I wondered how much longer I'd have to stay here.

Sighing, I threw on a cotton shirt and a pair of sweats for bed. As irritating as it was to be put out of my own room, at least I was being inconvenienced to save a young woman's life.

Not that I was some sort of a selfless saint, but the fact that someone had poisoned her and drugged her just didn't sit well with me. On top of that, intentionally or not, I took her first time. Just for that reason alone, I owe her to at least nurture her back to a somewhat healthy state.

I closed my eyes, but snapped them open again. f**k, I couldn't get the image of her out of my head—especially when she had her back to me, how much she looked like Rosalie.

Knock. Knock.

"Soren, are you in there?" Lee called through the door.

I unlocked the door and stepped back to allow Lee inside. He immediately closed the door behind him. Whatever he had to say was private.

"I'm not disturbing you, am I?"

I shook my head firmly. "You have news of her condition, I assume?"

"Yes. And it is rather... strange. The poison in her system is actually breaking down and dissolving."

I arched an eyebrow. "Isn't that what the medicines are for?"

"Not exactly. This is a very strong poison and what I gave her were not exactly antidotes. The medicines may hold it at bay and help her body to gain strength, but it wasn't supposed to break down the poison," he explained.

Lee seemed unusually perturbed by her reaction to the meds. I knew as much about healing as I did this strange girl.

"She seems to have some kind of natural immunity to the poison, which is probably why it didn't kill her immediately. But... that is incredibly rare," Lee said with a bewildered shrug.

"You think the poison was meant to kill her?"

"Soren, this isn't a garden variety poison. The ingredients themselves aren't easy to come by. Only someone with incredible power or wealth could get their hands on it and you know what that means,"

he said, shrugging again.

"This poison is rich and powerful, and dangerous," I muttered.

Lee nodded in confirmation. "But it is like the girl has some protective force within her, keeping her safe from harm. At least, safe from the poison. Anyone else who took that high of a dose would be dead... except..."

"Except?" I pressed when Lee trailed off, his eyes distant.

"I only know of one other that might have survived..."

A girl that young with the ability to survive a lethal poison. I didn't know whether to be impressed or concerned. She had special abilities and that wasn't always a good thing. Now, I wondered if someone had tried to poison her to kill her or if they were testing her abilities.

"Soren, I can't urge you enough, but you should send her on her way the moment she is able. Don't give her your name, and don't exchange pleasantries. Just get rid of her," Lee said firmly.

Lee clasped his hands behind his back and rocked back on his heels. He looked nervous. I could tell he was holding back things he knew about the girl. He wouldn't caution me twice on the same matter if there wasn't more going on with the girl.

I knew I could trust Lee. He'd never let me down or led me astray and he knew how to be discreet. He knew when to share information and when not to ask questions. As a healer, he ended up learning people's medical histories, which were often accompanied by their secrets.

He was the only one allowed to ask questions about others' past here but I trusted him to keep the answers to himself. More than anyone, he strictly followed the rules.

Lee wasn't a busy body, nor was he a wordy man. It was unlike him to repeat himself and be so... forceful. That girl must have had big secrets to shake the healer up. I couldn't ignore his warnings.

After everything we'd accomplished, the last thing I needed was to invite trouble into this territory. I no longer had the luxury to be curious about that Mila woman. I had to treat her like a threat.

“No matter what, when she wakes up, let her go. Trust me, like you always do. You don’t want a woman like her around,” Lee emphasized.

I nodded once. “Do you know when she might regain consciousness?” I asked flatly.

“Any day, now. I don’t know precisely,” Lee confessed.

“Okay, Lee. Leave it to me.”

After Lee left, I went back to my bedroom, where Mila was. She was still unconscious but Ashley was there with her.

“Soren,” Ashley beamed at me.

I noticed that Ashley had recovered Mila’s bag and put a fresh outfit on her, leaving a pile of Mia’s belongings nearby.

“That’s everything she had on her?” I asked.

“Well...”

“Well, what?” I asked when she hesitated.

Slowly, Ashley stuffed her hand in her pocket and pulled something out. She opened her hand and revealed a very intricate, antique looking ring resting in her palm. It was made of precious metal and the detailed work was exquisite. The gemstones in the band were perfectly cut and the large center stone was sparkling with colorful lights.

“Is that hers?” I asked.

Ashley handed the ring to me. I studied it a moment longer. It wasn’t a normal trinket that could be picked up in any jewelry shop. If I had to guess, this ring had been passed down for generations.

“We’ve put a lot of time and energy into taking care of her and finding out who she is. We even saved her life. She ought to pay us something.”

I wondered if Ashley even realized the treasure she’d discovered.

“For now, put all her valuables back, Ashley. I don’t want her belongings disturbed. Am I clear?” I asked. I shoved the ring back into Ashley’s hand.

Ashley sighed and rolled her eyes. “Fine, fine.”

I softened my tone. “Be good.”

Ashley bit her lip and smiled shyly. She turned back to Mila’s belongings and tucked the ring away securely.

“I want you to watch her things. If anything is missing when she wakes up, I’ll hold you responsible, alright?”

I trusted Ashley and Payne and they would never disobey me. However, this was an inn in the rogue zone. Theft wouldn’t even be considered a crime here.

“You can count on me,” she replied.

“Now, keep administering the medicine as instructed. I know she is healing on her own but I don’t want to take any chances. I need answers from her.”

If Payne couldn’t find any information on her, I’d need some answers. It was the only way to protect ourselves if anyone came after her. I had to know what we were up against.

“Alright, I’ll look after her,” Ashley agreed. “What answers do you need? I thought Payne was out gathering information.”

“He is.”

“Well, isn’t he back yet?”

“Not yet but he should be checking in tomorrow,” I replied, wondering whether she had something else to say.

“Okay...”

I arched an eyebrow at Ashley, waiting for her to continue. As she was thinking, a small movement caught my attention.

It was from the woman in my bed. Her eyes were still closed, but her finger had just wiggled.

[Chapter 658](#)

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder

: I Have to Get Out of Here

Mila

My head pounded. It felt swollen and huge. It was so heavy, I couldn’t lift it. That’s when I realized I was lying down.

“If not, I’ll send someone after him,” a sudden voice echoed around me.

It was him again. It was the voice I’d been dreaming about, the voice that had kept me grounded... Soren.

He pulled me from the darkness. I started coming back to myself and my body. My mind hovered between unconsciousness and wakefulness. Back and forth I drifted from being aware and being unaware.

It was as if I was part of two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Would I ever be able to wake up? Would I see daylight again and be free of this endless dream?

I was trapped in a prison. A prison made by my own mind and body. I didn’t even know if it was real or part of the dream. Regardless, I clung to that voice hoping it would pull me back to reality completely.

“Are you sure you should be putting so much effort into this girl?” a female voice asked. I vaguely remembered hearing her name... Ashley.

I tried to open my eyes but my eyelids were too heavy. They stuck together, refusing to let any light in. I couldn't see who was talking or where they were. Whatever they were talking about was important and I had enough sense to listen.

"I know you've been keeping an ear out. Have you heard anything in the town or from outsiders?" Soren asked, clearly ignoring the original question.

"Not much," she replied, her answer was a bit curt.

"Ashley, tell me." Soren obviously didn't fully believe her.

Ashley complained, "You know I don't like to listen to gossip and I don't believe rumors. It hasn't been easy to figure out what is true."

"There has to be some truth in them," Soren chuckled, like a spoiling big brother trying to persuade his naughty baby sister to do her homework.

"So says you. I know otherwise. You can't trust the rumors spread by drunk shifters. They tend not to see reality."

If I could have smiled, I would have. She sounded like someone I would get along with. I tried to smile but my mouth wouldn't move. I didn't even know where my mouth was.

"Alright, that is all true. So what you've heard? Mind sharing so I can determine what is worth investigating?" Soren suggested patiently.

"If that's how you want it. Well, one rumor that seems to be common is that she is a fugitive from the crown. You know the Alpha King's preferences... a pretty girl like that. She could be on the run from him."

I had nothing to do with the Alpha King... if anything, I was the total opposite of a royal.

"Hmm... No, that seems unlikely. She was on foot. It would be hard to get far from the palace on foot with all the guards. And if she was one of the Alpha King's, then you can bet he had a lot of security on her. What else?"

"Well... I did hear something else. The details are a bit sketchy. I'm not sure how much you want to read into it."

"Go ahead," Soren encouraged.

"There's a pack looking for someone but they wouldn't reveal who they were looking for, only saying that it's their Alpha's order. Do you have any guesses on what they might be after?"

My mind spun again and I hoped Soren would speak before I lost consciousness and missed out on the rest of their conversation.

Soren grunted coldly and scoffed. "What else could they be after? Power and wealth of course. Not much else gets them so enthusiastic, or secretive."

"You think she has power and wealth?" Ashley asked.

Soren didn't answer her. I wished I could see his expression. After a little silence, he finally said, "Let me know if you hear anything more about this pack and who they are after."

"I'll keep you informed."

Dread welled inside of me. This male whose voice kept me solid was just like everyone else! He was nothing more than an ambitious jerk that wanted to use me for his own benefit. That's exactly what I'd been running from, wasn't it?

He was only keeping me around until he could figure out exactly how I could be used to benefit him.

I just wanted my freedom.

What was worse, if what Ashley said was true... If there was a pack searching for "someone," it could have been the Norwind Pack.

I knew the "someone" they were looking for.

Me.

"Soren, what if their... ventures have something to do with this girl?" Ashley asked, echoing my fears.

I wondered if I'd somehow telepathically communicated that to her since it echoed my concerns so perfectly.

"We should find that out, sooner rather than later," Soren said gruffly.

Suddenly, a memory flashed behind my closed eyes. I remembered running through the desert. The sand was so hot it blistered my bare feet. My throat was dry and raw, making it impossible to swallow or talk. Wind tossed the sand around and grains pelted my skin like little bullets. No matter how far I went, danger closed in on me.

Wherever I was, I wasn't safe!

I had to leave this place. I had to wake up and run!

I mustered as much strength as possible and tried to will my body to move. It wouldn't but I could feel my arms and legs. They were heavy as lead.

"Help me, Moon Goddess," I called out in my mind. "Help me find a way back to my body and my life. Please, guide me back to the real world so I can find safety."

In the darkness, a pinprick of light appeared above my forehead. It grew as it got closer to me. Slowly, it descended into my forehead.

My body instantly felt light and as if I was floating. My movements were still slow and sluggish, but I could sense myself again.

All the mist, fog, and darkness I'd been drowning in cleared in my mind and everything inside of me got lighter and brighter. I thought I was in a dark cave, that I'd been spinning around endlessly looking for the entrance, and now I could finally see it.

A light came from the entryway and I got up and ran toward it.

As soon as I ran through the door of light, my eyes opened, but my eyelids were extremely heavy. I wasn't sure how long I would be able to stay awake like this.

The next second, my body flared with pain. My joints ached, my skin burned, and my hands and feet were so sore. Every muscle was like being stabbed with a million needles.

Each breath was agony so I inhaled faster and shallower.

Tears stung my eyes, leaking out the corners. They were searing hot on my skin like someone was pouring scalding hot water on my face.

How could I be in this much pain!? I hadn't felt it at all while I'd been unconscious.

Now, the blood in my veins was on fire, burning me up from the inside.

My mind grew fuzzy again and the fogginess started tugging at my ankles. It was tempting for me to give in to it, because in the fog, I'd been numb, and my suffering would stop.

No! I had fought myself awake and I needed to stay awake. I needed to get out of there!

For the sake of my survival, I slowed my breathing down. I needed to know where I was and who was nearby. If I focused on that, I could force myself to push through the worst of pain.

I was lying on a bed. The room was unfamiliar. It looked like it belonged to an inn or tavern of some kind, yet I didn't recognize the decor or anything about the room.

How had I gotten there?

I tensed against the excruciating agony and finally managed to turn my head just enough so I could see who was in the room with me.

There were two people standing near the door talking to each other.

One was a tall man. He was well-built and muscular. He had a pair of stunning grayish blue eyes and jet black hair. While he was slightly older, in his thirties, perhaps, he was one of the most handsome men I'd ever seen.

Also, somewhere in my mind, he seemed familiar, and I wanted to be close to him...

I snapped out from my illogical thoughts of the man and checked out the woman next to him. She looked younger and defiant but she was definitely respectful when talking to him.

As my vision cleared, I strained my eyes and looked around the room. It wasn't a typical customer room at an inn, instead, more like someone's personal, private space. Nice and cozy.

Try as I might, I couldn't remember where I was or how I'd gotten there.

I closed my eyes and another flare of pain shot through me. I bit my tongue to keep from crying out!

My only advantage right now was they didn't know I was awake. I wanted to keep it that way until I could figure out how to escape from them.

“Oh, it looks like it is time to change her medicine,” Ashley commented, a bit annoyed for some reason. “Lee also included a painkiller? For what reason? It doesn’t seem like she has visible wounds!”

Frantically, I slowed my breathing down and relaxed my face and my eyelids, pretending I was still unconscious. It was the only way I could think of to protect myself at this moment.

In any case, medicine was welcome, especially if a painkiller was offered.

Both the woman and the man were so close to me that I could feel them moving just inches away. I was completely vulnerable. If they knew I was awake, they’d want answers.

I just had to focus on remaining still and calm until the painkiller kicked in.

Still, calm, quiet. I repeated those words to myself again and again until that was all I knew and all I embodied.

Ashley administered the medication with a shot and I managed to stay still. Now all I had to do was wait until they left. Then I could escape.

However, the painkiller given to me wasn’t enough to ease my discomfort entirely. I kept my body as still as possible, but I was distressed.

Suddenly, someone’s hands came down on my skin, although they were warm and soft, a bolt of pain shot through my arm like lightning.

An uncontrollable tremble rippled through me and Ashley immediately pulled her hands away.

Crap! I had no idea Ashley would rub cream over me. Now they must have realized I was faking it!

[Chapter 659](#)

Sold as the Alpha King’s Breeder

: I Know You’re Awake

I held my breath, waiting for Ashley to say something or react. When nothing happened, I started thinking about how I could fight them off and escape.

It was just Ashley and Soren, from what I could tell. I might not be stronger than the two of them but I was fast. My desire to survive was strong. If I could get to a window, I’d be able to flee before they detained me... I just didn’t know where any of the windows in this room were!

“Huh,” Ashley muttered.

This was it. Time for me to escape.

“Her wounds haven’t healed yet. I don’t understand why,” Ashley said with a sigh.

I started breathing again, lightly so she wouldn’t see that I’d been holding my breath. I guess I fooled her after all.

Ashley went back to applying the pain relief cream and I stayed still this time. Warmth and relief swept through me as my pain lessened. By the time she was done, I might be well enough to pick myself up and escape... at least, until the painkillers wore off.

It was hard not to relax and enjoy the soft, gentle touch Ashley applied, along with that remarkable painkiller.

My mind started to wander and I thought about everything they'd done for me. They'd rescued me from the sandstorm, given me a place to stay, tended to my wounds, and continued to take care of me.

Were they such bad people if they'd do that for a stranger?

Perhaps I was overreacting earlier, but either way, I needed to find out more about them before I let them know I was awake. Lying there and listening seemed to be my best option.

Ashley finished with the cream and she quickly swapped out the bandages on my blistered hands and feet. There was cooling gel on the fresh bandages and I nearly moaned with satisfaction.

"Thank you, Ashley," Soren's deep, delicious voice rumbled. "You've been a big help. I'll watch her for now, you can take this rotation off."

"Alright, get out of jail free card. I'll be back in a few hours to check on her and give more medicine if needed," Ashley said.

I heard her footsteps getting softer as she left the room. Soren didn't move, though. I was laying there in bed, pretending to sleep, and he was hovering around like a big creep.

I understood why they wanted someone to watch me, in case I woke up or took a turn for the worse. But did it have to be Soren? From the sounds of it, he was some kind of leader. That meant, he'd be the hardest to fool and sneak around.

There were some rustling sounds. Soren must have shifted his position from where he was.

Suddenly, a soft breeze washed over me. My nostrils tingled with a familiar, tempting scent. I had to fight the urge to inhale deeper as my mind swam with the smell of warm cedar and amber, which reminded me of the forest.

I'd been in the desert so long, I barely remembered the forest but that scent was too much. Saliva built in the back of my mouth and I swallowed as inconspicuously as possible.

Heat from his body told me that he was really close. Close enough to touch if I just reached out.

What was I thinking!?

His smell might be tempting and delicious, but I wasn't about to compromise myself, or my escape, by acting on some crazy impulse to touch him!

Something soft brushed my face. Soft, warm, and light. I did my best not to react as I realized it was his breath. He had to be right next to my face for me to feel his breath.

I breathed as lightly as possible and held perfectly still, willing my body not to betray me. He was so close... If I so much as twitched, he'd know I was faking.

My nerves shuddered when he spoke again.

“How long do you plan to just lie there?” he asked.

When I didn't move or answer, he let out a short chuckle. “It's alright, you can open your eyes. I know you're awake,” he added.

Still, I kept perfectly still. I didn't want to alert him that I was awake and aware. For all I knew, he was just testing me or trying to trick me. He might not know I was awake and be faking it to try and get a reaction out of me.

I had to be smart about this. I still knew nothing about this guy, why he'd helped me, or what he wanted from me.

His dark, low laugh resonated through my body. My bones trembled and my skin crawled.

“I am a patient man but you are coming dangerously close to the edge of it. However, if you are really asleep, I can think of one very interesting way to help you wake up,” he said in a quiet, threatening voice.

I shuddered inwardly, hoping he didn't notice.

Suddenly, his scent washed over me again. My mind swam and I felt like I was drowning in him. All I could smell and taste was that delectable scent.

And his breath was on my face again. He was close to me, so close. A ghost of something passed over my lips.

What the hell was he doing?

My skin heated and I clenched my thighs unconsciously. My insides squirmed in all kinds of pleasant ways. Part of me wanted him to take the next step and kiss me.

But I resisted the urge to inhale his scent and lick my lips. This was not the kind of man I wanted to have anything to do with, especially not what he was implying!

I snapped my eyes open.

Soren was leaning over me, his face inches away from mine.

Our eyes locked together and for an agonizingly long moment, I was transfixed. I couldn't look away and he seemed just as unable to either.

Shaking my head, I sat up quickly and pushed him back.

“Mind your distance,” I warned, sitting straight with my spine stiff against the headboard and glared at him.

Soren smirked but obliged and backed away.

“Who are you and why did you bring me here? What do you want from me?” I blurted out all the questions at the forefront of my mind.

Soren stared at me for a long moment. His brow furrowed ever so slightly.

Why did he look confused?

“You don’t remember me...?” he asked slowly and deliberately.

Was I supposed to remember him? Quickly, I racked my brain for the answer. I remembered struggling through the desert in the sandstorm. I remembered thinking I was going to die out there and feeling all my strength evaporating. Then, I remembered being in a soft bed with others talking around me and taking care of me.

No, I didn’t remember anything about Soren, except his voice and how it had grounded me. Slowly, I shook my head and gave him a suspicious look.

Soren’s eyes widened for a moment and then he smiled lightly. Almost like he was happy I didn’t remember him. That didn’t bode well...

“You came here several nights ago wounded, poisoned, and half dead from the sandstorm,” he explained.

“I remember that,” I muttered. For some reason, I felt exposed in front of him, even though I was fully clothed. I grabbed the sheet and lifted it around my torso and chest.

Soren’s eyes glinted, apparently finding that amusing.

“I saved you, more or less, but... Well, you should know that something happened—”

“I appreciate your help,” I cut him off. “In fact, I’m even grateful. But you didn’t have to save me.”

Again, he just stared at me. I couldn’t tell if he was shocked or relieved.

He c****d his head to the side, a slight upturn to the corners of his mouth.

Intrigued. That’s how he looked at me.

I shifted my gaze to my lap, ignoring his obvious curiosity about me. All I cared about was getting my stuff and getting the hell out of there. I needed to put as much distance between myself and my pursuers as possible.

Yet, the way he looked at me was almost soft and friendly. I got the feeling that he wasn’t going to hurt me. He was dangerous but he wasn’t a threat to me.

To keep from looking at him, I started scanning the room. I knew that I had a pack on me when I’d gone into the desert. I’d brought some water, spare clothes, a knife and some other possessions.

It would make me feel a lot better if I could get my knife back. I’d need it for self-defense or to help me escape.

Soren chuckled again and walked to the dresser. He rummaged through one of the drawers and turned around with my pack in his hands.

“Looking for this?” he asked, arching an eyebrow at me.

I stared at the pack warily. Why was he just offering it back to me? If he'd searched it, then he'd know I had a knife and some valuables. If he hadn't searched it, then he was an i***t.

Tentatively, I reached out and took my bag.

"Thank you."

Our hands brushed as he handed the bag to me and I pulled away with a gasp. I avoided looking at Soren again and peeked inside the bag. All my stuff was still inside. I hugged my pack to my chest and relaxed a little.

Hurried footsteps in the hall made me turn my head to the door. Ashley rushed into the room, her eyes wide when she saw me sitting up.

"Oh, you're awake," she said, surprised.

Her eyes shifted between me and Soren. He was still standing close to me, our hands just inches apart from when he'd handed me my pack.

Ashley scoffed and crossed her arms. I could see her dissatisfaction with our proximity. I wondered if Ashley and Soren were together.

Not that it mattered to me...

"It is good that you're awake. Now that you're up, you can leave," Ashley requested sharply.

"You're right. I really should be on my way. I'm not going to overstay my welcome," I agreed with a nod.

If they weren't going to keep me prisoner and I didn't have to stage an escape, then I was happy to just walk through the front door.

"Thank you for your help—"

"Ashley, give us a moment alone before our guest is on her way," Soren's voice rang.

Ashley stared at Soren with absolute disbelief, however, she didn't fight with Soren. Turning on her heel, she stomped away.

I looked at Soren with wariness. Was I too hopeful to think he'd let me go easily?

"Don't worry about Ashley. She is a little spoiled by her brother and is very direct. She doesn't have that filter which tells her when not to say something," Soren said fondly.

I was starting to think there was something going on between the two of them. Every time I heard them talking, he was so gentle and kind with her.

"Deep down, she's really a sweet girl," he continued.

I scoffed and shook my head. "I'm not really concerned about the type of person she is. She does have a point, though. I really should be on my way, now that I'm awake."

Hugging my pack, I tried to stand up.

My knees wobbled and my head swam dizzily. The world tipped sideways and I was falling!

Soren's arms came around me and he held me upright. The room stopped spinning and I slumped against him slightly. If he hadn't caught me, I would have smashed my head on the headboard.

"Th-thank you," I stuttered.

He kept his arms around me and our eyes locked again. Deep, stormy pools of blue-gray. So restless and endless like the sea. His dark hair gave him an imposing look but close up, I could see how attractive he was. His angled features weren't as sharp and he looked almost kind.

What was I thinking? He was the enemy. Everyone was the enemy, as far as I was concerned.

"You're too weak to head off on your own. You should stay until you're stronger," he suggested.

[Chapter 660](#)

Sold as the Alpha King's Breeder

: What Choice Do I Have?

"I really appreciate all the help, I do, but..."

I couldn't pull away from Soren's intense look. His eyes swam with concern. My throat tightened and I tried to swallow, but it hurt.

All I wanted to do was get out of there! I wanted to get out of bed, be able to stand on my own two feet, put on some new clothes, and leave. There was too much on the line if I stayed put.

Besides, whenever I smelled Soren, felt his warm body, or looked into his eyes, I was like a giddy, lovesick puppy. That just wouldn't do. Not to mention that lady friend of his. Ashley... She really didn't want me around.

"Your friend is right... it is time for me to leave," I insisted.

I tried to pull away from Soren and stand on my own. My legs shook and I plopped down on the bed. Tremors ran through my body and I felt weak and faint.

How could I get anywhere like this?

I had to try again. Gritting my teeth, I tried to stand. I strained every muscle in my body but I could only rise a few inches before I fell back on the bed.

A heavy, calming hand rested on my shoulder, keeping me still.

I sighed and looked up at Soren. His hand was more comforting than it should have been. It was like that one touch told me I could trust him and that everything would be okay.

"You know, you can take it easy when you need to. No one will think less of you for taking time to recover after what you've been through," he said kindly.

I scoffed and shook my head. "I really need to move on."

“If you’re concerned about your safety, no one here will hurt you. I will make sure of it. Stay and rest until you are strong enough to make it on your own. I’m not sending you out there to die before you get to the edge of the village.”

His sentiment was almost nice but there was a passive-aggressive undertone. After all the trouble he’d gone through to help patch me up, he wasn’t going to see me throw it all away.

If only he knew the danger he was inviting by allowing me to stay. If he did, he might not have helped me at all.

What choice did I have?

I could stay here among strangers and trust Soren’s words. A stranger, an ambitious male that could easily use me for his own gain.

Or, I could take my chances and run away. Too weak to walk on my own, I’d never get far. Soren was right about that. I’d be far too vulnerable out in the open, stumbling around. It would also draw too much attention.

“Thank you,” I said. At least, so far, Soren hadn’t acted like a villain...yet. I really didn’t have many choices. It was the better of two bad options.

After that, my strength completely sapped, I laid back on the bed and got comfortable on the pillows.

“You’re welcome,” he replied and left the room, locking it for me before sleep took me quickly.

Several days passed on my road to recovery. Every day I could feel my strength returning and my pain lessening. Soren even came by to check on me every day or two.

Our conversations were pleasant and he never made me feel like he was trying to interrogate me or rush the healing process.

If anything, he seemed to want me to slow down. But I wasn’t going to milk this or drag it out. I had to be on the move, and soon.

Ashley was still my main caregiver. She came by regularly with food, clothes, and medicine.

Every day she asked, “Did you sleep well? Are you feeling better? When will you be leaving?”

She hardly seemed interested in the answers to the first two questions. Only the third one.

After a few days, the questions became more routine than insistent.

Maybe she was getting used to me being there, or she was just tired of asking and getting the same vague answer.

“When will you be leaving?” Ashley asked again as I finished my breakfast.

“Soon, I hope,” I said. I tried to convey that I didn’t want to be there any more than she wanted me there.

I sat on the edge of the bed in a clean outfit she'd brought for me. After several more days, I was strong enough that I didn't need the painkillers anymore.

It was my hands and feet that still needed to heal. The blisters from the desert heat had really done a number on them. For a while, I couldn't change the bandages because my fingers were too swollen, until now.

"Well, that's a first," Ashley said when she saw me wrapping fresh bandages on my own. The cooling, healing gel was always such a relief on my raw skin.

"See, I'll be out of here soon," I tried to make it easy for both of us.

"Sure, whatever," Ashley muttered. She collected my empty plate and left the room without wanting to converse more. I didn't mind at all, for I had my own plans.

My feet were still sore but I could finally stand without shaking or excruciating pain.

Hobbling, I left my room for the first time since I got there, balancing myself on the wall along the way.

The stairs were tricky but I made it downstairs. No one stopped me as I limped through the front door and out onto the porch, where I was pleasantly greeted by clean, fresh air for the first time in days.

I sighed happily and leaned against the porch railing. As I looked around the village, I realized that it really was in the middle of the desert. No matter what direction I looked in, whether close by or at the horizon, everything was covered or surrounded by the golden, scorching sand.

All the buildings were shabby and looked like they were in need of maintenance. Even the inn I was staying at could use a layer of new paint and even a new roof.

How did it survive the sandstorm?

I went back inside when the sun started to feel hot—I didn't want to aggravate my blisters anymore—however, I realized something usual.

The interior of the inn was a lot nicer than the exterior. It was obvious that the owner of this inn had good tastes. It was cozily decorated with comfortable furniture and low lighting, however, that wasn't what drew my attention.

What caught my attention was that although it looked beat-up from outside, the building structure from inside was totally the opposite.

The load bearing walls were well-kept brick or stones which looked very steady and the other walls were majorly built with solid woods.

Looking up at the ceiling, there was no sign of aging or damage, which meant that the roof which looked beat up was actually doing a great job protecting the inside of the building.

Lastly, I noticed that there were two layers of windows. The inside layer was new and clean, while the outside layer gave the building an old and rundown look.

I was surprised to find that the rundown appearance outside was only a disguise!

My energy started fading fast and I hobbled to the bar. I plopped down on a stool and my feet were pleased not to have weight on them anymore. I relaxed my body, listening to the conversation and soft music emanated from the restaurant.

The bartender smiled at me and headed my way. "Would you like something to eat?"

"Oh, that would be great," I said. I'd need my strength to get back upstairs.

I ate my lunch in peace. When was the last time I actually sat down to enjoy a meal? It was ironic that out of all the places in the world, it was in the rogue zone where I found shelter.

This inn seemed to have some magical charm which made people feel safe and...homey. Was it why those around me, regardless how rough and tough they look, kept their decent manner inside the inn, making it a peaceful place for all who chose to stay?

If I wasn't chased by my enemy, would this be a good option for me to settle down?

What the heck was I thinking?

Ashley hated me and wanted me gone. She'd be happy to see the last of my backside any day.

Soren... Well, I thought he'd like to see my backside too, but for an entirely different reason. At least, he seemed to like me and was willing to help me.

His scent and his body... oh, they were enough to make me drool.

It was impossible not to think about him—the mysterious man who lived among the rogues, but lived and behaved nothing like a rogue. If anything, he was like an elegant alpha, or even a graceful royal, even though I'd never met a royal before.

Quickly, I shook my head and stuffed a bite of food in my mouth in case I really was drooling.

After lunch, I headed back to my room. The little walkabout was enough to exhaust my energy. As soon as I got to the bed, my eyes closed and I was ready to fall asleep again.

Except, I didn't get the rest I was hoping to get.

A repetitive dream surfaced in my mind, taking me down a long, winding road.

Suddenly, I was a child again. A woman held my hand, leading me deep into the forest. I couldn't see her face in the shadows.

I heard the woman's voice. She was whispering words I didn't understand, chanting spells that made no sense to me.

"You must come find me, young Mila," she said.

This wasn't the first time I'd dreamed about her. When I was younger, this dream had just been a dream to me. I never cared much about it. However, this time, it wasn't the same.

The images of the forest were much clearer. The woman's voice was louder and stronger than before, and I could feel the gnarled, rough skin of her hand in mine and smelled the faint scent of herbs and tinctures clung to her clothes.

Details I had never seen before.

If my mind had such clear, crisp details, was it possible she was real? Had I met her when I was young? Or was she out in the world somewhere, calling to me with some power that I wasn't aware of?

As soon as I wondered if she was real, the dream became even clearer.

The woman's scent grew stronger and I could almost see the outline of her facial features through the shadows.

She spoke again. "Mila, go to the Miltern pack. Ask for someone named Helen," she said so perfectly clear I wondered if I was still asleep.

"Hey, what does that mean?" I asked.

Suddenly, my eyes snapped open and I sat up in bed. The dream faded so fast and reality rushed in. I panted and clutched my chest. That was the clearest version of this dream I'd ever experienced! So clear that I had to question whether it was really just a dream?

Outside the window, the full, silver moon hung in the dark blue sky. She lit up the entire town and moonlight poured through the window.

Had I been asleep for hours already? It seemed to be only half an hour ago I'd just had my lunch.

My mind was working faster than it had in the past few days. That woman had told me to go to Miltern pack and look for Helen.

If I was willing to believe that she was real, I had to believe Helen and the Miltern pack were real.

For days, I'd been trying to figure out a plan for where I was going next and who I could ask for help. Now, it was as if this recurring dream gave me the answer.

There was no point postponing my departure. I got out of bed and packed my things. Everything felt so much easier. Now that I had purpose and direction, my strength and determination had returned.

Just before leaving, I paused. I had no intention of saying goodbye but I wanted to leave Soren and his people something for helping me.

I dug into my pack and pulled out the valuables I'd brought with me and laid them out on the pillow. I had only brought them along in case I needed to barter for supplies. This seemed like the right way to use them.

Soren saved me and I made my payment. Going forward, I did not owe them anything.

Quietly, I snuck out of the bedroom. Out of caution, this time, I tiptoed down the hall until I came to a door that was slightly cracked. Light streamed out into the dark hallway.

Shadows moved around inside. Someone was awake and alert. I'd have to avoid them.

Holding my breath, I took one step by the room but I froze when I heard Soren's voice.

"Now, what have you found out about the girl?" he asked firmly.

He had to be talking about me...