

## Kings Breeder 671

### [Chapter 671](#)

\*Mila\*

I kept the box pinned to my chest as I raced away from the graveyard. Soren could talk to his henchman all he wanted but I wasn't going to stick around, especially if what Payne said was true and there were other bounty hunters closing in, I had to get far away.

Just outside the cemetery, my knees started to ache. The pain spread up my hamstrings and into my hips. Every step sent shocks of pain through my legs. I had to slow down to ease the pain but it still crept through me.

My hips felt loose, like they'd collapse if I took too many more steps. My knees were dizzy and threatened to buckle.

I groaned and clenched my teeth. My lower back started to ache, too. I'd never get far like this.

Why couldn't I just heal already? I'd overcome the worst of the poison and the pain but it just wouldn't go away!

The hairs on the back of my neck prickled. Someone was tracking me. I could feel it in my bones. They were just on the edge of my senses and if there wasn't this thick fog, they'd probably be on me already.

For a split second, I thought it was Soren or his henchman, Payne.

Of course, Soren wouldn't just let me go...

No, it wasn't Soren or his friend. Whoever was tracking me felt fouler and more sinister.

This part of the village was in bad shape. My legs shook and I stumbled forward. I reached for the nearest structure for support needing to rest. My fingers connected with a broken wall. Heavily, I leaned against the wall and breathed deeply.

"Don't fall down, you i\*\*\*t," I muttered to myself.

My head hurt and my thoughts spun. The world around me tilted strangely and I thought I'd pass out.

How was I going to keep moving like this?

I couldn't give up. Not here, not now. I'd survived the Trial of Black Fire, one of the only ones to ever do that. I'd escaped from a powerful alpha like Alpha Chandler. I'd walked through a brutal sandstorm in the hot desert.

Through it all, I survived.

Finding the box meant I was finally going to get some answers and I wasn't going to fall down here and lose that chance.

I continued to catch my breath and will the pain away, thinking about where to go from here.

My biggest threat was the damn bounty hunters that Norwind had hired. They wouldn't mess around. To them, I was a payday and it wasn't just me they were after. They were all competing with each other to get to me first.

Only one of them would get paid for my capture.

With the poison still in my blood and my basic self-defense skills, I couldn't defend against them, let alone fight them all off and I wouldn't be able to outrun them, either.

For the first time, I realized just what kind of trouble I was in. No one was coming to save me. I was unable to make my escape.

If any of the bounty hunters found me, I might not live to my 21st birthday, and then I'd never shift or know my wolf. I'd never know who I was, who my parents were, or get my questions answered.

It wasn't like I wanted to live like this forever. Once I got my answers, my goal was to settle down and live a happy, peaceful life.

What if I never got the chance because I couldn't get through this one moment?

I'd never had peace and happiness... What if I died without ever knowing what that was like?

No! I wouldn't let that happen. There had to be a way.

Soren flickered across my mind. He had behaved so strangely toward me, right from the beginning.

If I was being honest with myself, I couldn't definitely say that I thought he was after me to use me or hurt me. It is what I suspected but...

He hadn't done anything to hurt me at all.

Whatever his ultimate motivations were, he wasn't treating me like a prize or a means to an end.

He'd already made it clear that if he wanted to, he'd find me or track me anywhere I tried to hide. I'd spent my life learning to cover my tracks and avoid being seen or followed.

Yet, Soren seemed to always know how to find me.

Was that because I was getting sloppy or because he was better at tracking than anyone else I'd encountered?

He'd only let me escape when he wanted to. That much I knew.

How could I trust someone like that?

There were times when my heart had urged me to trust him. Moments after he was kind to me, I wanted to trust him and accept his help. The feeling had always faded.

But the more I'd learned about him, and how I'd seen him interact with Ashley and Payne, the more I thought that he treated me differently.

Not differently in the sense that he wanted something from me. Differently from anyone else he knew.

I wasn't used to it.

He wasn't greedy with me like the people of Saboreef pack. He wasn't vicious like Norwind.

If anything, he was kind. I didn't see him being that kind to the other people in his life. He was more like a boss or a leader, but to me, he wanted to be a friend. At least, he was trying.

I kept pushing him away.

But if he really wanted to be my friend, it might be worth exploring that.

Sighing, I pushed off the wall and started hobbling back toward the graveyard. The fog had a mind of its own back there and seemed to want to help me. Maybe, if I could go back, it would help hide me from the bounty hunters while I figured out what to do.

I made it back to the gravestone and the fog closed around me like a curtain. I felt safe there and I slumped on the ground, leaning my back against the gravestone where I'd found the box.

I kept the box on my lap, brushing my palms over the lid and dusting off any remaining dirt. Payne and Soren had left a while ago and I was completely alone.

Whoever had been tracking me must have slowed down or couldn't track me through the fog. I didn't feel them anymore.

After being hunted for so long, I'd gotten used to sensing when others were closing in or even when they were focused on finding me. Kind of like a sixth sense.

If I was ever going to live to meet my wolf and have a life of peace and happiness, I needed to get rid of these bounty hunters.

Soren said that Alpha Chandler had called in the worst of the worst. They'd be hard to throw off or eliminate and I knew I couldn't do it on my own.

My thoughts wandered back to Soren again. He'd offered to help me and protect me. I didn't want to be protected. I wanted to fight back and eliminate the threat against me.

If that meant destroying the bounty hunters and Alpha Chandler, I'd go as far as I had to. But could I get someone like Soren to back me up?

He was strong and powerful and he had a whole group of rogues that followed him. They could easily make an army.

And after it was settled, I could easily find a way to escape from Soren. By then, I should be back up to my full strength and I wasn't above hiding out in this immense fog where his senses would be dulled until he lost interest in me.

Then I could resume my quest to find out about myself and finally start living a real life. There was a chance Soren's resources and knowledge could point me in the direction of answers. He seemed... well traveled.

The only problem was that I knew he didn't want to get involved in what was going on with me.

Offering protection was one thing. Fighting back meant getting very involved and I wasn't sure that Soren was up to that.

Well... I'd just have to convince him, wouldn't I?

Smiling to myself, I got to my feet and brushed myself off. My hips and knees didn't ache as much and the pain in my back was gone. I wondered if the fog helped dull my pain, too, or if I was actually feeling better from resting.

I made my way back to the hotel. Soren was probably there trying to figure out how to track me down without alerting the bounty hunters.

He was kind of predictable.

I laughed to myself and hugged the box tighter.

All that time and effort and I was just going to show up at his door. I couldn't wait to see the look on his face!

Then again...

I paused outside the hotel and took a deep breath.

He'd extended an offer of help several times now. Each time, I'd thrown it in his face and made all kinds of accusations. Would he even be happy to see me? Would he want to take another chance on me?

I'd said some mean things and never given him the benefit of the doubt. He could have just as easily gotten tired of me and decided to move on with his own life, happy to be rid of me.

I would need to gain his trust somehow or make him more willing to help me.

There was one thing that could bend almost all men to a woman's will.

I hesitated one final time and then went into the hotel. Keeping to the shadows, I returned to the room that Soren had offered me. I still had the door key and I let myself in.

My stomach trembled but I couldn't turn back now. My mind was made up.

I went straight to the bathroom and set the box on the sink vanity where I could keep an eye on it. I ran a warm bath and changed out of my dirty clothes.

The water felt so good on my dirt-smearred skin and my aching joints. I sighed and relaxed, but I never took my eyes off that box.

Once I was clean and my hair brushed and detangled, I dug through my pack for the clothes I carried with me. There was only one dress in there, the same one I'd been wearing when I showed up at Soren's inn.

Smirking, I slipped the dress on. Ashley must have cleaned it and I was pleased to see it wasn't damaged by the storm at all. It was just a sundress, but it revealed my legs, arms, shoulders, back, and a good portion of my bosom.

Before leaving my room, I pried up a floorboard and hid the box and my pack below. Then I moved the carpet to cover my hiding place. To the casual observer, no one would think anything was out of place.

Now, I just needed to wait for Soren. Apparently, he hadn't made it back to the hotel yet.

It didn't seem like anyone else was staying in this hotel either. The halls were empty and the rooms quiet. It was probably because of the fog and gloom that hung over Miltern.

Either that or bounty hunters stayed at lower class motels than a place like this.

I went to the room across the hall and positioned myself against his door. I leaned against the frame in a way that caused my hip to jut out. My breasts were far more noticeable, and I arched my back slightly.

He'd get the perfect view when he showed up...

### [Chapter 672](#)

\*Soren\*

After sending Payne on another recon mission, I headed back to the hotel. Instead of following Mila directly, I sent him to keep an eye on the bounty hunters.

I made my way to the top floor and headed toward my room. Halfway down the hallway, I paused.

A slender, brunette beauty leaned against my door. She wore a familiar white sundress, her brown hair rippling down her back like a chocolate waterfall.

She had her ankles crossed and leaned against my door casually, but also in a way that made it impossible not to see the perfect shape of her body.

"Rosalie?" I murmured, thinking that maybe I was dreaming again.

The woman turned around and smiled gently, nodding to me.

I scoffed and rolled my eyes at myself. No, it wasn't Rosalie. It never would be.

Instead, Mila stood there. Inwardly, I chastised myself. What the f\*\*k was I thinking? Why was I still thinking about Rosalie? There was seriously something wrong with me.

I approached Mila, crossing my arms.

"Why are you here? What do you want?" I asked sharply.

Mila licked her lips and tried to smile again. I saw her jaw tense, her lips strained. She forced her smile wider.

"I was waiting for you," she said in a soft, sultry voice.

I pursed my lips and arched an eyebrow at her. Less than an hour ago, she yelled at me to stay away from her and ran off again. She made it clear she wanted nothing to do with me and nothing from me.

And yet, here she was, at my door, wearing an outfit obviously meant to entice me.

I narrowed my eyes at her.

The dress wasn't all that was different. She'd showered. I could smell the nice fragrance of her shampoo.

What was she up to? Most women who tell a man to leave them alone and run off don't come back an hour later looking for something... deeper.

I looked her over and shook my head. It bothered me that she could make me think of Rosalie so easily. It bothered me that I couldn't stop thinking about Rosalie! I'd tried to let her go. I even hopped dimensions to get as far away from her as possible.

Had Mila come into my life simply to be a reminder of what I longed for and could never have?

She was free to leave from the temple. I hadn't followed after her and I hadn't tried to stop her once she ran. If she'd just taken that chance then her issues would be long gone, along with the aching in my heart for Rosalie.

Had she come back just to torment me further?

Of course, Mila didn't know anything about Rosalie or how she impacted me. Maybe this was my punishment for running away and abandoning my family. The Moon Goddess would never let me forget or move on.

Well, if Mila was my punishment, I didn't have to make her existence any easier.

"Do you know what kind of women dress up and show up at a man's door in the middle of the night?" I asked coldly, narrowing my eyes further.

Mila took a half step back and pressed her hand to her chest. She looked offended for a moment, then her face flushed. I thought it was embarrassment until I saw her clench her hands at her sides.

She'd attacked me with a knife before, I wouldn't put it past her to try and hit me.

I raised an arm, ready to block her, but Mila relaxed her fists.

She took a deep breath and gave me a sweet, challenging smile.

"I didn't know you would read that deeply into my actions," she said, arching an eyebrow. "You're free to perceive me however you want, but if that's what you think of women, that sounds more like a you problem."

I scoffed but held my tongue. The insult I threw at her came from my own anger at myself. It wasn't like I was really mad at her. I knew I was overreacting.

I bit the inside of my lip to keep from smirking. Her reply was... unexpected and intriguing. She was definitely after something.

But that was just how she was. Whatever she wanted, I knew it was about her own survival. She wouldn't be here unless she was desperate and that made me curious. What could have happened in the past hour to make her suddenly so desperate to put herself back in my presence?

Waving her aside, I opened the hotel room door and went inside. I left the door open, giving Mila the chance to come in if she chose to.

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\*Mila\*

Soren disappeared into his room but he left the door open. I stood in the doorway for a moment wondering if I should follow.

Well, I wasn't going to get what I came for by standing out in the hallway all night. I went in and closed the door behind me.

Soren moved around the room and I leaned against the doorframe. He hadn't really invited me in and he hadn't offered me a place to sit, so I wasn't sure if he was going to turn around and tell me to leave.

He was upset about something. I thought it was at me, but it felt deeper than that. He lashed out in anger, I've seen that happen again and again, but I got the feeling that he wasn't directly angry at me.

Thick silence hung between us as Soren moved around the room, busying himself with picking things up and moving them around. It didn't look like he had an actual purpose to anything he was doing.

"So... Do you have anything to drink?" I asked, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

Without glancing at me, Soren went straight to a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of wine and two wine glasses.

My stomach twisted nervously. That was a little more intimate than what I was thinking. I just wanted a glass of water because my throat was dry.

Still, without speaking, Soren sat down on the couch and nodded to the seat beside him. He set the glasses and wine bottle on the coffee table.

I rubbed my hands together and bit my lower lip. Drinking wine on a couch together was pretty... intense.

Shaking my head, I walked across the room and sat down. I had made up my mind that I would do whatever I needed to in order to get his help tonight. This was all about survival and there wasn't anything I wouldn't do to survive.

Soren shifted slightly on the couch, making a comfortable space between us. I sighed and relaxed slightly.

While he uncorked the wine, I looked him over. The light in the room was dim but I was close enough to see the lines on his face.

Sure, I'd looked at him before and I'd seen how handsome and attractive he was. I'd never really seen him before, not until I looked at him in this lighting.

I'd always looked at him as an enemy, so I was guarded and refused to see deeper than his physical features. The room was so relaxed and I could finally see more of him.

He was good looking, there was no dancing around that. Who was I kidding? He was more than good looking. He was absolutely gorgeous! But behind his attractiveness, I could see strength and fierceness.

The way he went through the motions of uncorking the wine and deliberately pouring it into the glasses showed focus. But I also sensed aloofness. Like his focus on the wine was a way to take him out of the current situation. He used that action to keep himself distant from being in the room with me.

Soren swished the wine around in one glass and tasted it. He sighed and his eyes softened slightly.

It was the same look he'd had in his eyes when I turned to face him after he'd called me Rosalie. I couldn't really remember, but I felt like he'd called me that before.

Underneath that cold, distant, fierce exterior, he had a soft heart and tenderness. Maybe he was even a little gentle.

Of course, I knew that softness was reserved for someone else. The mysterious Rosalie. It had nothing to do with me. When he looked at me like that, it was because he was seeing her.

It didn't matter who he longed for or who he reserved that tender, gentle part of himself for. I was here to make a deal with him and if the fact that I reminded him of someone else played to my advantage in this situation, I'd take it.

Soren topped his wine glass off and then handed the second one to me. He leaned back on the sofa and relaxed. I could visibly see the tension melt off his muscles.

I looked into my wine glass at my distorted reflection on the surface of the crimson drink.

"So, tell me, Why are you here?" Soren asked.

His eyes slid sideways until he was looking directly at me.

I chewed the inside of my cheek, my face heating up. My hand tightened around the wine glass and I sighed. How did I want to ask him this question?

I had to tread carefully here or Soren would just laugh and throw everything back in my face. If I could appeal to that gentleness within him, I could probably make him do whatever I wanted. I just needed to find the right words.

In the graveyard, he seemed intent on protecting me. Maybe, if he saw me as helpless or weak, he'd be willing.

Sighing, I nodded to myself, determined, and met his gaze.

I took a deep breath and said, "You know there are people after me... bounty hunters," I started. I kept my voice soft and meek.

"Yes. Payne and I are the ones that told you that," he said tartly, sipping his wine.

"Right. Well... after I left the graveyard I realized I wouldn't be able to fight them all. I wouldn't even be able to run from them all," I said with a dramatic sigh.

I watched Soren's face. So far, he showed no sign of buying my innocent, helpless routine.

"Another point I made to you in the graveyard," he added.



“I know. And you were right. I didn’t realize it at the time but the Black Fire poison is still... it acts up now and then and makes me really weak. I don’t know how long it will be until I’m fully healed. I guess... what I’m saying is... Soren, I need your help,” I said, letting some desperation seep into my voice.

Soren arched an eyebrow at me. He tilted his head to the side, seeming intrigued by my request. Suddenly, he chuckled.

“Why should I help you?” he asked.

### [Chapter 673](#)

\*Soren\*

I waited for Mila to answer. She seemed at a loss for words and unable to provide me with an answer. I pursed my lips and sipped my wine.

There was no reason for me to give her a hard time. I didn’t even know why I was doing it. I’d already resigned myself to helping her. I was just curious to see how far she was willing to go with this.

Mila sighed and raised her glass to her lips. In one large gulp, she drank all her wine.

I stared at her.

She gasped and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Already, her cheeks turned red and her eyes glassy.

“You should help me because now, we are in the same boat,” she said.

“Are we? I don’t think our situations are similar. Those bounty hunters could give a crap about me but they are after you,” I pointed out, smirking at her.

“It’s not lost on me that you are a powerful leader. When you took care of those Norwind raiders that came to your inn, it was easy for you. They were flies in a barn, nothing life-threatening, just bothersome,” she said.

“And what does that have to do with you?” I pressed.

“They are a big deal for me,” she said, shrugging.

I chuckled. “Doesn’t that mean we are not in the same boat? It sounds to me like we are in very different positions.”

Curiosity got the better of me. I wanted to see how Mila was going to turn this around and where she was going with her train of thought. She seemed to have a direction but I wasn’t sure.

It could have been the wine talking.

The girl smirked and gave me a coy look. She teetered back and forth slightly. I could tell she wasn’t drunk, but she was definitely feeling the wine.

“But they want me alive. You... they don’t need you alive. So, I can always outrun them but if they get to be too much for me, I can find my way back to you, leading them along with me,” she said. She giggled and pointed a slender finger at me.

I stared at her finger and waited to see if she had anything else to add.

“You’ll never be able to go back to your peaceful and secluded life until I am able to have a peaceful and secluded life,” she continued.

Sniffing, I looked away from her. I hadn’t expected her to behave so childishly. Trying to tell me that she’d make my life miserable if I didn’t help her.

Groaning, I glared at her. “Are you threatening me?”

Mila met my gaze bravely and shrugged one shoulder. “Sort of. It’s not like it would be a real threat to you since you could always take them out easily.”

I almost laughed at her adorable rationalization. It must have been the wine that made her boldly admit that she was “sort of” threatening me.

I looked her over and thought about what she said. Mila was nothing like Rosalie. She was bold, courageous, and sharp. It was a challenge just to have a conversation with her.

That first night I’d met her, I shouldn’t have mistaken her for Rosalie. I might have been drunk but I could still remember thinking how forward and responsive this “Rosalie” was to my touch and her own desires. That should have been enough to convince me she wasn’t Rosalie.

And once again, I was shocked by their differences when from certain angles, they looked so much alike.

“If I agree to this, what’s in it for me?” I asked.

“Oh, I’ve got a few ideas,” Mila said. Her eyes closed halfway and she gave me a seductive, smoldering look.

Heat shot straight into my groin and I sipped my wine quickly. Was that because I was thinking about Rosalie and the first night I’d encountered Mila? I did remember that night fondly, even if she couldn’t.

“I don’t make deals without knowing the return. So, how are you going to repay me? Keep in mind, I’ve already saved your life twice.” I added.

“I repaid you for helping me through the Trial of Black Fire,” she pointed out, smiling a little clumsily.

“Ahh, that’s right. You did. So, what is a fair price for the second life saving and helping you against your foes?” I asked.

Mila didn’t know it, but I was still carrying that ring around in my pocket. I thought it might come in handy if I needed help tracking her down once coming to Miltern. So far, I hadn’t needed to resort to using it.

Sighing, Mila leaned a little closer to me. She licked her lips slowly and caught my gaze with her hooded, sultry eyes. Deliberately, she bit her lower lip and I couldn’t look away.

I was captivated by her stare and the way she knew exactly what expressions and gestures to make to keep me hooked.

My skin warmed and my pants tightened in response to her antics.

She sniffed as she leaned closer and her mouth slackened as she panted slightly.

I smirked, still staring deeply at her.

In the dim light, the shadows on her face enhanced the brightness of her eyes and the glossiness of her lips.

She rested a hand on the couch cushion and leaned in closer, her warm, sweet breath mingling with mine.

“How about, I trade my body for your help,” she suggested.

I raised my eyebrows. Again, her boldness was unexpected. I kept thinking of her like Rosalie and she would never be so forward. But Mila was, and I couldn't deny being intrigued by it.

Her sweet, amber scent tingled in my nose and I swallowed the saliva that built up in my mouth.

When she licked her lips again, slowly, my eyes latched onto her tongue.

Her rosy cheeks made her look so adorable, which contrasted pleasantly with her beauty.

I clenched my fists, my pants getting even tighter. It was impossible to hide my erection and she knew exactly what she was doing to me.

Growling, I scooped Mila into my arms and carried her to the bed.

She gasped and wrapped her arm around my neck. Her skin was warm and smooth against mine, her body soft. She pressed against me, open and willing.

The mood was right and if she was going to offer herself, after getting me so worked up, I wasn't going to refuse.

As soon as I laid her down, Mila pulled at the hem of my shirt. She was clumsy and the shirt caught on my chin as she pulled it off.

“Slow down,” I said, chuckling.

She frowned at me. “I just want to make good on my offer,” she said. She slid her hand between my legs and rubbed the inside of my thigh.

I smirked. “First time, my little virgin?” I asked her.

She laughed nervously and suddenly looked very sheepish.

Of course, I knew it wasn't her first time. She'd come to me, poisoned and drugged, and begged me to take her. But she couldn't remember that, so she was just as inexperienced as if this was her first time.

Sighing, I took her wrist and pulled her hand away. I'd be enjoying her body, but I wasn't going to leave her wanting.

Mila creased her brow as I grabbed her other wrist. I held them firmly and knelt on the bed, forcing her to lie back. Kneeling between her legs, I pinned her arms to the mattress.

“Allow me,” I said.

Mila swallowed hard and nodded.

Leaning in, I kissed her lips. She responded immediately, kissing me back.

Releasing her wrists, I cupped her breasts over the sundress and gently massaged them. I moved my mouth to her neck, kissing and sucking on her skin.

Mila panted and tangled her hands in my hair. She writhed around beneath me.

Chuckling, I ran my hands down her sides. Slowly, I pulled her dress up, revealing the full expanse of her legs. I caressed her thighs. Her warm skin trembled under my touch.

Mila gasped as I caressed her hips and her stomach. I moved my hands up her body, lifting her dress until I could push it over her head completely.

Immediately, she crossed her arms over her chest, covering herself.

“Uh-uh. None of that,” I said huskily. I grabbed her wrists again and held her arms to the side.

My eyes roamed over her body, drinking in the globes of her breasts, her flat stomach, and the lines of her hips.

A shiver ran through her and I licked my lips. I felt like I hadn't had a drink in weeks and she was a cool splash of water.

I looked into her eyes and she blushed. The crimson color spread from her cheeks down her neck and covered her chest.

“You have nothing to be shy about,” I assured her.

Still holding her wrists, I bent my head and stuck out my tongue. I pushed against her pink n\*\*\*\*e with the tip of my tongue and she gasped. Her back arched slightly.

My grip tightened on her wrists and I closed my mouth around her n\*\*\*\*e. I sucked on her puckered flesh and rolled my tongue around it.

Mila moaned and my c\*\*k ached for release.

I suppressed my own desires for the moment, focusing on her. I wanted to make up for the last time, even if she didn't remember it.

I moved my mouth to her other breast, repeated the sucking action on her n\*\*\*\*e until they were both tightened into little buds.

Again, I let go of her wrists and I brushed my fingers up and down her sides. She shuddered and squirmed, panting in pleasure.

I could smell the sweet scent of her arousal. I moved my hands to her hips and squeezed, slowly coaxing her legs apart to release her scent into the room.

I kissed between Mila's breasts and then lower against her stomach. I placed another kiss on her navel, then at the apex of her hip.

Mila lifted her hips off the bed, gasping and panting as I mirrored the kiss on her right side. I wanted to shower her with appreciation. And, more surprisingly, I realized that I wanted to keep her all to myself and protect her from the world.

Kissing her navel again, I slipped my tongue into her belly button and swirled it in a slow circle.

Mila moaned loudly and twisted beneath me.

My erection twinged, desperate to feel her clenching around me. I groaned, running my hands up her sides and my tongue up the center line of her torso.

Her eyes were half closed and she looked drunk on pleasure.

I cupped her breasts again, massing and kneading them generously as I kissed her lips. I pushed my tongue into her mouth and she met it with hers.

Sighing, I pulled back.

“Close your eyes,” I whispered.

#### [Chapter 674](#)

\*Mila\*

I hesitated for a moment but then I closed my eyes. Already, my body was on fire in all the best ways. The space between my legs was damp and slick and hot and I had an uncontrollable desire for Soren to touch me there.

As soon as my eyes were closed, Soren’s lips pressed to my eyelids, lightly, one at a time.

I gasped and a shudder ran through me.

His mouth moved to my neck and he sucked and nipped at my skin, sending shocks of pleasure through me. I clenched my legs, panting with each new sensation.

Soren’s fingers closed around my sensitive n\*\*\*\*\*s and he pinched lightly.

I moaned and threw an arm over my eyes.

He pulled on the rosy buds and I arched my back at the sweet, stretching pleasure.

His hands were on my sides again, fingers caressing me in light, quick strokes.

I writhed around, pressure in my abdomen building uncontrollably. When I told him I’d give him my body, I had no idea I would enjoy it so much too!

Soren’s hands grabbed under my legs and he pulled my legs apart. I felt his knees press against the inside of my thighs, keeping me spread open.

His lips moved from my neck and trailed kisses down my torso. I kept my eyes closed and each touch lasted a lifetime and each sensation was prolonged.

His lips touched my belly button and I gasped, jerking at the feeling. Then they moved lower.

I felt his hair brush the inside of my thighs and my legs trembled. I had never been this exposed in front of anyone before.

My heart hammered and my mind raced. My stomach twisted nervously, but I'd come too far to turn back now. And as much as I didn't want to admit it to myself, I wanted to know what came next.

Soren's tongue darted out and caressed the outside of my p\*\*\*y. I shivered and gasped and my legs shook.

Heat poured from inside of me as his tongue dove between my folds, stroking every inch of my womanhood.

I arched my back and moaned. Instinctively, I put a hand on the back of his head.

He dug deeper with his tongue, slipping it into my slick entrance. He licked up and down the narrow slit.

I sucked in a sharp breath and lifted my hips. My swollen clit ached to be touched.

"Soren..." I moaned his name without even thinking.

He grunted, apparently liking that, and he seemed to anticipate my desire and his tongue moved higher. When it brushed against my clit, my legs shook and I cried out.

I heard Soren chuckle lightly. Then, he swirled his tongue around my sensitive nub with slow, slippery strokes.

Panting, I bent my legs at the knee. They clenched around his head. I couldn't stop writhing around as ecstasy coursed through me.

The pressure from before built faster and faster and I moved my hips to increase the pleasant friction of his tongue as it rolled over my clit.

And suddenly...

The floodgates opened and I moaned loudly, my legs clamping around Soren's head. My entire body jerked and spasmed as uncontrollable waves of pleasure coursed through me.

Even with my eyes closed, I saw stars swirling. I breathed heavily not knowing what had come over me.

Gentle fingers pulled my arm from my eyes and I blinked them open. Soren was laying beside me, propped up on one arm. He had removed his clothes at some point.

Suddenly, I was nervous again. Clearly, he knew what he was doing and I... didn't.

There was a soft, tender look in his eyes, like he didn't mind taking the lead.

I turned on my side to face him and mirrored his posture.

Soren guided my hand to his groin and he closed my fingers around his firm, pulsing c\*\*k.

My eyes widened and I gasped. I didn't expect him to feel so warm and soft. I glanced at Soren's face, unsure of what to do next.

He smirked. "Like this."

He closed his hand around mine and moved my fingers up and down his shaft.

I licked my lips nervously and followed his instructions. He nodded and released my hand. I continued to stroke his c\*\*k with light, loose fingers.

For some reason, I tightened my fingers around his length, squeezing a little more as I stroked.

Soren breathed out heavily and tilted his head back. He closed his eyes. I could tell he liked what I was doing.

Getting a little bolder, I brought my fingers around his swollen, mushroom head, gently stroking and pressing against his heated skin.

Soren gasped and I saw his lips twitch. He really seemed to like that.

Just as I was getting comfortable, Soren grabbed my hips and pulled me on top of him. I straddled his waist, clenching my legs around his hips.

He put a hand on the back of my neck and pulled me to him, kissing me hard on the mouth. I sighed into his kiss as his hands ran up and down my back. He curved them around my butt, squeezing hard, then trailed them up my spine.

I shivered and ground my hips against his hard, throbbing c\*\*k.

Soren grunted against my lips and rolled his hips against mine.

My p\*\*\*y quivered with desire.

He put his hands on the back of my head and broke our kiss.

“Tell me you want me,” he said huskily.

“Um... I want you,” I said, confused by what he meant.

He smirked and shook his head. “Like you mean it.”

I bit my lower lip and Soren kissed my neck. He ran his hands down my sides and I gasped.

“I want you,” I panted.

Soren groaned and ground my hips against his. My stomach fluttered and my swollen clit throbbed again.

Soren grabbed my hips and rolled over so he was on top of me. I hooked my hands on the back of his neck.

He positioned the tip of his c\*\*k at my soaked entrance. I clenched my teeth as he pushed inside of me.

I tilted my head back, bracing against the pain and discomfort. My body felt like it was splitting in two.

Soren moved slowly and the pain melted quickly. I tightened my arms around his neck and realized I wanted him to go deeper.

His c\*\*k stroked my inside walls and I trembled. Soren kissed my neck and then my lips. He breathed heavily as he thrust inside of me.

I moved my hands down Soren's back and I felt the rough, coarse scars that marred his skin. He had such a rough exterior, but his muscles and body were perfectly built. I felt his muscles bulge in my palms.

Soren thrust into me faster and I rolled my hips to meet his thrusts. He groaned and pressed his forehead into the crook of my neck.

My entire body shook again and I clung to him tighter, panting and moaning with each thrust. A thundering release coursed through me and wave after wave of pleasure crashed down.

Soren's breath got heavier and more ragged. His hands tightened on my hips, almost to the point of pain, and his c\*\*k quivered inside of me. His movements changed, slowed, and then he just wrapped his arms around me.

After a moment, Soren rolled off of me and lay on his back. I turned toward him and pressed my body against his side. Biting my lower lip, I put my forefinger to his chest and started drawing lightly on his skin.

He had scars on his chest too, but I thought they made him more attractive.

"That tickles," he said, wincing at my touch.

I giggled but I didn't stop.

Soren opened one eye and glanced at me. "Are you unsatisfied, because if you keep doing that..."

I glanced down and saw his c\*\*k jerk a little. Smirking, I moved between his legs. I put my hands on his knees and slowly massaged his leg muscles.

"And how about this?" I asked, teasing.

Soren groaned and nodded. "That will do it."

I leaned down and kissed the inside of his thigh. Soren grunted and bucked his hips, his c\*\*k rising back to life. Licking my lips, I closed my mouth around the stiff, pulsing organ, just like he'd done for me.

Soren moaned and rested a hand lightly on the back of my head. I slurped around his erection and moved my mouth down his entire length. I curled my fingers around the base of his shaft and squeezed lightly, then stroked him with my fingers in time with my lips.

He really liked that! Soren gasped and bucked his hips.

My confidence grew, the more he responded to my touch.

Just as I got a rhythm down, Soren grabbed me again and flipped me on my back. He practically pounced on me and kissed me fervently as he found his way inside again.

Again and again, he claimed my body, sending me over the edge with pleasure and ecstasy.

Finally, I was too exhausted to keep my eyes open.



I rested my head on Soren's chest and he looped his arm around me. I kept panting heavily and his chest rose and fell with big, dramatic breaths. I'd never felt so drained and so fully satisfied before.

My mind relaxed into oblivion and sleep came over me quickly.

Just as I was about to drift off, I felt Soren kiss the top of my head.

"Whatever you want, I'll help you get it," he whispered.

\*\*\*

When I opened my eyes, I instinctively reached across the bed. The other side was cold and empty.

Sighing, I sat up. The sheet fell away from my naked body and for a moment, I didn't know where I was!

Then, I saw Soren sitting on a couch across the room. He had a book open in his lap, a deep look of concentration on his face. He was shirtless, wearing only sweatpants.

I bit my lower lip and looked him over. His sleek, strong body was accented by the lazy sunlight that came through the window. He was a perfect specimen.

He turned the page of the book, his movements so fluid and graceful. I found it strange that someone as rough and ragged as him could be so poised. The way he focused on the book, how he was so stoic and strong, it made me feel safe.

Peace settled over me and I wrapped the sheet around my torso. I felt like he was reliable, like he would always be there to protect me.

Soren's eyes flicked to mine. He looked away and then back quickly, a small smile tugging at his lips. His eyes held mine in a deep look and my stomach squirmed. I couldn't figure out what that look meant.

"Awake?" he questioned casually.

It was too casual, like last night meant nothing to him or wasn't a big deal. My heart sank and I looked down. It shouldn't have been a big deal, it was supposed to be a means to an end.

So why did I feel this way?

I took a deep breath and looked around for my dress. It was in a heap on the floor. Keeping the sheet secured around me, I slipped out of bed and put my dress on.

"We have a deal now, right?" I questioned tartly.

Soren didn't answer. I looked over at him again. His eyes were on me, dancing over my skin and appreciating the way I looked in the dress. I could see the lingering lust in his gaze.

"Soren, we have a deal, right?" I asked, crossing my arms.

"Yes." Soren nodded.

My heart felt lighter, like a huge weight was lifted. Soren would protect me, I'd gotten what I came here for.

Suddenly, my stomach twisted uncomfortably and I frowned. I turned away from Soren so he wouldn't see my expression.

I'd refused the Norwind alpha and gone through the Trial of Black Fire so I wouldn't have to do things like this. Yet, it had still come back to me using my body and my looks in exchange for what I wanted.

Sighing, I rolled my shoulders back and erased my frown. I turned back to Soren, ready to say goodbye and go back to my room.

Soren stood up, his face was easy and casual but his eyes were hard and demanding.

"I want to know what is in that box," he said in a tone that would not tolerate disobedience.

### [Chapter 675](#)

I stared at Soren for a long moment, frozen in place.

Scoffing, I threw my head back. Of course, last night was just a means to an end for him. He would use it to his advantage now and find out what was in the box.

I'd made the deal that he would protect me but now that we'd sealed it, he could use whatever leverage he wanted. He could tell me that if I didn't show him what was in the box, he wouldn't help me.

Just because I'd given him my body didn't mean he had to respect that or honor it. With how casually he was treating last night, he clearly didn't realize how big of a deal it was for me.

It was just his way of using me. He got his own physical satisfaction, like any man would want, and now he was going to satisfy his curiosity, and his own ambition if he wanted what was in the box.

Every time he tried to hide his intentions, I saw the truth come through.

He was no different than any other man.

Had last night been a joke?

Soren probably saw me as nothing more than one of "those women" he'd referenced who showed up at his door in the middle of the night.

And maybe I was no better...

I glared at the floor and looped my arms around my waist. I'd been the one to offer my body as payment. But I had truly wanted there to be an alliance between us, a real one.

Soren seemed to have other plans.

My jaw tensed and I kept glaring at a knot in the hardwood floor. If I had any sense at all, I'd run from Soren now and leave him with the bitter memory of the night we spent together without ever fulfilling his true desire, to look into the box!

Sighing, I relaxed my arms and opened my eyes fully. Perhaps, there was another way to salvage this situation.

Last night was full repayment for the times he'd saved my life. From now on, whatever happened between us could be purely business.

"Have you already looked in the box?" Soren asked, pulling me from my thoughts.

Thinking fast, I nodded. It was a lie, but I needed to keep the upper hand in this situation.

"I did look," I said, offering no further detail.

Soren arched an eyebrow at me and I smiled coyly.

As it was, I was still weak from the poison. My wolf hadn't awoken yet, and wouldn't for a few more years. There were bounty hunters closing in from all sides. I had no choice but to work with Soren and use him to my advantage.

If I had to put myself in this position where I had to manipulate and use Soren, I might as well establish myself as the shrewdest one. Otherwise, I might lose sight of Soren's intentions.

Since it seemed as if he planned on using me, then I would use him right back. We could use each other until one of us came out on top. One of us would eventually outsmart the other. I'd have to play this game very carefully in order to be the victor.

And if he was going to use me for his own purposes, I could put him in harm's way without feeling guilty. That made this entire deal easier.

"Did it answer all your questions," he pressed. He remained calm and composed. His eyes were still gentle as he regarded me.

Whether he was feeling any tenderness at all from the night before or he was trying to make me let my guard down, it didn't matter. I wouldn't fall into his traps.

"It did. But you don't even know what my questions are, so seeing it won't give you any more insight into me," I insisted, pointing to myself.

Soren chuckled and shook his head. "Don't be so sure."

I faltered for a moment but I kept my expression cool and aloof.

"A bit cocky, don't you think?" I challenged, arching an eyebrow.

Soren wasn't stupid. He was one of the smartest, most strategic shifters I'd encountered. Taking advantage of him came with risks. I knew that.

Not just because he was smart but because he was powerful and had a whole band of rogues that followed him. I hadn't seen his ruthless, cunning side, but I had no doubt that it existed.

If I crossed him and he found out what I was doing... Well, I had a feeling I'd rather turn myself over to Alpha Chandler than find out what Soren would do to me.

I bit my lower lip and gave Soren a sultry look.

He pursed his lips and set his book down. I could no longer read the emotion in his eyes.

“So, what’s in the box?” he asked.

Slowly, I licked my lips and ran my hands down my sides. My dress tightened slightly around my curves and the neckline pulled lower, revealing more of my breasts.

Smiling, I flipped my hair over my shoulder and laughed playfully. I was thinking on my feet, trying to distract him and come up with a lie at the same time.

“Inside that box is something so powerful that it could turn this world upside down, of course. Whoever gets their hands on it might even be able to... control the world, or destroy it,” I explained silkily.

Soren’s eyebrows shot up into his hairline.

I licked my lips again and pranced across the room to him, swaying my hips sexily.

His eyes fixed on me as I moved. It was hard to tell what he was thinking but I knew he wouldn’t be devouring me with his gaze if he wasn’t transfixed by me.

I stopped in front of Soren, so close that if I took a deep breath, my breasts practically brushed against his chest. Smiling coyly, I lifted my eyes to his, half-lidded under my long eyelashes.

“Just so you know,” I said in a low tone that expressed both danger and temptation. “Only I can control what’s in the box. If I die... it would be useless.”

I reached out and pressed my finger to Soren’s bare chest. His eyes widened as I trailed my finger down the centerline of his torso, between his pecs and his abdominals. Just when I got to the waistline of his pants, I hooked the tip of my finger in his waistband and then pulled back.

Soren’s eyebrow twitched and he let out a nearly inaudible grunt. I wasn’t sure if he was angry that I was playing with him or angry that I stopped.

He remained silent but I held his gaze, still giving him an innocent yet sultry smile.

His eyes looked right through me. I could practically feel his gaze wrap around my heart. It was like he saw straight into my soul and knew what I was thinking, feeling, and planning. I felt like he could peel away my lies and knew exactly what I was planning.

My lower lip quivered and my breath hitched, but I leaned a little closer, trying to play it off like it was our proximity, not his gaze, that had me trembling.

Suddenly, I wondered what Soren really thought of me. He was older and much more experienced and mature.

Was I just some child to him, playing games and pranks under the watchful eye of an adult? Did he even take me seriously at all?

I swallowed and lost my composure for a moment. Blinking, I quickly recovered and I smirked at Soren again, maintaining my confidence.

It didn’t matter what he thought of me. This was about my survival and getting my answers. I didn’t need him to think highly of me in order to get what I wanted from him.

Soren chuckled suddenly, his lips curving in a smile.

“Sounds good to me. Do we have to chat about it all day?” he asked.

I sniffed and crossed my arms. Honestly, I thought he’d pressure me more into explaining or demanding that I show him what was in the box.

He didn’t seem that eager to see it with his own eyes. The fact that he trusted what I said was baffling. I hadn’t even looked in the box and somehow, I’d convinced him I knew what was in it and how it worked...

“I thought you wanted to see it,” I said, testing his response carefully.

“Why would I need to see it if you’ve told me what it is?” he asked, c\*\*\*\*\*g his head to the side.

“Because I know you’re curious about it,” I said, quirking an eyebrow.

“Am I?” Soren asked absently. He turned to the side and shrugged casually. “I suppose I have some curiosity...”

I narrowed my eyes at him. It was hard to tell whether or not he was trying to act casual and like he didn’t care or if he actually didn’t care.

Was he trying to use reverse psychology on me?

“Alright, I admit, I do wonder what a world-dominating or destroying artifact looks like and how it is meant to be used,” Soren commented.

I smiled lightly and kept myself calm and cool.

“Well, if you want to know exactly what is in it, you’re going to have to help me,” I said.

If Soren planned to use our deal to leverage his own desires, I was going to make sure that I used what power I had to get everything I could out of him.

“I already am helping you. Wasn’t that the deal?” he asked, chuckling lightly.

“The deal was for protection. But since I have something you want, I’m going to make a small amendment to the terms,” I told him.

“Oh, is that so?” he asked, smirking.

“It is so,” I said with a firm nod.

“Pray tell, what must I help you with now? And how will you be compensating me?” he asked. His eyes dropped to the low neckline of my dress and he licked his lips.

I got the feeling he was imagining me naked!

“I told you, you’ll get to see what is in the box with your own eyes,” I reminded him.

Soren pouted slightly and then shrugged. “Very well. But it depends on what you need help with. A peek inside a box might not be enough to cover my services.”

I shuddered. Damn, he was good at this too!

I already anticipated that I might have to continue to satisfy his... needs to keep this arrangement going. My stomach fluttered at the thought and vivid flashes of his hands and mouth on my body flickered in my mind.

My breath caught as I steadied myself. There was a part of me that hoped he wanted that kind of payment because that same part of me wanted it too.

“Well, for starters, I need your help detoxifying me. I’m useless with this Black Fire poison still in my blood,” I said.

“I suppose I can help there,” Soren said casually.

“And, I need you to help me find a woman named Helen. She’s from Miltern,” I added.

“Hmm... that’s two things. You only offered me one look inside the box. Does that seem fair?” he countered.

### [Chapter 676](#)

Soren broke out in laughter, throwing his head back. He clutched his chest and shook his head.

I stared at him. What was he trying to pull? I had no idea how to respond to his sudden outburst of laughter.

Slowly, he stopped laughing and sighed. When he looked at me again, his features were composed and professional.

“I’ll help you,” he stated simply. He did not ask for additional favors and he didn’t make more s\*\*\*\*l jokes. He didn’t question me further, he just agreed to my terms.

In fact, he didn’t even ask who Helen was.

A pit formed in my stomach. What if he already knew Helen? What if he was using me to get to her?

I didn’t know who she was but I didn’t want to lead a potential threat to her.

Soren’s willingness to help without actually demanding further payment concerned me. Was I giving him everything he wanted?

What if getting his help meant that I was putting Helen and myself in a worse situation?

It was too late to second guess. I’d set myself on this path and whatever Soren’s intentions were, I needed to bide my time. This was a long, complicated game of wits and strategy between the two of us. I needed to evaluate each move and figure out what was the most beneficial thing for me to do.

Lost in thought, I didn’t notice Soren move until his arms were around me.

I gasped as my breasts pressed against his chest and our legs brushed together. His bare chest was firm and warm. I could practically feel the hot blood running through his veins as his skin pressed against my arms.

“Wha...”

I tried to wriggle free but he was too strong.

Soren grabbed my chin between his fingers and lifted my face. He stared into my eyes and smiled lightly.

“I told you, Mila, whatever you want, I’ll help you get it,” he purred.

It sounded familiar. Last night, when my mind and body had been exhausted and sated, he’d spoken those words to me. I almost thought I dreamed them.

Staring into Soren’s eyes and thinking about last night, my stomach fluttered and my heart hammered heavily in my chest, like a hammer on an anvil. I worried he’d feel my heart and I tried to step away again.

Soren shook his head and tightened his arm around my waist. “Do you remember?” he asked huskily.

I nodded slowly. “I-I remember.”

My breath rushed out of my lungs and my cheeks warmed. A blush covered my face, neck and bosom and I noticed Soren’s eyes roam over me quickly. He bounced his eyebrows as he traced my flushed skin with his eyes.

He released my chin and brushed his fingers along my neck and collarbone.

I sucked in a sharp breath. The feeling of his fingers on my heated skin reminded me of last night.

It had been my first time and he’d guided me through how to touch him and make him feel good. And he hadn’t held back when it came to making me feel good too.

My thighs clenched with renewed desire.

What was wrong with me? I wasn’t some lustful woman with loose morals and a need for carnal satisfaction.

Last night might have felt amazing, but I still considered it sinful because it had been based on gaining the advantage, not true feelings.

Shame and irritation flourished in my abdomen and I glared at Soren.

I pushed my palms against his firm chest and pulled away from him. Turning on my heel, I headed straight for the door and across the hall. I shut and locked the door so Soren wouldn’t try to follow me.

I fanned myself with my hand and then hopped in the shower. I kept the water cool to calm me and relax me. When my shower was over, I changed into something comfortable and kept most of my skin covered.

Although Soren couldn’t see me now, I just wanted to feel comfortable in my own body for a while.

I shifted the rug and opened the floorboard where I’d stashed my things. The box was still in there, undisturbed.

Retrieving the box, I set it on the bed and stared at it for a while.

It was made from dark reddish wood with brass hinges and a matching brass lock. The wood was glossy and the metal fastenings were polished. The box had been well cared for, even though it had been buried.

I hadn't done anything to clean it off but it was impossible to tell it had been covered in dirt the night before.

I ran my fingers over the top of the box. It was completely smooth.

There were no markings, no writing, or anything to tell me where the box was made, what pack it belonged to, or anything.

Even though there was a lock on the box, I couldn't feel or see the seam where the box would open.

It was a long shot, but I tried to lift the lock and see if the box was open.

Nothing happened.

Sighing, I tapped the lid. I could hear that the box was hollow inside, which meant it was intended to be opened.

I got my pack from under the floorboards and pulled out a small leather pouch with tiny metal tools in it.

Just because I didn't have a key didn't mean I couldn't get into that lock.

I sat on the bed, cradling the box between my knees, and I used my lock-picking tools. Two little metal rods in the lock, one bent, and I rolled them around each other, listening for the sound of the lock opening.

Click.

"Aha!"

I tried again to open the box but it wouldn't budge.

"Dammit..."

So apparently, I would need a key. Just picking the lock wasn't enough. It was like it had a spell or some kind of magic protecting it.

I'd heard of keys that unlocked physical locks and mystical locks. Unfortunately, my lock-picking kit only worked on physical locks. It wasn't like I had any magical powers...

Sighing, I pushed the box aside.

I had no idea what was in there. Everything I said to Soren was completely made up. I couldn't even guess what might be hidden inside.

But Helen probably knew.

I knew as much about Helen as I did about the box I was wrestling with. She was just a figment from my dreams.



Sure, she felt real, and everything she'd told me in my dreams had been real. I'd followed her instructions to Miltern, and seen the woods where I'd been in my dreams, but there was still no sign of her and no hint as to what the box was for.

Every time I thought I was making progress, I was just left with more questions.

Growling, I kicked the box further across the bed.

Why couldn't I make anything work? Why couldn't I get my questions answered? I wanted to stop living this life of running and hiding and just be myself!

Clenching my fists, I slammed them down on my pillow. It puffed up and sighed as air rushed out of the center.

Sighing, I curled up in a ball, leaning against the headboard. I hugged my legs and buried my face in my knees. Disappointment crept in like a dark shadow covering my heart and mind.

Why did my life have to be like this? Why couldn't I have been adopted by a good, loving family? Why was my fate always leading me in horrible directions?

Nothing I ever tried worked out as I expected or wanted. Was this the fate I was born into the world for?

Silently, I asked the Moon Goddess why she was punishing me. This wasn't my life! I didn't even know who I was or what I was capable of. I'd never been given the chance to find out.

And still, no matter how hard I fought or how hard I tried, I hit wall after wall. I never made any progress.

All I had to go on was Helen, a dream woman, and I didn't even know if she was real or not.

I started to wonder if maybe she wasn't real at all. Maybe I'd made her up to comfort me and to give me hope. She was a symbol of the family I'd never have, the answers I'd never find, and that's why I desperately wanted to find her.

Was it possible she didn't exist at all and there were no answers to find?

Sighing, I blinked back tears and looked up.

Across the room, the bouquet of flowers from the night before sat in a vase. They were starting to wilt slightly without the fresh air, earth, and sun they were used to. But they still had vibrant coloring.

"Why can't anyone tell me what they want from me!?" I snapped, glaring at the flowers.

Whoever had left them only brought me more riddles and secrets, which only led me to more questions.

"Why can't anyone be straightforward and honest with me!?" I cried. "Why couldn't you give me answers!"

Groaning, I rolled my eyes at myself. I had to be crazy, sitting here yelling at a bouquet of flowers. What kind of sane person did that?

I wiped the stray tears from my face and shook my head. This wouldn't do. I couldn't sit here feeling sorry for myself. I needed to act.

“Moon Goddess, guide me,” I whispered.

Suddenly, a strange voice rose up in my mind and in my heart. I opened my mouth and spoke words I’d never heard before.

“Agsha salmen gosha inhunen tala vitry donnamy.”

I uncurled my legs and rubbed my throat.

Had that really been my voice? What were those words? I’d never heard them before. They weren’t in a language I knew. They... sounded almost like a spell or incantation.

But I didn’t know magic! Did I? The words were familiar somehow, like I’d heard them in a dream. Was I just repeating something I’d dreamt once or were those words real?

All bets were off at this point.

“What was that?” I asked aloud.

The strange words rang in my mind and I felt the air in the room change. It got heavier, stiffer, and like it was turning into jello around me. My body felt stuck, like in glue. All my movements slowed down.

Gasping, each breath felt like someone was standing on my chest. It ached and I panicked, trying to breathe in more air.

Just as quickly as it had come, the sensation vanished and I could breathe again.

The hairs on the back of my neck prickled and I stiffened for a different reason.

Slowly, rigidly, I turned to the other side of the room.

My eyes widened and I gasped.

“How is that possible...?”

## [Chapter 677](#)

\*Soren\*

As Mila hurried off, I tilted my head and watched her backside as she went. I had no intention of following her but I wasn’t above enjoying the way she looked as she left.

She was so... cute. I couldn’t think of a better way to describe it. She tried to be feisty and fierce, which I admired, but instead, it was like getting nipped at by an overly zealous puppy.

I had a puppy once. We’d play together and the more rambunctious I got, the more worked up he got. He’d start yipping and nip at me with his sharp little puppy teeth.

If he did nip at me, I’d yelp, purposefully, and it would startle him. He’d shy away and get really sad. Then he’d try to lick me to make me feel better.

That’s what Mila had done last night, though her form of making me feel better went far beyond playful licks.

I smirked to myself and took a moment to reflect on last night. Based on that, she was definitely not a puppy. Though, I couldn't help but compare her to my old pet.

No... she wasn't a pet. She was adorable and feisty and right now, she was mine. Her determination, despite the helplessness to achieve her own goals, made me feel protective over her and watchful.

I knew she was lying through her teeth. I doubted anything she'd told me was real. She probably hadn't looked in the box yet and I seriously doubted it was that dangerous of an artifact that would stop working if she was dead.

It frustrated me that she thought she had to lie to me and manipulate me in order to gain my cooperation. We'd made our deal and I had already agreed to help, so why was she still playing games?

Last night... I smirked and closed my eyes, remembering how open and unguarded she was under me on the bed. She'd surrendered completely and didn't hold back.

Part of me wished she'd remain open and trusting when she woke up but I hadn't counted on it. No, she'd reverted back to her same old ways. I couldn't be mad at her for that.

First of all, I knew she was lying so I didn't feel like she was actually manipulating me to do anything I wouldn't already have done. Secondly, I knew it was how she survived. It would take a lot more than one epic night to get her to relax around me.

Sighing, I grabbed a t-shirt and threw it on. I picked up the hotel room phone and called to Payne's room one floor down.

"Payne, come to my room," I ordered.

"Be right there..." he mumbled.

When Payne arrived he looked... deflated. His shoulders sagged and he had big, purple bags under his eyes. His hair was mussed and he was wearing the same wrinkled clothes from last night.

"Did you not sleep?" I asked arching an eyebrow.

Payne grunted, yawned slightly, and then shrugged. "I did not rest well."

"I see that," I added with a scoff.

"The woman who sent Mila the flowers yesterday vanished into the fog. I tracked her to the forest and lost her trail. I couldn't find anything else about her," Payne reported.

I creased my brow and pursed my lips. "Yeah... you told me that last night."

Payne's eyes widened and he pinched the bridge of his nose. "I... sorry... my mind is... I didn't sleep well," he stammered.

He bowed his head and sighed heavily.

"I'm sorry, Soren. I'm a little out of it," he admitted.

"Hmm."

Payne had always been trustworthy. He had no reason to lie to me or hide things from me. If he said he was over tired, then he was over tired. I couldn't remember ever seeing him this exhausted.

Perhaps I'd been working him too hard recently. I'd been relying on him a lot while I dealt with Mila. Normally, he and I would be out there together.

I held my hand up and shook my head.

"No need to apologize, it isn't a big deal. Get some rest," I ordered.

"Thank you. I am sorry..." Payne muttered. "Do you need anything from me, since you called me here?"

"I'd rather you rest first," I admitted.

"Tell me what you need and I'll get on it after I rest," he said. "Then you won't have to call me back here."

I nodded. "Alright. If you could call Dr. Lee and ask him to meet us here ASAP. I need his medical expertise."

Payne nodded in agreement. "Are you injured, or..."

"No. Mila is still weak from the Black Fire poison and I think Dr. Lee can help," I explained.

"Mila!?" Payne asked. "Didn't she leave?"

"She came back," I said with a chuckle.

"Man, I am out of it," Payne muttered. He ran a hand down his face.

If anyone could help Mila detox, it would be Dr. Lee. That was the first request she'd made of me and I wanted to see it happen soon. Who knew what that poison was doing to her?

"Anything else?" Payne asked.

"Yes. When you're feeling rested, I want you to start investigating Helen," I said. I watched Payne carefully for his reaction.

Payne shuddered and looked away from me. Quickly, he shook his head and met my eyes again. "Yes. I'll get into it."

"Thank you."

For a long moment, Payne just stood there. He probably expected more details for the investigation I was sending him on but I didn't have more details. Mila wanted to know about Helen and how to find her.

That was about all I knew about the situation as well.

"Get some sleep before you do any of those things," I instructed, nodding to the door.

Payne slowly turned to leave. He shuffled to the door and pulled it open.

On the floor outside I saw a stray petal from the bouquet Mila had received.

“Payne, wait a moment,” I blurted.

If I wanted to gain Mila’s trust, I’d have to show her that what had happened between us was meaningful. The petal gave me an idea.

“Yeah, boss, what is it?” Payne asked, perking up slightly.

“Do you know of any flower shops in town? You did a pretty thorough investigation of the town, are there any florists in business?” I asked.

Payne creased his brow for a moment. “I’m not sure that woman would leave an obvious trail like that.”

Of course, he assumed that I was referring to the mysterious woman who left the bouquet for Mila. It was a good thought, tracking her down from where she bought the flowers, but not what I was thinking of.

“Those flowers weren’t from around here. The woman had to have purchased them from somewhere else. Besides, with the foggy climate here... I don’t think there are a lot of flowers blooming these days. Even if someone was selling flowers, they wouldn’t be the type anyone would want to buy,” he concluded.

I nodded and bowed my head. “All right then. Go get some rest now. And I mean that.”

Payne agreed and closed the door behind him.

Tapping my lips, I paced back and forth. What would a woman Mila’s age like?

There were the obvious options like flowers, jewelry, and chocolates of some kind. That seemed a little... like I was trying too hard.

She’d probably see gifts like those as a bribe or some other way to gain her affection so I could use her. That’s how she viewed all kind gestures.

I’d have to come up with a gift idea that was personal and meaningful and that would help her realize I wasn’t just trying to use her for my own gain.

Flowers were out of the question, anyway, given what Payne said. Besides, some mystery woman had already left her flowers. I wanted to find something more original than that.

I could replace the ring she gave me... or...

I still had the ring. Striding over to the bedside table, I opened the drawer and looked at the ring. Should I give it back to her? Would she see that as a kind gesture?

It wasn’t just her ring, though. This same ring had been on Helen’s finger on a “wanted” poster.

Payne made it sound like she was a seer or a mystic. If she was, why would she be on a wanted list? Seers were rare. They were rare in the Realm of Light and in the Realm of Shadows. Most of them were seen as special and their talents honored.

What could Helen have done to get herself on a wanted list over a decade ago?

Seers were treated as guests, practically as royalty, especially by alphas. Why had this realm condemned her as a criminal?

I'd heard stories of seers and mystics doing some awful things with their powers. Had Helen been one of them? If so, would helping Mila track her down be beneficial? What if she wanted to hurt Mila too?

Well, I'd have to protect her if it came to that.

I stared at the ring in my drawer.

Based on what Payne said, Helen was connected to his pack. His father had explicitly told him that she was dangerous and he wanted to know if Helen was ever sighted or found.

And if Mila was looking for her, somehow, Mila had gotten it into her head that Helen was going to help her.

So, Helen was connected to both Mila and Payne. And the two of them were connected to me.

Who on earth was Helen?

And the ones that were after Mila, Alpha Chandler and Norwind, did they know about Helen too? Was she part of the bigger threat coming after Mila?

Or were they after Mila because of her connection to Helen?

Was Helen working with them or was she their real target?

I had to determine if Helen was a friend or a foe, and with what I knew, I wasn't willing to gamble in either direction.

Sighing, I stroked my chin and closed the drawer. Now, I wanted to find Helen. It was possible she could tie everything together. She was the missing piece that could answer all the questions.

I worried about Payne. The prospect of investigating her and tracking her down seemed to unnerve him. I'd need him focused and at the top of his game in order to track her down.

My thoughts raced. No matter how hard I tried to prevent it, almost every thought and question circled back around to Mila. Had she really become that big of a priority to me?

Yes, she had, because I wasn't going to let her life go to waste after I'd saved her multiple times... but was there something more?

BANG!

My entire room shook and I stumbled slightly. The sound came from across the hall.

"Oh s\*\*t! Mila!" I cursed and rushed across the hall, practically ripping the door off its hinges.

### [Chapter 678](#)

Mila's door cracked as I pulled the lock right off in my haste to open it.

She was sitting on the floor, staring off into space, completely still like a statue.

A chair was flipped over and glass was shattered all over the table and floor. Water dripped off the edges of the table. Some of the drops hit her legs and she didn't even react.

What the hell had happened?

Quickly, I assessed Mila. She didn't appear to be injured. I couldn't smell blood and none of her bones were broken. She just sat there, staring off into space, perfectly still.

Was she in shock?

I swooped down and grabbed her shoulders.

"Mila, are you okay, what happened?" I asked.

She didn't move or react. Her eyes stayed distant and I noticed how pale she was. I shook her a little harder.

"Mila!"

Her head wobbled back and forth but she still didn't say anything or move. I couldn't even tell if she was breathing.

She was completely in shock, her hands balled into fists in her lap.

I raised a hand and gently patted her cheek.

"Mila, what happened?"

She blinked and her eyes snapped to me like she was seeing me for the first time. There was no expression there. She was blank, in shock.

"Soren?" she asked.

"Yes. It's me. Are you okay, what happened here?" I asked. I nodded toward the mess on the table and the chair.

Slowly, Mila lifted her hands. She turned them up and uncurled her fingers. In her right palm, she had a fistful of ash. It wasn't light and feathery like ashes pulled from a fire pit. They were densely packed together.

Maybe that was because she'd held them so tightly in her hand but I'd never seen ashes like that.

"What is it?" I asked.

Mila blinked at me. She glanced at her hand and then pulled away. Quickly she jumped to her feet and tossed the ashes on the floor. She clapped her hands together and wiped away the residue.

"It's nothing," she said, backing away from me more.

The ashes were collected in a small pile on the ground. It was unusual behavior for ashes. They might float away or scatter but not drop into a pile like grains of sand.

"Mila..."

"I said it was nothing," she insisted.

When I glanced at her again she still looked dazed and confused. But she'd recovered from her shock enough to lie to me again.

I looked over the table and realized the shattered glass was from the vase she'd put the flowers in. Water on the table had come from the vase. The only thing missing was the flowers.

I looked at the little lump of ash again. The flowers were burned to ash and the vase had been smashed or maybe exploded based on how scattered the shards were.

"What did you do?" I demanded, pointing to the ashes.

"Hmph."

Mila crossed her arms and turned on her heel. She disappeared into the bathroom and returned with a towel. Quickly, she righted the toppled chair and then started wiping up the water and collecting the shards of glass.

I noticed how she carefully stepped around the ashes, like she was afraid to touch them again.

She knew exactly what had happened.

I stood by and waited for her to respond, to say something. She kept cleaning up the mess as if I wasn't even there.

Suddenly, she hissed.

"What is it?" I asked, moving to her side.

Mila had dropped the towel on the table. She had her palms pressed together and I saw blood mixed in with what was left of the water. Crimson dripped to the floor, thinned out from the water.

Small rivulets of blood ran down her palm and wrist and her face got even paler. She gritted her teeth and I could tell she was still in a fair amount of pain.

"Let me see," I said, holding out my hand.

Mila shook her head. "I can take care of myself."

Ignoring her refusal, I grabbed her wrists and pulled her hands apart. There was a long gash across her palm and I could see a sliver of glass deeply embedded in the cut.

I sighed. "We've gotta get that glass out or the bleeding won't stop."

Gently, I tugged Mila into the bathroom. I found a first aid kit in the medicine cabinet and tapped the sink vanity.

"Sit up here," I ordered.

Mila arched an eyebrow at me but she didn't resist my request. She hopped up on the sink vanity and held her hand out to me.

I dug a pair of tweezers out of the first aid kit. "This is going to hurt."



"I can handle it," she assured.

I had to get closer to Mila. Sliding between her legs, I was surprised when she tightened them briefly around my hips, but I kept my eyes down.

She didn't seem aware she'd done it and just stared at the bloody gash on her hand.

I cupped her hand in mine and held it to the light. The sliver of glass glinted and I probed her wound with the tweezers.

Mila hissed and her body tensed.

"Hold on, I've almost got it," I said. I could feel the glass with the tweezers but it was slippery from her blood and I couldn't get a good grip.

She clamped her eyes shut and sucked in a sharp breath.

"Got it!" I pulled the glass out and Mila let out a long, low sigh of relief.

"Thanks," she murmured.

"Press this to the wound," I said, putting a piece of cotton in her hand. She held it in place while I prepared a bandage and an antiseptic wipe.

When I glanced at her face, she was looking at me. There was still something distant in her eyes but she smiled lightly.

"Maybe, sometimes it is alright to have someone looking out for me," she said, smiling lightly.

I smirked and held her gaze as I took the cotton away and cleaned her wound.

She winced and bit her lower lip.

"You're tough. You can handle a little cut in your hand," I told her. I put the bandage on and patted her hand gently.

As I pulled away, Mila grabbed my hand, sandwiching it between her hands. She ran her thumb over my knuckles.

"Still, I don't mind this right now," she said, her cheeks flushing slightly.

I shook my head. She was being too nice, too seductive. I knew that meant she was working her manipulations on me.

"Well, I'm here whenever you need a little extra care," I said with a playful scoff.

Her blush deepened and she flitted her eyes to the side for a moment. Then she looked at me again.

"Thank you for coming to check on me," she said in a soft, sultry tone.

I reached up with my free hand and touched her cheek. "I told you I'd protect you."

She swallowed hard and nodded. Her breast rose and fell just inches from me. She looked so innocent and vulnerable sitting on the sink vanity.

If I leaned in an inch, I could kiss her. I could grab her hips and take her right there. The look in her eyes told me she'd let me.

But I was more interested in what had happened to her flowers.

Every other question she'd brushed off, I had let it go because I knew it was the only way to get her to cooperate. This time, I couldn't. The situation was too strange and if Mila was hiding something that big... I had a few theories to go off of but nothing I'd accuse her of without more information.

"I know the flowers burned to ashes," I said, breaking the heated tension between us. "Normal fire doesn't burn plants like that. And if you had just lit a fire, you wouldn't be acting like this."

Mila turned her head from me. She released my hand and slid off the sink vanity. Without responding, she walked into the other room and got back to cleaning up her mess.

"Mila..." I followed after her.

I'd seen my fair share of odd occurrences, magic, and strange artifacts. Based on what I'd seen, there was only one possibility that made sense.

"You just used a spell, didn't you? You're the descendent of witches," I said.

Mila rounded on me, wide-eyed. She put her hands on her hips and glared.

The revelation was surprising, even to me. It had been one of my theories, but I hadn't intended to throw it out there until I knew more.

Was it intuition that told me I was making the right guess?

Among shifters, across many dimensions, there were some that were blessed by the Moon Goddess and given special powers. Supposedly, they served the Moon Goddess as her maidens, because they were usually women, so the Moon Goddess gifted them with powers, and those powers passed on to their descendants.

Over the centuries, witches became fewer and fewer in number. Their powers also weakened.

No one knew why. It could have been because the Moon Goddess revoked the blessing or because their bloodlines were watered down.

Eventually, they became so few and their powers less legendary, so most just passed as regular shifters.

All the stories of them were considered legends or folktales now. It was hard to tell what was true and what wasn't. I didn't even know what was true or not and I'd spent a lot of time researching it.

I looked away from Mila and studied the scene in her room again.

Ever since I'd learned about Rosalie's true identity, I had realized that many legends were based in truth. Stories came from somewhere, didn't they? I spent a lot of time digging into legends and stories.

Whenever I went somewhere new, I dove into the local legends, especially ones about magic, so I could understand the cultures better and look for traces of magic based on the history of a place.

I'd been looking into magic legends before coming to the Realm of Shadows. Since being here, I'd done my research.

What I found hadn't made complete sense. About fourteen or fifteen years ago, a few years before I arrived in the Realm of Shadow, the already rare descendants of witches practically vanished.

From what I understood, no one knew if they existed anymore or not.

If Mila was a witch descendant, it was proof enough.

I'd never been to a realm before where a large group of mystics, in this case, witch descendants, vanished in one large group at a specific time. That detail had always stuck out to me.

There wasn't a lot of documentation about witches in this realm anymore and I hadn't had a reason to dig deeper.

Until now...

"Mila, you're descended from witches, aren't you?" I asked again when she continued to stare at me.

"No!" she cried vehemently. "I am not!"

## [Chapter 679](#)

\*Mila\*

Soren's accusation rang in my head like a gong.

He took a few steps toward me, arms outstretched like he was going to hug me.

"No!" I snapped. I pushed him away and ran around the bed so he couldn't get close to me again.

My mind raced with thoughts and images from my childhood. I grabbed the sides of my head and shook my head slowly.

"No. I'm not a witch, okay? I'm not," I insisted, my voice calmer but no less insistent.

It was crazy for him to think that. Magic wasn't part of my life. I mean... sometimes things just happened, but that wasn't magic. It was just... divine intervention.

"I'm not a witch. I can't be a witch," I repeated to myself over and over again.

"Mila..."

Soren's voice was soft and low.

I snapped my eyes to him and glared at him. I didn't want him to come any closer to me.

So many memories surfaced, memories that I could hardly imagine. Were they repressed memories? Had I blocked them out?

One memory surfaced over all the others.

Before I'd left the Saboreef pack, I had found a rat in a rat trap. I hated when my foster mother set those!

Thinking the rat might still be alive, I took it out of the trap. It was dead. Or... I thought it was. I cried because the rats weren't bad. They always ate the tainted and rotten food, which meant our rations were better.

While I cried over the rat, I remembered praying to the Moon Goddess that its soul be honored and find peace. When I touched his little body, the rat jumped up, squeaked, and sat up, cleaning its whiskers.

But it had been dead!

Had I resurrected the rat with some unknown power?

At the time, I just thought I'd made a mistake and it wasn't dead. But I had always wondered if something else had happened.

Could I believe my own memories?

I laughed bitterly and shook my head.

"I can't be a witch. It isn't possible," I insisted in a soft murmur.

Lost in thought, I hadn't noticed Soren come around the bed. He reached for me and at his touch, I fell into his arms. He cradled me against his chest and my heart fluttered.

Pain and fear gripped my chest and my stomach. It coiled in me like a poisonous snake.

What did it mean if I couldn't trust my own memory?

"It's okay, Mila," Soren cooed. He ran his fingers through my hair and pressed a warm, soft kiss on my temple.

I sighed and leaned against him.

"Don't listen to me. I know you're not a witch," he said in a gentle murmur.

My mind settled slightly and I closed my eyes. I clung to his shirt like it was my only lifeline and I breathed in his delicious scent. The scent of cedar and amber in the rain. Every muscle in my body relaxed, except for my fingers as I held onto him.

"What... what if..."

"What if...? Mila, what are you thinking?" Soren asked kindly. He kissed my temple again.

The reoccurring dream I had about Helen surfaced again. She'd used a spell in my dream. I didn't know the words but I knew it was magic.

How did I know that?

I didn't know anything about magic! Did I?

If Helen was appearing to me in dreams and whispering incantations, did that mean she was a witch?

"Helen, is she a witch?" I asked, breathing heavily.

"I don't know," Soren admitted.

I'd never told anyone about those dreams before. I never had anyone to tell and I'd always thought it was just a fantasy of my own creation.

I knew the dreams were real now.

"She came to me in dreams, ever since I was a girl," I blurted out. "And she used a spell on me. She... she asked me to come find her. If she can get in my dreams, she could be a witch."

"She didn't use a spell on you, Mila. It was just a dream," Soren said soothingly.

I nodded against him.

"But... she led me here through dreams," I argued.

"I don't believe that. You're here because some hidden knowledge inside of you brought you here," he told me.

I wanted to believe him, but I couldn't. "If she is a witch... does that mean... I am?"

I could barely say the words and as soon as they were out of my mouth I shivered and trembled.

Soren tightened his arms around me and squeezed me against him. I felt his heartbeat against my cheek and I wanted to stay protected in his arms forever. It was the only safe place for me in the entire world.

No matter where I went, he was the only one that ever saved me.

"Mila, I'm sorry I said that. You would know better than me if you're a witch," he said. He rubbed my back gently.

"I don't know... I..."

There were other memories pressing at the back of my mind. I didn't want to remember them but I did at the same time. I felt like I had to know the truth.

"What do you mean?" Soren asked.

"What do I mean?" I repeated his question.

I felt like a fog lifted from my mind and all these memories from my childhood flooded in. Details I'd pushed so far down that I hadn't thought of them in years.

Groaning, I buried my face in Soren's chest and I shook my head. Tears sprang to my eyes but I refused to let them fall.

"Mila, talk to me," Soren coaxed.

I shook my head again. "No," I whispered.

"Why?" he asked.

I kept shaking my head, kept my face buried in his shirt. I couldn't look at him. I couldn't pull away from him.

"I... my parents I never knew them. But my foster mother, she was horrible. She always used me. And I had to get away..."

"You're not making any sense," Soren said.

"And no one ever liked me... they kicked me and spit on me. But I never did anything to them!"

"Mila!"

Soren leaned back and put his hands on my shoulders. He stared deeply into my eyes.

"You're babbling and I can't understand you. I need you to slow down and tell me what is going on in your head. Clearly, not like a child learning to talk," he said firmly.

"O-okay," I whispered.

He guided me to the chair and pushed me down. Once I was sitting, I didn't feel as shaky. I rubbed my hands on my thighs and took a deep, centering breath.

As much as I wanted Soren to wrap his arms around me again and hold me close, I needed to regain myself.

"I'm sorry. I totally lost it," I said, touching my forehead.

"It's okay, Mila. We all have our moments." He rested his hands on my knees.

"As you know, I was orphaned, and my foster mother..." I sighed and pressed my hand to my forehead. "She was nothing but a murderer and she used me to make it happen!"

I glanced at Soren. He watched me with steady eyes, completely open and receptive to what I had to say. My reservations melted completely away and I sighed, my shoulders sagging.

"My foster mother wasn't rich. I never understood why she took me in because she couldn't afford a child. But every now and then, she'd dress me up nicely, do my hair, and leave me all alone in populated areas. My instructions were simple, if anyone paid me special attention, I had to bring them home," I explained.

I twisted my hands in my lap, ringing them like I could go back in time and stop the little girl I used to be from helping her.

"Every now and then, someone would pay me special attention. They'd be concerned that I was a young girl all alone. Many of them tried to get me to go with them with promises of food and comfort. It was tempting... but instead, I always brought them to my foster mother," I said.

My throat tightened and I squinted my eyes shut.

"They were 'guests' of ours. That's what my foster mother said. They'd stay for a day or two and then disappear. They never said goodbye and my foster mother told me it was because I'd done things to upset them and I'd have to do better next time."

Soren remained quiet, listening attentively and patiently. I'd never told anyone this and my heart fluttered away. I'd never had anyone pay so much attention to me.

“It always seemed like after the guests left, suddenly, my foster mother had money. As I got older, I hoped she was just robbing them. It was worse than that... much worse. One night, I was woken up by the sounds of fighting. I crept downstairs and saw my foster mother fighting one of our ‘guests.’ He said some strange words and caused an explosion, but he was overtaken...”

Still, Soren didn’t speak, but he squeezed my knee and nodded encouragingly at me.

“I ran off before the fight ended but... I never saw that person again...”

I looked into Soren’s eyes and sighed. Reflected in his bright, shining orbs, a new memory surfaced and dragged me under. I felt like I was being tossed around in a violent storm as I watched the memory unfold.

I was curled in a ball on the floor, crying. I couldn’t even tell how old I was. Wearing a pure white dress that was stained with blood and a rusty colored substance. I hugged myself and wept.

My foster mother stood over me, a cruel, twisted smile on her lips. The gap in her teeth was like a doorway to hell. She leered at me, her eyes bright and wild.

Laughing, her entire body jiggled and she raised a knife in the air. It was made of silver, both the blade and the hilt. There were designs on the knife hilt but with tear-blurred eyes, I couldn’t see what they were.

The blade was dripping blood and that’s when I remember the rusty stains on my dress were blood, too. I wanted to shout and scream but all I could do was cry.

I wasn’t hurt. It wasn’t my blood on the knife, but the pain inside of me was so strong and so terrible I felt like my entire body would break in two.

With the knife, my foster mother had made something horrible happen. Something, I’d blocked out of my mind for years.

She stopped laughing and leaned over me. Her oversized breasts nearly spilled out of her too tight bodice. She kept smiling that cruel, twisted smile.

As she leaned closer, I smelled blood but I also smelled the stink of her body odor, sweat, and alcohol.

“Thank you, my child. This wouldn’t be possible without you,” she said, barking a laugh.

I held myself in the fetal position and rocked back and forth on the ground. This couldn’t be happening. It was a nightmare, one I couldn’t wake up from.

My foster mother laughed again.

“Yes, it is all thanks to you and your beautiful, lovely, innocent smile,” she said.

The memory faded quickly and I covered my mouth. For as long as I could remember, I hated being beautiful. I thought it meant people like Alpha Chandler would use me and take what they wanted from me.

Was it that memory with my foster mother that had caused me to hate my beauty?

When I got older, I realized she was a bounty hunter," I finished.

"You mean, she was hunting witches?" Soren clarified.

"By the time I realized what she was doing, it was too late. I just thought... She was inviting them over as dinner guests. Or maybe she was a thief and stole from them... but there was a high bounty for witches and she always had money after they disappeared," I said.

I shook my head and hugged myself. Tears sprang to my eyes and I sniffled.

"S-so, I c-can't be a w-witch. It i-is my f-fault so m-many of them w-were k-killed," I sobbed. "I-I can't b-be one wh-who... who caused th-their e-extinction. It's n-not p-possible."

My hands shook and I tried to blink my tears back but they flowed freely.

"I can't be one if I d-did all that!" I cried.

"Okay, I hear you," Soren said softly.

"You can't understand!" I snapped, brushing his hand from my leg.

"I didn't say that I understood. I said that I heard you," he clarified smoothly.

"... Okay..."

I stared at him for a long moment and Soren stared back. I kept waiting for him to say something comforting or touch me again. I expected him to tell me it wasn't my fault or that I was too young to know better. But he remained silent.

Sniffing, I wiped my tears away and still, he said nothing.

I must have been crazy to tell him about my past! Was I seriously looking for sympathy from him? Was he even capable of sympathy? Why would a man like him have any sympathy for me?

To Soren, I was just his latest plaything. A toy.

Why did I even want him to comfort me? That was ridiculous!

I lifted my chin and wiped the rest of my tears away. "I'm sorry for my useless sentiment. I'm better now. You can leave."

Soren arched an eyebrow but he didn't leave. He held my gaze intensely.

"Running away from your past and who you are won't make you feel better. You can't change the past but you can change the future," he said.

I cleared my throat. "Maybe you should follow your own advice. I know you're running from something."

"Maybe so, but I still changed my future. I'm changing mine every day. What are you doing for yours?" he asked pointedly.



I opened my mouth and quickly clamped it shut. Soren was right. I'd been running from my past and from myself. I didn't even know who I was anymore. I kept telling myself that I was running to a future of peace and happiness but had I made any progress?

No, because I still hadn't started changing my future. I was just running from my past.

Suddenly, I sat up straighter and nodded to myself.

He didn't comfort me with superficial words or shallow sentiments. He didn't give me a useless, warm touch that would only affirm my fears and self-anger.

Soren said exactly what I needed to hear. It gave me direction, hope, and snapped me out of my self-pity.

For the first time in my life, I acknowledged my witch bloodline and I didn't feel ashamed or horrified by it.

Soren's voice cut into my thoughts.

"So, Helen was one of the witches you met when you were young?" he asked.

#### [Chapter 680](#)

\*Soren\*

Mila hesitated. Her eyes darted away from me for a moment as if she was trying to think of something to say.

Most likely, she was trying to come up with something clever or evasive.

I figured that because she'd just opened up about her past, she was too emotionally conflicted to think fast. I honestly hadn't expected her to be so open with me. There was a moment when I thought she'd shut down and make an excuse about not talking to me. But she surprised me and let me in.

It was a rare moment and I was waiting for the fallout.

She sighed heavily and brought her eyes back to mine. There was something deep in her eyes, something vulnerable and trusting.

Was she finally starting to trust me?

"I don't know who Helen is. She was not one of the witches I met as a child," she said clearly and without any attempts to hide the truth.

"Then how do you know her?" I pressed.

"About three years ago she started appearing in my dreams. Always the same, but I didn't pay attention before. She kept urging me to come here, to Miltern," she said, holding her arms out.

"And you followed a dream vision?" I asked, creasing my brow.

Mila sniffed and crossed her arms. "Well, after I left Saboreef, I didn't have anywhere else to go. It seemed as good an idea as any."

"I suppose so," I agreed. "And so, you followed a dream vision, knowing it was somehow real, but didn't think you were a witch?"

Mila swallowed audibly and her tense, walled-off posture softened slightly.

"I blocked it out. Maybe I thought Helen was a witch, but I didn't think that had anything to do with me. Or... I didn't want to believe that," she admitted somberly.

"Hmm."

I paced back and forth in front of her, mulling over everything that had happened. Helen had lured Mila here in dreams, but she had thus far not shown her face or revealed her intentions.

It didn't sound like Mila had had any repeat dreams of Helen since arriving in Miltern. Had Helen communicated with her in some other way?

"Do you think it is possible that Helen is the woman who delivered those flowers to you?" I asked, motioning to where the vase stood, before Mila had blasted it apart.

Mila shook her head. "I'm not sure. I didn't even know..."

She narrowed her eyes on me. Standing up Mila puffed herself up like she was about to attack me.

"You saw the person who delivered those flowers?" she asked, pointing accusingly at me.

"Yes. But only through a keyhole. I didn't get a good look," I said, smirking.

I realized that she hadn't known I was watching her. With the cat out of the bag, there was no point in denying it. After our interaction at the temple, I had assumed she knew I'd been keeping a close watch on her.

"You've been spying on me and following me around!?" she cried, throwing her arms up in the air.

I found her attempt at intimidation adorable. Like a mouse squeaking at a cat.

"I assumed a smart girl like you would have figured that out by now," I challenged, giving her a wolfish grin.

Mila scoffed and rolled her eyes.

I thought she might start ranting and raving, given that she was still in an emotionally vulnerable state. Opening up to me hadn't been easy. She was just as likely to become defensive and angry in an attempt to push me away again.

Now that we'd come this far, I wasn't going to let her do that.

Sighing, Mila flopped back down on the couch. She pinched the bridge of her nose, apparently recovered from her emotional outburst.

I sat beside her again and put my arm around her shoulders, half expecting her to pull away or punch me again.

She didn't.

Mila rested her head on my shoulder and deflated slightly. She must have been exhausted after reliving all those memories.

But she wasn't emotionally out of control now. She was steady. Her breaths were even and she wasn't leaning on me or clinging to me for support and comfort this time.

"You didn't catch up with her, did you?" she asked in a soft whisper.

I had to strain to hear her words. They were filled with disappointment and sadness.

"Otherwise, you wouldn't be asking me if it was Helen that delivered the flowers," she clarified.

"No. Payne went after her but he lost her in the fog around the forest. Whoever she is, she knows this area well and can come and go almost invisibly," I explained.

Her ability to fill in the blanks was astounding. I knew it had to do with her upbringing. She'd been raised in a high-risk, dangerous environment. Growing up, she'd had to rely on her instincts and constantly be aware of everything around her.

I'd met others like her before and it was always the same.

With Mila, it had evolved into a keen intelligence and strong survival skills. I was impressed to see that in someone so young and with such limited experience in the world outside her dangerous upbringing.

"That's unfortunate. But you should really stop spying on me," she added a little snippily.

"I would if you stopped trying to run off," I countered.

Mila shook her head against me but didn't respond.

I couldn't deny feeling bad for her upbringing. She'd been raised in horrible circumstances. Adopted by a poor family that only intended to profit off of her and used to lure her own kind into a bounty hunter's trap before she was able to understand what she was doing.

I seriously doubted that any of the money her foster mother made from those bounties ever benefited Mila at all. She'd probably gone hungry while her foster mother ate like a queen.

That kind of manipulation on someone so young and no wonder she didn't trust anyone.

I thought about the fights she'd heard and how her foster mother blamed her for their 'guests' leaving without saying goodbye. She probably had nightmares every night about those bumps in the dark and about constantly being left alone.

Although, she'd managed to survive her adverse upbringing and I appreciated the skills and attributes she'd gained from it. If I was putting money on anything, it would be her survival and her determination to get her questions answered.

"Well, now that you've gained my compliance and my help, perhaps you'll actually come to me so I won't have to spy on you," I told her to lighten the mood.

"What's the fun in that?" Mila asked, giggling.

It was good to see her bouncing back.

“What do you want to do now? You’re taking the lead here. Tell me what we do now,” I urged.

“Why are you asking me that now?” Mila asked.

She lifted her head from my shoulder and creased her brow. I saw the confusion in her eyes.

“You can figure it out on your own,” she huffed.

“I could... but it will be a lot easier if you just tell me. It will save us both trouble.”

“I don’t see how,” she muttered.

“Well, if you tell me, then you won’t have to deal with me tracking you down and getting in your way. And I won’t have to deal with putting in the effort to track you down.”

“I want to go back to the temple,” Mila said, sighing heavily.

I looked her over. She wasn’t vulnerable anymore. That was obvious. She had reverted to her usual wary, guarded expression and posture.

My sentiment for her rough childhood faded as she put up her defensive walls again. When she hardened herself, she wouldn’t be receptive to any sentiment or comfort.

She wasn’t like most people I knew, even from my own dimension. She was strong-minded and didn’t need sympathy or pity. I was used to females that were softer, gentler, and that needed more comfort and encouragement.

Mila was strong on her own and didn’t rely on anyone for that support. I appreciated that because I’d never been good at the comforting side.

When she was willing to open up, I felt... special. Having her open up at all was rare, but for her to open up to me was something I couldn’t take for granted. My heart softened slightly and for the first time, I wished I was good at giving comfort and support because when she was vulnerable, I didn’t know what to say.

I’d seen in her eyes that she wanted comfort. Never before had I wanted to be that guy for anyone. But there was this special, strong, unique female and she cracked the defenses around my heart.

“You can leave now,” Mila said, breaking into my thoughts.

She pulled away from me slightly.

“Oh, you’re giving me permission to leave the hotel room that I pay for?” I asked, arching an eyebrow.

Mila scoffed. “Look, you saw me cry, I told you a story, and now we made a plan for what to do next. I really want to take a shower.”

Smirking, I stood up and stretched until my back popped. My shirt pulled up over my stomach.

Mila, who was at eye level with my stomach, gasped and her eyes widened.

I chuckled and pulled my shirt down.

She huffed and looked away from me.

“I’ll pick you up at ten tonight,” I told her firmly.

“Well, at least I know what time not to be here,” she scoffed.

Growling, I grabbed her chin and forced her to look into my eyes.

“You asked for my help. You’re not cutting me out anymore. If you dare leave on your own...”

Mila blinked at me. “You’ll what? Hunt me down again?” she asked snarkily.

I sniffed and shook my head. “Oh no. I’ll tell all those bounty hunters that are after you exactly where to find you.”

Her eyes widened and she sneered at me.

I could practically hear her thoughts, even though she didn’t say anything.

She couldn’t believe that I was threatening her after I promised to help her. It was obvious in those big, blue eyes of hers and the way her jaw tensed in my grasp.

I released her face and nodded.

I admired how she kept her silence at that moment. And the startled look she gave me was kind of cute. A deer in the headlights look, and I was the car barreling toward her. She realized just how trapped she was.

“I’m glad we could come to this agreement. I’ll see you at ten,” I reminded her.