

Kings Breeder 701

[Chapter 701](#)

Mila

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It was the most dressed up I'd been in a long time. Even more beautiful than the time Soren took me to lunch in the gardens.

I ran my hands up and down my sides, delighting in the cool feeling of the satin against my skin.

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She was right!

Inside, the entire hotel was lavishly decorated. We walked along a corridor lined with light sconces that resembled torches. At the end of the corridor, it opened up into a large ballroom. A giant glass chandelier hung from the ceiling and there was a live band playing music.

So many people were already there, and there were some of the most beautiful ball gowns I'd ever seen.

The way some of the women were flirting with and dancing with the other males made my cheeks burn.

I looked down.

So, it was a brothel. That's why the woman who ran it was called Madam. No wonder Payne was giving Ashley such strange looks when she brought Madam Scarlett up.

It took me no time at all to find Madam Scarlett in the crowd. She wore a black and red dress. The skirt was deep red, floor length, and poofed out slightly at the waist. The bodice of the dress was black. It was backless with a halter strap. The front was tight around her breasts and there was a large slit, revealing her abdomen and navel.

Her brown, curly hair was pinned up and a few curling tendrils hung down around her neck. She had sparkling ribbons in her hair, diamond earrings, and a matching diamond necklace.

She was in her late thirties, but I saw that many men in the room looked at her with lust and desire. She was absolutely beautiful.

Catching sight of us, Madam Scarlett waved and headed over. Her hips swayed when she walked, causing her skirt to crinkle as she approached us.

“Soren, I wasn’t expecting you,” she said. She held her hand out to him.

Soren smiled and kissed the back of her hand. “I hadn’t planned to be here.”

He glanced at me.

“Oh, and who is this?” Madam Scarlett asked. She turned to me and took my hands in hers.

“I’m Mila,” I introduced myself.

“Is she one of yours, Soren?” the Madam asked, looking me over quickly.

“One of mine? You make it sound like I run a brothel too,” Soren grumbled.

Madam Scarlett chuckled. “Hardly. I never see you with a woman at all, let alone one as beautiful as this.”

My cheeks warmed and I smiled shyly.

Madam Scarlett held my arms out to the sides and twisted me back and forth so she could get a better look at me.

“Absolutely stunning,” she muttered.

“Thank you,” I whispered.

“Why don’t you come with me? I know Soren’s group is a real boy’s crowd. You need a girl’s night,” Madam Scarlett insisted.

She looped her arm through mine and started pulling me through the crowd.

I glanced back at Soren. He just shrugged and smiled at me. I didn’t have a choice but to follow along.

“You’ll notice I have quite a few girls working for me,” Scarlett said, motioning to the dancefloor.

“They aren’t very shy, are they,” I said.

Scarlett laughed, a sound like a bell. It drew a lot of attention from men around the room.

“No, they aren’t. But they do look lovely, don’t they?” she asked. We passed close by one and Scarlett touched the girl’s cheek.

She smiled and I saw the look in her eyes as she looked at Scarlett. She was completely devoted to the Madam.

All her girls were dressed in fine evening gowns, even finer than the dress she wore. She really did care about them because a wardrobe like that was very expensive!

“Here you are my dear,” Scarlett said. She snatched a cocktail off a tray as a waitress walked by and handed it to me.

“Oh, thank you,” I said. I took a sip and gasped. It was so sweet and delicious.

“Now, enjoy the party. You are an honored guest of mine tonight,” Scarlett said, swiping her own cocktail.

"I am, why?" I asked, sipping my drink again.

"Because you managed to get Soren to come to my event. Anyone that can get him out of his own head is honored in my opinion," she said. She winked at me and touched my cheek the same way she had one of her working girls.

I could see why so many people were completely enamored with her. She had a way of making anyone she looked at and spoke to feel special.

I was almost sad as she walked away from me.

Shaking my head, I looked around to see if I could see anyone that I recognized.

For a moment, I wondered if Scarlett and Soren had had a romantic relationship. They seemed to know each other pretty well and she seemed to care about him. Though, as prominent figures in the rogue zone, they probably had to work together a lot.

Ashley was on the other side of the room with several of the brothel girls. I headed over to her since I couldn't see anyone else that I knew.

Ashley's cheeks were rosy and she had a half-empty drink in her hand. I didn't think it was her first drink.

"Oh, ladies, you have to meet this special, special lady," Ashley gushed when she saw me approaching. She grabbed my wrist, a little tightly, and half dragged me back to the group of girls. She nearly tripped on her own feet.

"Ashley, slow down," I whispered to her. She'd been drinking quite a bit.

"Girls, this is Mila. Isn't she beautiful?" Ashley asked the other girls.

They giggled and suddenly they were all pawing at me. They looked over my dress, my hair, and my bracelet.

"So beautiful."

"This bracelet is truly exquisite."

"You really know how to wear this dress."

My cheeks were practically on fire as they praised me and touched me. I'd never had so much positive female attention before and I had no idea how to handle it.

Ashley grabbed my hand suddenly and squeezed my fingers.

"You're so beautiful. It is no wonder... no wonder he likes you," she said, slurring slightly. She tried to give me a serious look but she was too drunk to pull it off.

"Well, this is a great party. Thank you for inviting me," I said, trying to change the subject before Ashley said something she'd regret later.

"No, no. I mean... He really likes you," she insisted.

I cleared my throat. This was the whole reason she was mad at me before and I really didn't want that anger to resurface while she was drunk.

"I'm sure it just seems that way," I muttered, trying to refute her claims.

"But it is totally okay. I know that Soren doesn't have romantic feelings for me... but I wondered... I wondered what kind of woman he'd like... Now I know," she said.

She hugged me tightly around the neck.

My eyes widened and I realized the other girls had all heard what Ashley was saying. I hugged her back awkwardly, wishing the ground would swallow me up and end this torment.

At least, Ashley was being nice and supportive instead of mean.

"Ashley, how much have you had to drink?" Payne asked, coming over and pulling her away from me. He gave me an apologetic look.

"Oh, not that much," Ashley said. She held her glass up and nearly sloshed the beverage over the sides of the glass.

Payne sighed and glanced at me again, with another apologetic look.

I shrugged and nodded to him, slowly backing away.

As I retreated, I caught bits of their conversation.

"Why are you such a buzzkill, brother?" Ashley whined as Payne wrestled her drink away.

"I'm looking out for you because that's what brothers do," he defended.

"But... I have to ask you. Isn't Mila pretty? Like, way prettier than me. I feel like I've seen her before," Ashley slurred.

"She's very pretty," Payne muttered, going along with Ashley.

Their voices were distant but I could still hear them through the crowd.

"Who does she look like? Oh, I know. She looks like Lu-"

"Ashley, you're drunk. Give it a rest," Payne said.

His voice was so soft to me now that if Ashley replied, I couldn't hear it anymore.

I grabbed another drink off a nearby waitress's tray and stood at the edge of the dance floor, sipping slowly.

I got the feeling that Payne was trying to keep something from me. The last time he did that was when Soren had gone off to get the Howlingred blossom. I knew now that those looks he gave me were because he wanted me to know how displeased he was that Soren was risking his life to save mine.

"I am, why?" I asked, sipping my drink again.

“Because you managed to get Soren to come to my event. Anyone that can get him out of his own head is honored in my opinion,” she said. She winked at me and touched my cheek the same way she had one of her working girls.

But Payne was loyal to Soren and wouldn't speak out against him or do anything to diminish Soren's sacrifice, like by telling me how much he blamed me for Soren's recklessness.

This was different. He kept showing up whenever Ashley and I were talking and getting in the way. It was like he didn't want me to hear what Ashley had to say.

I grabbed another drink as soon as mine was empty and kept sipping as I thought things over.

He couldn't be trying to keep the truth about Ashley's feelings for Soren from me. I already knew that and she wasn't exactly shy. I was sure Soren knew how she felt, too.

When I finished my third drink, I decided that I needed some fresh air. There were a lot of giggling, gushing women in the room and I just wasn't used to that. Especially when they were all gushing over me.

At one end of the ballroom, there was a set of double doors that led to a balcony. Setting my empty glass aside, I headed out onto the balcony. No one else was out there and I sighed in relief.

It was good to be alone.

The moon was so big and beautiful in the night sky. I stared up at it and all my thoughts and worries disappeared. The light came down to me and I almost felt like I was floating away from my body and from all the troubles I had.

Ever since I stumbled into Soren's inn, my life felt like it was accelerated so quickly. I was constantly going from one thing to the next and I'd already accomplished so much, with their help.

I'd had so many new experiences, not all of them good, and learned more about myself and my family than I'd ever known before.

My life in Saboreef felt so far away now.

“Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know anyone else was out here,” Soren's voice broke into my thoughts.

I glanced at him over my shoulder. Suddenly, the wind picked up and I shivered. I grabbed my arms and rubbed my hands up and down them to warm myself.

Soren paused, half turned back to the door. He came toward me and pulled his jacket off. He draped it over my shoulders and stood next to me at the balcony rail.

“Thank you,” I whispered. I slipped my arms into the jacket. His warmth and scent still lingered, making me feel much warmer and more comfortable.

“You looked like you were deep in thought,” he commented.

“Oh, I was just getting some fresh air,” I said, grinning.

“Me too,” he said, smiling. “What were you thinking about?”

My smile faded slightly and I shrugged.

"I was thinking about the past few weeks and how so much has happened. More has happened to me in just a few weeks than in the past ten years," I explained. Sighing, I leaned my elbows on the railing and looked up at the sky.

"Well, you should get used to it," Soren said with a chuckle.

I arched an eyebrow at him. "I should? Is your life always this intense?"

"I just mean that you're still young. You've got a lot of life ahead of you. I'm sure there is plenty more you have yet to experience. So, relax. Enjoy the ride," he said, winking.

Smiling, I looked at my hands and the moonlight glinted off the bracelet Soren had given me. I held my wrist up and spun the bracelet around.

I chewed my lower lip and opened my mouth to speak. Then I closed it and shook my head.

I saw Soren's smile out of the corner of my eye. "You have something on your mind. What is it?"

"If I ask, will you answer?" I questioned softly.

"That depends," Soren admitted with a shrug.

"Then, I suppose all I can do is try." My stomach fluttered nervously. "I'm wondering why your mate isn't with you."

Soren's brow creased and he pursed his lips. He seemed surprised by my question but not upset or angry.

I knew it was a pretty personal question to ask.

"I haven't found my mate," he said, frowning slightly.

It was my turn to be surprised. Soren was old not to have found his mate. Not that he was old, but he was old enough. Most shifters found their mates pretty young.

Part of me was a little relieved to hear it. Maybe there was hope that he could have feelings for me.

Soren sighed and bowed his head slightly. He turned away from me and looked out at the endless sky. He seemed distant, lost in thought.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked," I whispered.

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"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked," I whispered.

Soren turned to me, his gaze falling on me again, burning intensely.

[Chapter 703](#)

Soren's gaze had me paralyzed. My breath caught in my throat and warmth rose to the surface of my skin.

I wasn't sure if it was the drinks from earlier or the power of the moon but I felt elated and a little fuzzy. The moonlight hit just right and the mood was romantic.

I bit my lower lip, looking into Soren's deep, penetrating eyes. His face was so handsome and I got lost in his gaze.

Without thinking, I leaned a little closer to him.

Soren leaned closer to me until our arms were touching.

I gasped and my lower lip quivered.

Soren's lips quirked up and he moved even closer. He placed his hand on my wrist and swooped down, kissing me on the lips.

My breath caught in my throat and I was frozen in place.

He moved his lips against mine and cupped the back of my head, preventing me from pulling away.

My stomach fluttered and I could have squirmed right out of my skin!

When he pulled away, Soren grinned. He took my hand and led me back into the ballroom.

I stuck close to him as he led me around the outside wall and to the nearest staircase. I glanced around shyly as he pulled me up to the hotel rooms. No one seemed to notice us, but my stomach fluttered around as I thought of the scandalousness of what we were doing.

He pulled me into the nearest hotel room. As soon as the door was closed, Soren had me pressed against the door, kissing me fervently. His hands on my face.

I giggled and dropped Soren's jacket to the floor. He ran his fingers up my arms and I shivered.

"Are you sure you want this?" he asked, c*****g his head to the side.

His bright, lusty eyes burned into me.

I nodded and slipped my arms around Soren's neck. "Yes."

He picked me up by the waist. I had to wrap my legs around him which forced my dress up my legs, all the way to my hips.

Soren pushed me against the door again, running his hands up my thighs.

I shivered and gasped against his mouth. Knotting my fingers in his hair, he trailed kisses and nips down my neck.

He ran his hands up my back. The heat of his fingers sinking through my dress and to my bare back. He pulled me away from the door and brought me to the bed.

Soren hovered over me, smirking.

My entire body trembled.

He hooked a finger into the spaghetti strap of my dress and pulled it down my arm slowly. With a mischievous grin, he repeated the action with the other strap, pulling my dress down to my waist.

He ran his hands up my sides, brushing my navel with his thumbs.

I squirmed in his grasp.

Soren's hands cupped my breasts and his thumbs rolled over my n*****s. They tightened into little buds.

Gasping and moaning, I arched into his touch. My core heated and warm liquid pooled between my legs.

Leaning down, Soren sucked one of my n*****s into his mouth. He rolled it around with his tongue and pinched the other between his fingers.

I threw my head back on the pillows, writhing as pleasure coursed through me, making my clit throb. I clenched my thighs.

I ran my hand up the inside of Soren's thigh until I felt the sizable bulge between his legs.

He gasped, his teeth grazing my n****e.

I cupped his erection, pressing and rubbing my palm against it, over his pants.

He moaned and pushed his hips against me, clearly liking what I was doing.

Intrigued by his response, I unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. I slipped my hand inside and felt his hard, heated flesh against my palm. I curled my fingers loosely around his c**k and stroked lightly.

Soren panted, releasing my n****e and latching his mouth onto my neck.

I stretched my neck out as he kissed and sucked on my artery.

He kissed the base of my throat and between my breasts. Soren kissed down my abdomen, pulling my dress off my legs as he went.

He kissed my mound. Lifting my hips, I pressed against his mouth, desperate to feel more.

Soren chuckled and pulled back.

I whimpered.

He slipped his hand under my knee and lifted my leg. He kissed the inside of my knee, then trailed kisses up the inside of my thigh.

His lips were hot and wet. Shivers ran up my spine each time he placed a fresh kiss. My clit throbbed with need.

Soren's free hand pressed against the inside of my other leg and I automatically opened up to him.

With a pleased grunt, Soren dipped his head between my legs. He pressed his hands on my stomach. Soren's tongue traced my outer lips.

Moaning, I threw my arm over my eyes, my head falling from side to side.

His wet, hot tongue probed deeper, licking up and down my soaked entrance.

Groaning, I ground my hips against his tongue. My insides clenched and I felt ready to bust!

Slowly, he moved his tongue to my clit, swirling the tip around my swollen pleasure bead.

I gasped. Arching my back, I put a hand on the back of his head and ground my hips against him, increasing the pleasurable friction.

My legs trembled around his head. I moaned and moaned as the circling of his tongue on my clit brought me closer and closer to the edge.

I cried out as an explosion of pleasure burst through me. Moaning and panting, I tightened my legs around his head and twisted my hips as waves of ecstasy overcame me.

Slowly, Soren pulled back and lay down beside me.

I removed my arm from my eyes and looked at him. My entire body was flushed and I was embarrassed to see him so calm and serious while I was losing my mind from what he'd done.

Turning on my side, I reached for his c**k and wrapped my fingers around him again.

Soren's eyelids fluttered and he groaned as I loosely stroked him. The swollen tip of his c**k oozed a large bead of precum.

I pressed the tip of my finger to it and smeared it around on his heated, sensitive skin.

Soren gasped and lay back on the pillows.

Smiling in triumph, I continued to stroke his mushroom tip. His c**k getting bigger and harder.

Suddenly, Soren grabbed me and pulled me on top of him. He pulled my head down and kissed me roughly on the mouth. His c**k nestled between my legs and I ground my hips against him.

His hard erection pressed against my clit and I gasped, a shiver running up my spine.

He shuddered and squeezed my hips.

Soren's hands tightened on my hips and he rolled on top of me, kissing me hungrily. Ravenously, he nipped at my neck and angled my hips upward.

I wrapped my legs around him, locking my ankles together.

Soren thrust forward, his c**k sliding into me, spreading me apart.

I bit my lower lip. My insides clenched around his thick c**k and Soren panted against my neck. His hands tightened on my hips and he thrust into me faster.

I rolled my hips to meet his thrusts, tightening my legs and arms around him.

Pleasure sparked through me and I writhed on the bed, pressing as much of my skin to his as possible.

It didn't matter to me who Soren was or what he'd done. I couldn't deny my attraction to him anymore. I didn't care how he felt. I wanted him and I was done pretending I didn't.

"I love you!" I exclaimed.

Soren's thrusts quickened and my insides quivered, pulsing around his c**k. He stroked my inner walls with his erection.

I stretched my neck out as he kissed and sucked on my artery.

Shuddering, I clung to him tighter.

Soren grunted below my ear. His breaths came in ragged, husky pants.

Pressure built in my abdomen, pressing against my insides. Moaning, I arched my back and into Soren and cried something out as the floodgates burst.

Trembling and shaking, another orgasm ripped through me. Wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me and I moaned and panted. My arms and legs tightened around Soren, holding him as close as possible.

His breathing and thrusts quickened. He rotated his hips and tightened his arms around me. His c**k quivered and he released into me. Soren shook just as hard as he held me close, riding out his orgasm.

Slowly, Soren pulled back and looked me in the eye.

“Did you say...”

“I.. yes...” I gasped, nodding. My cheeks burned with more than the flush of my afterglow.

Soren smirked and kissed me again. His passion and vigor were just as intense as on the balcony and it didn't take long for us to be ready again.

Soren returned again and again, all night long.

When I woke up, I was comfortable and warm. Soren had his arms wrapped tightly around me.

I instantly knew we weren't in his room.

His firm, muscular body pressed against me and I hardly had any room to wiggle around. But I didn't mind.

I thought back to the night before and I recalled all of it. Apparently, I hadn't been as drunk as I thought. Every memory was clearly ingrained in my mind.

I'd enjoyed every second of it. All. Night. Long.

Giggling, I nuzzled against his chest as he still slept.

The last time we'd slept together, it had been all business. Sure, he made me feel really, really good but it hadn't felt so passionate and intense. This was the first time I felt like I had chosen this for the right reasons.

I looked at his sleeping face and my heart softened to him. Last night, I'd had so many strong feelings about him. Waking up, I still felt that deep feeling of love for him.

But I still didn't know how he felt. He'd responded favorably when I cried things out in pleasure. But he hadn't said anything back...

With a heavy sigh, Soren hugged me closer and blinked his eyes open.

“Oh, good morning,” he said, grinning at me.

My cheeks reddened and I looked away.

“Something wrong?” he asked, rubbing his hands up and down my back.

“I just...” I trailed off. How did I want to handle this?

I was completely blissed out but I wasn't sure if I could handle it if Soren started acting like this was just another business transaction.

Creasing my brow, I sighed. "I don't remember what happened..."

We hadn't prefaced our night together as a business transaction but he hadn't done anything to make me think that he had real romantic feelings for me.

He could have been drunk or feeling the mood with the full moon. Maybe he'd just given in to some primal desire and longing. It didn't have anything to do with me. And I didn't want to feel disappointment again. Not after how amazing it had been!

"Hmm." Soren sighed and laid back, releasing me from his arms. He seemed disappointed.

He reached to the bedside table and grabbed my charm bracelet. At some point, we'd taken it off because it got caught in Soren's hair.

Wordlessly, he put the bracelet back on. He played with the chain, the look in his eyes heavy.

"Mila, if I planned to build my own pack, would he stay?" he asked.

[Chapter 704](#)

Soren's question blindsided me. I stared at the bracelet on my wrist as he played with the Blackfire flower charm.

"You're asking me to stay in a pack with you?" I repeated the question, thinking I might have misheard him.

"Yes, that is what I'm asking," Soren said, chuckling and smirking. "Stay with me." He fiddled with the flower charm again.

He wanted me to stay with him? He wanted a pack?

Was this his way of acknowledging what I said to him in the throws of passion last night?

No, I told him I didn't remember that. He wouldn't respond to that now, especially since he hadn't had anything to say about it last night.

It was still an unexpected turn.

I thought Soren chose to be a rogue to avoid responsibility. He hadn't told me much about himself or his past but I knew enough to know that he had the makings of an alpha.

And yet, he chose to be a rogue. That's as much as I could piece together. I'd thought for a while that there was a woman in his past who contributed to his decision. He said he hadn't found his mate but I doubted someone like him had never had relationships before.

What made him change his mind?

I couldn't think of how to answer. I was safe with Soren, he'd made that clear. But I still had so many questions I needed answered and too many things I had to get done before I could think about settling down in a pack.

Not to mention, I'd just escaped the last pack.

Soren might have been ready to give up rogue life for a pack but I'd only just got my freedom.

Danger could come at me again at any moment. Especially if others wanted to use the artifact.

"I can protect you, Mila, whatever danger comes your way," Soren said, as if he was reading my mind.

"I know you can," I said. I cupped his cheek and smiled. "But there's Helen and it was more than just that one-eyed creep that destroyed my pack."

"And I promised to help you with those. I will continue to do so but it is going to take time. In the meantime, you could have some stability," he suggested.

"And the artifact? We haven't found the pieces yet," I reminded him.

"But we have the map and it has been hidden for over a decade. There's no rush to go after it. I'd rather find a way to destroy it first to make sure no one ever uses it again, if you don't want it," he told me.

My heart melted and I creased my brow. It was such a tempting offer. To have a real pack, a real home, and to be surrounded by pack members that were supportive and kind. I'd always dreamed of that kind of life when I was a child because things at Saboreef had been so horrible.

It would be nice to stay with Soren and build a stable life for myself.

Still, in my bones, I could feel that Helen was important to me. She knew about my parents' deaths and she could answer my questions. I had a feeling Helen knew about the artifact and the rest of the trouble I was dealing with, too.

I had to find her!

Shaking my head, I pulled away from Soren slightly.

"I can't stay with anyone or set down roots in one place until I get all my answers," I told him. "I'm sorry, but that's the way it has to be."

Soren sighed and nodded. He didn't seem surprised or disappointed.

"I thought you'd say that," he admitted.

I felt a little dejected. Had he asked knowing I would refuse? If he wasn't disappointed in my refusal, did he even want me to stay? Why ask at all if he thought I would refuse?

"You know that I will stay with you until we figure all of this out," he promised.

"I know," I said, nodding.

One day, I could think about settling down. Maybe it would even be with Soren.

At the thought, my heart fluttered and my cheeks reddened.

Quickly, I looked away from him. I didn't want him to ask what was on my mind because I wasn't sure I'd be able to come up with some story.

Knock. Knock.

I sighed with relief and looked to the door. It could have been Ashley barging in to yell at me again but it was still a relief to have that conversation ended.

At least, Soren was still keeping his end of the deal to help me, even though I had turned down his request.

Soren jumped out of bed and threw his pants on.

I looked around for my dress but couldn't find it anywhere. Had someone made off with it in the night? I shifted the blankets around and looked around Soren's clothes but my dress was just gone.

Before Soren opened the door, I hastily tucked the sheet around myself.

What was I going to wear if I couldn't find that dress? I hadn't brought anything else to wear...

Soren pulled the door open a crack. I immediately recognized Madam Scarlet, even though I could only see half her face.

She reached a red, silk gloved hand through the crack in the door and ran a forefinger along Soren's jaw, smiling mischievously.

"Soren, you know the rules about using one of my rooms without permission," she teased, shaking her head.

"I don't believe your guests would have appreciated it if we didn't use a room," Soren said.

My cheeks burned hot and I slapped my palm into my forehead. That was not the response I was expecting from him!

Madam Scarlett chuckled. "Really? You don't know my guests at all."

"What do I owe you?" Soren asked.

"Ten times the usual rate should cover the inconvenience and the disappointment of my guests who were turned away because this room was full," Madam Scarlett said.

Embarrassed, I flopped back on the pillows, my cheeks so hot it felt like I had a fever.

"Hmm. No wonder your bottom line is always so much better than mine," Soren said, chuckling.

"Oh, I'm sorry, are you complaining? Ten times the usual rate is a special discount because I like you so much. And because I'm thrilled you've finally found a woman," Scarlett said.

She waved her gloved hand at me through the door and winked at me.

I groaned and threw my arm over my eyes. It was too early for this and I was far too naked for it!

"No complaints. The money will be in your account by this afternoon," Soren assured.

I peeked out from under my arm to watch them together. Again, I wondered if they had any kind of romantic relationship. Based on what Madam Scarlett was saying, it didn't sound like it.

She seemed to think he was sexually repressed or something.

I doubted a man like Soren ever lacked for company in his bed. He was too hot for that. But he also seemed like the kind that kept it on the down low, unless the woman happened to become a fixture in his life, like me.

Which begged the question, why had I become a permanent fixture in his life?

Other than asking me to stay in a pack with him and giving me a bracelet, he hadn't done or said anything to indicate that he wanted more from me than this friendship and this deal. Actually, he'd never indicated wanting friendship either.

"You know that I will stay with you until we figure all of this out," he promised.

"Thank you for your business, then," Scarlett said, winking again.

She turned away but Soren grabbed her arm.

"Hang on there, I'm not done with you yet," he grumbled.

"You can't afford me," Scarlett said, pushing Soren's hand off. "And threesomes are top dollar."

I groaned again and wished I could sink into the pillows and disappear.

"I have some questions for you and I believe I can afford that rate," Soren said.

"Hmm. Questions. Well, normally, you wouldn't be able to, but today I am running a special. Just for you. Ten percent off for today. Think of it as a bundle discount for the room and the questions," she said, grinning.

Soren glanced over his shoulder at me.

"To be more precise, Mila has some questions," he said, nodding to me.

"I do?" I asked, sitting up.

We hadn't talked about that yet.

Soren nodded discreetly,

Was I supposed to ask Madam Scarlett about Helen and the artifact? As the owner of a brothel, she probably heard a lot of rumors. The men that came here would tell the girls anything.

I imagined they would report anything noteworthy back to Madam Scarlett.

Scarlett pushed the door open slightly and looked me right in the eye.

"Oh really? A pretty young lady has something to ask me?" she asked, curiosity in her eyes.

"I guess I do," I said, laughing nervously.

"Well, I charge by the question. It is a good thing your big boss is paying today," she said. She patted Soren on the chest.

"Okay," I replied, still a little confused.

“Come, come, ask away. Don’t be shy,” Scarlett said, getting a little short.

“Mila hasn’t had anything to eat yet. Why don’t we talk over breakfast?” Soren asked, jumping in to save me.

Good thing since he was the one that made this mess!

“I’ll have breakfast prepared,” Madam Scarlett said with a nod.

“Mila, meet us downstairs when you’re ready,” Soren told me.

Madam Scarlett turned to the door. She glanced over her shoulder and blew a kiss at me.

“Take your time, my dear. Breakfast is on the house today,” she said, winking.

“Umm... where is my dress?” I asked before they could leave.

Madam Scarlett looked at Soren and smirked.

He scoffed and looked away from her like they had some private secret.

Part of me thought I should be jealous of the way they interacted. It was obvious to me that they were just friends and business peers, though. Scarlett was like that with everyone, even me, and she didn’t know me at all!

“I’m afraid your dress was... shredded. It appears some males can’t control themselves,” she said, narrowing her eyes at Soren.

“Shredded?” I asked.

Sure, Soren and I had been pretty intent on being together last night but I didn’t remember him being that rough with me while he was undressing me. Had I blocked it out? Or maybe I had been drinking a little too much and I lost a few memories.

Soren shrugged. “I admit to nothing.”

“There are spare dresses in the closet. Take whichever one suits you best. Soren will pay for it,” Madam Scarlett said. She waved her hand to the closet door.

“There’s no rush, Mila,” Soren reiterated, smiling at me.

“Okay, I’ll see you downstairs,” I said blankly. I stared after them as Soren and Scarlett left the room, the door shutting closed behind them.

What the hell just happened?

[Chapter 705](#)

The closet was filled with gorgeous, elaborate dresses. They seemed inappropriate for breakfast, even if I was in a brothel.

I found a dress shoved in the back. It was a soft jade green color with off the shoulder sleeves. It wasn’t flashy or shiny and it was nice, form fitting. I slid the dress on and brushed it into place.

Downstairs, I could smell warm, fresh breakfast and my stomach growled. Mouth watering, I hurried into the dining room where Soren and Scarlett were waiting for me.

Scarlett smiled and patted the seat beside her. I sat down next to her and across from Soren.

The table was covered in fresh muffins and coffee cake. There was bacon, eggs, several kinds of juice, champagne for mimosas, and fresh cut fruit.

"Please, help yourself, my dear," Scarlett said.

I grabbed a warm muffin and cut it open, slathering butter inside.

"That is a nice dress. I don't recall it being in that room," Scarlett said, eyeing me suspiciously.

"I had to dig for it. All that you had in that closet were ball gowns," I pointed out, arching an eyebrow.

Soren chuckled. "Scarlett isn't the type to have... casual clothes."

Scarlett glanced sideways at Soren. "No, I'm not. This dress must have been left behind." she pulled at the sleeve of my dress.

"I'm glad it was there," I said, shrugging.

"Well, you certainly are pretty, no matter what you wear. Though, I imagine Soren thinks you're more beautiful when you wear nothing," Scarlett teased.

Soren chuckled and reached for his mimosa.

My cheeks burned and I took a big bite of my buttered muffin to avoid answering.

I liked Scarlett. She was easy to get along with and hard to be mad at. Even when she teased me, she still had a way of making it seem special.

When I finished my muffin, I took a deep breath and wiped my mouth with a napkin.

"Scarlett, have you ever heard of Alpha Kaleb and Luna Jessica?" I asked, broaching the subject.

"Hmm... sounds familiar," Scarlett said, glancing at the ceiling. "Do you have more information about them? I'm not all that great with names."

"They died about 14 years ago," Soren jumped in. "Their pack was attacked and..." he glanced at me.

I smiled weakly and nodded. It was hard to listen to but I needed answers. I needed to know the truth.

"... They were wiped out, completely," he finished.

"Ahh, yes. That does ring a bell. 14, maybe 15 years ago, there was a period of time that was very chaotic. Chaotic for the packs, I mean," Scarlett explained.

She fixed me with a bright-eyed look.

"Chaotic how?" I asked, tilting my head to the side.

"It started with a rumor. Nothing major, just that a lost artifact had been found," Scarlett explained.

“An artifact?” I gasped. My heart thudded in my chest.

Scarlett nodded. “The real uproar began when these rumors said the artifact was rare, powerful, and had a terrifying power. Supposedly, it had been obtained by a powerful, wealthy pack and that was... concerning.”

“Do you remember the powerful pack’s name?” Soren asked.

I creased my brow, unsure why he wanted to know the pack name. I was more interested in learning about the artifact.

“Hmm... P something... Pom... Oh, that’s right, it was called Pomeni.” Scarlett snapped her fingers and smiled.

Pomeni. That was the pack’s name, my pack’s name. I’d never thought of it before. Hearing the name made me miss the pack I couldn’t remember.

“Wh-what kind of people w-were they?” I asked, my voice trembling.

I wanted to believe that they were good people but the entire pack had been wiped out. What if Alpha Kaleb wasn’t the back guy? It was a thought I’d been avoiding for a while but now I had to face the fact that the answers wouldn’t be what I wanted to hear.

Scarlett chuckled and rolled her head on her neck. “Oh... Alpha Kaleb was most delicious. He was one of the greatest warriors of his time. No one wanted to mess with him or cross him. He was well respected by the other Alphas for being such a strong warrior.”

I smiled slightly and nodded. “Was he a good leader?”

“He was every pack’s dream. Under his leadership, Pomeni’s population tripled and their wealth grew even more than that in just five years. He was in his early twenties! We all expected great things from him as he got older and wiser. Not to mention... he was so handsome!” Scarlett chuckled and covered her mouth, her eyes flashing.

I glanced at Soren. He smirked and winked at me. It was so good to hear these things about my father. It helped put my worries to rest.

“I remember when he got married. It broke every woman’s heart, especially those that were daughters of Alphas. But Alpha Kaleb had eyes for only one...”

“Jessica?” I asked.

Scarlett smiled and poured me a mimosa. She also dished me up some eggs and bacon. It was a kind, maternal gesture, not one I expected from her.

I got the feeling I wouldn’t learn more unless I ate a healthy meal, so I grabbed my fork and dug in.

Scarlett nodded, seemingly satisfied.

“Luna Jessica was very different from Alpha Kaleb. She was more low-key, but she knew how to handle him. Before she married Kaleb, hardly anyone knew of her. She wasn’t a high-profile figure,” Scarlett continued.

“Huh...”

I wondered how two people like that would end up together. I knew there were things Scarlett couldn't tell me but I couldn't help thinking about them. Had my parents fallen in love at first sight? How did they meet? Did they ever worry about their differences?

“On their wedding day, no one could deny how perfect the two of them were for each other. Jessica was beyond beautiful. It was the joining of a strong alpha and a powerful witch,” Scarlett said.

I set my fork down. “And that was... okay?”

“There were no laws against it. I'll tell you this, no one wanted to be the enemies of such a pack,” she said.

My mind wandered back to the couple I'd seen in my memory. I envisioned them in their wedding clothes, kissing and smiling at each other. They looked so strong and so in love. Would I ever have that?

My eyes wandered to Soren but I quickly looked back at Scarlett.

She stared at me for a moment like she was looking for something. “A few years later, they had a daughter. She must have been stunningly beautiful with her parents' good genes,” she said.

Scarlett sighed and the light left her eyes. She glanced down at the table.

“What is it?” I croaked, my throat dry.

“It is a shame that their happiness didn't last long,” Scarlett said.

My heart sank and I looped my arms around myself. So much strength and power but it hadn't been enough to save them. We should have been a happy family but that was taken from me!

I felt Soren's eyes on me but I couldn't look at him. I couldn't get the memory of my pack destroyed out of my head.

“You mentioned an artifact,” Soren said, picking up the conversation for me. “Do you have more information about that artifact? Anything... name, size, color, description, powers, use, whatever you know would be helpful.”

I knew Soren was asking so that Scarlett wouldn't recount my parents' demise. I'd already seen it and heard about it. I didn't need her to tell us the tragedy all over again.

“I heard it was a dagger of some sort, perhaps,” Scarlett said, shrugging.

“A dagger, that's it?” Soren pressed.

“There have been so many rumors about that artifact and what it could do. I heard a story where it gave the wielder unimaginable strength. Another that gave the owner the power to kill with just a thought. It was said to be able to raise the dead, and there were many other speculations,” she answered.

Scarlett chuckled and rolled her head on her neck. “Oh... Alpha Kaleb was most delicious. He was one of the greatest warriors of his time. No one wanted to mess with him or cross him. He was well respected by the other Alphas for being such a strong warrior.”

“Yes, that’s what we heard, too,” Soren agreed.

“They are all so wildly different and unlikely, it is hard to know what it could really do,” Scarlett added.

I nodded slowly.

“Perhaps,” Soren said. “Or, is it possible that there is truth in all the rumors?”

I raised my eyes to look at him. Was it possible for an artifact to have so many different uses? If so, it would definitely be coveted by others. Something that powerful couldn’t exist, could it?

“It is possible,” Scarlett said with a thoughtful nod. “I suppose it depends on how you view it. Though, you’re asking the wrong questions, Soren.”

“What do you mean?” Soren and I asked together.

Our eyes met and he smirked at me.

“I’m assuming the two of you think that Pomeni was destroyed because of the artifact, that some other Alpha wanted it?” Scarlett asked.

“That is what we were thinking,” Soren confirmed.

“I don’t buy that,” Scarlett said, tapping her painted fingernails on the table.

“You don’t?” I asked, frowning.

“I’m sure there were others that wanted to get their hands on the artifact. But you see, the artifact was around for years. It was no secret that Pomeni had it. So, why all of a sudden was there chaos and a growing desire for the artifact?” Scarlett asked, arching an eyebrow.

My eyes nearly popped out of my head and I gawked at Scarlett.

“I think it is more plausible that someone created an uproar about the artifact to draw unwanted attention to Pomeni pack. The artifact was the perfect excuse,” she said.

My sadness faded and I gritted my teeth. “You mean, someone set them up to be destroyed and it wasn’t about the artifact!?! Who would do that?”

Scarlett sighed and shook her head. “I cannot answer that. I hear a lot of things through my work and through my girls but I don’t know everything in the world. The Hathaways were nice, generous people with power and wealth. I don’t know who would want to hurt them or who would risk making enemies of them.”

“Hathaway...” I whispered my own last name.

In all my life, I’d never known my own last name. I’d never imagined what it would sound like or be. Hearing it for the first time filled me with a sense of identity and belonging. I had a last name!

“Under what normal circumstances would a pack like that be targeted?” Scarlett asked somberly.

“When greed took over, there would be no normal circumstances,” I muttered, shaking my head.

“Scarlett, is there any other information you have?” Soren asked.

She shook her head and looked over at me.

"I don't have more information about Pomeni or the Alpha and Luna, not that I'm aware of," she replied.

She reached over and ran her fingers through my hair. It amazed me how she could be both seductive and maternal at the same time.

"Miss Mila, I do have a piece of advice for you. And don't worry, Soren, I won't charge you for it," Scarlett said.

She gave Soren a sly smirk and winked.

Soren chuckled. "You know I wouldn't mind if you did charge me."

"Hmmm. Is that so...?"

Slowly, Scarlett turned to look at me.

"Listen, my dear girl, no matter what happened in the past, the last thing parents would want to see is their child seeking revenge," she said.

She leaned a little closer to me, staring right into my eyes. I got the sense she knew more about me than we'd told her. At least, she suspected it.

"No parents would want to watch their beloved child suffer from fury and anger. Mila, let go of the past and focus on your life ahead."

[Chapter 706](#)

Soren

Mila was quiet as we walked back to the inn. I knew she had a lot to think about with what we'd heard from Scarlett.

"Mila..."

"Yes?" she asked a little too quickly and a little too breathily.

I smirked and arched an eyebrow at her. "You know, I agree with the advice Scarlett gave you."

"You promised to help me get revenge," Mila said, narrowing her eyes.

"I did, and I will help you if that is indeed what you want. But you should think about what she said," I rephrased.

We made it back to the inn. Payne was waiting for us on the porch. As soon as he saw us, he stood up and came down the stairs to meet us. It was a formal gesture of respect I didn't expect or usually get from him.

I noticed how Payne's eyes shot to Mila and he bowed his head slightly.

He looked at her like she was an important person or that he had some newfound respect or reverence for her.

“Welcome back. It took you two long enough,” he said in a gentle, respectful voice.

Normally, Payne would tease me.

“Boss, I have something to tell you,” Payne said, flicking his eyes to Mila.

“I can take a hint. I’ll see you later,” she said, nodding to me.

Mila smiled at Payne and headed inside the inn. His eyes followed her in an unusual way. If he was any other male, I might have taken it personally, but I knew that the way he looked at her wasn’t with lust or desire.

He was a little off today and I couldn’t understand what was going on with him. He seemed a little nervous and oddly docile at the same time.

Payne took a deep breath. “Do you remember the first time we met?”

“Payne, I’m not likely to forget that,” I replied.

“Remind me,” Payne said.

I creased my brow. I knew that he hadn’t forgotten. There was no way he could forget that. Apparently, we were having a deep conversation about our past, which was unusual.

“It was seven years ago,” I started quietly. I motioned to the porch where there were some wicker chairs.

Payne followed me and we took our seats on the porch.

“When I first saw you, you were in wolf form. Barely alive and caught in a battle between two southern packs. I heard Ashley crying. That’s what caught my attention and I went to check on her,” I recounted.

“She had a rough time with those battles,” Payne agreed, nodding somberly.

“I saved the two of you. You were so young. Half dead, starved and skinny. You both looked younger than you actually were,” I said.

“And I was wary of you, like a wild animal,” Payne reminded me.

“I brought you back to the inn to recover. I told the both of you that I didn’t need anything in return but I wanted you to take the time you needed to recover. You were free to leave whenever you wanted.”

“A lot like someone else who recently joined us,” Payne murmured, glancing toward the inn.

“Only, unlike Mila, the two of you didn’t leave when you had the chance. You and Ashley both vowed your loyalty to me once you were well enough,” I said, chuckling.

Payne gave a very weak, lazy laugh and nodded. “There was nowhere else for us to go and you showed us kindness.”

Out of respect for Ashley and Payne, I’d never asked about their past. They’d been by my side for seven years and I had never pried. It wasn’t just because I didn’t want anyone prying into my past.

With Ashley and Payne, it was different. They were family and I didn't want them dredging up old memories.

It wasn't until I'd fallen into the dream with Mila that I had seen more about Payne and Ashley's history.

I'd known the basics, that their pack was wiped out and that Payne had been saved under unusual circumstances, which allowed the two of them to escape. Other than that, I'd never known the details.

But now I knew that Mila, Payne, and Ashley were all part of the same destroyed pack and that Mila was the one who saved Payne. It was more than I'd learned about them in seven years.

"For the longest time, I thought the two of you were from those warring southern packs," I admitted, broaching the topic carefully.

"We weren't from either of those packs. Our pack was wiped out fourteen years ago!" Payne said, anger ebbing into his voice.

"I know," I said, nodding slowly.

We hadn't talked about the dream yet. I hadn't figured out how to tell him that Mila was the daughter of his deceased Alpha and Luna. I didn't know how to tell him that Mila was the one who saved his life as a child, with magic.

Was it my place to tell him? It seemed like a conversation he should have with Mila and I wasn't sure that she was ready for me to tell him.

"The Alpha of our pack... he was the most powerful dominant Alpha in the world at the time. People loved and respected him. We had very comfortable lives," Payne explained.

"I am sorry that it was taken from you," I replied. I hadn't figured out why Payne had chosen to tell me all of this.

He looked at his hands, rubbing them on his thighs. Talking about the past was difficult for him but something had changed for him and he felt it was necessary that I learned the truth of what his past held.

"Our Luna... you'll never believe this. She was a witch," Payne said. He chuckled darkly and shook his head. "Not a lot of people knew about it, even though back then, witches weren't hunted or feared. They were rare but they were accepted."

"Do you know what changed?" I asked.

Payne shook his head. "No. But that is a question for another day."

"I understand," I nodded.

"They were a force to be reckoned with. A mighty Alpha paired with a witch Luna. Others were jealous and envious. Some might have feared them. But no one would want to cross them or fight them... unless..."

I met Payne's gaze and nodded. "Unless the prize was too tempting and the gains outweighed the risk."

Payne snorted and nodded. Suddenly, he clenched his fists and gritted his teeth.

“Greed makes people into monsters! That is exactly what happened. When Luna Jessica married Alpha Kaleb, she brought a powerful witch artifact with her. It was kept a secret, even from the pack,” Payne explained.

“Why would they keep it a secret? If they didn’t fear attack...”

Payne nodded. “Why indeed? The rumor was that it was so powerful that if other packs knew they had the artifact, they would want it for themselves.”

“That’s a good reason to keep it a secret,” I muttered.

“Yes,” Payne agreed. “And Pomeni was so wealthy that everyone knew there were enough spoils to go around. Even if only one competitor ended up with the artifact, everyone else would get a fair share of loot and wealth.”

Payne gritted his teeth and I saw his clenched fists tremble. Blood seeped out from his curled fingers. His nails must have cut through his skin and he made himself bleed.

“Payne, it’s not that I don’t appreciate you sharing this, but why did you decide to tell me today?” I asked.

“All the pieces have started coming together, from the moment you asked me to investigate Helen. It immediately made me suspicious of Miss Mila and who she was. But I wasn’t sure, so I needed to take a step back,” he explained.

“And where did that step lead you?” I asked.

I realized now that Payne had dredged up the past because it was important to his investigation of Helen. He’d needed to give me context and lay the groundwork before dropping an even bigger bomb on me.

“Helen was Luna Jessica’s sister and I’d seen her when I was a child. Then again on the wanted posters,” he said. “It took me a while to make sense of it all and I didn’t want to tell you until I was sure. I didn’t want to add more trouble to your... long list of problems.”

Payne smirked at me.

“Since when have you worried about bringing me trouble?” I teased.

“Well, I normally don’t. But lately, you’ve been choosing trouble and that’s what worries me,” Payne told me playfully.

“Through all this, that’s what you’re worried about? That I’m choosing trouble?” I chuckled.

Payne’s smile was faint and he turned serious again quickly. “People are after the artifact again and Miss Mila is in danger.”

“Miss Mila?” I asked.

It was the second time he’d referred to her like that. Did Payne know who she was now?

“You know, don’t you?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at him.

“My father was Alpha Kaleb’s beta. Ashley and I both recognized her. It took us time to place it, but we finally agreed,” he explained. “We saw her a lot as children.”

“Are you planning to tell her who you are?” I asked. I had a feeling Mila already knew but it was up to Payne and Ashley whether or not they wanted to pursue that relationship.

“No... not yet anyway. I’m not ready and... there might be a time when Miss Mila could help us rebuild Pomeni pack. For now...”

I hadn’t thought about Mila rebuilding the pack. When I’d asked her to stay with me, I hadn’t been thinking of the fact that she was the daughter of an Alpha and Luna or that she might want to rebuild her own pack. If given the chance, what would she choose?

“Soren,” Payne pulled me from my thoughts.

I looked over at him and nodded.

“Ashley and I will do everything in our power to protect her. You have our support on that. But I have to prepare you for what is coming. You can’t be blindsided,” he said in a very serious tone.

“You mean about the artifact?” I clarified.

“Soren, you’re a strong shifter. You can handle a rough pack here and there and minor Alphas. There’s no way you could fend off an all out war with the combined power of many packs,” he laid out for me.

I appreciated his candor but I wasn’t delusional. I knew my strengths and what I was capable of. My bigger concern was that Payne truly believed it could come to that.

“You think it will come to that?” I asked.

“These packs want the artifact. They wanted it back then and they still do. You and Miss Mila are their only link to it and it won’t take them long to realize that,” Payne said firmly.

“I imagine that’s true. Payne, do you know what the artifact does?” I asked.

“The funny thing about artifacts, their powers are often exaggerated,” Payne said wryly. “My entire pack was wiped out because of the rumored power of the artifact. And the irony, it wasn’t as powerful as people think.”

“Hmm...” I stroked my chin. “Please elaborate.”

“People said it could kill without a trace, it would raise dead, and there were some other rumors that are absolutely nonsense. Well, sort of. The real use of that artifact is... soul exchange,” he told me.

“Soul exchange...” I repeated.

“The artifact has the power to swap the souls of two shifters between bodies,” he clarified.

“How would that work?” I asked, trying to imagine something so unusual. It wasn’t a common phrase or a term used in magic.

“Think of this. You have a sick, dying shifter and a healthy, young shifter. The artifact could swap their souls. What would happen then?” he asked.

“The person who is dying would be refreshed and healed with a young, healthy body and the young soul would end up in a dying body. They’d parish,” I said. “That explains the rumor about it being able to raise the dead and kill without a trace.”

“Ridiculous that anyone could believe those rumors, isn’t it? Yet, they wouldn’t believe us. Even if they did, they would have destroyed our pack...”

“You also think that the artifact was just an excuse to wipe out your strong, powerful pack and steal their riches,” I muttered.

“Also?” Payne asked.

I shook my head. “Nevermind. The point is, the artifact was an excuse for a larger, more sinister purpose.”

The front door of the inn opened and Thomas joined us on the porch.

“Excuse me, I need to see my sister,” Payne said. He stood up and left me with Thomas.

“I didn’t interrupt, did I?” Thomas asked as Payne slipped away.

“No, we were done,” I said.

“I just wanted to give you an update. Remember that rumor you told me to spread... Well, I sent it out. People are going to think that you have the powerful artifact. You’ll be drowning in trouble before you know it,” he reported with a smirk.

I chuckled. “Thank you.”

Thomas gave me a worried look. “Be careful.”

[Chapter 707](#)

Mila

When I left Soren, I went to my room in the inn. The spellbook from the box was open on my dresser. Ever since I got back from the dream that April had sent me into, I felt like I could understand more of the text.

I’d spent hours staring at it but I hadn’t been able to make any words out. It just felt familiar when I looked at it.

Sighing, I picked up the book and flipped through it. I couldn’t help but wonder if it was my mother’s handwriting in that book. Somehow, the spells in it felt even older.

I plopped down on the bed and flipped to the beginning of the book, studying the simple text. Maybe a name or an introduction.

Scanning over the unusual language, I brushed my thumb over the inked characters wishing that they would tell me what they said.

Was it possible to do a spell to translate the book?

I'd been successful at casting spells before. My memory proved that and I had broken a curse on a whole village. Whenever I felt very strongly about something, I could focus on my desires and pray to the Moon Goddess.

It always felt like the Moon Goddess was with me, filling me with a strong power that consumed me. It always felt like the Moon Goddess was speaking directly to me and telling me what to do and say.

Like she was guiding me.

Could I create that connection whenever I wanted or only when I was focused on casting a really important spell? Would I be able to make spells up or could I only use spells my mother had taught me when I was a child?

I knew I had to strongly desire what I wanted to make the magic happen.

As curious as I was to read the spells in the book, I didn't desire it strongly. I didn't feel about it the same way I felt about healing that child or breaking the curse. It was something I wanted, not something I needed.

But there had to be other ways to get information or tap into my own powers...

Closing the book, I set it on my lap. I crossed my legs and rested my hands on my knees. Maybe, I could put myself into my own dream-like trance, like April had done, and I could see some more memories.

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and focused my mind on my past memories. I thought of the way I felt as April had put me into that trance.

Drowsy, detached from my body, light, and floating.

My head dipped and I swayed slightly.

I breathed in through the nose and out through the mouth, deepening my breath and keeping my eyes closed.

I thought of my childhood with my parents, the mansion, the woods. I focused on the feeling of happiness from my childhood, from before the fire and the destruction of my pack.

My mind unfolded and I felt like I was wandering into a dream. I was still aware enough of my body to know that I was sitting on the bed but I wasn't seeing the room or feeling the room anymore.

I was feeling my past and my memories.

The image in my mind became that of the forest where I'd met Helen when I was dreaming, many times. The woods weren't the same as my dreams. It was older and damaged, like I was seeing the woods years after the fire.

I heard a grunt and I whipped around.

Helen was lying on the forest floor. She clutched her stomach, her dress and clothes stained with blood. She was breathing hard.

As soon as she saw me, her eyes nearly popped out of her head.

“Mila!?” she gasped.

Helen winced and groaned, turning onto her side slightly.

I went to her and knelt down beside her.

“Helen, what happened to you? Is there anything I can do for you?” I asked, looking her over. I touched her and she was solid.

Was she here? Was this a dream or a memory?

“Mila, what are you doing here?” she asked, her breathing labored. Sweat dripped down her forehead.

“I was meditating and... that’s not important. What happened to you?” I asked.

She reached for me with a blood-stained hand.

I grabbed her hand, squeezing her warm, slippery fingers in my own. Tears pricked my eyes even though I couldn’t tell if this was real or not.

“It doesn’t matter... you don’t need to worry about me...” Helen winced again and her hand slipped from mine.

“Let me help you...”

“Mila, I don’t have much time left,” she said more urgently. “Since you’re here... that means your witch power has started to awaken...” she gasped and her eyes rolled back.

“No! Stay with me, Aunt Helen,” I said. I put my arm around her shoulders and lifted her slightly, hugging her against my chest.

“You found the box in Miltern, didn’t you?” she asked, looking up at me with a pained, affectionate smile.

“Yes! I was there. I found the box and... I was able to break the curse,” I told her, smiling.

Helen’s eyes lit up and tears brimmed. She blinked them back and sighed.

If she was asking me about the curse, this had to be real, right? It had to be some kind of vision of Helen in the present moment.

“You lifted the curse? Oh, my sweet girl. Thank you... thank you so much. Your... parents would be so proud,” she gasped out. Wincing again, Helen reached for my face and then her hand dropped.

“You’re welcome. I was just doing what I had to. But Aunt Helen, I have questions for you.” I told her, tightening my arm around her a little more.

Helen sniffled and blinked, fresh tears leaking from the corners of her eyes.

“Mila, please don’t call me ‘aunt.’ My dear... I don’t deserve that...” she said, shaking her head and sobbing.

“What? What are you talking about? You’re my mother’s sister, that makes you my aunt,” I reminded her.

“Your mother was the powerful one. She was the witch. But I... I could always see the future. One of my visions has caused all this chaos and destruction...” she told me.

“I don’t believe that. You’re not responsible for what happened, even if you saw it. Just because you say it doesn’t mean you could control it,” I said, defending her to herself.

“But I tried to. I tried to change things and that’s when everything went horribly wrong,” she said. She closed her eyes and shook her head back and forth.

“What happened?” I asked, needing answers.

Helen was right. She didn’t have a lot of time left. I could tell and I wanted to know what she knew!

“I was young and ignorant, thinking that I could change the future. But it is my fault,” she insisted.

“What is your fault? How did my parents die?” I pressed urgently.

“Your parents died... because of me,” she admitted with a long, heavy sigh.

“No!” I shook my head. “I don’t believe that, Aunt Helen. My parents died because of greed and conspiracy.”

“Oh, Mila, you are truly a wonderful young woman. I wish... I wish Jessica was here to see you now. She’d be so proud...” Helen whispered.

“I don’t blame you. Whatever you saw, whatever you tried to do, at least you tried. You’re not responsible for the outcome,” I insisted.

She smiled weakly, her tears glistening in her eyes. “My dear, sweet girl, the past is in the past. It cannot be changed, so please don’t let it haunt you.”

“It doesn’t,” I assured. It was a lie, but I wanted her to feel better in her painful, last moments.

“The future... it can’t be changed either. No matter what you know or what you see, it can’t be changed,” she told me.

“That... can’t be true...”

“It is. We can’t change the future so all we can do is cherish our present,” Helen said. She sighed and closed her eyes.

“Helen! Helen!” I said, shaking her slightly.

She coughed and her lips turned up slightly. “I’m still here. Be gentle with me.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Listen, Mila, someday, you will meet your mate. When that day comes, live a happy life and cherish him and the time you have. That’s what I ask of you, what your parents would want for you...”

Helen sighed again and her body sagged in my arms. She muttered something else, her voice trailing off. The vision began to fade.

I tried to hold onto her but she slipped from my fingers. All my focus and willpower was on maintaining that image of her.

She was almost invisible when she opened her eyes again and looked at me.

“I wish I could spend more time with you and get to know you... please, my dear niece, find the artifact. It belongs to you. Find the Blade of Souls. When your beloved is in danger... you will need it...”

“Aunt Helen! Wait!” I cried, grabbing for her.

The image faded, Helen faded, and I was drowning in darkness again.

Slowly, I blinked my eyes open and looked around, my vision was blurred with warm tears and I sniffled, wiping my nose.

Where was I? I could tell where I was. My mind was still fuzzy and disconnected. My body felt numb and heavy.

I blinked my tears away and the room at the inn came into focus. What had I seen? Was it real? Was Helen really injured and dying somewhere alone in the woods?

My heart sank and I hugged myself, rocking back and forth slightly.

That was my aunt. She cared about me, I could tell. More than anything, I wanted to meet her and get to know her too.

I hoped we hadn't missed our chance.

My mind raced with everything Helen had said to me. I could easily shove away her concerns about thinking the death of my parents was her fault. I didn't believe it and I didn't blame her.

It was what she said at the end of the vision that I paid attention to.

She mentioned finding my mate.

Who was my mate? I hadn't found them yet, right?

Immediately, my thoughts shifted to Soren. He could be my mate... or... I sighed and shook my head.

If Soren was my mate, I would feel it, wouldn't I? I couldn't feel that with him. But I didn't feel it.

My heart sank slightly at the thought that Soren might not be the one for me. I was falling for him hard and I didn't want to think that someone else could come along and ruin that.

From what Helen said, she made it sound like she had a vision of my future. My future and my mate's future. I'd have to use the artifact to save my loved one, was that what she had told me?

Helen had called the knife the Blade of Souls. That was ominous.

I lay on my pillows and sighed. Rubbing my eyes, I kept sifting through the chaos of my chat with Helen. She told me a lot without actually telling me a lot.

Even before she urged me to find the artifact, I'd planned to get it. It was something that belonged to me, that my parents had left for me. Even if I never used it, I wanted it. I wanted to keep it safe from others that wanted to use it for evil.

Besides, I needed to know if it was the artifact that was the true cause of my parents' losing their lives.

If not... then I had good reason to use it, whatever it did!

Suddenly, Helen's words popped into my head.

'When your loved one is in danger.'

Did that mean that if Soren was my mate, he'd be in danger? Would he die?

My heart ached and I threw my arm over my eyes. No. Soren couldn't die. He couldn't be dragged into more danger because of me.

Hadn't I already put him through enough?

It was better that I didn't feel a mate bond for him. That meant he probably wasn't my mate and probably wouldn't be in danger in the future.

At least, not the kind of danger that Helen had warned me about.

The rest of the day, I stayed in my room. I tried looking at the book and deciphering more of it.

When that didn't work, I got myself some lunch and then took a nap. The next time I woke up, it was dark again.

The inn was quiet. I wasn't sure how late it was but a lot of the lights were out in the inn. Most of Soren's men were probably asleep now.

I grabbed my pack and snuck barefoot down the stairs. Keeping away from the guards, I slipped out the back door. This time, no alarms went off.

[Chapter 709](#)

Soren

As Mila left the village, I watched her back fade into the darkness. I shook my head.

So, she was off on another venture on her own. She still hadn't learned anything.

I hadn't expected her to stick around, especially after she refused my request to stay. I had expected her to keep me in the loop as she promised to do.

Was I getting soft by believing she'd change?

Fortunately, I was prepared for her not to change. I was prepared for her to do something like this.

Payne joined me on the porch. He handed me a travel backpack.

"Ready to go?" he asked me, looking into the darkness after Mila.

"Let's do it," I said. Shouldering my backpack.

Payne nodded respectfully.

I'd noticed a change in Payne since he'd told me everything about Mila and Pomeni pack and the artifact. He was showing a lot of respect and care toward Mila. It seemed like he supported everything she chose to do now but he'd still be there to help her out when she needed it.

He never complained or showed any impatience anymore.

We headed down the street but hurried steps came after us before we got far.

"Wait! Wait for me!" Ashley called, running up behind us.

"Ashley, what are you doing here?" Payne asked, creasing his brow.

Ashley scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Why wouldn't I be here? You're going after Mila, aren't you?"

She looked between me and Payne. I glanced at Payne.

"Aren't you?" she pressed.

"Yes," I confirmed, nodding.

"Then I want to go, too. If she really is the heir to our Alpha and Luna, then she's the only hope for us to reestablish our pack," Ashley pointed out.

"If we're going to go, we've got to go. She's not far and we can still catch her," I said, nodding down the street.

Ashley and Payne nodded and followed along with me. I hadn't thought to invite Ashley initially but it made sense now that she'd explained it to us.

We caught up to Mila in the next village, just as the sun was rising.

I paused and held Ashley and Payne back.

"You don't want to go to her?" Ashley asked, creasing her brow.

"Not yet... I want to know what she's doing..." I said in a low voice.

"But..."

"Ashley, Mila doesn't want us to get involved," I pointed out. "We need to give her some space or she will try to run off again."

"Okay, that's a good point," Ashley agreed, nodding.

"Also, as a larger group, we could attract unnecessary attention. It is easier for us to protect her while we are discreet," I said.

"We can keep a safe distance and follow her," Payne agreed.

For two days, Payne, Ashley, and I followed Mila as she kept heading north. I couldn't think of where she was going, but we held back and gave her room.

On the third day, we ended up in a decent sized village at the base of a mountain range.

Mila moved easily through the crowd but I could tell she was tense and on alert.

Looking around, I saw a small group of hitmen closing in around her. I held a hand up to stop Ashley and Payne again.

“Keep an eye out. She senses something and there are men closing in around her,” I said.

Ashley and Payne fanned out.

Mila quickened her pace. She started to blend into the crowd. If she got too far ahead, we’d lose her completely!

I looked at Payne and Ashley, nodding to them once.

As one, we moved in and each of us grabbed one of the bounty hunters. I dragged mine behind the nearest building and thrust him into the wall. He grunted and fell unconscious.

They’d been so focused on Mila, they hadn’t been prepared for another attack.

I rejoined Payne and Ashley who had taken out their bounty hunters just as quickly and easily.

“I don’t see her, Soren,” Ashley said, standing on tiptoes.

“That’s okay, just make sure there are no other bounty hunters in the area. Meet back here in ten minutes,” I insisted, pointing to the ground in front of me.

We broke apart again and scanned the area for more bounty hunters. I didn’t find any or a trace of any. The village seemed completely safe and sound.

I met back up with Payne and Ashley in the street.

“It’s all clear, Boss,” Ashley reported.

“But Mila’s gone. What do we do now?” Payne asked.

“It’s fine. I can find her,” I assured. I pulled a small object out of my pocket and held it in my palm. The needle on the compass spun around. I narrowed my eyes and moved my hand back and forth trying to get a lock on where it was pointing.

“Is that a compass?” Ashley asked. “Do you think that Mila is magnetic north?”

Payne shot Ashley a sharp look.

“It isn’t a compass... Well, not exactly. It is a specialty item,” I explained.

The needle would settle in one spot, then it would jump in another direction. Mila couldn’t possibly be jumping around like that.

“What is it?” Ashley asked.

“A while back, I came across a special stone. They are moonstones that come in pairs called Camswell. I had one of the stones built into the charm on Mila’s bracelet and I turned the other into a compass, seeing as she keeps running off,” I explained. I turned around and tried to calibrate the needle.

“Wow, you really made a compass just for her?” Ashley asked. She laughed nervously.

“It has come in handy so far. It’s how I found Mila when Chandler took her,” I reminded him.

“But Soren, why does it keep spinning? I doubt Mila is running in circles around us,” Ashley pointed out.

“Damn! I can’t get it to lock on. It’s not working,” I hissed. I snapped the compass closed angrily.

“There could be something in the area interfering with the connection between the stones,” Payne suggested.

“Interference,” I muttered. I looked around to see if there was anything in the immediate area.

The mountain range cast shadows over the village.

“Mountains. This is Mount Lournet,” I said, pointing to the tallest mountain.

“What’s the significance of that?” Payne asked.

“The artifact. There’s a piece of it hidden here. She must be coming after it herself...”

I groaned and shook my head. Mila’s parents had hidden a piece of the artifact here. It made perfect sense that she’d come here.

But why was she coming after the artifact herself? I’d promised to help her. She’d even given me the map.

Frowning, I looked at the compass in my hand. That would explain why the Camswell stones weren’t sensing each other. The artifact was powerful. Even a piece of it could emit magical energy.

The connection between the stones was subtle. Any other magical energy could easily throw it off.

“Dammit!” I muttered, kicking the ground.

I’d been so sure that I wouldn’t lose her because I had the compass to rely on. We’d been discreet, we didn’t spook her, and we protected her. I’d done everything right! And I even had a backup plan with the Camsell stones.

Arrogance was my downfall.

I paced in the street.

Payne and Ashley sat on the steps of a building, waiting for me to give them instructions and give them directions.

It was hard for me to admit that I wasn’t sure what to do. We’d come here with such clear direction and means to keep up with her.

I shifted my eyes to the sky. It was late afternoon and a faded sliver of the moon hung in the blue sky.

“What are we going to do now?” Ashley asked, breaking through the silence.

“Ashley!” Payne snapped.

“I haven’t figured that out yet,” I grumbled.

“We have to catch up to her. There could be other bounty hunters waiting in the mountains,” Payne said.

“Unlikely. There weren’t any more in the village and no one else knows where the artifact is hidden,” I said, waving off Payne’s concerns.

“We don’t know that for sure. We can’t know if the ones we incapacitated had others lying in wait outside the village or if they got word to them,” Payne reminded me.

“Right.” Sighing, I glanced up at the sky again. “I want to try something. Give me a minute.”

Ashley and Payne sat back down. When Ashley opened her mouth again, Payne grabbed her arm and pulled her back down.

I nodded to him and looked up at the Moon Goddess.

Mila had told me that when she used magic she could feel a strong connection to the Moon Goddess. As shifters, we were all connected through the Moon Goddess.

Closing my eyes, I took several deep breaths. I focused on Mila, her scent and what she was wearing.

Silently, I prayed to the Moon Goddess.

“Please, lead me to your beloved daughter. I know you protect her and guide her. Lead me to her now,” I whispered to myself and the Moon Goddess.

Suddenly, I felt a ripple go through me. I could feel Mila and visualize her perfectly in my mind. She was wearing the same thing I’d seen her in before she disappeared in the crowd.

The connection I felt was weak but I knew it was from her.

“Come with me,” I said, motioning for the two of them to follow me.

“Where are we going?” Ashley asked skeptically.

“After Mila,” I said.

“You can’t know where she is. Do you?” Ashley asked.

“Ashley, will you stop!?” Payne growled.

“She’s this way,” I insisted.

“Is your compass telling you that? I thought it was just spinning. Am I the stupid one? Can I not read it?” Ashley asked in a nervous voice.

“Seriously, Ashley, it is not the time for this!” Payne said. “We need to focus on catching up to Mila.”

I just motioned for them to follow me.

It felt like the direction I was being drawn in was the same direction as the map location for the artifact piece. We were headed toward the mountain.

I thought of the map that Mila had given me. I'd spent time memorizing it so I could hide it and no one would be able to take it off of me and use it for themselves.

We'd go up Mount Lauren and the moonlight would guide us to it. Between the moonlit path and my knowledge of the map, and the pull I felt toward Mila, I knew we were going in the right direction.

Fortunately, Payne and Ashley were loyal enough to me that they wouldn't keep interrupting me and asking questions. They would follow along and question me later.

Honestly, I didn't have a good answer for their questions. Maybe it was just luck, or the map, or the Moon Goddess really was guiding me, but I didn't really know what was leading me in that direction.

Near the base of the mountain, I saw a familiar figure. Beautiful hair down her back, a familiar outfit. Her physique was a perfect match to Mila from behind.

Sighing a big sigh of relief, I hurried to her. We'd finally caught up to her and she was safe!

[Chapter 710](#)

Mila

After leaving the rogue zone, I felt my strength growing. Perhaps, the antidote Soren gave me was working and whatever that had been dampening my powers was being treated, or maybe getting closer to Mount Lournet and the artifact was helping my powers awaken.

Mila

After leaving the rogue zone, I felt my strength growing. Perhaps, the antidote Soren gave me was working and whatever that had been dampening my powers was being treated, or maybe getting closer to Mount Lournet and the artifact was helping my powers awaken.

Whatever it was, I felt looser and lighter.

My mind opened up to possible spells I could try and I felt the flow in my veins. It felt like I could touch a part of myself that I never even knew existed.

The closer I got to the mountain, the more I felt like it was pulling me in and drawing me closer.

If this was how I felt around all the artifact pieces, they might be pretty easy to find.

By the time I made it to the base of the mountain, the sun was setting.

There were bounty hunters after me. I'd given them the slip but I needed to find a place where I could hide and lay low for the night.

But I didn't want to give the bounty hunters the chance to sneak up on me. I had to come up with some kind of trap to warn me.

I picked around the cave and found some good sized sticks. Smiling to myself, I came up with a plan!

I put my sticks together and quickly glanced around to make sure I was really alone. Giggling, I stripped my clothes off.

Immediately, I felt a tremor deep inside. My wolf was waking up.

I looked up at the sky and smiled, silently thanking the Moon Goddess that the antidote Soren had given me was working.

I closed my eyes and let instinct take over. Quickly, instinct took over, and so did my wolf. I dropped down onto four paws and let out an excited yip.

Like a happy puppy, I hopped around, prancing and nuzzling my nose into the ground, inhaling all the delicious scents in the mountain forest.

Now that my wolf was awake, all my senses had increased. I felt like I was seeing the forest, hearing sounds, and smelling scents for the first time.

My ears twitched at the slightest sound and I slunk into some nearby underbrush near the cave.

Maybe the Blackfire antidote was freeing my magical powers and my wolf now that the poison wasn't clogging up my veins anymore. Next time I saw Soren, I would really have to thank him for getting me the antidote, and the blood he'd shed for me.

Thinking of Soren made my heart soften.

I didn't want to think about him but I couldn't help it.

Would he be mad that I ran off? What was he doing right now? When would I see him again?

Ugh.

I shook my head, pushing the thoughts away.

Soren had done too much for me already. I couldn't drag him into my problems anymore. The fact that my wolf was awake was proof enough that he'd given up too much for me.

The hairs on my neck prickled and I sensed someone approaching the cave.

A low growl rippled through me and I backed deeper into the woods. Let them find the track instead of finding me.

Soren

The closer I got to Mila, the more I slowed down.

"What's wrong, Boss?" Payne asked.

"I don't know..."

I hurried closer to Mila. Reaching out, I grabbed her shoulder.

"Mila!"

My hand closed around something sharp and prickly. The clothes crumpled in on themselves and "Mila" fell to the ground in a pile of sticks and logs.

Creasing my brow, I stared at the one stick I still held in my hand.

“What the...?” Ashley asked.

“A dummy,” Payne suggested.

“With Mila’s clothes... so where is Mila?” I asked.

What could have happened to her where she lost all her clothes and someone dressed up a bunch of sticks to look like her?

My heart sank and I shook my head. We had to find her!

The bushes rustled and suddenly a sleek, golden-brown wolf launched out of the bushes.

The wolf clipped my arm and I spun around, catching my balance. Payne shifted instantly and leapt at the golden-brown wolf. He pinned the wolf down, growling, ready to bite her.

“Payne, stop!” I cried, rushing over to them.

Payne’s eyes widened. He snarled but he released the golden-brown wolf.

She panted, her chest rising and falling noticeably as she rolled. She remained lying on the ground.

“Mila?” I asked, crouching down in front of her.

Mila’s wolf stared back at me. She looked surprised. But the way her eyes stared at me, I knew it was Mila. She sighed heavily and shook her head, like she wasn’t happy to see me.

A shudder ran through her and her head collapsed on the ground. She whined.

I could see her strength had failed. She was still weak from the poison, not yet fully healed.

She whimpered again and sighed heavily, a soft cloud of breath puffing out of her nose.

I motioned for Ashley and Payne to move back, giving her some space.

Payne shifted back and put his clothes on.

I knelt down by Mila’s head and lifted it into my lap.

She shuddered and twisted. The air around her trembled and Mila’s beautiful wolf melted away and she returned to her human form. Swiftly, I took my jacket off and I laid it over her. She was still shivering and trembling.

“Come on, I’ve got you,” I said. I scooped her into my arms, keeping the jacket tucked around her, and I carried her back into the cave.

Payne and Ashley tried to follow.

“Wait here,” I said to them.

Mila was naked, I didn’t want them all hovering around her.

“Well, I don’t want to wait around her. I’m going to go collect firewood,” Ashley grunted.

I heard her run off into the woods and I could see Payne standing guard outside.

Firewood would be good. Mila still seemed shocked and warming her up would help.

I slowly laid her down on the cave floor and rubbed my hands on her arms and legs, trying to warm her up.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, her eyes never leaving me. “I mean...”

I smirked. She was surprised but she was happy. But then her eyes cooled and she turned away.

“I haven’t found the artifact yet, if that’s what you’re here for,” she muttered coldly.

“Mila, I told you that I’d help you get the artifact and I’d help you get your revenge. You don’t need to find the artifact on your own,” I reminded her.

“It is my responsibility,” she said softly, still not looking at me.

“I know you like to do things on your own, though, so if you’d like us to camp outside, we will,” I assured, nodding gently.

She turned back to me and sat up, holding the jacket around her. She bowed her head a little and took my hand.

“You don’t have to... I feel safe when you’re around,” she said, smiling shyly.

“That’s my good girl,” I said, squeezing her hand back.

“Soren... you shouldn’t have come,” she told me, shaking her head.

“Why not?” I asked, creasing my brow. “Mila, what’s going on?”

“I had a vision of Helen, and she said... you know, it doesn’t matter what she said. This whole venture is dangerous and troublesome... I’ve caused enough trouble for you...” she whispered.

“Mila...”

“Soren, no. I... I don’t have anything more to offer you. It isn’t worth it for you to put yourself in danger again... I’m not worth it...” she muttered.

I chuckled and shook my head. I would expect Mila to find excuses to push me away. That’s what she had always been consistent with. I held her hand when she tried to pull away and squeezed it tighter.

“You’re not the cause of the trouble that finds me. In fact, even if I don’t go with you or help you, there will be plenty of trouble coming my way,” I assured her.

Mila glanced at me and arched an eyebrow.

“You don’t know that. Everyone has told you to stay away from me because I’m trouble,” she said.

It was my turn to be surprised. I didn’t know that Mila heard anyone say those things to me. She wasn’t wrong, but it was too late now. I was too involved and had already done my own work to stay involved.

"I don't think you understand just how dangerous this is. And I don't mean finding the artifact. I mean everything that will come after it once we have all the pieces," she insisted. She chewed her lower lip nervously.

"Mila... you don't have to worry about me. I've been dealing with trouble for a long time. Besides, I'm involved now," I told her.

"What do you mean?" Mila asked, her brow creasing.

"When you asked me to help find the artifact, I sent Thomas out to plant a few seeds so that the attention of the other packs would turn to me," I explained.

"Why would you do that?" she asked, getting angry, her eyes flashing with anger.

"Because I'm involved. He has been telling people that I have a very powerful artifact in my possession, one that is a universal converter, and if I used it, I could assert control over any other artifact without the Alpha blood of the pack it belongs to," I continued.

Mila shook her head and hugged her knees to her chest.

"And thus, I'd be able to use those artifacts, too, regardless of my bloodline," I finished.

"Soren, that's... you'll be the target of any power hungry alpha, and all kinds of greedy rogues," she pointed out.

"I know. But that will take the focus off you and the real artifact while we search for it and put it all together," I explained.

"Well, as risky as that is... I suppose it is also genius," Mila said, smiling lightly.

"It was Thomas's genius idea. We know that each pack usually has one artifact and it is passed down through the Alpha bloodline. To use the artifact, it requires that bloodline," I reminded her.

"I know that," Mila said sharply.

"Well, an artifact that could be used by any shifter and exert control over any other artifact... that would be far too tempting to rogues and Alphas. It would be the ultimate control," I said.

"And people think it is real? If artifacts belong to one pack bloodline, where did the universal one come from?" she asked, arching an eyebrow.

I chuckled. "It's a mystery. Isn't that the beauty of it? It makes people a lot more likely to believe."

"Seriously!? Have you lost your freaking mind!? Why would you do this?" she snapped suddenly.

"Uhh... Mila, it isn't that big of a deal. Besides, we need the distraction while we hunt for the real artifact," I said, shrugging.

She wasn't listening. Standing up, she tucked the jacket around herself and paced back and forth.

"What, is your life just so boring that you have nothing better to do than invite death!?" she ranted.

Snearing, I stood up and grabbed her shoulders, forcing her to stand still and look at me.

“Remember this, Mila, I’m not afraid of trouble. Usually, trouble tries to avoid me! Let them come. Let them all come. I want to see exactly how greedy these people are and what they will do for it,” I hissed.