

Kings Breeder 981

[Chapter 981: Revolving Door](#)

Sasha

"Come on, now. You must know I don't usually come and recruit young interns personally," Stone Hamline said, leaning in the doorframe of Lucas's house.

I was glad Lucas was gone, for Stone's sake. "I really would like to work for you," I replied honestly. It would be a wonderful opportunity, after all. "But I have to go visit my mother in the Winter Forest."

"The Light Realm?" Stone's eyebrows nearly hit his hairline. "That's quite a journey. Is she sick?"

"Well...." I pushed my hair behind my ear. "No...."

Stone clucked his tongue. "Such a shame. I hope you're not leaving us because that Lucas Black has you all twisted up. Honestly, not every Royal Engineer is like him."

I frowned at Stone. "No, I would never leave because of Lucas."

"Again with the Lucas." Stone grinned at me.

I shifted from foot to foot, flustered by his attention. "Sorry. Mr. Black."

"Don't worry about it. I'm just teasing. Childhood friends should be able to call each other by their first names," Stone said.

"Well, I suppose... anyway, it's not because of Luca—Mr. Black that I'm visiting his mother—" I stuttered.

"Ooo, visiting HIS mother now, too. Is there a happy announcement in your future?" Stone teased.

I must have gone redder than an apple because Stone's smile faded. "Oh dear, Miss Wentley, I would caution you against someone like that. He will absolutely ruin your career."

"It's... not...." I pushed my hair behind my ear again.

"This is about that temple at the northern library, the one the Lycaons wanted you to bury—and lo and behold you did," Stone cut in.

I took a step back into the house. "I just remembered I have an appointment. I have to say goodbye, Mr. Hamline. And thank you for your generous offer. I hope we'll both be in a position for me to take you up on it when I return."

"What was it?" he asked eagerly, putting his foot in the door when I tried to close it. "What did you find? It was an ancient temple of the White Queens—say those who were there—with hundreds of bodies. But there was something else, something that's made all of you cagey and erratic. Something... valuable?"

"Mr. Hamline, I'm afraid I can't discuss—" I said sharply.

Someone came up behind me and kicked Stone's foot out of the door. "Miss Wentley told you to get lost. Now get lost before I track down Lucas Black and tell him you were harassing his guest at his house."

Stone had the sense of self-preservation to pale at that. He turned to me and bowed. "I am sorry for disturbing you, Miss Wentley. It is my hope that you will be able to work with me when you return as well."

He turned and walked back to his expensive car, the kind men got when they were lacking in... other areas.

Lucas was never going to need that kind of car.

"You just seem to have a gift for attracting the bottom-feeders." Brady sighed as I turned around.

"He's not a bottom feeder. He's a well-respected Royal Engineer," I said. "Though, thanks for the help. I didn't know what to say to him."

"Anytime." Brady stepped back so I could get back into the house. "Hate for Lucas to go to prison over a creep like that, anyway, especially when things in his life are just getting interesting."

"Interesting?" I echoed.

"You. The orb. You," Brady said with a shrug.

I followed him into the kitchen, still marveling that we lived in a world where vampires could now survive on snack cakes. "What about me?"

"Please," Brady replied, puncturing a snack cake bag with his fangs. "It's obvious. He wants you, two-and-a-half wolf pups, and a white picket fence around this place for all of you."

"Oh, that's not—" I flushed bright red.

"It's very true," Brady said before I could even finish my sentence. "He's had a thing for you since we were all running around the Winter Forest together."

I snorted. "Alright, that one you're never going to make me believe. He was a bully and a complete asshole to me."

Brady was looking at my sternum, where I was playing with Lucas's gift. It had become even more precious to me than the bracelet he'd broken. "Well, he's neither of those things now, is he?"

"No," I mumbled.

"Besides, he was only a bully because he wanted to toughen you up. Lucas knew you were different, and he was always worried something was going to happen to you," Brady went on.

I looked at Brady askance. "Really. Something worse than him?"

"MUCH worse," Brady said. "You had no idea how tough the world could be, all sheltered by your mother and bookish and—"

"The worst thing that happened to me growing up was him," I grunted, taking the plastic bag from Brady so he'd stop playing with it and throwing it in the trash.

"Yeah. Lucky you," Brady said.

I turned and frowned at Brady. "Are you going to tell me Lucas had some kind of terrible thing happen to him while he was growing up that I didn't know about, and he wanted to toughen me up so it didn't happen to me?"

"Not exactly." Brady licked frosting off his lips. "He got his act together later. Though he still had terrible taste in women until... well... you."

"That's... good? Flattering?"

"Besides, you're not going to try to tell me nothing bad happened to you growing up. I can smell tragedy on you a mile away," Brady informed me. "It's a wonder Lucas doesn't try to pry it out of you."

I twirled the emerald between my fingers. "He's... feeling a bit guilty."

"About the bracelet," Brady guessed.

"Ugh. Why do I even bother having an independent thought? EVERYONE can read my mind!" I complained.

Brady grinned. "You're very expressive when you're angry."

I stabbed a finger in his direction. "I swear if that leads into some smartass remark about make-up s*x, I am going to stake you."

"Why would I have to say anything? You're the one putting it out in the open," Brady laughed.

"Shut up. Hand me a snack," I grumbled, and Brady tossed me a pack of cookies.

"Seriously, though, Lucas said that bracelet was supposed to protect you from your father's pack...?" Brady said.

I pushed my hair behind my ear. "My... sperm donor... was Lycennian... and, well, if I had any power to speak of, my mother was afraid they'd come for me. She's very superstitious, and had this idea that the bracelet would protect me from that happening. But then Lucas crushed it, and Mom went all haywire...."

Brady's gaze sharpened. "What happened?"

I ran my tongue over my teeth. "Nothing. It's not important."

"I think it is." But Brady shrugged. "I think it's important you tell Lucas about it."

"He knows the highlights," I said.

"Doubt it. But, anyway, Lucas really was trying to look out for you," Brady explained.

"Funny way of showing it." I relented. "He's not that way anymore, I know that. And we were kids."

Brady patted me on the shoulder. "I'm glad to hear you say that. I'd hate it if there was this childhood bitterness swirling between you along with everything else."

"Everything else?" I asked.

"The orb, the old black witch, danger and mayhem around every corner...." Brady began ticking things off on his fingers.

"The question of whether or not we're mates," a new voice chimed in.

I turned to see Lucas standing behind me and jumped. "When did you get here?!"

"Figured, as it's my house, I can come and go as I please," Lucas chuckled. He wrapped his arms around me from behind.

Even though we were still arguing with each other, I found myself leaning back into his embrace. "You want us to be."

"You don't?" Lucas asked, giving me a puppy-dog look.

"Well... that's not... here or there...." I said primly.

Brady burst out laughing. "Oh, you two are fun. By the way, Stone Hamline was here, sniffing around."

Lucas, who had been nuzzling my hair, looked up suddenly. "Pardon?"

"I'm not sure if he was more interested in your girl or what we might have found at the northern library site," Brady said. "But he was sure laying it on thick."

I shuddered, feeling slimy again.

"He was, was he?" Lucas's voice was all growly and sexy and I felt it in places I would never mention to Brady. Lucas's arms tightened possessively around me. "The artifact, he's welcome to ask about."

"Kind of figured you wouldn't want him asking about even that," Brady said. "But I catch your point. I'm sure Sasha does, too."

I turned my face up so my cheek rubbed against the stubble of Lucas's jaw. "Where did you go today?"

"I was sending messages ahead to let New Dianny know we were coming," Lucas replied. He licked the spot I knew he'd given me a hickey on purpose and I could have died of embarrassment in front of Brady.

"Oh, would you listen to that? I think I hear Phoebe calling me...." Brady whistled, downing what was left of his Ding-Dong in one bite and hurrying out of the kitchen. "Lucas, my man, not in the kitchen though, okay? We eat here."

I groaned and covered my face with my hands. "We weren't going to do it in the kitchen. That's not where this was heading."

"Speak for yourself," Lucas rumbled, nipping the hickey on my neck. His hands rubbed over my hips, then over the tops of my thighs, leaving a burning trail beneath my jeans.

"We are not doing it in the kitchen," I told him firmly.

"Mhm," Lucas agreed. But he made no move to go anywhere else, just to pop the buttons on my sweater and push his hand inside my bra.

"Lucas!" I gasped.

"I'll take you to the bedroom right now if you agree we are going to have s*x," Lucas murmured against the back of my neck. "Or I'm taking you quick over the table. Your choice."

I shivered again, this time with anticipation. If Brady and Phoebe weren't also living here, I wouldn't have stopped him from having a quickie over the table. But, as it stood, I threaded my fingers through his, pulling his hand out of my bra. "Upstairs," I panted. "You can have me... any way you want me... but we're doing it upstairs."

Lucas nodded and actually flung me over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. I squealed as he brought me to his bedroom, slapping me on the ass on the way up the stairs.

"You just never want me to walk again so I CAN'T go get the orb," I muttered, reaching down to slap his ass back.

"Curses, you've foiled my evil plan," Lucas chuckled. He dropped me gently on his bed and started pulling his shirt off.

I knelt up and unbuttoned his pants. "I knew it."

"Enough of orb talk," Lucas growled, taking my sweater off and stalking me onto my back. "s*x now. Orb talk later. Well, certain orbs." He palmed my breasts.

I shrieked with laughter.

It was dark, and I was sprawled across Lucas like he was a bearskin rug. That's when I heard the sound again.

"Lucas...?" I murmured, but then his hand went over my mouth and anything else I might have asked ended in a squeak.

"Shh." Lucas gently pushed me off him and sat up, c*****g his head.

I sat up as well, looking around in the moonlit darkness. However, the sound was not coming from inside the house. It was coming from outside. A low growl reached my ears, and I shivered despite the warmth of the room.

"I swear, if that old hag is back," Lucas growled, throwing the covers off him and standing up, stark naked. In contrast, he pulled the covers all the way up to my chin and pressed my hands on the edge to hold them there.

"I'll be right back," Lucas whispered. "You stay here." He kissed my forehead, then he disappeared from the room.

[Chapter 982: Maturity](#)

Sasha

I sat alone in the dark for what felt like hours, though it was probably less than fifteen minutes. Then the light came on in the bedroom and Phoebe popped her head in, wearing lingerie probably meant for Brady's eyes only.

But then I was sitting under the covers completely naked, so I wasn't one to say anything. "Is everything okay?" I asked softly.

Phoebe shook her head and motioned for me to follow her.

My blood ran cold. Had something happened to Lucas? I rolled out of bed and pulled on Lucas's shirt, then quickly followed Phoebe.

We tiptoed down the stairs, where Lucas, in wolf form, was pacing and growling on the front landing.

Brady had a splash of blood on his chin, his fangs still elongated. He was sporting a pair of boxers, thankfully.

"They got away," Brady said as Phoebe went to stand next to him.

"But they're gone?" Phoebe asked in a small voice.

"Yes." Brady put an arm around her and kissed her temple. "They're gone."

"Who? Who's gone?" I asked. "Did they take the orb?"

"They didn't get that far," Brady said. "By the look of things, they didn't even know exactly what they were looking for."

There were popping sounds, and then Lucas was standing there, naked, once more. He grabbed an overturned throw pillow for modesty, holding it in front of him.

"It couldn't have been the priestess if they didn't know what they were looking for," I mused. "And she already told me she was quite happy with what I was doing, so there would have been no reason—"

"f**k that orb. I swear to the Goddess...." Lucas snarled. "What is this, a youth hostel? We've got people coming and going at all hours."

"We're heading to the docks in a couple of hours," Brady reminded him. "We're leaving Egoren. When we get to New Dianny, we'll be a lot safer."

Phoebe looked at the door, then looked again. "What is this...?"

A scrap of paper was caught in the hinge of the door.

Lucas walked over and snatched it. "Fuck."

I went over to him, touching his arm. "Lucas?"

With an angry huff, he showed us the paper.

'Tell the dream dancer she has something that doesn't belong to her, and we are going to get it back.'

Lucas

The wind whipped through Brady's hair, blowing the longish locks into his face and mouth. He grimaced, pulling hair out of his mouth for the hundredth time since we'd boarded the ship.

"You could just cut it shorter," I said, gesturing to my own hair, cut short at the sides and longer on top, but still not nearly long enough for the waves to get in my mouth.

"Phoebe likes it," Brady grumbled, but he smiled slightly when he said her name.

The man was completely lost... or found, depending on how you looked at the situation.

"Sasha still have you locked out of the state room?" Brady asked as we leaned on the railing, watching the water rise and fall against the wood of the ship.

I grunted. "I merely SUGGESTED we toss the orb in the sea. SUGGESTED."

"Well, between that, outside threats, emotional confusion, and the fact you're treating her like a two-year-old with a dangerous toy... I think I'd probably need my space, too," Brady said.

"I'm not treating her like a two-year-old," I protested.

"You're treating her like a two-year-old," Brady repeated. "You know you're treating her like a two-year-old. That's why you're standing here with me and not banging down the stateroom door to have rocking make-up sex."

I groaned. "I just want her to be safe. That orb is not safe."

"And it's her choice whether she wants to work with it or not," Brady said. "You know that."

"I don't know that. I don't think she's being smart," I replied.

"You can tell her that, but you have to stop acting like her father and forbidding her to do things," Brady told me.

I frowned at the sea. "I don't know what else to do."

"You love her. I understand," Brady said. "I'd be the same way about Phoebe. Probably. But I also don't want to have to sleep with one eye open, and I don't want her tossing me overboard, either."

"Phoebe would never toss you overboard," I scoffed.

"I'm surprised Sasha hasn't tossed you," Brady chuckled.

I rubbed the back of my neck. "Fine. Fair. True."

"And I notice you didn't say anything about me saying you love her, so I'm assuming you've stopped fighting that, too," Brady said.

"What's there to fight? She's either my mate or she's not," I murmured.

"And?" Brady prodded.

"And what?" I asked.

"Why are you so glum about it? She's your mate for sure," Brady said. "A blind man could see that."

I picked at a splinter on the ship's railing. "I don't know that she loves me back. She was... well... a virgin. She might just be enjoying the new experiences."

That turd Brady punched me so hard in the arm I stumbled sideways. "Goddess, you're an i***t," he snorted.

"What?" I asked peevishly, rubbing my arm. "She hasn't said anything...."

"When's she supposed to say something? You're always crawling down her throat with some new command or forbidding her to do stuff," Brady said. "You interrupt her all the time. Yes, I've noticed. Okay, Phoebe noticed, but then I noticed, too. She just wants to tell you what she thinks, but you aren't listening. So why would she tell you how she feels?"

"You've definitely been talking to Phoebe. I'm about five seconds away from tearing up your man card," I muttered.

Brady gave me a toothy grin. "You can try. But, seriously, you've got to get your head out of your ass, or no matter how much she likes you, no matter how much she loves you, she's not going to accept you as her mate. Sasha Wentley is too independent to put up with your s**t for all eternity."

I thought of Sasha rejecting me when she turned twenty-one and the idea made me sick. And panicky.

"Maybe I should go talk to her."

"Talk WITH her. WITH. You've been doing a lot of talking TO her," Brady corrected me.

"Talk WITH her," I agreed with a grunt. I gave Brady a powerful punch in the arm before stepping out of range.

"Ow! What was that for?!" Brady complained, rubbing his own arm.

"Payback." I strode off quickly before we got into a punching war. Fun as that would have been, I had a Sasha Wentley to... deal with.

The door to the stateroom was still closed when I got there, and I sighed, wondering if I was going to have to sleep on the galley floor as a wolf again. I knocked, and there was no answer.

"Sasha?" I asked. I tried the knob and was surprised how easily the lock broke in my hand. I was going to have to talk to the captain about safety, but just this once, it was a gift from the Goddess.

The room was dim as I stepped inside, the windows covered with curtains and the room lit by a single candle. My eyes adjusted quickly, but I almost immediately wished they hadn't.

Sasha was on the bed... with the orb.

I bit back a snarl of anger. How had she even found it? I thought I'd hidden it VERY well.

Obviously not well enough.

"Sasha," I sighed, going over to the bed. Her eyes were unfocused and she was clearly "elsewhere," using the power of the orb to see something I could not.

She didn't seem to be in any distress, so I simply sat beside her, looking at the glowing, pulsing, now-pink pain in my ass.

"Look," I said, pretty sure Sasha couldn't hear me. "I'm sorry for treating you like a child, and for being an overbearing asshole. But you're scaring me to death. I love you, Sasha. I love you and I don't want you to get hurt. And I don't want to live a day without you—not even one day. I can't deal with a world where you don't exist."

Of course, Sasha didn't answer, and I sighed, dropping my chin on her shoulder.

"You're the bravest person I know, Sasha Wentley. I would be blessed and honored if you are my mate. I feel a pull to you I've never felt before, and I'm almost certain you must be my mate. But even if you're not, I will love you until the day I die," I murmured in her ear.

Since Sasha didn't answer, fixated on her connection to the orb, I saw no harm in continuing.

"Brady says I want two-and-a-half pups and a white picket fence with you," I said. "That's not entirely true. I want as many pups as you'd see fit to give me and the Goddess blesses us with, and I'm rather fond of the wrought iron I've got around the property now. Safer, though it hasn't kept intruders out like it's supposed to." I scowled at the memories of the old hag and the new unknown stalker breaking into my home... our home.

"I think maybe I'll build a stone wall around the property," I mused. "High one with decorative spikes."

I could just see it now. Though I'd love to see Sasha's designs and ideas for it as well. Just because it was defensive architecture didn't mean it couldn't be pretty.

"I'll give you everything you could ever want and more, Sasha sweetie. You'll probably say I'm being too extravagant, but I won't be able to help myself. I feel... so much around you, so good, so right." I touched the emerald around Sasha's neck, and when she didn't so much as flinch, I twiddled it between my fingers. "I want to put a rock on you they can see from space. I want to mark you and make you mine. But I also don't... I don't want to deny you the opportunity to find your true mate if we... aren't destined." I swallowed bile that rose in my throat at the very idea Sasha might not be mine.

Sasha's eyes continued to have a faraway look in them. I chuckled sadly and let the emerald dangle against her sternum once more. Then I fixed the chain so the clasp was in the back, fretting over her like a mother hen.

"I'll let you use the orb. No, that's not right. I'll support you using the orb," I said quietly, patting her knee. "Just please don't scare me by going away."

We fell into silence, or rather I went silent while Sasha still stared into space, for a few hours, my stomach tightening with worry every passing minute Sasha did not come out of her trance.

There was a knock on the stateroom door, and I got up to answer it.

"Everything okay?" Brady asked. "You missed lunch, and dinner's being served—sweet mercies of the White Queens, when did you give her the orb?"

"She found it on her own," I sighed. I raked a hand over my hair, looking from Sasha, to Brady, and

back again. "Hey, would you mind so much bringing two plates of food here? I'll see if I can get her to come out of... whatever this is... long enough to eat."

"The cook's going to have a fit," Brady said. But then he shrugged. "Sure thing."

"Thanks."

Brady craned his neck to see Sasha better. "How long has she been this way?"

"Since before we stopped talking on the deck earlier," I replied.

Brady frowned. "Is there a... safe amount of time for her to be doing that? I mean, I know I told you not to treat her like a child, but we also don't want her getting sick."

"I'm going to try to call her back soon," I said. "Missing two meals is long enough, and it's unhealthy."

"But no barking orders," Brady admonished me.

"No barking orders," I agreed.

Brady nodded. "I'll be back with some grub. See if you can't get her back to reality for a little bit."

"Trust me, I will. And... um... can you just leave dinner outside?" I asked.

That made Brady laugh. "You going to pounce her the moment she's back?"

"I don't know," I responded honestly. "Every time she scares the crap out of me, though, we seem to have a pattern of it. And right now, I'm more than a little nervous."

"I get it. I get it, man. Two outdoor dinners it is," Brady said. He stepped out the door and started down the hall to the galley.

I closed the door and sat beside Sasha once more. "I don't know if this is going to work...."

With a swallow, I placed my own hand over the orb.

It was a mistake. The stupid thing zapped me with a lightning bolt of angry red, throwing me off the bed and against the door. I nearly splintered the heavy door off its hinges.

"f**k!" I yelled, clutching my throbbing head after I hit the floor. "Okay, so, that was a definite 'f**k you, and f**k off' from that asshole thing."

[Chapter 983: Little Girl Lost](#)

Sasha

Lucas was clever, but not clever enough, in hiding the orb under the floorboards of the stateroom. He must have forgotten the pitch and roll of the ship.

The thing had rolled around like a penny in a hurricane collection jar, and it had taken mere minutes of him being locked out for me to pry up the right board and have the orb in my hands.

I felt a bit bad working with the orb behind his back, but since he wouldn't let me do it in front of him, I felt I had little choice. For the two days, I kept Lucas away, I used my dream dancer powers to watch the people who had the orb in ancient times.

They kept preparing to go through some portal. There were also whispers of using the orb to keep Lycaon from ever leaving the Light Realm and spreading like dark fire across the Dark Realm.

Since Lycaon had definitely spread across the Dark Realm, I was getting the impression the orb hadn't worked as hoped. That and the many bodies that were found at the northern library convinced me something had gone terribly, terribly wrong.

In between sessions with the orb, I poked my head out the door and found a tray for every meal. I also heard the padding of paws and whuffling under the door at night. I might have sent Lucas away, but that didn't mean he was staying away.

When I went to work with the orb the morning of the third day, I was surprised to find it brought my vision back in time again, but not very far. I didn't recognize the location. I could tell I was in a mansion. The decor seemed dated in recent history.

A young girl with pigtail braids was skipping down a hallway that seemed vaguely familiar to me. She was completely carefree.

I followed behind her, curious as to why the orb had brought me here to see a child.

"Anna!" someone was calling.

The girl giggled and hid behind a, yes, honest-to-Goddess suit of armor.

"Where are you?" a portly woman asked, huffing and puffing as she looked here and there, ladle in hand. "I swear, when I find you this time, I'm gonna bean you good!"

Anna stifled another giggle with her hands.

Luckily for Anna, the portly woman didn't hear her and waddled off to a new location, calling her name.

Anna pumped a fist in the air in victory, then began dancing around the suit of armor, hanging off its parts as though it were a jungle gym.

"Anna," came a different voice, masculine this time.

A chill ran down my spine. I knew it was ironic coming from someone in the middle of a vision, but the voice sounded disembodied, not a real person's voice at all.

"Anna."

The girl looked up, then down the hall where we both knew the voice was coming from. She stopped playing with the suit of armor and began heading down the hall.

"Anna."

I wondered if Lucas thought I was as completely stupid using the orb as I was thinking Anna was following this voice.

Damn fool girl... I had to do something. There was something truly sinister behind that voice, and Anna needed protecting. Where was that mean old portly woman, anyway?

"Come here, Anna. Come to me...."

I wanted to bang my head against the wall when Anna did, skipping down the hall toward the darkness.

"Don't do it, Anna!" I called, wondering if I could be connected enough this time for the girl to hear me.

Anna didn't pause, but the voice did.

Then a roll of darkness filled my vision, surrounding me on all sides.

"Dream dancer," the shadow hissed.

Oh Goddess, I was screwed. "Um... hi... just visiting...."

The darkness cackled. "I'm not afraid of you. Save her if you can, you weak thing."

Then the darkness sucked itself back down the hall, dragging a screaming Anna with it.

A panel in the wall across from the suit of armor slid out of the way, revealing a secret passage.

Anna clawed at the walls to get out of the grip of the... something.

I ran forward, but it was too late. Anna disappeared into the darkness, and the secret entrance slammed shut behind her.

"Anna!" I called, feeling around the entrance, trying to figure out how to get in there myself.

I searched in vain for a way to get to Anna until I heard Lucas's voice.

"f**k!" came Lucas's voice from a distance.

I decided to use my dream dancer powers to take me back to the ship. Lucas sounded like he was in pain.

When my eyes focused, I saw Lucas laying on the floor by the door, rubbing his head. A few quick questions later, and I knew something else about the orb, or at least the darkness. It didn't like Lucas.

"You know, usually you say 'Sasha' not 'f**k' when you're trying to call me back," I said slowly.

"The orb doesn't usually throw me across the room when I'm trying to call you back," he grunted, standing and dusting himself off.

"Oh." I blinked slowly, still coming out of my trance. "You shouldn't have touched it while it was active."

"No s**t," he said, but I could tell he bit back any more harsh words and as he came to sit beside me, careful not to touch the orb again.

"Are you mad at me?" I asked cautiously, clutching the orb closer to my chest.

I sighed and kissed her temple. "No, princess, I'm not. I'm just scared for you."

I relaxed slightly and set the orb aside, wrapping it back in the silk. Then I leaned my head against his shoulder and looked up at him with hesitation about what I should say.

"You might as well tell me everything," he said, reaching up and stroking my hair.

"You going to tell me?" Lucas asked again as it took me a moment to mull over my vision.

"You going to be mad at me?" I replied with a wince.

Lucas took my hand and threaded his fingers through mine. "No. I'm done being mad at you. I'm afraid for you, but I won't try to stop you anymore."

I relaxed. "Oh. Good." I recounted the tale of the girl and the darkness, which made Lucas pale.

"Something evil in that orb has its eyes on you now?" Lucas wheezed.

"I think it always did, or was always going to. And I don't think it's part of the orb. It's... something to do with the past. I... I think I was supposed to save that girl," I said.

"Save the... Sasha, you can't go around meddling in the past. You could change the whole course of history!" Lucas warned me.

"We were saying something about not being mad? And maybe not being an overbearing brute?" I asked sweetly. I wasn't sure how I knew the second was true as well, but the way Lucas's cheeks flamed told me I was right and he had made such a commitment.

"I'm not mad at you," Lucas replied, his tone measured. "I'm mad... at the situation, I guess. I'm definitely mad at whatever force has you tangled up in all of this."

"Because you love me," I reasoned. Or rather... remembered?

"Could you hear me the whole time?" Lucas gaped.

"Maybe. Sort of? I'm not sure." I looked up at Lucas. "You know, I have feelings for you, too."

"Well, that's good to know," Lucas said, breathing out a long breath.

"I just don't know if we're mates. Do you know if we're mates? You're twenty-seven now. You're past where you'd be able to sense it," I said.

Lucas was quiet a long time. "I can't be sure until you've had your twenty-first birthday."

"But you feel something, right?" I asked.

"You know I do," Lucas rumbled.

I felt the vibration through his chest and into my own body. "This is really confusing, Lucas. You're kind of all over the place with how you treat me. I don't know... I don't know what to think, yet."

"Fair enough. Maybe we should just table the topic until your birthday. It's not that far away, you know," Lucas said, sounding both excited and trepidatious at the same time.

I tossed my leg over his thighs and crawled into Lucas's lap, snuggling my head under his chin. Much to my delight, he automatically wrapped his arms around me. "How will we table the discussion when we're making love all the time?"

Lucas groaned. "Don't tease me."

"I'm not teasing. I wouldn't tease about that." I reached between us and pushed my hand into his pants, stroking his d**k until he was fully erect.

"Goddess, it's been DAYS, Sasha," Lucas sighed. "All I've been able to think about is you." He rubbed his erection against my palm and groaned.

"I missed you, too. I missed this. I missed us," I whispered, holding up my arms so he could take off my shirt. "Well, I missed the us we are when we're not fighting. Actually, no, that's not true. I missed the other us, too."

Lucas laughed and opened his pants. "Hips up a little, Sasha baby. Ah, f**k it." He ripped my jeans and underwear clean through.

"You know there aren't any department stores on this ship, right?" I complained.

"Sue me." While we were both still mostly clothed, Lucas lowered me down onto his hard c**k.

I was more than ready for him. I'd been ready for days.

"Lucas," I whispered against his lips.

"Hmm?" Lucas groaned, moving me up and down on his shaft, building a fire in both of us.

"I think I'd like to be your mate," I confessed.

Lucas shivered, and then I was bouncing on his lap as he took me hard and fast.

I clung to his shoulders for dear life, sparks of pleasure zinging all through my body.

We came at the same time, moaning our satisfaction into each other's mouths.

Then Lucas laid me back on the bed and shredded the rest of my clothes off of me. His own clothes received similar treatment.

I was getting the sense we might walk into New Dianny naked.

"Lucas?" I whispered when he paused, just looking at me.

"Hush," he murmured, his hands beginning to move reverently over my skin.

"Lucas, what happens now?" I asked, gasping as his fingers found my entrance.

"Now, we make love again," Lucas chuckled around my n****e.

I spread my legs wide so he could ease himself inside me again. Tears gathered at the corners of my eyes. "No, I mean... us."

Lucas sighed, thrusting slowly as he mulled over an answer. "We're either mates or we're not, Sasha."

I shook my head, cupping his face in my hands. "That's not good enough. Even if we're not mates, I... I just... I can't imagine my life without you."

Lucas was silent. He turned and kissed my hand, then pushed my hair behind my ear as he pushed in and out of me. "I can't make you any promises, Sasha. I won't. I won't do that to you. If someone else is your mate... I won't deprive you of them."

I wrapped my legs possessively around Lucas's waist. "Don't deprive me of you." I kissed him softly on the lips. "We can figure this out... together."

Lucas gave a long, drawn out breath. "Okay," he said, kissing me slowly, thoroughly. "Okay, let's figure it all out together."

I smiled and arched my back, taking him deeper inside me.

[Chapter 984: New Dianny](#)

Lucas

New Dianny, considering how young it was for a city in the Light Realm, had sprung up like a field of tulips at the edge of the sea, scant miles from a jungle. If it hadn't been for the sea, the place would have been sweltering. As it was, it was quite warm, and the sweaters in our wardrobes became a thing of the past.

It was just as well. I'd torn the majority of Sasha's. Sometimes, something about her just made me so... impatient, especially sweaters. Goddess, I hated having to find her under all those folds.

Then again... I watched Sasha pull on a halter top and shorts that were shorter than I would have liked. There were some advantages to sweaters, like keeping other shifters' eyes off my Sasha.

"Lucas, I swear if you rip these shorts, I will rip your balls off." Sasha misinterpreted what must have been a very intense look.

I couldn't help but smile, sliding my hand into her back pocket to cup her ass cheek. "I promise. I will TRY not to shred this pair of shorts."

"I'm taking your coin stash and going shopping once we get settled," Sasha threatened.

I nuzzled the bruise I'd made on her neck. "Sasha baby, you can do whatever you want with my coin stash."

"You've been very hard on my wardrobe," Sasha sniffed, but she didn't remove my hand from her back pocket as we walked out of the stateroom.

Phoebe was similarly dressed, though she was sporting a bikini top in the warm weather, and I could see Brady was about as thrilled about her outfit as I was about Sasha's.

"We could go to the Winter Forest now," Brady suggested, his arm sliding possessively around Phoebe's bare waist.

"I thought we needed to meet Lucas's brother, Oliver, here first?" Phoebe said, confused. "Why would we go to the Winter Forest now? Not that I'm not excited to see it—"

"Better dress code," Brady grumbled.

Phoebe looked down at her bikini top and cutoff jean shorts. "What? It's hot!"

"That's not the problem. The problem is you're hot, and every man in New Dianny is going to think so, too," Brady sighed.

Phoebe beamed at him. "You think I look hot?"

Brady pinched the bridge of his nose. "Not the point. Not the point."

Sasha glanced up at me, her eyes narrowed. "You're having jealous thoughts, too, aren't you?"

"I was just thinking it's a bit nippy today, and maybe a sweatshirt wouldn't be a bad idea." I coughed.

Sasha swatted me in the chest. "You have your hand on my ass. I think that's a bright, red, flashing 'hands off' sign to any challengers."

"You'd be surprised," I growled.

Both rolling their eyes, Phoebe and Sasha led us across the gangplank and onto the bustling docks of New Dianny. On a small hill in the distance, the packhouse rose large and robust above the din.

"We're heading that way," I said to a porter, pointing with the hand that wasn't on Sasha's ass.

The porter took an appreciative look at Sasha and Phoebe, but a hiss from Brady stopped him halfway between bust and hips. He quickly turned his attention to our bags and summoned a larger town car once we reached the end of the dock.

"You're so bad," Phoebe giggled at Brady as they settled themselves across from us in the spacious back of the car.

"Yeah, well, that keeps happening and I'll be getting worse," Brady grumped.

My hand was now low on Sasha's waist, and I peeked out of the windows of the car, every movement catching my eye.

Brady was watching out the back window, seeing if we were being followed.

We didn't want to alarm the girls, but after the threats and unwelcome visitors we'd been getting since we got the orb, we'd been worried about... followers—not just those who wanted the orb, but those who wanted Sasha and... crazy prophecy-worshipping nutballs like the old priestess.

"Is it all clear?" Sasha asked me softly, and I realized Brady and I hadn't been subtle enough.

"Yeah, everything's fine," I said, kissing her temple.

"You think someone's going to follow us," Sasha continued, putting a hand on my knee.

"They can try," I replied, "but I'm not borrowing any more trouble than we already have."

"Okay." Sasha cuddled into my side.

I idly stroked her hair and kept my gaze sharp out the window.

Phoebe fell asleep on Brady, but the journey wasn't long enough for much of a nap, and soon he was giving her a little shake as two shifters in very official uniforms came to open the back door to the town car and let us out.

"Lucas Black?" one of them asked me.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Follow us." The guard turned and began leading us into a very modern, very beautiful pack house. I wanted to meet the engineer who'd designed it. It was awe-inspiring; its artistry was flawless, and it still managed to give off a homey vibe.

The second guard took up the rear, which told me my warning of possible unwanted additional guests in New Dianny had been heeded.

"I should have worn something more formal," Sasha fretted, tugging on her halter top as we passed under beautiful wood relief carvings dotting the ceiling down the hall.

I looked down at my own polo shirt and khaki shorts. "I think it'll be fine. It's not like you had a whole lot of options."

"And whose fault was that?" Sasha muttered.

"Mine," I said unrepentantly.

"Welcome to our home!" a loud voice boomed as soon as we were escorted into the great hall.

The big, barrel-chested ex-pirate Robbie was standing in front of his intricately-carved wooden high-back chair at the head of the room. Next to him was a small woman with blond hair, who was also smiling. Robbie dwarfed his Luna, Alison, by about three hundred pounds, and it was a miracle we could see her at all.

"Thank you for having us. I realize it's a great inconvenience, considering we might be bringing trouble behind us," I said, giving a slight bow.

"Nonsense," Robbie replied, his loud voice shaking the light fixtures. "We haven't had trouble here in so long, I'm starting to get rusty."

"What he means is we're happy to have you, and prepared for any trouble that might be chasing you," Alison said serenely.

"Still, could be fun," Robbie added.

Alison sighed. This was clearly a common back and forth between them.

"Where are my manners?" I inserted quickly, not wanting there to be a fight between the Alpha and Luna on my account. "I would like to introduce you to my friend, Brady, his fiancée, Phoebe, and this is Sasha Wentley."

"Charmed," Alison smiled.

"Thank you for having us, Luna Alison," Sasha said.

"Not at all. It's been an age since we've seen Lucas—" Alison began.

"Your story was so intriguing!" Robbie interrupted. "How could we not host you and see what happens?"

Alison rolled her eyes. "You must be exhausted. Can I show you to your rooms?"

"That would be wonderful, Luna Alison," I said.

"And you must join us for dinner!" Robbie rumbled. "We're having barbecue."

"Sounds tasty. Thank you for inviting us," I replied with a grin.

Robbie nodded and Alison stepped down off the low dais to take us to another part of the pack house.

"I assumed Brady and Phoebe would be sharing a room," Alison said. "Since your letter did indicate they were engaged. But I did prepare separate rooms for you and Sasha."

Reality snapped painfully into place, and I winced. Technically, Sasha and I were nothing to each other. "Thank you, Luna Alison. That was very kind."

Alison looked me up and down, then Sasha. "Though I could still put you in one room."

I glanced down and noticed my hand had tightened around Sasha's waist, tucking her under the shelter of my arm.

"That's... up to Sasha," I responded in a more gentlemanly way than I was feeling.

"I'd feel a bit safer if I were still rooming with Lucas if that's alright, Luna Alison," Sasha said softly.

Safety... yes, I really needed to stop thinking about how good it felt to make love to her and start thinking about her safety.

"Dear, I wouldn't be able to sleep a wink without Robbie. Pity you're not of age yet. We'd be able to see properly if you were mates," Alison smiled.

Sasha blushed, and it stirred all kinds of feelings inside me.

"Her birthday is a few days away," I said quietly.

"Oh, you both must be on pins and needles!" Alison opened the door to a large suite and shoed us inside. "This should do for the two of you. I was going to save it for Oliver, but he can deal with something smaller."

"When is he coming, do you know?" I asked.

"He's still about a week out. But don't worry, you'll be honored guests until then," Alison beamed.

"I really can't thank you enough," I said.

"Nonsense. Robbie hasn't been this excited since he was pirating the high seas," Alison chuckled.

"You've given him something to do with all his excess energy."

"Happy to oblige," I grinned back.

Two shifters showed up behind us carrying our packs. The orb itself was tucked securely in the shoulder bag Sasha carried. Technically it was a large purse, so it wouldn't arouse suspicion, but it wasn't as though we were going to leave it to be played around with.

"I'll see you both in two hours. Don't be late. Robbie doesn't like to have to wait for his supper," Alison said.

"No, I imagine he doesn't. Thank you, Luna Alison. Really. For everything," I replied.

Alison nodded and wandered back into the main area of the pack house.

I took both our packs from the servants and bumped hips with Sasha to get her to go into our new lodgings.

The suite had two bedrooms, opposite each other, with a small living area in between. Alison, in her infinite wisdom, had decided to give us the choice, it seemed, of whether or not we'd be sleeping together.

Sasha looked from one bedroom to the other, and then back at me.

"Pick one," I said with a slight smile. "Then tell me if you want me putting my stuff in there, too, or if you want me in the other room."

"You know I'd never want you in the other room," Sasha replied, her voice husky.

Dear Goddess, we hadn't been here for half an hour and I already wanted her. I walked over and hooked my fingers in her belt loops, pulling her to me. "Did she say two hours?"

"Yes...." Sasha murmured. Her smile turned impish. "But I really should go shop for something proper to w-!"

I slung her over my shoulder and stalked toward one of the bedrooms. I didn't care which one. "I'll help you pick. I'm sure you've already got something appropriate."

"Lucas!" Sasha squealed.

Then, shortly after....

"Ohhh... Lucas..."

[Chapter 985: Dinner with Friends](#)

Lucas

Two hours sped away, and we were barely dressed and decent in time for dinner. It turned out Sasha did have a lovely blue sundress that she had now FORBIDDEN me to shred, which clung to her in all the right places.

This caused the same dilemma for me as the halter top and jean shorts. On the one hand, the sundress made her look good enough to eat. On the other hand, other men were going to be feasting their eyes on what was mine.

What I hoped was mine.

Dear Goddess, let her be my mate....

Robbie eyed us as we scurried in, the very last people to arrive. We squeezed in next to Joy and George—Robbie and Alison's daughter and her mate—and across from Brady and Phoebe. Phoebe's cheeks were flushed, so I guessed she hadn't been spending the past two hours “shopping” either.

“Now that we're all here,” Robbie said, looking pointedly at me. “The High Priestess will give thanks to the Goddess, and then we can all dig in.”

An ethereal woman all in white, with whitish hair, early for her age, stood from Robbie's left side and began singing a soft prayer. Where we knew the words to the call and answer, we joined in.

“A priestess!” Sasha whispered to me as the chanting died down. “Maybe we should try talking to her about the orb?”

I groaned as I passed the sweet potatoes. “That didn't go so well for us the last time.”

“This one's got to be trusted if she's sitting at Alpha Robbie's left hand,” Sasha pointed out. “I figure it can't hurt to try.”

“I don't know....”

Sasha leaned in closer and whispered in my ear. “I'll let you do that thing we were talking about.”

“So,” I said to Joy, “how does one go about getting an audience with that priestess?”

“You want an audience with the High Priestess?” Joy asked.

I nodded. “We were hoping to ask her a few questions.”

“I'll let Mother know. I must say, you four have been the best entertainment we've received around here in a long time,” Joy beamed.

“Thought Alpha Robbie was going to do cartwheels and start singing pirate shanties when he heard you were in danger,” George added over a mouthful of barbecue. “Been far too peaceful around these parts for his liking.”

“Father's always been a bit of an adventurer. Now that New Dianny's all constructed, fortified, and has a reputation for being able to defend itself, well... he's run out of things to occupy his time,” Joy agreed.

“Glad we could help,” I said sardonically.

Joy laughed. “You're quite safe here. We don't get many strangers. They'd draw a lot of attention if your pursuers just showed up. Not that Father isn't hopeful.”

“He's probably polishing his sword every day now,” George chuckled.

“Well, we do thank you very much for your hospitality. I'm sorry to disappoint Alpha Robbie, but we are kind of depending on it being safe here,” I said.

“Of course you are. We're just teasing,” Joy replied.

Sasha swatted my arm. "Way to kill the conversation."

"Ow," I grunted, rubbing my arm. She was getting quite good at that.

"You two are so adorable together. I hope you're mates," Joy said.

Sasha and I both blushed. "We'll find out while we're here, if it really does take Oliver a week to get here. Sasha's turning twenty-one in a few days."

Joy clapped her hands. "Oh! How wonderful! We'll have to throw a BIG party."

"Oh, you really don't have to—" Sasha began.

"Nonsense. You only turn twenty-one once. You'll get to meet your wolf!" Joy said excitedly.

"And possibly have rocking good s*x with that guy," George added.

George got a swat for that one. I supposed it was a mate thing.

Sasha gave a nervous giggle, and I reached under the table and squeezed her hand.

"I'm seeing fairy lights. I'm seeing gauzy, draped white fabric. I'm seeing cocktails and dancing..." Joy mused.

Sasha's grip tightened.

"But... mostly low-key, right?" I said, and Joy and George both frowned at me.

"Why would it be low-key?" Joy asked.

"Well... I mean... we don't know many people here...." I tried.

Joy waved a hand. "That's easily remedied at a party. You can meet all sorts of people and come out of it fast friends with half of New Dianny. You'll see."

I gave Sasha's hand a helpless squeeze back. There was nothing we could do. Sasha was having a big twenty-first birthday bash.

"Th-thank you. That's very kind of you to throw me a party," Sasha said politely.

"Oh, believe me, it's my pleasure. We don't get more than the usual celebrations around here most of the time. This will be the event of the season!" Joy announced.

I winced at the force of the pressure Sasha was putting on my hand.

"It'll be so much fun. And it'll help take your mind off worrying about your wolf and your mate," Joy said sagely. "Otherwise you could spend the whole day in a tizzy."

"She'll be in a tizzy anyway, darling," George put in.

"I know. That's why she'll need distracting," Joy replied.

Sasha was starting to look a bit pale.

I subtly switched her water for my spring wine. "So... just out of curiosity, would you say the High Priestess is a... good priestess?"

George chortled while Joy laughed. "Alpha Robbie would have keel-hauled her by now if she wasn't."

"Good point," I said.

"I think he was just trying to subtly change the topic, and prod me into getting their introduction," Joy responded sagely.

"Well-spotted, love," George smiled, kissing Joy's temple.

Joy patted his hand and stood. "I'll go speak with Mother, Father, and Priestess Canela," she said, winking at us.

"Thank you," Sasha and I said together.

Joy smiled and walked up to the head of the table where she, her parents, and Priestess Canela put their heads together.

"It will be such a relief when you know you are mates," George continued when she was gone, and I wanted to kick him under the table.

Sasha looked at George, then at me, then asked softly, "What if we aren't?"

The words stabbed me in the gut.

"I'd find it highly unlikely that you aren't," George said, "but if you aren't, well, you still have options. You can stay together until you find your true mates, or decide you're going to stay together regardless. It's happened. There's no law saying you have to be with your true mate, or that it's not possible to love more than one person. It's not the end of the world, I promise."

"Easy for him to say," Sasha muttered in my ear, making a big show of leaning over to get a bread roll. "He's with his true mate."

I squeezed Sasha's thigh reassuringly, even though my own stomach was roiling at the unsavory possibilities. "We'll work it out," I whispered.

Joy came back to the table all smiles. "High Priestess Canela will be delighted to see you after dinner."

"Good. Thank you," I said.

Dinner went on very pleasantly, with Robbie's booming voice sometimes carrying over the whole table, but otherwise rather low-key. Sasha was clearly enjoying herself, which made me relax. It was a relief to be doing something that had nothing to do with the orb.

A variety of sorbets were served for dessert, from lemon, to mint, to strawberry. I chose lemon and Sasha chose strawberry.

Phoebe and Brady began making a scene by dabbing sorbet on each others' noses, which made everyone laugh.

I was about to bring my third teaspoon of lemon sorbet to my lips when I saw Sasha had already finished hers.

"Open," I said as she looked up from her crystal dish.

Sasha quickly got my meaning, blushed, but did open her mouth.

I was soon spoon feeding her the rest of my sorbet, which I enjoyed far more than eating it myself.

"You two are just so cute," Joy sighed.

George chuckled. "You want me to spoon feed you sorbet now, too?"

"It'd be nice sometimes," Joy sniffed.

"Aww, honey, if I knew this young and in love thing was catching...." George said.

Joy harrumphed and stood when the High Priestess nodded our way. "Priestess Canela is ready to see you now. I'll escort you all to a sitting room."

"Aww, Joy, now don't be that way...." George pleaded, but Joy was already heading toward the head of the table with Sasha and me scrambling in her wake.

Brady and Phoebe started to get up as well, but I waved him back into his seat, figuring that someone should be free to just enjoy the evening, after all.

Priestess Canela alighted more than sat on a delicate chair in a sitting room that was clearly meant to entertain groups of women rather than men. All the furniture ended in carved, spindly little legs, and I looked dubiously at the loveseat, wondering if it would hold both Sasha and me.

"Please, sit," Priestess Canela said, gesturing.

Joy gave us a wave and slipped out.

I held my breath as I sat slowly down on the loveseat. It creaked ominously beneath me.

Sensing the problem, Sasha swallowed and carefully lowered herself down next to me. More creaking, but the seat held.

I dared to lay my arm across the back of the loveseat, but didn't move beyond that. Sasha had also frozen. We were both terrified the intricate yet insubstantial thing was going to give beneath us.

"I'm High Priestess Canela," Priestess Canela said. "Joy told me you were hoping for an audience with me?"

"Well...." I rubbed the back of my neck and looked at Sasha.

"Good priestess," Sasha reminded me.

I sighed. "We found something in a temple north west of Egoren capital, near the site of the northern library...."

"Oh. That explains it," the priestess breathed. "There's been a terrible disturbance in the timeline of late."

"Yeah, that's kind of the thing's main job—disturbing the timeline," I said.

The priestess looked from me to Sasha and back again. "And you have united it with a dream dancer." Her eyes fixed on Sasha.

"Y-yes, priestess, we did," Sasha gulped.

"That is... unfortunate," Priestess Canela said sadly. "The Slipstone was buried for a reason."

"Oh, you know about that, too? They keep calling it that when I go back and forth— Sasha responded.

Then High Priestess dropped the bomb. "I know if it's the one buried with the temple to the White Queen, then yes, it is the Slipstone."

"The... one from...?" I wheezed.

"There is more than one of these things?" Sasha gasped.

The high priestess nodded. "There is another stone, called the Lightstone. Your Slipstone glimpses the past. The Lightstone glimpses the future."

"Please tell me we don't need...." I didn't know if I was begging her or the goddess.

"You will need the second stone," the priestess intoned.

And just like that, my hopes were dashed.

[Chapter 986: Uses and Useless](#)

Sasha

I could feel Lucas lose it even before he started to swear.

"We need both?" I repeated hesitantly, hoping perhaps her answer might change or there might be a 'but' in there somewhere.

No such luck. "Yes, you will need both now. The Slipstone has been awakened by a dream dancer, which means the other stone will be awake as well," Priestess Canela said. She frowned at Lucas. "Language, young man."

Lucas ended his tirade with a cough and a low, "Sorry, High Priestess."

"I was shown a vision of people who were going to use the stone to return to the land of the Goddess or something like that," I said. "And then the Goddess said I was supposed to 'save them,' only I'm not entirely sure who 'them' are, if it's the people I saw in one vision or another vision...."

"Can you go fetch it?" Priestess Canela asked. "I might be able to divine something from it. I'm not a dream dancer of any great power. But I do know more about the orbs than you do."

I looked at Lucas and he took a silk-wrapped package out from a bag at his side. I could sense the power of the orb even with the silk around it. But then, I could always sense the orb. Its eyes were always on me.

Lucas unwrapped the Slipstone, which was still a sort of pink from my working with it on the ship, and handed it to the High Priestess.

The orb glowed dimly when Priestess Canela took it in her hands. "Yes, this is quite a bit more powerful than was even rumored," she said. "Quite a bit."

Then, to my surprise, Priestess Canela took my hand and held it as she held the orb. Her eyes closed and her mouth moved in silent murmuring.

When she opened her eyes, Priestess Canela's eyes were glowing a dull blue. "Hmm... I cannot answer all of your questions. But I can tell you what I know." She looked at me and it was as though she could see straight into my soul. "You are the most powerful dream dancer I have ever heard of since Tasia. Do not follow her dark path."

"O-okay," I replied.

Priestess Canela closed her eyes again. "Old Dianny was created when Lycoan kidnapped and brought a group of women through the portal to be his brides. I don't know if you knew that. The people you see—they are descendants of these women, and so is the girl you saw in the hall, Anna. That much I know. But I know nothing more."

"Nothing more?" Lucas protested, but I put my free hand on his chest.

The priestess looked at me again, the glow in her eyes beginning to fade. "You will come into your wolf soon."

"Yes, my birthday is within a week," I replied.

"Perhaps then we will know more," the priestess mumbled. Then she took her hand off the orb and handed it back to Lucas. "There is much we will know...." She looked between Lucas and me.

I understood her meaning, and wanted to know the same. Was Lucas my mate? Deep down, I really hoped so. It wasn't even that deep down.

Lucas quickly wrapped the orb again and stowed it in his bag.

"Am I meant to save that little girl, Anna, from the darkness?" I asked Priestess Canela.

The high priestess shrugged helplessly. "I don't know. I would hope the Goddess would wish a young life such as hers to be spared, but when you say she said save 'them,' it must mean more than one person. I agree, it is very confusing."

"Do you at least know how to use the stone?" Lucas butted in, exasperated.

Priestess Canela blinked. "Oh. I thought you'd surely figured that out by now."

"Not so much, no," Lucas said. "Basically, until recently, it's been one, Sasha touches the stone, two, Sasha disappears completely from the world itself like she was never born and it's the day before, then three, Sasha reappears after the day ends. On the ship, she was able to use her powers to work with it through visions and not disappear on me, but...."

"Oh dear... you poor dears. No wonder everything has felt so jumbled lately," Priestess Canela clucked. "Sasha, being a powerful dream dancer, should be able to use the stone to change the past. So far, you've just been watching it?"

"Yes. I haven't done anything to change it," I replied.

Priestess Canela nodded. "That is probably for the best for now. Watch, learn, find out what the Goddess wants of you. It is a dangerous thing, to change the past."

"That's what I was thinking," Lucas grunted.

The priestess c****d her head to the side, regarding Lucas. "A mate might help. Powerful objects like this one often lead to evil and corruption. You will require help to remain centered and focused. You are powerful, indeed, but harnessing that power to use the Slipstone—and in future the Lightstone—is dangerous, dangerous work. But, apparently necessary now."

"I was wondering that, too. Why now of all times? Is it just because we happened to find it and I accidentally paired it with Sasha that the Goddess is like, hey, yeah, let's have a past party?" Lucas asked.

"It could be that simple, yes," Priestess Canela said. "In any case, you must guard the Slipstone. Guard it with everything you've got. Because there are many, even those you've already met, who would use it for great evil and personal gain."

Lucas blew out a frustrated breath. "And that's all you can tell us."

"Unfortunately," the high priestess replied regretfully.

"Thank you for trying," I added. "We've gained a little wisdom, at least."

Priestess Canela nodded. "I am glad the Slipstone fell into good hands. It could have been picked up by anyone. But you two will keep it safe. I have a good feeling." The high priestess rose and smoothed out her robes. "I will return to the temple now. I'm sorry I couldn't be more helpful."

"You helped clear up a thing or two for me, High Priestess Canela. I really am grateful," I said while Lucas stared balefully at the bag containing the orb.

"Good luck," Priestess Canela replied before sashaying out of the room.

Lucas threw himself back, groaning almost as loudly as the loveseat as he stared up at the ceiling. "Damn this stupid orb anyway."

"I know. It just keeps getting more complicated, doesn't it?" I asked softly. I couldn't stop myself from curling into him, leaning my head against his shoulder, drawing strength from his strength.

Lucas dropped his arm around me and stroked my hair. "A second f*****g orb... a second one. FUCK."

My eyes stung with tears. "I don't know if this is ever going to end, Lucas," I whispered, despair heavy in my heart. A second orb? Would it mean a second mission? More answers? Fewer?

Lucas's lips brushed my temple and I looked up. Then he kissed away my tears and pressed a salty kiss to my lips. "Hey," he said huskily, stroking my hair behind my ear. "We've still got a next step. We'll go to Winter Forest with Oliver and Mother will help us."

My stomach tightened, and I looked away as I said, "I suppose we'll be seeing my mother, too."

"Is that a problem?" Lucas asked.

I shrugged. "We haven't really communicated much since I moved to the Dark Realm."

"Oh. Well... she'll be happy to see you. Will you be happy to see her?" Lucas hazarded.

I pressed my forehead into Lucas's shoulder. "I don't know. I have... questions. But she's never answered them before and I don't know if she will now. Now, though... now I think it might be more important than ever."

"What questions, Sasha baby?" Lucas asked, combing his fingers through the length of my hair.

I shook my head. "I'll tell you later, if I can get her to answer them. If I can't, it won't matter anyway."

"Okay." Lucas was silent a long time, then wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into his lap. The loveseat creaked in protest.

"Lucas, I don't want to go breaking Luna Alison's furniture," I admonished him as he slid his hands up my bare thighs.

But he stayed a polite distance from my panties. "I just want to hold you, Sasha baby. I know this has to be rough— the orb, you coming into your wolf... things."

"Yeah," I agreed, knowing he was referring to the biggest unanswered question of them all. "Things."

Lucas wrapped his arms around me once he had me settled in his lap. He nestled his chin on the top of my head. "Sasha, it's all going to be okay. I promise. We're going to work it all out. We'll go to Winter Forest, and your mother or mine or both will give us more information, and we'll just take it one next step at a time."

"I really just wanted to be your intern and work on the northern library project," I sighed, placing my hand on his chest. "School, internship... um... maybe some other stuff...."

Lucas chuckled, and it rolled straight through me. "We have done a lot of 'other stuff.'"

I couldn't help but smile. "Amanda was going to plan this big birthday bash. I was going to invite you and at midnight...."

"It seems you're still having a big birthday bash. And midnight will still come." He stroked his hands up and down my back. "And... we will still know."

"You want to be the Head Royal Engineer, don't you? Still?" I asked Lucas.

I felt Lucas's chin move on top of my head as he nodded. "Yes."

"If I'm your mate, will it make that hard? I mean, you already had the whole northern library thing go south, so that's one project—"

"Two. That's the second project of mine that went south, in a row." Lucas sighed.

"Oh. Then it's even worse you're sleeping with your intern, isn't it?" I whispered.

Lucas was silent for a long time, his fingertips stroking up and down my back. "When we get back to the Dark Realm, we can sort out all those questions. But, Sasha, I would not trade one second of the time I've spent with you to be the Alpha King himself."

My eyes stung again. "Really?"

"Really." Lucas thumbed my tears away this time and lowered his lips to mine.

I felt safe, and wanted, and yes, even loved. I didn't want that to end. With every passing day, I cared less and less about if we turned out to be true mates or not. I wanted Lucas. I would always want Lucas. I would always... love Lucas.

After several minutes, which stretched out a lifetime and also seemed too short, Lucas let me go and helped me to my feet, twitching my skirt back into place. "Come on, princess. Let's go be sociable."

"I suppose," I sighed.

"And... I seem to remember a certain promise someone made if we talked with the High Priestess...?" Lucas wiggled his eyebrows at me.

"Oh, don't worry," I grinned. "I always keep my promises."

[Chapter 987: Love Me, Love Me Not](#)

Lucas

"... and you brought it here," George said, staring at the pink orb nestled in red silk in the middle of the coffee table between the four of us. *Lucas*

"... and you brought it here," George said, staring at the pink orb nestled in red silk in the middle of the coffee table between the four of us.

"We brought it here," I replied with a wince.

"They brought it here!" Robbie boomed, sounding as excited as a kid in a toy store.

"We're sorry about that," Bredy added.

"Don't be," George and Robbie said together, though probably for different reasons.

"And apparently there's another one somewhere that we're supposed to find," I sighed.

"Never a dull moment," Bredy added.

"Maybe Alison won't miss me for a few weeks," Robbie said whimsically.

George shook his head sheepishly. "She'll miss you. And you have duties here."

"Aww, but this is life and death, world-saving stuff!" Robbie protested.

"No," George said firmly, then added with a respectful cough, "Alphe."

Robbie sulked, stering et the orb.

"Oliver is teking us to the Winter Forest. Hopefully, my mother will be eble to shed more light on the situation," I seid. "It'll be pretty boring, Alphe, I'm sure."

"Lier," Robbie grunted, but he geve up on his thirst for edventure.

I wropped the orb up just the seme so he didn't heve to keep sulking et it. "In eny cese, we heven't quite decided whet needs to be done with it. I meen, eside from some cryptic orders from the Goddess, we reelly don't know... whet the best course of ection is."

"You meen you don't know. Seshe's perfectly heppy to keep working with the thing to see if she cen't figure it out herself," Bredy seid.

I grimeced. "Yes, well, I'm still not sure it shouldn't be thrown in the see."

"Sounds like that wouldn't help, from whet the High Priestess seid," George observed.

"Yeeh. Kind of why I heven't chucked it out with the tide," I seid.

"And, why didn't you teke it to the White Queen egein?" Robbie esked.

My shoulders slumped. "Thet wes probably e bed move on my pert. I wes just efreid of someone in her court finding out end trying to steel the orb or use it. But since we know more about it now...."

"The fect thet it wes ewekened by e dreem dencer, for instence," Bredy seid.

"Yes. Maybe thet meens only e dreem dencer cen use it? I touched the thing while it wes ective end it blested me into the well. Literelly," I recelled.

"You need to teke it to the White Queen," Robbie boomed. It wes neerly en Alphe's order. "But... given you ere elready in the Light Reelm trying to find out more about the thing, you might es well weit to go beck until you've heerd whet your mother hes to sey."

I nodded. "Yes, thet's e good plen."

"Of course it is. I ceme up with it," Robbie seid.

"Modesty, thy neme is Alphe Robbie," George muttered.

"You know, just beceuse you're merried to my daughter doesn't meen I still cen't exile you," Robbie grunted.

Bredy end I looked et each other, but before we could try to smoothe over the situation, the other two men burst into heerty guffews.

"You should heve seen your feces," Robbie chuckled.

"Ghost pele," George egreed. "Ghost pele."

"Sorry. We didn't know it wes e running joke," I mumbled.

Robbie clepped me on the shoulder, neerly bowling me right out of my cheir. "Thet's whet mekes it so funny!"

"Anyway," I said, scooping the silk-covered orb back into my bag, "we probably don't need to keep stering et the thing. I'm gled we telked, though. You're right, Alphe, I should heve taken it to the White Queen. And I will efter talking with Mother." *Lucas*

"... and you brought it here," George said, staring at the pink orb nestled in red silk in the middle of the coffee table between the four of us.

"Good." Robbie rose. "I'm going to go check with Alison and see what we're having for dinner. Though she and Joy are getting all wrapped up in this birthday thing. I swear, it's going to be bigger than Joy's wedding!"

"Good." Robbie rose. "I'm going to go check with Alison end see whet we're heving for dinner. Though she end Joy ere getting ell wrepped up in this birthdey thing. I sweer, it's going to be bigger then Joy's wedding!"

"I'm gled they're so excited," I replied, trying to feel swept up in the excitement myself. I was too worried about the mete question, however, end probably looked e bit green eround the gills.

Robbie smekked me on the beck, end I weeved. "Don't worry, son. She's your mete. A blind men could see thet."

"We'll see," I said quietly. "Thank you. I'll see you leter."

Bredy end I scooted out before Robbie could give me eny more reessurances.

"Let's go for e welk," Bredy suggested, end I geve in with e shrug.

We ended up down by the beech, shoes off, letting the weves lick our enkles.

Bredy steyed silent, though I sensed there wes something he wanted to sey. "Spill it," I said.

"Fine." Bredy stopped end turned. "You're e wreck over this mete thing with Seshe, eren't you?"

"I don't know whet you meen," I tried, but when Bredy's expression told me thet wouldn't fly, I sighed end plopped myself down right in the send. "I'd like her to be my mete. If she isn't, then, well, thet's thet, I suppose."

"Uh-huh." Bredy set down next to me. "You love her to bits end pieces."

I looked down et the impression my hend wes meking in the send. "I do."

"She loves you to bits end pieces," Bredy continued.

"I... think so, yes," I said.

Bredy snorted. "She loves you to bits end pieces, trust me. If she's going to let you do THAT, she hes to love you e good greet deel."

My heed snepped up. "How did you know about thet?"

"Phoebe. Seshe wanted some edvice before you did it," Bredy said offhendedly.

I knew my face was flaming red. "I don't know if I should be more embarrassed that Phoebe knows or that you know."

"Hey. I get some of that, too. Nothing to be embarrassed about," Brady grinned. "Phoebe is a wildcat. And that's all I'll say about it."

"Enough said," I agreed.

Brady made holes in the sand with his fingers, which he swept away with his palm, only to do it again. "Sasha's coming into her wolf."

"I'm excited for her to meet her," I replied with a slight smile. "Best day of my life."

"If she comes into her wolf, and she realizes you're mates?" Brady prodded.

I leaned back on my elbows and stared up at the sky. "Then I'll have a new best day of my life."

"Will you marry her?" Brady asked.

I gave that some thought, then shook my head. "Not right away. We've got a lot going on with this orb, and back home with my job and her finishing school... I want her to have plenty of time—quiet time—to think it through. And I'd like us to spend time together when, you know, there isn't a crisis. And... call me sentimental... but I would like to set it up so it's something really special."

"Wine. Roses," Brady said.

"Kind of like that, yeah," I replied.

"You really are a romantic, Lucas Bleck," Brady chuckled.

I raised an eyebrow at him. "I suppose you wooed Phoebe with an old gym shoe?"

It was Brady's turn to get awkward. "... no, not an old gym shoe."

"Wine. Roses?" I teased.

"Kind of like that, yeah," Brady copied me and laughed.

"Good." Robbia rose. "I'm going to go check with Alison and see what we're having for dinner. Though Sha and Joy are getting all wrapped up in this birthday thing. I swear, it's going to be bigger than Joy's wedding!"

"I'm glad they're so excited," I replied, trying to fall swept up in the excitement myself. I was too worried about the main question, however, and probably looked a bit green around the gills.

Robbia smacked me on the back, and I waved. "Don't worry, son. Sha's your main. A blind man could see that."

"We'll see," I said quietly. "Thank you. I'll see you later."

Brady and I scooted out before Robbia could give me any more assurances.

"Let's go for a walk," Brady suggested, and I gave in with a shrug.

Wa andad up down by tha baach, shoas off, latting tha wavas lick our anklas.

Brady stayad silant, though I sansad thara was somathing ha wantad to say. "Spill it," I said.

"Fina." Brady stoppad and turnad. "You'ra a wrack ovar this mata thing with Sasha, aran't you?"

"I don't know what you maan," I triad, but whan Brady's axprassion told ma that wouldn't fly, I sighad and ploppad mysalf down right in tha sand. "I'd lika har to ba my mata. If sha isn't, than, wall, that's that, I supposa."

"Uh-huh." Brady sat down naxt to ma. "You lova har to bits and piacas."

I lookad down at tha imprassion my hand was making in tha sand. "I do."

"Sha lovas you to bits and piacas," Brady continuad.

"I... think so, yas," I said.

Brady snortad. "Sha lovas you to bits and piacas, trust ma. If sha's going to lat you do THAT, sha has to lova you a good graat daal."

My haad snappad up. "How did you know about that?"

"Phoaba. Sasha wantad soma advica bafora you did it," Brady said offhandadly.

I knaw my faca was flaming rad. "I don't know if I should ba mora ambarrassad that Phoaba knows or that you know."

"Hay. I gat soma of that, too. Nothing to ba ambarrassad about," Brady grinnad. "Phoaba is a wildcat. And that's all I'll say about it."

"Enough said," I agraad.

Brady mada holas in tha sand with his fingars, which ha swapt away with his palm, only to do it again. "Sasha's coming into har wolf."

"I'm axcitad for har to maat har," I rapliad with a slight smila. "Bast day of my lifa."

"If sha comas into har wolf, and sha raalizas you ara matas?" Brady proddad.

I laanad back on my albows and starad up at tha sky. "Than I'll hava a naw bast day of my lifa."

"Will you mark har?" Brady askad.

I gava that soma thought, than shook my haad. "Not right away. Wa'va got a lot going on with this orb, and back homa with my job and har finishing school... I want har to hava plenty of tima—quiat tima—to think it through. And I'd lika us to spand tima togathar whan, you know, thara isn't a crisis. And... call ma santimantal... but I would lika to sat it up so it's somathing raally spacial."

"Wina. Rosas," Brady said.

"Kind of lika that, yaah," I rapliad.

"You raally ara a romantic, Lucas Black," Brady chucklad.

I raised an eyebrow at him. "I suppose you would Phoebe with an old gym shoe?"

It was Brady's turn to get awkward. "... no, not an old gym shoe."

"Wina. Rosas?" I teased.

"Kind of like that, yeah," Brady copied me and laughed.

I looked back up at the sky. "You... ever worry about Phoebe's true mate popping up out of the woodwork?" I looked back up at the sky. "You... ever worry about Phoebe's true mate popping up out of the woodwork?"

Brady turned his head, staring at the side of mine until I met his gaze. "I don't worry about that for one second."

"How can you not?" I asked.

"Because Phoebe loves me, and I love her, absolutely and completely. The mate bond is a powerful thing, sure. But love is stronger." Brady held up a finger to stop me from saying anything. "I want you to remember that... if she isn't your true mate."

"Because... you think I should deprive her of her true mate and selfishly—" I realized what I was saying and who I was saying it to. "I didn't mean that."

Brady sighed. "You did. You think I'm depriving Phoebe of her true mate?"

"I don't think any man will treat her as well as you do, mate bond or no mate bond," I replied honestly. "And that matters."

"So turn that logic around on yourself. You can't have rules you apply to yourself that are different from rules you apply to the rest of the world. That's hypocritical, and it's not fair to you or to Sasha. I mean, what if you're not mates, but she wants to choose you anyway? Are you going to stop her?" Brady asked.

I squeezed my eyes shut and groaned. "I don't think I'd have the strength."

"There you go. And like you said. You have a lot going on with the orb, and a lot going on back home with your careers. No snap decisions need to be made at midnight on her birthday. This isn't Cinderella," Brady said. "You're not going to turn into a pumpkin if you don't have the answers right away."

I chuckled sadly. "When did you get so wise?"

"Phoebe brings it out in me," Brady grinned. "Though, I mean it. Don't make any decisions either way just because she's suddenly twenty-one. I mean, she's getting her wolf, too. That's already overwhelming enough, I'm sure. I mean, I've never gotten a wolf before, so I can't say from experience, but having a whole new voice in your head and new instincts and suddenly being able to turn into something else...."

"I get the point," I said. "And yeah, it is overwhelming." I winked at him. "But I don't think you can say you've never gotten a wolf anymore...."

Brady tossed sand at me. "Careful what you say about my woman!"

"I didn't say anything," I responded innocently, tossing sand back at him.

Brady sent another handful my way. "Then be careful what you imply about my woman."

I grabbed a larger handful and dumped it over his head, getting his dark, carefully-styled hair full of sand. "I wasn't implying anything."

As Brady scooped two handfuls of sand, I got up and took off at a run.

"You'd better run!" Brady called, right on my heels. I'd forgotten how freaky fast vampires were.

"Remember, you're a doctor!" I laughed, jumping over a piece of driftwood.

"Means I'll be able to take care of the damage without anyone finding out!" Brady said.

As we chased each other around the beach, my stomach became less and less tight. But I had to admit, as Sasha's birthday drew closer, I was more and more anxious.

What if she wasn't my mate?

The very idea made me sick to my stomach. I couldn't imagine a world where Sasha was someone else's mate. I'd probably tear the arms right off the bastard for touching her, mate bond or no mate bond.

But the other question came with its own set of complicated problems.

What if she was?

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I looked back up at the sky. "You... ever worry about Phoebe's true mate popping up out of the woodwork?"

Brody turned his head, staring at the side of mine until I met his gaze. "I don't worry about that for one second."

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what if you're not mates, but she wants to choose you anyway? Are you going to stop her?" Brody asked.

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"How can you not?" I asked.

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"Because... you think I should deprive her of her true mate and selfishly—" I realized what I was saying and who I was saying it to. "I didn't mean that."

Brady sighed. "You did. You think I'm depriving Phoeba of her true mate?"

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[Chapter 988: Stay](#)

Sasha

"Your hair is so beautiful," Trina gushed as she brushed through my long, blond locks. Another new friend was doing my nails, as I had done for her. *Sasha*

"Your hair is so beautiful," Trine gushed as she brushed through my long, blond locks. Another new friend was doing my nails, as I had done for her.

"I wish I had those tight curls you have," I responded.

Phoebe sipped her mimosa and then raised her glass to us. "Pedicures next!"

"I like the way you think," Trine said.

It was a lovely afternoon, in a series of lovely afternoons. The women of New Dienny had welcomed me with open arms. I'd never been so pampered, nor felt so much like I... belonged. There were more dream dancers in New Dienny that I could exchange experiences with. None of them had my kind of power, but it was still nice to talk to people who "get" it.

"You know," Trine mused, sharing a wink with another girl, "you should stay here, like, permanently. Make New Dienny your home."

I blinked at her, startled. "You... you'd really like me to stay?"

"Of course, silly!" Trine said. "You're the coolest person we've ever met!"

"But I bring... a lot of trouble with me," I replied with a wince.

Trine shrugged. "Our Alphe was an accomplished pirate. I'm sure any trouble you bring will just end up walking the plank."

Laughter bubbled up in me and soon we were all giggling. "Yeah, I got that impression about him," I said.

"There's nothing Alphe Robbie can't handle. Just think about it, okay?" Trine asked.

"Okay," I agreed with a nod. "I'll think about it."

"Oh!" Trine exclaimed. "How excited are you for your birthday?! Luncie, Alison, and Joy have been planning the bash of the century!"

I blushed. "They really shouldn't go to so much trouble."

"Sure they should! It's not every day a dream dancer comes into her wolf," Trine winked.

"Well... I suppose not, though it must happen here more frequently than anywhere since Lycenia," I said.

"Probably. But it's still a big deal." Trine finished my nails and flopped back on her lounger, soaking up the sun. "And you'll find out you're mates with that handsome devil you play around with."

I pushed my hair behind my ear nervously. "Actually, I'm kind of worried about that. I have feelings for him. But what if he's not my mate?"

"He's your mate," every woman there, including Phoebe, insisted.

"And... you know... there's all the stuff we have going on back home and in the Dark Realm and..." I went on.

"Ugh. Honestly, people in love are SO silly sometimes!" Trine sighed. "If he's your mate, then we all know he is, that stuff isn't going to matter. Really. You'll just want to be together all the time."

"I already want to be with him all the time," I admitted softly.

"Then you should tell him so," Phoebe said. "I mean, what does this mate business even mean? If my true mate walked right in front of me right now, you know what I'd be doing? Racing right back to Bredy. It's biological, yeah, but it's also a choice. Why don't you two just decide to stay together regardless?"

I gave that some thought. "Yeah. We could decide to stay together regardless."

"Exactly," Phoebe replied. "Love is love. It might not be a huge rush of wolfy hormones, but it's something deeper and more important."

"You're right. You're right," I agreed. "I..."

Trine got up and tugged me out of my lounger by the wrist.

"What are you doing?" I asked, stumbling to my feet.

"Well, obviously you have to go talk to him now," Trine said.

"Now?" I repeated.

"Oh yes. Right now. Get it all ironed out before tomorrow," Trine confirmed.

I looked at Phoebe, who was also nodding.

"Best course of action, really," Phoebe said. *Sasha*

"Your hair is so beautiful," Trina gushed as she brushed through my long, blond locks. Another new friend was doing my nails, as I had done for her.

All the women were nodding now. I took a deep breath and squared my shoulders. "Alright, I'll go talk to him now."

All the women were nodding now. I took a deep breath and squared my shoulders. "Alright, I'll go talk to him now."

A cheer went up as I went back inside the peckhouse from the patio.

Lucas was not hard to find. He was brooding in our bedroom, staring at the orb as though it were a snake that was going to bite him.

"Afraid to touch it again?" I asked, rapping my knuckles gently on the bedroom doorframe.

"How did you guess?" Lucas responded with a lopsided smile.

"Well, considering the fact that it nearly blessed you right out of our cabin the last time...."

Lucas chuckled and covered the orb again with the silk. "I was just wondering what the other orb is going to look like, where it is, and what the hell we'll be doing with THAT one once we have it."

I set down on the bed next to him. "That's a lot of questions."

"It is. We've got so much hanging over our heads, and besides that we're both trying to be Royal Engineers," Lucas said.

"True." I twisted a lock of hair behind my ear. "Um... Lucas?"

"Hmm?" he asked, nestling the orb back in his bag among his clothes.

"I... you know I love you, right?" I began.

Lucas turned back to look at me, frowning in confusion. "... yes..."

"Do you love me?" I asked him.

"Seshe, you know very well this isn't the conversation we should be having until tomorrow night," Lucas said sternly.

I put my hand on his knee. "I mean it. I mean, Bredy's not Phoebe's true mate and they've decided to stay together. If... if WE'RE not mates, we could do the same. I can't... I can't imagine loving anyone but you."

Lucas petted my hand. "Seshe. I could never deprive you of your true mate. Let's just discuss this tomorrow night, okay?"

"You don't want to stay with me even if we're not mates?" I whispered, feeling my eyes sting.

"I didn't say that...." Lucas said.

I snatched my hand out from under his and stood, deeply hurt by how calculated he was being about all of this. "Never mind, Lucas. If being true to me is so important to you, maybe I shouldn't be depriving YOU of YOURS."

"Seshe...."

I grabbed the orb out of Lucas's bag over his protests and stomped toward the door. "Don't you dare follow me, Lucas Bleck!"

Disappointment washed over me when Lucas didn't follow. Sometimes, men were SO dumb.

I made my way down to the beech, finding a little, hidden alcove just for me. If Lucas was going to be so disappointing today, then maybe I'd have better luck with the orb.

Tucking my legs under me, I sat lotus-style in the sand and held the orb in my hands, letting my dream-dancer powers unfurl.

Initially, everything seemed to be working as usual. My vision swirled and brought me somewhere... else. Only this time it was a place I recognized.

I saw myself, sitting in my little clearing all by myself, perched on an old stump. I was perhaps... nine years old? The book in my lap nearly dwarfed me, but that was the sort of thing I read in those days.

Fondly smiling, I started heading over to see what I'd been reading that day, only to freeze when a bunch of boys wandered into my clearing.

"Hey, bookworm, haven't seen you around the playground much these days," one of them sneered, filing into a line across from me. In the line were Lucas and Bredy.

"Didn't know you cared," nine-year-old me replied with a shrug, not even looking up from my book.

"I don't," the boy stuttered, glancing around at his cohorts to make sure the others also knew he didn't care.

"Good. Now you can go away," nine-year-old me sniffed, turning a page.

All the woman was nodding now. I took a deep breath and squared my shoulders. "Alright, I'll go talk to him now."

A chair went up as I went back inside the packhouse from the patio.

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"I don't," the boy stammered, glancing around at his cohorts to make sure the others also knew he didn't care.

"Good. Now you can go away," nine-year-old me sniffed, turning a page.

The boy who'd been starting to taunt me turned bright red. "You trying to tell me what to do?" The boy who'd been starting to taunt me turned bright red. "You trying to tell me what to do?"

"I wouldn't dream of it," nine-year-old me deadpanned.

"Sass. You're sassing me right now," the boy said while the other boys snickered at his predicament.

He must have been twelve or older, yet this little wisp of a bookworm was telling him to go take a flying leap.

"Well spotted," nine-year-old me grunted, turning back a page. "Could you just go, please? You're interrupting an important chapter."

The boy marched up and slapped the book out of my hands, landing it right in the rich, wet dirt around the roots of the stump. "What did you say to me, freak?!"

Then another boy marched up and sucker-punched the bully in the jaw.

Nine-year-old me looked up from carefully brushing mud off the book to see Lucas squaring up with the boy.

"Hey, Lucas, what gives?" the boy snapped, rubbing his jaw. "You got a death wish or something?"

"Come at me and let's find out," Lucas said, his fists held up in front of him.

The boy growled and swung at Lucas, who punched him in the nose this time.

Blood rolled out of the boy's nose and he made a sound of rage in his throat. "Damn it, Lucas Black! You're dead, you hear me? You're f*****g dead!"

"Haven't seen any signs of that yet," Lucas snorted.

The boy took another swing at Lucas, who deflected the punch, then got the boy in the ribs.

With a grunt, the boy went down to a knee, holding his ribs. "Fu-uck...."

"Lucas," Brady said. "Maybe you should lay off him now. You don't want to get in trouble."

"Maybe I do. Besides, it's too late for that. This coward's going to go run to his mommy and tell her what big, bad Lucas Black did to him," Lucas taunted the boy.

The boy snarled. "Hit me with your best shot, Lucas. Go on. I dare you."

"Lucas... really... don't...." Brady begged.

Lucas kned the boy right in the face, forcing his head to snap back and his whole body to land on the ground.

Then Lucas settled himself on the boy's chest and began punching him mercilessly.

"Lucas... LUCAS!!!" Brady said and he and a few of the other boys ran over to pull Lucas off the bully.

"Sweet mercies of the White Queen, Lucas...." Brady hissed as we all looked at the mess Lucas had made of the boy.

The boy struggled up to his feet and weaved a bit.

Two boys went to him, each putting an arm around their shoulders.

"I'm not telling my mom," the boy said, spitting blood and raising his chin defiantly. "I'm telling my DAD."

"You can go whine to the Goddess herself, for all I care," Lucas barked back. "You just make sure you're listening—that all of you are listening—when I tell you that NOBODY CALLS THE FREAK A FREAK BUT ME!!!"

The boys all looked at each other, then nodded in unison, even the bully.

"Nobody calls Sasha a freak but you," they said, almost in the same cadence.

"Good. Now get me to a healer. I think I might have stubbed my toe kicking Jordan's ass," Lucas grumped.

He winked at me as he passed and the others shuffled away.

Nine-year-old me stared after him. Then, true to form, she sat back down and started reading again.

My vision went black and the orb stopped revealing anything to me, even though I tried to direct it back toward the people of the past I was probably supposed to save. I tried and tried, but nothing happened. No visions came.

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Ha winkad at ma as ha passad and tha othars shufflad away.

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[Chapter 989: Life of the Party](#)

Sasha

Midnight. Midnight tonight, I would have my wolf. And I would have Lucas. Or... I wouldn't.

The stubborn jackass refused to talk about being in love and ignoring the mate bond if it didn't work out for us, even into today. I'd actually had to beg him to stay in our room and sleep next to me. But we didn't make love, and that made me sad. If Lucas was going to make me let him go, I wanted to make love with him at least one last time.

Next to me, the bed was cold, which told me Lucas had gotten up and gone out a lot earlier. That wasn't surprising, though, given I'd mutinously buried myself in bed well into the afternoon.

Finally, Phoebe knocked at my door. "Sasha?"

"Come on in," I said.

Phoebe wandered in, wearing a very nice party dress that would also work well in the heat of New Dianny. "Trina and the other girls wanted me to get you up so we could do some pre-birthday primping."

I snuggled my head below the comforter, leaving just a small tuft of hair sticking out. "I'd rather not."

"Sasha." I felt the mattress dip as Phoebe sat down on the side of the bed. "I know you're worried about you and Lucas, but this is a really big birthday. You should celebrate, either way. And, not to guilt trip you, but the others did put a lot of effort into this party."

With a groan, I popped my head out. "Alright," I sighed. "Primp me."

Phoebe grinned. "That's the spirit." She yanked the covers off of me entirely and tugged me up, pushing me toward the shower. "Doesn't smell like you had a rocking good time with your almost-mate last night, but I figure you want to be clean, anyway."

"Yeah, that was kind of disappointing to me, too," I grumped, jumping in the shower even before it was warm. I yelped.

"Okay, I should have said you didn't need to freeze yourself to death to get to the primping on time," Phoebe called into the bathroom.

"Good to know... now," I called back.

When I finished a quick shower, Phoebe was there holding out a towel. I dried off quickly, finished my "morning" routine, even though it was late afternoon, and followed Phoebe out into the arboretum.

The women I'd been spending time with in New Dianny, including and especially Trina, were all there, armed with implements of beauty torture.

I laughed and sat myself down on the empty chair they were surrounding.

"About time," Trina scolded, starting to dry my dark hair. "We thought we'd have to send the guard up sooner or later."

"Or Luna Alison. Luna Alison is good at getting people up and at'em," another girl, who was brushing my eyebrows—and plucking them—said.

"Sorry, guys. Just been a little... I dunno...." I mumbled.

"A little lovesick? Yeah, we get it," Trina clucked, blowing some of my locks into my eyes. "The rumor mill says your talk didn't go well."

I turned my head, and the eyebrow-plucker shrieked, jerking my chin back where she wanted it.

"Seriously, do the walls around this place have ears?"

"Definitely," Trina said. "Can't do a damn thing around here without someone finding out. Biggest little small town in the whole Light Realm."

I shook my head, making both Trina and the girl doing my eyebrows shriek in protest.

"Do you ever just sit still?" Trina despaired.

"I could try," I replied contritely.

"Good. Try." Trina worked her way around my whole head while the other girl carefully sculpted both of my eyebrows.

Phoebe perched herself on a white, wrought iron chair not far off and enjoyed an afternoon martini. She raised her pink drink to me and sipped it daintily.

Obviously, I wasn't getting one unless I was a good little china doll, which was a shame, because I desperately needed one for my nerves.

Through the windows, I could see a HUGE stack of wood being built up for a bonfire. Lucas appeared out of the mass of men doing the stacking, holding an armload of wood and passing it off to a stacker.

My heart pounded and wept at the same time.

"He's your mate," Trina assured me as she put down the blow dryer and got out a curler.

"You're sure?" I whispered.

"If he's not, I'll eat my stilettos," Trina said.

We all laughed at that image. Trina had stilettos on right now that could double as weapons for sure.

I was soon in a white wraparound dress, the new modern version of the robe that had been used in wolf calling ceremonies of old. Luna Alison and Joy had decided to reenact such a ceremony for this evening. They still practiced it in the Dark Realm, but Amanda had decided to forego it when she'd started making plans for my birthday. I felt a little bad I wouldn't be there with her to bring in my wolf.

"If he doesn't eat you alive, then I'm a cat," Trina declared, and the others agreed, including Phoebe.

I twirled in front of a standing mirror that was set off to one side. I wasn't really one to think much of my looks, but right now, I had to say I did look gorgeous.

"Go out to him right now, wearing that," Phoebe suggested.

"Ooo, yeah! Who could possibly say 'no' to that!" Trina said. Then she added, "But don't get it wrinkled."

"Or mud or sand-stained," another girl added.

I blushed. "I'll try not to."

"Good plan. Now off you go," Phoebe said, shooing me away.

I walked out the garden door of the arboretum and headed toward the bonfire.

Brady was coming with an armload of wood. He looked at me and whistled. "Looking for Lucas?"

"Yes," I replied.

"This has got to be one of those moments where you're like, not supposed to see the bride before the wedding," Brady sighed. "But, he should be along shortly."

True to Brady's word, Lucas came walking up behind the others carrying wood just seconds later. He looked up, saw me, and froze.

"Don't wrinkle her," Brady said to Lucas, clapping him on the shoulder as he wandered off.

"Sasha," Lucas swallowed.

Not 'Sasha sweetie.' Not a good start. "Lucas."

"You... you're... you look...." Lucas's burning eyes raked me up and down.

"Trina made me promise you wouldn't wrinkle me, or get sand or mud on the dress." I giggled nervously.

"Er... right... yeah. Well, no risk of that, right?" Lucas replied, gesturing with a shrug to the wood in his arms.

"Oh, sorry, I'm in your way." I stood aside and let him pass, following in his wake. "You know, Lucas, I was thinking we could—"

"I'm kinda busy right now, Sasha. Can it wait?" Lucas cut in quickly.

I felt as though I'd been stabbed in the heart, but I nodded. "It's... yeah. It's fine. I should get back to the girls, anyway."

Lucas gave me a strained smile, then went back to shuttling wood to the bonfire site.

My steps felt heavy as I made my way back to the arboretum.

Trina was already holding out a martini. So was Phoebe.

"Which one am I supposed to take?" I asked.

"After what just happened there, I'm going with both," Trina said, and Phoebe agreed.

They didn't have to tell me twice. I downed both martinis in less than ten minutes, throwing myself into one of the wrought iron chairs.

"I think it really might be over," I mumbled.

"Nonsense. Don't be so glum. He's your mate. When his fat stupid head realizes that, everything will be back to the way it was," Trina said, gesturing with her glass. I didn't know how many martinis she was on, but I was happy to catch up.

"And if we're not mates?" I asked glumly.

"I'll eat my stilettos," Trina announced.

I laughed. "You said that already."

"And it's just as true now as it was then."

I wasn't sure, but I thought it was about five martinis later that all of us girls, arm in arm, went swaying toward the roaring bonfire as the party began. I think we also might have been singing—or slurring—one of the two.

Joy rushed over with water, George with a plate of hors d'oeuvres as we arrived.

"Boys are dumb," I explained to Joy before she could scold me.

Joy groaned and waved George off, handing the plate of hors d'oeuvres to Phoebe. "Is Lucas being a big dumb i***t?"

"Yes," I grumbled.

"Of course he is." Joy rolled her eyes and handed the pitcher of water and some glasses to Trina and the rest of the girls. "Sober up a bit. We're hoping to have the ceremony by eleven."

"Yes, ma'am," Trina said, giving a mock salute in the wrong direction.

Joy huffed and marched over to Lucas, muttering something under her breath about "men" and "morons."

I was just putting a glass of water to my lips—or rather I was trying to, but couldn't quite find my mouth—when Lucas stomped over.

"Ladies," Lucas said, "can I borrow the guest of honor for a minute? Oh, and some of those nibbles."

Phoebe presented Lucas with the hors d'oeuvres plate, which was already two-thirds empty.

Lucas balanced the plate on one hand and put his free arm around me, steering me off to the side of the celebrants. "Did you have to get hammered, really?"

"Yes. Because boys are dumb," I told him. I poked him in the chest, my water almost sloshing onto his shirt. "You're a big dumb idiot."

"Okay. I take full responsibility for that. I guess I have been a big, dumb i***t today," Lucas sighed, plucking the water from my hand. He held it to my lips so I could finally drink.

I took a few swallows, then pointed a more steady finger at him. "I love you, and you won't love me back unless I'm your true mate. That's messed up."

"I never said I didn't love you back," Lucas said quietly.

I blinked until there was only one of him standing before me. "What?"

Lucas set the hors d'oeuvres on a nearby small, high table. "I said I never said I didn't love you back. I do love you, Sasha."

"Then I don't see the problem!" I wailed.

"Shhh...." Lucas put his finger to my lips. "Keep your voice down."

"Then I don't see the problem," I said in a loud whisper.

"There might not be a problem. We just have to wait until you get your wolf," Lucas insisted.

"That doesn't make any sense! Phoebe and Brady are committed to each other and they're not true mates!" I pointed out.

Lucas closed his eyes and pressed his forehead to mine. "Sasha, sober up. Meet your wolf. Then... come find me and we'll talk."

"But—"

A soft kiss stopped whatever else I was going to say. "Just do as I say."

As Lucas wandered off, I ate the rest of the hors d'oeuvres in a fit of rage—not because he'd told me to—and drank the pitcher of water dry—again, not because he'd told me to.

When I was sober, I walked back into the party, feeling really crummy. But I put on a fake smile when Alison and Joy came for me to bring me up on a low stage and start the ceremony.

"And now," Alison said, "I want you all to get out your cue cards so we can do the ancient chant together until midnight. When midnight comes, so will Sasha's wolf, and she will finally be whole."

I'd never be whole without Lucas, but I smiled just the same.

The chanting began and repeated over and over again in a solemn loop. I knew it was midnight when the chanting stopped.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

Please, let Lucas be my mate.

Moments later, I opened my eyes.

[Chapter 990: Hello Young Lovers](#)

Lucas

I stayed on the beach after Sasha and I argued. I couldn't bear to be there when she got her wolf. If we found out she wasn't my mate, it would kill me. I didn't want to be there for that.

As the stars twinkled on the water, the moon reflected with them like a second sky. I stared out at the beauty of it all and prayed to the Moon Goddess, the White Queen, hell, even Lycaon that Sasha was my mate.

A white flutter caught my eye, and I looked in the direction of the party.

Sasha was descending, alone, in the white dress I'd been threatened within an inch of my life about tearing off her. Luna Alison and Joy could be very scary when they wanted to be.

When she got close enough that the mate bond throbbed in my chest, I knew I was a dead man—because that dress was not going to survive the next fifteen minutes.

Sasha took off her shoes when she reached the beach, then ran over the sand to me. I swung her up in my arms and kissed her, feeling the mate bond snap into place.

Her lips parted, and I deepened the kiss, sliding my hands under her thighs so she was straddling my waist as she wrapped her arms around the back of my neck.

As I held her, I couldn't help but feel that the moon and stars had aligned just for us. Sasha was my everything, and I was happy to finally claim her as mine. The way her body fit so perfectly against mine only reaffirmed what I already knew in my heart.

Breaking away from the kiss, I looked deep into her eyes.

"Sasha baby," I murmured. "Can you feel it?"

"Yes," Sasha breathed. "And I should still smack you a good one for making it such a big deal. I would have chosen you anyway."

"I'd rather be slapped by you every day than spend my life with anyone else," I confessed. "I love you. I love you, Sasha, my princess."

"And don't you forget it," Sasha warned me.

As if that were possible. "Sasha baby?" I asked. "How attached are you to that dress?"

Sasha groaned. "I can't believe you're even asking. No matter what I say, the dress was toast the minute I stepped foot on the beach."

"You're right." I knelt with her wrapped around me and then tipped us both down into the sand.

"You want to do it right here?" Sasha squeaked.

"I can't wait to go anywhere else. Besides, no one's watching. And even if they were, they'd understand," I said, pushing up the skirt of the dress and destroying a pair of lacy white panties.

"Luna Alison is going to kill you," Sasha sighed, but she simply laid back in the sand as I made short work of her bodice and bra, tearing both right down the middle.

"Worth it," I growled. I opened my pants and let my hardness spring free. "I hope you don't mind a little roughness, 'cuz this first time is gonna be hard and fast. I can't do it any other way."

Sasha smoothed her fingers through the longish hair at the top of my head and pulled me down for a searing kiss. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

Sasha

Lucas groaned against my lips and plunged his c**k inside me, gripping my hips so he went deep, so deep—maybe deeper than he'd ever been before.

I strained up to meet him as he thrust over and over, hitting all the right places inside me. He knew my body. I knew his. And together, we made beautiful love, desperately like this, or slowly like I knew we'd be doing later.

I didn't even need to ask if we'd be leaving this beach tonight. I just cradled his hips with my thighs and accepted everything he had to give me. We weren't going anywhere for a long, long time.

"Lucas," I moaned when he put a hand next to my head for better leverage, letting his hips swing freely between my legs. He used his other hand to fondle my breast, running his sandy thumb over my peaked n****e. The rough texture was sheer heaven.

"You like that, Sasha baby?" Lucas grumbled, doing something positively sinful with his thumb.

"Mhm," I managed.

Then his mouth descended and he pulled my n****e between his teeth.

I whimpered and came hard, my inner muscles gripping at his c**k.

Lucas groaned around my n****e and found his own release.

I was not surprised that, although I felt his climax inside me, he didn't lose his hard-on.

"Are you going to mark me, Lucas?" I asked as he started again, hugging him to me as he lapped the bite he'd made on my breast.

"Mm." Lucas thrust more slowly this time, making unhurried love to me. "Not tonight."

I rubbed my cheek against his, noting the rough stubble was almost like the sand beneath me. "Why not?"

"Shhh. We'll talk about it later. For now, I just want to love on you and make love to you," Lucas crooned.

I was bursting to know his reasoning, but I let it go for now, especially since what Lucas was doing to me was so sinfully sweet.

His hips moved against mine at a slow pace, giving me a chance to feel every inch of him as he thrust in and out.

"I love you, Sasha baby," Lucas whispered.

Tears stung my eyes, and Lucas kissed my eyelids. "I hope those are happy tears."

"They are." I caught his lips and kissed him back.

"I love you, Sasha baby. I love you," Lucas whispered in my ear, and I came again, the words reaching me in places his physical touch could not go.

Lucas came inside me again, then rolled us so he was on his back and I was splayed over his body. "Goddess, what am I going to do, princess? I'm never going to get tired of this. There will never be anything more sublime than being inside you, knowing you love me." He tipped his head down. "You still do, I hope," he teased.

I pretended to think about it and Lucas swatted me on the ass. "Ouch! Of course I do, you big dumb idiot."

"But I'm your big dumb i***t," Lucas reminded me.

"And you have no idea how happy that makes me," I said, snuggling into him.

It was a good thing we were in the tropics, because Lucas and I didn't have a blanket, and my dress was a thing of the past. Lucas finished tearing it off of me while we laid there and tossed the rag it had become aside.

"So... I'm almost afraid to start talking about the future," Lucas began, running his hands up and down my back. "But... I was hoping at least two kids?"

"If you keep coming inside me, that's going to happen sooner rather than later," I smiled.

Lucas sighed and scrubbed a sandy hand over his face, then winced at his mistake. "I really can't help myself."

"I know." I dusted my hands off to the side, then used my mostly-sand-free hands to wipe the sand off his face.

Lucas caught my hand and kissed my wrist, then linked our fingers and laid our joined hands over his heart. "We have so much going on back home. I... I don't want to ruin your future. You're such a gifted engineer."

"You couldn't possibly ruin my future," I said, bopping him on the nose. "You worry too much."

Lucas nibbled my fingertips. "I think I worry just the right amount, actually."

"Hopefully. I know the orbs have you all in a twist," I replied.

"The orbs." Lucas rolled his eyes. "I can't believe there are two of them. TWO. Then we'll find the second one and they'll tell us there's a third we need to find... by that time, Stone Hamline will be the Head Royal Engineer and they'll have me designing garden sheds for his properties."

"That's very pessimistic, Lucas. Don't ruin my bliss," I warned him.

Lucas pouted at me. "I was just trying to be realistic."

"I've seen Stone Hamline's designs. He's never going to be Head Royal Engineer," I assured Lucas.

"I could still end up designing garden sheds," Lucas muttered.

I flicked his forehead and he yelped. "Killing my bliss. And they would be the most beautiful garden sheds ever built."

Lucas rubbed his forehead and smiled at me. "Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"I'm always going to be confident in my man," I said loyally.

Lucas lowered his chin and kissed me. "I don't know what I'd do without you, honestly. Ever since I saw you in Nostalgia, I haven't been able to imagine my life without you."

"Then mark me," I murmured, skimming my palm under his shirt.

Lucas wriggled out of his clothes in a series of coordinated moves that were rather impressive. While I rocked back and forth, Lucas never tossed me back into the sand.

Then we were skin-to-skin and I ran my hands over him, everywhere I could reach. "Mark me," I asked again.

"String quartet. Doves. Fireworks," Lucas said.

I sighed and laid my head on his shoulder. "Well, I suppose I could wait for something romantic like that."

"So impatient." His breath feathered my hair.

"I'm always impatient for you," I confessed. I also blushed, realizing what I was admitting to on more than one level.

"Really? I hadn't noticed," Lucas responded innocently.

I stuck out my tongue at him. "Yeah, well, you're the one who keeps ripping everything I own to get at me faster."

"Guilty," Lucas said unrepentantly.

"At this rate, when I take you to see my mother, I'm going to be completely naked," I grumbled.

"Fine by me," Lucas grinned.

I snorted. "You're incorrigible."

"You like me that way."

I felt him, hard and smooth against my thigh. I raised myself up a little just to look down at the state of him.

Lucas took this as an invitation to grip my hips and bring me down on his c**k so I was riding him.

I gasped in surprise but was soon moaning in pleasure as Lucas encouraged me to move my hips.

"Incorrigible," Lucas said, getting me in just the right position so he could lick my n*****s as I moved up and down on his c**k.

I braced my hand on his shoulder, offering him my breast with the other.

Lucas latched on and did things with his tongue and teeth that made me beg, just beg him to bring me to orgasm.

His hand slid between my legs, and I was done for. I screamed his name.

Lucas came with a cry on the heels of my orgasm.

"Incorrigible," he panted, stroking a lock of hair behind my ear.

I collapsed on top of him, completely wrung out.

"I guess I am, too," I said.