

Kings Breeder 781

[Chapter 781](#)

Thomas stormed into the house, his nostrils flaring.

“You f*****g son of a... Do you know how worried I was!? Five months! Five months without a single word to me! You f*****g bastard! You couldn’t send a message?”

He scoffed and threw his hands in the air. I was worried that he would tackle Soren down the next moment. He only got a couple steps closer to Soren, fists clenched, but he didn’t swing. As he was just about to start ranting again, he finally noticed me.

“Oh, Mila, you’re here! I apologize. Please forgive my language.”

“Thomas, we...” I was about to explain the situation, but Thomas didn’t let me.

“Mila, let me finish. Soren was a total jackass for not reaching out to me! Had I not happened to come through Marno and heard people mention Dr. Heather Way... I never would have figured out where you two were.”

Soren folded his arms and let Thomas vent. He didn’t look offended or upset at all, instead, there was a slight amusement on Soren’s face.

Thomas pointed to Soren. “It’s not funny at all, okay? Jackass!”

Soren chuckled. “It’s rare to see you this...upset.”

Thomas roared, “I was so f*****g worried about you and you’re just standing there and looking at me like that?!”

“Thomas, I’m sorry!” I interrupted, not wanting to let Thomas’ fury escalate. “Soren had been unconscious for most of the past five months. If you need to blame someone, blame me.”

“Unconscious, what happened?” Thomas dropped his arm and frowned. His anger faded almost instantly.

I could feel my stomach complaining again. Regardless of how Thomas felt, I had to eat something. The food was calling my name, so I gestured to the kitchen.

“Why don’t we sit down and I’ll explain. Soren, want to get another plate for our guest?” I turned to Thomas and winked. “Soren cooked tonight.”

“Mila, I made that just for you,” Soren said, but he still walked over to get a new plate. “Besides, Thomas is too angry to eat right now.”

I arched an eyebrow at Soren, whose lips were still upcurled. It was obvious that he was happy to see Thomas, regardless of Thomas’ attitude tonight.

Thomas scoffed and stared at Soren. “What makes you think that? I’m starving! Thank you for offering, Mila, you are a true hostess, unlike that guy over there!”

Soren

Thomas sighed and looked at Mila. "I'm sorry about Helen."

Mila tightened her lips before she took a bite, chewing slowly so she didn't have to answer.

"Are you guys going to tell Payne where you are?" Thomas looked between both of us.

Mila didn't answer right away, so I kept my silence. Ultimately, Pomeni was her pack.

"You know, he totally lost it when he heard about the fire at the palace. He was ready to take on the king himself and declare war. Eros and Ashley had to knock him out to calm him down."

Thomas chuckled and shook his head.

I watched as Mila pushed some food around on her plate, deep in thought. Thomas had no such problems. He devoured his dinner ravenously.

"I think, for the time being, we should keep our location a secret," she said. "As long as Payne is upset and challenging the king, then the king will truly believe that Soren and I are dead."

"That's what you want?" Thomas asked through a mouthful of food. He looked up at me, then glanced at Mila.

"This is safer," Mila said, touching her large, round stomach. "At least for now."

I couldn't fight the small smile that tugged at my lips as I looked at my swollen belly full of life. Our child.

"No matter how upset Payne was, as long as Pomeni doesn't openly betray the king, the king made a blood oath not to harm them. Payne wouldn't risk the entire pack's lives to seek an answer for me, especially when there's no evidence that the king tried to take my life," she continued, "And the king would just have to deal with Payne's bad attitude. Knowing the king, he would rather do that than breaking the blood oath and having it backfire on him. It is better to keep things this way for now."

I studied my mate. She had changed so much. When I first met her, she was wary and suspicious. She didn't trust anyone and only looked out for herself. She'd been angry and easily irritated. Like a little wolf pup, testing her strength, snarling at those who approached her.

But now, she was confident and composed. Not only that, she cared about others and she would do everything to protect them. Whether she was close to them or far away.

Thomas's sigh broke me from my thoughts. "Alright. If that's the way you two want it."

"Thank you, Thomas, for keeping this secret for me." Mila stood up and started collecting our empty plates.

"Mila, you don't need to work tonight," I said, holding my plate away.

She shook her head and insisted, "I'll clean up. Why don't you and Thomas move to the patio? Get some fresh air. It is a nice night. You've probably got a lot to catch up on. There's some beer in the fridge if the two of you want it."

She wrestled my plate from me and headed into the kitchen.

“Yeah, I’ll take a beer,” Thomas agreed.

I grabbed two beers and then followed Thomas outside onto the patio. The garden was full of fragrant night-blooming flowers.

“I had to make some arrangements for our men. The inn in the desert wasn’t safe anymore. They had nowhere else to go,” Thomas started.

I handed him a beer and we sat on the patio chairs.

“That’s why we’ve always had a backup plan. I trusted you to carry it out.” I sipped my beer and looked out at the starry sky.

“Well, obviously. I moved everyone who was willing to Alvar.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Everyone who was willing? Who chose to stay in the desert?”

“Lee and Scarlett, who else?” Thomas chuckled and sipped his beer.

“Scarlett forgave Lee?” I glanced at Thomas. “Did Lee find their son, is that why?”

“Bingo! Lee finally made good on his promise to bring their son home. And you’ll never believe it, but it is someone we met. Someone who... shares his father’s talents.”

“Oh... you’ve got to be kidding me...” I rolled my eyes. “Eros?”

“That’s it! I knew you wouldn’t disappoint me, Soren.” Thomas smirked at me. “Lee and Scarlett wanted to be somewhat closer to Pomeni so they could get to know Eros. They aren’t ready to tell him yet.”

“So, they are out of danger?” I confirmed.

“Yes. And Eros is too busy to worry about family right now. He wants to mend his relationship with Ashley and that’s what he is focused on.”

“He’s got his work cut out for him if that’s his goal. Why didn’t you bring this up at dinner?”

I glanced inside where Mila was still washing dishes.

“This is Scarlett and Lee’s business. I’ll tell you because you know their past. But...”

I shook my head. “Going forward, there is no need for secrets between me and Mila.”

Thomas chuckled. “What about your secrets? All the truth about where you’re from and who you are and... the past.”

Sighing, I bowed my head. “I’ll explain it to her, over time.”

“Soren, you’re missing the point. What do you plan to do from here? Are you going back? Mila has the Moonstone or Moonlit Crystal, whatever the hell it is called... Why haven’t you asked her for it?”

“Without the portal, the Moonstone alone isn’t going to get us back to the Realm of Light. What’s the point in asking her for it?”

Thomas frowned slightly, a serious expression crossing his face. "One of the reasons I have been trying so hard to find you is..."

"Is...?"

"I found a portal back to the Realm of Light."

My hand froze, beer bottle halfway to my lips. "For real? Where?"

"Close to Miltern," Thomas reported.

I sipped my beer and nodded. "Well, we don't have additional moonstones, so there's not much I can do about it."

"Okay, I know you're not that dense. Are you just playing dumb?" Thomas asked. "Mila has the Moonstone. As far as I know, she doesn't have any use for it. I'm sure if you ask, she will give it to you!"

I shrugged and sipped my beer again.

"Soren, you've been looking for this thing for over ten years! We both know that portals don't last forever and that they are unstable," Thomas reminded me.

Looking up at the starry sky, I just sipped my beer and nodded absently.

"If you miss it this time around, who knows when and where we'll be able to find it again? You may not be able to get back for the rest of your life!"

I arched an eyebrow at him. "I get it Thomas... Can you give me a moment to think?"

Mila

While cleaning up in the kitchen, I wasn't trying to eavesdrop but I couldn't help it. The night was quiet and Thomas and Soren's voices filtered in through the open windows.

When I heard them mention Miltern, my ears perked up. I couldn't help it. Miltern was Helen's home and it had personal significance to me.

I kept washing the dishes but I started to listen to their conversation. They were talking about something important...

"Mila has the Moonstone... If you ask, she will give it to you...Soren, you've been looking for this thing for over ten years...If you miss it this time around...you may not be able to get back for the rest of your life..."

My hands slipped on the soapy dishes.

How could I have forgotten? The woman Soren loved was still back in his hometown, wherever that was. The Realm of Light. I still didn't know what that meant.

I knew that his home world was far away. Too far from the world I was living in. With the chance to go back, would he take it?

His words from right before he almost died echoed in my head.

'I need to be honest before I go...I'm sorry...but you're not my type...I've been lying to you... because one day... if I survive this... I will have to go back to my realm... I need to go back to her...'

I'd been so focused on helping him recover that I had intentionally "forgotten" about what he told me. Sighing, I started stacking the dishes in the drying rack.

There was no doubt in my mind that Soren loved me. Just like there was no doubt in how I felt about him.

But on the other side of the world, in another dimension, there was another woman he also loved. Perhaps someone he loved equally as he loved me...

I rubbed my large belly. If I pretended I never heard their conversation, I was sure Soren would never ask me for the Moonlit Crystal. He wouldn't want to hurt my feelings.

But if he never got the chance to go home... would he regret it for the rest of his life? Would he resent me for tying him here? Would he miss his home so much he could never truly have a happy life here with me?

I didn't want him to have any regrets and I didn't want him to resent me. Not after he'd nearly died for me!

Since I'd met him, Soren had done too much for me already. He'd always given and I'd always taken. I couldn't be the selfish one this time.

Drying my hands off, I went to the master bedroom.

Soren and Thomas might be up all night talking, especially now that Soren was almost completely healed.

I took a long, warm shower and put on a nice, silk night dress. I unpinned my golden hair and shook my head, letting my blonde locks fall in curls around my neck and shoulders. It had reverted completely to my natural color.

Looking at my own reflection in the mirror, I couldn't believe how much I had changed in the past year. Not just my hair color, I'd filled out some and gotten stronger. Most importantly, my eyes were no longer filled with fear and resentment.

Smiling at myself, I hugged my belly and turned from side to side.

I wasn't scared or broken now. I wasn't fighting and scrapping just to survive.

And for all of the things Soren had done for me... I was forever grateful to him for who he'd helped me to become, and of course, for the child growing inside of me.

I pushed the window open to let the fresh night air in. There were several candles around the bedroom and I lit them, turning down the overhead lights.

I looked out at the garden and the starry sky.

If this was the last night we spent together because he decided to go home, I was going to make it a perfect night.

Click.

The door behind me opened and I whipped around.

Soren arched an eyebrow, his eyes traveling up and down my body and the night dress. As he closed the distance between us, I could sense his breathing got heavier.

His arm looped around my waist to pull me close to his chest, and his slender and powerful finger lifted my chin up. With a sultry smirk, he planted a kiss on my lips.

“You look gorgeous,” he whispered.

As simple as that, I melted in his arms.

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I enjoyed the moment in my mate’s arms as he showered me with sweet kisses. When we pulled apart, Soren noticed the candles all around the room.

“What’s so special tonight?” Before I could answer, it was as if Soren suddenly sensed something and he creased his brow. “Mila, are you okay?”

Smiling brightly, I looked down at my belly. “I’m more than okay. It’s been a great day today. I finished with my work at the clinic, you’re walking again, and Thomas found us. I thought it was worth a little celebration.”

Soren’s expression relaxed and finally, he agreed. “Indeed, it has been a good day.”

Dressed simply, all he wore was a black t-shirt and some black sweatpants. Yet, he still managed to look like a model ready for a photo shoot. It never mattered what he wore—he made his clothes look good, as always.

I pressed my head to his chest. Naturally and smoothly, both of his arms came around me. His embrace was warm and powerful and I knew they would protect me and our baby from any harm.

I just didn’t know how much longer I would be able to stay like this with him.

Breathing in his scent, I pushed the unhappy thoughts away and forced myself to enjoy his presence at this moment.

Burying my face into his muscular chest, I indulge myself in his delicious scent mixed with a hint of alcohol taste from the beer.

Soren kissed the top of my head. “What are you thinking about?”

“Um, about how lucky I was to have you as my mate,” I murmured honestly.

Soren chuckled, “Good answer.”

Meanwhile, he slipped his arms around me and took a few steps to the left.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

Soren just kept moving, pulling me along with him. “Guess...”

There was no music, so it took me a moment to realize he was dancing with me. We held each other and I followed his steps.

The warm, flickering light of the candles filled the room with a golden, romantic glow. Moonlight shone in through the open window and the soft scent of flowers wafted in.

It really was a gorgeous night. A perfect night.

I lifted my eyes and looked into Soren’s, where I found my own reflection. He looked down at me with a soft, doting smile, and I knew I was all he saw at the moment.

“Have you missed me?” he purred in a deep, smooth voice against my ear, sending pleasant chills down my spine. I flushed a little and looked down.

Soren cupped my cheeks and lifted my face. He swooped down and kissed me passionately on the lips. Moaning, I wrapped my arms around his neck.

Immediately, he scooped me into his arms and growled.

I gasped, clinging to his neck. For a moment, I was worried that he wouldn’t be able to hold me because he had only just started walking again, and I’d gained weight from the growing baby, but he hardly seemed to notice.

He carried me to the bed and laid me down on the comfortable, silky pillows, moving his fingers under the hem of my nightdress.

“You set the room up quite well,” he praised with a light chuckle, “so you deserve to be rewarded.”

His fingers ran up my inner thigh, caressing the inside of my leg up and down, and slowly getting higher and higher until he reached my swollen clit.

Gasping, I leaned back on the pillows, arching my back slightly.

He chuckled and licked my earlobe. “You smell so good...”

The hot air from his breath set my body on fire as he started kissing and sucking my neck while his fingers stroked my p***y lips and slid deeper into my folds.

I shuddered and grabbed the comforter, balling my hands into fists around the poofy fabric. Tingles ran up my legs and straight into my core that was throbbing with desire.

He brushed his fingers over my aching clit, slowly circling my little nub.

“Mmm!” I grabbed Soren’s shirt, almost tearing a hole in the fabric.

He kept rubbing. My legs trembled and I closed my eyes, writhing around on the bed.

Pressure and pleasure built in my abdomen; my insides clenched. Heat spread through my body as I melted into the pillows, letting him take me to a climactic height.

“Soren...Soren...”

I called his name, but then suddenly he stopped, leaving me still trembling with pleasure. Wanting to beg him to give me more, I squinted one eye open. When I realized he was undressing, my eyes raked over his smooth skin and his toned muscles and couldn't move away.

“Do you like what you see?” he teased.

“Very much,” I sighed as I reached out to him, and couldn't wait any longer to feel the warmth of his body again.

“Good to hear,” he smiled dangerously as he hovered over me.

Grabbing the hem of my nightdress, he slid it up my body. The silky fabric sent shivers over my skin, gooseflesh springing up on my arms and stomach. He slipped his arm around my back and held me close.

Then his tongue parted my lips and claimed every inch inside of my mouth. I put my hands on the back of his head, tangling in his hair while responding to him with equal passion.

His hands roamed around my waist and suddenly grabbed my hips. My soaked p***y ached for him.

“Please...don't make me wait another second!” I moaned.

His eyes darkened and without any hesitation, he pushed his hard, throbbing c**k inside of me, stroking my core. My tight ring of muscles clenched around his quivering member.

“You're so f*****g tight! How did you do it?”

“Wha—Oh—Soren—Ahh...”

“How could you make me feel so f*****g good?!” he growled.

“Oh...” I rolled my hips in time with his thrusts, all the pleasure and passion blossoming in me again.

“Say my name!” he ordered.

“Soren...” I moaned as he thrust harder and faster.

“Again!”

“Soren! I...”

He nuzzled his face in my neck and I saw his throat just below my mouth.

“Tell me what you want.”

“S-Soren,” I gasped, hugging him tighter. “I want to mark you!”

Soren growled, thrusting faster. He tilted his head, exposing more of his neck. His faint smile and his heavy panting told me that he wanted to bear my mark as much as I desired to mark him.

I clung to him, my core stirring with molten lava. Panting, I bit into his neck, marking him as my own.

He groaned and his arms tightened around me. His c**k trembled and thrust faster and faster.

“Soren...Soren...” I cried. I couldn’t think of anything other than being overwhelmed by waves and waves of pleasure that he brought me.

“Say you’re mine!” he commanded.

My body moved with his, wanting more of him. There was nothing in the world I couldn’t give him.

“Yes,” I cried, “I’m yours! All yours!”

“Ah—” He sighed and filled me with his seed.

My body shook with pleasure as an orgasm rocked through me.

Sighing, I cradled Soren’s head against my breast.

He breathed heavily. Then, slowly, he touched his neck and his body shivered against me.

Our bond strengthened and it was unbreakable.

Would it be strong enough for me to feel it even after he left this realm? Would I still sense my mate even if he was in another place that was far beyond my reach?

I turned on my side, getting comfortable with pillows propping me up in a few places. Soren slipped his arms around me, pressing his chest to my back. He nuzzled the back of my neck and kissed my shoulder, my collarbone, and then my breast and my heart.

“I love you, Mila.”

Tears sprang to my eyes and trickled down my cheeks. “I love you too.”

He tightened his arms around me, his hands rubbing gently against my large stomach. Soren peppered my neck and shoulder with kisses. He tucked my head under his chin.

“Sleep now, Mila...”

I heard the exhaustion in his voice.

I snuggled against his chest and let myself enjoy his embrace. If this was the last night we spent together, I wasn’t going to waste it.

My eyes fluttered open and I immediately looked toward the window. The sky was turning gray. It was just before dawn.

Soren lay next to me, breathing evenly. It was really rare for him to be asleep once I woke up. Or for me to wake up before him.

I unclasped the Moonlit Crystal necklace and put it around Soren’s neck. Now, he wouldn’t have to ask me for it. Then, gently, I untangled myself from his arms and got out of bed as I grabbed one of my books for expecting mothers and sat in the chair across the room, reading, waiting for Soren to wake up.

When he sighed heavily, I looked across the room.

Soren stretched and his arm fell onto my side of the bed. His arm moved around and suddenly, he sat up, fully alert and awake.

When his eyes fell on me, he sighed and relaxed into the pillows again.

“Why are you up so early?” he asked.

His brow creased and he grabbed the necklace around his neck.

“And why is this on me?”

Slowly, I closed the book and sat up straighter. “Soren, I think we need to talk.”

Soren narrowed his eyes and frowned. “I’m not sure I like that tone this early in the morning. Mila, you’re scaring me...”

Smiling, I shook my head. “Don’t be. There’s nothing to be scared of.”

“Hmm, okay, then what do you want to talk about?”

Soren got up and put on some sweatpants. His strong, sculpted chest remained in full view and I bit my lip as my eyes automatically traced over his muscles.

“First, I need to apologize. I did overhear some of the conversation you had with Thomas last night.”

Soren arched an eyebrow at me. “It’s okay, Mila. I figured that sooner or later; we’d have to talk about it, I mean, my past.”

“Yeah, sooner or later...” I muttered. “I know you’ve been wanting to go back to your home realm for over ten years. Where you’re from is mysterious to me, but that doesn’t change the fact you want to go back. At least, for a visit. Right now, there is the perfect opportunity. And I don’t want you to miss it. Like Thomas said, who knows when the next time will be.”

I spoke quickly. I wanted to get it all out before I had the chance to talk myself out of it.

Soren frowned. “Mila, do you not understand that you’re my mate? Why are you trying to send me away?”

“I understand. And I couldn’t be more grateful to the Goddess that you’re my mate. But that’s why we are talking about this.”

I sighed and glanced down, worrying my hands in my lap.

“Soren, I’ll always be here for you. I’m not going anywhere and I don’t want to run away like before. We have so many years ahead of us, if and when you choose to come back—”

“Mila!”

He tried to interrupt but I continued, “You have no idea how hard this is for me, Soren.”

I stood up and went to Soren. My hand brushed over the Moonlit Crystal that hung around his neck.

“Keep this for me, please?”

Soren sighed, his eyes fixed on me and his brow creased.

Nodding, I headed for the door when he didn't say anything. Just as I reached for the knob...

"Mila, wait! Come back!"

I took a deep breath and plastered a smile on my face, turning to face him.

"Don't worry, I'm only going out to run some errands. I'll be back tonight. I... can't bring myself to help you pack... I'm sorry."

Tears warmed in my eyes and I turned away, walking out the door.

I could feel Soren's eyes still on me as I left but I had no idea what he was thinking. Consciously, I shut down the mindlink because I knew this wasn't easy on either of us.

He would need some space to make up his mind, and I would need to escape the house before running back and begging him to stay.

[Chapter 783](#)

I didn't really have errands to run, so I headed to the harbor where boats were pulling in, took a seat on a bench and watched people load and unload the ships.

But no matter how many people I saw, there was only one person occupying my mind.

I glanced back at the way I'd come and scoffed at myself. Maybe what I did deep down was just me selfishly trying to force Soren to make a choice between me and his past.

I thought I loved him, so I'd love everything about him, including his past. However, I couldn't. I couldn't bring myself to try to compete with his past, nor was I going to share him with the memory of another woman.

I acted like I was being thoughtful of him, but deep down, I was just a coward. I couldn't bring myself to beg him to stay, so I threw the difficult decision to him and I escaped—again.

I rubbed my stomach and watched several more ships unload, one pulled out from the harbor and head out into the ocean. I wondered, would Soren take a boat and disappear on the horizon just like that?

If he had gone back, I wouldn't see him for a very long time. I'd have to tell our child all about him—fortunately, I wouldn't be alone because I'd have our child.

As the afternoon wore on, the docks got quieter and slower. Fewer people were there working. The setting sun reminded me that it was time to go back. However, my feet were dragging.

I wasn't sure I was prepared to return to an empty house, but I still forced myself to head toward the bungalow.

There was a faint glimmer of hope thrumming in my heart—maybe he was willing to give up his past for me and our family.

But when I got to the house, I sighed and bowed my head.

All the lights were off.

So, he had made the choice and went back to his hometown. After everything, Soren had chosen to leave me behind and return to his past.

For a moment, bitterness mixed with fury flared in my chest.

Sighing, I shook my head and sent the anger away. This wasn't Soren's fault. If anyone was to blame, it was me. I'd been the one to push him to make a decision. Had I not offered him the Moonlit Crystal, knowing him, he would probably never ask me for it.

I rubbed my belly.

"You, my precious, it is just going to be the two of us for a while. Don't worry, no matter how much time goes by, I'll make sure you know who your father is. Someday, I don't know when, but you'll get to meet him."

I smiled at my belly, as if the baby could see me. Whatever happened, we would still be a family and Soren was welcome to return to us any time.

When I got inside, I left the lights off. It was late, and after everything, I just wanted to crawl into bed and sleep. This late in my pregnancy, I was too exhausted to stay up much longer and do all anything extra after my walk today.

Not to mention the pain in my heart from Soren's absence.

I went to the master bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed. In the dark, I could see that the room hadn't changed at all.

Had Soren not taken anything with him?

His clothes from the night before were neatly folded and placed on the nightstand.

He probably could only take what was necessary, some clean clothes and such.

Sighing, I stared at the clothes, and our lovemaking the night before replayed in my mind. Heat climbed up my face, but soon it faded away. It already felt like a distant dream, even though it happened less than 24 hours ago.

Sniffing, I realized tears were dripping from my eyes and streaming down my face. I wiped them off and swallowed the rest of my tears.

"From now on, I will only smile for my baby... My baby is all I'm living for now."

The moon outside the bedroom window shone brightly, glinting off the glass. It was so beautiful and cast lovely silver light into the bedroom.

I was glad that I could still appreciate the beauty of nature.

Standing up, I went to the window and pushed it open. From that window, I had a great view of the backyard.

"What...!" I gasped, glancing down at the yard.

The patio was covered in little, flickering candles. Several luminous stones laid out on the grass formed a path that led into the nearby woods.

My hands shook and my heart pounded in my chest.

What was going on? None of those were there when I'd left!

Rushing down the stairs, I went onto the patio, where I found flower petals scattered over the floor between the candles.

The luminous path was made of stones that had been carefully laid out one by one. They glowed in the grass, much dimmer than the flickering candles, but clearly leading in a specific direction.

Someone had set this up.

My heart thudded heavily. I rubbed my clammy hands on my sides, taking in a deep breath before stepping off the patio to follow the path.

It led me all the way to the edge of the woods and continued deep into the small forest ahead of me.

Without hesitation, I kept going. My heart pounded faster with every step I took.

The glowing path stretched through the dark forest and eventually took me to a clearing.

I was stunned by the dream-like scenery in front of me.

The circle-shaped clearing was outlined in a ring of luminous stones. All the little blue stones lit the clearing with a lovely, magical glow. I felt like I'd stepped right onto the surface of the moon!

On the opposite side of the opening, the trees parted over a cliff. The ocean waves rumbling below. The moon hung over the cliff, its reflection massive on the restless ocean below.

Stars twinkled in the sky like little fireflies and the star filled sky spread on forever.

It was absolutely breathtaking.

In the shadow of one of the trees, I saw a familiar, dark figure in a familiar dark suit leaning casually against a large rock. One hand in his pocket and his back towards me.

I took a step closer, thinking I had to be dreaming.

Snap!

A twig snapped under my foot.

The figure turned around. Moonlight shone on his face and he beamed, "Miss Hathaway, what took you so long?"

I stared at him; my jaw ajar. I was at a loss for words. Seeing him was beyond elating. I hadn't expected him to be here at all, let alone setting up this beautiful scene for me.

"S-Soren!?" I finally managed to speak. I covered my mouth with my hands. "Why are you still here?"

Groaning inwardly, I wanted to bite off my tongue. Why did I ask the question in a way that almost sounded like I wished he wasn't there? Goddess knows how happy I was. I was beyond ecstatic to see him!

My hands shook, and my entire body vibrated with joy and excitement.

Soren chuckled. It didn't seem like he cared what I said.

"I'm here because I knew you would come... eventually." He answered my question. "And here you are."

I looked around again, still stunned by how beautiful this place was.

"Was it all for me?" I asked, trying to find something to say. "You...you didn't have to do all this..."

"I didn't have to, but I wanted to." Soren's face looked serious. "Mila, as you know, I came here from another realm and I do have family there."

My heart sank. Was this Soren's way of saying Goodbye? I'd wanted to avoid a painful scene!

"The fact of the matter is... I ran away from there years ago because the woman that took my heart didn't choose me."

I didn't want to hear it any more. "Soren—"

"Listen to me, please. I thought I loved her. And because of that, I thought love was just pain... until I met you."

I lifted my eyes.

Soren had moved a lot closer to me. He still had one hand in his pocket.

"I said that to you before but I don't think you truly believe it. I'm not sure what else I can do to convince you and persuade you." He took a deep breath in.

I held my breath, waiting for him to continue.

He looked me in the eye. "I want you to know that I may have places I want to go, but I'll only go to those places if you are with me."

My heart lifted and I felt some new hope and excitement growing in me.

"Mila, keep this in mind. Wherever you are, that is where I belong. Unless we find another Moonstone so that we can both go, I'm not leaving here without you."

Tears pricked my eyes and I shifted my weight from foot to foot. I had no idea what to think. So much joy and hope swelled inside of me and I couldn't contain it!

"I spent all day pondering. There was only one way that I could think of to convince you that I don't want to leave your side. Wherever you are, Mila, that is my home. It doesn't matter what realm we are in, as long as we are together. And I'm going to prove that."

I nodded slowly, unsure where Soren was going with this. Seeing him here and hearing his words was enough to make me believe him.

He stayed there all day and prepared this beautiful scene for us. I couldn't ask for a more romantic setting.

And he clearly wasn't here to say goodbye to me. So, what else could he do to prove himself to me? I kind of thought he already had by being here.

"So... I'm putting my heart out there again, and I am hopeful that I know you well enough to not crush it into a million pieces."

Soren chuckled and pulled his hand out of his pocket. He held up a little silk cushion with a ring on it.

I gasped and took a half step back.

The ring was lovely. It had a gold band etched with blackfire flowers. In the moonlight, the gold almost looked like orange flames.

Instead of a diamond, the Moonlit Crystal had been set into the band, flickering in the moonlight and glowing deep in its center.

Soren went down on his knee in front of me.

"I'm going to ask you what you asked me earlier. Would you keep this for me, please?"

I kept staring at the ring, my mind completely blank and hysterical as I thought about what was going on.

"I...I..." I murmured but couldn't form a sentence.

"Will you accept my love forever and marry me?" he asked.

Fresh tears wet my eyes and I looked into Soren's gray-blue orbs.

My heart fluttered so wildly that I thought it would grow wings and fly away.

Soren was proposing!? Soren was proposing! I could hardly believe it. He really did love me and wanted me by his side forever!

How could I ever have doubted that?

When I stared into his eyes, I saw such depth and vulnerability. He was opening his heart and soul to me, risking his views on love again, and he was trusting in me and our love.

"Yes..." I gasped, dropping my hands from my face.

"What was that?" Soren asked, leaning closer.

"Yes! Soren, yes, I will marry you!"

Grinning in the moonlight, Soren stood up and slid the ring on my finger.

"Now the deal is sealed, Mila. Don't even think about getting rid of me again!"

[Chapter 784](#)

Mila

Warm lips pressed to my cheek, pulling me from my dreams. My eyes fluttered open and I looked up at Soren's smiling face.

"Good morning, sleepy head."

He put his newspaper aside, curled an arm under my neck, leaned down and kissed me. His breath held the faintest hint of fresh coffee.

I'd never been a big coffee drinker. Especially now that I was pregnant. But I liked the scent on his breath. Then again, he always smelled amazing.

I lifted a hand and cupped Soren's face, a bright flash catching my eye. Pulling back, I saw the ring on my finger and a smile tugged at my lips.

It had been three days since Soren proposed, and I still had to convince myself it wasn't just my imagination!

"It's really great to see you smiling this early in the morning," Soren asked, pulling my attention back.

I shifted my eyes to the window. It was almost noon. I had been so tired lately because of the baby.

"Early in the morning?" I giggled.

"Early for you," Soren laughed. "Did you have a good dream?"

I shook my head. "No, it isn't any dream I'm smiling about."

Soren arched an eyebrow.

"No dream could be more wonderful than the life I'm living now." I grinned and lay back on the pillows.

How could I not be happy? Everything that I ever wanted, a mate, a home, a family, and a peaceful life. I'd gotten it all.

Not only that, my mate was the most handsome, protective, and doting man I'd ever met. I tilted my head and just couldn't stop smiling as I watched him.

Soren chuckled lightly and my heart fluttered.

"We should get up and start the day." He threw the covers back and held a hand out to me.

My eyes barely saw his hand, glancing at his full, naked body as he stood at the edge of the bed.

"Mila, I would love to spend the day in bed with you," he enticed, smirking, "but today we have to go shopping."

My face heated but I was curious. "For what?"

"Well, for the baby. We need to get the nursery ready. And... for whatever makes you happy."

"Uhh... I'm already happy." I stood up and kissed his coffee scented lips again, thinking perhaps I would be happier staying in bed for the day. "But I suppose we do need to get the nursery ready."

"How about this dress?" He held up a sky-blue maxi dress with elegant neckline ties.

“It seems a bit overkill for going shopping?”

“Trust me, it’s perfect.”

When Soren said, go shopping, I thought we were going to a furniture store in the trading center. There were quite a few there. Instead, we ended up at a gorgeous building by the beach, overlooking the ocean.

The lobby was elegantly designed and decorated, which made me think he took me to a luxury hotel by mistake, until a very friendly saleswoman greeted us and led us into an enormous showroom behind the lobby.

“We’ve got some really lovely floor designs and customizable murals that are wonderful in infant nurseries. And we have ones that can be for a boy or girl if you don’t know what you’re having,” the saleswoman said, sweeping her arm over the showroom of nursery plans.

They were like little office cubicles with sample nurseries set up inside. We could walk into them and interact with the furniture, and check out all the designs.

“So many options...” I whispered as we walked through the various samples.

We were the only customers there. Apparently, they were by appointment only to ensure their customers were treated with the most prestigious services.

The saleswoman took us to the back of the showroom where there were a few sample nurseries that were simpler, cleaner looking.

Smiling, I went right in and started checking out the furniture. It was all very nicely made out of sturdy materials but I could tell right away that they weren’t the average furniture brands or materials from other stores.

“You have a good eye, my dear,” the saleswoman smiled, “This timeless style is our signature design. They might have looked simple, but they were elegantly crafted by our master carpentry artists.”

I went to the crib and casually picked up the price tag.

My eyes nearly popped out of my head and I coughed, letting it fall.

“Mila?” Soren asked, coming up beside me.

“The price, it’s equal to half a year’s rent on our cottage,” I hissed so that the saleswoman wouldn’t hear us.

“But you like it?”

I ran my hand along the crib rail. It was so perfectly adorable. “I do, but—”

Soren nodded. “We’ll take this, and anything else that catches my lovely fiancée’s eye.”

“Great choice,” the saleswoman nodded, “Please excuse me. I’ll get the order written up for you.”

As soon as she stepped out of the mock nursery we were in, I hushed, "Soren, what are you doing? If we get the whole nursery here, it will cost the same as renting our cottage for five years!"

Soren shrugged.

I glared at him. "It is too expensive!"

"Mila, our baby is worth the best of everything." He looped his arm around my shoulders. "You like the house?"

"Sure, I like it. It isn't too big and the yard will be great for a toddler," I said, nodding. I pulled away from him and looked at a changing table.

The price tag was almost double the crib, but Soren really didn't seem to care.

"So, does that mean you want to stay in Marno forever?" he asked.

I glanced at him. "Um...Marno is nice, but I'm not sure we can stay hidden from the Alpha King here forever. It is a busy pack and his loyal subjects might see us one day. He probably already has spies here."

"That's a good bet." Soren nodded and stroked his chin.

"I'm not sure there is anywhere safe for us to go." I sighed and moved away from the changing table. "Hey, don't change the topic. We were talking about the furniture. It's too expensive."

Soren ignored my protest on the price and only responded to my comment about the Alpha King. "That's only if we keep hiding. I think that the only way to resolve the threat is to confront the threat. Hiding isn't a permanent solution."

I creased my brow. "How?"

"Well, the reason he wanted you dead was because you were the only one capable of using the Blade of Souls."

"But the sheath was ruined so the Blade of Souls couldn't be used as a whole any more. Nor have I planned to use it against him anyway," I pointed out.

Soren smirked. "Exactly. If I were you, I'd make him aware that the sheath was totally destroyed so that he knows it is useless, even if you are alive, or any of your children. We wouldn't be a threat anymore."

I mulled over Soren's words, nodding slowly.

"You know, that didn't exactly answer my question about staying in Marno," Soren reminded me.

I met his eyes and smiled shyly, my cheeks turning red. "I only like Marno because you're here."

Soren raised his eyebrows. "Well, I knew that already," he said cockily. "Well, in that case, I'd like to invite you out for a date, beyond Marno, tonight."

"A date?" I tilted my head and teased him, "I don't know, that depends on how sincere you are."

Soren laughed and shook his head. "Lucky for you, you have the matebond to help you test me out. Why don't you tell me how I feel about you?"

Closing my eyes, I reached out my senses and was immediately surrounded by the overwhelming mixture of emotions from him.

Soren projected tenderness, admiration, and love. I felt an intense desire from him, to protect me and support me, and give me everything that would make me happy.

"So, how did I do? Am I sincere enough for you to go on a date with me?" Soren's voice broke into my thoughts.

Tears brimmed my eyes and I blinked them back quickly. I tried to talk and my voice caught in my throat. I cleared my throat and tried again.

"You called it. I really don't know how I got so lucky."

Soren grinned. "I'll take that as a yes."

The saleswoman came back with our order form.

"The furniture will be ready in a week. I just need your signature." She handed the form to Soren.

"Thank you."

"You two qualify as our pristine VIP guests. We do offer a black car service for VIPs. Is there somewhere we can take you?" she asked, taking the form back.

"Actually..." Soren smirked and winked at me. "Could you arrange a boat rental for us?"

"Umm..." The saleswoman smiled after a short pause. "Sure. I will happily arrange that."

Soren took my hand. "Come with me."

I didn't even hesitate, grabbing his hand. What did he plan that was so secretive?

Soren glanced over his shoulder at me and winked. "You'll find out," he responded to my unasked question, thanks to the mindlink.

We got to the docks where there was already a beautiful boat for us. The services the furniture store provided to their customers were indeed unparalleled.

"We're going to a small island off the coast," Soren explained as he put the life vest on me, "I'll drive. Please take a seat and enjoy the ocean."

I nodded with a smile as my fiance drove the boat away. One hour later, a small island came into sight.

The beach was bathed in the orange afternoon sunlight. Not far away from the coast were small hills covered with little wildflowers. The island wasn't big, three or four acres maybe, but it was absolutely adorable!

As soon as we got off the boat, I kicked my shoes off and ran through the frothy surf.

“This is so lovely.” I turned to Soren and hugged him. “Thank you for bringing me here. It is a very peaceful date.”

Soren chuckled. “Mila, this isn’t our date. We’re still in Marno territory. I’m just waiting for transportation.”

“Another boat?”

Soren shook his head and nodded to the sky.

I followed his gaze and stepped back. Some large, metal bird-like machine was plummeting toward us from the sky. As it got closer, the thunderous, whirring noises pounded against my eardrums, louder than anything I’d ever heard.

The giant metal bird thing landed heavily in the water, sliding through it like a boat, and sending up large plumes of water that splashed back down.

I stared at it as the machine got closer to us. The engines were just gurgling now. It pulled right up to the dock.

Too shocked, I couldn’t say a word.

Soren took both my hands and tightened his grip on me. “Mila, take a breath. There’s nothing to worry about.”

I exhaled, not even realizing I was holding my breath. “What is that!?”

“It is called a seaplane.”

I shook my head and stared at the weird contraption. It looked like some method of transportation that could... fly?

“I’ve never... this is... new...”

“It is probably the only plane in this realm right now. In my home realm, they are quite common. Thomas and I had to work pretty hard to get the right materials and people to build this thing. Pretty neat, right?”

I just kept staring at it. The engine idled and it rocked gently on the waves. I noticed that instead of feet, this “seaplane” had giant flotation-like pieces. They must have been hollow metal, that helped keep it floating on the water.

There were glass windows around the exterior. Suddenly, the door opened and I jumped back clutching Soren’s arm but immediately relaxed when I saw the person exiting the seaplane.

[Chapter 785](#)

Thomas appeared, grinning. He hopped onto the dock and patted the metal shell of the plane.

“Hey Mila, your expression is priceless!”

“Thomas! This is unbelievable!” I was about to run up to greet him when Soren interrupted us.

“Took you long enough,” Soren arched an eyebrow. “For a two-day trip, you managed to make it three.”

“What took me so long?” Thomas retorted, pointing to himself. He had puffy bags under his eyes like he hadn’t slept in a while. “Two days is one way! Since when have I become your servant, getting everything ready for you? Soren, I swear, one of these days, I’m going to punch you in the face!”

I watched the two of them interact. In the past, I always thought Thomas was only Soren’s Beta, his subordinate. He was usually respectful and formal towards Soren when others were around. It was rare to see them joke.

It wasn’t until Thomas showed up a few days ago that I realized that their friendly teasing was a normal part of their relationship.

Thomas was more than Soren’s subordinate. He was Soren’s friend, best friend. Perhaps, even like a brother.

I smiled at Thomas, hoping to ease their harmless tension a little.

“Thomas, you look tired. I’ve been wondering where you’ve been the past few days. Is everything okay?”

Thomas turned to me, replacing his fake angry face with a smile. He shifted his eyes back to Soren quickly and then to me again.

“Thank you, Mila. At least, SOMEONE cares about me!”

I chuckled and covered my mouth. “So, you’ve been getting what ready?”

Soren cleared his throat.

“Well, my tasks are done, and Soren will tell you everything. But if you get the chance, give him a good punch for me.” Thomas winked at me.

“You two and your secrets!” I crossed my arms.

Soren wrapped his arm around me. “Let’s go. It won’t be a secret for long.”

He glanced over his shoulder at Thomas. “And Thomas, I have some furniture ready to be picked up in a week. Take care of them.”

Thomas growled.

“WHAT!? I’m your f*****g Beta, not your slave!”

“It is for your godchild; do you still want to argue?”

Thomas’s anger disappeared immediately. He gaped at both of us.

I caught the triumphant smile on Soren’s lips. As he led me by Thomas to the plane, I heard him murmur to his Beta, “Thanks, man. It means a lot.”

Thomas stared at us a second longer and then shook his head. Then he broke into a small smile and waved, “Have a good flight!”

I dug my heels into the dock and stopped walking. Pointing at the plane, I stared at Soren. "We're not getting on that thing, are we!?"

"You bet we are." Soren laughed. He opened the door for me and nudged me into the plane.

Soren got in the driver's seat and helped me get buckled in. He put a set of headphones on my head.

"Sit tight."

The plane roared to life and shot through the water, faster than anything I'd ever felt.

A scream tore from my lips and I grabbed the armrest tightly, squinting my eyes closed.

"Don't close your eyes," Soren suggested.

I struggled to keep them open, but once the plane got out of the water and was up in the air, I noticed just how beautiful it was.

I was flying! My whole body felt light and floaty.

The world became smaller under us. The island we were on turned into the size of my palm and further away, Marno packland came back to view by the horizon. The ocean sparkled with the afternoon sun, shifting from blue to green and I could already see the colors of the sky changing in the opposite direction.

When I looked over at Soren, he seemed so relaxed and at ease. Would I ever learn everything about him? Would he ever stop surprising me?

After three hours of flying in that tin can, we started to descend. It was dusk, the sun nearly set, and as we plunged down, my stomach flew into my mouth! I grabbed Soren's arm.

He expertly maneuvered the plane to a lake and we slid into the shallows, pattering up to a dock.

Soren hopped out and tied up the plane. Slowly, I took off the headset and unbuckled myself.

"We've arrived." He opened the door and held his arm out to me. "You've done great on your first flight!"

"Arrived where?" I asked, grabbing Soren's hand as he helped me down. My legs shook a little and I clung against him.

"It's a vacation home." Soren glanced at me. I captured a sense of uncertainty in his eyes, but I couldn't quite understand what might be bothering him.

He led me up a boardwalk and I saw a house with some lights on in the distance. It was not just a house, it was a mansion! At least three times the size of our house in Marno. But it wasn't extravagant or overbearing. It looked cozy and homey with gardens out front and a cute little walkway up to a wrap around porch.

There was a swing on the porch and a large yard all around. The lights were so yellow and warm.

"How are you feeling, are you hungry?" He seemed to skip over the answer about what this place was very quickly.

“Starved!”

He led me to the kitchen and I noticed how familiar he seemed to be in this place. He knew where everything was.

“I’m going to make us some food. Go take a look around if you’d like. I’ll need about 15 minutes. Then I’ll answer all your questions, alright?” He winked at me.

He went to the fridge and started pulling things out, piling them on the counter.

Nodding, I wandered out of the kitchen and into the living room. The wooden ceiling was two stories tall with a simple crystal chandelier. On two sides of the front door were two floor length glass walls, through which I could see the lake where the plane was tied up.

There were large picture windows on the other side of the living room, looking out to a large, mowed backyard edged with a forest.

Even though it was dusk, the first floor was still bright thanks to the natural light. Most of the furniture and decoration were primarily light colored, making the rooms look new and refreshing.

The rug on the floor was extremely soft. The curtains over the windows were a solid champagne color. After a closer look, I realized that there were elegant embroideries on the panel. Nothing seemed to be too lavish, but the texture of them made me believe that they would cost a fortune to acquire.

From the moment I’d laid eyes on this house and the cute wrap around porch, I’d fallen in love. Every moment that passed, everything I saw, I loved it all the more!

I looked out at the backyard where there was a large apple tree. I could imagine a young child running around in the yard, climbing the tree, and exploring the woods.

The kitchen was starting to smell great, but I knew dinner wasn’t ready yet. So, I headed up the carpeted stairs with the carved wooden railing.

There were four bedrooms in the house. Only two of them were furnished. The master bedroom was obvious because of the four-poster bed. The other two bedrooms didn’t have much in them. Perhaps the owner of this place knew it would be just two guests for this visit so didn’t bother to set up every room.

However, it didn’t make the house any less charming.

“Ready for food?” Soren called from downstairs.

My stomach growled and I went back down. My fiance was standing with his arm held out to me. I looped my arm through his as he led me to the back porch, which connected to the front wrap around, where there was a table and two chairs.

Fresh flowers and candles made the centerpiece. On the two plates were mouthwatering steaks, accompanied by baby potatoes and a salad.

“Soren...” I gasped, amazed at how quickly he’d put it all together.

He had two wine glasses in hand. He poured himself some wine and poured me some sparkling cider, alcohol free.

We sat down and Soren raised his glass. I lifted mine, too.

“To our first flight.” He clinked his glass to mine and took a sip of his drink.

“Thank you, Soren, this really is an amazing date.”

I was so hungry! It was later than usual and we’d had a busy day. I dug into my meal, the steak practically melting in my mouth. It was perfect!

Soren ate too, letting me focus on my food over anything else.

“Oh man... I’m stuffed,” I grumbled when I was done.

“Then we should probably walk it off a little.”

The moon had risen. We walked through the backyard garden. It was large and full of various flowers—roses, peonies, lilies and daisies, you name it. Even under the silver moonlight, the garden was vivid with colors.

A soft breeze wafted the floral scent around us.

I rested my head on Soren’s shoulder, taking in everything that nature and this beautiful place had to offer.

All of a sudden, tears sprang into my eyes. I couldn’t help it. This was a perfect day, and I thought Soren had some magic of his own. I sniffled, holding back the urge to weep again.

I’d cried more often in the past three months than in my entire life before.

“Mila, are you okay?” Soren held me closer. “Why are you crying? Are you not feeling well... Did I do something wrong?”

I shook my head. “No, it is just hormones making me emotional. This is... perfect. You’re with me, our baby is healthy and almost here, and this place is so beautiful. For the first time, it feels like we are a family and... It is almost too good to be true.”

Soren chuckled and hugged me closer to him.

“Silly girl, this is how life is supposed to be.” He kissed the top of my head. “You seem to like this place, don’t you? Do you think you’d want to spend a few days here?”

“Are you kidding!?” I gasped. “This place is gorgeous. I would love it!”

Soren kissed the top of my head again.

“You like it better than our cottage?” He winked at me.

I shrugged. “Our place in Marno is good enough. But this... this is like a dream.”

We walked through the garden a little further.

"I mean, once the baby is born, I'll go back to work and a few years from now, maybe we'll be able to afford a house like this. After we pay off the nursery stuff!" I stuck my tongue out at Soren.

He shook his head at me.

"But I wouldn't mind spending a few days here."

Soren stopped walking for a moment. "Mila, earlier, I asked you where you wanted to be and you said you wanted to be with me. Is that still true?"

I turned to face him, looking deeply into his eyes. "When we were at the palace, the moment Payne was made Alpha of Pomeni, I'd made the decision to go with you."

I grabbed his hands and squeezed. My voice was firm and I meant every word I said.

"Wherever you are will be where I am."

I lifted his hand and held it against my chest. "Since the first time I met you, here," I pointed to my heart and said, "it didn't belong to me anymore. You have my love, my body, and my soul... unless you tell me to go away, I'll always be with you."

Soren grabbed my chin and lifted it, his eyes and his smile brighter than the moon.

"In that case, we aren't going back to Marno."

"What?" I tried to pull away but he wouldn't let me.

"Mila, welcome to Alvar, our pack and our new home."

[Chapter 786](#)

Payne

I stood at the altar at the top of the hill where the packhouse once stood. Instead of rebuilding the Pomeni mansion, we'd left the hilltop empty.

Now, it was where I was getting married.

An arch made of vines stood behind me and white cherry blossoms from a nearby tree blew in the wind, sending white petals skittering across the ground.

Guests sat in tiered seats on the hill with a white silk carpet laid out between the chair rows as an aisle.

The sun was setting just behind the hill, making the sky orange, purple, and pink. It was such a stunning view but I couldn't stop staring at the end of the aisle, waiting to see my bride.

Since we first settled in Pomeni, we'd been hiding behind Mila's magical barrier. But now that the rest of the world knew we were here, we had to establish ourselves as a legitimate pack. The Alpha's wedding was the perfect coming out for us.

Other than all of Pomeni pack, Lee and Scarlett had come, along with the Alpha King's Beta, Xavier. He was there to represent the royal court.

His presence was a huge honor to Pomeni, despite the fact that I didn't totally trust him. But it did show the rest of the world that we were a pack of high status and the royal family thought highly of us.

My eyes flickered to the expressions of some of the other guests.

Many of them looked uncomfortable, like they didn't think such a rag-tag pack that sprang up out of nowhere deserved the royal court's attention.

They could think whatever they wanted. Today, I wasn't going to let anything bring me down.

I smoothed down the front of my suit coat and smiled.

Maybe in the future, our neighbors would be enemies. I hoped they'd be friends, but we could sort that out later, like when I wasn't about to get married.

A live band started playing a song and I perked up.

The bridesmaids and groomsmen were paired off and walking down the aisle. The groomsmen were in gray tweed suits and the bridesmaids wore lavender dresses. The color popped beautifully against the white petals drifting by.

Eros and Ashley were the last pair, as the best man and the maid of honor.

I looked at them, and couldn't help but smile to myself. Once Eros had learned that Ashley was going to be the maid of honor, he'd begged me for days, like a hungry puppy, to be my best man.

Of course, Ashley had protested.

I hadn't wanted to upset Ashley, but it was also difficult to turn down Eros. I'd learned about his enslavement to the Alpha King and how he won his freedom. He'd made mistakes, but he also somewhat redeemed himself by helping us out.

Especially, ever since meeting my own mate, I finally understood what the matebond really meant to us. I felt a little bad for the guy because he was trying very hard to make things right with Ashley. I wanted to give him another chance, not just because he was perfectly capable of taking good care of my little sister, but most importantly because I was certain that he still loved her.

My mind wandered back to the conversation I'd had with my mate when we were discussing the pros and cons of Eros as best man.

"You know Eros can charm everyone in a room. He could be a good asset for helping to keep everyone at ease and making them feel comfortable," she reminded me. "I think he's the best choice for your best man."

I sighed and shook my head. "Maybe so, but will Ashley ever forgive me?"

My mate grinned and wrapped her arms around my neck. "Of course, she will. Just like she will forgive Eros. It is only a matter of time."

It was all I needed to hear. After that, I agreed to let Eros be my best man. If nothing else, it allowed me to keep a close eye on him.

I turned my attention to my sister and her rejected mate. Eros kept his arm around Ashley as they walked down the aisle, an exaggerated grin on his face. It was obvious he couldn't be happier with every second of his proximity to Ashley.

Ashley, on the other hand, had an annoyed look on her face. Eros then whispered something in her ear, and it seemed like she was having trouble not smiling.

She was warming up to Eros, and I knew there was a laugh bubbling inside of her that was just dying to get out regardless of the cold facade she forced herself to put on.

It wasn't a secret to me that Ashley still loved Eros. Otherwise, he wouldn't piss her off so much. She just needed a little more time to get over the mistakes he'd made.

The bridesmaids and groomsmen clustered around the arch. A new song started playing and all the guests stood up. My palms started to sweat.

Finally, two figures came into my sight. I held my breath and looked at my bride, my beautiful mate, as she stood at the end of the aisle.

Piper Hill.

She wore a pure white dress. It was strapless and tight fitting around her torso. Low cut in the front. The dress wasn't overly extravagant, which I liked. It had layered tiers of lace from the waist down the skirt, all the way to the ground, and a short lace train off the back.

She had her hair pinned up with little sparkling barrettes tucked into her tendrils.

Piper's cheeks were rosy red. She had her arm looped through her brother's and carried a lush bouquet of white lilies, bluebell flowers, and some purple lavender blossoms.

I'd never seen anything more beautiful in my life.

My heart swelled and a massive smile spread across my face. I couldn't control it if I wanted to. It was fate that brought us together.

It had been over nine months since we got any news from Thomas about Miss Mila or Soren. I kept telling myself no news was good news and I had to switch my focus from searching for Miss Mila to handling the day-to-day pack affairs.

Then one of my pack members went to Marno to trade. He brought back word of a Doctor Heather Way. Of course, I immediately thought of Mila Hathaway and went to Marno to investigate.

Instead of finding them, I found my beautiful Piper, my mate.

Charles stood under the arch. He was there to officiate.

When Piper and Victor reached me, Charles stepped up and spoke. "Who gives this woman away?" he asked.

Victor held his arm out, gently pushing Piper toward me. "I do."

He kissed her cheek quickly and took his spot in the front row.

Piper handed off her bouquet to Ashley and took both my hands.

“Today, we come together to see Piper Hill and Payne Chambers wed in holy matrimony,” Charles began.

I squeezed Piper’s hands and looked into her gorgeous eyes. She had such an innocent look about her, but it only made her more attractive.

“Do you, Payne Chambers, take Piper to be your lawfully wedded wife and mate before the Moon Goddess from now until death?” Charles asked.

“I do!” I exclaimed, not missing a beat.

Piper bit her lower lip and looked down, her cheeks turning pink. I wanted to pull her to me and hug her!

“And do you, Piper Hill, take Payne to be your lawfully wedded husband and mate before the Moon Goddess from now until death?” he continued.

It was all I naadad to haar. Aftar that, I agraad to lat Eros ba my bast man. If nothing alsa, it allowad ma to kaap a closa aya on him.

I turnad my attantion to my sistar and har rajactad mata. Eros kapt his arm around Ashlay as thay walkad down tha aisla, an axaggaratad grin on his faca. It was obvious ha couldn’t ba happiar with avary sacond of his proximity to Ashlay.

Ashlay, on tha othar hand, had an annoyad look on har faca. Eros than whisparad something in har aar, and it saamad lika sha was having troubla not smiling.

Sha was warming up to Eros, and I knaw thara was a laugh bubbling insida of har that was just dying to gat out ragardlass of tha cold facada sha forcad harsalf to put on.

It wasn’t a sacrat to ma that Ashaly still lovad Eros. Otharwisa, ha wouldn’t piss har off so much. Sha just naadad a littla mora tima to gat ovar tha mistakas ha’d mada.

Tha bridasmaids and groomsman clustarad around tha arch. A naw song startad playing and all tha guasts stood up. My palms startad to swaat.

Finally, two figuras cama into my sight. I hald my braath and lookad at my brida, my baautiful mata, as sha stood at tha and of tha aisla.

Pipar Hill.

Sha wora a pura whita drass. It was straplass and tight fitting around har torso. Low cut in tha front. Tha drass wasn’t ovarly axtravagant, which I likad. It had layarad tiars of laca from tha waist down tha skirt, all tha way to tha ground, and a short laca train off tha back.

Sha had har hair pinnad up with littla sparkling barrattas tuckad into har tandrils.

Pipar’s chaaks wara rosy rad. Sha had har arm loopad through har brothar’s and carriad a lush bouquat of whita liliars, bluaball flowars, and soma purpla lavandar blossoms.

I'd never seen anything more beautiful in my life.

My heart swelled and a massive smile spread across my face. I couldn't control it if I wanted to. It was fate that brought us together.

It had been over nine months since we got any news from Thomas about Miss Mila or Soran. I kept telling myself no news was good news and I had to switch my focus from searching for Miss Mila to handling the day-to-day pack affairs.

Then one of my pack members went to Marno to trade. He brought back word of a Doctor Haathar Way. Of course, I immediately thought of Mila Hathaway and went to Marno to investigate.

Instead of finding them, I found my beautiful Piper, my mate.

Charles stood under the arch. He was there to officiate.

When Piper and Victor reached me, Charles stepped up and spoke. "Who gives this woman away?" he asked.

Victor held his arm out, gently pushing Piper toward me. "I do."

He kissed her cheek quickly and took his spot in the front row.

Piper handed off her bouquet to Ashley and took both my hands.

"Today, we come together to see Piper Hill and Payna Chambers wed in holy matrimony," Charles began.

I squeezed Piper's hands and looked into her gorgeous eyes. She had such an innocent look about her, but it only made her more attractive.

"Do you, Payna Chambers, take Piper to be your lawfully wedded wife and mate before the Moon Goddess from now until death?" Charles asked.

"I do!" I exclaimed, not missing a beat.

Piper bit her lower lip and looked down, her cheeks turning pink. I wanted to pull her to me and hug her!

"And do you, Piper Hill, take Payna to be your lawfully wedded husband and mate before the Moon Goddess from now until death?" he continued.

"I do!" Piper lifted her eyes to mine.

I pulled her to me then and hugged her tightly.

Charles chuckled. "You may kiss the bride."

I kissed her hard on the lips and held her close. Piper responded eagerly and for a long moment, I didn't want to let her go.

Finally, we did pull apart and I nodded at Charles. He would announce the reception and get the guests headed toward where we were gathering.

He stepped up to address the guests. So far, the wedding had gone smoothly.

“Hey!” Just as I was letting out a sigh of relief, one of the guests stood up, pointing at us. “At an event like this, it is customary to present the pack artifact for the Goddess to witness. What is Pomeni’s artifact? I’m sure I’m not the only one that wants to know...”

The person was an Alpha from a mid-size pack not too far south of Pomeni.

I narrowed my eyes at the man. If I still didn’t have an arm around my lovely bride, I would have jumped at him and punched him!

It was a taunt. True that it was customary to present the pack artifact, but it normally was also at the discretion of the Alpha. Some packs would rather keep their artifact a secret and not easily show others.

I frowned, “Alpha Gael, today is my wedding, and I thank you for coming. However, I’d rather keep our pack artifact as a private matter for my packmates.”

Alpha Gael scoffed, “Pomeni pack disappeared 14 years ago and we want to ensure whoever resides here is the legitimate owner of this packland.” He turned to face the crowd and asked, “Am I right? Who else wants to know what Pomeni’s artifact is?”

It was rude and provoking to make such a request, however, in this situation, if the neighboring packs found out we didn’t have an artifact like the other packs, they might not recognize us or respect us as a true pack. We’d have to rely heavily on the king’s protection, and I didn’t like that.

I didn’t trust the king fully... even if he made a blood oath. Our pack would be looked down upon and we might never grow or develop.

“That’s right! What’s Pomeni’s artifact?”

“Show us!”

“Or...do you guys not have one?” Alpha Gael scoffed.

My fists clenched by my sides, but I didn’t have an artifact to present.

What should I do?

Ever since our packland was deserted 14 years ago, other packs had been trying to take it over. It only stayed empty for so many years because it was uninhabitable until its rightful owner’s blood returned and rejuvenated the land.

Now that other packs had seen the abundant resources we possessed, if they didn’t think we were a real pack and were blessed and protected by the Goddess, they might move in and try to claim the land for themselves.

Even if the king would honor his word and provide protection for us in the next thirty or fifty years, what would happen to our next generation? Would the blood oath carry on to the next Alpha King? If not, Pomeni would be left vulnerable and wouldn’t be able to protect itself.

All of the guests were staring at me now. Even Beta Xavier was looking at me with a smug smirk. My head raced with thoughts, but there wasn’t a viable solution.

“So it’s true that you don’t actually have a blessing from the Goddess!” Alpha Gael sneered viciously.

“Heh. Haha...” Laughter came from the back of the crowd. “Who says we don’t have our artifact?”

My eyes widened. I recognized that voice!

[Chapter 787](#)

Whipping in the direction of the sound, I saw a family silhouette approaching us.

“Thomas!” I gasped.

He was standing near the back. In his hand was a dagger with a shimmering blade and jewels in the handle. He held it over his head so that everyone would see clearly.

The design of the knife was elegant and distinct, and even for those who hadn’t seen it before, there was no doubt that the dagger was a powerful Goddess artifact!

Immediately, I thought of the last part of the artifact that Miss Mila had been trying to gather—the missing dagger.

“The Dagger of Mercy!” Thomas announced, and everyone turned their attention from me to him. It was so quiet that I could hear a pin drop.

I couldn’t believe that Thomas, after disappearing for months, suddenly showed up at my wedding, helping me out with the most difficult problem that I was facing. I had a million questions to ask him, but right now, in front of the crowd, I had to keep my composure.

My bride felt my internal turmoil and she gently squeezed my hand, and I squeezed her back.

Thomas walked toward me and Piper, bowed his head and held the dagger out to us.

“Here I present Pomeni’s Goddess artifact, the Dagger of Mercy!” he claimed, “May the Goddess’s mercy be upon us and the newlywed couple. May her blessing be with the Alpha and Luna of Pomeni!”

I nodded to Thomas, but I didn’t take it over, for I knew that it didn’t belong to me. The dagger’s real owner was Miss Mila and I would not take it from her!

As long as other packs believed what Thomas said and believed that Pomeni had an artifact, that was all I needed. Thomas had put on a good enough show and I appreciated that he came with the artifact to help me with my dilemma, but I couldn’t take advantage of Miss Mila’s belongings.

Furthermore, normally, artifacts could only be used by the Alpha blood of the pack. While I was made an alpha by the Dark King, I wasn’t sure whether I could use the dagger even if I tried.

Therefore, I left the artifact untouched.

Alpha Gael stared at me, his eyes narrowed, seemingly displeased with what was happening. Suddenly, he burst into laughter and drew all the attention from the crowd again.

“How ridiculous! As an Alpha, you don’t have the guts to admit that your pack doesn’t own an artifact, not only so, you borrowed one to try to trick us! That’s despicable and such a disgrace to the Goddess!”

I narrowed my eyes. “Alpha Gael, you continuously tried to interrupt my wedding and have gone too far. Pomeni pack doesn’t welcome you any more. Guards, escort Alpha Gael out of the border of our pack!”

“You’re afraid!” he exclaimed.

Before I snapped back, Thomas turned to face Gael, his tone icy cold. “It’s Alpha Payne’s big day and yet it seems that your only goal here is to cause disruption. It’s so easy to accuse someone without consequence, isn’t it? How about this, if Alpha Payne can prove he’s the rightful owner of the artifact, you agree to take five punches from me?”

Alpha Gael’s face fell. He argued back, “Why do I have to agree to your stupid terms?”

“Because if you don’t, you’ll end up getting fifty from me before you leave the packland today. I guarantee you’re not going to like it!” Thomas said, and then he let out a long howl, “Awhooo—!”

His roar carried formidable force, and all the Alphas present, including me, felt its overwhelming oppression. Xavier, who was also a Beta, could barely maintain his stance.

The entire hilltop was dead silent. It was obvious that no one wanted to be Thomas’ enemy.

Thomas relaxed and pulled up an apologetic smile. “Please excuse my loud noise,” he grinned as he held the dagger up to me again. I could read his lips. “Take it,” he said.

Everyone was watching and I really didn’t have a choice. However, his encouraging gaze assured me that everything would work out just fine.

I took a deep breath and reached out to the Dagger of Mercy. My eyes widened as soon as it started to glow upon my touch!

What happened to the dagger? Why did it recognize me and accept me as its master?!

Charles and Enzo were the first to lower their heads and bow at the artifact.

“Praise the Goddess’s mercy,” they whispered.

Like a spell had been broken, the rest of the crowd bowed their heads as I held the dagger up.

I smiled and looked at the rest of the crowd. Everyone in Pomeni was happy but there were several faces that weren’t smiling.

Like Alpha Gael. Besides him, I also noticed that some of the Alphas and Lunas of the neighboring packs didn’t look all that pleased either. They no longer appeared arrogant but... intimidated.

Perhaps, that was the best for our pack for the time being.

“Congratulations Alpha Payne and Luna Piper,” Beta Xavier said, breaking the silence as he started clapping. Some annoyance was hidden in his tone but I wasn’t going to call him out.

Beta Xavier turned to Alpha Gael. “Now you’ve witnessed the artifact has recognized Alpha Payne as its master, on behalf of the royal court, I won’t tolerate any nonsense or further provocative requests.”

He looked slyly at me. I tightened my arm around Piper protectively.

“This is a happy, special day,” Xavier continued. “We shouldn’t delay the celebration any longer. Let the party begin!”

The provoker went white as a sheet and looked around nervously. After this, I knew the neighboring packs wouldn't push or test us at least for quite a while.

Eros immediately made a sign at the band and they started playing the music that was meant for the wedding party and me and Piper to walk down the aisle to the reception area. The tension melted and everyone began heading to the party tent at the bottom of the hill.

The bar opened and drinks were served, which also helped with the intense situation.

As soon as I got a moment, I pulled Thomas aside and hugged him.

"Man, I can't thank you enough!"

Thomas chuckled and capped me on the back. "Of course! Congratulations! And it's the least I could do. Sorry, I was a bit late for the ceremony."

"No, no, it's so good you were able to make it. Really!" Thomas's appearance wasn't the most surprising thing. That dagger had been with Mila the last time I checked. "Now, tell me. Where did you get the dagger... did you find them?"

Thomas opened his mouth and then closed it, shaking his head discreetly. I realized that Beta Xavier came over to join us. Similar to Thomas, I wasn't about to start asking questions about Soren and Mila with him around.

Xavier smiled at Thomas. "I don't think we've met. Alpha Payne, did you forget to introduce such a fine warrior from your pack to me?"

I tapped my thumbs on my thighs. How was I supposed to introduce Thomas? I didn't want to give anything away nor did I have any ideas what had happened after I left the palace with the provisions to get Pomeni stabilized.

"Beta Xavier, I'm not part of Pomeni. Just a good friend," Thomas filled in.

"Huh. Is that so? I wonder how the Dagger of Mercy, the artifact of Pomeni, ended up with you, then?" Xavier asked, arching an eyebrow.

This was the Beta's way of trying to extort information. He made it sound like a friendly, casual conversation, but I didn't think Thomas would get drawn in.

Yet Thomas chuckled. He didn't seem bothered by Xavier's questions. However, instead of answering Xavier directly, he looked at me.

"Alpha Payne, on behalf of my Alpha and Luna." Thomas put his hand to his chest and bowed respectfully. "Please accept the Dagger of Mercy as a wedding gift!"

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"Alpha Payna, on behalf of my Alpha and Luna." Thomas put his hand to his chest and bowed respectfully. "Please accept the Dagger of Mercy as a wedding gift!"

I sucked in a sharp breath, hiding my surprise. Thomas's Alpha and Luna... that was Soren and Mila. There wasn't anyone else it could be!

After almost a year, I finally had news of them.

Thomas nodded and winked at me, guessing the reason for my shocked silence.

He turned to similarly shocked Beta Xavier. "I also have a message to pass along to His Majesty."

Xavier's eyes widened for a moment but then he nodded. "Please, what is your message?"

"The Sheath of Protection was destroyed, the Dagger of Mercy has found its rightful owner and the secret has been buried in the past. As long as His Majesty does not seek her out going forward, there will be no more Mila Hathaway, just an ordinary wife and mother."

Xavier rubbed his chin.

"Hmm..."

My heart hammered in my chest. It was still good to hear that Mila and Soren were alright. They seemed to have come up with a way to get around the Alpha King's desire to kill them.

Suddenly, Xavier smiled. "I'm sure His Majesty will appreciate that message and honor their wishes, as long as she upholds her end."

"Wonderful." Thomas grinned.

"Well, now that all this business has cleared up, I've got to report to the king about the wedding. It was lovely, and I left the King's gifts and well wishes on the gift table."

Xavier nodded and backed away.

"Here," Thomas handed me a letter. "Mila figured out a way to cleanse the artifact's 'memory' by using her blood. Along with the fact that you're the survivor of the original Pomani pack member and

accepted help from her magic, she was able to ‘persuade’ the artifact to recognize you as its new owner. She wrote down how to use the dagger in this letter.”

“But—”

“Don’t ask me how she did it, I have no idea. You know, it’s all magical and all that.” Thomas shrugged and put his hand on my shoulder. “I’ve got to be on my way as well. It was good to see you, Payne. Oh, and congratulations on your beautiful bride.”

There were more questions I wanted to ask him but it wasn’t the time for that. He wasn’t going to tell me the important details at a public event, anyway.

I watched as Thomas left, following him in the crowd until Piper came up to me.

“So, was Heather the person you’ve been looking for?” she murmured softly.

I cupped her face and brushed my thumbs over her cheeks.

“Yes. My heart is a lot lighter now.”

Piper’s brow creased. “Are you going to go look for her? I do miss Heather.”

I shook my head. “If she wanted to be found, she would have sent word before now. She’s well and safe, that’s all I need to know.”

Piper sighed and leaned against me. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her close.

“Are you sure?”

I put my finger under her chin and tipped her head, looking into her lovely eyes. “Piper, could you do me a favor?”

She grinned and bit her lower lip. A look I absolutely adored!

“Anything for you. You know that.”

I kissed her forehead. “Thank you, my love.”

She frowned, confused. “What was it you wanted me to do?”

I took a deep breath and tightened my arms around her. “Miss Hathaway has done a lot for me and this pack. The only way I could repay her is to make Pomeni the most powerful pack in this land, a pack with status that no one will look down on. That way she could be assured that all her effort and sacrifice was worth it. Will you help me make that a reality?”

Piper smiled widely, beaming.

It was the most stunning smile I’d ever seen.

She looped her arms around my neck. “Did you forget that I’m your Luna? It is my responsibility and honor to help grow this pack, Alpha Payne.”

[Chapter 788](#)

Mila

14 Years Later

“Wait a second!” Ciana’s eyes grew wide open as she gasped, “So the real artifact of our pack is not the Feather of Justice?!”

“Correct,” I confirmed.

Ciana jumped down from a low branch of a cherry tree, in her arms were some freshly picked, luscious, red fruit. She dropped the large heart-shaped cherries on the picnic blanket and sat down next to me.

“I need a moment to process this,” she frowned, digesting the new knowledge as she popped a cherry in her mouth. “...Um...um, Mom, you have to pack those. They are so sweet! Especially since they’re hand-picked by your lovely daughter. They will remind you to miss me on your trip!”

Tomorrow was the anniversary for Soren and I. Not our wedding anniversary, but the first time we met. We usually went on a trip just the two of us, but before we were on our way, we always made sure to spend some time with Ciana in our vacation home at the edge of our packland.

“Thanks, honey. I will,” I smiled as Ciana shoved one cherry against my lips.

“Mom, but...why?”

“Huh?”

“The artifact,” she reminded me. Oh, right. She pulled me back on our topic. “Does it mean that our Alvar pack has no artifact at all, and we’ve been lying to our people?!”

“While we will never intentionally hurt others, the reality is there are people who always want more strength, wealth, influence, you name it. Driven by greed, those people aren’t afraid to harm others for their own benefit.”

“So, you and Dad decided to lie to the entire pack?”

“Ciana, think about this. What use is the artifact other than being taken out and shown to the pack during routine ceremonies?”

She thought for a moment, “You’re right. It really doesn’t have much real use, but for a long time, I thought artifacts are there to protect the pack. The more powerful the artifact is, the more protection it would provide. At least that’s what a lot of people believe.”

“Quite the opposite,” I sighed, “in my experience, the more powerful the artifact is, the more trouble it could bring to the pack. Therefore, it’s best for others to know that Alvar pack only has a low-threatening artifact—a feather that could tell whether one is lying or not.”

“If the person is telling the truth, nothing would happen,” Ciana caught on. “If the person is lying, the Goddess would punish them. Liars wouldn’t want to be punished by the Goddess, and therefore, of course, they would never try it out. As for honest people, if they try to use the feather, nothing would happen...Thus no one would really know the sacred artifact in the pack house is just an ordinary feather?!”

“Um, an ordinary turkey feather to be precise,” I pointed out.

Ciana froze for a second then started coughing while bursting out into laughter. “Mom, that’s...that’s... so bizarre! But so funny. I bet it was Daddy’s idea. Hahahaha!”

“It was your uncle Thomas’ idea, actually,” I couldn’t hold back my own laugh as well. “Your father and Thomas decided to do that because they know what makes a pack really powerful is never its artifact, but its people.”

“True...then do we have a real artifact for our pack?” Ciana asked curiously.

“Of course, we do,” I smiled and lifted my hand. On my left ring finger were my wedding band and my engagement ring. The Moonlit Crystal sparkled in the sunlight.

“Your...your ring?” Ciana was confused.

“No, it’s the gem on your mother’s ring.” A familiar voice rang behind me.

“Daddy!” Ciana jumped into my husband’s arms and gave him a tight hug.

“Alright, monkey girl,” he laughed and peeled Ciana off him.

Ciana didn’t forget about our conversation and turned to ask, “Daddy, Mom told me about the Feather of Justice. You guys are tricky!”

“Nah,” Soren laughed, “It’s just called self-preservation.”

“You?” Ciana tilted her head, “If there’s anyone in the world who doesn’t need self-preservation, that’s you, Daddy! Who would want to pick a fight with the most powerful Alpha?”

“Don’t try to butter me up!” Soren gently poked her nose.

Just then, something in the woods flashed, and Ciana’s full attention was immediately drawn by it.

“Wow, what a gorgeous fawn!” Ciana shouted, but by the time I lifted my head to look, all I saw was rustling foliage.

Ciana ran after the baby deer, “Hey, wait!”

Knowing her, she wouldn’t return until she caught up with her wild furry friend.

For good or bad, Ciana didn’t inherit my witch power, and I was glad she didn’t. Greater power most times was a burden, and looking at her smiling face, I knew the Goddess had already given my daughter her blessing—a kind and positive heart.

Unlike Soren and me, Ciana was an open book, happiness or displeasure, people around her could easily tell. She didn’t hide her emotions because there was no need for her to do so. Luckily, with her naturally upbeat personality, it was rare to see her get truly angry at others. She was our sunshine. She was everyone’s sunshine. It was hard to not smile when she was around.

And it wasn’t just people, it was animals too.

I looked again in the distance, Ciana had somehow “persuaded” the fawn to come to her, and it was eating the snacks she brought for it out of the palm of her hand. Not only that, a mixture of animals started to gather, bowing to her feet...

I gaped, amazed by my daughter’s ability to get along with animals. I knew that as she grew up, she’d have to deal with people more than animals, and it wouldn’t always be sunshine.

As the Alpha’s daughter, she was groomed to lead a pack, and thus she needed to understand there are lies and conspiracies, and she needed to be able to see through them and protect herself and her people from them. For example, today’s topic was all about the artifacts.

I sighed. If possible, I didn’t want to have to teach Ciana about the dark side of people, but I was a bit worried that my precious child would get hurt someday. Especially since Soren and I traveled away for a couple of months every year.

Ciana gave us a big smile and waved at us before she went deeper into the woods.

“Why are you sighing?” Soren’s arm wrapped around my shoulder.

I smiled at my mate. “I was just thinking about Ciana. Our sweet girl is growing up. She is becoming more independent, and soon she’ll find her mate... Sometimes I wish I could just keep her in a box, and she would always be my baby girl.”

“She is always going to be our baby girl!” Soren insisted.

I nodded. “I guess you’re right. By the way, you’re here quite early today. I thought you had quite a lot to wrap up before we leave tomorrow.”

“Well, I have two pieces of news. One good, one bad. The bad news is that I don’t think we should leave our packland for the time being.”

I frowned. “What happened?”

Soren sighed and averted his gaze. “The crown prince Justin and his mother, queen Regina were sentenced to death by the king today. A lot of people related to them were also killed. More details to come, but I suspect that the whole country would be unsettled for a little bit, including our own pack.”

I froze. Not that I cared about the royal family too much, it was just that I remembered seeing Justin as a teenager when I was at the palace. Years had passed, the prince would be in his thirties. If the king left him alone for so long, why all of a sudden had he decided to kill him?

Even back then, I wondered what would become of him as the only heir that wasn’t truly related to the Alpha King... or the person that swapped bodies with him.

“It was said that Justin was trying to overthrow the king,” Soren explained.

“But he was the crown prince, sooner or later, the throne would be his. Logically, there was no need for him to do that.”

“Unless he found out that the man on the throne wasn’t his real father. Or if the king didn’t want the sovereignty to go to Justin anymore. Whatever the reason, it already happened.”

I nodded again. "In that case, you're right, let's postpone our trip."

Soren pulled me close. "Mila, I'm sorry that we can't go. But believe me, we still have great reasons to celebrate tomorrow."

I tilted my head and chuckled. "Why did you apologize? It's not your fault. I'm with my family, nothing is better than that. So, I've learned the bad news, what's the good news?"

Soren's expression lit up and he said, "I've been trying to find the right opportunity to tell you... Recently, I remembered something from a long time ago... and—"

"Mom, Daddy!" Just then, we heard Ciana's footsteps running towards us.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"Someone needs help!" she urged.

[Chapter 789](#)

Ciana led us to a woman that was in distress. I could tell from the material of clothes and jewelry that she came from a wealthy background.

She was clutching her stomach and I could feel that something was wrong. I could sense it straight through my bones. It was some kind of dark magic. That's why I could feel it so strongly.

"Soren, we need to get her inside. She's been cursed or something," I said quickly.

Soren scooped the woman into his strong arms and moved her into our vacation home.

He got her settled on a bed and left the young lady to my care. It took a couple of hours to fully examine her and the extent of her injuries and clean up her wounds.

Ciana stood by and watched, which was another good lesson for her.

"Mom, what's this?" Ciana found a backpack the woman had been carrying and was going through her belongings. It was the only way to learn more about her since she'd passed out when Soren picked her up.

I glanced over at Ciana and what she was holding. It was a map...

My eyes widened. It was the map of the dungeon under the royal palace!

Soren had returned to my side and also recognized where the map was showing. He glanced at me with a worried look. If this young woman was from the palace, would she have anything to do with Prince Justin or Queen Regina?

"How's she doing?" Ciana asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

"Her external wounds seemed severe, but in reality, they aren't difficult to treat. However..." I wasn't sure about the curse, so I held back the information. As I spoke, I used my magic, scanning over her to see if there was anything I'd missed, and to my surprise, she was pregnant!

"Oh..." I gasped and shook my head. If she was pregnant and cursed, what would happen to the baby?

However, I didn't have time to think further on that question, because she started to wake up.

As soon as she opened her eyes and saw us, her eyes immediately became alert and wary. "Give that back to me!" the young woman snapped at Ciana.

Soren handed the map over, and Ciana jumped in to apologize, "Sorry, we didn't mean to pry. It fell out and I was just curious. I'm Ciana and these are my parents. You're in our house. Are you feeling better?"

Ciana just had the power to put people at ease and make them like her. The woman in the bed softened up after seeing Ciana's smile.

"I'm sorry I snapped. Thank you for saving me... I just... don't always know who to trust."

"Who are you?" I asked.

The woman shook her head and looked down. "Please, I just need to get to Saboreef as quickly as possible. Can you tell me the way?"

"You'll need to take a boat down the river. But please, rest for a few days and regain your strength. We won't pry, but you should take care of yourself, for the sake of your baby," I urged, touching her shoulder.

The woman blinked at me, surprised. She shook her head and recovered quickly. She didn't trust us, which I couldn't blame her for.

I knew what it was like to not want to answer questions, so I wouldn't push if it meant keeping her and her baby healthy.

"I'll throw a meal together for us all. You should eat something hearty to help regain your strength," Soren suggested and avoided any further questions regarding her identity.

He and Ciana went downstairs to prepare dinner. I stayed with the strange woman and bandaged her up until the two of them reappeared with the mouthwatering grilled chicken with mixed green and mashed potatoes.

Soren put a plate on her lap, and she ate hungrily and quietly.

The meal was silent from start to finish.

"I should get going," the woman said when Soren cleared our plates away.

"I don't think that is wise. You'd be leaving against my recommendation. I do have experience as a doctor."

She shook her head. "I appreciate your help, but the longer I stay here, the more dangerous it would be for me and my child, and for you."

On her face, I saw a familiar determination, which I'd seen many times before—on my own face. I sighed. Her mind had been made up and I knew very well that she wouldn't change her mind.

Ciana's eyes shifted between me and her. As soon as she could tell I'd given up trying to persuade the young woman to stay, she offered. "If you have to leave, then at least let me help you get to the border of our packland and find you a boat."

"Ciana, it's almost midnight!" I frowned.

"Mom, I'll be fine. I'll stay on the packland. I spent nights in the woods quite often as you know. No biggie."

"But—"

Soren grabbed my arm and whispered in my ear, "She is the Alpha's daughter and she's well trained. We've got to let go a little bit and let her grow up. If that woman is who we think she is, there will be no reason for her to harm Ciana. Our daughter will be fine, trust me."

I sighed heavily. He was right and I knew it. "You're right."

Ciana had already led the woman out of the door and waved back at us. "Don't wait for me, go to sleep!"

"Be careful, okay?" Soren called out the door.

We stood in the doorway, waving at them.

"You got it." Ciana glanced over her shoulder at us.

Soren turned to me. I tried to hide my concern but I didn't do a very good job. "Honey, we're not going anywhere. She'll be back in no time. Ah, it's past midnight. Do you want to go to bed?"

I shook my head.

Soren chuckled, "I figured that's the case. Now, remember the second piece of news I wanted to tell you?"

"You've told me the bad news. I could use some good news."

"Well, then, take a seat, please." He motioned to the kitchen chair.

"Why all this song and dance?"

Soren put a little gift box in my hands. "Here, open it."

"Didn't we agree not to get each other anniversary gifts since we've got everything we both ever needed and wanted?" I asked, smiling.

"It's not an anniversary gift."

I arched an eyebrow and tore the box open, too curious to argue anymore. Inside, sitting on a silk pillow, was a tuft of... golden fur?

Soren took my hand and explained, "Years ago, during a huge sandstorm, a beautiful girl showed up in my room, and ended up in my arms. It was the most unforgettable night I'd ever had..."

My face started to burn. I had such a vague recollection of that night, but over the years, as my witch power awakened and with the help of the Moonlit Crystal, I sometimes got bits and pieces of scattered memories back. It always embarrassed me to remember how... needy I was that night.

"I had quite a bit of alcohol that evening and I thought I might have blacked out for a short period. That was until I found this in the pocket of my old jacket," he continued.

My eyes shot open wide. "You mean... this is my fur?!"

"It turns out that I didn't black out. Instead, it was my wolf who took over because he found his beautiful mate—a golden brown wolf who was coated in the softest, silkiest, most beautiful fur."

I touched the silky fur and shook my head. This seemed so impossible.

"The irrepressible desire to shift for the very first time when you turn 21 along with the newly found mate call that night broke through the Blackfire poison temporarily... Mila, the night we met 15 years ago was your 21st birthday!"

I couldn't breathe. We were never able to celebrate my birthday because we had no idea when it was. Overwhelmed with emotion, I almost burst into tears.

"Mila, don't cry... sorry that I didn't remember this until recently..."

"No," I gasped, shaking my head. "I'm just... just so happy. I had always known I was lucky to have you... I just had no idea that the Goddess sent the most wonderful man to me as my 21st birthday gift!"

Soren lifted my chin and told me, "The Goddess indeed spoiled us."

He leaned in and kissed me. I wrapped my arms around him and kissed him back, hugging him and kissing him like I couldn't get enough!

"Mom and Dad, I'm bac—well, I'm not back. I didn't see anything... You guys continue. Oh, and, happy anniversary!"

My face burned as I pulled away from Soren. I wanted to call Ciana back.

Soren pulled me into his arms and kissed me again. "Hey, our girl is smart enough to understand that her parents need some couple time."

"I—"

Soren kissed me again, swallowing my protest. He pushed his tongue between my lips and pressed it to mine. I battled him for dominance but I already knew that I'd always surrender to him.

Out of breath, desire stirred in my core. Soren scooped me into his arms and carried me into the master bedroom. He placed me on the soft mattress.

"Happy birthday and happy anniversary, my love."

He kissed my lips, then along my jawline, and down my neck.

I moaned, my core tightening and my legs clenching.

“And now,” Soren smirked, “Tell me what you want for your birthday?”

I gasped, lost in his sensual, powerful gaze, filled with love and desire. I blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

“You.”

Soren chuckled as he hovered over me. “I thought so...”

The night would be long, and it had just begun.

[Chapter 790](#)

Breeder Season 6 – Rejected by the Dark Lord

Eliza

I blinked into light so bright it was impossible to clear my vision. My head was throbbing, and I reached back to feel along the base of my skull where dried blood was caked into my thick, dark brown curls. Every movement of my body sent a sharp ache shooting down my spine. The slightest touch of the fabric of the dress I’d been made to wear set my skin on fire. Nausea roiled in my stomach, but I found it impossible to swallow.

Everything was too bright, too loud, too much.

The clink of coins... the smell of sour, bitter ale... low, grisly voices dripping with violence and hunger—that was all I could hear, and as my eyes began to adjust to the lights about my head, all I could see was the silhouette of the crowd.

Men huddled around bar tables. Women walked between them, dropping pitchers of ale so carelessly in front of them that foam spilled over the rim of the glass. It smelled like smoke and mildew, and my stomach lurched as another chill ran down my spine. Where was I? How had things gone so awry?

I could barely turn my neck without pain, but a movement a few feet from where I stood caught my eye. Another woman stood nearby, her body bathed in dusty, amber light.

“Three healthy sons,” came a male voice, a voice I immediately recognized.

It belonged to the same man who had given me the injury on the back of my head. I closed my eyes, flinching away as he moved out from behind me, his voice booming over the muffled chatter enveloping the room.

“A professional, you could say.”

A professional what, exactly? I painfully turned my head to look at the woman through my lashes, noticing her expressionless face. Murmurs erupted through the crowd as the man made her do a twirl, showing her off. Her dress didn’t leave much to the imagination, but neither did mine.

I looked down at the scrap of fabric that barely covered my body, the strips of white, thin cotton that hung loosely from my shoulders and fell over my breasts. Under this light, every inch of me was exposed to the hungry gazes in the crowd.

“The bidding starts at twenty—”

Bidding?

Noise fanned out over the crowd before the man could finish. People yelled. Some argued. I turned to the woman and noticed her eyes shining with nervous pride.

I'd been so distracted by the scene unfolding before me that I hadn't noticed my captor had moved behind me once more until one of his hands tangled in my hair, pulling roughly so I was forced to tilt my chin toward the ceiling, blinded by the light once again. His other hand clasped my wrists together behind my back and pulled my arms down so I had to bend back toward him, my breasts raised and on full display.

I yelped in pain and surprise as he forced me to walk forward to the very edge of the stage, his fingernails digging into my skin.

“Virginal,” he hissed loud enough to send an echo across the now quiet room.

Tears welled in my eyes as I panted, my arms trembling with the strain of having them held so violently behind my back.

“Untouched. You could get three, maybe four pups out of her before she's worthless.”

What?

My heart was beating so rapidly in my chest that I found it hard to catch my breath. Virginal? Three or four pups before I was worthless? Rage ripped through my fear as I took a shuttering breath. I'd graduated two years early from the University of Mirage's prestigious history program with a dual major in archeology, for Goddess' sake. How the hell how I ended up here, being measured by nothing more than my ability to bear a child?

‘Take a deep breath, Eliza,’ I told myself. ‘You're so much stronger than this.’ But when I did, it was nothing but ripe, bitter air.

A murmur ran through the room as the patrons of whatever seedy tavern I was in considered me, juggling their coins in their hands. My captor chuckled low in his throat as he started to bunch the fabric of the flimsy white gown over my thighs, revealing the paleness of the skin there. I felt tears roll down my cheeks, despite my will to keep my eyes from watering. He was hurting me.

“What's the starting bid?” someone shouted from the crowd, which was followed by shouts of agreement.

My captor let my dress drop back to my knees, releasing his tight hold on my hair. “One hundred,” he grinned, and if I had the strength to look up and peer into his eyes, I knew I would have seen greed there. But I had no desire to see this man's face. I didn't want to remember him at all.

I kept my eyes downcast on my bare feet, curling my toes against the dry wood of the stage as the shouts echoed from the crowd, numbers reflecting my supposed worth being flung in a chaotic fashion, showering me with shame.

But I swallowed back my fear enough to peer through the loose strands of curls that were falling over my face, long enough to see a tall, golden-haired man rise from his seat and slam a bag of coins down on his table, which effectively silenced the room.

“One thousand,” he said, his voice echoing through the tavern.

Every fine, downy hair on my body stood on end as the hush reached the stage, sending a chill up my spine.

I knew of breeders. It hadn't been so long ago that a great aunt had been offered up as such, sold by her own father. But she hadn't been sold at an auction, no. This was... archaic, primitive... disgusting and depraved.

I blinked through tears as I slowly raised my head to look into the eyes of the man who'd bid a small fortune on my body. I couldn't see his face through the smoke-filled darkness, but his voice was strong, hearty, dripping with both honey and venom.

I knew without a doubt that this man was an Alpha. He'd either be my savior, or my demise.

But, what did I know? It was my own miscalculation and romantic notions of adventure that had put me in this mess. This place, this realm...it wasn't my own.

I was entirely in over my head.

A thundering sounded in the crowd, and then I was roughly pulled from the stage and shoved down a short flight of stairs. I cried out as I fell to the bottom, my knees scraping against the uneven and cracked stone pavers lining a narrow, ill-lit hallway.

I'd just been bought. I'd been sold as a breeder.

Before I could come to terms with what had happened, I was shoved down the hallway and into a dark room, the door slamming shut and locking behind me.

Moonlight crept through the gaps in the boards covering a single window that was my only source of light. I paced, wringing my hands as I deliberated my next move.

Escape was impossible. I'd already tried the door. My nails were cracked and bleeding from trying to loosen the wooden boards covering the window. I was resigned to throwing myself on whoever came through the door next, then bolting, running as long and as fast as I could to any kind of safety I could find.

But I was hurt. I was dressed in nothing but a thin, skimpy white dress. If I had escaped, I would have died of exposure before I was caught.

This wasn't how I thought things would go. My once-in-a-lifetime journey had ended in peril, and I could only blame myself. I cursed under my breath, running my hands over my face as I rested my back against the wall, letting myself crumble, but only for a second.

There was a chance the man who'd bought me would be kind and loving, right? It had worked out that way for others, I was sure. I knew that for a fact. But something about his voice when he gave his final, astonishing bid had my teeth on edge, my skin crawling with discomfort.

"You need to get out of here," I breathed, reaching deep into my mind to try to connect with anyone from my pack, from my family, who might be within range to pick up my desperate attempt to mind-link.

It was no use. I was not home anymore.

No, I was in the Dark Realm.

I was thousands of miles from safety.

My head was pounding as I dropped to my knees and pressed my forehead into the floor. I was freezing, my skin pebbled and pale in the soft moonlight drifting through the boards on the window.

"Goddess," I breathed, "Please...."

The door swung open and I lifted my head, staring at the shadowed figure taking up the doorway.

"Get her up," he said sternly, and I recognized the voice as the man who had bought me.

I flinched away, pressing myself into the cold stone wall as two men stepped forward and tried to roughly drag me toward the door and to the man who lingered just across the threshold.

But then there was an echoing thump on the other end of the room. It was the window. Something was throwing itself onto the window with enough force to shatter the glass and cause the boards to groan against its pressure.

The men holding my arms halted their progress toward the door, letting me go long enough for me to drop back to my knees and crawl away. One of them grabbed my ankle and pulled me across the floor, my fingernails digging into the stone as I yelled in frustration.

I screamed in earnest as the boards covering the window shattered into shards of dried wood and showered me in splinters and broken glass. I covered my neck as the men behind me stuttered and scrambled out of the room, yelling profanities as they pushed and shoved into the hallway.

A rush of frigid air wafted over me. I turned my head enough to gaze over my arm at the now open window, just as wolves began to leap into the room, their jaws snapping and teeth bared.

Well, this was how I would die. I was sure of it. It felt like a waste, if I was being honest. I'd made it this far on what I thought was going to be a journey of a lifetime, only to die in a frigid room full of wolves. My ill-fated adventure into the unknown would end on a tragic note.

There was a scuffle happening in the hallway. Men had just started coming through the window, trailing behind the wolves.

I just laid there, peering over my arm at the boots that passed by, no one giving me a passing glance. The men, those who were not in their human forms, were wearing masks that looked as though they

were made of scraps of leather and dried... skin. I shivered involuntarily as another couple of men passed me, their eyes shining like gems behind the grotesque masks covering their faces.

But then the air left my lungs in a high-pitched scream as I was lifted up onto my feet, someone's arms coming around me and holding me still against their chest. His warmth penetrated my nearly frozen skin, his roughly calloused hands gripping me securely to his body as he lifted me off my feet and moved me toward the window as though I weighed nothing.

"Stop!" I pleaded.

His mask brushed against my cheek as he adjusted his hold on me so he carried me like an infant, clutching me against his chest.

"Let me go!"

I bucked against him, going as far as biting him on the shoulder hard enough to draw blood. He hissed out his breath, fixing me with a steely glare.

The mask distorted his face. I knew nothing of his physical features other than the fact that he was large, muscled, and incredibly strong. Blood covered his hands. His knuckles were split open and his shirt was torn so badly it was hanging off of him.

I punched him in the chest, crying out in pain. It was like punching a brick wall. I felt his laugh, his mask distorting the sound.

"We're going to run," he said as he held me close and ducked through the window.

I looked up into his eyes as I clawed his neck with what was left of my fingernails.

But what I saw beyond the mask gave me pause and sent a shiver of recognition up my spine.

His eyes were black, and not from shadow or the darkness that consumed us outside of the tavern. His irises were black, or at least a dark gray. But it was the crimson and amber flakes that made my body go rigid and caused my heart to thunder in my chest.

"Tell me your name," he commanded.

"Eliza," I whispered, unable to stop myself from telling the truth.

"Trust me, Eliza," he replied, then he ran off with me into the night.