

Kings Breeder 741

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It was time to go, whether everyone else was ready or not. I was rested and the packs were gathering. We needed to get to a vantage point where we could observe and figure out the other packs' motives.

"Everyone, follow me!" I bellowed to my men.

I motioned them in the direction of the Moon Goddess temple in Norwind territory and I took off without waiting to see them coming after me. My only priority was getting to Mila and saving her. Whether my pack backed me up or not was their concern.

Thomas gathered the troops to follow. At least, my Beta knew how to keep the pack organized while my focus was on something else.

Payne stayed at my side.

"Tell me everything," I said. "All the details.

"Some of the other packs have already made it to Norwind's Moon Goddess temple. They've all heard the rumors of the artifacts," he reported.

Payne had his fist clenched as he ran beside me. I heard the sound of his teeth gritting as he held back his rage. This was personal for him.

Mila and the artifact were symbols of the pack he lost. Chandler and Norwind were behind the destruction of his pack and the murder of his parents. I knew Payne would declare war on Chandler and Norwind all on his own if I wasn't with him.

I didn't blame him. There were horrible memories in Payne's past. Things he'd blocked out, tried to forget, and questions he didn't want answered but couldn't live without knowing. I could relate to that.

"You think they want the artifacts?" I asked.

"I doubt they are gathering to rescue Mila."

Ahh, that was the source of his anger. He was pissed the other packs were only there for greedy, selfish purposes. They didn't care about Mila or her safety, they just wanted power or, at least, to keep Chandler from having the power.

It occurred to me that a lot of the packs gathering could have been working with Norwind when Pomeni pack was destroyed fourteen years ago. Payne probably suspected that too.

None of the packs gathering were innocent, and neither was Norwind. By the end of the day, we could be involved in a complete bloodbath. None of these packs trusted each other and I was skeptical in regard to them cooperating and working together.

I'd tried to give them Chandler and Norwind as a common enemy to rally around. We'd see if my hard work had paid off.

As we jogged closer to the temple, I was glad that I'd rested. Rather, I was glad Thomas forced me to rest. I was a lot more energetic and motivated. But my mind was clearer too. I'd had time to cool down and I could handle this situation logically.

"Once we get there, Payne, our goal is to save Mila. Remember that. We're not getting revenge on what happened to your pack," I said.

"I know."

"Do not let your anger and hatred sidetrack you, okay?"

"Yes, boss." Payne grunted and nodded.

"We should pick up our pace."

Payne and I started sprinting toward the temple. I felt completely refreshed and at full strength. Nothing was going to stop me until I got Mila back.

I had to make sure that Payne was on board and wouldn't give in to his anger or desire for revenge. This would be the first time in over a decade he saw those responsible for his pack's destruction. I trusted him to follow orders but I had a feeling he wasn't as in control of his anger as he wanted me to believe.

Sometimes, I didn't think that Payne was honest with himself about how strongly he felt.

We'd find out soon.

Norwind's Goddess temple was on top of a mountain in Norwind territory. There was a thick forest around the base of the mountain. It slowed us down a little but the higher in altitude we got, the thinner the trees became.

Payne and I stopped talking on the steep ascent to save our breath and our strength.

When our entire group made it to the end of the tree line, just below the temple, there were other packs gathering outside and talking.

I held my arm up to stop my men. With a quick signal, I told them to spread out and find cover. I didn't want them to show themselves yet. We needed to know more about who we were getting involved with.

Payne and I moved close enough to hear what they were saying.

"How dare Chandler steal those artifacts! No alpha should have that much power."

Those artifacts should be locked in the castle where no one can use them."

"Not just the artifacts. Chandler kidnapped Miss Mila Hathaway! She's the descendant of the Pomeni Hathaways."

"Those bastards!"

"Well, that's it, we have to rescue her and get those artifacts away from Chandler."

"You can all play with the artifacts, I need to rescue Miss Hathaway."

“You, rescue her? We’re all here to save her. You’re not taking all the credit!”

“Yeah, we’ll all get the credit for showing up and rescuing her.”

“You know, Mila grew up in Saboreef. Once she’s safe, she’ll come back with us, to her home, of course.”

I scoffed under my breath. That must have been the Saboreef Alpha. All her life, he had tormented Mila and treated her like dirt.

Now, he was there to rescue her and take her home? He probably only had any interest because he knew her identity now and thought that it would gain him power and status. Not to mention the artifacts.

No one in Saboreef had been protective of her until they realized she had power and status.

Sneering, I glanced at Payne. None of these packs would be here if it weren’t for the artifacts. They wouldn’t have come just to rescue her.

Payne was crouched down, his jaw tense, eyes glaring at the gathered packs. He had one fist clenched and the other curled around a knife handle that I knew he kept in his pocket.

Reaching out, I put a hand on Payne’s shoulder, reminding him to keep his cool. He was right on the edge. We still needed to stay in control.

For the time being, it was better to have them on our side. We could take advantage of their greediness and selfishness until we got what we needed.

My ears perked up again when I heard the conversation center around the artifacts, including the one I’d made up and spread rumors about.

“Who even knows what Chandler can do now.”

“Probably not much. Miss Hathaway won’t use the artifact no matter what Chandler does. She’s too sweet.”

“But he must have the Blade of Souls and she’s the only one that can use it. He probably has ways of controlling her through magic or...”

“Or the Moonstone of Blessing.”

“What is that? I’ve never heard of that.”

“It is the other rare artifact that Chandler has. Supposedly, it can control all other artifacts. He wouldn’t even need Miss Mila for the Blade of Souls.”

“So, Chandler has both artifacts. He’s unstoppable.”

“Not yet. He doesn’t know we are here to stop him.”

“He won’t have to know! Norwind pack, with both artifacts, could take all of us down in a second.”

“How do we even know what the Blade of Souls does? Is it really that powerful?”

“I’ve heard a lot of rumors, like how it can kill anyone without leaving a trace.”

“But then, how do we stop him?”

“Even with the Moonstone of Blessing, that isn’t the same as a blood connection. If we can rescue Miss Mila and the Blade of Souls, she’ll have the advantage over Chandler and Norwind.”

“You think she’d help us?”

“Miss Mila is honorable and strong. She will help us against Chandler. She won’t let him become all-powerful.”

“That voice,” I whispered.

Someone stepped out of the crowd. It was Eros, he was the one who spoke!

How did Eros get here? The last time I saw him, he was chained up in the basement of the inn.

Groaning, I shook my head. Eros was free and there was only one person I knew that would free him.

Ashley.

Eros was her mate, she loved him and believed he was a good man. She might have made a deal with him to prove it, though I wasn’t sure why he’d care. He didn’t seem all that concerned about Ashley’s safety before.

I bowed my head. She’d helped him escape, despite my orders. I’d have to deal with her appropriately.

Although, Eros didn’t seem to be there to cause problems... yet. He didn’t think the Moonstone of Blessing was real, because it wasn’t, yet he hadn’t tried to convince the others of that.

Beside me, Payne gritted his teeth.

“Ashley helped him,” he growled, coming to the same conclusion as me.

He tensed and was about to jump out of our hiding place. I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back.

“Payne, remember why we are here. To save Mila,” I hissed in a sharp whisper.

Payne sighed and relaxed slightly but his eyes never left Eros. I was comforted to know that he could keep his cool or redirect his focus. Though, given the chance, I knew Payne would rip Eros to shreds.

“Once she’s safe, we can take care of Eros but now is not the right time.”

Eros’s voice came to us again.

“With both artifacts, the Blade of Souls and the Moonstone of Blessing, Norwind can easily take over any other pack.”

“Then we must take down Chandler!” someone yelled.

“Take down Chandler! Take down Chandler! Take down Chandler!”

The whole crowd started to cheer. The noise grew louder, echoing off the trees and the mountains.

My stomach was uneasy. Was this Eros's plan, get rid of Chandler and take over Norwind? I already knew he wanted Chandler out of the way.

"Take down Norwind! Take down Norwind! Take down Norwind!"

"Save Mila! Save Mila! Save Mila!"

The cheers grew louder and spread through the entire gathered group.

Eros moved to the front of the group, leading the chant, and heading toward the temple. The others followed him readily.

That was a bad sign. Eros would love that power and control. He might have been the one to unify the packs for the time being, but I didn't plan on him becoming an ally, no matter what Ashley tried to tell me.

Eros was bad news.

I looked at my men solemnly. This was our big moment. It pained me to send them off into this mess because I knew some of them might not make it back.

"Follow them."

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I kept my men at the back of the group. I knew they were anxious to get into this but we still didn't know what we were up against.

Chandler had told us that we were welcome at the temple but I didn't believe it. Chandler would have set traps for us. Better to let the others feel those out. I wasn't willing to risk my men until I had a better understanding of what Norwind was up to.

It seemed unlikely that they were going to let a large force sweep through their territory.

"Hey! You're trespassing," a Norwind warrior said, stepping out of the trees.

Behind him, several more warriors stood menacingly, the humans had their arms crossed, the wolves had their teeth bared, snarling.

"We're here to rescue Mila Hathaway and we know you have her prisoner. We're not leaving without her!" the Saboreef Alpha demanded.

"Alpha Chandler has a lot to answer for!"

"Alpha Chandler wants you all to leave our territory," the Norwind warrior growled.

"Take them!" Eros ordered.

The makeshift army of packs swarmed into the trees.

My men stepped forward and I stopped them, holding out an arm.

"Not unless we are needed. This isn't the real fight, it is just a diversion."

“Fine,” Payne muttered.

He was antsy and chomping at the bit. We all were a little.

Eros and the packs quickly took out the small Norwind fleet. The wolves whimpered and ran off into the woods.

When they gathered together again they were high-fiving and cheering for each other.

I shook my head and sighed.

The group continued up the hill making so much noise as they continued to congratulate each other. It was absolutely ridiculous. I started to wonder how many of them had ever been in a serious conflict. Packs fought all the time but this... they should have known better.

Not too much farther up the hill there was a barrier. The packs slowed down, grumbling in annoyance.

“This is nothing, we’ll get it down,” Eros said.

“Mila is waiting for us!”

As a group, they started tearing down the barrier. Again, I kept my group back. I didn’t want them to waste their energy on these small traps and tricks.

The trees rang out with howls and another group of Norwind warriors moved in. The packs immediately turned around and defended themselves.

“Get out of our land!” the leader shouted.

“Not without Miss Mila,” Eros demanded.

Another skirmish broke out. Once again, the Norwind wolves turned tail and ran.

The packs praised each other and finished taking down the barrier. They broke a crevice open and flooded through the opening.

“Something isn’t right here,” I whispered.

“What do you mean?” Payne asked.

“Is this Norwind’s best defense, or are they just playing with us?”

“Does it matter?”

“No, I guess not.”

I sighed and squeezed through the barriers after the others, Payne, Thomas, and my men following close behind. We were getting closer to the temple and the top of the hill.

On the other side of the barrier, I could see the temple just over the next peak. We were getting close and I had a feeling in my stomach that there was something worse coming.

As the other packs sped up, I slowed down a little. This felt too much like a game of cat and mouse. But were we the mice?

“There’s the temple!” Eros shouted.

The others cheered.

“Split up and secure the area,” he ordered.

The other packs obeyed without hesitation. I watched as they broke into smaller groups and headed into the nearby woods looking for any Norwind stragglers.

Again, I shook my head. No wonder Eros had never gained any traction for himself as a leader. He didn’t know how to be smart. Instead of keeping a singular, strong force, he was dividing his strength.

I stopped dead, another awful thought occurring to me... what if Eros was doing that to help Chandler? For all I knew, his claims of not supporting Chandler were more lies.

Thomas scoffed and came up beside me.

“Bastards, they’re making it too easy,” he grumbled.

“That’s not our concern,” I said, shaking my head.

“Apparently, they can work together when they don’t know Norwind’s strength. Now that they don’t think Norwind is a threat, they are weakening themselves,” Thomas added.

“A few small victories doesn’t mean that they have the upper hand,” Payne agreed.

“This isn’t about securing the perimeter or rescuing Mila. They’re competing against each other to prove who is stronger and better. Whoever gets Mila or the artifact first, wins,” Thomas growled.

“We’re not letting them get to her first!” Payne snarled.

“No, we aren’t, but we’re going to play this smart,” I agreed, nodding.

“Soren...” Payne argued.

I held a hand up. “Wait. Chandler and Dylan aren’t stupid. They drew us here with an invitation, now you can’t tell me you believe it was genuine.”

“They had to know all the packs would show up in this place because of the invitation they extended. They wouldn’t do that if they weren’t prepared,” I pointed out.

“They set traps and had attack parties... but you think that was all for show, don’t you?” Payne asked.

“It was to test our strength while also getting the other packs to drop their guard. Look at them all. They are puffed up, thinking they’re tough and stronger than Norwind. They’re even confident enough that they’ve let their guard down. I’m willing to bet that was Norwind’s plan,” I said.

“And you’re not about to follow along with them.” Thomas grinned.

“No.”

“What are you planning?”

“I’m going to try and contact Mila again. I should be a lot closer to her now.”

Payne and Thomas stepped back to give me some space. Thomas had our men set up a perimeter for safety so I could concentrate without worrying about another attack from Norwind's forces.

With all the shifters tramping through the woods, there was no way I'd be able to pick up her scent. But if we were close enough, I should be able to reach out with the mind link and find her. Even if she didn't respond, if I could just sense her...

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Reaching out with the mindlink, I focused on Mila.

"Mila, where are you? Tell me where you are."

I focused and focused and then...

"Soren..."

It was such a faint whisper I almost didn't think I heard her.

"Soren is that you... are you close by?"

I opened my eyes and looked around. There was wind rustling the leaves and murmurs from the other shifters nearby. Any of those could have been my mind playing tricks on me and thinking that I was hearing Mila's voice.

"Is it really you, Mila?" I asked through the mindlink again.

"Yes, it's me! Soren, you're really here. You're in Norwind territory?"

Her voice was louder and clearer now. It was almost like she'd been whispering before, afraid someone would overhear. I knew that was impossible but she might not. She had no experience with packs or the mindlink.

A flood of emotions ran through me and I pressed my hand to my chest. Mila was alive and nearby. Relief swept through me, along with fear and concern. If she was here then Chandler really did have her!

"Are you okay? Where are you?"

"I'm... fine. I'm okay..." she replied.

That wasn't very convincing and concern overtook my relief quickly, my heart pounding in my chest.

"You don't sound sure."

"I'm fine. But I'm not sure where I am..."

"Can you find out?"

The mindlink went silent for a moment.

It bothered me that I couldn't talk to her after just finding out she was okay and that she really was here. If she didn't know where she was, that could mean a whole bunch of things, like she was blindfolded, drugged, or somewhere dark.

This was all my fault. Whatever she was going through... I'd pushed it on her because I hadn't been honest with her.

She could talk to me and sense me which was a huge relief... but this was far from over and she was definitely not safe!

My blood boiled. I would kill Chandler and Dylan if they touched her. I didn't care if Dylan was royalty. Mila meant too much to me and I wasn't going to let them get away with hurting her.

I took a deep, steadying breath, relaxing my fists. For Payne and for Thomas, I had to stay calm and clear-headed. They would follow me as long as I did.

"Soren, are you still there?"

Her voice through the mindlink was like the voice of an angel. My heart warmed.

"I'm here Mila. Where are you?"

"I'm in a tomb, probably underground. There are no windows and the lighting is strange."

"That's a start. Anything else you can tell me about this place?"

She was very calm and collected now. I was surprised by that, seeing as she'd been kidnapped again and I knew she was mad at me. Once I got her to safety, I'd let her be as mad as she wanted and then I would tell her the truth of it all and promise her that it was only her I wanted.

Until then, as long as she was willing to work with me, we'd be able to pull this off.

"I don't know much about my surroundings. But Soren... I'm in Chandler's Luna's tomb."

"Alright."

It was hard to control my anger and frustration. Chandler had taken her there to try and bring his Luna back to life. He was ready to force Mila to work for him but she didn't even have the artifact!

He was not going to be happy about that.

"Is Chandler there with you?" I asked.

"There's another guy here too... I don't know him but he seems... off. Chandler left a few minutes ago. He told me he had to deal with some pests." she explained.

'You're alone with him!?' I asked harshly.

Mila was alone with Dylan. That was not a good thing. Dylan was completely insane and he was too strong. Mila was in serious danger with him.

"Is that bad?" she asked.

"Be very, very careful with him. Do not provoke him or cross him, he's dangerous," I insisted.

"I sort of picked up on that... Who is he?"

"I believe he is Dylan. He's a cousin to the Alpha King and used to be his Beta many years ago. You'll be careful, won't you?"

"I heard your warning the first time. I'm being careful."

"That's my good girl. We're coming to rescue you. Stay put until we get there."

"Okay..."

"I love you, Mila."

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My heart pattered in my chest, skipping like a happy child. Warmth swept through me as my declaration of love slipped through the mind link.

I hadn't realized it was true until the words came out but I knew now that it was.

Grinning like a fool, I imagined the look on Mila's face when hearing my confession and my heart raced even faster. I was like a teenage boy confessing love to a girl for the first time. One so far out of my league that I could only hope for her to return my feelings.

The only difference, in this case, was that I was fairly certain Mila did return my feelings. She wouldn't have been so pissed at me about the picture if she didn't.

As I waited for her to reply, my heart raced and my palms were clammy, just like a nervous little pup.

She never responded.

"Mila?"

My mind raced suddenly. Had I been too presumptive in thinking that she had real feelings for me? Had I been too quick to tell her how I felt given that she was angry at me? I hadn't really meant to tell her, the words just slipped out.

But was Mila ready?

She was so quiet and I worried that I'd scared her off again.

What was she thinking? I wished I could read her mind but the mindlink didn't work that way.

"Mila, is everything okay?" I asked, gently prodding her.

There was nothing on the other end. Not even static. Our mindlink had been severed. It was impossible for me to determine if that was because she'd shut it down or if something had happened to her that made her unable to respond.

Whatever the reason, I wasn't going to stop until she was safely in my arms. Then I could tell her with my own words how I felt and I could see the adorable, shy yet hopeful look on her face.

I took another deep, calming breath, keeping myself under control.

As much as I wanted to rush off and tear everyone's heads off, I was still hesitant. Chandler was working a plan here.

He'd referred to all the other shifters as "pests." Mila had told me that. And he was planning on doing it in person. I had a feeling he would be showing himself soon and the temple was his arena for the showdown.

Since he'd just been in the tomb with Mila, that meant the tomb had to be near the temple. It made perfect sense because Chandler loved her deeply, even though she'd been dead for years. He'd want her somewhere sacred, to be protected spiritually.

He would want her soul wrapped in the Moon Goddess's arms. What better place for that than under the Moon Goddess Temple?

It was the holiest place to lay someone to rest. He could keep her body preserved, protected, and surrounded by the Moon Goddess's love and energy. And no one would disturb her there.

"Soren, have you figured out what you need?" Payne asked, cutting into my thoughts.

"We should get to the temple."

We started heading up the hill again when the sounds of a commotion broke out.

"What's going on now?" Thomas grumbled.

"Tell the others to hang back. I don't want them to get involved until we know what we're dealing with!"

I rushed ahead of Payne and Thomas while they coordinated the men. If Chandler's plan was unfolding I needed to be there. I wasn't going to let him go anywhere without my eyes on him.

Sounds of battle and fighting got louder as I got closer to the temple. It sounded like a vicious war with Norwind unleashing all hell on the other packs.

Screaming and curses floated down the mountain, along with other sounds of ripping and tearing skin.

I winced and turned back.

"Hey, you two, come with me," I said, pointing to two of my warriors.

As much as I wanted to keep them out of it, I needed backup in case something happened to me. They could report back to Thomas and Payne.

We ran up the rest of the mountain, all the way to the temple. The sounds of battle got closer and I realized there was something strange about the temple... strange but eerily familiar.

"Alpha Soren, what is this?" one of the warriors asked me.

"Stay out of that fog!" I ordered.

Just like all of Miltern, the Norwind temple was surrounded by a thick fog. The fog in Miltern had dulled our senses. It made it difficult for us to smell, see, and hear. It would make a Norwind ambush incredibly easy.

I wasn't sure if this fog was the same but all the sounds of fighting were coming from inside.

The fog didn't look the same as the one in Miltern. The Miltern fog had been hazy and sluggish. It was eerie. This fog was thick and dark. It seemed angry. I couldn't see anything even when I squinted. I'd have to go in there to find out what was going on.

"Stay here and stay out of the fog!" I ordered.

"Where are you going?" one of the warriors asked.

"If I'm not back in ten minutes, report back to Payne and Thomas. Do not follow me!"

They nodded and stood at attention as I slipped into the fog.

Shifters from the other pack raced around in the fog. They were all attacking each other, snarling, fighting, and scratching at each other. It was like they'd lost their minds and were rabid.

I noticed two men from Saboreef fighting against each other and I didn't see any members of Norwind.

What was happening to these guys? They were going completely crazy.

I headed a little deeper into the fog and paused.

My blood boiled and I clenched my fists. Gritting my teeth, I felt the sudden urge to kill. I wanted to wrap my fingers around someone's neck and snap it. I wanted to rip into someone's throat!

What the...

What was going on with me?

It was the fog. It had to be the fog. Just like the Miltern fog messed with our senses, this fog messed with sanity and aggression. The others lost all grip on reality and were unable to stop themselves.

So... this was Alpha Chandler's trap.

By inviting us all to the temple, he lured us into the fog so we would kill each other. It meant all his warriors would be safe and out of harm's way while the packs picked each other off. Even if they didn't wipe each other out completely, they'd be weak enough that Norwind would have the upper hand again.

"Well played, Chandler," I growled, my desire to kill bubbling up again. I fought against the urge. The only person I'd kill on sight right now was Chandler. I wasn't going to let myself lose it until then...

"Hahahahaha!"

Chandler's thick delighted laugh echoed from the temple through the fog.

Instinctively, my eyes flitted toward him. I clenched my fists and strained against the urge to rush him and kill him. It was strong. The fog was strong.

But I was stronger!

Chandler hopped down the steps, one stair at a time. He laughed and pointed to the shifters fighting each other.

None of them even noticed him. They were too caught up in the effects of the fog.

“Look at this. You all thought you came to stop me?” Chandler asked, a vicious, sweet tune in his voice.

“Chandler!” I snarled through gritted teeth, holding on by a thread. I stamped my feet into the ground to hold myself in place.

Chandler didn’t notice or hear me, for the moment.

“You hypocrites. You came to stop me but you were fueled by greed. And now, this is where your greed has brought you. This is the price you pay,” he sang.

I was ready to rip the smirk right off his face! He dared lecture others on greed! The man that was kidnapping my mate just to bring his dead Luna back to life... that was the definition of greed!

Closing my eyes, I thought of the blessing I’d received from the White Queen. She’d given me the blessing years ago but it was probably the only thing keeping me from losing my mind in this fog.

But it was starting to get to me. I had to get out of here!

Retreating from the fog, I rejoined my warriors on the edge.

Immediately, I felt like I could breathe again. I hadn’t felt like I was suffocating within the fog cloud but the fresh air was very refreshing.

“Are you okay, Alpha Soren?” one of the warriors asked.

“Yes. Do not go into the fog under any circumstances, alright?”

“Yes, of course,” they both agreed.

I ran my hand down my face and thought about what was going on. I needed to get to Chandler and I needed to get to the temple. If I went back into the fog I had no way to ensure that I wouldn’t lose my mind.

I’d barely kept it together and I’d just been standing still. To make it to the Temple I’d need to spend at least twice as much time in the fog cloud than I already had and I didn’t know if I could make it that long.

Chandler had things set up perfectly.

This was exactly why I didn’t want my men rushing in with the others. They were safe and that meant we still had a chance. I just needed to get to the temple.

“What’s your plan?” one of the warriors asked.

I stroked my chin and shook my head. The biggest problem was the fog. Once that was resolved or bypassed, everything else would fall into place. I just needed...

Someone else was circling the outside of the fog bank. Immediately, I recognized Eros.

He hadn’t gone rushing in. Too bad, if someone had killed him in a fit of insanity, I wouldn’t have been too broken up about it.

“Where are you going?” I muttered to myself watching Eros skulk around the fog.

He was looking right at where the temple was, eyes narrowed in a harsh glare. Could he see Chandler?

That was the only person I imagined he was glaring at through the fog.

He sneered in the fog and shook his head. It was like he was embarrassed about what the shifters were doing, fighting each other to death.

Suddenly, Eros ducked into the fog.

“Why...”

I started following him.

“Alpha?”

“Wait here!”

I went to where Eros disappeared and saw that there was a hidden pathway. It looked like it would take him safely through the fog.

“Well, well, Eros, Apparently, you do have some use after all.”

I returned to my warriors.

“Go back to Thomas and Payne. Tell them that I found a path and am leaving marks for them along the way,” I ordered.

“Yes, Alpha.”

They ran off, scurrying back to Thomas and Payne. I went back to the path and bent a twig.

“Thomas,” I reached out through the mindlink.

“What is it?”

“Follow the bent twigs.”

“That’s... descriptive.”

“You’ll understand soon.”

I cut off the mindlink and went further down the path, bending another twig for Thomas to follow.

Further down the path, I reached out to Mila once more with the mindlink. I sensed her but the connection was weak. Any second, it could break off. But she was still there and that was what mattered.

Hope rose up inside me.

“Wait for me, my mate. I love you,” I said again before I lost the mindlink.

[Chapter 744](#)

Mila

When Soren told me that he loved me, I nearly broke down but I kept myself composed. My hands trembled slightly and I tucked them behind my back.

I wanted to tell him that I loved him too and that I was pregnant with his child. More than anything, I wanted to run right into his arms again. The woman in the picture was still stuck in my heart like a thorn but it didn't matter. I didn't care about Soren's past, only his future.

And that future, I wanted it to be with me and our child.

I rubbed my hands on my thighs and paced back and forth, trying to convey nervousness instead of hope and happiness.

I knew Dylan was watching me. Dylan was what Soren had called him but I wasn't sure if that was his name and I wasn't about to ask him. It would let him know that I was in contact with someone else.

Any change in myself would alert Dylan that Soren was on his way and I couldn't risk that. Soren still had surprise on his side.

"You seem anxious," Dylan said.

He smirked and pulled a small knife out. His eyes lit up viciously.

"I'm locked in an underground tomb," I said.

"Ahh, you're anxious to get out of here. Okay, then there's no need to beat around the bush. You want to get back to your sugar daddy with your precious child, right?"

I didn't respond, I just paced some more. In my mind, I wished Soren would hurry, but I didn't reach out to him in the mind link. If he confesses his love to me again, I wouldn't be able to hide my joy from Dylan.

"So, all you have to do is tell me where the last part of the artifact is. It's that simple. Tell me where the artifact is and that's the last favor I'll ask before setting you free." Dylan gave me a slick smile.

I imagined he thought it was a gentle, tender smile but it was terrifying.

How was I supposed to respond to that? If I told him I didn't have it then he might think I was useless. If I told him I didn't know where it was or how to use it... well, Soren told me to be careful.

I had to think my way through this.

"You've got the Light of Guidance and the Sheath of Protection. Where is the Dagger of Mercy?" he pressed.

I blinked at him and stopped pacing. He already knew more about the artifact than Chandler did. I'd always thought the final part of the artifact was a dagger because of the sheath but I couldn't be sure. Besides, I didn't know each of the parts had its own name.

Dylan knew the artifact well. He knew it better than I did, that was for sure.

I bit my lower lip. Chandler and Dylan couldn't hurt me. They'd need me to use the artifact once they had all the pieces. I had a little wiggle room to push back and ask questions.

Maybe I could learn a little something in the process.

"If you know all about the artifact, why didn't you tell Chandler the truth?" I asked, crossing my arms.

Dylan arched an eyebrow. "The truth about what?"

"The Blade of Souls. I know it isn't as powerful as everyone thinks."

"I doubt you truly understand the power it has," he countered.

"Perhaps. But we both know that it can't raise the dead like Chandler wants. His Luna will never come back to life." I motioned to the crystal coffin.

"And you're sure of that?"

"At first, I thought you were helping Chandler resurrect his Luna, but now..." I stared him straight in the eye. "You're after it for your own purpose, aren't you?"

Dylan's eyes narrowed and flashed. He snarled and I felt like I was having a staring contest with a venomous snake. One wrong move and he'd strike with poisonous fangs.

Suddenly, he smirked. It was dangerous and hungry and I was his prey.

He scoffed. "Well, you are clever, just like your mother."

I froze at the mention of her but I kept my face a mask. Dylan knew my mother? Then, was he one of the causes of my parents' demise?

"That smart brain of yours will only get you into more trouble. My recommendation to you is... shut up and do as you're told!"

I took a half step back as he raged. Clearly, I'd struck a nerve. I wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing in this case.

He could keep his composure when he wanted to. Even when he lashed out, it was very controlled. Like he was only making me think he was angry to scare me or rattle me. I'd never met anyone that could control themselves like that and use their emotions so skillfully... except Soren.

It made him more dangerous and creepy.

The only difference was, if I provoked Soren, I knew he'd just tease me or... throw me on the bed.

Dylan would do much, much worse. I knew I shouldn't taunt him anymore. But if I was honest, then maybe I could stall him long enough for Soren to arrive.

"Alright, alright," I said shrugging. "I'm just curious. You don't have to get upset."

Dylan pursed his lips, his brow creasing.

I smiled warmly and softened my voice, making myself as gentle and approachable as possible.

"Since you saved me and my child from Chandler... then I will return the favor by telling you the truth. I don't mind sharing at all."

Dylan nodded and held his hand out to me motioning for me to continue.

"I have no idea where the last piece of the artifact is." Sighing, I shrugged heavily.

Dylan scoffed. I could tell he didn't believe me but what more could I tell him?

"Perhaps we've been treating you too well, young lady. Unfortunately, that's bad news for you."

"I'm telling the truth."

"That remains to be seen. Willing or not, I will get the truth out of you." he held the knife up, the dim light reflecting off of it.

Dylan clapped his hands and two warriors came into the tomb.

"Tie her up!"

The warriors came at me. I backed away from them but they caught me quickly. There were wrist shackles on the wall and ankle shackles on the floor.

I struggled against the warriors but they shoved me against the wall and shackled me in place. They pushed me back again, the air leaving my lungs.

Groaning, I stopped struggling. I had to be careful because of the baby. I couldn't let them push me around and if I stopped struggling, maybe they'd go easy on me.

I breathed heavily and couldn't get my hyperventilation under control. Shackled to the wall and floor I had no escape and no way to protect myself.

Dylan smiled gently and walked closer, holding the knife in front of my face.

Although his smile was meant to be comforting, the knife really ruined that. I glanced around for any help at all but the only other people were Dylan's warriors.

I could reach out to Soren through the mindlink but what could he do? If he hadn't gotten here already, knowing my predicament wouldn't get him here faster. I already knew he was getting here as fast as he possibly could.

Dylan stuck the knife into my shirt sleeve and cut it open. The fabric made a loud tearing sound but the knife never touched my skin.

He cut my other shirt sleeve and the ripped fabric fell away from my body, leaving my torso bare. He glanced over my breasts and my stomach.

The warriors behind Dylan all stared at me. They salivated and their eyes glowed with lust.

April popped into my mind and I couldn't breathe.

She'd been so beaten and sexually abused... was that what Dylan was going to do to me?!

Had he been the one to hurt April so badly? Was my fate going to be the same as hers?

No...Goddess, please...help me!

"All of you, get out!" Dylan snapped.

I heard his warrior's mumbles of hesitation. They were slow to react, reluctant to leave. They probably wanted to see me get tortured.

Finally, they left and I was completely alone with Dylan.

I wasn't sure if that made me safer or put me in more danger.

Dylan offered me a gentlemanly smile. His eyes were empty of all emotion and warmth, which took away from the gentleman facade.

"I can smell it... your fear. It is... delicious. But clearly, it's not enough to get you to talk..."

"What are you going to do?" I asked, my voice cracking.

Dylan rolled his eyes.

"Don't flatter yourself. I'm not a vulgar barbarian and I have no interest in f*****g a chick like you..."

He sneered as he looked over my exposed body.

Regardless of his insult, I was relieved. I actually believed him when he said that.

Dylan smirked and leaned in, knife in hand.

"Ahhh..."

I cried out as the knife blade sliced a shallow, painful cut across my forearm. Blood bubbled over my skin. It was warm as it smeared my flesh. The cut wasn't deep but it was painful, stinging like a hundred bees.

Quickly, he slashed several more shallow cuts over my abs.

Groaning, I bowed my head and gritted my teeth. All the wounds were superficial but that almost made them more painful. The cold air made them sear with pain.

"However, I'm not going to pass up the chance to hear the cries of pain from my dear old friends' daughter," he purred.

The words should have meant something to me... Dylan knew my father too... but I was in too much pain to process that or think more about it.

"You f*****g monster! You're a creepy bastard that gets off on cutting women open. How does that make you any less vulgar and barbaric!?"

I shouted and screamed at him but I held onto my anger and I bit my tongue. There was no way I'd cry in front of Dylan. I wasn't going to give him that satisfaction.

Dylan continued to smirk. He made several more cuts on my inner thighs. The same shallow, painful, stinging cuts right in a row down my thighs. It was such a sensitive part of the body and that made them hurt even more.

Blood smeared my skin. It dried and crusted over with more layers. The bleeding didn't seem to stop despite the cuts not being deep.

I glanced down. My belly and legs were almost covered with blood. I was losing too much. It would get dangerous for me and the baby.

With quick slices, he cut my arms and then left ten more quick swipes across my abdomen.

“Come on, Mila, I want to see you cry,” he said, grabbing my chin.

The knife was so close to my face, I couldn't stop staring at it. It was covered with fresh blood. My fresh blood.

“Don't worry, your face will be fine. Even I don't want to cut up that pretty face and leave it scarred,” he chuckled.

My mind was fuzzy. I was so close to passing out from blood loss.

Dylan's voice became cold and hard.

“Now, this is just a little lesson for your smart mouth. If you refuse to tell me what you know, the next cut will go directly into your belly.”

His lips twisted in a cruel smirk. He pressed the tip of the blade into my stomach, harmless for the moment, but I felt the prick.

“I don't want to see a lovely girl like you die, so I won't kill you. But I have no problem cutting out your womb and that child inside... I might even enjoy it.”

I gasped and gagged, my own breath choking me.

“I don't know!” I screamed. “I told you, I don't have it! I don't know where it is!”

My shrieks echoed around the tomb and Dylan took a step back.

He narrowed his eyes at me for a moment and then licked my blood off the blade of his knife.

I cringed and looked away from him.

Dylan walked a circle around the room. As he turned the corner and started coming at me again, I was filled with despair completely. What if he didn't believe me?

I wasn't afraid of dying. I'd die to keep the artifact out of their hands to keep Soren safe.

Soren's words echoed in my head, when he told me he loved me.

It was all I needed to know. If I died at that moment, I could be at peace. But it wasn't just me. Now, I had the baby to think about...

Dylan's eyes turned to ice, sending a shiver down my spine. He closed the space between us and brought the knife to my belly again.

I closed my eyes, silently begging him not to hurt the baby.

“AWOOO”

A howl echoed through the spacious tomb.

Opening my eyes, I watched as a massive, beautiful wolf tackled Dylan, knocking him away. The wolf stood between me and Dylan, ready to defend me.

It was Soren. I knew his wolf anywhere!

Tears sprang to my eyes. I'd been holding them back all day and suddenly the floodgates broke. I couldn't hold back anymore and I burst into tears.

Soren was here. He'd come to save me!

[Chapter 745](#)

My vision blurred. I tried to blink them back so I could see what was happening with Soren and Dylan.

Soren still stood protectively in front of me. He pawed the ground and snarled at Dylan.

With a heated growl, Dylan rolled onto his hands and knees, shifting as he moved. He was as large as Soren and menacing.

My heart nearly stopped. That's the wolf Soren had to fight? I knew he was strong but Dylan was terrifying and Helen's warning came back to me.

It was okay. It would all be okay, I told myself.

Soren was here. He'd come for me... he'd really come for me and that was what mattered.

All the strength and defiance I'd been holding onto drained from my body. Sobbing, tears streamed down my face and I trembled. I'd kept strong until Soren arrived by now I could let it all go.

My body shook and I couldn't control my tears or sobs.

Dylan charged at Soren and they fought. They scratched at each other and rolled around the tomb.

Blinking my tears back, I watched the fight. Soren should have been stronger, there wasn't anyone stronger than him, but Dylan was holding his own.

At one point, I saw Soren strike Dylan with his paw but his paw bounced away like it had hit a shield.

Dylan was using magic! That's why Soren couldn't get the upper hand.

But Soren wasn't giving up. I'd never seen him fight like this! His wolf eyes were bloodshot as he relentlessly attacked Dylan again and again.

I could sense his overwhelming desire to kill Dylan. His ferocity was... overwhelming, but I didn't let it show. Regardless of his motives, there was no one in the world that could make me feel as safe as Soren did. His wolf was terrifying but he was there to protect me.

Dylan snarled as Soren's claws raked down his side. Soren was starting to get the upper hand. He was just about to tackle Dylan when Chandler ran in.

His eyes glowed and he shifted immediately, ganging up on Soren. Dylan and Chandler were both strong, I didn't think Soren could take them both easily.

There had to be something I could do to help... I pulled at my chains but they were too strong. All I could do was yell!

“Alpha Chandler, did you know that Dylan has been using you all these years,” I shouted. “That’s right! Did he ever tell you exactly how the artifact would bring your Luna back to life?”

Chandler snarled and hardly spared me a glance.

“I doubt he did. Because if he had, you wouldn’t be here right now. He’s been lying to you the entire time! The artifact belonged to my pack, I think I know more about it than Dylan,” I added.

Chandler snarled again and he kept attacking Soren.

“You’re Luna is dead! There’s nothing, no artifact, and no magic that can bring back someone that has been dead for years. He wants the artifact for himself!”

Chandler paused. He looked at me and then at Dylan. It was like the idea that Dylan was driven by greed too had just popped into his head.

His pause was enough. Soren slammed a blow into Chandler’s head, knocking him unconscious. He growled a little and then was still.

I heard footsteps down the hall. It was probably Norwind warriors. Soren would be completely outnumbered and Dylan was still putting up a good fight.

I had to distract him too. Biting my lip I glanced around. I didn’t know what he was after, so I couldn’t taunt him with it... but I did know what Soren had told me about it.

“Hey! Hey!” I shouted in an overly obnoxious tone at Dylan.

He ignored me... for now.

“Why would you have to lie to Chandler to get him to find the artifact for you? Could it be because you’re just a big, limp noodle with no real power at all? I mean, you wouldn’t even tell me your name. Is that because you’re a big fat nobody or... maybe you are ashamed of something?”

Dylan growled and threw himself at Soren. Soren dodged away but I knew I was getting to him.

“Or maybe you’re hiding from someone. Yeah, I bet that’s it. You’re hiding from the Alpha king, aren’t you, Beta Dylan. What did you do that made the king, your cousin, so mad at you? To keep you hiding in the shadows for 10 years. I think I’ll have to tell him where you are.”

“RAWWW!” Dylan roared. He whipped around, snarling at me.

Soren jumped on top of him and pinned him down, biting his neck until he passed out from lack of air.

Immediately, Soren stood up in human form. He came over to me and broke my shackles one by one, careful not to hurt me.

“Soren, more are coming...”

As soon as I spoke, the tomb door burst open and eight strong warriors came in. They surrounded Soren, protecting Dylan and Chandler.

Soren shifted again, ready to fight. Chandler and Dylan recovered.

Just before they attacked, Payne and Thomas came in with several of Soren's men. All hell broke loose as Payne fought Chandler, Thomas fought Dylan, and the warriors clashed with Norwind warriors.

Soren shifted back to human and came over to me. He broke off the last shackle around my ankle. Sighing, I threw myself into his arms. I didn't care that the room was full of fighting shifters just a few feet away.

"Mila, you're bleeding," he said, looking over my bare torso at all the small cuts.

His eyes widened with sadness and he cradled me against his chest. I nuzzled against him.

"Did Dylan do this to you?"

"I'll be okay..."

"I'll kill him!"

He started to get up but I grabbed his arms and put them around me again. I pressed my forehead to his chest and fresh tears started to fall.

I was so relieved to be in his arms again and to have him safe. Not at all harmed like Helen had warned.

"I thought I'd never see you again," I whimpered, clinging to him.

Part of me worried that if I didn't hold onto him, he'd slip away like a dream. I wasn't about to let that happen. Not this time.

Soren rocked me against him and ran his fingers through my hair.

"Shh. I'm here, silly girl. Of course, I came to get you. I always will, no matter where you are. I promise."

Shaking my head, my tears came faster. I sniffled and pressed myself against his warm chest as much as possible.

The pain from my cuts was gone now that his strength surrounded me.

"Come now. Have I ever broken my promises to you? Or, do you not trust me?"

I could tell there was some deeper meaning to his words. Had he found out I'd seen that picture?

The image of the way he looked at that other woman, the one who resembled me, flickered in my mind.

"I... I trust you..." I croaked. "Wh-why didn't you ask me about what made me run away?"

Soren chuckled, the deep rumble rolling through my chest. It shook me to the bone in a pleasant, warming way.

"Mila, look at me," he instructed.

Slowly, I lifted my eyes to his. Soren's gray-green eyes looked at me with such deep, open vulnerability, my heart skipped a beat. It was like I could see straight into his soul. His gorgeous eyes sucked me in, drowning me in their beauty and his affection.

Tears sprang to my eyes again but it wasn't from sadness. My breath was shallow and I couldn't imagine how anyone could receive such a loving, open, genuine look and not weep.

The world around us faded away. The fighting was gone, the artifact didn't exist. It was just me and Soren. I was trapped in his gaze. I felt like time stopped and we had all the time in the world to talk about what had happened. Nothing else could bother us.

I wanted time to stay still so I could be with Soren forever, just like this.

My heart hammered in my chest like galloping hooves.

Soren's lips moved. What could he say that could even come close to that look?

He sucked in a deep, long breath.

"Listen to me, Mila, what I'm about to tell you is straight from the heart. It is pure, genuine, and the absolute truth. If anything I say isn't genuine, then the Moon Goddess can damn me to hell."

He spoke so seriously.

"No!" I cried, hugging him tighter.

Soren arched an eyebrow at me.

"I don't want you to go to hell. It is okay, Soren, you don't need to tell me. You don't need to convince me of anything anymore. As long as you're here, that's what's important to me."

I sighed, melting against him.

"I owe this to you, Mila. Let me say it."

"O-okay..."

"In my past, there was a woman that I loved. The woman you saw in the picture, Rosalie. But... she is my sister-in-law. She never belonged to me and she never loved me. I spent a long time feeling resentful, like I'd lost something and like I'd never love anyone like that..."

My heart felt like it was being squeezed in a fist. This was the truth. I'd wanted to hear it but I wasn't sure I could take it. When I looked into his eyes again, I saw pain there. But it wasn't pain from the memory. He was in pain because what he was saying hurt me.

It must have been hard for him to open his heart like that when he knew I could turn on him.

Now, I wasn't sure if I wanted to hear the rest. I wouldn't stop him if he chose to continue. It was his story to tell.

Tears leaked from the corners of my eyes.

Soren leaned in and kissed them away quickly.

"Until I met you, Mila, I never even knew what true love was. I never understood it until you entered my life. I never knew what it was like to have someone dominating my thoughts every second of every day.

I'd never felt my heart racing with passion or the constant longing to see you and hold you. I never felt complete until... until you were in my arms."

I couldn't stop crying. Soren's confession had my stomach in knots. My heart fluttered and I clung to him.

His gaze was soft and tender as he looked at me. His eyes glued to me like he never wanted to gaze on anything else.

I saw my own reflection in his big, beautiful orbs. I was all he could see. I was embedded in his soul. At that moment, I knew that his heart belonged to me. I would be in his heart forever, just like he was in mine.

"I love you, Mila. The Moon Goddess sent you to me to be my mate. You can't keep running away from me."

I just stared at him. There was nothing I could say to equal that confession or that emotion. Telling him that I loved him back wasn't close to describing what I felt for him.

It didn't seem like he was expecting an answer.

Soren held out his hand, revealing the charm bracelet he'd given me with the Blackfire charm. He clipped it on my wrist. Somehow, he'd found the time to get the clasp replaced while looking for me.

But of course, he did, because he was always so thoughtful like that.

How had I ever doubted him?

I wrapped my arms around his neck, sobbing crazily as I pressed my lips to his. It was all I could do, even though it didn't feel like enough.

Pulling away, I pressed my forehead to his.

"I... I have something to tell you too," I squeaked.

I glanced down at my belly. It was covered in dry blood, but the cuts weren't bothering me now. My cheeks warmed and I hoped Soren was as excited by this news as I was.

Soren lifted my chin and kissed my lips passionately. As our mouths moved together, I completely forgot what I had to say.

He stood up, scooping me up in his arms. I squealed and hugged his neck.

"That can wait. Right now, I just want to get you to safety,' he insisted. "Let's get out of here."

"Okay."

Just then, something dashed into the room. Swift and blurred like a shadow, it swirled around, not touching anyone, and then headed for the door again.

"Hey guys, thank you so much!"

Eros's voice echoed around the room. The shadow stopped in the doorway. It was Eros, and he grinned at us. He winked at me quickly and saluted.

"I really appreciate the gift. And don't worry, it is in good hands now."

With that, he disappeared again. No one had time to react.

"Soren, my backpack! He took my backpack with the artifact pieces in it!"

[Chapter 746](#)

Soren

"Payne!" I called him.

Payne's wolf head snapped in my direction. He had Chandler pinned down and looked ready to make the killing blow.

"Go after Eros. Thomas and I can handle things here."

Payne huffed and nodded. He slammed a final blow into Chandler, thrusting him into the floor. I winced as Chandler groaned and rolled over. He might have been unconscious... again.

Payne nudged a few of the closest warriors and they all took off after Eros.

I wasn't sure they'd be able to find him. Eros was too quick and cunning for that. But if they could figure out the direction he was going, at least we'd have a starting point.

Growling, Dylan tried to follow but Thomas caught his leg in his teeth and dragged him across the floor away from the entrance.

Most of Chandler's warriors had been taken down. It was just Chandler and Dylan we had to worry about now. With Thomas down here, I was positive that the two of us could finish them off.

But I knew they wouldn't go without a fight.

"Can you walk?" I asked Mila.

"Yes. The pain has been gone since you put your arms around me.

Warmth flooded my chest and I smiled at her. Slowly, I set her on the ground.

"Good. Go up to the surface and wait for me."

"What? No! I'm not leaving you, Soren. We only just..."

"Mila, I need you safe."

"The safest place for me is with you. I'm not going anywhere without you."

She put her hands on her hips and glared at me.

My heart softened. How could I say no to her? She had a point. Whenever we were separated, one or both of us got hurt. There were still Norwind warriors unaccounted for.

For a moment, I wrestled with my thoughts. I wanted to keep her safe but I didn't want her out of my sight. Her desire to stay by my side just made me and my wolf melt.

"I can help with magic."

Smiling lightly, I held a hand out to her. She took my hand and I pulled her against me. I kissed her briefly on the lips.

"Then you'll never have to leave my side," I murmured. "Just stay against the wall. I don't want you getting hurt."

I released her and Mila stepped back, as far from the fight as possible.

I turned around and shifted again.

Chandler had recovered. He pushed Thomas off of Dylan, and they both tried to corner Thomas.

I ran up behind them, tackling Dylan out of the way and pouncing on Chandler.

"Awwwoo!" Thomas howled.

He went after Dylan again. Thomas pounced on him and rode him like a cowboy on the bucking bronco. I could see that Dylan was tiring.

I grabbed the scruff of Chandler's neck with my teeth and shook him.

The tomb floor trembled, knocking Chandler off his feet. He whimpered and struggled in my grasp. The floor split open and thick, winding roots burst out.

Instinctively, I jumped back.

The roots wrapped around Chandler, binding him tightly. They pulled him down to the floor, pinning him in place. He yelped and struggled but the roots were too strong.

I couldn't look away from what was happening until the roots stopped moving. They kept Chandler tightly locked up, his side on the ground, unable to twist, turn, or get up. He let out a defeated whine.

I glanced over at Mila and she had a satisfied look on her face.

Turning to Thomas and Dylan, I joined the fight. In moments, we had Dylan pinned. I put my paw on his neck, applying just enough force that if he tried to get up, my claws would puncture his artery.

Mila came over to me and put her hand on my shoulder, patting my fur.

"Can we go now?" she asked.

I nodded. With a final headbutt, Dylan's eyes rolled back in his head. He was subdued for now.

Thomas and I shifted back and found our clothes.

I slipped my arm around Mila's shoulder and we walked towards the tomb door.

"Wait!" It was Chandler's voice.

Mila froze. We turned around to see Chandler. He'd shifted back to human and the roots had adjusted, still holding him in place.

"Wait. I have to know, is it true?" he asked.

I creased my brow, but I noticed that Chandler was staring at Mila. She bowed her head and stepped away from me.

"In the Goddess's name, what I said is absolutely true. Your Luna has been dead for a long time. She will stay dead for all eternity. Let her go in peace," she said somberly.

Chandler deflated, melting to the floor like his body had no bones left.

I glanced at Mila and saw the tenderness in her eyes. Did she feel bad for Chandler? He lost his mate years ago but he might have been hopeful that he would get her back. It could have been enough to hold off the true grief of losing his mate.

Suddenly, Chandler's face turned beet red. He glared at Mila.

"This is all your fault! You wicked witches! If it weren't for that b***h, Helen, my Felicia never would have died. Some friend she was! Felicia loved her like a sister and what did Helen do? She poisoned Helen with Silversnow!"

"Silversnow?" Mila asked, lifting her head. Her brow creased, thinking about something.

"Do you know the poison?" I asked Mila as Chandler kept ranting.

"I know it's a plant," Mila replied, "A flower. I read about it in my mother's journal. I liked the name because it was pretty and the little silver bell-shaped flowers are very beautiful. There's just one thing..."

"What's that?" I arched an eyebrow at her.

"Silversnow isn't a poisonous plant..."

"Then what is it?"

Mila turned back to Chandler. "Are you sure it was Silversnow?"

Chandler scoffed. "Of course I'm sure! How could I forget the name of the poison that killed my mate? You are nothing but a heathen b***h! Your whole family, all of you are cunts. Evil women that should be damned to hell! Helen, Jessica, You, you're all worthless wastes of breath."

I put a hand on Mila's shoulder but she didn't seem upset about Chandler's name calling. Something else was on her mind. I could see the wheels turning behind her eyes.

More names were coming out of Chandler's mouth. I was about to snap at him to shut up but Dylan groaned. He squirmed and shifted back to human.

"Shut up, Chandler. You shouldn't be chatting with them!"

He rolled over and tried to get up. His arms trembled under his own weight and he collapsed again.

I smirked and nodded triumphantly. The headbutt I gave him probably scrambled his brain a little. It would still be a while before he recovered completely.

Mila stiffened and shuddered like she'd been struck by an electric bolt. She shook her head and glanced at me quickly.

"Mila?" I asked.

"You're wrong!" She raised her voice sharply at Chandler, "You think Helen killed Felicia with Silversnow, but she couldn't have. Silversnow isn't a poison. It is a very rare herbal medicine."

"That's impossible!" Chandler groaned. "Felicia was the healthiest person I knew. Why would she need medicine? You can't just make up these lies about her being sickly and think I'll buy it. You're just trying to humiliate her and cover for your wicked aunt."

"I'm not. You and Felicia never had any children, did you?"

Chandler stopped his ranting.

"What..."

"You both wanted kids but never had any, am I right? I'm willing to bet the two of you tried everything, medicine, magic, whatever you could find and it didn't work, right?"

"How did you..."

"Silversnow is an herb that can be used to treat infertility, magically. It is more potent than anything else and Helen is a powerful witch who also possesses healing power with proper medicine. She'd be able to boost the effects," Mila explained.

My heart swelled with pride for her. Single handedly, she cleared her aunt's name and debunked Chandler's theories.

She sighed and shook her head.

"Helen wasn't trying to kill Felicia. They were friends. She was trying to help you and Felicia grow a family." Her eyes grew sharp and she glared at Dylan. "On the other hand, your so-called friend over here, Lord, Dylan, whatever you want to call him... I wonder how many secrets he's been hiding from you. Maybe he knows more about Felicia's death."

"Mila," I warned.

Turning the blame on Dylan was dangerous. She shrugged.

Chandler twisted in his root prison and stared at Dylan wide eyed with disbelief.

"Is it true? Tell me how Felicia died!" he shouted.

Dylan sighed heavily. His eyes still weren't fully focused but he'd managed to sit up.

Suddenly, he burst out laughing. He threw his head back and clutched his chest, his laughs echoing in the tomb, making it sound like a hundred people were laughing.

His laughs quieted down but as he spoke, he still snickered.

“Felicia was a gentle soul, wasn’t she? I promise, Chandler, she passed away peacefully without any pain. Though... it wasn’t from natural causes.”

He sighed and wiped some years from his eyes, still grinning and laughing intermittently.

“What did you do!?” Chandler screamed. He thrashed against the roots.

Beside me, Mila shuddered and the roots fell away from Chandler.

“I must say Chandler, you and your mate have served the crown well. You will both reap the rewards for that service... once everything is settled.”

“AHHHHHH I’ll kill you!”

Chandler launched himself at Dylan.

With a flick of the wrist, Dylan had Chandler pinned with magic.

I grabbed Mila and moved her behind me, ready to fight if Dylan turned on us again.

“Stop that!” Dylan snapped. “You all are my faithful subordinates and you should be proud of what you’ve done so far. But this isn’t over yet. I need you to help me get back what rightfully belongs to me.”

“Shut the f**k up, you murderer! I’m done helping you,” Chandler snapped. He strained against the magic but it was no use.

I glanced at Thomas and pursed my lips. What did Dylan mean? He said “serving the crown” ... He wasn’t the king. And what was he trying to get back?

BOOM!

The entire tomb shuddered and rocks pelted down from the ceiling.

I almost lost my footing as the ground slipped out from under me. Grabbing Mila, I helped her to the nearest wall.

“What was that?” she gasped.

BAM! BOOM!

The tomb shuddered again and I smelled the faintest hint of smoke. This wasn’t good! Those were explosions coming from outside the mountain.

“Someone is trying to blow up the mountain. They’ll bury us! Run!”

[Chapter 747](#)

Mila

As Soren guided me to the entrance, Thomas ran behind me, still in his wolf form.

I glanced back and saw Chandler fighting with Dylan, trying to grab him and hold him down.

The entire tomb kept shaking and big chunks of rock fell from the ceiling, crashing on the floor and making it shudder under my feet.

“Stop acting like a child, you fool!” Dylan shouted at Chandler.

“You’re not going anywhere, you murderer,” Chandler cried. He grabbed Dylan’s leg and hugged it tightly, like a child to his mother when he doesn’t want her to leave.

Dylan growled and kicked his leg, trying to shake Chandler off.

“Come on, let’s go,” Soren said, urging me to the door.

Thomas dodged this way and that to avoid getting hit. We had to get out of there before the entire tomb collapsed!

“You’re staying here, with my Luna!” Chandler shouted.

BOOM!

The entire mountain trembled and a giant rock shook loose. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw it falling like it was in slow motion. It was headed right for Felicia’s crystal coffin.

“FELICIA!”

Chandler let go of Dylan and dove at the coffin, like he could use his body to shield it from the falling rock.

Another rock came tumbling down and I couldn’t see Chandler or the coffin anymore.

Growling, Dylan jumped to his feet. Before any of us could react, he slipped out the door into the tunnel beyond.

“He’s getting away!” I shouted.

“We can worry about that later. Right now, we need to get out of here without getting crushed. The tunnels are going to start collapsing soon,” Soren told me.

He took my hand and pulled me along. By the way he charged forward, I figured this was the same tunnel he’d come through to get to the tomb in the first place. He seemed to know exactly where he was going.

The tunnel around us shuddered but we didn’t have rocks falling all around us anymore.

I took a breath and Soren slowed his pace slightly. He pulled me closer and looped his arm around my shoulders.

“How are you doing?” he asked.

I sighed and shrugged.

“I’m just thinking about Chandler.”

Soren arched an eyebrow. “That’s not exactly what I was expecting.”

I rolled my eyes. "I just mean... he lost his Luna. That alone was a tragedy. But then to be deceived for years... He spent all his time hating the person that tried to help him and helping the one who caused his misery."

"Losing one's mate is enough to rob even the strongest man of rationality."

"He sacrificed his entire pack going after this fantasy dream of bringing her back to life. He was loyal to the one person taking advantage of him and secretly betraying him."

"Mila, you don't need to feel sympathy for him..."

No, I didn't feel sympathy for him.

I sucked in a sharp breath when I thought of Miltern pack. Chandler was the one that cursed them, as retaliation for wrongly believing Helen killed Felicia. For years, Helen's innocent home pack had been living in an emotionless, senseless world, enduring an unjust punishment that should never have been placed on them.

And then there was April, who he actually tortured. That was at Chandler's bidding, if not by his own hand.

Let alone my parents and my pack. Chandler didn't mind destroying another pack just so that he could chase the false hope of using the Blade of Souls to resurrect his Luna.

Yes, he lost his mate, it was a tragedy, but his selfish desires brought irreparable harm to three packs including his own. How could I empathize with such a bastard?

I couldn't. I just felt sad and unworthy.

All of that suffering was caused by a lie. Dylan's lie.

Chandler and Dylan, both of them were unforgivable!

"Stop here a moment," Soren muttered.

Thomas still trailed behind us. He hadn't shifted back yet and I wondered if that was because he didn't have any clothes to wear.

"What is it?" I asked Soren.

"There's light up ahead. We're getting close to the exit."

We sped up even more to get there, but even before I could express my gratitude to the Goddess—

BOOM!

The tunnel around us shuddered and rocks came loose.

"MILA!"

Soren grabbed me and shoved me against a wall, shielding me with his body. I heard the clatter of rocks falling all around us and thick dust filled the air.

I coughed and kept my eyes closed.

I felt Soren step away and I opened my eyes, fanning the air to clear it of the rock dust.

“s**t!” Soren snapped.

He ran in the direction the light had been but now it was dark.

“Our exit is cut off.”

“Can we go back?” I asked.

“No... we can’t go back.”

A shiver ran through me and I heard Thomas growl. Slowly, I turned and saw Dylan leaning against a pile of rocks opposite of Soren.

We were trapped in a tunnel with Dylan! There was no escape. Both ends were blocked off with piles of rock and the four of us were crammed into a space that hardly had enough room for us to comfortably walk around each other.

“Oh, this can’t be happening,” I grumbled.

The only good thing was, there wasn’t enough space for a fight to break out. Dylan was outnumbered and outmaneuvered and he knew it. He wouldn’t try anything in such a close space when he was alone and there was no way out.

I glanced at Soren. He looked like he was calculating the odds of whether or not it would be possible to take Dylan out easily. He shook his head and turned back to the stone wall.

“We need to conserve our energy and air,” he muttered.

It sounded more like he was trying to convince himself than me but I nodded in agreement.

Reaching into his pocket, Soren pulled out a luminous rock.

“I nabbed this from the tomb,” he said, winking at me.

He held it up and I could see that the cave ceiling was only about ten feet up. That didn’t leave a whole lot of space. The entire area we were in was only about two hundred square feet. It was the size of a small living room and the four of us were crammed in close.

Thomas, in wolf form, took up a lot of space but he didn’t seem willing to shift back. He stood with his back to me and Soren, tail whipping back and forth.

His eyes were fixed on Dylan, who was on the opposite side of the cave.

Soren might not have wanted to fight Dylan, but I could tell that if he made one wrong move, or gave us one wrong look, Thomas would be ready to rip him to shreds.

Fortunately, for the time being, Dylan didn’t seem interested in us. He stayed on his side of the cave.

I looked up at the ceiling. “Do you think there could be another cave-in?”

I moved closer to Soren and snuggled up to him.

"I doubt it. We're in a tight space and the places where the tunnel was blocked off provide good support for the ceiling. All in all, we'll be safe from a cave-in right here," Soren said, hugging me against him.

"But... we'll run out of air?"

"Eventually. We've got enough for a while and it is possible that air is coming in through the rocks. I'm sure a rescue team will be here before there is any real danger."

I nodded. His optimism made me feel a little better.

"Are you okay, my love? Are you holding up?"

My heart swelled in my chest and I leaned heavily against Soren. He grunted and wrapped his arms around me. I felt so safe in his arms and right now, I didn't want to be anywhere else.

I clung to him, softening completely now that we were out of any immediate danger.

"I'm okay. I just don't want to be separated from you..."

Soren chuckled and ran his hand through my hair.

"Well, then I should probably apologize for getting us trapped."

I tilted my head up and looked at him.

"This isn't your fault...if it is anyone's, it is mine. I shouldn't have run away and I-"

Soren's lips crashed against mine, shutting me up. Sighing, I leaned into his kiss and closed my eyes.

He wrapped his arms around me tighter and held me intimately as we kissed. I didn't even care that Thomas and Dylan were trapped in there with us. I was completely lost in his kiss and touch.

Slowly, he pulled away and pressed his forehead against mine. I trembled and snuggled closer to Soren.

"Are you afraid?"

I creased my brow. "Of what?"

"Of death?"

His question was so serious that it caught me off guard. I swallowed a few times. Why was he asking? He said we were out of any immediate danger and that rescue crews would be here before we ran out of air.

"No." I shook my head.

"Really, there won't be anything you regret not saying or doing if we were to die right now?" he pressed.

I thought of the baby growing inside me. How I wanted to tell him about it but it wasn't the right time. I couldn't tell Soren about his child while Dylan and Thomas were hovering close by.

"Now that we are back together again, no," I said.

"Agreed. That is all that matters, us being together," he said. He placed his palm over my heart. "And if I were to die right now, I'd have no regrets."

Smiling, I rested my head against his chest and nodded.

"I'm glad we agree on that. But you know, Mila, I wouldn't let you die."

I giggled.

"I know."

We stood together in silence for a moment. I leaned against Soren and he held me close. Even though we were trapped, it felt almost peaceful. I didn't like the idea of having a secret now that we'd just said all those things.

Quickly, I glanced at Thomas and Dylan. Thomas was still on guard and Dylan looked bored out of his mind. I could tell Soren about the baby without drawing their attention, right?

"Soren... Can I tell you something?"

I looked up and met his eyes.

"Of course. Right now, we've got all the time in the world for you to say whatever you need to say."

"I—" I was interrupted as soon as I started.

"Screw this! I'm not going to sit here and listen to this lovey-dovey bullshit." Dylan started pulling rocks away from the cave-in pile. He grunted and groaned, heaving at the rocks. His heavy breaths and frustrated mumbblings were very distracting in that small space and it really killed the mood.

"Dylan, if you don't stop that, I really have no problem silencing you... forever," Soren snarled.

He looked so annoyed, like we'd been on a romantic date and Dylan had dropped by to interrupt.

Well, that wasn't too far from the truth. I'd been planning on telling Soren something I knew he'd get excited about, or I hoped he would, and it was very intimate.

Dylan sneered over his shoulder.

"If you idiots want to sit here and wait for your death, it's your choice. I'm not wasting what time I have with you guys," he growled.

"Don't be stupid. If you weaken that support, the whole mountain could come down on us. We have no idea what the damage looks like on the other side," Soren warned.

"Now you're a structural engineer. Thanks, but no thanks for the advice!"

"Dylan, stop! We are three hundred feet from the outside, and if the cave-in runs that far, you'll never dig yourself out on your own. You'll die of exhaustion before you even get halfway."

"I'd rather die doing something than die sitting around waiting."

"That's your choice, but we don't have food or water here. I'm not going to let you waste precious air that could mean the rest of our deaths. So, either stop what you're doing, or I will stop you," Soren warned coldly.

Dylan scoffed and whipped around.

“How dare you speak to me like that! Do you have any idea who I am?”

He puffed up his chest and pointed to himself.

“First, I don’t give a s**t who you are. Second, unlike your foolish subordinate, Chandler, you have never been and will never be my king,” Soren stated firmly.

“What, king?” I asked.

“That’s right, Dylan Crimson... or should I call you Sebastian Crimson?”

Soren smirked as the blood drained from Dylan’s face.

My eyes widened and I gasped. What had Soren just called him?

Wasn’t Sebastian Crimson the name of the current Dark King!?

[Chapter 748](#)

Mila

I kept looking between Dylan and Soren. Was this some kind of a joke? One of them was bound to make a facial expression that would reveal the truth.

They both just stared at each other with hardened expressions.

Then Dylan, or Sebastian, narrowed his eyes at Soren. His look turned vicious and he snarled.

“Who the hell are you?”

“That doesn’t matter. All that matters is that I know your secret, and I’m not the only one.” Soren shrugged casually, like they were having a simple chat about the weather.

“What else do you know!?”

Soren smirked coyly. “It would probably be best for you to assume that I know everything. And if I were you, I wouldn’t want to leave the safety of this tunnel so quickly.”

“Well, you aren’t me, and we don’t agree there,” Sebastian hissed.

Soren sighed. “Too bad. Just because Mila and I aren’t ready to pounce and kill you doesn’t mean that gentleman outside won’t want you dead.”

Sebastian glowered but he didn’t reply. I saw the wheels turning in his head. Whatever Soren was talking about, Sebastian understood it.

I, on the other hand, had no idea!

Dylan, or Sebastian, hadn’t denied he was truly the king. So, did that mean the man sitting on the throne was actually Dylan? That made no sense! How was that even possible? Wouldn’t someone have noticed that Sebastian changed in appearance overnight? Unless...

Unless someone had used the Blade of Souls to swap Dylan and Sebastian! Dylan, Beta and Cousin to the true king, was wearing Sebastian’s body and ruling the kingdom!

The truth sank in and it was too wild for me to believe.

But who had done it? The exchange had to have happened before the artifact was scattered, and that was before my parents had been killed.

Was it Helen, or...my parents?!

If so, why? Why would they want to meddle in royal affairs? And if that was the case...Was it what triggered the destruction of our pack?

"Very well," Sebastian looked toward me with satisfaction. "I can see your wisdom on the matter. In the meantime, your little girlfriend owes me a favor."

"Wh-what?" I snapped out of my thoughts.

Thomas growled and Soren pulled me behind him.

"She doesn't owe you anything. Whatever happened fourteen years ago had nothing to do with her!"

"Hehehe. Mila Hathaway, do you want to know the legacy of your wonderful parents?"

Sebastian smirked cruelly, his eyes glinting in the low light. He completely ignored Soren, looking around him, right at me.

I really didn't want to hear what he had to say but how could I refuse? I wanted answers. I just wished they were coming from someone else.

My lower lip quivered and I sucked in a sharp breath.

"I'll take that as a yes," Sebastian said slyly. "Fourteen years ago, that witch b***h of an aunt of yours, Helen, claimed to have a vision that the young Alpha King Sebastian Crimson would bring chaos, war, and destruction to his people."

Sebastian pointed to himself and scoffed.

I thought back to what Helen said about being a seer. She'd told me she tried to stop a vision from coming true but it only made things worse. Was this what she'd been referring to?

All this time, I thought it had to do with Chandler. But this... it was much worse.

"She claimed that in her vision many packs in this world would face extinction because of my actions. That my unjustified rage would trample the kingdom with wars and hatred, that people would suffer for years. Can you believe that?"

He gave me a hard look.

I swallowed into my tight, dry throat. He didn't really seem to want an answer to his question, so I kept my mouth shut.

"One of the packs Helen said would go extinct was Pomeni pack, your parents' pack. As you can imagine, they freaked out."

I clenched my fists. My parents were hardly the type to freak out or overreact, like Sebastian implied. I realized that I couldn't take anything he said at face value.

"I'd only just become king at the time. I was young but I was trying hard to be a good king. And yet, Helen was insistent that her vision would come true. She wanted to judge me for things I hadn't done yet!"

I reached out and took Soren's hand. This wasn't a version of my aunt and parents that I wanted to think about. Even if I couldn't trust Sebastian, there was a certain amount of evidence that supported what he was saying.

"She went around whispering about her vision to other packs. She gathered several Alphas from those packs together to try and come up with a solution, to mess with my fate," Sebastian continued.

With a frustrated growl, he started pacing back and forth.

I could tell he was still in control, despite his outward display of anger.

"But, as Soren knows, to overthrow a Dark King means world war. The Dark King reigns with the blessing of the Moon Goddess herself. No one wanted to offend the Moon Goddess and risk something worse... and they didn't want a world war. Weaklings..."

I bit back my remark.

He had to be crazy! There he was trying to defend himself, saying he didn't want war and was punished for a crime he didn't commit. And yet, he called my family weaklings for taking action that would avoid a war?

It made no sense and it further convinced me I couldn't believe everything he said.

"If my sources are to be believed, and I had eyes and ears everywhere, someone in that Alpha meeting joked about if only the King's soul could be swapped. Body and appearance the same, just someone better behind the wheel."

Sebastian pointed to his own head.

"Most of the others laughed it off. But it hatched a plan for three of the people in that room."

Sebastian stopped pacing. He glared at me fiercely, fire and hatred in his eyes.

"Do you know who they were?"

I bit my lower lip and looked away from his burning eyes.

Yes, I knew. Of course I knew. It was Helen, Jessica, and Kaleb. My family. They had the Blade of Souls.

I couldn't bring myself to say it aloud and condemn them.

Sebastian let out a dry, threatening chuckle and he nodded. His voice became dark and malicious. His face twisted like some horror mask. The green light of the luminous stone made him appear inhuman.

“If you guessed your parents and aunt, then you’re right, Mila,” he said in a ghostly tone, like a specter from the past. “Thanks to your asshole parents and that b***h of an aunt of yours... Oh yeah, and my bastard genius of a cousin, Dylan, they exchanged my soul.”

I gasped and shrank back. The way he told it made them sound vicious and evil. But I had to believe that Helen and my parents would only act for the greater good.

But was Sebastian right? Had they punished him for crimes he hadn’t committed yet? How did Helen know he would, without a doubt?

Sebastian laughed bitterly. I could still feel his eyes on me and slowly, I looked up at him.

“Tell me, Mila, what did I do to deserve that? In my reign as king, I caused no wars, I brought no chaos, and they still stole my throne from me. Who did that cunt Helen think she was to determine my fate?”

I twisted my hands together. As much as I didn’t want to admit it, he had a point. It wasn’t right to mess with someone else’s fate. But I still only had half the story. Sebastian could have been lying to me about their motives.

“Since when does a f*****g so-called prophet have the right to ruin my life and my rein because of some preconceived assumptions about me?”

I bit my tongue. It should have been easier to defend my parents and my aunt’s actions, but the truth was, I didn’t know if I should. How could I justify their actions when I didn’t know their reasons?

“Now, since you’re the last of that wretched, awful family, don’t you think that you should be the one to fix their mistake?” Sebastian asked, his eyes gleaming again.

I couldn’t even process his question. My mind spun in a million different directions. Were my parents really at fault? Was Helen truly capable of this? Did that mean that all the suffering I’d gone through in life, all the pain, it was the aftermath of their actions against the crown...?

Soren took my hand and squeezed gently. I met his eyes as his warmth spread into my fingers, filling me with strength and hope.

He looked at me but spoke to Sebastian, his words cold and sharp.

“You can play the victim all you want, Sebastian, but in the end, it was Jessica and Kaleb who died. It was their pack that was wiped out and Helen who went missing. And because of that, Mila suffered her whole life.”

He winked at me and then turned toward Sebastian, a cold look in his eyes mirroring his voice.

“You brought war on her family and chaos to her life. Just as Helen prophesied. So, excuse me for not feeling sorry for you.”

When Soren spoke, it gave me yet another perspective. We still didn’t know if Sebastian was the one that had my pack wiped out. Even if it was in retaliation, it still proved what he was capable of. Something no king should ever do!

Sebastian threw his head back and laughed. He clutched his chest and shook his head at Soren. He pointed a straight, sharp finger at me.

“Don’t play like you really care about her! It might have taken me a while, but I remember you now... I’ve seen you before! What were you even doing in the Southern Pass that day? I bet you were looking for the same thing I was, weren’t you?”

I glanced at Soren but he was still looking at Sebastian. His face was still a hard, cold mask. I felt like if I touched his cheek, it would be cold as ice or stone.

Sebastian smirked and continued to laugh. “So, I was right! Hahaha. Mila... you think he came here for you? But did you know that he was only going after a special Moonstone? And you shamed me for deceiving Chandler...” he trailed off, still laughing.

Soren growled under his breath and his hand tightened around mine, almost to the point of pain.

I wasn’t sure what Sebastian was talking about but if he didn’t cut it out, Soren would cut his tongue out to shut him up. I could see that much on his face.

“The one thing I can’t figure out is... where on earth are you from? An Alpha as powerful as you never would have stayed under the radar in my country. Not while growing up and learning their strength. Which means, you didn’t grow up here...”

My heart raced faster. If Soren hadn’t grown up here, where had he grown up? What was beyond Egoren? He’d mentioned his home was far away before but... how far exactly?

“None of my intel knew about you from before... the incident. It was as if you came out of nowhere. Poof! Let me guess, you’re not even from this world, are you?”

“What?” I gasped.

I clamped my free hand over my mouth and looked at Soren, trying to find some truth there. How could he not be from this world? Were there really other worlds out there?

Blood rushed in my ears.

It didn’t matter to me what Sebastian said in regards to Soren being after some special stone or the artifact. If he wanted the artifact, he could have it. I’d already told him that much and I would gladly give it to him. I trusted him to use it correctly.

He’d told me he loved me, multiple times, and I knew those were words he hadn’t uttered to anyone in a long, long time. I knew in my heart of hearts that he meant it and Sebastian wasn’t going to shake me that way.

But another world?

He’d told me he missed his home once.

Did that mean if he had the chance, he’d leave this world and go back? Would I be able to go with him? Would he even ask?

Chuckling, Sebastian opened his twisted lips to keep speaking.

“Thomas,” Soren said quickly.

Growling, Thomas pounced on Sebastian.

Soren let go of my hand and rushed at him too.

Together they held him down. He struggled and groaned but the earlier fighting must have weakened him and I could tell that Soren was a much, much stronger Alpha than he'd been letting on.

Soren looked at me with a somber expression.

Sebastian laughed maniacally, his eyes crazy and darting around.

“What, can't handle the fact that I called you out? Now you're going to kill me? You want to kill the real king of Egoren? Mila, don't you see his true colors? He's been lying to you, using you!”

I scoffed. “What makes you think I'd believe anything you have to say?”

Soren smirked and I saw a wave of relief in his eyes. He nodded to me and glared down at Sebastian.

“Mila, how many cuts did he give you?” he asked gently.

He licked his lips like he was about to bite Sebastian the same amount of times that he cut me.

I shook my head. “Don't...”

I put a hand on my stomach and sighed heavily, leaning against the wall. Now that I learned what Sebastian knew about my family, crushing fatigue came down on me. I was so tired of searching for answers and fighting for the artifact.

I was physically and mentally drained.

“Soren, don't. I... I don't want revenge anymore. I don't want to hear anything else he has to say. I don't want to see him ever again but... spare his life. Let's just... never talk about him or anything to do with him ever again.”

Soren creased his brow slightly and I held a hand out to him.

“I just want to spend some time with you, quietly, peacefully,” I said.

[Chapter 749](#)

Soren snarled and stripped off his shirt. He ripped it into strips, tying Sebastian's arms behind his back with one. He tied up his ankles with another. The last strip, he tied as a gag in Sebastian's mouth.

“Now you won't have to hear him. And if nothing else, it will slow down the amount of air he consumes,” Soren said, tossing Sebastian aside.

He kept muttering through the gag, but I was glad that I couldn't understand what he was saying.

Thomas grabbed the back of Sebastian's shirt and pulled him into a corner. He laid down and closed one eye, keeping the other sharply on Sebastian.

Soren came over to me and placed his hands on my shoulders.

“Mila, let me explain... it is a long story, but you deserve to know...”

He spoke in a soft, gentle voice.

I slipped my arms around Soren’s neck and kissed him before he could continue.

Soren grunted and hugged me tighter.

“I don’t care about the past, Soren.”

I pressed my forehead to his, our lips hovering inches apart.

“I don’t care about the future. Right now I’m with you, in this moment. That’s all that matters and all I need to know. Will you please hold me?”

Soren smirked and held me against him. He cradled the back of my head in his hand and I melted into him.

I sighed and a shiver ran through me.”

“Are you cold?” Soren asked.

“A little...”

He rubbed my arms up and down. Gooseflesh popped up on my arms. And I leaned into his touch more.

His skin was so hot and my skin was so cold!

I shivered again. Soren’s brow creased and he pulled me closer, kissing my forehead.

Sweat covered my brow but I kept shivering. I thought I was starting to feel cold from being stuck in a damp cave underground but my joints started to ache, too.

So much had happened. A few hours ago, Dylan, or Sebastian, had been slicing me up with a knife. I’d lost a lot of blood and I hadn’t allowed myself to feel the weakness from that.

All the adrenaline left my body in a whoosh and I leaned against Soren.

“Mila, are you okay?”

“I’m just... tired...”

We were still trapped in a cave and didn’t know when a rescue would come. Sebastian was tied up for the moment, but he was still dangerous and we had limited air.

We weren’t out of the woods yet but there wasn’t anything we could do but wait. Wait for help to come, wait to die...

Soren lowered to his knees and held me in his arms, cradling me gently against him. I could barely keep my eyes open.

“We might be here for a while, yet. Why don’t you rest?” he asked.

I nodded drunkenly. The power of his scent took me over and I couldn't get enough of it. It was like his scent had some powerful magic over me. It soothed me and calmed me. I knew I was safe in his arms and that no matter what happened, it would all work out.

Sighing, I nuzzled closer to him. My eyelids grew heavy and another shiver ran through me. Despite Soren's warmth and comfort, I still felt cold. My mind got fuzzy. I thought I was falling asleep but I just felt weak...

Soren's palm pressed against my forehead and he stroked my hair.

"Mila... my sweet Mila, you're getting a fever..."

He tightened his arms around me and kissed me on the forehead again.

"I need to rest..." My voice was just a soft whisper, even to my own ears.

"Shh, just relax. You can rest now," he told me.

I nodded and turned against him. I didn't really care about the artifact or what happened fourteen years ago. If Soren still wanted to explain himself when we were out of this cave, he could.

But for now, I didn't care. There were a lot of things in his past I didn't care about anymore. I knew he loved me and that's what mattered.

And now, I just wanted to be left alone by everyone. I didn't want to keep fighting people off that were coming after me and the artifact. I just wanted to be left alone by everyone and be with Soren.

Especially now that I knew he was from "another world." I wanted to savor every moment I had with him.

Even though he told me I could sleep, I couldn't seem to actually fall asleep. I was relaxed in his arms and he kept stroking my hair and kissing my forehead and my cheeks. I couldn't have been more comfortable if I was in a feather bed.

I thought that if we both died here together, it wouldn't be so bad. We were comfortable and peaceful in each other's arms.

No. I couldn't die here. Neither could Soren. We still had too much to live for.

And Soren deserved to live a long, happy life. We both did, with our baby, who was still so small and safe in my belly.

I knew I should tell Soren about the baby but it wasn't the right time or place. If we made it out of this alive, then I will tell him. I felt like telling him now would be cruel, seeing as we were still in danger and there was already nothing he could do to protect me.

What good would it do to tell him now? It would just stress him out more.

We'd have plenty of time to celebrate when we got out of there.

And if we didn't get out... then it really didn't matter."

“Sweet, beautiful Mila, stop fighting to stay awake. You’re exhausted and you have a fever. Sleep now,” Soren whispered, his words breaking into my thoughts.

I sighed and let go of whatever I was fighting. Soren was right. The moment I realized I was trying to stay awake, I slipped to sleep almost immediately.

My mind drifted in and out of dreams. Sometimes, I was floating through space.

At other times, I heard the sound of hammers and shovels... digging, digging.

I could feel Soren’s fingers slipping through my hair, rubbing my head as he held me and rocked me gently. It was like he was in no hurry to get out of the cave.

The digging continued and I couldn’t tell if any of it was real or if it was just hopeful thinking on my part.

Soren seemed confident that we were going to get out of there, even if it was just a dream.

“Hey, hello there!?”

I knew that voice.

Payne, that was Payne.

Sighing, I turned closer to Soren, still drifting in and out of sleep.

“Boss, Thomas, Miss Mila! You’re all here and you’re okay!”

We were saved. Payne was there to save us!

Finally, I fully succumbed to sleep.

Yawning, I opened my eyes and sat up. I was on a bed in a room that I didn’t recognize. Blinking, I rapidly looked around.

Where was I?

Rain splattered the window pane and outside, all I could see were dark clouds through the streaks of water. It was a gloomy day.

I guessed that it had to be about noon. From what I could see outside, it looked like I was still in Norwind territory.

There was a constant dripping in one of the corners. Rain water was dripping in. Whatever building I was in was run down and crummy.

My mind was a jumble. I put my hands on the sides of my head and groaned, leaning forward. What had happened?

It felt like days could have gone by since Soren and I were been trapped in the cave.

There was so much new information crammed into my head and I hadn’t had time to digest it. All I’d wanted was peace and quiet, but so much had been thrown at me all at once.

It was a lot to unpack and I hadn't had the time to digest it all.

I relaxed and tried to lean back. My stomach and legs ached from where I'd been cut. I lifted the sheet and looked at them. They still weren't that healed. Seeing the cuts helped me start to remember.

"The baby!"

Immediately, I pressed my hands to my stomach. Somehow, I knew that the baby was okay.

"Thank the Goddess..."

"I hope you're hungry,"

Soren bumped the door open and came in with a steaming bowl of soup in his hands.

I could smell the chicken noodle soup. First, my stomach gurgled uncomfortably and then growled, ravenous.

"I am!"

I reached for the bowl but Soren shook his head. He sat on the bed beside me and stirred the soup in the bowl. I couldn't look away from it, ready to swallow the whole bowl in one gulp.

After Chandler and Dylan took me... or Sebastian, whoever he was... they didn't feed me on a very regular schedule. I wasn't sure when the last time I'd eaten was. And when they did feed me, it wasn't exactly like they were feeding me full meals or anything like that. It was just enough food and water to keep me alive.

"I'm glad to see you're awake. Here, give this a try."

He scooped a spoonful of soup out of the bowl and sipped a little. Nodding, he held it out to me.

"It should be cool enough."

I reached for the spoon and Soren shook his head. He smirked and moved the spoon toward my mouth.

Sighing, I leaned in and let him spoon feed me. The temperature was perfect. The broth and the chicken hit my stomach just right. For a moment, my mind couldn't do anything but appreciate the food.

I wanted to grab the bowl from Soren and dump it in my mouth.

But Soren continued to spoon feed me in a slow rhythm.

He talked to me as I ate.

"Three days ago, Payne led a rescue team that dug us out of the mountain. The weather wasn't great and it was getting dark. We couldn't go far with our large group and you also needed treatment and rest immediately," he explained.

"We're still in Norwind, aren't we?"

"Yes. We found shelter in this run-down house. It has been good enough."

I sighed and nodded. As grateful as I was for Soren's explanation, I didn't really care how we got here. I was feeling much better now and Soren was taking care of me. Literally spoon feeding me. It was all I needed to feel happy.

"It's been raining ever since Payne dug us out. So, we're not in any hurry to go anywhere. We're just here, taking out time while waiting for our own Sleeping Beauty to wake up..."

Soren winked at me and spooned another spoonful of soup into my mouth.

I looked down slightly.

When I looked up again, Soren's handsome face was right in front of mine. There was nothing but a thin veil of steam between us. He looked a bit unreal behind the steam.

Was I still sleeping?

Don't let this be a dream, I silently begged.

Under the sheets, I pinched myself to make sure it wasn't a dream. My leg stung where I pinched.

No, this wasn't a dream.

The weather might have been awful and we might have been in a run-down house but I couldn't help feeling happy and content.

My lower lip quivered and tears poured from my eyes, completely uncontrollably.

Soren chuckled and set the soup aside.

"Is my cooking bad enough to bring you to tears?"

I shook my head, still at a loss for words. How could this moment feel so perfect when we were in a place like this?

"Well, I've got a way to make it taste better."

Soren popped a spoonful of soup into his mouth. He grabbed my cheeks and pressed his lips to mine.

Gasping, I couldn't move or react.

Soren's tongue pressed against my lips and pushed them open. Then he parted my teeth. Warm, flavorful soup trickled down his tongue into my mouth. I swallowed quickly, tasting Soren's tongue with the soup.

When he pulled away, he grinned at me. "Does that taste better?"

I bit my lower lip. Pushing myself off the bed, I grabbed Soren and pulled him to me again, kissing him fiercely.

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Soren

I returned Mila's kiss passionately. Heat stirred in my abdomen and my pants tightened.

As much as I wanted to throw her back on the bed and claim her, it wasn't the right moment.

Groaning, I pulled my hands from her hips and tore our lips apart.

Mila panted, her cheeks bright red and her lips swollen. I grabbed the bedcovers, keeping myself from launching at her and kissing her again.

She was still recovering from all the cuts Sebastian had given her and I didn't want to slow down her recovery. She'd only just woken up after being unconscious for three days.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

Her eyes looked at my fists as they clenched the bedspread.

"I'm fine. But you're being a naughty girl and if you start something you can't finish... Well, that's a whole other issue." I smirked.

Mila's cheeks turned a dark shade of crimson and she looked away, chewing her bottom lip.

I chuckled. "I can't wait to devour you... so get better soon, for me. Because when you're back up to your full strength..."

"Now who's being naughty?" she teased.

"You should keep focusing on getting better. Do you want to sleep more?"

Mila creased her brow and shook her head. "No. I want to move around! I've been lying here for days and my whole body is sore. I'm going to get bed sores if I keep lying here."

"Let me see," I said, motioning to Mila's stomach.

She pushed the sheet back and pulled up her shirt. I brushed my thumb over her stomach. It was awful seeing her cut up like that, even though she was healing. Her cuts were scabbed over now, so she probably wouldn't be too weak or lose any more blood.

"That's probably a good idea. Stretch your legs and your bones, then you can get a good night's sleep tonight."

I dropped the sheet and held a hand out to her.

"I can get up on my own."

"I'm not taking any chances," I said, shaking my head. "Your cuts are scabbed over but they could reopen if you aren't careful."

Mila sighed and took my hand. I looped my arm around her waist and helped her out of the bed. The moment her feet touched down, she winced and leaned on me heavily.

When we'd gotten to the house, I cleaned her wounds. They were shallow cuts but there must have been something on the blade Sebastian used because they weren't healing as fast as they should have been.

I'd cleaned them and dressed them for days, checking the healing progress and keeping infection away.

Every time I had cared for her cuts, I regretted not shredding Sebastian to a thousand little pieces when I'd had the chance.

I should have returned the favor tenfold!

And now, I didn't know when I'd get that chance again.

Sebastian had escaped into the bad weather that night.

I hadn't gone after him. Mila's health and safety were more important to me.

I helped Mila pick out some fresh clothes and sat her on the bed to get her dressed. She was able to put her own shirt on but I gave her an extra hand so she wouldn't have to reach and stretch so far. That's what I worried would open her wounds again.

I didn't think Mila needed to know that Sebastian had escaped yet. Rather, that I'd let him go.

That night, Payne asked me why I let him go and didn't send anyone after him.

I'd told him it was because Mila wanted nothing to do with him. And if there ever came a time when we needed to kill Sebastian, it would be Mila that did it, after everything he'd done to her...

At the time, I hadn't thought it necessary to tell Payne about the soul swap. As far as he knew, Dylan was Dylan, not Sebastian. Right now, the fewer people that know, the better. Besides, with Sebastian running around in Dylan's body, he'd keep whoever was in the Alpha King's skin busy and occupied while we took care of what we needed to.

"I'm feeling stronger now. I bet I can walk downstairs on my own," Mila said when I helped her to her feet.

"If you're sure..."

"I am. Soren, I really appreciate you taking care of me but I do need to get my strength back."

"You're right. But I'm not letting you out of my sight."

I followed her downstairs, watching for any sign that she was weak or losing her footing. She was doing just fine.

The main area of the house had a few tables set up. Payne and Thomas were sitting at one table together and there were other shifters sitting at other tables around the room.

We were in a spacious house with plenty of room for everyone from our confrontation with Norwind to relax and spread out. We weren't in a rush to leave just yet.

It wasn't just Mila that needed to rest and recover. All my men needed some R&R time after what they faced in Norwind.

"Hey, there she is. Sleeping Beauty awakes," Thomas said, motioning us over.

"How are you feeling?" Payne asked, looking at Mila with concern.

"Much better, thank you," Mila said.

Payne and Thomas scooped over in their seats and Mila and I sat down. I was glad to have her sitting again so she didn't overdo it and wear herself out.

"Miss Mila, I must apologize for not being able to get the artifact back," Payne said, casting his eyes down.

Mila smiled. I noticed that she was trying to keep things light.

"I'm glad you chose to save us over getting the artifact back. I like to think my life is worth a little more than that old trinket."

She giggled.

Payne's face remained serious and Mila stopped laughing quickly. She shot me a nervous look.

I shrugged. There was no reason for her to be worried.

"There is no doubt about that." Mila smiled again, more genuinely, and nodded. I could tell she appreciated Payne's sentiment.

"Enough of that serious jibber jabber. Mila, have you eaten?" Thomas asked.

"Yes, I did. Thank you."

Thomas grinned slyly at her. "Is there any more of that chicken noodle soup left?"

He wiggled his eyebrows at both of us.

"Why do you have to make it sound dirty? It was just soup," Mila argued, crossing her arms.

"Right, just soup," Thomas repeated with a sarcastic emphasis. "Tell me, did Soren save some of his famous, and yet oh so rare, cooking for the rest of us?"

"Ooh. I'm sorry, Thomas, but chicken noodle soup has officially been taken off the menu," I said, smirking.

"Awe."

Thomas bowed his head and feigned disappointment.

"Where are we?" Mila asked, looking around the run-down house. "This is a lot bigger than what I was expecting."

It seemed like her mood had lifted a lot from earlier. Getting her around other people was a good way to lift her spirits. She seemed to have a good rapport with Payne and Thomas.

It made me happy to see her connecting with the most important people in my life.

"This is Norwind's pack house... or it was..." Payne said.

"Their pack house?" she gasped and looked around again. "What happened to it?"

I glanced around at the buildings' disrepair. Curtains were torn, and several of the floorboards were uneven and cracked. What was left of the furniture was mostly broken or basic items. Everything on the shelves had been taken, and all the art on the walls was gone.

I'd noticed a broken window in one of the upstairs rooms where a lot of water had leaked in and caused damage.

"The packs that Chandler invited here to his temple, well it was all a big trick. There was some kind of mist or magic protecting the temple and everyone that ran into it went mad," Thomas explained.

"Mad?"

Mila's eyes shifted to mine.

"They started killing their friends, overpowered by rage," I filled in.

"Either that or they killed themselves," Payne added.

I nodded. "It was brutal to watch. I kept my men out of it as much as possible.

"Chandler had a lot of traps set, including the ones that resulted in the mountain blowing up. The explosion claimed a lot more lives," Payne continued.

I'd heard all these updates already but Mila had been asleep. It was important for her to know what had happened.

"There were a few that escaped. The cunning ones, I suppose," Thomas said, his voice serious.

"Or the lucky ones," Payne countered.

Thomas nodded in agreement. "Some were from other packs and some were from Norwind, but they managed to escape and run. Of course, they felt like they were owed something for their troubles, so they robbed, luted, and vandalized whatever they came across, including the pack house."

"What about the rest of the Norwind warriors? Why weren't they protecting the pack house?" she asked.

"Chandler ordered most of his men to the temple. He wanted as many of the intruders to die as possible and he thought his Norwind warriors could help even the score. Most of his warriors died in the battle," Payne said.

"The ones that didn't, they collected what loot they could. All the survivors from the different packs, including Norwind, gathered together and confirmed there wasn't any more money they could squeeze out of Norwind," Thomas said. "They all left."

"What about the women, children, and the elderly?" Mila asked.

I smiled lightly. Hearing her concern for the ones that needed protection warmed my heart. She was so kind and nurturing. She'd make an excellent Luna.

"They're still here, on their own. All their defenses are gone," Thomas sighed heavily.

Mila's eyes wandered to the nearest window. I followed her gaze and saw a lightning bolt strike the ground. Mila gasped.

Several seconds later, a loud thunder clap shook the pack house. There were other buildings around the pack house that were visible in the rain. The once prosperous Norwind pack was in shambles. It was gloomy, pitiful, and defenseless.

I watch the rain pelting the destroyed town. It was adding insult to injury to see it so waterlogged.

"A prosperous and wealthy pack like Norwind could be destroyed overnight... I've asked myself many times how that could happen. Now... it has occurred right in front of my eyes..."

Mila's voice was soft and distant as she spoke, like she was talking about her own pack, not Norwind.

I looked at Payne.

His expression mirrored Mila's, somber, nostalgic, and sad.

Suddenly, Mila smiled and looked at everyone at the table.

"Well, I appreciate you all waiting for me. I'm better now, though. Now that I'm awake, let's go home."

When she said the word "home," she paused and looked at me.

I stared back. Was my inn in the rogue zone home to her?

My heart pounded in my chest, trying to break right through my rib cage. She considered my place home? Had she finally let go of her past? Was she willing to stay with me... be with me?

Since she'd woken up, I'd been avoiding serious topics with her. After everything that happened in the tomb and the cave, she hadn't told me that she loved me back. I was still concerned that her feelings weren't as strong as mine.

But she thought of the inn as home and that gave me hope.

We could always talk about our relationship later, after she was back up to full strength and we were somewhere safe and familiar.

Mila's cheeks turned beet red and she bit her lower lip.

"I'm sorry. I invited myself again, didn't I?"

She tried to laugh it off.

I reached for Mila, taking her arms. Leaning across the table, I kissed her right on the lips.

I could feel everyone in the room staring at us but I didn't care.

"Yeah!"

"Whoohoo!"

Other cheers and whistles went off in the room as they watched us.

I tasted her fully and then pulled away slightly. "I'm glad to hear you're doing better. But we can't leave, not just yet."