

## **Kings Breeder 691**

### [Chapter 691](#)

\*Mila\*

I opened my eyes and glanced around. The first thing I saw was Payne leaning over me, a concerned look on his face.

We'd made it back from my memory.

My heart thudded in my chest as I sat up. All the pain and emotions from that memory were still fresh, like an open wound in my heart. I clasped my hands over my heart.

April sat beside me, slumped against the nearest wall. She was asleep too, or unconscious. I couldn't tell but her breathing was even and slow.

Payne dropped to his knees at my side.

"Thank the Goddess you're awake!" he said happily, relief filling his eyes.

His eyes drifted to my right and I turned to see what he was looking at.

Soren was still asleep beside me, eyes closed, heavy breaths steaming up the dimly lit cavern.

I nodded absently at Payne, but my attention was only on Soren. I thought of how he'd protected me in the dream. Not just from what was around us and the danger of getting trapped in my mind. He protected me from myself and from my own emotions.

Laying there, he looked so soft and peaceful. Nothing like the sarcastic, harsh shifter I was growing attached to. It almost seemed like I could get close to him without fearing he'd shut me down or push me away.

He was open and vulnerable.

I was still shaken from my memories and all I had to hold onto was how his arms felt around me and how he'd kept me grounded when I was ready to lose myself.

Shifting to hands and knees, I crawled to Soren's side. Slowly, I reached out and tenderly brushed some hair from his face. I cupped his cheek with one hand.

"What are you..."

Payne's voice trailed off in a surprised gasp when I leaned down and pressed my lips to Soren's.

"Mila..." he reprimanded.

I ignored him and kept kissing him.

After everything I'd seen and felt, I needed it. I needed to feel like I wasn't alone and that someone cared about me and what I'd been through.

Soren had seen it, he'd know. He was strong and powerful and I could rely on him to hold me up when I was losing it. That's what I needed right now.

Suddenly, Soren's arms came around me.

I squeaked as he rolled me onto my back. He wrapped his arms around me firmly, pinning me against him as he kissed me back.

Soren's tongue dove between my lips, expertly parting my teeth. He ran his tongue over mine and over the inside of my mouth, tasting me thoroughly.

My stomach fluttered and my thighs ached. Warmth blossomed in my core.

He kissed me back with such passion and I wrapped my arms around his neck, putting a hand on the back of his head. I returned his kiss with the same fervor, our tongues battling for dominance.

I rolled my hips against Soren, forgetting anyone else was around.

He responded with a pleased grunt and I felt the firmness of his c\*\*k press against my leg.

"Eh-hem..."

Soren and I froze.

Slowly, we pulled apart. Sheepishly, I glanced at Payne, who had cleared his throat. He stared at us completely dumbfounded, eyes ready to pop out of his head, jaw nearly on the floor.

"What happened in that dream?" he asked, gaping at us.

My cheeks burned hot and I quickly straightened my ruffled clothes.

Soren smirked at me. Quickly, he composed himself and stood up, cool and professional again. He held a hand out to me and helped me to my feet.

"Nothing out of the ordinary," Soren said smoothly.

I heard a note in his tone that told me he learned something important from my memory. He hadn't shared any great revelations with me during the experience. I wondered what it was.

"Right, then, shall we work on the problem of breaking the curse?" Payne asked, reverting to his own professionalism. "That's why we're here, isn't it?"

"Mila?" Soren asked, glancing at me.

I nodded. "Yes, that's what we are here for. I think..."

I trailed off, rubbing my hands on my thighs. That memory showed me I had magic, and very powerful magic if I was able to save that little boy when I was half his age. If I could reach the Moon Goddess with a prayer or a spell, I was certain I could break the curse.

I would need something to amplify my powers because I was rusty when it came to magic.

Absently, I brushed my fingers over the tip of the Feather of Justice tucked into my back pocket. I'd known it was powerful and important and thought I might need it to help with the curse.

Now, I was glad I'd brought it along.

I didn't think I could just perform the spell, from anywhere. The temple was a holy place. Even if it was ruined, it was still holy. The energy here was powerful and it was the central place of Miltern's history. I knew I'd have to cast the spell from a place that would affect the whole pack.

April murmured and opened her eyes. She creased her brow, almost like she was surprised we'd made it back.

"I'm so glad you're here!" she jumped up and took my hands. "Honestly, I thought... I wasn't sure I'd be able to bring you back but I knew you had to see in order to break the curse."

"Thank you for guiding us. I think I'm ready now," I said. I smiled tightly.

I thought I knew what I needed to do but I still wasn't sure it would work. This was a huge gamble but April was counting on me. All of Miltern was counting on me. I couldn't put it off anymore. The truth was, I could spend the next five years preparing and practicing and it still might not work.

There was no way to know for sure until I tried.

"April, can you take me to the temple altar? I want to try something," I said.

"Of course, follow me," April nodded.

She collected her lamp and the three of us followed her back up the winding stone steps.

April led us to the back of the ruined temple. The altar was still standing, despite being covered with debris. It was made of stone and untouched by the fire.

I ran to the altar and smiled, running my hands along the upper edge where the stone was carved intricately.

"Can we brush it off?" I asked Payne and Soren.

They nodded in unison and together, they brushed the soot away and removed some of the larger planks and beams that covered it.

"April, do you mind?" I asked, motioning to her lantern.

April smiled widely and set the lantern on the center of the altar.

It wasn't much, but it gave the altar a more sacred, magical feel to it.

Satisfied, I knelt down at the base of the altar and clasped my hands in a silent prayer.

"Moon Goddess, guide me," I whispered.

I grabbed the white, silky feather of justice from my back pocket and clasped it between my hands.

Behind me, I heard several gasps. I couldn't discern who they were from but it sounded like everyone was shocked that I had this feather.

I still didn't know what its importance was but I could feel that this feather would work for me. It was like my blood vibrated when I held it.

Closing my eyes, I bowed my head until the feather tickled my forehead.

“Moon Goddess above, please hear my prayer. Your light shall guide us and your mercy shall be praised...” I whispered the same words I’d heard myself use in the memory.

Sighing, I thought of where to go next. My heart fluttered and the feather warmed between my hands. I could tell that the magic was stirring. Now, I just needed to find the right words to break the curse.

I knew they were there, on the tip of my tongue.

Taking another deep breath, I focused on drawing those words out of me.

“Goddess, please... lift this numbing darkness, free these people from the bonds of fog and apathy. Give them back the joy of life and light. By moon bright and Goddess light, break this foul curse.”

The feather wiggled out of my hands.

I opened my eyes and watched as it floated into the air. The feather slowly drifted down on the altar.

The moment it touched the stone altar, I felt a tremor through the air.

Immediately, the fog felt lighter.

Standing up, I backed away from the altar and instinctively, I looked through a crack in the ceiling at the night sky.

Moonlight pierced the fog, getting brighter and brighter as the fog lessened and thinned. In a few minutes, the night sky was fully exposed and we could see the moon and stars.

Payne, Soren, and April all looked at the sky with me, gasping at the beautiful, glittering jewel stars.

I felt like I hadn’t seen stars in months, even though I hadn’t been in Miltern that long. How quickly the fog had taken over and sapped away my own happiness and enjoyment of beauty.

“My Goddess,” April whispered.

My knees wobbled and I stumbled forward, leaning on the altar. My muscles were weak and trembling. The spell had taken a lot out of me.

“Look to the east,” Payne said.

Forgetting about my weakness, I pushed off the altar and I followed Payne’s pointing finger.

A sliver of unhindered light appeared on the horizon. The sun crept over the horizon, revealing a bright, cloudless, clear sky. There was no fog, no clouds, and the sun was brighter than I remembered it.

It was like watching the sunrise for the first time.

All the heaviness and weight of the fog lifted off of me, off of the temple, and I felt like I’d lost a hundred pounds in just a few minutes.

Payne and April gasped. They were completely in awe of the rising sun, unable to look away.

I thought of how April must feel. She hadn't seen the sun rise like that in years. She hadn't breathed free, fresh air without the fog in years.

Tears wet her eyes and I thought she might faint as she swayed back and forth.

My mind spun and I pressed my hands to my temples. Groaning, I stumbled toward the altar again. My legs shook and my knees buckled.

My toe caught on a piece of wood and I pitched forward.

Just before hitting the ground, someone's strong, warm, safe arms came around me. Soren held me against him in a warm embrace.

Sighing, exhausted and drained from the spell, I forced my heavy eyelids open and looked into Soren's face.

"I did it," I whispered.

He smiled at me. Gently, he stroked my hair and brushed my face with the tips of his fingers.

"Yes, you did it. Well done," he said, a note of pride and appreciation in his voice.

My chest swelled with his praise. I struggled to keep my eyes open but my eyelids felt like they were made of lead. I closed my eyes.

The last thing I remembered was feeling safe and peaceful in Soren's arms.

## [Chapter 692](#)

\*Soren\*

I carried Mila's slight figure in my arms, all the way back to the hotel.

While walking through the village, it was clear that people were feeling the freedom from the curse. They spoke to each other, smiling, hugging, and laughing. Kids ran through the streets playing.

The entire village was transformed and absolutely stunning.

"Payne, you called for Dr. Lee, right?" I asked as we got closer to the hotel.

"Yes. He should be arriving today," Payne confirmed.

"It isn't uncommon for spells to take a lot out of the witch," April said. "Breaking curses is hard and takes a lot of energy."

"I'm aware of that," I muttered.

It wasn't the spell that worried me. It was the Blackfire poison that ran through her veins. Passing out from casting a spell was nothing new. However, Mila was pale and seemed delirious. She muttered to herself and kept wincing.

Those were signs of poisoning, not spell fatigue.

"I've got things to check on. Will Mila be alright?" April asked me.

I nodded firmly. "I'll make sure of it. Do what you need to, she'll contact you when necessary."

April nodded and headed off to a shop that had been closed since we arrived. Now, it was open and there were lights on inside.

The village had really bounced back quickly. I was happy to see it and I knew Mila would be too.

I promised myself that she would wake up and see it.

In my hotel room, I laid Mila down on my bed.

Dr. Lee bustled in with a bag of travel medical equipment. He saw me and he saw Mila and shook his head.

"Move," he ordered, nudging me aside.

Gently, I brushed some hair out of Mila's face and stepped aside.

Lee pulled out his stethoscope, a travel pulse-oximeter, and a blood pressure device. He muttered under his breath as he checked her vitals and gave her a quick physical examination.

"Well, is she going to be okay?" I asked sharply.

"Let me work," Lee barked.

I rolled my eyes and walked across the room. He was probably the only one that could speak to me like that. As a doctor, I had to defer to his expertise in these matters. Where Mila was concerned, I didn't want to get in his way and mess things up.

Lee muttered something and sighed. He leaned over Mila's face, turning his head to the side so her breath touched his cheek. Lee's brow creased and he pulled back.

"What is it, what's wrong?" I asked.

"I warned you before to stay away from her," Lee mumbled, glaring at me. "Why don't you listen?"

I scoffed. "She was in need."

"Like that's ever swayed you before," Lee grumbled. "No pretty face, no desperate story has ever convinced you to engage with someone you know is trouble. And yet, she's still here and you're still advocating for her."

"There is more I need to know about her. All of us could be at stake if I don't find out the truth," I said with a growl. I did not like having to justify myself to Lee.

"Well, yeah, there is plenty about her... near as I can tell, there is a very powerful power awakening in her," he explained.

"What kind of power?" I asked quickly. She'd just cast a powerful spell, could Lee sense the residual magic coming off of her?

"It isn't like anything I've encountered before," he admitted, shaking his head.

It couldn't have been her magic, then. Lee would have detected that.

“Because this power has been kickstarted, the Blackfire poison is also being kickstarted. It is feeding off her power and taking over,” Lee explained.

Frowning, he put a hand on her forehead.

“What does that mean, exactly?” I asked, holding my breath.

“It means the poison is spreading and growing stronger. If it spreads throughout her entire body, she will die,” he said with an uninterested sigh.

“Is there any way to stop the poison, or slow it down, like you did before?” I questioned.

I raked my eyes over Mila. What justice was it for her to die just when she discovered who she was and saved an entire pack?

“The power in her is incredibly strong. I’ve never seen anything like it. Once it is fully awakened in her, she should be able to fight off the poison. Right now, it is far stronger than any antidote. I’d say it is a miracle she’s alive at all,” Lee reported.

He started packing up his kit and I sat on the edge of the bed, taking Mila’s hand.

“You hear that? You’re my little miracle,” I muttered under my breath. “What happens if the poison spreads faster than her power awakens?” I asked, looking back at Lee.

“She’ll die.”

I knew he was going to say that.

“You mentioned an antidote before. Is there no way to get it?” I asked.

Lee sighed and bowed his head. “Is she really worth all that?”

“Lee, the packs are rallying to find some dangerous, magical artifact. Mila is at the center of it all somehow. Do you think it is worth it to save her if it means saving the world?” I snarled.

Lee gaped at me for a moment. Quickly, he shook off his shock.

“Well, there is one thing...”

“What is it?” I snapped when he trailed off.

Lee sighed, hesitating. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

I waited as my patience wore thin. Just when I was about to demand a response, he spoke.

“I would need a Howlingred Flower,” he said slowly.

“Howlingred...”

“No!” Ashley’s voice pierced the room and she burst in, throwing the door wide open.

“Ashely?” I asked, creasing my brow.

“Don’t be crazy, Soren! She isn’t worth it. Setting aside the fact that Howlingred grows in very dangerous locations, it will only bloom when it is fed blood. Lots of blood!” she said sharply.

I arched an eyebrow at her. "Did you just call me crazy?"

Ashley clamped her hands over her mouth quickly. Sighing, she lowered them and bowed her head. "I'm sorry, but... it is too high a cost."

"Why are you still here?" I asked. I thought I had sent her back to the inn.

"I helped Lee with his equipment and protected him on the way back here," she explained. She chewed her lower lip, her eyes darting to Mila on the bed.

I had wanted her to stay at the inn, but she had other plans...

"Why is she still here? We've done enough for her! We've sacrificed enough for her!" Ashley argued, nodding sharply at Mila.

"She's still an asset," I insisted.

Since when did the people that followed me demand explanations for my actions and choices? Was everyone that annoyed that I'd brought this female into the mix? I didn't think any of them could personally dislike Mila that much. None of them knew anything about her.

Wasn't I the one that was in charge? What was with all the questioning?

"All she's done is bring us trouble," Ashley continued. "She's been a constant pain and liability and now you—"

"Ashley, stop!" Payne demanded. He came into the room, a firm look on his face as he glared at his sister.

"But I—"

"No! Soren doesn't need your prattling. I'm sorry Soren," Payne said, glancing at me apologetically.

"It's fine," I said, turning my attention back to Mila.

"Ashley, get out in the hall and wait for me, now!" Payne demanded.

"That's not fa—"

"I said out! NOW!" Payne snapped, pointing to the door.

I looked over at the siblings. It was rare for Payne to scold Ashley.

She glared stubbornly at her brother and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Everything in the room trembled.

Payne winced and looked at me again.

"I apologize for her behavior. She knows better... I'll talk to her and make sure this doesn't happen again," he assured.

"It will, she's just a child," I pointed out absently.

Payne rolled his eyes. "She needs to grow up." He followed his sister out, shutting the door much more softly.

I shook my head and traced my thumb along the back of Mila's hand.

Ashley didn't know how much she owed Mila for saving Payne when they were kids. One day, she'd learn the truth and she might even have to ask forgiveness for the way she talked about her.

A muffled sob came from the hallway and I could hear Ashley and Payne talking.

"Why did you stop me? You know my feelings toward S—"

"Ashley! Soren is on his own path. You need to stay out of this," Payne warned.

"What the hell is wrong with you!? She deceived Soren. And now even you're acting like she's a gift from the Goddess. Has she sucked everyone's d\*\*k around here?"

Payne growled. "If I ever hear you say something like that again, you'll never be allowed to leave the inn, got it?"

Their voices got softer and I heard the sounds of their footsteps retreating.

I wondered if Payne had somehow figured out that Mila was the one that saved him. He could have been standing up to her out of loyalty to me, but she was still his sister and he had a lot of loyalty to her as well.

If he had figured it out, he hadn't said anything and I hadn't told him yet.

Behind me, Lee sighed.

I'd nearly forgotten he was in the room after listening to the sibling spat outside.

"I'll warn you again, Soren, the best thing to do is leave that girl somewhere and let her find her own way," Lee advised again.

"I tried that," I pointed out.

It was true. I'd let Mila go with every intention of leaving her to find her own way. It was her connection to Payne's past that made me pursue her out of loyalty to him, not to get involved in her mess.

Things had escalated from there.

"Why are you helping her, anyway?" Lee wanted to know.

"I made a deal with her," I muttered, watching her face as she shuddered.

I looked over my shoulder at Lee. He arched his eyebrow at me.

"What deal is worth giving up your own blood and putting yourself in danger?"

I didn't reply. Lee and Ashley were acting like I wasn't in danger every day of my life. They must have thought it was different, me putting myself in danger for someone else's sake, not just for myself or for our group.

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” Lee muttered.

“Thank you, as always, for your advice. Don’t worry, I have a plan. Everything will be fine,” I assured.

Lee shook his head and finished collecting his things. He paused at the door and looked back at me.

I glanced up quickly and then returned my attention to Mila.

Sighing heavily, Lee left, shutting the door behind him. There was nothing he could say to change my mind and he knew it.

I cupped Mila’s hand in mine. Her skin was so cold and clammy, her face pale. And yet, she was sweating.

Leaning in, I pressed my lips to her forehead. Her skin was hot.

She had a fever again.

Would she make it out of this? The only chance she had was if her power awakened faster than the poison spread. There was no guarantee it would work. Was it worth the risk to wait and see or endanger myself to get the plant?

Worry thrummed in my chest. What if she didn’t make it?

I realized that I was actually concerned about her. Not because I wanted to know her secrets and how they’d help against the alphas in search of the artifact and not because she could use magic and had power over the Feather of Justice.

I was worried about her because she was... her.

It had been a long, long time since I worried about anyone. After leaving my home, I felt like an outsider in this dimension. That was why I fell in with the outsiders. I never wanted to be entangled with anyone or have ties to anyone.

I kept to myself and minded my own business. But now...

Whether I wanted it or not, I was pulled into Mila’s life.

Even as she slept she looked determined to survive. She had such a fierce look of concentration, I imagined she was willing the poison out of her body right now.

If only it were that simple.

A small moan escaped her lips and I noticed how dry and chapped they were. I touched her forehead again and she was still warm.

She needed to stay hydrated to help keep her fever down.

I grabbed a nearby water bottle and poured a bunch in my mouth. Cupping Mila’s face, I leaned over her and pressed my lips to hers.

Slowly, I released some of the water, letting it pass between our lips.

She moaned and squirmed, swallowing the water greedily.

I let her have more.

Suddenly, her eyes snapped open.

### [Chapter 693](#)

\*Mila\*

Strong, warm arms wrapped around me in a firm, secure embrace. I felt light and safe, protected and cared for.

My mind was a bit hazy and I couldn't remember where I was but something cool slipped down my throat and I greedily swallowed it. The liquid quenched my parched mouth and throat and I wanted more.

I sucked at the source of where the water was coming from, my mind clearing with the more water I got.

The powerful arms around me tightened slightly and I felt like I could have melted into them forever. I'd be safe and happy there, no need to leave.

My throat eased and I started to come back to myself.

Sighing against the water source, I slowly opened my eyes.

A bright pair of grayish-blue orbs peered down at me. Startled, I tried to pull back, but those strong arms kept me encapsulated.

After a moment, I realized it was Soren's handsome face behind those lovely eyes, hovering so close to me.

He pulled his mouth from mine and I gasped. He'd been feeding me water through his lips! It was strange and sweet. How out of it did I have to be for him to need to feed me water like that?

"You're awake," Soren said, smirking. He still held me in his powerful arms and I didn't try to pull away again.

"Ah..."

My throat spasmed and my dry, cracked voice only made a harsh sound. I rubbed my throat, wishing for that cool sensation from the water to come back.

I glanced around the room. It was Soren's hotel room. How had I gotten back here? The last thing I remembered was breaking the curse.

Abruptly, I sat up, forcing Soren to lean back slightly and loosen his arms on me. I looked out the window and saw the sun shining brightly.

Relief swept through me and I sighed. The curse was broken!

"You've been running a fever and are pretty dehydrated," Soren said.

I turned my attention back to him and nodded. That's why the water had tasted so good, like life itself, and why my throat was so messed up.

“Don’t try to talk now, if you can help it,” he suggested.

I nodded again and leaned against his chest.

Soren chuckled and ran his fingers through my hair. He moved his hands to my upper arms and gently eased me back on the bed. As I lay down, he fluffed my pillow a little.

“Comfortable?” he asked.

I nodded, looking into his face. He kept my gaze for a long moment.

I wondered if he’d been the one taking care of me. I wasn’t sure how long I’d been out of it or why I’d passed out but Soren was dressed differently than I remembered.

Biting my lower lip I glanced down at my clothes and realized I was dressed differently, too. I had been put into one of Soren’s t-shirts.

My cheeks burned hot and I grabbed the sheet, tucking it around myself.

Like it would make a difference now. If Soren had been caring for me, he was probably the one that dressed me in his shirt... just his shirt. I had no pants or underwear. It wasn’t like he hadn’t seen me before but it was still embarrassing to think he’d changed me while I was passed out.

“If you’re wondering who changed your clothes, it was me,” he offered.

I looked at him again, creasing my brow. Swallowing into my dry throat, I tried to ease it enough to talk.

Soren shook his head.

“Don’t strain yourself. I’ll have more water and some medicine from Dr. Lee brought up,” he told me, holding a hand up to me.

All I could do was nod.

“You seem surprised that I’m the one who changed you. I thought it only appropriate since I’m the only one who has seen...” Soren smirked and winked at me.

My cheeks got even hotter, my blush spreading down my neck and shoulders.

“Besides, I promised to help you, so you shouldn’t be that surprised. Part of the deal was to help detoxify you from the poison and restore you to health. Wasn’t that one of your conditions?”

I nodded and played with the edge of the sheet.

Our “deal” had been his help curing the Blackfire poison and helping me find information about Helen in exchange for what was in the box. He was also supposed to protect me.

Yet, the first chance Soren had to see what was in the box, he’d taken off. It had been respectful and thoughtful but he’d also had other business to take care of.

After going to the temple, he never once asked me what I’d found. In fact, he hadn’t brought up the box at all. Instead, he jumped in to help me uncover secrets about my past and anchor me from getting lost in my memories.

Sure, that could have been a way to protect me and help me find out about Helen, but it went above and beyond the deal we'd made.

I raked my eyes over him as he sat on the edge of the bed, caring for me while I was sick.

It occurred to me suddenly that Soren didn't actually care about the secrets in the box. Otherwise, he would have made me reveal it a while ago. Instead, he was just helping me do whatever I wanted.

Our eyes locked again and my stomach squirmed.

There was warmth in his eyes, openness.

I really looked at him and for the first time, I saw him for who he was.

There were no calculating thoughts in his eyes, no scheming or hidden motives. He didn't have a suspicious look about him!

If anything, he looked like he was actually concerned about me. Like he cared for me and my well-being.

There was a soft knock on the door and Soren went to answer it. He didn't open the door all the way, so I couldn't see who was there.

They spoke in muffled whispers that I couldn't hear.

He shut and locked the door and returned to the bed. Soren had a bottle of water and a small vial of medicine with him.

"Drink this," he said, handing me the vial. "It will help the soreness in your throat. Just a little numbing tonic."

Obediently, I did as I was told.

Immediately, my throat felt coated in a slimy substance, but the pain was gone and it didn't feel dry or scratchy anymore.

"Now, drink this, all of it," Soren ordered, handing me the water.

I propped myself up on the pillows slightly and took a sip. Again, the water tasted so good that I tipped the bottle back and guzzled it all down in seconds.

Soren chuckled. "I'm glad to see you like it."

Sighing, I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand and handed him the empty bottle.

"Th-thank you," I said, testing out my voice. It still sounded hoarse but I could talk without croaking now.

Smirking, Soren tossed the bottle into the trash. He sat on the edge of the bed again and leaned in so close.

I pulled back, sinking into the pillows.

Still, he got closer until his sweet breath fanned my face and his lips were inches from mine.

“Well now,” he whispered, his words tickling my lips. “Just how are you planning to thank me?”

His voice was deep and husky.

I felt it sink straight into my abdomen and my stomach exploded with butterflies. Wrapping my arms around myself, I squirmed a little.

His eyes burned into me and I clenched my thighs. He was so close again. His scent covered me, filling my nose and making me dizzy.

“Umm...”

My mind was too fuzzy to form any real thoughts or sentences. All I could think about was his scent and the warmth of his body over me. His chest pressed slightly against mine. He was so close...

How easy would it be to pull him down to me?

I thought of how I woke up with his lips on mine. It wasn't a true kiss but his lips had still been on mine and he'd been feeding me water, which felt very intimate.

Then there was the kiss we shared after we woke up from the dream. I had meant to give him just a thank you kiss but he had gone much further than that. The way he'd grabbed me and rolled me over...

My stomach fluttered again and I squirmed on the bed. It had been so unexpected but I loved it!

And now, once again, his lips were just inches from mine. I could practically taste his sweet breath and I licked my lips, the tip of my tongue grazing his lips.

My heart raced in my chest and I knew Soren would be able to hear it. I didn't look away or try to conceal it, though. I just bathed in his scent and his overpowering masculine energy.

Heat rushed through my veins and I felt like my entire body was flushed red. My skin got hotter and hotter until I thought I might burst into flames!

Soren reached out delicately and brushed his fingers across my cheek, tucking some stray hair behind my ear.

His touch was light and pleasantly cooling against my burning hot skin.

I pressed my cheek into his touch and I felt like electricity coursed through my body. My skin hummed and the blood in my veins felt alive.

My breath caught in my throat and I arched my back slightly, hoping he'd touch me more. A tremble shot through me and my n\*\*\*\*s hardened against the fabric of his shirt, which felt cool against my burning skin.

My core tightened and I clenched my thighs, feeling dampness pool between my legs.

What was happening to me?

Soren's fingers slowly trailed down my neck and I moaned slightly.

Embarrassed, I closed my eyes and bit my lip to muffle the sound. I was longing for him. Not just his touch and his lips, but for all of him!

Forgetting my embarrassment, I turned my face toward him slightly. I licked my lips and puckered them a bit, waiting for him to close the space between us and kiss me.

I couldn't deny how strongly I desired him. It coursed through me, causing me to tremble. I wanted him to kiss me, wrap me in his arms, and claim my body again. What did I have to be embarrassed about?

I sensed Soren lean in closer and I held my breath in anticipation.

Any second, I'd feel his lips on mine and he'd give into the same desire and passion he'd responded to under the temple.

His warm breath brushed over my face and my neck and his lips grazed my earlobe.

I quivered beneath him.

Soren chuckled lightly. "You should get some more rest," he whispered softly, just below my ear.

#### [Chapter 694](#)

When I felt Soren pull back, embarrassment flooded through me again. I clamped my eyes shut tightly and looped my arms around my waist. I could barely sense him anymore.

What had come over me? Why was I acting like that?

Had I really been... horny?

That's what it seemed like. And Soren was the one I wanted. What was worse, now he knew it!

I shuddered and hugged myself tighter. Disappointment and unfulfilled desire stuck to me like tar. I was disappointed in myself for showing the way I felt but I was also disappointed in Soren for not doing anything about it.

When had he become so prude? It wasn't like he hadn't done all that and more to me already...

I shook my head to push those thoughts aside. Maybe he was purposefully trying to torture me. That was all I could think.

The room was quiet. Almost too quiet.

I wondered if Soren had left after my embarrassing display. Squinting one eye open, I checked to see if he was still there.

Soren was still sitting on the edge of the bed, his gaze steadily on me. Those blue-gray orbs were penetrating, seeing straight through the sheet and his t-shirt.

My insides squirmed and my cheeks flushed again. I covered my face with my arm.

"Drink a little more water, just to make sure you are staying hydrated," Soren said.

I uncovered my face and saw he was holding out a cup of water this time. Pulling myself up, I leaned back on the pillows, semi-reclined, and I took the cup of water. This one, I drank slower, hoping the awkwardness I felt would go away by the time I was done.

Soren remained where he was, watching me. He didn't seem upset by my earlier behavior but he seemed cold and distant now. Soren didn't move or speak as I drank my water.

When I was done, I handed the cup back to him and sighed.

"I'm feeling much better now, thank you," I said.

"You're welcome," Soren replied warmly.

"How is Miltern pack? The curse was lifted, wasn't it?" I asked, looking out the sunny window again.

I must have woken up later in the afternoon because the sun was already setting. I could see brilliant, vibrant colors across the sky.

"The curse was lifted, thanks to you, and the pack is already on the mend," he said.

A little frown touched Soren's lips.

"What is it?" I asked, leaning forward more.

"You figured out how to use the Feather of Justice. Unfortunately... it seems like it was a one-use artifact," he said.

Soren held the box out to me, the lid opened.

Had he gone through the other items there while I had been sick? The other things seemed undisturbed but there was a small pile of ash in one of the corners.

The letter, the spellbook, and the map hadn't been moved or touched.

Sighing, I reached out and touched the light, fluffy ash. That was probably one of the only things my mother had ever left me and it was gone, destroyed. I had to use it to save Miltern but my heart ached at thinking one of my last links to her was gone.

"Your mother would be proud of you. I know that much from your memory," Soren offered, pulling me from my thoughts.

I smiled dryly at him and nodded.

"What are you going to do now? You lifted the curse and found out about your past..."

I lowered my gaze to my lap and twisted my hands together.

"I'd like to make a trade with you," I said, lifting my gaze to his.

Soren arched an eyebrow.

I reached into the box and pulled out the map that had come with the letter. I held it between my fingers, stroking my thumb over the soft parchment.

“Everyone was looking for that artifact, the one they talked about in my memory,” I said.

“Yes. I doubt they ever found it because it is still a mystery,” Soren said.

“I know they didn’t. Because my mother broke it into separate parts and hid them all over where no one would think to look,” I said, holding up the folded map.

“Why do I get the feeling that you know?” Soren asked, eyeing the paper in my hand.

“My mom marked it on the map. I’ll trade you this map and the artifact but I do need one thing,” I said.

“You’re keeping me quite busy with your pursuit of Helen and taking care of that poison,” Soren said smugly. He crossed his arms but I got the feeling he was teasing me.

“I know... I,” my cheeks turned crimson. “I know I’m asking a lot but... Please?”

“What is it that you want?” Soren pressed.

“I want revenge!” I snapped, looking straight into his eyes. Anger flared in me. I thought I’d buried it after that dream, but it came flooding to the surface. “I want revenge on those that killed my parents and my pack. The ones that tortured my mother and... The ones that stole from the dead!”

I unfolded the map and held it out to Soren so he could see.

“I swear, I will make them pay. But I need your help,” I said.

Soren glanced at the map and pursed his lips. He snatched the map from my hands and immediately folded it up, tucking it into his pocket. He stroked his chin and nodded.

“In that case, you need to get back to your full strength. You can’t seek revenge with a weak body.”

“But...” I pointed to the pocket where he’d hidden the map. How did he expect to help me if he didn’t know where the pieces were hidden?

“Be a good girl, Mila, get some rest,” he demanded.

Soren stood up and turned toward the door. I grabbed his arm and held him back.

“Wait... can you... stay the night?” I asked softly, casting my eyes down.

Soren sighed but he didn’t pull away. He stepped closer to me and gently urged me to lie back down.

I released his arm and he pulled the blankets snugly around me and ran his hand over my forehead.

“Are you comfortable?” he asked.

“Yes,” I nodded.

“Alright, I will stay until you fall asleep,” Soren whispered.

He laid down next to me, over the covers, and wrapped me in his warm, comforting arms.

I closed my eyes. Even being awake for part of the day had me exhausted. I guess I really had a ways to go before I was fully healed.

With Soren's arms around me, I drifted into a deep, dreamless sleep.

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Bright light struck my eyes and I moaned, rolling away from it. The sun pierced through the window, covering me completely. It was so warm and bright, I couldn't fall back asleep.

Opening my eyes, I noticed that Soren was gone and I was alone in his bed. It didn't surprise me.

Warm, golden sun bathed the entire bed. I was so happy to see the sunlight bright and warming the village. Giggling giddily I stretched in the warm light. I felt so rested, like I hadn't slept that well in years!

I probably hadn't given everything I'd been dealing with since I ended up in Saboreef.

With the curse lifted, my mood felt lighter and I just felt like things were starting to turn around.

Yes, I wanted revenge and I still needed to find Helen but breaking the curse had been a huge achievement. I finally felt like I could really do everything I needed to.

I got out of bed and stretched even more, doing a little happy dance in the sun patch in front of the window.

Outside, I saw people in the streets of Miltern. They looked happy and they were actually talking to each other, laughing and playing.

That warmed my heart completely.

After another quick look around the room, I saw a new dress folded on the dresser. There was a folded note on top of it. I picked up the note first.

"Mila,

I'm waiting for you in the hotel gardens. I think you'll be pleased with how they've transformed. Wear the new dress I got you and we can have lunch together.

I'll see you soon,

Soren."

My stomach dropped into my feet and I giggled, hugging the note to my chest.

It was so formal and sweet. Almost like he was asking me out on a real date or something.

Soren wouldn't do that though, would he?

I checked the clock and saw I still had a little time before lunch. It was barely mid-morning.

That was perfect, because I knew I hadn't showered in a few days and if I was going to get dressed up in a new dress, I wanted to freshen up first.

I hopped in the shower and cleaned myself. The silky soap felt so good on my dirty skin. I shampooed and conditioned my hair, scrubbing down to my scalp.

Wrapped in a towel, with my hair drying, I found a little makeup in the bathroom and threw some on. I quickly brushed and styled my hair and then put the new dress on. It was a sundress, nothing overly fancy.

The dress had smooth, fitted lines that clung to my curves. It was low cut in the front with spaghetti straps. The skirt fell to just above my knees, showing off my long legs.

It was a mostly white dress with orange and black tropical flowers on it.

I examined myself in the mirror. The dress was the perfect size and the color was bold. I liked the way I looked in it. And the way my legs and breasts looked in it.

The black charm on my bracelet matched the dress perfectly and the colors accented my skin tone and my hair.

Was Soren this well versed in fashion, or had he had some help?

A little nervous, I left the hotel room and went to the gardens. I gripped the handrail on the stairs to keep myself from running headlong all the way down. Excitement made my skin hum and buzz.

So few times in my life had I gotten dressed up and really pampered myself. Even if it wasn't a real date, I still expected to have a good time and I was loving the excuse to actually look good for a change!

I went to the door that led to the gardens and Soren was waiting there for me. He smirked when he saw me and held his arm out.

Soren was dressed in a nice black suit with an orange pocket square. His outfit complimented mine perfectly.

He had on a black silk tie and I was certain he'd showered and actually combed his hair. He didn't look anything like the gruff rogue I knew. He almost looked... like a gentleman.

My mouth dried out as I got closer to him and my stomach fluttered.

I'd never seen anyone so handsome. Like a Greek god standing there in all his glory.

Heart racing, I met up with him, unable to pull my eyes away. I was transfixed like a moth to a flame as I stared at him and his undeniable handsomeness. I didn't think I'd ever seen him look so good!

My breathing was shallow as I reached him and I flushed, hoping he wouldn't notice.

Soren took my hand and kissed the back of it. He placed it in the crook of his elbow and we walked out the door.

I trembled as I followed along, stealing sidelong glances at him.

"I'm glad you wore the bracelet," he said, grinning.

"It goes with the dress," I teased.

"I don't want you to take it off. It looks too good on you," he purred.

I almost squirmed right out of my dress at the compliment!

## [Chapter 695](#)

The garden had sprung to life since the curse was lifted. There were flowers in bloom and butterflies fluttering around. All the plants seemed to be reaching for the sun, soaking up the rays. Everything was so vibrant and colorful.

The floral scent almost swept me off my feet and I leaned heavily against Soren.

There was a small table for two in the center of the garden patio and I realized we had the whole garden to ourselves. Food had already been laid out and a waiter poured champagne into glasses.

Soren held my chair out for me and I sat down. I'd never been treated like this before. He sat down across from me and musicians came out and started to play some slow, romantic music.

I reached for the champagne and Soren quickly raised his glass.

"A toast," he said, smiling warmly at me.

Giggling, I raised my glass too.

"What are we toasting?" I asked.

"You, Mila. A toast to your bravery and determination. If not for you, this village would still be trapped in darkness and I... I would still be living a boring life," he said. He winked at the last statement.

The rest was really sweet.

We clinked our glasses and I took a sip. The bubbling drink tickled me all the way to my stomach.

I was so impressed with the presentation of food on the table. Soren had put a lot of planning into this. He even picked out a meal that he somehow knew I would like.

We ate and sipped champagne until we were completely full.

Sighing, I leaned back and rubbed my belly.

Soren stood up and held a hand out to me.

I arched an eyebrow.

"Time to work off that meal," he said, bouncing his eyebrows.

Slowly, I took his hand. He pulled me up and held me in a close embrace, guiding me in the steps of a slow dance.

I smiled and rested my head on his chest, listening to the heavy thump of his heart. It was racing, just like mine.

Glancing up at him, I saw that he was looking down at me.

I blushed but held his gaze.

"This is an awful lot of trouble you went through, just to have lunch with me," I said, nodding to the romantic setting around us.

Soren smirked. "It was no trouble at all. Besides, this way, you get to see the impact of lifting the curse."

"I know but... you could have just asked. It didn't have to be so fancy," I clarified.

"Ahh..." Soren released my hand for a moment.

He touched my face, his fingertips warm on my cheek, then he took my hand again and twirled me away from him. He pulled me back and held me even closer.

"After everything we've dealt with, I thought we both deserved a quiet, peaceful meal. And you... Well, you're worth it," he said sweetly.

I shook my head and tried to pull away. I wasn't worth all this! After helping my foster mother kill witches and running away when I was a child. I was lucky to have broken the curse. It wasn't talent.

Soren held me firmly and pressed me against him. He gave me a deep, meaningful look that I felt straight into my soul.

My heart melted and I sighed, resting my head against him again.

Maybe... maybe he was right?

"Boss?"

Payne's voice cut into our moment.

Soren released me and I quickly stepped back. Whatever I had felt in his embrace faded quickly.

Soren waved Payne over.

"We're ready," Payne said, nodding.

I noticed he didn't look at me.

"Ready for what?" I asked.

Soren nodded to Payne. He turned to me and took my hands in his. My hands disappeared inside his strong palms and fingers.

"Mila, I'll be away for a few days on business. I want you to go back to the rogue zone with the rest of the group. I'll meet you there in a week, okay?" he said calmly.

I nodded and gripped his hands in mine. I didn't want him to leave. Whatever he had to do was probably important, and might even have to do with helping me get revenge, but I would have rather gone with him.

"Good girl," he said, chucking my chin.

Without another word, he left me in the gardens with the musicians playing a romantic tune and Payne.

I watched as Soren walked away. We hadn't known each other that long but somehow, I had allowed myself to get attached to him. I was so used to him being there to protect me, steady me, and guide me that seeing him leave made me feel... empty and hollow.

I felt like as he walked further away, he was taking a piece of me with him.

“Mila, are you ready? We should get on the road while it is still early,” Payne said.

I looked at him and noticed that he still wouldn't meet my eyes. He didn't seem unfriendly or like he was mad at me. More like he was trying to hide something from me. I knew how to read people well.

Whatever he wanted to hide, I'd figure it out now that I knew he was hiding something.

“Can I go get my things?” I asked. “I'll meet you in the lobby in ten minutes.”

“Sure, we'll be waiting,” he said with a nod. He glanced at me quickly and then left the garden.

Well, whatever was going on with Payne could wait.

I went back to my room and collected the box. There was a fireplace in the room so I tossed some crumpled paper in it and lit a fire. As soon as the flames licked up, I tossed the box and my mother's letter into the fire.

While it burned, I packed the spell book and my other belongings back in my pack.

It didn't take long for the fire to burn down. I poked around with a fire poker to make sure that the box and the letter were nothing but ashes.

I was a little sad to see the letter and the box go. The letter had been written by my mother, in her handwriting. It was safer to burn it, though. I didn't want anyone to find out that she'd dismembered and hidden the artifact pieces.

With a sigh, I grabbed my bag and headed down to the lobby. As grateful as I was that the curse was broken, I was looking forward to moving on. I'd spent days in Miltern. Normally, I didn't hang around anywhere that long. At least, not since I'd run away from Saboreef.

Payne, Ashley, Dr. Lee, and several of Soren's followers were waiting for me in the lobby.

They didn't say much as we headed out of the hotel and followed the main road out of town.

I was happy to remain silent and watch Miltern blossoming with new life. Silently, I prayed to the Moon Goddess to protect them and shield them from future harm. They'd suffered enough and deserved a chance at happiness.

Outside of town, there were a few vehicles waiting to take us away from Miltern. Dr. Lee and Ashley got in one and I joined Payne in another. The rest of the followers filled up the remaining vehicles.

On four wheels, we sped out of Miltern pack land.

I kept my head down and remained silent.

Payne didn't try to strike up a conversation and I was grateful for that. He seemed just as content to keep quiet. His hands gripped the steering wheel tightly, his knuckles white. The way he stared out the windshield, it was like he wasn't really seeing anything, just completely zoned out.

I worried he might crash but he didn't seem to have a problem driving.

Something was seriously bothering him. I always thought Payne was better at hiding his emotions. Either he wanted me to know that something was bothering him or he wasn't trying to hide it around me.

We drove until the sunset and then Payne stopped to make camp.

We'd made it back to the desert and a sharp wind indicated a sandstorm was brewing.

"Everyone, set up the emergency shelters ASAP," Payne ordered. "I want them up before this storm hits."

Immediately, the others got to work pulling gear from the vehicles and setting up tents.

Payne didn't give me anything to do so I wandered through the little camp and kept an eye on the sky as clouds rolled in and the winds picked up.

The first time I met Soren had been during a sandstorm. I got to his inn and sought shelter from the little bullet-like grains.

My heart ached and I closed my hands over it. Why was I missing him so much? I couldn't figure it out. I'd never missed or longed for anyone like this. My thoughts drifted to Soren and where he might have gone.

I kicked the toe of my shoe into the sand as I considered the possibilities.

Had he run off to collect the artifact parts so soon after I asked for his help?

I knew he was doing it to help me get my revenge but with how quickly he took off, I couldn't help but wonder if his eagerness was more about getting his hands on the artifact rather than helping me.

Less than twenty-four hours after he learned the secret inside the box, he'd abandoned me.

My heart sank with disappointment.

Payne was helping with one of the shelters and I sauntered over to him. If anyone knew where Soren had really gone, it would be him.

"Where did Soren have to run off to so quickly?" I asked conversationally.

Payne glanced at me quickly and looked away just as fast.

"If Soren wanted you to know where he went, he would have told you. Since he didn't, you'll have to ask him when he gets back."

He wasn't harsh or rude, just professional.

Sighing, I turned away from him and found myself face to face with Ashely. She had her arms crossed and was glaring at me.

"Why do you need to know where Soren went?" she asked snippily.

"That's between me and Soren," I replied, shaking my head.

"Whatever you think is between you and Soren—"

"Ashley, help me with this tent," Payne interrupted her with an exasperated sigh.

Ashley glared at me. She pushed by me to help her brother.

It didn't seem like anyone in the camp really wanted me there, so I walked away from the shelters into the desert.

The sun was setting fast and soon it would be completely dark.

It was nice to be alone and have some quiet, especially after all the driving. I didn't know why Ashley had it in for me. It could have something to do with Soren but he always blew that off when I brought it up.

Why had he taken off and left me with these people?

Crossing my arms, I scoffed at myself and tilted my head back.

Why did it matter? Even if he was going after the artifact, it would help me get revenge. That's what I wanted! As long as he helps, the artifact is his. It had only ever brought my family misery and I didn't want anything to do with it.

No matter what I told myself, disappointment still lingered.

Was it silly to hope that I actually had a place in Soren's heart? Was he just putting on a show or did he really want me? Was it all about the artifact?

My heart was slowly giving itself over to him and I was getting lost in that feeling. I didn't know how he felt about me, though.

Snorts and growls cut into my thoughts.

I whipped my head around to the camp and heard the sounds of fighting. Soren's men were under attack!

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Snarls and growls cut into my thoughts.

I whipped my head around to the camp and heard the sounds of fighting. Soren's men were under attack!

### [Chapter 696](#)

Sticking to the shadows, I made my way back. I hid behind a tent and saw that Payne, Ashley, and the others had been ambushed. They were both in restraints and most of Soren's other men were being restrained and held back.

"We don't know who the hell you're talking about!" Payne shouted. "It is just us. We don't know any witches and we haven't seen one!"

"Me?" I gasped, covering my mouth.

These men were after me!

Payne must have been trying to convince them I wasn't around because they hadn't seen me. I guess my walk in the desert had been a good thing... unless Soren's friends got hurt because of it.

Normally, they'd have no problem fighting off attackers but this group was highly trained. The kind of organized military force that only a strong alpha could afford and maintain.

If I backed away and snuck off into the shadows, they could search the camp all they wanted and they'd never find me. Hopefully, they'd leave Payne, Ashley, and the others in peace if they realized I wasn't there.

"Is that so?" the leader asked, pointing a spear at Payne's chin.

He snapped his fingers and two of his strongest guards pounced on Ashley. She spit and hissed as they pulled her back and restrained her.

"Well, this b\*\*\*h will do just fine for now. When you find that little witch, you can exchange her for your sister," the leader said, pressing the tip of his spear harder into Payne's neck.

My heart hammered in my chest. I couldn't let Ashley get hurt, not on my account.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Ashley snarled, struggling against her captors. "We don't know who you're talking about and we definitely don't know any witches. They're a myth!"

“Shut up!” one of the men snapped. He threw Ashley on the ground.

The guards that had taken her hostage began kicking and beating her.

Payne winced but he didn't move toward her. The spear tip still at his throat. The others couldn't move either. They were powerless to help Ashley.

“Where is she!?” the leader demanded.

“W-we don't know any-anything,” Ashley sputtered from the ground. She coughed up blood. Her skin and clothes were covered in sand and bloody smears.

After all that, she still didn't give up my location. I knew she didn't like me but she was showing true loyalty and she was trying to protect me.

The others might be powerless to save Ashley, but I wasn't!

I pulled my knife from my pack and tucked it into my pocket.

“Everyone lower your weapons,” I said. I held my arms up and walked out from behind the tent.

The leader whipped around, pointing his spear at me.

“Oh, what do we have here? A redheaded woman?” he asked. He glared at Payne.

“Release Ashley and take me instead. I know I'm the one you're after,” I said.

Ashley glared at me. “What the hell are you doing? Get out of here! No one asked you to come help me!”

I ignored her and looked at the leader. “Let her go or I will disappear into the darkness and you'll never find me.”

The leader snapped his fingers and his soldiers let Ashley go. She scrambled back toward Payne.

“Come on, we've got to go,” the leader said.

“Wait!”

I pulled the knife from my pocket and held it to my throat.

The leader froze and held his hands up to the other men.

“Release them, all of them, and let them leave in the Jeeps. I'm not going to let you kill them the moment I turn my back,” I insisted.

The leader glared at me.

“I know you want me alive!”

“Fine. Go, all of you. Get the hell out of here!” the leader snarled, waving to Payne and Ashley.

His soldiers released all of Soren's men and they raced to the Jeeps. They all drove away quickly but Payne hesitated before pulling away. I could tell he didn't want to leave me and he was badly injured.

We made eye contact and I nodded. He nodded back and drove away.

Something thumped on the back of my head and everything went black.

\*\*\*

\*Soren\*

Thomas and I traversed the dangerous landscapes to the north of Miltern. The closest place where Helingred flowers grew was north in the high-peaked, impassable mountains. This time of year, they were prone to random flurries and high gusts of wind.

We clamored over the rocks, using our hands and feet to make our way through the difficult mountains.

"I think you're losing your mind," Thomas teased me. "I mean, can't this wait a couple of more months?"

I rolled my eyes and pulled myself over another rock. I had to climb up a high rock wall and I turned around, offering my hand to Thomas.

He glared at my hand but he took it and I hauled him up the wall.

"Why wait? Howlingred will need blood regardless," I said.

"Of course it does... but at least, closer to the winter solstice, it won't need as much blood. During its regular budding season, it won't require you to drain yourself dry," he reminded me.

"I'm not good at waiting," I grumbled.

"Don't I know it," Thomas scoffed, rolling his eyes.

We picked our way through the winding pathway. It was an animal trail which meant it was very narrow and in some places, a sheer drop on the other side. And it was a long, long way down!

"Be honest, Soren, this is about Mila again, isn't it?" Thomas asked.

I glanced back at him. We had to walk single file.

"Are you trying to gossip with me? When did you become a schoolgirl?" I asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Look, you might not care, but I really don't want to be the one to tell your brother that you committed suicide in order to save a random girl," Thomas told me, smirking.

I rolled my eyes. "Thomas, you don't have to worry about my brother."

"No. It is the White Queen's tears I don't want to deal with. And you know there will be a lot of them," he said.

I chuckled, burying the sore spot that was pricked at the mention of the White Queen.

"Shut the f\*\*k up already. Why do you think I asked you to come with me?" I snarled.

Thomas groaned and I imagined him rolling his eyes.

I was on such a narrow strip of land I didn't want to risk looking back. I might lose my footing and go over.

“Because you need an audience to watch the show: Howlingred’s Blood Bath by Soren Black,” he said dramatically.

“And here I thought, after so many years, you might have grown up a little,” I teased.

“Pfft. We wouldn’t be friends if I grew up. This friendship only has room for one super-serious, brooding guy,” Thomas chuckled.

“I’m not that serious,” I defended. “Is that what people think of me?”

“Heh,” Thomas chuckled. “You really haven’t changed either... People here must be blind if they think you are composed and serious.”

I shrugged and shook my head. “I never asked them to think of me that way.”

“No, but you didn’t have to. I’m guessing all that brooding is borrowed from our White Queen,” he said.

“Once upon a time,” I muttered. I wasn’t sure if the longing I had for Rosalie was really about her anymore or just a longing not to be lonely anymore.

We reached the peak of the mountain where the Holwingred herb grew. Normally, when they were closer to blooming, there were several bloodthirsty predators guarding them.

Venomous snakes that swallowed their prey whole, bats that drank blood, and other wild beasts that were excited by the scent of blood and prospect of fresh meat.

“Here are some herbs with tiny buds. They’ll be good,” Thomas suggested, bending down over one.

“Right. You know that once I start bloodletting, the beasts will come,” I reminded him.

Thomas shrugged. “That’s why I’m here. To protect your sensitive little butt.”

“I’ll pick the flower and then we get out of here,” I said.

“Got it,” Soren agreed.

I looked at the plant and stroked my chin. “Alright, let’s get this done.”

\*\*\*

\*Milo\*

Groaning, I started to come to. My head was bowed uncomfortably. I could tell I was sitting in a chair. My wrists were bound behind my back and my ankles were tied to the chair.

I took a deep breath through my nose, discovering that there was duct tape over my mouth.

Opening my eyes, I found myself in a narrow, dark room. My eyes adjusted quickly but I had no idea where I was. There were no scents or sounds that gave away anything about where I was.

Immediately, I started wiggling my wrists in the ropes, trying to get loose. I tested the ropes for weak spots and kept trying to loosen them, even if just a little.

"Ahh, you're awake, and much sooner than I anticipated," a rough voice said from behind me, a hint of surprise in his voice.

I swallowed hard and glanced over my shoulder and I kept working my wrists, trying to free them.

The more I tried to fight, the weaker I felt. My arms were like rubber and I didn't have much strength left at all. Had they drugged me or was that because of the Blackfire poison again? It always floored up at the worst times!

"What, nothing to say?" the man asked.

He was intimidating, filling up the doorway behind him. I could see that the door was closed, probably locked too.

He had shadows over his face so I couldn't see his features. But he was strong and hulking. Whoever he was, he was powerful.

"I'm sorry, I forgot that you have all this duct tape on your mouth," the man said. He strode across the room in two strides and grabbed a corner of the tape.

"Ahh!" I cried out as he ripped the tape off my mouth.

I glared at him and moved my lips around as the sting faded.

"Let me go, you bastard! Who the hell are you!?" I snapped.

Even if I did get loose, I'd have to break down the door and

"Watch your language!" he snapped. He slapped me across the mouth.

My head snapped to the side and I tasted coppery blood in my mouth as my teeth bit down on my tongue.

"Don't make me put this tape back on, not when we're just about to have a nice, civilized chat," he said. He rolled the tape up on his palm and tossed it on the floor.

"Who are you? Why did you kidnap me?" I asked more clearly. I kept my tone even and stopped swearing at him.

The only way to figure out what was going on was to get this guy talking. He'd spill more than he realized to me just by having that "civilized" conversation.

Suddenly, the man threw his head back and laughed. He pressed his hand to his chest, his whole body trembling as he laughed.

"I'm not kidnapping anyone. In fact, I'm rescuing you from a potentially dangerous hostage situation," he told me.

I arched an eyebrow, testing the ropes again. It was no use. I couldn't loosen them. Even if I did, I'd have to get past this massive, strong man, a locked guard, and whatever security was on the other side. There was absolutely no way I'd be able to get out on my own.

But I could get as much information as possible.

"You had your men attack me and threaten the people I was traveling with," I reminded him.

"Yes, well, they were the ones that took you hostage," he said.

He walked around the chair so I didn't have to crane my neck to look at him. I was still having trouble seeing his face still but his eyes flashed in the darkness.

"They were protecting me. They were traveling with me," I argued. "Are you sure you have the right person?"

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Thomas shrugged. "That's why I'm here. To protect your sensitive little butt."

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“They were protecting me. They were traveling with me,” I argued. “Are you sure you have the right person?”

### [Chapter 697](#)

“Oh, I’m sure, I have the right witch,” he said. He leaned in and grabbed my hair. I leaned away but I couldn’t swat him away or anything because my wrists and ankles were still tied. “I’d know this head of hair anywhere.”

“Then why do you think I was being held hostage?” I asked.

“Well, you see, I was reclaiming something that rightfully belonged to me. Something that had a very untimely disappearance,” he said. He dropped my hair and took a few steps back.

My jaw dropped as I realized he was talking about me. He thought I was his property!?

“I don’t belong to anyone! I’m a rogue!” I snapped.

“Hmm... that’s not how I remember it. I made a very large purchase from Saboreef. I paid top dollar for you as well,” he explained.

I gasped and leaned away from him as much as I could in the confined chair. My mind was working quickly as I put the pieces together.

“When Saboreef offered a last minute exchange... well, I wasn’t too happy about that, seeing as I’d agreed to something much better than what I was given,” he explained.

“Y-you’re Alpha Chandler... of Norwind...” I gasped again.

Alpha Chandler chuckled and nodded. “I am indeed. You are a smart girl, aren’t you?” He grinned through the darkness, seemingly in a good mood.

“I stand by what I said, I don’t belong to anyone,” I muttered.

I tested the ropes again and sighed. There was no point in trying to escape. I already knew that. Hopefully, I could keep him going until Soren came to get me.

There was no doubt in my mind that he would. Especially since he’d need me for the artifact, once he found all the pieces. I wasn’t going to give into Alpha Chandler but I’d be less resistant if it kept me alive longer.

He’d already revealed that he was after me for a specific reason. It wasn’t just about finding a younger, prettier companion. He was buying women to cover his tracks but it was really me he was after. Otherwise, a last minute exchange wouldn’t bother him so much.

At least I knew he wouldn’t kill me yet. I was safe from death but it could still be a while before Soren could come to get me. I didn’t want to give Chandler an excuse to be uncourteous with me.

I took a few deep breaths and calmed myself down. The goal was just to keep him talking and if I argued with everything he said, he’d clam up and leave me here alone, eventually. Once I had what I needed, I could form a better plan for escaping.

And waiting for Soren.

Sure, he’d show up eventually, but I needed to think of something in the meantime, in case I had to act before Soren made it to me.

“Alpha Chandler, I think you’ve made a mistake,” I said, becoming more friendly and pleasant. “I’m just a rogue. I don’t belong to Saboreef. I’ve been on my own my entire life. That’s why I was with a band of rogues.”

It wasn’t a lie, not exactly. I had never felt like I belonged in Saboreef. Now that I knew the truth about who I was and my family, I could confidently say I never belonged with Saboreef.

“Whatever deal you had with Saboreef, you should be talking to them, not me. I’m not one of them,” I insisted as pleasantly as possible.

Chandler shook his head.

“Nice try, young lady. However, that’s not going to work for me,” he said.

“It works for me,” I countered.

Chandler chuckled again and nodded appreciatively at me.

“Now, to make both of our lives easier, hand over what you found in Miltern,” he said firmly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I muttered, looking away from him.

“Don’t play dumb with me, girl! Hand it over!” he thrust his hand out, palm up.

I stared at his open palm and then looked down at my tied hands.

“Do you expect me to hand it over with tied wrists? Where do you think I’m hiding it, in my shoe?”

For some reason, I’d decided to leave my backpack in the Jeep. I hadn’t wanted any of Soren’s men going through it at the camp. At least the spellbook was safe in Payne’s Jeep and the map was safe with Soren.

Chandler growled and lifted his lips, showing me his teeth.

“Now, you’re trying my patience,” he hissed.

I smiled sweetly at him. “Well, if you tell me exactly what you’re looking for, maybe I can try to think through everything I’ve seen and tell you if I have what you’re looking for.”

Chandler narrowed his eyes on me. “I really hoped we could do this the easy way.”

“What is easier than you telling me exactly what you’re looking for?” I asked.

Chandler sniffed and snarled again. He didn’t like being challenged or called out.

Maybe I shouldn’t have pressed him so much but the more I pushed, the more I thought he’d reveal. I just had to be careful and not push him over the edge. Now that he was threatening me, I had to pull back a little.

“Looks like we’ll be doing things the hard way,” Chandler growled.

He clapped his hands and the door behind him opened.

I leaned over as much as I could to see if I could catch a glimpse of what was outside the room. Maybe I could see how many guards were out there.

I saw nothing as two, burly men forced their way through the door and slammed it shut quickly. The lock clicked and now I was locked in this small room with three men.

“What can we help with, Alpha?” a familiar voice asked.

My eyes snapped to the two new men. I recognized them immediately.

One of them had a tattoo across his face and the other was missing an eye. His beard was still scraggly but it was gray now. The man with the tattoo was balding slightly.

Anger boiled in my blood and I strained against the ropes. I clenched my teeth, grinding them. I just stared at the men, not showing the anger on my face. I remained quiet and still.

The last time I had seen them, they were robbing the dead members of my pack. They'd been responsible for killing everyone! I didn't have proof of that but I knew it. I knew that Alpha Chandler had ordered them to search my pack members and their destroyed mansion. That meant Alpha Chandler had ordered them to be destroyed in the first place.

Right from the start, he'd been behind it all and I would never give him what he wanted! I was going to have revenge against these two creeps and against the alpha that had destroyed it all!

My mind wandered back to what they said in the dream.

\*"I don't even know why all the alphas are so obsessed with it. I wondered what it could do?" the one-eyed man said.

\*I heard it can raise the dead and give endless power to those who are alive. I think our Alpha may want it to resurrect our dead Luna," tattoo-face said.\*

I glared at the two men as they came in, their words from my dreams echoing in my head. They wanted the artifact to bring Chandler's dead Luna back to life.

Was that even possible? I thought they were all crazy.

But it didn't matter what they wanted the artifact for. These guys killed my parents. They killed my pack! Chandler and his men had to die!

"Do what you must to break her... Just don't spoil her for me," Chandler ordered.

I saw the disgusting gleam leave the grotesque man's single eye. I should have felt relieved for that small mercy, but I knew what this guy was capable of.

All I could think was that I was going to kill him the moment I got free.

"Report back to me once she's in the mood to talk," Chandler said, smirking.

One-eye chuckled and nodded. "Oh, I'll loosen her up for you."

I shuddered at his words. The implication was nasty. Thankfully, Chandler had forbidden him from taking liberties with me.

Chandler nodded and left.

One-eye smirked and looked at me.

"Alright, let's do this," tattoo-face said.

One-eye held his arm up. "You watch. This b\*\*\*h is the daughter of that witch who refused to speak... Yeah, it'll take a lot to break her. I've got this."

“Argh. Whatever, but I’m not just going to sit and watch the whole time. You get first crack at her,” tottoo-face grumbled.

One-eye rolled up his sleeves. “I’ll only need one...”

I snorled at one-eye as he came closer to me. I knew he couldn’t kill me but there was a lot more he could do to me.

One-eye thrust his palm into my chest, knocking the wind out of me.

I coughed and sputtered as the chair I was tied to slammed into the back wall. The chair shattered and I crumpled on the floor, gasping and heaving for air.

Catching my breath, I watched as he pulled out a knife next.

Leaning over me, he grinned, showing his pitted, rotten teeth. His sour breath washed over me.

I wrinkled my nose, gagging and trying not to breathe in his smell, but my lungs had only just started letting me breathe again and I needed air!

Slowly, he pulled a knife out and waved it in front of my eyes. My eyes widened and I struggled against the bindings on my wrists.

My legs were free now that the chair had broken but I wasn’t at the right angle to kick him.

“Now, we’re going to have a little chat about a certain artifact,” he said.

He dove at me with the knife.

I cringed and curled in on myself but the knife never struck me.

Opening one eye, I saw him leaning over my back, slicing into the ropes of my wrists. When he was done, he stepped back and I could move my arms again.

I brought them around my body, rubbing my wrists and rolling my shoulders trying to ease the ache from being tied up.

“What do you do that for?” tottoo-face asked from the corner.

“It’s not fun if she doesn’t fight,” one-eye said, laughing.

“Whatever, I’m going to get some lunch. Want me to bring you anything?” tottoo-face asked.

At the mention of food, my stomach growled. I looked down and covered it with my hands.

“No, but bring your lunch back here. I want her to see and smell what she can’t have,” one-eye ordered.

As soon as we were alone, he turned back to me, his one eye gleaming.

“So, you’re hungry?” he asked. “Don’t worry, if you ask nicely, I’m sure I can find something to stuff that little mouth with.”

Laughing, he motioned to his groin.

My stomach turned and I groaned, looking away from him.

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I bit my tongue to hold back a scream as pain shot through my head. He craned my neck back so far I thought my spine would snap!

"Don't turn away from me, slut! We're going to have a lot of fun together. I took so much pleasure in breaking your mother," he snarled in my ear.

Gasping, I shook my head.

"But... you didn't... break her," I reminded him.

"Oh, you've got a mouth on you, don't you!" he snapped. He threw my head forward and my face smashed off the wall.

Blood spurted from my nose and dripped down my lips. I pinched the bridge of my nose and squinted my eyes shut.

“Don’t worry, you’ve still got all your limbs attached. That means we’ve got a long time to spend together,” one-eye chuckled.

He placed the edge of the knife blade at the base of my pinky.

“So, are you going to talk, or do I start chopping?” he growled.

### [Chapter 698](#)

“Whoa, whoa!” tattoo-face shouted when he walked back into the room.

Immediately, the strong scent of a steak and cheese sandwich filled my nose. My stomach growled again but I kept my eyes down. I refused to show them how much the smell was getting to me.

I had no idea when I ate last but my mouth watered and I swallowed repeatedly to keep them from noticing.

“Alpha Chandler said not to spoil her, remember?” tattoo-face said.

One-eye snarled and pulled the knife from my finger.

My pinky stung where the blade had cut through my skin and a sliver of blood formed. It wasn’t a bad wound.

“Well, he’ll change his tune eventually. For now, leave her to starve.”

\*\*\*

Two days.

For two days one-eye starved me and beat me.

He didn’t even ask any questions. He was just trying to break me down.

Every visit, he’d threaten me, call me names, call my mother names, and smack me around.

I kept my mouth clamped shut.

My entire body was bruised and aching. I had wooden splinters stuck in my arms from when the chair broke.

When one-eye and tattoo-face came in on the third day, I was too exhausted to glare at them. My head lolled to the side and I closed my eyes, so close to drifting off to sleep.

With how much pain I was in, it was really hard to get any rest at all. Finally, I’d gotten so exhausted, I could pass out through the pain.

“Hey, hey!” one-eye shouted. He slapped my face.

My cheek stung but I was so tired and so numb, I barely noticed.

“What the f\*\*k? I’m here to talk to you, you nasty w\*\*\*e. You’re going to disrespect me by sleeping?” he growled, slapping my face back and forth.

Groaning, I closed my eyes and hoped he’d leave me alone if I didn’t react.

“No. You don’t get off that easy,” he said.

One-eye stepped away.

Suddenly, icy water splashed my skin and soaked into my clothes.

I jerked awake, gasping and shivering. Of course, it was asking too much for them to let me get some sleep!

My mind wandered to Soren. How long would it be before he realized I was gone? Had Payne been able to get in touch with him at all? I couldn’t help but be mad at him. He was off chasing after the artifact while I was being tortured!

One-eye pressed his hand to my forehead and pushed my head back, forcing me to look into his face and his one eye.

“Good to see you awake,” he said, smirking cruelly. “Now, where is the box?”

They were asking about the box? Before, Chandler just asked about what I found in Miltern. Where had they gotten additional information about the box?

I kept my mouth shut and shook my head. He might have beaten and tortured me for days but I wasn’t going to give him what he wanted. The worst thing for a guy like this was to know he failed in breaking me.

But that still didn’t answer the question of where they were getting the information. I wondered if they had anyone else feeding it to them. Had they been spying?

Sighing, one-eye closed his eye and shook his head.

“Well, if you’re still not ready to talk, then perhaps someone else can convince you,” he said, grinning slyly.

He motioned to tattoo-face. He left the room for a moment and came back in, dragging someone in a cloak. Tattoo-face tossed the woman across the room and she rolled to a stop right in front of me.

“April!” I gasped, covering my mouth.

April muttered something unintelligible. Her lip was split and she had heavy, purple bruises on her eyes. Her cheeks were puffy and she had other cuts on her arms and her collarbone.

Whatever they had done to her was far worse than what I’d been going through. It looked like she had a bad head injury.

I saw that her clothes were ripped too, especially her pants and I could see bruises on her thighs.

One-eye licked his lips, lust filling his one eye as he looked at April.

“Now, you better talk or I can guarantee, you’ll end up just like her,” he said. He grabbed my cheeks and forced me to look at him. He moved his face closer to mine and licked his lips again, the tip of his tongue touching my lips.

I squirmed away from him. Tears dripped from my eyes. I couldn’t help it. My body was so worn down and April had suffered far worse than me. And she had suffered because of me.

“Tell me where the box is, I know you have it!” one-eye demanded.

I clamped my lips tightly and shook my head. I wasn’t going to disgrace April’s sacrifice by telling them what she wouldn’t.

“Very well, then,” he snarled.

He released my face and hovered over April’s limp body. He licked his lips again and pulled his knife out, waving it over her body.

“Don’t kill her,” I begged, speaking for the first time in days. My voice was hoarse and raspy.

One-eye laughed and shook his head. “Oh, I’m not going to kill her yet. She’s still got some use in her, a little more fun to be had before I end her.”

Still laughing, he cut down the center of April’s shirt and pants, her clothes falling away from her body.

I gasped in horror as I saw the damage they’d done to the rest of her. One of her breasts had been cut off and she was bruised and bleeding all over. The bruises on her thighs were a lot more noticeable now and she had blood between her legs. This wasn’t the first time one-eye had assaulted her...

“Stop it!” I yelled. “Stop! Don’t touch her!”

“M-Mila?” April whispered, her eyes fluttering.

“April, I’m here,” I said soothingly. I reached out and took her pale, weak hand in mine.

“I-I’m s-so sorry... I d-didn’t know... didn’t know they got y-you... I thought...” her voice was so soft I could barely hear it. Like every word was an effort.

She coughed a little and trembled.

“I th-thought you were s-safe... they th-threatened m-my pack... p-please... p-lease forgive m-me...”

She trailed off.

Fresh tears dripped down my face. I kept my eyes on April but I could tell that one-eye and tattoo-face were absolutely enjoying the pain in April’s voice and my tears. I was surprised they weren’t panting and jerking off with pleasure.

“Shh, April, save your strength,” I urged, rubbing her hand.

April smiled weakly. Before I could react, she grabbed the knife from one-eye’s hand and thrust it into her heart.

“No! April!” I cried.

She twitched several times and then lay still, her breathing stopped.

"What the f\*\*k!?" one-eye snarled, jumping to his feet.

I clenched my teeth and balled my hands into fists. These men were monsters! They killed whoever they wanted, even the innocent, for their own greed. My hatred for them grew and grew. I had to stop sniveling. It was time to get the upper hand!

"I want to talk to Chandler," I said.

One-eye ignored me. He leaned over April and checked her pulse. Sighing, he bowed his head.

"She's dead. That's so boring..."

Licking his lips, he looked at me.

"Well, little w\*\*\*e, since I can't use this one anymore, it looks like it is your turn." he grinned, showing me all his teeth.

"Stop! I want to talk to Alpha Chandler," I insisted. "I changed my mind..."

Single Eye threw his head back and laughed. "Sorry, Missy, you should have thought of that sooner. It would have been easier for you, and for your little friend."

He stalked toward me and I shrank against the wall.

Suddenly, the door opened and Alpha Chandler came in with several other male wolves. They stood around the room with their arms crossed.

"Stand down. She said she's changed her mind," Chandler said.

One-eye groaned and turned away. "Demmit!"

"Is it true, you changed your mind?" Chandler asked.

"Yes," I said with a weak nod.

"Tell me."

"When you first brought me here, I thought you were just a bastard that lost your mind. But now... I see you're nothing but a limp d\*\*k that has other men do your dirty work because you're too weak!"

Alpha Chandler growled and nodded toward one-eye.

He punched me in the face and I groaned. Then he kicked me in the stomach.

Leaning against the wall, I ignored the pain. It was easy when I looked at April. I just thought of what she went through and it gave me strength.

Laughing, I shook my head and clutched my stomach.

"What are you going to do with me? Even if you get the box, you can't use what's in it. Not without me!" I reminded them, laughing again.

I glanced up at Chendler and saw his face twist cruelly. He nodded to one-eye again and I got another kick in the stomach. I curled up a little but I still ignored the pain.

"If I was your Luna, I'd rather stay dead than come back and live with a monster like you. She'll never forgive you for destroying packs and torturing women," I teented.

"Shut her up now!" Chendler snarled.

"What? You wanted to talk to me and now you don't like what I have to say? Look at what you've turned into. Your wife would be absolutely disgusted by what you've done. She'll never be able to lay beside you without seeing the women you've murdered and assaulted. You're nothing but a common thug, a rapist, and she'll hate you!"

"Argh!" Chendler snarled.

He grabbed my throat and lifted me up, slamming me against the wall. His fingers tightened so much I could barely breathe. I thought I'd pushed him too far and he was going to kill me finally.

"Watch what you say. I can make your life a living hell. You'll wish I'd kill you, but you know what, I won't because you're right, you still have use to me," he whispered harshly in my ear.

Chendler released me and I slid back to the floor. Choking and coughing, I rubbed my throat.

"Tie her up so she can't kill herself like that one," Chendler snarled, kicking April's foot. "Then, have your way with her. Do whatever you need to do to break her," he said.

All the males in the room started cheering and high-fiving.

I saw their eyes light up lustfully. They were hungry for me and I already knew how one-eye felt. They were laughing and drooling over me.

Would Chendler have given that order if I hadn't insulted him? I knew I had pushed him off balance but now I was paying the price. Had I been too impulsive?

As they tied me up, I felt desperate and hopeless.

I closed my eyes and prayed to the Moon Goddess, asking her to send someone to save me. Immediately, Soren came to my mind but I didn't think that was possible. He was hundreds of miles away, how could he be here in my greatest time of need?

**BOOM!**

The ground trembled as an explosion ripped through the building.

#

Single Eye threw his head back and laughed. "Sorry, Missy, you should have thought of that sooner. It would have been easier for you, and for your little friend."

He stalked toward me and I shrank against the wall.

Suddenly, the door opened and Alpha Chandler came in with several other male wolves. They stood around the room with their arms crossed.

“Stand down. She said she’s changed her mind,” Chandler said.

One-eye groaned and turned away. “Dammit!”

“Is it true, you changed your mind?” Chandler asked.

“Yes,” I said with a weak nod.

“Tell me.”

“When you first brought me here, I thought you were just a bastard that lost your mind. But now... I see you’re nothing but a limp d\*\*k that has other men do your dirty work because you’re too weak!”

Alpha Chandler growled and nodded toward one-eye.

He punched me in the face and I groaned. Then he kicked me in the stomach.

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BOOM!

The ground trembled as an explosion ripped through the building.

### [Chapter 699](#)

The men all froze, Chandler stopped near the door, just before leaving.

"What the hell was that!?" he snarled, looking at the others.

They all shrugged and looked at each other in confusion.

For the moment, I was free of their torture and I took a few deep breaths, trying to settle myself. I still felt so much pain but my body was running on adrenaline. Whatever was going on, this was my chance to escape while they were distracted.

I started working on the knots that had me bound.

"Get out there! See what the f\*\*k is going on!" Chandler demanded, pointing to the door. He stepped out of their way.

One-eye, tattoo-face, and the others rushed to the door. Just as they reached it, the door flew inward with a huge blast. It crashed into Single Eye and the other wolves. They all fell to the ground like dominos, groaning and writhing in pain.

Chandler was far away from the attack and just stood there, staring.

I glanced around quickly trying to make sense of this. My mind reeled, my vision blurred from tears and weariness. But when newcomers flooded through the door, my heart soared.

Soren, Payne, Thomas, and a bunch of others, swooped in and immediately started fighting.

"Mila!" Soren's voice called.

"I-I'm here," I croaked.

Suddenly, he was beside me. He knelt down and looked me over quickly. He looked a little pale as his eyes roamed over me. What had happened to him?

I wanted to ask but his eyes fell on the ropes binding my hands and feet. Soren's nostrils flared and rage exploded in his eyes.

Roaring, he launched himself at Chandler and shoved him into the nearest wall. They began fighting.

Thomas, Payne, and the others were gaining the upper hand against Chandler's stunned wolves. As soon as Thomas stepped in to take over the fight with Chandler, Soren returned to me.

He pulled a knife out and cut the ropes on my legs and arms. Immediately, he scooped me into his arms and pressed his forehead against mine.

"Are you okay? What did Chandler do to you?" he murmured, stroking my tangled, messy hair.

I shook my head and trembled in his grasp. How was it possible that he was here? I hoped this wasn't some cruel dream or fantasy. Gripping Soren's shirt with one hand, I lifted a shaking arm and pointed to one-eye.

"April died," I whispered. "But he..."

"Shhh, shh," Soren soothed. He hugged me against his strong chest.

I shook my head. "He is one of them."

Soren's eyes widened and he nodded. He ran his fingers down my face and pressed a soft kiss to my forehead. I knew he understood what I was trying to tell him.

"Do you want him dead?" Soren asked.

I nodded slowly. "I'm going to kill him."

Soren kissed my forehead again. Gently, he placed me on the floor. I could feel his reluctance as he pulled his arms from around me.

I didn't want him to let me go. His arms were warm and safe. They'd protect me. But I was too sore to pull him back.

Soren looked at April's body. I saw the horror in his eyes as he could see the damage done to her and that her clothes were shredded. I didn't want to look at her anymore so I kept my eyes on Soren's face.

He became very still. His face a stone mask. He looked tense, like a spring ready to go off at any moment. Stiffly, silently, he stood up and took his jacket off. Respectfully, he lay his jacket over April's naked body.

My heart softened a little, seeing that gesture of respect. Tears pricked my eyes again but I held them back this time. There would be a time to grieve for April.

Thomas and Payne were still fighting Chandler. All the others had been incapacitated or were still suffering injuries from the explosion.

Soren walked right by them. He really trusted them to handle Chandler.

The Alpha was putting up a big fight but Thomas and Payne had a lot of strength. I knew that they would be able to handle Chandler while Soren took care of one-eye.

I watched as Soren went over to the one-eyed wolf. He snarled and lifted his upper lip, showing his teeth.

One-eye had taken the brunt of the hit when the door exploded. He was curled in a ball on the floor, groaning and writhing.

He glared at Soren. "Are you after that witch's p\*\*\*y too?" he asked, sneering.

Soren glanced at me. "Did he hit you?" he asked.

Slowly, I nodded. I gently touched my bruised cheek, showing Soren what he'd done.

Soren's terrifying, calm demeanor didn't change as he looked down at my attacker again.

"You bet your f\*\*\*\*\*g ass I did! You sissy... AHHHHH!" One-eye's foul language cut off as Soren dug the heel of his boot into his hand.

I heard the crunching bones as all his fingers, knuckles, and hand bones broke. Soren dug his boot in deeper and twisted it back and forth, grinding his hand into the ground.

I noticed it was one-eye's dominant hand, the one he'd struck me with repeatedly.

Soren stepped back and one-eye clutched his broken, mangled hand to his chest.

"f\*\*k you, you f\*\*\*\*\*g t\*\*t! If you're going to kill me, kill me like a f\*\*\*\*\*g man, not some limp weasel!" he shouted.

Chuckling, Soren crouched down over One Eye. He whispered to him in a deep, threatening whisper.

"Oh, I'll kill you. You can be sure of that. But I'm not going to kill you like a man. To me, you aren't a man and don't deserve a man's death. Quick and easy is too good for scum like you."

"Argghh!" Chandler groaned.

I looked across the room, seeing Thomas and Payne shoving Chandler to the floor, subduing him. Payne tied a rope around him like a rodeo star and Thomas held Chandler down with his foot.

Soren nodded to them and they remained close to Chandler in case he tried anything.

I looked back to Soren. The only thing I cared about was witnessing one-eye's fate.

"Since you're not a man, you won't need these anymore..." Soren kicked one-eye hard in the groin. He was wearing steel toed boots.

One-eye groaned and I saw his pants bleed through with blood.

"You're a f\*\*\*\*\*g psycho! You think you're so high and mighty... pft. You're no better than me!" he cried, snarling, spitting, and cursing as he clutched his damaged groin. "You're going to pay for that! You f\*\*\*\*\*g bastard. You're nothing but a flaming fag!"

"Oh, you're not going to make me pay now... not with your favorite weapon permanently out of commission," Soren taunted.

"You're a f\*\*\*\*\*g b\*\*\*h. You hear me! You'll bend over for that t\*\*t and do her killing for her!" one-eye shouted, pointing right at me. "I'll kill you for this. I'll kill you!"

Soren sneered. "How many times have you heard the same threats from the people you've tortured and the women you've assaulted? Has it ever bothered you?"

One-eye snarled and hissed. He didn't answer with words, his single eye glaring viciously at Soren.

Smirking dangerously, Soren said darkly, "I bet it didn't. Why do you think it would bother me?"

One-eye just glared at Soren. He snarled, nostrils flaring, spit flying from his lips with every breath.

I couldn't deny that seeing him struggling on the floor was satisfying. I knew I was too weak to do anything to him but it was still gratifying to watch. Now he could crawl and cower on the floor in pain!

Soren twisted his wrist, catching light on the blade of his knife.

"You know, being watched by someone as hideous as you is just... unsettling. Let me fix that."

In one swift motion, Soren popped out one-eye's remaining eye.

"AHHHHH!" Blood spurted from the socket one-eye, or no-eye now, screamed in pain. "You bastard. You f\*\*\*\*\*g prick! I curse your f\*\*\*\*\*g name and very existence. You got that! Even after I'm dead, I'll hunt your ass!"

The knife April had stabbed herself with was still sticking out of her body. I grabbed the knife and leaned against the wall, pulling myself into a standing position.

My legs trembled and shudders ran through me as I inched toward Soren, sticking to the wall for support.

"I went to do it," I whispered, my voice trembling.

Soren glanced over his shoulder at me. "What?" he asked.

"I went to end him with my own hands," I clarified, holding up the bloody knife.

"No, Mile. No," Soren said. He frowned and shook his head.

"Do you... even know what he did to A-April?" I asked. "To my mom?"

Soren bowed his head and nodded. His eyes flicking to April's body.

"It isn't hard to figure out," he said.

"I went to kill him. I went to feel his life leave him," I insisted, brandishing the knife.

Soren stepped between me and no-eye's limp, bloody body.

He still gasped and groaned on the floor, very much alive. I couldn't bear it that he was still breathing!

"Mile, it isn't worth it. He isn't worth it," Soren said gently, creasing his brow. He reached out and wrapped his hand around mine, carefully pulling the knife from me.

"But I..."

Soren held up his hand. "Shhh. This isn't your burden."

"After what he did! It won't be e burden," I insisted, trying to stey strong by holding onto my enger.

Sighing, I slumped egeinst the well. I could berely reise my voice without sepping ell my strength.

Soren smiled sedly end put his hend egeinst my cheek. "Meybe not todey, meybe not tomorrow, but somedey, it will be e burden for you. I won't let you cerry thet burden for e lowly piece of scum like him."

Soren tossed the knife ecross the room.

"Pleese..."

Before I could finish, Soren spun around end snepped one-eye's neck. He berely uttered e grunt before he died, instently.

I didn't even heve time to reect before Soren was stending between me end the deed body. His hulking form kept me from seeing the worst of the c\*\*\*\*\*e.

A huge weight lifted off of me. He wes deed. The men that killed my peck, tortured my mother, end tortured me... He wes deed!

Footsteps pounded down the corridore outside the room end severel new wolves burst in. They swarmed Thomes end Payne, pushing them ell eside end collecting Chendler.

As quickly es they'd epeered, they ell left, cerrying Chendler with them.

"Demmit!" Payne shouted, jumping to his feet.

"We'll catch up to him," Soren essured.

"We'll go now," Thomes seid, clepping Payne on the shoulder. The two of them reced out of the room.

It wes over. All of it wes finelly over.

Sighing, I wevered end fell forwerd. Soren's erms ceme around me end I leened egeinst him.

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Sighing, I slumped against the wall. I could barely raise my voice without sapping all my strength.

Soren smiled sadly and put his hand against my cheek. "Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but someday, it will be a burden for you. I won't let you carry that burden for a lowly piece of scum like him."

Soren tossed the knife across the room.

"Please..."

Before I could finish, Soren spun around and snapped one-eye's neck. He barely uttered a grunt before he died, instantly.

I didn't even have time to react before Soren was standing between me and the dead body. His hulking form kept me from seeing the worst of the c\*\*\*\*\*e.

A huge weight lifted off of me. He was dead. The man that killed my pack, tortured my mother, and tortured me... He was dead!

Footsteps pounded down the corridor outside the room and several new wolves burst in. They swarmed Thomas and Payne, pushing them all aside and collecting Chandler.

As quickly as they'd appeared, they all left, carrying Chandler with them.

“Dammit!” Payne shouted, jumping to his feet.

“We’ll catch up to him,” Soren assured.

“We’ll go now,” Thomas said, clapping Payne on the shoulder. The two of them raced out of the room.

It was over. All of it was finally over.

Sighing, I wavered and fell forward. Soren’s arms came around me and I leaned against him.

My mind went dark as all the exhaustion, fatigue, and hunger from my long torture overwhelmed me.

## [Chapter 700](#)

\*Soren\*

We got Mila back to the inn and I stayed beside her, waiting for her to wake up. Dr. Lee examined her and assured me that she hadn’t been sexually assaulted and that she should make a full recovery, physically. He also assured me the poison hadn’t spread too far.

But she was still asleep. I didn’t know why and I wasn’t taking my eyes off of her until I knew for sure that she was going to be okay.

Lee set her up with an IV to keep her hydrated and nourish her since she was so malnourished from her captivity.

I pulled a chair up beside the bed and held a book in my lap, my eyelids drooping repeatedly. Every time my eyes closed, I opened them quickly and bobbed awake.

Knock. Knock.

I looked to the door as Thomas let himself in.

“Soren, you look like ass,” Thomas said.

Grunting, I closed my book and set it aside.

“Thanks?” I asked.

“You’ve got to get some rest, man. First, you nearly drain yourself of blood, then rush off to save Mila before fully recovering. You haven’t slept for more than two days. Do you think you’re still in your twenties?” Thomas chastised.

“I’m fine,” I muttered. I rubbed the back of my neck.

“You don’t look fine, and it definitely doesn’t smell fine in here.” Thomas waved a hand in front of his face. “When was the last time you showered?”

“Are you here to be constructive or just insult me?” I growled.

Thomas smirked. “Alpha, can I say something?”

“Only if you stop calling me that,” I growled, sighing heavily.

After all the years we'd known each other, Thomas wasn't just my Beta. Or, would have been my Beta if I'd accepted my role as Alpha. He was my best friend.

I knew him as well as I knew myself and he wouldn't be so serious if he wasn't actually concerned about me.

Like me, Thomas valued freedom. He didn't like being tied down, which is why he never bugged me about going back and becoming an Alpha. He didn't urge me to settle down or take on more responsibility.

Out of everyone else in my life, Thomas understood me and wouldn't speak out against me or my choices unless he had a real reason to object.

"Go ahead," I said with a sigh.

"I know I was excited by the prospect of you finding your mate and settling down but... I have to agree with everyone else on this one. This girl is trouble. If she is your mate, I understand why you want to do these things for her but... is she?"

I pursed my lips and leaned back in the chair. "Honestly, I don't know..."

"You don't know?" Thomas asked, arching an eyebrow.

"No, I don't," I repeated.

"Heh. That means she isn't. Otherwise, you would have felt the matebond by now. So, she's not your mate... but do you love her or are you falling for her?" he pressed.

I pinched the bridge of my nose and closed my eyes.

Thomas wasn't usually this forward and insistent with me. Our relationship almost always revolved around teasing each other and having fun. If he was being so serious and confrontational, then he had true concerns about what was going on with me and Mila.

I could guess why he was concerned but I wanted to hear it from him first.

Thomas sighed and bowed his head. "She's not your mate. You're not in love with her. Why the hell are you doing all of this?"

"I don't know what to tell you," I said, shrugging.

Thomas's jaw dropped and he just stared at me. "Soren, I know that she bears a certain resemblance to Rosalie but you've done enough for her. Saving her isn't going to win you Rosalie."

I growled lightly but I didn't deny Thomas's claims. There had never been a moment where I thought helping Mila would change the relationship between Rosalie and me. We didn't have a relationship and that was how it was meant to be.

It had been painful to accept, so painful that I left the light realm. But I had no delusions or fantasies of us finding a way to be together in the future. She was with who she was meant to be with.

Thomas's eyes continued to burn into me. I didn't look at him, letting my eyes rest on Mila's weak, soft body.

"I'm going to get a drink at the bar. See you around, man," Thomas said. He tossed me a dismissive wave and closed the door behind him.

Mila shuddered and shifted on the bed but her eyes remained closed. I leaned my elbows on the soft mattress and watched her closely.

Thomas's words rang in my mind.

Was I doing this because of Rosalie? I could deny it all I wanted but if it wasn't because of her, then why?

When I'd first seen Mila, she reminded me of Rosalie and that was one reason she caught my attention. So much had happened since then, so much had changed.

When Payne told me that Mila was kidnapped, the rage and fear I'd felt had been overwhelming. I'd never felt anything like that. When I'd seen her beaten and tied up, it was like a bomb went off in my mind.

I had been ready to kill everyone in the room. It had taken all my self-control not to kill everyone there, including Alpha Chandler.

Reaching out, I ran my fingers through Mila's soft hair. I couldn't describe the relief and internal peace I felt at having her safe and back with me.

But... was I ready to fully cut my ties with my own past, with Rosalie?

\*\*\*

\*Mila\*

Slowly, I opened my eyes in the bright room and blinked several times. I knew right away that I was in Soren's room at the inn. I remembered it from the last time I'd woken up there from being poisoned.

The bed was just as comfortable as I remembered it. My body didn't hurt nearly as much as it had before but the mattress was definitely helping.

I glanced sideways and saw Soren sitting in a chair next to me. He had a book open, his eyes roaming back and forth on the pages as he read.

A giggly laugh bubbled up inside of me and I flopped back on the pillows.

Soren looked up and shut the book. He creased his brow as he watched me laughing.

"I'm sorry. I just... I don't even know how many times you've saved me at this point. Other than 'thank you,' I have no idea what to say. It just sounds so lame with everything you've done," I muttered, still laughing.

Soren nodded curtly. "We made a deal, remember? You already held up your end. I'm just holding up mine."

Immediately, I stopped laughing and my heart sank. Whenever I said anything about our relationship or his actions, he'd bring up the deal again. I was nothing but a business transaction to him.

As much as I wanted to be mad at Soren for that, I couldn't be. It was my fault. The whole deal had been my brilliant idea.

There were times when it seemed like he cared about me, actually cared about me. Soren was so powerful and reserved. I'd never be able to interpret his feelings, especially the ones he didn't want to share. What right did I have to ask him anything like that, anyway?

"Speaking of saving you, here," Soren said. He pulled a vial with a dropper out of his pocket and placed it in my hand.

"What's this?" I asked, c\*\*\*\*g my head to the side.

"This is the antidote for your Blackfire poisoning. You'll have to put three drops on your tongue once a week for three months and the poison will clear up," he explained.

"Where did you get this?" I gasped. I didn't even know there was an antidote. I just thought Soren's doctor would have to come up with something.

"The Helingred plant provides a blossom that creates the antidote. Thomas and I went to get one so Lee could make this for you," he told me.

"Helingred?" I asked. That explained why he was so pale!

My stomach twisted and my face scrunched up. I'd been wrong about Soren, again. He hadn't run off to find the artifact pieces. He'd been risking his life to get me the antidote instead.

In his mind, it was probably just because of the deal. I couldn't help feeling warm and soft toward him. Helingred flowers were not easy to get and Soren had clearly paid the price.

Suddenly, I felt guilty. I'd been mad at him for leaving and allowing me to get kidnapped. I thought he was just hungry for the artifact but it had always been to save me. He was nothing like what I thought!

"I..."

I had no idea what to say.

Fortunately, I didn't have to struggle for it.

Someone knocked on the door and Ashley let herself in. She glanced at me but she didn't look angry or pissed. If anything, she seemed uncomfortable.

Swallowing, Ashley rubbed her hands on her thighs.

"Thanks... you know, for helping me," Ashley muttered, looking at the floor.

"Oh. You're welcome," I said, smiling.

Ashley sniffed. "No one asked you to be the hero! I could have handled it myself."

She put her hands on her hips but I could tell she was reacting from wounded pride, not out of anger.

"I know. But I wasn't going to let anyone else get hurt because of me," I said. I thought of April and my heart trembled.

"Well, thanks," Ashley repeated.

Peyne came through the door looking a little winded, like he'd been chasing after Ashley.

"I apologize for the interruption. Ashley, you need to stop acting like a child. Mile needs peace and quiet to recover," he said. He nodded to me and Soren.

I smiled and shook my head. Despite her rough exterior, I knew that Ashley had a kind heart. She was stubborn and proud.

"No, Payne, Ashley is right," I said. I turned to Ashley and held her gaze. "In the future, I won't be so hasty. Next time, I'll think twice."

"Next time? There better not be a next time," Ashley grumbled, crossing her arms.

Ashley grinned back and rolled her eyes playfully. Whatever tension was between us before seemed to be gone. I was grateful for that because I had nothing against her at all.

I caught the relieved look that passed between Payne and Soren as well. Apparently, they were also hoping that Ashley would ease up and get over her issues.

"Well, we still have a lot of preparations for the Hunter's Moon party. If you went, you can attend," Ashley said, extending an invitation.

I creased my brow. "Hunter's Moon?"

"It is a big party. A pretty big deal here in the rogue zone," Payne explained.

"If you went to go, I'll introduce you to Medeme Scerlett," Ashley offered.

"Who?" I asked.

Peyne scoffed and glared at Ashley. I wondered what it was about Medeme Scerlett that he disapproved of. It made me curious about who this woman was.

Ashley rolled her eyes at Payne. "You're such a stick in the mud! There aren't many young girls in town. You know Medeme Scerlett will want to meet Mile too. She'll like her."

Curiosity gnawed at me. Payne's disapproval, the vague description of who this Medeme was, and Ashley's eagerness. It made me want to jump right out of bed, get dressed, and go check her out.

Before making any commitments, I glanced at Soren. I wanted to know what he thought of Medeme Scerlett.

Soren smiled slightly and shrugged. It wasn't a yes or a no. But he didn't flinch or have the same disapproving look that Payne had.

That was good enough for me.

"Thank you, Ashley. I would love to go!" I said, smiling at the other women.

#

“Helingred?” I asked. That explained why he was so pale!

My stomach twisted and my face scrunched up. I’d been wrong about Soren, again. He hadn’t run off to find the artifact pieces. He’d been risking his life to get me the antidote instead.

In his mind, it was probably just because of the deal. I couldn’t help feeling warm and soft toward him. Helingrind flowers were not easy to get and Soren had clearly paid the price.

Suddenly, I felt guilty. I’d been mad at him for leaving and allowing me to get kidnapped. I thought he was just hungry for the artifact but it had always been to save me. He was nothing like what I thought!

“I...”

I had no idea what to say.

Fortunately, I didn’t have to struggle for it.

Someone knocked on the door and Ashley let herself in. She glanced at me but she didn’t look angry or pissed. If anything, she seemed uncomfortable.

Swallowing, Ashley rubbed her hands on her thighs.

“Thanks... you know, for helping me,” Ashley muttered, looking at the floor.

“Oh. You’re welcome,” I said, smiling.

Ashley sniffed. “No one asked you to be the hero! I could have handled it myself.”

She put her hands on her hips but I could tell she was reacting from wounded pride, not out of anger.

“I know. But I wasn’t going to let anyone else get hurt because of me,” I said. I thought of April and my heart trembled.

“Well, thanks,” Ashley repeated.

Payne came through the door looking a little winded, like he’d been chasing after Ashley.

“I apologize for the interruption. Ashley, you need to stop acting like a child. Mila needs peace and quiet to recover,” he said. He nodded to me and Soren.

I smiled and shook my head. Despite her rough exterior, I knew that Ashley had a kind heart. She was stubborn and proud.

“No, Payne, Ashley is right,” I said. I turned to Ashley and held her gaze. “In the future, I won’t be so hasty. Next time, I’ll think twice.”

“Next time? There better not be a next time,” Ashley grumbled, crossing her arms.

Ashley grinned back and rolled her eyes playfully. Whatever tension was between us before seemed to be gone. I was grateful for that because I had nothing against her at all.

I caught the relieved look that passed between Payne and Soren as well. Apparently, they were also hoping that Ashley would ease up and get over her issues.

“Well, we still have a lot of preparations for the Hunter’s Moon party. If you want, you can attend,” Ashley said, extending an invitation.

I creased my brow. “Hunter’s Moon?”

“It is a big party. A pretty big deal here in the rogue zone,” Payne explained.

“If you want to go, I’ll introduce you to Madame Scarlett,” Ashley offered.

“Who?” I asked.

Payne scoffed and glared at Ashley. I wondered what it was about Madame Scarlett that he disapproved of. It made me curious about who this woman was.

Ashley rolled her eyes at Payne. “You’re such a stick in the mud! There aren’t many young girls in town. You know Madame Scarlett will want to meet Mila too. She’ll like her.”

Curiosity gnawed at me. Payne’s disapproval, the vague description of who this Madame was, and Ashley’s eagerness. It made me want to jump right out of bed, get dressed, and go check her out.

Before making any commitments, I glanced at Soren. I wanted to know what he thought of Madame Scarlett.

Soren smiled slightly and shrugged. It wasn’t a yes or a no. But he didn’t flat out object or have the same disapproving look that Payne had.

That was good enough for me.

“Thank you, Ashley. I would love to go!” I said, smiling at the other woman.